



Ramsey Lewis
“Ramsey, Taking Another Look”
November 2011

Composer, pianist and jazz legend Ramsey Lewis has been referred to as “the great performer,” a title reflecting his performance style and musical selections which display his early gospel playing and classical training along with his love of jazz and other musical forms. A native Chicagoan (born May 27, 1935), Mr. Lewis represents the great diversity of music for which Chicago is noted.

Ramsey Lewis first captivated fans with his first album “Ramsey Lewis And The Gentlemen of Swing” by the Ramsey Lewis Trio in 1956. By 1965, he was one of the nation’s most successful jazz pianists, topping the charts with “The In Crowd,” “Hang On Sloopy” and “Wade In The Water.” He has three Grammy Awards and seven gold records to his credit. Often called legendary, Mr. Lewis concedes “It’s a high honor when someone says so, but I don’t see myself that way. What keeps me enthusiastic and energizes me, is the realization that the more I learn, the more I find there is to know.” He was awarded the 2006 Stellar Award for Best Gospel Instrumental Album, “With One Voice” presented in January 2007. He was also the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Award in January 2007. Mr. Lewis has received five (5) honorary doctorate degrees and numerous other accolades.

Ramsey Lewis began taking piano lessons at the age of four, studying the basics and fundamentals. But, “It wasn’t until I started studying with the late Dorothy Mendelsohn that I responded to some of the startling things she was teaching me, such as ‘Listen with your inner ear,’ and ‘Make the piano sing.’ These concepts were revelations!” Soon after, he began learning Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, Brahms and Chopin, and other basic piano repertoire for the concert pianist.

Except for records his father played around the house, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Mead Lux Lewis and others, Mr. Lewis had no experience playing jazz. He was 15 years old when a fellow church musician, Wallace Burton, asked him to join his jazz band and took the time to coach and help the young musician learn the language of jazz. It was a brand new experience for him. The seven-piece group called themselves “The Cleffs” and provided Mr. Lewis’ first real involvement with the great music of jazz. The emerging Ramsey Lewis Trio had its roots as the rhythm section (comprised of Mr. Lewis on piano, Eldee Young on bass and Redd Holt on drums) and remained after the other members of the Cleffs went off to the Korean War. “Jazz soon became a major force in my musical life, but European classical and gospel music were of almost equal importance,” he recalls.

In addition to recording albums and performing live, Mr. Lewis hosted WNUA-FM Chicago’s weekday morning drive-time radio show, “The Ramsey Lewis Morning Show,” from 1997-2009 for which he was awarded R&R’s (Radio&Records) 1999 and 2000 Personality of the Year Award. The syndicated “Ramsey Lewis Morning Show” ran from 2007-2009 nationwide. His syndicated “Legends of Jazz with Ramsey Lewis,” radio program continues to air in a number of cities throughout the U.S.

Active in community efforts, especially on behalf of youth, in 1995 he helped organize the

TEDKURLANDASSOCIATES

173 Brighton Avenue, Boston, MA 02134
phone: 617-254-0007 fax: 617-782-3577
agents@tedkurland.com www.tedkurland.com

Ravinia Festival's Jazz Mentor Program and also serves as the Artistic Director for that festival's jazz series. In January of 2007, the Dave Brubeck Institute invited Mr. Lewis to be on the Honorary Board of Friends of the Brubeck Institute at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, CA. He also serves on the Board of Trustees for the Merit School of Music, an inner city music program in downtown Chicago as well as on the Board of Trustees of the first public high school for the performing arts in Chicago, The Chicago High School for the Arts, and is a member of Loyola University (Chicago) Council of Regents. Early 2005 saw the formation of the Ramsey Lewis Foundation, a program designed to help provide scholarship opportunities to youth as they move through high school and on to college. Unfortunately, due to a health related issue in 2008, Mr. Lewis had to suspend this program.

In 2003, Mr. Lewis along with Larry Rosen (founder and former president of GRP Records) and Lee Rosenberg formed LRSmedia, an independent music entertainment company that created and produced branded entertainment properties for distribution across broadcast, live and recorded media. LRSmedia co-produced, along with PBS television station WTTWChicago in April 2006, a series of 13 one-half hour television programs called "Legends of Jazz with Ramsey Lewis" making it the first time in forty years that jazz had enjoyed television coverage. The program not only featured the legends of this great music, but also the young and upcoming stars as well. Mr. Lewis, along with Mr. Rosen and Mr. Rosenberg were co-executive producers of the series.

Beginning in 2005, Mr. Lewis began seriously composing large-scale musical works. The first was an eight-movement work for jazz trio and ballet in collaboration with the Joffrey Ballet and choreographed by Donald Byrd. The world premiere of "To Know Her . . ." was performed at Ravinia Festival in June of 2007.

The second large-scale work was an eight-movement work for jazz trio and string quartet entitled "Muses and Amusements". This world premiere with the Turtle Island Quartet was also performed at Ravinia Festival in June of 2008. The next large-scale work was a multimedia tribute to Abraham Lincoln on the 200th anniversary of his birth. This eightmovement work entitled "Proclamation of Hope: A Symphonic Poem by Ramsey Lewis" was world premiered once again at Ravinia Festival in June of 2009 and consisted of Mr. Lewis performing with his trio and twenty-one other musicians on stage enhanced with visuals on giant screens and a historical description in the program conveying what each movement represented. Scott Hall arranged the music and conducted, Michael Coakes created the visuals, Guthrie Ramsey wrote the historical descriptions and Jan Lewis was senior advisor/coordinator. Mr. Lewis composed yet again a large-scale multimedia work that premiered at Tokyo Blue Note in Tokyo, Japan in September of 2010. The work entitled "Colors: The Ecology of Oneness" received critical acclaim. This performance of "Colors" in Tokyo as well as the Kennedy Center performance of "Proclamation of Hope" was taped by Chicago Public Television station WTTW and aired on over 200 PBS stations nationwide in 2011. "Colors: The Ecology of Oneness" makes its U.S. debut at Ravinia Festival in July of 2011.

Mr. Lewis continues to perform in the U.S. and abroad with his trio, Joshua Ramos on bass and Charles Heath on drums. His latest album "Ramsey, Taking Another Look" on Concord Records/Mazenzi Recording Company will be released in the summer of 2011. This project launched the coming together of a quintet composed of Chicago musicians: Henry Johnson (guitar) and Tim Gant (keyboards) along with Joshua and Charles who will perform with Mr. Lewis in concerts and festivals beginning summer 2011.

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