DREAMS OF JELLY ROLL

BY JOHN GOTO

FREUD MUSEUM - LONDON

29 JUNE - 16 SEPTEMBER 2012
PSYCHOANALYSIS & JAZZ

WERE BOTH BORN AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, though under very different circumstances. Their founding fathers were respectively Sigismund Schlomo Freud (1856-1939), a doctor and medical researcher in Vienna, and Ferdinand ‘Jelly Roll’ Morton (1885-1941), a Creole musician who had honed his musical skills playing in the brothels of New Orleans. Whilst Freud never claimed for himself the title of ‘founding father’, Jelly Roll most certainly did, attracting derision and controversy in the process.

In fact both Freud and Morton built on the work of their predecessors. Freud specifically attributed the origins of psychoanalysis to the work of Dr. Joseph Breuer whose hysterical patient, Anna O, first described the method as ‘the talking cure’ (Freud 1910).

Jelly Roll was a great talker. Accompanying himself on piano and later guitar, Morton left us a strange and dreamlike account of his life in over eight hours of recorded interviews made in 1938 by Alan Lomax, Folk Music Curator at The Library of Congress. Morton’s detractors have accused him of self-aggrandisement and braggartry in these recordings, and yet his testimony remains ‘the first significant attempt at constructing a history of the music’, and Morton himself emerges as the ‘first theorist and intellectual of jazz’ (Schuller G. 1968).

Morton’s boast of having invented jazz is not as risible as some have suggested. As well as being a composer of great subtlety and invention, his piano playing provided a bridge between ragtime and jazz. He modified his claim when speaking to Lomax, saying ‘I started using the word in 1902 to show people the difference between jazz and ragtime’. Freud might have been interested in Morton’s choice of the word ‘jass’, a patois term for sexual intercourse, and indeed in his stage name of ‘Jelly Roll’.

What are we to make of Morton's numerous fabrications and exaggerations? Were they signs of an immoral personality as some critics have claimed, or were they a culturally specific form of hyperbole? Support for both viewpoints can be found in Jelly Roll's reputation as a fast talking showman, a singer of lewd lyrics, a dandy given to ostentatious displays of diamonds, a poolroom shark, gambler and occasional pimp.

But maybe the causes were more complex than either of these scenarios suggest. Laurie Wright comments that 'Morton would have been a wonderful subject for psychoanalysis' (Wright L. 1972). Morton's contemporary, Volly De Faut, believed 'Jelly suffered inwardly from an inferiority complex' (Russell W. 1999). Gunther Schuller argues that Jelly Roll was 'led by his musical and personal frustrations to embellish the truth' (Schuller G. 1968) whilst Philip Pastras draws attention to Morton's uncertain sexual orientation, and the disturbing effect on a young mind of witnessing nightly floor-shows in the brothels of New Orleans (Pastras P. 2001).

Psychoanalytically, Jelly Roll on the couch would have found himself considering his primary narcissism, egotistical omnipotence, obsessional defences, and underlying melancholia. The impressions on his psyche created by the absence of a father, abandonment by his mother as a two year old and her death when he was aged fourteen, would have been a significant part of his analysis. Tracing his Oedipal configurations through the subsequent influences of Catholicism and Voodoo in his extended Creole family would also have formed part of the work.

Lomax's daughter Anna Lomax Wood's depiction of Jelly Roll seems particularly pertinent. She describes how his fragile mask of 'pride, dignity, vanity, and bravado' protected him from hurt, and helped him to 'cross the lines' of class and race.
She seems to have understood that his distinctive personality traits were used in the service of securing his creativity and art (Wood 2005). Morton’s sensitive emotional intelligence and understanding of human nature come through on careful listening to the Lomax recordings, beyond the showmanship of his virtuoso performances as a musician and oral historian. Perhaps the most enduring aspect of these recordings is Morton’s articulation of creativity and its emergence from a sophisticated montage of high and low culture. Like Freud he was a genius who stirred up envy and admiration in equal measure amongst his contemporaries, and even to this day both continue to suffer hostile critical attacks.

For this writer Morton’s personality and worldview can best be described, in the Bakhtinian sense, as carnivalesque. Whether in Mardi Gras or Vaudeville, the Wild West Show or Minstrelsy, whether through Catholicism or Voodoo, the dividing line between rational life and the teeming unconscious seemed porous for Morton. For artists this is, as it needs to be.

My aim in this series is to take a creative approach to the possible meanings behind Morton’s daydreams and tall stories. Using clues found in his pronouncements, I mix people from his musical and social circles with significant figures from the world stage to which he aspired. In the framed prints I place the cast within virtual environments, whilst in the Augmented Reality installation, made in collaboration with Matthew Leach, Maresfield Gardens is inhabited by virtual figures. Playing with disjuncture, slippage and anachronisms, I weave imaginative narratives from factual documentary material. Here the divergent disciplines of history and psychoanalysis are brought together into new formations. Finally they are offered up for scrutiny in Dr. Freud’s House of Dreams.

**John Goto**  [www.johngoto.org.uk](http://www.johngoto.org.uk)
SOURCES

BOOKS ON JELLY ROLL MORTON


BOOKS WITH SIGNIFICANT CHAPTERS ON JRM


RELATED BOOKS

Recordings of 19 piano solos made by Morton between 1923-1926

**Jelly Roll Morton 1930 - 1939** (Classic 654) The last of the Red Hot Peppers sessions, then eight years silence broken by new solo sessions and four sides with Sidney Bechet

**Last Sessions: The Complete General Recordings** (Commodore CMD 14032) Morton’s Hot Six and Seven and solo recordings from 1939-40

**New Orleans Rhythm Kings 1922-1925: Complete Set** (Retrieval RTR 79031) Jelly Roll Morton made a small but significant number of recordings with NORK in 1923.

---

**JELLY ROLL MORTON ON CD**

Compilations consulted in the making of this series - **Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax.** (Rounder 11661-1889-2, 8 CDs) Also contains Alan Lomax’s book ‘Mister Jelly Roll’ with Lawrence Gushee’s afterword, transcriptions of all dialogues, research notes, correspondence and additional New Orleans interviews by Alan Lomax

**Jelly Roll Morton** (JSP JAZZBOX 903, 5CDs) Re-mastered by John R.T. Davies, contains all available recorded work 1926-1930

**The Piano Roll’s** (Nonesuch 79363-2) Digital reconstructions of Morton piano rolls by Artis Wodehouse

**Ferd ‘Jelly Roll’ Morton 1923-1926** Retrieval RTR 79002
OF COURSE, MY PEOPLE ALWAYS HAD ME WEARING DIAMONDS SINCE I GUESS I WAS JUST A BABY. AND I ALWAYS HAD SOME KIND OF A DIAMOND ON, AND THEY WOULD JUST FIGURE I WAS A SMART KID.

JELLY ROLL MORTON

MORTON EMPHASISED THE FRENCH SIDE of his Creole heritage. ‘My folks were in the city of New Orleans long before the Louisiana Purchase...all French, and as long as I can remember those folks, they never was able to speak a word in American or English.’ The Morton family’s genealogy was complex and even within the family different accounts emerged. Jelly Roll’s youngest sister, Frances, claimed their ‘grandmother Mimi, was a German Jew - Felice Schmidt, so, of course, we are Jewish.’

The women of the family brought Morton up after his father, a trombonist, abandoned his mother. Seen here in front of the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans are from left to right - Edward Joseph Lamothe (father); Jelly Roll Morton; Louise Hermance Monette (mother); Frances Mouton (youngest sister known as Mimi); Laura Hunter (aka Eulalie Hécaud, godmother and voodoo priestess); and Laura Péché (grandmother, a slave at birth she was manumitted in 1855).
MORTON IN MOSCOW

JELLY ROLL MORTON WAS INVITED TO TOUR RUSSIA IN 1930 according to Mabel Morton, or more likely 1935 as Down Beat magazine reported. The project fell through when the musicians realised that they could not exchange their wages for foreign currency. The location seen here is before Lenin’s Mausoleum in Red Square. From left to right - Leonid Utesov, the most popular Soviet jazz musician of the pre-war period, who satirically claimed that jazz originated in Odessa. Utesov appeared as a black-faced minstrel named John Johnson from Brazil early in his career; Joseph Stalin and his daughter Svetlana; Maxim Gorky who wrote an influential article disparaging jazz entitled ‘The Music of the Gross’; Boris Shumiatisky, the much feared boss of the Soviet film industry, who wrote a defence of jazz in the pages of Pravda; Barney Bigard, New Orleans clarinetist and one of the musicians Morton had lined up for the tour according to Mabel; Lazar Kaganovich, nicknamed ‘The Wolf of the Kremlin’, the purger of the Soviet railways. A jazz fan, he wrote a pamphlet with Utesov entitled ‘How to Organise Railway Ensembles of Song & Dance & Jazz Orchestras’; Jelly Roll Morton; Sidney Bechet, soprano saxophonist and another of the musicians reportedly recruited for the tour; Kasimir Malevich, avant-garde artist and the subject of Goto’s ‘Commissar of Space’ series; General Kliment Voroshilov, Civil War hero and keen jazz dancer; Alexander (Bob) Tsfasman, pianist, arranger, bandleader and dandy, whose musical achievements and cosmopolitan outlook gained him recognition beyond the Soviet Union.
BUCK - HOUSE

ALISTAIR COOKE the BBC broadcaster met Jelly Roll Morton in Washington, D.C. in 1938. ‘London?’ Morton said, ‘Why sure, I was through that section in nineteen and thirteen (1913)’. Extensive research, however, has failed to find evidence of Morton ever having travelled beyond continental North America. Seen here from left to right are - Walter Sickert, a painter whose subjects included music hall scenes and prostitutes; Jelly Roll Morton; Marie Lloyd, a music hall singer renowned for her use of innuendo; unknown woman; George V, King of the United Kingdom and British Dominions, Emperor of India and avid stamp collector; woman with dog; Mark Sheridan, music hall comedian; Edward, Prince of Wales, occasional jazz fan who asked Sidney Bechet to perform for the King at Buckingham Palace in 1919; Vesta Tilley, male impersonator; Eugene Stratton, American black-faced minstrel working in London.

DO THIS FOR MONEY. JIVE - A FABULOUS, FLOWERY THING. HOMOSEXUAL INTERCOURSE - THEY PRETENDED TO EAT DUNG-CAKES (REALLY THEY WERE GINGER CAKES MIXED UP WITH LIMBURGER CHEESE AND WATER). THE MEN ALWAYS PICKED UP THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL, THE WORLD IS CRUEL.”

JELLY ROLL MORTON

BRS 013 B
BERLIN · OLYMPICS

NAZI GERMANY WAS on Jelly Roll’s mind. In his open letter to radio presenter Robert L. Ripley, he ends with ‘Lord protect us from more Hitlers and Mussolinis.’ From left to right - two Hitler Youths; two German jazz fans known as ‘Swings’, a sub-culture harshly suppressed by the Nazis; Siegfried Wagner, Director of the Bayreuth Festival, who vilified jazz’s ‘nigger rhythms’; Jesse Owens who thwarted Hitler’s aim to use the Olympics as a demonstration of Aryan superiority by winning four gold medals; Kurt Weill, composer of the jazz influenced ‘Threepenny Opera’; on the podium are musicians Jelly Roll Morton, Benny Goodman and Django Reinhardt. Nazi racist ideology placed Jews above Romanies, and Romanies above people of indigenous African descent; Benito Mussolini holding his son Romano who grew up to become a prominent Italian jazz pianist; Kurt Gerron, who played the role of Tiger Brown in the original version of ‘The Threepenny Opera’. Later deported to Auschwitz, he walked into the gas chambers singing ‘The Canon Song’ from Weill’s opera; Pery Broad, Auschwitz camp guard, war criminal and accomplished jazz accordion player; Lutz Templin (crouched), leader of ‘Charlie and His Band’, a Nazis propaganda jazz band. Their records were broadcast from Berlin by William Joyce (behind Templin), known as Lord Haw-Haw; D.C. Stephenson, Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon, convicted rapist and murderer. Morton had witnessed several lynchings during his early travels; Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda; Leni Riefenstahl, director of ‘Olympia’, an acclaimed film about the Berlin Olympics; finally the idealised figures are by Georg Kolbe, one of Goebbels’ honoured ‘List of Immortals’.

DREAMS OF JELLY ROLL
THE CRAVE

AT THE TIME OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RECORDINGS in 1938, Jelly Roll was running a down-at-heel club in Washington DC called ‘The Jungle Inn’. Despite the dispiriting reality, he had big plans for the place, including enticing back the Hollywood set he had know on the West Coast in better times.

From left to right - heart-throb Rudolph Valentino had been a nightclub dancer at Baron Long’s in Watts before his breakthrough into movies; Thelma Todd, Hollywood starlet found dead in her carbon monoxide filled garage; Todd’s ex-lover, gangster Lucky Luciano, who was suspected of involvement in her death, believing that she was about to blow the whistle on the mob’s growing involvement in Hollywood; actress Olive Thomas, ex-Ziegfeld Follies queen, whose life ended in uncertain circumstances in a Paris hotel room; her husband Jack Pickford, screen idol and brother of Mary Pickford, was thought to have supplied the drugs from which Olive died; Virginia Rappe, aspiring movie actress died after a party at the Hotel St. Francis in San Francisco; Roscoe ‘Fatty’ Arbuckle, famous screen comedian, was charged with the first degree murder of the actress, but cleared after two mistrials; Al Jolson, a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant, is best remembered for his leading role in the first full length talkie, ‘The Jazz Singer’ (1927). Jolson played the racially complex role of a Jewish cantor’s son who performs on stage as a jazz singer in blackface makeup; proprietor Jelly Roll Morton was stabbed by a customer whilst seated at the piano in ‘The Jungle Inn’. Morton’s composition ‘The Crave’ had caused a sensation in Hollywood back in 1917 when it was a great favourite of Jack Pickford and Fatty Arbuckle.
JELLY ROLL WAS BY NATURE COMBATIVE. His artistry made him the clear favourite in cutting contests, which pitched one pianist against another, with the aim of outplaying and humbling the opponent. The build-up to such battles often involved insults and jibes, accompanied by boasts of prowess. Aside from these ritualistic rucks, Jelly Roll was quick to give and take offence, and over time accrued some powerful enemies.

It was said of Morton that he would sit down and play a piano anywhere he found one. He was required to register for the draft in September 1918, but as the war ended in November, he was never inducted into the US Army.
JELLY ROLL & THE SIRENS

JELLY ROLL TOLD ALAN LOMAX that at the height of his fame, “There was nothing under the sun that I ever wanted that I didn’t get during that time but two things. And those two things - one was a yacht, and the other was a cow.”

On account of his extensive travels as a young man throughout the United States, Morton has sometimes been compared to Odysseus. The Sirens seen here from left to right are; Mabel Bertrand, his devoted companion from 1928, who told Lomax after Morton’s death, “I have been loved by a great man, I have watched a genius at work in the cold, lonely hours”; Rosa Brown his girlfriend around 1913 and stage partner in the Vaudeville act Morton and Morton, in which Jelly Roll appeared in blackface; ‘The Pearl’, a waitress Morton was infatuated with in Tijuana, and named a composition after; Anita Gonzales, the most important and controversial woman in his life, from his teens through to his deathbed. She inspired at least two of Morton’s compositions: “Sweet Anita Mine” and a tango entitled “Mama ‘Nita.” Morton sometimes referred to Gonzales as wife, though no documentary evidence has emerged to support this claim.

TO MAKE SOMEBODY FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU
TAKE FROG LEGS AND GRIND THEM, ALSO BOA CONstrictor Tongues.

JELLY ROLL MORTON 😊
NICKELODEON

JELLY ROLL CLAIMED TO BE A SHARPSHOOTER and to have known ‘Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley and all that crew’. As the hey-day of the Wild West Show coincided with that of ragtime in the first decade of the twentieth century, it is not implausible that their paths crossed during Morton’s travels. The division between the popular entertainment forms of Circus, Medicine Show, Fairground, Minstrel Show, Vaudeville, Mardis Gras and Wild West Show often blurred with performers working in a number of contexts. Great Expositions also attracted all manner of entertainers.

An account of the Colombian Exposition in Chicago (1893) records that ‘Cody’s Show Indians…on occasion rode the merry-go-round by the hour…’ In the Library of Congress recordings Morton describes his youthful encounters during Mardis Gras with members of tough street tribes, which had been formed following Buffalo Bill’s visit to New Orleans in 1885.

Morton occasionally found employment accompanying silent films in Nickelodeons. In the early days of cinema the Western soon established itself as a genre. Bill Cody’s last entrepreneurial project was to direct a movie, ‘The Indian Wars’ (1913), which failed at the box office. From left to right - Indigenous Americans; Jelly Roll Morton; Annie Oakley; Buffalo Bill Cody.

“You’d please me if you’d just play those little black dots-just those little black dots that I put down there.”

JELLY ROLL MORTON
IN A LETTER TO THE BROADCASTER ROBERT R. RIPLEY written in 1938, Jelly Roll declared, “I guess I am 100 years ahead of my time”. Were these the words of a man whose career was in decline, pinning his hopes on posterity, or did they simply express the commonly held notion that the artistic avant-garde would lead society forward into the future? A little of both maybe.

One of the ways in which the future was envisioned was through the popular genre of science fiction. Based on a screenplay by H.G. Wells, the 1936 film ‘Things to Come’ was set in 2036 and contains a special effects sequence by avant-garde émigré artist Lazlo Moholy-Nagy.

From our present perspective, how prescient was Morton’s statement? The global availability of his music through e-commerce would surely have surprised even Jelly Roll, and to a lesser extent the continued sales of his sheet music as legions of pianists still attempt to imitate his inimitable style. But the measure of a musician’s legacy is best judged by their influence on succeeding generations of creative musicians, and this aspect is less secured. The selection of musicians in this picture is based less on the quantity or duration of their engagement with Morton’s work, than on its quality. From left to right - Charles Mingus, Anthony Coleman, Sun Ra, Giorgio Gaslini, Mary Lou Williams and Art Hodes.

“WHEN I MADE A HUNDRED DOLLARS A DAY I THOUGHT I HAD A SMALL DAY. AND NOW TODAY IF I MAKE TEN, I THINK I’VE GOT A GREAT DAY.”

JELLY ROLL MORTON
AN INDEFATIGABLE CAMPAIGNER Jelly Roll wrote in 1938 to James Roosevelt, secretary to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with a plan to get unemployed musicians back to work. Self-reliant as ever, he concludes “I intended trying to get it started without asking assistance, but knew it would only be like trying to swim across the Pacific Ocean in a storm. This was my reason for trying to get in touch with the proper authorities…” Set in the Oval Office of the White House, from left to right - British journalist Alistair Cooke, who introduced Morton to Alan Lomax; Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the President; Jelly Roll Morton; Lucy Mercer, FDR’s longtime mistress; Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States; Roy Carew, Morton’s business partner and champion during his later years; folklorist Alan Lomax who recorded Morton’s account of his life on a Presto disc-recording machine in the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress, between May 21 and December 14, 1938.
BARON·SAMDI

IN HIS OPEN LETTER TO ROBERT R. RIPLEY, published in Down Beat magazine (1938) Morton states that ‘The only knowledge that anyone may claim today is strictly what history gives’. He goes on to claim that he will get in touch with three musicians he identifies as ‘from the early nineteenth century,’ to verify his claim that the blues existed long before W.C. Handy began publishing his transcriptions.

In the cemetery a group of eminent ragtime pianists and composers make up the funeral cortège. From left to right are - James Scott; Arthur Marshall; Joseph Lamb; Artie Matthews; Tom Turpin and Louis Chauvin. In the bishop’s vestments is Scott Joplin.

Catholicism and Voodoo were closely entwined in New Orleans’ culture, and both played a significant role in Morton’s life. Jelly Roll’s mentor, the pianist and composer Tony Jackson, here wears a top hat and tails reminiscent of those of Baron Samdi, Voodoo head of the spirits of the dead.

JELLY ROLL MORTON

“How WORRIED WITH SPIRITS WHEN I WAS A KID. HARDLY A NIGHT PASSED WHEN I DIDN’T HAVE TO JUMP IN MY BED. THOSE SPIRITS WAS ONE OF THE MOST HORRIBLE THINGS EVER HAPPENING TO ME.”

JELLY ROLL MORTON
HOUSE OF DREAMS

AN AUGMENTED REALITY INSTALLATION at the Freud Museum by John Goto and Matthew Leach.

Dream-like apparitions inhabit Freud’s house and gardens. The spectres shudder, switch position, surround us, and then timorously take flight. They hover above Freud’s couch, hide amongst his collection of antiquities, shift scale, become fearful giants, and then vanish from Maresfield Gardens as suddenly as they appeared.

John Goto, in collaboration with Matthew Leach, has created a permanent installation at the Freud Museum by placing virtual characters from ‘Dreams of Jelly Roll’ into the material environment of the house. They remain invisible to the eye, however, unless roused from their dormant state by the visitor.

Augmented Reality is achieved by combining three functions of a smartphone - GPS reading, internet connection and camera - to create an image layer in front of the place observed through the camera. In order to participate the visitor should download from the App store LAYAR, which is free, and enter the search term - House of Dreams - then launch.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK FOR THEIR SUPPORT in realising this series Carol Seigel, Director of the Freud Museum, and Ivan Ward, Deputy Director and Head of Learning.

Thanks also to Mike Meddings and Ate van Delden for their kind permission to use documentary images from the Ate van Delden Collection, which can be seen on the Doctor Jazz website www.doctorjazz.co.uk

The fine catalogue design is the work of Tracy Allanson-Smith. The exhibition frames are by jazz fan Lindsey Jones at Oxford Framing Services. The project and publication received support from the Digital and Material Arts Research Centre (D-MARC) at the University of Derby, for which I am grateful. Mrs. Hwang, Director of Gallery On, Seoul, first exhibited images from this series in my Jazz exhibition (2011).

Also representing my work are Galerie Dominique Fiat, Paris, and Galerie f5.6, Munich.

Kitchen table conversations with my wife, Celia Goto, about her work as a psychotherapist and mine as an artist, have been a great source of inspiration in making this series.

John Goto
Oxford 2012