

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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On
April 29



Do Something Creative!

Public Events a High Point In Ellington Youth Project Year

The Duke Ellington Youth Project Festival will celebrate the launching of Jazz Appreciation Month at the Smithsonian this month. As in the past, the Festival serves as a culminating activity for students and teachers who have participated in the multi-disciplinary Project throughout the academic year.

It all opens with a new program, a Poetry Jam/Slam with poets from secondary schools and musicians from the Ellington School of the Arts. Our Reuben Jackson will be master of ceremonies. The Jam/Slam will begin at 11 am on Monday, April 22 in the Carmichael Auditorium in the National Museum of American History (NMAH).

On the same day, beginning at 12 noon, another "first" at the Smithsonian will be Art Day, during which student art will be on display in the Reception Suite of NMAH.

Thursday, April 25 will mark the Eleventh Annual Duke Ellington Youth Festival, in the Carmichael Auditorium at 7 pm. Over 300 students in bands, choirs, string ensembles, and dancers will celebrate Jazz Appreciation Month with music of Ellington, Strayhorn, and other greats.

Another of our members, Dr. Luvenia George, is the first and continuing Director of this highly successful Duke Ellington Youth Project that has served as a model for similar endeavors in schools, museums, and other educational and cultural institutions.

The public is invited to all these events. Duke Ellington Society members are especially welcome and encouraged to come and cheer these young performers on!

Anything Goes

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our program for April will be a members' choice. The theme? "Anything Goes" — bring anything you like and tell us about it. It can be a recording, book, photograph, or even a funny story with, of course, some Ellington connection. If you have an item that hasn't fit any of our previous members' choice themes, here's your chance to get it in. Please keep your choice relatively short so that there is time for everyone. Out-of-area members should mail their choice to our address or via email to spmachare@yahoo.com.

The April program will take place at 8 pm on Saturday, 6 April at our regular meeting place, Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW.

Wendell Marshall, 81

We are saddened by the death of Ellington bassist Wendell Marshall, who died on February 6 at his St. Louis home. A cousin of Jimmie Blanton, who preceded him in the orchestra, his tenure with Duke was from 1948 to 1955. Mr. Marshall also performed and recorded with many stellar musicians and worked with bands playing for stage musicals.

After leaving full-time performing, Marshall became involved in the insurance business. In semi-retirement he occasionally played piano professionally. Though out of the spotlight, in later years he did receive deserved honor. During Black History Month in 2001, Capitol Jazzfest (in Missouri) promoted a radio special, "The Rest of the Story: An Extra-Ordinary Quiet Legend—Wendell Marshall." In celebration of Duke's birth centenary in 1999, he was featured on a two-hour radio broadcast.

Among the Ellington recordings on which Marshall can be heard to advantage are "B Sharp Boston" and the Cornell University concert version of "Dancers in Love."

We extend to his family and other loved ones our sincere condolences.

Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn by Walter van de Leur
New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. \$30.

Reviewed by John Mason

The celebration of Billy Strayhorn's life and legacy continues with Walter van de Leur's magnificent new book. Van de Leur's goal is to bring Strayhorn out from under Ellington's shadow, at the same time rescuing him from the condescension of commentators and performers from Gunther Schuller to Wynton Marsalis. Drawing on an impressive body of evidence—including thousands of autograph manuscripts of original compositions and arrangements that Strayhorn created during his lifetime, most of which have never before been analyzed—he convincingly demonstrates that Strayhorn was an original and distinctive musician who produced some of “the most sophisticated and meaningful works in the entire history of jazz.”

Van de Leur, founder of the Billy Strayhorn Manuscript Editions, co-leader of the Dutch Jazz Orchestra, and well known among Strayhorn scholars, puts to rest the notion that it is impossible to tell where Ellington's composing ended and Strayhorn's began. He shows that Strayhorn's highly individual harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, and structural vocabulary is evident in his earliest, pre-Ellington compositions and continued to shape his music throughout his lifetime. While both men “shared a fascination for orchestral sonority, harmonic richness, and formal balance,” they remained “two different composers, who not so much co-wrote music but rather functioned as each other's sounding board and source of inspiration.” As Stray himself once said: “He is he and I am me.”

Something to Live For immediately takes its place as an absolutely indispensable addition to the history of the Ellington orchestra and American music in general. Those who wish to persist in seeing Strayhorn as nothing more than, in Marsalis's words, “a Duke Jr. of sorts” will be able to do so only by ignoring the overwhelming musical evidence and powerful musicological arguments that van de Leur brings to the table.

Van de Leur reminds us that to honor Strayhorn is not to diminish Ellington. His book serves only to enhance the stature of two men for whom “genius” is too small a word.

Duke Ellington Live at Carnegie Hall, December 11, 1943
Storyville 103-8341 (Two-CD Set)

Reviewed by Ben Pubols

This is a must-have CD set! This release of Duke Ellington's second Carnegie Hall concert was produced by Carl A. Hällström, utilizing the original acetates provided by Jerry Valburn, with digital remastering by Jack Towers. The sound quality is superior to that of the Prestige CD release of the first Carnegie Hall concert of January 23, 1943, and on a par with other releases of “live” performances such as the 1948 Cornell University concert on the Music Masters label. Throughout, the band sounds clear and crisp, with good balance among sections and between sections and soloists. The excellent, detailed, scholarly notes are by Ken Steiner. We may note with pride that Jerry Valburn, Jack Towers and Ken Steiner are all members of our Society.

This was the second of a series of seven annual Carnegie Hall concerts given by the Famous Orchestra throughout the mid- and late-1940s. From Sonny Greer's crisp drum roll introducing the “Star Spangled Banner” to the closing notes of the final number, “Things Ain't What They Used To Be,” the band was clearly in top form, and the audience was audibly receptive—during the final round of applause, we even hear Jerry shouting “More!”

Each of the annual concerts served to introduce a new major work. Of course it was the first concert that introduced *Black, Brown and Beige*. Here, the new one is “New World A-Coming,” a fourteen-minute work inspired by the recently-published book of the same name by Roi Ottley. Although the work was to undergo several metamorphoses, here it is presented as a piano concerto, the only solo by anyone other than Duke being a brief passage by newcomer Jimmy Hamilton on clarinet.

Aside from “New World A-Coming” and two brief excerpts from *Black, Brown and Beige*, the program was largely a conservative one relying almost exclusively on tried-and-true numbers, ranging from the 1927 “Black and Tan Fantasy,” with Wallace Jones taking Bubber Miley's original trumpet part, to “Things Ain't What They Used To Be,” recorded only a month earlier for World Transcriptions (and also released on V-Disc) but already well-known. Among the pieces this reviewer found particularly appealing were son Private Mercer Ellington's “Moon Mist,” superior in many ways to the commercial Victor release, with beautiful solos by Ray Nance (on violin) and Lawrence Brown, “Ring Dem Bells,” and “Rockin' In Rhythm.” Other outstanding soloists throughout the concert included Rex Stewart, Tricky Sam Nanton, Johnny Hodges, and (with apologies to Whitney Balliett) “The Voice of God,” Harry Carney.

In summary, a great concert, excellent audio quality, highly recommended.

Short Sheets . . .

No Matter, You Can Tell He's Heard Bubber's Descendants. Is James Bolden, trumpeter and music director for B.B. King's romping band, the same James "Buddy" Bolden who played in Mercer's Ellington band back in the 70s?

Bellson's Sacred Compositions Emmanuel Baptist Church in San Jose proudly announced the Northern California premiere of his *The Sacred Music of Louie Bellson* there on March 1, featuring Louie with symphony, big band, and choir. Proceeds from the concert are to support for the Emmanuel Family Life Center. Louie and his wife, Francine, are members of the church. Another performance was scheduled for nearby Stanford University as part of a Northern California tour.

A Joya Sherrill Anecdote

by Alan Schneidmill

Marian Cox, who sang with Duke for about a year back in the stone ages and then with Dizzy and Hamp for shorter periods, had promised me repeatedly that she would attend one of the many Ellington programs set up for his centennial. The big one put on by Wynton Marsalis at the Lincoln Center in New York in 1999 was one she told me she would really like to attend. At the last minute she said she wouldn't be able to go, after all, because she could not get a baby-sitter for her many grandchildren.

Joya Sherrill told me that she was really looking forward to seeing her old pal after all these years. When Miss Cox (now Mrs. Taylor) didn't show up, I had to tell Miss Sherrill why. Miss Sherrill was quite disappointed and told me to tell Miss Cox that she also has grandchildren, but she came all the way from California and couldn't see why Miss Cox couldn't come up the road from Maryland!

Answer to FAQ – Well, Occasionally AQ

Except for those carrying a byline or otherwise indicated, all items in *Ellingtonia* are written by the editor.

Quiz for Wannabe Strayhorn Experts

(No fair peeking into Walter van de Leur's book)

Response to our quiz in last month's issue was encouraging, in that (heh heh) no one got all three correct answers, so here's another, this one about Billy Strayhorn compositions:

What are the later, or alternate, titles for (a) "Lonely Again," (b) "Elf," (c) "Haupé," (d) "Pretty Girl," and (e) "Lately"?

Answers to last month's quiz: (a) Jimmie Blanton and Wendell Marshall were cousins. (b) Jimmy Grissom is the Ellington vocalist whose uncle, Dan Grissom, sang with the Jimmie Lunceford band. (c) Trombonists Quentin "Butter" Jackson and Claude Jones were brothers-in-law.

Possible Outlaw CD Elicits Reactions on Web

A recent posting on the popular Duke-LYM internet site indicated that the sender had purchased on a label other than Storyville a cheaper 2-CD release of the famous Fargo concert and had no complaints. Carl Hällström, producer of the authorized Storyville release, responded, "Well, if they did a straight rip-off of the latest Fargo release it should sound pretty good! We spent a lot of time & money in order to make sure our release on Storyville should be the best yet. And we do pay royalties to the Ellington Estate too."

The overall quality of the Storyville 60th Anniversary Edition has earned high critical praise. As Ben Pubols noted in his review in our October issue, three of our Society members played significant roles in its production: remastering by Jack Towers from his original recordings [and the use of some of his photographs of the occasion], an introduction by Jerry Valburn, and an essay booklet by Annie Kuebler.

Regardless of whether the version in question is a rip-off or not, the matter raises issues. Are knock-off and pirated recordings a threat to legitimate companies? And if they are, how willing will producers and the Jacks, Jerrys, and Annies feel when others can come along and capitalize from their honest efforts? Steve Voce commented, "Eventually Storyville, Mosaic and so on will have to think twice before putting a lot of work and resources into producing their high quality albums. Why should they when someone can disrupt and take easy profit from their efforts? If they decide their projects are not worthwhile then we will all lose." Duke-LYM webmaster Andrew Homzy wrote, ". . . I think that, in general, CD manufacturers must do more to make their work 'collectible.' Jazz and Ellington is a small market of knowledgeable collectors and fans. I believe they will pay for a product that is more than just a plastic/aluminum disc with encoded music. In the case of the Fargo rip-offs, how many of us would be happy owning the CD without Annie's notes and the pictures?"

Seeing Stars?

If you see two ☆☆ stars on your mailing label, it means we most cordially invite you to join us. It's easy: just send your dues to:
The Duke Ellington Society, PO Box 15591,
Washington, DC 20003-0787, USA.

Membership's a bargain:

First-Time-Ever Member, \$20

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If your membership lapsed, we miss you—come back!

Renewing Member, \$30

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

About Our Members

Miriam Ewing

Miriam Ewing, widow of co-compiler of the Ellington itinerary Gordon Ewing and co-chair with Josie Childs of Ellington '98 in Chicago, was married on February 18. The groom and his deceased wife were long-time, close friends of Miriam and Gordon. Both sets of children were present to happily confer their blessings. And we send the newlyweds every good wish for a blissful life together.

Jane Vollmer, Peter MacHare, Sjef Hoefsmit

"Peter [MacHare] is doing an excellent job on his web site. I think Sjef and Peter are two outstanding individuals to continue the promotion of Duke." This is excerpted from a recent posting by Jane Vollmer on Andrew Homzy's Duke-LYM internet site.

Esther Williams, Davey Yarborough, Geneva Hudson
Esther Williams (Yarborough) will be a vocal soloist, Geneva Hudson will sing in the Chancel Choir, and Davey Yarborough will play with the Jaques "Saxman" Johnson Orchestra at the Ellington Sacred Concert on Saturday, March 9, 4 pm at Peoples Congregational Church, 4704 - 13th Street, NW, DC. Taxable donation for adults is \$20.

Geneva Hudson, Ted Hudson

In a two-part series during February, Ted Hudson lectured, with illustrative music and film, at Peoples Congregational Church in DC on "Duke Ellington's Spiritual Life and Sacred Music." The church asked that an exhibit that Geneva Hudson had prepared for Ted's presentations remain there for a while for general viewing.

Guitar Book Available for Members' Use

Duke Ellington for Fingerstyle Guitar by Steve Hancock, with demonstration CD, is available from our president /archivist, Peter MacHare, for use by our members. You will recall that a copy inscribed to and autographed for our Society by Steve was given to us by member Jack Ladd Carr. So far, gifted guitarist Scott Schwartz has used it.

Quotation of the Month

There are some marvelous writers in jazz but nobody has influenced me as much as Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Not only that—I would have given anything to have played in Duke's band and if it exists in another lifetime, I want to play in it!

— Saxophonist Jack Montrose as quoted in an interview published in *Jazz Journal International*, September 2001
Ed Note: We thank Bob Reny for sending us a copy of the article.

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< www.depanorama.net >

Shell Presents Clark Terry Videos

by Peter MacHare

Ted Shell presented a program of Clark Terry videos at our March meeting that delighted members. He almost entirely featured Clark outside the Ellington fold. Indeed, the only Ellington item was the moving film of Ellington at the White House in April 1969. Ted showed us Clark's versatility as a trumpeter, flugelhornist, and vocalist. Clark's blues vocal on "Things Ain't What They Used To Be" – both raucous and humorous – was certainly a highlight of the evening. By way of contrast, we were also treated to him playing "God Bless The Child" on flugelhorn in the company of Oscar Peterson, Milt Jackson, Niels Pederson, and Joe Pass.

Ted originally planned the program to be half video and half audio, but there was so much good video, it filled the program. Therefore, he will present the audio part of the program at our May meeting. Ted also prepared a handout for us, summarizing Clark's career and listing the selections. Future presenters should note that the handouts have been quite popular with our members.

Thank you, Ted Shell.

Coming Soon

A web site is in the works for us. So far announcements of our meetings, activities, and other news have appeared on the Duke Ellington Panorama and other internet sites, but as planned ours will be maintained by us, The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.

CALENDAR

Saturday, March 9, 4 pm

Ellington Sacred Concert

Chancel Choir and Jaques "Saxman" Johnson & Ellington Size Band
Peoples Congregational Church, 4704 -13th Street, NW
Donation \$20

April

Jazz Appreciation Month

For information, see < www.smithsonianjazz.org >

Monday, April 22 - Thursday, April 25

Duke Ellington Youth Project Activities & Festival
See page 1 for details.

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

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