

# Ellingtonia



Newsletter Of The  
**Duke Ellington Society**  
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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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## **Jazz Devotee Dennette Harrod Dies**

Dennette Harrod, authority on jazz and friend of such luminaries as Duke Ellington and Count Basie, passed away on March 23. Born in 1917, he came to Washington as a youngster, where his intense love of jazz began. He was a member of our Society.

Because of his extensive knowledge, Dennette was a key interviewee in the recently nationally televised documentary *Duke Ellington's Washington*. Teresa Gionis, its associate producer, says that his contribution to the project was "enormous" and that "I really liked him so much. I don't think I'd ever met anyone so completely music crazy. It had a transforming effect on him . . . ." Luvenia George, director of the Ellington Youth Project, asserts that he was her favorite source of information.

One of Dennette's dearest friends was Jack Towers. [See the remembrance on page 2.] They met in 1947 and remained very close during the ensuing 53 years, frequently traveling together in the earlier years to New York, Massachusetts, and other places to hear the Ellington band. Dennette was also chummy with members in the orchestra, especially Hodges, Nanton, Webster, Carney, Procope, and Rick Henderson.

Funeral services were held in Washington on April 10, followed by interment at Arlington National Cemetery, just across the river in Virginia.

We will miss Dennette. To his wife, Phyllis, other family, and friends, we extend sincere condolences.

## **Nominations Invited**

by Ben Pubols, Chair

The Nominations Committee is soliciting nominations for officers and board members of our Society for 2000-2001. Officers are President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. Our By-Laws also call for a seven member Board of Directors. Before nominating someone it is necessary to obtain their approval.

Send nominations to: Ben Pubols by either e-mail: <bhpubols@gateway.net> or telephone: 301-913-5951. They should be received in time to be announced at our May 6 meeting, for voting at our June meeting.

## **May Meeting: Bus Tour of Ellington's Washington**

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

Our May meeting will be unique: an afternoon bus tour of Ellington's Washington! The tour will be on Saturday afternoon, May 6, at 2 pm, and will take the place of our regular evening meeting.

Our bus will be provided free of charge by Capitol Entertainment Services, Inc., which is inaugurating a "Duke Ellington Neighborhood" tour as one of their regular sightseeing tours of Washington. We will, of course, see several of the houses where Duke lived, as well as some of the venues where the band played.

With a limited seating capacity, we may have to have a second tour to accommodate everyone on a later, perhaps the next, Saturday afternoon. We need a head count, so to reserve your seat for Saturday, May 6, call **Mac Grimmer at 202-546-7764.**

We will board the bus promptly at **2 pm, Saturday, May 6**, in front of our regular meeting place, the **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW**. Don't be late for this unusual chance to experience another facet of Ellingtonia!

Bring your camera!

## **Members Going to Ellington 2000**

As has been the case at previous ones, our Society's contingent of registrants will be one of the largest, in relationship to its membership, at the 18th Annual Duke Ellington Study Group Conference, this year in Hollywood, California, May 24-28.

Patricia Willard, who is on the program, has been to all of them, beginning in Washington in 1983. Unless his plans change so that he is able to attend, this year Morris Hodara will join members of our Society who have missed only one: Sjef Hoefsmit, Ted Hudson, Ted and Marion Shell, and Jack Towers. There are others who have been to all since joining our Society.

As announced here previously, in addition to Patricia, two others of our members are presenters, Dennis Dimmer from England and Anthony Brown from California.

## Dennette Harrod: "...Family Close..."

by Jack Towers

Our long-time member and devoted Ellington admirer Dennette Harrod passed away on March 23, 2000.

Dennette became devoted to the Ellington band in the 1930s and became close friends with many of the band members—especially Tricky Sam Nanton, Ben Webster, Harry Carney, and Johnny Hodges. One time in 1964 I encountered the Ellington band in Chicago and went up to Johnny Hodges and said I was a friend of Dennette. Hodges wrinkled up his face and said he didn't know a Dennette Harrod. Two weeks later I went down to an Ellington performance at American University. I got there early and here were Hodges and Dennette chatting up on the stage. I went up and said to Hodges, "In Chicago last week you told me you didn't know Dennette Harrod." Hodges said, "Oh, you mean *Podner*."

One time in the 60s Dennette and I were talking with Lawrence Brown, and Lawrence said that through the years when the band came to Washington, he would keep his eyes on the people in front of the band, and sure enough, there would be Dennette. He was also a very close friend of Wild Bill Davis. They became acquainted when Wild Bill and Johnny Hodges were doing some jobs together in the 50s.

Dennette was piano playing buddy of Billy Taylor in the 1930s. Dennette and I went up to the Ellington concert honoring Billy Strayhorn in New York in the late 60s. At intermission Billy Taylor came up and said, "Hey, Dennette, you're the guy who taught me the flatted fifth!"

Count Basie was also one of Dennette's close friends. Whenever the Basie band came to town, he and Basie would get into the car and go out to the race track, or wherever Basie wanted to go. Once Basie invited Dennette and his wife, Phyllis, for a weekend at a Basie home in the Bahamas. Dennette was very touched when Basie, the day before he died, made a phone call to the Harrods' but Dennette was away from the house at that touching moment.

Dennette and I met in 1947. Our shared interest in Duke Ellington kept us family close until he called it quits.

## **Duke Ellington for Solo Guitar by Steve Hancoff** (Discipline Global Mobile DGM 9914)

by Richard Ehrenzeller

While there have been other Ellington tribute albums by guitarists, this is the first solo acoustic guitar album I have ever found. Hancoff is a blues guitarist. The listener should not expect to hear someone like Django Reinhardt or Charlie Christian. It is an instructional and enhanced CD. The guitar chords are listed in the booklet and images can be seen when it is played on a computer CDROM. It is, however, quite pleasing to listen to. Steve plays many of the lesser-known pieces of the 1920s—"Misty Morning," "Move Over," "Awful Sad," "Mississippi Moan," "Rent Party Blues" and "Blues of the Vagabond." About the only common pieces are "Drop Me Off in Harlem" and "Come Sunday." This well played CD is not only highly recommended for its repertoire, but also for its uniqueness.

*We thank Richard Ehrenzeller and the New York Duke Ellington Society (TDES) for permitting us to reprint the above from its March newsletter.*

## **A New Sacred Concert**

by Theodore A. Shell

Browsing on my monthly trip to Towers record store looking for new releases, etc. to add to my collection, I ran across a new video titled *Duke Ellington Sacred Concerts*, recorded in Lugano Cathedral on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Duke Ellington's birth and produced by Image Entertainment. Other than this meager information, no other appears on the jacket. I was rather loathe to purchase the item on such little information

Again, no dates for the concert or even where it took place. No name of the orchestra, conductor, or choir or its director. I decided to take a chance anyway, and to my surprise it is a welcome addition to my collection. Much of the information not on the jacket cover is included in the credits on the tape.

I was first struck by the quality of its clarity, not usually found on earlier jazz video tapes. In close-ups, even the performers' fingernails are dutifully manicured. The resolution is remarkable. The cathedral in which the concert is performed seems to be a vintage one, with an old baroque organ. One expects somehow to hear some Ellington played on it during the concert, but no luck. The choir, and the direction of the performance, was without question a very professional one. The voices of the choir and the pronunciation of the words would lead one to believe that the singers were well versed in the English language, and the band's performance is superb. Yes, there is no "David Danced." The trumpet solos of John Faddis are impeccably done and the vocalists perform with excellence.

This is a must for one's collection and a model for future performances of Duke's Sacred Concerts." The Duke himself would have enjoyed this tape.

The credits on the tape are as follows: Performance is by the Lausanne Big Band at the Cathedral Di San Lorenzo in Lugano (Italy, I presume). Guest soloists are John Faddis, trumpet; Adam Nussbaum, drums; Michele Hendricks, soprano; Allan Harris, baritone; and Octuro de Cordes, the chorus.

It is 79 minutes of blissful listening.

## Short Sheets . . .

♪♪ Leslie Dunner, conductor of the Annapolis Symphony, is a finalist among stiff competition to lead the Hartford Symphony. An Ellington admirer, season before last he guest-conducted the National Symphony in Duke's *The River*; last season he conducted the Hartford in the same work. While Dr. Dunner was resident conductor of the Detroit Symphony, though not under his direction, that orchestra recorded *The River* for release on Chandos (Chan 9154). ♪♪ You discography anoraks (to borrow a *Blue Light* term) out there, here's a *DESOR* amendment for you, as published in the latest *DEMS Bulletin*: June Norton should be included in the session of 18 July 1950, singing "Creole Love Call" and "On a Turquoise Cloud." ♪♪ There is a Florence Mills internet site now at [www.tip.net.au/~wegan/](http://www.tip.net.au/~wegan/). ♪♪ According to *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams* by Linda Dahl (NY: Pantheon, 2000), "We know that Mary contributed at least forty-seven compositions and arrangements to the Ellington Orchestra between the 1940s and 1960s, and there may well be others." The author also says that "Trumpets No End" ("Blue Skies") was written by Mary Lou Williams as a solo showcase for husband Harold Baker, but Duke changed it to feature all the trumpeters.

## Watch for . . .

- A two-CD release, *Hollywood Swing & Jazz . . .*, excerpts from M-G-M, Warner Bros., and RKO movies, including the likes of Goodman, Armstrong, Eckstine, James, Shaw, and Basie, is in the works. The Ellington components are "All God's Chillun Got Rhythm" and a previously unreleased dance segment, both from *A Day at the Races* with the Marx brothers.
- We can expect the imminent release of a book, *Jazz: The First Century*, edited by our member John Edward Hasse.
- We saw a posting on the internet that Lene Ellington, Mercer's widow, is writing a book about their life together.
- Modern Library is preparing *Trading Twelves*, letters between Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, both friends and admirers of Ellington. (There is a story of an invitation from Duke to then-trumpeter Ellison to sit in at a rehearsal that conceivably could have led to his joining the band.) In creating his monumental *Invisible Man*, Ellison thought of the novel's characters at members of Duke's band: "Boy, I really think I got me some soloists in there near about as good as old Cootie and Rex and Johnny and Ben Webster and Harry Carney, but you also got to have a pianist-arranger like old Duke to make them cats really blow, and naturally THAT'S got me worried."

## Quotation of the Month

*What Ellington and Wagner achieved in music is here achieved in fiction [Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man]: the transmutation of folk materials into a fully orchestrated masterpiece.*

– Robert G. O'Meally, *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*

## Please Note: Festival's Venue Changed

The Duke Ellington Youth Project's Annual Festival at 7 pm on April 27 will be at Flag Hall in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (NMAH), rather than in the Carmichael Auditorium. This "don't miss" event climaxes the academic year of this unique and highly successful educational initiative. Over 400 students are expected to perform.

Two other year-culminating events of the Project will take place on Tuesday, April 25 at NMAH. The Original Poetry Reading of works by students inspired by Ellingtonia will be at 11 am in the Hall of Musical Instruments. Then at noon in Photography Hall the Student Art Show will open with a reception. The show will run through May 31.

Our member Luvenia George is the director of the Project, which serves as the model for similar curricula in a number of educational systems throughout the country.

Let's get there and by our presence and by other ways let those kids know that what they have been doing is appreciated and important enough to continue in and to enrich their out-of-school lives.

## Toronto's Syd Blackwood Passes

The community of Ellingtonia devotees has been saddened by the death of Syd Blackwell, president for the past four years of the Toronto Duke Ellington Society, on 17 March. As an internet posting noted, he was "well known to Ellington fans across North America for his attendance at conferences, and for his untiring efforts on behalf of the Toronto chapter."

One of his favorite projects was the Toronto Duke Ellington Society's Music Scholarship. The family suggested that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to that fund in his memory, which our Society did.

We convey our deep sympathy to his wife, Patricia Poole, and other family members and friends. We will miss the pleasure of the company of him and Pat together at the conferences. We hope that Pat will continue to come.

## Piano Exhibit and Programs Include Duke

"Piano 300: Celebrating Three Centuries of People and Pianos" opened in March for a one-year run at the Smithsonian's Ripley Center. The exhibit focuses on the evolution of the piano and the playing of it. It develops as well its role in cultural and social history over the 300 years since its invention. Among the pianos on display is a white one owned by Ellington. Also for viewing is the music manuscript for "Ad Lib on Nippon." Also there is a listening station where one may hear "Reflections in D."

Among the exhibit's events of special interest Ellington enthusiasts readers are piano recitals on April 27 and 29 in celebration of Duke's birthday, respectively by Tony Walker and Burnett Thompson. On April 28, as part of the "Gallery Talks" series, Reuben Jackson will speak on "Lots o' Fingers: Ellington the Pianist."

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

**About Our Members**

♪♪ In regard to his web site "A Duke Ellington Panorama," **Peter MacHare** is described in the current issue of *DEMS Bulletin* as a "terrific administrator" ♪♪ A photo of **Ferebee Streett** singing with the Last Chance Jazz Band graces the April *Tailgate Ramblings*. In the same issue **Harold Gray** has an expository article entitled "Jazz at Elderhostels" about travel/learning adventures for people 55 and older. ♪♪ As this goes to the printer, **George Henderson** is expecting to be released from the Washington Hospital Center and go across the street to the National Rehabilitation Center to begin physical therapy. He expresses appreciation for the well wishes of our members.

♪♪ We thank **Sjef Hoefsmid**, who found another of our former president Terrell Allen's collector-item letters and sent it on to **Peter MacHare** as a donation to our Archives.

♪♪ **Local Performances by Our Members** ♪♪

**Esther Williams and Trio**

Washington Plaza Hotel  
April 21-22, May 12-13, 26-27, June 9-10, 23-24

**Davey Yarborough Quartet**

Kennedy Center Millennium Stage  
Monday, April 17, 8 pm (free)

**Davey Yarborough Hosting Jazz Series, French Embassy**

Tuesday, April 18, 8 pm

♪♪ (Call 202-944-8000 for tickets and schedule.) ♪♪

**We Have Heard Nothing Further . . .**

. . . of a possible host for an Ellington 2001 conference.

**"The Musical World of Mary Lou Williams" at Kennedy Center**

The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra concerts, with Geri Allen as guest pianist, and other events will explore Williams' art and life on May 7 and 8 at the Kennedy Center. Up to four tickets for these free programs may be reserved by calling 202-464-4600 (\$2 convenience fee) or may be picked up at the box office by April 8, 10 am. For those without tickets, doors will open to the general public at 8:15 each day.

**Duke Nearby, but Not Present At April Members' Choice Meeting**

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

A wide variety of music was heard at our April meeting, a "member's choice" night that featured Ellington/Strayhorn compositions played by other bands. Among others, we heard several versions of "Cottontail," a panorama of piano versions of Duke's pieces selected by Ted Shell, and an Alice Babs selection by Ted Hudson. We also heard from Jimmie Lunceford, Count Basie and Louis Armstrong, but the curiosity of the night was presented by Ben Pubols, a 1933 version of "Creole Love Call" by a German vocal group, the "Comedian Harmonists," imitating band instruments a la early Mills Brothers.

Patricia Willard noted that our meeting date, April 1, fell on Harry Carney's 90th birthday, and paid tribute by playing the "Carney with Strings" selections from the *Verve Jazz Scene* album..

**Tentative Schedule for Ellington 2000**

**Wednesday, May 24 Evening Program**

Mixer with Live Music

**Thursday - Saturday, May 25-27 Day Programs**

- Anthony Brown - preparation and recording of *Far East Suite*
- Patricia Willard - panel leader of alumni of *Assault on a Queen*
- Steve Hancoff - Ellington music adapted for solo guitar
- Dennis Dimmer - Jimmy Hamilton's tenor saxophone stylings
- Mark Cantor - films, including 15 mins. of *Unseen Jump for Joy*
- Brooks Kerr - at piano, sharing memories of Duke
- George Avakian - production of *Ellington at Newport* recording
- Steve Lasker - Ellington rarities and new discoveries
- Bill Hill and Hal Jovian - interview of "living legend" trumpeter/arranger/composer in Lunceford, Basie, and Ellington bands
- Lee Farley - videos of Ellingtonians in other settings and venues

**Thursday and Friday Evening, May 25-26 Programs**

Bill Berry L.A. All Star Band - Tom Talbert Orchestra - Vocalists

**Saturday Evening, May 27 Program**

Annual Banquet  
All Star Ellington Group: B. Berry, K. Burrell, B. Cooper, J. Lamb, A. Baron, A. Domnerus, H. Jeffries

Singing sensation Vicki Copeland accompanied by Dini Clarke

**Sunday Morning and Afternoon Programs**

Closing Ceremony  
Guided Bus Tour, ending with lunch and live music at Ellington High School

**18<sup>th</sup> Annual International Duke Ellington Conference at Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel - May 24<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, 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 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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 have been extended a rate of \$99 for a deluxe single or double room.

**CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FEE**

\$195 U.S. Funds

Payable to Duke Ellington Society  
PO Box 2652, Culver City, CA 90231-2652

**DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY**

Washington, DC

- |                                 |                    |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
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| Vice President and Co-Treasurer | Ben Pubols         |
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