

FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE



JAN 23 - FEB 15
ALLEN THEATRE



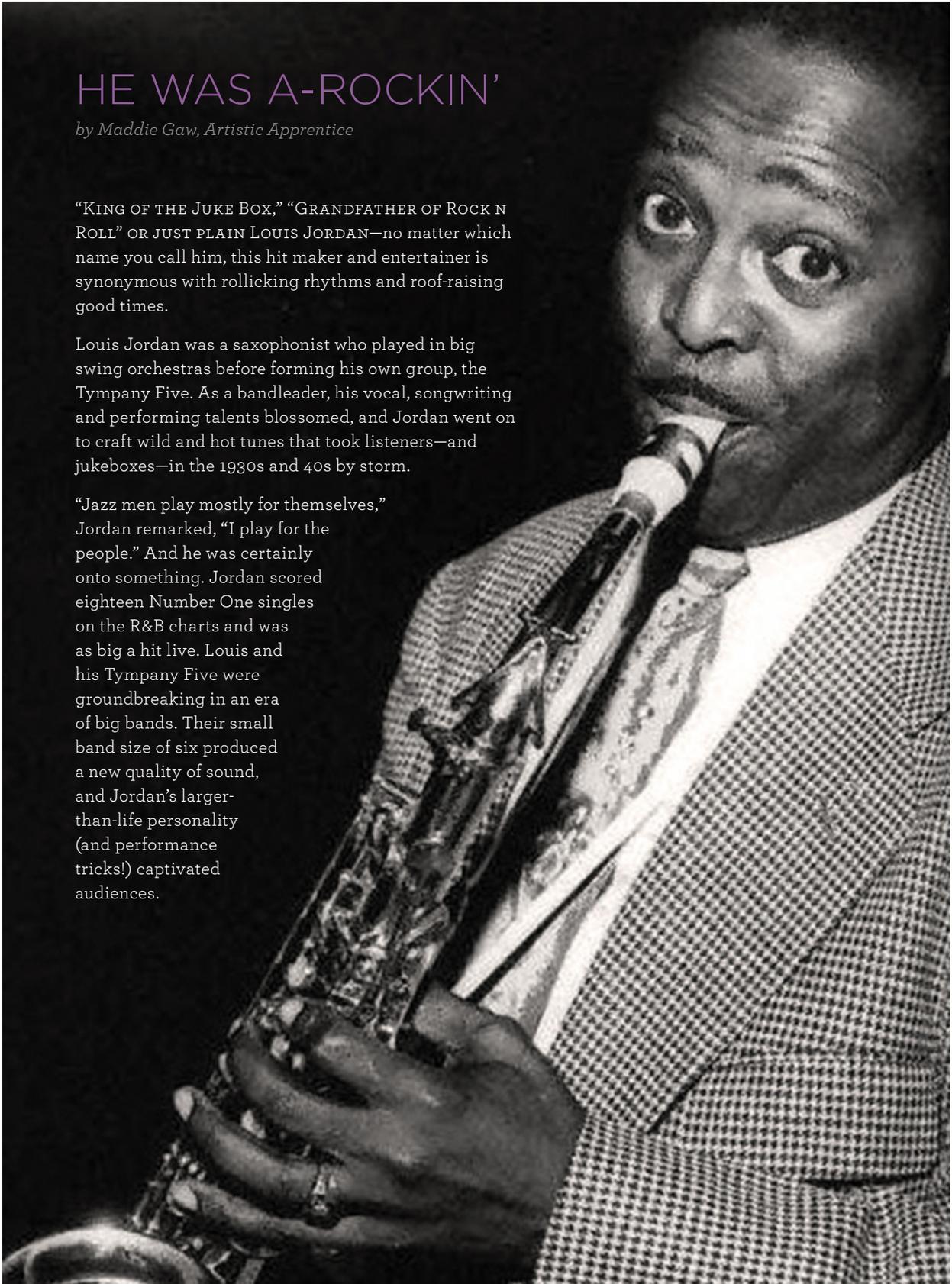
HE WAS A-ROCKIN’

by Maddie Gaw, Artistic Apprentice

“KING OF THE JUKE BOX,” “GRANDFATHER OF ROCK N ROLL” OR JUST PLAIN LOUIS JORDAN—no matter which name you call him, this hit maker and entertainer is synonymous with rollicking rhythms and roof-raising good times.

Louis Jordan was a saxophonist who played in big swing orchestras before forming his own group, the Tympany Five. As a bandleader, his vocal, songwriting and performing talents blossomed, and Jordan went on to craft wild and hot tunes that took listeners—and jukeboxes—in the 1930s and 40s by storm.

“Jazz men play mostly for themselves,” Jordan remarked, “I play for the people.” And he was certainly onto something. Jordan scored eighteen Number One singles on the R&B charts and was as big a hit live. Louis and his Tympany Five were groundbreaking in an era of big bands. Their small band size of six produced a new quality of sound, and Jordan’s larger-than-life personality (and performance tricks!) captivated audiences.



Louis Jordan, with his signature wide-eyed stare and his saxophone.

"I didn't stick to what you'd call jazz," Jordan explained, "I have always stuck to entertainment." Jordan cultivated his persona and wit from vaudeville comic Bert Williams and other black performers from his youth. Jordan became known for his comedy. For instance, he once dedicated his song, "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby" to movie star Errol Flynn during Flynn's notorious paternity suit.

Jordan's performance style provided the blueprint for rock n' roll—visually and musically—and all that's come after. According to a Tympany Five member, Jordan was trying to "present his audience with a Technicolor picture of a live band," which included wearing the "wild colors" that eventually became the hallmark of some of popular music's biggest stars. Musically, his focus on the small-combo and incorporation of electric guitar was also a vital precursor to rock and roll's sound.

Jordan's work immediately impacted the next generation

of early rockers like Chuck Berry and Ray Charles who often covered his material. "Louis Jordan has had a great and lasting influence upon my appreciation of music," Charles reflected, "and, perhaps, even my performance." Meanwhile, Berry reworked the guitar parts of Jordan's "Ain't That Just Like A Woman" into his famous "Johnny B. Goode" riff.

Jordan's influence extended beyond his lifetime and can still be heard in popular music today. As B.B. King once explained, "What [Louis] was doing became the origins of rap. He was rhyming things that nobody else was able to do." Jordan's song "Beware"—featuring rhymes at a mile a minute—has been called the earliest rap song.

Perhaps Louis Jordan's most lasting legacy transcends genre or form: the celebration of good music and good times. In the spirit of today's YOLO (You Only Live Once) culture, Jordan once famously sang, "I don't care if you're young or old. Get together, let the good times roll." 🎷



A still of Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five performing "Caledonia." Jordan's "soundies" were amongst the predecessors for music videos made by artists today.