Ellingtonia

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On November 29 . . .

Let's pause, reflect, and be ever so grateful that William "Billy" Strayhorn created so much beauty that enriches our lives.

Members Spread Word and Music

New England

The Rev. Mark Harvey and his Aardvark Jazz Orchestra began their 33rd season at Emmanuel Church in Boston with a lecture by Harvey, "Jazz as Celebration and Challenge," on 15 September. According to an information release, this program explored "the pioneering efforts of clergy and musicians, including Ellington, to establish rapport between jazz and religion and examining the relations of jazz to the civil rights movement." The event inaugurated a new series celebrating 40 years of jazz at the church and 40 years of Ellington's sacred concerts.

The band's first concert in this "Jazz as Celebration and Challenge" series focused on music from Ellington's first sacred concert some 40 years ago in San Francisco. It also premiered Harvey's *Democratic Vistas*, in honor of the 150th anniversary of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Upcoming is a lecture by Harvey on "Ellington's Sacred Concerts" on 15 December. This will be followed on 18 December by the Aardvark Orchestra's 33rd annual Christmas Concert of Ellington's sacred music.

Pacific Northwest

In the Pacific Northwest, the Seattle Jazz Repertory Orchestra, co-directed by **Michael Brockman**, has begun its 11th season. (The other co-director is Clarence Acox, director of bands at famed Garfield High School.)

Of special interest is its 17th Annual Duke Ellington Sacred Music Concert at the University Christian Church in Seattle on 17 December. Choral music for the occasion will be by the Oregon Repertory Singers. This ecumenical holiday tradition will also showcase guest vocalists James Waddell and Nichol Eskridge and dancers. Among scheduled works are "In the Beginning God," "David Danced before the Lord," and "Praise God and Dance."

Informative Video Program Planned for November Meeting

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our November program will be an all-video evening including both music and a fascinating panel discussion featuring many of our big band heroes such as Louis Bellson and Clark Terry.

The program will be held on **Saturday, November 5, 2005** at **8 pm** at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum streets, NW.**

Our programs are open to the public, so please do encourage other music lovers to attend.

Mid-West

In July, **The Rev. Janna Steed** was one of four major presenters for Des Moines, Iowa's annual Jazz in July. She conducted a workshop for children, introducing them to Ellington's music and to jazz in general. She also provided narration and sang at a concert on the lawn of Salisbury House, accompanied by a quartet led by Dan Knight, who subbed for her at the Stockholm conference. Years ago, Duke and the band not only played at the House when it was a residence but also were housed there when hotels were closed to blacks.

In October, Steed will give the Memorial Lectures at First United Methodist in Crossett, her home town in Arkansas. On 16 October, she will preach and sing at the Unitarian Church in Little Rock. She concludes her stay there with a gig at The Afterthought, for the Arkansas Jazz Project.

The Netherlands

Dr. Walter van de Leur continues as an artistic director of the Dutch Jazz Orchestra. For their upcoming CD *The Lady Who Swings the Band: Rediscovered Music of Mary Lou Williams*, he was the researcher. In his essay to accompany the CD, van de Leur writes that Williams wrote at least 17 and maybe as many as 50 arrangements for Duke Ellington, including "Trumpets No End," an adaptation of "Blue Skies."

They Say

Sometimes Duke and Strayhorn have adjoining rooms at a hotel. It will be bright daylight when they climb into their beds, Duke first having said his prayers. Ellington may stare up at the ceiling a moment before he falls asleep and then call to Billy, in the next room. "Sweeper! How about dah Dee dah, dah Dee dah as an opening fanfare?"

"Why not needle Dee needle Dee needle Dee, needle Dee?" sings Sweeper sleepily. Then there is silence.

– Richard O. Boyer, from "The Hot Bach," rpt. Mark Tucker, ed., *The Duke Ellington Reader* (NY: Oxford UP, 1993).

♦♦♦

[Billy Strayhorn] loved to have deadlines. On the metro going down to the studios, he would be finishing off an arrangement. I think he did his best writing when he was under pressure. At the studio he would give the arrangements to Tom Whaley, the copyist, who would say he wrote music like he was writing letters.

– Aaron Bridges in interview by Gregory Morris published in *Momentum*, July-August 1997

♦♦♦

He was the only man I really loved.

– Lena Horne, quoted in David Hadju, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (NY: Farrar Straus Garrets, 1996).

♦♦♦

Strayhorn's invisibility during his long connection with the Ellington orchestra stands in marked contrast with his significance as a jazz composer. He possessed an advanced harmonic knowledge and paired his unfaltering talent for creating original melodies with a great rhythmic sensitivity. In addition, Strayhorn's understanding of music form and internal balance was staggering. But Strayhorn's true forte lies in his capacity to weld all this knowledge and talent into naturally sounding, individual works, expressing the whole gamut of conflicting human emotions. With these means, Strayhorn composed some of the most sophisticated and meaningful works in the entire history of jazz.

– Walter van de Leur, *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn* ((NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).

♦♦♦

Ever Up and Onward!

– Billy Strayhorn's motto

Dave Brubeck, Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra, Chuck Redd Star at Festival

A large audience gave Dave Brubeck a standing ovation as he came onstage at Washington's Lincoln Theater for the kick-off concert of the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival on 26 September. And although his quartet's performance this night was not vintage, there was plenty to please everyone. While old-timers may have wished for more interplay among the instrumentalists, especially between Brubeck and his alto saxophonist, there were long solos that gave them space to stretch out. This format allowed Brubeck to explore songs' lyricism, as his treatment of "Over the Rainbow" was a prime example. A bit unexpected was alto saxophonist Bobby Militello's occasional, yes, honking saxophone, especially to those for whom Paul Desmond's light, airy tone so helped define for them the Brubeck sound. Drummer Randy Jones and bassist Michael Moore provided unobtrusive and meaningful support throughout the concert. (A note: Brubeck did not include Ellington or Strayhorn in his program.)

The late Chico O'Farrill's Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra, led by his son Arturo, was a joy. Comprised of four trumpets, four trombones, five reeds, bass, and, including drums, three percussionists (at times augmented to four by the bassist), it had the arsenal and expertise and verve to more than arise to the occasion. Two of their offerings were works commissioned especially for the festival, an "Overture" and "Suite for Duke Ellington." The former had hints and traces of Ellington standards such as "Prelude to a Kiss" and of lesser heard compositions such as "Such Sweet Thunder." As for the premiered suite, for our lay ears, too much was going on for anything more than an impressionistic reception of the moment—carefully woven themes, complex rhythms, piercing and muted brass, bits of quotes of Ellington phrases, and medly-like transitions, all executed with noteworthy precision and enthusiasm. Among other selections were "Oclupaca," so well-suited to this band's style and imagination; "Perdido," a tribute to Juan Tizol; and the lovely and too-little-heard "Purple Gazelle." The closer was a non-Ellington extended work, "Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite." All told, it was an intriguing adventure in listening.

The "Chuck Redd & Friends" concert was musically and, because of its setting, nostalgically a most pleasant experience. The venue was the Lankford Auditorium of the True Reformer Building, likely the room in which, according to Ellington, he played his first professional gig for seventy-five cents, his repertoire being three songs that he repeatedly played, likely disguised by changes in rhythm and embellishment. (If this be true, we may hope that the acoustics were better then, or that the dancers/audience simply didn't notice.) For the occasion, vibraphonist Chuck Redd designated his group (Tommy Cecil, bass; Nasar Abadey, drums; Tom Williams, trumpet; and Robert Redd, keyboard), The Serenaders, the name of one of Duke's earliest groups. Their music demonstrated what dues-paid, sensitive, and skilled musicians can do with Ellington, Strayhorn, and Tizol compositions. To this listener's delight, they played "Purple Gazelle," showing the tune's intrinsic art, regardless of musical setting and instrumental context. Redd introduced a young vocalist, Cathy Elliot, who sings in a delicate, high, birdlike manner. She opened scatting "Cottontail," during which she traded fours with the drummer. For "Day Dream" her voice was whispery, her accompaniment only the bass.

Kudos to the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival for booking such groups!

Short Sheets . . .

Clark Terry Archives

Clark Terry has donated manuscripts, recordings, memorabilia, and one of his trumpets to William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey.

Chamber Society Begins 15th Season

In September the Chamber Jazz Society of Baltimore opened its 15th season of jazz concerts with "Another Kind of Blue: The Latin Side of Miles" at the Baltimore Museum of Art. For information about individual events and season tickets, contact the society at 410-385-5888 or visit their website at < *www.baltimorechamberjazz.org* >.

Ellington Study Group Conference Still Possible

The current TDES newsletter reports that at its June business meeting Ray Carmen, president, said that the possibility of its hosting an international conferences is not a dead issue. He is quoted, "We don't want to do the conference hastily; we want quality, not just a filling of space."

What's in a Name?
The Duke Ellington Jazz Festival

"The Premiere Duke Ellington Jazz Festival" in Washington, DC during the last days of October and the first of November offered a welcomed abundance of live music, including concerts by widely known artists and groups, a unique, free eight-hour marathon of performances on the Mall and special attractions at clubs and other places of entertainment.

Understandably, while applauding an initiative that featured so much good music and musicians, a number of enthusiasts were disappointed that more focus was not on Ellington and, especially among the cognoscenti, by the "disparate yoking" of Duke's name and the word "jazz." It is well known that Duke disapproved use of the term to denote America's classic music, considering it too limiting. As to his own music, founding members of our Society remember that at his request, the term was removed from our original name, resulting in a simply change from The Duke Ellington Jazz Society to the Duke Ellington Society.

In a panel discussion about Ellington that was part of the festival, musician Jerry Gonzalez reminded the audience of Duke's contention that there were only two kinds of music, good and bad. Given the variety of music and musicians involved, if it seemed wise to invoke Ellington's name, how much more appropriate and respectful it would be to title the enterprise "The Duke Ellington Music Festival."

A Home-Cooked Meal and the Bible

A recent feature article in the Washington *Afro-American* about 104-year-old Lavinia Craig reports that "Her husband was a schoolmate of jazz artist Duke Ellington. She related how she would cook for Ellington at her home many times when he came back to town. 'I remember how he wanted a home-cooked meal. He was very religious too. He would always be reading the Bible backstage,' said Craig."

modern life

ellington
leaps from a
guitarist's hands
toward
the indifferent
ears of diners
sporting t shirts
bearing flags and
patriotic slogans
inside the sated
food court

– reuben jackson

Milt Grayson Dies

We extend sincere condolences to the family and friends of former Ellington vocalist Milt Grayson, who passed away on 3 September 2005.

A graduate of Julliard, his first major engagement was with Katherine Durham when she toured Europe and South Americas in the 1950s. A versatile singer, whose deep baritone voice was often characterized as "velvety," during his varied career, among other things he appeared on Broadway as an actor-singer, and sang with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and in opera at the Met.

Mr. Grayson joined Ellington at Las Vegas in 1960 and stayed until 1963. On Ellington recordings he can be heard on such standards such as "The Blues" and "I Got It Bad" and lesser known songs such as "The Lonely Ones" and "To Know You Is to Love You."

Get *Jazz Notes* Online

The Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund (FMJS) has resumed its quarterly newsletter, *Jazz Notes*. Those receiving it by snail-mail may now get it online at *eastcoastjazz@earthlink.net*. This will help the fund save postage expenses. To join or renew membership in FMJS, you may call 301-933-1822 to pay by credit card or mail a check to PO Box 1768, Silver Spring, MD 20915-1768.

Clinker Alert!

In our last issue we incorrectly stated that the late Barbara Winfield, who had been an Ellington vocalist, never made a commercially released recording. Truth is, she did so with Tadd Dameron's Orchestra. What we should have said is that Ms. Winfield made recordings with the Ellington orchestra, but that none of them was commercially released.

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

About Our Members

Powhatan "Brad" Bradbie

The schedule is out for the East Coast Jazz Restival in February 2006. Brad Bradbie is listed to conduct a workshop on "Listening to Jazz."

William A. Brower

Our first-time-ever member William Brower was listed on the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival's official program as a producer for the event.

Morris Hodara; John "Jack" Dennis

We noticed in the minutes of TDES' June meeting that Morris Hodara was "recuperating" at that time. We subsequently talked with Morris and happily report that he is doing nicely.

While finishing this issue, we learned that Jack Dennis is in Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, MD. But about an hour later we received a call from Jack during which he said that he expects to be discharged soon.

They Have Set the Example

Two first-time-ever members, John Coleman and Alexander Leak, paid their dues for 2006 in advance. They join James and Elizabeth Janifer, who in 2004 prepaid for 2006.

Who will be the first to send in dues for 2006 ***and beyond!***

Heady Discourse: Siegel's Aesthetic Realism and Duke's Art

The Duke Ellington Society, United Kingdom (DESUK) sponsored a July lecture by Ed Green entitled "Ellington and the Opposites: Or, How the Aesthetic Realism of Eli Siegel Explains the Beauty of Jazz and of Duke Ellington."

The Aesthetic Realism Foundation quotes one of theorist Siegel's three principles as "All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves." As to music, in the preface to his *Self and World* (NY: Definition Press, 1981), Siegel states, "It happens that music is felt always as a oneness of motion and rest, or of difference and sameness."

To develop his thesis about Aesthetic Realism and Ellington's music, Mr. Green focused on the "The Mooche," "Black and Tan Fantasy," "Harlem Airshaft" and "Concerto for Cootie."

DESUK's *Blue Light* reports that Mr. Green's presentation was "excellent," and that although the venue, Ray's Jazz at Foyles, has a café bar whose patrons were a distraction, the program was "well received by an appreciative audience."

Ed Green has given papers at academic and scholarly gatherings, a recent one being "Duke Ellingtons's 'Koko'—a Masterpiece of Motivic Composition" at the Greater New York Chapter of the American Musicological Society.

Ben Webster: Member's Choice at October Meeting

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Our member's choice at our October meeting featuring Ben Webster really showcased his versatility and virtuosity. We started with a tape prepared and sent by Jack Towers, who was friends with Ben from 1950 until his untimely death in 1973. After introductory remarks about their meeting at Fargo in 1941, he played for us Ben's rendition of "Stardust" that Jack recorded there and which was the impetus for their long friendship. Mac Grimmer played a much later version of "Stardust" from the last recording Ben made before moving to Europe.

Peter MacHare shared two takes from 1946, "Dark Corners" and "The Jeep Is Jumping." Ted Shell played three pieces, "Until Tonight," "I Hear a Rhapsody," and Blue Serge." Ted Hudson showed an excerpt from The *Brute and the Beautiful*, a documentary about Ben's life and artistry and played for us three takes of "Faberge" from a rehearsal Ben had with the Danish Radio Orchestra. The tempos and phrasing were so radically different it was hard to trace a common melodic theme. Angela Grimmer shared a version of Ben playing "All Too Soon."

Allan Schneidmill gave a quick quiz on identifying at least six women band leaders (Ina Ray Hutton, Blanche Calloway, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Frances Wayne, Anna Mae Winburn, Marie Rodriguez, Maria Schneider, Rio Rita) and then our evening was over all too soon.

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To Join, Continue, or Renew

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