



Ja-Da Ja-Da Jing Jing Jing

Every year for the past zillion years, my music partner Lou and I have put on an early New Year's Eve show. We auction off -- for a charitable cause -- a silly painting by yours truly, as an imitation self-portrait by Matisse, because his birthday is Dec. 31.

This year the subject was Matisse's birthday in 1940. He has painted himself as part of Carmen Miranda's trademark fruit-filled hat, because 1940 is the year Carmen swooned the US as the star of the movie *Down Argentine Way*. She is holding Jiminy Cricket who is disguised as Albert Einstein. Jiminy Cricket's debut was in 1940 with an appearance in the film *Pinocchio*. He is disguised because of Matisse's assumed fear of Disney copyright lawyers, and looks like Einstein because 1940 was the 75th anniversary of the publication of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. End of painting description.

In *Pinocchio*, the voice of Jiminy Cricket was performed by Cliff Edwards, also known as Ukulele Ike. Cliff Edwards and his uke enjoyed great popularity in the 20s and 30s, appearing on Broadway and in films and so forth. His latter years were not so fortunate -- he died flat broke in 1971 -- but he had quite a ride.

I was intrigued by this bit of info from Wikipedia: "[Cliff Edwards] got his first break in 1918 at the Arsonia Cafe in Chicago, Illinois, where he performed a song called "Ja-Da", written by the club's pianist, Bob Carleton. Edwards and Carleton made it a hit on the vaudeville circuit. "

That's what this Whither Zither is about, finally. The song Ja-Da. I had never heard of the song before, which I came to find out later put me in a distinct minority. I had to track it down on YouTube, where there reside plenty of examples of it. (To search for it on iTunes or the web, use the phrase "jada jada jing jing jing," because if you just use the word "jada," you'll

have too many unrelated hits, such as for the Journal of the American Dental Association). Though I couldn't find a version on YouTube sung by Cliff Edwards, I bought one for 99¢ on iTunes that Cliff recorded in 1956 with the great Wonderland Jazz Band.

So. I was at a party (rare for me) a few days after coming upon this stellar ditty and mentioned never having heard it, whereupon about four people started right in, belting it out together. Such is the folk process; we're all left out of the processor now and then. But now I'm in the know.

Spurred on by this outburst of song at the party, my friend Sue Deneen went home and found for me (thank you Sue!), in an old Reader Digest music volume, the words and notation for Ja-Da, introduced in part by this: "*On the serious side, musicologist Sigmund Spaeth saw in this gibberish song 'a foretaste of modern Dadaism, Dali and Gertrude Stein.'*"

Gosh, who can say? But this melody did seem so crazy familiar to me that I knew I had been injected with its ear-worm somewhere in the vast past. I thrashed around the few remaining memory cells and, by golly, I found it.

My high school in Appleton WI, had and still has a sports team called the Terrors. Their fight song was, and probably still is (with a different fourth line than shown here; I can't remember the original):

*Terrors, Terrors, T-E-R-R-O-R, S.
Terrors, Terrors, T-E-R-R-O-R, S.
We're the team that can't be beat
Purple hair and stinky feet
Terrors, Terrors, T-E-R-R-O-R, S.*

And the melody of this song is the Ja-Da chorus melody! A few short days after I was struck with this epiphany, my wife Kristi -- who is also from Appleton -- was talking about her reckless youth, and how she and her brother used to drive 30 miles to Waupaca with their fake IDs to get drunk and watch a filthy band called Doug Clark and the Hot Nuts. She then sang the only song of theirs she could remember: "Hot nuts, hot nuts, get 'em from your peanut man." And -- you guessed it -- it was to the melody of the Ja-Da chorus! Now,

often when I tell people about this song and sing a little of it, the reaction is, "I'm sure I heard a commercial with this melody..." and I wouldn't be surprised if they had. It's catchy.

And that catchiness is why Ja-Da became a jazz standard, recorded by countless artists and bands such as Tommy Dorsey, Count Basie, Al Hirt, The Pointer Sisters, The Four Seasons, Bob Crosby, etc. Suddenly, to me, it seems like it's everywhere. Where have I been? Here are the lyrics, as recorded from a YouTube video of a piano roll of the song, apparently produced in 1918, the year the song was written. The YouTube URL for this piano roll is:

<https://youtu.be/rrwCJXrsBL0>

And here is a recording of Arthur Fields singing it in 1918:

<https://youtu.be/1wMQb8QQzBs>

The lyrics are stupid which I think makes them catchier. At least that's the theory behind my own life's work:

Ja-Da ©1918 Bob Carleton

*You've heard all about your raggy melodies
Everything from opera down to harmony
But I've a little song that I will sing to you
It's going to win you thru and thru*

*There ain't much to the words but the music is grand
And you'll be singing it to beat the band
Now you've heard of your will-O'-the wisp,
But give a little listen to this; it goes*

Chorus:

*Ja-Da, Ja-Da, Ja-Da Ja-Da Jing Jing Jing
Ja-Da, Ja-Da, Ja-Da Ja-Da Jing Jing Jing*

*That's a funny little bit of melody,
It's so soothing and appealing to me; it goes
(Chorus)*

*Now everyone was singing a Hawaiian strain
Everyone seemed to have it on their brain
When Ya-ka-hicky-hoo-la-do was all the craze
Why, that's the one that had 'em dazed*

*The object now is for something new
Something that will appeal to you
And here's a little mel-o-dy
That you will find will linger, linger
There on your mind; it goes
(Chorus)*

*That's a funny little bit of melody,
It's so soothing and appealing to me; it goes
(Chorus)*