
THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

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N E W S L E T T E R

Volume III, Number 7

OCTOBER 1995

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William (Wild Bill) Davis, 1918-1995

Organist and arranger William S. (Wild Bill) Davis, with the Ellington orchestra for two years beginning in 1969, died of a stroke in Moorestown, NJ, on August 24. His individualized playing of the Hammond organ helped establish the instrument as a legitimate jazz instrument. In his *MIMM*, Ellington calls attention to Wild Bill's musical "grace and taste." He performed with several Ellingtonians and others at "Ellington '90" in Toronto.

We extend condolences to the family and many friends of Wild Bill Davis.

Watch for an appreciation of Davis by member Alexandre Rado in our next issue.

Ellington Exhibit at Local Venue

A mini-version of the Ellington "Beyond Category" exhibit ran at the New Carrolltown Branch of the Prince Georges County Library during the summer.

At a well attended opening reception on July 30, Chapter member John Hasse gave an orientation address. The program included Ellington-Strayhorn music by pianist Marc Cary and flutist Yarborough Charles Laws. In August, pianist Sir Roland Hanna played a solo concert.

As an addition to the exhibit, Chapter members Jack Towers and Ted Shell prepared a special collection of local memorabilia, artifacts, and other materials for a special case just inside the entrance to the library. Member Deborra Richardson prepared another special display, this one relating to resources in the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian, where she is an archivist.

Hassan Will Focus on Ben Webster At October 7 Meeting

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

The program for our first meeting in the fall, on **Saturday, October 7**, will be presented by Rusty Hassan, a veteran Chapter member who for many years has been hosting a jazz radio program on station WDCU, as well as teaching jazz courses at American University. His topic will be Ben Webster, one of the giant stars in the universe of Ellingtonia.

Rusty promises a highly informative and entertaining evening, with a look at Ben's career in the context of the times, as he went through his several stages of development.

This promises to be as fascinating as the program Rusty did last year on Johnny Hodges. You won't want to miss it!

We will meet on **Saturday, October 7** at our usual place, **Omega House, 1232 Harvard Street, NW**, at the corner of Harvard and 13th. Remember that we start on time at **8:30 pm**.

Other Necrology

James Truitte, a lead dancer with Alvin Ailey, died in August at the age of 72. During his career he was a lead dancer with the Lester Horton and Alvin Ailey companies. In May he appeared on Patricia Willard's panel "Ellington and the Arts" at "Ellington '95" in Pittsburgh.

Ulysses Kay, a classical composer, passed away in May. He is the subject of a recent bio-bibliography co-authored by Chapter member Deborra Richardson.

Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: World Broadcast Series 1943 and 1945

Five CDs. Circle Records CCD 101-105.

Reviewed by Jack Dennis

Recordings in these five CDs, which number about 80 including alternate takes, are from studio transcriptions initially made by the World Broadcasting Company for radio broadcasts. The recordings are just as they were on the original transcriptions, including alternate takes, breakdowns and false starts. None of these were available to the public because the Musicians' Union imposed recording bans in 1943 which prevented its members from making records for commercial release.

George H. Buck, Jr. of Circle Records obtained the original masters of these recordings and released them on nine LPs, beginning in 1985. They now have been reissued on these five CDs.

The superior sound of these recordings is a product of the form of LP recording used by World Broadcasting, which was far in advance of the forties norm and was not limited by the three minutes restriction of the standard 78 r.p.m. single recording. As a result many numbers exceed the three-minute limitation, and some extend as much as five minutes. The resulting sound is so good that it has been said that ". . . it's like listening to Ellington live."

There are excellent explanatory notes with each CD package. These notes are invaluable to the listener, providing background and information on the band, the musicians, and the music. We are indebted to the late Eddie Lambert, who wrote these notes before his death in 1987. Also, in appreciation, Circle Records has dedicated this World Broadcasting Series to him. Some of us had the pleasure of meeting Eddie at the annual Ellington International Study Group Conferences in the early eighties.

The Ellington orchestra had been very stable in the thirties. When these recordings were made, Barney Bigard, Ben Webster, Cootie Williams and Jimmy Blanton were no longer with the band. However, there were quality replacements such as Shorty Baker, Taft Jordan, Cat Anderson, Jimmy Hamilton, Elbert (Skippy) Williams and, later, Al Sears. At the same time as these personnel changes occurred the style of the band changed. Ellington still wrote for his talented musicians, but as Eddie Lambert states, ". . . the intimate, chamber music like quality of much thirties Ellington was modified into a more orchestral concept." This was the big band era and the Ellington band sounded like a big band. Nevertheless, the inimitable Ellington flavor was still evident.

This five-CD set contains so much of not only the great Ellington music but some music of other composers carefully selected by Ellington to showcase his talented musicians. Some of the familiar Ellington recordings include: "Creole Love Call," "Mood Indigo," "Rockin' in Rhythm," "Caravan," "It Don't Mean a Thing," "Harlem Air Shaft," "Midrift," "Main Stem," "Metronome All Out," "Sentimental Lady" ("I Didn't Know about You"), "C-Jam," "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree," and many others. They also include some rarely heard songs: "Baby," "Please Stop and Think about Me," and "Hit Me with a Hot Note."

There is an abundance of terrific solos throughout this set. We can cite a few of them as follows: Shorty Baker on "Caravan" and "Ain't Misbehavin'," Johnny Hodges on "Passion Flower" and "Sentimental Lady," Rex Stewart on "Frantic Fantasy" and "Sentimental Lady," Harry Carney on "Frustration" and "Mood Indigo," Lawrence Brown on "Somebody Loves Me" and "Blue Cellophane," Jimmy Hamilton on "Honeysuckle Rose" and "C-Jam," Tricky Sam Nanton on "C-Jam" and "Rockin' in Rhythm," and solos by Wallace Jones, Skippy Williams, Al Sears, Junior Raglin, Otto Hardwick, and of course, the piano player. Trick Sam Nanton solos in a large number of these recordings, more than usual, representing probably the best collection of his work in the forties.

We should not overlook the work of the Ellington vocalists in these recordings, Joya Sherrill, Al Hibbler, Betty Roché and Kay Davis. Joya sings "I'm Beginning to See the Light" with great appeal, and the band is in great form supporting her. Her other numbers include "Kissing Bug" and "Everything but You." Hibbler sings a fine "I Ain't Got Nothin' but the Blues" (with Kay Davis' obligato behind him), "Every Hour on the Hour," and several others. Betty Roché sings three numbers, one of which is "I Wonder Why."

This five CD set is a welcome addition to the body of Ellington music. It fills a gap in the period in 1943 and 1944 when the Musicians Union prohibited commercial recordings. We are fortunate to have these recordings available.

Het Ellington Jaar in The Netherlands

Reviewed by Sjef Hoefsmit

My country, The Netherlands (a strange plural form for what is undoubtedly a singular identity), does not have the reputation to be the first one would think of when looking around in Europe for a place where Ellington's music became highly appreciated. Although Duke never skipped The Netherlands when he toured Europe, and although the many concerts he gave in my country were well attended, countries like Denmark and Sweden have a much greater reputation as "Ellington-minded."

One only has to think of the full houses in huge Konserthuset and Berwald Hall in Stockholm during "Ellington '94" to realize that Ellington's popularity in Sweden is far greater than in The Netherlands, although I believe that Alice Babs' presence also attracted quite an audience.

In view of the small number of Ellington devotees in my country, it was a tremendous achievement by the Conservatory of Hilversum to devote the year 1994-1995 to Ellington. *Het Ellington Jaar* translates as Ellington Year, during which the array of highly ambitious activities was called the Ellington Project. The project was supported by one of our radio organizations, VPRO, and by a special music centre in Amsterdam, De IJsbreker.

The whole approach was extremely Dutch. The quantity is of no importance as long as the quality is taken care of!

From November until April at the conservatory, an Ellington expert, Arie van Breda, made five presentations in which he concentrated on different aspects of Duke's music and the sections of the band. Sometimes the number of visitors grew to 25, many of them coming in between courses at the conservatory. There were only a few, like me, who could afford to stay the whole 90 minutes.

It was refreshing to hear the reactions of the young students when they, probably for the first time, listened to some well chosen examples of the brilliance of people like Tricky Sam Nanton, Rex Stewart or Johnny Hodges, to name a few.

When I was sitting in an ugly classroom looking at reproductions of well known record covers on the screen and listening to commercial recordings, all of which I knew by heart, I experienced (as at the annual conferences) a well known feeling of joy only because there were a few other people paying tribute to this music by sitting quietly and listening with extreme attention.

In March, I visited a very successful concert given by the first Big Band of the Conservatory, with some well known Dutch guest soloists, under the direction of Jerry van Rooyen playing Ellington music, most of which was arranged by Jerry van Rooyen, Rob Pronk and Bora Rokovic. Some of these arrangements were quite acceptable. The best parts, however, were those that were arranged the least.

It was also very clear that music written for the full band without too many solos can be very well played by devoted musicians under professional direction. "Traffic Jam," a.k.a. "The Biggest and Busiest Intersection," played as a part of *Black, Brown and Beige* came out very well. It was a pleasure to hear it performed live for the first time. This concert was given in the Dudok-hall of the conservatory, not bigger than four middle-size classrooms, and was consistently filled up to the last place with quite a number of proud relatives of the young musicians.

The most ambitious concerts were given in April. There was a very interesting day in De IJsbreker in Amsterdam on Saturday, April 22. In the afternoon there was a discussion with Gunther Schuller and in the evening a concert by the second Big Band of the Conservatory of Hilversum, this time not directed by either Jerry van Rooyen or Gunther Schuller. The music had been prepared by Walter van de Leur. The programme consisted of six selections from *Jump for Joy*, "Rose Bloom" by Strayhorn, "Nymph" by Ellington, and five selections from *Anatomy of a Murder*. All this music had been discovered in the Smithsonian Collection by Walter. It is impossible to give a serious review of the music as it was written. The way it was performed was embarrassingly pitiful.

Continued on page 4 under "Ellington Year in The Netherlands"

Ellington Year in The Netherlands (*Continued from page 3*)

Parts of this concert were broadcast recently. I have listened to the recordings several times. This could make me change my opinion. At the end of the broadcast, Walter pointed out that this music was written for the best musicians in the history of jazz and extremely difficult to play. He also must have been disappointed by the performance.

The next day, Sunday, April 23, the first Big Band of the Conservatory, under the direction of Gunther Schuller, gave a concert in a bit more ambitious surrounding, Paradiso, the Dutch Carnegie Hall for pop-music, Paradiso. This was my first visit to this famous Dutch music hall. It is an old protestant church, and it looks to have survived successfully many musical storms.

The concert was terrific. It is unbelievable how much Gunther had achieved after only one week of rehearsals with a group of young music students. He told me that they really worked intensively during the rehearsals. The result was overwhelming.

The concert opened with "Rockin' in Rhythm." Gunther played it again as an encore at the end of the concert. It was a great pleasure to hear and see that the clarinetist fully succeeded this time. He had troubles at the beginning of the concert. Who could blame him for being nervous?

I had the pleasure of seeing Gunther working in the following week with the very renowned professional Metropole Orchestra. Actually, I could see that he had quite some difficulties making these professionals do what he wanted. Also the fact that there were three different scores of "Harlem" in circulation made things complicated.

They rehearsed for the final concert in the first real full-sized concert hall, Vrendenburg in Utrecht. This most modern music hall in the centre of Holland was not sold out, but I was pleased to see that there were quite some people interested in listening to Duke's music.

"Harlem," which in my opinion was even too difficult to be played by Duke's own band, came out quite well. "Night Creature" was, on the other hand, excellent. It was not the first time for Gunther to conduct a symphony orchestra playing this piece. He did it three times in the early sixties with Duke's band and with Duke at the piano. It was neither the last time. He conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra on June 29 this year. We learned from the *DESUK Newsletter* of July that he gave among other selections another "stunning" performance of "Night Creature."

Although it does not belong to this "Ellington Project," which I have tried to review, I must admit that I am very proud of the achievements of the Dutch Jazz Orchestra, both at "Ellington '95" and when they recorded last January the beautiful Strayhorn music for the expensive but indispensable CD *Portrait of a Silk Thread*.

Strayhorn CD Available Through Member van de Leur

Members wishing copies of the unique CD *Portrait of a Silk Thread: Newly Discovered Works of Billy Strayhorn* may order copies from: The Dutch Jazz Orchestra, c/o Walter van de Leur, Klaasstraat 62, 5911 JR Venlo, The Netherlands. Enclose US\$25 (or 40 Dutch Guilders) in cash for each copy (includes postage and handling).

The music is essentially as performed by the Dutch Jazz Orchestra at "Ellington '95" in Pittsburgh.

Ellington Swedish Society Offers Strayhorn and Joya Sherrill CDs

You can buy *Portrait of a Silk Thread* by the Dutch Jazz Orchestra (Dutch Jazz 95001) and *Black Beauty: Joya Sherrill Sings, Arne Domnérus & Friends Play with the Duke in Mind* (Phont 8834) from: Duke Ellington Swedish Society, Skogstorpsvägen 39, 191 39 Sollentuna, Sweden.

Portrait is US\$25 plus estimated sending costs; *Black Beauty* is SEK 110 [Swedish krona] plus sending costs. Equivalent sums in other currencies are acceptable.

First-Person Recollection of a June 1947 Recording Session

Contributed by Walt Z. Seldon

Fred Waldhauer and I had been following Ellington as closely as we could, while remaining in school. Of course we had been at the Spring 1947 Bailey Hall concert (Cornell). Then we hitchhiked to the Sampson Naval Training Base for an Ellington concert. By a stroke of luck, we hitched a ride home in the band bus, which was passing through Ithaca. Russ Procope and Oscar Pettiford were particularly kind to these two college student admirers of the band. Somehow we were invited to the next recording session in New York. My recollection was that the recording studio was in mid-town Manhattan. Talking to Fred in 1993, he remembered the location as the Bronx. I remember we were both impressed at the purported giant echo chamber somewhere in the building. So there we were at an Ellington recording session for Capital Transcriptions.

The studio was impressive to me. Two magnificent recording tables. My dim recollection is Scully. They recorded each tune on a pair of fresh 16-inch acetates, with one serving as the master, to be held untouched until making the final master; the other was used for immediate playback in the studio. I was also impressed by the large number of microphones...perhaps as many as six or eight.

I had been impressed by an article in which Art Hodes had related a story of the personnel at a record session, and so I decided I would preserve my impressions for posterity. Now I will refer to my notes of June 10, 1947.

1. "Frustration": 3 trombones, Glenn out; 4 trumpets, Baker and Hemp[hill] out
2. "Blue Is the Night"(?): Same as 1; 3 trombones; 4 trumpets; trombone solo, Brown; baritone solo, Carney; trumpet solo, Nance; alto solo, Procope
3. "Jump for Joy": 4 trumpets, Frances & (?) out; 3 trombones, Glenn out; trombone solo, Brown; vocal, Nance; alto solo, Hodges; clarinet solo, Hamilton
4. "Blues in D Flat": Nance, Hodges, Brown, Sears, Pettiford, Guy, Sonny
5. "Azalea": Duke out. ? on piano, Strayhorn; vocal, Chester Crumple[r]; Nance out; Brown out; trumpet solo, Jordan
6. "Orchids": Trumpet, Jordan out; trombone, Brown out; Strayhorn on piano; sax, Hamilton out
7. "Frisky": Same as "Blues in D Flat" plus Carney; Guy out
8. "Blues in C": 5 trumpets, Nance out; 3 trombones, Glenn out; trumpet solo, Nance

On the next page I see 4. Skat Hemphil [sic]; 3 Hal Baker; Nance; 5. Jordan, 1. Frances William[s], 2. Dud Bascomb. These numbers may allude to their seating.

In conversation, we were told that Duke had just added (hired) two more trumpets, but had not had a chance to rewrite the charts, so he shuffled the musicians to fit the charts.

On one tune (perhaps "Azalea"), several takes were rejected. One because Sonny had hit a loud shot at the very end of the tune. Duke stood up and tried to get a good take. He used the line (today considered in very bad taste), "Just like in the case of rape, relax and enjoy it."

Ed. note: Walter Z. Seldon is a certified public accountant residing in Severna Park, Maryland. We thank him for sharing his recollection and notes.

Recent Releases Vary; Jeffries Has Different Album

Ageless in appearance and voice, Herb Jeffries recently recorded a set of "cowboy" songs, *The Bronze Buckaroo (Rides Again)*. As we know, Herb starred in black western movies as a singing cowboy before joining the Ellington orchestra.

Several recordings of Ellington-Strayhorn music give fresh interpretations and readings of their music. One is *Praise God and Dance: Jazz Vespers Featuring the Sacred Music of Duke Ellington*. This privately produced cassette is of a program at Yale on April 30.

Conceived and staged by the Rev. Jana Steed, it features local talent. And in a silky soprano, Jana (surprise!) sings "Heaven," and well, too.

Another is *A Swedish Tribute to Duke*, Vols. I and II, by the Swedish Radio Jazz Group (Phono Suecia PSCD 84-2 Stereo). Produced by STIM/Swedish Music Information Center in 1995, it has music as performed at "Ellington '95," including standards, original tributes by Swedish musicians, and Strayhorn's "Portrait of a Silk Thread."

Notes on Our Society's "Dramatis Felidae"

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

Have you seen the license plate on the car driven by **John Hasse**? It reads "JAZ4EVR." ♪ ♪ ♪ **Reuben Jackson** introduced the documentary film *A Great Day in Harlem* at its Washington premiere, held at the Smithsonian. Following the showing, he interviewed bassist Milt Hinton, one of the film's principals. A few days later, the film began a run at a local theater. ♪ ♪ ♪ The Swedish Duke Ellington Society has published transcripts of twelve of the presentations at "Ellington '94." Of these, half are by Chapter 90 members!: **John Hasse**, **Ted Hudson**, **Walter van de Leur**, **Alexandre Rado**, and two by **Patricia Willard**. ♪ ♪ ♪ **Ted Hudson's** article on the alleged Mrs. Clinkscales has been reprinted in three European publications. ♪ ♪ ♪ **Luvenia George** and **Jack Dennis** attended the IAJRC convention in Memphis during the summer. ♪ ♪ ♪ **Lois Moody** has an item on Yvonne Lanauze in the "Forum" section of the July 1995 issue of the *DESUJ Newsletter*.

Menees Collection Goes To Archives in Kansas City

According to a St. Louis newspaper, it took two 24-foot trucks to haul "Cactus" Charlie Menees' collection of recordings, books, periodicals, and other music memorabilia from his home in St. Louis to the Marr Sound Archives at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, a center for jazz research.

Charlie, who died in 1993, was a legendary radio personality in the service of jazz. His program was picked up far, far from St. Louis by listeners with appropriate equipment. They enjoyed his intelligent commentary and the type and quality of the recordings he played.

Duke Ellington was Charlie's favorite. In a *St. Louis Post Dispatch* article, Charlie's son Hardy is quoted as saying that the largest part of his father's collection was of Duke, "an entire room devoted to Ellington, and a large, framed photograph of Duke dominated the front room." Charlie attended the annual International Ellington Study Group Confer-

New Publication Focuses on Ellingtonia

Daybreak Express is the title of a brand-new official newsletter of the Archives Center of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, repository of the Ellington Collection. Created "to inform old and new friends of . . . collection-related news and other jazz based initiatives being implemented throughout the Smithsonian," it is edited by Chapter member Reuben Jackson.

The first issue (Spring 1995) is unusually attractive visually as well as informative. It includes "The Duke Comes Home" by Collection ex-archivist Marilyn Graskowiak, a description of the "hows and whys of archival processing." In "Preserving the History of Jazz," John Hasse speaks of challenges and issues involved. Reuben contributes a revue of Lena Horne's Strayhorn-tribute album, *We'll Be Together Again*. And there's a teaser: the reader is asked to identify a photo of Duke in a group of apparent fans and several musicians, taken perhaps during his 1971 tour of the U.S.S.R.

Daybreak Express will consider unsolicited manuscripts for publication. Its mailing address is MRC 601, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560; phone, 202-357-4477.

Bellson Earns Tributes

Louie Bellson has been selected by the Los Angeles Jazz Society to receive its award at its 13th Annual Jazz Tribute and Awards Concert, October 8. Last May his hometown, Moline, IL, held the Second Louie Bellson Jazz Fest '95 in his honor. Performers included his vocalist daughter Dee Dee Bellson and his long-time friend Clark Terry.

ences whenever he could, including "Ellington '89" in Washington.

Following the removal, his widow, Mary Kay Menees, remarked that until then she hadn't seen the surface of her dining room table in years. "Before the move," according to the newspaper, "floors had to be shored up with steel beams to keep them from buckling" under the weight of the collection.