

Shmanners 475: Josephine Baker

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[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette.

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: How *are* you?

Teresa: I'm well...

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: Yeah, how are you?

Travis: Happy October!

Teresa: Oh! Yes. You are correct, sir. It *is* October.

Travis: Which means it's almost November, which is the month I was born.

Teresa: Oh, that's what we're going for.

Travis: No...

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: I'm just like— This is—

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: The two months... And it feels like there's less fall every year.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But the two months of October and November are my two favorite months of the year.

Teresa: I saw online a petition to make December fall.

Travis: Now, this is interesting. Because to me, the problem isn't that December's not fall.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: It's that September's not fall.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Because the first day of fall isn't 'til, what, the 21st of September or something?

Teresa: Yeah, something like that.

Travis: And any time it's September 1st, and I'm like, "Happy fall!"
And people are like, "Not yet..."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yes, it is! It's an -ember month.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: The -ember months are fall.

Teresa: [laughs] Well, I would say that here in the Ohio Valley, it would be—
December is usually—

Travis: Well, we can't make it regional, baby, or California will *never* get *any* seasons!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It will always just be—

Teresa: California doesn't have seasons.

Travis: It will just be summer there, all the time.

Teresa: It *is* summer there, all the time.

Travis: I know, but... that's bad for your mental health.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's the kind of thing that people are like, "I wish it was summer all the time!" And then there are whole movies where they learn, because they made a wish, and now it's summer all the time. And they're like, "Actually, I don't want it to be summer anymore. I want it to be other things." And all those people are trapped in California.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And we were there for two years, and we got *out*!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But none of that is what we're talking about.

Teresa: No. Not at all. [laughs]

Travis: What are we talking about this week?

Teresa: We have a biography this week, and we are talking about Josephine Baker.

Travis: Now, *is* Josephine Baker... I think I know.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: But she's like the quintessential flapper? Or am I *so* wrong?

Teresa: When you hear Josephine Baker, what— Describe the picture that comes into your head.

Travis: Um... [sighs] I think I'm thinking of the wrong person now.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: But I was thinking, like, feather in the hair, flapper dress? Is that a different person?

Teresa: I mean—

Travis: I was *so* excited that I thought I knew who Josephine Baker was.

Teresa: It's possible that she did wear a flapper dress, but what you should picture when you hear Josephine Baker is a banana skirt.

Travis: Okay. That might also be what I'm think— I don't know what I'm doing. Hold on.

Teresa: Okay. She was often found with close-cropped hair. We think about spit curls and finger waves for her, for that time period. But the banana skirt is the iconic piece of costume that we think about, when we think about Josephine Baker. And you know what? She is a woman—

Travis: Oh, literally a skirt that looks like bananas.

Teresa: Yeah! Who—

Travis: I see it now.

Teresa: Who lived several lifetimes, within her own lifetime. So, so many things. So many things happened to and because of Josephine Baker.

Travis: And around, and...

Teresa: I mean, sure!

Travis: ... within.

Teresa: At the—

Travis: Beside, above, below, and other...

Teresa: Prepositions? [wheeze-laughs]

Travis: Other prepositions.

Teresa: Okay. Let's start at the very beginning.

Travis: A very good place to start, I've heard.

Teresa: Yes. She has been referred to by many as, quote, the Black Venus for her beauty and talent. And she is synonymous with a very specific period in Paris.

Travis: I'm just gonna say, when I search either Josephine and flapper, or Baker and flapper, Josephine Baker comes back for both with it saying, like, "Known for embodying the spirit of the 1920s flapper." So...

Teresa: Okay. Okay.

Travis: I'm just gonna say, that's a check mark for Travis McElroy.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: Not a big check mark, mind you. A little check mark. Because the only thing I knew about her was that she embodied flapperism. [laughs]

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: Flapperiness. But still, you take the wins where you can get 'em.

Teresa: So, she was an entertainment superstar, at the time. But also contributed to liberation efforts in World War II and did unflinchingly brave work for the Civil Rights Movement in the US, and abroad.

Travis: I have this thing. I'm just formulating a theory here.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But it's almost like women in history, and specifically women of color, have a big impact on history, and maybe stuff that was going on in the world. And it's not taught or talked about enough.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: Because listen, all joking aside...

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And that wasn't really joking; 'cause that's true. That is just...

Teresa: That is true.

Travis: ... demonstrably true. But also, it's always amazing to me that so many of our biography episodes start with, "Here is a woman known for being an entertainer, or known for existing in the art community, be it as a model, or photographer, or artist, or whatever. And also, they had a big impact on World War II." [laughs]

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And it's like, "Wait, what?"

Teresa: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Travis: Okay. Okay. *Everyone* was involved in World War II.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Hard to stay out of it. It was a World War.

Teresa: Indeed. It is often said, of artists of this period, that they come from humble beginnings. And I think that is very true for Miss Josephine. She was born June 3rd 1906 in St. Louis, Missouri.

Travis: What, what year?

Teresa: 1906.

Travis: Okay. I'm trying to think of what time frame basis I have for understanding St. Louis, Missouri in 1906. But I don't think it was the metropolitan hub that it is now.

Teresa: I mean, it was certainly an urban area. But I would say that—

Travis: It wasn't like New York.

Teresa: No. It was not on par with New York, it being further west and whatnot.

Travis: Not like now. Where St. Louis, New York? Basically the same thing.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I love you, St. Louis. That was for you guys. You're great, big fan.

Teresa: What year was the World's Fair in St. Louis? Mm...

Travis: 1896?

Teresa: So it was big enough, around that time, for a World's Fair.

Travis: If I'm right— Don't—

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Did you hear— Every letter in the words I just said were separated by the question mark.

Teresa: [laughs] "1896?"

Travis: It was, "One, question mark? Eight, question mark? Nine, question mark?" Uh... 1904? Is that correct?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: 1904 was the St. Louis World's Fair.

Teresa: So enough of a bustling metropolis to support the St. Louis World's Fair. The stresses of poverty in her childhood were immense. She was one of many siblings who lived in a tenement house for several years.

Travis: So a thing I've noticed about siblings, there's never just one of 'em.

Teresa: Yeah. There's lots of 'em, usually.

Travis: No, do you get it? 'Cause you couldn't have siblings with just one...

Teresa: [gasps] Well, you could have two s— I guess—

Travis: Yeah, but you wouldn't just have *one* si— You wouldn't be an only child, and be one sibling. You'd have to have two siblings.

Teresa: But is it no— Is it two siblings, if there's only two—

Travis: Yeah, because it's a set of siblings.

Teresa: No, but if it's two siblings if there's two people? Or is it one set of sib— No, I think you're right. In order to have a set, you need the two.

Travis: Or is it like scissors and pants?

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: That's a great point, baby, that I hadn't thought of.

Teresa: I hadn't thought of it like pants. But yes, like scissors.

Travis: Siblings are like pants.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You heard it here first. So wait, does that make me, Justin, and Griffin a three-legged pair of pants? Huh!

Teresa: Oh, no.

Travis: Seems unnecessary. One of us is the belt. [laughs]

Teresa: Oh, okay. Right. So to say that Josephine had a difficult childhood would be an understatement, okay? But that didn't mean that there were not moments of joy. She was a performer from a very early age, and also felt a deep responsibility for the people around her. Her siblings, they relied on her as another breadwinner. But she was often gone, because she would attempt to run away a lot.

Travis: I think that those seem— Like, one leads to the other.

Teresa: I think so, too.

Travis: If it's like you're another child in the home, but have a lot of responsibility put on you, and kind of being forced to grow up too quickly and have that kind of level...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... and also try to run away a lot, I think that that makes complete sense that those go hand-in-hand.

Teresa: Yeah. And when she was gone, she would often be found in the entertainment districts, watching other performers and performing herself on street corners, and such.

Travis: Busking, as it's called.

Teresa: Yes! She was married, for the first time, at the age of 13.

Travis: Get *out*!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Get out of the town!

Teresa: I know.

Travis: Oh, no! I'm— You know what? This is a hot take: that's too young!

Teresa: I agree. And although it was supposed to be that— [clears throat] excuse me, that Josephine would be now away from her family, it ended up that she and her now-husband moved *in* with her younger siblings.

Travis: Woof.

Teresa: And mother.

Travis: I'm gonna guess that her husband was older than her? That they weren't like two 13-year-olds getting married?

Teresa: Correct.

Travis: [groaning] Ahh... Ahh!

Teresa: She did get out of that situation. Possibly by hitting him over the head with a beer bottle.

Travis: Yeah, that— Yeah, that follows, yeah.

Teresa: So one of the places that she was often found was the Booker T. Washington Theatre. Because she loved to buy a ticket for \$.10 in those days.

Travis: A good price.

Teresa: To watch troupes of comedians, and acrobats, and singers. And this is where she fell in love with a group of Vaudeville entertainers called the Jones Family Band, where she would eventually perform with them!

Travis: Oh, cool!

Teresa: And—

Travis: That's fun!

Teresa: Yeah! I mean—

Travis: They'd be like, "I really like this! And now, I've *joined* them."

Teresa: Indeed. She later joined another group called the Dixie Steppers.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And that is when she was able to leave her meager surroundings, and her first husband, behind, and go on tour.

Travis: Good. Go out. Explore the world.

Teresa: I know, right? And it was on the road where she honed her singing and dancing talents, along with her comedic style. And it's very important to mention that that was part of her commentary on her surroundings, and as her experience as a Black woman.

Travis: Yeah. I will also say, all you have to do is look at pictures of her, and you can see that she was fun and funny.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And I don't just mean like, "When you see someone smiling, you know they're funny." But when somebody had photos taken of them in that time, especially as a performer...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: It was very much like, "We're going to capture what your deal is, and use these photos for promos, and if we're gonna sell them to people, what they would want." And hers are always kind of fun?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And also, she's gorgeous.

Teresa: Yeah, she is.

Travis: I mean, if you can get past the weird flapper hair. [laughs]

Teresa: You're not a fan?

Travis: Ahh, it's a little too slick for my tastes.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: But that's—

Teresa: That's alright.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You don't have to like every hairstyle.

Travis: No, but she's *gorgeous*.

Teresa: Yeah. There's a PBS documentary that talks about how she would be the girl at the end of the chorus line, who would pretend to make mistakes and then roll her eyes, so that people would look at her. So all of the attention would be diverted to *her*. And she did that on purpose.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So that people would look at her. And that ended up getting her noticed by critics. And it wasn't just because she had messed up, right? It was like, "That one girl at the end, she's got something else." Right?

Travis: Well, this is— I mean, anybody who's been in musical theater, and choir, and dance, and stuff like that knows, it takes a really good singer, or a really good dancer, to dance badly on purpose.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: To sing badly on purpose, and have it be entertaining and fun.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And the second you start describing, "She would make mistakes as part of a clowning act," I'm immediately thinking about Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin, and the Marx Brothers. And this idea of that being the bit.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And Martin and uh, Jerry Lewis, that idea of clowning. You know?

Teresa: I don't know if the other dancers were in on it. But...

Travis: No, I wouldn't imagine.

Teresa: ... it did work out for her. And on her way to Philadelphia, this is where she met and married a railway porter named Billy Baker. Although this marriage, again, would not last very long, because she was not yet 16.

Travis: Oh, boy!

Teresa: She would keep the surname Baker for the rest of her life and career. Alright. We've made it all the way up to 1922.

Travis: So she's now 16 years old.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay. Already a career under her belt.

Teresa: Indeed!

Travis: And two marriages.

Teresa: Yes. And *now*, she is interested in the Black musical Broadway revivals.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: A couple of very talented Black artists and composers, Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, were interested in reviving Black musicals on Broadway after World War I. And so, she moved to New York to take a chorus role in their Broadway hit, *Shuffle Along*. And when that closed, she was immediately offered another starring role in their next musical, *Chocolate Dandies*.

Travis: So even then, knowing nothing else...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: That is a good indication of someone you like working with.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? Because I always think it's a good indicator when a director, or producer or somebody keeps casting the same person in something.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: 'Cause yeah, of course it means they're talented, they wanna work with them. But it also means, "I *liked* working with you. The experience was not terrible, and so you're someone—" I once remember having a casting director come teach a class at my acting college. And he was like, "Yeah, listen. Talent's great. But when people come in for auditions, you see a lot of talented people."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And the people who end up getting cast are the people you would wanna hang out with. The people that you're like, "Yeah, this guy seems cool! I wouldn't hate having him on set for 12 hours a day."

Teresa: [laughs] She worked a lot in New York. The Cotton Club, you may have heard of, we've talked about before. Also, there was a place called the Plantation Club she also worked. And at one point, she was offered a place in a all-Black review that was set to start performing in Paris.

Travis: Ooh, la la!

Teresa: Indeed!

Travis: I've heard of that place.

Teresa: Paris would become the place that she would make into her home.

Travis: Yeah, that tracks.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That follows. I mean, she— Listen, from what I know about her *so far*, at what, 17 or 18 at this point...

Teresa: Indeed!

Travis: It does seem like the type of person that would be like, “You know what? I think I was actually born to live in Paris. And somehow, fate messed up, and I was born in here. And I was supposed to be in Paris, so I’m just gonna fix that.”

Teresa: Yep, and she did! 1925 was when she landed in Paris. And Black performers were touring *all* throughout Europe. And France *especially* was entranced with all things jazz, and Afro-American. This is where the Charleston was solidified as a very popular dance marvel. And it was full of big band performances, and packed theaters. And most of all, very famous headlining Black artists.

But that doesn’t mean that everything was roses, right? For example, Josephine found sensational success performing at *La Revue nègre*, which translates to *The Negro Review*. So, the name is a little controversial in our modern era, but...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: The *performance* is what I wanna talk about. Because this is what I was saying about the banana skirt.

Travis: Okay. We’re gonna talk about this in just one second, but first, here’s a word from another Max Fun show.

[theme music plays]

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[relaxed music plays in background]

Manolo: Hey, it's Sue the Subway Train.

[quick beeping]

Manolo: Hey, guess what, Sue? I just inherited a game show. And I have to continue it, because there are people out there who like to curl up into a ball and listen to it.

[melodic beeping]

Manolo: Yeah, it's a podcast where listeners submit game show ideas for others to play on air.

[conversational beeping]

Manolo: Well, it is! In fact, the dumber the better.

[rushed beeping]

Manolo: Right, right. It's called *Dr. Gameshow*. Some curled-up balls consider it a tradition, while others called it a trainwreck.

[discordant beeping]

Manolo: No, not you, Sue. It's *Dr. Gameshow*. If you're the sort that likes to listen to people competing for refrigerator magnets, then curl up into a ball and listen to *Dr. Gameshow*. Every other Wednesday, at MaximumFun.org.

[melodic beeping]

--

[upbeat music plays in background]

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[ad break ends]

Travis: Okay. I'm gonna take a guess.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Because this is a thing that we see a lot in history. Even at times where marginalized people are, quote unquote, "celebrated..." it's almost treated like a novelty act, more than it is an acceptance thing.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Where it's like, "Yeah, they're getting a lot of work, because people want to see them perform in the way they expect them to perform, and play into these

stereotypes. Or to seem, quote unquote, 'exotic and foreign,'" as they were often described at that time.

And not because they were like, "This is totally just like seeing any other show. We've accepted this as a normality."

Teresa: Right. And this banana skirt that I was talking about is part of that. Right? And it's part of a commentary on that phenomenon. The dance is called *Le Danse Sauvage*, which translates to Dance of the Savage. And this is where she made the commentary of this idea that you're talking about, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: So the skirt is a skirt made of rubber bananas. And then, on her top, she just wore necklaces of pearls, and other jewels and such. Right? And she based this character, in the dance, on a very popular story in France at the time, about a young native girl who follows an explorer around as he investigates where she lives.

And everything about the dance, and everything on her body, was a statement about this. Right? So the bananas were purposely phallic, to comment on France's colonization of the rubber and banana trade. And the way that the skirt's silhouette is angled evokes the structure of a ballerina's tutu, right? So we've got this juxtaposition of something that is very refined and elegant, and then the bananas being phallic, like I said.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And then her top is a very Eurocentric kind of rich trappings, right, of the pearls, and the jewels, and such.

Travis: And there's kind of, at least in some images, like a golden bikini...

Teresa: Mm, sure.

Travis: ... kind of deal, yeah.

Teresa: Sure. And so, it didn't pander to these racist, sexualized fantasies. It was a critique of them.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Which is *amazing*, right? And why it's so iconic, even today.

Travis: Also, just to mention, while I was looking for pictures of Josephine Baker...

Teresa: Mm-hmm?

Travis: This one from her Wikipedia came up. And she looks like... I don't know, like I would see her— There's sometimes historically, like, you see women who were considered the ideal beauty of this time period, or this time period. And you're like, "Oh! I see why, in that time period, in the 1940s, it doesn't fit what the aesthetic is now, but I can see that then."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: She's *timeless*.

Teresa: Timelessly beautiful.

Travis: She's *gorgeous*!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And her hair looks great in this picture.

Teresa: [scoffs] Oh, okay. You like that.

Travis: Just to say—

Teresa: You like *that* style.

Travis: Well, I— [stammers] The slick-down reminds me of when I was like 13, and put too much gel in my hair. But this? Oh, my gosh! Gorge!

Teresa: So she was a sensation, right? And she was the talk of the town. Everyone wanted to work with her. She would go on to model for Picasso, who was problematic as well.

Travis: Still. Famous, though.

Teresa: Famous.

Travis: You can't argue that that's a huge namedrop...

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: That you're like, "Yeah, I modeled for Picasso."

Teresa: Mm-hmm. And Ernest Hemingway, same thing.

Travis: Who, terrible, but also quite famous.

Teresa: And he described her as, quote, "The most sensational woman anybody ever saw, or ever will."

Travis: Okay. Pretty unequivocal.

Teresa: So the more famous that she got, the more she took control of her life. Not only her public image, but her persona. And she had goals in her life, as the performer. So the year after she came to Paris, she bought a bar on Montmartre, a place referred to affectionately as Harlem-on-the-Seine.

Travis: Wait, you said the year after?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: So just 20 years old?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay. Every so often – a lot of these, I guess I should say – there's a moment where I'm like, "I have not done enough with my life."

Teresa: [laughs] She would go on to have her own nightclub, *Chez Josephine*. She was headlining at the *Folies-Bergere*. And she would continue this satirical line of performing, but also was very serious, and very glamorous, about her singing and her performing career.

Travis: I think that it's a very rare talent, throughout history, right? I think it's very rare to see in a performer, someone who is able to nail clowning without making themselves into a joke.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Right? And I think that it's a lot of the people – like Groucho Marx is a great example of that.

Teresa: Yes!

Travis: That idea of like, this person is so good at this, and also to be respected and taken seriously as a performer.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: You know what I mean? And that's what she is really striking me as.

Teresa: In 1927, she made her motion picture debut in *Siren of the Tropics*. And this was during a time in Hollywood where Black women were relegated to playing maids, or nannies. But Josephine starred in this film, and it was a Cinderella-inspired story.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And it helped her move onto her next couple movies, again, where she would play a titular role. Not just be in the background.

Travis: It also really strikes me that she was someone who knew her worth.

Teresa: Definitely.

Travis: Right? Which, man, I respect.

Teresa: One of those films was called *Zouzou*, which is one of the earliest films to portray interracial romance. It's where she's adopted into a circus family, and grows up, and falls in love with her adopted brother. But the love is unrequited.

Travis: Aw.

Teresa: It's very dramatic, and stylish, and French.

Travis: Very French. It sounds French.

Teresa: Another film would be *Princess Tam Tam*, where she plays a shepherdess discovered by an aristocrat. It's a very Pygmalion type of movie.

Travis: Gotcha. I prefer *My Fair Lady*, but...

Teresa: [giggles] And then—

Travis: Or the— What's the— *Anastasia and— Anastasia*. It's just called *Anastasia*, right?

Teresa: *Anastasia*. Oh, hold onto that thought.

Travis: Oh, okay!

Teresa: We'll talk about that.

Travis: Is *she* Anastasia!? [laughs]

Teresa: No.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: In 1935—

Travis: It could've been anyone.

Teresa: No, it couldn't have been anyone.

Travis: I guess that's true.

Teresa: It could only have been one person, Anastasia.

Travis: Oh, right.

Teresa: There were many, uh... what do I say? Imposters. [laughs]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay. 1935, we're up to the 1930s now. She signed with Ziegfeld Follies.

Travis: That's a big deal!

Teresa: Right. She returned to the states to headline next to Fanny Brice.

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: *And*, here's the kicker.

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: They were paid the same rate.

Travis: Aw! Heck yes.

Teresa: Which is very important, at this point in history. Right?

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: But America was not good to her. She encountered...

Travis: Can you imagine?

Teresa: ... a *lot* of racism.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And one particular event happened when she was trying to check into her Manhattan hotel. And the Southern guests complained about having to, quote, "look at" an interracial couple. Her and her manager slash lover at the time were an interracial couple. And the stress of the *unrelenting* racial prejudice led to them dissolving their union.

Travis: That sucks.

Teresa: Taking advantage of a clause in her contract, she left the Ziegfeld Follies. And then practically ran back to Paris.

Travis: Yeah, makes sense. Yeah.

Teresa: Where she could be appreciated, of course.

Travis: At the very least, even if it's being treated as the novelty act or whatever it was, it sounds like she kind of, by sheer force of will, pushed past that, to a degree. But at least *there*, you wouldn't be dealing with... the American-ness of it.

Teresa: Indeed. And back in Paris, this is where she was about to step into her most important role: as a war hero.

Travis: I can't wait. I wanna hear more. Please.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: I'm on the edge of my seat.

Teresa: So not only did she drive an ambulance for the Red Cross, she also used her stardom as her best weapon in espionage.

Travis: Ooh, la la!

Teresa: So—

Travis: She was a spy?

Teresa: Yes! She became a courier of messages. So she was able to use her sheet music. She wrote— There were messages written in her sheet music, in invisible ink.

Travis: Get out!

Teresa: I know, right?

Travis: Get out of town! That just gave me chills.

Teresa: Also—

Travis: That doesn't feel like a real thing that really happens. That's wonderful.

Teresa: Also, they pinned notes and photographs into her costumes, like the hems of her costumes, in order to be smuggled places.

Travis: Where's this movie!? Where is this movie?

Teresa: And her quote, "ballet teacher," end quote, was a resistance worker, and helped get this covert information to the right people.

Travis: Incredible.

Teresa: Very, very cool. Of course, her innate charisma and sparkling personality helped her not only serve in World War II, it also continued her career throughout the war. On August 25th 1944, Paris was officially liberated from the Nazi

occupation. And 18 months later, Lieutenant Josephine Baker was awarded the French Medal of Resistance.

Travis: My gosh!

Teresa: Very cool, right? And she continued her military service post-war, touring to raise money for victims of World War II.

Travis: Amazing.

Teresa: She married her band leader at that point, Jo Bouillon— Bouillon.

Travis: So, she wasn't married to her manager, though, right? They were just...

Teresa: No.

Travis: So, this is only her third marriage.

Teresa: I believe so, yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And they bought a castle!

Travis: Come *on*!

Teresa: The 15th-Century Château des Milandes.

Travis: Okay! Cool. How many castles do *you* own, listener?

Teresa: [laughs] They were married there, and brought their families to live with them. And later on, they would adopt about a dozen children.

Travis: Okay. Cool!

Teresa: To live with them there, as well. They said they wanted to, quote, "If we want this multicultural and interracial world, we start at home."

Travis: I love that.

Teresa: So, they adopted— Between 1953 and 1963, she adopted a dozen children from Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yeah. She had a little— She called it her global village.

Travis: Cute.

Teresa: And in the 1950s is when we see Josephine be activist.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: She—

Travis: Did we miss the *Anastasia* thing, or is that coming up?

Teresa: No, no, no.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: That's coming up. That's coming up. In 1951, she made a statement of performing in Havana, which was only two years before the Cuban Revolution.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And went on to put together a protest of nonwhite Cubans when a hotel turned her away, due to her skin color. And then, following another tour in the United States, when a person threw a racial slur at her during a performance, she stopped the entire show and performed a citizen's arrest on that person.

Travis: *What!?*

Teresa: That made the news.

Travis: That was *not* what I thought you were gonna say!

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: I did not think “performed a citizen’s arrest...”

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I thought “performed a dramatic monologue,” or like...

Teresa: No.

Travis: You know, like you see the TikToks of somebody really making a heckler look silly. Performed a citizen’s arrest.

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: Incredible.

Teresa: And she was so routinely outspoken about racism that Edgar J. Hoover—J. Edgar Hoover.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Yes. Would go on to compile over—

Travis: I think it’s pronounced “Jedgar.” [laughs] Jedgar Hoover.

Teresa: Of course it is... No.

Would go on to compile an over-400-page report on her ongoing activism. He didn’t like it, is what I’m gonna say.

Travis: Yeah, no, yeah.

Teresa: No, he didn’t like it.

Travis: No, no, no, yeah. That would be wild, if his report was just hundreds of pages long, of just like, "This was great! I'm a big fan." That would be a wild turn for Jedgar Hoover.

Teresa: Yeah. *Jedgar*.

Travis: You love it.

Teresa: [laughs] A very particular incident at the Stork Club in New York City ended with her being— The staff refused to serve her until an hour into the meal, and then only brought her a small portion of what she ordered. And so she placed a call to the NAACP, leading to hordes of protesters waiting outside the Stork Club, and accused the business of discriminating against her. She would file a 400,000-dollar lawsuit.

Travis: Wow.

Teresa: Against a radio host, for not coming to her defense in this tense situation. It was thrown out, but it would serve as a public display of cowardice against racism, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And I think this is probably one of the things that Hoover put in his report, because the man was named Walter Winchell, who was a wet blanket and J. Edgar Hoover's best friend. [wheeze-laughs]

Travis: *Oh!*

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Mm-hmm! So then, there were always other things that she very rightly stood up for, for herself and for other Black people. There was also, in 1963, she participated in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s march on Washington, as a personal close friend of Dr. King's.

Travis: I believe it.

Teresa: And at *this* particular march, she chose to wear her full military uniform and her medals.

Travis: Oh, yeah.

Teresa: Alright. So in 1968, things were not as effusively... What do I want to say? Financially stable as they had been, for Josephine.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So she was forced to leave her home in the castle. The kids and her were evicted. And began to tour again, even into her 60s. She was saying, "I love performing, and I'll do it until the day I die." And that is what happened.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Because she was plagued by several heart attacks throughout her 60s...

Travis: [exhales]

Teresa: ... and continual difficult health. So in 1975, at the age of 68, she passed away on April 12th, the day *after* she opened another review in Paris.

Travis: Okay, yeah. Like, working the whole way through.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Performing the whole time.

Teresa: Performing the whole time. She only had a couple of performances in the review. And so in France, she was given the honor of a state funeral. And thousands of Parisians flooded the streets to see the procession off.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: A street in the Montparnasse Quarter of Paris was named in her honor. There's also a swimming pool in her honor, on the banks of the Seine. And 25 years later, she would be inducted to the St. Louis Hall of Fame. So obviously, she has a very—

Travis: What about the *Anastasia* thing?

Teresa: Oh, *alright*! Okay!

Travis: You told me to put a pin in it! And I've got the pin in it!

Teresa: I'm getting to it!

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: *Because—*

Travis: But she's already died!

Teresa: [giggles] It's about her *legacy*.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Her lasting iconic image.

Travis: Okay. Okay.

Teresa: Young Black women throughout the world learned the banana dance, and perform it in Baker's honor. Including Beyoncé!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Who did it at—

Travis: I've heard of her.

Teresa: At the Fashion Rocks radio concert— No, the Fashion Rocks concert in Radio City in 2006.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: *Vogue* would go on to describe how her 1926 banana skirt dance— Remember *Le Danse Sauvage*?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Did, quote, “Brilliantly manipulate the white male imagination, and radically defined notions of race and gender through style and performance in a way that continues to echo throughout fashion and music today, from Prada to Beyoncé.”

Alright. What I was talking about with *Anastasia* is, the icon of Josephine Baker in specifically the banana skirt is represented, and her likeness pops up today, in movies and television and stage shows. We’ve got Diana Ross. We’ve got— Let’s see, there are multiple television shows and movies about her life. And there was even a limited Broadway run of *Josephine*, a burlesque cabaret dream play. And she was also in the 2003 animated film *Triplets of Belleville*.

Travis: Oh, yeah? I love that movie.

Teresa: And... the 1997 Don Bluth masterpiece, *Anastasia*!

Travis: Get out of town!

Teresa: Okay. So, this is where I was talking about. There is a musical number called “Paris Holds the Key (to Your Heart).”

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Where the duchess is getting Anastasia introduced to Paris. And what you see is a woman who walks by in a purple body suit, wearing a glimmering banana skirt. She waves to Anastasia with one hand, while walking a pet cheetah

with the other hand. And it's true, she did have a pet cheetah at one point.
[wheeze-laughs]

Travis: What!? You buried the lead!

Teresa: [laughs] That's not— That's not the lead.

Travis: It's all I've ever wanted!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's my favorite animal in the zoo! What are you talking about? I want a cheetah so bad!

Teresa: So as you can see...

Travis: Not even gonna tell me the name? I gotta look it up, I guess.

Teresa: What? The name of what?

Travis: The pet cheetah?

Teresa: Oh, I don't know! [laughs]

Travis: [sighs]

Teresa: But everybody should watch that movie. It's a great movie, and you can see Josephine Baker in that scene.

Travis: Josephine...

Teresa: Alright. So um...

Travis: Chiquita!

Teresa: Chiquita.

Travis: The pet cheetah's name was Chiquita. And you weren't gonna tell me that!?

Teresa: [through laughter] I'm sorry!

Travis: A woman famous for her banana skirt...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Had a pet cheetah Chiquita.

Teresa: I don't know if that was a commentary on the banana trade.

Travis: I don't know either!

Teresa: But it probably was.

Travis: But it makes me incredibly happy.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Don't I *sound* happy, Teresa?

Teresa: [laughs] Knowing her, it was definitely a comment on the colonization and exploitation of the banana trade. Anyway...

Travis: Okay. Wait, hold on. This is great. "She was known for posing with and incorporating her pet cheetah, Chiquita, into performances. Chiquita would often escape into the orchestra pit [through laughter] *during shows*, terrifying the musicians and adding excitement for the audience."

Teresa: Oh, boy.

Travis: Mm. Thanks, Google.

Teresa: Her life was a whirlwind of splendor, and fierceness, and bravery, and delight that... I mean, we could continue on for *hours* about it.

Travis: She also had a goat named Toute-Toute, and a pig named Albert.

Teresa: So you know, check out the countless biographies, and documentaries, and all of the things that you can about this amazing and iconic woman.

Travis: And we want to say thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make the show. And thank you to *you* for listening. I don't wanna make the show without you. Don't twist my arm!

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I'm a very weak-willed man. But for right now, I don't wanna make the show without you. It's a new month, so there's new merch over at McElroyMerch.com. And coming up soon, *My Brother, My Brother and Me* and *Adventure Zone* are coming to Salt Lake City in San Diego. I believe it's October 18th, 19th, and 20th. But you can go to bit.ly/McElroyTours for all the ticket links and information. And you can just check out McElroy.family for all our stuff there.

What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

As always, please continue to submit your topic suggestions, your questions, your idioms, [with hushed tone] your romance novel recommendations. Shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, who reads every one.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week!

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*! Get it?

[theme music plays]

[acoustic sting]

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