

Ellingtonia

A Publication Of
The Duke Ellington Society

Volume XIV, Number 5

MAY 2006

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Courtesy Carlyle Productions

TDES Holds One-Day Ellington Conference

At its 5th Annual Ellington Conference at the Institute of Jazz Studies on Rutgers University's Newark campus, all the lecturers, panelists, and performers were members of event sponsor TDES, the New York-based Ellington society. Their presentations showed what remarkable Ellington expertise exists among this society's membership.

After a continental breakfast and welcoming remarks by Ray Carmen, president, and Jack Kleinsinger, conference coordinator, the program began with a discussion by Basilio Serrano, author of a forthcoming biography entitled *Caravan to Perdido; The Genius and Legacy of Juan Tizol*. Serrano presented little-known information about and insights into his subject's life and compositions, before, during and after his stints with Ellington. Next was composer, improviser, performer, and Columbia University professor George Lewis, who spoke on "Ellington and Experimental Music," illustrating his lecture with music and film.

After a lunch break, its director Dan Morgenstern conducted an insider's tour of the Institute of Jazz Studies. Afternoon sessions featured, first, David Amram, who detailed the "Impact of Ellington on Jazz and Classical Music." Then, playing several instruments, he joined pianist Dick Katz and young saxophonist Tyler Schwartz for a musical interlude.

The conference ended all too soon with "Reflections in 'D'," a panel consisting of collector Morris Hodara, musician Katz, and educator Arnold J. Smith with some intriguing reminiscences of events and epiphanies, if you will, in their Ellington/ Strayhorn infused lives.

Ellington Concert Videos

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Ted Shell will present Ellington concert videos at our May gathering. He has a wonderful collection of video, so you will see many of our heroes play the music we all love.

The program will be **Saturday, 6 May** at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets NW, Washington, DC at 8 pm**. See you there for a very enjoyable evening.

Our presentations are open to the public, so come one, come all.

Awardee Continues to Excel

Benjamin Williams, one of the two students who received our Society's Student Fund Awards in 2002, has gone on to achieve as a performing bassist, composer, and arranger. He has won competitions and earned other honors and awards, among them first place in the Jazz Division of the International Society of Bassists' competition in 2005 (he will lead that organization's 2007 jazz concert in Oklahoma City).

A graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, DC, he is now a senior at Michigan State University (MSU), where he is a member of Phi Sigma Theta National Honor Society and on the Dean's List. Further, Benjamin serves as bassist for the MSU's Octet I Jazz Band, Philharmonic Orchestra, Chorale, and as pianist for the Jazz Choir.

A featured bassist at the recent East Coast Jazz Festival, Benjamin Williams cherishes having been mentored by Keter Betts and Milt Hinton.

**Two Reviews by Ben Pubols:
Bubber Miley: Rare Recordings, 1924-1931**

Vintage Music Productions CD VMP 0161

This new CD will be of interest to all Ellington lovers, but especially those (like myself) with a fondness for “early Ellington.” There are twenty-four selections, including items recorded before, during, and after Miley’s tenure with Duke. They range from “Down in the Mouth Blues” (1924, with Arthur Ray, reed organ) to “St. Louis Blues “ (1931, with Leo Reisman and His Orchestra). Among those in between are ten items with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, pseudonymous or otherwise, including the early “Rainy Nights” (1924) and “Yellow Dog Blues” (1928). Many of the old standbys, such as “Black and Tan Fantasie” and “Creole Love Call,” are not present. But then, how many duplications of these do we really need? Nor are any of the Mileage Maker selections, from 1930, included. The audio quality is quite good, even on the earlier acoustic recordings, and better than on other CDs I have containing some of the same material. The post-Ellington selections, with Leo Reisman, are interesting, especially a medley that includes “The Mooche.” A few of them include forgettable male vocals. But the wonderful Lonnie Johnson appears on guitar on Duke’s “Move Over (1028). Recommended, especially for Ellington “completists.”

Duke Ellington in Hollywood

Idem Swing Era DVD IDVD 1029

Duke Ellington in Hollywood brings together on DVD many early movies in which Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra appear. They range from the 1929 *Black and Tan*, featuring Fredi Washington, through the 1943 *RKO Jamboree*. Most of the six shorts in between will be familiar to readers, so rather than enumerate, I will merely list some of the highlights. These include “Old Man Blues” from *Check and Double Check* (1930), Ivie Anderson’s wonderful vocal on “Stormy Weather” from *Bundle of Blues* (1933), the infectious “I’ve Got To Be a Rug Cutter,” with vocal by Ivie Anderson, Hayes Alvis, Rex Stewart, and Harry Carney, from *Hit Parade of 1937*, and “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore” from *RKO Jamboree*, featuring Johnny Hodges, with Tricky Sam Nanton taking the usual Lawrence Brown solo. For some reason, *Paramount Pictorial No. 889* aka *Record Making With Duke Ellington and His Orchestra* is sped up by about 5% (length of the program is only 5 minutes, as opposed to 5 minutes, 15 seconds). Fortunately, Ivie still is recognizable as Ivie. Overall the sound on all of these is better than on any of the tapes I have of the same material, and the images are clear (for some reason they have been lightened up). Should you buy this? It depends on how many of the items you have on videotape and how satisfied you are with the audio and video quality.

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**A Review by Bill Hassan:
The Sacred Music of Louis Bellson and The Jazz Ballet**

Percussion Power

This CD represents Louis Bellson's recognition of and the continuation of the masterful power of the Lord. He had long heard the percussive thunder in the two bass drums that he used in his drum kit. Playing in the bands of Duke Ellington Count Basie, Harry James and Tommy Dorsey gives Bellson the abilities to incorporate the styles of these masters. There is even a Jazz festival named after him in the Quad cities of Illinois and Iowa.

His exploration into sacred music and jazz ballet is a devoted extension of the spirituality he experienced with the Sacred Music Concerts of Duke Ellington. Much can be said for Bellson’s abilities as a composer and most of his ardent supporters identify him with “Skin Deep.” But the tunes on this CD demonstrate his breadth to compose in many different styles for voice and instruments. The trumpet of Bobby Shew and the USC Thornton School of Music Jazz and String Orchestra and Choir display a rich, lush force to Louis Bellson’s creations.

These compositions give the listeners a fresh and modern approach to the music. Bellson states that he has a profound belief in the power and the majesty of an almighty God. We are indeed blessed to have had Louis Bellson with us for the last 82 years and to leave with us an everlasting legacy. The music on this CD is an expression of a gift given to a legend that has made an indelible imprint on the jazz continuum.

Further information is provided in a scholarly written set of liner notes by Patricia Willard.

Short Sheets . . .

More Lorraine Feather Adaptations

By composing lyrics and new titles, Lorraine Feather continues to re-create Ellington and Strayhorn tunes. Her latest CD, *Dooji Wooji*, includes "Harlem Air Shaft" as "Calistoga Bay," "Dooji Wooji" as "Sweet Honolulu," "Jubilee Stomp" as "Indiana Lana," and "Voom Voom" as "Tryin' to Get Over on Doin'." Delightful whimsy and good music, all.

For a note on her all-Ellington/Strayhorn based CD, *Such Sweet Thunder*, see the "Short Sheets" column in our November 2004 issue.

Classes by Claire Gordon at Cal Poly

In April, Claire Gordon, author of *My Unforgettable Jazz Friends* (2004), will begin a series of lectures at California Polytechnical University on jazz and ballrooms, c. 1937-47. Among other things, she plans to start with music that led to jazz, talk a lot about Ellington, postulate a few theories about why practically exhausted musicians engaged in seemingly endless jam sessions, and play music by artists she discusses in her book.

Jazz Centered Masters Degree at Rutgers

The Institute of Jazz Studies serves as a primary resource facility for students pursuing masters degrees in jazz history and research at Rutgers University-Newark. According to information published by the Institute, such masters programs are not offered anywhere else.

Hasse at Cape Town University

Our members Angie and Frank Arnold shared with us information from a friend in South Africa that in March John Edward Hasse gave lectures at the University of Cape Town on the "icons of jazz."

Updated Book on Trombonists Released

A recently published second edition of Kurt Dietrich's *Duke's 'Bones: Ellington's Great Trombonists* (Advance Music 1995) includes some text corrections, revisions in its discography, and other emendations. At the same time the publisher announced a new book by Dietrich, *Jazz 'Bones: The World of Jazz Trombone*.

Humor(?) Found on the Internet

☺ Kenny G walks into an elevator and says, "Man! This place is *happening!*"

☺ General Ulster and his aide were in the fort. The aide says, "General, I don't like the sound of those drums." From over the hills a voice yells, "It's not our regular drummer!"

Passing It On

Back in 1873, the newly formed Colored American Opera Company gave its first public performance, *The Doctor of Alcantara* by Julius Eichberg, before an integrated audience, reported to have numbered 1,500, in Washington, DC. The success of this fledgling group led to other local performances, eventually going on the road, and achieving financial success.

One of the company's soloists was Henry F. Grant, whose son Henry, Jr. became a musician who according to Duke Ellington in *Music Is My Mistress*, "invited me to come to his house to study harmony. It ended up a hidden course in harmony and lighted the direction to more highly developed composition. It was a music foundation . . ."

"Little Duke" Dies

Harold Earle, familiarly known as "Little Duke" because of his manner, dapper dress, and diminutive size, passed away in February, apparently in his sleep. He was at many Annual International Duke Ellington Study Group Conferences and, according to New York area residents, a regular on the jazz scene there.

Broadcast Will Celebrate Duke's Birthday

Ellington expert Bill Saxonis will be a guest on "Saturday Morning Edition of Jazz" over WCDB 90.9-FM in Albany, NY on Duke's birthday, Saturday, 29 April. Those outside the area may pick up the broadcast on the internet at <http://wcdb.albany.edu/>.

Internet Addresses to Keep Handy

A Duke Ellington Panorama:
www.depanorama.net

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.:
www.depanorama.net/dcsociety/

DEMS Bulletin:
www.depanorama.net/dems

Billy Strayhorn Songs:
www.billystrayhorn.com

Andrew Homzy's Discussion Group:
Duke-LYM@concordia.ca
To become a member, go to
www.majordomo@concordia.ca
and simply write **subscribe duke-lym**

Ellington on the Web:
(Major focus is websites related to Ellington and Strayhorn)
www.ellingtonweb.ca

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

John Mason

"Jazz," an article about John Mason along with his photographs of musicians in rehearsal and performance, appears in the April 2006 "Music Issue" of *Arts and Sciences*.

Morris Hodara

At the one-day Ellington conference sponsored by TDES in March at the Institute of Jazz Studies, Morris Hodara spoke on his adventures tracking down the identity of a World War II era V-disc he heard years ago featuring Johnny Hodges on "Sunny Side of the Street." After decades of searching, he discovered that Johnny was playing with Lionel Hampton.

Quotation of the Month

That recording of "Skin Deep" to me was nothing but a guy playing drums, bit I guess I got lucky. I drove drummers crazy with them because they thought that was me clapping my hands. It was not me. Al Foster, the great drummer, said to me, "Lou, I drove myself crazy trying to figure out how you did that." I told him it was really easy, nothing to it, because that's the band doing the clapping and they did it so well it sounds like one guy. But I didn't tell most drummers, instead, I let them go ahead and break their necks trying to do this (sic).

— Louie Bellson in Briton S. Tracy, *Bands, Booze and Broads*, as quoted in *Blue Light*, XII.2.

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They "Gave the Drummer Some"

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Our April meeting was a Member's Choice focused on Duke's Drummers. John Anderson led with "Skin Deep" from Duke's renowned performance at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival. If the crowd had calmed down any since the band's raucous "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" it was hard to tell from the response following Sam Woodyard's more than four-minute drum solo. By the way, we learned for the first time that our member Frank Arnold was there when it happened!

Patricia Willard honored both Louie Bellson and Harry Carney (as April 1 would have been the latter's 96th birthday) with "VIP Boogie" and "Jam with Sam," which together are known as "Threesome." Patricia also shared Dizzy Gillespie's take on Bellson: "He was a master of the most fundamental thing in music: one. ... Some people get so engrossed they forget to tell you when one is [meaning the down beat]...He was a virtuoso but he had complete submission to the soloist."

Peter MacHare also featured Bellson, in "European Skallyhoppin," from his *Black, Brown and Beige* album. Peter followed with Ella Fitzgerald singing "I'm in the Mood for Love," accompanied by organist Jackie Davis and drummer Sonny Payne, whom Peter included in the pantheon of Duke's Drummers by virtue of his playing in the 1956 Ellington-Basie session. Sonny Payne also was featured in Frank Sinatra's rendition of "My Kind of Girl."

Alan Schneidmill recalled the night he decided Sonny Greer was one of the all-time top jazz drummers. Alan attended both nights of Duke's December, 1947 Carnegie Hall concert, but the first night there was a blizzard and only about one-third of the seats were filled. From his perch in the balcony Alan saw Greer peering into the audience as he was setting up. His playing that night was "magnificent," according to Alan. It was as if he decided the hardy souls who fought their way through the ice and snow really deserved something extraordinary.

Ted Shell shared one of the newest additions to his collection, a video of Duke's 1965 concert in Copenhagen. Ted selected "Take the A Train," with a rarely videoed Billy Strayhorn on piano and Ray Nance total camp as he sang "He Huffed and Puffed and Blew That Horn." We enjoyed the show so much Peter went back to the beginning and ran a few numbers. Made us all wish we had been there, too.