

Ellingtonia



Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society

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Ellington Community Sorrowed By Death of Scholar Mark Tucker

Numerous outpourings of grief and love immediately followed the untimely passing of Mark Tucker on December 6 at his home in Williamsburg, Virginia, having been in failing health for some time. He is survived by his wife, Carol, and two children, Wynn and Zoe, to whom we extend heartfelt condolences.

While he was highly regarded as an authority and author and editor in the field of Ellingtonia, he was equally admired and loved by those who knew him to be a innately unassuming and unusually generous-spirited human being.

Dr. Tucker's definitive *Duke Ellington: The Early Years* is a model of exhaustive, meticulous research and lucid writing, without peer in this area. His judiciously edited *The Duke Ellington Reader* is a comprehensive collection for both lay reader and expert.

He was in great demand as a consultant and lecturer. An accomplished pianist, he often illustrated his talks with selections at the piano, including deft recreations of Ellington's playing. By profession a teacher, his last academic appointment was at the College of William and Mary.

In all his writing and speaking, Mark Tucker was able to present technical or arcane concepts in a manner intelligible to the lay person.

A number of persons who knew Tucker as a friend, casually, or only from his books and presentations have expressed their thoughts and feelings on the Duke-LYM internet site. The excerpts that follow from a few of them indicate their esteem of him as a person and their realization of a great loss.

"Mark Tucker was a humble and charitable man. . . . God bless Mark Tucker." — Andrew Homzy

"Mark Tucker was the most self-effacing and generous scholars I have ever met. . . . he was of a different stripe than not only most other academics, but . . . was a rare human being. . . . a vital and original voice has left us." — Loren Schoenberg

(Continued on page 3 under "Tucker")

Annual Winter Seasonal Social Will Be on January 6

Regardless of venue and type—whether a pot luck 12th-night, a get-together at someone's home or a private club, a sit-down dinner-dance at a caterer's banquet facility, a special egg-nog and fruitcake tasting at Omega House, or whatever—three things have been constant at our yearly winter holiday activity: good food, good music, and most important, the pleasure of each other's company.

This year's event will again be in the **Party Room** of the **Park Sutton Condominium, 1900 Lyttonsville Road, Silver Spring, MD, at 8 pm on Saturday, January 6, 2001.**

As in the past, each current member may invite three guests and is asked to bring something for the communal table. See you there!

Directions:

The Park Sutton is on the corner of 16th Street and Lyttonsville Road in Silver Spring, about ½ mile from DC and from the Beltway. You can park on the street or lighted lot behind the building.

From DC

Go north on 16th St, NW, past the District line (the circle where North Portal Drive and Eastern Ave meet). As you continue, you will see on your right the Spring Shopping Center. Lyttonsville Rd will be the next street on your left.

From 495 (the Beltway)

Take the Georgia Ave exit south toward Silver Spring. After two lights, bear right onto 16th St. After the next light, the Park Sutton Condo will be at Lyttonsville Rd on your right.

Coming in May 2001

First Annual Duke Ellington Society

Student Fund Benefit Concert

Featuring

The Ronnie Wells/Ron Elliston Sextet

Watch for Further Announcements

Annie's Checkin' Out, But It's Not Go'om-Bye

by Ben Pubols

Annie Kuebler has been a major asset to the Ellington community both in the Washington area and beyond. She has been a vital member of the Smithsonian Institution's Archives Center, devoting her efforts full-time to the Ellington and related collections since 1993. Her identification and organization of the hundreds of music manuscripts in the Ellington Collection have made her a leading authority in the field. She has eagerly shared her vast Ellingtonian knowledge with scholars and fans around the world.

Annie's contributions to Ellingtonia have extended beyond those directly related to her duties as a Smithsonian archivist. She has presented papers at recent Annual International Duke Ellington Conferences as well as at colleges and universities. Her writings include program notes for concerts by the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, a contribution to the recently published *Jazz: The First Century*, edited by John Hasse, and the liner notes for the forthcoming CD reissue of Duke's famous Fargo Crystal Ballroom appearance in 1940, originally recorded and now remastered by our own Jack Towers. Annie has also been an active participant in the "Duke-LYM" discussion group on the internet. And of course she has been a major contributor at the Society's annual December meetings held at the Smithsonian's Archives Center.

In addition to these Ellingtonian activities, Annie has developed an abiding interest in the life and music of Mary Lou Williams, and for the past half-dozen years or so has been actively examining her musical output. It was this interest that led Annie to be offered her current position as Project Archivist at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University in Newark, where the Mary Lou Williams Archives are housed. We are confident that the contributions she will make in her new position will be as significant as those she has made at the Smithsonian.

Annie has been a delight to work with and has become a true friend during the seven years I have been a Behind-the-Scenes-Volunteer at the Archives Center—charming, eager to help, always ready to discuss any topic relating to Duke, however trivial or profound. Annie will be missed by her many friends and colleagues in the Washington area. She will always be in our thoughts and we look forward to her promised visits. Meanwhile, we wish her well in her new endeavors.

Asian American Orchestra a Hit in Seattle Concert

Directed by our member Anthony Brown, the Asian American Orchestra performed the *Far East Suite* at Seattle's Earshot Jazz Festival in October. The band received two standing ovations, the second following its encore of "Come Sunday" featuring Qi Chao Liu on Chinese viola (Zhou hu), based on Billy Strayhorn's 1958 arrangement.

Dr. Brown informs us that the orchestra will release *Monk's Moods: The Music of Thelonious Monk* in time for Christmas. The CD will feature guest Monk alumnus Steve Lacy on soprano saxophone. Jointly produced by Orrin Keepnews and Anthony for Emusic, it will be distributed by Fantasy and available as a digital download at < www.emusic.com >.

Those at Ellington 2000 will remember Anthony's presentation, during which he explained how he adapted Duke and Strayhorn's music for the Asian American Orchestra's instrumentation.

A Play On the Bard and the Duke

As we go to press, the musical *Play On!* continues a popular run at Washington's Arena Stage. Apart from its premise of disguised gender identity and its consequences in matters of the heart and apart from the line "If music be the food of love, play on," this stage show bears little resemblance to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Nor does *Play On!* begin to approximate the Bard's thematic resonance. No matter. Nor does it pretend complexity of plot. No matter either. The glorious music makes such considerations inconsequential. As the *Baltimore Sun* concluded, "... when the cast is singing the show's 23 marvelous Ellington songs, 'Play on!' transcends..." The *Washington Post's* reviewer noted "the brilliant, multihued complexity of Ellington's music." Billy Strayhorn's, too, we insist, for the production includes such classics as "Take the 'A' Train" and "Something to Live For."

Here are reactions of two of our members:

Geneva Hudson: A feast for the eyes and ears is my overall assessment of *Play On!* The staging, singing, choreography, and costumes are outstanding. It has been brilliantly adapted for a theater-in-the-round, and the talented performers, well-suited for their roles, make music memorable for those who were around in the 40s as well as for the younger set, not so familiar with the music. The show was even more enjoyable for me because Gary E. Vincent, the featured vocalist in the "Black Butterfly" segment that opens the second act, is a fellow member of my church choir. It is an evening of sheer enjoyment.

Norma McCray: Cotton Club diva Lady Liz is powerfully portrayed by Nikki Crawford, who was born in Silver Spring, attended Springbrook High School there, and after a year at Howard, graduated from Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh. The choreography by Mercedes Ellington, Duke's granddaughter, is great and full of energy; there is never a lull in it, no static moments. The memorable music is vintage Duke. I liked *Play On!* very much and would consider seeing it for a second time.

Short Sheets . . .

♫♫ Royal Stokes discussed and signed his new book, *Living the Jazz Life: Conversations with Forty Musicians*, at Borders Books & Music in December. ♫♫ Steve Hancock, who performed at Ellington 2000, is “embarking on some serious concert tours.” Watch his website: < www.Stev Hancock.com >. ♫♫ Gary E. Vincent, the featured soloist in the “Black Butterfly” segment that opens the second act of *Play On!* is a graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and earned a BFA in musical theater from Howard University. Among his credits are roles in *Guys and Dolls* and *Dreamgirls*; also, he currently sings with the choral group Voices of Peoples, of which our Esther Williams and Geneva Hudson are members. ♫♫

Youth Project Expands Its Curriculum

Reported by Luvenia George

Representing schools from each Washington, DC ward, 65 teachers received materials and instruction for their students on the theme “The First Century of Jazz: Duke Ellington and His Contemporaries” as the Duke Ellington Youth Project began its 10th year with the Teachers Workshop in November. Niani Kilkenny, director of the Smithsonian’s Program in African-American Culture, welcomed them and introduced Rex Ellis, chair of the Division of Cultural History. Special guest was David Baker, artistic director of the Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, president-elect of the International Jazz Educators Association, Indiana University professor, author, and composer, who shared insights into the music of Ellington and other artists.

After a decade of concentration solely on the great Ellington, the Project has now broadened its horizon to include jazz greats Louis Armstrong, Gerry Mulligan and Miles Davis. Luvenia George, the Project’s coordinator, presented the teachers with a curriculum that outlined “Six Jazz Masterpieces,” including Ellington’s *Far East Suite*, Armstrong’s “West End Blues,” Miles Davis’ “The Birth of the Cool,” and Gerry Mulligan compositions. The teachers were very enthusiastic about the more encompassing perspective.

This year the Project is collaborating with the Smithsonian’s Lemelson Center in viewing the arts as creative energies that are analogous to creativity in the sciences. The curriculum includes not only music, arts, social studies, English, and Foreign languages, but for the first time, science and mathematics. Also, the Project is collaborating with the Library of Congress in relation to the Gerry Mulligan materials and their value to music and arts education. It promises to be an exciting year!

For Stimulating News, Views, and a Great Ellington/Strayhorn Database. . .

Regularly check Peter MacHare’s “Duke Ellington Panorama” at: < geocities.com/BourbonStreet/Square/2660/ >.

CDs and Book Supplement Burns’ Jazz

Duke Ellington is among the 22 artists for whom individual CDs are available as accessories for “Jazz: The Story of American Music,” the 10-part documentary by Ken Burns scheduled for telecasts January 8-31. CDs may also be had in 5-CD box sets. A separate CD of representative artists and tunes serves as a sampler.

Although the *New York Times*’ reviewer noted some “short-comings” in his preview of the companion book, *Jazz: A History of America’s Music* by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), he thinks that the book “. . . judged on its own terms, must be accounted a success. It will introduce generations of readers who know nothing about jazz to an essential part of their American heritage. It will prompt those of us who know a little to return to our music stores, clubs and concert halls to rediscover musical gems we had long forgotten.”

Some six years in the making, the documentary series, according to a press release, includes 500 pieces of music, over 2,000 still photographs and over 2,000 film clips. Historically, it will consider beginnings in the early part of the twentieth century to post-1960s developments. As might be expected, Armstrong and Ellington are prominent

Tucker (Continued from page 1)

“The news has been numbing. I regarded Mark to be among a new generation of critics, historians and musicologists who have brought a needed and entirely fresh level of perception and insight to jazz and the complex personalities who create it. . . .

“Like Andrew [Homzy] and Loren [Schoenberg], Mark had the ability to break down complicated musical concepts and make the insights accessible, and then combine these with lively scholarship. . . .

“I pulled his Ellington books from the shelf last night and thumbed through them, still in disbelief. I am so sad we have lost him; so grateful that we had him at all.”

– Rob Bamberger

“The spirit of Mark Tucker will live on.” – Bill Egan

“The year 2000 could not have ended with a heavier blow to the Ellington community.

“The most expensive price one has to pay if one grows older and older is to feel the sorrow of losing your best friends. Eddie Lambert, Klaus Stratemann, Mark Tucker. They all died much too young.” – Sjeff Hoefsmit

“Although I did not know Mark personally, I admired him immensely, for all the reasons so well expressed by Loren, Rob, Andrew, and others. . . .

“That Tucker maintained the generosity and humility of spirit which so many have remarked on . . . is an indication of a remarkable depth of character.

“As Andrew said, ‘God bless Mark Tucker’ and his family, and let us also give thanks for what Mark has given to us all.”

– The Reverend Janna Steed

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

About Our Members

♪♪ Davey Yarborough and his wife, who performs professionally as **Esther Williams**, gave a Spiritual Jazz Concert at Plymouth Congregational Church on November 18. Appearing with them were John Ozment, piano, Francis Thompson, drums, and Steve Novosel, bass. ♪♪

♪♪ Our report on Ellington 2000 was reprinted in its entirety in the Fall issue of *In a Mellotone*, publication of the Southern California DES. ♪♪

This Time It's Reuben. Who's Next?

In our November issue, we printed a photo of Yvonne Condell that adorns the AARP headquarters building in downtown Washington, DC, and was appearing in national print media. This month we spotted Reuben Jackson—whom we know as archivist, humorist/humoree, musician, arts and culture lecturer, critic, poet, and great guy in the bargain—taking up a full page in a two-page advertisement by Hewlett Packard in *Travel and Leisure* magazine. The same appears in a number of other widely distributed publications, including *Martha Stewart Living*, *Oprah*, *Rolling Stone*, *Black Enterprise*, and *National Geographic*.



Quotation of the Month

"... When I Really Heard the Call"

... when I was around 12 or 13. I had some money for my birthday, I think, and I went into a record store. I thought I'd buy an album. I didn't know what I was going to get, but I was very intrigued by a set of Duke Ellington 78's on Brunswick, because it said "Duke Ellington And His Famous orchestra." And I was wondering, why is he famous, you know? (laughs) Why is it a famous orchestra, you know? It just looked interesting, I don't know why, but I bought it, sight unheard, just like that. And I took it home and I flipped. It was the most fascinating music I had heard—the original growl, the jungle band, you know? . . . And I flipped, man, I thought was...whew, out of sight. And that was really the beginning of my passion for jazz.

— This excerpt is from an interview of clarinetist and soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy printed in *Cadence*, November 1998. We thank Bob Reny for bringing it to our attention.

Important Dates

Jan. 6 — Society's Annual Holiday Party (See page 1.)

May 6 — First Annual Youth Fund Concert

The Disappearing Guitar At the Smithsonian

by Angela Grimmer, Secretary

At our December meeting, Scott Schwartz presented a fascinating program at the Smithsonian: the story of the disappearing guitar in Ellington's band. Scott pointed out that most of the early bands had a guitar in the rhythm section; Duke had Freddie Guy - first on banjo, then guitar. His importance diminished as the band expanded and progressed through the 30s and 40s, but Duke's interest in the guitar was rekindled when he encountered Django Reinhardt, who was recruited for an American tour with the Ellington band. However, after the Reinhardt episode and Guy's retirement in the late 40s, there was no replacement and no guitar in the band from then on. Eventually the guitar even disappeared from "Guitar Amour," the piece Duke wrote for the movie *Paris Blues*, and it became a violin feature for Ray Nance. Scott speculated that, for Duke, Django represented the pinnacle of the jazz guitar.

A brief business meeting was then held, in accordance with our by-laws amendment, in which the terms of our officers was extended 6 months, in order to coincide with the calendar—and membership—year. During intermission, we took advantage of the Smithsonian's hospitality and refreshments and looked over some of the Archives' latest acquisitions from the Cat Anderson and the Edward and Gaye Ellington collections. Then, to close the evening, Ben Pubols emceed a video program, including some early Duke and soundies featuring Herb Jeffries.

Again this year, we want to extend our appreciation to Deborra Richardson, Martha Lawrenz, Scott, Ben, and the Smithsonian staff for a most enjoyable evening.

Do You See a Star? ☆

If you see a star ☆ beside your name on your mailing label, you are a *stellar* present, past, or prospective member whom we urge to get your dues for the year 2001 in without delay. Just use the enclosed form or bring your dues to the next meeting.

The schedule is unchanged: Renewing Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; First-Time-Ever Member, \$20; and Student, \$5.

If there is no star beside your name or if your check "is in the mail," please pass the form on to someone else. Thank you.

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

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