

Ellingtonia

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Courtesy Carlyle Productions

Lesser Known Resource: The Yale Ellington Project

Usually when one thinks of Ellington and Strayhorn repositories they are the Institute for Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, the Ellington and related Collections at the Smithsonian, and particularly for Strayhorn scores, the Jazz Archive of the University of Chicago Library. There is another, however: the Ellington Project, a component of the Oral History, American Music holdings at Yale University.

The Project consists of over 90 interviews of persons associated in some way with Ellington. Additionally, it includes a series of interviews focusing on Billy Strayhorn.

Not only are the interviewees musicians important in the evolution of the orchestra—for example, Louis Metcalf, Adelaide Hall, Kay Davis Wimp, and Clark Terry—but also those important in other ways in the chronology of the Ellington saga—for example, Irving Mills, Edmund Anderson, Fr. John Gensel, Cress Courtney, Stanley and Helen Oates Dance, and two of our members, Jack Towers and the late Maurice Banks, who during his boyhood was a close neighbor of the Ellington family in Washington. Important for genealogical and biographical information about the family are Bernice Wiggins and Juanita Middleton; for the same information about Strayhorn are members of his family, among them his nephew Gregory Morris and sister Lillian Dicks. Of course, well known Ellington orchestra members are among the interviewees; but represented as well are important but lesser known musicians such as Rick Henderson, June Norton, and Barry Lee Hall.

Unless restrictions were placed on them by the subjects, these interviews are available to the public. To get a list of the holdings and to learn how to access them, contact the Project by postal service: Oral History American Music, Yale School of Music and Library, PO Box 20824, New Haven, CT 06520-82466; phone: 203-432-1988; fax: 203-432-1989; and e-mail vivian.perlis@yale.edu.

In 1967 Yale University became one of the earliest institutions of higher learning to award Ellington an

Holiday Party and Flea Market

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our annual pot luck Holiday Party will be on **Saturday, 8 January at 8 pm** in our usual meeting room at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.**

If you can contribute food or drink to the table, please do so. We have always had a pleasant variety of treats without coordinating what each person should bring, so bring what you like. Perhaps it is worth pointing out that Duke Ellington especially loved desserts.

If you have any Ellington or music items that you wish to sell, please feel free to bring them and mark each item with your name and price. Likewise, bring a little extra cash for the chance to buy some great music. If you wish to donate proceeds to the Society—well, that will be fine, too.

We look forward to seeing you all there!

New Curriculum Guide in Preparation

The first in a proposed series under auspices of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra (SJMO), a *Louis Armstrong Curriculum Kit* is being written by Dr. Luvenia George and SJMO leader Dr. David Baker. Scheduled for distribution in 2005, it is intended for students in grades 5-12.

The Smithsonian's *Duke Ellington Education Kit: Beyond Category*, prepared by Dr. George several years ago, has proved highly influential, having been adopted or adapted by a number of school systems, museums, and other cultural and educational entities.

honorary doctorate. Not long afterward, through the efforts of Willie Ruff a permanent Duke Ellington Fellowship was established there. Among its diverse Fellows honored through 2003 by selection for this "Conservatory Without Walls" are William Warfield, Joe Williams, Odetta, The Jazz Jumpers, Roland Hayes, and Marian Anderson.

Dollar Brand/Abdullah Ibrahim: “I’m Tired of Going Down in History, I Want to Eat”

by John Mason

In 1968 Abdullah Ibrahim, the great South African pianist, returned home after seven years in the United States and Europe. By then he was internationally famous and was invited to write a series of articles for the weekly Cape Herald. In this excerpt, Ibrahim, then known as Dollar Brand, talks about his love for Duke Ellington’s music and about subbing for Duke with the orchestra on five occasions in 1966. His big break had come in early 1963, when Ellington heard him and the singer Sathima Bea Benjamin in Zurich.



... The only way to obtain complete musical freedom is to play what you honestly hear and feel, regardless of what has gone before or what “has to come.” Both Monk and Dizzy are good examples of artists who went beyond the accepted form and created their own arena. It is a hard road. . . . Monk had to wait for 20 years before his music was accepted. . . .

The Ellington band, when [it] first came to New York from Washington, had similar experiences. It took . . . time for the “public” to accept Ellington’s music.

I know when I first heard Ellington on records only the more “swinging” things held my interest, and it was only after long hours of intense listening the beauty of “Lady of the Lavender Mist” and “Harlem Airshaft” was revealed. Ellington is the master.

... [Playing with the Ellington orchestra was] one of the most beautiful experiences of our stay in the United States. Duke was out on the West Coast writing the score for Sinatra’s film *Anatomy of a Murder*. He asked me to sit in with the band for some concerts and dances in Baltimore and New York. Duke’s son, Mercer Ellington, takes charge of the band when Duke is indisposed.

Bea [Benjamin] sang with the orchestra on these occasions, too.

Because there is no piano score, I had to brush up on my Ellington by listening to records.

The engagements called for the Ellington institution which meant that people expect to hear the old favorites “Take the ‘A’ Train,” “Things Ain’t What They Used to Be”—Ellington warhorses. Johnny Hodges showed me some of the piano introductions on some of them. I hardly played anyway. I couldn’t. Just listening from the inside was enough.

One night in Baltimore we had two bass players. Through some misunderstanding both the regular bass player, John Lamb, and would-be substitute, Richard Davis, turned up. But it was wonderful. I have never heard “Rockin’ in Rhythm” really rock like that.

And what a beautiful musician is Paul Gonsalves. Tender, warm balladeer—and fast and fiery when the occasion calls for it.

... The Ellington band is the Ellington instrument. It functions as a unit and it is not surprising when one realizes that some of the Ellington members have been with him for over 25 years. The main reason, I think, for Ellington’s success with his orchestra is his ability to get the best out of his musicians or anyone for that matter. To some degree he is graced with clairvoyance and knows immediately what is needed and what should be discarded.

Duke gave me access to all his published music and I spend most of my time going through his files checking and rechecking sequences, melody lines, [and] chords, [all of which] seem to disappear when they are played by other musicians.

Thelonius Monk is about the clearest interpreter of Ellington I have heard. But then Monk is a direct musical descendant of Ellington.

... Ellington, Monk, Dizzy, Ornette Coleman, Coltrane, Cecil Taylor. Their insistence on creating honestly is absolute proof that the truth survives anything.

– Dollar Brand, “I’m Tired of Going Down in History, I Want to Eat,” *Cape Herald*, 7 September 1968.

Edited by John Mason

Ed. Note: This is the second of two articles on Abdullah Ibrahim and Duke Ellington by Prof. Mason, back at the University of Virginia from an unrelated research trip to South Africa last summer.

Short Sheets . . .

The Same Butterfly That We Know and Love?

First prize winner in the short story division of the 2003 creative writing contest sponsored by the College Language Association is Elizabeth Werazko of Marionopolis College in Quebec, Canada. The story's title: "Black Butterfly."

"Harlem Speaks" Jazz Series

The Jazz Museum of Harlem's "Harlem Speaks" programs resumed in November. Robert O'Meally discussed his love of jazz and Harlem and his scholarship on Ralph Ellison, and with Marjorie Eliot conversed with executive director Loren Schoenberg about her weekly Sugar Hill soirees at 555 Edgecomb Avenue, where at one time or another the likes of Ellington, Andy Kirk, and Johnny Hodges lived. December attractions are Allan Harris and Bobby Sanabria. For information about the series, go to jazzmuseuminharlem.org.

House in Maine Where Traveling Black

Entertainers Stayed Is Now on National Register

While vacationing in Maine last summer, Ben Pubols came across an article in a local paper that tells of black entertainers staying in places like a converted farm-house when they played in the resort town of Old Orchard Beach, where they were not always welcome at local hostleries. A house at 110 Portland Avenue where Basie, Calloway, Ellington, and Hampton were guests is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

According to the news article, the accommodations there were "Spartan, but the hospitality was great. So was the food—lobster salads, fried chicken, and every Sunday morning, the proprietor's beloved mackerel and beans." The daughter of the woman who ran the guesthouse says her fondest memories involve Ellington, whose autographed photo still hangs in her bedroom there, and his musicians.

Early Exposure to Music Pays

In a feature article "Early Exposure Is Key to Developing a Child's Love of Music," special to the *Washington Post*, November 15, Brian Gilmore uses Davie Yarborough and her parents Davey and Esther to show how children are greatly advantaged and have an abiding appreciation for music if they experience it at a very young age.

Davie's parents put a piano in her room when she was just a tot. Gilmore writes, "One evening Davey . . . heard then 3-year-old Davie pecking at the piano keys. He didn't get up and go into her room. He just listened. Davie Yarborough, who now plays piano, gained an early appreciation of music from her musician dad, Davey, and vocalist mom, Esther Williams. . . . 'When they are young,' [Davey] says, 'their minds are very open.'" Davie, now in college, remains a lover and performer of music of various types.

[We proudly note that Gilmore and all three of the Yarboroughs are members of our Society.]

Fargo Described as "Pivotal"

The Ellington dance and broadcast date, recorded by young techies Dick Burris and Jack Towers, at the Crystal Ballroom in Fargo, ND on 7 November 1940 was "One of the most important events in music's history," according to Phil Schaap.

In his "Out to Lunch" program on 29 November over WKCR-FM, he pointed out several reasons for considering it so: Cootie had left Duke and had just been replaced by Ray Nance; Dick and Jack's was the first field recording of the band (not an aircheck); and it was essentially the beginning of Jack's lifelong love of Ellington's music, fortuitously at a time when Jack was developing an interest in relatively new recording and radio technology, which led to a career in farm radio. Further, it occurred in the Strayhorn-Blanton-Webster era.

Location recording in those days was hard to do and practically unheard of. Schaap stated that getting their equipment to Fargo was a challenge and that Dick and Jack got it there from South Dakota by plane and then flatboat across the Red River from Minnesota. Although a pilot and at that time co-owner of a small plane, Jack says that in fact he drove to Fargo with the gear in his car.

Schaap's broadcast celebrated not only the Fargo event, but just as importantly, Jack Towers' birthday. November 7 was the 64th anniversary of the Fargo event, and November 15 marked the 90th anniversary of Jack's birth.

As Schaap declared, a "great man" gave us an incredible gift.

[Ed. Note: We are grateful to Jack for sharing with us his reference copy of Schaap's broadcast, which included engaging commentary about Jack as well as the music.]

Clinker Alert!

In last month's article on Abdullah Ibrahim, we incorrectly spelled his drummer's name. The correct spelling is Makaya Ntshoko. We apologize.

Internet Addresses to Keep Handy

A Duke Ellington Panorama:
www.depanorama.net

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.:
www.depanorama.net/dcsociety/

DEMS Bulletin:
www.depanorama.net/dems

Billy Strayhorn Songs:
www.billystrayhorn.com

Andrew Homzy's Ellington Site:
Duke-LYM@concordia.ca

To become a member, go to
www.majordomo@concordia.ca

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

About Our Members

Morris Hodara

Morris Hodara has stepped down as editor of TDES' newsletter. His successor, Eden Eskin, writes, "Morris Hodara has edited this publication with intelligence, knowledge of the Ellington history, and a graceful command of the English language for about fifteen years." Not one to be idle, Dr. Hodara has already published in the newsletter the third (the 1930s) of a series entitled "Duke Ellington for Beginners," an era-by-era, overview. He continues as corresponding secretary of TDES.

John Mason

Seems as if Dr. John Mason is a renaissance person. A professor of history at the University of Virginia, he plays french horn avocationally with the Heritage Repertory Theater and other groups. He is also quite a photographer, as evidenced by his candid portraits of Frank Morgan on the front and back of this alto saxophonist's latest CD, *City Lights* (HighNote HCD 7129). You can see the front cover on the internet at www.dustygroove.com/prp/4/5/356154i.htm.

Mark Harvey

During November the Turner Classic Movies channel telecast several restored silent movie classics, this time with new music scores. Two of the films, *Birth of a Nation* and *There It Is* feature musicians from The Reverend Mark Harvey's Aardvark Jazz Orchestra, including him. He can also be heard on the collage-soundtrack for *A Bronx Morning*. Other commissioned scores for the series includes some by colleagues of his at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

A preview announcement of the telecasts advises, "As David Letterman used to say, 'Wake up kids, call the neighbors, this is great stuff, an authentic collection of 'treasures.' Hope you enjoy the sights and sounds."

Luvenia George

The president of the International Association of Jazz Educators has asked Dr. Luvenia George to serve through 2006 on its Education Pedagogy Resource Team. Also, at the Smithsonian she is busy documenting the Duke Ellington Youth Project: 1990-2002, which she conceived and for which she admirably served as director over the years. The Project had its first Youth Festival in April 1991.

Dick Spottswood

Where Will You Be This Christmas? (Dust to Digital Records) is the title of a CD of 24 recordings of, according to producer Dick Spottswood, "Southern fiddles, jazz bands and blues singers, festive music from Puerto Rico, Italy, Ukraine, and Trinidad . . . [T]here is equal time for sacred and secular, for Christ and Santa Claus, and for respectable and rowdy."

Billy Strayhorn Redux

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Our December meeting was a continuation of November's Billy Strayhorn tribute. Peter MacHare started us off with two versions of "A Flower is a Lovely Thing," Johnny Hodges and orchestra (1947) and Joya Sherrill (1965). Mac Grimmer presented three selections from a mid-1990s Dutch Jazz Orchestra album featuring newly discovered Strayhorn compositions "Bagatelle," "La Sacre Supreme," and "Cashmere Cutie" (about Lana Turner). Angela Grimmer brought a classic "A-Train" from Ella Fitzgerald's *Ellington Songbook*. On behalf of Geneva, Ted Hudson presented Ella's haunting version of "Something to Live For" along with "All Day Long" from Duke's tribute album to Billy. H. Norton Duhaney contributed Andy Bey's rendition of "Lush Life." Ted Shell closed out the evening with two versions of "A Train," Harry Carney with strings and Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Orchestra. As an encore for Helen Frazier, Peter played Johnny Hodges performances of "Key Largo," "Triple Play," and "Violet Blue."

Peter was the winner of Alan Schneidmill's jazz family contest, identifying the members of 38 jazz families, for which Alan presented him a cappuccino-flavored layer cake. (Good thing he won, since Peter's daughter Erica told him he'd better do it!) Alan came up with 50 families himself.

Officers, Board Continue in 2005

Beginning on 1 January, our 2004 Officers and Board Members will begin a new term of service, having been re-elected unanimously at our November meeting.

To Join or Continue Membership in Our Society

Simply send a check payable to

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. to
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.

Dues remain a bargain:

Renewing Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;
and a special rate for a Brand-New-Member, only \$20

