

Harlem Renaissance Honors Billy Strayhorn

Written by Editor

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Billy "Sweet Pea" Strayhorn was a great Jazz composer. He joined the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1939, at the age of 22, and his works include "Take the A Train," "Chelsea Bridge," "Day Dream," "Johnny Come Lately," "Rain-check," and "Clementine."



Harlem Renaissance 2008, a black tie fundraiser for the Arts Council of Beaufort County, celebrates Strayhorn's collaborations with bandleader Duke Ellington as part of the the musical legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, an intense and productive era for the arts between 1919 and 1940.

"If you've ever wanted to take the A Train," said Barbara Carter, member of the Harlem Renaissance committee, "then you need to know about Billy Strayhorn's collaboration with Duke Ellington."

Smiler-extraordinaire and bandleader Duke Ellington is quoted as saying "....Billy Strayhorn was my right arm, my left arm, all the eyes in the back of my head, my brainwaves in his head, and his in mine."

The most famous pieces by Strayhorn are Ellington's theme song, "Take the A Train" and Ellington's signatory, "Lotus Blossom". Some of the suites they collaborated on are: "Deep South Suite," 1947; the "Shakespearean Suite" or "Such Sweet Thunder," 1957; an arrangement of the "Nutcracker Suite," 1960; and the "Peer Gynt Suite," 1962. He and Ellington composed the "Queen's Suite" and gave the only pressing to Queen Elizabeth of England. Two of their suites, "Jump for Joy," 1950 and "My People," 1963 had as their themes the struggles and triumphs of blacks in the United States. Both included a narrative and choreography. "A Drum Is a Woman" presented an allegorical history of jazz through music and dance. The "Far East Suite" was written after the band's tour of the East, sponsored by the State Department.

"Strayhorn's compositions are fantastic to listen to, and to dance to," said Carol Tuynman, Vice President of the Board of the Arts Council of Beaufort County and Harlem Renaissance supporter since its beginnings in 1998. "He was one of the greatest lyrical composers of the century, in terms of musicality. He deserves more recognition."

During this celebration of Billy & the Duke on Saturday, January 26th, Harlem Renaissance 2008 also offers dinner, a silent auction, an emerging artist exhibition, loads of ambiance from the elegant Cotton Club era, and the joy of the arts in Beaufort County. Advance tickets only: celebrity seating for 8- \$560; reserved table for