

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

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

NEWSLETTER

Volume II, Number 5
MAY 1994

Theodore A. Shell, President
202-363-2446
Angela Grimmer, Secretary
202-546-7764

Theodore R. Hudson, Vice President
301-585-9204
Jack Towers, Treasurer
301-570-4236

Theodore R. Hudson, *Newsletter* Editor
Copyright © 1994 by the Duke Ellington Society, Chapter 90

HASSAN THE PRESENTER FOR JUNE 4 MEETING; ELECTION OF OFFICERS ALSO SCHEDULED

Veteran chapter member Rusty Hassan, host of a radio jazz program for some years and teacher of a course in jazz at American University, will provide the program for our June meeting. Rusty has not announced the nature of his program, but knowing him, we expect it to be highly informative as well as entertaining. You will want to be there!

Election of officers for 1994-95 will take place during a brief business segment of the meeting. At our May meeting, the Nominating Committee presented a slate of officers for for 1994-95: the current officers, for a second full term. Further nominations may be made from the floor. We might also hear a few words from members who attended "Ellington '94" in Stockholm.

The meeting will be at the usual place, **Omega House, 1232 Harvard Street, NW (corner of 13th and Harvard)** on **Saturday, June 4**, beginning promptly at **8:30 pm**. Of course, we welcome guests!

MUSEUM PRESENTS ELLINGTON YOUTH PROJECT AND FESTIVAL

More than 800 students from 15 District of Columbia public schools participated in the Third Annual Duke Ellington Youth Festival at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in April.

The festival—a culmination of the Duke Ellington Youth Project, which began in September 1993—opened with "Artistic Impressions of Ellington," a collection of paintings, drawings, sculptures and other student art now on display on the third floor of the Museum of American History.

On April 22, a series of performances showcased students performing Ellington's work through choirs, drama, dance, readings, and bands. In preparation for their participation, the students spent weeks studying the life and music of Ellington.

"The students have been participating in a multidimensional and interdisciplinary learning approach to the life and work of Duke Ellington," said Niani Kilkenny,

Continued on page 4 under "Youth Project"

THE DUKE IN BOSTON (Jazz Unlimited JUCD 2022)

Reviewed by Ben Pubols

Ted Shell's review of *Duke Ellington at Birdland 1952* (Jazz Unlimited JUCD 2036), in the February issue of the *Newsletter*, concluded ". . . we look forward to future releases from Denmark." The future is here, in the form of a new CD of Ellington airshots from Boston, recorded during engagements at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in July 1939 and the Southland Theatre Restaurant in January 1940. This is an excellent release, one of the few available CDs containing music "live" during this important period in Duke's career. As such, it provides the opportunity to hear Duke's band in a "natural" setting and to compare these performances with studio recordings of many of the same works from this time (e.g., an instrumental version of "Something to Live For," and such classics as "Rose of the Rio Grande," "The Gal from Joe's," and "Merry-Go-Round").

Lawrence Brown and Johnny Hodges are the soloists most frequently featured, and they perform at a consistently high level. Among the high spots for me are Harry Carney's lovely, lyrical solo on "Something to Live For," Brown's solo on "Little Posey" (introduced by the radio announcer as "Little Josie"), Hodges' solo on "My Last Goodbye," the Rex Stewart-Cootie Williams "chase" sequence on "Tootin' through the Roof," and the three Ivie Anderson vocals from the first date.

Sound quality is acceptable, but perhaps a little heavy in the bass. It is less open and more pinched on the Southland sides than on the Ritz-Carlton sides. Also, the balance between soloists and orchestra is better on the earlier date. By today's standards, the announcer leaves much to be desired, as he recites many of the clichés of the day. "Something to Live For" is introduced as "a little thing," Duke is "banging on the 88" in "Pussy Willow," and Lawrence Brown is heard "slush-pumping" on "Day In, Day Out."

But this is quibbling, especially when one has the opportunity to hear the classic Famous Orchestra in peak form. The CD is enhanced by our own Ted Hudson's excellent and informative liner notes, including a tribute to Ivie Anderson as warm and lyrical as was her singing.

RALPH ELLISON, 1914-1994: AN APPRECIATION

by Theodore R. Hudson

The death of Ralph Ellison, a major literary figure, is a severe loss as well to Ellington discourse. He did not write extensively about Duke, but what he wrote was unfailingly lucid, insightful, and ultimately profound. He understood the reciprocity between societal culture and art. In his nonfiction books *Shadow and Act* and *Going to the Territory* and in other works, while often using music as a referent, Ellison presents analyses of the cultural contexts in which art, not just so-called jazz, finds its genesis, expression, and influence. He placed his thoughts about Ellington in such contexts.

There is another Ellison-Ellington connection. The story goes that before a young Ellison became a recognized fictionist, having studied music at Tuskegee Institute, he played trumpet well enough to be invited by Duke to sit in for an orchestra rehearsal. It seems as if the rehearsal was called off, and Ellison never auditioned. What if he had? The literary world may well be thankful that things turned out as they did.

Best known as a novelist, Ellison was also an accomplished critic, short fictionist, and essayist. One of his more cited essays, "Homage to Duke Ellington on His Birthday" (published in the old *Washington Star* and reprinted in Mark Tucker's recent *Duke Ellington Reader*), was written on the occasion of the 70th birthday ceremony for Duke at the White House. He notes, ". . . perhaps it is inevitable that Duke Ellington should be shown the highest hospitality of the nation's First Family in its greatest house, and that through the courtesy of the chief of state all Americans may pay, symbolically, their respects to our greatest composer."

Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, is generally acknowledged to be among the most important in American literary history. Because it is so richly substantive and so technically virtuosic, it continues to "give," reading after reading. (Incidentally, in my opinion, the best of the book-length critical analyses of Ellison's life and art is *The Craft of Ralph Ellison* by TDES member Robert O'Meally.)

We are fortunate to have had in Ralph Waldo Ellison a perceptive, wise, and holistic illuminator of the art and person of Edward Kennedy Ellington.

NOTES ON OUR SOCIETY'S
"DRAMATIS FELIDAE"

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

Don and Jean McCathran recently entertained **Bill Flemmons** and **Helen Frazier** at their home in Washington Grove, Maryland. They spent the afternoon listening to Duke's music and reminiscing about all the meetings at their home in the old days. Helen enjoyed Billie Holiday's recording with background by Duke and, of course, her fantastic Johnny Hodges. The afternoon was completed with a lovely repast prepared by Jean. *Contributed by Helen Frazier*



Now you see him, now you don't. **Walter van de Leur** paid a short visit to the states last month, spending a couple of days or so researching in the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian before going to Pittsburgh for a few days to consult with Greg Morris.



Willis O. Webb, president of InfoTech of Memphis, Tennessee, knowing of the great interest **Vasco and Maxine Smith** have in Ellingtonia, sent in gift memberships for them. We are happy to welcome Vasco and Maxine. We thank Mr. Webb, and we hope that other executives will consider such gifts.

EUROPEAN CHAPTER 90 MEMBERS
WILL ATTEND "ELLINGTON '94"

In our last issue we named Washington area Chapter 90 members who have made arrangements to attend the 12th Annual Duke Ellington Conference, May 19-22 in Stockholm. We happily report that our two European members will also be there, Sjef Hoefsmit from Belgium and Walter van de Leur from The Netherlands. We expect that they will be accompanied, respectively, by their lovely wives, Milia and Ilona.

Chapter 90 presenters at the conference will be Sjef Hoefsmit, Teddy Hudson, Walter van de Leur, and Patricia Willard.

dusk

*at seven thirty
on certain nights
the sky resembles
a ducal orchestration.*

*heartwrenching magenta
ringed with lavender,*

*rooftops varied
as the orchestra's members.*

*their profiles deepen
as the sun drops like a tempo,*

*and you become the ballad
on which i fix my eyes.*

reuben jackson
4/23/94

NEW ELLINGTON PUBLICATION

Work is now underway for a new magazine, *The Dooji Review*, devoted entirely to Duke and his music. A pre-publication announcement states that "it's partly . . . scrapbook with all those long-forgotten clippings from newspapers and magazines (1927 and onwards)" and "partly a research journal with radio-logs, record reviews (yes, CDs too!) and other Ellington memorabilia and a photo-section!"

The publisher writes that the cost for four-issues, airmailed, is US \$15 payable in bank notes or international postal money orders — but not by personal checks. Subscriptions should be sent to Carl Hällström / Liljefors Gata 85 / S-754 29 Uppsala / Sweden.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
Picnic, July 16, at the Shells', Lake Caroline!

REMINISCING IN TEMPO AT MAY MEETING: FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE RECALLED

Contributed by Angela Grimmer

Enthusiastic response to the "Members Choice Small Groups" program carried the May meeting well past the usual ending time. Members finally drifted away one by one, complaining about loss of beauty sleep or imminent early morning church services. A great variety of choices of varying familiarity were heard.

One terrific highlight was a duet by Brooks Kerr and George Duvivier, recorded 11 years ago to the day and the hour in the same room of Omega House. The occasion of the recording was an evening's entertainment during the first annual Duke Ellington International Conference.

At the meeting, Jack Dennis, chairman of the Nominating Committee, submitted a slate of nominees: president, Ted Shell; vice-president, Teddy Hudson; secretary, Angela Grimmer; treasurer, Jack Towers. Elections will be held at the regular meeting in June.

The date of **Saturday, July 16** was chosen for our annual picnic hosted by Ted and Marian Shell at Lake Caroline.

TAILGATE RAMBLINGS CELEBRATES DUKE'S 95TH

Potomac River Jazz Club's April issue of *Tailgate Ramblings* has three pieces in recognition of Ellington's 95th birthday. One is a news article about happenings in observation of the event, another a delightful reminiscence by Maury Cagle about Duke's "cool professionalism" in continuing a concert after being injured by a bad fall during intermission, and the third a sketch by David Jellema about our Chapter and its activities. [David was a guest at our March meeting; we hope he will become a regular.]

"TIME'S A-WASTIN'"? NO WAY.

(Thanks to Jack Towers for sharing this anecdote.)

During intermission the night that Jack Towers and Dick Burris recorded Duke at Fargo, Jack asked Duke how he had managed to time unarranged "Plucked Again" and "The Blues" so accurately for 10-inch, 78-rpm records. He pulled up his sleeve and showed Jack a novelty timer wrist watch.

Duke then related that he put the watch up on the piano before him, and he and Blanton swung away. In each instance, Duke kept an eye on the watch and when their time was just about up, eye still on the watch, he fingered a precisely timed ending for the piece.

YOUTH PROJECT

(Continued from page 1)

director of the museum's Program in African American Culture. "They have learned that one of the most important American composers of this century was someone born and nurtured in the Washington, D.C. African American community."

The Project, a partnership between the Museum of American History and the Washington public schools, has as major components an educational kit, workshops for teachers, and the annual festival. "The District of Columbia public schools have served as a national role model for other school districts participating in similar programs," adds Kilkenny.

The project and festival were presented by the museum's Program in African American Culture and supported in part with funding from the Duke Ellington Collection, which is housed in the Archives Center.

Ed. note: Don't miss the artwork exhibit at the National Museum of American History. You will be impressed by how creatively and sensitively these students portray Ellingtonia.