



JOE WILDER

Joseph Benjamin Wilder was born into a musical family in Colwyn, Pennsylvania on February 22, 1922. His father, Curtis, was a bassist and bandleader in Philadelphia. At an early age he was featured on a weekly children's radio program in Philadelphia. On that program, young musicians were often backed by bands such as Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway. This experience also led to an early encounter with Louis Armstrong. Although drawn to classical music, Mr. Wilder soon came to realize that, talent notwithstanding, a career in the symphony was not a realistic goal for a black musician coming of age in the late 1930s. Instead, he set out on a veritable big band odyssey, leaving home in 1941 at nineteen to join Les Hite's band. He later worked for Lionel Hampton, Jimmie Lunceford, Herbie Fields, Sam Donahue, Lucky Millinder, Dizzy Gillespie, and Noble Sissle. He was one of the first black members of the United States Marine Corp during World

War II. He eventually was assigned to the headquarters band and promoted to assistant bandmaster. The warmth, lyricism, humor, and sophistication of his music are an extension his persona. Mention his name to almost any professional musician in both the jazz and classical worlds and you are sure to get a smile and a testimonial—not only to Mr. Wilder's musical talents, but also to his sterling personal qualities. Joe Wilder's sense of propriety is almost as legendary as his musical prowess. While genuinely modest, his belief in himself enabled Mr. Wilder to overcome the many obstacles facing a black musician coming of age in the 1930s and aspiring to a classical career. Mr. Wilder has earned the reputation as a highly original jazz soloist through his own albums for Savoy and Columbia (*The Pretty Sound* is practically a cult classic among musicians), and countless sessions as a sideman with Hank Jones, Gil Evans, Tadd Dameron, Michel Legrand, Benny Goodman, and many others. He also became a favorite of vocalists, such as Billie Holiday, Lena Horne, Harry Belafonte, Johnny Mathis, Tony Bennett, Helen Humes, and Johnny Hartman. Mr. Wilder joined the elite group of "first-call" studio musicians who skillfully (and almost always anonymously) produced much of America's recorded popular music until synthesizers and sampling began to replace orchestras. He was on staff at ABC from 1957 to 1974. He was a member of the pit orchestras in some of the top Broadway shows including *Alive and Kicking*, *Guys and Dolls*, and Cole Porter's *Silk Stockings*. He earned a bachelor's degree at the Manhattan School of Music and studied trumpet and orchestral repertoire with Joseph Alessi and Bill Vacchiano. Mr. Wilder is also an accomplished photographer and certainly could have pursued that as a career had music not intervened. Joe Wilder's trumpet sound remains one of the glories of American music. His elegant solo style is instantly identifiable, drawing from the swing and bebop eras he straddled, as well as reflecting his classical experience. As Whitney Balliett wrote in a 1986 *New Yorker* profile of Mr. Wilder, "His solos are immaculately designed. He makes the song gleam. "Wilder's solos "tell a story" with poise, wit, swing, and feeling.