

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



Courtesy Carlye Productions

Volume IX, Number 4

APRIL 2001

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

Copyright © 2001 by The Duke Ellington Society, Inc., P.O. Box 15591, Washington, D.C. 20003-0787, U.S.A.

Youth Festival Focuses on Century Of Ellington and His Contemporaries

Reported by Luvenia George, Project Director

More than 500 students from 33 Washington, DC schools will showcase their artistic talents at the 10th Annual Duke Ellington Youth Festival, April 23-26.

With a focus on innovation and creativity, it opens in at the Library of Congress' Coolidge Auditorium at 10:30 am, April 23 with performances by a string ensemble from the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, woodwind ensemble from Dunbar High School, dancers from Sousa Middle School, and the Ellington School's famous Show Choir. As an added attraction, Davey Yarborough will play the saxophone of the late Gerry Mulligan, on exhibit at the Library.

At 11 am the next morning at the Smithsonian's Hall of Musical Instruments in the Museum of American History, literary and media arts students from the Ellington School will read their original poetry, accompanied by the All-School Choir. Immediately after, the Art Exhibit, showcasing creativity of students from all over the city in a colorful explosion of youthful innovation in a variety of artistic media, will open in the first floor of the West Wing. Student art celebrating creativity in the arts and sciences will run until May 25 in the Taylor Gallery as part of the Lemelson Center's exhibit celebrating Nobel prize winners.

The Festival concludes with student performances in Carmichael Auditorium at 7 pm, Thursday, April 26. Bands, choirs, dancers and ensembles will joyfully celebrate the first century of jazz with the music of Armstrong, Ellington, Gerry Mulligan, Miles Davis and others who made the century an explosion of creativity as expressed in the freedom of jazz.

All events are free and open to the public. Come celebrate with young performers, artists and poets the 10th Anniversary of the Duke Ellington Youth Project!

Wells Heads Festival Group

Vocalist Ronnie Wells has for some time has been president of the nonprofit Fish Middleton Fund, and she is director of the Annual East Coast Jazz Festival.

Treasury Series Program Rescheduled for April 7 Meeting

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

The date for our "Highlights of the Treasury Broadcasts" program has been changed to our regular meeting time on Saturday, April 7.

In 1945, Duke Ellington began what was to be the largest single recording project of his career, the "Treasury Series." Consisting of complete broadcasts, and called "A Date With The Duke," the first of 22 (!) double CD albums has just been released. (They even include Duke's sales pitches for war bonds.) The "sound quality is excellent" and the series was "one of the most exciting ever produced," according to Eddie Lambert in his *Duke Ellington: A Listener's Guide*.

Jack Towers, of course, did the remastering, and will give us a sneak preview, a few highlights from the series although he says, "It sure was easy to pick out the numbers—any selection would have worked fine."

Be there to enjoy it all on **Saturday, April 7**, at our regular meeting place, the **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, at 8 pm.**

The Duke Ellington Society

Presents an Evening of
Ellington and Strayhorn Music

Featuring

Ronnie Wells

with

Ron Elliston & Friends

Saturday, May 5, 2001, 8 PM

Grace Lutheran Evangelical Church
16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC

Proceeds Support The Society's Student Fund

\$15 Per Person

For Tickets, Contact Patricia Braxton at:
202-269-5960 / pbraxton24@hotmail.com

Jazz: A History of America's Music by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. 512 pages. \$65.

Reviewed by Ben Pubols

This book, which appeared in late 2000, is the companion volume for the Ken Burns's *Jazz* that aired on PBS television in January of this year. This series has been much discussed in the press and by jazz aficionados. It has been recognized that the series was not intended for the enlightened, and there was the hope that it would attract new jazz fans to the fold. However, there also has been general criticism regarding the assumptions underlying the series, including the role of jazz in American history, misplaced emphases, omissions, and out-and-out errors. Although not without flaws, the book comes off somewhat better than the film.

Like the telecast documentary, the book takes the "Great Man" approach to the history of jazz, with special emphasis on Louis Armstrong. And like the television series, the book is divided into 10 segments; however, these 10 chapters do not correspond to the 10 television episodes. The book is broader in scope and flows more smoothly. The many minutes devoted to talking heads in the film are replaced by six essays inserted between chapters. The essays, by Wynton Marsalis, Dan Morgenstern, Gerald Early, Gary Giddins, Stanley Crouch, and Albert Murray, can be read independently of the main text. All but Morgenstern were prominent commentators on the television series.

The book's broader scope allows inclusion of musicians and events omitted or given slight shrift in the television series. Thus, Jack Teagarden receives a good write-up covering his early (late '20s-early '30s) period, Mary Lou Williams has a full page sidebar, and the Claude Thornhill Orchestra receives brief mention as a precursor to the Gil Evans-Miles Davis collaborations; however, it is referred to condescendingly as "a distinctly unorthodox dance band." Stan Kenton, who was also slighted in the documentary, receives largely negative attention in Gerald Early's essay. Finally, Benny Carter, who was only briefly mentioned in the telecast series, receives 19, albeit brief, citations in the book.

Appealing aspects of the book include superb photographs, many of which, as had been promised, are "new" (at least to me), and Dan Morgenstern's delightful eight-page reminiscence of his introduction to and early exposures to both recorded and live jazz.

Apropos this newsletter, Duke Ellington, the man and his music, receives thorough, generally accurate, coverage. However, it is necessary to point out a few major errors. The first thing one sees after getting beyond the inside front cover is a music manuscript sheet, a part labeled "Cootie" for "Reminiscing In Tempo". It is said to be "written in the composer's hand, 1935." This is clearly not the case. Duke never (except perhaps in the very early days) wrote out the parts for his individual musicians. In the mid-1930s, this task was generally assigned to Juan Tizol, and this sheet has been verified by Annie Kuebler as being in Tizol's hand. A double error appears on page 49 where it is written that Duke was born "on Twentieth Street in northwest Washington on April 22, 1899." One more: "Dreamy Blues" a.k.a. "Mood Indigo" is stated to have been composed in 1931; it was first recorded in October, 1930. One wonders about errors regarding musicians whose lives this reviewer is less familiar with. Where were Knopf's "fact checkers?"

One final pique is in order. The book is downright LOUSY on documentation. It is filled with quotations for which the author is not identified and/or the source is not cited. All readers, especially those interested in pursuing a topic further, be they lay persons or scholars, deserve better. This failure of attribution should not have been allowed to happen; as an academician, I find it inexcusable. Finally, there is no discography. Presumably anyone turned on sufficiently to want to hear the *music* is expected to purchase the numerous *Ken Burns Jazz* CDs issued by Columbia/Legacy and Verve.

In conclusion, I recommend the recently published *Jazz: The First Century*, edited by John Edward Hasse (William Morrow, 2000), reviewed in these pages in our November, 2000 issue. Although somewhat smaller (256 pages), it is well written, profusely illustrated, broader in scope, better balanced, and includes excellent bibliographies and discographies.

Short Sheets . . .

♪♪ Tim Black, a regular at the International Ellington Study Group Conferences, is a commentator in *Goin' to Chicago*, a documentary televised recently on PBS. An authority on Windy City history, he was a major speaker at Ellington '98 there. ♪♪ In a note, Wambi Cook informs that, as Willie Cook's oldest, he "made certain his funeral arrangements were appropriate and I recently returned from Stockholm where I finished his estate and brought his remains to the U.S.A." ♪♪ We saw a Duke Ellington section among the classical composer bins in a Towers record store. The CDs therein are works by him performed by persons who by current descriptors would likely be called symphony or classical musicians.

Re Duke's "(A Very) Unbooted Character" -- and "Chico Cuadrado" As Well

by Bill Flemons

An unbooted character is one without shoes, barefoot, as many persons were while working on the plantations in the deep South. When such persons came to the city to take up residence the term "unbooted" was used figuratively to express the opinion that they were too ingenuous, gullible, and awkward for urban living. In other words, they were viewed as extremely unsophisticated. Consequently, the native-born youth and the long-time residents of the big city referred to themselves as being "booted," which meant in jargon that they were sophisticated.

Booted to the hips and to have on hip boots were concepts voiced for a long time. One so booted was, of course, at the nth degree of sophistication, having even savior-faire. Thus the word hip in this even changing, idiomatic jargon of hipness survives to date.

[Ed. note: We thank super-hip Bill for his etiologic semantic lesson. We look forward to more.]

Youth Project Grows in Size and Influence

The first Duke Ellington Youth Project Festival took place in 1991 in the Smithsonian's Flag Hall with 150 performing students; this year's will showcase approximately 500 students. The Project began during academic year 1990-1991 with five schools; from 1991 to 2001, a total of 45 District of Columbia schools have enrolled. Its multidisciplinary curriculum of performing and visual arts, literature, foreign languages, and history has been requested and used by teachers, school systems, museums and other education institutions and organizations nationwide for study and implementation. For example, based on the Project's curriculum, the American Jazz Museum in Kansas City, Missouri now has its own Annual Duke Ellington Youth Festival!

We congratulate our member Dr. Luvenia George for her imaginative and dedicated professionalism as Director of the Ellington Youth Project over the years.

Sacred Concert a "Welcomed Success"

Commentary by Ted and Marion Shell

Those of us who attended the presentation of Duke Ellington's music from his Sacred Concerts in February at Peoples Congregational Church of Christ were pleasantly entertained. The band of five reeds, four brass, piano, bass, and drums led by Jacques "Saxman" Johnson was well disciplined and competent. Steven Herring, baritone, and Esther Williams, contralto, were hampered by an inadequate sound system but were very effective. The Chancel Choir, directed by Clyde T. Parker, did a yeoman's job. Michael Wooden, who danced to "David Danced" was well received. Among the performers were three of our members, Esther Williams, Davey Yarborough playing reeds in the band, and our first lady Geneva Hudson in the choir.

The program was a shortened version of Duke's concerts as we have heard them when orchestrated and played by the Duke himself, with choirs trained for the concerts by choir-master Tom Whaley and with the full Ellington orchestra with its widely known instrumental soloists. This concert repertoire was abbreviated, as many of the numbers we are used to hearing were missing. The program consisted of "In the Beginning God," "Will You Be There," "The Lord's Prayer," "Come Sunday," "David Danced," "My Love," "Father Forgive," "Is God a Three Letter Word for Love," "Praise God and Dance," and, finally, Billy Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train." In all of the 30-odd renditions of Duke's sacred concerts we have in our collection, I don't recall any rendition of "'A' Train," and it seemed out of place.

We'd be safe in saying that a great majority of patrons heard most of these selections for the first time, and many probably had not listened to any Ellington music for quite some time. For those, the concert could be said to be a welcomed success. For us tried-and-true fans, the more Ellington we hear, the better.

Erik Weidemann, 1931-2001

The international community of premier Ellington scholars has lost Erik Weidemann, who recently died in Denmark, where for years he taught at the University of Copenhagen. He was a familiar presence and presenter at the Annual International Duke Ellington Study Group Conferences. A regular critic for the Danish newspaper *Information*, his other writing includes books and articles on jazz published in both Danish and English.

A former student, Jørgen Mathiasen, who recently compiled an index to Duke's *Music Is My Mistress*, writes in an internet posting, "It has been said, that when a human being passes away a library disappears and Wiedemann was a tremendous library of jazz." Our president emeritus, Ted Shell, had a professional as well as personal remembrance of Prof. Weidemann, having treated him for an emergency dental problem when he was in Washington doing research about ten years ago.

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

About Our Members

♪ ♪ **Davie Yarborough**, a freshman at the Ellington School of the Arts, "sat in" with her dad's quartet at the East Coast Jazz Festival in February. She professed nervousness, but it didn't show during her warmly received, unscheduled debut as a singer in the big time. Incidentally, the entire Yarborough family—Davie and parents **Davey** and **Esther** (who performs professionally as Esther Williams)—are members of our Society. ♪ ♪ The US State Department is sending **John Edward Hasse** to Madrid and Barcelona to lecture on Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald, March 5-9. ♪ ♪ **Ken Steiner** has a review of Ken Burns' *Jazz* in TDES' current newsletter. ♪ ♪ We extend condolences to **Lillian Pubols** on the death of her mother, Mrs. Marie Menges. One of **Ben's** many delightful memories of his mother-in-law is dancing with her to the music of the Ellington orchestra at the Starlight Ballroom in Hershey, Pennsylvania in 1965. ♪ ♪ **Anthony Brown's** Asian American Orchestra is releasing another CD, *Monk's Moods*. Look for a review of it in our next issue. ♪ ♪ Our member **Ken Steiner** escaped injury in the Seattle earthquake. Unfortunately, his wife, Naomi, suffered a "minor injury" to her calf. Alvin Thompson, a friend of our Society, was fortunate; his household damage amounted to a scattering of books and papers, a cracked vase, broken lamp, and smashed jar of olives. ♪ ♪ Two articles well worth reading: **Harvey Cohen's** op-ed "Duke's Music Helped Bring U.S. Together" in the Baltimore *Sun*, Tuesday, 27 February, and **Ben Pubols'** "Ken Burns's *Jazz*: An Assessment," posted on the Duke-LYM internet site on 16 February, followed by reactions to his summary analysis by others.

New Book on Ellington Forthcoming

Austin H. Lawrence tells us that his *Duke Ellington and His World* is scheduled for release by Routledge Press in April. A number of book signing events are being planned for this once-postponed biography. We will provide more details as they become available.

To Join the Duke Ellington Society . . .

Send your check payable to The Duke Ellington Society to PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003-0787, USA.

Dues are a bargain — Renewing Member: \$30 or Couple: \$50; First-Time-Ever Member: \$20; and Student: \$5.

Note: If you have a star ☆ on your mailing label, either you are being invited by an associate or friend to become a member, or else we are reminding you to renew your membership.

**For Stimulating News, Views, and
A Great Ellington/Strayhorn Database**
Regularly check out Peter MacHare's "Duke Ellington Panorama" at:
< geocities.com/BourbonStreet/Square/2660/ >.

March Detour to Amsterdam

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

At our March meeting, first we were treated to a 1947 rendition of "Stardust" by the Lionel Hampton "Just Jazz" all-stars. Future Ellingtonian Willie Smith was on alto, already sounding a lot like Johnny Hodges. The tune was played as slowly as possible, until it was Hamp's turn; impatient with the slow pace, he double-timed it on out. Other great solos were by Corky Corcoran, Charlie Shavers, Barney Kessel, and Slam Stewart, humming and bowing.

We then took a slight detour, to Amsterdam, in 1958—one of Duke's European tours. This concert was later broadcast, and Sjef Hoefsmit compiled a tape of it and sent it to Ted Shell in 1990 as a Christmas present. (Parts of this concert have since been released on CD and video.) Nothing was routine; one of the highlights was a spirited "Diminuendo and Crescendo." After playing it each night for two years (since Newport), it sounded, to our ears, like an even better rendition. Sjef's tape also included a 1972 "Mood Indigo," with Tyree Glenn reprising the solo he did 22 years earlier, in 1950, on the *Masterpieces* LP. One of Sjef's comments was about the piano player on this tune: "The greatest surprise is Duke's support. . . . how can a musician be so incredibly original, when he has played this tune almost every day for more than 40 years?"

Calendar

Wednesday, March 21

Black & White & Jazzed All Over: An informal and thoughtful discussion of race, gender, and other tangled issues within the jazz world. Reuben Jackson, moderator, with John Murph and other special guests. 7 pm, Borders Books, 18th and L Streets, NW.

April 23-26

Annual Duke Ellington Youth Project Festival

April 23, 10:30 am, Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress - Ensembles, Dancers, Choir
April 24, Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, 10 am, Hall of Musical Instruments - Original Poetry and Music; 12 noon, West Wing, First Floor - Art Exhibit
April 26, 7 pm, Carmichael Auditorium, National Museum of American History - Bands, Choirs, Dancers, Ensembles
April 24-May 28, Taylor Gallery, National Museum of American History - Art Exhibit

Saturday, May 5, 8 pm

Duke Ellington Society's First Annual Concert, featuring Ronnie Wells with Ron Elliston & Friends. Benefit of the Youth Fund. \$15. Tickets: Patricia Braxton at 202-269-5960 or < pbraxton24@hotmail.com >.

Monday, May 14

Davey Yarborough the featured artist, Billy Taylor's Jazz at the Kennedy Center Concert. Info: 1-800-444-1324 and < kennedy-center.org/jazz >

June 22-23

2001 Baltimore-Washington JAZZfest, affiliated with the Columbia Festival of the Arts. Info: African Art Museum of Maryland, 410-730-7105 or 301-895-0051

