

# Ellingtonia



Newsletter Of The  
**Duke Ellington Society**  
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## ♪ Conference Grace Notes ♪

We have received many, many compliments, for which we are indeed grateful, on Ellington '99, ranging from hotel accommodations, bus transportation, efficiency of the registration procedures, attractive and useful registration packets, substantive day sessions, evening events, exhibits, the banquet menu and concert, to time for informal small group and person-to-person discussions. The few glitches that occurred were minor and readily attended to. Hotel staffers repeatedly earned compliments on their service and their gracious personalities. One young man, especially after overhearing the music on Saturday night, declared his intention of becoming a member of our Society.

### **Out-of-Area and Local Members Volunteer**

In town a few days early from her home in Canada, upon hearing that the registration committee and other volunteers would be putting together the packets and performing other tasks on Tuesday, Lois Moody came to the assemblage site and worked tirelessly. Not only that, she helped at the registration desk practically all of Wednesday and part of Thursday. Further, though not on any Conference committee, early on Jennie and George Henderson offered their services in any capacity. They, too, came to help assemble the packets and assist in myriad other ways, including the registration and the setting-up of the vending room at the hotel. Joanne Dennis came to the assembly site with her parents and, as usual, willingly took on several tasks. Thanks, Lois, Jennie, George, and Joanne!

### **Our Man "Depped"**

The day before he was to present, we received a message that Austin Lawrence had been admitted to a hospital. On short notice, with an adaptation of the program he gave at our March meeting, Peter MacHare substituted brilliantly for him. A post-Conference call to Austin to express our concern was not answered, but we left a message wishing him well.

*(Continued on page 2 under "Conference Grace Notes")*

## **June Program: Jack Towers Plays the 24 CD RCA Set**

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

He's not going to play all of them, of course, but will play selections from the new gigantic box set, the RCA 24 CD collection, 1927-1974. Jack says this is the best sound he's heard of some of the early things and will play, as much as time allows, a sampling of the songs that particularly impress him. Incidentally, the best price for this set, as of now, is on the internet, at a mere \$285, plus postage. If you don't want to shell out that much money, come to our meeting on **Saturday, June 5, at 8 pm.** The place is the **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th & Varnum Sts, NW.** Music by Ellington, commentary by Jack Towers.

## **Pulitzer Board Honors Ellington Posthumously**

The story of Duke's reaction to being denied a Pulitzer Prize in 1965, ostensibly because there were no criteria for "jazz," is well known among Ellington devotees: "Fate is being kind to me. Fate doesn't want me to be famous too young." Now during the hundredth anniversary of his birth, their board has awarded him a special citation. A news service quoted a Pulitzer spokesman as saying that the award was being made "not only in recognition of Duke Ellington's achievements, but as a further step in the evolution of the accepted criteria for the Pulitzer award in music." As some historians have noted, Duke was never nominated for a Pulitzer *prize*, but rather for a special award. This posthumous award is just that, a *special citation*.

*Ed. Note: Let's be thankful that they did not give him the award for a "category" known as "jazz."*

*Deadline realities precluded an overall review and assessment of Ellington '99 in this issue. For now, we invite your attention to "Conference Grace Notes," beginning in the next column.*

## Commendation

Ever since the culmination of the Seventeenth Annual International Duke Ellington Conference, I have wondered how I could express my gratitude for the outstanding job done by our conference coordinator, Ben Pubols. I had expressed my thoughts in our last meeting and also at the conference itself at the awards ceremonies. But that did not seem enough. I have this opportunity to expand in our newsletter. When I stated earlier that we would leave no stones unturned in order to make this year's conference the biggest and the best, little did I realize how prophetic I had become to have chosen Ben for the undertaking. He dug in and chose among the best of us to help him do a thorough job—unselfishly, efficiently, and untiringly. He has set a standard for future coordinators to shoot at, and he has our greatest huzzahs for his success. Again, Ben, thanks for a beautiful and highly successful enterprise from all of us.

Ted Shell  
President

## ♪ Grace Notes ♪

(Continued from page 1)

### Guests Artists = Delightful Lagniappe

Happily, we were treated to two guest performances by Eve Smith, known to many Ellington enthusiasts simply as Yvonne. The first was at the reception, at which she played piano and sang, accompanied by a bassist and drummer, students from the Ellington School of the Arts' New Washingtonians Orchestra. Then at the banquet she sang backed by Art Barron and members of Doug Richards' Great American Music Ensemble

Trombonist Baron, a regular with Duke's last orchestra, was a surprise guest artist with the banquet band. He clearly enjoyed playing, his enthusiasm carrying over to an appreciative listening and dancing audience.

### Not the Savoy, But the Feet Were Happy

Phil Schaap, red sneakers a blur, tested the footwork of Janna Steed and Geneva Hudson, among others, all of whom performed more than commendably. "Little Duke" Earle was no slouch either, to the surprise of those who did not know him well. Angela and Josef Mahdal also demonstrated terpsichorean talents.

### Exhibits Enhance Common Areas

For the all too few times that Ferebee Streett was all too briefly on hand, she graciously posed for photographs with her large sculpture of Duke, which drew compliments. Ted Shell's photographs and Geneva Hudson's "Duke's Washington Connection" display also evoked favorable comments. Geneva's exhibit will travel to the Annapolis Jazzfest in June.

### Unscheduled Mini-Tour

Riders on the last two buses from the Ellington Youth Festival were treated to an extra by the drivers—a sightseeing route back to the hotel that included a stop at the famous "The Awakening" sculpture at Haines Point and nightlight views across the Potomac River of both the Washington and Virginia shorelines.

### Radio Shows Enriched by Visiting Experts

On the closing Sunday, Richard Ehrenzeller, Janna Steed, and Steve Lasker were guests on local Pacifica radio programs.

### Translators Assist *DESOR* Compilers

Thanks go to Angela and Mac Grimmer for securing the services of a translator to field questions for Giovanni Volonté and Luciano Massagli after their presentation. They have functional facility in the language but could have found it difficult at times to understand idiomatic English.

### Book Is a Work of Written and Visual Art

In case you want to order *For Jazz: 21 Sonnets*, the wonderful book by Peter Townsend, one of our presenters, he published it under the pseudonym Peter McSloy, the surname being his mother's maiden name. His insightful and subtly swinging poems are illustrated by finely wrought linoleum cuts of the musicians by Nina Mera. An illuminating introduction is by Ted Gioia.

### Friday's Win-Win Evening

Registrants were presented with a most pleasant dilemma on Friday evening. They could go to the Annual Duke Ellington Youth Festival at the Smithsonian or to the US Air Force Symphony and the Airmen of Note at Constitution Hall with guest Barbara McNair. Both groups came back with high praise for what they had heard, the latter especially about the rendition of *Three Black Kings*, which most had never heard live, and the former especially about two closing choral ensembles, either of which, many remarked, could with rehearsal perform the Sacred Concerts choral music with professional musicians.

### Conveners Meet

On Sunday morning, former conveners met with planners for "Ellington 2000." The California group is well into preparations for a conference that we won't want to miss!

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

April 28, 1999

Warm greetings to everyone gathered in our nation's capital for "Ellington '99," hosted by the Washington, D.C., Duke Ellington Society. I am delighted to join Duke Ellington's countless fans across America and around the world in marking the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Edward Kennedy Ellington was one of the musical giants of the 20th century. In thousands of compositions, ranging from romantic ballads and jazz tunes to tonal portraits and sacred music, he captured the American experience in sound and made it his own. A genius in his own right, he recognized genius in others and attracted some of the finest musicians of our time to join his orchestra. Drawing on their individual strengths and crafting compositions that allowed each of them to shine, he created compelling and unforgettable music for more than 50 years.

It is fitting that this year's conference should take place in Washington, D.C., Duke Ellington's hometown and the cradle of his extraordinary career. I thank the Duke Ellington Society and the organizers and participants of Ellington '99 for your commitment to preserving Duke Ellington's great artistic legacy for the enjoyment of generations to come.

Best wishes to all for a successful conference and a memorable centennial celebration.

*Bill Clinton*

*This greeting from President Bill Clinton arrived too late to be included in the official printed program for Ellington '99. With permission, we reprint it here.*

## CONFERENCE HONOREES

*At Ellington '99, we paid tribute to four of our members. The following is adapted from the Conference program.*

### JACK TOWERS



A member to be emulated for his quiet friendliness and accommodating and selfless nature, Jack joined our Society in the early 1960s. An Ellingtonia aficionado from his youth, during his college days he and buddy Dick Burros—never dreaming what a classic their then-amateur efforts would produce—in 1940 recorded the orchestra at their now famous dance date in Fargo, North Dakota. Jack has served as our treasurer for many years and takes care of audio-visual needs for our meetings, which he rarely misses. Jack has also well served the annual conferences, almost singlehandedly manning the audio-visual equipment at them throughout the 1980s. He is known as a meticulous and reliable sound engineer, a specialty being the remastering of recordings. We salute Jack Towers and ask him to forgive us for compromising his innate modesty by doing so.

### HELEN FRAZIER



Photo by Ted Shell

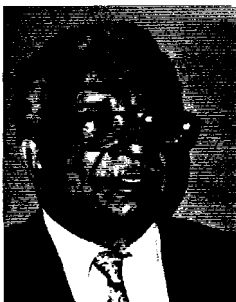
Helen was one of the very earliest members of our Society, having grown up in Washington, DC. We are especially proud of her and grateful to have known her through the years. One of our most willing and untiring members, she has worked selflessly on numerous committees, helped arrange many of our social activities, and at one time served as the Society's secretary. Friendly and gently persuasive, she brought in new members and graciously lent her home on so many occasions for various of our activities. Her favorite Ellingtonian? No contest, it's Johnny Hodges!

### MAURICE LAWRENCE



Maurice was the founder and first president of our Society. He started it all among the great memorabilia in his home by gathering a few friends and fraternity brothers to listen to his music library. As a student, he had met Duke at Howard University when it was his good luck to be assigned the duty of escorting the maestro to the campus. At his home he and wife, Sylvia, even showed movies they had made of Duke and band members playing baseball. Maurice was also in on the start of the International Duke Ellington Jazz Society in collaboration with Bill Ross of California, later becoming its president. After a distinguished career in government, he retired to Florida, but retired is hardly accurate, for he initiated and co-founded the Statesmen of Jazz, now serving as its Executive Secretary. He is always affable, always willing to share, and we take great pride in honoring him.

### THEODORE SHELL



Dr. Theodore Shell, president of the Washington Duke Ellington Society, is one of its founding members. Ted, as he likes to be called, has spent almost a half century as a collector of Ellington memorabilia, a sizeable collection of records, tapes, both audio and video. Duke allowed him to tape many of the band's appearances in and about Washington, at dances, military installations, and clubs. An advanced amateur photographer, he has taken over a hundred photos of the Duke and members of his orchestra, one of which, taken at the Washington Watergate amphitheater, Duke autographed when he appeared at Ted's home for a birthday party given for him. Ted has appeared on programs of the Ellington Conferences and has given many programs for the local society. He has attended all but one of the annual Conferences. Some of his memorabilia now comprise the Theodore A. Shell Collection, which complements the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian Institution.

## Short Sheets . . .

The 24-CD reissue by BMI of Duke's RCA recordings is listed at \$407. Some bargain hunters have found changing lower prices, for example, \$285.58-\$350 on the CDNOW web site and \$300 from Daedalus. ♪ ♪ Jana Steed is writing a short biography of Ellington for the "Lives and Legacies," a popular series. ♪ ♪ The *Washington Post* had a welcomed article on the Howard Theater in its "Outlook" section on April 25. ♪ ♪ We haven't seen Kenneth Vail's *Duke's Diary, Part I: 1927-50*, a month-by-month chronology, but have been told it will be a valuable addition to enthusiasts' libraries.

## Fr. Yaryan Dies

*The following is from an internet posting by Wm. Fawcett Hill, president of the Southern California Duke Ellington Society:*

Reverend Canon John S. Yaryan died on April 19th . . . [He] was a Member of DES-SC and has been residing for several years in Santa Rosa.

He is famous, of course, for the pivotal role he played in making the First Sacred Concert of Ellington possible. He was at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco at the time when it was consecrated. It was he who suggested Ellington for the dedicatory service and he shepherded what became known as the First Sacred Concert (16th September 1965).

## Next: The Ellington Component At the Annual Annapolis Jazzfest

No sooner than they taken a breather after Ellington '99, Geneva and Ted Hudson returned to their work for the Annual Annapolis Jazzfest, June 20 on St. John's College campus. The Ellington focus was the idea of Jack Ladd Carr, one of our members who lives in Annapolis. He will man--er--that is--person an Ellington booth. He and Ted have been serving as proposers/consultants for the Ellington emphasis. Geneva, a member of the Friends of the Annapolis Symphony, sponsor of Jazzfest, is concessions chairperson.

In addition to Strayhorn-Ellington music, a highlight of Jazzfest will be a special symposium, "A Hundred Candles for the Duke," led by Reuben Jackson. Also, Geneva's "Ellington's Washington Presence," first displayed at Ellington '99, will be on exhibit at Jazzfest.

## Norton, Kilkenny, Hudson Earn Awards

At the Annual Ellington Youth Festival at the Smithsonian, three local persons—June Norton, Niani Kilkenny, and Ted Hudson—were honored for their dedicated work with and on behalf of the unique, highly successful, and copied Duke Ellington Youth Project. Present on the occasion were members of the Ellington and Strayhorn families, conference registrants, school officials, and most important, proud parents and other relatives of the student participants.

## Events Complement Ellington '99

Duke's home town proudly paid homage to its cultural icon during April. In a program at Borders Books and Records moderated by Larry Appelbaum, Ted Shell, our president, shared some of his rare films and videos. At the same place the next week, Reuben Jackson was the featured speaker. The Parish Gallery in Georgetown opened a photograph exhibit of Duke and his musicians, to run through May 18. During its annual filmfest, the American Film Institute sponsored "Duke Ellington on Film: A Tribute" at the Kennedy Center.

The Ellington Youth Project, in addition to its Festival and other annual activities, was part of a "Centennial Distance Learning Celebration," along with students from Cleveland and Kansas City, with special guest Lisa Terry.

In Annapolis, the Baltimore Jazz Orchestra performed "A Salute to Duke." Guest Ethel Ennis and conductor Edward Golstein paired successfully for a unique vocal-tuba "Solitude."

At Prince Georges Community College, "Ellington: A Musical Conversation," featured our members Rusty Hassan, Jack Towers and Ted Shell, along with trumpeter Jimmy Owens. The brochure for the event was unusually artistic, with photographs by Jack and Ted.

The Shells, Pubols, and Hudsons were guests at the opening of the "We Love You Madly: Duke Ellington" exhibit prepared by the Museums Studies Department at the Ellington School of the Arts. Some of the display will remain throughout the building after the show closes in May.

The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra concert at the Kennedy Center was splendid, a result not only of sterling individual and group musicianship but also the intangibles of having become familiar with the music and relative continuity of the band's personnel. LCJO's cohesiveness, verve, willingness to take on challenges, and sense of nuance were exemplified by such as "Ko-Ko." Leader Wynton Marsalis' feeling for the music and technical prowess were evident in a muted trumpet on "Mood Indigo" a both virtuosic and moving extended solo on "The Shepherd."

For Information About  
**Ellington 2000**  
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So. California Duke Ellington Society at PO Box 2652, Culver  
City, CA 90231, or by E-mail at <moanerhill@telis.org>

## "Dramatis Felidae" (To Use Our Man's Term in *MIMM*) About Our Members

♪♪ Last month, in response to a last minute request, **Walter van de Leur** got together a tribute to Duke for a Dutch television station. Using scores on hand, the Dutch Jazz Orchestra performed Ellington and Strayhorn tunes. ♪ During a casual conversation, Yvonne Duke (Eve Smith) and **Liz Braxton** found that they had been taught by the same private piano teacher. ♪♪ **Morris Hodara, Ted Hudson, and Ted Shell** are quoted in the Washington *Post's* Sunday, April 11, "Style" section articles on Duke. ♪♪ New member **Harvey Cohen** is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Maryland. His thesis topic is Duke Ellington as a *historical* figure. ♪♪ **Jack Towers** is the subject of a feature article in the current *IAJRC Journal*, with great photos of him by Rhoda, his wife.

## Ellington Orchestra Conducted by Grandson to Perform Here May 22

The National Gallery of Art will present the Duke Ellington Orchestra led by Paul Ellington, Mercer's son, on May 22 (rain date, May 23), 2-6 pm. A press release indicates that it will be the only appearance of the band in Washington this year. The event is to celebrate both the centennial of Duke's birth and the opening of the Gallery's new Sculpture Garden, a gift to the nation by the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, on the Mall at 7th and Madison Drive, NW. The Dukes of Dixieland are also scheduled to play. The concert is free and open to the public. For more information, call 202-842-6353.

## Rossen Recuperating from Accident

by Jack Dennis

Member Jan Rossen fell in his home on March 17 and fractured a hip. He received medical treatment at Holy Cross Hospital after which he was placed in a rehabilitation facility in Wheaton, MD. Jan's recovery has proceeded on schedule, and he expects to return to his home in Silver Spring in mid-May. Best wishes to Jan for a complete recovery.

## √ Mark Your Calendar

**Saturday, May 22** - The Duke Ellington Orchestra conducted by Paul Ellington, National Gallery of Art's New Sculpture Garden (on the Mall at 7th & Madison, SW), 2-6 pm. Added attraction, the Dukes of Dixieland. Free.

**Saturday, June 5** - Regular Monthly Meeting

**Saturday, June 5** - "A Celebration of the Duke Ellington Centennial," David Murray Big Band with James Newton and Carmen Bradford, Lisner Auditorium

## "Busking the Duke" and More

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Dennis Dimmer, one of our English members, stayed an extra week past the annual international conference date and presented the May program, "Ellingtonia in England," a survey of performances of the music as it developed after Duke's 1933 visit there.

Just recounting the names of some of the bands demonstrates the fascinating variety of approaches to the music: Madame Tussaud's Dance Orchestra; the Squadronnaires (the RAF band); the Happy Wanderers Street Band (street musicians, or "buskers," who frequented the theater district); the Directions in Jazz Unit; Jack Hylton and His Orchestra; the Ted Heath band; Cleo Laine and John Dankworth; and the Stan Tracey band (who played at the Leeds conference two years ago).

Such an informative program makes one realize how much we've missed by not having Dennis at our meetings more often; we extracted a promise from him to never to miss another meeting.

## Multiple Events Involve Students

Students from The Paseo Academy in Kansas City, MO, did not play as scheduled at our Ellington '99 opening reception. Once here, they were offered the opportunity to workshop with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra during its rehearsal for the Sacred Concert. We encouraged them to go and not worry about their commitment to us. Understanding, our member Davey Yarborough, whose New Washingtonians had had the same privilege a few days earlier with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, had his students play for us longer than planned. We had arranged for all the young musicians to meet some of the educators at the Conference and to attend our day sessions, but they were so busy with student events that few were able to come.

