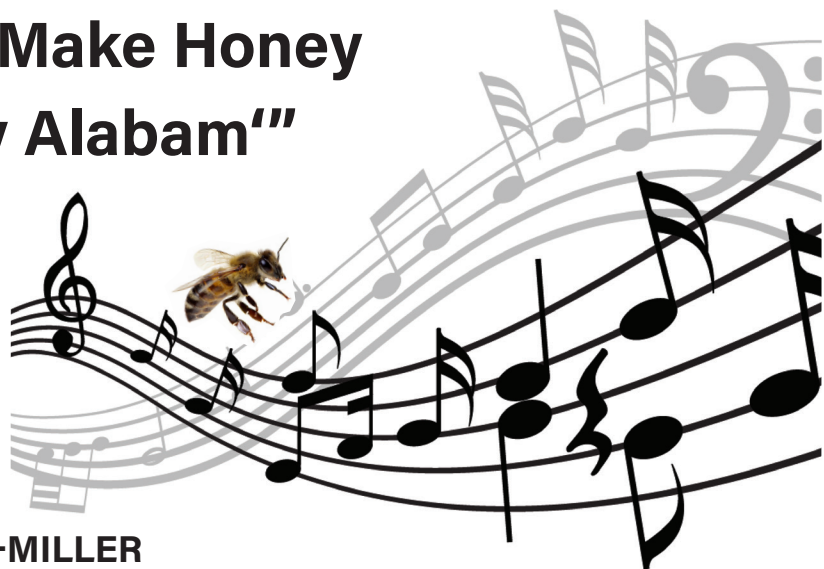


"When the Bees Make Honey Down in Sunny Alabam'"

Comic Honey Bee
Songs and Illustrated
Sheet Music,
1902-1922"



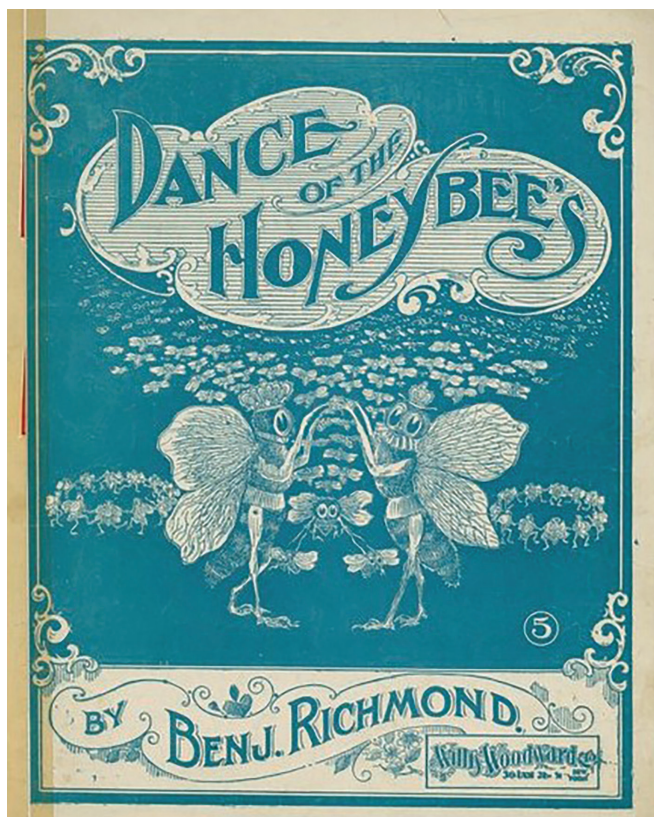
by DR. THERESA LEININGER-MILLER

Comic songs about honey bees date back at least to the turn of the 20th century in the U.S., paralleling the presence of bees and bee imagery in other forms of popular culture, such as motion pictures and 78 rpm records. Music publishers attracted buyers partially with large, vibrant, chromolithographic covers (11" x 14" and 9 1/2" x 12 1/2") designed to be perceived at a glance with titles in crisp, capital letters, limited palettes of saturated color, minimal shading, graphically bold and simple designs, and humorous or sentimental scenes. In this selection, romantic themes dominate, both in lyrics and on music covers, encompassing initial attraction, flirtation, courtship, weddings, marriage, and long-term commitment. Frequently, anthropomorphized bees express the pleasures and challenges of such human relationships, as well as

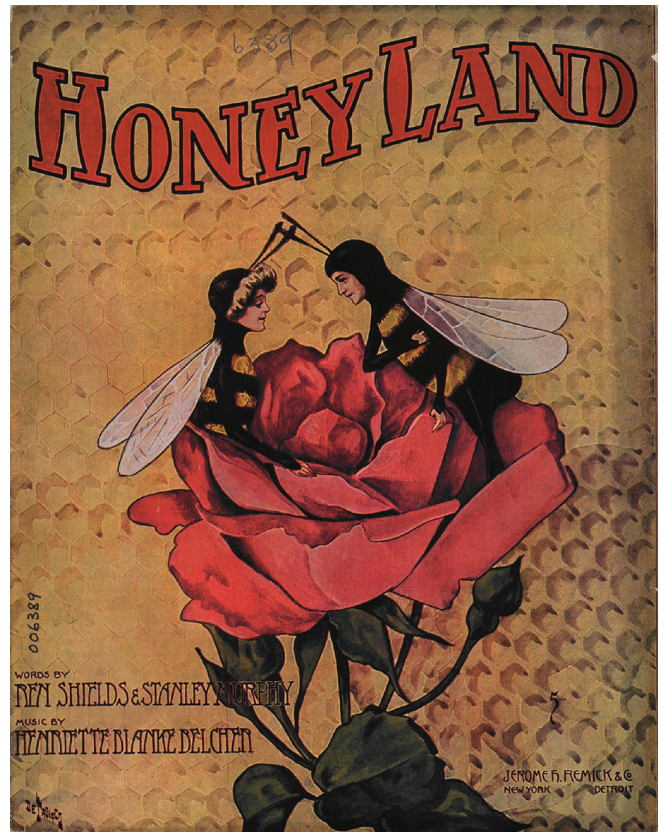
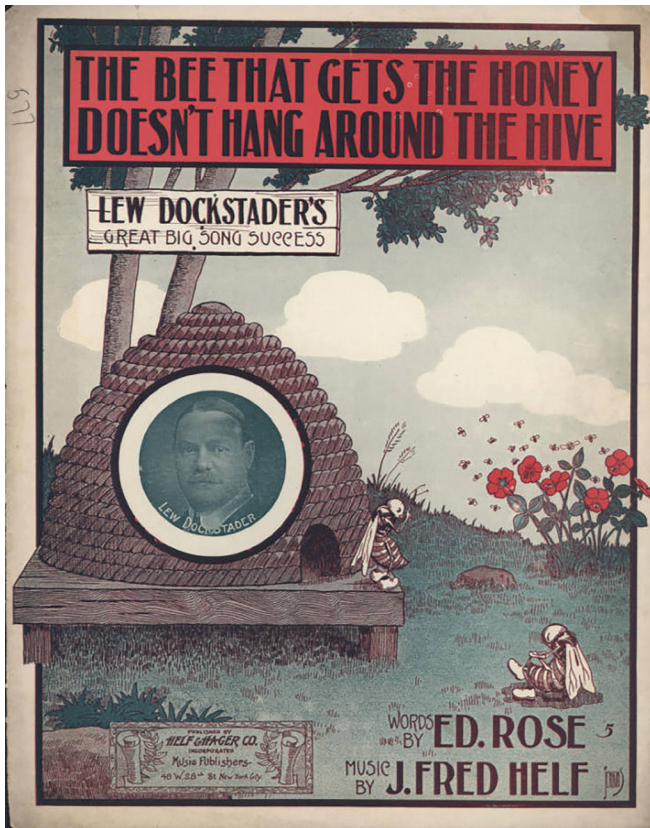
the threat of unanticipated pain with both heartache and physical misery.

As an art historian, I was drawn to the visual appeal of these illustrations and culled them from multiple university library databases. What follows is a brief analysis of a dozen images in relation to songs' words, plus some cultural and biographical context in terms of illustrators (when identified), composers, lyricists, and performers. While this essay focuses on honey bees in comic songs, bumble bees also star in many maudlin ballads.

"Dance of the Honey Bees" (1902) is an instrumental with a busy, blue and white title page. The delightful composition features a royal bee couple standing upright on hindlegs, touching the tips of their upraised forelegs. Sporting crowns, the queen also wears a neck ruff and turns her head to look at viewers with her large eyes. Between the two fly three smaller bees, one whose legs skim the backs of two below it. Flanking the couple are circles of bees dancing, as though holding hands, and above them swarms a multitude of bees. The slow-moving composition belies the industrious activity of bees in April and May and can be heard here: <https://billsaudioreferencelibrary.com/track/1881073/dance-of-the-honey-bees-1902>. A sped-up orchestral version, with whistling (or bird warbling) added (1907), can be accessed at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/jukebox-123154/>. Composer Benjamin Richmond also produced "Dance of the Song Birds" in 1902. Sousa's Band recorded his "Honey Bees Jubilee" in 1912.



On the cover of "The Bee That Gets the Honey Doesn't Hang Around the Hive" (1906), one bee, standing on the wooden platform before a skep hive, scolds another with right index finger upraised. The other sits nonchalantly on a small rock on the ground, hands clasped over a bent knee. Both bees inexplicably wear shoes. On the horizon of the grassy knoll, bees hover near six red blossoms. Emblazoned at top is the title. In the middle of the hive is a round photographic head shot of a mustachioed, middle-aged white man with slicked down dark hair, with the performer's name at bottom. Affixed to the tree trunk above the hive is a wooden sign, "Lew Dockstader's Great Big Song Success." Dockstader (b. George Alfred Clapp, 1856-1924) was a comedian and vaudeville star, unfortunately best known as a blackface minstrel entertainer, both in a



solo act and as part of the troupe Primrose and Dockstader's Minstrel Men (1898-1904). He also appeared in several comedy shorts, 1904-07.

The chorus goes:

The bee that gets the honey doesn't hang around the hive
And the man that makes the money's got to worry work
and strive.

You can't get no honey buzzin 'round dis room
Unless you flop your wings you're gwine to get stung
soon

The bee that gets the honey doesn't hang around the hive.

J. Fred Helf (1870?-1915), from Maysville, Kentucky, composed over 100 songs. One wonders whether he also penned this song's words; the lyricist is amusingly identified only as "Rose."

Hungarian-born illustrator André De Takacs (1880-1919) produced numerous music covers, particularly for publisher Jerome H. Remick, 1906-1919, as well as posters, postcards, commercial art, and illustrations for at least two novels. His design for "Honey Land" (1909) shows two anthropomorphic bees standing in profile in the petals of a full red rose facing each other, antennae tips touching as they bow their heads forward. She has a Gibson Girl-style coiffure, with blond locks upswept around her head into a snug black cap, and she looks demurely at the chest of her wooer who places his right hand over his heart. The background is a honeycomb. Lyrics describe the courting couple who dream of sipping honey under a persimmon tree in the refrain. A man sings the first verse, promising to build a home of "wax and honeycomb." A woman accepts his offer in the second verse, on the condition that he work hard, not leave her home alone to be with others, and pledge monogamy: "Always be a busy bee and never be a drifter or a drone."

The refrain goes:

Honey-land! Honey-land! Together we will wander in
that sunny land.

Happy we'll be just you and me

Sipping honey underneath the simmon tree:

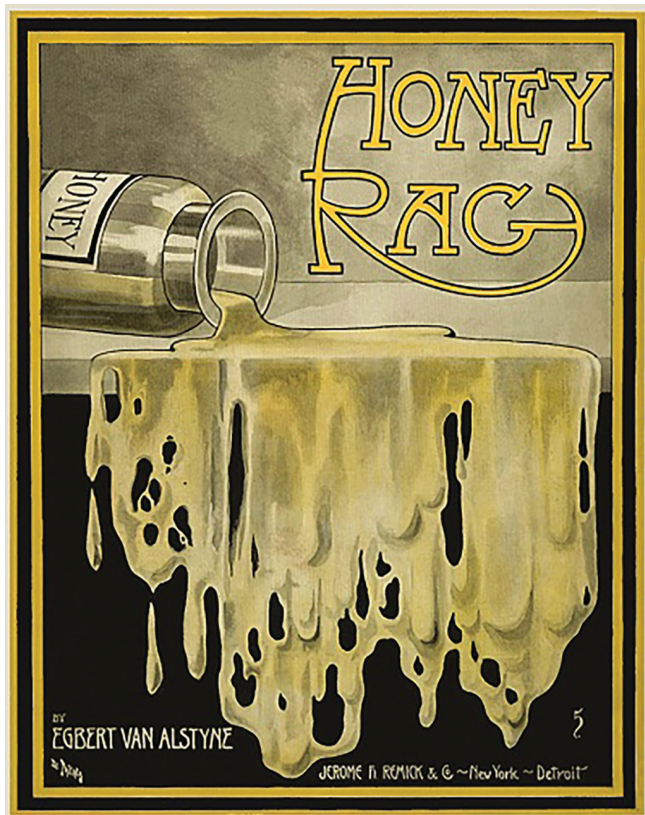
Honey-land! Honey-land! We'll need no money, honey,
in that sunny land.

Spending all our lives loving in the hives,
In Honey-, Honey-land.

The composer of this ditty, Henriette Blanke-Blecher (1882-1958, aka Henriette B. Melson), produced waltzes, ragtime tunes, ballads, and novelty songs, 1901-1918. She married Frederick E. Belcher, an executive at Jerome H. Remick, in 1905, in Detroit, where there was a branch of the New York music publisher that published this piece. Lyricist Ren Shields (1868-1913) was a folk musician who performed vaudeville, as Blanke-Belcher had done in 1909.

De Takacs also produced perhaps the simplest but most visually striking title page of this collection, that of "Honey Rag" (1909). It depicts a jar of honey on its side spilling over a ledge, its golden viscosity glistening, bulging, revealing air bubbles, and separating into elongated holes. A rendition of the jaunty ragtime melody can be heard at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_1zizBQIOI. Composer Egbert Van Alstyne (1878-1951) was a prolific songwriter and pianist in New York who produced seventy-five compositions, 1900-1920. His best remembered song is "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" (1905), co-written with Harry H. Williams.

The vivid title page of "Honey Bug (1910) features a bee embracing a fully blown red rose, two petals of which are falling beneath a lateral bud. The bee sports antennae atop a woman's head with thick, upswept black hair.



Her face has full red lips, arched eyebrows, and a short, broad nose, and her thorax looks like a shaggy yellow cape. Behind her and the flower is a white circle with a yellow band. The composition concerns a woman who is elated by the pet names her beau has given her, especially "Honey Bug":

I am not to blame if my heart's a flame,
 For my beau has given me the lovin'est name,
 He used to call me "Pet" and "Little Hon,"
 "Cutie," "Dear" and "Pretty one,"
 But last night at a ball in Germania Hall
 Sweetie said "I've got for you the best name of all."
 Then with a kiss full of bliss,
 Right into my ear he whispered this:

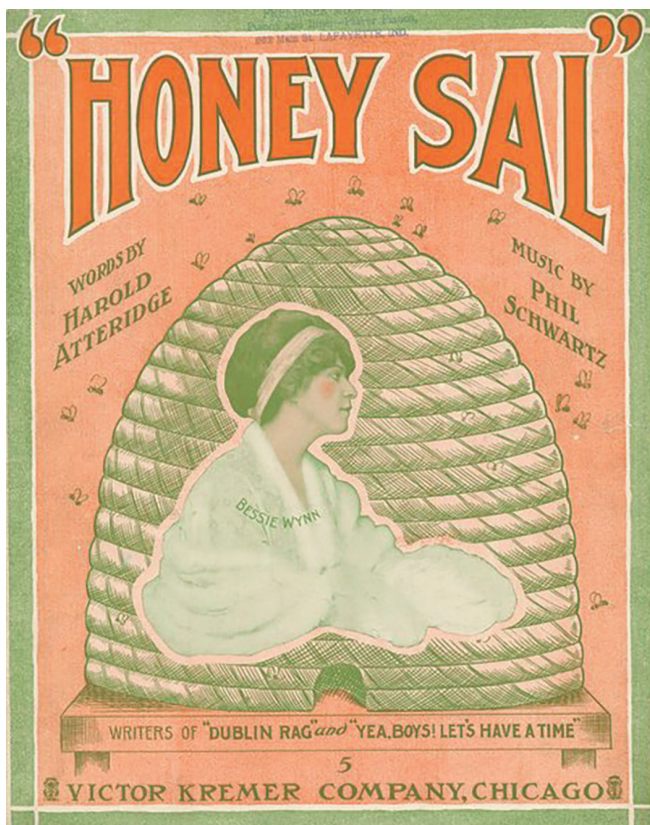
Chorus

Honey Bug, Oh, I love the name of Honey Bug
 I want to say it very gently as we kiss and hug
 Then I'll be as happy as a bug in a rug
 Oh, Honey bug
 You're a beauty tho' your nose is pug
 My heart is warmer than an oven
 And I feel so lovin'
 For I am the Honey of my little Honey Bug.

The Jerome H. Remick music publisher hired the composer of this song, Charlotte Blake (1885-1979), as a writer and arranger when she was eighteen. She produced over forty waltzes, marches, and ragtime tunes for the company, 1903-1916.

"The Bee Ne'er Returns to the Same Flower Unless He Finds Honey There" (1911) seems to have been a rather low-budget production in Kalamazoo, with its graphite drawing on a lavender cover. The song is dedicated to the "J" Hop of 1911 at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. This was an annual junior dance in Waterman Gymnasium. While the lyrics describe a wandering bee — "Flower from flower, day to day/Little bee's not contented to stay/In the same old rosebud when the honey's all gone/He keeps a moving on" — the title page depicts an anonymous couple at that dance. With eyes closed, a





man in suit and tie embraces a woman rather awkwardly. She, with eyes open, leans against him with her right side, her forearm against the right side of his chest as she strokes the back of his neck. Her left hand rests on a low ledge, arm emerging from a gown sleeve layered like the full roses that wind around the couple on two parallel, thorny vines. Above them fly six bees. Photographic medallions of composer Burton E. Fischer (1882-1965) and lyricist P.R. Wilds are in the lower right. Fischer was a pianist, instructor, music publisher, and prolific composer, known as the "Dean of Kalamazoo Musicians." With his older brother, he led Fischer's 'Exposition' Orchestra, and performed at the J Hop sixteen times, beginning in 1901.

The pink title page of "Honey Sal" (1911) depicts a large skep hive around which twenty-two bees buzz. On the hive, singer Bessie Wynn (1876-1968) appears thoughtful, wearing a head band in her light brown bouffant hair and a swirling white fur cape. Born in Chicago where the Victor Kremer Co. published this sheet music, Wynn was an actor/singer in two highly popular Broadway productions, "Wizard of Oz" (1902) and "Babes in Toyland" (1903-05), then appeared in vaudeville, 1907-1930s. Curiously, the song is in the voice of a man who croons about the sweetest gal in Dixieland, comparing her to a daisy and a southern rose, anticipating their marriage: "Something tells we are headin' straight ahead into a weddin' Honey Sal."

Composer and librettist Harold Atteridge (1886-1938), born in Lake Forest, Illinois, wrote over twenty musicals and revues for the Shubert family in New York, including the successful series, "The Passing Show", 1913-1924. Atteridge was also the lyricist for the popular song, "By the Beautiful Sea" (1914).

The imposing blue and yellow title page of "When the Bees Are Busy Buzzing in the Busy Bee Time" (1913)

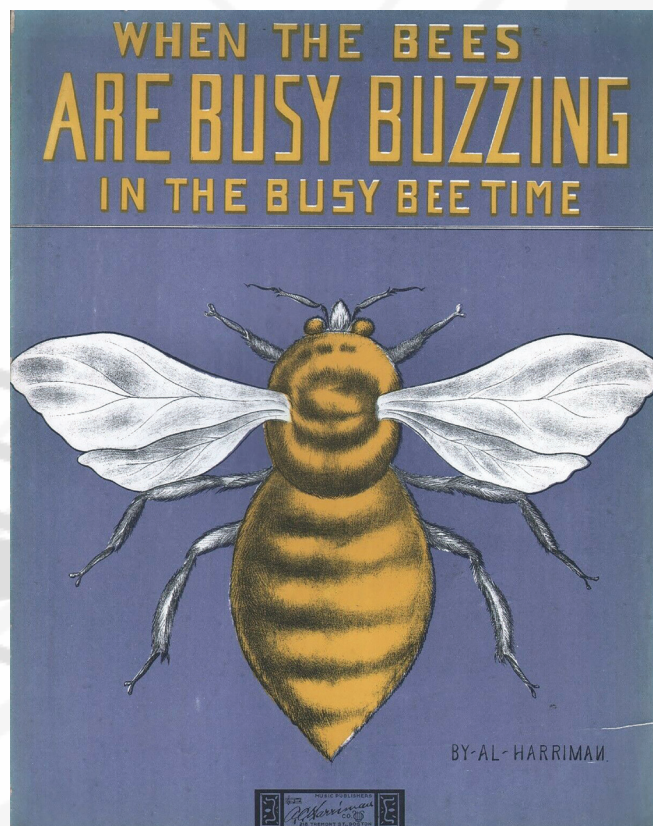
portrays a single huge honey bee from above. Oddly, the head is missing, as are large black compound eyes. Instead, small brown eyes are on the front of the thorax which is softly banded, as is the abdomen. The curious image, almost menacing, gives no hint of the human courtship expressed in the song's words "All about a lovin' man who loves just you/Look into my eyes and say that you'll be mine/When the bees are busy buzzin' in the busy bee time."

"Isn't She the Busy Little Bee" (1917) is a song about a girl who entranced a boy in May. The chorus incorporates buzzing noises:

Isn't she just a busy little bee
 Buzzin' 'round him
 (Ziz ziz ziz) You can see she's a busy little bee
 Since she found him
 (Ziz ziz ziz) Hiding 'mong the flowers where she sips
 the honeydew
 Kidding him for hours 'till he don't know what to do
 He has to tumble and be be her bumblebee,
 Isn't she just a busy little bee
 Has him winging
 Ziz, ziz, ziz, She's a prize some beginner and a winner
 for her size
 Rolls her eyes oh what eyes!
 She cuddled closer and she gave his heart a sting
 He got excited and he went and bought the ring oh gee!
 Poor he! Isn't she the busy little bee

In the second verse, the girl "Led him to the parson right away/And then he let her sentence him for life."

Edward H. Pfeiffer (1868-1932) designed the dynamic golden image of a queen bee with a smiling woman's face hovering over a skep hive and surrounded by a myriad





of drones. Her body fits within the white circle of the sun bursting with deep yellow, rectangular rays of light that fill the picture plane. Pfeiffer is one of the best-known music cover illustrators whose work spans over 100 publishers. He was especially gifted in depicting near-photographic realistic shading, as in the bee wings and head of the woman with dark wavy hair.

Pfeiffer also drew the remarkable red, white, and blue World War I cover for "Watch the Bee Go Get the Hun" (1918). A white beam from the torch of the Statue of Liberty in the upper right streams diagonally like a search light toward the lower left, locking on a terrified Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941), the last German Emperor and King of Prussia. He reigned from 1888 until his abdication in November, 1918. A swarm of marauding bees, all wearing doughboy hats, begins to attack, one landing on the leader's short-cropped, bristling hair while another huge one is about to sting his forehead. Identified by his distinctive, upturned mustache, the "Hun" (what Allied anti-German war propagandists called the Kaiser) bites his lower lip. He looks downward, eyeballs bulging in fright. Cropped high on the chest, Wilhelm's military uniform is shredded, as if already mostly destroyed. The lyrics describe bees as American-made bullets that will sting the Kaiser:

Just watch the bee go get the Hun
 And bye and bye you'll see them run
 We're sending swarms and swarms of bees far across the
 deep blue seas,
 To buzz around that big long-distant gun.
 So help the bee to get the Hun,
 Stamp U.S.A. on ev'ry one,
 And the Germans will be wiser when our Bees have
 stung the Kaiser,

Watch the bees go get the Hun
 Just watch the Hun.

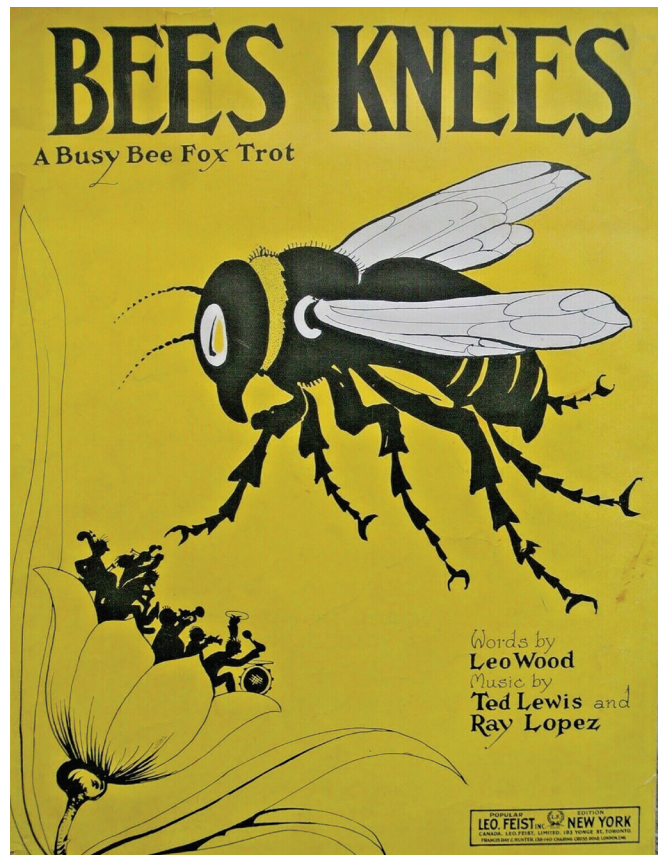
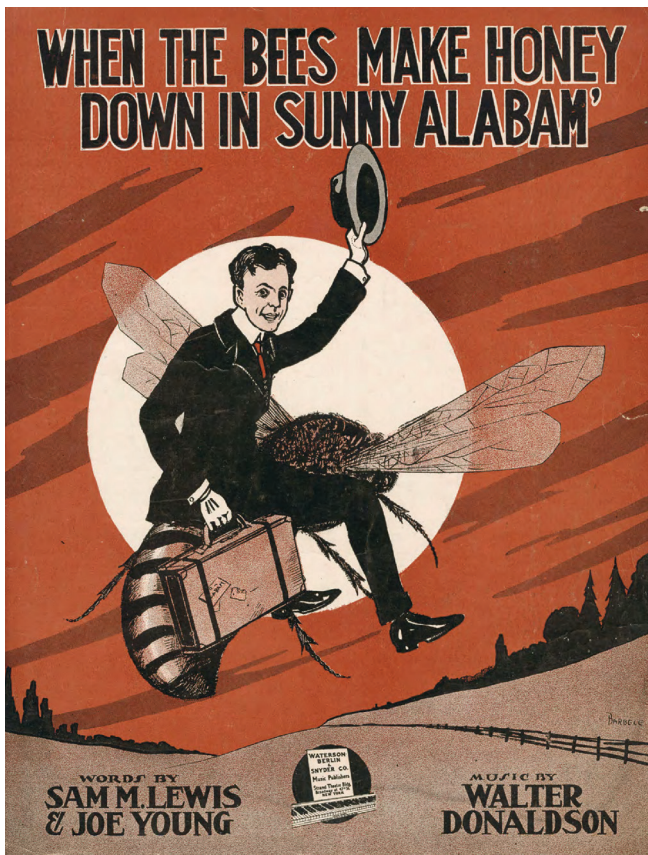
There is a recording of this song on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ff0BUZIEUQ>.

Composer Theodore Leopold Friedman (1890-1971), was an entertainer, bandleader, singer, and clarinetist. Known as Ted Lewis, his nicknames were "Mr. Entertainment" and Ted "Is Everybody Happy?" Lewis. He recorded for Columbia Records, 1919-33, and for Decca into the 1940s. His was one of the most popular jazz bands in the 1920s.

One of the most comical covers in this group is "When the Bees Make Honey Down in Sunny Alabam" (1923), graphically bold with a limited palette of black, orange, white, and light brown. The prolific illustrator Albert Wilfred Barbelle (1887-1957) produced this design. He studied art in Paris, London, and New York. From 1912, Barbelle worked as a designer of sheet music covers for the Water-son, Berlin, & Snyder Company in New York, the publisher of this piece.

A cheery young man in a suit, tie, and gloves rides a giant honey bee toward a white-hot sun in an expansive orange sky streaked with long, thin, diagonal brown clouds. The youth twists backward to smile and salute viewers with his hat in upraised left hand. In his right hand he carries a small suitcase bound with straps. A label on the front reads "To Alabam." In the lower foreground is an empty field with a wooden fence. Along the low horizon are black silhouettes of buildings on the left and a bridge and trees on the right. Clearly, the traveler is headed away from an urban center toward a rural home. He is eager to visit parents and "buzz around" with his "honey lamb," believing that if he doesn't get stung by her, "there'll be a honeymoon."





The chorus goes:

When the bees make honey down in sunny Alabam',
That's when I said, I'd be sending a telegram;
Down to a honeysucked home,
Where my folks live all alone;
They're like a pair of honeybees,
In a honeycomb,
I'm gonna make a bee-line straight for home,
That's what I am,
And I've a plan, to buzz around with my honey lamb;
And on some Sunday afternoon,
If I don't get stung, there'll be a honeymoon,
When the bees make honey, down in sunny,
Oh! You Alabam'.

Composer Walter Donaldson (1893-1947) penned more than 600 songs in his thirty-year career, ranging from pop melodies to sophisticated jazz tunes, much of it for New York stage shows and Hollywood movies. Two lyricists wrote the words for this piece, Sam M. Lewis (1885-1959) and Joe Young (1889-1939). Lewis (b. Samuel Levine) sang in New York cafes and began song writing in 1912, often collaborating with others, most frequently with Young. During World War I, Young entertained U.S. troopers in Europe as a singer. His last composition was the famous standard, "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter" (1935).

An unknown illustrator delineated the stunning yellow and black cover of "Bees Knees, A Busy Bee Fox Trot" (1922). White appears only in the eyes and wings of a gigantic honey bee with barbed legs seen in profile hovering over a tulip drawn in outline. The tilted blossom barely contains an energetic six-piece orchestra in silhouette. One can just make out individual spiked hairs of musi-

cians who play bass, violin, saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, cymbals, and a drum. The subtitle of the composition (on the first page) is "a queen bee fox trot full of honey." Lyrics describe a catchy tune that makes one feel heavenly: "When you start a-stepping you'll understand/Very soon how this tune goes,/For you'll get a feelin' that's simply grand,/Right from your head to your toes./For this syn-copated tune will make you sure forget your sorrows and all other cares./Without showing you're knowin' you're goin' at all,/You're climbing the golden stairs." Six years later, Cole Porter would croon about birds, bees, and even educated fleas in "Let's Do It (Let's Fall in Love)," but no known music covers of the song depicted bees.

Buyers were often drawn to such memorable title pages as these, whether seduced by the love stories, wooed by the beauty and scent of oversized blossoms, lured by the taste of golden honey, motivated by patriotic fervor, or tickled by fantastic size discrepancies between gigantic insects and tiny humans. They performed the compositions publicly and privately, instrumentally and orally, and savored the visual display of colorful, eye-catching designs on home pianos. For early 20th-century Americans, bees symbolized a broad range of aspects, including springtime, youth, romance, oral pleasure, devotion, industry, productivity, defense, and teamwork. Catchy melodies about honey bees kept them humming and buzzing throughout the day.

With thanks for assistance from Rebecca Bedell, Lucille Jordan, Gene Kritsky, and Brian Miller.

Theresa Leininger-Miller is Professor of Art History at the University of Cincinnati and a gardener of flowers, herbs, and vegetables. While her primary area of expertise is African American art, she has curated multiple exhibitions of illustrated sheet music. Email: theresa.leininger@uc.edu

