

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society

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MARCH 2004

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/



Courtesy Carlyle Productions

Sacred Music Concert in March

A concert of Ellington's sacred music will take place at 4 pm on Sunday, 14 March at Peoples Congregational Church, 4704 - 13th St, NW, Washington, DC. Tickets, \$10 for adults and \$5 for children, may be purchased in advance and at the door.

The event will feature The Blues Alley Youth Orchestra, directed by Jacques "Saxman" Johnson, and the church's Cancel Choir, directed by Clyde T. Parker.

In early February these same performers presented a program at the Kennedy Center that included some of Ellington's sacred music.

Incidentally, our Society has more members that are also members of Peoples Congregational Church than of any other church or religious entity that we know of in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Ed. Note: About Jacque Johnson's recent CD More Than Smooth a Washington Post critic wrote, "With his old-school tenor tone and relaxed, persuasive phrasing, Johnson trumps most of the contemporary jazz competition without breaking a sweat."

Still Blue?

If your mailing label is **blue**, we still haven't received your membership renewal for 2004. This is serious! Send 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. We miss you. Come back home.

Blue, green, or red, follow the directions for renewing or joining on page 4, or use the enclosed membership form.

Setting a Good Example

Ben and Lillian Pubols of Portland, Oregon are our first members this year to pay dues for 2005. Next is John Anderson of Silver Spring, Maryland, who last month prepaid for 2005.

Duke at the Piano

Saturday, 6 March, 8 PM

Grace Lutheran Church, 16th & Varnum Streets, NW
Washington, DC

Open to the Public

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

It has become almost a cliché to say that Duke Ellington combines the three careers of composer, musician, and orchestra leader better than anyone else in the history of music (to my knowledge only F.J. Haydn and J.S. Bach come close). Add the fact that Ellington was also his own patron, we find that Duke's achievement was quite singular.

At our March meeting, we will celebrate Duke the Musician. Peter MacHare will present Duke composing, supporting the orchestra, and taking solos in a video and audio program.

Also mark your calendars for Saturday, April 3, when Gina Rollins will present "Duke and the Ladies."

Ellington Reunion Draws Alumni

As we finish preparing this issue of *Ellingtonia*, we learn that an impressive number of former Ellington musicians and associates were located and are participating in the Ellington Reunion and Oral History Project. Sponsored by the American Jazz Institute and Claremont McKenna College, it is taking place (7-9 February) in Claremont, California. We plan to include news and, hopefully, reprint a review of the performances in our next issue.

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Contact Information for Ellington '04

Stockholm, Sweden

12-15 May, 2004

Sponsor: Duke Ellington Society of Sweden
Address: Skogstorpsvägen 39
191 39 Sollentuna
Sweden
Email: goran.wallén@ellingtonsweden.com
Web Page: <http://www.ellingtonsweden.com/>
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Also, see pages 3-4 in our November 2003 issue.

The Boola Script at the Smithsonian

by Theodore R. Hudson

"Boola," said Duke Ellington back in 1941, "is the name Negro historians use to symbolize their race. If they want to tell you that Negroes took part in this or that event, they will say 'Boola was there.' My opera traces Boola's whole history in four scenes. . . . There isn't any continuous plot, but there is one symbolic figure, Boola himself who appears throughout."¹ In another place he said that "it tells the story of the Negro in America."²

In the late 1930s there were reports of Ellington's having begun writing this work, what has since been called an unfinished opera, after his 1934 *Symphony in Black* and before his 1941 *Jump for Joy* and 1943 *Black, Brown, and Beige [BBB]*.² Indeed, *BBB* is recognized as a realization of some thematic, structural, and chronological features of *Boola*. However, it does not include *Boola's* integral protagonist, who suffers, overcomes, and in doing so demonstrates highly moral and heroic humanity. As Ellington's words above are borne out in the script, Boola is symbolic and representative, but he is not mythical or legendary.

The three-part *Boola* script in the Ellington Collection in the Archives Center of the Smithsonian's Museum of American History consists of some 37 sheets. The first 29 plus several inserts, on approximately 5½x8¼-inch brown or yellow (maybe oxidized-brown) paper, in pencil in Duke's hand, is untitled. The remaining two "Movements," one titled "Brown" and the other

"Beige," are typewritten, double-spaced on standard 8x11½-inch white paper. While the work of an amanuensis or use of a secondary source cannot be ruled out, one would like to assume that a typist transcribed these parts of the script from a manuscript in Duke's hand. There is no music manuscript for *Boola* in the Ellington Collection.

The handwritten part begins with a motific rhythm: *Boom /· /· /·* Its narrative begins with Boola's capture and enduring of the infamous Middle Passage amid "shouts, screams—moans—groans" that constitute "a Symphony of Torture." Once in the Americas, Boola learns that the captured black man's role is to work, but his "thoughts always wandered back to Freedom." Whites, fearful that a silent slave is a thinking slave, order them to sing, giving birth to the work song.

Boola becomes curious about the white man's religion, and it is not long before an old white lady secretly begins teaching him to read the Bible. As Boola, with "His Woman" Voola at his side, struggles to read, they conclude that although the white man's God is the same as theirs, "My Lord is greater than the man with the whip—He is a good God." Now their song has a "rhythmic *todle-o*" [emphasis added], the beginning of the Negro spiritual. Next, "like a Rainbow in its many colours" a new type of song is born of the intermingling of work song and spiritual.

The narrative then shifts to Boola the freedom fighter. He is with the Massachusetts Army as early as 1652 and in Colonial wars with Native Americans, the Battle of Bunker Hill, and the Revolutionary War.³ In an effort to win his freedom, Boola fights in the War of 1812, planning to escape and come back to help his people gain freedom. At the first part of the Civil War, while still a slave he spies for and otherwise aids Union troops. At the War's end, young Negroes "*Jumped for Joy*" [emphasis added], while some old folks, turned out by their former masters, were free to get up and go where "Nobody Knows but God." In the Spanish-American War, Boola is the "hero," the first to storm the enemy and win the Battle of San Juan Hill [not Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders, as false history has claimed]. But when soldiers return to their women, there

many of Boola's Brothers had
been freed. They had earned
their freedom earned for their
& slaves — But How Can
earn my freedom — There is the
war — the Amesthetics is dying
out — I must Plan an Escape
& When I am away, I can
Probably come back & help
some of my people to get away
one by one — Grand after Grand
some successful & others caught
& Perished — But keep on trying
(Fred Douglass) (the Abolitionist)
then came the Civil War — People
are trying to free the white people
too — So Boola did his best
to provide the Union Soldiers with
the food that he would have
been given if he had been free

Courtesy of the Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

are "love triangles," for heroes attract many women. This, the handwritten part of the script, ends abruptly with three words: "The Blues Ain't."

"Brown" reviews blacks' contributions to the ongoing saga of America, a catalog, as it were, more topically than chronologically structured.³ "Boola belonged!" it exhorts, and the symbolic Boola now is now frequently exemplified by the historical figure—among others, Crispus Attucks, Barzillai Lew, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Denmark Vesey, and the "greatest of them all...A black woman...HARRIET TUBMAN!" Not to be omitted, the West Indian influence is invoked by way of the Fontages Legion at the 1779 Siege of Savannah, Christophe, and Touissant L'Ouverture. The movement ends with text that becomes the lyrics in *BBB's* "The Blues."

Boola the character is absent in "Beige." In this least realized and perhaps least conceptualized section of the work, the venues shift to urban centers such as Boston, Cleveland, Harlem, and Rocky Mount. Now the Boolas are the likes of World War II era Dorrie Miller and unnamed, ordinary other heroes who are involved in

(Continued on page 3 under "Boola")

Short Sheets . . .

Awaited Reissues Due in February

For those of us who have been anxiously awaiting them, latest we have read about a release date for Columbia Legacy reissues on CDs of *Masterpieces by Ellington*, *Festival Session*, and *Ellington Uptown* is 17 February. Previously unreleased works will be included.

Ellington was not a street

is the title [sans conventional capitalization, as above] of a book for youth by poet Ntozake Shange. *Book World* describes it as “a celebration—of a time in Harlem when Ellington ‘was not a street,’ but a man who came and went in a little girl’s house along with the likes of Paul Robeson, Dizzy Gillespie . . .” The poem and illustrations by Kadir Nelson, it continues, “give life to an era and a movement that today’s kids dismiss as ‘old people’s stuff,’ frozen in textbooks, monuments and street signs.”

The Dooji Review Planned

From Sweden comes news that Carl Hällström is busy on a publication to be called *The Dooji Review*, “partly to be an Ellington scrap-book with all those long-forgotten clippings from newspapers and magazines . . . and also . . . a research journal . . . and other memorabilia.” Its schedule admittedly will be irregular. Interested persons may get in touch with Mr. Hällström at PO Box 23061, SE-750 23 Uppsala, Sweden or by e-mail at <dooji@swipnet.se >.

Want to Hear Mex on Guitar?

In his consistently praiseworthy “Digital Jungle” column in TDES’ newsletter, Richard Ehrenzeller informs that Paul Gonsalves plays guitar on the Mater Jazz Recordings series LP *Tenor Stuff*, featuring him and Harold Ashby.

Say What? Say Who?!

The Smithsonian has acquired Milt Gabler materials, among them some HRS Originals series records made by small groups nominally led by stars. One group, Rex Stewart’s Big Seven, has among others, Lawrence Brown on trombone and Albany Biggers on clarinet. Jack Teagarden’s Big Eight includes in addition to Ben Webster on tenor, Rex King, trumpet, Albany Biggers, clarinet, and Billy Tyler, bass. No Piano Red or Cue Porter, though.

Updates: Stockholm Conference

- Another of our members, Ken Steiner, has been added to the array of scholars and experts to make presentations at the International Ellington Conference in Stockholm in May. A historian by training, though not by profession, Ken will speak on a topic dear to his heart and about which he has published: “On the Road and On the Air with Duke Ellington: The Blanton-Webster Era.”

- From an internet posting, we are advised that “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.]

Azure Series Will Cease

Sjef Hoefsmit in *DEMS Bulletin* has announced that beginning this year it will not be possible to continue the Azure cassette series. For one thing, copyright owner Karl Emil Knudson, with whom DEMS had an agreement, passed away. Moreover, since *DEMS Bulletin* will no longer be restricted to members but available to anyone via the internet, the cassettes could not be “for DEMS members only” without encountering copyright problems.

We cannot say enough about Sjef Hoefsmit’s selfless efforts and generosity of spirit over the years to make such great music available, and we thank him again and again!

Our prediction: The Azure series will soon become treasured collectors’ items.

Quotations of the Month

Contributed by Mac Grimmer

Bubber Miley! Well, Bubber used to say, “If it ain’t got swing, it ain’t worth playin’; if it ain’t got gutbucket, it ain’t worth doin’!

– Duke Ellington, as quoted in *Duke* by Derek Jewell

Improvisation? Anyone who plays anything worth hearing knows what he’s going to play, no matter whether he prepares a day ahead or a beat ahead. It has to be with intent.

– Duke Ellington in a Buenos Aires radio interview, 1968

Boola (Continued from page 2)

non-physical struggles. As far as it goes, this seven-page movement, even granted that it is a fragment or work-in-progress, is a rather disjointed, unfocused, and homiletic-toned recitative or soliloquy or, for that matter, free verse. One wonders what the effect would be if the words had been set to music, where rhetorical principles for printed text are less important.

Boola, unfinished as it is, indicates that Duke Ellington the amateur historian was on to some things that by and large mainstream historians had overlooked, distorted, hidden, dismissed, minimalized, or simply ignored.

One wonders what other *Boola* scripts, if any, are like. In any event, we can be thankful for *Jump for Joy*, *BBB*, several musical “portraits,” *New Orleans Suite*, *Sacred Concerts* and other of Duke Ellington’s history-informed music, can’t we!

¹ Quoted by Alfred Frankenstein, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 November 1941, reprinted in Mark Tucker, *Black Music Research Journal*, Fall 1993, p. 68.

² “Swing Is My Beat,” *New Advance*, October 1944, as quoted in Mark Tucker, ed., *The Duke Ellington Reader*, p. 249.

³ At this point in the handwritten manuscript, a notation at the top of page 21 reads: “—2nd—M—BROWN.”

⁴ In the *Boola* script, the date “1945” in “Brown,” p. 11, and allusions to World War II in “Beige” raise questions about possible disparities between an original, likely handwritten draft and the typed pages as well as about the possibility of Ellington’s working on these parts during the mid- and later 1940s.

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

Esther Williams, Geneva Hudson

At a concert that included some of Duke's sacred music at the Kennedy Center on 8 February, Esther Williams-Yarborough was a featured soloist and Geneva Hudson sang with the Chancel Choir from Peoples Congregational Church.

Brian Gilmore

You may have noticed Paul Robeson is on the US Postal Services's latest Black Heritage stamp. Brian Gilmore authored a syndicated piece on him that ran in the Baltimore *Sun*, Tallahassee *Democrat*, and other publications.

Jehangir B. Dalal

Speaking of Paul Robeson, long-timers may remember a while back when Jehangir Dalal played at one of our meetings a recording of Robeson singing Ellington tunes, among them "Solitude."

Anthony Brown

Anthony Brown and his Asian American Orchestra will postpone until early September the premiere of his "American Rhapsodies" as well as his new arrangement of "Tang" from Ellington's *Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*. Their debut had been announced for April during the orchestra's tour in the East. In early February, Dr. Brown was in Los Angeles for the Grammy events as a National Trustee and San Francisco Chapter President.

Ken Steiner

In a review of the CD *Duke Ellington at the Hurricane* in *Jazz Journal International* (June 2003), critic Vic Bellerby writes: "The 12-page essay by Kenneth R. Steiner is well written and captures excellently the spirit of the Ellington band at the time and the enthusiasm of the listeners (who seemed to include just about every famous person in New York - from Charlie Barnet to Chico Marx)."

Looking Ahead

12-16 February

Annual East Coast Jazz Festival. Junior Mance Trio, David "Fathead" Newman, Ronnie Wells, Guitar Summit, Ernie Andrews, et al. Free and ticketed attractions, including clinics, educational programs, seminars, performances, and concerts. School bands, dance troupes, and emerging jazz artists as well as established stars. DoubleTree Hotel, Rockville, MD. For schedule and more information, contact: <fmjseastcoastjazz.com>.

Friday, 20 February

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

14 March

Duke Ellington Sacred Concert with Blues Alley Youth Orchestra, directed by Jacques "Saxman" Johnson, and Chancel Choir conducted by Clyde T. Parker. 4 pm, Peoples Congregational Church, 4704 - 13th St, NW, Washington, DC. \$10, children \$5.

12-15 May

Nineteenth International Duke Ellington Conference, Stockholm, Sweden

February Program

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

At our meeting on Saturday, 7 February we got to try out our new DVD-VCR-CD player with Mac Grimmer's presentation of *The Piano Player...Plus*. Mac played selections from both sides of *The Intimate Duke Ellington*, a DVD of solo/trio and octet sessions with Duke recorded for Danish television in 1967. Duke in solo or trio (Rufus Jones on drums and John Lamb on bass) included "Lotus Blossom," "Second Portrait of the Lion" (dedicated to Willie "The Lion" Smith), "Meditation," and "On the Fringe of the Jungle." The octet sessions featured Harry Carney on baritone sax, to, in Duke's words, "escort one of our favorite ladies," "Sophisticated Ladies," and "Jam with Sam," with Cat Anderson on trumpet closing on a blistering high note.

One of the highlights from the second half included Clark Terry with the Woody Herman orchestra in 1984, with Clark living up to his nickname "Mumbles." At one point, with mock bewilderment Woody asked the audience, "What the hell is he saying?" There also were selections from a *Live in Europe* DVD including Alice Babs joining the group for "Take the A-Train" and the Count Basie Orchestra at Carnegie Hall with some impromptu dancing by Joe Williams, Joe Turner, Sarah Vaughn and Tony Bennett. In a more recent recording, we experienced vocalist Jane Monheit doing a sultry version of "Just Squeeze Me" at the Rainbow Room in New York City.

Bad News and Good News

At our February meeting, several members said that they heard just that evening on Rob Bamberger's radio program that Dick Spottswood had been injured by a fall on the ice and was hospitalized. Happier news: It was good to see another long-time member, Bill Flemons, at the meeting, his first since undergoing surgery during the summer.

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