

BLACK MANHATTAN

VOLUME 3

THE
PARAGON RAGTIME
ORCHESTRA

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DIRECTOR



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BLACK MANHATTAN

VOLUME 3

Notes by Rick Benjamin

This is the third volume of Paragon Ragtime Orchestra recordings documenting the music of important African-American composers from late 19th- and early 20th-century New York City. The inspiration for this effort came about twenty-five years ago when I read James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan* (1930), a fascinating chronicle of the city's black artistic life from the Victorian era to the Harlem Renaissance. I came to Johnson's volume after finishing Eileen Southern's *The Music of Black Americans* (1971), a wider-ranging academic work, but a no less revealing one. After reading these books I was excited to listen to the music they had described. But this was problematic: I discovered remarkably few available recordings of historic African-American music, and even fewer to represent New York's pioneering black composers. This inability to actually experience a considerable span of our musical heritage was a void that needed to be filled. Clearly it was time for a carefully curated new recording of first-rate performances played from authentic scores.

I started thinking through the possibilities for such a project in 1996, collecting music and texts and beginning an (ongoing) odyssey through thousands of microfilmed pages of historic black newspapers. I also initiated regular performances of this repertoire in concerts around the country with my Paragon Ragtime Orchestra (PRO). Three years later it seemed I had enough material, knowledge, and experience to pitch "Black Manhattan" as an album concept. I made the rounds of the recording companies without initial success.

Eventually and happily however, in 2003 New World Records decided to take on the project. Fifteen years and three *Black Manhattan* volumes later, we have recorded three and a half hours of this previously neglected music: sixty pieces by thirty-two outstanding African-American composers, spanning the seminal years of the 1870s to the early 1920s.

It is our hope that these efforts have started to close this gap in America's cultural memory. Our even greater hope is that these recordings will enable the world to rediscover this magnificent music and the gifted, spirited, and persevering people who gave it to us.

EUBIE BLAKE (1887–1983)

Pianist, songwriter, and theater composer James Hubert Blake was a major figure in Black Manhattan. Notes on his musical style appear in *Black Manhattan Vol. 2*. Therefore, we will limit ourselves here to remarks on the two Blake selections presented on this album from his sensational 1921 Broadway musical *Shuffle Along*.

First is the ebullient "**I'm Just Wild About Harry**," heard instrumentally on track 2 in its first-ever dance orchestra arrangement, published by M. Witmark & Sons in 1922. In this performance, the famous refrain is introduced by our concertmaster, Keiko Tokunaga, and then taken up on the repeat in grand Crickett Smith style by cornetist Mike Blutman. This is inspiring music, and it is easy to see why James Weldon Johnson and the rest of the world were so delighted by it.

Early in the first Act of *Shuffle Along* came one of the most beautiful theater songs ever written—"Love Will Find A Way" (track 11). Here we finally get to savor Noble Sissle's (1889–1975) gorgeous lyrics, which were of similar splendor throughout the show's seventeen numbers. Soprano Janai Brugger gives a deeply moving account of this song, accompanied with the original Will H. Vodery orchestration from the 1921 Broadway production—marking the first time this historic score has been heard since *Shuffle Along* left the stage in 1923.

JAMES A. BLAND (1854–1911)



Minstrelsy was America's first indigenous form of theater, and enormously popular from the 1840s into the 1890s. Its originators were urban white Northerners and its essence was the caricaturing of rural Southern African-American life. The minstrel show was developed in New York around 1830, and that city soon became the national center of the minstrel business. (Indeed, minstrelsy launched New York on its course as a world capital of music and entertainment.) By the 1850s

Manhattan had several large minstrel theaters with celebrated resident troupes, and was also the home base of dozens of touring companies, great and small. Minstrelsy, in all its gaudy racism, was the crude and boisterous ancestor of the American musical theater and the birthplace of American popular song.

Minstrelsy was coming into full vigor when on October 22, 1854, James Allen Bland was born in Queens, New York. Coincidentally, African-Americans were just then joining whites in the minstrel business—a development that James's father, schoolteacher Allen M. Bland (1834–?) must have viewed uneasily. The Blands were a remarkable black family in that era: Allen Bland came from a line of educated freedmen of Charleston, South Carolina. Between 1845 and 1848 he attended Oberlin College, and subsequently earned degrees from Wilberforce and Howard Universities. His wife Lydia (1836–?) was from a free black family of Wilmington, Delaware.

Following the Civil War, Allen Bland relocated with his family to Washington, D.C., to take up a position at the U.S. Patent Office. There, his son Jimmy began to become interested in music. He sang and organized neighborhood vocal groups. Then, according to legend, Jimmy's father gave him a banjo. The child was delighted and soon developed considerable facility on the instrument.

In the 19th-century Washington, D.C., was a true “Southern” city, and its already large African-American population swelled after Emancipation. These ex-slaves brought their music and culture with them, and it was on display everywhere. Jimmy found it fascinating. Later, in the 1860s, he attended his first professional minstrel show. That was the turning point: Young Jimmy Bland developed “minstrel mania.”

In the fall of 1870 Jim Bland began attending Washington's Howard University, studying mathematics, geography, and literature. But he left a little over two years later without finishing. It has been suggested that Bland's preoccupation with minstrels and the stage caused him to neglect his studies. Further, Howard University policy at that time forbade its students from attending theatrical performances of *any* kind, under pain of expulsion. Clearly, Jim Bland and Howard University were not compatible.

How James Bland filled his next three years is unrecorded, but by the early 1870s African-American minstrel troupes were enjoying widespread success, and Bland had probably begun his apprenticeship with one. In any case, in 1875 he first blazed forth on a Boston stage with a company billed as the Original Black Diamonds. He then joined up with Sprague's Georgia Minstrels. Four years later Bland had risen to “principal comedian” of this celebrated all-black troupe.

James Bland's singing and banjo playing were valuable assets in this profession, but his talent extended further—he could write his own songs. This was a prerequisite for minstrel stardom, white or black. Better still, Bland was a *genius* with words and music. His songs blossomed on the stage, and in 1876 he began to have them published as well. Two years later his “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny” appeared, his signature song and the one for which he is still remembered. Others soon followed—“In the Evening by the Moonlight,” “Oh! Dem Golden Slippers,” and “Hand Me Down My Walking Cane.” James Bland was one of the first black composers to be published, an achievement that not

only benefited him, but which successfully opened the doors of the music publishers (completely white-controlled) for other African-Americans.

Around 1881 Bland went to Great Britain to star with Haverly's Genuine Colored Minstrels. But when that renowned company returned to America, Bland chose to remain behind. He spent much of the next decade touring the British Isles as a singer/banjoist, performing without blackface as "The Prince of Negro Songwriters." Bland made a powerful impression there, and gave command performances for Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales, and other notables. He also toured the Continent, and was particularly admired in Germany.

During the 1880s Bland grew in wealth and fame. Between his British and European engagements he made several trips back to the United States to guest star with major American minstrel companies. At home, Bland was important as an inspirational figure to other blacks in "the show business" struggling to build careers and infrastructure.

In the summer of 1887 Bland announced his plans for a grand tour of Australia and the Pacific islands. This may have occurred, since U.S. newspaper coverage of him lapses for almost three years. Then, in October 1890, he reappeared in California with W.B. Cleveland's Colossal Colored Carnival Minstrels. The following spring Bland was back performing in Manhattan, but although the *New York Sun's* reviewer found that he was "... as good an end man as ever," the end of minstrelsy itself was coming into view. As Americans grew more sophisticated, a new whiz-bang form of popular theater—vaudeville—was pushing the minstrel show and its hoary racial stereotypes from the nation's stages.

For some reason James Bland did not adapt to vaudeville. Instead, through the 1890s he continued on with what we would now call a "nostalgia act." Bland's performances were still captivating, as fellow minstrel Tom Fletcher (1873–1954) recalled, "He was a great comedian as well as a great composer. When he walked on stage to do his specialty no one but he knew just what he was going to say. He followed no set routine and could convulse an audience

with laughter from his handling of whatever crossed his mind. Anytime Bland joined a company and found songs or material he didn't particularly like he would write new stuff, songs and all. One of his commonest sayings was that anything he was connected with had to be the best."

In 1900 Bland moved to Philadelphia, probably to work at the old Eleventh Street Opera House—one of the country's last remaining minstrelsy-only theaters. Although he was merely in his forties, having "the best" was no longer an option. A spendthrift, he had long ago burned through his fortune. Bland was also estranged from his family and nearly friendless. To make ends meet he did clerical work between sporadic dates with small-time shows. Finally, in 1907 disaster struck: Bland knifed a man during a street scuffle. The former star was arrested, convicted, and sent to prison. Just seven months after his release in November 1910, James Bland died of tuberculosis. "The Negro Stephen Foster" was buried without a funeral in an unmarked pauper's grave on the outskirts of Philadelphia. It was a sorry end indeed for one who had brought such joy and inspiration to so many.

One of James A. Bland's masterpieces was "**Oh! Dem Golden Slippers**" (track 9). First published in 1879, it was one of the hundreds of songs he created (words and music) for his own use during his thirty years on the stage. Only a small percentage of these works (approximately thirty-five) ever saw print. But their impact was tremendous. "Slippers," like most of Bland's songs, is written in the Southern black "dialect" of the day. And it is a patter song; much of the fun for the listener is wondering how long the performer can continue without faltering. And *fun* really is the operative word because, far from expressing religious fervor, the song slyly ridicules it. "Oh! Dem Golden Slippers" is a parody of the old Negro Spiritual "Golden Slippers" ("What Kind of Shoes You Gwine To Wear?") which had been revived in the 1870s by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Jim Bland was surely familiar with their reverent performance, as were his audiences, setting the stage for this bit of gentle mockery.

FREDERICK M. BRYAN (1889–1929)



A complete biography of this accomplished pianist, organist, conductor, composer, and Clef Club official appears in *Black Manhattan Vol. 2*. At the time of that release no photograph of Frederick Bryan could be found. Happily, one has recently surfaced, which is included here.

“**The Dancing Deacon**” (track 3) certainly confirms Bryan’s reputation as New York’s “Harmony King.” Inspired by the election of Frederick W. “Deacon”

Johnson as the third President of the Clef Club, “The Dancing Deacon” is sophisticated orchestral ragtime, sporting the rhythmic figures of the then novel “fox-trot.” The piece was premiered by the sixty-piece Clef Club Orchestra, conducted by Bryan, at the May 1, 1915 Clef Club Carnival. From that night onward “The Dancing Deacon” remained a regular feature of the Club’s many concerts and galas.

GUSSIE L. DAVIS (1863–1899)



Gussie L. Davis brought a new sense of gentility and refinement to black popular music. Not simply a black man writing to suit existing expectations, his music was artistic, inspired by a wide range of human emotions and situations, and evinced no particular racial point of view. Because of this, even after Davis had become one of America’s most celebrated songwriters, his identity was a matter of confusion. As one newspaper put it in 1897, “Almost everyone who reads the name of Gussie L. Davis

on a sheet of music concludes that it belongs to a young woman. But it is not so. The popular composer is a young colored man, not a white woman, and his songs are known in almost every household in the land.”

Augustus Lord Davis was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on December 3, 1863 to William and Catherine Davis. The Davises were of middle-class means, and young Gussie began his education at Cincinnati’s Court Street School. The boy had access to a piano and learned to play it “by ear.” He also possessed an attractive voice. Cincinnati was an intensely musical city and many classical concerts and popular shows played in its theaters. Tragically, when the boy was twelve his mother died; to help support his family he took a job while remaining in school. The following year (1876) Gussie was offered a good position at a bank in distant Queens, New York. The income was needed, so the offer was accepted.

In Queens, Gussie Davis worked in the bank while attending night school. Nearby Manhattan was the center of minstrelsy, which was probably how the boy developed his burning ambition to become a “minstrel comedian.” Davis returned to Cincinnati sometime in the late 1870s; around 1879 he joined Sprague’s Georgia Minstrels as “... end man, tambourinist, [*sic*] and comedian.” This was a spectacular prize for a neophyte, but better still, it brought Davis into contact with James A. Bland (see above), who was then the company’s star.

In late 1880 Gussie Davis was back in Cincinnati, now with another ambition: songwriting. He still could not read or write music. However, he acquainted himself with James E. Stewart (1842–1884), a successful Midwestern tunesmith who had recently come to Cincinnati. Stewart appreciated the black teenager’s talent and became his mentor. Stewart probably also introduced Davis to his own publisher, F.W. Helmick. In any case, Helmick printed Davis’s first song, charging the lad \$20 for the service. Then a near-miracle occurred: Davis’s song began to fly off the shelves; impossibly, a first-time writer had scored a hit!

Within just a year of their appearance, Davis’s songs were creating such a stir across the Midwest that the *Indianapolis Leader* sent a reporter to interview their eighteen-year-old creator (“GUSSIE L. DAVIS—CINCINNATI’S COLORED COMPOSER OF MUSIC”). Among the quotes: “Mr. Davis is ...

ambitious to become a brilliant star in comedy, and desires to leave his songs as a monument to perpetuate his memory when he is dead.”

This public attention may have made Davis more aware of his artistic limitations; he realized that he would not be able to write truly great songs without a stronger musical foundation. Around 1882 he undertook three years of serious study at a Cincinnati musical college, working off his tuition as a “chore boy” there.

While attending music school Davis kept composing. He also found a new publisher—a well-to-do Cincinnati music lover named George Propheter. After printing a few more Davis successes, in 1886 Propheter moved his operation to New York City. Gussie Davis and his new bride Lottie followed. More fine songs resulted, and Davis resumed his performing career, singing his own songs in minstrel shows around the city. His fine tenor voice and pleasing stage manner delighted audiences and established Davis’s reputation on the stage.

Through the 1890s Davis continued to grow in fame, if not fortune. His 1893 ballad “The Fatal Wedding” became one of the decade’s greatest hits. And while white Americans were oblivious to Davis’s ethnicity, he had become a hero to black America through stories in the African-American press. Davis also became a leader within Black Manhattan. (Among other honors, he was secretary of the Colored Professional Club of New York City.)

In 1895 Gussie Davis was one of ten leading songwriters invited by the *New York World* to compete in its highly publicized “America’s Best Song Writer” contest. Davis won second prize. (It was claimed that Davis’s entry had actually earned him top honors, but when the judges discovered he was black, demoted him.) But such a contest was hardly necessary—by that time Gussie L. Davis’s music was ringing from nearly every parlor, bandstand, and music hall across the land.

In late 1898 or early in ’99 Davis decided to make the leap from the writing of single songs to the greater challenge of composing entire musical shows, creating a two-act “Farce Comedy” entitled *A Hot Time in Dixie*. This was produced by a black troupe led by the veteran minstrel Tom McIntosh (1840–1904). The company hit the road in August 1899 and successfully continued its Northeastern tour for about two months. Then tragedy: In early October Davis was stricken with “pulmonary troubles” while in Pennsylvania. He was rushed by train back to his home in Queens, New York, and died there on October 18, 1899 of heart failure. Only thirty-five and on the crest of triumph, Davis’s demise was like a storyline from one of his own sad songs.

Gussie L. Davis was an extremely productive composer. He was adept in several popular vocal styles: sentimental ballads, comic songs, love songs, and even “coon” songs (these last he thought unsuitable for home use). Davis was a methodical worker: When a new song was required he would first conjure an evocative title. From this would flow his lyric (almost always in florid high-Victorian English, although he did occasionally use black “dialect”). As the final step he would set this poem to music.

Davis excelled at the “tear-jerker,” a form of Victorian ballad involving a sad tale, offering (usually) some sort of morality lesson. Davis wrote many of these, but **“In The Baggage Coach Ahead”** (1896) (track 10) was his magnum opus, selling more than a million copies of sheet music. Previous writers have stated that Davis worked as a railroad Pullman porter, and that this song was inspired by an event he had witnessed. But after combing through many period documents I have found no evidence to support any of this. More likely, he had simply read the popular poem *Mother* by Frank Archer (1850–1932). (Archer’s poem contains the fateful line, “Their mother is in a casket in the baggage coach ahead.”) In any event, Gussie L. Davis’s handling of the heartrending story is artful and I think that, listening here to Chauncey Packer, its creator has indeed left us a worthy “. . . monument to perpetuate his memory”

WILL H. DIXON (1879–1917)

Will Dixon was one of the central “players” in the Black Manhattan story. A complete biography of this fascinating vocalist, pianist, conductor, composer, actor, comedian, playwright, theatrical producer, and Clef Club leader appears in *Black Manhattan Vol. 2*.

Dixon’s efforts in classical composition are an intriguing aspect of his tragically short career. “**Delicioso: Tango Aristocratico**” (track 17) is one surviving example. Despite its title, “Delicioso” is not a tango at all (noticeably absent is the genre-defining “tango bass”); nor was it really intended for dancing. Rather, it is a concert miniature with a South American flavor. But even that description is challenged by Dixon’s second theme, which plunges forcefully into what sounds like a forgotten Spiritual tune. This unique and poignant piece was one of several Dixon works published in 1913–14 by the venerable Italian firm of G. Ricordi.

J. LEUBRIE HILL (1873–1916)

A complete biography of singer, songwriter, composer, librettist, actor, director, choreographer, and producer John Leubrie Hill appears in *Black Manhattan Vol. 2*. Hill’s triumph was the musical ***My Friend from Kentucky*** (track 12), which became one of the most celebrated of the early African-American shows. Years later James Weldon Johnson commemorated it in his book *Black Manhattan*: “... in this field there stands out above them all a musical show produced at the Lafayette Theatre in 1913, which not only played to great local crowds, but brought Broadway up to Harlem.”

My Friend From Kentucky opened at the Lafayette on October 27, 1913. Led by Hill, its sixty-four-member cast gave two exhilarating performances a day there for several weeks. Then the production hit the road, playing leading African-American theaters across the East and Midwest until February 1915.

New York Age critic Lester A. Walton took issue with Hill’s libretto but highly praised his score. The great Flo Ziegfeld liked it also, and licensed two of *My Friend’s* songs, “At the Ball, That’s All” and “Rock Me in the Cradle of Love” for his own *Follies of 1914*. Under Ziegfeld’s aegis both were also published and became nationwide hits. (Refer to *Black Manhattan Vol. 2* to hear the former.) However, the rest of *My Friend From Kentucky’s* score was seemingly lost until the summer of 2016, when I found the orchestration of the Overture in an uncatalogued box in my collection. This was a welcome find, and a revelation: Hill’s music is by turns romantic, stirring, flirtatious, reflective, comical, swaggering, and eccentric (note the seventeen-bar phrases and odd bass progressions). If its overture is any reflection of the rest of the production, *My Friend From Kentucky* was one Hell of a show.

AL. JOHNS (1879–1928)

Alphonso Johns was a noted pianist, composer, lyricist, musical director, and Clef Club founding member. His “**Ianthia March**” (track 20) was written for New York’s Ianthia Wheelman, an African-American cycling club founded in 1896. Ianthia’s members were professional men based in Black Bohemia—doctors, lawyers, merchants, and even a few musicians—all drawn together by the bicycle craze that swept turn-of-the-century America. Al. Johns was friendly with many of these intrepid athletes, and in 1902 composed “Ianthia March” for use at their functions. It was an ideal fit, as the *New York Age* reported in 1905: “. . . there was a grand march by the club, and as each one of the officials marched the entire length of the room it was a very impressive spectacle. Each member was dressed in the regulation full dress coat and waistcoat, knee breeches, black stockings, and patent leather pumps.”

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON (1871–1938)
& J. ROSAMOND JOHNSON (1873–1954)

Biographies of the extraordinary brothers James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson appear in *Black Manhattan Vol. 1*. The duo was responsible for many successful songs, but their claim to immortality must certainly rest with **“Lift Every Voice and Sing”** (track 22). This is a truly great work, and an impromptu one: In January 1900 James Weldon Johnson, principal of Jacksonville, Florida’s segregated Stanton School, was casting about for student assembly ideas to celebrate Lincoln’s birthday. Johnson decided to write a poem for the occasion. Then a better idea occurred: Since his composer brother was at hand, why not have a poem *with* music? Together at the family home in Jacksonville, the Johnsons set to work. James paced the front porch working out the words, handing each finished stanza to John, who sat inside at the piano. James’s first phrase came easily—*Lift every voice and sing!* The rest of the first stanza was harder. Then the floodgates opened: “I paced back and forth . . . repeating the lines over and over to myself, going through all of the agony and ecstasy of creating. . . . I could not keep back the tears . . . I was experiencing the transports of the poet’s ecstasy. Feverish ecstasy was followed by that contentment—that sense of serene joy—which makes artistic creation the most complete of all human experiences.”

Simultaneously, J. Rosamond was busy creating music every bit as powerful as his brother’s poetry—triumphant, noble, uplifting. These elements perfectly joined, the Johnsons mailed the manuscript to their publisher in New York, requesting mimeographed copies for use by their students. Over the following weeks the brothers taught the Stanton School’s chorus their new “song.” And on February 12, 1900 these youngsters gave the first performance of “Lift Every Voice and Sing!”

Satisfied, the brothers hurried on to other things. A few months later their publisher printed the work as “The National Negro Hymn.” Little more

thought was given to it. But the black people who had heard it were touched and spread the song across the South the ancient way—orally. By 1910 “Lift Every Voice” was generally known around the country. In 1919 the N.A.A.C.P. (of which James Weldon Johnson was a founder) adopted it as the organization’s official anthem.

Over the 20th century many different arrangements of “Lift Every Voice and Sing!” appeared, and today the words and melody are recognized throughout the world. Although some considered it the “Black American National Anthem,” “Lift Every Voice and Sing!” should be embraced by all. In that spirit, we are enormously proud to present this world-premiere recording of the Johnson brothers’ original 1900 score. It seems fitting to conclude this album—and our explorations of James Weldon Johnson’s Black Manhattan—with a performance of his most enduring creation.

SCOTT JOPLIN (c. 1867–1917)

A biography of Joplin appears in *Scott Joplin: Treemonisha* (New World Records 80720-2) and a discussion of his activities in New York appears in *Black Manhattan Vol. 2*.

The **“Wall Street ‘Rag’”** (track 8) is a fascinating demonstration of Joplin’s expanding artistry. In 1907 he moved to New York not only to advance himself as “King of Ragtime Writers,” but also to study, create, and perform classical music. During his decade in Manhattan Joplin composed an opera, a symphony, a piano concerto, and perhaps even chamber music. (He destroyed some of this material during his terminal illness; the rest was examined in the 1940s and ’50s but accidentally discarded in 1962.) In his New York period even Scott Joplin’s most commercial efforts—his rags—became “. . . more and more intricate,” one of his publishers remembered, “until they were almost jazz Bach.”

“Wall Street ‘Rag,’” appearing in February 1909, was one of these genre stretchers. Although built on the standard ragtime structure, the piece is actually a miniature tone poem. Joplin gives us the following program: “Panic in Wall

Street, Brokers feeling melancholy,” “Good times coming,” “Good times have come,” and “Listening to the strains of genuine Negro ragtime, brokers forget their cares.” “Wall Street ‘Rag’” reveals Scott Joplin’s expressive powers, and may even allow us a rare glimpse at his personality, all in this four-minute journey from sadness to exaltation.

J. TURNER LAYTON (1894–1978)

A complete biography of this notable pianist, composer, and entertainer appears in *Black Manhattan Vol. 1*.

During the 1910s Layton composed music for several spectacularly popular songs. Most of these appeared with lyrics by Henry S. Creamer (1879–1930), the noted wordsmith, exhibition dancer, and Clef Club official. Their greatest hit, **“After You’ve Gone”** (track 16) is an evergreen entry in the Great American Song Book. Originally a slow ballad, Turner’s music for it has somehow always invited livelier rendition. Over the last century dozens of up-tempo arrangements have been made of “After You’ve Gone.” But here PRO presents the granddaddy of them all—the original 1918 Broadway Music Corp. one-step orchestration, complete with its amusing train-leaving-the-station effect.

“Dear Old Southland” (track 7) is more arrangement than an original Layton tune. In fact, it is his setting of two Spirituals, “Deep River” and “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” Rather than the usual slow, reverential treatment, Layton felt free to use them as basis for an up-to-date syncopated dance number. This would seem to be sacrilege of sorts, but the result is noble and thrilling. This superb 1921 orchestration of “Dear Old Southland” was the work of the great African-American arranger Will H. Vodery (1884–1951). Who else would dare score a final chord for pizzicato strings, a trombone pedal tone, and temple block?

TOM LEMONIER (1869–1945)



Tom Lemonier

Tom Lemonier was a noted African-American pianist, composer, actor, vaudevillian, and founding member of the Clef Club. His syncopated songs were in vogue at the opening of the 20th century, and his ballad “Just One Word of Consolation” was a nationwide hit, prompting the *Indianapolis Freeman* to hail Lemonier as “. . . one of America’s greatest colored song writers.”

He was born on March 29, 1869. (The 1870 date in the composer’s ASCAP biography is incorrect.) His roots are intriguing: The Lemoniers were pioneering free black citizens of New York City. Their patriarch, Augustus Lemonier, was a descendant of African slaves who had been brought to Cuba in the 18th century. A cigar maker by trade, Augustus escaped to America around 1810 and opened a tobacco shop on Hester Street in Manhattan. There, he fell in love with a New York-born slave woman, bought her freedom, married her, and started a family. (It should be noted that slavery was legal in New York until 1827; prior to that “free Negroes” were still somewhat exceptional.) The Lemoniers later moved uptown to West 44th Street, making them “. . . one of the first colored families to live in that part of Manhattan.” Augustus’s son William (1839–1869) and William’s wife Sarah (c. 1840–1898) had two boys, William and Thomas, who were born in 1863 and 1869, respectively.

Young Tom attended New York public schools and was musically inclined. He learned how to play the piano, but as a boy he achieved greater renown as the city’s “champion harmonica player” who had “. . . a challenge for three years in all of the leading New York papers. . . .” Nothing else is known about Lemonier’s musical background. However, based on his later accomplishments, he must have had competent instruction.

New York City was the nation’s center of theater and popular music, and although Lemonier’s activities there in the 1870s and ’80s are unknown, he

was likely involved in both. However, it was not until he was twenty-five years old that his name first appeared in a New York theater program, as a bit player in the Charles A. Taylor melodrama, *The Derby Mascot* (1894).

But it was songwriting rather than the stage that brought Tom Lemonier his first real taste of fame. Around the turn of the century he teamed up with celebrated black lyricist Cecil Mack (real name: Richard C. McPherson, 1883–1944) and the two wrote several solid hits, including “Miss Hannah From Savannah,” “The Leader of the Ball,” and “Good Afternoon, Mr. Jenkins.” These were quite popular with black performers and were interpolated into the important Williams & Walker musicals *Sons of Ham* (1900) and *In Dahomey* (1902/03).

Tom Lemonier’s breakthrough came in 1905, when he co-composed the score for the musical *Rufus Rastus* with black comedy star Ernest Hogan (real name: Reuben Crowders; c. 1866–1909). Billed as the “Unbleached American,” Hogan was a veteran singer/comedian/actor, and one of the first major African-American performers to break away from minstrelsy to appear in vaudeville and musical comedy. *Rufus Rastus* was a Hogan vehicle—his first attempt at a starring role in a full-length “book” show. It was a critical and popular success, toured widely, and appeared briefly on Broadway.

Lemonier’s success with *Rufus Rastus* ignited his own performing career. He began appearing in vaudeville presiding at the piano, playing his own music in a duo act with singers. By 1910 Lemonier was well regarded enough to gain membership in the Colored Vaudeville Benevolent Association. This exclusive New York club also included Scott Joplin. The two men served together on a number of C.V.B.A. committees, and their music was a highlight of the Association’s 1910 Madison Square Garden gala.

At that same time Tom Lemonier also joined an even more important organization—the Clef Club. This now-legendary collective was just getting underway when Lemonier’s music was featured in the Club’s October 20, 1910

concert along with pieces by Will H. Tyers, Al. Johns, Ford Dabney, and Club founder James Reese Europe, all performed by the Clef Club Symphony Orchestra under Europe’s direction. (The music of all of these composers can be heard on *Black Manhattan Vols. 1 and 2*.)

Tom Lemonier thrived through the 1910s; he wrote many songs, dabbled in music publishing and café management, continued in vaudeville, and began appearing as a supporting actor in the serious Broadway plays of prominent white producer William A. Brady (1863–1950).

In 1917 Lemonier moved his residence from the West Side’s “Black Bohemia” to Harlem. By that time he had become a widely-respected music and theater maven; this was confirmed when the black *Chicago Defender* newspaper gave him his own column on these topics. Entitled “Lemonier’s Letter,” these slangy and gossipy articles were widely read and are now a valuable historical resource.

Around 1920 Tom Lemonier left Harlem and relocated to Chicago, continuing to pen new songs and write his column for the *Defender*. He finally retired from the stage in 1922 and opened Tom Lemonier’s Song Shop at 3640 State Street. This establishment sold records, player piano rolls, and sheet music—“Religious music a specialty.” The Shop also printed its proprietor’s latest songs and stocked many of his old ones.

Lemonier’s music store fully occupied the remainder of his days. However, he did occasionally work as a piano accompanist for a number of Chicago radio stations. He also appeared “on the air” several times as a “solo whistler.” Lemonier joined ASCAP in 1942 and was still writing pretty songs when he passed away on March 14, 1945.

Lemonier’s claim to fame rests on his lovely 1905 ballad “**Just One Word of Consolation**” (track 15). The lyrics for the song were written by the African-American tenor Frank B. Williams (1869–1942), one of Lemonier’s vaudeville singer-partners. Its premiere seems to have been in 1905, when Henry

Troy sang it in the Ernest Hogan musical *Rufus Rastus*. The song was subsequently published in New York by Charles K. Harris and soon became a coast-to-coast favorite. For years “Just One Word of Consolation” was standard repertoire for American tenors. White performers no doubt thought its composer was French; blacks quietly knew better.

SIDNEY L. PERRIN (1873–1931)

A mainstay of early 20th century African-American show business, Sidney L. Perrin was another Black Manhattanite as versatile as he was accomplished. A successful songwriter, composer, singer, comedian, playwright, and producer, he was lauded by black critic Sylvester Russell as “. . . one of the greatest comedians of his race.” Historically speaking, Perrin remains a key African-American transitional figure between minstrelsy and vaudeville.

Sidney Leonard Perrin was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1873 to Frances and Matilda Perrin. Nothing is known of his early life or education, but music and theater must have been early pursuits, including the only theatrical “training academy” then available to African-Americans—minstrelsy.

Sid Perrin came to New York sometime in the mid-1890s, and the metropolis was his base of operations for the remainder of his life. Curiously, few traces of him can be found prior to 1897, when he blazed forth on Manhattan stages as a fully formed professional. In this period Perrin was a “musical comedian,” drawing laughter from contrived, absurd musical situations. During his act he sang and also performed clever stunts. (Among his “specialities,” Perrin “. . . extracted melody from flatirons, clothespins, sleigh bells and bamboo rods.”)

Sid Perrin, like so many of the period's leading stage performers, wrote his own music. His breakthrough year as a performer—1897—also marked the appearance of his first published song, under the banner of one of America's top publishers, M. Witmark & Sons. However, while Witmark remained his main publisher, Perrin sold works to other Tin Pan Alley firms. Publication

enabled his music to circulate nationally; several of his songs became well known and were especially popular with fellow African-American performers.

In researching Sidney Perrin's career, the overwhelming impression is of an unusually industrious, imaginative person. He never seems to have stopped striving ever onward for new opportunities. His career also seems to have associated him with nearly all of the movers and shakers of the early African-American theater. By 1900 Perrin had already been featured with the Georgia Minstrels, the Black Patti Troubadours, John W. Isham's extravaganzas, Gussie L. Davis's (see above) *A Hot Time in Dixie*, and Pat Chappelle's Rabbit Foot Company.

Perrin continued to work for others until 1903, when he unveiled his first display of large-scale artistry—an original, two-act musical comedy called *The Bogus Prince*. Perrin had written the book, lyrics, and score, built a production company to mount it, directed, and starred. His show opened in Waterbury, Connecticut in July, and by October 1903 was playing in New York at Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre. In May 1904 *The Bogus Prince* moved to Washington D.C., where the *Washington Post* gave it a very favorable review, noting the happy sold-out house and fine cast, adding approvingly that “. . . the music savors more strongly of the old-time plantation melody than of the modern coon song.”

These adventures as impresario mark the dividing line between Sidney Perrin's minstrel days and his long subsequent career in vaudeville. He kept writing, but only sketches for his own use. One of these, a “one-act farce” called *Ethiopia*, was popular at Chicago's Monogram Theatre during 1909. Perrin also wrote original routines (and the occasional song) for other black artists, including Charles Gilpin (1878–1930; a sometime Perrin employee as well), who was just coming into his own as a famed dramatic actor.

Perrin's Chicago sojourn was extended when he joined the stock company of the legendary Pekin Theatre, at that time America's foremost black playhouse. Perrin and his wife Goldie Crosby (herself an accomplished actress

and singer) appeared in at least three Pekin productions. (To hear the music of the Pekin Theatre, refer to New World Records' *From Barrelhouse to Broadway: The Musical Odyssey of Joe Jordan*, 80649-2.)

In 1911 Perrin was back in New York, where he joined Scott Joplin and Tom Lemonier in membership in the Colored Vaudeville Benevolent Association (C.V.B.A.). But by July Perrin was back on the road again, seemingly without interruption until 1917, when he flirted briefly with the movies as the star of *The Accidental Ruler*, a feature film by the pioneering black director/producer Peter P. Jones.

Following World War I Sid Perrin continued in vaudeville. But in addition to performing he was now also producing and managing other acts. He also began leading his own comedy troupe across the Theatre Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.) circuit, a new syndicate of largely white-owned Southern venues presenting black performers to black audiences. T.O.B.A.'s one hundred houses represented expanding employment opportunities for artists of color, but the working conditions and pay were sub-standard. ("Ma" Rainey once famously quipped that T.O.B.A. stood for "Tough on Black Asses.")

By the mid-20s it was clear that vaudeville, like minstrelsy before it, was headed toward extinction. The movies and radio were draining away its audiences. Unfazed, Sid Perrin—now a genuine "old timer"—simply shifted gears and adapted his talents to the New York nightclub scene. In 1926 he began appearing in producer Lew Leslie's (c. 1888–1963) famous *Blackbirds* revues in Harlem's Cotton Club, and went with the *Blackbirds* for their storied run at the Café des Ambassadeurs in Paris. And when the troupe returned to the States, Perrin stayed behind to give the still-thriving British music halls a try, with some success.

Returning to New York in late 1928, Perrin tapped into another new opportunity—performing in-between-film comedy sketches in the city's movie houses. He was still enjoying applause with this somewhere out on the Radio-Keith-Orpheum circuit in 1931 when he died. Never a huge star, Perrin was

nonetheless a well-known and respected show-business pioneer, thriving in an always-difficult field during an era of appalling racial discrimination. That alone is a legacy worth remembering.

Over his forty-year career Sidney L. Perrin no doubt composed a trunk full of original music. However, all that survives today are about fifty published songs and a smattering of orchestrations, all printed in New York between 1897 and 1910. Unfailingly bright and melodious, much of Perrin's *oeuvre* was, unfortunately, of the "coon" song variety, with themes and lyrics presenting derogatory racial stereotypes. An exception to this was his 1904 cakewalk "**We'll Raise the Roof To-Night (Whoop 'Er Up Boys)**" (track 5). This is joyful music, and it is easy to understand why it was so admired in Sidney Perrin's heyday.

LUCKEY ROBERTS (1887–1968)



Luckey Roberts remains legendary as one of the founding fathers of Harlem "stride piano"—the powerful, virtuosic fusion of ragtime, the blues, and jazz. Over the years much has been written about Roberts's piano music and his brilliance at the keyboard. However, his career was actually much more complex: Roberts also enjoyed successes as a theater conductor and composer, Tin Pan Alley songwriter, and orchestra director. These experiences were not only critical to the development of Roberts the piano virtuoso, but also to the musical advancement of Black Manhattan.

Charles Luckeyth Roberts entered the world on August 7, 1887 in Philadelphia, the son of William L. and Elizabeth Roberts. Tragically, when Charles was just a few weeks old his mother died. Unable to manage, his father placed the baby in the care of a family of vaudeville performers. Charles stayed with his foster parents for several years, and by age five was himself on the stage, adding adorableness to a number of touring stage acts.

William Roberts was not pleased with his son's theatrical life, and decided to set the boy on a different path. Since Charles expressed interest in the piano, Mr. Roberts took him to meet Lonnie Hicks, Philadelphia's noted African-American pianist. The boy was enchanted by this encounter and became infatuated with the keyboard; he practiced for hours each day and sought to learn from every pianist who came within range.

By his late teenage years Charles Roberts—now “Luckey”—had made himself into an extraordinary pianist. He earned his living playing ragtime in Philadelphia cafés, saloons, and similar “resorts.” His father no doubt now *really* disapproved, but no matter: It was obvious that music would be Luckey's gateway to a bright future.

By around 1910 Luckey Roberts had outgrown Philadelphia. New York beckoned. He moved to Harlem, which was just then becoming the new center of Black Manhattan. He also joined the Clef Club, bringing himself into the circle of many of the important musicians profiled in this series. And he wisely continued studying, taking private lessons in musical “theory, counterpoint, fugue, and composition” with Eloise Smith and the noted organist Dr. Melville Charlton (1880–1973).

It did not take long for Luckey Roberts to be recognized as one of the best “ticklers” in New York. He played mainly ragtime, and quite distinctively: heavier and more florid than that of his rivals, and more rhythmically complex. In essence, Roberts used the piano to simulate an entire orchestra, an expansive concept that eventually became known as Harlem “stride.”

Roberts had also been experimenting with composition, and in 1913 his first pieces saw print—“The Junkman Rag” (his first hit) and his extraordinary “Pork and Beans Rag.” 1913 also brought Roberts in to an extremely fruitful partnership with the great black lyricist Alex Rogers (1876-1930). Over the next seventeen years the team created a number of fine pop songs, many of which were sung by major stars like Nora Bayes, Bert Williams, and Al Jolson.

1913 also marked the fulfillment of one of Luckey Roberts's childhood ambitions—to conduct a musical show. In July of that year he joined the Smart Set Co. as music director for their production of *The Wrong Mr. President*. For his efforts rehearsing the company and orchestra, conducting the performances, and writing original music, Roberts received \$18.00 per week.

In mid-1914 Luckey Roberts left the Smart Set and returned to more lucrative opportunities in New York. America's Dance Craze was in full cry, and the demand for black dance orchestras had never been higher. Roberts decided to organize his own “society orchestra” to play for the private affairs of wealthy white Manhattanites. He was continuing his rise in Black Manhattan as well: On May 21, 1915 Roberts conducted the sixty-piece Clef Club Orchestra at the Manhattan Casino in a performance that included his own rags and one-steps. At the same time his new Luckey Roberts' Orchestra was building a fine reputation. It occasionally “subbed” for Europe's Society Orchestra and had a high-profile regular engagement at Riesenweber's trendy theater district restaurant.

Luckey Roberts made his leap to full-fledged theater composer in mid-1919, when a new black theatrical syndicate called the Quality Amusement Corp. contracted him and Alex Rogers to write a series of musical comedies for their circuit of theaters. The duo's first effort, *Baby Blues*, opened at Harlem's Lafayette Theatre on December 22, 1919. Rogers wrote a strong book and provided lyrics to Roberts's music for the show's eighteen-song score. Conducted from the keyboard by Roberts, *Baby Blues* was a critical and commercial hit.

Luckey Roberts began the next chapter in his career in 1924, when he assumed the late James Reese Europe's position as the leading “purveyor” of music for Eastern high society. Department store magnate Rodman Wanamaker had been Europe's patron, but after the black conductor's tragic death in 1919, Wanamaker was unable to find anyone to take his place. Finally, in 1924 someone great enough did come to his attention—C. Luckeyth Roberts. With Wanamaker's support, the diminutive pianist resumed his pre-war role as a society orchestra

leader, but now at the very highest levels of wealth and power. For the next six years the Luckey Roberts' Orchestra spent each winter in Palm Beach, Florida, playing for society events while maintaining a regular "stand" at the plush Everglades Club. In the spring the Orchestra traveled north to continue these entertainments in the mansions of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Unfortunately, the deepening Great Depression ended the days of lavish parties, even for millionaires; Roberts's society orchestra business ground to a halt. He remained busy as a pianist though, both as soloist and with small jazz combos around New York. Roberts was also financially secure: He was careful with money and invested wisely. For some time he had dabbled in classical music (in 1926 he announced that he was composing a Negro grand opera), and with the lessening of business pressures he was able to further explore these interests. Throughout the 1930s Roberts wrote serious, extended pieces, including a rhapsody for piano and orchestra and a three-movement *Spanish Suite* for orchestra. In 1939 he presented some of these in a formal Carnegie Hall concert, a well-received event which was attended by many of his former society clients, including First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Although Luckey Roberts had enjoyed a few pop song successes earlier in his career, his true blockbuster, "Moonlight Cocktail," did not come until 1941. It was not really new, though—just a refurbishing of an unpublished 1912 piano rag with lyrics (by Kim Gannon) added and a new title. Launched by a fine Glenn Miller Orchestra recording, "Moonlight Cocktail" quickly became an American pop music sensation. The Miller recording was a "Top Ten" radio hit, and in May 1942 *Variety* declared it "No. 1 all over the nation." The Miller and the later Bing Crosby records of "Moonlight Cocktail" both sold in excess of a million copies.

With his royalties from "Moonlight Cocktail" and another new song hit—"Massachusetts," Luckey Roberts entered a new and final career—club ownership. He bought a bar at 773 Saint Nicholas Avenue in Harlem and

renamed it Luckey's Rendezvous. Roberts (a teetotaler) served as house pianist and his waiters sang both operatic favorites and pop tunes. Not surprisingly, the Rendezvous became a popular "hang" for the jazz musicians of New York and visitors from everywhere.

Luckey Roberts passed away in Harlem on February 5, 1968, having, as the *Pittsburgh Courier* put it, ". . . fought hard and played harder with the determination of the true and great artist. . . ."

Roberts created "**Pork and Beans Rag**" (track 1) as a piano solo in 1912. It was one of his early signature numbers, and Roberts later recalled it as the first piece he taught to his young student, George Gershwin. While "Pork and Beans" uses the classic rag structure, that is where most similarities end. This is "Eastern Ragtime"—fast, aggressive, and relentless. In its orchestral form "Pork and Beans" was the perfect "soundtrack" for America's 1910s Dance Craze, and quickly became a favorite of New York's leading African-American orchestras.

Although Luckey Roberts was an important composer for the black stage, very little of this work has survived. "**Jewel of the Big Blue Nile**" (track 4) gives us a tantalizing taste. It was one of the eighteen songs written for the Lafayette Stock Company's 1919 production of *Baby Blues*. A delightful bit of mock exoticism, "Jewel" was introduced in Act II by Roberts's wife, classically-trained soprano Lena Sanford (1888–1958).

Our Luckey Roberts tribute concludes with his "**The Tremolo Trot**" (track 14), a joyful 1914 romp. This also began life as a piano solo, and was arranged for orchestra as fuel for the nation's mania for one-stepping. But here is no ordinary one-step: Although hard-charging, it is refined and contains "concert" effects (the extended viola/cello unison solo in the Trio is one). "Tremolo Trot" may well be an early inkling of Roberts's later interest in classical music.

Q. ROSCOE SNOWDEN (1887– c. 1955)

In contrast to most of the other composers profiled in this series of recordings, pianist, songwriter, and publisher Q. Roscoe Snowden was not famous during his lifetime. Rather, he gained recognition in retrospect through the compelling artifacts he left behind. Since the beginning of serious jazz scholarship, Snowden has been a recurring topic of interest, primarily for two extraordinary piano solo recordings he made in 1923. Emotionally gripping and technically assured, these seem to represent some lost Deep South blues style. His handful of surviving scores are also intriguing, and more have recently come to light, leading to further curiosity about Snowden's background and speculation as to his place in the musical scene of 1910s and '20s Black Manhattan.

Quilla Roscoe Snowden was born in Philadelphia on December 22, 1887, one of the thirteen children of Hamilton and Hannah Snowden. Hamilton Snowden (1854–1924) was an ex-slave, born in Maryland. His wife, five years younger, came from a long established family of Pennsylvania free blacks. The Snowdens married in 1877. By the 1890s they were living on Lombard Street in Philadelphia's African-American district; Mr. Snowden worked as a porter, while his wife ran the household and rented out rooms to lodgers. (Eight are listed living there in the 1900 Census.)

No information can be found on Quilla Snowden's early life, but it could be safely assumed that he attended Philadelphia public schools. He was of course musical, and probably started playing the piano while still very young. (The fact that he was able to notate his own compositions would indicate music lessons of some kind.) In any case, Quilla Snowden grew up in the same Philadelphia musical scene as his contemporary C. Luckeyth Roberts (also born there in 1887). The two must have shared similar experiences and perhaps even knew one another. But Snowden stayed in Philadelphia much longer. When Roberts left for New York in 1910, Snowden was still living in the old family

house on Lombard Street. That year's census sums him up thusly—"occupation: musician; industry: odd jobs."

When the United States entered the First World War in April 1917, Snowden—now "Q. Roscoe"—was married with two children. He was still in Philadelphia and still a self-employed "Piano Player." But now we see an interesting flash of personality: Selective Service registrations required the applicant to state his race. All African-Americans of that era wrote "Negro," "colored," or (less frequently) "black." But on his card, Q. Roscoe Snowden boldly penned the word "*African*."

Snowden did not serve in the armed forces. Instead, sometime in the second half of 1917, he moved to New York City. Whether or not he had found work as a pianist is unclear, but he was certainly composing: His first published piece saw print there in January 1918. Tellingly, it was not a rag, one-step, or patriotic song; it was "The Deep Sea Blues," published by a small music store in Harlem. Not many months afterwards Snowden ventured downtown to visit New York's just-opened "Home of the Blues" in the Gaiety Theatre Building—the Pace & Handy Music Co. Its proprietor, W.C. Handy (recently arrived from Memphis), was taken with Snowden's new number "The Slow Drag Blues," and decided to buy it.

Q. Roscoe Snowden's reputation as a pianist grew in New York during the late 1910s. Unfortunately, his relationship with W.C. Handy did not. But Snowden kept on composing, now concentrating on pop songs for which he wrote both words and music. However, established publishers were not interested. In 1920 Snowden was living without his wife or children in an apartment on West 143rd Street; he was employed as a "musician [in] orchestra." But he had bigger plans: In July 1921 he opened the Q. ROSCOE SNOWDEN—MUSIC PUBLISHER in the Gaiety Theatre Building, with an office just down the hall from Pace & Handy.

Snowden's publishing venture lasted only a few years, and its minuscule catalog consisted only of its proprietor's works. But it was enough to finally interest other tenants of the Gaiety Building. The first was Harry H. Pace (1884–1943), who had recently left Pace & Handy to organize the first major African-American recording label—Black Swan. William Grant Still (see below), a Pace & Handy employee, also left the publisher to work for Pace. One or the other (or both) of these men liked Snowden's music enough to want it for Black Swan. A deal was struck, and Snowden's "Please Don't Tickle Me, Babe" was recorded by singer Josie Miles accompanied by the composer at the piano. The resulting disc (Black Swan 14121) was released in August 1922.

At around this time another new tenant of the Gaiety, Clarence Williams (see note below), also took an interest in Roscoe Snowden. Williams was just beginning to do A&R work for several white phonograph companies. A month after "Please Don't Tickle Me, Babe" was released by Black Swan, Williams produced a recording of it for the OKeh label, sung by "contralto" Lizzie Miles (no relation to Josie). Snowden's piano playing must also have intrigued Williams; on October 31, 1923 he brought Snowden into the studio to record two of his own piano solos, "The Deep Sea Blues" and "Misery Blues," also for OKeh. Both performances were released and reveal an artist of dazzling talent. Unfortunately they must not have sold well, because they were Q. Roscoe Snowden's first and only commercial recordings.

Snowden kept writing songs through the '20s. None seem to have been published or recorded, although he was dutiful about copyrighting them. 1930 finds him playing piano in a Harlem restaurant, which presumably was how he supported himself. Our final official glimpse at Snowden is his 1942 draft card, which describes him as unemployed and living alone on West 116th Street.

But Q. Roscoe kept performing, at least into the early 1950s. He had a fervent admirer in modern-day jazz pianist Dick Wellstood (1927–1987), who

was very familiar with Snowden and his music. Over the years Wellstood made references to both, including in liner notes to his own 1971 recording of the stride showpiece "Carolina Shout." There Wellstood modestly confessed, "I knew a piano player named Q. Roscoe Snowden who could play it better."

Nevertheless, Snowden faded into complete obscurity. Extensive searches have failed to even reveal his date of death. Perhaps he would take comfort in the fact that he is finally known today, and more widely than ever, though reissues of his masterful 1923 OKeh piano recordings. Both have been featured on important CD anthologies of jazz piano and early blues, and both now are now sounding forth from multiple websites. The enigmatic Q. Roscoe Snowden had something meaningful to say, and happily, the world is now ready to listen.

The score for "**The Slow Drag Blues**" (track 19) provides us with welcome opportunities for study: Published by W.C. Handy and orchestrated by a youthful William Grant Still (1895–1978, the future famous black classical composer), it is one of the few surviving Q. Roscoe Snowden orchestral works. This is more than enough to warm a musicologist's heart. Musically reflecting Snowden's affection for genuine Southern blues, the title also suggests his awareness of traditional black social dance. (The slow drag was a 19th-century favorite of Midwestern African-Americans.) Indeed, with its four-bar phrases and ragtime syncopations, "Slow Drag Blues" would have been almost backward-looking in 1919. The truly modern touches are brought to it by Still, whose spiky treble cross rhythms (pitting the clarinet's triplets against the flute and 1st violin's dotted eighth-sixteenths) and imaginative instrumentation (creating a transparent and almost chamber-music-like texture) raises Snowden's "Slow Drag Blues" far above the usual popular dance tune of that time. And it is still a real pleasure to play today.

CLARENCE CAMERON WHITE (1879–1960)



Clarence Cameron White achieved the dream that had eluded nearly all of the serious African-American artists of his time: national and international acclaim. Indeed, White was not just successful, but was lauded with awards, fellowships, and honorary degrees throughout his long and productive life.

This violinist, composer, conductor, and educator was born in Clarksville, Tennessee on August 10, 1879. His father, Dr. James White, was a physician. His mother, Jennie, was an Oberlin-trained violinist (Class of 1876). In 1881 White's father died. This tragedy, however adverse for the family, had unforeseen positive effects on the course of American music: White's mother returned with her children to Oberlin, Ohio, to live with her parents. Her father, John H. Scott, was an ex-slave who had been active in the Underground Railroad there during the 1850s and '60s. Grandfather Scott was also musical, and gave young Clarence two precious gifts: first, at age six, a violin; the second, more important—a deep love for African-American culture.

In 1890 Jennie White remarried and brought her two sons into her new husband's household in Washington, D.C. There, in 1892, young Clarence attended a recital of black violinist-composer Will Marion Cook (1869–1944; see *Black Manhattan Vol. 1* for Cook's music). The young boy became Cook's pupil and as White later recalled, "Every lesson was one of pure joy, and it was during this period that I definitely made up my mind to be a violinist."

In 1894 White continued his violin studies with another pioneering black classical artist, Joseph Douglass (1869–1936), grandson of the great abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass. Two years later White was himself

accepted at Oberlin College, where he studied violin with Cook's former teacher, Frederick G. Doolittle (1859–?).

In 1903 Clarence White returned to Washington, D.C. to teach in the public schools, but instead became director of the string department of the Washington Conservatory of Music. White's fine violin playing quickly made him a standout in the capital's serious music-making circles. This led to his 1904 performance there with Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912) during that famous Afro-British composer's visit to conduct a concert of his own music.

While Clarence White did not live in the New York area until 1937, he was closely connected to Black Manhattan from 1904 onwards. In April of that year he performed a joint New York recital with two legendary African-American artists—singer-composer Harry T. Burleigh (1866–1949) and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906). This was the first of literally hundreds of New York performances by White over the next fifty years. This influence on classical music in the black community there can hardly be overstated.

1906 was a momentous year for Clarence White: He travelled to England to study composition with Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. After a brief return to the United States, in mid-1908 White resumed his studies in England, this time with the great violinist Michael Zacharewitsch (1876–1953). The Russian virtuoso, a former protégé of Tchaikovsky, took a keen interest in White, and taught him at reduced fee for nearly two years.

Clarence Cameron White returned from his overseas studies in April 1910 excited to resume his American career. Choosing Boston as his base, he simultaneously opened a private violin-teaching studio while building bookings as a touring concert violinist. While in Boston White also helped found the National Association of Negro Musicians (1919), serving as the organization's president from 1922 to 1924.

While Clarence Cameron White's initial focus had been performance, during the 1910s his interests turned more toward composition. Not surprisingly,

his inspiration was the folk music of black America. His first efforts were violin solos based on the Spirituals he had heard as a boy. By 1917 several of these pieces were heard in White's own recitals. In 1922 White decided to devote himself full time to composition, and moved with his family back to Oberlin for greater peace and quiet.

In early 1924 this interlude was interrupted when a great project was offered to White: the West Virginia Collegiate Institute (later State College) approached him to create a new School of Music to “. . . help preserve the beauty of the Negro's contribution to musical art and to awaken and energize the Negro's possibilities for new musical endeavors.” White accepted this challenging administrative/artistic post, which involved the organizing and conducting of a band, an orchestra, and several choral groups. It was at WVCi that White composed his largest works, including incidental music for *Tambour* and his three-act opera *Ouanga*. It was also there that White did the research and composition of his monumental *Forty Negro Spirituals* (1927).

In 1930 White won the Rosenwald Foundation Award. He decided to resign his post at the Collegiate Institute and use the Rosenwald fellowship to further develop his artistry as a composer. Toward that end, White moved to Paris to study with the noted French opera composer Raoul Laparra (1876–1943). Two years later, White returned to the United States to replace R. Nathaniel Dett (1882–1943) as head of the Music Department of the Hampton Institute. White remained at the Institute for about three years, before resuming his solo violin career.

Through the 1930s, '40s, and '50s White moved from honor to honor. In 1939 the Boston Pops under Arthur Fiedler premiered his *Pantomime for Orchestra*; he received a Harmon Foundation Award; an honorary doctorate from Wilberforce University; the Bispham Memorial Medal from the American Opera Society, and the E.B. Benjamin Award for his *Elegy for Orchestra*.

Clarence Cameron White's last work was the cantata *Heritage*, based on the famous poem by Countee Cullen. It was premiered in New York in

February 1960. The composer succumbed to cancer later that year, on June 30th. White's papers and scores are preserved at Howard University and the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Two lovely examples of Clarence Cameron White's music are his Spiritual settings, “**Chant**” (track 6) and “**I'm Goin' Home**”(track 21). Both pieces were originally composed as violin solos for his own recitals. “Chant” (Op. 12, No. 1) is based on the familiar “Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen.” It was published in 1918 as part of the suite *The Bandana Sketches*. A bit later White orchestrated *The Bandana Sketches* and conducted the Clef Club Orchestra in its premiere at Carnegie Hall on November 22, 1921. The movement “Chant” features extended cornet solos, which are played here with deep expression by Paul Murphy.

White's orchestral arrangement of “I'm Goin' Home” appeared in 1921 as part of another suite—*Cabin Memories*. The very piece's existence is proof of White's profound knowledge of African-American folk materials; when “I'm Goin' Home” was published, it was the first time this Spiritual had appeared in any written form. Our performance here once again features lovely cornet solos by Paul Murphy.

CLARENCE WILLIAMS (1893–1965)



Clarence Williams was a pianist, songwriter, promoter, producer, and music publishing and recording executive. As a black visionary he could in some ways be compared to James Reese Europe. However unlike Europe, Williams's rise was rooted more in commerce than in art: He was concerned with economic gain and understood that financial rewards in music would no longer come primarily from live performance, but rather through control of copyrights and the emerging technologies of mass media.

SPENCER WILLIAMS (1886–1965)




A fine and prolific black songwriter, Spencer Williams brought authentic blues and early jazz to the mainstream of American popular music. During his long career Williams created nearly five hundred compositions, many of which became national and international hits. A few remain beloved “standards” even today.

WILLIAMS & WILLIAMS: **Royal Garden Blues**” (1919)

The “**Royal Garden Blues**” (track 13) is an archetypical example of the important early 1900s flow of black music from New Orleans to Chicago to New York. The result is a fascinating musical synthesis. Since the score bears the byline “Clarence Williams & Spencer Williams,” it is difficult to determine who wrote what, especially given that these two men composed in a similar style. A more important point is just how splendidly outlandish the piece seemed to most listeners when it appeared in 1919: First, its rhythmic underpinning is “four beat” rather than the long-familiar “two beat” of ragtime, creating a surprising feeling of urgency. Secondly, but more compellingly is “Royal Garden’s” use of short, repeated motifs—“riffs.” This rhythmic-melodic device had been a feature of African-American music for some time, but had not yet taken hold in mainstream pop music.

Named for Chicago’s well-known black café, “Royal Garden Blues” remained a modest success until 1921, when recordings by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and Mamie Smith’s Jazz Hounds exploded into best sellers. Since then, virtually every major (and otherwise) jazz performer and group has featured it.

The arrangement of “Royal Garden Blues” performed here is itself a fascinating historical document. The very first orchestration of the tune, it was scored by the noted black orchestra leader Dave Peyton (c. 1885–1955) and

published in New York in December 1919. Peyton’s task was to create a written score that would enable note-reading musicians to *sound as if* they were jazz improvisers. So every trombone slide, flute swoop, and drum tap is meticulously notated; the performers have only to “play the print” to get the proper effect. The clarinet part is most interesting: In the last section of the piece, the player is given the option of continuing on with unison harmony notes, or jumping down and playing a written out “hot” solo (“*Note* If desired jump to  for Jazz effect”). This device made the arrangement not only delightful to listen and dance to but provided an early jazz “lesson.”

CLARENCE G. WILSON (1888– ?)

Clarence G. Wilson provides us with a bright, brief, and ultimately enigmatic Black Manhattan story: A university-educated pianist, conductor, and composer, Wilson made his mark as music director of one of the great African-American theatrical companies, served his country in World War I, and then quietly faded from the scene.

Wilson was born in Brooklyn, New York on July 10, 1888. He was the only child of Gilbert (c. 1864–?) and Landonia Dickerson Wilson (c. 1865–?), who had migrated from Maryland and Virginia, respectively, to begin new lives in the North. Gilbert Wilson was a stationary engineer, which was a responsible and well-paying vocation. Around the turn of the 20th century he moved with his family to West 53rd Street in Manhattan—a racially mixed neighborhood just steps from Broadway. There, young Clarence likely attended New York City public schools and certainly began his musical life.

In the fall of 1907 Clarence Wilson entered Howard University in Washington, D.C. Undertaking studies in music education with Prof. Lulu Vere Childers (1870–1946); his curriculum included lessons in piano, harmony, and music history. Wilson did conspicuously well: The *New York Age* proudly reported that he was one of “. . . the New York boys making good at Howard University. . . .”

Between classes Clarence Wilson supported himself by playing the piano around the capital. Howard must have lifted its earlier ban on students entering theaters, because by 1911 Wilson was working as pianist with the orchestra at Washington's new and elegant Howard Theatre. (Still in operation, this African-American showplace was built in 1910 in the neighborhood of Howard University, but had no other connection.)

On June 2, 1912 Wilson graduated from Howard University with an *artium baccallaureus* degree in music. How he put this to use over the next three years is not known, but in the fall of 1915 he was in New York as the new musical director of one of the last major black touring companies—the Smart Set. Wilson seems to have been the first college-educated black man to hold such a position. But he had big shoes to fill: His predecessors in the job were C. Luckeyth Roberts (see above) and James J. Vaughan (1874–?), “Dean” of African-American theater conductors. (See *Black Manbattan Vol. 2* for an example of Vaughan's beautiful music.)

The Smart Set's owners and stars, Salem Tutt Whitney (1869–1934) and J. Homer Tutt (1882–1951) built and presented a new show each season, and their musical directors were expected to compose original music and construct the finished score. Whitney & Tutt's new production for the 1916/17 season was an anti-war farce called *How Newtown Prepared*. Work on it began in New York in the summer of 1916, and the result was a two-act musical comedy with book and lyrics by Whitney and Tutt and music by Taylor L. Corwell (the troupe's manager) and Clarence Wilson.

How Newtown Prepared opened on September 11, 1916 in Philadelphia's New Standard Theatre. The show, conducted by Wilson, garnered good reviews and had strong runs in Baltimore, New York (at the Lafayette Theatre), and Washington, D.C. (at the Howard Theatre). Then it hit the road, playing forty weeklong stands in the major cities of the South and Midwest, concluding its tour in June 1917 with return engagements in New York, Washington, and Philadelphia.

Clarence Wilson had hardly begun to rest from these labors when, in July 1917, he was drafted into the army; the United States had finally entered the Great War and a million men were needed to “Make the World Safe for Democracy.” Fortunately, the U.S. Army made good use of Private Wilson: he was assigned to the 807th Pioneer Infantry Band, a fine African-American unit commanded and conducted by the extraordinary Lieut. Will H. Vodery. (Vodery's superb scores can be heard on this recording, as well as on *Black Manbattan Vols. 1* and *2*.) Attached to the Headquarters of the U.S. First Army, Clarence Wilson spent his time “Over There” playing the piano to entertain American and Allied troops, dignitaries (including French President Georges Clemenceau), and civilians all across France.

Clarence Wilson returned to New York with the 807th late in the winter of 1919. He did not resume his position with the Smart Set, however. Luckey Roberts and then James Vaughan had been brought back after Wilson entered the army. According to the 1920 census Wilson was living in Harlem with a wife and one child and working as a musician. This is our final glimpse of him. Since Wilson's name never again appears in black theatrical circles, it would seem likely that his eventful 1916–1919 had provided enough trouping (and trooping) to last a lifetime.

The only example of Clarence G. Wilson's music that seems to have survived is “**The Zoo-Step**,” (track 18), one of the nineteen musical numbers composed for *How Newtown Prepared*. It appeared early in Act II as a dance feature for the show's stars, J. Homer Tutt and Blanche Thompson, backed by the Smart Set chorus girls. And what a number it is! Raucous, hilarious, virtuosic, stylistically “The Zoo-Step,” represents unique musical territory somewhere between the circus, Dixieland jazz, and the *Folies Bergère*. It certainly makes one long to hear the rest of the score, and see “The Zoo-Step”'s choreography! The piece is also an excellent case in point on the influence of African-American theater music on white-controlled Broadway: In September 1916 powerful

producer J.J. Shubert (1880–1963) watched the Smart Set at the Lafayette Theatre and decided that “The Zoo-Step” would be perfect for his upcoming Winter Garden extravaganza, *The Show of Wonders*. Shubert was quite right, but gave Sigmund Romberg program credit for it. We know better.

For more than thirty years, the **Paragon Ragtime Orchestra** has remained the world's only year-round, professional ensemble specializing in the authentic recreation of “America's Original Music”—the sounds of early musical theater, silent cinema, and vintage ballroom dancing. PRO came into being as the result of Juilliard student Rick Benjamin's 1985 discovery of thousands of historic orchestra scores of the legendary Victor recording star Arthur Pryor. This extraordinary collection sparked Mr. Benjamin's formation of his “Paragon Ragtime Orchestra” at The Juilliard School the following year. 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 toured extensively across 48 states and several countries overseas. These travels have taken the Orchestra to more than 700 performing arts centers, including the Ravinia Festival, the Smithsonian Institution, Chautauqua, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, the Brucknerhaus (Austria), the American Dance Festival, and in New York at the 92nd Street Y and City Center. 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 Paragon and has since toured the world. In 2003 the Orchestra premiered Rick Benjamin's reconstruction of Scott Joplin's opera *Treemonisha* to great acclaim at the Stern Grove Festival in San Francisco. More recently, PRO had the honor of appearing twice as special guests of the Minnesota Orchestra, and in 2017 presented the official Scott Joplin Memorial-Centennial Concert at the composer's grave in Queens, New York.

In addition to its worldwide concert hall, university, and festival appearances, PRO has acquired a considerable following both here and abroad

through its radio programs on National Public Radio, WQXR, the BBC, WWFM Classical, the Bayerischer Rundfunk, and the *Voice of America* networks. Since 1989 more than six hundred million people have enjoyed the Orchestra's recorded “area music” on *Main Street, U.S.A.* at Disneyland, Disney World, and Disneyland Paris, and in 1992 PRO proudly served as “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 feature films and television programs, including productions for PBS, HBO, the FX Channel, and Turner Classic Movies. The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra's discography includes eighteen albums and two DVD sets of historic Hollywood films with authentic scores. All of these achievements have been widely praised and considered instrumental in rekindling interest in the rich history and tradition of the American theater orchestra.

www.paragonragtime.com

Conductor and historian **Rick Benjamin** has built a singular 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 20,000-title collection of historic theater and dance orchestra scores (c. 1830–1930) 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 conductor, in addition to the PRO he has led the National Orchestra of Ireland (Dublin), the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the Aalborg and Aarhus Symfoniorkestere in Denmark, the Olympia Symphony (Washington State), the National Orchestra of Iceland, the Erie Philharmonic, the Anchorage Symphony (Alaska), and the Virginia Symphony. Mr. Benjamin is also one of the foremost researchers of early cinema music; he has unearthed the original orchestral accompaniments to many great motion pictures of the 1910s and '20s, and he has conducted for nearly seven hundred silent film screenings

across North America and Europe. Mr. Benjamin has written many articles on American music, and lecture tours have taken him to over a hundred colleges and universities. Rick Benjamin is a member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences and BMI; he was educated at The Juilliard School in New York City.

www.rickbenjamin.com

Janai Brugger, a 2012 winner of Operalia and of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, begins the 2017–18 season returning to the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in the role of Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. Ms. Brugger performs in Mahler's Fourth Symphony with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra and will travel to her home city of Chicago to take on the role of Liù in *Turandot* at Lyric Opera of Chicago and star in *Ask Your Mama* with Chicago Sinfonietta. Ms. Brugger will also give a recital at the University of Michigan as well as a concert performance as Clara in *Porgy and Bess*. At Palm Beach Opera she will make her role debut as Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* and finishes the season at the Dutch National Opera as Servillia in *La Clemenza di Tito*.

Recent highlights include performances at the Metropolitan Opera of New York in several roles: Jemmy in *Guillaume Tell* (role debut); Michaela in *Carmen*; Pamina in *The Magic Flute*; and Marzelline in *Fidelio* (role debut). The proud recipient of the 2016 Marian Anderson Award, Ms. Brugger gave a recital at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and later joined the Atlanta Symphony for the role of Amor in *Orfeo* in concerts and for a recording.

Chauncey Packer, tenor, has sung operatic roles with Nashville Opera, Mobile Opera, Pensacola Opera, Utah Festival Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Pacific, New Orleans Opera, and LSU Opera. Mr. Packer has sung the roles of Rodolfo (*La Bohème*), Alfredo (*La Traviata*), Pong (*Turandot*),

Werther (*Werther*), Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), Sam (*Susannah*), Ruggero (*La Rondine*), Dr. Blind (*Die Fledermaus*), Tamino (*The Magic Flute*), Larry/Matt (*The Face on the Barroom Floor*), Arturo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Beppe (*I Pagliacci*), and the roles of Sportin' Life, Mingo, and Robbins (*Porgy and Bess*). Mr. Packer has garnered rave reviews for his portrayal of Sportin' Life with Tulsa Opera, Atlanta Opera, Opera Birmingham, and San Francisco Opera. He has sung with New York Harlem Theatre's production of *Porgy and Bess* throughout Europe. In 2008, he debuted in Paris with Opéra Comique in *Porgy and Bess*. Mr. Packer's recently made his debut with Teatro alla Scala in their production of *Porgy and Bess* as Sportin' Life. His engagements include concerts with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Colour Music Festival, and the National Philharmonic Orchestra.

Baritone **Edward Pleasant**, a native of Midland, Texas, has distinguished himself as a versatile performer and as a gifted actor in opera and musical theater. Career highlights include his appearance in the role of Jake in New York City Opera's production of *Porgy and Bess*. He was also seen in that production's historic Emmy-nominated *Live From Lincoln Center* telecast on PBS. He has frequently performed at David Geffen Hall, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall, and he has also sung in other prominent venues such as the Texas State Capitol and the White House. Pleasant appears on no fewer than a dozen recordings and operatic compilations, among them the previous two volumes of *Black Manhattan* and as Zdzetrick in Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, all with the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra.

The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra

Rick Benjamin, conductor and piano soloist

Keiko Tokunaga, 1st violin & concertmaster

Melissa Tong, second violin

Colin Brookes, viola

Lisa Caravan, cello

Max Jacob, bass

Leslie Cullen, flute & piccolo

Vasko Dukovski, clarinets

Paul Murphy, cornet

Michael Blutman, cornet

Michael Boschen, trombone

Mike Dobson, drums & mallets

Diane Scott, piano

Vocalists

Janai Brugger, featured soprano

Andrea Jones, soprano

Chauncey Packer, tenor

Edward Pleasant, baritone

The Paragon Minstrel Band

Melissa Tong, 1st violin & leader

Keiko Tokunaga, 2nd violin

Max Jacob, bass

Vasko Dukovski, clarinet

Paul Murphy, cornet

Paul Draper, banjo

Mike Dobson, bones & tambourine

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra on New World Records

Black Manhattan: Theater and Dance Music of James Reese Europe, Will Marion Cook, and Members of the Legendary Clef Club. New World Records 80611-2.

Black Manhattan, Volume 2. New World Records 80731-2.

From Barrelhouse to Broadway: The Musical Odyssey of Joe Jordan. New World Records 80649-2.

Irving Berlin: This Is the Life! The Breakthrough Years: 1909–1921. New World Records 80773-2.

Midnight Frolic: The Broadway Theater Music of Louis A. Hirsch (1881–1924). New World Records 80707-2.

Minding the Score: The Music of Harry L. Alford, America's Pioneer Arranger. New World Records 80743-2.

Scott Joplin: Treemonisha. New World Records 80720-2 [2 CDs].

The Pioneers of Movie Music: Sounds of the American Silent Cinema. New World Records 80761-2.

You're a Grand Old Rag: The Music of George M. Cohan. New World Records 80685-2.

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