

Ellingtonia



Newsletter Of The

Duke Ellington Society

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Documentary Widely Viewed

Most of the nation's 350 PBS stations scheduled telecasts of the socio-historical documentary *Duke Ellington's Washington*, first shown in this area on February 7. The title carries his name, but it is as well about other achievers in varied fields who grew up in the same neighborhood and milieu as he during the first half of the 20th century. It is also about those reared in the same ethos and community who have had productive and satisfying private lives.

With special emphasis on the U Street corridor, the film chronicles a Washington that was the nation's black cultural center. It was also an outstanding commercial center, a place, for example, where early on there was a black bank and where public facilities such as True Reformers Hall were "black-owned, black-run, and black-built." Its beginnings as such going back to pre-Civil War days, this "cultural capital of black America" had flourished for some time before the so-called Harlem Renaissance began. The film depicts a race-segregated, necessarily self-sufficient community whose cultural activities, schools, and university were a magnet and was home for the working-class alongside artists, intellectuals, and professionals. Its latter part focuses on the area's socio-economic decline in the last half of the century and recent signs of renewal.

Our Society's Dennette Harrod, Davey Yarborough, and John Edward Hasse are in the film. Also shown is the Ellington School of the Arts' New Washingtonians. Ted Hudson is among several credited for "special assistance in the preparation" of the film.

The documentary was produced by Hedrick Smith Productions, with offices in Bethesda, and was directed by Stanley Nelson, who grew up in DC.

About the !! Warning !! on Page 3 -

Don't delay! Don't risk cultural deprivation! Mail your dues (\$30 single, \$50 couple, \$20 first-time-ever, \$5 student), check or money order, payable to the Duke Ellington Society, PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003. Still seeing stars on your mailing label? Two (☆☆) means we are waiting for you to renew; three (☆☆☆) means we cordially invite you to join.

Jack Towers' March Program: Duke's Rare Carnegie Hall Concert

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

This is a Carnegie Hall concert that few people have heard. In 1947, the band gave two performances there, one on December 26 and one on the 27th. On the afternoon of the 26th, Duke and several members of the band went to the Liberian Consulate for a ceremony in which Duke was saluted for the brand new *Liberian Suite*. When they came out of the Consulate, the city had been hit with a blizzard—16 inches of fluffy snow. Many people who had tickets didn't get to Carnegie Hall. The band was late, too, and their uniforms didn't get there, either.

When Prestige did the LP masters, and CDs as well, they took everything, except for one number, from the December 27th performance. The performance on the 26th has never been issued, and of particular interest on that night was the first, and one of the few, recorded performances of Duke's "avant garde" piano piece "The Clothed Woman."

So, for our March program, Jack Towers will play a concert heard only by people who got to the Hall, plus perhaps 20 or 30 record producers and engineers and a few Ellington record collectors who may have heard the tapes. Come to the **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, at 8 pm on Saturday, March 4**, and your name will be added to this list of people who have heard this unheard Ellington!

Condolences

We extend heartfelt sympathy to Maurice Lawrence, our first president, on the death of Sylvia, his wife of 57 years. She is fondly remembered, especially by long-time members of the Duke Ellington Society.

Members at IAJE Conference

Our members who attended the International Association of Jazz Educators Convention in New Orleans included Patricia Willard, Walter van de Leur, John Edward Hasse, Rusty Hassan, Luvenia George, and Anthony Brown. John chaired a panel, and Walter was on hand at the Billy Strayhorn Songs exhibit.

Royal Essence: An Evening of Ellington with Sir Roland Hanna and Davey Yarborough

Review by John Mason

The Ellington centennial year is over, and all that remains are the memories—memories and more CD releases and re-releases celebrating the Duke's music than there are fish in the sea. This tidal wave of Ellingtonia has been a blessing, but it's been all too easy for recordings that aren't backed by the marketing might of the major labels to be lost in the flood. It would be a shame if that were the fate of this gem from Sir Roland Hanna and Davey Yarborough.

Hanna and Yarborough recorded *Royal Essence* last year before an enthusiastic audience at the Montpelier Cultural Arts Center in Laurel, MD. Except for three originals, the session was devoted to music written by Ellington or closely associated with the Ellington Orchestra.

Hanna's accomplishments as a pianist and composer are, of course, the stuff of legend; the much younger Yarborough is well known in the Washington area as a performer and as the head of jazz studies and director of the jazz orchestra at the Duke Ellington School for the Arts. Though an obvious love for Ellington's compositions unites them, it would be hard to pick two musicians with more dissimilar styles. The rich textures of Hanna's piano sound all the more lush when set against the angular astringency of Yarborough's flute and saxophones. Yet in the hands of these two musicians, the contrast in no way detracts; it simply broadens the sonic landscape.

Yarborough delights on up-tempo numbers, such as "Black and Tan Fantasy," where his reedy tone on alto and technical athleticism perfectly capture the spirit of the young Ellington. While the tartness of his sound on the ballads will at first seem a bit abrasive to listeners more used to warmth of Hodges or Webster, his moving interpretations will win many admirers.

Hanna proves to be a sensitive accompanist, thinning his textures, for instance, when Yarborough takes up his flute, and making sure the proceeding always got that swing. Still it's as a soloist that he really shines—unflagging inventiveness wedded to breathtaking virtuosity. His dazzling solo in "Cottontail" is alone worth the price of the CD.

Intimate, but full of musical fireworks, this is a terrific CD.

(*Jazzmont 01. Available from Montpelier Cultural Arts Center, 12826 Laurel-Bowie Road, Laurel, MD, 20708. Phone: 301-953-1993.*)

Duke Ellington's Washington. Cedric Smith Productions, 2000.

Commentary by Bill Hasson

The recent airing of *Duke Ellington's Washington* on PBS was noteworthy in presenting to the public some unknown facts on a Washington neighborhood where Ellington spent his formative years and on the entrepreneurial achievements of Black businesses of the 1920's. It does, however, fall short by giving credit to some Washington institutions for having such a great impression on the formation of Duke's genius. Let me just say that other urban areas such as Chicago and New York had similar circumstances with cultural and business institutions that rivaled Washington, DC. Segregation created and forced the Black population to develop their own cultural institutions. Duke Ellington sought throughout his career to speak or portray all human beings as equal. He was awed by beauty of God's creation.

Much of the film really deals with how good people feel about the fact that Ellington was born in Washington, DC. There should have been more attention to his existing residencies that are still intact. Why Howard University came late to recognize and embrace the music Duke played. One need look at the music recognized by the music department during that period. The late noted writer Sterling Brown, who taught at Howard, stated to this writer that he had to close his door while listening to "jazz." Howard did, however, confer an honorary degree on Duke. I did not get a sense of a chronology of events that would allow me to measure the progression of Duke's maturation.

When I spoke to the producers of the project, they had a certain exotic presentation they were hoping to pull off. They gave me the impression that Duke Ellington became the genius he is today because of the events that occurred in Washington, DC and U Street. The rest of his world experiences would deny that. Washington was just a beginning. And he certainly had to leave Washington to achieve the recognition that he did. I asked them explore the questions of race, class, and the impressions of White people knowledgeable of the period when Duke lived in Washington.. They were uninterested. John Hasse's comments were, however, quite superb. It is always refreshing to have new information on the life and genius of Duke Ellington as long as concepts are not improbably stretched. Let the debate begin.

Commentary on Duke Ellington's Washington in local print media include:

- Sue Beving, "High Notes of Ellington's Washington." *Washington Times*, 5 February 2000.
- Marc Fisher, "Duke Ellington's Washington' with Blinders." *Washington Post*, Monday, 7 February 2000.
- Courtland Milloy, "When Black Was a Color for Success." *Washington Post*, Sunday, 6 February 2000.

See also, "Comments via the Internet Re Film" on page 3.

Short Sheets . . .

We note the passing last summer of Thomas R. Griffith, born in Washington, DC in 1919, who for several years traveled with the band as Ellington's valet before settling in Chicago. He remained a friend of Duke and Mercer and, in 1978, was a charter member of Chicago's Duke Ellington Society. ♪ ♪ The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra began its tenth (yes, count 'em – tenth!) season in late January with "A Bebop Celebration in the New Millennium" concert. The event, held at the Kennedy Center, had as its guest artist James Moody. ♪ ♪ A Chicago *Tribune* review of "The Harlem Nutcracker" praises David Berger, who "gathered up the gumption to finish a score that Ellington and Strayhorn had only started." A CD of the music by Berger's Sultans of Swing orchestra can be had by way of his web site at < sultansofswing.com > or by phone: 732-335-1030. ♪ ♪ Area musician Steve Hancock has made a CD, *Duke Ellington for Solo Guitar*. ♪ ♪

Comments via the Internet Re Film

The following observations about *Duke Ellington's Washington* are excerpted from internet postings.

I saw the show at the Kennedy Center and it is excellent. In a sense, the music and the majesty of the U Street neighborhood is personified by Ellington's life and how he approached his art. . . . it is about his city, the neighborhood he was born into, and about hundreds of other African-Americans who came up in that neighborhood and benefitted from the sense of community there. People like Charles Drew.

– Brian Gilmore

I thought it was fantastic-the comments, the historical footage, the music, as well as the overall organization of the program. It reinforced my regret at never having gone to see Duke . . . at the Howard Theatre when I had the chance.

– Ben Pubols

The program is more about Ellington's Washington (then til now) than Ellington, but the director skillfully ties the two together. . . . I think the director-Stanley Nelson . . . , did a fine job indeed. Many in the live audience during successive premieres . . . were moved by the film and by the people from the community who shared their memories on-camera.

– John Edward Hasse

It was superb and accurate. I was expecting it to be exclusively about Ellington. I was surprised that it was a history of DC. I did not tape it, but I ordered it . . .

– Alvin Thompson (Dr. Thompson grew up in DC before settling in Seattle)

Youth Project in Full Swing

Reported by Luvenia A. George

The Duke Ellington Youth Project began the 99-00 academic year with 65 teachers attending a Workshop in October at the Ripley International Center on the Mall. Beginning with a delicious catered lunch, participants then heard inspiring messages of support by special guests Delores Kendrick, District of Columbia poet laureate, and James Zimmerman, executive director of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra. Luvenia A. George presented a curriculum update, *Duke Ellington, Composer: The Man and His Music*, based on her May 1999 article in *Music Educators Journal*. During her presentation she distributed to each teacher a lesson plan with support materials of books, tapes, and CDs of Ellington music for use with their classes. Teachers also viewed videos of the last Youth Project Festival in the Smithsonian's Flag Hall in celebration of the Ellington Centennial.

Mark your calendars now for events at the National Museum of American History. All participants will be students in the Duke Ellington Youth Project.

- ✓ April 25, 11 am – Original Poetry Reading with Music, Hall of Musical Instruments
- ✓ April 25, 12 noon – Art Exhibit Opening, Photography Hall
- ✓ April 27, 7 pm – Duke Ellington Youth Festival Music Performances, Carmichael Auditorium

More details will come as we continue to celebrate the Ellington Centennial!

Origins of Chicago DES Recalled

In a note accompanying a copy of the funeral program for Thomas Griffith (see "Short Sheets..." above), Marion Stevenson informs that she founded the Chicago Chapter of the Duke Ellington Society in April 1978. She writes, "Among the charter members were Tommy Griffith, Bob Johnson of *Jet* magazine, Holmes (Daddy-O) Daylie, Chicago's prominent DJ I was also the 1st president from the founding date to February, 1981 at which time I moved to California and left the records with LeRoy Wimbush for him, and others who wished to carry on the Society. . . ." However, the group did not continue.

Ed. Note: The Ray Nance Chapter, host of the Second International Ellington Study Group Conference, in 1984, was a later group spearheaded by Don Miller along with Melvin Saxton, Carl Watson, and others.

Go Online for . . .

- A Herb Jeffries internet site was recently inaugurated. To subscribe, send an e-mail with only the word "subscribe" as the message to: <FlamingosRoost-subscribe@onelist.com>
- For materials on Washington, DC's African-American history and its notable personalities; the music scene, including ragtime and early jazz; Ellington quizzes; a visual tour of sites; etc., go to: <www.pbs.org/ellington>
- The Maryland unit of IAJE gives news of festivals, concerts, and more on <members.aol.com/iajemd>

!! Warning !!

Non-Payment of Your Dues
Can Compromise Your Cultural Well-Being

"Dramatis Felidae" (To Use Our Man's Term in MIMM)

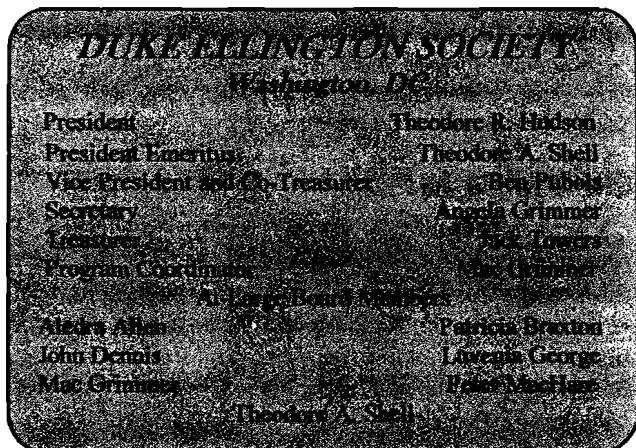
About Our Members

Yvonne Condell has been traveling extensively in connection with her service in myriad educational, humanities, and professional associations and commissions. The last survivor of the Condell family, she also went to the ancestral town of **Jim Condell** (her deceased husband and a former member). She saw the tomb of his great-grandfather, Admiral Charles Condell, one of Chile's heroes, and walked down Condell Avenue in both Valparaiso and Santiago. Jim expertly played classical as well as jazz guitar and at the time of his death was writing a book-length psychological study of Duke. ♪ ♪ **Jana Steed's** spiritual biography of Duke continues to earn favorable reviews. ♪ ♪ Congratulations to Mac Grimmer. His "*What a Life! No War-horses!*" in our October 1999 issue is reprinted in the latest *Blue Light*, edited by one of our English members, **David Fleming**. In the same issue are several Ellington '99 photographs by **Ted Shell**. ♪ ♪ Talk about hardship duty, **John Edward Hasse** has been on a cruise around New Zealand, during which he lectured for Smithsonian Associates. He has also found time to perform a jazz piano concert at Lock Haven University and to lecture on Ellington at the University of Kentucky and the Chicago Humanities Festival. ♪ ♪ **John Hornsby**, a pillar of Toronto's Duke Ellington Society, presented a program on "The Sounds of Paul Gonsalves" at their January meeting. ♪ ♪ **William "Bill" Fawcett Hill** is co-chair, with Steve Lasker, of Ellington 2000. ♪ ♪ More honors for **Davey Yarborough**: In their ceremony in February he received a Special Achievement Award from the Washington Area Musicians Association, and in March he will receive the National Urban League's Whitney Young Award.

Puzzler Answers (Continued from February issue)

We gave the titles of the music manuscript excerpts in our previous issue: "My Funny Valentine," "The Star-Crossed Lovers," and "Love You Madly." The music notations respectively, are by Billy Strayhorn, Tom Whaley, and Norris Turney.

Have ideas for a fun quiz? Publish them in Ellingtonia.



An Evening with Eddie Lambert

Reported by Norma E. McCray

At our February meeting, Peter MacHare's excellent selection of exemplars from Eddie Lambert's *Duke Ellington: A Listener's Guide* gave us an evening to remember and relish. It was informative, for example, to sample the music of Charlie Johnson's Paradise orchestra, part of the young Duke Ellington's musical world in which he would thrive and excel. Hearing music that was the subject of Lambert's analysis and commentary, photocopied excerpts of which Peter provided, was exhilarating.

Jack Towers' superb sound engineering transformed the setting to "Club Ellington," making us feel that we had been transported back through time to a live performance.

The evening provided an insightful glimpse of Ellington's genius, daring combinations of instrumental colors, and impressive body of work. His music always reveals something new, challenging, and remarkable. Peter's thoughtful presentation led us to discover and experience Ellington's evolution as a master innovator and orchestrator. It was the perfect vehicle for welcoming a new member and visitors.

Thanks to modern communications technology, Elaine Norsworthy, who after his death saw Eddie's masterpiece through to publication, collaborated with Peter in the preparations for the presentation. He taped the meeting to send to her in England.

Ed. note: We thank Norma McCray for this report. She substituted for our secretary, Angela Grimmer, who could not be at the meeting.

Latest Information from Ellington 2000:

18th Annual International Duke Ellington Conference at Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel - May 24th to 28th, 2000

GUIDELINES FOR MAKING ROOM RESERVATIONS

Reservations must be made directly with reservation department by Telephone 1-800-950-7667 or 323-466-7000 or Fax 323-469-7006 or E-mail <reserve-hollywoodroosevelt.com>

To take advantage of following 'special' Conference rates reservations must be made prior to April 23rd, 2000.

HOTEL RATES

\$109 for a deluxe single or double; \$119 for 3 persons and \$129 for 4. Also \$119 for Cabana Room or Junior Suite. 25% discount will apply to all other suites. Rates are per room, per night, including existing beds plus a 14% tax. Guests that reserve at least 60 days prior to arrival and stay 6 to 14 nights will be extended a rate of \$99 for a deluxe single or double room. Reservations made prior to January 15th for any number of nights will also be offered this rate.

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FEE

Early Registration - post-marked by March 20th - \$170 U.S. Funds
Later Registration - \$195 U.S. Funds
Payable to Duke Ellington Society

PO Box 2652, Culver City, CA 90231-2652

CALL FOR PAPERS

Proposals for Daytime presentations - please submit name, affiliation, topic, length, audio/visual requirements and any other pertinent information to Duke Ellington Society, Attention: Steven Lasker, PO Box 2652, Culver City, CA 90231-2652 or E-mail <him-wphill@telis.org>