

# Ellingtonia

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Theodore R. Hudson, Founder and Editor

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Web Site: [depanorama.net/desociety/](http://depanorama.net/desociety/)

## Howard Theatre Reopening Gala Scheduled for April

The Ellis Development Group has announced that the Howard Theatre renovation is about a third completed and a grand opening will take place on 12 April 2012.

The facade has been preserved, underpinning has been installed for the structure, concrete poured for a new basement and for the first level and stage, and a new roof installed.



Ted Hudson Photo

Howard Theatre Being Renovated, November 2011  
Building at Right Is a Former Pool Hall

The gala will be a fund-raiser for construction of an educational facility adjacent to and south of the theatre. As envisioned it will include classrooms, museum, listening library, offices, lounge, and recording studio.

When constructed in 1910 it was "the largest colored theatre in the world." It was a venue for "legitimate" theater, musicals, pageants, vaudeville, community programs, and for a time, a church.

During the Great Depression it closed for a while, then opened with its first jazz show in 1931, with native son Duke Ellington and his orchestra heading the bill. Except for occasional events in the 1970s and 1980s, it closed after the 1968 riots.

This renovation and revival has been long awaited.

## Happy New Year, Ellingtonians!

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

It just doesn't seem fair, does it. Fans of Duke Ellington enjoy life more than anyone I know. And why not? We have the best music. And now we also have our New Year's Party on **Saturday, 7 January 2012 at 7 pm** in our usual meeting room at **Grace Lutheran Church, 4300 - 16th Street, NW, at the corner of 16th and Varnum Streets, Washington, DC.**

Our president will provide soft drinks, ice, plates, and cups. We ask our members to bring a pot-luck dish for the table. But if you forget a dish, please come anyway (because we do love you madly).

Members may bring guests.

## Ellington 2012 Note

A posting on Duke-LYM by Antony Pepper, leader of the group organizing Ellington 2012, states that it is expected that among the persons to speak over the first three days of the conference are our member Ken Steiner of Seattle, WA and Bill Saxonis of Albany, NY.

## ELLINGTON 2012

**23-27 May 2012 - Woking, England**

Opening Reception - Four Days of Papers and Panel  
Discussions - Wednesday Evening Reception  
Evening Concerts - Sunday Closing Banquet - And More

For Details Go To

[www.Ellington2012.org](http://www.Ellington2012.org)

Other Contact Information:

Postal address: Ellington 2012, 2 Julian Close,  
Woking, GU21 3HED, United Kingdom  
E-mail address: [E12@Ellington2012.org](mailto:E12@Ellington2012.org)

Registration forms are available online at  
[www.ellington2012.org/E12-Oct-Reg-Form.pdf](http://www.ellington2012.org/E12-Oct-Reg-Form.pdf)

## “Frustration” to “Acquiescence”: Billy Strayhorn’s *Suite for Horn and Piano*

by Bill Saxonis

One of Billy Strayhorn’s more remarkable compositions is the *Suite for Horn and Piano* (aka *The North by Southwest Suite* and *Suite for the Duo*). The suite, written in the midst of Billy’s battle against the cancer that was ravaging his diminutive body, lies as testimony to Strayhorn’s magnificent artistry. The 1967 composition was written, not for the Ellington band, but for the piano and French horn of the Mitchell-Ruff duo. Strayhorn biographer David Hajdu described the suite as Billy’s “dying scream,” and musicologist Walter van de Leur observed that through Willie Ruff’s horn the music captured the “whole gamut of sentiments that asserted themselves in the final stages” of Strayhorn’s life “from anguished frustration to resigned acquiescence.”

Fortunately the recording of this 12-minute masterpiece is still publicly available including from Amazon.Com and Willie Ruff’s own web page ([www.willieruff.com](http://www.willieruff.com)). The performance by Mitchell and Ruff is superb. After listening to the Mitchell-Ruff Duo perform the suite, Dizzy Gillespie was so impressed he told the Duo that we “have to make a record together some time soon!” (Recordings of the collaboration with Gillespie are also still readily available.)

In September 2011, I had the honor of interviewing Willie Ruff at Yale University, where he has been a faculty member dating back to 1971. He reflected upon his incredible life’s journey and offered fascinating insights into his relationship with Duke and Billy including how the *Suite for Horn and Piano* was born. Excerpts from this interview will be featured on my upcoming Ellington birthday radio show on WCDB-90.9FM in late April 2012.

*Ed. Note: In our listing of Strayhorn sources in our November 2011 issue, we did not include Suite for Horn and Piano, thinking that it not generally available from vendors. We thank Bill Saxonis for calling our omission to our attention and for being kind enough to contribute this article about this important composition. We look forward to Bill’s highly regarded annual Ellington birthday show, broadcast in April from Albany, New York.*

## ***Riding on Duke’s Train, a LeapKids Book by Mick Carlon***

Teaticket, MA: Leapfrog Press, 2012. 173 pages.

Reviewed by Theodore (Ted) Hudson

The esteemed 19th century British author Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that the reading of much great creative literature requires “the willing suspension of disbelief.” This unconscious voluntary pretending is natural among children, and appreciating literary works in this way can take place by adults in much the same way. The pleasure of reading Mick Carlon’s *Riding on Duke’s Train* is enhanced with disbelief suspended, with no expectation of plausibility, but rather with expectation of coincidence, congeniality, surprise, and a touch of fancy. After all, this narrative was written mainly for pre-teen youngsters.

A nine-year old boy named Dan lives in the woods of Georgia with his grandmother, his parents having died when he was 10 months old. She dies, he buries her in the woods behind their cottage, and walks away, for apparently there are no other relatives or go-to adults around. He comes upon a parked silver train headed north, sneaks aboard, takes a nap during which the train leaves, and he is awakened by a man who turns out to be Rex Stewart. He takes the boy to Duke in the dining car who sees that he is fed and otherwise makes him welcome. This is the band’s train, and when it arrives in Washington, where they are to play a gig at the Howard Theatre, a lady named Ivie takes Dan out and buys him clothes. The next stop is New York, where Duke takes Dan to stay at his apartment on Sugar Hill’s Edgecombe Avenue, where Ruth and Mercer also live. So it looks as if Dan will be a member of the entourage. To earn his keep, he is to help with the loading and unloading of instruments as the band travels about, assist Jonesy, and keep Sonny’s drum kit shined.

As time passes Dan gets to better know his new family: Rex, father figure, encourages him to read great books; Ivie, older, doting sister-type, teaches him to play poker; Rabbit turns out to be not so impassive after all; Cootie, with Rex teaches him to play the trumpet; Blanton, who coughs a lot and jams a lot; and then there are Tricky Sam, Harry, Django, Juan, Lawrence, and Jonesy. Dan sizes up Duke: “. . . there’s something distant about him. He can really duck back into his head, and his eyes get that distant look and you know then not to bother him” and “. . . always keeping people at a distance, always living inside his head.” Duke teaches him to read and copy music, so later in life he becomes the band’s copyist.

Several year pass, and in 1939 they board a ship for a tour in Europe. First it’s France where they are greeted by a wild mob of fans. When they play Paris’s National Theatre de Chaillot, Dan wanders about, manages to get lost, and is taken back to the theater by a kindly old Jew, from whom he senses the rising threat of the Nazis and impending war clouds.

From France they go to Belgium, Antwerp, then to Denmark via Hamburg. There the train must stop and they are harassed by Gestapos who are contemptuous of jazz and, germane to these musicians, Negroes. It is here that Dan and several of the musicians are chased, but rescued and hidden by a member of the literally underground Hamburg Hot Club. Once back on the train that manages to escape further detention, they continue their itinerary, ending in London, where Johnny Hodges improvises a tune at the otherwise empty, 900-year old Westminster Abbey, the tune later being alternately titled “Night Wind” and “Finesse.” Eventually, they are back in the United States.

There is no foreshadowing, no actions, no characterization leading to a climax, for *Riding on Duke’s Train* is not a structured novel, but a fictional remembrance. But there is an ending that nicely caps this delightful yarn.

This slim volume is an excellent read for youngsters—including the youngster in you, Ellington enthusiast.

## Short Sheets . . .

### ♪ Paradise Has Moved ♪

Record collectors in the mid-Atlantic area will want to know that Joe's Record Paradise, source of rare or simply scarce or out-of-print recordings, has relocated from Plaza Mecado in Aspen Hill, MD to 8216 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring.

### ♪ Theatre Documentary Wins Award ♪

A 2010 documentary titled *Howard Theatre: A Century in Song* produced by WDCW-TV won a Salute to Excellence award from the National Association of Black Journalists in August 2011.

### ♪ Mosaic Set Back in Stock ♪

Did you miss the original release of *Duke Ellington: The Complete 1936-1940 Variety, Vocalion and Okeh Small Group Sessions*? Mosaic Records has announced that the limited edition CD set is now back in stock.

## The Words He Wrote Were

It is not unusual for vocalists performing Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" to sing

*The girls I knew had sad and sullen gray faces  
With distant gay traces . . .*

rather than Strayhorn's lyrics, that are

*The girls I knew had sad and sullen gray faces  
With distingué traces . . .*

The difference is the French term *distingué*, an adjective that means *distinguished* or *having an air of distinction*, maybe even *an air of sophistication*.

And it's not unusual to hear Strayhorn's *gray faces* in the first of the two lines sung as *gay faces*.

## Now Hear This

November marked the 100th anniversary of the invention of the phonograph by Thomas Edison. Using tinfoil cylinders, he was trying for a "talking telegraph." Cranking up the gadget for the first time recreated a "Good morning . . ." Recording of music was an afterthought.

Well, there followed technology for recording music via cylinder, 78 rpm, 8-track, LP, 45 rpm, CD, computer down-load, and assorted other short-lived methods along the way, such as the old wire recording machines for home use. Are you among those who consider LPs the best for reproducing music with presence and fidelity?

## Time Flies, and All That Jazz

This issue begins Number 1 of Volume XX, or year, of this publication. We began under the title *Newsletter* with a May-June issue in 1993. In 1997 we asked members for suggestions for a less generic name. Harold Gray, deceased since, came up with *Ellingtonia*, members agreed, and a special 8-page edition carried the new title.

## Gentle Reminder — Dues Are Due

Have you taken care of your 2012 dues yet?

If not, please remember that our memberships are by the calendar year, and we most assuredly value your membership. And your early remittance simplifies our bookkeeping.

You may notice that our dues have remained the same since—well, since we can't remember.

And as is the habit of some of our members, you may pay in advance for years to come. Doing so can be calming to your fear of inflation.

## Quotation of the Month

*It's too bad some ruthless Hollywood editor cut to ribbons the score Ellington and Strayhorn wrote for Anatomy of a Murder (1959). But sew the snippets together again - with your imagination or a tape recorder - and you have one of their most haunting extended works, a 35 minute sonic drama that features gorgeous playing by the band and memorable cameos by many of its leading soloists. . . . Anatomy of a Murder shows Ellington and Strayhorn probing the tensions and anomalies of everyday life, searching for clues, like Jimmy Stewart in the movie, to the insolvable mystery of human behavior.*

— Mark Tucker, as quoted in *Blue Light*,  
10:4 (October -December 2003)

## Looking Ahead (Wherever You Are)

### Mason du Duke Orchestra

Dec. 27 *Enregistrement Duke Orchestra*  
Conservatoire de Clamart, Paris

### Westminster Church

Dec. tba *Billy Strayhorn*

At the church, 401 Eye Street, SW, Washington  
(Watch for or call church for updated information.)

### Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra

26 Dec. *23rd Annual Duke Ellington Sacred Concert*  
Town Hall, Seattle, WA

### The Strathmore

The Strathmore, in North Bethesda, Maryland, is presenting a "Discover Duke Ellington" series in February:

- 16 Feb. *Mostly Ellington* by Robert Glasper, piano
- 17 Feb. *Brian Stokes Mitchell Sings Ellington's American Songbook*
- 18 Feb. *Big Band Ellington: Duke Goes Latin*  
Featuring the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra with Arturo O'Farrill
- 19 Feb. *Ellington: A Sacred Concert*  
Featuring the Morgan State Choir and the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra

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

**Elinor Eugene**

We salute and thank Elinor Eugene, who decided not to be a candidate for another term as a Board member, for her dedicated support and service.

Among other ways, in her unassuming manner she seldom missed a meeting, served on the Board, wrote for *Ellingtonia*, and served as a sort of on-call translator for documents that came to us written in French.

**Election Results**

At our meeting on Saturday, 3 December, Bob Reny was elected to the Board to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Elinor Eugene.

All of the in-place Board members and Officers were re-elected by acclamation.

**Duke's Registration for the WWI Draft**

In 1917-1918, during World War I, the United States required males of certain age groups to register for the military draft. Here is a copy of the draft card of Duke Ellington, all of 19 years of age at the time.

**REGISTRATION CARD**

SERIAL NUMBER: [blank] ORDER NUMBER: 23156

1. Name: Edward Kennedy Ellington

2. PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS: 1955 - 3rd St NW, Washington, D.C.

3. Age in Years: 19 Date of Birth: Apr 29, 1899

RACE: [ ] White, [ ] Native American, [ ] Oriental, [ ] Citizen, [ ] Indian, [ ] Hawaiian

U. S. CITIZEN: [ ] Naturalized, [ ] Alien

15. Present Occupation: Messenger, Employer's Name: Federal Govt.

16. Name of nearest relative: Edna C. Ellington, Address: 1955 - 3rd St NW, Wash DC

Courtesy Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, NMAH, Smithsonian Institution

Notice that Edward Kennedy Ellington's present occupation is listed as "Messenger" and his employer as "Federal Govt." Much later in his life he was to describe himself as "God's Messenger Boy."

**Duke in Copenhagen Was Wonderful**

Reported by Bro. Juniper

Our esteemed vice president, Ted Hudson, presented a delightful selection from two Danish television specials featuring Duke Ellington and His Orchestra that were recorded in concert in 1965 at the Falkoner Center in Copenhagen, Denmark. Ellington's band of the 1960s was a powerhouse, with Sam Woodyard and John Lamb propelling a slew of first-rate soloists.

Highlights included a beautiful "Ad Lib on Nippon" featuring Jimmy Hamilton on clarinet and John Lamb on bass. This tune was composed by Hamilton, though Ellington got the credit on the album. From Johnny Hodges we heard "Come Sunday," "Passion Flower," and "Things Ain't What They Used To Be."

Paul Gonsalves, who could be seen sleeping on stage during three numbers, roused himself for amazing performances on the up-tempo "Blow by Blow" and the beautiful ballad "Chelsea Bridge." Gonsalves really deserves more credit for his moving ballad work. Ellington himself is brilliant at the piano during these performances. Billy Strayhorn is featured on his own composition "Take the 'A' Train."

Last but not least, Ray Nance showed us that he is one of the most versatile musicians with his romantic violin on "Work Song" and his rousing vocal and dance on "He Huffed and He Puffed."

Our attendance was great, members brought lots of treats, and a splendid time was had by all.

**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**

Send your check payable to  
 The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.  
 PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA  
 Our dues remain a bargain:  
 Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5

**THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.**

**Executive Board**

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