

Ellingtonia

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**Season's
Greetings**



A Memorable Evening Of Ellington's Sacred Music

The concert of Duke's sacred music featuring the Duke Ellington Orchestra led by Barrie Lee Hall at the Gilliam Concert Hall in the relatively new Murphy Fine Arts Center in Baltimore on 11 November was highly commendable. Other performers were the Morgan State University Choir, the Anne Swain-Clark Sacred Chorale, several other vocalists and narrators, and tap dancer Andrew Nemr. While there were numerous highlights, there would be little disagreement that the highest of them would have to include the performances by the Choir, Barrie Lee Hall, and student Choir member Jessica Lynn.

The justly famed Morgan Choir amazes by how its 100 or so balanced voices can sing in tune with fine intonation and articulate each word from a whisper to a shout. Recalling how Ellington insisted that his vocalists clearly enunciate a song's lyrics, we are certain he would have madly loved these students' singing. Barrie Lee Hall, Duke's last first trumpeter, evoked spontaneous, demonstrative approval by the other performers and the band as well as the audience with a masterful interpretation of "The Shepherd Who Watches Over the Flock at Night," his only solo of the evening. For the closer, soprano Jessica Lynn sang the opening of "Praise God and Dance" with electrifying purity of tone and telling dynamics, deserving a standing ovation midway through this exciting piece, during which all performers joined in a rapturously rollicking finish. Indeed, all the performers were in fine fettle, well-rehearsed, and into the spirit of things. Overall, the concert was professionally presented and, except for intermission, seamless.

The Ellington Orchestra was excellent, giving indications that in a setting conducive to "stretching out" by itself, it can swing with the best big bands. Barrie Lee Hall and drummer Rocky White were the only alumni of Duke's own band among its members.

If You Like Duke, You'll Like...

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our December program will be a member's choice. Each member may bring two recordings. One by Duke, the other by another artist that you think Ellington fans will enjoy. Expand your musical horizons! Try to keep your selections short, so that everyone will be able to participate.

The program will be held on **Saturday, December 3 at 8pm** at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW**. Our meetings are open to the public, so we invite everyone who loves music.

Contribution Will Benefit New Washingtonians

Our Society's recent gift of \$1,000 to the Duke Ellington School of the Arts will be put to good use, according to Davey Yarborough, Director of the Music Division, the program for which it was earmarked. The school's big band, the New Washingtonians, will use the grant to help with its travel and lodging expenses, for which there is no specific line in its budget.

While a part of the DC Public Schools, for its overall program the school supplements its official appropriation by holding fund-raising events under the auspices of the Ellington Fund, which encourages support from private and corporate donors and from other nonprofit organizations such as our Society.

Our contribution came from money raised by the concert several years ago starring our member Ronnie Wells. This benefit event, we may recall, was conceived and coordinated by Patricia Braxton. Previous awards were made to two students, both of whom went on to college and are doing well. At its October meeting our Executive Board unanimously approved The New Washingtonians as this year's recipient.

Mr. Yarborough expressed deep appreciation to our Society for its gift. He anticipates that our award will especially help the highly regarded New Washingtonians to accept in a timely manner invitations to perform during the summer. In the past, invitations to events included some festivals overseas.

Two Welcome Rarities

Nelson Williams, *Five Horn Groove & Nelson Williams All Stars* (BMG Media Original Vogue Masters)

Ray Nance, *When We're Alone: The Complete 1940-1949 Non-Duocal Violin Recordings*

Featuring Ben Webster Clarinet Transcriptions (AB Fable ABCDI-014)

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

Nelson "Cadillac" Williams was in the Ellington trumpet section a relatively short time, during 1949-51 and occasionally thereafter. In 1951 he was highlighted on a remarkable "Brown Betty," released on Columbia. (To appreciate how he evokes a uniquely haunting aura on this tune, listen to this piece, volume down, in the quiet of early morning or late night.)

During a 1950 European tour, Duke's trumpet section consisted of Williams, Al Killian, Ernie Royal, Harold Baker, and Ray Nance. Under the direction of Williams, these five, backed by Wendell Marshall, Butch Ballard, and a pianist named Art Simmons, recorded three of the tunes on this CD in France in April of that year. The CD's title tune, "Five Horn Groove," is a succession of solos introduced by a boppish riff and with scant trumpet ensemble playing. Perhaps because Baker and Nance are more familiar than the others, their playing is identifiable, but in all honesty none of the five plays with notable inspiration, albeit with technical proficiency. The other two tunes, "Big Al," composed by Killian, and "Chumpa Leezy," by Williams, pretty much follow the same format.

Nelson's All Stars consists of him; Don Byas, saxophone; Art Simmons, piano; Pierre Michelot, bass; and Zutty Singleton, drums (yes, Zutty). On "Creole Love Call" it becomes apparent that Williams' forte is his insinuatingly subtle mute, as on the aforementioned "Brown Betty" ("Creole..." is wistful while his "Brown..." is more mysterious), and indeed throughout this session, particularly on the opening of the two takes of "The Masquerade Is Over." Don Byas' self-assured tenor is both a force in itself as well as a sensitive foil for Williams' trumpet. It's so good to hear them play off each other. The other pieces by this group are "Acipco," "Marcelle," and two takes of "Just Some Blues" (in which Zutty takes a brief break).

This CD makes one wish that Nelson "Cadillac" Williams, of the muted trumpet lineage in the Ellington orchestra traceable back to Bubba Miley, had remained with Ellington longer.

Ray Nance certainly has been around the block a few times with that violin of his, as abundantly evidenced by *When We're Alone*, which begins in 1940 with the Horace Henderson orchestra and ends in 1949 with Babs Gonzales. In between there is variety of style and context, but always recognizable Ray Nance. It all begins with "Kitty on Toast" with the Horace Henderson orchestra (an opportunity to enjoy as well the polish of the orchestra, conducted here by Fletcher Henderson.). Then comes a surprise, seven tunes played by what is called Ben Webster and Ray Nance and Quintet, from "home lacquers" recorded in Los Angeles by a friend of Ben. It's all very interesting not only for the unusual setting and for inclusion of Jimmie Blanton, Sonny Greer, and not-positively-identified-but-likely Freddy Guy—but also for Webster on clarinet! (A self-test: Listen and then decide if you would have guessed the clarinetist to be Ben had you not been told.). The group merrily swings through "A ♭ Swing," "E ♭ Swing," "Swingin' in 4," "Memories of You," "I Never Knew," "The Sheik of Araby," and "I Can't Believe That You're in Love With Me," with occasional background and encouraging talk.

Clearly Nance is right at home with an Earl Hines group of Hodges, Flip Phillips, Al Casey, Pettiford, Big Sid Catlett, and Betty Roché. He plays obligato behind her on "Trouble, Trouble" before Don Byas solos; then he is central to "Design for Jivin'." With the Eddie Heywood orchestra he plays melody on "How High the Moon" before Heywood and clarinetist Aaron Sachs take turns, followed by Nance on cornet and Byas on tenor, some ensemble work and then a closeout by all. "Penthouse Serenade" follows the same formula, with Nance establishing the melody. At first Ray Nance and the Ellingtonians as the name for the next group appears to be a misnomer or typo, for none seems apparent; then one reads that its leader is Ray Ellington with fellow Britishers. Recorded in London in 1948, Nance delivers "Moon Mist" beautifully with minimum accompaniment, followed by him on trumpet and violin on "Sometimes I'm Happy" and "Blues for Duke," these too with little accompaniment. By contrast, the combo led by Ivory Joe Hunter boasts Baker, Glenn, Procope, Marshall, and Greer in classic Ellington small group music. What a joy it is to hear Procope and Glenn and Baker play solos on ballads, especially on "It's You Just You" and "Guess Who?" Again, here is proof of Nance's talent for obligato. The CD closes with a boppist group on which leader Babs Gonzales sings "When Lovers They Lose"; by "general census" the violinist is Nance.

Compleatists will want, Nance and Williams enthusiasts will applaud, and plain music lovers can appreciate these unusual CDs

Two Members' Latest CDs Are Unique

Each in its own way, *Trumpet Madness* by the Mark S. Harvey and his Aardvark Jazz Orchestra (Leo Records LR 423) and *Rhapsodies* by Anthony Brown's Orchestra (Water Baby Records WBR1010) are not what one expects by a big jazz band.

Dr. Brown's CD contains a trilogy of homages to Mingus, Gershwin, and Ellington. Its centerpiece is "Rhapsody in Blue/American Rhapsodies." He had received a Guggenheim Fellowship to "recompose" Gershwin's famous work, and this six-part extended work is the result. Mingus is saluted in through-composed "Self Portrait in Three Colors," which contains no solos. Ellington is represented by "Tang," from his *Afro-Eurasian Suite*, and "Come Sunday," which Brown says is his favorite of all of Duke's compositions. Other selections also of uncommon interest make up the rest of the release.

Of particular interest about all the selections in *Rhapsodies* is the instrumentation, pretty much the same as on previous CDs featuring Brown's Asian-American Orchestra, among its instruments Chinese hammered dulcimers, steel drums in place of a piano, shakuhachi (Japanese flute), suona (reed trumpet), and Chinese harp zither. A master drummer, Brown, plays percussion instruments and waterphone. And we must mention that one of our student members and the leader's teen-age daughter, Georgia Brown, is right there on Western, Asian, and African percussion.

In our last issue we noted the activities of the Rev. Mark Harvey and his Aardvark Jazz Orchestra. Well, they have just released another CD, *Trumpet Madness*, that has raised some eyebrows and perked some ears. In addition to being one of the trumpet soloists, Harvey composed all but one of the works on this release.

The British publication *Jazz Review* speaks of the CD's "exuberance, imagination, and sheer brio." In France, *Les Disques* calls attention to "rare diversity" and "very colorful" orchestral playing. In New York State, Downtown Music Gallery calls it "a really shocking record that breaks a lot of new ground."

In a personal note to your editor, Harvey advises, "This is definitely exploratory music—so do have a strong cup of coffee (or other libation) nearby when listening! As the boppers said, it's crazy, man." To which we say, "Amen."

Selections from *Trumpet Madness* were part of the orchestra's Aardmania Concert in October at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

For a copy, send a \$17 check payable to Aardvark, c/o Mark Harvey, PO Box 8721, JFK Station, Boston, MA 02114-0037.

SJMO Season Opener Is a Delight

by Gina Rollins

The opening performance of a three-concert Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra (SJMO) series was a delight for Ellington fans of all sorts, aficionados to novices. The concert took place on October 29 at the Carmichael Auditorium, National Museum of American History. The series, "From Harlem to Hollywood," highlights the careers of Duke, Benny Carter and Ella Fitzgerald in both locales, and traces the movement of jazz from East Coast to West.

Leader Loren Schoenberg combined a program of standards—"A-Train," "Satin Doll," "Things Ain't What They Used to Be"—with lesser-known Ellington compositions, including "Fleurette Africaine," "Barzallai Lew," "Charley the Chulow," and "Wig Wise."

All three concerts will feature smaller groups of SJMO. Several pieces for this concert were specially arranged to "downsize" Duke's (or Billy Strayhorn's) original orchestrations for the full band down to four lead instruments. In addition to Schoenberg (who played both tenor sax and piano and also sang), the group featured Marty Nau on alto sax and clarinet, Scott Silbert on bari sax, John Eckert on trumpet, James King on bass, Ken Kimery on drums, and fourth-year Julliard student Willie Applewhite on trombone, who will bear watching as his career blossoms.

The concerts honoring Benny Carter and Ella Fitzgerald will take place on February 25 and April 22, respectively. Hope to see you there!

Shirley Horn, 1934-2005

by Patricia Braxton

Washington, DC's own, Shirley Horn, died on October 22. Known for her classic piano style and oft times slow and intimate vocal delivery, she recorded a couple of Ellington pieces, including "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good" on the 1992 album *I Thought About You*. And Verve Music Group's website cites "Her sweet rendition of the nostalgic Ellington piece "Take Love Easy," which features Verve labelmate Roy Hargrove on fluegelhorn.

About her style, online Swingmusic.net says, "Shirley Horn's piano playing drew on the influences of Ahmad Jamal and Wynton Kelly. Her intricacies in harmony bring to mind Duke Ellington. Her notes were always chosen wisely, placed expertly at well-chosen times. She had the rare ability to utilize rhythm through silence much as Count Basie and the aforementioned Kamal. Although these behemoths may come to mind when listening to Horn, she claimed the utilization of these manifestations as very much her own art. She was not an imitator."

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

Walter van de Leur and Scott Schwartz

We have heard that Walter van de Leur is slated to be an artist in residence at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, on the invitation of faculty member Scott Schwartz.

Anthony Brown

Anthony Brown's "Rhymes for Children," included on his latest CD, is the theme music for "Pacific Time," an NPR weekly syndication.

He and his music are featured in the documentary film, *Doubles: Japan and America's Intercultural Children*. His ancestry includes Japanese, African American, and Native American strains.

John Hornsby

Congratulations are in order. Several issues ago we mentioned that he was running for one of the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors' trustee positions. Of course, he won.

East Coast Jazz Festival Program Can Be Had Online and in Print

For copies of the complete program for the upcoming East Coast Jazz Festival, go online at < www.fmjseastcoastjazz.com > or write or call the Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund at PO Box 1768, Silver Spring, MD 20915-1768; phone: 301-933-1822 and fax: 301-933-1151.

The Festival runs 16-20 February 2006. As expected, accommodations at the DoubleTree Hotel Rockville [MD], main venue for the event, sold out early. The Ramada Inn Rockville, across the highway, has been designated for overflow lodging.

For Lexiphiles

Show me a piano falling down a mineshaft and I'll show you "A-flat Minor."

— Passed on to us by Ben Pubols

Gloria Nance Passes

Just as we were finishing this issue, we learned that Gloria Harper Nance died on 10 November in New York City. An actress, she married Ellington trumpeter and violinist Ray Nance in 1952.

We are saddened by this news and extend to her family and other loved ones our condolences.

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November Meeting: Big Band Videos

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Alan Scheidmill presented a collection of panel discussions taped in the 1990s by alumni of the Ellington, Basie, Woody Herman, Stan Kenton and Artie Shaw bands. Participants included, among others, Louie Bellson, Britt Woodman, Clark Terry, Jan McShan, Buddy DeFranco, John Lewis, Chubby Jackson and Artie Shaw. They reminisced about life on the road, the leaders of the groups, how they were recruited into the bands and what it was like to be part of that time and place. Louis Bellson summed up life with Duke pretty well: "We're all blessed to know there was a Duke Ellington in this century." He went on to say, "If today is my last it will be OK because I played with Duke."

The second half of the program featured Artie Shaw holding court on various road stories and on how one becomes a master musician. We then segued into Peter's presentation of a video montage of early jazz and entertainment greats, including Louis Armstrong, Bill Bojangles Robinson and, of course, Duke.

We also celebrated Ted Shell's 90th birthday with champagne and cake. We were blessed to see Jack Dennis, his wife Betty and daughter Joanne, who had not been able to join us in quite a while. It was great to see you again, Jack. Hope you continue on the road to recovery.

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