

# The Whole Drum Truth Concert

A stellar gathering of jazz drumming talent took place this past September 17, when **Albert "Tootie" Heath**, **Ben Riley**, **Ed Thigpen**, and **Jackie Williams** joined forces at Yale University's Sprague Memorial Hall in New Haven, Connecticut to perform as The Whole Drum Truth. The program was presented under the auspices of Yale's Duke Ellington Fellowship. That organization's inaugural celebration, presented in 1972, featured Max Roach, Papa Jo Jones, Sonny Greer, and Kenny Clarke. Not since then have four drummers appeared together.

The audience entered to see four drumkits, set up in a semicircle on an otherwise bare stage. Drumming alone was to be the focus of the evening. But a "chops-fest" it was definitely *not*. Instead, the talented gentlemen played individually, in pairs, in trios, and as a full quartet on a variety of original and standard compositions. The rhythmic melodies of tunes like "Salt Peanuts," "All Blues," and "St. Thomas" were readily apparent, while more abstract compositions by each of the drummers showcased their skills with sticks, brushes, mallets, and bare hands.

A particular highlight was the first-act closer: an extremely musical solo composition by Jackie Williams titled "Rhythmic Journey." Though he is probably the least well known of the evening's artists, Williams' dynamic performance won the audience over and brought them to their feet.

At the opening of the second act, Duke Ellington Fellowship director Willie Ruff presented gold medals (bearing Ellington's likeness) to Ben Riley, Ed Thigpen, and Jackie Williams, in honor of their contributions to jazz. (Tootie Heath was given his medal in 2003 as part of The Heath Brothers.) Later, after several more solo and group numbers, the full ensemble joined to perform "The Whole Drum Truth Samba," closing the show on a note of sheer joy and percussive intensity.

**Rick Van Horn**



**"Tootie" Heath**



**Ben Riley**



**Jackie Williams**



**Ed Thigpen**



**Ellington Fellowship director Willie Ruff (left) presented the drummers with gold medals in recognition of their contributions to jazz.**