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# SOUNDIES

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# MOVIES, MUSIC, CONTRADICTIONS

## SOUNDIES AND 1940s AMERICA



By Susan Delson



Teens with a Panoram in the 1944 Soundie *The Bobby Sox Tune*.

If, on a hot summer night in 1944, you finished your shift at the defense plant and strolled down to the corner tavern for a beer, you might have found your pals gathered around a machine at the back of the bar. A little taller than a modern refrigerator, the Panoram, as it was called, was a “movie jukebox,” playing three-minute music films called Soundies.

The crowd might have been watching Jimmy Dors-ey, Larry Clinton, or another big-band leader swinging through a hit like *Au Reet* or *Dipsy Doodle*. They might have eyed the Pretty Priorities doing a patriotic strip tease in *Take It Off*, or sung along with Spike Jones and His City Slickers on *Clink! Clink! Another Drink* (with the lyrics appearing on an on-screen Panoram).

The eight Soundies on the reel probably included a comic “hillbilly” title like *There’s a Hole in the Old*

*Oaken Bucket*, along with a Latin number like *Rhumba New York*. And one with Black performers—a teenage Dorothy Dandridge showing off her new outfit in *A Zoot Suit*, Duke Ellington and His Orchestra in *Jam Session*, or Sister Rosetta Tharpe rocking the house with Lucky Millinder and his band in *The Lonesome Road*. Back at the factory, there might have been a Panoram in the break room, stocked with numbers like *Defend America*, *Don’t Be an Absentee*, and *I Shut My Mouth for Uncle Sam*.

Catapulting movies out of the theater, jukebox films are a little-known way-station in the long migration of the moving image to ever-smaller screens. In bars and restaurants, bus stations and military bases—anywhere a music-only jukebox might be found—movie jukeboxes offered on-the-fly snips of film entertain-



The Nat Cole Trio performing on a restaurant Panoram in *Frim Fram Sauce*.

ment, no ticket required. They were an ideal match for the frantic, swing-shift pace of the World War II years, when even the beds in defense-plant towns were often rented in eight-hour shifts, and movies and pop music were the roaring twin engines of American popular culture.

To some enterprising minds, putting music and movies together in a freestanding, coin-operated machine looked like the wave of the future. In 1940 and 1941, close to 20 movie-jukebox ventures were launched. By 1942, only one contender was left standing: the Mills Novelty Company of Chicago, manufacturers of the Panoram and, through a subsidiary, distributors of the three-minute films it played—Soundies.

At a time when the average cost of a movie ticket was 24 cents, at 10 cents a play Soundies were, minute for minute, “the highest-priced cinema entertainment, the equivalent of a single feature bill necessitating an expenditure of \$3.25,” wrote *The New York Times*. “On such a basis a customer would have paid \$7.30 to see *Gone with the Wind*, a realization that must fill David O. Selznick with envy.”<sup>1</sup>

Soundies have been called the music videos of the 1940s, but that doesn’t really describe them. It’s true that they feature a remarkable range of talent, from luminaries like Ellington and Count Basie to then-emerging stars like Doris Day and Ricardo Montalban, and outstanding performers little known today. But as a body of work—some 1,880 films in all—Soundies are also a rich, largely overlooked chronicle of American popular culture during and just after World War II. Visually interpreting pop-music lyrics with all their clichés, Soundies have an uncanny way of revealing what Americans were thinking about topics that weren’t discussed openly, from sexuality to ethnicity and race.

But Soundies speak in multiple voices, and they don’t all say the same thing. As a body of work they manage to hold, simultaneously and without apparent difficulty, a number of conflicting positions about American life and culture. Shot through with inconsistencies, they both reinforce and subvert 1940s social norms—sometimes in the same film. Uncensored by wartime federal agencies and beyond the reach of Hollywood’s moral watchdog, the Hays Office, Soundies took a relaxed attitude toward sexuality and an expansive approach to who and what they depicted on screen. With



Duke Ellington in *Hot Chocolate* (“Cottontail”). Bottom: Doris Day in *Is It Love or Is It Conscription?*

an elbows-on-the-table informality that foreshadowed early television, Soundies were both like and unlike what wartime Hollywood was putting on screen.

That free-ranging multiplicity sprang in part from the business model. The Mills Novelty Company’s product line included music-only jukeboxes, and its Panoram Soundies business followed a jukebox-industry template. On jukes, hit records were played repeatedly and enthusiastically, and the Mills subsidiary that handled the films—the Soundies Distributing Corporation of America (shortened in this essay to the Soundies Corporation)—counted on a similar

response to its films. Just as jukebox operators restocked their machines with fresh record releases, each week the Soundies Corporation made a new eight-film reel available to Panoram operators.

It was a breakneck schedule. But it meant that Soundies producers could be far more agile in picking up pop-music trends than the Hollywood studios, where even a fast-tracked movie could take months to reach theaters. And because Panorams catered to the same highly localized audiences as music jukeboxes, Soundies producers could—in fact had to—address a similarly broad array of musical tastes. Each eight-film reel was a careful balancing act, with something for everyone.

Or so the Soundies Corporation hoped, since the Panoram had a serious drawback—it could play only the next Soundie on the reel, no choice involved. If you wanted to see Ellington's *Jam Session* again—and many people did—it took seven more dimes to bring the film back on screen. With revenue built by play, crowd-pleasing films were essential.

Enthusiastic audiences became even more crucial in spring 1942, when, to conserve essential war materials, the federal government halted all jukebox manufacture, Panorams included. That left the Soundies Corporation making films for roughly 3,000 Panoram locations—a barely profitable circuit, and a tenth of the 30,000 machines that the company had expected to place nationwide. That summer, the situation became yet more dire when the national musicians' union called an industry-wide strike, effectively ending Soun-

dies appearances by most professional musicians for more than a year. Under the best of circumstances the production schedule was daunting: even at three minutes each, eight Soundies a week meant 416 films a year. Over the Soundies Corporation's lifetime, from 1940 to early 1947, the company never once actually hit that figure. But getting anywhere close to it demanded a radical rethink of how films were made.

If Hollywood studios were tightly centralized hierarchies, the Soundies set-up was the opposite: a loose network of small production companies in Los Angeles and New York, working independently from each other and—to a surprising degree—from the Soundies Corporation's home office in Chicago (where some Soundies production also took place, briefly, in late 1942 and early '43). More than 45 different companies were involved in producing Soundies at one point or another. Their filmmakers enjoyed remarkable creative leeway in their choice of musical material, visual approaches, and the talent they worked with. Some makers passed quickly through the Soundies ambit, leaving behind a handful of films. Others made dozens and, in a few notable cases, hundreds. All of them brought their own experiences, attitudes, expertise, and assumptions to bear on what was, down to its final days, an evolving entertainment form.

## COMPOUNDING THE CONTRADICTIONS

The Soundies Corporation began regular release of eight-film reels in January 1941. By 1943 it was struggling to meet its weekly quotas. As budgets tightened and production schedules shifted into overdrive, professional filmmaking standards became something of a luxury. In film after film, soundtracks slip out of sync with the visuals, vocalists continue to sing even as they kiss, and shots remain on screen long after someone has clearly called "Cut." Mounting productivity pressures sparked experimentation. Documentary material was freely spliced into studio footage, occasionally serving as a comic punch line (as in *Pass the Biscuits, Mirandy*), and low-end special effects sent dancers spinning across clouds and frisking in cocktail glasses. It was a try-anything, use-anything approach to filmmaking, befitting what an early Panoram sales booklet had confidently called "a new motion picture art." Unlike movies made "with the inten-



Duke Ellington and His Orchestra in *Jam Session*.

tion of being seen only once by the same persons," the booklet declared, "Soundies must be so good, so rich in fast and concentrated action and meaning, that the same persons may want to see the very same film fifty or more times!"<sup>2</sup>

What those films actually looked like was up to Soundies filmmakers to figure out—and to a significant extent, Soundies audiences. With profitability based on repeat views, audience response was crucial in shaping the Soundies catalog, not only in determining which performers became stars but how they were depicted and in what types of settings. Through weekly postcard polls, surveys, and informal conversations with Panoram operators and viewers, Soundies Corporation executives kept close tabs on how individual films were faring.

Statements in a 1944 court case indicate that most Panorams in commercial operation were located in urban areas, especially in the northeastern US—and that Soundies audiences in those areas weren't necessarily white.<sup>3</sup> Those two factors had significant impact on Soundies as a body of work. "In their willingness to present a multiethnic, cosmopolitan, and pluralist coalition of music, dance, comedy, and drama during World War II America," writes music historian Kristin McGee, Soundies were, for their time, "revolutionary."<sup>4</sup>

Given that assessment, it's worth a moment to consider the broader culture that Soundies were part of, which was neither as unified nor as inclusive as the era's patriotic rhetoric would have us believe. More than a decade of economic mauling in the Depression had left millions of Americans impoverished, depleted, and resistant to social change. One poll at the time found 92 percent of respondents in favor of racial segregation—an attitude reflected in numerous violent encounters through the war years, both in the military and on the home front.<sup>5</sup> In 1942 alone, race riots were reported at Camp Stewart, Camp Shelby, Fort Bliss, Fort Benning, March Field, Fort Dix, and the Air Force training school in Tuskegee, Alabama.<sup>6</sup> Racial tensions on the home front exploded in spring and summer of 1943, which saw several days of rioting in Detroit—perhaps the most intensely overcrowded defense-industry city—as well as New York and Los Angeles, where white servicemen and others, egged on by civilians, attacked Mexican and Black Americans in what



Dorothy Dandridge in *A Zoot Suit*.

became known as the "Zoot Suit Riots."<sup>7</sup> In Mobile, the South's major shipbuilding center, 20,000 white workers rioted when a group of skilled Black welders were upgraded and assigned to work alongside whites.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the country, women workers faced workplace harassment and discrimination in hiring and wages. These tensions left their mark on 1940s pop culture. A casually insulting reference could turn up anywhere—in a song lyric, a set backdrop, a line of movie dialogue, a comic punch line. Or a Soundie.

As a body of work Soundies were, without doubt, revolutionary in the way McGee describes. For one thing, they routinely showcased music, dance, and performers from Latin American, Caribbean, Hawaiian, and other cultures. And at a time when Black performers were increasingly written out of Hollywood movies, Black-cast Soundies were part of almost every weekly reel from mid-1941 to early 1946, usually in settings that reflected contemporary Black success, sophistication, and style. Audience demand for Black-cast Soundies was so strong, in fact, that from autumn 1943 through the end of 1945, the Soundies Corporation distributed *additional* Black-cast films beyond the weekly reels—the only category of Soundie to receive this treatment. (For more on Black-cast Soundies, see the excerpts from Ellen C. Scott's essay and from my book included in this volume.)

But as progressive and ahead-of-the-curve as Soundies may be in the aggregate, there are individual Soundies that are as demeaning to Black, Asian, and Latinx people as anything Hollywood or the music



industry might produce. Stereotypes of all kinds turn up in characters, backdrops, and cutaway shots. In some films, the racism of a song lyric is intensified by its interpretation on screen. And white performers occasionally appear in blackface, as they did on wartime movie-theater screens.

Soundies viewers weren't entirely of one mind either. Even as audiences in key markets clamored for more Black-cast Soundies, others demanded the films' removal from the weekly reels, forcing the Soundies Corporation into a series of increasingly convoluted workarounds in the films' distribution.<sup>9</sup> Even so, the economics of the business meant that every Soundie had to earn as much revenue as possible, and this imperative sometimes brought about cultural slippages, disconnects, and odd mashups. A weekly reel, for example, might include a Soundie with racist stereotypes as well as one depicting Black performers as modern urban sophisticates. Or a Soundie showcasing Indigenous Hawaiian dancers might be followed a week or two later by one with white dancers approximating those moves, dressed in abbreviated, Americanized costumes.

The patriotic strip-tease mentioned earlier was no fluke, either. Pinups—photographs and illustrations of glamorous young women in alluring poses—were everywhere in World War II pop culture, from government war posters to women's magazines (for sending to servicemen in the family). "Female sexuality was in a sense nationalized," one historian observed, "and a discourse of obligatory sensual patriotism circulated around American women."<sup>10</sup> Soundies makers enthusiastically embraced this sensibility, especially in their presentation of women dancers and background players. Whether for patriotic purposes or otherwise, the Soundies camera could be frankly, openly appraising of women's bodies.

But only in some instances. Like so much else in Soundies, women are presented from multiple, sometimes contradictory perspectives. Women vocalists and musicians are generally seen as performers rather than sexual objects, and in many films—especially Black-cast Soundies—women background players add personality and flair, relating to their male counterparts and each other rather than to a voyeuristic camera. There are Soundies in which women plainly enjoy each other's company, express dissatisfaction with male sexual partners, respond incisively to domestic

violence, and physically vanquish men who threaten them, all in the name of feel-good entertainment. Wartime social norms may have demanded a rigid heterosexuality, but in Soundies there is room for gender play and a more encompassing eroticism. Despite state-level censorship in a few important markets—especially New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio—Soundies that were deemed objectionable usually remained in wide circulation and were sometimes re-released.

It's not possible to fully resolve the contradictions in Soundies, and that's probably a good thing. In their paradoxes and inconsistencies, their embrace of disparate and dissonant perspectives, the films draw a real-time, pop-culture portrait of the United States as it attempted to come to terms with itself as a multicultural, multiracial nation in a time of war. Offering sly correctives to outdated notions of cultural history, reinforcing racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes on the one hand while playing with, deflating, and discarding them on the other, Soundies became a site for exploring a different sense of American identity—one that, under wartime pressures, slowly became more inclusive. Those changes were bitterly resisted in the culture at large but arguably less so on Panoram screens. From Appalachian "hillbilly" tunes to rumbas and Hawaiian numbers, Soundies were filled with the music of non-mainstream cultures and subcultures. As visual representations of music, Soundies gave rise not only to a broader awareness of different cultures but to an expanded sense of hybridity that sparked further explorations. In this, the



Inspired by Indian classical dance, performed to swing music, set in a Hollywood fantasy: the Soundies mash-up *Swinging in a Harem*.

films were often led by their music—freewheeling combinations and crossovers ranging from Latin-inflected boogie to country-western calypso.

But in Soundies, pop music isn't simply the content. It's an organizing principle, and much of the films' evocative power stems from their willingness to follow the dreamlike logic of music. In *Soundies*, writes film theorist Amy Herzog, "what would otherwise remain a stereotypical or prosaic image becomes abstracted, exaggerated, and immoderate," and the need to resolve or punish anything seen as threatening is suspended. Instead, Herzog concludes, in *Soundies* "there is room for irrationality, transformation, eruption—even a joy in difference."<sup>11</sup>

## A LOOK AT THE DISCS

That "joy in difference" is one of *Soundies*' most distinctive traits, and it was a guiding principle in curating the programs in *Soundies: The Ultimate Collection*. But the films' contradictions and inconsistencies, their casual racism and sexism, can't be ignored. The idea is to present a full picture of *Soundies* as a pop-culture chronicle of 1940s America—the dazzlingly good, mostly, but also the not-so-great and the ugly—while spotlighting what made some of the films so remarkable for their time.

The *Soundies* Corporation's weekly reels generally held eight films, and by and large that's the format used in these programs. Each of the four discs has six programs—24 programs in all—plus extras created by the Kino Lorber team. Each disc has a general theme—Introducing *Soundies*; Life in the *Soundies* Era; Musical Evolutions; and Women, Sexuality, and Gender—that's explored in the first five programs. To give a sense of the *Soundies* Corporation's approach to programming, on all four discs the sixth program—called *Straight from the Panoram*—re-creates an eight-film reel as listed in the *Soundies* catalog.

Although *Soundies* were filmed in 35mm, many of those original elements are lost or missing. In most cases, what survives are 16mm prints that are several generations down from the original and may have been played repeatedly in *Panorams*. But we're fortunate that 35mm elements do exist for some *Soundies*, and those films are stunning—for instance, *Cow Cow Boogie* (Disc 3, Program 5), *Kazbek* (Disc 3, Program

1), and *Hot Chocolate* ("Cottontail") (Disc 1, Program 2). The Library of Congress is continuing to locate materials for the films, and restoration efforts are ongoing.

In some *Soundies*, opening credits have been removed or changed by later distributors. A few films here cut right in on the action, or cut out abruptly at the end. On the other hand, there are films that offer the full *Soundies* treatment, starting with a shot of velvet theater curtains opening—meant to evoke the actual curtains that audiences might have seen in a high-end movie palace. That might be followed by a production-company credit shot—most often for Minoco Productions, usually with beautiful women, occasionally with a racist stereotype—and a two-screen credit sequence identifying the film, its makers, and its stars.<sup>12</sup> Some films open with a screen credit for Official Home Movies, the first distributor to package the films after the *Soundies* Corporation folded.

Throughout these discs, Black-cast *Soundies* are statistically overrepresented: though they're roughly a fifth of the total *Soundies* output, they're about a third of the programming here. That weighting is commensurate with the films' importance to *Soundies* as a business, and the fact that they were the only category of films to be distributed in addition to the weekly reels. More to the point, it reflects the fact that so many of them are outstandingly good—and that in the aggregate, they constitute a vital, hidden chapter of African American and American music and



Carolina Cotton, Merle Travis, and members of the Glee Gates Trio in *Why Did I Fall for Abner*.

pop-culture history. Unlike some previous Soundies compilations, the Black-cast films are not presented in Black-cast-only programs. Instead they appear as they were originally shown, alongside other Soundies, in the programs where they fit most effectively.

The same is true for Soundies that offer early glimpses of future celebrities. Future movie star Doris Day appears in a program on heterosexuality and World War II on Disc 4, and budding country-western great Merle Travis turns up in a rom-com duet on Disc 3. A young Liberace, not yet an international gay icon, is part of a program on pianists on Disc 1, and later vocal legend Mel Tormé is heard on the soundtrack—though not seen on screen—in a Disc 3 appearance by his group, the Mel-Tones. Perhaps more exciting are discoveries like the Kim Loo Sisters, the De Castro Sisters, and Maurice Rocco. And rediscoveries, including vibrant performances by Gene Krupa and his band, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Louis Jordan, and many others.

## DISC 1: INTRODUCING SOUNDIES

Disc 1 showcases what the films do so well: big-band swing with stars like Duke Ellington and Count Basie, a cavalcade of dance, pianists of every description, and—befitting entertainment shown in bars—Soundies in which alcohol figures prominently. Those films in particular are a playground for cinematic special effects, including the singalong *Clink! Clink! Another Drink*, featuring a young Mel Blanc (the original voice of Bugs Bunny and most Warner Bros. cartoon characters) and a rare on-screen appearance by a Panoram machine. It was not all that unusual for two different Soundies to be produced using the same song, and the drinks program includes a good example: two films interpreting the tune “Moonlight Cocktail,” made on opposite coasts and copyrighted less than a month apart in spring 1942.

“Outrageously Incorrect—and Sometimes Subversive,” the fifth program on Disc 1, tackles Soundies’ regressive tendencies head-on, in films studded with wince-inducing stereotypes of all kinds. Soundies like these are a small fraction of the total output, but the fact that they exist at all informs our understanding of the social and cultural climate of the 1940s. The first, “Ching Chong,” plays on stereotypes about Chinese Americans, and the entertainment industry’s penchant



Mel Blanc (left) and colleague in *Clink! Clink! Another Drink*.

for framing unfamiliar cultures or subcultures in an Americanized context. The racist assumptions behind Hoagy Carmichael’s two Soundies have only become clearer with the passing decades, and *Ballet Dancer’s Nightmare* expresses, in the guise of comedy, a degree of misogyny that few Soundies approached.

“Outrageously incorrect” then shifts into “subversive,” with Soundies that undermine and contradict 1940s stereotypes. The man-tossing judo expert in “Ruff and Tuff,” the dress-wearing trio in “Operatin’ Rhythm,” and two sly send-ups by Day, Dawn, and Dusk show off Soundies’ streak of liberatory, against-the-grain inclusivity. These films and others buoyantly display the “joy in difference” that—despite some egregious missteps—sets Soundies apart from other 1940s film fare.

## DISC 2: LIFE IN THE SOUNDIES ERA

Disc 2 focuses on everyday experiences during the war and just after, filtered through Soundies’ pop-music sensibility. For viewers today, it’s helpful to recap a few facts that were common knowledge back then: “Schicklgruber” was Adolf Hitler’s original family name, “Zero” was the nickname for an especially deadly Japanese fighter plane, and Hideki Tojo was Prime Minister of Japan for most of World War II.

The first program, “Going to War,” starts with *We’ll Slap the Japs (Right into the Laps of the Nazis)*, a patriotic morale-booster released less than a month after the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. It’s followed by films that humorously—and



A pinup "victory garden": *Plant a Little Garden in Your Own Back Yard*.

in one case, dramatically—portray enlistment and military service. This set closes with a 1944 tribute to Black servicemen in the Pacific who, late in the war, had started to engage in active combat—having been previously limited, in a strictly segregated US military, to mostly support and service units. (The Tuskegee Airman being one notable exception, seeing active combat early on.)

The second program on Disc 2 surveys aspects of the wartime home front, from war bonds and rationing to grow-your-own "victory gardens" and scrap-metal and fabric drives—with that last topic getting a typical Soundies pinup-style treatment. *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* is an affectionate salute to Black servicemen, underscoring Soundies' commitment to depicting them on screen at a time when Black people in the military were all but invisible to the culture at large.

The third program, "On the Job," starts with defense work. That includes one Soundie featuring a blacksmith who's called back into business due to the rationing of gas and rubber—along with a horse who, mindful of rationing, rejects two lumps of sugar but accepts one. The program then moves to everyday workplaces, including a Cinderella story with a New York twist and a swing-time romp through a medical waiting room. Other Disc 2 programs look at Soundies' vision of the city as a place of encounter, improvisation, and sophistication, and fashion as an arena of imagination and visual play.

## DISC 3: MUSICAL EVOLUTIONS

Disc 3 explores the range of popular music in Soundies, and how different genres developed and expanded. The first program "Stirring Up the Melting Pot," reflects Soundies' embrace of inclusivity, clichéd as it sometimes could be. Opening with veteran vaudeville entertainer Gus Van—himself a one-man melting pot—the program features Hawaiian, Russian, Trinidadian, and Irish performers. There's also a number inspired by Bharatanatyam, an Indian classical dance indigenous to Tamil Nadu, performed to a swing-music soundtrack and set—inaccurately, outlandishly, but almost predictably, given Soundies' show-biz perspective—in a Middle Eastern harem.

The second program looks at the relationship of "hillbilly" music—and the crude, played-for-laughs stereotypes often associated with it—and country-western. That connection is epitomized by the Soundie *Montana Plains*, in which the classic western tune is sung—and yodeled—by a group known both as Emerson's Hillbilies and Emerson's Mountaineers. Purely for fun, this program ends with a Broadway-style number featuring another horse, this one with a dance routine.

The third program, "Latin and Staten Island," traces the impact of Latin music in the 1940s—in this set, primarily Cuban—and its diffusion into the musical mainstream. Cuban performer Sergio de Karlo reportedly composed more than 300 rumbas and boleros, including the one he sings in *Dark Velvet Night*. The Havana-born De Castro Sisters bring a jolt of 1940s glamour to *Pumpa Pumpa*, and *Paran-Pan-Pan* spotlights the Havana-Madrid Show, a popular New York nightclub act of the era. Three more Soundies deliver Americanized versions of Latin music, emphasizing the hip-shaking sensuality—and explosion of ruffles—typical of 1940s Latin music and dance performance. The program closes with *He's a Latin from Staten Island*—the screen debut of movie and TV star Ricardo Montalban, who, despite his Spanish-Mexican heritage, is cast as a Latin-lover wannabe.

Latin music and its influence turns up throughout *Soundies: The Ultimate Collection*—in the cocktail-shaker dance in *Cocktails for Two* (Disc 1, Program 4), for example, or *There's a Pampas Moon on the Campus* (Disc 3, Program 6). In the Disc 3 program



Ricardo Montalban—credited only as “Ricardo”—in *He’s a Latin from Staten Island*.

“Latin Boogies and Other Hybrids,” the pop-culture take on Latin music reflects the casual, undiscerning approach to Latinx cultural identities that pervaded mainstream US culture at the time. The women in *Hula Rhumba*, for instance, don Mexican hats and serapes to perform a dance of Afro-Cuban origin; in *Jitterbug Señorita*, the “hip señorita from Union Square” makes her entrance through an oversized Mexican sombrero, wearing the kind of fruity headdress popularized by Brazilian performer Carmen Miranda. In *Rhumba Swing*, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Policy”—which promoted friendly relations between the United States and other countries of the Western Hemisphere—is more or less set to music. Other experiments in this program include a country-music-meets-Swiss-Alps yodelfest, an accordion-fueled *Cowboy Calypso*, and an incandescent Dorothy Dandridge in *Cow Cow Boogie*.

#### DISC 4: WOMEN, SEXUALITY, AND GENDER

With the final disc, the focus shifts to “Women, Sexuality, and Gender,” starting with the impact of World War II on heterosexual relationships. The opening film, *Goodbye Dear, I’ll Be Back in a Year*, references the nation’s first peacetime draft created in 1940—and the short-lived expectation that military service would be limited to a single year. Similarly, *Is It Love or Is It Conspiration?*, starring a teenage Doris Day, reflects the fact that men who were married when they received

their draft notices were initially exempt, prompting a nationwide rush to the altar. Other films in this program look at pinup culture and the mix of sexual and patriotic pressure that women were subjected to in this era, ending with a sweetly sexy Soundie about a quick-to-marry wartime couple still learning about each other.

Despite the frequent objectification of women dancers and background players, there are many Soundies in which women clearly collaborate in shaping their screen personas. The program “Playing with Expectations” features frank and varied expressions of female sexuality, from a self-assured invitation by Vanita Smythe and a playful strip tease in *The Blushing Bride* to Gale Storm and Iris Dawn as discontented partners in *He Plays Gin Rummy*. (With this film, we start to see how the unspoken subtext in some Soundies can all but eclipse—or greatly amplify—what the film says it’s about.) This program also includes two Soundies starring Gracie Barrie, who knowingly plays with audience expectations in *I’ve Got to Get Hot*, then tells of killing her abusive husband in the Caribbean-set *Stone Cold Dead in the Market*.

In the 1940s, a white performer singing calypso would have provoked little comment. The year before Barrie made *Stone Cold Dead*, for instance, the Andrews Sisters had a huge hit with their recording of “Rum and Coca Cola,” touching off a nationwide calypso craze. And a few months before Barrie’s Soundie was released, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Jordan recorded a hit version of “Stone Cold Dead in the Market.”



Gracie Barrie in *Stone Cold Dead in the Market*.

Domestic violence was not a topic of open discussion in 1940s America, but the song's then-exotic calypso roots—and the sly humor of the Fitzgerald-Jordan recording—created what one writer calls “a comic and ethnic ‘mask’ from behind which the song’s subject matter could be presented with relative frankness.”<sup>13</sup>

In *Minnie from Trinidad*, the final Soundie in this program, Luba Malina adopts a similar mask to portray another Trinidadian character. Thanks to her high-energy, play-to-the-camera performance, Malina’s *Minnie* arguably beats the original version, performed by Judy Garland (in lightly tinted brownface) in the 1941 movie *Ziegfeld Girl*.

Another program on Disc 4, “Jumping into Gender Play,” explores a key aspect of Soundies’ insouciant approach to sexuality and libido. Mainstream wartime culture was relentlessly heterosexual, largely owing to what cultural historian Despina Kakoudaki describes as “an underlying homophobic reaction to the massive mobilization of young men” in the armed services.<sup>14</sup> For the most part Soundies enthusiastically reinforce these heterosexual norms, but there are films that undermine them, too. Non-binary gender fluidity was not widely recognized in the 1940s, but within a binary framework these films offer a freewheeling counterweight to then-prevailing social norms.

In *On the Boulevard*, a heterosexual couple negotiating their relationship in song are intercut with dancers performing as both male and female. In *The Better Half*, Leila Moore takes a similar, more ardent approach to this theme. Vocalist Ed Coleman of Day, Dawn, and Dusk and bass player Jonathan “Candy” Candido don feminine apparel in their Soundies, and the Burch Mann Dancers burlesque masculine behavior in *Too Many Sailors*. A six-gun-toting cowgirl shoots the skirts off a trio of women in *Shy Anne from Old Cheyenne*, and a nightclub performer seduces audience members in *You Never Know!*

The program ends with *Shoeshiners and Headliners*, an early Soundie that is almost startling in its disregard for the social norms of the day. Like many of the films in Disc 4, it was censored by one of the handful of state censorship boards that actively scrutinized Soundies. Sourced from the Library of Congress, the version here is the complete original—unlike the one that was eventually shown on Panorams, which had 18 seconds cut from the dance sequence near the end of



Dorothy Dandridge in *Yes, Indeed!*

the film. (In an era of racial segregation, it's not hard to guess which part of the choreography the censors marked for deletion.)

In his 1977 memoir, Soundies production head Sam Coslow wrote that Dorothy Dandridge and Gale Storm “were responsible for more dimes being dropped into our juke boxes than anyone else we had under contract.”<sup>15</sup> This comment prompted the fifth program on Disc 4, which alternates several of the performers’ Soundies—and in the process, draws a telling comparison between the roles and characterizations that were considered suitable for Dandridge and those given to Storm. Other Dandridge and Storm Soundies appear elsewhere in the discs, including films that present each of them in a more generous light. But seeing these Soundies side by side throws into sharp relief the racist thinking that Dandridge had to contend with, and the assumptions about sexuality that shaped the material that each of them was given to work with.

That said, Soundies’ inconsistencies quickly come to the fore no matter which program you’re watching. *Maharaja* (Disc 1, Program 2) features some of the most energetic jitterbugging done for the Soundies camera, but it opens with an incongruous Middle Eastern sequence. Then there’s the white hero of *Goodbye Mama (I’m Off to Yokohama)* (Disc 2, Program 1), who, in the song’s lyrics, is counting on his company’s “colored” bugler—a virtual impossibility in the strictly segregated military of 1942—to take vengeance on “the Japs” by means of a dice game,

compounding one pejorative stereotype with another.

The more concentrated and focused the viewing, the more sharply the films' contradictions stand out. But the same is true of Soundies' thematic potential, which the programs in these discs barely begin to cover. It's easy to expand on existing themes—*Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes* (Disc 2, Program 6), for example, would make a logical addition to the “We'll Drink to That” program, and gender play and cross-dressing turn up in several films beyond the program on Disc 4. And the disturbing images of field surgery in *The Line Is Busy* (Disc 4, Program 6), produced by the US Army Corps of Engineers, would add a sober note to the “Going to War” or “On the Job” lineup. Great dance is everywhere, as with the energetic interludes in bandstand films like *Jumpin' at the Jubilee* (Disc 3, Program 4) and *Air Mail Special* (Disc 1, Program 1), the living-room jitterbugging in *Good-Nite All* (Disc 2, Program 4), the miraculously recovered patients in *A Little Jive Is Good for You* (Disc 2, Program 3), or the snap of Jack Baker's choreography in *Strollin' in the Park* (Disc 3, Program 6).

In short, there's more to say about all these films. You'll find more on Black-cast Soundies in my book, *Soundies and the Changing Image of Black Americans on Screen: One Dime at a Time* (Indiana University Press), which was a crucial source for this essay. Other Soundies in these programs will be discussed in an upcoming publication. And there are more titles of interest in the “For Further Reading” list.

Enjoy your time with *Soundies: The Ultimate Collection*. History has rarely been this entertaining.



## ENDNOTES

1 Douglas W. Churchill, “Hollywood Strikes Back,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1940, 121. For the price of a movie ticket, see “Cost of Products in the 1940s” in Robert Sickels, *The 1940s* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2004), 237. In 2023, \$3.25 in 1940 dollars would be \$69.18, and \$7.30 would be \$155.39.

2 Panoram Soundies sales booklet, 1940, unpagged.

3 For more on the court case and the demographics of Black-cast Soundies viewership, see “Introduction: Turning on a Dime” in Delson, *Soundies and the Changing Image of Black Americans on Screen*.

4 Kristin A. McGee, *Some Liked It Hot: Jazz Women in Film and Television 1928–1959* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 147.

5 Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, “Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 73 no. 2 (September 1986), 387.

6 Harvard Sitkoff, “Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War,” *Journal of American History* 58 (1971), 688.

7 For an analysis of the zoot suit as a cultural phenomenon and its politicization in the 1940s and later decades, see Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

8 See “8 Hurt in Mobile in Inter-Race Fray,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1943, 25; “Mobile Race Riot Laid to Company,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1943, 34.

9 For more about the Soundies Corporation's handling of its Black-cast films, see the section titled “More Films, Fewer Screens: The M Film Conundrum” in chapter 3 of Delson, *Soundies and the Changing Image of Black Americans on Screen*.

10 Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 7.

11 Amy Herzog, *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same: The Musical Moment in Film* (University of Minnesota, 2010), 57.

12 Once a dime was inserted into the Panoram, it took roughly 16 seconds for the sound system to warm up—one reason for the velvet curtains and other preliminary visuals.

13 Franklin Bruno, “Stone Cold Dead in the Market’: Domestic Violence and Americanized Calypso,” *Popular Music and Society* 34 no. 1 (February 2011): 7–21.

14 Despina Kakoudaki, “Pinup: The American Secret Weapon in World War II,” in *Porn Studies*, Linda Williams, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 335–369.

15 Sam Coslow, *Cocktails for Two: The Many Lives of Giant Songwriter Sam Coslow* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 228.

# SOUNDIES: MUSIC FOR THE EYES



By Mark Cantor

For those who read the entertainment trades in the late 1930s—*Variety*, *Billboard*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and others—the concept of an audiovisual jukebox was almost old news. Such a device was referenced with growing frequency, and one was actually in operation at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

Beginning in 1940, dozens of companies announced their intention to produce projection devices, the films screened in them, or both. But Musical Shorts, Featurettes, Nickel Talkies and Phono-Vue came and went. It was Soundies—a film product of the Mills Novelty Company of Chicago—and the Mills Panoram projection system that would reign supreme in the short-lived audiovisual jukebox derby. The Panoram was on the scene for a little more than six years, and each week it shared another reel of eight three-minute musical Soundie shorts.

The term "Soundie" has taken on a generic quality, and music fans and writers often use the word to describe any short musical film, regardless of origin or purpose. But the word actually has a precise meaning: a Soundie is a three-minute musical film copyrighted and distributed by the Soundies Distributing Corporation of America (SDCA), a subsidiary of the Mills Novelty Company, for display in the Mills Panoram machine. Anything else may be a "musical" or "jukebox" short, but it is not a Soundie.

More than four dozen companies produced these musical subjects, and a total of 1,883 Soundies (not counting reissues) were released between January 5, 1941, and March 10, 1947. Soundies featured some of the most important entertainers of the day, along with stars of the past and unknowns who would become stars of the future. The variety found on the Panoram screen is astounding, and in many ways Soundies was



Promotional photo from a Panoram sales booklet. The original caption read: "She drops a dime and Panoram delivers the fascinating Soundie." Courtesy Mark Cantor Collection.



the most democratic of entertainment forms. Because the intent was to distribute material nationwide, musical tastes from Manhattan to Hollywood—and all points in between—were represented on screen. Viewers were entertained with big-band music and jazz, the popular songs of the day, novelty and vaudeville performances, and such “ethnic fare” as Latin American, Irish, Hawaiian, balalaika, and polka music. Dance was a big part of each weekly release, and here too variety was a staple of the film shorts: ballroom, apache, chorus line, and tap dance were all found on Panoram screens.

The production of a Soundie involved many people, all working under pressure to turn out a large number of films in a short period of time. Although the films were copyrighted and distributed by the SDCA, the actual Soundies were made by a large number of outside production concerns. Some were directly tied to the Mills home office in Chicago, including R.C.M. Productions (the initials stand for promoter Jimmy Roosevelt, songwriter Sam Coslow, and the Mills organization), Minoco Productions (an abbreviation from Mills Novelty Company) and Filmcraft Productions. Other companies not directly associated with Mills were contracted to produce Soundies; Cinemasters, L.O.L. and Frederick Feher, for instance, fall into this category. Material produced in the late 1930s and early 1940s was also licensed for release as Soundies.

Today, almost 80 years after the demise of the Soundies “experiment,” most of the attention is on the films featuring African American performers—and rightly so. In addition to such well-known talent as Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington and Nat “King” Cole, Soundies allows us to view performances by artists who were known at the time—Lynn Albritton, Vanita Smythe, Dallas Bartley, and Pat Flowers, for example—but whose careers have been largely lost to time.

After an artist was selected for a series of Soundies, a session was scheduled to record soundtracks. Although the number varied from one to fifteen tracks, a Soundies session usually resulted in three or four soundtracks that were used in released films. Following the session the producer and director would review the various takes and select the ones to be used. At a later date—the following day, or perhaps a number of weeks later—the cast would reassemble for filming, termed “sidelining.” The soundtracks would be played

while performers mimed what they heard over the speakers. With the exception of a few spoken-word Soundies that were recorded and filmed simultaneously, most subjects were filmed to playback.

What happened to Soundies? This is a complex question and I am one of the few Soundies historians who argue that the advent of television played a minor role. By late 1946 the novelty of the audiovisual jukebox had vanished, and “television in every living room” was still far in the future. The end of the war resulted in a recession as war-related industries shut down. For many African Americans, Latinx people, and others facing the loss of jobs or reduction of wages, and for women forced out of the workplace and back into prewar “homemaker” roles, the expenditure of a dime in a Panoram would have prompted second thoughts. Newly returning servicemen and women renewed relationships, got married, and often moved to the growing suburbs where Panorams were less likely to be found. There were also changes in musical tastes, and bebop, Dixieland jazz bands, and solo vocalists had less to offer a visual medium like Soundies.

After the release of March 10, 1947, Soundies ceased distribution of its musical shorts. Later that year the Soundies catalog was purchased by Official Films, and the films soon resurfaced, phoenix-like, on early television. But these older performances could not compete with the likes of Milton Berle and Ed Sullivan, and they soon passed from view. Official Films did not see enough value in the material to renew the copyrights. With very few exceptions, Soundies passed into the public domain, of little interest to anyone other than film collectors.

In recent years Soundies have seen a resurgence in interest. They have been shared in several documentaries and can be found in great numbers on YouTube. The author’s upcoming book, *The Soundies: A History and Catalog of Jukebox Film Shorts of the 1940s*, features a complete history of Soundies and other jukebox shorts, along with a complete and comprehensive catalog of all Soundies.

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*Adapted from The Soundies: A History and Catalog of Jukebox Film Shorts of the 1940s by Mark Cantor, published April 2023 by McFarland (McFarlandBooks.com).*



Sister Rosetta Tharpe in *Four or Five Times*.

# SOUNDIES, HARLEM, AND THE BRICOLAGE OF BLACK LIFE



By Ellen C. Scott

While classical Hollywood cinema was at its height and movie palaces drew spectators through layers of grand palatial architecture to the center-stage spectacle, it was Soundies that defied the auditorium's containment. These three-minute films have remained on the fringes of Black cinema history, although many prominently featured Black musicians and dancers of the 1940s, distributing them to viewing machines situated in drugstores and

five-and-dimes nationwide. More than Hollywood's underinformed Black "scenes," these films drew performers and aesthetics from Harlem nightclubs. In their embrace of the blues song's "lowdown" sensibility (at once an affective, sexual, and racial designation), they pictured the vivid grit and crassness but also the candor and excitement of Black urbanity.

Soundies projected African Americans into a surreal, casual world far from Hollywood. They also,

perhaps unwittingly, produced a cinematic discourse on African American freedom unique in its moment. Motivated by music, Soundies often figured Black freedom abstractly, and their desire to mirror and extend music's abstractions to the visualization of Black life loosened the strictures of stereotype and allowed for nonrepresentational projections of freedom. This was a departure from white fictions of race that required Blackness to be tightly linked to the symptomatically racial body (with marks of physiognomy and pigmentation facilitating the regime of the color line). More important, the Soundies showcased African Americans publicly exercising their right to the "pursuit of happiness" by having fun on their own terms. This was a less impeccable yet dignified African American freedom, different from that which Black uplift leaders championed, but one no less concerned with the dynamics and techniques of being free.

Cinematically, Soundies provide some of the most visually interesting Black images of the decade, combining documentary footage of musicians with surrealism, populist elements of the Hollywood musical, strangely unmotivated camera angles, and jazz-induced abstraction. There were limits to their freedom, however. White people were generally absent in Black-cast Soundies, so there was no real challenge to power.<sup>1</sup> While Black people were permitted to expand into space, that expansion was circumscribed because the diegesis, or narrative function, is limited by the films' three-minute duration. What is more, the presence of Black stereotypes and Black challenges to public space did not often exceed white-authored narratives of Black aberrance or exoticism.<sup>2</sup> Yet Soundies, over which Black creative talent had significant control, still had a firmer grasp of Black pleasure and movement than did Hollywood, attaching to popular songs close, gritty, and vibrant images of noir urban space.

There are several aspects to Soundies' strange liberatory discourse: how stereotypes are both invoked and undermined; how Black working-class people occupy public space in carnivalesque ways; and how surprisingly directly and intimately they depict Black sexuality and Black women's public personae. State film censorship boards harshly censored Black sexuality, seeking to restrict this Black on-screen free-

dom especially when it involved Black women. However, reining in these films was a struggle for censors, so even some racially transgressive images escaped cuts. Thus Soundies became unique not only in their evocation of Black bodily freedom on the classical Hollywood-era screen, but also in their ability to get these freer images past film censors.

### SOUNDIES AS GENRE AND CULTURAL OBJECT

Soundies were three-minute films produced by various companies between 1940 and 1947 for distribution by the Soundies Distributing Corporation of America to Panoram film jukeboxes.<sup>3</sup> Although lucrative before US entry into World War II, wartime metal shortages halted the manufacture of Panorams, hobbling Soundies production. During Soundies' brief postwar renaissance, William D. Alexander, their first Black producer, began working with Filmcraft Studios. By 1947, however, regular production of Soundies ceased.<sup>4</sup>

The films also in a sense constituted a genre, one with a unique set of stylistic elements, and were more than just filmed musical performances. Directed by Hollywood expendables—short and B-film directors—they were complex, sometimes experimental films.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike statically-shot performance films, they efficiently but smartly employed complex editing, glamorous make-up and costumes, expressionistic visual effects and camera angles, deliberate high- or low-key lighting tailored to the theme, and set-pieces that take spectators away from the "scene" of the music.



Expressionistic and low-angle: *Give Me Some Skin*.

Abstraction and indirect representation were common in Soundies (as in Black popular music). Not only did illegible lyrics such as “I want the frim fram sauce with the aussen fay with chafafa on the side,” and titles like *All Ruzzit Buzzit* and *E-Bob-O-Lee-Bop* use neologisms and deliberate nonsense to gesture beyond the representational, but Soundies themselves also visually mirrored this drive toward abstraction, pointing to surreal, half-conceived, or incompletely representational spaces and bodies. Further, Soundies’ dominant visual motifs use *mise-en-abyme*, one of the cinema’s most compelling tools of abstraction, often presented as a separate interlude within the film. Each song’s depth is revealed as the film’s initial setting (usually the space of musical production itself) opens out to alternative and unexpected spaces from a seemingly flattened plane of action.

At the center of a Soundie was not a song but an “act”—a loosely dramatized spectacle featuring showmanship rather than simple musical talent. The cleverest Soundies humorously played with the song on which the film was based as well as with audience expectations. They showed more than performances: they rendered the “live” orbit around performance, fictionalizing the lives of performers and cinematically rendering the dynamics of music spectatorship. Often evoking the cabaret, the films created “intimate” entertainment through closeups and direct address, in which “the performer might temporarily take up a fictional character in a sketch while still remaining

within the time and space of the cabaret.”<sup>6</sup> “Charismatic personality” was as central to the Soundies as Farah Griffin argues it was to African American blues performance.<sup>7</sup> In Black-cast Soundies (many of which were based on blues songs), it was just these abundant personalities (of musicians, dancers, and active on-screen “spectators”) that drew interest and spectatorial identification. Such personalities provided musical humor rich in irony, vernacular wisdom, and playfulness common in the music world but unusual for Black film.<sup>8</sup> Soundies drew upon blues performance tradition, mimicking the vitality and unrestrained joy (and joy at being unrestrained!) of these spaces as well as their collective ethos.

Most Black-cast Soundies credit white Iowan William Forest Crouch as director; since Crouch operated in Chicago, however, it is unlikely that he always directed in the Hollywood sense.<sup>9</sup> To save money, Crouch imposed a two-take maximum on each scene.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Soundies (like some B- and exploitation films) imbued Blackness with a feeling of “liveness” and “immediacy” before the advent of television. This liveness manifested itself through the spark, jitters, flubs, and deliberate counterperformance that coursed like a live wire through the films. Crucially, this liveness offered Soundies’ Black performers a unique form of control over their own cinematic image, allowing them to become what Donald Bogle termed “non-directorial auteurs.”<sup>11</sup>

### STEREOTYPE AS SURREAL ODDITY IN BLACK-CAST SOUNDIES

In Soundies such as the Marshalls’ *Showboat Melodies* and the Dixairs’ *Waiting for the Robert E. Lee*, white hicks joyfully and unselfconsciously black up in homage to Dixie. Stereotypes are also discernible in Black-cast Soundies, but rarely were they so straightforwardly deployed due to Black-cast Soundies’ own production history. According to the Black press, most Black-cast Soundies were shot at Filmcraft Studios at 2826 Decatur Avenue in the Bronx, New York, many under the aegis of Minoco Productions. Crouch coordinated productions in Chicago, New York, and California, and could not dedicate the personal attention to each Harlem production a Hollywood director would. The role of Black creative minds in molding the on-set spectacle deserves further re-



“I want the frim fram sauce with the aussen fay”: Nat King Cole in *Frim Fram Sauce*.



Sister Rosetta Tharpe with Lucky Millinder and His Orchestra in *Four or Five Times*.

search (although material documenting these productions is limited).

From existing documents, however, we can see clearly that African Americans not only appeared in Black-cast Soundies but also molded these productions behind the camera as well, even before William D. Alexander's productions. Frederick Douglass "Fritz" Pollard, the first Black NFL player, also found and booked Soundies' Black talent through his 125th Street outfit, Suntan Studio. As talent scout and production coordinator, Pollard's Soundies featured performers from the Ubangi Club (known in the 1930s for its gender-bending drag routines), Small's Paradise, Café Zanzibar, Murrain's, and the Apollo.<sup>12</sup> Suntan also employed Black songwriters, such as *New York Amsterdam News* columnist Dan Burley (who authored "The Chicken Shack Shuffle," performed on-screen by Mabel [aka Mable] Lee; and "Back Door Man," sung by Vanita Smythe) and Leighla Whipper (daughter of Black actor Leigh Whipper and writer of "Tropic-Hula").

This local basis for Soundie production continued into the medium's later years. As his production assistant Harryette Miller Barton explains, William D. Alexander's New York Soundies were an outgrowth of Black performance networks: "[S]horts were sometimes made just to give a group of musicians work... Sometimes we shot in donated spaces—a barber shop after hours or on a Sunday."<sup>13</sup> Such familiar spaces and camaraderie built an evident comfort into these films. Their divergent production history helps to ex-

plain why many Black-cast Soundies invoke stereotypes self-consciously, often in a surrealistic, abstract or uncanny way that contrasted with the films' "live," normalized Black folks who challenge the essentializing force of stereotype. Gordon Allport has defined "stereotype" as an "exaggerated belief" functioning "to justify conduct in relation to" a marginalized "category."<sup>14</sup> For Donald Bogle, stereotypes are "square boxes on a shelf" that Black actors were "wedged into . . . to entertain by stressing Black inferiority."<sup>15</sup> While this was sometimes true of Black-cast Soundies, more often they recast stereotypes' exaggeration in terms of surrealism, thus defying the purpose of rigid categorization. Instead of poisoning Black caricatures against whites to create humor, Black-cast Soundies posed stereotypes against real (i.e., nonactor), urbane Black people, thus exposing the stereotypes' inadequacies. Stereotypes, then, operate as a static backdrop against which Black progress or movement is measured.

Local specificity drawn from the films' Harlem production history also undermined stereotypes. Soundies such as the Delta Rhythm Boys' *Give Me Some Skin* and *Jack, You're Playing the Game* present Harlem as reductive, stylized essence that can be summed up in a look or a catchphrase, but many others revealed Harlem's complex hybridity. Soundies' Harlem was not a ghetto or a monument to a dead past but a place of fluidity and continual Black reinvention. In the 1940s, a crucial measure of having become a settled Harlemit was one's distance from



Music by Dan Burley: Vanita Smythe in *Does You Do or Does You Don't*.



Reimagining and remixing Black “primitive” pasts: Dorothy Dandridge at the “Harlem Jungle Club” in *Jungle Jig*.

“the South,” which then became available for stylized re-tooling and creative abstraction (Griffin 51). The Soundies document northern Black artists’ sonic, visual, and metaphorical Southern negotiations. *Chicken Shack Shuffle* focuses on Mabel [Mable] Lee’s sexy hoofing in a 1940s Harlem diner. At first blush, Lee’s feathered cabaret-wear and “chicken shack” dance bind her to a premodern past indirectly rooted in the South or the jungle. But her lyrics proclaim her dance’s link to “Sugar Hill in Harlem” where she tells us it is performed (and indeed where Lee herself was a performer). Harlem is thus figured as a site for reimaginings, remixing, and bastardization of Black “primitive” pasts. The *mise-en-scène* further hybridizes Harlem through a line of Black “spectators” behind Lee who bob in high-necked frills, veiled hats, and suits, representing a different urbane performance of feminine self. Even in the film’s spare set, both performers and signage point toward Harlem as a space of deep bricolage and mixing—where symbolic reorganization of the Southern past becomes the material for the present’s vanguard.

Some of these “Harlem” films were pointedly anti-Dixie. For example, “Sugar Hill Masquerade,” banned in Ohio, opens in a Harlem dance hall with trumpeter Walter Fuller playing riffs to see what the audience (including Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers) wants to hear. The first, “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” elicits shouts of “no!” “Dixie” also provokes emphatic rejections; and the patriotic military tune “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean” is also

firmly vetoed. It is only Fuller’s fast rendition of the jazz standard “After You’ve Gone” that sets the masquerading Lindy hoppers, including a giant in drag, to dancing. The Lindy hop, as Robin D. G. Kelley has suggested, was essential to resisting labor’s claim on Black working-class bodies, animating them instead for feats of pleasure.<sup>16</sup> Here the film’s celebration of elastic bodily possibility is based on modern Harlem youth’s rejection of the Dixie past and the patriotic modality of the World War II present. To Black spectators, the film transmits the kinetic kick and zeitgeist of rejecting the South and America’s patriotic national culture as forces that would govern their bodies.

Harlem was both the site of Soundies’ production and often their fictive point of genesis—their “where it’s at.” Soundies’ Harlem, though, was less a unified center than a place of competing, variable performances and cultural influences. In these frames, Harlem posed as a performative space, one in which stereotypes were sublimated largely to the changing bricolage of Black life.

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*Adapted from Ellen C. Scott, “Black Movement Impolitic: Soundies, Regulation, and Black Pleasure,” African American Review 49, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 205–226. Published with permission of the author.*



## ENDNOTES

- 1 I use “Black-cast Soundies” to indicate those Soundies that prominently featured Black people, though some of these were interracial.
- 2 See Amy Herzog, *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same: The Musical Moment in Film* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 52; and Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 234–35.
- 3 These various companies included Cinemasters (run by Arthur Leonard and Dick Hyland) and Globe Productions (run by Jimmy Roosevelt, son of President Franklin Roosevelt). After the spring of 1941, Mills Novelty Company (which made the Panoram machines) made moves toward vertical integration, establishing production units, including Minocco (an abbreviation of Mills Novelty Company) on the East Coast and, in the West, Sam Coslow’s Cameo Productions (which later became RCM, standing for Roosevelt, Coslow, and Mills).

4 Following the demise of the Soundies Distributing Corporation of America, some musical short films were distributed on the home market. Producers, including Alexander, sutured together various Soundies for theatrical release. Filmcraft Productions, one of the most prolific sites of Soundie production, continued operations by turning to feature-length films, including race films (e.g. *Sepia Cinderella* [1947]) and importantly, *The Underworld Story* (1950), the racially themed breakout film of white Leftist director Cy Endfield.

5 Significantly, a number of the producers and directors of Soundies also produced race films and musical shorts featuring Black artists. Arthur Leonard of Cinemasters had directed *Devil's Daughter* (1939) and *Straight to Heaven* (1939) and had acted as supervising producer on *Gang Smashers* (1938). Soundies production company RCM apparently had only three major directors and two of them had worked extensively on Black-cast films. Dudley Murphy had experimented with rhythmic expressionism in portraying Black life in *St. Louis Blues* (1929), *Black and Tan* (1929), and *The Emperor Jones* (1933). Arthur Dreifuss directed *Double Deal* (1939), *Mystery in Swing* (1940), *Sunday Sinners* (1940), and *Murder on Lenox Avenue* (1941) before becoming a Soundies director.

6 Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 29.

7 See Farah Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'?: The African American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 55.

8 See Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 73.

9 See Don DeLeighbur [Dan Burley], "'Soundies' Opening Way for More Colored Talent," *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 11, 1945: 14; "Crouch, William F., *The 1949-50 International Motion Picture Almanac*, ed. Terry Ramsaye (New York: Quigley, 1949), 53; and "How Movies Are Made," *Ebony* 2.5 (1947): 40-43. In his article, DeLeighbur refers to Crouch as "the Darryl Zanuck of the field." According to the *International Motion Picture Almanac*, Crouch was born in January 1904 in Boone, Iowa (53). After attending Grinnell College, he worked in publicity for West Coast Theaters, and later RKO, wrote a syndicated column entitled "Talk of the Talkies," and later worked on the editorial staff at *Motion Picture Herald*. He also produced travel films and a stage revue featuring Ted Weems's band before beginning at Filmcraft Productions in 1942. According to *Ebony*, Filmcraft's studio space in the Bronx was originally built by Thomas Edison and had the largest single concentration of moviemaking equipment in the New York area. Both Filmcraft Productions and Minoco made films at the Filmcraft studio.

10 "How Movies Are Made," 41.

11 Bogle, 36-38.

12 "22 New Shorts for Soundies Are Completed," *New York Amsterdam News* August 21, 1943: 15. See also Vogel, 80-81, 84-85.

13 Quoted in Bowser, 28.

14 Quoted in Noriega, 30.

15 Bogle, 4.

16 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 170.

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# A DENSELY LAYERED HISTORY: BLACK-CAST SOUNDIES AND CULTURAL CHANGE



By Susan Delson

**T**he World War II years were a time of intense social upheaval and nation-shaping demographic shifts. Millions of unemployed workers flocked to the newly booming industrial centers of the West Coast, upper Midwest, and beyond. Vast

numbers of rural people suddenly found themselves urban, and these mass relocations stoked social change. Throughout the country Black people were determined to take part in the wartime economy, and rising Black activism brought the expectation—and in



The Delta Rhythm Boys in *Take the 'A' Train*.



Hollywood, the demand—for changes in the way they were depicted on screen.

At the neighborhood movie palace, those changes took years to happen. But things moved faster in Soundies.

As a body of work, Soundies offer an acutely observed, pop-culture snapshot of racial attitudes during the World War II years. Most of the films feature white performers exclusively and present a world view in which whiteness is an unquestioned baseline. In several more, persistent racial stereotypes and racist iconography turn up in one form or another. But there's a substantial subset—more than 300 films—with a radically different perspective.

In these Soundies Black performers are stars, featured players, dancers, and uncredited extras. They appear as romantic partners, neighbors, colleagues, and friends. They are soldiers, subway conductors, policemen, defense-plant workers—positions that, for Black Americans in the 1940s, were often more readily achieved in Soundies than in real life. Soundies were a significant channel for documenting Black performance on film, bringing it to audiences who might otherwise know it only through records or radio. And they did it on terms that boldly contradicted Hollywood's usual depictions of Black people, in images of success, competence, and style.

In African American cinema history, lost and missing films are a sobering reality, especially from the decades before the 1970s. In this light, Soundies are a remarkably intact archive. At 300-plus films, Black-cast Soundies represent roughly 15 percent of the total Soundies output—a significant figure, given that in 1940 the Black population in the United States stood at 9.8 percent. A densely layered history is inscribed in these reels, and many of them register, in a pop-music idiom, the cultural and demographic shifts that marked African American and American wartime life. The breadth of performance that Black-cast Soundies encompass is itself remarkable, particularly with respect to women musicians. Performers include not only stars like Duke Ellington and Count Basie but gospel and blues icon Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Los Angeles women's jazz combo the Vs, harpist and composer LaVilla Tullios, and singer and trumpeter Valaida Snow (affectionately called the world's second-best trumpeter by Louis Armstrong himself). For some musicians,

like pianist Lynn Albritton, these films may be the only surviving record of their performances. There's a sense of discovery in them—watching a teenage Dorothy Dandridge take command of the screen in *Cow Cow Boogie*, glimpsing the Black metropolis sketched out in *Take the 'A' Train*, or seeing a Black performer in whiteface portraying, with comic brio, composer Giuseppe Verdi in a swingtime *Rigoletto*. Without aspiring to anything but light entertainment, many of these Soundies play with, contradict, and otherwise undermine then-prevailing images of Black people on screen.

And in another rarity for that era, they did it for white audiences too. An active “race film” industry made Black-cast features and shorts for movie houses serving Black audiences, but white viewers had limited access to those productions. Stars like Ellington and Basie were broadly famous long before they made Soundies, but for other Black performers Panoram play was a rare opportunity to reach mainstream audiences on film, and in some cases—as with Louis Jordan—to fuel successful crossover careers. Restrictions on manufacturing materials and other wartime constraints choked Soundies' growth as a business, and that created opportunities for Black performers. Every film had to circulate as widely as possible to maximize its earnings. That meant that, for most of Soundies' corporate lifespan, films starring Black performers were routinely included in the weekly multifilm reels that were distributed to Panoram operators around the country. Soundies audiences, Black and white, saw images of sophistication and success playing out in a stream of Black-cast films.

For the most part Soundies were produced independently by a shifting roster of filmmakers, all of whom brought their own ideas and attitudes about race into play. As far as we know, all Soundies producers and directors were men,<sup>1</sup> and almost all were white. Some worked in Hollywood but others worked in New York, at studios in Queens, the Bronx, and in Harlem, where Soundies production was part of a thriving circuit for Black musicians, dancers, and entertainers.

That interplay of Black performers, white and Black filmmakers, and audiences of both races was rarely seen in American popular culture of the World War II era. As an entertainment form, Soundies offer a different take on the war years—a street-level version fueled by music and popular culture. As an offspring of

Hollywood movies and popular music, Soundies were susceptible to the worst of both—pop music’s reliance on stereotyping as a cultural shorthand, and the film industry’s stubborn reluctance to rethink its caricatures. But in Soundies, the pop-culture DNA of music and movies often combined in less predictable ways, giving individual films an unexpected currency, intensity, and occasional streak of dreamlike surrealism. In these instances, the fantasies and anxieties of a nation at war are clearly if inadvertently exposed. Race is part of this collective stream-of-consciousness and emerges in eloquent ways.

Almost 80 years have passed since the end of World War II—long enough for the realities of lived experience and personal memory to give way to collective mythmaking. Over time, the conflicts and contradictions of that era have been folded into a simpler story line—a “greatest generation” narrative of patriotism and national unity that obscures a more complex

history. A close reading of these films cannot help but complicate that narrative. With Soundies, contradictions, inconsistencies, and messy open-endedness seem to come with the territory. Individual Soundies aren’t always progressive about race, and Soundies as a whole reflect the jagged course of wartime race relations. But something else also unfolds, in parallel, in the great majority of Black-cast films. Seen as a coherent body of work, many of these films take on the character of an ad hoc cultural incubator, a space for exploring different images of Black Americans on screen. As a marginal entertainment form with a seat-of-the-pants business style, Soundies made (and broke) their own rules, and that spirit of invention characterized the Black-cast films, their many different makers, and their performers. Substantive issues were rarely thrashed out on Panoram screens, but traces of the era’s Black activism are visible in film after film.

Historians have cast the war years as part of the “long Civil Rights Movement” extending from the 1930s to the 1970s. It is interesting to approach the films from this perspective, and to consider how they might have contributed to a climate of possibility and change. For Black performers, Soundies were a relatively unmediated channel for connecting with Black audiences through film. They were also a rare entry-point for Black performers, music, and culture into the visual mainstream.

That visibility, in turn, had an impact on the films. Over Soundies’ brief lifespan their portrayal of Black people shifted profoundly, if not consistently, with Hollywood-style stereotypes giving way to images that were increasingly in sync with wartime and postwar realities. The most successful were often the product of creative exchanges with performers who, in their work with Soundies producers and directors, became collaborators who actively shaped the style, look, and impact of their films.

This is not to deny the existence of racist Soundies, or the Hollywood-style racism that surfaces in some of the Black-cast films. World War II made the United States acutely aware of itself as a multiracial and multiethnic nation, and that realization brought both social change and its vehement denial. Both are reflected in Soundies, in significantly different proportions. The great majority of films with and about Black



Americans reflect the active interest of performers and makers in reshaping the image of Black people on screen.

Black-cast Soundies are little known and have yet to be fully considered as a body of work. But they are vital to our understanding of mid-20th-century America and the cultural landscape of the World War II years. In pursuing commercial success the films became an informal arena for negotiating how Black performers and characters were presented on screen, and the densely layered histories they contain demand close examination.

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*Adapted from Soundies and the Changing Image of Black Americans on Screen: One Dime at a Time by Susan Delson (Indiana University Press, 2021).*

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# FILM CREDITS

(In Program Order)

Compiled by Mark Cantor



Credits are given as they appear on the film, including terms like “with” and “featuring.” Alternate names, spellings, and other corrections appear in brackets after the relevant credit.

## DISC 1. INTRODUCING SOUNDIES

### Starting from Swing

**Jam Session** [“C-Blues”/“C-Jam Blues”]

February 16, 1942

## ENDNOTES

1 A full-page ad appearing in a 1941 issue of *Variety* lists a number of filmmakers working on Soundies in New York. Among the producers, directors, art directors, and other staffers, the sole editor is identified as Shirley Stone. IMDb lists Stone as “Actress, Editor,” and credits her with editing the 1946 Black-cast featurette *Tall, Tan, and Terrific*. At the time, “Shirley” was not exclusively a woman’s name, but if Stone was indeed a woman—as IMDb seems to believe—then the *Variety* ad is the only public documentation I’ve found of a female film professional in a non-secretarial position working in Soundies. Stone’s one appearance as an actress was an uncredited part (“Girl in Photo”) in the 1938 feature *Port of Missing Girls*. The IMDb entry for the film lists her with several other uncredited actors, many of them Black; her own racial identity is a question, as no images of Stone are available online. “Minoco Productions Presents a Star-Spangled Program,” advertisement, *Variety*, October 1, 1941, 66; “Shirley Stone,” IMDb. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0832172/>

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne

Performers: Duke Ellington and His Orchestra

### Dipsy Doodle

October 4, 1943

Phonovision

Produced by: probably Luther Reid

Directed by: Unknown

Performers: Larry Clinton and His Orchestra

### Airmail Special

December 8, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Robert Snody

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Count Basie and His Orchestra [featuring Jimmy Rushing]

### Swing for Sale

August 11, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Warren Murray  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: The Charioteers

**Jammin' in the Panoram**

February 23, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Reginald LeBorg  
 Performers: Stan Kenton and His Orchestra with Helen Huntley

**Let Me Off Uptown**

January 12, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: "The Ace Drummer Man" Gene Krupa and His Orchestra

**Take It and Git**

July 8, 1946  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Ben Hersh  
 Directed by: Dave Gould  
 Performers: Thelma White and Her All-Girl Orchestra with Ellen Connor



**She's Crazy with the Heat**

November 3, 1946  
 An Alexander Production  
 Produced by William D. Alexander  
 Directed by: Ray Sandiford  
 Performers: The International Sweethearts of Rhythm featuring Anna Mae Winburn

**Powered by Dance**

**Hot Chocolate ("Cottontail")**

February 2, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Duke Ellington and His Orchestra with Whitey's Lindy Hoppers

**The Chool Song**

March 2, 1942  
 Herbert Moulton Productions  
 Produced by: Herbert Moulton  
 Directed by: Reginald LeBorg  
 Performers: The King's Men with Collins and Collette

**Maharaja**

June 7, 1943  
 Atlas Enterprises  
 Produced by: Adrian Weiss  
 Directed by: Clarence Bricker  
 Performers: Hal and Betty Takier

**Breakfast in Rhythm (Introducing "Be Careful")**

Unknown 1943 release date  
 Atlas Enterprises  
 Produced by: Adrian Weiss  
 Directed by: Clarence Bricker  
 Performers: The Three Chefs

**Mi Rumba**

April 13, 1941  
 Cinemasters  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard  
 Performers: Nano Rodrigo and His Orchestra featuring the Lola and Andre Dancers

**Goin' to the Barn Dance Tonight**

September 8, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Jack Barry  
 Directed by: Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Carson Robison and His Buckaroos

**May I Have the Next Trance with You**

April 27, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Neil McGuire  
 Directed by: George Cunningham  
 Performers: Grace Pogi [Poggi] and Igor  
 Recorded by: Hal Borne and His Orchestra

**Arthur Murray Taught Me Dancing in a Hurry**

May 25, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Neil McGuire  
 Directed by: Dave Gould  
 Performers: The Three Murtah Sisters  
 Recorded by: Hal Borne and His Orchestra

**At the Piano**

**Tiger Rag**

November 1, 1943

Soundies Films

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Walter Liberace with Mildred Hughes and Cecilia Nielson

**Got A Penny Benny**

April 22, 1946

Filmcraft Productions

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: The King Cole Trio

**Ain't Misbehavin'**

December 15, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Warren Murray

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: "Fats" Waller

**Adventure in Boogie Woogie**

April 15, 1946

Filmcraft Productions

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Robert Crum

**Jealous**

February 2, 1942

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne

Performers: Mary Brian with Charles Baron featuring Stan Kenton and Hal Borne



**Harry the Hipster**

September 8, 1944

B. K. Blake Productions

Produced and directed by: B. K. Blake

Performers: Harry Gibson [Harry "the Hipster" Gibson]

**Dispossessed Blues**

July 5, 1943

Soundies Films

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Lynn Albritton and the Four Knobs

**Grand Piano and Gals**

February 2, 1941

Fredrick Feher Productions

Produced by: Fredrick Feher

Directed by: Unknown

Additional Credit: by David Raksin

Performers: Dorothy Janice and the Mills Piano Quartette

**We'll Drink to That**

**Abercrombie Had a Zombie**

November 24, 1941

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Dudley Murphy

Performers: Liz Tilton and Lee Murray

**Clink! Clink! Another Drink**

March 23, 1942

Herbert Moulton Productions

Produced by: Herbert Moulton

Directed by: Reginald LeBorg

Performers: Spike Jones and His City Slickers [featuring Mel Blanc]

**Moonlight Cocktail**

May 11, 1942

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: John Graham

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: The Murphy Sisters and Patricia Hall

Recorded by: Nat Brandwynne and His Copacabana Orchestra

**Moonlight Cocktail**

June 8, 1942

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Neil McGuire

Directed by: Dave Gould

Performers: Buddy Clark with Dolly Mitchell

Recorded by: Hal Borne and His Orchestra

**Bottoms Up**

December 8, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: The Globe Trotters

### **Cocktails for Two**

February 2, 1942  
 Arthur Dreifuss Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Dreifuss  
 Performers: Bob Hughes and The Mellowaires

### **Penthouse Party**

January 1, 1945  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Gloria Parker

### **Beer Barrel Polka**

January 7, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Warren Murray  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: The Eton Boys

### ***Outrageously Incorrect – and Sometimes Subversive***

#### **Ching Chong**

December 13, 1943  
 Cine Sound Productions  
 Produced by: Harry Popkin  
 Directed by: possibly Neil McGuire  
 Performers: Maxine Conrad and Muzzy Marcellino  
 Recorded by: Ivan Scott and His Orchestra

### **Hong Kong Blues**

March 2, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Hoagy Carmichael with Mi Chee

### **Lazybones**

December 15, 1941  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Dudley Murphy  
 Performers: Hoagy Carmichael with Dorothy Dandridge and Peter Ray

### **Ballet Dancer's Nightmare**

August 4, 1941  
 Minoco Productions [West Coast]  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: The Slate Brothers with Vivien Fay

### **Ruff and Tuff**

May 15, 1944  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Mary Parker and Lou Leonard (Champion Judo Experts)

### **Operatin' Rhythm**

February 1, 1943  
 L.O.L. Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard  
 Performers: The Three Heat Waves

### **Sleep Kentucky Babe**

September 3, 1945  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced by: William Forest Crouch  
 Directed by: Joseph Berne  
 Performers: Day, Dawn, and Dusk

### **Rigoletto**

June 25, 1945  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced by: William Forest Crouch  
 Directed by: Joseph Berne  
 Performers: Day, Dawn, and Dusk

### ***Straight from the Panoram #1: Soundies Miniature Review No. 1014, May 5, 1941***

#### **You Walk By**

May 5, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Del Casino and His Orchestra with Betty Jane Smith

### **Swingin' at the Séance**

May 5, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Johnny Long and His Orchestra featuring Helen Young

### **St. Louis Blues**

May 5, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: The Four King Sisters with Alvino Rey and His Orchestra

### **Penthouse Serenade**

May 5, 1941

Cameo Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Johnny Downs and Gale Storm  
 Recorded by: David Rose and His Orchestra

### **Don't Cry**

May 5, 1941  
 Cinemasters  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard  
 Performers: Vincent Lopez and His Orchestra featuring Sonny Skylar

### **Swing for Your Supper**

May 5, 1941  
 Cameo Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Dorothy Dandridge and Cee Pee Johnson

### **Sheherezade**

May 5, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Dave Schooler and His Twenty-One Swinghearts

### **Seven Beers with the Wrong Man**

May 5, 1941  
 Cameo Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Cindy Walker and Peter Buy Rey  
 Recorded by: Fran Frey and His Orchestra

## **DISC 2. LIFE IN THE SOUNDIES ERA**

### *Going to War*

#### **We'll Slap the Japs (Right into the Laps of the Nazis)**

January 5, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Joseph Berne  
 Performers: The Four Sportsmen  
 Recorded by: Ted Fio Rito and His Skylined Music

#### **Paddy Callahan Has Joined the Army**

July 27, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: John Feeney with Charles Devlin

### **G.I. Jive**

March 13, 1944  
 Soundies Films  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Louis Jordan and His Band [Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five]

### **K.P. Serenade**

September 21, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: The Hoosier Hot Shots



### **Gee! The Jeep Jumps**

October 23, 1944  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: The Kimloo [Kim Loo] Sisters and Bobby Davis

### **Johnny Zero**

May 31, 1943  
 W.F.C. Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: The Song Spinners

### **Goodbye Mama (I'm Off to Yokohama)**

May 18, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Johnnie Johnston and Marvel Maxwell  
 Recorded by: Hal Borne and His Orchestra

### **Hey! Tojo, Count Yo' Men**

May 29, 1944  
 Filmcraft Productions

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Bob Howard

**The Home Front**

**I Shut My Mouth for Uncle Sam**

May 25, 1942  
Minoco Productions  
Produced by: Fred Waller  
Directed by: Robert Snody  
Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
Performers: Frances Faye  
Recorded by: Harry Brent and His Orchestra

**Keep Smiling**

August 16 or 23, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: The Four Ginger Snaps

**When Hitler Kicks the Bucket**

October 4, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Toni Lane

**Plant a Little Garden in Your Own Back Yard**

May 17, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: The Song Spinners

**Ration Blues**

May 27, 1944  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Louis Jordan and His Orchestra [Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five]

**Take It Off**

January 11, 1943  
Minoco Productions  
Produced by: Fred Waller  
Directed by: Robert Snody  
Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
Performers: The Pretty Priorities

**Defend America**

October 13, 1941  
Minoco Productions  
Produced by: Fred Waller  
Directed by: Robert Snody  
Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
Performers: The Patrioairs

**When Johnny Comes Marching Home**

September 27, 1943



Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: The Four Ginger Snaps

**On the Job**

**Rosie the Riveter**

February 8, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced by: William Forest Crouch  
Directed by: John Graham  
Performers: The Smoothies (Babs, Charlie and Little) and Cappy Barra's Harmonica Boys

**Don't Be an Absentee**

September 10, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Additional Credit: Based on an idea by Ronna Richards  
Performers: Patti Ryan

**On Time**

July 26, 1943  
Minoco Productions  
Produced by: Jack Barry  
Directed by: Charles Curran  
Performers: Carolyn Ayres

**Stop That Dancing Up There**

August 28, 1944  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Ben Hersh  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Kay Starr and Jimmy Dodd [Jimmie Dodd]  
Recorded by: Joe Reichman and His Orchestra

**The Blacksmith Song**

August 24, 1942  
Herbert Moulton Productions  
Produced and directed by: Herbert Moulton  
Performers: Spike Jones and His City Slickers



**Frim Fram Sauce**

December 31, 1945  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: The King Cole Trio

**Struttin' to Sutton Place**

February 9, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: John Primi  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Mary Jane Walsh

**A Little Jive Is Good for You**

August 25, 1941  
 Minoco Productions [West Coast]  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Martha Tilton with the Slate Brothers

**City Life**

**Take the 'A' Train**  
 October 20, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: The Delta Rhythm Boys

**Take Me Out to the Ball Game**

Mark 19, 1945  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: The Kimloo [Kim Loo] Sisters

**Tenement Symphony**

October 12, 1942  
 R.C. M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Bob Carroll

**The Joint Is Jumpin'**

December 1, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Warren Murray  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: "Fats" Waller

**The Kerry Dance**

May 4, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Owen Murphy  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Kay Lorraine  
 Recorded by: Merle Pitt and the Five Shades of Blue

**Give Me Some Skin**

December 16 or 30, 1946  
 Production Company: Unknown  
 Produced by: Unknown  
 Directed by: Unknown  
 Performers: The Delta Rhythm Boys

**Navy Yard**

October 25, 1943  
 Soundies Films  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Toni Lane



**Good-Nite All**

July 12, 1943  
 L.O.L. Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard  
 Performers: Johnny Taylor [and Drucilla Drew]

**... And City Fashion**

**Gorgeous**  
 October 27, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credits: Furs by From Brothers of New York; [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Michael Loring

**Down, Down, Down**

March 15, 1943  
 Soundies Films  
 Produced by: William Forest Crouch  
 Directed by: John Graham

Performers: Louis Jordan and His Band [Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five]

## **Beautiful Clothes (Make Beautiful Girls)**

November 24, 1941

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne

Additional Credit: Furs by Louis Rifkin

Performers: Harry Langdon

## **Jack, You're Playing the Game**

November 17, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Robert Snody

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: The Delta Rhythm Boys

## **A Zoot Suit**

March 9, 1942

Century Pictures

Produced and directed by: Josef Berne

Performers: Dorothy Dandridge and Paul White

Recorded by: Ted Fio Rito and His Skylined Music

## **Glamour Girl**

December 13, 1943

Cine Sound Productions

Produced by: Harry Popkin

Directed by: possibly Neil McGuire

Performers: Gale Storm

Recorded by: Ivan Scott and His Orchestra

## **After a While**

July 23, 1945

Filmcraft Productionops

Produced by: William Forest Crouch

Directed by: Josef Berne

Additional Credit: Hats and Headdresses by Lily Daché

Performers: Danny O'Neil

## **Emily Brown**

June 14, 1943

Glamourettes

Produced by: Sydney Williams

Directed by: Dave Gould

Performers: Bob Parrish and Chinky Grimes

## ***Straight from the Panoram #2: Soundies Miniature Revue No. 1061, March 30, 1942***

### **Deep in the Heart of Texas**

March 30, 1942

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Owen Murphy

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Van Alexander and His Orchestra with  
Lew Hearn and Phyllis Kenny

### **As Mabel Goes So Goes the Navy**

March 30, 1942

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: John Primi

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Mary Jane Walsh

### **Where Has My Little Dog Gone**

March 30, 1942

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Robert Snody

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Claude Thornhill and His Orchestra with  
Martha Wayne and Buddy Stewart



### **Two Pair of Shoes**

March 30, 1942

Neil McGuire Studios

Produced by: Neil McGuire

Directed by: George Cunningham

Performers: Jean Porter and Larry Stewart

### **The Skunk Song**

March 30, 1942

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Robert Snody

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Cab Calloway and His Orchestra

### **Frankie and Johnny**

March 30, 1942

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Owen Murphy  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Moore and Revel with the Dixieland Jazz Band

### **Farewell Blues**

March 30, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Owen Murphy  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Tommy Reynolds and  
 His Orchestra with Sunnie O'Dea

### **Drink to Me with Only Thine Eyes**

March 30, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Reginald LeBorg  
 Performers: Ginger Harmon and Harry Barris  
 Recorded by: Stan Kenton and His Orchestra

## **DISC 3. MUSICAL EVOLUTIONS**

### *Stirring Up the Melting Pot*

#### **I'm an Old Cowhand**

August 11, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Warren Murray  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Gus Van

#### **Ta Ha Wa Hu Wa** [Hawaiian War Chant]

November 22, 1943  
 Phonovision  
 Produced by: probably Luther Reid  
 Directed by: Unknown  
 Performers: Lani McIntyre and His Orchestra

#### **Pete the Piper**

March 23, 1941  
 Globe Productions  
 Produced by: James Roosevelt  
 Directed by: Reginald LeBorg [as John N. White]  
 Performers: Susan Miller and Danny Hoctor

#### **Kazbek**

August 14, 1944  
 Triumph Films  
 Produced and directed by: Jack Shaindlin  
 Performers: Yasha Davidoff with Simeon Karavaeff,  
 Lalla Zalipskaya, Nadia Veralle, Russian Balalaika  
 Orchestra

#### **Willie Willie**

February 1, 1943  
 L.O.L. Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard  
 Additional Credit: West Indian Calypso  
 Performers: Sam Manning and Belle Rosette [Beryl  
 McBurnie]

#### **There's Nothing Like the Smile of the Irish**

August 11, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Lanny Ross

#### **Swinging in a Harem**

February 15, 1932  
 L.O.L. Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard  
 Performers: Marian Lawrence and Her Dancers

#### **Dance, Baby, Dance ("Tantze Babel")**

October 15, 1945  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Ben Hersh  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: The Mel-Tones [Mel Torné on soundtrack only]

#### *Hillbilly to Country Western*

#### **I Wanna Go Back to West Virginia**

November 23, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Slim Andrews and The Fashionaires with  
 Sybil Rae

#### **There's a Hole in the Old Oaken Bucket**

June 16, 1941  
 Cameo Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Florence Gill, Redd Harper and The Sells

#### **Pass the Biscuits, Mirandy**

May 4, 1942  
 Herbert Moulton Productions  
 Produced by: Herbert Moulton  
 Directed by: Reginald LeBorg  
 Performers: Spike Jones and His City Slickers

#### **Back in the Saddle Again**

September 14, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Additional Credit: (By Gene Autry)  
 Performers: Dick Thomas

**Montana Plains**

January 3, 1944  
 Phonovision  
 Produced by: probably Luther Reid  
 Directed by: Unknown  
 Performers: Emerson's Mountaineers [aka Emerson's Hillbillies]



**Along the Navajo Trail**

October 15, 1945  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Ben Hersh  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: John "Shadrach" Horace and Johnny Moore's 3 Blazers

**Why Did I Fall for Abner**

July 9, 1945  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Ben Hersh  
 Directed by: Dave Gould  
 Performers: Merle Travis and Carolina Cotton [with The Glee Gates Trio and other musicians]

**Horse Hairs**

November 23, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Ginger Dulo

**Latin to Staten Island**

**Rhumba New York**  
 June 25, 1945  
 Phonovision  
 Produced by: Probably Luther Reid

Directed by: Unknown  
 Performers: Caridad Garcia with Gerald Marks and His Orchestra

**Dark Velvet Night**

March 22, 1943  
 L.O.L. Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard  
 Performers: Sergio De Karlo with Patricia Hall

**Pumpa Pumpa**

April 2, 1945  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: The DeCastro [De Castro] Sisters

**Paran-Pan-Pan**

March 30, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: probably Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Maya's Pan-American Orchestra with Carlos and Zedra

**Chi-Chi Castenango**

January 20, 1947  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Ben Hersh  
 Directed by: Dave Gould  
 Performers: Marilyn Hare and The Paragons

**Havin' a Time in Havana**

June 15, 1942  
 Herbert Moulton Productions  
 Produced by: Herbert Moulton  
 Directed by: Reginald LeBorg  
 Performers: Marvel Maxwell

**Cielito Lindo**

October 13, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced and directed by: Fred Waller  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: The Four King Sisters with Alvino Rey and His Orchestra

**He's a Latin from Staten Island**

June 4, 1941  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: John Primi  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Ricardo [Ricardo Montalban; vocal by Gus Van]

**Heading Toward Rock 'n' Roll**

**Wham**

September 13, 1943

Soundies Films

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: The Four Ginger Snaps



**Rock It for Me**

December 27, 1943

Soundies Film

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Maurice Rocco

**Opus 12EEE**

December 18, 1944

B. K. Blake Productions

Produced and directed by: B. K. Blake

Performers: Harry Gibson [Harry "the Hipster" Gibson]

**Shoo Shoo Baby**

February 28, 1944

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Ben Hersh

Directed by: Joseph Berne

Performers: The Les Paul Trio and Carolyn Grey

**Four or Five Times**

October 6, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: John Primi

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Lucky Millinder and His Orchestra featuring Sister Tharpe [Sister Rosetta Tharpe]

**The Lonesome Road**

November 10, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: John Primi

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Lucky Millinder and His Orchestra featuring Sister Tharpe [Sister Rosetta Tharpe]

**Jumpin' at the Jubilee**

April 17, 1944

Soundies Films

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Louis Jordan and His Band [Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five] with The Swing Maniacs

**47th Street Jive**

August 28, 1944

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Ben Hersh

Directed by: Josef Berne

Performers: June Richmond with Roy Milton and His Band

**Latin Boogies & Other Hybrids**

**Rhumboogie**

February 7, 1944

Soundies Films

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Maurice Rocco and His Rockin' Rhythm

**Hula Rumba**

February 3, 1947

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Ben Hersh

Directed by: Dave Gould

Performers: Gloria King and Bernie Kaai with Kuaana's Dream Islanders

**Jive, Little Gypsy, Jive**

February 16, 1941

Cameo Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Roy Mack

Performers: Bobby Sherwood's Orchestra, The Three Cheers, Diana Castillo

**Jitterbug Señorita**

January 19, 1941

Cinemasters

Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard

Performers: Vincent Lopez and His Orchestra featuring Anne Barrett

**Rhumba Swing**

January 13, 1947

Filmcraft Productions

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Leona Fredericks and Irving Fields Trio

## Yodel

July 19, 1943

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Jack Barry

Directed by: Charles Curran

Performers: Rosalie Allen

## Cowboy Calypso

October 28, 1946

Filmcraft Productions

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: The Cactus Cowboys with Bobby Gregory

## Cow Cow Boogie

October 26, 1942

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne

Performers: Dorothy Dandridge [with Dudley Dickerson]

## *Straight from the Panoram #3: Soundies Parade of Hits No. 1137, October 11, 1943*

### Au Reet

October 11, 1943

Phonovision

Produced by: probably Luther Reid

Directed by: Unknown

Performers: Jimmy Dorsey and His Orchestra with

Helen O'Connell

### They're Going to Build a Monument

October 11, 1943

Atlas Enterprises

Produced by: Adrian Weiss

Directed by: Clarence Bricker

Performers: The Delegates – Elmer, Sonny, and Glen

### Boxcar Rhapsody

October 11, 1943

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne

Performers: Borrah Minevitch and His Harmonica Rascals

### Strolling Through the Park

October 11, 1943

Soundies Films

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Additional Credit: [Choreographed by Jack Baker]

Performers: Kaye Popp, Stanley Catron, Jack Baker,

Betty Heather, Benny de Sio, Margie Jackson

### International Revue

October 11, 1943

Julius Hagan Productions

Produced by: Julius Hagan

Directed by: Leslie H. Hiscott

Performers: Jack Hylton and His Band

### My Reverie

October 11, 1943

Phonovision

Produced by: probably Luther Reid

Directed by: Unknown

Performers: Larry Clinton and His Orchestra

### There's a Pampas Moon on the Campus

October 11, 1943

R.C.M. Productions

Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne

Performers: Diana Del Rio

Recorded by: Hal Borne and His Orchestra

### Do I Worry?

October 11, 1943

Soundies Films

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Patterson and Jackson

## DISC 4. WOMEN, SEXUALITY, AND GENDER

### *Is It Love or Is It Conscription? Heterosexuality and World War II*

#### Goodbye Dear, I'll Be Back in a Year

September 8, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced by: Fred Waller

Directed by: Robert Snody

Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: The Landy Trio



### *Is It Love or Is It Conscription?*

April 21, 1941

Cinemasters

Produced and directed by: Arthur Leonard

Performers: Les Brown and His Orchestra featuring Doris Day

**Love's Gonna Be Rationed**

November 1, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: The Song Spinners

**Pin-Ups on Parade**

March 20, 1944  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Lee Sullivan and The Dream Dolls

**Paper Doll**

December 7, 1942  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: The Mills Brothers  
[and Dorothy Dandridge]

**But What Are These?**

October 7, 1946  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Gracie Barrie

**Lackadaisical Lady**

December 29, 1941  
Song-O-Graph Productions  
Produced by: Peter Ratoff  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Jimmie Dodd

**I'd Love to Know You Better**

September 28, 1942  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Gayle Mellott and Ralph Young

**Anxieties, Bickering, Heartbreak**

**Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby**  
February 21, 1944  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Ben Hersh  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Ida James and the King Cole Trio

**Better Not Roll Those Eyes**

November 9, 1942  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow

Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Harry Barris and Jean Porter

**You're Unfair to Me**

May 12, 1941  
Cameo Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Florence Pepper with The Cameo Girls  
Recorded by: The David Rose Orchestra

**Buzz Me**

April 2, 1945  
An Adams Production  
Produced by: Berle Adams  
Directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five



**Mailman Blues**

November 16, 1942  
Minoco Productions  
Produced by: Fred Waller  
Directed by: Robert Snody  
Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
Performers: Nita Norman

**Low Down Dog**

March 15, 1944  
Dave Gould Associates  
Produced and directed by: Dave Gould  
Additional Credits: Voice Recording by Joe Turner;  
Billy McDonald, Musical Director  
Performers: Meade (Lux) Lewis and Dudley Dickerson  
[with Avanelle Harris, Leonard Bluet]

**The Story of Two Cigarettes**

May 28, 1945  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced by: William Forest Crouch  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Vickee Richards and Don De Leo

**I'm Tired**

August 21, 1944  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Apus and Estrellita

**Playing with Expectations: Loosening & Upending 1940s Stereotypes of Women**

**Does You Do or Does You Don't**  
 August 5, 1946  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Vanita Smythe

**He Plays Gin Rummy**

January 19, 1942  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Sam Coslow  
 Directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Gale Storm and Iris Dawn

**The Blushing Bride**

November 9, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Jackie Gately

**I've Got to Get Hot**

November 2, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Gracie Barrie

**Bearcat Mountain Gal**

March 2, 1942  
 Neil McGuire Studios  
 Produced by: Neil McGuire  
 Directed by: George Cunningham  
 Performers: Cindy Walker

**Time Takes Care of Everything**

November 10, 1946  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: June Richmond

**Stone Cold Dead in the Market**

September 23, 1946  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Gracie Barrie

**Minnie from Trinidad**

December 21, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Luba Malina

**Jumping into Gender Play**  
**Ma, He's Making Eyes at Me**

April 27, 1942  
 Century Pictures  
 Produced and directed by: Josef Berne  
 Performers: Ted Fio Rito and His Skylined Music  
 featuring Candy Candido



**Faust**

May 14, 1945  
 Filmcraft Productions  
 Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
 Performers: Day, Dawn, and Dusk

**Shy Anne from Old Cheyenne**

May 25, 1942  
 Minoco Productions  
 Produced by: Fred Waller  
 Directed by: Robert Snody  
 Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
 Performers: Denver Darling and His Texas Cowhands

**On the Boulevard**

April 22, 1946  
 R.C.M. Productions  
 Produced by: Ben Hersh  
 Directed by: Dave Gould  
 Performers: Carolyn Grey and Jimmie Dale

**Too Many Sailors**

October 22, 1944



Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: The Burch Mann Dancers

**The Better Half**

January 18, 1943  
Minoco Productions  
Produced by: Fred Waller  
Directed by: Robert Snody  
Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
Performers: Leila Moore



**You Never Know!**

November 3, 1946  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: The Harem Trio and Arica Wild

**Shoeshiners and Headliners**

January 19, 1941  
Fredrick Feher Productions  
Produced by: Fredrick Feher  
Directed by: Unknown  
Additional Credit: by Lothar Perl  
Performers: Florence Pepper

***Dorothy Dandridge and Gale Storm***

**I'm a Shy Guy**

December 27, 1943  
Cine Sound Productions  
Produced by: Harry Popkin  
Directed by: possibly Neil McGuire  
Performers: Gale Storm and Ray Shultis  
Recorded by: Ivan Scott and His Orchestra

**Yes, Indeed!**

November 24, 1941  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow



Directed by: Dudley Murphy and Josef Berne  
Performers: Dorothy Dandridge and The Five Spirits of Rhythm

**Let's Get Away from It All**

May 19, 1941  
Cameo Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Jose Berne  
Performers: Johnny Downs with Gale Storm

**Blackbird Fantasy**

August 31, 1942  
Herbert Moulton Productions  
Produced and directed by: Herbert Moulton  
Performers: Dorothy Dandridge with Billy Mitchell

**I Know Somebody Who Loves You**

February 16, 1941  
Cameo Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Roy Mack  
Performers: Gale Storm with The Fashionaires

**Jungle Jig**

June 2, 1941  
Cameo Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Dorothy Dandridge and Cee Pee Johnson

**The Merry-Go-Round**

December 15, 1941  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Dudley Murphy  
Performers: Gale Storm and the Dorn Brothers and Mary with The Palladium Handicap Girls

**Straight from the Panoram #4: Soundies  
Parade of Hits No. 1189, November 20, 1944**

**Canine Capers**

November 20, 1944  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Max and His Gang

**The Line Is Busy**

November 20, 1944  
United States Treasury Department; Army Pictorial  
Service – Signal Corps  
Produced by: Unknown  
Directed by: Unknown  
Performers: Unknown

**Tea on the Terrace**

November 20, 1944  
Century Pictures  
Produced by: Sam Coslow  
Directed by: Josef Berne  
Performers: Marvel Maxwell  
Recorded by Ted Fio Rito and His Skylined Music

**Side by Side**

November 20, 1944  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Nick Lucas

**Paris Is Gay Again**

November 20, 1944  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Ben Hersh  
Directed by: Dave Gould  
Performers: Joan Marshall and James Alexander

**Dance Impressions**

November 20, 1944  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Bobby Davis

**Ja Da**

November 20, 1944  
Minoco Productions  
Produced by: Fred Waller  
Directed by: Owen Murphy  
Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
Performers: The Dixieland Jazz Band

**Ain't She Pretty**

November 20, 1944  
Filmcraft Productions  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: The Three Peppers

**BONUS!**

**Celebrating the Chorus Line**

**Backstage Blues**

May 31, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Lynn Albritton, Lou Ellen [Llewelyn  
Crawford] and the Harlem Cuties

**Born to Swing**

July 7, 1941  
Minoco Productions  
Produced and directed by: Fred Waller  
Additional Credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]  
Performers: Ginger Harmon  
Recorded by: Studio Orchestra under the direction  
of George Steiner

**Brazil**

October 30, 1944  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Ben Hersh  
Directed by: Dave Gould  
Performers: Nilo Menendez and His Orchestra with  
Maria Del Rey and Raul Martinez



**Give This Little Girl a Great Big Hand**

July 27, 1942  
R.C.M. Productions  
Produced by: Unknown  
Directed by: Dave Gould  
Additional Credits: [Sam Coslow, Executive Pro-  
ducer; Neil McGuire, Associate Producer]  
Performers: Ann Pennington  
Recorded by: Hal Borne and His Orchestra

**Chatter**

November 29, 1943  
Soundies Films  
Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch  
Performers: Cook and Brown and the Sepia Steppers

**Pan-Americongas**

February 16, 1941

Globe Productions

Produced by: Unknown

Directed by: Reginald LeBorg

Additional Credits: by Henry Russell; [James Roosevelt, Executive Producer]

Performers: Rita Rio [aka Dona Drake] with Allan Baldwin and Theodore

Recorded by: Studio Orchestra under the direction of Lou Forbes

**There'll Be Some Changes Made**

July 21, 1941

Minoco Productions

Produced and directed by: Fred Waller

Additional credit: [Jack Barry, Executive Producer]

Performers: Ginger Harmon

Recorded by: Studio Orchestra under the direction of George Steiner

**Everybody's Jumpin' Now**

February 10, 1947

Filmcraft Productions

Produced and directed by: William Forest Crouch

Performers: Noble Sissle and His Orchestra with Mabel [Mable] Lee

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## PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

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**Mark Cantor** is a Los Angeles-based archivist and historian of music on film. He is the curator of the Celluloid Improvisations Music Film Archive, a collection of close to 10,000 performances that focus on jazz, blues, country, dance, and other forms of popular music. Mr. Cantor is an expert on Soundies, and has been researching these music shorts for more than fifty years. Working from original production documents, film prints, interviews with participants, and information from the entertainment trades, he has written the definitive history and filmography of these music shorts: *The Soundies: A History and Catalog of Jukebox Film Shorts of the 1940s*, published by McFarland Books in 2023.

**Susan Delson** is the curator of *Soundies the Ultimate Collection*. A cultural historian focusing on film and art, she is the author of *Soundies and the Changing Image of Black Americans on Screen: One Dime*

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**Bret Wood** is Producer of Archival Restorations for Kino Lorber. His award-winning work includes *Pioneers of African American Cinema, Pioneers: First Women Filmmakers, Cinema's First Nasty Women, and Forbidden Fruit: The Golden Age of the Exploitation Film*. His essays have appeared in *Sight and Sound, Film Comment, Positif*, and *Video Watchdog*. He is also a filmmaker and producer of podcast dramas.