

Ellingtonia

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Duke's 112th Birthday Celebrated By Concert at Ellington Park

On 29 April there was a large turnout for a program and concert to celebrate his birthday at Duke Ellington Park, a gem of an oasis at the east end of Ward Place, NW in Washington, DC, the street where he was born. On hand were Mayor Vincent Gray, who when a DC Council member had guided through that body the process by which the plot, sometimes unofficially called Triangle Park, was designated Duke Ellington Park.

This time last year, when the official naming took place, it was decided that a celebration of Ellington's birthplace would be an annual event there.

This year music provided by two excellent student groups, The New Washingtonians from the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and King James and the Serfs of Swing from nearby George Washington University. An impromptu added attraction that delighted the audience was several toddlers, maybe 2 to 4 years of age, who spontaneously "danced" (well, jumping up and down *is* a form of dance) with abandon whenever musicians got a beat going. They somehow intuitively sensed that "It don't mean a thing . . ."

The original naming and subsequent celebrations were conceived and sponsored by the key organizations and individuals, chiefly among them West End Friends, led by Anita Diliberto, and Rebecca Coder, ANC Commissioner. This year's program and concert was chaired and hosted by Dick Golden, veteran radio personality, in recent years associated with XM radio.

Scientists Offered Creative Artist's Wisdom

In April, energy expert and environmentalist Bill Saxonis, well known also as an Ellington authority, spoke on "Building Energy Codes: A Design for a More Energy Efficient Future?" at a national symposium in Washington, DC sponsored by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. He chose for the last slide of his presentation a photo of Duke and a quotation by him, "A Problem is a chance for you to do your best."

June Program: Member's Choice

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

Our program for June will be a member's choice. Bring any Ellington recording and tell us a little about it. This is a great way to participate in a presentation without having to do an entire program. It is also a great way for new members to get their feet wet.

The program will be **Saturday, 4 June at 7 pm at Grace Lutheran Church, 4300 16th Street, NW**, at the corner of **Varnum Street** in beautiful **Washington, DC**.

This will be our last program for the season, so don't miss it or you will have to wait until October for our next meeting. So come on down and hear some great Ellington music!

Scholarship Recipient Comes Back a Successful Pro

by Patricia Braxton

Our 2002 Duke Ellington Society Scholarship awardee, bassist Ben Williams, was in Washington, DC in mid-April adding his talents to the Helen Sung Quartet at the Residence of the Turkish Ambassador for the Ertegun Jazz Series.

He followed that up later in the week with his own ensemble at the Kennedy Center's KC Jazz Club. Ben mentioned to me that he has been living in New York City for the past three years. Check him out at: <http://www.myspace.com/benwilliamsjazz>.

Piano Sheet Music of Ellington And Strayhorn Tunes Is Available

Storyville Records and Wise Publications have produced *Storyville Presents Duke Ellington: The Original Piano Transcriptions*, a collection of sheet music, with accompanying CD, of Ellington and Strayhorn tunes.

The selections should be a boon to pianists, vocalists as well, among them favorites such as "Satin Doll," "Caravan," "C-Jam Clues," "Kinda Dukish," and "Don't Get Around Much Any More." Two extended works, "New World A-Comin'" and "Meditation" are included.

Come Sunday: The Music of Duke Ellington by Cynthia Felton

(Felton Entertainment FE0002)

Reviewed by Theodore (Ted) Hudson

Cynthia Felton is a talented singer. She has a range of over three octaves; excellent enunciation, an attribute that Ellington so admired in singers; and formal training culminating in an advanced degree in jazz studies at the University of Southern California. During our first listening to the CD this latter factor unfairly brought to mind how Duke responded to Joya Sherrill when she informed him she was considering taking formal vocal training. Happily, further listening dispelled the thought.

Cynthia Felton chose well known works by Ellington and Strayhorn for this self-produced CD, and for accompanists and soloists she chose variously for each selection from an array of 19 instrumentalists, among them drummer Terri Lynne Carrington, trumpeter Wallace Roney, and pianist Cyrus Chestnut.

She, and they, swing, opening with "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing," during which she moves from jaunty singing to scatting. She also scats to good effect on "Perdido" and "In a Mellow Tone" (sic). She romps through the former; in the latter she is more forthright than mellow, except when at the end she "speaks in tongues," as it were. "Take the 'A' Train" strangely begins with a Latin-y, slow beat and Roney's trumpet underlying her full-throated singing, followed by her scatting before a mechanical close. A bit of a showcase for percussion and voice, "Caravan" starts as if the camels are in some sort of hip, laid back semi-gallop, their steps easily heard even on presumably soft sand, but soon they revert to a more camel-ish gait as she sings of their mission. "I'm Beginning to See the Light" is playful and spritely. In "Duke's Place" a rhythm section of Carrington, pianist Partrice Rushen, and bassist Tony Dumas augmented by altoist Jeff Clayton and trumpeter Nolan Shaheed are fine foil for Felton's spirited voice.

If we may nit-pick just a teeny-tiny bit with Cynthia Felton's performance on this CD, it would be about a lack of sensitive nuance on some of the slower tunes. At times it seems that she is singing notes and words, albeit singing them well, but not telling the story or conveying the feeling that lyrics plus notes can evoke. For example, her rendering of "In a Sentimental Mood" is more testimonial than softly reflective, more declarative than wistful. Still, the song falls pleasingly on the ear, and don't be surprised to find yourself singing along with this and some of the tunes mentioned below.

On "Lush Life," accompanied beautifully by Chesnut, Felton does come across as the former ingénue with a story to regretfully cherish. Her plain, unadorned approach and spare accompaniment work especially well on "Sophisticated Lady." Her "Prelude to a Kiss" is a pretty song prettily sung. She begins *a capella*, then is accompanied by harp, after which there is a guitar solo. All very lovely. Perhaps "I Got It Bad" is Felton's most convincingly told story; during its telling she is accompanied by Roney on trumpet, and he as well contributes an intriguing solo passage.

The title song, "Come Sunday" is a delight during which Felton's seems imbued with personal spirituality. Her mood at the beginning is one of reverent supplication; by the end it has given way to more exultant praise. Chestnut supports her and solos with sensitivity, imagination, and feeling.

All told, this CD is a commendable offering by a gifted young woman from whom we anticipate great things. In particular we would like to hear her Felton in subtly nuanced modes, cushioned by a full orchestra!

Yes, get a copy of *Come Sunday: The Music of Duke Ellington* by Dr. Cynthia Felton.

Anthony Brown's Latest

In preparing his contribution to the recent book *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music*, edited by Eric Nisenson (Oxford University Press), our Anthony Brown, leader of the Asian American Orchestra, "immersed" himself in Coltrane's multi-movement extended works that followed his, Coltrane's, "A Love Supreme." Then, realizing how much India and Africa thematically informed Coltrane's works, Brown set about producing *India & Africa: A Tribute to John Coltrane* (Water Baby Records WBR 1110) by his Asian American Orchestra, recorded live at Oshi's in Oakland, California.

The offerings are, in a sense, re-inventions, or fresh interpretations, of Coltrane artistry, using sheng, shakuhachi, sarod, tabla, African drums, and other instruments used mainly in other cultures in addition to familiar piano, brass, reed, and percussion instruments. Among the Coltrane-related tunes on the album are "Africa," "India," "Living Space," "Exaltation," "Dahomey Dance." The CD has received critical attention and praise, and it has done very well in recent jazz polls, for instance, placing among the 10 best 2010 CDs in both *Village Voice* and *Metrotimes* ratings.

(Sorry, Ellington enthusiasts, none of the tunes Coltrane recorded with our hero is included; but remember, Dr. Brown produced a tribute to Duke and Strayhorn, *Far East Suite*, by his Asian American Orchestra back in 1999.)

Short Sheets . . .

♪ Duke and Blake Correspondence ♪

The Maryland Historical Society has a nice online collection at archive.mdhs.org/eubieblake/ featuring Eubie Blake that includes a few letters between him and Ellington, including when Ellington was chairman of the Negro Actors Guild of America in 1962. *Ed.Note: We thank Patricia Braxton for contributing this information.*

♪ Howard Theatre Project ♪

While passing by recently we noticed scaffolding on the entire front facade of the Howard Theatre in Washington, DC, hopefully a sign that things are moving along on what some have been looking forward to, an Ellington Plaza.

♪ A Note from Claire Gordon ♪

A second printing of Claire Gordon's novel *The Color of Music* is available from Amazon, and a Kindle version is available. As many of our readers know, Ms. Gordon for a time served as the secretary for the Ellington band. And so she offers a deal to "Ellington people": If the reader does not like the book, send her a copy of the receipt and she will refund its cost.

♪ Esther Marrow at the Birchmere ♪

Vocalist Esther Marrow, billed as Queen Esther Marrow, was booked with the Blind Boys of Alabama at the Birchmere Music Hall in Alexandria, VA in May. She performed with Duke occasionally during 1965-67 and recorded several of his sacred compositions with the orchestra.

♪ Governor's Dad in Duke's Band? ♪

According to Wikipedia, Pat Patrick, father of governor of Massachusetts Deval Patrick, "...spent time in Duke Ellington's Orchestra..." It's pretty well known that the elder Patrick played with Sun Ra, but such reference works as DESOR and Timmer do not list him as ever playing with Ellington.

Quotation of the Month

You've taken my blues and gone --

You sing 'em on Broadway

And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,

And you mixed 'em up with symphonies

And you fixed 'em

So they don't sound like me.

Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

— from "Note on Commercial Theater" by Langston Hughes

Distinguished Visitors

We welcomed four guests at our May meeting: Barbara Anderson, an active member of Peoples Jazz Society; Ellington relatives Alphonso and Alvin Frost; and Tom Sweeney, chief client advocate of North American Network (NAN).

Ms. Anderson won a very fancy cake provided by Alan Schneidmill in a contest to list the most movies in which jazz musicians had acting roles.

The Frost brothers are related to Duke's family on his mother Daisy Kennedy Ellington's side. She had a sister named Florence Kennedy who was the Frosts' great-grandmother. Thus, Daisy was their great-aunt.

Attention: Itinerary Specialists

Just think, our hero had been a teen-ager just a little over a year before the time of this literary and music program for which he was the music "Director."

Center Market was located where the National Archives stands today.

MASONIC VICTORY RECEPTION BY THE NEW MASONIC HALL CORPORATION	
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FRIDAY EVENING, JUNE 6, 1916, from 8 P. M. until 9 A. M.	
Literary and Musical Program, one hour, by the following contributing artists: Mr. Frank E. Williams, composer of "Jesseamine"; Mrs. Louisa Mills Brown, Dr. C. Sumner Wormley, and others. Come and whirl the hours away, for pleasure is assured.	
MUSIC BY DUKE ELLINGTON'S SERENADERS Edward K. Ellington, Director	
The public is especially invited. Your comfort will be our effort. Craftmen and Honored Ladies, remember the cause for which we are laboring.	
DANCING UNTIL 11 P. M. REFRESHMENTS IN ABUNDANCE.	
COMMITTEE ON ARRANGEMENTS:	
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"Over the Top in Smiles and Pleasure." Mark your calendar for this rare treat.	
opened a piano and vocal studio at 931 Westmaster street, Washington, D. C. Mrs. Johnson is a gradu-	OVERSEA MUSICIANS, NOTICE Musicians of the A. E. F. are re-

This advertisement appeared in the Washington Bee on 31 May 1919.

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

For the 2011 Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference, William (Bill) Brower produced a retrospective show entitled "Twenty-five Years of the Jazz Issue Forum and Concert." The program paid particular attention to the story behind and impact of HR 57, which designated jazz "as a rare and valuable national American treasure." Cedric Hendricks was a co-presenter and the executive producer.

Joseph Daniel Clipper

An exhibit of portraits by Joseph Daniel Clipper took place at Unity in Washington, DC in early May.

John Edwin Mason

The photograph on the cover and those of the studio recording session in the accompanying notes for the Hod O'Brien Trio's CD *It Don't Mean a Thing* (Spice of Life Records SV-0017) are by John Edwin Mason.

Setting the Record Straight

In our last issue, we included Morris Hodara among four persons who, to the best of our knowledge, missed only one of the 20 International Duke Ellington Society Conferences. We were imprecise. Morris and his wife Jo registered for the Los Angeles conference; however, they did not attend because of illness in the family. So in terms of actual presence he missed only two.

Donor of DVDs

Copies of the DVD *Reminiscing in Tempo* were presented to three of our members at our May meeting. These complimentary promotional copies were distributed by Wienerworld in the UK (<http://www.wienerworld.com>).

Children's Books about Ellington:**A Selected Beginning Bibliography**

Black Americans of Achievement: Duke Ellington: Bandleader and Composer by Ron Frankl. Introduction by Coretta Scott King. Chelsea House Publishers. 1986

Duke Ellington by Mike Venezia

Duke Ellington (Importance Of) by Adam Woog.

Duke Ellington: His Life in Jazz with 21 Activities (For Kids Series) by Stephanie Stein Crease. Chicago Review Press. 2009.

Duke Ellington: I Live with Music by Carin T. Ford. Enslow Publishers, Inc. 2007.

Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer by Judy Monroe and John Edward Hasse. Coughlan Publishing. 2006.

The Life and Times of Duke Ellington (Masters of Music: The World's Greatest Composers Series) by John Bankston. Mitchell Lane Publishing Co. 20004.

Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra by Andrea Pinkney. Brian Pinkney, illustrator. Hyperion Book CH. 1999.

Reminiscing in Tempo

Reported by Elvira Doman

The showing of this video at our May meeting was enthusiastically received by the audience. It provided a collection of vignettes with vocal and instrumental sounds in the background as close friends and family members (Duke's sister Ruth Ellington Boatwright and granddaughter Mercedes) reminisced about their memories of Duke Ellington.

The well-known story of the 30-year relationship between Duke and Strayhorn was included.

A portrayal of the trip to Mexico in the 1960s presented some Latin music played according to the "Duke" style. Another highlight was the presentation by the late Billy Taylor, pianist, who illustrated how different musicians interpret "Take the 'A' Train" to suit their own styles. The film moved from one musician to another with each playing the same tune.

There was a reflection of how Duke Ellington devoted much of the last ten years of his life to writing sacred music, this segment of the film culminating in a sacred concert at the American Embassy in Moscow.

A monument of the Duke that was placed in New York City at 110th Street and Central Park North, renamed Duke Ellington Circle, was shown. This led to comments about Duke's love of the ladies and how they, in turn, responded to him.

Ed. Note: We thank Dr. Doman for this report on the meeting. Our secretary, Art Luby, was away.

Attention Members

Please check your membership expiration date on the upper right of your address label. Remember, our membership is by the calendar year. Thank you.

To Join or To Renew Membership

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