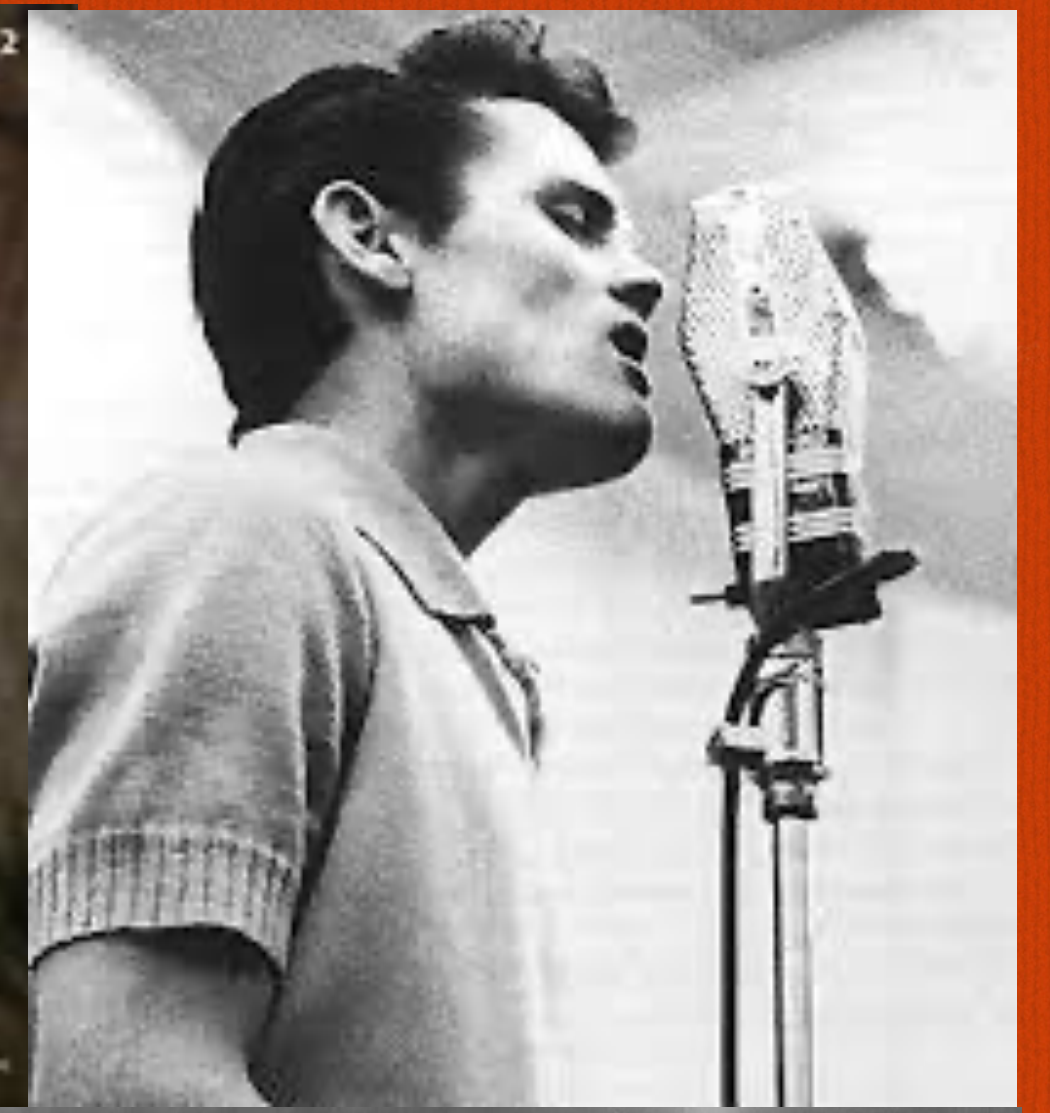


# Crooners

## The Music of Jazz's Male Singers





# **The History of Crooners**

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- ☐ **Crooner style singing started in the 20's with the proliferation of the microphone**
- ☐ **Prior to the widespread use of microphones, singers in a live setting had to project over the instrumentalists all the way to the back of the room**
- ☐ **This meant that singing quietly was not an option**
- ☐ **Microphones gave singers access to a fuller range of dynamics, which led to the more intimate and quiet singing style often associated with crooners**



# Cab Calloway

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- ☐ Born in Rochester NY, 1907, grew up in Baltimore
- ☐ Energetic scat singer, mixing jazz and vaudeville influences
- ☐ Rose to fame during the swing era, leading his own orchestra at the famed Cotton Club
- ☐ A pioneer on radio, first black artist to have a national program
- ☐ Known as the “hi-de-ho” man for his most famous hit, “Minnie the Moocher”
- ☐ Learned to scat from Louis Armstrong





# **Minnie The Moocher**

**Cab Calloway's most famous hit, originally recorded in 1931. Also  
features in "The Blues Brothers"**

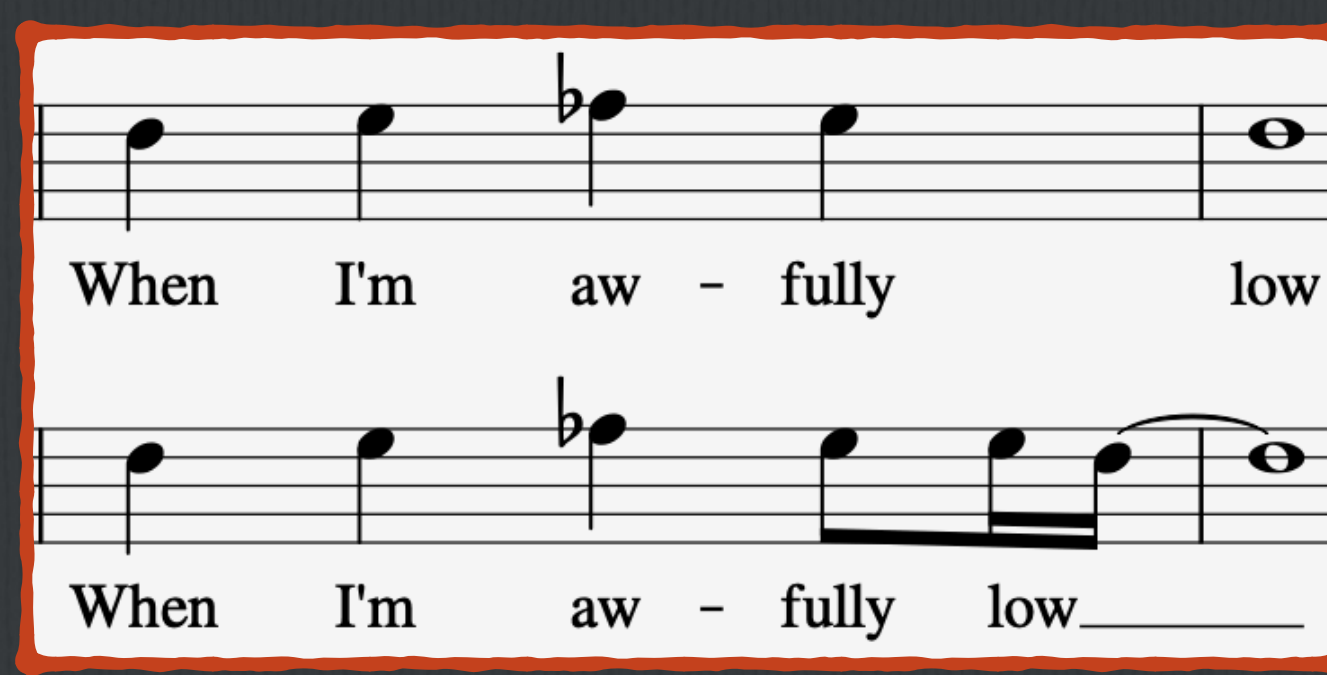


# Crooner Phrasing



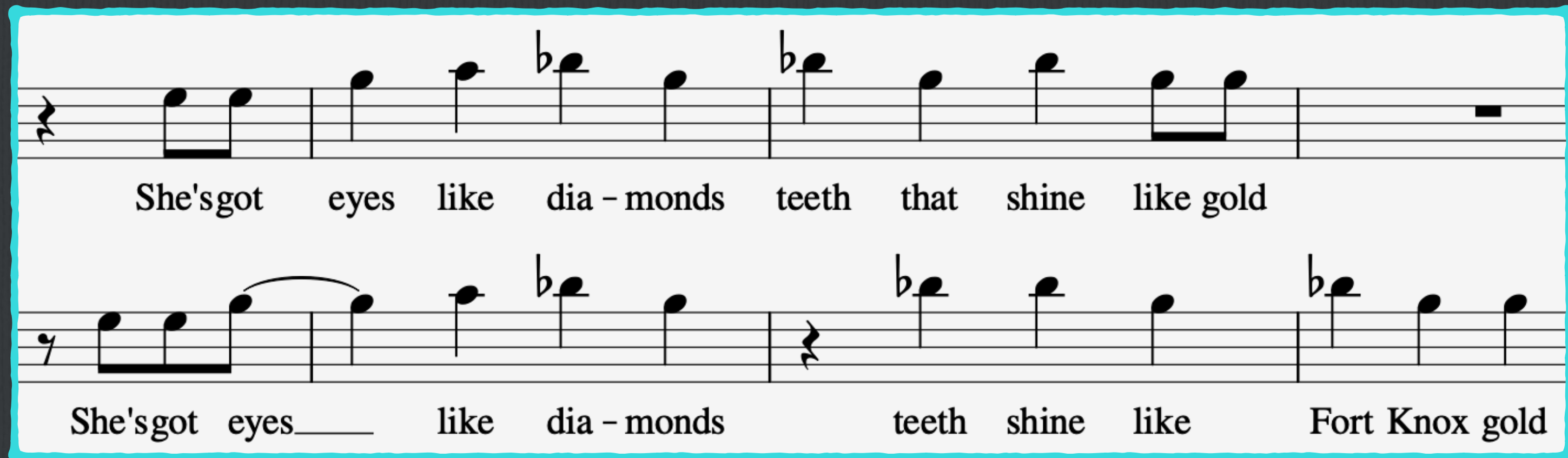
Can't you hear that pit - ter - pat

Can't you hear that pit-ter-pat



When I'm aw - fully low

When I'm aw - fully low



She's got eyes like dia - monds teeth that shine like gold

She's got eyes like dia - monds teeth shine like Fort Knox gold

- ☐ In jazz, musicians alter written melodies and rhythms
- ☐ Each musician has their own style, like a fingerprint
- ☐ Start late, speed up, end early (green, Louis Armstrong)
- ☐ Start on time, speed up, finish early (red, Sinatra)
- ☐ Start early, end late (blue, Joe Williams)



# Louis Armstrong

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- ☐ The most important figure in jazz history, born in NOLA in 1901
- ☐ Came to prominence in the 20's with King Joe Oliver's band, Oliver was his trumpet mentor
- ☐ Said to have invented scat singing
- ☐ Trumpet playing and singing influenced everyone after him
- ☐ Distinct vocal tone and command of melody
- ☐ Important duets with Ella Fitzgerald and others





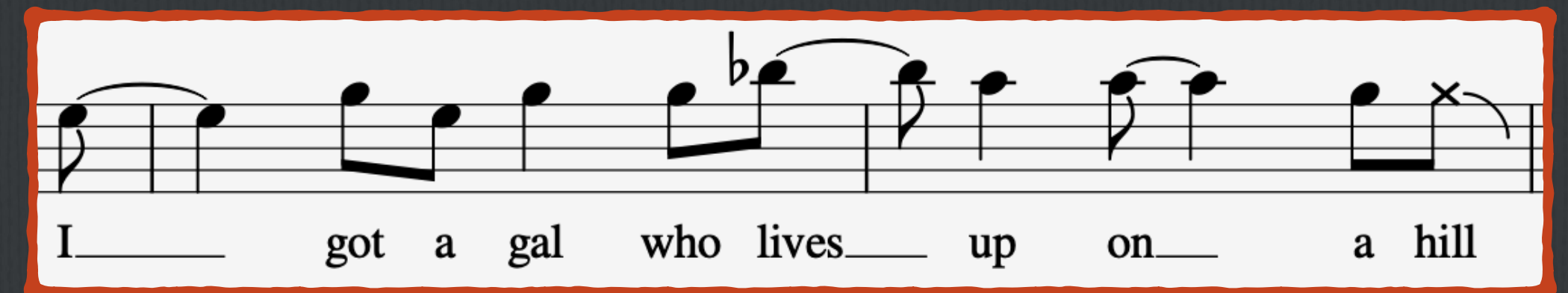
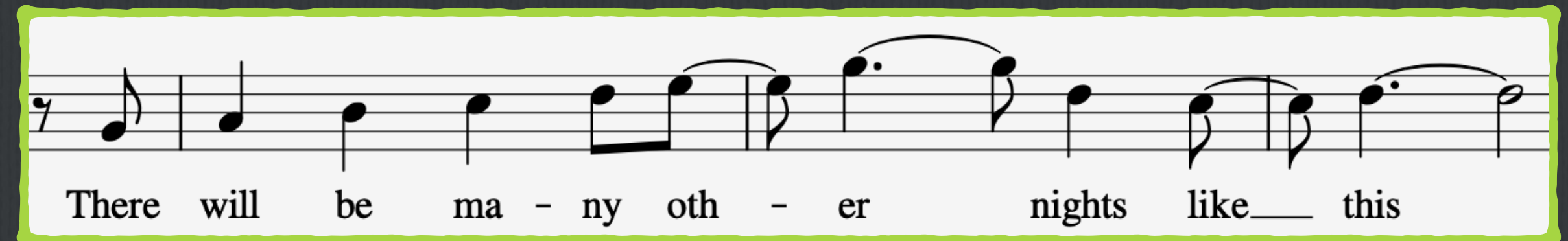
# **On The Sunny Side of The Street**

**Jazz standard written in 1930 by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields.  
Made most famous by Louis Armstrong, featuring his trumpet playing,  
singing, and scatting**



# End of Phrases

- ☐ The ends of phrases are also distinctive to each crooner
- ☐ End on long steady notes (green, Chet Baker)
- ☐ Short notes that are half spoken, half sung (red, Joe Williams)
- ☐ Short notes with an upward turn at the end (blue, Ray Charles)
- ☐ Short notes with a downward turn at the end (purple, Sinatra)





# Frank Sinatra

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- ☐ The most famous crooner, born in 1915 in Hoboken
- ☐ Among the world's best selling musical artists of all time
- ☐ Powerful baritone backed by big bands and string orchestras
- ☐ Never learned to read music, but had an innate sense for phrasing and inflection, heavily influenced by Bing Crosby
- ☐ Famously perfectionist





# **The Way You Look Tonight**

**Jazz standard written in 1936 by Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields.  
Covered by many singers, with Sinatra's 1964 version with the Nelson  
Riddle Orchestra being the most famous**



# **Crooners and Jazz**

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- ☐ **Crooner music often relies heavily on music from Tin Pan Alley and the Great American Songbook**
- ☐ **Tin Pan Alley composers include Fats Waller, Irving Berlin, George and Ira Gershwin, Hoagy Carmichael, and others**
- ☐ **The songs written by these composers make up the basis for the majority of the standard jazz repertoire**
- ☐ **Bands would buy the sheet music for these songs to perform live, and because the rise of the microphone, these songs, the big band era, and film music were simultaneous, big bands and string orchestras became the preferred ensembles for crooners**



# Nat King Cole

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- ☐ Born in Alabama in 1919
- ☐ Started career as a jazz pianist in the late 30's, helped establish the standard piano trio of piano/bass/guitar
- ☐ One of the most commercially successful black artists of the 50's
- ☐ First black host of a national TV show
- ☐ Smoked heavily to help his vocal tone
- ☐ Active in the Civil Rights Movement after an attempted lynching





# **Autumn Leaves**

**Composed by Joseph Kosma and Jacques Prevert in France, 1945, as Les Feuilles Mortes. Wildly popular jazz standard, recorded over 1000 times. Recorded by Cole in 1955 with string and brass orchestra**



# Christmas and Crooners

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- ☐ Part of the crooner repertoire is Christmas music
- ☐ The reason many people associate Christmas music and jazz is crooners singing these songs, from Sinatra and Bennett right up through Harry Connick Jr. and Michael Buble.
- ☐ This is largely due to the absolutely massive success of Bing Crosby's 1942 hit "White Christmas," which is, with 100 million sales, the biggest selling song of all time
- ☐ It also established secular Christmas music as a viable option, and so crooners (and most other musical acts) are obliged to release a Christmas song or album at some point in their careers



# Tony Bennett

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- ☐ Born in NYC in 1926
- ☐ Influenced by Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong
- ☐ Imitated instrumentalists like Art Tatum and Stan Getz
- ☐ Staunch singer of standards and jazz. Avoided modern repertoire
- ☐ Had fruitful collaborations with Count Basie, Bill Evans, Bill Charlap, Lady Gaga, and more





# **Santa Claus Is Coming To Town**

**Recorded by Tony Bennett in 1968 with a studio orchestra and again  
with the Count Basie Orchestra in 2008**



# Count Basie Orchestra

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- ☐ Many big bands were important to crooner music, but none more than Count Basie
- ☐ His big band recorded behind Sinatra, Bennett, Sammy Davis Jr., Nat King Cole, Billy Eckstine, Joe Williams, Jackie Wilson, Bing Crosby, Big Joe Turner, and more
- ☐ Had an outsized influence on the swing feel of jazz in a large ensemble
- ☐ Backing band for many of Sinatra and Bennett's most famous recordings





# Joe Williams

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- ❑ Born in Georgia in 1918, a true blues crooner
- ❑ Best known for his work with big bands, especially Count Basie
- ❑ Deeply steeped in blues, was also an excellent singer of ballads
- ❑ Interesting mix of blues inflections and phrasing combined with a smoother vocal tone
- ❑ Also worked with the small groups of many major jazz artists





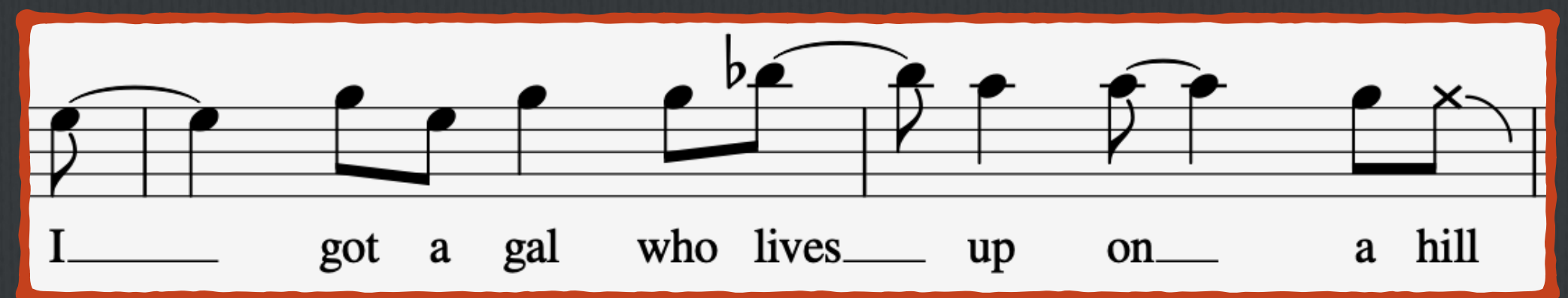
# **Roll ‘Em Pete**

**Written by Pete Johnson and Big Joe Turner in 1938. Recorded by Williams on 1955’s “Count Basie Swings, Joe Williams Swings.”**



# Crooner Tone

- ☐ Tone is both biological and chosen
- ☐ Some, like Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby, go for full, buttery baritone (purple)
- ☐ Bluesier singers like Ray Charles use a variety of shout and falsetto techniques to extend range (blue)
- ☐ Some go in between (red), like Joe Williams or Cab Calloway, using blues based inflections but keeping a purer tone

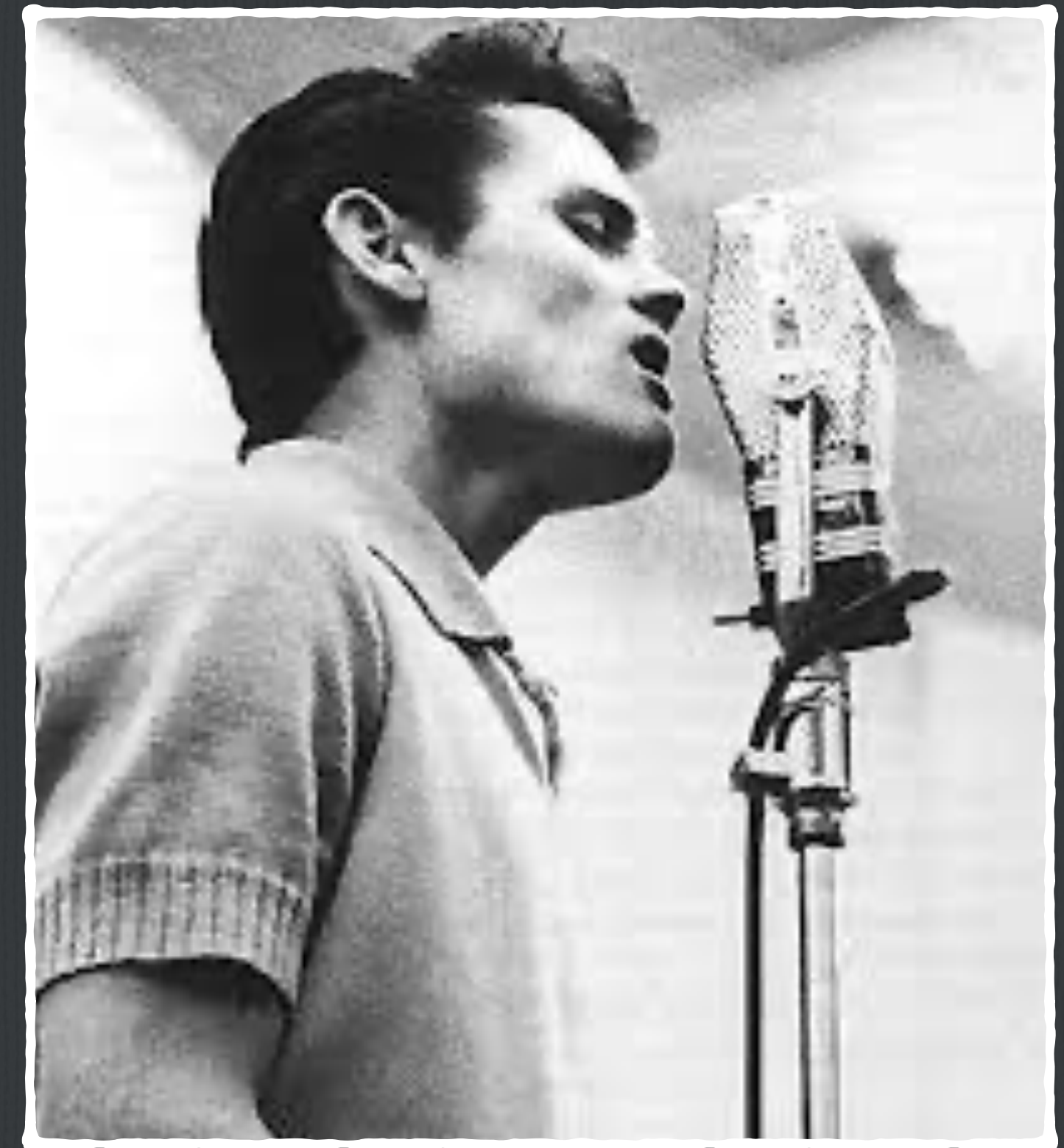




# Chet Baker

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- ❑ Born in Oklahoma in 1929, moved to CA at 10
- ❑ Important trumpeter and vocalist, contributed heavily to cool jazz/West Coast jazz
- ❑ Smooth, thin, monotone vocal style, with phrasing based on his trumpet playing
- ❑ Best known for his performances of ballads and standards, most notably “My Funny Valentine” and “It Could Happen To You”





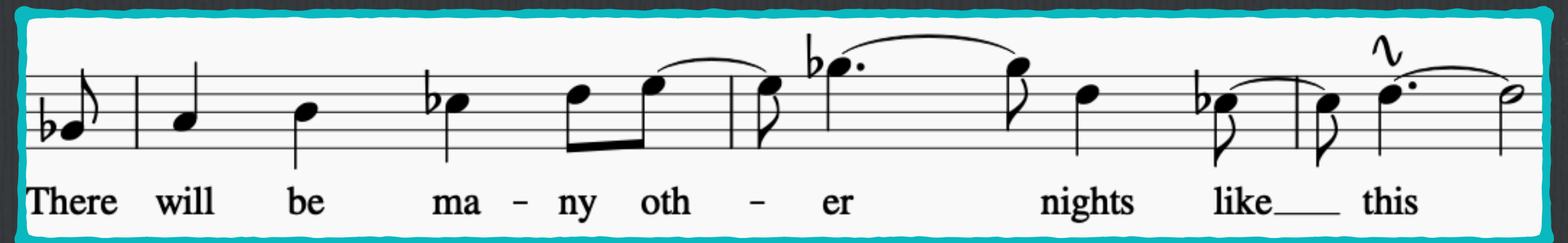
# **There Will Never Be Another You**

**Jazz standard written by Harry Warren in 1942, recorded by Baker on  
his debut vocal album “Chet Baker Sings” in 1954**



# Crooner Musicianship and Improvisation

- ❑ Crooners can change the actual melody but keep the words and chords to ensure the song is recognizable (Armstrong, green)
- ❑ Some use influences like New Orleans funk, gospel, and blues in their song choices, like Harry Connick Jr. or Joe Williams
- ❑ Many play an instrument that influences their phrasing and style (Chet Baker, blue)





# Ray Charles

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- ☐ Born in 1930 in Georgia
- ☐ Blind from childhood, possibly due to glaucoma
- ☐ Pioneered soul music by combining influences from gospel, blues, jazz, and R&B
- ☐ Sang songs from all of those genres as well as country and pop
- ☐ Excellent pianist and singer, sang in all genres





# **Mess Around**

**Written by producer Ahmet Ertegun, drew heavily on New Orleans and boogie woogie piano influences. Recorded by Charles in 1953 and became one of his first hits**



# Crooners and Acting

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- ☐ Starting with Calloway, Sinatra, and Crosby, many crooners went on to appear in film and television
- ☐ This tradition extended into early rock and roll singers as well, most notably Elvis and the Beatles
- ☐ Sinatra even won the Oscar for best supporting actor in 1953 for “From Here To Eternity”
- ☐ Other famous examples are Bing Crosby in “White Christmas,” Harry Connick Jr. in “Will and Grace” and “Independence Day,” and Cab Calloway in “Porgy and Bess” and Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. in “Cannonball Run”



# Harry Connick Jr.

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- ☐ Born in New Orleans, 1967
- ☐ Piano prodigy, performing with the NOLA Symphony at age 9
- ☐ Heavily influenced by NOLA piano music and crooners of the 50's
- ☐ Became well known thanks to his contributions to the soundtracks of "When Harry Met Sally" and "Sleepless in Seattle"
- ☐ Contributed heavily to humanitarian efforts after Katrina





# **Mardi Gras in New Orleans**

**New Orleans standard written by Professor Longhair in 1949. Recorded  
by Connick live in 2011 and on his 2007 studio album Chanson Du  
Vieux Carre**