

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor
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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/



Greetings from Our President

Blessings upon you, Ellingtonians. Duke Ellington was known for sending Christmas cards (sometimes, I understand, very early). This message is our Holiday wish to you.

The Duke Ellington Society always has great fun during the Holiday Season. You know who you are – the merry little band that comes to our meetings each month. Free food! Free drink! Good company! Great music!

Does it sometimes seem that we are having more fun than we deserve? It makes you want to share that fun with others. Why not invite a guest to one of our monthly meetings? We have some great programs coming up. December at the National Museum of American History is always informative. Our holiday party in January is always fun.

Our esteemed editor suggests giving a gift membership to someone you know who appreciates the finer things in life. The cost of a first time membership is only \$20. You don't have to feel responsible for renewing their membership every year, just the first year. After that they are on their own. What a wonderful way to celebrate the magic of the holiday season! Introduce someone you know to the Duke Ellington Society and deepen that person's appreciation and enjoyment of a great artist.

Dues

First-Time-Ever Member, \$20
Member, \$30 Couple, \$50 Student, \$5

Send Check Payable to
The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. at
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA

Smithsonian Archives Center To Host December Meeting

by Mac Grimmer & Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our annual pilgrimage to the home of the Duke Ellington collection, the Archives Center at the Smithsonian, will take place on Saturday, December 7. They have hosted our December meeting for several years now, and we are looking forward to another fascinating program presentation by Deborra Richardson, Scott Schwartz, Reuben Jackson and associates. Once again we will have the opportunity to see some of the photos, music manuscripts and documents in the collection—seemingly always something new, something we haven't seen before, or something we didn't know about!

The Archives Center is in the National Museum of American History, on Constitution Avenue between 12th & 14th Streets, NW. Please use the Constitution Avenue entrance and arrive between 7:30 and 8:00 pm, when the guards and staff will be on hand to escort you to the Archives Center, on the third floor. The museum will be closed to the public (except for us) at this time. The program starts at 8 pm on Saturday, December 7—at the epicenter of Ellingtonia!

Jazz at the Embassy

by Gina Rollins

Numerous DES members were among the enthralled audience during a November 4 presentation of a French documentary on Duke. The screening took place at La Maison Francaise on the grounds of the French Embassy. Duke's granddaughter, Mercedes Ellington, who was introduced by our own John Edward Hasse, in turn introduced the series. She spoke tenderly of her relationship with Duke and the guidance he gave her early in her career, including the recommendation to spend time in Paris.

(Continued on page 3 under "Jazz at the Embassy")

The Dutch Jazz Orchestra Plays the Music of Billy Strayhorn

A Review by Scott Schwartz

Recently released by Challenge Records, *The Dutch Jazz Orchestra Plays the Music of Billy Strayhorn*, (CHR 70106) represents another informed contribution to the canon of American popular music. The box set consists of four CDs titled respectively *Portrait of a Silk Thread: Newly Discovered Works of Billy Strayhorn*, *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*, *So This Is Love: More Newly Discovered Works of Billy Strayhorn*, and *You Got My Head: Strayhorn and the Standards*. All were recorded in Hilversum, The Netherlands. The first was recorded by NCRV Studio 1 in 1995, and the remaining three by Wisseloord Studios between 1997 and 2002.

Building on Walter van de Leur's insightful scholarship in *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn* (New York: Oxford Press, 2002) these recordings provide lovers of all things that swing a tempting sampler of newly discovered arrangements and unabridged compositions written by one of the twentieth-century's greatest jazz artists. The Dutch Jazz Orchestra has embraced the jazz tradition with a zest and true appreciation for the art, a delight compared to American audiences' current taste for bubble-gum or hip-hop.

John Ruocco's clarinet performance on "Lonely Again" (a.k.a. "Lush Life") is intimately sensual, while Rob van Bavel captures in Strayhorn's youthful piano arrangement "Valse" all of the melodic beauty and harmonic complexities that are the hallmarks of both Strayhorn and Chopin. Strayhorn's incidental music to Federico Garcia Lorca's play *The Love of Don Perlimplin* provides the listener with shades of Poulenc, Debussy, Stravinsky, and Gershwin bound by the composer's creative intellect and subtle sense of humor. The unabridged performance of "Chelsea Bridge" starts a little faster than in some Ellington recordings, but the orchestral color of this arrangement and additional thematic sections make the selection quite an interesting audio experience.

Ack van Rooijen's fluegelhorn performance on Strayhorn's arrangement of the Johnny Mercer and Henry Mancini standard "Moon River" works quite well with the rest of the ensemble's orchestral color. Toon Roos, on tenor saxophone, has a sound that is distinctly his own and performs, with the exception of "Skylark," flawlessly throughout the set of recordings, and Albert Beltman, on alto saxophone, offers the listeners consistent reminders of the sound that made Johnny Hodges so memorable to audiences. The belle of these recordings is Harlem-born vocalist Marjorie Barnes. She provides elegant performances of so many of Billy's arrangements it is difficult to single out any one song as the best of the series. However, Barnes' performance of "Day Dream," originally written for Ella Fitzgerald in 1957, could be considered one of my favorites in the series because she captures the nuances of American song and Strayhorn's sense of music like no other musician in the Dutch Jazz Orchestra.

The series is not without its flaws. For those of you who thrive on liner notes, these are limited in scope and leave you asking for more. Each CD includes a brief reference to Walter van de Leur's book, but no effort was made to emphasize the importance of his scholarship to learn more about the music.

Three of the four recordings, all made at Wisseloord Studios, provide tracks where the rhythm section, particularly the cymbals and bass, overshadow the rest of the ensemble. This is particularly noticeable with "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance," "Hipper-Bug," "Matinee," and "Blue Heart" where the cymbals almost take center stage. In the recordings of "Feet on the Beat" and "Autumn in New York" the rhythm section wrestles with the "feeling" of a "steady" beat to such a large degree that it provides an unstable sense of rhythmic pulse for John Ruocco's clarinet and Toon Roos' tenor saxophone solos. This makes it uncomfortable to listen to as the soloists pull and push the sense of beat, a staple of many skilled musicians' style of jazz, throughout their performances. In addition, the fidelity is inconsistent; most notably on the recordings of "Jo" and "Lozit." In both the quality of the recording seems muffled when compared to tunes that precede and follow.

When the Wisseloord Studios recordings are compared to the NCRV Studio recording, *Portrait of a Silk Thread*, the issues of technical recording quality and some individual performances become more pronounced. This first recording of newly discovered Strayhorn works is superior to its successors. The performances by the musicians in this 1995 recording are tighter and give the listener every impression the ensemble had the necessary time to develop an understanding and "feel" for Billy's musical language. At various times in the latter recordings the ensemble gives the listener the sense the musicians are reading the charts, but have not had the opportunity to grow with the music. This may be pure supposition, but the fact remains that some selections are less polished.

As a reviewer I have to answer the question that each of you will ask of me and yourself. Do the inconsistencies that may be encountered among these recordings dampen a listener's appreciation for the music of Billy Strayhorn? Do these recordings reflect poorly on Billy's artistic genius? My heart-felt response to both questions is, "No."

Should the orchestra have produced one less CD in order devote more study, time, rehearsal, and money to generate a more narrowly focused and polished production? My response again is, "No!" Strayhorn's voice has been obscured too frequently by histrionics of the past and now his music must thunder sweetly for Billy to achieve the historical station his art merits.

(Continued on page 3 under "Dutch Jazz Orchestra Plays Strayhorn")

Short Sheets . . .

Will Somebody Ascertain, Refute, or Illuminate This?

In Ken Vail's recently published *Duke's Diary, Part Two*, in what appears to be a reproduction of a 1953 newspaper clipping is the passage "Duke has not yet set a permanent replacement for [Louie Bellson's] drum chair. Other changes in the band are the return of Cat Anderson to the trumpet section and the arrival of Tony Scott to replace Paul Gonsalves, who left to join Tommy Dorsey" [emphasis added].

Cultural Exchange for Ukranian Visitors

The US Department of State is the sponsor of a project for six Ukranian jazz specialists, educators, journalists, musicians, and festival organizers to network with US jazz specialists and professionals. On their itinerary was time at the Archives Center, repository of the Ellington Collection, of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Hip Wisdom on a License Plate Frame

Our ever-observant prexy, Peter MacHare, tells us that a license plate frame reading "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing!" is available by way of < www.nostalgietreasures.com >.

Jazz at the Embassy (Continued from page 1)

The highlight of the evening was a session Duke recorded solo in Paris late in his career. He played numerous pieces, including "Little African Flower," "Warm Valley," and "Lotus Blossom," and mused about jazz and his experiences in France. Through much of the session, he talked directly to the camera, and one had the sense of just hanging out with him.

Other venues included a 1970s concert, excerpts from the Sacred Concerts recorded at Eglise St. Sulpice and excerpts from Duke's raucous 70th birthday concert in Paris. In the US, the film was screened only here and in New York.

Dutch Jazz Orchestra Plays Strayhorn (Continued from page 2)

The recordings of Billy Strayhorn's music by The Dutch Jazz Orchestra offer American and European audiences a sampling of exciting new music that will stimulate future performances of Billy's musical language and research of his legacy to American music. The Dutch Jazz Orchestra's recordings offer everyone who chooses to listen to them treasured moments of music history. Their distinctly European approach to jazz is testament to the vitality of the art form and serves as a reminder that if the music sounds good, it is good. So to everyone who loves Billy and his music, go out and buy this box set and discover the many facets of this brilliant composer and artist. If you don't already own a copy of Walter van de Leur's book, *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*, you must purchase this insightful work to fully appreciate all that was and is Billy Strayhorn.

Ed. Note: As we went to press, the box set was not available from regular sources in the US. We have been advised that the CDs are being released separately and that the box may become available later. However, the complete set (at 65.12 Euro Dollars, or approximately \$63.64 US Dollars, including shipping and handling) may be ordered from Challenge at: < challenge.nl >. Separate CDs may be ordered from the distributor at: < allegro-music.com >.

Swedish Ellington Society Planning 2004 Conference

Great news for Ellington aficionados: The Duke Ellington Society of Sweden is planning to resume the Annual International Duke Ellington Conferences in 2004!

In its current *Bulletin*, a quarterly, the Society states, "DESS believes that the conferences have got to continue, but maybe in other forms than before. . . . Everybody who has something to say in words or in music is welcome to take contact with us." The selected venue is "the famous jazz temple 'NALEN'" in Stockholm; the probable date is May 13-15.

The last such Ellington Study Group Conference was hosted by the Southern California Ellington Society in Hollywood in 2000. This will be the second by the Swedish society, its first being an outstanding one in 1994. It will be the 19th in the series, the first of which our Society sponsored in Washington, DC in 1983.

The Duke Ellington Society of Sweden promises to continuously update information about programs, speakers, concerts, accommodations, and other details, in successive issues of its *Bulletin* and by other means.

The Society's address is: DESS c/o Göran Wallén, Skogstorpsvägen 39, 191, 39 Sollentuna, Sweden; e-mail: goranwallen@telia.com; and internet page: www.ellingtonsweden.com

Answers to Last Month's Quick Quiz for Anoraks

(To Borrow a Term Used by *Blue Light*)

We gave three names by which persons associated with Duke were also known. The answers are: Alice Nilsson (her real name) = Alice Babs; Arthur Shaefe/Schiefe/Schief (not yet sure why) = Artie Whetsol/Whetsel; and La Pearl (as part of a dance duo) = Mildred Dixon. One respondent, Allan Schneidmill, got the first two right.

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

About Our Members

Luvenia George

"A Framework for Jazz Education in General Music" is the title of a paper by Luvenia George at the National Symposium of Multicultural Music held in October at the University of Tennessee. The symposium is a bi-annual event sponsored by the Music Educators National Conference attended by educators from across the country and abroad, including Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.

Harvey Cohen

Though busy getting his post-doctoral professional and personal affairs in order, Harvey Cohen hopes to see us at a meeting soon. In the History Department at the University of Maryland, he is teaching his "first big lecture hall class."

Annie Kuebler, Janna Steed

Always busy, Annie Kuebler has been especially so as coordinator of the Mary Lou Williams conference/symposium on November 16 at the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.

She saw Janna Steed at a jazz vespers in New York City, and reports that Janna "looked great" and "Sang well, too."

Tex Gathings

Joseph "Tex" Gashing was recently interviewed for a historical documentary on the 1960s Teenarama Dance Party, radio and television versions. Tex, as WOOK-TV operations manager, was the first in the Middle Atlantic area and one of the first nationally to produce such a television show.

Michael Kilpatrick

Michael Kilpatrick came over again from England to do research in the Ellington and related collections at the Smithsonian, this time with special attention to music manuscripts. Unfortunately, he had to leave the day before our November meeting, but he paid membership dues for 2003 before taking off.

John Hornsby

The excellent article in the summer issue of the International Association of Jazz Record Collector's *Journal* about its annual convention was written by John Hornsby and his lovely wife, Gerry. In the same issue are two full pages of portrait photographs by John of musicians performing in the IAJRC Annual Members Jam.

Don Rouse

Don Rouse is clarinetist with the Razz'm Jazz'm "skiffle band" that performed at the Garden Resources of Washington Harvest Party in October at the newly reopened US Government's Botanical Gardens on Capitol Hill.

Jack Dennis

John "Jack" Dennis appears in one of the "A Moment in History" television series. He places a historic site plaque at the house where Sterling Brown made his home.

Jerry, Jack, and Duke

by Gina Rollins

Through rare master copies and skilled engineering, Jerry Valburn and Jack Towers presented a history of Duke's recordings. The two have worked together since the 1970s to preserve and reissue Duke's works. The day they met in 1971 "was one of the big events of my life," Jack noted. Jerry was unable to attend our November meeting, so Jack recorded the evening for him.

From a 1939 Columbia session, Jack played "Subtle Lament" and "Lady in Blue." Jerry had given Jack one of the original acetate discs from which the master copy was cut, and Jack passed it around the audience.

In the early 1980s, Jerry was visiting Columbia headquarters and learned that some tapes had just been thrown in a dumpster. He went to investigate and found that the junk pile included Ellington's first taped session. He sent the treasure trove to Jack, who dubbed the tapes. We heard the ending of "Harlem Suite." "Tape gave an advantage. You could record in any order, so they did this first when their chops were fresh," Jack explained.

Jack's gifted engineering abilities were on display with four takes from a 1932 recording session of "Mood Indigo." Jack obtained four separate copies—three from Jerry, one from Ted Shell—and dubbed them together to create a stereo effect.

Among other highlights: From a 1950s concert in the Poconos that Jerry recorded, two themes from *Anatomy of a Murder*, which was to open in theatres the next week; a 1960 recording in Boston of "Blues from Blokes" in octet; and several pieces from the 1946-46 Treasury Series, which Jerry and Jack are still reissuing.

Thank you, Gentlemen!

Officers, Board Retained for New Year

At our November meeting, our current officers and board members were re-elected for 2003. The only new official is Gina Rollins, elected to the open position of Secretary, whose responsibilities she had been assuming temporarily.

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

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