

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Show a Friend You Really Care

Give A Membership

In The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.

(And Remember To Treat Yourself As Well)

New Release Makes Available Book and CD Versions of Interviews

In our January 2005 issue we wrote about the Oral History of American Music (OHAM) project at Yale University. Its holdings include approximately 1,800 audio and video memoirs, among them some 800 interviews by and about composers as varied as John Cage, Eubie Blake, Aaron Copland, and Mary Lou Williams.

Now, *Composers' Voices from Ives to Ellington* by Vivian Perlis and Libby Van Cleve (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), according to an information release, offers "The first opportunity to read—and hear—interviews with and about great American composers and musicians of the early twentieth century.... This book and the two CDs that accompany it present the most significant musical figures of the era. [It] is a unique account of what it was like for musicians and composers to live and work in those years."

We haven't had an opportunity to see the book, but understand that an entire chapter is devoted to Duke Ellington. As reported in the January issue, OHAM includes some 90 interviews by persons professionally associated with or otherwise knowledgeable about him, and there is a related series of interviews about Billy Strayhorn.

Yale has more connections to Ellington. It was one of the earliest universities to award him an honorary doctoral degree, and, mainly through efforts of musician Willie Ruff, a permanent Duke Ellington Fellowship is established there.

New Year's Fling

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

We are looking forward to seeing all of you at our annual New Year's Fling at 8 pm on Saturday, 7 January 2006 at Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.

Everyone is encouraged to bring a dish or dessert for the table, but at least bring yourself. The Society will provide liquid refreshments, ice, cups, paper plates and, of course, music!

Film of First Sacred Concert Now Available to the Public

For years Ellington authorities have known of a visual recording of his first Concert of Sacred Music, at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral in 1965. On the other hand, an audio recording of the event was commercially released in 1997. Although some compositions on the CD are not included, the situation is now remedied by a DVD released in November entitled *Ralph J. Gleason Celebrates Duke Ellington: Love You Madly / A Concert of Sacred Music at Grace Cathedral* (Jazz Casual Productions EE39100-9).

The *Love You Madly* part of the DVD is a 1965 television documentary on Ellington composed mainly of interviews made over several months in 1965 and of performances of about the same time. The interviews generally do not adhere to a conventional question-answer format. Rather, they tend to be conversational, frequently employing voice-over-background scenes and -music, with many segments showing Duke on the go.

Both parts of *Love You Madly / A Concert of Sacred Music at Grace Cathedral* were produced by Ralph Gleason in 1965, an especially momentous year for Ellington in regard to his sacred music.

Excerpts of Interviews in Yale's Oral History of American Music Collection

Vocalist Jimmy MacPhail and saxophonist-composer-arranger Rick Henderson were Ellington orchestra alumni. Bernice Wiggins and Duke were first cousins. Maurice Banks' and Duke's extended families were friends, and as a boy he ran errands for Edna Ellington. Banks was a long-time member of our Society, and he frequently attended the Annual International Duke Ellington Study Group Conferences.

Rick Henderson with Dan Friedman

F. Now, were you back in Washington [*after being in the Army where he led and wrote for service orchestras*] before Ellington heard of you? How did he run across you?

H. Well, I'd come out of the Army in November of '52, so March of '53 I got a call that Ellington wanted a saxophone player and was I interested.

F. Now, who was it that would've called you?

H. That's a good question . . . what I think happened at that time, I think Tony Scott was playing, was filling in that chair, and I think Tony called me, and asked me if I was interested and if so, come out to where they were playing and see Duke. So I went out, they were playing somewhere in Maryland . . . and Duke put a white coat on me and sat me down in the band.

F. Without hearing you once?

H. Well, that's his way of hearing you. So he sat me down and we proceeded to play as if I was a member of the band all night. When he left town, I left with him and we went to, on tour. . . .

F. Were you a little scared?

H. Well, not really. I had sort of problems dealing with leaving town, 'cause I'd just come out of this Army bit, being routine and regimented for two years . . . and I was enjoying being free. So I had reservations about going.

Maurice Banks with Mark Tucker

B. My godfather was Henry Grant [*whom Ellington credited with teaching him harmony*] and his daughter Alice was my godmother. She looked after me and all until I got grown. And Henry Grant at that time was in charge of [music at the three black high schools]. . . .

T. Do you remember Henry Grant having anything to do with jam sessions or people playing jazz or popular music?

B. Papa. Papa Grant was conservative. And he went more for symphonic music and choirs, like they say. I don't remember having talked to him about Ellington. I don't know whether he liked Ellington's band or what, but I do know he was a conservative and he liked symphonic music and choirs . . .

Jimmy MacPhail with Mark Tucker

JM. . . . I went to Armstrong High School, the same school that Duke Ellington went to, and while I was there we had a group called the "Armstrong Four," four fellas used to sing around town . . . [A]nd, after I graduated . . . I went to Shaw University and continued singing down there, playing football and running track. When I graduated . . . came back to Washington, DC and there was a fella named Jackson Lowe who used to have a program on radio station WWDC. He had a talent contest, and I won it and the prize was a week's engagement at the Howard Theater with Duke Ellington. . . . This was 1950. And then we worked together for a week at the Howard Theater and . . . Duke Ellington had spoken to me about coming with him. But Jack felt we could make it by ourselves and so I didn't go with him. Well, about 7 or 8 years later I started working once in a while with Duke Ellington just around town. . . . Well, out of town, too, a few places. But then in 1963 I started with [him] and that lasted for quite some time. . . . at Grace Cathedral in . . . San Francisco, and we just started going around the country. . . . I [was] with him off and on, I guess about 17 years, off and on

MT. At the Howard Theater. . . . how did that work exactly?

JM. Well, you know, Duke really didn't play for me, this fella, he was called "Sweet Pea" . . . Billy Strayhorn played for me for that first show. . . . And the full band. Well, you know, they played the last note—or the first opening note primarily unless I had the full arrangement and I only had the full arrangements for a couple of songs at that time. . . . He was a beautiful person. Could play, too.

Bernice Wiggins with Martha Oneppo

W. . . . And I never will forget this—which has never been told because I lived with my Aunt Daisy and with Ruth and with him when he was in high school. I never will forget it. And he came in one evening and he said, "Mother Dear." and she turned around and looked at him and he always would come and kiss her on both sides of the cheek and she says, "What have you been up to today?" as a mother would. He says, "Someday I'm gonna have the kings and queens—I'm gonna be bowing before the kings and queens." And Aunt Daisy used to say, "The boy's talkin foolish." But that came true. As the day he lived and died. I will never forget it.

O. So he foresaw his destiny. . . .

W. He made it.

Name That Singer

The question of Herb Jeffries' birth name has resurfaced. Is it Umberto Allesandro Valentino or Umberto Allesandro Balentino or still something else? Noted Ellington researcher Steven Lasker says that he asked Herb, who confirmed "Balentino." Sjef Hoefsmit, another highly respected authority, theorizes that Herb, who has given different birth dates, "couldn't resist giving us different names as well."

Then there's the matter of Jeffries and Jeffrey. In the March-May 2000 *DEMS Bulletin*, Herb's daughter Trish is quoted: "According to my Dad, Herb Jeffrey was used during the time for the westerns. When he joined Duke Ellington and recorded *Flamingo*, someone at Victor records told the label printer his name was 'Herb Jeffries' and spelled it wrong. Dad figured he might as well adopt the spelling, as it was too late to change the label on 1 million records!"

In the same issue his daughter Ferne is also quoted: "Throughout his long and illustrious career, my Dad has had a few acceptable variations in his name, most especially in his earlier years. However, as long as I've known him . . . and that would be 52 years . . . 'Herb Jeffries' has been his name."

Florence Mills Biographer Earns Kurt Weill Foundation Award

Bill Egan's *Florence Mills: Harlem Jazz Queen* (Scarecrow Press, 2004) won Honorable Mention in the Kurt Weill Foundation's biennial competition for "distinguished scholarship on twentieth-century musical theater."

Mr. Egan was guest presenter at our March 2005 meeting, during which he discussed his meticulously researched and lucidly written book on Florence Mills and provided musical examples of Duke Ellington's "Black Beauty," ostensibly written as a tribute to her.

The biennial awards are determined by a four-member panel consisting of representatives from the Modern Language Association, American Musicological Society, American Society for Theatre Research, and Kurt Weill Foundation for Music. The winning book was *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* by Andrea Most.

A DES Society Planned in South Africa

Enthusiast Lance Travers wants to start an Ellington society in South Africa. Interested? Contact him at travis@telkomsa.net or by phone at 018 381 55 81.

Who Are They?



We all probably recognize Mercer Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and Duke Ellington in this photograph. But who are the others, and what and when was the occasion?

The photograph is from the Scurlock Studio Collection now in the Archives Center of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. It is captioned in Scurlock records simply as "Duke Ellington at party," produced in October 1956. Since the famed studio was in Washington, DC, the photograph in all likelihood was taken in or in the vicinity of that city.

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

About Our Members

Sjef Hoefsmit and Peter MacHare

For two years now *DEMS Bulletin* has been available to all online, free. We are grateful to Sjef Hoefsmit for his exemplary editing and to Peter MacHare for taking care of the technical aspects of publishing it through his web site at www.depanorama.net/dems. For both, it is assuredly a labor of love.

Patricia Willard

Patricia Willard has written authoritative notices of the deaths of Barbara Winfield and Gloria Nance in the current *DEMS Bulletin*.

Esther Williams and Davey Yarborough

Musicians, Esther Williams and hubby Davey Yarborough have set the tempo for the rest of us. They are our first members to prepay their dues through the calendar year 2007.

The Duke Ellington Legacy Has Web Site

Others as well as those at The Duke Ellington Legacy's performance at the Ellington School of the Arts concert last year will appreciate this group's web site at www.dukeellingtonlegacy.com. Check out its archives, musicians' bios, education activities, itinerary, music clips, and photos. Duke's grandson Edward Kennedy Ellington II, who plays guitar with the Legacy, is also musician-in-residence at Moses Brown School.

Those Flats Were Just Fine

by Ben Pubols

Recently the Duke Ellington e-mail discussion group, Duke-LYM, had an interesting exchange on Duke's penchant for the key of D \flat . David Berger and I concurred that it was probably the key Duke used most frequently. Berger suggested that "a main reason why Duke (and many of us arrangers) loves D \flat is that the tonic is the lowest key on the baritone sax, so you can get very fat tonic chords. Also D \flat sounds dark." David Palmquist ("David in Delta") pointed out that perhaps Duke liked the key for its sound, but also that it's a good key for trumpets and reeds.

How would the sidemen have felt about its frequent use? As a former trumpet player, I'm sure they loved it. After all, D \flat (five flats) is the so-called "concert key," which Duke would have played in. Trumpets, clarinet and tenor sax would have been in the key of E \flat (three flats) and alto and baritone sax in the key of B \flat (two flats), both much easier to read. Of course it would have been up to Tizol, Whaley and others to transcribe and transpose for the individual parts, but they'd all had lots of experience in this capacity. The results were great.

Ed. Note: After being persuaded to contribute this item, Ben noted, "But you must realize I'm not a musicologist, composer, arranger or copyist, only a long-gone trumpet player."

"If You Like Ellington, You'll Like..."

by Peter MacHare, subbing for Secretary Gina Rollins

Our December meeting was a member's choice. The theme was "If you like Ellington, you'll like...." Our members completed that sentence in many different ways.

Peter MacHare thought that if you like Ellington, you might like do-wop. He played the beautiful "Something Saxual" featuring Johnny Hodges backed by an unknown male singing group. This led Peter to play an alternate version of the Blenders' hit "Don't Play Around With Love."

Ted Hudson jumped in to play a delightful version of "David Danced Before the Lord" recorded by our member Mark Harvey's Aardvark Jazz Orchestra. For more information about this orchestra, visit <http://web.mit.edu/mharvey/www/aardvark.html>. Ted also played works by Claude Bolling, Alice Babs, and Lorraine Feather (Leonard's daughter).

Bill Hasson figured that if we like Duke Ellington that we'd absolutely adore Lena Horne. Right you are, Bill. He treated us to a rendition of "Heaven" by Randy Weston.

Nina Simone Sings Duke Ellington was the next album up. From it Elinor Eugene chose unforgettable versions of "Hey, Buddy Bolden," "Merry Mending," and "I Love the Sunrise."

A splendid time was had by all.

Officers, Board Members Re-Elected

At our December meeting the current officers and board members were unanimously re-elected for another year. If you forgot who we are, just check out the box that appears in every newsletter.

To Join, Continue, or Renew

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