Clew Gangsters, Says Cole

The Closing Chapters of the Life of ‘Black Patti’

Sissieretta Joyner Jones Climbed the Heights of Fame, But She Gave It All Up to Come Back and Stay Here in Providence When Her Relatives Needed Her Aid.

BY F. C. TERRY

QUIETLY and unassuming she lived here in the city where her parents had brought her as a small girl. And when she died here this month there were few who paid much attention to the brief obituary that told of the passing of Mathia Sissieretta Joyner Jones.

But this was “Black Patti” who had died—the little lady of color who had started in Sunday school and then gone on to fame on the concert stage as one of the greatest artists of her race.

In one week she sang to 75,000 people in Madison Square Garden. And she appeared before 50,000 at the Buffalo Exposition. She sang before several Presidents and was a White House guest. Dame Nellie Melba and other famous men and women were her friends, as photographs attest. How her race looked up to her can be imagined from the fact that the “Green Pastures” company asked to be allowed to visit her in a body when they were in Providence for a week.

Many of the greatest colored actors, musicians and composers started in her companies, including Williams and Walker; Rosamond Johnson, the great composer; Richard B. Harris, David Burleigh, the famous “Black Patti Troubadours” in Paris and elsewhere.

She had given her start in Sunday school; when very young she married Major Pond who piloted her in a parrot brought by her from Argentina 28 years ago, were her companions.

Recently when Green Pastures played here, Madame Joyner refused to allow them to visit her in a body, but at the personal appeal of Whitney and Mr. Harrison, who had toured with her, she did attend a performance, the whole company according her worshipful courtesy.

Once she remarked “I woke up famous after singing in Madison Square Garden and didn’t know it.”

In later years she knew she was famous but certainly did not want others to know it.

The other day, occasionally, a sweet faced, modestly dressed, unassuming lady of color walking along the city streets—one who would not dream that here walked one who had sung before presidents, kings and queens by command, who had been presented with countless medals and scrolls of appreciation from nobility, from various countries and to whom the citizens of Providence gave a medal.

In Chicago in 1893 and at the Great Actor’s Fund Benefit in New York.

INVITED BY HARRISON TO THE WHITE HOUSE

President Harrison in February, 1892, invited Madame Jones to appear at the luncheon in the East Room of the White House. Mrs. Harrison presented her with a bouquet of White House orchids and she appeared at the houses of Chief Justice Fuller, Senator Andrews and other dignitaries. She sang before President McKinley and President Roosevelt.

Her first foreign appearances were made at Berlin, the many cities that followed were Paris, Cologne, Munich and Milan. She was received with great enthusiasm and applause in Europe. Under Charles Matthews she toured South America, Voelckel and Nolan formed the world famous “Black Patti Troubadours” in 1895, which toured the United States, Canada, Mexico.

When Madame Jones came to Providence to care for her relatives she intended to return to the stage but she would not leave them ill. Her grandmother passed away and later her mother, but she had them every comfort and devotion, her friends say. Naturally rescued, she became more as she passed on and she never made one more stage appearance and that was at Grand Theatre, Chicago.

She lived a retired life at her home on Wheaton street, scarcely ever going out. The homes of Providence, gangsters, says Cole.

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