

Song Title: **WHEN THE RED, RED ROBIN COMES BOB, BOB BOBBIN' ALONG**

Rating: **YES: Note**

REVIEWERS' NOTE

This song was performed in blackface by Al Jolson, e.g. in the 1926 short film, [A Plantation Act \(full 10-minute film\)](#).

RE: Songs, such as this one, for which the earliest performances were done in blackface

Blackface minstrelsy portrayed racist, demeaning caricatures of Black people, shown as naive buffoons or uncontrollable children who danced their way through and expressed a fondness for the system of slavery ([video montage of blackface caricature](#)).

Please review the [Blackface Minstrelsy document](#) for details on this noxious genre, its influence on the perception of Black people, and its presence today.

Given the pervasiveness and popularity of blackface for over 100 years, many songs of that period had their beginnings in blackface performances. In evaluating these songs, we consider:

- (a) Are the lyrics and message of the song in any way demeaning? **NO**
- (b) Did the song gain popularity through subsequent non-blackface performances? **YES**

Therefore, this song is rated ADMISSIBLE.

* * *

What year was this song written? 1926

Who wrote the lyrics? Harry Woods

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

Henry MacGregor Woods (1896 – 1970) was a [Tin Pan Alley](#) songwriter and pianist and composer of numerous film scores. Born with a deformed left hand, he nevertheless became a professional pianist. He began cultivating his talent for songwriting while in the Army during World War I. After his discharge, Woods settled in New York. His first songwriting success came in 1923 with the song "I'm Going South," written with Abner Silver. By 1926, Woods had become an established songwriter on Tin Pan Alley. In 1929, Woods began contributing songs to Hollywood musicals. While Woods primarily created both the words & music for his songs, he also collaborated with Mort Dixon, Howard Johnson, Arthur Freed, Rube Bloom and Gus Kahn. Harry wrote over 360 songs during his career. He was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970.

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

Paddlin' Madelin Home, When The Red, Red, Robin Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbin' Along, I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover, The Man From the South, Me Too, River, Stay 'Way From My Door, What a Day!, When The Moon Comes Over The Mountain (Kate Smith's radio signature), The Clouds Will Soon Roll By, Just An Echo In The Valley, Try A Little Tenderness, What A Little Moonlight Can Do, When You've Got a Little Springtime In Your Heart, You Ought To See Sally On Sunday, Celebratin', Over My Shoulder, My Hat's On the Side of My Head, It's Love Again and I Nearly Let Love Go Slipping Through My Fingers, and many more.

Who is the composer of this song? Harry Woods

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

The Tin Pan Alley composer wanted to make a living writing songs that would sell! Post WW1, prohibition, speakeasies: he seemed to take an accurate reading of a public that needed cheering up, optimism and love songs. The song is certainly one of optimism. Numerous performers of the 1920's used it, including Paul Whiteman, "Whispering" Jack Smith, and Al Jolson. **Jolson was performing "minstrel shows" at that time, shows that featured him singing in "blackface."** Jolson was "...at his peak in the 1920's, the most successful performer in the U.S. " Despite this, "A more serious impediment to his long-term legacy, however, is that he was the foremost blackface entertainer of his day, and his reputation has suffered as the racist implications of minstrelsy have become more apparent to later generations." (aln2.albumlinernotes.com/Al-Jolson.html)
<https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/sheetmusic/1845/>

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors, or jargon?

This song did not demean a marginalized group through idiomatic expressions, metaphors or jargon; however, one performer's (Al Jolson) use of it while he was wearing blackface certainly did. Many others performed the song NOT in blackface, including Lillian Roth (for whom it was a signature song), Doris Day, and Bing Crosby.

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.

<https://youtu.be/y1QAa3BGfJs>

What historical or social events were happening at the time this song was written?

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/essays/progressive-era-new-era-1900%E2%80%931929>

This article examines the historical and social events of the 20's. From Post WW1 migrations of people from farm to industry and south to north, prohibition and the Volstead Act, Al Capone in Chicago, the opening of Rt. 66, the opening of the first major broadcasting network, NBC, the Scopes Trial, Charles Lindbergh's first trans-Atlantic flight, "The Jazz Singer" debut as the first motion picture with sound and Disney's "Steamboat Willie," the first animated cartoon featuring Mickey Mouse, to Amelia Earhart's flight across the Atlantic, the St. Valentine's Day Massacre right up to the Dow-Jones Industrial Average fall 68 points to set off the Wall Street Crash of 1929 that triggered the Great Depression, the 1920's truly were Roaring.

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme? No

Does the research on the background of the song reveal any discriminatory, racist, or non-inclusive prior versions?

No

Please supply the links to any additional sources you used for this section of research.

<https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.law.gwu.edu/dist/a/4/files/2018/12/whentheredredrobin-1zff2az.pdf>

https://www.songhall.org/profile/Harry_M_Woods

<https://www.dbopm.com/Link/index/4201/312>

al2.albumlinernotes.com/Al-Jolson.html

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/essays/progressive-era-new-era-1900%E2%80%931929>

Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY**. They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. *Please refer to the Music Choices section of [Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) for details and strategies related to these factors.*

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage, related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. [Please see instructions here.](#)

Age: No

Disability: No

Gender: **No**

Religion: No

Sexual Orientation: No

Visible Physical Difference: No

Other? No

Please explain your reasoning for YES/UNSURE answers and any NO answers you wish to explain.

Gender is No because the line "I always feel happy as happy as a king" does not imply the gender of the narrator. This is because "as a king" refers to a third party and not to the narrator.

Are there any adjustments to the lyric that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms?

I did not identify any lyrics that might be addressed.

Please supply the links to any additional sources you used for this section of research.

The following are titles from the pre-supplied sources that I read and consulted:
That's Why Darkies Were Born; Black Singers and The Minstrel Tradition in NYC.
Message in the Music; Do Lyrics Influence Well Being?
20 Politically Incorrect Songs That Are Controversial.
12 Songs With Lyrics That Are Actually Misogynistic.
Top 10 Whimsical Songs With a Dark Past.
You Might Be Left With Silence When You're Done.
Being Sensitive: Song Culture and History.
Songhall-Songwriters Hall of Fame.
Tin Pan Alley History
Café Songbook

Our performing group believes that this song is appropriate for a Sweet Adelines performance for the following reasons:

This song has an enduring optimism that has inspired dozens of amateur and professional singers and musicians to choose to perform it. The melody, the message and the recognition factor makes this song a crowd favorite. The song may have been performed by one artist 100 years ago who performed it in a fashion that is repugnant to all of us, but all that did was destroy the legacy of that performer; directly counter to that performer's guise, the song's message and tune appeal to all. The original message of the songwriter remains unchanged as does the arrangement. The song is so strong that it has endured an unfortunate introduction to the world only to become an anthem for surviving troubled times and embracing optimism.