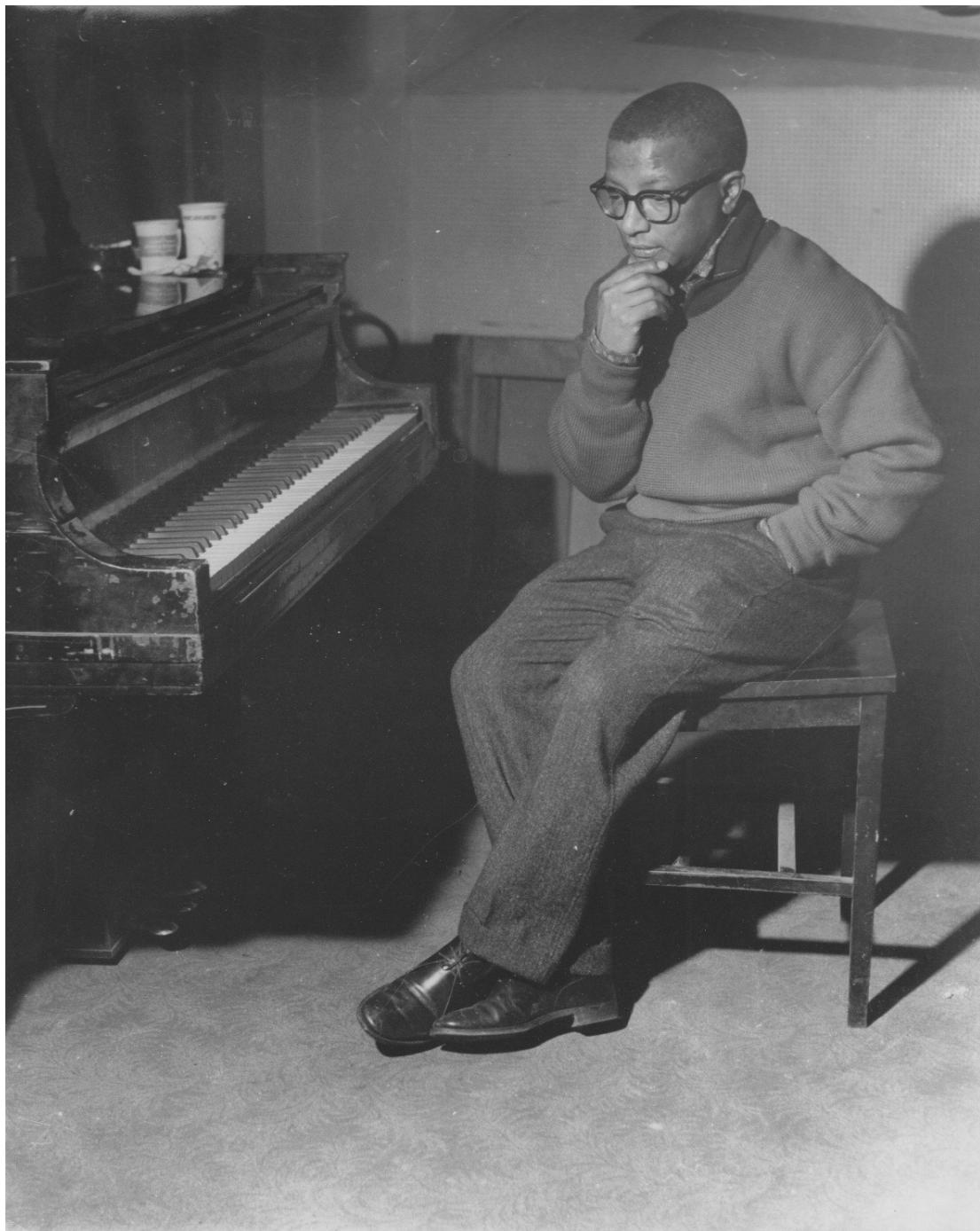


BLUE LIGHT

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The Billy Strayhorn Festival

September 4 - November 21

**JUST
ANNOUNCED**

A city wide Billy Strayhorn Festival is running in the city of Chicago from September 4th to November 21st in clubs, concert halls, community centers and other venues throughout Chicagoland. Coordinated by Chicago's famed Auditorium Theatre and its executive director Brett Batterson, the Strayhorn celebration will feature performances of his work in many forms as well as panel discussions examining Strayhorn's place in music, culture and American society.

Programming for The Billy Strayhorn Festival began with...

Chicago Jazz Orchestra at the Chicago Jazz Festival

Friday, Sept. 4 at 8:30pm

Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, 201 E. Randolph Street

Tickets: FREE

The City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events and Jazz Institute of Chicago join the Auditorium Theatre to throw a FREE 100th birthday for Strayhorn in the heart of Chicago at Millennium Park. The Chicago Jazz Orchestra performs many of Strayhorn's classic works.

And includes...

Fundraiser and Performance for Strayhorn's Plaque on North Halsted's Legacy Project

Saturday, Oct. 3 at 6pm

Private Event

An evening of live performance, original recordings and speakers to raise funds to include Strayhorn as part of North Halsted's Legacy Project, an outdoor public display that celebrates LGBTQ history and people. Hosted by E. Patrick Johnson, Department of Performance Studies and African American Studies at

Northwestern University, with Kim Hunt, Johari Jabir and Cedric Brown.

The Life and Music of Billy Strayhorn

Sunday, Oct. 4 at 4pm

Tickets: FREE

Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted St.

A tribute to Billy Strayhorn's life and music with live music, original recordings and a chronicle of his career and personal history. Hosted by E. Patrick Johnson, Department of Performance Studies and African American Studies at Northwestern University, with Kim Hunt, Johari Jabir and Cedric Brown.

Lush Life: The Music of Billy Strayhorn

Saturday, Nov. 21 at 8pm

Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Pkwy.

Tickets: \$29 – \$68

The three-month centennial celebration of Billy Strayhorn concludes at the Auditorium Theatre with *Lush Life: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*. Under the musical direction of Bruce Mayhall Rastrelli, this fully staged salute to Strayhorn features Broadway star Darius de Haas and local favorite Joan Curto with Alan Broadbent on piano, the Auditorium's "Too Hot to Handel" Orchestra, the Joel Hall Dancers and a 30-voice-all-male choir arranged by conductor Bill Chin.

For the duration of his entire 100th birthday month, WDCB, the radio station of the College of DuPage, schedules Strayhorn music and hosts programs on the legendary man, his career and his influence on music and society.



Editorial

This edition of *Blue Light* is a celebration of the life and work of William Thomas Strayhorn, the centenary of whose birth falls on 29 November 2015.

For us, of course, it is Billy Strayhorn's rich association with Duke Ellington and his Orchestra which is the wellspring of our rejoicing. Talk of miracles may be overstating it a little, but whatever combination of circumstances led to Billy Strayhorn walking into Ellington's dressing room at The Stanley Theatre, Pittsburgh on 2 December 1938 for an audience created, like a miracle, an event which was both propitious and unique. That Strayhorn chose in the first place to let Ellington 'hear what he could do' and that Ellington, in return and as the self-styled 'world's greatest listener' really *heard* what Billy had to offer is the happiest accident not just for the course of category-defying music over the next twenty-nine years but for the rich legacy we enjoy today and will continue to enjoy for a long time to come.

I am particularly grateful for the generosity of our contributors this issue in allowing us to re-publish work which has appeared previously elsewhere. It should be noted, however, that three of these pieces – by Martin Gayford, Professor Andrew Homzy and Kevin Whitehead appeared as long ago as 1989 and 1992, respectively. They have not been republished since and I hope they will be new to many readers. Since Ellington's own centennial in 1999, thanks to biographical research and academic study, a much clearer picture of Strayhorn's contribution to Ellington's *oeuvre* has begun to emerge. These researches were not available to those writers then. This only makes their prescience all the more remarkable and the beginnings through their writing of Strayhorn's emergence as a major artist in his own right all the more fascinating.

I am grateful also to The Billy Strayhorn Foundation, Inc. and in particular Alyce Claerbaut, Billy Strayhorn's niece, Vice-President of Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc. for their support in putting this special issue together.

Billy Strayhorn's arrival in the Ellington aggregation coincided, it seems to me, with two particularly important trends. Firstly, Ellington's relationship to the members of his band was beginning to change and the way new music was created. Was Ellington now a little less close to the members of the orchestra than formerly? Did rehearsals, try-outs, collaboration or (in Lawrence Brown's loaded term) 'compilation' have a lesser impact on the creation of new music? If so, then Billy's arrival as a 'staff

writer' was all the more fortuitous. And Strayhorn began work, too, with the Orchestra just on the cusp of what became 'the Swing Era' or as otherwise known, the era of the 'name bands'. Ellington had been a 'name' for more than a decade. As jazz became more popular with white audiences, many 'new' names came into the jazz universe including Goodman, Dorsey, Shaw et al. These 'names' rather eclipsed those of the musicians and writers who worked for them. Billy became friends with, and tutored, the young Bill Finegan, staff arranger for Glenn Miller. I can never hear Finegan's arrangement of *Little Brown Jug* without being reminded of Strayhorn's *The Gal From Joe*'s and that 'stringed' rhythmic, 'walking' introduction Finegan replicated on several arrangements in the Miller book. Like Strayhorn, Finegan toiled for his boss in relative anonymity and, like Strayhorn too, had to suffer the indignities of the dreaded blue pencil on their work as their bosses looked to simplify or popularize what they had written. As Strayhorn had done for him, Finegan in turn came to tutor the young Nelson Riddle whose settings for vocal work by the likes of Frank Sinatra fifteen years later would take adult pop music to a whole new level. Finegan claimed that Billy's work for Rosemary Clooney on the album *Blue Rose* resulted in the finest vocal album he had heard. When one considers that Gil Evans was a frequent visitor to Strayhorn's apartment in the period leading up to what became known as the 'Birth of the Cool' sessions, then it becomes clear that Billy Strayhorn's influence on much mainstream, sophisticated music beyond the Ellington orchestra is incalculable.

I have space here only to draw attention briefly to two further intertwining silken threads of Billy Strayhorn's life and legacy. The first is the stage production *My People* which took place in Chicago's McCormick Place in 1963 as part of the 'CENTRURY OF NEGRO PROGRESS' Exposition. Strayhorn sought to work with Ellington because a conventional career in the conservatoires of the classical world was forever closed to him because of his race. As a result, he created music far more demotic and therefore truly democratic; far more vital and more significant than much produced by the composers of 'serious' music in the European tradition. Strayhorn's involvement in the Civil Rights movement and his links to Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. can only receive ever greater attention in future Strayhorn studies. Strayhorn's convictions found their most explicit expression, perhaps, in the musical production of Ellington's *My People* in 1963

for which he was the musical director and conductor. Along with 1941's *Jump for Joy*, these were the two peaks of Ellington and Strayhorn's success writing musical theatre. The medium of musical theatre brings us full circle to the young man standing in Ellington's dressing room preparing to perform his own composition, *Lush Life*. His own musical, *Fantastic Rhythm*, was written circa 1935 and professionally produced for two years in Pittsburgh and West Virginia. Several songs from that play became part of the Ellington book, namely "*My Little Brown Book*" and "*Your Love Has Faded*". I have never considered *Lush Life* a love song in the conventional sense. The structure, the usual narrative arc of unrequited love is there, it is true, rendered, albeit in the rather overwrought language of the adolescent. But, those opening lines seem to indicate a much more profound and existential concern. What compulsion, after all, had drawn the song's singer to those 'come-what-may' places in the first place? And what of the phrase '*the axis of the wheel of life*' with its echoes of Lear's *I am bound upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears do scald like molten lead*, that leads the listener to believe that something is rotten to the extent that love will neither salve nor solve. With its prophetic references to Paris (Strayhorn's favourite city), smoky dives and luminous libations, it is tempting to see the song as self-dramatizing autobiography. This would be wrong, I think, after all, Strayhorn was classically schooled. His work is neither mere self-indulgent self-expression nor therapy. It is art of the highest order and an art in touch with what it was like to be alive in the 20th Century: the century of Eliot's *The Wasteland*; Joyce's *Ulysses*; Picasso's *Guernica*.

Lush Life paints on the broad canvas not of Tin Pan Alley but of sophisticated supper club songs or cabaret. Ellington never found the unqualified success he hoped for in musical theatre and I think if he had, Billy Strayhorn's name would have reached much greater prominence sooner for Strayhorn's métier found perfect expression in this genre. Albums have been recorded of Ellington and Strayhorn's music for *Saturday Laughter* and *Beggar's Holiday* (which received a revival in Billy's beloved Paris in 2012). These are invariably recorded with just small-group, jazz-inflected arrangements. What treasures remain yet to be uncovered – and better still, performed – from his music for the theatre? And the projects to which Strayhorn was drawn often revolve around characters *in extremis*: Timon of Athens, Turcaret. Professor Unrat, Don Perlimplini: those whose lives are metaphors all, perhaps, for life in the 20th Century, or the dark corners of our own lives. As we celebrate Strayhorn's own centenary, we can be assured that his work will continue to speak as long as there are those who have ears to hear and we shall continue to make

new discoveries about his work throughout Billy Strayhorn's second century and beyond... **IB**

Catherine Coates

At the DESUK AGM in May 2011 Catherine Coates was elected as our Secretary. She had responded to an earlier appeal for members to fill several vacant positions and brought with her many years' experience as a Senior Secretary/PA. Her skill at transforming her shorthand notes into accurate and succinct minutes brought a new standard of professionalism to our work. The only condition Catherine imposed on her appointment was that our Saturday meetings in London should never clash with home fixtures for her beloved Sheffield Wednesday. A stipulation with which we were more than happy to comply!

Born and bred in Glasgow and when, as a young girl, she suffered the loss of her father, Catherine was determined to help her mother and started work in legal offices, picking up basic secretarial skills which were later developed in manufacturing industry. Higher education had to wait but eventually she took a full time degree course at Sheffield University, graduating at the age of 42 with a Dual Honours Degree in English and Philosophy. This stimulated a lasting enthusiasm for *inter alia*, the works of Joseph Conrad and John Donne.

Catherine will be best remembered within our Ellington community for her attendance, always with her husband Mike, at eight of the international Ellington conferences. Their first was Oldham 1988 and the most recent at Amsterdam in 2014.

Her funeral on 16th July was pre-arranged in considerable detail by Catherine herself while she spent her final days in St Luke's Hospice, Sheffield. She had no religious beliefs and, at her specific request, both the gathering in the funeral home and the burial a few miles away were entirely secular. All hospices have one or more chaplains of various religious denominations and the one who worked with her, in complete confidence, was Captain Mike Reeder of the Salvation Army. He officiated at both locations wearing an ordinary suit rather than the familiar military-style uniform. He ensured that Catherine's wishes were carried out to the letter. Her love of nature led her to pre-select the location where her willow casket was lowered into the ground at the Woodland burial site in Wisewood Cemetery. An ash tree will be planted.

Catherine is survived by her husband, DESUK life member and (since the May 2015 AGM) our Membership Secretary, Mike Coates and their son Steven.

(Catherine Coates, 9 January 1938 – 20 June 2015)

Peter Caswell

Duke's Other Hand by Martin Gayford

Thunder in the Wings

Duke's right hand man for nearly 30 years, Billy Strayhorn was sole composer of Ellington band classics like 'Take The 'A' Train', 'Chelsea Bridge' and 'Raincheck' as well as close collaborator on longer Ducal works like 'Such Sweet Thunder'. A retiring figure, Strayhorn's backstage input is both incalculable and unjustly neglected.

Billy Strayhorn was a major jazz composer and arranger by any standard; his music is graceful, astonishingly accomplished, easily accessible; some of his compositions are among the staple fare of most improvisers, yet he remains a curiously vague and elusive figure. The reason, of course, is almost inextricably interwoven with the oeuvre of a more important and far more celebrated musician – the world-famous, magnetic, charming Duke Ellington.

Theirs was probably a unique, creative partnership. Strayhorn was Duke's disciple, pupil, heir-apparent, assistant and staff arranger for 28 years (1939-1967), more than half the lifetime of the Ellington band. His early death from leukaemia shook Duke more than any event apart from the death of his mother, Daisy Ellington, in 1935. Although there does not seem much doubt about who was the senior partner, the relationship was not one-sided, either musically or personally. They were as complementary in personality as they were contrasted in appearance: Ellington tall, swashbucklingly good-looking, a footloose womanizer, flamboyant in every way; Strayhorn diminutive, bespectacled, homosexual, a retiring sophisticate by nature.

Sixteen years the younger, Strayhorn was partly inspired to become a jazz musician by Ellington's example, learned his craft from studying Duke's scores, and clearly continued to idolize him to the end. But Duke, it appears, was also influenced by Billy. A friend described the process like this: "I think Duke was a much simpler character before he met Strays, you could even say he was sweeter. But he was so much more interesting once Strays happened along." Ellington, a great deal of whose genius lay in seizing what other people had to offer, apparently gained the cosmopolitan gloss and baroquely convoluted language of his later years from Strayhorn.

To assess their mutual musical influence is a difficult, if not impossible task. At some point in the 1940s Duke developed the habit of referring all his work to Strayhorn for criticism and comment. There is a story, for example, about Ellington waking up Strayhorn in the middle of the night to hum the

theme of *New World A-Comin'*, which had just popped into Duke's head. Strayhorn's editorial hand, therefore, is present even in music on which his name does not appear. Ellington himself confirmed, when asked a question about the music for *Anatomy Of A Murder*, that Strayhorn was always his "consultant." The Ellingtonian influence on Strayhorn is undisputed, but what, one wonders, was the Strayhornian influence on Ellington?

When it comes to the music that they composed jointly – most of the major works of the late 50s and early 60s – the question becomes yet more tangled. Some of this seems to have been genuine collaboration, with passages by one mixed with passages by the other; but in the suites, they often seem to have worked separately on different sections of the whole. *Isfahan*, for example, from the *Far East Suite*, is known to be Strayhorn's, but, probably deliberately, it was not often explained who had written what. Even the players in the band didn't know, according to Clark Terry, since the music all arrived on the stand in the handwriting of the staff copyist, Tom Whaley. Nonetheless, once one finds out that Strayhorn composed *Isfahan* alone, it is tempting to go a little further. *The Star-Crossed Lovers*, for example, from *Such Sweet Thunder*, is so close to *Isfahan* in every way that it must also be by Strayhorn, and several other sections form the same work, notably *Half The Fun* and *Up And Down*, seem to me almost certain Strayhorn attributions.

Such Sweet Thunder is widely regarded as Ellington's finest work after the golden period of the early 40s, but a good half of it, I suspect, is pure Strayhorn.

Such speculations, of course, are on treacherous and difficult ground, and would probably not be worth pursuing at all if Strayhorn were not such an undeservedly forgotten figure. Aficionados may remember that it was he, not Duke, who composed *Take The 'A' Train*, but the rest of his work, when it is not sunk in the collaboration with Ellington, is scattered here and there across dozens of LPs and known to be his only by assiduous readers of liner notes. A further portion of his efforts, the arrangements of standards and re-arrangements of Ellington's old compositions, was seldom credited at all. Even when alive, he was scarcely visible, usually remaining in the dressing room while the band performed, and playing the piano almost exclusively on recordings; today he seems to be remembered only by musicians.

It's a different story if one sifts Strayhorn's contributions from the Ellington band's vast output.

Throughout the 1940s and the early part of the 50s, he composed, for the most part, alone, and during those years he produced a string of impressive and original scores: apart from '*A' Train*', the most notable include *Raincheck*, *Rock Skippin' At the Blue Note*, *The Intimacy Of The Blues*, *After All*, *Smada*, *Snibor*, *Chelsea Bridge*, *Johnny Come Lately*, *UMMG* and *Midriff*. The bulk of these, together with some previously unrecorded material, were gathered together by Ellington for his memorial album to Strayhorn, the wonderful ... *And His Mother Called Him Bill*.

This, rightly described by Gary Giddins as "one of the most sublimely conceived and executed long-playing records ever made," is Strayhorn's only monument, and the best starting place for a consideration of his style. Less iconoclastically original than Ellington, less craggy and less turbulent, Strayhorn nonetheless had a highly distinctive voice. The texture of his writing has a unique, satiny sheen, and his workmanship is far more orthodox than Duke's. Tom Whaley, the copyist, who was in an excellent position to know, described the difference between them in harmonic terms: "Billy always had a very good idea... the way he pictured music, when you looked at the chord, you could almost hear it... Sometimes, with Duke's, you have to stop – he has all the notes in there."

Strayhorn delighted in deft, contrapuntal patterns, He loved to divide the band up formally into trumpets, trombones and reeds, and then weave them neatly and elaborately back together again. This procedure derived not from Ellington, who preferred to build his music upon tonal contrasts, but from Fletcher Henderson, of whose style *Take The 'A' Train* began as a direct imitation. But Strayhorn took the idea far further; indeed, little else in jazz has the same combination of great complexity and absolute clarity as some of his later scores. *Boo-Dah* and *All Day Long* are good examples. One is reminded that before he had the road-to-Damascus experience of hearing the Ellington band, Strayhorn had been a classically trained musician and had studied Bach.

The feelings expressed in Strayhorn's compositions are less extrovert and more delicately etched than Ellington's. They include, it is true, the carefree high spirits of *Raincheck* and '*A' Train*' but the most individual mood is one of wistful languor. *Chelsea Bridge* is the perhaps the perfect example here, but, unlike most of the others, was not a feature for the sensuous ballad style of the band's alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges. The list of Strayhorn's vehicles for Hodges is long, and notably includes *Daydream*, *Passion Flower*, *Isfahan*, and, if I am right, *The Star-Crossed Lovers*. The culmination came in Strayhorn's last work *Blood Count*, which

he wrote on his deathbed; the gentle resignation, without any loss of poise, becomes dark and despairing. Hodges's performance of this piece on ... *And His Mother Called Him Bill* is one of the most affecting moments in jazz.

Eerily, the brooding atmosphere of this valedictory lament echoes Strayhorn's first important work, *Lush Life*, which was written when he was still in his teens. This astonishingly precocious effort was unorthodox in its construction but already contained several of Strayhorn's musical hallmarks: sighing cadences, urbane world-weariness, pastel Romanticism. The lyrics, which apparently first attracted Ellington's attention to Strayhorn, are less characteristic, and highly revealing. Strayhorn's later efforts in this line, the sub-hip nonsense added to *Satin Doll*, for example, are far from distinguished; but those for *Lush Life*, though gauche in places, are strongly felt and effective. The current of feeling is bitter and self-dramatizing, much what one might expect from a talented young misfit in a dull provincial town; but its imagery and props suggest he was living an imaginative life far removed from depression-bound Pittsburgh. *Lush Life*, with its "twelve o'clocktails" and Parisian cafés, belongs to the witty, melancholy world of Cole Porter and Lorenz Hart.

He had other affinities outside the borders of jazz. With Ravel, for example, of whose work the main theme of *Chelsea Bridge* is an accidental repetition. Although Strayhorn had not heard the Ravel, this incident is more than a fluke; there is a real similarity between the two. Ellington was sometimes alleged to be close to European Impressionistic music, but was in fact too ruggedly individual to have much in common with anyone else. With Strayhorn, however, the kinship was real.

Occasionally he slipped into tiresome artiness (on *Overture To A Jam Session*, for example), but in general Strayhorn's standards of taste and craftsmanship are astonishingly high. He wrote a few dozen of the most perfect scores in jazz, and for that alone he deserves to be remembered better than he is. But he also had a huge hidden impact on the style of the Ellington band from the 40s to the mid-60s. As I said, above, it is virtually impossible to separate Strayhorn's work from Ellington's in any given composition, but it is hard to believe that the Ellington band's music would have the suavity and polish which it did during those years had it not been for Strayhorn's presence. He is one person whose contribution to jazz is, literally, inestimable.

This article first appeared in Wire magazine, Issue 63, April 1989 and is reproduced here by kind permission of the author.

Me And You: The Musical Partnership Of Billy Strayhorn And Duke Ellington

By Andrew Homzy



Me and you got to get together...

From a composition by Duke Ellington for which Billy Strayhorn may have arranged the vocal chorus

The creation of wonders and mysteries Ellingtonian sometimes depended on assistance and collaboration. Collaboration was easy for the Duke since he was not only a leader but a team player in a sense similar to that of a player–manager on a baseball team, a writer–actor–director in theatre, or more closely to the subject, like the composer–conductor–keyboardist working in the courts and churches of Europe prior to the 19th century.

In Mark Tucker's fine book, *Ellington: The Early Years*, and in many other books and articles, much has been made of the importance of trumpeter Bubber Miley, who came to the small group that Ellington had in the early 1920s and brought to it not only a sense of the blues but a number of important melodies now regarded as canon in the Ellington

repertoire. Of the five or six known titles on which Miley shares composer credits with Ellington, *East St. Louis Toodle–O* and *Black And Tan Fantasy* unquestionably stand out as the most important and innovative.

In the 1920s, Ellington's group was a collective enterprise. And while Ellington was the front man and the major supplier of arrangements and compositions, other members besides Miley contributed to and collaborated in the process. The catalogue of Ellington's music includes other co-composers from within his orchestra such as Arthur Whetsel (*Misty Mornin'*), Otto Hardwick (*Down In Our Alley Blues*), Barney Bigard (*Mood Indigo*), Juan Tizol (*Caravan*). Others such as Harry Carney, Rex Stewart, Cootie Williams, and even bassist Hayes Alvis (*Love's In My Heart*—1940) also collaborated on a tune or two. Seemingly, the most prolific of these early collaborators was Ellington's

publisher/manager Irving Mills who received either composer and/or lyric credits on at least fifty compositions written prior to 1940—including the music to *Ring Dem Bells* and the words to *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart*.

Ellington lore intimates many uncredited collaborations or lick choruses which Ellington's musicians may have provided to the Ducal repertoire. Among these disputed collaborations may be Freddie Jenkins's lead line for the harmonized trumpet chorus heard in *Tiger Rag* and *Braggin' In Brass*, Otto Hardwick's main theme for *In A Sentimental Mood*, Johnny Hodges's melodic inspiration for *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart* and Ben Webster's melody for the exciting saxophone chorus in *Cottontail*. However, one point must be kept in mind concerning these melody-only collaborations: Ellington's part must have been the defining contribution since none of Duke's musicians went on to write compositions of any significance after they left his orchestra.

The 1930s brought Ellington more fame and respect—and his orchestra a new member with the addition of its first full-time vocalist, Ivie Anderson. By the late 1930s a number of changes seemed to be imminent in the social-musical organization of the orchestra. What had once been a family-like collective with everyone throwing in their ideas had became big business with corporate responsibilities and goals. By the late 30s, Ellington began to doubt the effectiveness of Irving Mills's management and the economic practice of sharing the royalties from his new compositions. The band members themselves were probably more hesitant to give away tunes and licks for fear of them turning up in future compositions without any associated composer credit.

As his orchestra was expected to play more and more hit parade tunes at their engagements Ellington found that any time spent arranging pieces by other composers took away time to write his own music. Thus it was proverbial good fortune when a young musician showed up back stage at the Stanley Theatre in Pittsburgh in December 1938.

While from an extremely poor family, Billy Strayhorn had developed into a child prodigy at the piano and upon graduation from Westinghouse High School, he played Grieg's A minor Concerto with the school orchestra. About this time, Billy's older brother James, Jr. said: "Why don't you play some jazz? Billy said, 'No, I don't like jazz'". His sister-in-law Carol maintained, "He planned to be a concert pianist." Robert Conaway, a close friend and accomplished pianist, observed that Billy Strayhorn had perfect pitch and that he had a good stack of music on his piano. Furthermore Conaway said that

Billy "was really an academic musician... he played, more or less, like Tatum and of course, Tatum is fantastic. He definitely was an academic musician." Strayhorn himself said: "I started out studying the Three B's - Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms."

Even if he was not attracted to jazz at this time, by age 20, Strayhorn must have heard Pittsburgh contemporary Erroll Garner (b. 1921 - d. 1977) - 6 years his junior (and perhaps he had also heard Mary Lou Williams, b. 1910, who also grew up there).

Interviews with those who knew Strayhorn in high school offer contradictory statements about the young musician's activity after he graduated. Carol Strayhorn has said that "in 1934, Bill broadcast every night from a nightclub in Pittsburgh with a trio called The Top Hatters". Yet, Robert Conaway has stated, "I've never known Billy to play in a club or anything - no kind of night club." Billy himself said "While I was in Pittsburgh, I had worked around, playing gigs, but I didn't consider myself good enough, so I hadn't decided what to do."

We can probably assume that he was practising a lot and playing little jobs around town (although it doesn't seem as if he ever worked in dance bands), but his main income still came from working in a drugstore. Finally Robert Conaway encouraged Strayhorn to take his music to some of the big time bandleaders to try and get it published. It happened that Duke was in town.

Robert Conaway remembered this 1938 meeting, saying that "Duke had started an arrangement for his band and asked Billy to complete it. Duke was pleased [with the result] and gave Strayhorn \$20.00. Billy did the work on the spot while Ellington was backstage." And while at a backstage piano, Strayhorn ran over a few original tunes, singing the lyrics to some of them as he played. According to Carol Strayhorn, *Something To Live For* was among the songs Billy first showed to Duke, who said he liked them and asked for copies. "I can't, I haven't written them down", Billy replied. Ever the talent scout, Duke left Strayhorn saying: "Maybe we'll see you here again, or maybe you can come and see me in New York. I like your stuff".

Billy later recalled: "I had never thought about being an arranger, I hardly knew what an arranger was, but I had a friend in Pittsburgh called Bill Esch, and he was an arranger. In fact, he and I came to New York together. He worked for Ina Ray Hutton and he was a great help to me. We discussed music and everything together. Even so, I wasn't particularly desirous of becoming an arranger. I came to New York because Duke liked my lyrics, but after I joined the band I was completely turned around, and I went to arranging and playing the piano." Officially, Billy joined the Ellington

organization at the Adams Theatre in Newark on 23 January, 1939.

At first, Duke seemed particularly interested in Strayhorn's lyrics. Perhaps on reviewing some of the compositions Billy had shown him in Pittsburgh, Duke took an interest in *Something To Live For*. Scores in Strayhorn's hand exist in the Ellington archives. These may represent attempts by the callow composer to write for the orchestra—but what also exists is the score in Ellington's hand which was used for the 21 March, 1939 recording to feature vocalist Jean Eldridge. Ellington's score demonstrates the quality of a master arranger quickly putting together a piece of music professionally and imaginatively. Always one to recycle good ideas, Ellington simply lifted the introduction from his never-recorded-arrangement of a now forgotten pop tune, *Robins And Roses*. These four measures were immortalized in *Something to Live For* when it was recorded just before Ellington left on a short tour of Europe in the spring of 1939.

While Ellington was in Europe, Billy and Duke's son, Mercer, studied Ellington's scores. During this time, Strayhorn composed and arranged *Day Dream* for full band. But again this arrangement may have had too many problems—the piece was eventually recorded by Hodges' small group. When Duke returned from Europe, he and Mercer suggested Billy try his hand at some small band arrangements. "I was scared", Billy recalled. Later, Strayhorn said: "Of course, Duke is a great teacher, but not in the sense that he sits down and says, 'Now you do so-and-so.' He'll hand you something and say, 'Do this!' And you have so much faith in him that you sit down and do it! You find that you can."

For Hodges, Strayhorn wrote *Like a Ship in the Night* (featuring Jean Eldridge, vocal), *Savoy Strut*, and *You Can Count On Me*; for Bigard, he wrote *Barney Goin' Easy* and *Minuet in Blues*.

Strayhorn must have also eagerly accepted Duke's offer to travel with the band as this gave the budding arranger opportunities for listening to soloists and sections, studying Duke's scores, analyzing his arranging technique, ensemble chords, melodic lines, and especially the characterization of the soloists. By virtually living with the band Strayhorn was able to assimilate "The Ellington Effect."

During this time, a rivalry began to develop as Mercer had difficulty in getting his music played when Strayhorn joined the band. Duke's son must have been a bit jealous about Strayhorn's ability since the young Ellington was also pursuing a career in music. Mercer later said that "[Billy] was capable of playing good piano - not great piano, but good piano. He had a solid foundation in music theory and enough training in composition to appreciate Duke

Ellington's work. What really put Billy into the picture was the struggle between ASCAP and BMI in 1940-41." As if to make Mercer even more jealous, Duke enlisted Billy to provide "manuscript and rehearsal aid" for Mercer's new band formed in 1941. Mercer was not the only one to react antagonistically. Strayhorn remembered that Duke's copyist Juan Tizol refused to write out instrumental parts from the newcomer's scores.

Quickly, Strayhorn virtually took over the small group dates as arranger and as a pianist. On these sessions, Billy plays on *Blues a Poppin', Toasted Pickles, Give It Up, Tired Socks, Skunk Hollow Blues*.

Duke was particularly impressed with one of Strayhorn's small group arrangements: *Barney Goin' Easy*. "I'm Checkin' Out, Goom-bye should be the title," said Duke. Strayhorn completed the lyric suggested by Duke who then wrote the arrangement featuring Ivie Anderson with the big band. Billy later wrote full arrangements for Ivie—*Jumpin' Jive* and *Killin' Myself*—which assured his position in the ranks of the band.

As he acquired more experience, Strayhorn began to collaborate with the Duke on instrumental arrangements. One known example demonstrates how valuable the new member was to Ellington. While in Europe, Duke had written and played a new piece without much success. Sometime in the fall of 1940, Strayhorn looked over the composition, which Duke had called *Take It Away*, and re-worked it for the newly discovered prodigy on the double bass, Jimmie Blanton. With Strayhorn's alterations, the piece became an Ellington classic in its recorded version as *Jack The Bear*. In fact, it was Strayhorn who had discovered Blanton in October 1939. The young bassist set new standards for his instrument and brought the Ellington rhythm section to the vanguard of American jazz orchestras. Obviously pleased with Strayhorn's development, Ellington gave the young musician more opportunities to write for the full orchestra. In 1940-41 Billy Strayhorn contributed brilliant original compositions to Ellington's repertoire. Many of these pieces—*A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing, Clementine, Day Dream, Take The 'A' Train, After All, Chelsea Bridge, Passion Flower, Raincheck*—have become classics in American music.

In 1940, Duke had two theme songs: *Sepia Panorama* for openers and *Warm Valley* as a closer. Late in 1940, ASCAP, a performing rights association to which Duke belonged, called a ban on the music they controlled in order to gain higher royalties. As Mercer had mentioned, Billy and he were fledgling composers and as such were not

signed up with ASCAP. Thus, Duke took to featuring their pieces and when it came time to provide a theme song for radio broadcasts, Duke chose a new piece of Billy's—*Take The 'A' Train*. As well, Duke realized the opportunity to set up his own publishing company, Tempo Music, and was able to collect royalties on almost every piece he recorded from that time on. Duke's biggest hits of 1941, *Take The 'A' Train* and *Flamingo*, were among the first pieces in the new catalogue.

There may have been some collaboration between Strayhorn and Ellington on *Take The 'A' Train*. On the first known recording, 15 January, 1941 for the Standard Radio Transcription company, in the final A section (after the bridge), the orchestration simply repeats the initial statements of the A section. On the famous Victor recording one month later, this final A section has been re-scored—replacing the counter riffs of the trumpets and trombones with a harmonized mass-brass response to the unison saxophone melody. Master Ellington transcriber David Berger has found a score page in Duke's hand consisting of only six measures which correspond exactly with this passage. Furthermore, Berger suggests that Ellington was responsible for the piano introduction as well as the pyramid effect which provides the transition from the end of Ray Nance's trumpet solo to the final reprise of the melody. Berger speculates that perhaps Ellington assisted Strayhorn with the arrangement of *A-Train* since it seems unlikely that such a young, inexperienced composer/arranger could have produced such a masterful score.

Much of the literature on Ellington agrees that Duke promoted Strayhorn to arrange almost all of the big band's pop tunes with vocals, including Herb Jeffries's first records (1940) and Ivie Anderson's last (1942). In 1941, Duke had Strayhorn do much of the writing for his ill-fated but important musical, *Jump for Joy*. With this able assistant on the team, Duke could now apply his teacher's, Will Vodery's, advice: "When you write a score [for a show], don't ever arrange it. When you do, you are confined by your own personal prejudices."

Of the original scores from *Jump For Joy* now housed in the Ellington Archives at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, the clearest example demonstrating Strayhorn's assistance is *Rocks In My Bed*. One can see that Ellington wrote the first two instrumental choruses. Strayhorn's hand takes over for the two vocal choruses and Ellington's returns to write the rest of the arrangement. (Due to the time limits of 78 rpm discs, a full chorus for Rex Stewart was replaced by a 4-bar piano interlude on the Victor recording.) By studying this score, one can discern foreign yet compatible techniques such as the

rhythmic writing in the trombones (bars 3 and 4) and the unison sax line supporting the first vocal chorus (bars 9 and 10). In the second chorus the increased chromatic harmonization and the quarter-note descending chromatic 9th chords (bar 9) seem to be idiomatic Strayhorn devices. Ellington had used a similar sounding technique as this later device in bars 7 & 8 of the second instrumental chorus to support Bigard's solo. However, whereas Strayhorn simply slides his harmonies down in locked constant structures, Ellington's voice leadings are at once more sophisticated and more distinctive (linear) when considering each individual part. Also in the first vocal chorus, is an upper-register-wail scored for clarinet and three trumpets which illustrates the innovative concept of cross-section voicing that set Ellington apart from his contemporaries (bars 3-4 and 7-8). Yet, there is a seamless unity to *Rocks In My Bed* which never causes the listener to suspect that two people were involved in creating this piece of music. Strayhorn had learned his lessons well.

Ellington's and Strayhorn's first official collaboration was *The Perfume Suite* (December, 1944) in which one can hear the younger musician's classicisms. More effective however were Strayhorn's wonderful vocal arrangements such as *My Heart Sings* (4 January, 1945) - with its introduction inspired by fin du siècle art song of Parisian salons. However, such stylistic affectations were not always appropriate. In the coda of his otherwise brilliant *Midriff*, after the wonderful saxophone tutti, Strayhorn closes with a "Roman" spectacle of brass fanfares. Billy's avowed interests in Stravinsky, Rachmaninov, Ravel, Milhaud, and Schubert sometimes showed up inappropriately.

Besides *The Perfume Suite*, the only other known compositional collaboration from this period was *Tonk* (10 January, 1946), a deliciously bi-tonal, 4-hand piano duet Ellington and Strayhorn often played at parties. *Tonk* was probably never written down—it probably developed out of requests for the two composer/pianists to entertain their hosts.

The mid and late 40s were busy times for Strayhorn who wrote practically every vocal arrangement. He also wrote the arrangements on some of the non-Ellington compositions including *Royal Garden Blues* (3 September, 1946). Once, this author speculated "this arrangement sounds as if Strayhorn wrote the first half, turning over the score to Duke to finish as might one who grew up with the music." Does the original score, now found in Strayhorn's hand, confirm or deny Ellington's input?

In 1949, the NBC Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Arturo Toscanini commissioned Ellington to write a musical portrait of New York. *The Harlem Suite*—also known as *A Tone Parallel*

To Harlem—is now considered to be a major work, if not a watershed piece, in Ellington's œuvre. Duke's son Mercer remarked that “Pop was always rather proud of [Harlem] as one of the most integrated of his longer works.” Today, Ellington's original score may be found in the Ellington Archives. Unsuspected by students of Ellington for all these years, is the fact is that the ending is scored by Strayhorn. With this knowledge one seems to hear the change of hands when listening to the recording.

Ten years after he was brought on the team, Billy Strayhorn had worked out all æsthetic and compositional problems and would be trusted and invited to collaborate with Ellington on practically every major work for the rest of his life. Billy and Duke's styles of composition began to merge so closely in the mid-1950s that even long time band members had difficulty distinguishing who wrote what. Not surprisingly, even their music manuscript began to look similar. The pair co-wrote many extended pieces and suites such as: *The Newport Festival Suite* (1956), *A Drum Is A Woman* (1956), *The Shakespearean Suite* (1957), *A Portrait Of Ella Fitzgerald* (1957), *Toot Suite* (1958), *Idiom '59* (1959), *The Nutcracker Suite* (1960), *Suite Thursday* (1960), *Paris Blues* (1960), *Pousse Café* (1962), *The Sacred Music Concerts* (1965), *The Virgin Island Suite* (1965), *The Far East Suite* (1964-66).

The following excerpt from an interview of Strayhorn by Bill Coss for Downbeat magazine provides a remarkable insight into the level this collaborative process had reached:

Strayhorn: I can give you a good example of something we did over the phone. We were supposed to be playing the Great South Bay Festival about three years ago. Duke had promised a new composition to the people who ran it. He was on the road someplace. So he called me up and told me he had written some parts of a suite. This was maybe two or three days before he was due back in New York, and that very day he was supposed to be at the festival.

He told me some of the things he was thinking of. We discussed the keys and the relationship of the parts, things like that. And he said write this and that. The day of the festival, I brought my part of the suite out to the festival grounds. There was no place and no time to rehearse it, but I told Duke it shouldn't be hard for the guys to sight-read their parts, without playing, you understand.

“Then they played it. My part was inserted in the middle. You remember I hadn't heard any of it. I was sitting in the audience with some other people who knew what had happened, and, when they got to my part, then went into Ellington's part, we burst out

laughing. I looked up on the stage and Ellington was laughing too. Without really knowing it, I had written a theme that was a kind of development of a similar theme that he had written. So when he played my portion and went into his, it was as though we had really worked together - or one person had done it. It was an uncanny feeling, like witchcraft, like looking into someone else's mind.

Coss: How about the larger pieces - what's the extent of your work on them?

Strayhorn: I've had very little to do with any of them. I've worked on a couple of the suites, like *Perfume Suite* and this one. I've forgotten the name of it. That day, it was called *Great South Bay Festival Suite*. [Ellington expert Patricia Willard recalls the title became *Toot Suite - Red Garter; Red Shoes; Red Carpet; Ready, Go* - 1958]

(Coss, Bill and Billy Strayhorn.

Ellington & Strayhorn, Inc., Downbeat, 7 June, 1962, pp.22+)

Another example of this communication comes from Ellington, who in his biography *Music Is My Mistress* (p. 156), relates: “Our rapport was the closest. When I was writing my first sacred concert, I was in California and he was in a New York hospital. On the telephone, I told him about the concert and that I wanted him to write something. ‘Introduction, ending, quick transitions,’ I said. ‘The title is the first four words of the bible—*In the Beginning God*.’ He had not heard my theme, but what he sent to California started on the same note as mine. ... Out of six notes representing the six syllables of the four words, only two notes were different.”

This collaboration could work on another level as in *The Queen's Suite* where Ellington described his experience of the Aurora Borealis while on tour in Canada to Strayhorn. “Billy Strayhorn did not see this, but he wrote the music after I told him about it. It (*Northern Lights*) turned out to be a wonderful piece...” (*Music Is My Mistress*, p. 112-113)

Some critics and authors have suggested that most of the music written during the 50s and 60s was by Strayhorn and that for many years after his death, Ellington continued to draw from a well of Strayhorn's music. Finally, the availability of manuscript scores in the Ellington Archives provides many clues for determining who wrote what. Scores do not exist for every piece but one can come to a more informed conclusion by studying all the available Strayhorn scores and compare them to all available Ellington scores. This analysis will provide more sophisticated tools for listening to the recordings and developing more informed criteria for making judgements.

During the final stages of his illness, Billy had

asked his friend and nephew, Gregory Morris, to be the executor of his estate. Strayhorn seemed particularly concerned, complaining he had found someone from Ellington's office trying to take away his music. Gregory Morris said that he took back some of Strayhorn's sheet music which consisted of "arrangements" and that it was all published material. Missing from the Ellington archives are a number of scores which may prove pivotal in defining the extent to which Ellington and Strayhorn collaborated. Among these are *Take The 'A' Train*, *Satin Doll*, *Beige from Black, Brown And Beige* and *Suite Thursday*. Mr Morris's concern may have been well founded since the ASCAP listing of copyright percentages does not credit Strayhorn properly. Any manuscript scores that may now be in the possession of Morris might provide more clues to the process of collaboration between Ellington and Strayhorn. One can only hope that someday all of Strayhorn's remaining scores will be archived together.

Ellington considered himself "a primitive" and Strayhorn "a sophisticate". However, the two

composers easily reversed those characterizations and wrote music which will continue to confound any definite authorship. Despite Strayhorn's denial of working on the larger suites, David Berger has revealed that Ruth Ellington was told to add Billy Strayhorn's name to *all* the suites when she visited the Duke as he lay ill in the hospital just before his death.

It may be impossible to determine exactly which was the last composition Billy Strayhorn ever wrote. A likely candidate seems to be *The Intimacy Of The Blues*. First recorded as part of a *Combo Suite*, scores for four movements of this collaboration were found in the archives titled *High, Figh, Fo, and Fum*. Strayhorn wrote the first and Ellington the last three. It may be that Ellington wrote the big band arrangement used for ...and his Mother called him Bill. Thus if recollections and deductions are to be believed, Billy Strayhorn's first assignment for and last contribution to Ellington were collaborations—a unique partnership in all of music.



Weely by Roger Boyes

'Always heard but seldom seen' is what they said about Billy Strayhorn, and that was certainly how it was with me. From the time I started listening to jazz in the late 1950s I was aware of him. *Take The 'A' Train*, Ellington's signature tune since 1941, was the final track on my first Ellington LP of Victor classics. The magnificent 1952 '*A' Train* with Betty Roché's hip vocal was also a signature tune, of the *Voice of America Jazz Hour*, presented nightly by another pillar of my musical education, Willis Conover, the deep, ponderous voice *d'outre-tombe*. But I never saw Billy.

In those days opinions seemed to be divided about him. Richard O Boyer's 1944 *New Yorker* profile *The Hot Bach*, recently (1958) reprinted in Peter Gammond's anthology on Duke, revealed a young man who was already at the heart of Ellingtonia. Against that, jazz pundits with lively imaginations, little evidence, and sometimes (I now realize) limited musical ears, had built up a construct according to which Billy's arrival in 1939 had brought to Ellington's music an unwelcome effeteness. More than one of Gammond's contributors expressed reservations about his influence. A Strayhorn composition on a Hodges LP of the time, *Ballade* (note the 'e') *For Very Sad And Very Tired Lotus Eaters*, seemed to encourage that view. It was many years before I heard this lovely piece, listed in the Record Guide at the back of Gammond's book. But I never forgot its striking title.

The negative critical view seemed to me from the start to be bound up with the arid 'hot' versus 'cool' (or 'sweet'), and 'trad' versus 'modern' controversies which were then rife. Other Strayhorn titles seemed to support the idea. *Passion Flower* and *A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing* were two, no doubt originating in the love of flowers imbibed at Billy's maternal relatives' home in North Carolina, to which he escaped from time to time as a child from the rough Pittsburgh home dominated by his heavy-drinking father. I never had a problem with these titles, nor with *Day Dream*, which for me recalls Debussy's *Prélude A L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*. No-one crudely dismisses that as 'effete'. You might think so, if it was not to your taste, but you don't bang on about it in print. We'll never know if Billy liked Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, a wonderful septet for harp with flute, clarinet and strings. But if he knew it, I'm sure he did.

Other compositions offered another side of Billy Strayhorn. There was *Rock Skippin' At The Blue*

Note, the delightful title track of a Philips EP which was my little sampler of Ellingtonia from the start of the 1950s. There was Duke's *Weely*, a sprightly 1939 portrait of Billy, on the first of CBS's three-LP anthologies of *The Ellington Era 1927-1940*. Fancy the Maestro composing a musical portrait of his newly-arrived protégé at the same time as he created his portraits of his mentor Willie 'The Lion Smith', and Little Posey, his recently retired showman trumpeter Freddy Jenkins! The youngster hadn't taken long to make his presence felt in the Ellington *milieu*. There was the lovely *Something To Live For* on the second *Ellington Era* set, affectingly sung by the obscure Jean Eldridge. Duke and Billy shared composer credits for many of these pieces, usually (though not always) with Ellington's name appearing first. Years later we learned that some of them were Billy's alone. *Something To Live For* certainly was. He wrote it in Pittsburgh, before he left to join Ellington.

Such Sweet Thunder, *A Drum Is A Woman* and the *Newport Suite*, all of them prominent works of my formative years in the late fifties, were bell-wether LPs for Duke's productive final Columbia period. On these too Billy's name appeared as co-composer, and again, it was much later that we learned who wrote what. It was easy, but wrong, to reduce the role of the 'writing and arranging companion' to that of 'assistant', a sort of hands-on Eric Fenby to Ellington's Delius.

Like '*A' Train* and *Rock-Skippin'*', some pieces were always Billy's alone. On *All Day Long* (1954) the soloist Clark Terry has the initial theme statement, and the orchestral sections, *soli*, have the development and recapitulation, a reversal of the usual soloist-ensemble relationship in jazz arranging. Why don't the writers who support their dismissive view of the Capitols by trundling out routine disparaging remarks about *Bunny Hop Mambo* from the same session ever mention *All Day Long*? Duke liked it well enough to revive it on the 1967 Strayhorn memorial album *And His Mother Called Him Bill*, on which Cat Anderson takes over Clark's solo.

There's *Snibor* which I first heard on the Hodges LP *Ellingtonia '56*, though it goes back to the late 1940s when it was originally titled *The New Look*. There's *Smada*, a light swinger which like *Snibor* Duke first recorded around the end of the 1940s. It is jointly credited, but Eddie Lambert was in no doubt it was Strayhorn's alone, 'a piece in the '*A' Train* mould'. And so it is, but *Smada* came first. Billy wrote it in 1935 for his show *Fantastic Rhythm*,

titling it *Ugly Duckling*. How quickly the youngster, until then largely preoccupied with his piano studies, classical music and music for the theatre, became not just fluent but decidedly ‘advanced’ in the jazz idiom, to the extent that he was already thinking musically in ways which would produce *Take The ‘A’ Train*.

The views of musicians always merit closer attention than those of pundits and jazz journalists. By the 1940s forward thinking musicians were in no doubt about Strays.

John Lewis: ‘It was the arrangement of *Flamingo*. It had nothing to do with what had gone on at all in jazz before. It sounded as if Stravinsky were a jazz musician’.

Gerry Mulligan: ‘When Strayhorn came on the scene, he just blew us away, because he was doing very complicated, sophisticated things, and they didn’t sound complicated to the ear at all – they sounded completely natural and very emotional’.

Gil Evans: ‘From the moment I first heard *Chelsea Bridge* I set out to try to do that. That’s all I ever did – try to do what Billy Strayhorn did’.

Dizzy Gillespie: ‘All those sevenths – man, I never heard anything like those things until him.’

Ralph Burns: ‘Billy took big-band music and took it up a couple of steps musically. He was really writing classical music for the Duke Ellington Orchestra’.

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Early RCA reissues of 1940s Victors introduced me to *Chelsea Bridge*, *Raincheck* and the shamefully neglected *Clementine*; and in a later one I discovered *Midriff*, which became a firm favourite. I became a bit of a collector of *Midriffs*. I first encountered it through the fine versions on Columbia’s *Piano In The Background* (1960) and Bethlehem’s *Historically Speaking – The Duke* (1956), on which Ray Nance took the major solo slot, in the absence from the band of Lawrence Brown, to whom it was originally entrusted. As soon as I heard the 1946 Victor (which they actually recorded for Charles Delaunay’s Swing label, not for themselves) I knew something was wrong. The ending was a mess. Years later, at *Ellington’88* in Oldham, Loren Schoenberg showed in a fascinating tour through Billy’s composition how the score had been savagely cut to fit the constraints of the 10-inch 78. I’d always known that ‘three-minute form’ is nonsense. The beautifully-recorded 1946 Victor *Midriff* is three-minute deformity. I began to listen to other Ellington recordings of the late 1930s and 1940s which end unsatisfactorily, with truncation in mind. Live versions and transcriptions recorded for radio later confirmed that there were many cuts for 78s. By the mid-1940s Billy, and Duke, were

regularly writing four- to five-minute scores. They had outgrown the three-minute constraint.

It is well known that one of Billy’s early assignments, along with the small-band arrangements, had been the popular songs. For a long time it was not well known that, in addition to songs of the day, like those on albums like *Mary Poppins*, *Ellington’65* and *Ellington’66*, this responsibility extended to charts of some of the masterpieces of the American songbook. *My Funny Valentine* and *Laura* (c1956), *Out Of This World* (1945), parts of which were incorporated in *The Eighth Veil* (1946), are three. *Where Or When* is an interesting example. It appeared, not credited to Billy, on *Ellington Indigos* (1957), but the score dates back to around 1943 and is tailored to the needs of a singer (unidentified). *WOW!* is the abbreviated title on the manuscript score.

An arrangement of Vernon Duke’s *Autumn In New York* dates from 1948. I own up to being prejudiced here, as this song is a long-time favourite of mine, but you don’t have to be a fan of the song to appreciate the excellence of Billy’s score. Yet the Ellington Orchestra never recorded it at all, and it remained, as far as I am aware, unheard until 1999, when the Dutch Jazz Orchestra recorded it, in a reading which lasts for almost eight minutes.

Billy died in 1967, of the throat cancer he had been fighting for some time. In the late summer of that year the Ellington Orchestra recorded *And His Mother Called Him Bill*, eleven Strayhorn compositions plus a piano solo by Duke, *Lotus Blossom*. It is a beautifully put together RCA album, enhanced by Duke’s eulogy and notes by Stanley Dance. Dance had come a long way from his contemptuous dismissal of Billy’s work in an article he had written 24 years earlier. His take on *Raincheck* in 1967 is very different from the view he took in 1943. Ex-Ellingtonians Clark Terry, John Sanders (by then a Roman Catholic priest) and Sam Woodyard re-joined the band for this tribute, on one or other of the recording dates. Within the Orchestra Billy was deeply loved.

From the 1970s onwards live performances and transcriptions began to clarify our understanding, hitherto based solely on the studio recordings. Later still the availability of the musical MSS added further perspective. Eventually we were able to learn how the two writing and arranging companions worked together. It seems they didn’t actually collaborate as much as was once thought, and when they did, it was often over the telephone. They knew each other’s ‘pings and pongs’ intuitively, but they usually wrote as individuals. Strays might be called on to flesh out an Ellington sketch (*Blutopia*, *Blue Belles of Harlem*), or to produce an ending with

which Duke was having difficulty. Duke might interfere with a Strayhorn score for recording or performance purposes (*Orson*), sometimes to the younger man's understandable annoyance.

In the early 1950s Billy was frustrated enough at his lack of recognition and at Duke's neglect of a lot of his music to fly the coop. His lover had settled in Paris successfully some years earlier, and Billy moved there to join him. He loved Paris but things didn't work out as he had hoped, and by 1955 he was back in the fold, though still prone to frustration at being undervalued. It was an unavoidable aspect of the relationship, but against it he was spared the harsh realities of having to hustle a living in the unforgiving world of the music business. Duke offered him financial security and social status, and the freedom to pursue his interests and way of life without fear of persecution. It was a two-way thing, and the two men were good for each other. Duke exploited Billy as he exploited so many who came into his orbit, and as a fellow pianist and composer, Billy was particularly vulnerable. But Billy's position served him well too, admittedly in his subordinate role, and with the unresolved frustrations arising from his lack of recognition. 'He is he and I am me'.

Just how much lack of recognition there was of Billy's distinctive genius can be seen in the substantial body of music which remained quite unknown until Walter van de Leur investigated the MSS in the 1990s. There's *Pentonsilic* (1942), a 12-minute exploration of two contrasting subjects, the first a bright theme of show-tune theatricality, the second a slower, moody ballad which was adapted a couple of years later into *Balcony Serenade*, a movement of the *Perfume Suite*. *Le Sacre Supreme* from the same period looks ahead in its chromaticism and modality to pieces like Miles Davis's *So What* over ten years later. There are pieces like *Everything Is Copasetic*, written in the 1950s for the annual revues of a the Copasetics, a hoofers' fellowship society of which Billy was an honorary member. There are theatre songs (this aspect of Strayhorn's art goes right back to the 1930s in Pittsburgh and *Fantastic Rhythm*). He wrote the raucous *On The Wrong Side Of The Railroad Track* for *Beggar's Holiday*.

Quite different, and often not really jazz at all in the usual sense, is the music for Lorca's surrealist play *The Love of Dom Perlimpín for Belisa in their Garden – Wounded Love, Sprite Music, Love Love, The Flowers Die Of Love*. This music dates from the time when Billy was living in Paris in the early 1950s. There's *Tonk*, familiar as a piano four hands party piece Duke and Billy used to perform, but in reality a short concertino for piano and orchestra

from 1940, seasoned perhaps with a dash of Francis Poulenc. Is this Billy's 'Portrait of The Duke', returning the compliment of Weely?

While Billy's upbringing in Pittsburgh was far from easy, he had the advantage of attending Westinghouse High, a school with a thriving music department staffed by lively teachers of energy and vision. He aspired to be a concert pianist but the colour bar ruled out that idea. Like Will Marion Cook before him, who had studied in Berlin with Joseph Joachim, Billy turned to musical theatre when faced with this barrier, and then to jazz, where a black musician could thrive in the 1930s.

Before the harsh injustices of American racism bore down on him Billy had benefited from a thorough, well-rounded musical grounding, certainly compared to the rudimentary one Duke received fifteen or so years earlier in Washington. I find it hard to believe he didn't know the Brahms F minor clarinet sonata. Listen to the second movement, *Andante un poco Adagio*, and in the piano part you'll hear, at bar 23, around a minute and a half into the piece, the familiar verse of *Something To Live For* ('I have almost everything a human could desire....'). The movement is a regular test piece for aspiring clarinettists working through the musical grades. Billy, who developed into a gifted pianist while at school (he performed the Grieg concerto with the school orchestra), may well have been called on to accompany a fellow student on the piece. Westinghouse High served Billy well, and prepared him for a distinguished musical career.

The Strayhorn bookshelf is minute compared to Ellington's, comprising just two volumes. In the mid-1990s David Hajdu published his well-researched, balanced biography *Lush Life*, and a few years later Walter van de Leur published *Something To Live For*, his comprehensive survey of Billy's musical legacy, based firmly on the manuscript scores and his researches into them for his doctoral thesis. Both are excellent examples of their genres, and they complement each other very well.

As we celebrate the centenary of Billy's birth, we can reflect on the varied musical legacy of a gifted composer and pianist who was much more than a collaborator, and certainly no mere assistant. Look at the names of those eminent musicians singing the praises of Billy Strayhorn. I could have just as easily selected comments by Benny Carter, Bill Finegan, Billy May, Slide Hampton. In the 1940s especially, Billy advanced the development of jazz composition, orchestration and arranging hugely. Strays, Swee'pea, Weely was an inspiration to many, and for the best part of thirty years an enriching force, in the world of Ellingtonia and much more widely.

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Strayhorn the Pianist by Kevin Whitehead



Even Strayhorn devotees and scholars have trouble focusing on his piano playing. Bring up the topic and they tend to wander onto some other aspect of his art, or go mum, or sheepishly confess they hadn't heard (or can't remember) his playing much. Or else they fall back on effusive but unspecific praise. Pianist Brooks Kerr, who knew him and listened to him play in the 1960s, says simply, "I loved it—everything he did. His touch, his choice of notes, his voicings were perfection. I have no criticism."

There isn't a whole lot of Strayhorn's piano on record. The A list includes a few dates under his own name, most long out of print; ten four-hand duets (or trios, adding bass) with Duke recorded in 1946 and '50; scattered live and studio appearances with the Ellington orchestra or with small spinoff groups, mostly ones led by Johnny Hodges. (Bob Thiele's Red Baron label put out an album of unreleased performances, but Sony brass nixed letting us hear them in advance.)

With Duke's band, Strayhorn was very much the boss's deputy—subbing on the stand when Duke

was ill or had injured a hand, or was schmoozing with someone in the audience come show time. In the studio, Strayhorn was often but not always featured playing his own material. Ellington's Boswell, Stanley Dance, recalls that on some sessions, Strayhorn might play during the rundowns or an early take, to be replaced by the leader for the master. And sometimes, says writer and Ellingtonian Helen Oakley Dance, Strayhorn would man the piano when Duke wanted to monitor proceedings from the control booth.

There are two good reasons for his low profile: Ellington was the world's greatest band piano player, and Strayhorn just wasn't a guy to push himself. Marian McPartland: "When I played at the Hickory House, Duke would come and sit in, but it never occurred to me to ask Billy to do it, even though he'd come in and sit for hours, and I knew all his tunes. He was such a retiring person, a guy who'd always defer. Not the same kind of guy as Duke, who was a big ham."

That said, there's enough Strayhorn piano on record to give you a fix on his style. Often he sounds like what he was: a classically trained pianist who became enamoured of Duke's playing. (Kerr says Ellington and Willie the Lion Smith were avowed influences, but concedes he doesn't hear the Lion's mighty stride in Strayhorn.) Even so, Billy never quite got the Ellington effect at the keyboard — his touch was more even, less idiosyncratic. "Duke used the piano like a drum," Stanley Dance says. "The difference between Billy and Duke was like the difference between Teddy Wilson and Earl Hines."

Downtown composer/improviser Anthony Coleman was a precocious fan of the Ellington band—he reckons he heard Duke live about 150 times, starting in 1969, when Anthony was 13—and a student of various piano styles. He's also contributed to editor Gary Carner's book of essays on Strayhorn. Of *Cue's Blue Now*, from the Dance-produced 1959 album *Cue for Saxophone* (a mainstream septet date showcasing Johnny Hodges as "Cue Porter"), Coleman says, "You can hear that he's 'doing a Duke,' on the intro especially, but he can't bring out that jagged attack, doesn't have a feel for it. He tries to feed the soloists the same way Duke does, but he's too well mannered: his comping is halfway between embellishment and prodding. He plays Ellington chords in Ellington places, but he doesn't play them percussively."

Still, about their four-hand set piece *Tonk*, which is highly percussive—surreal boogie-woogie for a Fritz Lang cityscape—Coleman says, "This sounds like Strayhorn to me. With its superimposed chords, its suggestions of whole-tone scales and polytonality, it has to do with musics influenced by jazz—Gershwin, the French composers of the '20s like Poulenc—coming back to jazz."

"Ellington's playing and writing is about the weight of sonorities—which, for me, is what 20th century music is really about—rather than harmony, which is Strayhorn's strength. So Strayhorn is backward looking in that sense; his harmony isn't radical but it is beautiful. There's nothing pitiless or steely in his playing.

"In the '40s, jazz was pop, and had more pop trappings in it. Strayhorn often sounds like a pop piano player—closer, say, to Carmen Cavallaro than James P. Johnson. Strayhorn expanded Duke's world almost to the breaking point, from modern classical music on one side to pop on the other. Listening to him play, I'm not sure how deep his jazz roots really are. But the jazz aesthetic has something to do with prettiness—something critics don't always understand—and Strayhorn makes the case for that prettiness."

His playing on his own *Passion Flower* (from a 1946 Ellington aircheck on Hindsight LP 125) shows just how pretty pretty could get. Behind Hodges's rapturous tracing of the melody, he's so busy it's amazing he never sounds in the way or out of place. As elsewhere, he pushes beauty to the brink of fussiness. His part's as much countermelody as chordal accompaniment, as he sweeps through literally harp-like arpeggios, and ascending and descending chromatic chords that run with or against the flow of the orchestra's direction, or even quietly clash with it. Few musicians, let alone pianists, have made dissonance sound so beautiful. During the last chorus and gentle rideout, he fashions and then keeps modulating upward one niftily crafted little phrase. He might've worked it out in advance, but he gives you the impression it came to him on the spot.

It's exactly the sort of rhapsody that leaves Coleman cold (understandably, given the steely and pitiless postmod settings he works in), and which appeals so much to Strayhorn nut Marian McPartland. She notes he could pound out the ballsy chords when the occasion demanded it — she points to the riff tunes *Scufflin'* and *No Use Kickin'*, from a 1955 Hodges date for Verve. (They're in the [first] Hodges Mosaic box.) "But basically he was a romantic in the true sense, really soulful," she says. "I suppose that pop piano sound is there, but I don't feel that he overdid it — he doesn't sound like Roger Williams, even if he's not always as strong or as forceful as Duke. But with the band, his comping was perfect, his fills so nice and musical. He'd always play just what was needed—make a little comment, or show a soloist where he was in a tune."

Among the performances she singles out for special praise is Carmen McRae's 1955 reading of *Something to Live For*, with the composer on piano and Wendell Marshall on bass. (It's on the reissued *Here to Stay*, Decca.) "I love his nice single notes, and those long-line fills, like flowing horn lines, and that lovely ending with its dissonant chords." His rubato phrases bring out McRae's bel canto qualities too, and he's a marvel of discretion, almost evaporating at times, then prodding her gently with a repeated chord when he thinks the time needs firming up.

It was behind singers—and Hodges, Ellington's most voice-oriented soloist—that Strayhorn was consistently at his best. That makes sense: accompanist is the perfect role for a deferential player, one who doesn't mind staying out of the spotlight and letting attention fall on his musical partner. In his playing as well as his writing, Strayhorn was jazz's quiet man.

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STRAYHORN: AN ILLUSTRATED LIFE TO BE PUBLISHED 10 NOVEMBER 2015

COMMENTARY FROM LENA HORNE • CLARK TERRY • DIANNE REEVES
NANCY WILSON • TERELL STAFFORD • HERB JEFFRIES AND MORE

Strayhorn: An Illustrated Life is a stunning collection of essays, photographs, and ephemera celebrating Billy Strayhorn, one of the most significant yet under-appreciated contributors to 20th century American music. Released in commemoration of Strayhorn's centennial, this luxurious coffee-table book offers intimate details of the composer's life from musicians, scholars, and Strayhorn's closest relatives.

Perhaps best known for his 28-year collaborative role as Duke Ellington's "writing and arranging companion," Strayhorn has emerged in recent years as an even more meritorious force in shaping the jazz canon. *Strayhorn* begins by describing Billy's abusive upbringing and early success, and goes on to cover his music, family, intellectual pursuits, involvement with civil rights, and open homosexuality.

Strayhorn features contributions from Strayhorn's biographer David Hajdu, film director Rob Levi, music scholar Walter van de Leur, as well as commentary from jazz greats like Lena Horne, Clark Terry, Dianne Reeves, Nancy Wilson, Terell Stafford, Herb Jeffries, and more. With lush photography and rare memorabilia like handwritten scores, this is a book to be treasured by jazz aficionados and music lovers everywhere. Enthralling and visually captivating, *Strayhorn: An Illustrated Life* lauds a beloved jazz legend and captures a prodigious legacy that will influence generations to come.

Review

BILLY STRAYHORN OUT OF THE SHADOWS Storyville 1088614

Strayhorn. While his name is known by those in the know, the breadth of his work largely is not. And in fact, the full scope of his work—for the most part done in the shadow of the great Duke Ellington, his boss from 1939 until Strayhorn's death in 1967—might be forever lost to history.

The sad state of his legacy can be summed up as such: Billy Strayhorn, born 100 years ago, wrote *Take the 'A' Train*, certainly one of the most recognizable and popular tunes in the jazz canon and almost universally known as an "Ellington tune". Occasional efforts attempt to right the record. The New York-based saxophonist Tad Shull's big band and the Dutch Jazz Orchestra both strive to make Strayhorn heard.

With seven CDs and a DVD, *Out Of The Shadows* also helps to re-establish the reputation of the composer of *Chelsea Bridge*, *Blood Count* and *A Flower is a Lovesome Thing*, not to mention *Lush Life*, one of the most perfect songs of Western history. The boxed set mixes archival with more contemporary recordings. Disc One features 16 tracks recorded between 1945-61 with Strayhorn at the piano (including the only recordings with him as a leader released during his lifetime) as well as some lovely piano duets between Strayhorn and Ellington. While the sound quality is understandably lacking, it's wonderful to hear Strayhorn on the bench. Common wisdom is that Strayhorn's style was merely an extension of the Ellington aesthetic, but here we hear him as more lyrical, playing in thoughtful waves that belie his dedication not just to Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson but the pastoral touch of composers Debussy, Ravel and Satie. □ Disc Two collects recordings of Ellington and his orchestra playing 20 Strayhorn compositions stretching from 1939-67, which is to say it's about as good as it gets and could stand alone as a fine companion to Ellington's memorial LP ...*And His Mother Called Him Bill*, recorded shortly after Strayhorn's death. The third disc is a bit of a hodgepodge of greats, from a 1948 Art Tatum take on *Just A-Sittin' and A-Rockin'* to a 1993 recording of *Lush Life* by Duke Jordan. It's a hot mess, with a nice vocal quartet by the Delta Rhythm Boys, lovely *Satin Doll* by Mary Lou Williams and some welcome appearances by Horace Parlan and James Spaulding, but would have

been better served at a minimum by chronological ordering.

The rest of the set is given over to more recent performances. A Dutch Jazz Orchestra reissue comprises the fourth disc, a collection of Scandinavians fills the fifth, a pair of reissues by reed player Ken Peplowski small groups occupy the sixth and the final disc repackages a 1993 session by saxophonist Harry Allen. They are fine tributes all, ranging from trio to big band, but they serve to underscore something about the Ellington/Strayhorn confluence. While Strayhorn inarguably set a new standard for jazz composition, his music was brought to life by a magnificent orchestra led by an unparalleled bandleader. The subtle dynamics, layered harmonies across instrumental sections, push and pull between fore- and background of the Ellington Orchestra have rarely, if ever, been matched. To say a group isn't as good as Ellington is like faulting an inventor for not being Edison, but nevertheless having them stacked side-by-side demonstrates the contemporary propensity for full-forward performance and production.

The real treat here is the 42-minute DVD. Beginning and ending, of course, with *Take the 'A' Train* (with Strayhorn at the keys for the first and Ellington for the final), the DVD pairs six mid '60s Ellington orchestra pieces (including the rarely heard *Mid-Riff* and a lovely *Passion Flower*) with a great 1951 setting (*Take the 'A' Train again*) by the Delta Rhythm Boys, a Jordan quartet and a Clark Terry trio. As Walter van de Leur points out in his recommended *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*, Ellington included compositions and arrangements by his associate in "virtually every performance and almost every studio session" he did between 1939-67. Any effort to put Strayhorn's name back into the public consciousness, and especially one as sweeping as this one by the Danish label Storyville, is to be heralded.

Kurt Gottschalk

This review appears courtesy of The New York City Jazz Record, where it was published originally in their November 2014 issue.

AN EJC BILLY STRAYHORN COMPILATION

July's *Jazz Journal* ran a review of a 2CD Strayhorn set from Essential Jazz Classics: EJC 55667 *Day Dream – Complete 1945-61 Sessions as a Leader*. This article sums up what I know about the music on it. It is not a review, as I haven't seen the set and so

cannot comment on its production values (EJC's are usually good).

CD1 opens with: *Lush Life*, *Just A-Sittin' And A-Rockin'*, *Passion Flower*, *Take The 'A' Train*, *Strange Feeling*, *Day Dream*, *Chelsea Bridge*, *Multi Coloured Blue*, *Something To Live For* and *A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing*, the eight titles which Billy recorded in Paris in May 1961, with soft voices, a few strings, or solo. There is a full account of the origins and aims of the resulting LP in David Hajdu's *Lush Life*, pages 211-4. Producer Alan Douglas was not entirely happy with its title, *The Peaceful Side*, which was his, and Billy later expressed reservations about his performance. But it is indisputable that Billy had complete artistic control; that was the producer's intention. *Cue's Blue Now*, *Gone With The Wind*, *Cherry*, *Watch Your Cue*, *You Brought A New Kind Of Love To Me*, *When I Dream Of You* and *Rose Room* are from one of the sessions which Stanley Dance organized and produced in New York for the British label Felsted. Dance wanted a Hodges small-band set, but Johnny was contracted to Norman Granz at the time, so the LP couldn't appear under his name. Dance turned to Strayhorn to lead the session, and Billy agreed to, though he didn't have much time for Dance. Recalling the date, both Oliver Jackson, the drummer, and Cue, Hodges' wife, said that Billy, whose usual *dictum* was, give every musical project, however slight, your best shot, took little care over it. Again, Hajdu's book has the story (pages 198-9).

CD1 ends with *Feather Roll Blues* one of four sides from a 1947 Sunrise session in which Ray Nance, Jimmy Hamilton, Harry Carney and Al Sears took part, and Al Hibbler sang three songs. The set is listed in Timner as by Al Hibbler with the Harry Carney All-Stars, and as Billy was the pianist on all four, *Feather Roll Blues* seems to be neither a Strayhorn session nor a complete one.

The provenance of the music on CD2 is more complex. I don't know whether the piano solos *Halfway To Dawn* and *Tailspin* come from the same 1949 sessions as *Sono* and *Frustration*, but I do know that these two titles, showcases for Carney with strings, were part of a Norman Granz album project, *The Jazz Scene*. There's a lot of information about it in Tad Hershorn's 2011 biography of Granz, *The Man Who Used Jazz For Justice*. Granz recalled that Ellington supervised the Carney titles, on which Billy plays piano. There are two takes each of *Halfway To Dawn* and *Sono*.

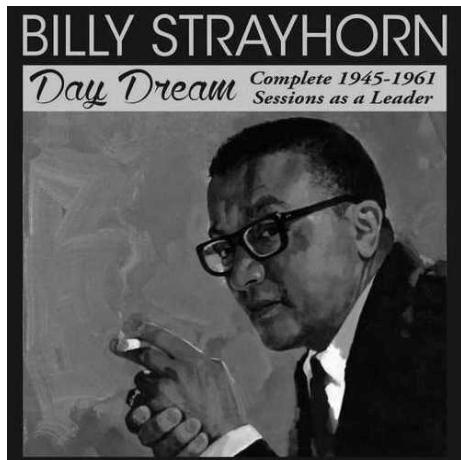
As far as I know the piano solos, which are not mentioned in Hershorn's book, have not been commercially issued before. I recall being told that they survived untitled, and that they were named *Halfway To Dawn* and *Tailspin* many years later.

My friend Lynne Mueller, who co-ordinated the Ellington'93 conference in New York, and was a formulation chemist then Fragrance Manager at Colgate Palmolive, told me that Tailspin was the name of Billy's favourite fragrance.

CD2 now moves onto much more familiar ground. *Cotton Tail*, *C-Jam Blues*, *Flamingo*, *Bang Up Blues*, *Tonk*, *Johnny Come Lately*, *In A Blue Summer Garden* and *Great Times* are the eight Ellington-Strayhorn duets from two late 1950 sets for Mercer Records and issued frequently down the years. Four Jimmy McPhail vocals, never issued, also survive from the earlier set. Four more Mercer sides follow, on which Oscar Pettiford plays *pizzicato* 'cello. Duke is the pianist on all four, and Billy's contribution, a minimal one on '*A' Train* and *Oscalypso*, is on celeste. He doesn't play at all on *Perdido* and *Blues For Blanton*, or on two other tracks from the session which are not on the CD.

Another *Tonk* and *Drawing Room Blues* are the two Ellington-Strayhorn duets recorded for Victor in January 1946. Finally, on *Lush Life* from Duke's 1948 Carnegie Hall concert, Billy accompanies Kay Davis. Since that concert is not, I think, currently available, it is valuable to have this first known recording of the song in circulation, though the event is scarcely a complete Strayhorn session. The JJ review lists a third *Tonk* before this finale; I can't imagine which it may be, unless it's the one Duke and Billy played on the 25 August 1945 Treasury Show. It's undated in the review, and as I won't be buying the EJC set, I'd welcome further information about it.

The set is a bit of a mish-mash and not quite what the title promises. In fairness it can't have been easy to compile it. One day perhaps a bit of care and specialist knowledge might come up with one including such Ellington recordings as *Hearsay* and *Overture To A Jam Session*, works which are often not associated with Billy at all but which are unquestionably his. Meanwhile the EJC may assist your collecting purposes. RB



GUILDHALL JAZZ BAND

Directed by Martin Hathaway

Music programme by Michael Kilpatrick

**AGM Saturday 9th May 2015, Pizza Express,
Dean Street, London**

Trumpets: Tom Harrison, Alec Brain, Jack

Courtney, Charlotte Keefe

Trombones: Ed Parr, Vijay Prakash, Joe Fenning

Reeds: Rachel Kerry, Matthew Grenz, Sam Knight,

Gustavo Clayton Marucci, Giles Thornton

Violin: Dominic Ingham Piano: David Swan Bass:

Oliver Copeland Drums: Alec Martin-Jones

Vocals: Clara Serra Lopez, Crawford McInally-Kier

Billy Strayhorn's centenary 2015 also marked the tenth year of collaboration between DESUK and the Guildhall Jazz Band, and Michael Kilpatrick put together a knockout Strayhorn-focused programme for the Society's annual concert after the AGM at the Pizza Express Jazz Club in Soho. The band of Guildhall students – many of them in their first year – responded to the leadership of Martin Hathaway with enthusiasm, ability and style, and the result was a thrilling and richly enjoyable afternoon that deserved a bigger attendance from DESUK members.

The programme showed Ellington and Strayhorn working together to varying degrees and also working separately. It featured a good number of vocals for the two fine singers with the band, Clara Serra Lopez and the very smooth and swinging Crawford McInally-Kier, reminding us that Billy's initial job with Ellington was to take care of vocal arrangements.

Martin Hathaway, the Guildhall's Director of Jazz, asked Michael, DESUK's resident scholar and expert on the Ellington band's repertoire and scores, to say a few words to introduce each piece, and the 1943 Strayhorn vocal setting of *It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing* started the concert with a bang. Crawford McInally-Kier took the urbane Ray Nance/Taft Jordan vocal role, and the delightfully clear sound of the (unamplified) sections was immediately apparent as well as good solos from Joe Fenning on muted trombone, Charlotte Keefe on trumpet, Dominic Ingham's violin and Sam Knight generating some heat on tenor. There was also some fine comping from pianist David Swan, one of the first-year students.

Clara Serra Lopez then took on Ivie Anderson's vocal in Billy Strayhorn's *Love Like This Can't Last* from 1941, with the vocal continuing all through the piece after what Michael pointed out was a typical, somewhat grandiose Strayhorn intro.

Maybe I Should Change My Ways from 1947 featured the excellent violin of Dominic Ingham and Ed Parr on trombone. It was, Michael said, a classic example of collaboration, with the first chorus by

Ellington after which the piece was handed over to Strayhorn, who wrote both a vocal and an instrumental version.

Rock Skipping At The Blue Note, by contrast, was pure Strayhorn. This, the 1952 version rather than the familiar one from the 1967 *And His Mother Called Him Bill* album, featured Charlotte Keefe in the Ray Nance trumpet role, both open and muted.

A pair of vocals was next – the famous and highly influential Billy Strayhorn 1940 arrangement of *Flamingo*, a big hit for Bronze Buckaroo Herb Jeffries, and *He Makes Me Believe* from 1947, which Michael noted is listed as by Ellington but has an arrangement entirely by Strayhorn according to the score in the Smithsonian.

A piece of "hard Billy Strayhorn swing" from 1942, *Raincheck* saw the band dig in somewhat, with gutsy tenor from Sam Knight, before the band played a real rarity. This was *The Vulture Song*, a grim, pain-filled vocal number from 1952 which Michael put together from instrumental parts in the Smithsonian and which he imagines was arranged by Strayhorn, although without a score you cannot be sure. Michael said he was delighted when he heard the current Guildhall band had a strong male vocalist and a strong clarinetist, which meant he could include this piece. Crawford McInally-Kier and Gustavo Clayton Marucci took the parts that originally belonged to Jimmy Grissom and Jimmy Hamilton's virtuoso clarinet.

By contrast, the band then played *Oh Babe*, a piece of pure Ellington from the 1930s which represented the pre-war, pre-Strayhorn period of music that the Guildhall and other such bands do not often get to play. Clara Serra Lopez again sang the Ivie part, the band caught the mixed two-beat and 4/4 swing feel, and Gustavo Clayton Marucci's clarinet over the out chorus brought a great reception from the crowd.

Then it was pure Strayhorn again, *Progressive Gavotte* (originally *Rebop Gavotte*) from 1947, followed by a fine rendition of *Moon Mist* -- officially by Mercer Ellington but almost certainly by Duke, with Mercer's name used to get around the 1941 ASCAP broadcasting ban. That ban gave a big break to Strayhorn in terms of his own music being recorded and broadcast early in his time with Ellington, as well as boosting Mercer. Along with more lovely violin, *Moon Mist* featured some fine alto saxophone from the section leader, Rachel Kerry.

The band then took on the show-stopping shout number *Goin' Up* from the 1943 film *Cabin in the Sky*, with grand, declamatory, preaching trombone by Joe Fenning as well as a wa-wa solo by Vijay Prakash.

Making the point that at Guildhall they do the jazz side equally as well as written music, Martin Hathaway said the band would open up solos on the

closing number, *C Jam Blues*. David Swan on piano shone particularly on this, both in his solo and behind the others, including more violin from Dominic Ingham. Billy Strayhorn's shouting out-choruses and Gustavo Clayton Marucci's clarinet made for a satisfying end to a very rich, varied and enjoyable programme.

Quentin Bryar

HARMONY IN HARLEM

Directed by Michael Kilpatrick
Mumford Theatre
Anglia Ruskin University
Cambridge

Thursday 11 June 2015

This was *Harmony In Harlem*'s latest performance of *Such Sweet Thunder*, which the band has been presenting, complete, over the last year or so, to mark various Shakespearean anniversaries. We are fortunate indeed to have these opportunities to see and hear it, and to learn something of what Duke and Billy were up to, by watching the performers as they play. The *Such Sweet Thunder* LP was well received in 1957 and the suite has remained highly regarded ever since, but it is seldom played live. Two performances I heard in 1994, in Leeds and in Stockholm, were, I think, the first since Duke's premieres, in New York and in Stratford Ontario in 1957.

This recent performance was arranged through Cambridge Modern Jazz, which has been a presence in the town for many years. The benefits were good support from an appreciative audience of regular members, and a good venue. The Mumford has the steeply raked seating which is more usual in a lecture theatre than one primarily used for staging plays. The stage accommodated the performers comfortably, and the auditorium ensured good views. What remained was the all-important task of revealing the delights of the music, to listeners who were unlikely to be Ellington specialists. In this *Harmony In Harlem* succeeded well. Michael's love of this music and his attention to detail ensured idiomatic performances.

Michael's announcements revealed his knowledge and enthusiasm, and a welcome extra was to have the spoken introductions supported by an informative leaflet, with movement-by-movement notes, and details about the band. Such notes are standard practice at orchestral concerts and chamber recitals, but are rare at a jazz concert. For this type of presentation they are most useful.

After the introductory '*A*' *Train Such Sweet Thunder* took up the first half of the programme, and in response to the warmth with which the suite was received *Royal Garden Blues* was a well-chosen if surprising encore. Billy's inventive and forward-looking 1946 take on the old Clarence and Spencer

Williams chestnut is exactly the sort of thing which brought him to the notice of young innovators like John Lewis, Gerry Mulligan and Gil Evans, and so a good choice for a 'modern jazz' audience.

Twelve well programmed titles followed the interval, mainly of the 1940s though ranging from *Way Low* (1939) to *Serious Serenade* (1953). While the opening *Harlem Air Shaft*, the closing *Cotton Tail*, and *Never No Lament* (under its better-known title), may have been familiar enough to the audience, few are likely to have known *Bensonality* or *Magenta Haze*. *Change My Ways* and *Bakiff* gave further solo opportunities to guest violinist Peter Sellars, brought in for his instrument's role as a member of one of the mazed couples in *Up And Down*. *Bojangles*, *Rain Check* and *Happy Go Lucky Local* completed the eclectic tally of second half titles.

Roger Boyes

Billy Strayhorn DESUK London Group

Saturday 13 June 2015

Here are some details of the recordings I presented to members attending this afternoon meeting, at which I had been invited to speak about Billy Strayhorn. I prepared a similar programme for an earlier Sheffield Jazz Society, meeting, though with differences. The informal London meetings generate plenty of informal discussion, especially as the afternoon goes on, which means less music is played. No matter – I certainly enjoyed myself. Asterisked titles are taken from one or other of the four CDs of Billy Strayhorn's music on Challenge Records, performed by the Dutch Jazz Orchestra. I don't know how readily these CDs are now available. All the songs are sung by Marjorie Barnes.

*Fantastic Rhythm** (piano solo); *A Penthouse on Shady Avenue**, *Let Nature Take Its Course**. All these are from Billy's 1935 show *Fantastic Rhythm*, presented at Westinghouse High School and elsewhere in and around Pittsburgh. For *Lush Life*, also from the 1930s, I chose Billy's own version, sung at Basin Street East in New York, in January 1964.

I played some familiar 1940-41 classics in less familiar versions: *Clementine* (Hollywood Empire, February 1949); the full-length (five minutes plus) *Chelsea Bridge* (Pacific North West, March 1952); *Manhattan Murals* (Carnegie Hall New York, 13 November 1948). *Murals* is an extended *Take The 'A' Train* and an Ellington-Strayhorn collaboration, something that happened more rarely on individual works than is often thought.

The 1940 composition *Tonk** was fully scored though as far as we know the Ellington Orchestra never played it. It features solo piano, but is much more familiar as the piano-four-hands piece recorded in 1946 (Victor) and 1950 (Mercer). *Pentonsilic**,

also from this period, is a long, cryptically titled composition; it too was apparently unperformed until the 1990s. It has two contrasting themes, one brisk and theatrical, the other slower, which Billy later recycled it into *Balcony Serenade (Perfume Suite)*.

Ellington's earliest known performances of *Smada* date from the early 1950s. I selected the version played at the Embassy Auditorium, Los Angeles, in April 1954. The much more familiar *Blues In Orbit* recording is quite different in flavour, and features Hodges and Nance instead of Hamilton's clarinet. In a way though, the most interesting playing is by Billy himself, who hints at the modal explorations being undertaken by Miles Davis at the time. Unfortunately I didn't have time to play this 1959 reshaping of the piece. More interesting still, this composition with modal overtones dates back to 1935, when Billy titled it *Ugly Duckling*. No wonder his work excited innovative composers like John Lewis, Gerry Mulligan, Ralph Burns and Gil Evans in the early 1940s! *Smada* took us to half time.

I chose Billy's 1952 chart of *Johnny Come Lately* for a Louie Bellson octet with Harry Carney, Clark Terry, Juan Tizol, Willie Smith Wendell Marshall, plus Wardell Gray, strongly featured on this track, and John Graas. I came across it on Properbox's

introduction to Strayhorn's music, but the entire Capitol session (eight tracks) is currently available on Avid's Louie Bellson double-CD set.

*Bagatelle** dates from c1956, though the title suggests an association with the Paris years. It melds two melodic lines into a single thematic statement. *All Heart/Change My Ways* was recorded by Dan Block in New York in August 2009. *Sprite Music** (piano solo), *The Flowers Die Of Love** and *Love, Love** (songs) are all taken from the incidental music Billy wrote in Paris in 1953 for a production of Lorca's play *The Love of Dom Perlimplin for Belisa in their Garden*.

*Everything Is Copasetic!** was written for the 1962 annual revue staged by the Copasetics, a tap dancers' friendly society in New York of which Billy was an honorary member. *Where Or When** is Billy's score from c1943, played in full with a singer, as intended. The *Ellington Indigos* recording, unattributed to Billy, is a shortened version.

I intended to finish with *Snibor*, but I think time must have run out, as I don't recall playing it. The music for the Lorca play in particular provoked a lot of discussion, and animated conversation is always a sign that the meeting is going well. I hope this will tempt other members to join us at a future one.

Roger Boyes

RNCM Big Band: Take the 'A' Train, Saturday, 31 October, 7:30 pm, Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester

As a working jazz soloist I find it is initially Strayhorn's ballads that stand out as being so noteworthy and ahead of their time. The sheer sophistication of *Lush Life* (apparently this was forming while Strayhorn was only 17 years old) and the brave harmonic colours of *Chelsea Bridge* (alleged to have had a profound impact on Gil Evans) make these and their companion songs into art pieces; quite different from the pop ballads of the day.

As a big band director I can think of no more thrilling a programme (for the audience or for our young students) than the recreation of the *Nutcracker Suite* or the even more challenging *Shakespeare Suite*, *Such Sweet Thunder*, probably my favourite big band suite of all. In the case of the Tchaikovsky, Strayhorn excels where others would fail at the perilous task of 'jazz meets classical'; a set of tone poems rivalling the originals.

So on October 31 the RNCM big band will present a programme of Strayhorn inspired delights! We will present the well known works but also the less well known, hopefully making it a worthy celebration of the centenary of this artist's birth. Leave your Halloween costumes at home!
Mike Hall, director

Ticket prices start at £15 and are available from the website: <http://www.rncm.ac.uk>

Saturday 31 October
7.30pm RNCM Theatre

RNCM Big Band

Directed by Mike Hall, the RNCM Big Band
pays tribute to the American jazz legend Billy
Strayhorn in his centenary year.

Lush Life: Strayhorn's Longing for Songjectivity

By Frank Griffith

The 2015 London Jazz Festival (LJF) will be presenting *Lush Life – the songs of Billy Strayhorn* on 20 November at Cadogan Hall in Chelsea. The show was written and largely conceived by pianist, songwriter, producer and DESUK member, Alex Webb. It will feature the Festival Tentet led by myself (also a DESUK member) and feature three outstanding vocalists, Allan Harris (USA), Sandra Nkaké (France) and David McCalmont (UK). It will be narrated by USA singer and poetess, Sirena Riley.

The first incarnation of this show debuted at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in November 2010 as part of the LJF and also included Webb, my nonet, Sirena and singers, China Moses and Alexander Stewart. It might be of interest to recount the genesis of the show and how it has developed to its present state. It is very typical of an Ellington “labour of love” project largely enabled by the generosity of the UK Jazz community which includes the performers, composers/arrangers, curators, promoters and punters (including DESUK members) alike.

Alex Webb’s name was first brought to my attention in September 2009 by the gaffer of the *London Jazz News*, Sebastian Scotney. He kindly passed on Alex’s email to me and knowing little about him, I contacted him to meet up (about nothing in particular) as we resided close to each other at the time. Our first “official” meeting was at the Castle Pub in Harrow on Boxing Day 2009 where we discussed the general concept of what would become *Songs of Strayhorn*. The two hour show consisted of a mixture of the well known (*Satin Doll*, *Daydream*, *Lush Life*, etc) and the lesser known (*Grievin’*, *Imagine My Frustration*, *My Little Brown Book*). In addition Alex had penned new lyrics to *Johnny Come Lately* and *Blood Count*. There were also a few instrumentals added like *Upper Manhattan Medical Group*, *Sophisticated Lady* and *Chelsea Bridge*. While the LJF budgets are more “budge than get”, Alex managed to wrest a parsimonious honorarium to help finance a handful of nonet arrangements by members of the group like Henry Lowther, Adrian Fry, Robbie Robson and myself as well as French pianist/arranger, Franck Amsallem. His scores for *Imagine My Frustration* and *Daydream* were superb as was Robson’s treatment of *Blood Count*, a hauntingly poignant treatise that delivers the pathos of this song written by Strayhorn on his deathbed shortly before his untimely demise in May 1967. The moody baritone

of Alexander Stewart handled the new Alex Webb lyrics with aplomb resulting in the most moving and effective depiction of Strayhorn’s oeuvre of the entire evening (if one doesn’t mind me saying so). Nonet trombonist, Adrian Fry, produced a spirited chart of *Raincheck* which included the classic small group soli passage with clarinet lead above five lower voices in close harmony. Classic, classic stuff-o-rooney. Lowther’s jaunty version of *Just A Sittin’ and a Rockin’* sung by a sunny voiced China Moses scored highly as well. I enjoyed arranging *Johnny Come Lately* (also lyricized by Webb) which incorporated themes and riffs from the 1944 original as well as more modern modal concepts and quartal harmonies in an attempt to move Strayhorn in the 21st Century. Not that this needs to happen, mind you, as it was plenty modern when it was written. We also included *Take The ‘A’ Train* (how couldn’t we?) but in this case I adapted a coolly sauntering Mel Tormé version from 1961 arranged by Johnny Mandel which included equal parts transcription and updating.

All in all, a winning batch of Strayhornia that ably showcased his many sides and strengths. It should also be added (as many singers will attest) that the songs of Strayhorn are not particularly easy to sing. Why? Like Ellington, Monk, JJ Johnson, Benny Golson and many other jazz composers, the melodies are often angular (large and awkwardly pitched intervals) and consume a large range (high and low notes) of a singer’s voice. These factors, along with the challenging and dissonant harmonies floating underneath subtly set many a trap for singers to negotiate through. Even a seemingly straightforward octave leap in the opening stanza of *Daydream* (just like Harold Arlen’s *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*) can be a misleadingly simple indicator of what is to come later in the song. All credit then to all of the singers who have taken up the challenge of interpreting Billy’s music.

The 2015 version of *Lush Life* will also include 10tet arrangements of *Jump For Joy*, *Lush Life* and a transcription/adaptation by Alex Webb of a rarely heard 1944 opus called *Strange Feeling*. Another welcome addition will be Adrian Fry’s adaptation of *Snibor* (from *And His Mother Called Him Bill*) which was kindly donated to us by Pete Long. I’ll also be arranging 10tet arrangements of *Satin Doll* and *Duke’s Place*.

The members of the Festival Tentet will include

myself on tenor sax and clarinet, Tony Kofi on alto sax, who is a member of the World Saxophone Quartet and has appeared with everyone from Abdullah Ibrahim, Donald Byrd and the David Murray Big Band to name a few. Gemma Moore a frequent dep with the BBC Big Band will be holding down the baritone sax chair. Trumpeter Robbie Robson will occupy the lead chair joined by Sue Richardson, whose expertise in growling muted trumpet stylings so often associated with Ellingtonia (and Strayhorn?) will be featured. Trombonist and arranger, Adrian Fry will also be present and this sextet of blowers will be supported by a top rhythm team of Peter Edwards, piano and Gary Crosby, OBE, on bass. Drummer Rod Youngs, originally from Washington DC, who played for many years with Gil Scott Heron will complete the rhythm section. Sailing over the ensemble in the Ray

Nance role will be Cuban violinist, Omar Puente, a longtime resident in the UK. Omar will no doubt spice up the proceedings much in the same way that fellow Cuban trombonist, Juan Tizol, did all those years ago with The Maestro.

As a DESUK member and lifelong fan, student and sometimes practitioner of Ellingtonia I am so pleased to be a part of this project. The Frank Griffith Nonet performed much of our Ellington/Strayhorn repertoire at the Woking 2012 DESUK Conference on the Friday night. This included two new arrangements by DESUK member, Tony Faulkner of *Lush Life* and *Rhumbop* sung by Louise Gibbs. We look forward to continuing this great tradition on 20 November at Cadogan Hall and to seeing as many DESUK members there to help celebrate it with us.

Lush Life – the songs of Billy Strayhorn



Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace, London SW1X 9DQ
Friday 20 November 2015

The centenary of Duke Ellington's arranger and co-composer, Billy 'Swee' Pea' Strayhorn, is celebrated in a words-and-music event created by Alex Webb and Frank Griffith.

New arrangements of classics like *Take The 'A' Train*, *Satin Doll* and *Lush Life*, are complemented by rarely heard songs that evoke the spirit of this most sophisticated of jazz composers.

One of the UK's most dazzling vocal stars, David McAlmont, is joined by rising American jazz singer Allan Harris and Paris-based Sandra Nkaké to tell the fascinating story of the shy, gay genius who Duke Ellington called, 'my right arm, my left arm, all the eyes in the back of my head'.

The vocalists will be accompanied by a 10-piece band of the cream of UK jazz musicians under the direction of US-born saxophonist and arranger Frank Griffith:

Rod Youngs drums, Gary Crosby bass, Peter Edwards piano, Gemma Moore baritone sax / flute, Frank Griffith tenor sax, Tony Kofi alto sax, Adrian Fry trombone, Robbie Robson 1st trumpet, Sue Richardson 2nd trumpet, Omar Puente, violin

Vocalists: David McAlmont, Allan Harris, Sandra Nkaké
Narrated by Sirena Riley

Arrangements by Frank Griffith, Alex Webb, Adrian Fry, Robbie Robson and Frank Amsallam

A Copasetic Production, written and curated by Alex Webb.



FRIDAY 13 –
SUNDAY 22
NOVEMBER
2015

Ellington and Strayhorn: A Celebration



Greenberg Distinguished Scholar Program

Join us for a series of lectures and performances to commemorate the one-hundredth birthday of Billy Strayhorn; celebrate jazz greats Strayhorn and Duke Ellington; and explore a creative partnership unique in the history of music.

Presented by the 23rd International Duke Ellington Study Group Conference in partnership with Reed College. All events are free and open to the public. Registration will be requested for planning purposes—more to come!

Reed College November 6–8, 2015

Visiting scholars and performers include Walter van de Leur, author of *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*; Harvey C. Cohen, author of *Duke Ellington's America*; jazz horn master Willie Ruff; Lisa Barg; Luca Bragolini; Andrew Homzy; Steven Lasker; David Schiff; Carl Woideck; clarinetist David Shifrin, and, for the first time together, two of Portland's international jazz stars, Rebecca Kilgore (vocals) and Darrell Grant (piano), performing songs by Billy Strayhorn.

Friday, November 6

4 p.m.

Keynote: "'After All': Strayhorn Studies in the 21st Century," Walter van de Leur, Professor of Jazz and Improvised Music at the University of Amsterdam and author of *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*
Performing Arts Building 320

7:30 p.m.

Concert: Performances by Darrell Grant (piano) and David Shifrin (clarinet), arranged by David Schiff; Matt Cooper (piano); and Darrell Grant (piano) and Rebecca Kilgore (vocals).

Kaul Auditorium

Saturday, November 7

10–11:45 a.m.; 2:15–3:30 p.m.

Scholarly Sessions

4 p.m.

Master Class: Matt Cooper, Professor of Music at Eastern Oregon University, Ellington scholar, classical pianist, and author of *Duke Ellington as Pianist: A Study of Styles*

Performing Arts Building 320

Sunday, November 8

10 a.m.

Discussion and coffee/pastry with the International Duke Ellington Study Group

Contact Reed College

3203 Southeast Woodstock Boulevard
Portland, Oregon 97202-8199
Phone: 503/771-1112; Fax: 503/777-7769
<http://www.reed.edu/greenbergscholar/ellington-strayhorn.html>



Strayhorn – A Mitchell-Ruff Interpretation by Willie Ruff

One summer night in 1967 as Dwike Mitchell and I played the Hickory House, a popular New York emporium, Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn strolled in together. To say that we were flattered would be an understatement.

A few nights later, when the Ellington orchestra had taken off on a string of cross-country one-nighters, Strayhorn was back at the Hickory House, alone. We knew he'd had surgery weeks before he came in with Duke, but was on the mend. He ate dinner while we played. I noticed him writing something on paper as I played the horn. He stayed on late into the night. The next night, he was back again, and over a drink during intermission he put a few technical questions to me about the French horn's range, its loudness, bent notes, and the use of the mute. A couple of nights later he showed up once more, this time with a message:

"Willie," Billy Strayhorn said, "can you come over to my apartment sometime soon and play something I've written for you and the French horn."

I was startled. Strayhorn had written something for me? "Is this afternoon soon enough?" I asked.

That afternoon, horn in hand, I called on the master composer, songwriter, and arranger. Strayhorn was seated at the Steinway. He still looked slightly frail from his operation, but he went right to work accompanying me as I played a passage of his new composition. It was a heavy work of dark sonorities, laden with surprising melodic turns that seemed to leap through daring rhythmic configurations into total unexplored crevasses of the diatonic scale. No light musical entertainment, this, and like his thoughtful *Lush Life*, the composition was overwhelmingly rewarding and masterful, but challenging.

He led me through the first movement of what he intended as a suite, taking it section by section until he was sure of what was needed. Then he used his eraser, tore away pages, re-sketched, and played through the new materials with me until he was nearly satisfied. I was in heaven. How did I get lucky enough to attract the notice of the composer of *Take the 'A' Train* and *Passion Flower*. Nobody this important had ever written an original work for me or the Duo before.

Then more work with the manuscript, and we took a break for the dinner working on the stove; Strayhorn cooked as imaginatively as he wrote music. During the main course of lamb chops, fried corn, new peas, and yams, the phone rang. Ellington was calling from Omaha.

"Listen, Edward," his arranger said, "you called at a good time. I want you to hear something new. Got a minute?" Strayhorn poured a generous slug of wine into my glass and signalled me to wash away the lamb chop and take up the horn. Performing an unfinished work long-distance for Duke Ellington with the grease of a lamb chop still on my embouchure made my blood rush. But I did as I was told.

When we had played all he'd written, Billy took up the phone and accepted Ellington's compliments graciously. More talk followed. Words like "transition," "modulation," "bridge," "coda," and "diminuendo" flew back and forth to Omaha. More scribbling. Then came the signal to rinse again and Strayhorn sat down to repeat with me the middle section. After we'd played a few bars of it through twice, there was further talk on the phone, and out came the eraser. Strayhorn expanded parts and added dynamics, while the receiver rested on the Steinway. There was no apparent rush and scurry. We played the new and very much improved version again and again. By then it was time for me to rush out to the Hickory House. I shudder to think how much that phone call cost the Ellington-Strayhorn duo. But that's the way we did it for the rest of the week, my horn and I at Strayhorn's, playing for Ellington somewhere out on the distant prairie.

Days later, when he had the suite set down in its final manuscript form, Strayhorn said, "Now I want to hear it with a real pianist. Call Mitchell!"

For the next several days, Mitchell and I came together to Strayhorn's apartment and worked at learning the suite. On the first day, Strayhorn sat beside Mitchell on the piano bench, propped the new manuscript on the music rack of his Steinway and turned to sections he wanted to discuss. With his elegant finger, he pointed to places in the score.

"What I've written here," he said to Mitchell, "is quite complete in the compositional sense. But I want this first meeting to feel to you like a fitting, as in 'fit' a custom-made suit. The compositional elements should fit your hands, which are so much larger and more powerful than mine... You know how to make sections like these on this page as big and as rich in sonority as you can. But here in this interlude, let the horn ring through... Let Willie's sound kind of hover over it all, right there. And pause here, but only slightly... Over in this middle part, your line and the horn line are of equal importance. Balance is the key word; but that's the kind of thing you two do naturally anyway. I have left you space and, at the same time, given indications of essential details..."

By now Mitchell was alive with excitement. His large fingers trembled as he carefully shaped them to fit the powerful, two-fisted chords Stray had written to underscore the horn theme. And wham! Stray was up off the piano bench at the huge sound Mitchell made. He stomped the floor and beamed at Mitchell, "Hell yes!" he hollered. "That's what I had in mind; I just don't have the hands and strength to make it sound that way."

Mitchell's reaction to the compliment was almost sheepish. "Ohhh, I see more clearly now what Ruff has been trying to describe these past two weeks. It's a very beautiful and powerful piece, Billy."

When Ellington called later that afternoon, Strayhorn put the receiver close to the piano strings.

"Now, Edward, you'll hear the final setting, with Dwike Mitchell at the Steinway." And at last Billy Strayhorn's *Suite for Horn and Piano* took its place in our permanent repertoire.

Several months later, while I was living in Los Angeles and teaching at UCLA, my phone rang and Ellington's voice surprised me; it was afternoon, the wrong time for him to call. But Strayhorn had died a few weeks before, and Ellington's life and most of his old habits had changed. Nobody among his friends could have guessed how much the loss of Strayhorn, his greatest artistic ally, would cost him. Still, his voice that day sounded the same as ever, only better, more enthusiastic than I'd heard him in a long time.

"Strayhorn had such an extraordinary musical life in New York," Ellington began; he was in no mood for small talk. "He should have a fitting memorial here. He was a New York composer; I mean, what other New Yorker wrote *Take the 'A' Train* and *Upper Manhattan Medical Group*? I'm establishing a Billy Strayhorn Memorial Scholarship at The Juilliard School, and we're going to kick it off with a gala: the dream concert, man."

"Imagine a program with Stray's friends: Lena Horne, Tony Bennett, Willie 'The Lion' Smith, Joe Williams, Clark Terry, Lou Rawls, Carmen DeLavallade, Geoffrey Hodder, and of course all his many friends in my band?"

I interrupted, "That sounds like a concert I don't want to miss. Count me in for a ticket."

"Oh no," said Ellington, "that's not what we had in mind. I want you and your partner on the stage to play that fabulous suite Strayhorn wrote for you two. I still hear that music coming from Stray's apartment on the phone. The concert will be at Lincoln Centre on Sunday, October 6. I'll get back to you later about a rehearsal time."

On the day of the performance, at Philharmonic Hall, Ellington's rehearsal plans were still sketchy; there was only enough time for the singers and dancers to do a quick run-through with the orchestra. Mitchell and I made ourselves comfortable backstage, cooled our heels and 'visited' with the stars. Carmen DeLavallade and Miss Horne charmed us all with their beauty.

By show time, everything was in readiness, and the programme began with Duke and the orchestra on stage. The artists waiting backstage could hear that the band sounded great. Lena Horne said, "Listen to them! They're playing their hearts out for Strayhorn."

Smiling at Miss Horne, Duke said, "I think your public is properly primed and ready for you now, darling. Ready?" Then he suddenly scooted back to the front of the orchestra, cut off their large resonant chord, and went to the microphone. When he announced Lena Horne, the audience roared. Willie the Lion snatched off his derby hat, slapped his thigh, and exploded out of his chair.

"You can't beat him! That guy just can't be beat. I don't care how you cut it. My Gawd! You see what he just did? He's got a dozen world-class artists, a million dollars' wortha talent waiting right here in this wing, and he hasn't said a word to anybody about the order of the programme. Only he knows who's on next; he's making it up as he goes along, I tell ya. You can't beat experience, man. You know what I call him? 'The Master of Situations'!"

For more than two and a half hours we all watched as Ellington mastered the situation: playing out his dream concert, dishing up his musical feast with the flair of the consummate host-presenter. One surprising delicacy after another showed his practiced attention to texture, colour, and, above all, timing. The dancing was tastefully placed and balanced, and there was proportion to the singing and the instrumental performances.

Then Ellington pointed to Mitchell and me in the wings at the side of the stage and went to the microphone to share with his audience just how it was that he'd been the first person to hear Strayhorn's new suite, long-distance. Willie the Lion eased up to my ear and whispered: "Now go out there and kill 'em for Strayhorn."

The suite we were about to play was written during Strayhorn's short but stunningly introspective final creative outburst. Another of his most serious compositions, *Blood Count*, was also a product of that period, and like *Blood Count*, the suite thunders with highly autobiographical overtones, the moods of a vibrant musical career shutting down.

As Mitchell and I began to play, I was oblivious to our Lincoln Centre surrounding. I was hearing Strayhorn in his apartment, leading us through the music; talking us through the transitions; showing me when to bring out a counter line, when to make my horn's voice match the heavy piano sonorities he'd written for Mitchell. Strayhorn's powerful presence was there on the stage with us, giving directions, and making us play better than we knew we could. The spell was broken for me only as the last note lingered and died and Joe Williams and Tony Bennett led the applause there among the performers in the wings.

As soon as we left the stage, Dizzy Gillespie, who had been down in the audience, burst through the dressing room door. "Mitchell and Ruff! Man! I didn't even know Stray had written that music for you guys. What a compliment to you. He sure as hell wrote it, didn't he? And you two played it so fabulously, the three of us have to make a record together some time soon!"

Ellington ended the concert with a sensational string of selections by the orchestra. Then all the artists assembled to link hands in a long line across the stage and bow long and low with Ellington.

Afterward, in a moment of quiet, Duke gave a wise wink to us all. "Strayhorn," he said, "smiled tonight."



**Minutes of the DESUK Committee Meeting on
Saturday 18th April 2015 at the Civil Service Club, 13-
15 Great Scotland Yard, London, SW1A 2HJ**

Present: Peter Caswell, Ian Bradley, Quentin Bryar, Phil Mead, Antony Pepper, Geoff Smith.

Observer: Mike Coates

1. Chairman's opening remarks (PC). Proceedings started at 1pm, with PC asking MC for an update on Catherine; PC asked MC to convey greetings and best wishes from the committee to her. PC thanked QB for taking over from CC.

2. Apologies for Absence. Chris Addison, Catherine Coates, Frank Harvey, Victor Lawrence

3. Draft Minutes of Saturday 19th January 2015. Already circulated, these were approved with a couple of amendments.

4. Matters arising:

(a) Reaching a Wider Audience. GS reiterated he would approach Alyn Shipton; in CA's absence further discussion was held over. **(b) Matt Cooper** GS has been in touch with MC, who has come up with dates towards the end of March 2016, meaning there is more time to arrange recitals etc. GS has been in touch with Foyle's about an event in the auditorium in their new location on Charing Cross Road, and also with George Duncan about Scotland. GD was keen and had been given literature. AP had contacted Martin Hathaway at the Guildhall. PC also mentioned the RNCM and Chethams in Manchester. GS said Mike Fletcher might be able to help in Birmingham, and said firm commitments in London, Manchester and Scotland would be sufficient as a basis. PC said the matter would be mentioned at the AGM. **(c) Postholders' description of responsibilities.** PC noted that CC (Secretary) and VL (Treasurer and Membership Secretary), as outgoing postholders, had provided descriptions of their roles for their successors. He saw no need to detail the roles and duties of the chairman. Others agreed there was no need for other postholders to do so at this time. **(d) Discounted annual memberships** AP said he had nothing to add to January's meeting.. PC noted this and said it would be left to the next committee to decide what memberships to offer.

(e) TDWAW, David Palmquist (PC/AP) PC said he was aware AP and DP had exchanged information and said he wished to include the use of DESUK's site by TDWAW to finish off the second part of his DESUK history for BL. AP said the link to the mirror of TDWAW was up on the DESUK website. AP said we could include a small passage on the home page about it, and PC said he would be happy to provide this.

5. Officers Reports. (a) Treasurer. VL had circulated by email draft accounts for the year to end March 2015 and a forecast for 2016. These showed some improvement, with a small surplus for 2015, but a small loss was forecast for 2016. **(Membership Secretary).** VL's emailed report showed little change in membership year on year, although a good number of 2015 annual subscriptions remain unpaid. **(b) BL Editor.** IB the latest issue, Vol 22/1 had

gone smoothly, and he circulated some BL copies printed on better quality paper, with a white rather than blue cover, which he said made for a more professional journal. IB recommended we upgrade the paper stock from Vol 22/3. Printing would cost 6p more per copy, and it would push BL into the next postage band. It was agreed to look into using franked postage. AP said the cover with no colour looked more old-fashioned and GS asked about the possibility of odd spots of colour. IB said he could enquire about colour prices. IB said the Billy Strayhorn Foundation was very interested in the proposed special Strayhorn issue (22/3). PC thanked IB for his work, especially his regular innovations. **(c) Vice Chair.** GS referred the meeting to his remarks at Item 4(b) and stressed the need for the future committee to continue to protect DESUK. **(d) Publicity.** In the absence of a report from CA, there was general discussion. Observer Mike Coates spoke of community radio as a way to reach outside the jazz hard core, and GS said he was very keen on Roger Boyes's willingness to let DESUK use his introductory DE presentation prepared for the "intelligent listener". AP suggested new leaflets which would not cost much per unit and could be given out freely. GS concurred, and PC asked GS to email CA with suggestions. **(e) Meetings/Website.** AP reported that London meetings were going well, with good presentations. AP reported the website was up to date, although Honorary and Eminent Members and Associates needed to be updated. The TDWAW link is now there. CA has suggested some revamp of the web design which AP is aware of, and AP said Michael Kilpatrick has volunteered to do some editing duties and update events with VL. GS asked about hits. AP said he would collate the numbers.

6. Standing Agenda Items:

(a) Future of the Society/Committee Structure PC said this was best deferred to the new committee **(b) Recommendations on Constitutional change** PC said

there was nothing to add today.

7. Arrangements for AGM. AP said we have the venue from 12 to 5pm, with the AGM planned for 1pm and the concert at 2.30pm. He asked committee members to get there early and would be grateful for any volunteers to help.

8. Dates of Future Meetings:

(a) AGM – Saturday 9th May 2015, Pizza Express Jazz Club, Dean Street, London WD1 3RW at 1pm

(b) Newly Elected Committee Meeting (to be confirmed) - tentatively Saturday 11th July

9. AOB:

PC noted the recommended slate of candidates for election at the AGM, as published in BL, would now have a vacancy, as CC was to remain as a committee member before she became unwell. PC proposed to raise the issue at the AGM and to call for nominations from the floor.

PC declared the meeting closed at 2.40 pm.

Quentin Bryar 18th April 2015

