

Ellingtonia

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Encouraging News . . . Read On

We quote from a District of Columbia Commission on the Arts and Humanities (DCCA) announcement:

Though [it has been] vacant since the 1970s, the District Government is negotiating a long-term, ground lease that would restore the Howard Theatre to active use as a contemporary performance venue and full-service restaurant, which is rooted deeply in the Howard's rich social and cultural heritage. It is anticipated at this time that the Howard will re-emerge in 2009 or 2010 from decades of being a dark and derelict house. The Howard will come back online at the same time as a significant mixed use project along 7th Street and will become Broadcast Center One—the headquarter offices of both the national-syndicates Radio One and TV One as well as hundreds of new residents, shoppers and theatergoers. Together, the two projects will anchor the east end and create a restore[d] destination district . . .

Ellington Plaza will complement and support this restoration and revitalization and help to establish a complete destination for shoppers and visitors by attracting restaurants, outdoor cafes/dining, intimate music clubs, bars, bookstores, art galleries, modest priced retail and other destination uses.

The DCCA and the Great Streets Initiative recently issued an invitation for an artist or artist team to design, create, and install permanent outdoor three-dimensional artwork/s to enhance a proposed Ellington Plaza in front of the Howard Theatre at T Street between 7th Street and Florida Avenue, NW.

A related event, "**The Howard Theatre—Yesterday and Tomorrow!**" will be held place at 3:00 pm on Saturday, 24 February at Carnegie at Mount Vernon Square, 801 K St, NW. It is sponsored jointly by the Historical Society of Washington, Howard Theatre Restoration, Inc., National Music Center, Shaw Main Street, and WPFW. Free and open to the public, it will include live jazz, performers' and audience's remembrances of the Howard, a panel, an illustrated history of the theater, and planning information.

No Regular Meeting in March

Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

As announced in our February issue, we will not hold our regular monthly meeting in March because a considerable number of our members plan to attend the Jazz in Our Time concert and awards ceremony at the Kennedy Center during which Ellington alumni Clark Terry and Louie Bellson will be among those to receive Living Legend Awards.

Our president, Peter MacHare, will present a program on Ellington's trombonists at our April meeting.

Impressive Stats, Right? Right!!

A mailing from The Ellington Fund informs that last academic year **100%** of the seniors in the Duke Ellington School of the Arts graduated, **99%** of whom were accepted into an institution of higher learning. Among this group, **79%** earned scholarships.

Bellson at Grace Lutheran Church in March, Returns for Concert on 15 April

On Saturday, 3 March, Louie Bellson will be one of the honorees at the Jazz in Our Time All-Star Concert and Awards Ceremony at the Kennedy Center.

On the very next day, Sunday, 4 March, he will perform at the regular 11:00 am service at Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.

Plans are well under way for a 15 April performance by Bellson and the Duke University Jazz Ensemble of two extended works from his more than 2,000 compositions, *The Sacred Music of Louie Bellson* and *The Jazz Ballet*.

Both will be premiere performances of these works in this area. This event will take place at the same venue, Grace Lutheran Church, where our Society holds its regular meetings.

Some members of our Society are helping in the planning and production of this event. Stay alert for more details.

The Ringmaster

by Angela and Mac Grimmer

St. Petersburg, Florida. We were there for spring training baseball games, but one of our objectives was to track down one of the last of Duke's musicians with a regular gig, Buster Cooper. We knew he was playing at a local tavern named "The Garden," and we found it in downtown St. Pete, a couple of blocks from the waterfront.

We sat down at the bar and ordered a drink. Buster was nowhere in sight, but the bartender said he'd be in around nine. "How long has he been playing here?" we asked. "I dunno, he was here when I got here, and I've been here seven years." Actually, Buster has been playing there 12 years, on Fridays and Saturdays, with time off for festivals and other special engagements.

On time, Buster came in. We introduced ourselves, adding "Ellington Society Washington," and he greeted us like old friends. A waitress stopped by the bar, "Hey, Buster, how you doin'?" Buster replied, "Great, baby, now that I see you're here." She blushed, turned to us and said, "He gets me with stuff like that every time." Buster leaned over and said, "You know where I got that from? I got it from Duke. And that's not all. I watched him very closely, and I got a lot from Duke. I know all his lines. And I finally realized his secret—want to know what it is?" We leaned forward, not wanting to miss a word. We were eager, after years of speculation and discussion, to finally learn the answer, which was, "He knew who he was!" We leaned back, thinking it over.

"The Garden" has a large rectangular outdoor dining space where the musicians play. It's sandwiched between the street on one side, a cocktail lounge advertised as an "Elegant Martini Bar" on the other, and, in the center, a huge tree with drooping branches. At the far end, behind the band, is the wall of an old hotel. Buster and his trio—bass and drums—warmed up with "All of Me," which was a feature for Johnny Hodges with Duke's band. At one of the front tables a fan had dozed off, but was soon wakened with a blast from the trombone. The fan, who resembled a boiled-down version of Gene Hackman, was introduced by Buster as "Scatman," and was soon engaged in a scat duet with Buster (a talent that remained hidden during his time with Duke). After a particularly aggressive scat passage by Buster, Scatman responded with a low, rapid-fire passage that gradually increased in intensity and volume. The Garden patrons were delighted. Scatman's encore was "Secret Love," a version that didn't remind anyone of Doris Day. Then Buster took the stage again, playing Duke's ever-popular "Satin Doll," followed by "Foggy Day," with an added vocal. This was followed by a punchy, rousing "Battle Hymn of the Republic" that had everyone ready to get up off their chairs and start marching. "I don't know why I decided to play that. It just came to me," he said later.

We had been talking to a man at the next table whose first and middle names were, actually, "Stan Kenton." His father was a Kenton fan, knew Kenton, and named his son after him. The son was, of course, also a Kenton fan, and knew all about him. Buster came over during intermission, and "Stan Kenton" engaged him in conversation about—Stan Kenton. Buster volunteered that he had once auditioned for Kenton, who had said, "You know, Buster, I can't pay you what you're worth!" (a line Duke also frequently used.). Buster's reply was, "That's OK, Stan, I ain't asking for that much!" But Buster didn't take the job, although he played for almost everyone else—Goodman, Herman, Hampton, *et al.* He said that he always had to audition—until he played with Duke. After that, with Ellington on his resume, no more auditions were needed.

A tenor sax player showed up to sit in during the second set, dueting with Buster on "Bye Bye Blackbird" and "St. Thomas." Then a young trumpet man appeared and took over on "Birks' Works" and "Moonlight in Vermont." They were mostly students of varying degrees of proficiency, but they were in exactly the right place. Next, an alto player joined in on "Sometimes I'm Happy," and that end of the Garden was getting crowded. Buster left the stage to his "students" and mingled with the customers. Going from table to table, he greeted old friends, many of them weekend regulars. At the same time he was also directing the solo order of the expanding band. We realized Buster was running the whole show like a circus ringmaster, in control of everything, from one end of "The Garden" to the other.

Some of the cats sitting in eventually melted away, and Buster returned to the bandstand. However, still others showed up, including a trombone player with a Hawaiian shirt, straw hat, eye patch and girlfriend. An animated player, he was bobbing and weaving throughout his high-powered duet with Buster, and then was startled to find himself in another scat duet. He left after a couple of numbers while he still had some energy left. We congratulated him on his playing as he passed by on his way out. He replied, "Thanks," then leaned over our table, glanced back at Buster, and said, "That guy is something."

Floyd Levin, 1922-2007

Whitney Balliett, 1926-2007

When Floyd Levin died in late January and Whitney Balliett died on 1 February, the jazz world lost two of its premier critic-chroniclers. As writers, Levin is probably best known for his book *Classic Jazz: A Personal View of the Music and the Musicians*, while Balliett is remembered for decades of articles on jazz in *New Yorker* magazine.

Mr. Balliett was noted for his graceful, jargon-free style. Critic Philip Larkin, himself a poet, described Balliett as a "writer who brings jazz journalism to the verge of poetry," while Institute of Jazz Studies director Dan Morgenstern claimed him to be "the greatest prose stylist to ever apply his writing skills to jazz." An example of his descriptive powers is a passage about Ellington drummer Sonny Greer: "Sonny Greer is an elegant pipestem, with a narrow, handsome face and flat black hair. His eyes are lustrous, and his fingers long and spidery. He...sat godlike above and behind the band surrounded by a huge, white, blazing set of drums. . . . He used deceptive, easy arrays of after beat rim shots that drove the band while remaining signals of cool. He flicked cowbells to launch a soloist, and he showered everyone with cymbals. He sparkled and exploded, but his taste never faltered."

Empathetic about lifestyles of jazz musicians, Balliett wrote, "I once traveled with Duke Ellington's orchestra, for about five days, and I couldn't believe it. Jesus! You don't know where you are, you have no sense of time or place, you can't sleep right. How these guys do it for so long, I don't know."

Mr. Levin's principal interest was early jazz, mainly its New Orleans heritage and development. Nevertheless, he wrote for a variety of jazz publications on a variety of subjects. His *Classic Jazz* contains a section entitled "The Duke Ellington Sacred Music Concert—New Orleans, 1970." In this book he also wrote about Ellington clarinetist Barney Bigard, a close personal friend. Levin played a major part in the conception and installation of the Louis Armstrong stature in New Orleans' Armstrong Park. He was an active member of the Southern California Duke Ellington Society.

Recent Publication

Ben Webster Sessionography

Compiled by Heinz Baumeister

This is good complement for the recent Webster biography *Someone to Watch Over Me* by Frank Büchman-Möller.

It's available only on CD in Microsoft Word format. For details, e-mail heinz.baumeister@kolumbus.fi

National Symphony Presents Ellington and Strayhorn Music in Its Pops Series

One may not know what to expect of a program billed as "Doc Plays the Duke," a recent National Symphony Orchestra offering in its Pops Series at the Kennedy Center. After all, Tchaikovsky did not write *The Nutcracker* nor Grieg his *Peer Gynt* for a 14-piece modern American band; and Ellington and Strayhorn did not have a 100 or so member symphony aggregation in mind to play their, respectively, "Happy-Go-Lucky Local" and "Take the 'A' Train."

As things turned out, the concert was a delightful diversion for an appreciative audience. Fans of band leader Doc Severinsen from decades earlier "Tonight" television shows got to see him in expected flamboyant attire (a sparkling sequined bright blue jacket and red shirt, and after intermission a raging purple outfit) and to hear his trumpet away from his band. Ellington and Strayhorn enthusiasts got to hear compositions familiar to them in a different musical milieu. Throughout, Severinsen's commentary and jovial banter kept the audience in a receptive mood.

While some melodies lent themselves to a large symphony orchestra adaptation, for others such full instrumentation was too weighty, too thick for some of Ellington and Strayhorn's nuanced, textured, nimble, and subtle idioms. An example is "The Mooche," played, it seemed, by too many instruments at once and too loudly to convey its subtly mysterious aura.

Among highlights of this entertaining evening were "Sophisticated Lady," where strings were in the fore and there was a brief 3/4 passage; vocalist Carmen Bradford on everything she sang; an extended version of "Caravan" with muted slide trombone in place of the usual piston trombone; and strings and Severinsen's flugelhorn to good advantage on "Lush Life."

Above all else, the compositions were world-class.



Are You Experiencing a Variation of SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) Because of the Postponement of the Annual East Coast Jazz Festival? Prescription: Check out these CDs:

♫ *Byron Morris and Unity: Live at the East Coast Jazz Festival* (CD Baby)

♫ *Keter Betts: Live at the East Coast Jazz Festival 2001* (The Orchard)

♫ *Ronnie Wells: Live at the 10th Annual East Coast Jazz Festival* (CD Baby)



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

Bob Reny continues to write perceptive and informed reviews for *IJRC Journal*.

Hugh "Rusty" Hassan

Rusty Hassan will be a moderator at "The Howard Theatre—Yesterday and Tomorrow!" on 24 February at the Carnegie at Mount Vernon Square in DC.

Jack Towers

Back on 7 December 1977, Jack Towers was the featured guest on the W. Royal Stokes radio program broadcast over WNGT. A recording of that event is now in the Stokes Collection at the Smithsonian.

Minerva and Lewis Giles

We happily report that Lewis and Minerva Giles, who were seriously injured in an automobile accident over a month ago, are now both home in Columbia, MD, continuing therapy and recuperating.

Harvey Cohen

We just learned that Dr. Harvey G. Cohen will moderate "Independent Film-making in Britain: A Conversation with Terence Davies" on 1 March at King's College, where he is a Lecturer in Cultural and Creative Industries. "If you happen to be in London next month," he invites, "feel free to drop on by."

Some More Encouraging News . . .

Some members of the Duke Ellington Society, United Kingdom (DESK), including Victor Lawrence and Antony Pepper, have formed an ad hoc group apart from DESK to study the possibility of having a 2008 International Duke Ellington Conference in London.

The year would correspond with the 75th anniversary of Duke Ellington's first trip to England, in 1933, and the 50th of his next performances there, in 1958.

The planners are eager for input. Pepper and Lawrence may be contacted directly, respectively, at ap@antonypepper.com and v.lawrence@which.net.

Lôoking Ahead

Saturday, 24 February, 3:00 pm, Carnegie at Mount Vernon Square, 801 K Street, NW

"The Howard Theatre—Yesterday and Tomorrow!"

Saturday, 3 March, Kennedy Center

Clark Terry and Louie Bellson among honorees, All-Star

Concert and Living Jazz Legend Awards Ceremony

Sunday, 4 March, 11:00 am service, Grace Lutheran Church

Brief performance by Louie Bellson

Saturday, 7 April, 8:00 pm, Grace Lutheran Church

Regular Monthly Meeting - Presentation by Peter MacHare

Sunday, 15 April, 6:30 pm, Grace Lutheran Church

Area premiere of *The Sacred Music of Louie Bellson and The*

Jazz Ballet performed by Louie Bellson and the Duke

University Jazz Ensemble

Recording of Duke's Last Washington Performance Shared at Meeting

by Peter MacHare, subbing for Gina Rollins, Secretary

At our February meeting, Ted Shell presented music from Duke Ellington's final Washington, DC concert of February 10, 1974 at Georgetown University. Ted recorded the event himself on his reel-to-reel recorder from his seat in the balcony.

The fact that Duke Ellington was to die three and one-half months after this recording made the hearing of it more than a little poignant, putting us all in a sentimental mood.

Highlights of the performance included an unusual arrangement of "Caravan" with wild percussion by Quentin "Rocky" White, response on a "Soul Soothing Beach," and "Cinoiserie." Ellington gave way to Jacki Byard (on electric piano) during parts of the concert. We were also treated to vocals by Anita Moore, Tony Watkins, and Money Johnson (the latter doing his very credible Louis Armstrong on "Basin Street Blues").

Instrumental highlights included Johnny Coles on trumpet, Harold Minerve on flute, and most especially the excellent Harold Ashby on tenor.

Needless to say, Ted Shell wasn't the only Duke Ellington Society member present at this concert. Ted Hudson and Alan Schneidmill both volunteered stories about their own memories of the event. One of our Northwest Pacific Coast members, Ken Steiner of Seattle, then a student at Georgetown, became an Ellington fan at that concert.

The recording also captured Ted Shell's powerful baritone voice calling for "More" at the end of the concert. Duke didn't let Ted down and gave a wonderful encore. I do believe that one word describes how we all feel about Duke Ellington's music—"More!"

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.**Executive Board**

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