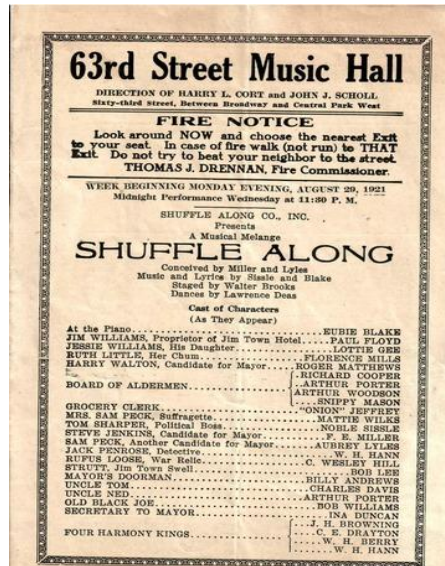


Harry Walton in shuffle along: His impact and legacy



What is Shuffle Along?

a groundbreaking 1921 Broadway musical revue, written, performed, and produced entirely by African Americans, which featured music and lyrics by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake and a book by Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles. The show was an unexpected smash hit, becoming the first African American musical to achieve mainstream success on Broadway and significantly influencing the evolution of musical theater by bringing jazz to the stage and paving the way for future Black theatrical works.



Harry Walton

Harry Walton is the honest, virtuous candidate for mayor in *Shuffle Along* (1921), running against corrupt rivals and winning both the election and Jessie Williams' love.



Why Harry Walton specifically?

1. The way he presented himself.
2. He was the main reason for the popularity of the songs “Love will find a way.” and “ I am just wild about Harry”.
3. The inspiration and the leadership he provided for a lot of African American actors after him to show their talent.

Reason number one: His charm.

In the years before 1921, Black males on Broadway were always comic characters who received no attention from the spectators as they were sidekicks. However, Harry Walton is the exact opposite: sincere, aspirational, passionate, emotional, and idealistic. In contrast to the dishonest Sam and Steve, he actually stands for development when he runs for mayor in the program as a reform candidate. This was unheard of and made people rush to see this new style of musicals.



Reason number two: the popularity of the song

His song lyrics carry the show's most radical innovations: they show Black love with dignity, joy, and seriousness, something Broadway had never seen before. This made the songs a national hit and made people want to see this show more. For instance, the song "Love Will Find a Way," which was sung by Harry Walton and Jessie Williams and was one of the show's hits, makes Harry from an ordinary plot element or political candidate into an interesting romantic lead character. This was Broadway's first serious Black love duets ever! By singing it, Harry created what it meant to be a Black man on stage: passionate, loving, and caring.



Reason number three: His Legacy

Harry Walton's influence went beyond just making the show popular; it also paved the way for future black actors to freely display their talent and take on major roles. Actors enjoy Paul Robeson's parts (he sang "Ol' Man River" in the Show Boat in 1927). Porgy and Bess (1935) and other musicals featured later Black romance leads. Black actors portraying "serious" love stories instead of simply comedic supporting roles have become more usual.



In conclusion



Thank you!