

# 'Brownskin Models' Is Back-Better Some Say

Olde Tymers Scrapbook

## Greats Of First Edition In Wings For The Opening

By ROB ROY

The appearance of Irvin C. Miller's "Brownskin Models" running along the eastern seaboard spotlights the successful opera-

tion of the second oldest show ever to gain the public's fancy. First is "Silas Green From New Orleans," now in its 1st year.

That "Brownskin Models" can be compared with "Silas Green" is in itself noteworthy. It is even more amazing that Irvin C. Miller who gave the nation "Models" more than two-score years ago is still producer-director of the attraction. That it has operated lose to 40 years under its own financial steam is another thing Mr. Miller and his friends can point to, with pride.

"There were times," Mr. Miller points out, "when things were tough but we managed one way or another to keep going. A few gamble or two that paid off and changes here and there, a we somehow discovered a way."

It may be pointed out that Mr. Miller made several changes ever to the show's name in his plan to bring his attraction up to its former paying position. Old tymers will remember that the Irvin C. Miller attraction became "Irvin C. Miller's Varieties" for a few seasons.

For a while this change paid off but it wasn't the standard attraction that "Brownskin Models" had proved to be. So the switch back to "Models" followed and the turnstiles began to click as of old.

While Miller was the show's brain, producer and director there was another individual, Blanch Thompson, who meant almost as much to the show as Mr. Miller did. He must have thought so too since she is now his wife and has been for years. Blanch started out as the show's glamour girl. The most shapely and attractive chorine in show business. Her photos in the lobby and placed in newspapers, her shapely gams that were on display from the stage and her radiant personality drew as many patrons to the theatre as the stars did. And Miller majored in presenting the best talent available. Graduating from lead chorus girl Blanch Thompson became the production's gla-



BLANCH THOMPSON "Miss Glamour" of early "Brownskin Models" shows, who became soubrette because of her talents and beauty and manager because of her knowledge

of the business and co-owner when she married Irvin C. Miller the show's owner-producer. She is a part of the revival staged jointly by the Millers, Irvin C. and Flournoy.

Later is main comic in the show with music by Eubie Blake who co-starred in the original "Shuffle Along", a Broadway production.

morous soubrette. Later on she became manager and handled the show during Miller's absence.

"Brownskin Models" presented many of the very bright Sepia stars of the period when it first

opened. Many of these were on hand for the show's 1955 opening in Washington and later at New



ONE OF THE earlier chorus beauties who became soubrette and specialty artist later was Sara Venable known as "Cleo Speedy." She was in "Black

Politician" that toured the nation almost 60 years ago. "Cleo" was one of the beauties who helped make the patrons of tent shows chorus conscious.

York's Apollo theatre.

Among the returnees were Blanch Thompson herself, Ida Forsythe, Anita Bush, Marguerite Simmons, Goldie Cisco, Laura "Red" Livingston, Ollie DeSilva, Inez McDowell and Gussy Chadwick.

Naturally "Brownskin Models" cannot be credited with introducing the chorus girl line but it was easily one of the most famous of the "Glamour lines," headed by Blanch Thompson.

"Silas Green," several of the Williams and Walker shows and the original "Smarter Set" had choruses before "Models" came along. However those productions did not feature the glamour chorus as Miller interpreted it with his first "Models."

Old timers speaking of Sepia choruses name several cuties who hit the lights in "abbreviates" before turn of the century. Top notchers among the oldies were Daisy Peters, Lydia Halle Rivers, Sadie Mears and Sara Venable, who was known on stage as "Cleo Speedie." Old time singers like "Base" Foster, Matt Johnson of the Hogan show used to tell friends "We get as much kick out of watching the chorus as the patrons do." Harry Hill, then manager of the "Smart Set" was responsible for most of the girls even though his duties were not to include casting. He just moved around, helped pick the girls and his choices were usually okayed by the producer-owners.