

Fats Waller's Ain't Misbehavin'

Written by bluesever

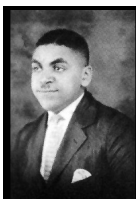
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The history of the song has always been shrouded in legend. Waller himself used to like to say that he wrote it while in jail for failure to pay alimony. Some biographers have taken this as fact, but Razaf himself cleared up the mess in a 1966 letter to Bob Kumm, writing: *"There is no truth to the widely circulated erroneous story about 'Ain't Misbehavin'" being written while Fats was in prison. The song was written by Fats and myself at his West 133rd. St. home in Harlem. The title and words are entirely mine. An hour after we wrote it we went to the 44th St. Theatre and demonstrated it for the show rehearsal. It was selected to be the theme song of the show. After Paul Bass and Margaret Simms sang it as a love duet, I suggested that Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong sing and play a chorus from the orchestra pit. When he did, it became a terrific hit."*

Ain't Misbehavin'

"Ain't Misbehavin'" was first recorded in August 1929 in Camden, NJ, on Victor Records. Written by Thomas "Fats" Waller with lyrics by Andy Razaf as part of the score for the Broadway play 'Hot Chocolates,' the song debuted in March 1929 as a vehicle for Louis Armstrong to sing from the orchestra pit, but when Armstrong dazzled audiences with his vocal performance of the song, the producers of the play changed the script to bring him on-stage to sing it.



Young Fats Waller

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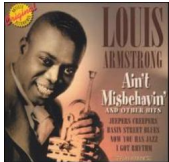
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A reporter in The New York Times took note, writing *"A synthetic but entirely pleasant jazz ballad called 'Ain't Misbehavin' stands out and its rendition between the acts by an unnamed member of the orchestra was a highlight of the premier."*

Soon enough, those in the audience had no choice but to know the name of this *"unnamed member of the orchestra"*:

due to the popularity of the performance, Armstrong was moved from pit to the stage and given a featured billing. He was officially a Broadway star.



Louis Armstrong - Ain't Misbehavin'

"Connie's Hot Chocolates: Hot Feet" was an all black revue that opened at Connie's Inn on February 28, 1929. Barry Singer, Razaf's biographer, quotes a review of the show from the Pittsburgh Courier as saying, *"This is the first floor show of New York's exclusive night clubs to entirely the work of men of color"*.



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Andy Razaf

Ken Bloom quotes Harry Brooks, who generally receives co-credit for the music, as presenting yet another aspect of how "Ain't Misbehavin'" was written. The composition was, according to Brooks, *"an attempt to copy the successful formula Gershwin used for 'The Man I Love.' We imitated the opening phrase that began just after the first beat and the minor part of the bridge, too."*



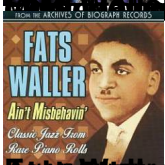
Louis Armstrong - Ain't Misbehavin', 1929

"Ain't Misbehavin'" was inspired by Waller's desire to answer quips regarding his reputation for overindulging in wine, women, and song. He was known for keeping two bottles of gin on the table during rehearsals, one for himself, the other for the band, and regular toasts for all kept the music flowing. The stride piano and ragtime master combined a sure sense of "ragged" syncopation on this song that was written while he was still in his twenties.

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Ain't Misbehavin', Broadway 1978