

Ellingtonia

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November 29th

Billy Strayhorn's Birthday

!! Let's Celebrate !!

SMJO at the Lincoln Theatre

by Patricia Braxton

An event in the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival in Washington, DC on October 8 at the Lincoln Theater featured the Smithsonian Masterworks Jazz Orchestra in concert. Conducted by lead alto saxophonist Charlie Young, the orchestra first played songs from various Ellington suites followed by the Ellington-Strayhorn version of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker Suite*.

Among the presentations were a few rarely heard songs such as "Brasilliance" from the *Latin American Suite*; a song from the *Far East Suite*; "Such Sweet Thunder," the title song from the 12-part suite based on the sonnets and plays of Shakespeare; "West Indian Dance" and "Emancipation Proclamation" from *Black, Brown and Beige*; and "Portrait of Louis Armstrong" from the *New Orleans Suite*—with a thankful introduction to each piece by the conductor.

Then, without intermission, the orchestra continued with the nine-piece *Nutcracker Suite* that included a rousing "Peanut Brittle Brigade," prompting thunderous applause and shouts of appreciation from the half-full theater. Unfortunately, the event did not seem to have been well advertised.

The orchestra ended the concert with everybody's favorite, Billy Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train."

Reminder: Strayhorn Concert on 28 October at Smithsonian

The Smithsonian Jazz Masters Orchestra will present an all-Billy Strayhorn concert at 7:30 pm on 28 October in the Baird Auditorium of the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History. For reservations, check out customerservice@residentassociates.org online or phone 202-252-0012.

November Program: Ellington by Others

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Ted Shell will present videos of Ellington's music as played by other artists for our program on 4 November. The world continues to have a love affair with Ellington's music, so we will see many wonderful performances.

Our program will be at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC at 8 pm on Saturday, 4 November.** As always, visitors are welcome.

Nominations for Officers and Board

If you are presently an Officer or member of the Board of Directors and are unable to continue in your present position, please get in touch with Angela Grimmer at 202-546-7764 before the next meeting. Likewise, if you would like to nominate someone to serve as an Officer or as a member of the Board of Directors, please also get in touch with Angela.

Several Ellington-Focused Events in Jazz Festival

A major offering of the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival in Washington, DC in October was an "African Ellington Tribute" with Randy Weston, Victor Masondo and Lalela, and special guest Roy Hargrove, at the historic Lincoln Theater.

The central attraction of a "Family Concert" by the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra was Ellington and Strayhorn's *Nutcracker Suite*. (For some reason, festival ads and media releases did not list Strayhorn as composer/arranger of parts of the work or as Ellington's co-composer/arranger.)

A festival fundraiser at the Willard Hotel, "Recreation of Legendary Cotton Club," featured Davey Yarborough and The New Washingtonians with special guest Avery Brooks and festival artists-in-residence Paquito D'Rivera and Roy Hargrove.

Benny Aasland

by Sjef Hoefsmit

Ten years ago DEMS [Duke Ellington Music Society] lost its founder, Benny Aasland, and I lost my best friend. It might seem to be an exaggeration to say that he was my best friend. Other very dear friends may question my statement since Benny and I only met a few times and lived very far apart. Benny is my best friend simply because he opened for me a world full of other good friends with whom I could share what was and still is my dearest and longest dedication in life: Duke's music.

My Swedish friends have asked me to write some words for the *Duke Ellington Swedish Society Bulletin* which will be dedicated to Benny and which [was] out before you read these words in *DEMS Bulletin*. Because it is difficult, I only write these words once for both *Bulletins*.

Thanks to my Swedish friends who insisted that I should try to continue the publication of Benny's *DEMS Bulletin*, I can now say that I am proud of having kept alive for the past ten years, Benny's creation. I am very good at following in other people's footsteps. I followed my father's in printing cardboard and paper packages. When Benny died, I couldn't accept that this would also be the end of *DEMS Bulletin*.

One can praise me for what I achieved the past ten years. Thank you very much, but believe me, creating the *DEMS Bulletin* is something else. Benny was a **creator pure sang**. He is still and will always be the one who for the first time published a discography dedicated to only one musician: *The Wax Works of Duke Ellington* in 1954. It has been (and still is indirectly) the base of all following Ellington discographies. So much so that it took quite some time before some of the very few mistakes in Benny's discography which were copied by later discographers were corrected.



Sjef and Benny

International Ellington Conference, Stockholm, 1994

One of the advantages of publishing the *Bulletin* on Peter MacHare's web-site is the fact that we have many more readers than before and that one of Benny's dearest wishes, to have the *Bulletin* free for everybody, came through.

Not long ago a complete stranger asked me the following question: "For my father's 65th birthday, I am trying to find the song he used to dance to when he was but two years old. Unfortunately, I do not know the name of the song, only that it was on the flip side of an LP record of 'Mood Indigo' by Ellington. My question of course is if you would be able to help me uncover the name of this song, I would be most obliged for any assistance you can render." After some correspondence about the unlikelihood of his father having heard an LP 63 years ago, the date of his father's dance was confirmed as being 1943. This opened the possibility to use Benny's *Wax Works* to search for the recording. Benny gave for each 78 rpm record the recording on the flip side. There were only four possible recordings of "Mood Indigo," but that resulted in a number of 12 possible recordings on the flip side. Combinations could be different in other countries and on other labels. All that information can still be found in Benny's *Wax Works*! We have made a CD with these 16 recordings and we are curious to hear if the song in question will be detected.

The greatest creation, however, of Benny is the *DEMS Bulletin*. Long before there was anything like the present Duke-LYM list, the *Bulletin* was the first possibility for collectors to discuss matters of interest with each other. When I met Benny for the first time, I asked him why he did not give us a list of addresses of all members so that we could contact each other without bothering him for printing our questions and answers in the *Bulletin*. He answered that this would be completely against his intentions.

He wanted that everybody who was interested would benefit from reading other people's questions and answers. He was so right! And as long as *DEMS Bulletin* is published in print or on the web-site, Benny's name will be on the front page as the founder of the Duke Ellington Music Society. I couldn't find a better way to pay tribute to him than by continuing the publication of his greatest creation.

This article was published in the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden's Bulletin, Number 2, June 2006 and in DEMS Bulletin, August-November 2006. We thank Sjef for his kind permission for us to reprint it here. DEMS Bulletin may be accessed online at www.depanorama.net/dems.

Documentary Showing Augmented By Knowledgeable Panelists

Between two viewings of Terry Carter's award-winning documentary *A Duke Named Ellington*, a panel consisting of Carter, Reuben Jackson, and our member Patricia Willard provided fascinating insights and commentary about Ellington, the film, and related topics.

Mr. Carter explained much about the conception and making of the film and, with admirable and graceful modesty, cited others who he claimed were absolutely vital to the success of the film. Patricia Willard provided background and supportive details and observations about events and persons in the film. Reuben Jackson, witty as ever, kept the conversation moving and focused, occasionally adding insightful comments about the documentary and its importance.

Sponsored by the National Music Center, it all took place at the Historic Carnegie Library Building in Washington, DC on 4 October.

Oregonians Get Opportunities To Increase Appreciation of Duke

West Coast member Ben Pubols continues his proselytizing on behalf of Duke Ellington. In late September he gave two two-hour presentations of "The Life and Music of Duke Ellington" at the OASIS Senior Citizens' organization. They included recordings ranging from the 1924 *Choo Choo* through the 1967 *And His Mother Called Him Bill* "UMMG," accompanied by Powerpoint images of Duke and his various soloists. More recently Ben gave an after-dinner talk to the Portland Lion's Club on "Duke Ellington and the Evolution of Mood Indigo," with musical examples from 1930 through 1960. He presumes that in cases the audiences enjoyed the presentations as much as he did.

Ronnie Scott's to Release Digital Downloads Online

by Patricia Braxton

Ronnie Scott's, the famous jazz venue in London, will offer online some of the great concerts performed there over the years, reported the UK's *Financial Times* in June. An agreement between Ronnie Scott's and a record company is currently being worked out to sell digital downloads of many of the club's great performances. Additionally, Ronnie Scott's is planning to release pod-casts of future performances on its website through iTunes.

Although the club has released some performances in the past, its owners promise recordings, from tapes recently discovered during a renovation, of some premiere artists who played there, hopefully such greats as

Cohen Lectures at Library of Congress

by Gina Rollins

On June 8, before leaving to assume a teaching position at Kings College, London, our member Harvey Cohen, a Kluge Center fellow at the Library of Congress, gave a talk there on his forthcoming book, *Duke Ellington's America*. Due out in 2007, it assesses Duke's significance in American history. Cohen combined his own commentary with audio clips of performances by and interviews with Duke to present a portrait of Duke in the context of 20th-century history.

Although Duke grew up in a racist, segregated society, he had the advantage of coming of age in Washington at a time when the federal government was less prejudiced (i.e., before the Wilson administration) and in a thriving community of successful black professionals. He attended schools run by African Americans who gave their students a strong grounding in black history and taught them that they were worthy of respect. These circumstances, combined with the strong influence of his parents, gave Duke confidence and a sense of purpose as he started down the road to success.

Cohen noted that as Duke began making a name for himself he "always looked elegant." This stood in stark contrast to media portrayals of blacks at the time as "simpletons." Everything he did in public undermined the tenets of white supremacy," Cohen said.

Cohen also assessed Duke as a businessman, and concluded that he was successful, albeit not in the traditional sense of the bottom line. Duke, he contended, was like other African American entrepreneurs who used their businesses to support their extended families and communities. Duke also plowed royalties back into the band, enabling him to keep the band together as an ongoing laboratory to test his prolific creative output.

Duke's post-World War II career might be summed as "fighting nostalgia," Cohen asserted. In interviews from the 1950s through 1970s, Duke referred to himself as an "up and coming musician struggling for a new note just like everyone else." Cohen contrasted this with performers such as Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong, both of whom were still immensely popular but whose music had not continued to evolve.

Based on Harvey Cohen's commentary, *Duke Ellington's America* should be an interesting read, not only for Duke's fans, but for those interested in the defining element of 20th-Century America, the struggle for racial equality and civil rights.

Fitzgerald, Vaughan, Gillespie, Simone, Davis, and Basie during the 1960s through 1980s.

One of the challenges of this project is locating old-format machines needed to play some of the old tapes.

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

We are always happy when Ronnie Wells takes time from her busy life as educator, founder and president of the Fish Middleton Scholarship, and producer of the East Coast Jazz Festival to perform publicly. In August she appeared at Sabang, a new jazz venue in Wheaton, MD.

Hugh (Rusty) Hassan

Rusty Hasson wrote the liner notes to accompany *Theory and Practice*, a first CD by flutist Mike Gillespie, who is accompanied by Kevin McNeal, guitar; Pèpe Gonzales, Bass; and Nasar Abadey, drums.

Ben Pubols

A review by Ben Pubols of the CD *Bubber Miley: Rare Recordings, 1924-31* appears in *Blue Light*, 13:2 (April-June 2006), along with details about the selections, personnel, and dates.

Davey Yarborough

Under the direction of Davey Yarborough, the Washington Jazz Arts Institute's Summer Mentor Program held its annual summer concert in July, at the National Music Center. The Institute, an initiative of Davey and his wife, Esther Williams, is a unique mentor-based training experience for youth..

John Mason

John Mason along with Bruce Penner broadcast an hour of Cape Town, South Africa jazz in October over WTJU, Charlottesville, VA as part of a jazz marathon to raise money for the community-funded station. They included music by Duke protege and the "Mother City's" best known musical son, Abdullah Ibrahim.

Join or Renew Membership in Our Society

Send a check payable to The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.
to PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.

Calendar-year dues remain a bargain: Renewing Member, \$30;
Couple, \$50; Student, \$5; Brand-New-Member, only \$20!

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October Meeting

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Our first meeting of the season started with a presentation by Grace Church's Rev. Kersey about plans for the church's involvement in a concert of "The Sacred Music of Louie Bellson" and dancing and playing of "The Jazz Ballet" by Louie. A date has not been set, but it will be in the April 2007 time frame.

This will be the first East Coast performance of his Sacred Music, which Louie spent decades crafting and premiered in 2000. It will be only the second time the ballet has been both danced and played since its premiere in 1962. Performances are also planned at Duke University and at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City.

There are ambitious plans for publicity, preparation of a documentary about Louie and an oral history recording of his life and experiences in jazz, as well as participation by numerous local organizations.

Rev. Kersey is chairing a multi-organizational planning committee, which was scheduled to hold its first meeting on October 10. He asked for the support and participation of the Duke Ellington Society. Our member Ted Shell is co-chairing the Grace Church planning committee, and Rev. Kersey asked anyone who wishes to become involved to let Ted know of their interest. Please call Ted at 202-363-2446 to lend a hand.

As Rev. Kersey explained, this is a great opportunity for Grace Church but more importantly, it's an avenue to pay tribute to a living jazz statesman and to draw new people into jazz and the sacred music of jazz.

After an extended period of technical difficulties (Jack Towers, we really missed you!) we started the member's choice program with two versions of "I Can't Get Started" (very appropriate), followed by two of "April in Paris," highlighting the organ mastery of Wild Bill Davis. We moved on to Phyllis Hyman and Gregory Hines giving a rendition of "Take the A Train" and Horace Silver's "Silver's Blues," followed by Erskine Hawkins on "After Hours."

Next was "Dance Number Three" from Duke's *Liberian Suite* and two versions of "Band Call," one by Duke and band and the second by Jimmy Rowles and Ray Brown, mixed in with "Sophisticated Lady." We heard the Sonny Greer RexTet on "Helen Is Green" followed by Sidney Bechet on "Never No Lament" (which, we learned, was the first title of "Don't Get Around Much Any More"). We finished the evening with a raucous performance at the Playboy Jazz Festival featuring Jimmy Rushing on vocals.