
THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

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N E W S L E T T E R

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Archives Staff Hears Rare Strayhorn

Contributed by Reuben Jackson

The National Museum of American History's weekly Archives Center meeting of February 8 was considerably enlivened and uplifted by the presentation of our Ellingtonian friend and partner in (archival) crime, Walter van de Leur, who played sumptuous, previously unrecorded compositions by Billy Strayhorn, arranged by the affable and modest van de Leur and performed by the Dutch Jazz Orchestra for a (hopefully) soon-to-be-released CD *Portrait of a Silk Thread*.

Before playing four selections from the collection, Walter briefly discussed the challenge of arranging, recording and performing Strayhorn compositions for a contemporary jazz orchestra, but there was no sign of struggle present in the aggregation's reading of titles like "Blue Star," which highlighted "Strays" gift for constructing lithe, sensual and wistful harmonic voicings, and the orchestra's tenor saxophonist Toon Roos, who struck a perfect balance between approximating Ben Webster's breathy choruses and his own enticing variations.

By contrast, the still undervalued use of humor in the works of Ellington and Strayhorn was delightfully illustrated in an ensemble arrangement of "Tonk," wherein the title's stride piano-based rhythms and melodic richness were successfully transferred to full jazz orchestra, while the title track, which Walter approximates as being written in either 1944 or '45, appropriately wove the brand of cloudy, impressionistic harmonies beloved by arranger-composers such as Claude Thornhill, and haunting, somewhat mysterious themes.

Hopefully, Walter will present some (if not all) of this gorgeous material in Pittsburgh. Had he not been among friends in the Archives Center, there is a very good chance his master tape could have ended up in any number of hands!

Two Exciting Chapter Events Scheduled for March

by Mac Grimmer, Programs Coordinator

Drumming Styles Is Topic for Presentation By Anthony Brown at Regular Meeting

Duke's drummers will be the subject of our next regular meeting, **Saturday, March 4**. The program will be presented by Anthony Brown, Director of the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program (and a new member of our Chapter). A drummer himself, Anthony will analyze the style changes that took place over the years, for instance when Sonny Greer gave way to Louie Bellson, Sam Woodyard, and others. One of the leading authorities on the subject, he is currently writing a book on the history of jazz drumming.

This program on **March 4** will be at our regular meeting place, **Omega House, 1232 Harvard Street, NW (corner of 13th and Harvard)**. The time is **8:30 pm**, and remember, we start promptly.

Chapter to Enjoy Unusual Library of Congress Tour on March 25

In addition to our regular March 4th meeting, a special program has been arranged for the Ellington Society at the Library of Congress to take place on **Saturday, March 25**, at two o'clock in the afternoon. Sam Brylawski, LC's head of recorded sound, will give us a guided tour of the Music Division and of the remarkable Jerry Valburn Collection of Ellingtonia, which includes recorded sound, audio-visual, and photographic materials. Other jazz collections reside in the LC Music Division.

To take advantage of this rare opportunity, members should meet in **Room 113**, the Performing Arts Reading Room, in the **Madison Building** of the Library of Congress, located at **Independence Avenue, SE**, between 1st and 2nd Streets, **Saturday March 25, at 2:00 pm**.

Washington Nightclubs

by Mac Grimmer

The ultimate jazz reference book—*The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*—originally published in 1988, has just been issued in a one-volume edition (\$37.50 at Olsson's). Coffee-table size, over 1,300 pages, and weighing five pounds, it contains not only biographical material but also informative articles about every conceivable angle of the music. One example of interest to Ellington fans is in the article on "Drums": there is a half-page diagram identifying 16 different components of Sonny Greer's 1940 drum set.

There are 70 pages on "Nightclubs and Other Venues" with brief paragraphs describing current listings as well as historically important clubs (and venues) in each city, both in the U.S. and abroad. For instance, there are 187 listings for New York, 134 for Chicago, 63 for Paris, 30 for Philadelphia, and 12 for St. Louis. These numbers suggest very good coverage for each of these cities. On the contrary, there are only three listings for Washington, D.C.!

The Howard Theater, Duke's old stomping ground, is not listed. Nor is Jelly Roll Morton's Jungle Inn, nor any of the other clubs in and around U Street (except the Crystal Caverns). Blues Alley is there, but what about Charlie's, the Spotlight, the Showboat, the Blue Mirror, and any number of other clubs a casual Washington jazz fan could name. Olivia Davis' Patio Lounge was host to almost every small group in jazz during the middle '50s. There are records from there by Art Tatum and Lester Young (with Bill Potts). Recordings by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Bud Powell, as well as Willis Conover's THE Orchestra, were made at the Club Kavakos on H Street, N.E. The Casino Royal was Washington's leading night club and occasionally booked jazz. Many current clubs such as the One Step Down could have been listed, and anyone could have added Wolf Trap and the Kennedy Center to the listed Constitution Hall as a "venue."

Another current book, *Chicago Jazz* by William Howland Kenney, is partly a fascinating chronicle of Windy City nightclubs. Someone should do this for Washington. While not as important a jazz city as Chicago, we are at least as important as Buffalo, which has 24 listings in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*.

Close Encounters of the First Kind

by Lois Moody

In the early '50s, my life away from home at university in London, Ontario, became that happy blend so familiar to students: routine and surprise; scheduled classes and unpredictable discoveries—many of them during the quiet hours in my own room with books, a study paper deadline, and a radio to ease the silence. Quality radio was still the norm, with formatted mediocrity yet to be born in someone's nightmares.

It wasn't long before some select programs emerged as treats to be savored when the day's run on campus was over. Heading the list was a dinner-hour program from Toronto co-hosted by Helen MacNamara and Dick McDougall, challenged for top honors by an early evening show called *Byng's Choice*, presented by Byng Whittaker. Many of their selections were already familiar to me but began to take on new dimensions—perhaps because I was now ready to listen more critically and below the surface.

It was during one of those programs that I found myself totally captivated by a haunting wordless vocal, delivered with simplicity and crystal clarity. Like a tonal soul-mate, a clarinet line moved with it in marvelous counterpoint and harmony. In the same moment, I learned that this musical revelation was Duke Ellington's "Transblucency" and that it really was possible to be frozen motionless, spine tingling, because of the magic of music.

Ellington's work was favored on both these programs, along with well-informed and appreciative commentary, so my musical education moved along in grand style for the entire four-year period in London.

Imagine, then, the excitement when I learned in my junior year that the Duke Ellington orchestra was booked for the major ball of the season (18 February 1955), at which the prom queen would be crowned. No doubt the candidates and their escorts could hardly wait for the moment when "her majesty" would be announced, but I could have cared less. It was other royalty that held my interest. In fact, I wasn't even at the dance—officially—although I heard a great deal of the program, all under the guise of "working."

As a member of staff for *The Gazette*, the University of Western Ontario newspaper, I had volunteered for the task of periodically checking the progress of the ball program. My scouting forays became increasingly frequent, and extended, as I absorbed

(Continued on page 3 under "Close Encounters")

Notes on Our Society's "Dramatis Felidae"

(To Use Our Man's Term in *MIMM*)

Scott Schwartz attended the January opening of an exhibit of his photographs at the B. Carroll Reece Museum of East Tennessee State University. The exhibit, entitled *Appalachian Serpent and Fire Handlers: A Rainbow of Social and Spiritual Interaction*, consists of 32 black and white images documenting this religious practice. The purpose of the show is to illustrate the unique social and cultural interactions that are encountered during these services, interactions that go beyond the simple acts of handling serpents and fire. Versatile person that he is, Scott has engaged in scholarly scientific research and published on such fire handling practices. ♪ ♪ One of our new members, **Luvenia A. George**, is coordinator of the Washington public schools' Duke Ellington Youth Project (See the article "Ellington Youth Project..." on page 1.) ♪ ♪ Although we are considered to be regional, our membership is international. Our latest Chapter member from another country is well known to us, **Lois Moody** of Canada (See her article on page 2.) ♪ ♪ ♪ **Don and Jean McCathran** have brought—count 'em—five (5) first-time-ever members into our Chapter. ♪ ♪ ♪

TDES Supports "Sepia Panorama" Score and Parts Publication

With substantial financial support from (New York's) TDES, Inc., a score and parts for "Sepia Panorama" have been produced as the third in the Smithsonian's Jazz Masterworks Editions. Transcribed by Mark Lopeman and edited by Gunther Schuller, the complete score and parts cost \$40; the score alone is \$25. Previously released editions are "Daybreak Express" and "Take the 'A' Train."

Close Encounters (Continued from page 2)

the music, explaining earnestly to my editor on trips back to the office that I wanted to be sure we were right on top of events that would involve us later in the evening. When the moment for the crowning was approaching, I was to scoot down to our basement quarters in the field house, alert my budding journalist cronies, then tote my share of a special edition (featuring the newly-crowned queen) back up to the gym-turned-ballroom and scatter papers like wildflowers in all directions when the queen's name was announced.

For the popular coed, it was a highlight of her college career. For my *Gazette* buddies, it was a time of knowing secrets in advance in order to prepare the special edition and make the dramatic distribution move. For me, it was the first time to see (even if from a distance) and hear the man who already stood in my mind and heart as a unique creator of excitement, beauty, and originality in modern music.

And that's where the Duke still stands.

We Had Our Love (Of Duke) To Keep Us Warm

by Angela Grimmer

The Winter Storm of '95 cancelled most events in Washington, but while the rest of the city stayed home to escape the freeze, intrepid members of Chapter 90 bravely struggled against the elements to attend their monthly meeting in February. We were richly rewarded! The wind chill was below zero outside, but thanks to Jack Towers' presentation of selections from Circle's reproductions of the World Broadcasting transcriptions, things rapidly heated up inside.

The radio transcriptions, besides filling in a (relatively) undocumented period of Duke's career, were of further interest in that they are slightly longer than the standard three-minute limit, giving the band a chance to stretch a bit. As the freeze deepened outside, Chapter 90 members were ending their evening "In the Shake of the Old Apple Tree."

Membership Growing

Dues for 1995 membership have been coming in nicely, but we have not yet reached our goals. Have you sent in yours? Remember our dues structure: Student member-\$5; First-time-ever member-\$20; Continuing or former member-\$30.

Mini-Version of "Beyond Category" Exhibit to Travel to Libraries

A scaled-down "Beyond Category" exhibit has been made available for libraries, beginning in April. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and developed by the American Library Association with the cooperation of the Smithsonian's SITES, there are three copies. One will be at the Prince Georges County Memorial Library, Hyattsville, July 27-September 7.

Ellington Youth Project Underway In D.C. Schools; Festival Set For April at Smithsonian

Contributed by Luvenia A. George

The Fourth Duke Ellington Youth Festival will be held on April 28 at 7:30 pm in Flag Hall of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. It will be a showcase for student creativity, consisting of an art exhibit in Taylor Gallery; a literary anthology; performances of Ellington's music by choirs, bands, dance and string ensembles; and scenes from Shakespeare's plays with the music of Ellington and Strayhorn's *Such Sweet Thunder* (Shakespearean suite) as background. Students from 18 District of Columbia junior and senior high schools are participating this year.

The culminating activity of a year's study, the Festival is a component of the Ellington Youth Project, a multidisciplinary curriculum that includes music, art, English, social studies, foreign language, drama, and dance. Students have access to primary sources in the Smithsonian's Ellington Collection. The Project serves as a model, nationwide, for study of Duke's life and music.

The Smithsonian's Program in African American Culture, directed by Niani Kilkenny, and the Duke Ellington Collection, under chief archivist John Fleckner, present the Festival in partnership with the D.C. public school system. Chapter 90 member Luvenia A. George is the coordinator of the Project.

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

CELEBRATING THE ELLINGTON AND 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)

For Your Calendar

- March 4 Meeting/program (at Omega House)
- March 25 Library of Congress Tour
- April 1 Meeting/program (at Ben Pubols')
- April 28 4th Duke Ellington Youth Festival, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian
- May 6 Concert, Washington Grove (details later)
- May 24-28 "Ellington '95," Pittsburgh

Ellingtonia Curriculum Kit Prepared For Use in Schools

A package for use by teachers to promote understanding of Ellingtonia by secondary-level students will be released in April. Among the materials will be art, theater, and newspaper sources; Ellington's own writings; a teachers' manual; color transparencies and prints of jazz-inspired art; photographs; and two CDs or cassettes. For more information, you may call the Alternative Publishing Group of the Addison-Wesley Publishing Company at 415-688-0800.

Mitchell Parish's Lyrics for Popular Ellington Tunes

Bob Rcnyc sent us an item from the *Big Band Jump Newsletter* (July-August 1994), which reads in part:

It is not generally known that Mitchell Parish . . . who wrote the sensitive lyrics to Hoagy Carmichael's haunting STARDUST, as well as SOPHISTICATED LADY . . . also wrote the lyrics to Ellington's MOOD INDIGO.

The tune was originally an instrumental titled DREAMY BLUES, when it was given a new name by Parish. However, since his work was a buy-out, that is, sold for a flat fee, his name does not appear in the credits nor did he ever receive any royalties from the song's sheet music or recorded successes, which went instead to the song's purchaser-publisher Irving Mills.

P.S.: Don't Forget Your 1995 Dues!