
THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90
P.O. BOX 15591 . WASHINGTON, D.C. 20003-0787

N E W S L E T T E R

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Theodore A. Shell, President
202-363-2446
Angela Grimmer, Secretary
202-546-7764

Theodore R. Hudson, Vice President
301-585-9204
Jack Towers, Treasurer
301-570-4236

Theodore R. Hudson, *Newsletter Editor*

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**Strayhorn Birthday To Be Observed
By "Mysterious Process" November 29**
Contributed by Annie Kuebler

In commemoration of Billy Strayhorn's birthday, the staff of the Duke Ellington Collection will present "The Mysterious Process: The Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn Collaboration." The staff mined the Duke and Ruth Ellington Collections, discovering oral history interviews, documents from the business records, photographs from Harry Carney and other sources, programs, posters and other ephemera to illustrate and honor Duke and Billy's unique musical and personal relationship.

The presentation, which premiered at the 1995 Ellington Conference held in Strayhorn's hometown, Pittsburgh, will be on **November 29** in the Hall of Musical Instruments located in the West Wing of the third floor of the National Museum of American History. It is from **12-1 p.m.**

Members of the DC Chapter of the Duke Ellington Society are invited to drop in afterwards for a brief tour of the Collection in its Archives Center home.

Ed. note: For up-to-date information about possible changes in time and place, give Annie a call at 202-357-4477.

Condolences to Robinson Loved Ones

We sadly report the death of William Robinson in February. A guest at our Chapter's winter holiday party last January, he joined at that time, but never was able to attend a regular meeting. We extend to William's family and friends our deepest sympathy.

**Ellington Drummers Is Topic
For November 4 Meeting**

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

Anthony Brown, director of the Smithsonian Oral History Program, will present the **November 4** program, on Ellington's drummers. A professional drummer himself, Anthony will show how the development of the band is reflected by the change in drumming styles, from Greer through Bellson and Woodyard and beyond. One of the leading authorities on the subject, Anthony is currently writing a book on the history of jazz drumming.

The meeting will be **Saturday, November 4**, at our usual place, **Omega House, 1231 Harvard Street, NW**, on the northeast corner of 13th and Harvard, and will begin promptly at **8:30 pm.**

First President to Present in December

At our December meeting, Maurice Lawrence, a founder and the first president of our Chapter now living in Florida, will conduct the program on the 1964 Carnegie Hall Concert, at which he was introduced to the audience by Duke.

Get Your Calendar Out

Other programs scheduled for later include an evening at the Smithsonian viewing rare film clips and listening to musical fragments, yet to be identified, from the Ellington Collection. Also scheduled is reprise of an occasion we all enjoyed last spring, a program at Lillian and Ben Pubols' home. We plan on having at least one member's choice night, when members bring their own favorite recordings to be played. Later in the year Jack Towers will have another surprise or two in store for us.

***Ben Webster: Music for Loving* (Verve 314527774-2)**

Reviewed by Reuben Jackson

When asked by a journalist to explain the emotional methodology which led to his mastery of the ballad form, saxophonist and erstwhile pianist Ben Webster replied he was simply "Playing Hodges"—the individual in question being fellow saxophonist and musical poet Johnny Hodges, with whom the tough-tender Kansas City-born Webster played during his two stints with the Ellington orchestra.

But even if one allows for the sudden meshing of the mournful vehemence heard in '40s Webster solos on titles such as Mercer Ellington's "Blue Serge" with what jazz critic Whitney Balliet referred to as Hodges' "pouring, country tone," there is still an awful lot of Webster's own arresting emotional reflections present in the ballads heard throughout *Loving*, a collection whose somewhat calculated title (remember how the same eros-based sales pitch was used to push material under Jackie Gleason's name during the '50s?) should not deter listeners from purchasing this reissue, which in addition to containing now classic Webster interpretations of Billy Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge" and Ellington's "All Too Soon," features imaginative string arrangements from the pens of masters such as Ralph Burns and the aforementioned "Strays."

Loving also boasts seldom heard mid-fifties Webster performances like Irene Kitchings' "Some Other Spring" and "Stars Fell on Alabama," and is also noteworthy for its inclusion of the eight titles originally issued on the long unavailable *Harry Carney with Strings* sessions, in which the justifiably celebrated cavernous lyricism emanating from Carney's baritone saxophone (and in one case, bass clarinet) embraces Ducal standards like "I Got It Bad" and the discreetly arresting Carney-Strayhorn composition "Chalmeau."

***The Complete Capitol Recordings of Duke Ellington* (Mosaic MD5-160/MQ8-160)**

Reviewed by Lee Puricelli and Eva-Marie Nye

Critics often dismiss the brief stint with Capitol Records (April 1953 to May 1955) as the nadir of Duke Ellington's career. True, the orchestra missed the talents of Johnny Hodges and Louis Bellson, and Duke was concentrating more on popular success than his own composition. However, re-examined in Mosaic's new *The Complete Capitol Recordings of Duke Ellington*, the Capitol period can be seen as an era in which Ellington strengthened his skills as an arranger and bandleader. The era pales only in comparison to some of Ellington's great bands of the 40s and his soon-to-become "rebirth" at the Newport Festival in 1956.

From the brilliant recomposition of Ellington's "Harlem Air Shaft" to the lesser "Bunny Hop Mambo," the band maintains its deep, spacious sound in these recordings. That sound alone makes the five-CD set worth the price, but there are also other highlights.

The most outstanding are the lovely arranged standards, such as "Cocktails for Two" and "Star Dust," and the powerfully swinging tracks originally on the LP *Ellington '55*. On the fabulous "Flying Home" the whole band quotes Illinois Jacquet's famous solo, then achieves a groovy swing on "Stomping at the Savoy." Ellington provides poignant piano solos on trio numbers such "Melancholia" and rocks on the classic "Kinda Dukish." "Rockin' in Rhythm" (in two different takes) and "Bakiff" are two examples of some masterfully extended reworkings of classic compositions.

The set also features singles, including Ellington's first "Satin Doll," and some unusual vocal work by Jimmy Grissom. His phrasing of "Blue Moon" is truly bizarre. Billy Strayhorn's "Boo-Dah," Mercer Ellington's "Ultra Deluxe," and Richard Henderson's "Commercial Time" are some of the original pieces recorded by the band.

The majority of the Capitol albums and singles in the Mosaic set have been unavailable since their initial release. Other offers were never released, including one interesting small group session led by Ellington on electric piano.

Stanley Dance's adroit liner notes are well written, but add little to the common knowledge about the period for Ellington aficionados (some interviews with Ellington musicians and associates would have been nice). The packaging, as usual from Mosaic, is done well. The price is \$75 dollars for the CDs or \$104 for the Q-LPs, plus shipping, BUT as of November 1 it will go up to \$80 and \$120, respectively.

Wild Bill Davis: An Appreciation

by Alexandre Rado

William Strethen "Wild Bill" Davis left us in August last and with him disappears one of the great, nowadays underrated, jazz musicians. He became first known as a piano player (he did not like the word pianist) in Louis Jordan's Combo, but from 1948 onwards he concentrated his efforts on the Hammond organ. Even if others used the instrument before him, one may consider Bill as the "inventor" of the jazz Hammond organ. He was indeed the first musician to create an original style making use of all the possibilities this instrument provided. He soon started to play mainly with a trio or a quartet in New York and Atlantic City, and he gained a strong reputation among the jazz public of the fifties.

Duke admired him and recorded with him in October 1950 "Things Ain't What They Used to Be" on Mercer, the titled being issued under the name *Wild Bill Davis and His Real Gone Organ*. As Bill was adding shouts to his forceful solos, he soon was called "Wild Bill." It has even been said that Duke was the first one to name him that way.

In the sixties Wild Bill Davis made several excellent records with Johnny Hodges, as both were able to complement each other with great talent. Bill had a contract with RCA and Johnny with Verve, and they were clever enough to pursue their cooperation on both labels.

Duke Ellington liked the music they played, as it was partly influenced by him. He also felt there was some danger for him to lose Johnny Hodges on the long run, viewing the partnership between Hodges and Davis as lasting. He convinced Wild Bill to join his orchestra. In doing so Duke not only brought a new sound to his band but also a valuable arranger. Wild Bill in the old days had been working for Earl Hines before writing for Count Basie the world famous arrangement of "April in Paris." He arranged quite a number of pieces for Duke, partly replacing Strayhorn. He was also quite a composer of some importance, and his "Azure-Tc," for instance, became one of his hits.

It is during his stay with Duke, from 1969 until 1971, that we became friends. Wild Bill Davis was a gentleman who took music very seriously, hoping that others would be as strict on the subject as he was himself...and this was not always the case. After having left Duke he often came to Europe, apparently making more records in the Old Continent than in the USA. He had an open mind, a faithful friendship, and a big following although he was in fact a rather reserved person. Besides music he had another passion and that was aviation. He enjoyed making short trips flying his own aircraft.

When in Paris, he liked, as in the Caveau de la Huchette, that I remain near him, which was giving me the possibility to admire his wide technique. He was often swinging so hard that I was shouting more than he did. Last time I spoke to him I tried to convince him to take his family over to Paris and have some good time with his numerous friends. It is difficult to realize that we can now only hear him on records. Ooh, Ah Bill!

Tell Helen All About It

At the request of Ted Shell, our president, Helen Frazier has accepted appointment as Amenities Coordinator. Additionally, Helen has graciously agreed to serve as a *Newsletter* reporter of amenities and other relatively personal news about our members. So if you know or hear of anything about our always newsworthy members, pass it on to Helen. Give her a call at 202-387-7071. (Of course, you can still send news directly to the *Newsletter*.)

'96 Conference Time and Place Set

A recent notice from the Toronto Chapter of the Duke Ellington Society informs that "Ellington '96" will be June 19-23, its primary location being the Park Plaza Hotel. Eileen R. Ward is the conference coordinator. As in '97, John Norris will serve as music director. Persons who are interested in participating or who want more information may write to Ellington '96, 95 Thorncliffe Park Drive, Suite 2906, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4H 1L7.

Notes on Our Society's

"*Dramatis Felidae*"

(To Use Our Man's Term in *MIMM*)

During a recent phone conversation with him, we learned that **Willis Webb** is a cousin of Al Hibbler. President of a Memphis, TN business, Willis has set a good example by giving client friends memberships in our Chapter. ♪ ♪ ♪ As the second of three National Geographic Society sponsored Washington History Series, **Rusty Hassan** will lecture on "Hitting the High Note: Jazz in Washington" at 7:30 pm, October 24 at the Society's Grosvenor Auditorium, 1600 M Street, NW. According to a Washington Historical Society calendar, Rusty will survey "the city's musical geography, highlighting the people, places, and music that once made D.C. a star in the jazz universe." For ticket information, call 202-857-7760. ♪ ♪ ♪ **Walter van de Leur** was in town recently doing research on Strayhorn in the Smithsonian's Ellington Collection. ♪ ♪ ♪

Patricia Willard Writing Commentary For Concert and Piano Series

Contributed by Mac Grimmer

For the third consecutive series, Patricia Willard is writing the program notes for the Kennedy Center's big band jazz series featuring Doug Richards' Great American Music Ensemble. Chapter 90 members know Richards well, his band having been a spectacular success at the Ellington '89 conference in Washington. In September their first program of the season included the *Far East Suite* and the *New Orleans Suite*, followed by Ellington dance music played for the Terpsichoreans in the Center's Grand Foyer. Later programs include Ethel Ennis performing Gershwin with the band, a tribute to Woody Herman, and Frank Foster on hand for a night devoted to his compositions.

Patricia is also writing program notes for the Art Tatum Piano Series, hosted by Billy Taylor. So far, guests have been Dorothy Donegan (whose performance measured well up on the Richter scale). Kenny Barron, Hank Jones, and Walter Norris will appear later.

Worlds of Ben Webster Explored

By Hassan at October Meeting

Contributed by Angela Grimmer

Rusty Hassan was our guide for a Grand Tour of the several worlds of Ben Webster at our October meeting. We visited, among others, early and late collaborations with Benny Carter, Teddy Wilson, and Billie Holiday. The "Chelsea Bridge" version chosen was the one with Mulligan, and "Have You Met Miss Jones" was the choice from the mind-blowing Tatum session. Among selections from the early '40s band was the Fargo duet with Jimmy Blanton, with added commentary by Jack Towers, who was there to make the recording. Rusty pointed out that the *See You at the Fair* CD has Webster playing Duke's "Single Petal of a Rose," which was not on the original LP and is a rare non-piano version of the tune. Although Ben was with the band a relatively short time, at least compared with some of the other members, he had a varied and successful career apart from it. Nevertheless, Ben was always identified as an Ellingtonian, and was proud and happy to be. Rusty has given us once again an evening of exciting and interesting music enjoyed by all.

Chapter Members on Programs of Library of Congress Jazz Film Series

The Library of Congress began its fall Jazz Film Series on October 10 with *Artie Shaw-Time Is All You've Got*, at which Shaw spoke and answered questions. Several Chapter 90 members will also serve as speakers during the series: Patricia Willard for *A Concert of Sacred Music* (Duke's first sacred concert, at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral) on October 31; Rusty Hassan for *Jazz on a Summer's Day* and *Newport Jazz 1967* on November 21, and Reuben Jackson for *Jazz on the Steve Allen Show* on November 28. Larry Appelbaum, another Chapter member, is the series curator.

All programs will be in the Mary Pickford Theater at the Library and are free, but seating is limited. Reservations by phone may be made beginning a week before any given show. For more information, call 202-707-5677.