

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/

Society Founder's Statesman Of Jazz Scheduled for Imax

We received a letter from Maurice Lawrence, our founding president and co-founder of the Statesmen of Jazz (SOJ), telling that a unit of that group will perform at the Imax Jazz Café at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History on Friday, 11 June.

The Statesmen features groups of veteran jazz artists who perform worldwide. The one that will perform on 11 June consists of leader Warren Vache, cornet; Norman Simmons, piano; Keter Betts, bass; Eddie Locke, drums; and Houston Pearson, tenor sax..

Mr. Lawrence retired to Florida some years ago and has spent considerable time in the administration of SOJ, though he has curtailed his traveling in this respect. Hopefully he will come back to his former home town for this event and enjoy seeing old friends.

Cohen Dissertation Wins Award; Article and Book in the Offing

Congratulations are in order for our member Harvey Cohen. The Historical Society recently awarded his dissertation about Duke Ellington its Pauline Maier Best Dissertation in American History Prize. This is quite a signal honor.

His book, based on the dissertation and currently titled *Duke Ellington's America*, will be published in 2006 by the University of Chicago Press. An article, "Duke Ellington and 'Black, Brown, and Beige': The Composer as Historian at Carnegie Hall," derived from a chapter in the book will be published in *American Quarterly* in 2005.

Dr. Harvey teaches history at the University of Maryland.

Coverage of Stockholm Conference

This edition of *Ellingtonia* will be published before the 19th Annual International Duke Ellington Conference takes place in mid-May in Stockholm, Sweden. Look for a report in our next issue.

Ted Shell Video Program

8 pm, Saturday, 5 June

Grace Lutheran Church, 16th & Varnum Streets, NW
Washington, DC

Open to the Public

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our final program for the season will be a video program of a wide array of artists performing the music of Ellington and Strayhorn.

Ted Shell's video programs are always a delight, so be sure not to miss the festivities. You are sure to see something new. Come one, come all, to enjoy an evening of splendid sights and sounds.

Claire Gordon Book Set for May Release

Claire Gordon's jazz memoirs entitled *My Unforgettable Jazz Friends* have just been printed. Twenty-five first edition, numbered and autographed hard cover copies will be available at the International Duke Ellington Conference in Sweden in May.

When she was fresh out of college, Gordon worked at Commodore Records. When she was fired, she fell into a better position as Duke Ellington's band secretary. He was a member of the wedding when she married songwriter Irving Gordon (he wrote lyrics to "Unforgettable," "Prelude to a Kiss," and dozens more songs).

Starting 60 or so years ago, she met and was friends with such artists as Mary Lou Williams, Dizzy Gillespie, Nat Cole and Benny Carter. The book is about working with Duke, men in the band, and all the other artists she knew. Included are a large number of never-been-seen photos both black and white and color, reprints of letters, invitations, and more.

Claire Gordon's previous book credits include a biography, *Marshall Royal: Jazz Survivor* (Continuum, 2001), and the posthumous Rex Stewart autobiography, *Boy Meets Horn* (University of Michigan Press, 1991), which she edited.

Club Ellington

by Mac Grimmer

Bass player Bill Crow's book *From Birdland to Broadway: Scenes from a Jazz Life* includes a couple of items of interest to Ellingtonians: a reminiscence of working with Ivie Anderson in Seattle in the late '40s, and in Washington, the brief days of the Club Ellington.

Crow, in the army and stationed at Fort Meade, frequented the jazz venues in Baltimore and Washington, mentioning the Club Bengazi on U Street, where he heard Charlie Ventura's "Bop for the People" octet, and the new Club Ellington near the Howard Theatre and Griffith Stadium, the baseball park. Actually the club was advertised as Duke Ellington's, and the building is still standing, although Griffith Stadium is long gone and the Howard is not far behind. When it opened, November 1, 1948, Crow was there every night, as were Jack Towers and, sitting in, Ben Webster. Ben lived only a few blocks away, on the other side of the Stadium. Crow was impressed by tenorman Al Sears, who had a lot of solo space; nevertheless, Duke wanted Webster to rejoin the band. The first night Ben had to borrow Sears' sax when Duke asked him to sit in; the other nights he brought his own. Jack asked him each night what was he going to do, but Ben couldn't decide, or wouldn't say. His answer to Jack on the last night was, "Call me in the morning. If I don't answer you'll know I'm gone." The next morning he didn't answer, and Ben was back with the band—just in time for the Carnegie Hall and Cornell concerts.

Crow describes the club: "A wide, burgundy-colored carpet ran from the entrance straight across the floor of the huge room to the bandstand, continued up over it and right up the wall behind it to the high ceiling. . . . at the back of the band on the highest riser, Sonny Greer sat behind a white enamel drum set that included tympani, chimes and a huge Chinese gong that rose behind him like the sun . . . high on the side wall over Duke's piano was a little wrought-iron balcony with a door through which Kay Davis would step, without a microphone, to sing her vocalise parts. . . . her voice carried all the way to the back of the room, and blended prettily with the horns . . ."

Duke announced that Club Ellington would be the band's home base in his home city, Washington, but after he left for Carnegie Hall business fell off. Buddy Rich, Illinois Jacquet, and Billy Eckstein didn't draw like Duke. After New Year's day the club closed, before the Ellington band had a chance to get back "home." Afterwards, and for a long time, it was a club called the Music Hall. Now the building houses the pop-rock 9:30 Club. Kay Davis' balcony is still there.

Crow's book is fascinating from beginning to end, an insider's story of a life in jazz and a marvelous portrait of the jazz world. For Ellingtonians, his account of Ivie Anderson's club date in Seattle is priceless, making the cost of the book negligible. He closes that chapter with: She was "a small plain woman with luminous eyes and a voice filled with ecstatic power, filling a roomful of entranced listeners with glorious song. She was terrific."

The 12th Annual Kennedy Center Spring Gala: *Ellington, Etc.*

by Patricia Braxton

The Kennedy Center hosted its Spring Gala fundraiser in tribute to Duke Ellington on Sunday evening, 25 April. The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra started the concert with "Squatty Roo," a lively piece that showcased the band members' talents. The acoustics of the Concert Hall gave the band under the direction of John Clayton a good and clear sound.

After opening remarks by Alma Powell, Ken Duberstein, and Laura Bush, the next performer was vocalist Dianne Reeves, who literally came out of one shoe upon entering the stage and quickly kicked off the other one as she sang "Blip" to a joyful audience. She came back later to sing a lovely "Mood Indigo."

Regina Carter treated us to three numbers. She began "Come Sunday" hauntingly before the band joined in, settling into a beautiful rendition. She played the bluesy "Imagine My Frustration," exhibiting a little string picking in the middle, and later performed "Five O'Clock Whistle" with only bassist and band conductor John Clayton.

Nancy Wilson, a crowd favorite, spoke a little about Duke's talents and recognized Billy Strayhorn's as well, then launched into "Prelude to a Kiss," followed by "Satin Doll." Two dancers from the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater presented "Pas de Duke," a medley of Ellington songs. Dressed in satin suits the colors of piano keys, the lady in black and the gentleman in white, they displayed their high kicks while dancing on point.

The final performer, Liza Minelli, belted out three pieces, "But the World Goes 'Round," "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good," which she claimed to have never sung before but was clearly quite comfortable doing so, and finished with "What Did I Have That I Don't Have."

The performers ended the night singing and playing "C-Jam Blues." This ninety-minute concert was clearly enjoyed by all in attendance.

Check Out DEMS Bulletin Online

As one would expect of editor Sjef Hoefsmit, the current *DEMS Bulletin* is excellent. Beginning with this one, for April-July 2004, these publications will be available online only. To access them, go to Peter MacHare "Duke Ellington Panorama" web site at: < www.depanorama.net/dems >.

This first issue of the year is organized as follows:

- Part 1. News - New Finds - Duke's Itinerary (1-9)
- Part 2. Discussions - Additions - Corrections (10-21)
- Part 3. New Releases & Re-Releases (22-29)
- Part 4. New Desor Explanations & Corrections (30-34)
- Part 5. New Releases on Compact Disc (35)

Because of this arrangement, you can download and/or print only the pages or parts you want or the entire issue. Also, for specific topics, you can use your computer's search facility.

Don't have a computer or have one but don't have web access? Hey, what are friends for!

Jimmy MacPhail Follow-Up

Since our last issue, we had a delightful chat with Catherine MacPhail, Jimmy's widow, during which we learned that our statement was not true that Jimmy's 1950 appearance at the Howard Theater, at which he was backed by Duke's band, was his only performance with the band "for a number of years." Duke offered him a regular job shortly thereafter and several times again, but Jimmy declined, the principal reason being that he did not want to leave his very young family and go on the road. However, after this Howard Theater "first time," from time to time Duke or Mercer would call and Jimmy would join for gigs or short period road trips. Additionally, as is well known, Jimmy MacPhail performed at Sacred Concerts and in *My People*.

Isfahan

by Reuben Jackson

*walk to the corner of
georgia and kennedy,
where, as a child,
the sweet scent of
newly opened bags of
sweet tarts
rivalled any raging greenhouse.*

*then facing east,
like the muslims who
lived next door,
sail on strayhorn's
sumptuous plane of sound
until you reach a city
more distant than even sheila turner's eyes.*

*isfahan.
where, ellington said,
"all is poetry".
just pronouncing it
is a first class ticket for the tongue*

*darling sheila, meet me there.
I will shed this winter hat
for a fez of many colors-
trade my tiny bedroom
for a palace if you would kiss me.*

*just thinking of it
is a first class ticket for my mind.*

Archives Center Moves, Has New Contact Information

The Archives Center has been moved from the third to the first floor of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. The new location has a researchers' room apart from areas where materials are stored and where archivists and other staffers work.

The Ellington Collection is only one of over 800 highly varied collections in the Archives Center. In addition to it, the Center is the repository of related Edward and Gaye Ellington, Ruth Ellington, Tom Whaley, Cat Anderson, and Theodore Shell Collections. Others of interest to jazz enthusiasts are the Jimmie Lunceford, Apollo Theater, Jack Seifert (Woody Herman), Benny Carter, Ella Fitzgerald, and Milt Gabler Collections. Also there are the Ernie Smith Jazz Film Collection, Herman Leonard and Frank Driggs photographs, and Jazz Oral History Project recordings.

The holdings are available in support of scholarship, exhibitions, publications, and education. Research hours are 10-5 M-Tu, Th-F; 12-5 W. Please call 202-633-3270 for appointments. Other contact information, some new, follows:

Archives Center

Websites:

Archives Center
www.americanhistory.si.edu/archives
National Museum of American History
www.americanhistory.si.edu
On Line Catalog
www.siris.si.edu
Smithsonian Institution
www.si.edu

Mailing Address:

Archives Center, MRC 601
National Museum of American History
Smithsonian Institution
P.O. Box 37012
Washington, D. C. 20013-0712
202-633-3270 tele
202-786-2453 fax
202-357-1729 TDD
Email: archivescenter@si.edu

Location:

National Museum of American History
1st Floor West Wing
Smithsonian Institution
14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D. C.

The nearest Metro stations are Federal Triangle and Smithsonian, on the Blue and Orange lines.



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Behring Center

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

Frank A. Turner, 1924-2004

We are saddened by the loss of Frank Turner, who died on 24 April following a brief illness.

He attended public schools in Washington, DC. Following college and army stints, Frank moved to Detroit where, after going into business as a food management and restaurant consultant, he opened a club. His expertise in these fields led to work for corporations and took him all over the world, including Afghanistan, Russia, and Germany.

Upon retirement Frank settled on a small farm on the Eastern Shore in Denton, MD. Several times when in town for visits, he attended our meetings. His interests included reading, history, art (especially from countries in which he traveled), gourmet cooking, and, of course, music.

A memorial service was held for him on 1 May at the Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes in Washington, DC. We extend to Frank Turner's family and other loved ones our sincere condolences.

Ben Pubols

His sessions on jazz a success last year, OASIS is scheduling a series of talks this summer by Ben Pubols in Portland, Oregon. This time the focus will be "The Golden Age of Pop Singing." He plans to devote two sessions to "Creators" Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday; one to "Crooners," including Crosby, Sinatra and Eckstine; and one to "Canaries," including Mildred Bailey, Helen Forrest and Sarah Vaughan.

Sjef Hoefsmit and Peter MacHare

Accolades and gratitude are due editor Sjef Hoefsmit and webmaster Peter MacHare for making the invaluable publication *DEMS Bulletin* widely available by way of the internet.

Quotation of the Month

Contributed by Mac Grimmer

You've got to be older to realize that many of the people you meet are mediocrities. You have to let them run off you like water off a duck's back. Otherwise they drag you down.

— Duke, as quoted in *Duke: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* by Derek Jewell, 1977

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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May Member's Choice

by Gina Rollins and Peter MacHare

Our May meeting was a member's choice, with members asked to bring two recordings, one featuring Duke and another of any other artist. The result was an eclectic mix demonstrating the diversity of the House of Jazz.

From Oregon, Ben Pubols through Ted Hudson presented two versions of "Sophisticated Lady," by the Jimmie Lunceford orchestra and a previously unreleased duet version by Duke and Jimmie Blanton. Pat Braxton shared two Lambert, Hendricks and Ross pieces, including a lickety-split version of "Cotton Tail." Geneva Hudson featured two singers, Alice Babs in "Heaven" and Milt Grayson in "The Lonely Ones." Gina Rollins brought Duke paired with John Coltrane in "In a Sentimental Mood" and Stan Getz performing "Falling in Love." Next, Ted Shell presented a "Rockin' in Rhythm" medley off a Brooks Brothers (yes the clothier) CD of Winton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Orchestra. Ted Hudson featured two mystery artists who turned out to be Earl Warren singing "Blue Shadows and White Gardenias" with Count Basie's orchestra and Johnny Hartman singing "Thanks for Everything," a worded version of Billy Strayhorn's "Lotus Blossom." We closed the first half with John Anderson sharing a Coleman Hawkins piece and Louis Armstrong singing "It's a Beautiful World."

Marion Shell kicked things off after intermission with Benny Carter and Clark Terry playing "I'm Beginning to See the Light" live at Princeton University in November 1990. Helen Frazier brought in a couple of Johnny Hodges albums and treated us to "Going Out the Back Way" and "Rockabye River." Patricia Willard played two delightful recordings by Carmen McRae, "Something to Live For" with Billy Strayhorn at the piano and "Lush Life." Pat also brought a previous unreleased version of "Harlem Airshaft" that will be released this summer on the reissue of *Piano in the Background*. Dick Spottswood, breaking new ground for all of us, played "John Hardy's Wife," the famous Ellington recording of the Blanton-Webster period, along with a country music recording by the Carter Family of "John Hardy." Was this earlier country song the inspiration for "John Hardy's Wife"? Peter MacHare closed the program with two of his favorite vocals, Bing Crosby with Duke Ellington on "St. Louis Blues" and Louis Armstrong's masterpiece "Lazy River."

April Meeting Erratum

by Gina Rollins

Peter MacHare very graciously offered to write-up for the newsletter my presentation "Duke and the Ladies" at our April meeting. However, he conveniently "forgot" to mention his own contributions. As I stated during the meeting, without Peter I wouldn't have been able to make the presentation. He generously shared some of his recordings and helped me with research. So thank you, Peter, once again!