

The

PIANO

of

DONALD LAMBERT
“THE LAMB?”

Born: Princeton, New Jersey, 1904
Died: Newark, New Jersey, May 8, 1962

Introduction:

I don't think any of us in the Oslo Jazz Circle had no idea of the genius and artistry of Donald Lambert, back then in the late fifties and sixties. How could we? The only recorded evidence at that time was two Bluebird 78s. Only later has material turned up on LP and CD. So we should be excused. "The Lamb" definitely deserves to be remembered as long as jazz exists!

History:

His mother, who led a band, gave him first piano tuition. Worked for most of his life as a solo pianist; in New York during the late 1920s and early 1930s, then played for many years at the 'Town House', Montclair, before long residency at Wallace's Bar in East Orange, New Jersey. Recorded for Bluebird in 1941 and for 'Solo Art' in 1961. Featured at Newport Jazz Festival (July 1961) (ref. John Chilton).

Message:

Information on various LPs indicates that what have been issued is only a small selection of what was recorded and probably exists. We can only hope for future CD issues, and in the meantime I would be very happy to have more information. Could we make a complete survey of Donald Lambert's treasures? Postscript of April 2021: Surveys have been done, and it seems that there exist more than a hundred items from Frank Wallace's High Tavern. Hopefully these will be catalogized and made available in the not too distant future.

DONALD LAMBERT SOLOGRAPHY

MABEL GARRETT**1932**

Probably Donald Lambert (p) accompanying Mabel Garrett (vo, dance).
 Movie "Veiled Aristocrats" by Oscar Micheaux (YouTube):

Draggin' My Heart Around 2:38. (FM)

The movie has a sequence of approximately 6 ½ minutes, starting with piano backing female vocal and male step dancing before a real jazz number is introduced, with Ms Garrett first singing, then dancing. Particularly the 32 bars of piano behind the latter is very exciting. As Mark Cantor tells me: "It is the piano accompanying Garrett, and especially the solo behind the dance, that catches our attention: melodic, driving and featuring Lambert's incredibly strong left hand (we are not 100% positive it is Lambert, but pretty close). Also, it is in the somewhat unusual keys of D flat and G flat, which is important to know since both Mezetier and Lipskins point out that Lambert was a "black keys" player".

DONALD LAMBERT**NYC. Jan. 30, 1941**

Donald Lambert (solo-p).

Four titles were recorded for Bluebird:

60603-1	Pilgrim's Chorus ("Tannhäuser" - Wagner)	2:40. (S/F)
60604-1	Anitra's Dance "Peer Gynt" - Grieg)	2:40. (S/F)
60605-1	Elegie (Massenet)	2:45. (S/F)
60606-1	Sextette ("Lucia di Lammermoor" - Donizetti)	2:56. (S/F)

Donald Lambert was once forgotten, "having deliberately been shying away from the limelight all his life, preferring to "play the way I feel" in Harlem clubs and, from 1936 on, in bars in New Jersey", quoting Johnny Simmen's liner notes. How he played then can only be guessed at, but this solitary session with four sides of blending jazz and classics show that he was a hell of a piano player and deserving not only jazz archeology but Hall of Fame!

JAM SESSION**NYC. 1940/1941**

Hot Lips Page (tp), Herbie Fields (ts), Donald Lambert (p).

Four titles recorded in Jerry Newman's flat, issued on Onyx LP 207:

4:54	I Got Rhythm	Solo 64 bars. (F)
3:22	I'm In The Mood For Love	Acc. (tp). Solo 16 bars. (S)
7:58	Dinah	Intro 8 bars. Acc. (ts/tp). Solo 64 bars. (M)
6:59	Tea For Two	Intro 8 bars to solo 32 bars. Acc. (tp). (M). Solo 64 bars (F) to 4 bars and acc. (M)

The date is given as 1940 on the LP, but as the real date is unknown, I prefer to put it after the legendary Bluebird session. Dan Morgenstern in his liner notes calls DL "unsung hero of the Harlem stride school", and is in general very positive to the event. However, the quality of the piano is so terrible, and the lack of structure totally lacking, so I will warn listeners; you will have some ideas of what this great pianist could do, but otherwise you have to be very dedicated to enjoy yourself. As a highlight, try "... Two".

DONALD LAMBERT**NYC. ca. 1949**

Donald Lambert (solo-p).

Eight titles were recorded for Circle, unissued, but now available on Sound Cloud:

NY233	Golden Earrings	3:12. (S/F)
NY234	Overnight	3:06. (S/F)
NY235	Blue Waltz	3:06. (SM/F)
NY236	Harlem Strut	2:46. (F)
NY237	Tea For Two	3:06. (SM)

NY238	Russian Lullaby	3:13. (S/F)
NY239	Lullaby In Rhythm	3:00. (M)
NY240	Liza	2:56. (S/F)

Postscript of April 2021: This is DL's first appearance in a studio since the Bluebird recordings eight years earlier, the beautiful music finally making its appearance for the public in general ("Blue ..." has been available on YouTube). To have DL recorded with professional sound is a great pleasure, since so much of his production belongs to the noisy night life. These eight items contain the most beautiful of stride piano, usually starting in slow tempi and then changed to fast. Each and everyone of them is a gem, but for highlights, try his fancy "Tea ...", his fast "Harlem ...", the nice blue "... Waltz", and foremost "Overnight", what a magnificent pianist!

Note: The LP/CD productions from the period 1959-62 below are selected from numerous dates, some known, but also many unknown, and I find it obviously convenient to list and comment by production rather than dates.

DONALD LAMBERT

Warren, NJ. 1959-1961

Donald Lambert (solo-p).

Twentyfour titles were recorded at Frank Wallace's High Tavern, issued on Storyville(Dan)1018376 (CD) as "Harlem Stride Classics" (fourteen of these titles also issued on Pumpkin LP 110 as "Classics In Stride", the remaining ten also on Pumpkin LP 104 as "Harlem Stride Classics"):

-59	People Will Say We're In Love	2:53. (F)
"	Hold Your Temper	2:23. (S/F)
12/3-60	Daintiness Rag	2:16. (F)
"	When Your Lover Has Gone	2:43. (S/M)
7/7-60	Anitra's Dance	2:34. (S/F)
"	Tea For Two	3:48. (SM)
"	Liza	2:30. (F)
"	I've Got A Feeling / Don't Let It Bother You	2:33. (M/F)
21/8-60	Moonlight Sonata	4:05. (S/F)
13/9-60	The Trolley Song	2:05. (S/F)
4/3-61	Sextet From Lucia Di Lammermoor	2:25. (S/F)
"	Hallelujah	5:28. (S/SM/F)
"	Keep Of The Grass	3:14. (FM)
"	If Dreams Come True	3:15. (S/F)
"	How Can You Face Me	2:47. (SM)
2/9-61	Save Your Sorrow	1:15. (F)
unknown	Harlem Strut	2:26. (S/F)
"	Beautiful Love / Sweet Lorraine	3:02. (S/SM)
"	I Know That You Know	3:07. (S/F)
"	As Time Goes By	2:49. (S/SM)
"	Carolina Shout	2:34. (M)
"	I'm Just Wild About Harry	2:37. (S/F)
"	You Can't Do What My Last Man Did	2:46. (SM)
"	Russian Lullaby	3:18. (F)

The Storyville CD is one of those you simply have to possess, if you are the least interested in the history of jazz piano and its major performers. For once I think I will abstain from making any comments to this brilliant music, because Dick Wellstood has already done it in a way I never can. Each item is described in minute detail, an amateur critic can learn a lot, and some of those who think jazz piano started with McCoy Tyner should give it a second thought. Quoting what is written to sum up the liner notes to "Hallelujah", a special item since it lasts much longer than anyone else (verse and nine choruses): "This is Lambert's major effort on this

record. ... What a lovely rich way to play the piano. It has been lost to us, probably in accordance with the operation of Wellstood's law, which is that we get what we deserve". Another interesting note before I quit, this to "Moonlight ...": "One should not fail to remark the amount of effort required of Lambert to learn all or part of one of the "classical" warhorses he used to like to mount, especially since he could not read music".

DONALD LAMBERT

Warren, NJ. 1960-1961

Donald Lambert (solo-p).

Twelve titles recorded at Frank Wallace's High Tavern, issued as "Meet The Lamb" on IAJRC LP 23:

28/1-60	Hold Your Temper	2:40. (S/F)
21/8-60	Chloe	3:35. (S/SM)
"	The Bells Of St. Mary's	2:24. (S/F)
ca. 9/60	Tea For Two	3:10. (SM)
"	If I Had You/Pennies From Heaven	2:32. (SM)
"	Hallelujah	4:47. (S/SM/F)
2/3-61	All The Things You Are	2:46. (S/M)
"	Don's Mother's Song	4:17. (S)
"	Russian Rag	2:23. (SM/M)
20/8-61	Pork And Beans	2:41. (F)
"	The Lady's In Love With You	2:11. (S/F)
"	Let's Get Lost	1:55. (S/F)

Since the contents of this LP supplements the Storyville CD and is from the same time and place, it is not much more to say that the selection of items is superb, and that the record is a true must!! Note an alternate version of "Hallelujah", slightly briefer, and quite different!

DONALD LAMBERT

1960

Donald Lambert (solo-p).

Six titles were probably recorded at Frank Wallace's High Tavern, issued on Euphonic LP 1226 as "Kings Of Harlem Stride":

Got A Date With An Angel	2:25. (SM)
Cherokee	1:25. (S/F)
My Heart Stood Still	2:12. (M)
If Dreams Come True	2:34. (SM)
Golden Wedding	2:54. (S/FM)
Caravan	1:51. (F)

Nothing much to add here, several nice items, particularly the fast "Cherokee" and "Caravan" make your hair raise.

RUDI BLESH & STRIDE PIANO STARS **Newport, Rh. I., July 1, 1960**

Collective personnel: Eubie Blake, Donald Lambert, Willie "The Lion" Smith (p) + Danny Barker String Trio (Danny Barker (bjo, vo), Bernard Addison (g), Al Hall (b)), Rudi Blesh (mc).

Program of 1 ½ hours at Newport Jazz Festival (date erroneously given by me earlier as 1961). Dave Lambert appears on eight items, all as solo pianist, except the final "Stars And Stripes" which have all three pianists. Note that "Anitra's Dance" and "Liza" are available on YouTube:

Stride Piano Demonstration /Sweet Lorraine	2:55. (M)
Anitra's Dance	2:49. (S/F)
Tea For Two	4:05. (SM)
Liza	2:31. (S/F)
Fats Waller Medley: 2:42	I Got A Feelin' I'm Fallin'. (M) Don't Let It Bother You. (F)

James P. Johnson Medley: 2:49	You Can't Do What MLMD. (SM)
	Harlem Fuss. (SM)
I Know That You Know	2:38. (M/F)
Stars And Stripes Forever	3:59. (FM)

Great pleasure to see and hear DL at Newport! Both titles have been available before in various settings, and there are not really any surprises here, but the visual aspect is highly important! Postscript of April 2021: The whole program has now become available in excellent sound. Get it and play it all, not only DL, and you will be highly rewarded, great piano music!

DONALD LAMBERT

NYC. March 1, 1961

Donald Lambert (p), Howard Kadison (dm).

Large number of titles were recorded for Circle, the following thirteen issued on Solo Art BJ18001 and Solo Art SACD-44 (CD), as "Giant Stride":

208	Liza	3:23. (M/F)
212	When Your Lover Has Gone	4:27. (S/SM)
215	Swingin' Down The Lane / My Sweetie Went Away	4:09. (SM)
216	People Will Say We're In Love	2:40. (S/M)
218	If I Could Be With You	2:56. (SM)
221	I'm Putting All My Eggs In One Basket	2:55. (SM)
222	Trolley Song	2:15. (F)
223	Misty	3:17. (S)
224	Rose Of The Rio Grande	2:24. (F)
225	Sophisticated Lady	3:20. (S)
227	There Will Never Be Another You	3:24. (M)
229	Spain	2:08. (M)
230	Linger Awhile	2:46. (S/F)

There is much good piano playing on this session, but DL seems to be somewhat constrained here, and it is held that he was not in favour of having a drummer. Possibly he also was frightened of being in a recording studio. His music is best enjoyed in Frank Wallace's tavern. Nevertheless, this CD should also be in your collection. Postscript of July 2017: "Howard Kadison was a good friend of Lambert's and played alongside him at Wallace's, so his addition to the Circle session was probably not an intrusion but something Lambert wanted (ref. Michael Steinmann)".

DONALD LAMBERT

Warren, NJ. Jan. 2, 1962

Donald Lambert (solo-p).

Nine titles were recorded at Frank Wallace's High Tavern, first four issued only on IAJRC 23, last five titles issued only on Pumpkin 104:

Golden Earrings	1:39. (S/F)
Wabash Blues	2:26. (SM/M)
Harlem Strut	1:41. (F)
I Love You Madly	2:05. (SM)
It's All Right With Me	1:42. (F)
Ain't Misbehavin'	4:42. (S/SM)
Old Fashioned Love	2:09. (SM)
Rose Of The Rio Grande	1:47. (F)
Jingle Bells	1:48. (F)

The last session, rather brief performances but of high quality, the highlight may be "... Rio Grande". Donald Lambert passed away only four months later. We can only marvel at his magnificent art, mostly recorded in a small tavern, but that was the way he wanted it, or did he really, who knows?

No further recording sessions.

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