

Ellingtonia



Newsletter of the Washington, D.C.

Duke Ellington Society

Volume VI, Number 9

DECEMBER 1998

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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P.O. Box 15591 . Washington, D.C. 20003-0787, U.S.A.

George, Yarborough Earn Arts Honors

At the 14th Annual Mayor's Arts Awards, our Society's Luvenia George was named winner for "Outstanding Contribution to Arts Education." The level of competition was high, finalists including such institutional nominees as the Dance Institute of Washington and the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz.

In the "Excellence in Service to the Arts" group, Davey Yarborough, teacher at the Ellington School of the Arts and director of its internationally known New Washingtonians student orchestra, won. He too was in choice company, for example, the Vocal Arts Society and the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Dr. George's citation mentioned, among other things, her book, *Teaching the Music of Six Different Cultures*, now in its second edition, her conducting of "many award-winning choirs," and her recent induction into the African-American Museum Hall of Fame. Of course, we know her best as Director of the Duke Ellington Youth Project.

As to Davey Yarborough, among his mentioned accomplishments were his deanship of instrumental music at the Ellington School of the Arts and his conception and presentation of the Smithsonian's lecture series "Jazz Evenings for Young Professionals." His saxophone can be heard in the theme music of NBC's "The Cosby Show." Further, he is the conductor on the New Washingtonians, the excellent student orchestra at the Ellington school.

Television personality René Poussaint presided at the awards gala. Music included a "Salute to the Duke" by music director Rickey Payton, Sr. and Duke's "Limbo Jazz" by the Monk Institute's Jazz Sextet.

We heartily congratulate Luvenia George and Davey Yarborough!

December Meeting at Smithsonian Archives Center: "Three Lovely Ladies of Song"

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

For the third consecutive year, the Smithsonian Archives Center will host our December meeting, in what is rapidly becoming a pre-holiday tradition with the Ellington Society. It will be held again in the National Museum of American History, home of the Ellington Collection, on **Saturday, December 5.**

Deborra Richardson, Assistant Chair of the Archives Center, will reprise her multimedia presentation, "Three Lovely ladies of Song, given at the recent Chicago international conference. Deborra, with assistance from the rest of the Archives staff, will explore the prevailing attitudes toward women and musicianship during the 40s, as well as the friendship that developed among the three women in Duke's "Pretty Department," Kay Davis, Maria Ellington, and Joya Sherrill.

The Museum is on Constitution Ave., between 12th and 14th Streets, NW. Please use the Constitution Ave. 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 Center, since the rest of the museum will be closed at this time. Don't miss your chance to hear this unique program and also see some of the photos, music manuscripts and documents in the Ellington Collection!

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Our President and First Lady
Ted and Marion Shell
Wish Members and Friends a
Joyous Holiday Season



Commentary: "Two Native Sons"

From the Flying Dutchman (Dutch Brown) - To the Peregrinating Duke (Edward Kennedy Ellington [unintelligible]) - Two Native Sons - 13th & T - 11th & R - + elsewhere in - Foggy Bottom - Armstrong Kissing Dunbar - tut-tut!! Thus reads the inscription on the back of a photograph in the Smithsonian's Archives of the two engaged in a Ducal "four cheeks" kiss. The occasion is their being awarded honorary doctoral degrees at Howard University in 1971. The street references are to same neighborhood, respective "hanging-out" places, 13th and T near Duke's home and 11th and R, site of Lincoln Temple Church, where Brown's father, a professor of theology at Howard, was pastor; Foggy Bottom is the area where Duke was born. The kissing bit is a little "signifying" on the friendly rivalry between their high schools, Armstrong being Duke's and Dunbar, Brown's. They, barely two years apart in age, had grown up in a racially segregated Washington that, fortunately ironic, in Brown's words was the home of "the most distinguished and brilliant assemblage of Negroes in the world."



Dutch and Duke
Courtesy Ellington Collection
Smithsonian Institution

Last month a two-day symposium, "A Celebration of Sterling A. Brown, American Poet and Cultural Worker," took place at the Library of Congress. The event drew top-notch students and critics of aesthetics and culture. His son, our Society's Jack Dennis, while not on the printed program, when accepting an official citation of Sterling N. Brown Days, reminisced eloquently and wittily.

This celebration called to mind that though engaged in different cultural endeavors, these two native sons creatively evolved, in significant ways, certain similar aesthetics. Both worked apart from received notions of culture. Importantly, for example, both grounded their art in vernacular traditions, extracting from them "high art." Ellington never forgot the blues and the spiritual essence of his musical heritage; Brown knew the wisdom and values embedded in vernacular language. And so Dutch and Duke illuminated the timeless and universal in that which appears to be indigenous and provincial or, to use an overused term, ethnic. The type of scholarly and ultimately insightful examination of Brown at the symposium suggests possibilities for increasingly broadened and deepened interdisciplinary study of his hometown contemporary, Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington.

Ed. note: Those who want to know more about him will find helpful Callaloo: Sterling A. Brown, critical essays on him, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, and Sterling A. Brown by Joanne V. Gabin, published by the University Press of Virginia.

Mozart and Ellington

Ed. note: The following items by two of our members are from Andrew Homzy's Duke-LYM internet site.

There is enough room in the world to recognize both Mozart and Ellington (as well as Strayhorn) as geniuses. However, I agree that the term should be used sparingly. In my short life, in addition to Duke (I never met Strays), I have met only two individuals I would call geniuses—one was a historian and the other was a neuroanatomist. No musician, jazz or otherwise.

But perhaps there are greater attributes creative individuals can possess than that of genius. In their later years, Braque is reported to have said of his friend and colleague, Picasso: "Alas, poor Picasso—he used to be an artist. Now he is only a genius."
-- Ben Pubols

Oh, but I love the impossible comparisons. I make them all the time. I guess I've gotten so used to making them that I don't consider them impossible at all. I find that comparing Ellington and Mozart, thinking about differences and similarities, helps me understand and appreciate both.

I love most styles of music. For example, I've always compared the development of jazz to that of classical music. I think of Louis Armstrong and New Orleans jazz to be the equivalent of Medieval and Renaissance polyphony. The development of country blues are akin to the development of songs such as Marley. The Baroque and Classical was the early big band era. The Romantics were the cool jazz and the ballad sax players. The 20th century composers are often as wild as the free jazz movement. Even individual styles merit comparison. I can explain classical music to jazz fans by telling them that many of Bach's great works were improvisations that were later written down. That Mozart was as syncopated as any jazz.

I find the similarities between these different styles to be more significant than the differences. I find much more in common between Monk and Debussy's piano music than between Monk and Oscar Peterson.

Perhaps I've taken the phrase "Beyond Category" too much to heart?

-- Peter MacHare

Short Sheets . . .

The Ellington Orchestra under the direction of grandson Paul Mercer Ellington has been getting some good reports on the internet. Here, for example, is an excerpt from an especially enthusiastic one by David Palmquist, who caught the band in British Columbia: "I guess the way to describe the style of this contemporary group is this—no electric guitars, no out of control drummers, but strong, strong soloists backed up by magnificent sidemen. . . . The music is true Ellington in the style of the 50's and early 60's, i.e., mature but swinging enough to knock your socks off, but plenty of quality improvising." ♪ ♪ One may also note on the internet good things about the Billy Strayhorn website at: <http://www.billystrayhorn.com> ♪ ♪ DESUK reportedly has a website now, but we don't know its address. ♪ ♪ There's a possibility that a special *DEMS Bulletin* of selected previously published articles will be prepared for distribution at Ellington '99. ♪ ♪

Slatkin Comes To Aid of Youth Orchestra

Faced with a possible phase-out of DC school system funds, the DC Youth Orchestra was given an immediate boost when Leonard Slatkin asked at a Kennedy Center concert for suggestions for help, but did not specify financial. By the second concert, pledges from individuals and businesses had come in, enough to cover budget slashes.

Its October "Salute to Duke Ellington" black-tie benefit gala at the Austrian Embassy and Mayflower Hotel was a success artistically and otherwise. The students presented an all-Ellington/Strayhorn program. The souvenir booklet for the occasion contains a formal greeting by Ted Shell on behalf of our Society. He also spoke briefly.

After youth orchestra music, dinner and ceremonies, The Duke's Men, led by Ellington alumnus Art Baron, played. At one point they were joined by three trombonists from the youth group, who acquitted themselves admirably!

While DC is a part of the orchestra's title and much of its basic funding comes from the city's school system, it is a regional orchestra. Its repertoire is eclectic, but mainly classical. Throughout its 36-year history, a number of its over 50,000 students have gone on to perform with major musical groups, such as the Washington National Symphony. At the invitation of Austria, the orchestra will perform in an American Celebration of Music there in 1999.

Their Dues Are No Longer Due

Several persons have paid their dues for 1999. The "firsts" are Erica MacHare (student), Bob Hohlmayer (new), and, as again this year, Davey Fleming (renewal). Get your membership for the centennial year, 1999, in as soon as possible. Then give someone a membership as a holiday gift.

such sweet thunder (for sam woodyard)

*before muhammad ali,
sam woodyard shuffled
in the spotlight;
hands intent
on the same sublime knockout punch
of beauty.
swinging, sweating,
summoning strength in corners;
hearing the pa system call his name.
roadwork: buses, trains,
black, brown or beige tarmacs.
ellington's nomadic canvas
(seductive as butterflies flirting
with the eyes of children)
is the payoff for these brown bombers—
rings beneath the collars,
and the eyes*

-- Reuben Jackson

Quotation of the Month

Duke's was a working band, and it moved into the concert hall when the work moved there. They didn't 'outgrow' the dance hall in some way, the ballroom business simply folded.

-- Roger Boyes in *Blue Light* 5.3 (1998)



April 28-May 2, 1999
Washington, DC

Ellington '99

Theme:
"Edward, You Are Blessed."

PO Box 42504, Washington, DC 20015-9998, USA

"Dramatis Felidae"

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

For Ellington '99, Jerry Valburn and Jack Towers are preparing a special CD of Ellington's appearances in the Washington, DC area, including such venues as Uline Arena, the Armory, and, of course, the Howard Theater. ♪ ♪ Hollie West attended the Sterling Brown symposium at the Library of Congress. His 1979 "The Day of the Wordmaster" is a perceptive introduction to Brown. In a related event sponsored by a book store, Brian Gilmore was one of three persons selected to read their original poetry honoring Brown. ♪ ♪ Geneva Hudson was high bidder for two items in the silent auction at the DC Youth Orchestra fund-raising gala. One is a complete orchestral score of Billy Strayhorn's "Take the "A" Train" transcribed by Brent Wallarab and edited by Gunther Schuller. ♪ ♪ Jack Towers supplied an audio tape of an unidentified interview of Johnny Hodges that is printed in the current issue of the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden's *Bulletin*. It also has a photo from Ellington '98 of Geneva Hudson and Patricia Braxton with Al Hibbler. And there is a reprint of the Washington *Post's* article on the DC's Ellington Youth Project Festival, in which its director, Luvenia George, is quoted. ♪ ♪ Dennis Dimmer is in a Chicago conference photo in the current *Blue Light*. ♪ ♪ Aledra Allen and Patricia Braxton's World Bank/IMF Jazz Society sponsored Dick Morgan in a November concert at the World Bank auditorium.

Mark Your Calendar

Saturday, December 5 — Regular Monthly Meeting, Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, 8 pm

Saturday, January 2 — Annual Holiday Party, Grace Lutheran Church

DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

Washington, DC

President	Theodore A. Shell
Vice President	Theodore R. Hudson
Secretary	Angela Grimmer
Treasurer	Jack Towers
Program Coordinator	Mac Grimmer
Ellington '99 Coordinator	Ben Pubols
At-Large Board Members	
Aledra Allen	Patricia Braxton
Luvenia George	Mac Grimmer
Ben Pubols, Jr.	Patricia Willard
[Remaining Position Open]	

November Meeting A Johnny Hodges Festival

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Johnny Hodges was front and center at our November meeting, a members' choice evening dedicated to the alto sax superstar. Members complained of the difficulty of making selections from so much superlative material, and had we played all the songs requested we would have been there well into the early morning.

Mac Grimmer began with the 1956 "Passion Flower," a neglected version originally on the Rosemary Clooney LP until revived on the Smithsonian *Singers & Soloists* collection. Helen Frazier's selection was rollicking "Wings 'n Things" from the *Côte d'Azur* package. Ben Pubols played "Warm Valley" and "Never No Lament" from the Fargo concert, after which we gave an ovation to Jack Towers, acknowledging the 58th anniversary of that event. Jack followed with "Whispering Grass," then a new feature for Hodges, the only playback Duke requested that night, now so long ago. Ted Hudson's selections were "Stompy Jones" from the Sportpalast in Berlin and "The Midnight Sun Will Never Set," a Quincy Jones tune. Ed Morris surprised us with a tape of three solos from three different albums, sandwiched in the middle of a Bob Dorough vocal entitled, appropriately, "Johnny Hodges."

After a brief intermission, during which time Ben gave us an update on the '99 conference, we returned to the main order of business, the Rabbit. Ted Shell's selection was some rare material from the Rainbow Room, an octet with Hodges as the principal soloist. Peter MacHare's choices were "Sophisticated Lady" and a "I Let a Song.../Don't Get Around..." medley. Angela Grimmer played a Hodges original, "I Told You So," and a standard, "The Very Thought of You." The evening concluded with Marion Shell's selections from the Lawrence Welk album, which might be called "Johnny Hodges with Strings." After one more tune, a jaunty "All of Me," from the *Party* album, we, and Johnny Hodges, were through for the night.

Special Deals on Special CDs

If the *Colors of Eve* CD by Eve Smith (known simply as Yvonne when she sang with Duke) is not in stock at your record store, you can get one from her. Send US\$20 (including s&h) via Ted Hudson. Buying Davey Yarborough's *Lovetones* at the 2000 Pennsylvania Ave. Tower store can produce \$2 for Peoples Church for the next month. Just bring your receipt to the church office at 4704 - 13th St., NW.