

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/

Thursday, 29 November Is
BILLY STRAYHORN'S BIRTHDAY
In Loving Memory Of Him,
Let's Thankfully Immerse Ourselves In
The Beauty Of His Music



An Anecdote about "Strays"

I think everyone looked forward to becoming a member of [Duke's band]. We played so many beautiful engagements that I enjoyed every one of them. One unusual thing that happened was that when we were rehearsing Strayhorn's last arrangement of "Sophisticated Lady," he had stamped on the music "Sophia." So he said, "Pass out 'Sophia.'" It was an absolutely gorgeous arrangement. Almost everybody went up to Sweet Pea and said, "Man, that was a beautiful arrangement." His . . . reply to us was, "Did you enjoy your part?" I thought that was fantastic. How many people would give a damn whether you enjoy the part? Most guys would say, "Just play the part."

— Clark Terry in interview with Bill Donaldson,
as quoted in "Clark Terry," *Jazz Improv, Fall 2005*

A-Train's 75th Birthday Officially Observed

The first New York subway line both owned and operated by the city and named the "A-Train" celebrates its 75th birthday, and the Metropolitan Transit Authority strung together a train with historic cars for the occasion, as William Neuman reports (*New York Times*). The first A-Train carried passengers on February 10th, 1932. And the jazz connection? Well, of course Billy Strayhorn's composition "Take the A Train," the signature tune of Duke Ellington's Orchestra, which was played by a saxophonist in one of the cars and which in the early 40s already celebrated the "A-Train" as the quickest way to get to Harlem.

— from "Jazzinstitut's Jazz News Mailing,"
Jazz News No. 24/2001 at jazz@jazzinstitut.de

Anything Goes At November Program

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our program for November will be a member's choice featuring the very broad theme "Anything Goes."

Bring a recording, tell a story, show us a photograph. Any Ellington connection, however slight, will be acceptable. We want to explore the wide world of Ellington. The recording can be by the Ellington Orchestra, it can be by another artist performing a composition written by a member of the Ellington Orchestra, or it can be a performance by a member of the Ellington Orchestra in another context. Please do bring several recordings and we will play them if time permits.

The date, time, and place for our November program are **Saturday, 3 November 2007 at 8 pm** at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets NW, Washington, DC.**

"75 Years On – The Duke in London"

The Twentieth

Duke Ellington International Conference

London, England – 22 -26 May 2008

For Registration and Other Details,

See the Insert in This Issue

For More Details and Updates,

Use Contact Points Below:

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Blowin' Hot and Cold: Jazz and Its Critics by John Gennari

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. \$35.00.

Reviewed by John Mason

In this dense, complex, but ultimately rewarding book, John Gennari argues that critics cannot be avoided “if one is to reckon with the cultural history of jazz.” Critics have celebrated some jazz musicians, thereby boosting their careers and their place in jazz history, and they have disparaged. They have literally written the history of jazz, shaping popular notions about the significance of jazz in American culture. For Gennari, then, jazz is a three-way conversation among the musicians, their audience, and the critics.

It's a big argument and a convincing one. Gennari shows how, for instance, the widely accepted belief that jazz is America's classical music didn't come out of nowhere. From the very beginning of jazz criticism, writers such as John Hammond and Leonard Feather set out to persuade the world “that a music born of slavery and segregation was the true American art, the singular twentieth-century art. . . .” He also gives early jazz historians credit for paying attention to aspects of American history that professional historians of the day ignored, especially the African-American experience and the African-American foundations of American culture.

Gennari acknowledges that there has always been tension in the relationship between the mostly black musicians and the mostly white critical establishment. In this regard, Duke Ellington Society members will be especially interested in his vivid account of the war of words between Hammond and Ellington in the late 1930s. Hammond fired the first shot, in *DownBeat* magazine, disparaging Ellington's sophistication and artistic aspirations. Ellington, Hammond charged, had been seduced by European classical music and was unconcerned about the plight of his people. In a restrained and eloquent response, also published in *DownBeat*, Ellington acknowledged Hammond's contributions to jazz, but argued that his left-wing politics has “warped” his musical sensibilities. Ellington and his music appear at many other points in this book, something that is not surprising, given his centrality in jazz history.

Gennari's discussion is by no means limited to early writers and early jazz musicians. He takes us up to the present, stopping along the way to examine the jazz critics and historians, such as Marshall Stearns, Whitney Balliett, Ralph Ellison, Nat Hentoff, Martin Williams, Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones), Stanley Crouch, and, yes, Ken Burns. Many of the jazz musicians who most effectively challenged the critics, notably Ellington, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and Wynton Marsalis, also receive their due.

Blowin' Hot and Cold is by no means an easy read; I came away from it exhausted. But the story that Gennari has to tell is compelling, his research is deep, and his argument is sound. My vision of jazz is distinctly richer for having read this book.

Duke Ellington Live in '58

Jazz Icons Series DVD. Reelin' in the Years Productions and Naxos 2.119001

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

Because of its historic and artistic qualities, collectors and other enthusiasts will delight in this DVD: It is the first known video of a *full* Ellington concert, the music is superb, and the accompanying booklet by Patricia Willard is lucidly informative. The 2 November 1958 event at the Concertgebouw was videotaped by AVRO, a Netherlands broadcast union, for radio and television but never before commercially released. As Quincy Jones is quoted as saying about the Jazz Icons Series as a whole, this “is like the unearthing of a musical capsule.”

All the Ellington stalwarts of the era, in formal attire, are on hand and playing at the top of their form. It begins with an engaging melange of “Black and Tan Fantasy,” “Creole Love Call,” and “The Mooch” by Jackson, Nance, Procope, Carney, and Hamilton. Then it's one fine tune after another. Highlights? All really, including “fresh” renditions of “Harlem Air Shaft” by Terry, “Jack the Bear” by Woode, and “You Better Know It” sung by Ozzie Bailey. “My Funny Valentine” by Hamilton is a textbook example of an instrumentalist's sensitivity to the lyrics of a song. Except for it and “All of Me,” almost the whole program consists on what can be called Ellington and Strayhorn standards, or classics if you will.

One more thing: It's obvious that the artists are getting their jollies. As Patricia Willard closes her insightful text, “This DVD captures the 1958 Duke Ellington Orchestra at its very best. And they feel it. See the musicians' smiles. Ray Nance's ecstatic expression with his violin, as he dances. “Butter” smiling every time he lifts his horn. Carney exuberant in his chair. Woodyard grinning at his drums. Except for the dour Hodges? No. After the DVD credits finish, we get to watch the band pack up and disperse. Look carefully—before he leaves the stage, the camera catches Johnny Hodges smiling!”

Short Sheets . . .

♪ First Jazz Chair in The Netherlands ♪

From an announcement at www.musicology.nl we learn:

Dr. W. van de Leur (1962) is benoemd tot hoogleraar Jazz en improvisatiemuziek aan de Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen.

Got that?

To which our man Walter van de Leur says, "I couldn't stop the University of Amsterdam from making me the first professor of jazz and improvised music in the Netherlands. . . . Sigh."

♪ From the Jazzinstitut We Learn ♪

Free excerpts about specific musicians can be ordered by mail, using the Jazzinstitut's "Jazz-Index, the world's largest computer-based bibliography on jazz," which lists books, jazz periodicals, and essays from daily and weekly newspapers. The Jazzinstitut Darmstadt is a municipal cultural institute of the city of Darmstadt, Germany. To request its weekly news about the jazz world, go to its website, jazz@jazzinstitut.de.

♪ Peripatetic John Hasse ♪

At the request of the US State Department, John Edward Hasse traveled to lecture on Duke Ellington and American jazz in Hungary, Estonia, Germany, and South Africa, where he addressed the National Youth Jazz Festival and the National Arts Festival. Stateside, Hasse spoke as part of a panel discussion on "Duke, Dizzy, and Diplomacy" at GWU, part of the 3rd annual Duke Ellington Jazz Festival, and was interviewed about Ellington by John Tegner for his syndicated radio series, "Capitol Conversations," heard on 101 radio stations. Hasse also performed an illustrated concert-with-commentary of "Rags, Blues, and Jazz" piano to dedicate the Goodwin Performing Arts Center at Waynesburg University in Pennsylvania.

♪ Hodges Centenary ♪

July 25 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Johnny Hodges.

Hodges fans, and who isn't, should be aware that Mosaic Records offers a 6-CD limited edition of *Johnny Hodges: The Complete Verve Johnny Hodges Small Group Sessions 1956-61*.

A Very, Very Quick Quiz:

Who called Johnny Hodges
"the Lily Pons of the alto saxophone"
?

Answer spelled backwards:
Rekrap Eilrahc

Notes on the Ellington Jazz Festival

September 14, 2007—What an enjoyable concert! An evening of marvelous performances at the NEA Jazz Masters Concert at the Lincoln Theatre as part of Washington's Duke Ellington Festival was a highlight of the varied events.

Did we hear any Ellington pieces? Well, not exactly. Performances this night were by two wonderful orchestras: the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra (SJMO) led by David Baker, and the vibrant, energetic Dizzy Gillespie Big Band led by trombonist Slide Hampton.

Duke Ellington Jazz Festival Lifetime Achievement Awards were given to legends Hank Jones and Clark Terry, who were then joined by Czech bassist George Marz to play "The Nearness of You." Program notes state that, among other things, the honorees "serve as model representatives of jazz."

Featured artists with the Gillespie band included Jimmy Heath, James Moody, Paquito D'Rivera, Roy Hargrove, and vocalist Roberta Gambarini.

— *Patricia Braxton*

In the "Duke, Dizzy & Diplomacy" forum near the close of the festival, a panel of knowledgeable experts, among them several ambassadors, discussed jazz as a medium for diplomacy, the consensus being that jazz is, indeed, an effective bridge between cultures. John Hasse, for instance, spoke of the impact of Ellington during his international tours, and Festival executive director Charles Fishman recalled the positive effects of Gillespie's mingling with the ordinary people during his travels, as is the case among with other jazz artists (albeit, he claimed that rock-and-rollers, hip hop and some other contemporary stars tend to be insulated by their entourages from close contact with ordinary people). Frequent mention was made of the lasting value of Willis Conover and his Voice of America broadcasts.

Many fans of Davey Yarborough are accustomed to his wonderfully lilting, lyrical playing on soprano and alto saxophones and on flute. However, at the festival's opening reception he displayed a rousing, big-throated, full-toned, assertive, style on tenor saxophone. His The New Washingtonians Quintet played a seamless full set, sans verbal segues, that included "Silky" (which he composed for his *Royal Essence* CD project with Sir Roland Hanna), "Cotton Tail" with a Latin flavor, and variations of other Ellington/Strayhorn tunes. His compatriots in their dazzling ensemble and solo offerings were bassist Wes Biles, pianist John Ozmert, trumpeter Chris Royal, and percussionist Francis Thompson.

— *Ted Hudson*

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

Ted Shell

As we prepare this issue, Ted Shell has had successful surgery at Georgetown University Hospital and is home recuperating. Way to go, Ted!

Bob Reny

Bob Reny continues to provide illuminating reviews of recordings and of live performances for the *IJRC Journal*. His latest is a report of the current Artie Shaw orchestra entitled "Modern Band in Shaw's Clothing."

Harold Gray

At a standing-room-only reception at Palisades Community Church given for Harold Gray on the occasion of his 100th birthday, he was presented with a proclamation from Mayor Fenty declaring 21 September as Harold Gray Day in the District of Columbia. During an "open mike" period on the program, Ted Hudson brought him greetings and love from our Society. Music for the occasion was provided by the Federal Jazz Commission, with which one of Harold's sons plays bass.

Sjef Hoefsmit and Jerry Valburn

In the "Introduction" to his 5th edition of *Ellingtonia: The Recorded Music of Duke Ellington and His Sidemen*, W.E. Timmer accords "very special thanks" to Jerry Valburn and Sjef Hoefsmit, along with Steven Lasker, for assisting him "with fresh material and valuable advice."

Harvey G. Cohen

If you find yourself near London or Copenhagen in the next month or so, try to catch Harvey Cohen at one or more of three upcoming events. The first is on 22 October at the Center for Study of the Americas in Copenhagen where he will talk on major themes from his forthcoming book, *Duke Ellington's America*. On 5 November at King's College in London he will moderate a panel on the state of music from an artistic and business perspective. Then on 22 November at London's Elizabeth Hall, he and others will discuss the significance of Benny Carter and Johnny Hodges during the 30s and 40s. Dr. Cohen is a faculty member at King's College in London.

Dennis Dimmer

We thank Dennis Dimmer for sending us an advertisement that he came across about a Clinkscale's, that offers tuition and are "main agents" for Hammond organs in Scottish Border Country. Find any genealogical connections, Dennis?

Audience Thoroughly Enjoys Just Released DVD of Amsterdam Concert

by Peter MacHare, substituting for Secretary Gina Rollins

The program on tenor titan Paul Gonsalves originally scheduled for October was postponed because our dear friend, former president, and board member Ted Shell had surgery. Riding to the rescue was "the other Ted," Ted Hudson, who presented a new DVD in the Jazz Icons Series, *Duke Ellington Live in '58*, filmed at a concert in Holland.

This is a superb concert video. One that all our members will want to add to their collection. There is a review of the DVD elsewhere in this issue, so I will concentrate on our member's reactions. You know a music video is good when the audience gathers around the screen and applauds after each number. The Maestro Duke Ellington never ceases to amaze with his piano variations during the "Medley." A surprise was "My Funny Valentine" featuring Jimmy Hamilton. Ray Nance on violin and Shorty Baker on trumpet charmed with "Mr Gentle and Mr Cool." Johnny Hodges got us all going with his performances on "All of Me" and "Things Ain't What They Used to Be." Paul Gonsalves brought down the house with the "Wailing Interval" between "Diminuendo in Blue" and "Crescendo in Blue."

Our member Patricia Willard wrote the extensive liner notes. Our member Sjef Hoefsmit attended this concert in Holland.

Send Dues for 2008 and Beyond Now!

Memberships are for the calendar year,
and 2008 is fast approaching.

So mail your check payable to
The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. at
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003.

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

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