Five Guys Named Moe is a jazzy, sassy tribute to Louis Jordan, singer, songwriter, bandleader and rhythm and blues pioneer. Jordan was in his heyday in the 1940s and 50s and his new slant on jazz paved the way for rock and roll.

Five Guys Named Moe was originally produced in London's West End, winning the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Entertainment; when it moved to Broadway in 1992, it was nominated for two Tony Awards.

The party begins when we meet our hero Nomax. He's broke, his girlfriend, Lorraine, has left him and he is listening to the radio at five o'clock in the morning, drinking away his sorrows. Suddenly, out of the radio, pop five guys named Moe – Big Moe, Little Moe, Eat Moe, Know Moe and Four-Eyed Moe, to help Nomax turn his life around with their megawatt singing and red-hot dancing.

Skylight audiences will be groovin’ and movin’ along with the guys to more than 25 classic hit songs, including Saturday Night Fish Fry, Choo Choo Ch’ Boogie, Let the Good Times Roll and Is You Is or Is You Ain’t My Baby?.

“Audiences love Five Guys because Jordan’s music is joyful and human, and takes you on an emotional rollercoaster from laughter to heartbreak,” said Skylight Stage Director Malkia Stampley. “Five Guys is, of course, all about guys. But it is also a true ensemble piece and the Skylight is proud to support our talented performers with a strong creative team of women rocking the show from behind the scenes.”

The Los Angeles Times called Five Guys Named Moe “A big party with…enough high spirits to send a small rocket into orbit.” The Chicago Sun Times said the show is “The very definition of pure, unadulterated theatrical fun.” The Northwest Herald wrote, “It is less like a traditional night at the theater and more like a party at your funniest, most talented friend’s house, only more fun than that!”

Come on in. The party is about to begin.
Louis Thomas Jordan was a pioneering American musician, songwriter and bandleader from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. Known as “The King of the Jukebox”, he was highly popular with both black and white audiences in the later years of the swing era.

At the height of his career in the 1940s, Jordan scored 18 Number One hit records. In the tradition of Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller, Jordan exhibited a brilliant sense of showmanship coupled with great musicianship.

Jordan's jazz-based boogie shuffle rhythms laid the foundation for rhythm and blues, modern electric blues and rockabilly music. Able to "straddle the fence" between black and white audiences, Jordan emerged as one of the first successful crossover artists of American popular music and one of the most successful African-American musicians of the 20th century.

His musical talents were endless. He played the piano, clarinet, all forms of the saxophone and fronted his own band for more than twenty years. He was a singer with great comedic flair and a prolific songwriter, writing or co-writing many songs that were influential classics of 20th-century popular music. He recorded with some of the biggest singing stars of his time, including Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong.

He was also an actor and a major black film personality, appearing in two musical feature films made especially for him, Swing Parade of 1946 and the 1947 all-black film Reet, Petite and Gone. He also appeared in dozens of promotional short films, called "soundies."

Louis Jordan was born on July 8, 1908, in Brinkley, Arkansas, where his father, James Aaron Jordan, was a music teacher and bandleader for the Brinkley Brass Band and the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. His mother, Adell, died when Louis was young.

Jordan studied music under his father, starting out on the clarinet. In his youth he played in his father's bands instead of doing farm work during school breaks. He also played the piano professionally early in his career, but alto saxophone became his main instrument.

Jordan briefly attended Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock, and majored in music. He moved to New York and began his career in big-band swing jazz in the 1930s. He became famous as one of the leading practitioners, innovators and popularizers of jump blues, a swinging, up-tempo, dance-oriented hybrid of jazz, blues and boogie-woogie.

In 1938, Webb fired Jordan for trying to persuade Fitzgerald and others to join his new band, originally a nine-piece group soon scaled down to a sextet. The new band was called the Elks Rendezvous Club Band, but Jordan soon changed the name to the Tympney Five, with Jordan playing alto, tenor and baritone saxophone and singing lead vocal on most songs.

With his dynamic Tympany Five band, Jordan mapped out the main parameters of the classic R&B, urban blues and early rock-and-roll genres with a series of highly influential 78-rpm discs released by Decca Records. These recordings presaged many of the styles of black popular music of the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and exerted a strong influence on many leading performers.

In late 1936 he joined the influential Savoy Ballroom orchestra in New York City. Led by the drummer Chick Webb, the orchestra was one of the best big bands of its day. This was a vital stepping-stone in his career. Webb was a fine musician but not a great showman and the ebullient Jordan was often in the spotlight introducing songs and singing lead. Ella Fitzgerald was the Webb band's lead female vocalist and she and Jordan often sang duets on stage, and later made several records.

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In 1941, the band played an engagement at Chicago's Capitol Lounge, supporting the already famous Mills Brothers. It proved to be an important breakthrough for Jordan and the band.
Jordan's band was transferred from Decca's "race" label to the Sepia Series, which featured artists thought to have black and white audience appeal including the Delta Rhythm Boys and the Nat King Cole Trio.

In the mid-1940s, Jordan's Tympany Five drew thousands of listeners to white nightclubs and black theaters. The band toured constantly, playing shows in Hollywood, Chicago, Detroit and the Apollo in Harlem.

Meanwhile recording sessions in 1942 produced nine sides including What's the Use of Getting Sober (When You're Gonna Get Drunk Again), which became Jordan's first number one hit, reaching the top of the Harlem Hit Parade in December 1942.

The comical call-and-response song Five Guys Named Moe, was one of the first recordings to solidify the fast-paced, swinging R&B style that became Jordan's signature. The song became the title of the long-running stage show now at the Skylight.

In late 1942, Jordan and his band relocated to Los Angeles, working at major venues there and in San Diego. While in Los Angeles, Jordan began making "soundies," and also appeared on many radio shows and a series of programs made for the Armed Forces Radio for distribution to American troops overseas.

In October 1943, Jordan and his band recorded Ration Blues, which struck a chord with audiences with the imposition of wartime rationing. It became Jordan's first crossover hit, charting on both the white and black pop charts, where it spent six weeks at number one and stayed in the Top Ten for a remarkable 21 weeks.

The prime of Jordan's recording career, 1942–1950, was a period of segregation on the radio. Despite this he had a crossover number 1 single, G.I. Jive backed with Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby? in 1944, thanks to his performance of the song in the all-star wartime musical film, Follow the Boys. Two years later, MGM's cartoon cat Tom sang it in the 1946 Tom and Jerry cartoon Solid Serenade.

Jordan's success with a smaller combo had larger implications for the music industry. The blues singer Gatemouth Moore said, "He was playing...with five pieces. That ruined the big bands...He could play just as good and just as loud with five as 17. And it was cheaper."

Jordan's original songs joyously celebrated the ups and downs of African-American urban life and were infused with cheeky good humor and a driving musical energy that had a huge influence on the development of rock and roll.

Loaded with wry social commentary and coded references, they are also a treasury of 1930s and 1940s black hipster slang. Sexual themes were often prominently featured, and some sides were so risqué it's remarkable that they were issued at all.

In the 1940s, Jordan released dozens of hit songs, including the comic classic Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens, the multimillion seller, Choo Choo Ch'Boogie, and the freewheeling party adventure Saturday Night Fish Fry, one of the earliest and most powerful contenders for the title of first rock and roll record.
Its distinctive comic narrative is strikingly similar to the style later used by Bob Dylan in his "story" songs, such as Bob Dylan's 115th Dream and Tombstone Blues. Saturday Night Fish Fry is also notable for Jordan's rapid-fire, semi-spoken vocal and is one of the earliest examples in American popular music of the vocal stylings that eventually evolved into rap.

According to Joel Whitburn's points-based analysis of Billboard chart placings, Jordan ranks fifth among the most successful artists over the period 1942–1995. From July 1946 through May 1947, Jordan had five number 1 songs, holding the top slot for 44 consecutive weeks.

By the mid-1950s, Jordan faced a new record-buying public dominated by teenagers and his record sales declined. Determined to keep up with the burgeoning rhythm and blues market, Jordan intensified his sound to compete with rock and roll. In 1956, Mercury Records released two LPs of updated rock-and-roll versions of previous hits such as Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens, Caldonia and Choo Choo Boogie, but it was not commercially successful, and the label let him go in 1958.

During an interview late in life, Jordan made the controversial remark that rock and roll was simply rhythm and blues played by white performers. The link between Jordan's music and rock and roll was later underscored by others, notably Chuck Berry, who acknowledged in 1987 that Jordan was his main inspiration.

Health problems forced Jordan to retire from one-night stands. In 1946 he bought a home in Phoenix, Arizona, where he lived for 18 years; he moved to Los Angeles in the early 1960s.

In October of 1974, he suffered a heart attack while performing in Sparks, Nevada. He returned home to Los Angeles, where he died on February 4, 1975. He is buried at Mt. Olive Cemetery in St. Louis, Missouri, the hometown of his wife Martha.

In 1987, Jordan was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Though many had forgotten his contributions to popular music over the intervening years, Jordan was described by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as "the Father of Rhythm & Blues" and "the Grandfather of Rock 'n' Roll."

Jordan helped shape the careers of rock and roll pioneers Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Bill Haley and countless others. James Brown has also specifically cited Jordan as a major influence because of his multifaceted talent. In the 1992 documentary Lenny Henry Hunts the Funk, Brown said that Jordan had influenced him "in every way. He could sing, he could dance, he could play, he could act. He could do it all."
Peter Clarke (born April 7, 1952), known professionally as Clarke Peters, is an American actor, singer, writer and director, best known for his roles as detective Lester Freamon and Albert "Big Chief" Lambreaux on the David Simon HBO dramas The Wire and Treme respectively. More recently, Peters has portrayed Alonzo Quinn on the CBS crime drama Person of Interest and Isaiah Page on The Divide.

Peters was born Peter Clarke, the second of four sons, in New York, and grew up in Englewood, New Jersey. At the age of 12, he had his first theater experience, in a school production of My Fair Lady. He began to have serious ambitions to work in the theater at the age of 14.

In 1973, he moved to London, and changed his name to Clarke Peters because Actor's Equity already had a member named Peter Clarke. While in London, he worked as a backup singer on such hits as Love and Affection by Joan Armatrading and Boogie Nights by Heatwave. However, he preferred to work in the theater and his appearances in West End musicals include Bubbling Brown Sugar, Blues in the Night, Porgy and Bess, Chicago and Chess.

In 1990, Peters wrote the revue Five Guys Named Moe, which received a Tony Award nomination for Best Book of a Musical. He followed this with Unforgettable, a musical about Nat King Cole, which received scathing reviews.

Since then, Clarke has appeared on Broadway in The Iceman Cometh (1999), and as shady lawyer Billy Flynn in the revival of Chicago in 2000 and 2003. In regional theatre he has appeared in Driving Miss Daisy, The Wiz, Bubbling Brown Sugar, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Carmen Jones and The Amen Corner.

Peters has had five children from three relationships. He and his first wife, Janine Martyne, had two children: a daughter, China Clarke, an architect, and a son, Peter Clarke, a tattoo artist. A subsequent relationship with Joanna Jacobs produced two sons: Joe Jacobs, an actor, and Guppy, who died of a kidney tumor at the age of four in 1992. He has a son, Max, with his second wife, Penny.

Peters, a follower of the Brahma Kumaris, splits his time between a house in the Charles Village section of Baltimore, which he bought in 2006 while working on The Wire, and one in London, where Penny and Max live.

Clarke discussed his work on 5 Guys in The Guardian in 2017:

“Growing up, Louis Jordan tracks like (You Dyed Your Hair) Chartreuse, Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens, Open the Door, Richard and Let the Good Times Roll were the soundscape of my youth.

Fast forward 30 years. In 1985, I was living in London and had worked with the late Ned Sherrin in several of his musical tributes – Li, about composer Lionel Bart, and I Gotta Shoe, a black musical about Cinderella that mixed 30s tunes and new compositions, and Only in America, the Lieber and Stoller songbook.

I was learning how to create a musical and wanted to do it myself. My eureka moment came after listening to hundreds of Jordan songs. Some were poignant, others lighthearted. Many of them featured interesting characters or were vignettes. Jordan's music fitted my scenario and I started to create a show using his songs.

I wrote a story about a broken-hearted and broke man, Nomax, who one night is visited by five singing and dancing angels, Big Moe, Four-Eyed Moe, Eat Moe, No Moe and Little Moe, who emerge from his 1930s-style radio to help him get his life back on track, using Jordan's songs.

At that time, there was no vehicle for men of color to express and challenge their talents, which was another reason I wanted to create a show. In that respect, Five Guys Named Moe has fulfilled its mission. The number of young men and women who have told me that this show inspired them to come into the business is a wonderful thing to hear.

Jordan wanted everyone who saw his shows simply to have a good time. With all that is happening in the world today, locally, nationally and internationally, a moment to escape into the "rolling good time" is needed."
Jazz has been called the purest expression of American democracy; a music built on individualism and compromise, independence and cooperation.

Jazz has deep roots. It is an outgrowth of an improvisational musical form, often derived from African rhythms and influenced by European harmonic structure. Developed partially from Ragtime and Blues, it is often characterized by syncopated rhythms, polyphonic ensemble playing, and varying degrees of improvisation. The core aesthetics of Jazz - call and response, improvisation, driving rhythms, high creativity, passion – are all clearly African.

The word Jazz has a veil of mystery. Some research suggests that it traces to African origin; other evidence says it is possibly related to the French word jaser which means "to chatter". One thing is certain -- Jazz has been, from its very beginnings at the turn of the 20th century, a constantly evolving, expanding, changing musical genre passing through many distinctive phases of development. Along the way, Jazz even developed its own jargon, Jive.

New Orleans, home of Ragtime, Dixieland and the Blues, was a natural birthplace for Jazz because it was more diverse than anywhere else in the South. Here, people of African, French, English, Caribbean, Italian, German, Mexican and American Indian descent interacted with one another. African-American traditions blended into this cultural mix to create a unique musical hybrid: Jazz.

Jelly Roll Morton, an early jazz pianist who liked to credit himself as the inventor of jazz, recalled that New Orleans was a very prosperous city in the "early jazz" era and that its "adult entertainment" industry was especially supportive of live music, thus the nickname "The Big Easy" given the city by musicians who could rely on it for steady, high paying work. Morton also points out that musical standards and variety were very high in the city. High level instruction in all kinds of music was available – that remains true today.

After the first recordings of jazz were made in 1917, the music spread widely and developed rapidly. The unique music traveled almost simultaneously to other areas - St Louis and Kansas City Speakeasies. Southside Chicago, New York's Times Square, where only whites were allowed to dance and to the more egalitarian Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, where people of all colors mingled. Louis Jordan got his first big professional start at the Savoy playing with the Chick Webb band.

In the 1920s and 30's, musicians latched onto yet another variation of Jazz, a new form called "Swing". Swing music was characterized by very large bands, fixed, usually written arrangements, and solos by individual musicians instead of group improvisation.
The Savoy Ballroom was famous for its "Battle of the Bands" where Chick Webb's band would compete with other top bands (such as the Benny Goodman Orchestra or the Count Basie Orchestra) from opposing bandstands. Other top bands of the day included Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Artie Shaw, Cab Calloway and Glen Miller.

The Swing era also saw the saxophone supersede in many ways the trumpet as the dominant jazz solo instrument. Swing arrangements often emphasized the reed section to carry the melody, with trumpets providing accent and highlights. It was an open invitation to Jordan, master of the sax, to form his own band with what was already a new trend called Jump Blues.

Jump groups, which were employed to play for jitterbugs at a much lower cost than big bands, became popular with agents, ballroom owners and colleges. Jordan's Tympany Five, which came into being at the same time as the boogie-woogie revival, achieved maximum effect with fewer musicians playing an eight-to-the-bar boogie-woogie style.

Jump was especially popular in the late 1940s and early 1950s, through artists such as Louis Jordan, Billy Wright, Wynonie Harris, Louis Prima, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.

Over the years, as each new style has added its own flavor, Jazz has splintered (if not exploded) into countless subsets and variations. But whether it's called Blues, Ragtime, Dixieland, Swing, Bebop, Boogie-Woogie, Jump, R & B, rock or rap, it’s Jazz.

Jazz is among America's greatest cultural achievements and exports to the world community. It gives a strong voice to the American experience. Born of a multi-hued society, it unites people across the divides of race, region and national boundaries and has always made powerful statements about freedom, creativity and American identity at home and abroad.

**Saturday Night Fish Fries**

Wisconsin's popular Friday night Fish Fries have nothin’ on the Saturday Night Fish Fries in New Orleans. An old tradition in the black community, folks would go from house to house to parties with lots of food, drink, music and revelry. A red kerosene lamp would indicate which houses were hosting.

The song tells about hitting up a particularly festive fish fry on Rampart Street, where everyone is dancing and having a good time. But then the place gets busted by the cops, and Little Moe ends up in jail.

Scenic design by Tara Houston
Louis Jordan was always interested in new music styles. When the calypso craze hit the country in the 1940s, his *Calypso* Afro, with vocal by Jordan and the Calypso Boys, reached the number-one spot on Billboard’s R&B charts in 1948. *Five Guys* audiences will be singing along at the end of Act 1, and dancing in a conga line when they hear this:

*Push ka pi shi pie-eh eh,*
*Push ka pi shi pie-eh eh,*
*Oobli-aayee eye yay abla,*
*It’s the new calypso be bop!*

Calypso is a style of Afro-Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago during the early 19th century and eventually spread to the rest of the Caribbean Antilles and Venezuela by the mid-20th century. Its rhythms can be traced back to West African Kaiso and the arrival of French planters and slaves from the French Antilles in the 18th century.

Calypso became the voice of the people, characterized by highly rhythmic and harmonic vocals, usually sung in a French creole. Perhaps the most straightforward way to describe the focus of calypso is that it articulated itself as a form of protest against the authoritarian colonial culture which existed at the time.

Sex, scandal, gossip, innuendo, politics, local news, bravado and insulting other calypsonians were the order of the day in classic calypso, just as it is today with classic hip-hop.

The Andrews Sisters recording of the calypso song *Rum and Coca-Cola* became an American hit in 1944 despite being a critical commentary on the explosion of prostitution, inflation and other negative influences accompanying the American military bases in Trinidad at the time. It was originally written and recorded by Lord Invader, who pursued a legal case involving the theft of this song.

Calypso, especially a toned-down, commercial variant, became a worldwide craze with the release of Harry Belafonte’s recording of the *Banana Boat Song, or Day-O*, a traditional Jamaican folk song, on his album *Calypso* (1956). *Calypso* was the first full-length record to sell more than a million copies. The success of that album inspired hundreds of “Folkies”, or the American folk music revival to imitate the “Belafonte style”, but with a more folk-oriented flavor.

More recently and famously, *Under the Sea*, a calypso song from the Disney film, *The Little Mermaid*, won an Academy Award for Best Original Song in 1989, as well as the Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media.

The Limbo is a traditional dance contest that originated on the island of Trinidad. It initially took place at wakes in Trinidad and Tobago, and was popularized by dance pioneer Julia Edwards (above), known as the First Lady of Limbo. Limbo is unofficially considered the national dance of Trinidad and Tobago, which refers to itself as the land of limbo, steelpan (steel drums) and calypso.

A horizontal bar is placed atop two vertical bars. The dancer lowers their body and leans back while going under the bar. The dancer is declared "out" if any part of the body touches the pole or if the hands touch the floor. When several dancers compete, they go under the stick in single-file; the stick is gradually lowered until the dancer, who has not touched the pole or the floor, remains.

Traditionally, the limbo dance began at the lowest possible bar height and the bar was gradually raised, signifying an emergence from death into life. In its adaptation to mainstream entertainment, the traditional order troupes began reversing.

As Limbo gained popularity as a tourist activity and a form of entertainment, pop music began using Caribbean rhythms to respond to the emerging craze in the United States. One major example is the song *Limbo Rock*, recorded by Chubby Checker, which became a number 2 charted hit on the *Billboard* Top 100, from which emerged the popular quote/chant that is associated with limbo which Checker also helped to popularize: “How low can you go?”