

Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of
The Duke Ellington Society



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety/

French Documentaries Of Duke to Debut at Embassy

Films by French public television of Ellington and his orchestra never shown before in the United States will be presented by La Maison Française and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities at the Embassy at 7 pm on Monday, November 4. The program will include films from Institut National de L'Audiovisuel of "Duke Ellington Special," his 70th birthday in Paris, a sacred concert, and excerpts from other occasions. Duke's granddaughter Mercedes Ellington has been invited to host the event.

The venue is the Embassy of France at 4101 Reservoir Road, NW, Washington, DC. General admission is \$5. Reservations are required and may be made by phone at 202-944-6091 and at the internet address: < culture@ambafrance-us.org >.

Other jazz-related programs at La Maison Française are "The Pianists," recordings of Earl Hines, Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, and Oscar Peterson on a big screen on November 5; and "The Django Reinhardt NY Festival" on November 25. The latter will be part of five special concerts dedicated to famous French jazz musicians to be broadcast over National Public Radio during 2003.

Effort Undertaken To Save Historic Structures

by Bill Hasson

In the wake of the demolition of the Thomas Cabaret, where Duke Ellington once performed, members of the Duke Ellington Society have been asked to submit the names of historic structures in the District of Columbia that should be preserved from demolition when a permit is requested from the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. Legislation is being requested from the City Council to have on file the list of historic structures for which requests for demolition would be denied. The Howard Theatre was at the top of the list in that it was the venue that Duke Ellington had some of his most memorable performances.

November Program: Jack, Jerry and Duke

by Mac Grimmer & Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

If there is a number one Duke Ellington fan in the world, the leading contender for this exalted position would have to be Jerry Valburn. It was the mid-50s when he decided to become not just a collector of Ellingtonia, but a "completist," including records, programs, photographs, memorabilia, ephemera, etc.—in a word, everything. After 40-odd years, he eventually sold what was by then a huge collection to the Library of Congress, where it now resides. Besides this, he traveled with the band on occasion and was present at many of Duke's recording sessions. He also was—and is—responsible for many record releases of the band, most of which would be unavailable otherwise. (The latest example is the "Treasury Shows" broadcasts, now in the midst of a multi-volume release.)

Jerry's sonic partner—the sound engineer responsible for getting the recordings ready for release—is our own Jack Towers. Jerry and Jack have been doing this for decades, and at our November meeting Jack's program will take us through these years with Jerry. We will hear about—and hear—some of the projects they worked on together, how it happened, and—what's next!

Jack's program starts promptly at 8 PM on Saturday, November 2, at our usual meeting place, the Grace Lutheran Church at 16th and Varnum Streets, NW. Don't miss this exciting evening, the **Jack, Jerry & Duke Show!**

Good News!

Despite rising costs, our dues schedule remains the same: Renewing Member, \$30; Renewing Couple, \$50; First-Time-Ever Member, \$20; and Student, \$5.

Remember, our membership year is the calendar year, so use the form inserted in this issue, enclose your check, and mail both so that you will be all set for 2003. Play Santa early this year and give a neighbor, friend, associate, co-worker, client, or loved one (or a combination from the above!) a membership.

What Do You Think?

One of the theses in Walter van de Leur's doctoral dissertation on the music of Billy Strayhorn reads: "The designations accorded to Duke Ellington in certain circles, such as 'most important composer of the twentieth century,' are hardly reflected thus far in the quality of the research on his oeuvre."

"How true, and how disappointing!" commented the Louis Tavecchio on the Duke-LYM internet site last spring. "It's true that a large number of biographical works of Duke have been published. Yet, more than 25 years after his death, a work of the caliber, intent, and scope of Walter's dissertation on Billy still awaits to be written on Duke. I mean a thorough, in-depth analysis of his music as such." He concluded by asking for others' feelings and views on the subject. (Incidentally, Mr. Tavecchio was among those attending Walter's public defense of his dissertation at the University of Amsterdam in March.)

Respondents to Tavecchio agreed. The only book-length study is Ken Rattenbury's *Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer*, not altogether highly regarded. Other analyses are shorter, notable among them a chapter in Gunther Schuller's *The Swing Era* and parts of Mark Tucker's *Duke Ellington: The Early Years*.

Jørgen Mathiasen offered the example that it was almost 200 years after Bach's death before the publication of his complete works, adding that "patience is perhaps appropriate" in regard to such a magnus opus on Duke.

Sjef Hoefsmit wrote in a subsequent posting, "I think if one compares the bodies of work by Ellington and by Strayhorn one should keep in mind that (as far as I understand Walter van de Leur) Strayhorn wrote complete compositions, which could be performed as they were written. Duke on the other hand was not interested in writing music, but in playing music and listening to it. He had the great fortune that he lived in an era in which he could make sound recordings of his work. That is what he produced: recordings. . . . He certainly wrote, but not more than necessary to produce a fine recording." In the same vein, Adrienne Alyce Claerbaut pointed out that "according to Walter [van de Leur] . . . Ellington wrote on the 'bandstand' and Strayhorn wrote on paper."

Given the scarcity of full scores by Duke in relation to his total output and given his penchant for revising, revising, revising, one would be hard put to determine "final intent" anyhow, to borrow a term used in literary discourse. Transcriptions and recordings of what an analyst considers the "definitive" version of any composition would have to be used in conjunction with its original music manuscript, if any. And what about collaborative creations? And what about the interrelationship of arrangement as composition and vice versa? Above all, the musicologist-analyst-writer engaged in such a project would have to possess the requisite technical "chops," sensitivity, discipline, dedication, and scholarly turn of mind.

What are your thoughts on the matter?

* * * * *



A Three-Part Non-Rhetorical Question

Seated on the left are Mary McLeod Bethune and Duke Ellington. (1) Isn't that Channing Tobias standing, (2) who is the man seated on the right, and (3) what is the occasion?

Short Sheets . . .

Institute of Jazz Studies Celebration

The Institute for Jazz Studies, at Rutgers University in Newark, will have a 50th Anniversary Jubilee Celebration on October 23. We thankfully congratulate the Institute and wish it continued growth as, to quote Gary Giddens, "one of the most comprehensive and well-run archives anywhere in the world. In jazz, it has no rivals."

Band and Budget

The Toronto Ellington Society newsletter reports that the Carnegie Hall Jazz Orchestra led by Jon Faddis no longer exists, the victim of an overall cost-cutting project at that venerable venue.

New Volume of Duke's Diary

Author Ken Vail has announced that his *Duke's Diary, Part II* is under production by Scarecrow Press.

Versatile Alice Babs

While a youth, Alice Babs was sufficiently skilled as a diver to have been considered for participation with a group in the Olympics. In a 1993 interview in Stockholm by Ed Bridges, published in the current issue of the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden's newsletter, she is quoted, "I was very gymnastic, but I had no training, so I did it in the way I thought was correct, and they could see that I was talented for it. . . . It was a pity that I couldn't continue with [the training], but it was all this chlorine in the water and I couldn't take that and at the same time keep my voice in shape."

A Quick Quiz for Anoraks

(To Borrow a Term Used by *Blue Light*)

Three persons associated closely with Duke were also known by other names: Alice Nilsson, La Pearl, and Arthur Sheafe or Schiefe or Schief. What are their better known names?

For the answers, baste your precious breath until our next issue.



Check Out These Web Sites!

Our Society:

depanorama.net/desociety/

Sjef Hoefsmit's DEMS Bulletin:

depanorama.net/dems/

About Accessing Duke-LYM

From time to time we quote or refer to postings on the Duke-LYM internet site (for example, in the article on page 2). Whether or not one actively participates in this informative and evocative discussion group hosted by Ellington expert Andrew Homzy, anyone may join. Simply go to its e-mail address < majordomo@concordia.ca >, type "subscribe duke-LYM" as the message, and send it off. In case you didn't know, LYM = Love You Madly.

Three Quotations for the Month

I don't know why it should have been so, but quite often musicians sitting next to each other in the [swing era big] bands didn't speak to each other. It happened a lot on Duke Ellington's band. I often wondered how, in Duke's band, they weren't falling over each other with the joy of simply being there.

— Milt Bernhard as quoted by Steve Voce in "Scratching the Surface," *Jazz Journal International*, November 2001. ((Ed Note: We thank Bob Remy for sending us a copy of this article.)

With its trio of clarinet and muted trumpet and trombone. "Mood Indigo" starts, each chord shaped by small movements in the line of a single instrument.

A slow tempo, a minimal melody. With the stealth of sunset it moves and, suddenly, is gone. No coda, just Duke picking out two notes on the piano.

What is it about the light of departure that reveals the essence of things?

— Excerpt from the poem "Ellington Indigoes" by Aledra Shirley in *The Jazz Poetry Anthology*, ed. Sascha Feinstein and Yusef Komunyakaa.

I believe it was the late Michael Hedges who, wisely, that melody reflected and expressed the heart, harmony reflected the intellect and rhythm reflected the sexuality in music. New Orleans music was all about rhythm. It was Duke Ellington who first and most successfully integrated all three components of both music and the human experience so compellingly and so honestly. And because he did, his music will live forever.

— Steve Hancock, *Duke Ellington for Fingerstyle Guitar* (Miami, FL: Warner Bros. Publications, 2001).

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

About Our Members

Lillian and Ben Pubols

New (re-newed?) residents Ben and Lillian Pubols are easily acclimating to the cultural and intellectual environment in Oregon. Beginning next spring, Ben will give a series of lectures on jazz (including sessions on Ellington/Strayhorn, of course) for Portland's OASIS chapter. Lillian has already served as a neuroscience consultant, for a biomedical research institute in Seattle, Washington, and at a medical school. She's also volunteering at a local food bank, assisting chefs teaching cooking, nutrition, and kitchen hygiene.

The Yarborough Family

At a recent jazz vesper service at Peoples Congregational Church featuring the David Yarborough Quintet with vocalist Esther Williams-Yarborough, their daughter Davie Yarborough sang an unscheduled solo of "Summertime" that drew a spontaneous standing ovation.

Davie, one of our young members and a student at the Ellington School of the Arts, may be heard from time to time on "2KNation: Voices of the Future," 7-8 pm on Sundays on WPFW-FM (89.3). The program is completely run by teenagers, even behind the scenes.

Mark Harvey

The Rev. Mark S. Harvey was one of the featured speakers at the "Jazz and the Church Conference" at the Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY in October. A trumpeter and leader of the Aardvark Jazz Orchestra, he also teaches jazz history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Janna Tull Steed

"Dr. Sorrell says that I am well, and I'm going to believe him," writes Janna Steed. It being over a year now since her kidney transplant surgery, she says, "Now I'm officially a 'survivor.'" She has been asked to write an article for *Transplant Chronicles* on her post-transplant experience.

Janna has been active: Last spring she actively participated in an American Choral Directors Association in Des Moines (she sings, you know), presented in Greenwich, Connecticut, St. Louis, Missouri, and New York City, where she had a chance to address Loren Schoenberg's graduate classes at the Manhattan School of Music. Speaking and other engagements this fall have included "Spirituality Meets Swing: Celebrating the Music of Duke Ellington" at the Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, Tennessee; the "Conference on Jazz and the Church" at the Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY; and jazz vespers at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City. And on August 5 she had a "very big" birthday at her home, "with live music, of course"!

Reuben Jackson

Reuben Jackson has helped identify jazz musicians in photographs taken during the 1950s and 1960s that are in the Felix Grant Archive at the University of the District of Columbia.

Duke in Europe

by Gina Rollins

For our October meeting, Mac Grimmer treated us with videos of Duke from various European tours between 1958 and 1969. We viewed several versions of "Take the A Train," including a rarely heard recording of Ernie Shepard singing and scatting with his bass (recorded in London in 1964). Another featured Duke looking resplendent in a fiery red jacket and playing the first chorus solo with Cootie Williams taking center stage during the finale (recorded in Berlin in 1969). Another highlight was Duke, drummer Sam Woodyard and bassist John Lamb performing "The Shepherd (who watches over the night flock)" surrounded by sculpture and under the watchful eye of sculptor/painter Joan Miro (recorded along the Cote D'Azur in 1966).

The second half featured a video by our member Nat Moore of our 2001 picnic held at Ted and Geneva Hudson's summer home in Highland Beach, MD. In addition to seeing DES members in all manner of merriment, we were blessed with a private tour of Twin Oaks, Frederick Douglass' summer home, now the Douglass Museum and Cultural Center, given by interpreter extraordinaire Geneva, who also serves as a board member of this National Historic Landmark. Finally, Nat was present and preserved for posterity a jazz vespers performance by DES members Davey Yarborough and Esther Williams Yarborough, supported by a rhythm section of Ellington School of the Arts students. At the end of the meeting there was enthusiastic applause for Geneva, Esther and David, none of whom could be present.

Bill Hasson also announced his interest in creating a list of Ellington sites to present to the DC City Council. Hopefully, the list will provide better coordination among governmental entities and forestall any further destruction of Ellington landmarks. Francis Arnold volunteered to assist him in the initiative. If you are interested in participating, please contact Bill at 202-829-8246.

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