



Ellingtonia

A Publication Of
The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.

Volume XXIII, Number 9

December 2015

William McFadden, Editor

Copyright © 2015 by The Duke Ellington Society, Inc., P.O. Box 29470, Washington, D.C. 20017, U.S.A.

Web Site: depanorama.net/desociety

E-mail: Ellingtonia@comcast.net



Courtesy Carlyle Productions

Billy Strayhorn's 100th Birthday 'A-TRAIN' TAKEN NOVEMBER 29

To help celebrate the exact 100th anniversary of William Thomas Strayhorn's birth, the New York City subway system operated a commemorative, historically preserved 'A' train, boarded by music makers, Strayhorn kin, and a host of bewildered riders.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority's *Music Under New York* program, in collaboration with Jazz at Lincoln Center and the New York Transit Museum produced this homage to Strayhorn, a reverse ride from Harlem to Lincoln Center, and planned it as a surprise to holiday customers with special performances by the Donald Malloy Quartet from the *MTA Music* roster, and the Evan Sherman Entourage from Jazz at Lincoln Center.



The Wall Street Journal

It kicked off at the 145 St. station, where the bands played a medley of Billy's tunes, then followed his directions: "Hurry, hurry, take the A train!" stepping aboard the special train with seven cars from the era when "Take the A Train" was written in 1939. Legend has it that the song was inspired by Ellington's directions for Billy to get to his new job in the Sugar Hill section of Harlem in northern Manhattan.

Customers who boarded the train were treated to performances by the two bands, which ultimately alighted at 59 St.-Columbus Circle and together performed on that station's mezzanine level. Both ensembles continued the performance as they headed up to Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola in Jazz at Lincoln Center, where planned one-night-only celebrations featuring *MTA Music* performers Sunnyside Social Club and Underground Horns, and the Evan Sherman Entourage would continue all evening.

The New York Transit Museum provided the "nostalgia A Train" comprising the seven antique cars which are stored on the platform level at the downtown Brooklyn museum.

December Blue Spotlight On Divas Who . . . Sing A Song Of Ellington-Strayhorn

Join us for a highly vocal close to our 2015 programs, as we focus on the differing approaches to the Ellington/Strayhorn songbook by established and less established popular song stylists. **Art Luby** will step up to the plate for the second time this year, and treat us to Ducal interpretations from mostly, if not exclusively, those female artists often qualifying as *la Diva*.

Art's presentations are always substantive, and go way beyond the surface as his May showcase of Ray Nance so vividly proved.

This panorama of *chanteuses* will unfold at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW** in Duke's birth place, the District of Columbia on **Saturday, 5 December 2015—7:00 PM.**

Pot luck defines our refreshments policy—everybody brings a little something good. But if you eschew catering, come anyway because we do love to see you—madly, that is. Management brings beverages and ice.

**Next Meeting: Annual Holiday Party
Saturday, 2 January 2016—7:00 PM**

A Centenary More Quietly Remembered

Ruth Dorothea Ellington Boatwright was born in Washington, DC on July 2, 1915 (d. March 10, 2004).



As Duke Ellington's younger (and only) sibling, she became the object of his lifelong devotion. "He was the only brother I had, and I was his only sister," she said in 1999. "He took care of me from the time I was 12, and he's still taking care of me."

Ruth Ellington managed most of her famous brother's business activities, including his first publishing company, Tempo Music, Inc. At some special occasions Ellington brought her as his official escort. The justification was honoring his sister; she once offered another explanation. "He took me to the White House because he didn't want his women to be upset. If he picked one, all the rest of them would have screamed."



23rd International Duke Ellington Study Group Conference—Reed College, Portland, OR—November 6-8 Distinguished Experts Make Portland Conference A Sudden Success

Initially it was to be a small academic gathering at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. Composer and musicologist **David Schiff**, a professor at Reed, was organizing a conference for the college's annual Greenberg Distinguished Scholar Program. It would be themed with the Strayhorn Centennial as "Ellington and Strayhorn: A Celebration." Soon it became known that the world's foremost Ellington authorities were eager and available to present their work, and Dr. Schiff's concept rapidly morphed into a fully-realized 23rd International Conference of the Duke Ellington Study Group.

A good deal of feedback on this nearly impromptu, substantive conclave is appearing in various sources, most notably the *Duke-LYM* email bulletin board. (To join, send an email to majordomo@concordia.ca. Write only the words **subscribe Duke-LYM** in the message field. You don't need to write anything in the subject matter field of your email.) **Ken Steiner** has generously shared his impressions among *Duke-LYM* members; those remarks comprise this summary.

Ken described "a wonderful event for all who attended. The nature of our conferences is changing, different from the previous ones. The presentations were weighted toward academics and those with Ph.Ds. and I anticipate that this is a trend for future conference. I felt like I had crashed the party. But the after-hours gatherings and a chance to hang out was, as always, the reason we have conferences—in line with my statement, *It is better to discuss Duke over a beer than over the internet.*" Ken sketched out the three days as follows:

Friday: Walter Van de Leur set a Strayhorn tone for the conference with the keynote address discussing his research. The concert Friday night was a highlight of the conference (and unfortunately the only musical performance). It opened with more stellar work from **Matt Cooper**, who played solo. Pianist **Darrell Grant** played duets with clarinetist **David Schifrin**, then Darrell remained on stage for a performance with singer **Rebecca Kilgore** of Strayhorn compositions. The concert was open to the public and the 750 or so in attendance were mesmerized.

Saturday: A series of presentations, some reprises of talks given at Amsterdam 2014 by Van de Leur, **Luca Bragalini** (who spoke about "Harlem"), **Carl Woideck** ("Duke and Africa"), Schiff ("Deep South Suite"), and Cooper (who illustrated his points at the piano). **Harvey Cohen** was ill and couldn't attend. The presence of **Willie Ruff** was a highlight. Ruff is a professor at Yale and talked only briefly about his own fascinating life and his work with Strayhorn. He showed a film that had been recently discovered of Duke's receiving an honorary doctorate at Yale in 1972; forty jazz greats were also honored that weekend. The film contained concert footage and interviews with some of the honorees. The comment that really stuck with me was a quote from Jo Jones, "Duke is a puppeteer. We are all his puppets." **Lisa Barg** is a professor at McGill University and discussed Strayhorn in the context of LGBT studies. She cautioned that Strayhorn is being "over-victimimized" in some current portrayals.

Sunday: The highlight was **Steven Lasker's** presentation of a few new finds and rarities, all beautifully restored, including a Harvey Brooks (a very early Duke influence) recording from 1924, the rare Blu-disc, "Oh, How I Love My Darling," a 1937 Cotton Club broadcast, one of Ellington's soundies with an unheard piano intro, and the full-length "Chelsea Bridge" from Casa Manana. I gave a brief presentation on "Duke and Radio," emphasizing both Strayhorn's vital role, and how I find the broadcasts to be more interesting than studio recordings, as the band played for *impact*, not *perfection*. **David Palmquist** presented his TDWAW website and discussed his finds re the 1963 Middle East tour, and **Geoff Smith** presented some of the works from Duke's stockpile with an emphasis on Strayhorn.

Andrew Homzy amplified Ken's (and *Ellingtonia's*) assessment for future dedicated Ducal gatherings of the faithful. "What I came to realize in Portland is the Academic Gentrification of the Duke Ellington Study Group. In the past, people such as Sjef Hoefsmit, Jack Towers, Jerry Valburn, Klaus Stratemann and Eddie Lambert participated with many others to research/discover and produce recordings and literature about Ellington's world without any institutional support. The conferences were "home-made" events booked into a local hotels and often featuring Duke's surviving musicians along with local talent. What I see in the future is clear - that institutional hosting is necessary for the survival of continued Ellington Conferences. Gentrification is not a bad thing - and we've seen the wonderful results of Dr. David Schiff's efforts to bring all these people together at Reed College offering free admission to all events and a complimentary breakfast buffet on Sunday. What I would like to see in the future is continued recognition of non-academic scholars who are currently dedicating their time, driven by their passion, and contributing immeasurably to Ellington Scholarship. Their presentations should be inter-twined/blended into the schedule with the academic papers."

Season's Greetings

From The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.

All of us on your Society's Executive Board extend our warmest greetings. We wish you much joy and good health as we begin our annual religious and cultural celebrations lasting through the new year. Without regard to how or what you observe during these festive days, may they be some of your memorable best.

Here, we celebrate the legacies of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn every day. Their music expresses all emotions and feelings, but the ones we think of most at this season are love and peace. And so, may you enjoy a most musical 2016, beginning with our ever-popular and fun Holiday Party on Saturday, January 2.

An Appeal

As 2015 comes to a close, you're reminded that we are funded solely by dues payments; there are no other sources of revenue. Our Society's very survival depends on membership recruitment and membership retention. The latter category is critical: If you are reading this message at the moment, please help now by paying dues for 2016, or beyond. Consider a contribution in addition to, or in lieu of dues. Make a commitment to get a music loving friend or two to a meeting; everyone you know is a prospective member.

Your help is of utmost importance toward sustaining the mission of The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.—to preserve and promote the separate and joint legacies of Edward Kennedy Ellington and William Thomas Strayhorn. Please help us maintain our annual calendar of nine lively and informative meetings in a welcoming atmosphere, made all the more special thanks to your generosity and love for the greatest music the world has ever heard. Thank you for 'sticking with it.' Thank you for being 'all heart.'

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

About Our Members . . .

2015 Election Results

At the meeting on November 7, the entire slate of officers and directors was unanimously re-elected for a one-year term.

Additionally, **Leora (Toni) Robinson** accepted a nomination to the Society's Board of Directors and was unanimously elected.

The Society extends its gratitude to **Tom Henderson** for his participation during his term on the Board.

Leave it to **Ted Hudson** to uncover an anomaly every now and then. In listening to the 2013 CD import, *Big Bands Live—Duke Ellington Orchestra—Liederhalle Stuttgart March 6, 1967* Ted immediately noticed that a beautiful rendition of Billy Strayhorn's "Blood Count" was introduced as a tune called, "Freakish Lights." In fact, it's listed that way in the album credits. Seems to be one of those Duke Ellington idiosyncrasies which, for us mortals, will likely remain mysterious.

On October 25, **Patricia Willard** attended a concert of the Chamber Music Series presented by the United States Marine Band ("The President's Own"). According to the program brochure, the 7-piece Chamber ensemble's recital included five Ellingtonian selections: "Sophisticated Lady, Satin Doll, In a Sentimental Mood,

I Got It Bad, and Caravan." Also played were "Honeysuckle Rose" (Fats Waller), "St. Louis Blues" (W.C. Handy), and the Vince Guaraldi arrangement of "Little Drummer Boy." Interestingly, the other chosen songs were by Stevie Wonder ("Overjoyed"), Eddie Harris ("Cold Duck Time"), and a medley of four tunes by Sting, who is evidently now considered an American songwriter. Must be a Kennedy Center Honors thing.

As the **Strayhorn Centennial 2015** year winds down it's nice to remember the person who made all of it happen in the District of Columbia every month, **Vernard Gray** and his **CA-FAM III, Incorporated**. On November 29, **Rusty Hassan** posted the following accolade on Facebook: *Vernard R. Gray began curating a series of performances, lectures and discussions to commemorate the centennial of Billy Strayhorn in February. It included various interpretations of his music in a variety of locations from the Kennedy Center to a number of locations "east of the river" bringing Strayhorn's music to the community. I even gave a lecture at Goucher College on the other side of Baltimore. Today, on Billy Strayhorn's birthday, the series culminated with a performance by Nasar Abadey's Washington Renaissance Orchestra Sextet at We Act Radio in SE DC. We owe*
(Continued on next page.)

“*Dramatis Felidae*” (Continued from previous page.)

Vernard Gray a debt of gratitude for bringing Billy Strayhorn's music to the community. And a big thanks to Rusty for the most deserving recognition.

Mark Harvey has written a chapter in a new book about Saint Peter's Church in New York City. The chapter “Jazz Ministry in Manhattan: The Shepherd, the Night Flock, and the First Church of Jazz” chronicles the work of the Reverend John Gensel, to whom Ellington dedicated “The Shepherd Who Watches Over the Night Flock” from the Second Concert of Sacred Music. The relationship between Duke and “the Shepherd” is discussed as well as many other interesting facets of the jazz ministry, covering hundreds of Jazz Vespers and funeral services, including those for Billy Strayhorn and for John Coltrane. The book is titled, *Religion and Art in Modern Manhattan: Saint Peter's Church and the Louise Nevelson Chapel*, Ashgate Publishing, and is due in early January.

Rev. Harvey is also celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Inaugural Ellington Sacred Concert with his Aardvark Jazz Orchestra on their annual Christmas Concert on December 12th. Selections from the First and Second Concerts of Sacred Music will be performed at Boston's Emmanuel Church where Duke presented his Second Sacred Concert in 1969.

Speaking of Saint Peter's Church, it will be the primary venue for **The Duke Ellington Center for the Arts**-produced [24th International Duke Ellington Study Group Conference in New York](#), May 19-23, 2016. The hyperlink above should take you to more information, sketchy though it may be. Apparently there is a system for RSVP, which should at least get you on their email list. No current details on program, hotels, or ticket prices which will most likely be applicable for each individual conference event.

If you write, play, or listen to jazz, this is the book for you! *Creative Jazz Composing and Arranging* by composer/arranger **David Berger** is a new eBook explaining the writing process and the construction of jazz pieces. It demystifies the construction of jazz on the deepest level and answers many of the questions that arrangers and composers ask themselves when they are writing. Players who read this book will better understand the arrangements that they play and will get more from their listening which will make them better at interpreting the music they perform. Listeners will get into the creators' heads and appreciate the jazz experience to a greater degree.

Please remember to keep our beloved **Ted and Marion Shell** on your mind and in your heart.

More Prevalent Than Most Listeners Realize The Strayhorn Touch—With All Due Credit by Art Luby, Secretary

On the 100th anniversary of Billy Strayhorn's birth it was more than proper that the November meeting of the Society was devoted to samples of his work. **Mr. Saturday Dance** entitled his presentation *The Strayhorn Touch*, well-chosen in recognition of the idiosyncratic shadings and nuances always present in both Strayhorn's compositions and orchestrations.

The chosen selections encompassed virtually all of Billy's thirty years with the Ellington Orchestra, and illustrated practically all aspects of Strays' musical gifts, from swinging (“Rock Skipping at the Blue Note”), to romantic (“A Flower is a Lovable Thing”), to reflective (“Day Dream”). A very effective longer work that I had never heard before devoted to Ella Fitzgerald (“A Portrait of Ella Fitzgerald”) was also played. There was only one rendition of “Lush Life” but this version, performed by Kay Davis accompanied only by Strayhorn at the Orchestra's 1948 Carnegie Hall Concert, was a distinctive choice. Ms Davis' superb phrasing and perfect diction provided a contrast to the song's story of wasted life and regret which, along with Strayhorn's rueful modulations, greatly enhanced its poignancy. So impressed was Ellington that after the applause for their performance subsided, he openly questioned which was better, “living a lush life or singing about it.”

Renew Your Dues Now for 2016 To Join or to Continue Membership

Please Send Your Payment to:

**The Duke Ellington Society, Inc.
PO Box 29470, Washington, DC 20017, USA**

Our dues remain a bargain:

Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Students FREE (limited time)
First-Time-Ever Member, Just \$20

*We meet on the first Saturday, October—June at
7:00 PM. Guests are always welcomed!*

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

Theodore A. Shell, Founding Member

President	William McFadden
Vice President	Barbara Anderson
Secretary	Arthur Luby
Treasurer	Patricia Braxton
Board of Directors	
Luvenia George	Robert Reny
William Hasson	Leora Robinson
Edward Morris	Walter Robinson
Theodore Shell	Lawrence Smith