

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

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N E W S L E T T E R

Volume V, Number 5

MAY 1997

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Washington Chapter Was First

by Ted Shell, President

Congratulations to the Toronto Chapter of the Duke Ellington Society for starting its newsletter; we are thankful to have received a copy.

We would like to take issue with a statement in its lead article: "The Toronto Chapter, which was founded in 1959, has the second longest record of continuity, trailing only that of New York." The fact is that the Washington Chapter should be considered the oldest chapter, having started in 1955. Maurice Lawrence, a close friend of Duke who frequently travelled with the band during his vacations, was our first president; second was Juanita Hardwick, wife of the inimitable Otto, also a member of our Society.

Our original name was The Duke Ellington Jazz Society. In deference to Duke's suggestion, we changed it to The Duke Ellington Society.

Whenever the band was in Washington, we attended en masse and were always introduced to the audience by the Duke. We entertained him several times at birthday parties. On one memorable occasion he brought Stanley Dance with him and spent several hours while a taxi waited.

The founding of our Society precedes that of the international group in the early 70s with Bill Ross of California as president and our Maurice Lawrence as vice-president.

The current Annual International Duke Ellington Conferences have no direct relationship to the aforementioned group. The Washington Society, with its third president, Terrell Allen, along with Jack Towers, Malcolm Tillett, Ted Shell, Dennette Harrod, Don Miller, and a few other locals got the First Annual Duke Ellington Study Group Conference together here in Washington, and that started it all. The second was in Chicago, the third in Oldham, England, and so on. We also hosted the ninth conference, in 1989, again under Terrell's presidency.

Of course our Jack Towers had great input in the goings-on, including responsibility for the

May Program: Duke in Cyberspace

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

The internet, the hottest topic around these days, has an increasing jazz presence, including that of Duke Ellington. There are not only web sites for Duke—the New York Ellington Society has a new one—but also a discussion group, maintained by Andrew Homzy. For the non-technically-inclined, cyberspace can be intimidating, at least initially, but fortunately we have our own tour guide to the labyrinth, Peter MacHare. Peter has designed and maintained one of the major web pages devoted to Duke and his music and will explain and demonstrate it to us at our May meeting. Don't worry, there will be lots of music, too!

See you on **May 3**, at our regular meeting place, the **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th & Varnum Sts., NW**. The time is **8 pm**.

sound systems in most or all of the first nine or ten conferences. Jerry Valburn was also very prominent in the first meetings.

We want the 17th Conference, which we will host in 1999 on the 100th anniversary of our hero's birth, to be the largest and most memorable. Plans are in high gear, the hotel having been booked already.

The title of the Toronto newsletter article quotes our man: "We Love You Madly." We also love you madly, but cherish our history and accomplishments and jealously guard them. But seriously, we just want the history to be correct. The Washington Chapter has been meeting continuously since 1955; thus, we feel we are the original and longest meeting group.

Duke Ellington Youth Project

April 24, 6 pm - 6th Annual Festival, UDC
April 25, noon - Original Poetry & Drama,
Carmichael Auditorium, NMAH, Smithsonian
April 26-June 2 - Art Exhibition, Taylor
Gallery, NMAH, Smithsonian

Don and Bill Fondly Remember Their Good Friend Toby

by Jack Towers

During the last decade of his life, Otto "Toby" Hardwick had two close friends, both members of Chapter 90—Don McCathran and Bill Flemmons. Here are some of their memories of their days with their old buddy.

Like Duke, Toby was a native Washingtonian. As teenagers, they lived just a block apart. Both were interested in music, so Toby was with Duke when the band process began. Toby's first instrument was the string bass, and at 14 years, he had to have his dad carry the big fiddle up on the band stands. In the early Ellington band, he often played a bass sax, which he called "the mule." Toby's main job was playing the lead alto which gave an appealing "creamy" sound to perhaps the greatest reed section in jazz history.

According to Don McCathran, Toby had a great memory and loved to talk about his Ellington years. Toby said, "The early Ellington compositions were largely group efforts. Somebody would get an idea. The band would put it together, and Duke would shape it into an arrangement." Both Don and Bill recalled how much Toby liked Bubber Miley, and that Bubber would go to church on Sunday...hear some sounds...and use those sounds in his solos the next day. Toby told them that the band got the first movie job for a black band because the members could read music so well. He said, "If a fly landed on one of our music sheets, he had to watch out 'cause he was going to get played!"

Toby itched to go to Europe, and thought he would never get there if he stayed in Duke's band. So he left the band in 1928 and struggled his way over to Europe. There he played with Noble Sissle and other groups. Eventually he came back to the States and formed his own big band. Count Basie played with his for a while, and through the years when the two would meet, Basie would call him "Boss."

When Toby came back to Duke's band in 1932, he found Lawrence Brown waiting on the sidelines. Duke had hired Lawrence, but wouldn't actually put him on the stand because that would boost the band to an unlucky 13 members. When Toby returned, Lawrence sat in the section to make a 14-member band.

What kind of guy was Toby? According to Don and Bill, he was a warm, out-going, with a nice outlook on life. He was a very religious person. One time Don went to Toby's home and entered with his personal key to the door. Toby was on the phone. When the conversation ended, Toby asked Don, "Do you know who I was talking to? I was talking to my undertaker. You've got to keep in good with those people." One time when Don and Toby were watching one of Duke's sacred concerts on TV, Toby remarked, "I know for certain that Duke is sincere about that."

Toby had great respect for his fellow Ellington band members, especially Johnny Hodges. Toby said, "Nobody can follow the Rabbit. His personality came out of his horn." Toby loved "Come Sunday" from *Black, Brown and Beige*, and always wanted to play the solo. But he said, "Johnny was never sick. Johnny was never late. Johnny was never nothing." So, Toby never got to solo the number until he recorded it with Jimmy Jones on Wax records.

Don tells of one time he was playing an Ellington record. As Johnny Hodges' solo was approaching, Toby said, "Here comes the goosebumps, Don."

Sometimes on the stand when Hodges was soloing, Toby would put down his horn and just sit and marvel. He said one time Harry Carney nudged him and said, "Start playing. You didn't buy any ticket."

Toby liked Barney Bigard, especially his beautiful low register. "But," said Toby, "let me hear him play 'Air-Conditioned Jungle'!"

Toby was very close with Lawrence Brown. One time after he left the Band, Toby met Lawrence and asked him how things were going. He quoted Lawrence: "Well, you know we play 'Things Ain't What They Used To Be.' What they really should title it is 'Things Ain't What They Seem To Be.'"

According to Bill, Toby gave Joe Nanton the nickname "Tricky Sam" because he was so slick and tricky with his fingers. Toby said Tricky would go to a water fountain with a cup in his hand and turn on the water with the same fingers that held the glass. Bill listed some of the other nicknames Toby gave to people: "Sweet Pea" for Strayhorn, "Jeep" and "Rabbit" for Hodges, and "Little Jazz" for Roy Eldridge. Otto himself was known as "Professor." Bill also said that Toby learned to fly airplanes in the 1930s.

Toby told Don that "Duke never hired anybody...and never fired anybody. We did the hiring. You couldn't get out of the band unless you got a replacement." Toby had some family problems and needed to leave. He urged Duke for a long time to get Russell Procope in the band as a replacement. One time Toby got Procope to take his chair in the band at a theater performance. Toby went down in the audience and sat in the first row. The curtain went up, and as Duke came out on the stage, he caught sight of Toby and did a double-take. Then he looked at the reed section, and there was Procope."

(Continued on page 3 under "Toby")

Three Souvenirs from Paul: *Smoke, Sketch & Song*

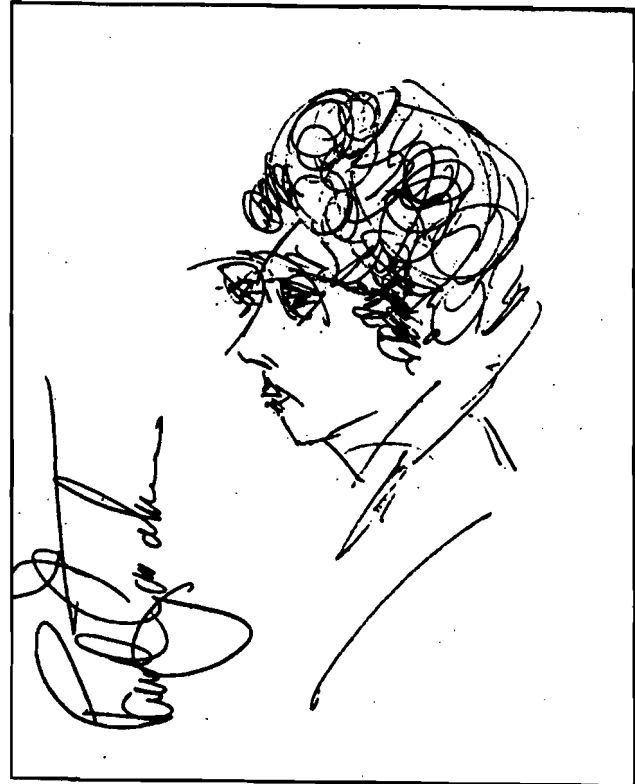
by Angela and Mac Grimmer

The time, a cool, rainy night in January, 1973. The place: a small, narrow bar named Churchill's on the upper east side. We can't remember why we came to New York for the weekend, but we know why the weekend became memorable for us: we met Paul Gonsalves.

We had gone there to hear Brooks Kerr, pianist, Ellington specialist and one of Duke's alter egos in his later years. Brooks had just arrived and the trio included Paul Quinichette (the vice-president) on tenor and Sam Woodyard on drums. (Sam was by then out of the band, but soon would reunite briefly with Duke on conga drums!) They were just setting up in the front window—that was the only place even a trio would fit in Churchill's—when Paul came in, walked up to the bar beside us, and looked around. We both had the same thought, where was the band and how can Paul be wandering around New York by himself? Angela immediately said, "We know who you are. Why aren't you out playing with the band?" Paul put his finger to his lips and said, "Shhh! Duke's in the hospital. Nobody's supposed to know. Don't tell anyone!" We promised we wouldn't. (We found out later that Duke was indeed in the hospital, in Los Angeles, for a virus infection and general fatigue.)

Paul reached in his pocket, pulled out a cigar, gave it to me, and started a conversation with Angela. I moved closer to the trio, which by now had begun playing. They found a table, where they sat and talked as Paul produced another souvenir of the evening, a sketch of Angela on the back of a menu, which we still treasure. He then borrowed the tenor from the other Paul, Quinichette, stood at the end of the bar—there was no room on the bandstand—and serenaded Angela in his unique ballad style with "Gone With the Wind." Even the conversations at the bar stopped as everyone turned to listen to Paul's tender, languorous glide through the melody.

A few minutes later Teddy Wilson came in, looked around, said a few hellos, and turned to leave. Brooks tried gesturing him over to the piano bench, but Teddy smiled, waved, and was gone. Soon, Paul, too, was gone, out the door and off to the next stop on his evening tour.



Courtesy of Angela Grimmer

Toby (Continued from page 2)

About the difficulties faced in band living, traveling, race relations, etc., Toby said, "We always played our best when we were tired, hungry, and mad." According to Don, Toby never talked about those difficulties in a complaining way. He talked about it all as something amusing—not that he hadn't recognized tragedy or inequities. He had the philosophical outlook to overcome those things. His only comments on his role in the great Ellington reed section were in a self-deprecating way. He never spoke of himself in laudatory terms.

Back in Washington in his later years, Toby worked mostly in hotels in menial jobs such as doorman. Once he told Don, "Most folks work hard when they are young and take it easy when they get old. I played around when I was young. Now I'm working like hell as an old man."

Don urges folks who are interested in the old days in the Ellington band to look up the book *Duke Ellington* by Barry Ulanov, published in 1946.

Ed. note: We thank Bill, Don, and Jack for this informative evocation of Otto "Toby" Hardwick. We encourage other contributions from both members and non-members.

"Dramatis Felidae"

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

About the Cats and Kittens in Our Chapter

♪♪ One of our new members, **George Davis**, who heads an investment firm in St. Louis, for two years during the late 50s led the Howard Swingmasters. After 30 about years, he picked up his trumpet again and occasionally plays publicly. He has written scripts for jazz tv presentations and produced concerts in the St. Louis area featuring the likes of James Moody, Wallace Rooney, and Frank Foster. ♪♪ Another new member, **Ken Steiner**, an Ellington "nut" who lives in Seattle, formerly resided locally. He was on WPFW-FM's all-Duke music broadcast on Duke's birthday in 1986. **Jack Towers** was also a featured guest that day. ♪♪ Multi-talented **Scott Schwartz** presented a paper titled "Death, Where Is Thy Sting" for the 20th annual meeting of the Appalachian Studies Association in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, March 15-16. In addition, that weekend Scott turned in the finished draft of photobook manuscript *In Our Father's House* to the University of Kentucky Press. The book and paper presentation document the culture and music of the Appalachian serpent handlers in Eastern Kentucky. ♪♪ **Davey Yarborough** is pictured and quoted in the April issue of *Washingtonian* magazine. Re his leadership of the Duke Ellington School's jazz orchestra, he says that "Ellington's group was always open to talented Washingtonians who wanted to get in the music business." ♪♪ At a March concert by the Dutch Jazz Orchestra, **Walter van de Leur** was called upon to talk about some of his Strayhorn discoveries, some of which were played by the orchestra on that occasion. ♪♪ **Patricia Willard** and **Jack Towers** were recent guest lecturers at **Rusty Hassan's** sessions on Duke sponsored by Georgetown U's continuing education program. We've heard that Rusty will do another series at the Smithsonian. In April, Patricia was on the "HERstory-Preserving the Legacy" panel of the Tri-C Jazz Fest's "Remembering Ella" events in Cleveland. ♪♪

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The Bubber-Barney-Toby Connection Revealed

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Ben Pubols captivated the audience at our April meeting with a perceptive analysis of Duke's music. His topic, "Bubber, Barney & Toby," referred to their being the prototypes of three elements of Ellingtonia that persisted through the years—the growl trumpet, the New Orleans clarinet, and the liquid, sultry alto sound. Ben's inspiration was a Mercer Ellington oral history audio clip he played for us in which Mercer pointed out the continuum of these elements in the orchestra's history—in slightly different forms—can be traced back to the beginning, the first incarnations being Miley, Bigard and Hardwick. Toby's wife was one of the early presidents of our chapter, and he attended some of our meetings. Ben produced another oral history tape where he mentions this. A fascinating evening.

The New Washingtonians to Debut

Known as the Duke Ellington School of the Arts' Jazz Orchestra, on April 29, this fine group of youngsters will be renamed The New Washingtonians in honor of their school's namesake. The band is led by Chapter member Davey Yarborough, head of the school's instrumental music program and himself a respected jazz artist. The New Washingtonians are to perform at the North Sea Jazz Festival in the Netherlands in July. A concert here on April 29, Duke's birthday, will help with their expenses for the trip.

Another Alumnus Set for "Ellington '97"

Bill Berry will be joining Willie Cook, Norris Turney and Jimmy Woode at the evening concerts at the Leeds Conference. They will also appear on the daytime programme, as will Kay Davis—who will be reunited with the Anglo-American trio with whom she, Ray Nance and Duke toured Britain and Europe in 1948.

ELLINGTON '97

MAY 22-26



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