

withdrew from Howard, and joined Haverly's Colored Minstrels after a successful audition in Baltimore.

He, like other Black minstrels, adopted the broad humor common to those shows. His cork-blackened face, James talked in dialect and wore the standard dress; high hat and swallow-tail coat.

The first summer was spent in the New York area, then the show went on cross-country tour to California. In 1881, the troupe went to England with James Ker-sand as the star.

Bland was well received in Great Britain, and his music enjoyed wide currency in all of the British music halls.

He retired from minstrelsy when the troupe returned to the States, and became a solo performer earning as much as \$1000 a month. The Prince of Wales, later crowned King Edward, acknowledged Bland as his favorite entertainer. German critics declared that he, Stephen Foster and John Phillip Sousa were the three Americans who had done much for America's foreign relations.

This extraordinary performer was the inventor of the Bland banjo; he added a fifth string to give the banjo more versatility.

It is ironic that the son of a Patent Officer Examiner neglected to publish under his name all but about forty pieces of the hundreds he composed. However, as was common the days before copyrights, composers often sold their songs for whatever the going rate was, or balladeers or other composers appropriated the music as was the case of Milburn. Another example may be found in a song that Picayune Butler created. He wrote a tune he named *Old Zip Coon*. According to Langston Hughes, a young white performer, George Nichols, who was with Purdy Brown's Circus, introduced the same tune as *Turkey In The Straw* with the result that the song had been ascribed to white authorship.

Of the forty tunes that are registered or published in Bland's name, *Carry Me Back*... became Virginia's State song in 1940, and *Oh, Dem Golden Slippers* was the marching song for the annual Mummer's New Year's Day Parade in Philadelphia for over fifty years. *In The Evening By The Moonlight* and *In The Morning By The Bright Light* are two other well-known songs by Bland. In addition, *Missouri Hound Dog* has become a campaign song.

When the type of music that he played and sang became passe, Bland returned penniless to Philadelphia where he died.

After adopting his song, the State of Virginia wished to honor the composer. It was not until 1946 that they were able to locate his grave; the Lion's Club of Virginia had a headstone erected, the governor ceremoniously placed a wreath upon his grave, and perpetual care was undertaken by the grateful state.

As stated earlier, although Blacks enjoyed and employed the wide spectrum of music in post-bellum times, classical artists were not immune to being all but ignored as soloists and were, in but a few cases, required to combine their talents with others in order to perform widely.

SISSIERETTA JONES (1886-1933) was one of the few solo vocalists after the war. She was born in Virginia, raised in Rhodes Island, and completed studies at the New England Conservatory. Touring for several years, it was not until she appeared at the Jubilee held at the Madison Square Garden in New York in 1893 that the critics acknowledged her existence with any real enthusiasm. Dubbed "Black Patti," after an Italian operatic diva Adelina Patti, she was approached by the manager of the Metropolitan Opera Company to sing the part of the African in Verdi's *Aida*, and *Meyerbeer's L'Africaine*. However, a Black was not to appear with the Met until Marian Anderson did so in 1955.



Sissieretta Jones, the "Black Patti."

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Officer George Hardin
1894

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For further information contact:

Officer Dwight Ford, Officer Jeannie Bradley or Officer Beth Knudsen 248-5653, Personnel Division,
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