

Jazz, Cartoons, and Jazz Cartoons
A Critical Study of the Approach of Golden Age Animation
Studios to Cartoon Music

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Acknowledgements	2
2. From the Top: An Introduction	3
3. A Bit of History: Chapter One	11
4. For the Laughs of a White Audience: Chapter Two	29
5. Fin: The Conclusion	62
6. Bibliography	64

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FROM THE TOP: An Introduction

The animation that will be discussed in this work pertains to a modern form of entertainment – only about 100 years old – that has gained an influential place in American society. It is a medium in which hand drawn images are given the illusion of movement by certain cinematic means: “a film made by hand, frame-by frame, providing the illusion of movement which has not been directly recorded in the conventional photographic sense” (Wells 10). For the purposes of this study, the words animation, cartoons, cartoon animation, cartoon features, animated features, and animated film all will be used interchangeably.

Cartoon Animation is, and has always been, an inherently surreal medium (Wells 11). Given to the fact that the cartoon world is completely contrived, the medium opens up to animators the possibility of exaggerating or even recreating reality. In comparison to live-action films, whose contents are dictated by a certain amount of realism, cartoon animation is much more unlimited. In cartoons, subjects can do what is believed to be the impossible – fly, spring from inanimate to life, and much more. They reflect interpretations of ideas and concepts, straight from the animators’ mind to the screen. “If it is the live-action’s job to present reality, animated film is concerned with metaphysical reality – not how things look, but what they mean” (Wells 11). Cartoons challenge what is generally accepted as reality, putting into question “the orthodox understanding and acceptance of our existence” (Wells 11). From the characters used, to the plot, to the gags, to the background, every part of an animation is designed; and

moreover, designed to reflect an interpretation of, an exaggeration of, a contrast to reality. Quite literally, animation can never depict reality, no matter how realistic an example may be. It is essentially abstract.

Nevertheless, there are certain common values that tie all animation together, beyond the physical process of animating. These include a sense of magic and mystery, the medium's tendency to depict taboos, and the undeniable affinity of most cartoons to comedy.

“Still intrinsic to the understanding of these developments was the idea of the moving image as essentially magical – something colorful, playful and ‘miraculous’ in its manipulation of images” (Wells 12). Before nineteenth century physicist Mark Roget's theory attributed *persistence of vision* to the reason why flipbook-like devices appeared to give the impression of movement, the principles behind such devices were seen as magical. Very early in its development, animation retained a somewhat mystical aesthetic, inherited from these earlier notions. Pioneer animators quickly saw the potential in the medium to create ‘trick effects,’ or gags based on characters performing unnatural acts (Wells 14). Warner Bros.' infamous gag involving a character who unknowingly walks across midair until the realization causes it to fall, or Disney's anthropomorphic characters, both represent examples of the magical aesthetic. Reality is readily warped and poked fun at in a system that seems so naturally unnatural: it is a strange system where a series of inanimate pictures are activated into a semblance of life.

Another fundamental trait of animation is its ability to break societal taboos. “The very language of animation seems to carry with it an inherit innocence which it

has served to disguise and dilute the potency of some of its more daring imagery” (Wells 19). The comic and simplistic nature of cartoons allows them to be seen as innocent. Yet, often times, this innocence can mask strong, socially unacceptable concepts relayed in cartoons. Ideas of sex and race, for instance, seen in the sexual Betty Boop and the minstrel-based Mickey Mouse, respectively, are common throughout animation history, but often ignored. Ironically, this innocence in conjunction with the general view of cartoons as a children’s toy, “a trivial and easily dismissed form” (Wells 3), weakens the strength of such mature concepts. Thus, ideas like sex and race become quietly subversive. “As the animated film progresses, its acts of subversion become more complex and radical but *seemingly* remain innocent by virtue of the form in which they are created. Issues of gender, sex, and sexuality, and law and order are being played out in this comic scenario, but they are essentially ignored because they are part of ‘a cartoon’” (Wells 19). Animation, therefore, is a goldmine for “transgressive possibilities” (Wells 19).

Last, but certainly not least, humor is a major and enduring aspect of cartoon animation. “Comedy is assumed to be at the core of most animated films, seemingly, its intrinsic but largely uninterrogated vocabulary” (Wells 127). For whatever reasons, sources do not tend to discuss why cartoons seem so intimately tied with humor. Perhaps it’s the exaggerated expressiveness of the medium, or its simplicity, or its perceived innocence. Paul Wells, author of *Understanding Animation*, offers the explanation that this tendency towards humor, found in even the most realistic cartoons, is reminiscent of the medium’s predecessors, comic strips and silent films. “The codes and conventions that characterized comic narratives were soon employed in the cartoon

but, more importantly, developments in animated comedy were enhanced by the recognition and exploitation of the graphic possibilities available to animators” (Wells 132). Wells seems to suggest that the nature of cartoons, even greater than its influences, is what ultimately determined their normative comic quality.

Although animation as we know it has existed since the late 1800s, this study will focus on the features of the Cartoon Golden Age – but more specifically, on the music in these cartoons and how it pertains to the overall medium. The Golden Age encompassed the animation for American studios during the 30s, 40s, and 50s (Barrier ix). It was in this period that the medium leapt into new levels of development with the advent of the sound cartoon – that is, the cartoon feature synchronized with pre-recorded music. Heavy usage of sound effects, the practice of recording live orchestras and ensembles, incorporating popular music, and highly deliberated scores, were all important factors that found new ways to bring acoustical humor to the images on screen. While often overlooked, cartoon music is indeed a systematic discipline that reflects many of the values inherit in the animated features. Furthermore, the music consists of a “musical vocabulary” meant to “enhance the story of a film” (Goldmark 14).

To demonstrate what this might mean, take for instance, an animated scene, in which a small kitten is horrified to find that its beloved mother had been run over and is now lying motionless and bloody in the street (the sounds and music of the run-over scene is already a discussion of its own). The kitten pitter-patters up to her limp body, and begins to cry as it softly rubs against her mother’s peaceful face. The kitten nudges and tugs, crying all the while, slowly realizing that the hump of fur and blood before it

was never to become its mother again. The tears fall even harder. The scene could be drawn beautifully, with the most beautiful motions depicted in a warming array of colors. And the voice actors could be spellbinding, bringing power to each word spoken. But still, the full profoundness of the scene could not be achieved without the presence of music. What if, as the kitten cries, the audience hears the sound of the tears hit the cold street pavement – perhaps, the sound of droplets, or different keys in the higher register of the piano, each note sounding individually, lonely? And what if the wind were to bellow in the background, strengthening the audience’s understanding of the kitten’s feeling of isolation? In the midst of it all, “Ave Maria” sounds, just barely audible at first. But then, gradually, it overtakes all other sounds. The piece is performed by an ensemble of strings, the part for the voice played by a single flute. Thus, with the simple addition of carefully placed music, a beautifully drawn and performed scene of a kitten and its dead mother becomes a memorable moment. Having music in animation adds a little touch of humanity to the drawings, thus completing in the cartoon a sensibility, which people can relate to as a believable form of life. More importantly, however, cartoon music extends on and exaggerates the inherent qualities of animation: the magical aesthetic, the depiction of taboos, and the humor.

What if the arrangement of “Ave Maria” was replaced by a tune from a Heavy Metal Rock Band? The change in music would create a whole new effect to the scene – perhaps a comical one? It would not be *so* strange; after all, cartoons are generally presumed to be comedies. Cartoon music employs the audience’s familiarity with a tune to create a secondary narrative to the main story (Goldmark 16). In fact, according to Edith Lang and George West, authors of the film music manual *Musical*

Accompaniment of Moving Pictures, the primary role of cartoon music is to exploit the humor at every given opportunity in a feature in various, imaginative ways.

“The player should learn to recognize, and be able to personally enjoy, the fun of the comic situations depicted on screen [...] In the cartoons and in the comedies all sorts of other emotions, besides that of plain hilarity, may come into play; there may be sorrow, doubt, horror and even death; only all of these emotions lack the quality of truth, and they must be expressed as “mock” sorrow and grief, “mock” doubt and death. This is very different from reality and should therefore be treated differently in the music.” (Taylor 18)

Music must mirror the surrealism intrinsic to animation; its purpose being not to depict reality, but to manipulate it – to laugh at it. Hence, cartoons tend to employ a wide array of musical gags, including sound effects and mickey-mousing. Even the very linking of the music and the image can lead to its own gag (Goldmark 15). For instance, a cartoon score composer could use a song that purposefully does not match the context of that moment of the film, like accompanying the kitten scene with Heavy Metal.

Music, in the context of cartoons, is essentially a surreal medium. And the power of music in cartoon animated features lies in its ability “to shape, direct, and manipulate both the emotional level of the story and the feelings of the audience” (Goldmark 16).

At the heart of this study is a discussion of the stereotypic representations of African American culture in Golden Age cartoons as expressed through black popular music. I discuss the history behind caricatures of African Americans in American media. Furthermore, I seek to answer the question: how is music used to narrate stereotypical black culture in cartoons? In chapter two, animation will be discussed as a medium predominantly created from the perspective of white Americans. This idea is

born from the fact that the directors and composers of all the major Golden Age animation studios – the Fleischer Brothers, Warner Brothers, and Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) – were white professionals. I further consider the argument that the cartoon features of the time were also directed to an audience of white Americans. A sizeable number of features incorporated animated and musical gags, which ridiculed specific ethnic groups for the amusement of a white audience. This audience, being personally removed from the subject matter, would not find these gags offensive, but funny.

“All character types [caricatures of African Americans] were used for the same effect: to entertain by stressing Negro inferiority. Fun was poked at the American Negro by presenting him as a nitwit or a childlike lackey. None of the types was meant to do great harm, although at various times individuals did. All were merely filmic reproductions of black stereotypes that had existed since the days of slavery and were already popularized in American life and arts.”
(Bogle 4)

The persistence of these hurtful representations seems to be the result of systematic influences. They are subversive acts most likely encouraged by ignorance and informed by historic practices, rather than done out of a deliberate want to oppress.

Cartoon scores engaged in stereotyping by using musical selections and genres which signified black culture (Goldmark 84). Jazz, in particular, was often used for its attractively exotic sound. Composers found they could easily extract from it the right musical emotions, and create a colorful narrative for cartoons that perpetuated ideas of the primitive, innocent, dangerous, and sensual black life. Through humor, the negative social implications of jazz were rendered less intimidating and essentially laughable.

Furthermore, Daniel Goldmark, author of *Tunes for 'Toons*, further asserts that the targeted white audiences found jazz cartoons desirable because the cartoons “emphasized the stereotyped notion that blacks live their lives with careless freedom” (Goldmark 86). The combination of both humiliation and reverence, which the genre endured in these features, stood as a possibly subconscious means of combating the threatening stereotypes of blacks. In my study, I analyze the scores of several different cartoon features accessed on Youtube.com, in hopes of determining the methods with which the Golden Age composers used jazz; and in hopes of understanding why.

The copyrights of many of the early cartoons have apparently expired in the past year or so, allowing them to be uploaded onto Youtube.com (Times Online). It is through Youtube that I watched all of the features mentioned in the study.

A BIT OF HISTORY: Chapter One

Before the debut of the very first sound cartoon in 1928, Walt Disney's *Steamboat Willie*, music in cartoons was comparatively underrepresented, though still highly innovative. "In the days before sound and image were physically joined on a piece of film, movie houses and theatres had either a pianist, an organist, or a group of musicians available to play before, during and after shows" (Taylor 17). In fact, some features may not even have had accompaniment. "There is evidence that cartoons might have just as easily been shown without any music whatsoever" (Taylor 17). Thus, I refer to this unique period of history as the pre-sound era. To truly understand the position Golden Age composers and animators were in when creating their cartoons, it is important to first discuss the pre-history. The innovations of the pre-sound era provided many of the fundamental principles, with which the cartoons of the Golden Age were formed.

Long before woodland creatures outrageously connived and gimmicked their way across the television screen, the term "cartoon" had already been in use. Originally, the word referred to a preliminary drawing for a work of art. It was a quick sketch that would become the basis of a larger piece of work, a fresco, a painting, an engraving. But, it wasn't until the mid-1800s that the word came to mean a humorous drawing – and the early 1900s, animation (Punch.co.uk).

A few years after a devastating fire destroyed the British House of Parliament in 1834, a new House was in the process of completion. In 1843, the Parliament held an

art exhibition with the intention of commissioning several pieces to decorate its newly built building. This act won the government much criticism – people questioned Parliaments’ sense of priority (Punch.co.uk).

Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, a satirical magazine, *Punch*, was just beginning to find its footing. Magazines had been common in that period for some time; so when *Punch* published its first edition in 1841, its creators were looking to bring something new to the market: a lighter mood and higher literary standard. One of the most important features brought to the magazine was a full-page satirical drawing in every issue called The Big Cut (Punch.co.uk). In 1843, in response to Parliament’s art exhibition, *Punch* Magazine replaced the Big Cut for one week with a series of drawings that criticized Parliament’s actions. The first drawing of the series portrayed degraded peasants viewing the art displayed in the exhibition, revealing pointedly that their government “determined that as they cannot afford to give hungry nakedness the substance which it covets, at least it shall have the shadow. The poor ask for bread, and the philanthropy of the State accords – an exhibition” (Punch.co.uk). *Punch* originally submitted this drawing to the exhibition, and for the irony, called it a cartoon. In time, the new use of the word caught on. According *Punch* Magazine, ever since then, the name “cartoon” came to refer to any type of humorous drawing: satirical cartoons, comics, and eventually animation.

However, far beyond the redefining of the word “cartoon,” the late 1800s and early 1900s revealed a flourish of technological activity, paving the way for animation. The most instrumental products of this movement were the development of a camera able to take sixteen to twenty photographs per second, the invention of the projector,

and the resultant birth of cinema: the viewing of still photographs taken by camera and displayed by projector in rapid succession (Bandazzi 6-8). In 1895, Alfred Clark became the first film maker to use special effects in his films. In particular, he pioneered the now age-old method of replacing actors with look-alike dolls during photographing, in order to create various visual illusions (Bandazzi 7). Also in 1895, American Thomas Edison and the French Lumière Brothers, Louis and Auguste, both invented the first practical motion picture cameras, concurrently. James Stuart Blackton, in 1900, was possibly the first to ever animate a caricature; though only by photographing a drawing, which he modified each time he took an individual picture. In this busy period of history, it would seem that hundreds upon hundreds of inventors, scientists, artists, and businessmen worldwide, came together in a mass collaboration. And their combined individual efforts led to the development of the animation we know of today.

However, despite the great feats of these many figures, it was physicist Peter Mark Roget who first opened the discussion on the illusion of movement. In 1824, Roget published his study “Persistence of Vision with Regard to Moving Objects” (Bandazzi 3). In his paper, he proposed that images are retained in the retina for a fraction of a second before being replaced by another image. It is this visual memory phenomenon he called *persistence of vision*. Roget sought to explain how successive images, flashed before the eye at a sufficient speed, gave the impression of movement. This concept would be further studied much later by George Sperling in 1960. According to Sperling, persistence of vision actually belongs to the larger topic of visual sensory memory – otherwise known as iconic memory (Luck 5-6). His theory

combats the misconception that visual memory is purely spatial mapping and picture-like images. It also combats Roget's claim that the phenomenon is affected in the eye. As his study states, iconic memory is actually composed of two subcategories: visible and informational persistence. Visible persistence (similar to Roget's persistence of vision) describes the experience of a fading visual image. The neurons and light receptors in the brain tend to remain stimulated just a fraction of a second after the stimulus has gone, and then quickly decays into inactivity. On the other hand, informational persistence describes the interpretation of the visual stimulus that carries on even after the stimulus has gone (Luck 6). Following the earlier Roget's theory, early artists and inventors were able to design films that recreated this visual effect. The many images appear one after the other quicker than it takes the impression to disappear. "Frame by frame," as the process was called, describes this method of taking a series of pictures drawn in consecutive stages of movement and displaying them one by one in rapid succession (Bendazzi 7). And, as Roget initially discovered, this process creates the illusion of motion. The overall concept of visual sensory memory is necessary in understanding just exactly how animation fundamentally works and has worked throughout history.

The earliest known person to animate according to Roget's theory was French inventor, Emile Reynaud. Reynaud may be known as the first animation artist in the world, because it was from his innovative invention that the basic ideas of the medium first found fruition. In the year 1888, he designed a machine composed of a cylindrical box whose inner walls held a series of sequenced drawings, drawn on a long film-like ribbon. The box spun on a pivot and the drawings were reflected through a system of

prisms, mirrors, and finally, a projector that displayed the animation on screen. The machine also included several features that produced music and sound effects.

Thoroughly complex and highly fragile, it was dubbed the *théâtre optique*. It was fashioned as an upgrade to Reynaud's earlier invention, the *praxinoscope*, created about ten years prior in 1877 (Bendazzi 4). Emile Reynaud had great hopes for the machine – he believed that it would win him big business worldwide. He ran daily shows for years in the Grévin Museum, a popular wax museum, and incessantly tweaked and improved on his masterpiece.

The *théâtre optique* was unique because no one had ever done or seen anything quite like it before. There were other smaller devices around that ran on the same basic principles. But Reynaud was the first to bring the entertainment to such a level. He created sustained animation – and, despite its novelty, it was actually very good! Take as an example “Autour D’Une Cabine” (“Around a Bathing Hut”). The feature depicts a static scene at a seaside equipped with bathing huts and what seems like a randomly placed diving board. Several comical characters in bathing suits appear and clumsily dive into the sea. Then a well-dressed woman and her over-excited dog appear, clearly hoping to use the bathing huts to change into swimming attire. What could questionably be the bathing hut vender suddenly appears from behind the huts, clumsily bumping into the woman. After a quick exchange, the woman makes her way into a hut, only to discover that the vender is peeking. She runs out and kicks the man in the rear. Dejected, the vender goes off leaving the woman in her own company. But, of course, within moments another woman appears from behind the huts and the two carefully enter the water together and swim away. The once over-eager dog is nowhere to be

seen, left behind in the bathing huts perhaps? The short cartoon ends with a man on a tiny row-boat. He loses his sail, revealing the words “*représentation terminée*” (presentation finished). (Youtube.com)

While only a two minute long presentation, “*Autour D’Une Cabine*” (1894) still contains much of the same fundamental characteristics seen in cartoons today. The drawings are beautiful and clear, reflecting good graphics. And the portrayal of movement is impressively attempted, especially in light of the fact that it preceded the invention of more efficient animation techniques. The animation is not at all sloppy, but interesting and believable. In addition, the music, a waltz-like piano piece filled with awkward dissonances, was well chosen to accurately display the silly mood of the cartoon (that is, if the video sources remained true to the original piece). On the whole, Reynaud’s use of bodies, props, plot, and music represents a great example of how humor is intrinsic to cartoons. The first cartoon was a comedy.

Cartoon characters on television appear, disappear, and reappear in all sorts of odd places: in a rabbit hole, under a bush, falling in mid-air, or standing right behind another, unsuspecting character. It is this kind of comedic and nonsensical randomness that Reynaud portrayed in this feature. While watching, the viewer must wonder, to where do all the bathers swim off? What happened to the dog? Why do people keep appearing from behind the huts, what were they doing there? How is it that a rowboat, with a sail announcing the end (presumably prepared beforehand), can appear right as the feature is terminating? The answer to all of these questions is, simply, because it is a cartoon. Reynaud may or may not have started the trends found in the cartoons of later generations; after all, his approach to the cartoon medium was unique, never to be

attempted again. Nevertheless, he was a pioneer in a long tradition of cartooning, who inspired others to look for alternative methods to animate. Unfortunately for Reynaud, however, his once great hopes for glory were never fully realized. His théâtre optique turned out to be a passing fad, a simple entertainment that was truly fascinating at first, but soon became overshadowed by the other, newer innovations of the time. In 1895, the Lumière Brothers debuted the world's first live-action film at a time when Reynaud was still working hard to gain mass recognition. The fragileness of his machine coupled by the fact that it could only run by the manual labor of a trained operator, proved to further work against his efforts. No one wanted to buy the device and audiences quickly grew smaller. Reynaud's screenings ended in 1900 (Bendazzi 5).

In twentieth century America, when Emile Reynaud's career was coming to a close, James Stuart Blackton became the first animator to use the cinematic "frame by frame" technique (Bendazzi 8). Blackton began his career as a cartoonist in the vaudeville act called Lightning Sketches, where he would draw caricatures of audience members while lecturing. He eventually left vaudeville and, under the employment of Thomas Alva Edison, turned to cinematography. Prompted by Edison, he designed several short cartoon animated features depicting some of his Lightning Sketches and various other themes, scenarios and special effects. Blackton's cartooning career ended early in 1909, but his contributions spurred other artists into action. The methods behind his popular cartoons and the impressive fluid motion were considered a coveted secret (Bendazzi 9).

Emile Cohl, a young artist in France uncovered Blackton's mystery technique, taking the medium into new planes. Blackton previously limited his cartoons to an

existence that was positioned in contrast to reality. Every feature contained the presence of the artist – a hand would draw the image, then the image would move. But Emile Cohl kept no such inhibitions. He provided his audiences with an all new experience, leading them head-first into the animated world. In his features, such as “The Hasher's Delirium” (1910), he pioneered the concept of cartoons moving solely in their own space (Bendazzi 9). Although Emile Reynaud had done in it first in 1888, Cohl did so via the more modern frame by frame method, which provided him much greater freedom to depict movement. Instead of drawing out each individual moment on a slide, he photographed his drawings, using film and projector to display his features. His wild imagination, simple drawings, and busy cartoons seemed to ask the question: how much movement can one skillfully and artfully fit in a short amount of time? Together, Cohl and Blackton’s work revealed early attempts at portraying the magic of animation, as discussed in the introduction of this paper. Each one of their cartoons was devoted to bending reality in interesting ways.

At around the same time, New York newspaper cartoonist, Winsor McCay, became the first American animator to have notable success in the United States. Thus, he helped animation become appropriated into the country as an American medium. His claim to fame relied in his unique virtuosic animation, as well as the careful way in which he packaged his product (Barrier 10). In 1911, McCay brought his characters from his comic strip, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, to animated life. It was the first of his animated features, establishing many of the techniques that signified his style. In the tradition started by other early animators, McCay made heavy use of silly humorous gags and surrealistic circumstances, embracing the imaginative possibilities available in

animation. Many of his features, from *Nemo* on, were also included as part of his vaudeville act (Bendazzi 16). They were simply attached on to his own short, live-action comedy films. Most importantly, he presented detailed drawings that displayed impressive depictions of movement, perspective, and depth – a very distinctive aspect of his style.

“An animated cartoon could easily require thousands of cartoons, each differing a little from the next, and making those drawings could take a long time; finding some way to generate drawings faster could seem all-important” (Barrier 10). McCay was uninterested in solving the issues that came with the complexity of the animation process. In his eyes, animation was an art, and should be treated as such. He disregarded the attractive method of rapid production on a regular schedule, and readily put excruciating effort into creating his drawings, taking years to put out successive films (Bendazzi 17). As a result of his diligence, a number of his films achieved a lasting notoriety. For instance, his 1914 film, *Gertie*, a delicately drawn cartoon featuring a playful dinosaur named Gertie, was considered a masterpiece. What was perhaps most impressive about the film was that, in order for it to have a consistent background, the detailed and largely static landscape was *redrawn* in every frame. “*Gertie* was the first to require much of a background. Fitzsimmons provided it by tracing a McCay drawing of the background onto each of the many hundreds of McCay’s detailed drawings of the dinosaur herself. Even the most talented cartoonist would have found it extraordinarily difficult to produce a regularly appearing series [...] by working as McCay and Fitzsimmons did” (Barrier 11). His style was different from that of the French Emile Cohl. The depicted movements were slow and full of

personality, the drawings intricate, and the plot less wildly imaginative and a good deal steadier. And, above all, it was American.

Winsor McKay is important to this study because he was instrumental in popularizing cartoons in America. His work led to the establishment of an American cartoon industry, though against his will. In a pointed statement to his colleagues, McCay remarks “Animation should be an art, that is how I conceived it [...] But as I see what you fellows have done with it is make it into a trade ... not an art, but a trade ... bad luck” (Bendazzi 18). While the cartoonist initially approached animation as an artistic endeavor, it would be his colleagues and heirs who built upon his innovations and developed the industry. Starting with businessman John Randolph Bray, the focus of animation shifted to competing to produce cartoons faster, reduce unnecessary effort and expenses, make a greater profit, and dominate the appeal of the public.

John Bray, a contemporary of McCay, can be described as having “a most dominant personality [...] Resolute, manipulative and farsighted, he laid the foundations for American animation and gave it direction” (Bandazzi 20). Because McCay side-stepped resolving the problems in animating, instead choosing to work with them, other early animators had to deal with these plaguing issues. How can we create more cartoons for the public? How do we raise public appeal and therefore make this a lasting career? To make it worse, as time progressed towards the 1920s, the novelty of cartoons wore off as the public grew less interested in the medium (Barrier 9). However, Bray had a solution: systemize the process of animating. In his studios, he cleverly divided and compartmentalized the work load, so that separate groups of artists worked at the different stages of animating.

“Labour was structured in such a way that animators first sketched their drawings with light blue pencils. Since the ortho-chromatic films then in use were insensitive to a light blue color, light blue pencils reproduced as white, so lines could be changed and corrected over and over again. The drawings were then passed over to assistants for colouring. The assistants were also responsible for adding those details which the animators, concerned with the fluidity of the action, did not have the time to draw: physiognomical traits, clothing details, etc. [...] The job was divided and the people who worked on its fragments did not take care to maintain continuity of action [...] The underlying principle (which lasted for the next twenty years) was to make the viewers laugh at all costs, even if the movie resulted in an assembly of primitive expedients.” (Bendazzi 23)

Compartmentalization of labor certainly represented a point of departure from the artisan ideals of McCay. In order to produce cartoons faster, the quality of the animation had to suffer. Furthermore, a new significance was placed on humor: the cartoon’s sole purpose, disregarding all else, was to make the audience laugh – a mentality that would last through the Golden Age.

In addition to designing a unique, business-minded system for his studio, John Bray was involved in the development of two other major innovations: the creation of the cartoon series, and the use of cels as a replacement for paper. Perhaps aware of the public’s only casual interest in animated films, Bray sought to change the medium’s status as a novelty – a passing fad. “I wanted to simplify and perfect the process, so that cartoons could be supplied as a regular motion-picture feature – as *many* of them as the public might want” (Barrier 12). In 1914, he released *Colonel Heeza Liar in Africa*, the first in a series of cartoons whose plots all centered on the same character. Colonel Heeza Liar, a daringly adventurous, but humorously unassuming old man, was the hero of the Bray studios. To produce a scheduled amount of these features, Bray did not solely depend on the reorganization of his studio. He also took advantage of a new

invention, meant to speed the actual drawing process further. Inventor and moviemaker Earl Hurd patented the cel process in 1914, which solved the issue of animating images with a lot of background. Instead of redrawing the background for every frame in a scene, it would be drawn on a single sheet. The characters to be animated would be drawn on transparent celluloid sheets and then applied to the painted backgrounds (Bendazzi 21). Bray quickly recognized the brilliance in the invention. He hired Hurd as a partner in his patent company, forcing his competition to buy from him the license to use the superior animation technique. Fortunately, the patents expired in 1932. Nevertheless, his exploits served to tap into the unexplored enterprise potential of cartoon animation. He developed an efficient system that thrived on competition and mass production. Ultimately, Bray's efforts ensured that animating would never be the same again.

The pre-sound era came to an end in 1928, after the release of the first sound cartoon. The key point about this era is that it reflected a time when early animators were engaged in creating the foundations of animation – a new form of entertainment for a new century. Their contributions led to a systemized approach to the medium that would be followed into the Golden Age of Cartoons. The exploitation of the potential in cartoons for humor and surrealistic gags was founded. Its connection to what is modern – its incorporation of new technology, and its history with popular culture – is an enduring aspect, as well. Furthermore, the pre-sound era witnessed the appropriation of cartoons into American entertainment, and the birth of the American cartoon industry.

This chapter has so far been concerned with the creation, history, and development of animation techniques. But, it is important to remember that this era also yielded the birth of cartoon music techniques. As stated earlier, silent cartoons would often be accompanied by live music. The music supported the narrative of the story and enhanced the emotions presented therein. Accompanists “must not only know where and when the comedic moments will occur within a picture, they also must cue the audience to those incidents [... An accompanist] needed at any given moment to quickly present an appropriate musical analogue for the emotion [...] on screen” (Goldmark 14). Precision was very important to cartoon musicians. Making the most of a humorous or any emotional situation required a mixture of good timing and thoughtful musical selection. Thus, cartoon music tended to be approached methodically. However, individual methods varied greatly from person to person. “Film accompanists could acquire dozens of manuals on how to play for pictures, as well as reams of music well-suited to the task. Little specific information exists on how cartoons [...] might have been accompanied, as features received most of the attention of accompanying manuals” (Taylor 17). Nevertheless, the basic form of contemplative accompaniment carried on into the Golden Age of cartoons. Possessing the new technology of synchronized sound, Golden Age cartoonists and score composers enhanced the various methods of presenting music for cartoons. Their eventual mastery of the sound cartoon contributed to the growth of cartoon music into a more uniform practice, creating and solidifying specific gags and techniques. Especially instrumental were the contributions of cartoonist and entrepreneur Walter Elias Disney, Warner Bros score composer Carl Stalling, and MGM score composer Scott Bradley.

In 1928, Walt Disney releases the world's first sound cartoon, *Steam Boat Willie*. Thus ends the pre-sound era. An innovator with the mind of a businessman, Walt Disney instantly saw the great potential for recorded sound. "Like the Warners, whose prime interest in sound film was *not* that characters could finally speak onscreen, but that 'now we can bring a symphony orchestra to every small town in America,'" Disney's primary concern was also musical" (Taylor 22). The cartoonist regarded music as an inseparable part of animation, and he strove to enhance this relationship. Early in his career, his studios developed a series, apart from the Mickey Mouse cartoons, called *Silly Symphonies*. The series consisted of animated shorts choreographed to European classical music. It pioneered the now standard Mickey-mousing technique, which involved close synchronization between character movements and music (Taylor 7). *Silly Symphonies* reflected Disney's growing desire for the mature, expressive power inherent in old music. "Disney did demand a certain element of quality in his musical scores: he wanted class, but nothing too classy, and seriousness, but not the type of music to be taken too seriously" (Taylor 23). But, in the tradition of pre-sound era accompanists, it was important to him that the music only mocked true mature emotions. It was not a rational class or seriousness, but a cartoonish, false class and seriousness. Disney, apparently, understood the surrealism involved in scoring cartoons. Furthermore, he experimented heavily with music in his films. He would incessantly test the boundaries between popular and serious music, and sound and image. *Fantasia* (1940) and *Make Mine Music* (1946) can be seen as the culmination of his endeavors (Taylor 32, 76).

As wonderful as Disney's innovations are, it is necessary to note that all of the achievements discussed above owe their existence to his very first breakthrough. And in fact, so does everything else that will be discussed in this study.

Steamboat Willie, a pivotal item in cartoon history, was the third in a series of Mickey Mouse cartoons. Walt Disney initially designed it as a silent feature; however, the success of the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, in 1927, spurred him to promptly make a change. Collaborating with a small staff, he fashioned a soundtrack for the feature using a crude system of synchronization, developed by a colleague of his (Taylor 22). The soundtrack offers a jam-packed mixture of sound effects and orchestrated tunes. Passages of "Turkey and the Straw" and the Irish folk tune "Steamboat Willie," are fused together and jumbled up with numerous diegetic sounds – including those of rushing water, exaggerated body movements, whistling, farm animals, and plenty more. The plot of the cartoon is simple: a steamboat carrying Mickey Mouse and a large anthropomorphic cat is on a shipment route to pick up livestock. Minnie Mouse soon boards, as well, carrying several pages of sheet music. But when she drops a few pages, a nearby goat eats them and then becomes a living gramophone. The rest of the steamboat ride turns into one large musical gag, in which Mickey uses various animal passengers as musical implements (Youtube.com). *Steamboat Willie* proved to be more of an exposition of sounds and music than anything else. Probably for this reason, it was a commercial success. Disney provided the amazed and delighted public a new reason to enjoy cartoons.

Similarly to Disney, composers Carl Stalling and Scott Bradley each developed their own unique technical styles for scoring cartoon features. Carl Stalling, known best

for his long career scoring *Looney Tunes* for the Warner Brothers studios, may as well be considered “the one person who had the greatest impact on the field” of cartoon score composing (Goldmark 10). His approach to relating music to onscreen images has retained a lasting impression on the field. One major aspect of his scoring was the heavy use of popular music. In a very Ivesian fashion, he would fuse passages of several songs together, linking them by short original cues. His scores were very elaborate and deliberate, involving a succession of rapidly changing brief cues. They reflected the fast-paced storytelling style of the Warner Bros studio, which moved along from gag to gag incessantly. Thus Stalling developed a matching style that was dramatic, intense, and to the point. “As a result, Stalling took a building block approach to his scores, treating them as individual segments; he devised cues that were brief and still packed a significant dramatic punch, telegraphing the moment’s mood or idea before the next gag came along” (Goldmark 17). Furthermore, his song choice was literal. The titles of the songs reflected the content of the scenes, allowing the opportunity for the music to be a gag in itself. And so, he set up a routine, in which certain specific songs were used for certain situations from cartoon to cartoon. Even Chuck Jones, animation director of Warner Bros studios, remarked of his colleague: “If there was a lady dressed in red, he’d always play ‘Lady in Red.’ If somebody went into a cave, he’d play ‘Fingal’s cave’” (Goldmark 22). Over twenty years of scoring for the studios, the composer developed a very noticeable system of techniques, which provided a predictable yet exciting underline narrative to each cartoon’s plot. Perhaps this is precisely what allowed his approach to endure the test of time: his scores were easily absorbed and stayed in people’s minds.

On the other hand, Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studios' cartoon score composer Scott Bradley had his own approach to music. Bradley is best known for his work on the *Tom and Jerry* cartoons. His powerfully illustrative style was uniquely designed to carry the violent action sequences that characterize MGM cartoons. MGM's small music library, especially in comparison to that of the Warner Bros, encouraged Bradley to craft original compositions. He did not avoid using popular music; he would occasionally use a familiar tune in order to signify an important moment in a plot. However, his scores consisted mostly of his own work. "Highly dissonant, contrapuntally labyrinthine, and rife with special effects," Bradley had a great appreciation for modern music. Given the minimal dialogue that also characterized the studio's animated features, the composer had the complete liberty to fill the sonic space as he pleased. His scores were closely interwoven with the sequence of action in each cartoon, often resulting in them being melodically angular (Goldmark 52). Bradley also made heavy use of sound effects that were musically based (as opposed to manufactured noise). Some of the specific conventions he employed include chord changes to move the action along, mickey-mousing in which the music directly imitates the animated actions, and sharp dissonances as sound effects. To further illustrate violence and the sound of impacts, he orchestrated the music so that the sound of the action came either a little before or after the animated action. "Bradley usually anticipated an impact or reaction by at least a second or two, so that the audience would *hear* the action before seeing it. In the swiftly paced fight or chase sequences, Bradley could prepare the viewer for each gag before it occurred and could also bridge the occasional momentary breaks in animation" (Goldmark 64). Scott Bradley's intentions

were always to musically tell the story of a cartoon and be as explicit as possible. As a result, his scores were impressively complex and consistently creative – with every individual cartoon given its very own score. Consequently, Bradley developed a system of accompanying that may have been difficult to reproduce precisely, but is a goldmine of innovation.

“Composers like Carl Stalling and Scott Bradley did more than musically narrate each episode they scored; they added speed to downward falls, pain to anvils on the head, amorous impact to the love stricken, and swing to every last dance sequence that came across their respective desks. Since cartoons can, by definition, do things we can’t (or shouldn’t) do, the music exaggerates and celebrates that difference. Cartoon music does more than simply add life to cartoons – it makes cartoons *bigger* than life” (Taylor xiv). The Golden Age was an important period in animation history when the role of music in cartoons was strengthened greatly. People like Walt Disney, Carl Stalling, and Scott Bradley refined the methods and systems of cartoon accompaniment created during the pre-sound era. They found ways to manipulate music so that their scores would narrate and augment the ideas presented in the animation most effectively. Others involved in the process, who were not previously mentioned include: the Fleischer Brothers, Paramount Studios, Walter Lantz, among others. They all played an important role in perfecting the practice of scoring cartoons.

Now one big question remains to be answered: what did these great innovators fail to take into account, when assembling their cartoon scores?

FOR THE LAUGHS OF A WHITE AUDIENCE: Chapter Two

Jazz Cartoons in the Golden Age

The appropriation by cartoon score composers of jazz in the early to mid-twentieth century can be seen from their point of view as an attempt to tame an exotic and essentially naughty entity for popular consumption. The lively and exuberantly expressive, illustrative music seemed to compliment the exaggerated world of cartoons wonderfully (Goldmark 79). Often times, jazz would serve as the inspiration of a feature, the plots, persistent gags, and even character design conceived out of the music itself. But if animation in America is predominantly a creation of white artists, why jazz? What is it about this largely African American music style that intrigued the composers of the cartoon Golden Age? Racism, exoticism, and primitivism (Goldmark): the same principles at the basis of the media's exploitation of African American culture throughout history are behind its unique use in cartoons of the 1920s through 1950s. The music is wrought to perpetuate many stereotypes and false notions for the laughs of an audience of white Americans. In particular, composers of this time period set up a language through which jazz and, as they evolved, other African American music styles came to represent black people themselves.

Racism can be described as “a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others” (Dictionary. com). In the United States racism is a phenomenon commonly seen – and too often overlooked – that is entrenched in every nook and cranny of American

society. However infamous, the oppression of Blacks is just one of many examples existing in America. Racism is a form of oppression, an expression that describes complex social interactions dealing with acts of hatred committed against a person or people of any different race (Winant). Although the meaning may vary, growing greater in complexity and fragility with every situation; in each circumstance, the oppressor has the society-given power to oppress those deemed inferior in specific social circumstances. In this sense, racism involves the maintenance of social hierarchy: who has the power and who lacks thereof (Winant). Furthermore, it is from this kind of mentality that other arguably negative social concepts stem, like exoticism and primitivism.

Exoticism is the awareness or adoption of a foreign entity, of something considered intriguingly unusual or strange (Dictionary.com). The issue with this concept, especially when it comes to dealing with people, is the question of what is determined as exotic and the objectification faced by the exotified. In essence, the exotified are valued for their strangeness – one that is not an inherent quality, but an aesthetic perception – and are simultaneously ostracized for the same. “Exotic is understood as a dialectical symbolic system of strangeness and familiarity in which the strange and culturally different is domesticated so that it becomes comprehensible. However the "exotic" is always kept at arms' length, it is never completely integrated in the familiar because that would ‘neutralize its capacity to create surprises’” (Graverson). In a similar manner, primitivism involves the intrigue in what is considered wild, childish, and or ancient. Primitivism and exoticism are intimately linked by this same fascination with what is presumed uncommon in the observer’s

society. Therefore, they indicate a fascination that stems from an unrealistic comparison. “Both terms express valuations, but in a curiously ambivalent way – as terms of either approval or derision – and both imply an opposing term: the primitive is paired with the civilized or modern; the exotic with the familiar or local” (Marx 6).

With all three concepts, the oppressor places the oppressed in a compromising position without the support of the powers of society. As a result, the oppressor experiences the privilege of ignorance, clean of the responsibility to deal with these issues (Winant), which only further leads to the assimilation of racism, exoticism, and primitivism into all aspects of life – not the least of which being cartoon animation. However, to understand how these concepts play a role in the use of music for cartoons, it is important to first discuss the history behind negative representations of African-Americans in American media as a consequence of the concepts’ presence in society. By analyzing the issue of representation of blackness in cinema in general, I am also contributing to the more specific discussion of music and animation.

Since the creation of Thomas Edison’s motion picture camera in 1894, white filmmakers were driven by their fascination with ‘the other’ to capture ethnic Americans on film (Strausbaugh 201). For instance, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1903), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and *The Jazz Singer* (1927) are all critical films that debuted early in cinema history – and, interestingly enough, are films whose contents heavily incorporate representations of Blacks.

“Political scientist Michael Rogin noted the oddly telling fact that three of the most important films in this developmental

period of American movies use stories that centrally feature Blackness. The 1903 Edison-Porter adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is considered one of the first “full-length” American films (at fourteen minutes) to tell a more or less fully developed story, and the first to use title cards. D.W. Griffith's 1915 *The Birth of a Nation* was really the first feature-length Hollywood epic, establishing a language for making and watching films that Hollywood follows to this day. And in 1927, *The Jazz Singer*, with Al Jolson's renowned blackface scenes, was the first talkie [film with recorded sound].” (Strausbaugh 203)

These three early movies depicted stories about the traumatic life of slaves, the triumph of the white South over the perceived tyranny of the North, and the struggle of the son of a Jewish cantor on the road to success and acceptance as a jazz singer, respectively. Together, they demonstrate that, from the very beginning, film presented itself as a medium through which artists could portray their notions of African-Americans. The persisting presence of blackface characters and the reductive images of African-Americans in cinema – such as Topsy, the comical character in blackface and drag from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – suggests that cinema inherited the traditions of the earlier forms of entertainment, Vaudeville and the Minstrel show (Strausbaugh). These traditions helped to secure the survival of negative representations of black people in other related American entertainments.

Black film historian Donald Bogle suggests black film caricatures can be categorized into five main images: toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies, and bucks (Bogle 4). The antebellum and post bellum periods of American history produced much of the stereotypes embodied in these caricatures. The tom, coon, and mammy were created by the supporters of slavery preceding the Civil War in an effort to depict slavery as a

benevolent institution. The attractive and troubled mulattoes, as well as the menacing bucks, however, stemmed from other controversial stereotypes (Pilgrim).

Toms and mammies were portrayed as docile servants, deeply loyal to their masters, and content with their servitude. Often seen as older African-Americans, they enjoyed their enslavement, eagerly accepting the lives they were born into. Toms were quiet and pleasant male characters, who were accustomed to abuse and desperately sought acceptance from their masters. They were symbols of Christian morality. Their peaceful devotion was a testament of their faith. “Always as toms are chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, and insulted, they keep the faith, n'er turn against their white massas, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and oh-so-very kind. Thus they endear themselves to white audiences and emerge as heroes of sorts” (Bogle 5-6). On the other hand, mammies were depicted as large, smiling black women, purposefully designed in order to hide the truth about the sexual abuse of female slaves. “Mammy is distinguished by her sex and her fierce independence. She is usually big, fat, and cantankerous” (Bogle 9). These women servants willingly cut themselves off from black society to run the households of their masters. Mammies disguised the poor relations between slave master and slave by simply presenting black women as part of the white family. They, like their male counterparts, were desexualized and popularly considered as the good black examples.

In stark contrast, the caricatures of the mulatto and the buck represent the stereotypes of hypersexual and dangerous blacks, respectively. The preconception of a hyper-sexualized black people has existed for centuries. During colonialism, blacks were considered highly erotic due, at least in part, to the misinterpretation of their

appearances and cultures (Pilgrim). The presence of mulattoes in society, lighter-skinned African-Americans of mixed descent, caused the preconception to evolve. Their existence was proof of miscegenation, and so mulattoes came to symbolize rape and concubinage (Pilgrim). The romanticized mulatto was one who would walk the line between black and white constantly, often under tragic circumstances. Possessing light skin and the supposed idyllic beauty, he or she would be highly desirable, yet victimized by their mixed heritage (Bogle 9). Ultimately, it was whiteness which made the mulatto beautiful and blackness which made him or her an object of exotification. In a slightly different vein, the buck or brute, although also hyper-sexualized, was additionally seen as a threat, a danger to the white race. "The brute caricature portrays black men as innately savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal -- deserving punishment, maybe death. This brute is a fiend, a sociopath, an anti-social menace. Black brutes are depicted as hideous, terrifying predators who target helpless victims, especially white women" (Pilgrim). This particular caricature developed after black slaves were freed, as a justification to fear and eradicate them. In cinema, however, the buck remained largely scarce. It proved to be unprofitable to portray blacks as a menace because that image scared white audiences. As such, these audiences tended to favor the portrayal of toms, mammies, or the highly popular coons (Tucker 101).

The last of Bogle's five black archetypes, coons were slaves discontent with their positions, but were too lazy to do anything about it. They were the clowns and dancers, a slow and childlike people unequipped for freedom (Pilgrim). In entertainment, they were the beloved comedians: unkempt, inarticulate, and outlandish. The coon, along with the tom, mammy, mulatto, and buck, has lasted for much over a

century – and yet these characters have evolved very little. They have become more complex, but still retain the basic stereotypes that heralded their birth. The question to answer now is, why?

“Films that are favorably received by mainstream audiences tend to entertain white audiences while reassuring them that the threat of blackness, which is embossed in the white imagination as the image of a black male, has been contained” (Tucker 101). To put it another way, films featuring African-Americans do well when the “threat of blackness” – the fear of the iconic black criminal – is whitewashed. The threat is hidden in a comedic frame – one that overlooks systematic causes when criminality is depicted. Linda G. Tucker, in her study of the images of black men in American popular culture, entitled *Lockstep and Dance*, suggests that cinematic media tend to juxtapose two reductive images of black men: the successful and the thugs – arguably synonymous with the tom, coon, and the buck. Presented in film, these opposing images give the illusion that films are providing real and full depictions of African-American men, which misleads viewers into believing it a positive sign of social change. “These binary representations create a comfort zone for white America that fosters what is often a naïve or disingenuous faith in its openness with respect to matters of race; it is a misguided belief that racial equality has been achieved in the United States [...] ‘Look how liberal we are. We enjoy movies with black people in them’” (Tucker 101-102). Films that portray different iconic images of Blacks serve to ease white discomfort regarding the responsibility over the racial inequalities in American society. Thus, it is no wonder why the angry, threatening black male from the news is reduced to a comic or laughable criminal in film; whereas the successful black

man is good, an image that can be achieved simply with hard work. In this sense, the presence of the successful black person invalidates the experience of the thug, making the former appear as a realistic possibility, and the latter appear as the exception. The result of these polar representations is the absence of more complicated, and therefore, more accurate depictions, as well as the neglect of the systematic workings forming reality's African-American (Tucker 102).

Racism, exoticism, primitivism; toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies, and bucks: just like film, cartoon animation has a history loaded heavily with the tradition of misrepresenting African-Americans, albeit, in more wildly imaginative ways. "As [...] African-American cultural forms in general have been simultaneously condemned and co-opted in America through the years, we should not be surprised that the figures caricatured in the cartoons [...] are just that – caricatures composed of nothing but stereotypical attributes" (Goldmark 78). After all, film and animation directors have a common aspiration: to amuse a particular audience of white Americans. Cartoons, however, are not limited by the same constraints of imitating reality that, to a certain extent, govern films. Artists have the liberty to interpret the negative perceptions of Blacks in a number of creatively strange ways. The most obvious are the illustrated caricatures, like the wide-eyed, fat-lipped savages who chase Betty Boop in the 1932 cartoon feature *I'll Be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You* (Fleischer Studios); or even Disney's anthropomorphic Mickey Mouse, whose appearance and mannerisms were "modeled on blackface performers from vaudeville and elsewhere" (Goldmark 83). Perhaps more subtle is the handiwork of the cartoon composers. From the 1930s to

the 1950s, they provided music for these kinds of cartoons that served to not only support the ideas and stereotypes presented in the animation, but also to make statements of their own. Jazz, in particular, was a common tool used for such purposes.

Jazz was conceived out of a *mêlée* of musical genres and cultures, now widely regarded as “the pinnacle of African American music in the twentieth century” (Burnim 145). The musical influences leading to the genre’s creation include ragtime, blues, marches, African American religious music, European classical music, American popular song, and musical theatre (Burnim 145). However, the Louisiana port city of New Orleans is generally given credit as its birthplace; the ways in which the racial and ethnic groups interacted there, to be precise, sparked its development.

“The emergence of jazz has been often been explained as the meeting of the uptown English-speaking African American brass and string band tradition of blues-drenched, aurally transmitted music, with the downtown Creole band tradition of instrumental virtuosity, musical literacy, and training in classical music. Like all capsule histories, this story simplifies a more complicated reality that includes Creole musicians who did not have great musical literacy and Black musicians who did.” (Burnim 147)

New Orleans was once divided into three social spheres: white, black, and Creole (persons of any race, who celebrate their French heritage). But, the tripartite division met its demise in 1894, due to the adoption of Jim Crow segregation laws (Burnim 147). This re-categorized the “gens de couleurs” Creoles as Black, further causing a cross-pollination of musical traditions between the now legally merged groups.

Furthermore, early pioneers, such as Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong, set up standards that were to be followed by jazz musicians far into the future – major

examples being band instrumentation and improvisation. The Chicago black club scene was also fundamental in the development of jazz, as it provided a space for greater interracial communication through music. Besides the “blacks and tans,” young White musicians, too, were attracted to these clubs (Burnim 148). This idea of crossing the color and cultural line seems to be characteristic of jazz throughout its history.

A closer look at the variety of distinct rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic qualities of the music is essential to understanding what jazz is. Techniques founded by black jazz musicians of the 1920s include Jelly Roll Morton’s use of piano, bass, and drums as the rhythm section of his ensemble. He also incorporated double time and the walking bass line into his intricately designed compositions (Burnim 150). On the other hand, Fletcher Henderson and Don Redman developed a Big band sound by incorporating jazz soloists into the larger instrumentation of a dance band, as well as call and response between instrumental sections, and sections written in the style of improvisations. Duke Ellington was one who made very significant contributions to jazz because of his unique sound. He combined the dance band style, the blues-trumpet style, and his own ragtime piano style to form the colorful, so-called ‘primitive’ sound in his music (Burnim 151). Furthermore, Ellington experimented with the tone color of his ensemble instruments to produce musical effects – such as altering the sound of trumpets and trombones to make a “growl sound,” and the use of chromatic voice leading and contrary motion. Many of these early artists made significant contributions to jazz that served as a platform off of which future musicians leaped and modified the genre further.

As jazz evolved, different techniques came in and out of style. For instance, the Swing era highlighted the walking bass, repetition, and the heavy use of riffs – that is, the repetition of short melodic patterns. At this time, America also witnessed a substantial growth in the number of white jazz artists (Burnim 153), stemming from their popularity with white audiences and the segregation of radio broadcasts and performance spaces. Bebop of the post WWII era, featured notably harmonically dense compositions, but also heralded much simpler styles, like that of Thelonious Monk (Burnim 157). Other eras include Cool Jazz, Hard bop, Modal Jazz, and Free Jazz. These perpetual changes to jazz over time occurred partly as a result of the influence of social phenomenon. “Several broader social forces have shaped the history of jazz and its changing cultural meaning in the twentieth century including urbanization, racism, the advent of recording and broadcasting technology, modernism as an aesthetic ideology, World Wars I and II, and the Civil Rights Movement” (Burnim 145). Although it was not always the case, today, jazz stands as a virtuosic example of African American musical culture.

In the 1930s to the 1950s, jazz intrigued white American audiences with its raw and exotic sound. Its connection to black culture lent itself to being perceived as primitive. The same negative stereotypes that brought images of black people to the stage – the simple, carefree-mindedness of coons, the innocent bliss of mammies and toms, the naughty sensuality of mulattoes, and the dark, dangerous, and primitive thrill of bucks – were the stereotypes that made jazz attractive. It came to represent everything the white audiences were perceived not to be: black, African, simple, and happy. In his study of cartoon music, *Tunes for 'Toons*, Daniel Goldmark suggests that

it was the hedonist desire of listeners that drew them to the music. “By visiting clubs in Harlem and even by viewing cartoons, whites could gain access to something they felt implicitly lacking in their lives: the freedom and hedonism believed to be characteristic of a simpler, more instinctual society” (85). Trumped by the unique syncopated rhythms and soulful performances, many white musicians sought fervently to conquer the style. In 1918, “Music for the Picture,” a column in a periodical dedicated to early film industry contained in its question and answer section the following query: “ Q. In playing ‘blues’ how do you get the real ‘nigger’ effect? A. There is no way to explain the peculiar darky rhythm acquired by Southern players that makes ‘blues’ effective. It is a thing born in the player and not made. Would advise that you hear the real thing” (Goldmark 79). From the popular white perspective of the time, jazz evoked an image of the South, or the remnants of wild and darkest Africa. As such, the style was seen as removed and exotic – also very much similar to how African Americans themselves were viewed. “White audiences began seeing jazz as nearly synonymous with black culture by the 1930s” (Goldmark 83). Times had changed from when the ex-slave owners first donned the black face and danced and sang in malicious mockery of the black slaves, whom they knew so well. Those men consciously humiliated the people who they were familiar with, lived with, and loathed. But the white man of the 20th century represented a new breed. He lived in isolated communities, possibly going his entire life without ever even meeting a Black person (Strausbaugh). Yet the tradition of mocking the ‘other’ lived on through him, thus transforming a consciously racist attack into an ignorant one.

Cartoon animation proved to strengthen the connections between perceived jazz and perceived African American identity by presenting the many racist preconceptions in a clean cut and simple manner. Being caricatures of real life, cartoons are like a children's book: large letters, easily consumed message, and pretty pictures. Directors present their ideas through animation, but then composers add another layer of implications with the music they decide to include. And because of the obviousness of the medium, the audience is able to fully understand and passively accept the messages. So, when black people were stereotypically represented with jazz, the audiences not offended could simply accept it. More than that, as Linda Tucker would probably agree, white audiences could enjoy the cartoons because the representations would allow them to feel comfortable with their world. The enthralling mixture of danger, sex, and primitive joy coupled with the often ridiculous depictions of African-Americans cached away the threat of Blackness, while simultaneously feeding them the safe blackness they constructed and desired.

One perfect example of jazz being explicitly used as a code for perceived blackness is the Fleischer Studios' 1932 cartoon feature *Minnie the Moocher* (Youtube). The cartoon opens with a live recording of Cab Calloway and his band performing the jazz piece after which this feature was named, "Minnie the Moocher." For perhaps a minute, the band plays and Cab Calloway dances away in the forefront. Then the main title ends, and the story begins.

In the suburban home of Betty Boop, Betty is caught up in an argument with her parents. Sitting miserably at the dinner table, she is yelled at and threatened furiously because she refuses to eat her meal. All of a sudden, her father's head cartoon-ishly

transforms into a gramophone, threats spewing out from his bell. The dispute is so bombastic even the flower sitting on the table top springs to life. It takes a bite of her meal in an attempt to encourage her appetite, at which point it passes out. Apparently, it was too overcome by the horrible taste of the food. Poor, upset Betty dashes off in tears. However, unmoved, her mother replaces the gramophone-father's cylinder with another that comically plays a duet piano-violin version of the nursery rhyme "The More We Get Together, The Happier We'll Be." Meanwhile, after being inquired by a concerned animate statue, Betty runs up the stairs to her bedroom in song: "When I'm gone/ You wait and see/ They'll all be sorry/ They picked on me" (Youtube). The piano and violin duet plays a new nursery rhyme accompaniment for her. The music sweetly draws on as Betty promptly packs up and writes a goodbye letter to her parents. She calls her friend Bimbo and makes a hasty escape out her window. Waiting for her outside is Bimbo, and in a hurry, the pair takes off. Betty Boop is running away from home.

The rest of the feature can, at best, be described as random moments from the haunted house of jazz. Almost as soon as Betty and Bimbo begin to take off, the lulling melody of the piano and violin is rather abruptly swapped with the minor-keyed swing of Cab Calloway's bellowing trumpets. "Minnie the Moocher" returns, bringing along with it a sense of foreboding. As Betty and Bimbo run, the suburban backdrop blurs by. Then, within seconds, it transforms into a dark and barren forest, equipped with faceless ghouls and spirits. Terrified, the two find themselves in what appears to be an opening of a cave. They go deeper inside. There, they are greeted by an anthropomorphic singing walrus-ghost. In fact, it is not just a walrus-ghost, but a clear

caricature of Cab Calloway. While it looks nothing like the band leader, its voice is that of Calloway, singing the melody of the title song:

“Folk's here's the story 'bout Minnie the Moocher
 She was a red hot hoochie coocher
 She was the roughest, toughest frail
 But Minnie had a heart a big as a whale
 Ho-di-ho-di-ho
 Hod-di-hod-di-hod-di
 He-di-he-di-he
 Ho-di-ho-di-ho
 She messed around with a bloke named Smokey
 She loved him, though he was coke-y
 He took her down to Chinatown
 And he showed her how to kick the gong around
 (Hi-di-hi's)
 She had a dream about the King of Sweden
 He gave her things that she was needin'
 Gave her a home built of gold and steel
 A diamond car, with the platinum wheels
 (Hi-di-hi's)
 He gave her a townhouse and his racing horses
 Each meal she ate was a dozen courses
 She had a million dollars worth of nickels and dimes
 She sat around and counted them a million times
 (Hi-di-hi's)”

And, as if to leave no doubt whom the ghost is portraying, its movements are precisely identical to the dance Calloway does during the main title. From this point on, Betty and her little friend Bimbo stay huddled away in a corner of the cave. In fact, all they do up until the last few seconds of the cartoon is cower in fear – for the focus of the cartoon has shifted to the gruesome performance of walrus-ghost Calloway and his jazz ensemble of skeletons and ghosts. Here, the plot disappears altogether, and the animation becomes secondary to the music.

As Calloway sings, an assortment of bizarre images seizes the screen. Three singing skeletons, seated at a randomly placed bar in the cave, chug their drinks and collapse. Three singing ghosts then appear behind the bars of the cave's jail cell. They are released and brought to three electric chairs, where they are subsequently electrocuted 'to death.' In yet another scene, a mother cat lacking eyeballs and plump with milk, is sucked to the bone by her almost parasitic singing kittens. Then the walrus-ghost reappears, surrounded by other singing animal-ghosts, ghouls, and skeletons. Finally, a wailing hag emerges from deep within the cave. The jazz piece ends abruptly, replaced by a quick major-key ragtime played by a full ensemble, thus marking the return of the plot. Betty and Bimbo are chased out the cave and, in blind terror, zoom right back to the safety of the suburbs. The pair split up, and Betty finally returns home. The feature ends with Betty's note to her parents ripping apart to reveal the words "Home Sweet Home."

Fleischer Studios' *Minnie the Moocher* did more than simply make use of Cab Calloway's jazz piece to imply certain ideas about African-American culture; it juxtaposed jazz against what would have been perceived as acceptable music to define spaces. Home in the feature is represented by nursery rhyme music: lulling, peaceful, and sweet. Betty Boop's parents, in ironic humor, dance to the rhyme "The More We Get Together, The Happier We'll Be." And Betty sings her own rhyme in 3/4 time, bringing to mind the music of a carousel. This, in addition to the use of the European classical instruments, piano and violin, creates a very specific impression of the suburban home. The music claims it as a space of peace and tradition. Even stronger is the implication that this home is a container of youth and innocence. The music is

child-like, as is Betty Boop's voice and mannerisms. When contrasted by the portrayed ominously matured and racialized rhythms of jazz, the home environment too gains a racial identity. In light of the black jazz forest and caves, the suburban home is white.

And thus, therein lays the joke. The extremely simple, two-piece nursery rhyme signifies civilization, while the complicated and sexually-mature jazz represents primitiveness. However, this is most likely just another example of ironic humor, rather than a pointed political statement about social change. The stereotypes and racist notions linking African Americans with jazz are actually heavily played out in the cartoon. To begin with, the topic of Cab Calloway's song *Minnie the Moocher*, which recounts a tale about a young woman who dreams of living in luxury but finds herself involved with an underachieving man, only vaguely relates to Betty Boop's story. This leads me to believe that the purpose behind the presence of the song was solely to exploit several stereotypes associated with jazz and, of course, black people.

Dangerous. Primitive. Forbidden. Wrong. Male. From the moment the jazz ensemble begins to play, strange and disturbing things appear to antagonize the white female Betty Boop and her friend Bimbo. In this case, jazz is used to create an atmosphere of fear with the oddly death-oriented images augmenting its power. However, it is important to note that, except for the minor key, there is nothing peculiarly dark or frightening about Cab Calloway's song. The concept of a dangerous jazz is constructed from the imaginations of white society and presented via animation. Moreover, at the end of the feature when Betty and Bimbo are chased back to the safety of home, the music changes to a sort-of ragtime piece in a major key – thus terminating the threat of jazz. The symbolic use of major-minor key changes throughout the cartoon almost

seems to propose a concealed message: an innocent young white woman is led away from her parents into the world of jazz, where she is overcome by the danger and must return to her society to be protected. Perhaps it is a warning to white audiences against the menace of jazz, against the menace of blackness.

Fleischer Studios is uniquely known in cartoon history for their use and promotion of original and 'authentic' jazz performances. "The Fleischer brothers took an unusual approach to jazz in the late 1920s and the 1930s, in that they treated it not as background but as a musical genre deserving of recognition. [...] Thus a wide variety of musicians and others, including Ethel Merman, Rudy Vallee, the Mills Brothers, Cab Calloway, and Louis Armstrong, began appearing in Fleischer cartoons" (Goldmark 84). Fleischer Studios had to itself a number of resources available, making it possible to hire real stars. Besides being a prominent cartoon studio, it had access to Paramount Pictures', its distributor and parent company's, news reel recording facilities. These facilities were used to record the performers. Appearing in cartoons gave performers greater exposure and an open door into mainstream entertainment. At the same time, the studios benefited from simply being able to use popular songs and attract viewers. Fleischer would choose a song from the featured artist, and then develop a story in which the performance of the song is the centerpiece of the cartoon (Goldmark 85). It was an unusual method of making cartoons – choosing the musical accompaniment before the cartoon is made. But it reveals that the use of jazz in "Minnie the Moocher," as well as in several other Fleischer jazz cartoons, was a particularly deliberate one.

It would seem that the wild and instinctive interpretations of jazz allowed the cartoon studios during the Golden Age, in general, to employ their imaginations and

humor to much greater extents. Some of the more ridiculously daring, nonsensically gimmicked, statement-loaded cartoons were jazz cartoons. In Fleischer's 1932 feature *I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You*, Betty and her friends, Bimbo and Ko Ko, are explorers promenading through a thick jungle. The musical accompaniment is played by Louis Armstrong and his band. When the trio is confronted by a tribe of male blackfaced cannibals, Betty is kidnapped (the endangered white woman being the object of the black brute's desire). Bimbo and Ko Ko, on the other hand, become wrapped up in a long chase scene, which features very bizarre moments, such as the transformation of a giant floating head of a cannibal into the giant floating head of Louis Armstrong (instantly making a clear connection between jazz, the African American musician, and the cannibal). In Warner Brothers' 1943 feature, *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*, the fairytale of Snow White is reinvented with an all-black cast. Unlike Fleischer Studios, WB did not have access to famous artists; instead, they relied on the sheet music of popular songs combined with celebrity impersonators (Goldmark 93). Supported by an assortment of jazz pieces including "Old King Cole," "Five O'Clock Whistle," and "Nagasaki" (Goldmark 100), *Coal Black* presents a horrendously wacky display of black stereotypes: skimpily dressed and pig-tailed So White (sexual and simple black female), inarticulate and overweight woman narrator (mammy), deep voiced and excessively unattractive Mean Old Queen (black is ugly), Prince Chawmin' and his 'glamorous' gold teeth, several characters in gaudy clothing, everyone speaking to the rhythm of ever-present jazz, completely random dance sequences, highly inconsistent sequence of actions (all representing different ideas associated with the coon); not to mention, the presence of laughable men with guns and

ill-intent (comedic criminal brute). Warner Brothers effectively achieves the use of jazz in this cartoon to bluntly ridicule African Americans, capturing the urban savage wilderness associated with the musical genre. It is not an overstatement to say that all the major cartoon studios during the Golden Age had their share of racist jazz cartoons. “All the studios helped perpetuate such myths; for some jazz represented a total lack of civilization, while others moved the jazz sound into rural and urban settings as well” (Goldmark 93).

Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studios, otherwise known as MGM, produced an interesting jazz cartoon in 1937, entitled “Swing Wedding.” Once again, jazz is heavily intertwined with the plot of the cartoon, serving as diegetic music – that is, music produced by people or devices within the cartoon space. But this particular feature takes stereotyping to a whole new level by caricaturizing not one, but multiple Black artists and stars. Fats Waller, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, Ethel Waters, the Mills Brothers, Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, and more, all make guest appearances. It is a grand musical animated event in which the most popular stars of the time, very well impersonated, come together to celebrate a wedding. In addition, the cartoon features parodies of several popular songs, including “Minnie the Moocher” and Duke Ellington’s “It Don’t Mean a Thing.” However, the glory of the extravaganza is somewhat offset by the fact that the marriage is being held in a swampy pond and the attendees are witlessly impulsive, fixated on music, and even slightly minstrel-looking frogs. It stands as yet another cartoon portrayal of the simplicity and bliss inherent in the perceived black jazz – only bigger.

The full moon shines amongst passing clouds as arpeggiated piano chords strum gently beneath the melody of what could be an oboe. The gentle melody, inducing an impression of peaceful night and of water, soon fades away, joined in the last moment by an ensemble of clarinets. The scene shifts, gradually focusing on four humming toads in a pond landscape. They begin to sing in a Mills Brothers-like harmony, a song about dancing in “the Mississippi mud.” Suddenly, a tall frog appears and begins to tap dance. The tap dancing frog takes the lead as more and more frogs appear to dance: “What a dance/ Do they do/ Lawdy! How I’m tellin’ you/ They don’t need no band/ They keep time by clapping their hands/” (Youtube).

After just a few seconds of singing and dancing, during which a frog in the likeness of Ella Fitzgerald sings a line, the musical number ends in applause. But not long after, the tap dancing frog, in a preacher-like manner announces the wedding between Minnie the Moocher and Smokie Jo, thus launching the pond of frogs into yet another song: “It’s Minnie the Moocher’s/ Wedding day” (Youtube). A female frog, clad in a skimpy, form-fitting wedding gown emerges from the bushes. It’s Minnie, awaiting her husband-to-be. In her Ethel Waters voice, she takes the lead to the song. Very soon, however, the scene shifts to a small fat frog on a trumpet. He begins to speak and sing in a low, husky voice, in mockery of Louis Armstrong. Once finished, Armstrong frog quickly notices Smokie Jo in the distance, ever-so slowly making his way through the pond. He asks the skinny frog where he is heading; to which Smokie replies “Guess I’s e goes to dat ole weddin’” (Youtube). After realizing he’s the groom, Smokie Jo dashes off in terror, in an attempt to make it to the wedding on time.

Unfortunately, his motivation rapidly wanes and he begins to walk again. “Dog gone ole weddin, anyhow.”

Minnie is still waiting, clearly aggravated by Smokie’s tardiness. Suddenly, a wildly scating frog emerges from inside the pond accompanied by an entire jazz ensemble. A caricature of Cab Calloway, he begins wooing Minnie through song, his singing adorned by frequent random fits of shouting and wailing: “Come on Minnie and/ Swing/ With the Ha-di-ho/ King” (Youtube). At first Minnie turns him down; however, almost immediately afterwards, she approaches him, intrigued by his talk of ‘swing.’ They dance off together, followed by the maids of honor, to be married by the tap dancing preacher frog. Yet another frog, resembling Fats Waller, begins to play “The Bridal Chorus” on a piano. The tune quickly melts into yet another musical number, “many times a bridegroom/ but never a bride,” featuring a tap dancing Bill Bojangles Robinson frog. This too melts into another number. The preacher goes through with the marriage of Minnie and Calloway frog, complete with song and dance.

As the tap dancing preacher frog asks if anyone objects, Smokie Jo finally arrives. He half-heartedly objects. Then, Armstrong frog runs up to Calloway frog and vouches for Smokie: “You talk about you got rhythm. You got this, you got that. He’s got rhythm” (Youtube). The little frog then blows his trumpet, which sends Smokie dancing wildly. Defeated, but encouraged by the music, Calloway frog rejoins his band. They begin to play one last number, “Running wild.” At this point, chaos breaks loose. Turned on by the music, the frogs of the pond shout and scream, becoming more and more destructive and insane as time progresses. After a thermometer appears and subsequently explodes, the pond takes a turn for the worst. The musicians destroy their

instruments and beat each other with the broken pieces. One trumpet player even goes as far as to destroy his trumpet against the head of another frog, then to stick himself with a syringe (after which, he really goes insane and lands inside a drum). Finally, Armstrong frog blows his trumpet so hard, he flies into the water. As he sinks beneath the water's surface, he coolly whispers "swing" and the cartoon ends (Youtube).

The basic idea behind this animation feature, *Swing Wedding*, was probably to show audiences just what might happen when you bring all of their favorite black stars together. It extracts many of the negative stereotypes perceivably apparent in jazz to caricaturize these stars, and in effect, portrays highly stereotypic images of African Americans. The frogs' obsession with dancing, singing, and their music depicts the happy image of black people; and of jazz, what Goldmark called "the freedom and hedonism believed to be characteristic of a simpler, more instinctual society" (85). Their attention spans are pitifully short. Their speech ranges from relatively well-spoken to utterly unintelligible. Everyone has a song to sing and it is always about rhythm. Ultimately, the frog people are not smart, but they are incredibly talented. From this point of view, *Swing Wedding* appears to be more like the gathering of the coons. They are perfect representations of the African Americans constructed from the prejudices of American media. Of course, the sexy black female is manifested in Minnie the Moocher and her maids of honor – all dressed skimpily and dancing suggestively. Smokie Jo, on the other hand, represents the more traditional coon: lazy, apathetic, inarticulate, and slow. Not to mention, the last musical number "Running Wild," which works all the frogs up into a mindless frenzy. Similar to in *Minnie the Moocher*, the scene warns white audiences about the threat of jazz. At first, the music

brings all the frogs together in celebration – but once they get too involved, the music becomes too hot, leading them to become dangerous and self-destructive. It is as if the writers of MGM were saying ‘jazz can be fun, but too much of it is a bad thing.’

Negro Spirituals and Gospel in Jazz Cartoons

In studying jazz cartoons, it has come to my attention that a number of other African American music styles have been used in a very similar manner during the Golden Age of cartoons. Black religious music has also been used in very interesting ways.

“Although music scholars have also documented the performance of lined hymns and psalms, standard hymns, and songs from the western European classical music literature on black religious services, Negro spirituals and gospel music are the religious music genres actually created *by* and *for* blacks themselves and which therefore reflect African American musical genius” (Burnim 51). Though created over 100 years apart, with the birth of Gospel dating back only to the early twentieth century, Gospel and Negro spirituals are linked by their function in the African American society. To black participants, the Negro Spiritual represented a unique religious expression, formed in opposition to the oppressive religious expression of the white Methodists – it stood as a means to defiantly maintain black identity against assimilation via a white Christianity (Burnim 53). More importantly, it allowed black Christians to “express themselves in a way that was uniquely meaningful to them,” in a private space meant solely to gather together and worship. The call-response structure

of the spiritual is its most popular feature, involving the musical call from a leader or soloist followed by the collective response of a group. The absence of drums due to the bans of the use of loud musical instruments during slavery led to the heavy use of handclapping and foot-stomps as rhythm keepers. A mixture of singing and spirited dancing was also characteristic of the music's performance. Some other key features, as outlined in Mellonee Burnim and Portia Maultsby's *African American Music*, include repetition, continuation of songs for indefinite periods, variation of tempo, and highly embellished melodic lines (Burnim 56). In addition, song texts reflected "a concept of God as personal and integral to everyday life. God was neither distant not abstract" (Burnim 60). The personal and genuine expression, at times carrying a hidden meaning, ultimately identified Negro Spirituals as a source of freedom. And the exact same can be said for Gospel music: it provided African Americans with the freedom to worship God uninhibited.

Gospel emerged out of the folk spiritual tradition and into widespread popularity in the 1930s (Burnim 66). The Great Migration of black populations from Southern rural areas to Northern urban areas at the turn of the century led to its formation, as new importance was placed on musical accompaniment and a new practice of a single person composing pieces developed. Songs became more dependent on the verse-chorus structure apparent in European hymns. Furthermore, the Gospel style incorporated blues and the use of a wider variety of instruments – organs, pianos, trombones, and trumpets, to name a few (Burnim 68). On the other hand, the genre faithfully kept the free and exuberant worship style at the heart of spirituals, while also maintaining its oral tradition, call and response methods, and polyrhythmic feel

(Burnim 70). What resulted in this meeting of musical influences was a spiritual-like musical genre that featured greater levels of musical sophistication. One specific example is the use of gospel choirs: choirs that sing in a three-part harmony (soprano, alto, and tenor) that moves in parallel motion, and soloists who sing the text in a melismatic fashion (several pitches to a single syllable) (Burnim 72). Thus, Gospel represented the changing times in the lives of African Americans, while reflecting in its commonalities with Negro spirituals a nostalgia for the good in the past – the sense of a unified identity (Burnim 66).

In animation during the golden age of cartoons, African American religious music and, by extension, religious practices were portrayed in various interesting ways – but, ultimately, to the same effect as jazz. In fact, *Swing Social* (MGM 1940) is one very fascinating example in which the religiosity of black Christians is portrayed, but actual religious music is barely heard. Instead, MGM parodies Negro spirituals and gospel, using jazz.

A black man in tuxedo briskly strides along a countryside path, framed on one side by a body of water. A slow and somber Negro spiritual, “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” bellows as he walks. Soon, he comes upon another black man, much more humbly dressed, who is fishing. Then, in an authoritative manner, he approaches him. “Good morning Brother Brown,” “Good morning Deacon!” After a swift greeting, the tuxedo-wearing Deacon politely asks fishing Brother Brown if he intends on missing “the meeting” (an obvious reference to a Church service). Subsequently, in a conversation reminiscent of the inarticulate banter once popular in coon shows, Brother Brown explains that he is fishing for black bass.

D: “I resume you is fishin’, rather then tendin’ the meetin’ this mornin’.”

B: “Yessah! I’s e ‘bout to catch myself some bass – some black bass.”

D: “Well Brother Brown, you is operatin’ under the false delusion.”

B: “I is?”

D: “Hm-hm. Cos the bass, I mean the black bass, don’t bite on Sunday.
On Sunday, they hold they’s regular weekly swing social.” (Youtube)

Below the surface of the water, the swing social of the black bass (as opposed to the regular bass, of course) is just beginning.

Introduced is a well dressed group of ecstatic, dark skinned fish, who, together, paint a picture of the quintessential Happy Negro. No logical flow of sense seems to be happening, as the focus jumps from one singing bass to the next. But one thing is automatically clear: this “Swing Social” is actually an underwater Church social event, equipped with a pastor and podium, group singing, dancing, handclapping, fried chicken, and incessant call and response. In a flurry of rhyming idioms and exclamations, like “Well slap my face/ And break my bones!/ If da’ain’t Franklin/ D. Roosevelt Jones” (Youtube), the apparent pastor bass commences the service joyfully welcoming different attendees. The attendees return the welcome in rhyme, staying faithful to the underlying rhythm. And, so as to ensure group participation, the entire congregation sings in between each greeting in repetitive call-response fashion.

“So shout hallelujah brother!
Be right glad to be born!
So sing it when you swing it on
A social Sunday morn!” (Youtube)

Their song is vibrant with spirited harmonies accompanied by a big band jazz ensemble. Piano, trumpet, and tympani, among other instruments; resound beneath the strong voices of the so-called impromptu choir. Soon, the entire congregation ends the

number, holding the last note dramatically. However, it does not take long for yet another jazz number to surface. The pastor bass announces that it is time to eat. This launches the cook, a full-bosomed mammy-like bass, into a song about the purpose of vitamins in her cooking. After she describes vitamins A through E, misuses several words, and scats, she concludes with the statement “Let’em take away, take away the vit’ms/ [...] For vit’ms to me, is a slimmy sort of pickins’/ Cos I like good ole, plain fried [...] chicken” (Youtube). Convinced that no one would want healthy food containing vitamins, she reveals that she has prepared fried chicken for the social – to the especial approval of one overeager attendee.

At this point, the cartoon takes an unexpectedly gloomy turn. Still using jazz, the focus gradually lands on an old voodoo practitioner, whose drum rhythm has interrupted the swing social and has caught the curiosity of three little female bass. With the drum beat serving as the new underlying rhythm, the previously major-key music is replaced by a melody in minor. This provides a contrast that gives both the music and the complimentary cartoon scene a dark ambiance. One of the little fish asks the old drummer what is voodoo. In response, he sings a surprisingly pretty song in which he explains that voodoo can refer to any kind of music, as long as it contains the special voodoo rhythm. The girls catch on quick and join him in harmony, call and response fashion. The number is further accompanied by an ensemble of soothing, but gloomy clarinets. It ends in an unresolved chord.

“It’s the devil. Yessir, it’s that ole voodoo devil.” Overcoming his shock, the pastor bass returns to his senses to warn the congregation not to be afraid of the devil. This sets the swing social back in motion. The big band jazz ensemble resumes playing

a major-key melody, and the attendees start to sing their final song, testimonies included.

“Don’t run from the devil. No!
 Don’t run from the devil. No!
 Don’t run from the devil. No!
 Make the devil run from you!” (Youtube)

After another powerful ending, the focus returns to the surface, where Deacon just finishes up telling Brother Brown “why the black bass don’t bite on Sunday.” “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” returns for only a moment, before the credits appear heralding the final return of the Black bass song: “So shout hallelujah brother!/ On a social Sunday morn!” (Youtube).

What makes *Swing Social* special is not only that it portrays a caricature of African American religiosity; it also mimics the sounds of religious music in jazz form. The cartoon pokes fun at different aspects of Negro spirituals and Gospel, while never abandoning the white notion that jazz is synonymous with black culture. In other words, for black Christians, religious music represented their own identity, but MGM superimposed the more obvious cultural features of this music onto jazz – what white Americans could perceive as the representation of black identity. Thus, it makes stereotypical use of the joyful atmosphere characteristic of the music, as well as a handclapping 4/4 rhythm, a call-response structure, epic singing, testimony interruptions, simple lyrics, vague Christian beliefs, and whole group participation. This, when added to the pep and harmonies of a jazz big band accompaniment creates an interesting sound, a fusion of the three genres of African American music. Of course, just like all of the other jazz cartoons, black people are misrepresented as coons

and the like. Not to mention, the black bass looked more like actors in blackface than fish. Another interesting aspect of the cartoon, however, is the use of “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” the only actual Negro spiritual in the cartoon. Solemn, sluggish, and in what I call an old-fashioned choral arrangement (SATB voicing, melismatic bass line, and accompaniment on organ); the spiritual is used as a code for the old South and for black religion. It only appears in the presence of the human characters, both of whom are implied to be Church members. On the other hand, there is the voodoo scene, where a minor-key jazz melody is played over a hand drum rhythm, thus referencing Africa and an opposing black identity. Interestingly enough, this identity is shunned by the other bass, hinting at an inner conflict with the black bass community – quite an unexpectedly insightful statement by MGM. Consequently, in this cartoon, music might have been used to simply define and ridicule specific black identities.

What MGM might have been hinting at in inserting a voodoo scene amidst a Christian social event, is this: at the heart of African American religiosity remains a constant struggle originating from the historic need to define boundaries between secular and religious practices – a struggle that is clearly evident in black religious music. “With the emancipation and the decline of the “sacred world view” which dominated the mental lives of the slaves, previously fuzzy distinctions between black sacred and secular realms of thought and practice actually became more precise” (Ward 187). According to Brian Ward’s study of African American music styles, *Just My Soul Responding*, religious and secular music have always cross fertilized with each other. However, the distinction between the two, imbibed from the white religious mentors during slavery, has been stricter more so in pious theory than in practice (188). On the

one hand, for instance, black Christians developed the ring shout in order to dance in a perceived holy manner, and thus distance themselves from secular dancing. On the other, during the mid-twentieth century, Christian performers constantly jumped back and forth between styles, thus blurring the distinctions – like Sam Cooke, who left his religious career to pursue R&B, and Little Richard who did the opposite (Ward 189). Nevertheless, the rules that denounced secular music and culture in general, persisted.

One major result of this was that the Christians who listened to or performed blues, jazz, rock and roll, or R&B, were caught in the middle of a moral conflict. In 1958, a young girl interested in rock and roll wrote to Martin Luther King Jr expressing these concerns: “Can a person be a Christian and interested in those things? I am a church worker. Would listening to those things be considered as devil-work? I know I can’t combine the work of the devil and the Lord. Should I quit listening to them?” Of course, King rejects rock and roll, suggesting that it “often plunges men’s minds into degrading and immoral depths” (Ward 189). Black Christians felt a need to pick one between the two fields of music, fearful of committing the sin of combining the two. But the occurrence of secular artists who willingly blended them, including Ray Charles and James Brown, led to new problems for the Church. Essentially, attendance waned as more and more young Christians grew tired of the Conservative ways of the Church. Surrounded by a new and urban world, Church leaders found themselves competing with secular businesses for people (Ward 193). In response, they modernized their Churches, incorporating flashy dance and music performances to capture the interests of young members. In addition, the still new music style of Gospel entered the broadcast and recording business, where it found great success among black

audiences (Ward 196). This modernization further blurred the line between secular and sacred musical practices, since Christians resorted to secular means – i.e., the entertainment business, the acceptance of the hybrid genre Gospel – to promote religion. Over time, the issues surrounding this distinction never disappear; however, the flexibility of religious music helped allow for a greater variance in the African American religious culture.

Two cartoons that portray these conflicts between the secular and the sacred are Warner Brothers' 1937 *Clean Pastures* and 1943 *Tin Pan Alley Cats*. *Clean Pastures* is a story about a black heaven, known as "Pair O' Dice." Apparently, the numbers of people going to heaven have been declining rapidly, so an angel is sent down to earth to investigate. The angel quickly discovers that heaven needs to update, to use modern rhythm to attract people. So, an ensemble of "jive" angels is sent down to earth. Once there, they put on a jazz show that has people parading into heaven. The music is so good, even Satan repents. Although neither Gospel nor Negro spirituals are used in this cartoon, it is absolutely clear what concept this cartoon is portraying: the loss of Christian followers to secular music and the subsequent modernization of Christian musical practices. In reality, jazz would have never been seen as an acceptable means for the Church to reach people. However, WB still managed to catch on to the basic issue that currently evolved in the urban African American communities during the time of the cartoon's creation.

Unlike *Clean Pastures*, *Tin Pan Alley Cats* focuses more on the need for Christians to choose between secular music and holy music. A small fat cat in the image of Fats Waller is on a night out on the town, when he passes by two very

different adjacent buildings. On the right is the “Kit Kat Klub,” a dance club for blacks, and on the left is “Uncle Tom’s Mission,” where a band of Black people are having a revival. The latter are singing a dry, dragged out, harmonized version of “Give Me that Old Time Religion” (note the ironic humor) when they stop Fats Waller in his tracks to warn him about the dangers of the night club. Undeterred, Fats Waller enters the club anyway. There, he enjoys himself thoroughly, until the powerful blast of a trumpet player sends him “out of this world.” He finds himself in a crazy and frightening world where jazz is taken literally and nothing makes sense. When he eventually returns to reality, he dashes out of the Kit Kat Klub in terror and promptly joins the people in the Revival next door. Like the previous cartoons, *Tin Pan Alley Cats* imagines African American religious music as an out of date and rhythmically unattractive entity. However, it places the Negro spiritual in physical juxtaposition to jazz, forcing Fats Waller cat to make a choice. At first he chooses jazz, but after a threatening experience, he chooses religion. While the representations of both genres of music are grossly exaggerated, this cartoon again highlights on a real conflict within black communities. The held belief that secular and sacred don’t mix, that secular is sinful, and that people must make an ultimate choice is all seen here. In addition, WB creates a main character who, like Little Richard, actually makes two choices, and so actively crosses the line between the two.

FIN: The Conclusion

Innocent and humorous, the taboo-breaking nature of animation allowed jazz to be used to racialize cartoons of the Golden Age, and subversively present offensive concepts and gags. During this period of cartoon history, jazz was generally perceived by white audiences as a primitive and utterly black musical genre. This interpretation reflected prejudiced ideas, and incorporated many of the negative stereotypes of black people that originated in historic media. Coons, toms, mammies, mulattoes, and bucks are all archetypal caricatures that were recreated and manifested in this perceived jazz. Once introduced into cartoons, the music would provide a loaded underline narrative for the often offensive images and storylines on screen. The reality warping potential in animation led to the caricatures being portrayed in ridiculously surreal ways, while the music simply enhanced their meaning. The media willingly yielded to ideas of jazz as a representation of black people's supposed instinctual state of freedom and bliss, as well as their dangerousness, attractive sexuality, and innocent simplicity. Furthermore, its role as an identifier of black identity caused it to take on several specific sub-roles in order to present different characteristics of African American culture, like religion. For instance, in MGM's *Swing Social*, jazz is used and manipulated to imply Gospel. Additionally, the genre can be used to represent cultural and moral conflict within black society.

In the end, it is ceaselessly evident that all of these interpretations, no matter how offensive, were essentially made for the sake of humor, for the laughs of a white audience. Perhaps, this is what happens when the power of cartoons, of music and animation combined, is wielded without a proper understanding of responsibility,

consequence, and one's role in American society. To the animation directors, I ask: as masters of the medium, what is your responsibility to *all* of the peoples who make up your audience? And what are the consequences for evading this responsibility, whether purposefully or not? Animation, like all popular media, affects people's lives. It has the power to manipulate people's emotions, their perception of reality. Therefore, it must be handled with care – for the sake of the entire audience.

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