

# Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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## **Forthcoming: A New Edition of Timmer And a Book on "Newport '56"**

Scarecrow Press has announced that as part of its Studies in Jazz Series it will publish the 5th Edition of *The Recorded Music of Duke Ellington and His Sidemen* by W.E. Timmer, a standard in the field that starts with the 1923 first known recording by Ellington through a concert in March 1974.

A press release states that "More than a discography, the book comprises all the activities of these musicians, including studio recordings, movie soundtracks, concerts, dance dates, radio broadcasts, telecasts, and private and unissued recordings by Ellington's musicians under their own names and in other bands."

The other book, *Backstory in Blue: Ellington at Newport '56* by John Fass Morton, is scheduled for publication in 2008 by the Rutgers University Press.

According to a feature article about Morton and the book in the Annapolis *Sunday Capital* of 6 May, Leslie Mitchner of the Rutgers press says that he has "situated this concert in the trajectory of U.S. history, race relations, gender relations (and) where politics and music intersect."

In connection with this book, Annapolis-based Filmsters is working on *One Night in Newport*, a documentary that company founders Patti White and Lee Anderson plan to release next year. As conceived, it too will consider the event as a societal as well as a music phenomenon.

*Ed. Note: We are eagerly awaiting an announcement from the University of Chicago Press of another work-in-progress, our member Harvey Cohen's Duke Ellington's America.*

## **October Program — Spotlight on Paul Gonsalves**

by Mac Grimmer and Peter MacHare, Program Coordinators

Our first program of the season will feature the titan of the tenor, Paul Gonsalves, presented by our illustrious former president, Dr. Theodore Shell.

As you all know, Ted has an especially deep collection, so your appreciation of Paul Gonsalves will certainly be expanded. Ted will feature Gonsalves both in and out of the Ellington orchestra.

The program will be held at our usual meeting place, **Grace Lutheran Church, at 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, in Washington, DC at 8 pm on Saturday, October 6.**

## **The Good News Continues**

A recent posting on Duke-LYM by Antony Pepper, one of the planners, tells us that progress has been made for "Ellington 2008," the 20th International Duke Ellington Conference, to be held in central London, 22-26 May. A call for papers will be made and delegate registration is planned to open soon. Doubtless, "seed money" will be needed, so those who can offer gifts or loans should contact the sponsors.

Mr. Pepper's address given in his posting is "Antony Pepper" <[lym@antonypepper.com](mailto:lym@antonypepper.com)>.

## **Happy 100th, Harold Gray**

Harold Gray, who may be our most senior member, became 100 years young in August. In observance the Potomac River Jazz Club officially designated its joyous 2007 Jazz Picnic a celebration of his birthday. What a great guy and what a great way to show love for him!

**The Great Black Way:  
L.A. in the 1940s and the Last African-American Renaissance, by R.J. Smith**  
New York: Public Affairs by the Perseus Books Group, 2006. \$26.95Hardback/\$16.95Paperback.  
Reviewed by Patricia Willard

RJ Smith's *The Great Black Way* is a curious book with much to commend, much to condemn, and much to ponder.

Reviewed here because of its reputed Ellington content and the suggestion that it examines the jazz history of Los Angeles's Central Avenue, the volume flounders helplessly despite a plethora of citations suggesting that expert aid was available.

A somewhat irresponsible account of Duke's 1941 stage *revu-sical* "Jump for Joy," taken entirely from this reviewer's Smithsonian liner note booklet (and so credited) is very nearly the total Ellington entry: "The Duke had all but moved from his beloved Harlem to the Dunbar Hotel for the sake of a show that was dear to his heart." Duke had not "all but moved" anywhere. As always in his five decades on the road, his home base remained in New York and his temporary domiciles were wherever the gigs were. And, yes, preceding and during the twelve week-run of "Jump for Joy," he stayed at the Dunbar. And during six-week engagements at Chicago's Blue Note, he stayed at the Hotel Sherman.

Only three song titles from "Jump for Joy" are mentioned—two incorrectly. Much is made throughout the book of zoot suits and their social significance, saying, "This was not Duke Ellington's merry suit of clothes...The zoot suit had been a part of the jazz scene since the late 1930s...Perhaps their coming-out party occurred on the evening of July 10, 1941, opening night of... 'Jump for Joy'...Who invented it nobody really knew," ignoring completely the carefully researched history in the liner notes, i.e., the *style* had indeed been around but it was named by Ellington collaborator Sid Kuller and James A. "Potts" Jackson of the Pot, Pan and Skillet team for the first time in "Jump for Joy."

Because actor John Garfield is mentioned in the liner notes as a major investor in the show and as being present at the theater and at Kuller's house the night the production was conceived, author Smith concocts such statements as "Ellington seemed to be everywhere that autumn. He was hanging out with John Garfield at Culver City's Casa Mañana." The Ellington band was playing at the Casa Mañana January 2 through February 20. In the autumn, they—Duke included—were at the Mayan Theater in downtown L.A. Garfield was there, too, smitten with dancer-singer Marie Bryant.

The only heretofore unpublished Ellington "history" Smith offers consists of two puzzling assertions: "He [the Rev. Clayton Donovan Russell, pastor of the People's Independent Church of Christ] sponsored a Duke Ellington performance in 1941, earning the scorn of elders who felt the Spirit and swing did not belong together" and "The Duke even caused a zoot suit-like clamor of his own when he played selections from 'Jump for Joy' as part of a series of religious concerts in Pasadena. Members of the clergy revolted." Smith does not elaborate, and his End Notes contain no corroboration. However, Dr. Klaus Stratemann, in his *Duke Ellington Day by Day and Film by Film*, reports a 5 p.m. August 24, 1941 concert at the Pasadena Gold Shell in the "First Annual Starlight Fiesta of Negro Music" to an "appreciative audience," according to the *California Eagle*.

Ellington associates who appear briefly in the text include Billy Strayhorn (stayed at the Dunbar, "lurked" at the Mayan), Herb Jeffries, Foster Johnson, Jimmie Blanton (misspelled), Countee Cullen and Ivie Anderson, who is said to have sold Ivie's Chicken Shack to a John Collins, not mentioning that Mr. Collins, whose actual name was Walter Collins although he liked to be called John, was Ms. Anderson's last husband. Spelling, syntax, names and Los Angeles geography also are not Mr. Smith's strong suits. Marshal Royal and George "Red" Callender each get two different spellings, the Elks Auditorium not only moves around; it morphs into the Elks Temple. Tom Breneman's Restaurant on Vine at Sunset Blvd. is rendered as "Tom Brenamen's at Hollywood & Vine," KTLA-TV is on the wrong street, and L.A.'s "Sugar Hill" is moved to "a little east of the Avenue" when it was several *miles* to the west.

So what's good about this book? Smith produces respectful and detailed biographies of newspaper publisher/attorney Loren Miller and of the little known

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### Gillespie a Focus, Terry to be Honored at Duke Ellington Jazz Festival

Renowned trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie's 90th birthday will be celebrated in a special "In the Footsteps of Dizzy" concert and in other ways during the Third Annual Duke Ellington Jazz Festival in Washington, DC, 9-17 September 2007.

A stellar regular for a number of years with the Ellington orchestra, Clark Terry is scheduled to perform on trumpet (and likelihood fluegelhorn, too) at the "NEA Jazz Masters in Tribute to Dizzy" program at the Lincoln Theatre on Saturday, 15 September. At this affair he, along with pianist Hank Jones, will be presented Duke Ellington Jazz Festival Lifetime Achievement Awards. This will be the second time this year that Terry has received recognition in Washington, DC for his contributions to music. He was among the recipients of a Living Jazz Legend award at the Kennedy Center in April.

Of Diz in his *MMMM*, Duke says, ". . . I am proud to say that the fabulous, flamboyant John Birks Gillespie worked in our band once, for four weeks. Diz played with us at the Capitol Theatre in 1944 . . . Of course, I'd known him for quite a while before that, because I was an avid visitor on Fifty-second Street. . . . But I can always say that Dizzy Gillespie, one of the original pioneers of the bop, worked with us. He also played on rather an unusual album of ours called *Jazz Party*." On this occasion party guest Dizzy played a memorable solo on "U.M.M.G.," also known as "Upper Manhattan Medical Group."

For a complete schedule and other information about the festival, go online to [www.dejazzfest.org](http://www.dejazzfest.org), [info@dejazzfest.org](mailto:info@dejazzfest.org), or [jana@janlynpr.com](mailto:jana@janlynpr.com).

### The Duke and The Bard Alive and Very Welcome in Canada

Fifty years ago Ellington and his orchestra introduced his *Such Sweet Thunder*, aka *The Shakespearean Suite*, at the annual Stratford Shakespeare Festival at Ontario, Canada. This past summer during Elegant Ellington Weekend there, Barrie Lee Hall, Jr. led the 15-piece Duke Ellington orchestra in a reprisal of the entire suite.

Lois Moody, one of our Canadian members, points out that it is significant that Duke's performance back then remains a cherished highlight in the entire history of Stratford Festivals.

Ms. Moody also reports that in June the 50th anniversary of *Such Sweet Thunder* was commemorated in Ottawa by a performance of the complete suite by the highly regarded Impressions in Jazz Orchestra, founded and directed by Adrian Cho. He is described in the program notes as "one of the city's in-demand freelance bassists and a producer, bandleader and educator of note" whom one media writer characterizes as "one of our city's most adventurous musical renaissance men."

Barrie Lee Hall, Jr., fresh out of college, played trumpet in the last orchestra actually led by Duke and was a mainstay instrumentalist and arranger in the successor orchestra led by Mercer Ellington. Since then he has arranged for, played in, and directed other orchestras bearing the Ellington name. For more about Hall and about the recent CD *Barrie Lee Hall, Jr.: The Duke Ellington Small Band*, see our February 2007 issue.

*Ed. note: We thank Lois Moody for talking with us and for sending programs and other printed material about both the Stratford and Ottawa events.*

### The Great Black Way

(Continued from page 2)

but fascinating journalist John Kinloch, a nephew of the famous writer/publisher/activist Charlotta Bass, who ran for vice president of the United States on the Independent Progressive ticket, a feat *not* noted by Smith. He also carefully documents the painful racial discrimination, segregation and restrictive covenants that ruled Los Angeles in the first half of the 20th Century and Miller's role in dismantling them. Smith is convincing about L.A. being the birthplace of Rhythm & Blues and fascinating, if true, that Pentecostalism was founded in the very early 1900s in the downtown area which became Little Tokyo. The problem is that there are so many dozens of errors, irresponsible assertions, some couched in unbearably florid writing, that the probably authentic material becomes questionable. He would have done well to have focused conscientiously and in depth on L.A. in the 1940s, as his subtitle infers, rather than scattershot boomeranging from hearsay-to-scholarship-to-distortion. And, for a history of jazz on Central Avenue, there are a number of reliable published studies—not this one!

*Disclosure: This reviewer was among the many persons interviewed for this book, and a number of oral histories conducted by this reviewer are listed as source material. Thank you to the ever-diligent Steven Lasker for sharing some of his Los Angeles research for this review.*

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

### Patricia Willard

Patricia Willard is the author of the booklets that accompany two just released Jazz Icons DVDs, *Ellington in Amsterdam* and *Sarah Vaughan Live—1958 & 1964*.

### Ronnie Wells

Several events celebrated the life of vocalist, festival promoter, scholarship founder, and music educator Ronnie Wells following her death in July. A number of artists who had performed or recorded with her or who had been on programs at the annual East Coast Jazz Festivals were featured at "A Tribute to Ronnie Wells" at the Strathmore Music Center in Bethesda, MD.

## Terry and an Ellington Reissue Among JJA Award Finalists

In our May issue, we noted nominees for the Jazz Journalists Associations annual awards who would be of interest to our readers. Of them, Clark Terry has been named a finalist in the trumpeter of the year category and Mosaic's *The Complete 1936-1940 Variety, Vocalion and Okeh Small Group Sessions* a finalist in the jazz reissue of the year category. Worth noticing also among finalists in the best book about jazz group is Frank Buchmann-Moller's *Someone to Watch Over Me: The Life and Music of Ben Webster*. The CD was reviewed in our April 2007 issue and the book in our December 2006 issue.

## Progress for Egress

(Bet That's What They Said Then)

Noting our article and photographs about the April re-dedication of the 2728 Sherman Avenue, NW, the last home in Washington that Duke lived in before moving to New York, Dr. Alvin Thompson, a friend in Mercer Island, WA who grew up in Washington wrote, "Our address was 2724, just out of the picture . . . It was a lovely street till they took away the tall trees and the lawns to accommodate the bus line to Silver Spring."

## Royalty? Of Course.

"Why Some People

Think Duke Ellington Is a Member of the Royal Family" is the title of a prominent advertisement by Americans for the Arts in the 15 July issue of the *New York Times*. You can check out the organization on the internet at [Americansforthearts.org](http://Americansforthearts.org)

## June Program: "Beyond Category" as Describer of Duke's and Billy's Oeuvres.

by Peter MacHare, substituting for Secretary Gina Rollins

In our June program, "Lesser Heard Ways of Duke and Strays," Ted Hudson presented a fascinating sample of the broad range of compositions by our heroes, Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. You all know Ted Hudson as our esteemed vice president and *Ellingtonia* editor, but he has been also a university professor. It makes sense, then, that we always come away from a Ted Hudson program with new knowledge and appreciation of the subject at hand. Duke Ellington always used the term "beyond category" as high praise for other musicians. By the end of the evening, Ted Hudson proved that the term "beyond category" fits no one better than Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn.

We heard such good music! Piano pounders like "Carolina Shout" and "Tonk." Duke Ellington's witty and all-too-true comment on the sexes in the delightful "Pretty and the Wolf." During our intermission, we had "The Tattooed Bride" playing in the background. Ted presented suites, tone poems, ballet, film scores, and three types of synaesthesia (olfactory, visual, and literary). Did you know that "Apes and Peacocks" from *The Queen's Suite* is partly based on the story of Sheba and Solomon in 2 Chronicles 9:21? Well, you do now.

Thank you, Professor Hudson for a most enjoyable and informative evening.

## DEMS Bulletin

The latest *DEMS Bulletin* (August-November 2007) is out and may be accessed and downloaded free at [depanorama.net/dems](http://depanorama.net/dems) on Peter MacHare's Duke Ellington Panorama website. As usual, Sjef Hoefsmit has produced a superb product. Thanks, Sjef.

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