

Ellingtonia



Newsletter Of The
Duke Ellington Society

Washington, D.C.

Volume VII, Number 5

MAY 1999

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

Copyright © 1999 by the Duke Ellington Society, Inc.

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

Members Contribute to Ellington Centenary Products, Publications

Davey Yarborough co-stars on a CD, Jack Towers and Brian Gilmore have articles in periodicals, David Fleming, Patricia Willard and Ted Hudson wrote annotations for CDs, and Jerry Valburn and Jack Towers produced a CD—all in celebration of Duke Ellington's 100th birthday year.

Royal Essence: An Evening of Ellington features the duo of Davey Yarborough, reeds, and Sir Roland Hanna, piano, recorded live at nearby Montpelier Cultural Arts Center. The CDs for which David, Patricia, and Ted wrote notes are, respectively: *What a Life* by Bob Hunt's Duke Ellington Orchestra, commissioned by the Duke Ellington Society, United Kingdom (DE Suk) for release during the Centenary Year; "The Last Recordings" section of the *Centennial Edition* of Duke's RCA recordings; and *The Duke in Washington*, produced by Jerry and Jack especially as an Ellington '99 souvenir.

Brian's thoughtful "The Blessings of Ellington" is the prestigious "Last Word" page of the special Ellington-focused April issue of *emerge*. Jack's "An Evening with Ellington" in the "Happy Birthday, Duke!" edition of *Down Beat* is about his and friend Dick Burris' now-famous recording of the band at Fargo in 1940. It includes a full page of Jack's photographs taken on the occasion. Ellington '99 commissioned a bust of Ellington by sculptress Ferebee Streett; limited edition copies may be purchased at the Conference site.

As we noted previously, our members have been especially active in a variety of programs, panels, and talk shows, among them Patricia Willard, Jack Towers, Ted Shell, Rusty Hassan, and Luvenia George. Of course, a number of our members have been working very hard on Ellington '99. We'll tell about them in the next issue.

Ellington '99 Coverage

This *Ellingtonia* issue will be out before the 17th Annual International Duke Ellington Conference begins; thus, there is no report of it in this edition.

May Program: Ellingtonia in England

by Mac Grimmer, Program Coordinator

One of our English members, Dennis Dimmer, has promised to stay an extra week after the Conference and will make a rare appearance at our meeting on May 8. He will present the program, the story of the emergence of Ellingtonia in England. Duke's first visit there, in 1933, stimulated interest and encouraged development of an Ellington repertoire by British bands, slowly at first, but accelerating in the late 30's. Ellingtonia had fully emerged by the 50s, culminating in groups such as the Ted Heath band. We are fortunate to have Dennis, a close observer of the British jazz scene, here to tell and show with musical examples how it happened, for this is an area in which even many knowledgeable Ellington experts know little. The date is **May 8 (the SECOND Saturday, due to the conflicting Conference on the first Saturday), at 8 pm, Grace Lutheran Church, 16th & Varnum Sts, NW.** Be ready for an encounter with a whole New World of Ellingtonia, from the Old World!

Ellington Collection Tour Now On-Line

Thanks largely to our member Scott Schwartz, enthusiasts can now take a tour of the Ellington Collection on the internet. Go to the home page: si.edu/organiza/museums/nmah/archives/ac-i.htm, then take a link from there. Equipment requirements include: IBM Pentium processor, 28.8 baud modem, sound Netscape 3.0 or higher/equivalent for Explorer and Shockwave 7.0.

The Duke in Washington, Ellington '99 Souvenir CD

Washington Production by Jerry Valburn and Jack Towers, Notes by Ted Hudson
Copenhagen: Storyville Records

Preview by Brian Gilmore

It seemed appropriate that the very first selection on this special release, *The Duke in Washington*, is "I Wonder Why" with the late Betty Roché singing lead. Roché, who passed only recently, managed over the years to sing many of Ellington's best performances before she disappeared altogether from the jazz world, this tune being no exception to her consistently clean, strong and bright deliveries.

This recording, a dynamic selection of live tunes by the Ellington band in and around Washington, DC, is nonetheless full of everything which made Ellington and the Ellington Orchestra the institution that it is too: carefully chosen solos, inspired performances, excellent musical selection, and of course, the incomparable personality and artistic excellence of Duke. Rex Stewart (born in Philly, but moved to Washington and was schooled here) is here with that singular trumpet style that kept him in the Ellington band for much of the swing era, and which acquired for him his own following of fans who preferred a style that could play a variety of different ways and could experiment with the best. Stewart's tune here is "Amor, Amor," and he doesn't miss the opportunity to showcase his talents for U.S. Navy personnel in Bainbridge, Maryland.

The *Duke in Washington* is also full of both acknowledged classics like the long length "Harlem" and two consistent Ellington showstoppers, "Perdido" and "Take the A-Train," but then there are tunes which rarely appear on Ellington recordings such as "A Single Petal of a Rose," "The Blues" (excerpt from *Black, Brown, and Beige*) and "All the Things," where another unsung hero from Washington, DC, Rick Henderson, stretches out with courage on saxophone.

Suitably, this album of extraordinary recordings ends with Duke at the White House entertaining President Richard Nixon and family on Duke's 70th birthday. That event, heavily covered by the local press at the time, rewarded Washington's favorite son with a triumphant return to his birthplace, and he did it in style in the house that runs the entire world. I hear even Dick Nixon was impressed. You will be impressed with this entire recording.

lush life (for Billy Strayhorn)

a mid-life adolescent
playing the changes:
negro to colored to black
in central vermont winters—
echoes of spring
beneath brown boots,
black, resilient earth
and i,
bedecked in webster
blue overalls,
yearning for something
in addition to/other than
"purple haze."
Enter swee pea's lament—
socrates in d flat.
lyrical comfort
as snow fell
like pages from a
raconteur's
black book
and where
crude snifter
filled with mateus rose,
corncob holding
prince albert's finest,
i sat, wondrously suspended
between woodstock
and the montmarte.

— Reuben Jackson

Commemorative Year CDs Flourish

For enthusiasts, not just completists, the Centenary Year brings a wealth of Ellington recordings, among them:

- ♪ *The Complete Capitol Ellington, 1953-55* (Blue Note) 5-CD set reissue of Mosaic's
- ♪ *The Duke Ellington Centennial Edition: The Complete RCA Recordings, 1927-1973* (BMG) 24-CD set
- ♪ *The Duke in Washington* (Storyville Records), produced in conjunction with our Ellington '99 Conference.
- ♪ *Royal Essence: An Evening of Ellington* (JazzMont Records) featuring Davey Yarborough, reeds, and Sir Roland Hanna, piano, as a duo; recorded live at nearby Montpelier Cultural Arts Center
- ♪ *Johnny Hodges and Billy Strayhorn's Orchestra* (Verve), reissue
- ♪ *Side by Side* (Verve), Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodes, reissue
- ♪ *Soul Call* (verve) reissue
- ♪ *What a Life!* (Lake Records) by Bob Hunt's Duke Ellington Orchestra, sponsored by the Duke Ellington Society, United Kingdom (DESUK)
- ♪ As yet untitled all-Ellington release by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra

Short Sheets . . .

As a centennial recognition of Ellington, the Annapolis Symphony performed "Solitude" as an encore for its regular concert in February. Scored as the beautiful melody it is, mercifully with no attempt to "classicize" it, the rendition drew a standing ovation. The orchestra's conductor, Dr. Leslie Dunner, an admirer of Ellingtonia, guest-conducted the National Symphony in *The River* last summer. ♪ ♪ *Momentum Bulletin*, an "Interim Version" of the Strayhorn family's suspended *Momentum*, is out. As published here previously, the original is being reviewed in preparation for a revamping. ♪ ♪ The Smithsonian's "Beyond Category" exhibit has completed a five-year tour; a smaller version will tour for another year or two. ♪ ♪ David Hajdu's biography of Strayhorn, *Lush Life*, is now on an audiocassette produced by Talking Book Topics. ♪ ♪ A-pun my word: DESUK's internet server is < *clara.net* >. ♪ ♪ We extend condolences to Peter Robinson, friend of our Society who judged *pro bono* our logo competition and has done us other favors, on the death of his wife of many years, Frances Robinson.

Here's the Web Address For an *MIMM* Index

We mentioned in a previous edition that an index for Duke's *Music Is My Mistress* may be available on the internet. We've learned from Peter MacHare and Sjef Hoefsmits' *DEMS Bulletin* that the web address is: < <http://home0.inet.tele.dk/jurian-m/index.htm> >.

The compiler is Jørgen Mathiasen of Denmark. Huon's earlier index is really three (people, places and locations, and music); Mathiasen's is one index of compositions and people.

Collectors Celebrate Duke

by Mac Grimmer

The Association for Recorded Sound Collectors celebrated Duke's 100th at their March meeting in the Library of Congress. Larry Appelbaum's program included rare and otherwise unavailable videos from the Valburn collection, as well as audio selections from the members and guests, providing a broad spectrum of Ellingtonia..

Perhaps the biggest treat, new to almost everyone in the audience, was a film clip of Strayhorn actually playing the piano! A fascinating evening for everyone.

Long-Time Member Malcolm Tillett's Funeral Reflects His Tastes in Music

Live and recorded music that he loved in life were part of the last rites for Malcolm Tillett in April. A devoted member of our Society since 1957, he attended regularly until the last few years, when illness curtailed his mobility. His wife, Bernice, and Malcolm were vital to the success of the first Ellington Study Group Conference, here in 1983; they also worked on the 1989 Conference. Norma McCray, whom Malcolm had successfully urged to join, spoke as a friend and as a member of our Society.

The only traditional funeral music was the Navy Hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," which Malcolm had said he would want, having served in that branch of the military. During the wake, before the service, Ellington's recorded sacred music, requested by his widow, was played on an audio set-up provided by Jack Towers and Ted Shell. During the funeral, they played the recording of "The 23rd Psalm," sung by Mahalia Jackson with the Ellington orchestra. Live music by a swinging group, Sheila Ford and Friends, included "Come Sunday" and a scatted "A Train," both featuring vocals by Ms. Ford. Malcolm would have enjoyed it all immensely.

He was interred in Arlington Cemetery several days later in a private ceremony. Contributions in memory of Malcolm Tillett may be sent to the American Diabetes Association or the American Lung Association.

We will miss our dear friend. We extend to Bernice Tillett and family our profound sympathy.

Competition Open for Commissioned Works to Honor Ellington

ASCAP and the International Association of Jazz Educators invites applications for two commissions to honor Ellington. A \$7,500 award will go to an established "jazz composer of international prominence"; another, for \$3,000 will be to an emerging jazz composer who has not reached his or her 35th birthday" by June 1. For details, write to: 2803 Claflin Rd, PO Box 724, Manhattan, KS 66505, USA, phone 785-776-8744.

We Note With Deep Regret . . .

. . . the passing of vocalist Joe Williams, who sang Ellington and Strayhorn songs with such sensitivity. Those at the second Ellington Conference, in Chicago in 1984, will fondly remember his performance there.

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

Brian Gilmore is the proud father of a baby girl. Mother, child, and dad are doing just fine. ♪ ♪ Luvenia George spoke at the "Everything Ellington: Duke's Place in Contemporary Education" conference in Cleveland in March, sponsored by a partnership of the Tri-C JazzFest and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. ♪ ♪ Congratulations and thanks are in order for Mac Grimmer for his compilation "Duke's Washington," distributed along with this year's membership cards. He includes Duke's residences, places of significance during his early years, and venues where he performed over the years (with dates!) ♪ ♪

Commemorations Continuing Throughout Centennial Year

As well they should, observances of the year of Ellington's birth will be taking place all year, among them radio and television airings, publications, music releases, lectures, exhibits, and public programs.

Locally, the exhibition of artwork by students in the Duke Ellington Youth Project continues at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History through May 31. At the Postal Museum in May, Annie Kuebler will speak on correspondence and stamps in the Ellington Collection. (By the time this is published she will have made a multi-media presentation on the Collection in Troy, NY.)

On May 2, Jazz Unites will present its "21st Annual Tribute to Duke Ellington" at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. On May 12, PBS Television will present "Swingin' with the Duke," featuring Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra at New York's Supper Club. Books include: *Jump for Joy: Jazz at Lincoln Center Celebrates the Ellington Centennial, 1899-1999* produced by Jazz at Lincoln Center, a collection of essays, interviews, paintings, drawings, and photographs; a biography by Austin Lawrence, scheduled for distribution within the Centennial Year; *Reminiscing in Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* by Stuart Nicholson; *Duke's Diary* by Ken Vail (to be offered at a special price to Ellington '99 registrants); the new *Duke Ellington Story on Records (DESOR)* by Luciano Massagli and Giovanni Volonté; and *Duke Ellington: A Listener's Guide* by Eddie Lambert, seen through to publication by Elaine Norsworthy (reviewed by Peter MacHare in our March issue).

Members Find Some Favorites
by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

Duke's centenary was celebrated at our regular monthly meeting in early April with a member's choice program, with each member bringing one of their favorite Ellington pieces, as well as a lesser known choice, a "find." Many items turned up that were new to everyone but the presenter! We had a sneak prevue of *The Duke in Washington* CD that will be available at the International Conference later this month: Duke's piano solo "Pat," improvised at the White House birthday party. Another highlight was the Rainbow Room octet's broadcast on Hugh Downs's "Today" show, with Duke and the band the only guests of the morning. As Ted Shell pointed out, the band was there early, since they only had to take the elevator down from the Rainbow Room to the ground floor "Today" studio. Other favorites included "Blue Light" and the early versions of "Sophisticated Lady" and "Harlem Air Shaft." A real find was Clark Terry playing "Caravan" with the Charlie Barnet band in 1947 (52 years ago!), well before he joined Duke. He sounded as good then as he does today.

If You Want to Do Research At the Smithsonian . . .

Our out-of-town members and others, as well as local members, may want to do research at the Archives Center, repository of the Ellington and related collections, before or after the Conference. It is open 10 am-5 pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and Noon-5 pm on Wednesdays. Research appointments are necessary; phone 202-357-3270. (See page 1 about touring the collection via the internet.)

