

# Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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As in Previous Years  
Do Something  
Creative on April 29

## Duke's 110th Birthday Will Be Widely Commemorated

On April 29, Ellington enthusiasts will happily celebrate the birth of their cultural hero in various ways, among them:

- As part of "Kick Off Day" for Jazz Week 2009 in New England, the Aardvark Jazz Orchestra will honor Duke with "A Salute to Duke" on 25 April in Newton, Massachusetts. The program will include an Ellington inspired work by our member the Rev. Mark Harvey, leader of the orchestra.
- The John Beasley group will perform for the Southern California Ellington Society's observance of the birthday.
- From 8am until noon on April 25, Bill Saxonis will present a birthday tribute to Duke on WCDB 90.9 and on the internet at <http://www.wcdbfm.com> as the guest on Bill McCann's "Saturday Morning Edition of Jazz."

A media release promises interviews by Saxonis of Bob Wilber and Ellington alumna trombonist Buster Cooper and bassist John Lamb, recorded at the 20th Duke Ellington Conference in London last May. This will be in addition to "an eclectic collection of music and conversation about [Duke's] art, life and times."

Over ten years, this popular broadcast has become an anticipated annual event, especially among the cognoscenti. Comments have included "splendidly done" (Belgium), "four memorable hours" (Israel), "a treasure" (New York), and "so enjoyable" (Chicago).

- A celebration in Gothenburg, Sweden on April 28 will include an evening of bands, a Midnight Concert by Sandviken Bit Band with Johannes Langren, pipe organ, and Håkan Lewin, alto sax. The next afternoon Landgren will speak on Duke and on the research topic "Interpretation in the 20th Century," followed by a mini-concert by the duo. At night an "Ellington 110 Years Anniversary Concert" by the Gothenburg Wind Orchestra will close out the two-day celebration.

## Backstory in Blue: Ellington at Newport '56 Presented by John Fass Morton

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

Our April program will be one for the ages, ladies and gentlemen, so be sure not to miss it. John Fass Morton will present his book *Backstory in Blue: Ellington at Newport '56*. This book examines the cultural history leading up to and surrounding Ellington's performance at Newport in 1956.

Our member and friend Sjef Hoefsmit wrote about *Backstory in Blue*: "It is amazing. It is different from all other books about Ellington. . . . It is an exciting story and it reads like the most thrilling fiction. . . . He has interviewed everybody who played a role in this exciting story. . . . The way all these testimonies are brought together is masterly." We plan to have copies of the book available for purchase and signing.

We will meet at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC at 7:00 pm on Saturday, April 4.**

Our meetings are open to the public. Come join us and we'll get the backstory on *Backstory*.

*Late News:* *Backstory in Blue* has been nominated for the Jazz Journalists Association Award for "Best Book About Jazz" in 2008.

## In the News: Avakian and Wein, Key Role Players at Newport '56

The *New York Times* reports that George Wein, who produced the now historic Newport Jazz Festival in 1956 that starred Paul Gonsalves and the Ellington orchestra, may return to produce an upcoming Newport jazz and folk festival.

For his researching, preserving and disseminating French music, several months ago George Avakian was named a Commander in the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government, a high awarded to non-French persons. Ellington and especially Gonsalves devotees know Avakian well for his production of the *Ellington at Newport 1956* album, the first, and some say the best, of its kind.

## Louie Bellson: Appreciation Statements



Mr. Bellson  
At Ellington 2000

I will never forget Louie Bellson's brief appearance on a panel discussion at Ellington 2000 in Hollywood. He had been in the middle of a gig on the East Coast, flew to Los Angeles that morning, and said in hushed tones (I'm paraphrasing from memory), "Working with Duke Ellington was the most profound experience of my life, personally and professionally." That's it. Louie immediately returned to the airport and on to his next gig. He felt it was important enough to make a special trip to tell us that. I will never forget it. Thank you, Mr. Bellson.

– Ken Steiner, Seattle, WA

I recall that when I was coming up in the 50s "Skin Deep" was all the rage with the group of teens I was hanging with, it was held up as the latest best—it had Hi-Fi, and amazing drum technique. In the 70s, I happened to be visiting the N.O. Jazz Museum, run by the N.O. Jazz Club in the US Mint, on the same day Louie Bellson was visiting for the first time. I recall his hosts remarking what a gracious and interested guest he was.

– Don Rouse, Alexandria, VA

Louie Bellson was not only a consummate percussionist and all-around musician, he was always the classiest of gentlemen and a great human being. Every time we spoke—whether it was when he guest-soloed with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, or appeared at an Ellington conference or at an IAJE conference—he always greeted me warmly and with humility. I will miss him.

– John Hasse, Alexandria, VA

Louie Bellson will forever be remembered for his heart and humanity as much as for his masterful drumming and musicianship. He remains my hero as a paragon of excellence, integrity and commitment, possessed with a spirit of love and respect for all. I have played Jazz around the world for nearly forty years, and I have not met anyone who does not feel the same way about him.

Louie's prodigious talents touched me long before I got to meet him. My first drum teacher was a former student of his who taught me using Louie's books, *Modern Reading Text in 4/4* and *Odd Time Reading Text*. When I finally did meet Louie twenty years later, he treated me with a depth of simpatico as if we had been close friends since I first opened his book as a teen.

The last time I spent with Louie was in October 2005 with Ken Kimery for the Smithsonian/NEA Jazz Oral History interview\* for two days of incredible stories and generous hospitality provided by his wife, Francine. I remember that Louie was especially proud of his recording with James Brown, and he said that his time with Duke was the most important of his career.

Now both Maestros are together again, and forever will be.

\* [http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/oral\\_histories/joh\\_start.asp#bellson](http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/oral_histories/joh_start.asp#bellson)

– Anthony Brown, Berkeley, CA

## Louie & Clark Expedition 2, by Louie Bellson and Clark Terry

(Percussion Power PERC 2)

We may well consider *Louie & Clark Expedition 2* an oeuvre, a parting gift that we will treasure. If you love big band music expertly played you will love this CD. And of course, Louie and Clark are exemplars of the term jazz masters.

This is pretty much Bellson's CD—except for two co-authored pieces, he wrote all of them. Happily, his buddy Terry is center stage on seven of the thirteen compositions. On "Back to the Basics (Old)," at first sounding suspiciously like "Believe It Beloved," his famed wit seeps through a tight mute. "Terry's Mood" finds him a tad mannerly in conception, while from the first note of "Well Alright Then" he is more his familiar impish self. On riff-based "Davenport Blues," although in line behind other soloists who "get some" first, his relaxed open mid-range horn is well worth the wait.

Centerpiece of the CD is Bellson's four-movement *Chicago Suite*, arranged by former Tonight Show's Tommy Newsome. Here tenor saxophonist Steve Guerra shines on "State Street Song," trumpeter Stjepko Gut delivers a wistful "City of Seasons" and a conversational "The Blues Singer," and soprano saxophonist Stantawn Kendrick is spritely, nimble on "Lake Shore Drive." Guest drummers Kenny Washington and Sylvia Guenca join the Maestro on "Two Guys and a Gal," which would be sensational on video. Overall, the band is crisp and swinging.

Throughout, there is Bellson's admirably tasteful, supportive, and impeccable technique.

*Thank you, Louie Bellson!*

## Short Sheets . . .

♪ **Ellington Orchestra Listed for 2009 Festival** ♪  
The 5th Annual Duke Ellington Festival scheduled for June 5-15 in the Washington, DC area includes the Duke Ellington Orchestra. The theme will celebrate New Orleans, with performances by Ellis, Branford and Delfeayo Marsalis, Buckwheat Zydeco, Harry Connick, Jr., and others associated with the Big Easy.

### ♪ **Ellington Quarter Ceremony** ♪

From the Washington, DC television station's online WTOF.com site, we learn that a ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in early March celebrated the release of the Ellington quarter.

### ♪ **Gonsalves Website** ♪

The Paul Gonsalves website is back on line. The site is run by Alex Dunford, a British saxophonist who took it down while he was successfully pursuing his doctorate in astronomy. It is an excellent site with a substantial amount of material. — *Contributed by Art Luby*

## Terry Eager to Leave Hospital (If He Hasn't Already!)

Clark Terry was hospitalized just after the inauguration for a serious infection in the bone tip of his middle playing finger. In a statement on his Web site ([clarkterry.com](http://clarkterry.com)) Terry says, ". . . I'm happy that The Old Man Upstairs has been good to me and I'm on the road to recovery here in Pine Bluff [AR]." He praises the hospital staff, adding "and the hospital food here is good!" As to his condition, Terry said earlier, "In a few weeks, I should be back on the mound."

At our Society's meeting on 8 March, Patricia Willard recounted that during a phone conversation with Terry he sounded very good and upbeat. When she asked where his friends could wish him well, his wife Gwen suggested that they send messages his and her e-mail address, [clarkandgwen@clarkterry.com](mailto:clarkandgwen@clarkterry.com), to which he added, "I want to hear from everybody."

## Quotation of the Month

The composer as misunderstood, ignored, unappreciated, alienated, I find an absolutely pathological model. I decided early on in my life that a composer like Duke Ellington was a far more important model to me. Ellington particularly influenced me because he was a person who wrote for his audience. He wanted to be popular. He wanted to write hits. He worked constantly. He was like Bach. There was just this endless flow. He never stopped. He was married to his work and married to the players in his band. He created one of the great bodies of art in this century.

— *John Adams in an interview with Vivian Perils, as quoted in Composers' Voices from Ives to Ellington: An Oral History of American Music (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005).*

## LaPradde Honored by TDES

For his many contributions over the years, Ulysses "Speedy" LaPradde was feted at the February meeting of TDES, the New York-based Ellington Society.

In her account of the event in the March issue of the TDES newsletter, Eden Eskin, its editor, writes:

"Ray [Carmen] said he always was amazed that the Living Room at Saint Peter's Church was in order when the first members of the audience arrived. He discovered that it was because Ulysses along with Morris Hodara, Art Zimmerman, and several others would arrive early to set up the room. . . . [LaPradde] also looked after Duke Ellington's gravesite at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx and organized (and paid for) bus trips to the cemetery in April, around Duke's birthday. On behalf of the society, Ray presented a plaque inscribed 'To Ulysses LaPradde, the 1st Life Member of TDES, Inc. Remembering Duke Ellington! 2/18/09.'

"Ulysses responded that the late Pastor John Gensel had also been instrumental in remembering Ellington and keeping things running smoothly at the church. Our guest of honor reminisced about how he had first met Duke Ellington, when Ulysses was in the army and had come to know several of Duke's sidemen. They invited him to attend concerts, and Ulysses was hooked on Ellington."

Testimony by Ray Carman, TDES president, Tom Detienne, its third president, and others stressed that many of LaPradde's contributions were behind the scenes, in small ways, in the background.

Ms. Eskin's account ends with a well-deserved "Thank you, Ulysses LaPradde."

## Concert of Sacred Music Is Praised

Reported by Elizabeth Braxton

Duke Ellington was royally celebrated in a concert of his sacred music sponsored by the Jazz Society of Peoples Congregational United Church of Christ in Washington, DC on Sunday, March 1

The afternoon began with a welcome by Patricia Ellis, the society's president, who then introduced our own Ted Hudson for introductory commentary. The Blues Alley Youth orchestra directed by Jacques Johnson then treated the audience to a short medley of popular Ellington tunes. Highlight of the afternoon was the church's Chancel Choir, accompanied by the Youth Orchestra in selections from Duke's sacred music. Michael Wooden's dancing to "David Danced" brought a standing ovation. Also noteworthy was the lovely performance of "Come Sunday" by soprano Toni Robinson and a young lady guitarist from the Youth Orchestra.

The afternoon ended with words of praise and appreciation by the pastor, the Rev. Michael C. Murphy.

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

### Luvenia George

Luvenia George was a panelist, the topic of which was "Exploration," at the Honors! Festival at New York's Carnegie Hall on Sunday, 8 March. Among the panelists was C. Eric Dyson, who spoke on hip hop culture, and Cornel West, whose topic was Coltrane. Hers was Ellington.

The day before the "Exploration" panel, a concert of Ellington's sacred music featuring Jessye Norman and others, took place at a packed Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The Honors! Festival runs until the end of March.

### Jack Towers

Peter MacHare, our prexy, saw in the new March 2009 Mosaic Records catalog a description of *The Complete Dean Benedetti Recordings of Charlie Parker* that "Everything is transferred directly from the original discs and tapes by legendary engineer Jack Towers and coproducer Phil Schaap." [Emphasis added]

### Bob Reny

Bob Reny continues to contribute unusually insightful, informative, and ultimately useful reviews to the *IAJRC Journal*, his latest being of Sathima Bea Benjamin's *A Morning in Paris* and Ellington's *New York New York* and the *Treasury Shows, Volume 13*.

### Theodore Hudson

In February, Ted Hudson gave a lecture-demonstration on Duke's spiritual life and sacred music at historic Ebenezer United Methodist Church, on Washington's Capital Hill.

## *Il Maestro*

by Anthony Brown

*Luigi Paulino Alfredo Francesco Antonio Balassoni*  
*A true Master of Grace and Time*  
*Was Called Home*  
*This Valentine's Day*  
*To spread his love from high above*  
*And join Duke in Heaven's band.*

## Louie Bellson Condolences and Contributions

*Contributions in Memory of*  
*Louie Bellson Can Be Made to:*  
Emmanuel Baptist Church and Mailed to Mrs. Bellson,  
c/o Remo, Inc, 28101 Industry Dr., Valencia, CA 91355  
*Condolence Cards May Be Sent to:*  
The Family of Louie Bellson at the Remo Address

## March Program Spotlights "Witty, Ebullient" Clark Terry

by Art Luby, Secretary

On March 7, Ted Shell presented a comprehensive retrospective on the work of trumpeter and vocalist Clark Terry. Ted's presentation of DVDs covered a wide swath of Terry's 70-year professional career, extending from the breathtaking solo on "Harlem Airshaft" taken in Amsterdam in 1958 to a performance at the White House some 47 years later before a properly appreciative President Bush, during which the physically weakened trumpeter still managed to improvise eight bars of blues out of "I Won't Dance." In between there were excerpts from performances by Terry in small combo settings given from New Orleans to Brussels, accompanied by a variety of all-star musicians including Dizzy Gillespie, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, Oscar Peterson, and a surprisingly animated Milt Jackson.

Terry, until his health was undermined by circulatory problems, was a musician of unsurpassed technical facility and swing, talents which will always place him at the center of any discussion of great Ellington trumpeters. However, Terry was also a witty, ebullient performer who, as Ted's tapes clearly show, consistently inspired fellow musicians and audiences. This, as much as his musicianship, accounts for the fact that he is, perhaps, the only one of the great Ellington soloists whose artistic achievement after leaving the orchestra equal or exceed his work within it.

## To Join or To Renew Membership

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The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. at  
PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.

*Our dues remain a bargain:*

Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;

First-time-ever member, just \$20.

Keep in mind that memberships are for the calendar year.

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