

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Music Kept Alive by Fargo Area Media and the Echoes Band

In a letter to us from her home in Moorhead, MN just across the river from Fargo, ND, our member Yvonne Condell tells us:

"Duke Ellington is greatly appreciated in this part of the country. Two local radio stations feature his work on almost every show. Especially on North Dakota Public Radio station KDSU, 91.9 and on Minnesota Public Radio KCCD, 90.3. Lloyd Anderson, host of 'Friday Night Swing,' plays one Ellington/ Strayhorn composition each Friday. Leigh Kamman, host of 'The Jazz Image,' always devotes time to their music.

"In Minneapolis/St. Paul there is a group dedicated to Duke's music, and it performs all over the state." Dr. Condell refers to the Ellington Echoes orchestra founded by the late Red Wolfe and now led by Percy Hughes. According to a public relations flyer, Wolfe, a trumpeter, created a repertoire for the band by collecting "old, hard-to-find Ellington records and transcribing the music." Among those whom saxophonist Hughes credits for training him are Ellingtonians Chauncey Haughton and Russell Procope.

In 1985 the mayors of the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) proclaimed 16 November as Red Wolfe and Percy Hughes Day. In 1995 Ellington Echoes played in conjunction with the showing of the Smithsonian's "Beyond Category" exhibit there.

Today the band performs mainly in the Twin Cities region at festivals, workshops, and in concert. In August they opened the Twin Cities Jazz Society's "Jazz from J to Z" series with a "Remembering Red Wolfe" concert in Bloomington, MN. About this performance the *Star and Tribune's* reviewer wrote, "Although the band did and still does play some of Ellington's most famous compositions, such as 'Sophisticated Lady,' Wolfe concentrated his efforts on lesser known but equally beautiful or hand-swinging numbers that might otherwise have been lost."

Here's to Percy Hughes and the Ellington Echoes!

December on Broadway

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

You've heard of April in Paris, well how about December on Broadway?

Our December program will be a film of the Broadway show *Sophisticated Ladies* that features more than thirty songs by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn and the voices of Hinton Battle and Phyllis Hyman.

Our program will be held on **Saturday, December 2, 2006 at 8 pm** at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets NW, Washington, DC.**

Girl Gives Up Sweet Sixteen To Help Duke Ellington

Written by Audrey Barnes
9NEWS NOW

The deplorable conditions at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts have captured the attention and the heart of an unlikely benefactor.

Alex Tievy, 15, of Rockville is giving up her sweet sixteen party and donating a bunch of money from her savings account to the school.

Add in some donations from family and friends and Tievy's gift to Duke Ellington tops \$15,000.

The teenager is hoping it will jumpstart a new building fund the school has set up to make repairs.

Dancers at the aging school have to practice in the hallway because their dance floor has buckled. Toilets don't flush. The list is long.

Tievy says she's not doing it for school credit either. She says she saw a need and wanted to help.

To make a donation, write to Duke Ellington School of the Arts or call 202-333-2555.

Ed. Note: This article appeared on WUSA9.com, the WUSA-TV Channel 9 website, on 26 October. We are grateful to Ms. Barnes and to WUSA.com for its permission for us to reprint it here.

**Someone to Watch Over Me:
The Life and Music of Ben Webster, by Frank Büchman-Møller**

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

Proceeding chronologically rather than thematically or topically, to complement the biographical flow in his book Frank Büchman-Møller intersperses anecdotes, commentary, criticism, interview excerpts, opinion, and other illuminating (and frequently entertaining) matter by critics, witnesses, Ben Webster's colleagues and friends, and others. And in concord with the narrative line, he includes evaluative accounts of Webster's public and private music performances and recording sessions. He further enhances the book with photographs from Webster's personal collection, some rare. The result of all this is a uniquely multi-faceted portrait of his subject.

Büchman-Møller writes well. If you ever saw Webster perform, consider this passage: "When Ben played, he stood erect, was well-dressed, and held his horn straight in front of him, almost like a soldier presenting arms. His face, with its eagle-beaked nose, was expressionless, and he stood completely still, totally concentrated with closed eyes, as if listening to something inside his head. Only when playing an altissimo note, would he open his upturned eyes, as if in need of extra space or of help from above. Once in a while, he would remove the saxophone from his mouth after a phrase, ever so slightly shake his head—on which he always wore a hat that seemed too small—and continue with the next phrase."

The book starts conventionally with Benjamin Francis Webster's childhood. Born 27 March 1909 in music-rich Kansas City, he was raised by his mother and a great aunt in a comfortable home. Though spoiled by them, he was unfailingly respectful toward them, well-behaved and obedient—even throughout his matured adulthood. Still, according to early girl friend Mary Lou Williams, during his youth "they couldn't keep him in college."

Known throughout life for a volatile and sometimes brutish personality, the docility and warmth exhibited in the presence of these ladies who raised him carried over into his relationships with such persons as Benny Carter, who could make Ben behave if he were acting up, and with a Mrs. Hartlooper, an elderly lady in whose home in Amsterdam he roomed for a while and who seemingly mothered him. She spoke little English and Ben little Dutch, but according to one source "had a fantastic communication with Ben, and also a fantastic authority." He was prone to volatility when drinking, but normally was protective (his caring for young Jimmie Blanton is well known), helpful, considerate, generous, tender—and famously subject to be moved to tears by beauty.

Webster began his music career on violin, much to his dislike, while a schoolboy, putting it aside when he had the chance. His next instrument was piano, which he pretty well mastered in the stride mode and enjoyed playing throughout his life. After taking up the saxophone and following an apprenticeship in Kansas City's legendary music training-ground and a stint with the Young Family Band (which included Lester Young), he went on to develop musically with popular bands led by the likes of Blanche Calloway, Willie Bryant, Andy Kirk, and Teddy Wilson, the culmination of which was his tenure with Duke Ellington. (In the opinion of drummer Ed Thigpen, Ben "never left Ellington in spirit.")

While Büchman-Møller is much aware of the legendary Young-Hawkins-Webster triumvirate, it is clear that he considers Webster the peerless tenor saxophone balladeer, a judgment that many readers will happily and unreservedly share. Of utmost importance to Webster was his tone, a sound that critic Whitney Balliett wrote "embraces the listener," adding that "ultimately, perhaps, tone is a direct extension of personality, an unwitting mirror of soul." Commenting on "that big fine sound," his friend Hilton Jefferson declared that "Ben is one of those kind of musicians who, when he plays a tune, spoils it for anyone else. You just don't want to hear anyone else play it." Tempo was another element of music about which Webster was meticulous. Small wonder he so highly appreciated accompanying rhythm sections that were congenial to his way of playing. As to music idioms or styles, Webster did not reject the "new sounds" of bop, was receptive of them but played the way he knew how to play. Indeed, except for what might be called avant garde drummers, he enjoyed playing with and listening to younger musicians. Charlie Parker, for instance, played in one of Webster's bands.

In later years, when new styles were evolving, the big-band era was drawing to a close, and his reputation was diminishing as was the case with many other stars of the swing era, he went to Europe where—"comfortable" yet lonely "deep inside" for his American friends—he spent

(Continued on page 3 under "Ben Webster")

Ellington School of the Arts Earns a Grammy Award

The following appeared in Rhythms, a newsletter published by the school's support group The Ellington Fund:

At an April ceremony, Ellington was recognized as one of two U.S. schools (of 1,800 applicants) to win the Grammy Signature School Enterprise Award. The \$15,000 award will support Ellington's new recording studio, enabling students to record CDs for college auditions and competition entries. They also will learn to operate recording equipment, an invaluable skill for those with career ambitions in the music production industry.

A Little Report from Sweden

by Göran Wallén

Last night the bandleader, conductor and arranger Dave Berger visited the city Nyköping close to Stockholm on a two-week tour with the Swedish Bohuslän Big Band. They have done several concerts in Sweden. The program was entirely Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. The presentation and playing was wonderful. Even if it was covers from Duke and Billy the band played very well.

Dave Berger has done a great work with the band and he told us that he will be back to Sweden next year with his own big band from New York.

Lighten Up - - Have Some Fun

Check out the Smithsonian Jazz Class puzzles and games at smithsonianjazz.org/class/ellington

Ronnie Wells at Montpelier: "A Wonderful Evening of Music"

by Patricia Braxton

Montpelier Cultural Arts Center in Laurel, MD hosted a fan favorite, vocalist Ronnie Wells, in October. She treated us to her normal mix of familiar and not-so-familiar pieces. Most of these were mellow, sometimes bluesy tunes ranging from the 1920s through 1950s, for which Ms. Well's voice is well-suited.

Accompanying Ms. Wells was a quintet of Ron Elliston, piano; Paul Wingo, electric guitar; James "Tex" King, bass; Paul "PC" Carr, saxophone; and Jeff Neal, drums. Although we enjoyed quite a bit of music, some songs stood out for this writer, including three Ellington pieces. Bassist King played a prominent role, expressing his music dexterity in the introduction and throughout "Love You Madly." "It Shouldn't Happen to a Dream" featured Carr aptly playing the mellow Johnny Hodges part, and "Everything But You" showcased Elliston on piano, and interplay between Ronnie and saxophonist Carr.

Other memorable songs were an ad-libbed "How High the Moon" featuring instrumental solos; a mellow "Bye, Bye Blackbird"; Sondheim's "I Think About You," from the Broadway play *Follies*, highlighting Ms. Wells and Wingo; "Let's Face the Music," an Irving Berlin piece performed in a nice samba style; and a very slowly played, almost haunting "My Funny Valentine." The two-hour performance ended with a swinging "All of Me," leaving the sold-out audience with lots of smiles and appreciation for a wonderful evening of music.

Ben Webster (Continued from page 2)

his last years before appreciative audiences. On 1973 he died in Amsterdam and lay in state in a hospital there before his remains were flown back to Copenhagen for a wake at Jazzhus Montmartre and burial in Assistens Churchyard, not far from his apartment.

Someone to Watch Over Me, while not gossipy, contains a wealth of lore and fact. Item: A surprise to many is that among his lady friends, in addition to "Mule" (whose real name is never given) and Eudora Williams, whom he married, were Mary Lou Williams and Billie Holiday. Item: A very physical man, he enjoyed golf. Item: Intrigued by animals, he was a frequent visitor to zoos. The book also includes assertions that run counter to previously "received" information. For example, Büchman-Møller reports that Webster, not Duke, composed "Cottontail"; according to Milt Hinton, so was "In a Mellotone."

Admirably researched, informative, and lucidly and lovingly written, *Someone to Watch Over Me: The Life and Music of Ben Webster* is the type of book the reader is likely to take down from the bookshelf time and again, especially while listening to, say, Benjamin Webster's "Danny Boy." Thank you for it, Frank Büchman-Møller.

Note: Unfortunately, the book has no index of topics, only of titles, venues, and persons, and there is no appendix of titles, personnel, and other information to correspond with the running textual discography. However, the Preface states that "a complete list of Webster's musical activities from 1925 to 1973 will be made available on the Internet by the University of Michigan Press, and a complete sessionography of Ben Webster's music compiled by Heinz Baumeister will be made available on the Ben Webster Foundation's website."

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

Brian Gilmore

An retrospective article by Brian Gilmore entitled "Looking Back: Stanley Clarke's *School Days 30 Years Later*" appeared in the August 2006 issue of *Jazz and Blues Report*.

Ronnie Wells

We send our very best "Get-Well!" wishes to Ronnie Wells, who recently underwent surgery.

Don Rouse

In the current issue of *Tailgate Ramblings*, clarinetist Don Rouse is pictured with fellow musicians at a Razz'm Jazz'm gig in Mason District Park.

Mark Harvey

The Rev. Mark Harvey and his Aardvark Jazz Orchestra continue performing regularly in the New England area. In October they performed music by Mark inspired by politics and culture, including his *The Booboisie Suite* and the premiere of *Movin' On*. The band's 34th Annual Christmas Concert in December in Boston will benefit the Massachusetts Department of Peace Campaign, an effort to establish such a department on the federal cabinet level. This concert will include a new work by Mark, *Peace Soundings*.

Georgia Brown; Anthony Brown

Georgia Brown, a student member of our Society, is a percussionist for dad Anthony Brown's Asian American Orchestra. She is also a member of critically acclaimed Oakland (California) Interfaith Youth Gospel Choir that performed in October at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco as a featured attraction at the Voices of America's Future concert program. Established in September 2001 as "an expression of unity and hope for the future of young people, Voices was presented this year as part of a global network of concerts involving over 60 countries in World Music Days 2006 promoting "Harmony for Humanity."

Dr. Anthony Brown traveled to Washington, DC in October to serve on an Arts in the Schools panel under auspices of the National Endowment for the Arts.

CD Release Party Benefits Jazz Arts Institute

In November, Smooth Jazz (WJZW 105.9) had a bash in celebration of the premiere of its CD compilation, *Smooth Jazz Volume IV*.

Proceeds from the occasion benefitted the non-profit Washington Jazz Arts Institute, which is unique in that its students are mentored by former members as a way of "giving back." Founders of the Institute are Davey and wife Esther Williams-Yarborough

November Meeting: Films of Others Playing Duke/Strayhorn

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

For our November meeting Ted Shell once again opened his vault and shared some memorable Ellington-related clips.

In the first half of the program, we saw a bit of *Echoes of Ellington* with Randy Brecker, Bill Evans, Robben Ford and Tom Scott. Ted then replayed a news clip from 1989 when the plaque was dedicated noting Duke's birthplace at Ward Place, NW in Washington, DC. The piece was narrated by a dark-haired Jim Vance from WRC-Channel 4, and our own Patricia Willard made a brief appearance, as did Mercer Ellington.

In the second half, Ted presented several clips of Clark Terry in performance, including a concert recorded live in 1985, and the Clark Terry Quartet in several venues.

Quotation of the Month

My biggest thrill," said Basie, "came one night back I think it was 1951. The so-called progressive jazz was going big then, and here comes Duke one opening night at Birdland. He had just revamped his band, and no one knew just what he'd have. We all dropped in to catch him—and what we heard! What a thrill that was.

"The Duke was swinging. All this 'progressive' talk and the Duke played the old swing. He scared a lot of people that night. It was just wonderful. Of course the Duke always had the greatest band at all times. There's never been any other band for me, year in, year out."

— We thank Bob Reny for forwarding this gem that appeared in *Jazz Journal International* last year.



Don't Forget Your Dues!

Join or renew your membership right away!

Remember, our memberships are for the calendar year and 2007 is fast approaching. So mail your check payable to The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. to PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003.

Our dues remain a bargain: Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5; First-time-ever member, just \$20.

