



# Wild Bill Davis

Duke's  
Organ Grinder

## I detta nummer – In this issue

Ledare	2	Monsignor John Sanders	
Cootie Williams i ord, bild och ton	2	in memoriam	13
Wild Bill Davis – A real gone organist	4	Harlem Air Shaft	14
Wild Bill Davis Biography	7	Bensonality och Jam With Sam	17
Wild Bill Davis (by Steve Voce)	9	Duke Ellingtons textförfattare	18
Johnny Hodges interviewed	10	Kallelse	20

# Gott Nytt År!

Nu går vi in i ett nytt DESS-år. Det 25:e året i DESS verksamhet. Kanske värt att celebrera vid något tillfälle under året. Vår första Bulletin kom ut hösten 1994 och har sedan rullat på. I början bestod medlemstidningen av enbart 12 sidor. 2010 ökade sidantalet till 16 sidor och i och med sista numret 2012 ökades sidantalet till 20. Även om det funnits material tillgängligt för att fylla fler än 20 sidor har vi av praktiska skäl ändå beslutat att stanna vid detta sidantal. Det har att göra med kostnaden för tryckning och distribution. En 20-sidig tidning väger strax under 100 g och det är en gräns som vi tvingats leva med. Under de senaste åren har tidningen distribuerats som Posttidning B, vilket varit det billigaste alternativet. Men i och med 2018 års utgång har Postnord bestämt att skall man skicka en tidning som Posttidning B måste man skicka minst 500 exemplar per gång. Så många medlemmar har vi inte. Vi tvingas därför bita i det sura äpplet och måste nu packa tidningen i kuvert och skicka som ekonomibrev. Det blir dyrare för oss men dessvärre enda möjligheten.

I min ledare i vår förra Bulletin gick jag ut med ett upprop och efterlyste medlemmar som kunde tänka sig att på något sätt delta i styrelsens arbete. Antingen som formell styrelseledamot eller adjungerad dylik. Dessvärre har ingen hört av sig. Det är tråkigt. Vi kan behöva nytt blod och nya idéer i styrelsen, men nu får vi tydligen rulla på i de gamla hjulspåren.

Vår CD nr 5, som distribuerades med vår förra Bulletin, har blivit mycket väl mottagen, både av våra egna medlemmar och av DESUKs (Duke Ellington Society of United Kingdom). Om två år kommer vi att ge ut en CD igen.

Nu när vi är inne på ett nytt år vill jag påminna alla om att betala medlemsavgiften. Den är viktig för oss. I skrivande stund har ungefär hälften av våra medlemmar betalat och jag hoppas att de resterande medlemmarna betalar sin avgift under de närmaste månaderna. Viktigt är att ni anger vem som betalar, annars kan jag inte pricka av er i matrikeln. Bulletin nr 2/2019 kommer endast att skickas ut till de som betalat för året.

I sammanhanget är det intressant att notera att procenten utländska medlemmar sakta ökar. Anledningen torde vare att dessa medlemmar finner Bulletinens engelskspråkiga artiklar intressanta och läsvärda och motiverar medlemsavgiften.

Avslutningsvis vill jag hälsa alla medlemmar välkomna till årsmötet den 18 februari. Dessutom kommer ni att få avnjuta ett personligt färgat kåseri av Rune Sjögren och därefter musikalisk underhållning av högsta klass. Alla minns vi väl konserten i Stockholms Konserthus i samband med Ellingtonkonferensen 1994 då John Lewis tillsammans med Davor Kajfes framförde underbara Ellingtontolkningar för två pianon. Nu kommer Davor Kajfes att påminna oss om detta tillfälle. Ni är alla varmt välkomna!



Leif Jönsson, ordförande i DESS

## Cootie Williams i ord, bild och ton

Bo Haufmans föredrag om Cootie Williams blev en ömsint och detaljrik beskrivning av en framgångsrik personlighet och musiker. Om födelsedagen tvista de lärde, men anges numera till 10 juli 1911. Cooties uppväxt i Mobile, Alabama, var kärleksfull och med en bra lärare lärde hans sig snabbt att läsa noter och spela trumpet. Han "debuterade" vid 14 års ålder i familjen Youngs band med Lester, och var vid 17 års ålder redan professionell.

Den första skivinspelningen gjorde han tillsammans med pianisten James P. Johnson 1928, och han framträdde också i Chick Webbs och Fletcher Hendersons orkestrar. 1929 anställdes Cootie av



Duke Ellington när orkestern spelade på Cotton Club, som ersättare för growlspecialisten Bubber Miley. Under de första åren i sin karriär spelade Cootie med öppet horn men utvecklade nu successivt growl-tekniken likt sin företrädare. Detta spelsätt skulle i fortsättningen också bli hans signum. Ellingtonsejouren kom att vara till 1940, men Cootie var också under alla dessa år produktiv i andra sammanhang som trumpetare och vokalist.

Bo illustrerade också Cooties utveck-

ling musikaliskt. Vi fick bl a höra *Nine Little Miles From Ten Ten Tennessee*, *New East St. Louis Toodle-Oo* (1937) och *Lost In Meditation*, inspelad under Johnny Hodges namn. Ellington skrev också som bekant *Concerto For Cootie* direkt för honom under dessa år. Dessutom tillägnades Cootie flera minnesvärda melodier där han var en pregnant huvudsolist. *Ain't the Gravy Good* med Cooties sång var ett exempel från den tiden.

1940 började Cootie i Benny Goodmans orkester, en för den tiden mycket uppmärksam händelse. Jammet *Waiting for Benny* från en sextettspelning från 13 mars 1941 var en av hans tidiga inspelningar. Anställningen hos Benny



Bo Haufman.

Goodman varade i ett år eftersom Cootie ville bilda en egen stor orkester. Från 1942 och flera år framåt var han mycket framgångsrik med sin orkester i olika konstellationer, men tvingades 1948 minska till en sextett eftersom jobben uteblev. Under 50-talet arbetade han bl a på Savoy Ballroom med främst R&B - betonad musik och förde dessa år en mer tillbakadragen tillvaro.

Efter 22 års frånvaro, år 1962, var det dags igen för Ellingtons orkester. Vi fick bl a höra *Tootie For Cootie* från 1 juli 1967, samt en förnämlig inspelning av *Take the "A" Train* från en konsert i Oslo 1971 med Cootie i högform. Bo Haufmans framträdande var inträngande, pedagogiskt och mycket uppskattat av deltagarna. Det var lätt för alla att konstatera att Cootie Williams är en av hans stora favoriter.

### Filmer från anno dazumal

Anders Asplunds del av kvällen var som vanligt välkomponerad med filmer i anslutning till Cootie Williamsföreläsningen, men också andra filmer med kända jazznamn från olika tidsepoker. Filmen *Check and Double-check* från 1930 fick inleda programmet med melodierna *Three Little Words* och *Old Man Blues*. Därefter Cooties storband från början av 40-talet samt *Tootie For Cootie* med Ellingtons orkester från en inspelning från Cirkus i Stockholm januari 1963.

Därefter en mycket blandad kompot: *Minnie The Moocher* med Cab Calloways orkester från 30-talet; glimtar från Benny Goodmans konsert 1938 i Carnegie Hall; *The Joint Is Jumpin'* med Fats



Anders Asplund.

Waller; Art Tatum-jam och ett kort inslag med Billy Eckstine och orkester från början av 40-talet. Sedan Dukes orkester i en BBC-inspelning från 1964 av *Rockin' In Rhythm*. Ytterligare stora jazznamn passerade revy; Dave Brubeck, Paul Desmond, Wille "the Lion" Smith, Wes Montgomery och Marian McPartland. Slutligen en brittisk Granada-inspelning av *Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue* från 1963 med Ellington och Paul Gonsalves i högform. Se det var en riktig musikkväll!

Thomas Harne

## The 26th Duke Ellington Conference

Nu är det bekräftat. The 2020 International Duke Ellington Conference kommer att arrangeras av Georgetown University i Washington DC. Tidpunkten är satt till 15/20 mars, 2020. Temat för konferensen är "Mapping Duke Ellington's World".

De som praktiskt ansvarar för evenemanget är Anna Harwell Celenza och Thomas E. Caestecker, båda tydligen engagerade i musikundervisningen vid universitetet. Under de närmaste månaderna kommer man gå ut med "Call for Papers". I sinom tid kommer vi att få veta mer om avgifter, hotell och program och vi kommer att hålla våra medlemmar löpande informerade.

## The Second Portrait Of The Lion

I vårt föregående nummer av Bulletinen ingick en artikel om Willie "The Lion" Smith. I den nämndes att Duke Ellington den 15 maj 1963 gjorde tre tagningar av *The Second Portrait Of The Lion*



och att dessa ingick i Ellingtons s.k. "stockpile", som numera till största delen härbärgeras hos Danska Radion och i utvalda delar getts ut av Storyville Records. Vår misstanke att dessa tagningar skulle komma att ges ut framdeles av Storyville förnekas dock av Bjarne Busk, som gått igenom allt material. Bjarne har förklarat för oss att dessa tagningar endast kan betraktas som "fingeruppvärmningar" samtidigt som allmän

oordning råder i studion. Varje tagning omfattar endast en tidsrymd om 17 till 37 sekunder och är således knappast av något större musikaliskt intresse. Vi tackar Bjarne för hans observation.

Bo Haufman

## Nya medlemmar

DESS hälsar följande nya medlemmar välkomna i vår illustra förening:

Wayne Clutton, Birchington, England  
Thomas Malm, Stockholm

DESS behöver fler medlemmar.

Inspirera Dina vänner och bekanta att också vara med!

# Wild Bill Davis – A real gone organist

By Bo Haufman

Wild Bill Davis was engaged by Ellington during the summer of 1969, and remained with the band until July 31, 1971. But he had worked with Ellington long before that as will be explained later. To most people Wild Bill Davis is remembered for *April In Paris*, a melody he arranged for Count Basie's band and which became one of Basie's greatest hits. The number was also performed by the Ellington band on several occasions during Davis's stay with the band. *April In Paris* was composed by Vernon Duke in 1932 and the lyrics were written by Yip Harburg. The first recording of the tune was made shortly thereafter by the singer Marion Chase, but the melody didn't reach fame until Basie made his hit recording.

## April In Paris

Wild Bill Davis, who liked the tune and saw its potential, had recorded *April In Paris* in 1953 with his trio (Okeh 6946) and had made an arrangement of the song for Count Basie's band. When Davis and his trio played opposite the Basie band at Birdland in 1955, Davis presented Basie with his arrangement and Bill Crow has described the incident in his book *From Birdland To Broadway* with the following words: "Bill was playing the Hammond organ with his own trio opposite Basie that week, and when the band ran down his chart, he played organ with them while Basie listened. Davis booted the band along, playing the figures with them to help them learn the phrasing. At the end, Davis initiated the "One more time" reprise that Basie always used on that arrangement. After the last 'One more time' and several minutes of applause from the audience, Basie climbed back onto the piano bench, pulled the mike over and said, 'Thanks for the arrangement, Bill. Now I've got to go out and buy a damn organ!'

Wild Bill could really make the organ swing. On October 22, 1954, he ap-



peared at Birdland with his trio and his performance of *April In Paris* drove the audience crazy and he can be heard, maybe for the first time, with his 'One more time' ending, which seems to have become sort of a part of the composition.

*April In Paris* was on the repertoire of most big bands in the 1940s, but it was Count Basie's recording on July 26, 1955 (Clef 89162) of Wild Bill Davis's arrangement that made the melody known to most everybody. Thad Jones' trumpet

solo is a gem and Basie's "One More Time" and "One More Once" contributed to the popularity.

The melody was on Duke Ellington's repertoire as early as 1940 as we know from a radio broadcast from Hotel Sherman in Chicago on September 11, 1940. Released on LP Jazz Supreme JS 704.

## Mercer recording

Ellington's cooperation with Wild Bill Davis started already in 1950. At this

time Duke Ellington, together with his son Mercer Ellington and Leonard Feather, had started a recording company, which they named "Mercer Records". Ellington used this label for experiments and presentations of musicians normally not included in his big band. In November 1950 he recorded Wild Bill Davis and his "Real Gone Organ", a name probably initiated by Leonard Feather. Two numbers were recorded: *Things Ain't What They Used To Be* and *Make No Mistake*. In addition to Davis we hear Duke Ellington on piano, Johnny Collins guitar and Jo Jones on drums, originally released on Mercer M-1955.

Wild Bill Davis was a friend of Johnny Hodges' and when Hodges recorded under his own name for Verve in the early 1960s, Davis took part in many of them. LPs like *Blue Hodge*, *Sandy's Gone*, *Joe's Blues*, *Wings And Things* are some of them. Every summer Wild Bill Davis used to play at a club in Atlantic City, Grace's Little Belmont, and for a few days in August 1966 he had invited Johnny Hodges and Lawrence Brown to join him. The RCA recording engineer Brad McCuen was at hand and recorded some of the music for later release on Victor LPM3393. Stanley Dance has described the entire session in detail in his book *The World of Duke Ellington*.

Wild Bill and Johnny Hodges seemed to have identical ideas about music. They were two of a kind. They both preferred swinging and jumping tunes. Ellington probably feared that Hodges would prefer to go on playing with Davis and leave his band, which would be devastating for him. Jim Northover, in his talk for the Duke Ellington Society in Toronto in October last year, described the situation with the following words: "Duke Ellington was concerned that Hodges relationship with Wild Bill Davis had been going on too long, from about 1960 to 1969. Hodges was making too much money and having a better time with Wild Bill Davis, he even smiled once, so instead of offering Hodges a raise, which Hodges always wanted, he hired Wild Bill instead. We all know that giving people a salary increase does not make them happy in the long run. It needs to be repeated annually in or-



Mercer record signed by Wild Bill Davis.

der to be effective. So hiring Wild Bill Davis was a masterstroke of personnel management. Davis acted as arranger and substitute pianist. He was used in Duke's band sparingly as Davis was a hard driving rocker and Ellington used him only where appropriate, when he didn't impact upon the more subtle shadings that Ellington employed in much of his work."

### Rainbow Grill

During August 1968 Duke Ellington had his annual performance at the Rainbow Grill in New York and he asked Wild Bill Davis to come up with some arrangements for the small group playing at the venue. He especially wanted him to write arrangement for Joya Sherrill and in fact he accompanied her on piano on some numbers. As from now Davis was permanently engaged by Ellington and would remain so until mid 1971.

Many Ellington fans raise the question whether Wild Bill Davis really fit-

ted into the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Several of us feel he didn't. The sound of an organ was not a traditional Ellington sound but we can find several explanations for Ellington's hiring of Davis. First of all they were good friends and most probably Johnny Hodges advocated for Davis joining the band. Secondly Ellington did not have the time to do all the necessary arrangements. He was mostly concerned with composing new music and left the arrangements of the music to several others and Davis became one of them. Thirdly Ellington always wanted to try out new sounds. When Ray Nance joined the band as a trumpet player he happened also to be a superb violinist. Duke didn't search a violinist but since Ray played it so perfectly he made good use of that new sound. The same goes for Norris Turney and his flute and Tyree Glenn with his vibraphone. Wild Bill Davis's Hammond organ offered a new sound that Ellington surely wanted to try out.



Over the years Duke Ellington had many recording sessions for his so called "stock pile". A couple of years ago one of them, erroneously called The Conny Plank Session, was released on the German Grönland Records. The recordings were made in Cologne on July 9, 1970. Two numbers are performed with several takes and they all have in

common that Wild Bill Davis is featured. One number is titled *Alerado*, a composition by Wild Bill dedicated to the French jazz critic Alexandre Rado. The arrangement is most likely by Ellington and he employs Wild Bill in a more subtle way. The second number *Afrique* shows off Wild Bill to a lesser degree but it is of special interest to Swedish aficionados because on one take Lena Junoff can be heard with a vocal obbligato.

### The Composer

Wild Bill Davis contributed to the Ellington repertoire with several composition. One is *Azure Te*, a number that Wild Bill had recorded as early as 1951. When Ellington took it up it offered solo opportunities for Wild Bill and Johnny Hodges and can be heard on the "70th Birthday Concert". Another number that Ellington took a fancy to was *R.T.M.*, that was played quite often featuring Wild Bill together with different other soloists. He also composed *Sans Snyphelle*, *Naidni Remmus* and *Organ Rag*, which were all performed only once.

However, Duke Ellington made good use of Wild Bill Davis in his own compositions. *Black Swan* was a number featuring Wild Bill and often performed in 1969 thru 1971. *Blues For New Orleans* is a composition forming a part of Ellington's *New Orleans Suite*. It was originally intended for Johnny Hodges

and his return to the soprano saxophone, but shortly before the recording, Johnny Hodges passed away, and instead the number was entrusted to Wild Bill Davis. He also played various blues numbers that in the New DESOR discography have been listed as *Blues No. 18*, 20 and 21.

### Recorded in Europe

Simultaneously with his engagement by Ellington, Wild Bill Davis made recordings with other groups and after his departure from the Ellington organization he spent much time in Europe where he made several recordings. In 1990 he took part in the Ellington Conference in Ottawa, Canada. As can be seen from the attached pictures of Wild Bill Davis he became bald-headed early in life which seems to have bothered him and he therefore started to wear a wig.

Duke Ellington has devoted a short chapter to Wild Bill Davis in his autobiography *Music Is My Mistress* and Stanley Dance has made a lengthy interview with Davis presented in his book *The World Of Duke Ellington*.

William Strethen Davis left this world on August 17, 1995. Those who want to know more about him are recommended to pay a visit to [www.wildbilldavis.com](http://www.wildbilldavis.com) where most everything about Wild Bill Davis can be found.

## Was Bill Davis "Wild"?

Why did he become "Wild Bill"? He certainly didn't show a particularly "wild" character. He was rather more quiet than wild. Another jazz musician who got this kind of nickname was Wild Bill Davison. I don't know if he was particularly "wild", but Bill Davis certainly was not a "wild" personality. An inquiry on Duke-LYM gave several explanations to the name.

Michael Menege, a musician from Saint Paul, said "that pretty much every musician named Bill that he had worked with got to be called "Wild Bill" at some point. It just made it funnier if they had a non-wild personality."

Brian Koller commented, "Bill Da-

vis is such a common name that he may have believed a stage name was needed to further stand out. 'Wild Bill' Hickok is a potential name-sake, but the book *Soul Jazz* by Bob Porter provides another possibility: 'Davis left Louis Jordan, near the peak of the latter's popularity in mid-1948 to experiment with the organ sound. A lot of people thought he was crazy to do so.'

Brian Priestley stated, "as far as I recall, this was the inspiration of Leo-



nard Feather, producer of the first Davis single for Mercer Records (with Duke at the piano). I believe it was Feather who decided on the billing "Wild Bill Davis and his Real Gone Organ." The Mercer Recording Brian is referring to was made in 1950 and Leonard Feather's initiative certainly established the name "Wild Bill Davis", but the fact is, that according to the discographies, Davis made a solo recording already in 1949 for Mercury as Wild Bill Davis.

Stanley Dance, in his book *The World of Duke Ellington*, describes Wild Bill Davis as a serious, intelligent musician once mistakenly nicknamed "Wild".

Bo Haufman

# Wild Bill Davis Biography

By T.C. Pfeiler

Wild Bill Davis pioneered the Hammond Organ in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His always famous driving and swinging trio concept with organ, guitar and drums has served as inspiration for all important jazz organists including Jimmy Smith. This site should help to make his name better known to contemporary jazz fans, because he played a main role in the emergence of the Hammond Organ as a true solo jazz-instrument. As a sensitive and creative arranger, Wild Bill Davis proved his deep musical understanding. The master of heavy block-chords said: "I play more big band than organ".

Wild Bill Davis was born William Strethen Davis on November 24th, 1918, in Glasgow, Missouri. The family moved to Parsons, Kansas, when Bill was a youngster. Davis got his first music lessons from his father, a singer who also collaborated with Buck Clayton beside his main job as a breakman for a railroad company. After studies at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and at Wiley College in Texas he moved to Chicago in 1939, where he worked as an arranger and guitarist for Milt Larkin. Davis stayed with Larkin through 1942. No recordings from this era are known.

In 1943 he arranged for pianist Earl "Fatha" Hines. Bill Davis did his first piano recordings probably with singer and alto saxophonist Buster Bennett for Columbia in 1945. Later in 1945, Davis joined vocalist/saxophonist Louis Jordan's Tympany Five. He was the main arranger and pianist for Jordan, who was one of the most successful jukebox performers in the late 1940s. With *Choo Choo Boogie* the group had a number seven hit in the US singles chart. The Davis arrangement over Jordan's version of *Saturday Night Fish Fry* was one of the first Rock'n Roll songs in history.

In 1947 he recorded with Tiny Bradshaw for Savoy Records. Late in 1948 he worked as pianist with saxophonist Claude McLin and Ed McLin on trumpet. Sometimes the group backed Billie



Wild Bill Davis with Louis Jordan and his Tympany Five.

Holiday at the Pershing Ballroom in Chicago.

In 1949 Davis began recording on the Hammond Organ as a single and with Louis Jordan in 1950. His new trio conception with organ, guitar and drums was a very powerful and phenomenal swinging vehicle and most of today's jazz organists still use this concept. Davis's first album with his organ was released in 1950: "Wild Bill Davis And His Real Gone Organ" on Mercer Ellington's Label Mercer Records, featuring Duke Ellington on piano for the song *Things Ain't What They Used To Be*.

## Organ boom

In 1951 Davis recorded the album "Live At Birdland" with guitarist Floyd Smith and drummer Christopher Columbus. Floyd Smith replaced Bill Jennings who was a genial guitarist but

unfortunately a drug addict. Smith later produced and married disco sound queen Loleatta Holloway. After two final albums with Jordan in 1951 he signed with Okeh/Epic Records and recorded a number of great 78rpm records and 10" and 12" LPs. It was the beginning of the "organ boom" in the USA. Davis was soon called the "daddy" of all jazz-organists. In 1952 he recorded with Hot Lips Page for King Records and in 1955 with Frank Morgan.

From now on he was called "Wild" Bill Davis. His nickname was created by Leonard Feather. In 1955 Wild Bill Davis arranged Vernon Duke's all time standard *April In Paris* for Count Basie's Big Band. Although Davis was unable to make it to the recording session because his organ transporter broke down on the way to the studio. The song was a big hit for Basie and Davis used the final chorus

later as intermission riff with his own groups.

Davis signed with Imperial in 1956, recorded with Ivory Joe Hunter in 1957 for Atlantic and with Illinois Jacquet for Verve Records in 1958. In 1959 Davis switched to Everest. He recorded a number of commercial successful albums under his name and with singer Gloria Lynne. Another album in collaboration with trumpeter Charlie Shavers called "Hit Songs From Milk And Honey" was also very successful.

While under contract with Everest he recorded under the pseudonym "Strethen Davis" with Arnett Cobb in 1959 for Prestige Records. The same year Davis played organ on the Capitol album "Jackie Gleason Presents Aphrodisia", still a Jackie Gleason all time bestseller.

In 1960 Wild Bill Davis was included in Raymond Scott's unusual production "Lute Song, Raymond Scott Plus The Secret Seven" released on Top Rank Records while both worked for Everest. The music was reissued on CD as "The Unexpected" a couple of years ago. The identity of the musicians was "top secret" for a long time, but jazz listeners should recognize the identity of most of the performers.

### With Hodges and Ellington

In 1961 the first album in collabora-

tion with Duke Ellington's altosax star Johnny Hodges was released on Verve Records: "Blue Hodge". A number of remarkable albums should follow until Wild Bill Davis joined the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1969, one year after Billy Strayhorn passed away.

The album "Little Jimmy Scott Acc. By The Marty Paich/Gerald Wilson Orchestra" from 1962 was overdubbed with Wild Bill's organ lines some years later while Scott's voice was deleted. From now on this album was sold as "Wild Bill Davis - Wonderful World Of Love". Davis signed with Coral Records the same year. He was the organist on Ella Fitzgerald's very successful Verve album "These Are The Blues" in 1963 and on Milt Jackson/Ray Brown's "Much In Common" in 1964.

From 1964 to 1969 Wild Bill Davis was under contract with RCA Victor and recorded a number of remarkable albums. He collaborated with Sonny Stitt on two productions for Roulette Records. For more than 25 years Davis performed in Atlantic City, NJ. Two of his RCA albums are live-recordings from the club Grace's Little Belmont: "In Atlantic City" and "Midnight To Dawn" (Wild Bill's personal favorite album), recorded on August 10th and 11th, 1966, with members of the Duke Ellington Orchestra and James "Dickie" Thompson

on guitar. Thompson composed the flip side of Bill Haley's Rock'n Roll hit single "Rock Around The Clock", entitled "Ten Women (And One Man)".

From 1969 to 1971 Davis worked as arranger and organist and second pianist for the Duke Ellington Orchestra. A lot of recorded material from this period is still unissued. With Ellington he came to Europe for the first but not for the last time. In 1970 he recorded with Paul Gonsalves in Paris the album "Paul Gonsalves In Paris" for the French label Blue Star Records under his other pseudo "Prince Woodyard".

### Touring Europe

In the 1970s Wild Bill Davis started a second career in Europe. He performed on important European Jazz Festivals, recorded many albums for the French label Black & Blue and for Doris and Joerg Koran's Swiss label Jazz Connaisseur with sidemen from his beginnings and/or with prominent French musicians like tenor saxophonist Guy Lafitte and vibraphonist Dany Doriz.

In 1976 Milt Larkin's reunion album was recorded in New York with Wild Bill Davis on organ. From 1978 to 1982 Davis toured Europe with vibraphonist Lionel Hampton as a member of his Giants of Jazz. In 1978 Davis recorded with blues pianist Memphis Slim in Paris the album "Blues And Women". In 1992 Davis recorded his last CD in Paris called "Paris-Barcelona Connection" for Black & Blue Records.

Wild Bill Davis' home was in St. Albans, NY, but he passed away from a heart attack on August 17, 1995, in Moores town, NJ, during convalescence following a road accident in 1994. He is still with us every day! We'll never forget you Bill!

*T.C. Pfeiler, the author of the above compilation, is himself an organist working and living in Austria. He is today known as Austria's first international jazz-organist and was Wild Bill Davis' only private student. Davis became Pfeiler's most important mentor and teacher at the beginning of his career.*



Copyright by T.C. Pfeiler

# Wild Bill Davis

By Steve Voce



The boom in the popularity of the Hammond organ as a jazz instrument, almost an obsession in the United States, was created in 1950 by Wild Bill Davis and has burgeoned until the present day.

Davis led the way for Milt Buckner, Bill Doggett, Jimmy Smith and the multitude of pianists who switched allegiance. In the early days Davis suffered criticism from churchgoers who considered the instrument had sacred connections. "Who wants a church organist in a night club?" But the church organ is a mere wind instrument and the Hammond could achieve all-pervading power through the use of electricity.

Bill Davis, paradoxically, was a quiet and gentle person who completely belied his nickname "Wild Bill". But when it came to music Davis was transformed. He will best be remembered for his

foundation-shattering arrangement of *April In Paris*, written for and recorded by the Count Basie band of the Fifties. The arrangement alone forced the band to swing, not that it needed any coercion, and the recording was probably Basie's biggest ever hit, copied to this day by big bands across the world.

## The Ellington connection

But Davis was best known for his friendship and employment by Duke Ellington. Davis's first records under his own name were made in 1951 for Ellington's own record label Mercer and, uniquely for a non-Ellington musician, he had Ellington to accompany him on piano. British fans were dismayed when the Ellington band of 1969 arrived with Wild Bill added to its ranks. In Britain the organ was regarded as vulgar, and

potentially destructive of the fine-tuned sound of the world's greatest jazz orchestra. They needed not have worried. Davis's was a token role and in fact Ellington had employed him mainly for his company, for his writing abilities (he wrote arrangements for the band) and to be the pianist when Ellington, as sometimes happened, failed to arrive in time for the beginning of a concert.

Since the organ was such a brute to transport, Bill Davis owned several of them, keeping one in California, one in New York and another for when he had to take it by road.

The Davis family moved to Parsons, Kansas, while Bill was still a baby. His mother was a piano teacher and she taught her son intermittently – he was never very interested – until an orphaned relative came to live with the Davises and brought a Victrola with him, along with some Fats Waller records. "I played those records over and over, and they developed a new interest for me," Davis remembered. "I was in a remote area and radio was in its infancy, but you heard actual performances then. One night, by chance, I heard Art Tatum, and I couldn't believe it. He sounded like a person with four hands and two pianos."

In 1937 Davis won a music scholarship to Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, after two years transferring to Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. "I had been gaining experience in the school hands but found that I could express myself better in writing than in playing. So I got a couple of good books and learned the voicing of instruments. When they heard some of my work at Wiley, I was offered a position with Milt Larkin's band, playing guitar but principally as a writer." The band included Arnett Cobb, Eddie Vinson, Russell Jacquet, Cedric Heywood and several musicians who later made big names for themselves. When he left, Davis moved to Chicago where he wrote arrangements for Earl Hines and for Sarah Vaughan.

# Johnny Hodges

## interviewed

"I finally joined Louis Jordan and his Tympany Five in 1945. He was about at his peak then. At first I worked for him as an arranger, writing all his things like *Choo, Choo, Ch'Boogie* and *Don't Worry 'Bout The Mule*. One of the first engagements I played for him was at the Club Zanzibar in New York. We were there for three months, on the same bill as Duke Ellington, and that was when I got to know Duke. *Love You Madly* was one of two arrangements I remember doing for him."

### The Organist

The Hammond Company had been engaged on war contracts and hadn't been making organs. "When I ordered mine in 1945, I had to wait almost two years to get it. It cost me \$2290 and it was a gamble, absolutely. I was making \$175 a week when I left Louis, and I started out on organ making \$45 a week." He rejoined Jordan, this time on organ, in 1950, but from 1951 onwards worked in the leading clubs with his own trio and later in Europe.

As the leading player of the Hammond, Davis became much in demand in the recording studios and made fine albums with Ella Fitzgerald (1963) and with another longtime friend, the Ellington alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, with whom he worked often during the Sixties. Hodges liked the freedom of working with the Davis trio as opposed to the more demanding surroundings of the Ellington orchestra. Davis played a prominent part in Ellington's 1970 *Blues for New Orleans* which was a feature for Hodges, and since he died a few days later, his last recording for Ellington.

Davis spent much of the Seventies in Europe working with musicians like Buddy Tate, Slam Stewart and Illinois Jacquet. He joined Lionel Hampton's band in 1978 and stayed until 1980. From then onwards he appeared frequently at jazz festivals throughout Europe.

William Strethen "Wild Bill" Davis, organist, pianist, composer, arranger – born Glasgow, Missouri, 24 November 1918, died in New Jersey 22 August 1995.

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**Over the years there have been made innumerable interviews with Johnny Hodges. The one presented here was conducted by Henry Whiston, probably in 1965, and was published in the Jazz Journal (January 1966). Hodges tells about his early years but also gives us his opinion about his actual situation in the Ellington band.**

We all have our influences. Duke Ellington had his Fats Waller influence, his James P. Johnson influence and he is a great admirer of Willie "The Lion" Smith but Sidney Bechet is tops in my book. He was my favorite! He schooled me a whole lot and I'll say that if it hadn't been for him, I'd probably just be playing for a hobby, not professionally.

I met him first in Boston. He was playing with a burlesque show called Jimmy Cooper's "Black and White Show" and I went backstage and asked to see him. I had a little soprano tucked under my arm, wrapped up in a cloth bag and told him I was interested in the saxophone, so he asked me to play one so I took out this old horn and played one. I had no idea I was going to New York at any time later. In the meantime I used to listen to records of his, Clarence Williams and His Blue Five. Louis Armstrong was in the band at that particular time. So I went to New York for a visit, and got a job playing in a little ol' cabaret at 135th Street. It was called "Fritz", I think. I got \$25 a week and I made about \$25 to \$30 a night tips.

### Playing with Sidney Bechet

Bechet had a club that he was going to open at 145th Street called "Club Bechet" and he came by one night and approached me and said he wanted me in his band right away! That was my big chance so I quit "Fritz" and went to work for him. And it was then he used to show me different things on the soprano. We

played together sometimes, but I don't think very many people would remember that. I think it was *I Found A New Baby* or *Everybody Loves My Baby*, but I'm not quite sure which, but this was one of the things he taught me. You see, each club used to go to the Lafayette Theatre every Friday at the midnight show and advertise. Now they'd bring their whole show and, you know, the band and everything, and do a couple of acts. Fats Waller was playing organ at the time. This was all free, you didn't get paid for this it was just all advertisement for your club. So Bechet and I did this duet, and that was one of the duets we played together. Before we recorded *The Sheik* he taught me the saxophone chorus. We spent a week in Philadelphia and he made me play it over and over, until finally we recorded it. I would like to make a record with soprano again but it is a funny instrument you know. You just can't pick it up today and put it down tomorrow and go back and play it. So I'll have to do a little woodshedding before I make this record but anyhow I intend to do it sometime sooner or later.

Back in the 1920s Carney lived about three blocks from me. I lived on Hammer Street and he lived on Connaught Street. This was in 1925 in Boston. Harry was just playing alto at that particular time. I don't think he joined Duke's band until he decided to play baritone. He also used to play piano, but as he says nobody else plays piano in Duke's band!

### Going to New York

Well, I used to go to New York for a visit, with no intention of staying and I would pick up these jobs just for the ideas, you know. It was very easy to get a job then. You'd work in a dancing school and you'd go to a jam session. They didn't call them jam sessions then, they used to call them cuttin' contests, and you would learn a whole lot from the different sax-



ophone players, trumpet players, and trombone players who would come in and play all night long. You would get cut and when you got cut you went to "school". So I went back to Boston and showed them what I had learned. They would all meet in my home, Harry Carney, and Charlie Holmes and some others and we would compare notes, what was new in New York and what had happened behind in Boston.

So I'd make this trip to New York every two weeks and stay over weekend, or four or five days. Gee, there was a club on every corner in those days, there were five clubs on 134th Street. There were Small's, Leroy's, The Owl and Fritz', and Connie's. This was all in one block.

Around 1926 I joined Chick Webb, and was with him for a while. He had a terrific band. He started with seven men and went to eight when he went to the Savoy, where after a while, I left him. He enlarged his band to ten and later on he picked up Ella Fitzgerald and that was it. I joined Duke in 1928. It was on my sister's birthday, May 18, which is also my son's birthday, a day to remember. I replaced Otto Hardwick. "Professor Booze" they called him. He was terrific. There was no man in the world who

could master the high notes like him. In those days we had two different styles. Until Otto left, if you notice, during those years, I very seldom played anything slow. They were all peppy and fast tunes. As I said before, Otto Hardwick was a master of these high notes, hittin' off them and slidin' off them, so what happened was that Duke threw it all on me and I had to go and rehearse this thing and try to get as close to him as I possibly could. He was always first alto. As it is now, Procope and I alternate for first part. Some fit him and some fit me, so we switch back and forth like that.

I wanna do this thing soon. Four numbers on soprano and four on alto, all in one album. I want to take my time and pick out things that everybody knows. Some well known standards and probably a couple of originals. Tunes like *It Don't Mean A Thing*. I used to play the verse, but I don't think I'd be able to play it now, it has been so long. I don't think anybody in the band remembers it and we'd have a hard time finding the music. We've had so many arrangements of *It Don't Mean A Thing*, one for Ivie, one for Ray Nance, one for Al Sears when he was in the band, and one for Ben Webster. It's the same thing for *Sophisticated Lady*, we have so many arrangements. And so many arrangements of *Main Stem* and so many of *Mood Indigo*. The book is enormous!

When we're playing a club it doesn't matter for we have a pretty good idea of what we're going to play. You know you're going to play *A Train*, you know you're going to play *Mood Indigo*, you know you're going to play *Sophisticated Lady*, you know you're going to play *Things Ain't What They Used To Be*, *I Got It Bad*. You know that's all coming. I know I'm going to play *All Of Me* and *Passion Flower*, and that Duke will have to play his albums, "*Ellington '65*" and "*Ellington '66*". People want to hear them and he has to put them in sometime, the first show or the second show, so you get all that up together and put it on your music stand.

### Own band

I used to like picking music for my band, with Lawrence Brown, Emmett

Berry, Harold Francis, Arthur Clark, Allan Walker, and Barney Richmond. I had formed the group in 1951 and kept them until 1955. Then I went to a TV Show with Ted Steele, Cozy Cole and Jonah Jones. We only played from three 'til five, five days a week. That was nice. I used to come on at four and I got so that I used to pick out the numbers to play. I wanted to play one fast number and one slow number so it got to the point where I got some real elderly fans, these sewing circle people, you know. These women that was at home doing the sewin', and washin' and things like that, and these people that had club meetings. So, at four o'clock every day, I had to play some kind of a slow pretty number for these people in New Jersey.

### Favorite songs

I once listed in an article my favorite Duke Ellington records, they were *Braggin' In Brass*, *All Too Soon*, *Flamingo*, *Jack The Bear* and *Rocks In My Bed*. But I'd probably add to it now. I like some of these things that Duke made with "*Ellington '65*", "*Ellington '66*" and I like the *Mary Poppins* album very much too, I was surprised with that. We made *A Little Spoonful Of Sugar* that I had to play. When we made this thing, we didn't know what we were doin', just figurin' we'd run two minutes of this and two minutes of that, and when it was released it sounded completely different. I like *A Drum Is A Woman* too.

It was a whole lot of work leading my own group and it was a whole lot of headaches too. That was my main reason to give up because it was too much. Duke has people to worry for him, but if you have your own band you have to rush, get the tickets, get the money, go to the union and pay the tax. Then you have seven pieces and you're supposed to start at nine o'clock and it's five minutes to nine and there's only five there, so you start worryin', where's the other two? And there they come, two minutes to go, and then you got to worry about where you're goin' to work the next week. So it was too much for me. Once you get set like Duke is, you don't have to worry, 'cause you pay someone to worry for you. But my small group recorded

for Mercury and had quite a bit of success with several records. It was a lucky break. *Castle Rock* that was the first date and it did pretty good.

I was surprised with Japan, everybody was so nice over there and they went for jazz so much. The Japanese musicians, they're on the ball too. India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Beirut, all those places like that, see, they were good too. We only had to work three days a week and we had a chance to do a little socializin' the rest of the week. We had a chance to see the country and you know, it wasn't hard at all. Duke Ellington was impressed with the Indian music. He wrote a suite about it, the *Far East Suite*. Very little escapes him. He get his ideas from everything he sees and hears.

### Editor's comments

This interview raises a few questions as well as confirmations.

Hodges starts by telling about his first meeting with Sidney Bechet in Boston and how he visited him with his saxophone wrapped up in a cloth bag. It gives the listener the impression that he possibly treated a curved soprano saxophone. Later on we have always seen both Hodges and Bechet appear with a straight soprano, so possibly Bechet convinced Hodges at this meeting to buy himself a straight one.

Hodges further states that he at an early stage made a recording together with Bechet of *The Sheik (The Sheik Of Araby)*. There is no confirmation to be found of this in the available discographies. It might be possible that a recording was made but the recording company didn't care to release it and consequently it didn't get into the discographies. It is, however, most likely that Hodges refers to the recording he made with Duke Ellington 1932 of *The Sheik Of Araby*, where he solos on soprano. This solo is exactly identical with Sidney Bechet's tenor solo in his recording with his One-Man Band from April 18, 1941. It was apparently a set-solo that Bechet once taught his younger student.

When it comes to Harry Carney, Hodges states that he was not employed by Ellington until he decided to play the baritone saxophone. This does not seem



to be the case. According to available research Carney was primarily engaged as an alto saxophonist while the baritone was handled by Otto Hardwick. However, when Hardwick suddenly left the band in 1928 Carney took over the baritone position.

Hodges states that he joined the Ellington band on May 18, 1928. In *New DESOR* it is just said that he started with Duke in "spring 1928". Since Hodges has such a clear memory of this date it should prove that we now know the exact date for his joining.

When great jazz personalities are asked which melody or recording they regard as good they surprisingly often pick very unusual and unexpected examples. In this interview it is interesting to note that Hodges picks *A Little Spoonful Of Sugar* from the Mary Poppins album as a favorite, a number not too often observed. In this regard it is worth mentioning that Hodges appreciated Lawrence Welk and his orchestra. An orchestra not so well appreciated by the jazz community, but still Hodges made an LP with the Welk orchestra.

Hodges is also talking about his ambition to take up his use of the soprano

saxophone. He stopped playing the instrument in the early 1940s and there seem to be many explanations behind this decision. One is said to be that Hodges claimed extra payment for treating two solo instruments. Ellington was unwilling to meet this request, which in turn led to Hodges refusing to play the soprano. There may be other reasons as well. However, in 1965, as we learn from his interview, Hodges showed interest in taking up the soprano again. No doubt this was discussed with Ellington but it seems like no preparations were made until it was time for recording *The New Orleans Suite*. It was apparently planned for Hodges to record *Portrait of Sidney Bechet* with his soprano but he passed away on May 11, 1970, before the recordings of the suite was finished.

Finally Hodges touches on the problems he faced while running his own band in the 1950s. A problem he certainly shared with many band leaders. *Castle Rock* was a hit for the band but it should be observed that Hodges has no solo on this number. It is primarily a show case for Al Sears who also composed the melody.

Bo Hauffman

# Monsignor John Sanders in memoriam

Strax innan denna Bulletin skall gå i tryck nås vi av beskedet att ännu en Ellingtonian lämnat oss. Den 6 januari lämnade John Sanders denna värld för att förenas med sin Gud och med sin Maestro Duke Ellington.

John Sanders föddes den 30 juni 1925 i Elmford, NYK, men växte upp i ett fosterhem i Harlem. Han fick tidigt tillfälle att besöka de kända jazzscenerna i Harlem, bl a Apollo Theatre där han fick uppleva framträdanden av Jimmie Lunceford, Count Basie och framför allt Duke Ellington. Han har beskrivit hur han vid tretton års ålder fick höra *Azure* och *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart*, och var från den stunden gripen av Ellingtons musik. Redan i gymnasiet började han studera musik och när det var tid för militärtjänstgöring 1943 var det som musiker i ett Navy band.

Efter utryckning 1946 började han studera trombon vid Juilliard School och 1949 var han mogen för att ingå i ett band lett av Lucky Thompson, som var engagerat som husband på Savoy Ballroom. Men redan 1952 blev han tillfrågad av Mercer Ellington om han kunde tänka sig att spela med Duke Ellingtons orkester, som tillfällig ersättare för Juan Tizol. Han ingick i bandet under en turné som varade i sex veckor, men efter Tizols återkomst återgick han till att spela med Lucky Thompson.

1954 kallade Duke Ellington igen

och Sanders var inte sen att acceptera erbjudandet. Som ventiltrombonist och ersättare för Juan Tizol, som nu lämnat för gott, kom han att ingå i bandet fram till september 1959. Under ett av orkesterns engagemang i Kalifornien träffade Sanders sin företrädare, som gav honom vissa tips om sitt sätt att spela. Han sålde dessutom en specialtillverkad ventiltrombon, stämnd i C i stället för konventionella B. Sanders kom att använda det instrumentet under resten av sin karriär. Man skall dock ha klart för sig att Sanders egentligen var i början en "slide" trombonist, men hans position i Ellingtons orkester som ersättare för Juan Tizol fordrade att han övergick till ventilvarianten.

John Sanders fick inte mycket soloutrymme i Ellingtons orkester och tycks inte heller ha begärt detta. Det finns dock flera exempel på Sanders som solist. Framför allt hörs han alltid i inledningen av *Caravan*, helt i Tizols anda. Han kan också höras på Bethlehem-skivan "Duke Ellington Presents" i *Blues*, i ett alldeles utmärkt solo, som inte nämns i skivans baksidestext. Fler exempel finns. Under 1960-talet gjorde Sanders några kortare inlägg i orkestern. Utöver sin position som trombonist var han dessutom verksam som notskrivare, speciellt när orkestern var på resande fot. Den ordinarie notskrivaren Tom Whaley stannade oftast kvar i New York.



Troligen fann Sanders turnélivet påfrestande och lämnar bandet 1959. Han lämnar musiklivet och arbetar som försäljare för ett musikförlag och tar även en anställning som bibliotekarie på Juilliard. Han hade dock en dröm om att bli präst och 1965 påbörjar han utbildningen. Den 11 februari 1973 håller han sin första mässa och en av åhörarna är Duke Ellington. Under de följande 25 åren fungerade han som romersk katolsk präst vid St. Mary Church in Norwalk, Connecticut. 1988 utser påven John Paul II honom till a Chaplain of His Holiness med titeln Monsignor.

John Sanders och Duke Ellington hade mycket gemensamt i sin tro på Gud. När Ellington fick vetskap om Sanders ambition att bli präst lär han ha sagt: "John, we're on the same team".

Bo Haufman

## The Savory Collection

I Bulletin 3/2018 nämndes Ellingtonfamiljens ovilja att låta publicera det Ellingtonmaterial som finns i samlingen. Men den 2 oktober 2018 höll Loren Schoenberg ett anförande hos National Jazz Museum in Harlem (den institution som sitter på materialet) och spelade då upp några exempel på vad som ingår i Ellingtonmaterialet. På hemsidan sägs följande om innehållet:

The Unheard Savory: Duke and Django live – The bulk of the Duke El-

lington items in the Savory Collection came from radio broadcasts made between 1937 and 1939. The band was broadcasting from The Cotton Club, and included are unique items that were never recorded again, such as a hot version of *China Boy* featuring Johnny Hodges in a tribute to Sidney Bechet. There is also an Ellington small group session in superb fidelity. Of special significance is the 1946 jam recorded at Carnegie Hall with guest guitarist Django Reinhardt.

Lorens mycket intressanta och initierade presentation kan avlyssnas på följande webadress:

<http://jazzmuseuminharlem.org/events/savory-session-2/>

Den som råkar befinna sig i New York kan besöka museet på 58 West 129th Street och kan då få möjlighet att avlyssna allt Ellingtonmaterial som finns i samlingen.

Bo Haufman

# Harlem Air Shaft

By Mike Zirpolo

It has frequently been noted by commentators that the year 1940 saw an “explosion of genius” from Duke Ellington. This is undoubtedly true. Seldom, however, has anyone offered any detailed explanations as to why that might have happened at that particular time. I will take a crack at it.

Several liberating events occurred in Duke Ellington’s professional life in 1939. The largest of these on the business side of the Ellington operation was Duke’s separation from his long-time manager Irving Mills. Mills had been a pervasive presence in Ellington’s career from the late 1920s until they went their separate ways in 1939. He was Ellington’s personal manager, booking agent, music publisher, and guru. During the years Mills was calling the shots in Duke Ellington’s career, Duke looked upon him as a white man in a racially segregated society who could do things for him that he couldn’t do himself. Mills was an aggressive force (sometimes quite crudely so) that pushed Ellington ahead in what was all too often a vicious Jim Crow America in the late 1920s and 1930s. It was Mills’s idea, for example, that Duke should be presented as not just another bandleader, but as a “genius of syncopation,” an “American Delius,” a composer of concert works who should be taken seriously, indeed as “Royalty of Rhythm.” Mills very much believed that Duke Ellington belonged in Carnegie Hall because of the prestige that venue conferred, as well as in any other venue where he could command top-dollar. Although Ellington did in the 1940s achieve Mills’s (and Duke’s) dream of performing in Carnegie Hall, he did it without Mills.

## New booking agency

1940 saw Ellington move to new personal management by the William Morris Agency, which also booked the Ellington band. This was clearly an extension of the Mills plan to present Duke as someone who was a cut above all

other bandleaders, no matter how successful they were. The Morris Agency represented artists who were famous show business personalities, not bandleaders. Bandleaders were largely represented by Music Corporation of America (MCA), and General Artists Corporation (GAC). Nevertheless, the Morris Agency (at least in 1940), adhered rather strictly to the practices developed and perfected by MCA and GAC that kept their bandleader clients on the road as much as possible, generating commissions for the agency. The Ellington band spent almost the entire first seven months of 1940 on the road. Although some theater dates where the band could sit down for several days at one location were scattered in, most of the schedule was filled with weeks on end of back-breaking one-nighters. In reviewing the itinerary of the Ellington band for this time, one finds the band in Seattle, Washington on April 1; in Emporia, Kansas on May 9; in Lawrence, Massachusetts on June 27; in Atlanta, Georgia on July 17. Literally dozens of other play dates are sandwiched in between.

## Recording for Victor Records

Another reason why Duke Ellington was feeling liberated in 1940 was that his long-time relationship with Columbia Records, including its corporate predecessor American Record Corporation (ARC), and (in 1937) its affiliates, Irving Mills’s Master and Variety labels, terminated in February 1940. (Mills recorded Ellington’s music and issued the records on his labels; ARC and later Columbia distributed those records.) Starting on March 6, 1940, Ellington began recording for Victor Records, where he was given a good bit more freedom to record his original compositions. He was the only black artist at Victor to have the records made by his big band issued on the prestigious Victor label. (This label sold for 75 cents a disc throughout the depression ravaged 1930s. Victor cut the price

of its Victor label releases in 1940 to 50 cents a disc.) All other black big bands in the Victor stable had their records issued on the 35 cent Bluebird label.

Through 1939 and 1940, Duke had been delegating much of the routine arranging work on current pop tunes, vocals and preparing music for the small groups drawn from the Ellington big band to his newly-arrived (in early 1939) musical associate, Billy Strayhorn. This freed-up a good bit of time for Duke to compose and arrange his new opuses. He made good use of that time.

The Ellington band settled in for a stand at Eastwood Gardens outside Detroit on July 26, 1940. They would remain there until July 30. While at Eastwood Gardens, they broadcast over the NBC Red network nightly, with WWJ-Detroit providing the local radio hook-up and announcers. The broadcast aired from 11:30 p.m. to midnight (eastern time). The classic Victor recording of Ellington’s *Harlem Air Shaft* was made in New York on July 22, 1940, only seven days before this performance. It is clear from the vigor and passion we hear in this live recording, that the Ellingtonians were still very much engaged in the process of joyously animating this composition. Here is a link to that great live recording: <http://swingandbeyond.com/2018/04/11/harlem-air-shaft-1940-duke-ellington-live-version/>

## Describing Harlem Air Shaft

As is so very often the case in trying to describe Duke Ellington’s music, there are challenges. To help a bit, I will cite to the brilliant and comprehensive analysis of *Harlem Air Shaft* done by Edward Green, a professor at the Manhattan School of Music:

“*Harlem Air Shaft* has an abstract design analogous to a concrete experience: namely, reading a book. First, we meet a “Table of Contents”, a series of chapter titles. These are exceedingly short. Then, the chapters arrive, fleshing out and de-



veloping the hints provided in the titles. Here is how these parallels work. First we hear a 12-bar intro divided into three 4-bar segments – respectively in A-flat, C, and E major. The sudden shifts of key place these short segments in sharp relief, highlighting how different they are in terms of timbre, rhythm, and melodic contour.

Then, a series of 32-bar choruses follows. They are all in A-flat, and take up – now without modulation – the musical ideas presented earlier. Chorus I develops the first segment of the Intro; Chorus II, the second, Chorus III, the third; and – to round it off – Chorus IV (the “shout chorus”) develops the opening four measures of Chorus I. Thus, the opening 16 measures of the composition, considered as four separate 4-bar units, are the “titles,” and foreshadow the main “chapters” of the work as a whole. Nothing in all of previous jazz composition compares to this audacious structural plan.”

I have been trying to hear and understand as much as possible what is going on musically in *Harlem Air Shaft* for decades. In that time, I sought out guidance in the writings of various musical experts. I am sorry to say that more than one of those experts wrote dismissively of this composition as in essence a jumble. (I will not name them to protect the guilty.) I have found that it is usually a mistake to underestimate Duke Ellington in musical matters. Professor Edward Green’s article, which demonstrates that *Harlem Air Shaft* is anything but jumbled, is scholarly, readable, and wonderfully informative. It is essential reading for anyone who really wants to know about *Harlem Air Shaft*. I have provided a link to it at the end of this post.

When I listen to the first chorus, I hear a classic AABA thirty-two bar format: (four eight-bar sections with the first two being one melody repeated twice, the third section – the bridge – being another, and the last eight bars being a reprise of the main (A) melody). The first and second eight bars (section A, the main melody) has the cup-muted brass (carrying Duke’s jaunty opening vamp figure into the first chorus), playing against the five saxophones, at first

in unison, then harmonized. Trombonist Joseph Nanton plays characteristically using a plunger mute in the B-section bridge, backed by surging saxophones. The final eight bars of the first chorus return to the A section melody, played as before in the first sixteen bars.

The second chorus contains the rhythmic “breaks”, set-up by the saxophone section, which acts as a launching pad for Cootie Williams’s fiery open trumpet. Note how his playing is catapulted upward in the four AABA eight-bar sequences of his chorus.

The third chorus has the swaggering trombone trio (with dovetailing reeds in the background), sparring with Barney Bigard’s agile clarinet. This is yet another set of contrasting musical sounds.



The fourth chorus presents the climax of *Harlem Air Shaft*. Williams’s plunger muted trumpet, played a low dynamic level against a syncopated cushion of brass and reeds. Listen to the power and thrust of Jimmie Blanton’s bass in this passage. The relatively quiet playing is then contrasted with Bigard’s oscillating clarinet arcing upward, supported by drummer Sonny Greer’s rocking back-beat, as the entire ensemble blasts through the fortissimo finale.

In *Harlem Air Shaft*, Ellington demonstrates that he was a master at creating music for and with his 15 piece band and highly individual soloists that is vividly colorful, with many contrasting sonorities, that swings mightily. An explosion of genius, indeed!

### Is it Program Music?

The central inquiry addressed by

Professor Green’s article is this very question, and he answers it comprehensively. (“Program Music” is defined as: music that is intended to evoke images or convey the impression of events.)

The WWJ announcer introduced *Harlem Air Shaft* as reflecting “the themes and sounds of the Harlem courthouse,” which is a hilarious error. Ellington avoided courthouses, lawsuits, and other legal activities like the plague – often to his economic detriment.

Here is Duke’s picturesque explanation (provided to a journalist in 1944), of what inspired him to compose *Harlem Air Shaft*: “So much goes on in a Harlem air shaft. You get the full essence of Harlem in an air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love. You hear intimate gossip floating down. You hear the radio. An air shaft is one great big loudspeaker. You see your neighbor’s laundry. You hear the janitor’s dogs. The man upstairs’ aerial falls down and breaks your window. You smell coffee. A wonderful thing is that smell. An air shaft has got every contrast. One guy is cooking dry fish with rice and another guy’s got a great big turkey. Guy-with-fish’s wife is a terrific cooker but the guy’s wife with the turkey is doing a sad job.” Duke laughed. “You hear people praying, fighting, snoring. Jitterbugs are jumping up and down always over you, never below you. That’s a funny thing about jitterbugs. They are always over you. I tried to put all that in *Harlem Air Shaft*.”

When I asked Duke Ellington’s drummer Sonny Greer about this in 1979, he laughed and said: “That was just Duke’s jive. He was always his best public relations spokesman.”

But there is more to this, and you will learn about it if you read Professor Green’s article.

Here is the link to Edward Green’s article: <https://jjs.libraries.rutgers.edu/index.php/jjs/article/view/9/18>

Mike Zirpolo is running a website “Swing & Beyond” with lots of interesting studies of music by various orchestras from the Swing Era. Go to: [www.swingandbeyond.com](http://www.swingandbeyond.com)

# Bensonality och Jam With Sam

I vårt föregående nummer av Bulletinen ingick en artikel med titeln "Hur namngavs låtarna?". I artikeln kunde konstateras att två kända Strayhornkompositioner, *Smada* och *Snibor*, var tillägnade kända discjockeys. Men det fanns ytterligare discjockeys, som hyllades av Duke Ellington. En av dem var den i Chicago verksamme Al Benson. Han hade många strängar på sin lyra. Började sin bana som tap dancer, ingick i olika revyer och var t.o.m. religiös predikant innan han blev discjockey på en radiostation i Chicago. Han startade även ett grammofonbolag och gav ut blues- och R&B-inspireerade artister på flera olika etiketter. Hans förhållande till Duke Ellington är okänt, men troligen uppskattade Ellington honom så pass mycket att han namngav en komposition till hans ära.

*Bensonality*, som komponerades av Duke Ellington 1951, gick även under namnen *The Bend* och *Alavanting Al*, den senare titeln torde även den syfta på Al Benson. Numret ingick i Ellingtons repertoar fram till början av 1953. Första tillfället då numret spelas är vid den kommersiella inspelningen för CBS den 7 december 1951. Clark Terry är ny i bandet och får ett korus till sitt förfogande. Så får även Ellington själv, Francis Williams och Paul Gonsalves. Numret finns senare bevarat från några live inspelningar. I mars 1952 utgivet på Skata 501 och den 30 juli 1952 på Aircheck 4. Därutöver existerar några liveupptagningar som ännu inte getts ut officiellt.



Al Benson.

Den andre i Chicago verksamme discjockeyn var Sam Evans, en mera obskyr personlighet, som det inte finns mycket att läsa om på nätet. Duke Ellingtons komposition *Jam With Sam* syftar emellertid på denne person. Det är lätt att tro att titeln syftar på Sam Woodyard, men så är alltså inte fallet. Troligen kallade Evans sitt radioprogram för "Jam With Sam". Numret framfördes av Ellington vid otaliga konsertframträdanden som en presentation av ett flertal solister.

Det låg naturligtvis en taktik bakom Ellingtons och Strayhorns sätt att namnge sina kompositioner. Förhoppningsvis skulle de åsyftade personerna uppskatta hyllningen, vilket i sin tur väntades leda till att de skulle återgälda detta genom att spela upp Ellingtonskivor i sina program och därmed troligen öka skivförsäljningen.

*Bo Hauffman*

## Billy Strayhorn Archive

När Billy Strayhorn gick bort 1967 efterlämnade han mängder av musikaliskt material i form av manuskript till hundratalet kompositioner, sångtexter, fotografier, kontrakt, ekonomiska rapporter m.m. Materialet har förvaltats av Strayhorns familj och endast varit tillgängligt för vissa utvalda forskare. Hela

samlingen, som består av cirka 18.000 objekt, har nu sålts till The Library of Congress och kommer att finnas tillgänglig för de som önskar studera Billy Strayhorns bidrag till jazzhistorien. Vi kommer säkert att på ett eller annat sätt få ta del av dessa studier under de kommande åren.

## Dolores Parker in memoriam

Dolores Parker var en av Ellingtons många kvinnliga vokalist. Hon var engagerad från september 1947 till januari 1948 och gjorde under denna tid ett antal insjungningar med Ellington för Columbia. Hon torde vara mest ihågkommen för sina versioner av *Take Love Easy* och *The Wildest Gal In Town*. Hon framträdde även med bandet vid Ellingtons konsert i Carnegie Hall 1947.

Innan hon hamnade hos Ellington hade hon ett förflutet som vokalist hos Earl Hines 1946, och med Hines gjorde hon en insjungning av *Just A-Settin' And A-Rockin'*. Billy Strayhorn fick höra henne och bad henne besöka honom för en audition. Han bad henne sjunga *Lush Life*, en svårhanterad melodi, som hon inte kände till. Emellertid blev Strayhorn nöjd med vad han hörde, ringde upp Duke och bad Dolores sjunga melodin för Ellington i telefon. Ellington anställde henne omedelbart.

Efter sejouren hos Ellington försökte hon sig på en karriär i Hollywood och medverkade i ett antal filmer men lyckades inte slå igenom. Under denna tid hade hon även en relation med boxaren Joe Louis, som även fungerade som hennes manager. Men 1956 gifte hon sig med en läkare, bosatte sig i Ohio och drog sig tillbaka från estraden. Hon gör dock en kort comeback 1960 då hon gör en inspelning för Atlantic tillsammans med Herbie Mann. Under sina år som hemmafru i Akron, Ohio, var hon ändå verksam som sångare med bl a Cleveland Jazz Orchestra och med Akron Symphony Orchestra. Vid Ellingtonkonferensen i Chicago 1998 hade vi nöjet att få träffa henne och höra henne berättat om sin tid med Duke Ellington.

Dolores Parker var född 1919 och gick ur tiden i december 2018, 99 år gammal.

*Bo Hauffman*

# Duke Ellingtons textförfattare

I den amerikanska sångskatten finner vi mängder av exempel på lyckade samarbeten av en kompositör och hans "lyricswriter". Exempelvis kan nämnas Jimmy McHugh/Dorothy Fields, George/Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers/Lawrence Hart. Flera kombinationer finns.

I fallet Ellington finns det inte många områden där han fått kritik. Ett är hans val av manliga vokalisterna och ett annat är hans förmåga att skriva texter till sina kompositioner. Han var en genialisk kompositör, men en mycket medioker textförfattare. Hans text till *Azalea* utgör ett exempel på detta. Vid de tillfällen han skapat acceptabla texter har det i de flesta fall rört sig om monologer av typ *Saddest Tale*, *Pretty And The Wolf*, *Moon Maiden* och hans intalade illustrationer till *A Drum Is A Woman*. Men det fanns kapabla textförfattare som tog till sig Ellingtons musik och satte lyckade texter till kompositionerna. Låt oss studera några av dessa:

## Paul Francis Webster

1941 deltog Duke Ellington och hans orkester i uppsättningen av musikalen *Jump For Joy*. Ellington hade en central roll i tillkomsten av musikalen, men han var långt ifrån den ende. Flera av den



Paul Webster.

tidens stora namn i Hollywood hade en hand i tillkomsten av musikalen och idéerna var många. De var så många att musikalen konstant ändrades från föreställning till föreställning. Ellington stod för musiken, men det var andra som satte text till hans musik. Sid Kuller, som var en av initiativtagarna till musikalen, hade stort inflytande över resultatet och skrev även några texter, men den som framför allt bidrog med texter till Ellingtons kompositioner var Paul Francis Webster. Han skrev texterna till *Jump For Joy*, *I Got It Bad*, *Chocolate Shake* och *The Brown-Skin Gal In The Calico Gown*. Sid Kuller bidrog med texten till *Bli-Blip* medan Ellington själv både komponerade och skrev texten till *Rocks In My Bed*.

Beträffande *I Got It Bad* säger Will Friedwald följande: "*Webster was doubtlessly inspired by Ellington's melody. His lyric is masterful, and fully captures a distinctly Ellingtonian mood. Sad but not without humor, saturated with the spirit of the blues (and even a suggestion of religion), but also, to use that favored Ducal adjective, 'sophisticated.'*"

Paul Webster var både före och efter *Jump For Joy* synnerligen aktiv som "lyrics writer" och hade en hit redan så tidigt som 1932 med *Masquerade* inspelad av Paul Whiteman. Han var sedan knuten till olika filmbolag och skrev musik till flera filmer och tilldelades under sin levnad flera Academy Awards.

## Bob Russell

1940 spelade Ellington in två nummer som skulle komma att bli uppmärksammade på flera sätt. Den ena var *Concerto For Cootie*, som ursprungligen var en uppvärmningssnutt som Cootie Williams brukade använda sig av, men som Ellington insåg möjligheterna med och använde som grund för Cooties stora featurenummer. Den andra var *Never No Lament*, som spelades in några månader senare och var ett melodiskt nummer, huvudsakligen för Johnny Hodges sensuella altsax. Om Duke och Bob Russell

hade någon form av musikalisk relation är okänt, men i varje fall insåg Russell de melodiska kvaliteterna i nämnda stycken och skrev fyndiga texter till numren, som därför blev omnamnade till *Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me* och *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*. Båda numren spelades av Ellington vid hans många radioutsändningar under 1940-talet,



Bob Russell.

men p.g.a. inspelningsstopp gjordes inga kommersiella inspelningar förrän i november 1947 med Al Hibbler som vokalist. Mängder av andra orkestrar hade också melodierna på sina repertoarer.

Den insiktsfulle Will Friedwald har följande att säga om Bob Russell: *Bob Russell was responsible for a double miracle. He adapted a pair of Ellington instrumentals – already hits – into what would be, quite independently, two of the band's most successful songs, Don't Get Around ... and Do Nothin' ... In each case, Russell freely adapted the original instrumental melody. In the first instance, he and his wife Hannah (a competent pianist) virtually rewrote the bridge; the one they came up with is, for vocal purposes, much stronger and more melodic. They also made Do Nothin' ... into something far more song-like than the original.*

*Ellington and Russell wrote another classic song together, I Didn't Know About You, adapted from the instrumental Sentimental Lady. However, curiously enough, when they wrote one song together, apparently from*

*scratch, the result was Ring Around The Moon, a completely forgotten piece of work that never went anywhere. A pity, since it's not bad at all.*

Bob Russell påstås även ha satt text till *Warm Valley* men någon vokalinspelning av numret med Ellington finns inte.

Precis som med de flesta kända "lyric writers" var Bob Russell engagerad av Hollywoods filmbolag och både komponerade och skrev texter till ett flertal filmer.

### Don George

Torde vara mest känd för sin text till *I'm Beginning To See The Light*, som från början var en melodislinga praktiserad av Johnny Hodges och som senare utvecklades av Ellington. Don George hade emellertid även en affärsrelation med Harry James och det var James som först lanserade melodin. Några månader senare spelade Ellington in numret med Joya Sherrill som vokalist. I och med detta står Harry James tillsammans med Duke Ellington och Johnny Hodges noterade som kompositörer till melodin och med Don George som textförfattare.

Don George arbetade till och från för Ellington under en stor del av hans karriär och har bl.a. skrivit texter till *Everything But You*, *Every Hour On The Hour* och *Tulip Or Turnip*. Den som vill veta mer om hans samarbete med Ellington kan läsa hans bok *Sweet Man – The Real Duke Ellington* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York).

### Lee Gaines

Är mest känd som bassångaren i Delta Rhythm Boys, en kvartett som blev mycket populär i Sverige på 1950-talet.



Lee Gaines.

Men Gaines ägnade sig även åt att sätta texter på kända jazzmelodier och ligger bakom *Take The "A" Train*, *Just A-Settin' and A-Rockin'* och *Just Squeeze Me*.

### Johnny Mercer

En av den amerikanska underhållningsvärldens stora namn och en av grundarna till gramfonbolaget Capitol skrev mängder av fyndiga texter till olika kompositörers melodier. Han samarbetade ofta med Harold Arlen. När det gäller Duke Ellington så skrev han texten till en av Ellingtons största hits, nämligen *Satin Doll*. Will Friedwald beskriver Mercers text med följande ord: *The lyrics seem like random snatches of slangy verbs, objects and subjects, rather than well-rounded, classically full sentences. Together, the lyrics and melody give us a collection of hints which eventually add up to a substantial portrait of the title character.*

För övrigt ligger Mercer bakom succéer som *Jeepers Creepers*, *Lazybones*, *Blues In The Night*, *That Old Black Magic* och *Laura*, för att nämna ett fåtal i en lång rad av utmärkta texter. Han skrev även texten till *Accentuate The Positive*, som Ellington framförde vid några tillfällen med Joya Sherrill som vokalist.

### Irving Mills och hans stab

Affärsmannen Irving Mills finns noterad både som medkompositör och som textförfattare till flera av Ellingtons kompositioner, rätt eller inte är ständigt föremål för åsikter. Irving Mills och hans organisation hade många kända namn knutna till sig och han hade flera textförfattare som skrev texter till melodier som framfördes vid Cotton Clubs många revyer. I hans stab ingick **Henry Nemo**, som främst blev känd för *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart*, men även *Swingtime In Honolulu*, *If You Were In My Place* och *Carnival In Caroline*. Det största namnet i Mills stab var emellertid **Mitchell Parish**, som mest är känd för sin text till Hoagy Carmichaels *Star Dust*. Men när han arbetade för Mills skrev han texten till *Sophisticated Lady* och han har själv uppgivit att han även skrivit texten till *Mood Indigo*, men att Mills tog åt sig äran av den texten. **Irving Mills** själv står listad som textförfattare till *Azure* och *It Don't Mean A Thing*, men



Mitchell Parish.

tveksamhet råder om sanningshalten i detta. Även **Eddie de Lange** arbetade en tid för Mills och skrev texten till *Solitude*. Ett mera okänt namn i Mills stab var **Manny Kurtz**, som satte text till *In A Sentimental Mood*.

Citaten av Will Friedwald är hämtade ur boken *The Cambridge Companion to Duke Ellington*. Edited by Edward Green (Cambridge University Press).

Avslutningsvis citeras följande avsnitt ur boken: *I'm hardly the first to complain about the tragedy that Johnny Mercer only wrote one song with Ellington. Yet this is a pattern Duke repeated with nearly all his lyrical collaborators. Even with Bob Russell and Don George, Ellington only wrote about ten songs each. He was, in other words, lyrically promiscuous and non-committal, not wanting to settle down with any one songwriting partner. That is why we have only one major song apiece with Mitchell Parish, Manny Kurtz, Eddie De Lange, Irving Gordon (Prelude To A Kiss) and Henry Nemo. One gets the feeling (sadly enough) that Ellington wanted to assert sole authorship of his catalogue, and therefore took preventive measures so that no partner could lay claim to any significant part of his songwriting canon. *Satin Doll*, for instance, is almost always included in Ellington songbook albums but rarely in Mercer tributes. To this day, when you think of *Don't Get Around ...* or *I'm Beginning To See ...*, you don't think of Bob Russell or Don George, you think exclusively of Ellington. The "accidental" songwriter.*

Tuffa ord men säkert med ett visst mått av sanning.

Bo Hausman

# KALLELSE!

Duke Ellington Society of Sweden hälsar sina medlemmar välkomna till medlemsmöte och årsmöte den 18 februari 2019.

## PLATS:

Franska Skolans aula,  
Döbelnsgatan 3, Stockholm.  
Portkod för kvällen: 1802  
Entrén öppen från kl. 17.00.  
Entréavgift: 100:- i kontanter eller Swish.  
Den som endast önskar övervara årsmötet betalar ingen entré.



## PROGRAM:

**17.30-18.00** – Årsmöte. Årsmöteshandlingar kommer att finnas tillgängliga.

**18.00-19.00** – DESS-medlemmen **Rune Sjögren** kåserar på temat **JAZZATMOSFÄR**. Det handlar om hans personliga intryck av jazz i alla dess former från dess tidiga början till senare litet modernare jazz. Naturligtvis lägger han viss betoning på Duke Ellingtons inflytande.

**19.00-19.30** – **PAUS** med möjlighet till mingel och inköp av öl/vin 30:- och baguetter 40:-. Obs! Endast kontanter eller Swish.

**19.30-20.30** – En sann Ellingtontolkare, pianisten **Davor Kajfes**, underhåller oss. Förbered er på ett elegant pianospel som Ni inte får höra varje dag.

Tidsangivelserna är ungefärliga.

## NÄSTA ÅRS MÖTEN:

Anteckna i Din almanacka följande återstående mötestillfällen under året: 6 maj, 16 september och 25 november.

Du har väl inte glömt att betala medlemsavgiften för 2019? Gör det! Utan den kan vi inte hålla verksamheten igång!

Our members outside of Scandinavia are reminded to pay the annual membership fee for 2019. You may choose between two alternatives: \$40 and you will receive our bulletin in hard copy, or \$30 and you will receive the bulletin in digital format. Payment methods shown to the right.

# Duke Ellington Society of Sweden, DESS

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## DESS medlemsavgift

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