

# Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor  
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**MAKE IT AN ANNUAL HABIT:  
DO SOMETHING CREATIVE ON April 29**



**Happy Birthday, Duke!**

## **Members Impressive at Festival**

The four-day (and night!) 15th Annual East Coast Jazz Festival in late February was, as might be expected, another artistic triumph. Several of our members contributed to its success.

First in many ways was vocalist Ronnie Wells, who was the founder and is president of the sponsoring Fish Middleton Scholarship Fund. With Ron Elliston and Friends, she played the closing set of the final major concert, during which she included a heart-stirring and ultimately uplifting tribute to the late Mike Smith and Keter Betts. [See Brad Bradby's "The Last Set," page 3.]

The Duke Ellington School of the Arts Jazz Ensemble got things swingingly under way in the opening concert. In his review the *Washington Post's* reviewer first noted that the group "is well versed in good music, thanks largely to band director Davey Yarborough." Continuing, he wrote, "Celebrating fulgent swing, churning Latin beats and joyous calypso spirit, the performances were clearly tailored to showcase the

## **April Program Members Choice: Ellington's Drummers**

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

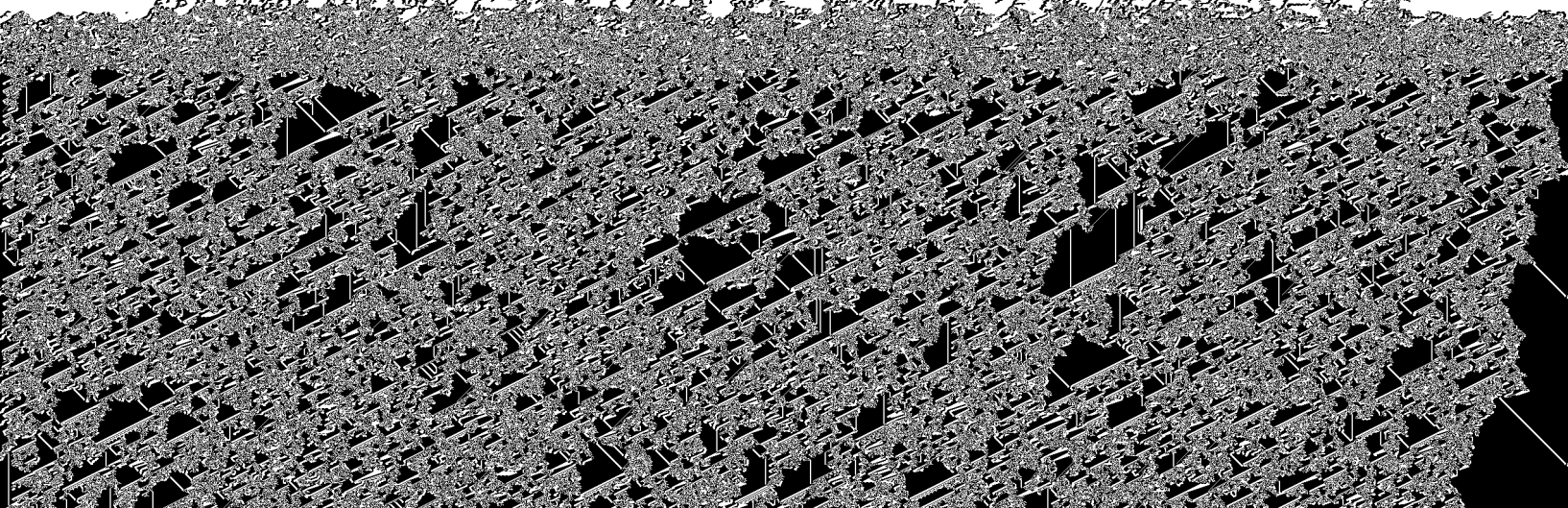
On Saturday, April 1, we'll be rockin' in rhythm as our program will be a member's choice featuring Ellington's drummers. Member's choice programs are when everyone gets a chance to participate—just bring a recording featuring one of your favorite Ellington drummers and tell us a little about it. Just to make the evening more exciting, the recording can be with the Ellington Orchestra or with another artist—so long as the drummer is an Ellingtonian. For example, our president is going to bring a recording featuring Louie Bellson with Ella Fitzgerald.

The program will be at **8 pm on Saturday, April 1, at Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.**

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Bradbie conducted an engagingly instructive workshop on "Listening to Jazz." As he explained basic song forms—AABA, ABAC, varied bar lengths, 12-bar blues, etc.—Brad illustrated each with recordings by the likes of Ellington, Lena Horne, Nat Cole, Kenny Durham, Stan Kenton; and even showed a relationship of certain forms to the sonata and to works by Mozart and Haydn.

Davey Yarborough also directed the Washington Jazz Arts Institute Community Jazz Orchestra on Sunday. The Institute, founded by him and wife



## ***Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies***

**Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, Editors**

New York: Columbia University Press, 2004

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

A guiding position of *Uptown Conversations* is that "jazz is not only a music to define, it is a *culture*." Thus, scholars and artists who comprise the Jazz Study Group that meets at Columbia University regard their studies and commentaries not as isolated academic exercises but as parts of a constantly evolving, interdisciplinary whole. As the Introductory Notes says, they "have been attempting to function as a kind of band or scholarly jazz orchestra."

The 20 some authors in this book are impressive; among them, for instance co-editor O'Meally, Krin Gabbard, and Mark Tucker, all known to Ellington and Strayhorn devotees. The international community of serious jazz enthusiasts who pick up the book will be impressed as well by the likes of Penny M. Von Eschen, whose "The Real Ambassadors" will move some to read or re-read her book *Satchmo Blows Up the World* [see article below ] and of the likes of Brent Hayes Edwards, whose "The Literary Ellington" is, in the opinion of your reviewer, the best exposition of this topic yet. Other authors and their diverse topics are also alluring, for example: "Revisiting Romare Bearden's Art of Improvisation" by Diedra Harris-Kelley, "Exploding the Narrative in Jazz Improvisation" by Vijay Iyer, and "Hipsters, Bluebloods, Rebels, and Hooligans: The Cultural Politics of the Newport Jazz Festival, 1954-1960" by John Gennari. All, divergent as they may be in their interests, have the chops for such a "scholarly jazz orchestra."

This is not a read-through book, as you probably sense by now. While not eclectic, it offers a range of essays that the reader is likely to read and mull over one at a time. Eventually he or she would profit by re-reading the splendid "Introductory Notes" by the editors. *Uptown Conversation* is, in a sense, an academic book, and therein lies its value, a book that one may profitably return to as need and curiosity precipitate. *Ed. Note: In 1998, Robert O'Meally edited the excellent The Jazz Cadence of American Culture, a collection of essays, speeches, interviews, and other pieces about "the jazz factor as it operates in a wide variety of expressions of U.S. life" and about its influence in the world. See Ellingtonia, VIII.2 (February 2000).*

### **Jazz Ambassadors "Blowing Up" the World**

In *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2004), author Penny Von Eschen wrote about how the US State Department, noting the positive effect of Willis Conover's Voice of America broadcasts, developed a "jazz ambassadors" program. The purpose was to cultivate good will during the so-called Cold War.

These cultural diplomats, it was thought, would heighten foreigners' appreciation of American democracy and culture and, concurrently, counter negative perceptions about racism in the United States. But it seems that Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington did not always pan out as quite the types of ambassadors they were hoped to be. Armstrong, for example, forcefully and explicitly made his feelings known about the handling of the integration of public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas. Further, it appears that the State Department wanted to expose these artists to pre-selected, politically significant persons and audiences; they were, of course, but additionally, all enjoyed playing before and connecting with ordinary citizens whenever they could. In a sense, these artists' musics may well be called the ambassadors.

In his review in the *Washington Post* when the book was published, critic Jonathan Yardley wrote that "Ellington was suave, sophisticated and diplomatic, but he had vigorous opinions and the strong belief that 'the Negro artist' should do more for the cause. His 1971 tour of the Soviet Union was a diplomatic as well as a musical triumph, and did much to advance artistic freedom in that totalitarian state."

There are current reports that a film with the working title *The Jazz Ambassadors* is planned by New Line Cinema, in which Morgan Freeman will play Duke Ellington. The story line is supposed to be about the alleged/fictional? planting by the CIA of spies in the Ellington group as it toured the Middle East and India under sponsorship of the State Department. We have not heard if the projected film will, if at all, relate to Ms. Von Eschen's book.

## Look for Strayhorn Documentary Later This Year

A documentary film on Billy Strayhorn, reportedly several years in the making and now in the editing stage, is scheduled for debut on PBS sometime this year, maybe in the spring. At the last International Association of Jazz Educators conference, film maker Rob Levi unveiled information and showed clips of it.

Among others, the documentary will feature Clark Terry, Luther Henderson, Mercedes Ellington, David Hajdu, Louie Bellson, and Gerald Wilson, all well known to Strayhorn devotees. It also promises premiere television performances of lesser known Strayhorn compositions such as "Sprite Music," "My Flame Burns Blue" ("Blood Count" with lyrics), and "Valse" as well as favorites such as "Satin Doll," "Something to Live For," and, of course, "Take the 'A' Train."

Laurence Fishburne has been mentioned for the narrator role. A DVD is to feature bonus tracks and version. As planned, the documentary will provide hundreds of rare images. Blue Note has been named to produce a major soundtrack for the project.

## The Reverend Kersey's Installation

Three members of our Society attended the installation service of the Rev. Clinton Kersey at Grace Lutheran Church on Saturday, February 25: Ted Shell, Marion Shell, and Peter MacHare. It was a beautiful ceremony that featured a great deal of wonderful music—including Ellington's "Come Sunday."

— Peter MacHare

## Seattle Orchestra's Latest: a 2-CD Recording of Sacred Music by Duke

In our May 2005 issue we featured on the first page news about members of our Society who lead outstanding big bands: Anthony Brown and the Asian American Orchestra, the Rev. Mark Harvey and the Aardvark Jazz Orchestra, and co-director Mike Brockman and the Seattle Jazz Repertory Orchestra (SJRO). We haven't been able to get a copy yet, but have read and heard high praise about SJRO's just released *Sacred Music of Duke Ellington* (Origin 82456).

## See *Cabin in the Sky* on DVD

The 1943 movie *Cabin in the Sky* starring, among others, Lena Horne, Ethel Waters, Louis Armstrong, and Ellington and his orchestra, is now on DVD. Described then by some as folkloric and stereotypical, the film, however, was a box office success. Duke's major contribution was the tune "Goin' Up" during a dance hall sequence, which *Metronome* called the best scene in the movie.

## The Last Set

by Brad Bradbie

This year's East Coast Jazz Festival came to a close wistfully. The musicians were dressed in tuxedos, unlike the groups that had preceded them throughout the long weekend. Gaiety would have seemed out of place given the fact that two of the Festival's regulars had passed away during the past year.

Ronnie Wells-Ellison, the Festival's president and founder, began this set with an exuberant rendition of "Candy." Yet this mood was slowly diminished with the remembrances of fallen comrades: drummer Mike Smith and bassist Keter Betts.

After a touching offering of "My Buddy" with house lights dimmed and just the glow of tiny flashlights, even the traditional onstage appearance of Ernie Andrews for a short duet didn't erase the gloom.

But as Mike and Keter would have wanted, we look forward to next year knowing we'll swing once again.

## Aardett's Dadaistic Music Comps Dada-Era Films Nicely

The Aardett, a sextet from our member Mark Harvey's Aardvark Jazz Orchestra, performed at the National Art Gallery in Washington, DC. on Sunday, 5 March in two pro-grams in connection with the Dada Exhibit there running through 14 May. Dada, a nihilistic movement that affected the arts, blossomed during the first quarter of the 20th century. Disdainful of traditional aesthetics and opposed to conventional ideas about rationality, the movement anticipated surrealism and other so-called avant garde expressions in literature, film, visual arts, and music.

The evening event, a "Concert of Dada Music and Film," showed how well the Aardett can compose improvisational group music—not an easy task, with no charts, no preconceived form, just their sensitivity to what the others are doing, a creative bent, and excellent technique. Their opening improvisation was *Entr'acte Nouveau*. Their second of the evening was accompaniment for the hilarious dada-era film *There It Is*. They sat facing the screen, all the while providing improvised music as the characters, plot, action, scenery, and atmosphere changed. The Aardett more than met the challenge, fulfilling the MC's introduction of them as "the best—no, the only dada orchestra there is," or words to that effect.

The performances at the Gallery were the last of recent appearances of contingents from the Boston-based Aardvark Jazz Orchestra along part of the East Coast: Middle Collegiate Church in NYC and the Sangha in Takoma Park, MD.

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

**Bill Brower; Charlie Fishman**

In the last issue we noted that interviews of Jack Towers, Don Rouse, and Bill Hasson are among those recorded on tapes in the W. Royal Stokes Collection in the Smithsonian. We have since discovered that Stokes' interviews of Charlie Fishman (Duke Ellington Jazz Festival) and Bill Brower are also there.

**Charles Stewart**

Charles Stewart has been re-elected president of the Duke Ellington Society, Southern California Chapter.

**Don Rouse**

A report of exemplary music title sleuthing is recounted in "Limehouse Blues" in the February 2006 issue of *Tailgate Ramblings*: Don Rouse traced the source of the title "Limehouse Blues," his peripatetic/labyrinthine travels ending up at the Thames River in London's Limehouse district where in 1922 one could catch "the strains of the ting-tang, that Chinese violin instrument of one string," as one history source put it—and where in the 1960s as Don put it, "the dock area and water was blasted out, cleared off, to plant upscale yuppie housing."

**Anthony Brown**

Check out the article in the March 2006 issue of *DownBeat* about Dr. Anthony Brown and his music, especially about his most recent CD, *Rhapsodies*. It also mentions his working on his book about jazz drumming, *Give the Drummer Some!*, scheduled for 2007 publication.

**For Jazz Appreciation Month Info . . .**

To learn about Jazz Appreciation Month and find out what celebratory events are taking place in your geographical area, check the internet site, at [smithsonianjazz.org/jam/](http://smithsonianjazz.org/jam/) and follow the links.



**Patricia Willard Tells of Situational and Cultural Contexts for Gleason's Ellington Documentary and Sacred Concert Film**

by Peter MacHare, for Secretary Gina Rollins

Patricia Willard presented two Ellington films, *Love You Madly* and *A Concert of Sacred Music at Grace Church*, at our March meeting. She worked extensively on both films as an assistant to the producer, Ralph J. Gleason, and certainly gave us an insider's view of these films. One of Patricia's most difficult tasks, for example, was working to condense 22 hours of fabulous footage down to two one-hour films. The other 20 hours are apparently lost—we can all hope that the film wasn't destroyed and will someday be found.

Ellington's album *A Concert of Sacred Music* was from a later performance at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, so many of our members were hearing the premiere of this music for the first time. After hearing the recording, Ellington thought the acoustics at Grace Cathedral caused too much echo, so that is why a later performance was used for the album.

Ellington, a religious man all his life, was delighted when, in 1961, he was asked to compose music celebrating the consecration of Grace Cathedral. The music itself is wonderful and the visual aspect an important part of the performance. No one will forget Bunny Briggs dancing to "David Danced Before the Lord with All His Might." In fact, allowing tape dancing in the sanctuary was an idea that Grace Cathedral accepted only gradually. Not until Ellington brought his Bible and pointed out the passage that is the title of this performance, did Grace Cathedral consent. Other fabulous performances were Jimmy MacPhail (whose widow, Catherine, was at our meeting) singing "Ain't But the One" and the lovely Esther Marrow singing "Come Sunday."

All our members appreciated this presentation and frequently broke out in applause during moving moments, just like the audience present that September in 1965. I'm certain I speak for all our members when I say Patricia Willard, We Love You Madly. Thank you.

**THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.**

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