

# Ellingtonia

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## Joya Sherrill:

### "I Never Really Left the Band"

Joya Sherrill, born in Bayonne, NJ in 1927, died in Great Neck, NY on 28 June 2010. Media reports indicated that she had leukemia.

The story goes that when she was a teenager, a friend of her father arranged for Joya to be introduced to Duke Ellington. When they met she sang lyrics she had written for "Take the 'A' Train," accompanied by its composer Billy Strayhorn, who happened to be present. Duke asked her to sing several other songs and was so impressed by her voice, especially her diction and articulation, that he asked her to keep in touch.

When she finished high school, he invited her to join the band. Because of her age, Joya's family permitted her acceptance of the job provided that her mother travel with her.

She sang with the band briefly in 1942, attended Wilberforce University for a while, and joined again in 1944 to remain until 1946. Her first hit was "I'm Beginning to See the Light," and she is also remembered especially for "The Blues" from *Black, Brown and Beige*, and "Kissing Bug." It was also during part of this span that she was one of a threesome with Marie Ellington and Kay Davis. She returned to sing with Ellington from time to time thereafter, notably for the 1959 *A Drum Is a Woman* and 1963 *My People*.

A New York *Times* obituary quoted Joya Sherrill as saying in 1979, "I never really left the band. Duke would call me for jobs once a year at least."

Ms. Sherrill sang briefly with the Benny Goodman orchestra during its 1962 Soviet Union tour. During 1970-72 she had a children's television show, "Time for Joya," that morphed into one with more educational content called "Joya's Fun School."

Her husband, Richard Guilmenot, died in 1989. Among survivors are a son, Richard Guilmenot; a daughter, Alice Guilmenot LeNoir; and two grandchildren. We extend to them and other loved ones our sincere condolences.

## October Program: Video Performances Of Ellington and Strayhorn Compositions

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

The wondrous body of compositions left behind by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn will be the subject of our October presentation. Ted Shell will give us the treat of videos of many different artists performing the music of Ellington and Strayhorn.

The event will be at our usual meeting place: **Grace Lutheran Church, 4300 16th Street, NW between Varnum and Webster Streets in Washington, DC at 7 pm on Saturday, October 2, 2010.**

Join us as we open a new season with an enjoyable video program.

## Cohen's Book Earns Praise Of Culture and Arts Media Critics

*Duke Ellington's America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) by our member Harvey G. Cohen was the cover story of a recent *New York Times Literary Supplement* and is the key referent for an extended essay, "Black, Brown, and Beige: Duke Ellington's Music and Race in America" by Claudia Roth Pierpont in the 17 May 2010 *The New Yorker*.

Inasmuch as Cohen teaches at King's College, London, the book has attracted attention in Europe. The London *Independent* and *Metro International* (Sweden and Denmark) have reviewed it. A program at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival centered on it, he has guested on several BBC broadcasts, and literary web sites have focused on him and his book.

It has generated favorable comments by major print media, for example: "... an important work and one that Ellington scholarship will benefit from and draw on for new debates." – *Times Higher Education*; Cohen is "as much a historian of business as of music . . ." – *Literary Review*; and "Cohen offers a fascinating, exhaustively researched social history

– *Continued on page 3 under Duke Ellington's America*

**Queenie Pie** (Longhorn Music LHM2010003)

Reviewed by Peter MacHare

Many unusual and intriguing characters inhabit the world of Duke Ellington. Most of his musicians, of course, were characters; stories of their antics abound. But on the fringes of this world are characters so strange they seem to slip into and out of existence, mere mists on the wings of time—characters like the handsome traffic cop, the stalking monster, a fearsome night creature, or a bird mocking the sunset. Queenie Pie is one of these characters. Duke Ellington was, in fact, still imagining Queenie Pie at the time of his death. Maybe you have not yet met her, but thanks to the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas at Austin, you may now spend an evening enjoying her company in your own living room.

Perhaps you wonder “What is Queenie Pie?” Well, as with all that is Ellington, she is many things. First, Queenie Pie is an honorary degree given to a very successful beautician. This degree is so desirable that the recipient herself becomes known as Queenie Pie. *Queenie Pie* is an opera written by Duke Ellington, but left unfinished upon his death. Lastly, *Queenie Pie* is a new CD issued by the University of Texas at Austin.

John Franceschina’s fine book *Duke Ellington’s Music for the Theatre* traces the origins of *Queenie Pie* back to the 1930s and Ellington’s desire to write a musical about the famous Madame C. J. Walker who made a fortune selling hair straightener. This idea progressed only slowly in the ensuing decades, but in 1970 the TV station WNET commissioned Ellington to finish the work. What had been done by the time of his death became a bone of contention between Mercer Ellington and Betty McGettigan, who worked with Duke on some of the lyrics. By 1986, matters settled enough for a production of it, first in Philadelphia and then at the Kennedy Center.

The CD of *Queenie Pie* is a delightful romp. The University of Texas Jazz Orchestra and the University Concert Choir are as fine a university group as I have heard. The band swings throughout; harmonies and rhythm are executed with aplomb. The baritone sax and clarinet especially catch your attention. Carmen Bradford ([carmenbradford.com](http://carmenbradford.com)), who sings the role of Queenie Pie, is the perfect big name talent to front this excellent production. While you will certainly hear Ellington compositions unique to *Queenie Pie*, the music is not entirely new; you will be pleased to hear familiar Ellington melodies woven into a new context. If a Harlem beautician and her friends Café Olay, Hold Fay, and Lil’ Daddy don’t sound like pleasant company for an evening, well, we beg to disagree.

**Duke Ellington Is Alive, Laurent Mignard Duke Orchestra** (Juste un Trace AMOC305369175646)

Reviewed by Theodore (Ted) Hudson

The Duke Orchestra was founded in 2003 by highly respected French composer/arranger/conductor Laurent Mignard. This CD, recorded live in concert in 2009, demonstrates that this aggregation has earned a reputation as an authentic Ellington *repertory* orchestra. The arrangements are remarkably close to the originals, and the ensemble passages, technically and nuanced, are remarkably like the originals. Wisely and respectfully, the instrumental soloists do not, however, attempt to replicate Ben or Cootie or Tricky Sam or any of the other unique, one-of-a-kind musical personalities on the original recordings, but assuredly they capture the spirit as they “play themselves.”

The selections are rich in intriguing music, from the opening “Ko Ko” with its undulating and cascading passages to the closing comfortably fresh yet familiar “A-Train.” Incidentally about the latter, if you like Ray Nance’s and Clark Terry’s vocalizing, you will enjoy Patrick Bacqueville’s scat/mumbling, and if you like “In Triplicate” you will get a kick out of tenors Nicholas Montier and Christophe Allemand’s rousing up-tempo close-out.

While all the renditions deserve praise, we were particularly drawn to two extended pieces. “Diminuendo and Crescendo” is a fascinating piece on its own without an ear-catching so-called wailing interlude, as evidenced here by tastefully delivered lessening and increasing dynamics, which is not to say that Nicholas Mantier cannot play an interesting sustained solo of his own between the two. A 12-minute “Ad Lib on Nippon” presents a wonderful interplay of piano, bass, and clarinet, dauntless ensemble bravado, and a truly splendid clarinet obligato/solo by Aurelie Tropez.

There is plenty more on *Duke Ellington Is Alive*: fine muted trumpet and trombone and mellow clarinet on “Black and Tan Fantasy”; “Kinda Dukish” with pianist Philippe Milanta that segues into “Rockin’ Rhythm” and ends with trumpeter Jean-Louis Damant up in Cat territory; a Phillippe Chagne baritone concerto “Sophisticated Lady”; Shakespeare-inspired “Madness in Great Ones and “Half the Fun”; the serene beauty (or is it melancholy) engagingly effected “Isfahan” by altoist Didier Desbois; the inherent lyricism of “The Eighth Veil” explored by trumpeter Franck Delpeut; and a romping “It Don’t Mean a Thing,” this, too, featuring vocalizing by Bacqueville.

We always feel a tinge of sadness for people who say they never got the chance to see Duke Ellington and his band in person. With this in mind, we say “amen” to the insightful words of Sjef Hoefsmit in *DEMS Bulletin 09/2-15*: “I never dreamed that it would be possible to come that close to the original performances. If you want to hear Ellington live, go to Paris. If you do not believe me, try to find a copy of this marvelous CD.”

*Ed Note: We thank our member Elinor Eugene for translating for us information in French that accompanied our copy of Duke Ellington Is Alive.*

## Short Sheets . . .

### ♪ New Strayhorn Tribute CD Released ♪

During the spring *The Strayhorn Project* by Don Braden and Mark Rapp, produced by Premium Music Solutions, debuted as number 20 and rose to number 4 on JazzWeek's Jazz Album Chart. Look for a review of it in our next issue.

### ♪ Roi Ottley Remembered ♪

In the Fall 2009 issue of *American Legacy*, an article entitled "The Famous Forgotten" is about Roi Ottley, author of the book *New World A-Coming*, about which Duke wrote a piano concerto with the same name.

### ♪ Duke Guitarist To Be on Walk of Fame ♪

At the fourth annual Gennett Records Walk of Fame Music Festival in Richmond, Indiana in September, early Ellington guitarist Lonnie Johnson will be inducted by the Starr-Gennett Foundation. The Walk is in that city's Gorge Park on the Whitewater River. Gennett is noted for very early recording of blues and jazz. Incidentally, it is worth noting that a Starr Gennett Foundation web site says that Gennett "launched" Duke's career.

### ♪ Hodges Article Is Cover Story ♪

A biographical and discographical article by John Tumpak entitled "Johnny Hodges: Sensuous Musical Beauty" appeared in the May (Issue No. 272) *Jazz Scene*, published in Los Angeles. (Copies of the issue may be obtained for \$2.50 by calling 818-293-0584.)

### ♪ Sophisticated Ladies Breaks Record ♪

*Sophisticated Ladies*, starring Maurice Hines, broke the Arena Stage's 60-year box office record during its mid-April to late-June 2010 run at Washington, DC's Lincoln Theatre. The production, which had to be extended two times, was the highest grossing show in Arena's history.

Arena has been using the Lincoln while its home structure is undergoing an estimated \$125-million remodeling.

## Duke Ellington's America (Continued from page 1)

Duke Ellington's world. Highly recommended for general readers and jazz aficionados alike" — *Library Journal*.

An internet posting reported that Kenny Burrell, director of jazz studies at UCLA, will assign the book in his classes during the forthcoming academic year.

Some live and archived broadcasts featuring Cohen can be accessed online, including NPR's "Metro Connection" at [resonancefm.com/listen](http://resonancefm.com/listen); U. Of California Davis' KDVS "New Day Jazz" at [kdvs.org/show-info/1355?date=2010-07-18](http://kdvs.org/show-info/1355?date=2010-07-18); and WNYC-FM's "Soundcheck" at [radioopensource.org/duke-ellingtons-america-musical-genius-and-then-some](http://radioopensource.org/duke-ellingtons-america-musical-genius-and-then-some).

Here's hoping that book signings and other personal appearances by Dr. Harvey G. Cohen will take place in the States, including here at "home."

## New Book by Claire Gordon Available

Claire Gordon, well known to Ellington enthusiasts and at one time Duke Ellington's band secretary, has written a novel entitled *The Color of Music*.

The plot involves mixed-race identical twins separated at a very early age, one raised black and the other white. Ms. Gordon writes, "Sprinkled in where it fits, are the names of many jazz figures who could have been there or done what it says." The apt title for the book was suggested by John Hasse.

The print version of the book should be ready in early September. It is already on Kindle (and as we go to press, possibly available on iPad) and may be accessed via her web site, [clairegordonjazz.com](http://clairegordonjazz.com). Also, two sample chapters may be downloaded free at the web site.

Her *My Unforgettable Jazz Friends* was published in 2008; before that she edited Rex Stewart's *Boy Meets Horn* and co-wrote *Jazz Survival* with Marshall Royal.

Congratulations, Claire!

## Finding Ellington "Down Under"

by Lois Moody

Just a few words to let you know that jazz is alive and well in Australia and New Zealand. Traditional Orleans-rooted music and the blues in many forms are most in evidence, but there's more.

On a recent extended holiday, mainly in New Zealand, I was delighted to hear Ellington interpreted by musicians from many generations. My arrival in Tauranga on New Zealand's North Island coincided with the annual National Jazz Festival's opening day, so there was no shortage of music for the next five days on the streets, in clubs and on concert stages.

Admirers of early Ellington would have particularly enjoyed the evening with Brett's New Internationals, a 16-piece unit celebrating the music of the 1920s. In sound, repertoire, dress and presentation, the pre-swing era was enthusiastically re-created.

There were moments for Fletcher Henderson, Jean Goldkette, Paul Whiteman, Leo Reisman, Ben Bernie, Jack Hylton and others, but only Ellington was featured twice. "The Mooche" was an early program choice and the night finished with a spirited "Jungle Nights in Harlem." It was like being in a time warp, but a very pleasant one.

If business or pleasure should draw you "down under," you might consider an evening at the Ellington Jazz Club in Perth, western New Zealand, or at Satchmo's in Lyttelton, just outside Christchurch on New Zealand's South Island.

*Ed. Note: We thank our peripatetic Canadian member Lois Moody for this report. She included the following contact data for both places "so you can go prepared": Ellington Jazz Club, 191 Beauford St. Perth, [www.ellingtonjazz.com.au](http://www.ellingtonjazz.com.au); and Satchmo Bar & Café, 8 London Street, Lyttelton, phone 328-8348*

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

### About Our Members

#### Dick Spottswood

Congratulations are in order for Dick Spottswood, whose "The Dick Spottswood Show" (aka the "Obsolete Music Hour") on WAMU is being celebrated for 25 years on air. The show is now heard on the station's 24/7 online bluegrass station, "Bluegrass Country." An aside: See if you can spot Dick in a Duncan Scheidt 1963 group photo of "established big-shots of collecting and discography" in the June *IAJRC Journal*, p. 13.

#### Ben Pubols

Ben Pubols will be offering two OASIS sessions in Portland, OR this fall on Duke and two on "The Golden Age of Pop Singing," from Louis and Billie to Sarah Vaughan and Frank Sinatra.

#### Patricia Willard

As part of its 2010 Jazz Series the Felix Grant Archives at the University of the District of Columbia will present Patricia Willard on Wednesday, 17 November. She will speak on the connections between Duke Ellington and Dance.

All programs in the series are free and open to the public. They are held at 7 pm in the University's Recital Building on the Van Ness Campus. For more information about Jazz Series programs and other projects connected with or sponsored by the Grant Archives, call 202-274-5265.

#### Jack Ladd Carr

Just after finishing our June issue we learned that long-time member Jack Ladd Carr had died in January.

He was the first director of planning for the city of Annapolis and had much to do with the preservation of properties in this richly historic town on the Chesapeake Bay. Later he was senior manager of state-wide historical, cultural, and art programs. All along and in retirement, Jack Ladd Carr was active in the town's cultural affairs, including service on the board of the Annapolis Symphony.

We extend sincere sympathy to his widow, Lois Carr, a professional historian, and to others who knew Jack.

#### Anthony Brown

Anthony Brown and his Asian American Orchestra were selected to perform the 33rd Coltrane Memorial Concert, featuring a composition entitled "India & Africa: A Tribute to John Coltrane," at Northeastern University in Boston in mid-September. The schedule for the month-long commemorative events includes a private "Meet the Composer" gathering with maestro Brown at the University's Asian-American Center.

Also, Dr. Brown is a contributor to the recently released book *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music*, edited by Leonard Brown and published by Oxford University Press.

## June Meeting: Food and Music Both Well Served and Well Received

by Art Luby, Secretary

The Society's final meeting of the spring, on June 5, was an informal, but well attended affair which featured a pot luck approach to both food and music.

The members were generous in both matters, and a highly eclectic selection of Ellington music was delivered featuring performers as diverse as Ben Webster, Alice Babs, and the Detroit Symphony.

It was a warm send off to the summer recess and everyone looked to the resumption of musical activity in October.

## Howard Theatre's 100th Anniversary Observed, Projected Date for Reopening Is November 2011

A celebration at the Historical Society of Washington on 22 August, marked 100 years to the day that the Howard Theatre opened. At the event, the Ellis Development Group announced that, after several setbacks, plans are in place to complete renovation of the historic venue in a little over a year. The project will not be a restoration of the original, but a renovation for "flexible space" to accommodate a museum, supper club, banquets, entertainment, and community affairs.

In its early years, advertised as the "largest Colored theater in the World," it featured vaudeville, drama (for a while home for the Lafayette Players and Howard University Players), musicals, and lectures. During the Great Depression, it served as a church. It reopened in 1931 as a movie and live entertainment venue, with Duke Ellington playing on its grand reopening night. During the 1960s attendance declined, and it was closed in 1970, opening sporadically thereafter for special occasions.

The Ellis Development Group has indicated the new Howard will be operated by Blue Note Entertainment, owners of New York's Blue Note Jazz Club.

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Send your check payable to  
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PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA  
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.

### THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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