

Notes from the Director



“Everybody had a time, everbody had a real good time.” These lyrics by Louis Jordan are what this evening is all about.

Tonight we are going to celebrate the music of a man who holds a unique place in music history. Coming between the big band era and the rise of rock and roll, Mr. Jordan’s work is valued more and more as time passes. As Zoo.com says, “What sets the man apart is what he combined—part comedian, part band-leader and a great song writer, he never allowed the novelty of his approach to obscure either his own musicianship (he was a great saxophonist) or that of his sidemen.”

Southernmusic.com calls him “the father of rhythm and blues.” His first million-seller was “Is You Is Or Is You Ain’t My Baby,” in 1944. His second million-seller was “Caldonia,” and then in 1946, “Choo Choo Ch’Boogie” was the biggest seller of all. In all these he pursued a basic rhythm of “shuffle” boogie, later taken over by rock and roll. As he said, he “made the blues jump” and in so doing influenced B.B. King, Chuck Berry and Bill Haley. His ballads also influenced the artists Ray Charles and Etta James.

As a director, one of the most enjoyable things about this show are the “story” songs. To me, the crowning number is “Saturday Night Fish Fry.” It combines a huge narrative with lots of humor. This is known to be one of the true, early rock and roll songs. But the lyrics also show a beginning of the rhythm and rap style that prevails in music today.

So sit back and enjoy the unbelievable talent you’ll see on this stage. We’re all very fortunate to have this particular group of actors and musicians. Enjoy.

—*Pamela Hunt, Director*



Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five

Jazzmen play mostly for themselves.

I want to play for the people.

— Louis Jordan

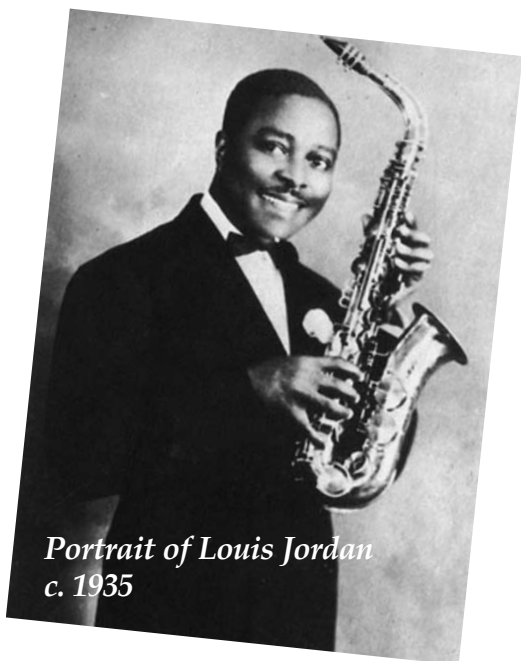
**Jordan worked
with many
musicians
including**

Louis Armstrong
Ella Fitzgerald
Chick Webb
Bing Crosby
Sarah Vaughn
Hot Lips Page
Charlie Gaines
T-Bone Walker
Leroy Smith
Fats Waller
Kaiser Marshall
Dinah Shore
Quincy Jones

Five Guys Named Moe keeps the good times rolling with hits that kept Louis Jordan #1 on the R&B charts for 113 weeks between 1942-1950, and does it all with an entertaining, Jordan-like flair. Jordan was a highly accomplished singer, alto and soprano saxophonist and clarinetist, but above all he was a performer—“one of the great performers” according to Nat King Cole. Playing sets that could last as long as four hours with only a 20-minute intermission, Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five (often seven or eight musicians) kept their shows hopping with his highly danceable shuffle boogie rhythms. Critics noted that Jordan could “use the audience like an instrument” with his playful banter and comedic “Deacon Jones” and “Old Moses” minstrel show routines, which were drawn from his early days with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. Trumpeter Aaron Izenhall claimed Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five “came over like a scene from a movie,” with their dapper suits and energetic performances accompanied by dancers known as the Jordanettes. Their performances crossed into films as well. Besides cameo appearances in *Follow the Boys* and *Meet Miss Bobby Sox*, Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five starred in their own short and feature-length films *Caldonia*; *Look out Sister*; *Beware*; and *Reet*,

Petite and Gone. However, it was jukeboxes (Jordan was known as the “King of Jukeboxes”) and soundies—pre-music videos that cost 10 cents to watch—that captured the imaginations of the likes of B.B. King and Sammy Davis Jr., who dropped “nickel after nickel” to enjoy Jordan’s “messages in song and monologue.”

Neither *Five Guys Named Moe* nor the winning ease of his work hint at how relentlessly Jordan worked to get from his small home town of Brinkley, Arkansas, to the Savoy and Apollo theatres in New York City. From his father—who played for traveling minstrel shows and led the local brass band—Jordan learned how to play multiple instruments, and spent hours practicing in the backyard where his grandmother could not hear him. Beginning his professional career at age 15, Jordan played everything from the Charleston to waltzes to jazz, and traveled from one gig to another, always looking for the next great opportunity. “His life was his music, and finding new material,” pianist and arranger Wild Bill Davis noted. “He was always listening, wherever he was, for the next idea for a new recording.” As Izenhall remembered, Jordan spent “hours sitting backstage in his robe, and when any idea came to him, he’d pick up his sax and call for [Wild] Bill Davis. So many of Louis’s hits were born



*Portrait of Louis Jordan
c. 1935*

July 8, 1908

Louis Jordan is born in Brinkley, Arkansas.

1932 *Jordan joins Clarence Williams and His Washboard Band in Philadelphia. He later records “I Can’t Dance, I Got Ants in My Pants” with Williams.*

1936 *Jordan joins Chick Webb and His Orchestra, playing with Ella Fitzgerald.*

1938 *Jordan starts the Elks Rendezvous Band, named for the club they played in. He soon changes it to Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five in reference to the tympani drum his percussionist plays.*

1944 *“G.I. Jive” hits #1 on the R&B chart and #1 on the pop chart.*

1945 *“Caldonia” hits #1 on the R&B chart and #6 on the pop chart.*

1946 *Jordan hits #1 three times on the R&B chart with “Stone Cold Dead In the Market (He Had It Coming)”—recorded with Ella Fitzgerald—“Choo Choo Ch’Boogie” and “Ain’t Nobody Here But Us Chickens.” All three also held #6 or #7 on the pop chart.*

continued . . .





*Apollo Theater
publicity poster, 1955*

in 1975, he received little recognition from jazz historians. Researching Jordan to write *Five Guys Named Moe*, Clarke Peters found "limited success. Here was a man who, by all accounts, had a great influence on popular music and had just disappeared." Still, musicians like Joe Jackson and B.B. King kept his music and his memory alive in their albums *Jumpin' Jive* and *Let The Good Times Roll: The Music of Louis Jordan*. King reminded audiences that "Jordan was a great musician, and in my opinion was way ahead of his time. As people get to know more about him, they will realize what a great contribution he left to the music of today." King's prophecy has slowly come about, principally due to Jordan's 1987 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the four-year run of *Five Guys Named Moe* in London and its subsequent success on Broadway.

Ray Charles once said Jordan was "a great showman, with a sense of humor and an unforgettable tongue-in-cheek style that, after hearing once, I couldn't forget and I became a great fan." We trust our Rochester audiences will find in *Five Guys Named Moe* Jordan's showmanship, humor and unforgettable genius.

—Amy Jensen, Literary Fellow

just like that. He was a genius at thinking up these things."

With declining record sales in the 50s and 60s and his refusal to "get on that rock thing," Jordan's successes were fewer. At the 1973 Newport Jazz Festival, *Melody Maker* magazine reported "Jordan sang and played like a man possessed, not content to remain a footnote in the histories of both jazz and rock."

However, after his death

1949 "Saturday Night Fish Fry (Part 1)" hits #1 on the R&B chart and #21 on the pop chart.

1951-52 Jordan tours the larger Louis Jordan and His Orchestra, but after lukewarm response they disband.

1956 Jordan records some of his hits with Quincy Jones conducting in *Somebody Up There Digs Me*.

1973 Jordan performs at the Newport Jazz Festival. At the Berlin Jazz Festival he joins Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and Keith Jarrett.

February 4, 1975 Louis Jordan dies of a heart attack in Los Angeles, California.

1987 Jordan is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, where it is said, "Jordan embodied both the soul and good-time feel of rock and roll before the music form even existed."

1992 After playing two years successfully in London, *Five Guys Named Moe* opens on Broadway.

A few of the musicians Jordan influenced include

Ray Charles • Bill Haley • Chuck Berry • Sonny Rollins
James Brown • Anita Baker • Etta James • Joe Jackson
Woody Herman • Muddy Waters • Eric Clapton • B.B. King