

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90
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NEWSLETTER

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Undaunted by Hurricane's Aftermath, Picnickers Have Fun

Reported by Jim Lewis

Hurricane Fran, which arrived the day before, did not spoil an Ellington picnic day that was one of the most pleasant we've had in many years. Both the temperature and humidity were ideally comfortable. Our president and host Ted Shell stated that Fran had caused the water to rise to around a foot above normal, but not to the extent to cause damage to their deck; by picnic time it had receded to just about three inches above normal.

Marian's picnic servings were superb as usual, with a hint of vegetarianism, but there was plenty of barbecued ribs and chicken for all. Guests brought other delectables.

Members and guests included Ben Allen, Rodney Cory, Dave Cummings, Grace Graye, Helen Frazier, Katherine Freeman, Angela and Mac Grimmer, Ted Hudson, Annette and Jim Lewis, Ben and Lillian Pubols, and Delores Thompson. Ben and Lillian, while not going all the way across Lake Caroline and back, proved themselves excellent swimmers, as did Dave. Our president, Ted, took those who wished on a cruise around the beautiful lake. Everyone enjoyed the food, music (guess whose), setting, and companionship.

Jim Schneller Injured in Accident


Reported by Jack Dennis

Chapter member Jim Schneller suffered severe head injuries in an automobile accident in May. After stays in two hospitals in the area, he was transferred recently to a treatment facility in Baltimore. Jim has been in a coma since the accident. We hope for his complete recovery.

Fargo Echoes for November Meeting

by Mac Grimmer, Program Director

Our November meeting will be at Jack Tower's house in the Maryland suburbs. We will have a chance to hear Jack's elaborate sound equipment at work, and we will have a rare chance to hear some of the Fargo concert played from the original acetates—made this month 56 years ago. Jack also promises us a few surprises of Ellington rarities and goodies.

The address is **1200 Tucker Lane, Ashton**. A detailed map is enclosed, and the meeting starts at **8 o'clock** , **Saturday, November 2**.

Chapter 90 to Host "Ellington '99" International Conference

by Ben Pubols, "Ellington '99" Coordinator

As we all know, Duke was born right here in Washington, DC on April 29, 1899. To commemorate the Centennial of his birth, Chapter 90 will sponsor the 1999 International Ellington Study Group Conference.

As a first step toward this end, an Organizing Committee consisting of Ben Pubols, Pat Braxton, Ted Hudson, and Bob Reny has been established.

Based on your responses to the questionnaire we circulated over the summer, we are now in the process of organizing a timetable and matching responsibilities to your stated interests. We hope to hold the conference during the week encompassing April 29 and at a venue near Duke's birthplace on Ward Place. We're just getting started, so stay tuned. Meanwhile, contact any of the four of us with your thoughts or suggestions.

Ben: The Music of Ben Webster: A Discography

Comp. Peter Langhorn and Thorbjørn Sjøgren. Copenhagen, Denmark: Jazzmedia ApS, 1996. viii, 288 pp.

***Ellingtonia: The Recorded Music of Duke Ellington and His Sidemen*, 4th Edition**

Comp. W. E. Timner. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996. xxv, 608 pp.

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

Ellington-Strayhorn aficionados have had several first-rate reference works for their research and private use, beginning with Benny Åslund's 1954 *The "Wax Works" of Duke Ellington* and including Timner's previous editions. They will welcome these two new works.

The Ben Webster book covers 42 years of recordings on which he played, from 1931 to several weeks before he died in 1973, and a listing of him in films, exclusive of those made for television. Each recording entry gives the name of bandleader or band, personnel, date and place, matrix and take numbers, title and length of each tune, and label and its catalogue number. Alternate takes, breakdowns, false starts, and incomplete performances are noted, and multiple releases from the same recording session, with variations if any, are indicated.

In separate groupings, the compilers give what they consider to be Ben's "most important" LPs and CDs. Unfortunately for those who would prefer it the other way around, these lists are arranged according to label rather than title. Finally, there are two indexes, one of musicians and the other of titles. One would wish for an index of album, LP, and CD titles as well.

The book is enhanced by several drawings and a number of photographs, including an evocative one of Coleman Hawkins and Ben, axes in hand, staring at each other—Hawk appearing a tad apprehensive and Ben with what could be a mixture of glare and awe. And couldn't our man "Frog" wear a hat!

According to Timner, he did not attempt a discography, his intention being to provide a one-volume reference work. Still, as Dan Morgenstern notes in the foreword to Timner's latest edition, it is "not only much enlarged and thoroughly revised, but also easier to use, with its expanded indexes and improved typography." The body of the book is its chronology, beginning with a 26 July 1923 test recording of Snowden's Novelty Orchestra and ending with the 20 March 1974 appearance at Northern Illinois University's Central Ballroom (Timner knows of no recording of the concert two days later at Sturgis, MI.) A cursory comparison of the titles in this and the third edition will testify to the increased inclusiveness of this new one. The listings of recorded music include studio sessions, sound tracks, concerts, dances, television appearances, private recordings, and unreleased music. Recordings by various "Ellingtonian" groups are listed separately. Each entry provides date, place, personnel, tunes, and comments as deemed necessary.

Users will find other helpful data and lists in Timner. Among data are pseudonyms as well as known names, names under which Ellington bands recorded, bands with which Ellingtonians recorded; among the lists are names under which Ellington bands have recorded, soloists with whom they recorded, bands with which Ellingtonians recorded, and record labels. Aids at the end of the book include title, musician, and general indexes; a chronological attendance chart; and a miscellaneous "Addenda" of materials not in other sections. There is no place index.

Timner graciously acknowledges his use of works by Åslund, Nielsen, Rust, and Stratemann (but strangely, not Massagli, Pusateri, and Volontò's *DESOR*). He acknowledges help by Steven Lasker, Charles Plank, Robert Rickles, Jerry Valbum, and Chapter member Sjeif Hoefsmitt.

As is the case with reference works of such scope and detail, usage will reveal critical inaccuracies, if any in both of these books. The really important thing is that serious Ellington-Strayhorn enthusiasts will find both valuable. We thank Langhorn and Sjøgren and Timner for their respective monumental labors of love.

Quotation of the Month

"Fear God, love your parents and never talk during a Lawrence Brown solo" was how someone at the funeral of the great trombone player described the upbringing his father gave him, and I have always regarded the speaker as very astute in his choice of parents. — Andrew Dunn in "Call Me an Ellingtonian," Blue Light, July 1996, p. 17.

Net Effect

As many are discovering, the internet can be a source of evocative views about Ellingtonia. Here are some recent excerpts:

Duke was a very talented composer and musician. Billy, however, was gifted....Duke was disciplined and organized because that is how you cure and nurture a great talent. On the other hand, music came to Billy, he didn't have to go to it. – uaclarb@uxa.ecn.bgu.edu (Alyce Claerbaut, one of Billy's nieces)

I'm not sure the distinction...bears much scrutiny. After all, if Ellington wasn't gifted, then we don't need the term in the English vocabulary. – macharc@nicom.com (Chapter member Peter MacHare)

What a waste of time to put an emphasis on such trivialities...! Both Duke and Billy were extremely gifted and talented musicians. – tavecchil@rulfsw.fsw.LeidenUniv.nl (Louis Tavecchio)

...my only problem...lies in the distinction between gifted and talented and the conclusion you seem to draw that Duke was not gifted--at least I read it that way. Surely both men were amazingly gifted in music--their gifts were different and it seems to me they were aware of that themselves. – mroeder@gpu.srv.ualberta.ca (Michael Roeder)

Perhaps I should elaborate....The distinction does in no way affect the output or the quality of work, it merely describes the mechanism....The only reason I mentioned this was to shed light on how differently Duke and Billy approached writing music and why. It was not to make a distinction in the quality of their output, which was equally great. (Alyce Claerbaut)

Stayhorn Biographer Appears Locally

Reported by Jack Dennis

David Hajdu was in Washington in July for several days promoting his book, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn*. On July 9 he was interviewed on Earnest White's show "Cross Talk." Next day he was at a Borders store for a book-signing session. July 11 he was interviewed on Derck McGinty's WAMU-FM show. In these sessions, Mr. Hajdu covered some highlights of his book and answered audience's questions. He was interviewed by Chapter member Rusty Hassan at the opening session of the Washington Arts Club in October.

Ed. note: Until November 15, Lush Life is offered by TDES (PO Box 31, Church Street Station, NY, NY 10008-0031) at special prices: book-\$18, CD-\$8.75, both-\$25, all plus shipping.

Annie R. Sacre

by Theodore A. Shell

We shall not soon forget the lady with the comely face with its built-in smile and the jocular voice who was one of our earliest members. Annie Ruth Sacre recently died suddenly during a short illness. She had a constantly pleasant greeting whenever she spoke. One could hardly ever hear her utter an unkind word or present anything but a kind and pleasant expression.

Annie came to Washington at an early age, attended the public schools, graduated from Dunbar High School, and entered the work force as a dental assistant. In 1945, she started working for the Government Printing Office, a position she held until retiring in 1993.

Again, we will miss that voice, that pleasant expression, and that jocular laughter.

Two European CDs Now Have Domestic Distributors

The Duke in Boston, produced in Denmark by Jazz Unlimited (JUCD 2022), is available through City Hall Records of San Francisco. *Portrait of a Silk Thread: Newly Discovered Works of Billy Strayhorn* by the Dutch Jazz Orchestra is now being distributed by Kokopelli Records (Koko 1310). It has already sold 10,000 copies in the United States.

You will recall that Chapter member Walter van de Leur discovered the previously unknown Strayhorn compositions, prepared performance scores of them, and wrote the accompanying notes for the Dutch orchestra's CD, while Ted Hudson wrote the accompanying notes for the Danish release.

Prexy-Donated Ellingtonia Archived

The Theodore Shell Collection of Duke Ellington Ephemera, 1933-1990, which he donated to the Smithsonian, is catalogued and ready for researchers. It includes autographs, concert programs, correspondence, and broadcast transcripts. Among holdings of particular interest are a pencil-sketched portrait of Duke, biographical notes, hand-illustrated poems by African-Americans, broadcast transcriptions, and possible family photos documenting the life of one-time Ellington public relations agent Jerome O. "Jerry" Rhea, a Washingtonian.

"Dramatis Felidae"

(To Use Our Man's Term in MIMM)

About the Cats and Kittens in Our Chapter

As we write this, **Jack Dennis** is recovering from surgery in Suburban Hospital. Hurry back, Jack. ♪♪ In the remote possibility that you don't have a copy, **John Hasse's** *Beyond Category* is being offered by Daedalus Books for \$9.95. ♪♪ The current TDES newsletter notes that **Patricia Willard** has pointed out that *Man With Four Sides*, not *A Man...*, is the correct title for that creation by Duke. For other news about Patricia, see the article in the next column on Library of Congress film programs. ♪♪ A summary of **Ben Pubol's** report on "Ellington '96" for our *Newsletter* leads the article "Bouquets and brickbats for Ellington '96" in the Toronto Chapter's October publication. **Dennis Dimmer** and **Jack and Rhoda Towers** are quoted in the same article. ♪♪ A "perceptive letter" by **Lois Moody** is the subject of commentary in the "Members' Corner" feature of the current TDES newsletter. ♪♪ **Reuben Jackson** wrote the program notes for the Miles Davis-Gil Evans, J.J. Johnson, and Michel Legrand concert by the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra in October. He also wrote the *Washington Post's* review of the collected reissue of Evans-Davis music. ♪♪

Calendar

Sat., November 2 - Monthly Meeting

November 16-December 28 - Small format version of *Beyond Category* exhibit, public libraries in Manalapan, NJ and Wichita, KS

Mon., Nov. 4 - *Duke Ellington-Love You Madly* and *Duke Ellington at the Cote D'Azur* films, Library of Congress, 7 pm

Thurs. Nov. 14 - Monterey Jazz Festival Tenth

Hassan Illustrates Ellington's World

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Rusty Hassan's program, "Ellington in Context," opened our new season in October. Rusty's broad knowledge of the history of jazz resulted in one of our most fascinating evenings, a look at Duke and his relationship to his contemporaries. As an arranger/composer, extending the ideas of Jelly Roll Morton and other early band leaders, he incorporated the solo capabilities of his band members, a development made necessary by the dominance of the first great soloist in jazz, Louis Armstrong. Ellington's piano was also put in context, coming out of the early stride school, and extending to his later work, for instance the trio recording with Roach and Mingus, far away from the stride tradition. Betty Roche's scat vocal on "A-Train" was one of the reflections of the bop influence on the band, and there was influence in other directions, as Duke's train songs filtered down to the pop world as "Night Train" and perhaps influenced such things as Louis Jordan's "Choo Choo Ch-Boogie." Rusty filled the evening with wonderful musical choices as he demonstrated the interaction of Ellington with his musical contemporaries.

Found in the Smithsonian's Ellington Collection...

...on Hotel Washington stationery, undated, in Duke's hand: "*God is Beyond Gender.*"

Duke in Library of Congress Film Series

Reported by Mac Grimmer

The Library of Congress' Jazz Film Series, curated by Larry Appelbaum, includes an evening of Duke Ellington on Monday