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Ramsey Lewis and Billy Taylor

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Presents

RAMSEY LEWIS
& BILLY TAYLOR

OPENING NIGHT
JAZZ GALA

A TRIBUTE TO
DUKE ELLINGTON & GEORGE GERSHWIN

SEPTEMBER 12, 1998

GOVERNORS STATE UNIVERSITY
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present
A Tribute to
Duke Ellington and George Gershwin

Ramsey Lewis and Billy Taylor
Pianists

MOTEN SWING
QUIET NOW
DJANGO
NIGERIAN MARKET PLACE
COOKIN’ AT THE CONTINENTAL
BODY AND SOUL
SOUL SISTER

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By George
'S Wonderful
Embraceable You
But Not for Me
How Long Has This Been Going On
The Man I Love
I've Got a Crush on You
O Lady Be Good
Summertime
I Got Rhythm

Echoes of Ellington
I'm Beginning To See The Light
In My Solitude
Take The A Train
Mood Indigo
It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing
Just Squeeze Me
Caravan

Management: Herbert Barrett Management, Inc.
1776 Broadway Suite 1610
New York, NY 10019

Recordings: Arkadia

Piano: Ramsey Lewis & Dr. Taylor are Steinway Artists
"One’s style is one’s style. Once your style materializes it’s there in every song you do, as are your fingerprints,” says legendary jazz pianist Ramsey Lewis, who has recorded over 60 albums in his four decades in the music business. “You allow yourself to become a sponge influenced by friends, places, good books, the sunset...being open to changes as creativity flows through you.”

Chiefly responsible for establishing Chicago jazz in the 1960’s, Ramsey Lewis was born in the Windy City, May 27, 1935 and was seduced by the piano by age nine. By 13 he decided he would become a concert pianist based on his love for classical music. However, as he began playing for his church choir, gospel crept into Ramsey’s early life. And when in high school another church musician, Wallace Burton, invited Ramsey to join his seven piece jazz band, The Cleffs, the die was cast.

While attending Chicago Musical College, he formed Gentlemen of Swing (later called The Ramsey Lewis Trio) with the Cleffs’ old rhythm section, Eldee Young (bass) and Redd Holt (drums). Their weekend gig caught the attention of an influential deejay, who convinced blues record company owner Phil Chess to expand into jazz and sign the trio. Their first Chess album was released in 1956. Ramsey’s love for music was now spread between playing European classical music, America’s classical music, jazz and Gospel music.

As their reputation spread, the trio was offered booking at New York’s Birdland, The Village Vanguard and the Randall’s Island Jazz Festival. After three months in New York, Ramsey came home to numerous sold out shows all over the Chicago area, and the trio’s booking agent was getting offers from around the country as a top attraction, often playing four sets a night, six nights a week in nearly every state.

In between the travels across America, the trio was asked in 1960 to be the house band at Chicago’s London House, “the top-cream job in Chicago, playing opposite George Shearing, Oscar Peterson and The Modern Jazz Quartet.”

By the mid’60’s, Ramsey was one of the most successful popular jazz pianists in the country, hitting the pop singles charts four times since 1965 with “The In Crowd” (which reached #5), and covers of rock classics “Hang on Sloopy,” “A Hard Day’s Night,” and “Wade in the Water.” Three of these singles, as well as the albums Sounds of Christmas (1961) and later Sun Goddess (1975), went gold and Ramsey won performance Grammy’s for “The In Crowd,”

In the 70’s, Ramsey abandoned his synthesizers to spend full time with his first love, the Steinway grand piano, and led a septet of “smart young musicians whose independent imaginations bound them together by the shared pleasure of transmutation.” The septet achieved great popularity (helped by doing two tours with Earth, Wind and Fire as a result of the hit album Sun Goddess). Ramsey started feeling more like a bandleader than a pianist, so in the early 80’s, he went back to the trio format, reuniting for a time with Young and Holt. He now changes his formats regularly, from trio, quartet, and quintet, to duets with Billy Taylor, to solo recitals.

Currently, in addition to recording and playing live dates, Ramsey spends his time as host for his syndicated weekly radio program (“The Ramsey Lewis Show”) at WNUA Chicago; hosting a Black Entertainment Television weekly jazz program on “Jazz Central” (for which he was twice nominated for a ACE award); and performing the duties of artistic director for the Jazz at Ravinia Festival at Ravinia Park. He is the recipient of many honors, among them honorary doctorate degrees from DePaul University (June 1993) and from The University of Illinois at Chicago (May 1995).

Being sensitive to the community at large and wanting to give back to others some of what he has achieved, has led to Ramsey’s profound involvement in civic affairs. He has given of himself and his talent in many ways over the years in that regard, and young people ask for and get a lot of his attention.

Despite the numerous phases and accomplishments in a career now spanning four decades, Ramsey’s basic approach to this piano is still as simple as it was in the beginning: “Experience has taught me that music is built on transitory things, and this knowledge is reflected in my playing. Over the years, it has taken on more depth and I express emotion more directly. I don’t think when I play...I feel. A beautiful melodic line will come...as if I am a conduit. I play a mood and it is yours. I want to bring that secret to an audience who will recognize in it the deeper secrets of their own hearts.”
DR. BILLY TAYLOR

Distinguished ambassador from the world of jazz to the world at large, Billy Taylor was born in Greenville, North Carolina in 1921. His musical education began seven years later in Washington, D.C. At 15, he enrolled as a sociology major at Virginia State University. Not long after graduating, Taylor moved to New York City, where his first important engagement as a jazz professional was with Ben Webster. Throughout the 1940’s, Billy played with several legendary musicians, including Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Machito, Coleman Hawkins, Eddie South, Stuff Smith, and Slam Stewart. As the house pianist at Birdland (1949-51), he supported many of that era’s standouts in jazz, including Dizzy Gillespie. Since then, Taylor has performed predominately as the leader of his own trios, which have, over the years, featured such great supporting players as Ed Thigpen, Earl May, Oscar Pettiford, Art Blakley, Charles Mingus, Jo Jones, Victor Gaskin, Freddie Waits, and currently Chip Jackson and Steve Johns.

An astute observer and contributor to jazz, Taylor is a prolific writer on and about jazz. In the later 1940’s, he published the first book ever written on bebop piano, and since then, has written more than a dozen others, as well as numerous articles and feature stories. His most recent publication is entitled, “Jazz Piano A Jazz History.” (Wm. C. Brown Publishers). He has some 300 songs to his credit as well. “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free” was recently featured as the theme over the opening and closing credits for the film “Ghosts of Mississippi.” He has successfully wed jazz with European classical music in a number of works commissioned by such prestigious organizations as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (“Theme and Variations”); the Krannert Center for Performing Arts at the University of Illinois for the Parsons Dance Company (“Step Into My Dream”); as well as “Peaceful Warrior,” a composition commissioned by Robert Shaw for the Atlanta Symphony.

Immensely energetic and passionately devoted to jazz, Billy vigorously campaigns on behalf of the idiom. During the 1950’s he was the Musical Director for the first educational jazz series for television, “The Subject is Jazz,” which traced the history of the music. His long and accomplished career as a broadcaster began in radio at New York’s WLIR, segueing into a stint as Musical Director for the Emmy Award winning, “David Frost Show.” Well known for his work as on-air arts correspondent for the popular CBS program “Sunday Morning,” Taylor continues to shine a light on well known and less known jazz talent, winning awards for excellence along the way.

Dr. Billy Taylor continued

Indeed, he is the recipient of two Peabody’s, an Emmy, a Grammy nomination and a host of prestigious and highly coveted prizes including the National Medal of Arts, Tiffany Award, the NEA’s Jazz Masters Fellowship Award, being named to Hall of Fame for the International Association of Jazz Educations, as well as an appointment by the President to the National Council for the Arts.

Dr. Taylor’s efforts on behalf of jazz have taken him to the podium as well as the stage. Recognizing the need for arts education early on, Taylor is considered the foremost jazz educator of our time. From community grass roots efforts such as Jazzmobile (which he co-founded) to programs focusing on young people and adults, to master classes and seminars for professionals, Dr. Taylor has achieved remarkable success in providing insight, information and deep appreciation for America’s classical music: jazz. He earned his doctorate from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, prior to joining the faculty for that school, where he holds the Wilber D. Barrett Chair of Music. He has also been appointed a Duke Ellington Fellow at Yale and holds an additional sixteen honorary degrees.

Since 1994, Dr. Taylor has served as Artistic Advisor for Jazz to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. In that capacity, he has developed a number of different concert series which are presented throughout the year, such as the Art Tatum Panorama, the Louis Armstrong Legacy series, the Mary Lou Williams “Women in Jazz” Festival, and, of course, “Billy Taylor’s Jazz At the Kennedy Center,” a series of concerts with Billy’s trio and various guest artists who perform and engage in musical discussion with audience members. Taylor began to play a little, talk a little with jazz artists, within the context of his New York City based series, “Jazz Models and Mentors,” now in its eleventh year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is this format on which his concert series, “Jazz at the Kennedy Center” and his NPR radio series are based.

Despite hitting the three quarters of a century mark, Taylor remains as vigorous and dedicated to his music as ever. In fact, the 1990’s have seen a veritable renaissance of his recordings. Having signed an exclusive recording contract with New York’s Arkadia Jazz, for whom he has completed a solo album and a CD with his Trio, Taylor is ready to bring his stylish and masterful playing into the 21st century and beyond.
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