TRADITIONAL JAZZ SERIES

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
OUR ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY SIXTH PROGRAM

James Williams,
solo Steinway

SPONSORED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
AND THE NEW HAMPSHIRE
LIBRARY OF TRADITIONAL JAZZ

8 PM MONDAY
MONDAY, APRIL 6, 1998
JOHNSON THEATRE
PAUL CREATIVE ARTS CENTER
DURHAM, NH
THE ARTISTS

JAMES WILLIAMS

Historically the solo pianist is one of the most enduring figures on the musical scene. J.S. Bach’s son Johann Christian is said to have given the first public piano recital in 1767, and soon ever-larger halls were being filled, exemplified in the 19th century by Franz Liszt and his competitors, replicated in the next by Vladimir Horowitz and his, with the conservatories currently producing an over-abundance of post-millennial contenders. The analogous venues in early jazz were somewhat limited and frequently had red lights in the windows advertising less aural attractions some of us find it provocative that pianists in such employ were called “professors”. But in only a few decades Horowitz was listening to Art Tatum.

The fascination of the audience with solo pianism is not just with how it sounds; for better or for worse there is often a visual athleticism involved in manipulating the triple function of melody, harmony, and rhythm. Gunther Schuller describes this succinctly in Early Jazz; “It is obvious that to encompass all these functions, three hands would be a lot better than two.” He goes on to point out that this is particularly problematic in jazz as opposed to classical music because the necessity for explicitly stating the “beat” is more critical in the former; thus the presence of so many piano trios (even on this series). The challenges are both physical and aesthetic; nevertheless, resourceful pianists - at least a few of them - have found magical solutions which satiate the ear, stimulate the intellect, and still encourage the tapping of the foot. Tonight, James Williams will reveal all.

Born in Memphis in 1951, James grew up immersed in two of the wellsprings of jazz - the blues and the black church - and no matter to what level of sophistication and complexity his explorations take him, these fundamental roots are always apparent. He earned a degree in music education at Memphis State, and soon was teaching at Berklee. This led to gigs with numerous jazz celebrities, the most significant being four years with Art Blakey when Wynton Marsalis was also aboard. Now living in New York, he is also active as a composer and record producer besides being in demand as a performer sensitive to the wide range of jazz styles. In recent years he has led his own group, the Intensive Care Unit, which weaves together the multiple strands of his artistic life.

Though crediting the Herbie Hancock/Wynton Kelly generation of pianists as being his primary influences, we can be sure that the imaginative virtuosity of his fellow Memphian, the tragic Phineas Newborn, Jr., has likewise penetrated his consciousness. Moreover, James is a person of strong spiritual and human values, and his respect for and compatibility with musicians of older generations is matches only by their admiration for him. He appeared here first with Benny Carter, played on Clark Terry’s 70th Birthday Bash with Louie Bellson and Milt Hinton, and on that occasion (and this very stage) performed for the first time with another New York resident who had never heard him before and was
duly impressed; it is an appropriate if sad coincidence that our entire series this year is dedicated to the memory of Doc Cheatham.

James Williams is an artist of substance, a person of character, and a great role model for students not only as they approach careers but also as they face life itself. It is an honor to have him as the first jazz pianist in the fullness of his powers to give a solo concert on our Johnson Theatre Steinway.

Tape recorders and cameras are not permitted due to contractual arrangements. Your cooperation is requested.
THE SERIES

The UNH Traditional Jazz Series began in 1979. It promotes the enjoyment and understanding of the art through concerts featuring musicians of regional, national, and international prominence. The program represents a unique endeavor to expand interest and honor outstanding talent and achievement.

Musicians wishing to do so are encouraged to offer their recordings for sale or mail order during intermission; a brief announcement may be made. The sponsors have no financial interest in such sales beyond offering a courtesy service to the artists and the public.

Program Notes -- Paul Verrette
Production -- David Seiler

THE SCHEDULE

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Performance</th>
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<td>September 15</td>
<td>Clark Terry Quintet with Carol Sloane (Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center)</td>
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<td>October 6</td>
<td>M-N-M Trio with Jimmy Mazzy, banjo; Eli Newberger, tuba; Joe Muranyi, clarinet</td>
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<td>November 10</td>
<td>Paul Broadnax and Friends</td>
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<td>December 1</td>
<td>Artie Shaw Orchestra, directed by Dick Johnson (Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center)</td>
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<td>February 2</td>
<td>Duo, Brad Terry, clarinet and Joachim Mencel, piano (Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center)</td>
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<td>March 9</td>
<td>Galvanized Jazz Band and Spiegle Willcox, trombone</td>
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<td>April 6</td>
<td>James Williams, solo piano (Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center)</td>
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<td>May 4</td>
<td>Claude Williams, violin; Norris Turney, saxophone; and Red Richards, piano (Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center)</td>
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(Concerts in Strafford Room of the Memorial Union Building exception noted)