

# Ellingtonia

Newsletter Of  
*The Duke Ellington Society*



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor  
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## 2004 Conference in Stockholm Promises to Be "Can't Miss" Event

Our members Patricia Willard, Walter van de Leur, Scott Schwartz, and John Hasse are among the star-studded authorities, performers, critics, and musicologists confirmed for the program of the Ellington International Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, 13-15 May, 2004.

Sponsored by the Duke Ellington Society of Sweden [DESS], the conference will include an opening get-together-party; day programs of speakers, panels, and presenters; evening concerts; and a closing banquet. Official conference lodging will be at the Hotel Scandic Sergel Plaza and the Hotel Kom AB. Most events will take place at Jazz Music Hall Nalen, a short walk from the hotels.

Registration forms will become available in September. For more information about hotel rates, conference fees, and other details and for updates, contact DESS at: Address: Duke Ellington Society of Sweden, Skogstorpsvägen 39, 191 39 Sollentuna, Sweden. E-mail: <[goren.wallén@telia.com](mailto:goren.wallén@telia.com)>. Home page: <[www.ellingtonsweden.com](http://www.ellingtonsweden.com)>. Telephone: 0046-8-965234. Fax: 0046-8-965234.

## "Ellington Weekend" in Oregon Focuses on Sacred Music

A premiere for Portland audiences, the award-winning Seattle Jazz Repertory Orchestra and the Oregon Repertory Singers will present three concerts of selected Ellington Sacred Music during "Ellington Weekend" in Portland, Oregon in the first part of October. Such concerts by this orchestra are an ecumenical holiday tradition in Seattle. Acclaimed for their musical excellence and ambitious programming, this will be the first time for the Oregon Repertory Singers to perform Ellington works.

The Reverend Janna Steed, one of our members and the author of *Duke Ellington: A Spiritual Biography*, will provide narration before and during intervals in the concerts. As part of the events, Janna will also provide music and preaching for World Communion Sunday at Portland's First United Methodist Church.

## A Video of Others Doing Ellington

by Mac Grimmer & Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Ted Shell will present a video program to open our 2003/4 season. The program will explore Ellington's legacy by showing how other musicians have interpreted his work.

The program will take place at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC at 8 pm on Saturday, 4 October.**

Visitors are welcome.

## "Firsts" for the Year 2004

Lance Travis of South Africa and Bertha "Bee" Pine of Portland, Oregon are our first brand-new members for 2004. Our first renewals are from Geneva and Ted Hudson. Members who prepaid last year for 2004 are Harold Gray, Janna T. Steed, and Coleman Reed Tuckson. But wait, before them Harold E. Finley prepaid through 2005.

What a great example they all have set!

## Yarborough Earns Another Honor

The *DownBeat* Achievement Award is the latest recognition of the accomplishments of Davey Yarborough, especially as it relates to his teaching of music, but more importantly as it relates to of his, wholesome influence on the development of his students as valuable members of society.

In its June 2003 issue, the publication notes that "Since the Ellington School for the Arts is a college preparatory school, Yarborough's primary job is to ensure that his students attend college. 'Where we want to enhance your performance skills and make you a better artist, we also want to guarantee that you're going to be accepted into college,' Yarborough told *DownBeat* in 1999."

Davey, along with wife Esther Williams-Yarborough, founded the Washington Jazz Institute, an outreach music and education program for city youth. In 1998, he received the District of Columbia Mayor's Arts Award.

**Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce**, by Alfred Appel, Jr.  
New York: Knopf, 2002  
Reviewed by Ben Pubols

Alfred Appel, Jr. is Professor Emeritus of English at Northwestern University. He has written a complex and frustrating book. His goal is to fit what I have termed “classic jazz” (through the 1950s) into the broader context of “early” twentieth-century cultural developments in art and literature. As such, the book is as heavy with references to Matisse, Mondrian, Picasso and James Joyce as it is to Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Jo Jones. The book might have been subtitled “Oh, Didn’t He Ramble” because of his hop-skip-and-jump approach to jazz and jazz performers, and their context in twentieth-century Western culture. For example, right in the midst of discussing Louis Armstrong’s early vocal recordings (“Just A Gigolo,” “Laughin’ Louie”), he bemoans that Louis never had a lasting collaboration with a first-rate female vocalist. This leads directly to a discussion of the Billie Holiday-Lester Young musical love affair. A half-dozen pages later he gets back to Louis, but is soon talking about “Lolita” and Matisse.

Because of Appel’s free-associative approach to his subject matter, the book makes for confused and confusing reading at times. This may be a case of the whole being less than the sum of its parts, but there are interesting and informative references and analyses scattered throughout the book. His discussions of the singing styles of Fats Waller and Louis Armstrong are well worth reading. Both often sang silly or demeaning material (“Your Feet’s Too Big,” “Shine”), but transcended the lyrics by their mocking enunciation and phrasing. Unfortunately, Appel does not indicate in each case who selected the music to be recorded. Was it the musician? His agent? The recording A and R man? To what extent were the performers rebelling against something forced on them? One never knows, do one? Important in this context is Armstrong’s 1929 rendition of “Black and Blue.” Louis was clearly in control in this case. By dropping the verse and combining and rearranging the lyrics of the two choruses, he turns this piece, originally written for the musical review *Hot Chocolates*, into a song of racial protest, not as powerful as Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” of a few years later, but compelling nevertheless.

Although Appel clearly appreciates the percussion artistry of Jo Jones, no separate section is devoted to him. Rather, he appears throughout as counterpoint to observations on works by Matisse, Picasso, Carlo Carrà, and Joyce, as well as in a tribute to the Basie-Rushing “Sent For You Yesterday.”

Some examples of Appel’s analytical approach to the music of Duke Ellington are worth noting. His discussion of the haunting vocal-trombone interplay between Louis Bacon and Tricky Sam Nanton on the 1933 “Dear Old Southland” is particularly astute, as is his discussion of “Black and Tan Fantasy.” The Fargo version of “St. Louis Blues” and the 1962 tributes to the “big bands”—especially Duke’s renderings of “Artistry in Rhythm” and “Auld Lang Syne”—are also considered at length, as is the 1941 recording of “Menelik: The Lion of Judah” by an Ellington unit led by Rex Stewart (“the Calder of the Cornet”). Although the discussion of Duke’s music is sufficiently lengthy, this chapter, and the book as a whole degenerate into utter chaos as, in the last few pages, Appel tries his hand at revising the Molly Bloom chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* under the new title *Blooming Molly*.

The book is profusely illustrated with 127 images—photographs of jazz musicians in performance, reproductions of works by Matisse, Calder, Mondrian, Picasso, and other greats, record labels, album covers, and the like. So one does not need to be well versed in the *Matisse* of the title, but this reviewer might have gotten more out of the James Joyce allusions had he previously read *Ulysses*. Obviously, it also helps if you are familiar with the jazz selections under discussion. Should you read this book? Your call.

## Recently Deceased Ellington Associates Remembered for Their Contributions

The deaths of Harold Ashby in March and S. Aaron Bell and Luther Henderson in July, all in New York City, revive fond memories of their professional and social associations with Ellington, Strayhorn and their affiliates.

A childhood neighbor of the Ellingtons from age four when his family moved to New York, Henderson was a schoolmate of Mercer Ellington.

A Los Angeles *Times* obituary quotes him as saying, I came out of jazz, under the aegis of Duke Ellington. That was my affiliation.” Sometimes referred to by Ellington as his “classical arm,” having produced arrangements and orchestrations for him when occasions called for symphonic instrumentation or “classical” scoring. Henderson collaborated with Billy Strayhorn on some orchestrations for Duke’s 1946 *Beggar’s Holiday*. Later in life, he did the

music for the Tony-nominated *Play On!*, a drama featuring Ellington and Strayhorn music.

Classically trained, Henderson’s main activities were as composer, arranger, orchestrator, and conductor for Broadway-type musicals. His likely best known works in this artistic milieu are *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music*, *Ain’t Misbehaving* and *Jelly’s Last Jam*. His other credits as orchestrator, dance arranger, music supervisor, and the like include *Flower Drum Song*, *Funny Girl*, and *No, No Nanette*.

Known for his assertive playing, Harold Ashby is well-remembered for a tenor sax showpiece with the Ellington orchestra, “Chinoiserie” from *Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*. Although he was his own distinctive stylist, his friend Ben Webster’s influence can be discerned in the mood he sets in  
(Continued on page 3 under “Ashby, Bell, Henderson”)

## Cultural Trips to Cuba Planned

Contributed by Don Rouse

*Jazz Times* and Insight Cuba are offering group cultural trips to Cuba monthly throughout this year. Currently these group tours are licensed and legal. The U.S. Government wants to terminate tours such as this in the future, so stay informed. For more information, call 1-800-835-CUBA (2822) or < insightcuba.org >. The tours include interaction with Cuban musicians and artists, workshops, Cuban dance, percussion, jazz clubs, and day trips.

## Ashby, Bell, Henderson

(Continued from page 2)

"I Can't Get Started" recorded with the Ellington orchestra. His ability to jam can be appreciated in "In Triplicate" and other Duke's vehicles for the trading of bars and choruses.

Born in music-rich Kansas City in 1925, it was there that he met Ben Webster, who reportedly tutored him, and began his career in the 1940s. Prior to joining Ellington as replacement for Jimmy Hamilton, he played with the combos of bluesmen Willie Dixon and Jimmy Witherspoon and with the bands of Count Basie and Mercer Ellington.

In later years he produced as leader, several CDs of merit. At the Annual International Ellington Study Group Conference of 1990 in Toronto, he regaled the audience with his account of joining the orchestra (a somewhat impatient Duke had the loaded band bus waiting outside Ashby's digs as he hurriedly tried to get his traveling things together) and delighted them by his performance with former Ellingtonians organist Wild Bill Davis and drummer Butch Ballard and other musicians.

Aaron Bell was quoted as saying, "When I was with Duke I learned an awful lot. I had four degrees, but I always tell anyone that I learned more at the School of Ellington than at any of the other schools." In 1983, he assembled a 14-piece orchestra to debut a birthday tribute he composed entitled Memorial Suite for Duke.

Before joining Ellington as bassist, he had played with major orchestras, including those of Andy Kirk, Lucky Millinder, and Cab Calloway and with small groups, among them those of Teddy Wilson, Lester Young, and Carmen McRae. After Duke, he played with Dizzy Gillespie and Broadway pit bands, among others. Then, while continuing to play, frequently more on piano than on bass, he began teaching at Essex College, becoming chair of its Performing Arts Department.

Our members Joe and Olivia McMillan attended his funeral and report that friends of his performed musical tributes, among them Ellington alumni vocalist Milt Grayson, trumpeter Clark Terry, and trombonist Art Baron, and a jazz violinist Dr. Bell had taught. Phil Schapp was one of two eulogists. Musicians played Billy Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train" as his remains were being taken from the church..

## Annual Picnic a Happy Occasion

Warm weather notwithstanding, our well-attended picnic in July, again at Geneva and Ted Hudson's place at Highland Beach, MD, was memorable: great people, great food, and great beach fun, especially for the youngsters.

Smithsonian staffer Wendy Shay's teen-age daughter Nina and a girl friend who came with them enjoyed frolicking in the water and meeting in person legendary soccer player Steve Mokone, one of our members. Youngsters who came with Mimi Minnick brought tried their luck at crabbing, splashed about, and explored aquatic life. Several adults also went swimming, and those who had not been before went with hostess Geneva for a tour of the Frederick Douglass Museum and Cultural Center.

Several guests sent us very gracious notes, from which we share the following excerpts:

Rudolph Jones: . . . *as a guest of Charline Jacob, I was afforded the distinct pleasure of being in the company of members of the wonderful Duke Ellington Society . . . It was a conscious expanding experience: meeting and conversing with new acquaintances, listening to good music (at just the right volume), and tasting delicious food. . . we walked a short distance along the beach drive to the Frederick Douglass home where Geneva conducted an impressive tour . . . A wonderful day in my life.*

And from another guest of Charline, Brenda Mathews: . . . *some 60 Ellington enthusiasts greeted us. While dining on various chicken dishes, pastas, and cakes, I was privy to share the knowledge that Buster Cooper, the renowned trombone player with Duke's band, was born and raised in my home town of St. Petersburg, Florida and we actually attended the same high school. His family was very close to my family. . . This picnic was especially rewarding for me. I was able to become a lifetime member of the . . . Museum and Cultural Center, a noted tourist attraction on the beach. . . Our walking tour . . . passed the summer home of Mary Church Terrell . . . This extraordinary picnic slowly melted to a final few, who lazily reminisced, shared experiences and exchanged dreams..*

Mimi Minnick: *Thank you . . . for letting the children enjoy your beautiful beach. Highland Beach is a miracle and a treasure, and I'm so glad I had the opportunity to feel welcome there. The children felt it was the highlight of our summer so far.* Not to be outdone by her note, Alex, Ben, and Kate drew delightful thank-you pictures, as only children can, and sent them.

## Awardee Continues to Achieve

Thomas Williams, the young bassist who was one of our two Student Fund winners last year, in a note to our president, Peter MacHare, writes, "I am doing fine. At this particular time of the year [last spring], I am doing a lot of things, including getting ready for college, creating new artwork masterpieces, and just finishing up my last months of high school. It has been nice hearing from you and again, thanks for the scholarship."

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

### Luvenia George

Luvenia George was an invited speaker at the International Conference on Thinking IX, convened in Phoenix, Arizona in August. Her topic was "The Duke Ellington Youth Project: The Smithsonian Paradigm in Arts Education." Last spring at Indiana University Dr. George conducted two days of workshops and a classroom presentation on the Duke Ellington Youth Project, which she directs. The University's sponsor of the event, mainly for students in their Department of Folklore and Musicology, described her presentations as "outstanding" and "served to help launch our public sector track . . ."

### Francis Arnold

When Frank Arnold and his wife were in New York to see *Gypsy*, after the show they "happened into Birdland, a few doors away," where Clark Terry was appearing with a combo. During a break Frank was able to get near Clark, and mentioned that he sang "Happy Birthday" to Clark a couple of years ago. Clark replied, "You must be from D.C.!"

### Ulysses LaPradde

In May, as he has done before, Ulysses "Speedy" LaPradde paid all expenses for a trip by bus for a group to visit the Ellington grave site in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York's Bronx..

### Scott Schwartz

Dr. Scott Schwartz is leaving the Smithsonian to accept a professorial post at Indiana University. More details will be in our next issue.

### Brian Gilmore

Brian Gilmore is now writing reviews for *Jazz Times*, the first scheduled for its July/August issue. We would not be at all surprised if this exposure leads to this talented poet-critic writing for other music publications and maybe liner notes. We recall that for centenary celebration of Duke's birth in 1999, he wrote "The Blessings of Ellington" for the special edition of *emerge*. Also, Brian is doing research on the R&B singer Otis Blackwell. According to Brian, he was a "fascinating guy" who wrote most of Elvis' early hits.

### Joseph and Olivia McMillan

Joe and Olivia McMillan went to New York for the funeral of their dear friend Aaron Bell. For years they were neighbors in New York. One of the interests they shared was tennis, which they frequently played with him..

## Mark Your Calendar for Musical Drama

Reported by Gina Rollins

*Sophisticated Ladies* will be presented by the University of Maryland's Department of Theatre, October 17-25. A college production, single tickets are only \$20, \$16 for subscribers. Performances will be in the state-of-the-art Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center on the College Park campus. For more information, go to the internet site at < [www.claricesmithcenter.umd.edu](http://www.claricesmithcenter.umd.edu) >.

## The Fantastic and Fabulous Strays

by Peter MacHare

We closed our season in June with a member's choice featuring Billy Strayhorn compositions. As you'd expect, we had an evening of wonderful, widely varied music.

We heard Billet himself sing "Lush Life," perhaps his greatest composition, in a famously poor version. Well, the usually sober Strayhorn (despite reports to the contrary) had a tad too much to drink that night and was not in good voice. Let it be known that Strayhorn normally could sing quite well.

Everything we heard was fantastic. I'll just give you a few examples from an evening that left everyone smiling. Ben Pubols came all the way from Oregon (now there's a Strayhorn enthusiast for you!) to let us hear "After All" and "Kissing Bug," with the very playful Joya Sherrill vocal. Patricia Willard brought "Rock Skippin' at the Blue Note." I had always wondered if "rock skippin'" was a code for something on the rocks, but, no, Billy Strayhorn and Louie Bellson had indeed been skippin' rocks on Lake Michigan.

Especially enjoyable were "A Flower is a Lovesome Thing" from *The Peaceful Side of Billy Strayhorn* and "Take the 'A' Train" with Billy on piano and Betty Roche singing from *Ellington Uptown*.

Billy's great friend Lena Horne was called upon by Ted Hudson to sing "Maybe" Maybe we had a good time? No "maybe" about it. You know we had a great time listening to the wonderful music of Billy Strayhorn.

## To Join The Duke Ellington Society

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The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. to us at  
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You and we will be glad you did. Dues remain a bargain:

Renewing Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;  
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Join Those Listed on Page One of This Issue!

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