

# Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of  
*The Duke Ellington Society*



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**MAY 2001**

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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## **Ronnie Wells' Music World: Vocalist, Educator, Producer, Fund Founder**

Washington, DC-based jazz vocalist Ronnie Wells, who began professionally in the mid-60s, has shared the stage with internationally known artists, among them Billy Eckstine, Lonnie Liston Smith, Oscar Brown, Jr., Jimmy Witherspoon, Dorothy Donegan, and Warren Vache.

She has been featured with the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra, US Airmen of Note, US Navy Commodores, and appeared at numerous venues in the States. Also, Ms. Wells has had semi-annual engagements for five years at Blackbeard's Castle in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, and has appeared in many festivals and nightclubs in South America, Holland, Switzerland, France, Norway, Brazil, and Canada.

Among her numerous recordings are those with the Jazz Karma Records and several independent labels. She recorded with the Widespread Jazz orchestra on CBS/Columbia Records.

In 1983, Ms. Wells was appointed assistant professor at the University of Maryland, where she teaches vocal techniques under a Jazz Vocal Program that she designed, developed, and implemented. She presented a panel and performance by university students at our 1989 International Ellington Study Group Conference. Her teaching experience there and in her private studio, coupled with that in conducting jazz seminars at institutions throughout the country, make her a much sought after adjudicator at competitions.

In 1991 Ms. Wells founded, and now serves as president of, the nonprofit Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund, which helps emerging jazz artists, facilitates in-school programs on jazz history, musicianship, vocal and instrumental techniques, and presents quarterly concerts. And, under her direction, the Fund presents the Annual East Coast Jazz Festival. Her expertise in concert and festival management and production led to her appointment as director for the first African-American Arts Festival 1996, presented by the University of Maryland.

We look forward eagerly to her performance, with Ron Elliston and Friends, of Ellington and Strayhorn music at our own fund-raiser on Saturday, May 5.



*On April 28  
Do Something  
Creative!*

## **Our May Attraction**

Let's all encourage friends and associates to patronize this most worthy event, our Benefit Concert on Saturday evening, May 5.

Our regular monthly programs resume on June 2.

## **Student's Art Now in Paris Embassy**

As a participant in the 1999 Duke Ellington Youth Project, Matthew Bier, then a senior at the Ellington School of the Arts, created a highly original work of art, "The Duke," that attracted much attention at the Project's exhibit at the Smithsonian. That 4x3½-foot work, which he created using a plexiglass plate technique, now hangs in the American Embassy in Paris, France. Matthew is continuing his education on the college level at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan.

*The Duke Ellington Society*  
Presents an Evening of  
**Ellington and Strayhorn Music**

Featuring

**Ronnie Wells**

with

**Ron Elliston & Friends**

**Saturday, May 5, 2001, 8 PM**  
Grace Lutheran Evangelical Church  
16th & Varnum Sts, NW, Washington, DC

**\$15 per Person**

Proceeds Support The Society's  
Student Fund

## Don Miller, to Whom the Entire Ellington Community Owes Much

by Jack Towers

Don Miller of Chicago, the person who launched the Annual International Ellington Conferences, passed away on March 16. Don had two passions: Duke Ellington and Thomas Jefferson. The first meeting Don organized was in Chicago in mid-1981. Eleven Ellington fans attended, including conductor and Ellington enthusiast Gunther Schuller, Jerry Valburn, and recording engineer John Steiner. The next get-together, which Don Miller helped organize, was at Jerry Valburn's home in early 1982. That fall at the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors meeting in Detroit, Jerry and Don organized an Ellington fan event. After that meeting several of us had breakfast at a table with Don, and he asked, "Why can't we have a meeting of Ellington scholars and fans every year?" He turned to me and said the first meeting should be in Washington, DC—Duke's boyhood home. I told him I would take it up with our chapter right away. Our president, Terrell Allen, was thrilled with the idea, and the first of the Ellington Study Groups, as Don called them, was held.

On May 6, 1983, in Washington, DC, nearly a hundred people came from all over the United States, Canada, and Europe. The presenters included Martin Williams from the Smithsonian, Dan Morgenstern from the Institute of Jazz Studies, Sjeff Hoefsmit, Jerry Valburn, Patricia Willard, Fish Middleton, Willis Conover of the Voice of America, and Klaus Stratemann, who presented a program of Ellington films.

Don with a group he founded of aficionados named after hometown and Ellington star Ray Nance, produced the next Ellington Conference, in Chicago in 1984, and he took part in the meetings that followed in England, New York, and Toronto, until health problems prevented him from traveling.

The entire Ellington community owes much to Don Miller for helping to organize the world-wide devotion to Duke Ellington. *Ed. Note: As his long-time friend Jack Towers, who was in the group from its beginning, reports above, Don was both conceiver and co-founder of the Annual International Ellington Study Group Conferences. While ill health prevented him from attending most of the 18 conferences that eventually took place, he made a warmly welcomed appearance at the sixteenth, Ellington '98 in Chicago. A memorial service was held for him at the First Unitarian Church in Hyde Park, Illinois on April 21, 2001.*

## Herbie Jones, Ellington Trumpeter, Librarian, and Music Extractor

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Herbie Jones, a big band trumpeter, arranger, composer, photographer and educator, best known for playing in the Duke Ellington Orchestra from 1963 through 1968, died at a Bronx hospital on March 19 of complications from diabetes. He was 74.

Mr. Jones also served as Ellington librarian and music extractor, one of the few musicians who worked closely with the leader and his collaborator Billy Strayhorn, usually sitting between them as they wrote musical sketches which Mr. Jones developed and copied into individual parts for his colleagues.

In his memoir, *Music Is My Mistress* (Doubleday, 1973), Mr. Ellington wrote, "Herbie Jones, a young veteran of Mercer Kennedy Ellington's many bands, came out and joined us in Ceylon...Because of his great interest in the wisdom and culture of the East, nothing could have stopped him when we sent him the invitation...He was a great asset to the band...A good reader, he played first trumpet whenever required, and he extracted and copied scores accurately. He never demanded any special treatment or consideration. He was neat and clean, neither smoke nor drank, and always walked four miles a day...Herbie Jones is my good friend. I love him and his beautiful family, and the only reason he is not with us today is because his duties as husband and father came, as they should, first."

"What surprised me when I joined the band," Mr. Jones recounted in an oral history interview for the Smithsonian Institution in 1989, "was that you come in on parts that are under the lead...You're not on top any more. You're coming in on the harmony parts, and those parts are jammed together in clusters--chords that are jammed together so that nobody can copy what Duke's doing...You think that something's wrong...that your horn's a little out of tune. You're playing the notes right but they sound a little off. Later, you learn that everything is perfect. Nobody else wrote like that."

Oral history material from Mr. Jones exists in the TDES (New York Ellington Society) archives and at the Smithsonian Ellington Collection, where Mr. Jones served as a consultant in 1989, identifying unmarked music.

Mr. Jones toured five continents with the Ellington band. Among his recorded arrangements for the Ellington band were "El Busto," "Cootie's Caravan," "The Prowling Cat" and "The Opener." His contributions to Mr. Ellington's First and Second Concerts of Sacred Music were acknowledged in the programs. Even before he became a regular member, he was summoned to the band for several significant dates, most notably the famed Newport 1956 concert. Despite Mr. Ellington's repeated offers to compose music especially for Mr. Jones, he declined to accept solo assignments because, he confided, he did not want to be indelibly identified with the Ellington style.

During one of the tours for Norman Granz, the impresario and producer, Mr. Granz was so impressed with Mr. Jones's expert photography that Mr. Granz presented the musician with a Hasselblad camera, complete with accessories.

Born Herbert Robert Jones in Miami, Fl., March 23, 1926, Mr. Jones began arranging and playing professionally at 14, attended Florida A & M College, before it expanded to a university,

*Continued on page 3 under "Herbie Jones"*

## Short Sheets . . .

♪ ♪ Latest word is that the new Fargo CD will be available in the United States in April.

♪ ♪ A recent concert in New York City of all-Strayhorn songs by singer Darius de Hass elicited a very favorable review in the *NY Times*.

## Newspaper Spotlights Annie Kuebler

In a highly complimentary article beginning "If you want to know who Mary Lou Williams was, ask Annie Kuebler," the *New Jersey Star-Ledger* tells of her work as the Project Archivist and authority of the Williams Collection at Rutgers University's Institute of Jazz Studies. It is our member and former Smithsonian staffer Annie's responsibility to oversee the identification, organization, and creation of finding aids for the many and varied materials left by Williams, as the newspaper describes her, a "pack rat."

## Los Angeles Ellington Society Sponsors Britt Woodman CD

As a tribute to the late Britt Woodman, a native son, the Southern California DES made available to its members a CD of his works that had been compiled by its member Stan Brager for a presentation at one of their meetings. He also wrote the accompanying notes that discuss the music as well as illuminate Woodman's life and musical and private personalities. The selections featuring Britt are varied, among them recordings with groups led by Les Hite, Boyd Raeburn, Lionel Hampton, Toshiko Akioshi, Bob Wilbur, Britt himself, and, of course, Ellington. In his versatile solos here, as the liner notes say of his playing in general, one will "notice the smooth, easy grace of his legato playing, the rich, clean tone of his sound . . . his lightning speed," all put together "to have it all sound so effortless." Of great interest are rare recordings by trombonists who obviously influenced Britt: his professional musician father, William Woodman, Sr. with the Teddy Buckner band playing dixieland(!) and an Arthur Pryor, playing trombone on "Blue Bells of Scotland" with John Phillip Sousa's band.

## The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD

by Richard Cook and Brian Morton  
2000. 1725 pages. Soft-cover, \$24.  
Mini-review by Peter MacHare

If you have not yet made the acquaintance of Messrs. Cook and Morton, now is the time to do it. Their fabulous *Guide* is now in a brand new fifth edition. Not only is this edition the largest, but it is the first printed on quality paper. This book consists of reviews and ratings of thousands of jazz albums.

## Anthony Brown a Key Figure In Smithsonian Week in California

Representing the Smithsonian Institution, our member Anthony Brown recently conducted lecture-demonstrations and concerts with a trio at 12 different elementary through high schools, community centers, and colleges throughout the Long Beach Unified School District. Music presentations surveyed various jazz styles from ragtime to modern. A former curator and director of the Jazz oral History Program at the Smithsonian, he explained its Ellington Archives as centerpiece of the Institution's jazz program, and stressed Ellington's importance in world culture.

For a grand finale concert, Dr. Brown brought some members of his Asian American Orchestra to town with him to perform with the award-winning Long Beach High Jazz Band excerpts from the *Far East Suite*. Ken Kimery, producer of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra (who had been his drum student in Germany) had sent copies of the score and parts to the school band.

Smithsonian Week is a program partnership with the Public Corporation for the Arts and Unified School District of Long Beach, the only city to have such an official affiliation.

## "A Jack Towers Year"

*I think it is safe to say that the two most important Ellington releases this year (the first volume of the Treasury series and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the Fargo concert) are both by Jack.*

*"2001 - A Jack Towers Year"*

— Peter MacHare

## Herbie Jones (Continued from page 2)

leaving just short of graduation in 1950 to join the Lucky Millinder band in New York. He continued his arranging and composition studies in New York with Eddie Barefield and at Manhattan academies. Mr. Jones subsequently was a member of the Andy Kirk, Buddy Johnson, Cab Calloway and Mercer Ellington orchestras.

After leaving the Ellington band, Mr. Jones was the director for several years of Arts & Culture, Inc., a New York City-sponsored alternative school on 125th St., and, as a volunteer, he directed the Bugle Corps of the Police Athletic League in Harlem for more than a decade. He continued to teach, write, arrange and occasionally lead his own group until incapacitated by his illness.

He is survived by a brother Benjamin of Miami; two daughters, Jennifer of Mt. Vernon, NY, and Priscilla Carr of Lancaster, Ca., a son Herbert Jr. of Jersey City and three granddaughters.

*Ed. Note: We thank Patricia Willard for her permission for us to publish this obituary that she wrote for the New York Times.*

## "Dramatis Felidae" (To Use Our Man's Term in *MIMM*)

### About Our Members

♫ ♫ The April *Tailgate Ramblings* has an interesting reminiscence by our senior member **Harold Gray**, with **Don Rouse** providing prompting questions and commentary. Harold has lived in several music cities, including Kansas City during its heyday, but this article focuses on his recollections of jazz in and around Washington, DC, beginning in the late 20s when he was a student at George Washington University before leaving and eventually returning to settle in the area. ♫ ♫ Good news: His health continuing to improve after surgery last year, **William Fawcett "Bill" Hill** is increasingly active. He has agreed to take on editorship of *In a Mellotone*. And about one of our British members, *Blue Light* editor **David Fleming**, that publication reports, "The good news is that David is slowly on the mend . . ." In its current issue, David has contributed an evocative article on Ray Nance, as its subtitle says, "taking issue with some received critical opinion." ♫ ♫ Discussion of **Brian Gilmore's** book *jungle nights & soda fountain rags*, a tribute to Ellington, is included in a critical survey in the Washington Post's *Book World* of recent books of poetry. ♫ ♫ **John Hornsby** presented "Alice Babs - Fodd 'Till Music [Swedish for 'Horns of Music']" at the Toronto Duke Ellington Society meeting in March. ♫ ♫ We were delighted to have **Lois Moody**, our only Ottawa member, attend our April meeting. ♫ ♫ The current Ellington Society of Sweden's *Bulletin* contains a overall review by **Patricia Willard** of Ken Burns' televised *Jazz* series. In December, Patricia visited the White House with Benny Carter, recipient of an award for his contributions to the arts and humanities. ♫ ♫

## Spreadin' Rhythm Around

by Mac Grimmer

One of our members abroad. Dennis Dimmer, travels all over England to deliver his Ellington programs. He, of course, gave a program here in Washington not too long ago, and last fall he was in New York in a similar capacity. Recently he went north to Stockholm, speaking before the Swedish society, then it was south to Malta, spreading the jazz word. The question was, where would the peripatetic Dennis be seen next? We found out when we saw the cover of the March issue of the English *Just Jazz* magazine. Dennis is on the cover.

## To Join the Duke Ellington Society . . .

Send your check payable to The Duke Ellington Society to PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003-0787, USA.

Dues are a bargain — Renewing Member: \$30 or Couple: \$50; First-Time-Ever Member: \$20; and Student: \$5.

Note: If you have a star ☆ on your mailing label, either you are being invited by an associate or friend to become a member, or else we are reminding you to renew your membership.

## Treasury Series Treasures

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Jack Tower's selection of highlights from Duke's "Treasury Series" exceeded our expectations at our April meeting. Listening to the variations of the arrangements of Duke's tunes, as well as some of the less familiar songs played at the time, was fascinating. It's easy to see why Martin Williams, who originated the Smithsonian's jazz program, called the Treasury Series the best representation of the Ellington repertoire. Only the first of 22 double CDs has been released, and with around five a year scheduled, we have a few years of delights to look forward to. Many thanks to Jack Towers for getting rid of all the surface pops and clicks in this huge project.

## Trouble Finding the Treasury CDs?

TDES is making available the 2-CD Volume I of the Duke Ellington Treasury Series, selections from which Jack Towers played at our meeting, described above. The cost is US \$22 + shipping. For further information, contact TDES, Inc, PO Box 31, Church Street Station, NY, NY 10008-0031, USA. Volume 2 has been released in Europe and should become available in the States in August.

## Calendar

Wednesday, April 18, 7:30 pm

**Annie Kuebler and Linda Dahl**

Discuss "Mary Lou Williams and Duke Ellington"

St. Peter's Church, Lexington & 54th, NYC, Sponsored by TDES

**Annual Duke Ellington Youth Project Festival**

(Joint Project of Smithsonian's Program in African American Culture and DC Public Schools)

April 23, 10:30 am, Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress - Ensembles, Dancers, Choir

April 24, Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, 10 am, Hall of Musical Instruments - Original Poetry and Music 12 noon, West Wing, First Floor - Art Exhibit

April 26, 7 pm, Carmichael Auditorium, National Museum of American History - Bands, Choirs, Dancers, Ensembles

April 24-May 28, Taylor Gallery, National Museum of American History - Art Exhibit

Saturday, May 5, 8 pm

**Duke Ellington Society's Benefit Concert**

Featuring Ronnie Wells with Ron Elliston & Friends

Benefit of the Youth Fund. \$15 per Person

Monday, May 14

**Davey Yarborough**

Featured Artist, Jazz at the Kennedy Center Concert

Info: 1-800-444-1324 and < [kennedy-center.org/jazz](http://kennedy-center.org/jazz) >

## THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

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