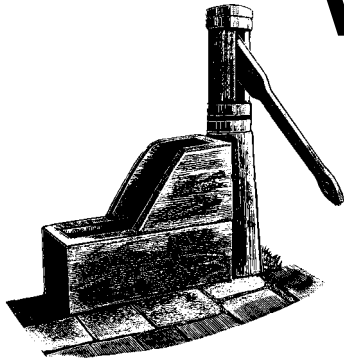


“I Love My Vincent Baby...”



“Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by.”



The 1979 fundraising release

JAZZ FAN Adam Goodheart '92, after listening carefully to his Count Basie recording of “Harvard Blues,” expressed to Primus puzzlement about the lyrics, written by George Frazier '32. (For some vintage bars of the blues and a profile of jazz critic and style arbiter Frazier, go to www.harvard-magazine.com.) Basie recorded the piece at least twice—first in late 1941, three weeks before Pearl Harbor, and in 1944. Jimmy Rushing was the vocalist both times, delivering in an insouciant tenor words that must have been Greek to him. On neither cut did he get beyond the third verse, beginning with “Rinehart” and ending with “I love my Vincent Baby, and that’s no Harvard lie.” “I know what a Rinehart is,” writes Goodheart, “but what’s a Vincent? A car? Slang for marijuana?”

Now it just so happens that in 1979 this magazine reissued the 1941 recording as a fundraising premium, with liner notes by Primus IV. Noting that the lyrics “call forth a Harvard stereotype that seems both remotely absurd and absurdly remote,” he went on to explicate the blues:

“The dogs and women of the second verse are twin prohibitions of a student manual called *Rules Relating to College Stud-*

ies. ‘Rinehart’ is a Harvard rallying cry that goes back to the turn of the century. Its eponym was one James B.G. Rinehart '00, who was often hailed by a classmate beneath his window. On a warm June night in 1900, the classmate’s cry of ‘Oh, R-i-i-n-e-HART!’ was spontaneously taken up by hundreds of inmates of the Harvard Yard, and in after years reverberations were reported from sites as far off as Cairo. In recent years, the tradition has all but died. Rinehart himself died in 1952.”

In his 1984 biography of Frazier, *Another Man’s Poison*, Charles Fountain reports that

HARVARD BLUES

I wear Brooks clothes and white shoes all the time
I wear Brooks clothes and white shoes all the time
Get three “Cs,” a “D” and think checks from home sublime

I don’t keep no dogs or women in my room
I don’t keep no dogs or women in my room
But I’ll love my Vincent Baby, until the day of doom

Rinehart, Rinehart, I’m a most indiff’rent guy
Rinehart, Rinehart, I’m a most indiff’rent guy
But I love my Vincent Baby, and that’s no Harvard lie

Institute and Porky are my clubs
Institute and Porky are my clubs
And I think that girls at Radcliffe all are dubs

Went to Groton and got a big broad A
Went to Groton and got a big broad A
Now at Harvard and follow an indiff’rent way

Do my drinking down in the cool Ritz Bar
Do my drinking down in the cool Ritz Bar
Dad is Racquet and Chilton is my ma.

REPRINTED FROM ANOTHER MAN’S POISON

in 1941 Frazier regaled his friend Basie with a sadsack version of the legend: “Rinehart was a friendless young Harvard who tried to present the illusion that he was in truth a popular sort by standing under his dormitory window and hailing himself,” wrote Fountain. “Every other

November, on the eve or the morning of the Harvard-Yale game, part of the atmosphere in the lobby of the Taft Hotel in New Haven was the faithful and incessant paging of Mr. Rinehart—“Call for Mr. Rinehart! Call for Mr. Rinehart!”—with never a Mr. Rinehart to answer.”

All this amused Basie, and Frazier was emboldened to write his lyric. Basie and arranger Tab Smith wrote a tune for it. John Hammond, a Columbia Records impresario, recorded the blues, perhaps as a favor to Frazier. The song was popular and became a regular part of the shows

Basie gave on college campuses. It enjoyed some critical acclaim, the *New York Times*’s jazz critic calling it one of the “greatest of all blues lyrics.” That went too far, Hammond told Fountain years later. “It wasn’t very good.”

“George treasured the achievement,” writes Fountain. “‘You could criticize some of his work and get away with it,’ said Frazier’s son, Pepper. ‘But not “Harvard Blues.” He was awfully proud of that.’” When this magazine omitted it from a survey of songs about Harvard, Frazier shot off a mock-irate letter. “Harvard Blues,” he told the editors, had been performed not only by Basie, but by the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra.

What’s a Vincent? Frazier’s lyric shows an exquisite concern with clubs. The Institute of 1770/Hasty Pudding Club and the Porcellian are the narrator’s clubs, the Tennis & Racquet Club his father’s, and the Chilton Club his mother’s. His inamorata belongs to Boston’s Vincent Club, a suitable affiliation for an upscale girl. ~PRIMUS V