

ment which he has gathered toward the shaping of a piano concerto to gather dust in his rented room in an apartment at 545 Edgecombe Avenue. His routine is well established now: he cabarets all night and often through the early morning, drinks, talks, sometimes eats; after a brief sleep he will get up to work or to play piano battles with Aaron or to come down to an Ellington rehearsal or record session. He doesn't have time between the cabaretting, the sleeping and his actual assignments for Duke, to get much other work done. He can be quite late in turning in those assignments, and he usually is, following a pattern set by Duke himself. Duke will forgive him anything, for, after all, when he feels the strength of God within him and the sense of doom evanescent without, he writes such magnificent music or goes over to Duke's apartment, at five in the morning, to talk about it. And he is still the remarkable little man who, after an evening's "sashaying" around the town of Buffalo, eating here, drinking there, got "jus' loaded enough" so he wasn't quite sure what had happened to his drinking companion, gathered hat and coat and found where the band was playing. He walked, slowly, with all the dignity he could muster, up to the stage, carefully placed his coat on the back of the chair, his hat on the back of his head and went to sleep, right on the stage. Through better than an hour and a half Strayhorn slept on the stage in full view of the audience. But neither Duke nor any of the musicians would disturb him.

Once, recently, Duke and Peaswee', as Ellington calls him, shared a roomette together, Strayhorn taking the upper berth, Duke the lower. Several hours after they had retired Strayhorn's pillow fell down.

Duke inclined his head outside his berth and looked up at Strayhorn. "What was that?" he asked Billy.

"That was my pillow," Billy said.

"Oh," Duke said, "I thought it was a cloud."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

JUMP FOR JOY

"I'VE GOT THE GIRL," DUKE SAID. "SHE'LL SUN-TAN THE FIRST ten rows."

This was in the early summer of 1941. Duke and the movie writers who formed the American Revue Theatre were talking over possible stars and featured players for a new type of revue. It was to atone for the guilt feelings of the movie writers. It was to atone for the serious mistakes and grievous errors, of omission and commission, in the treatment of Negroes in the American theater. It was to feature the Ellington band and such talent as Duke thought fitted with it. But the advice of these movie writers had to be listened to. They were putting up much of the money. They were writing the skits and the lyrics. They were bright men.

"Who is she?" one of the advisory council asked.

"Lena Horne," Duke answered.

"Good girl," somebody confirmed.

"She'll cost too much," somebody denied. Lena wasn't a big name then, but she was enough of a singer on records and at spots in New York and Hollywood so she could command a fair salary.

"No go," somebody else added. Lena was out. Nonetheless, a good share of sun-tanning was effected. There were some very pretty girls in the cast finally arrived at, notably Dorothy Dandridge, who is getting a good career as a movie actress under way. There were good comedians and good dancers and good singers and the Ellington sections and soloists. During the show's run, it impressed the "hip," confirmed Duke's conception of the validity of honest Negro theater and got a number of excellent

careers under way. And it was the vehicle for the finest show score Duke ever wrote.

When George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* was produced by the Theatre Guild in 1935, Duke was asked to comment on the first American opera by the *New Theatre*, a leftist monthly. Duke was not at all loath to comment.

"Grand music and a swell play, I guess, but the two don't go together," he said. "I mean that the music did not hitch with the mood and spirit of the story. Maybe I'm wrong, or perhaps there is something wrong with me, but I have noted this in other things lately too . . . I am not singling out *Porgy and Bess*."

Duke listed a bill of particulars. It is about Negroes but "it does not use the Negro musical idiom. It was not the music of Catfish Row or any other kind of Negroes." The music was grand, Duke said, because it was in the spirit of the "grand" composers and the composers of grand opera, too much in their spirit, as a matter of fact. "Gershwin didn't discriminate. . . . It [the music] was taken from some of the best and a few of the worst. . . . He borrowed from everyone from Liszt to Dickie Wells' kazoo band." Ellington demonstrated the way Gershwin borrowed, showing the derivation of some passages from *Rhapsody in Blue* in *Where Has My Easy Rider Gone?*, a Negro blues. His own music, Duke explained, was truly "in the Negro idiom." And he played what he called a "gutbucket waltz," still a waltz, still Negro. "I have not stolen or borrowed."

He objected strongly to much of the music in *Porgy and Bess* which did not characterize the scenes it set. "The actors," he said, "had to make their own characterizations . . . There was a crap game such as no one has ever seen or heard. It might have been opera, but it wasn't a crap game. The music went one way and the action another. . . . Still, the audience gasped: 'Don't the people get right into their parts?' and 'Aren't they emotional!'"

In any honest Negro musical play, Duke said, there would have to be social criticism. Talking of a projected movie short on which he was working, Duke gave an example of what he

meant: "I have an episode which concerns the death of a baby . . . I put into the dirge all the misery, sorrow and undertones of the conditions that went with the baby's death. It was true to and of the life of the people it depicted. The same thing cannot be said for *Porgy and Bess*."

The *New Theatre* interviewer, Edward Morrow, summed up well for Ellington as well as himself. "No Negro could possibly be fooled by *Porgy and Bess*. . . . The production is cooked up, flavored and seasoned to be palmed off as 'authentic' of the Charleston Gullah Negroes—who are, one supposes, 'odd beasts.' But the times are here to debunk such tripe as Gershwin's lamp-black Negroisms, and the melodramatic trash of the script of *Porgy*. . . . There will be fewer generalized gin-guzzling, homicidal maniacs, and more understanding of rotten socio-economic conditions. . . . There will be fewer wicked, hip-swinging 'yellow-gal hustler' stereotypes. . . . The music will express terror and defiance in colorful Negro musical idioms which have remained melodious despite a life of injustices. They will compose and write these things because they feel the consequences of an existence which is a weird combination of brutality and beauty."

Morrow was overoptimistic perhaps. A few years later along came *Mamba's Daughters* and *Cabin in the Sky* (stage and movie versions), which once again bowed handkerchief-heads. Bill Robinson continued to play the arch Uncle Tom character. Billy Rose produced a mildly syncopated version of Bizet's *Carmen*, with the modern counterparts of the Spanish liquor-guzzling, homicidal maniacs found, naturally, of course, among Negroes. He used also the usual exaggerated "dese, dem, dose, I'se gwine" diction, and had that last line spoken by the colored equivalent of Don José (Joe)—that immortal sentence, "String me high to a tree," an incredible line to hear a Negro speak, with his people's tragic history of lynching.

Duke has the permanent answer to these stereotypes and caricatures of Negroes. It is as well a deft parry of the thrusts of amateur anthropologists who refer to all Africans of darker color as savages. It's a musical comedy called, tentatively, *Air-*

Conditioned Jungie. The opening scene sets mood and clime and theme. In a particularly chic living-room, decorated in the best of urbane good taste, but not given to flamboyant extravagances, sit the King and Queen of one of the ancient African tribes. She's dressed in a gown by Schiaparelli; he in a sleekly fitted dinner jacket. They are drinking their after-dinner brandy and coffee in relaxed comfort: the house is air-conditioned. A muffled bell rings. The King picks up the telephone.

"Yes," he says, "yes, yes. Mmm-hmm. Oh, bother. Well, if there's nothing we can do about it." He slams the receiver down on its cradle and turns unhappily to his consort.

"What is it, darling?" she asks.

"There's another of those expeditions coming over from America. Trying to discover the original sources of their jazz, you know?"

"Oh, damn," the Queen curses.

"Yes, my dear," the King says, "we shall have to get out our leopard skins again."

The story goes on from there to inquire, not too politely, but without inflammatory wrath either, into the castes and molds of Negro culture in Africa and America, those which are true and those which are false, the whole structure of myth and legend about the colored people. It isn't too likely that this ironic inquiry will ever reach Broadway or Hollywood production. Its subtleties will not be understood; its stratagems will probably not be appreciated.

Much of *Jump for Joy* was above people's heads, too. But there was so much warmth and humor and musical enjoyment in that revue that most people who came to see it couldn't help loving it. Almena Davis, Editor of the Los Angeles *Tribune*, one of the most exacting and most able of Negro journalists, caught its mood and named its character. "*Jump for Joy*," she said, "gawky and as unaware of its real charm as an adolescent, is new and exciting. It's a new mood in the theatre, reflecting truly the happy satire of colored life. In *Jump for Joy* Uncle Tom is dead. God rest his bones."

The title song of the musical announced its point of view

with great good humor. Paul Webster, who wrote the lyrics for most of the songs, did very well by Duke's social philosophy in these words:

Fare thee well, land of cotton,
Cotton lisle is out of style, honey chile,
Jump for joy.

Don't you grieve, little Eve,
All the hounds, I do believe,
Have been killed, ain't you thrilled,
Jump for joy.

Have you seen pastures, groovy?
Oh, *Green Pastures* was just a technicolor movie.

It goes on from there to its last eight measures, more typical show-song stuff about stepping up to Pete when you stomp up to Heaven and giving Pete some skin. To "give skin" is pretty basic social exchange among musicians, especially colored musicians today. Instead of shaking hands, you pat or slap palms. There are many "skin" variations: some involve touching little fingers, some thumb and pinky, some go from rump to elbow to little finger to thumb to palm. Generally you take the skin you've been given and deposit it, in an elaborately formal pantomime gesture, in a pocket. Tricky Sam has a lovely way of giving skin, preferably to a pretty girl. He takes her hand, rolls the skin together from wrist and fingers, as if he were gathering tobacco to fill a home-made cigarette; then he closes her fingers slowly over the skin gathered so carefully in the center of her palm, takes the fist which results and kisses it with surpassing elegance.

Jump for Joy was "hip." People gave skin. They were, upon occasion, dressed in "zoot" suits. As a matter of fact, the first extensive treatment of the "zoot suit with a drape shape and a reet pleat" was in this revue. Pot, Pan and Skillet, whom Almena Davis called "the unholy triumvirate," danced dead-pan through a tailor-shop scene in which the zootiest suit ever was draped about one of their shapes. The language, the costumes, the dancing, the singing in *Jump for Joy* were the real

thing, music with a beat, talk with an understanding, bodies moving with unpretentious grace across the stage of the Los Angeles Mayan Theatre.

The sketches and skits followed the lines of the title song lyric. "Cotton lisle was out of style." "*Green Pastures* was just a technicolor movie." The first half opened with an explanation of the place and position of *The Sun-Tanned Tenth of the Nation*. It closed with a little serenade entitled *Uncle Tom's Cabin Is a Drive-In Now*. The second act spotted Rex Stewart in his *Concerto for Klinkers*, one of his several engaging cornet chop sueys in which wrong notes, humbug notes, notes just a hair's breadth sharp or flat, are paraded amusingly across the valves and through the bell of his capricious horn. And then Joe Turner, the great blues singer, turned up dressed as a policeman in a skit called *Ssh! He's on the Beat!* Joe came on every night about 9:30, and his fans turned up every night about that time. They listened to him shout the blues for fifteen minutes and then left. Joe himself left, went to a near-by gin-mill and played his own records on the juke-box, singing duets with his recorded voice.

Marie Bryant and Paul White cavorted through *Bli-Blip*, a bright Ellington jump-piece, and Marie came back to do her parody of Katharine Hepburn. Marie and Paul and an exotic dancer named "Garbo" kept toes on a high level. "Garbo," whose body, Almena Davis said, "was like strawberry mousse . . . interpreted Ellingtonia like it cries to be interpreted." Marie swung her hips intriguingly in a *Chocolate Shake* to one of Duke's catchiest tunes. The show used Strayhorn's "*A*" *Train* and Duke's *I've Got It Bad and That Ain't Good*, perhaps the most touching of Ellington's torchy ballads. Ivie's singing of its melancholy strains stopped the show and sold hundreds of thousands of records. In contrast, she "kicked" the slightly raucous plaint, *Rocks in My Bed*, which was also a record success. Herbie Jeffries sang several of Duke's songs, none better than he did *The Brownskin Gal in the Calico Gown* and the title tune. Herbie's tall, lithe figure, trained in all-colored Western films, strode a stage with some magnificence, and his soft voice,

excellently disciplined by Duke, made more than ordinary sense of Paul Webster's lyrics. Dorothy Dandridge was lovely to look at, and Wonderful Smith and Willie Lewis and Udell Johnson were very funny to listen to. The show was jammed with specialties: the bands' soloists, Rex and Johnny and Ben Webster and Ray Nance, another newcomer, Lawrence and Tricky and Barney and Carney, got some opportunities to display their capacious talents; the writing was fresh and its delivery invigorating.

Each night, for twelve weeks, as soon as the curtain was down, the collective which ran the show met to discuss that night's performance. The material was always in flux.

"You're sure, now, that the point of that first act curtain gets across?" somebody, one of the writers, perhaps Sid Kuller or Paul Webster or Hal Borne or somebody, would ask Duke. "People won't think we're 'Tomming,' will they?"

"No, no, baby," Duke would assure them, individually. "It isn't 'Tom' stuff." They were worried about the white-haired Uncle and his millions of followers more than anything else. In this show he was to be killed dead.

Jump for Joy lasted less than three months. It didn't go anywhere from Hollywood, just dragged itself out as a little bit of this stage show and that in theaters in Boston, Chicago, and so on. But it left enough of an impression so that most of those who saw it and are concerned with a vigorous and honest Negro theater continually refer to it as *the* Negro musical. It was probably the only employment of colored singers and dancers and comedians which really didn't lapse into crude caricature of the Negro at some point, which didn't pander to the white man's distorted idea of colored singing and dancing and comedy. It was ahead of its time and presented on the wrong coast of America for theatrical success, but it made its valorous point.

Duke's plans for opera and operetta and musical comedy and revue have never crystallized, since the demise of *Jump for Joy*. He's always working on three or four or half a dozen at once. One was an idea based on modernizing *Aesop's Fables* in jump

time. Another was the *Air-Conditioned Jungle*, which ended up as a title for a piece written for clarinetist Jimmy Hamilton. But Duke has not entirely relinquished the hope of doing that bright satire. He wants to do a show for Lena, because "she's got a soul." And he's talked with Paul Robeson about one. He's got a complex rhythmic pattern worked out for a dance-drama, which may end up as a ballet or a scene in a musical, utilizing the polyrhythms of African drumming, music set in two against that set in three against four to the bar, and motions to follow the twists and turns of the beats against each other. Once, in the time when Duke made so many plans for large-scale expression and did not carry them out, even in part, it would have been possible to dismiss these ideas as verbal blueprints, which would always remain at the nebulous plane of conversation pieces. But Duke has *Jump for Joy* behind him, "gawky and unaware of its real charm" as it was, which demanded and extracted from him a brilliant score and ingenious casting and matching of cast and music. He wrote and helped to direct a musical which cast out some of the devils from the Negro entertainment world. With that achieved, it is certain that other shows will follow. They will follow as *Black, Brown and Beige* followed *Jump for Joy* a year and a few months later.

Jump for Joy, though it spun no narrative, told a story, the story of Negroes in the entertainment world, what they looked like and how they acted and danced and sang and made fun. Unlike *Porgy and Bess*, its music did "hitch with the mood and spirit of the story." "It was true to and of the life of the people it depicted." There was no heartless lampooning of Negroes, as in the country-club scene in *Carmen Jones*. Here was a happy show which still had dignity. Duke had done what he'd always wanted to do. With that accomplished, the success and the rich articulation of ideas which followed were inevitable. Since the trip to Europe in 1939, everything, work and play, thinking and acting and composing and performing, seemed to fit into a pattern of achievement. *Black, Brown and Beige* was the proper next step, as Duke confronted his twentieth anniversary in popular music.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BLACK, BROWN AND BEIGE

WHEN THE BAND CAME BACK EAST IN THE WINTER OF 1942, there were great cheers from its supporters up and down the Atlantic Coast. Duke had stayed in California, with just short excursions away, for almost two years. Listeners in the East had heard the band on the air, had spun his records on their turntables, but had not heard the Ellington musicians in person. The personnel of the band had changed greatly. Everybody was interested. Loyal supporters of the band were anxious.

The first big change in the band had taken place in October, 1940. Cootie Williams left Duke to join Benny Goodman's Sextet. Benny offered him more money than Duke could pay him, to play in his Sextet and to take spotlighted solos before the band. The figure was good, the stardom sounded good. Cootie left. Dire were the predictions of the Ellington's band's future. Duke was finished. If not finished, he was on his way out. Nobody could replace Cootie. That distinctive growl sound, that remarkable open trumpet tone could not be elicited from any other horn. Raymond Scott composed a dirge to accompany the sad shaking of heads, *When Cootie Left the Duke*, which was one of his band's most successful jazz instrumentals. But Cootie was replaced and the replacement, bruited about in the trade press as just "temporary," turned out to be happily permanent. The man who replaced Cootie became one of Duke's greatest stars, one of the most versatile performers ever to hit jazz.

Duke brought Strayhorn to hear Ray Nance at Joe's De Luxe, a South Side spot in Chicago, where he was featured as trumpeter, violinist, singer and dancer. Duke was impressed with him, amazed at his freshness and versatility, and Ray was hired. Ray was a Chicago boy, born in 1913, brought up on the South Side. He was taught violin by a friend of his mother's, a photographer and musician named Charlotte Page. After eight years with her, he studied under her teacher, Max Fisher, at the Chicago Musical College for another four. And during his years of study, he peppered his education along traditional musical lines with gigs and some longer engagements fronting small and large jump bands. He played opposite Nat "King" Cole's band in battles of music, then got jobs with Earl Hines and Horace Henderson, and, as a single, at the 5100 and other clubs in Chicago.

From the first number Nance played with Duke, his ebullient, infectious personality was clear. When he jumped up to play a solo, only sheer sparkle made his short little figure apparent behind the broad shoulders of the trombonists who sat in front. Like Freddy Jenkins before him, Ray was a "Posey," a natural showman. When he came down to stage front to play fiddle solos, he fenced an imaginary opponent with his violin bow. He danced brightly, short nervous steps alternating with great twirls and swirls. He sang, as do most singing trumpeters, with a rhythmic rip in his voice. On the band's record of *Bli-Bli-Bli*, from *Jump for Joy*, his fetching, slightly raucous singing was heard. On *Take the "A" Train*, his trumpeting, more tasteful than anybody else's in the band at that time (1941) could be apprehended. Singing, dancing, fiddling through such very different pieces as *Moon Mist* and *C Jam Blues*, blowing bright horn on *Brown Suede* and "*C*" *Blues*, for Barney's small unit, Ray was in. Cootie had been brilliantly replaced; that gloomy gossip had been scotched.

Next big loss was Barney Bigard. He left in July, 1942, to join Freddy Slack, a white band, on the West Coast, later to form his own little band. Nobody could replace him. Chauncey Haughton, a veteran of the Chick Webb band, took over his

chair for a year, playing the clarinet parts with legitimate exactness, but without distinction. Later, more successful substitutes were found, but Barney's particular brilliance on his instrument was his own alone. In the growth of Jimmy Hamilton as a clarinetist of stature, another sort of musician is being developed in his place, but it is true beyond cavil that Barney is missed.

By the time Duke got to New York, he was carrying four trumpets. Rex was the veteran, now playing cornet, preferring the shorter, stubbier horn's brilliance to the more reliable, full tone of the trumpet. Wallace Jones, who had taken Whetsol's place, was next oldest in length of service. Then came Ray Nance and Harold Baker. Baker was an added starter, a fourth of surpassing brilliance. He had been a mainstay in the Andy Kirk band for some years. Before that he had played with Teddy Wilson's big band and, briefly, with Louis Armstrong. Harold was everybody's idea of how to play lead trumpet. His big singing tone carried a melody as nobody else could, and his conception, so important in shaping a jazz phrase, was rhythmic. There was some dyspeptic talk about his not fitting Ellington, but one hearing of his choruses of *Stardust* and *Body and Soul*, later of his parody performance of *Paper Doll* in the olden manner, was sufficient to allay that querulous discussion.

The vocalists had changed, too. Ivie Anderson had wanted to leave for some time. She wanted to get back to California and tend to her cooking: Ivie's Chicken Shack was a successful Los Angeles restaurant and Miss Anderson was anxious to supervise the roasting and the toasting, the drying and the frying of the legs and wings and breasts which were her delectable specialties. She gave fair warning, and Duke replaced her over some months, an interesting process. First, Joya Sherrill, a seventeen-year-old Detroit schoolgirl, came in, with Betty Roche, to pick up some of Ivie's tricks, her showmanship, her fine understanding of song lyrics and her remarkable feeling for the way this band thought and felt and acted and played. But the tall girl with the bright eyes and the eager manner was still very young in the summer of 1942. She needed more schooling,

both formal education and band experience: Joya went back to school after four months with Ellington, and Betty Roche stayed.

Betty had sung with the Savoy Sultans and other little outfits. She'd gigged around, played all kinds of spots and was a trained blues singer with something of the manner of Billie Holiday. She bent notes and carried measures along in cadenced groups much like the magnificent Billie. In addition, she had her own specialties, an infectious *Body and Soul*, with her own added lyrics ("Take it all, Take it all, Take it all, Body and Soul") at up tempo, lots of blues. Duke wrote a salacious set of blues choruses for her, *I Love My Lovin' Lover*, which Betty sold with delicious gesture and rowdy shout. It was all about taking her man to his wife's front door and his wife turning out to be as big as Joe Louis ("I ain't gonna do that no more"). Betty was still new when the band hit New York in the winter of 1942 and Ellington fans crowded the bandstand at a one-nighter in the Royal Windsor Ballroom in uptown Manhattan to "dig" her and the other new additions to the band.

Jimmy Britton was new, too. He replaced Herbie Jeffries, who went back to the Coast to start his own café and make records for small companies, records which revealed all his melodramatic defects, unfortunately, and none of the charm which he had displayed with Duke. The balancing musicianship of Ellington and his musicians was sadly missed on those sides, but even on them some of Herbie's rich voice and tender feeling could be heard. He was easily the best ballad singer Duke ever had. Jimmy Britton was the pride of St. Louis, a boy in his early twenties who never quite "got with" Ellington's music. But he did sing an occasional song beautifully; Strayhorn wrote naturally for soft voices like his and in such arrangements as Billy's *Just As Though You Were Here*, score and singer matched perfectly and set exquisite moods. Jimmy was cut out of the finale of *Black, Brown and Beige* at the dress rehearsal performance at Rye High School the night before the Carnegie Hall concert, and he was a broken-hearted boy. The cut was inevitable: he had been assigned some gaudy flag-waving

lyrics in the patriotic splurge with which *BBB* concluded. They had to go. But Jimmy didn't last long after that.

January 17 to 23, 1943, Ellington Week was proclaimed in the music business and among Negroes. It was the anniversary, roughly, of Duke's New York debut, twenty years earlier, and the week before his first Carnegie concert. All up and down New York, jazzmen were discussing a coming event. It was to be a benefit for Russian War Relief and the committee in charge of the affair had done a good job in getting word around that Duke was going to do a concert for them. Musicians to whom Duke was an idol were excited. They came in large number to hear rehearsals for the concert at Nola Studios, where all bands in New York rehearse, in the Hollywood Theatre building on Broadway between 51st and 52nd Streets. There was talk about a forty-five-minute work, something symphonic in conception and dimension.

Rehearsals were devoted almost entirely to this forty-five-minute work, called *Black, Brown and Beige*. Duke stood before the band with the great score before him, rehearsing it piecemeal, section by section, sometimes in sequence, more often out of it. The hangers-on, who came from every part of the music business, "sidemen" (members of bands), bandboys, young fans, music publishers, friends of those in the band, critics, were disappointed.

"Doesn't sound like much," a musician commented.

"Awfully choppy," another agreed.

Don Redman, who was listening with intense interest, turned to the disappointed musicians. "You're so wrong," he said. After the concert they agreed that they had been wrong.

There were a lot of fine performances at that first Ellington concert at Carnegie, on Saturday evening, January 23, *Black, Brown and Beige* was preceded and followed by a distinguished number of Ellington compositions, but it was the long work that held primary interest.

The concert opened with *Black and Tan Fantasy* and *Rockin' in Rhythm*, Ellington classics. Then came two pieces of son Mercer's, *Moon Mist* and *Jumpin' Punkins*, two of his first

ambitious efforts: the first a beautiful example of Nance's fiddling; the second a swing exercise, with Sonny's cheerful drumming its highlight. This formed the first section of the concert. The second comprised three of Duke's *Portraits*, tone pictures of Bert Williams, "Bojangles" (dancer Bill Robinson, of course) and singer Florence Mills. The Florence Mills tribute was a scantily rescored version of Bubber's old *Black Beauty*, with Harold Baker carrying its heavy solo. Rex played perky cornet through the first two *Portraits*, with nimble assistance from Tricky Sam in the impression of the great Negro comedian and from Ben Webster in the sketch of the tap dancer. Missing from this group was Duke's charming *Portrait of the Lion*, pianist Willie Smith, which he had written several years earlier.

Black, Brown and Beige, which followed, was the centerpiece of the concert; it in turn was followed by the brief intermission, after which the listeners, eagerly discussing the merits and faults of *BBB*, were hastily summoned back into the hall to watch and hear the presentation of a plaque in honor of Duke's twenty years in the music business. Movie actor Dennis Morgan made the presentation, stumbling unhappily through lines which were written for him. But his stumbling and the hastiness and roughness of the whole ceremony were forgotten in the rush of emotion which the Ellington musicians, the Ellington friends and fans and Duke himself felt as the names of the thirty-two musicians on the plaque were read. These were the men who congratulated Duke Ellington, who tendered him gratitude and admiration and respect for his formidable musical achievement, men from both sides of the musical tracks, who were anxious to break down every line of musical snobbery, from the social to the aesthetic. A baton was fitted into the top of the plaque. Under it were the signatures.

"Leopold Stokowski," Dennis Morgan read. That was the first name. A man who had given jazz and Ellington great support. "Walter Damrosch," George Gershwin's first sponsor. "Edward Johnson," the Metropolitan Opera impresario. The other names followed, all well known in music, from every

branch of music. John Charles Thomas, William Grant Still, Deems Taylor, Earl Hines, Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Lawrence Tibbett, Marjorie Lawrence, Artur Rodzinski (he had not then decided boogie-woogie was the cause of juvenile delinquency), Roy Harris, Count Basie, Albert Coates, Fritz Reiner, Eugene Ormandy, Morton Gould, Kurt Weill, Aaron Copland, Paul Whiteman, Benny Goodman, Jerome Kern, Cab Calloway, Artie Shaw, Max Steiner, Dean Dixon, Allen Wardwell, L. E. Behymer.

After a short wait the air was broken with the searing sounds of *Ko-Ko*, an excerpt from the incomplete score for Duke's opera, *Boola*, which had also yielded much of the material for *BBB*. The names of both the opera and the excerpt are African, but the music is simply Ellington. Tumultuous brass writing, with brilliant accenting by piano and bass and Tricky Sam's growling trombone, carries all before it.

Then it was Strayhorn's turn. A *Dirge*, *Nocturne* and *Stomp* were announced, but only the first and last were played. The *Stomp* was the jump piece, *Johnny Come Lately*. The *Dirge* was something new, played at that concert and since dropped by the band. It is fit only for concerts, and somehow, by its nature, not fit, Duke feels, for his concerts. It is jazz only in its colors. Its scoring, for valve trombone, two trumpets and saxes, out of tempo, implements its dry, acrid figures: it really is a dirge. The audience was nonplused by what it heard, music that sounded more like Milhaud and latter-day Stravinsky than Ellington, with only a bent note here and slow syncopation there to remind them whose concert it was. But for all these difficulties, most musicians at the concert listened attentively and were deeply moved by Billy's somber chant for jazz instruments.

Next, a flock of concertos featured various men in the band. Chauncey Haughton on clarinet did Barney Bigard's *Are You Sticking?* (which is a word-play in Harlemese on "licorice stick"). Juan Tizol was featured, along with Ray Nance, in his own Turkish delight, *Bakiff*, exotically near-Eastern in harmonies and rhythms. *Jack the Bear* (ain't nowhere—to complete

the couplet well known as a description of a Harlem character) spotted Junior Raglin on bass. Then *Blue Belles of Harlem*, which featured, as Duke said, "the pianist in the band." Johnny Hodges elicited screams with his tortuous unveiling of Strayhorn's *Day Dream*, and Lawrence Brown played jump trombone, unusual for him in the forties when most of his assignments were of a lusher sort, in *Rose of the Rio Grande*, the one number on the program not written by Duke or one of the boys in the band. *Boy Meets Horn*, Rex's half-valve love story, concluded this section of the concert.

The concert itself was concluded with a trilogy: *Don't Get Around Much Any More*, then enjoying great popularity as a pop tune; *Goin' Up*, which appeared in an abortive version in *Cabin in the Sky*, but here gave blowing space to Tricky and Johnny and Lawrence and Ben Webster and sixteen impassioned bowing measures to Ray Nance; and *Mood Indigo*, which until quite recently was Ellington's inevitable closing piece, a soft end to an evening which had missed none of the dynamics from *pp* to *ff*.

When the audience left the hall that night it was buzzing with talk about the various soloists, about the works of Duke and Billy and Tizol, but those buzzes skirted the louder roars of approval or condemnation which greeted Ellington's long work, *Black, Brown and Beige*. One listening, most people felt, was not enough. Unfortunately, only a privileged few were ever to hear the complete work again.

Duke introduced each of the three sections of *Black, Brown and Beige* verbally. He explained first of all that it was "a tone parallel to the history of the American Negro." This was the suite he had been talking about since the middle thirties. It had much in it of the opera he had been preparing for an even longer period. It was the story of his people.

Black, the first section, is the longest, built around work songs and spirituals, driving deeply into the Negro past for its thematic material, musical, social and literary. Sonny Greer's timpani smashes out the opening sounds of Negroes working on the railroad, in road gangs of all sorts, on the levee, in cotton

fields. Harry Carney's baritone saxophone announces the secondary theme after the first has been stated imperiously by the ensemble. Then comes Tricky Sam's growling of still another work song. Toby leads the way into *Come Sunday*, the spiritual theme which is the second section of *Black*. The Sabbath is portrayed by the various members of the orchestral community in spirited solos, Nance's fiddle, the valve trombone, muted trumpet. Then the full glory of the spiritual theme appears as Johnny Hodges at his most mellifluous sings against the strong chording of Freddie Guy's guitar and the bass in stunning contrast. In a final recapitulation, the several themes of this section are restated and Duke's opening scene ended, the dominant motifs of early Negro life not finished, either historically or in the music, but temporarily abandoned.

Brown, part two, chronicles the various wars of the past in which Negroes have participated and the great nineteenth-century influences among the colored people. There are the American Revolution, then the West Indian Influence, in which musical representation is given to the migration to the United States of Negroes from the Bahamas and Puerto Rico and Jamaica and other islands in the Caribbean by Duke's piano and Tricky's trombone and two trumpets in vigorous plunger playing. *Swanee River* and *Yankee Doodle* call the Confederate and the Union armies to Civil War, and Rex Stewart joyously proclaims Emancipation with Tricky, after the older folks, whose lives have been uprooted by the war, have had their mournful say in the voices of baritone and tenor saxes in duet. The Spanish-American War cues the end of the century and introduces the urbanization of the Negro in the twentieth century. Our time suggests the Blues, and the Blues are played and sung, in exposition of the lives and experiences of the people colored *Mauve*. An unmeasured Blues is sung (at the concert Betty Roche sang, later Marie Ellington took over) with obligato by Toby Hardwick in the early portions and a tenor solo between those and the end. The words and the music follow an intriguing pattern of build-up and break-down:

The Blues. . . .
 The Blues ain't. . . .
 The Blues ain't nothin'. . .
 The Blues ain't nothin' but a cold gray day
 And all night long it stays that way.

'Tain't sump'n' that leaves you alone,
 'Tain't nothin' I want to call my own,
 'Tain't sump'n' with sense enough to get up and go,
 'Tain't nothin' like nothin' I know.

The Blues. . . .
 The Blues don't. . . .
 The Blues don't know. . . .
 The Blues don't know nobody as a friend,
 Ain't been nowhere where they're welcome back again.
 Low, ugly, mean blues.

The whole band interrupts, almost viciously; then there is a tenor saxophone solo of the kind of reedy virility of which that instrument alone is capable. The brass introduces the work's only orthodox twelve-bar blues, and the singer comes back for the sorrowful bridge and the conclusion:

The Blues ain't sump'n that you sing in rhyme;
 The Blues ain't nothin' but a dark cloud markin' time;
 The Blues is a one-way ticket from your love to nowhere;
 The Blues ain't nothing but a black crepe veil ready to wear.
 Sighin', cryin', feel most like dyin'. . . .
 The Blues ain't nothin'. . . .
 The Blues ain't. . . .
 The Blues. . . .

And with an anguished chord the movement ends.

Beige, the third movement, depicts the contemporary Negro, the United States between two world wars and during the second. It is Ellington's own story and beautifully told, skipping from the fast ensemble statement of the theme of the twenties to that of the thirties and the forties. The twenties meant gin-mills, the pseudo-African movement, the Charleston, the party life. The ensemble spins that tale, quickly, lightly. Then Duke's

piano enters in the lonely plaint of the single drinkers, the sad tinkle of a people sad beneath the temblors of their night life. Here is a new dignity, the serious side of Negro life. In exposition of this theme, Duke says, "After all, there are more churches in Harlem than gin mills." First ensemble, then in beautiful open trumpet (at the concert this was Harold Baker's most entrancing contribution) there is a change to waltz time, and a lovely little tune marks the Negro's striving for sophistication. Tenor saxophone, the band, Duke and Carney present several themes: yearning for education, the shouts of the underfed and poorly clothed and miserably housed, the kept woman in a Sugar Hill penthouse (Harry Carney's clarinet tops the saxes in this gently mordant melody). Finally, a brief patriotic motto, "The Black, Brown and Beige are Red, White and Blue," signifies Duke's awareness of the war and the Negro's participation in his country's destiny and brings the movement and the whole work to a conclusion.

There was a lot to be said about the work. The critics on the daily newspapers went right to work. Paul Bowles, of the *Herald Tribune*, the most knowing of the classical arbiters at the concert and generally the most sympathetic to jazz, was displeased because: "Between dance numbers there were 'symphonic' bridges played out of tempo. . . . If there is no regular beat there can be no syncopation, and thus no tension, no jazz. . . . Nothing emerged," was Paul's sad verdict, "but a gaudy potpourri of tutti dance passages and solo virtuoso work."

John Briggs in the *New York Post*, Douglas Watt in the *Daily News* and Robert Bagar in the *World-Telegram* generalized their disapproving impressions: Briggs curtly, "Mr. Ellington had set himself a lofty goal, and with the best of intentions he did not achieve it"; Watt snidely, ". . . Such a form of composition is entirely out of Ellington's ken"; Bagar kindly, "If you ask me, Mr. Ellington can make some two dozen brief air-tight compositions out of *Black, Brown and Beige*. He should." Henry Simon in *PM* was more appreciative. He felt that the first movement "all but falls apart into so many separate pieces." But he was impressed by "the extraordinary

melodic fertility of the Duke, his genuinely subtle rhythms and some harmonic experimentation." He thought *BBB* "showed, better than any of the shorter pieces, how well and how far Mr. Ellington has emancipated himself from the straitjacket of jazz formulas. He has taken a serious theme and treated it with dignity, feeling and good humor." Irving Kolodin in the *Sun* was most appreciative. "The sheer talent that has gone into it," he said of the large work, "the number, variety and quality of the ideas, certainly affirm again that Ellington is the most creative spirit that has worked this field." He had a mild demur. "Only a very great amount of talent could sustain the interest bowed down by the limitations of a dance band, its rhythmic conventions and clichés. One can only conclude that the brilliant ideas it contained would count for much more if scored for a legitimate orchestra, augmented by the solo instruments indicated for certain specific passages."

Metronome and *Down Beat*, the leading trade magazines in popular music, and *Billboard* and *Variety*, the entertainment world's news weeklies, were whole-heartedly enthusiastic. The latter organs were impressed by the tremendous box-office returns (ELLINGTON, AT B.O. AND MUSICALLY, NIFTILY IN GROOVE AT CARNEGIE HALL CONCERT, said *Variety*), and the former were more taken by the impact of the music upon its reviewers and the audience (DUKE KILLS CARNEGIE CATS, said *Metronome*).

The *BBB* controversy brought to a head the whole problem of vital expression in the small jazz forms, the place of Duke among contemporary composers and the validity of his art judged by universal standards. Constant Lambert, who had been a constant supporter of Ellington before and during his trip to England in 1933, a year after that visit reappraised Duke and jazz in a section of his provocative and admirably organized panorama of contemporary music, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*. Though he knew "of nothing in Ravel so dextrous in treatment as the varied solos in the middle of the ebullient *Hot and Bothered* and nothing in Stravinsky more dynamic than the final section"; though he found "the ex-

quisitely tired and four-in-the-morning *Mood Indigo* . . . an equally remarkable piece of writing of a lyrical and harmonic order," he nonetheless decided that Ellington was "definitely a *petit maitre*. . . . But that, after all," he said, "is considerably more than many people thought either jazz or the coloured race would produce." He amplified this judgment. "Ellington's best works are written in what may be called ten-inch record form, and he is perhaps the only composer to raise this insignificant disc to the dignity of a definite genre. Into this three and a half minutes he compresses the utmost, but beyond its limits he is inclined to fumble."

There is no question that *Black, Brown and Beige* is not traditional symphonic writing: it is essentially a series of solos linked together by orchestral bridges; its themes are not developed, changed and restated in accordance with the rules of sonata form. It is, too, clearly programmatic writing which is heightened by an understanding of the program and an appreciation of the sociological, psychological and musicological significance of various of the phrases introduced in the long suite. The fact that it is not written in the sonata form and therefore is not a symphony, the fact that it is programmatic, these are not limitations from Duke's point of view or from that of sympathetic auditors whose listening experience in some large way duplicates Ellington's. Duke, contrary to the arrogant dismissal of his musical equipment and knowledge, could have written a symphony and would have if that were the form which best expressed his ideas and emotions about his people. He would have written a symphony or string quartet or oratorio or opera; he chose, instead, to write a "tone parallel," in which jazz virtuosi, in solo and in section and in band ensemble, gave vigorous interpretation to his phrases, some rough, some tender, all colorful and all directed to a narrative point.

It is not easy for those of us who have had a traditional musical education to listen to music with an idea of a program in mind. We have long been taught that the association of imagery with musical phrases is a banalization of them, that we are not to hear Cervantes' hero fighting windmills in Richard

Strauss' *Don Quixote*, nor specific birds in a thunderstorm in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, but simply the music itself. But the fact is that Strauss and Beethoven and countless other composers had these images, these stories, in mind when they wrote their music, and like artists of stature in any art, they communicated the images and stories with an unassuming directness. Certainly it is not necessary to see Don Quixote's lance hurtling through the air toward the windmill nor is it vital to limn the outlines of a cuckoo and a rain cloud to appreciate the tone poem of Strauss or the symphony of Beethoven, but neither is it necessary to strain oneself to obliterate those images from one's mind. In *BBB* there is a similar relationship of picture and tale to the music: you can take it or leave it alone as a story. Your understanding and appreciation of the work will, however, be considerably heightened if you bear Duke's program in mind while listening to this music.

There are both the obvious and the subtle in *BBB*. The gradation of color, black to brown to beige, as the Negroes were assimilated in America, mixed with the whites and changed in character as well as appearance, are obvious. The paradoxical mourning of the old folks for the old way of life which they had fought against, from which they had been freed by the conquest of the Confederate armies by the Union, this is subtle, subtle on every level, the social, the psychological, and the musical. In the second section of the suite, *Brown*, Duke gives exquisite voice to these people, in the baritone and tenor saxophone duet, answered in enthusiastic stridency by another duet, trombone and trumpet in plunger mutes. The old Negroes were free but bewildered, insecure; their progeny were happy. Emancipation was literal for them, unshackling, it held out hope for the hopeless. This difficult, this subtle conflict is in the music.

Though anthropologists and sociologists and psychologists have been unable to adduce any statistical evidence of any inherent musical superiority among Negroes over members of other races, evidence even of any rhythmic understanding different from or greater than whites', they cannot and have not

denied the vital role of music in the lives of colored people. To Duke especially, of course, but to most of his people as well, there are musical symbols for all the great moments in American Negro history. To these, Duke has given expression in a structure as loose as the flow of events in *Black, Brown and Beige*. It may give offense to those oriented in traditional music, but it gives a people with very different orientation and traditions a powerful voice. The least those interested in the people can do is to listen to the music with some awareness of the meaning of *Black, Brown and Beige* to Duke and to Negroes. In its apparent formlessness listeners may find a greater awareness, an understanding of the main lines of Negro experience and thinking. They may or may not discover great music. They will surely find a great people.