

Basin Street Blues

Written by bluesever

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Basin Street Blues

New Orleans in the south of the United States is famous for many things. One is traditional jazz. Another is the regions in the city which are divided into areas known as Quarters. And in the French Quarter is a well-known area called Storyville, and its main thoroughfare is Basin Street, the basis of this song. Storyville became a red light district in the 1870s. So if you were heading down the mighty Mississippi to New Orleans and you ended up in Basin Street, there's a fair chance you'd hear some jazz and see a little of the local night life.

Basin Street Blues

"Basin Street Blues" is a song often performed by Dixieland jazz bands, written by Spencer Williams. The song was published in 1926 and made famous in a recording by Louis Armstrong in 1928. The famous verse with the lyric *"Won't you come along with me/To the Mississippi..."* was later added by Glenn Miller and Jack Teagarden.



Basin Street Blues - Louis Armstrong, 1928

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“Basin Street Blues” is one of the most instantly likable of all of Armstrong’s “hot five and seven” recordings. Although it’s tempo is slow, it’s one of the prettiest melodies of the sessions, and Louis plays it magnificently – indeed, he plays with such carefree abandon that it’s impossible not to be swept up in his enthusiasm. Armstrong’s vocal is magnificent, his “scat” singing taking a few listens to get a feeling for, but one the listener does, it becomes a style of incredible beauty. “Basin Street Blues” would become one of Armstrong’s signature numbers throughout his whole career, and this sublime performance is the reason why.



Louis Armstrong plays Basin Street Blues, 1959

Spencer Williams was one of the earliest black composers to shape jazz as popular music. Many of his songs including "Royal Garden Blues," "Everybody Loves My Baby" and "I Ain't Got Nobody" became anthems of the Jazz Age and the Swing Era—and remain standards today.



Spencer Williams

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Spencer Williams was born in 1889 in New Orleans. Educated at St. Charles University, Williams worked in Chicago as a vocalist and pianist as early as 1907. There, he often performed with another pianist, composer, and bandleader: Clarence Williams—no relation. About the time of WWI, Spencer Williams began writing pop songs, such as "Squeeze Me," which he co-composed with Fats Waller.



Basin Street, 1909

In 1925 Spencer Williams traveled to Paris and wrote songs for the voluptuous and exotic American expat, Josephine Baker, a star of the famed Folies Bergère. In 1930 Spencer made several recordings, singing and playing the piano with the highly regarded blues guitarists Teddy Bunn and Lonnie Johnson. In 1932 he vacationed in France with his friend Fats Waller. When Waller returned to the U.S., Williams moved to England, where he remained in residence until 1951, after which he made Sweden his home.



Josephine Baker

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"Basin Street Blues," Williams' 1928 song, celebrates the center of New Orleans' nightlife, which took its name from the "basin" formed back of town from the excavation of building materials by the city's early inhabitants.



Mahogany Hall

Pianist and composer Spencer Williams titled this number after the street where he lived as a youngster with his aunt. But the house he lived in was no ordinary house: it was Mahogany Hall, probably the most famous brothel of Storyville, New Orleans' red light district. And Spencer's aunt was the notorious madam Lulu White.

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Basin Street Blues - Benny Goodman, 1934