The Jazz Republic
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CHAPTER I

Jazz Occupies Germany: Weimar Jazz Culture between the Rhine and Berlin

The German schoolmaster cannot dance it. The Prussian reserve officer cannot dance it. If only all ministers and councilors and professors and politicians were obliged to dance jazz, even now and again publicly! In what a joyous way would they be stripped of their entire honor (Würde)! How human, how nice, how comical would they have to become! No atmosphere of stupidity, vanity, and grandeur (Würde) could form. If the Kaiser had danced jazz—all that would never have happened! But no! He could never have learned it. Being German Kaiser is easier than dancing jazz.

—Hans Siemsen (1921)

In what has become one of the most cited early commentaries on jazz in Germany,1 Hans Siemsen, cultural critic and early proponent of popular culture, sums up much of the hope placed in jazz by German leftists in the period following war.2 Offering the absurd counterfactual history of Kaiser Wilhelm II dancing jazz, he suggests jazz could have changed the course of German history. While the comedy of this image ensures its effectiveness, both then and today, Siemsen’s words raise more questions than they offer answers. Though jazz for Siemsen clearly has the effect of removing dignity from those who practice it, what exactly would not have happened had the Kaiser danced jazz: the war? Germany’s defeat? For another, why does he not ask us to imagine the German Kaiser playing, rather than dancing jazz?

The goal of this opening chapter is to investigate the broader context of Siemsen’s statement in order to understand more precisely how jazz entered and eventually spread across Germany’s cultural and geographical landscape in the first years of the Weimar Republic, roughly the period between 1919 and 1923. For while Siemsen’s report takes jazz’s presence for granted, the road leading from the end of the First World War in November 1918 to this text from early 1921 was not only circuitous but filled with developmental cul-de-sacs.
Indeed, any attempt at reconstructing jazz’s presence in this early period is faced with a number of difficult, hitherto only vaguely answered questions. How did Germans first encounter jazz? Where and under what circumstances? How did jazz in Germany develop in contrast to the United States, England, France, or elsewhere? And was there something unique to its use and spread in Germany? Such questions are all the more compelling due to the seemingly eccentric place Germany holds within broader jazz history itself, what Damon J. Phillips has called the “puzzle of German jazz.”

This chapter will attempt to answer some of these questions by broadly tracing the earliest exposure of Germans to jazz and related musical styles and dances through a comparative framework. On the one hand, I will pay attention to the development of jazz and jazz criticism within the United States and Western Europe, in particular France and England, in order to evaluate the issue of German jazz’s uniqueness. In addressing this early history of jazz in Germany, I argue that it is essential to distinguish, at least for the years 1919 through 1921, between the situation in Berlin and that within the zones of occupation and occupied cities along the Rhine like Bonn, Coblenz, Cologne, and Wiesbaden. Though the word “jazz” enters roughly simultaneously in Berlin and in the zones of occupation, Weimar jazz culture proceeds, initially at least, along slightly different paths within these two spaces, with the greater contact with foreign citizens, soldiers, and musicians more quickly producing encounters with jazz music and jazz bands than in Berlin. More substantively, I want to suggest that just as jazz spread across America, Europe, and indeed the globe at different rates and along different paths, there is not one singular genealogy of jazz in the Weimar Republic, but many.

**Taking Jazz Seriously in Postwar Germany**

As mentioned in the introduction, jazz in Germany, and even more so German critical writing and musical compositions related to jazz, have for at least the past twenty-plus years taken on a reputation of being characterized by misunderstanding and ignorance, due both to Germany’s separation from developments in American popular music during the war and then, later, to the political and economic instability of the early Weimar Republic. At the same time, there is general consensus that by 1921, there existed a demand amongst younger, metropolitan Germans for “jazz,” also known by variants such as “Yazz,” “Dschatz,” “Schesbend” (jazz band), and others. What remains in question is whether such a thing has anything to do with what one today would call jazz.
In a retrospective account of his introduction to the music, entitled “Meine Jagd nach der ‘Tschetzpend’” (“My Hunt for the ‘Tschetzpend’” [i.e., jazz band]), musician Henry Ernst offers a comic glimpse into the apparent ignorance of early Weimar-era musicians and audiences regarding jazz. Ernst’s 1926 article is not only a unique firsthand narrative of German musicians’ exposure to jazz, it, like Siemsen’s image of the dancing Kaiser, has also become a centerpiece of various arguments for German jazz’s uniqueness and aberration. Though Ernst’s text offers us much in terms of better understanding early jazz culture in Germany, it begs many questions as well. First amongst them is who exactly “Henry Ernst” was and what his relationship to jazz was. This question is especially pressing when one considers that he was described as an opponent of modern trends in music in his obituary.

Born Ernst Ratkowsky in Austria, “Henry Ernst” studied piano and, under Antonín Dvořák, cello in the period before the First World War. In 1903, he became a Kapellmeister and worked in Munich, Hamburg, Bremen, and Dortmund as well as touring neighboring countries like Holland, Sweden, and Denmark. After serving in the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War, he took up residence in Dortmund after the war but also toured within Germany’s neighboring countries. It was one such foreign booking that set off the famous “hunt” for the jazz band. Ernst and his Original Wiener Meistersalonorchester were hired to perform in a hotel in St. Moritz in Switzerland in 1920, which became the setting for his 1926 article. Ernst had brought along with him the latest German foxtrots, mostly now-forgotten pieces like Ernst Tompa’s foxtrot “Mariposa” and an unnamed piece by another popular composer Wilm Wilm (Wilhelm Wieninger). All seemed to be going as planned, he related, until one evening, an English audience member requested that Ernst play a foxtrot, in other words, the type of music Ernst assumed he had been playing all along. When Ernst replied that he was indeed playing foxtrots and questioned whether the gentlemen had been listening closely, the guest “responded for his part that he had paid close attention to our playing. Though he could not say what we had played, he could say with certainty that there was not a single foxtrot amongst them.” Determined to rid his repertoire of such pseudo-foxtrots, Ernst reestablished his subscription to a London music publisher in order to acquire dance music from England and America. This apparently improved his standing with the English and other foreign guests, as Ernst reports no further uncomfortable requests. However, the hotel’s director then made his own uncomfortable request. He said that he would like to hire Ernst for the next season, but first the director needed to know if he could play what Ernst initially hears as Tschetzpend (“jazz band”), later explaining that last
season an English group at the hotel across the street had quite the success with this music. Despite his utter ignorance and inability to parse the word, Ernst claims to know how to play this music, whatever *Tschetzpend* may be, so that he can secure the contract.

The ensuing hunt for the “jazz band” begins, understandably enough, with him excluding musicians in the area as potential sources of information for fear that his ignorance will be exposed and he will lose the potential contract. While from Ernst’s perspective this may indeed be a necessary strategy, it is the first of two moves that will isolate him from any international artists in his midst. Avoiding the local musicians, Ernst writes back to Germany and *Der Artist*. Published in Düsseldorf from 1882 onward, this was the most important trade periodical for practicing musicians and popular entertainers in Germany. From there he learns “that the general view is that jazz band is an American Negro music,” a claim that, while interesting, does not help him very much. He also writes to the *Kapellmeister-Verband Deutschland* and receives word from his colleagues that jazz is not music, but a “new Negro dance, so a sort of new edition of the cake walk.” The organization does, however, provide him with the address of a foreign band in Wiesbaden said to play jazz music, one that had apparently been brought there by the English officers stationed there. Though Ernst follows up on this lead and writes a letter (in English) to the bandleader, he will never receive a response. Within Ernst’s “hunt,” this is but one dead end of many, and he hardly pauses before turning elsewhere. Yet, the reference to a foreign jazz band in the city of Wiesbaden is more significant than it may at first glance appear.

Following the First World War, German territories west of the Rhine were occupied and divided into four zones of occupation by the American, Belgian, British, and French. I will speak to the debate sparked by the French use of African colonial soldiers and its relation to German jazz reception a bit later. For now, however, I want to think about the occupied territories as a whole in terms of their function as an incubator for German encounters with jazz bands and Weimar jazz culture more generally. First, as in Berlin, there existed within occupied cities like Wiesbaden, Cologne, Coblenz, and Bonn a demand for new dances such as the foxtrot and “jazz,” but with the additional element of large numbers of foreign soldiers. Numbering just over 100,000 in early 1919, American soldiers brought with them a variety of entertainment typical in US society. In June of that year, journalist Harry A. Franck noted that the Americans “commandeered the poor man’s drinking-places and transferred them into enlisted men’s barracks. We shooed the rich man out of his sumptuous club and turned it over to our officers. We allotted the pompous *Festhalle*
and many other important buildings to the Y.M.C.A., and ‘jazz’ and ragtime
and burnt-cork jokes took the place of Lieder and Männerchor.”¹³ Yet after a
severe reduction in forces, by September, the American influence had been
limited to the city Coblenz and the immediate area surrounding it.¹⁴ Even still,
there are isolated accounts in the German press and in later memoirs of musi-
cians having both heard and learned jazz from American troops.¹⁵ If not the
American zone directly, then the neighboring cities of British-occupied Bonn
and Cologne and the French-occupied Wiesbaden would prove to have a more
lasting influence on the development and spread of jazz within Germany.

This idea is partially substantiated by the fact that the first extended dis-
cussion of jazz music in German is published in the city of Cologne in June
1919. The author of this first German-language essay on jazz music was
George Barthelme, long-time Washington correspondent for the Kölnische Zei-
tung. Barthelme, to be sure, had a unique perspective insofar as he had experi-
enced firsthand the music’s entry into New York during the First World War.
Indeed, he is one of the only German commentators to mention the early Afri-
can American jazz great James Reese Europe, whom Barthelme refers to as
New York’s great “jazz master” (Jazzmeister).¹⁶ Despite this, his politicized,
anti-modernist reading of the music shares striking similarities with later Ber-
lin writers. As with Siemsen and his use of the jazz-dancing Kaiser in possible
reference to the war, Barthelme uses James Reese Europe’s transformation
from army lieutenant into American jazz king to argue for jazz as a cultural
continuation of the war. Throughout this article, which was reprinted in the
American press as well, Barthelme’s take on jazz oscillates between ironizing
the claims made on the music’s behalf and, given the British occupation of the
city of Bonn, taking them more seriously.¹⁷ In part satirizing the language of
early American jazz modernists, Barthelme invests the music with grandiose
aesthetic claims, transforming jazz from music into worldview, jazz into jazz-
ism. “Now listen!” he writes:

Jazz is a worldview and therefore to be taken seriously. Jazz is the expres-
sion of a cultural epoch, the victorious battle of the elementary forces of
the soul over the redemptive form. [. . . ] Jazz is thus . . . a musical revela-
tion, a religion, a worldview, like Expressionism and Impressionism. But
these two are only partial. Jazzism by contrast is total, is the higher unity,
the Hegelian synthesis. But its synthesis lies ultimately in the negation of
any synthesis. It doesn’t bring together, it disperses, isn’t solution but dis-
solution. It is analysis driven to the extreme. In Jazzism form cedes to
chaos, law to anarchy, the rule to incidence or coincidence. Jazzism is
amorphous music. It is the negation of all musical syntax and stylistics, likely also of musical notation, which, however, can’t be heard. It is the transvaluation of all values of tone and tempo. It is anti-, anti-, anti-: Anti-Wagner, Anti-Strauss, Anti-Reger, even Anti-Debussy. As such musical Bolshevism. Or a big joke to find out what you all can offer an audience of the 20th century while still getting paid.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite the article’s hyperbolic tone, it is clear that for Barthelme, jazz was to be taken seriously, at the very least as a musical and cultural sign of Germany’s precarious present. Linking the war, jazz, and the question of Germany’s future, he notes in conclusion: “In the right jazz mood, anyone will pledge anything. Even the introduction of a soviet system or the creation of the Rhine republic! Dschatz [jazz]! Dschatz!”\textsuperscript{19}

If Barthelme’s experience of American jazz was certainly unique, the presence of jazz bands along the Rhine was not. For one, beginning in December 1919, a French jazz band, Marcel’s Jazz Band, performed in Wiesbaden, with many more to follow.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, many of the first jazz formations advertised in \textit{Der Artist}, the same publication in which Ernst’s article later appeared, can be geographically located within Germany’s occupation zones on its western border. The very first jazz band, Jackson’s Jazz Band,\textsuperscript{21} that advertised in \textit{Der Artist} (and later examples William’s Jazz-Band,\textsuperscript{22} The Harlington-“Jazz-Band”\textsuperscript{23} Original-Jazz Band,\textsuperscript{24} and Jimmy’s Jazz-Band\textsuperscript{25}) originated in Wiesbaden, while those like the Jazz Band Duet\textsuperscript{26} and Harry Johnson’s Orig. Amerik. Jazz-Band\textsuperscript{27} originated in Bonn. The Original Jazz-Band from Wiesbaden is one early example of the Black diasporic presence in the German jazz scene. The advertisement was placed by Joseph (Joe) Sewonu, a multilingual artist and Togolese migrant active in the zones of occupation and Wiesbaden in particular.\textsuperscript{28} It was also in Wiesbaden that an advertisement for a very large group of African American musicians could be found in late 1921. This group, a “Negro Orchestra” from New York featuring 35 performers, potentially represents the largest single group of African American musicians in Germany until 1925.\textsuperscript{29} Though very little is known about this group and no reviews of the performance have surfaced, it was potentially a spin-off of Will Marion Cook’s \textit{Southern Syncopated Orchestra (SSO)}, which left New York in 1919 for England and is today considered one of the most important examples of the African American musical presence in Europe during the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{30} Cook’s group featured an almost ever-changing personnel that amounted to more than one hundred participants and whose repertoire encompassed a variety of African American music, including, but by no means limited to, jazz. Throughout its
history, various iterations of Cook’s group played in London, Paris, Vienna, and elsewhere, famously inspiring one of the most significant early European commentaries on jazz, the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet’s tribute to Sidney Bechet in October 1919. Though it is impossible to know with certainty, the group that was advertised in Wiesbaden in October 1921 was potentially similar to the one headed by African American composer Harry M. Wellmon that had performed in Paris in the summer of 1921 and would perform in Vienna from May through October 1922.

So while Henry Ernst was not able to connect with any jazz bands or jazz musicians, Black or white, they were present in Germany and from at least December 1919 onward in Wiesbaden. Indeed, in counterpoint to Ernst, whose relevance to German jazz history is based solely upon this article, the popular German bandleader Bernhard Etté, who recorded prolifically during the 1920s, reported that his jazz career began after he was inspired by listening to a visiting English jazz band in Wiesbaden. As the case of Etté and others indicate, rather than developing in isolation from France, the UK, and America, jazz bands and German jazz culture along the Rhine, both foreign and domestic, emerged precisely at the closest points of contact with American, British, and French soldiers. As should be clear, however, it is important to avoid overgeneralizing the situation of early German knowledge and experience of jazz based upon any individual account. Instead, the situation of jazz in Germany in 1919/1920 was at once isolated from and connected to developments elsewhere, with personal connections and one’s individual geography being the most salient factors.

Moreover, not only does Ernst’s missed lead in Wiesbaden exclude this avenue of jazz’s dispersion in Germany, it impacts the direction his “hunt” next takes him, namely towards Berlin. As he explains: “Berlin has everything, Berlin knows everything, so it will be able to clear up the mysteries of the Tschetzpend for me.” From an unnamed source in Berlin, Ernst received word that jazz is a new dance, a three step, and that they had been dancing it for months. His Berlin colleagues send him the “Dolores Jazz” by Byjacco, a pseudonym for the popular composer Fritz Jacoby. Like other early German popular songs featuring the word “jazz,” the music was labeled a “three step” and was named after a dance pair, in this case Bella Chitta and Arthur Dolores. Still, the reference is telling insofar as it can be connected to perhaps the earliest usage of the word “jazz” in the Berlin press (figure 1). Defined as “the newest fashionable dance,” their jazz dancing was a major drawing point for the duo’s April 1919 appearance at the Simplicissimus, a cabaret and dance club located on Potsdamerplatz.
Figure 1: Advertisement for jazz, “the newest fashionable dance” (1919) by Chitta and Arthur Dolores.
This definition of jazz as a new dance, rather than music, was utterly common in 1919, and the jazz dance can be found across Europe in the late 1910s and early 1920s. As Jed Rasula writes in his treatment of jazz’s place within the European and American avant-garde: “In both Europe and America jazz is often taken to mean dancing, not a kind of music. The dance audience being considerably larger than the listening audience, recordings are meant for dancing—a point made conspicuous on their labels, in which jazz releases bear a generic indicator: ‘Fox trot.’” Still, while jazz dance may have been common elsewhere, Berlin’s adoption of the dance had some unique consequences owing to the fact that, unlike in cities like Wiesbaden, let alone Paris or London, there were no corresponding jazz bands. Most significantly, the German recording industry’s concentration in this city meant that there is a disjuncture in the discographical record between jazz recorded in Germany, i.e., in Berlin, and the jazz bands present in the occupation zones. What this means concretely is that the first German recordings to feature the word “jazz” unsurprisingly refer to the dance, and not the music. While Germany is hardly alone in producing recordings that sought to capitalize on the dance craze by featuring the word “jazz” in their title, the geographical divide between the Berlin recording industry and the jazz musicians in the occupation zones impeded the recording of such groups in Germany until early 1921.

Back in St. Moritz and now outfitted with “Dolores Jazz,” Ernst began playing this latest jazz dance music from Berlin. Yet he is again confronted with “puzzled looks” from the audience, confirming for him that he has failed to find the Tschetzpend. His confusion only increases as yet another foreigner, this time a Parisian woman, requests a shimmy, also a new dance from America. Confronted with another instance of his failure and frustrated by the answers he has thus far received from Germany and especially Berlin, the next morning Ernst goes to a local Swiss bookstore, where he finds a stack of sheet music containing dance music from France and England. Leafing through them, he discovers a foxtrot with a photograph of a famous jazz band from London. He notes: “Then I finally saw what a jazz band is. Seven little men (Männeckens) dressed in sporty clothing: piano, violin, two banjos, saxophone, trumpet, and percussion instruments.” Having finally found out what Tschetzpend was, Ernst returned to Germany confident in his knowledge. Indeed, in 1921, he even advertised for his group in Der Artist as possessing “recognized success as a jazz band.” In a final twist, however, Ernst reports that once back in Germany, the audience was less than welcoming of his “real” jazz. He says they still preferred the jazz dance, and in the end, he returned to playing just as he had before his discovery of the Tschetzpend.
While Ernst’s account of jazz’s entry into Germany is generally substantiated by evidence from Der Artist, it is clearly also a well-crafted tale, hitting all the right notes of a humorous anecdote. So for as much as it tells us about the encounter with jazz in the early years of the Weimar Republic, it also speaks to the changing conception of jazz in the mid-twenties. To a certain degree, Ernst is laughing at himself, his colleagues, and the Berlin audience in this story, indulging in a bit of self-effacing humor at a moment when he could claim to understand jazz music fully. Recalling the photograph of the jazz band, he notes: “All that which is today considered by every musician to be self-evident regarding jazz, but what was at the time still unclear and mysterious, became evident to me.” So if Ernst’s individual story contains much about how musicians dealt with the introduction of jazz to Europe and Germany and Switzerland, its status as indicative of the early German experience of jazz writ large needs a degree of contextualization.

Indeed, Ernst’s report serves as a reminder of the fact that overreliance on the dissemination of jazz via recordings and the Berlin press to the exclusion of other cities and areas can have a distorting effect on what was an extremely complex process. While Berlin will no doubt remain the focal point for the study of Weimar jazz culture, one cannot lose sight of the fact that jazz in Berlin is also very much a local story. It is, however, one with great implications for the rest of Weimar Germany and one that remains fundamental to understanding how jazz culture in the Weimar Republic develops.

**Berlin Dances to Dada’s Jazz**

The jazz dance’s entry into Berlin at the latest by April 1919 was itself part of the broader dance mania that followed the war. An individual example of the European and American dance craze of the time, Berlin’s embrace of social dancing, in particular the foxtrot and jazz, was also partially unique. During the war, such dancing had been controlled by the German authorities and there had been a ban on dancing in Berlin. Even before the war, German officers had been prohibited from publically dancing in uniform or associating with people who danced the tango, one-step, or two-step. Of course, the fact that jazz and foxtrot were not just new, but American dances, lent them even more resonance. When the dance prohibition was lifted on New Year’s Eve 1918, the Berliner Tageblatt wrote the following morning: “Music plays in hundreds of locales, dance after dance: waltz, foxtrot, one-step, two-step. Legs race across the floor as if bewitched, skirts fly, hearts jump [. . . ] and new year’s greetings
resound in the exact same streets where the steps of demonstrators had just echoed.”48 If such frenzied dancing certainly had much to do with the pent up desires of four years of corporeal and psychic deprivation, foxtrot and, later, jazz dances were not only fashionable, they were foreign and racially suspect.

In his impressionistic account of the same New Year’s eve dancing, writer Karlernst Knaatz wrote in description of two foxtrot dancers that “the couple raised their feet in a negroid manner;” continuing: “How it would lose its attractiveness, this joke treated so very seriously, if it were simply called ‘Fuchstrab’ [i.e., foxtrot].”49 Like the critic in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Knaatz also linked such dancing to the revolution, noting: “The rage with which our contemporaries disjoint themselves at the first partial-peace balls [Halbfriedensbälle] ultimately originates from the same source from which the tidal wave of the revolution sprang. It is but the other end of the same current.”50

In broadly similar fashion to the situation in Britain and France, jazz enters the Berlin public sphere as a dance in 1919, though with the crucial difference that there are no jazz bands in Berlin until 1921 at the latest, whereas in Britain, France (and Wiesbaden), jazz bands emerged, in part, from direct contact with American forces.51 In addition, such dancing, be it foxtrot, jazz, or any of the other fads of the period, was initially linked to the upper echelon of Berlin society, a fashionable pastime for the city’s middle-class and wealthy youth to satisfy their need for the new. The cycle of dance fashions, foxtrot, jazz, maxixe brésilienne, fish walk, and others, meant that “jazz” as a word rarely surfaced in isolation. Instead, its fashionable origins as a social dance opened it to conservative, moralistic, as well as leftist, political attacks.

Already in January 1919, one could observe around Berlin the now well-known image of a woman dancing with Death,52 on which the caption read: “Berlin, stop! Come to your senses. Your dance partner is Death.”53 The poster combines lines from author Paul Zech’s “Berlin, halt ein” (“Berlin, stop”) with a wartime illustration, “German Tango,” by the Belgian artist Louis Raemaekers.54 Though the original image had referenced the tango, by 1919 the foxtrot and jazz now became implied targets of its message. Indeed, leftist cabaret artists like Walter Mehring connected this specific image with foxtrot and jazz dancing in works from the period. Mehring’s “Dada-Prologue 1919,” for example, contains the lines: “Berlin, your dance partner is Death—/ Foxtrot and jazz—/ The republic is amusing itself royally / Forget me not on the first of May.”55 Further examples, most notably the “foxtrot epidemic” featured in Ernst Lubitsch’s *Die Austernprinzessin (The Oyster Princess)*, demonstrate the cultural resonance of social dancing and American dancing in particular. Filmed in Berlin in May 1919, i.e., during the initial wave of the jazz dance
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craze, Lubitsch’s depiction of the foxtrot features an absurdist caricature of popular dance and the bands that accompany them. A large orchestra plays to the tune of a conductor wildly flailing about and accentuating his posterior. Equally significant here are the strange percussive instruments depicted, e.g., a saw cuts through wood, a pistol is fired, and a man is slapped in intervals indicated by musical notation, etc. The jazz dance as part of the post-war dance fad and the eccentric conductors and percussionists who provide the musical accompaniment will largely hold sway in Berlin for the first two years of the Weimar Republic. Still, it will produce at least one spectacular example of early exchange between artists in Germany and American jazz, namely the British musician and eccentric arranger Frank Groundsell’s recording of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band’s classic “Tiger Rag” in 1919 in Berlin.56

Yet if Berlin’s embrace of the “Dolores Jazz” and eccentric jazz dancing point generally towards the city’s isolation in terms of jazz music, the important modernist movement of Dada helped bridge the pre-war history of African American music and dancing with the newfound jazz dance fad. The place of popular culture and Blackness within Dada Berlin, whose activities peak in the period 1918–20, is a reminder of the longer history of modernist engagement with these essential elements of Weimar jazz reception. More than this, Dada’s interest in African American music and Blackness is itself embedded within the modernist network of Europe that had similarly embraced precursors of jazz like the cakewalk and ragtime.57 In considering Dada Berlin’s use of jazz, it is therefore important to understand how, during this initial period, their works draw as much on the newness of jazz and foxtrot dancing as on their experience of American popular music and culture from during and before the war.

The significance of African American popular music to Dadaist George Grosz’s work in the years 1917 through 1920 is hard to overestimate. More than any other artist, Grosz’s works from this period, poetic, performance, and visual, reveal a long-standing engagement with American popular culture and a particular interest in music characterized as African American. Grosz collected ragtime records, and in his letters to fellow artist Otto Schmalhausen, he references ragtime song titles and describes debauched nights spent drinking, dancing, and listening to them.58 During the dance mania of winter 1919, furthermore, he advertised for “Foxtrot and Ragtime Records” in the short-lived Dadaist periodical Jedermann sein eigner Fussball (Everyone his Own Football).59 In addition, at Dada events, he performed American step dances and jigs under the rubric “sincopations”60 and likely performed in blackface during at least one such event.61
Significantly, all of the musical works referenced by Grosz in this period date from the period between 1890 and 1914. While obviously his dependence on these works shows the more or less culturally isolated position of Grosz during the war and afterward, the history of these works’ production and their reception in Germany is also noteworthy. It was during this period that American popular music and culture entered the German and European market on a wide scale. This occurred both in the form of African American performers like Elmer Spyglass, Louis Douglas, and Arabella Fields, as well as in the form of blackface minstrel iconography and American racial stereotypes. Further complicating the field was the introduction of ragtime. While piano ragtime music from African American composers like Scott Joplin enjoyed some popularity in Germany, a greater influence was exercised on the German listening public (Grosz included) by related, though distinct, musical forms like the ragtime song and so-called “coon songs.” As Fred Ritzel notes, during Wilhelmine Germany, popular music about, influenced, or performed by African Americans became a staple of the German music publishing industry’s repertoire. It is thus no accident that Grosz returns, again and again, to songs of this era during the war or that he portrays the same Black performers in three separate drawings between 1915 and 1920. Both through Dada Berlin’s resurrection of the prewar encounter with Blackness and American popular music and culture, as well as the foxtrot and jazz dance mania of 1919, Berlin, its artists and dancing public, were thus well prepared for the initial wave of jazz bands that arrive in early 1921.

Berlin Occupied

If jazz bands nonetheless remained largely outside of Berlin in 1919 and 1920, the debate over the occupation did not. In April 1920, the scandal over the use of French African colonial troops along the Rhine, catalyzed by an altercation in Frankfurt, reached its boiling point. France was not only the largest occupying force in the region, it also made the greatest use of colonial, non-white troops. Out of 85,000 troops, in the summers of 1920 and 1921, there were between 30,000 and 40,000 African troops, primarily from Morocco, though troops from West Africa (Senegal) and Madagascar were also present at various times and in significant numbers. As Christian Koller has shown, the propaganda campaign against the so-called “Schwarze Schmach am Rhein” (“Black Shame” or “Black Horror on the Rhine”) was carried out by official government channels as well as unofficial groups like the Rheinische Frauen-
liga (Rhenish League of Women). Apart from claims of “inverse colonialism,” the stationing of black troops within German borders brought with it a threat of large-scale encounter between Africans and Germans. In particular, the propagandistic claim that Black troops were raping German women became a major rallying cry for opposition to the occupation. While much has been written on the campaign, even in relation to its use within German jazz discourse, it is important to think through how discussion of the Black presence in the occupation zone functioned in the context of Berlin’s modernist interest in Blackness and American popular culture.

Significantly, it is also in 1920 that Black performers, initially unrelated to jazz bands, once again appear in significant numbers in the Berlin entertainment district. Apart from isolated Black performers in cabarets who used pseudonyms like the dancer Tom Black in May 1920, a large group of Black performers and stars were featured in the October 1920 production Haremsnächte (Harem Nights) at director James Klein’s Apollo-Theater. The cast included twenty Cameroonian performers and thirty Bayadere dancers. Most significantly, two of the lead roles were occupied by Black performers: Myriam Barka, a “Sudanese actress,” and Louis Brody, the “Negro film star.” Barka, about whom little is known, apparently spoke fluent German and had been active as a performer in Berlin as early as September 1919, while Brody, born (Ludwig) M’bebe Mpessa in Duala, Cameroon, was amongst the first Black German artists to be recognized during the period for his work in films such as Joe May’s Die Herrin der Welt (The Mistress of the World) (1919–20), Robert Wiene’s Genuine (1920), and Fritz Lang’s Der müde Tod (Destiny) (1921). Harem Nights ran during October and November 1920 and was by all accounts a success, if clearly a provocative one. Though details regarding the plot are few, it was described in an official police report as involving “a [. . .] sultan kidnap[ping] the favorite wife of a Negro chieftain. As revenge, the Negro’s tribe attacks the sultan’s harem and kidnaps its inmates.” According to historian Jared Poley, in spite of the regular press reports on the occupation, Harem Nights was generally well-received by the Berlin audience, which is said to have been composed primarily of members of the lower middle-class, in addition to foreign visitors. British officer J. H. Morgan, then part of the Inter-Allied Military Commission of Control in Germany, later noted: “By a curious irony, at the very time that all Berlin was flocking to ‘Harem Nights’ the whole German Press was launching the vast campaign of propaganda . . . against the ‘infamy’ of ‘black troops on the Rhine.’” Though unlike later performances featuring Black men on stage with naked women, Harem Nights did not result
in police intervention;\textsuperscript{29} it did provoke critique from the \textit{Rhenish League of Women}, one of the main groups associated with the “Black Horror” campaign.\textsuperscript{80} Indeed, almost two years later, nationalist DNVP representative Reinhard Mumm criticized the piece for featuring “partially-clothed women kow-towing before their black master every evening for weeks on end,” continuing: “How can we in the Reichstag act effectively against the Black Horror, when such a shameful act is not forcefully prohibited in the capital?”\textsuperscript{81} The timing of Mumm’s speech was anything but coincidental; it was delivered during the same month as the Lola-Bach Ballet was performing its own, apparently unrelated \textit{Haremsnächte}, featuring the Liberian artist Peter Johnson.\textsuperscript{82}

More typical than Klein’s \textit{Harem Nights} in terms of the use of Blackness and American popular music was the newly resurrected \textit{Schall und Rauch} (\textit{Sound and Smoke}). Originally created by Max Reinhardt in 1901, this famous cabaret reopened in 1919 and featured performers like Paul Graetz and Gussy Holl, in addition to key modernist writers like Walter Mehring and Klabund (Alfred Henschke), as well as, of course, composers such as Friedrich Hollaender and Mischa Spoliansky.\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Sound and Smoke} took part in both the foxtrot and jazz dance craze during this period and was closely aligned with Dada artists, including George Grosz.\textsuperscript{84} In terms of jazz, \textit{Sound and Smoke} is important not only of early German jazz criticism but also as a site of jazz performance. In spring 1921, for example, at least two separate jazz bands are featured there.\textsuperscript{85} The cabaret also included the participation of two of the authors discussed below in relation to early writings on jazz music, Kurt Tucholsky and Jaap Kool.\textsuperscript{86} Already during the 1920 season, one finds Klabund’s “Rag 1920,” yet another variation of the motif from “Berlin, Your Dance Partner is Death,”\textsuperscript{87} while the May 1920 “Dada-Issue” presents three images of the foxtrot-inspired “Dada-Trot” by “Music Dada” Gerhard Preiss.\textsuperscript{88}

The impact of the new configuration of race, music, and politics following the “Black Horror” debate can be felt here as well. Two important, early compositions by Friedrich Hollaender reflect the changing circumstances of Blackness and American popular music. The first is his “Fox macabre (Totentanz)” (Dance of Death). Though like Klabund’s “Rag 1920” and Mehring’s “Dada-Prologue 1919,” the primary frame of reference remains the foxtrot and jazz dance with death, Hollaender’s lyrics may also be read as offering commentary on the occupation debate. “Berlin, you’re dancing with Death! Berlin, you’re reveling in filth! Stop, relent, and think about it a moment! You can’t dance away your disgrace (Schmach), for you’re dancing and jazzing and foxing on the powder keg.”\textsuperscript{89} In including the word \textit{Schmach} in this piece published in December 1920, Hollaender adds a further layer to the idea of decadent jazz
dancing as escapism not only from politics but from the continuation of the occupation of Germany.\textsuperscript{90} Issued alongside the “fox macabre” was Hollaender’s “Jonny (fox erotic).”\textsuperscript{91} Though the word “jazz” is absent from Hollaender’s 1920 song, its status as a foxtrot places it clearly within the context of jazz’s development in Berlin as dance and then in 1921 as jazz band music.\textsuperscript{92} Originally performed by Blandine Ebinger at the Café Größenwahn, Hollaender’s Jonny, as cabaret scholar Alan Lareau has discussed, was issued in two versions, one in which Jonny is a white American and one in which he is a Black African.\textsuperscript{93} In both, however, Jonny is a foreign violinist at a local bar, where he attracts the attention of a German girl and impregnates her, only to leave shortly thereafter. Read in tandem, the “fox erotic” and “fox macabre,” the American with the African Jonny, suggest an important moment of confluence between jazz and foxtrot dancing, the debate over race, and the presence of Black artists inside and outside the capital city Berlin.

At the same time, as Lareau has also shown, Hollaender is neither the first, nor the last Central European composer to deploy the figure of Jonny or to produce a song revolving around a Black man and white woman.\textsuperscript{94} One further example of how cultural production involving American popular music changed through the debate surrounding the “Black Horror” is Walter Mehring’s “If the man in the moon were a coon.”\textsuperscript{95} Mehring, part of the Dada circle around the Sound and Smoke, authored a variety of politically inspired cabaret songs at the beginning of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{96} Here, one sees not only the continuation of pre-war traditions in this work’s citation of the 1905 Fred Fischer song of the same name but a melding of pre-jazz vocabulary and the “Black Horror” debate. This element is most clearly present in the song’s refrain, which asks listeners to imagine what would happen if this Black man in the moon: “Gave all white \textit{ladies} / Black babies / Black boys.”\textsuperscript{97} Postulating the reality of the very worst fears of the scandalized members of the German public, Mehring ironizes, rather than soothes, their anxieties. He achieves this effect, however, not by directly commenting on the “Black Horror” campaign but by borrowing from foreign, here American traditions, with the distance between Germany and America functioning as a buffer for his critique.

Jazz music’s relationship to Blackness will be considered in detail below, but it is important to note how Berlin artists and the Berlin public in 1920 were already engaging with these crucial elements of the Weimar jazz discourse prior to the large-scale introduction of jazz bands in the winter of 1921. Dances like the foxtrot and jazz, modernist movements like Dada, and theatrical spaces like Sound and Smoke, as well as, of course, the presence of Black performers
on stage and screen meant that the city was never far removed from the jazz band’s music that soon enough reached Berlin as well.

**Enter the Jazz Band**

Though the first documented occurrences of the word “jazz” in the Berlin press occur in 1919 and then only in reference to this three-step dance, it was only in the first half of 1921 that one finds a large number of musical groups calling themselves “jazz bands” in the city. If scattered use of the word “jazz” had been made in 1919/1920, early 1921 brought wide-scale use of a new term, the “jazz band,” to the press. This term could refer either to a new form of music, closely associated with the latest dance, the shimmy, or simply the trap drum. In this, German usage of the term closely matches that of the French, English, and indeed Australian. What distinguishes this moment from the earlier one is that jazz’s presence in Berlin did not dissipate as it had in 1919—it intensified. Not coincidentally, this was also the moment at which jazz bands and musicians from the occupied zones came to the capital in significant numbers.

Beginning in January, but peaking in March and April of that year, jazz and jazz bands seemed to be everywhere in Berlin. There was the Cosmo Jazz Band, Jimmi Jazz Band, Kapelle (or Ballorchester) Boesing mit Original Jazz Band, High Life Jazz-Band, Jazz-Band Max de Groot, and others. If some of these examples refer to the presence of a trap drum alone, there are nonetheless at least two highly significant jazz bands and German jazz pioneers playing in Berlin. The first of all these, appearing in January 1921 at the recently opened Scala-Casino, was the four-man formation of the Original Piccadilly Four Jazz Band. While a photograph of this early jazz band exists (figure 2), little certain is known about this group or its history.

It is, however, now clear that the group was not from Berlin, as had been long assumed, but in all likelihood from London. It can also be stated that the group did not come directly to Berlin, but rather reached Berlin via Wiesbaden, where it had performed at the Apollo starting in October 1920. After Berlin, the group likely played the north-German resort town Binz auf Rügen and, after a return stint in Berlin in the fall of 1921, traveled to Switzerland, performing in Geneva and Zurich in 1922, and, potentially, Lausanne in 1923. After this date, however, it has not been possible to trace these “famous syncopated Entertainers of London” as they were advertised in Zurich. Of course, had they not performed in Berlin, with its proximity to the German recording
industry, they might have been entirely forgotten. Yet as it was, this group released more than twenty recordings from Berlin in the first half of 1921 on the labels Parlophon, Beka, and Anker. These recordings remain early highlights of early jazz recorded in Germany. The instrumentation features banjo, drums, violin, and piano, which, with slight variations, was typical of the jazz bands active in Germany (and elsewhere) in this period, such as the previously mentioned Marcel’s Jazz Band.

In addition to the Original Piccadilly Four, another important jazz band, the Original American Jazz Band was present at the Scala-Casino from February 1921 onward. This band was quite probably formed by German jazz pioneer Eric(h) Borchard(t). Born in 1886 in Berlin, little is known about Borchard’s life before the First World War, though he likely spent some time in the United States before 1914. While Borchard has long stood out as an early German jazz pioneer and it was assumed he spent at least some time in the

Figure 2: The Original Piccadilly Four Jazz Band at the Berlin Scala in early 1921. From F. W. Koebner, Jazz und Shimmy (Berlin: Eysler, 1921).
United States, it now appears that between 1914 and 1918 he lived not in Germany, but in America, specifically New York, where he was active as a vaudeville artist. The duration and timing of his stay in the United States are important because, like Barthelme’s wartime experiences that resulted in the first German jazz essay, Borchard’s stay took place during the beginnings of the New York jazz scene, for example, the arrival of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. While details of Borchard’s exact path from New York in late 1918 to Berlin in early 1921 remain unknown, this information lends credence to Borchard’s later claims to the press that he had played jazz in German cities around the Rhine following the war. None of this work, like that of the Original Piccadilly Four, was recorded until his move to Berlin, when in May of 1921 and under the name Eric Concerto’s Yankee Jazz Band, Borchard and his band recorded major American hits from 1920, such as “Whispering,” “Japanese Sandman,” “Everybody Shimmies Now,” “After You Get What You Want, You Don’t Want It,” and “Swanee.” In other words, in the cases of the Original Piccadilly Four Jazz Band and Erich Borchard’s jazz band, we have clear examples of Weimar jazz culture developing via direct and prolonged contact with foreign musicians and environments, rather than a simple dressing up of German music in the new foreign vocabulary of “jazz” as Ernst’s “hunt” may make it appear.

The Original Piccadilly Four and Borchard’s band are white jazz formations, yet, from other sources, we know that members of the Black diaspora were also involved in the move of the jazz band from the Rhine to Berlin. This fact is substantiated by the presence of yet another early jazz pioneer in Berlin in July 1921, Evandale Roberts. Potentially the first example of a jazz musician of African descent to perform in Berlin, Roberts, who at times went by the name as the “Original Jazz-King,” came to the Scala-Casino in the summer of 1921 via Wiesbaden. Another example is Phillips Original amerikanische Neger Jazz Band, which performed in Cologne in September 1921, before appearing in Berlin in November at the Scala-Casino, yet again repeating the path from the Rhine to Berlin. A third example from this period, one discussed further in the next chapter, is Pete Zabriskie’s jazz band, which performed in Berlin in 1922. As is clear, by 1921 at the latest, multiple artists of African descent were active in the Berlin jazz, music, and entertainment industry. Though like many of these early jazz bands, one can debate whether the music they played was likely to have been jazz in the narrow sense of the jazz tradition, it is important that they and their groups were marketed and indeed marketed themselves via the terminology of jazz and the jazz band.
The Jazz Band Drums

In response to the numerous jazz bands, German writing on jazz increased exponentially as different authors with varying degrees of interest and knowledge of popular music produced newspaper and journal articles, illustrations, and caricatures about the jazz band. Aside from further jazz-inspired works for the cabaret by Walter Mehring and Hans Erich Winckler for example, the presence of jazz bands in Berlin can be tied to an extremely early German-language book: Jazz und Shimmy. Brevier der neuesten Tänze (Jazz and Shimmy: Brevier of the Newest Dances). To a large extent, this unique work is but a collection of early German-language texts and images related to the jazz dance, rather than the music. Jazz and Shimmy was edited by Franz Wolfgang Koebner, author of a series of dance manuals (to which Jazz and Shimmy clearly belongs) and fictional works, as well as cofounder and editor of the important journals Die elegante Welt and Das Magazin. Beyond its noteworthy title, Jazz and Shimmy contains selections by modernist writers like Hans Siemsen and Kurt Tucholsky, drawings and texts by the artist and designer Robert L. Leonard, and an essay on dance music by the Dutch ethnomusicologist Jaap Kool. At the same time, it is important to recall that Jazz und Shimmy remains a work interested in jazz almost solely from the perspective of modern social dancing. The fact that “jazz” shares the title with the shimmy, the latest of the American dance trends to hit Germany, is an obvious indication of this focus.

In the following analysis of the Berlin and German reception of the “jazz band” in early 1921, attention will be paid both to selections from Koebner’s collection, as well as works that fall outside of it, yet are clearly part of the Berlin discussion. While the following selection is by no means exhaustive, it offers a cross-section of responses from Weimar mass media; the music trade press; modernist journals; voices of liberal, socialist, and conservative writers; and German-speaking modernist authors. As a whole, these documents suggest the emergence, through competing claims, of a set of ideas about the jazz band’s origins, practices, and place within contemporary society. For example, on March 11, 1921, the Berliner Tageblatt publishes an initial report on the jazz band and shimmy as the latest “Berlin hype,” only to be corrected and expanded upon two days later. Written by the Berlin music publisher, Curt Max Roehr, the correction later appears in Der Artist as well as in Koebner’s Jazz and Shimmy, yet Roehr’s name is included only in the publication in Der Artist. Further, in at least one early report, Americans present in Berlin are used to critique the inauthen-
ticity of the Berlin vision of jazz.\textsuperscript{124} As this brief excursion suggests, unless early German jazz criticism is considered from such a multi-perspectival approach, its interconnectedness, as well as the different audiences it reached, can all too easily become lost in the focus on any one publication such as \textit{Jazz and Shimmy}.

Aside from the fact that the jazz band was new to these writers, a remarkable trait of almost all of these documents is that names of specific jazz bands, let alone individual musicians, are rarely if ever mentioned, making it all but impossible to align individual accounts with specific groups like the Original Piccadilly Four. Rather, individual names generally remain a distinction reserved for the music’s composers. Even in exceptional cases, such as art critic Herwarth Walden’s reference to recordings by the Original Piccadilly Four, the author does not praise the group’s performers but instead remarks: “The composer doesn’t even have a name, but he can certainly compose. An unknown master.”\textsuperscript{125} In another variation on this theme, Hans Siemsen proclaims of one jazz drummer: “The fat man—a musical genius!”\textsuperscript{126}

Like Siemsen, who uses a descriptive adjective in line with the image of the American “doughboy,”\textsuperscript{127} most writers functionalize individual members of the jazz band, distinguishing between, without, however, naming the musicians or their groups. It is only later, from around 1924 onward, that reference to the names of individual jazz bands becomes standard, rather than exceptional within German jazz reception. While authors vary in terms of their descriptions of instrumentalists, the most space in these accounts is devoted to the percussionist, or trap drummer, as “the most important person of the jazz band” (figure 3).\textsuperscript{128}

Descriptions of the jazz band tend to begin by noting the presence of the piano, violin, and banjo, as well as further instruments like the saxophone, clarinet, bassoon, guitar, trumpet, and harmonica. When writers reach the trap drum and the percussion instruments, however, they often produce a dizzying list of exotic and everyday objects. “Four nice fellows sit and make the noise of a regiment,” begins Robert L. Leonard, continuing:

A banjo rattles and causes your bones to shake, a violinist fiddles syncopés, a pianist races across the keys, a fourth man . . . sure, what does he do? What is he? What is he playing?

A fourth man has constructed an instrument for himself, no, not an instrument, an orchestration of instruments that strike, clap, hammer, torture. He plays everything at once: the small xylophone box, the tambourine, the cymbal, the drum . . . temtemtemtem, tem—tem—tem.\textsuperscript{129}
Figure 3: A Jazz Drummer in Berlin in early 1921. From F. W. Koebner, *Jazz und Shimmy* (Berlin: Eysler, 1921).
Other writers use similar imagery to describe the trap drum of the jazz band as consisting of “an eight-headed instrument,” “a number of extremely interesting objects,” “a number of nameless, extremely fantastical instruments, that don’t exactly make music, but a form of musical noise (Geräusch),” or, finally, as a “mystical instrument.”

Of course, not all commentators respond in this manner. Those more accustomed to describing musical instruments and popular dance orchestras like aforementioned Jaap Kool, Poldi Schmidl, or Richard Effner are less ecstatic in their descriptions. Effner, a Berlin manufacturer of music instruments, seeks to correct readers of Der Artist about jazz and its most characteristic instruments: the trap drum and the banjo. On the one hand, he notes that “jazz band” is often incorrectly taken to be synonymous with the trap drum; on the other hand, he insists that “‘jazz’ is, as we know, a dance.” Arguably more successful interventions are those by Poldi Schmidl, Berlin music critic for Der Artist, and Jaap Kool, an ethnomusicologist. Though by no means supportive of the jazz band, in his first discussion of jazz from February 1921, Schmidl points not at the centrality of any particular instrument, but at the unique timbre of the jazz band, its rhythm, and, most notably, its use of syncopation. Kool, by contrast, focuses on historical precedents of the jazz band and the technology of the trap drum specifically. He claims that it was around 1900, with John Phillip Sousa and the introduction of ragtime to Europe, that instrument makers began developing a “mechanical apparatus (Maschinerie)” that would enable control of the drum and cymbal through the feet so that the hands would be free to use other instruments. Kool’s argument here lines up with that of American expatriate composer George Antheil and his 1922 call for composers to take up the drum: “Let our youngest composers buy a drum or two and limit themselves to one or two lines of rhythm for a year. Let them work with a pencil and learn dynamic draughtsmanship. Let them experiment with space and create new musical dimensions.” As becomes clear in these early treatments and descriptions of the jazz band, it was the trap drum that carried much of the interpretive weight for these writers. It is also, as I want to suggest in this chapter’s concluding section, in such depictions of the jazz band’s drum that one most clearly finds the intersection of music, race, and American culture.

**Blackness and the Machine, or Jazz Band Modernism**

If Cornelius Partsch and others are certainly correct to point towards the strong correlation between Expressionism and jazz, in addition to its equally strong
correlation with Dadaism, within early accounts, the jazz band is also related to Futurism and Cubism, with reference to Picasso, Joyce, Klee, Schoenberg, and even Einstein’s theory of relativity. So while critics like Herwarth Walden and Hermann Wedderkop may intellectually spar over whether the shimmy and jazz band belong to Expressionism or an as yet unnamed post-Expressionism, there was no overarching consensus regarding the jazz band’s specific brand of modernism, other than that it was obviously, fundamentally modern. The three elements of the jazz bands’ modernism and modernity that attract the most attention are: the jazz band’s connection to machines and mechanization, the music’s ability to destroy individual free will, and the music’s relation to Blackness.

The effect of the rhythm of the jazz band, of the trap drum and its arsenal of percussion, was interpreted along a variety of axes, commonly invoking the mechanization of war, capitalism, and industrial production. Alice Gerstel writes, for example, that the jazz band has the “rat-a-tat (Geratter) of the cannons they have been firing at the ‘enemy’ for five long years.” Kurt Tucholsky links jazz and shimmy to the dance around the golden calf and contends further that “the jazz band is the continuation of business by other means.” He continues that its music “clacks to the beat like the typewriters, which the audience left two hours ago,” while its rhythm “jerks and its counter-rhythm works against it, firmly and intricately, as a softly tapping motor.” For dance critic Heinz Pollack, meanwhile, the rhythm of jazz doesn’t sound like it is coming from “four humans, but [from] an electrically-driven band.” The jazz band can also serve as but a symptom for the broader mechanization of humanity. “Humans have become mechanical,” writes Hermann Wedderkop, “firmly ruled by a rigidly rhythmic, onward-rushing present that calls itself jazz band.” Indeed, for some writers, it was the mechanization of labor that stood behind much of jazz’s popularity. Of the men dancing to the jazz band, Gerstel writes: “Nothing can dissuade them from the secret of which they are certain: how dreadful is the wretchedness of this time, how there remains nothing for them to do but dance and the market runs itself and [Karel] Čapek’s robots make the sewing needles and roll their cigarettes into ready-mades.”

The materialism and mechanization authors viewed in the jazz band, its audience, and the age for which it stood, could seem overpowering. In a manner similar to the reaction of critics to the jazz of African American bandleader Sam Wooding discussed in chapter 2, writers report being overwhelmed at the experience of the jazz band. Be it hypnosis, the madness of an insane asylum, or the ecstasy of intoxication, the jazz band overtakes their rational,
mental faculties. Dancers, for example, are said to be “under the spell of these rhythms, these colors and sounds.”

Wedderkop would note that under the influence of the jazz band: “Intellect no longer controls the leg, rather the leg at best controls the intellect, were this not so completely suspended (ausgeschlossen) that it no longer sees the consequences for itself.”

Berlin theater critic Oscar Bie wrote of his experience of another jazz band: “The drummer drummed beyond all measure. It had been paid for. Everything had been paid for. The jazz band, the champagne, the ornaments, and my intellectual faculties (Geistigkeit).”

One notices this sense of shock in visual representations as well. Visual artist Otto Schmalhausen, previously encountered as correspondent of George Grosz, provided an image to accompany a 1924 essay by Jaap Kool in the journal Uhu. Schmalhausen’s “Jazz Band Music: What I Felt the First Time I Heard It” (1924) can be read as a visual representation of the chaos of the experience of the jazz band, melding technology, alcoholic excess, and dancing with distortions and screams to visually represent the psychological state of confusion so common to all these representations of the first experience of jazz.

In its depiction of three caricatured Black dancers, Schmalhausen’s image also brings to the fore another important element of numerous early jazz discussions, namely race and the function of Blackness within these accounts. Though authors disagreed as to whether jazz in its present form was a Black or white music, they were all but unanimous in attributing a Black, at times African, origin to the music.

In this way, German commentators partook in a reading of jazz similar to what Jeremy F. Lane has called the trope of the “techno-primitive hybrid,” something he finds within a wide array of French modernist thought, in particular in relation to jazz. While certainly not originating with jazz, this fusion of Blackness and the machine was present at the beginning of white American jazz criticism. This occurs most notably in American critic Walter Kingsley’s reference to jazz as “an attempt to reproduce the marvelous syncopation of the African jungle” and as an “opera of ultra-modernity” in his article “Whence Comes Jass” from 1917.

Long before the “red count” Harry Kessler would connect “ultramodern” and “ultraprimitive” with jazz after seeing Josephine Baker in Berlin, writers in the United States and Europe were already at work linking jazz with Africa, primitive Blackness and urban, industrial capitalism. Not least of them was Austrian novelist Joseph Roth, then working as a journalist for the Berliner Börsen-Courier. In a May 1921 article, he wrote in reaction to this idea: “A funny punch line (Pointe) of cultural history is that the machine becomes negroid.”

While Roth’s and oth-
The deployment of this idea partake in a broader European and American discourse, unique to the German case is its presence in light of the debate over the occupation on the Rhine.

The Black presence within Germany’s borders, on the Rhine and in Berlin, complicated the embrace of jazz and its Blackness by early writers. For example, though claiming a Black origin to the jazz band, Kurt Tucholsky still sought to differentiate between jazz’s Blackness and that of the occupation. He writes:

[Enrico] Caruso is old and fat and meanwhile that which the Nigger sang has gone into the people’s blood. (It is very difficult to speak the word Negro in Germany, without one being cut off with the cry “Black Horror.” But the black horror, as far as it exists, appears to me to be much more a French one, and Abyssinian rapists do not repudiate [desavouieren] the rhythm of Nigger songs.). / The new troubadour is not a Nigger anyway.\[161\]

This distinction between jazz’s white present and its Black past was one whose “nuance” was often ignored by those who opposed the music and its modernism. Indeed, given the centrality of the trap drum to early modernist readings, the issue of the jazz band’s Blackness was one not easily pushed aside.\[162\] It is a point that was caricatured within the pages of the *Berliner Volkszeitung* already in April 1921. In a drawing entitled “The Jimmy” (here meaning shimmy), artist Theodor Leisser depicts a bustling Berlin dance hall with a four-man white jazz band on the left-hand side. In the foreground of this image, however, two caricatured French African soldiers comment: “The Germans are really a curious bunch (wunderliche Leute). In the occupied territories they get excited about the ‘black horror,’ but in their ballrooms they dance to our nigger dances with passion and devotion."\[163\]

Yet if readings like this from early 1921 still assume jazz’s black origins and white present, texts from a bit later, in particular from 1922 onward, hint at the shifting ground of jazz performance in relation to race. For from the summer of 1921 onward, members of the Black diaspora, like Evandale Roberts, Joseph (Joe) Sewonu, and others, were becoming more visible and audible within the Berlin jazz scene. In September 1921, the Berlin correspondent for the Austrian *Neues Wiener Journal*, Albert Held, wrote that, in Berlin, Black performers and jazz bands were all over, noting: “the audience only loves the variety theater stars and the Negroes with their terrible music.”\[164\] In his comments from January 1922, Poldi Schmidl discusses the increasing preference of Berlin entertainment establishments for Black performers over their white
counterparts. For him, the “many music-making Negroes in Berlin” are not musicians but film actors and dancers masquerading as such because they could not find any roles. In part echoing earlier comments regarding the success of *Harem Nights* despite the “Black Horror” debate, his problem, he insists, is not with the Black musicians but with the public “that runs to the Negroes.” Schmidl’s thoughts on Black musicians and the “Black Horror”
debate thus act both as a sign of the resistance to jazz’s Black origins as well as an indication of the very real existence of Black jazz musicians in Germany in 1921 and 1922.167

The jazz band, the trap drum, and the Black presence in Germany find a synthesis of sorts in Otto Dix’s *An die Schönheit (To Beauty)*, from 1922 (figure 4). Like other modernist writers and artists analyzed here, Dix was an early adopter of jazz, both dance and music.168 Tellingly, Dix’s representation of the trap drum in this painting features a large image of a Native American figure in headdress, as well as the words “Tom Boston,” an oblique reference to this pseudonym of another Black jazz performer of the period. As with other jazz musicians from these early years, little definitive is known about Tom Boston, a musician and dancer who also went by the names Tom(m)i and Tommy Boston and appeared in Wiesbaden (1920), Frankfurt (1921), Chemnitz (1924), and Erfurt (1928).169 Like the other jazz artists of the Black diaspora and otherwise, Tom Boston’s path seems to have taken him from the occupied zones to the east and Dresden, where Dix and fellow visual artist Friedrich Karl Gotsch encountered him as a drummer in a jazz band in 1922.170 As one moves away from the Berlin explosion in early 1921, there is less and less a concentration of voices from this city, indicating that the jazz band expanded its impact to other metropolitan areas in Germany like Dresden or the unidentified jazz band that appeared in Danzig around this time (figure 5), not to mention other Central European metropoles like Prague, Vienna, and Budapest.171

While Dix’s painting is in some ways typical of the space of the encounter with the jazz band in the postwar period, the work also figures its meaning through a contrast between the self-portrait of the artist and the Black drummer. They share identical suits, torso positions, and each engages the viewer with an askew glance. Furthermore, from Dix’s sketchbooks, which contain various versions of the Black musician and numerous sketches of his instrument, the highly caricatured presentation of the Black drummer was one Dix came to only gradually.172 Though the physical and visual proximity between the artist’s self-representation and the drummer produce a connection between the two figures, Dix’s use of contrasting technologies in the work also act to create distance between the two. Whereas the Black drummer relies on his physicality to communicate via the drum, Dix’s persona deploys modern technology to overcome any corporeal limitations. For one, the drummer is the only figure in the work whose mouth is not closed, with his wide grin acting to suggest an oral, rather than technological, mode of communication. Dix, by contrast, presents his white German persona as not only capable of reaching beyond these limitations but via the telephone in his hand of both sending and
receiving information. One might say that Dix uses the telephone within this work to affect an image of himself as the passionless transmitter of information via direct, immediate, and modern technology. While one must be careful not to draw too many conclusions based upon Dix’s work in isolation, it is also evident from Tucholsky’s and Schmidl’s remarks that the Black presence in the German jazz scene impacted the framework for representing jazz in this period, even as the use of the trap drum and technology remained equally significant points of interest.

If initial reactions to the jazz band had generally emphasized the music’s Black origins and its white present, Black jazz musicians, whether by choice or by circumstance, complicated this developmental narrative. Indeed, questions surrounding jazz’s Blackness as a thing of the past, present, or future, continue throughout the period, with various responses given at different times. Here, as elsewhere, the turn towards jazz between 1919 and 1923 proceeded in fits and starts as jazz expanded across the cultural and physical landscape of Germany. From the embrace of American dancing following the war through the incubation of the jazz band in the occupation zones, by 1922, jazz and jazz

bands had become part of Weimar modernists’ vocabulary, works, and personal experience. As the debate over the “Black Horror” and a short while later the jazz band travelled east to Berlin, Dresden, Danzig, and beyond, commentators constructed a chaotic vision of the contemporary moment and its disruption, or rather representation, in the jazz band’s drum. Finally, reacting to greater numbers of Black performers in Germany, critical reactions to jazz in visual and textual form offered competing interpretations of the music and its meaning, in particular in relation to race.

Still, in 1923, the jazz band momentarily seemed to retreat into the background. Both for musicians and the public, confronting the economic misery and political violence of the early republic outweighed discussion of jazz and, of course, lowered the rates for foreign musicians. In point of fact, as Konrad Nowakowski has documented, the premiere German jazz musicians of the period, like Fred Ross and Eric Borchard, fled the German capital and headed to Vienna, further weakening the resonance of jazz in the capital, while the Original Piccadilly Four had already left for Switzerland in 1922. Yet, after the stabilization of German currency in 1924, Weimar Germans and their jazz musicians continued their consideration of the role of jazz in their republic. This time, however, Black musicians and African Americans in particular moved from the periphery to the center of Weimar Germany’s experience of jazz. This change is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the case of Sam Wooding and his jazz band from Harlem.