
THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

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

NEWSLETTER

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HEAR UNIQUE STEINER-RECORDED DUKE AND ON-THE-SPOT ARRANGING AT A RECORDING SESSION OF DUKE WITH ELLA

Contributed by Jack Towers

At our **April 2** program we will hear Ellington recordings made in the mid-1940s by John Steiner and a unique Ellington-Ella Fitzgerald arranging/rehearsal/recording session. You know Ella but ask, "Who is John Steiner?" He is a great jazz music lover and a great fan of Duke Ellington. John operated his own jazz record label and assembled some fine recording equipment. He recorded many performers in the Chicago area, fortunately including Duke.

We will hear Ellington performances at the Chicago Opera House. John used just one microphone. In some cases he climbed up onto the catwalk over stage — dangling the microphone in front of the band and moving the microphone to accommodate the pickup of the soloists. These recordings with just one microphone give more realistic sound than do some present-day efforts with many microphones spread around the band.

The other feature will be a rare opportunity to hear Duke, the orchestra, and Ella Fitzgerald at a recording session, possibly in Los Angeles. You will hear Ella rehearsing by humming through her part; and you will hear Duke telling the band what to do, assigning parts, working out section passages, and otherwise taking care of artistic business. It's a rare revelation of a Ducal creative *process* — impromptu arranging, almost spontaneous, if you will.

Come to the meeting on **Saturday, April 2** to check out some of the contributions of John Steiner to the Ellington recorded legacy and for an aural glimpse of an underappreciated Ellington method. We will be back at our regular meeting place, **Omega House, 1231 Harvard Street, NW (corner of 13th and Harvard Streets)**. And remember, we start on time, **8:30 pm**. Bring some friends.

PLAN FOR "ELLINGTON '94"

Some Chapter 90 members have already received confirmation of their reservations for "Ellington '94" in Stockholm. On page 4 is a form to register for the conference and to reserve hotel accommodations for this "Serenade to Sweden."

WE'RE COUNTING ON

... your 1994 dues. If you haven't paid, make a check payable to Chapter 90, Duke Ellington Society, and bring it to the April meeting or mail it to the Society at Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003-0787. Memberships: Individual, \$30; couple, \$50; student, \$5.

REPRINT OF A LETTER TO A FRIEND: THE DUKE JUST BEFORE NEWPORT

Contributed by Ben Pubols

July 3, 1956

Dear Terry,

Your letter came today . . . and I thought I'd get a quick reply back to you in case you make it up to Newport this weekend. I want to be sure that you approach Duke from the proper perspective and with the right mental attitude.

The Ellington slump is ended! Or at least it can be when Duke wants it to be. The concert, here June 29, presented by far the best—and the worst—Ellington I heard since Cootie left the Duke (apologies to Raymond Scott). Personnel was same as given in the current issue of 'Beat.

The concert opened with "Black & Tan Fantasie," Nance and Jackson carrying the first chorus, followed by the usual sequence of solos plus a clarinet solo after the trombone solo. Nance was quiet, Jackson was mellow, and Procope, who took Toby's alto solo and the clarinet solo - and Procope, I was shocked and surprised to say the least. He was great. The alto solo made me think I was back in 1927 and Toby had grown some hair on his head. It was far superior to his solo on the same tune in "Ellington '55," and was above his chorus in "Jam with Sam" in the Seattle Concert LP. Between the opening and closing notes of "Black & Tan" I settled back in my chair with the feeling that I was hearing great music, that Ellington had once again attained his usual high standards. As it turned out, this was one of the two high-spots of the whole evening.

On the second number, "Perdido," I noticed that Duke had a drummer in the band, and I didn't stop noticing it until the final curtain came down. . . . Back in the old days, you very seldom actually heard Sonny Greer, except for special effects such as in "Caravan" or "Moon over Cuba"; you only sensed his presence. But not so with Woodyard. . . . he's much too heavy—he blows loud even on such things as "Prelude to a Kiss." . . . Throughout the entire concert, we got two rhythms: the dotted-eighth, sixteenth, quarter note pattern on the symbols widely used by Chick Webb and Jo Jones, and a steady bass-drum-on-the-down-beat-rim-shot-on-the-up-beat.

Item number three was Jimmy Hamilton's "Clarinet Melodrama," awfully reminiscent of a Harry James tour-de-force arrangement a la "Flight of the Bumblebee." Comparison of this rendition with Procope on "Black & Tan" makes me look upon the latter as the better reed-man, something I thought would never happen. . . . Somewhat better [than two other pieces] was "La Virgin" featuring Cat Anderson, the only Ellington trumpet man with any tone Still better was Johnny Hodges on "Prelude to a Kiss" and "Things Ain't What They Used To Be."

The other high-spot was Harry Carney doing "Sophisticated Lady," which also had a passage by the reed section, sounding beautifully mellow like the reed section of the 1940 "Lady" or "I Let a Song." Woodyard was quiet enough not to be obnoxious, or maybe he seemed that way because Carney was so good.

But with the exception of Carney's number, and possibly the two Hodges numbers, the concert didn't live up to the promise of the first piece. But anyway it did show me that Duke is still capable of being the old Duke—a most difficult feat—when he wants to be. I had been wondering if the old Ellington sound had been lost forever. "Black & Tan" and "Sophisticated Lady" showed me it had only been lying dormant. But why he doesn't use it more often I don't know. His best soloists are Carney, Hodges, and Quentin Jackson. . . .

I don't mean to imply that Ellington is good only when playing old numbers or slow mood numbers. Witness the new Bethlehem LP, "Historically Speaking," which I picked up yesterday. One of the highlights is the last band, "Upper Manhattan Medical Group," spotting some great Carney baritone. Other highlights include "Creole Love Call,"

(Continued on page 5 under "Letter")

EXCERPT FROM THE MAILBAG

Art Pilkington writes in connection with our notice about his request for itinerary data:

Member Donald McCathran has responded to the plea for DEI [Duke Ellington Itinerary] assistance in a most positive manner. Two letters plus some memories of various concerts and a treasure trove of memories of when and where he saw the Duke Ellington band.

He felt that the Baker's Dozen benefit concert which was to be held on Friday, June 13, 1947, at the Watergate Amphitheatre was rained out. I wonder if other members might remember the event and be able to say whether it was ever rescheduled? Newspaper microfilms of Washington papers are unavailable here [in Canada].

WATERS MAKES EXCITING FIND

In an auction, Charles Waters, a Houston friend of our Society, has obtained five 12" acetates containing Ellington music from two Universal International films, *Symphony in Swing* (1949) and *Salute to Duke Ellington* (1950). Writing in *DEMS Bulletin*, Klaus Stratemann, author of *Duke Ellington: Day by Day and Film by Film*, states that Charles' acetates would be "in-studio reference discs [that] contain the unaltered original pre-recordings as they sounded before their subsequent adaptation to the film . . ."

Among the tunes are "A Train," "Suddenly It Jumped," a vocal version of "You Oughta" with Ray Nance doing the honors, "The History of Jazz in 3 Minutes," "You of All People" with vocal by Al Hibbler, and "Hey, Little Boy."

Charles has been kind enough to share these discoveries with Sjeff Hoefsmit, our chapter member in Belgium, so that he may use them on the cassette for the "Ellington '94" study group.

SHELLS HOST MEETINGS, NOMINATORS APPOINTED

Contributed by Angela Grimmer

In the last few weeks Marian and Ted Shell have treated us to their wonderful hospitality.

On February 23, the Shells welcomed the Executive Committee of the Society for a meeting. We applauded Teddy Hudson for the *Newsletter*. In turn, he asked everyone (this means YOU!) to contribute: a paragraph (or more!) of comment, memory, reminiscence — anything about Ellington and the music and its history or future that's on your mind.

At the regular June meeting it will be time for our annual election of officers. President Ted Shell appointed a nominating committee of Ben Allen, Ben Pubols, Jan Rossen, Jack Dennis (serving as Chairperson), and Betty Dennis, and charged them with providing a slate of candidates for the May meeting. Nominations from the floor will be accepted also.

On March 5, Ted and Marian opened their home once again to welcome Chapter 90 membership for our regular meeting. Twenty-three of us came to enjoy the program presented by Ted Shell. We were treated to several Ellington performance videos from various years ranging from 1943 to 1974, closing with an hour-long *Duke Ellington on the Road*, a laser disk from Japan. The Shells received a standing ovation.

THAT'S WHY WE'VE MISSED HIM

Bill McLaurin, formerly of WDCU, is now the general manager of the Tower Records store at 2000 Pennsylvania Ave. More important congratulations are in order: In January, the McLaurins were blessed with a baby girl, Evan Joy. We hope Bill, though busy, will soon rejoin us.

The Duke Ellington Society, Chapter 90

NEWSLETTER

ED. NOTE RE THE PUBOLS LETTER

For some time we have been twisting the arm of reluctant and too modest Ben to let us share with our readers his letter to a friend in Washington. The concert was at Madison, Wisconsin, June 29, 1956, eight days before the band's celebrated Newport gig. At that time, Ben was a student (imagine him at that age talking about "the old days"!). Now with the benefit of hindsight, that best of all sight possessed by all of us, Ben says, "I seem to have been pretty opinionated 38 years ago, and would not write such a strongly-worded review today. . . . I was young then and knew everything, which certainly is not the case today!" In particular, he would now omit or tone down his comments about Sam Woodard. Notice, on the other hand, the instances in which our young critic-letter writer, in "[the] slump is ended!" and other places, predicts the resurgence of the orchestra's artistic reputation and commercial appeal. Thanks, Ben, for an interesting contribution.

LIBRARY RESCHEDULES FILMS

Tuesday, April 12 is the new date for the showing of *On the Road with Ellington* and *Duke Ellington Swings through Japan*, postponed in January because of an ice and snow storm. Chapter 90's Reuben Jackson, as originally scheduled, will introduce the films.

Admission is free, but seating is limited. Beginning a week before the program, for a reservation call (202) 707-5677, 9 am-4:30 pm. The program begins promptly at 7 pm in the Mary Pickford Theater, Madison Building.

QUOTED WITHOUT COMMENT (FOR YOUR REACTION)

Music is very regenerating when performed.

-- Duke Ellington in the documentary
On the Road with Duke Ellington

The 12th Annual International Duke Ellington Conference

May 19th-22nd, 1994

Registration Form - Please type or write in block letters

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION:

Name(s).....
 Badge(s) should read.....
 Complete address(es).....
 Telephone number(s)..... Fax number(s).....

*The fee for the Conference is USD 160.- [SEK 1280.-] which amount includes tickets for a Ger-Together party, two evening concerts and one luncheon in the City Hall. Please make your reservation as early as possible by remitting USD 160.- through a *Credit Card (Bank) Cheque* (No private cheques) to the *Duke Ellington Syndikat Society, P.O. Box 4020, S-102 61 Stockholm, Sweden*. For reservations made after March 10, 1994, the fee will be USD 190.- [SEK 1520.-].*

The Banquet on Sunday, May 22nd, is however not included in the Conference fee. The costs for taking part in this 3 course dinner and following dancing is USD 40.- [SEK 320.-].

Please reserve seat(s) for person(s) at the Banquet
 Special food requirements.....
 Total amount USD for person(s) sent

HOTEL RESERVATION:

Please reserve room(s) for person(s) at:
 Scandic Crown Hotel - suite, SEK 990:- (approx. USD 124.-/night)
 Scandic Crown Hotel - double room, SEK 680:- (approx. USD 85.-/night)
 Scandic Crown Hotel - single room, SEK 630:- (approx. USD 79.-/night)
 Aston Hotel - single room, SEK 400:- (approx. USD 50.-/night)
 Breakfast buffer is included in the above prices. No taxes will be added.
 Arrival date Departure date

Reservation guaranteed by (e.g. credit card and No.)
 Credit card Card No.....
 Expiry date
 Signature.....

NO REFUNDS CAN BE GIVEN FOR CANCELLATIONS RECEIVED AFTER MAY 1, 1994

The Duke Ellington Society, Chapter 90
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March 1994

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ELLINGTON'S TIMON OF ATHENS: INCIDENTAL MUSIC FOR SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY

Music Adapted by Stanley Silverman. 1993 Varcsc Sarabande Records VSD-5466 [Compact Disk]

Reviewed by Mac Grimmer

Originally written for the Stratford Festival in 1963, here, 30 years later, is the first complete recording of Ellington's music for Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*.

Ellington's second encounter with Shakespeare was very different from the first, *Such Sweet Thunder*, where the music had to tell the whole story. In *Timon* most of the music was an underscore, incidental music accompanying the dialogue and action. Ellington, therefore, concentrated his efforts (rushed, according to liner notes) on just a few pieces, only two of which found their way into the band's repertoire. The most important one, "Banquet Theme," became one of Johnny Hodges' most effective vehicles. The other, "Skillipoop," accompanied the dancing girls at the banquet who, according to Duke, were amateurs, not really equipped to perform the required skills, and thus had to "Skillipoop, or try to make what you're doing look better than what you're supposed to be doing." This piece became a feature for Sam Woodyard. Both were in the band's repertoire for over a year, in 1964-65. They can be heard along with "Draggin' Blues," another number from the score, on Vol. 8 of the *Private Collection*. Both pieces can be seen and heard on the currently available Swingtime Video *The Big Bands*, Vol. III.

Revived by the festival in 1991, restoration and adaptation of the music was the responsibility of the conductor, Stanley Silverman. Working with only lead sheets and sketches, etc., he utilized several approaches to the problem of fleshing the score. One ten-measure phrase, not used in the original production, became the centerpiece "Timon's Theme" and was given three different treatments. There are also three versions each of "Banquet Theme" and "Revolutionary March" (recorded by Duke in 1969).

Silverman also included some early songs: "Black and Tan Fantasy" (as an overture), "The Mooche," "Creole Love Call," and "Ring Dem Bells," using arrangements from the Cotton Club days.

With all the changes, additions, and new arrangements, this is obviously not the same score people heard in 1963, but it is all Ellington's music—however diluted—and is a fascinating addition to Ellingtonia. The Stratford Festival musicians could not be mistaken for a jazz band, but do pass as a show band, which is what this requires and is where Duke was once, as well.



LETTER

(Continued from page 2; Ed. note on page 5)

especially Procope's clarinet solo, "Ko-Ko," and "In a Mellow Tone." For me, "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo" just doesn't come off. It sounds as if they had discovered an old manuscript and were just reading the notes on paper without any conception of the original feeling. At least by comparison with the 1927 recordings. Jimmy Woode, although no Jimmy Blanton, is good, especially on "Jack the Bear." My feelings about the LP are about the same as about the concert—it contains some of the best and some of the worst Duke in a long time. . . . Although none of the numbers come up to the concert "Black & Tan," I still recommend the LP. It's far superior to some of his recent stuff on Capitol. Both the concert and the LP represent, I hope, the beginning of a trend toward better things to come. . . .

If you do make it up to Newport, let me know your impressions of Duke's crew. I wonder how they would compare with mine. . . .

Duke-ishly,
Ben

NOTES ON OUR SOCIETY'S
"DRAMATIS FELIDAE"

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

Helen Frazier checked on **Roland Hayes** and **Jean Allen** for us. You probably missed Roland at our last several meetings. You will be pleased to know that, although Roland underwent surgery, he is better and looking forward to rejoining us at our first-Saturday-of-the-month good times at "Duke's Place." Hurry back, Roland. Jean, widow of **Terrell Allen**, our beloved late president, has been in a rehabilitation hospital but expects to be going home soon. Jean has our best wishes.



We talked by phone with **G. Leo Hunt**. His mobility is a bit more limited than in 1985 when he went to the conference in Oldham by himself. Leo has considered attending "Ellington '94" but doubts that he will make it. He sends regards to friends in the Society.



Ben Pubols, one of our newer members and author of the 1956 letter reprinted in this issue, was born in Washington. After a satisfying career elsewhere as a neuro-scientist, he and his lovely wife, Lillian, have returned for his retirement years. But retirement is hardly the word to describe his life, for Ben serves as a Behind-the-Scenes-Volunteer at the Smithsonian, is finishing up several research projects at the VA Hospital in Washington, and occasionally lectures on jazz for community organizations. Judging from the letter, we have in member Ben some available critical talent. Now, let's get him to write some present-day reviews and opinions!

MEETING NOTICES IN *TAILGATE*

David Jellema, a guest at our March meeting, will have placed in his Potomac River Jazz Club's *Tailgate Ramblings* a notice about our monthly meetings. A musician himself, Dave is currently working in the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian.

SPOTLIGHT ON HELEN FRAZIER

Contributed by Ben Allen

Helen Watts Frazier, a long-time member of Chapter 90, is our member of the month. Helen's first office was as secretary during the presidency of Maurice Lawrence in 1959 and later of Juanita Hardwick, widow of Otto Hardwick. In the early 1960s, she worked with a group to entertain Duke, the orchestra, and other artists at the home of the late Judge Fauntleroy, a chapter member. At the time Duke and orchestra were sharing a bill with Ella Fitzgerald, Coleman Hawkins, and Oscar Peterson at the nearby Carter Barron.

Helen is always a reliable and willing appointee and volunteer for whatever activity or program the Society needs her. Consistently a member in good standing over the years, she seldom misses a meeting. As most members who have witnessed Helen's reaction to any Johnny Hodges solo know, she is an avid admirer of "Rabbit."

Helen is a Society treasure.

Ed. note: We asked Ben Allen to write this brief note about Helen. Thanks, Ben. Now who will spotlight another member for a future issue?

YOU WILL WANT TO BE THERE

In its bulletin, TDES [New York] announces that at its regular meeting on April 21, Krin Gabbard will speak on Duke's role in *Paris Blues* "in terms of the films characterization of jazz as a would be art form."

On April 29, TDES will celebrate Duke's 95th birth date with a concert by the Manhattan School of Music big band conducted by David Berger. Milt Grayson, whom critics praised for his singing with the Lincoln Center orchestra here recently, will be the vocalist. For a "donation" of \$15 you can attend this concert at St. Peter's Church.