

Ellingtonia

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Wednesday, 29 November Is

BILLY STRAYHORN'S BIRTHDAY



In Loving Memory Of Him,
As We Have Done in Previous Years,
Let's Thankfully Immerse Ourselves In
The Beauty Of His Music

*Billy Strayhorn was my right arm, my left arm,
all the eyes in the back of my head, my
brainwaves in his head, and his in mine.*

— Duke Ellington

Festival Includes Ellington Orchestra

The Duke Ellington Orchestra, led by Barrie Lee Hall, Jr., performed in the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival's (DEJF) NEA Jazz Masters Concert on 4 October in Washington, DC. Special guests with the band were clarinetist Paquito D'Rivera, vocalist Sharón Clark, and saxophonists Buck Hill and George Botts. Also on the bill was the DC Bass Choir, a double bass trio, and their guest, Christian McBride. Among their selections was an engaging "Don't Get Around Any More." Impresario George T. Wein and Hill were awarded Lifetime Achievement Awards, and Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, was presented the year's John Conyers Jazz Advocacy Award.

The orchestra's set began with a comfortably grooving "Satin Doll," followed by D'Rivera's clarinet on "The Mooche," the piece just a tad more declarative than traditionally mysterious. The following "C-Jam Blues," a relentlessly driving yet tasteful showcase for Hill and Botts joined by D'Rivera, had the audience on its feet in joyful appreciation. Things quieted down a bit with an appropriately eerie "Mood Indigo." The indigo milieu changed when Sharón Clark sang and scatted "It Don't Mean a Thing" to a

November Program: Foreign Bands and Musicians Performing Ellington and Strayhorn

We quote from reportage of Ellington 2008 in our last issue: "...those English bands are so good they are scary." Well, the same can be said of a number of other foreign bands and musicians who demonstrate serious appreciation of Ellington and his music in a tangible way—by performing it so well. Some are relatively well known, for example France's Claude Bolling, South Africa's Sathima Bea Benjamin and Sweden's Nils Lindberg; others are less known, for example England's Peter Long and Denmark's Jesper Thilo. Come to our November meeting and hear Asian, Canadian, Central and South American, and other countries' artists explore and interpret music of our heroes. You will be treated to rare ear candy!

It will all take place at 7:00 pm (remember, this is our new meeting time) on **Saturday, 1 November 2008** at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 18th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.** Our meetings are free and open to the public, so guests are welcome.

to a fare-the-well while the band chanted behind her. She then took a spirited ride on the "A-Train" with Hall taking the open horn trumpet solo. Another change of pace took place as broad-toned reeds, mellow trombones and muted trumpets provided background for Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life, a concerto, if you will, for tenor saxophonist Bobby Lavelle. The spotlight then shone on alto saxophonist Shelley Carroll on "Things Ain't What The Used To Be." He was followed by a "two-for-one" (as introduced by Hall) by Bobby Young on "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart," its music and its story line modulating seamlessly to "Don't Get Around Much Any More." The final number was a delightful, foot tapping, Charleston-ish "Jubilee Stomp" that got an enthusiastic rise from an audience not all that familiar

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“The Year I Was Born”
***Backstory in Blue: Ellington at Newport, 56* by John Fass Morton**

Foreword by Jonathan Yardley
(New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008)

Reviewed by Ben Pubols

This is an absolutely fascinating book and a must for Ellington lovers. Although it is primarily a recounting of Duke’s appearance at Newport 1956, it is also rich in biographical detail regarding aspects of Duke’s life leading up to and following the Newport event. The book’s greatest emphasis is on the famous performance of “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue” with Paul Gonsalves’ astounding 27-chorus solo bridging the two halves of the composition and the ecstatic dancing of Elaine Anderson. The event is placed within the larger sociological context of the times. A number of figures, many well known, some not so well known, appear prominently in the book, including of course Paul Gonsalves and Elaine Anderson, as well as George Wein and Elaine Lorillard. A major figure appearing frequently throughout the book is George Avakian, who in a sense made it all happen and preserved it for posterity.

The book is divided into three parts, “How We Got There,” “Newport ‘56,” and “Where It All Went”; these could just as well be subtitled “Before,” “During,” and “After.” Each time a new character appears, he or she is introduced with detailed background information. This begins of course with Duke himself, but also includes each of the musicians who appeared in the band at Newport ‘56. It is in this first section of the book that we learn much about George Avakian: How his family arrived in the United States from Armenia, his first exposure to jazz, his important role in promoting jazz, both new recordings and reissues at Columbia Records, and of course his role creating the first-ever outdoor recording session.

In the second part of the book, just prior to a detailed discussion of Paul Gonsalves’ precedent-setting solo, an entire chapter is devoted to his ethnic background and how the Gonsalves family migrated from Cape Verde to New Bedford, Massachusetts. And just before a full chapter on “The Gal Who Launched 7,000 Cheers,” an entire chapter is devoted to the background of Elaine Anderson, whose family had earlier emigrated from Prussia to New Bedford. We learn that Elaine had dancing in her blood, having taken lessons since the age of three. By the time of Newport ‘56, she was a fun-loving, well-to-do New England socialite. A full chapter is devoted to Gonsalves’ solo and another to Elaine’s dancing. The action described in this middle section of the book is so detailed and vividly written that the reader almost feels as if he or she is right there, sitting in one of the front-and-center boxes. Fortunately, many photographers were present. Thus the book is richly illustrated, with many new (at least to me) photos—of Paul in army uniform and later, of George Avakian at various stages of his career, and of Elaine Anderson, including 17 of her unforgettable dance.

The final part of the book describes the aftermath, both the good and the not-so-good. Of course there is the LP record, produced and annotated by George Avakian, and the Voice of America broadcast later in 1956, hosted by Willis Conover. But we also learn of the subsequent dissolution of Elaine Anderson’s marriage, in part a result of her performance at Newport ‘56, her two subsequent unsuccessful marriages, and her death of pancreatic cancer in 2004 at the age of 80. We also learn of Paul Gonsalves’ post-Newport life, how the friendship between him and Duke was strengthened, subsequent recordings of “D and C in Blue,” and that he cut more than 20 post-Newport LPs, most with Duke’s orchestra. Paul died in 1974, just nine days before Duke, and the two, along with recently deceased Tyree Glenn, lay in state side-by-side prior to Duke’s funeral.

John Fass Morton did a superb job of documenting this thoroughly researched book, including interviews with Elaine Anderson, her son Rick Anderson, George Avakian, Duke’s nephew Michael James, Elaine Lorillard, John Sanders, George Wein, and a host of others. An extensive bibliography is included.

The evening is best summarized by the author (p. 233): “It was a moment expressing heroism for all. Two Americans with immigrant roots—one German Jewish, the other Cape Verdean, both with ties to nearby New Bedford—reached deeply into their very beings to bring forth their innate dance-beat dispositions. And riding on the percussive statement in the music, together they interpreted Duke Ellington’s inclusive but distinctly Negro American cultural idiom to express arrival in postwar America.” The book captures the essence, not just of an event, but of an era. Highly recommended.

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Band Alumni Notes

A concert at the new concert hall in Uppsala, Sweden was the occasion for the **Alice Babs** Jazz Award ceremony in March. This year's winner was Jonas Kullhammar. The Duke Ellington Society of Sweden's *Bulletin* 308 reports that "The concert came to a crescendo when Alice Babs, who was in a very good mood, came up on stage and took part with her fellows in an improvised blues."

From Göran Wallén, a founder and former president of the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden, we learn that in September in a ceremony at Nacka/Salt-Sjöbaden, near Stockholm, **Alice Babs** and family were honored with the unveiling of a stature designed by sculptor Peter Linde.

Cinicocinema, an Italian TV company, is seeking source material for an upcoming documentary on **Anthony Sciacca**, aka **Tony Scott** and vice versa. For info, contact Franco Maresco, c/o Residence Liberty, Via Enrico Albanese 104, 90141 Palermo, Italy; or tecnocinico@gmail.com.

Barrie Lee Hall, Jr. decided not to evacuate Houston, Texas in September during Hurricane Ike that decimated much of that city and essentially destroyed Galveston. His house suffered some damage. Afterwards, he had a bit of regret that he had not left.

"The Bellson Beat" invites you to keep up with **Louie Bellson** by regularly checking out its Web site: <http://www.louiebellson.net>.

Happy Birthday to Two of Our Nonagenarians

by Jack Dennis

Maurice Lawrence, one of the group that founded our Society, recently celebrated his 91st birthday, and Ulysses LaPradde, a long-time member of our Society and dedicated Ellingtonian of Yonkers, New York, recently celebrated his 90th..

Maurice became an Ellington admirer early in his formative years. He traveled with the band whenever he had the opportunity. He was well known to Duke and band members and helped them in various ways. His friendship with Duke lasted through the years. He tells stories of their relationship, one being that Duke would call him in the wee hours of the morning (we all know that Duke's day began when we all were sleeping) to ask for a small favor. Maurice now resides in a senior community in Sunrise, Florida.

Ulysses, aka "Speedy," contributed generously to our and other Ellington societies' activities. He has been involved in programs of New York-based TDES. Along with Father John Gensel, now deceased, who chaired the Jazz Ministry at St. Peters Church in New York City, Ulysses arranged for beautification of Duke's grave site in Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY, and has also arranged for annual visits there. His generosity and support of programs commemorating the Duke and his accomplishments are notable.

Ellington Orchestra Concert

(Continued from page 1)

with early Ellington. The encore was a romping "Cottontail" at breakneck tempo, with saxophonists Charlie Young and Lavelle playing a series of dueling chases and duets. Knowing devotees were delighted when the entire reed section came down front to execute with precision and verve the tune's famous saxophone passage. Throughout the concert, Hall's muted and open trumpet's distinctive voice could be appreciated even when the band was in full blast behind him.

The festival opened with a invitational opening gala featuring artistic director Paquita D'Rivera and the Turtle Island String Quartet. Then followed six days of performances at various venues by Taj Mahal, the McCoy Tyner Quartet, Monty Alexander, Dee Dee Bridgewater, several groups from the Berklee School of Music, vocalist-drummer Grady Tate, and the Christian McBride Quartet, among others. Scores of clubs, restaurants, theaters, arts and cultural centers and other sites hosted Jazz in the 'Hoods events. This year's commissioned work was performed by Step Afrika!, as the program described the group, "the first professional dance company in the world dedicated to the tradition of "stepping." A new offering, under a Director of Outreach and Education, was free concerts and master classes for students. Another attraction was a full weekend of Jazz on the Mall—two full days of music and a Jazz 'n Families Fun Day, all free. The 2009 Duke Ellington Jazz Festival, the fifth, scheduled for 4-15 June will have as a theme "Celebrating New Orleans."

Duke Ellington Orchestra Personnel

Leader and trumpet: Barrie Lee Hall, Jr.; *trumpets:* Randon Lee, Mark McGowan, Tony Barreo, James Vollar; *trombones:* Stafford Hunter, Andre Murchison, Jack Jeffers; *reeds:* Stafford Hunter, Robert Randham, Emilio Enrique, Charlie Young, Bobby Lavelle, Shelley Carroll; *piano:* Tommy Jones; *bass:* Kengo Makamura; *drums:* Marty Morrell.

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

Ben Pubols

Ben Pubols' review in our January 2008 issue of Terence M. Ripmaster's book *Willis Conover: Broadcasting Jazz to the World* has been reprinted in *DEMS Bulletin* 08/2 (August-November 2008).

Jack Towers and Jerry Valburn

Also in the cited *DEMS Bulletin*, we find this passage about Jerry's latest *The Treasury Shows, Vol. 13* release: "Let's hope that the series will be reissued yet again for my great-grandchildren after another quarter of a century. That music is classic and for all generations. With the release of these DETS broadcasts, Jerry Valburn with the help of Jack Towers, erected the biggest statue possible for Ellington."

The late Benny Aasland, founder of DEMS and its *Bulletin*, wrote years back, "As you know Jack is not only famous for the Fargo recordings but also for producing master tape works for many big companies, both in the USA and in Europe. We are fortunate to have him handling the Treasury Shows."

Anthony Brown

For an absorbing account of Anthony Brown's growing up and of the evolution of his Asian American Orchestra, see www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file

Ted Hudson

Recently Ted Hudson recently was the interviewee/featured guest on "Capital Conversation," the hour-long syndicated radio show hosted by John Tegner. Topics included Duke and Strayhorn and related things about the USA's indigenous classical music.

Wonderful Smith Passes

Wonderful Smith, a star of Ellington's 1941 *Jump for Joy*, died in September in California. He was 97.

His signature show-stopper was "Hello, Mr. President," a satirical monologue in which the telephone caller, Private Wonderful Smith, guilelessly asks to speak to then President Roosevelt about the discrimination against of blacks in the so-called New Deal and in preparations for World War II. A reverse-charges call, this fictitious soldier asks the operator to charge it to the New Deal. Such a incisively comedic skit seemed daring at the time. The name Wonderful was given to him at birth by his proud parents.

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Keep in mind that memberships are for the calendar year.

October Program: A Member's Choice

Reported by Peter MacHare

The member's choice theme of our October meeting was "If You Like Duke Ellington, You'll Like..." Members were asked to play a recording by Ellington and one by another artist and to explain the connection. Since we are all jazz fans, it was quite appropriate (unavoidable, really) that we improvised on the theme.

Alan Schneidmill got the festivities off to a good start by playing two songs from Duke's Cotton Club period—"Cotton Club Stomp" and "Jungle Nights in Harlem." In other words (which is a Sinatra song), he suggested that if you like Duke, you're just a lucky so and so because you like some of the best music America has to offer. Speaking of which, John Gray played a wonderful vocal of "I'm Just a Lucky So and So" sung by the soulful Ernie Andrews from a live album by the Three Sounds pianist Gene Harris.

Ted Hudson, who missed our meeting, sent in his choices. "Nil significat nisi pulsatur" is approximate Latin for "It Don't Mean a Thing..." but knowing this did not help us correctly guess the pianist on his selection. We all guessed Earl Hines when it was really Claude Bolling. Ted, by the way, had the best excuse ever for missing a Society meeting: he went to hear the Duke Ellington Orchestra!

We heard other selections that our members thought Ellingtonians would love. "If you like Duke Ellington, you'll love Johnny Hartman" was a theme two members picked. Peter MacHare suggested that if you like Duke with Frank Sinatra singing "Come Back to Me," you'd also like Hartman's "September Song." John Gray quickly chimed in that you'd also like Hartman singing "Lush Life." We all agreed that too much of Johnny Hartman was a good thing. Maybe we should have a future program exploring his versions of Ellington and Strayhorn songs.

Other selected artists were B.B. King paired with Duke's "Rock City Rock" featuring vocalist Jimmy Grissom, the Georgia Washboard Stompers with Ellington trumpeter Taft Jordan, Tony Bennett, and a very mellow Charles Mingus on "Mood Indigo."

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