

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/

Jazz Appreciation Month:

“Jazz. Made in America. Enjoyed Worldwide.”

Wherever you happen to be or reside, be on the alert during April for PSAs, word-of-mouth, and media messages about international, national, and local Jazz Appreciation Month (JAM) events. This annual observance has grown admirably since the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, along with partners and jazz greats, launched it in 2001. JAM's web site suggests:

As a musician, learn a new piece of jazz music. Admire the genius of Louis Armstrong, Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, or John Coltrane. Donate a performance to your local school.

As a fan, attend a jazz concert with friends or family. Listen to your favorite jazz station. Watch a jazz video. Read a book about a jazz legend. Learn some vintage jazz dance steps.

Organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to draw attention to jazz by way of publications, multi-media events, public forums and meetings, educational activities, music clinics, art and literature, and, of course, performance. By notifying JAM by e-mail at jazz@si.edu or by phone at 202-633-3607 yours can be published in the official JAM calendar.

To find out more about JAM and other Smithsonian sponsored and related jazz initiatives, have fun browsing www.smithsonianjazz.org.

Ellington School of the Arts To Celebrate Its First Thirty Years

The founding of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts will be observed in a festive evening of dinner, music, and performance by students on 25 April. The event, “Duke Ellington Goes to the Cotton Club,” will take place at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC. Honorary chair is internationally renowned vocalist Denyce Graves, who graduated from the school.

Proceeds from the affair will support the school's Ellington Fund. For further information about the occasion, including reservations, contact Alice Tullis at 202-237-0090, Ext. 14, or go online to the school's website: www.ellingtonschool.org.

Florence Mills, The Black Beauty

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

There were many beautiful singers and dancers in the 1920s, yet only one of them is the Black Beauty and that is Florence Mills. Her death in November 1927 inspired Duke Ellington to write “Black Beauty,” one of his most beautiful compositions. Our guest for our March program will be Bill Egan, author of the new book *Florence Mills: Harlem Jazz Queen*.

Bill will tell us about Florence Mills and Duke's great composition written in her honor. We also expect to have copies of his book available for sale at the meeting for \$30. Bill is coming all the way from Australia to give this presentation, so we will allow extra time for all our members to meet and talk with him.

The March program will be at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington DC on Saturday, March 5 at 8 pm.** Visitors are welcome.

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Courtesy Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

First: Help us identify this photograph. Where? When? Why? What? Who? These are not rhetorical questions – help us.

And/Or: Come up with a caption for it. Your caption could be a product of your creative genius; or it could refer to the real world; or it could be the title of an Ellington or Strayhorn composition or a fitting song title that you made up.

Look for readers' responses in our next issue.

JAM

Dvorák to Duke Ellington:

A Conductor Explores America's Music and Its African-American Roots, by Maurice Peress

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Reviewed by Brian Gilmore

There is a subtle theme running throughout classical conductor Maurice Peress' new book: Did legendary Czech composer Antonin Dvorák's brief visit to America at the turn of the century influence the direction of jazz composition into the Ellington era? When you read Peress' well-documented prose you will know this proposition cannot be dismissed lightly. Peress traces the African-American aesthetic line that Dvorák discovered and utilized in his own work very diligently.

This tale includes American composers such as Gershwin and Bernstein, but the true stars are lesser-known musicians such as Will Marion Cook, a student of Dvorák and violinist who mentored a young Duke Ellington. Peress makes all his pieces fit best when he recounts Dvorák's relationship with black musicians such as Harry Burleigh. Burleigh was assigned to Dvorák when the master taught at the National Conservatory of Music of America. It was under Burleigh's influence that Dvorák came to proclaim the cultural dominance of African-American music forms when he told the *New York Herald* in May 1993: "In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music."

Ed. Note: We are grateful to JazzTimes for granting us permission to reprint this review by Brian Gilmore, which appeared in its February 2005 issue.

Echoes of Harlem

by Brad Bradbie

Sometime ago an article entitled "Reminiscing in Tempo" appeared in an issue of this newsletter. Those of you who read it might recall it was about a re-issue of Duke Ellington (1940-1942) recordings in a set called *The Blanton-Webster Band*. The package included a booklet with commentaries on each selection.

Remarks about the tune "Are You Sticking," which featured the clarinet of Barney Bigard included a suggestion that "Its title may have referred to the act of playing the clarinet or 'sticking.'" (Well-read jazz buffs know that "licorice stick" was a clarinet sobriquet among jazz musicians.) However, the old salt, who was reminiscing in tempo, knew better. And, so thought a number of readers in the English-speaking world.

When informed of the many different responsive definitions of "sticking" which crossed the desk of the newsletter editor, yesteryear's sailor was surprised and amused. But soon after, the smugness he retained, based upon a confidence of knowing just what Ellington's title question meant, began to erode when he could find no one to confirm his belief that "sticking" meant "having bread (money)." Time passed, the issue remained unresolved, but not forgotten.

Then it happened! In the following spring the ancient mariner, his wife and a friend drove up to the "Big Apple," the occasion, a Sunday afternoon jazz concert at historic St. Phillips Episcopal Church on West 134th Street, just off Seventh Avenue (now Adam C. Powell Avenue).

Having been away for so many years the trip evoked a feeling of joyous nostalgia. Going east on West 125th Street, and seeing once again the old, but still active, Apollo Theater became an emotional moment which brought back memories of those wonderful swing era shows: Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jimmie Lunceford, Charlie Barnett, Andy Kirk, and Ivie Anderson, Jimmy Rushing, Mary Lou Williams, Ella, Sarah, Mr. B. and those great Apollo chorus lines opening the shows.

Turning north on Seventh Avenue, the names of other memorable places and thoroughfares came to mind: The Savoy and Renaissance Ballrooms; Borman's, The Fat Man's and Small's Paradise; St. Nicholas, Convent, Lenox, Edgecomb and Moningside Avenues; Dewey Square, and the immortal Woodside Hotel.

As soon as the traveling party members sat at their table in the church music hall, they were cheerfully greeted by a senior local denizen known by most of the attendees. Perhaps a more apt description of this fellow would be a senior fixture, for he has never resided outside of Harlem.

After an exchange of warm pleasantries, Nat, a.k.a. Sonny, was asked the meaning of "Are you sticking?" Assuming his familiar professorial stance, he responded at once with "Do you have any bread, loot or green?" Hearing these words of vindication, the old wartime seafarer smiled softly, and leaned back to enjoy the concert.

To begin to comprehend what Duke Ellington was asking with pun in cheek, we have to put ourselves in a place and time and circumstance where we would be likely to hear the question in question. Also, we must be reminded that Duke was in a business not noted for providing steady incomes for its practitioners. Consequently, the success of any plan of action contemplated by a jazz musician often depended, at the moment, on the depths of his pockets, or how much he could borrow from a colleague or friend.

Much of the colorful jazz vernacular emanated from Uptown Manhattan, i.e., Harlem, during the '20s, '30s, and '40s. So if one didn't often, or ever, take the "A" train above the 59th Street station, it is most unlikely that this idiom could become a familiar one. Say, as unlikely as: Prez splitting the crib in his short, for a gig, without his axe. Dig?

TDES Announces New Website

TDES, the Ellington Society headquartered in New York, has a new internet site: www.thedukeellingtonsociety.org. In addition to usual information such as mission statement, membership information, calendar, and news, among others features it will include a timeline of Ellington's life, a "Duke Ellington for Beginners" series such as has been running in issues of its newsletters, a recommended reading as well as a recommended listening list, a section where one can listen to music clips, and a marketplace. A planned archives is expected to be a "treasure trove" of this society's 46-year history.

We congratulate TDES and look forward to its internet site as a valuable source of pleasure and information!

Gordon Book Released

Those lucky persons who got the paperback, pre-released, printer's draft copies of Claire Gordon's *My Unforgettable Jazz Friends* that she was nice enough to bring to the Ellington Conference in Stockholm last May have rare collectors' items. The finished version of the book is now available to the general public in "hard cover only, typos removed, spelling corrected . . . a far more elegant book with dust cover."

Ms. Gordon, who devotes a separate chapter to Duke Ellington, for a time served as the band secretary.

Some distribution details have to be finalized, but fortunately *My Unforgettable Jazz Friends* is now available from the catalogues of Art Newman at artnewman@earthlink.net and of the Jazz Record Center, 236 West 26th Street, Ste. 804, New York, NY 1001, jazzrecord-center@verizon.net. List price is \$32.50. We hope to have more about this important book in our next issue.

Looking Ahead

16-21 February

14th Annual East Coast Jazz Festival

To benefit the Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund

PO Box 1768, Silver Spring, MD 20915-1768

Phone: 301-933-1822 Fax: 301-933-1151

E-mail: eastcoastjazz@earthlink.net

Web: www.fmjseastcoastjazz.com

23 February

An Evening of Jazz

Starring former Ellington trombonist Buster Cooper and former Basie trumpeter Sonny Cohn

Clarion Inn Ballroom, Shepherdstown, West Virginia

Free & Open to the Public; To Reserve Seat, Call 304-870-8000

21 April

Eddie Ellington "Legacy" Orchestra

7:30 pm, \$10 Donation

To support New Washingtonians' Summer Travel

Duke Ellington School of the Arts

3500 R Street, NW, Washington, DC

Details: 202-333-2555 and www.ellingtonschool.org

25 April

Duke Ellington Goes to the Cotton Club

30th Anniversary of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts

6:30pm, Reception - 7:30pm, Dinner and Performance

Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, DC

Questions: Alison Tullis at 202-237-0090, Ext. 14

Two of Ours in the News

Ben Pubols

"For the Love of 'Duke,'" the first-page, lead feature of the current issue of *Northwest Senior News*, a Portland, OR/Vancouver, WA publication, is subtitled "Ben Pubols Is a Fan and Authority on Jazz Great Duke Ellington." The article includes accounts of his formative days in Washington, DC, where he saw favorite musicians perform and listened to late-night broadcasts; of his first meeting Duke at a dance and enjoying Hodges' ad-libbing a no-longer-in-the-book song in response to Ben's request; and his recent OASIS classes on the "golden age of pop singing."

As to Ellington, Ben says, "I think [he is] my favorite because his music is more challenging, complex, and varied than that of some of the other bands. I look at him as a composer and, secondarily, as a performer. He looked at himself that way, too. He once made a statement that because he had his own band, he was the only composer since Joseph Hayden who could write a composition tonight and hear it performed tomorrow night by his own band. He considered himself very fortunate in that respect."

The article is enhanced by several photographs: Ben; a CD and LP covers; and the bust of Ellington by Ferebee Streett, commissioned for our Society's centennial celebration of Ellington's birth, for which Ben served so admirably as coordinator.

Anthony Brown

"Family Creates a World of Sound" is the title of a feature article in the Oakland *Tribune* about Anthony Brown and his teen-age daughter, who has played Asian percussions instruments professionally with her dad. In an unrelated review of the Monterey Jazz Festival, the Seattle *Times* wrote, "When the 14-year-old percussionist in the Asian American Orchestra struck a gong at just the right moment Saturday night on the Garden Stage, the band leader beamed a big smile her way. Of course, the band leader was her father, Anthony Brown, and his approval for his aptly-named daughter, Georgia, was emblematic of a theme at this year's Monterey Jazz Festival—passing the baton to the next generation."

Anthony continues to receive accolades, not just for his leadership of and performances with the Asian American Orchestra but also for lectures, clinics, and otherwise acquainting the public with the legacies and possibilities in what has been labeled in various forms and idioms as jazz. His compositional daring is frequently noted, too. For example, in "Rainbow 'Rhapsodies,'" the San Jose *Mercury-News* discusses his re-composing Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" into a new work titled "American Rhapsodies." "In essence," the article claims, "Brown has taken Gershwin's progressive 20th-century vision and re-imagined it from a 21st-century Pacific Rim /Caribbean perspective."

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

"Jazz at UVA: The Photographs of John Mason" opened at Take It Away in Charlottesville, Virginia on 4 February. Among those in the exhibit are University of Virginia music department faculty, the institution's jazz band, and of special interest to our readers, jazz, blues, and Afro-Pop musicians from Kanda Bongo Man to Mulgrew Miller and John D'earth to Carey Harris.

To see an announcement about his exhibit and to sample photographs, go online to www.virginia.edu/music/jazzatuva/johnmason.html. And if you like auto racing, see more of his photos at "Democracy of Speed: A Photo Documentary Project" at www.people.virginia.edu/~ds8s/john-m/john-m.html.

As we mentioned before, Dr. Mason is a history professor at the University of Virginia whose hobbies include music performance and photography.

Yvonne C. Condell

We received a lovely note from Yvonne Condell (in Moorhead, Minnesota, just across the river from Fargo), in which she reports receiving from Willie Ruff and Dwiki Mitchell the CD entitled *Strayhorn: A Mitchell-Ruff Interpretation*, the 50th anniversary reissue of Strayhorn's *Suite for the Duo.*, which she calls "yet another example of the creative genius of Strayhorn."

Harvey Cohen

The lead article in the Fall 2005 issue of *The Journal of African American History* is "The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro" by Harvey G. Cohen. In our opinion, it is a model of careful, exhaustive scholarship and judicious writing on an important subject about which little has been written as credible, researched history. In this article Ellington comes across as much shrewder and knowing and in business affairs and image-making savvy than "received knowledge" has credited him.

The essay is adapted from a chapter in Dr. Cohen's forthcoming book *Duke Ellington's America*, to be published by the University of Chicago Press.

We haven't seen it yet, but he also has an article in another reputable journal, "Black, Brown, and Beige" in the latest issue of *American Quarterly*.

Quotation of the Month

Russell Procope joined the Orchestra for a short gig and stayed for 24 years. On the night Duke died Mercer Ellington was conducting the Orchestra. When Duke's death was announced Procope closed his music, packed his sax and clarinet, turned to the others and said, "Goodbye, gentlemen, the party is over," and walked away from both the bandstand and the Orchestra.

— from "The Sounds of Ellington" in the Newsletter of the Toronto Duke Ellington Society, May 2004

A Night at the Movies

by Mac Grimmer

At our February meeting our president Peter MacHare, also demonstrated his talents as our archivist extraordinaire; he treated us to a cinematic evening of early Ellington, 1929 through 1941. Co-starring with Duke and the band were a succession of singers, including Billie Holiday (in her first screen appearance) in *Symphony in Black*. Marie Bryant sang "Bli-Blip," one of the songs from *Jump for Joy*. Herb Jeffries; "Flamingo" was one of the hit tunes of the day. (This was 64 years ago; Herb is still going strong today.) And we saw the incomparable Ivie Anderson sing five songs, showing why she was one of the best of the early band singers.

Standout instrumentalists (besides Duke) included Arthur Whetsel in "Black and Tan" Freddie Jenkins in "Old Man Blues," Ben Webster in "Cottontail," and everybody in "C Jam Blues," a soundie from 1941.

Louis Armstrong provided a brief interlude, playing three tunes with a Danish band in 1933. His amazing performance in this film gave us an indication, if any was needed, of what all the fuss was about concerning the early Louis, the inventor of the jazz solo.

There were also surprise guest appearances by Mae West, singing, and Harpo Marx, on the flute. We overheard one of Miss West's conversations in which she was asked about her favorite types of men. She said, "There are just two. Domestic and foreign." Harpo said nothing.

To Join or Continue Membership in Our Society

Simply send a check payable to

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. to

PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA. Dues

remain a bargain:

Renewing Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;

and a special rate for a Brand-New-Member, only \$20

*Remember: Dues Are for the Calendar Year***THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.****Executive Board**

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