

EUBIE BLAKE (1883-1983)

Born and raised in Baltimore, Eubie Blake was a versatile and active musician well into his nineties. While still a teenager, he was playing piano professionally in Baltimore. His "Charleston Rag" (1899), composed when he was sixteen, is a complex, sophisticated piece of ragtime, a perfect example of the east coast tradition which later became known as "stride piano," a style which Fats Waller and others popularized.

By age fifteen, Blake was a professional musician. In 1901, he joined Dr. Frazier's Medicine Show as a dancer and musician, and in 1902 he visited New York for the first time. By 1907 he was playing in Atlantic City during the summers, and in 1914 his first rags were published.

Blake met his longtime partner, the vocalist and lyricist Noble Sissle, in 1915. Their very fruitful partnership included *Shuffle Along* (1921), the first all-Black Broadway show, which had a cast including Josephine Baker, Florence Mills, and Paul Robeson. This extremely influential and successful show led to others. Working with lyricists like Henry Creamer, Andy Razaf, and others, Blake wrote music for *Chocolate Dandies*, *Lew Leslie's Blackbirds of 1930*, *Shuffle Along of 1933*, and many more.

During World War II, Blake was musical director of USO shows, touring widely, and continued to compose and study music. Harry Truman used Blake's "I'm Just Wild About Harry" (from *Shuffle Along*) as his presidential campaign song.

During the 60s and 70s, Blake stayed extremely active, piling up various awards and founding Eubie Blake Music, his own record label, in 1972. In 1973, at the age of ninety, he made dozens of personal appearances, including numerous TV talk-shows, and was honored by the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) and by his hometown, Baltimore, where the mayor declared "Eubie Blake Day" and he performed a concert at Peabody Conservatory. He collected honorary degrees and awards continually, and performed at jazz festivals around the world.

Eubie Blake's long career was characterized by his great versatility and undiminished enthusiasm for performing and composing music. The influences on his work were many, including Viennese operettas and Sousa marches as well as American jazz musicians, many of whom he knew personally, among them Willie "The Lion" Smith, James P. Johnson, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin.