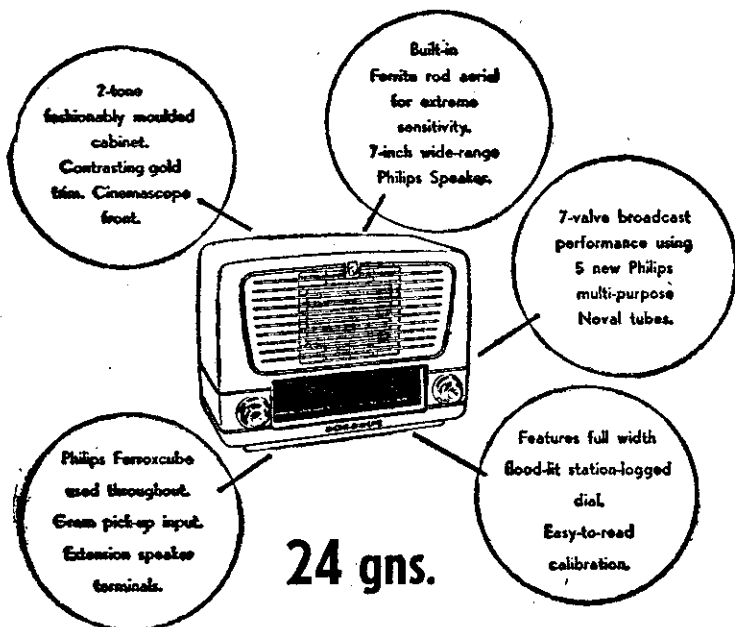


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First Hearings in Jazz

NEWPORT FESTIVAL 1956

First presentation: Station 2YD, 9.0 p.m., March 7.

DUKE ELLINGTON's contribution to this hour programme was recorded by George Avakian on the last night of the Festival. Ellington's orchestra rather half-heartedly opened proceedings at 8.30 p.m. and most of the 7000 customers were dissatisfied with their early glimpse of Ellingtonia. However, three and a quarter hours later the band was back on the stage and Duke was under way with something new, written specially for a Newport premiere. The work *Festival Suite*, in three parts bearing the titles "Festival Junction," "Blues to be There" and "Newport Up" had no immediate thematic impact but provided a framework for solos by almost everyone. There were many unmistakable and glorious Ellington sounds, especially in the beautiful, slow second movement, with Duke's piano, the trombones' passage, Russell Procope's clarinet, Ray Nance's trumpet, Stan Woodyard's sizzling drums, Jimmy Woodie's driving bass and the unique reed section.

Following this came "Sophisticated Lady" and one old "pop" tune and then Duke announced his "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" which was to feature the improvisations of tenor saxophonist, Paul Gonsalves. This number got through its first three or four minutes uneventfully but then a black-dressed platinum blonde stood up and began to jitterbug. Within two minutes the whole of Freebody Park was transformed into a seething mass.

With the enthusiasm of the crowd behind him, Duke carried right on. The last four items included "Jeep's Blues" featuring Johnny Hodges and the show wound up at 1.0 a.m., a dramatic climax to a completely successful jazz convention.

One factor most forcibly stands out when listening to this programme—the music really swings with a rocking beat throughout.

But is it all great jazz? I venture to utter a most definite "no"! Portions of the "Suite" and "Jeep's Blues" please immensely and must rate amongst the

most tasteful and enjoyable music Duke has presented. This is not the case with "Diminuendo, etc." It may well have been exciting for a live audience, but the fact that several thousand fans were carried away by 27 bars of tenor playing by Gonsalves (boring in the extreme) and some high note trumpet work by "Cats" Anderson (the distasteful screaming of a slaughtered cat in agony) does not necessarily mean that great jazz history was being made at that moment.

I feel that members of the original live audience will always get a sensational thrill out of this programme because of all the memories it will revive but my thrills came only with the tracks labelled "Blues to be There" and, to a lesser extent, "Jeep's Blues."

The music of the Phineas Newborn Junior Quartet was presented at the Festival on Saturday, July 7 at 1.30 p.m. In the particular selection of items presented there are some which will form the second portion of this jazz hour.

Phineas was born on December 14, 1932 and started to study the piano six years later. In addition to furthering this interest at high school he took up the study of brass instruments and later vibes, and alto, tenor and baritone saxophones.

Already his piano playing has elicited the enthusiasm of such jazz authorities as Count Basie, John Hammond, George Wein and Willis Conover. His style is modern, but his harmonic approach is far from startling and I think, for this reason, his music will have greater universal appeal than that of many of the other moderns. He swings confidently, playing with a lovely clear touch and displaying a fantastic command of the piano keyboard.

Although Phineas has concentrated on this instrument, he does not attempt to impress us with his versatility despite the fact that he has the fastest right hand of anyone since Tatum (he may even exceed Tatum for sheer speed).

Through all his technical intricacies there is an outstanding musical mind, one that has absorbed the music of the jazz masters. You listen to his ideas, influenced by Charlie Parker, and then you get the feeling that he may at any moment swing into the stride piano of Fats Waller.

His first jazz idols were Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Bud Powell; but later on, after he had begun to develop his own style, he heard Art Tatum and Errol Garner. The influence of these men is evident on this L.P. which is beautifully recorded and gives us the following tracks: "Barbados," "All the Things You Are," "The More I See You," "Celia," "Dahoud," "Newport Blues," "I'm Beginning to See the Light," "Afternoon in Paris."

Phineas Newborn's adroit technique and variations qualify him as one of the most promising and interesting new pianists of the current jazz scene.

—Ray Harris



DUKE ELLINGTON
"A black-dressed platinum blonde began to jitterbug"