

The Museum of Modern Art

“A motion picture stealthily operating as an interactive double-murder-mystery dinner show, [Ten Minutes to Live](#)—with its elliptical formations and incessant gazing—compels its audience viscerally past the fourth wall. Viewers enter a shape-shifting musical VR-like experience wherein narrative entry points are illusive and layers of spectatorship are blurred. Immersed in sensorial tension, participants traverse zigzagging tonalities, temporalities, and nonlinear filmmaking ranging from deliciously dreamy to alarmingly abrupt. A magnificently rebellious writer, director, producer, and distributor, [Oscar Micheaux](#) functioned by both necessity and strategy outside Hollywood’s segregated studio system. Raw, obsessive, personal, and subverting mainstream rules, his films impart an ambitious African American auteur’s observations while making meaning from a virulent Jim Crow world.

Nuances of African American culture, economics, politics, rhythm, and sensibility are inscribed within the music, dance, and design of *Ten Minutes to Live*, a window into 1930s urbane Blackness in all its sensual maneuvering, performative attitude, and agitated splendor. Wearing its aspirations, bravado, and underfunding on its sleeve, *Ten Minutes* showcases: stilted acting, compromised sound, beguiling music, trickster casting, continuity gaffes, swing-band swagger, campy combat choreography, ferociously fashionable Harlemites, resilient Black heroines, alarming blackface, stunning cityscape tracking shots, wooden dialogue-dubbing, enjambed flashbacks/-forwards, mesmerizing tap sequences providing caesuras between plot-points—and abundant suspenseful glancing.”

–Lisa Collins, excerpted from [Among Others: Blackness at MoMA](#), 2019

Organized by Dave Kehr, Curator, Department of Film.