New York Showfronts

BY DON DE LEIGHBUD

Let's talk about the great Duke Ellington, the modern classicist who has reigned on top of the musical heap, consistently creating new tunes and setting new records for the past 23 years.

The King — he has ruled undisputed in his field — unless one wants to be charitable and say that Paul Whiteman should be permitted to share the throne, but at Duke's left, and slightly to the rear on a lower level.

Not that Paul isn't a durable maestro, but the obese orchestra leader surely has not produced the lilting and infectious numbers that have oozed from the nimble baton of Duke Ellington, only to become a part of our world is musical tradition . . . almost legendary.

It would be a waste of effort to try to describe in words, however graphic, the brilliant career of Duke Ellington. Born Edward Kennedy Ellington in the nation's capital in 1901, the Duke at 44, has the musical world at his feet. Not even excepting Mr. Whiteman, Ellington is the one big time baton wielder who has maintained his prestige without a break ever since he hit the crest. In the meantime, other musicians have come and gone; have soared to dizzy heights and dipped to earth again, but the inimitable Duke, like The Brook in Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem of the same name, simply goes on forever.

Whether the Duke had been warned that colleges and conservatories often ruin born artists, the fact remains that he rejected an art scholarship at Pratt Institute in order to play the piano with small bands in and around Washington. Soon he felt he was ready for the big show, and in 1923, in company with five musicians, he "invaded" New York, and the rest is history.

Opening at a small rendezvous in Harlem called the "Kentucky Club," the Duke soon has jazz enthusiasts shouting praises of his haunting tunes and of his skilled musicianship. Four years later he went to the Cotton Club, then also located in Harlem, show place of New York, and one of the most popular night clubs in the country. He remained there four years during which time his records and radio work lifted his band to a place of prominence from which no one, up to this moment, has been able to dislodge it.

The Duke, it must ever be borne in mind, has not held his secure place in the "kingdom of swing" by mere accident or by some freak of circumstances. Woven into all his music is a rare but happy combination of folk and serious influences, the development of which has been astonishing. The wedding of these influences by Ellington to produce his music, found him performing at his creative best, and in so doing he has managed to capture the feeling and imagination of millions which, perhaps, explains why his works are always exciting, and why they are imperishable.

To the great Duke must go much of the credit for transforming ordinary jazz, earlier called ragtime music, into "symphonic jazz" and then lifting it out of the dance hall and transplanting it, first into the theatre and later into some of be most famouse concert halls of the world.

After the Cotton Club engagement, the Duke was featured by the late Florenz Ziegfield, of Follies fame, in the musical "Show Girl" in which Ellington presented for the first time the late George Gershin's "Concert in F" as a ballet with Harriet Hector as the Ballerina.

Then with the popular French singer and actor, Maurice Chavalier, the Duke went again on Broadway. Following that, he took his orchestra on a cros-country tour which was climaxed at the old Palace in New York, acme of all variety houses in the United States, upon whose boards it was the dream of every performer to trod.

The Palace was to the performer what Carnegie Hall and Town Hall are to the concert artist, the Metropolitan to the opera singer, or Madison Square Garden to the ambitious prize fighter. Duke added immensely to his stature, and enlightened the lustre of his star, already firmly fixed in the entertainment firmament, during his stay in the Palace.

Then came Hollywood and several films, including "Belle of the 90s" with the buxom Mae West, and "Cabin In the Sky." Additional glory came after a highly successful European tour of 1933. A second tour of the continent in 1939 just before the war began was a soul triumph and the Duke's star truly became a diamond in the theatrical sky.

Back from Europe, the Duke returned to the Cotton Club, which had moved downtown to Broadway in the earlier 1930's. Through broadcasting regularly and with record after record finding their way into hundreds of thousands of homes and juke boxes Ellington tunes became the most whistled and hummed of those of any contemporary composer. "Mood Indigo," "Sophisticated Lady," "Cresole Rhapsody," "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good," "Caravan," "Solitude," "Take The 'A' Train," "I Let A Song Go Out of My Heart," "Black and Tan Fantasy," "Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me," "Don't You Know I care?" "I Don't Know About You," "I'm Beginning to See the Light" and the "St. Louis Toodle-oo" are some of the great numbers, many of which will live forever.

On the Pacific Coast in 1942, the Duke wrote and appeared in the hit revue "Jump For Joy." He was back in New York in January 1943 for his 20th anniversary which was observed in Carnegie Hall, scared to the World's famous concert artists for generations. There for three full hours, the Duke hurled his fine music against the walls of the historic hall that had resounded to the melodies of old masters as interpreted by Caruso and Gluck, Anderson and Hayes, while a wildly cheering capacity crowd convulsed itself with rapturous applause.

Since that original Carnegie Hall debut, the Duke has been back twice, each time sustaining his claim to being the "Master" and proving convincingly that things and people do get better with age and maturity.

Other concerts by the versatile Duke have been performed at such renowned places as the Philarmonic Hall in San Francisco and the Civic Opera House in Chicago, where audiences have listened in awe to his most serious works, among them "Blue Utopia," "Black, Tan and Beige," and "Perfume Suite."

The musical historians can have their fun when it comes time to file away for posterity their final evaluation of the 20th Century genius. Meanwhile, the great Duke just goes along writing chapter after chapter for the book that one day will surely occupy an honored spot in the musical library of every music lover — whether he be a devotee of the Savoy on Lenox Avenue in Harlem, addicted to swing and bookie-woogie, or the holder of a family section in New York's opulent and celebated Carnegie Hall, stamping ground of the master.

Just this past week the Board of Education of New York announced that Duke Ellington will award three instrumental scholarships at Juillard Institute of Musical Art to worthy high school students regardless of race, creed or color. This is believed to be the first time a Negro has made a scholarship available for all Americans. Good going, Duke.

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The weed killer called "Sinox" will detroy such broad leaf plants as rag weed and morning glory but does not affect Bermuda grass, crab grass, and the like, reports Dr. Emerson Collins of State College, after a series of tests in corn fields.

Orrin Clayton Suthern, recognized as one of the greatest musicians in the country, will become in September the new head of the Music Department at Dillard University, New Orleans, La., according to an announcement by A. W. Dent, President.

Mr. Suthern's specialties are the organ, and choral direction. In both he has won national recognition. He is a graduate of Western Reserve University with additional study at Columbia University. He was formerly an organist and choral director at Tuskegee Institute, Florida A. and M. College and Bennett College.

Mr. Suthern is a member of The American Guild of Organists, The Music Education National Conference, The Association of Music Teachers in Negro Schools, and the National Association of Negro Musicians.

WHAT DOES HOLLYWOOD THINK OF NEGRO FAN MAIL?

BY VERNA AVERY

HOLLYWOOD (CNS) — Some of the colored film players complain that the majority of their fan mail comes from white people. Colored people, they say, do write letters occasionally, but they usually write they to white stars. Van Johnson and Frank Sinatra, so they people told me, receive heavy fan mail from colored people and, since a star can be "made" overnight, this has helped them in their rise to fame. On the other hand, the colored actors feel that they are left to fight alone.

On hearing these statements, I determined to question various studio officials to see what, if anything, they would reveal on the subject of fan mail, it sources, its power and to what use it may be put.

First of all, I asked the studio spokesman if they had any way of determining, possibly by checking the districts from which each letter comes, in each city, who was colored and who wasn't. Segregated districts, I thought, might make this possible. In each case, the film people assured me that there is no segregation of fan mail, that such a thing would require a more costly system of book-keeping than the studios wish to employ. They also said they didn't see any point in it, for, from their standpoint, a favorable letter is a favorable letter no matter who wrote it, and it represents a happy customer. The only breakdown they make nowadays is to separate ordinary mail from that sent in by servicemen and women, for their reactions are considered important.

Of course, some of the letters that come in say specifically that the writer is are colored and that, the studio claim, is the only way to tell a colored letter-writer from a white one. But fan-mail DOES play an important part in shaping studio policies. The studios watch it as carefully as they watch the reports of theatre manakers on this and that star. Because of it, even before newcomers to the screen have an important film, their home studios know whether or not they'll be important people in the future.

Now, here is a peculiar aspect of the fan mail situation. The studios say that the great majority of it is written directly to stars. Seldom do letters come to the studio, criticizing or praising their policies. Even after the press has criticized something, there may be a few people who will write into comment but such letters do not come in great numbers. For instance, there was much criticism in the press to Walt Disney's current "Uncle Remus" film. One of my friends in the Disney studio told me later that, as far as he knew, there had been no resultant public protest. The Public Relations head at Fox Studios assured me that except for one bad situation concerning the "Stormy Weather" film (William Grant Still's walkout) the film itself received nothing but praise from fans. "Lifeboat" another Fox film, was criticized in the papers but, so he said, was accepted happily by the public. He did say that many letters commented favorably on the use of colored people in the Wilson film. In direct contrast to the spokesman of Selznick's Film Company, who declared that, to the best of his knowledge, no one had written to compliment Mr. Selznick on including a Negro soldier and his baby among other people in Since You Went Away."

Recently there was no opposition in the Negro press to a proposed film based on the life of George Washington Carver at Fox. The studio never made the film. I asked the Public Relations head why they had shelved it and he replied that it was not because of the opposition, but because the scenario itself was difficult to write. He did admit, however, that on picture after picture, there is a small percentage of people who are offended by what they read in the papers and who write in, in protest or in agreement even without seeing the picture itself.

One white man in the studio gave me the startling information that, so far as film people were aware, none of the all-Negro films had been financially successful, from Hollywood's standpoint, no matter what exaggerated claims were made for them from inflated box office receipts. This to my mind, is a healthy sign, because an all-Negro film like an all-Negro show, merely serves to clorify segregation.

This, however, brings us back to the inevitable fact that the film studios are in business to make money. Colored people can, and should, use their power, through fan letters to get the Negro portrayed well on the screen. It is not enough to write to individual players, although if you do want to see competent colored actors in good roles on the screen, remember that fan mail can build them up, just as Van Johnson was built up in an incredibly short time.

Far more important is the need to write directly to the studio heads. Here it is not enough to tell what you don 'twant to see, and to protest against coarse characterizations. Tell what you DO want to see and praise anything the films do that seem to you worthwhile. Let them know that a concession in racial matters has box-office value.

Overnight, the Negro public could change the status of the Negro Race in Hollywood, if it wanted to. Will the Negro public do it?

Hilda Simms To Be Patron Of Hampton Drama Festival

Hampton Institute, Va. — Miss Hilda Simms, star of the Broadway hit, "Anna Lucasta," and a 1943 graduate of Hampton Institute, will be a patron of the forthcoming drama festival at Hampton, it was announced today. She is one of a number of persons interested in the theatre who are helping to sponsor the unique "Arts of the Theatre" festival which is to be presented July 23 to 28, under the auspices of the Hampton Institute summer school.

Miss Simms, who graduated from Hampton Institute, recently honors two years after she played the first major role in Cutlar Hall and the Hampton camera when she appeared as "Kathy" in a student [illegible] of "Wuthering Heights" during the course of 1942. Although she had [illegible] she [illegible] to return [illegible] and at Hampton, "Kathy" was her first full-length role.

EUSKINE HAWKINS

Euskine Hawkins and his orchestra are a sensation at the Hotel Lincoln in New York City.

Jimmy Rushing Pens New Blues For Count Basie

CULVER CITY, Calif. — With the release of Count Basie's latest Columbia recording, passing "Jimmy's Blues" and "Taps Miller," slated for July 23, it is worth nothing that Jimmy Rushing, the Harlem's renowned blues-shouter, who is featured on "Jimmy's Blues," has been [illegible] and his 10th year with the Count.

Rushing, who is known under the name of "The Man Who Sings The Blues," and Basie had their first association in Harlem City, where they were members of the late Bennie Moten's orchestra at the Reno Club, Upon Moten's death in 1936, [illegible] the Basie and Rushing [illegible] of the original members [illegible] that remained past association [illegible] with the Count ever since.

The 270-pound Rushing, who was the inspiration for the song hit of several years ago, "Mister Five By Five," is regarded by critics as the greatest blues singer of all times and is unquestionably the most widely imitated singer of his kind.

Having not only sung the blues but he also writes them. To date he has penned more than a hundred blues specials, and only recently Decagman Vocco-Conn, Inc. published a "Jimmy Rushing Blues Folio," consisting of a selected group of his greatest successes. Among his smash hits, all of which he arranged, composed and sang, have been "Sent for You Yesterday And Here You Come Today," "Evil Blues," "Goin' To Chicago Blues," "Rusty Dusty Blues," "Good Morning Blues," "The Blues I Love To Hear," "How Long Blues" and many others.

The latest, "Jimmy's Blues," is being hailed as the most authentic blues Rushing has ever turned out, and Rushing is equally enthusiastic about it. Aside the name, "Jimmy's Blues," or Jimmy Rushing's own blues.

On the reverse side of Columbia's newest Basie disc is an original jumperoo by the Count and his former star trumpeter-arranger, Sgt Buck Clayton, titled "Taps Miller," inspired by the noted dancer-arranger-musician - composer of that name who is now rocking New York's 52nd Street with his own band at Kelly's Stables.

The Count and his band are currently breaking records at the famed Casa Manana nitery in Culver City, Calif., in an engagement that will extend through July 30.

Hampton Unique Drama Festival Something New In Theatre

Hampton Institute, Va. — Something ne win theatre will be initiated at Hampton Institute week after next when "Arts of the Theatre," a drama festival employing several types of dramatic media, will be presented under the auspices of the summer school of the college July 23-28.

Believed to be the first of its kind, the festival is being directed by Owen Dodson, noted Negro poet, playwright, and director, and Robert J. Sailstad, former coordinator of the communications Center at Hampton and now on the faculty of Stephens College. It will feature a dance recital by Pearl Primus, brilliant young Negro dancer, and a Negro folk choral symphony, as well as samples of the modern cinema, the classical play, and the contemporary drama.

—"Jake and Sue"—

"Jake and Sue," the folk choral symphony, was written by Dr. James E. Dorsey, of Lincoln University (Pa.), director of music at the Hampton Institute summer school. Its presentation in the drama festival will be heightened by choreographic effects, staged by Mr. Sailstad, in which people 50 students at the summer school will take part.

John Steinbeck's "Forgotten Village," produced by Herbert Kline, as the modern [illegible] film, has been chosen for the drama festival. It was filmed in Mexico and is replete with music by Hanns Eisler and the narration by Burgess Meredith.

—Dodson Directing—

Experimental lighting and staging will highlight "Outward Bound," the contemporary drama, and Mr. Dodson's streamlined production of Shakespeare's "Hamlet," which will be performed by a group of young actors from New York City, under the director of Mr. Dodson. The title role in "Hamlet" will be taken by Gordon Heath, former student at Hampton Institute, and now a staff announcer for Station WMCA in New York City.

—V—

ELLA'S NO. 1 SONG STYLIST

BY TED YATES

SHE FOUND HER YELLOW BASKET. Ella Fitzgerald skyrocketed to fame swing her nursery rhyme "A Tisket, A Tasket, I Lost My Yellow Basket." At 16 she went AWOL from the orphan asylum she lived in to dance in an amateur contest at the old Harlem Opera House. Numb with stage fright she lost her feet, and in desperation found she possessed a voice. Chick and Mrs. Webb adopted her, cradled in a broken body head. But He was with his manager, Moe Gale, up front in the audience. Chick and Mrs. Webb adopted her. When Chick died in 1939 Ella inherited his entire orchestra.

"Three years before that I stopped Mr. Webb on the street and I said, 'Mister,' and Ella I asked for his autograph and his hands were freezing cold, but he signed that autograph for me."

Ella will always be the spirited little girl who can laugh and mean it. And cry too. For she's real. With ability, and with a kindness and humility she inherited from her many years in the orphanage.

Ella comes from Newport News, Va. When her father died she was sent to the Riverside orphanage in New York. After Chick and his wife adopted her she travelled with his band for two years and never sang once. That's because Chick kept saying "Don't come up like a shooting star and drop out as fast. Take your time. Build."

But when Chick thought she was ready he wanted to record music for her. The record company objected. Ella at first, Chick refused to make records unless she was on them. Chick won.

She made her first professional appearance at Yale. There the crowd liked and took to putting her in the Savoy Ballroom up Harlem way. "There was real excitement in Harlem. If I was accepted there, I'd go places."

She did go places — clear across the country, blazing on every college campus, in every major theatre, and right to Hollywood and pictures.

After Chick's death Ella kept his band going for three years, then she at last fulfilled a hungry ambition on a coast to coast radio show over the Blue Network teamed up with the Four Keys, launching them once again with her repertoire as a power among quartets. When she moved into the Cafe Zanzibar Ella has been held over for able to make their own way in professional theatres. Still at the Zanzibar Ella has ben held over for 15 weeks.

She has composed enough words and music to make the ASCAP membership — she's the youngest in the revered songwriting organization. She picks her songs not naturally with one finger on the piano.

Ella is currently featured with the famed Ink Spots.

—V—

IN THE THICK OF IT

BY MONROE SWEETLAND

(Note: Monroe Sweetland, former director of the National CIO War Relief Committee, has been for nearly two years an American Red Cross representative in the China-Burma-India theater of operations. Well known for his work with organized labor, Mr. Sweetland did much of the spade work in establishing the CIO War Relief Committee, and, before that, helped to organize the Oregon Commonwealth Federation.

Recently, for Red Cross, he accompanied the troops who invaded Okinawa, bringing them the comforts that mean so much to the man under fire. In the following story he describes one of the American Red Cross beachhead canteens.)

OKINAWA INVASION FRONT (Delayed) —On the beach here on Okinawa, at a point where thousands of the late General Buckner's Tenth Army men first step ashore on Japanese territory, is a Red Cross canteen. It is operated by Harold Kirk, of 846 Buena Vista, Ventura, California.

For twenty hours a day on the Okinawa beaches, canteens like Kirk's have served hot coffee, cigarettes and candy to the thousands of soldiers as they came ashore. The roar of battle is loud, for the canteens are usually located at the main routes where troops and supplies move from the shipe to the harbor right into the thick of the fighting.

At times, in the course of landing operations, men are kept on the beach for hours waiting transportation, sorting gear or sweating out an air raid. Also, despite all precautions to land troops with full equipment, many a water-soaked GI hits the beach only to find his personal luggage has been misplaced or lost. A cake of soap, or a cup of hot coffee takes on new importance in all the strain and confusion.

The Red Cross canteen, in the relatively broken on the sandy littered beaches where huge amphibious vehicles, ducks and half-tracks, lumber back and forth all through the day and night. At the canteen the GI can pick up a cake of soap, a toothbrush, a razor; perhaps even a sweater to use until he can find his lost duffle or replace his gear through regular Army issue.

Like many another Red Cross worker, Harold Kirk started this canteen on D-Day, when Red Cross came in right with the troops. He managed, with only a tarpaulin, a few boards, and some GI coffee cans, to take care of the men as they moved forward.

That the soldiers appreciate the presence of Red Cross in their forward lines is indicated by Kirk himself.

"They do twice as much for me as I do for them," he said. "The metal for this stove was dragged in by the engineers. When I ran out of milk for the men, an artillery mess sergeant sent me two cases. My heavy glove came from a truck driver who also brought a coral for the canteen floor and offered to bring water every day.

"Out here, Kirk continued, "everyone pitches in to help the Red Cross, just the way people do back home."

On their way out of the battle-zone, men are also cared for by Red Cross. On the Yonaha airstrip, wounded being evacuated by air are given Red Cross comfort articles. All the field hospitals, too, are covered by Red Cross workers, providing comfort supplies, canteen service, and even movies or "live shows" of entertainment prepared by GIs themselves, under American Red Cross direction.

The American people have made all this possible — the Red Cross IS out his side" even in the thick of it.

—V—

HALF COUNTIES HAVE AIRPORTS

Washington. — Of the 3,073 counties in the United States, 1,635, or 53 per cent have one or more airports. The 412 inches places of 25,000 and up have 602 airports. Of the 140 metropolitan districts there is an airport for every 80 square miles. There are 428,585 residents per airport for cities of over 500,000 population.

SINGER PRESENTED

Ethel Wise, soprano, a former director of music at A. and T. College now a concert artist of New York City was presented in concert Monday morning in the Richard B. Harrison Auditorium of the college. The singer rendered several modern, classical and spiritual numbers. Her appearance was a feature of the summer school lyceum program.

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North Carolina now has 27 frozen food locker plants and 15 additional plants have either been authorized or are in the process of being built.

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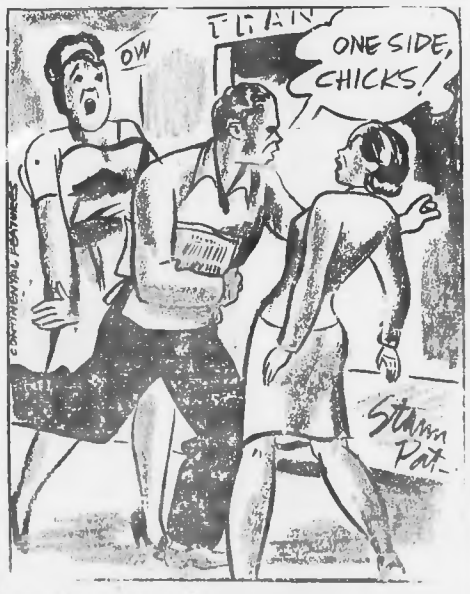

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