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THE PLAY

Nomax has got the blues, so he tunes into his favorite radio station. On this particular night, the station is celebrating the music of Louis Jordan, "father of rock, rap and roll" and "showman extraordinaire!" When Nomax tries to turn off his radio, he is accosted by five guys who magically appear from nowhere. It gets weirder because they are all named Moe!

There is **No Moe**, **Little Moe**, **Eat Moe**, **Big Moe** and **Four-Eyed Moe**. They have come to show Nomax the error of his ways. While Nomax mopes about losing his girl, the five guys named Moe try to teach him some life lessons through the jiving music of the "grandfather of rock 'n roll," Louis Jordan. ●

FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE



Now Playing in the Kreeger Theater
November 14 – December 28, 2014
Lyrics and music by Louis Jordan
Book by Clarke Peters
Directed by Robert O'Hara
A co-production with Cleveland Playhouse

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



Clarke Peters

"I was blown away by the amount of people ... who paid homage to Jordan: Nat King Cole, Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, James Brown, B.B. King and Chuck Berry among them. Like Count Basie, Jordan just has a natural musical bounce ... How I wish I could have had even just ten minutes talking to him. That's history, African-American cultural history."
– Clarke Peters

Clarke Peters was born in New York City, and grew up in Englewood, New Jersey. He is an accomplished actor, writer, director and singer. Peters earned a Tony award nomination in 1992 for Best Book of a Musical for *Five Guys Named Moe*, which was nominated for Best Musical that year. Peters even played the role of Nomax in the Edinburgh Festival and **West End** productions in 2010.

Peters won the Theatre World Award in 1999 for his starring role in *The Iceman Cometh* on Broadway. He also played the role of lawyer Billy Flynn in the Broadway revivals of *Chicago* in 2000 and 2003. He is famous in the television world for his role as Detective Lester Freamon on HBO's *The Wire*.

West End – London's premiere professional theater district, like Broadway in the U.S.

William P. Gottlieb/Ira and Leonore S. Geishwin Fund Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.)



Jordan with Sax.

LOUIS JORDAN THE JUKEBOX KING AND FATHER OF RHYTHM AND BLUES

(July 8, 1908 – February 4, 1975):

Louis Jordan was the connection between the Big Band era and the Rhythm and Blues era. Born and raised in Arkansas, Jordan had played with various bands and majored in music before he decided to start his own band, the Tympany Five.

Their music was unlike anything else at the time. The sound was big and happy like the big bands, but Jordan only had five band members, a radically small number at the time. Having fewer instruments opened to band up to a looser style of **riffing** and improvisation, while still maintaining the sound of the big bands. Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five were an instant success. Music critics called his new sound "jump music" because it made people dance.

In 1943, Jordan released the hit "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby?" His band first performed the song in Hollywood. A Universal Pictures movie crew happened to hear it and filmed them for an upcoming movie. Jordan released the song when the movie premiered, and it took off. This song helped him to attract a white audience. Bing Crosby, one of

the most famous white artists at the time, wanted to make a record with Louis Jordan. They released "Your Socks Don't Match" in 1944.

Jordan provided much of the slang in early rock 'n' roll and directly influenced its freewheeling spirit. This down-home Arkansas man knew what the people wanted to hear. In 1946 he sold over 2 million recordings of "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie," obliterating any previous record. Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five were on fire for the whole of the 1940s.

However, in the 1950s, he started losing steam. His manager left him and his experiment fronting a big band was a failure. Then in 1953, Decca Records canceled his contract as well as those of Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong. The landscape of popular music was changing quickly. Jordan continued to play and record music with diminishing success until his death in 1975. The musical *Five Guys Named Moe* kicked off a Louis Jordan revival in 1992 with its U.K. premier.

riffing- making use of short rhythmic phrases repeated in a song.



ARENA BACKSTAGE: DIRECTOR ROBERT O'HARA

Writer and director, Robert O'Hara returns to Arena Stage for the first time since his acclaimed production of *The Mountaintop*.

Tell us about *Five Guys Named Moe*. What attracts you to this show?

What attracts me to *Five Guys Named Moe*, besides the music, is the opportunity to reinvent it. So when Arena said to put my own take on it I immediately thought about what context I could put the play in. So I said, "Well, what if they were a tribute group? What if the Moes were a modern day boy band, but they sang the songs of Louis Jordan?" We got the OK from producer Cameron Mackintosh, so we're reinvigorating the songs. We're going to add different types of instruments and put a different spin, so it doesn't feel like we're in the 1930s and 40s listening to a band, but that we're listening to a tribute to that music. We're going to make it an event — a Five Moes event — and a celebration of Louis Jordan's music.

How would you describe the aesthetic of the show?

It's going to be incredibly stylish. We're really looking for it to be almost a night

club act. I want the cast to feel like rock stars, and I want to encourage them to be rock stars.

What about dancing?

It's going to be a huge dance show, which is why it required us to really search for the people who have that sort of stamina and skill set. There's going to be flips, there's going to be tapping, and there's going to be throwing people around the stage. I want it to be an event in that way.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT: Rhythm and Blues to Rock 'n' Roll

Rhythm and blues is a genre of music that combines soulful singing with a strong back beat. Its clearest beginnings can be seen after World War II and through the 1960s. The economic boom and rising employment after the war drew many rural African Americans to the cities. This created a young, urban black audience. Swing music was on its way out, but the need for dance music was stronger than ever. Early R&B artists, led by Louis Jordan, broke away from the big band structure and moved to small instrumental combos with blues-style vocals. New instruments like the electric guitar and the bass added volume and intensity to the sound.

The term “rhythm and blues” was coined in 1949 by *Billboard* magazine to rename its “race records” chart. This new term reflected the rise in social status, economic power and musical influence that African Americans were cultivating. New independently owned radio stations and record labels that marketed to black audiences fascinated young white audiences and led directly to



Jordan and His Tympany Five.
William P. Gottlieb/Ira and Leonore S. Gershwin Fund Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.)

the creation of rock 'n' roll.

Songwriter Jon Hendricks wrote a lot of songs from Jordan's last Decca record. During the recording period Hendricks had a conversation with Milt Gabler, one of the producers. Hendricks tells this story,

“I was in the studio when

Milt Gabler said, ‘This is [Louis Jordan’s] last date for Decca.’ And I said, ‘What?’ He says, ‘Yeah, we have to let him go.’ And I said ‘Why?’ He said ‘Well, they got this new kid comin’ up, so Louis has to get out of the way.’ And I said, ‘What new kid?’ And he said, ‘Elvis Presley.’”

Artists like Louis Jordan, Little Richard, James Brown and Ray Charles were the link between rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll. It was fitting that they were some of the first inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986 and 1987. ●

TIMELINE:

1938-1962

1938: Saxophonist Louis Jordan forms his band, the Tympany Five.

1945: Modern Records is founded in Los Angeles to specialize in black music.

1946: Louis Jordan launches “jump blues” or “rhythm and blues” with “Choo Choo Ch’Boogie.”

1947: Atlantic Records is founded in New York to promote black music at the intersection of jazz, rhythm and blues and pop.

1948: Memphis radio station WDIA hires Nat Williams, the first black DJ.

1951: The first rock 'n' roll record, Ike Turner's “Rocket 88,” is released.

1952: Little Richard's first record is released.

1953: Sam Phillips records the first Elvis Presley record in his Sun Studio in Memphis, using the effect of “slapback” audio delay.

1954: Ray Charles forms his band.

1955: Chuck Berry cuts his first rock 'n' roll records, the first ones to have the guitar as the main instrument, and invents the descending pentatonic double-stops (the essence of rock guitar)

1956: *American Bandstand* begins to air on nationwide TV.

1962: The Supremes first recordings are released and James Brown records his famous “Live at the Apollo” album.

THE JUKEBOX MUSICAL



A jukebox musical is a musical that uses songs that have been previously released. The concept of a jukebox musical started in 1977 with *Elvis!* This musical told the story of Elvis Presley's life, career and death and used only Elvis' music.

There have been many more jukebox musicals since the 1970s, but the most notable is *Mamma Mia!*, which repopularized the genre in 1999. *Mamma Mia!* used the music of the Swedish band ABBA, but in a fictional storyline. Some recent jukebox musicals you may have heard of are *We Will Rock You*, *Jersey Boys*, *Rock of Ages*, *Motown: The Musical* and *Moulin Rouge!* ●



ACTIVITY Choose an artist, album or genre of music that is important of you. Write the synopsis of a musical that would use this music to help tell the story. In your synopsis, note where key songs would go and why.

a! ACTIVITY Listen to clips of the artists listed above in chronological order. What commonalities do you notice? How does music change over this 24-year period?

DO THE CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN?

Fashion and Costumes



Costume design by Dedy Ayite

Louis Jordan was famous for his unique style of dressing. His trumpeter Aaron Izenhall said Jordan “was trying to create a Technicolor picture on stage like you have now on TV.” He wore items like kelly green jackets and canary yellow pants, and he dyed his shoes and socks to match.

For this production, costume designer Dede Ayite said, “I got my inspiration from the fashionable modern man. A well-tailored suit on a man does a lot. I also looked at boy bands/groups (past and present: Backstreet Boys, 112, Il Divo, The Temptations), rockers and fun performers like Lenny Kravitz, Bruno Mars, etc.”

Funny Man and Showman Extraordinaire

Louis Jordan was a full entertainer. As his drummer Chris Columbus said, “He was also one of the best front men with a band.” He gave his tunes funny names, like “You’re My Meat,” “What’s the Use of Getting Sober?” and “You Run Your Mouth, I’ll Run My Business.”

(William P. Gottlieb/Ira and Leonore S. Gershwin Fund Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.)



THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1. How do we see the influence of artists like Louis Jordan in music today?
2. How does music reflect a time period?
3. How has music changed in your lifetime?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

- *Legends, Icons & Rebels: Music That Changed the World* by Robbie Robertson, Jim Guernot, Sebastian Robertson and Jared Levine.

MOVIES

- *Look Out Sister*: Astor Picture Corporation, 1947.
(You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r44cYv-X9Pg>)
- *Beware*: Astor Pictures Corporation, 1946.
(You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LCNiisgnkw>)

ON THE WEB

- Photographs from the Golden Age of Jazz: The William P. Gottlieb Collection at The Library of Congress. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/gottlieb/gottlieb-home.html>
- Learn more about influential rock ‘n’ roll musicians. <https://rockhall.com/>
- Listen to stories about Louis Jordan and recording of his music in the NPR special. <http://www.npr.org/2008/03/04/87905064/louis-jordan-jukebox-king>

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- <http://www.npr.org/2008/03/04/87905064/louis-jordan-jukebox-king>
- <http://www.loc.gov/search/?fa=subject%3Ajordan%2C+louis>
- http://www.history-of-rock.com/rock_and_roll_timeline.htm

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
 - Visit the restroom before the show starts.
 - Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
 - Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
 - Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
 - Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
 - Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
 - Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
 - Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
 - Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.
 - Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.
- Enjoy the show!**



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