

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

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NEWSLETTER

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Looking to "Ellington '97"

Ed note: We recently received this press release via the internet:

We [Conference sponsors] are very pleased to announce details of the concerts at Ellington 97. The following bands and artists are scheduled to appear:

- * The City of Leeds College of Music Duke Ellington Repertory Orchestra
- * Brian Priestley Septet
- * Dave Newton and Alan Barnes
- * Stan Tracy
- * The Echoes of Ellington Orchestra - every musician taking care of the chair he's sitting in!
- * Alumni of the Duke Ellington Orchestra - name(s) yet to be confirmed.

IN ADDITION, KAY DAVIS has agreed to join us for the daytime programme.

Lush Life Nominated for Award

David Hajdu's biography of Billy Strayhorn, *Lush Life*, has been nominated for a National Book Critics' Circle Award.

Anderson Kin Visit Archives

Contributed by Annie Kuebler

The staff of the Duke Ellington Collection received a surprise visit in February from Andrew Brazington and John Coffey, nephew and brother-in-law of notable Ellington band member William "Cat" Anderson. The family was excited to see some of Cat's compositions and parts in the Ellington Collection, and the staff was thrilled to hear their personal reminiscences of Cat. Andrew lives in Dallas, TX where he and his wife run an ethnic textile printing company. John is a retired professor who taught University of Maryland courses overseas. A Washington resident, he attended our February Ellington Society meeting.

Ted and Marion Shell to Host March Meeting

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

Our President and First Lady, Ted and Marion Shell, have graciously offered to host our March meeting, and promised once again to present another evening of rare videos, the latest laser discs from Japan. By now this has become an annual event, and is one of the program highlights of our year. Come out, see as well as hear unforgettable performances by the Ellington band on an oversized screen and superb audio system.

The address is **4326 Westover Place, NW** (off the south side of Massachusetts Avenue, one block east of Ward Circle, which is near American University). The show starts promptly at **8:00 pm on Saturday, March 1**, and if anyone needs further information or directions, Ted's phone number is **202-363-2446**. You won't want to miss a minute of this rare treat. Come, and bring a friend!

Ellington - A Real Class Act

An 8-session course on Duke, covering his music from the earliest to the sacred concerts, is being taught by Chapter member Rusty Hassan. Offered under the continuing education program at Georgetown University and open to the public, the class meets Wednesdays, 8-9:30 pm, February 5-April 2. At our last meeting, Rusty invited Chapter members to drop by.

ELLINGTON '97
MAY 22-26  **LEEDS ENGLAND**
11 Grosvenor Mount Leeds LS6 2DX England
Telephone / Fax: +44 (0)113 275 9633

Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn by David Hajdu

New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996.

Review by Sjef Hoefsmit

Strayhorn has been given quite some publicity lately. Both because of this biography as well as because of the conference in Pittsburgh and the famous CD with unissued compositions.

Many of the reviews I saw were disturbing.

I tried to persuade myself that when these reviews were right and Duke had treated Billy wrong, his music would still be the same great joy in my life. But I couldn't help it to feel myself upset and I started to collect arguments for Duke's defence.

I felt completely relieved after having read David Hajdu's book for the first time. Probably eager to sell more printed paper, some newspapers published reviews in which facts are brought forward in such a combination that the resulting suggestion is simply ridiculous. Let me give you only this example, found in the most prestigious Dutch newspaper (the translation is by me):

"Billy felt himself being neglected. Ellington swept in all the credits, he even received the highest American tributes. Slowly but steadily Strayhorn drank himself to death."

I was really worried that David Hajdu's book would have given any justification for such [allegations], but this is not the case. On the contrary, I can throw away my notes. All the arguments are in David's book! I have read it now three times.

David Hajdu's book gives us an exemplary unbiased view on Billy Strayhorn's musical career and on his personal life.

The author worked 10 years to collect the facts he needed to write this book. He was the first who went through Billy's papers, after Billy died. He did 500 interviews. He found the man who introduced Billy to Duke: George Greenlee, never before interviewed! He also found the only survivor of the Mad Hatters, Billy's combo in Pittsburgh: Jerry Eisner.

The story of his research as told by himself in *Jazziz* from September is almost as intriguing as the book itself. Thank you, Walter van de Leur, for sending me a copy!

I was most impressed by David Hajdu's discrete criticism on the lyrics of *Lush Life* (page 36). It takes courage to do so on Billy's most acclaimed song, which Ellington said that he couldn't play because it was too good.

It gives me the guts to come also forward with a few remarks after having stated first that this book is in my opinion a masterpiece in itself. It is not only the first Strayhorn biography, it is also a superb Ellington biography. Duke is clearly recognizable when he manages to disturb the plans for the collaboration of Billy with Luther Henderson (page 142). And what can be more Dukish than to work close together with someone without having the slightest agreement about the conditions or the consequences?

Here are first some discographical remarks:

The correct sequence of the Reprise sessions in 1963, starting on page 219, is as follows: The violin session is from 22Feb, Beatrice Benjamin recorded under Duke's direction on 24/25Feb and Alice Babs started her recordings on 28Feb. In Hajdu's book the sequence is Alice-Beatrice-violins.

Beatrice in *Downbeat* of 21Nov63: Duke played in "Solitude" (*DEMS* 88/4-3). Hajdu, quoting Svend Asmussen (page 220): Billy played "Solitude."

There were two takes made of "Solitude," not one as claimed on page 220. Take one has 1½ choruses and is 4:40 long. Take two has one chorus and is 3:26 long. Take two is "issued" on Azure CA-3 (*DEMS* 85/3-14) and broadcast through Danish Radio on 13Apr92.

On page 229, Billy left the show *My People* to join the 28Aug63 March on Washington. He arrived two days earlier to help in the preparations. This makes us question the correct date of the third recording session for *My People*, considered to be 27 Aug, when Billy was undoubtedly present. But what about 26Aug, the last Monday in August, being reserved for the Copasetics Show in NYC (page 230)?

I know that these are trivial remarks. I have one serious remark: In many interviews members of the orchestra, including Billy and Duke,

(Continued on page 3 under Lush Life)

Short Sheets...

- ♪ A book by John Franceshina on Duke's theater endeavors is reportedly in the works.
- ♪ *Play On!*, with Ellington/Strayhorn music, Luther Henderson arrangements, and Mercedes Ellington choreography, is scheduled to open at New York's Brooks Atkinson Theatre on March 20.
- ♪ Dedication of the Ellington Memorial in NYC is being planned for this spring.
- ♪ David McNeill is a new Behind-the-Scenes Volunteer working on the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian.
- ♪ An information leaflet and booking form for "Ellington '97" are available via Peter MacHare's "Ellington Panorama" website: <http://www.nicom.com/~machare/leeds/htm>.
- ♪ The Toronto Chapter is preparing order forms for tapes of "Ellington '96" sessions.

All Around Duke's Place

The U Street area where, incidentally, Ellington grew up is being proposed for designation as an official historic district. It would be bordered by S Street and Florida Avenue, 5th and 13th Streets, all in NW, and would include such former and still standing places as the Howard and other theaters, Murray's Casino, True Reformer's Hall, Crystal Caverns, Frank Holliday's poolroom. (One may wonder why the boundaries do not extend to 16th Street, thereby encompassing Club Bengasi, Republic Gardens, and other sites significant in the history of America's classic music in Washington.)

A Dedication to Us, Yes Us, on the Duke Ellington Panorama Web Site!

In several previous issues we have mentioned the praise that Chapter member Peter MacHare's Ellington internet site has justifiably earned [machare@nicom.com]. While primarily a guide to Ellingtonia on compact disc, among its other attractions are news, timely information, indexes, and links to other pages of interest to Ellington-Strayhorn enthusiasts. But we hadn't mentioned his site's dedication, which reads:

I would like to dedicate these Ellington pages to the members of the Washington, D.C. Chapter of The Duke Ellington Society. I attended the first meeting . . . in November, 1995. The members were considering moving to new quarters for their monthly meetings, from a fraternity house to a church. They had been in the same place for decades. Members began to wax eloquently about the great times they had and all the musicians who had played in that fraternity house. One member even had to stand up and touch the piano. "I remember that Duke Ellington himself played this piano for us," he said. I remember thinking to myself, "There's no way they can leave this place." When the President opened the matter to debate, there was only one question: "Can we still have happy hour at the Church? They will let us drink, won't they?" When that question was answered in the affirmative, the membership unanimously voted to move their monthly meetings to the Church. So much for sentimentality. I knew I had fallen in with a good group."

Lush Life (Continued from page 2)

have admitted that Duke would often make considerable modifications in the compositions or arrangements, made by himself or by others. I have always believed that this was Duke's forte: what was already rather good, even very good, became excellent after Duke's interference. I thought that Billy called this "the Ellington effect." It is just this "effect" that I missed in the beautiful Strayhorn compositions on the CD *Portrait of a Silk Thread* and [about] which I missed any reference in *Lush Life*.

I can not urge DEMS members enough to read this excellent biography. It contains a wealth of "fresh" information and it is extremely well written.

You can accept the invitation from TDES to order your copy for a greatly reduced price. . . .
Ed note: This review by Sjef Hoefsmit, one of our Chapter members residing in Europe, first appeared in the DEMS Bulletin 96/1. We thank Sjef and DEMS for permission to publish it here.

"Dramatis Felidae"

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

About the Cats and Kittens in Our Chapter

We happily report that **Ben Allen** is recovering from a bout with pneumonia. He became ill in December, but we didn't know it at the time, hence no notice in our last issue. ♪ ♪ Rusty Hassan presided at a panel discussion at the recent Jazz Music Educators conference in Chicago. ♪ ♪ We extend condolences to **Don McCathran** and his family. **Bill Flemmons** reports that Don lost his son-in-law, husband of daughter Joan. Also, Don's son Tom, who lives in Florida, has not been well. ♪ ♪ In their monthly publication TDES cites **Annie Kuebler** for compiling, from the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian, drafts of scripts and portions of the music for its production of Duke's *Man with Four Sides*. ♪ ♪ **Larry Appelbaum** did the transfers, editing, and masters for the 2-CD *Ellington: The Great Chicago Concerts*, recorded at the Civic Opera House in 1946 by John Steiner. ♪ ♪ **Helen Frazier** continues to improve, hopes to be at our next meeting.

Quotation of the Month

If the rhythm section ain't making it, go for yourself. -- Ben Webster, as quoted by Nat Henthoff in *Listen to the Stories*.

Calendar

Sat., March 1 - Regular Monthly Meeting

Feb. 22 - *Duke Ellington-Reminiscing in Tempo* documentary, A&E cable television, 10 pm-midnight

Feb. 6-March 20 - "Beyond Category" Library Exhibit, Tampa, Florida and Boise, Idaho

April 3-May 15 - "Beyond Category" Library Exhibit, Charleston, SC and Tacoma, WA

May 22-26 - "Ellington '97," Leeds, England

Chapter 90 Board of Directors

Patricia Braxton	Helen Frazier
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Rusty Hassan	Theodore Hudson
Ben Pubols	Bob Reny
Theodore Shell	Jack Towers
Patricia Willard	

Potpourri of Ellingtonia Marked February Meeting

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

An interesting and varied selection of Ellingtonia, spanning the complete range from the 20s to the 70s, was the result of our February member's choice meeting. "Sitting In," by musicians not considered Ellingtonians who at some point played, and recorded with the band (or band members), was the theme of the evening, and everyone had their own favorites, from moldy figs to be-boppers.

One of the highlights, one that most of us had never heard before, was Ted Shell's selections from his tape of a Madison Square Garden tribute to Ellington. B.B. King and Ray Charles joined forces for a blues number, before Charles joined Wild Bill Davis and the Ellington band for "Satin Doll." Then Duke introduced Louis Armstrong, who sang "Hello Dolly" with the band. Quite a night! And this was just a brief excerpt. Maybe someday we'll hear the complete concert!

All in all, the varied selections presented by national and international members gave us an evening of delightful surprises.

You Can Contribute to "Ellington '97"

by Elaine Norsworthy, Conference Committee

You can contribute to the PIANO IN THE FOREGROUND feature and EXHIBITION PROGRAMME at any time. Offers of contributions to the CATHEDRAL CELEBRATION may be made up to 20TH APRIL. Contact:

Ellington 97
11 Grosvenor Mount
Leeds LS6 2DX
United Kingdom.

Reminders

☞ Annual dues are for the calendar year: \$30, single; \$50, couple; \$20, first-time-ever; and \$5, student.

☞ Please promptly complete and return the "Ellington Connection" form that is inserted in this month's issue.