

# Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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## **Delfeayo Marsalis Project: "Re-Working" of *Such Sweet Thunder***

A theatrical production entitled *Sweet Thunder: Duke & Shak*, in what might be called a re-composing/re-arranging by trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's Shakespearean suite, premiered in New Orleans on 20 January. (A 26 January performance at Austin's Paramount Theater was cancelled, for reasons we have not been able to ascertain.) A 36-city tour schedule includes February appearances in Charlotte, Orlando, Miami, and other cities and ends in May.

According to media releases, Marsalis says that his work has some songs and tunes that are longer than the originals, an octet rather than full orchestra, the insertion of "solo sections in the work," and changed "grooves on a number of compositions." Nonetheless, he explains, "It's still based on Shakespearean characters and themes and there are still composed character portraits."

In the show, Marsalis plays Ellington and Kenneth Brown, Jr., who acts in the *Treme* tv series, plays Strayhorn.

As quoted in a *Washington Post* article, Marsalis declares, "I've always believed that each generation is responsible for preserving and furthering the work of their forefathers while maintaining originality."

A CD by him, *Sweet Thunder*, is scheduled for release on 15 February on the Troubadour Jass label. The musicians include Delfeayo's brothers Branford on saxophone and Jason on drums.

## **Turkish Embassy Jazz Concerts**

The concert at the Turkish Embassy Residence that we reported in our December issue and to which a number of us were special invitees, has become the forerunner of a formal series of such concerts named for the Ertegun brothers. Curated by Jazz at Lincoln Center, because of limited space at the official residence, each program will be by invitation only.

## **March Program: The Eagerly Awaited Mosaic Set**

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

Our program for March will be devoted to the new box set that Steven Lasker has produced for Mosaic Records, *The Complete 1932-1940 Brunswick, Columbia and Master Recordings of Duke Ellington*. (See review on page 2 in this issue.)

We will play selections from the set, compare the sound quality to previous releases, and give you all a chance to examine the booklet that comes with the set.

Don't miss this program on **Saturday, 5 March 2011**, at **Grace Lutheran Church, 4300 - 16th Street, NW**, at the corner of Varnum Street, **Washington, DC** at **7:00 pm**.

(Note: We still need a volunteer to bring snacks. Call Peter MacHare at 301-982-4249 if you can help out.)

## **Ellington Devotees and Others Saddened By Death of Trumpeter Barrie Lee Hall, Jr.**

Barrie Lee Hall, Jr., who played in the last orchestra led by Duke himself, died in his home town of Houston on 24 January, reportedly of complications of diabetes. He was 61.

The story of his joining the band, as Hall himself told it, is that when the Ellington orchestra was in Houston for an engagement, the popular Texas tenor saxophonist Arnett Cobb arranged for Barrie, then a student at Texas Southern University, to meet Duke. At this first meeting Duke's reaction was, "Ah, how come you're not playing in my band?" and took his phone number down.

The young trumpeter and pianist took this to be courteous patronizing. But at 3:00 am one morning (sound familiar as the hour for a call from Duke, those of you who know?) the phone rang and it was Duke offering him a job in the band, which he took. That was in 1973 and Hall remained through Duke's death in 1974 and

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## **The Complete 1932-1940 Brunswick, Columbia and Master Recordings of Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra**

Mosaic Records MD11-248. 11 Discs. Available from \$179.

**Reviewed by Peter MacHare**

In this 11-CD box set, Mosaic Records and producers Steven Lasker and Scott Wenzel have given us one of the finest Ellington reissues ever produced. The title of the set is perfectly descriptive of the contents: it contains all the surviving records from 1932 to 1940 made by the Ellington Orchestra (i.e., not the small group recordings) for the three labels listed—Brunswick, Columbia and Master (Master is a record label and is not used in the sense of a master or alternate take). There are three reasons to recommend this set: (1) the music is fantastic, (2) the sound is superb, and (3) the liner notes are excellent.

### **The Notes**

Let's talk about the liner notes first. Even calling the descriptive material that comes with this set "liner notes" does them a disservice. You receive an 11x11, 44-page booklet with a glossy cover and many excellent photos from Steven Lasker's collection. If you flip through the pages, you will find an essay on the Ellington Orchestra during the period with biographical information on each member; detailed comments concerning every session and title recorded; a complete discography of all the material; a list of release dates, as opposed to recording dates; and a list of known takes that apparently have not survived, which is distressingly large.

The notes are written to inform, but also enhance the listening experience. In the *Bulletin* of the Duke Ellington Music Society, our member and dear friend Sjef Hoefsmit says about Steven Lasker's notes that "Nothing gives me more satisfaction than to read his notes and to listen to the music at the same time" (*DEMS* 10/3-5).

Perhaps two examples will suffice to give you an idea of the wealth of information here. First, variations in the spelling of the recording "Diga Diga Do" are unavoidable as even the package submitted with the copyright application is not consistent in the spelling of that title. Second, Freddie Jenkins was 4'10" tall. But in no way is information presented as mere trivia, but connected to the music. If you want to know why it is important to know how tall was Freddie Jenkins, buy the set and read the notes.

### **The Sound**

As soon as I began listening to the first disc, a smile crossed my face as I was hearing more deeply into this music than ever before. In removing extraneous noise from old recordings, the danger is that some of the music will be removed as well. Mr. Lasker has achieved a remarkable balance in this regard; in many of these recordings (some of which I have listened to hundreds of times) I heard notes I just never heard before, especially from the bassists. The earliest session presented in this set was recorded February 2, 1932 and features the Ivie Anderson classic "It Don't Mean a Thing." I have always been a fan of New Orleans bassist Wellman Braud and have never heard him to better advantage than here, where you can often hear him coax several sounds out of one note (and only now have I learned to pronounce his surname correctly by reading Lasker's notes).

### **The Music**

Over the years I have had many friends tell me that they were familiar with Ellington's "Jungle Music" and with the Blanton-Webster Band, but not with the music that came between. Classics like "It Don't Mean a Thing," "Sophisticated Lady," "Solitude," "In a Sentimental Mood," "Caravan," and "Prelude to a Kiss" come from this period, as well as lesser known works that are just as good such as "Ducky Wucky" and the irrepressible "I've Got To Be a Rug Cutter." In addition to Ivie Anderson, other great vocalists on these recordings include Bing Crosby, the Mills Brothers, Ethel Waters, Billy Strayhorn, and even Duke Ellington himself. Of course, our heroes are there--Johnny Hodges, Lawrence Brown, Cootie Williams and all the rest in resplendent glory. There are also 8 tracks on this set that have never been released before. It is somewhat astounding that this much new Ellington could be found at this late date.

It is worth pointing out that the Mosaic box set that contains the small group recordings from this period, also done by Steven Lasker, is still in print. *Duke Ellington: 1936-40 Small Group Sessions* (Mosaic Records MD7-235) consists of 7 CDs and sells for \$119.

*Continued on page 3 under "Review of Mosaic Set"*

## Short Sheets . . .

### ♪ Ellington Orchestra to Alaska ♪

The Duke Ellington Orchestra, under the leadership of Duke's grandson Paul Ellington, is scheduled to perform in the Atwood Concert Hall in Anchorage, Alaska on 19 February.

### ♪ DownBeat Reviews Cohen Book on Duke ♪

Although a bit tardy in our opinion, *DownBeat* has published a review of our member Harvey G. Cohen's *Duke Ellington's America*. It opens with the assertion that, as the book's title suggests, it "is as much about the country as about the composer."

### ♪ Brian Rust ♪

Brian Rust, 88, well known for his two-volume *Jazz Records 1897-1942*, passed away on 5 January in Dorset, England. As well as a discographer he was also a jazz journalist and reviewer.

### ♪ Plans of Maison du Duke ♪

Laurent Mignard has announced that the organization will transcribe some never released Ellington compositions and will present them on CD this year, has scheduled a French translation of *Music Is My Mistress* for 2012, and is looking forward to having an Ellington conference in France in 2012. Meanwhile, on 26 March, Mignard's The Duke Orchestra will present an Ellington concert at the Alhambra in Paris.

### ♪ John Lamb CD ♪

Former Ellington bassist John Lamb's CD *Conversations North of the Border* has been released.

### ♪ DESS Plans Follow-Up CD ♪

We call your attention to our commentary on the *Echoes of Duke Live* CD in our December issue. In an insert in the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden's latest *Bulletin*, Jan Falk, the organization's chairman, says that their board "hopes to be able to produce a follow-up in a not too distance future and with music samples from the orchestras that have participated in recent years."

## Barrie Lee Hall, Jr. (Continued from page 1)

continued with that orchestra when Mercer Ellington assumed its leadership. When Mercer died in 1996, Barrie conducted it for a year or so and intermittently since.

An accomplished musician, during his career Hall did orchestrations, wrote scores and arrangements for musicals and other music events, did transcriptions, and worked on a project to organize and preserve Ellington's music manuscripts. Importantly, he pretty much took over the tradition of growl trumpeter that was a unique feature of Ellington orchestras over the years. He became the literal inheritor of Cootie Williams' trumpet, telling your editor some time ago that Cootie himself actually handed it over to him. A video of his rendering of a Cootie feature, "The Shepherd," can be found online at at least two places: [youtube.com/watch?v=WGyotDjgeaMF](http://youtube.com/watch?v=WGyotDjgeaMF) and [www.jazzhouston.com/articles/words/barrie\\_lee\\_hall\\_rip](http://www.jazzhouston.com/articles/words/barrie_lee_hall_rip)

Two other Texas Southern students followed Hall into Duke's band, drummer Quinten "Rocky" White, who stayed on for a while after Duke's death and died in 2008; and vocalist Anita Moore, who returned to Houston in 1998 to teach school and died in 2001. The three were sometimes called "the Mod Squad" because of their youth in a band of such veterans.

During recent years Hall was musical director of Houston's Liberty Baptist Church. "I love working in the church. It brings out of me my essence. I use music to gladden the spirit of people," he wrote on his web site.

Three "goodbyes" were scheduled for him: a family and friends afternoon at the McCoy Harrison Funeral Home on 3 February, a memorial jam session with the Conrad Johnson orchestra the next day, and a "Last Chance to Say Goodbye, Barrie" celebration at a church on the morning of 5 February.

We extend to Hall's wife Lula; brother Edwin; sisters Loretta, Mary, Cassandra, and Roslyn; and other loved ones our deep sympathy.

## Review of Mosaic Set (Continued from page 2)

I imagine that a product the size of *The Complete 1932-1940 Brunswick, Columbia, and Master Recordings of Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra* could potentially consume an unlimited amount of time, yet it was created in a commercial world with deadlines and sales goals (in fact, a pre-Christmas release screams deadline). The mere fact that a product as good as this exists creates a corresponding duty upon consumers who enjoy excellence in music and scholarship to purchase it. This set is a limited edition of 5,000 copies. The chief danger lies in procrastination (Ellington was a procrastinator, perhaps it is understandable that some of his fans have become so as well). If you put off your purchase and the set sells out, you will regret the "one that got away." If price is an issue, consider that the cost is barely more than \$16 per compact disc—and you get so much more. My advice, fellow Ellingtonians, is to buy this set even if it means eating turkey hot dogs for a week.

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

### About Our Members

#### Priscilla R. Ramsey

Priscilla R. Ramsey's is the author of a recently published book, a scholarly yet accessible critical text entitled *Postmodernism, Culture, and Class in John Edgar Wideman's Selected Fictions*, now available from Amazon and other vendors in paperback. Dr. Ramsey, an authority on the Harlem Renaissance, has taught at Howard and Rutgers Universities and has published extensively on the arts, culture, and critical theory.

#### Arthur Luby

"Memories of Paul" by Arthur Luby in our November 2010 issue has been reprinted in the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden's quarterly *Bulletin* (No. 1, February 2011). It is one of a few selected articles printed in English rather than Swedish and is enhanced by interesting photographs of Paul alone and with Duke. Congratulations, Art!

## We Are Invited

The DC Music Salon will hold a "Duke Ellington: Our Neighbor" program at 7 pm on Wednesday, 20 April at the new Watha T. Daniel Library, neighborhood, 1630 - 7th Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Our members are invited to come and encouraged to participate in the discussion. Patricia Willard and Ellington biographer John Hasse will be special guests, and the documentary *Duke Ellington's Washington* will be shown.

DC Music Salon programs are not lectures, but typically include films and open conversations among guest experts and members of the audience. The Salon meets on the second Tuesday of even months. Previous topics include the "Howard Theater," "Go-Go," and "Nightclub 9:30."

Incidentally, day sessions of the first International Ellington Study Group Conference, sponsored by our Society in 1983, were held at the original Watha T. Daniel Library, at the same spot of the present, new structure.

## See an Episode of *Time for Joya!*

Our president, Peter MacHare, has a knack for coming across interesting things on the internet, especially anything with an Ellington connection.

This time it's the only episode known to exist of the *Time for Joya! Series* for kids that former Ellington vocalist Joya Sherrill hosted on New York television station WPIX in the 1970s. You can see this rare video at [www.tvparty.com/lostny2joya2.html](http://www.tvparty.com/lostny2joya2.html).

## Jack Towers Night

by Art Luby, Secretary

The February meeting of the Society was devoted to the appreciation and memory of long time member Jack Towers and his work.

Jack was, of course, the brilliant sound engineer responsible for, among many accomplishments, the preservation and restoration of the recording of the Ellington Orchestra's legendary performance in 1940 at Fargo, North Dakota—an event originally recorded by Jack and his close friend, the late Dick Burris.

The meeting was well attended and was graced by the presence of Jack's family, including his wife Rhoda, daughters Martha Caudill and Jeanie Kemp, and granddaughter Ann Marie McIntyre.

A number of examples of Jack's work in preserving Ellington performances were played along with several recorded interviews on PBS. However, one of the most rewarding features of the evening was the exchange of fond personal memories by family and Society members of Jack and his work, including wife Rhoda's recollection of Jack, Dick, and the band members' excitement as they listened to the initial recording after the first set at Fargo some sixty years ago.

## Back Copies, Anyone?

Imagine, we are now in our 19th year of *Ellingtonia*, and we have a surprising number of back issues, starting with May-June 1993 when we published it with a generic title, "Newsletter." If you have published in it or have any other reason to want copies of back issues, just let us know which ones. Simply send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope and we will try to honor your request.

### To Join or To Renew Membership

Send your check payable to  
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Our dues remain a bargain:  
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