

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Founder and Editor

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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/

Mercedes Ellington Day Declared In Recognition of Her Leadership

In October for the 37th Annual 52nd Street Americana Jazz Festival, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer proclaimed Mercedes Ellington Day in recognition of her cultural and civic activities, especially her leadership of the Duke Ellington Center for the Arts.

For this special occasion a septet from the Center's Big Band performed, along with vocalists, two ballroom dancers, and a tap dancer.

Ms. Ellington founded this organization in 2003 and serves as its president. It keeps in mind that Duke Ellington traveled more miles and played more destinations than any other bandleader of his time and "that he was determined to inspire harmony worldwide." Accordingly, the Center focuses on human similarities through music and other arts, its mission being to "support the inspiration of all people to become Ambassadors for Peace and Harmony through the magic of the Arts—one note at a time." An "arm" of the Center is the Duke Ellington Arts for Peace Foundation.

During December the Center sponsored "Ring Dem Bells" holiday events in New York City, an annual concert, and an after-party. In a Veterans Day Tribute on November 11, it encouraged members and friends to honor veterans. Last April, Duke's birthmonth, the Center celebrated the achievements of choreographer and performer Donald Sadler by naming him the recipient of the First Annual Duke Ellington "Beyond Category" Award.

Ed. Note: Discover Ellington at the Strathmore and the Mid-Atlantic Jazz Fest at the Hilton Hotel in Rockville, MD occur just as this current, March, issue is being distributed. We intend to include news about these events in the following issue, to be distributed in mid-March.

Shorty Baker: "No Bad Notes at All"

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

Our March program will be an in-depth examination of trumpeter Shorty Baker presented by our very knowledgeable member Ed Morris.

In *Music Is My Mistress*, Duke Ellington said, "Harold 'Shorty' Baker came into the band in 1942 to give us our first trumpet section of four. He joined Ray Nance, Rex Stewart, and Wallace Jones. . . . He ad-libbed hot or blues as though he were recalling some beautiful dreams of St. Louis, his home and birthplace, and he had no bad notes at all."

The program will take place at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets NW, Washington, DC** at 7 pm on **Saturday, 3 March**. Come learn more about the fabulous musician who was Shorty Baker.

Ellington 2012 Notes

♪ It's a GO! Antony Pepper, principal organizer of the 21st Duke Ellington Study Group Conference, writes that there are now enough early registrants to assure that the event will go on as planned, with a full program and concerts on two nights.

♪ Among scheduled Study Group day sessions are: Luca Bragalini (Italy), "Three Black Kings (and a Duke) in a Symphonic Celebration"; Darius Brubeck USA & London, "Dave and the Duke"; Matthew Cooper (Oregon), "Duke Ellington: The Pianist"; Bill Saxonis (New York State), "Reflections on Duke and His World: The Oral History Project"; Louis Tavecchio (The Netherlands), "Duke in Toronto"; and Ken Steiner (Washington State), "Wild Throng Dances Madly in Cellar Club II."

♪ Among scheduled evening events are: Wednesday, reception and buffet supper followed by six personal takes on the Ducal Decades; Thursday, Guildhall Jazz Band, *A Drum Is a Woman*; Sunday, Claude Bolling Trio preceded by Conference Banquet.

♪ For more details, use the contact information in the box on page 3.

Mexican Blues, Dreamy Blues, Mood Indigo?

by Don Rouse

The original title of the piece on early labels was “Mood Indigo,” subtitled in parenthesis, “Dreamy Blues.” It has two 16-bar strains. Almost certainly Ellington worked out the first strain, consisting of the sustained organ chords. It's entirely plausible that he, as reported, sketched that out in a taxi ride or while waiting for his mother to cook dinner, two versions of the same story. The voicing of that strain has been widely written about, because he inverted the conventional voicing, while at the same time giving the lead to the clarinet and harmony parts to the trumpet and trombone.

Doesn't seem to be any question that Bigard brought the second strain to the band. “Dreamy Blues” was published in New Orleans by someone else, not Bigard, nor Lorenzo Tio, who reportedly wrote it. I haven't yet seen the music, which is on file at the Hogan Jazz Archives, Tulane University, but those who have seen it say it's the same melody. All of that opens up more questions than it answers. Of course, Bigard's personal approach has to have added a hell of a lot.

For your information, here's some interesting internet discussion on the subject:

<http://www.jazzstandards.com/compositions-1moodindigo.htm>

In 1930 Bigard approached Duke with a composition that he claimed as his own. In his autobiography *With Louis and the Duke: The Biography of a Jazz Clarinetist*, Barney partially sets the record straight: “My old teacher Lorenzo Tio (Jr.), had come to New York . . . with some tunes and parts of tunes he had written. There was one I liked, and I asked him if I could borrow it. He was trying to interest me in recording one or two. . . . I took it home and kept fooling around with it. I changed some of it around . . . and got something together that mostly was my own but partly Tio.”

Truth was, however, that the tune was the theme song of Piron's New Orleans Orchestra of which Tio was a member. Its title was “Dreamy Blues” (early recordings by Duke's band show both “Mood Indigo” and “Dreamy Blues” as the title). Although Bigard claimed that most of the piece was his, we can now never be sure since Tio never copyrighted his original number. Tio's daughter claimed, “We had this business arrangement with Duke Ellington.”

[Http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/Mood_Indigo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/Mood_Indigo)

The main theme was provided by Bigard who learned it in New Orleans, Louisiana from his clarinet teacher Lorenza who called it “Mexican Blues.” . . .

#

Thanks, Don!

At our February meeting Don Rouse presented as his “member's choice” the 1930 Victor version of “Mood Indigo” by the Ellington orchestra. This was the first year of recordings of the piece. In his introduction to his selection Don told something of the history of the composition—theme and secondary theme—and of the various titles with which it has been associated. Peter MacHare, our president, thought it would be good to have this summary information available in print along with leads for further investigation, and Don kindly obliged with the above commentary.



Short Sheets . . .

♪ Sadly, Melody Does Not Linger On ♪

In our January issue, we noted that Joe's Record Paradise had moved. Now another record store also well known to mid-Atlantic patrons, Melody Record Shop in the Dupont Circle area of Washington, DC, is *closing*. A *Washington Post* article notes that "Melody traffics in the art of browse . . ." but that its demise is a product of the times.

♪ We Located Reuben Jackson ♪

Reuben Jackson, among other things an occasional critic-reviewer for our publication and award-winning poet, seemed to have disappeared after taking advantage of an "early out" retirement, after 20 years, from the Smithsonian's Archives Center (repository of the Ellington Collection).

Well, he is happily teaching English in a secondary school in Vermont. It has been 33 years since he graduated from Goddard College in central Vermont.

♪ Ellington Plaza Phase Moving Apace ♪

Washington's T Street, between 7th Street and Florida Avenue, NW has been closed to traffic so that work may proceed on Ellington Plaza, a part of the Howard Theatre renovation project. The closing will also involve Wiltberger Street and an alley, both of which run between S and T Streets

As planned, this entertainment zone will include a stature of Ellington, outdoor restaurants, new trees, preserved building facades, pedestrian amenities, public art, etc. Plans for the Dunbar Theatre include renovation for ground floor retail and small entertainment.

♪ "Soul Train" and "Teenarama" ♪

Wording in some media obituaries about Don Cornelius suggest or imply that his "Soul Train" in 1969 was the first such televised program. Actually, "Teenarama" dance party had been aired over WOOK TV in Washington beginning in 1963. However, "Soul Train" was the first of its kind to be syndicated and telecast nationally; "Teenarama" remained local.

Our Joseph "Tex" Gathings was the originator and first producer and director of "Teenarama." Incidentally, he may be seen in the documentary *Dance Party: The Teenarama Story*, excerpts of which may be viewed on YouTube.

Post Publishes Feature Articles re Duke

In its Arts section on Sunday, 5 February, the *Washington Post* printed a wonderful Ellington-focused, full-page plus spread titled "Take the A Train to U Street." The article provides significant information and lore, including historical sites, performance venues, a map and related photographs, the Ellington family's various residences over the years, and ephemera.

Upcoming Releases

Juste une Trace has set 27 February for the premiere of a new CD, *Duke Ellington: French Touch* by the Laurent Mignard Duke Orchestra.

What promises to be an important book, *The Ellington Century* by David Schiff published by the University of California Press, will be available in February. A media advertisement says that the book "demonstrates how Duke Ellington's music is as vital to musical modernism as anything by Stravinsky, more influential than anything by Schoenberg, and has had a lasting impact on jazz and pop that reaches from Gershwin to contemporary R&B."

Quotation of the Month

Ellington's music is not just endlessly rearrangeable standard melodies like "Sophisticated Ladies" or "Solitude." Pieces like "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo" (1926, "The Work Song" from Black, Brown and Beige (1943), and "The Little Purple Flower" (1967) are difficult to imagine divorced from Ellington's arrangements and orchestrations. The melodies, as lovely s they may be, are not the main attraction. Do we listen to Debussy just for the pretty tunes?

— from Matthew Asprey, "Duke Ellington and Paris Part 2: An Interview with Laurent Mignard." PopMatters at www.popmatters.com

Did You Know?

The upcoming 21st International Duke Ellington Conference brings to mind that our late Jack Towers, one of the 11 founders of the Duke Ellington Study Group, was key to our Society's 1983 hosting of the First International Duke Ellington Study Group Conference. There have now been 20 such conferences, 10 in the States and the other 10 in other countries, the most recent having taken place in London on 2008. Of these 20, our Society sponsored three: 1983, 1988, and 1999, the latter a centennial celebration of Duke's birth.

ELLINGTON 2012

23-27 May 2012 - Woking, England

Four Full Days and an Introductory Get-Together

For Full Conference Details Go To
www.Ellington2012.org

Other Contact Information:

Postal address: Ellington 2012, 2 Julian Close,
Woking, GU21 3HED, United Kingdom

E-mail address: E12@Ellington2012.org

Registration forms are available online at
www.ellington2012.org/E12-Oct-Reg-Form.pdf

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

Sjef Hoefsmit and Robert Baird

We wish speedy and complete recoveries for Sjef Hoefsmit in Belgium and Robert Baird in Washington, DC, both of whom have had successful surgeries.

Harvey Cohen

Our man Harvey Cohen, author of *Duke Ellington's America*, is on sabbatical from King's College London from January to August to work on his next book.

Ken Steiner

Kudos for Ken Steiner's notes for Volume 16 of *The Treasury Shows* continue. In his review in the latest *Blue Light*, Roger Boyes states that "...Steiner's notes, thoroughly researched and annotated, offer first-class background information and perceptive comments on the music."

Art Luby

Kudos to Art Luby! His play *Paul Gonsalves on the Road* has been selected for this year's Washington Fringe Festival, to be held in July. Capital Fringe is a non-profit organization that seeks to infuse "energy into performing arts through its annual festival and year-round Training Factory."

Esther Williams and Toni Robinson

Esther Williams and Toni Robinson (one of our new members) are two of the three Sisters in Song who will be the featured artists at a Jazz Café Brunch at Peoples Congregational Church in Washington, DC on Saturday, 17 March. They will be supported by the Wes Biles Quintet.

Smile!

© The piano player went into a bar but kept fidgeting so much that he could not enjoy his drink. Finally the bartender asked him what was wrong. The piano player replied, "My key, my key! I can't seem to find my key!"

© Q. How can you tell there's a drummer at your door? A. The knocking gets faster and faster.

© Q. What do you get when you play New Age music backwards? A. New Age music.

[Hey, that wasn't a smile; it was a pained grimace.]

Gonsalves with Tommy Dorsey Band?

Some years ago we heard a rumor that for a while Paul Gonsalves had left Duke Ellington and joined the Tommy Dorsey orchestra. Recently we have come across a translated statement in the Multilingual Archives internet site that states that he was a member of the Dorsey band for a short time in 1953 and then returned to Duke.

Can anyone tell us more about this matter? Is it true? And if so, are there recordings available of him with Dorsey? Why did he leave Duke? Dorsey?

Lesser Known, Well Regarded Performances at February Meeting

by Art Luby, Secretary

The February meeting of our Society was a musical pot luck event in which the theme was Ellington performances that inspired the member's lifelong commitment to the music. As is normal the selections, by and large, came from off the beaten track. No one latched on to "Take the A Train" or "Satin Doll," but rather the focus was on lesser known, but well regarded performances such as Ellington's *Piano Reflections*. To be sure, in dealing with inspiration it is hard to avoid the original recording of "Mood Indigo" with Barney Bigard's subtle and sinuous clarinet line growing out of the master's statement of theme, and of Ella Fitzgerald's unsurpassed performance of Strayhorn's "Something to Live For" driven by the orchestra at its sensuous best.

Like Peter MacHare, my first real experience with Ellington was the *70th Birthday Concert*, which was a surprisingly effective performance, notwithstanding that the band was well past its prime. Peter chose to play the lovely "4:30 Blues" by Russell Procope along with Cat Anderson's signature number "El Gato." Both remained as impressive as ever some 42 years after the original performance in Manchester, England, but had I beat Peter to the punch I might have chosen three great Hodges solos "Black Butterfly," "Things Ain't," and "Laying on Mellow" performed barely a year before his passing.

The evening ended with the full performance of *The Liberian Suite*, and the various dances performed by the orchestra near the peak of its talent more than justified Patricia Willard's judgment that this was one of Duke's truly great extended works.

Are Your Dues Due?

Please check your membership expiration date on the upper right of your address label. Remember that membership is by the calendar year. Thank you.

To Join or To Renew

Send Your Payment to:

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA`

Our dues remain a bargain:

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First-Time-Ever Member, Just \$20

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