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Feature Editor

## Where JAZZ in CABARETS Was BORN

By JAMES A. JACKSON.

This is one of a series of articles now being contributed by Mr. Jackson to the Illustrated Feature Section. The first article appeared in the September 21 issue.

**H**OW came Jazz bands with the juggling drummers, top hatted cornets and whirling bass violins into vogue? From whence came the impulse that gave social prestige to the swaying band leader and the muted trombones?

In general one hears that the war is to be blamed for the introduction of raucous sounds into our music, and that is about as far as the average person is willing to go toward placing the responsibility for the new musical mood of the American public. One might well say the World, for at one time, nearly half of the famous Clef Club of New York was playing jazz in Paris, while each winter for several years past, the Edward Morris International Booking Agency has sent bands to South America.

But Jazz didn't just grow, as did Topsy of immortal "Uncle Tom's Cabin" fame. Jazz, the son of the blues, is a distinctively American Negro contribution to the musical lore of the land. It came into vogue through the medium of a restaurant that was once the rendezvous of the uptown Bohemians of New York. While the music was making a way into public favor, the proponents of it were erecting a permanent home that today stands as a monument to

the effectiveness of organization among musicians. With Jazz came its handmaiden, the Cabaret.

Each day one may see on Michigan avenue, or its purlieus on the South side of Chicago, a dapper little old gentleman, whose debonair dress at once arrests attention; or, should one see him in a restaurant, one would instinctively pay the immaculate one the tribute of observing that there is a man who knows how to eat with the enjoyment of a gourmet.

That man is Charles Lett, who, perhaps, more than any other one individual, may be credited with giving the modern cabaret its place in metropolitan life.

Prior to 1900 there were coffee shops in New Orleans. There were singing waiters in the places that were termed restaurants in San Francisco. Coney Island boasted of singing waiters, and these waiters worked in the dens that lined the Bowery when wintry blasts made the populace abandon Coney Island until another summer sun again invited one to the water side. In

cities like Chicago, one fond of revelry found noisy voiced entertainers in the places that were mentioned with bated breath, if mentioned at all, in polite society.

All of these manifestations were attributes of the underworld and they were accorded no social recognition. Polite society knew not of them as places of which to beware. They were not cabarets, nor was the music heard therein called jazz.

About 1899, James B. Russell and Charles Lett, two clever and widely known hotel workers determined to have a restaurant that was to be different from anything that had preceded its inception. Marshall was a Canadian boy who had acquired his knack of serving the public in the old Russell House in Detroit. He was a well set up young man with education and a polished air. He also had a practical knowledge of the art of cooking, acquired somehow while he worked his way through school.

Mr. Lett, an Ohio boy, had worked in hotels in Columbus, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago. His was a varied experience with the public and its changing moods with regard to food. The two made an ideal team. Meeting happily in New York, while both were in funds, they discussed the idea of a business and joined hands to create the establishment that bore the name of "The Marshalette," which was destined to create a remarkable impression upon the night life of the city that is hard to impress.

The first location was in the neighborhood once known as the Tenderloin, a district that was so named by a hard boiled police inspector, who regarded control of the district as "juicy pickings" from his point of view. A short time served to show the boys that this was not the environment for them. The Marshalette was moved from its original location in 1900 to a brown stone house within two doors of the then largest Baptist church in New York, on fashionable 53rd street, in those days the finest of residence districts.

The congregation and its minister looked askance at the opening of a restaurant so close to an exclusive church, and all of Charlie Lett's suave diplomacy was required to mollify the opposition that was set up against his business. But he prevailed, and the old brownstone residence was soon converted into a series of cute little dining rooms, each of which was invested with an air of exclusiveness, without any of the distastefulness of the frankly private rooms then so common to restaurants of a certain type.

The show folks at once adopted the place as their meeting ground. The musicians followed suit, for there is too much in common between these groups for them to be separate in their social and business gathering places. "Tin Pan Alley," a nickname for Thirty-eighth street where publishing houses once were assembled, was but a few blocks away. The restaurant

### AT A MODERN CABARET



Twenty-five years ago, these couples would have been dressed very differently. Doubtless, this was because the rough and tumble of jazz entertainment did not require freedom of movement as does modern jazz—especially the jazz found in modern cabarets. You will notice also that the young couples are well dressed and respectable looking people.

made an inviting half way place for the boys and girls to stop en route to and from their publishers.

Here came Bert Williams and George Walker, then the stars of their firmament. Ernest Hogan found joy in foregathering in the little place with young Jack Nail, an admirer of the professional boys, today one of the wealthiest realty operators in the city of New York.

Henry Troy, now a publisher in his own name, and Irving Jones, who wrote such things as "Home Ain't Nothing Like This," "St. Patrick Day Is Bad Day," "You Must Think I'm Santa Claus," and a hundred other popular numbers, used to try out his words and music there. James Vaughn, now a musical director, knew the place in his younger days.

President Fenner of the rich Clef Club, was a struggling musician, who often had a tab on the books at the Marshalette, fore-

gathered there with the late Lieutenant James Reese Europe and the nationally known "Deacon" Johnson, an officer in the National Association of Negro Musicians.

Hodges and Lanchmere lunched there. So did the few other vaudevillians of their day. Pretty soon the performers of other race groups began wandering into the place. With them came operatic artists from the then new Metropolitan Opera House; and in their wake came the wealthy young bloods who are to be seen wherever stage celebrities congregate.

It became the accepted practice of the song writers and composers to give their wares a trial performance before those who happened to be there whenever a fellow had a new number that yearned for expression. Dancers,

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Frances Hubbard, of Connie's Inn, New York. She is an entertainer of exceptional ability and is a particularly clever exponent of modern cabaret jazz. Besides her singing and dancing ability her symmetry of figure meets the rigid beauty standards of the 20th century cabaret.



#### DEMPSEY WOODSON

In Chicago Miss Woodson is well-known in theatrical and cabaret circles. She has been featured at the Sunset Cafe there. This is the leading cabaret of the Windy City, and of course furnishes its share of modern jazz. Miss Woodson will be known in private life as Mrs. Bob (Uke) Williams.

