Music of the Harlem Renaissance
A four-part lecture series with Eric Elder
10:30 am - 12:00 pm.

LECTURE 1 (January 23)

“O, rise, shine for Thy Light is a’coming”: Framing the Harlem Renaissance

In the first lecture of the series, we will look behind the romantic façade that has come to represent the Harlem Renaissance to identify the political underpinnings and cultural goals of its driving force, the New Negro movement. In considering the historical context of this important moment in American history, we will examine the musical landscape of the crucible of the Harlem Renaissance, early twentieth-century New York.

Suggested readings:


Additional recommended readings:


LECTURE 2 (January 30)

_Darker America: Toward an Ideal Harlem Renaissance Aesthetic_

In this lecture, we will take a closer look at the aesthetic mold espoused by Dr. Alain Locke and other key intellectual leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, placing particular emphasis on the role of music therein. We will consider the proposed role of the Negro Spiritual, the place of so-called classical music in the movement, and the various and shifting viewpoints of notable Harlem Renaissance figures on jazz and the blues.

**Suggested reading:**


**Additional recommended readings:**


LECTURE 3 (February 6)

_“Lenox Avenue Blues”: Music in Harlem, At Home or On the Town_

In the third installment, we explore the tension between the aesthetic ideals of the New Negro movement and the actual music present in the lives of Harlem’s diverse residents. We will examine the music that permeated 1920s and 1930s Harlem—in the home, church, speakeasy, and cabaret—and we will consider the cultural significance of the marked departure of the populace’s musical tastes from the ideals of the Negro Renaissance.

**Suggested readings:**
LECTURE 4 (February 13)

**Shuffle Along**: Black Musical Theatre, Symphonic Jazz, and the Legacy of the Harlem Renaissance

In our final lecture, we will consider Harlem’s relation to theatrical music, perhaps the pinnacle of the New York entertainment establishment through the 1920s and 1930s. Vaudeville, musical theatre, and the developing medium of sound film were key avenues for the musical depiction of—and at times even the expression of—Black life in the Harlem Renaissance. We will examine the development of symphonic jazz in theatrical music, and we will consider its important place in the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance.

**Suggested readings:**


BIO

Eric Elder is a candidate for the PhD in Musicology at Brandeis University and the recipient of the Bernard and Jennie Shivek Memorial Fellowship. Having written and lectured extensively on the cultural roots of early jazz, he holds degrees in jazz studies from Roosevelt University and Rutgers University. Eric’s primary research interests lie in the history of music theory, and he was awarded the 2017 Hollace Anne Schafer Memorial Award by the New England Chapter of the American Musicological Society for his work uncovering Rudolph Reti’s application of Alfred North Whitehead’s cosmological constructs in *The Thematic Process in Music.*