

# THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

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## NEWSLETTER

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### Firsts with 1997 Dues

Having paid in advance several years ago, Sjef Hoefsmit is the first "financial" Chapter member for 1997. The first to pay currently for 1997 is David Fleming of England. Sjef and David have set a fine example. Let's get our dues paid before the end of this calendar year.

### DEMS Continuance by Hoefsmit Begins Auspiciously

Having received permission of Benny Åslund's widow and son, Sjef Hoefsmit has assumed editorship of the *DEMS Bulletin*, founded by Benny. His informative, engaging, mature, and attractive first issue (Sept.-Nov. 1996) is indicative of a smooth, quality editorial transition. In addition to discographical and other content expected in the publication, this issue contains tributes to Benny, Mercer Ellington, Leo Hunt, Willis Conover, Ella Fitzgerald, and Gordon Ewing by contributors.

As we are certain Sjef would be the first to insist, no one can take Benny's place. In this connection, we see an analogy: When Duke lost a founding stylist, the new "personality" (a term Duke used), respectful of the departed stylist's "personality" and of the orchestra's distinctiveness, nevertheless enriched that distinctiveness with his own conception and artistry. The *Bulletin* is in good hands!

### "Jim" Schneller, 1941-1996

A memorial service for Chapter member Frank James "Jim" Schneller was held at St. Jude's Church in Rockville on November 2. He died at Bon Secours Hospital in Baltimore on October 23 as a result of injuries in an automobile accident in May, as reported in our last *Newsletter*. Among friends mentioned in a newspaper obituary are "members of the

### Chapter Will Be Guests of Smithsonian for December Meeting

Our meeting on **Saturday, December 7** will be a combination program-exhibit-reception hosted by the Archives Center of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, home of the Duke Ellington Collection.

Multimedia "Through a Moon Mist: Duke Ellington in Our Intimate Lives" is the scheduled program feature. It is a slight revision of the presentation conceived and produced by Annie Kuebler that was a hit at "Ellington '96" in Toronto last June.

Especially for the evening, materials in the Theodore Shell Collection of Duke Ellington Ephemera, 1933-1990 will be exhibited. If there are any other items you would especially like to see, contact Annie at (202) 786-2214. Refreshments will be served.

The meeting will be in the Archives Center of the **Museum**, Constitution Ave. between 12th and 14th Sts., at **8:00 pm**. Please use the **Constitution Ave.** entrance and **arrive between 7:30 and 8:00 pm**, when a guard will be on duty and Archives Center staff and volunteers will be available to direct you to the meeting site (except for our meeting, the Museum will be closed at this time).

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Duke Ellington Society Chapter, Chapter 90." Jim was brought into the Chapter several years ago by long-time friend Jan Rossen. Born in Milwaukee, Jim once said he had been "a lover of [Duke's] art since 1954 when I was just eleven taking piano lessons...in Chicago." Very knowledgeable, during time he resided in Pittsburgh he was a jazz disc jockey.

We extend condolences to Frank James "Jim" Schneller's relatives and friends.

## Tom Whaley — Footnotes and Whole Notes in Jazz History

by Annie Kuebler

If Billy Strayhorn was the "shadowy figure" of the Duke Ellington organization, then Tom Whaley operated under deep cover. When mentioned at all in the annals of jazz, he typically appears in the footnote as Tom Whaley 1892-1986, chief copyist for Duke Ellington 1941-1968.

Born in Boston, Whaley was a trained musician and pianist who began his career in 1912; he worked with many personalities, including Enrico Caruso. During World War I, Whaley played piano for Will Vodery's US Army Pioneer Regiment Band (the 807th) travelling throughout Europe. Afterwards he returned to play throughout New England, and first met Fubie Blake in Worcester, MA when the cast of *Shuffle Along* was stranded there. In 1921, Whaley arrived in New York as pianist for Wilbur Sweatman's Band. He recalls meeting Ellington in New York in 1923 when Duke joined his friends Sonny Greer, Otto Hardwicke and Arthur Whetsol as a replacement for Elmer Snowden. He vividly recalls meeting Johnny Hodges (dressed in short pants!) in 1928 in Boston and insists that he turned Duke on to Hodges and Cootie Williams.

By the late '20s, Whaley began orchestrating as a musical director for various New York theatres. His duties included rehearsing acts and vocalists for popular amateur nights. He heard Ella Fitzgerald for the first time when he rehearsed her for a Lafayette Theatre amateur night and recalls that he, not Ali Bardu, introduced her to Chick Webb and his wife. Whaley remembers introducing Sarah Vaughn to Earl Hines while working in 1930 as director of the Harlem Opera House. In 1931, he began a long association with the Apollo Theatre.

Whaley's statements about his pre-Ellington career are from an interview by Milt Hinton for the Smithsonian Institution. Like most oral history, Whaley's recollections add colorful detail and supplement the historical record, but details and dates are obfuscated by memory and time passed. Moments of "discovery" are favored elements in American music, theatre or even military legends' biographies, and like oral histories contain elements of truth. But these mythic stories might also serve to sustain our belief that just as Ella Fitzgerald could step off the streets into the spotlight of center stage so, too, our own ship might one day arrive.

The music manuscripts in the Ellington Archives tell many tales. Scattered throughout are many scores in Whaley's hand with notations like "Small's Paradise," "Berry Brothers" or "Aphos & Estralita." These scores have often been dismissed as inconsequential "Whaley material," but instead they are records of the thriving Harlem theatre scene from the 1930s.

One recurring mystery of the Ellington Collection is now being solved and authenticated by Wayne Shirley, music specialist at the Library of Congress. Like Whaley's arrangements for the Harlem theatre, a number of scores and parts marked "Willard Robison" were clearly not intended for use by the Ellington orchestra. Many of these arrangements are the seminal work of William Grant Still.

Robison and Still are two more footnotes in the history of jazz. Prolific composer Robison is most noted for songs of the rural South like "Old Folks" or "rhythmic spirituals" like "Truthful Parson Brown." From 1931-34, he aired a weekly half-hour radio show called The Robison Deep River Orchestra Hour on WOR in New York City. William Grant Still later went on to a distinguished career in classical music and is considered the "Dean of African-American Composers." Still often noted that his work with Robison was an important stage in his development as an orchestral arranger and conductor, but his footnote in jazz usually lists his participation as oboist in the pit orchestra for *Shuffle Along* while omitting his composition and arranging contributions. Gunther Schuller does mention Still's arranging work in *The Swing Era* and swings himself from describing Still's arranging work as "talented" (for Paul Whiteman) to "turgid" (for Artie Shaw).

So why are the Robison Deep River Orchestra Hour arrangements in the Ellington Collection? Somehow the image of Duke tucking them under his arm for safekeeping doesn't come to mind. The New York black music scene whether in theatres like the Apollo, nightclubs like the Cotton Club or radio stations like WOR were fluid environments and interacted a great deal. I believe Tom Whaley, who considered himself "Head Librarian" of the Ellington organization, recognized the value of arrangements and collected the Robison scores and parts. Could Whaley have done a stint as Robison's musical director after Still left in 1934? Some of the parts are in his hand...?!

Duke Ellington reportedly displayed disregard for his own music manuscripts and in a 1956 interview with Carter Harmon firmly stated, "Posterity? I don't give a shit about it!" It is my personal notion that Ellington could afford such a casual public stance because he was well aware that Tom Whaley was behind the scenes documenting Ellington's role in 20th century American music. To study the orchestral style of "classical" composer William Grant Still you must figuratively crawl into the pit of a Harlem theatre orchestra and watch acts derived from 19th century minstrel shows. To study the orchestral style of "jazz" composer Duke Ellington you might find yourself ushered into one of Europe's grand performance halls listening to Grieg or Delius. I delight to think of a young musical student flitting from aisle-to-aisle between the genre-labeled bins of a record store or twisting his radio dial from one formatted station to another and discovering that Duke's definitions of the two types of music—good and bad—still ring true.

In his lifetime, Ellington expressed deep frustration over his inability to "break down the walls of music categorization." The finest legacy Duke Ellington has left us might be the means to do it.

## Can't Find the River's Source?

At "Ellington '96" in Toronto, Ron Collier mentioned during his presentation that Duke's *The River* music conducted by Ron had been recorded by the Detroit Symphony. Have you searched in vain for it? Well, it's on a double title CD: *William Grant Still: Symphony No. 1 (Afro American)* and *Duke Ellington: Suite from "The River"* (Chan 9154) in the American Series produced by Chandos Records in England. (Neeme Järvi conducts the Still composition.) Borders, and perhaps others, has it in their computer catalog of available CDs.

## "Yvonne" Performing in Hong Kong

Eve Smith, as she is professionally known now and who sang with Duke simply as Yvonne [Lanauze], says, in correspondence to your editor and his wife, that she received our *Newsletter* and "enjoyed reading critiques on the daily sessions" at "Ellington '96" in Toronto. You will recall that she performed at the conference.

Since September (and until January), Yvonne has appeared at the beautiful Island Shangri-La Hotel in Hong Kong, where she is "singing a lot of Ellington - What better music is there?" A Washingtonian until joining Duke, this is her third trip to Hong Kong.

## In Praise of Sonny

Following is an excerpt from the poem "Sonny Greer" by Howard Hart in *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* edited by Sascha Feinstein and Yusef Komunyakaa:

... *your right hand could handle*  
*all those drums those cymbals*  
*While your left picked flowers out of the horns*  
*of Ben Webster Rabbit Harry Camey*  
*And each time Duke played*  
*you put a ring on each finger*  
*of his hand*  
*and a bell on his toe.*

## Quotation of the [Last] Month — Addendum

In our last issue, we ran the quotation within a quotation in *Blue Light* by Andrew Dunn: *Fear God, love your parents and never talk during a Lawrence Brown solo.* Dunn attributed it to "someone at the funeral" of Brown. Well, turns out that the "someone" was Chapter member Morris Hodara, who writes to tell us that the words were not original with him, but that he was quoting Ed McDonough. The correct quotation by McDonough, printed on the Brown funeral program (a copy of which Morris so graciously sent us) is: *Love God, obey your parents, and never talk during a Lawrence Brown solo.*

## Strayhorn Book by van de Leur In Preparation

Chapter member and Walter van de Leur is working on a proposal and hopes to land a contract by the end of the year for a book on the music of Billy Strayhorn. The book will be guided by his extensive research and analysis of manuscripts in the Strayhorn estate, the Smithsonian, and other sources. Naturally, collaboration between Ellington and Strayhorn will be addressed, but not as a major focus.

## Plans for *Play On!* to Play On

The new musical *Play On!* opened at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre recently. It is a loose version of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with Ellington-Strayhorn music arranged by Luther Henderson and choreography by Mercedes Ellington. Efforts have been underway for the production to go to Broadway in the spring.

## Widow of Former President Dies

Following a lengthy illness, Jean Allen recently passed on. She was the widow of the late Terrell Allen, who had been president of Chapter 90 for about 30 years.

Jean's family and loved ones have our deep sympathy.

## New Publications

One in a series of African-American biographies, *Duke Ellington: Giant of Jazz* by Wendie C. Old has been published by Enslow Publishers. We have not seen a copy, but it reportedly is an introductory work intended primarily for youth.

The Center for Black Music Research has launched *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interartistic Inquiry*, part of its Integrative Studies Program, "designed to investigate common modes of inquiry into the black expressive arts, including . . . music."

## "Dramatis Felidae"

(To Use Our Man's Term in MIMM)

About the Cats and Kittens in Our Chapter

As we know, **Jack Towers** is in great demand as a sound engineer, especially for reissues. Recently he did the sound restoration for *First Base: Oscar Pettiford: Rare Recordings & Concert Dates, 1953-60*, produced by the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors. ♪♪ For the Montgomery County Historical Society, **Don McCathran** lead a tour of Washington Grove, where he has lived all his life and served for many years as its mayor. ♪♪ **Teddy Hudson's** spoken tribute to Leo Hunt at "Ellington'96" in Toronto was transcribed and printed in the latest *DEMS Bulletin*, now edited by **Sjef Hoefsmit**. Incidentally, an internet posting says that Sjef will complete the Ellington itinerary project started by Joe Igo and continued by Sjef's great friend Gordon Ewing, who died recently. ♪♪ **Walter van de Leur** was in town in the middle of November to wind up his Smithsonian fellowship. Archives staffers there gave him a "best wishes" luncheon. He regretted missing our November meeting by a day or so. ♪♪ Recently **John Hasse** spoke, **Reuben Jackson** conducted an overview of the Ellington Archives, **Davey Yarborough** talked about Gonsalves and Hodges and, with other musicians, presented a mini-concert, and **Patricia Willard** discussed *A Duke Named Ellington* film following its showing—all for an "Ellington and Jazz" Smithsonian Study Tour, which attracted participants from as far as California. In mid-October **Patricia**, **Reuben**, and **John** spoke at the two-day "Sung and Unsung Jazz Women" Symposium and Concerts at 651, An Arts Center in Brooklyn, NY. Always in demand, during November **Patricia** was the discussant for two evenings of programs in the Library of Congress Jazz Film Series. ♪♪ **Jack Dennis** is progressing in his post-operation therapy.



Holiday Gift  
Suggestion:

A Membership in Our Society!

## An Evening with Jack Towers

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Our November meeting, at Jack and Rhoda Towers' home, provided a good illustration of why he is in the forefront of the world of Ellingtonia. We heard a sampling of his collection from the 40s, from the Hurricane club and later, and listened with rapt attention as Jack described the step-by-step process of synchronizing two discs of a 1932 recording of two medleys to produce stereo for the later released *Duke Ellington: Stereo Reflections in Ellington* CD. The highlight of Jack's program, though, was a tape of Willis Conover's Voice of America interview of Duke 25 years after the Fargo concert, with Duke comments on some of the tunes as Conover played them. Duke was gratified to know what the band sounded like at a dance date at that time and, among other things, professed surprise that the tempo of "Boy Meets Horn" was so slow! Our surprise (and delight) was a phone call in the middle of the meeting from Wendy Heuston from England, checking in so that she would not be marked absent from the meeting.

## Leeds Conference Planners Seek Ellington Portraits

Among other attractions, the "Ellington' 97" Committee would like to develop an exhibit of Ellington Portraits—musical and artistic. If you have good quality copies or originals and are willing to loan them, get in touch with Elaine Norsworthy by e-mail: [enorswor@environ.devon-cc.gov.uk](mailto:enorswor@environ.devon-cc.gov.uk) or "snail" mail: *Pepys Cottage, 2 Granary Lane, Budleigh Salterton, Devon EX9 6JD, United Kingdom*. Elaine says that exhibition space will be stewarded when in use and locked at other times. She advises that as far as Duke's own paintings are concerned, "there are some intriguing clues in Stratemann—see the entry on 'Celebrity Art.'"

### Chapter Board of Directors

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