



Twentieth century fix

From jazz age to computer age, one exhibition captures the spirit of Harlem's past and another the face of an interactive future

The Harlem renaissance of the Twenties and early Thirties is one of the great overlooked artistic movements. Spawned in the clubs, theatres, ballrooms and studios of New York's most vibrant district, it was a movement that brought together musicians, writers and artists into a decade-long celebration of black cultural life. Admired but often critically undervalued, the renaissance has now inspired a major exhibition devoted to capturing its astonishing vitality.

Rhapsodies In Black details black America's first significant struggle to establish a separate, self-sufficient artistic identity. Featuring the modernist, jazz-and-nightclub-inspired paintings of artists Aaron Douglas and Archibald Motley Jr, the street and society photographs of James VanDerZee, as well as rare archive film and

sound recordings of, among others, actor and performer Paul Robeson, blues singer Bessie Smith and dancer Josephine Baker, the exhibition attempts to show how the Harlem renaissance became a symbol of black pride.

While Dorothy Parker and F Scott Fitzgerald were having a gay old time downtown, Harlem intellectuals such as poet Langston Hughes and black nationalist Marcus Garvey were breathing cultural life into an otherwise impoverished area. In a revolutionary and glamorous period during which art triumphed over environment, Harlem became "the Mecca of the New Negro" and "sambo slaves" could be reborn as stylish sophisticates. It is a legacy that influenced artists the world over and infuses the work of such contemporary black Americans as Spike

Lee, Wynton Marsalis, Public Enemy and, perhaps most of all, Toni Morrison, whose 1992 novel *Jazz* is set in Harlem in the Twenties.

Yet, at the heart of the Harlem renaissance lay the infectious, spontaneous new music of the jazz age. From the radical stride piano style of Fats Waller and Art Tatum, to the progressive black musicals and revues at the Savoy Ballroom and Apollo Theatre, to the famous and sartorially splendid Duke Ellington residency at the Cotton Club, Harlem taught the world to dance to the rhythm of a different drum. *Philip Watson Rhapsodies In Black is at the Hayward Gallery, London from June 19 to August 17; the Arnolfini, Bristol from September 6 to October 19; and the Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry from November 1 to December 6.*

