

# Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of  
*The Duke Ellington Society*



Courtesy Carlyle Productions

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**JUNE 2001**

Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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## **First Benefit Concert a Success Artistically and Financially!**

A full audience gave featured vocalist Ronnie Wells and her accompanists, Ron Ellison and Friends, a standing ovation at the end of their concert of Ellington and Strayhorn music at Grace Lutheran Church on May 5. A fund-raising event for the Society's Student Fund, it turned a tidy profit as well, slightly exceeding expectations of several associated with its production.

The first set was all-Strayhorn, including well-known tunes such as "Chelsea Bridge," "Something to Live For," "I'm Checking Out-Goom Bye," and, of course, "Take the 'A' Train." After intermission, it was all Duke, a mixture of standards and lesser known works, among the former "Rocks in My Bed" and "All Too Soon" and among the latter "I'm So in Love With You" and a little known Hodges-Ellington-Stewart song, "Starting with You (I'm Through)." The concert ended with "Come Sunday."

Their interpretations were fresh, sensitive, and in good taste, not slavish attempts at recreation of original versions, thereby providing for fresh insights into the essence of the music. Throughout, Ms. Wells demonstrated why a recent *Jazz Times* review notes that because of her "warm contralto and sophisticated choice of material . . . [Ronnie Wells] has been a well-appreciated fixture for 20 years . . ."

Major credit for the wonderful evening goes to far too modest and unassuming Patricia Braxton. It was she who conceived the event, went about the planning and implementation with admirable quiet efficiency and dedication. (So self-effacing was Pat that she found a way to make herself so busy at the ticket desk in the lobby that she wasn't present when called upon to stand and receive the appreciation of the audience.) She was more than ably assisted by an equally unassuming committee of Grace and James Gabriel and by Ted Shell, who served importantly as liaison with the church.

We enthusiastically applaud Pat Braxton and all who helped make this affair so successful!

## **June Program: Member's Choice A Battle of the Bands**

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

At our June program, we will recall the days of the great band battles. In the 1930s and 40s, there were scores of bands in many cities. The degree of competition among them was high. Not only did fans debate the merits of their favorite bands, but the bands themselves engaged in legendary contests before judges. Perhaps the night that Chick Webb vanquished Benny Goodman in Harlem's Savoy Ballroom is the most famous.

Duke Ellington will take on all comers in a Battle of the Bands on **Saturday, June 2**, at our regular meeting place, the **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW**, at **8 pm**. Members are to bring at least one pair of recordings of the same title, one by Ellington and the other by another artist. We will play them one against the other and see if Duke Ellington can conquer the world.

## **Summer Fun**

We will not have regular meetings again until the fall. Meanwhile, watch for an announcement in the mail about our annual summer get-together.

## **Dear Friends,**

*I want to express my deep gratitude to the Society for making the student award fund-raising concert a success.*



*Special thanks to Ronnie Wells with Ron Elliston and Friends, Ted Hudson, Ted Shell, Grace Gabriel, Jim Gabriel, Ben Pubols, Geneva Hudson, Marion Shell, Lillian Pubols, Joanne Dennis, Peter MacHare, Mac Grimmer, Angela Grimmer, the Rev. Dean L. Moe and Mary Birbalsingh of Grace Lutheran Church, Maria Morse, Margaret Murray, and to all of you who helped to sell tickets, offered tickets as gifts to friends, and generously donated to the student award.*

*Sincerely,  
Pat Braxton*

## **Duke Ellington's Music for the Theatre by John Franceschina**

Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 2001. ISBN 0-7864-0856-1. 250 pages. \$35 soft cover.

Reviewed by Peter MacHare

Duke Ellington's music for the theatre was, perhaps, the least successful aspect of Ellington's career. Yet John Franceschina has given us a fascinating study of this music.

Franceschina, a professor of theatre arts at Pennsylvania State University, describes his book as "a survey of every theatre piece Duke Ellington is known to have worked on during his lifetime." This includes revues, musicals, plays, ballet, and opera. "The plot of each work is described," Franceschina adds, "and the score analyzed according to its dramatic function in the piece." Franceschina also tells us a great deal about many of the posthumous musicals such as *Sophisticated Ladies* and *Play On!* that employ Ellington's music.

The book is rich in delicious detail, both sublime and funny. For example, Jo Trent had to pawn his wife's engagement ring to raise \$500 for *Chocolate Kiddies*. In working on the ballet *The River*, Ellington studied water music from other composers, including Handel's *Water Music*, Debussy's *La Mer*, Britten's *Peter Grimes*, and Smetana's *Moldau*. In 1966, Ellington composed a short incidental score of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

The book concludes with a marvelous appendix listing and briefly summarizing the 72 musicals discussed at greater length in the book. Other features of the book include musical illustrations and a few very well-chosen photographs (dig the shot of the chorus girls making up for *Beggar's Holiday* on page 63).

Finally, our member Annie Kuebler is mentioned prominently in this book. Franceschina dedicates the book both to his parents and to Annie. In the acknowledgments Franceschina thanks Annie and adds: "This book is as much hers as it is mine, and I hope it is worthy of her generosity."

*Ed Note: To order this book, call 1-800-253-2187. The cost is \$35 plus \$4 shipping and handling.*

## **The King of All, Sir Duke by Peter Lavezzoli**

London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001

Review by Jack Towers

*The King of All, Sir Duke* is both study and appreciation. It points out the astonishing influence and musical legacy Ellington has placed in the world of music, often in unexpected ways.

The author, Peter Lavezzoli, makes the point that Ellington's music and legacy will be preserved through education, publication of scores, live performances, Ellington conferences, and scholarly research. But he stresses that the most important impact that Ellington can have in the future is how new artists learn from his example—not to imitate, which would only be nostalgia, but do as he did: find their own inner voice, seize the moment, take risks, break rules, and become masters in their own right. Lavezzoli has fascinating interviews with Butch Ballard, Gunther Schuller, Morris Hodara, Luther Henderson, and Jerry Valburn.

## **New Biography of Duke Evokes Spirited Comments**

The awaited *Duke Ellington and His World* by A.H. Lawrence has been described variously in print media and on the internet. Following an aborted release in 2000 by its original publisher, G. Schirmer, it is now available from Routledge, who took over.

Noted critic Nat Hentoff is reported to have called it "the finest Ellington biography of all" last year. A number of authorities commenting on the Routledge book do not agree with Hentoff's evaluation. Perhaps the most severe analysis is an open letter to the publisher by Steven Lasker that was posted on the internet. His extended analysis details alleged plagiarism, "mistakes that cumulatively suggest Lawrence lacks knowledge and understanding of the subject," erroneous dates, and fabrications/distortions. At the end, he urges the publisher to recall it from the marketplace. In follow-up postings, others expressed concerns about the book's scholarship. George Avakian, for instance, called the book "a major disaster." From England, Brian Priestley wrote that it is too late to stop circulation there, review copies having been distributed. He indicates that he has not read the book yet, so he withholds his views; however, he notes that Lawrence addressed the annual Ellington conferences several times, "and I don't recall anyone shooting him down in flames then."

The few customer reviews on Amazon.Com are not encouraging, their average rating being one of a possible five stars. Comments include "abysmally inaccurate" and "impossible to take seriously." More sanguine are the editorial reviews. *Kirkus* describes it as a "workmanlike portrait of the legendary composer/pianist/ bandleader," although "general readers looking for a good biography will be disappointed." *Library Journal* calls it "An informative look at one of America's greatest musical figures."

We await further discussion. Meanwhile, the whole matter is puzzling. After all, Routledge is a respected press. Further, Lawrence is no stranger to his subject, having been around the music life a long time, including playing with Luis Russell's band, and having known Ellington personally. More important, he has had a non-music professional career in an academic environment, an environment that prizes impeccable scholarship.

## Short Sheets . . .

♫ ♫ Ken Rattenbury, British musician and music analyst who wrote the book *Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer*, died recently. ♫ ♫ John Hasse informs that for persons interested in Ellington arrangements and to a lesser extent, transcriptions, SheetMusicPlus.com lists 231 titles, quite a few of which are “school music” arrangements, but some the “real thing” by Duke by the likes of transcribers David Berger and Brent Wallarab.

## “Davey Yarborough, Sax of All Sorts”

Thus reads the headline of the *Washington Post*'s review of our member Davey Yarborough's appearance as the May 14 featured artist of the “Jazz at the Kennedy Center” series.

In addition to his tenor playing, the review praises Davey's command of other instruments. As to his flute, it states that he “infused Antonio Carlos Jobin's ‘Trieste’ with an airy lyricism, and subsequently employed his soprano sax to bring a soft glow to ‘Stella by Starlight.’ Yarborough had a chance to display contrasting sides of his tenor playing too, as bop's racing harmonies gave way to deeply resonant tone that marked his performance of ‘Body and Soul.’” Our readers, of course, will be interested in knowing that “Yarborough occasionally explored the Ellington canon,” including “a warm and aptly ruminative alto rendition of ‘Solitude.’”

A regular part of each series is question-and-answer time. Davey's responses, the *Post* says, indicate that “Here's someone who clearly views himself as the beneficiary of a lot of good advice, and who's devoted his professional life to returning the favor.” This characteristic of service to others, especially youth, was the thesis of a nationally televised program last year about Davey and his selflessness, dedication and success as a music teacher at the Ellington School of the Arts.

Congratulations, Davey!

## Jazz Study Group Spotlighted In Columbia University Publication

The winter issue of *Columbia* contains an article about DC native Robert O'Meally, a professor at that university, and the important work of the Center for Jazz Studies there. It all began with his founding six years ago of the Jazz Study Group, “more than thirty of the nation's best jazz scholars, musicians, artists, and writers” who gather at the university to share their research and writing.

Edited by O'Meally, they published *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, an importantly serious anthology. A second such scholarly work is scheduled for publication by Columbia University Press in the fall.

[Ed. note: We thank member Elinor Eugene for sending us a copy of the article. For a brief review of *The Jazz Cadence*, see our February 2000 issue.]

## Hibbler, Moore Remembered For Contributions to Ellington Palette

Two Ellington vocalists, Al Hibbler and Anita Moore, died in April. Obituaries and other memorial statements note that each was a distinctive stylist, having a unique tonal color.

Born in Mississippi in 1916, Hibbler's big-time career began with Jay McShann. He joined Ellington in 1943 stayed some eight years, during which time he was featured on such classics as “It's Monday Every Day,” “My Little Brown Book,” and “I Like the Sunrise.” While he used his unusually rich baritone voice for such songs, he also affected stylistics that Duke called “total pantomime,” as in his version of “Don't Get Around Much Any More.” After leaving Duke, Hibbler had a successful career as a single, especially for a recording of “Unchanged Melody.” Blind from birth, he is reported to have said that he preferred not to have sight, being satisfied with the sights of the world as he perceived them.

Anita Moore, who sang with the band in its later years, passed away in Texas. In an energetic, sometimes husky voice, she performed some Ellington standards such as “I Got It Bad,” but is better remembered for such as “One More Time for the People” and “Somebody Cares” with Alice Babs and/or Tony Watkins and “NY, NY,” somewhat a signature song for her. After Duke's death, she sang for a while with the band under Mercer's direction and appeared in *Sophisticated Ladies*.

## Scholarship Fund Announces Guidelines

The Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund is accepting applications for year 2002 scholarships. Categories include tuition assistance, study with a jazz master, and music education programs.

For eligibility requirements, submission dates, requirements and other information, contact the Fund by mail: PO Box 1768, Silver Spring, MD 20915-1768; web site: [www.eastcoastjazz.com](http://www.eastcoastjazz.com); e-mail: [eastcoastjaz@earthlink.net](mailto:eastcoastjaz@earthlink.net); phone: 301-933-1822; or fax: 301-933-1151.

## Jack a Crossover Bear?

Charlie Watts, the jazz-loving drummer for the Rolling Stones, selected Ellington's “Jack the Bear” as one of his favorite records when he was the guest on the BBC radio program “Desert Island Discs” in February.”

[Ed. note: We thank Peter MacHare for this little gem.]

## Quotation of the Month

*Strayhorn could imitate Ellington [on the piano], but Ellington couldn't imitate Strayhorn.*

— Aaron Bridgers, Oral History Interview, Ellington Collection, Smithsonian Institution

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

### About Our Members

♫ ♫ John Francescina dedicates his book *Duke Ellington's Music for the Theatre* to his parents and to **Annie Kuebler**. She was a presenter at TDES' April meeting. Also, Annie is slated for occasional Sunday broadcasts on the "Jazz from the Archives" show over WBGO-FM in Newark. Her first was April 29 on the topic of West Coast jazz. ♫ ♫ Among the interviewees in Peter Lavezzoli's *The King of All, Sir Duke* is **Morris Hodara**. Among the nine authorities the author names for having "directly contributed to this book," are **Morris, Jack Towers, and Maurice Lawrence**. **Annie Kuebler** is thanked for making suggestions and offering encouragement. ♫ ♫ **Bill Hill** is hoping to revive his "Ellington and the Arts" project, about which we expect to hear more from him. ♫ ♫ In a forthcoming book, *The Heart Within: Jazz Journeys to Japan*, **Anthony Brown** discusses the universal qualities of jazz with author Bill Minor. ♫ ♫ **John Edward Hasse** is also now a Doctor of Humane Letters, having been accorded such honorary degree by Walsh University, where he was the commencement speaker in May. An unrelated recent example of his writing is a review-essay in *College Music Symposium* in which he looks at five books, three boxed CD sets, and several music editions useful to college-level teachers of music. For a copy of the article on the internet, go to < [music.org/Prof/Activ/Pubs/Review/SymVol40/hasse](http://music.org/Prof/Activ/Pubs/Review/SymVol40/hasse)>. ♫ ♫ Great news: Having been on the waiting list for a liver transplant for three years, **Janna Steed** has been notified that a living donor has been approved for her!

## We Are Glad We Were a Catalyst

"Every year [*Ellingtonia*] exhorts us to 'do something creative' on Duke's birthday.

"So encouraged was I that a little over two years ago I started taking piano lessons. My piano teachers holds an informal recital for her adult students every spring. I've been working on 'Black and Tan Fantasy' and will be presenting Ellington to my peers, who will most likely be playing works by Bach, Brahms, and Bartok.

"Imagine how I felt when my teacher gave me the date for this year's 'recital': April 29th!

"...It is my little way of honoring Duke and his humanistic vision, and helping others appreciate his timeless music." *Ed. note: The above is taken from a posting by our member Ken Steiner, who lives in Seattle, on the Duke-LYM internet site. We heard that it went over very well, so, as our hero was wont to say, "Take a big one, Ken!"*

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

Regularly check Peter MacHare's "Duke Ellington Panorama" at: < [geocities.com/BourbonStreet/Square/2660/](http://geocities.com/BourbonStreet/Square/2660/) >

## Participate in the Elections Process

Our recently amended By-Laws call for our Nominations Committee to present a slate of nominees at our October meeting, for elections to take place in November, and for installation of officers on January 1. This means that the committee will be working over the summer receiving and seeking nominations.

At our April meeting, Marion Shell and Gwen Mathis volunteered to serve on this committee. You, too, may join them; just get in touch with either of them or with Ben Pubols. Before our June meeting, he will have convened the group, and it will have selected its chair.

Since officers and board members are elected for one term, all positions will be open. You may nominate yourself and/or, provided they have given you their permission, someone else. We all need to provide input to the committee. Contact Marion at 202-363-2264, Gwen at 202-462-5785, or Ben at 301-914-5951.

## Calendar

Saturday, June 2, 8 pm

### Regular Meeting, Duke Ellington Society

Grace Lutheran Church, 16<sup>th</sup> & Varnum Sts, NW

April 24-May 28

### Ellington Youth Project Art Exhibit

Taylor Gallery, National Museum of American History

June 22-23

### 2001 Baltimore-Washington JAZZfest

Affiliated with the Columbia Festival of the Arts.

Info: African Art Museum of Maryland, 410-730-7105 /301-695-0051

July 14 (Tentative)

### Summer Picnic/Outing

Watch for a Mailed Announcement

## To Join the Duke Ellington Society . . .

Send your check payable to The Duke Ellington Society to PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003-0787, USA.

Dues are a bargain — Renewing Member: \$30 or Couple: \$50; First-Time-Ever Member: \$20; and Student: \$5.

Note: If you have a star ☆ on your mailing label, you are being invited by an associate or friend to become a member.

## THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY

President	Theodore R. Hudson
President Emeritus	Theodore A. Shell
Vice President and Treasurer	Ben Pubols
Secretary	Angela Grimmer
Program Coordinators	Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare
At-Large Board Members	
Patricia Braxton	John Dennis
Luvonia George	Mac Grimmer
Peter MacHare	Theodore A. Shell
Jack Towers	