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## David Baker and the Smithsonian: A Personal Perspective

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I FIRST MET DAVID BAKER in fall 1973, when I arrived at Indiana University to pursue a doctorate in ethnomusicology.<sup>1</sup> Even though I would earn my degree in the Graduate School rather than in the Music School, where he taught, David was a huge factor in my decision to attend IU. Unknown to me at that time was how significant he would turn out to be in my life and career, and how important he would become to the Smithsonian Institution.

Over the course of my studies leading to MA and PHD degrees, I took just about all the courses I could from David, including F321: Jazz Improvisation; M393: History of Jazz; M395: Contemporary Jazz and Soul Music; M593: Advanced History of Jazz; M582: The Bebop Era; M584: Research in the History and Analysis of Jazz: Miles Davis and John Coltrane. Although I had taken a course or two in jazz at my

undergraduate alma mater, Carleton College, studying with David was eye-, ear-, and mind-opening. He was highly organized and systematic in his approach: a thorough syllabus announced the week-by-week progression and he adhered to it religiously. His exams combined drop-the-needle identification of recordings with traditional true/false and multiple-choice questions, and were themselves models of organization. (I still have my copious handwritten notes on his lectures, all his syllabi, and all the tests I took from him.)

David galvanized my interest in jazz. He was such a passionate, articulate, and effective educator—the phrase “master teacher” doesn’t even do him justice—that I soon began to see him as a role model: an academic who performed, wrote, published, lectured, advocated, and inspired. Who could do all that better than David Baker?

In fact, some years later, when Bernice Johnson Reagan, as Director of the Program in African American Culture of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, brought David to do a lecture on improvisation, she remarked that he was “the best teacher of *anything*” she had ever encountered.<sup>2</sup> Coming from someone who maintained very high standards and was known as candid and tough minded, this was praise of the highest order.

A few years earlier, in New York, I had had the good fortune to take private lessons in jazz piano with two great practitioners—Jaki Byard and Roland Hanna (who later became Sir Roland Hanna, when the government of Liberia knighted him). From each I learned a lot. But when I enrolled in David Baker’s jazz improvisation course, I was thunderstruck; on the very first day, he explained the relationships of scales to chords. I confess that during that initial class, I learned more from David than I had in months of lessons with Byard and Hanna. That’s how organized and incisive David Baker is.

In 1984, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History created a new curatorship to specialize in twentieth-century American vernacular and popular music, and I was hired to fill that position.<sup>3</sup> Immediately I sought to put to work the learning, perspective, and judgment that David had taught me. One of my very first acquisitions was the custom-built, angled-bell trumpet of Dizzy Gillespie. When I spoke at the packed press conference at which Gillespie formally presented

TABLE 1. DAVID BAKER AND THE SMITHSONIAN: A CHRONOLOGY

1984	David Baker's ex-student/mentee John Hasse arrives at the Smithsonian to assume the new position of curator of American Music, and begins to apply knowledge gained from studying with David.
1985	The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History acquires the trumpet of David Baker's mentor, Dizzy Gillespie.
1986	A national conference on jazz is held at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, under the leadership of David Baker; among the speakers are Baker and the Smithsonian's Martin Williams.
1987	The National Museum of American History receives its first federal appropriation for jazz, to acquire and catalog the massive Duke Ellington Collection.
April 1988	The Duke Ellington Collection is moved from a warehouse in New York to the Smithsonian.
1990	Smithsonian Institution Press publishes <i>New Perspectives on Jazz</i> , edited by David Baker, comprising papers from the 1986 Wingspread Conference.
October 1990	Congress authorizes the establishment of the SJMO—the Smithsonian's second federal appropriation for jazz.
October 1990	Baker takes the Indiana University Jazz Ensemble to the Smithsonian to perform an Ellington concert for the annual conference of the College Music Society (CMS).
January 1991	The IAJE conference in Washington, D.C., features a mini-conference on Ellington, and Baker speaks on a panel discussing jazz repertory.
May 19, 1991	SJMO debuts at the NMAH, begins a summer season of seven free weekend concerts.
August 1991	Nationally syndicated newspaper columnist David Broder urges Congress to provide more funding for the SJMO so it can perform in other cities.
1991	SJMO plays "Concert for Congress" on Capitol Hill.
1992	The Smithsonian secures a \$7 million grant from Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Fund, and establishes ten-year partnership called America's Jazz Heritage.
May 22–23, 1992	David Baker conducts the SJMO in "Stompin' at the Smithsonian," two nights with the sixteen-member Big Apple Lindy Hoppers and veteran swing dancers Norma Miller and Frankie Manning, master classes, dance demonstrations, and a dance floor for the audience.

- June 19, 1993 SJMO performs at the White House Jazz Festival.
- July 26, 1993 Writing about the White House Jazz Festival in *The New Yorker*, Whitney Balliett calls the SJMO “the best jazz repertory band in the country.”
- 1993 First Jazz Masterworks Editions are published: Ellington’s *Daybreak Express* and *Sepia Panorama*.
- October 15, 1993 Under David Baker, the SJMO performs at Harlem’s Apollo Theater, in conjunction with the Smithsonian’s *Beyond Category* traveling exhibition.
- 1993 Ken Kimery joins staff, works on the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program and the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra.
- February 1994 David and Lida Baker interview J. J. Johnson for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program.
- 1994–95 SJMO tours the United States, under John Gingrich Management.
- 1994 *Jazz Smithsonian* radio series begins, hosted by Lena Horne.
- 1995 Third JME is published: *Take the “A” Train*.
- 1995 SJMO *Demo Disc* issued, with ten tracks from the radio series *Jazz Smithsonian*.
- Spring 1996 Gunther Schuller resigns as musical co-director of the SJMO; David Baker takes sole reins as musical and artistic director.
- August 2, 1996 SJMO performs for the Cultural Olympiad at the Olympic Games in Atlanta.
- September 1996 *Smithsonian* magazine publishes a lengthy article about the SJMO.
- 1996 NMAH issues the SJMO’s first CD, *Big Band Treasures, Live*, with support from AJH and Nissan: its twenty tracks were conducted by David Baker and Gunther Schuller and taped in concert from 1993 to 1996.
- 1999 SJMO begins touring under the management of SRO Artists.
- April 29, 1999 SJMO performs Duke Ellington’s Sacred Concerts at the Washington National Cathedral on the night of Ellington’s hundredth birthday.
- July 1999 SJMO does “world tour” of Canada, Europe, and Turkey, performing a show called the “Cotton Club Revue.”
- September 1999 SJMO performs a tribute to Ellington, including *Suite Thursday*, at the Monterey Jazz Festival.
- November 1999 James Zimmerman becomes executive producer of the SJMO; Ken Kimery becomes producer.

TABLE 1. *continued*

2000	David Baker becomes music co-editor for the series Essential Jazz Editions, a collaboration among Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and Warner Brothers Publications. Five editions of Louis Armstrong's music are issued.
June 2000	David Baker sits for full interview by Lida Baker for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program.
July 2001	The NMAH announces a new initiative—an annual, national jazz month called Jazz Appreciation Month, to be observed each April.
2001	With David Baker as music co-editor, Essential Jazz Editions issues its set of five scores and parts titled <i>Music of the 1930s, Part 1</i> .
January 2002	David Baker, then president-elect of IAJE, participates in a panel discussion on Jazz Appreciation Month at the IAJE conference in Long Beach—along with Willie Hill, President-Elect of MENC; Tim Owens, executive producer, NPR Jazz; and JAM founder John Edward Hasse.
2002	Under music co-editor David Baker, Essential Jazz Editions issues its set of five scores and parts titled <i>Music of the 1930s, Part 2</i> .
2003	Smithsonian Folkways Recordings begins planning a book and CD set, <i>Jazz: The Smithsonian Anthology</i> ; David Baker becomes part of the executive committee.
2003	Essential Jazz Editions issues five scores and parts, <i>Music of the 1940s, Part 1</i> , with David Baker as music co-editor.
2003	Ken Kimery takes over as head of the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program.
2004	Smithsonian Folkways Recordings issues <i>Tribute to a Generation: Salute to the Big Bands</i> , its seventeen tracks were recorded live by the SJMO from 1992–98 (Smithsonian Folkways SFW40817).
2005	Ken Kimery takes over as SJMO Executive Producer.
2005	<i>Louis Armstrong Education Kit</i> , co-authored by David Baker and Luvenia George, is issued by the Museum.
2005	<i>Music of the 1940s, Part 2</i> , a set of scores and parts for five classic works, is issued by Essential Jazz Editions; David Baker is music editor.
February 2008	Under the sponsorship of the US State Department, the SJMO tours Egypt; the theme is “Jazz on the Nile.”
July 2008	MCG Jazz issues <i>Live at MCG</i> , a CD/DVD recorded live at Manchester Craftmen's Guild in Pittsburgh, in April 2005, under the baton of David Baker.

- September 2008 David Baker interviews Quincy Jones for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program.
- September 2008 The *SJMO* tour of Egypt is discussed in “Jazz on the Nile: The Smithsonian Takes the Nation’s Jazz Band to Egypt,” a *DownBeat* article by Hasse.
- June 2010 David Baker does research at NMAH for Quincy Jones’s American Music Curriculum.
- September 2010 David Baker conducts the *SJMO* in a twentieth anniversary performance for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation’s annual Jazz Forum and Concert, organized by Rep. John Conyers and Cedric Hendricks.
- March 2011 Smithsonian Folkways issues *Jazz: The Smithsonian Anthology*, a 6-CD, 111-track set packaged with a two-hundred-page book. David is the author of four track essays and a member of the five-person executive committee that chose the selections.

his instrument to the nation, it was David’s judgments on Gillespie that informed my remarks. When, beginning in 1985, I had the opportunity to lead the Smithsonian’s efforts to acquire Duke Ellington’s archives, again, it was what I had learned from David that provided a framework for my further learning about Ellington.<sup>4</sup> David’s influence would inspire one aspect of my Smithsonian work after another.

## JAZZ MASTERWORKS EDITIONS AND ESSENTIAL JAZZ EDITIONS

Jazz Masterworks Editions was a pioneering series of authoritative printed versions of jazz classics. The initiative came out of Oberlin College and the National Museum of American History. David recalls,

That had its genesis with Fred Starr, President of Oberlin. . . . I went out to do an evaluation of their school. Gunther [Schuller] had already been there. Fred started talking then about, why not publish some—what he was calling “urtext” editions of works by Ellington, works by Fletcher Henderson, and that kind of thing. It seemed like a pipe dream to me at the time, but he pursued it with Roger Kennedy, who at the time was head of the [Smithsonian Institution’s National] Museum of American History. . . . Of course it was logical to call in Gunther Schuller, who had done a lot of work along these lines, because he had had repertoire orchestras—ragtime orchestras and [jazz] repertory orchestras. And the