

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society

Volume XII, Number 4

APRIL 2004



Courtesy Carlyle Productions

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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On April 29



Do Something Creative!

Van de Leur and Towers Earn High Honors

Two of our members, Jack Towers and Walter van de Leur, have been chosen for important awards. Ceremonies for the bestowing of both awards were scheduled for the joint convention of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) and Society for American Music at Cleveland in mid-March.

Jack Towers selected by ARSC for its new Award for Distinguished Service to Historic Recordings. Criteria for this signal honor includes "contributions of outstanding significance to the field of historic works or discographic research." In his typically unassuming manner, Jack says that he was "startled" by his being selected, especially as the first such honoree.

A program note by the American Music Society reads, "The Lowens Book Award represents our most prestigious honor . . ." It is this award, which carries a monetary prize as well as a citation, that Walter van de Leur earned for his *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn*.

This is not the first time one of our members has won an ARSC prize; Dick Spottswood was given a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003.

Ellington enthusiasts will be interested in knowing that the Society of American Music has in his memory a Mark Tucker Award for scholarly writing.

Ruth Ellington Boatwright Passes

We just learned that Ruth Ellington Boatwright died on Saturday, 6 March and in a private ceremony was interred at the Ellington family site at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx on Monday, 8 March. A memorial service at St. John's Church in New York City will be announced later. We will have more in our next issue.

Duke and the Ladies

8 PM, Saturday, 3 April

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

Open to the Public

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

For our April program, Gina Rollins will present Duke and the Ladies, a sampling of the wonderful ladies who sang with Ellington. Gina will feature both guest and band vocalists.

Come and spend an evening with Ellington Songbirds. This is a Jazz Appreciation Month event.



Now This Is One Classy Class

Want to have some fun showing yourself and others how much Ellingtonia you know? Take the class on Duke offered online by Smithsonian Jazz. The site's graphics are an engaging plus, and there is great music, too, some 15 tunes in case you like music when you "study" (?), including "Ko-Ko," "Pitter Panther Patter," "Soda Fountain Rag," and "Three Cent Stomp."

To expand your knowledge, you can also take classes on Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Benny Carter, and What Is Jazz. As a sidebar on the web site encourages, "Live it, Learn it, Love it."

When you get tired of all that studying and cramming and taking tests, rest your brain and try some of the other features at the site.

Just go to < Smithsonianjazz.org >, click on "Interactive" and follow the simple directions.

The Real Blues!

If your mailing label is **blue**, we are blue because of you. Unless you renew your membership right away, with a great sense of loss (hopefully temporary) we will not be able to continue you on our mailing list. Help us shake off this blues pall by sending in your dues today! If your mailing label is **green**, we very much want you to join The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. as a first-time-ever member at our special rate.

Blue or green, please follow the directions on page 4, or use the membership form in your March issue of *Ellingtonia*. Thank you.

The East Coast Jazz Festival and Young Musicians

No question about it, the Annual East Coast Jazz Festival in February, as in previous years, was a delight. The venue was comfortable and geographically convenient to transportation. The atmosphere was congenial and relaxing. There were a generous number of free seminars, performances, workshops, and clinics. And, of course, there were established stars, among them this year such as Buck Hill, Keter Betts, and David “Fathead” Newman. With up to six events going on simultaneously, from early morning until late at night (including open jam sessions until 4 am and line dancing until 2 am), there was a cornucopia of varied performance, educational, and participatory events—all for a worthy cause, the Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund.

Most gratifying about this annual event, at least to this observer, is its emphasis upon students and other young, aspiring musicians. In one day, for example, we counted nine youth bands, each with its own full-session time slot and stage. Throughout the four days, there were performances by middle school and high school bands (we counted a dozen, but there could have been more), school dance troupes, and groups such as the Blues Alley Youth Orchestra, Levine School of Music Jazz Ensemble, Goucher College Jazz Ensemble, University of North Florida Jazz Combo, and the Ellington School of the Arts’ New Washingtonians. Individually and collectively, all looked good, too (some even were in black tie), well-groomed, acting as if they were “about something,” as indeed they were. And then there were finalists who engaged in the live Scholarship Competition session. Not only were all these youngsters given the opportunity to perform before appreciative audiences, but the congenial ambience permitted their casual associating with their “elders,” to use a contextually current term that denotes respected, seasoned professional musicians.

The entire East Coast Jazz Festival accomplished much, not the least being its showcasing of an oncoming generation of authentic jazz musicians—and listeners, too, we hasten to add.

Alumni Reunion a Historic Occasion

They came! From 92-years young Herb Jeffries to Rocky White, a relative youngster in the orchestra when Duke passed on—they came to the Duke Ellington Reunion Project hosted by the American Jazz Institute and Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California, 7-9 February. They performed, shared memories, reminisced, renewed acquaintances and friendships, and in a number of instances met for the first time, their common bond being the privilege of having played or sung with Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra.

The weekend get-together opened on Saturday night with a concert by the American Jazz Institute Orchestra—augmented by Ellington alumni Art Baron, Vince Prudente, Buster Cooper, Barrie Lee Hall, John Lamb, and Jimmy Woode. The next day oral history sessions were conducted by Patricia Willard in a studio at the college. Guests were welcome to watch on a huge screen in an adjoining room. On Monday evening the affair closed with a banquet and a jam session during which all alumni had a chance to shine, re-visiting, as it were, their time with the orchestra.

“Wonderful!” was how Eve Smith summarized the experience. Introduced by Duke simply as Yvonne (apparently Duke preferred not to deal with the Castilian phonetic nuances of her then surname, Lanauze) during her 1950-51 tenure, she notes wistfully that to her knowledge she is the only remaining member of that band—and thankfully, she is still performing professionally. She was in the band after Herb Jeffries and before Louie Bellson, both of whom were much in evidence at the reunion. For her contribution there she sang “Sophisticated Lady” with the orchestra and then “Love You Madly” to her own accompaniment on piano (she was, after all, a pianist before becoming a vocalist). In a pre-event publicity article on the college website, two drummers (or as Duke was wont to call them from time to time, first-chair percussionists) are quoted about their joining the band. Dave Black, in his 20s when he auditioned, remembers Ellington as a relaxed and graceful man. “Most band leaders, when you work for them,” he said, “you play the song how they want you to—but Duke would get to know your style, he would make an arrangement around how you played.” Although he had played with Count Basie and other well-known leaders, Butch Ballard recalls that when he came aboard in the early 1950s, “I was scared of him, I was petrified with fear—I mean, this was *Duke Ellington* and I was going to be in his band? But he had this wonderful way of making you feel so comfortable. . . . It was a joy and one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.” While the entire event was videotaped for the College archives, we hope that such recollections at the oral history sessions will become publicly available.

Alumni at the event, in addition to those already named, were Jeff Castleman, DeVonne Gardner, Milt Grayson, Lil Greenwood, Dolores Parker, and Barbara Winfield. Those for various reasons not present included Maria Ellington Cole, Kay Davis, Marian Cox, Rick Henderson, Steve Little, June Norton, John Sanders, Joya Sherrill, Clark Terry, and Trish Turner. We later learned from Alan Schneidmill, for example, that Marian Cox had been bedridden, but that she no longer is. Some had prior commitments.

Several members of our Society were there. Alan Schneidmill, who made the trip from Maryland, says he enjoyed the presentations, but deeply regrets not finding where the second afternoon event took place until too late. Walter van de Leur, who came over from The Netherlands, rehearsed the orchestra and conducted it during the Strayhorn session. Patricia Willard was a consultant to the project for several months and coordinated and conducted its oral history sessions.

Curiously, as far as we and others have been able to know, there was no post-event reportage or reviews in major media, none, for example, in the Los Angeles *Times*. Thus, we are deeply grateful to participants Patricia Willard and Walter van de Leur for so kindly providing details for this report. We are also thank Eve Smith and Alan Schneidmill for their comments and impressions.



JAM Events

Jazz Appreciation Month

A number of our members and associates are participating in Jazz Appreciation Month, aptly April, the month in which Duke was born. Events in which they are involved include:

3 April

"Duke and the Ladies" by Gina Rollins. Regular meeting of The Duke Ellington Society (see page 1).

12 April

"Jazz on Film" by Wendy Shay. Smithsonian's Carmichael Auditorium. 12 noon. Free.

15 April (tentative)

New Washingtonians and Walter Johnson H.S. Jazz Band playing Ellington and other masters. Smithsonian's Carmichael Auditorium. 7 pm. Free.

22 April

Ellington Birthday Concert by the Duke Ellington School of the Arts' New Washingtonians Jazz Orchestra, in the Theatre at 3500 R Street, NW, 7:30 pm. Part of the school's 30th Anniversary.

25 April (tentative)

Ellington's Sacred Music by Blues Alley Youth Orchestra and Chancel Choir of Peoples Congregational Church. Smithsonian's Carmichael Auditorium. 2 and 4 pm. Free.

29 April

"Duke Ellington: Genius Beyond Category." Overview of Duke's life and music by John Edward Hasse. Smithsonian's Carmichael Auditorium. 12 noon. Free.

Popular Ellington Mural To Be Installed at Historic New Location

An organization known as the The 14th and U Main Street Initiative has announced tentative plans for "reinstallation of the Duke Ellington mural at the True Reformer building" in Washington on 2 April in connection with Jazz Appreciation Month. The edifice is where some of Ellington's earliest performances as a fledgling professional pianist took place. It stands at the corner of 12th and U Streets, in the same block and on the same side of the street where the huge painting previously hung before being removed for construction of a new building.

Quick Quiz

We were impressed and enlightened by Brad Bradbie's seminar at the East Coast Jazz Festival on the inter-relationship of jazz and Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hart type songs and show music. Among his illustrations were examples of chord structures of popular non-jazz songs that underlie jazz classics. Below, we have put into quiz form several Ellington/Strayhorn recordings he used as examples.

- You can sing "Especially Like You" along with a trumpet solo on one of the Ellington orchestra's best known recordings. What is the tune and who is the trumpeter?
- "I Got Rhythm" became what tune at the hands of Duke and Ben Webster?
- "Lullaby of Birdland" is based on what song?

See our next issue for answers. Can you think of others?

Updates: Stockholm Conference

- Our Society will be well represented on the official program for the Conference. They include Patricia Willard, Ken Steiner, Scott Schwartz, Walter van de Leur, Annie Kuebler, Janna Steed, and John Hasse.
- From an internet posting, we are advised that "Conference registrations will be accepted through May 12."

[For more details about the Conference see our November issue.]

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

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More on *Boola*

We were pleasantly surprised by an unusual number of comments about the article in our last issue on the *Boola* script in the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian's Archives Center. Janna Steed e-mailed us, "I really enjoyed your article on the *Boola* script," and former Archives staffer Mimi Minnick wrote, "I loved learning about 'Boola!'" Others knew about Ellington's extended work *Black, Brown and Beige*, of course, but remarked that they were unaware that Ellington had worked on what has since been referred to as an unfinished opera that, in his words, "tells the story of the Negro in America."

More light will be shed on the work by our member Walter van de Leur when he lectures on *Boola* at the Criss Cross Conference at the University of Nottingham in England in June. In addition to the script at the Smithsonian, he will refer to an all-typed version that to him "appears to be seriously edited and was in all likelihood created after the premier of *Black, Brown and Beige*."

Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival Notes

Following a triumphant appearance at the East Coast Jazz Festival at the beginning of February, the New Washingtonians, from the Ellington School of the Arts and directed by their teacher Davey Yarborough, traveled to Moscow, Idaho at the end of the month and performed at the huge 37th Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival.

Wendy Shay, Head of the Audio-Visual Collection at the Smithsonian's Archives Center who is known to a number of Ellington researchers who have come there, lectured on "Before Ken Burns's Jazz." Program notes indicate that she discussed how efforts to collect and preserve jazz on film, especially live performances, made Burns' series possible.

As a JAM feature, at noon on 12 April in the Smithsonian's Carmichael Auditorium, Ms. Shay will give a lecture/screening entitled "Jazz on Film," with illustrated approaches to filming live jazz performances.

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

Priscilla Ramsey

As part of a Black Poets Series recently televised, Dr. Priscilla Ramsey lectured on the Harlem Renaissance.

Ronnie Wells

Heartfelt congratulations and gratitude are certainly in order for vocalist-educator-producer Ronnie Wells! Her East Coast Jazz Festival, a fund raiser for the Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund, was well worth attending.

Walter van de Leur

In addition to a lecture on *Boola* in England (see "More on *Boola*," page 3), Walter van de Leur is to talk in Genoa, Italy on "A Matter of Being Humble: Billy Strayhorn as Arranger," a thesis of which is that Strayhorn's approaching each work that he arranged with the greatest care regardless of its musical merits was a sign of humility.

Powhattan "Brad" Brady

Brad Brady's seminar "Jazz and Broadway" was a highlight of the East Coast Jazz Festival. Worth noting is that a number of persons who attended his session on another topic last year came to this one. (See the "Quick Quiz," page 3.)

Don Rouse

We quote directly from *Tailgate Ramblings*: "Don Rouse, *Tailgate* co-editor, was asked to tape for WETA-FM a segment on New Orleans Jazz. He was interviewed by Andrea Murray and, as we go to press, the interview is scheduled to be broadcast February 22nd on a program that is just called 'The Program.' This is great exposure from one of our own music historians."

Dick Spottswood

Dick Spottswood is out of the hospital, up and around, and back hosting his regular music program on the radio. He is very favorably referenced and quoted several times throughout a *Washington Post* spread entitled "Gospel Music's New Apostle," about *Goodbye, Babylon*, the recently released 6-CD collection of historic gospel music and sermons. Dick was a consultant for the project, contributed about half of the materials, and co-authored the accompanying booklet.

Brian Gilmore and Reuben Jackson

Poets Reuben Jackson, Brian Gilmore, and DJRenegade will conduct a poetry reading and workshop on the coalescence of music and literature at the Smithsonian on 5 April.

Looking Ahead

Entire Month of April Jazz Appreciation Month

For information about events taking place internationally, check media wherever you are. Also, organizations and sponsors post their special JAM events on the JAM National Calendar. For more information, go to the internet at < smithsonianjazz.org/jam > or < JAM.org >.

29 April

105th Anniversary of Birth of Edward Kennedy Ellington

12-15 May

Nineteenth International Duke Ellington Conference, Stockholm, Sweden

March Meeting: Aspects of Duke at the Piano

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Peter MacHare put together an intriguing program that traced Duke's progression as a musician, pianist-composer and pianist-conductor. He started with "Carolina Shout" by the master of Harlem Stride, James P. Johnson, who was one of Duke's earliest influences. Illustrating that connection, we heard Duke in 1932's "Fast and Furious," also known as "Lots O' Fingers." Next we saw and heard Duke composing at the piano with a viewing of the cinematic classic *Black and Tan*. From there, we went on what Peter called "the journey, following Duke as he matured in the three roles and explored new boundaries. From 1930's "Rocky Mountain Blues" we moved to "Plucked Again" from the first series of Ellington/Jimmie Blanton duets and ended with 1940's "The Clothed Woman."

During the second half we witnessed Duke's arrival (or return?) as a piano virtuoso. From 1959's "Weary Blues" we moved to "Single Petal of a Rose" from *The Queen's Suite* and closed with "Lotus Blossom," recorded for Duke's tribute album to Billy Strayhorn. There Duke was totally exposed: emotionally raw and stripped of any bravura.

Next Peter featured segments of *On the Road with Duke Ellington*, a documentary filmed in 1967 where we saw Duke composing and conducting. He said one of his favorite composing venues was after-hours in clubs, where he would be surrounded but not bothered by the noise and hub-bub from cleaning crews. "It's not physical isolation. It's mental isolation," he said. More than once we saw the road manager hovering nearby after a gig, patiently pointing at his watch and trying to get Duke away from the piano and off to the hotel (or on the road). Peter ended as he said "not with a bang, but a GONG," from 1971's *Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*.

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