

## “King Porter Stomp” and the Jazz Tradition\*

By Jeffrey Magee

Fletcher won quite a few battles of music with “King Porter Stomp.” And Jelly Roll Morton knew this, and he used to go and say “I made Fletcher Henderson.” And Fletcher used to laugh . . . and say “You did,” you know. He wouldn’t argue. (Henderson 1975, 1:69)

Toward the end of his life in May 1938, Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton (1890–1941) walked into the Library of Congress’s Coolidge Auditorium sporting an expensive suit, a gold watch fob and rings, and a diamond-studded incisor (Lomax 1993:xvii). He sat down at the piano and, with the assistance of folklorist Alan Lomax, conveyed his music and life story into what Lomax called a “one-lung portable Presto recorder” (ibid.:287). Speaking in a measured, orotund baritone, Morton explored his past at a leisurely, dignified pace, but he was eager to set the record straight on one particular subject: that he had “personally originated jazz in New Orleans in 1902” (ibid.:84). Historians have since shown the origins of jazz to be more complicated than Morton allowed (Gushee 1994; Panetta 2000), but none can refute the story of his most popular and enduring composition, “King Porter Stomp”:

[T]his tune become to be the outstanding favorite of every great hot band throughout the world that had the accomplishments and qualifications of playing it. And until today this tune has been the cause of many great bands to come to fame. It has caused the outstanding tunes today to use the backgrounds that belong to “King Porter” in order to make great tunes of themselves. (Morton 1938)<sup>1</sup>

“King Porter Stomp” did indeed become a standard during the Swing Era, widely performed by big bands throughout the 1930s and beyond. Moreover, as Morton said, many musicians used the chords, the “backgrounds,” of “King Porter”’s Trio and Stomp sections as the basis for new tunes. Adding luster to “King Porter”’s agency in jazz history, Benny Goodman gave the piece a key role in an account of his band’s legendary performance at the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles on the night of August 21, 1935. As Goodman recalled, when the band started playing Fletcher Henderson’s arrangements of “Sometimes I’m Happy” and “King Porter Stomp,” the “place exploded” (Goode 1986).

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Jazz historians have reinforced and expanded Morton’s claim and Goodman’s testimony. The Palomar explosion and its aftershocks have led some historians to cite it as the birth of the Swing Era, most notably Marshall W. Stearns, who, after tracing jazz’s development in 1930–34, could simply assert, “The Swing Era was born on the night of 21 August 1935” (Stearns 1956:211; see echoes of this statement in Erenberg 1998:3–4, and Giddins 1998:156). Gunther Schuller has called “King Porter Stomp” one of the “dozen or so major stations in the development of jazz in the twenty years between 1926 and 1946” (Schuller 1989:840). And Goodman’s recording, he wrote elsewhere, “was largely responsible for ushering in the Swing Era” (Schuller 1985). One of Morton’s many recordings of “King Porter Stomp” appeared on the canon-shaping *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* (now out of print), and Henderson’s and Goodman’s versions may be found on the Smithsonian’s *Big-Band Jazz* anthology. Other reissues of Goodman’s and Henderson’s recordings remain easily accessible.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Ken Burns’s television documentary *Jazz* highlighted the piece as paradigmatic. In the liner notes for the program’s spin-off compact disc anthology, Loren Schoenberg has written that the “pedigree of ‘King Porter Stomp’ traces the evolution of jazz composition” (Burns 2000:10).<sup>3</sup>

A piece inspiring such vast claims deserves to have its story told, especially as scholars question the value of canon formation in jazz studies and even the “seductive menace” of records that constitute the canon (Gabbard 1995:1–28; Rasula 1995:134). For as the jazz canon—or more properly, jazz canons—continues to serve useful pedagogical, historiographical, and performative purposes, the works that comprise it should not be ignored so much as they should be investigated more thoroughly.<sup>4</sup> If, as Robert Walser has argued, “the price of classicism is always loss of specificity” (Walser 1995:169), then we might balance classicism with *more* specificity in order to forestall the homogenization of the jazz canon that Walser and others wish to avoid.<sup>5</sup> “King Porter Stomp” presents an intriguing case in jazz history before bebop, because exploring its transformation from multistrain piano piece to big-band standard reveals the piece’s canonical status to be less inevitable than anomalous and rather unlikely.

### “Private Material” (ca. 1907–1923)

“King Porter Stomp” had existed for nearly three decades before making a national impact in 1935. Morton himself claimed to have conceived it in 1905 (Lomax 1993:146). Following Roy Carew, who assisted Morton late in his life, James Dapogny suggests a date of 1906 (Dapogny 1982:25, 496). Lawrence Gushee—who discovered that Morton was born in 1890, not in 1885, as he himself claimed—dates Morton’s first compositions

slightly later, during an itinerant period in 1907–11. “King Porter Stomp” had probably been composed (if not written down and titled) by 1910, when Morton met the man for whom he named the piece (Gushee 1985:396–97). Whatever the case, the piece stands as one of Morton’s earliest compositions, conceived by a young pianist in the peak decade of ragtime.

The title, like the composer, conjures both aristocratic gravitas and honky-tonk grit. In Morton’s account, he named the piece after Porter King, “a very dear friend of mine and a marvelous pianist” from Florida. King, according to Morton, was

an educated gentleman with a wonderful musical education, far much better than mine . . . he seemed to have a kind of a yen for my style of playing. And of course he particularly like [*sic*] this type of number that I was playing, and that was the reason that I named it after him, but not “Porter King”; I changed the name backwards and called it “King Porter Stomp.” (Morton 1938)

As for the “stomp” part of the title, Morton staked another major claim, considering the term’s widespread use in the 1920s and beyond. “‘King Porter’ was the first tune with the name ‘stomp’ wrote in the United States,” he said, confessing, “I don’t know what the term ‘stomp’ mean myself [*sic*]. There wasn’t really any meaning only that people would stamp their feet and I decided that the name ‘stomp’ would be fitted for it” (Morton 1938). Schuller defines “stomp” as “synonymous with blues” and indicating a piece with a “heavy or strongly marked beat” (Schuller 1968:382). By the 1920s stomps comprised a loosely defined marketing category for fast, hard-driving jazz-oriented music, somehow distinguished from blues, as in the “blues and stomps” series of Morton’s compositions published by the Chicago-based Melrose Brothers Music Co. (Dapogny 1982: plate between 36–37). On the copyright registration card at the Library of Congress, the Melrose Brothers aim to have it both ways: there, the piece bears the subtitle “Dixieland stomp, blues master piece [*sic*].”

If Morton wrote anything down when he composed the piece, no sources have come to light. The earliest version is Morton’s solo piano recording of 1923, and his publisher did not claim its copyright or publish it until late in the following year. Such facts suggest that Morton had a casual or naive attitude about publication. Certainly, he stood outside the orbit of aggressive *Tin Pan Alley* song plugging and the smaller industry of midwestern ragtime, whose leading composers regularly saw their works published soon after composing them. But Morton was anything but casual or naive about the market value of his works. As an itinerant pianist,

he saw much more benefit in withholding them from publication, as he explained to Lomax:

You may wonder why I didn’t copyright my tunes in the old days . . . The fact is that the publishers thought they could buy anything they wanted for fifteen or twenty dollars. Now if you was a good piano player, you had ten jobs waiting for you as soon as you hit any town and so fifteen or twenty dollars or a hundred dollars didn’t mean very much to us. . . . So we kept our melodies for our private material to use to battle each other in battles of music. (Lomax 1993:146–47)

#### **Publication and Early Piano Recordings (1923–26)**

Morton never shed his distrust of publishers (Stewart 1991:168–69), but by 1923 he had more incentive to protect and promote his music. That year he moved to Chicago and began an association with the Melrose Brothers, who published Morton’s works after he had recorded them (Dapogny 1982:20). At this point, the Melrose Brothers Music Co. was a fledgling, “small-time” operation with a “modest store,” as Rick Kennedy has noted, but it “stood at the forefront of the new jazz movement” (Kennedy 1994:72–73). Although Morton had seen his first publication in 1915 (“The Original Jelly Roll Blues” [Will Rossiter, Chicago]), the jazz vogue that had begun in 1917 and crested in 1923–24 now coaxed more of Morton’s music into the public arena, where other musicians could play it in their own way. Morton quickly achieved success with “Wolverine Blues,” the first of his pieces that Melrose issued (Dapogny 1982:20, 63–64).

“King Porter Stomp,” however, did not show promise of becoming a hit, much less a standard, in jazz or any other repertory. Morton played the piece in his first solo recording session (July 17, 1923, Richmond, Indiana, Gennett 5289), suggesting the work’s pride of place in his repertory. (He ultimately made more recordings of “King Porter Stomp” than of any of his other pieces [Dapogny 1982:495].) The next year the piece was further disseminated through a couple of pre-publication “plugs” and Melrose’s dual publication of the work as a piano solo and as a dance-band arrangement. Judging from the documented recording legacy from 1923 through 1927 (see table 1), however, the piece failed to attract a broad or sustained following among other musicians—even though *Variety*, in late 1924, had observed a “recording vogue” for “only ‘hot’ tunes” (*Variety*, November 12, 1924). Certainly, the piece came nowhere near matching the interest raised by another “hot” Melrose publication, Charlie Davis’s “Copenhagen,” which spread rapidly among bands in Chicago and New York after its publication in October 1924 (Magee 1995:51, 55).

**Table 1**  
 “King Porter Stomp”: A discography, 1923–1942\*

Date	Artist/Group	Matrix No.
1923	July 17 Jelly Roll Morton	Gennett 5289
1924	ca. October Al Turk's Princess Orchestra	Olympic 1463
	November 3 Benson Orchestra of Chicago	rejected
1925	ca. December King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton	Autograph 617
	ca. February 3 Johnny Sylvester and His Orchestra	Pathe Actuelle 036211
	February 20 Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra	rejected
	February 26 Lanin's Red Heads	Columbia 327-D
	March Charles Creath's Jazz-O-Maniacs	Okeh 41565
1926	April 20 Jelly Roll Morton	Vocalion 1020
1928	March 14 Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra	Columbia 1543-D
1932	December 9 Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra	Okeh 41565
	late 1932 Cab Calloway and His Orchestra	Stash ST124
	[taped broadcast from Cotton Club, New York]	
1933	August 18 Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra	Brunswick A-9771
1934	September 14 Claude Hopkins and His Orchestra	Decca 184
1935	April 29 Isham Jones and His Orchestra	Rumbleseat Records RS 103
	June 6 Rhythm Makers Orchestra	NBC Thesaurus 127
	[Benny Goodman Orchestra]	
	July 1 Benny Goodman and His Orchestra	Victor 25090
	November 6 Blanche Calloway and Her Orchestra	Vocalion 3112
	[as “I Gotta Swing”]	
1936	February Chick Webb and His Orchestra	Polydor 423248
1937	January 10 Count Basie and His Orchestra	Jazz Archives JA-16
	[taped broadcast from “Chatterbox,” William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh]	
	May 17 Teddy Hill and His NBC Orchestra	Bluebird B-6988
	July 13 Benny Goodman and His Orchestra	Columbia ML4591
	December 16 Harry Roy and His Orchestra	Parlophone 1158
1938	May–July Jelly Roll Morton (2)	Circle 23-24
	August Jelly Roll Morton	Circle 73-69
	September 12 Erskine Hawkins and His Orchestra	rejected
	September 27 Glenn Miller and His Orchestra	Bluebird B-7839
	September 27 Glenn Miller and His Orchestra	?
1939	April 6 Harry James and His Orchestra	Brunswick 8366
	December 14 Jelly Roll Morton	General 4005
1940	February 7 Metronome All-Star Band	Columbia 36389
	March 28 Teddy Bunn	Blue Note 503
	May 28 Zutty Singleton and His Orchestra	Decca 18093
	July 14 Jelly Roll Morton	Pirate MPC-502
	July 27 Cab Calloway and His Orchestra	Jazz Panorama 16
1942	January 27 Bob Crosby and His Orchestra	Decca 4390

\*Adapted and expanded from Richard Crawford and Jeffrey Magee (1992), which was compiled from Brian Rust (1982).

An obvious explanation for the piece's initial failure to catch on might seem to be that by 1924 “King Porter Stomp” was decidedly old-fashioned, a strain-form piece from the ragtime era. But Melrose had no reason to think that would hinder its chances in the marketplace. Dance bands of the era occasionally played older material, including “Maple Leaf Rag” (1899), “High Society” (1901), “Panama” (1911), and “Eccentric” (1912), as well as more recently published strain-form pieces such as “Tiger Rag” (1917), “Clarinet Marmalade” (1918), and “Copenhagen” (Crawford and Magee 1992:xii–xiii, and passim under song titles).<sup>6</sup>

A closer look at “King Porter Stomp” as it appeared in the Melrose sheet music publication and Morton's early recordings reveals the qualities that made the piece both old-sounding and unique in the early 1920s (ex. 1). An observation by Dapogny can serve as a starting point: “[Morton's] departure from ragtime style is more radical than the surface of his playing might suggest” (Dapogny 1982:11). And as Dapogny puts it, the piece's final strain is “one of Morton's most forward-looking creations” (Dapogny 1982:496). Yet the forward-looking elements rise in relief only after ragtime roots are recognized. First, the overall form and key scheme of the piece, as Morton recorded and published it in 1924, resembles conventional non-*da capo* march and dance forms, and piano ragtime as standardized in the work of Joplin and others. (It lacks one formal quality regularly seen in Joplin's rags, however: the first strain's return after the second strain.)

	Interlude	Trio	Stomp
I <sub>4</sub> [: A <sub>16</sub> :] [: B <sub>16</sub> :]	X <sub>4</sub>	C <sub>16</sub>	CX <sub>16</sub> CX' <sub>16</sub>
A <sub>b</sub>		D <sub>b</sub>	

The roles of the hands show both Morton's indebtedness to and departure from ragtime conventions. As in ragtime, the left hand serves the dual purpose of marking the beat and supplying the harmonic foundation, while the right hand features a variety of syncopated patterns that play against the pulse. The second strain is the most conventionally rag-like, with an alternation of octaves and chords in the left hand, and a right-hand pattern based on the “Maple Leaf Rag” motif. Meanwhile, Morton also steers away from ragtime's regularity and repetition. At the opening of the first strain, for example, Morton played and published parallel fifths, lending force and weight to the opening idea. In the second strain, the left hand plays New Orleans-style “tailgate” trombone breaks. Morton's early recordings of the tune reveal left-hand patterns even more active and varied than the sheet music shows: “trombone” figures, syncopation, and forceful accents jolt the texture, especially in the opening of Morton's 1926 recording.

Example 1: "King Porter Stomp." By Ferd "Jelly Roll" Morton. © 1924 (Renewed) EDWIN H. MORRIS & COMPANY, A Division of MPL Communications, Inc. This arrangement © 2002 EDWIN H. MORRIS & COMPANY, A Division of MPL Communications, Inc. All Rights Reserved

gva  
f 3  
gva

[A]  
mf

[B]  
mf

marcato

Example 1 (cont.)

Interlude  
f

[C] Trio  
p

Stomp

Example 1 (cont.)

The musical score consists of six systems of piano accompaniment. Each system contains a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The music features a mix of chords and single-note lines, with some systems showing more complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines in the right hand. The piece concludes with a 'Fine' marking.

Use of riffs reveals another way in which Morton reaches beyond ragtime. In the Trio and Stomp strains, Morton builds eight-bar phrases from repeated one- and two-bar riffs. Conventionally considered a phenomenon appearing in band arrangements of the 1930s and 1940s, riffs distinguish Morton's style not only in "King Porter Stomp," but also in other pieces such as "Big Foot Ham," "Grandpa's Spells," and "Wolverine Blues" (Dapogny 1982:496 and *passim*). Morton's "King Porter" riffs, in Dapogny's words, "pointed the way for arrangers and composers for years to come" (Dapogny 1982:496).

Although Morton contrasts the Trio and Stomp strains with riffs, he underscores each of them with a form of a recycling IV–V–I progression, in which the tonic serves a dominant function, tonicizing the subdominant. The built-in momentum of starting away from the tonic and returning to it every two bars surely accounts for the piece's appeal to later jazz soloists. Morton distinguishes the harmonic plans of the Trio and Stomp only in their bass lines. In the Trio, the tonic is approached by chromatic descent in the bass line: B $\flat$ , A, A $\flat$ , to D $\flat$ . In the Stomp, the tonic is reached through chromatic ascent: G $\flat$ , G, A $\flat$ , to D $\flat$ . This reveals another key departure from ragtime: contrasting strains unified by a common harmonic plan. The first evidence of Morton's characteristic practice of strain variation appears in his 1915 publication of "Original Jelly Roll Blues," which Dapogny, slightly more decisively than Schuller, calls "probably" the first published jazz composition (Dapogny 1982:293; cf. Schuller 1968:137).

In the final strain, the high E $\sharp$  draws attention to another distinctive feature of Morton's style: the blue note. Edward Berlin has cited a few examples of blues-inflected ragtime pieces, yet they tend to prove the rule that, especially before 1912, ragtime rarely got the blues (Berlin 1980:154–60). The blues saturate Morton's works, however, and in "King Porter" the blue third stands out as the most distinctive pitch of the climactic final strain's riff.

Is "King Porter Stomp" a rag? On the surface it would appear so. In fact, on a 1925 sheet music cover, Melrose advertised the piece as part of "Jelly Roll Morton's Famous Blues and Rag Series" (Dapogny 1982: plate between 36–37). Yet, although his form and some figuration follow ragtime, it is clear that Morton's varied left-hand style, his riff-based phrase structure, his variations on the Trio and Stomp strains, and his use of the blues place "King Porter Stomp" in another world. Stylistically anomalous in the early 1900s, the piece would remain so in the Swing Era and beyond.

#### Stock Arrangements and Early Band Recordings (1924–25)

The Melrose Brothers gave the piece every chance to succeed. Had they simply issued "King Porter Stomp" as a piano solo, it might not have

found a new life as a band arrangement. As was customary in the early 1920s, however, the publisher issued the piece in a stock arrangement for dance orchestra by Elmer Schoebel, one of its staff arrangers. Before the firm claimed the piece's copyright on December 9, 1924, it found two bands to promote the piece in pre-publication recordings (see table 1): Al Turk's Princess Orchestra and the powerful Benson Orchestra of Chicago, both of which had likewise recorded the Melrose stock arrangement of "Copenhagen" before its publication in late 1924 (Crawford and Magee 1992:16). In addition, Morton and King Oliver made an unusual duo recording of the piece within a month of the copyright claim. On it, Morton keeps time with a standard rag-derived alternating bass as Oliver plays the melody almost note-for-note as it appears on the sheet music. Hearing the recording as a publisher-instigated plug helps account for the apparently unimaginative playing on this record, which has puzzled at least one jazz historian (Gioia 1997:66).

The whole plugging process seems to have had a short-term effect. Within three months of the stock's publication, several additional bands made "King Porter Stomp" records, including the St. Louis-based Charles Creath's Jazz-O-Maniacs, and New York dance orchestras led by white bandleader Sam Lanin and black bandleader Fletcher Henderson.

Any consideration of these recordings calls for a few words about the stock arrangement. The white pianist, composer, and bandleader Elmer Schoebel was a talented and versatile musician in the 1920s—"a key figure in Chicago jazz" (Sudhalter 1999:31)—but his arrangement for Melrose looks like standard work for hire. It did what a stock was supposed to do: preserve the structure, harmony, melody, rhythm, textures, and other figuration of its source while giving it dance orchestra colors. The clarinet and alto saxophone carry the main melody through the introduction and first two strains; the trumpets play most of the riffs in the Trio and Stomp.

Two of the early-1925 recordings show how bands adapted the stock. Creath's group, featuring the soulful trumpet star who led the band,<sup>7</sup> clearly follows the stock arrangement, departing from it in just two ways: (1) Creath paraphrases the Stomp melody accompanied only by piano, and (2) the band repeats the Trio and first Stomp sections. Such minor alterations were unremarkable at a time when the most popular bands regularly "doctored" stocks or wrote their own "specials" (arrangements tailored by a band's staff arranger to feature that band's particular strengths).

In contrast, Lanin's Red Heads take considerable liberties with the stock. Their four-bar introduction features a new harmonic scheme. Instead of Morton's alternation of tonic (A $\flat$ ) and diminished chords, Lanin's band plays a harmonic surprise, the major submediant in measure

2, leading to a somewhat deceptive return to the tonic: A $\flat$  | E | F<sup>7</sup> | B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>. A novelty-style piano solo in the Trio includes a few substitute chords, and in the end the band slips from the stock's cadence on a D $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> chord to an E<sup>9</sup> chord, recalling the introduction's surprise chord in a new harmonic context. Despite such typically New York-style twists, the band plays in a notably loose, flexible quasi-New Orleans style.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that Lanin and his sidemen, like most other jazz-oriented musicians in 1924, were catching the spirit and style of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, whose first recordings had hit New York within the past year. Two other things are notable about Lanin's record: a trumpet solo (instead of reeds) in the first strain and the use of the Trio, with its chromatically descending line, as a foundation for solos (by clarinet and piano). Interestingly, both of these features would appear in Henderson's recordings in 1928 and beyond, yet Lanin's doctored stock hardly represents the kind of reconception that Henderson's band would later undertake.

Considering Henderson's prominent connection to "King Porter Stomp" in the Swing Era, his band's 1925 recording looms large for its absence: it was never released. By this time, Henderson and Lanin shared the musical duties at the Roseland Ballroom, midtown Manhattan's leading dance hall—"the 'class' dance place on Broadway," in the words of *Variety's* monomial music columnist "Abel" (Green), writing in October 1924 (quoted in Magee 1995:48). Don Redman, Henderson's principal arranger and reedman, has recalled the many "battles of music" that Henderson's and Lanin's bands fought at the Roseland. "He was at one end of the hall," Redman recalled, "and we were at the other, and in the middle was the arrangers' table. . . . We were always making up new arrangements trying to top theirs" (Driggs 1962:96). We can only wonder what kind of arrangement Redman might have worked up for Henderson's band, which recorded "King Porter Stomp" on February 20, 1925, just six days before Lanin's did. The closeness of the recording dates leaves little doubt that the two bands fought this battle on two fronts: in the recording studio as well as in the ballroom.

Unfortunately, we now hear only one side of the battle. A tantalizing question remains: did Louis Armstrong, who joined Henderson's band a few months earlier, play a role in the recording? If Henderson was "battling" Lanin with this piece in early 1925, he should have featured Armstrong, as he often did, as a weapon from his arsenal that Lanin could not match. In fact, among the thirty-one recordings Henderson's band made since Armstrong had joined it in October, only six do not feature an Armstrong solo, so more likely than not, Armstrong had a solo on "King Porter Stomp." Evidence from later Henderson recordings invites further speculation on that point.

**Henderson's Stomp: From Stock to Head (1928–33)**

After the brief flurry of “King Porter Stomp” recordings in early 1925, no one but Morton recorded the piece again for three years. When Henderson’s band revisited the piece in 1928 it became the main conduit through which “King Porter Stomp” passed from the Jazz Age to the Swing Era. Henderson made three different recordings of the piece: the revised version recorded in 1928, the so-called “New King Porter Stomp” of 1932, and another revised version of 1933. In these recordings we hear his band transform the piece from a stock to a head arrangement, that is, an arrangement developed through discussion and demonstration with little or no written music. In the process, “King Porter Stomp” changed from a multistrain rag-based piece to a streamlined “jamming” piece for improvising soloists, a shift graphically revealed in table 2. To make the change, Henderson and his sidemen extended Morton’s riff principle to the entire piece; riffs serve as the foundation for the solos.

Why did Henderson revisit the piece three years after his unissued recording in 1925? That his name was closely linked to the piece from the 1930s onward—making it seem entirely natural for him to have made the piece a central element in his band’s book—has tended to overshadow some practical exigencies in 1927–28. For one thing, many historians interpret the late 1920s as a low point for Henderson, attributable to Don Redman’s departure from the band in July 1927 (see, for example, Allen 1973:214). Richard Hadlock notes that Redman left an “enormous gap” that Henderson never filled (1988:205). Similarly, Schuller argues that Redman was “virtually irreplaceable” as the “architect of the band’s style” (1968:267). With Redman gone, Henderson had to seek out new arrangers and arrangements, or resort to old ones. Yet, although Redman’s departure posed a challenge to Henderson, the 1928 “King Porter Stomp” reflected a trend in Henderson’s repertoire that had appeared before Redman left: playing updated arrangements of older pieces. Present since the early 1920s, the tendency had escalated in 1926 with such recordings as “Clarinet Marmalade,” “Fidgety Feet,” “Sensation,” and “Livery Stable Blues,” all revised versions of pieces by members of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, as well as “Panama,” “The St. Louis Blues,” “The Wang Wang Blues,” and “Wabash Blues” (Magee 1992:202). It was in 1926, too, that Henderson’s band played Morton’s “The Chant” in a newly published Melrose stock.<sup>9</sup>

The 1928 “King Porter” may also have had impetus from a more proximate cause: the composer. Morton was in New York at this time, and, in fact, he had been in the Columbia recording studio a day before Henderson’s band came there to record his piece (Allen 1973:246). Whether or not Henderson encountered Morton at this time, by the 1930s Fletcher

**Table 2**  
Form outlines of “King Porter Stomp” recordings and stock arrangement, 1923–35

Morton (1923)	I(4)	A	A	B	B	X	Cx	Cx	Cx'	T
Melrose stock (1924)	I(4)	A	A	B	B	X	C	Cx	Cx'	T
Morton (1924)	I(4)	A	A	B	B	X	C	Cx	Cx'	T
Lanin (1925)	I(4)	A		B	B	X	C	C	Cx	Cx' T
Creath (1925)	I(4)	A	A	B	B	X	C	C	Cx	Cx' T
Morton (1926)	I(4)	A		B	B	X	C	Cx	Cx'	T
Henderson (1928)	I(8)	A		B		X	C	C	C	Cx Cx' T
Henderson (1932–33)	I(8)	A				X	C	C	C	C C Cx Cx' T
Goodman (1935)	I(8)	A				X	C	C	C	C Cx Cx' T

I = Introduction

A = First strain

B = Second strain

X = Interlude

C = Trio

Cx = Stomp 1

Cx' = Stomp 2

T = Tag ending

and Morton were “great friends,” at least partly because of “King Porter Stomp,” as this article’s epigraph suggests.

The 1928 recording occupies a pivot point in the piece’s biography, one that can be heard in at least two contrasting ways. Retrospectively, it marks the earliest documented stage of Henderson’s transformation of the piece. So it stands as a rough early version of the arrangement that evolved in the early 1930s to become a national hit for Benny Goodman in 1935 and a big-band standard thereafter. As I’ve written elsewhere, listening to Henderson’s recordings of 1928–33 “from a classicized perspective on musical composition is like hearing a sketch develop into a finished score” (Magee 1999:68).

Yet the “sketch” analogy, however apt in retrospect, obscures the arrangement’s basis in aural, not written, music making, and the exciting, even radical nature of Henderson’s revision.<sup>10</sup> So it takes some effort to hear the arrangement from the contrasting perspective of the 1920s. The band announces its distinctive approach from the opening bars, with a new eight-bar introduction featuring a fiery trumpet solo by Bobby Stark (ex. 2). The solo’s tone, figuration, and structure further suggest Louis Armstrong as a kind of “missing link” in the piece’s evolution. Armstrong’s trademarks permeate the solo, including the syncopated leaps of a fourth at the opening, characteristic of Armstrong’s solos with Henderson three

**Example 2:** "King Porter Stomp," introduction, trumpet solo by Bobby Stark (Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra, 1928).

years earlier (Magee 1992:316, 319–20), and the big, blaring tone throughout. The whole eight-bar unit parses clearly into a pair of parallel four-bar phrases, with the rhythm of measures 5–6 nearly identical to that of measures 1–2. That reveals a new sense of the importance of linking and relating phrases of a solo, of the coherence that Armstrong had brought to the jazz solo since his early days with Henderson (Harker 1999).

The overall form of the arrangement throws greater emphasis on the Trio and Stomp than ever before, beginning a pattern that would extend into the Swing Era. Henderson's band omits the repeats of the first and second strains, setting another trend that would become standardized in the 1930s. The first Trio hews close to Morton's original melody; subsequent choruses of the Trio are used for solos backed by riffs. The Stomp, on the other hand, becomes the place for the whole band to shine. In the 1928 recording, the band runs through the Stomp just once, but that chorus would become the most famous of all, the call-and-response chorus that Schuller (1968:268) has termed "the single most influential ensemble idea in the entire swing era" (ex. 3).

While many ideas anticipate standard swing arranging practice, the rhythm section marks this as a 1920s recording. Two instruments in particular signify the recording's twenties vintage: the tuba, mostly plugging alternate beats (one and three), and the banjo, strumming a steady four-beat pattern. Close listening also reveals a haze of ride cymbal and high hat work, including a cymbal hit after the final cadence—a trademark of Henderson's drummer, Joseph "Kaiser" Marshall, since 1923. The whole recording lopes along at around 180 beats per minute, approximately the same tempo as Henderson's former competitor, Sam Lanin, had taken it in 1925. Rhythmically, the 1928 version looks not forward but backward.

When Henderson recorded the piece again on December 9, 1932, it was issued under a revised title: the "New King Porter Stomp." That day's recording session has become—like the session of Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra that produced "Toby" and "Moten Swing" four days later—

**Example 3:** "King Porter Stomp," final strain, beginning (Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra, 1928) (from Sturm 1995:63).

one of those legendary sessions prized for the desperate, unlikely artistry of struggling black bands in the early Depression years (on Moten's session, see Schuller and Williams 1983:18). It is this recording, along with Henderson's "Down South Camp Meetin'," that Martin Williams and Gunther Schuller chose to exemplify "the swing band style as it was taken up by nearly everyone else" (Schuller and Williams 1983:14). Yet the recording's hallowed status belies the haphazard conditions of its making. John Hammond has written an account of the session in which the "King Porter Stomp" recording appears as an afterthought, squeezed in at the end:

We were scheduled for ten o'clock on a Friday morning, a standard three-hour recording session, which meant we had to be through by one. At ten on Friday two musicians were in the studio. At 12:15 John Kirby showed up with his bass, followed shortly by the rest of the band. We cut three sides in less than forty-five minutes, two of which were masters acceptable for release: "Underneath the Harlem Moon" and "Honeysuckle Rose." The third side, "New King Porter Stomp," we could play through only once. (Hammond 1977:67)

The session produced a single Columbia disk, featuring "Honeysuckle Rose" on one side and "Harlem Moon" on the other. "King Porter Stomp" found its way onto a low-budget Okeh recording backed by a Clarence Williams-led "nonunion jug band" (ibid.:68).

Yet, from Hammond's perspective, "the session was one of the most satisfying I have ever had anything to do with." He attributed the results, in part, to what had appeared to be liabilities: the time and space constraints placed on the event by the studio and the musicians themselves. "Perhaps to make amends for their casual behavior," Hammond recalled, "the musicians really put out in the short time available to us. The studio was small, the band setup intimate—the kind of conditions in which musicians can

really hear and feel what each man is doing. The results were superb" (ibid.:67).

This "King Porter" is "new" in many respects. The band quickened the tempo to 210 beats per minute. The string bass (played by Kirby) and guitar (Freddy White) impart a lightness and forward momentum far from the comparatively heavy, "vertical" tread of the 1920s tuba-banjo combination. Formally, the new version makes a decisive shift toward the Trio and Stomp: the band omits the rag-like second strain entirely, adds two solo choruses to the Trio, and creates a new Stomp strain acting as an intensive build-up to the final call-and-response shout chorus, which now features saxophones in place of the outmoded clarinet trio. Howard Spring (1997) has convincingly argued that the differences between Henderson's first and second "King Porter" recordings may partly be explained by the development of the Lindy Hop in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Despite fundamental changes, however, it remains a "head" arrangement whose basic structure, procession of solos, riff foundation, and climactic antiphony remain intact from 1928. With the second strain's omission and the Trio and Stomp's expansion, the first strain now sounds like an extension of the introduction: an introduction to a series of solos over a riff foundation. That foundation, poured in 1928, now solidifies in Henderson's 1932 and 1933 recordings. Under Stark's first-Trio solo, the saxophones play a syncopated variation on Morton's original Trio melody, which had been in the foreground in Henderson's 1928 recording. Coleman Hawkins's solo appears over a four-note syncopated brass riff. The first chorus of J. C. Higginbotham's trombone solo is accompanied by a falling-thirds figure in the saxophones that had its origins under Jimmy Harrison's trombone solo in 1928.

By 1933, the riff foundation has become more pronounced. Now, the recording balance shifts so that the solos interact with the riffs rather than soaring above them. The band retains the basic structure from 1932 while changing some of its contents. Henry "Red" Allen's trumpet solo fills the two-chorus slot, previously taken by J. C. Higginbotham, preceding the ensemble out-choruses. Morton's original trio melody, suggested in the saxophones' variation of it under Stark's solo, comes to the fore in a clarinet solo (by either Hilton Jefferson or Russell Procope) in the next Trio strain.

By the late 1920s, public performance practice had departed from recording practice, which had to fit the arrangement into the three to three-and-a-half minute limit of a 78-rpm record. Critics Wilder Hobson and Otis Ferguson noted that Henderson's recordings give few clues about how the band sounded in public. Few of the recordings, noted Hobson, "give anything like the golden, seething spirit of a Fletcher Henderson occasion" (Hobson 1962; cf. Ferguson 1982:57). And accord-

ing to Sandy Williams, who would soon be playing the piece with Bobby Stark in Chick Webb's band, on Christmas night at the Apollo Theater, "I counted the choruses I played on 'King Porter Stomp'—twenty-three. Bobby Stark and I could play as many choruses as we felt like on that, so long as each chorus was a little more exciting. That was *our* tune" (Dance 2001:69–71). Accounts like Williams's are reminders that part of "King Porter"'s appeal came from things that were never captured on a printed page, a sound recording, or any other media.

A transcription and analysis of the 1933 recording by Dave Jones and James Dapogny allow for a closer look, revealing several things. First, they notate and discuss the exceptional solos of Coleman Hawkins and Red Allen. Both soloists demonstrate an uncanny ability to "float against the rhythm," to create and sustain "motivic coherence" apart from the original melody, and, in general, they reveal "improvisers thinking compositionally." Second, they reveal "many small disagreements among members of the band about what notes and rhythms to play and how to play them," reinforcing the notion that even five years after his band's first issued recording of the piece, Henderson's "King Porter Stomp" remained unnotated, a "head" arrangement "made collectively by the band members and played from memory" (Dapogny and Jones n.d.:n.p.).

#### Goodman's Stomp: A Score

After playing a job in Detroit's Graystone Ballroom in November 1934, Henderson failed to pay his sidemen. The accumulated uncertainties of getting a regular paycheck in Henderson's band took their toll and Henderson's entire band quit en masse, many of them to join Benny Carter back in New York (Allen 1973:300–1). Meanwhile, Benny Goodman's fledgling career as a bandleader was shaping up to become permanent. On December 1, 1934, Goodman began leading his band on the "Let's Dance" radio program. It was billed as a "dance party" every Saturday night and would be heard across the country, but there was also a large studio audience, for NBC's studio 8H could seat around one thousand people (Firestone 1993:106). Although "Let's Dance" lasted only twenty-six weeks, it shaped the careers of Benny Goodman and, by extension, Fletcher Henderson in several important ways, and it helped seal the canonic destiny of "King Porter Stomp" in the twentieth century.

As a commercially sponsored network radio program, "Let's Dance" was a potential gold mine in the music industry. Network radio was less than a decade old, and commercial sponsorship had only recently taken hold as the chief means of promoting radio, a phenomenon validated by the Communications Act of 1934 (Smulyan 1994:167). Live music on radio, of course, was not a new phenomenon. As early as 1924, for example,

Henderson's band could be heard playing at the Roseland Ballroom on WHN New York, and radio stations carried many other bands and singers on "sustaining programs," that is, on-location broadcasts from hotels, ballrooms, and nightclubs throughout the 1920s. Such programs certainly expanded a musician's audience in a way that had been impossible before the advent of radio in 1920. But the more recent commercially sponsored programs guaranteed a broad national audience on a regular basis. As David W. Stowe has noted, these were the choice jobs, bringing unprecedented prestige and remuneration. Such programs were "the swing industry's greatest prize" and the "primary means by which a band and its agency found and prepared its audience" (Stowe 1994:108–9).

"Let's Dance" also allowed Goodman to expand his repertoire and style. The program's format called for three bands to play thirty-minute sets in alternation, beginning with Kel Murray and His Orchestra playing sweet dance music (to use the parlance of the era, when "sweet" and "hot" designated the range of popular dance music), continuing with Xavier Cugat's orchestra playing Latin-tinged music (on the crest of a rumba fad in the early 1930s), and ending with Goodman's band playing "hot," jazz-oriented music. The job came with an allowance for eight arrangements per week in the first thirteen weeks, reduced to four per week when the show was renewed for a second thirteen-week period in late February (Hammond 1977:108–9). Goodman cast about for arrangers he could call on and work with. In search of a distinctive sound, and with John Hammond's encouragement, Goodman sought out black arrangers to give his style the shot of jazz that the job required. Among many possibilities, Henderson—struggling to make ends meet and with more than a decade of dance-band experience behind him—stood out as a natural choice to take on much of the arranging work, sometimes doing as many as three a week (Firestone 1993:109–10, 116).

An entire network show featuring hot music would have been commercially unfeasible before August 1935, but with the presence of Murray and Cugat hewing closer to the melodies of the tunes they played, Goodman was freer to depart from them. John Hammond has stressed this point: "The liberties Goodman was allowed on Let's Dance," he recalled, "were made possible because Cugat and Kel Murray were playing in straight, commercial fashion. By the time Benny came on the air he could play his own way." Hammond also emphasized the importance of the show's budget allowing Goodman to commission new arrangements, which broke "the stranglehold music publishers had on the performance of popular songs" (1977:109).

Ross Russell later made a similar point in a more evolutionary and emphatic tone: "[T]he war against the horrible products of the tunesmiths,

which began with Fletcher Henderson in the 1920's, has been brought a successful conclusion only by the beboppers (Russell 1959:202). Actually, Henderson had adapted and rearranged stock arrangements in the 1920s (Magee 1992), so it was not so much the "first time" that arrangers had broken away from publishers' arrangements of popular songs as it was the first time in the early 1930s that white bands in particular had departed from what publishers had provided.

At this point, Henderson finally committed "King Porter Stomp" to paper, and in this form it became the first Fletcher Henderson arrangement in Goodman's book. (At the same time, Goodman also acquired Fletcher's brother Horace's "Big John Special.") Yet the arrangement that Henderson gave Goodman in late 1934 or early 1935 was not simply a transcription of the version his own band had played. It introduces several slight but telling changes. For example, Henderson enhanced the riff accompaniment in the opening strain to include incisive exchanges between the brass and saxophones, where before there had only been saxophones (ex. 4 and 5). In addition, the revised arrangement for Goodman also restores Morton's Trio melody to the foreground in the first Trio; the melody retains the syncopated character that Henderson's band had brought to it in its earlier recordings, but it no longer accompanies a trumpet solo. Henderson also recast the penultimate chorus. In 1933, Henderson had featured a rippling, triplet saxophone riff (with piquant brass dissonances) flowing right out of the end of Red Allen's trumpet solo (ex. 6). In contrast, the 1935 recording featured a full ensemble chorus based on a climbing syncopated figure (ex. 7).

To some extent these differences reveal the more fundamental distinction between the versions played by Henderson and the version played by Goodman: Henderson's band played a "head" arrangement that—despite fundamental similarities among the 1928, 1932, and 1933 versions—was never played the same way twice. Goodman's band, on the other hand, clearly plays an arrangement that has been fully written down, except for the solos. The "many small disagreements" between the Henderson recordings of 1932 and 1933 would not be allowed by the fastidious Goodman and his well-rehearsed band. Under Goodman's auspices, "King Porter Stomp" coalesced into a score whose recorded performances, especially the much anthologized July 1, 1935, version, gleam with polish and sparkle with vitality. "[O]ne of the biggest kicks I've ever had in music [was] to go through these scores and dig the music out of them, even in rehearsal," Goodman noted in his 1939 autobiography (Goodman and Kolodin 1961:147). John Hammond, who stood in a unique position to appreciate what both Henderson and Goodman did with the piece, recognized the musical and cultural import of Goodman's version. In his words,

**Example 4:** "King Porter Stomp," first strain, mm. 9–16 (Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra, 1933, transcribed by James Dapogny and Dave Jones).

Trumpet solo

Saxophones

Bass

*mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Ab F7 Bbm Bbm

*mf*

Db D°7 Ab F7 Bb7 Eb7 Ab

Goodman's version "is something of a landmark in white jazz circles. It is the first time, to my knowledge, that a large white orchestra has succeeded in capturing the attack and freedom of the best coloured bands" (quoted in Erenberg 1998:74, from a Hammond article in *Melody Maker* that appeared *before* Goodman's commercial recordings of "King Porter" [May 28, 1935]).

#### Swing Standard

Goodman's success with "King Porter Stomp" seems to have prompted many other bands to record it: the number of recordings of the piece rose significantly after 1935. Table 1 presents an outline of "King Porter Stomp"'s biography through most of the Swing Era. Although the bands of Cab Calloway, Isham Jones, Claude Hopkins, and undoubtedly others, played the piece before Goodman, the table illustrates dramatically that Goodman's recording and performances in 1935 launched a new phase in the piece's history, when it became a standard among big bands. In that year, the piece's trickling recording history became a steady stream, with several big-band versions mixed with a notable revival of interest in recording the original piano version by its composer.

**Example 5:** "King Porter Stomp," first strain, mm. 9–16 (Henderson arrangement for Benny Goodman, transcription in Benny Goodman Collection, Yale University).

Trumpet solo

Saxophones

Trumpets

Trombones

Bass

Solo

Saxes

Tpts.

Tbns.

Bass

Ab6 Gb6 F7 Bbm7

Db6 Dbm6 Ab6 F7 Bb9 Eb7 Gb6 G6 Ab6

Among these recordings stand many nearly forgotten treasures of the Swing Era. During the same period in early 1936, when Stanley Dance promoted "cutting" contests between the Goodman and Chick Webb orchestras, for example, Webb's band recorded what might be the fastest "King Porter" on record. The arrangement is clearly derived from Henderson's, but its tempo is not. Played at more than 260 beats per minute, Webb's "King Porter" clearly "cuts" the Goodman band in sheer speed. A year later, the Teddy Hill Orchestra recorded "King Porter Stomp." It too borrows heavily from the Henderson arrangement and offers several novel

**Example 6:** "King Porter Stomp," penultimate strain riff (Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra, 1933, transcribed by James Dapogny and Dave Jones).

**Example 7:** "King Porter Stomp," penultimate strain riff (Henderson arrangement for Benny Goodman, Benny Goodman Collection, Yale University).

ideas as well. Most notably, Hill's recording features a new four-bar introduction (during a period when almost all bands played a version of Henderson's eight-bar opening), followed by a two-bar break and the first strain solo featuring Hill's nineteen-year-old trumpet player, John Birks Gillespie, in his first recorded solo.

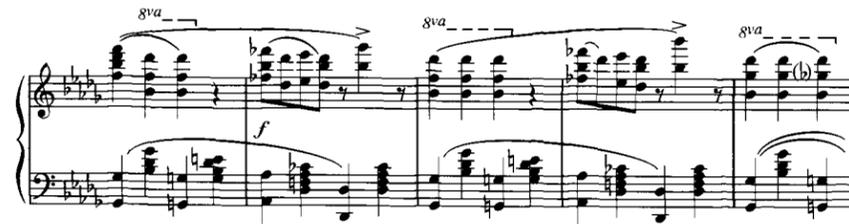
The band recordings after Henderson's tell part of the same story: that the Henderson arrangement was the prevailing approach to "King Porter Stomp" in the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, considering that no band besides Henderson's recorded the piece between spring 1925 and fall 1934, it is safe to say that Henderson saved the piece from obscurity.

In the meantime, its composer *had* fallen into obscurity. Between 1930 and 1938 Morton appeared on only one recording. He had become personally alienated from the younger jazz musicians from New York (with the exception, apparently, of Fletcher Henderson), and he suffered financial problems, ill health, and fear of a voodoo curse (Dapogny 1982:21–22). Beginning with the Library of Congress recordings, Morton made five more records of "King Porter Stomp" from 1938 to 1940. By then, his playing style was at least twenty years out-of-date, but his recordings reveal it to be even more exuberant and vital. High-register octave flares signal the beginnings of phrases, left-hand figures inject sudden accents, the right hand frequently leaps among registers—all revealing a new mastery and an unprecedented freedom and flexibility. We've seen how Morton's riffs and structure continued to shape big-band versions into the 1930s, but the influence also worked the other way. In his 1939 recording of "King Porter Stomp" (anthologized on the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*), Morton shows his awareness of the arrangement, because here for the first time he leaps among registers in a pianistic version of call-and-response. In the Lomax interviews, Morton had said, "no jazz piano player can really play good jazz unless they try to give an imitation of a band" (Lomax 1993:79). Example 8 shows the closing bars of what might be called Morton's "band" version of "King Porter Stomp."

Although Morton recorded "King Porter Stomp" more than any of his works, no single musician demonstrated a more sustained and public commitment to the piece than Benny Goodman. Over his half-century career as a bandleader, Goodman returned to Henderson's arrangement of "King Porter Stomp" again and again, more than almost any big-band chart in his sizeable book.<sup>11</sup> It was the first Fletcher Henderson arrangement he received from Henderson, and one of the last he ever played in public, at his final concert at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia, a week before his death in June 1986. The piece served a particular function for him, what might be called the "hot slot," since whenever he played it on radio, television, and concert programs it often served as a climactic closer, either for the first half of the program or for the entire program, usually followed by either an intermission or the band's sign-off theme, "Goodbye" (Connor 1988:passim).

A recording issued in 1986 preserves a televised performance from the previous year featuring Goodman's band playing several Henderson arrangements, including "King Porter Stomp." In this performance the band harks back to the 1935 score. The trumpet soloist, Laurie Frink, recreates Bunny Berigan's famous solo in the introduction and first strain, and the same riffs appear under this and other solos. The last two choruses feature the same ensemble arrangement as the 1935 recordings.

**Example 8:** “King Porter Stomp,” final strain (Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, 1939, from Dapogny 1982:504).



Meanwhile, the ensemble sounds remarkably good—better, in some ways, than the 1935 band. The saxophones are milky rich and smooth, with carefully tapered phrase endings. The brass are not as harshly bright as the 1935–36 band’s brass. And the drummer has a lighter touch than Gene Krupa did. More than an artifact demonstrating a continuous performance tradition, Goodman’s 1985 PBS performance shows that “King Porter Stomp” could sound fresh a half a century after it had launched the Swing Era.

#### New Bottles, Old Wine

The piece’s recording history extends far beyond records bearing its name. Several bands developed and recorded “King Porter” contrafacts based on the Stomp strain—using the “backgrounds” of “King Porter,” as Morton put it, “to make great tunes of themselves.” For example, Benny Carter’s “Everybody Shuffle” (1934) features a sequence of eight Stomp-based strains with solos and ensemble riff choruses. Schuller and Williams note several other Swing Era spinoffs, including Larry Clinton and Bunny Berigan’s “Study in Brown,” Cab Calloway’s “At the Clambake Carnival,” Harry James’s “Jump Town” and “Call the Porter,” and Benny Goodman’s “Slipped Disc,” a punning title referring both to the record and to Goodman’s sciatica, for which he’d had surgery at the Mayo Clinic in the summer of 1940 (Schuller and Williams 1983:14). Sy Oliver’s “Well, Git It!” for Tommy Dorsey’s Orchestra, recorded in 1942, begins as a blues flagwaver a la “Bugle Call Rag” then shifts to a series of Stomp-based strains. Duke Ellington’s “Bojangles (A Portrait of Bill Robinson)” (1940), includes a recurring riff chorus also based on Morton’s Stomp. The Stomp progression also makes a surprise appearance in the eight-bar tag ending of the Willie Bryant Orchestra’s recording of Gershwin’s “Liza,” recorded August 1, 1935, while Goodman’s band was in the midst of its national tour.

A couple of “King Porter”-related tunes preceded the Swing Era. Morton’s own “Hyena Stomp” comprises several variations on the Stomp underneath the laughing hyena antics of Lew LaMar (Victor, Chicago, June 4, 1927: *The Jelly Roll Morton Centennial: His Complete Victor Recordings*, RCA Bluebird 2361-2-RB). This recording comes as close as we can get to hearing how Morton might have arranged “King Porter Stomp” for his own band.<sup>12</sup> One of Morton’s frequent sidemen, Johnny Dodds, also wrote a partial “King Porter” contrafact, the languorous “Indigo Stomp,” which combines twelve-bar blues choruses and strains based on the Stomp progression.

The piece has attracted several modern jazz musicians as well. John Lewis composed at least two pieces based on “King Porter”: “Golden Striker” and “Odds Against Tomorrow.” When asked what he found intriguing about the piece, Lewis responded in a way that typified his generation of jazz musicians. “What made ‘King Porter Stomp’ interesting to me,” he said, “was not a performance by Jelly Roll Morton or what I heard from him, but what Fletcher Henderson did. He recomposed the piece. That’s what’s important” (Lewis 1987). In 1958, Gil Evans made a new arrangement of “King Porter Stomp” for his eighteen-piece orchestra for his album *New Bottle/Old Wine*. The album’s title aptly captures the spirit of Evans’s “King Porter,” which takes shards of Morton’s original (Morton’s second strain, which the Swing Era had discarded, in a quasi-Dixieland setting, and Morton’s first stomp strain in a style closer to the original than to any big-band setting) as well as allusions to Henderson’s arrangement (most clearly in the pickups to the final chorus and the approach to the final cadence), and casts them in an advanced bebop idiom, with extended tertian harmonies (including ninth and thirteenth chords), darting, angular lines for the ensemble, and a post-Charlie Parker alto saxophone solo. In short, the arrangement fits squarely into the era of Evans’s collaborations with Miles Davis while taking full measure of jazz history before it was filtered through earlier versions of “King Porter Stomp.” As a result, Evans’s version not only reaffirms the piece’s place in the jazz tradition, it also makes the piece a repository *for* that tradition.

A similar effect through contrasting means emerges from Jon Hendricks’s vocalese sung by the Manhattan Transfer in a precise rendition of Goodman’s July 1, 1935, recording. Although explored by several sophisticated practitioners since the 1940s, vocalese has only recently emerged as a serious subject in jazz scholarship (see Grant 1995). Hendricks, a master of the genre, creates a vocalese that characteristically tells a fact-based but fanciful story about the music on which it is written (sometimes with rhymes worthy of another Porter: Cole). By telling the story behind Morton’s piece in words set to Goodman’s recorded performance of

Henderson's arrangement, Hendricks, in effect, unites the tune's three principal legends. Here is the introduction and first strain sung by Alan Paul to the tune of Bunny Berigan's solo (while the other three singers back it with the accompanying riffs and long tones set to words shown in italics):<sup>13</sup>

Gather roun' 'n hear my story  
*Oh boy!*  
 'Bout the time when Jelly Roll was in town  
*(Stompin' it off, stompin' it off . . .)*  
 He heard a local pianist  
*What joy!*  
 Stompin' out music on an old upright piano  
*Here comes King*  
 that was downright ragged in a Scott Joplin way  
*(Here he comes—master of the stomp)*  
 Ol' Jelly knew the fella' could play  
*Dig him!*  
 by the things he heard his right hand say  
*(Now we're gonna romp)*  
*(There was no doubtin' that the man could swing)*  
 When Jelly Roll demanded his name  
*Hail! King Porter*  
 Well, the man responded "Porter King"  
*(Dig 'im!) By order!*  
 Well, Jelly lef' the city, but he wrote  
*(Dig 'im!) Ya wanna dig 'im*  
 a rompin' ditty 'bout a Porter  
*(Dig 'im!) Ya gonna dig 'im*  
 who was "King o' the stomp"  
*Porter King sho' can stomp*

### Conclusion

The story of "King Porter Stomp" in the period before bebop ranges across four decades and three crucial figures in jazz's early development: Jelly Roll Morton, the pianist and bandleader whom Gunther Schuller has called the "first great composer" (Schuller 1968:134); Fletcher Henderson, the bandleader and arranger whose 1920s band was a prototype for Swing Era big bands, and whose arrangements defined the style of Benny Goodman's orchestra, and by extension, a normative standard of big-band

swing in general; and Goodman himself, whose band projected Henderson's arrangements, starting with "King Porter Stomp," into the ears and feet of Americans from New York to Los Angeles, creating a national style from an arranging style that originated in Harlem. The story also includes a cameo appearance by the young Dizzy Gillespie, and perhaps even Louis Armstrong, in absentia. Such a lineage lends the piece's canonic status an aura of rightness and inevitability.

Yet the piece's history reveals that it was anything but destined for that status. For well over a decade, Morton withheld it from publication and recording. When it was finally published and recorded in 1923–24, it failed to catch on among bands, despite publication as a stock arrangement promoted through pre-publication plugs. Henderson's first recording, in fact, was never even issued. After that, between 1925–31, few if any other bands picked up the piece besides Henderson's. Indeed, Rust documents only two recordings between March 1925 and December 1932: one by Morton (1926) and one by Henderson (1928). And while Rust's discography is not exhaustive, it makes clear that "King Porter Stomp" was neglected in comparison with other hits and emerging jazz standards of the period (see Crawford and Magee 1992). Henderson's 1928 version, a radical revision of the piece, nevertheless came at a time when the band had lost Don Redman, a pillar of its musical identity since the band's formation in 1923. The 1932 Columbia version, now widely anthologized, was squeezed in at the end of a recording session that almost did not take place, and appeared only on a cut-rate OKeh record. The arrangement developed by Henderson's band came into Goodman's hands only after Henderson's band, out of money, had dissolved. Even Goodman's now-legendary Palomar Ballroom appearance on August 21, 1935, almost didn't happen because Goodman nearly disbanded his orchestra after a debacle in Denver, Colorado. Moreover, Bunny Berigan's solo on "King Porter Stomp," which had electrified the Palomar crowd, might not have been heard in public because Goodman actually fired Berigan in Salt Lake City for excessive drinking, only to hire him back the next day (Firestone 1993:146).

The written and aural record of "King Porter"'s history suggests that this canonical work, so influential and widely played in jazz's first half-century, achieved its hallowed status almost in spite of its creator and chief advocates. Yet it continues to exert fascination for musicians, listeners, and dancers even now, a century after the date its composer claimed to have "originated" jazz. If an "originator" or "inventor" can be seen as a catalyst as much as a creator, perhaps the staying power of the "King Porter Stomp" may redeem Morton's claim as we look back on his legacy.

## Notes

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1. In this article, Morton's statements about "King Porter Stomp" are transcribed directly from the Library of Congress recording, not from Lomax (1993), which, although usually preserving the substance of Morton's discussion, represents considerable editing. Cf. Lomax (1993:146) for Lomax's edited transcription of this passage.

2. All three of Henderson's recordings of the piece (made in 1928, 1932, and 1933) may be found on *A Study in Frustration: The Fletcher Henderson Story* (Columbia/Legacy 57596), as well as in the Fletcher Henderson series on Classics (Classics CD 572 and Classics CD 535). Among Goodman's many recordings of the piece, the most easily available is the classic and widely anthologized version recorded on July 1, 1935, which has been reissued, for example, on *Benny Goodman Plays Fletcher Henderson*, HEP CD 1038; and *Benny Goodman: The Birth of Swing (1935-1936)* (Bluebird 07863). *Big Band Jazz* (Smithsonian RD 030) features that Goodman recording and Henderson's 1932 version. Earlier recordings of the same arrangement may be found on *Benny Goodman and His Orchestra 1935 from the Famous "Let's Dance" Broadcasts* (Circle CCD-50), from a March 9, 1935, broadcast, and the *Rhythm Makers Orchestra* (NBC Thesaurus 127), from the band's marathon recording session on June 6, 1935.

3. The point is further reinforced in Fred Sturm (1995:n.p.), which includes "King Porter Stomp" among four case studies.

4. With due respect for legitimate concerns about canon formation in jazz, I find that the jazz canon is far from exerting the kind of hegemony claimed by some scholars. For example, at my institution, Indiana University, over 1,600 music majors—both undergraduate and graduate—work toward their degrees with no required exposure to jazz in the classroom or private lessons (unless they are jazz majors), although the School of Music has an internationally renowned jazz studies program. Meanwhile, non-music majors by the hundreds pack the elective jazz survey course offered through the school's "General Studies" program, which offers an introduction to major figures and key recordings—a canon—of jazz history, while also confronting issues relating to improvisation and African roots that counter the implied fixity of canonic works.

5. Walser himself has demonstrated the value of that kind of specificity in his analysis of Miles Davis's 1964 recording of "My Funny Valentine" (Walser 1995).

6. "Tiger Rag" probably dates from before 1917. Although the Original Dixieland Jazz Band received its composer credit and made its first recording that year, Morton muddied its pedigree when he claimed credit for composing it "back in the early days before the Dixieland Band was ever heard of" (Lomax 1993:82).

7. For a vivid memory of Creath, "the greatest blues player of his time," see Bushell and Tucker (1988:34-35).

8. As Garvin Bushell told Mark Tucker, "New Orleans" carried stylistic connotations for musicians in 1920s New York. "When you went to hear a band out of New Orleans," Bushell recalled, "you heard a different feel. The harmonic line was the same, but the rhythm of the solos was different" (Bushell and Tucker 1988:25).

9. Copyright July 19, 1926 (E644871), arranged by Mel Sützel.

10. The phrase "Henderson's revision" must be understood as a shorthand reference to the interactive origins of the arrangement. According to Allen, the arrangement stems from Coleman Hawkins's ideas; trombonist Sandy Williams (with Henderson in the early 1930s) credited material in the arrangement to banjo player Charlie Dixon (Allen 1973:246, 529). Certainly others, undocumented, contributed as well. There is no contradiction in these claims; the arrangement that came to be known as *Henderson's* "King Porter Stomp," and later written down by him, had its roots in a collaborative effort.

11. A few pieces exceed it, based on a count of Goodman's big-band performances documented by D. Russell Connor (1988): "Don't Be That Way," "One O'Clock Jump," "Sing Sing Sing," "Stealin' Apples" (another Henderson arrangement), and "Stompin' at the Savoy." Goodman also performed several other tunes more frequently, but mostly in small group settings.

12. Another close approximation may be heard on the "King Porter Stomp" recording by James Dapogny's Chicago Jazz Band, on *Original Jelly Roll Blues: Music of Jelly Roll Morton* (Discovery 74008, 1993).

13. *The Manhattan Transfer, Swing* (Atlantic 83012-2, 1997).

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