

Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Editor

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No Ellington-Focused Program At Annual Duke Ellington Jazz Festival

A performance by the Duke Ellington Orchestra of his *New Orleans Suite* during the 5th Annual Duke Ellington Festival in Washington, DC in April was cancelled. The orchestra's appearance this year had been announced at last year's Festival, and it had been scheduled in media releases not long before the event opened. We understand from a Festival spokesperson that a reason had to do with budget.

Thus, among the scores of performances and other attractions that took place at the Festival named for him, none concentrated on Duke Ellington

The rendering of the *New Orleans Suite* would have been in keeping with this year's Festival theme, "Celebrating New Orleans."

Among featured performers were Ellis Marsalis and sons, Buckwheat Zydeco, Billy Taylor, and Harry Connick, Jr.

One of our Society's members, poet Brian Gilmore, headed a "Spoken Word" session of verse and music at a local club.

JazzTimes Survives

Amid rumors that it would cease publication, back in June *JazzTimes* announced on its Web page that "*JazzTimes* has temporarily suspended publication of the magazine and has furloughed the bulk of its staff while it finalizes a sale of its assets."

Then in August came the news that the ". . . *JazzTimes* brand has been acquired by Madavor Media LLC, a market-leading enthusiast publishing and trade-show group based in Boston," and that "Madavor will resume publishing . . . immediately with an August issue . . ."

October Program: Oscar Peterson Plays Ellington!

by Ted Shell

For our October meeting I have decided to present Oscar Peterson playing Duke Ellington.

We who consider ourselves jazz aficionados feel that Peterson was the greatest jazz pianist extant. We can all agree that he was the best Canadian-born artist of the keyboard.

Those who attended the Ellington concert at the Carter Barron in Washington, DC in the 60s where he appeared on the same program with Peterson and Ella Fitzgerald may remember that Duke stated that his old piano teacher, Mrs. Clinkscales, suggested that he never sit down at the piano behind Oscar Peterson. There was a special mutual admiration society between them.

My program will be culled from video discs, video tapes, and laser discs, and in the main will include only compositions written by Duke.

In addition to Peterson, other artists we will see are Joe Pass, guitar, Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet, of course the great Ben Webster, tenor sax, as well as members of the Peterson Trio. The program will open with an interview by the famous local pianist Billy Taylor.

Dr. Shell will present his program at our upcoming meeting at 7:00 pm, Saturday, 3 October 2009, at our regular venue, Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.

Our meetings are free and open to the public, so invite or, better yet, bring friends.

“Dawn of the Jazz Age: Sir Duke Ellington’s Adventures in Britain”

by Harvey G. Cohen

Seventy-five years ago, Duke Ellington and his orchestra’s first tour of England transformed how Ellington, American music and African American music were viewed on both sides of the Atlantic. It changed how Ellington viewed his own artistry, encouraging him to experiment further beyond the danceable sounds audiences typically expected of black artists in the jazz world. And in the US, Ellington’s 1933 British tour significantly pushed forward the idea of Americans finally accepting their own music as a serious art form.

Ellington and his orchestra enjoyed the most concentrated American news coverage they had yet received upon their return [to the United States]. Newspapers triumphantly parroted the praise British critics showered on Ellington. They changed their tone in writing about him, employing rarefied language not usually lavished on popular or jazz musicians. The Youngstown (Ohio) *Vindicator* offered a headline of “Ellington to Show Piano Art.” A Columbus (Ohio) paper referred to Ellington as a “versatile” artist “just back from European triumphs” who could play both a concert and a dance in the same evening, utilising his “many manuscripts” of original music. The Memphis *Scimitar* wrote that Ellington’s “unorthodox, frenzied jazz” earned him the sobriquet of “this negro Stravinsky.”

Ellington himself never emphasized such platitudes. He had little use for fawning comparisons, outside of the promotional opportunities they presented. His music illustrated the feelings and impressions of his own existence and identity. In “words bearing a slight London accent,” Ellington told *The Hollywood News* in 1934 that “I want to be independent. I want to do what I want. I want to break away from European traditions.” Despite international inclination to classical comparisons by various critics, this is what his music had done all along.

Before Aaron Copland and Charles Ives rose to international prominence in the 1940s, Ellington offered convincing evidence that American music could offer something original and lasting, even if earlier works by Scott Joplin, among others, should have tipped off critics decades before. Following the Second World War, American music, along with American literature and art, would be more frequently and seriously studied and reviewed both in the United States and abroad. Ellington’s work in the 1930s, and the British recognition of it, proved significant in presaging and inspiring this cultural shift.

Ed. Note: The above consists of excerpts—the opening and the three summary-conclusion paragraphs—of an article bearing the above title that appeared in London’s The Independent last November. A member of our Society, Dr. Cohen teaches at King’s College, London. His forthcoming book, Duke Ellington’s America, is scheduled for release in the spring of 2010 by the University of Chicago Press. We are grateful to him for his kind permission for us to reprint these excerpts.

A Souvenir of the Music at Ellington 2008: The Great London Duke Ellington Festival

(MCPS E08CD3)

Hosts of 20th International Duke Ellington Conference, held in London in May 2008, have released a double CD of music played there, prominently featuring Ellington orchestra alumni bassist John Lamb and trombonists Art Baron and Buster Cooper. The release also includes the Brian Priestley Trio and five UK bands: Harmony in Harlem, Kinda Dukish, Ellingtonia, Vo-De-O-Do, and Harlem.

Centerpiece of the first CD is the three former Ellington Orchestra stalwarts—each of whom has space to stretch out—backed by the relentlessly swinging interplay and support of Priestley, piano and arranger, Frank Griffith, clarinet and tenor sax, and Dave Barry, drums. Selections include not only familiar works as “Mood Indigo” and “Sultry Serenade” but also lesser known “Oh Gee” and “Parachute Jump.” Then the Harmony in Harlem band supports Cooper and Lamb on “Come Sunday” and the Kinda Dukish group supports Baron and Lamb on “Hy’a Sue.”

Disc Two provides delightful hearings from different stages of Ellington’s artistry. Harmony in Harlem offers oldies such as “Buffet Flat” and “Pussy Willow” while the Kinda Dukish group plays later pieces, among them “Concerto for Cootie” and “Oclupaca.” Ellingtonia contributes “Black Beauty” and “I’m Beginning to See the Light.” The Vo-De-O-Do Orchestra favors earlier classics, including “Echoes of the Jungle” and “Doin the Voom Voom,” and the aptly named Harlem aggregation does “Drop Me Off in Harlem” and “Jubilee Stomp.” All-in-all, there is something to tickle the ear and/or twitch the feet of just about everyone. And these spirited British groups can play, no doubt about it.

Copies of A Souvenir of the Music at Ellington 2008 may be obtained directly from Ellington 2008 for One Pound Sterling. For information about payment options, including bank transfers, and orders from outside the UK, contact Ellington 2008 at 38 Thurstone Avenue, London N12 OLP, United Kingdom, or go online to www.ellington2008.org.

Short Sheets . . .

♪ Jazz Corner in Woodlawn Cemetery ♪

The June 2009 issue of TDES' newsletter informs that in the area across from Duke Ellington's grave site are those of Illinois Jacquet, Max Roach, Joyce Wein, and Jackie McLean. This "Jazz Corner" was held until the end of June for other members of the jazz community. After then, it was opened to the general public.

♪ Bellson Daughter Passes ♪

Dee Dee Bellson, daughter of deceased Pearl Bailey Bellson and Louie Bellson, died in her home in Charlottesville, Virginia on 4 July. A singer, she had performed as a single, with backup groups, and on occasion with her father's band. Louie's widow Francine Bellson, who recently had memorial service for him in June, has been comforted by Dee Dee's former band members and Charlottesville friends.

♪ **New Upscale Hotel Bears Ellington's Name** ♪
Leeds, England, significant in the history of him in that country, now has a Hotel Ellington.

♪ **The Time Has Arrived: CDs on Demand** ♪
Peter MacHare, our alert prexy, noticed in a description on Amazon.com of the CD *Duke Ellington at Birdland-1952*: "This product is manufactured on demand using CD-R recordable media. Amazon.com's standard return policy will apply." Peter's comment: "Amazing!. Making commercial CDs to order. Maybe one day, nothing will ever go out of print."

♪ **Avakian Named an NEA Jazz Master** ♪
Among the National Endowment of the Arts' recipients of its 2009 Jazz Masters Awards is George Avakian. Among his many achievements over the years is the recording of the historic 1956 Ellington at Newport now historic happening.

♪ **Museum Offers Famed 1917-47 Radio Shows** ♪
The Jazz Museum Bix Eiben Hamburg has made available in regular intervals on the internet the highly regarded "Jazz-Revisited Radio Show" that was broadcast in the United States for over 30 years. For details, go to bixeibenhamburg.com

Images of Duke at the Mosque

by Patricia Braxton

Did you know that Ellington and His Orchestra performed "A Concert of Sacred Music" in Richmond, Virginia, sponsored by the Progressive Matrons of Fifth Street Baptist Church?

Well, the Virginia Historical Society provides images of the concert program and press kit for the concert held at the Mosque Auditorium on November 8, 1968. You can find these images along with autographs of some of the band members, including Ellington's son, Mercer, and Harry Carney. See the Society's website at:

www.vahistorical.org/research/tacl_ellington.htm

James Earl Lewis, 1931-2009

James E. Lewis, a faithful member of our Society for a number of years, died on 14 June at home with his wife, Annette, and daughters Janice, Tamara, and Jacquanette by his side.

Having earned degrees in electrical engineering and physics, he had a stellar career as a scientist. He became one of the nation's foremost experts in radar and antenna technology and held positions with leading defense contractors.

Among James' other relatives are our members Marion and Ted Shell, his sister- and brother-in law. We extend sincere condolences to his family and other loved ones.

Ellington and Strayhorn Music Headline Gateshead Jazz Festival

Blue Light reports that Duke's "Harlem" and "Night Creature" were "a major part of the opening concert" of the Gateshead International Jazz Festival at Sage Hall, near Newcastle, England in March.

Among other Ellington and Strayhorn works performed at the Festival by the Gay Barker Jazz Orchestra, the Northern Sinfonia, and guest artists were "Lush Life," "UMMG," "Chelsea Bridge," and a Maurice Peress arrangement of *Black, Brown, and Beige*.

Report on Echoes of Ellington Conference

For an account of the Echoes of Ellington Conference at the University of Texas in Austin in April, by all means see what Bill Saxonis, an internationally known Ellington authority, has written in the August-November edition of *DEMS Bulletin*. He calls it "a personal reflection," but it reads like good journalism to us.

Looking Ahead >

Ellington Orchestra at Strathmore

Ellington enthusiasts in the Mid-Atlantic area, and farther, will have an opportunity to hear the Duke Ellington Orchestra directed by alumnus Barrie Lee Hall perform at the Concert Hall of the Strathmore, in North Bethesda, MD at 8 pm, Thursday, 5 November.

This special, described in Strathmore's calendar as "one incredible night of legendary jazz standards" and "America's contribution to world music," is being sponsored by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, but it will not participate in the performance.

For reservations and other information, go online to strathmore.org, call 301-581-5100, or write to Strathmore at 5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda, MD.

Ed. Note: In one place in the Strathmore's internet announcement of the event, Barrie Lee Hall is named as the Orchestra's leader, but in another place "Duke's grandson Paul Mercer Ellington" is named as the leader.

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

About Our Members

Mark Harvey

The Rev. Mark Harvey and his Aardvark Jazz Orchestra celebrated Duke's 100th birthdate with a "Salute to Duke" in Newton, Massachusetts on 25 April. The program included Ellington-inspired compositions by Harvey.

The next day he played a solo trumpet version of the National Anthem at a Yankees vs. Red Sox baseball game at Fenway Park.

Bob Reny, Ken Steiner, Sjef Hoefsmit

Sjef Hoefsmit's current issue of *DEMS Bulletin* is, as usual, chock full of news, reviews, discographical data, and commentary. For example, see Ken Steiner's illuminating review of John Howland's recent book *Ellington Uptown: Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson, and the Birth of Concert Jazz* as well as his contributions to "Cotton Club Broadcasts on NBC 1932-1933" in the same issue.

Bob Reny, a regular music reviewer for *IJRC Journal*, has a feature article in the September 2009 issue entitled "Sam Donahue on CD." Among the CDs that he reviews in the same issue is *The Sacred Music of Louis Bellson and The Jazz Ballet*.

Ben Pubols

This fall Ben Pubols will be giving several OASIS lectures in Portland, Oregon. One will be two two-hour sessions on "The Rise and Fall of Big Bands," from 1919 Art Hickman through Duke, Count and concluding with Herman and Thornhill. The other presentation will be on "The Three Tenors," they being, of course, Prez, Bean, and Ben.

Davey Yarborough

Invited by First Lady Michelle Obama, Davey Yarborough and some of his students at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, DC performed at the White House in April. There were other students sponsored by the Thelonious Institute of Jazz. Also participating in this big music workshop-concert, affiliated with the Annual Duke Ellington Jazz Festival, were Bradford Marsalis and sons and Paquito D'Rivera.

Pictured in the *Post* playing a saxophone solo was Ellington School student Elijah Easton, recipient of an award from our Society from an initiative established by the late Dr. Lettie Austin-Fenderson for recognition of aspiring students.

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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.

Alumni's Post-Duke Recordings Explored at June Meeting

by Art Luby, Secretary

The Society's final meeting until fall featured a presentation by Ted Hudson entitled "Ellington Continuum" that focused on the work of Ellington alumni after their service with the maestro.

Ellington's dominance of the creative lives of his musicians was such that—with the notable exceptions of Clark Terry and Louie Bellson—few were able to match their work with his orchestra after they left the band. Still, Ted's collection had a number of notable performances that were generated after Duke's death.

Ted's selections included a number of Ellington's singers, all of whom were overshadowed by his legendary instrumentalists while they were in the band. The powerful voice of Milt Grayson (emanating, as recalled by Geneva Hudson, from a very small man) was on display in "Slidin' Home." Eve Smith (known as Yvonne Lanauze when she delivered memorable vocal choruses of "Mood Indigo" and "Sophisticated Lady" in *Masterpieces by Ellington* in 1950) provided a husky and creatively phrased "Muddy Water Blues." And Herb Jeffries, still active late into his 90s, was heard on, of all things, a country/western styled number.

Virtually all of Duke's well known sidemen were represented in Ted's selections, including Clark Terry, Britt Woodman, and two from his final band, Rocky White and Art Baron. Patricia Willard added a selection from Louis Bellson entitled "Carnaby Street" performed at the height of Bellson's fame as a West Coast musician when, as she recalled, Johnny Carson and Doc Severenson were regulars at his performances at Dante's nightclub. However, one of the most impressive recordings was Barrie Lee Hall's rendition of "The Shepherd," an extraordinarily demanding trumpet composition originally written for Cootie Williams as part of the *Second Sacred Concert*. Hall, one of the true keepers of the Ellington flame, provided his own interpretation while matching the intensity of the original Williams solo with both muted and open horn.

The evening ended with the Bill Berry Band's rendition of "Cottontail," swung hard enough to inspire Bill Hasson to devise his own choreography in response, and to persuade Geneva Hudson and Georgiana Baird to, however reluctantly, join in.

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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