

Ellingtonia



Newsletter of the Washington, D.C.

Duke Ellington Society

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Strayhorn Manuscript Editions Adds Titles, Reduces Prices

In addition to well known works such as "After All" and "Rain Check," Strayhorn Songs' new catalogue of music manuscripts includes previously unknown works and arrangements such as "Portrait of a Silk Thread"; "Pentonsilic"; never recorded "Blue House," from the Blanton-Webster band era; "Valse," described in the catalog as solo-piano "Chopin-esque waltz"; and three versions (1941, 1945, 1956) of "Passion Flower."

Dr. Gregory A. Morris, executor of Billy's estate, heads recently incorporated Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc., producer of the editions. Proudly we note that Walter van de Leur, one of our members, is the music editor.

The catalogue asserts that Billy Strayhorn Editions is "determined to match the quality and honesty of Billy Strayhorn's compositions with equally beautiful and trustworthy published scores." They are not transcriptions from existing recordings; rather they are scores drawn directly from original handwritten music manuscripts. The handsomely produced scores are on landscape paper, spiral-bound, computer-engraved, and annotated. Each comes with a full set of parts and personal license to perform and record the music.

Prices, importantly reduced, vary for the 35 or so available scores. While it is anticipated that over 300 titles will be published over time, commissions for scores for particular works will be accepted.

For a listing of available titles and for other information, you may reach Billy Strayhorn Manuscript Editions at: PO Box 10285, Pittsburgh, PA 15232, USA; phone/fax: 412-681-3538 and (within USA) 1-800-209-9696; e-mail: gregory573@aol.com and wvandeleur@wxs.nl. (Also, for other purposes there is a Strayhorn website: <http://www.billystrayhorn.com>.)

Highlights of Past Conferences: February Program by Jack Towers

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

The archives have been searched, and Jack has come up with a program of highlights of the International Ellington Conferences, beginning with the very first one held here in Washington in 1983. The musical memories will include the duet by Brooks Kerr and George Duvivier at the first conference, Bob Wilber's big band at Oldham, and Doug Richards' band at the '89 Washington conference. That last one, incidentally, will give us a sneak preview of our 1999 centennial conference, when we again will have Doug and his band playing Ellingtonia. There will be highlights of the programs, too, including our own Patricia Willard's *Jump for Joy* presentation in '83 and Alice Babs' '87 reminiscences in Toronto.

February 7 is the date, at 8 pm in our regular meeting place, the **Grace Lutheran Church**, at **16th and Varnum Streets, NW**. This is the night we can fill in the gaps of many of the things we've all missed—don't be late!

Youth Project to Receive Wahl Collection Item

DEMS, which has responsibility for disposition of the Wahl Collection, has announced that the book *Duke Ellington - King of Jazz*, part of Dell Publishing's "Yearling Series," will be given to the Washington, D.C. Duke Ellington Youth Project. Our member Luvenia George, who coordinates the Project, had requested unclaimed items from this rare collection.

While it was the most-requested item in the collection, DEMS felt that since this little book was written for children, a fact of which Ellingtonia completists may not have been aware, the Youth Project would benefit greatly from it.

The Duke Gets His Man or The Hiring of Homie

Last year we published an excerpt of Rex Stewart discussing his half-valve technique, from a typescript of a c.1963 interview by Robert Oliphant and Anne Judd Kennedy now in her papers at the Smithsonian's Archives Center, repository of the Ellington Collection. Some readers reported finding it interesting, so, slightly edited by paraphrasing, here's some more by Rex from the same source.

Anne - How did you get your job with [Ellington] first?

Rex - I'd made a record date for Irving Mills who was handling Ellington at the time and I went down to Mills' office to pick up my check, and prior to that Ellington had always, let's see, after Cootie got in the band I used to run into Ellington in a bar and he'd say, "My Homie," we grew up in Washington you see and we've known each other ever since I had on short pants. I just thought of him as another affable musician. I never had any serious thoughts about going with the band or anything, but he used to always say, "Well, you ready to come with the band now?" "No," I'd say, "no, I'm still with Fletcher." Then, later on we'd meet at a breakfast dance or something and he'd say, "Well, how would you like to be my third trumpet player?" I'd say, "Great, Man," you know. I was actually putting him on because I didn't like the music they played.

So, to get back to my story, this day I was in the office and Irving Mills said to me, he says, "Say, why don't you come on and join Ellington?" Well, Ellington was behind the partition and I didn't know it. So I said, "No, thanks. I don't want to go on the road." That was my excuse that time. Then Ellington came around the partition and said, "Ah, Homie, I know you're going to join us now, aren't you." He was turning on the charm. So I said, "No, Duke." I mean, I'd just recently been married and I don't want to go on the road. So he said, "Well, if you were to join the band, let's assume just for the sake of conversation you were going to, a-, what kind of money would you want?" So I said, "Well, I don't want any kind of money because I don't want to join the band." With that I left the office, and I took the subway and went home.

As I arrived home, Paul Barbarin the drummer with Luis Russell with whom I was playing at the time was standing in the doorway of my apartment which was one flight up, and as I entered the door there was Jonesey who was the valet and man in charge of virtually everything for Ellington standing at the bottom of the stairs shouting to my wife, "Tell Rex to come down and get measured for his uniform." And I heard this, so I said to him, "What uniform?" [S]o he said, "I don't know. Duke told me to tell you where to get measured for your uniform." So I laughed; I didn't think anything of it. That night I went to Brooklyn Roseland and as I walked in the ballroom Luis Russell said, "You're fired." "What do you mean I'm fired, I didn't do anything?" He says, "You don't have to do anything - I heard you were going with Ellington." I said, "Oh, forget that, I'm going to stay with this band, I want to stay in town." Russell said, "Well, I heard the news, Paul told me, and I already hired somebody, so you can play tonight, and, you know."

So, I didn't have any choice because this was during the depression and jobs weren't easy to come by, so I went to Ellington, I've kind of blocked out the conversation, but I said, "You got me in this thing," something like that. "What do you plan to pay me?" So, when he told me I was shocked because the musicians on the outside thought that the Ellington guys were making a lot of money. He offered me \$75 a week. I had been getting a hundred, hundred and a quarter. I said, "No, this won't do," so he explained to me that everybody started in his organization at \$75 a week. So I said I'd take it for two weeks, I had to have some money, after that you get somebody. That was the understanding. So that's how I happened to join Ellington.

Anne - and you stayed for 11 years.

Rex - I stayed 12, but I quit after the first month, and I got raised to \$85 a week. Then I stayed maybe about 6 months after that and I got the salary up to \$100. That's the way it went.

Short Sheets

The Smithsonian had a Jazz Booth at the International Association of Jazz Educators Conference in New York City in January. ● ● ● His many friends are pulling for Father Gensel to recover from a recent stroke. ● ● ● Congratulations are in order for David Hajdu and Phil Schaap, both of whom received ASCAP Deems Taylor Awards, David for his book *Lush Life* and Phil for his Saturday night radio broadcasts, "Traditions in Swing." ● ● ● Duke's three sacred concerts, with previously unissued music, will be available as a multi-CD issue by RCA within several months. ● ● ● Now home after serious surgery, Monika Stratemann is grateful to the international Ellington community for cards, telephone calls, and other expressions of support. As we know, the past year has been difficult for Monika and family, especially because of the death of her husband, Klaus Stratemann. Should you wish to send her a message, the address is: St. Raphaels-WEG 9, 32361 Preuss. Oldendorf, Germany.

Necrology

Within the last year, the Ellingtonia community has been saddened by the deaths of several persons, including two very recently.

Born in 1926, Johnny Coles died in Philadelphia in December after extended illness. He became a regular in the Ellington orchestra in the early 1970s, having had wide experience with top notch artists such as Hancock, Mingus, Basie, and Gil Evans. More often than not identified with the so-called "cool" be-bop idiom, he was nonetheless technically and creatively versatile, with his own musical personality, characteristics that likely caught Duke's attention. Coles is probably best remembered as a recorded soloist with the Ellington orchestra for the sparsely scored "How High the Moon."

Ole J. Nielsen died in Denmark in December. His valuable Ellington discography was the sixth volume in a comprehensive series entitled *Jazz Records 1942-80*. In a posting on the internet, his dear friend Sjeff Hoefsmit notes that "Ole will be best remembered as the one who came with a most welcome updated discography including the many previously unpublished sessions from Denmark's Radio collection. This was a real work of love. . . . He gave us great support in continuing Benny Aasland's DEMS bulletin. His warm friendship will be missed."

Don't Miss Member's Multimedia Program on Jazz in Washington

Rusty Hassan will be giving a lecture on jazz in Washington with slides, video and musical selections on Thursday, January 22 at 7:30 pm in the Armand Hammer Auditorium of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. His presentation there last August was so well received that they asked for a reprise. The Corcoran is located at 17th and New York Avenue, NW.

For Your Reading Pleasure and Edification

In a letter published in the Toronto Duke Ellington Society newsletter and *DEMS Bulletin*, recently deceased Art Pilkington had graciously announced that Ken Vail's *Duke's Diary, Vols. I and II*, will be released in February 1998, with "the most up-to-date itinerary of the band in print, listing every known gig from the early days right up to Duke's death." As you probably know, after the death of Joe Igo, Art and the late Gordon Ewing worked assiduously over the years on the *Duke Ellington Itinerary* (now in the Library of Congress), begun by Joe.

We've heard that psychologist Austin Lawrence, who has presented at several of our annual international conferences, is writing a biography of Duke.

The Power of Black Music by Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. (Oxford University Press), though several years old, has generated occasional notice on the internet recently. One person writes that it is "for me the most important book on black music since *Blues People* by Amiri Baraka. It enlightens the meaning of black music in a way unknown to other scholars." It is described by another as a "tour de force" that surveys the music from African origins to the present, "from a socio-cultural perspective."

Ellington '98

16th Annual International
Duke Ellington Conference
May 6-10, Chicago

For details, contact:

Ellington '98

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

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

"Dramatis Felidae"

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

Jack Towers and Ted Hudson have items in the latest *DEMS Bulletin*. ♪ ♪ We continue to see postings from our members on the internet. Recent substantive contributions included some by Ben Pubols and Sjef Hoefsmid. One of Ben's is reprinted in TDES' current newsletter. Speaking further of Ben, we notice in Oasis' 1998 Course Registration Catalogue the description of a course entitled "Jazz Goes to the Movies" to be taught locally by him during the winter 1998 session. ♪ ♪ Correct us if we're wrong, but it appears that John Hasse was the first on the internet to wish aficionados throughout the world a Happy New Year, "filled with peace, harmony, and the extraordinary music of Duke Ellington."

Presidents' Jazz Weekend Festival To Aid Middleton Scholarship Fund

February 11-15 are the dates for the 7th Annual East Coast Jazz Festival, at the Double Tree Hotel in Rockville to benefit the Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund. Keter Betts, Jimmy Heath, Ernie Andrews, Ronnie Wells, Houston Person and Etta Jones, Mulgrew Miller, and many others will perform "straight-ahead," bop, Latin, blues, and other styles. Plans call for 50 hours of acoustic music, including 74 concerts. Some jam sessions, workshops, and concerts will be free and open to the public.

The non-profit scholarship group was created in memory of Elmore "Fish" Middleton, jazz radio personality and ardent supporter of emerging jazz artists. He was a featured presenter at our First Annual International Ellington Study Group Conference, here in 1983. In addition to granting scholarships, the organization facilitates in-school and public education programs, sponsors workshops and seminars, and otherwise encourages appreciation and development of jazz in its varied forms.

For more details, contact FMJS/East Coast Jazz, PO Box 1768, Silver Spring, MD 20915.

Death of Former Member Reported

Just as we were finishing this issue, Ted Shell learned that Dave Cummings had died last spring. He was unable to get more information. Dave had been a long-time member until last year.

Post-Holiday Party Kicks Off New Year 1998

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

We celebrated the end of our holiday activities when we welcomed the New Year with our annual January party at Grace Church. The affair was well attended, the weather cooperating for a change, and we all enjoyed a convivial evening of shared good food, drink, and conversation. The only order of business was Ted Hudson's yearly award of certificates to the *Ellingtonia* newsletter contributors, of which there was a surprisingly large number. And, of course, we listened to the incomparable music of Duke Ellington well into the night.

Oops! In last month's newsletter, listing the people responsible for the preparation and presentation of the Smithsonian's program "Swingers for the Cause," I neglected to mention our own Ben Pubols and Ted Hudson. They each made substantial contributions to the program and presentation here, as well as in New York and Leeds, and also should be included in the list of swingers.

We Have a WWW Page

Peter MacHare has put a page for our Society on his "A Duke Ellington Panorama" internet site. Anyone surfing the net can now find us. The page will post activities, regular meetings, and other information about us. Give it a look at: <http://www.nicom.com/~machare/>

Calendar

Jan. 22 - Rusty Hassan at Corcoran Gallery

Jan. 27 - Reuben Jackson at Folger Library

Feb. 7 - Regular Meeting at Grace Church

May 6-10 - Ellington '98, Chicago

DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

Washington, DC

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