

# Ellingtonia

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*The Duke Ellington Society*



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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## Ellington Birthday Commemorated At His Last Washington Residence

Reported by Bill Hasson

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. with the cooperation of its current owner Delta Sigma Theta Sorority held a 108th birthday celebration for the Duke in front of the house at 2728 Sherman Ave, NW, Washington, DC that he and wife, Edna, occupied from 1919-1922. The event was also an occasion to re-dedicate the refurbished 1990 plaque that marks the building's historical importance.

The program was a mix of music and historical and other informational presentations. The audience was warmly welcomed by Thelma A. Randall and our president, Peter MacHare. Ray Carmen, its president, brought greetings from TDES, Inc., the New York-based Ellington society. Bill Hasson handled MC responsibilities.

In addition to MacHare, members of our Society contributed talks: Don Rouse, historical survey of the

## June Program: "Lesser Heard Ways of Duke and Strays"

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

**Saturday, June 2 at 8:00 pm**

**Grace Lutheran Church**

**16th and Varnum Sts, NW, Washington, DC**

Our June program will be a presentation by our esteemed vice president and *Ellingtonia* editor Ted Hudson, who has chosen to title poetically, "Lesser Heard Ways of Duke and Strays."

Here's Ted's description of the theme of the program: "The range and number of Ellington's and Strayhorn's works, together or alone, are astounding. A majority of them may be considered 'jazz,' whatever that means to different people, but their gifts to posterity are much more than fits handily in most people's connotative definition of the term. They wrote 'jazz,' yes but also, among other compositions are tone poems, portraits, fugues, sonatas, musicals, opera, scores for films, ballet, and synaesthesia of other art forms."

Sounds like Ted is going to prove that Ellington and Strayhorn are "beyond category." This will be our last program of the season, so be sure to attend. Our programs are open to the public, so do feel free to bring a friend.

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neighborhood and ownerships of the building over the years; Patricia Willard, background of Duke's writing of sacred music and the producing of the first such concert; Ted Hudson, scope and content of the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian and ways it may be accessed online and can be used at the repository; Brian Gilmore, selection from his book of poems about Ellington entitled *jungle nights and soda fountain rags*. Member Esther Williams contributed a captivating *a capella* solo.

Other music artists included vocalists Gail Shipp,

Chad Carter, Gail Dixon, and James Zimmerman (a Smithsonian administrator associated with its Jazz Masterworks Orchestra). Saxophonists Fred Foss and Brian Settles provided instrumental selections.

Additional speakers were C.R. Gibbs, historian; Darroll Hunt, maestro of the Urban Philharmonic Orchestra; and Askia Muhammad, multi-media journalist and writer who, accompanied by Foss, read a poem he had written especially for the occasion. Several others from the audience spoke at the end of the program.

A similar program is planned for next year.

*Ed. Note: Somehow, Bill Hasson neglected to say that it was he who conceived, planned, and produced the successful affair.*

## Two Reviews by Your Editor:

***The Duke Box: Ellington in the 1940s*** (Storyville 108 8600)

In our January 2007 issue, we mentioned some of the good things that Storyville is doing to continue the legacy of Karl Emil Knudsen, in particular the music of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Well, they've done it again, this time with a masterful 8-CD release of 1940s music by the Ellington band. It is well known that many aficionados consider his orchestras of this era Duke's best, especially when considering the so-called Blanton-Webster band.

Think of a favorite Ellington recording of these days, and in all likelihood it's on one of these CDs: Strayhorn's "A' Train," Duke's "Warm Valley," Tizol's "Caravan," Mercer's "Moon Mist," and on and on and on. And the musicians: Ray, Ben, Al, Ivie, Herb, Lawrence, Harry, Sonny, Johnny, Tricky Sam, Cootie, Jimmie, Rex, Otto, Barney, et al. Will — no — *can* such a disparate-together group ever exist again?

Some of the music in this collection has connections to our Society. Several tunes from a performance at Langley Field in December 1943 and two from a Howard Theatre engagement in April 1946 were previously available on our souvenir CD for "Ellington '99," *The Duke in Washington*, and there are tunes also on *The Duke in Boston*, for both of which Ted Hudson wrote the accompanying booklets. Of course, no gathering of 1940s Ellingtonia would be complete without the famed 1941 Fargo concert, recorded by Dick Burrus and our member Jack Towers. Many consider it, with good reason, the finest live recording of Ellington of all time.

Another big plus: The accompanying enlightening booklet, a good read in itself as well as a read-along while you are listening to the music, is by Dan Morgenstern, Director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University.

No doubt about it, *The Duke Box* is a gathering of classic Ellington recordings. Most serious collectors already have most of the recordings on 78s, LPs, CDs, tapes, and other sources; for them this set can be a handy one-place source. For listeners who are relative neophytes, this is a practical, most welcome introduction by Storyville to some of Duke's greatest music. Winners all around.

***Rex Stewart—Stuff Smith: The 1963 Duets & Narration*** (AB Fable ABCD1-016)

This CD is an interesting mélange of informal conversation, anecdotes, instrumental solos and impromptu bits and pieces of tunes by Rex Stewart and Stuff Smith accompanied by friends. Recorded by Roger St. Onge at his home on several occasions, the principals talk about each other, Art Tatum, Earl Hines, Peck Kelly, and to a lesser extent, assorted other members of the jazz community. Among others present at one time or another during the tapings are Allie Ross, Claire Gordon, Arlene Smith, and Jody, who was to become Mrs. St. Onge.

First, the music—it's mainly noodling or jam session style, everybody having fun. Naturally, there are background talk, occasional breakdowns, and incidentals in the mix. There's something fascinatingly entertaining about the relaxed informality of the music, in spite of abrupt interruptions and stops and starts. The tunes are mainly standards such as "Summertime," "On the Sunny Side of the Street," and "All of Me." Smith plays a favorite of his, "Claire de Lune," and there are several incidentals. For this listener, it took a while to recognize a short "Harlem Air Shaft." No never-to-be forgotten performances here, just musician and friends enjoying themselves and each other.

The talk is as, if not more, interesting than the music. One can learn, for instance, how different it was for a violinist, in this case Stuff Smith, to gain recognition in the jazz world. Another example is an anecdote about an apparently self-assured Earl Hines' introduction to established New York pianists. While only listening will do it justice, as transcribed in the CD notes, here is the gist of the story that Rex begins and to which others contribute:

They recognized him eventually. But when Hines hit New York he was just another piano player. Willie the Lion Smith and Art Tatum tore Earl Hines up. Art Tatum got hold of him last. It was a shame. . . . So they said, Hey Fatha. We've got a little boy down here. Wants to play some piano with you. Fatha says, Where is he, where is he? Jelly [Roll Morton] says, Yeh where is he . . . . Fatha wasn't hip, you see. So, they all sit back and Fatha sits down. And so Art says, What do you want to play? Well, "Sweet and Lovely" just come out, which was a hard song . . . . So Art sits down and starts playing "Sweet and Lovely" and every four bars he'd change to a different key and go up a different key higher. Kept on playing and started in E $\flat$ . From E $\flat$  on up...gets back to E $\flat$ , and that takes him through every key that was ever written. Every key. And Fatha says, I don't think I'll play that. I'll play this one. And he sits down and plays "Honeysuckle Rose." And Fats, Fats Waller's sitting over there, with all that powerful left hand, you know.

Our recommendation: You won't find canonical performances on this unique CD, but get it and have some listening fun.

## Short Sheets . . .

### More Honors for Bellson

Louie Bellson has been named an Honorary Artist on the Christian Jazz Artists network, and he was the first inductee into the Hall of Excellence of Drummers for Jesus at their international conference in Dallas in February.

(Bellson tote bags, CDs, pins, photos, drum books, and other merchandise are described in a catalog that is available via [bellson@remo.com](mailto:bellson@remo.com).)

### Clark Terry Scheduled for Festival

According to a just received press release, Ellington orchestra alumnus Clark Terry will participate in the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival planned for September in Washington, DC.

### Anyone Seen *Reminiscing in Tempo*?

We have read of a new documentary DVD produced by Gary Keys entitled *Reminiscing in Tempo*, scheduled for release in 2006.

Notices and reviews of it have been posted on the internet, but it seems not to have shown up on web sites of well known vendors nor in stores that carry such items.

## Public Acclaim

by Don Rouse

Forty years ago when I was living in the Ft. Bennett Apartments off Rt. 29 in Arlington (which I affectionately dubbed "Fort Roach"), I would practice clarinet in my apartment. Until one day, when someone slipped a 5x8 notice under my door which read "Neighbors are complaining about a musical instrument being played too loud in this apartment. Please refer to section XXXX of your lease." I see now that this was the earliest public recognition of my art.

I was forced to go to my 1958 Ford, and I would drive out to somewhere isolated and practice in the car. One night I drove around to the side of a shopping mall that was under construction, and there was not a soul around. I was wailing away, when I saw headlights in the distance pulling up behind me. I thought, "Oh geez, if this is a cop and he asks me what I'm doing, what am I going to tell him? I'm playing clarinet? he's going to believe that?" Sure enough, an Alexandria cop got out and came over to the driver's side. I rolled the window down. He asked, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm practicing clarinet." He said, "What a relief. You never know what you are gonna find out here."

*Ed. Note: This anecdote by our member Don Rouse first appeared in Tailgate Ramblings. We thank Don and the publication for kind permission to reprint it here.*

## The New Washingtonians Celebrate Duke's Birthday in a Zesty Latin Mood

The New Washingtonians, under the direction of Davey Yarborough, played with verve and aplomb in a "The Cotton Club Goes 'Brazilian'" concert on 29 April at St. Paul's Episcopal Church Rock Creek Center in Washington, DC. The student aggregation, from the Ellington School of the Arts, delighted a full audience by the way they handled tricky rhythms and orchestral challenges.

Two pieces from Duke's *Latin American Suite*, "Latin American Sunshine" and "Oclupaca" were among many highlights of the afternoon. Both featured assertive, cascading brass and surging reeds (seven saxophones, count them!), intriguing rhythms played with precision and spirit, and delightful piano introductions and passages by Jenna Henderson. A mysterioso tinged "Caravan" was another crowd pleaser. Trombonist Lillian Banks shone on it as well as on "Pyramid." "The Peanut Vendor," with tempo as the Ellington band had recorded it, was another salute to our South American neighbors.

But the program didn't neglect standards with a more familiar beat. One was a baritone saxophone feature by Reginald W. Williams on "Sophisticated Lady," a la Carney replete with a bit of crowd pleasing circular breathing at the end. "C-Jam Blues" gave a number of the other musicians a chance to show their mettle in short solos, including a nod to Ray Nance by violinist Ashley Parham.

The whole affair, free but with donations accepted, was to raise money to enable the ensemble to travel to Brazil in June to attend the Samba School there.

*Ed. Note: If you weren't there you can still help. Send a donation earmarked for The New Washingtonians to The Ellington Fund at the Ellington School of the Arts, 3500 R Street, NW, Washington, DC.*

## Information, Entertainment, and a "Special Surprise" Mark TDES Conference

Choreographer Mercedes Ellington led a "Pas De Duke" session, Jean Bach and Louise Michelle offered reminiscences, a panel of experts spoke on "Latin Duke," pianist Dick Katz played a mini-concert, and others participated during an all-day conference by TDES at the Lincoln Center in New York on 7 April.

Described in the TDES newsletter as "a special surprise," vocalist Eve Smith, introduced by Duke simply as Yvonne during her days with the band, accompanied herself on piano for several numbers. The newsletter recounts that "Despite cautioning the crowd that she 'was a singer not a piano player,' both her vocal and piano artistry delighted an appreciative audience."

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

### John Hornsby

Focusing on the initial releases of Duke's "stockpile," John Hornsby, who is also a member of our Society, was the presenter at the April meeting of the Toronto Duke Ellington Society.

### Davey Yarborough

Davey Yarborough and Friends will be the guest artists for the 24 April "Sundays at 4:00" series at St. Paul's Parish Rock Creek Center in Washington, DC.

### Jack Towers, Theodore Hudson,

### Kenneth Steiner, Jerry Valburn

Among those who wrote annotations for previous releases of some of the music in *The Duke Box* set and are thus acknowledged by Dan Morgenstern in his booklet for it are Jerry Valburn, Ken Steiner, and Ted Hudson.

In his discussion of the 1940 Fargo concert, which Morgenstern characterizes as a "milestone in the history of recorded Ellingtonia," he writes that "Jack [Towers], bless him, is still active as one of the few true masters of record restoration, and he has refined the Fargo material several times over."

## Quotations of the Month

*I couldn't work until they got the fourteenth man. I couldn't go to work because Ellington was superstitious. He couldn't have thirteen.*

— Lawrence Brown in an interview with Dennett Harrod (one of our founding members), quoted in *Composers' Voices from Ives to Ellington: An Oral History of American Music* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005)

*It's too bad some ruthless Hollywood editor cut to ribbons the score Ellington and Strayhorn wrote for Anatomy of a Murder (1959). But sew the snippets together again—with your imagination or a tape recorder—and you have one of their most haunting extended works, a 35 minute sonic drama that features gorgeous playing by the band and memorable cameos by many of its leading soloists.... Anatomy of a Murder shows Ellington and Strayhorn probing the tensions and anomalies of everyday life, searching for clues, like Jimmy Stewart in the movie, to the insolvable mystery of human behavior.*

— Mark Tucker, quoted in *Blue Light* 10:4 (October -December 2003)

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## An Enjoyable Evening of Filmed Interviews from a Rare Collection

by Peter MacHare, substituting for Secretary Gina Rollins

Our member Alan Scheidmill presented interviews from the Hamilton College Jazz Archives (<http://www.hamilton.edu/jazzarchive/>) at our May meeting. The bulk of the program consisted of a delightful conversation between Clark Terry and Joe Williams. They had a wide ranging discussion of topics such as their time with Count Basie, touring in the South, music theory and blue notes, and most especially stories about Duke Ellington.

If you missed this interview, you really missed something special. Williams can really do an amazingly good Duke Ellington impression that he employed when telling stories about the Duke. Terry, of course, never fails to amaze. When talking about learning the theory behind blue notes, he sang examples as he beat time with his hand. I don't know if I have ever seen a human being more imbibed with music. Music is Clark Terry, and Clark Terry is music.

The second portion of the program consisted of an interview with drum hero Louie Bellson. Clark and he were appropriately paired in this program because, according to a recent mailing entitled "Keeping Up with Louie Bellson" (as if keeping up with Louie Bellson is possible), Clark and Louie are recording an album together this May.

Louie was immersed in music from a very early age when he saw the drummers marching in a parade. At age 17, he triumphed over 40,000 other drummers to win a national contest sponsored by Gene Krupa. He told about playing with Benny Goodman, Harry James, and Duke Ellington. When Louie told James that he was leaving to go play with Ellington, James famously replied, "Take me with you." Well, Louie Bellson has taken us with him on a fabulous musical journey.

We look forward to Louie Bellson and Clark Terry together on their album.

### THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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