

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



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Strayhorn's Four Freedoms

While we remember well the remarkable musician Billy Strayhorn was, during this his birth month we remember the remarkable human being he was by noting again this excerpt from Duke Ellington's tribute on the occasion of Billy's death in 1967:

He demanded freedom of expression and lived in what we consider the most important and moral of freedoms: freedom from hate, unconditionally; freedom from self-pity (even throughout all the pain and bad news); freedom from fear of possibly doing something that might help another more than it might help himself; and freedom from the kind of pride that could make a man feel he was better than his brother or neighbor. . . .

God bless Billy Strayhorn.

Members' Big Band Performances Focus on Ellington and Strayhorn

We are always happy to report good things about professionals among our members who lead large orchestras, among them this time, Anthony Brown and Mark S. Harvey.

The Rev. Harvey's *Beyond*, a 45-minute commemoration of the passing and legacy of Duke Ellington, was premiered by the MIT Wind Ensemble with guest soloists including Herb Pomery and Ron Blake. The composition was commissioned on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Duke's death. Pomery played with the Ellington orchestra and taught a course on the maestro's music at Berklee College of Music. Blake, head of the Contemporary Improvisation Department at the New England Conservatory, has recorded a CD entitled *Duke Dreams*.

Harvey was an usher at Ellington's funeral, one of the scenes depicted musically in *Beyond*. The title is, of course, for Duke's personal artistic-spiritual creed "beyond category." The intent is for other wind ensembles to perform this piece as a way of learning about and paying homage to the Grand Duke.

Dr. Brown's Asian American Orchestra performed at the Monterey Jazz Festival in California in September, exactly

November Is Billy Strayhorn Month !

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

William Thomas Strayhorn (but his mother called him Bill, don't you know?) Was born on November 29, 1915. He joined the Ellington organization early in 1939 at the tender age of 24. He stayed with Ellington until he, Strayhorn, died on May 31, 1967. His collaboration with Ellington as composer, arranger, pianist, and even vocalist is the stuff of legend.

Our November program will be a member's choice celebrating Strayhorn. Bring one or two of your favorite Strayhorn compositions. The performance can be by anyone, whether inside the Ellington Orchestra or not. Feel free to take a little time to introduce your choice so we can appreciate it all the more.

Also, by popular demand, Alan Schneidmill will test our knowledge of jazz trivia. Study hard! Alan's tests are always challenging and informative.

The November program will be at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC, on Saturday, 6 November at 8 pm.** Our meetings are open to the public, so please bring a friend (or even a stranger!) If you wish.

God bless Sweet Pea!

"...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

five years after its premiere there of the *Far East Suite*. This time the orchestra played Duke's "Tang" from *Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* and ended with Anthony's new arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue*, entitled *American Rhapsodies*. They also performed Thelonious Monk's "Little Rootie Tootie" and "Monk's Mood" and a composition by Brown, "Bread & Bowie (for Lester)." Following what was later described as a "rousing ovation" by over a thousand enthusiasts, the orchestra reprised "Blue Pepper" from the *Far East Suite* as an encore.

A Proper Introduction to the Music of Billy Strayhorn

A CD Review by Ben Pubols

Earlier this year, Proper Records Ltd. of Great Britain released *A Proper Introduction to Billy Strayhorn: Passion Flower* (#2046). The single CD includes 21 selections arranged chronologically according to date of recording, beginning with the 1939 “Something to Live For,” and concluding with the 1953 “Satin Doll.” Most of the gems in between are by the Famous Orchestra or Johnny Hodges small groups (e.g., “Day Dream” “Passion Flower,” “A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing”). Nor surprisingly the most frequently featured soloists are Johnny Hodges and Lawrence Brown—and Strayhorn frequently is heard on piano. One selection, “Johnny Come Lately” (recorded in 1952) is by the Louie Bellson Just Jazz All Stars, including Wardell Gray, Clark Terry and Harry Carney. The one strictly non-Ellingtonian inclusion is Pete Rugulo’s rather pompous and overblown arrangement of “Lush Life,” Nat Cole’s vocal. This was apparently the first commercial recording of “Lush Life” and one of which Strays expressed strong disapproval. The version of “Take the ‘A’ Train” included here is not the original February 1941 recording but the later, extended 1952 version with the Betty Roché scat vocal. The liner notes, which require a magnifying glass to read, are fairly detailed; however, they fail to include discussion of “The Eighth Veil” or “Brown Betty.” Nearly everything in this collection is available elsewhere on CD. However, it is nice to have so many Strayhorn compositions and co-compositions brought together in a single CD. To my ears the sound is more than acceptable.

For a different take on the Strayhorn “song book,” the 1996 Verve release *Lush Life* (#314-529-908-2), issued in conjunction with the appearance of David Hadju’s biography of the same title, is worth mentioning. All of the recordings of course originally appeared on the Verve label. The 15 selections include Sarah Vaughan’s “Lush Life,” Ben Webster’s “Chelsea Bridge” (both with strings, the latter with Strays on piano), and Dizzy Gillespie’s “UMMG” (not the 1959 Ellington recording with Diz, but a 1960 recording with his own big band). These two CDs complement each other very nicely.

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The Famous Musician and the Young Attorney

“...The Greatest Bandleader Was in His Corner”: Duke Ellington and Thurgood Marshall

by Ken Steiner

Thurgood Marshall tells a story of the time when Duke Ellington stopped his orchestra’s tour to support the future Supreme Court justice in an early (1941) civil rights case in Houston:

“Duke Ellington happened to be in town, and about a half dozen of us played poker and he wanted to know what I was doing down there,” Marshall reminisced later. “And I explained the case to him, and he said, ‘Man, that’s interesting. When is it coming up?’ I said tomorrow. He said, ‘Well, that’ll be no trouble. I’m free until tomorrow night.’ So he arranged to go to court the next day, and it was postponed. And it was postponed at least two times, and he kept the whole band waiting, at his expense. You can’t imagine what it cost him. But he finally heard the case.” (Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary*. New York: Random House, 1998. Pp.110-11.)

Although Marshall recalled the case as *Smith v. Allwright*, the actual trial observed by Ellington would have been its predecessor, *Hasgett v. Werner and Blackburn*, argued in the United States District Court on 18Apr41. (“Kennerly to Rule Later on Negro’s Plea,” *Houston Chronicle*, 19Apr41, p. 8.) The case was a legal challenge to the Democratic Party’s refusal to allow African Americans to vote in a primary election.

Research confirms that Ellington was indeed in Houston. “Duke Ellington played at Pilgrim Auditorium [16Apr41] and later came back to the city and cooled all during the week.... Attorney Thurgood Marshall, counsel for the NAACP is in the city prosecuting the white primary case in federal court here.” (“Man About Town,” *Houston Informer*, 26 April 1941, p. 13.)

The 32-year old Marshall was criticized for lack of preparation for losing the case on a technicality when it was discovered that his plaintiff had not tried to vote in the Democratic primary, but another election. Marshall found another plaintiff and returned to the U.S. District Court in the fall of 1941 and tried the same issue in *Smith v. Allwright*, but lost. Marshall appealed, but lost again in the United States Circuit Court in 1943. Marshall persevered, arguing the case before the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in 1944 that racially restricted primaries were unconstitutional.

Toward the end of his monumental career, Marshall recalled *Smith v. Allwright* as a landmark, and he did not forget that in an intimidating atmosphere, the greatest bandleader was in his corner.

(Ed. note: See the related item “Steiner Gives Credit for Ellington-Marshall Leads” on page 3.)

Short Sheets . . .

Elvin Jones Stint with Ellington Orchestra

Several obituaries for Elvin Jones, who died in May, note that the legendary drummer played in the Ellington orchestra for a short time. Sjef Hoefsmit's current *DEMS Bulletin* indicates that these performances by Jones were during January 1966, when Louie Bellson could not join the band in Europe.

Unusual CD of Strayhorn and Ellington Tunes Out
Such Sweet Thunder: Music of the Duke Ellington Orchestra is a collection of mainly Ellington and Strayhorn compositions to which vocalist Lorraine Feather has written lyrics. Samples of her whimsical imagination include "September Rain," an adaptation of "Chelsea Bridge"; "Imaginary Guy," described in promotional material as "hilarious" is based on "Dancers in Love"; "The 101" is "Suburbanite" about a speedy drive on that road trying to catch up with a leaving lover; and "Antarctica," based on "The Ricitic," has the lines "I cried all night/That's half a year." Among other offerings is "Mighty Like the Blues," her father Leonard Feather's tune that Duke recorded. Ms. Feather is backed by a cast of musicians. (*Such Sweet Thunder*, Sanctuary Records 86353)

Lady Who Danced at Newport Dies

We learn from an item by George Avakian in the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden's *Bulletin* that Elaine Anderson, the lady who danced during Ellington's performance at Newport in 1956, passed in April in South Carolina, where she established herself as a businesswoman. He notes, "R.I.P Elaine. As Duke would have said, you brought beauty and happiness to our grateful little circle."

Jazz Museum Plans Progressing

The jazz museum to be located in Harlem is moving from conception toward realization. For progress reports and other information, go to < jazzmuseuminharlem.org >.

DE Suk Inaugurates Record Production

The Duke Ellington Society, United Kingdom has announced its first CD release, *The Duke Ellington Repertory Orchestra Live at Ronnie Scott's* (DE Suk 1). Attendees at the 1997 conference in Leeds, England will remember the Duke Ellington Repertory Orchestra on that occasion for its musical integrity, technical expertise, and feeling. As then, the orchestra is led by Tony Faulkner.

For information about the recording and about ordering copies, contact DE Suk at 47, Yoxley Drive, Ilford, Essex, IG2 6PX or on the internet at < www.dukes-place.co.uk >.

My People Alternates May Be Released

Sjef Hoefsmit's *DEMS Bulletin* is such a rich source of information! We read in it that alternate takes of *My People* exist and that plans are being made for the release of some of them.

"Strayhorn is like Beethoven—every note he wrote seems inevitable." – Cliff Colnot, Resident Conductor, Civic Orchestra of Chicago

Maurice Lawrence Honored For Human Rights Activities

We heartily congratulate Maurice Lawrence, the Duke Ellington Society's first president, on his being selected by the Urban League of Broward County (FL) as the recipient of its 2004 Margaret Roach Humanitarian Award. Described by the organization's CEO as a "long time human rights advocate," he will be presented the award at the Equal Opportunity Day Awards Dinner in Fort Lauderdale on 29 October.

Mr. Lawrence retired to Florida some years ago and has remained selflessly active in both music and civic endeavors.

"All those sevenths – man, I never heard anything like those things until [Billy Strayhorn]." – Dizzy Gillespie

Ellington Jazz Festival Being Planned

A "Sneak Preview" Gala Concert in September at the historic Lincoln Theatre in Washington, DC—featuring among others Poncho Sanchez, Hugh Masekela, Steve Turre, and the Ellington School of the Arts' New Washingtonians—served as a premiere of a projected 2005 Ellington Jazz Festival.

Our member Patricia Braxton reports that the musicians were "great," noting particularly that Turre played a lovely, muted "In a Sentimental Mood."

Named sponsors include the Greater Washington Board of Trade, Fannie Mae Foundation, and *Washington Post*. It will be staged by Charismic Productions. At this point the event, while bearing his name, will not be devoted to Ellington alone. As we learn more, we will provide more information.

Steiner Gives Credit For Ellington-Marshall Leads

A trained historian, Ken Steiner thanks his wife, Naomi, and Ellington authority Steven Lasker for sparking his interest in the Ellington-Marshall incident recounted on page 2. Mrs. Steiner gave Ken a first edition of the biography *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary* long before he dug into his Ellington itinerary research, and Steven Lasker refreshed his attention to an article in the *Los Angeles Times* about Marshall by the biographer, Juan Williams.

A copy of Ken Steiner's "On the Road and on the Air with Duke Ellington," an itinerary for October 1939-December 1940 that was distributed at the Ellington '04 Conference in Stockholm in May, is available, complete with graphics, in the Fall issue of *DEMS Bulletin*. For a copy of this valuable scholarship, go to Peter MacHare's website at < depanorama.net/dems >.)

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

Advance information about the National Symposium on Multicultural Music at the University of Tennessee in October lists Luvenia George as a major speaker.

Patricia Willard

Patricia Willard will speak on Duke Ellington at the "Celebration of Jazz at the Brooklyn Paramount" on 15 October. An aim of the event is to call attention to this venue's relatively unsung importance in jazz history. Among other scheduled prominent presenters are Willard Jenkins, Gary Giddens, and Jean Bach. In addition to the one-day conference, the celebration will include a concert and a month-long photo exhibit, "They Played Here."

Ronnie Wells

Recently Ms. Wells took time from her teaching and other activities to appear at Blues Alley. The Washington *Post's* music critic described her performance there as "...playful, spirited and soulful by turn—and, in many respects, refreshingly old-fashioned. . . . [S]he had no difficulty making each tune sound worthy of another go-round, usually with a distinctive twist or two."

Rusty Hasson

By way of a coast-to-coast telephone interview, Claire Gordon was the guest of Rusty Hassan on his regular Pacifica network radio program on 27 July, originating in Washington on WPFW. He had met her at the Ellington Conference in Stockholm in May.

Walter van de Leur

Several issues back, we reported that Walter van de Leur earned the American Music Society's prestigious Lowens Book Award for his *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*. We have since learned that he is the first non-American to have received this honor.

Officials of the international Criss Cross Conference in June at Nottingham University in Great Britain have selected Walter's paper on *Boola* and *Black, Brown and Beige* for publication. Also, for the Society of American Music's next conference, he has been asked to put together a three-paper session, entitled "Jazz, Multicultural Modernism, and Cold War Cool."

"Billy [Strayhorn] to me was the boss of the arrangers."

— Quincy Jones

Nominations

If you are an Officer or Member of the Board of Directors of The Duke Ellington Society and are not able to continue in your position, please call Angela Grimmer at 202-546-7764. If you can continue in your present position, you need do nothing. If you wish to nominate someone for a position, also call Angela. The person you nominate, of course, must be willing to serve if elected.

Duke on Film

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Mac Grimmer presented our October session, "Duke on Film," featuring videos from both his and Ted Shell's collections. Mac contributed three segments. *The Goodyears of Jazz* was one of the series of jazz shorts for television underwritten by Goodyear Tire. One of the highlights was Sam Woodyard in "Kinda Dukish" drumming like he was playing for his life. His sticks fluttered like hummingbird wings and he pounded on the rims and planted his elbows on the snares to add gritty urgency. *The Art Ford Jazz Party*, part of the *Coleman Hawkins Centennial Collection*, was filmed in 1958 and in addition to Coleman featured Sonny Greer, JC Higginbotham, Pee Wee Russell and Willie "The Lion" Smith. *The Golden Age of Jazz - Timex Show #4* from a Louis Armstrong and His Friends DVD featured Duke and the band, Jo Jones, Milt Hinton, Coleman Hawkins, Dizzy Gillespie, Gene Krupa, Bobby Hackett, Satchmo himself and even a cameo of Jackie Gleason.

Mac borrowed from Ted a presentation of Duke's 70th birthday party at L'Alcazar Club in Paris. Originally produced as an hour-long program for French television, Ted acquired it many years later as a Japanese-released laser-disc. The raucous evening featured Duke and the band in "Rockin' in Rhythm," "Satin Doll," "A-Train" and "In a Sentimental Mood," among others. Harry Carney held the end-note so long on "Sophisticated Lady" that Duke at one point stopped playing and inspected the inside of the straw hat that Maurice Chevalier gave him earlier in the evening. During "Satin Doll," Duke playfully instructed the audience not to snap their fingers on the beat, because that would be considered too aggressive. Being a little behind was "conservatively hip," he said.

From a conversation Mac had a few years ago with Alex Rado, part front man-interpreter-tour guide for Duke in Paris, he got some juicy details such as that the party literally went on all night and Duke at one point secreted himself with the media people for a nap. L'Alcazar was one of "the" cabarets of the time, and besides Chevalier, the audience included Salvador Dali and other luminaries that Mac will have to fill us in on later. In the final scene, Duke, holding a glass of champagne, a cigar and a bouquet of roses, said, "I hope it happens again real soon." We do too.

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