

Ellingtonia



Newsletter of the Washington, D.C.

Duke Ellington Society

Volume VI, Number 1

JANUARY 1998

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

Copyright © 1997 by the Washington, D.C., Duke Ellington Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 15591 · Washington, D.C. 20003-0787

See the Open Air Exhibit at 13th & U

On the Metro construction fence at the intersection of 13th and U Streets, NW, passersby can see photographs, handwritten remembrances, and other memorabilia of this area of Washington so important in African-American history and culture.

Contributed mainly by long-time residents and collectors, this "public art" recalls the heydays of the corridor's neighborhoods, venues such as the Crystal Caverns and Howard Theater, musicians such as Calloway and Ellington, institutions such as Howard University and various churches and schools, and black-owned businesses. Additions from the public are not only welcome, but encouraged.

A very informative, related article with photographs, "Remembering U Street," appears in the current issue of *Washington History*, publication of the Historical Society of Washington, DC, one of the planners of the exhibit.

Residential Development

Named for Duke

by Rodney Corry

Ellington Mews, a group of lovely town houses in historic LeDroit Park, is named after the great Duke. Near Howard University, the homes are being built as a non-profit enterprise.

The southwest corner of the site is 4th and U Streets, NW, and it is bordered on the north by Elm Street. At one time the Ellington family lived at 420 Elm.

[Ed. note: For many years Ewell "Reds" Conway, who had been Duke's partner in a sign-painting business, and his family lived in the area.]

Annual Post-Holiday Party

At Grace Church on January 3

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

Get ready for a last fling, to celebrate the end of the holiday season, with a great evening of camaraderie, mouth-watering food and drink, superb music, and merriment. Our annual winter party is scheduled for Saturday, January 3, at our regular meeting place, Grace Lutheran Church.

Members may invite guests, and are asked to bring a food contribution for the buffet. Questions about food choices? Give Helen Frazier (202-387-7071), Marion Shell or Angela Grimmer a call.

Remember, one last holiday fling, at 8 PM on Saturday, January 3, at the Grace Lutheran Church, 4300 - 16th Street, NW (16th and Varnum Streets).

Ellington Scholar Art Pilkington Dies

Art Pilkington, known among aficionados mainly for his meticulous research on the Ellington itinerary project, died in November in Canada, his homeland. An unassuming, soft-spoken, and gracious man, he selflessly shared his findings and knowledge.

Art was a regular at the annual international conferences. He missed "Ellington '97" in Leeds because of illness, but had been feeling better since and continued working on the legendary itinerary begun by the Joe Igoe and carried on by the late Gordon Ewing, Art and others.

We extend our sympathy to the family, friends, and admirers of Art Pilkington.

It's Dues Time

Remember, our dues are for the calendar year. If you haven't already taken care of your 1998 membership, don't delay—use the insert provided for your convenience in this issue.

ELLINGTONIA ABROAD

Main Stem. Echoes of Ellington. Toad Productions TOCD 001.

Rockin' in Ronnie's. Echoes of Ellington Orchestra. Ronnie Scott's Jazz House JHCD 050.

Cleo Laine - Solitude (RCA Victor 09026-68124-2)

For Love of Duke...And Ronnie (Jazz Academy Records JAZA4)

Like Minds. Alan Barnes and David Newton. Fret Records FJCD 105.

A Drum Is a Woman. Claude Bolling Big Band. Milan Jazz 73138-35784.

Reviewed by Mac Grimmer

"Ellington is far more a hero in Europe than he is in his own country." – Rex Stewart

This may be as true today as when Rex wrote it, 30 years ago. There are strong enclaves of Ellingtonia in several European countries, particularly England, Sweden and Denmark, each of which has recently hosted an international Ellington conference. Books, periodicals, newsletters and scholarly papers are produced regularly, and complementing this intellectual avalanche is a landslide of musical events, performances, and recordings.

The performances matched the recordings, both superb, when the repertory band Echoes of Ellington played at the Leeds conference earlier this year. Their CDs offer fresh sounding interpretations of Duke's warhorses, with precision ensemble work and jaunty solos. This band is on a level with the Lincoln Center and Smithsonian orchestras.

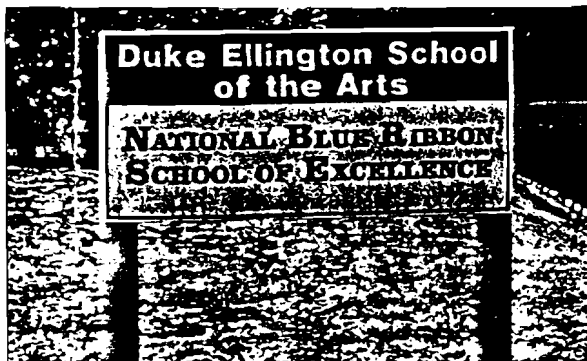
One of Mercer Ellington's last recordings added Cleo Laine and Johnny Dankworth to the big band, reworking some of Duke's best known tunes. Lyrics have been added to several instrumentals, like "Chelsea Bridge," "Rockin' in Rhythm" and "Creole Love Call," creating a whole new experience with familiar old favorites. Cleo's voice is still gorgeous, only slightly affected by the passage of time, and one of the highlights is her duet with Duke, overdubbing his 1941 piano solo of "Solitude."

Cleo's daughter, Jacqui Dankworth, follows in the family tradition, as the vocalist on Michael Garrick's latest CD, *For Love of Duke...and Ronnie*. Michael, who is DESUK's education consultant/activist, doesn't play any Ellington tunes on the CD. He doesn't need to, being, for many years, England's leading jazz composer, he writes his own. Homage to Ellingtonia is present throughout; however, in such tunes as "Webster's Mood" and "For Love of Duke," the latter a title inspired by Alice Babs.

"Like Minds," a swinging, laid-back reed-piano duet recording by Alan Barnes and David Newton, effectively captures the aura of the Ellington small groups. Doubling on the reeds, Barnes recalls several of Duke's reed soloists—Jimmy, Barney, Johnny and Harry; the Carneyesque bass clarinet treatment of the sultry "Lull at Dawn" is hypnotic.

Farther across the sea, Claude Bolling, always an Ellingtonian, staged and recorded *A Drum Is a Woman* for the first time since Duke's 1956 television production. One of Duke's favorite projects, in Paris, one of his favorite cities. Perhaps Rex Stewart's long-ago comment on Ellingtonia abroad was not only an observation, but also a prophecy.

Wouldn't Duke Be Proud!



Photograph Courtesy of Ted Shell

New Book Stimulates Comments

A presumptuously entitled publication, *The History of Jazz* by Ted Gioia (emphasis added) is evoking varied critical and other responses. In general, this ambitious work is considered important in the discourse on this broad subject. A major thesis of the book is that jazz is a highly hybridized, inclusive music — "the most glorious of mongrels."

Ellington, of course, is a major focus, as are Armstrong, Parker, and other giants; attention is also directed to some whom many consider musically marginal, such as Eddie Condon.

Short Sheets

The latest *Momentum* (publication of Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.) has an interesting interview of Aaron Bridgers by Greg Morris, Billy's nephew and executor of his estate. ● ● ● Early Ellingtonia enthusiasts were pleased that among the anthology CDs produced for the holiday season was *Santa Claus Blues*. It includes the 1928 "Santa Clause, Bring My Man Back" by Ozzie Ware with Ellington musicians. ● ● ● Eddie Lambert's long-awaited *Duke Ellington: A Listener's Guide* is scheduled for publication as No. 26 in Scarecrow Press' "Studies in Jazz" series. ● ● ● An updated edition of Jerry Valburn's *Duke Ellington on Compact Disk* is nearing completion. It will be available in two formats: (1) a hard cover book containing the original and the supplement and (2) a separate supplement for those who have the original. ● ● ● A bronze statue of Duke is planned for Soho Square in London. ● ● ● We all feel the loss of Stephane Grappelli, whose warm, flowing style delighted listeners for over 60 years. For Ellington enthusiasts, he lives on, especially on *Duke Ellington's Jazz Violin Session*, playing with fellow violinists Svend Amussen and Ray Nance. He also played a duo with Duke for the French ORTF-TV in 1973. ● ● ● Harold Gray reminds us that Goodman's 1938 Carnegie Hall Concert will be recreated on its 60th anniversary, January 16, at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Quotations of the Month

Excerpts from poems in the
Duke Ellington Youth Project Anthology 1997

*A mix of refined fury and royal grace, this man
Never sounded like he was in a hurry about life
Because he was creating it.*

-- Campbell Kennedy, "R. Man"

*It's funny how "Mood Indigo" makes me feel
not so blue.*

*I feel like some strawberries, a checkered
picnic blanket and a spot in the shade . . .*

-- Terry E. Dawson, "Ellington"

*Blow again Duke Daddy . . .
slow it a bit
cause the air forgot*

I gotta breath you in too.

-- Katrina Skinner, "Duke Daddy"

MacHare To Teach Ellington Course

One of our members, Peter MacHare, who also has the respected "Sepia Panorama" website, will teach a course on Duke at the USDA Graduate School during the first semester of 1998. While there have been other, outreach-type series by institutions and organizations in the area, Peter's will be the first to carry academic credit. (No stranger to the classroom, he has taught legal research courses there for six years.)

Meeting on Thursdays, 6-9pm, January 22-March 22, in addition to lectures and discussions, students will use readings, listening assignments, two field trips, and the internet to explore the life and music of Duke Ellington.

For details, interested persons may check with Peter or with the Graduate School at 202-720-5885 or its WorldWideWeb: <http://grad.usda.gov>.

Congratulations, Peter!

Grandson Named to Lead DEO

A recent press release states that Paul Mercer Ellington, Mercer's son (Duke's youngest grandchild), will conduct the Duke Ellington Orchestra. According to the flyer, he began playing guitar in the band at the age of 12, studied with Juliard teachers, and intermittently led the band "while his father beamed in approval." We have read no reports of this band's personnel or performances.

Tribute Paid to Mary Lou Williams

by Annie Kuebler

Like Soul On Soul (taken from *Music Is My Mistress*) was the title of a tribute to Mary Lou Williams sponsored by the Jazz Institute of Chicago in November. The event included a concert of her music by pianist Geri Allen and our fellow Ellingtonian-conductor Dick Wang & His Fletcher Basington Band. Mary Lou's long career reflected or presaged every jazz style and Ms. Allen and the band were definitely up to the task. The concert featured three songs that Ms. Williams arranged for Ellington, "Star Dust," "Scorpio" (from her *Zodiac Suite*), and "Blue Skies."

Oh yeah! Everyone was already talkin' 'bout Ellington '98!

[Ed. note: The original material that inspired the arrangements for the concert was found in the *Ellington Archives* by Annie. Being a Mary Lou Williams researcher, she attended the tribute.]

"Dramatis Felidae"

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

About Our Members

Walter van de Leur will be in the States this month. Among his activities will be a lecture on "Unheard Strayhorn Music" at the January 22 meeting of TDES in New York. He probably will illustrate his talk with recorded music. ♪ ♪ Aaron, 5-year-young, violin-playing son of guitar-playing Scott Schwartz is already performing publicly in duets with his dad. What have we here, another Nance? Heifitz? ♪ ♪ We hope you didn't miss Harold Gray's letter in the *Washington Post* on Sunday, November 9, concerning a previous article on the apparent lack of jazz in the area. Harold lists places, events, and organizations—including our Society, of course—which the author had overlooked. ♪ ♪ The finding aid for the Ted Shell Collection of Ellington Ephemera can be accessed on the Smithsonian's worldwide website.

New Museum Prominently Features Ellingtonia

The just-opened 18th and Vine Museums in Kansas City includes a Jazz Museum that could serve as a model for others. Also in the expansive complex, which takes most of both sides of 18th, are the Negro League Baseball Museum, an in-house small theater, a club for live performances, instructional facilities, local history exhibits, and restored historical structures, including the again active Gem Theater just across the street from the main building.

As one might expect, the Jazz Museum showcases homies such as Charlie Parker and Bennie Moten. But it is more than a "local" museum; there are also major interactive displays of Ellington-Strayhorn, Armstrong, Basie, *et al.* The Ellington section allows the visitor to sample different styles and periods of Ellington-Strayhorn music, see a display of the sartorial Duke, and note his importance in context of art worldwide.

Prominent in another part of the main museums structure is the Smithsonian's "Beyond Category" traveling exhibit.

Calendar

Saturday, January 3 - Annual Party
May 6-10 - Ellington '98, Chicago

Depth of Smithsonian Archives Demonstrated at December Visit By Ellington Society

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Our latest visit to the Smithsonian Archives Center provided another example of the depth of the resources of the Ellington collection. The multi-media presentation, "Swingers for the Cause," (a phrase taken from the movie, "Paris Blues") was compiled from several sources: oral histories, film clips, slides, and recordings, with narration by Annie Kuebler. The main thread of the presentation was provided by excerpts from the band members' oral histories; hearing their voices with their words projected on the screen was particularly effective. The Smithsonian has such a plethora of material that selection must be difficult; several more presentations with other themes could easily be extracted from this source alone.

Of particular interest was a silent film clip of Duke's band and the dancers at the Cotton Club, and a short film of Cootie's band of the early 40's.

Our thanks go to John Fleckner, Annie, Scott Schwartz, Debora Richardson, Reuben Jackson and the rest of the Archives staff for a fascinating evening; they, too, are "Swingers for the Cause."

Make Plans Now for Ellington '98

You won't want to miss the many events at the 16th Annual International Duke Ellington Study Group Conference, May 6-10 in Chicago. For details, get in touch with:

Ellington '98

6935 South Crandon Avenue, Suite 2D
Chicago, IL 60649

Phone: 773-288-DUKE; Fax: 773-643-4829

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	