

# Ellingtonia

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*The Duke Ellington Society*

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Courtesy Carlyle Productions

## *Helen Frazier, 1915-2006*

Helen Frazier, a founding and continuing member of our Society over the years, died in Hyattsville, Maryland on 28 November. A memorial service for her is scheduled for 2 pm on 16 December at St. George's Episcopal Church, 160 U Street, NW, Washington, DC.

There were no immediate survivors but she is lovingly remembered by many friends. In a "member of the month" article in our March 1994 newsletter, friend and fellow member Ben Allen noted that Helen was our Society's secretary during the presidencies of Maurice



Photo Courtesy of Dr. Ted Shell

Lawrence and later of Juanita Hardwick and that she "is always a reliable and willing appointee and volunteer for whatever activity or program the Society needs her."

She was one of four honorees (the others being Jack Towers, Maurice Lawrence and Theodore Shell) at Ellington '99, the international conference hosted by our Society in celebration of Ellington's 100th birthday. The program for the occasion states that she was "One of our most willing and untiring members . . . Friendly and persuasive, she brought in new members and graciously lent her home on so many occasions for various of our activities."

Long-time member Dick Spottswood writes, "I'm heartbroken over Helen. She was Ted's [Shell] receptionist when I walked in the door of their dental facility in 1962. They encouraged me to come to a Duke Ellington Society meeting and it changed my life! She was one of the most lovable people on the entire planet—a lucky Johnny Hodges was a special object of her affections. As far as Helen was concerned, Johnny didn't know how to play a bad note."

We will miss sharing her joy whenever we hear a Johnny Hodges solo at one of our meetings.

## Duke Ellington Society New Year's Party

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our New Year's party will be held **Saturday, January 6, 2007 at 8 pm** in our usual meeting room of **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.**

If you can, please bring an item for our pot luck snacks and dessert. The Society will provide liquid refreshment and ice. In addition to food and friends, of course we'll have some great music playing in the background.

Be there; don't be square!

## Big News re Terry and Bellson

Ellingtonians Louie Bellson and Clark Terry (among others) will be honored at the Kennedy Center on Saturday, March 3, 2007. For more information, visit [www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index](http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index).

Louie Bellson will appear at Grace Lutheran Church on Sunday, March 4 and Saturday, April 14. We (not the editorial "we" but "we" the members of the Duke Ellington Society) are just beside ourselves with excitement. More information will appear in future issues of *Ellingtonia*.

— Peter MacHare

## Your Donation to the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Will Make a Difference

The school is part of the DC Public School system, but it does not fully fund the school; thus, a substantial part of the school's artistic programs must be sustained by outside sources. Send your tax-deductible contribution to the Ellington Fund, the nonprofit fundraising arm of the school that is committed to closing the financial gap, at 3500 R St, NW, Washington, DC. You can also donate online at [www.EllingtonSchool.org](http://www.EllingtonSchool.org). If you wish, you can earmark your gift for a specific department or activity.



## Chico Hamilton and Duke

by Brian Gilmore

Chico Hamilton, the West Coast legend of a drummer, is among other things, a colorist. As he states in the liner notes to his 2006 album *Juniflip*: “We don’t create music, we create moods.” This is just one of the overt connections between Hamilton and the master colorist of all, Duke Ellington. Hamilton’s words even sound like something Ellington might say, only Hamilton, an accomplished composer as well, is still around writing, playing and performing at the young age of 85 (birth date: September 21).

“Juniflip” is a tune Ellington recorded over the years (it is on the Newport 1958 album, at least as I recall); but for Hamilton, it is a “playful epithet” that the pimps and hustlers of L.A. referred to him when he played clubs as a teen. In addition to *Juniflip*, Hamilton has three other albums out, all released this year. There are *Believe*, *Heritage*, and *6th Avenue Romp*, a recording that includes an impressive piano-less version of “Take the A-Train.”

Are there any other Ellington and Hamilton connections to makes besides endurance, organizational savvy, and respect? Well, the baritone sax work on Hamilton’s four albums is very good for starters. Also, Hamilton, like Duke, is a superb accompanist; he repeatedly sets the stage and tempo for the soloists like a genius (on drums nonetheless).

And finally the most interesting note of all—according the Duke-LYM listserv folks, Hamilton sat in with the Ellington orchestra when Sonny Greer got sick back in January 1941. Most agree that it was in January-February 1941 for about a week of shows in Lost Angeles. Hamilton remarked recently on NPR that as a youngster it was seeing Sonny Greer with the Ellington band and all those drums that inspired him to play drums in the first place.

*Ed. Note: Brian Gilmore recently reviewed several Chico Hamilton CDs for a major publication. The above passage, which was part of his submitted copy, and which we are happy to print here, in his words, “did not make the review.”*

## **Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing by David Yaffe**

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

This book proposes to examine “a series of crucial moments when jazz has surfaced in the work of major American novelists, poets, and playwrights, and how, in turn, the musicians chose to represent themselves in autobiographies.” Highly selective in the literary works he chooses for discussion, David Yaffe does not attempt comprehensiveness. Proceeding topically in a series of essays and musings, he does not establish an overriding thesis for culminating conclusions.

He presents four major groupings: 1) blacks and Jews—Mailer, J.D. Salinger, Baraka, *et al*; 2) Ralph Ellison’s sometimes-called “neo-conservative” preferences in jazz; 3) poetry and jazz—T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes; Frank O’Hara, *et al*); and 4) “jazz memoirists, [who] on the cusp between shame and cultural fascination, play both sides of the game,” exemplified by Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, and Charles Mingus “who when they put their names on [their autobiographies] were practicing literary versions of the hustle.” (Ellington devotees will find some consideration of him in relation to a few writers, principally Pulitzer-prize winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa.)

*Fascinating Rhythm* is not for the casual lay reader. For one thing, Yaffe’s literary/academic/critical prose at times can seem, well, a bit stuffy or elitist. Further, the literary works he chooses require that the reader know them or be willing to become familiar enough with them to follow his discussion.

Throughout, Yaffe does proffer stimulating assertions, for example: “In the 1920s, unless [Hart] Crane was reading W.E.B. Dubois’s *Crisis*, or Louis Armstrong was thumbing through the T.S. Eliot’s *Criterion*, there would have been fewer outlets to find out what one segregated group of artists were thinking about the other”; or “Indeed, the least understood yet most thoroughly developed dialectic between blacks and Jews was achieved not through literature but music, where song provided a haven for two marginalized ethnic groups before integration became the law of the land.”

Sins of omission? While this book does not claim to be summarily inclusive in scope, one can understandably wonder why there is no attention—not even a related entry in its bibliography—to the illumination of jazz/poetry synaesthesia by such critics as Stephen Henderson. And one may wonder why there is, with the exception of Baraka, no substantive mention of the aural poets of the Black Arts Movement. Sarah Webster Fabio (“Tribute to Duke”), Ted Joans (“Jazz Must Be a Woman”), and Larry Neal (“Don’t Say Goodbye to the Pork-Pie Hat”) are among those who immediately and insistently come to mind

What David Yaffe does cover in *Fascinating Rhythm* will be of most interest and most accessible to lovers, scholars, and students of literature who also know a thing or two about jazz.

## New Owner Continues Storyville Productions

When Karl Emil Knudsen died in 2003, there was great concern about the future of his Storyville Records. "I was stunned," wrote our member Ken Steiner, who had only recently visited "Papa" Knudsen in Copenhagen. "What a loss. He had some great things planned for Ellington listeners." Knudsen had gained exclusive rights to release many of Ellington's previously commercially unavailable music. Before his death, the company had already issued a number of Ellington CDs, including, especially for our Society, *The Duke in Washington* in connection with Ellington '99, the commemoration of the centennial of Duke's birth.

Since his founding of it in 1950, this Danish company consistently turned out high quality recordings by some of the giants of America's classic music. The Storyville enterprise also turned out books, notably Klaus Stratemann's masterfully researched *Duke Ellington: Day by Day and Film by Film*

After an interim following Knudsen's passing, Storyville was acquired by Edition Wilhelm Hansen, and this company has begun a Masters of Jazz series featuring CDs by Johnny Griffin, Bechet, Holiday, Wilson, Hines, Stuff Smith, Louis Armstrong, Art Tatum, and of particular interest to us, Ellington, Ben Webster, Johnny Hodges, and Clark Terry.

The Terry offering includes several of his compositions, widely known pieces such as "Mack the Knife" and "God Bless the Child," Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train," and compositions by Dizzy Gillespie, Monk, Miles Davis, and others. Several small groups complement the versatile Terry; among them French pianist/composer Raymond Fol, Danish saxophonist Jesper Thilo, saxophonist Ernie Wilkins, and Duke sidemen Gonsalves, Woode, and Woodyard. And Terry doesn't say a mumblin' word through it all!

The Hodges CD has those "good old good ones" – "All of Me," "I Got It Bad," "In a Mellotone" – as well as less familiar tunes like "Cambridge Blues," and "Brute's Roots," a tip of the hat to guess who. He is accompanied by Coltrane, Procope, Carney, and other stalwarts. Speaking of you know who, Webster's CD is rich in Ellington and Billy Strayhorn works—such as "Johnny Come Lately," "Stomp Jones" and expectedly beautiful balladry on "Come Sunday." All were recorded in Europe during his later day residence there. He plays with some nine groups of varying size, mostly Europeans with whom he performed from time to time.

The Ellington CD is Volume 1 of the Masters of Jazz series. Recorded in the 1940s and 1960s, the music affords the opportunity to hear those who were with him through the years and those of lesser tenure, from, say, Lawrence Brown to Sax Mallard to Sonny Greer to Alvin Raglin in venues, say, Carnegie Hall to the Hollywood Empire to the Hurricane. And in case anything was missed, there is one of Duke's famous medley sets, but this time—surprise!—in solo piano format. This is a good collection of tunes that have become familiar over the years. The sound quality is very good, with great presence. Great listening, all in one CD!

All in all, the Storyville's Masters in Jazz is worthy of its title, individually and collectively.

## Short Sheets . . .

### Terry Inducted into Hall of Fame

Along with trumpeter Joe Wilder, Clark Terry was awarded membership in Temple University's Jazz Master's Hall of Fame this year.

### Curious . . .

During mid-September we checked room availability at the DoubleTree, the host hotel for the 16th Annual East Coast Jazz Festival to take place in February 2007. Only one room was left! Watch media for announcements of alternate lodging.

### Course on Ellington

Reed College in Oregon will offer a semester-length course on Ellington during the 2007-08 academic year.

### Sacred Concerts in Sweden

From our friend Göran Wallén we have news of a sold-out concert of Ellington's sacred music at Hagalunds Kyrka in Stockholm in November. He writes, "Ellington is still a strong part of the church music in Sweden. Thanks to Alice Babs!"

## Have You Heard or Heard About . . .

♪ *Duke Ellington Octet at the Rainbow Grill* Gambit 69248.

Cat Anderson, tr; Lawrence Brown, tb; Johnny Hodges, as; Paul Gonsalves, ts; Harry Carney, bs; John Lamb, sb; Steve Little, dr; and Duke, piano. 1967.

♪ *Duke Ellington: The Complete 1936-1940 Variety, Vocalion and Okeh Small Group Sessions* Mosaic Limited Edition: 5000. MDT-235.

7-CD set includes many considered classics. Bonus numbers Ellington solos, duets with Jimmie Blanton and a Gotham Stompers session comprised of both Ellington and Chick Webb Band with its leader on drums. Accompanying booklet written by expert Steven Lasker, co-producer of the project.

## Last Minute News

We just learned that drummer Dave Black, who joined the band in the mid-1960s shortly after Bellson left, died on 4 December in his home in Alameda, CA.

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

### Maurice Lawrence

We had a call from the founding and first president of our Society, Maurice Lawrence, to update us on performances of The Statesmen of Jazz, which he and Mat Domber co-founded in 1994. For some years now retired and living in Florida, recent health issues have curtailed his traveling with or going to hear the Statesmen. He sends regards to his many friends.

### Yvonne Condell

Dr. Yvonne Condell, professor emerita of multi-disciplinary studies at Minnesota State University Moorhead, has been named to that state's Colleges and Universities Foundation Board of Directors.

### Janna Steed

The Rev. Janna Steed has begun a new position as chaplain for Hospice of Central Iowa, a large, independent nonprofit organization. Though very busy, she hopes to get back to music, too.

### Lewis and Minerva Giles

We wish Minerva and Lewis Giles swift and complete recovery from injuries they incurred in a recent automobile accident.

## Watch for Strayhorn Documentary

In February, PBS will televise a documentary, *Billy Strayhorn: Lush Life*, as part of its Independent Lens series.

## Quotation of the Month

*Knowing how to play an instrument is the barest superficiality if one is thinking of becoming a musician. It is the ideas that one utilizes instinctively that determine the degree of profundity any artist reaches. To know, in some way, that it is better to pay attention to Duke Ellington than to Aaron Copland is part of it.*

— LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Black Music*

### THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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## December Meeting: *Sophisticated Ladies*

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

For our December meeting, Peter MacHare presented a DVD of *Sophisticated Ladies*, the Broadway revue of Duke's music which premiered on March 1, 1981, starring Gregory Hines, Judith Jamison, and Phyllis Hyman. The version we saw featured Hinton Battle, Phyllis Hyman, Paula Kelly, Terri Klausner, and Gregg Burge. The tapping was hot(!), the vocals were exquisite, and the costumes fanciful and fun. One member who saw the original on Broadway commented that it didn't hold a candle to the revival. Well done, Peter.

## Update on Louie Bellson Concert

by Gina Rollins

As reported previously, Grace Lutheran Church is sponsoring a performance of *The Sacred Music of Louie Bellson* along with dancing and playing of *The Jazz Ballet* by Louie. The date has been set for Saturday, April 14. The performance at the church will be preceded by one at Duke Chapel on the campus of Duke University and followed by another at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City.

These three venues will be the first East Coast performance of *The Sacred Music*, which Louie spent decades crafting, and premiered in 2000. It will be only the second time his *Jazz Ballet* has been both danced and played since its premiere in 1962.

There are ambitious plans for publicity, preparation of a documentary about Louie, and an oral history recording of his experiences in jazz, as well as participation by numerous local organizations. Given the short time frame and uniqueness of the performance, YOUR HELP IS NEEDED. To join the Grace Lutheran Church—Duke Ellington Society committee that is helping plan and promote the performance in Washington, please contact Grace Church member Mark Baker at 202-581-6520 or online at [crying2phoenix@netscape.net](mailto:crying2phoenix@netscape.net).

## Don't Forget Your Dues!

Join or renew your membership now!  
Remember, our memberships are for the calendar year and 2007 is fast approaching.

So mail your check payable to  
The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. at  
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003.

Our dues remain a bargain:  
Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;  
First-time-ever member, just \$20.