

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/

Early Ellington Landmark Razed

by Gina Rollins

On Saturday, August 17, another Ellington landmark disappeared. The former Louis Thomas Cabaret, located at 901 R Street, NW was razed in about three hours' time, despite objections from the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office. The property was a designated historical structure and had been selected as one of 100 sites along the future African American Heritage Trail in Washington. However, because of its state of deterioration, the District Office of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs ordered the owner to either repair the building immediately or raze it. She chose the latter, and reportedly plans to build condominiums on the site.

Louis Thomas, a pianist, bandleader and booking agent, owned the building during the early stages of Duke's career. It served first as headquarters of Thomas's Capital City Clef Club, a booking agency and meeting place for black musicians. In 1920, Thomas also made it a cabaret open to the public with a restaurant on the first floor (Oriental Gardens or Oriental Grill). Photographs of the time feature Duke there with drummer Sonny Greer and banjo/guitar player Sterling Conaway. Other musicians who performed at the cabaret included trombonist Sandy Williams, pianist Claude Hopkins and singer Ada "Bricktop" Smith.

The cabaret was one of many sites where Duke appeared in his hometown as he was developing as a pianist, bandleader and composer. In 1923, he relocated to New York City, and the rest, as they say, is history. Other Ellington landmarks, including his birthplace, have met similar fates.

First Members for 2003

As we know, our membership year is the calendar year. So as not to miss out on anything, five wise souls have already paid their dues for the coming year: Harold E. Finley, Priscilla Ramsey, Davie Yarborough, and Davey and Esther Williams Yarborough. Of them, student member Davie was the first, having paid before 2002.

October Video Program: The European Duke – Plus –

by Mac Grimmer & Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

London! Paris! Copenhagen! Stockholm! Amsterdam! Berlin! Duke played them all, and the Europeans had their cameras rolling. We'll see some of it—not all, we can't stay all night—at our first meeting of the new season, on October 5.

Among others, we'll see (and hear) three versions of "A-Train"—with Alice Babs in Stockholm, Billy Strayhorn in Copenhagen, and Ernie Shepard in London! We'll meet "Mr. Gentle and Mr. Cool" in Amsterdam, peek in on Duke's 70th birthday party in Paris, and check out a few Ellington trio performances in Copenhagen.

A special treat will be some footage of our picnics at Geneva and Ted Hudson's summer house in Highland Beach, taken by our member Nathaniel Moore. He has also taped performances by some of our members.

We'll close the evening with a conversation between Clark Terry and Woody Herman, in the mid-80s. Woody can't get a word in edgewise, and can't seem to get the drift of the conversation—in fact, he turns to the audience at one point and says, "What the hell is he talkin' about?" No wonder he can't figure it out—it's "Mumbles."

The program starts promptly at 8 pm on Saturday, October 5, at our usual meeting place, the Grace Lutheran Church at 16th and Varnum Streets, NW. Don't miss this exciting evening!

"Flamingo" Co-Composer Dies

Edmund Anderson, close friend of Ellington and composer with Ted Grouya of "Flamingo," passed away June 29. He had a career in his family's stock brokerage firm; early on, he produced jazz radio shows and wrote music for tv and radio. A young Billy Strayhorn's 1940 arrangement of "Flamingo," with vocal by Herb Jeffries, is described by Duke in *MIMM* as "a turning point in vocal background orchestration," after which "other arrangers have become more and more daring, but Billy Strayhorn started it all." The hit recording by Duke became a standard and remains Jeffries' signature song.

Our Society Now Has Its Own Web Page

by Ben Pubols

In his ever expanding endeavors to become the Compleat Ellingtonian, our president, Peter MacHare, has recently added to his popular web site, "A Duke Ellington Panorama," a series of links to related sites, including a newly-created "The Duke Ellington Society, Inc., Washington, D.C." page. At the top of the page is our logo, Duke surrounded by three other famous Washington icons. The remainder of the page consists of three parts, announcements of coming meetings, "Meet Some of Our Members" (links to pages featuring several of our members), and a brief description of the Society, its meetings and other activities.

Among the more interesting member links on "The Duke Ellington Society" page are those to Luvenia George and Patricia Willard. Luvenia's link includes a study guide to "Koko" prepared for the Smithsonian Institution's Duke Ellington Youth Project (WARNING: the test is not easy!), while Patricia's includes a National Public Radio interview she gave in 1999, which makes for pleasant and informative listening.

"A Duke Ellington Panorama" can be accessed at <depanorama.net> where links to the Society's home page will be found, or the latter can be accessed directly at <depanorama.net/society>.

Other links from "Panorama" include: "Billy Strayhorn: Take the A Train," a clever and well designed page with music and animation; The Jazz-institut Darmstadt, a very detailed Ellington bibliography (in English) covering the years 1923-1999; an Irving Mills biographical sketch by his son, Bob Mills; and the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Also included are links to other "appreciation societies," including DESUK (Great Britain) and TDES, Inc. (New York City), as well as Sjeff Hoefsmits very important Duke Ellington Music Society (DEMS). Most of these links in turn include others to further expand your Ellingtonian horizons.

Finally, there are links to two WAMU radio programs, the Dick Spottswood Show, broadcast on Sunday afternoons, and Rob Bamberger's "Hot Jazz Saturday Night." And, if you really want to know where President MacHare is coming from, there is a delightful link to the History of the Clan MacHare.

All in all, in "The Duke Ellington Society, Inc." Peter has created a very useful addition to "A Duke Ellington Panorama," and is to be congratulated for his efforts. The Panorama is large indeed, and ever expanding.

***Tonight at Noon* by Sue Graham Mingus. New York: Pantheon, 2002.**

Reviewed by Gina Rollins

In the 23 years since he died, Charles Mingus' reputation as the Angry Man of Jazz has become so legendary that it is arguably the image lingering of him in the public consciousness. Fortunately, in the past two decades his currency outside jazz circles has risen steadily, not only as a talented, if eccentric, musician, but also as a composer of the first order. A new generation of musicians and music lovers have discovered that his works are not so closely associated with his psyche that they, like he, were doomed to an untimely death.

In her moving, elegantly written memoir, *Tonight at Noon*, Sue Graham Mingus recounts the full spectrum of Life With Charles, complete with its dizzying highs, despairing lows, excesses, angst, antics, tenderness, beauty and truth. From their meeting in 1964 at the Five Spot in lower Manhattan until his death nearly 15 years later of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's Disease), there was plenty of Charles As Legend. At a benefit at the Village Gate, he had drummer Dannie Richmond play solo for 20 minutes, then came onstage to berate the audience for not understanding his music. After a heated exchange with a fan at the Village Vanguard, wielding a microphone stand he chased the young man out of the club, Sue and the writer Norman Mailer in tow. Alone with Sue at a San Francisco bar, he ordered a Ramos fizz, one of those concoctions that make bartenders wish they'd gone into banking. The bartender said he could only make it in large quantities, no less than 24 drinks. Charles called his bluff, ordered 25 and drank them all.

He imagined that people were out to kill him and once checked himself into Bellevue Hospital so that he could get "crazy papers" that would invalidate a contract he'd signed at the behest of a promoter with Mafia ties. He used anger as a shield, had a vivid imagination and gigantic mood swings. Unpredictable and impetuous, "Above all," says Sue, "he tried to express everything without interruption." Perhaps he was afraid to hold his feelings in where he was not always sure what they meant or where they might take him. He needed other people in on it who could share the responsibility or the pain. It was his way of surviving.

It is understatement to say that life as Mingus' partner was challenging. Once after an argument, he sent Sue a present every day for a week, including a full-length antique mirror with the accompanying note: "Look at yourself for company; you can't get along with anyone else." He cut his foot on scissors and wrote "I love you" in blood on the sidewalk in front of her apartment, and once followed her taxi home because he thought she might have a thing for the cabbie. When they finally moved in together (and later married), the storms between them were over. "Life was as peaceful and productive as I could imagine," she recalls.

Sue credits Duke with ending Charles' self-imposed retirement. For three years in the mid-60s he stopped playing and composing, but the invitation to participate in a tribute concert to Duke (in Berkeley) wooed him back to music. Duke was "the man he loved most on earth," she says simply.

(Continued on page 3 under "Mingus")

Short Sheets . . .

Though He's Not Known to Have Worn Watches

Jazziz, in its August issue, reports that a Patek Philippe watch owned by Duke was sold at a Swiss auction for \$1.59 million to a museum. [*We thank Bob Reny for sending us the clipping.*]

CD of Strayhorn Compositions

Day Dream: Variations on Strayhorn (PS Classics PS0204) features vocalist Dariusde Haas, who performed at the TDES-sponsored concert in May of Strayhorn's known and recently discovered works.

Now That's Class

The "classic" Tally Ho Theatre in toney, horse country Leesburg, Virginia is being restored and refurbished. Among its completed features is a wall portrait of Duke, appropriately resplendent in top hat and formal white tie.

U Street Cultural and Business Icon Dies

by Don Rouse

We regret to report that Freeman W. Murray (Ted and Geneva Hudson's next door neighbor at Highland Beach) passed away in August. From the late 20s into the 40s he engaged bands for the family business, the Murray Casino, including Duke Ellington, and he knew Duke and his musicians—Ben Webster, Sonny Greer, and many others. (Freeman grew up with and went to school with Billy Eckstein and Pearl Bailey.) The business (founded by his father, uncles, and grandfather—who was also a founding member of the NAACP) at one time or another included the Howard and Lincoln Theatres, five movie theaters, the Suburban Gardens amusement park, and Murray Brothers Printing, where the Casino was located. He sponsored at the Casino the first teen dance in DC, if not the US, with Hal Jackson as MC.

Ed. Note: Last year Don conducted several interviews of Mr. Murray, one tape of which will likely be contributed to the Smithsonian for its oral jazz history project.

Ted Shell Gives Sorority-Sponsored Talk on Ellington to Student Group

by Marion Shell

Dr. Theodore Shell was invited to talk on the life of Duke Ellington to a group of fifth graders at Brightwood Elementary School in Northwest Washington in May. The students had been previously introduced to Ellington study by their volunteer teacher, Jacqueline Williams, and Marion Shell, members of the national teachers sorority, Phi Delta Kappa. Ted brought some books, memorabilia, and photographs he had taken of Ellington and band members. He was asked questions such as, "Had you met Ellington in person?" "What was he like?" "Do you have any pictures of yourself with the Duke?" Ted did happen to have one to show to them, given to him by someone who had taken a photograph of the Duke that included him. Videotapes were a part of his presentation, among them a cartoon feature and excerpts from *Reminiscing in Tempo* and *A Duke Called Ellington*.

Quotation of the Month: Re "Lush Life"

[Barry Manilow] couldn't afford sheet music. So when he decided to learn Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" he had to do it by ear. He remembers playing the song on Willie Murphy's turntable, then sitting at his piano and straining to decode Strayhorn's remarkably complicated arrangement. It was the first song he "crawled into," as he puts it, and though it took a while, he eventually figures it out.

"Those are the most sophisticated chords to any song ever written, Manilow says . . . I don't know he gets back to the beginning. He just goes rambling through a myriad of key changes and somehow winds up in the right place. I don't know how you do that."

— David Segal, "The Songs Barry Manilow Wishes He Had Written," *Washington Post Arts*, 7 April 2002

Mingus (Continued from page 2)

Tonight at Noon breezes through their first 13 years together, but it slows considerably—as did life for them—when ALS enters the picture. Faced with a grim diagnosis, the couple eventually put their faith in an Indian healer, Panchita. Told by saxophonist Gerry Mulligan that she cured someone with Mingus' exact condition, they uproot to Mexico and willingly apply manure to Charles' body, drink Iguana blood and generally eschew western medicine. As Charles' decline accelerates, they cling to hope while grudgingly accepting the inevitable.

Until the very end, Charles' indomitable spirit—and prodigious appetite—is intact. When his hands no longer function, he continues composing by singing into a tape recorder. When his voice falters, they invent a shorthand of sorts to keep communicating. With Charles in a wheelchair chained in the back of a van, they drive for hours through the Mexican countryside in an effort to ease his pain. More than once, Sue considers driving off a cliff.

The journey ends when Sue spreads Charles' ashes in the Ganges River, a fitting finale to one who lived more, created more, dared more, than most people in one.

Although there is some of it, jazz aficionados might wish for more enlightenment about Mingus' composing habits and stories behind particular works. Perhaps that will be the focus of a future volume, but *Tonight At Noon* is first and foremost a love story. It's a must-read for any Mingus fan, and not to be missed by anyone interested in a compelling story of an extraordinary life.

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

About Our Members

Harold Gray

The current issue of *Tailgate Ramblings* contains a full view photo of Harold Gray all decked out in a splashy period sportcoat practically covered by souvenir jazz buttons. The occasion was the 25th anniversary celebration of the Buck Creek traditional jazz band

Jerry Valburn

A press release for Blue Note's *Duke Ellington 1969: All-Star White House Tribute* CD states that Duke's piano solo "Pat," dedicated to President Nixon's wife, "is the debut recording appearance of the tune." Not so, Jerry Valburn informs on a Duke-LYM posting. The performance is on our Society's *The Duke in Washington*, for which Jerry was the source of the music. This CD was produced in celebration of the centenary of Duke's birth, in conjunction with Ellington '99, which we sponsored.

David Fleming

David Fleming composed the Wendell Marshall obituary for *Jazz Journal International*, April 2002. David recently stepped down as editor of DESUK's *Blue Light* and is Vice Chairman of that organization.

Sjef Hoefsmit

Sjef Hoefsmit's DEMS has distributed a remarkable booklet, *A Cotton Club Miscellany*, compiled and annotated by Steven Lasker, who is to be congratulated and thanked for this fine collection of information, reviews, news articles, and reproductions of ads, programs, menus, and playbills.

Harvey Cohen

After receiving his Ph.D. degree in the spring, Harvey Cohen took a "post-dissertation stress-reducing trip" to the United Kingdom.

Lillian and Ben Pubols

Lillian and Ben Pubols kept us updated by postcards as they leisurely drove from the East to the West Coast in June. They are now ensconced in their new digs in Portland, Oregon, from whence they send best wishes to all.

John Edward Hasse

John Hasse has been elected secretary of the International Association of Jazz Educators.

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

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Sweet Swan Song

by Gina Rollins

In his final presentation before moving to Portland, Oregon, Ben Pubols delighted members with a video cavalcade featuring Duke and other jazz greats. Highlights included Adelaide Hall reminiscing about how her haunting vocal from "Creole Love Call" came into being, and the lesser known Ellington short *Symphony in Black*. Eddie "Clean Head" Vinson rekindled warm memories with an energizing rendition of "Things Ain't What They Used To Be," recorded with Cootie Williams at a time when he wasn't with Duke; and *Jammin' the Blues*, produced by Gjon Mile and featuring, among others, Lester Young and Ellington alumna Marie Bryant, lived up to Ben's billing as the pinnacle of aural and visual jazz performance.

In bidding farewell, Ben reviewed the growth and programming achievements of DES since he joined nine years ago. Acknowledging the expertise and contributions of numerous members, he paid special tribute to Ted Hudson, saying "He's a dear friend, like a brother to me." Ben invited all out for a visit once he and Lillian get resettled. "What you may not know about me is I'm half-Southern, so y'all come!"

The second half of the program was a social and sale, with members buying and selling albums, books, CDs and the like. It netted over \$250 for DES thanks to members who donated proceeds from their sales.

Ben and Lillian, thanks for all the great programs and friendship. It's not an ending, just a change in tracks. Godspeed!

"... A Perfect Saturday Afternoon"

So begins a note from Lewis and Minerva Giles as they list in particular

"The hospitality

"The people and conversations

"The beach atmosphere & food!"

and "The weather!" — this last item in reference to the fortuitous break in the oppressive heat spell that preceded our annual summer picnic, at Geneva and Ted Hudson's cottage at Highland Beach, Maryland on July 6.

In comments accompanying photos of the occasion, Olivia McMillan writes:

"The food and drinks were great and as usual, most of us ate too much!

"Some took a leisurely stroll and splashed in [the Chesapeake] Bay, while others strolled and toured the Frederick Douglass Museum. Then there were some who enjoyed the summer breeze, listened to the music, talked and sipped and never moved. However, Stephen Mokone engraved his name on the chaise lounge and was caught napping!"