

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/

Good News! Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival Promises to "Reignite" Former East Coast Festival

We quote from a media release: "Remember what a great time the old East Coast Jazz Festival always was and what stellar work the beloved ancestor vocalist Ronnie Wells did to make it happen? Recall how [it] filled those mid-winter blahs . . . right after the Super Bowl weekend, just when you were dying for springtime; how that event filled that void with an entire weekend of great artists, swinging sounds, fellowship with jazz lovers from across the country, and big fun all under one roof? Well daydream wistfully and regret the loss of that event no more!"

Sponsored by the Jazz Academy of Music, a 19-21 February week-end Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival proposes to continue the format and style of its predecessor at the same venue, formerly the Doubletree Hotel and now the Hilton Executive Meeting Center in Rockville, MD. And importantly, as before, in addition to headline performers such as Bobby Watson, Mulgrew Miller, and Nasar Abadey, the festival will offer opportunities for students and other upcoming musicians to perform as well as interact with established artists.

There will be a tribute to Ronnie Wells, a member of our Society who co-founded the East Coast Festival in 1992 with her husband Ron Elliston. Its last was in 2006, for Ms. Wells was not well enough to continue as producer the next year. She died in early 2007.

In addition to live music performances the festival will feature workshops, master classes, films and other activities.

For a schedule of events and more information, including pricing, accommodations, and travel, go to www.midatlanticjazzfestival.org.

1940 - It Was a Very Good Year

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

In February we will look at one year of Ellington's music—1940. In that year, both bassist Jimmie Blanton and tenor giant Ben Webster were in the band, the exclusive contract with RCA began, and our own beloved Jack Towers recorded Duke in Fargo, North Dakota.

Our member Alan Schneidmill deserves the credit for the idea to do a program on 1940, and what a great idea it is. Think about the possibilities: Ellington had far more than his fair share of great years, so I'm sure that in the future we'll be examining other years.

The program will be on **Saturday, 6 February at 7 pm** at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW**, in Duke's home town, **Washington, DC**.

If you ain't there, you're square.

Terry Selected for Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award

The Recording Academy has announced that trumpeter Clark Terry will be a recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award. The honor will be bestowed upon him at a special invitation-only ceremony in Los Angeles on 30 January, during Grammy Week.

This award is different from the Grammy Hall of Fame Award, which honors specific recordings rather than individuals.

Terry will be among several performers described as "a prestigious group of diverse and prominent creators who have contributed some of the most distinguished and influential recordings."

Over his long career, he has recorded as leader and with a host of luminaries such as Charlie Barnet, Louie Bellson, Gerry Mulligan, Quincy Jones, Oscar Peterson, and, of course, Duke Ellington.

**Sweethearts of Rhythm:
The Story of the Greatest All-Girl Swing Band in the World, by Marilyn Nelson**

Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial Books, 2009.

Reviewed by Geneva Hudson

The story of the Sweethearts of Rhythm, the all-female swing band popular during the 1940s, is uniquely told by Marilyn Nelson. By her using the instruments themselves to tell the story in poetic form, the reader is introduced to the band members and the instruments they played. Sitting in a pawn shop, they recall the glory days they spent on the road with the Sweethearts—the hardships, trials and tribulations and the triumphs.

At a time when the world was at war and segregation and Jim Crow laws ruled the country, this group of young women from different races and nationalities forged their talents to form a sixteen-piece big band that played swing music. From a small group formed to raise funds for the Piney Woods Life School in Mississippi, it grew into the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and helped fill a void left by the male musicians who had gone off to war. Americans still wanted to go out and hear music and dance, so the Sweethearts played to sold-out crowds of mostly black audiences in New York, Chicago, Washington, DC, and other places. They even went to Europe to entertain the troops.

Using song titles for her poems, Marilyn Nelson weaves in the history of the times that are beautifully illustrated by the artist Jerry Pinkney.

I would recommend this book for anyone interested in the history of jazz, particularly the swing era and the unique role of the Sweethearts of Rhythm in this history. The book has many possibilities for students of music or art or writing poetry, or as a resource to learn more about our history during the times these women were performing.

Ed. Note: The late Geneva Perry, who played saxophone with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, was an active member of our Society during her retirement years.

**Details about Duke's Last Performance Sought from Ellington Devotees
Sturgis, Michigan Commemorates This Historic Occasion**

Linda Winkens, president of the Sturgis Historical Society, would like to have information from Ellington authorities and others that relates to Sturgis and Ellington's 1974 performance there, which proved to be his last.

In October 2009, under auspices of the Sturgis Historical Society, the Sturgis Council of the Arts and other civic and cultural organizations, the installation of a historical marker, a concert by the Ellington band led by Barrie Lee Hall, Jr., and programs commemorating Duke Ellington's last performance, took place there. The Duke Ellington Music Society (DEMS), headed by Sjeff Hoefsmid, contributed half of the marker's estimated cost of \$2,500.

Standing prominently on the lawn of the Sturges-Young Auditorium, the plaque bears at its bottom the words "The venue has hosted many famous musicians, comedians, and public figures. On March 22, 1974, bandleader Duke Ellington (1899-1974) gave his final performance here, two months before he died." An article about the commemoration in the *Sturgis Journal* states that "Just to have the Sturges-Young Auditorium serve as host to a musician of Ellington's stature offers bragging rights. To have it be the site of his last concert is monumental."

In a recent letter to us Ms. Winkens says, "I would love to see our city make some use of this last concert by Duke Ellington and to add it to one of our few annual local activities. It needs to be noted, remembered and to be made into a point of honor for our community. . . . I am asking you for more information about his final concert, for the files of our historical society." She may be contacted at the Sturgis Historical Society, 200 West Main Street, Sturgis, MI 49091.

The late Gordon Ewing, one of the Ellington itinerary compilers, in 1990 spoke of planning to have a commemorative plaque in Sturgis. For a quotation by him in this regard see *DEMS Bulletin* 90/1, and for photographs of the marker see *DEMS Bulletin* 09/3. Both *Bulletins* may be accessed at Peter MacHare's depanorama.net/dems.

The concert by the current Ellington Orchestra led by Barrie Lee Hall, Jr. was highly praised. *Kosmopolitan Online*, for example, says that the band's rendition of "Mood Indigo" was "like telling stories you care about and love to hear around the fire." And the mayor stated that "It's great to have this level of musical talent on the stage of Sturges-Young."

During the concert Hall announced, "I was at that concert. That makes me 35 years older," Then, tongue firmly in cheek, he added that he was only 13 years of age at the time he joined the Ellington orchestra.

In the spirit of things, a pre-concert dinner menu offered "It Don't Mean a Thing" (prime rib), "Take the A Train" (beef Manhattan), "Sophisticated Lady" (vegetarian lasagna), and other delectables.

Short Sheets . . .

♪ One of the Year's Best ♪

In *Book World's* "The Best of 2009" special holiday issue, *Sweethearts of Rhythm* by Marilyn Nelson (Dial) is listed as one of the best kid's books of the year.

♪ Ellington-Strayhorn Exhibit Online ♪

John Hasse, curator of music at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, has curated an exhibition titled "Jazz Composers: Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn." It can be viewed online at americanhistory.si.edu/documentgallery/exhibitions/ellington_strayhorn_1.html

♪ A "World Jazz Awards" ♪

Jazzinstitut Darmstadt reports in its "Jazz News" that US-based World Jazz Awards Company, a group that it admittedly never heard of, might organize an awards event next year. Possible venues include DuBai, Singapore, and Australia. *Vietnam News* reports that HCM City there is being considered as the venue.

Ed. Note: Any of our readers know more about this organization and the proposed event?

♪ Kelly Strayhorn Theater ♪

A year-end report from Pittsburgh's Kelly Strayhorn Theater, named in honor of Billy Strayhorn and Gene Kelly, says that is "excited to move in new directions with a commitment to a bold artistic mission."

Now Now! — Be Nice.

The 6 December issue of the *New York Times* includes a review by Steve Coates of the new book *Jazz* by Gary Giddens and Scott DeVeaux. Coates notes that "When sax-blowing Bill Clinton claims the great tenor man Lester Young and the smooth-jazz king, Kenneth Gorelick, a k a Kenny G, as favorites, their [Giddens and DeVeaux's] skepticism is delicious. ('There are many things to dislike about smooth jazz,' they add. 'For example, everything.')

Seattle Has Longest Running Production of Duke's Sacred Music

Back in 1989 the Interfaith Council of Seattle launched the first productions of Ellington's Sacred Music. A *Seattle Times* writer asserts it has become an annual tradition that today "is woven firmly into the city's cultural scene."

Now under Earshot, the event features the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra and various choral groups and soloists, overall totaling some 50 performers. The orchestra is co-directed by drummer Clarence Acox and university professor and saxophonist Michael Brockman.

Klaus Götting Directory

Researcher and collector Klaus Götting has, with the assistance of many contributors directly and through sources such as the *DEMS Bulletin*, compiled a directory of Duke Ellington's itinerary from March 1923 through to the end of his life, with cross-references to all *DEMS Bulletins* to date and to [Klaus Stratemann's] *Duke Ellington Day by Day and Film by Film*. If you look at a particular date, this will tell you where to find information about events and recordings made on that date in the *DEMS Bulletins*. Mr. Götting is willing to provide a copy to those who write to him directly at eke2.kg@orange.fr.

Klaus made this directory originally for his own use. He is now willing to share it with the Ellington community. It is not an itinerary of Duke's whereabouts, but it is very helpful to find specific events in *DEMS Bulletins* and in Klaus Stratemann's book.

Ed. Note: The above article is reprinted with permission from DEMS Bulletin 09/3 December 2009-March 2010, for which we gratefully thank Sjef Hoefsmit, the editor. It complements and clarifies our item titled "An Ellington Itinerary Is Available Online" that appeared in our January 2009 issue.

Quotation of the Month

The composer as misunderstood, ignored, unappreciated, alienated, I find an absolutely pathological model. I decided early on in my life that a composer like Duke Ellington was a far more important model to me. Ellington particularly influenced me because he was a person who wrote for his audience. He wanted to be popular. He wanted to write hits. He worked constantly. He was like Bach. There was just this endless flow. He never stopped. He was married to his work and married to the players in his band. He created one of the great bodies of art in this century.

— John Adams in an interview with Vivian Perils, as quoted in *Composers' Voices from Ives to Ellington: An Oral History of American Music* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005).

Clinker Alert! — and New Contacts

The e-mail address for Louie Bellson in the "Short Sheets..." column of our November issue was inaccurate. The Web site www.louiebellson.com should be used instead.

A new postal address for the Louie Bellson Legacy is 16055 Ventura Blvd., Suite 1212, Encino, CA 91436. A new e-mail address for the Guestbook page of the website is <http://louiebellson.info/guestbook.html>.

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

Charles Stewart

Congratulations are in order for Charles Stewart. He was recently re-elected President of the Duke Ellington Society, Southern California Chapter.

Scott Schwartz

Scott Schwartz, director of the Sousa Archives at the University of Illinois, continues to improve on its collection. He and his wife and children are popular in the community for their "American folk/jazz/bluegrass" music performances.

Joseph Daniel Clipper

The Washington *Post* recently ran a feature article on Joseph Daniel Clipper, who is a highly regarded photograph portrait artist. His "Clipper Classics Portraits" specialty is large formal portraits, some measuring as much as 40x60 inches. The *Post* writer states that a 16x20 inch costs about \$4,995.

At first "self-taught," later Clipper was mentored by others, including Yousuf Karsh. Among those who have sat for his portraits are Dr. Martin Luther King, the Congressional Black Caucus, Dorothy Height, and Ben Ali, founder of famous Ben's Chili Bowl.

Members of our Society know him to be a dapper dresser, therefore are not surprised that for his photo shoots, Clipper wears a full suit and sometimes a top hat.

Who's the Creator?

A question has arisen as to who is the artist who drew the well known caricature of Duke Ellington that appears, among other places, on the cover of *DEMS Bulletin*, the home page of Peter MacHare's "Duke Ellington Panorama" website, and the cover of the original RCA *A Duke Ellington Panorama* 78 rpm record set. Some say Boy Ten Hover, a number of whose sketches have of Duke have been published. Some skeptically wonder why a similar caricature of Duke in the program for *Jump for Joy* is credited to José Miguel Covarrubias, a Mexican-born illustrator and artist.



Attention Members

Take a look at the membership expiration date on the upper right of your address label. Remember, our membership is by the calendar year, so if you did not pay in advance for 2010, please get your dues in right away. Thank you.

To Join or To Renew Membership

Send your check payable to
The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.
Our dues remain a bargain:
Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;
First-time-ever member, just \$20.

Please keep in mind that our memberships are for the calendar year.

Fun at Annual Holiday Party

by Art Luby, Secretary

On January 2, 2009 the Society held its annual Holiday Party. Unfortunately, attendance was restrained by the bitterly cold weather. However, the members who managed to find their way through the bone-chilling weather all brought food and good spirits (of the psychological rather than liquid form).

Appropriate seasonal jazz was played, including the famous Ellington/Strayhorn version of the Nutcracker. As with all of the annual parties, the highlight was the singing of "Twelve Days of Christmas," which all participants managed with assertive and, occasionally, even melodic voices. Notwithstanding the conditions outside, it was a very pleasant evening filled with good music, good cheer, and fellowship.

Notes from Other Ellington Organizations (Culled from Their Publications)

Duke Ellington Society (United Kingdom)

The *Ellington '08 Souvenir Double CD* is still available. For directions on how to order, write to Ellington 2008, 18 Thurlsestone Avenue, London N12 0LP, United Kingdom, or go to ellington2008.org.

Duke Ellington Society, Toronto Chapter 40

The Canadian Jazz Archives Network (CJAN) has been collecting major jazz memorabilia for the York University for over five years. The repository is open to the public for personal and professional research.

Duke Ellington Music Society (DEMS)

DEMS Bulletins dating from 1979 are available on Ellington Panorama at www.depanorama.net/dems

Duke Ellington Society of Sweden (DESS)

Words from the Chairman, Jan Falk, in its *Bulletin*: "The question we have to raise is if DESS Web site . . . shall be considered a blog. . . . it is not a blog."

The Duke Ellington Society (TDES, Inc.)

Richard Ehrenzeller has completed in the TDES newsletter Part 4 of his recommendations of CDs by Ellington's sidemen.

Duke Ellington Society, So. California Chapter

The Web site for the Duke Ellington Society, Southern California Chapter is "Under Construction."

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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