There were unlikely defenders of jazz. The Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII) and his brother, Prince Albert (George VI), were evidently aficionados of the jazz band; while the latter was 'adept at strumming jazz tunes on the piano', the former rarely resisted the opportunity to assault any drum kit within reach of his syncopated royal fingers. Edward was soon dubbed 'the Jazz Prince', and his attendance was both a badge of honour for any jazz dance, and also a source of acute anxiety. He was prone to approaching bandleaders with exact instructions as to the tunes that should be performed, and any musicians who were asked to accompany him had to adjust discreetly to his accidental changes of tempo.

London's elite appeared to have surrendered to the American invader without the slightest resistance. As early as February 1919, chic dancing establishments in Kensington and Knightsbridge were boasting of their jazz bands, while the Queen of Romania was persuaded to take the floor with the Prince of Wales at a Hyde Park Hotel jazz ball. There were jazz teas; jazz shoes which, at two guineas a pair, wore out more quickly than most girls could afford to replace them; even, at the Dickins & Jones department store, a jazz dress 'of gold and silver tissue'. Soon the fashion notices of the London press were filled with suggestions like this: 'Just one simple, curling natural plume set in a gold or enamel holder makes a jazz fan – and no jazz fiend feels in the mode without one. Aesthetically they are right, for barbarian noises call for barbarian adornments, and an ostrich plume is savage beauty in itself.' By 1920, not only had 'jazz' become a synonym for 'dance', but it was now a multi-purpose term applied to anything bright, jarring, exotic, unexpected – anything, in other words, that was modern. When the ill-fated peace treaty of Versailles was signed in June 1919, London celebrated with 'a jazz night – a mad, jolly night of frolic and dance'. And within a few weeks, the press was reporting confidently that jazz was dead, or dying, or at least fading, and certainly doomed: 'Jazz was overdone during its reign, and all overdone crazes quickly die.' Yet the Jazz Age was just about to begin.

> Some of you may wonder what 'Jazz' means. I don't know exactly. The word comes from America, and it means – well, whenever you feel particularly 'dancy' and excited and you don't care if it snows ink, then – you are jazzy.
>
> Children's author 'Uncle Dick', 1919

There are sufficient creation myths attached to jazz to equal those of the world's great religions. Even the name was open to multiple interpretations, and several choices of spelling: jazz, of course, but also jass, or jaz. The first author to pen a historical account of the music, as early as 1926, was forced to concede that, however it was spelled, the word 'has no relations at all in the English language', and must therefore hail from a different culture – Africa, in all probability. Some claimed that there was a musician, perhaps in New Orleans, named Razz, and that a mishearing of 'Razz's band' had resulted in the coining of the term. Others insisted that the musician concerned was Chas Washington, a virtuoso of the drums; or perhaps James Brown, from Dixieland via Chicago, whose given name was commonly abbreviated as 'Jas'. Links were sought with a 'jazzbo', which was either the climax of a vaudeville production, or (on more scholarly evidence) a description of a trumpet with a kazoo tied into its horn. The French verb *jaser*, meaning to chat or to gossip, was commandeered as a potential source. It was perhaps the slang term for 'noise' (members of the various anti-jazz leagues imagined it so). Or, perhaps most convincingly, 'jazz' was (like 'rock 'n' roll' to follow) a term connoting sexual intercourse, in this instance used by black Americans as a code during the slavery era.

If there was little concord about the origins of the word, there was still less harmony when it came to the music it described. Today, we like to imagine we can recognise jazz, in a club or on a film soundtrack: it is a stylistic language that we can decipher easily enough, whether the speaker is mellow (like Wynton Marsalis) or frenzied (like Archie Shepp). But from the late 1910s onwards, no such unanimity could be reached. Indeed, the exact borderlines of jazz were (and still are) hotly debated and contested. The distinction was not just, as the early critics had it, between music that was 'hot' (jazz) or 'sweet' (not jazz); or which was based upon improvisation (jazz) or tightly scored (not jazz, unless . . .). Almost as soon as jazz, whatever it was and is, was invented, it proved to be such a mesmerising concept, provoking such ferocity of ownership and identification, that the classification of music into jazz and non-jazz categories took on the air of a moral crusade.

Jazz was the earliest musical genre to provoke such argument and passion. In that sense, it was the first modern form of popular music: the first to divide and conquer its followers, to be demonised and celebrated in equal measure; to become, by name alone, a badge of pride and a symbol of freedom – artistic, moral and political.

And yet the vast majority of the music that inspired the outrage of clerics and politicians, and prompted such carefree abandonment of reserve amongst dancers in the years after the end of the Great War, was not – by the aesthetic standards of today, or even those of 1930 – jazz. Its creators may have seen themselves as jazz musicians, but subsequent generations have chosen to rob them of that title. While people believed fervently that they were living through the Jazz Age, more accurately, according to the definitions laid down retrospectively, this was the era of the dance bands, some of whom were bold enough to have flirted with 'authentic' jazz music amidst their repeated choruses of what was soon dismissed by critics as 'slush'.

> In the year 1915, jazz music burst upon the white population of America with the suddenness of a volcanic eruption.
>
> R. W. S. Mendl, *The Appeal of Jazz*, 1927

> Some say the Jass band originated in Chicago. Chicago says it comes from San Francisco . . . Anyway, a Jass band is the newest thing in the cabarets, adding greatly to the hilarity thereof. They say the first instrument of the first Jass band was an empty lard can, by humming into which, sounds were produced resembling those of a saxophone with the croup. Since then, the Jass band has grown in size and ferocity.
>
> Victor catalogue, 1917

Victor's tentative exploration of the origins of jazz was designed to promote the first releases by the musicians who comprised (by common if not unanimous consent) the first jazz band to be immortalised on record: the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, or ODJB. (Illustrating the elusive identity of their music, they were the Original Dixieland *Jass* Band until 1917.) The group's cornet player and co-founder, Nick LaRocca, claimed that 'The invention of jazz was the result of a mistake. It happened because four other guys and I couldn't play what we heard at band concerts in New Orleans because we were unable to read music. We tried to play the tunes as we heard them, but they wouldn't come out.' It's a deliberately naïve account, designed to admit that although the ODJB had borrowed from superior black musicians in their home city, they were still the true originators of jazz.

Not a single historian of jazz would support LaRocca's account, and with good reason. Yet the ODJB startled those who stumbled across them in New Orleans around 1915, as the journal *Talking Machine News* recounted: 'Visitors to the city heard a combination playing dance music of a type they had never heard before, and were fascinated. The players were futurists in music, and they express much the same ideas in noise as the futurists in art express in colour.' In late 1916, vaudeville stars Arthur Collins and Byron Harlan recorded a novelty tune that was surely inspired by the ODJB: 'That Funny Jas Band From Dixieland'. Besides some embarrassingly racist (to modern ears) minstrel by-play, the song talked about 'that harmony queer' and 'mad musicians playing rhythm'. There were even a few seconds of authentic 'hot' jazz playing to emphasise the point. The Collins/Harlan duet can with some merit be claimed as the first commercial record to offer any jazz musicianship, but it clearly had comic rather than pioneering intent.

In June 1917, American record-buyers were able to purchase the Joseph C. Smith orchestra's 'Havanola Fox-Trot', a tightly controlled but eminently danceable piece of ensemble playing. The Prince's Orchestra, a Columbia Records house band named after its founder rather than the jazz-mad Prince of Wales, released 'American Patrol', a march tune which would become a staple of the Glenn Miller Orchestra two decades later. And Victor unveiled the ODJB, with a 78 rpm recording of 'Livery Stable Blues'.

How did it differ from its contemporaries? It suggested a gang of crazed instrumentalists fighting for supremacy, while still managing to add their voices to something greater than themselves. The canon of classical music – such as the opening movement of Bach's first 'Brandenburg' Concerto – was rich in instances of ensemble playing which involved individual musicians throwing themes, and variations upon themes, back and forth (in faithful reading of a printed score, of course). To the unwary, 'Livery Stable Blues' sounded like a free-for-all, a rugby scrum rather than Bach's polite passing of the teacakes.* What is obvious in retrospect is that the ODJB are adhering to an agreed structure as closely as any Bach sextet: they all break at the same moment, hold back to let the clarinet squeal or the cornet squawk, maintain a tight melodic pattern,

* The ODJB's trombonist, 'Daddy' Edwards, recalled that the band's records would have been even more explosive had the primitive recording techniques of the day been equal to the sonic punch of Tony Spargo's bass and snare drums.