

# Blazed A Path From Beale St. To Broadway

(Continued from page 7)

The rhythm, familiar and native, conjuring up things in his hearers' past, caught on. A queer beat fused the crowd and Handy into a unit, a plant played on by the forces of the universe. After this, Handy almost symbolically returned to Alabama.

If a composer, a creator of music, remain academic and classical, he becomes merely imitative.

So when Handy returned to Alabama, all jejune imitation, stopped. He had realized what his people wanted, and as Wagner had said, "Latin music for Latin throats, German music for German throats," Handy added, "Negro music for Negro throats."

From 1900 to 1903 Handy was at A. and M. College, where he had charge of the band and vocal music. Often he would go around, striding through the cotton fields outside Huntsville, his ears drinking in the work songs and spirituals of the people he knew—songs that had sprung up without any apparent origin, like the poems attributed to Homer, epics of men like John Henry and Jim Crow.

We next find him in Clarksdale, Mississippi, where he saw aesthetic value of another type of Negro song.

"Beale Street, Beale Street!"—that was the next station on his jazz journey.

Moving to Memphis, Tennessee, meant moving to Beale Street. Here he organized a band and orchestra employing fifty men. A man named Crump ran for Mayor. Handy wrote words and a tune. The words went—

"Mister Crump, don't low no easy riders here, Mister Crump don't low no easy riders here.

I don't care what Mister Crump don't low, I'm gwine to be!—house anyhow— Mister Crump can go an' catch himself some air!"

The tune was that of the "Memphis Blues" which Handy published, but soon after, in despair, sold. The first real blues, it became an international hit, and still makes money for all but its author. He knew its commercial value but Memphis was not then a market for music, and besides would not at that time buy sheet music from a local colored publisher.

After the success of the "Memphis Blues," which ushered in the present era of jazz, both races recognized his genius and lent encouragement. He then formed the Pace & Handy Music Company to publish subsequent blues in their original form as well as the ballads of Harry H. Pace.

In Handy, we have the combination, weirdly successful, of artist and business man. In addition to managing this business, Handy wrote music. He writes words, music and orchestrations himself and in spare moments rehearses his band.

In 1917 the Columbia Phonograph Company engaged Handy's band which made twelve records. In 1918 Pace & Handy moved to Broadway and Handy with his wife and five children moved to Harlem. In the post-war depression Pace dropped out.

Pace next organized the Pace Phonograph Company and manufactured Black Swan Records, taking

with him most of the Pace & Handy organization. Handy's business was almost wrecked.

Many phonograph companies had failed after giving notes amounting to thousands which banks discounted. Handy, not only made these notes good, he in addition paid back heavy loans from four colored banks in the South.

Music dealers and syndicate stores felt the same national depression. The five and ten cents stores indulged in a music war. Woolworth cut out more than six hundred music counters. As these counters handled the firm's publications, approximately a half million copies of music were left on Handy's hands, copies that could not be sold for junk, yet on which large printing bills were due.

But the blues had an honest business man for father. He sold his beautiful home on 139th Street and paid off many of the debts. In attempting to do the work that had been done by a large organization, work in which no Sunday was his own and no hour of the night too late, his health was impaired as well as his sight. Two years he was kept inactive. But even in this period he continued to compose some of his most beautiful works—not all blues.

Business was in a bad way. Life, too. At the end of those two miserable years Handy staged his grand comeback. Nobody knows how. He regained his health and his sight, took a band on the road, and returned with money sufficient to liquidate what debts remained. By paying, and paying, and straining every nerve, he was able singlehanded to lift this great burden from his business.

In April, 1927, he and his band appeared in support of the world's most sensational composer direct from Paris, the young George Antheil, at Carnegie Hall, in a jazz symphony. When Handy, therefore, announced a concert of his own works and others with his own band of thirty and a large chorus at Carnegie Hall again, the audience numbered not only his old admirers, but new admirers, students of music; and among both groups were the elite of America and the sophisticates of Europe.

The drama inherent in this man's struggle, its crown of success, has reached even the proverbially dense Hollywood magnates. They want to fashion a film about him.

Well, let them. It can't hurt Handy. The man is bigger than his size. His head is normal. As a composer, blues are his life. When Handy writes a blues number, all of Handy goes into it. The words are his. Read "The Chicago Gouge." His many-sided experience casts lights and shades of meaning over the blues.

Don't forget the sound, classical musicianship he has had. He doesn't fall into the musical pitfalls that mark lesser men's work. The tune, the rhythm, the orchestration—all are his and all are racial. To this day they remain—and consequently all blues remain—in the twelve bars that the ruddy formal custom gave Mübber, Wiener, Krenek, the great Antheil, the greater Stravinsky.

Richard Strauss the master, are a hodgepodge of people better known in Europe than in America. They write symphonies, symphonic poems, operas. But even these men were so inspired by what they heard in the truly racial and native American songs and dances that a new pigment found its way to their musical palettes—the blues.

His is a great business ability, not only on the broad scale, but in minute details as well.

The man is full of energy though he must be somewhere in his fifties. He often smiles. He gets a kick out of life. It amuses him when the sharks of Broadway try to fleece him. While the race is justly proud of De Priest, sole Negro member of Congress, the race will likewise feel pride knowing that Handy enjoys the distinction of being the sole Negro member of the Music Publishers' Protective Association, the strongest organization of its kind in the world.

Through his connection with another group, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, also his foreign representatives in Europe, South America and Australia, he is receiving valuable contracts out of radio and sound picture rights.

The "St. Louis Blues," his masterpiece, has had more recordings than any other composition of any kind. Before the blues, there were three-phonograph companies. With Handy and the new music, a dozen sprang into life. Jazz bands gave employment to thousands of Negroes. Thousands of Negro artists made recordings.

He has edited an anthology, "Blues" in an exceedingly scholarly style. It is the most illuminating book on the subject of American music, with an introduction by Abbe Niles, published by A. & C. Boni, illustrated by Covarrubias. So much for the man and his work in life.

But what about the work's influence? Such men as Auric, Honneger,

Richard Strauss the master, are a hodgepodge of people better known in Europe than in America. They write symphonies, symphonic poems, operas. But even these men were so inspired by what they heard in the truly racial and native American songs and dances that a new pigment found its way to their musical palettes—the blues.

The white American composer, however, is more truly represented by his work in musical comedy as well as "popular" songs and dances than in those longer, more serious forms. These songs and dances are a decadent form of the original blues. Governed by the supposed requirements of ballrooms, picture palaces, and Broadway, they are played in the most refined saccharine style, with an empty precision in place of real rhythm and spontaneity, with also, sixteen bars instead of twelve.

Thus the ears of the white Ameri-

## ARE WOMEN MORE CONSTANT THAN MEN?

(Continued from Page Eight)

no doubt that, the more economically independent women become the less constant and the more honest they will be. They will lose their mystery which has been the result of this conflict of desire with caution, but they will make better companions and healthier mates.

can composer are deaf to this rhythm and spontaneity, and he is callous to the range of feeling all the way from the lugubrious to the "hot," which distinguishes the blues and excites all of Europe. Only one color is known on the White American palette; it isn't true blue, it is an adulterated Alice Blue.

Now, the blues have a definite

(Continued on Page Ten)

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