

Duke Ellington Fascinates Interviewer as He Takes 'Down Beat' Writer to Task

By ALMENA DAVIS

Duke Ellington is a very fascinating person. This may not be news to thousands of females who've swooned over his sophisticated pan in the newspapers and swung, limp and hysterical, before band-

stands from coast to coast and overseas. It's not news to me, merely confirms a suspicion I had about the composer of that wistfully-world weary "Sophisticated Lady," that bizarre "piece of satire," "Black and Tan Fantasy," of "Solitude, In a Sentimental Mood. It Don't Mean a Thing, Mood Indigo. . . music which calls out joy or sorrow and blows it away on the high notes of a trumpet, or drowns it in the piano's bass. . .

He received me in the sitting room of his suite in the Dunbar Hotel. Impressive sentence, that! I sat down without being asked. I wonder, could that have accounted for the startled look on his face? . . . Or perhaps it was my bright and glowing youth. . . or maybe I resembled his Aunt Maggie. At any rate, we started the interview of an amicably enough, with him traipsing off to the bedroom to answer the phone while I fidgeted without. . . That telephone rendered yeoman service, as a punctuation mark or a mechanical paragraph-er, for this interview. Every-time I figured I had about heard enough from our hero on any one subject, the phone would ring. By the time he had returned from being hearty to acquaintances would meet him "at Whoozis house when he was here in '37 and just heard he was in town and just thought they'd call to see what he was doing tomorrow night." . . . I'd have framed another question.

I understood Mr. Ellington is quite a fashion plate. Well, gather around, boys, while I describe, minutely, the Ellington attire on the afternoon of January 6. He wore a bathrobe of the fantastic design affected by bathrobes with extremely extended, vertical, personalized, extra-neck of it peeked the collar of his beige pajama top and from the skirt of said bathrobe, there protruded two thin and unattractive legs. It does beat all how unattractive men's legs are. It's downright "disillusioning".

And it does beat all how unfortified and unprotected men look without their pants. It wouldn't be a surprise if trousers were not the essence of the alleged superiority of the male sex. Deprive them of their trousers. . . (don't go around taking me literally, girls) . . . and what do they look like? Any other two-legged amphibian. . .

The Ellington face is just quite an elemental matter. It's awfully wide-looking, like that of a bronze Barchus. Long and complex, it has two outstanding achievements: a pair of eyes, peered upon two ponderous pouches that are gleefully-wicked and surgically-intelligent by turns; and a mouth that epitomizes what a lady novelist would have described, with an exclamation, in the days when there lady novelists, as sensuous!

HAVE INTERVIEWING CELEBS
Having found himself some cigarettes and an ash tray and draiced his ranging prawn over a sofa, we fell to talking. I hate interviewing celebrities. I long for the day when I shall receive Hattie Headline in my suite in the Dunbar Hotel. Then, they do me now, I shall pose and posture for the awed little blighter, look at her and not see her, answer her idiotic questions with condescension and no real effort at truth, patronize her shamelessly, then clip her lousy little interview and put it in my scrap book.

Question No. 1 concerned the article by R. J. Larkin in Down Beat magazine which contended that Ellington, Basie, Lunceford and the rest of the fair-haired Senegambians of the popular music field, are "slipping. . . no longer the box office attractions of former years. . . poor show-men. . . and are being boot-ed out in the cold by the white folks who are "stealing their stuff."

From the Ellington lips there was emitted a loud pooh-pooh. In the first place, the Duke doubts that Brother Larkin knows whereof he speaks. He thinks it hardly likely that any booker would give out the kind of information that would enable Larkin to speak authoritatively. And as far as his own band is concerned, he knows the brother is all wet.

Like anything else in this inconstant world, the popularity of bands waxes and wanes. From 1939 to '34, Ellington enjoyed a heyday, riding the crest both financially and artistically. From '34 to '37 there were no tremendous profits. '37 to '38 were good; '39 slow. Then 1940 saw that whimsical wench, Mistress Public, take the Duke to her bosom again. For confirmation of this, see story in this paper concerning the 1940 Down Beat poll, in which the Ellington outfit was voted the second greatest in the world; and the Chicago Defender, which last week reported the Duke No. 1 for 1940; and then there's Swing magazine's award of 17 "whole notes," (100 per cent—excellence), out of 24, in 1940 to Ellington.

In the second place, Ellington continued, Mr. Larkin is wrong because white bands are NOT stealing Negro stuff. They can't. "The Duke did not rationalize that very controversial statement. He just spit it out like a blast from Cootie Williams' trumpet, and in a breath revived the old argument about whether jazz and swing, the commercial terms for the popular music of the day, are Negro music. . . and whether Negro music is all swing and jazz. He thinks not. His band, he claims, "doesn't make any attempt at playing jazz or swing." What it plays is "unaltered American Negro music." It just happens that this music is danceable and therefore popular. It is danceable, he explained, because it is "rhythmic" and "in strict tempo." Spirituals, if they are sung as the singer feels them and not as he has been taught" have this same danceable quality. . . and the "shouts" of the old fashioned church, the same. "Swing is only an emotional element, not a type of music. The emotional element is a strong part of Negro music, but it isn't Negro music."

White bands are not stealing the Ellington style for another reason. . . because they can't get to it even if they wanted to. He and a youngster whom he is developing and whom he considers one of the finest arrangers in the country, one Billy Strayhorn, do all the arranging for the Ellington group and they DON'T SELL ARRANGEMENTS! I was interested in his method of arranging. He says he writes a piece, not for the instruments, but for the MAN who is to be featured. Take the case of Cootie Williams, the great trumpeter, for instance. During the years Cootie was with Duke, the pieces in which he starred, were written for him. Recently gone over to Benny Goodman's sextet, (not the orchestral) Cootie, according to critics, is experiencing great difficulty, conforming to Goodman's style.

In Cootie's place, Ellington has a Chicago youth named Ray Nance, who plays the violin as well as the trumpet. There has heretofore been no fiddle in the Ellington music, but the Duke is writing something now that will star Nance on that instrument. Asked which of his countless compositions he is most fond, the composer said whichever one he is currently working on. He usually works after playing hours, two or three a m. He has practically finished a full length opera, based on the history of the American Negro, and is reading a synopsis of it to submit to a prospective producer. There's another musician coming up rapidly in the Ellington family, son Mercer, a 20-year old Juillard and Columbia student, who joined his dad here Tuesday. Mercer has been composing a lot lately and his father plans to play and perhaps record some of the young man's efforts. Duke's sister, Ruth, well known here, is opening a music publishing business in New York for the express purpose of publishing Mercer's work. . .

PLENTY TOUGH



Bottles strong enough to drive spikes are the newest creation of American glass manufacturers. Given the name Duraglas, the containers are lighter than the old style glass bottle, yet tough enough to drive spikes through four-inch planks. Above, Tom Martin, Los Angeles glass engineer, demonstrates the durability of one of the new style milk bottles.

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Usher Board Officers to Be Installed

Mrs. C. K. Burgess Re-elected Prexy of California Ushers

Re-elected officers of the Union Usher Board of California and its board of directors will be installed Sunday afternoon in services at Progressive Baptist church.

Mrs. C. K. Burgess was re-elected president of Union Usher Board at last week's meeting, held Tuesday at Second Baptist church. N. W. Tukey was also re-elected chairman of the board of directors. Mrs. Burgess read her annual report at the election meeting, expressing her gratitude for cooperation with her in 1940.

Mrs. Emma Jones was elected assistant chairman of the board of directors. Other officers are: Elijah Gibbs, Shiloh Baptist church, first vice president; J. C. Sims, Mt. Zion Baptist church, second vice pres.; Mrs. Francis Brown, Zion Hill Baptist, recording secretary; Miss Inez Hamilton, Bethel A.M.E., assistant sec'y.; Miss Gentry, Metropolitan Baptist, corresponding sec'y.; Mrs. Emma Spencer, independent, treasurer; J. C. Ellis, Zion Hill Baptist, chaplain; Mrs. Artelia James, Second Baptist, parliamentarian; Mrs. Ada Dawson, Zion Hill Baptist, second assistant; Miss Celestine Scooby, St. Paul Baptist, reporter; Mrs. Pearl Craig, Grant Chapel, ass't reporter; Maurice D. Smith, Progressive Baptist, critic; Miss Mary Lockley, Hamilton, historian; Mr. Harrison, New Hope, custodian.

Ethiopians Plan Big Offensive
Claims British Move "to Do Right" By Abyssinians
CHICAGO, Jan. 9.—George Padmore, London correspondent for the Chicago Defender, declared in a cable report to his paper here that "Haile Selassie and his Rasas are preparing final plans for an offensive against the Italians in Abyssinia."

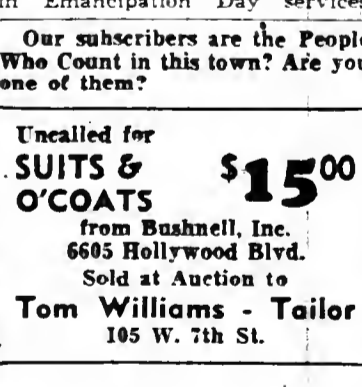
The British are moving to do the right thing by Abyssinia, Padmore inferred. He described activities of the authorities in Palestine where there are a number of Abyssinians and former Abyssinian holdings. "All Abyssinian properties which had been held under the custody of Enemy Property as Italian are now being returned to the Abyssinians," he said.

Preparations are now being made to reopen the Abyssinian Consulate general in Palestine. "All pending court cases between Italians and Abyssinians over property rights are being thrown out of court. "The Coptic church of Abyssinia owns considerable property in Jerusalem where Abyssinian monks in the Holy Land maintain their Headquarters."

EMANCIPATION SCRAP OF PAPER—WHITE
DETROIT, Jan. 9.—"When I hear of Emancipation services, I want to shout 'What Emancipation?' It is still nothing but a scrap of paper," declared Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, in an address delivered in Emancipation Day services.

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MRS. ESSIE L. TUCKER . . . speaks AKAs' Far Western Regional Director to Tell About Boule

Mrs. Essie L. Tucker of Santa Monica, Far Western Regional Director of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, will report on the boule at Kansas City at a meeting of Alpha Gamma Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority on Saturday at the home of Mrs. Cortez Ferguson Strang.

Outstanding among events at the boule, which Mrs. Tucker describes as the greatest in the history of the sorority, was the appropriation of \$6500 for the sorority's national projects, including the Mississippi Health project, which received \$2500 in 1941; the Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs, which received \$4000. The Council was founded by Norma Boyd of Washington, and will lobby in Congress for legislation, beneficial to Negroes and will continue vigilant to see that the laws are applied after adoption. Thomasina Johnson of Boston is the sorority's lobbyist.

Also included in the appropriation was a contribution of \$100 to the NAACP, bringing the sorority's total contribution to the Association in two years to \$600. Last year, the AKAs paid \$500 for a life membership, Mrs. A. W. Jordan, wife of Rev. Frederick D. Jordan, pastor of First A.M.E. church, will also report on the boule.

Mrs. Moss played Santa Claus and gifts were exchanged. Visitors present were: Mesdames Arthur Fields of Berkeley, John Lashley of Needles, and L. R. Raibon, Messrs. H. T. Grant, H. D. Rosard upon "Soy" H. Lee and Ben Ingraham.

SAN BERNARDINO WPC UNIT HOLDS ANNUAL YULE PARTY
SAN BERNARDINO, Jan. 9.—Once again members of the Anna B. Garner Women's Study club accepted the gracious hospitality of Mrs. Texanna Taylor of Spruce street, as the scene of their annual Christmas party Dec. 28.

The lovely home of Mrs. Taylor was decorated in Christmas colors, and gifts were piled around a beautifully decorated Christmas tree. President J. E. Muckleroy, called the members to order for a short program; highlights of which were, remarks on Cooperation, by Mrs. Alice Moss and a very clever quiz by Mrs. Dolly Radcliff assisted by Mrs. Charlotte Obara and Mrs. Marie Jiggett. Christmas carols were led by Mrs. M. Muckleroy.

After the program members were served a delicious turkey dinner by Mrs. Taylor, assisted by Mrs. Harriett Brown, chairman of Wives and Means, Mesdames Marion Holden, Holmes, Anna Waters and Letisia Ingraham.

More, Better Film Roles in Offing

Republic Launches Big Program to Include Negroes

NEW YORK, Jan. 9.—(By Ted Yates. TYP)—It would be putting it mild to say that Negroes crowded into the near-star brackets in 1940. Take it from me, they actually came into prominence with such box office force that at this early date, I will have you know, Republic Pictures is launching a major program to assure collective success for Negroes in motion pictures in 1941.

Outstanding was the performance of Clinton Rosmond and Marie Gover with Claire Trevor in "The Dark Command," a Republic picture. Hattie McDaniel won the Academy Award for her part in "Gone With the Wind," to bring to mind another great accomplishment of a sepian on the silver sheet, Louise Beavers.

Seen in many pictures, appeared last with Dick Powell and Joan Blondell in "I Want a Divorce." Although this and any number of other scripts called for Miss Beavers to do small bits, even in her brief moments she scores high.

In "Tin Pan Alley" and "Down Argentine Way" the Nicholas Brothers, sensational juvenile dancers, shared a number of brilliant moments with Ben Carter. And Carter is still getting fan mail for his work in "Maryland." The celebrated Hall Johnson Choir, too, has done well in the cinema. The Scott Grinoline Choir will also be remembered for the success it achieved, to the enjoyment of film fans everywhere, in Gene Autry's "Carolina Moon" in which Stanley Burnette co-starred.

Scoring the greatest individual triumph, aside from his brilliant acting, with youthful Frankie Darro in a series of mystery thrillers, Manton Moreland was the highlight of Republic's "Bowery Boy."

Florence O'Brien, a native Californian, making her debut in motion pictures, proved her ability in "Bowery Boy," among the other interesting features of that particular film. At 22, Miss O'Brien, by leaps and bounds, has won the hearts of theatre-goers.

LEIGH WHIPPER STILL TOPS
Consistently impressive in all his appearances on stage, screen and radio, Leigh Whipper, who will be long remembered for his part in the B-way stage success "Of Mice and Men," as well as the movie version, shared honors with Roy Rogers and Marjorie Reynolds in Republic's "Robin Hood of the Pecos." It is Republic's latest which is brimming with action and dramatic suspense.

Harlemites will recall the comic antics of laugh-provoking Billie Yarbo—now billed as Lil-

Public Auction Set Tomorrow on Avenue Land

Seeking to place tax-delinquent land back on the active list again, the County Tax Collector will conduct a public auction Jan. 10 on several parcels of land in the City of Los Angeles, among them some parcels in the Central avenue section.

The sale will be conducted by Deputy Frank Murphy on the fifth floor of the Hall of Justice at Temple and Broadway, beginning at 9:00 o'clock a. m.

Lian Yarbo, who thrilled at the old Lafayette Theatre, and at Harlem's famous Apollo theatre when she appeared in the chorus line of many a snappy, tuneful, fast-stepping musical comedy. I wonder if the Hollywood publicists know that Billie almost lost her chance for stardom when her eyesight was almost gone but, thanks to superb medical treatment and plenty of rest the Harlem favorite pulled through. Hers is truly a human interest story.

Acclaimed Hollywood's "find" Miss Yarbo was first seen in "You Can't Take It With You." Now in the first of the Higgins Family series this Harlem product clearly has indicated that she is the newest and most sensational comedian of the films.

Willie Best was officially rated four stars for his work in the thrilling pix, "Who Killed Aunt Maggie?" in which he appeared with John Hubbard and in the Bob Hope thrillers.

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SELLS FOR LESS

Current Topics: The Negro In National Defense

"Self Help" Still Held Greatest Need of U. S. Largest Minority
LOS ANGELES—While leaders are commending the swiftness with which the national defense program is moving, they still hold that as far as Uncle Sam's largest minority group is concerned, "self-help" is still the only solution for Negroes.

Pointing out that Negroes are being discriminated against in army and navy, and more flagrantly in industries. Race leaders are calling all who make up "America's Forgotten Tenth" to lose no opportunity to help themselves.

In making the plea for national unity, John A. Roe, representing California's economic institutions called attention to the fact that the Negro must support and invest in his own institutions in order to assure employment of his youth and respect for his status.

The opportunity being offered to small investors by the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company was seen as the soundest investment offer of the year. Offering for sale \$200,000.00 in Golden State units ("Certificates of Advancement and Contribution-Series 'B'") and no less than 5% thereafter on these securities sold in as few as two units at \$10.00 each, on an easy monthly installment plan. Californians are urged to take advantage of the offer at once.

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