

Black Manhattan

Notes by Rick Benjamin

In the years following the Civil War, New York City was the destination of thousands of African-Americans who, newly freed and in search of economic and political opportunities, migrated there from the South. These “first generation” arrivals in the great metropolis did not have an easy time; white society only allowed them a narrow range of occupations. For women, this usually meant domestic or laundry work, and for men, manual labor or service jobs as porters or waiters. But these toils were taken up with a hopeful eye toward the future: “No work was too dirty or too hard for them to do . . .” Tom Fletcher recalled from first-hand experience, “in order to keep a roof over their heads and to provide some education for their children . . .” But their struggles began to pay dividends as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Thanks to the opportunities resulting from this hard work, many of their children were able to become “. . . not only doctors and lawyers but also teachers and even poets and songwriters. . . .”

The first African-American New Yorkers to transcend manual labor were men from the sporting world—jockeys, prizefighters, and, to a lesser extent, baseball players. With their modest prosperity, by the 1880s many were able to take up residence on the West Side of Manhattan. There they formed the nucleus around which an entire self-sufficient, urban African-American community would grow and thrive. Restaurants, cafés, hotels, grocers, tailors, and a wide range of entertainment establishments sprang up to cater exclusively to them. This activity was in turn a magnet for the black musicians and entertainers. The result was a vibrant New York community that became known as “Black Bohemia.”

In the mid-1890s Black Bohemia’s collective search for better housing came to rest uptown in Manhattan’s West 50s and 60s. These streets were made up of large, formerly single-family houses that had been divided into apartments, and were a step up from the crumbling tenements that had been left behind. White New Yorkers referred to this new African-American district as the “Tenderloin” or “San Juan Hill.” And while it was rife with vice and crime, it also was quietly becoming a haven for black intellectual and artistic efforts. New York City was by then the nation’s undisputed capital of popular music and show business, and many black performers (such as Williams & Walker) lived in Black Bohemia when they were not on tour. By 1900 the neighborhood nurtured at least a dozen clubs catering to black clientele. “It was in such places as this that early Negro theatrical talent created for itself a congenial atmosphere, an atmosphere of emulation and guildship,” the author James Weldon Johnson (himself a key participant) recalled. And it was from here that the unique contributions of African-American culture began to emerge and powerfully transform white America.

At the center of Black Bohemia was the Marshall Hotel, a converted brownstone at 127–29 West 53rd Street. The Marshall quickly became the unofficial headquarters of African-American entertainers, musicians, writers, and artists. Many famous black show business figures from out of town stayed at the hotel while appearing in New York, and several, like James Reese Europe and the Johnson brothers, resided there full-time. The Marshall dining room glittered with the leading black personalities of the day, while in its barroom, lesser lights “at liberty” gathered, awaiting last-minute calls for private engagements. White guests were also welcome at the Marshall, and musicians and theater folk from nearby Broadway enjoyed the unusual opportunity to mingle with their “colored” counterparts. As Fletcher remembered, the place was often “. . . filled with members of both races, all in proper evening attire, mingling and having a good time.”

Because the music and show businesses at that time were largely segregated, the African-Americans in Black Bohemia (and later in Harlem, where the community began to move beginning around 1910) were a close-knit, self-sufficient, and highly motivated group. Racism had forced many of them to become astonishingly versatile: It often simply was not possible to hire white “specialists” for certain tasks. And so many, like Bob Cole or J. Rosamond Johnson, *had* to become actors, comedians, singers, songwriters, arrangers, dancers, producers, directors, and road managers. Often they wore these many “hats” within the same project. The entire scene was one of constant, swirling collaboration among the talented people of the community. And those who had successfully interfaced with the white power structures generally shared their contacts, allowing the community’s products to reach a larger national and international audience.

The composers featured on this recording represent the cream of Black Bohemia’s musical life—the movers and shakers who paved the way for the music of the better-remembered “Harlem Renaissance” of the 1920s. And while their names are obscure today, all once enjoyed national reputations in white America as well, feeding its burgeoning interest in black music, theater, and dance. Taken altogether, the talent, persistence, cooperation, and courage of these pioneers is an amazing American story that deserves to be better known.

BERT WILLIAMS & GEORGE WALKER

The black comedy team of Williams & Walker was one of the major sparks that set much of the post-minstrel world of black show business in motion. In the early 1900s they were among the most famous stage performers in America, and were beloved by both white and black audiences for their singing, dancing, and comic sketches. Williams & Walker performed to the music of many of the composers on this recording, and employed several of these men on their production teams over the years.

George Walker was born in 1873 in Lawrence, Kansas. His partner, Egbert Austin Williams, came into the world in 1874 in Antigua, the West Indies. These young entertainers met for the first time in San Francisco in 1893 and formed a comedy act. While they billed themselves in vaudeville as the “Two Real Coons,” paradoxically they used the old “darker” stereotypes in ways that defied and questioned them. “Together they achieved something beyond mere fun; they often achieved the truest comedy through the ability they had to keep the tears close up under the loudest laughter,” their friend James Weldon Johnson recalled.

Williams & Walker moved to New York in 1896 to appear in a new Victor Herbert farce which quickly closed. But the team’s act—particularly their eccentric cakewalk dancing, made them the talk of the town. Subsequently they accepted an offer to play big-time vaudeville at Koster & Bial’s Music Hall. During their record-breaking run there the team took up residence on 53rd Street in the heart of Black Bohemia.

During the next few seasons, Williams & Walker produced and appeared in a number of their own all-black musical comedy vehicles. In 1903 they made their big Broadway breakthrough with the show *In Dahomey*. This third collaboration with composer Will Marion Cook became a great success both in New York and on the road. The team followed this up with two similar productions that ran from 1906 through 1909.

In 1909 George Walker began to show the dire symptoms of syphilis. He struggled on, but was unable to perform and died on January 8, 1911. Walker’s illness forced Bert Williams to go solo for the first time in many years. He toured in vaudeville and starred in his own musical comedy. Then in 1910, the producer Florenz Ziegfeld engaged Williams for his soon-to-be legendary *Follies*. This was a bold stroke by Ziegfeld: Starring the black man in a prominent, otherwise all-white revue caused much controversy. But Williams quickly proved himself to be a tremendous asset. He appeared in the *Ziegfeld Follies* annually (except for the 1913 and 1918 editions) until 1919. The salary for his yearly appearance there was reportedly higher than that of the President of the United States.

In 1922 Bert Williams took to the stage for the last time in the musical *Under the Bamboo Tree*. He was suffering from pneumonia, but insisted on touring. In Detroit Williams finally collapsed onstage and was rushed back to New York. Arriving home, he received a blood transfusion from Will Vodery, which enabled him to live long enough to finish his will. The great comedian passed away on March 4, 1922.

THE CLEF CLUB

The Clef Club of New York City, Inc., was a fraternal and professional organization for the advancement of African-American musicians and entertainers; all of the composers on this recording were members or closely affiliated with the Club.

Before the Clef Club’s existence, it was the common practice of hotels, restaurants, and private-party hosts and hostesses to hire talented persons of color to do menial work—waiting tables, washing dishes, and so on, while expecting them also to entertain the guests by playing, singing, or otherwise performing—for no additional pay. And there was little redress for unfair or dishonest treatment: In those days most “locals” of the national musician’s union (the American Federation of Musicians) would not admit black members. To fill this real need for a collective voice, toward the end of 1909 a new organization—the Clef Club—was founded in New York by James Reese Europe and his associates. Their mission to highlight the value, dignity, and professionalism of African-American performers was a great success and did much to change racial attitudes at all levels of white society.

The Clef Club was officially incorporated on June 21, 1910, and quickly became a “who’s who” of early twentieth-century black music and show business. During its heyday, it boasted a membership of more than two hundred men (women were not allowed to join or even to enter the clubhouse). The Club devised a basic salary “scale” for various types of engagements, and its clubhouse at 136 West 53rd Street (directly across from the Marshall Hotel) functioned as an effective central booking office for black performers and ensembles. With its reputation for reliability, gentility, and quality performances, the Clef Club soon gained the favor of the loftiest of New York’s white society; it became the very height of fashion to announce that one had secured a genuine Clef Club Orchestra for an upcoming social event. Through the early part of that decade, the Club’s membership maintained a virtual lock on Manhattan’s high-society party engagements, much to the dismay of their white competitors.

Another Clef Club innovation was its introduction of fretted stringed instruments—the mandolin, guitar, harp-guitar, and especially the banjo—into the standard dance orchestra of that time. These instruments were, unlike the pianos they often replaced, portable. They could provide the needed accompaniments in places where pianos were not available (such as out-of-doors), and in upper-crust homes where blacks were often not allowed to touch the host’s grand piano. The peculiar strumming effect of the banjo and its kin provided a distinctive “lift,” which unaccustomed white listeners (and dancers) found electrifying (“the American Balalaika” according to one writer). Since the Clef Club’s ensembles became famous for their use of these instruments, we have attempted to re-create this effect on a number of tracks on this recording. Interestingly, banjo parts did not begin to appear in published dance orchestrations until around 1922.

In addition to nurturing freelance opportunities, the Clef Club sponsored its own public concerts. These often elaborate exhibitions included a mix of European light classics with current popular selections by leading black composers of the time. The first of these was given in May 1910. The second, in October 1910, presented the debut of the Clef Club Symphony Orchestra, which consisted of dozens of banjos, guitars, and mandolins, along with traditional band and orchestra instruments. Perhaps the Club’s most celebrated performances were its series of annual Carnegie Hall concerts, commencing in 1912 and continuing through the 1914 season; these hugely popular events proved to nearly everyone’s satisfaction that black musicians could deliver the goods on the concert stage as well as in the dance hall.

Founder James Reese Europe’s 1914 resignation as president ended the Clef Club’s Golden Era. The organization never quite recovered from this setback, although it remained active through the 1920s. By 1930, the combination of the death of prominent members, the Depression, and the City’s demolition of its clubhouse to build a subway station effectively ended the reign of this fascinating and important African-American association.

COMPOSER SKETCHES

JAMES REESE EUROPE

James Reese Europe was, along with Will Marion Cook, perhaps the most famous African-American musician of the early twentieth century. His careers as a conductor, composer, organizer, and eloquent advocate of Negro music were closely followed and reported by the major newspapers and magazines of his time. Europe was a tireless man and a gifted promoter. As a conductor and recording artist, he was not only an important figure in the transition from ragtime to jazz, but also a vital ambassador of authentic black music to millions of whites in the United States and overseas.

James Reese Europe was born on February 22, 1880 in Mobile, Alabama. He grew up in musical surroundings: His mother was a pianist, as were his brother and sister. In 1891 Europe’s father took on a Federal government position and relocated his family to Washington, D.C. There, young Jim Europe lived in comfortable and refined circumstances. He attended public schools and began to play the piano and violin. Europe studied both of these instruments with Enrico Hurlei (then assistant conductor of the U.S. Marine Band). And he began to think of a career in music.

The sudden death of Europe’s father in 1899 ended the family’s domestic ease and put a halt to the young man’s musical ambitions. Europe took work of any kind to help out with the family finances. Finally, in the winter of 1902 he was able to travel to New York, violin in hand, ready to break into the music business. He was quickly disappointed: Gotham had little interest in a classical-violin-playing black man. So he took up the mandolin and, falling back on his solid piano skills, made a living playing in saloons and cafés in Manhattan’s Tenderloin district (George Gershwin recalled sitting on the curb as a child listening for hours as Europe played the piano in such a place). He also wisely chose to continue his musical education by taking lessons with Hans Hanke, Harry T. Burleigh, and Dr. Melville Charlton.

Although as a conductor Europe was mainly self-taught and had little if any theatrical experience, in 1904 he was hired as music director for “Jolly John” Larkin’s production of *A Trip to Africa*. After a rocky start (and a bad review), Europe quickly got the hang of show conducting. But 1905 found him back in the “ranks” as a member of a singing-dancing vaudeville orchestra act known as the “Memphis Students.”

The three years from 1906 to 1909 were extremely critical in the development of Jim Europe’s career. He was engaged to conduct for S. H. Dudley’s show *The Black Politician*, and several important Cole & Johnson Brothers musicals (*The Shoo-fly Regiment*, *The Red Moon*), as well as Bert Williams’s *Mr. Lode of Koal*. Proof of the newcomer’s high standing in the profession was his membership in the “Frogs,” an exclusive club made up of America’s top black theatrical figures.

By 1910 Jim Europe’s experiences as a club musician and theater musical director gave him reason to create a black performer’s professional organization known as the Clef Club. He was president of this association for several years, and oversaw the Club’s greatest successes. Europe’s stirring and prideful “**The Clef Club March**” (1910) was the group’s official anthem.

In the meantime America’s “Dance Craze”—an explosion of popular interest in “modern” dancing, had propelled Europe and his new Society Orchestra into the national spotlight. In the summer of 1913, he met the celebrated exhibition dancers Irene and Vernon Castle while they were working at a society party. The young white dancers were especially taken with Europe’s keen sense of tempo and with the sound and quality of his orchestra. The Castles immediately engaged Europe as their personal music director, and insisted on having his musicians in all of the many types of venues (including those not hospitable to persons of color) they appeared in. This was an incredible boost to black music and its practitioners, as the Castles were the unrivaled media darlings and social trendsetters of that time. Their enthusiastic stamp of approval was an almost breathtaking advance in American race relations.

During his tenure with the Castles, Europe composed many special pieces for the team’s new dance steps (some written with his partner, Ford Dabney). Among these were “Castles in Europe” (an “Innovation Trot”), the “Castle’s Half and Half” (in 5/4 time!), the “Castle Walk,” the “Castle Maxxie,” the “Castle Innovation Tango,” and the “Castle Doggy Fox Trot.” Ten of these were published in piano solo and orchestral editions by the Joseph W. Stern Co., quickly disseminating the scores. Europe’s brisk and breezy “**Castle House Rag**” commemorates the couple’s posh East 46th Street dance academy. His “**Congratulations**” is the charming, lilting music for Castle’s “Lame Duck Waltz.” And the whimsically Sousa-esque “**Hey There! (Hi There!)**” foreshadows Europe’s future role as a U.S. Army bandmaster. Together the young dancers and their black conductor invented a new dance step—the “fox trot,” which overnight took the world by storm. This association with the Castles also fostered another historic first: When Europe and his men stepped into the Victor Talking Machine Company’s studio on December 29, 1913, they became the first black orchestra to make a recording. The Society Orchestra made several more discs for Victor on February 10, 1914, using instrumentation almost identical to the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra’s on this disc.

Unfortunately, all of this focus on Jim Europe caused friction within the Clef Club. There were accusations from the rank and file that he was using his position in the club to unfairly advance his own career. In response, in 1914 Europe resigned the presidency (although retaining his membership) and organized a similar but new black musicians’ union uptown in Harlem—the Tempo Club. Many leading Clef Club members followed him to the new association.

Through 1915 and ’16 James Reese Europe stayed busy touring with the Castles and keeping up with his Orchestra’s other engagements. In 1916 Vernon Castle returned home to England to fight the Germans. And upon America’s 1917 entry into the First World War, Jim Europe was asked to organize a military band to accompany the U.S. Army’s 369th Infantry (Colored) overseas. Using his connections in the music business, Lieutenant Europe recruited the best black players from across the land. The resulting unit, known as the Hell Fighters, was, according to *The New York Times*, an ensemble that “all Americans swore, and some Frenchmen admitted, was the best military band in the world.” On the Western Front, Lieutenant Europe and his band not only dispensed syncopated cheer to weary Allied servicemen: When called upon they actually fought in the trenches as well.

After the Armistice Lieut. Europe and the band returned home, demobilized as a group, and planned an ambitious North American tour together to capitalize on their status as authentic war heroes. Before pushing off in 1919, Europe and the Hell Fighters made twenty-four recordings for the Pathé label. Their tour then took them from New York to many of the country’s major cities, and on May 9, 1919, the band made a return appearance in Boston. There, at the concert’s

intermission, Europe was stabbed by one of his drummers. He was rushed to the hospital, but the loss of blood was too great and he died there that night.

The death of James Reese Europe was a staggering blow to the black community and its musical advancement. Details of the tragedy were widely reported in the media and the entire nation went into mourning. The city of New York gave Europe an elaborate public funeral—the first time that an African-American citizen had been so honored. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. There was a brief, halfhearted movement to carry on the Hell Fighters and the Society Orchestra without him, but as his friend Noble Sissle sadly said, “There was only one Jim Europe, and he had not just been ‘made’ with that band of his. There was years of experience behind that sweep of his arms. . . .”

FORD T. DABNEY

Pianist, conductor, composer, songwriter, and pioneer recording artist Ford Thompson Dabney was born in Washington, D.C., on March 15, 1883. Not much is known of his early life, but both his father and uncle were professional musicians (the uncle, Wendell Phillips Dabney [1865–1952], was a distinguished pioneer in music education). Young Dabney attended the Armstrong Manual Training School (one of the nation’s first African-American technical schools) in his hometown. He also took piano lessons with his father and studied theory, harmony, and composition with Charles Donch, William Waldecker, and Samuel Fabian.

From 1904 to 1907 Ford Dabney was the official court musician to President Noro Alexis of Haiti. Upon his return to the United States, he dabbled in vaudeville, creating several acts, including Ford Dabney’s Ginger Girls, and organized an instrumental quartet to play for private functions. Before 1910 Dabney became manager of a large vaudeville and motion picture theater in Washington, D.C. It was around this time that he wrote his most successful song, “That’s Why They Call Me Shine” (1910, with lyrics by Cecil Mack).

Also around 1910 Dabney made his move to New York City. There he quickly struck up a friendship with fellow Washingtonian James Reese Europe. Within a short while, Europe had Dabney acting as his virtual right-hand man, assisting him with society engagements and in the founding of the Clef Club.

In 1914 Dabney, following Jim Europe’s lead, also resigned from the Clef Club. Almost immediately the two men organized a similar association they called the Tempo Club. Dabney became vice-president of the new organization. In the summer months from 1914 through 1921 Ford Dabney directed his own dance orchestra for Flo Ziegfeld’s *Midnight Frolic* show atop the New Amsterdam Theater. Apparently this was the first black orchestra to have a regular engagement in a Broadway nightclub.

Europe’s role as musical director for the famous dance team of Irene and Vernon Castle had important benefits for Dabney as well. He played piano in Europe’s Society Orchestra and led them when Europe was attending to matters elsewhere. In 1914 Dabney co-composed with Europe eight new dance numbers for the Castles. The two men were often seen by Mrs. Castle in her home, working out in four-hand piano sessions their new dance numbers “for hours on end.” The “**Castle Perfect Trot**” very likely came to be in just that manner.

Ford Dabney was also a pioneering black recording artist. As a pianist he appeared on Europe’s 1913–14 Society Orchestra sides and, beginning in 1917, led various ensembles, including Dabney’s Novelty Orchestra, and Ford Dabney’s Military Band for the Aeolian-Vocalion and Paramount labels.

With Jim Europe’s departure for military service in 1917, Dabney was left in charge of the Society Orchestra’s business. But demand was low during the war years, and after Vernon Castle’s tragic death in 1917 and Jim Europe’s two years later, the end of an era in Manhattan was plainly in sight. Through the twenties and thirties Dabney led his orchestra at the Palais Royale in Atlantic City, and for aging society clients in Newport, Miami, and Palm Springs. In 1923 he opened an entertainment bureau. Four years later Dabney made a Broadway comeback of sorts, composing the score for the black musical comedy *Rang Tang*, which had a modestly successful run. In the mid-1930s writer Alain Locke recognized Dabney along with James Reese Europe, Will Marion Cook, and W. C. Handy as “four arrangers of genius” who “organized Negro music out of a broken, musically illiterate dialect and made it a national music with its own peculiar idioms of harmony, instrumentation, and technical style of playing.” Ford Dabney died in New York on June 21, 1958.

WILL MARION COOK

Will Marion Cook achieved nationwide fame and recognition during his career as a composer both for his musical comedy scores and for his serious works based on Negro folk materials. He became something of a living legend in New York music circles. Although extremely temperamental, combative, and abrasive, Cook's talents eventually made him, in Eileen Southern's words, "the chief music advisor, teacher, coach, and patron to black musicians in New York, among them . . . Duke Ellington—who said of "Dad" Cook, 'he was master of us all.'"

Will Mercer Cook (he later changed his middle name to "Marion") was born in Washington, D.C., on January 27, 1869, to advantages enjoyed by few African-Americans of his time. Both his parents were college graduates; his father was a lawyer and owned a comfortable home in the District of Columbia. In this refined setting, young Will first demonstrated his outstanding musical abilities. He took voice lessons as a boy, but in 1878 began his love affair with the violin.

At age sixteen, it was decided that Cook needed more advanced musical instruction, and he enrolled in the Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio. After two years there his violin teacher advised him to go to Europe for further study. Cook had no way to afford such an undertaking, but the great black leader Frederick Douglass organized a benefit concert which raised the necessary funds. In the fall of 1888, Will Cook went to Germany and attended the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. There he studied violin with the world-renowned virtuoso Joseph Joachim (1831–1907). Unfortunately, after two years at the conservatory, ill health forced his return home.

Back in Washington in 1890, Will Cook was asked to conduct a new Negro chamber orchestra organized in Washington by C. A. Fleetwood and Frederick Douglass; under Cook's baton this ensemble made two tours of the mid-Atlantic states, venturing as far north as Boston. It was his first conducting experience.

In 1893 while involved with musical events at the Chicago World's Fair, Cook met baritone Harry T. Burleigh. The young classical musicians struck up a conversation, and Burleigh, who was then a student of Antonín Dvořák at the National Conservatory in New York, recommended the school as a place where Cook might wish to go to continue his studies. Cook was convinced, and in 1894 moved to New York to attend the conservatory. Unfortunately, once there he took an almost instant dislike to Dvořák, and his relationship with Burleigh withered as well. He dropped out after a year.

At loose ends and probably desperate for a job, Will Cook found work as a staff composer for Bob Cole's All Star Stock Company. This was very likely his first professional encounter with the world of popular stage entertainment. But he soon clashed with Cole and quit the company. Cook returned to Washington to live with his widowed mother.

Throughout 1896 and '97 Will Cook made regular visits to New York's Black Bohemia. There, sometime in 1898 he encountered Williams & Walker, and this meeting inspired Cook to try his hand at composing a musical show for them. He returned to Washington and summoned the poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872–1906)—then a government clerk—to write the libretto and lyrics. Literally overnight the two young men finished their work, a "musical sketch" they dubbed *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk*. But when Cook's mother overheard their handiwork, she declared to her son "I've sent you all over the world to study and become a great musician and you return such a nigger!"

Clorindy was presented at the Casino Theater Roof Garden on July 5, 1898. It starred Ernest Hogan (Williams & Walker were already booked elsewhere), heading an all-black cast of forty. From opening night on it was a rip-roaring success. Although not the first black musical in New York (the Bob Cole/Billy Johnson *A Trip to Coontown* had opened the previous April), it was the first time such a production had been presented in a major white venue and had received such unanimous acclaim by both the press and the public. Not a full-length work, it nevertheless incorporated snappy songs, comedy, and a new dance sensation known as the "cakewalk." *Clorindy* also boasted a chorus that sang and danced *simultaneously*—apparently the first time this had been attempted on any New York stage. And it also marked the first time a black man—Cook—had conducted a white New York theater orchestra.

In the wake of this success Will Marion Cook became associated with the Williams & Walker Company as the conductor for their 1899 show *The Policy Players*. The team obviously liked his work, and for the next nine years Cook was their resident composer and musical director. His scores for them included the *Sons of Ham* (1900), and the "in" shows, *In Dahomey* (1902), *In Abyssinia* (1906), and *In Bandanna Land* (1908).

In Dahomey was undoubtedly the show most important to the advancement of African-American musical theater. It was the first full-length musical created and performed by blacks to appear in a leading Broadway theater; it became the yardstick by which all subsequent black shows were measured. *In Dahomey's* witty book was by Jesse Shipp and its lyrics by Paul Laurence Dunbar; in its three acts Bert Williams starred as "Shylock Homestead," and George Walker as "Rareback Pinkerton." With a cast of fifty, *In Dahomey* toured several months prior to its big opening at Times Square's New York Theatre on February 18, 1903. The production was given good notices, and was well attended by a racially mixed audience. Will Cook's score, and especially his choral numbers (including "Swing Along!") were especially impressive and commented upon. As the Boston *Evening Transcript* put it, "Musical comedies with real music are rarities, but this is one . . . The composer has succeeded in lifting Negro music above the plane of the so-called 'Coon Song' without destroying the characteristics of the melodies, and he has provided a score which is likewise unusually diversified." After fifty-three performances in New York (a respectable run in those days), the show traveled to London, where, after royal favor was secured, it ran for seven months. The number-one company of *In Dahomey* then returned to the United States and made a forty-week, coast-to-coast tour which ended in June of 1905. Although as in all musical comedies of that era, the score had a number of other composers' interpolations, for his **Overture to "In Dahomey,"** composer-in-chief Will Cook included only his own numbers: "The Caboceer's Entrance," "On Emancipation Day," "Brown Skin Baby Mine," "The Czar," "Society," and "On Emancipation Day—Reprise."

George Walker's forced retirement in 1909 caused the dissolution of the Williams & Walker production team, and brought to a close Will Marion Cook's most illustrious years as a theater composer. He collaborated with other writers and producers: *The Traitor* appeared in 1913, and the disastrous *In Darkeydom* in 1915. His only known recording session occurred in March 1914, when he led the "Afro-American Folk Song Singers" in his "Swing Along" and "Rain Song" for the Columbia label (A-1538).

In 1918 Cook founded the New York Syncopated Orchestra (also known as the American Syncopated Orchestra). With Cook presiding from the conductor's podium, this ensemble dispensed his concert versions of "jazz" in halls across the United States and Britain. The NYSO featured many celebrated and up-and-coming black performers, and toured actively until 1922. Cook's 1912 orchestral arrangement of "**Swing Along!**" heard here was quite possibly also featured in NYSO performances.

In the early 1920s Cook became active leading Clef Club orchestras (although the Club had featured his music in its exhibition concerts in the previous decade, it is not certain that Cook was actually a member at that time). During this decade Cook continued his associations with leading black performers, including Paul Robeson and Fletcher Henderson. In 1924 Cook joined ASCAP and founded the Negro Folk Music & Drama Society, which produced a concert series called "Negro Nuances" and later, "Virginia Nights." In 1929 he teamed with Will Vodery in composing a new musical, *Swing Along*, which was presented at Harlem's Lafayette Theater.

As the years rolled by, Will Marion Cook did not mellow. Viewed by some as the elder statesman of Harlem's music scene, to others he was ". . . an erratic genius . . ." Cook was idolized by his student Duke Ellington, but was described by Eubie Blake as a man ". . . trying to ape Richard Wagner." Nevertheless, he spent his remaining days organizing and conducting concerts featuring the works of fellow black composers, and writing and lecturing on the music. Will Marion Cook died in New York City on July 19, 1944.

HARRY T. BURLEIGH

Baritone soloist and composer Harry Thacker Burleigh was born in Erie, Pennsylvania, on December 2, 1866. At an early age he showed great natural abilities as a singer, and although he did not formally study music as a child, his mother encouraged him in this interest. As a boy Burleigh sought out jobs as a doorman and usher at concert halls in order to hear fine classical instrumental and vocal recitalists. And within a few years he found musical work for himself, singing at local church services.

Seeking to improve his musicianship, in 1892 Burleigh traveled to New York City to compete for a scholarship at the new National Conservatory of Music. On his second attempt he passed the exam and won the scholarship. Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) was then director of the National Conservatory, and Harry Burleigh became one of his students (he also found employment there as Dvořák's copyist). Soon the famed Czech composer and the young black singer became friends, and Burleigh is generally credited with introducing Dvořák to the traditional Negro spiritual melodies echoed in

the Czech master's 1893 symphony, *From the New World*. In turn, Burleigh readily absorbed Dvořák's idea of using Negro melodies, along with those of the native Indians, as the basis for a new "school" of American classical music.

While he was still a student at the Conservatory, Burleigh auditioned and won (surpassing forty-nine other applicants) the position as vocal soloist for Saint George's Protestant Episcopal Church. Because of his race, this appointment was unprecedented and caused turmoil within the church's wealthy white congregation. It was only the pastor's forceful support of him that enabled Burleigh to hold this position. But his beautiful singing and dignified bearing soon won over even his detractors, and he sang there every Sunday for fifty-two years. In 1900 he also became the soloist at one of New York's foremost synagogues—Temple Emanu-El. Burleigh's appointment there marked the first time that a black man (and a Christian one at that) had held such a position.

Harry Burleigh graduated from the National Conservatory in 1896, and in the fall of that year spent a month touring in vaudeville singing with Black Patti's Troubadours. Upon his return to New York he settled down and opened a private teaching studio which he maintained for years. He also gave frequent vocal recitals, and periodically toured both in the United States and Europe. He concertized in many prestigious venues, and in Britain gave two performances for King Edward VII. This self-taught master of the German, French, and Italian languages was also an esteemed guest soloist at several Clef Club events.

Burleigh began his distinguished career as a composer around 1898. His first efforts were typical Tin Pan Alley style tear-jerkers, but he gradually began composing art songs in the European mold. Over the years Burleigh composed more than three hundred works for both solo voice and for chorus. Many of these were his own arrangements of Negro spiritual melodies, and almost all of them show the influence of his old friend and teacher Dvořák. Burleigh's vocal music was tremendously popular in his day, and was in the repertoires of such major performers as John McCormack and Ernestine Schumann-Heink. He also composed several works for violin and piano.

In 1911 Harry Burleigh became an editor for the American branch of the prestigious Italian music publisher G. Ricordi. This firm issued Burleigh's poignant arrangement of "**Deep River**" in 1916. By then he had received much critical acclaim for his music, and was one of the nation's best-known and most respected African-American musicians. Burleigh was a charter member of ASCAP (1914), and joined its Board of Directors in 1941.

During his lifetime Harry T. Burleigh received many honorary degrees and awards, including a doctorate from Howard University (1920), and the NAACP's prestigious Springarn Medal for "the highest achievement by an American citizen of African descent" (1916). He died in Stamford, Connecticut, on September 12, 1946.

WILLIAM H. TYERS

William Henry Tyers was once well known throughout the United States as a composer and arranger of popular music. From the late 1890s through to 1920, the appearance of his name on an orchestration or piano sheet was a widely recognized stamp of quality. Contemporaries remarked upon the tunefulness and harmonic sophistication of his music: In 1912 the critic of the New York *Evening Post* wrote, "Were the name of Strauss appended to the *Tout à Vous* waltz by Tyers, it would be one of the most popular waltzes in the world to-day."

Tyers was born in Richmond, Virginia on March 27, 1876; his father was from South America, and his mother was a former slave. When he was twelve Tyers's family moved to New York City. It was around that time that he first became interested in music, and began taking piano lessons. While still a boy, Tyers ". . . showed a remarkable genius for composition." By the time he was a teenager, he had composed an impressive number of dance pieces, including waltzes and polkas.

When Bill Tyers was twenty he became the music librarian for a touring concert company, which he accompanied to Europe. While in Hamburg, Germany, he availed himself of the opportunity to study orchestration with a Professor Gaspari. Unfortunately, ill health forced him to return home. That same year—1896—Bill Tyers composed "**Sambo: A Characteristic Two Step March**," which at this writing stands as the first instrumental rag ever published (predating both the oft-cited "Mississippi" and "Harlem" rags, both from 1897). "Sambo" was issued in New York by the white pioneer ragtime composer/publisher Frederick "Kerry" Mills (1869–1948). For its time it is an exceptionally advanced number, sporting ornate woodwind obbligati and snappy, syncopated trombone counter-melodies—both techniques not

commonly seen in popular orchestrations until well after 1905. With its opening cornet fanfare, “Sambo” is the delightful herald of the coming ragtime age.

Around 1897 Bill Tyers was hired as the staff arranger, editor, and orchestrator for the Joseph W. Stern music company in New York. How this connection was made is lost to history, but it represented a major racial breakthrough: Tyers was the first African-American to hold such a position in a field dominated by conservatory-trained Europeans. During the late 1890s and on into the first decade of the twentieth century, Stern was America’s number-one publisher of black music. Their roster of composers and songwriters was impressive: It included Bob Cole and the Johnson brothers, Irving Jones, James Reese Europe, Ford Dabney, Ernest Hogan, Eubie Blake, Williams & Walker, Chris Smith, “Lucky” Roberts, Joe Jordan, Tom Turpin, and, briefly, Scott Joplin. In his position at Stern’s, all of this music passed through Bill Tyers’s able hands before reaching the printing plant, making him a critical link between the “underground” world of black musicians and the white music publishing industry. He held this position at Stern until around 1913.

While arranging and adapting the music of others, Bill Tyers also kept his hand in as a composer. He penned many light classical selections like his graceful “**Meno D’Amour**.” Curiously, he never wrote vocal music of any kind. Tyers’s interest in Latin rhythms (attributed to the influence of his father) made him one of the first North American composers to experiment with the new tango and habanera styles. His “Cuban Dance” “Trocha” was a successful early effort, but “**Panama**” became the most well known. It was a standard number in the repertoire of every dance orchestra of that era, helping to fuel the great tango craze that gripped the nation circa 1913–15.

Tyers was a founding member of the Clef Club. He was one of the organization’s first officers, and also assistant conductor for the various large Clef Club ensembles in their public exhibitions. The club’s October 1910 “Second Grand Musical Melange and Dance Fest” featured Tyers conducting his “**Smyrna**” and “Panama”; it is quite possible that this was the world premiere of both compositions, since the former was not published until 1914, and the latter, 1911.

In 1914 Bill Tyers resigned from the Clef Club along with Jim Europe and several others to form the Tempo Club in Harlem. During this time he assisted Europe with his Society Orchestra projects, filling in as conductor for Irene and Vernon Castle as needed. Tyers also led his own orchestra at the Strand Roof Garden on Broadway for many years. He joined ASCAP in 1917. In summer seasons between 1919 and 1924 he conducted his own orchestra at the Mount Washington Hotel in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire.

Tyers spent his last years as a freelance arranger for a number of New York music publishers, including Stern, Leo Feist, G. Ricordi, and Maurice Shapiro. He also composed much special music for individual vaudeville acts, and spent long periods touring in vaudeville as musical director for the white dance team of Rock & White. In 1919 Will Marion Cook appointed Tyers assistant conductor to the New York Syncopated Orchestra; he toured with the NYSO until 1922. William H. Tyers died in New York City on April 18, 1924.

BOB COLE

James Weldon Johnson remembered his friend and collaborator Bob Cole as “the most versatile theatrical man the Negro has yet produced: a good singer and an excellent dancer, and able to play several musical instruments. He could write a dramatic or a musical play—dialogue, lyrics, and music—stage the play, and act a part.”

This African-American Renaissance man of music and theater was born Robert Allen Cole on July 1, 1868. Hailing from Athens, Georgia, his family later moved to Atlanta. Cole left home at the age of fourteen to study music at Atlanta University’s prep school, and later at the university itself.

In the mid-1880s Bob Cole headed North to start a career in show business, singing in a vaudeville act with Lew Henry (1870–?). Soon Cole began to compose original music for their act, beginning a prolific output of over one hundred twenty published songs.

Bob Cole wound up in Chicago in 1890 and joined the cast of Sam T. Jack’s Creole Burlesque Show company. Managed by whites, this minstrel outfit was the first to feature women performers—a radical break from the traditionally all-male minstrel format. Simultaneously, Cole formed a song-and-dance team with Stella Wiley (whom he later married) that toured in vaudeville.

In 1894 Bob Cole moved to New York to start his own theater troupe, the All-Star Stock Company. Based at Worth's Museum, this was one of America's first African-American dramatic theater troupes. In this setting Cole worked with the celebrated black composer Gussie L. Davis (1863–1899) and the up-and-coming young Will Marion Cook. Unfortunately, the All Stars disbanded shortly thereafter, and Cole joined up with the Black Patti Troubadours. It was there that he met his next collaborator—veteran minstrel and songwriter Billy Johnson (1858–1916).

In 1897 Bob Cole and Billy Johnson made history with their new two-act musical show *A Trip to Coontown*—the first full-length, non-minstrel theatrical production composed, written, produced, and staged by blacks. It premiered off-Broadway at New York's Third Avenue Theatre, was critically acclaimed, and subsequently toured until 1901.

After the turn of the century, Bob Cole ended his partnership with Billy Johnson, and struck up a new one with different set of Johnsons—the talented brothers J. Rosamond and James Weldon, whom he had met earlier at the Marshall Hotel. This new trio created many successful pop songs, such as “**Under the Bamboo Tree**” and “**When the Band Plays Ragtime**” (both from 1902); most of these were issued in song-sheet form by the large Joseph W. Stern company, which under the shrewd management of Edward B. Marks (1865–1945) was one of the first major publishers to truly understand the value and importance of authentic black pop music. In addition, many songs by Cole and the Johnsons were sung by leading vaudeville performers (black and white) and interpolated into white Broadway shows as well.

Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson also created and produced two of their own successful musical comedies, *The Shoo-fly Regiment* (1907) and *The Red Moon* (1909). Both of these blazed important new trails for black musical theater, featuring plots that were more logical than the norm and with more realistic black characterizations. Through the early 1900s, Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson continued their appearances in vaudeville. Tragically, in 1910, the ravages of syphilis forced Cole to retire from the stage. He spent his last days in several hospitals, and died (a possible suicide) on August 2, 1911.

THE JOHNSON BROTHERS: JAMES WELDON & J. ROSAMOND

The James Johnson family of Jacksonville, Florida, was exceptional in many ways: They were middle class, educated, and had been free since before the Civil War. The father was a minister, and the mother, Helen, was Florida's first black female schoolteacher. It was into this setting that their two remarkably talented and determined sons were born.

James Weldon Johnson came into the world first, on June 17, 1871. As a child he studied both piano and guitar, and learned how to read and write music. He received his education at the Stanton School, and then attended Atlanta University. After James Weldon's graduation from the college, he returned to Florida and became superintendent of the Stanton School. In 1895, as a sideline he founded and edited the nation's first black daily newspaper—*The Daily American*. James Weldon then decided to become an attorney; he taught himself law, and became the first African-American ever to be admitted to the Florida bar.

John Rosamond Johnson was born on August 11, 1873. As a very small boy he demonstrated outstanding talent at the keyboard. After his Stanton School education, he traveled to Boston to attend the New England Conservatory of Music. Six years later, J. Rosamond took to the road singing with John W. Isham's “Oriental America” show. But around 1897, he returned to Jacksonville to become music supervisor for the public school district.

J. Rosamond's first taste of show business had inspired him to ask his man-of-letters brother to write a show with him. Thus the brothers began work on their first musical, *Tolosa*. During the summer school break in 1899, the brothers made the long trip to New York City to see about finding a producer for their show. While they did not succeed in finding one, the trip did result in the Johnsons meeting several of the elites of black show business—Bob Cole, Will Cook, and Bert Williams and George Walker, among others. But when the fall school term arrived, the Johnsons dutifully headed south to get back to their teaching posts. There in early 1900 the two wrote a new song for their students—“Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing”—which has since become the virtual black national anthem.

In the spring of 1901 the Stanton School was destroyed by fire, and the Johnson brothers, perhaps still savoring the memory of their first New York trip, decided to throw caution to the wind and attempt to get into show business. They returned to New York and rekindled their acquaintanceship with Bob Cole, who was at that time shopping for a new songwriting collaborator. Reunited, Cole and the Johnsons enjoyed a rich relationship, eventually writing more than two

hundred published songs. The trio adopted a remarkable creative process, which James Weldon described in his 1933 autobiography: “The three of us sometimes worked as one man. At such times it was difficult to point out specifically the part done by any one of us, but, generally, we worked in a pair, with the odd man as sort of a critic or advisor. Without regard to who or how many did the work, each of us received a third of the earnings. There was an almost complete absence of pride of authorship, and that made the partnership still more curious.”

In 1902 J. Rosamond Johnson and Bob Cole put together their own act for vaudeville; it was unusual for its time as it purposely avoided the old racial stereotypes. Both dressed in white tie and tails; Johnson played classical works on the piano, then the pair performed an art song (sung in German by Cole), then a selection of Cole & Johnson songs, and as a finale, Cole’s famous soft-shoe dance “speciality.”

1902 also saw the unveiling of two of Bob Cole and the Johnson brothers’ most famous songs—“Under the Bamboo Tree” (which quickly sold more than four hundred thousand copies of sheet music), and “Oh, Didn’t He Ramble” (a Dixieland standard to this day). By 1903 the songwriting trio was the most talked-about in Tin Pan Alley; their January royalty check from their publisher was \$6,000 (an absolute fortune in those days). And their July figure was \$12,000!

In 1903 the team finally cracked New York’s theatrical production scene: America’s largest and most powerful producers—Klaw & Erlanger—signed them to an exclusive three-year contract to compose in exchange for regular salary and royalties. The three earned more than \$25,000 during those years, and in 1904 completed scores for two white musicals, *Humpty Dumpty*, which was the first white Broadway show score composed by blacks, and *In Newport* (starring Fay Templeton), which was a failure.

In 1906 Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson resumed their vaudeville touring throughout the United States. Then they were off for dates in London and Paris, and in Belgium and Holland. With Cole and his brother away on tour most of the time, James Weldon Johnson turned his attention away from music and show business. He went to Columbia University to study English, and became manager of New York City’s Colored Republican Club. James Weldon Johnson had been a staunch advocate of the 1904 candidacy of Theodore Roosevelt, and in 1906 a grateful President Roosevelt appointed James Johnson U.S. Consul to Venezuela. Two years later, the President made him U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, where he served until 1912. James Weldon Johnson was the first African-American ever to hold a U.S. ambassadorship. But his departure for South America was the end of the line for the eminent songwriting trio: They would never work together again.

Upon their return from overseas touring, Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson produced and starred in a musical comedy that they had also composed and written—*The Shoo-fly Regiment* (1906/07). While it was a fine show, it struggled financially, but eventually made back its costs. Unbowed, Cole and Johnson followed this up with a second of their own productions, *The Red Moon* (1908/09). This one, more of an operetta in style, had a superior book and score, and was cited by contemporary theater buffs as the best of the early 1900s black shows. But it was not a box office success, and the damage to Cole and Johnson’s bank accounts convinced them to leave the show-building to others. They returned to the security of their vaudeville two-act.

Not long after resuming their vaudeville touring, Bob Cole’s health began to seriously decline. He collapsed onstage, and after lengthy stays in several hospitals, died in the summer of 1911. His passing was a major blow to world of black musical theater.

J. Rosamond Johnson continued on in the theatrical world; he had worked without Cole on the score for Bert Williams’s show *Mr. Lode of Koal* (with lyrics by Alex C. Rogers) in 1909. After Cole’s death he turned out the score for an early revue—*Hello Paris* (1911); he also served as musical director for the show, marking the first time a man of color had conducted a white orchestra *and* a white cast on Broadway. Finally, in 1912 the impresario Oscar Hammerstein named J. Rosamond Johnson musical director of his Grand Opera House in London, England.

With the outbreak of the World War in 1914, J. Rosamond Johnson returned to New York with his new bride, Nora Floyd, and together the couple founded the Music School Settlement for Colored People in Harlem. When the United States became embroiled in World War I, J. Rosamond joined the U.S. Army and served as a second lieutenant with the 15th Regiment. After military service, financial pressures forced him to leave teaching and return to the theater. For two years the Rosamond Johnson Quintet toured the Keith and Orpheum vaudeville circuits.

During the 1920s Johnson arranged more than one hundred fifty Negro spirituals; many of these were issued in the historic *Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), which was published by Viking Press. These volumes became standard titles on the shelves of every school and college library in the nation.

For J. Rosamond Johnson the thirties were still busy times: He conducted choruses for shows and films, and again made history by being the first African-American ever to compose a motion picture score (*Emperor Jones*, starring Paul Robeson). He also appeared as a singer and actor in a variety of stage productions, most notably as Lawyer Frazier in the world premiere production of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935). He played his last stage role in 1940, and died at his home in Harlem on November 11, 1954.

Meanwhile, James Weldon Johnson also remained extremely engaged. After his service in the diplomatic corps, he was a founding member of ASCAP (1914). In 1916 he translated the libretto of Granados's opera *Goyescas* into English for its debut at the Metropolitan Opera. That same year he began his work as a civil rights activist, becoming a field secretary for the NAACP and an editorialist for the *New York Age*. In 1930 James Weldon Johnson became a professor of literature at Fisk University. That year also saw the publication of his history book *Black Manhattan*, which chronicled the contributions and tribulations of New York's African-Americans from Colonial days through the 1920s. His autobiography, *Along This Way*, appeared in 1933. In 1934 he was the first African-American professor ever appointed by New York University. Tragically, this truly remarkable life was ended when James Weldon Johnson was killed in an automobile accident in Wiscasset, Maine, on June 26, 1938.

CHRIS SMITH

Although, like Irving Berlin, he never learned how to read and write music, Chris Smith became one of the best and best-known songwriters of the first decade of the twentieth century. A master of extremely catchy ragtime melodies and often unusual and quirky harmonies, he wrote hundreds of songs, several of which, like "**Ballin' the Jack**" (heard here in its original 1914 dance orchestra incarnation), remain favorites from the Great American Songbook.

Christopher Smith was born on October 12, 1879, in Charleston, South Carolina. He had little formal education, and as a boy worked as a baker's apprentice. He taught himself to play the guitar and the piano by ear while "waiting for the dough to rise." Smith was always eager to show off his abilities at local entertainments. And when a professional show would come to town, he would bring cakes and pies backstage to sell to the actors, actresses, and musicians. Then, as Tom Fletcher remembered, "Nobody had to ask Chris to perform. All he wanted was a few people standing around and he would go into his routine."

While he was still a child Chris Smith joined a traveling medicine show with his friend Elmer Bowman (c. 1879–1916). When this show's manager cheated them out of their wages, Smith and Bowman walked the seventy-nine miles home. In the late 1890s Smith and Bowman formed their own vaudeville act and headed for New York. Smith played the piano and Bowman sang, often performing their own original song material. Their act was well received and toured in vaudeville for nearly twenty years.

Chris Smith's first song hit was "Good Morning, Carrie" (with lyrics by Cecil Mack), which appeared in 1901. He collaborated with many different lyricists (white and black) over the years, including Bowman, Mack, Jim Burris, Arthur Lamb, and others. Smith had perhaps the best flair for writing vocal ragtime of any Tin Pan Alley tunesmith. And he was in the vanguard of songwriters beginning to steer clear of offensive "coon" and "darky" references in their titles and lyrics. Through the first two decades of the century, there came a flood of Chris Smith songs, many of them beloved by parlor singers and pianists as well as by major stage personalities. And many of these were also successfully interpolated into musical comedies of that era.

No Chris Smith songs appeared in 1918 or '19, but in 1920 he was back with five new ones, including "I Want to Know Where Tosti Went When He Said Good-Bye." And in a 1921 role reversal, we find Smith writing lyrics for pianist/songwriter Jimmy Durante! Ever adaptable, Smith made the switch to blues and "novelty" numbers when those genres became commercially viable in the early 1920s.

As the years went by and styles changed, there naturally was a diminished interest in Chris Smith's output. Nothing much of his was published after 1930. But in retirement he enjoyed his status in Harlem as a "patriarch of syncopation." In 1942, when Judy Garland and Gene Kelly revived "Ballin' the Jack" for an MGM film musical, the elderly Smith joyfully exclaimed, "There's still plenty of unused punches in that old meal-ticket yet!" Chris Smith died in New York City on October 4, 1949.

J. TIM BRYMN

Songwriter, composer, and conductor James Timothy Brymn was born in Kingston, North Carolina, on October 5, 1881. Little is known about his family background or early life. He was educated at the Christian Institute in Franklinton, North Carolina, and as a young man studied music at Shaw University in Raleigh. Around 1900 Brymn reportedly moved to New York City to attend the National Conservatory, the alma mater of several other leading black composers of that era.

In the early 1900s Tim Brymn formed a songwriting partnership with black lyricist Cecil Mack (real name: Richard C. McPherson, 1883–1944); together they wrote many successful pop tunes. Brymn was particularly adept at inventing catchy melodies in the then-new ragtime style. Many of the Brymn/Mack songs, including their biggest hit, "Please Let Me Sleep" (1902), were issued by major New York publishers and performed by leading stars of vaudeville and variety. Brymn later collaborated on songs with Chris Smith and other leading Tin Pan Alley denizens.

Tim Brymn also became well regarded as a conductor; in 1903 he relieved Will Marion Cook as musical director for the British tour of Williams & Walker's *In Dahomey*. Beginning in 1906, he worked as musical director for S. H. Dudley's Smart Set company; Brymn also composed complete scores for this company's productions, including *The Black Politician* (1906) and *His Honor, the Barber* (1911).

By the early 1910s Brymn was a leading conductor of dance orchestras for New York society clients as well as at nightclubs such as the Cocoanut Grove (a job which he took over in 1916 from Will H. Vodery) and Reisenweber's famous Café. He was also a founding member of the Clef Club.

With the United States's entry into the First World War, Tim Brymn joined the U.S. Army. In due course he was commissioned a first lieutenant and appointed director of the 350th U.S. Field Artillery Band. He served in France with this Harlem unit that, with the high-strutting pianist Willie "The Lion" Smith as drum major, became as well known for its after-hours jam sessions as it was for its military parade appearances.

After the Armistice Brymn and his outfit returned to America. Mustered out of government service, the band stayed together under their director to tour the country in vaudeville as the Seventy Black Devils in a manner similar to Jim Europe's postwar commercial activities with his ex-Army concert band unit.

In 1921 the famed blues composer and publisher Clarence Williams (c. 1893–1965) hired Tim Brymn to work as a "professional manager" for his New York publishing firm. After two years there he freelanced as a pianist and coach for aspiring singers and actors. In 1933 Brymn joined ASCAP in an effort to benefit from his old song copyrights, and again served his country in the U.S. military in World War II. He died in New York City on October 3, 1946. Unfortunately, an extensive search for a photograph of him for these notes has been unsuccessful.

Similarly, precious few of J. Tim Brymn's orchestral scores survive. His "**Tar Heel Blues Rag**" and "**Cocoanut Grove Jazz**" (the first work by a black composer to include the term "jazz" in a title) come from a time of great transition in American popular music: By 1916 the stiffer, older ragtime rhythms (and multi-strain structure) had begun to merge with blues melodies and swinging, dotted fox-trot rhythms. These brief examples here offer us a tantalizing glimpse of a musician of subtle elegance, sophistication, and good humor. It is no wonder that he was so well regarded during his heyday.

J. TURNER LAYTON

Pianist, songwriter, and entertainer John Turner Layton was born on July 2, 1894, in Washington, D.C. As a child he was fortunate to have had music lessons from his father, the distinguished African-American hymnodist, conductor, and music educator J. Turner Layton, Sr. (c. 1841–1916). After graduating from high school, Layton Junior attended Howard University's Dental School. But "tickling the ivories" held more interest for him than fixing peoples' "pearly whites," and he dropped out of the program after a year.

Around 1913 Layton found his way to New York, where his dazzling keyboard abilities caught the attention of James Reese Europe. He played with Europe's Society Orchestras for several seasons. Around 1916 Layton was introduced to the veteran lyricist and Clef Club founding member Henry Creamer (1879–1930). The two formed a vaudeville act in which Creamer sang and danced to Layton's piano accompaniments. They hit the touring circuit, and although Layton had never composed before, at Creamer's instigation the two began writing original numbers for their act. As a songwriting team, Creamer & Layton hit their creative stride very quickly. Their magnum opus, "After You've Gone," appeared in 1918. But they had other hits, and over their six-year partnership created more than sixty songs, some of which, like "**Strut Miss Lizzy**" (1920), and "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" (1921), remain popular standards today.

In 1920 Creamer & Layton were hired to write their first full musical comedy score. Unfortunately the resulting production, *Three Shows*, flopped badly. Unshaken, Henry Creamer decided to produce his own show featuring the team's music. His idea was to build a revue around their successful song "Strut Miss Lizzy." After scraping together the production money and putting the show together, *Strut Miss Lizzy* opened on June 3, 1922. It was well received by the critics and audiences. But grave financial difficulties soon forced the production to close in a quagmire of recriminations and lawsuits. The ensuing ill feelings ended Creamer and Layton's days as a songwriting team.

Turning away from the wreckage of *Lizzy*, Turner Layton returned to vaudeville with a new partner, the singer Clarence "Tandy" Johnstone (?–1953). Luckily, this new team clicked, and in 1924 they went to Europe, where they were a huge success. Moving to London, they were booked for years in the largest music halls and heard over the BBC radio network. In 1935 the Layton/Johnstone team broke up, but Layton continued in a solo act. Before he retired in the mid-1950s, Turner Layton had become a familiar star of BBC television, capping a colorful forty-year career that spanned from vaudeville to video. He died in London on February 6, 1978.

WILL H. VODERY

Will Vodery was one of the most respected, well-known, and best-connected black musicians in early twentieth-century America. Almost his entire professional career was involved in composing, arranging, orchestrating, and conducting theater orchestra music; much of this work was done for and in collaboration with some of the most important black and white stage figures of the era. While few of his scores survive to this day, Vodery was tremendously prolific, and his work inspired many of New York's younger Afro-American composers. As Duke Ellington recalled, "Will was a strong influence on me. His chromatic tendencies penetrated my ear and are largely responsible for the way I 'think' music, even today."

William Henry Bennett Vodery (often spelled "Vodrey") was born in Philadelphia on October 8, 1884. His father, a graduate student at Philadelphia's Lincoln University, died suddenly a month before Will's birth. His mother was left to make ends meet managing a theatrical rooming house. There, her child first came into contact with many black musicians and stage performers of the day.

As a child Vodery took piano lessons, and began giving recitals while still very young. While he was in high school he studied music theory and harmony with Dr. Hugh A. Clark (1839–1928), the founder and head of the University of Pennsylvania's music department. Shortly after his 1902 graduation from Central High School, Vodery worked as a music librarian for the new Philadelphia Orchestra. He also reportedly studied violin and piano with Louis Koemmennich (1866–1922).

In 1903 the team of Williams & Walker were guests in the Vodery family's rooming house. At dinner Bert Williams announced that he had just thought up some new songs and needed an arranger to get them transcribed onto paper; overhearing this, Vodery later recalled that he "boldly announced to Williams that he needn't have sent to New York to get what he wanted. It was right there in the house." The great comedian was skeptical, but Vodery quickly scored the songs, leaving Williams so impressed that he invited the young musician to accompany him back to Manhattan.

In November 1904 Will Vodery went to St. Louis to serve as music director and conductor for "Jolly John" Larkin's show *A Trip to Africa*, replacing Jim Europe. Unfortunately, the show closed in Chicago and left him stranded there. He became a staff arranger for the music publisher Charles K. Harris, while simultaneously working as score librarian for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. His time with the CSO was perhaps critical to his development, allowing him exposure to the European symphonic repertoire. This also reportedly provided him the opportunity for informal study with the Orchestra's famous maestro, Dr. Frederick Stock (1872–1942).

In 1907 Will Vodery moved again, this time to New York to establish himself as a composer and arranger. That year he finished his first full-length musical comedy score, *The Time, the Place and the Girl* (1907), which starred white singer/songwriter Joe E. Howard. He followed up this with a score for the black entertainer/songwriter Ernest Hogan's *The Oyster Man* (1907) and in the 1911–12 season, *Dr. Beans from Boston*.

Will Vodery was also busy building a solid reputation as a show conductor, serving as Music Director for S. H. Dudley's Smart Set company and for Williams & Walker's *In Bandanna Land* (1908). From 1911 to 1914 he conducted for J. Leubrie Hill's productions, including *The Blackville Corporation* (1911, for which he also composed the score) and *My Friend from Dixie* (1916, which he also orchestrated).

Will Vodery was closely identified with Bert Williams; one contemporary book describes him as the comedian's protégé. Vodery arranged the eccentric pit-orchestra accompaniments for many of Williams's original songs, including his legendary "Nobody" (preserved on Columbia record #A-1289). He composed music to fit Williams's lyrics as well, the best-known song being "The Darktown Poker Club" (1914). Vodery's association with Bert Williams also led to his most prestigious job—as music supervisor of Broadway's famous annual *Ziegfeld Follies*. When Bert Williams began his tenure as a star of the *Follies*, he brought with him the Vodery orchestrations of the music for his spot on the bill. Producer Flo Ziegfeld liked what he heard, and in 1911 asked Vodery if he would score for some of the other *Follies* acts. Finally, in 1915, the famed producer assigned Vodery to do the entire show. The *Ziegfeld Follies* was one of the most lavish and prestigious stage productions of that era, and Will Vodery's important position with it was a major breakthrough in the color barrier of American show business. He remained with the Ziegfeld organization for twenty years, once giving a rehearsal piano position to a "slim, intense" kid named George Gershwin. It was the future composer of *Porgy and Bess*'s first job in the theater.

Like many African-Americans, Will Vodery felt the need to answer his country's call during the First World War. He enlisted in the U.S. Army, and took the exam to become a band director. Scoring the highest marks out of the one hundred sixty two applicants, Vodery was sent to Bandmaster School. There, because of his advanced skills, he was quickly asked to assist in the teaching. Upon graduation (at the top of his class of forty) he was commissioned a lieutenant and appointed director of the 807th U.S. Pioneer Infantry Band. This outfit—while never as famous as Europe's Hell Fighters or Brymn's Black Devils—had a fine reputation and appeared widely through war-torn France and Belgium.

At the end of the war Will Vodery returned to New York City and picked up his career. Simultaneous with his work for Ziegfeld's productions he orchestrated Sissle & Blake's smash hit musical *Shuffle Along* (1921). He also led Will Vodery's Plantation Orchestra in several revues, finally abandoning the old theater orchestra instrumentation (which he preferred) and adopting the new big band-style dance ensemble featuring saxophones and tenor banjo. Through the mid-1920s he remained active as a show conductor, handling productions for Lew Leslie and others. 1929 found Vodery co-composing with Will Marion Cook the score for the musical *Swing Along*.

In the fall of 1929 Vodery followed the flood of New York theater professionals migrating to California to work in the new talking motion pictures. He accepted a position as an orchestrator and music supervisor for Hollywood's Fox Film Corporation. Vodery was the first black musician to hold such a position with a major studio. He worked on the soundtracks of several early sound pictures, including *Virginia City*, but he missed live theater and in 1933 decided to return to New York City.

During the 1930s Will Vodery continued his work on Broadway, although demand for his services had begun to decline (his great patron Florenz Ziegfeld died in 1932). So he freelanced on various theatrical productions and served as a musical consultant and composer for several of the decade's World's Fairs. Vodery closed out the thirties with a bang as arranger and music supervisor for the *Cotton Club Parade*, an annual revue starring the dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Cab Calloway and his band.

By the early 1940s Will H. Vodery had retired from music. He invested in real estate in Saratoga, New York, and eventually owned three "amusement places" there. He died in a New York veteran's hospital in November 18, 1951, leaving two sons and a widow, Rosanne.

As examples of his work, we have "**Carolina Fox Trot**," which was first heard in the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1914*. It is a charming, sauntering number, and sports an innovative "walking" bass line. "Carolina Fox Trot," was also the first published musical composition to use the term "fox trot." Later, on track 14, we hear Vodery's 1921 arrangement of J. Turner Layton's 1920 pop song "**Strut Miss Lizzy**." Not yet embracing the new trends in twenties instrumentation (namely, the use of a sax section, tenor banjo, and tuba, and the rejection of the second violin, viola, cello, bass, flute, and clarinet), here Vodery sticks to the older standard theater orchestra instrumentation. Thus, his "Strut Miss Lizzy" uses the same forces that Will Tyers had used in 1896 for "Sambo," yet amazingly, Vodery conjures up an elegant yet incredibly loose-jointed and swinging treatment of this song. And therein lies the magic and mystery of the arranger's art.

Founded in 1985, **The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra** is the world's only year-round, professional ensemble specializing in the authentic re-creation of "America's Original Music"—the sounds of early musical theater, silent cinema, and vintage dance. The PRO came into being as the result of Rick Benjamin's discovery of thousands of early 1900s orchestra scores of the Victor recording star Arthur Pryor. In 1988 the Orchestra made its formal debut at Alice Tully Hall—the first concert ever presented at Lincoln Center by such an ensemble. Since then PRO has appeared at hundreds of leading arts venues, including the Ravinia Festival, the Smithsonian Institution, the Chautauqua Festival, the Brucknerhaus (Austria), the New York 92nd Street Y, and the American Dance Festival. In 1999, PRO's music inspired master choreographer Paul Taylor's new dance, *Oh, You Kid!*, which was premiered at The Kennedy Center, jointly by the Paul Taylor Dance Company and the Orchestra. In June 2003 the Orchestra presented the premiere of Rick Benjamin's reconstruction of Scott Joplin's 1911 opera *Treemonisha* at San Francisco's Stern Grove Festival.

In addition to its worldwide concert hall, university, and festival appearances, the PRO has acquired a considerable following both here and abroad through its radio programs on the *New York Times's* WQXR, National Public Radio, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and the Voice of America networks. Since 1989 the Walt Disney Company has relied on the Orchestra for the recorded theme music at its *Main Street, U.S.A.* attractions, and in 1992 the PRO proudly served as an Ambassador of Goodwill for the United States at the World's Fair in Seville, Spain. Over the years the Orchestra has been heard on the soundtracks of several films and television programs (most recently Bill Moyers's *America's First River: Stories from the Hudson* on PBS). The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra's audio and video recordings have been widely praised, and are considered instrumental in rekindling interest in the rich American theater, cinema, and dance orchestra traditions. *Web site: www.paragonragtime.com*

Conductor **Rick Benjamin** has built a career on the discovery and performance of American music from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He is the founder and director of the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra, which uses his extraordinary 9,000-title collection of antique theater and dance orchestra music (c. 1870–1925) as the basis of its repertoire. In addition to his work with Paragon, Mr. Benjamin maintains active careers as a pianist, arranger, and tubist. As a guest conductor he has led many symphonic ensembles, including the National Orchestra of Ireland in Dublin, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the Aalborg Symfoniorkester in Denmark, the Olympia Symphony (Washington State), and the National Orchestra of Iceland. Mr. Benjamin is an energetic researcher of music for silent films. He has unearthed the original orchestral accompaniments to many great motion pictures of the 1910s and '20s, which he conducts at film festivals around the world. His articles on popular music appear in several international publications, and lecture tours have taken him to more than one hundred colleges and universities throughout North America. Mr. Benjamin's four-year reconstruction of the Scott Joplin opera *Treemonisha* was recently premiered to great acclaim at San Francisco's Stern Grove Festival, and is he continuing work on his books *The American Theater Orchestra* and *Encyclopedia of Arrangers & Orchestrators: 1875–1925*.

Soprano **Awet Andemicael** made her European debut in the summer of 2003 as Clara (*Porgy and Bess*) with the Kammeroper Schloss Rheinsberg. Other roles include Rosina (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), Gretel (*Hansel and Gretel*), Voluptua (*La Pizza con Funghi*) and Adele (*Die Fledermaus*). Ms. Andemicael has received awards from the Oratorio Society of New York, the Bel Canto Scholarship Foundation, Friedrich Schorr Memorial Prize Auditions, the Pasadena Opera Guild, the BEEM Foundation, and FéBland Foundation. Ms. Andemicael holds degrees from Harvard University and the University of California, Irvine. She has recorded for both the Pro Organo and Centaur labels.

Baritone **Edward Pleasant** received both Bachelor of Music Performance and Master of Arts Degrees from the Texas Tech University School of Music. He made his New York City Opera debut in March 2000 in a production of *Porgy and Bess* in the role of Jim. He has performed the role of Nardo in Mozart's *La Finta Giardiniera*, Jacques in Romberg's *The New Moon*, and in the dual roles of Alcindoro and Benoit in a production of Puccini's *La Bohème*. Other roles include Don Alfonso in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Giuseppe Palmieri in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*, Don Bartolo in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, and The Woodsman in Seymour Barab's *Little Red Riding Hood*. His discography includes a recording of Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ* for Gothic Records and a recording of Kurt Weill's *The Flight of Lindbergh* for Voices International.

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Bert Williams: The Middle Years 1910–1918. Archeophone Records Arch 5003.

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Steppin' on the Gas: Rags to Jazz (1913–1927). New World Records NW 269. (LP)

Paragon Ragtime Orchestra

Classic Rags by Scott Joplin, Joseph F. Lamb, and James Scott. Rialto Records 6005.

Knockout Drops: American Popular Music from the Ragtime Era. PRO 6002.

More Candy: Theater & Dance Music from the Ragtime Era. Rialto Records 6003.

On the Boardwalk: Music from the Arthur Pryor Orchestra Collection. Newport Classic NCD 60039.

On the Level: Songs of Vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley. Gretel Bailey Records GBR-1.

'Round the Christmas Tree: Vintage Yuletide Favorites. Rialto Records 6004.

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The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra

Rick Benjamin, director

Vesselin Gellef, first violin and concertmaster

Walter Choi, second violin

William P. Muller, viola and violin

Peter Prosser, cello

Deb Spohnheimer, bass

Leslie Cullen, flute and piccolo

Gilad Harell, clarinet

Kyle Resnick, cornet

Kevin Cobb, cornet

Tim Albright, trombone

Kerry Meads, drums and bells

John Gill, plectrum banjo

Vince Giordano, tenor banjo

Tom Roberts, piano

Awet Andemicael, soprano

Edward Pleasant, baritone

Producer and engineer: Judith Sherman

Engineering and editing assistant: Jeanne Velonis

Digital mastering: Dirk Sobotka, SoundByte Productions, Inc., NYC

Recorded May 28–29, 2003, at the Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City.

Cover photo: James Reese Europe and his Society Orchestra, c. 1916. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Inside back cover: James Reese Europe and members of the Clef Club, c. 1911. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Portrait of William H. Tyers, pg. 18. General Research Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

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William Tyers's "Sambo" courtesy the John S. Maddox Collection. All other orchestrations from the Rick Benjamin Collection.

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BLACK MANHATTAN: THEATER AND DANCE MUSIC OF JAMES REESE EUROPE, WILL MARION COOK & MEMBERS OF THE LEGENDARY CLEF CLUB

THE PARAGON RAGTIME ORCHESTRA

RICK BENJAMIN, DIRECTOR

80611-2

1. *The Castle Perfect Trot* (1914) (James Reese Europe & Ford T. Dabney) 2:15
2. *Carolina Fox Trot* (1914) (Will H. Vodery) 2:42
3. *Overture to "In Dahomey"* (1902/1903) (Will Marion Cook) 8:14
4. *Deep River: Old Negro Melody* (1916) (traditional, arr. Harry T. Burleigh) 2:21
5. *Sambo: A Characteristic Two Step March* (1896) (William H. Tyers) 3:10
6. *When the Band Plays Ragtime* (song, 1902) (Bob Cole & the Johnson brothers) 3:12
Edward Pleasant, baritone
7. *Castle House Rag* (1914) (James Reese Europe) 2:07
8. *Smyrna: A Turkish Serenade* (1910/1914) (William H. Tyers) 4:39
9. *Ballin' the Jack* (Smith) & *What It Takes to Make Me Love You—You've Got It* (Europe)
(medley fox trot, 1914) (Chris Smith & James Reese Europe) 1:42
10. *Meno D'Amour* (intermezzo, 1906) (William H. Tyers) 4:46
11. *Hey There! (Hi There!)* (one-step, 1915) (James Reese Europe) 2:38
12. *The Tar Heel Blues Rag* (1915) (J. Tim Brymn) 2:31
13. *Congratulations* ("the Castles' Lame Duck Waltz," 1914) (James Reese Europe) 4:55
14. *Strut Miss Lizzie* (fox trot, 1921) (J. Turner Layton/arr. Will H. Vodery) 2:00
15. *Panama: A Characteristic Novelty* (1910/1911) (William H. Tyers) 4:47
16. *The Clef Club March* (1910) (James Reese Europe) 2:47
17. *Under the Bamboo Tree* (song, 1902) (Bob Cole & the Johnson brothers) 5:05
Awet Andemicael, soprano
18. *Cocoanut Grove Jazz* (1917) (J. Tim Brymn) 3:04
19. *Swing Along!* (1902/1912) (Will Marion Cook) 4:05

Total Time: 67:41

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