

# STORY OF DUKE ELLINGTON'S LEADERSHIP OF JAZZ RACE

## BORN IN D. C., DUKE ELLINGTON GOES TO BIRMINGHAM ORCHESTRA AT 16

### Had to Be Called From Playing Baseball to Piano Practice Frequently—Started In Society Orchestra and Then To Broadway—Wins Courier Contest.

By FLOYD G. SNELSON, Contest Editor

NEW YORK, Dec. 17.—During the past year or more the name of Duke Ellington has lingered upon the lips of radio fans, dance lovers, theatergoers and the amusement public of the Nation in general. The colorful career and sudden rise to fame of this young man reads like fiction, and is beyond doubt a source of inspiration to every striving musician of the race.

Crowned "King of Jazz" last week in the National "Most Popular Orchestra" Contest conducted by The Pittsburgh Courier, reigning supreme and having polled 50,000 votes, the largest amount, competing with over 50 orchestras and bands all over the United States Duke Ellington has proven that he is the most popular orchestra leader to day.

Moreover, the Orchestra World, a white publication, published at 1674 Broadway, New York City, printed in its April (1931) issue: "Ellington Takes Lead in Popularity Contest." First returns show hot players favored for individual honors. Here's the leaders in order named: Duke Ellington, Gordon Kibbler; (Leo Hannon, Abo Dyanan, Rudy Vallee) the fourth honors: Hal Hallett, Sam Halloway, Guy Lombardo, Fred Waring and Paul Trenpaine. These leaders represent the big incidental winners. The Duke also led in the contest for the best individual player; Sonny Greer, drummer in Duke's orchestra standing second.

He is declared to be the "King of Jazz" in America today. Long live the Duke and may he reign upon his throne for many moons.

"The Hotest Band On Earth," which is the description given to Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra, and won by unanimous vote of the music loving public that reaches from New York to Los Angeles. And, now he is "The King of Jazz."

The record of achievement and heights of fame is the usual barometer by which an artist is judged in the arts and professions. If this be the case, it goes without saying that the Duke has merited this enviable position in the music world. He has toured the country during the past 40 weeks playing in the Paramount and Warner Brothers largest picture houses in the largest cities of the east and middle west. These playhouses concede with high appreciation, that Ellington has broken their attendance and box office records for the season, and in most instances has added new life and vigor to the institutions.

At the Oriental Theater, the foremost Paramount house in Chicago the Duke made his sixty appearance in a few weeks ago within a year, and the receipts totaled over \$40,000, breaking all former records of the house for the year. Managers and promoters all agree that he is the biggest hit of all time, regardless of race or color.

(Editor's Note: The succeeding part of this story is a reproduction of "Harlem Limited Broadway Bound" printed last February.)

Broadway has been agog with the name of Duke Ellington—having completed an engagement of 70 performances at the New York Paramount Theater, the world's cinema center, having reached the pinnacle of success along with Rudy Vallee, Paul Ash, Vincent Lopez, Paul Whiteman and others. The first time a Negro orchestra has played in this favored spot, sharing honors with Maurice Chevalier.

The Duke and his boys were billed in the Paramount like Barnum and Bailey, with mammoth signs, gigantic posters of every description, feather flags that heralded their black way. This was positively the greatest creation ever extended an artist of the Negro race in history.

In addition to this, vast achievement, Duke was a featured attraction in Amos 'n' Andy's radio talking picture "Check and Double Check" which has its premiere across the street at the new Mayfair Theater. It was Duke Ellington on both sides of Broadway—up and down the gay white way. The music shops were "grinding" away the Duke Ellington Victor records—pianos "plunking" his fascinating music. Still more the NBC nightly were thrilling its millions of fans over the air with his glories and baroque interpretations are in the heyday of delight and fascination.

Long after the radio stations had ceased the Broadway Heat had taken on an air of sophistication, theater crowds had retired in quietude, Duke and his boys were back at the Cotton Club in Harlem, making the

### Hardy Brothers to Play At Lafayette

WASHINGTON, D. C., Dec. 17.—Hardy Brothers, Washingtonians, fresh from a solid year's run at the Crystal Palace Pavilion, suburban Gardens and Lincoln Colonnade in Washington, D. C., will appear at the Lafayette Theater, New York, from December 19 to 25.

### Washington Boy

Born and reared in the District of Columbia, April 29, 1890 and was christened Edward Kennedy Ellington, and lived most of his early life at 2129 Ward Place, northwest, attending Garrison and Garrett schools and was graduated from Armstrong High. There he completed courses in art, painting, designing, etching, etc. Was an all-round athlete and his six feet of brawny manhood made him an ideal baseball, basketball, cinder path, or broad-jump candidate—anywhere a versatility was required. The Duke loved them all. It was in his school days that he gained the nomenclature as the Duke. His smart appearance and popularity among the classmen merited him the title, which he has made famous.

Began his studies of piano-forte at the age of eight years under the tutelage of Prof. Grant and later with Mrs. Clinkscales. He proved to be quite apt and displayed his remarkable gifts of music. Making brilliant strides in his scholastic work as well as a most unique talent at the piano, it was a surprise to his parents which one he would major. Many occasions his mother lauded young Edward from school baseball games to his music lessons. His hobby for sports created him a typical American boy.

He is a son of Mr. and Mrs. James Edward Ellington, long residents of the capital. His father retired after many years service as a blue printer for the United States Navy Yard. His mother was formerly employed in the Government departments. Has a younger sister, Dorthes Ruth, a pretty sub-deb, now a student at Wadleigh High. Some months ago Duke removed his parents and sister to New York, and they now reside with him in their spacious apartment, at 381 Edgecombe avenue. He is a handsome provider for his family, a most dutiful son, generous brother and recently presented his and maintains a chauffeur for her convenience.

Duke and his wife, Mrs. Edna Ellington, have lived apart for some time—however he grants her every wish and they are true platonic friends. They have a 12-year-old son, Mercer, who lives with the family, when not in the care of his mother.

It is interesting to note that Duke Ellington began his professional career at the age of 15 years, during his school days in Washington, with Louis Thomas, a local musician who supplies orchestras for D. C.'s wealthy society and diplomatic circles. They played in all sections of the surrounding territory of Virginia and Maryland. He later organized "his own band," which he called the Washingtonians.

He came to New York in 1923 and played for dances, etc. and his first job was at the Hollywood Cafe on Broadway. While there he made quite a name for himself and later worked at summer resorts, clubs, hotels and the like. Finally he was engaged at the Cotton Club, where he started upon his road to fame. His music became the sensation of New York and his radio programs were the peer of the air. During this time he was featured in Memphis' "Show Girl" and played at many important engagements at the Hotel



### RADIO PROGRAM

Radio fans are invited to tune in 15, at 4:30, and hear a splendid program "Broadway Bound" over station 210k—of 45-weekly programs that will come will be in behalf of the N. A. A. C. P. group.

## PANTAGES TO OPEN SEPIA SHOW DEC. 28

By LAWRENCE F. LeMARE  
LOS ANGELES, Dec. 17.—Coming under the direction of an experienced producer rehearsal of Rodney Pantages' all sepia cast play, "Good Omen," has been rounded into form and announcement has been made that the initial performance will be given in one of Los Angeles theaters during the week of December 28th. There has been a slight reduction of characters since the aggregation came under the direction of the Pantages group.

According to those in the "know" the show promises to be one worthy of the time and effort put forth. It is said that Mr. Pantages feels that a good show can be produced outside of New York City.

## Calloway On Lucky Strike Hour Debut

NEW YORK CITY, Dec. 17.—Cab Calloway and His Cotton Club orchestra will make their initial bow upon the Lucky Strike radio hour, Tuesday, Dec. 23. His Highness of Hot-Dishes will be picked up by remote control from the floor of the Cotton Club in Harlem between 10 and 11 P. M.

Calloway's will be the first colored orchestra to be featured on an important commercial broadcast. His music on this occasion will be sent out over the entire N. B. C. network, a distinction in keeping with his popularity as a radio entertainer.

The inimitable Cab is playing on the stages of various Loew Theaters in the vicinity of New York, doubling from his regular engagement at the Cotton Club. This will continue until January 8, when he and his band leave upon an extended tour of the Paramount Theater, Crewe, which will take him as far west as Kansas City.

## New Mills Hit To Go On R. K. O.

NEW YORK CITY, Dec. 17.—Irving Mills has completed production of an all-colored stage unit, "Harlem Scandals," with a cast of 40 persons, including Buba Milay and His Jungle Band and a chorus of dancing girls.

Tim Moore and Mantan, comedians, are featured in the new unit, with the Four Melody Bomboms, feminine quartet; Marcia Marquez, singer and dancer; Clarence Robinson, dancer and Pete, Peaches and Duke, dancing trio.

"Harlem Scandals" opened in Warner Theaters in New Jersey and is scheduled for a tour of the RKO vaudeville circuit for the remainder of the season.

This is Mr. Mills' first venture as a producer of an attraction of this character, although he frequently has assembled stage units around the nucleus of one of his several bands, including Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway and the Mills Blue Rhythm band.

Astor, Hiltmore, Plaza and other places of aristocracy, which leads up to his triumphant tour that has made him the nation's favorite and "The King of Jazz."