

Tuesday, October 16, 2012, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Delfeayo Marsalis Octet



Sweet Thunder

Delfeayo Marsalis	<i>trombone</i>
Mark "Preacherman" Gross	<i>tenor & soprano saxophones</i>
Jeff Clayton	<i>alto saxophone</i>
Jamelle Williams	<i>trumpet</i>
Oliver Bonie	<i>baritone saxophone</i>
Glen Pearson	<i>piano</i>
David Pulphus	<i>bass</i>
Winard Harper	<i>drums</i>

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Sweet Thunder

PROGRAM

All compositions by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, unless otherwise noted.

New Orleans Welcome (D. Marsalis)
Such Sweet Thunder
The Telecasters
Sonnet to Hank Cinq
Half the Fun
Sonnet in Search of a Moor
Up and Down, Up and Down (I Will Lead Them)
The Star-Crossed Lovers
Madness in Great Ones
Lady Mac
Sonnet to Cæsar
Circle of Fourths
Going Home New Orleans Style (D. Marsalis)

Tonight's concert will be performed without intermission.

DUKE ELLINGTON's *Such Sweet Thunder* is a classic musical tribute to the most consistent and poetic writer of the English language, William Shakespeare. In 1956, the Ellington Orchestra, along with long-time musical associate and literary scholar Billy Strayhorn, presented a concert of its then-current repertoire at the Shakespeare Festival in Ontario, Canada. Witnessing the seriousness and dedication each of the various artists showed toward performing Shakespeare's works, coupled with the brilliance of the material itself, inspired both Ellington and Strayhorn. The two composers "saw in performing there an opportunity to reach audiences not normally drawn to jazz." According to Ellington, "[I]t was the performances [we] witnessed that really inspired *Such Sweet Thunder*."

By 1956, many European composers had used a single Shakespearean play or personality as inspiration for a symphonic poem, opera, or incidental music, but none had tried to encapsulate the flavor of various characters and works in one composition. Ellington sought to pay homage to the author in a uniquely comprehensive fashion. The resultant suite is a twelve-movement masterpiece that Ellington himself described as an "attempt to parallel the vignettes of some of the Shakespearean characters in miniature—sometimes to the point of caricature." Though Strayhorn composed three movements, the suite's overall concept and structural design is clearly Ellingtonian. As a composer, he was an undeniable master of popular song form, having created a library of perfectly balanced orchestrations before teaming up with Strayhorn in 1939. Opposites in compositional approach, lifestyle, and temperament, the pair found success in a common love for and intellectual pursuit of musical excellence. Strayhorn's introverted personality perfectly matched the extraverted maestro's charisma, charm, and suave manner.

When asked about Shakespeare's reputation for highbrow literature, Ellington responded: Many people fear that as members of an audience, their reaction will reveal them as insufficiently informed or possibly unaware of the sensitivities one might acquire to savor completely the subtleties of a performance. Anybody who listens to a beautifully performed

symphony for the first time gains something from it. The next time he hears it, he gains more; when he hears the symphony for the hundredth time, he is benefited to the hundredth power. So it is with Shakespeare...repeated viewings multiply the satisfaction. ... I suspect that if Shakespeare were alive today, he might be a jazz fan himself—he'd appreciate the combination of team spirit and informality, of academic knowledge and humor, of all elements that go into a great jazz performance.



I have been privy to Delfeayo Marsalis's keen insights and musical translation of Duke Ellington's tone parallel to William Shakespeare since his research began. I would direct the reader to the glories of his outstanding efforts. Delfeayo has simultaneously added to the limited canon of written jazz, programmatic music; successfully adapted and expanded Duke Ellington's music; and taken a bold step in cross-pollination in the arts. The vast potential of Mr. Marsalis's efforts include: the narrative history of the work from Duke's inspiration to present performances; the recorded heritage of the music from the early 1950s—before Duke was commissioned to compose it—through Delfeayo's live and studio triumphs; and the creation of a traveling version of it all.

Delfeayo's *Sweet Thunder* maps out for jazz musicians, scholars, and students a way to create something of substance rooted in a pre-existing work. Indeed, his translation of Duke's full band arrangements to one for a midsize ensemble is such a display. Too often, jazz composition and orchestral heritage is performed by small combos and in jam sessions. Delfeayo has carved out a marvelous alternative.

That Duke Ellington put his stamp on William Shakespeare was impressive and even shocking. That a contemporary jazz musician, Delfeayo Marsalis, has put his stamp and identity on Duke's bold and unique music is a significant event in the arts for this new century. It is one to be nurtured.

Phil Schaap, curator of Jazz at Lincoln Center

KNOWN FOR HIS technical excellence, inventive mind, and frequent touches of humor, Delfeayo Marsalis is praised by critics as one of the top trombonists, composers, and producers in jazz today. Born into a musical family in the birthplace of jazz, Mr. Marsalis was destined to a life in music. "I remember lying under the grand piano as a child, while my dad [Ellis] practiced. His sound is so warm and comforting that I realized I wanted to play with as much love and passion when I was older." Mr. Marsalis attended the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts high school, was classically trained at the Eastern Music Festival and the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and majored in both performance and audio production at the Berklee College of Music. He earned a master's degree in jazz performance at the University of Louisville and was conferred a doctorate by New England College.

Mr. Marsalis has toured internationally with his own groups, as well as those led by five renowned bandleaders. "Art Blakey taught me patience and purpose in soloing; Abdullah Ibrahim's sense of harmony is prevalent in much of my music; Slide Hampton inspired me with his extraordinary command of the trombone and the language of jazz; and Max Roach played with conviction and dexterity all the time. Elvin Jones [who is featured on Mr. Marsalis's album *Minions Dominion*] taught me about humanity, expressing myself through music, and, most importantly, how to keep time." The lessons of these legendary artists can be heard throughout Delfeayo's compositions and improvisations still today.

Mr. Marsalis has dedicated much of his adult life to working with elementary and high school students. To further inspire New Orleans youth through arts education, Mr. Marsalis founded the Uptown Music Theatre in 2000 and has implemented its Kidstown After School in three New Orleans grammar schools. He has composed more than 80 songs that help introduce kids to jazz through musical theater and has reached over 5,000 students nationally with his Swinging with the Cool School soft introduction to jazz workshops.

In January 2011, Delfeayo and the Marsalis family (father Ellis and brothers Branford, Wynton and Jason) earned the nation's highest jazz honor: a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Award. He has also received Big Easy and Best of the Beat Awards for outstanding trombonist in his hometown of New Orleans.