

Welcome to American Mosaic from VOA Learning English.

I'm June Simms.

On the show today a report on an old and newly popular birthing practice.

We also hear some great jazz from the past brought to new life in a Broadway musical.

## **Home Births Becoming More Common in the US**

Most births in the United States take place in hospitals. Women giving birth are under the care of doctors, armed with modern drugs and equipment.

About one in three babies arrive through a surgical operation called a Caesarean section. However, a growing number of parents-to be are choosing a different way. Steve Ember reports.

Emilie Jacobs and her husband, Rowan Finnegan, are preparing to welcome their second child. The baby will be born at their home --- just like their first child, 22-month-old Elias. The same nurse-midwife will help with this birth, too. If all goes well it will be a peaceful birth, without medicine, high tech machinery or surgery.

“And then after giving birth, straight into my own shower, into my own bed, with our new family and our home. There’s just...there’s just nothing like that.”

Emilie Jacobs attended medical school, so she has attended hospital births. She thinks doctors consider hospital rules and possible legal risks in administering birth care more than the needs of the women they serve.

“It’s not an illness to be pregnant, it’s a beautiful experience, and if you feel supported and have the right kind of support, to labor and give birth in your own home is such a gift.”

Home births have risen sharply in recent years. There are now about 30,000 such deliveries across the country each year. However, that number still represents less than one percent of all

U.S. births. A 2008 documentary, "The Business of Being Born," helped increase the popularity of home births. The documentary included film of untroubled births in homes, including some in warm water. Other supporters of home birth have spread the idea with video of their water births with midwives assisting.

Critics disagree about the safety of home births. One study found that babies born at home are ten times likelier to be born dead. The study found that they are also four times more likely to have serious neurological problems.

The findings were reported in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Study co-author Dr. Jack Chervenak is with the New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center.

"We here on our labor and delivery unit fight for seconds when an unexpected fetal distress occurs, we do drills, so that we plan an emergency Caesarean and fight for seconds. If someone is as much as one block away from this hospital, it's too far."

But others say the study had problems. Tina Johnson is with the American College of Nurse Midwives.

“He used a lot of flawed data and drew a lot of conclusions that are inconsistent with all of the other research that’s out there currently, including another recent AJOG article, that came out more recently, citing that planned home births, with certified nurse-midwives, outcomes are just as safe as midwifery deliveries in the hospital.”

Writer Jennifer Block agrees. She says women are choosing home birth for the baby’s health as well their own.

“Because if the mother has a spontaneous vaginal birth, that’s absolutely the best-case scenario for a baby. We know babies benefit from vaginal birth: their lungs, their respiratory health, their gut health: they are colonized with good bacteria.”

And Ms. Block notes that the experience is very different in Western Europe and some other countries. In those areas, midwives care for healthy pregnant women and send them to doctors only if there are problems or known risks.

## **Broadway Show Honors Music of the Cotton Club**

The Cotton Club in New York City helped bring fame to many African-American performers during the early 1920s to the 1940s. Now, a new musical play celebrates some of the greatest jazz musicians who played there. Bob Doughty has more on the show "After Midnight."

Two men partnered to create "After Midnight." Wynton Marsalis is the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City. His friend Jack Viertel is the director of a company that brings old musicals back to life in new shows. Their shared love of the music of this time gave birth to "After Midnight."

The Cotton Club was in the Harlem neighborhood of the city. David Levering Lewis is a history professor at New York University and writer of the book "When Harlem Was In Vogue." He says "After Midnight" shows what one night at the famous nightclub was really like.

"I thought it captured the flavor of what would have been one night - the best ever - at the Cotton Club."

Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway and Bessie Smith are just some of the musicians re-created in "After Midnight." Mr. Viertel and Mr. Marsalis used old sound recordings from the Cotton Club to re-create what it was really like.

"Hello Everybody! Welcome to our famous Cotton Club. It's great to see so many friends here tonight, enjoying themselves in spite of the cover charge. If you can spare a minute from your merry making, I'd like to have the pleasure of introducing the greatest living master of jungle music, the rip-roaring harmony hound, none other than Duke Ellington!"

But there is an ugly side to the history. The Cotton Club was located in the center of the African-American neighborhood of Harlem. The club used black performers. But the club only permitted white people to attend the shows.

Mr. Lewis describes how even the celebrated composer W.C. Handy was not permitted to enter.

"As everyone knows, it was infamously racially-exclusive. W.C. Handy wished to go one evening to The Cotton Club and he was turned away. And he could hear his music being performed!"

Cotton Club shows often presented African-Americans in insulting ways. But this is not explored in "After Midnight." Mr. Viertel says the creators wanted to free the music from its past.

I'm June Simms. Our program was Anna Matteo and John Abbott. Caty Weaver was the producer

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