

EDITORIAL DIGEST & MANUSCRIPT FILE

PROJECT Negroes of N.Y.
 EDITOR: FILE TITLE & NO.: Biographies
 REPORTER: - ART. NO.: 22
 DATE: - COPY TITLE: Willie Bryant
 WORDAGE 700
 REWRITE: INDEXED BY: *Cannon* DATE: 7-6-42

INDEXED

NAME	COPY BORROWED PROJECT	DATE TAKEN	DATE RETD.

INDEXED

EDITORIAL DIGEST & MANUSCRIPT FILE

PROJECT **Negroes of N.Y.**
EDITOR: FILE TITLE & NO.: **Biographies**
REPORTER: - ART. NO.: **22**
DATE: - COPY TITLE: **Willie Bryant**
WORDAGE **700**
REWRITE: INDEXED BY: DATE:

NAME	COPY BORROWED PROJECT	DATE TAKEN	DATE RETD.

INDEXED

WILLIE BRYANT

WILLIE BRYANT IS A SLENDER, NICE LOOKING, WELL TAILORED NEGRO WITH A BREEZY, AFFABLE MANNER WHO IS WELL KNOWN IN HARLEM AS AN ORCHESTRA LEADER AND MASTER OF CEREMONIES. TRACK HIM BACK TO HIS PROFESSIONAL ORIGIN AND YOU WILL FIND THAT HE WAS A CANDY BUTCHER IN THE GRAND THEATRE ON CHICAGO'S SOUTH SIDE.

IN THE LAST DECADE BRYANT WON CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION AS AN ORCHESTRA LEADER WHO BROADCASTS OVER N. B. C. AND AS A MASTER OF CEREMONIES AT THE APOLLO THEATRE, WHERE ^{he} ~~BRYANT~~ HAS COME TO BE LOOKED UPON AS HARLEM'S MAJOR BOWES. AT LOCAL AMATEUR NIGHTS AND SIMILAR JAMBOREES HE HAS UNEARTHED A WEALTH OF NEW TALENT, INCLUDING ELLA FITZGERALD, WHOM HE DISCOVERED AT A NOVICE SESSION AT THE HARLEM OPERA HOUSE.

BACK IN THE DAYS BEFORE HE BECAME EXCLUSIVELY IDENTIFIED WITH VAUDEVILLE AND RADIO BRYANT RECEIVED A THOROUGH DRAMATIC TRAINING. HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE DRAMATIC COMPANY OF HARLEM'S ALHAMBRA THEATER AND PLAYED A WIDE RANGE OF CHARACTER ROLES IN THE FORTY MINUTE PLAYS THAT ACCOMPANIED THE MOVIE AND STAGE SHOWS AS PART OF THE ALHAMBRA'S NIGHTLY PROGRAMS.

BECAUSE OF WILLIE BRYANT'S PERSONALITY AND HIS BREEZY MANNER OF INTRODUCING ACTS THAT REALLY HELPS THE PERFORMERS, HIS ABILITY TO LEAD AN ORCHESTRA, PLAY STRAIGHT FOR THE COMEDIANS AND WORK IN SKITS HE KEEPS WORKING AND IS IN CONSTANT DEMAND.

IN NOVEMBER, 1936, HE WAS IN THE UBANGI CLUB'S REVUE, "ROUND THE WORLD IN SWING TEMPO!" IN SEPTEMBER, 1937, HE WAS AT THE PLANTATION CLUB. IN NOVEMBER, 1937, HE APPEARED AS GUEST STAR AT THE OPENING OF HARLEM'S

INDEXED

NEW REMODELED WEST END THEATRE (RUMORED TO HAVE COST \$150,000) VARIETY HAD THE FOLLOWING TO SAY.

"HARLEM'S FAMED WILLIE BRYANT STAGE-BOWED FOR HIS FORMER PARTNER, LEONARD REED, AND PANICKED THE COGNOSCENTI WITH HIS USUAL SUAVITY. ALWAYS A SMOOTHIE, BRYANT HITS IT OFF BEST WHEN WORKING FOR AND WITH HIS CONSORTS, AS IN THIS INSTANCE. RUNNING BANTER OF LOCALISMS, ECT., WAS PLENTY MEATY FOR HARLEMITES BUT ONLY APPRECIATED BY OTHERS IN PART."

DURING THE EARLY PART OF 1938 BRYANT AND HIS ORCHESTRA PLAYED AT HARLEM'S SAVOY BALLROOM AND THEN MADE A SERIES OF ONE NIGHT STANDS IN PENNSYLVANIA AND JUST BELOW THE MASON-DIXON LINE, BUT BY LATE JULY HE WAS AGAIN BACK AT THE 125TH STREET APOLLO. VARIETY, IN THE ISSUE OF JULY 20TH, 1938 HAD, IN PART, THE FOLLOWING TO SAY ABOUT MR. BRYANT:-

OPENED UP BY TALKING FOR A FULL FIVE MINUTES ABOUT A RECENT SOUTHERN TOUR OF ONE-NITERS AND RAPPING THE JIM CROW CONDITIONS OF DIXIE. MENTIONED SUCH THINGS AS HE WAS GLAD TO BE BACK IN HARLEM AND WOULD NEVER VENTURE SOUTH AGAIN. ALSO THAT 'THIS IS AN INTELLIGENT AUDIENCE, SOMETHING YOU NEVER SEE DOWN THERE'

WHILE THE COMMENT WAS PALPABLY AN EFFORT TO GET A SYMPATHETIC RESPONSE FROM THE ONLOOKERS, THEY SEEMED BORED. DOUBTFUL SHOWMANSHIP, NOT TO MENTION TASTE, TO OPEN ACT BY MUTING THE MUSIKERS AND DISSERTATING ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION; THERE'S A PLACE AND TIME FOR BOTH.

.....
ONE VERY GOOD BIT BY THE BAND WAS TOUCHING OFF 'FLAT FOOT FLOOGEE' IN FOUR DIFFERENT STYLES--VIENNESE WALTZ, MILITARY MARCH, SWEET AND SUPERSWING.
.....

INDEXED

PAGE THREE

BRYANT WAS BACK AT THE APOLLO IN NOVEMBER AND LATER STARTED WEST AS A FEATURED MEMBER OF AN ALL-NEGRO VAUDEVILLE UNIT, BUT IN DECEMBER HE RETURNED TO NEW YORK AT GUTHRIE McCLINTIC'S (THEATRICAL PRODUCER) REQUEST TO START REHEARSALS FOR MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS, STARRING ETHEL WATERS AND FEATURING, BESIDES BRYANT, FREDI WASHINGTON, ANNE BROWN, GEORGETTE HARVEY AND J. ROSAMUND JOHNSON.

IN MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS BRYANT IMPERSONATED GILLY BLUTON, A FLASHY, TIN-HORN, CHARLESTON NE'ER-DO-WELL. IT WAS TO SAVE GILLY'S LIFE EARLY IN THE PLAY THAT ETHEL WATERS AS HAGAR, VIOLATED A JUDICIAL ADMONITION TO STAY OUT OF CHARLESTON FOR FIVE YEARS OR SERVE A PRISON SENTENCE FOR THE SAME PERIOD. IN THE PLAY, GILLY REPAYS THIS ACT OF MERCY SOME YEARS LATER BY BETRAYING HAGAR'S DAUGHTER, LISSA, AND BLACKMAILING THE FAMILY AFTER LISSA BECOMES A NOTED RADIO SINGER. IN THE FINAL ACT OF THE PLAY HAGAR IN THE ROLE OF AVENGING MOTHER STRANGLES GILLY TO DEATH.

BROOKS ATKINSON IN THE NEW YORK TIMES FOR JANUARY 4TH, 1939, THE MORNING AFTER THE OPENING OF MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS SAID AMONG OTHER THINGS:

AS THE VICIOUS GANGSTER OF THE ISLAND, WILLIE BRYANT ACTS WITH STINGING ACCURACY OF OUTLINE.

IT LOOKS LIKE BROADWAY HAS GAINED ANOTHER GOOD DRAMATIC ACTOR AND HARLEM HAS LOST A SWING BAND LEADER.

ENCLOSURE