1 Legacies

New Year's Day, 1924. The American siblings Adele and Fred Astaire are in Birmingham, England, where audiences have been flocking to see them in *Stop Flirting*, the show that made them stars when it played in London the previous year. Evelyn Laye was establishing herself as London West End royalty in the title role of *Madame Pompadour*, while José Collins was continuing her reign as Empress Catherine of Russia in *Catherine*. In New York, three stars of the London stage – Gertrude Lawrence, Beatrice Lillie and Jack Buchanan – were preparing for their Broadway debuts in *André Charlot's Revue of 1924*. Eddie Cantor, a recent star of Ziegfeld's *Follies*, was revelling in the glow of his opening night performance in *Kid Boots* the previous evening. The dazzling Marilyn Miller, who had become a star thanks to Florenz Ziegfeld, had just gone through a very public departure from the powerful producer and, with her husband, was staying with actor John Barrymore in California, having attended his New Year's Eve party.[1] Nella Regini and Carlo Lombardo, managers of a prominent operetta company in Italy, were basking in the success of their original Italian operetta, *Il paese dei campanelli* (The Land of the Bells), and finalizing their next venture, an Italian version of the same *Madame Pompadour* that was thrilling audiences in London.

Although the musical theatre industry was enjoying renewed prosperity after the combined effects of the Great War and the Great Influenza Epidemic of 1918–1920, the remarkable events of 1924 truly stood out. This was an overlap of the old and the new, the past coming into the present and pointing toward the future. New stars were emerging as established ones were returning to the limelight, if they ever left. The same could be said for songwriters, librettists and producers. Genres such as the revue were likewise changing as impresarios were seeking new directions for their shows while maintaining, to varying degrees, the branding that had made them famous. The critic Brett Page wrote of this dynamism in September: 'There is no need

[1] Warren G. Harris, *The Other Marilyn: A Biography of Marilyn Miller* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 120.

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today to speak of 'the good old days of the stage'. The best days are here these flying minutes!'[2]

Musical theatre legends of the past were seeing their names on marquees and playbills in 1924. Among them were the illustrious West End star Marie Tempest, the Viennese operetta composer Franz Lehár, the Black songwriting team of Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, the venerable composer Victor Herbert and the former vaudevillian Fred Stone. They were joined by an illustrious group of relative newcomers, several of whom, like the Astaires and Florence Mills, were making their debuts as lead performers on Broadway. Others were seen in supporting roles on stages in the USA and Europe, such as the Austrian film actor Hans Moser and the African American dancer and activist Josephine Baker.

The year was likewise significant for many of the creators. George Gershwin had three musicals open in 1924: two in New York and one in London. In February he introduced his *Rhapsody in Blue* in Paul Whiteman's legendary 'Experiment in Modern Music' concert. Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml each had what would become their longest-running operetta (though neither was actually called an operetta at the time) open on Broadway: Romberg's *The Student Prince in Heidelberg* (aka *The Student Prince*) and Friml's *Rose-Marie*. These became the longest and second-longest-running musicals of any sort to open on Broadway during the decade.

It was also a time of passing. In Italy, the deaths in 1924 of opera composer Giacomo Puccini and actress Eleonora Duse had profound reverberations throughout the music and theatre realms, while in the USA the death of Victor Herbert marked the end of an era.

World events, some of which would have horrific consequences, were also taking place. In Germany, the American-led Dawes Plan, which restructured Germany's war reparations debt, was signed on 16 August 1924. The legislation provided further stability for the German currency and an ease in unemployment. As Peter Ross Range remarks, 'A corner had been turned; Germany seemed to be on the upswing.'[3] At the same time, Adolf Hitler was in prison writing *Mein Kampf*, and his trial for high treason (from 26 February to 1 April) attracted massive attention from the international media.[4] The decisive events of that year, according to Range, 'soon

[2] Brett Page, 'Broadway: A Glimpse of the New Plays, Picture Hits, Operas and Their Stars', syndicated column, *Birmingham News* (Alabama, USA), 28 September 1924, newspapers.com.
[3] Peter Ross Range, *1924: The Year that Made Hitler* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2016), 116.
[4] For more on the trial, including Hitler's testimony, see Range, *1924*, 125–183.

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became part of the growing Hitler myth' and became incorporated into legend.[5]

In the United Kingdom, on 22 January, the Labour Party came to power for the first time under Ramsay MacDonald. MacDonald was a former coal miner, and this was the first time a working-class person had ever served as prime minister. Though the party was defeated in a general election in November, Labour proved it was 'fit to govern' and instituted some changes to help working-class people and improve public spaces. Not surprisingly, social class continued to be a significant plot point and character-defining trait in musicals of various sorts.

In the USA, Calvin Coolidge was president, having succeeded Warren G. Harding, who died in office the previous year. On 20 March, the state of Virginia passed the Virginia Sterilization Act of 1924, which became a model for eugenics- and racism-based sterilization, especially after its constitutionality was upheld by the US Supreme Court. The law allowed for the sterilization of institutionalized individuals deemed as 'afflicted with hereditary forms of insanity that are recurrent, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness or epilepsy'.[6] This overt endorsement of eugenics, or 'selective breeding', through which proponents believed that negative traits could be eliminated from the human gene pool, had a huge following in the 1920s. That same day, Virginia passed the 'Racial Integrity Act', which made it illegal for a white person in Virginia to marry anyone except another white person. Texas legislation from the same year excluded Blacks from voting in Democratic primaries in the state – a law declared unconstitutional and overturned by the US Supreme Court in 1927.[7] It would not be until forty years later that Virginia's Sterilization and Racial Integrity Acts were officially overturned by the US Supreme Court with the 1967 *Loving* v. *Virginia* case.

Against this racist backdrop emerged what became known as the Jazz Age. The cultural contrasts and contradictions were profound. With the Jazz Age came a sense of vitality, newness and invention. This sense of invention was certainly present in the realm of musical theatre.

The sexualized body and risqué humour were likewise being intensified and curtailed. Eddie Cantor made it one of his New Year's resolutions for 1924 to stop telling off-colour jokes in his performances, and Ed Wynn's

[5] Range, *1924*, 258.

[6] 'Virginia Sterilization Act of 3/20/1924'; document image available at https://dnalc.cshl.edu/view/11213-Virginia-Sterilization-Act-of-3-20-1924.html, accessed 2 December 2023.

[7] Gerald Leinwand, *1927: High Tide of the 1920s* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2001), 157.

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The Grab Bag was lauded for not including anything that would make anyone blush. On the other hand, several series of revues, such as *Artists and Models*, played on the problematic commodification of the female body in various states of undress, as did some of the marketing for the Viennese operetta *Gräfin Mariza*. Sexual allure was at the heart of the Italian operetta *Il paese del campanelli* and was also featured prominently elsewhere.

This emphasis on the physical body coincides with the popularity of sport and physical fitness in the 1920s. In the USA, as John Bush Jones puts it, 'Both participatory and spectator sports caught the public imagination as never before.'[8] Golf was especially popular, with an estimated 2,000,000 golfers playing on 5,000 golf courses around the USA.[9] Sport also had its social implications, particularly in the British context, where, as Ben Macpherson asserts, 'a game of cricket or tennis on a village green . . . has come to be viewed as an idyllic embodiment of British civility'.[10] Values of 'fair play and camaraderie'[11] reigned supreme. Such sporting attitudes are reflected – or thwarted – in the numerous sport-themed musicals that were playing in 1924, including *Kid Boots* (golf), *Plain Jane* (boxing), *Top Hole* (golf again) and *Betty Lee* (foot race).

Musicals never play in temporal or geographical vacuums but form part of a continuum, one that is filled with various twists, turns and diversions. This was certainly the case in 1924. Echoes of the previous decade (and even earlier) rippled into the present and intrepid visions of the future were constantly bubbling and gurgling. More recent musicals continued to make their mark, among the most important of which was *Shuffle Along*.

Shuffle Along and Its Legacies in 1924

When *Shuffle Along* opened at the 63rd Street Music Hall on 23 May 1921, it was the result of a coming together of two pairs of Black creative artists: the vaudeville duo of Flournoy Miller (1885–1971) and Aubrey Lyles (1884–1932), and the songwriting team of Noble Sissle (1889–1975) and Eubie Blake (1887–1983). Miller and Lyles crafted the book and starred in

[8] John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 54.

[9] Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, 54.

[10] Ben Macpherson, *Cultural Identity in British Musical Theatre, 1890–1939: Knowing One's Place* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 191.

[11] Macpherson, *Cultural Identity in British Musical Theatre*, 191.

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the new endeavour, which included some of the classic routines they had already made famous in their stage personas of Steve Jenkins (Miller) and Sam Peck (Lyles). Sissle and Blake's sparkling songs provided a dynamic, often syncopated soundworld for the production (see Plate 1).

The story centred around a mayoral election in the fictional town of Jimtown, where the two candidates, Steve Jenkins and Sam Peck, run the local grocery store. Steve wins and appoints Sam chief of police. Corruption abounds until Harry Walton (played by Roger Matthews) comes along with a promise to clean things up. The town celebrates him in the show's hit song 'I'm Just Wild about Harry'. There's also a love story between Harry and Ruth Little (played by Gertrude Saunders) that provides the impetus for the duet 'Love Will Find a Way' and Ruth's 'I'm Craving for that Kind of Love'.

Writing in *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America*, published in 1924, the eminent Ghanian American historian, author and activist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) described how white authors were depicting Black men at the time: '[T]oday he is slowly but tentatively, almost apologetically rising – a somewhat deserving, often poignant, but hopeless figure; a man whose only proper end is dramatic suicide – physically or morally.'[12] In doing so, he was also describing how Black men needed to be depicted if a musical – even if created and performed by Blacks – was going to draw white audiences. Such is the case with Steve, Sam and Harry in *Shuffle Along*. To their white audience, Steve and Sam's forced departures from Jimtown constitute their social suicides, while Harry represents what Du Bois calls an 'exceptional case'[13] not only because of his professional integrity but also – more importantly – because he is the show's romantic leading man. To have a Black character who was not a comic but rather one who experienced real human emotion was something novel on white stages.

Shuffle Along looked simultaneously forward and backward. Theatre historian David Krasner sees the musical as combining an artistic goal to depict 'progressively minded musical characters with integrity and capable of romance' with a commercial need 'to appeal successfully to white nostalgia for minstrel humor and Dixie'.[14] It is the latter dimension that

[12] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* [originally published 1924] (Garden City Park: Square One, 2009), 138–139.

[13] Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk*, 139.

[14] David Krasner, '*Shuffle Along* and the Quest for Nostalgia: Black Musicals of the 1920s', in *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910–1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 240.

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is evident in such racist practices as blackface. (Black artists as well as white ones did this as part of performance expectations for white audiences.) There were songs with racially demeaning titles such as 'If You've Never Been Vamped by a Brown Skin, You've Never Been Vamped at All', which Miller and Lyles performed in blackface backed by the female chorus.

The foxtrot was one of the most popular dances in 1921, and it is no coincidence that 'I'm Just Wild about Harry', written for *Shuffle Along*, is a foxtrot. The step is thought to have begun with Harry Fox (1882–1959), a vaudeville performer. In the early twentieth century, there were strict rules about women moving about on stage if they were not fully clothed. Fox's idea was that the scantily clad women would remain still, and he would trot around them, at one step per beat, hence fox's trot or foxtrot. Dancer, choreographer and dance historian Robert Hylton describes the foxtrot, once it entered the domain of white ballrooms, as a 'smooth partner dance characterized by long, flowing movements. . . . [I]t proved to be a great accompaniment to the sounds of ragtime.'[15] The syncopation of ragtime, where the emphasized beats in the melody do not necessarily align with those in the lowest-sounding part, the bass line, along with a pronounced emphasis on uneven rhythmic figures (also called 'dotted rhythms' because of how they are notated) became among the most distinguishing features of popular musical theatre song in the 1920s. These so-called jazz rhythms inspired a slew of new dances drawn from Black culture that white dancers performed in ballrooms, on boardwalks and on stage.

This appropriation forms a critical part of what Matthew D. Morrison calls Blacksound, which he defines as 'the sonic and embodied legacy of blackface performance as the origin of all popular music, entertainment, and culture in the United States.'[16] Considering that *Shuffle Along* featured Black actors in blackface as well as songs that became hits in the white commercial marketplace through recordings and live performances, and especially how 'I'm Just Wild about Harry' became associated with US President Harry S. Truman in the 1940s and 1950s, what Morrison writes about Blacksound as an analytical tool can be applied to many of the musicals that were playing in 1924.

Shuffle Along was an unqualified success in the white theatrical marketplace and a key player in the legacy of Blacksound. The musical's popularity

[15] Robert Hylton, *Dancing in Time: The History of Moving and Shaking* (London: British Library, 2022), 78.

[16] Matthew D. Morrison, 'Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (2019): 789.

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inspired a string of Black musicals that perhaps oversaturated the white theatrical market to the point where, by late 1923 and into 1924, Black musicals were no longer holding the same drawing power for white audiences they once did.[17] As a result, Black artists wanting to write for white Broadway were having to create shows that would be funnier and faster than anything else on offer.[18]

Sissle and Blake and Miller and Lyles did just that. The creators of *Shuffle Along* wanted to capitalize on the sensation they themselves helped create. They did not do this as a foursome, however, for each team went its separate way. Sissle and Blake continued touring with *Shuffle Along*, doing their best to sustain the show's momentum. Miller and Lyles, meanwhile, signed on with the ambitious young producer George White (1891–1968), one of several white impresarios who wanted to capitalize on the popularity of Black musicals. The result was *Runnin' Wild*. For their new show, Miller and Lyles came up another misadventure featuring Steve Jenkins and Sam Peck. The duo is again forced to flee Jimtown, ending up in St. Paul, Minnesota, where they almost freeze to death in the harsh winter, before returning to Jimtown disguised as mediums. For the songs, White engaged the top-notch Black songwriting team of composer James P. Johnson (1894–1955) and lyricist Cecil Mack (1873–1944).

Mediums and spirituality were extremely important cultural themes in the 1920s. Especially after the deaths of millions during the Great War and the influenza pandemic that followed, making contact with the dead reached fever pitch in the decade. Among the most famous promoters of spiritualism was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), creator of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle's *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) and *The Land of Mist* (1926) reflect widely held beliefs of the time. Steve and Sam, therefore, are playing into a very lucrative subterfuge.

Runnin' Wild began its pre-Broadway tryout at the Howard Theatre in Washington, DC on 23 August 1923, and opened on Broadway at the New Colonial Theatre on 29 October 1923, where it continued until late June 1924. The New Colonial Theatre was a recently converted vaudeville house at 62nd Street and Broadway, north of the Times Square area and somewhat removed from the principal Broadway houses.

The score included many delights, but the two standout songs were 'Old Fashioned Love' and 'Charleston'. The moderately paced 'Old Fashioned

[17] For a discussion of some of these shows, see Allen Woll, *Black Musical Theatre: From 'Coontown' to 'Dreamgirls'* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 75–84.

[18] Richard Carlin and Ken Bloom, *Eubie Blake: Rags, Rhythm, and Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 186.

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Love' is a lyrical gem performed in the show by a vocal trio. Of the three singers who introduced it – Ina Duncan, Adelaide Hall and Arthur Porter – only Adelaide Hall (1901–1993), a member of the original *Shuffle Along* cast, went on to have a major singing career (see Figure 1.1). Concerning the song itself, by February 1924 no fewer than four different renditions had been recorded. Its popularity and appeal were immense. Leading the way was the white popular singer Frank Crumit, who recorded it on 7 September 1923, while the show was still in tryouts. An example of a white singer taking a song from Black creators and removing its context, an aspect of Morrison's Blacksound paradigm, Crumit's version was released in November, shortly after *Runnin' Wild* opened on Broadway.[19] In December, another white singer, Cliff Edwards, also known as 'Ukelele Ike', recorded the song and famously included scat singing in his rendition.



Figure 1.1 Adelaide Hall, one of the stars of *Runnin' Wild*.

[19] Columbia A3997.

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Black artists also recorded 'Old Fashioned Love.' In the recording made by Alberta Hunter and the Elkins-Payne Jubilee Quartette, the quartet's close harmonies add poignancy to the song's nostalgic tone, and none other than Sissle and Blake recorded it in what became a showpiece for Blake's fine pianism and Sissle's splendid tenor voice.[20]

The show's most famous and influential dance number, 'Charleston', was – somewhat surprisingly, given its future fame – overlooked by critics early on. The dance appears at the end of the first act and was led by the teenager Elisabeth Welch (1904–2003), playing the same Ruth Little character who had been the romantic lead in *Shuffle Along* (see Figure 1.2). Welch, like her co-star Adelaide Hall, would go on to become one of the most important popular singers of the twentieth century. Both women, African Americans, spent most of their lives and careers in the United Kingdom, where they were regarded as national treasures. In addition to leading 'Charleston', Welch sang as a member of the 'Song Birds Quartette' in Act 2, offering her a chance to display her vocal talents as well as her terpsichorean ones.

When *Runnin' Wild* opened, the Charleston was already well on its way to becoming an embodiment of the entire 1920s. Though *Runnin' Wild* was not the first Broadway musical to feature the dance (there's debate on which show can actually claim that title, but *Liza* from 1922 is a likely contender[21]), it was this particular musical, in the words of the Black cultural historian, author and activist James Weldon Johnson, that 'started the dance on its world-encircling course.'[22]

The Charleston, according to Hylton, 'is not the most complicated of dances. . . . it is all about style: a full-bodied rhythmic dance that oozes character, head to shoulders, torso, knees, feet and everything in between.'[23] Part of its immense popularity developed because, as Hylton states, it 'was a dance for people of all abilities.'[24] Like most dances, it has multiple origin stories, but what these tales have in common are the dance's

[20] Cliff Edwards recorded his version on 10 December 1923 (Pathé Actuelle 021097), Alberta Hunter and the Elkins-Payne Jubilee Quartette in February 1924 (Paramount 12093) and Sissle and Blake on 8 January 1924 (Victor 19253–A).

[21] Marshall Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Macmillan, 1968; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo, 1994), 144; Liza Gennaro, *Making Broadway Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 14.

[22] James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 1940 (first published 1930); reprint ed., New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 190.

[23] Hylton, *Dancing in Time*, 112. [24] Hylton, *Dancing in Time*, 119.

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Figure 1.2 Elisabeth Welch and chorus in *Runnin' Wild*. Photo by White Studio. ©Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

African American roots.[25] The Charleston, with its flamboyant limb crossing, could be danced as a solo dance or with a partner. Fundamentally, it represented a new, modern world filled with energy and possibilities.

For the white flappers – with their bobbed hair, headbands and knee-length dresses – the Charleston was a vibrant symbol of new opportunities and new roles in a rapidly changing world. The flapper, as Gerald Leinwand describes her, was 'radiant, energetic, volatile, voluble, brazen.'[26] The Charleston, therefore, held strong cultural capital in 1920s' white popular culture.

[25] See Ksenia Parkhatskaya, 'The History of the Charleston Dance', 23 August 2020, Ksenia's Secrets of Solo, https:secretsofsolo.com/2020/08/the-history-of-the-charleston-dance/, accessed 6 July 2021.

[26] Leinwand, *1927*, 173.

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When the dance appeared in *Runnin' Wild*, the accompanying chorus, 'The Dancing Redcaps', clapped their hands and stamped their feet to create a series of complex layered rhythms that Johnson described as 'electrical'.[27] This use of the Black body brought to the fore aspects of buck dancing, which Hylton describes as 'a rhythmic stomping of the feet danced by slaves.'[28] It also pays homage to the Charleston's ancestor, the juba, with its stomping and slapping of the limbs and torso.[29] When the Charleston migrated to white dance floors, these defining visceral aspects of the dance, ones tightly intertwined with the legacies of enslaved peoples, were excised.

The Charleston's closest rival in popularity as a dance in the 1920s was the Black Bottom, another dance with African American roots. Like the Charleston, the exact origins of the Black Bottom are somewhat nebulous, though it is thought that the name comes from an area in Detroit, Michigan.[30] Similar to the Charleston, it can be danced as either a solo or a partner dance. The Black Bottom, with its side-to-side rocking motion, joined the Charleston on white ballroom floors as an emblematic step of the decade.

The Black Bottom, not surprisingly, was also featured in a musical that opened in 1923 and continued into 1924, but not one that played in the greater Times Square area. *Dinah*, the show that introduced the Black Bottom, opened at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem on 2 December. In 1913, the Lafayette had become the first major theatre to desegregate.

The Black newspaper *The New York Age* called *Dinah* a 'typical Irvin C. Miller show', referring to its producer. Irvin C. Miller (1884–1967) was an actor who, after appearing in his brother's Flournoy's shows – the same Flournoy Miller of *Shuffle Along* and *Runnin' Wild* fame – toured on the vaudeville circuit. When it came to producing Black musicals, according to Bernard L. Peterson, Jr, Miller 'gave Black audiences exactly what they wanted when they came to the theatre.'[31] According to a writer for *The New York Age*, this meant 'a large and beautiful chorus, a waltz number and a lot of jazz, and the ghost scene'[32] – the last recalling the popularity of spiritualism at the time.

Miller came up with *Dinah*'s slight plot along with its requisite improbable twist. Dinah is set to receive an inheritance, which she plans to invest

[27] Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 190. [28] Hylton, *Dancing in Time*, 40.
[29] Hylton, *Dancing in Time*, 44. [30] Hylton, *Dancing in Time*, 114.
[31] Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., *Profiles of African American Stage Performers and Theatre People, 1816–1960* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001), 181.
[32] 'At the Lafayette Theatre', *New York Age*, 8 December 1923, newspapers.com.

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in a dance hall, but it gets lost in a haunted house (hence the chance to include one of Miller's popular ghost scenes). Because of the centrality of a dance hall to the plot, the show offered plenty of opportunities to showcase the latest moves, including the Black Bottom. Ethel Ridley, playing Corine, led the sixty-member cast in the new dance. Lt. Tim Brymn (1881–1946) and Sidney Bechet (1897–1959) crafted the songs for the show, which included the evocative 'Ghost of the Blues'. The song quickly found its way into the recording studio and likewise to turntables. Prion's New Orleans Orchestra recorded it in February 1924,[33] as did Fletcher Henderson with his orchestra in March[34] and Eva Taylor, accompanied by Clarence Williams's Harmonizers, in May.[35] It is the only song from the show to have achieved renown outside the theatre.

It was not just Ridley leading the Black Bottom that is a reason to remember this notable show. Playing the title role was Gertrude Saunders (1903–1991), who originated the role of Ruth Little, the romantic lead, in *Shuffle Along*. If Saunders's performances of songs in *Dinah* were anything like her recordings, audiences would have been in the presence of a remarkable female talent.[36] Her distinctive timbre, at once piercing and resonant, and especially her gifts at vocal improvisation and her uncanny ability to utter unique vocal tones, would have given her performances an unmistakably personal imprint.

The plots of *Dinah* and *Runnin' Wild*, as well as that of *Shuffle Along*, were necessarily thin. In many ways, the plot's purpose was less to tell a story than to hold together an entertaining array of skits, songs and dance spectacles. If such plots are minimized or even suppressed, one could say that we have crossed a soft boundary into the glamorous world of the revue.

The Glamour of the Revue

Among the most popular and most prolific types of musical theatre to appear on Broadway in the 1920s was the revue. With a spelling borrowed from the French, these lavishly staged productions – which included the likes of *Follies*, produced by Florenz Ziegfeld; *The Passing Show*, produced

[33] Columbia 99 D. [34] Emerson 10744.

[35] OKeh 8145, recorded 16 May 1924, released July 1924.

[36] Saunders recorded two songs from *Shuffle Along* in April 1921: 'I'm Carving for that Kind of Love' and 'Daddy Won't You Please Come Home', released on OKeh 8004. Other recordings include 'Potomac River Blues', which she recorded in 1923 and which was released on Victor 19159.

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by the brothers J. J. and Lee Shubert; and *Scandals*, produced by George White (the producer of *Runnin' Wild*) – were known for their large choruses of physically 'idealized' women who paraded around an expansive stage in revealing costumes amidst glamourous sets. Many provided a review of the current theatrical season, hence the title of the genre, but they became especially famous for their star performers and problematic commodification of female bodies. New material appeared every year, so many revues included the year in their titles (e.g., *The Passing Show of 1923*, *The Passing Show of 1924*). These annual versions were referred to as editions, a term that continues to be used when discussing revues. Changes also took place during the run of a particular edition as various stars left or joined the production.

Several important revues opened in 1923 and continued into 1924, including the 1923 edition of Ziegfeld's *Follies*. It opened at the New Amsterdam Theatre on 20 October and played until May 1924, when it went on tour.[37] (Pre- and post-Broadway tours were typical of musical theatre at the time, including revues.) Central to the *Follies* were the glorious costumes that adorned the female chorus. The story of this dimension of Ziegfeld's brand can be traced back to the influential British fashion designer Lucile (1862–1965), whose reputation was such that she would be recognized by only a single first name. Born Lucy Christiana Sutherland, she became Lady Duff-Gordon after marrying Cosmo Duff-Gordon in 1900. Lucile added theatrical flair to her London showroom when she installed rich carpets, curtains and a limelight-lit stage. She became even more renowned when she hired six women, whom she called 'mannequins', to wear her creations.[38] Lucile began working with Ziegfeld in 1915, and her 'fashion show' approach to not only the gowns themselves but also to how the women moved while wearing them remained a constituent part of the *Follies* brand long after her departure in 1921. Ned Weyburn's slow-moving choreography and Joseph Urban's iconic stair-centred sets, defining features of the *Follies*, were in many ways extensions of Lucile's fashion-show aesthetic.

The *Follies of 1923* opened with a number that showcased these trademark Ziegfeld features. Called 'Glorifying the Girls', even its title was a reminder of Ziegfeld's marketing tagline: 'Glorifying the American Girl'. What followed was a series of songs and sketches that featured five

[37] Ziegfeld chose the name *Follies* for his series after the Folies-Bergere in Paris.

[38] Marliss Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway: Theatre, Fashion, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 195.

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Ziegfeld stars: Fanny Brice (1891–1951), whose sense of physical comedy was unequalled and who delighted audiences with her Yiddish accent and general zaniness; Eddie Cantor (1892–1964), known for his racist blackface antics; Roy Cropper (1896–1954), a singer who would eventually make his career in operetta; Brooke Johns (1893–1987), a singer known for his ragtime-style songs; and Ann Pennington (1893–1971), an exquisite dancer and singer. The quintet, along with the chorus, offered a standard mix of songs, skits and dances.

This is exactly what critics then and commentators now agree was wrong with the show: a lack of originality and a stifling reliance on its past.[39] The spectacle of the series had become, in some ways, a victim of its own success. One aspect was novel, however. A special 'shadowgraph', which required audience members to wear special 'Follies-Scope' glasses, produced a 3-D effect in which shadows seemed to leap over the footlights into the audience. Laurens Hammond, the same person who invented the Hammond Organ, designed and patented the unusual visual apparatus.

As was typical for the *Follies*, a variety of composers and lyricists appeared on the bill. Among the contributors to the 1923 edition was the team of Harry Tierney and Joseph McCarthy, known for their gently syncopated songs such as the foxtrot 'Take, Oh, Take Those Lips Away', to which Johns sang and Pennington danced. Cropper showed his vocal prowess in lyrical numbers by operetta-leaning composers Rudolf Friml and Victor Herbert.[40]

While *Follies* was treading the all-too-familiar, other revues were forging new directions. Among these was the Shubert-produced *Artists and Models*, the first edition of which appeared in 1923 and continued, like Ziegfeld's *Follies*, into 1924 (see Plate 2). This series in particular very much emphasized the visual, as its title suggests, but in a different way than the *Follies*. The goal of *Artists and Models*, according to one reviewer, was 'to blaze a new trail in the matter of undraping the feminine form'.[41] *Artists and Models* also represented a different approach to the genesis of a revue. Rather than a theatrical producer (e.g., Ziegfeld) assembling a team of

[39] Ann Ommen van der Merwe, *The Ziegfeld Follies: A History in Song* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2009), 172.

[40] Friml's contribution was 'My Lady Fair', a texted version of his 'Chanson' from 1920 that surged in popularity in various guises throughout the next two decades, including 'Donkey Serenade' in the 1937 film *The Firefly*. Victor Herbert's 'I'd Love to Waltz through Life with You' is as sweeping as its title suggests.

[41] '"Artists and Models" Has Much Beauty', *New York Times*, 16 October 1924.

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creators and performers to realize their vision, *Artists and Models* originated not in the theatre industry but instead in the visual arts.

In 1901, the Society of Illustrators was founded in New York. Its mission, according to itself, was to 'promote generally the art of illustration and to hold exhibitions from time to time'.[42] In addition to curating displays in prominent New York galleries, the society also produced a series of what it called Illustrators Shows, otherwise known as 'Girlie Shows'. Society members – that is, the artists themselves – wrote the skits and songs and performed their own material, often with the assistance of their models: hence, 'artists and models'. The society also designed and built their own sets. One of its members, Watson Barrett, was the principal set designer for the Shuberts, and it was through him, in May 1923, that the group was able to secure the Century Roof Theatre for their show. (Roof theatres – which, as the name implies, were located above Broadway theatres – were extremely popular in the hot and humid New York summer evenings.) The Shuberts saw the production, liked it, secured the rights for the skits and used the rooftop production as the basis for what would become their latest series of revues: *Artists and Models*.[43]

The new revue had its much-anticipated Broadway opening at the Shubert Theatre on 20 August 1923. Shubert staff writers such as playwright and lyricist Harold Atteridge (1886–1938) and composer Jean Schwartz (1878–1956) were credited on the playbill, along with a long list of 'Contributing artists, authors and composers'. These were the members of the Society of Illustrators whose material appeared in the show. As was typical for a Shubert revue, the production carried the line 'Entire production under the personal supervision of J. J. Shubert'. In March 1924, the production moved to the Winter Garden Theatre, the Shuberts' principal venue for revues, where it closed in May before embarking on a highly successful tour.

The opening night audience, according to *The New York Times*, gave 'appropriate gasps' when they realized that the models who were moving slowly across the stage were unclothed from the waist up. As one critic noted, 'the absence of what has hitherto been regarded as the minimum in adornment for stage models was decidedly conspicuous'.[44] Among the most memorable sketches was 'All Wet',[45] a burlesque, or comic reworking,

[42] Society of Illustrators – History of the Society. https://societyillustrators.org/about/history-of-the-society/. Accessed 22 November 2021.

[43] Society of Illustrators – History of the Society.

[44] '"Artists and Models" in Scant Adornment', *New York Times*, 21 August 1923.

[45] By Harold Atteridge and Harry Wagstaff Gribble.

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of Somerset Maugham's short story 'Rain' and its popular theatrical adaptation by John Colton and Clemence Randolph, which was playing on Broadway at the time. 'Rain' concerns a missionary on a South Pacific island who tries to reform a prostitute and, according to the playbill, 'soon succumbs to the lure of her easy virtues'. During the revue's post-Broadway tour, the sketch often drew the ire of local censors, some of whom demanded its removal. Famously playing the prostitute, in drag, was the middle-aged George Rosener (1879–1945), who became a prolific film actor and screenwriter in the 1930s.

Another Shubert-produced revue that opened in 1923 and continued into 1924 was *Topics of 1923*. *Topics* was almost a polar opposite to *Artists and Models*, for dress rather than undress defined its visual aesthetic. Though critics noted its lack of real humour, the production was redeemed by its leading lady, Alice Delysia (1889–1979), a French actress and London revue star. Delysia captivated audiences with her brilliant and dazzling gowns. She shared accolades with the acrobatic dancing of Nat Nazarro and a spectacular diamond-studded Act 1 finale.[46] The revue opened on 20 November 1923 at the Broadhurst Theatre and transferred to the Winter Garden Theatre, where it played until March, when *Artists and Models* moved in.

Revues were also popular in London. Rather than relying on the sensuality and splash of their Broadway cousins, British revues focused on satire, modesty and intimacy. David Linton aptly describes what made the revues that played in London's West End in particular so distinctive:

> Often politically conservative, protective of the status quo and concerned with appealing to a mainstream audience, revue was highly sensitive to the status and position of Britain and London and cultivated a sense of itself as the defender of a colonial empire and, at the same time, the centre of a cosmopolitan culture competing with other metropolitan centres such as Paris, Berlin and New York.[47]

This aesthetic is readily apparent in *London Calling!*, which opened at the Duke of York's Theatre on 4 September 1923 and played well into 1924. The show's title, a call sign for BBC radio, connected the revue directly to the British capital and to technology. The revue opened with a scene that featured the same Shadowgraph technology that Ziegfeld included in his 1923 *Follies*. *London Calling!*, though, was much more than a display of theatrical technology. Produced by the French-born impresario André

[46] 'Triumph of Gowns in "Topics of 1923"', *New York Times*, 21 November 1923.

[47] David Linton, *Nation and Race in West End Revue, 1910–1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 10–11.

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Charlot (1882–1956), the show included among its stars Noël Coward (1899–1973) and Gertrude Lawrence (1898–1952), who were appearing together on stage for the first time. Theirs would become one of the most celebrated theatrical partnerships of all time. Coward contributed nearly all the songs to the show, with one notable exception. That was the final duet for himself and Lawrence, 'You Were Meant for Me', which was by none other than the musical creators of *Shuffle Along*, Sissle and Blake. While one might expect the song to be along the lines of *Shuffle Along*, or at least to emulate the various syncopated songs in vogue, 'You Were Meant for Me' is a moderately paced, basically diatonic tune, virtually void of syncopation, that exudes a sense of stasis and repose. Coward's songs which Lawrence brought to life in the show included 'Russian Blues' and 'Parisian Pierrot', the latter of which became one of the singer's standards. Lawrence left the show at the end of November 1923, and a second edition opened on 1 December. Lawrence departed for a very good reason: she was going to New York to star in *André Charlot's Revue of 1924*. A third edition of *London Calling!* opened on 19 February 1924, by which time Maisie Gay was the only star of the original cast still with the production.

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