

# Ellingtonia

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*The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.*

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William McFadden, Editor

Theodore R. Hudson, Founder and Editor Emeritus

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Web Site: [depanorama.net/desociety/](http://depanorama.net/desociety/)

E-mail: [Ellingtonia@comcast.net](mailto:Ellingtonia@comcast.net)



Courtesy Carlyle Productions



DownBeat

*Happy Birthday,  
dear Edward.  
Happy Birthday to you!  
April Twenty-Ninth*

**114 Years Old and Still Going Strong . . .**

## How to Celebrate Duke's Birthday

On Saturday April 27, from 8:00 AM to Noon, Ellington specialist **Bill Saxonis** will be a guest on Bill McCann's "Saturday Morning Edition of Jazz" on WCDB 90.9-FM in Albany, NY and worldwide at: [www.wcdbfm.com](http://www.wcdbfm.com).

The show will celebrate Duke Ellington's birthday with an eclectic collection of music, interviews, and conversation about his art, life, and times.

This year's program will feature an interview with a 90-year-old Dave Brubeck reflecting on his long friendship with Duke, a conversation with David Schiff, author of the widely acclaimed *The Ellington Century* and tributes to Ellington scholars Annie Kuebler and Sjef Hoefsmit.

For the past thirteen years, listeners worldwide have made this program an annual tradition, with glowing reviews.

Monday, April 29 is, of course, the actual birth anniversary. The West End Friends and the Advisory Neighborhood 2A Commission are planning the fourth annual Duke Ellington Concert at **Duke Ellington Park**, at the end of **Ward Place** (where Duke was born) in a triangle bordered by **New Hampshire Ave., M and 22nd Sts. NW**. The festivities are scheduled to begin around **4:00 PM**.

Also on April 29 at 8:00 PM, the **Calvin Jones BIG BAND Jazz Festival** celebrates twenty-seven years of world-class jazz at the **University of the District of Columbia**. Once again the powerhouse jazz ensembles from the University of the District of Columbia, Howard University, and the University of Maryland cap off Jazz Appreciation Month. Details on this and all **JAZZ Alive at UDC** April concerts at <http://lrdudc.wrlc.org/jazz/festival>.

## A Look at Duke Ellington's Washington

What could be more appropriate for our April meeting than a viewing of the acclaimed PBS documentary which originally aired in 2000? Ted Hudson will present excerpts from the video and lead an open discussion. Interspersed will be recordings of the birthday honoree taken from live appearances in the DC area.

We thank **Hedrick Smith**, Pulitzer Prize-winning correspondent and reporter on this program for donating a CD of *Duke Ellington's Washington* to our Society.

The meeting will take place as always at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW** in our Hero's home town of **Washington, DC on Saturday, 6 April**

**2013**. The Church has requested that we adjust our **meeting start time to 7:30 PM**.

Our **pot luck** method for small plate treats is working well, so please remember to bring along something to share. But if you're without a dish, come anyway; we love you madly! Management will provide soft drinks and ice.

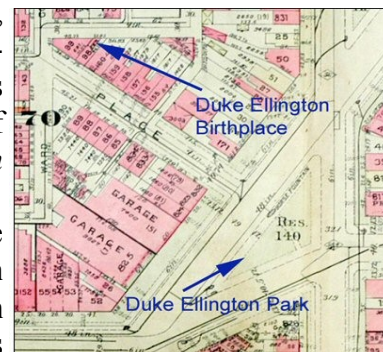
**REMEMBER: New meeting start time will be at**

**7:30 PM**

***And Before the Meeting on April 6 . . . at 4:00***

The Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ and the Dorothy Gentry Kearney Jazz Society will present: **Ellington-Strayhorn Collaborations** featuring the jazz quartet known as **The Ministerial Alliance**. This musical celebration blends "innovation + swing + blues + harmonies + musical alter egos". Admission is free. The Church is located at 5301 North Capitol St. NE (Riggs Road). A very nice flyer detailing this concert can be found at:

[www.plymouth-ucc.org/Newsletters](http://www.plymouth-ucc.org/Newsletters)



Location of Ellington birthplace at 2129 Ward Place on DC real estate atlas of 1924. (*West End Friends*)

## Smithsonian Leads the Way with April Jazz Appreciation Month Events



The story of America is embedded in the spirit and rhythms of jazz; captured in beats that have traveled through the African Diaspora and a spirit of freedom that has impassioned slave and free born, immigrant and migrant since America's founding.

**The Spirit and Rhythms of Jazz** is the 2013 Jazz Appreciation Month (JAM) theme highlighting jazz cultural history, musical performance and stories, programs and productions this April. JAM and UNESCO's International Jazz Day April 30 provide rich platforms for individuals and communities to explore jazz principles of freedom, inclusion and creativity to learn how jazz has transformed America and inspired the world.

The Smithsonian will present stories, images, and music highlighting various jazz artists and people who helped shape America's original art form – jazz – over several decades; three jazz legends to be featured are:

**Lionel Hampton** His image on the 2013 JAM poster is created from artwork by Frederick J. Brown on permanent display at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. A set of vibes Hampton donated to the Smithsonian jazz collection in 2001 will be played at special jazz events.

**Randy Weston** Renowned for illuminating linkages between African rhythms and jazz, his perspective is embodied in works like his *Uhuru Afrika*, collaborations with Gnaoua musicians of Morocco, and his promotion of the legacy of James Reese Europe. Weston will join the Smithsonian in presenting a concert and onstage discussion to showcase this history.

**John Levy** A successful African American jazz business manager during a period of American history when few black men commanded respect and fair business dealings for themselves, much less others, Levy delivered both with integrity and keen business acumen on the strength of his handshake and courage.

**John Clayton** teams up with the **Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra** to deliver a webcast performance of original music in tribute to John Levy, the jazz bassist turned business manager, to highlight the Smithsonian's celebration of International Jazz Day. Full details, and a *nationwide calendar of events* at [smithsonianjazz.org](http://smithsonianjazz.org).

**New CD Release From Ben Williams**  
**COVER ART**, Concord Jazz B00AO7HQN8  
 With Ben Williams  
 Christian Scott (aka Christian aTunde Adjuah)  
 Gerald Clayton, and the NEXT Collective  
 Released on February 26.



## Catching Up with Ben Williams

Story & Photo Copyright © 2013 by Olu Yemisi

I had a talk with bassist Ben Williams today. Yet another Washingtonian is making waves in the jazz world. He has come a long way. We discussed his musical journey that led to receiving an award from our Society. He also told me about his career before and after the Grammy Awards.

At about 8 years old, Ben started playing piano. Then he picked up the bass in middle school. "Fred Foss got me started in a jazz band," Ben reminisced. Instantly, a jazz musician was born. This occurred in DC Public Schools. Ben's public school experience climaxed at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. During his time in high school, he was awarded The Duke Ellington Society's Annual Scholarship Award in 2002. Ben was ecstatic about this honor. This award was an unexpected surprise one day when



he was performing at a local museum. Later, he earned degrees in music at Michigan State University and at the Julliard School of Music.

Ben feels that music has always been a calling on his life. "Music helps you realize who you are as a person... You discover who you are and why you are here (on earth)", he explains.

Things that inspire him surround phases of his life such as growing up, becoming a man, relationships, and watching people. His family is very musical and he grew up to the sounds of James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, and Donny Hathaway. He matured to the tunes of Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Duke Ellington. R&b, hip hop, gospel, and rock were essential for his artistic incubation. His musical taste is like a buffet with endless possibilities, but soul, r&b, and jazz are Ben's staples.

Williams recently won a Grammy with the Pat Metheny Unity Band for the Best Instrumental Jazz Album of 2013. He exclaimed, "That was a surreal and unbelievable weekend. This was my dream as a kid." It's the kind of award all musicians dream of. His words reassure the aspiring musician. His feelings about the Grammys beg us never to lose our childhood dreams.

One of Ben's current projects is a hip hop tribute called "The Lee Morgan Story." Further collaboration with Metheny is planned for the near future, and another album as leader will be released later this year.

It looks like Ben Williams' musical journey has great things in store. Hopefully, there are many more exciting adventures to come.



**Duke Ellington's Nutcracker Suite** by Anna Harwell Celenza ~ Illustrated by Don Tate

Charlesbridge Publishing, Cambridge, MA (Book and music CD)  
 Reviewed by Mr. Saturday Dance

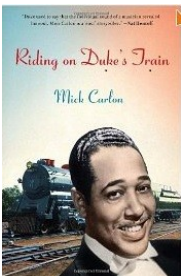
Admittedly we know next to nothing about children's literature intended for readers ages 6-9, having jumped from that caravan decades ago, around the time Dr. Seuss created *The Cat in the Hat*. Nevertheless, this writer's heart melted with these opening words: "Las Vegas, Nevada. In 1960 Las Vegas was the land of opportunity—a **new frontier** in the world of entertainment. All the stars were there: Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., Dean Martin, and more. **Perhaps the brightest star of all was Duke Ellington, an American pianist, composer and big-band leader.**" See what I mean?

Georgetown University professor and musicologist, Anne Harwell Celenza tells the (mostly) true story of how a Riviera Hotel meeting among Duke, Billy Strayhorn and record producer Irving Townsend led to the adaptation and recording of Tchaikovsky's ballet classic. Yes, Irving Townsend is a character in a kids' book.

The idea is Billy's brainchild, resulting in collaboration with the Maestro (art) and the producer (commerce). The score is written and arranged with Duke in California and Billy in New York. What remains is to convince a skeptical Orchestra (each identified by first name only) that updating the music for modern audiences is going to work. Duke explains that each movement represents a different dance in "a timeless musical map" of Vegas glitz, Hollywood glamour, Harlem Renaissance, Chinatown, an Arabian oasis, and (with inspiration from a cameo by Slim Gaillard!) New Orleans on-the-Volga.

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**Plans for Animated Film of Riding on Duke's Train**

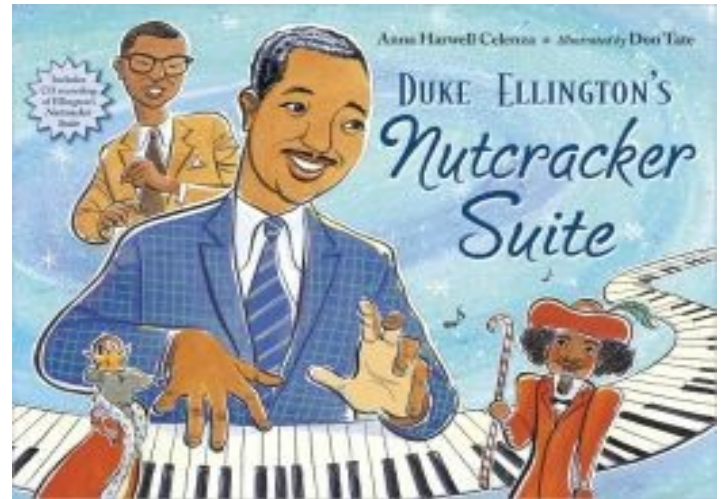


Ken Kimmelman, an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker is seeking investors or tax-deductible contributions to help produce an animated feature film based on the book for young readers, *Riding on Duke's Train* by Mick Carlon. (Reviewed here by Ted Hudson in the January 2012 issue.)

The story is about nine-year-old Danny, an African American orphan, living in the backwoods of Georgia with his grandmother during the 1930's. When, in 1935 his granny dies, he heads north with just his knapsack, and one night comes upon a silver train and sneaks aboard. It turns out to be Duke's private train! The film follows Danny's Ellingtonian experience for half a lifetime.

Mr. Kimmelman's Imagery Film, Ltd. will collaborate with Jazz at Lincoln Center on this project. A detailed prospectus can be downloaded from:

<http://suefernphillips.weebly.com/imagery-film-ltd.html>



For the musicians, clearer understanding that "the themes are there, but they're wearing different threads" means inspired feeling and vitality to their playing. Everyone contributes, cooperates, and collaborates. The end result is a joyful consensus that a work of genius has been created.

The author has contained much within this visually appealing package: lessons in history, culture, music and the creative process to go with the message that getting along with everybody when participating in a group activity is cool.

Don Tate, an award-winning illustrator of children's books uses soft lines and vibrant colors to accompany the text. A CD copy of the actual Columbia recording has excellent sound quality, and is a necessary complement.

Reputedly, this beautiful little book has been a highly popular selection during Black History Month, and as a Holiday gift. Perhaps the little ones can better endure sitting through the annual performance of *The Nutcracker* after they've read and listened to the Ellington/Strayhorn version. In any event, good luck with explaining who Sammy, Frank, and Dino were.

**MERRY-GO-ROUND . . .** by Ye Editor

The special election for Society Officer and Board Member vacancies was finally held at the March meeting. **Ed Morris** was elected to the Board, where he joins another new member, **Lawrence Smith** who was elected last December. Our new Vice President is **Barbara Anderson**. **Pat Braxton** officially became **Treasurer** in December of 2012, when **Art Luby** was re-elected Secretary. The new President is **Bill McFadden**. Hey, that's me!

Our Society's leadership structure now represents a decentralization of responsibilities as each of us has specific tasks to perform regarding meeting facilities, monthly programs, catering the pot luck dishes, membership, (Continued on Page 4 M-G-R)

## “*Dramatis Felidae*” (To Use Our Man’s Term in *MIMM*)

### About Our Members . . .

We welcome one of our newest members, Ms. **Olu Yemisi** to the pages of *Ellingtonia* with her profile of the rising star, Ben Williams. Olu independently produces and promotes a range of multi-cultural artistic events and entertainment through her own organization, **DanceWithMeDC.com**.

The most gracious invitation to “Ellington-Strayhorn Collaborations” on April 6 at Plymouth Congregational U.C.C. was extended by **Charlotte Douglass**. With some collaboration of our own, it might have been nice to combine this event with our April meeting later on the same day.

A little farther to the north, the **Aardvark Jazz Orchestra** under the direction of **Rev. Mark Harvey** performs in concert, **“Echoes and Resonance—Celebrating 50 Years of Jazz at MIT” on Saturday, April 20 at 8:00 PM**. Two of Mark’s major commissions at Massachusetts Institute of Technology will be reprised: “Beyond” (written for the MIT Wind Ensemble and featuring Herb Pomeroy and Ran Blake in the premiere), and “Saxophrenia” (composed for the MIT Festival Jazz Ensemble, featuring Joe Lovano in the premiere). The concert will also invoke memories of legendary musicians and their connections to Aardvark and MIT such as Jaki Byard and Mercer Ellington, who lectured to Mark’s classes at MIT and donated his arrangement of “Moon Mist” to the band. The main stage of MIT, **Kresge Auditorium** in Cambridge, MA is the locale, and admission, incredibly, is *free*.

### M-G-R (Continued from Page 3)

and the publication of *Ellingtonia*. Just about everything is falling into place to smooth the transition.

To be elected President of The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. is an honor beyond my wildest dreams. As previously stated here, the fact that my name might be associated in some small way with that of Edward Kennedy Ellington is an ultimate privilege. Of course, I’m fortunate enough to be standing on the shoulders of Peter MacHare and Ted Hudson (among others). For all of us listed in the space to the right of this column, there is a commitment to the tradition of a place where we can gather, listen, converse, think, and learn. And have great fun. For my own part, I owe it to Duke and to Billy and to you to serve in any manner.

One more thing: In announcing their new releases for 2013, Storyville has once again made available Jack Towers’ recording of ***The Duke at Fargo-1940, Special 60th Anniversary Edition*** (2-CD’s #1038435). **www.Storyvillerecords.com**

That’s it for this ride on your Merry-Go-Round . . .

## March, Mingus, Maestro

by Art Luby, Secretary

The March meeting of the society featured a very fine presentation by Bill McFadden on the musical relationship between Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus, the brilliant, mercurial bassist. Mingus frequently spoke of his admiration for Ellington, but had difficulty actually performing with him, having been fired after only 10 days with the Orchestra. The two were brought together many years later in an album called “Money Jungle” with Max Roach. We heard several cuts from this endeavor but, unfortunately, Duke seemed to be the only player who brought any inspiration to the set, as he illustrated in a fine rendition of “Warm Valley”.

Mingus played his best Ellington with his own men, who were normally bop-influenced players of his generation. There are few better recordings of “Things Ain’t What They Used to Be” than the one produced in “Mingus Dynasty” with Mingus’ powerful bass and Sir Roland Hanna’s piano driving the group. “Blues and Roots” featured a quartet of saxophonists pushed to their limits by Mingus’ drive, including Jackie McLean blowing hard just as he came into his own in the late 50’s. There couldn’t have been two individuals with more divergent personal styles and public profiles than Ellington and Mingus. Where they came together was the way in which their creative passion could inspire those who played with them and, as Bill’s program illustrated, that passion was almost always on display when Mingus played Duke’s music.

**2013 Dues still due? Please renew TODAY!**  
(We will never speak of it again . . .)

### To Join or to Renew Membership

Please Send Your Payment to:

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

Our dues remain a bargain:

Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student \$5  
First-Time-Ever Member, Just \$20

### THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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