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**THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90**

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***N E W S L E T T E R***

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***JIMMY HAMILTON***

1914-1994

James "Jimmy" Hamilton, who graced the Ellington reed section from 1943 to 1968, died September 20 in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, where he lived in semi-retirement. He was a disciplined, virtuoso clarinetist who was self-committed to continuous study and practice. Among his showcases with the Ellington orchestra were "Air Conditioned Jungle," "Ad Lib on Nippon," "The Tatted Bride," and "Tenderly." While a youngster, Jimmy started on baritone horn, but before settling on clarinet, played trumpet (hence the pre-Ellington nickname "Trumpet Joe"), piano, and trombone. His work with major band leaders before Duke included Lucky Millinder, Teddy Wilson, and Eddie Heywood.

At the time Duke sought him, Jimmy was reluctant to accept, for he was satisfied playing with a small "society band" and wondered how Duke had learned of him. Actually, he had never heard Duke in person and was artistically partial to the Lunceford band. After several calls from Duke, he did join for what he thought would be a six-month gig at the Hurricane, for he did not want to travel. The rest is wonderful musical history.

With his filigree and linear solos and obligatos as well as his section clarinet playing, Jimmy contributed distinctively regal, lilting, airy, and "pretty" colors to the orchestra's palette. But on tenor saxophone, which he had not played before joining Duke, Jimmy, a Ben Webster admirer, was down-homesy and robustly authoritative.

A genial, soft-spoken man, Jimmy Hamilton was beloved as a friend and revered as an artist.

**HAMILTON WILL BE FEATURE OF  
NOVEMBER 5 MEMBERS' CHOICE**

Contributed by Mac Grimmer

Our November program will be a members' choice tribute to the late Jimmy Hamilton. He was the last surviving member of the all-star reed section that stayed together for almost 20 years in the 50s and 60s.

Each member is encouraged to bring their own favorite Hamilton recording-tape or CD- and give a short commentary to accompany it. To avoid duplication, at your earliest convenience call Mac Grimmer at 202-546-7764 with your selection.

See you promptly at **8:30 pm on Saturday, November 5**, at our regular meeting place, **Omega House, 1232 Harvard Street, NW (corner of 13th and Harvard)**.

**MASTHEAD, LETTERHEAD, LOGO  
ANYONE?**

Calling artists and computer nerds (or whatever you might be or like to be called): How about designing a (1) masthead for our *Newsletter* and/or (2) letterhead for our stationery and/or (3) Chapter logo?

**MAC GRIMMER COORDINATOR  
OF MEETING PRESENTATIONS**

At the September meeting of our Executive Committee, Mac Grimmer accepted the responsibility for planning the programs for our monthly meetings. Pass on your ideas to Mac.

**DUKE ELLINGTON LIVE AT THE BLUE NOTE**

Roulette Jazz 7243 8 28637 2 4

Reviewed by Mac Grimmer

Almost all of this two-CD set is previously unreleased material, recorded in 1959 in the relaxed atmosphere of one of Duke's favorite clubs. Although most numbers will need little introduction to Ellington followers, the continually evolving repertoire always seems to contain a few surprises and new points of interest. And, of course, the band maintains their inspired and exciting performance level on this night as on nearly all other occasions.

The usual features for the soloists include, as always, lots of space for Johnny Hodges in several of his specialities, as well as some new tunes, in their polished form, from the soundtrack of the recently released *Anatomy of a Murder*.

Among the other soloists, Jimmy Hamilton's highly structured "Tenderly" is perhaps the ultimate version of this song. His encore is a much less formal "Honeysuckle Rose" with Duke playing stride piano.

Billy Strayhorn was also on piano that night. For those interested in comparing the two piano styles, Strayhorn's solo on "A Train" is considerably different from Duke's familiar introduction to the tune. Later, they duet on the longstanding but rarely heard "Drawing Room Blues" and "Tonk," their "party pieces."

A new tune, "Duael Fuel (Dual Filter)," written for Sam Woodyard, was played by two drummers that night with Sam trading his dynamic percussionistic fantasies with Jimmy Johnson. Another highlight is Shorty Baker's tongue-in-cheek solo in an unusual version of "Mood Indigo."

The funniest moment of the evening comes when Stan Kenton, in the audience, receives an extravagant introduction by Duke, who then calls for the band to play the brassy flag-waver "Newport Up." One of Kenton's constant complaints was that "Everybody says my band is too loud, but nobody ever says anything to him!"

**JAZZ MASTERWORKS EDITIONS: MUSIC FOR JAZZ ORCHESTRAS**

**NO. 1: "DAYBREAK EXPRESS" and NO. 2: "TAKE THE 'A' TRAIN"**

Reviewed by Annie Kuebler

One might as Brooks Kerr, pianist and Ellington expert, listened to Tony Bennett singing "Makin' That Love Scene," he recognized that it was another Ellington song based on the changes of "Tiger Rag." He mentally added it to a list of songs which includes "The Creeper," "Birmingham Breakdown," "Flaming Sword," "Braggin' in Brass," and most notably "Daybreak Express." Recasting familiar sounds and songs into new art forms lies at the core of the jazz tradition, one which young Billy Strayhorn learned quickly. Joining the Ellington organization in 1939 as a lyricist and copyist, it was only two years later that he altered the chords of "Exactly Like You" to fashion his breakthrough *tour de force*, "Take the 'A' Train." This song became the Ellington band's theme, providing the definitive word on Ellington's regard for Strayhorn. It reflected on Ellington's own measure as a bandleader, composer, and man that he encouraged the spotlight to shine on Strayhorn, "his right hand," as composer of the song most identified with the Ellington Orchestra and the most recorded song in their repertoire.

It is appropriate that the Jazz Masterworks Editions has chosen "Daybreak Express" and "Take the 'A' Train" as the initial transcriptions of Ellington/Strayhorn compositions for jazz orchestra. In its accompanying brochure the Jazz Masterworks Editions states its dedication "to the publication of performance and scholarly editions of enduring classics of the jazz repertoire." Based on the December 4, 1933 recording for Victor released under Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra, Brent Wallarab's transcription of "Daybreak Express," edited by Gunther Schuller, is scored for 16 pieces, including solos for alto saxophone and first trumpet. The Schuller transcription of "Take the 'A' Train" has written solos for piano and third trumpet. Scored for 14 pieces, it is a re-creation

of the Victor recording of February 15, 1941, also released under Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra.

Both these titles celebrate America's affection for songs of the descriptive genre and reflect America's love affair with the sounds of the locomotive. Surely, as soon as steam whistles pierced the air and the diminuendo and crescendo of a train's approach and departure burst into the aural history of our national life, the sounds were transfigured into an element in all American art forms.

"Daybreak Express" and "Take the 'A' Train" are available by request from: Jazz Masterworks Editions, National Museum of American History/Room 4127MRC 616, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560. Each Score is \$25; Score and Parts are \$40; for shipping, include \$4 for the first item and add \$1 for each additional item.

## GLEANINGS FROM JIMMY HAMILTON INTERVIEW FOR THE SMITHSONIAN

by Ted Hudson

*The Jimmy Hamilton interview for the Duke Ellington Oral History Project contains interesting recollections, observations, and opinions, among them:* When he joined at the Hurricane in 1943 (for \$125 per week), the orchestra played "all kinds of crazy ways"; there would be 15 different conceptions of how a piece should be played. He thought the reed section's execution was "terrible." ♪ ♪ Whenever Jimmy brought in a piece of music, Duke would never perform it as written. He tried it other ways; this would "wear you out." So Jimmy developed a habit of ignoring the changes until Duke settled on a way of doing the piece. ♪ ♪ At first, he had to tell Duke and Strayhorn how to write for him. Duke would bring in increasingly difficult music for him to play. ♪ ♪ While "Flippant Flurry" was Strayhorn's, "Air Conditioned Jungle" was a collaboration by Jimmy and him. Jimmy wrote the music for "Tootie for Cootie," but he and Duke "collaborated" on the final version. For "Pretty and the Wolf," Duke wrote the words, but Jimmy composed in one day the background (bass and two soprano clarinets), using a lot of counterpoint. The three instrumentalists rehearsed in a dressing room and then went right on stage to perform it. ♪ ♪ Jimmy wrote "Ad Lib on Nippon," but Duke had credit on the album as a way of getting "even" for some earlier disagreement. Later, when Duke wrote his autobiography, *MIMM*, he acknowledged Jimmy as composer. ♪ ♪ Duke did what others said you should not do, for instance, take a simple C chord — C, E, and G — and write it as C, E, F-sharp, and G. The F-sharp and G would "rub together," but still be "correct." ♪ ♪ Jimmy's famous photograph of Duke was a "lucky shot." When Duke saw it, he said it would be his "lobby picture." ♪ ♪ No Ellington band was "the best." Each had something "exceptionally outstanding." ♪ ♪ When Jimmy joined the band, Harry Carney did not know how to drive, so he drove Duke about in a "little old Plymouth." After Carney got a car in 1949, he became Duke's regular informal chauffeur. ♪ ♪ When Duke recorded Al Hibbler, he would not let him have a "trial," saying that he liked Hibbler's "virgin voice." ♪ ♪ As to critics, Jimmy did not think it right that a man might spend 30 years learning to play something and then have a critic with three years of experience say it "ain't nothing." Duke did not particularly like critics, but would be determined to make them "come over to his side." ♪ ♪ After leaving the band, on one occasion he found Duke and himself on the same bill with a number of first-class musicians. When Duke had his orchestra play a tune featuring the clarinet, he pretended to make a mistake and called Hamilton's name when introducing Russell Procope. ♪ ♪ For a year after moving to the Virgin Islands, Jimmy did not touch his instrument. Once he resumed playing, he performed with a small group at the Buccaneer Hotel for about 20 years. His contented life in the Virgin Islands was "the greatest thing that ever happened for" him. ♪ ♪

## QUOTED WITHOUT COMMENT

*If I hear a sigh of pleasure from the dance floor, it becomes part of our music.*

Duke, as quoted by Nat Hentoff in "A Magical Night with Duke," *Wall Street Journal*, 11 September 1991

## BROADCASTS REVEAL VARIATIONS ON DUKE/STRAYHORN MUSIC

Contributed by Angela Grimmer

At the October meeting Jack Towers' presentation of highlights from the Treasury series featured unique versions of many of Duke's tunes, broadcast in 1945-46 under government sponsorship. Most were longer than the studio recordings and reflected Duke's continuing process of invention and revision, making this a fascinating glimpse into a relatively neglected period of Ellington's career. The broadcasts were from many locations, including the Howard Theater here in Washington, D.C., and included "Reminiscing in Tempo" for the first time on radio. We also heard Duke's broadcast on the day of Franklin Roosevelt's death.

Jack and Jerry Valburn are selecting highlights from the original 48 LPs to be issued next year on five CDs.

### 1995 CALENDAR AVAILABLE

Bill Hill, president of the California DES writes:

"1995 Ellington Calendar. Twelve Great portraits by world famous Ray Avery (suitable for framing and eminently collectible) of Duke and also of his Sidemen and birthdates of most of all of the Ellingtonians. Produced and marketed by Los Angeles DES Chapter, PO Box 2652, Culver City, CA 90231. Cost is \$10.00 plus \$1.00 for P&H."

At our last meeting, our Pres. Ted Shell passed around a sample copy. For a group order from our Chapter, they will give us a rebate of \$1.00 per calendar. Our members may place orders at our November 5 meeting.

### AUDITION

So you want to play in our orchestra, eh? O.K., play this in 4/4 time, *allegretto*, any key you want (if you're a drummer, play it on your sock cymbal).



Done? Thanks. Tell you what—we'll let you know if something turns up for someone with your rhythmic conception. Have a good day.

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## 13th Annual International Duke Ellington Conference May 24-28, 1995

### CELEBRATING THE ELLINGTON & STRAYHORN COLLABORATION

For Further Information, Write To:

**The Billy Strayhorn Chapter of TDES**

PO Box 10285, Pittsburgh, PA 15232

Call or FAX:

1-800-209-9696 (USA)

412-681-3538 (Outside USA)

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### NECROLOGY

Henry Haywood, who occasionally substituted for Harry Carney in the Ellington orchestra in the early 1940s, died at home in New York on September 15. One of the 'Bama State Collegians along with Dud Bascomb and Erskine Hawkins, this "Gentle Monster" known for his full baritone saxophone sound played with Hawkins, Millinder, Hines, and others. In recent years he performed regularly with The Duke's Men.

Actress Fredi Washington, who starred with Duke in the film *Black and Tan Fantasy*, died in June. For a time she was married to Ellington trombonist Lawrence Brown.

### CHICAGO'S PEGASUS PLAYERS RE-STAGE *BEGGAR'S HOLIDAY*

Using some music found in the Smithsonian's Ellington Collection and a book rewritten by Dale Wasserman, the Pegasus Players present a modified *Beggar's Holiday*, for which Duke wrote music in 1947. The production is scheduled to open in October. Several years ago, this theater group revived the 1941 hit *Jump for Joy*.

For details, contact the Pegasus Players at O'Rourke Center, Truman College, 1145 West Wilson Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; phone (312) 271-2638.