

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, CHAPTER 90

P.O. BOX 15591 . WASHINGTON, D.C. 20003-0787

**N E W S L E T T E R**

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JUNE 1996

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## Ellington Youth Project A Resounding Success

Contributed by Luvenia George

Over 400 students from D.C. secondary schools participated in the Duke Ellington Youth Festival on April 26. Its theme, "A Tribute to Mercer Ellington," recognized his encouragement of this unique collaboration of the the city's public schools and the Smithsonian's Program in African American Culture.

The tribute began with a warm welcome by Spencer R. Crew, Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, who has shown dedication to the Project by providing a "safety net" for its survival. He was followed by Cedric Hendricks representing Congressman John Conyers, Jr., an avid supporter of jazz education programs. [Director of the Project and Chapter 90 member] Luvenia George gave a statement of the theme, a recognition of Mercer as "Keeper of the Flame" of the Duke Ellington legacy as leader of the band after his father's death, as conservator of his materials, and as informed biographer by writing, with Stanley Dance, *Duke Ellington in Person: An Intimate Memoir*, arguably the most important and knowledgeable of the voluminous Ellington literature.

The Senior High Band directed by [Chapter 90 member] Davey Yarborough opened the Festival with breathtakingly expert performances of "Sepia Panorama" and "Daybreak Express," both from Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Editions. The Junior High String Ensemble directed by Barbara Maxwell played "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "I'm Beginning to See the Light" and "Just Squeeze Me." The 50-strong Junior High Band was awesome in the depth and scope (Continued on page 2 under "Ellington Youth Project")

## "Resident Sound Wizard" To Present at June Meeting

by Mac Grimmer, Program Director

We return to our regular meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, Sixteenth and Varnum Streets, NW**, for our **June 1** meeting, the last of the season. The program will be presented by Jack Towers, our resident sound wizard, who has promised us a few surprises from his inexhaustable stockpile of Ellingtonia. Rumor has it that there will be some rare material from the 50's, with perhaps a Shakespearean twist thrown into the musical mix. The date is **June 1**. The time is **8 pm**. Don't miss it!

## Benny Åslund, 1920-1996

Benny Åslund, one of the world's foremost Ellingtonia authorities, died on April 27 in Sweden. He was an unduly modest and unassuming gentleman who was loved and revered by Ellingtonia enthusiasts.

A meticulous researcher, in the 1950s Benny was the first to compile, and publish, a full discography on a single musician, *The Wax Works of Duke Ellington*. He is perhaps best known by scholars in the field for his Duke Ellington Music Society's *DEMS Bulletin*, a labor of love that he began in 1979 and publication of which recently had been suspended because of his illness.

As a youngster, Benny led a band that included trumpeter Rolf Ericson and a very young girl vocalist, Alice Babs, both of whom were to star with the Ellington orchestra.

We extend to Mrs. Åslund and family and other loved ones our heartfelt condolences.

*Ed note: News of Benny's death reached us just as we were finishing this issue. See our February 1996 Newsletter for a 75th birthday tribute to Benny by our Sjef Hoefsmit. We invite tributes and statements about Benny for our next issue.*

## Pianist/Composer Geri Allen Wins Jazz Award

Commentary by Jack Dennis

The Washington *Post* of November 5 reported that pianist and composer Geri Allen had been selected for the Jazzpar Prize. Sponsored by the Danish Jazz Center, it is the only major international prize in the jazz world and carries a \$36,000 stipend that any jazz musician will tell you is like hitting the lottery. Miss Allen, the first woman to receive this prize, has toured with Betty Carter, Ornette Coleman's quartet, the Wallace Roney Quintet, and her own trio.

Miss Allen's dexterity and precision were quite evident when she and McCoy Tyner performed in concert at Ellington '95 in Pittsburgh last May. Playing with great intensity, hands moving deftly up and down the keyboard, her runs and sharp resonating notes were those of a truly talented pianist. However, her playing, progressive in style, was really a demonstration of her virtuosity with little emphasis on presenting the music of Ellington/Strayhorn, the theme of the Conference. Indeed, some compositions were barely recognizable. The result was not completely satisfying to everyone. Paraphrasing a classic comment of Roy Eldridge, "She played good but she didn't say nothin' about Ellington or Strayhorn."

## Ellington Youth Project Deserves Support as Well as Accolades

Commentary by Theodore Hudson

As in previous years, the year-long Ellington Youth Project has been a success artistically and academically. The culminating art show, "Speaking of the Duke" poetry and piano program, and Festival were overall, superb. We expect that the forthcoming anthology of creative work will maintain this high level. (If you missed the Festival or the poetry-piano performance, you can still view the artwork at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History until May 26.)

Clearly, the District of Columbia public school teachers had to be dedicated as well as skilled to produce such results in the youngsters—a number of whom might unfortunately be labeled as "hard-core inner-city" with all its connotations. More important, though, is that these hundreds of students, ranging in age from elementary through high school, demonstrated not only marvelous talent and sensitivity, but also willingness to undergo the discipline necessary to succeed as they did.

Sadly, at the Festival we saw no D.C. school board members or high-level administrators. And we saw only three members of our Chapter 90—well, five counting Luvenia George, who is director of the project, and Davey Yarborough, one of the participating teachers. (Of course, the press was not there because—we would like to think—such excellence is not "news.") We, especially since we profess to want Ellingtonia to be appreciated by succeeding generations, must do better to encourage and support such efforts as the Ellington Youth Project, unique not only in the nation but also in the world.

## Ellington Youth Project

*(Continued from page 1)*

of preparation exhibited under Edward Anderson in a medley, "A Tribute to the Duke."

Peter Romero choreographed "Such Sweet Thunder," "A Little Max," and "Come Sunday" for 20 very talented dancers from the Ellington School of the Arts. The Junior High Choir, coordinated by Patricia Braswell, included in their selections Mercer's "Things Ain't What They Used to Be."

It remained for the Senior High and Ellington School Choirs and a Grand Finale that included the Junior High Choir, all directed by Samuel Bonds, to give us "Ellingtonia" at its most evocative—a combination of singing and dancing reminiscent

of an era that still astonishes and attracts music aficionados everywhere.

This year's Festival coincided to the day ten years ago when Mercer Ellington presented his father's materials to the Smithsonian. On that occasion the National Museum of American History's then director stated, "This museum has a commitment to jazz, American jazz, to black American jazz. We intend to be the National Center for the study of that material." The Duke Ellington Youth Project and its Festival exist to support that commitment, through education, to the man whose creative output it treasures and, now, to the son who was "The Keeper of the Flame."

### The Intimate Ellington

Presented by  
Toronto Chapter #40  
The Duke Ellington Society

April 13, 1996



# Ellington '96

JUNE 19 - 23

Park Plaza Hotel  
Toronto, Canada

#### IMPORTANT

June's a busy month in Toronto and rooms will be at a premium. Please make your Park Plaza reservation now. If you have problems, call Tami Fillmore, Reservation Manager, (416) 924-5471 Ext. 1421. Let's celebrate Ellington '96 with our wonderful musicians:

#### Thursday, June 20 8:00PM Empress Ballroom

Wray Downes and Dave Young - Veteran Canadian pianist Wray Downes will set a high standard for other musicians to follow. He plays off a very subtle improvisatory instinct for matters of colour, voicing and dynamics against a rather strenuous sort of technical facility, building a solo, chorus by stealthy chorus, to a resounding conclusion. Bassist of renown, Dave Young, has often partnered Downes over the years. He also plays regularly with Gene DiNovi, Oscar Peterson, Guido Basso and Moe Koffman. The Downes/Young Duo can be expected to put Conference delegates in mind of the intimate Ellington/Bianton duets.

Keith Ingram/Harry Allen Septet - This New York-based group is distinguished not only by the spirit of an earlier era but by their own individuality and imagination, and the way in which they create their variations. Band members include Jackie Williams, a drummer of choice for more than thirty years. Keith Ingram, a highly respected pianist and composer and as co-leader, he is the group's principal arranger. Harry Allen, his tenor saxophone contributions to the septet are invaluable. Scott Robinson, on clarinet and soprano & baritone saxes adds immeasurably to the septet's tonal shadings. Peter Ecklund's trumpet virtuosity is well suited to the demands of Ellington-style small groups. James Chirillo, rhythm guitar and Murray Wall on bass.

#### Friday, June 21 8:00PM Empress Ballroom

Time Warp - The 1993 & 1994 Jazz Report Acoustic Jazz Group of the Year, with six recordings and three Juno nominations to its credit, is one of Canada's most consistently exciting jazz groups. Formed by drummer Barry Elmes and bassist Al Henderson, Time Warp now includes Mike Murley, who holds down the featured reed chair and Kevin Turcotte, widely renowned for his Miley-like growl trumpet playing.

Phil Nimmons Quartet - Phil Nimmons, known to many as the Dean of Canadian Jazz is a legendary clarinetist, composer, arranger and educator. His compositions include film scores, as well as radio, TV and theatrical specials. In 1976 he received the Juno Award for Jazz for his Atlantic Suite. The Quartet will provide us with special jazz moments in the Nimmons style.

#### Saturday, June 22 8:00PM Empress Ballroom

Archie Alleyne & Company - Toronto Chapter member, and drummer extraordinaire, Archie Alleyne, will lead a sextet plus vocalists. Archie has selected some of Canada's most versatile and talented musicians. Wray Downes will be "the piano player." Rounding out the rhythm section will be Lionel Williams on acoustic and electric bass, guitar, keyboards and vocals. Russ Little, a one-time mainstay of Woody Herman's trombone section, will be responsible for the lion's share of *Intimate Ellington* arrangements. Emulating Rex, Ray, Cootie and Cat will be trumpeter David Dunlop. Handling the reeds and flute will be Jamaican-born Michael Stuart. Jackie Richardson has won Gemini and AMPAC awards for singing and acting. Michael Dunston will be Archie's proxy for Al Hibbler. Herb Jeffries, Tony Watkins and perhaps even a bit of Ray Nance's joyous vocal nonsense.

Eve Smalh (also known as Yvonne Lanauze Duke) will be a special guest artist with Archie. This will evoke happy memories of her Ellington days and delight her friends.

#### Daytime Presentations

Our cup runneth over! You've been great and we've assembled an interesting and varied program for your pleasure and enjoyment.

Please register as a delegate as soon as possible, the rate goes up after April 30. The Park Plaza Hotel is filling up quickly, please call now.

We're ready and waiting for you!

Filcen R. Ward, Conference Co-ordinator

### Conference Registration

**Delegate Registration Fee** includes Welcoming Reception, daytime sessions, evening concerts and Gala Banquet.

\$ 250 (Cdn.) or \$ 190 (US) prior to April 30, 1996

\$ 285 (Cdn.) or \$ 215 (US) thereafter.

**Non - Delegate Registration Fee** covers Welcoming Reception, evening concerts and Gala Banquet only. Daytime sessions and Delegate kit are excluded.

\$145 (Cdn.) or \$110 (US)

Send cheque or Money Order, payable to  
"The Duke Ellington Society, Toronto Chapter"  
95 Thorncliffe Park Drive, Suite 2906,  
Toronto, Canada M4H 1L7

## Park Plaza Hotel

4 Avenue Road, Toronto, Canada M5R 2E8

Reservations  
Telephone (416) 924-5471 (Hotel Direct)  
Fax (416) 924-4933  
Toll Free Canada/USA 1-800-977-4197

A member of Preferred Hotels Worldwide  
1-800-323-7500

Special rates for Ellington '96  
Must be booked prior to May 21, 1996

Standard Room \$ 135 Cdn. Single/Double  
One-Bedroom Suite \$ 210 Cdn. Single/Double

Rates include full breakfast (max. 2 persons per room)  
All Provincial and Federal Taxes extra.  
Registered Guest parking \$15/day. In and out privileges.  
Limited accommodation of special rates for extended visits.  
*Now \$ 10*

Airport taxi or limousine service to and from the Park Plaza Hotel is the personal responsibility of delegates.

Tower Records Will Host a Conference Opening Reception at Their New Store  
Wednesday, June 19, 6 pm

To Salute "Ellington '96," Jim Galloway and His Wee Wee Big Band Will Recreate  
Duke's Newport '56 Concert

Sunday, June 23, 5:30 pm, as Part of Toronto's Du Maurier Jazz Festival

Conference Program Participants from Our Chapter Include

☆ Sjef Hoefsmit, Ted Hudson, Annie Kuebler, Ben Pabols, Alex Rado, Scott Schwartz ☆

### Have You Had a Chance to Read...

Stanley Crouch's "A Critic at Large: The Duke's Blues" in the much-talked-about special "Black in America" issue of *The New Yorker*? The *Washington Post*'s reviewer says that the Crouch's "essay . . . opens with three miraculous paragraphs and never lets up. I don't know that I've ever learned so much about an artist in such a small space."

### Local Historical Society Tours

#### Ellington D.C. Sites

Contributed by Jack Dennis

The Washington Historical Society sponsored a tour of various sites having significance in the life of Duke during his Washington years. Conducted by Chapter member Rusty Hassan, jazz historian, Ellington scholar, and D.C. government official, the tour began at Duke's Ward Place birthplace and passed locations of various homes on the Ellington family on 13th, Elm, and T Streets and his home on Sherman Avenue where Mercer was born. Other sites were the Whitelaw Hotel (now a residence home) where Duke stayed on trips to Washington, and abandoned Howard Theater where the orchestra played, and the restored Lincoln Theater on U Street.

The tour ended at the Society's headquarters for a reception and piano concert of Ellington compositions by Lafayette Gilchrist.

(Earlier, Chapter member Harold Gray reported on the tour in the Potomac River Jazz Club's *Tailgate Rambler*.)

### Quotation of the Month

Re the Columbia reissue of *Black, Brown and Beige*:

". . . the **Come Sunday** theme is overworked and Mahalia Jackson simply did not belong in the world of Ellingtonia. (Much the same could be said of certain singers in his later 'Sacred' Concerts when, in the opinion of some devoted Ellingtonians, growing religiosity got the better of the ageing maestro.) The concluding **23rd Psalm** is almost embarrassingly bathetic."

-- Dave Cavalier  
in the April 1996 *Blue Light*

### Grooving in Our Bag - Mail, That Is

✉ Yvonne Lanauze Duke sends a note from the Peninsula Hotel in Manila. She has been performing there since mid-April and will leave in time to appear at "Ellington '96" in Toronto.

✉ From Claire Gordon we received a card and an "open letter to my fellow Ellingtonians" in Chapter 90. She thanks us for our *Newsletter* and informs that their fledgling California Bay Area chapter has 10 active members. In this connection, in the letter she asks, "*Psst!* If any of your members have friends or relatives who are Ellington fans living on the [California] Peninsula, please let me know or have them get in touch with me [at 1251 Lisa Lane, Los Altos, CA 94024]. Claire also informs that Regina Stewart Fraser, Rex's daughter, who was to present with her in Toronto, will not be able to attend but will send a video tape about her life with her dad.

### Strayhorn Biography Set for May Publication

The culmination of some eleven years of research, field trips, over 500 interviews, and writing, David Hajdu's *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* is scheduled for release this May. Advance information is that it will include, in addition to primary source information, reproductions of rare artifacts, photographs, and original music manuscripts.

### Card of Thanks

*Perhaps you sent a lovely card,*

*Or sat quietly in a chair;*

*Perhaps you sent beautiful flowers,*

*If so, we saw them there.*

*Perhaps you sent or spoke kind words*

*As any friend could say;*

*Perhaps you were not there at all*

*Just thought of us that day.*

*Whatever you did to console the heart,*

*We thank you so much, whatever the part.*

-- And from a personal note to your Editor:  
*Leo's real joy in life was being a part of the  
Duke Ellington Society.*

*God Bless You,  
The Hunt Family*

## Inside Info (Well, Inside Opinion) about Duke at the Apollo

by Theodore Hudson

Among the recently acquired Frank Schiffman Apollo Theater materials at the Smithsonian are hundreds of cards on individual performers on which are notes about their performances and about receipts, payments, and miscellaneous matters. Below are reproductions of cards on Duke Ellington.

DUKE ELLINGTON BAND	
2/14/47	\$14,751.32 Unit.
4/8/48	\$10,582.78 Unit
12/30/48	Net 9,519.32
12/1/49	Net receipts 14,979.98 (Kay Davis, Johnny Hudgins, Patterson & Jackson, Peck & Peck, Joan Barry) Cash 7,034.93
9/20/50	Gross net 16,960.00, cash net \$8,480.04 - Sloopy performance. Hibbler deteriorated. Girl bad.
5-31-51	\$6085.08
7/4/52	\$6348.53 Jackie Mabley, Pigmeat Markham, John Bunn Edda Mae Harris, Roll & Tapp, Estelle & Alphonse, Jimmy Grissom and Betty Roche. Band was very good. Louis Bellson drum specialty was excellent.
2/20/53	This engagement with Pearl Bailey percentage, band earned approximately \$10,000.
8/14/53	\$21.67 Good performance. Still lacks drawing card power. Band is certainly worth playing twice a year.

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA	
2/19/54	\$6,727.16 UNchanged pattern. Fine personality. Good Band. Mediocre draw. Cast: The Flamingos, Dusty Fletcher, Olan Farley.
8/23/55	Fine band. Usual unprofitable business. Outstanding specialties by Cat Anderson and Johnny Hodges. Vocalist Jimmy Grissom is just so so.
9-12-58	7806.24 Fine musical show. Business profitable. Lil Greenwood new blues singer appeared with Duke.
2/27	7,000.00 Business very poor. This show grossed less the the last, although this was a much stronger show. Vocalist, <del>Ernestine</del> Lil Greenwood went over very well.
11/28/61	percentage--very good business/Had Moms Mableyas co-headline
4/26/63	\$2500

### "*Dramatis Felidae*"

(To Use Our Man's Term in *MIMM*)

Chapter 90 members are frequently mentioned in various Ellingtonia media. For example, the current issue of *Blue Light*, DESUK's newsletter, quotes **Dennis Dimmer, Morris Hodara, Ted Hudson, Alex Rado, and Ted Shell** and in one context or another mentions **John Hasse, Morris Hodara, Walter van de Leur, Alexandre Rado, Ted Hudson**, and our *Newsletter*. ♪ ♪ ♪ **Walter van de Leur** with **Iloa** and their sweet babies, Heleen and Floor, have returned to their home in The Netherlands. He was scheduled to return briefly for the TDES-sponsored *Assault on a Queen* world premiere in New York City on May 4. It was Walter who reconstructed pieces for this concert from manuscripts in the Ellington collection at the Smithsonian.

### A Note about Leo Hunt

Contributed by Stanley Robinson

I was a thirteen-year-old lad when I met George Leo Hunt, who at twenty-two was already a great Duke Ellington fan. When he learned that I was also an admirer of the Duke, he invited me to his home to meet some other Duke admirers.

This meeting resulted in the formation of a jazz club aptly called "The Dukes." We met every Saturday to play, listen and discuss Duke's music as well as the other great jazz artists of the era. At this point, I had started a collection of jazz music when Leo suggested that a serious collector should start with Duke's early music. The year was 1938 when Leo gave me *Ellingtonia* Volume II on the Brunswick label to listen to and treasure. Throughout our lives I often tried to return this album to him. He always said, "I'll get it one day." My friend Leo died March 12, 1996 after a short illness.

Move over, David, Duke and the band are tuning up, Leo wants to dance before the Lord.

### Calendar

*April 24-May 26* - Students' Ellington Art Show, Smithsonian's Museum of American History  
*Saturday, June 1* - Monthly Meeting: Program by Jack Towers

### Messages from the Deity Highlighted May Meeting

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Ben and Lillian Pubols hosted our May meeting at their home in Chevy Chase, and Ben treated us to an enlightening program on Harry Carney.

Ben's theme was that Carney's baritone, the anchor of the saxophone section, represented such authority that his was regarded as the "voice of God" in the Ellington band, and that he perhaps more than anyone, defined the Ellington sound.

To our pleasure, Ben demonstrated this with recordings from Carney's first years with the band as well as from later days. We also heard Carney on other instruments (bass clarinet, alto saxophone, clarinet) and in other contexts (with Hampton and Holiday).

An informational program with tasty treats during intermission! Thanks, Ben and Lillian.

### Skillipoopers Didn't—or Did

Contrary to the promise of their title, "Skillipooping with Duke," Patricia Willard and Reuben Jackson did not skillipoop during their presentation at Borders Books on Duke's birthday. Instead, they did exceedingly well what they were supposed to do, i.e., focus on Duke's humor. But wait, if they were supposed to skillipoop but did something else that looked better than what they were supposed to do, then they did in fact skillipoop. Hmmm. All this is getting too confusing.

Whatever, let's end this convoluted reporting by saying that Reuben and Patricia delighted the audience with audio and visual clips of conversations, interviews, and music and their own anecdotes. Surely, Duke would have been amused.

### Chapter Chairpersons/Coordinators

Amenities	Helen Frazier
"Ellington '99" ( <i>Pro Tem</i> )	Ben Pubols & Bob Reny
Membership	Angela & Mac Grimmer
Nominating	Jack Dennis, Bill Flemmons, & another/others t.b.a.
Program	Mac Grimmer

These "first chair" leaders will welcome your suggestions and active involvement.