Our Twenty-sixth Season

Our One Hundred Sixty-eighth Program
2004-2005

Bob Wilber
in a tribute to
Johnny Hodges

Second Annual Tommy Gallant Memorial Scholarship Concert

Sponsored by the Department of Music and the New Hampshire Library of Traditional Jazz

8 p.m. Monday, January 24, 2005
Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, Durham, NH
Bob Wilber (and Johnny Hodges)

Late in the preceding century the writer of these notes had the pleasure of sharing a course on the African-American Experience in the 20th Century with Prof. Les Fisher of the UNH Department of English. We required a musically-oriented term paper, and received the usual minimal efforts re such near-household names as Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and Miles Davis, etc. But one quiet young lady submitted a paper twice the required length, based on intense listening to the playing of Johnny Hodges, the Ellingtonian alto quite invisible (and inaudible) to her generation. When asked why she had made this atypical choice, she replied, "Until that day you played him in class, I had never heard such beautiful sounds come out of a saxophone."

Obviously there is a subjective dimension to that judgment, but she was in fact reflecting the general opinion of the jazz world prior to the dramatic changes in taste, style, and aesthetic purpose emanating from the bebop era at mid-century. Despite the collectivity common to its presentation, the evolution of jazz was tied to the emergence of distinctive individual voices, and Hodges set a compelling standard, not only in the sweep and expressive quality of the sound itself, but also in his earthy approach to the blues and the spacious sensitivity of his ballads, two genres not inherently compatible. Born in Cambridge, MA, in 1907 (as visitors to the recent exhibition of the New England Jazz Hall of Fame in the Dimond Library already know), Hodges joined the Ellington band in 1928 and except for brief interludes in the '50s, was Duke's quintessential sideman until his death in a dentist's chair in 1970. But at various points during those four decades Johnny would appear on recordings as leader of a small group drawn largely from the Ellington roster, often with Duke himself on piano. Tonight's program explores both of these identities.

Now the plot thickens, if only a bit. One tends to think of Bob Wilber as a clarinetist and soprano saxophonist, so it will be a welcome revelation for many to hear him in a different context. Moreover, we will also learn that Hodges himself played those other instruments, even with Ellington, into the early '40s. And maybe fewer of us had reason to know that during his soprano days Johnny had several meetings with Bob's mentor, the venerable Sidney Bechet. But certainly only those of us who are disciples of Casey Stengel, ("You can look it up"), would have dreamed that John Coltrane was on one of those small group sessions, and that Johnny Hodges was featured on a Lawrence Welk LP! (Daily we learn more about how "nuanced" the world is, if you will pardon the expression!)

We long ago were so fortunate as to be able to embrace Bob Wilber as part of our extended UNH family; his numerous visits began in 1986, with the late Milt Hinton, and this evening's tribute to Johnny Hodges was Bob's idea. As we said in October of 2000 "Bob has a passion both instinctive and experiential for acknowledging those aspects of our heritage which will ultimately endure; for example, he was exploring the music of King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton long before it was fashionable to do so, he re-created the famous 1938 Benny Goodman Carnegie Hall Concert on its 50th anniversary, and he celebrated the 100th birthday of Sidney Bechet by a major presentation with Wynton Marsalis"—and he once played the Mozart and Artie Shaw clarinet concerti on the same program!

Finally, thanks to the assemblage of supporting musicians who once again demonstrate the vitality of the idiom in our region, and to which Tom Gallant gave so much of his time, talent, and energy.
A Tribute to Johnny Hodges
presented by
Bob Wilber
saxophone

and
Members of the Seacoast Big Band
prepared by Dave Seiler

Saxes
Charlie Jennison
Gina Cusanelli
Marc LaForce
Sean Potter
Tony DiBartolomeo

Trombones
Chris Oberholtzer
Jim Robins
Steve Thayer
Ernie Mills

Trumpets
Greg Palmer
Mark Selesnick
Craig Skeffington
Kevin Knapp

Rhythm
Jim Butka
Nate Therrien
Andrew Greene

Ken Clark
Paul Verrette
Jim Howe

Tape recorders and cameras are not permitted due to contractual arrangements.
Please turn off beepers and watch alarms. Your cooperation is requested.
THE SERIES

The UNH Traditional Jazz Series began in 1979 through the imaginative vision and generous commitment of the late Dorothy C. Prescott. 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

2004-2005 SCHEDULE

September 20: Whistlin' Dixie: The Eli Newberger All-Stars

October 25: Ellingtonia Plus: Clark Terry, Jimmy Woode and Shawn Monteiro

November 22: Triple Play: Dick Hyman, Howard Alden, and Jay Leonhart

January 24: Second Annual Tommy Gallant Scholarship Concert:
The Incomparable Bob Wilber Pays Tribute to the Incomparable Johnny Hodges

February 28: Manhattan Magic: The Bob Mintzer Quartet

April 4: Right from the Source: Dave Pietro’s Banda Brazil

OTHER SPECIAL JAZZ PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS

October 23: Family Weekend Concert, UNH JAZZ BAND and COMBOS, Dave Seiler, directing: UNH JAZZ SINGERS, William Kempster, directing.

January 18: Harry Jones Memorial Concert: Seacoast Big Band featuring trombonist/composer JAY ASHBY; Dave Seiler, directing. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH.

March 21: Gala Jazz Concert, DR. CLARK TERRY, trumpet and flugelhorn and the UNH JAZZ BAND, Dave Seiler, directing. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH.

For tickets call (603)862-2290