

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor
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Big Plans for 2004 JAM

The overall purpose of Jazz Appreciation Month (JAM) is to draw public attention to the glories of jazz as both a historical and a living treasure. The initiative encourages musicians, concert halls, schools, colleges, museums, libraries, promoters, and tv and radio stations to offer special jazz programs and activities. Since its inception several years ago, every April (fortuitously, we think, the month of Ellington's birth) JAM by various means has increasingly brought this art form to the public's attention.

A particular goal of JAM is to educate and excite young people about the art form. One reason April was selected is to give schools time to prepare activities before the end of the school year. In 2003, U.S. Secretary of Education Roderick Paige, in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution, sent letters to 15,000 school districts to encourage participation.

This year Washington is one of six municipal areas designated to serve as models for celebrations of JAM. To this end, in January under auspices of John Hasse's Smithsonian office, an impressive group of musicians, diplomats, media personnel, educators, promoters, organizations, and other key persons met to formulate steering and working groups and to contribute ideas for collaborative as well as individual initiatives and programs. Our Society was represented at the meeting, as it is expected that we be part of the Jazz Appreciation Month celebration.

Blue? Here's the Remedy!

If your mailing label is blue, we haven't received your membership renewal for 2004. In a manner of speaking, we're blue because of you. What to do? Send in your dues right away!

On the other hand, if your mailing label is green, we very much want you to join The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. as a first-time-ever member. If your mailing label is red, your membership lapsed last year; and though we don't consider you a prodigal, come back home and be welcomed with open arms. Blue, green, or red, see the directions for renewing or joining on page 4.

February Video Program: The Piano Player...Plus...

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

... a few other things. Video of Duke's trio session in Copenhagen, and then of an octet drawn from the band—all great stuff. Duke really stretches out on the trio sides, and the clarity of the DVD picture is terrific. The next best thing to being there.

In anticipation of the upcoming Ellington Conference, and as added incentive for anyone trying to decide whether or not to go, we'll also play the 1963 video of Alice Babs with the band in Stockholm. Alice will be there, singing, again in '04!

Then, to round out the evening, we have more treats, such as Clark Terry doing "Mumbles" with the Woody Herman band, and the new singer Jane Monheit asking for someone to "Squeeze Me."

The time is 8:00 pm, Saturday, February 7, at our regular meeting place, the **Grace Lutheran Church 16th & Varnum Streets, NW**. Latecomers will miss some of those piano notes!

Upcoming Programs

March 6

"The Piano Player" is how Ellington sometimes referred to himself. Peter MacHare will present aspects of Duke at the piano.

April 3

"Duke and the Ladies": Gina Rollins will present Ellington's female vocalists.



Contact Information for Ellington '04 Stockholm, Sweden 12-15 May, 2004

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Also, see pages 3-4 in our November 2003 issue.

Ulanov, Ellington, Ellington, and Ellison (Barry, Duke, Mercer, and Ralph)

by Ben Pubols

The New York *Times Book Review* for last October 12 included an advertisement by Bauman Rare Books of New York. Among items listed was a second edition of Barry Ulanov's *Duke Ellington*, signed by Duke. The asking price was \$2,000. One year ago, Powell's Books in Portland, Oregon was asking \$1,200 for an Ellington-signed first edition copy of Ulanov's book; they are now asking \$1,500. Incidentally, I bought my copy, a first edition, second printing on remainder for \$1.00 in 1947 (not autographed).

So Duke signed at least two copies of the book. This is all very interesting, not just for what it says about the value of Duke's autograph, but, his relation with Ulanov. In Mercer's posthumously-released oral history on file at the Smithsonian's Archives Center (which I abstracted), Mercer had this to say about Duke's feelings toward the book and toward Ulanov (my paraphrasing except words in quotes):

Mercer has not read all of the biographies of Duke. He did not need to read Barry Ulanov's (1946) book, as he knew that Duke was "hostile about it - very unhappy with it." . . . Duke was upset that Ulanov mentioned his "affair" with Mildred Dixon [in actuality, Ulanov indicated that they were married; see p. 114]. Duke wanted it known that he was married to Mercer's mother—this gave him an excuse to break off liaisons. Duke felt that Ulanov had "transgressed," taking advantage of their friendship—the book ended the friendship.

'Nuff said. The same Bauman advertisement also listed a first edition of Ralph Ellison's classic *Invisible Man* for \$4,800. On the subject of Ellison, it might be mentioned that there is a recent book collating Ellison's writings on jazz, *Living With Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings*, edited by Robert G. O'Meally (Modern Library, 2002, only \$13.95). Included are several excerpts from *Invisible Man*, essays on Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and his hometown (Oklahoma City) boyhood friends Charlie Christian and Jimmy Rushing, as well as letters to his former Tuskegee Institute schoolmate, Albert Murray. Well worth reading. There is an accompanying CD, *Ralph Ellison: Living With Music* (Columbia/Legacy CK 85935) which includes many of the jazz recordings referred to in the book, including Duke's "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo," and "Black and Tan Fantasy" (the Okeh version with Jabbo Smith). Perhaps the best track on the CD, however, is the final track, containing excerpts from a lecture given by Ellison at the Library of Congress in January of 1964. Again, well worth having.

Let's Each of Us Make a Difference!

Following are excerpts from a recent letter from the Development Director of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Send your contribution to The Ellington Fund, 3500 R Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007.

Over the last thirty years, the Ellington school has touched the lives of thousands of students, artists and art enthusiasts throughout the Washington Metropolitan Community and around the world, and has continued to achieve remarkable success despite the numerous obstacles challenging public schools in general. ***Most importantly, Duke Ellington School of the Arts has demonstrated that the lives of students, some from the most economically and socially challenged neighborhoods in the city, can be transformed by the discipline and energy required by artistic training.***

Duke Ellington School of the Arts does more than provide students with a first-rate academic and arts education—we also prepare students to make significant contributions to their own lives, their families and communities. Ellington school is the doorway to a world of possibility for our students. It is safe to say that some of our students, if not for their attending Duke Ellington School of the Arts, would never have the opportunity to . . . pursue a college education, or even complete high school. Every day, the Ellington school gives youth in our community new opportunities by exposing them to life-changing experiences. ***The financial support of individuals like you is what makes it all possible.***

Because of the unique nature of the school, Duke Ellington School of the Arts has far higher proportional costs than an average high school, but is under-funded each year as a result of limited support from the city's public school system. In order to maintain our comprehensive curriculum and student support services, we must rely more and more on the generosity of individuals and corporations in our community who care enough to make a difference in the lives of our city's youth. ***Won't you help Duke Ellington School of the Arts today?***

Our students come to us with an abundance of talent. Duke Ellington School of the Arts and The Ellington Fund work together to provide the infrastructure that allows them to develop that talent and realize their dreams. It is like completing a puzzle to which you hold an important piece. ***Your donation, no matter what the amount, will help provide the art supplies and materials, current technology, equipment, staff, facilities, student services and performance opportunities our students require.***

You can make a difference . . . !

Short Sheets . . .

“Bohemians, Beats and Bebop”

Our member Rusty Hassan will teach a jazz survey course that examines the connection of the music to visual arts and literature. Duke Ellington, of course, plays a central role in this study. “Bohemians, Beats and Bebop” will meet 8 pm Wednesday evenings beginning 4 February at Georgetown University School for Summer and Continuing Education. For information on registration call 202-687-5942.

“This Is U Street. This Is You”

Thus begins an announcement about The Ellington, a large residential building being constructed on Washington’s U Street, NW between 13th and 14th. Publicity releases say it will be well appointed, with some 17-foot terraces, a rooftop terrace, a fitness center, underground parking, panoramic city views, and choice location. The Republic Theater and other historic edifices were razed to make room for the structure.

Update: Stockholm Conference Registrations and Lodging

A note from a Conference staffer strongly advises that those who have registered for the Ellington Conference in Stockholm and who plan to stay at the Conference hotels—Scandic Sergel Plaza (Hilton) and KOM Hotel—make their reservations before January 20. After then, the hotels may no longer hold remaining rooms, if any, that have been set aside for conferees.

Further, “Conference registrations will be accepted through May 12 . . . Conference staff will . . . make every effort to find rooms for everyone who registers; however, the Conference hotels and conference rates may not be available after January 20.”

[For more details about the Conference see our November issue. For contact information, see page 1 of this issue.]

Take Some Kids (And You’ll Get to See It Yourself)

Last month we simply made a note about the following event. In Discovery Theater’s words, here is more about *Duke’s Place: A Young Boy’s Request* on Saturday, 7 February at 12 noon:

This fabulous fable was dreamed up by the Brewery Troupe Puppets—New York City’s preeminent African American puppet company—as a way to introduce young audiences to the unforgettable sound of Duke Ellington..

As Benny and Raymond dream about becoming jazz musicians, right across the street from them is a club that really swings! One night they sneak out to listen to the hot band at Duke’s Place and are asked to join in by Duke Ellington himself.

Good puppets, great music and America’s musical heritage make this a must-see!

Carmichael Auditorium, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution – Resident Members: Adults \$7, Children \$4; General Admission: Adults \$8, Children \$5

Bobbie Gordon, Aaron Bridgers Pass

Bobbie Nell Brookshire Gordon, for whom Duke Ellington used a stage name, Nell Brookshire, died at Washington Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park, Maryland, just outside Washington, DC, on 27 December at age 64. A Dayton, Ohio native, she sang with the Ellington orchestra for several years in the early 1970s. She may be seen singing “Love You Madly” and “One More Time” in a recent DVD, *Live at Tivoli Gardens* [in Copenhagen]. An obituary in the Dayton *Daily News* reports that Mrs. Gordon named her children in alphabetical order, the fifth, and youngest, being Ellington.

Aaron Bridgers, pianist and close friend of Billy Strayhorn, died 3 November in Paris, where he had made his home. He was 85 years old. Bridgers was considered by many to be a supper club rather than a jazz pianist. A notice of his death in TDES’ newsletter said that “Nobody could play the Strayhorn compositions like him,” and Duke Ellington wrote in *Music Is My Mistress*, “I am sure [Billy’s] friend Aaron Bridgers plays [“Lotus Blossom”] better than I do.”

We extend our deep sympathy to the families and other loved ones of Ms. Gordon and Mr. Bridgers.

Award Winner Continues to Achieve

Last month we promised to tell more about the activities of Benjamin Williams, one of the two then-high schoolers who won our 2002 Student Awards.

We learn from a letter to our president, Peter MacHare, and a current resumé that Benjamin enrolled at Michigan State University, where he kept his grades up at 3.5 and made first-seat bassist in the Jazz Orchestra and Octet I Band. Last summer he accepted a scholarship to participate in the Ravinia Jazz Festival/Workshop, and was invited but because of contractual obligations could not accept an invitation to tour Italy and Japan with “some of the greatest jazz artists of all time.” From time to time he has performed onstage with, among well-known others, Ron Carter, Aretha Franklin, Herbie Hancock, Milt Hinton, and Kirk Franklin!

Gratefully, Benjamin writes, “All I ask of the Ellington Society is to continue to do what it is doing in support of young artists like me who really do appreciate and need the support.”

Elections

by Peter MacHare

We held our annual election on Saturday, 3 January. All officers and board members will continue in their present positions. Board of Directors: Theodore Shell, Olivia McMillen, Joseph McMillen, William Hasson, Mac Grimmer, Luvenia George, and Patricia Braxton; President: Peter MacHare; Vice President: Theodore Hudson; Secretary: Gina Rollins; and Treasurer: Francis Arnold.

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

Josie Childs

In a holiday note, Josie Childs informs that the concert that was part of the reunion last year of World War II Afro-American musicians who served at the Great Lakes Naval Base was recorded. She writes, "To see some of the guys, some of whom had not seen each others for 50 plus years...some with tears streaming own their faces...really tugged at the heart. . . . Hopefully, the concert will air soon on Public Television. We also got terrific interviews from all the guys who came for a documentary. That's the next step." Josie was personally "immersed" in the planning and work for The Great Lakes Experience, as the reunion project was called.

Anthony Brown

Anthony Brown happily reports that negotiations are being finalized for the premiere of his new version of "Rhapsody in Blue" at the Smithsonian in April by "a twenty-one piece intercultural, intergender and intergenerational" expansion of his Asian American Orchestra. During this trip Dr. Brown will also premiere his arrangement of "Tang" from Ellington's *Afro-Eurasian Suite*.

Jack Towers, Patricia Willard, Janna Steed

Among the photographs of "Ellingtonfamiljen samlas åter i Stockholm" gracing the cover of the December 2003 issue of the Ellington Society of Sweden's *Bulletin* are Janna Steed, Patricia Willard, and Jack Towers.

Reuben Jackson

"Traveling at the Speed of a Reborn Man: The Late Music of Jimi Hendrix" is the title of a presentation by Reuben Jackson before the Tuesday Colloquium at the National Museum of American History in January.

Looking Ahead

21-24 January

International Association of Jazz Educators Annual Conference, NYC. Contact: < info@iaje.org >

7 February

Duke's Place: A Young Boy's Request, Carmichael Auditorium, Museum of American History, 12 noon.

12-16 February

Annual East Coast Jazz Festival. Live music, educational programs, music clinics. Junior Mance Trio, David "Fathead" Newman, Ronnie Wells, Guitar Summit, Ernie Andrews, et al. Some free and open to the public workshops and seminars, plus concerts introducing school bands, dance troupes, and emerging jazz artists. DoubleTree Hotel, Rockville, MD. Contact: < fmjseastcoastjazz.com >.

Friday, 20 February

Davey Yarborough Quartet featuring Esther Williams. Westminster Church, 400 I Street, SW, 6-9 pm. \$5.

12-15 May

Nineteenth International Duke Ellington Conference, Stockholm, Sweden

Holiday Party

by Peter MacHare

Our holiday party on Saturday, 3 January was, as usual, a festive affair. Members and guests enjoyed a table laden with a wide variety of food and drink. Mac and Angela Grimmer provided the music for the feasting part of the evening. Ted and Geneva Hudson provided pleasant diversions. Ted, ever the professor, administered a test to investigate our knowledge of holiday facts. Geneva led a troupe of expert dancers.

As always, Ted Hudson thanked everyone who contributed to our newsletter by presenting certificates of appreciation. Extra thanks, of course, went to Ted himself for all his effort in preparing the newsletter each month. We all wish to express thanks to those who brought food or drink to the party and to those who contribute to the table at our monthly meetings. We do love you madly.

Live at the Apollo, June 8, 1940

Ben Webster with Duke Ellington "cut" so much tenor sax at the Apollo's midnite show Saturday, twas a shame. He started with "Stardust" and when the crowd yelled for "Body and Soul," Ben first demurred. Insistently, however, they demanded it and doggone if they didn't get it. Ben didn't want to play out of professional courtesy to the absent Coleman Hawkins, admittedly the master of the tune. However, after Ben ducked out offstage for a minute and came back, he was ready not only for Coleman but anyone else! Dig Jimmy Blanton, the new bass fiddler with the Duke! Too much! Ivy Anderson is better than ever and in a groove.

— Dan Burley, New York *Amsterdam News*, 15 June 1940
(From a posting on the Duke-LYM web site by Ken Steiner)

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