

# "Jazz History Workshop" - Roberta Donnay & the Prohibition Mob Trio

## JAZZ HISTORY WORKSHOP

Roberta Donnay

& the Prohibition Mob Trio

"History Of Jazz" workshop (90 minutes) covers the Prohibition era, artists, and song styles of the 1920s and 1930s, showing the growth of the music from blues into jazz and swing, the culture of the times, and how music influenced the culture and vice-versa. The workshop includes Roberta's voice over with intermittent song performances (piano- bass-vocals), and is accompanied by a DVD photo montage of the era, while the presentation is in progress.

Here's some short sample text taken from the workshop

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Band: "SQUEEZE ME"

This song was composed by Fats Waller, who wrote over 900 songs in his career, so many great ones, we'll discover more here.

The music he wrote became known as Jazz or Swing Music, it was the popular music of the day..

Jazz had its origins in New Orleans in the whorehouses (called Storyville) & houses of Nashville and St. Louis.

Jazz however was CITY music & dangerously suggestive.... It was called the DEVILS music to pious Baptists.

People who were religious dreaded to see their children turn to a life of underworld of pimps, hustlers, prostitutes and jazz musicians. These were the common thoughts around this word.

In the 1920s and 30s and even 40s this was the music of the people. This was good-time music. This was the pop music of its day.

When we think of the 1920s we think of flappers, the Charleston, Prohibition, bathtub gin, and the Jazz Era. Names such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Will Rogers, Herbert Hoover, Rudolph

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Valentino and Al Capone. Mobsters and boxers became celebrities. And what about the women? It was during & right after WWI that caused many of the young women to start behaving more like men. Because so many young men had gone off to War, leaving the women alone, when the men returned, they found that young women had shortened their skirts from Victorian to well up here, and the hair on their heads was even shorter. They smoked they drank, they stayed up late, they danced, they cursed. These young women became known as Flappers.

While Bessie Smith was called "Empress Of The Blues", Ma Rainey earned the title of "Mother Of The Blues". Georgia born Ms. Gertrude Pridgett - born in 1886 was raised as a dancer & singer. By the age of 14 she was in a show and met Will "Pa" Rainey, a vaudevillian ... by the age of 18 she was married, they did travelling shows together as Ma & Pa Rainey. By age 31 (1917) she had her own show. Her band consisted of piano - violin - bass violin (as it was called then) drums and cello. She called it her string band. Ma Rainey recorded over 100 songs in the 20s and 30s and 24 of these she wrote. Ma Rainey is responsible for the sound of records in jazz bringing in a full instrumental sound. Here's one of her hits. This song later was recorded by Bessie Smith and the song title was changed from Oh Papa to "Oh Daddy". This song was also later recorded by Ethel Waters. Here's our version of " Oh Papa " ...

BAND: "Oh Papa"

There was The Gramophone. And there were record companies. By 1920 the first jazz record had been recorded And records were selling in the thousands. Even more exciting was the invention of radio - a magic extension of the Gramophone. The people could now hear the songs of the day together for free and without leaving home, they could even gather around and sing along.

This same year 1920 - WOMEN got the VOTE. And the first Jazz Record was made and released. And what else happened in 1920? That's right. The PROHIBITION.

And so the songwriters were working. Record companies discovered in 1920 that blues and that blues singers could actually sell more records than the waltzes of the time.

And so blues and the early jazz singers began to work. And many of the top singers were women.

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Original New Orleans bands usually had a piano, bass fiddle (as it was called then), banjo, and tuba or drums, with several wind instruments out front. The bands of King Oliver and Louis Armstrong grew to include the trombone, clarinet and even vibes.

By 1925 Bessie was already a star. Ella Fitzgerald was 7 years old. Billie Holiday was 10 years old....

Bessie Smith was born in Chatanooga TN. her parents died when she was only 9, leaving her older sister to care for the children. One of her brothers played guitar while Bessie sang in the street for nickels and dimes. Her other brother joined a Travelling show in 1912 & Bessie went w/him. Ironically this show also featured Ma & Pa Rainey. Bessie is said to have learned everything about show biz from Ma Rainey.

Bessie Smith was turned down by 3 record companies before Columbia signed her. Her music & presentation had somewhat of a religious, spiritual vibe to it, people said they heard "Church" in it.

However, Bessie's songs were not about Church subjects as we'll soon discover. Bessie recorded with such greats as Coleman Hawkins, James Johnson, Louis Armstrong, and Charlie Green. Bessie rarely used a drummer. Sidney Bechet said of Bessie "she was the Greatest".

After the prime of her career, John Hammond found her in 1933 and recorded this next song.

By 1929, the stock market crashed and now there was the great Depression. And at the heart of all this, jazz was there. There were also movies which cost less than a nickel. And the theatres were being built at an alarming rate to hold 1/3 of the population in small towns!

And in the theatres there were Hammond organs and ragtime and the new jazz music could be heard throughout the movies.

Jazz was one of the few areas in American life where blacks & whites mixed with some degree of freedom.

Due to speakeasys and clubs in the cities, even tho there were segregated clubs ... others were not. The Manhattan Casino in NY held up to 6,000 dancers! The Savoy opened in early 1926 and had a 200 ft. dance floor ~ In 1925 a magazine called Social Forces wrote that "14% of all men" and 10% of all women in Manhattan went out dancing at least 3x a week.

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In the 1930s swing became the popular music. Jazz was gaily melodic, meant to be sung, whistled, or danced to and remembered.

IN THE 1930s Organized Crime –

The Mob – held a tight reign on

many facets of American business

and pleasure – from the Juke Joints to Horse Racing to corner flower stands.

By 1931 the country's era of the 20s and its colorful nonsense was over. The Great Depression was steadily sinking its fangs deeper into the nation's economic life with each passing day.

Unaffected by the growing un-employment, gangster-owned and operated speak-easies and night clubs continued to flourish.

Prohibition had spawned a new mobster aristocracy. And all loved the RED HOT JAZZ Music of the Day! The soundtrack, *if you will, for loan* sharking, extortion, forgery, bank jobs, hi-jacking, boot-legging, murder and mayhem.

But during the reign of terror many mobsters found it necessary to go back to school. Schools with names like Sing Sing, Alcatraz, Leavenworth, and Rykers Island.

To hear the great jazz dance music of the times Hoods and Civilians alike found themselves in joints like the Cotton Club, Jimmy Ryan's, the Onyx, Small's Paradise, The Hole In the Wall, The Savoy, Connie's Inn, and Jenny's on the Turnpike.

Lots of employment for good musicians. And the song requests flowed like wine. And the bands playing those spots might be swimming with the fishes if they didn't know tunes like:

Just a Gigolo, St. Louis Blues, Runnin' Wild, and this next one...