

Ellingtonia

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As in Previous Years,
Do Something Creative On
APRIL 29

Highly Regarded Radio Show Will Again Observe Duke's Birthday

Ellington authority Bill Saxonis will present a Duke Ellington birthday celebration from 8 am until 12 noon on Saturday, April 24 over WCDB (90.9-FM). The broadcast may also be heard on the internet at <http://www.wcdbfm.com>. The show will be a special feature of Bill McCann's "Saturday Morning Edition of Jazz" at WCDB in Albany, NY.

In addition to music, this year's celebration will include excerpts of interviews of Bob Wilber, Buster Cooper, John Lamb, Art Baron, Sathima Bea Benjamin, and George Avakian.

This will be Saxonis' 11th consecutive year of the broadcasts, and they have grown in popularity internationally. Comments include: from Norway, "the perfect excuse of doing nothing but listen on a Saturday!"; from France, "fascinating interviews"; from Florida, "enjoyed the format from the beginning to the end"; and from Washington, DC, "Great program!"

Morton's *Backstory in Blue* Earns ARSC Award for Excellence

Congratulations are in order for John Fass Morton.

His book *Backstory in Blue: Ellington at Newport*, about events leading up to, during, and the result of Paul Gonsalves famous 1956 solo, has been awarded the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) 2009 Certificate of Merit in the Best Research in Recorded Jazz Music category.

Official recognition will take place at an Awards for Excellence banquet during the ARSC annual conference, to be held in New Orleans in May.

For other recipients of merit awards and "bests" in other categories, go to arsc-audio.org/awards/awards.

Don't Miss *A Colored Life:* *The Herb Jeffries Story* at April 3 Meeting

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

Ellington vocalist Herb Jeffries will be the subject of our April 3 program. Jeffries, born Umberto Alejandro Balentino in 1913, is best known to us as the vocalist on Ellington's hit "Flamingo," recorded in 1940.

We will listen to some of Herb's recordings and will view the DVD *A Colored Life: The Herb Jeffries Story* that was reviewed by Ben Pubols in our March *Ellingtonia*. *The Herb Jeffries Story* is amusing, moving, and interesting. If you are not filled with admiration for this wonderful man after viewing this video, you have a hole in your soul. Jeffries, to put it mildly, has led an amazing life. You don't want to miss this presentation

The program will be held at **Grace Lutheran Church on Saturday, 3 April at 7 pm.** Grace Lutheran is on **16th Street, NW** between **Varnum and Webster Streets**, in Duke's home town, **Washington, DC.**

Ellington Program an Opening Event of Jazz Appreciation Month

At the beginning of Jazz Appreciation Month (JAM), on Friday, 2 April, a "Talk/Dance Exhibition" at the Smithsonian Institution's Carmichael Auditorium will feature the music of Duke Ellington with stars from the musical *Sophisticated Ladies*.

JAM was created by John Edward Hasse, curator of music at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and author of the well-known biography of Ellington, *Beyond Category*. Since its launching in 2001, JAM every April has grown to include celebrations in all 50 states and 40 countries.

Under this year's theme of "Jazz and Justice," according's to the museum's director, Brent D. Glass, JAM "will highlight jazz and its history and how the genre has an important function in global diplomacy."

A schedule of JAM events internationally may be accessed at smithsonianjazz.org/jam/jam_start.asp.

A Review by Brian Gilmore of
***Serious Jass Project* by Ralph Carney**
 Akroncracker Records

As far as I am concerned, saxophonist Ralph Carney has three things going to him no matter what. First, he has played extensively with Tom Waits, one of my all time favorite characters in popular music. Second, he is from Akron, home of poets Van Jordan and Rita Dove, suggesting that Carney understands the working man. And finally, judging by the number of Duke Ellington moments on his albums, songs and associations, *Serious Jass Project* can't help but to be strong. Carney is interested in jazz's traditions here: blues, group unity and personal expression by individual players.

Overall, the album sounds Dixieland but that's just the vibe. This is really a quartet enjoying itself and reinterpreting some of jazz's singular recordings. But mostly, this is about Duke Ellington.

The band's first Ellington offering is "Black Beauty," arguably one of Ellington's essential tunes, the one that tried to make a statement about the Black American Beauty identity. Carney's version is simple and bouncy; it doesn't swing hard, but it swings just enough with Carney leading the way. That is followed by the less known "Rextatious," a tune credited to long time Ellington trumpeter Rex Stewart. "Rextatious" is bouncy as well, the solos are short, and tight, the Dixieland vibe is intact. "Jeep's Blues" is here as well, and Carney resists trying a Johnny Hodges imitation. That is smart considering that Hodges owned the tune when he was in the Ellington band. Carney presents a call and response version of the tune with organist Michael McIntosh providing the best moments.

There is an abundance of good music on *Serious Jass Project* ("Backtrackin'" and "Boogie's the Thing" are especially uplifting) but the Ellington numbers carry the day. Carney honks and soars and his band follows his lead. They play the songs as if they have been playing them for years. The album is its own statement, a traditional take on tradition.

This review is reprinted from a recent issue of JazzTimes, with the kind permission of editor Lee Merger and Brian Gilmore.

A Review by Theodore (Ted) Hudson of
Stockholm Swing All Stars Play Ellington
 Imogena IGCD 155

This group of young musicians, relatively unknown outside of Sweden, deserves applause for this CD of Ellington and Strayhorn standards (or canonical works, if you wish). The tasteful and well executed solos and ensemble work and well conceived arrangements by the Stockholm Swing All Stars show that Duke and Strays did not compose static works that require absolutely strict adherence to the originals.

Take "Jeep's Blues," for instance. Hodges was peerless on this tune, yet the listener is rewarded by sitting back and enjoying the All Stars version on its own terms, which is easy to do. And if one is particularly fond of Nance's vocal on "It Don't Mean a Thing," one is not disappointed by the one by Karl Olandersson supported by the spare clarinet (there is no identification of specific soloists in the CD notes). "The Mooche," at least for this listener, has a slightly brisker tempo than is familiar; nevertheless, it is an engaging reading. "In a Mellow Tone" is perhaps more assertive than mellow as it swings with Fredrick Lindgorn's tenor saxophone and pianist David Tilling, with the others chanting behind him and the tune closing with some traditional ensemble riffing. On "Do Nothing 'Till You Hear from Me," trumpeter Olandrsson establishes the melody with plunger, takes a vocal, and ends the proceedings with open horn. "Kinda Dukish" is spirited and perky, with trumpet, tenor, and brass breaks and obligatos that will get the foot patting. "Lotus Blossom" is a pure delight, the tune played tenderly and lovingly on woody, mellow clarinet with exemplary supportive and economical background by the ensemble.

Our Swedish friend Göran Wallén says that this group is popular there, and "When asked why they play the old stuff instead of coming up with something new, the answer is 'But to us it's new!'" And we are glad.

Get this CD!

Personnel: Arrangers: Fredrick Lindborg, Carl Bagge, and Daniel Tilling; trumpet and vocals: Karl Olandersson; alto saxophone and clarinet: Klas Lindquist; tenor and baritone saxophones and clarinet; trombone: Magnus Wiklund; piano: Daniel Tilling; guitar: Gustav Lundgren; bass: Göran Lind; double bass; drums: Mattias Puttonen

Queenie Pie Available Online Now And To Be Released on CD Soon

In April 2008 the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas sponsored an "Echoes of Ellington Conference" that included a production of Duke Ellington's *Queenie Pie*, sometimes described as an opera, sometimes as a musical. He never quite finished the work, so future producers and arrangers, among them Mercer Ellington and Maurice Peress, interpreted and polished as best they conceived Ellington's final intent.

The version prepared by Butler faculty members and others for the conference starred Carmen Bradford, with the University of Texas Jazz Orchestra, the Huston-Tillotson University Choir, and supporting cast. According to the Austin, TX *Chronicle*, the performance was "all over the map: comic, tragic, real, magical; big-band swing, blues, calypso—an exuberant gumbo of musical and dramatic styles . . ."

All this is good news, for as far as we know a recording of *Queenie Pie* has never been commercially available before.

Longhorn Music has made this performance of *Queenie Pie* available for downloading, and a CD is scheduled for release in late March. We hope to have a review of the CD in a not distant issue.

A Brand New Web Site for You To Test Drive and Contribute To

Among the many internet pages that focus on Ellington and his professional associates is Marcus Girvan's just-launched *ellingtonia.com* (no official relation to our publication of the same name). Categories include Discography, Record Labels, Musicians, Time Line, Title, and Video.

It's initial page promises that "depending on when you access it, the site will appear to be growing week by week, month by month and even day by day" and that "Suggestions for any corrections will be gratefully received . . ."

Clark Terry: "I Hope to Get Back to Playing Again."

In a recent feature article about Clark Terry in connection with his having been awarded a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* writer Calvin Wilson mentions that Terry has suffered from health problems in recent years. One, which we reported over a year or so ago, was an infection of a playing finger. But the good news is that he reports Terry as saying, "I haven't played in about three years, and I haven't done much practicing, either. But I hope to get back to playing again."

Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival A Fine Tribute to Ronnie Wells

The keynote of the Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival (MAJF), 19-21 February, was a "Tribute to Ronnie Wells" on the opening evening. She was co-founder and producer of the predecessor East Coast Jazz Festival (ECJF) until her death in 2007.

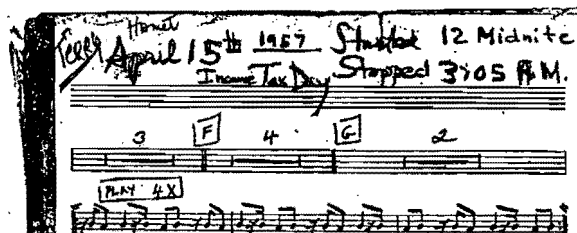
Among headline artists at MAJF were pianist Mulgrew Miller, saxophonist Bobby Watson, the Paul Carr Quintet, the Wes Biles Trio, and in terms of audience encouragement and appreciation, youth groups such as the Jazz Academy Ensemble.

In addition to instrumental and vocal performances, the festival offered films, public interviews of some of the "name" musicians, master clinics/classes, vendors, and even a "Mid-Atlantic Steppin' Dance Lounge."

It may be said that this entire MAJF was a tribute to Ms. Wells in that it seemed in significant ways a loving continuation of the ECJF under a new name. It took place in February at the same venue in Rockville, MD, albeit a Hilton now rather than a Doubletree facility; there was a focus on student and other aspiring musicians; the established artists were accessible to the youngsters; and an appreciable number of events were free.

The festival closed with a Sunday brunch featuring vocalist Luvenia Nesmith, a gem of a ballad singer whom we think Ms. Wells would have appreciated, for she clearly paid attention to the emotions and stories in the lyrics of songs, and delivered them convincingly in a tastefully nuanced, pleasing voice free of superfluous ornamentation.

Among our Society's members spotted enjoying the milieu and performances were Brad and Yvette Bradbie, Louis and Minerva Giles, Tom and Linda Henderson, and Ted and Geneva Hudson. Another, Rusty Hasson, was on the program as interviewer of pianist Mulgrew Miller, from whom we learned that for about three years at the beginning of his professional career, he was the pianist in the Ellington orchestra led by Mercer Ellington after Duke's death.



Courtesy Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, NMAH, Smithsonian Institution

Let's Hope He Made That Midnite Deadline

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

Dick Spottswood served as Judge-at-Large for the Association for Recorded Sound Collections' Awards for Excellence selections.

Olivia McMillan

We've missed Olivia McMillan lately. Great news is that after several months in a hospital and a convalescent facility, she is scheduled to return home in mid-March.

Harvey G. Cohen

From a publication by *Cultural and Creative Industries at King's College, London*: Dr. Harvey G. Cohen guested this morning on the BBC World Service Programme *World Update*, and commented on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the first film to be filmed in Hollywood . . . He explained why Los Angeles became a center of film production in the 1910s, and whether Hollywood can continue to be significant in the 21st century. ¶ *World Update* is broadcast around the world to hundreds of radio stations.

Ken Steiner

Ken Steiner is updating his meticulously researched publication *Wild Throng Dances Madly in Cellar Club: The Washingtonians 1923-'27*, first distributed at Ellington 2008 in London in May of that year.

Jerry Valburn and Jack Towers

Volume 14 of the *Duke Ellington Treasury Shows* has been released by Danish label Storyville. Jerry Valburn launched the series decades ago and Jack Towers has associated with him in the endeavor over the years.

Anthony Brown

Anthony Brown, with Smithsonian staffer Ken Kimery, has been conducting interviews for the Smithsonian/NEA Jazz Masters oral history project. He mentions that Gerald Wilson recounted how he received an early morning call from Duke for new arrangements for "later that day," and that Kenny Burrell "spoke reverently about Duke."

Attention Members

Take a look at the membership expiration date on the upper right of your address label. Remember, our membership is by the calendar year, so if you did not pay in advance for 2010, please get your dues in right away. Thank you.

To Join or To Renew Membership

Send your check payable to

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.

Our dues remain a bargain:

Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;

First-time-ever member, just \$20.

Please keep in mind that our memberships are for the calendar year.

1940—A Very Good Year, Indeed!

by Art Luby, Secretary

Attendees at the March meeting of the Society heard Peter MacHare's presentation of "1940—It Was a Very Good Year" featuring the Ellington Orchestra's work from one of its most creative and productive years. In choosing 1940, Peter was in accord with the late Martin Williams, the Director of the Smithsonian Institution's Program on Jazz Studies, who wrote in *The Jazz Tradition* that 1940 was the year that Ellington's work was brought "to a fulfillment."

The evening's recordings fully vindicate that judgment. The classic performances of well known numbers such as "Jack the Bear," "Ko Ko," "Sepia Panorama," and "Harlem Airshaft" were played. However, Peter also included lesser known (at least to me) pieces such as "Dusk," "Blue Goose," "Rumpus in Richmond," and a startling "Conga Brava," all of which would have been considered defining achievements in the repertoire of any other orchestra.

The 1940 orchestra continued to carry a number of musicians who had been with Ellington since Cotton Club days or the early thirties, many of whom (Hodges, Carney, Lawrence Brown, Cootie Williams) would go on to spend the bulk of their careers with Ellington. Others members left for good during or after WWII (Bigard, Nanton, Hardwicke, Webster), but were replaced by comparable players.

As Peter pointed out, though, the unique attribute of the 1940 orchestra in comparison to previous or later groupings was the presence of Jimmie Blanton, the brilliant doomed bassist whose work was emulated, but never equaled thereafter.

The evening concluded with Jack Towers' taped recollection of his work in recording Ben Webster during the orchestra's legendary Fargo, North Dakota performance, followed by Webster's rendition of "Stardust" from that concert. Webster also reached "a fulfillment" of his talent in 1940, and his powerful yet lilting solo inspired applause from those in attendance a full seventy years after the performance.

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