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**The Community that Gave Jazz to
Chicago**

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THE COMMUNITY THAT GAVE JAZZ TO CHICAGO

TED VINCENT

The studies of the rise of jazz and blues in the years just before and during the Jazz Age strongly display the importance of black American musicians and composers. But the studies say little about how African-American entrepreneurs provided the initial structure of the modern music business. The role of the entrepreneurs and other segments of the black community can be informatively sketched in reference to the rise of jazz and blues clubs in Chicago.

Chicago had a vital role in the formative Jazz Age thanks in part to the South Side cabarets and dance halls where many a star of jazz and blues first found fame. There were also good jazz and blues shows in the South Side's big vaudeville theaters and movie houses, but it is the more intimate settings that are best remembered by jazz musicians. The memories are of good music and mobsters. In the recollection of one Chicago jazzman of the Roaring Twenties, the band had trouble keeping the beat whenever Al Capone and his entourage entered the club (Walton 1972). Interesting anecdotes of this kind have distorted the true history of Jazz Age Chicago. Although it is true that individuals from places like Cicero, Illinois, along with corporate music industry executives, eventually took control of Chicago's black music, these outsiders were not there at the start. First, African Americans and others living on the South Side created and sustained successful jazz and blues organizations; then the mob decided it wanted "a piece of the action" and "took over the territory."

A generalization that the Jazz Age occurred simultaneously with the 1920s has contributed to the oversight of black input at the business end of the music. A more exact time frame was provided by Alain Locke ([1936] 1969, 70, 82–85), a scholar of the period, who dates the Jazz Age from 1918 to 1926 (declaring that "commercialization" changed the music scene around 1926). In Chicago, Jazz Age black music appears to have been mostly under the control of African Americans from 1918

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into late 1921 or early 1922. In fact, black initiative on the organizational front was evidenced in the years just before the Jazz Age proper, when the music industry was first beginning to experiment with the types of show places that would, in time, evolve into the modern nightclub.

Chicago's distinctive "black and tan" jazz cabarets date from just before World War I. Heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson was the principal originator of this style of club, and his involvement serves as an example of the many South Side music business pioneers whose lives affected the community on many levels. A racist backlash against Johnson's stand on interracial socializing led to his rude exit from the city. After this, the club tradition was brought to fruition through important work by a group of entrepreneurs who included the champion's former financial partner in the fight business, saloonkeeper Bill Bottoms.

It is surprising that Jack Johnson has gotten so little credit in Jazz Age histories, considering his role first in Chicago and then in New York. But he has been considered merely a prize-fight champ. In his autobiography he demonstrates a very wide range of involvements and interests, including the theater (Johnson [1930] 1969). In July of 1912, having defeated all creditable heavyweight contenders, Johnson turned his attention to show business and opened his Cafe de Champion on Chicago's South Side. There had been a few small night spots in the area, but the Cafe de Champion was something special. For one thing, Johnson welcomed both white and black customers, unlike the later "slumming resorts," where black musicians played before whites-only audiences. Chicago of 1912 prided itself on its good race relations, but Johnson's launching of the black and tan nightclub raised many eyebrows and no small amount of protest (*Chicago Defender* July 13, 1912, and July 5, 1913).

Unfazed, Johnson maintained his policy of welcoming all. He lined up the Elite Dance Band, one of the hot bands of the day, and he hired a chorus line of beauties to engage in Africanized dance. Within a year there were a number of copycat cabarets on the South Side. A powerful part of the Jazz Age had been launched by the champion, but the business still had a long way to go to reach its peak: during this period closing times for cabarets fell between midnight and 1:00 A.M., but by 1918 they would remain open all night (*Chicago Defender* July 13, August 10, and September 7, 1912, and October 17 and December 19, 1914).

Johnson took an active part in running his club, and a photograph in his autobiography shows him leading the Cafe de Champion's band. On the side, Johnson learned the bass violin, and at his thirty-fifth birthday party, shortly after opening his cafe, the *Chicago Defender* (April 5, 1913)

reported that he surprised his guests with a lengthy bass solo. In later years, Johnson sang, danced, and acted in musical revues, and in the 1930s he had a part in Verdi's *Aida* at New York's Metropolitan Opera House (Johnson [1930] 1969, see photograph sect.).

Johnson did not, however, last very long in Chicago after opening his club. He was tried in Chicago in 1913 on the strange charge of, in effect, having slept with his common-law wife after having taken her across state lines. This was technically a violation of the Mann Act, a federal statute that forbade transporting women across state lines for illicit purposes. At the time of the insipid trial, he and the woman in question had not lived together for two years. All the jury seemed to see was that a black man had a white girl friend. After conviction, Johnson jumped bail and fled the country with his new legal wife, also white (Johnson [1930] 1969, 58–62; *Chicago Defender* July 5, 1913).

Johnson spent much of his exile in Mexico, where he ran a nightclub in Tijuana and established a land company in Mexico City. He displayed a political consciousness in an ad for his company carried in the New York monthly, the *Messenger* (October 1919), the organ of blacks in the Socialist party. The advertisement, addressed to “colored people,” said, in part, “You who are lynched, tortured, mobbed, persecuted and discriminated against in the boasted ‘Land of Liberty’” should consider moving to Mexico where “severe punishment is meted out to those who discriminate against a man because of his color or race.”

After Johnson's departure from Chicago, that city's cabaret scene grew slowly until 1917 and U.S. entry into World War I. The cabaret and dance hall business then capitalized on the influx of African-American laborers from the South and upon the arrival of the jazz musicians who had been driven from New Orleans in November of 1917 when authorities closed down the fabled nightlife district of Storyville.

In 1917 Johnson's saloonkeeper friend Bill Bottoms opened Chicago's Dreamland Cafe. Early in 1918 Bottoms provided financial help to his housemate Virgil Williams, who subsequently opened the Royal Gardens dance hall. What had been a hall featuring white bands was refitted by Williams in the bench-seating style of black New Orleans dance halls. Williams then brought in New Orleans musicians. In 1919 Bottoms and Williams joined forces with Frank Preer, the proprietor of the De-Luxe Cafe, to help fund the Chicago *Whip*, their own advertising weekly for cabarets and clubs. The publication was edited by lawyer Joseph Bibb, whose sister Eloise Bibb Thompson was the Chicago representative for Black Swan Records, the foremost black American record com-

pany of the Jazz Age (*Whip* September 27, 1919; *Chicago City Directory* 1917).

According to contemporary accounts, particularly musicians' biographies and discographies, the establishments of Bottoms, Williams, and Preer featured most of the best-known jazz performers in Chicago during the 1917–1921 period. The number of licensed cabarets in Chicago rose as high as eighty-three during these years (Ostransky 1978, 75–78). From advertisements and news items in the *Whip* and other sources, it is clear that, up through 1921, a majority of the South Side's "cafes," dance halls, and clubs that featured jazz music were run by African-American entrepreneurs. The black-and-tan tradition of welcoming all races was maintained in this period. In addition to Dreamland, the Royal Gardens, and the DeLuxe, the memorable night spots included the Elite #1 and Elite #2 nightclubs of Henry "Teenan" Jones and Bob Motts's Pekin cabaret. The best known of white-run cabarets at this time was Isadore Shor's Entertainer Cafe, which stood across the street from Bottoms's Dreamland (Ostransky 1978, 75–78).

The music was provided at "live and let live prices," according to the 1920–1921 advertisements describing Virgil Williams's Royal Gardens. The club proprietors seemed to aim for audiences within a short trolley ride or a walk from the clubs. Black Chicago, at the start of the Jazz Age, was principally a long, narrow north-south strip whose western edge reached to State Street. The cabarets and dance halls were clustered between 28th and 35th on or near State. Just to the west were neighborhoods of white (and, largely, working-class) residents. Cabaret attendance was bolstered by workers coming by after work from the huge stockyards a mile to the southwest and from the city railway yards a mile or so to the northwest. Moreover, baseball's Comiskey Park was a South Side attraction, and black jazz bands, including that of jazz giant and cornet artist Joe "King" Oliver, worked the grandstand during White Sox games (Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922; Allen and Rust [1957] 1987).

Chicago had an unusually large pool of musicians from which the cabaret owners could choose. The city was a minor mecca even before the arrival of the musicians from New Orleans. Some had come for the chance to join the Musicians' Union Local 208, which, as the nation's first American Federation of Labor (AFL) local for black musicians, was already a decade old by the start of the Jazz Age. Others came to Chicago for the city's highly competitive church music scene or to study at the Chicago University of Music, a nationally renowned conservatory run by the concert soprano Florence Cole Talbert, who was a recording

artist for Black Swan and Paramount records. Good musicianship and a spillover of talent from one field to another marked the career of many South Side artists. There was, for instance, Dave Peyton, who was one of the founders of Local 208, an organizer of South Side concert music groups, a leader of pit orchestras at the big vaudeville houses, a bandleader at a number of jazz cabarets, the editor of the music and theater section of the *Whip*, and, later, a columnist for the *Chicago Defender*.

The strong sense of community was embellished by the "New Negro" political militancy that arose during the early years of the Jazz Age. Musicians who shared in political activism included the much-recorded jazz trombonist Roy Palmer, who, in the early 1920s, led the thirty-five piece band of the Chicago branch of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Later in the decade, Garvey's organization had regular Saturday night functions organized by the blues and jazz virtuoso James "Steady Roll" Johnson, best known for his recordings with his guitarist/vocalist brother Lonnie Johnson.¹

In the political arena the cabarets and dance halls were by no means universally applauded. Antivice reformers equated the cabarets with Chicago's sizable prostitution business, which had been concentrated in the African-American neighborhood because of deals between politicians, police, and the underworld. Most of the prostitutes working the South Side were white. The cabarets were also opposed by racists who were up in arms over the combination of hot jazz and mixed-race couples on the dance floor. The white daily newspapers sensationalized the South Side with stories like the following:

"Lid" a Joke as Pekin Shimmies Defiance of Law

Lawless liquor, sensuous shimmy, solicitous sirens, wrangling waiters, all the tints of the racial rainbow, black and tan and white, [were] dancing, drinking, singing, early Sunday morning at the Pekin cafe. . . . At one o'clock the place was crowded. Meanwhile a syncopating colored man had been vamping cotton field blues on the piano. A brown girl sang. . . . Black men with white girls, white men with yellow girls, old, young, all [were] filled with the abandon brought about by illicit whisky and liquor music (quoted in Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922, 323-324).

Of course, such articles did not really deter customers so much as increase curiosity and enlarge the number who, according to Joseph Bibb, "come to scoff and then remain to play" (*Whip* April 24, 1920).

1. On Palmer's tie to UNIA, see *Negro World*, July 14, 1923; for information on James E. Johnson, see the *Whip*, November 12, 1921, and *Negro World*, February 19, 1927.

Bibb ridiculed the detractors and said that their crusade to close the black-and-tan cabarets "looks as if it was all a clever conspiracy to increase the pàtronage." Moreover, argued Bibb, the opponents of the cabarets were hypocritical to claim that the night spots were bad for race relations when it should be obvious to anyone who ever attended a cabaret "how well the 'blacks and tans' get along together after midnight" (*Whip*, April 24, 1920). Bibb's paper was actually more than a sheet for the cabarets that provided him funding. It had a political slant. Bibb was an activist in Garvey's UNIA. He also had sympathies for trade unions, which he demonstrated by endorsing steel mill and packinghouse strikers and by having the *Whip's* music and theater section edited by Local 208 militant Dave Peyton.

There were other factors that contributed to the cabarets' success. They were typically small in size, meaning the rental price was affordable to a broader segment of the economically hard-pressed black entrepreneurial class than would have been the case if the establishments were larger. The cozy DeLuxe Cafe—a popular visiting spot of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, and other celebrities—was, for instance, upstairs behind the billiard parlor of the same name. Chinese American Chicago bordered on the north of the African-American community, and many a black cabaret featured Chinese food. There was a universal rather than exclusive appeal in a place promising good "chop suey" along with "good jazz."

And finally, the political machine of Chicago mayor William "Big Bill" Thompson was notorious for its "wide open" stance toward vice, and this situation created an opening for black music. Mayor Thompson had agreements with South Side vice lords, including Capone, notes jazz historian Leroy Ostransky. To maintain these agreements, Thompson needed votes at election time. He coveted black votes, and in return for neighborhood ward heelers delivering votes of over ninety percent for Thompson, favors were granted. A police presence that might have been turned against the clubs was minimized (Ostransky 1978, 93–99). Virgil Williams explained that he obtained a permit to open his Royal Gardens dance hall, along with a promise that the police would refrain from raids, by giving a one-third interest in the club to Alderman Louis Anderson, who was a loyal member of the Thompson machine. Williams made these disclosures after deciding to run for election against the alderman, who won reelection anyway.² By that time, late 1922, Wil-

2. A series of articles in the *Whip* (December 9, 16, and 23, 1922) records Williams's complaints.

liams, along with Bottoms, Preer, and other black pioneers, had lost their controlling roles in Chicago's music business.

The rise and fall of Bill Bottoms's Dreamland Cafe illustrates the pattern. Bottoms was probably the best known of the black entrepreneurs in the cabaret business, having been a partner with Jack Johnson and having had an "athletic club" on State Street in addition to his nightclub. Bottoms's involvement in the prizefight business extended well into the 1930s, when he was Joe Louis's personal cook.³

Shortly after opening Dreamland, Bottoms hired a young blues singer, Alberta Hunter, who had been forced from her first singing job after a gunfight in that club convinced the police to close the place down. Hunter began working at Dreamland for \$17.50 a week, but, with raises and tips, she was soon making much more than that in a night. The influx of good back-up musicians from New Orleans enriched the performance. Hunter explained in her memoirs how it was around this time that Chicago clubs figured a way around the official "legal" closing hour. "They were supposed to close at midnight. . . . But the minute they turned the key that way, the door was locked. Then they turned it back this way, and the club would be open for breakfast dance" (as quoted in Taylor 1987, 47-48). Of course, certain arrangements had to be made so that the police would wink at such a practice.

By early 1921 the lineup of entertainment at Dreamland was indeed impressive. Oliver's self-styled "Greatest Jazz Band on Earth" was now the lead band, and blues great Alberta Hunter was still the lead vocalist. Door prizes, raffles, and confetti-throwing time added to the fun. Dreamland was nothing if not exciting. One night Hunter was arrested inside the club. Two policemen had tried to stop an interracial couple on the dance floor from "shimmying too much." Hunter came off the stage and "abused" the policemen, according to an item in the *Whip* of December 11, 1920.

Hunter later recalled that many white jazz and pop music stars came to Dreamland to study and copy the styles of the black artists. She explained, with some sarcasm, that the white singer Sophie Tucker was eager to hear Alberta sing, but Tucker was reluctant to come to Dreamland. She sent her maid and her piano player to take notes. And then Tucker sent a note to Alberta requesting that she come downtown to meet Miss Tucker in her dressing room at the Palace Theater. "I never did go," Alberta noted (reported in Taylor 1987, 39).

3. General information on Bottoms's Dreamland Cafe can be found in various issues of the *Whip* between 1919 and 1921. Also, see the *Chicago City Directory* for 1917 and 1918 and Taylor (1987).

A great many stars of white jazz and popular music did come to the South Side cabarets and dance halls, and the memoirs of these artists contain some vivid tributes. Said pianist Hoagy Carmichael of his first visit to hear Louis Armstrong: "'Why,' I moaned, 'why isn't everybody in the world here to hear that?'" (as quoted in Leonard 1962, 56–58). Milton "Mezz" Mezzrow was particularly enamored of black women blues singers. In reverent detail he described the dignified carriage and controlled but powerful delivery of Alberta Hunter and the other early stars of Chicago cabaret blues (Mezzrow and Wolfe [1946] 1990, 27). Hunter, Bessie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, and the others of that era may have had "raunchy" lyrics in their blues, but the part of their act that involved their stage entry, their delivery, and their dramatically beautiful gowns was an important step above the old ragtime-era tradition of singers, male or female, who had to perform in minstrel-show blackface.

In early April 1921 Bill Bottoms made a major move to elevate his establishment even more. Anton Lada's Louisiana Five, one of the nation's top Dixieland bands, was playing the night show at a big dance hall downtown in the Loop during Lada's two week stay in Chicago. Bottoms convinced Lada to play the early set at Dreamland (*Whip* March 26, 1921). In effect, Bill Bottoms, jazz entrepreneur, was doing just what one would expect from a good businessperson: improve his offering to the public. In this case, he was offering a lineup of King Oliver's "Greatest Jazz Band on Earth" plus one of the greatest blues vocalists on earth plus one of the greatest Dixieland bands on earth. The rub was this: Bottoms was a *black* businessman, and while white promoters occasionally hired black acts, and while vaudeville shows in many cities had had integrated bills in houses that were black- or white-owned, Bottoms was breaking new ground in what could potentially be an immensely profitable type of lineup.

Almost immediately, rumors began to fly on the South Side that Bill Bottoms was under pressure to sell Dreamland. He angrily replied on Dave Peyton's music page of the *Whip*: "Dreamland is not for sale." The article noted that pressure had come from jealous competitors and from those who were angry because Bottoms "refused to pay the petty graft common to such questionable enterprises." Bottoms pointed to his reputation for giving "benefits" for community causes at Dreamland, and he added: "It has been the height of my ambition to equip a first class place for amusement lovers free from the degrading and contaminating influences which are usually present in most cabarets. I have succeeded in

accomplishing this desire and the respectable people know it and are rewarding me with their patronage" (*Whip* April 9, 1921).

Two weeks after Bottoms's brave statement, the bartender was murdered at Dreamland. It was after hours and there were no witnesses, but \$150 was missing from the open cash register. The police arrested a young black man, Lemontine George, "known to the underworld," who was reported to have left Dreamland earlier that night in an angry mood after allegedly having lost his money in a card game in the basement. Bill Bottoms vehemently denied that there had been any card game in the basement, and the *Whip* said the evidence against George was weak. George retained the legendary Clarence Darrow for his defense, and Darrow was not one to take a case without its having some special significance. The newspapers fail to mention any trial or other outcome of the case, which suggests that the arrest of George was typical of the police bungling in the face of Chicago underworld violence.⁴

On May 30, 1921, Dreamland closed. Peyton complained that the bands playing Dreamland should have known what was coming, but had instead missed a chance to play elsewhere and were now without work. At this point King Oliver left for a year on the West Coast. He had previously played at the DeLuxe, Royal Gardens, and Pekin, but these establishments were not available now. The DeLuxe had just changed owners and hired a new band, the police had revoked the license for the Pekin some months earlier, and the Royal Gardens had closed a week before Dreamland.

Chicago entered the summer of 1921 with its premier black-run South Side clubs closed, involved in a transfer of ownership, or both. In the case of the Royal Gardens, Alderman Anderson told Virgil Williams in early May that it was time to get out of the cabaret business. Anderson then sold his one-third share to the white landlord of the building. Williams got out and closed the place, not liking the new deal that brought his landlord into the actual music business.⁵ Traditionally, music hall owners gave the lease holders full artistic control. The end of the Jazz Age was due in part to new owners who dictated artistic decisions.

Jack Johnson came to the rescue of Dreamland and his old friend Bottoms. The champion had returned to the United States and served a brief prison term on the Mann Act charge. He was released from the federal penitentiary on July 9, 1921, and he arrived by train in Chicago

4. Coverage of the incident can be found in the *Whip* for April 23 and 30, 1921, and the *Chicago Defender*, April 23, 1921.

5. On the sale of the Gardens, see the *Whip*, March 26, June 4, and October 8, 1921. See also Williams's exposé in that publication, December 23, 1922.

five days later. His first sight of the city in eight years was of massive crowds in the train station. He was then driven to Dreamland, with an estimated 30,000–50,000 South Side fans packing the streets along the route. Fear of the mob evaporated, and Bottoms opened his club for a special afternoon with the popular champ and a few hundred friends.⁶

Bottoms reopened Dreamland for regular business two weeks later with Alberta Hunter as his headliner; the feisty blues star had stayed in town when Oliver left for California. At this time Johnson left for New York with a \$6,000 loan from Bottoms, which the champ invested in Harlem clubs and theaters. Bottoms's renaissance was rather short-lived. Three months after the reopening, he "sold a half interest" in his club and was reported to be "going on a fishing trip to Wisconsin." The new management was led by a "Packy" MacFarland, identified as "well known in sporting circles." One wonders what Packy packed. Packy relied on Bottoms for dealing with the musicians, but the old boss's main interest was now his Athletic Club.⁷

The loss of community control over the cabaret and dance hall business opened the way for well capitalized commercial interests to come in and upgrade black entertainment facilities in an attempt to attract the big-spending white "slummers." One such effort was the opening of the first cabaret with "refrigeration" (air conditioning), the Sunset Cafe.

The "slumming resorts" were a flamboyant offshoot of the cabarets, which also spawned the less gaudy institution, the present day jazz and blues nightclub. The resorts were noted for their riverboat decor, fake magnolia plants, and nearly nude dancers who wiggled frantically while the bandsmen alternately played their instruments and grunted and snorted suggestively. The resorts were also known for their nasty doormen who intimidated the few prospective African-American customers who had not already been dissuaded by the ridiculously high entry fee. In Harlem, Connie's Inn, for instance, was charging \$15 at the door in 1929, which in today's terms equates to around \$100 or more.⁸

Perhaps the nationwide pioneer in the resorts was Isadore Shor's Entertainer Cafe, the little spot across the street from Dreamland. The En-

6. Johnson's 1921 return was reported in the *Whip*, July 16 and 23, and the *Chicago Defender*, July 9 and 16.

7. On the loan to Johnson, see the *Whip*, May 6, 1922. While MacFarland appears to have been part of the black community, the expensive renovations he announced indicate that he was an agent for outsiders. See the *Whip*, November 19, 1921, Taylor (1987, 58), and the advertisements for "Dreamland A. C." in the *Whip* during the fall of 1922.

8. The Shuffle Inn was declared a "slumming resort" because of its prices at its opening (*Billboard* December 3, 1921); on the \$15 tab, see "Shuffle/Connie's Inn" in Kellner (1987); see also Ostransky (1978, 216–218).

tertainer had originally catered to all comers but went "exclusive" early in 1921. Shor was a shoemaker who lived on the South Side and had a shoe shop in the neighborhood (*Chicago City Directory* 1917).⁹ He was involved in the jazz scene as early as 1917, and Alberta Hunter recalled Shor as a hard worker who did everything at the Entertainer from taking the money at the door to sweeping up. Shor could be considered rather typical of the numerous white, foreign-born founders of jazz and blues clubs (largely Jewish and Italian) who lived in and ran little businesses in the African-American neighborhoods of the cities where the music flowered. These were whites who shared with African-Americans a loathing of the bigoted and mean-spirited WASP culture of the United States, but who were nevertheless much closer to the WASPs economically than were most of their black ghetto allies. And although Isadore Shor, along with his counterparts such as Connie Innerman of Harlem's Connie's Inn, clearly felt they had the interests of the black community at heart, they did much to turn jazz and blues into a business of high-priced tourist traps.

Chicago's South Side was a raw and rough-edged neighborhood, and the attempt to sell jazz to tourists did not always work. There was, for instance, the Plantation Cafe, which opened in 1923 amid much fanfare about its aim to elevate the music scene. But the effort failed, as noted in a press item of November 27, 1925:

This black and tan resort in the heart of the colored [area] once catered to vast number of whites, who were the main support of the place. It has recently become inhabited with undesirable characters whose actions have driven off practically all the white trade this cafe once enjoyed. White people are now given no protection when entering this cafe (quoted in Allen and Rust [1957] 1987, 54).

Drawbacks to the resort business included the costs for extra bouncers, fancy furniture, and wall fixtures, for lighting systems rivaling modern rock shows, and for graft payments to mobsters, the police, or even both. In the mid-1920s a new mayor, the reform-minded Democrat William Dever, rescinded the licenses of more than half the cabarets. Gangland wars accelerated in the late 1920s and violent closures stemming from competition over "turf" made the cabaret scene unstable. King Oliver's biography notes that, on the South Side during the latter part of the decade, nightclub "bombings and mysterious fires . . . [were] so fre-

9. The transformation of the Entertainer into a whites-only club was noted with alarm by Peyton, who warned Bottoms not to let Dreamland become such a place (*Whip* March 5, 1921).

quent and commonplace that they seldom merited mention in the press" (Allen and Rust [1957] 1987, 47). The Plantation Cafe, the Entertainer Cafe, and the Royal Gardens dance hall (then Lincoln Gardens) were three that met their end in mysterious fires (Allen and Rust [1957] 1987, 70–72).

As the jazz clubs faded in the late 1920s, the blues began to take over the South Side as performers such as Blind Lemon Jefferson and James and Lonnie Johnson became hot items at rent parties and functions at lodge halls and in the funkier cafes.

The classy resorts live on through memories of great jazz, with Duke Ellington's performances at New York's Cotton Club probably the best remembered. But the image of the tourist trap as the home of great jazz is greatly exaggerated. Commercial considerations inherent in appealing to musically ignorant rich whites led, as often as not, to the hiring of bands that played watered-down music. Although Chicago's Sunset Cafe had Louis Armstrong's band in the late 1920s, this came after this resort went some years with the undistinguished Carroll Dickerson group. After the Entertainer changed from a community club to a resort, the bands that Shor hired were along the lines of the one he featured through much of 1923, the Sammy Stewart band, a group that one reviewer compared with Paul Whiteman—white America's alleged king of jazz. The reviewer noted that Stewart and Whiteman "have taken the rough edges off of jazz," i.e. watered it down (*Messenger* January 1925).

Symbolically, the Entertainer Cafe, with its music that became distanced from its roots, provided owner Shor with the profits to distance himself physically. Whereas at the start of the Jazz Age he lived at 35th Street on the South Side, he had bought, by 1927 and the closing of his club due to fire, a home on Chicago's posh Far North Side. By way of comparison, Bill Bottoms still lived in the ghetto in 1927 (*Chicago City Directory* 1928). Dreamland was still open, and Cab Calloway had one of his first jobs there early in 1928. But Calloway recalled that he was glad to leave because the old hot spot was no longer the home of the stars and had instead become a "place where people came in to drink and talk, not to listen to the music" (Calloway and Rollins 1976, 57–58).

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