

# Ellingtonia

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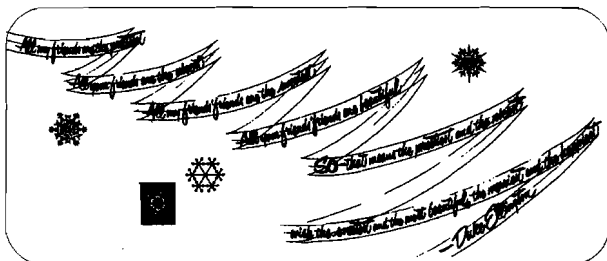
**DECEMBER 2008**

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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*All my friends are the prettiest  
All my friends are the nicest  
All my friends are the sweetest  
All your friends' friends are beautiful  
SO—that means the prettiest and the nicest  
wish the sweetest and the most beautiful  
the merriest and the happiest  
— Duke Ellington*



## World Premiere Concert At the Kennedy Center

In November the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC will present a one-show-only concert entitled *Ellington Voices: Classical to Jazz*, which it commissioned. Starring vocalists Nnenna Freelon and Harolyn Blackwell, the show, according to a press release, will “showcase how Ellington’s compositions blended European classical traditions, syncopated rhythms of stride piano and ragtime, and African American work songs, blues and spiritual music into an invigorating, unified whole.” Ms. Freelon is well known in jazz circles, while Ms. Blackwell is classically trained. Instrumental music will be by a string quartet and Ms. Freelon’s band.

## Our First New Members for 2009

We welcome Kofi Boone of Durham, North Carolina, our first new member for 2009! Last month Arne Tracey of Ottawa, Canada became the second new one.

Some current members had previously made multiple payments and therefore are prepaid for the coming year.

**Saturday, 6 December 2008 at 7 PM**  
**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**16th & Varnum Sts, NW, Washington, DC**  
by Peter MacHare

Let’s celebrate Clark Terry’s Birthday!

Clark Terry was born in St. Louis on December 14, 1920. After a stint in a Navy band during World War II, he played with Charlie Barnet, 1947; Count Basie, 1948-51; and Duke Ellington, 1951-59. Clark then spent 10 years appearing regularly in Doc Severinsen’s Tonight Show Band. After cementing his fame, he has been active in all areas of music and music education.

We are lucky to have Ted Shell, one of Terry’s biggest fans, in our Society. Ted will present the music of Terry at our December program. Don’t miss it! Come one, come all, and don’t forget our new starting time!!!

## Maurice and Jack, We Love You Madly!

The Board of Directors of The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. has designated Jack Towers and Maurice Lawrence as Honorary Members. Maurice was our first president and Jack was our long-time treasurer and sound engineer.

## Watch for Davey Yarborough on “CNN Heroes” Television Program

Our member Davey Yarborough was recently described by Wynton Marsalis as his “hero.” Further, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts’ *Media Alert* reports that Marsalis named him as his “role model.”

CNN will profile Davey in its “Heroes” series. In it, Marsalis stresses that his hero “uses jazz music to inspire the minds and souls of young folks.” Of course, Davey’s work with students at the Ellington School is well known. As Marsalis also points out, Davey, with wife Esther Williams-Yarborough, is involved in “things that are not school related,” notably their Washington Jazz Institute, where using former students as mentors, have touched the lives of over 1,000 aspiring musicians. For more info, start online at [cnn.com/video/#/video/living/2008/11/05/heroes](http://cnn.com/video/#/video/living/2008/11/05/heroes)

***Della Reese with Duke Ellington and His Orchestra*** (Acrobat Music Group ACMCD 4260)  
Reviewed by Elinor F. Eugene

This record is the result of tapes of 1962 radio broadcasts featuring Della Reese and Duke Ellington and his orchestra to promote recruiting for the National Guard. Martin Block, popular disc jockey, was the program announcer, informal interviewer, and commentator who combined light banter with admiring comments on the number just completed or on the one coming up. For example, after "Satin Doll" Block remarked that some of the National Guard planes were named for "Satin Doll" and "Sophisticated Lady." Another time he asked Duke how many times he had played "Mood Indigo." Duke replied, "If I had a grain of sand for each one, I'd open my own Miami Beach." It was a treat to hear the remarks of Della and Duke.

Duke's orchestra was the backup for Della who with her distinctive voice was at the height of her popularity. Her numbers alternated with selections by the orchestra alone. It was interesting that she did not sing any of Duke's compositions, as one would have expected, but her most popular hits, "Bye, Bye, Blackbird," "A Foggy Day in London Town," "And That Reminds Me," "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home," and "You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Loves You." At home dually with jazz, blues, or R&B in her upbeat, almost staccato-like style, Della was famous for adding lyrics to familiar classical melodies. One of her popular recordings was "Don't You Know?" to the melody of "Musetta's Waltz" from Puccini's opera *La Boheme*. Another was her hit "Softly My Love I Sing My Song," inspired by Chopin's "Etude in E." Both numbers are included on the CD.

In addition to the selections mentioned, Duke's numbers include classics "Take the 'A' Train," "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," and "Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me," in addition to the rarely heard "Taffy Twist" and "Jam with Sam." There were no vocals with the orchestra's numbers.

The CD is an interesting opportunity to hear both Della and Duke in a setting different from nightclubs, theaters, or ballrooms. The liner notes include historical information on the backgrounds of these three principals and are a definite plus.

Three Storyville Releases:

***Piano Passions, by Billy Strayhorn*** (101 8404)

***The Treasury Shows, Vol. 13, by Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra*** (903 9013)

***New York New York, by Duke Ellington and His Orchestra*** (101 8402)

Reviewed by Reuben Jackson

Duke Ellington's stylistic creativity is no secret to longtime Ellingtonians. But it's fair to say that even those of us "with the ears" (as the Maestro so wonderfully put it) still find ourselves astonished at both the quantity and stylistic variety of his output.

It's one thing to be a prolific composer, performer and recording artist. But at *New York, New York, Billy Strayhorn: Piano Passion*, and Volume 13 of *The Treasury Shows*, three recent releases on the Danish Storyville label wonderfully illustrate, quite another to have achieved such a high degree of accessible artistic success.

*Passion's* 21 tracks include music recorded for a 1961 session led by Billy Strayhorn. Among them are deft, arresting readings of Strayhorn classics such as "Passion Flower" and "Something to Live For," as well as the always satisfying 1946 Strayhorn-Ellington duet performances of "Drawing Room Blues" and "Tonk."

Equally unforgettable is the 1950 interpretation of "Cottontail," in which Ellington, Strayhorn and bassist Wendell Marshall turn the title's sumptuous harmonic banquet into a melodic and rhythmic romp and the always sublime and sensuous "A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing," also recorded in 1961, featuring the composer's ivories, and the Paris String Quartet.

Ellington's still somewhat undervalued post-War II ensemble is in full display throughout *Treasury*. These performances, recorded in New York's Club Zanzibar and Radio City Music Hall in 1946, include top notch, but (relatively) lesser known orchestra vehicles such as Mercer Ellington's brooding "Blue Serge," the unabashedly swinging Billy Strayhorn-Rex Stewart-Joya Sherrill collaboration "Kissing Bug" and an absolutely steaming reading of Duke's "Main Stem."

These tracks are not—I repeat—not for the faint of heart!

*New York, New York* spotlights late-period (1970-1972) Ellingtonia, and is a subtle reminder of how creative "the piano player" remained into his 70s. In addition to compositions such as "Afrique" (which appeared on 1971's *Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*), 19 tracks include intriguing originals like "Flute" (featuring Norris Turney) and "Dreaming by the Fire," in which Turney and an appropriately subdued organist Wild Bill Davis appear.

"Sophisticated Lady," "Mood Indigo" and a couple of other Ellington evergreens can also be heard on *New York, New York*. But to paraphrase comedian Jerry Seinfeld—"not that there's anything wrong with that."

## Short Sheets . . .

### ♫ DESS Plans for Duke's 110th Birthday ♫

The Duke Ellington Society of Sweden is gearing up for a celebration of Duke's 110th birth date. They will have a Ellington-themed evening on 27 April, and Jan Falk, their president, reports that a 24-hour concert is in the works to take place in Gothenburg.

### ♫ Bet You Didn't Know, Did You? ♫

We read in the current *Blue Light* that after Harry Carney and Sonny Greer, Russell Procope had the longest tenure in Duke's band, 1946 to 1974.

### ♫ At the Top of the List ♫

In "25 Classic Jazz Festival Recordings" *DownBeat*, May 2008, the rhetorical question is asked, "Is any festival recording as famous or celebrated as this LP, from 1956, when Paul Gonsalves wailed a long riffy tenor solo on "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" that put the audience in a frenzy, and Ellington back on top? You can feel its contagious energy build."

### ♫ Attention, Completists ♫

From the February 2008 *IAJRC Journal*: "[A Whitney Balliett] book is never mentioned because hardly anyone has seen it: *Duke Ellington Remembered: New York Notes*, published by Goldstein Press in 1981—it's Balliett's exact and exacting *New Yorker* column obituary of the Duke. This collector's item was published in elegant blue leather and measures all of two inches-by-three inches, making it possibly the smallest jazz tome ever published. Limited to 750 copies, this 47 pager was a tribute to the Worcester, Massachusetts fine press publisher of miniature books, Achille Joseph St. Onge. Extravagant Ellingtonian collectors may wish to know that the current price in the antiquarian book market is about \$120."

### ♫ Federal Jazz Commission "Retires" ♫

The Federal Jazz Commission played its last gig on 24 June. The band's bass player, Tom Gray, is the son of our recently deceased member Harold Gray.

## Quotation of the Month

*. . . spontaneity was . . . part of Ellington's orchestra. As Clark Terry explained to me about Duke: "He wants life and music to be always in a state of becoming. He doesn't even like to write definitive endings to a piece. He'd often ask us to come up with ideas for closings, but when he'd settle on one of them, he'd keep fooling with them. He always likes to make the end of a song sound like it's going somewhere.*

— Nat Hentoff, "Duke Ellington's Posthumous Revenge," *JazzTimes*, November 2004

## Looking Ahead to Our Meetings > > >

6 December -- Ted Shell on Clark Terry  
3 January -- Everyone Party Hearty!  
7 February -- (Valentine's Day) Sweets and Suites for Our Sweeties

## Harold Gray

by Don Rouse

Long-time Ellington Society member Harold Gray passed away November 5. He was 101. A jazz fan and advocate for most of his adult life, Harold was also for many years a citizen activist in DC and a past president of the Palisades Citizens Association. He was a past president of the DC Association of Oldest Inhabitants and of the Potomac River Jazz Club. A transportation lobbyist, Harold also lobbied on behalf of a variety of jazz initiatives generated by Rep. John Conyers.



*Ed. Note: Over years, Harold Gray was a regular at our meetings, usually riding with Don Rouse. He attended less frequently after moving to a senior community several years ago. Harold's suggestion led to the title of our newsletter, Ellingtonia.*

*We extend to his family and other loved ones our sincere condolences.*

## NEA Jazz Masters Publication Is Free

The National Endowment for the Arts latest *NEA Jazz Masters* (4th Edition 2008) may be requested online at [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov), from the NEA at 1100 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20506-0001, and by phone at 202-682-5400.

The handsome publication has photographs and biographical sketches of awardees over the years from 1982 and a *Jazz Moments* commentary and music CD. Among the masters are Ellington band alumni Louie Bellson and Clark Terry.

## About Duke-LYM

From time-to-time, we are asked what the popular Web site Duke-LYM is all about and how to find it.

A free e-mail discussion group, it's hosted by Prof. Andrew Homzy of Concordia University in Montreal. Members, including an impressive number of Ellington experts and scholars, discuss a variety of subjects, among them recordings, concerts, sidemen, compositions, films, discographies, current research, news—"in short anything which will be of interest about, or related to, one of the greatest musicians of the 20th century."

To join:

Send an e-mail to [majordomo@concordia.ca](mailto:majordomo@concordia.ca). Write only the words **subscribe Duke-LYM** in the message field, but nothing in the subject matter field.

To quit:

Write only **unsubscribe Duke-LYM** in the message field, but nothing in the subject matter field.

For a list of current members:

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For a list of archived files:

Write only **index Duke-LYM** in the message field, but nothing in the subject matter field..

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

### Lillian and Ben Pubols

Ben Pubols recently gave another jazz talk at the Portland, Oregon OASIS chapter. This one was on "Combo Jazz: Small Groups of the Swing Era." Ellington content included small group sessions led by Rex Stewart, Johnny Hodges and Barney Bigard, as well as pre-Ellington Ben Webster with Teddy Wilson and post-Ellington Cootie Williams with the Benny Goodman Sextet. For a look into the future he concluded with "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" by Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five.

Lillian Pubols, recently gave a series of OASIS lectures on the workings of the nervous system, including the effects of aging on the brain. "Use it or lose it."

### Ted Shell

On Sunday, 26 October, Ted Shell celebrated his 93rd birthday. Had it been known at the time, Jack Dennis could have included him in his item in our last issue about two of our nonagenarian "birthday boys." Ted points out that years ago he was among a few brothers of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, including Grant Wright and Jack Dennis, who got together to listen to Maurice Lawrence's collection of Ellington 78s. Ted, as we know, has been continuously active in our Society since its inception [That's a record!] and has served as its president. So, Belated Happy Birthday, Ted!

### Harvey Cohen

In a communication titled "Harvey Gets Out of the Ivory Tower..." the good university don states that "if you happen to be in London" on 17 November, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank, he will be participating for the second year in a panel at the London Jazz Festival, his topic being the music and careers of Duke and Billy. After the panel the Alan Barnes Octet will play a concert of Ellington music.

His other brief respite from academia has already taken place—an appearance on the Simon Mayo show on BBC Radio 5 Live in late October.

Did you get a reference copy of the show, prof? If yes, how about a copy.

## Secretary and Board Position Open

Nominations for Officers and Board of Directors are Peter MacHare for President, Theodore Hudson for Vice President, Francis Arnold for Treasurer, and Theodore Shell, Olivia McMillan, Joseph McMillan, William Hasson, Luvenia George, and Pat Braxton for Board of Directors. The positions of Secretary and one Board member are open.

If you know of anyone willing to serve, please call Peter MacHare at 301-982-4249.

## At Our November Meeting: Duke and Strayhorn Music By Other Countries' Artists

by Peter MacHare

Ted Hudson presented a very enjoyable evening of the recorded music of Ellington and Strayhorn played by musicians in other countries. We heard so much good music that it is difficult to pick out highlights. Several of our members were represented among the musicians. Anthony Brown's Asian American Orchestra's version of "Bluebird of Delhi" from the *Far East Suite* used a variety of East instruments. Ted paid Anthony a very high compliment, saying that if Anthony had come along earlier in time, he would have been just the percussionist Ellington would have wanted in his orchestra.

Another unusual instrumentation was "I Like the Sunrise" played by Hechuan Lewis on alto sax and Johannes Landgren on pipe organ, both Swedes. The Dutch Jazz Orchestra's "Bagatelle," a Strayhorn piece, was discovered and arranged by Walter van de Leur.

Among countries represented on the program were Austria, Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, and England

*Ed. Note: The Asian American is a US orchestra; its recording was used to illustrate sounds of authentic Asian instruments.*

## Society Newsletters Available on the Internet

To read our old newsletters and other documents, just go to our Society's web page and click on the link to our Archives. Note the document from Felix Grant that dates the origin of our Society to 1953.

## To Join or To Renew Membership

*Mail your check payable to  
The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. at  
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.*

*Our dues remain a bargain:*

**Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;  
First-time-ever member, just \$20.**

**Keep in mind that memberships are for the calendar year.**

### THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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