

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



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Fresh Scholarship, Engaging Reminiscence, Evocative Commentary and Analysis, Great Music, and Collegiality Mark 2004 Conference

The Duke Ellington Society of Sweden, under the leadership of Gören Wallén, deserves both high praise and heartfelt gratitude for producing the nineteenth of the International Duke Ellington Conferences, in Stockholm on 12-15 May. The presenters were informed and engaging, incidental music and the major evening concert were delights, and, according to many, the meeting with old friends and the making of new friends were as important as any of the other attractions. Further, events started on time; The Nalen, a jazz-historical venue, has wonderful acoustics; and the audio-visual setup was flawless and efficiently operated.

The event opened with an evening reception on Wednesday evening, 12 May. The next day began with the traditional passing-on of the gavel, from Charles Stewart, president of the Southern California Ellington Society, to Gören Wallén, head of the Ellington Society of Sweden. The day sessions were varied, for example: history by George Avakian in "The LP That Was Never Made—Louis Armstrong, Guest Artist with the Duke Ellington Orchestra"; discovery, as in Bjarne Busk's "The Eternal Ellington Stockpile"; analysis, as by Annie Kuebler in "The [Artistic] Relationship between Duke Ellington and James P. Johnson"; and behind-the-scene memories by Claire Gordon, for a while the Ellington band secretary, who also introduced the first run of her latest book, *My Unforgettable Jazz Friends*.

A "Celebrating Alice Babs" concert on Friday night was joyous. Backed by several different groups, she was in great voice, exuberant, and likely was having a time of her life! The feeling was reciprocated by an packed-house audience. The official closing event, the banquet at Nalen, featured the Kustbandet Orchestra. On Sunday afternoon an extra concert was scheduled, again featuring Ms. Babs with several star-studded Swedish groups.

Members of our Society were well represented, not only by numbers in attendance, but also by active participation in the day programs. Scott Schwartz' "Ellington's IRS Blues" was based on his examination of extensive business records in the Smithsonian's Ellington Collection; Patricia Willard brought to bear her vast knowledge and personal experience to her presentation, "Louis Bellson, Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington—Their Reciprocal Impact"; John Hasse gave a stimulating talk on difficulties involved in identifying "standards" in the repertoires of Ellington and Strayhorn; and in his "On the Road and on the Air with Duke Ellington: The Blanton-Webster Era," Ken Steiner revealed little or not known discoveries about the band's itinerary during that time frame, much of these gleaned by him in Negro newspapers of the day, a source often overlooked by researchers. The Rev. Janna Steed was to speak on performing Duke's sacred music in worship, but could not be there because of recent illness; Daniel Knight, who has

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October Program: Duke Ellington Concert

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators
On film, of course. Actually, videotape and DVD. It's the best we can do now, with the band no longer around, but it's still terrific. It's still Duke and the band. We'll show selections from several concerts in Copenhagen, Stockholm, London, and Paris. (The all-night 70th birthday party in Paris is really intense.) Just for variety we will also show a few clips of other groups playing some of Duke's songs.

The band call is at 8 pm, Saturday, October 2nd, at our regular meeting place, the Grace Lutheran Church, 16th & Varnum Sts, NW. Don't miss the show! The public is welcome.

Conference Impressions, Musings, and Commentary

We invited our members who attended to Conference in Stockholm to share with our readers their thoughts, reactions, observances, not just about the conference itself, but the whole experience of going, whatever came to their minds. Here are contributions by those who accepted the invitation.

Joseph McMillan

The people are very knowledgeable about Duke Ellington and as such would often initiate conversation to find out what I knew about him. In conversation with the Swedes, I learned that they not only admired Ellington, but all seemed to have collected his music. They were also of the same age group as in the US. The speakers were very informative.

Olivia McMillan

Please conduct a survey and let me know what it is about Ellington's music that makes him enjoyed around the world. Speaking of people I met at the Conference, after listening to Rusty Hassan on WPFW for years, we sat next to each other and of course talked extensively, and I looked at family photos at the wonderful concert at that BEAUTIFUL Cathedral style church in Stockholm. I also met and talked at length with Bjarne Busk, who was a speaker on the Thursday program. We shared with him our plans to visit Copenhagen after the conference and he offered to meet us at our hotel there and take us to the cemetery where Ben Webster is buried, and he did. That was a wonderful and moving experience!

It was a great experience to visit more of Scandinavia. Stockholm is a beautiful city and we had the pleasure of going to City Hall and taking the tour to see where the Nobel Awards are presented. That was one of the biggest highlights of our visit.

With respect to the program, I was especially impressed with Alice Babs in her concert, as well as in conversation. What a great, talented vocalist at her age! as well as a great human being. She is just so warm and passionate about what she loves and enjoys.

Patricia Braxton

. First, so happy that two friends [Loretta McDonald and Maria Morse] joined me for the Conference who were not particularly Ellington fans. I think they really enjoyed some of the presentations, and we all particularly delighted in the joy of Alice Babs and her performance along with the others musicians on Friday evening. One of my friends asked me to let her know when the next International Conference will be scheduled so that she could make sure to attend. I think we have two new fans.

. I loved the story of, I think it was pianist Dan Knight, who stood in for Janna Steed, when he mentioned speaking with a musician who played for the US military band in the early 70s during the Vietnam War in the demilitarized zone and who along with the other musicians kept getting shot at or killed by the Vietcong while they played the Souza marches. At one point, the musicians decided that if they were going to die, they would rather go out in style and decided to play all Ellington music. From that point on, the Vietcong stopped shooting at them, and upon hearing Ellington's music, broadcast it throughout the Vietcong side. What a great story. Ellington's music saved the lives of the musicians.

. Quite surprised to learn from Ken Steiner's presentation that the African American newspapers have been, by and large, ignored by most Ellington historians. He seemed to suggest that there is a wealth of information about Ellington and his band members' performances and that these papers appear to be an untapped source of info.

. Hearing several Swedish presenters speak of the love of American music by Ellington and Armstrong, among others, prior to WWI even though during that time the Swedish population, as some mentioned, spoke very little if any English.

. The quaintness of Old Town (Gamla Stan) for shopping and dining.

. From high points seeing the beauty of the islands that make up the city.

. The great hotel breakfasts at the Scandic Sergel Plaza – What a spread from fish to bacon & eggs to Japanese foods.

. The beautiful and mostly sunny, clear days.

. An Ellington related, but non-Stockholm story – A day before arriving in Stockholm for the conference, viewing Ellington & Armstrong waving from their respective rooms at the Hotel Tremoille in Paris in 1961, as French and African and/or African-American musician saluted them from the street below. This picture has been blown up and sits in the lobby of the Hotel Tremoille for all to see. What a great tribute the hotel has made to the musicians who were very welcomed in Paris at a time when our own country was not so accommodating.

Scott Schwartz

“Echoreos of Harlem,” “Heaven,” “Mood Indigo,” and “It Don't Mean a Thing” jump, jive and come alive for the historic Nalen Theater bringing dear friends not seen for many years together again for all things Ellingtonia.

Crowded streets teem with Volvos, BMWs, Mercedes, Peugots, Janguars, Renaults, and an oddly misplaced Ford Explorer; endless streams of bicycles weave between cars and people while their mechanized relatives—Harleys, Suzukis, and Yamahas—rocket down the night-scape, one wheel to the ground as the other reaches for the sky.

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Conference *(Continued from page 1)*

performed with her as pianist in sacred concerts, substituted with an inspiring talk. For the official program, Sjef Hoefsmit wrote a history of the International Conferences, beginning with the Duke Ellington Study Group organized by Don Miller that held several meetings before the first formal Conference was held by our Society in 1983. Several photographs from past meetings by Ted Hudson were in the program booklet.

In addition to the aforementioned, two of our members were volunteered [passive voice intentional] for unscheduled assignments at the Conference : On short notice Ken Steiner moderated a dialogue by Alice Babs and Nils Lindberg with great poise, prescience, and knowledge necessary to maintain the flow of their conversation; and Ted Hudson served as Scott Schwartz' graphics aide.

In a meeting of previous key producers and coordinators of the conferences, TDES president Ray Carmen announced that they are looking into the possibility of hosting the next conference, in New York in 2006.

Our opening statement bears repeating: The Duke Ellington Society of Sweden, under the leadership of Gören Wallén, deserves both high praise and heartfelt gratitude for producing the nineteenth of the International Duke Ellington Conferences!

Ed. Note: For more substantive and detailed reportage of the Conference, see Sjef Hoefsmit's "Stockholm 2004" in the current issue of DEMS Bulletin at < www.depanorama.net/dems >.

Impressions, Musings, and Commentary *(Continued from page 2)*

Sounds and images of Ellington resonate among row houses painted brown, green, orange, yellow, beige, avocado, blue and everything in between; windows adorned with art and an occasional dream catcher and Redskins ball cap

New artfully meets old, while wonderful people crowd the streets by day and then quickly slip away before the summer sun sets; humanity of every color and walk of life, especially the women whose stunning beauty only Ellington could appreciate

Churches of every majesty sit among the city's hills and valleys, the sacred, secular, spiritual and the mundane; those are what brought us together to celebrate one band's and one man's legacy to global swing

Two of nature's most perfect red roses sit among a dozen white roses gracing St. Johanne's Minnelund, a simple remembrance for Duke, Billy, and the band, touched by melody, rhythm, color and a Montecristo No. 4; these are my cherished memories of yesterday's Ellington in Stockholm .

Lois Moody

S – Superb Swedish hospitality, swinging music, tributes to and performances by a special lady – Alice Babs

W - Welcome reunion with friends in the extended Ellington conference community

E – Experiencing the creative range of Ellington's music and its ability to inspire fresh interpretations

D – Discoveries of Ducal recordings and archival materials, and delightful Ducal anecdotes shared with us by George Avakian, Alice Babs, Bjarne Busk, Steven Lasker, Nils Lindberg, Frank Buchmann Møller, Ken Steiner, and Patricia Willard

E – Enjoying the refreshing intermission sessions daily with top Swedish jazz musicians

N – New friends and new hopes for another Ellington conference in the not-too-distant future

Gerry Hornsby, with Asides from John Hornsby

Taking the A-train to and from the Arlanda Airport aboard the Arlanda Express. Very fast with a very yellow nose, a 20-minute ride, and being seniors the fare is half the adult rate!

Seeing the "glad to see you" looks on the faces of fellow delegates—even warm hugs. We are a family!

Having Steve Lasker translate the Swedish lunch menu on the blackboard at the Glenn Miller Cafe—as usual with great enthusiasm.

Talking one-on-one with Alice Babs when her concern for her husband Nils (just out of the hospital) was evident. But being the great entertainer she is, she performed for us as though we were the important ones.

Attempting to take photos of large groups of chapter members (UK, Washington, NY) while they moved around trying to include everyone. Lois Moody was late!

Holding one's breath while our bus driver took us along narrow streets and up a walled twisting road to the Engelbrektskyrkan for the concert "Ring Dem Bells."

Viewing the coloured film of Duke, relaxed and smiling, jamming with Louie Bellson, Ray Brown and Joe Pass, shared with us by Pat Willard. As usual Pat was well prepared and articulate in presenting another Ellington gem.

Hearing Alice and her daughter Titti sing "Somebody Cares." One could only imagine the singing in their home as Alice and Nils raised their children with song.

Listening to George Avakian's stories.

Appreciating the years of work that went into co-ordinating this conference. Thank you, Göran, for a most entertaining weekend. And thanks also to the committee members who carried out the many functions so necessary for a successful conference. The audio engineers deserve special mention as well, as they provided the audience with superb coverage of the musicians' efforts, and what a talented group of musicians!

Rick Henderson, 1928-2004

A memorial service was held for Rick Henderson at Westminster Presbyterian Church, well known for its jazz ministries, in Washington, DC on 2 June. He died in his home on 21 May.

As a saxophonist he was known for his full sound, instrumental proficiency, imagination, and knowledge of technical aspects of music. During the funeral, his solo on "All the Things," which he arranged and that was recorded by the band at Washington's Armory in 1955, was played. His composition "Frivolous Banta" was also recorded by Duke, and his composition "Carney," a tribute to the great baritone saxophonist, was recorded by the posthumous Ellington orchestra led by Mercer Ellington.

Before joining the Ellington orchestra in 1953 as alto saxophonist, Rick performed with well known jazz musicians and groups, and while in the service had been director of several highly-rated Army dance bands. He had also had been a member of Dizzy Gillespie and Clark Terry orchestras. Some time after his stint with Ellington, for a number of years Henderson led the Howard Theater house band. After putting down his horn, he lived a very quiet life while continuing in music as arranger, composer, and educator.

Several members of our Society participated in the funeral service. Esther Williams sang "How Great Thou Art." Charles Hooper, who was a music student with him at Armstrong High School, gave the tribute, recalling their excellent music teachers and fellow budding musicians who were also pupils at the time, including Jimmy Cobb. Davey Yarborough, who gratefully recalled being allowed while a veritable youngster to play with Rick's "Basement Band" that rehearsed in his home, was one of the six pallbearers, all alto saxophonists. Music for the recessional was "Take the 'A' Train."

Rick Henderson closest survivor was a loving and devoted aunt. We extend to her and to his other loved ones and friends our deep condolences.

Wanted

Do you have copies of the January and October 1993 issues of our newsletter? We would like to have photocopies of them for our collection.

We have all the others, beginning with a "Dear Members" communication dated 31 October 1992 from Theodore A. Shell, who was beginning his distinguished service as our president. At that time Terrell A. Allen, who had sent out personalized monthly letters, had just retired from the position because of illness.

Missing Something?

Our regular "Short Sheets" and "Dramatis Felidae" columns will resume in our next issue.

June Program Features Ellington in Copenhagen

by Peter MacHare

Ted Shell presented the recently released DVD *Duke Ellington Live at Tivoli Gardens* at our June meeting. The DVD contains two concerts from Ellington's European Tour in 1971.

Ben Webster is sitting in at both these concerts. In the first he is featured on "Cotton Tail" and "All Too Soon." But during the second concert Ellington surprises Webster by announcing "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good" instead of "All Too Soon." Webster is visibly surprised and asks a band mate, "What did he say?" Needless to say, his solo on "I Got It Bad" is terrific nonetheless.

Other highlights of the film include Norris Turney playing flute on "Fife," Harold Ashby playing tenor on "Chinoiserie," and most especially four tenors (Paul Gonsalves, Webster, Ashby, and Turney) together on "Quadruped."

Our video nights have proved quite popular. We hope to present as much Ellington video as possible again this season.

Picnic Is a Real Relaxer

In a note regretting being unable to attend our annual picnic, Sjeff Hoefsmit wished for all "a most wonderful day with good weather, good food and good music." His wish came true! The Society again held the event in July at Ted and Geneva Hudson's Highland Beach, Maryland home. A goodly number came; the food was delicious, varied, and plentiful; the weather was kindly; and conversation was characteristically congenial. Few ventured into the water or undertook other beach-related activities, most preferring the lazy comfort of the breeze-blessed porch and the company of old and brand-new friends. During the afternoon the Honorable Crystal Chissell, new mayor of Highland Beach, came by to welcome us and to share pleasantries.

Fiction buffs might want to read Southern Comfort by Sandra Kitt. The novel's setting is Highland Beach, which hosted a meet-the-author reception the week after our picnic.

