

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Artist Gaye Ellington Earns Critical Attention

Duke's granddaughter Gaye Ellington, an accomplished visual artist, is included in *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* by Lisa E. Farrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

The author describes her paintings as "a kaleidoscopic palette of lilacs and plums, jades and ceruleans" that unite to create "imagery that, while abstract, resonates with representational phantoms. Like visual riddles, [her] renderings at first appear to be purely formal—a series of flamelike and fluid shapes that dart across the surface of the canvas. Upon closer examination, specters of human faces and figures begin to emerge, and observers are drawn into the labyrinth." Two figures illustrate these qualities, *The Blues Ain't* (1989) and *Oclupaca* (1983).

The book notes that many of her paintings are "visual translations" of orchestral works of Duke, Billy Strayhorn, and her father, Mercer Ellington.

Gaye Ellington's work likely best known among Ellington devotees is her vibrant, colorful portrait of her grandfather, *Heritage: EKE* (1985). Of this acrylic on canvas, on the Smithsonian's website she is quoted as saying, "Ever since my grandfather died, many artists have done representations of him. They were what other people saw in my grandfather. When I looked at them, they didn't express what I thought of him, and it disturbed me. . . . A lot of photographs of him were very serious. I'm not saying he was always happy. But he would turn around in a minute and smile." This work may be seen on the Smithsonian's website at www.150.si.edu/150trav/remember/r1013.htm.

While her portrait of Duke is representational, as the critique in *Creating Their Own Image* states that her "painterly movements approach pure nonobjectivity and create the effect of light passing through a stained-glass window," for example, the above cited "Oclupaca."

Ms. Ellington majored in art at Howard University, where, Dr. Farrington says, she "responded to the Washington School and its late modern exploitation of color." In 2000 she was the subject of a one-person show, "Women as Inspiration: The Art of Gaye Ellington."

June Video Program:

Ellington Music Played by Others

8 pm, Saturday, June 4 at Grace Lutheran Church
by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

For June, we will have another all-video program. Ted Shell will present many different artists, all performing music written by Elling and his colleagues. You know the depth of Ted's collection, so this is sure to be a great presentation.

The program will be at 8 pm on Saturday, June 4, at Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC. This will be our last meeting of the season, so be sure to come and bring a guest if you can.

Jimmy Woode Dies

James B. Woode, characterized in the British online publication *Independent* as "a prodigious Duke Ellington bassist," passed away from post-surgery complications at his New Jersey home on 23 April, at the age of 76. He was also an adept classical pianist.

Jimmy (as he was usually referred to) Woode joined the Ellington orchestra after a "temporary" two-week engagement in 1955 and stayed for five years. Among those with whom he had performed previously are Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, and Miles Davis.

He was the Ellington orchestra bassist at the 1955 Newport Jazz Festival and its now-famed "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue," featuring Paul Gonsalves. After his stint with Ellington, Mr. Woode moved to Europe where he frequently worked with other expatriots such as Don Byas and Bud Powell and as a charter member with the KennyClarke-Claude Bolling Big Band. He returned to the United States in 2001 and continued performing.

We extend to his family and friends our sincere condolences.

Board Meeting Set for June 4

There will be a meeting of the Officers and Board of Directors of The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. at 7 pm on Saturday, June 4 at Grace Lutheran Church. Our regular monthly program begins one hour after it starts, so the Board meeting will start on time.

The Kelly-Strayhorn Theater

The newspaper obituary for Billy Strayhorn's youngest sister, Lillian Strayhorn Demus Dicks, requested that memorials for her be in the form of contributions to the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater. Founded in 2001 and not yet widely known outside the Pittsburgh area, its name honors Gene Kelly and Billy Strayhorn. According to its mission statement, this non-profit organization's purpose "is to provide a community theater facility and to encourage diverse artistic, cultural, and educational activities that will enrich the community as well as the lives of individuals." In keeping with this mission, since its inception over 100 arts organizations and community groups have "graced its stages." The quality of its programs and activities is suggested by the Pittsburgh *Post Gazette's* judgment in 2003 that "The Kelly-Strayhorn Theater is home to 4 of the top 10 Dance Concerts in Pittsburgh!!!" [Exclamation marks in original]

Last year a production at the theater of *Fantastic Rhythm* featured music, dance, and visual art, including video art. Strayhorn's original, and popular, *Fantastic Rhythm* played in Pittsburgh and East Liberty from 1936 to 1938, some rehearsals for which were held in his Homewood apartment. Still a youngster by most standards, by that time he had created pieces that were to become "classics," as it were, among them his best known ballad, "Lush Life" and "My Little Brown Book," which was included in the show. A poster for the first production proclaimed "Songs and Entire Book Written by Billy Strayhorn."

Persons who have not but wish to memorialize Mrs. Dicks by making a donation to the theater may still do so. The theater may be contacted by regular mail: The Kelly-Strayhorn Theater, 5941 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206; by phone: 412-363-3000; by e-mail: inro@kelly-strayhorn.org; and on the web: www.kelly-strayhorn.org.

"Ellington Lives" at School of the Arts Concert

The two-part concert at the Ellington School of the Arts on 21 April featuring Edward "Eddie" Ellington II with the Ellington Legacy and the Schools' New Washingtonians Jazz Orchestra and its Arts Combined Orchestra lived up to its billing "Ellington Lives."

The New Washingtonians included mostly Ellington and Strayhorn works in their program. To this reporter, a highlight was their taking on the rhythmically intricate "Oclupaca" with its changing dynamics and challenging section passages. The group's musical discipline was evident as well in a saxophone quartet's "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart" sans any rhythm support whatever. The Arts Combined Orchestra showcased strings, clarinets, and flutes on a sensitively conceived and presented "Mood Indigo."

After intermission Eddie Ellington and The Ellington Legacy began its all-Ellington/Strayhorn evening with a rousing "Take the A-Train," followed by classics "Satin Doll," "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good," "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," and more. The Legacy has fine musicians. The rhythm section, with Eddie on guitar, provided propulsive yet unobtrusive support for vocalist Nancy Reid and trombonist Rob Susman, saxophonist Virginia Nayhew, and trumpeter Mark McGowan. This front line was superb: Mayhew was articulate, clear-toned, and convincing; Susman played with authority, decisiveness, and vigor; and McGowan was a commanding soloist who sustained a full-toned, unfaltering presence even when he ventured into the higher registers.

When the The Ellington Legacy ended its set and was leaving the stage, the audience was on its feet, applauding. But having to rush to catch a train back to New York City, they could not respond to calls for "More! More!" Hopefully, the "more" will take place soon.

"It Was an Honor . . ."

by Derryck Dawkins

It was a honor to stand in the presence of the grandson of a man I respect greatly. I thought it was very nice of Edward Ellington II to stop by and to see us perform and be there to support us in spite of their busy schedule. I was also very excited to see his band play, and I thought they were an amazing jazz group. I am grateful that Edward Ellington came up to me and said that he would be watching me play guitar on stage when I did my solo and listen to some of my guitar licks. I felt kind of nervous after being told I was being watched! I am glad I didn't know at the time that the man who said that to me was...Edward Ellington.

Ed. note: We thank Derryck, a student at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, for allowing us to print his remarks here.

Short Sheets . . .

We Like The Way . . .

The Duke Ellington Society, United Kingdom (DESUUK) describes itself as an "arm of the world-wide Duke Ellington appreciation community." For information about membership, check their web site: www.dukes-place.co.uk.

You Have To Be Sharp to See Naturally

In the current *DEMS Bulletin*, Roger Boyes points out that "B-Sharp Blues" is "another mischievous Ellington title. In the key system, only a semitone separates B natural from C natural; thus, B sharp is tonally exactly the same as C natural, so 'B Sharp Blues' = 'C Blues,' the original title of 'C-Jam Blues.'" He also points out that the theme for "B-Sharp Blues" became "a rather permanent part of Duke's intro to 'C-Jam Blues.'"

Claire Gordon Book Available Several Ways

We received a note from Claire Gordon informing that her *My Unforgettable Jazz Friends* may be ordered from (1) myjazzbook.com at a special price for any Ellington group, (2) jazzbook@charter.net to request as an Ellington member a personally autographed copy for \$25 + \$3 p&h, and (3) by check or money order to PO Box 225, Oceano, CA 93445.

From Our Mailbag:

Member Awarded Fellowship

Just wanted to let you know the good news that I've been awarded one of the Library of Congress' John W. Kluge post-doctoral fellowships for this coming fall. It's a 12-month appointment. Translation into English: It means I get to work on and finish my book on Duke Ellington at the Library of Congress, on their dime, for a year. I'm ecstatic—this kind of time is what I've been working to secure for the last 2+ years.

Also, as part of a grant from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, I'll be spending the month of June and the first few days of July this summer in NYC, doing research at the Schomburg Library in Harlem.

That's it for now, thanks for all your support.

Harvey [Cohen]

More on the Duke-Sweatman Question

Last month in reporting on the release of a Wilbur Sweatman 2-CD, we mentioned the problem of determining whether Duke Ellington ever played and/or recorded with him.

In a 1967 interview by Lewis Fenderson, Duke says that he worked with Wilbur Sweatman for a couple of weeks, and then "Sonny and I decided to go back home."

Quick Quiz

What Ellington sideman, already a professional musician when he came to the United States, for a time worked as a dish washer in California before playing with American orchestras?

Answer: noscirE flor

Don Redmon Heritage Awards and Concert at Harpers Ferry on June 25

by Patricia Willard

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park will present the Fourth Annual Don Redman Heritage Awards Concert starring Frank Wess and Vince Prudente with the Howard Burns Quartet, Saturday, June 25, at 6 pm on the grounds of the Mather Training Center, Fillmore Street, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Admission is free.

There is train service between Washington, DC and Harpers Ferry. For information and directions, 301-535-6298.

Trombonist Prudente played in the Ellington Orchestra from March 1972 until the end. He now is on the faculty of New York University.

Todd Bolton, Branch Chief, Visitors Services, Niagara Movement Centennial Project Director, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, has e-mailed that traditionally the musicians "go back to the Hilltop Hotel Tap Room after the concert for some food and refreshment. Prices are fairly reasonable for dinner and drinks," so if any Ellington Society members would like to join the after-party, Mr. Bolton has asked me to gather names and he will make the reservations. Anyone interested can call me, 202-546-2451 or e-mail me at pwconsults@aol.com.

Quotation of the Month

Johnny Hodges was a poet. He could play just a simple melody and make you cry. Tommy Dorsey was that way on the trombone. He had that beautiful rich, lovely sound that God gave him and he had the ability not to mar a melody with a lot of notes. Just the plain, simple notes with a wonderful background and that was Johnny Hodges.

— Louie Bellson as quoted in *Blue Light 12:1* from *Sheila Tracy, Bands, Booze and Broads* (1966)

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

Michael Brockman

To know more about the activities and accomplishments of Michael Brockman, whom we mentioned in our last issue as co-director of the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra, go to <http://faculty.washington.edu/brockman/>.

Morris Hodara and Ken Steiner

Morris Hodara's "Duke Ellington in the Seventies" is the seventh and final of an excellent series entitled "Duke Ellington for Beginners." He also wrote the second and third, about the 1920s and 1930s. Ken Steiner wrote "Duke Ellington in the Forties." Other authorities who contributed are Bruce Kennan and Bill Saxonis, who wrote essays for the 1950s and 1960s, respectively. As a whole the series is a good introduction to the field of Ellingtonia.

Patricia Willard

On March 1, 1972, Duke opened a four-day engagement with Sarah Vaughan and Billy Eckstine at the Now Grove (formerly the Coconut Grove) of the Ambassador Hotel on Wilshire Blvd. in Los Angeles. My daughter, Lisa Renee Ortiz, who had been an invited guest at Ellington rehearsals (from age 2), recording sessions (from age 5) and concerts (all her life) took opening nights for granted and was there with me and my camera. The very personable and handsome Edward Kennedy Ellington II was there assisting his grandfather backstage. Despite the dim lighting and absence of my strobe (because, to protect his eyes, Duke forbade any flash photography), I took a chance on photographing Lisa and Edward together. The result was a very dark photo with just their faces dramatically illuminated by the recessed ceiling lights in the hallway. At Edward's concert here in April, I asked him to sign a print of that 33-year-old picture, which he did: "To Lisa, Love Always, Edward Ellington, XX LOVE XX."

Ed. note: Having seen Edward K. Ellington II sign this special photograph at the "Ellington Lives" concert, we asked Patricia Willard to tell us about it. We thank her for the above.

John Hornsby

Concentrating on the Ellington orchestra's music for dancing, with focus on the "fox trot," John Hornsby was the presenter at the Toronto Ellington Society's April meeting. His method was to play another orchestra's version of a tune, then the Duke's. For example, he played Tommy Dorsey's "On the Sunny Side of the Street" followed by the small group version featuring Lawrence Brown and Johnny Hodges; Artie Shaw's "Dancing in the Dark" and Duke's with Carney and Nance; Charlie Barnet's "Cherokee" and Duke's from 4 January 1963; and Goodman and Ellington versions of "Goodbye."

Don Rouse

Those who especially dig a liquid, full, wood-y clarinet sound will enjoy Don Rouse's clarinet playing with a group of traditionalists on the newly released CD *Razz'm Jazz'm* (Patuxent CD-131). On two tracks he plays slide whistle!

"Battle of the Bands" Delights

by Peter MacHare

Mac Grimmer's all-video program "Battle of the Bands" delighted everyone at our May meeting. He played Ellington as well as other bands during his presentation.

Lionel Hampton's "Smooth Sailing" featured Texas tenorman Arnett Cobb, and "Hamp's Boogie Woogie" featured Ellingtonian Buster Cooper. Sarah Vaughan sang "Take the 'A' Train" with a rather impressive trumpet section—Don Cherry, Maynard Ferguson, Chuck Mangione, Dizzy Gillespie, and Al Hirt. Woody Herman's second herd gave us a glimpse of the youthful Stan Getz, Shorty Rogers, Serge Chaloff, and Zoot Sims. Other unforgettable performances came from Dizzy Gillespie (the breath-taking "Manteca"), Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Count Basie.

Duke was featured on "The Hawk Talks," "A History of Jazz in Three Minutes" (a new one for me), and an extremely cool version of "Take the 'A' Train" highlighting bassist Ernie Shephard showing off his vocal talents, and finally more masterful vocalizing by Ray Nance and Ozzie Bailey in the medley of hits.

As with any "battle" featuring such a wealth of talent, it was the audience that came away the winner. Thank you, Mac, for such an enjoyable evening.

Important Notice

If you find yet another membership renewal form in your June *Ellingtonia*, we still haven't received your 2005 dues. Unless we hear from you soon, very regretfully we must inform you that this will be your last newsletter.

To Join or Continue Membership in Our Society

Send a check payable to The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.
to PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.

Calendar-year dues remain a bargain: Renewing Member, \$30;
Couple, \$50; student, \$5; Brand-New-Member, only \$20!

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