

# Ellingtonia

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*The Duke Ellington Society*



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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor  
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## Norma McCray

In a celebration of her life held at Trinity Episcopal Church in Takoma Park, DC, Norma McCray, a decades-long member of our Society, was lovingly remembered. Born in 1931, she passed on 19 August 2005, after a prolonged illness.

Ms. McCray's unassuming manner belied her many accomplishments and service to others. For over 40 years she was an innovative music educator in public schools, dedicated to enriching her students' musical horizons. Among her accomplishments: Twice she was selected Teacher of the Year and was recipient of an Agnes Meyer grant for travel to Brazil to research their indigenous music. For this project, she became proficient in Portuguese and later was honored by the Brazilian Embassy for introducing the music to her students.

Thoroughly involved in professional and scholarly activities, as an integral member of the Music Educators National Conference, Norma McCray was the first African American female to edit a state journal. She was a founding member of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, served as a board member of the Children's Chorus of Washington, and was accompanist and vocal and foreign language coach for the D.C. Boys' Choir. Using her musical network, she secured Marian McPartland (three times!) and, later, Wynton Marsalis to perform for her students.

"Norma McCray was truly caring," her good friend Bernice Tillett says, "and shared her considerable talent across a wide spectrum in education, music, and the community: from nursing home residents and needy children to students, colleagues, and friends who requested her help. Generous, talented, and altruistic, she will be remembered by those who were fortunate to have been a part of her life, professionally, musically, or socially."

Health issues prevented Norma from regularly attending our meetings during the past several years. However, she very much wanted to participate in our annual picnic in July, was able to come, and thoroughly enjoyed being with other members and guests.

We are fortunate to have known Norma McCray and will miss her gentle presence and fetching smile. We extend to her family and other loved ones our sincere sympathy.

## October Program: Member's Choice Featuring Ben Webster

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our first program for the 2005/6 season will be a member's choice featuring the music of the great saxophonist Ben Webster. Bring any recording featuring Webster, whether in the Ellington fold or not. Please also tell us a little about the recording. We will let everyone play one selection and then, if there's time, we can have seconds. Out-of-town members wishing to participate should send their selections to Peter MacHare at [spmachare@yahoo.com](mailto:spmachare@yahoo.com).

The program will be at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC at 8 pm on Saturday, October 1, 2005.** The meeting is open to the public. Come one, come all, have a ball!

## "Who Could Wish for Anything Better?"

by Norma McCray

Our gracious hosts Ted and Geneva Hudson greeted our members and their guests warmly before directing them to the delicious entrees, salads, beverages and scrumptious desserts that members had brought.

Everyone was friendly and jovial. There were many interesting things to do: enjoy the beautiful Chesapeake Bay, take short walks to historic sites in Highland Beach, swim in the Chesapeake Bay, fish, etc. Many of us relaxed on the spacious porch and engaged in stimulating conversation. Some of us had lots of fun trying to identify the jazz musicians in the famous "A Great Day in Harlem" oversized photograph that a guest had brought. The weather was perfect. It was neither too warm or humid. Gentle warm breezes were enjoyable. Familiar strains of Ellington's music wafted through the house and porch.

Who could wish for anything better?

Our hosts and others who knew the way made sure that departing guests got back to the main roads on their way home. We are thankful for wonderful hospitality.

*Ed note: As she was leaving, Norma expressed how much she enjoyed the picnic, so we invited her to jot down her impressions of the event for our newsletter. In her typically quiet way, she agreed.*

## Let's Do More Than Just Appreciate the Institution Named in Honor of Our Hero

*We print these excerpts from a recent informational letter from the principal of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts:*

Our faculty produces some remarkable results: Entering ninth and tenth graders are selected through audition, not by grades, and this year 96% of our graduating seniors are going to colleges and conservatories. Our graduates attend Julliard, Pratt Institute, Harvard, MIT, New York University and others. . . .

Our school does not receive special appropriations to assist the school in offering a dual curriculum. The difference between the cost of a dual academic-artistic curriculum and district appropriations amounts to hundred of thousands of dollars. To meet this difference, we must turn to you, our parents, alumni, and supporters.

Your donation of \$500, \$200, even \$100 will help us offset the difference between district appropriations and the cost of educating our students. You can help us create success stories.

## Students from Pacific Northwest High Schools Do Well in "Essentially Ellington" Competition

by Ken Steiner and Ben Pubols, Members of Our Society's Seattle and Portland Outposts

Among the fifteen finalists who vied for honors in New York City in the 2005 *Essentially Ellington* competition five were from the Pacific Northwest, four from Seattle area high schools and one from Beaverton, Oregon, just west of Portland. The judges were the well-known David Baker, David Berger, Gunther Schuller and Wynton Marsalis. Second place honors went to Roosevelt High School of Seattle, third place was awarded to Mountlake Terrace High School, and Shorewood High School received honorable mention. Both Mountlake Terrace H.S. and Shorewood H.S. are in communities neighboring Seattle. The other two Pacific Northwest schools whose bands competed were Garfield High School in Seattle, and the Arts and Communications Magnet Academy (ACMA) of Beaverton. Prior to the students' going to the Big Apple, Ben gave a musically illustrated lecture on Duke Ellington before them. Unfortunately, the talk didn't place them among the top four bands, but several individual students were recognized for their solo abilities, as were students from each of the four Seattle area schools. More schools from the Pacific Northwest made the top 15 than from any other major region of the country. We are both very proud of all of them

## Music and Poetry Coming Together "Like No Time I Can Recall"

*We are always glad to hear about our members' activities that celebrate the art of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. So we happily share with our readers a letter from Brian Gilmore, a lawyer by profession who also writes articles and reviews for publications such as JazzTimes and, pertinent to what follows, composes poetry. His jungle nights & soda fountain rags (Caribou Books, 1999), a book-length poetic tribute to Ellington divided into seven suites, earned a glowing commentary by Marjorie Hooper, published in our November 2000 issue.*

Last week [late May] Grace Episcopal [Church] invited me to read poetry with the fine local saxophone player Marshall Keys at their reading series. The series is very well attended and one of the most prestigious in the city. Keys has, of course, played with many of the best, including Lionel Hampton, just to name one. He is, like me, Washington DC born and bred.

I must admit I was intimidated a bit. But I met Keys the day before, over catfish and fried oysters, along with John Graham, an Episcopal priest who organized the program, so I felt good. Keys was also familiar with my poetry book on Ellington, and was anxious to improvise in the moment, no rehearsal or any of that.

So about 7:30 or so, he began our set, solo, and mixed some of his own work with some Ellington tunes. I distinctly recall "Sophisticated Lady" soaring inside the church with a crowd of about 40 or so mesmerized. About 15 minutes into the set, I came aboard and we mixed and matched my poetry from my book, *Jungle Nights and Soda Fountain Rags* with his captivating sound. He played "Caravan" for sure, as I asked, and threw in the old standard "St. Louis Blues" as well, which worked too with a piece in the book about Ellington in Europe. It was great. Words and music.

I did a short set of poetry from the book, talking about Duke's life in the city and his travels as a young man seeking his way in the world as a jazzman. Keys followed with a brief 10-minute talk on Ellington and Strayhorn during which he played Strayhorn's "Isfahan" and then "Flirtbird," an Ellington tune from the movie soundtrack for *Anatomy of a Murder*. The Isfahan was incredible, best song of the night.

We closed the set with my poem "things ain't what they used to be" with yes, of course, leading in and out with "Things Ain't What They Used To Be" by Mercer Ellington. It was appropriate.

I must say it was a really special night. I think the jazz and poetry came together like no time I can recall for myself. Just wanted to pass that along.

– Brian Gilmore

## Short Sheets . . .

### New Web Site with Links to Others

Canadian David Palmquist, known to regular Ellington website habitues as David in Delta, has launched a new Ellington internet site: <http://ellingtonweb.ca>, self-described in part as "A compilation of websites related to Duke Ellington and his Associates."

### Author Is Award Nominee

John Franceschina, who wrote *Duke Ellington's Music for the Theatre*, has been nominated for Pennsylvania State University's Faculty Scholar Medal in the Arts and Humanities.

### Color as Music and Music as Color

"Visual Music: 1905-2005" is the title of an exhibit at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Gallery of works by artists who, according to its chief curator, Kerry Brougher, "held an almost scientific belief that colors, like musical notes, stimulate specific emotions in people." (Any comments, readers?)

## FMJS Music Scholarships Available!!!

Until 15 November the Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship program is accepting applications for 2006 scholarships. Primary focus is to assist emerging jazz musicians, both vocalists and instrumentalists, in their development. The grants will be for performance and educational purposes.

More details are available on the internet at [www.fmjseastcoastjazz.com](http://www.fmjseastcoastjazz.com). Application forms may be downloaded at this site by clicking on "Education" and then on "FMJS Scholarships." Interested persons may also contact FMJS at PO Box 1768, Silver Spring, MD 20915-1768, by phone at 301-933-1822, and by fax at 301-933-1151.

We proudly note that our member Ronnie Wells heads the Fish Middleton Jazz Society and its corollary Annual East Coast Jazz Festival.

## Recorded Performance as Influence on Art

In a fascinating "The Record Effect" in the 6 June issue of *The New Yorker*, Alex Ross poses a thematic question, ". . . would Beethoven or Billie ever have existed if people had always listened to music the way we listen now?"—that is, recorded. Answers involve consideration of the evolution of recording and playback technology.

Mr. Ross raises evocative points, for example: Because early phonograph technology favored sharp brass, "Louis Armstrong's trumpet blasted through the crackle and pop of early records like no other instrument or voice of the time . . ." [while some other instruments' characteristics and subtleties were lost]; however, when magnetic tape came along, Bing Crosby could

### Nominations

A Note from Our President

If you are an Officer of the Society or a Member of the Board of Directors and do not wish to continue in your present position next year, please contact Angela Gimmer before October 1, at 202-546-7764. Please also contact Angela if you would like to nominate someone who is willing to serve as an Officer or Member of the Board of the Society.

## Necrology Notes

### Barbara Winfield

Barbara Winfield, who as a teenager sang with the Ellington orchestra, died in New York in August. Having been recommended to Duke by Al Sears when she was still a high-schooler, she later joined June Norton, Chubby Kemp, and Marion Cox as a fourth female vocalist. After the others departed, she stayed during 1950-52, occasionally alternating with Yvonne Lanauze. No commercial recordings of her having been released, Ms. Winfield was among the lesser known Ellington singers. She did participate, however, in the Ellington alumni reunion activities at Claremont McKenna College in 2004.

We extend condolences to Ms. Winfield's loved ones.

*Ed. Note: We thank Patricia Willard, who wrote an obituary about her for the New York Times, for providing us information about Ms. Winfield.*

### Keter Betts

Among the published tributes to bassist Keter Betts, who died in August, was Ronnie Wells', which reads in part: "His exceptional musicality was merely an extension of his heart and soul, which shone through every performance. The bassist is one third of a jazz trio; but, 'Keter Bee' [her name for him] always came through at 100%—sharing his extraordinary ideas in the most understated manner. In this setting, it was never important for 'Keter Bee' to be a star. He merely wanted to support. This approach to his music was mirrored in his stance as a human being. . . . I am blessed that our paths crossed."

### Benny Bailey

In an obituary in *DEMS* 05/2-5 about expatriate trumpeter Benny Bailey, who died in The Netherlands in April, Sjeff Hoefsmit reports: "Benny Bailey played for one week (7-15Nov69) in the Ellington band during Duke's European tour when he replaced Ambrose Jackson in the fifth chair of the trumpet section. He even soloed in the encores in Berlin (8Nov) and in the opening number of the second concert in Köln (10Nov). I saw him in Rotterdam, during two concerts on 7Nov. He may have been too briefly in the Ellington band to warrant a mention as an Ellingtonian, but nevertheless, he was there."

"whisper," i.e., croon into the microphone and be heard; and nowadays, it seems, audiences expect to hear in the club or concert hall what they hear on spliced, enhanced/diminished, or otherwise technically tinkered-with recordings.

We humbly posit a thematic question: How did evolving recording technology influence the art of Ellington and Strayhorn, and vice versa? Let's start with the three-minute composition. HMMMMMMMMM.

Ellington and Strayhorn aficionados, this is no rhetorical question. Share your thoughts, be they anywhere from pithy, aphoristic one-liners to full-blown disquisitions.

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

### John E. Mason

An article in the July issue of *Artsmonthly*, "John Mason: Professor of Many Talents," speaks of this University of Virginia history professor's extra-curricular versatility as musician (French horn), artistic photographer, and, yes, former sous chef. This past summer, he traveled to South Africa to research popular music there during the 50s through 70s and how it tied into the political atmosphere.

### John Hornsby

John Hornsby, one of our Canadian members, is a candidate for a Trustee position, beginning in 2006, in the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors. At the time this issue of *Ellingtonia* is being prepared, results of the elections have not been announced by IAJRC. Also, John was the presenter at the April meeting of the Toronto Duke Ellington Society, his topic being "Duke and the Fox Trot."

### Harvey Cohen

Harvey Cohen has begun a year-long, post-doctoral fellowship at the Library of Congress. We learned too late that for two Mondays in August, he substituted for vacationing Christine Moritz on her regular WMUC-FM show, "Variety Is the Spice of Life." We can rightly guess what Harvey chose to spice up the life of listeners.

### Ronnie Wells

Happily for serious listeners, Ronnie Wells takes time from her busy schedule as educator and head of the FMJS and the East Coast Jazz Festival to perform. In August she, hubby Ron Elliston, and a combo were featured at the Smithsonian's IMAXX Jazz Club. In June they appeared at Blues Alley as Wells, Elliston & Friends.

### John Q. Coleman

Our brand-new member John Q. Coleman was recently presented with an award especially for his dedicated work as Dean of the WB Bridge College.

### Jane Vollmer; Theodore A. Shell

"Where Were You?" is the title of an article about Duke's birthday celebrations by Jane Vollmer in the May issue of the Toronto Ellington Society's newsletter. In it she writes, "1970 - Three days before his birthday the Orchestra played at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, DC. A large cake was provided so that everyone could celebrate Duke's upcoming anniversary. Duke closed out the evening at a party hosted by Ted Shell."

### Hugh (Rusty) Hassan

Rusty Hassan will teach a course this fall on Duke Ellington at Trinity University in Washington, DC. The class will meet for eight sessions on Mondays at 7 pm from 26 September to 21 November. Rusty informs, "It is a noncredit course that will be informative and fun . . ." For registration information, go online to the University's website at [www.trinitydc.edu](http://www.trinitydc.edu) or call 202-884-9313.

## June Meeting: Ted Shell Videos

by Gina Rollins, Secretary

At our June meeting, Ted Shell opened his vault of videos and DVDs to share outstanding performances of other artists interpreting Duke.

Starting with the Delta Rhythm Boys singing "Take the A Train," we took a music journey with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, Count Basie, Tony Bennett, Harry James, Ellis Marsalis and Harry Connick Jr., Clark Terry, Duke Jordan, Ella Fitzgerald, Joe Williams, John Faddis, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, Carmen McRae and the Boston Pops.

Thanks once again, Ted, for sharing from your vast collection these timeless classics.

## Right Place, Right Time

Since becoming President of our Society, I have had the pleasure of extending our greetings to two luminaries at chance meetings. When I went to Purchase, NY to attend my niece's graduation from Pace University a year or two ago, Clark Terry was on hand to receive an honorary degree. I had the pleasure of extending our official Ellington Society "Love You Madly" greetings to Mr. Terry.

Just this past August, my family and I were on vacation in New Orleans (this was before the horribly devastating storm). We attended the Louis Armstrong birthday celebration in Armstrong Park (there was free cake, you see, and refusing free cake is no way to honor the memory of Duke Ellington). This time George Avakian was on hand for the celebration. Again I had the pleasure of extending our official Ellington Society "Love You Madly" greeting to Mr. Avakian.

## Membership in The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. To Join, Continue, or Renew

Send a check payable to The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.  
to PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.  
Calendar-year dues remain a bargain: Renewing Member, \$30;  
Couple, \$50; student, \$5; Brand-New-Member, only \$20!  
Be the first kid on your block to flash a 2006 Membership Card.

### THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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