

# Ellingtonia



Newsletter of the Washington, D.C.

## Duke Ellington Society

Volume V, Number 8

NOVEMBER 1997

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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P.O. Box 15591 . Washington, D.C. 20003-0787

### **Ellington Youth Project Begins School Year with Presentation by Jack Towers** by Luvenia George

The Teachers Workshop component of the Duke Ellington Youth Project met September 19-20 in the Smithsonian's Carmichael Auditorium. Participants were given new materials and information, and the focus of the year's study in the Ellington curriculum was discussed.

Highlight of the Workshop was the Saturday morning presentation by Jack Towers, titled "Edward, You Are Blessed." Jack began: "One of [Ellington's] great talents . . . a key to his great accomplishments, was his ability to see potential greatness in the musicians he chose for his band, musicians he inspired to perform beyond their accomplishments up to the time they joined the band, and musicians who returned the favor by inspiring Duke on many of his compositions." He then played examples of outstanding musicians in the band in the 1930s and early 1940s, a time when, as he pointed out, "...most of the Ellington followers feel that his band was the strongest, and his compositions were the greatest."

Some of the music Jack demonstrated in his inimitable way is as follows:

1) The Trombones: the growl, "wa-wa" and "ya-ya" of Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton in "Three Cent Stomp"; Juan Tizol on the opening of his "Caravan"; Lawrence Brown in a muted bit on "Do Nothing 'Till You Hear From Me." We were blown away when Jack played one of the most brilliant trombone tour-de-forces ever, the trio performing "Braggin' in Brass."

2) The Trumpets: Jack turned next to the trumpets, and we heard "Mood Indigo" with Arthur Whetsol; "Concerto for Cootie" with Cootie Williams playing; and "Subtle Lament," a number that showed how beautifully the brass and reed sections worked together, with trumpeter Rex (Continued on page 3 under "Youth Project")

### **November Program:**

#### **Reuben's Sandwich**

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

Reuben Jackson has worked up a unique program for our November meeting. On one side is Duke Ellington, and on the other Jimi Hendrix, and Reuben is in the middle! He promises to—somehow—reconcile the two musical giants, speculating on what might have happened if they had worked together, as Duke occasionally did with others of different musical persuasions. Reprise Records, looking for new directions, actually arranged a meeting between the two, in 1970, but what was proposed, we just don't know. Reuben is intrigued by the possibilities, and the personal as well as musical parallels between them—and he'll tell us all about it in our November program.

Reuben is a member of Smithsonian Archives Center staff and editor of their Ellington newsletter, *Daybreak Express*, as well as a poet and writer. He is the author of many reviews and articles in the *City Paper* and *Washington Post*, as well as *Jazz Times* and other publications.

The time is 8 pm, Saturday, November 1, at our regular meeting place, Grace Lutheran Church, at the corner of 16th & Varnum Streets, NW.

It promises to be a fun evening—don't miss Reuben's Sandwich!

#### **Library Program Engenders Interest**

Prepared by Deborra Richardson, "Duke Ellington: A Lifetime of Creativity" engaged an appreciative audience at the M.L. King Library on September 23. The evening included discussion by Deborra and videos, slides, and music/audio clips from the Smithsonian's Ellington Archives—all followed by a lively question-answer period. A special feature was analysis by Ben Pubols of chronological versions and permutations of "Mood Indigo," with selected audio samples.

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***The Duke Ellington Primer*** by Dempsey A. Travis

Chicago: Urban Research Press, 1996

Reviewed by Marion M. Shell

This book is quite an anomaly. First, its use of the word primer might be confusing. Webster describes primer as a small book for teaching children to read, or primer as a material for priming a surface of a pump. The book satisfies neither definition.

It must be a difficult task to write a biography of a person about whom a least ten biographies have already been published. There can be little material which has not already been discovered. Be that as it may, this book is a conglomeration of incidents, persons and occurrences, not in chronological sequence, some of which are irrelevant to the story of Ellington. Some of the persons referred to had little to contribute to Ellington's successes and were peripherally involved with his life. Many of the photographs are of little meaning in such a treatise. Chapters are devoted to persons who were not associated with the Duke nearly as long as others who are barely mentioned who contributed much more to the Ellington heritage and over a longer period of time.

Somehow the book misses the spirit of the Duke. It is a rather short work of only 202 pages, but a considerable portion is taken up with 16 pages of bibliography, 17 pages for an index, and a 20 page list of the titles of songs written by Ellington. If one wishes to have a complete selection of the biographies about Ellington, then *The Duke Ellington Primer* should be in their library. If not, maybe the world did not need another Ellington biography.

***Duke Ellington Education Kit***

by the National Museum of American History / Smithsonian Institution

Palo Alto, CA: Dale Seymour Publications, 1997

Reviewed by Geneva B. Hudson

The handsomely packaged *Duke Ellington Education Kit* is both a **unique** and **excellent** resource for teaching, studying, and celebrating the life and times of Duke Ellington and his musical innovations and accomplishments. It is a complete curriculum that includes: a Teacher's Resource Guide; two music cassettes of noted selections by Scott Joplin, Lucie E. Campbell, James P. Johnson, and W.C. Handy as well as Ellington; a set of transparencies for fourteen pieces of art; a set of twelve photographic prints of Ellington; and copies of two newspapers from 1919, the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Bee*, that offer two points of view on the race riot in Washington, DC that year.

Designed for use from middle school through college, the kit provides teachers much flexibility for use in various disciplines. Modeled after the curriculum of the annual Duke Ellington Youth Project introduced here in DC public schools seven years ago, it draws heavily from materials in the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian.

Organized into units of study that chronicle Ellington's life, the kit explores themes that touch upon art, history, music, drama, creative writing, and literature. This educational resource provides teachers with steps that make it easy for them to present ideas and engage students to think critically, explore ideas, and express their viewpoints as they interpret the material. The Teacher Resource Book is organized much like Ellington's biography, *Music Is My Mistress*, opening with a Prologue followed by eight sections called Acts. The first introduces Ellington, his family, and his life in Washington during the early 1900s; subsequent Acts introduce different stages of his life and his musical evolution. Each stage is interwoven with significant social, cultural, and political events of the time. Examples are given of how art, drama, dance, and literature impacted upon Ellington and how he was able, with his music, to reach the public through varied art forms.

The *Duke Ellington Education Kit* serves as a special tribute to a artist who was truly "Beyond Category." It will make Ellington, his life, the times in which he lived, and most of all, his music, come alive for young people wherever it is used. Commendations are due everyone who had a part in making this wonderful teaching guide possible, especially our own Luvenia George, Coordinator of the Duke Ellington Youth Project, who played a significant role in bringing the kit to fruition.

**Youth Project** *(Continued from page 1)*

Stewart joined by clarinetist Barney Bigard.

3) The Reeds: Jack noted that Duke had a stellar reed section from the late 1920s on, and he demonstrated with Otto Hardwick and Harry Carney on "I Should Care," the incomparable Johnny Hodges in "Whispering Grass," and Ben Webster soloing on "All Too Soon."

There were other fabulous examples, so expertly presented that Jack's 45 minutes on stage went all too fast. Importantly, he had provided a complete annotation of and a cassette tape of each of these examples. Copies, complete with recording information, had been prepared for each Workshop participant.

Jack furnished an exciting update for our Ellington Youth Project Curriculum, and the teachers were "blessed" to have access to his expertise!

The core of the Curriculum is material in the Ellington Archives at the National Museum of American History. Deborra Richardson, archivist, took the teachers on a tour of the Archives, where they inspected some duplicate materials that will be available for use by their students.

One each of the award-winning Duke Ellington Education Kits was made available to the 26 schools currently in the Project by Nancy McCoy, Supervisory Education Specialist, Education and Visitor Services, National Museum of American History. Ms. McCoy supports the Project as an example of a valuable Smithsonian education outreach program. She was an advisor on the Kit, which was adapted from the Duke Ellington Youth Project Curriculum, researched and developed by Luvenia A. George and Maria Marable of the Smithsonian Office of Education.

In spite of a three-week delay in DC schools opening this year, the Ellington Youth Project is off to a good start in its seventh year as an Educational Outreach Collaborate between DC Public Schools and the Smithsonian Institution.

Due in large part to the inability of the school system to provide financial support for the last few years, we presently lack funds for in-school activities and the annual Festival in April. Any leads and suggestions from Ellington Society members on possible funding sources will be appreciated greatly. Niani Kilkenny is Director of the Smithsonian's Program in African American Culture, at 202-357-4176, fax 202-786-2973. Luvenia A. George is Coordinator of the Duke Ellington Youth Project.

**5. cotton**

by Brian Gilmore

- east st. louis toodle-oo -

*out of the swamp,  
out of the fields, on the hot dusty roads,  
stumbling towards  
the train headed uptown.  
them wiseguys got steady work,  
tuxedos, tails, shiny shoes, swinging stomps and  
vamps out of vaudeville,  
the prettiest high yellow chorus girls  
tempt the tans in gowns and risque threads,  
exotic aura of far away places,  
the wiseguys don't like the kid at first,  
they can't fight off his charm,  
must be that "jungle" noise,  
the gangsters wanted king joe,  
joe didn't have this kid's luck (or irving mills),  
that famous folk sound got on  
a fancy suit now,  
with nightly radio  
visits the whole nation waits for,  
prohibition is the decree,  
only tans can get tanked up here,  
the boy who already captured new england  
soon will own harlem,  
the world can hardly wait...*

Brian Gilmore is a local attorney with obvious artistic sensitivity to America's classic music. We thank him for permission to publish this poem from his extended work *Jungle Nights (for duke ellington)*. His collection *Elvis Presley Is Alive and Living in Harlem* has been published by Third World Press. We also thank Reuben Jackson for bringing Mr. Gilmore to our attention.

**From Our Mail --**

It's always good to hear from Claire Gordon, a key person in the recent formation of the Bay Area Ellington Society. In response to Ted Shell's article about the founding of Washington's Ellington Society in 1955, she notes that he is correct in saying that the Los Angeles DES was started by Bill Ross, but she says that it began in 1958, not in the early 70s. "Sadly," she notes, "it did not survive after Bill moved out of town, but was restarted by Bill Hill in 1987."

## "Dramatis Felidae"

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

In DESUK's *Blue Light*, Jack Towers and Alex Rado are two of the three of its "distinguished" members who had to miss the conference in Leeds because of injury or illness. ♪ ♪ Luvenia George was invited to Kansas City to conduct a workshop for teachers who want to start a youth program similar to the Duke Ellington Youth Project here. Her appearance is in connection with the "Beyond Category" exhibit in KC. Also, the *Ellington Youth Project Anthology 1997*, in addition to students' original poetry, contains a fine tribute, "The Keeper of the Flame: Mercer Kennedy Ellington," by Luvenia. ♪ ♪ TDES' latest newsletter cites the Smithsonian's among the "most interesting" multi-media programs at "Ellington '97" in Leeds. Its presenters were Annie Kuebler, Ted Hudson, Ben Pubols, and Scott Schwartz. TDES invited the staff and volunteers to reprise the program at its October meeting in NYC. ♪ ♪ Mark your calendar now. Reuben Jackson, along with esteemed poet-novelist-journalist Al Young, will be featured at a reading and reception at the Folger on January 27. We expect that he will read some of his Ellingtonia-focused poems. We always knew, his undue modesty and unassuming ways notwithstanding, that Reuben would make the big time. ♪ ♪ We were pleasantly surprised at our October meeting by the appearance of Ulysses LaPradde, one of our New York members.

## Calendar

*Saturday, November 1* - Regular Monthly Meeting, 8 pm, Grace Lutheran Church  
*May 6-10* - "Ellington '98," Chicago

### **THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY** *Washington, DC*

President	Theodore A. Shell
Vice President	Theodore R. Hudson
Secretary	Angela Grimmer
Treasurer	Jack Towers
Program Coordinator	Mac Grimmer
"Ellington '99" Coordinator	Ben Pubols
At-Large Board Members	
Patricia Braxton	Helen Frazier
Luvenia George	Bob Reny
Patricia Willard	

## Unique Photographs Featured at Meeting

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

In our October meeting we were treated to a slide show presentation of the photographs of Charles Peterson, by Royal Stokes and Don Peterson, the son of the photographer. These pictures are collected in a book, *Swing Era New York*. Stanley Dance, in the preface, says these mostly informally posed photos "capture the spirit of those days better than any other," and with Royal and Don providing the context for each photograph and identification of the musicians, this was a unique trip back in time to the Swing Era days. It was fascinating to listen to Don describe his childhood, living above the Onyx Club on 52nd Street. One can only hope that the rest of the photographs will be published in a second volume. Of particular interest to us were several pictures of a jam session with Duke Ellington — on guitar!

Our first annual jazz flea market was also held at the October meeting. Several people brought their old, or duplicate, LPs, CDs and books, which were turned into someone else's surprise treasures. Another flea market will be scheduled in the future.

## 16th Annual Conference Update

"Ellington '98" has a date and place change to: May 6-10 at the Ramada Congress, 520 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago. Also, there is now a direct phone number: 773-288-DUKE. "It would have been nice," they write, "to open on the 29th . . . [but] we feel the lighter touch on the pocketbook in combination with the history and location is more important." A conference highlight will be recreation of *My People*, which Duke premiered in Chicago in 1963. David Baker, Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra leader, will be music director; Mercedes Ellington the choreographer/director; and Robert Morris and Irving Bunton, both of whom were involved in the original production, will handle choral music.

### CALL FOR PAPERS

"Ellington '98"

Inviting, but not limited to, proposals  
on Duke in Chicago

**Deadline: November 15, 1997**

Send to: 6935 S. Crandon Ave., Suite 2D  
Chicago, IL 60649