

Ellingtonia



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Duke Ellington Society

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Members Travel

To Present, Speak, Consult

In October, as they and others have done in the past, several of our Society members shared their know-how and knowledge.

Despite mishaps—including a mysterious disappearance somewhere between a taxi, bell-hops, and their rooms of slides they had brought and a projector at the meeting that would not support their LCD display—the Smithsonian's Annie Kuebler, Deborra Richardson, and Scott Schwartz successfully went on with the show at the TDES meeting in New York, it being a reprise of "Swingers for a Cause" presented first in Leeds.

Luvenia George conducted a workshop at the 18th and Vine Museum in Kansas City for educators who are now enthusiastically incorporating Ellington's life and music in their curriculum, using as a model DC's Ellington Youth Project, which is coordinated by Luvenia.

Ted Hudson, accompanied by wife, Geneva, spent four days in Fargo, ND, where he lectured on Shakespeare, Ellington, and Ellington and Strayhorn's Shakespeare synaesthesia, illustrating the last with excerpts from *Such Sweet Thunder* and *Timon Athens Suite*, in which they interpret The Bard's characters, plots, and literary genres.

Before Their Time

As he was for 1997, David Fleming, one of our British members, is the first to renew his membership for 1998. Earliest to pay 1998 dues as a first-time-ever member is Jim Condell, of Moorhead, Minnesota. Sjef Hoefsmit, of The Netherlands, is a unique exemplar; some time back he paid for years in advance. All of which reminds the rest of us that our dues are for the calendar year: \$20 for first-time-ever member; \$30, regular; \$50, couple; and \$5, student.

**Suggestion for Holiday Giving:
Memberships in Our Society!**



Smithsonian Archives Center

To Host December Meeting

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

Once again we will be guests of the Smithsonian for our regular monthly meeting, on **Saturday, December 6**. The Archive Center's latest multimedia presentation is "Swingers for the Cause," featuring excerpts from oral history interviews (Barney, Lawrence, Sonny, Juan & Cootie) and film clips from the Ernie Smith Collection (now at the Archives Center) of, among others, Duke at the Cotton Club and the Cootie Williams Orchestra in the early 40s. Then there are the photographs, music manuscripts and documents from the Archives to accompany the words and music of the audio tape, all expertly produced by Annie Kuebler, Scott Schwartz, Deborra Richardson, Reuben Jackson and the rest of the Archives staff. This the program that was so successfully presented at the Ellington conference in Leeds, England in May and, recently, at a New York Ellington society meeting.

The Archives Center, home of the Duke Ellington Collection, is in the **National Museum of American History**, on **Constitution Avenue between 12th and 14th Streets, NW**. Please use the Constitution Avenue entrance and arrive between **7:30 and 8:00 PM**, when a guard will be on duty and the staff and volunteers will be available to direct you to the Archives Center, since the rest of the museum will be closed at this time. Don't miss this unique evening!

Yvonne Visits Hometown

Known simply as Yvonne when she sang with Duke (he apparently didn't want to deal with the surname Lanauze), Yvonne Duke (now known professionally as Eve Smith) was in the area recently for a class reunion. As effervescent as ever, Yvonne is eagerly looking forward to being here for "Ellington '99."

Fantasia in Eb, or The Voodoo Chile Meets God's Messenger Boy

by Reuben Jackson

This informal paper, first presented at the November meeting of the Washington Duke Ellington Society, stems from two sources: One being my longtime love for the music of Edward Kennedy Ellington and James Marshall Hendrix, the other being something I read in Hendrix historian John McDermott's liner notes for *In From the Storm*, a 1995 release which sought to wed reinterpretations of Hendrix compositions featuring artists like Sting and the late drummer Tony Williams with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the end result comprising a kind of "what-if" compilation, as well as a celebration of the latter's still underrated writing and arranging talents.

During the course of discussing Hendrix' desire to expand upon the trio format for which he had become both controversial and famous, McDermott also noted a 1970 meeting (the year of Hendrix' death) between Hendrix and Duke Ellington, which according to McDermott, was arranged by Mo Ostin, vice-president of Reprise Records.

"That meeting really made an impression on Jimi," remembered Bob Levine, a member of Hendrix' management team. "He thought it would be incredible to be playing his music backed by the caliber of musicians in Duke's band."

This was also the time in which Hendrix had tentative discussions with the arranger Gil Evans, who recorded an album of Hendrix titles in the early 1970s.

Still, Hendrix and Ellington in the same room. Imagine. The glib, confident Ellington and the extremely soft-spoken, self-conscious Hendrix. How aware was each man of the other's music, and how would it have sounded? How would Hendrix have handled some of the more truculent personalities in the band? Would Ellington, like Gil Evans, attempt to capture the raucous sexuality of, say, "Foxy Lady"? Would Ellington allow Hendrix to wear those flamboyant costumes on stage?

But I am getting ahead of myself here. What I'd like to do in the next few paragraphs is to look at some real similarities between the two artists, and speculate concerning some of what Hendrix might have presented to Duke as a kind of aural resume. Where were those FBI microphones when you needed them?

1. Hendrix' Ellington Connection

Although indirect, the "Ellington effect" did have some resonance in the Seattle-born Hendrix' life long before this meeting. His father, James Allen Hendrix, was an erstwhile tap dancer in Seattle, who once performed on a bill with the Orchestra when they played that city (no date known). And Jimi's longtime Army buddy, bassist Billy Cox, had an uncle who was a member of the Ellington Orchestra. (Unknown—and my queries to Billy Cox, who lives in Nashville, were never answered.)

Hendrix, son of a dancer turned gardener and a hard-living mother who died when she (like her son) turned 27—had different upbringing (Hendrix was shuttled from relative to relative while his father was in the Army—unlike DE), but both men were close to their Mothers, and their deaths affected them greatly. Where Ellington wrote "Reminiscing in Tempo," Hendrix wrote "Angel," a ballad inspired by a dream about same.

2. Artistic Aspirations

Much has been written about Ellington's talent as a visual artist, and his success in translating that into "tonal color." Interestingly, Hendrix showed great promise as a visual artist in high school, although he did not (as did DE) attempt to pursue it professionally. Like Duke, he continued to paint and sketch throughout his career.

Most importantly, however, was the common desire to translate the visual effect of color into sound. We are well aware of Ellington's penchant for creating tonal portraits featuring colors within the musical contours as well as the titles ("Sepia Panorama," "Mood Indigo," "Lady of the Lavender Mist"), but Hendrix also sought the same effect with his compositions and guitar solos, some of which could be achieved via the technology taking flight during the late 1960s, but also via his lyrics, song titles ("Purple Haze," the colors referred to in titles such as "One Rainy Wish" and "Axis, Bold as Love"), and his instructions to fellow musicians, which often included comments like "The bass needs more orange in it." In 1970, the year of his death, and the years of his meeting with Ellington, Hendrix also told British journalist Stephen Clarkson that he dreamed of being able to "play a note on his guitar and having it come out a color." Perhaps Duke, upon hearing examples such as the 1969 studio version of the "Star Spangled Banner," would have told Hendrix that he already had.

3. Hendrix as Soloist

Since the proposed collaboration between DE and Hendrix was, according to Mo Ostin, slated to feature DE orchestrating Hendrix titles, and since JH was one of rock's greatest soloists, I think its also interesting to note how Ellington might have spotlighted Hendrix' "tonal character." The most obvious use for Hendrix might have highlighted his deft use of the wah-wah pedal, which, ironically, gave electric guitarists the ability to further explore the vocal qualities mastered by former Ellington greats like trombonist

(Continued on page 3)

Betty Roché Welcomes Word from Friends, Fans — and COOKIES

Betty Roché, the exuberantly hip and sensitive vocalist with the Ellington band from 1942-44 and 1951-53, has for well over a decade, resided at a convalescent home at Pleasantville, New Jersey, about 20 minutes from Atlantic City. Although physically confined to a wheelchair, her spirit soars as she dispenses cheer among residents and staff. On the wall of her room are a framed photograph, a gift from Gloria Nance, of Betty, Duke, Gloria and Ray Nance's brother Jeddy, taken at the Blue Note in Chicago, and a photocopy of a glamorous publicity shot of Betty. On her door is a brief show-business bio. Her long-term memory is better than the short term, but she enthusiastically welcomes visitors and would love to hear from friends and fans. I took a colorful plant and a bouquet when I visited her October 12th. She was appreciative but did not hesitate to mention that she really would rather have had cookies.

She will celebrate her 78th birthday January 20, 1998. Cards, notes, and COOKIES need not be deferred until then: Ms. Betty Roché, Mainland Manor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, 930 Church Street at John Henry Allen Lane, Pleasantville, NJ 08232; phone, 609-646-6900.

- - Patricia Willard

Fantasia in Eb, or The Voodoo Chile Meets God's Messenger Boy *(Continued from page 2)*

"Tricky Sam" Nanton and trumpeter Charles "Cootie" Williams. There are literally dozens of examples of Hendrix' use of the wah-wah pedal, but I chose "Rainy Day, Dream Away" for this presentation, because of its "jazzier" harmonic base (9th chords), use of organ (remember that DE began using organist Wild Bill Davis during this period and sax

Other musical devices associated with Hendrix might have proved more challenging to Ellington, and certainly to his audience—most notably, Hendrix' use of feedback and, I would argue, his version of what Ira Gitler called John Coltrane's "sheets of sound," which though somewhat diminished by 1970, still remained a central part of his aural arsenal. And yet it's also possible that Hendrix might have played DE some of the more meditative, harmonically and melodically restless works he began exploring during the spring and summer of 1969, and in 1970 the pensive B-flat minor composition posthumously titled "Pali Gap," recorded in July of that year.

Yet another of Hendrix' desires was also to learn to properly notate music, but it's clear from "Gap" (and many others) that his use of thematic development had evolved to a point which might have intrigued Ellington and spurred his imagination where this project was concerned. On a more personal level (though whether it's possible to get more personal than one's art is another matter), I think it's important to note these additional parallels: Both men were, their extroverted stage personae notwithstanding, extremely private people and extremely humorous individuals (though I think Ellington was clearly better at having constructed a veil around his life; Hendrix didn't have the time).

Both were (especially during the 1960s) occasionally called to task for what was seen as a more overt lack of "blackness." Ellington rightly responded that he had been doing his part via music all his life (witness titles like "Sepia Panorama," the musical *Jump for Joy*, and countless other examples), and Hendrix could well have said the same thing, as his work was, like Ellington's, an often wondrous mix of several strains of the African American musical tree.

In addition, Hendrix titles like "House Burning Down" had been composed about the 1965 Watts riots, while titles like "Freedom," "Long Hot Summer Night" and the title tune from 1968's "Electric Ladyland" are awash in the tight vocal harmonies Hendrix heard during his years on the R and B "chitlin circuit."

Finally, each artist hated labels applied to his art. Hendrix once told a reporter, "Our music is just like that big jar of candy over there—all mixed up," and we are well aware how Ellington felt about the word "jazz."

Whether Hendrix could have overcome the intimidation he felt in the presence of more formally school musicians (he was asked to participate in the session for what became arranger-composer Quincy Jones' "Gula Matari" album, but was reportedly too frightened to appear) to work with Ellington, and whether Ellington could have meshed with Hendrix' still evolving sensibilities is something that we will never know.

It is, however, fun to imagine the jazz and rock critics scratching their heads at the seemingly improbably sight of Hendrix and Ellington accepting Grammys for a massively popular album: Hendrix using the bow tie from his DE orchestra uniform for a headband, or the "West Coast Seattle Boy" withering under a stony glance from Johnny Hodges. Or, after a night of festivities with saxophonist Paul Gonsalves, a more than somewhat weary bandstand bound Hendrix hears the Maestro say: "Thank you very much for Jimi Hendrix. And now, Jimi Hendrix returns for"

"Dramatis Felidae"

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

About Our Members

Patricia Willard has a splendid tribute to Klaus Stratemann in the current *Dems Bulletin*. ♪ ♪ In the same issue there are three photographs by Teddy Hudson: Sjef Hoefsmit, Klaus Stratemann, and Eddie Lambert at "Ellington '83"; Klaus alone at that first conference; and Alex Rado at the Pittsburgh conference in 1995. ♪ ♪ Beginning in February, Jim Condell will teach a class on Ellington at F/M Communiversity in Fargo, ND. He published "Duke Ellington: The Fargo Connection" in a recent issue of *High Plains Reader*. Also, his Condell & Company performed an all Ellington-Strayhorn concert at Zandröz in Fargo in October. ♪ ♪ Jerry Valburn and wife, Barbara, stopped for a few days at Jack and Rhoda Towers' enroute to their winter home in Florida. While here, Jerry visited the Library of Congress, repository of his Ellington collection. ♪ ♪ We send get-well wishes to several of our members: Malcolm Tillett is undergoing post-surgery therapy. Our first lady, Marion Shell, is recovering from an unusual wrist fracture that required two short hospital stays. Sjef Hoefsmit intermittently has not been feeling well but, thankfully, recent tests have found nothing serious. ♪ ♪ Harold Gray writes the column "Washington Watch" for *Federation Jazz*, published by the American Federation of Jazz Societies. Also, Harold serves as the Jazzbassador for Potomac River Jazz Club. ♪ ♪ Morris Hodara continues as corresponding secretary for TDES and edits its monthly publication. ♪ ♪ Our Society's founding president, Maurice Lawrence, accompanied the Statesmen of Jazz to Japan for that orchestra's international debut. He is a board member for the organization, which features such stellar musicians as "Sweets" Edison, Benny Waters, and Louie Bellson. ♪ ♪ On the recent CD *Nothing Loved Is Ever Lost* by the Hot Mustard Jazz Band, Davey Yarborough plays flute and saxophone. Larry Eanet, who fronted a group for our concert at Washington Grove several years ago, plays piano on the recording.

Calendar

Saturday, December 6 - Regular Meeting
Dec. 2-7 - *Harlem Nutcracker*, Arlington, VA
May 6-10, 1998 - "Ellington '98," Chicago

Reuben Jackson's November Program Linked Duke, Jimi Hendrix

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Reuben Jackson's fascinating program for November revealed the speculative aspects of his imagination as he demonstrated some parallels between Ellington and Hendrix, in their personalities as well as their music.

Integral to his thoughtful talk were examples from performances by Hendrix and his musicians, which were especially revealing for those not thoroughly familiar with Hendrix' music. For instance, Reuben made it easy to appreciate how both were interested in unique sounds and voices, illustrated by the similarity of sound of Jimi's wah-wah guitar and Tricky Sam Nanton's trombone.

Reuben gave us much to think about. He noted, for example, that there was a meeting between Ellington and Hendrix in 1970, arranged by Reprise Records. The meeting came to nothing, but suppose Duke had used him. How would Hendrix have fit in? Would he have been another unusual voice, another color, like Wild Bill Davis was at the time he was with Duke?

Overall, Reuben's unique program opened our minds as well as our ears.

(Ed. note: The article on pages 2 and 3 is a slightly abridged version of Reuben's talk.)

About the Proposed Strayhorn Film...

Here's an excerpt from a posting by David Hajdu on the Duke-LYM web site re a movie based on his book *Lush Life*: . . . *nothing new has happened on the Lush Life movie front in a couple of months. The script is still being written, nobody's been cast to play Strayhorn, and there's no director, let alone a music director.*

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