

JUMP FOR JOY: “HIPPEST THING WE EVER DID” DUKE ELLINGTON’S MUSIC FOR THEATER

By Jerry Osterberg

Duke Ellington recalled in his autobiography *Music Is My Mistress*, that while confined to the house with a bad cold as a young teenager: “I started fiddling around on the piano, using what was left over from my piano lessons...and came up with a piece I called ‘Soda Fountain Rag,’ because I had been working as a soda jerk at the *Poodle Dog Café*. I started playing this around, and it attracted quite a lot of attention.”

After winning an art scholarship to Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute, he began performing at parties and with dance bands in the Washington, DC area, deciding to devote his life to music. At the age of 24, he formed his own band, *The Washingtonians*, and took it to New York, where he landed an engagement at the *Kentucky Club*, at Broadway and West 49th Street. In *Easy to Remember: The Great American Songwriters and Their Songs*, William Zinsser wrote “It was there that Ellington first began to make



Ivie Anderson

the band his instrument as a jazz composer, using it to paint the tonal colors in his head. The richness of his palette set *The Washingtonians* apart from other bands of the day, and by 1927...the rechristened *Duke Ellington Orchestra* began a long-running stand at Harlem’s Cotton Club.”

Miles Davis remarked: “Once a year, every musician should put down his instrument and thank God for Duke Ellington.” Although Ellington made it all work, he never forgot how critical it was to have good musicians to count on. Again, William Zinsser: “His lifelong method was to hire brilliant individual musicians and to blend them into an ensemble as

individualistic as the soloists were on their own. His identity was closely bound with the collective identity of his musicians, and he held his band together for five decades until he died in 1974, an astonishing feat of stamina, leadership, and charm.”

A key ingredient in the mix that essentially defined the Ellington band was Billy Strayhorn. Although he wrote well over 150 songs, including “Lush Life,” “Lotus Blossom,” and “Chelsea Bridge,” it is perhaps “Take the ‘A’ Train,” which has the strongest connection to Ellington. Legend has it that Strayhorn wrote it while traveling from Pittsburgh to New York City to join the Ellington organization in 1939. Ellington’s directions included a reference to the ‘A’ train, a subway line that ran up to Harlem, where the Duke

could be found, residing in Sugar Hill. Over nearly 30 years together, Ellington and Strayhorn were artistically inseparable. So strong was the alloy formed by their inspired partnership, it hardly mattered whose name appeared on the music. Ellington said of Strayhorn: “Billy Strayhorn was my right hand, my left arm, and the eyes in the back of my head.” When Strayhorn died in 1967, Ellington was devastated. Lena Horne, a friend of both, said: “Duke was young forever...listen to his music. He never aged a day, till Billy died.”

As driven and successful as he was throughout his illustrious career, there was one milestone which largely eluded Duke Ellington, creating music for the theater and seeing it produced on Broadway. *Beggar’s Holiday* (based on *The Beggar’s*



Washingtonians



President's Message...

Linda Amiel Burns, President

It's hard to believe that the 2016-2017 season has flown by so quickly, with only two programs left - and what marvelous treats we have planned, with which to end our year!

We cannot thank Marilyn Lester enough for her wonderful program on *Duke Ellington on Broadway*. I learned so much, as Marilyn's knowledge of her subject is close to infinite, and her enthusiasm is contagious. Also, kudos to singers Mikel Mafaro and Annette St. John for bringing the Duke's songs to life, and to Bryon Sommers who accompanied them wonderfully on the piano. This was a truly delightful afternoon.

Don't miss Sandi Durell's 13th Annual Songwriter Series on May 13th! She took some time off to create the excellent *Theater Pizzazz*, which has already become a leading theatrical site. Now, Sandy has come back to Songwriter Showcase with a bang! This upcoming edition will feature some of the best and brightest composers of today. The details are in this issue.

We will close our year with the amazing Richard Skipper's star-studded Birthday Celebration of Judy Garland on June 10th - a truly gala event, and the perfect way to end the season. Richard promises lots of surprises in store for us all. This will be a program not to be missed!

Since we have two such special programs coming up in May and June, I would encourage our members to bring guests to the meeting. It is a great way to introduce them to the American Popular Song Society and, hopefully, they will join and become members.

Our esteemed Board of Directors will be meeting in May to plan for our healthy future and to assure that our Society will continue to grow and thrive. Much of this depends on our members' willingness to spread the word about APSS, increasing our membership, and letting everyone know about the "best bargain in town"...our terrific organization that helps to keep good music alive!

Wishing you a happy Spring, and looking forward to seeing you all at the meeting on May 13th!

Linda



Mikel, Linda Amiel Burns, Bryon Sommers, Anette St. John, Jerry Osterberg

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MEETING LOCATION: Local 802 - Musicians' Hall
322 West 48th Street. Program: 1:45 - 3:30PM.

Come early to look thru Sheet Music & CD's & stuff, all FREE.



Duke Ellington...

Continued from page 1

Opera), for example, the book and lyrics by John Latouche, ran for only 108 performances during the 1946/1947 season. Despite the presence of Alfred Drake and Zero Mostel and Ellington's music, not one memorable tune emerged from the production.

APSS board member and Contributing Editor, Marilyn Lester, who is also on the board of the Duke Ellington Society of New York, produced an engaging tribute to the icon at Local 802 on April 8. Assisted by Musical Director Bryon Sommers, and the singers Annette St. John and Mikel, and her own enlightening narration, Marilyn presented a program within the best traditions of APSS, one which was entertaining, informative, and witty. Bryon is not only a well-known accompanist in the cabaret world, but a composer. With the lyricist David Zippel, he wrote "Why Don't We Run Away?" which caught the attention of the late Nancy Lamott, who included it in her 1991 CD *Beautiful Baby*. More recently, David Friedman, with a little help from his friends, produced a high quality compilation album of Zippel songs previously recorded by Lamott, including Bryon's. Annette, who performs regularly with her trio at the Smoke Jazz Club in Harlem, has been channeling the likes of Etta, Sarah, and Ella, for quite some time. Mikel, a popular professional hairdresser, follows his bliss

as a well-respected club singer by night.

Many of the songs performed by Marilyn's



Mikel, Annette St. John, Bryon Sommers, Marilyn Lester

impressive cast have long been Ellington standards, among them "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me," and "I'm Beginning to See the Light,"

all of which placed within the top ten in 1943, 1944, and 1945, respectively. "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)," first performed by Ivie Anderson in a stage

production *Jump for Joy*, soon joined the catalog of Ellington's best known songs. In the summer of 1941,

Ellington staged a sixty member, all-black cast musical revue which he called the "first social significance show," its conceit to celebrate the banishment of Jim Crow and Uncle Tom by



Duke & Billy Strayhorn

eliminating all stereotypes. Starring Anderson, Dorothy Dandridge, Herb Jeffries, and Big Joe Turner, it opened at the Mayan Theater in Los Angeles and ran for 101

performances. According to David Hajdu in his biography of Billy Strayhorn, black audiences loved it, but white critics did not: "They didn't know what to make of it." Calling *Jump for Joy* "the hippest thing we ever did," its failure to reach Broadway was one Ellington's deepest regrets.

Among the tunes heard by APSS members were: "Come Sunday," perhaps the best recognized of Ellington's sacred cycle, and "My Father's Island" from *Queenie Pie*, an ambitious but uncompleted opera at the time of his death. Commissioned by WNET, New York's public television station in the 1960s, *Queenie Pie* was to have been an hour long broadcast. Due to both a lack of funding and time, Ellington tabled it until 1971, at which point he determined to expand it into a full length production. Over the past 40 years, various people have attempted to finish what Duke Ellington started. With only character sketches, fragments, notes, and pieces of melody available, scattered in different locations, they've had to make educated guesses as to Ellington's intentions and probable path. As a result, while the musical has been staged a few times, as recently as 2014, the productions have varied.

Performing to a full house at Local 802 last month, the team of Mikel, Lester, Sommers & St. John, presented songs which were mostly well known. Besides those already mentioned were "Mood Indigo," "Hit Me

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TIN PAN ALLEY AND THE BIRTH OF THE AMERICAN SONGBOOK

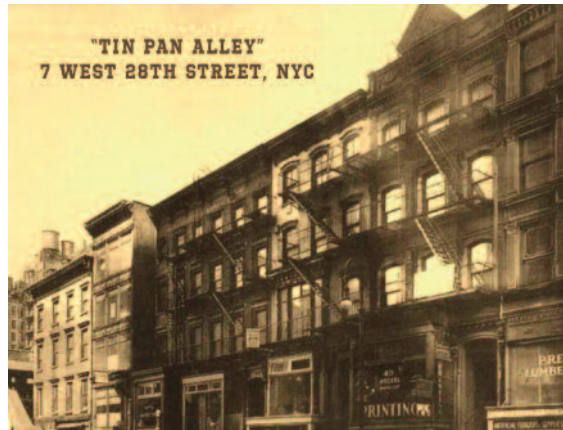
by Marilyn Lester

Tin Pan Alley isn't just a location, it's a state of mind – a place that conjures an image of eager young songwriters plunking feverishly away at pianos in hopes of scoring the next big hit. The location of what became known as Tin Pan Alley was a collection of tenement-style buildings on West 28th Street in New York, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Those buildings are long gone, save for a sidewalk plaque commemorating them. The origins of the name aren't really known, but one story is that Monroe H. Rosenfeld, a writer for the New York Herald newspaper, coined the term for the sound made by cheap upright pianos being played simultaneously.

The predecessor of Tin Pan Alley emerged in the late 1800s with the tightening of copyright laws, which caused songwriters, composers, lyricists and publishers to band together for mutual financial benefit. Simultaneously, publishers began to concentrate on popular music rather than on religious and classical music, while at the same time, piano sales skyrocketed, and vaudeville began to replace minstrel shows as broad popular entertainment. These trends created a demand for sheet music, leading more and more publishers to enter the music market, then centered in New York City's Union Square area. Prior to this consolidation, publishers were widely scattered across the nation. These entrepreneurial publishers were hungry to add momentum to the music industry. The men who led the publishing houses were quick to spot opportunity. Many had been salesmen in other industries before reinventing themselves in music: Isidore Witmark, for example, sold water filters, Edward B. Marks sold buttons, and Leo Feist sold corsets.

The major publishers in the new music market were Harms, Inc. (started in 1881) and Isidore Witmark (began in 1885), as well as Irving Berlin, Inc.; Shapiro, Bernstein & Company; Remick Music Company; Robbins Music Corp.; and E. B.

Marks Music Company. By the early 1900s Isidore Witmark had moved to 28th Street, and the others followed. The scene quickly became a frenetic one. Steady streams of songwriters, musicians, and performers looking for material began coming and



going. Tunes were purchased outright for a flat fee or under a royalty arrangement. Where royalties were concerned, publishers generally added a principal of the company as a co-composer to capture a greater percentage of royalties. Songwriters who became successful and established were often added to the staff of



a publishing house. Their for-hire status provided the publisher with exclusive rights to the music.

Tin Pan Alley's publishers were early adopters of market research to select music. The market was polled to determine what was selling best; composers were then directed to compose in that style. The new song was tested with performers and listeners, to determine which would be

published. Publishers also employed song pluggers, whose job it was to demonstrate songs to the buyers of sheet music. George Gershwin and Harry Warren are two songwriters who were also pluggers. Selling sheet music was often aggressive.

Louis Bernstein of Shapiro, Bernstein & Company told about taking his pluggers to cycle races at Madison Square Garden. He recalled, "They had 20,000 people there. We had a pianist and a singer with a large horn. We'd sing a song to them thirty times a night. They'd cheer and yell, and we kept pounding away at them. When people walked out, they'd be singing the song. They couldn't help it."

In 1914, The American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) was formed by Irving Berlin, James Weldon Johnson, Jerome Kern, and John Philip Sousa, all songwriters who made their living mostly from a percentage of sheet music sales. Thus, the core purpose of ASCAP was to "assure that music creators are fairly compensated for the public performance of their works, and that their rights are properly protected." Yet, the money to be made in the music industry continued to benefit the publishers the most. It was only in the 1960s that new terms were introduced that benefitted performers.

The end of Tin Pan Alley isn't clear cut. The beginning of its demise is attributed by some to the 1930s, with the growth of radio, phonographs and motion pictures taking a large bite out of the sheet music market. Others contend that Tin Pan Alley was alive and well until the 1950s,

when rock and roll upstaged the music that had become the American Song Book. This new style of popular music was centered in the Brill Building, which became a legend in its own right. Tin Pan Alley may be a memory now, but it will always be the iconic, magical place that birthed the American Songbook and made the writers and lyricists of those glorious tunes immortal.





Member News...

If you have any member news, or other items you would like to have considered for this newsletter, please send it by e-mail to the co-editor, Jerry Osterbergg: osterbergg@AOL.com. It will be subject to editing, depending on size and content, and please remember that we try to go to press two weeks before each monthly meeting. We often get very good items that get to us after the newsletter has been printed and mailed.

Linda Amiel Burns, APSS President, is celebrating four decades of The Singing Experience. A number of APSS members have taken this workshop, some more than once. For those of us who have, we can assure you that you'll feel like a pro by the night of the performance. Although many students have never sung in public before, the supportive environment has prepared them well for their debut. Call Linda at 212-315-3500 to sign up. The Singing Experience Cable TV show continues on MNN Time Warner: Channel 56 or RCN: Channel 111. The program broadcasts are every Sunday at 5:00 PM. You can also see your fellow NYSMS members on YouTube at any time.

Midday Jazz Midtown continues on Wednesdays (1:00 PM to 2:00 PM) at Saint Peter's Church (East 54 Street (entrance) @ Lexington Ave), NYC, Hosted by Ronny Whyte. Programs: May 3, Andrea Wolper; May 10, Barry Harris; May 17, Art Baron; May 24, Shiela Jordan & Cameron Brown; May 31, Cecilia Coleman Big Band. Suggested donation: \$10. Parking: Icon Parking, East 51 St, between Third and Lexington Ave. \$15 including tax for five hours with validation @ Saint Peter's reception desk. www.ronnywhyte.com/ www.saintpeters.org/jazz/midtownjazz.htm.

The Singing Experience will return with Workshop #481, *Silver Lining*, beginning on Monday, May 15 and continue on Mondays, May 22, June 5, June 12. All classes are from 6:30 to 9:30 PM @ Studio 353 on West 48th St. Performance at the Triad on Monday, June 19 followed by DVD cast viewing party on June 26. Call Linda Amiel Burns at 212-315-3500 or write: linda@singingexperience.com.

Ronny Whyte will be performing at Birdland, 315 West 44th Street @ 6:00 PM on Thursday, May 18 with Boots Maleson – bass, David Silliaman – drums, Sean Harkness – guitar, Lou Caputo – reeds, and Alex Nguyen – trumpet. Reservations: 212-581-3060.

Board member Will Friedwald will present the latest edition of his monthly Clip Joint program at the 92nd Street Y on Tuesday, May 23 @ 12:00 PM: *Celebrating Sheldon Harnick – Dueling Fiddlers*. Through the magic of video clips you'll see Zero Mostel and other members of the original case of *Fiddler on the Roof*, as well as highly original and sometimes startling impressions from performers ranging from Louis Armstrong to the Temptations. Tickets are \$25. www.92y.org/event/will-friedwald-s-clip-joint.aspx.

It's not too early to reserve for APSS member Carol Shedlin's newest show *Serenade in Blue* at the Brick Room at Don't Tell Mama, 343 West 46th Street, accompanied by Jon Delfin, Musical Director, and Boots Maleson on bass. Directed by Linda Amiel Burns, Carol will perform on Mondays, May 1 and 8, Tuesday, May 23, and Thursday, June 1. \$12 cover (\$10 for TSE,MAC,APSS,SAG/AFTRA). 2 drink minimum, cash only. All shows are at 7:00 PM. Call for reservations between 4-9 PM: 212-757-0788.

Carol J. Binkowski's new book, *Opening Carnegie Hall: The Creation and First Performances of America's Premier Concert Stage* was just published by McFarland & Company. Details are available at www.caroljinkowski.com.

Around the World in 90 Years is the name of the Down Town Glee Club's 90th Anniversary Spring Concert on Thursday, May 11 @ 7:30 PM at All Souls Church, East 80th St. & Lexington Avenue. Following the concert will be a free reception and gift auction. Tickets are \$30 at the door and \$25 in advance. APSS members will receive a special discounted price of \$15 at the door. Call 516-435-7817 or visit www.downtowngleeclub.org. Show your support for fellow APSS members who have been rehearsing hard since January 3: Jerry Osterberg, Andrew Poretz, and Terry Scott.

APSS Board member Tom Toce has recorded a studio version of his successful MAC Award nominated cabaret show *Songwriter in the House* at the Metropolitan Room last year. The recently released CD is different than Tom's earlier album. It features his singer-songwriter songs and his vocals throughout. Backing Tom are Jon Burr – bass, Sean Harkness – guitar, Justin McElroy & Peter Millrose – vocals. The CD is available on CD Baby. <https://www.cdbaby.com/cd/tomtoce>.

APSS member Dr. Sue Horowitz is thrilled to have had her original songs featured on WOS Radio's segment *Women of Substance* on February 15. In addition, her fans were delighted, as were reviewers, to attend one of her appearances at the 14th Street Y Theater during January and February. To catch up on all of Sue's many activities visit www.dr.sue.com.

Hilary Kole's newest CD: *The Judy Garland Project* (Miranda Music) is now on-sale. The remarkable performer conjures the spirit and beauty of Judy Garland in stunning arrangements of songs made famous by the legendary singer, including "The Trolley Song," "The Boy Next Door," "A Cottage for Sale," "The Man That Got Away," and "Over the Rainbow."

Do you seek an elusive song? If you do, write APSS Board member Sandy Marrone @ smusandy@aol.com or call 856-829-6104. You can also visit Sandy in New Jersey to see thousands and thousands of sheets of music, most of which can be yours very reasonably. She is a marvelous resource and a super-great lady!

Sandi Durell is Publisher-Editor of TheaterPizzazz.com, a vital website that presents up to date theater reviews, news, interviews and previews, along with cabaret reviews and videos. There is a large contributing group of writers who offer discerning and professional reviews and information. Sandi is a Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards Voter, member of the American Theatre Critics Association, League of Professional Theatre Women, The Lambs, and The Dutch Treat Club. Visit: www.theaterpizzazz.com.

Surprise! Author David Hajdu makes his songwriter debut with *Waiting for the Angel*, culminating a five year collaboration with esteemed multi-genre composers Jill Sobule, Fred Hersch, Renee Rosnes, and Mickey Leonard. Featured vocalists are Jo Lawry, Michael Winther, and Karen Oberlin, with musicians Steve Wilson, Steven Bernstein, Charles Pillow, Peter Bernstein, Dave Eggar, Sean Smith, Carl Allen. www.mirandamusic.com, www.cdbaby.com.

Dennis Livingston, cabaret songwriter, was honored by the Boston Association of Cabaret Artists as one of two songwriters (the other was Will McMillan) chosen to have his works performed at the BACA Invitation Songwriters Performance Showcase on September 25 @ the Amazing Things Art Center in Framingham, MA. In addition to Will, a fine singer as well as composer/lyricist, Dennis' cast included Brian De Lorenzo and Jinny Sagorin. Dennis has also begun performing publicly this year as an improvising jazz flutist with *The Alchemists*, a Boston based band of professional musicians devoted to collective improvisation. He took the occasion of the BACA showcase to accompany several of his songs on flute, along with pianist Doug Hammer. You may recall that a stellar revue of Dennis's songs *The Stories in My*

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American Popular Song Society

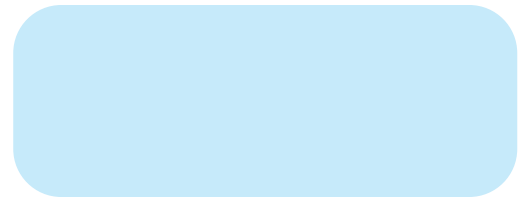
P.O. Box 5856
PIKESVILLE, MD 21282



Member News...

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Lucille Carr-Kaffashan sings the praises of contemporary songwriting artists in her 2017 Bistro Award Winning cabaret show "Unwritten, Celebrating 21st Century Female Singer-Songwriters." Directed by David Hilder, this show features a mix of joyful, touching, thought-provoking and laughter-inducing 21st century songs written by outstanding artists such as Adele, Annie Lennox, Sara Bareilles, Susan Werner, Meghan Trainor and Tracy Chapman. The program reflects the voices of women in their 20's as well as those in their 60's, and every decade in between, opening a window to the hearts and minds of contemporary women. With musical director Jeff Cubeta on piano, Sean Harkness on guitar, and Matt Scharfglass on bass, Lucille performs Unwritten at Don't Tell Mama in NYC on Saturday, April 29th at 7 pm and on Thursday, May 4th at 7 pm. In addition to her recent Bistro Award for Outstanding Theme Show, Lucille is the recipient of the prestigious MAC Hanson Award. There is a \$20 music charge (remember to ask for APSS member discount!), plus a two-drink minimum. For reservations call 212-757-0788 or reserve online at donttellmamanyc.com.



**Did you know every issue of this newsletter
is in COLOR online at www.APSSinc.org**

Duke E. (cont...)

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With a Hot Note and Watch Me Bounce," "Caravan," "Perdido," "In a Sentimental Mood," "Just Squeeze Me," and "Solitude." There are so many excellent recordings of Duke Ellington songs, such as "I'm Beginning to See the Light," a number one hit by Harry James, it's next to

impossible to choose. One that comes immediately to mind is the two disc studio album that Ella Fitzgerald made with Ellington for Verve in 1956-1957: *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Duke Ellington Songbook*. There's also their famous live appearance in 1966 at the Cote d'Azur in France, which is well worth listening to.

Just seven years after his death in 1974, much of

Ellington's best known songs were included in a musical revue starring Gregory Hines, *Sophisticated Ladies*, which ran for 767 performances, and featured his son Mercer and daughter Mercedes. It received eight Tony nominations, producing two winners, in addition to a Theatre World Award. In his review for *The New York Times*, Frank Rich wrote: "...the new musical revue at

the Lunt-Fontanne, is an Ellington celebration that just won't quit until it has won over the audience with dynamic showmanship...this is the only Broadway revue of recent vintage that operates on a truly grand scale." To which, Duke Ellington would have added: "There are two kinds of music. Good music, and the other kind."



Our Remaining 2016-17 Season

April 8, 2017

Duke Ellington's Music for Theater
Produced by Marilyn Lester

May 13, 2017

"Songwriter Showcase"
"Keeping American Popular Songs
alive..."
Produced by Sandi Durell

June 10, 2017

Richard Skipper Celebrates
An all-star cast celebrating
Judy Garland's Birthday.