

# Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of  
*The Duke Ellington Society*



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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## She Was Cool After All

by Francis Arnold

My third grade teacher at Sumner Elementary School (17th and M Streets, NW in Washington, DC) was Eudora Winters Webster. In my third-grade eyes and those of my classmates, Mrs. Webster was, well,—a disciplinarian. When I (then a Howard University freshman) saw her nine years later at the Wiltberger Street stage door of the Howard Theatre, she remembered me. I didn't realize until the door opened why she was standing out there. Then she introduced me to Johnny Hodges and Ben Webster.

From that moment on she was cool!

## Beautiful Tears

In the summer of 1973, [Ben Webster] went on an 11-night tour of Denmark with Harry Edison and Benny Carter. Webster got very sentimental about seeing Carter again, and sometimes, when a ballad was going well, tears ran down his cheeks. This happened more than once during his final year, and made his Danish friends quite uncomfortable. The old tenorist simply told Jesper Thilo, "I cry because I play so beautiful."

— Jeroen de Valk in *Ben Webster: His Life and Music*

## Members' Productions Now Available

Davey Yarborough, Esther Williams (Yarborough), and Walter van de Leur are the latest of our members to create important works for our enjoyment and edification.

*Beautiful Friendship*, a CD by multi-instrumentalist Davey and vocalist Esther will be introduced at a release party on January 24 at the historic Bohemian Caverns.

The awaited book by Walter van de Leur, *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*, has a publication date of January 28.

Previews for both the CD and the book have been highly favorable. Watch for our reviews of both.

## Cotton Tail and Tuff

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Ben Webster (1909-1973), one of the giants of the tenor sax, is the subject of our February program. Jack Towers, Ben's close friend, will be presenting the program. Jack will feature not only Ben's music, but also videos of Ben, and audio tapes that Ben sent personally to Jack.

Ben Webster's tenure in the Ellington Orchestra was short, but his accomplishments were great. Ben's music, as complicated as his personality, ranged from tender to tough. Ben himself was touched to the point of tears if he heard exceptionally moving music, yet he also earned the nickname "The Brut." Webster's best know tenure with Ellington was 1940-1943, but he also sat in with the band at least a couple times in the middle 1930s and rejoined the band in 1948-49.

This is a program you won't want to miss. It all takes place at 8 pm on Saturday, February 2 at our regular meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW.**



Poseur Pianist



Art and Art Lover

During his later years, Ben Webster resided in Western Europe and was somewhat an icon to jazz aficionados there. The restaurant in Copenhagen named after him and that featured fine art and music as well as food no longer exists. When your editor and wife visited the restaurant in 1989, the youngish manager knew little about Ben.

## Ellington School of the Arts Students Earn Critical Praise, Individual Awards

From time to time we hear negative talk about the future of jazz based on what youngsters are playing, and more important, listening to. So it is more than heartening to know what is being done at the Ellington School of the Arts, and surely also at other pre-college schools across the country.

A case in point is this excerpt from a review in the December 17 *Washington Post*:

In jazz, it's not easy being green: Budding musicians quickly encounter sophisticated arrangements that demand concentration, discipline and skill. So perhaps the highest compliment that can be paid the New Washingtonians Jazz Orchestra is that it makes the music of Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and John Conrane sound a lot easier to play than it actually is.

Under the direction of Davey Yarborough . . . this student ensemble from the Duke Ellington School of the Arts did itself proud at Harmony Hall Regional Center in Fort Washington on Saturday night. . . .

[T]here was no shortage of remarkably poised solos and cohesive ensemble passages.

Less one think that such students are narrowly-focused in their music interests, Davey's Saxophone Studio students—who voluntarily come early in the morning for lessons before regular school hours—presented a concert at a local church last month. In solo, duo, trio, and small group configurations, some with piano accompaniment, they presented a program of “classical” music -- Mozart, Debussy; Milhaud, and others. Exceptions were a medly of seasonal holiday tunes and the Bobby Watson composition “Conversion” (but that is classic, too, isn't it?). More important for their maturation than the experience that such public performances give is an altruistic motive: they donate to charity whatever the door brings.

And less we think that they are narrowly-focused academically, every one of the 2001 graduating seniors in The New Washingtonians Orchestra was excellent enough to earn a full scholarship to a major college, conservatory, or university. Among those currently in the orchestra who are being recognized are bassist and pianist Ben Wilson, a semi-finalist for a Fish Middleton Scholarship, and Julian Lane, one of the five from among nearly 4,000 applicants to win the National Arts Recognition Talent Search honor.

Yes, we can be grateful that the Daveys of our school systems everywhere are teaching more than notes.

### **Living the Jazz Life by W. Royal Stokes**

New York: Oxford University Press, 2001

Mini-review by Bill Hasson

In this book, subtitled “Conversations With Forty Musicians about their Careers In Jazz,” W. Royal Stokes demonstrates his passion for the preservation of authentic histories of jazz musicians. His approach is honest and frank. He is able to spin their stories in a sometimes humorous fashion and also reveal other, tragic events.

You are actually able to feel intimate with some of the circumstances that shaped the genius of these artists. Aside from being a very fine writer, Stokes possesses the conceptual and historical background to give these stories a genuine place in the inventory of biographies.

Author Stokes stated that “the two aspects of the book that I am proudest of are, one, the inclusion among the forty profiles of a dozen female instrumentalists, among whom are Vancouver-born trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, violinist Regina Carter of Detroit, and three women blues guitarists, and two, an emphasis on the early lives of the musicians, thereby pointing out how they became jazz artists.”

The reader is able to bear witness to the choice and profession these musicians have made in order to perpetuate the world's most cherished and creative art form.

### **Main Stem by Echoes of Ellington**

TOAD Productions, TOCD 001

Mini-review by Theodore R. Hudson

An advantage that this excellent British group, Echoes of Ellington, has over other repertory orchestras is that they focus on, immerse themselves in, and have become used to playing Ellington and Strayhorn. Although not note-for-note, as much as possible they use original scores and careful transcriptions, which they play deftly and with nuanced sensitivity, for example, two musically dissimilar numbers, “Ko-Ko” and “Primpin' for the Prom.”

The band's accomplished soloists acknowledge but do not slavishly replicate the originals. For instance, trombonist Bob Hunt carries on, making one glad that there was a Tricky Sam; altoist Colin Skinner in a sense mimes Hodges, but knows his own musical self; and leader and clarinetist Peter Long has found ways of sounding as if he could have been a member of Ellington's band. As for jamming, several others “get some” on “Jam with Sam.” And there is an unnamed baritone saxist really kicking it in ensemble work.

*Main Stem* by Echoes of Ellington is ear candy!

While stock lasts, this CD may be purchased for \$15, including p&h, from D.J.Else, DESUK Treasurer, 47 Yoxley Drive, Ilford, Essex IG2 6PX, United Kingdom.

## Short Sheets . . .

**Duke's Piano Unharmed** At first there was concern that the white piano that belonged to Duke might have been harmed in the December fire at St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York City. Seems that it was still in the custody of the Smithsonian where it had been part of its exhibit on pianos a short while back. ♪ ♪

**Singing Sculptress** Ferebee Streett, who created the bust of Duke for our Ellington '99 celebration, continues to sing with hubby Bob Thulman's Last Chance Dance Band, performing locally recently at the K of C Rosensteel Hall in Silver Spring. ♪ ♪

## Mail Bag

Hallo Everybody,

I hope that you will have a nice holiday after a heavy autumn for many people in the world. I had a ruff year in the office that is not the same as many other people had in their [lives]. Let's hope that the next year will be a better year.

I also hope that we all can get together again. In different ways.

We are still working for the good things around Duke.  
All the best to you all.

We Love You Madly  
Göran

*Ed. Note: Göran Wallén heads the Ellington Society of Sweden.*

## Ellington Festival in Hawaii

We have no new information about registration, accommodations, and other particulars about the Duke Ellington Festival sponsored by the Hawaiian Academy of Performing Arts in Honolulu next April. The following schedule is extracted from the Festival web site, < hapa2.com/duke > :

*Friday, 26 April 2002*

Registration and Orientation 12 pm - 4 pm

Opening event, 7-9 pm

Ellington Revue at Honolulu Hale

*Saturday, 27 April*

Morning Session, 9 am-12:30 pm

Dr. John Hope Franklin

Film and discussion

Afternoon and evening

Duke Ellington Music & Shoebox Festival at Civic Center

*Sunday, 28 April*

Morning session, 9 am-12:30 pm

Lunch speaker

Two afternoon sessions, 2 pm

Concert at Kapiolani Park

*Monday, 29 April*

Morning session, 9 am- 12:30 pm

Panel discussion

Free afternoon

Film

Closing reception at Honolulu Academy of Arts

Persons wishing information on or to list an event are advised to contact Project Manager Marsha Joyner by e-mail at < mrjoy@hawaii.rr.com >.

## Pubols Contributes Materials to Institute of Jazz Studies Holdings

In December, Ben Pubols donated the bulk of the "Pubols Jazz Collection" to the Rutgers University Institute of Jazz Studies in Newark, NJ. Included were approximately 400 78-rpm recordings dating from 1918 through the late 1940s. Among these were 89 by Duke Ellington and His Famous orchestra (1927-1947). Also in the donation were approximately 90 *DownBeat* magazines and other jazz magazines dating from the mid-1940s when Ben first became interested in jazz.

The collection was accepted on behalf of the Institute for Jazz Studies by our Society member Annie Kuebler, now actively engaged in organizing the Mary Lou Williams Collection for the Institute.

## Maurice Lawrence Recuperating Nicely

by John Dennis

By a recent telephone call to Maurice Lawrence, our first president, in Pompano Beach, Florida, we learned that he had been hospitalised for 26 days followed by extensive physical therapy. He is home now recuperating and keeping busy working long hours on his computer completing various projects relating to jazz and Ellington works and communicating with friends. He is fortunate to have with him a faithful nurse on whom he can rely to remind him to rest and pace himself.

Maurice is as cheerful as ever, joyously pointing out unexpected improvements in his physical condition. Optimism pervades his conversation as he reveals plans for attending a wedding and future plans for the Statesmen of Jazz [organized and managed by him]. Personnel of the Statesmen changes depending upon availability and has included such Ellington alumni as Clark Terry, Buster Cooper, Louis Bellson, and Bill Berry.

His enthusiasm for projects which have been a part of his life remains undiminished. Here's to Maurice! Carry on!

## Quotation for ♡ Valentine's Day ♡

*I know I must have fallen in love once because I quit biting my cuticles and my hair is gray and that must indicate something and I all of a sudden had a deeper appreciation for Billie Holiday and Billy Strayhorn so if it wasn't love*

*I don't*

*know what it was*

-- from the poem "Love in Place" by Nikki Giovanni

♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡

*Hint, Hint*

It being Valentine's Day month and all that, why not show affection/love/gratitude/respect/regard/appreciation with the perfect gift, a membership in The Duke Ellington Society. See the directions on the next page.

## "Dramatis Felidae" (To Use Our Man's Term in *MIMM*)

### About Our Members

#### Walter van de Leur

In February 1999, as part of the centennial celebration of Duke's birth, a conference organized by Stefano Zenni took place in Italy. Walter spoke on "Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn: A Veiled Collaboration." His paper, along with those by others, among them Andrew Homzy's, are available in English on the internet at: [www.metastasio.net/jazz99/jazz99](http://www.metastasio.net/jazz99/jazz99). ♪ ♪

#### Harold Gray

We received holiday greetings from Harold Gray, now a very young 94 years of age. We've missed him at the last couple of meetings, as he is recovering from a stroke. He's up and about and walking with a cane (with dignity and understated class, we can be sure) and continues writing occasionally for *Tailgate Ramblings* and otherwise keeping himself involved. ♪ ♪

#### Ken Steiner, Jack Towers, Jerry Valburn

The two-CD *Duke Ellington Live at Carnegie Hall December 11, 1943* is earning kudos. For one thing, the sound is reported to be superior to that of a previous release, thanks to re-mastering by Jack Towers of the original acetates supplied by Jerry Valburn. Also, there is the well-researched and highly informative accompanying booklet by Ken Steiner.

#### Luvenia George

Luvenia George is a key contributor to the SmithsonianJazz.org web site, having written education modules on Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.

#### Jane Vollmer, Brian Gilmore

During what turned out to be a record snowfall in Buffalo in December, via the internet Jane Vollmer wrote, "... about the conditions in Buffalo. Very bad, they expect 100 inches of snow by Saturday. ... We have a five foot fence in the yard and it is over the fence. ... As for me, I am as safe as a bug in the rug, so far that is." In response Brian Gilmore wrote, "Great story about Buffalo. If that ever came to Washington, DC, [Duke's home town] life would end here. They don't know how to handle snow at all." In a posting the next day Jane said, "Now you can see why Duke made that remark about Buffalo in *MIMM* but he should have known better to stay out of Buffalo in the winter."

#### Norma McCray

Wasn't it great to see Norma McCray out at our holiday party. Because of her extended bout with illness, it was her first time with us in about a year.

**Patricia Willard, Scott Schwartz, Anthony Brown**  
Anthony, Scott, and Pat were among those at the International Association of Jazz Educators conference in Los Angeles in January.

## What a Party!

by Peter MacHare

Our holiday parties are always fun and this year was no exception. Our table was loaded with food. Our bar flowed with drink. There were music, dancing, and games. But most of all there was delight in each other's company. Jack Dennis counted 55 people. Everyone agreed that this was one of our most attended events ever.

We thanked out-going President Ted Hudson for a job well done (as we all know, excellence is the norm for Ted). We noted that long-time treasurer and board member Jack Towers has decided to "retire" from these positions, but to continue as an active member. The lucky winners of our door prizes (copies of *Ellington Indigos*) were Peter Robinson and Patricia Willard. Pat Braxton was the recipient of our special "Presidential Award" of the year for producing our first benefit concert. Bravo Pat! The only sad note was the announcement that Ben and Lillian Pubols will be moving to Oregon later this year. Ben will continue to write for *Ellingtonia* and plans trips back East to include the first Saturday of the month.

Special thanks also have to go to Bill Hasson for preparing a delightful (if rather difficult) series of Ellington Quiz Games and to Geneva Hudson for directing our dancing. Joanne Dennis deserves our thanks for all the work she did after the party. Finally we have to thank Ted and Geneva Hudson for hosting our party. They do so much for the Society that having to thank them twice in the same column is not unusual at all.

Now we'd like to see everyone who came to our Holiday Party also attend our monthly meetings. Don't Skillpoop! See you there!

### What! You Haven't Renewed Yet!

Send your 2002 dues right away to: The Duke Ellington Society, PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003-0787, USA. Membership remains a bargain: Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; First-Time-Ever Member, \$20; Student, \$5.

#### Why a Star ☆ on Your Mailing Label?

This means that if you have never been a member, we cordially invite you to join us. If you are behind in your dues, it's to say we miss you.

