BLACK PATTI

Black Patti, the elegant Madame Susie Pitta Jones, is dead and the world that once sang her praises has to stop and scratch its head when that announcement was made last Saturday from Providence, R.I. This worldly forgetfulness can not be criticized too severely, however, when we recall that most anybody who spent part of his time in Providence, R.I. is likely to be forgotten.

There were those who believed that Black Patti was a native of Baltimore, a belief that, if true, would have neither added nor detracted from her brilliant career, unless, of course, she depended on the home-town folks to give her a boost, which would have never happened.

She did, however, marry a Baltimorean, I am informed, one Dick Jones, a race-horse and gambling man, whom she later divorced for good and sufficient reasons after he had had a swell time spending her money.

There were grand doings around these parts when Madame Susie arrived to do her number along with her troubadours at the old Holiday Street Theatre. Whites and others would gather around the stage door to get a glimpse of her well-rounded figure as with flowing skirts and protruding bosom she stepped into a waiting carriage drawn by a pair of stirknecked horses and was driven to her place of abode.

During some of her visits she was the house guest of the late Harry Cummings when he was Baltimore's only city councilman of color and she moved in the very best social circles. In those days being a stage celebrity was not looked upon with too much favor as the portly trust beauties, who exposed their beautiful hips and meaty thighs incased in tights and capped their heads in huge picture hats with flowing plumes were not what the more honeys people considered "fitting to associate with."

The story is told how upon one occasion the famous singer came to town to give a recital at a fashionable Madison St. Presbyterian Church, white, which was the gospel cafeteria of the first families who traced their ancestry back to the Calverts and the Cabots.

Madame Jones arrived at the church in the afternoon and was holding a little private rehearsal, and her thrilling voice drifted to the ears of one of the city's dowagers of great wealth who was entertaining her club just across the way.

She inquired whose voice it was and was surprised to learn that it was the great Black Patti.

"Oh," she said, "I must do something for her. I'll allow her to sing for our party."

The party was graced with the matrons who represented a line of generations of bankers, importers, planters and other Maryland blue gores. It would be quite an honor for this "Patti person" to yodel into such distinguished ears. The social columns would mention it to the undying credit of the hostess, adding another star in her crown as the city's most brilliant social entertainer.

The grand lady tripped to the kitchen and dispatched her colored cook to invite Black Patti over.

The black singer who had sung before crowned heads of Europe had been honored by President Harrison and was the toast of royalty, looked at the cook with an air of aloofness and said:

"Tell your mistress if she will have any manuas at the old Holiday Street Theatre. Whites and others would gather around the stage door to get a glimpse of her well-rounded figure as with flowing skirts and protruding bosom she stepped into a waiting carriage drawn by a pair of stirknecked horses and was driven to her place of abode."

BOB COLE

The name of Mme. Jones and that of the late Bob Cole are associated professionally by old-timers as it was his master hand which made the Troubadours the sensation they were.

The Troubadours, when they first came into prominence, featured such stars as Lloyd Giggins, the Dewitt Sisters, Billy Johnson, Giggins and Davis, Andy Byrd, Stella Wiley and Aida Reed, who later became famous in her own right as Aida Overton.

Many say that it was the Troubadours who really were the medium by which colored actors got their first firm foothold on the American stage.

It was when the show was playing in Proctor's 59th Street Theatre, New York, that they tried to bat with the white managers to get better pay for his troupe. Unable to better the condition of the cast, Cole took his music and quit the show.

Vokel and Noland, the financial backers, had Cole arrested, but he could not be intimidated and the backers later had him blacklisted.

Referring to this incident the Theatrical World, published in 1928, informs us that the backers induced other managers all over the country to refuse employment to Cole and his sympathizers. Naturally, the faint hearted deserted Cole at this juncture, but a few staunch followers, including Jesse Shipp, Tom Brown, Billy Johnson, Hen Wise and Loyd Giggins, decided to fight it out to a finish.

With his back to the wall Cole issued what may rightly be called the colored actor's Declaration of Independence. "We are going to have our own shows," he declared. "We are going to write them ourselves, we are going to have our own stage manager, our own orchestra leader and our own manager out front to count up. No divided houses—our race must be seated from boxes back." As a means of inaugurating these principles Cole organized his "Trip to Coontown" company. The title of the show, by the way, indicates that he did not have the slightest trace of an inferiority complex.

When "A Trip to Coontown" was ready for the road the managers dealt Cole another blow. They had already passed the word that any performer who signed up with the show would be boycotted for life. Now they informed managers that any house booking "A Trip to Coontown" could not expect any other colored show. This threat closed practically every important theater in the country to Cole and his followers and the show "was driven into the woods."

After months of terrific "wild catting" the company finally wandered into Canada and obtained a broken date in Ottawa and another in Toronto. Fortunately the American managers had overlooked the Canadian field when they issued their boycotting and lockout orders. The daily papers of the Dominion raved about the novelty of the show and managers began to bid for bookings. When the news of the success of the show drifted back to the States Klaw and Erlanger defied the lock-out order and booked the company for a New York opening. "A Trip to Coontown" opened in Jacob's Third Avenue Theatre during Holy Week, the worst week of the year. Nevertheless, crowds were turned away at every performance. Bob Cole had won his battle. His subsequent successes followed as a matter of course.

This interesting bit of history is fast passing into the discard as one by one the pioners of the stage pass on. There are few left. Black Patti is the end of her line.

of dancers on the Pacific coast, will autographed menus and cards by return here on or about the 13th July, after a sojourn at the Cathay Ballroom, located in the Chinese