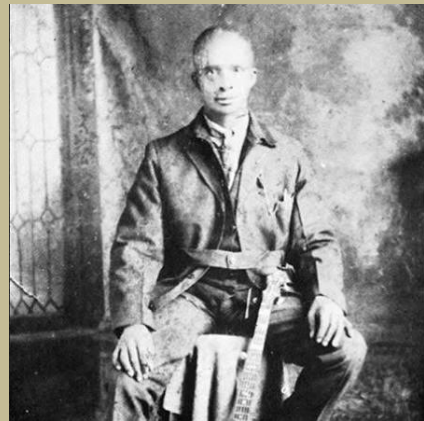


Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers

Cannon's Jug Stompers, led by Gustavas 'Gus' Cannon, was one of the all-time great jug bands, perhaps the best at capturing the full flavour of the rural countryside's rhythms and expressiveness. Their repertoire covered the whole panorama of American rural music: Rags, Blues, and Breakdowns, Tin-Pan-Alley, The minstrels and more! Certainly the Jug Stompers were among the most successful jug bands to come out of Memphis in the late 1920s and as such helped to popularise jug band music in the early days of recording.



After the success of the Memphis Jug Band's first records, Gus quickly assembled his own jug band, *The Cannon's Jug Stompers*, featuring Lewis and Thompson (later replaced by Elijah Avery). The group was created in January



1928 after a request to have a recording session with Victor Records, where Gus Cannon was requested to lead the band which included harmonic player Noah Lewis and a guitarist, Ashley Thompson. Their initial recording session was at the Memphis Auditorium in January 1928. During this session they recorded four songs, three of them blues and one influenced by ragtime. The initial group

also recorded the Hosea Woods classic, ***Walk Right In***. Hosea subsequently joined the group later in the 1920's, playing guitar, banjo and the ubiquitous, in jug bands, the kazoo and providing some vocals. ('Walk Right in' was notably covered by the Rooftop Singers in 1963).

The instrumentation of the ensemble was also typical of the jug band music, and included banjo, guitar, harmonica and jug, even the wonderful Sousaphone. Other improvised instruments like kazoo and washboard appeared. This mixture of instruments gave a syncopated rhythmic sound, which had a blend of blues, ragtime, and folk. The Jug Bands (Smithsonian Folkways) claim that jug bands such as those of Cannon's were significant in the entertainment of urban Southerners, especially in cities such as Memphis

in which the culture of street performance and dance music constituted the core of working-class culture.

The Jug Stompers soon became known and one of the most popular jug bands in Memphis, second only to the *Memphis Jug Band*. Although their last recordings were made in 1930, Cannon's Jug Stompers were one of Beale



Street's most popular jug bands through the 1930s. Recording between 1928 and 1930 they assisted in defining the genre, with some of the most important songs being, *Minglewood Blues*, *Pig Ankle Strut*, *Viola Lee Blues*, and of course the legendary *Walk right in*.

In music, the band tapes were marked by the banjo style of Gus, which frequently used a three-finger style of classic banjo, as opposed to the more traditional down-picking style. This method, as well as expressive performance of

Noah Lewis on harmonica, helped to give the band a unique sound. Their repertoire consisted of humorous and light-hearted songs mixed with more traditional blues themes, and both entertainment and storytelling roles of African American music of the era.

Despite the relatively short life of the group recording career, which ended around 1930, Gus Cannon, with his Jug Stompers, continued to play a significant part in the evolution of the jug band and folk-blues music. Their work was rediscovered in the folk revival of the mid-20th century, bringing new people into contact with early jug band recordings and establishing their role in American roots music history.

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