



POSTAL NEWS

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‘Vintage Black Cinema’ Movie Poster Stamps Highlight African-American Cultural Experience

Stamps Depict Posters From the 1920s Through 1950s

WASHINGTON, DC — Vintage movie posters highlighting various facets of the African-American cultural experience as represented in early film return on postage when the U.S. Postal Service issues the Vintage Black Cinema stamps. The 42-cent commemorative First-Class stamps will be dedicated July 16 at the Newark, NJ, Museum during the Black Film Festival and will go on sale nationwide that day.

Explained U.S. Postal Service Vice President and Consumer Advocate Delores Killete: “Whether spotlighting the talents of entertainment icons Josephine Baker, Duke Ellington, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Fredi Washington, Louis Jordan, Daniel L. Haynes, Victoria Spivey or King Vidor, or documenting changing social attitudes and expectations—these posters now serve a greater purpose than publicity and promotion. They are invaluable pieces of history, preserving memories of cultural phenomena that otherwise might have been forgotten.”

Scheduled to join Killete at the 10 a.m. dedication ceremony Wednesday are Emmy-Award winning Actress Lynn Whitfield who played the leading role in *The Josephine Baker Story*; Josephine Baker’s son Jean-Claude Baker and his brother, Jarry; Louis Jordan’s widow, Martha Jordan; Paul Ellington, grandson of Duke Ellington; Newark Mayor Cory A. Booker, and Gloria Hopkins Buck, chairwoman of the film festival.

“My adoptive mother, whose theme song was ‘Two loves Have I, my Country and Paris,’ would be delighted, thrilled and deeply moved by this wonderful tribute to African-American culture,”

said Jean-Claude Baker, one of Josephine Baker's adoptive sons. "Her legend was global and her heart embraced the world. But, despite the acclaim in films like *Princess Tam-Tam* she never forgot that she was, at heart, a daughter of St Louis."

The Vintage Black Cinema souvenir sheet includes 20 stamps in four rows with five different commemorative stamps featuring posters advertising movies produced for African-American audiences prior to 1950. Stamp Art Director and Designer Carl T. Hermann of Carlsbad, CA, intended to evoke a strip of film with perforations, or sprocket holes, running down the left and right edges. This souvenir sheet also includes selvage text.

Remembered as the first screen appearance of Duke Ellington, the 1929 film *Black and Tan* features three songs by Ellington and his Cotton Club Orchestra. In this 19-minute short, Ellington, playing himself, is in danger of having his piano repossessed. When his fatally ill girlfriend dances at a nightclub, she saves Ellington's music—and asks to hear his "Black and Tan Fantasy" on her deathbed.

In the 1921 silent film *The Sport of the Gods*, the family of a wrongfully convicted man flees disgrace in Virginia only to face immorality and temptation in New York City. Based on a novel by Paul Laurence Dunbar, the film was produced by the short-lived Reol Motion Picture Corporation, which made several movies for black audiences.

One of only four movies to star American-born entertainer Josephine Baker, *Princess Tam-Tam* tells the story of a novelist who discovers a simple African woman, played by Baker, and presents her as a princess to Parisian society. Released in France in 1935, this French-language feature remains a rare film showcase for Baker's singing and dancing.

Highlighting the talents of singer, saxophonist, and "jump blues" bandleader Louis Jordan, the 1945 short *Caldonia* is often cited as a precursor of today's music videos. The four musical numbers featured in this 18-minute film also appeared as individual "soundies," short films shown on video jukeboxes at nightclubs and restaurants during the 1940s.

Released in 1929, *Hallelujah* was one of the first major-studio films to feature an all-black cast. This dramatic story of a field laborer who is seduced away from his community by worldly temptations was filmed primarily in Arkansas and Tennessee. Noted for its portrayal of the rural African-American religious experience, *Hallelujah* earned King Vidor a nomination for Best Director.

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Please Note: For broadcast quality video and audio, photo stills and other media resources, visit the USPS Newsroom at www.usps.com/communications/newsroom/welcome.htm. High-resolution images of the stamps are available for media use only by contacting Roy Betts, 202-268-3207 or roy.a.betts@usps.gov

An independent federal agency, the U.S. Postal Service is the only delivery service that reaches every address in the nation, 146 million homes and businesses, six days a week. It has 37,000 retail locations and relies on the sale of postage, products and services, not tax dollars, to pay for operating expenses. The Postal Service has annual revenue of \$75 billion and delivers nearly half the world's mail.

Vintage Black Cinema Commemorative Stamps Background Information

THE SPORT OF THE GODS

Released in 1921, the silent film *The Sport of the Gods* tells the story of a man who loyally serves a prison sentence for a crime committed by a friend. When his wife and children move from Virginia to New York City to escape disgrace, their moral fiber is tested by the demands of survival in their new northern home.

The Sport of the Gods was produced by the Reol Motion Picture Corporation. Formed after World War I, Reol produced several movies for black audiences. The company survived only briefly, but it is sometimes credited with being one of the first companies to adapt literary works by African Americans for the silver screen.

The film was based on the 1902 novel of the same name by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906). Remembered primarily as a poet, Dunbar also wrote four novels. At the turn of the 20th century, he was one of the most widely read American poets and one of the first popular African-American writers. Dunbar was honored on a 10-cent U.S. stamp in 1975.

The poster for *The Sport of the Gods* depicts Jim Skaggs, played by Edward R. Abrams, embracing a reluctant Kitty Hamilton, played by Elizabeth Boyer. The logo for the Reol Motion Picture Corporation appears in the upper left corner. The lower third of the poster reads: "THE SPORT OF THE GODS / BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR / AMERICA'S GREATEST RACE POET AND AUTHOR / A TRUE-TO-LIFE STORY OF / ACTION, THRILLS AND HEART INTEREST / WITH AN ALL-STAR CAST OF COLORED ARTISTS / PRODUCED BY / REOL PRODUCTIONS CORPORATION." The poster artwork was obtained from the collection at the University of California, Los Angeles. The artist is unknown.

BLACK AND TAN

Released in 1929, the 19-minute film *Black and Tan* features Duke Ellington and his Cotton Club Orchestra performing "The Duke Steps Out," "Black Beauty," and "Black and Tan Fantasy."

Black and Tan is chiefly remembered as the first film appearance of composer, pianist, and bandleader Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington (1899-1974). The film was written and directed by Dudley Murphy, who later directed the 1933 film *The Emperor Jones* starring Paul Robeson.

In *Black and Tan*, Duke Ellington plays himself, but as an impoverished musician. When two bumbling movers arrive to repossess his piano, his girlfriend—actress Fredi Washington, also playing herself—manages to hold them off by offering them gin. Later, at the nightclub, an ailing Washington performs in an enthusiastic dance number despite her ill health. On her deathbed, she asks him to perform "Black and Tan Fantasy," secure in the knowledge that she has helped Ellington continue to make music.

The poster for *Black and Tan* depicts Duke Ellington in silhouette conducting caricatured representations of his orchestra. Text on the poster reads "SACK / AMUSEMENT / ENTERPRISES / PRESENTS / DUKE ELLINGTON / AND HIS / COTTON CLUB ORCHESTRA / IN / BLACK AND TAN / WITH / FREDI WASHINGTON." The Texas-based company Sack Amusement Enterprises was a producer and distributor of features and short films for African-American audiences during the 1930s and 1940s. The poster artist is unknown.

CALDONIA

Released in 1945, the 18-minute short film *Caldonia* showcased the talents of singer, saxophonist, and bandleader Louis Jordan (1908-1975).

In *Caldonia*, Louis Jordan, playing himself, is lured to New York by Felix Paradise, who promises him a film career. In the process, Jordan loses a promising Hollywood contract and *Caldonia*, his girlfriend. The short film features four songs by Louis Jordan and his Tympany Five: "Buzz Me," "Caldonia," "Honey Chile," and "Tillie."

Known as "King of the Jukeboxes" or "King of the Bobby Sox Brigade," Jordan began his career playing big band swing jazz music during the 1930s but later became one of the leading players of "jump blues," a hybrid of jazz, blues, and other elements that included a smaller band, humorous lyrics, and a strong rhythm section. A celebrity who appeared in numerous movies, Jordan was one of the top American recording artists of the 1940s and 1950s. He was known as "the father of rhythm and blues." He is also remembered as one of the first black recording artists to achieve "crossover" appeal with white audiences.

Although first shown together, the musical performances in *Caldonia* were also separated into individual "soundies." Soundies were short films that were played on video jukeboxes in nightclubs and restaurants during the 1940s. Today they are especially remembered for featuring performances by African-American artists, and Louis Jordan is often cited for his prominent role in these precursors to today's music videos.

The poster for *Caldonia* features a photograph of Louis Jordan carrying his saxophone around his neck and wearing a top hat and a zoot suit with a bow tie, pink topcoat, and burgundy-and-yellow striped pants. Three smaller photographs of women appear in the lower right. The title of the film appears at the bottom of the poster. Captions on the poster refer to Jordan as "KING OF THE BOBBY SOX BRIGADE / IN A JIVE AN' JAM PACKED MUSICAL." A box in the lower left reads: "HEAR HIM / SING / 'HONEY CHILE' / 'BUZZ ME' / 'TILLIE' / 'CALDONIA.'" The poster slogan "HERE COMES MR. LOUIS JORDAN" is a humorous reference to the film *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, an Oscar-winning 1941 film about a saxophone-playing boxer who returns from Heaven for a second chance to win the championship.

PRINCESS TAM-TAM

Released in France in 1935 and later in the United States, the French-produced *Princess Tam-Tam* was one of only four movies to feature an acting performance by American-born entertainer Josephine Baker.

Filmed in France and Tunisia, *Princess Tam-Tam* tells the story of a famous novelist, played by French actor Albert Préjean, who travels to Africa after an argument with his socialite wife. While attempting to overcome writer's block, he is charmed by a simple African woman, played by Baker. He subsequently presents her as a princess to Parisian society in an attempt to arouse the jealousy of his wife, while also hoping to use the resulting story as the plot for his next book.

A renowned entertainer, Josephine Baker (1906-1975) was born in St. Louis, MO. After touring the United States with traveling road shows, she soon became known for a style of dancing marked by a comic touch. When she performed in Paris during the 1920s, her career thrived, and she was soon one of the most popular performers in Europe. She became a French citizen in 1937.

Princess Tam-Tam featured Baker's exuberant dancing and her performances of two songs. Although the French-language film was little known in the U.S. at the time, it is now considered a rare film-length showcase for Baker's talents.

The poster for *Princess Tam-Tam* was used to promote the release of the movie in Denmark. It features an illustration of a glamorous Josephine Baker casting a large shadow behind her. Baker's name appears prominently at the top of the poster, while red, white, and blue stripes run at angles down the left and right margins. At the bottom of the poster, the title of the film is given as "Prinsesse Tam-Tam." The title is in Danish, as is all cast and credit information that follows it.

HALLELUJAH

Released by MGM in 1929, *Hallelujah* was one of the first films from a major studio to feature an all-black cast.

Hallelujah starred Daniel L. Haynes as Zeke, a field laborer who is seduced away from his family and community by the temptations of the world. Producer-director King Vidor hoped to create an authentic portrayal of rural African-American life, especially religious experience, by filming on location in Arkansas and Tennessee despite the technical challenges involved in doing so.

Enhanced by spirituals performed by the Dixie Jubilee Singers, *Hallelujah* also starred blues singer Victoria Spivey as Zeke's hometown love interest and Nina Mae McKinney as the city woman who cons and seduces him. Later billed in Europe as "The Black Garbo," the 16-year-old McKinney performs the Irving Berlin song "Swanee Shuffle" in *Hallelujah*.

Although not free of stereotypes, *Hallelujah* was praised by black and white critics alike and found many black defenders. In the October 1929 issue of the NAACP magazine *The Crisis*, W.E.B. DuBois wrote that the film offered "the sense of real life" and concluded that "everybody should see *Hallelujah*." More recently, film historian Thomas Cripps wrote in 1993 that *Hallelujah* "neatly caught the piety and enthusiasm of rural religion, while only occasionally lapsing into stereotyped gamblers and mummies."

King Vidor received an Academy Award nomination for Best Director for *Hallelujah*. He would later direct the black-and-white scenes in *The Wizard of Oz* as well as the 1956 film *War and Peace*.

The poster for *Hallelujah* shows a drawing of a female dancer above several musicians. The movie title runs across the top of the poster, and a caption to the left reads: "A KING VIDOR PRODUCTION." The original poster artwork for this 1929 film was created by prominent caricaturist Al Hirschfeld (1903-2003), whose work also appeared on the five Comedians stamps in 1991 and the ten Stars of the Silent Screen stamps in 1994. The poster was used with permission of the Margo Feiden Galleries Ltd., New York.

How to Order the First Day of Issue Postmark

Customers have 60 days to obtain the first-day-of-issue postmark by mail. They may purchase new stamps at their local Post Office™, at The Postal Store® Web site at www.usps.com/shop, or by calling 800-STAMP-24. They should affix the stamps to envelopes of their choice, address the envelopes to themselves or others, and place them in a larger envelope addressed to:

Vintage Black Cinema Stamp
Customer Relations Coordinator
2 Federal Square Rm 211
Newark NJ 07102-9998

After applying the first-day-of-issue postmark, the Postal Service will return the envelopes through the mail. There is no charge for the postmark. All orders must be postmarked by Sept. 17, 2008.

How to Order First-Day Covers

Stamp Fulfillment Services also offers first-day covers for new stamp issues and Postal Service stationery items postmarked with the official first day of issue cancellation. Each item has an individual catalog number and is offered in the quarterly *USA Philatelic* catalog. Customers may request a free catalog by calling 800-STAMP-24 or writing to:

Information Fulfillment
Dept 6270
US Postal Service
PO Box 219014

Philatelic Products

There are six philatelic products available for this stamp issue:

- 463163, *First-Day Cover, Set/5, \$4.00.
- 463174, *Commemorative Folio w/ Pane, \$12.95.
- 463176, *Diary Page and Pane, \$12.95.
- 463184, *Uncut Press Sheet, \$50.40.
- 463191, *Ceremony Program w/ 5 stamps, \$6.95.
- 463193, *First Day Cover Keepsake w/ 5 First Day Covers, \$12.40.