

Ellingtonia

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Congratulations to "Wammie" Winner Esther Williams!

Esther Williams is the winner of the 2007 Jazz Vocalist "Wammie."

The award was announced by the sponsoring Washington Area Music Association at a formal ceremony in February at the renovated, historic Star Theatre in Falls Church, Virginia.

A press release states that Ms. Williams "will take you from a whispered, heart-warming ballad to a swinging jazz standard, right into something that gets into your body and makes you move."

Her career began when she won a Miss Black DC competition and performed internationally with the Miss Black America Tour. Since then she has had an active professional life, appearing in musicals such as *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*, *Tambourines to Glory*, and traveling productions of *Ain't Misbehaving*. Also, she has created and directed variety shows.

Over time, Ms. Williams has opened for concerts by groups such as the Temptations and Peaches and Herb. More recently, she was a regular at the annual East Coast Jazz Festivals.

Among CD releases on which she may be heard, along with her husband, Davey Yarborough, and others, are "*Beautiful Friendships*," "*Jazz at Peoples Church*," and with a band lead by Bobby Felder, "*Amazing Grace*." Her latest is another with which she shares the spotlight with Davey, "*In the Spirit*," religious music.

Several years ago she and Davey founded the Washington Jazz Arts Institute, a non-profit dedicated to educating and developing young musicians.

We are proud of our member Esther Williams!

Duke's Big 4 and More

by Mac Grimmer and Pater MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our last two programs of the season will feature new Ellington releases on DVD and CD. The centerpiece of our May program will be the new DVD *Duke: The Last Jam Session*. This performance features Duke Ellington with Joe Pass, Ray Brown, and Louie Bellson. If this lineup looks familiar to you, it is because this is the group with which Duke recorded the album *Duke's Big 4*. As time permits, we will also explore several new releases on CD that you should know about.

If you want to look forward to our final program of the season, in June, we plan to show a DVD of a 1966 performance of Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington in France.

The place is **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC**. The date is **Saturday, 3 May 2008**. And the time is **8:00 pm**. We look forward to seeing you all there for a really big show.

History Note

Failing of the backstage elevator at the Roxy Theatre a week ago last Wednesday, came close to completely upsetting the new stage show there headed by Duke Ellington's Orchestra. On the day the show opened July 12, Duke was in the lift when it dropped a short distance into the cellar [and] the light globe on the car fell and sliced the leader's hand. It required several stitches.

Since the stage show is routined around Ellington much of the way it would have been a serious accident had he been forced to withdraw. He was out a couple shows, but is now playing an elaborate opening based on his keyboarding with one hand bandaged.

— New York *Amsterdam News*, July 1944

Carole Sloane: Dearest Duke

Arbors (ACD-19350)

Reviewed by Elinor F. Eugene

Dearest Duke is Carol Sloane's debut album with Arbors Records, Inc., but her singing career began more than fifty years ago in her hometown, Providence, Rhode Island, and she has more than twenty albums to her credit. In his liner notes Doug Ramsey refers to her as a "jazz singer," and in this album she demonstrates that she well deserves the title. Her early experience in the musical theater is reflected in her phrasing and impressive interpretation of lyrics. Her deep, mellow voice has the maturity of a woman probably in her sixties and is reminiscent of the style of other female vocalists who were Duke Ellington's favorites.

The surprise of her backup musicians is that there are only two: Brad Hatfield at the piano and Ken Peplowski playing the clarinet and tenor saxophone. Absent are drums and bass, but they are not missed. The two musicians' minimal but balanced accompaniment allow Sloane's rich tones to take the spotlight.

Included in the twelve tracks are such familiar Ellington compositions as "Sophisticated Lady," "Solitude," "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart," "Do Nothin' Till You Hear from Me," "Mood Indigo," "Prelude to a Kiss," "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good," "Just A'Sittin' and A'Rockin'," and "Just Squeeze Me." Among the less frequently heard numbers are "I Didn't Know About You," "Rocks in My Bed," "I Ain't Got Nothin' But the Blues," "Day Dream," and "All Too Soon." "Serenade to Sweden" features Hatfield and Peplowski only, taking turns as soloist and background with no vocal.

Backup support is shared equally with the piano prominent and the saxophone or clarinet subdued in some numbers and the reverse in other numbers. In "I Ain't Got Nothin' But the Blues" only the piano is heard. The backup is effective as it punctuates rather than accompanies and is always sensitive and balanced.

In most numbers Sloane's vocal is slow, sometimes melancholy with a blues edge. Occasionally the tempo is upbeat as in "Just A'Sittin' and A'Rockin'." The last track is an unexpected surprise with Sloane and Peplowski singing together and adding light-hearted, humorous banter.

Any fan of Duke Ellington's music will enjoy Carol Sloane as she interprets with warmth and feeling some of the classic songs of *Dearest Duke*.

Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: Live in Zurich, Sweden

TCB Music SA (TCB 43062)

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

In addition to engrossing music, two other factors make this CD distinctive. For one thing, the music from this 2 May 1950 concert at Zurich's Kongresshaus has never before been commercially released. Further, the orchestra's personnel was in a state of flux at the time and there are several new music personalities (as Duke sometimes referred to his musicians) on hand. Presumably they were significant in other performances during the band's 1950 European tour that had begun in France on 5 April and ended in Germany on 10 June.

At the beginning of the tour Don Byas came aboard in France to replace Charlie Rouse, whose stay had been less than a year, as the tenor saxophonist soloist; Alva McCain, who had just joined in February and was to leave in August, is the other tenor. Hodges, Hamilton, Procope, and Carney complete the six-piece reed section. (It is said the Byas declined an invitation to remain with the band when it went back home. After it's return to the States from this European tour, Paul Gonsalves joined in August.) Trombonist Ted Kelly, an April newcomer who replaced Tyree Glenn for the tour, joins Lawrence Brown and Quentin Jackson in the trombone section. Ernie Royal, who also joined in April, but left in July, is in a trumpet section with Nelson Williams, Harold Baker, Al Killian (too seldom recorded before his untimely death), and Ray Nance. Duke and Wendell Marshall are on piano and bass. And, to boot (literally it seems, for they certainly can be heard), there are two drummers, long-time stalwart Sonny Greer and newcomer Butch Ballard. Kay Davis, who upon return to the States was to leave the band and be replaced by June Norton and Marian Cox, is the only vocalist.

Royal shows his boppish proclivities and requisite "chops" on "'S'Wonderful." Byas solos on "How High the Moon" in an arrangement on which Ben Webster had previously been heard., that is, opening with a beguiling legato then modulating to full breach, up-tempo mode. Established sidemen Harry Carney, Jimmy Hamilton, and Johnny Hodges are spotlighted in "concerti," if you will, Carney on the seldom heard Strayhorn composition "Paradise," Hamilton on "Air Conditioned Jungle," his own composition, and Hodges on Strayhorn's incredibly lovely "Violets Blue." Kay Davis sings "Creole Love Song" for which Ray Nance plays the interlude. A very welcome lagniappe is Strayhorn himself playing a teasingly taddy flord piano on "Take the A-Train," indeed a fresh version. When the band takes on its classic extended version of "Frankie and Johnnie," it's Duke time to shine, of course striding mightily in spots, with Nance swinging plucked and bowed violin as only he can. Other pieces are "Rockin' in Rhythm," Nance singing "St. Louis Blues," Hodges again, this time on "The Jeep Is Jumpin'," and the quizzically titled "The Tatted Bride."

One doesn't have to be a completist to value this historically valuable CD; it's an artistic delight, so enjoy!

Short Sheets . . .

♪ Free Lecture on Duke Offered ♪

We know nothing about The Teaching Company other than what may be found on the internet. A posting there offers a free lecture, "Duke Ellington—the Jazzman" at its web site of the same name.

♪ Checking on Possible Iconic Kinship ♪

We have learned of two new condominiums bearing the name of Ellington. One in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is described as "elegant with fabulous views, right in the heart of Center City." Another, in Oakland, California, is advertised as having a "connoisseur's address," and "like it's iconic namesake Ellington brings big style and new prestige to Jack London Square." We got in touch with each to see if they were named after our hero. As we go to press, we have had no response from the one in Oakland. However, a public relations associate for the one in Philly tells us that while this upscale condo is not named after Duke, "We wanted a name that was memorable and elegant." Close enough, wouldn't you say.

♪ An 'A' Train in the Desert?!? ♪

From The Torch, a Smithsonian publication:

" . . . if you're one of the 17 members of the Smithsonian's Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, the A train can and will take you halfway around the world. In February, SJMO journeyed to Egypt for a series of historic concerts at the Great Pyramids of Giza and the Cairo and Alexandria opera houses.

"Take the A Train," Duke Ellington's swinging signature theme song, was just one of the highlights of a program that also featured the music of Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Quincy Jones, and Louis Armstrong, among others."

Supporter Passes Away

Dr. Lettie Austin-Fenderson died on Friday, 5 April at the Washington Hospital Center after a short illness. She quietly made financial donations to our Society in support of our scholarships, awards, projects, and other activities for students. She declined membership, apparently preferring that her total contributions be earmarked to benefit students.

A professor of English at Howard University for many years, she was known academically as Dr. Austin. She was the widow of Dr. Lewis Fenderson, at one time a member of the English faculty there also. (He, an ASCAP member and native Pittsburger, knew the Strayhorn family and was a friend of Duke Ellington, who reportedly early on offered him a position as lyricist.)

We extend to the family and other loved ones of Dr. Austin our gratitude and deepest sympathy.

The New Washingtonians-- Excellence as Norm

We are used to coming away lifted by performances by The New Washingtonians Orchestra at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and their offering on "Jazz Alive in DC Schools" last month was no exception. Personnel in the band changes as students graduate, but artistic discipline, technical accomplishment, aspiration, and obvious love of what they are doing remain admirable constants.

The varied and ambitious program opened with a show of technique al la Oscar Peterson on "Indiana" by student pianist Aaron Clay. Three Ellington pieces followed: "The Mooche," "Don't Get Around Much Any More," and the relatively unheard "Blue Ramble." The first was an exhibit of sensitive shading and controlled mutes, the second a trombone section that played with a biting burr (or was it the position of the mikes that made them stand out?), and the latter an understanding of carefully articulated understatement. The orchestra handled works by Herbie Hancock, Bobby Durham, Calvin Jones, Buck Hill and others as well. Throughout the band's section cohesion and overall ensemble playing were outstanding.

Following their performance that night these young troupers were to experience a taste of one-nighting, for they had to be at the school at 7 am sharp the next morning for a trip to Philadelphia to play in a competition.

Lord Discography Now Online

The Jazz Discography, often referred to as the Tom Lord discography and regarded by many as the best in its class, is available on the internet at <http://lordisco.com/tjd> We haven't checked it out, but its book and CD predecessors include such data as recording sessions, leaders, musicians, album titles, catalog numbers. Indexed, it reputedly lists 34,000 leaders, 189,000 recording sessions, and more than a million tune titles.

We Were Delighted to Have . . .

Jehangir B. Dalal, a decades-long, faithful member of our Society, at our April meeting, and we hope he is able to come again soon.

Ellington 2008

Places for Details about Program, Venues, Lodging, Participants, Registration Include:

Web Site: www.ellington2008.org

E-mail: contact@ellington2008.org

Mail: Ellington 2008, 38 Thurlstone Avenue, London, N12 OLP, United Kingdom

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

Sjef Hoefsmit

Congratulations and thanks to Sjef Hoefsmit for another excellent edition of *DEMS Bulletin*. It's available online free at Peter MacHare's website: www.depanorama.net/dems/

Mark Harvey

The Rev. Mark Harvey and his Aardvark Jazz Orchestra were nominated in the Boston Phoenix's Best Music Poll for "Best Local Jazz Act." Boston Phoenix describes itself as "an-arts-and-entertainment alternative newsweekly."

Anthony Brown

On 5 April, percussionist, composer, and ethnomusicologist Dr. Anthony Brown led his Asian American Orchestra in a concert at the Oakland Museum of California. The performance included music that was inspired by a chapter a book titled *Under the Dragon: California's New Culture*.

The band had just returned from a week-long residency at Pittsburgh's Manchester Craftsmen's Guild. While there the group celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Jerry Valburn

A couple of items in the "Good News" section of the current *DEMS Bulletin* indicate that Jerry Valburn's DETS 9013 [Duke Ellington Treasury Series] "is in production . . . and should be ready and on sale at the London conference in May." Liner notes will be by Lance Travers.

Joseph Daniel Clipper; Brian Gilmore; Rick Lee While none has a direct connection to what we are about, several current news media items have to do with three of our members.

In the *Washington Informer* of 28 February-5 March 2008, Joseph Daniel Clipper is profiled as a photography portrait artist. (Ed. Note: At one time his family owned the Ellington family house at 1212 T Street, NW in Washington that was sold several years ago.)

Att. Brian Gilmore, whom we know best as author of a complete volume of poetry about Ellington, teaches housing law at Howard University School of Law. In "This Old Housing Crisis," an essay published in *The Root*, he gives historical context for the current sub-prime situation.

Two photographs of Rick Lee, one with family members, are part of a multi-page expository article about Washington, DC at the time of Martin Luther King's assassination, the civil unrest immediately afterward, and what has transpired during the 40 years since in the now-called Shaw Area that includes the U Street corridor where Rick's family has had a flower and card shop business for generations. The president of the U Street Theatre Foundation, he is quoted several times.

March Program Featured Marion Cox and Sidney Bechet

Reported by Peter MacHare

Our March program was a grand affair indeed. We had the pleasure of hosting Michelle Denny and Kurt Augustus Lucas, who are children of Ellington vocalist Marion Cox. We also entertained their friends Wanda Evans Kimvilokani, Michelle Jackson, and Angela DeForest—as charming a group of people as you will find. We hope to see you all again soon. Now our goal will be to have Marion Cox herself attend one of our programs.

How did this come about? Ms. Cox has been on our mailing list for *Ellingtonia*. One day our member Alan Schneidmill happened to mention to me that he went to high school with her. We decided to feature a few Marion Cox vocals and a few recollections from Alan about her. We sent her a note about our plan, and she got in touch with her family to attend. And what a musical family this is! Two of our favorite bass players, Billy Taylor, Sr. and Billy Taylor, Jr. are part of this family, but that will be for another program. So, in March we concentrated on the beautiful voice of Marion Cox singing "Love Man" (two takes), "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance," and "St. Louis Blues," from 1946.

In the second half, we viewed the documentary about Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*. He was in the Ellington Orchestra briefly in 1926, but no recordings have survived. He was a tremendous influence on Ellington and also Johnny Hodges. Bechet is certainly not as famous in the United States as he should be, but that is partly because he spent most of his career in France, where he is indeed very famous.

Alan Schneidmill also presented a short jazz trivia quiz that we failed miserably. Our refreshments were provided by Joseph and Olivia McMillan. Thanks to all who helped make this meeting such a success!

To Join or To Renew Membership

Mail your check payable to
The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. at
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.
Our dues remain a bargain:
Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;
First-time-ever member, just \$20.

Keep in mind that memberships are for the calendar year.

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