The Department of
Music and Theatre Arts
UW-Eau Claire
presents

Jazz Ensemble II

Ronald Keezer, Conductor

"A Tribute to Duke Ellington"

~ Centennial Celebration ~

Thursday, April 22, 1999
7:30 p.m.
Gantner Concert Hall
Haas Fine Arts Center

PROGRAM

Such Sweet Thunder (1957) — Comp. Duke Ellington
from *The Shakespearean Suite* — Trans. David Berger
Soloist: Mike Ehr, trumpet

East St. Louis Toodle—oo (1927) — Comp. Duke Ellington & Bubber Miley
Trans. Brent Wallarab

Soloists:
Chris Woller, trumpet
Andrew Imoehl, trombone
Jarrett Cooper, bari sax
Julie Olson, clarinet

In a Sentimental Mood (1935) — Comp. Duke Ellington
Arr. Bob Parsons
Soloist: Julie Olson, clarinet

Harlem Airshaft (1940) — Comp. Duke Ellington
Trans. David Berger & Alan Campbell

Soloists:
Jarrett Cooper, bari sax
Jason Breen, tenor sax
Jesse Stacken, piano
Ryan Nelson, trumpet

Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue (1937/1956) — Comp. Duke Ellington

Soloists:
Jesse Stacken, piano
Jarrett Cooper, bari sax
Mike Ehr, trumpet
Jason Breen, tenor sax

Come Sunday (1945) — Comp. Duke Ellington
from *The Black, Brown & Beige Suite*

Soloists:
Mike Ehr, trumpet
Jason Breen, tenor sax

Happy Go Lucky Local (1947) — Comp. Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn
from *The Deep South Suite* — Trans. David Berger

Soloists:
Eric Solberg, bass
Sean Hanson, trumpet
Julie Olson, tenor sax
David Strong, alto sax
Jesse Stacken, piano
Jason Breen, clarinet

Jeep's Blues (1938) — Comp. Duke Ellington
Trans. Henry Mantner
Soloist: Joe Coughlin, alto sax

Single Petal of a Rose (1962) — Comp. Duke Ellington
from *The Queen's Suite* — Trans. David Berger
Soloist: Jesse Stacken, piano

Portrait of Louis Armstrong (1970) — Comp. Duke Ellington
from *The New Orleans Suite* — Trans. David Berger
Soloist: Sean Hanson, trumpet

Rockin' in Rhythm (1931 & 1963) — Comp. Duke Ellington
Irving Mills & Harry Carney
Trans. Brent Wallarab

Soloists:
Matt Parrish, trombone
Joe Coughlin, clarinet
Mike Ehr, trumpet

PROGRAM NOTES

The Overlooked Ellington

Duke Ellington's vast legacy has tended to be diminished in recent years by the attentions of academia, which understandably have focused on the composer and music on paper. This ties in paradoxically with the inferiority complex from which many jazz supporters have long suffered.

When Irving Mills told Ellington in 1931 that he had to have a "rhapsody" ready for performance next day, the composer reputedly wrote "Creole Rhapsody" overnight. The ever-astute Mills knew what would impress the public, although in this case he may have been echoing the advice of Broadway savants. Here, in any case, was the beginning of bigger-is-better concert pieces and the road to "extended works." Inappropriate comparisons with classical music and composer soon followed, and they increased after "Black, Brown and Beige" proved something of a sensation at Carnegie Hall in 1943.

Ellington's supremacy as a composer is unquestioned in jazz, where composers of note have been few, skilled arrangers many, and imaginative improvisers innumerable. His fame and fortune, however, have resulted from many different gifts, as pianist, arranger, and personable band-leader, as well as composer. That he developed into one of the most inventive pianists in jazz is shown in his 15 *Piano*, in *The Pianist*, and in *The Money Jungle* joust with Charles Mingus and Max Roach. Beyond his soloistic ability was his capacity for energizing his band from the keyboard, as Earl Hines, no mean energizer himself, never ceased to stress admiringly.

Billy Strayhorn, a major colleague as composer and arranger, once asserted that"Ellington plays the piano, but his real instrument is the band." The truth of this has been furnished in the numerous Cds that illustrate his long career. *The Okeh Ellington* offers a good example of the formative years (1927-1930), when Ellington learned how to use and combine the strongly individualistic plungered brass of Bubber Miley and Tricky Sam Nanton, and the reed voices of Barney Bigard, Johnny Hodges, and Harry Carney to maximum effect. He established his band

as one unlike all others with such numbers as "Black and Tan Fantasy," "The Moochie," "Rockin' in Rhythm," and "Mood Indigo," which were to remain a permanent part of his repertoire. Like "Lazy Duke" and "Big House Blues," his big hit, "Mood Indigo," was played by only a small contingent from the band's ranks. The success of this title and the group's instrumentation were undoubtedly remembered six years later when a long series of small-band records was instituted for Mills' Variety label with groups nominally led by Rex Stewart, Barney Bigard, Johnny Hodges, and Cootie Williams. Two-thirds of their very attractive music has been reissued as *The Duke's Men: Small Groups* , but a long-awaited third set to complete the series has, as this is written, yet to appear.

Ellington's masterly blending of tonal colors, so simply and strikingly exhibited on "Mood Indigo" (by clarinet with muted trumpet and trombone on microphone) was notably extended to the sections of the full band in many original ways. During the 1930's he rapidly became recognized as the finest arranger in his field. Besides such popular successes as "Solitude," "Sophisticated Lady," "Caravan," and "Prelude to a Kiss," his "It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing" served in 1932 as a proclamation of intent for the subsequent swing era. It is sometimes forgotten how many exhilarating, swinging instrumentals his band produced in the decade preceding the arrival of Jimmy Blanton and Ben Webster, but they included "Double Check Stomp," "Old Man Blues," "Ring Dem Bells," "The Sheik," "Ducky Wucky," "Harlem Speaks," "Stompy Jones," "Merry-Go-Round," and "The Gal from Joe's," not to mention the moving, four-part "Reminiscing in Tempo" (written in grief after the death of Ellington's mother) and the two-part "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" (to be triumphantly revived at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival).

The brilliant Jimmy Blanton on bass and the exciting Ben Webster on tenor saxophone obviously stimulated the imagination of both Ellington and Strayhorn. For many, the records they made in 1940, such as "Koko," "Jack the Bear," "Cotton Tail," "Harlem Airshaft," and "In a Mellotone," are representative of the band's zenith. Besides excellent Victor studio recording, a complete concert recorded at Fargo, North Dakota, by a young Jack Towers in November the same year has been issued as a two-CD set. Although there are a few gaps as discs were changed on the recording machine, the set offers a rewarding and graphic picture of a full night's work by the band. It was also of considerable significance as marking the first appearance of Ray Nance in Cootie Williams' chair.

Almost yearly concerts at Carnegie Hall and the presentation of new works helped Ellington's name very much before the public during World War II. After it ended, his "Deep South Suite" was a relatively quiet indication of his concerned awareness of racial conditions. But the war and is aftermath affected his band as it did all other: in 1951 the defection of Johnny Hodges, Lawrence Brown, and Sonny Greer was a blow he faced with some equanimity, replacing them with Willie Smith, Juan Tizol, and Louie Bellson. Hodges, however, was really irreplaceable, both as a soloist and as a source of engaging melodic material and

riffs. His contribution to "Things Ain't What They Used to Be" was one Mercer Ellington always acknowledged.

The previous year, after working for Count Basie and Dizzy Gillespie, the great tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves joined Ellington, and his marathon solo at Newport in 1956 did much to revive the band's fortunes. But Johnny Hodges returned in 1955 and the personnel had been further strengthened by Clark Terry on trumpet and Sam Woodyard on drums.

By this time the LP was demanding thematic statements of a kind the Ellington band was uniquely equipped to meet. Occasional genuinely "extended" works such as "Harlem" and "The Tattooed Bride" were recorded, but much of Ellington's new work came in the form of suites, contrasting dance pieces as in pre-sonata days. An amazing number of these exist on record, among them notably *Such Sweet Thunder* (devoted to Shakespearean matters), *The Ellington Suites* (for Queen Elizabeth II, Goutelas and UWIS, *Afro-Bossa* (the title number being a classic "gut-bucket bolero"), *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* (a wry look at internationalism), *The Latin American Suite* (celebrating the first tour to Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico), *The Far East Suite* (a favorite of critics, includes the Strayhorn-Hodges masterpiece, "Isfahan"), and *The New Orleans Suite.*

Johnny Hodges died before he could pay tribute to his early mentor, Sidney Bechet, on the last, but fortunately was at his supreme best on "Blood Count," another masterpiece, when his good friend Billy Strayhorn died in 1967.

It is a wonder how Ellington, traveling and playing engagements all over the world, yet managed to write and record so much as he did. He worked on scores for movies: "Anatomy of a Murder," "Paris Blues," "Assault on a Queen," and "Change of Mind." In 1963 he proudly produced his own show of social commentary, *My People,* in Chicago. He recorded albums with Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, and John Coltrane and, with his own band, made one featuring Paul Gonsalves at length on every number.

In his later years, he was glad to have opportunities to express some of his deeply held religious beliefs. His three "Sacred Concerts" were premiered in San Francisco, New York, and London in 1965, 1968, and 1973 respectively, where they introduced the marvelous Swedish singer, Alice Babs. They are all collected in one welcome BMG set for the centennial year, which seems to have already been anticipated by an eight-CD box devoted to Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and the band on the Cote d'Azur in 1966. There are 96 tracks, including 78 issued for the first time, an informative interview with Norman Granz in the pretty booklet, and a whole disc of a rehearsal at which the paterfamilias and his brood are heard discussing and battling with musical problems. This certainly reveals a lot about the personality of the bandleader who could charm audiences worldwide and keep 14 or more musicians of diverse character involved for years on end.—*Stanley Dance*

Admirers

"Ellington's greatness? First of all, because for a long time, he was the only true composer in jazz, though Jelly Roll Morton might be one exception. By sitting down and writing, he produced between fifteen hundred and three thousand compositions of quality. In there, you've got one thousand masterpieces. Who the hell ever did anything like that? I'd also like to point out that he was at least 10 to 20 years ahead of everybody in his composing and range of his band, even beyond the bebop years.

On top of that he maintained an orchestra for 50 years and often had to pay for the orchestra himself, just to keep it going because he realized that it was his real instrument, not the piano. This was unique in the annals of jazz and, in some respects, music altogether.

Those rings under his eyes? That's because he composed day and night. I lived with him for a week once and the man only slept from six to ten in the morning.

In 1945, I had just finished my season with the Cincinnati Symphony where I was principal horn and I heard that Ellington was playing in Cleveland for an entire week at the Euclid Theatre. In those days, no black musicians could stay in the downtown white hotels. So everyone stayed with relatives, in the ghetto. But in Cleveland, only Ray Nance did this. Everyone else stayed in the theater. It was a huge building, four or five stories with innumerable dressing rooms and that's where the members of the band stayed that week, in these little cubicles. The management of the theater would put a cot there and the musicians had a burner. They were used to living like that, like gypsies, nomads. Ellington himself had two cubicles and when I got to Cleveland, the guys in the band invited me to stay with them at the theater.

Duke heard the offer and suggested the room next to his. It was no bigger than a large closet. They had put a piano in Duke's room and after the last show each night, about 1a.m., he would come in and start ruminating at the piano, improvising. He'd put on his stocking cap and his beautiful maroon silk robe and play 'til five or six in the morning. There was a door between us but I could not sleep, the excitement was too great. I heard him play, and then the scratching of a pencil, writing down what he'd just been playing. Sometimes it was 30 seconds of writing, sometimes 10 minutes. I was witness to that.

He'd stop about six, grab a few hours sleep, and then at eleven, the band always had a little rehearsal, before the first show at noon. This was the miracle of Ellington, at eleven in the morning, he would hear what he composed that morning, played by the orchestra. That was unique. I've sometimes had to wait 25 years to hear what I've written."

—Gunther Schuller

"My favorite story, that also pleased them, was the one about the "Queen's Suite." The tale of how Queen Elizabeth and Duke Ellington were so taken with each other's royalty that he wrote a piece of music for her and went into his own pocket to record it. Who but a genuine Duke named Ellington would think of writing a song for a queen and making just one copy, for her ears alone?"—*Ahmed Abdullah*

"The thing that I'm still amazed at, and I'm 72, is the amount of music he wrote, and his imagination he applied. He had so many different sounding compositions, they just don't sound the same. His compositions all had an aura about them. Listening to "Sunset and the Mocking Bird," or "Single Petal of a Rose," you hear how he patterned his music after nature, flowers and birds and things he would encounter, the way a painter would. I found out that he was also a painter, early on. For me, Duke Ellington and Gershwin are the most important American composers."—*Jimmy Heath*

"Duke never announced the tunes to the band. He wouldn't say, "We're going to play Mood Indigo." He would indicate what we played by the intro he played. Then the cats started looking for the music...

Duke was a clever old dude and we learned a lot from him: how to deal with a choice of material, how to program things, and the psychology of dealing with the members of the band. He used to say, "I'm not a disciplinarian, everyone is here for purpose." Nothing would faze him; he never seemed to worry about any situation. He could deal with anything.

Duke knew what everybody could do and he used it, he played the band like we played our instruments. His pet word was "listen."

—*Clark Terry*

"Duke had a way of coming to you with a musical opportunity and letting you absorb it. Then coming back two or three days later, and your eyes would be opened up. At the Sacred Concert at Grace Cathedral, we were rehearsing and Duke said, "I want you to play a drum solo in church." I thought, a drum solo in church? Over the course of a week, he told me that the music was based on three things. That in the beginning, we had light and thunder, and that was me. It was no longer drum solos, but my playing lightning and thunder. He was a genius like that."

—*Louis Bellson*

Jazz Ensemble II Personnel
Ron Keezer, Conductor

Saxophone
Joe Coughlin, alto
David Strong, alto
Max Robinson, alto
Jason Breen, tenor
Julie Olson, tenor
Jarrett Cooper, baritone

Trumpet
Chris Woller
Ryan Nelson
Sean Hanson
Mike Ehr

Trombone
Matt Parrish
Sean Solberg
Andrew Imoehl

Piano
Jesse Stacken

Bass
Eric Solberg
Nick Moran

Guitar & Banjo
Trevor LaBonte

Drums
Tony Florez
Tim Glenn
Eli Johnson

Assisted by:
Jeff Dahlseng, trombone

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Please respect the need for silence during performances. Our concerts and recitals are recorded. Coughing, beepers, electronic watches, careless handling of programs and other extraneous noises are serious distractions to performers and the audience. The use of cameras and recording equipment cannot be permitted.
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