

Lost Icons: Forgotten Stars of Music and Tap Dancing, 1920-50

April 1 – May 6, Tuesdays 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

OLLI, UC Berkeley 2025

America was bursting with brilliant popular entertainers early in the 20th Century. Gifted bandleaders, tap dancers and singers who sustained American spirits through the Great Depression and WWII. This course celebrates the innovative but largely forgotten performers who flourished on records, radio and film, accelerating the emergence and growth of new entertainment mass media. Each class offers a curated cavalcade of fifteen or more audiovisual clips, many created expressly for the course.

Class 1:

The world's most extraordinary tap dancers -- Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Eleanor Powell, John W. Bubbles and the Nicholas Brothers -- expanded the interpretive range of tapping in Hollywood films of the 1930s & '40s.

Class 2:

Dancer Josephine Baker set Paris and Europe ablaze, altering the path of Continental music, fashion and art. Then during WWII she valiantly spied on the Axis for the Allies. Black life and music in Paris between the wars is depicted.

Class 3:

Gifted female actresses, singers and entertainers built successful orchestras and independent musical careers: singer Blanche Calloway, pianist Lil Hardin Armstrong, bandleader Ina Ray Hutton, composer Mary Lou Williams and jazz violinist Ginger Smock.

Class 4:

The International Sweethearts of Rhythm were the foremost among one-hundred touring all-female Swing orchestras entertaining American troops at home and overseas during WWII.

Class 5:

New Orleans-born multi-instrumentalist Frank "Big Boy" Goudie had one of the most colorful stories of jazz playing trumpet, sax and clarinet between 1924-64 in Paris, Berlin, Rio, Prague and San Francisco.

Class 6:

The hybrid country/swing/jazz orchestra of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys set American popular entertainment topsy-turvy on records, radio and in nineteen Western movies around

1940. Whitey's Lindy Hoppers were the foremost African American dance crew of the era frequently appearing in theater, movies and the short films known as "Soundies."