

The Jazz Museum in Harlem
104 East 126th Street
New York, NY 10035
www.jazzmuseuminharlem.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 04/28/05

Harlem Speaks Series Swings into Spring

- **Fred Staton of the Harlem Blues and Jazz Band (May 5)**
- **Mercedes Ellington (May 19)**
- **Dr. Billy Taylor (June 2)**
- **William C. Rhoden (June 16)**

New York, NY (April 28, 2005) *Harlem Speaks*, The Jazz Museum in Harlem's continuing series venerating the Harlem jazz continuum, begins a smoking new set with senior member of the Harlem Blues and Jazz Band, tenor saxophonist Fred Staton, followed by choreographer Mercedes Ellington, jazz renaissance man Dr. Billy Taylor, and long-time Harlemiter and New York Times sports columnist William Rhoden.

On **May 5th**, **Fred Staton** will recount his days and nights with legends Billy Eckstine, Howard McGhee, Art Blakey and Errol Garner plus the living legacy of the Harlem Blues and Jazz Band, formed in 1972. Others stalwart members include recent *Harlem Speaks* honoree Joey Morant, trumpet and vocals; drummer Johnny Blowers, on record with Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Frank Sinatra; Lloyd Mayers, pianist with Sammy Davis, Jr. for 11 years; bassist Michael Max Fleming, who shared stages with, among others, Mary Lou Williams, Jimmy Witherspoon, and Chet Baker; plus singer and Broadway actress Ruth Brisbane.

Mercedes Ellington, granddaughter of the great Duke Ellington, is the featured guest on **May 19th**. As a long-time dancer and choreographer, Ms. Ellington's career exemplifies the grace, professionalism, and drive that typifies her family name. Shortly after graduating from the Juilliard School of Music, she became a June Taylor Dancer on the "Jackie Gleason Show," the first and only woman of color to fill that position. In her native New York she has been involved with more than 10 Broadway shows, including "Play On," "No, No, Nanette," "Hello Dolly!" and "Sophisticated Ladies," in which she performed as the feature dancer, assistant choreographer and dance captain.

Jazz Museum in Harlem board member, **Dr. Billy Taylor**, has been an ambassador of jazz for over 50 years. Not only is he a stunning pianist, skillful composer, articulate broadcaster, and educator par excellence; Mr. Taylor founded the Harlem-based Jazzmobile, which has offered music clinics and free summer concerts in Harlem and across the city for 40 years. On **June 2nd**, Dr. Taylor will discuss his career, including his early days in Harlem during the bebop revolution and as the house pianist at Birdland; the musicians he's performed with over the years such as Billie Holiday, Ben Webster, Dizzy

Gillespie, Slam Stewart, and the unsung tenor saxophone giant, Don Byas; his tenure as advisor for jazz at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, and as presenter of an on-going series, "Mentors and Masters," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He'll also converse with executive director Loren Schoenberg and co-director Christian McBride about his very recent retirement.

The two-month set closes with **William C. Rhoden**, sports writer and columnist with the *New York Times* for 32 years. For the last 10 years he has written the *Sports of The Times* column. Along with discussing his career as a journalist, and analogies between sports and jazz, on **June 16th** Mr. Rhoden will reveal little-known details about his background as an associate editor of *Ebony* magazine from 1974 to 1978, his three years with *The Baltimore Sun* as a columnist and jazz critic, and his experience as the road manager for an international tour of the Billy Harper Quartet that made stops in Poland, Romania, Portugal, London, France, Turkey and Spain. Back in the 1970s, he wrote liner notes for Earth, Wind & Fire, and the Isley Brothers. Mr. Rhoden has recently completed his first book, *Lost Tribe Wandering*, a political and cultural analysis of African-American athletes.

On April 21st Milt Grayson regaled us with tales of his globe-trotting career, beginning with a full scholarship to Juilliard, shifting to European and South American tours with choreography master Katherine Dunham, moving on to R&B in Vegas, swinging tours with Duke Ellington, acting on the Broadway stage as well as elaborating on his recent tenure with Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. Those fortunate to be present focused intense attention, especially when he broke out into song, swathing all with his deep baritone voice.

The *Harlem Speaks* series is co-produced by the Jazz Museum in Harlem and Greg Thomas Associates. Each event takes place at the offices of the Jazz Museum in Harlem, located at 104 East 126th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues, from 6:30pm-8:00pm on alternate Thursdays.

As always, the series is *free* to the public. Please call for reservations: 212 348-8300.