

Ellingtonia

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Ellington School Will Not Be Moved in “Foreseeable Future”

During mid-January various media reported that consideration was being given to moving the Duke Ellington School of the Arts from its building in the Georgetown section of Washington to Logan, a vacant former elementary school closer to the center of the city.

Reaction to the news was swift. Peggy Cooper Cafritz, a co-founder of the school, reportedly was “stunned,” asserting that “No one has spoken to me or to the chairman of the board.” In a follow-up story later in the week, the *Washington Post* reported that Michelle Rhee, chancellor of the DC Public Schools, is scheduled to meet with the school’s board and that she has asserted that “Ellington will stay in Georgetown for the foreseeable future.”

In another medium, the arts school’s board president Michaele Christian was quoted as saying in response to the initial reports, “Those who believe that Ellington can simply be moved to any other building do not understand the needs of a comprehensive arts high school,” and that “a facility as woefully inadequate as the suggested new site of Logan School would eviscerate one of the most outstanding educational institutions in the District.”

Should the Ellington School be moved, its 100-year-old facility would likely revert to its former function as a high school. According to the *Post*, the building’s use for a neighborhood high school is an idea that city councilman Jack Evans, who represents the ward, “strongly backs.”

In *The Hoya*, Micelle Reaux, president of the School Home Association of Duke Ellington, responded that “only 5 percent of Ward 2 residents are under the age of 18, mitigating the

Note:

Program Cancelled due to Blizzard Has Been Rescheduled for March 6

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

In March 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 March 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.

need for a neighborhood high school.”

Maintaining that the long-term solution is a new building, in the *Washington Post* Ms. Rhee is quoted, “I’m very clear that what the school needs is a great state-of-the-art facility.”

Although it is part of Washington’s public school system, the arts school is operated in partnership with the Kennedy Center and George Washington University.

A web site titled “DESA Will Not Be Moved” provides a means of petitioning for the school to remain in its present location. At the site one may sign the petition and may also contribute comments on the situation. The address is www.thepetition.com/1/DESAWillNotBeMoved.

A Review by Ben Pubols of

A Colored Life: The Herb Jeffries Story

DVD Produced by AMS Pictures, 2007.

Internet Link: <http://store.amspictures.com/acoloredlifetheherbjeffriesstory.aspx>

This is an outstanding DVD, belonging in the libraries of every Herb Jeffries, Duke Ellington or Cowboy movie fan. It is part of a series entitled "Black History Uncovered" and is subtitled "The Colorful Story of Hollywood's First Black Singing Cowboy." As this subtitle intimates, the emphasis is on the Bronze Buckaroo aspect of his life. Lasting for approximately one hour, the video covers Jeffries' life from his birth in 1913 through 2007 when the video was produced. Most of the narration is done by Jeffries himself. In addition to the "A Colored Life" feature, there are also two complete versions of *The Bronze Buckaroo*, one as originally produced, the other with his own voice-over commentary.

Jeffries' mother was Irish and his father Sicilian. [His paternal great-grandmother was Ethiopian, and she met his great grandfather when he was stationed there by the Italian government; hence the black ancestry.] We learn from Jeffries that as a child he fell in love with cowboy movies, his early heroes being Buck Jones and Tom Mix. Jeffries also learned early on that he loved jazz and enjoyed singing. However, in order to get his first job as a band vocalist, and because of his light complexion, he had to identify himself as "a Creole from New Orleans." Early band stints were with Erskine Tate and Earl Hines. There followed his career as the Bronze Buckaroo, appearing as good guy Bob Blake in four such films. Then, in 1939, he joined the Ellington aggregation, where his big hit, of course, was *Flamingo*, which sold 14 million copies; the recording required only one take. A brief excerpt of the *Flamingo* Soundie is included.

After several years in the military during World War II, he began a successful career as a single, including many appearances in Las Vegas, several recording sessions and appearances in a few further films, not as Bob Blake but in other roles. Along the way, he became an ordained minister, but performed only one wedding. He now lives happily with his fifth wife near Palm Desert, making occasional recordings and public appearances. Although not mentioned in the film, he attended the Ellington 2000 conference in Hollywood as well as several previous ones.

My only complaint about the video is that not enough attention is paid to his years and association with Duke Ellington. For those, one could turn to the Herb Jeffries 1989 oral history conducted by Patricia Willard and on file at the Smithsonian Institution's American History Museum Archives Center.

A Commentary by Theodore (Ted) Hudson on

The National Capital Code of Etiquette by Edward S. Green

Washington, DC: Austin Jenkins Company, Publisher, 1920

This book was published in an era of pervasive and degrading segregation of and discrimination against Negroes (or colored people, both prevailing acceptable terms at the time) in the United States, a rationale being that they were inherently inferior. To counter this and other stereotypical perceptions, an article of faith among Negroes was that "one must put one's best foot forward."

At the time Washington, DC was the center of Negro intellectual, economic, and cultural life in the United States; indeed, according to W.E.B. DuBois it was the "cultural Capital" of Negro America. Concurrently, a cultural nascence was occurring that involved good schools, the "right" churches, historical pageants, society balls, legitimate drama, visual and musical arts, and Negro-owned and operated businesses. (This was before the so-called Harlem Renaissance.)

Enter *The National Capital Code of Ethics*, "Dedicated to the Negro Race" pointedly displayed on its cover. Among the chapters are those on table manners, the art of conversation, periods of mourning, suggested menus, introducing friends or acquaintances, social calls, sample social letters. From today's vantage of time, the book seems quaintly picky, a tad pretentious, and more prescriptive than descriptive. Consider: "A man should partially unfold his napkin and place it over the left knee"; "... gentlemen when meeting a lady acquaintance should give her a courteous salute, consisting of a short bow accompanied by raising the hat about one foot from the head"; "a gentleman's calling card is considerably smaller than those used by the opposite sex, 1½ inches by 2½ inches is a good size"; and "Unless seven musicians are employed, a drum is not only superfluous, it is an abomination." Foibles aside, this book has a noble theme: Good manners "are one of the first absolutely essential qualifications for the perfect lady or gentleman." After all, civility and concern for the well-being of others are important in any age.

Would Duke Ellington have known of *The National Capital Code of Etiquette*? Probably, but not likely to have read it. When it was published, he was out of his teens and into young manhood. Surely though, he had been immersed in the ethos that encouraged "one to put one's best foot forward." He recalls one of his teachers insisting that good manners were among their first obligations "because as representatives of the Negro race we were to command respect for our people."

Something of this ethos was reflected in him and fellow Washington musicians. Some years ago Barry Ulanov wrote in his *Duke Ellington*: "The atmosphere was softly, insinuatingly, urban [and] imposed a certain dignity upon those colored youngsters which no other group of jazzmen ever possessed. Duke had it, of course, so had Otto Hardwick, the Miller brothers, Bill Escoffery, Claude Hopkins, Arthur Whetsol, Elmer

(Continued on page 3 under "Etiquette")

Ellington Festival Renamed DC Jazz Festival

The former Duke Ellington Jazz Festival has a new name. The event will now be known as the DC Jazz Festival and this year will highlight Chicago and its musical heritage. Preliminary announcements indicate that, as in previous years, the festival will take place at concert venues and clubs throughout the Washington, DC area. More information and updates may be accessed at the official Website: www.dejazzfest.org.

News of Clark Terry's Grammy Award Elicits Admiring Responses

In our last issue we reported the selection of Clark Terry for a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. Several of our readers sent us their reactions.

John Morton, author of *Backstory in Blue*, wrote, "It made me smile...and mumble a bit." Dr. Luvenia George, former director of the Smithsonian's Ellington Youth Project, said, "This is a great and greatly-needed honor for Clark."

Göran Wallén, our good friend and former president of the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden, wrote, "I am glad to have had him [booked him for appearances] twice in Stockholm, in 1994 and 2005. He is such a great man." And that WAMU-FM star and authority on what he calls "osolete music," Dick Spottswood, said, "Good for Clark, who should get a separate survival award as well."

Quotation of the Month

Playing a large, double bass drum kit [Ed] Shaughnessy dedicated his set to the man who pioneered the set up, the great and recently deceased Louie Bellson. . . [his] enthusiasm for the music and his affection for the lost comrade Bellson made his set a touching celebration of the music's immortality.

—International Review of Music re Shaughnessy's performance at the Playboy Jazz Festival, as quoted on the Official Louie Bellson Website, July 2009.

Etiquette (Continued from page 2)

Snowden, Rex Stewart, all the musicians who were born or bred in the capital, they had it, they have it. There was a Washington pattern; it involved a certain bearing, a respect for education, for the broad principles of the art of music, a desire for order, for design, in their profession."

We found scarcely anything about author Edward S. Greene. The book's introduction informs that he "has served the United States Government for eighteen years, is a college graduate and recognized as a man of letters and literary achievement"; he is not listed in the Union League Directory of the time (although Marion T. Clinkscales is); and a commercial description of the book calls him "an African-American diplomat." As to the Arthur Jenkins Company, it was likely a respected Negro enterprise, for it also published Bibles, "special books for the Colored Race," and works by people of some stature, among them intellectuals Kelly Miller and W.E.B. DuBois,

To get back to Edward K. Ellington, much about him may be inferred from an observation by Gordon Parks: "...he never grinned, he smiled; he never shuffled, he strode. It was always 'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,' never 'How y'all doing?'"

Our internet search turned up copies of this book available from several rare book companies for prices over \$400. Digitized copies by Microsoft are available online from the University of California Libraries.

Ellington and Haiti

The recent earthquake in Haiti has drawn attention to this little Caribbean country. In a worldwide sense, few know anything of its history. Duke Ellington, though, was well-informed about the African diaspora in the Americas. As he wrote, in the segregated schools of his native Washington [and by extension we might assume, generally in similar schools] they were taught "the true story" about their heritage within American history. "Negro history, he writes in *Music Is My Mistress*, "was crammed into the curriculum, so that we would know our people all the way back."

He knew, for instance, that free Negro volunteers from Haiti, then a French colony, fought on the side of the colonies in the Revolutionary War, by which what would be fledging America won its independence. He dedicated his "West Indian Dance," sometimes referred to as "The West Indian Influence," in *Black, Brown and Beige* "to the valorous deeds of the seven hundred free Haitians of the famed Fontages Legion who came to aid the Americans at the siege of Savannah."

He was not the only African American artist to celebrate Haiti. For example, short-time Ellington bassist Charles Mingus wrote "Haitian Fight Song," visual artist Jacob Lawrence painted a series on the slaves's revolution that led to their freedom, playwright Ntozake Shange named a main character in her "for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enough" Toussaint, after the slave who successfully led the revolt.

Another Source for Songs on CDs

Most Ellington enthusiasts who use the internet are aware of the lists of tunes on such references as Peter MacHare's *Ellington Panorama*. Another useful database is the one by Girvan, Andresen and Palmquist: "Ellington Recordings on Compact Disc: Cross-Referenced Song Lists," sorted by CD name, DESOR number, session date, and CD brand.

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

About Our Members

Brian Gilmore

Brian Gilmore has been writing reviews for *JazzTimes*. His recent one of Ralph Carney's *Serious Jass Project* will be of special interest to our readers, for this release contains "Black Beauty," "Rextatious," and "Jeep's Blues," that according to Brian "among an abundance of good music . . . carry the day."

He continues to write poetry, contribute to publications and engage in literary enterprises.

Theodore (Ted) Hudson

At historic Ebenezer United Methodist Church on Washington's Capitol Hill during Black History Month, Ted Hudson will provide an introductory talk and running commentary for a program of music and dance entitled "Duke Ellington's Sacred Music."

Ronnie Wells

A tribute to the late Ronnie Wells, co-founder of the original East Coast Jazz Festival, will take place at 8:30 pm on Friday, 19 February at the replacement Mid Atlantic Jazz Festival.

Hugh (Rusty) Hassan

Rusty Hassan is scheduled to interview pianist Mulgrew Miller at 9:00 pm on Friday, 19 February at the Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival.

In this space we usually have a report of our Society's last meeting. In this issue there is none, as the February 6 meeting had to be cancelled because of the record-breaking Blizzard of 2010.



A Smile, a Chuckle, a Grin, a Guffaw...

Every now and then we offer (inflict on you?) an anecdote or some bit of humor—and on rare occasions, wit—that we come across. Here are a few more, several of which have been adapted:

♩ Question: Why do bagpipers walk while playing?
Answer: They are trying to get away from the sound.

♩ Things you won't hear on a band bus:
"Our leader nailed every tempo perfectly again tonight!"

"Can you believe all the money we're getting!"
"So, are you more heavily invested in balanced or growth funds?"

♩ In the program notes for a performance by a trio consisting of two guitarists and a drummer, the reader is informed that "Our specialty is recreating the big-band sounds of the 1930s and 1940s."

♩ The leader called for "C Jam Blues" and the pianist shouted back, "What key?"

Documentary Film on Babs Released

Now available *Alice Babs—Swing It*, a DVD by Vax Records, tells about the life and times of one of the best known Ellington vocalists is now available. A publicity release states that in the film she discusses her life and career and that it contains clips from movies and performances. Prominent on a photograph of her and Duke Ellington is a quotation by him, "Alice Babs is probably the most unique artist I know."

We plan to include a review of it soon.

Ellington Caricature Follow-up

Our "Who's the Creator?" article in our last issue about the identity of the artist who drew the graphic of Ellington used in several places, including the *A Duke Ellington Panorama* LP, was misleading. The article suggested that the matter had not been settled.

To the contrary, there is evidence that the graphic was created by Boy Ten Hover, a Dutchman, c. 1940. It appears in *Boy ten Hove's Caricatures: Drawings of Jazz Musicians 1935-1940*, edited by Ate van Delden.

Further, the caricature was not credited to José Covarrubias on the souvenir program for the original *Jump for Joy* show. Such a credit did appear in a subsequent Smithsonian Institution's *Jump for Joy* liner-note booklet, but was not supplied by Patricia Willard, who wrote the text for it.

Are Your

Dues Due?

Please 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 have not already paid for 2010, please get your dues in right away.

Thank you.

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