

# Ellingtonia

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## Ellington a Nominee for National Statuary Hall

Back in the 19th century, Congress established National Statuary Hall to display sculptures of prominent American citizens. Each state now has two sculptures in the collection in the Capitol building in Washington, but the District of Columbia is not represented. Recently for the end purpose of two sculptures being placed in Statuary Hall, the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities sought from the public nominations of two Washingtonians who significantly excelled in arts, history, civil rights, politics and who worked to make a difference not only in the District of Columbia, but also in the world.

Voting on the nominees, Ellington among them, ended on 28 April. His description on the nomination ballot read: "This legendary musician, composer and bandleader was born in Washington and moved to Harlem in 1923. He wrote, or cowrote, many popular compositions including *Mood Indigo* and *Sophisticated Lady*."

Sculptures of the winners will be exhibited in the John Wilson District Building in Washington, with the hope that Congress will approve their being placed in National Statuary Hall.

## New Book on Ben Webster

According to an announcement by its publisher, Michigan University Press, *Someone to Watch Over Me: The Life and Music of Ben Webster* by Frank Büchmann-Møller "tells for the first time, the complete story of [Webster's] brilliant and troubled career."

## June Program: "Everybody" and Others Looking Handsome

At the end of many of his concerts, Duke would exhort, "Everybody look handsome!" with emphasis on "Everybody," at which time the entire orchestra would stand and acknowledge the audience's appreciation. Duke knew, of course, that it was more than the well known soloists but all fourteen or so musicians who together made *an* orchestra *The Duke Ellington Orchestra*.

At our June meeting, Ted Hudson will call our attention to some of these musicians not heard enough in solo roles. He will also feature substitute, short-tenured, recording-date-only, and guest instrumentalists, singers, arrangers and the like who, regardless of length and manner of service and other vagaries, contributed importantly to the Ellington legacy.

Come hear recordings that spotlight some of these should-be-better-known artists. It all takes place at 8:00 pm on Saturday, 3 June 2006 at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.**

This will be our last regular meeting before our summer break, so by all means be there. And remember, our programs are free and open to the public, so visitors are welcome.

## Who Would Have Been Your Guesses?

According to the Official Duke Ellington Web Site, at [www.dukeellington.com](http://www.dukeellington.com), his favorite composers were George Gershwin, Stravinsky, Respighi, and Debussy.

## **Sacred Music of Duke Ellington by the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra**

Origin Records 82456

Reviewed by Reuben Jackson

Like another internationally celebrated Washingtonian, vocalist Marvin Gaye, Duke Ellington's overt declarations of faith were composed, recorded and performed toward the end of his career. By 1965, when Ellington's First Sacred Concert was performed, his always stunning gift for crafting a sensual and evocative orchestral palette had grown even more sublime—not unlike Gaye's equally moving vocal arsenal.

Yet critical response to Ellington's three Sacred Concerts (1965, 1968, and 1973) was as mixed as the collective collage of musical influences found in the respective recordings. But like Gaye, whose 1971 recording "What's Going On" was not exactly embraced by Berry Gordy and the brass at Motown, Ellington had—as always—something to say to "the people with the ears."

This two CD set by the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra consists of 20 titles from the aforementioned extended works. And though this ensemble is a repertory aggregation, the performances manage to embody Ellington's questing, playful and prayerful spirit without succumbing to facile imitations of the recordings, or an artistic version of "cold feet."

Highlights include a magisterial reading of "In The Beginning God," in which vocalist James Caddell and saxophonist Hadley Caliman excel (My CD player's repeat button may be on its last legs now!); conductor Michael Brockman's alto saxophone treatment of Duke's serene, melodically deceptive "T.G.T.T." from the *Second Sacred Concert*; the too seldom heard piano solo "Reflections in D" (performed by Larry Fuller); and the acapella interpretation of "The Lord's Prayer" from the *Third Sacred Concert*. (When will this concert be reissued on CD?)

While I would have loved to have seen this crack ensemble tackle the likes of "The Majesty Of God" or "My Love" (two additional gems from the third concert), *The Sacred Music of Duke Ellington* serves as an exemplary introduction to the work of this fine ensemble, and of a still undervalued phase of Duke Ellington's career.

## **Nina Simone Sings Duke Ellington / Nina Simone at Carnegie Hall**

Collectables 6414

Reviewed by Elinor F. Eugene

When Nina Simone died on April 21, 2003, an appreciation article appeared in the *Washington Post*. The discography at the end of the article included the title *Nina Simone Sings Duke Ellington*. A fan of both Ellington and Simone, I was disappointed when inquiries at several record stores yielded little information about the availability of the album. On a recent visit to a local books/music store I was delighted to discover the CD in a Collectables Jazz Classics Collection.

There are eleven cuts which include such popular titles as "Do Nothing 'Till You Hear from Me," "I Got It Bad," "Solitude," "Satin Doll," "It Don't Mean a Thing," and "I Like the Sunrise." Two rarely heard titles are "Merry Mending," which has a classical piano sound with orchestral and choral background, and "Hey, Buddy Bolden." The other cuts feature piano solos, vocals with Simone accompanying herself, and vocals with backup singers and orchestra.

Simone's classical piano training is quite evident throughout the album. Her lively, energetic style of playing creates an upbeat mood prompting the listener to move in time with the music. In "I Got It Bad" the tempo is slow with a blues mood, but "It Don't Mean a Thing" is played with a fast tempo and creative improvisation.

Nina Simone's refreshing and original approach to Duke's music creates an exciting experience for the Ellington fan.

A footnote: The same CD includes "Nina Simone at Carnegie Hall," recorded before a live audience. The seven selections include "Black Swan," "Theme" from *Sampson and Delilah*, "If You Knew," an original composition, "The Twelfth of Never," "Will I Find My Love Today?" and "The Other Woman"/"Cotton-Eyed Joe." The varied selections feature piano solos but mainly wistful and quietly emotional vocal interpretations with self accompaniment.

## Follow-Up of Bubber Miley CD Review

by Ben Pubols

After submitting the Bubber Miley review to *Ellingtonia* [published in May 2006 issue], I read Sjeff Hoefsmit's analysis of the CD in the latest on-line *DEMS Bulletin* (v.6, #1, Part 3). He researched the CD very thoroughly and found a number of errors, in particular with respect to the two versions of "St. Louis Blues." The first one (track 17) is not a vocal version as indicated in the liner notes, but an instrumental version recorded a month earlier. The second one (track 24) does not even have Miley on it. It was recorded as a tribute to Miley in 1937, long after his death! The other expressed concerns have to do mostly with questions about personnel. All things considered, I still recommend the CD.

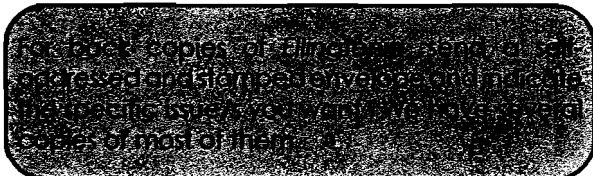
## Involved Neuroscientists Please Note

There has been increased reportage in media of experimental studies (some dubious) of the effects of exposure of infants to music, commonly referred to as "the Mozart effect." Adults can even buy for their little loved ones CDs such as *The Mozart Effect: Music for Babies*, newborn to age 3; *Beethoven for Babies*; and *Baby's First: Lullabies* (Bach). While their investigations mainly involve traditional classical music, early childhood experts and scientists collecting case studies would do well to consider Duke Ellington's testimony that legendary Buddy Bolden was:

*Born with a silver trumpet in his mouth  
Played the horn before he talked  
Born on the after beat  
He patted his foot before he walked*

## Mercer Ellington on Arthur Whetsel

In an e-mail to your editor, Gören Wallén, founder of the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden, recalls that when Mercer Ellington was in Stockholm in 1994 he asked Mercer who he thought was the best trumpeter in the band over the years. Mercer's reply was, says Göran, "That is in my opinion Arthur Whetsel."



## Who Knew?

by Francis Arnold

In June of 1956 a friend was awarded a fellowship for graduate school at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. That 4th of July weekend two of us went with him to explore the area. We found excitement throughout the campus concerning the Newport Jazz Festival, 35 miles away. We became caught up in the hoopla. On campus we scrounged up a free pass and two tickets to that night's performance—Off we went! We had never heard of George Wein or Duke Ellington's "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue." I'll never forget Gonsalves playing on and on and on and on, or the blonde dancing about 30 yards from us.

Who knew that we had watched a historical jazz performance (jazz, not one of Duke Ellington's favorite words) at Freebody Park.

## Bill Gottlieb, 1917-2006

Famed photographer Bill Gottlieb died on 23 April in his home, following a stroke. His photographs chronicled jazz musicians and scenes from the 1940s through the so-called bop era. It seems as if images of practically every major and scores of lesser known musicians were captured for posterity by his lens. His book *The Golden Age of Jazz* (Simon & Schuster, 1979) earned critical acclaim for his craft, which rose to the level of art.

In his book he said, "I was always awed by Duke Ellington. Everything about him dazzled me: his music, of course; but also his energy, his hipness, his suavity. . . . During the Golden Age, playing with the Duke Ellington orchestra was the ultimate goal of just about every black musician. Being tapped by His Highness the Duke meant being recognized as one of the world's outstanding instrumentalists. It was like getting a Pulitzer Prize."

Perhaps the best known of Gottlieb's photos of Duke is a mirrored reflection of him broadly smiling and grandly attired in a cluttered dressing room.

## Quotation of the Month

There are some marvelous writers in jazz but nobody influenced me as much as Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Not only that—I would have given anything to have played in Duke's band and if it exists in another lifetime, I want to play in it.

- Jack Montrose in *Jazz Journal International*, September 2001.

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

### Brian Gilmore

We normally think of Brian Gilmore, an attorney by profession, as a music critic-essayist, as a fictionist, and as a poet—his book *jungle nights and soda fountain rags* (Karibu Books, 2000) is a classic tribute to Duke and his musicians—so his "Unfair Housing Practices Divide Races" in an April issue of the *Tallahassee Democrat* shows another facet of his interests as a writer.

### Harvey Cohen

On 25 April, Harvey "The Harvman" Cohen broadcast a two-hour birthday tribute to Duke Ellington on his "Better Git It in Your Soul" program on 88.1 FM and [wmucradio.com](http://wmucradio.com)

### Theodore Hudson

During Jazz Appreciation Month, Ted Hudson presented a program on "The Protean Range of Ellington's Compositions" before an AARP audience in Washington, DC.

### Anthony Brown

Anthony Brown's latest CD, *Rhapsodies* continues to draw critical accolades, the latest being "Masscult, Midcult, and Multicult" in *Village Voice*.

He and saxophonist Dr. Leonard Brown have formed a duo. The latter, a professor of music at Northeastern University, is founder of the annual John Coltrane Memorial Concert, now in its 28th year.

### Joseph and Olivia McMillan

On a postcard from Egypt, peripatetic Olivia and Joe McMillan inform that on their current trip, "We have heard some Duke Ellington, 'Satin Doll' and 'A' Train.' And we will continue to hope for more." Having been to India, their itinerary includes visiting the Pyramids and cruising down the Nile. Hmm—maybe they will experience an actuation of "Caravan."

### Erica MacHare

When she was a mere kindergardener, Erica MacHare became the youngest ever student member of our Society after naming, in response to a Black History Month homework assignment, Fredi Washington as her favorite African-American hero. Having watched the film *Black and Tan Fantasy* (with guess who), she saw Washington collapse on stage and asked about it for weeks on end.

Erica, now ready for high school in the fall, has voluntarily, yes voluntarily, been serving as Assistant Circulation Manager for *Ellingtonia*, which job includes folding the newsletters, stuffing envelopes, affixing mailing labels and stamps, and otherwise helping to get *Ellingtonia* out to you, dear reader. Thanks, Erica

## Members Enjoy Tivoli Concert DVD

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

Ted Shell presented our May program, a DVD of Duke's November 2, 1969 performance at Tivoli in Copenhagen, part of a European tour that started in October and included concerts in Paris, Stockholm and Manchester. The band performed many standards—"C Jam Blues," "Take the 'A' Train," "Satin Doll," "Things Ain't What They Used To Be" along with several lesser known works, including "Up Jump," "La Plus Belle Africaine," "Drag" ("Laying on Mellow"), and, featuring who else but Cat Anderson, "El Gato."

Duke invited Tony Watkins to sing an operatic version of "Come Sunday" (in Dutch!) flowing seamlessly into decidedly non-operatic interpretations of "It Don't Mean a Thing" and "Be Cool and Groovy for Me." The climax was "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" with Paul Gonsalves sharing the spotlight with Harold Ashby and Norris Turney. Organist Wild Bill Davis also was featured in several sets. Of course we can't forget the group's piano player, charming as ever and looking ageless.

The Rev. Clinton Kersey, Grace Lutheran Church's new minister, spoke with us briefly to say that he is exploring the possibility of a live performance of Louis Bellson's sacred music at Grace Church, with subsequent performances in North Carolina in collaboration with Duke University (Rev. Kersey's alma mater) and North Carolina State University. He indicated that should the concert materialize it would take place about a year from now and that he would very much look forward to the participation of the Duke Ellington Society in this endeavor.

### Join or Renew 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!

