

Ellingtonia



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Duke Ellington Society

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Smithsonian Acquires Cat Anderson Collection

by Deborra Richardson

The Archives Center, also the repository of the Ellington Collection, now has the William "Cat" Anderson Collection, approximately five cubic feet of audio tapes, music, photographs, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia. Many of these materials had been kept in an air-conditioned and temperature-controlled music room in California. Photocopies of many of the materials were prepared by Andrew Brazington, Cat's nephew and instigator of the prospective donation.

Last April, I met with Dorothy Anderson, widow of Cat, at the home of her brother, John Coffey, in Washington, DC. We went through the materials she was willing to donate to the Archives Center of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. During a repast I answered many of Mrs. Anderson's questions about the Institution and the way in which we would care for the collection. After lunch, we retired to the basement to inventory the materials.

The bulk of the collection consists of audio tape reels and sheet music. Items include itineraries, a number of mouthpieces, some three-dimensional awards, two tapes of Cat's personally composed tunes, and sheet music — approximately 30% in Cat's hand, some in Whaley's and copyists', and one possibly in Strayhorn's or Tizol's.

Ed. note: Too modest, Deborra didn't want this article written in the first person and with a by-line, but editorial-ahem-privilege prevailed. Also, she omits her vital role in the acquiring of this valuable collection.

Ellington, Ellingtonians on Video - April Meeting at the Shells' Home

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

We will abandon our regular meeting place for a month to meet at the home of Ted and Marion Shell on April 4. Ted will again treat us to an evening of videos of Ellington and the Ellingtonians from his extensive collection, much of which is on Japanese laserdiscs. Included will be some later footage of band members in other contexts, at the Montreux Jazz Festival and the first incarnation of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, which at one point had no less than six bona fide Ellingtonians.

The address is **4326 Westover Place, NW** (off the south side of Massachusetts Ave., one block east of Ward Circle, near American University). If anyone needs further information or directions, Ted's phone number is 202-363-2446. Come at **8:00 pm on April 4** to see as well as hear unforgettable performances by the Ellington band!

Treat Yourself by Going To the Youth Project Festival

by Luvenia George

Students and teachers of the Duke Ellington Youth Festival are looking forward to their 8th Annual Festival on **Friday, April 24!** Twenty-six DC Public Schools are enrolled in the Project. Three events will highlight what the students have learned about America's great composer during the school year:

* **Art Show Opening** - 10 am, Photo Gallery, 3rd Floor, National Museum of American History (NMAH). Show runs until May 31.

* **Student Poetry Reading**, with Music of Ellington - 12 noon, Carmichael Auditorium, NMAH

* **Duke Ellington Youth Festival** - 6 pm, University of the District of Columbia

Plan to attend all three; encourage our young people to learn about Ellington and see their very fine performances. (See related news, page 3.)

Don't Forget:

Do Something Creative On

April 28!



Commentary: The Ellington Orchestra Legacy

by Theodore Shell

Soon after Duke died in 1974, Mercer Ellington, his son, assumed leadership of the band, after years of serving as third trumpet as well as manager of the organization. We had hoped that he would preserve the legacy of the Ellington sound. However, it was "Mercerized," so that it no longer sounded like the original. The band made many recordings and appearances under his leadership, but in later years because of a paucity of bookings, he was unable to maintain the working band and moved to Denmark, getting a group together when gigs were provided. His daughter Mercedes, it was thought, would assume the band engagements after his death, but as far as I know no such appearances have been made. She is to be featured in the revival of *My People* in Chicago this spring at the annual Ellington Conference.

On St. Valentine's Day I attended the concert by the Duke Ellington Orchestra under the leadership of Duke's grandson Paul Ellington at the Kennedy Center, part of the free "Millennium Stage" series. I had previously heard on the "grapevine" that legally Paul had assumed its leadership. I then searched several magazines and discovered that Paul was leading the orchestra at Birdland on Wednesdays.

Acoustics in the south wing of the main foyer where folding chairs had been placed and a standing crowd had assembled were surprisingly good. The well-trained musicians sounded like a very good band playing Ellington music. Among them were two Ellington alumni, trombonist Britt Woodman and drummer "Rocky" White. Britt said he was not a regular member but joined them for this engagement on third trombone. To my chagrin, the band did not sound "Dukish" enough, and seemingly no effort had been made to procure the old arrangements. The Count Basie Band even under different leaders has maintained the "Basie" sound and unmistakably always sounds like the band of old. Paul, like his father, led the band gracefully but lacked the mature professionalism he will undoubtedly acquire. But what the heck! he's only 19. The concert lasted about an hour without intermission. They had one well deserved encore and rousing applause.

After the concert, my wife, Marion, and I went to the bandstand to greet Paul, whom we had met in Copenhagen at a night club where Mercer was appearing with a local group. On that occasion Mercer introduced us to his wife, Lene, and son Paul. At the Kennedy Center, he said that he did not recall meeting us but did recall the engagement. He then introduced us to his mother, who did remember our meeting.

Then, Monday's mail brought the new copy of the *New Yorker*; it includes a short Ethan Smith article entitled "Talent: Scion-Tology" and a photograph of Paul. According to Smith, Paul inherited the band a year and a half ago and had been working around it since he was 8—playing piano and a little drums and had helped his father compose a tune for 1995's *Only God Can Make a Tree* compact disc. He quotes Paul: "There are plenty of people who could do a fine job. But this band needs more than a fine job. It needs someone who will bring excitement—not just someone who will say, 'What haven't we done in a while?'"

There have been few if any musical organizations whose leadership has passed from father to son and then on grandson, as has this band. It would, I think, be better if they could inherit the Ellington sound in their contemplations.

Members Meet Duke's Grandson Paul

Several of our Society members had the opportunity to talk briefly with Paul Mercer Ellington, son of Mercer, after the concert by the Ellington band conducted by him at the Kennedy Center on Valentine's Day. Those who remembered him as a chubby kid at the opening of the Smithsonian's exhibit several years ago found a handsome, lean young man who seemed genuinely unassuming and friendly. Also at the concert was his mother, Lene, Mercer's widow, who was also gracious and pleased that the group had come. When asked, Paul said that he is continuing formal music studies. A recent news item states that he has studied at the Manhattan School of Music and with a private teacher.

Slatkin Interested In Ducal Orchestral Works

by Peter MacHare

I came across this article, "Slatkin Speaks: America's Premiere Conductor on Ives, Ellington, and Musical Life on the Potomac" by Dan Buckley, in the March 1998 issue of *Stereophile* and thought it might be good for our newsletter. Leonard Slatkin is the new (since 1996) conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra.

Slatkin also plans to make connections with the city's favorite sons as well—John Philip Sousa and Edward K. "Duke" Ellington. "We've been trying to track down the body of what would constitute Ellington's works with orchestra," Slatkin says. "Since music is probably 35 to 40 percent research, it's nice to have this resource [The Library of Congress] available so readily."

Short Sheets

For the CD *Ron Gill: The Songs of Billy Strayhorn*, produced by WGBH in Boston, call 1-800-255-9424 or Public Radio Music Source at 1-800-MUSIC. The cost is \$16. ● ● ● Did you desktop and other publishers know that there is text typeface (font) by Monotype named "Ellington?" According to an internet posting, the designer, Michael Harvey, designed the font "with a tall x-height and narrow width, making it accommodating for both economy of space in short texts, and for display work as well. [Ed. note: No, unfortunately, we don't have it among our computer fonts.] ● ● ● Eddie Lambert's *Duke Ellington A Listener's Guide* will not be ready for distribution at Ellington '98. *DEMS Bulletin* quotes Elaine Norsworthy as saying, "The new production editor . . . had not realised how complex the project would be; she then advised me that rather than try to rush the book through in time for May [at Ellington '98], we should revise the production schedule." Scarecrow Press now projects the end of the year for its release. ● ● ● Luciano Massagli and Giovanni Volonté plan to present their updated *Duke Ellington Story on Records [DESOR]* here at Ellington '99. ● ● ● Ellington and Strayhorn will be in the Down Beat Jazz Hall of Fame scheduled to open at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida next fall. ● ● ● John Frazier is researching Duke and Mercer Cook's relationship, especially "connecting both men's sense of translation—Ellington's of music and Cook's textual translations between English and French." Cook, after whom Duke named his son, was the son of Duke's mentor Will Marion Cook. Mercer Cook became a distinguished professor of Romance languages and, later, an ambassador. If you might be of help, contact Frazier on the internet at: jofrazie@mailbox.syr.edu

Ellington '98

16th Annual International
Duke Ellington Conference
May 6-10, Chicago

For details, contact:
Ellington '98

6935 South Crandon Avenue, Suite 2D
Chicago, IL 60649
Phone: 773-288-DUKE; Fax: 773-643-4829

See the registration and
information sheet inserted in this issue.

Model Youth Project Plans Outreach to Even Pre-Schoolers

by Luvenia George

The Duke Ellington Youth Project has received the endorsement/support of *Downbeat* Magazine Special Projects directed by Tom Alexios. Plans are being made to encourage high school students to work with Head Start and other outreach programs that involve young children in an effort to stimulate early interest in music. This is a novel approach to music education that we feel has great possibilities for both the present and future. Youth Project students will be eligible to receive college scholarships, and very young children will be inspired to develop an interest in music. We expect to begin in the fall with this very challenging and new facet of our Project.

Based on our model, the Kansas City, MO public schools are planning their own Duke Ellington Youth Festival. In collaboration with the 18th and Vine Jazz Museum, a month-long celebration of Ellington in April will feature Kansas City students.

Member and Father Gensel Were Close Friends

In our condolences to the family of Father Gensel last month, we might well have included one of our members, Ulysses LaPradde, who was like family to him. A mutual friend notes that they "were like brothers." As the current *DEMS Bulletin* says, Ulysses "lost his dearest and closest friend."

Ulysses was with John, as he called him, when Father Gensel was stricken and fell on December 20 in Pennsylvania, where the Gensels had moved following his retirement. Understandably he says, "I have not been the same since." Their close working and personal relationship had begun at about the time Ulysses assisted Father Gensel in connection with Duke's funeral. Over the years, Ulysses was always about, giving most generously of his time and resources in working together with as well as assisting his good friend in many activities and projects. His latest efforts, of course, have been in the preparations for the commemorative services in New York for Father Gensel, a traditional religious ceremony on April 18 and a jazz memorial the next day.

♪ Ellington '98 Notes ♪

♪ Pack your formal attire: A press release says, "We're taking our cue from Duke and going Black Tie for *My People*" on Friday, May 8. ♪ A special "Sweet Pea" segment will precede the performance. ♪

"Dramatis Felidae"

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

Kudos to **Helen Frazier, Patricia Braxton, and Marion Shell** for designing our membership card and to **Mac Grimmer** for designing our new stationery. ♪ ♪ Our members continue their presence in publications. **Ben Pubols'** article on the question of when Ray Nance left the band during the Middle East tour appears in the *DEMS Bulletin*. He cites **Walter van de Leur's, Ted Hudson's,** and his research, concluding that "the evidence is pretty compelling that Nance left the band prior to the 13 September Amman concert." Watch for Ben's forthcoming article on the debate on who arranged Duke's recording of "Azure." ♪ ♪

Trumpeter Nat Woodward Dies

Nat Woodward, who played in the *My People* and in the regular orchestra for part of 1964-65, recently passed in New York City. Nat is known to enthusiasts for his trumpet work on "Skillipoop" (aka "Jungle Triangle") in the CBC television show *The Duke* and released on the Rarities #29 LP.

✉ From Our Mailbox:

A simple thank you hardly seems adequate to express my appreciation for the posthumous Certificate of Appreciation the Ellington Society bestowed on Art. It is always gratifying to know your efforts are appreciated....

Sincerely,
Marion Pilkington

Quotation of the Month

... Herman Melville having made what he made of the crew of the *Pequod* may have gained new dimensions and resonances from a world tour with the *Duke Ellington Orchestra*.

-- Last sentence in the book *The Blue Devils of Nada: A Contemporary American Approach to Aesthetic Statement* by culture and aesthetics thinker-critic Albert Murray.

Noteworthy Piano Night

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

President Ted Shell, at the end of the evening, pronounced our March meeting "the best member's choice we have ever had." Indeed, our members produced choices of such variety as well as quality that we were wondering throughout the evening what we were going to hear next—how could it possibly top the previous selection? Their selections included:

Ted Shell: two virtuosos, Marcus Roberts' "Mood Indigo" and Oscar Peterson's "Things Ain't"; Ted Hudson: excerpts from Michael Roeder's 1996 Toronto lecture on the "Back to Back" sessions, concluding with Duke's solo on "Stompy Jones," then Luther Henderson (celeste) and Strayhorn (piano) backing singer Marion Bruce (Logan) on "In a Sentimental Mood"; Ben Pubols: a piano roll "Jig Walk" from 1924, which may or may not have been Duke, "Lots O'Fingers" (1932) and an interspersed "Sophisticated Lady" (1932) and "In a Sentimental Mood" (1936), both of which were Duke; Patricia Willard: Jimmy Jones on "I Like the Sunrise," from *Francis A & Edward K*," the only Ellington composition of the session and the only one on which Duke didn't play, and Duke's solo on "New World A-Coming" from the First Sacred Concert in Grace Cathedral; George Henderson: "Satin Doll" from the *All Star Road Band #2* album, with a great Duke solo halfway through; Ed Morris: Dave McKenna's "C Jam Blues" and Duke's audience participation number, "I'm Beginning to See The Light," from the Whitney album; Mac Grimmer: Roland Hanna's "A-Train." from Montreux, 1974, and Barbara Carroll's "Satin Doll"; Jack Towers: two trio numbers, the second of which was "Carolina Shout," with Duke, Woode and Woodyard, rescued by Jerry Valburn from the Columbia Studios trash heap; Angela Grimmer: two Earl Hines numbers, "I'm Beginning to See the Light" and "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," wide-open grooving; Mark O'Blazney: two later interpretations of "I Got It Bad..." by Thelonius Monk and Bill Evans; Helen Frazier: Strayhorn on "A-Train," from Billy's *Peaceful Side* album.

We closed the evening with a rollicking "Perdido," by Billy Kyle with Louis Armstrong's All-Stars, with a little flourish by Louis at the end to send everyone home happy.

Calendar

- March 19 - Ella Fitzgerald Exhibit Opening, National Museum of American History (NMAH)
- April 4 - Society Meeting, at the Shells' Home
- April 24 - Ellington Youth Project: Art Show Opening, Poetry Reading, and Youth Festival
- April 24-May 31 - Youth Project Art Show, NMAH
- April 28 - The Maestro's Birthdate
- May 6-10 - Ellington '98, Chicago

DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY
Washington, DC

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