

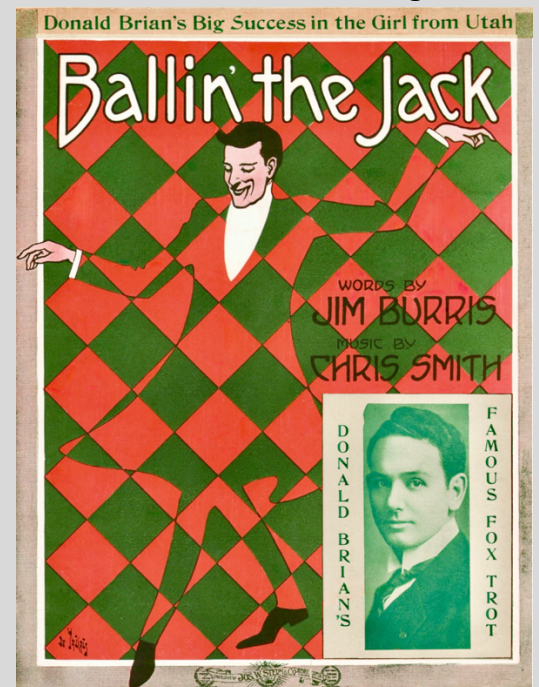
TIN PAN ALLEY

AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC PROJECT

Wraparound Series for Teaching American Popular Songs

Ballin' the Jack (1913)

Band, Vocal, Core Music
Middle School, High School



Music by **Chris Smith**
Lyrics by **Jim Burris**

Published by **Joseph W. Stern & Co., 102-104 West 38th Street, New York City**

This wraparound was developed by
The Tin Pan Alley American Popular Music Project Education Committee
aligned to New York City Public Schools'
Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Music

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The Tin Pan Alley American Music Project Repertoire series of music wraparounds aligns with the Strands and Benchmarks in the New York City Public Schools' *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Music*, and explores opportunities for teaching American popular songs, wrapped around all five strands of learning in music:

- I. Music Making
- II. Music Literacy
- III. Making Connections
- IV. Using Cultural and Community Resources
- V. Careers and Lifelong Learning

Recognizing NYCPS anchor values¹ to teach this music through the lenses of CR-SE, SEL and DEI&B, we have highlighted some learning opportunities throughout the wraparound to be considered.

Ballin' the Jack

Music by Chris Smith, Lyrics by Jim Burris

Published in 1913 by Joseph W. Stern & Co., 102-104 West 38th Street, New York City

NOTE ON EDITIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS:

For vocal and core music units on this piece, as outlined in the instructional sequence in Strand 1, the original 1913 sheet music can be used, which is also discussed in the harmonic analysis for Strand 2. This public domain piece is available for online download at the Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University².

For middle or high school band units, we recommend the following published arrangements:

- Jazz Classic: "Ballin' The Jack," Level 1 – easy, arr. John Edmondson, Neil A. Kjos Music Company³
- *Essential Elements for Jazz Ensemble, Book 1: A Comprehensive Method for Jazz Style and Improvisation* [Concert or Jazz Band], Level 1, 2 – easy,⁴
- Ballin' the Jack [Brass Ensemble], Level 3 – intermediate, arr. Luther Henderson, Canadian Brass Publications, Hal Leonard Corporation⁵

Key Ideas/Considerations for this Song

¹ Please visit the New York City Public Schools' Music Education Anchor Values page to explore teaching through SEL and CRSE as the lens for the entire lesson. <https://sites.google.com/schools.nyc.gov/gtm-k-5-curriculum/our-approach>

² <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/151/060>

³ <https://kjos.com/jazz-classic-ballin-the-jack.html>

⁴ Designed to teach jazz basics to students with 1-2 years playing experience (but no prior experience playing jazz), *Essential Elements for Jazz Ensemble* is great for individual or classroom use. "Ballin' the Jack" is a featured arrangement. <https://www.halleonard.com/product/841353/essential-elements-for-jazz-ensemble>

⁵ <https://www.halleonard.com/product/50482280/ballin-the-jackballin-the-jack> This arrangement is not assigned a level, and judging accompanying demo on the Canadian Brass page, we would rate this a Level 3, Intermediate, though it is mostly performed slow enough to be undertaken by an advanced middle school ensemble. <https://canadianbrassstore.com/ballin-the-jack-brass-quintet-smith-arr-henderson/>

- "Ballin' The Jack" is a jazz standard, containing rhythms and harmonies that would be more widely used in the jazz age of the 1920s.
- It is a dance song with intrinsic connections between popular music and social dance.⁶ Movement to music is a foundational Strand 1 activity.⁷ The song is ideal for music classes with no movement experience since the lyrics of the song outline the dance steps
- This song success by an African American songwriting team was propelled to widespread popularity and performance by both the theater and Tin Pan Alley music industries.
- This Tin Pan Alley piece is an example of music marketed to the ballroom dance craze in America in the first decades of the 20th century.

Enduring Understandings⁸

- Some American popular songs have become standards because of social dances that emerged at the same time to these songs, further popularized by dance and jazz bands.
- The evolution of jazz music directly affected the sound of American popular song.

Essential Questions⁹

1. What is the equivalent of social dancing today, and how does modern popular music support and nurture that societal need, really a human need, to dance together?
2. In what ways have American popular songs developed in musical scope and complexity through the twentieth century? How has jazz influenced its sound and structure?

STRAND I: Music Making

This selection's key characteristics ("big ideas") and technical considerations

- An early jazz standard, characterized by "raggy"¹⁰ jazz rhythms.
- The melody is a series of swinging dotted-eighth phrases that frequently end with a syncopated figure.
- Ideal for class movement activities, an essential component of learning to make music.

Suggested Instructional Sequence: [For vocal classes; band class sequence is dependent on the arrangement selected from above; see also possible learning opportunities on page 16 below.]

⁶ "Ballin' the Jack" evolved into a group dance in the 1930s, "involving vigorous hand clapping and chanting or singing. Clarence Major, Ed., *Juba to Jive: the Dictionary of African-American Slang*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 19-20. See also Barbara Cohen-Stratynier, "'A Thousand Raggy, Draggy Dances' Social Dance in Broadway Musical Comedy in the 1920s." *Ballroom Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, Ed. Julie Malnig, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁷ Examples of Strand 1 movement activities and experiences are found in the *Blueprint* at all grade level benchmarks, but this is particularly important for Early Childhood through lower elementary music learning. See Cathy Guy's article on "Pre-K and Early Childhood: Music & Movement" in the 3rd edition of the *Blueprint*, 143-144.

⁸ "Enduring refers to the big ideas, the important understandings, that we want students to 'get inside of' and retain after they've forgotten many of the details. . . . Enduring understandings go beyond discrete facts or skills to focus on larger concepts, principles, or processes." Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, (Alexandria VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum, 1998), 10.

⁹ Essential Questions are genuine questions that real people seriously ask, either in their work or in their lives — not a "teacherly" question asked only in schools. They are meant to be explored, argued, and continually revisited (and reflected upon) and have various plausible answers. Often the answers these questions, raise new questions, spark or provoke thought and stimulate students to engage in sustained inquiry and extended thinking. Essential Questions lead to transferable ideas within (and sometimes across) disciplines. Wiggins and McTighe, *The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units*, (Alexandria VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum, 2011), 77.

¹⁰ See Barbara Cohen-Stratynier for further definition of "raggy" in social dancing.

1. Learn Chorus. (Strand 1)
2. Rhythmic analysis, identifying syncopation pertaining to dance. (Strands 1, 2, 3)
3. Learn Vamp/Intro/Verse. (Strands 1, 2)
4. Lyric study of verses and chorus. (Strands 2, 3)
5. Study history of African-American contributions to jazz, the musical theatre, and vaudeville circuits as training grounds in writing and performance. (Strands 3, 1, 2)
 - Option for further context in Strand 3: students choreograph and learn this dance.
 - Option for further context in Strand 3: students explore musical theater history, wherein a symbiotic relationship was established between the commercial theatre and the emerging commercial sheet music industry on Tin Pan Alley, which contributed to the development of the American Musical.
6. Comparison of ragtime rhythms in Chris Smith's songs with other lyricists, such as Cecil Mack, Chris Smith, and Silvio Hein's "He's A Cousin of Mine," published on 28th Street by the African-American-owned Gotham-Attucks Music Company. (Strands 3, 4, 5)

Suggested unit time: 7-8 lessons (Longer if using Strand 3 options.)

Structural considerations and technical challenges (Edmondson band arrangement)

➤ **mm. 1-12**

chorus in concert F; verse in concert D*

m. 2 and m. 12 bass movement creates an early (1913) jazz progression: flattened (Db) submediant jazz chord m.1 moving to tonic (F) with a C bass in the lower brass and woodwinds (see Strand 2 harmonic analysis below.)

➤ **mm. 13-20**

lower brass takes melody m. 13

m. 19 is an early (1913) jazz progression: diminished ii-V-I instead of more standard resolution, again created in lower brass and woodwinds

➤ **mm. 21-36**

verse with multiple modulations and accidentals

verse is A-A form and mm. 29-36 repeats the same harmonic pattern

➤ **mm. 37-59**

second chorus is still arranged for full ensemble, but offers jazz solo opportunities for trumpet and clarinet at m. 37 and m. 44 respectively

m. 52-59 is extended ending with period cowbell coda

* The Edmondson arrangement is set in keys ideal for the female vocal range, should the teacher wish to add a vocal solo, mm. 21-59. The original published vocal edition is suitable to the male vocal range with the verse in G major and chorus in Bb major.

STRAND II: Music Literacy

Key Music Literacy Considerations:

- Two keys: verse in G and chorus in Bb (original sheet music); D and F (Edmondson arrangement).
- A harmonic comparison of the band arrangement with the original sheet music would show chromatic jazz-age modulations that occurred throughout a 1913 song.
 - In the original key of verse,¹¹ sophisticated harmonic movement and key modulations with dominant 7th progressions and with chromatic leading tone and bass lines are more commonly found in later jazz music of the 1920s.
 - Harmonically, the G major verse progresses to the Bb major chorus with an Eb7 chord moving chromatically down to a D chord, (on verse lyrics "bear" or "show"). This would anticipate a move back to G major where the verse began, but D in the melody is then used as a leading tone up to Eb, the dominant 7th pitch of F7. This dominant F7 chord (with C in the bass) *instead* leads to the new key of Bb:

JAZZ AGE PROGRESSIONS!

D major (dominant in G) with melodic leading tone up to Eb in a new dominant 7th chord arriving at a new key of Bb.

Root of Eb7 chord is a half step progression down to root of dominant chord D in G major.

- In a Bb major chorus, the weak pre-dominant submediant chord G is made stronger as Gb7, leading down to F on the lyric "then bring." The moving bass line literally underscores the lyric with a rising bass line under "bring it back" arriving at submediant Gm on "back."
- The second iteration of the Gb to F movement occurs on the final "title" phrase, "I call 'Ballin' the Jack.'" It is a jazzy variation of a standard ii-V-I resolution with a diminished Gb in the bass under the Cm7 chord. A more conventional choice would be to voice the G in the bass, but Smith lowers it by a half step for a tighter

TWO JAZZY CHROMATIC FUNCTIONS OF Gb:

Gb7 moves strongly to F, locking us back into the tonic Bb with an F root.

Gb functions as a dim 5 of Cm7, strengthening a bass movement to F7 in a final ii-V-I progression.

¹¹ New simpler verses for "Ballin' the Jack" were written by other songwriters in 1942 and 1951, possibly because the chromaticism in Chris Smith's original music was too sophisticated, but more likely to fit the needs for the films that featured the song. See the "Internet video clips / other media" section below under Strand 4.

and jazzy resolution, which would be more commonly used in the 1920s.¹²

- The chorus rhythms can be viewed as a hybrid between ragtime syncopations over a regularly accented accompaniment and less “choppy,” jazzier, linear bass lines that support an on-the-beat melody.
- Below is a list of musical vocabulary words and terminology that pertain to this selection:

Syncopation	A displacing of beats or accents, often stressing accent on a weak beat.
Ragtime	African American music form, characterized by a syncopated melodic line and regularly accented accompaniment.
Jazz	African American music form, characterized by improvisation and syncopation, played over varying and often complex rhythms. There are many subforms of jazz developed through the 20 th century.
Jazz standard	A popular song which provides the structure over which a jazz performance is improvised. Jazz standards thus form an important part of a jazz musician’s repertoire and often come from Tin Pan Alley.
Vaudeville	An unplotted form of popular entertainment in which acts were compiled to fit a time frame. In North America, vaudeville was an industry from the 1880s through the early 1930s, frequently organized by theater circuits that could be local or transcontinental.
Vamp	A repeated series of measures in a published song, usually two, which musicians would play on repeat or “vamp until ready” while the performer entered on stage. In vaudeville, the vamp usually was placed to start songs, dances and comedy routines.
Interpolation	A song that is added to a musical theater score, often at the request of the performer. The lyrics and narrative lines of interpolated songs did not always fit the story or character in a plot-driven musical.
Fox trot	A ballroom dance in 4/4 time that music publishers issued as piano-vocal sheet music and in arrangements for dance bands.
Ballin’ the jack	A vernacular term believed to refer to ball-bearing jacks developed to enhance rotation for loading industrial railroads. James Burris used the term for a dance step that featured a fast snake-hip spin. ¹³ Other scholars trace its origin to the train’s engine, nicknamed “Jack” and <i>high balling</i> , was “the trainman’s hand signal to start rolling. Hence ‘ballin’ the jack’ means traveling fast and having a good time.” ¹⁴
Snake hip	A dance move twisting the torso while spinning in place.

¹² Chromatic downward movement of bass lines occurs in classic ragtime too, as in the bass line that ends the first strain of Scott Joplin’s “The Entertainer” (1902), though Joplin and his contemporaries more often used an upward half-step movement in classic ragtime bass lines. Chris Smith’s harmonic voicings represent a new jazzier use of this practice on Tin Pan Alley. See this same practice in Smith’s “He’s A Cousin of Mine” (1906), though this song still rhythmically sounds more like ragtime. Further, consider the mostly standard harmonic voicing that is used in Irving Berlin’s “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” written two years earlier in 1911. The final, title phrase of the chorus has the only chromatically descending baseline: submediant6-iii diminished-V6, resolving to tonic. “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” is also a wraparound in this series.

¹³ Though the chorus’ tempo is specifically marked “not too fast,” a performer could perform the snake-hip spin faster and faster in repeats of the last measures, “that’s what I call Ballin’ the Jack.”

¹⁴ Professor Willis Laurence James in conversation with Marshall Stearns, and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*, (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 98.

Eagle Rock	A dance of African American origin, ¹⁵ among a series of “bird” dances ¹⁶ around the 1900s that included “The Buck and Wing.”
It’s a bear	The Grizzly Bear was a ballroom dance originating about 1909, in which the couple hugged closely (and often scandalously) on the dance floor and is referenced at the end of the first verse. ¹⁷



Chris Smith circa 1905. (Inset detail on sheet music “Good-Bye, I’ll See You Some More,” lyric by Billy Johnson.)

Jim Burris in *The New York Age*, August 24, 1911. The caption reads “James Burris, who will be ‘straight man’ in *The Smart Set Co.* this season.”

STRAND III: Making Connections

Music History:

1. Chris Smith (1879-1949) and James Henry Burris (1875-1923)

- Smith and Burris wrote more than 40 songs¹⁸ together from 1903¹⁹ to 1924.
- Smith and Burris were also performers, enjoying great success together on the Proctor Circuit in 1905.²⁰
- They wrote theater songs and performed with S. H. (Sherman Houston) Dudley, an African American comedian, composer, and producer for his Smart Set Company in an annual series of social parodies, rooted in minstrel traditions.²¹

¹⁵ The Eagle Rock dance was purportedly named after the Eagle Rock Baptist Church in Kansas City, where worshippers were waving the arms out and rocking side to side. Debra Devi, *The Language of the Blues from Alcorub to Zuzu*, (New York: Billboard Books, 2006), 102. Cornetist Charlie Love cites the dance being done in 1890s New Orleans to Buddy Bolden’s early jazz music. Stearns, 26-27. See also jazz origins in Strand 3 of this wraparound.

¹⁶ Dancers made the “motions of an eagle in flight.” Major, 156. A hilarious rendition of this is seen in Broadway choreographer, Graciela Daniele’s movement, performed by Gilda Radner and Dom Deluise in *Haunted Honeymoon*, 1986. See Strand 4, Internet video clips / other media.

¹⁷ “It’s a bear!” is a repeated phrase in the chorus of Irving Berlin’s “Everybody’s Doin’ It” (1911). Berlin also contributed lyrics to George Botsford’s “The Dance Of The Grizzly Bear” (1910). The dance is demonstrated in a 1913 French film, “Le pas de Lours Danse” and can be viewed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WYTSO99IGQ>

¹⁸ Eunmi Shim, *Chris Smith and the Ragtime Song*, Thesis, (Urbana IL: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1993), 26. Burris’ granddaughter Eve Burris lists 43 song collaborations on the James Henry Burris website, though some titles are unpublished. <http://www.eveburris.com/jhb/music.html>.

¹⁹ “Tain’t No Disgrace to Run When You’re Skeered” is their earliest publication together, co-composed with Ernest Hogan. Published by the Detroit-based Whitney-Warner Publishing Company, 1903.

²⁰ *The New York Sunday Telegraph*, March 5, 1905. Chris Smith had a vaudeville act with childhood friend Theodore Bowman, with whom he composed his first big song hit, “Good Morning Carrie!” along with lyricist Cecil Mack (1901). Benjamin Franklin V, “Chris Smith and the Bowmans,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly*, Volume 15, 2012, Issue 4, 251-252. James Burris toured in Ernest Hogan’s *At Jolly Coon-ey Island* (1898), singing “A Hot Time in the Old Town” which later became *A Trip To Coontown*, the first full-length musical comedy to be written and performed by African Americans. Krystyn R. Moon, David Krasner and Thomas L. Riis, “Forgotten Manuscripts: A Trip to Coontown,” *African American Review* Vol. 44, No. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2011), 7-9. He also appeared with Williams and Walker in *Sons Of Ham*, (1900), the second Broadway show written and performed by African Americans. He also toured in vaudeville and minstrel companies. <http://www.eveburris.com/jhb/theatre.html>

²¹ S. H. Dudley created the first black vaudeville circuit, which later developed into the Theatre Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.) which expanded this segregated vaudeville circuit for African Americans through the 1920s. A comprehensive study is by Michelle R. Scott, *T.O.B.A. Time: Black Vaudeville and the Theater Owners Booking Association in Jazz Age America*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2023).

- The success of "Ballin' the Jack" reportedly led Joseph W. Stern to sign "the clever team of" Chris Smith and James Burris to an exclusive publishing contract.²²

2. "Ballin' the Jack:" a jazz standard influenced by ragtime

- This 1913 song can be viewed as hybrid of jazz and ragtime in a timeline of popular music history. As shown above under Strand 2, "Ballin' the Jack" has melodic syncopations that were influenced by ragtime. The second verse refers to this: "Play some good rag that will make you prance." The song's swinging dotted-eighth phrases and harmonic progressions (See Strand 2) make it a good example of the influence of jazz on popular music.
- Ragtime, characterized by a syncopated melodic line and regularly accented accompaniment, evolved as a genre through the 1880s and 90s, moving north from New Orleans to St. Louis and Chicago in minstrel shows and the vaudeville stage during the migration of African Americans following the American Civil War.
- Classic ragtime was established as an authentic African American form with the publication of Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" in 1899.²³ Instantly popular, Joplin was proclaimed the "King of Ragtime."²⁴ Other African American composers, including James Scott and Joseph Lamb, further developed the form with their classic piano rags.²⁵ This syncopated music became an international craze, both revered by fans and reviled by critics in the first decade of the twentieth century.
- The origin of jazz music is debated, but most historical



Buddy Bolden, circa 1905, back row, second from left.

accounts trace its development to 1890s New Orleans, around the same time as ragtime was evolving, crediting trumpeter Buddy Bolden with improvising over New Orleans marching band music²⁶ and developing the "big four beat," accenting the "second fourth beat of a



1901 edition of the "The Maple Leaf Rag," by which time Scott Joplin was known as "The King of Ragtime."

²² Billy E. Lewis, "New York News," *The [Indianapolis, Indiana] Freeman* (November 28, 1914), 5.

²³ "[Scott] Joplin was the first true classicist of the piano rag, and he was consciously so." *Classic Piano Rags: Complete Original Music for 81 Rags*, Selected with Introduction by Rudi Blesh, (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), vi. "Classic piano ragtime" is a term discussed by Blesh in this collection, vi-viii.

²⁴ Berlin, Edward A. *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era*, [2nd Edition], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Chapter 8 "King of Ragtime Writers," 108-128.

²⁵ The origin and development of classic piano ragtime is documented in various critical and historical research, but one of the best accounts remains the seminal, *They All Played Ragtime* by Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis. (4th Edition, New York: Oak Publications, 1971). Chapter 1: "The Sedalia Story," pp. 14-34, beginning with "The Maple Leaf Rag." Tin Pan Alley's contributions to ragtime are detailed in the Chapter, "Cakewalk In the Sky," 219-230.

²⁶ "Buddy Bolden's Ragtime Band of 1893 is generally considered the first jazz band." Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz*, (New York Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 156.

- march."²⁷ "Buddy Bolden's Blues"²⁸ incorporates the flatted third and seventh or blue notes, from the African American form, which was also evolving at the same time in communities around the Mississippi delta.
- Chris Smith's melody for "Ballin' the Jack" traces up and down from the dominant or flat seventh ("Sway 'em to the left . . ."). Melodies playing off the flat seventh are also common in jazz standards of the 1920s.

Interdisciplinary (connection to other subject areas):

Theater History:

1. Smith and Burris in Musical Theater

- The duo had several musical theater hits, including *His Honor: the Barber* (1910), featuring their score with early jazz band leader, James Tim Brymn, (and in which Burris also had a stage role), as well as interpolations into *Dr. Beans From Boston* (1911)²⁹ and *Chocolate Dandies* (1924).
- *His Honor: the Barber*, toured in 1910 with a Broadway debut at the old Majestic Theatre in 1911, and included the Smith and Burris hit, "Come After Breakfast."³⁰ Though published by Joseph Stern as "the big surprise comic coon song hit," this was not a coon song:
- Chris Smith vowed never to write a "coon song" or use derogatory language he found offensive in his music, where other African American composers made what must have been a difficult decision to pander to the racist tropes of the day in order to make sales as a popular coon song. This vow went back to his first hit with "Good Morning, Carrie" in 1901 for which "Chris declared that he was not going to use the word 'coon.'"³¹

2. Interpolations.

- Though introduced in vaudeville by Lillian Lorraine³² and by bands in dance halls, "Ballin' the Jack" was interpolated into *The Girl from Utah* in 1914³³, by star Donald Bryan. *Utah's* score was by Jerome Kern and included the Kern standard, "They Didn't Believe Me,"

²⁷ Wynton Marsalis, "Gumbo," *Jazz: A Film By Ken Burns*, [DVD Box Set] PBS, 2000. The segment can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsnf-C1Pu-A>

²⁸ "The tune . . . was one of the earliest variations from the real barrelhouse blues . . . This tune was wrote about 1902." Jelly Roll Morton to Alan Lomax in *Mister Jelly Roll: the Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz,"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 60. No Bolden recordings or sheet music survives, but fellow jazz pioneer Jelly Roll Morton recreated his blues from memory with historian Lomax in 1939.

²⁹ Smith and Burris contributed "V-I-R-G-I-N-I-A" to the score by Will Vodery and Henry Creamer, for which Jim Burris himself got special mention for his dancing to his own song. Sylvester Russell, "The Smart Set at the Alhambra: S. H. Dudley Shines in 'Dr. Beans From Boston,'" *The [Indianapolis, Indiana] Freeman*, (December 9, 1911), 5.

³⁰ "That's Why They Call Me Shine" was one of the few songs in the score not by Smith and Burris, composed by Ford Dabney with frequent Smith collaborator, lyricist and publisher Cecil Mack. It marked one of the final important appearances by choreographer and dancer Aida Overton Walker, who introduced this jazz standard in drag.

³¹ Tom Fletcher, *100 Years of the Negro in Show Business*, (New York: Burdge & Co., 1954, Reprint. New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 147.

³² Jack Edwards, "In Melody Lane: Talelets [sic] Told By Stern Pluggers" reports on mobs of professionals coming around to Joseph Stern's offices at 104 West 38th Street to buy copies of "Ballin' the Jack" after seeing Lorraine's performance of the song at the Colonial Theatre, a Keith-Albee vaudeville house at 62nd & Broadway. *New York Clipper*, November 8, 1913. The Colonial Theatre housed Sissle and Blakes' *Chocolate Dandies* in 1924.

³³ Bernard Peterson states "Ballin' the Jack" was added during the tour, but IBDB records it being in the program when the show first opened on Broadway on August 24, 1914. <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/the-girl-from-utah-497079#Songs>. Both sources list the song in the return Broadway engagement a year later on August 9, 1915. Bernard L. Peterson, Jr. *A Century of Musicals in Black and White: An Encyclopedia of Musical Stage Works By, About, or Involving African Americans*. (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 146.

though that song wasn't an instant hit like "Ballin' the Jack." The success of the Kern show made "Ballin' the Jack" even more popular.

- "Ballin' the Jack" was then interpolated into the London revue, *The Passing Show of 1915*, which was recorded with the revue's original cast performers, Elsie Janis and Basil Hallam.

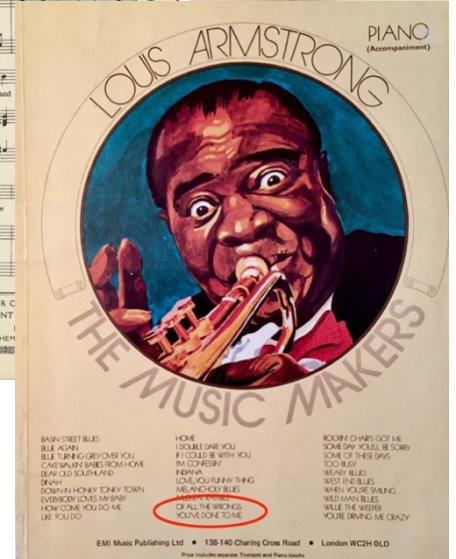
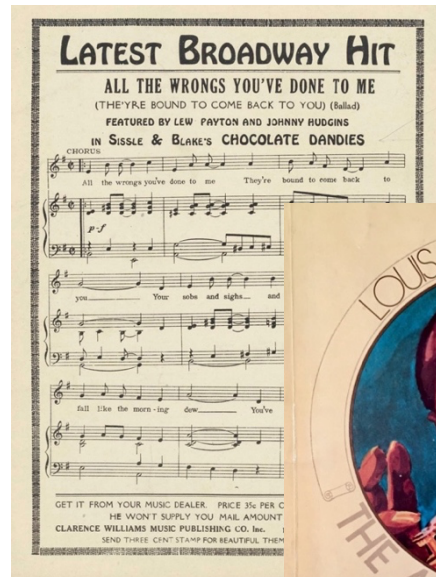
3. Bert Williams

- Smith and Burris' works were performed by the legendary comedian, Bert Williams.³⁴ "Constantly" was a huge hit with lyrics by Smith and Burris and music by Bert Williams. Williams featured the song in his *Ziegfeld Follies* debut in 1910.³⁵
- Chris Smith apparently was one of Williams' favorite songwriters,³⁶ and he recorded Smith's songs from 1901 to 1921, often those with Smith's frequent lyricist, Cecil Mack.³⁷
- Williams' last recording, "Unexpectedly" in 1921, featured a lyric by Jim Burris.³⁸



4. "All the Wrongs You've Done to Me,"

- Smith and Burris' last major song, is a hit interpolation into Sissle and Blake's 1924 Broadway musical, *Chocolate Dandies*.³⁹ The song is a collaboration with *Dandies* book writer and star, Lew Payton and Edgar Dowell.
- The song was recorded three times by Louis Armstrong: twice in 1924 including Clarence Williams' Blue Five with a vocal by Eva Taylor and again in 1957.⁴⁰



³⁴ One of the team's earliest songs, "'Tain't No Disgrace to Run When You're Skeered," published in 1903, composed by Smith and Ernest Hogan with lyrics by Burris, was also recorded by Williams in 1921. Columbia matrix 79934.

³⁵ Ken Bloom, *American Song: The Complete Musical Theatre Companion*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 1238.

³⁶ Shim, 26.

³⁷ Among Bert Williams first recordings was Chris Smith's "Good Morning Carrie" in 1901. One of Smith and Mack's biggest hits, "He's a Cousin of Mine," was recorded by Williams and introduced by Marie Cahill in *Marrying Mary* (1906). Smith and Mack wrote "You Got the Right Church but the Wrong Pew" for Williams and Walker's *Bandanna Land* (1908). Chris Smith provided both music and lyrics for two of Williams' final hits, "I Want to Know Where Tosti Went" *Broadway Brevities* of 1920 and "You'll Never Need A Doctor No More." *Broadway Brevities* of 1921.

³⁸ With lyrics by Perry Bradford.

³⁹ Bloom, 187. See also <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/the-chocolate-dandies-9559#Songs>

⁴⁰ Eva Taylor was the featured vocalist of Clarence Williams band and Williams' wife. Her 1924 vocal version is reissued on *Reminiscing With Sachmo Vol. 1 (1923-1927)*, The Millennium Collection King Jazz Records, KJ 3748 PM, available on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMHWK_KZFec. The 1957 instrumental recording is reissued as a "1983" remix version on *Satchmo: A Musical Autobiography*, Verve Records 314 543 822-2, 2001, available on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMhjOSZsTqo>

Dance History

1. Dance Crazes

- "Ballin' the Jack" is an example of a social dance, performed in public, including on the vaudeville stage, and at home.⁴¹ Though marketed as a "fox trot" on the sheet music, the song is not an example of the famous ballroom dance, very popular at the time.⁴²
- The fox trot goes back at least to 1905.⁴³ In 1913, its exact dance steps had yet to be established.⁴⁴
- Social dances with specific directions are also in evidence before 1913, including:
 - "La Pas Ma La" by Ernest Hogan.⁴⁵ The 1895 hit was performed by Otis Harlan as an interpolation into Charles Hoyt's musical farce, *A Black Sheep*, 1896.
 - "That's How the Cake Walk's Done" (J. Leubrie Hill), introduced by Aida Overton Walker, known as "Queen of the Cake Walk" with her husband George Walker *In Dahomey*, 1903.
 - "The Dance of the Grizzly Bear," a 1910 vaudeville hit for Sophie Tucker with music by ragtime composer George Botsford and lyrics by Irving Berlin.⁴⁶

SEL (Social Emotional Learning) Connections⁴⁷

Possible self-esteem; self-awareness; resilience; social-awareness; and/or conflict-resolution skills: "Ballin' the Jack" is a social dance, not a ballroom dance. Teaching social dance in the classroom offers considerable SEL opportunities for developing socialization skills, building stronger relationships, and experiencing greater well-being.

⁴¹ David Jasen and Gene Jones note that the "huge sales" of the Prince's Band recording of "Ballin' the Jack" on Columbia Records in 1914, "proved that people were dancing at home as well as in cabarets." *Spreadin' Rhythm Around: Black Popular Songwriters 1880-1930*, (New York: Schirmer Books. 1998), 142.

⁴² There is no evidence that "Ballin' the Jack" was used as an exhibition ballroom dance for couples as a fox trot, though titles on record labels (see picture below) also marketed the song as a fox trot. The lyrics indicate something closer to line dancing, one person demonstrating the moves. If played at home on piano, piano roll or other recording, the music could be used for a one-step. Fox trot sheet music sometimes was published in cut time (2/2) such as "Rockaway Hunt" (1915) by Milton Ager and Peter Wendling or "The Canary" by W. B. Kernell (1919).

⁴³ Precise "origins of the fox trot are unclear. Several sources contend that the dance was introduced at Florenz Ziegfeld's *Danse de Folies* cabaret in 1914 by professional dancer Harry Fox, who performed a trotting-type dance," Julie Malnig, *Dancing Till Dawn: A Century Of Exhibition Ballroom Dance* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 151, but we can find no primary source documentation that directly links the dance's name to Harry Fox. Eve Golden claims the dance itself goes back at least to 1905, *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 101 and this is borne out with a 1905 sheet music publication titled, "Get Together! Fox Trot" by Noble Mac Clure (M. Witmark & Sons). <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/hasm/n0542>

⁴⁴ The Library of Dance lists various practitioners' versions, including the version taught by the Castles, from 1914 onwards. <https://www.libraryofdance.org/dances/foxtrot-through-the-ages/>

⁴⁵ Hogan's lyrics set a template for instructive dance crazes: "Hand upon yo' head, let your mind roll back, Back, back back and look at the stars, Stand up rightly, dance it brightly, That's the Pas Ma La." <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/141/166>

⁴⁶ Irving Berlin also references this hit dance in the lyric of his subsequent dance hit for 1911, "Everybody's Doin It."

⁴⁷ Social And Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. For more information visit: NYCPS SEL InfoHub <https://infohub.nyced.org/in-our-schools/programs/race-and-equity/social-emotional-learning>

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI&B)
Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CR-SE)⁴⁸**

How can purposeful practices in CR-SE and SEL advance students' learning in the arts; guide students to a better understanding of themselves and peers; and engage them in their thinking about power, equity, and anti-oppression?

2. Choreographers and Credit

- James Burris was a vaudeville dancer and as well as a lyricist. It is noteworthy that the lyric is in first person and the first verse takes the point of view of someone who invented this dance and wants credit:

*I'm the only person who's to blame
I'm the party introduced it there, so!
Give me some credit to know a thing or two
Give me credit for springing something new*

- Choreography credit is rare in theater programs of this era.
- A real-life example is not directly connected to the Smith/Burris song, but to the dance term, "ball the Jack." Dancer Ethel Williams received great notices for her wild dance movements⁴⁹ in the finale of *My Friend from Kentucky*, J. Leubrie Hill's 1913⁵⁰ musical that drew "white Broadway theater patrons to Harlem's Lafayette Theatre in droves, the first show to accomplish that feat."⁵¹ In an interview, she recalled,

I'd "ball the Jack" on the end of the [dance line] every way you could think of—and when the curtain came down, I'd put my hand out from behind the curtain and "ball the Jack" with my fingers."⁵²



Dancer Ethel Williams in 1915. She garnered acclaim for her dancing in *My Friend from Kentucky*, then was hired by Florenz Ziegfeld to teach her "ball the Jack" movements to his *Follies* chorus.

⁴⁸ CR-SE (Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education) Framework is outlined and available for download at <https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf>.

⁴⁹ "Ethel Williams . . . is a whole show in herself. Throughout the performance, her dancing shines out . . . Long-limbed, loose and limber, she trips rhythmically about with agility and celerity, graceful in every move, which is a . . . cyclonic, acrobatic, sensational terpsichorean exhibition." Lester A. Walton, "Follies At Lafayette," *The New York Age*, February 4, 1915.

⁵⁰ The musical opened Lester Walton, "'My Friend From Kentucky' at Lafayette Next Week," *The New York Age*, October 23, 1913, 6.

⁵¹ Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 174.

⁵² Stearns, 125. Williams in this 1961 interview describes this "Ball the Jack" body and hand movement as improvised, apparently as summarized by Professor James in footnote 14 as "traveling fast" across the dance floor "and having a good time."



- Florenz Ziegfeld purchased the finale from *My Friend from Kentucky* and its staging that had so excited audiences uptown and made Ethel Williams a local celebrity. Ziegfeld hired Williams to teach her choreography of the finale, "At The Ball, That's All," to the white female chorus in his *Follies of 1914*. She explained:

*I went down to the New York Theater and showed the cast how to dance it. They were having trouble. None of us was hired for the show and at that time, I was supposed to be the best woman dancer in the whole country.*⁵³

- The resulting performance of Ziegfeld's female chorus failed to get the rave reviews like those received uptown when *Variety* proclaimed it as "the best put-on song ever seen in New York."⁵⁴ "As one white manager confidentially expressed himself: 'The trouble is, after you get consent from J. Leubrie Hill to use the finish, you have a mighty hard time getting white performers who can 'ball the Jack' and do the 'Eagle Rock' as effectively as the colored performers.'"⁵⁵
- Ethel Williams received no credit in programs for the *Follies of 1914*.

STRAND IV: Using Cultural and Community Resources

Visit publication site: Jos. W. Stern 102 West 38th (between 6th Ave and Broadway)

Visit NYPL for library research and digital literacy:

- Issues of credit and authorship, whether it be for choreographers (see Strand 3) or composers provides a good opportunity to teach research techniques and digital literacy at both the middle and high school levels. A field trip to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts could be the starting place for any learning assignment on topics in this wraparound. Contact the librarians at either the [Music Division](#) or the [Jerome Robbins Dance Division](#) to book a student orientation tour.
- Further research is almost always required to verify "facts" students may find on the internet. For example:
 - Chris Smith's "He's A Cousin of Mine" is co-credited to composer, Silvio Hein, but further research indicates this was not likely a collaboration, but a contractual credit for



102 West 38th Street, built in 1906 and headquarters for Jos. W. Stern & Co., publisher of many of Smith and Burris' songs. Stern moved there in 1907 from the Mack Stern building on East 21st Street and stayed at West 38th St. until they were purchased in 1920.

⁵³ Stearns, 130.

⁵⁴ Riis, 179.

⁵⁵ "Hill's Follies Repeat," *The New York Age*, July 23, 1914.

interpolating the hit song, solely composed by Smith, into a show featuring a score by the white composer.⁵⁶

- As late as 2023, the Boston Public Library published an article on James Reese Europe, miscrediting him for composing "Ballin' the Jack," probably due to a 1914 Victor label – see "Important Recordings to Know."⁵⁷
- Ethel Williams' story of creating dances and not receiving credit is hardly unique. African American choreographers, such as Aida Overton Walker, Laurence Deas, or Lyda Webb, all who staged dance specialties for Broadway and vaudeville, were seldom properly credited, although they developed such famous innovations as "The Black Bottom" and "The Charleston."



- Important recordings to know

Victor Military Band, Victor 35405, recorded September 25, 1914.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.100010756/>⁵⁸

Another notable instrumental version is by Columbia's rival house band, Prince's Band, Columbia A5595, recorded July 31 1914, but not released until October 1914.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjySIRwSv4w>

Elsie Janis and Basil Hallam with The Palace Theatre Orchestra under Herman Finck. His Master's Voice 2-4251, April 15, 1915. American vaudeville star and songwriter, Elsie Janis brought

"Ballin' the Jack" into her London revue, *The Passing Show Of 1915*, and introduced the foxtrot to Britain. See the "Recordings" section below for CD releases of this performance.

Johnny Dodds' Chicago Footwarmers, Okeh Records OK 8533, December 3, 1927. A "hot" 1920s version, featuring jazz pianist Jimmy Blythe and Baby Dodds on washboard.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOUHI3vp54s&t=1s>

Chubby Checker recorded in 1961 on his album, *Let's Twist Again*, Parkway Records, 7004-LP, 1961. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eoob1F_hlb4

Sammy Davis, Jr. *Salutes The Stars of The London Palladium*. Reprise Records R-6095, 1964.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do5mfS71K5Y>

⁵⁶ Jasen and Jones, 137.

⁵⁷ The credit is misrepresented in the statement, "One of Europe's best-known songs was "Ballin' the Jack" from 1913 . . . The library owns a copy of the 1913 sheet music of the song, which was published by Smith and Burriss and strangely did not give credit to James Reese Europe." Rebecca Hunt, "James Reese Europe," BPL Blogs, February 16, 2023. <https://www.bpl.org/blogs/post/james-reese-europe/>. The mistake is also in Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., 146.

⁵⁸ This is one of the earliest recordings, combined with a segment of "What It Takes to Make Me Love You—You've Got It" by James Reese Europe and J.W. Johnson. The early, widespread popularity of this recording with the "Smith/Europe" credit on the label has led some sources to mistakenly credit "Ballin' the Jack" itself as being composed jointly by Chris Smith and James Reese Europe, as is the referenced Library of Congress recording, (<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.100010756/>), though the music is solely by Smith. Without the lyrics, or with the chorus words, "Ballin' the Jack" has had a long life as a jazz standard, with over 100 recordings. Edison Records also released its own recording on September 12, 1914 by the National Promenade Band.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/26638265-National-Promenade-Band-Reuben-Fox-Trot-Ballin-The-Jack>.

- Internet video clips / other media

African American dancers in a 1914 circle dance, with an added soundtrack of New Orleans trombonist, Kid Ory's "Ballin' the Jack," recorded on Exner Records in 1945. The filmed dance is circle dance and the clip is a good illustration of authentic community dancing. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpEVCiAG70c>

For younger grades, an elementary class, perhaps third grade, "Ballin The Jack" is videoed dancing to Greg and Steve, *We All Live Together Vol 4* [CD] (Youngheart Music, 2000). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VezzmD01X3o>

Judy Garland and Gene Kelly perform "Ballin' the Jack," choreography by Bobby Connolly and Gene Kelly in *For Me and My Gal*, MGM, 1942. A new faster 2/4 verse is created for this vaudeville-style dance sequence by Associate Producer and Garland musical mentor, Roger Edens.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWryDF_yyH0

Dean Martin and Polly Bergen danced to the song at a "high school" dance, Eddie Prinz, dance director, in the film, *That's My Boy*, Paramount, 1951. Another new verse is created for the song, probably by Paramount musical director Leigh Harline (composer of Disney scores for *Snow White* and the Academy Award-winning *Pinocchio*.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfl2Erh1c3k>

Bob Hope and Ginger Rogers dance to the song on television's *The Bob Hope Show*, NBC, February, 22 1960. The uncredited choreography is a minimalist version of the dance, mostly limited by Rogers' narrowly-cut dress.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yC5cyFjZ9E>

Dom Deluise and Gilda Radner memorably performed the song, choreography by Graciela Daniele in the film *Haunted Honeymoon*, Orion Pictures, 1986.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnB2uirvRYY>



STRAND V: Careers and Lifelong Learning

- Career paths are made with perseverance
 - Chris Smith "taught himself to play the piano and guitar 'while waiting for the dough to rise' [in the bakery where, as a young man, he was apprenticed in Charleston SC], acquiring considerable skill on both instruments."⁵⁹
 - Songwriters, Composers and Lyricists, (as individual or in a team): Smith and Burris were typical of African Americans who performed in touring vaudeville and musical comedy troupes while developing their writing

Chris Smith and James Burris, authors of "Shame On You" and "Dat Ain't the Kind of Grub I've Been Getting Down Home," who are a big feature with Archer's Filipino Girls, are making a tremendous hit on the Proctor Vaudeville Circuit, introducing their latest and greatest song hit, "Nobody Has Mo' Trouble Than Me." This is a coon song which is a decided departure from the general run, and its clever words and catchy melody will make it one of the season's biggest hits.

Smith and Burris receive mention of their vaudeville act in the *New York Clipper*, March 5, 1905.

⁵⁹ Maxwell F. Marcuse, *Tin Pan Alley in Gaslight: A Saga of the Songs that Made the Gray Nineties "Gay,"* (Watkins Glen NY: Century House, 1959), 263.

careers in popular musicals or individual songs in the early 20th century.

- Publishing/Distribution.
 - “Ballin’ the Jack,” according to research and mathematical estimation, spent six months in the top 20 monthly sheet music sales, maintaining its place as the number one-selling song throughout November 1914.⁶⁰
 - In 1913, Burris and Smith advertised that they published and sold their own music as Smith & Burris Music “writing exclusively for singers,” at 60 West 134 Street.⁶¹
 - Following the overwhelming success of “Ballin’ the Jack,” they signed exclusively with Joseph W. Stern, a major Tin Pan Alley firm.

Joseph Stern advertises songs by his star writing team, newly under contract: Smith and Burris songs in this February 13, 1915 ad in the New York Clipper include “Goofer Dust,” “Fifty-Fifty,” “Fox-Trot Ball,” and of course, “Ballin’ The Jack.”

POSSIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

High School:

Students embark on a flipped classroom project, select a research topic related to “Ballin’ the Jack” (Music, theater or dance-related) and present a PowerPoint report to the class. The learning goal is to engage students in music history and to develop research and digital literacy skills. Strands 3, 4.

Middle School:

Before teaching the song, ask students to recite lyrics in normal speech before hearing the rhythm used in the song.

- Ask which lines are slower, which could be sped up, and which are elongated. Ask them to improvise a rhythmic recitation of the chorus.
- Ask students to pay attention to improvising rhythms that illustrate the movement described in the lyrics, especially the penultimate line.
- Compare to student lyric rhythms in different genres of hip-hop and rap.

The learning goal is to engage students in setting lyrics to their own rhythmic improvisations and thoughtfully devise movement to music. Strands 1, 2.

⁶⁰ Edward Foote Gardner, *Popular Songs of the Twentieth Century: Vol. 1: Chart Detail & Encyclopedia, 1900-1949*, (St. Paul MN: Paragon House, 2000), 71-72, 175.

⁶¹ *New York Age*, September 18, 1913, 6. That 134th Street block no longer exists, as it terminated in the late 1950s at Malcolm X Boulevard (Lenox Avenue) and a three-block square between Malcolm X and 5th Avenue was redeveloped as Lenox Terrace Apartments. “Building on 60 Years of Harlem History.” <https://lenoxapts.com/history>.

POSSIBLE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

High School:

Student presenters engage classmates in a flipped classroom presentation, and the presenters are able to answer follow-up questions on their researched subject.

Middle School:

Students perform their rhythmic improv with their own movements. In a guided discussion, classmates identify jazz and hip hop influences in the rhythmic delivery and offer feedback on how to rehearse movement to music more fluidly.

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