

0923-255

# Marshall, Bass On Own After 6 Years With Duke

New York—Duke Ellington's regular bassist since 1948 has been Wendell Marshall, whose early fame was based more on the fact that he was the legendary Jimmy Blanton's first cousin than on his own considerable musical ability. But, gradually, listeners, and especially musicians, have begun to realize through the years that the quietly conscientious Marshall has become one of the most dependably creative bassists in contemporary jazz.

Marshall's work on Ellington records and during Duke's personal appearance stands has been a model of steadily pulsating swing, good tone, and the kind of musicianly imagination that is far better heard than described.

Now Wendell is on his own. After Duke finished a long Basin Street engagement Jan. 2, Wendell left the band. His plans are still tentative, but he already has made arrangements to resume his formal studies on bass—a desire he has long been prevented from fulfilling because of the time-disintegrating difficulties of years of one-night stands. Eventually, Wendell intends to form his own combo. Characteristically, he's already planned ahead in terms of the instrumentation and style he wants. He'd like a clarinet doubling on tenor and a flutist doubling on alto, as well as piano and bass.

### Consolidation

For Marshall, the present moment, however, is one for consolidation and further thought concerning a future based on what are by now many years of active jazz experience. Marshall is 34, having been born in St. Louis of a musical family. When he was still a child, he was attracted to the piano and played by ear though he never had any lessons. He also had about a month of violin instruction when he was 8. But the major influence on his musical life didn't take place until Marshall was

Marshall, who was only two years older than Blanton, was interested in music before Jimmy came, but he was the one who channeled it—into the bass. It was the feeling he seemed to get out of it. It sort of caught fire with me.



Wendell Marshall

"It was Jimmy, you know," emphasizes Marshall, "who really revolutionized jazz bass. His rhythmic line was more melodic than most bassists had generally thought of playing; and his solos had the mark of his tremendous individuality. He used the bass like a horn for his solos, and he made the bass come to the front as any other solo instrument would. He could do that because he had an extensive musical background — Jimmy played other instruments as well as bass, and he arranged. And the uncle who had originally taught him in Chattanooga played all instruments.

"Jimmy had been playing the small violin since he was about 10, and at about the same age, he also began arranging for piano and violin. Another fact that

that instrument, probably picked up once. His intervals were very different from any I'd heard at the time. They were wider and weren't the usual 1-3-5 or 6 patterns that were common then. I didn't know

what they were at that time, but now I realize they were more along the lines the men are playing today. Jimmy also played piano—he played things harmonically I seldom hear men play even now. He was way out there musically, period.

### A Perfectionist

"Jimmy was very quiet and he was a perfectionist. His love for music was intense, and he was studying and thinking about it constantly. I remember that at that time, he particularly liked Lunceford and wanted to play with him. Jimmy left St. Louis in 1939 to go with Duke Ellington, and he died of TB three years later when he was 24.

"Those people who heard Jimmy only on records never really got to hear what he could do, as good as the records were. You had to catch him at a session. It was something almost unbelievable! When he had a chance to play at a session for an hour running, he really turned loose. It was when he was jamming like that at a St. Louis club that Johnny Hodges heard him. Billy Strayhorn came around too and they sent someone to get Duke. The story goes that Duke didn't want to come at first and finally arrived in his pajamas with his coat over them. After Duke heard him, he started featuring Jimmy with the band the next night.

"When Jimmy left St. Louis, he left a bass behind—a little half-sized fiddle. It lay around for about half a year, and the more Jimmy played with Duke, the more my interest in that bass grew. I picked it up finally and for six months practiced with the radio and with records, and then I played some non-union gigs at school. I joined the union in December, 1941, and I got with Lionel Hampton about that time. My being hired by Hampton was more or less a publicity stunt, I guess, because I was Jimmy's cousin—I'd only been playing about seven months. I stayed three or four months with Hampton and went back to school, Lincoln University, at Jefferson City, Mo.

