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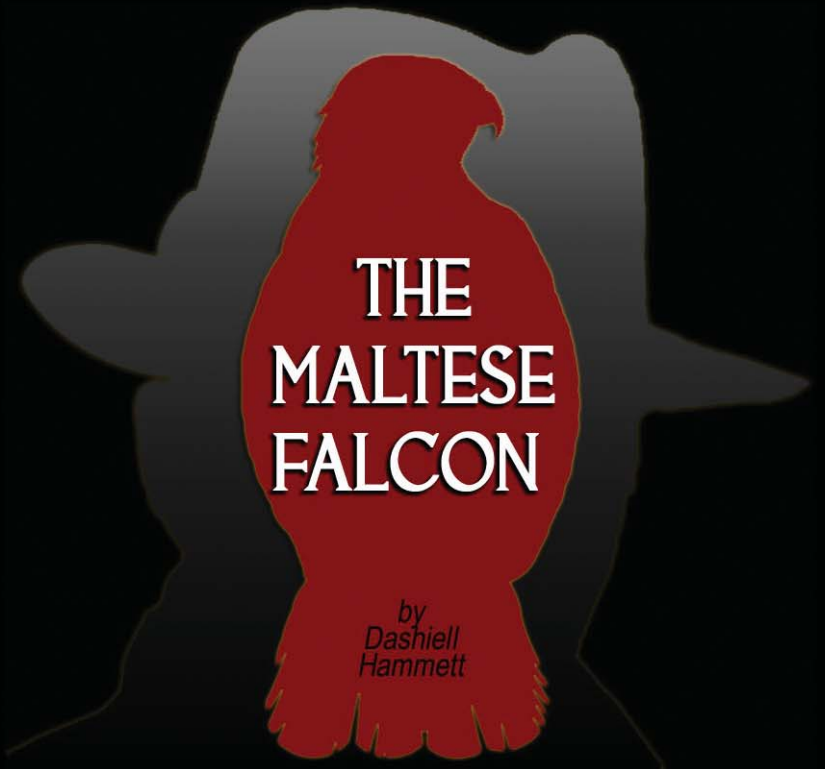
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# The Art of Deception

By Kathleen Maher, Executive Director/Curator, The Barnum Museum

The era of the 1920s was a time of immense social changes and profound cultural conflicts. The decade embodied epic transformations as America was shifting from an agrarian to an industrial economy, and new ideals of modern living were capturing broad national interest and imagination. Remarkable inventions such as the automobile, the airplane, and the advent of the radio began to expand society's ability to reach beyond the limitations of community boundaries and see the world as an expansive place of opportunity and fortune. Much of the nation was gaining a great sense of confidence from the momentum of industrial invention, and society began to embrace innovative technologies into their daily lives. As the economy flourished, new found wealth emerged and cities all over the United States were becoming vibrant social and cultural centers. The increasing popularity of mass entertainment including motion pictures, musical theater and vaudeville, jazz music, literature, and emerging styles of abstract and modern art, were defining the trends for a new, prosperous and flamboyant age. Influences of exotic styles in architecture, fashion and decorative design introduced by French and Russian artists and intellectuals were embraced by Americans, and fashionable tastes were being dramatically altered, redefining the Victorian genre with the movement of the Modern and Art Deco era.



The ravages of WWI (1914-1918) slowly dissipated, and by the 1920s, the new decade offered opportunity for recovery and change. As many new reforms were successful and stimulated economic and cultural growth, some changes were marked by social whiplash. In 1919, the 18th Amendment was enacted prohibiting the manufacture, transport and sale of liquor. Although it was believed that Prohibition, referred to as the "Noble Experiment," would alleviate social disorder, elevate moral character, and boost economic conditions during wartime transitioning, the law lacked public support and Americans found ways of side-stepping enforcement. Unlawful establishments such as speakeasies were opened and often controlled by illegal and at times violent gangster operations. Although organized crime existed before and after the Prohibition enactment, bank robberies, gambling and even black market drug running became business enterprises, and criminals became 'would be' celebrities. Al Capone, Bugsy Siegel, and John Dillinger, and later Bonnie and Clyde became notable legends of the era, heralding in the term "public enemy" to identify the most formidable outlaws of the day. Ultimately, Prohibition was seen as an affront to personal liberties, and its demise was compounded by the federal government's inability to enforce Prohibition law. On February 20, 1933, Congress proposed the 21st Amendment to repeal the 18th Amendment putting an end to Prohibition and presumably the violence of the gangster enterprise.

## The Barnum Museum Presents The National Endowment for the Arts Big Read 2009

Celebrating

### The Maltese Falcon by Dashiell Hammett

The Barnum Museum wishes to thank all those who have generously supported the 2009 Big Read! It is with much appreciation that we thank, Bank of America, Barnum Financial Group, Bridgeport Regional Business Council, City of Bridgeport, Connecticut Post, Center Stage of Shelton, Dr. DeJesus & Associates, Duchess Restaurants, Fairfield County Community Foundation, Food World, Greater Bridgeport Transit, HealthNet, People's United Community Foundation, City of Shelton, Sports Center of Connecticut, Stockbridge's Gourmet Cheesecakes, The Edge Fitness Club, Tremont & Sheldon, The Watermark at 3030 Park, University of Bridgeport, Valley Community Foundation, Written Words Bookstore and our Radio Sponsors, Star 99.9 and WPKN.

We are so grateful to all of our Partnering Organizations who come together each year in support of this extraordinary National Endowment for the Arts literary Program. It is with unyielding gratitude we thank, the Music and Arts Center for Humanity and the University of Bridgeport staff and students for contributing extraordinary artwork for this exhibition. We would also like to thank the Fairfield Museum and History Center for generously lending artifacts to our exhibition, and to the Historical Collections of the Bridgeport Public Library for lending historic images for our Big Read exhibition and catalog.

We thank all of our wonderful partners for the work they have done to present programs including Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo, The Discovery Museum, Bridgeport Board of Education, Bridgeport Community Historical Society, Downtown Cabaret Theater, Playhouse on the Green, City Lights Gallery, Historical Collections/Bridgeport Public Library, Plumb Memorial Library, Connecticut Free Shakespeare, Burroughs Community Center, Ralphola Taylor Center, Bridgeport Health Department.

Special thanks to The Barnum Museum staff and volunteers, Erica Bartelson for graphic design, White Light Advertising, and Large & Page Communications who worked tirelessly to produce the 2009 Big Read events at the Museum and throughout the Bridgeport and Shelton Communities. We wish to acknowledge all the dedicated volunteers who took part in Bridgeport/Shelton Big Read celebrating Dashiell Hammett's Maltese Falcon!

*The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Service and Arts Midwest.*

### The Barnum Museum

820 Main Street, Bridgeport Connecticut  
203-331-1104 • [www.barnum-museum.org](http://www.barnum-museum.org)

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places,  
The Barnum building is owned by the City of Bridgeport

*"The Noblest Art is that of Making Others Happy"*  
P.T. Barnum, 1891



# Exhibition Gallery Music

1. LET'S MISBEHAVE, Irving Aaronson and his Commanders
2. MY BLUE HEAVEN, Gene Austin
3. COLLEGIATE, Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians
4. ALICE BLUE GOWN, Edith Day
5. LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE, The Coon Sanders Nighthawks
6. LUCKY LINDY, Nat Shilkret and the Victor Orchestra & Chorus
7. THE VARSITY DRAG, George Olsen and his Music
8. DO, DO, DO, Gertrude Lawrence
9. WHISPERING, Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra
10. I WANNA BE LOVED BY YOU, Helen Kane
11. BLACK BOTTOM, Johnny Hamp's Kentucky Serenaders
12. MAKIN' WHOOPEE, Eddie Cantor
13. CHARLESTON, Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra
14. THE PRISONER'S SONG, Vernon Dalhart
15. MY PRETTY GIRL, Jean Goldkettle and his Orchestra
16. MY MAN, Fanny Brice
17. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY, Duke Ellington and his Orchestra
18. LOUISE, Maurice Chevalier
19. IF I HAD A TALKING PICTURE OF YOU, Johnny Hamp's Kentucky Serenaders
20. RHAPSODY IN BLUE, George Gershwin (Piano) with Paul Whiteman and his Concert Orchestra

## NIPPER'S GREATEST HITS THE 20'S



On August 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment was ratified, arming women with the right to vote, and giving force to women in immense numbers. Uninterested in conforming to old ideals of womanhood, this new generation of young women were eager to embrace a new role and presentation in society. In addition, with new found positions in the workforce after WWI, women were not inclined to return to conventional household routines. Although domestic service remained the largest occupation for women during the period, positions as secretaries, clerks, teachers and nurses remained most common occupations for the female labor force. Advancement and progress for working women remained slow as opportunities in varied occupations were limited, and often received with hostile reaction. To a still patriarchal society, the unfavorable attitude of women competing for male positions was prevalent. Pay for women in equal positions was significantly less, and the Supreme Court ruled down a minimum wage law which would have assisted in alleviating discrepancy. Unyielding in their efforts to continue to gain momentum in the workplace, women continued to pursue diverse occupations in male dominated fields, and women entered universities and colleges assuming degrees in law, finance, medicine, and higher educational vocations.

Alice Paul was an ardent crusader for the 19th Amendment, going so far as to stage hunger strikes in support of the cause. Having been arrested numerous times for her public rallies and protests, Paul celebrated the ratification of the women's suffrage amendment in 1920. In 1923, Alice Paul drafts the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) which was introduced into every session of Congress between 1923 and 1972. In 1972, the Amendment was finally passed and sent to the states for ratification. The seven-year time limit in the ERA's proposing clause was extended by Congress to June 30, 1982, but at the deadline, the ERA had been ratified by only 35 states, leaving it three states short of the 38 required for ratification. It has been reintroduced into every Congress since that time and is still not part of the United States Constitution.\*

\*(Equal Rights Amendment, [equalrightsamendment.org](http://equalrightsamendment.org))



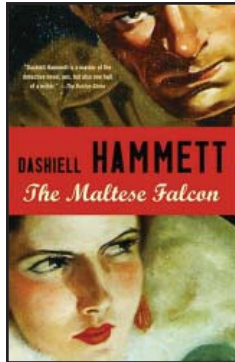
To counter the women's liberation movement, a new consumer culture emerged to entice and romanticize the old ideals of home and sanctuary. New technology and clever advertising methods set the tone for an emancipated woman, glorifying mundane consumption to allure and intrigue. The emergence of a consumer-oriented economy brought commercial opportunity, and innovative products were presented to a conspicuous market. The introduction of canned foods, and an abundance of readily available household appliances released women from domestic drudgery and time consuming household tasks. The accessibility to ready-made clothing in massive department stores provided access to the highest of fashionable

trends being set in Europe, and American women were eager to incorporate haute-couture into their lives. The emergence of the 'flapper' set the stage for a cavalier and care-free attitude, and presented a rebellious position toward authority and customary social traditions. Breaking the mold of the Victorian beauty, the flapper was considered scandalous to former standards of presentation and behavior. Abandoning corsets and petticoats, wearing



makeup, smoking, short hair, and wearing unstructured, short, loosely fitting dresses and even wearing trousers became part of visible culture and all the rage. The 'little boy' look, "garconne" as coined by the infamous French fashion designer, CoCo Chanel, was the perfect mantle for the vibrant free spirit young woman of the day.

The 1920s ushered in a period of extraordinary literature, music, and performing arts. Authors including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Edith Wharton, and Dashiell Hammett challenged the literary world, introducing courageous characters armed with sincere prose and dialog, examining, and at times challenging an established society with passionate thinking within the cultural and social context of era. With the 1929 introduction of Hammett's provocative hero, Sam Spade, the essence of the conflicted, independent-minded character suggests the struggles of the shallow, ethically troubled, modern society. Hammett, believing he was a 'bad influence on American literature,' interestingly sums up the era in his quote, *"I deserve all the love you can spare me. And I want a lot more than I deserve."* One of the most representative literary works of the Jazz age is Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Highlighting the scandalous corruption of the post-WWI age, layered with emerging new attitudes of individualism, superficiality and even cynicism, Fitzgerald's character Nick Carraway, embodies an honest and reserved disposition, determined to reject temptations of a greedy society.

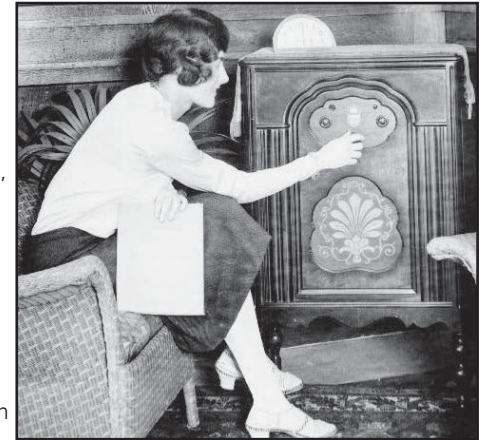


The popular rhythms of Swing and Blues-Ragtime began to transform into a uniquely American musical iconoclast. Having roots in African expression and inspired by the sound and movement of rich tempos, the age of jazz emerged during this time. Much like the new carefree fashions of the flappers, jazz music was considered controversial, and public apprehension of the movement was charged in many communities across the country. Resistance proved unsuccessful, and jazz music became a force in popular mainstream entertainment, producing such greats as swing's Duke Ellington who in turn influenced countless jazz musicians including icons like Count Basie, and Louis Armstrong. George Gershwin, Cole Porter as well as many others, would bring jazz influences to Broadway. By 1924, Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" premiered in New York. Synthesizing pop and jazz elements into classic band sounds, Gershwin referred to "Rhapsody" as a *"musical kaleidoscope of America - of our vast melting pot...of our blues, our metropolitan madness."* Gershwin set the bar for modern American musical compositions, and later commented *"true music ... must reflect the thought and aspirations of the people and time. My people are Americans. My time is today."* Over 50 new musicals were opening each season on Broadway during the late 20s, and record



numbers of people would paid more than \$3.00 for a seat at one of the spectacular New York City halls. In small communities around the country, small concert halls were producing extravagant theatrical productions, stimulating enormous local excitement. Theatres like Bridgeport Connecticut's Majestic and Lowe Poli Globe, graced Main Street, and welcomed thousands who would gather

for a day or evening of indulgence and fantastic entertainment. By 1929, the film industry was expanding, and major motion picture corporations including Paramount, Metro- Goldwyn-Mayer, and G.E./Westinghouse/R.C.A were in full production of the "talkies." Al Jolson, Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, Gary Cooper, and Greta Garbo were tremendous box office draws, and Walt Disney produced the animated cartoon films, "Plane Crazy" and "Steamboat Willie" starring Mickey Mouse.



In 1919, the first commercial radio broadcasts were heard, and more than ten million households welcomed the new technology into their living rooms. The new and exciting sounds of the jazz age gained remarkable popularity, and by 1929, Americans were spending approximately \$426 million on radios. Music, live radio shows, commercial advertising, and news broadcasts had families riveted to their easy chairs in the comfort of their own homes. The advent of the radio broadcasting completely transformed the way we receive news and entertainment, introducing the age of immediate information access, broadening the social and cultural network of the family, community and the world.



Known as Black Tuesday, the crash of the stock market on October 24, 1929 set the nation reeling and ushered in the era of the great depression. After a decade of remarkable optimism, the market crash sent the American economy into astounding despair. Panic was prolific and people rushed the banks, withdrawing all savings to ensure the preservation of their now meager fortunes. Many were left bankrupt in the wake of the massive rush. The frivolous lifestyle of the 'flapper' generation fell out of favor with the devastation of the Great Depression. The country was catapulted into an age of seriousness and extreme poverty setting the tone of the suffering nation.

Although the epoch of the Roaring Twenties came to a screeching halt in 1929, the influence of the era transformed into the modern age, and the impact of technological advancements and artistic forms survived the devastation. A defining moment in American history, the glorious days of the Roaring Twenties heralded in an epic of simplistic and elegant art, architecture, fashion, music and entertainment unlike any other. The decade is marked by extraordinary achievements in technology and sciences, and controversial public policy and reforms fueled social energy with passion, vision and determination of a new modern society.

**Images courtesy of the Historical Collections of the Bridgeport Public Library, Bridgeport, CT.**

**Costume loan courtesy of the Fairfield Museum and History Center, Fairfield, CT.**