
THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

P.O. BOX 15591 . WASHINGTON, D.C. 20003-0787

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 1994

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A REMINDER

Membership in our Duke Ellington Society runs for the calendar year, January through December. So, if you haven't paid your 1994 dues, now is the time.

Membership for individuals is \$30; couples, \$50; and students, \$5. Make your check or money order payable to the Duke Ellington Society, Chapter 90, and mail it to the Society at PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003-0787. Thanks.

FEBRUARY MEETING TRIGGERS MEMORIES AND ITCHES FEET

Contributed by Angela Grimmer

The Members' Choice Meeting on February 5 featured a wide range of Ellingtonia—some familiar and some not so familiar. Many of the selections were accompanied by personal reminiscences of the circumstances which prompted the particular choice. The shared memories enhanced the music for all the listeners.

Among the selections were: several Johnny Hodges features, including "The Gal from Joe's," "Alice Blue Gown," and "Stompy Jones"; several rarely heard things such as a Ben Webster rehearsal with the Danish Radio Band, an extended piano solo from the Rainbow Room; and some early versions of *Anatomy of a Murder* music. Selections ranged from the '20s with "Dicty Glide" to the '70s with Alice Babs' "Serenade to Sweden." Other musicians included in the selections were Louis Armstrong, Earl Hines, and Joe Venutti.

To everyone's delight, two members danced to their choice, "Blue Goose." A good time was had by all!

UNUSUAL VIDEOS WILL BE SHOWN AT MARCH MEETING

Our regular meeting at 8:30 pm on Saturday, March 5 will be at a different place, the residence of our president and first lady, Ted and Marian Shell. The program: Ellington videos projected on an oversized screen with the music played on a superior sound system. Most of the videos in Dr. Shell's collection are normally available only from foreign sources. However, there will be some domestic clips.

The address is 4326 Westover Place, N.W. As you know, we are in the habit of starting on time, so start a little earlier than usual and be there before 8:30 pm for the best seats. For directions, see the enclosed insert.

ANOTHER DUCAL COVER STORY

The Ellington story is increasingly attracting the attention of mass media. "Duke" by Mark Feeney is the feature story of the 19 December 1993 issue of the *Boston Globe Magazine*. The gist of the article is found in the caption under an Ellington-Strayhorn photograph: "Colleges offer courses about him, orchestras are being formed to play his music, the Smithsonian is publishing his scores. Twenty years after his death, Duke Ellington lives on." The author claims there is an "ascendancy" rather than a "revival" of interest in their music.

In pointing out the seriousness with which Ellington and Strayhorn are taken, Feeney notes that an eleventh Duke Ellington Study Group Conference was held last summer and that a twelfth will take place in Sweden this year. (Little did our Chapter realize what we were starting with ours, the first, in 1983!)

RECENT COMPACT DISC RELEASES

DUKE ELLINGTON AT BIRDLAND 1952 Jazz Unlimited JUCD 2036.

Reviewed by Ted Shell

Of the abundance of releases of Ellington works on compact discs, there has been an increasing output of previously unissued material. One such item has been produced in Denmark on the Jazz Unlimited label, *Ellington at Birdland 1952*. It is 73:34 minutes of prime Ellington. The sessions were recorded during broadcasts from New York's Birdland, the "Jazz Capital of the World," on November 20th and 24th, 1952. NBC decided to call these broadcasts the "Silver Jubilee" in celebration of the 25th year of Duke's organizing the band.

A few years before these 1952 broadcasts, the orchestra had lost some of its stellar soloists: Johnny Hodges, Lawrence Brown, Cootie Williams, and Ben Webster. But you couldn't find a better trumpet section than Cat Anderson, Ray Nance, Clark Terry, and Willie Cook. Then we had the addition of Louis Bellson on drums; the return of Juan Tizol, trombone; and Johnny's replacement on alto, Hilton Jefferson. The band performed outstandingly. There is some good Paul Gonsalves throughout, some electrifying trumpet playing on "How High the Moon," a delightful trumpet solo by Clark Terry on "Perdido," and much more happy Duke on the two evenings of music.

Those of us privileged to have heard the Duke other than on records, particularly at night clubs and dances, can appreciate that on such dates as these the band often played with happy abandon. Many of the numbers would be ad-libbed, as requests from persons in the audience were honored and music not in the current repertoire was offered. Many of these dates served as try-outs for music recently orchestrated, much to the delight of us listeners. For those of us who consider ourselves Ellington collectors, *Duke Ellington at Birdland 1952* is a must acquisition. And we look forward to future releases from Denmark.

CLAUDE BOLLING PLAYS ELLINGTON: BLACK, BROWN AND BEIGE Milan 35656-2.

Reviewed by Reuben Jackson

Because Duke Ellington's work fused artistic ambition and intensely personalized writing, any contemporary ensemble (regardless of size) choosing to interpret the Maestro's works is faced with the unenviable (and often unfair) task of having its renditions compared with original recordings-sessions graced with the likes of Johnny Hodges, Tricky Sam Nanton and others.

And if the artist chooses one of Ellington's extended works (as Claude Bolling does here with the monumental *Black, Brown and Beige*), there is also the added risk of failing to perform music which frequently runs the technical and emotional gamut with the vigor and sensitivity it deserves.

Fortunately, pianist-arranger Bolling and his ensemble have little trouble walking the terribly delicate line between interpretation which evokes the composer's intentions (and in Ellington's case, the contributions of his stellar players) without resorting to vapid attempts at "authenticity," yet discreetly displaying the talents of his own orchestra.

Bolling and Co. play admirably throughout this complete performance of Duke's controversial masterpiece, but are especially moving during a poignant "Come Sunday." They do considerable justice to the ensemble voicings of the deliciously swinging "Emancipation Celebration" and the alternately tempestuous and mournful "Work Song," in which trombonist Michel Cacimas successfully tackles Joseph Nanton's poignant aural poetry.

Two of this reviewer's favorite Ellington titles, "Sugar Hill Penthouse" and "Rock Waltz" (aka "Cy Runs Rock Waltz"), are devoid of the gradually unfolding sense of tenderness heard on the original recordings, but the orchestra's overall performance on *Black, Brown and Beige* indicates that Bolling and his ensemble are playing for those Duke lovingly referred to as "the people with the ears."



**QUOTED WITHOUT COMMENT
(FOR YOUR REACTION)**

You don't need authorities to talk about music. You don't need a man from the conservatory to talk about music. All you need is someone who's got ears and can hear, because if you can't hear it, music is nothing. . . . Music is an aural art. . . . When you're speaking of music you're speaking of performances A guy picks up his horn and plays the way he feels at that moment. The way he played yesterday has no relationship to it.

— Duke Ellington as quoted in a transcription of an interview by John Mazer on the "Round Midnight" program, WQRS-FM, 14 July 1962.

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
FILM SERIES CONTINUES**

Because of ice, sleet, and snow, the Library of Congress' showing of *On the Road with Ellington* and *Duke Ellington Swings through Japan* was postponed. When the program is re-scheduled, our Reuben Jackson, as originally planned, will introduce the films. March programs include:

March 8: *West Coast Jazz* introduced by Patricia Willard, Jazz Historian

Ernie Andrews - Blues for Central Avenue
Art Pepper - Notes from a Jazz Survivor

March 15: *Jazz Record Industry* introduced by Bill Holland, *Billboard Magazine*

Record Making with Duke Ellington
Anatomy of a Hit

South Bank Show - Blue Note Records

Programs are free, but seating is limited. Make reservations by phone, beginning one week before any given show. Call 202-707-5677 from 9am to 4:30pm. Programs begin promptly at 7pm.

LET'S HEAR IT FROM YOU

As we said in our January *Newsletter*, we want page 2 in each issue devoted to commentary, notes, queries, personal memories, opinions, observations, anecdotes, reviews, and the like. So, send us your contributions. If appropriate, we will proofread and do minor editing. If your contribution might take more space than the page allows, get in touch with the editor.

**MUSINGS ON DUKE AND
THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY**

February being Black History Month, we are reminded of how steeped Ellington was in the culture and history of people of African descent in the Americas. His statements about his pride in his heritage are known among Ellington devotees. And his music shows this pride and knowledge, say from his c.1943 "Barzallai-Lou" [Lew] about a relatively obscure Revolutionary War hero, to "West Indian Dance" in *Black Brown and Beige*, to [Martin Luther] "King Fit the Battle of Alabam'."

History has demonstrated that by rooting their creativity in the particularities of their indigenous cultures, artists in various fields reveal the commonalities, or human-ness, of all peoples—Sibelius, Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, and African writer Wole Soyinka come to mind as examples. And so it seems to your editor that because he informed his art with the spirit and culture of "his people" (to adapt the title of one of his major works), Ellington's music touches the spiritual and cultural sensitivities of other peoples. Thus, the wide appeal of his art.

On a lighter note, February also being the month for Cupid's happy tricks, we were curious to see how often Ellington played "My Funny Valentine," a sort of theme song for the occasion, on Valentine's Day. According to Timner, the last time Duke played the tune in February was during a 1956 Bethlehem recording session in Chicago. Nevertheless, who can deny that our man had the soul of an authentic romantic.

OOPS, CLINKERS!

#1: In our *Newsletter* listing of Chapter 90 members at "Ellington '93" in New York, we omitted Sjef and Milia Hoefsmit. Although they live in Belgium, Sjef has been a faithful and much valued member of Chapter 90 for some years. We apologize to the Hoefsmits for our oversight.

#2: In our last issue, we copied Art Pilkington's address as it appeared in a publication, thereby omitting his postal code. So if you write to Art about Duke's itinerary, include his postal code, M3C 3H9, just before the country, Canada.

NOTES ON OUR SOCIETY'S "DRAMATIS FELIDAE"

(To Use Our Man's Term in *MIMM*)

While preparing her Library of Congress presentation on *A Drum Is a Woman*, Patricia Willard discovered that one of the dancers in the production, Barbara Wright-Craig, lives in Washington, where she is a dance instructor. Ms. Wright-Craig came to the presentation as a special guest of Patricia and modestly provided some insights into the production of *Drum*.

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Homero Lurns, who joined at our January meeting, had a career as singer in jazz venues in Europe and the States. He "got the jazz bug" while traveling in Sweden while on leave from military service in Paris. Following his tour of duty, Homero learned his craft in jazz clubs in the 63rd Street area of Chicago. In the late 50s, he returned to Paris and performed at such clubs as Trois Mallets and the Blue Note (the setting for the Dexter Gordon film a few years back). He also sang in other European spots, including the Montmartre in Copenhagen. After coming back home, Homero performed for a few more years while concentrating on literature and creative writing. For some years now he has been a member of the English faculty at Howard University.

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We will miss Jehangir Delal, who is leaving for India. He was a regular at our meetings until last year when illness in the family prevented his attendance. At one, Jehangir played a recording of Paul Robeson singing with the Ellington orchestra. He quietly played a major role in the production of our chapter's "Ellington '90." We wish Jehangir and his loved ones the best and look forward to his return.

HE DIDN'T PLAY WITH DUKE, BUT...

Not long ago, we ran into Andrew White and invited him to become involved with Chapter 90. Of course, for him, as for other working musicians, our meeting time is not the most convenient. Anyhow, author Andrew soon afterward sent notice of two more books by him, *I, Oboist!* and *I, Educator!* If you haven't read any of his publications, well, they're—well, different. He advises, "GITTEM, GITTEM, GITTEM."

MORE ON RE-VISITED FARGO

In our last issue we reported that our Jack Towers attended the January extravaganza at Moorhead State University in commemoration of Duke at Fargo. As we know, fortunately on that artistically eventful night in 1940, Jack and friend Dick Burris recorded the music for posterity.

Since last month we have acquired a few items about Moorhead's "Elegant Ellington: Music and Memories of Duke" commemoration. One of their publicity brochures reads, "It was the fall of 1940. The U.S. had not yet entered the war in Europe, but the Battle of Britain was raging and Nazi Germany was bombing London. . . . On the afternoon of Nov. 7, 1940, Duke Ellington and his band arrived in Fargo for a dance performance at the downtown Crystal Ballroom that evening. They'd played in Winnipeg the night before and made the journey south in a special Pullman car. . . . For \$1.30, you could buy an advance ticket . . ."

Moorhead's re-creation concert by students and faculty featured not only a good number of the pieces played at the Fargo dance some 53 years earlier, but also included *The Queen's Suite* and, appropriately, "Swingin' on the Campus" by Ellington and Hodges. Jim Condell, whom a number of us know personally or from annual Ellington conferences, produced the script and narration, according to a local newspaper, the "background on Ellington, his music, and [his] 1940 engagement at Fargo." Afterwards, guests were invited to a "jam session" at a local hotel.

As we said in our last issue, our Jack Towers was the guest of honor at "Elegant Ellington."

WRITTEN VERSIONS OF ELLINGTON AND STRAYHORN MUSIC NOW AVAILABLE

"Daybreak Express" and "Take the 'A' Train" are the first publications in the Smithsonian's Jazz Masterworks Editions of "classic jazz." Such published music is expected to be especially useful to students and performing musicians, especially repertory groups. Non-performing enthusiasts as well should find them interesting.