BLUE LIGHT

THE JOURNAL OF THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY UK

VOLUME 31 NUMBER 1
Spring 2024

Nil significat nisi pulsatur

DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY UK COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN	Mike Coates
VICE CHAIRMAN	Antony Pepper (Tel: 01342 314053, Email: ap@antonypepper.com)
SECRETARY AND WEBSITE	Charlie Dyson (Email: charlie@charliedyson.net)
TREASURER	Bob Littlefair (Email: boblit40@gmail.com)
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Mike Coates (Tel: 0114 234 8927, Email: mbigwidge@aol.com)
MEETINGS	Antony Pepper (Tel: 01342 314053, Email: ap@antonypepper.com)
ARCHIVE OFFICER	Dr. Pedro Cravinho
ARTISTIC / ACADEMIC ADVISOR	Frank Griffith
ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS	George Duncan, Quentin Bryar, Grant Elliot

Blue Light Journal

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF	Gareth Evans (gjyevans@hotmail.com)
CO-EDITOR	Irina Evans

HONORARY MEMBERS OF DESUK	Art Baron John Lamb Vincent Prudente
HONORARY MEMBERS SADLY NO LONGER WITH US	Bill Berry (13 Oct. 2002) Harold Ashby (13 June 2003) Jimmy Woode (23 Apr. 2005) Humphrey Lyttelton (25 Apr. 2008) Louie Bellson (14 Feb. 2009) Joya Sherrill (28 June 2010) Alice Babs (11 Feb. 2014) Herb Jeffries (25 May 2014) Derek Else (16 July 2014) Clark Terry (21 Feb. 2015) Joe Temperley (11 May 2016) Buster Cooper (13 May 2016) Msgr. John Sanders (6 Jan 2019)

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS 2024

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 2024 were due from 1st January 2024. Membership fees again remain unchanged, and in fact (except for overseas members) have remained unchanged since 2016. Membership fees are £25 for UK members and £35 for overseas members. (Overseas members' fees can remain at £25 if you wish to receive Blue Light by electronic means (pdf))

Payment can be made by any of the following methods:

- PayPal, debit card or credit card at the Society's website: http://dukeellington.org.uk. PayPal commission charges are paid by DESUK so you may wish to make a small donation to cover the cost. The Society's PayPal email address is: desukpp@gmail.com.
- Standing Order or Bank Transfer to DESUK at Santander Bank: Sort Code 09-01-55. Account number 15478709. (include full name reference please). Current standing orders remain extant.
- Cheque payable to DESUK drawn on a Sterling bank account and sent to: The Treasurer, The Cider Mill, Hazel Barns, Dymock Road, Ledbury, HR8 2HT. Overseas members may send a Sterling International Money Order.

-Visit us online-

Be part of the conversations and gain access to the DESUK programmes, events interviews and Spotify playlists:

http://dukeellington.org.uk

Notices from UK music societies

Manchester Jazz Society

The mighty MJS continues to meet virtually every Wednesday.
Contact: Eddie Little (Tel: 0161 881 3995, Email: tmonk52@hotmail.com).

DESUK Uptown Lockdown

DESUK broadcasts programmes of Ellington related music and discussions. Society members are invited to post comments and requests through the YouTube, Discord and Facebook platforms. Please visit the DESUK website or Facebook page for schedules of upcoming broadcasts, recordings of past programmes and more details.

Issue One 2024

Contents

Front Cover: William Auerbach Levy. Duke Ellington, 1944. Museum of the City of New York

Having announced in the last edition of the passing of former *Blue Light* editor Peter Caswell, it is with great sadness that we have to tell readers that Grant Elliott, until recently DESUK treasurer, has died after a long illness. I had got to know Grant during my time on the committee over the better part of past decade and shall miss his sound judgement, generosity and humour very much. Roger Boyes, who was his friend and neighbour for many years, intended to send an obituary to be included in this edition but has himself been laid low with a nasty virus: a tribute to Grant will follow in the September *Blue Light* along with the next instalment of Roger's magnum opus on the Ellington orchestra in the Forties.

Musician, scholar and all round 'good egg,' Willie Ruff died since we last went to press. Although never part of Duke's orchestra, he does play an important role in the story of Ellington and Strayhorn which the editor's obituary describes.

After a gap of many years (decades?) I am delighted that *Blue Light* is able to publish some original writing by a DESUK member inspired by Duke Ellington's music. I am sure you will agree that Robin Thomas' poems are a breath of fresh air to these pages and that his words manage to capture the essence of the musical subjects. Many thanks to Robin and to his publishers for allowing his work to be reprinted here.

Following his much praised article on *Black and Tan* Danny Caine has contributed the transcript of an interview he carried out with Mercer Ellington in Chicago forty five years ago: fascinating reading it is too! Fred Glueckstein's piece on Duke's mother, Daisy, continues to add to his interesting collection on Ellington's family, friends and associates.

We are pleased to be able to print brief but very informative pieces by Ezio Chiarelli and Alyn Shipton on Ellingtonian minutiae, about *Joog Joog* and Ellington's bass players respectively. It is pieces such as these which make apparent the depth of knowledge possessed by DESUK members and make one wish for more contributions of a similar nature from subscribers…

Finally, there are two (shorter than usual) articles by the editor on the subjects of Duke's meeting with the English novelist Anthony Burgess in the early Seventies and the unusual session for Capitol in the mid Fifties which saw the first occasion on which Duke (or anyone) had used an electric piano in a recording studio.

—Gareth Evans, Editor

Society Notices

Committee Members

DESUK is keen to recruit new members to the committee. Whether you have a specific role in mind or would like to 'get involved' generally, do not hesitate to contact chairman Mike Coates
Tel: 0114 234 8927,
Email: mbigwidge@aol.com

Subscriptions

A rather large number of members have yet to renew their subscriptions. We regret to inform those individuals that this edition will be the last they receive if payment is not forthcoming. Please see the inside page of this edition for payment options or contact Bob Littlefair if you are having any problems making a payment.

Bob Littlefair
Email: boblit40@gmail.com

Tone Parallels

Ian Bradley's latest investigations (available on 'Substack') consider his final US concerts. His detective work unearthed some original and fascinating information.

DESUK Online Updates

The DESUK mailing list now includes nearly all members of the society. If you are not yet on our mailing list, please sign up at:
http://dukeellington.org.uk/mailing_list/
or email *desuk@dukeellington.org.uk*.

The DESUK website is continuously updated with important notices, links to interesting material and details and links to our other online activities. Please visit:
http://dukeellington.org.uk/

Uptown Lockdown
Special guests and schedules for 'Uptown Lockdown' will always be announced electronically through the usual DESUK online platforms. The latest edition on the subject of Duke's first recordings was broadcast on the 8th of May and is available to view on YouTube.

Access Uptown Lockdown by Scan

YouTube Archive

Discord Chat Group

Blue Light

Deadline for copy for next edition:
Monday, 31st of July 2024.
Email: gjyevans@hotmail.com
Post: 8 Lordship Road, London, UK N16 0QT.

DESUK AGM 2024

Our AGM is taking place on Saturday the 1st of June in central London.

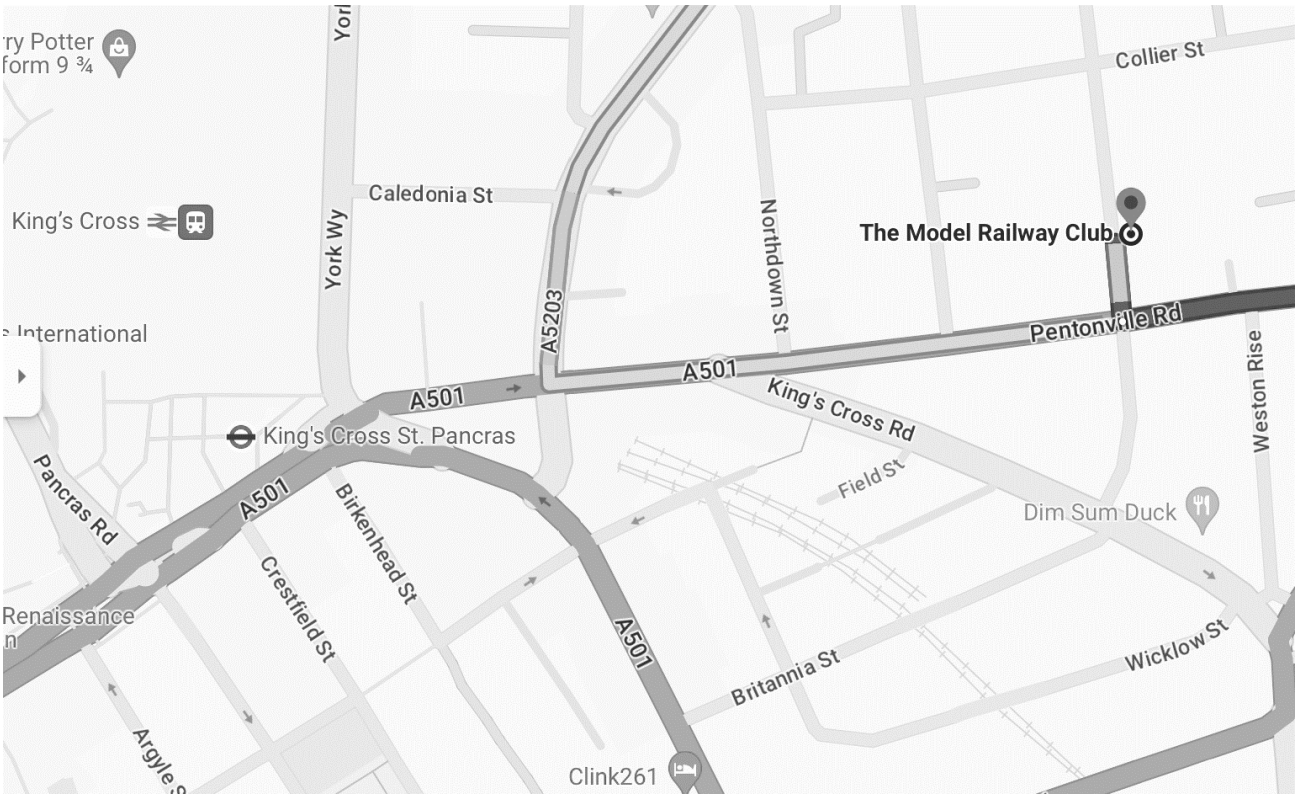
We're very excited for this opportunity for the membership to meet in person, and ideally get a few new faces on the Committee and helping to contribute to *Blue Light* and the society's other activities such as our YouTube show *Uptown Lockdown*.

We will get underway at 1pm at the Model Railway Club, Keen House, 4 Calshot St, London N1 9DA. This is a short walk from King's Cross station.

Please come along and get involved! If you'd like to join the Committee or otherwise make a contribution, and you're not able to attend, get in touch with us anyway. We'll sort something out! Our Committee meetings take place via Zoom these days so proximity to London (or indeed proximity to Great Britain) is not required!

If you're planning on attending, it helps to let us know but there's no need to book a place. You can send us an email (desuk@dukeellington.org.uk) or sign up at the Facebook event.

Model Railway Club, Keen House, 4 Calshot St, London N1 9DA.



A Blast From The Past!

Many thanks to Wendy Lawrence for sending this fascinating photograph of some of the founding members of DESUK (circa 1994).

The year, of course, is significant, marking as it does, thirty years since DESUK and *Blue Light* were founded. In September's edition we intend to include some articles devoted to 'the early years' and we would very much welcome any reminiscences from readers… Just think: thirty years is (almost) the same time span between Duke's first recordings with Alberta Prime in 1924 and his premier of *Night Creature* at Carnegie Hall. We have all come a long way!

Grosvenor House Hotel, London.

Back Row: unknown, Derek Else, Roger Boyes, Bill Bailey (one time membership Sec), Dennis Dimmer
Front row: Ray Bolden (Manager of Dobell's Blues and Folk shop and photographer), David Fleming, Vic Bellerby, Wendy Heuston (now Lawrence).

In Memoriam

Willie Ruff

1st September 1931- 24th December 2023

The death of Willie Ruff on 24th December 2023, aged 92, saw one of the last remaining stars disappear from the the outer reaches of the Ellingtonian firmament. Ruff will be remembered by fans of Ellington's music principally for his involvement in Strayhorn's late work *Suite for the Duo* as well as for being the founding Director of the Duke Ellington Fellowship Program at Yale, in 1972.

Ruff was born into poverty in Alabama in the segregated south of America. Despite this, his earliest musical partner and teacher was a white neighbour, some decade his senior, who would play drums along with Count Basie records. Ruff said he learned about "the mathematics of music" from his mentor and gained his first musical opportunities when he enlisted in the army at the age of 14 after the death of his mother. He taught himself the French horn from musical books he had been loaned and was soon proficient enough to participate in the army band.

Attracted to jazz, Ruff read an article in Downbeat in which Charlie Parker expressed his desire to learn musical theory from Paul Hindemith at Yale. Ruff wrote to the authorities at Yale in 1948 and was surprised receive an invitation to study there with Hindemith (although he was disappointed that Parker himself did not show up). At Yale, Ruff took up the bass and began his collaboration with pianist Dwike Mitchell, an army friend, who would become his lifelong musical collaborator.

In the Fifties he appeared on the recordings of a number of modern jazz luminaries including Dizzy Gillespie and Milt Jackson and is perhaps best known for his work on the Gil Evans- Miles Davis collaborations *Miles Ahead* and *Porgy and Bess.*

His involvement with Ellingtonia began when he met Strayhorn at a party in Harlem attended by Langston Hughes. Thereafter he would hang out with Strayhorn and Ellington at the Hickory House when he and Mitchell were the house band at the restaurant. Ruff appeared from time to time on the French Horn in (unrecorded) octets put together by Strayhorn… As Ruff reported it in his interview on the 'Cacophony' podcast (see the link to the recording below), *Suite for the Duo* was a collaboration between Strayhorn, Ellington and Ruff, although Billy eventually notated the whole piece himself. It received its debut shortly after Strayhorn's death in 1967 and Ruff and Mitchell recorded it together on a number of occasions thereafter during their long musical collaboration. Contrary to popular belief, Ruff denies that the piece was originally titled *North By Southwest Suite*. The name that it became known by is, of course, a tremendous testament to the musicians who performed it: the definite article indicating the centrality of Ruff and Mitchell in the genesis of the piece.

The work consists of three movements: *Up There, Boo Loose* and *Pavane Blue Numero Deux.* Walter Van De Leur writes that Ruff's playing of the French horn in the piece is "somber when played low, majestic in its middle register and aggressive in its extremes." Ruff himself noted that the work "thunders with highly autobiographical overtones; the moods of a vibrant musical career shutting down." Perhaps this piece, in which Ruff played such a significant role, along with *Blood Count* ought to be considered Strayhorn's musical epitaph.

Ruff's musical activities were not confined to jazz and classical music, and he was chosen by John Hammond to be the bass player for the recording sessions of *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, an album first released in 1967. During those sessions, he and Cohen laid down the bed tracks for most of the songs on the album.

Indeed, his intellectual and artistic interests were wide ranging. He could speak a number of languages, was a was a faculty member at the Yale School of Music from 1971 until his retirement in 2017 and his 1992 memoir *Call to Assembly: The Autobiography of a Musical Storyteller* was awarded the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award.

At Yale. Ruff was founding Director of the Duke Ellington Fellowship Program, a community-based organisation sponsoring artists mentoring

and performing with Yale students and young musicians from the New Haven Public School System. The program was founded in 1972 as a "Conservatory Without Walls" to "capture the essence and spirit of the tradition of African American music". By its 30th anniversary in 2002, the program had reached an estimated 180,000 students in New Haven schools.

Late in his life, Ruff recalled that his turn to education seemed almost predestined. When he was in second grade, W.C. Handy, the composer and musician known as "The Father of the Blues," who was from nearby Florence, Alabama, visited his class. Handy played trumpet for the students and talked to them about "how important it was to continue our education and hold up our heritage and our culture," Ruff told Yale in 2017. "He said that it's not from royalty or from the highborn that music comes, but it is often from those who are the farthest down in society."

https://www.podbean.com/ep/pb-pevas-1294091

In Brief

Bass-ically Speaking – A Reply

Alyn Shipton

It was good to see Brian's "Bass-ically Speaking" column in the current *Blue Light* (Winter 23/24), discussing the period when Jimmy Woode replaced Wendell Marshall as the band's long-term bassist, and during which (according to Jimmy) Junior Raglin briefly returned to the band.

I think the one significant detail Brian omitted from Jimmy Woode's account in my book (and bear in mind Jimmy was a mentor for me, and I had informal lessons from him), is that he recalls Raglin's bass being a 5-string model. As far as I can tell, neither of the other bassists mentioned in Brian's piece, Wendell Marshall and Oscar Pettiiford, ever used the 5-string instrument. Jimmy's clear memory of having to sub on this at Storyville before being able to bring his own bass

Willie Ruff with Charles Mingus and Duke at Woolsey Hall, Yale (1972)

into the band seems to clinch it for me. We spent many an hour discussing basses and set-ups, and Jimmy's memory was always excellent on this technical stuff.

I am attaching a photo from the Library of Congress Bill Gottlieb collection showing Pettiford (foreground) and Raglin (behind) in whichs Raglin's 5-string instrument is clearly visible. It gave him a low C, which other players (such as Ron Carter) achieve by having a fingerboard extension on the low E string. Except when forced to sub on Raglin's bass, Jimmy Woode always used the standard GDAE four-string tuning, as I know from having played his bass from time to time.

I hope this helps confirm my account - which, as with all the other dates in the Ellington chapter in *On Jazz*, was assiduously checked against all the local press reports I could find.

Joog Joog. Who's the second singer?

Ezio Chiarelli

Duke Ellington recorded *Joog Joog,* along with other 4 titles, on December 22, 1949 for Columbia, with a small group of members of his orchestra: Ray Nance (trumpet), Tyree Glenn (trombone, vibraphone), Johnny Hodges (alto sax), Jimmy Hamilton (tenor sax), Harry Carney (baritone sax), Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn (piano), Wendell Marshall (bass), Sonny Greer (drums), Al Hibbler and Lu Elliott (vocal). Specifically, in *Joog Joog* Ellington sits at the piano and the vocals are provided by Elliott and an unidentified vocal group.

Lu Elliott (August 3, 1924 – March 5, 1987) was a blues and jazz singer who was in the Ellington orchestra for few months, from September 1949 to February 1950.

"Joog Joog is a little thing by Ellington, which takes inspiration from a little train in motion and, between whistles of the chorus and onomatopoeic snorts and puffs of the orchestra, gives space to the singer, who moves with great ease, and to the dynamic Tyree Glenn and Jimmy Hamilton at the tenor sax." (*Duke Ellington, un genio un mito*. Antonio Berini, Giovanni M. Volonté, 1994, Firenze, Ponte alle Grazie; translation is mine).

Two takes of *Joog Joog* were recorded, DE4920d and DE4920e in the New DESOR; only the latter (CO 42551-1) has been issued: on 78rpm, Columbia 30195 and Columbia 38789 (coupled with *The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise*, sung by Al Hibbler, from the same date); on LP, Columbia KG 33341 and CBS 66607; and on CD, CBS 462987 and Classics 1191. The liner notes of those LPs and CDs show Lu Elliott and vocal group as vocalists in *Joog Joog*. The same does Benny H. Aasland on *The Wax Works of Duke Ellington.*

Listening to *Joog Joog*, the beginning of the third chorus is sung by another vocalist, emerging from the "unidentified vocal group". Such singer is erroneously specified as Kay Davis in the New DESOR. It is a male, high tenor voice, whom Ellingtonian scholars and discographers could not identify.

In the Rhythm and Blues world, that singer has been recognized as Joe Van Loan.

Joe Van Loan (December 6, 1927 – December 15, 1976), was a gospel and R&B singer that in 1949 was the leader of a group called The Bachelors. "Joe Van Loan possessed one of the most remarkable high tenor voices in the history of R&B," we read on the website of Marv Goldberg, a renowned researcher and writer in the R&B field. Joe Van Loan "turned up on *Joog Joog* by Duke Ellington. Most of the vocal is done by Lu Elliott, with an unidentified group in the

background. However, on the second bridge, the vocal is taken by Van Loan."
https://www.uncamarvy.com/Ravens/ravens07.html

Later in his career, in 1951, Van Loan joined the famous R&B vocal group The Ravens, as lead tenor.

In 2021 Jasmine Records included Ellington's *Joog Joog* in the anthology *The Great Group And Solo Vocals Of Joe Van Loan - Yesterday's Roses, 1949-1962*, JASCD 1105. *https://jasmine-records.co.uk/en/rb/3463-the-great-group-and-solo-vocals-of-joe-van-loan-yesterday-s-roses-1949-1962.html*

Isn't it time that Ellingtonian scholars credit to Joe Van Loan the voice of the second vocal soloist of *Joog Joog?*

Mercer Ellington Interviewed

Danny Caine

Printed below is a transcript of an interview with Mercer Ellington conducted by DESUK member Danny Caine in 1979. Danny explained the circumstances behind the meeting in an email which accompanied the text:

"The interview with Mercer took place on 22 July, 1979, at the Four Seasons nightclub on the North Side of Chicago. Mercer and I visited each other when the band played in the Chicago area, and a couple of times at his apartment in New York."

I want to ask you about your father's relationship with Irving Mills. The credit on the compositions that Mills took: Were they always given rightfully to Mills?

Well, it was the practice of publishers in those days. If they *were* somewhere, as Duke Ellington said, and you wanted to *get* somewhere, you had to make a deal with somebody to get your first tunes out. Today it hasn't changed too much. You get paid for yesterday's ball game. You write your song last year, and then they recognize you as a great composer this year, and that's when you get an advance on what you want to do.

I know your father never said anything publicly against Mills. Did you ever hear him say anything in private?

My feeling is that his relationship with Sidney [Mills, Irving's son] and to Irving was that it was a great place to get an education. Actually, he learned two things-- well, many things, I guess-- while he was growing up in music. And one of them was the business end he learned from Irving, and also many rules of being a showman, and so forth.

I know that many times in the Black press he was criticized for his relationship with Mills. Did that bother him at all?

Well, he was criticized for other things than that in the Black Press. In many cases, whatever was said was generally taken out of context. At one point, he made a statement that said, "We ain't ready," and they said that Duke Ellington thought that Negroes-- or Blacks as the new expression is-- just weren't intelligent enough to get freedom. What he meant was that they weren't financially strong enough to take their legal suits up to the Supreme Court. Never took but that part of the one question, made a whole big deal out of it, and it took them maybe a year

and a half to get over the propaganda. I'm not saying this to deride the Black press, or any other press. But, I mean, you're going to get hustlers, regardless of whether it's the white press or the Black press. Somebody that has no name, and he tricks on a giant to get himself into the limelight. And I think this is what happened in most of these instances. Through the years, some fifty years of being on the road, I don't think you can grab anybody who's really worth his salt in the industry to come up and really say something that's derogatory about Ellington or his thoughts.

What were his reasons, as far as you know, for leaving Mills and going with William Morris in 1939?

He grew up! I mean he decided... You have it today. You get a group like The Beatles, or whoever; they get to a point where they can sell millions of records. They buy their own contracts back, and they go on their own. And that's precisely just about what happened in those days. You see, it wasn't always a one hundred per cent deal. Pop owned fifty per cent of Mills Music, and Mills owned fifty per cent of Duke Ellington's band. At a time when both of them were apparently equal, they traded. That's pretty much that the relation grew. And at the time when he was passing away, they had a conversation with each other for about forty-five minutes. So if you think that there'd be a time when he'd have negative thoughts about Irving, it would have been at the end of his life, particularly since he knew it was.

I know that on the publication of his autobiography, it's said by one of your father's biographers, that Mills was calling up your father's friends, anxious about what your father would say about him.

Well, you have to bear in mind that Mills, Irving, was as much of a genius in his field as Ellington was in music. When that band traveled in those days, he'd get to a place; the college band would be there to greet the train. They'd march him around to the hotel. That alone gave him a new importance, of being in a spot where people would say, "I've got to go to the dance tonight, or whatever. Irving was responsible for his being in the Cotton Club, which was the break place of one of the new babies, radio. And, as a result, at a time when everybody else was practically unknown-- and there were great orchestras like Fletcher Henderson, and the rest of them-- he was being broadcast coast to coast and gaining tremendous recognition from it.

I get the impression that your father was very much concerned with his public image. Can you say anything about the role of Ned Williams and Joe Morgen in promoting him and putting this image forward?

My father had great respect for people who might be classified as "carney men." You know, a person who could take something and then ballyhoo it and make it so very important. And for this reason, this is one of the things that made him have such respect for Irving, as well, and also for anyone else who proclaimed to the public that this was a great man coming before it. With each of these people, he admired the fact that they were almost as much ham as he was!

Was Cress Courtney also important in that respect?

Absolutely. I'll tell you one of the things he really appreciated in Mills, Cress Courtney, and also William Morris. In those days, they had a tendency to categorize show-business. I mean, for instance, you've got people who make the great breakthroughs, you've got Black millionaires like James Brown and so forth. But in those days, you just didn't get that price, and Irving was one of the first to demand that he get the same consideration as the big white acts. The same thing with Cress Courtney. Cress Courtney came on the scene and doubled and tripled the money that he made in one-nighters. As time went on,, it put him on a level in show business he wouldn't normally have gotten to.

I want to take you back to the year 1943, which was the year of his first Carnegie Hall Concert. Presentation of *Black, Brown and Beige?*
Right. It was a benefit for the Russian War Relief. To your recollection, can you remember any of the names of those people who were on that

Committee? I've had trouble finding out exactly who was the Russian War Relief.

I'm glad you told me who the people were who sponsored it!

Okay, back a little further to Jump for Joy *in 1941. Did your father have any association with any kind of radicalism in Hollywood in those days?*

Well, there was plenty of it there, particularly Communism. As a result of *Jump for Joy*, they considered the show-not necessarily Duke Ellington, but the show-a pretty radical experience, because they had numbers in there like *I Need a Passport from Georgia*, and *Jump for Joy* itself derided the South for many things that happened there. Like they were talking about Uncle Tom's Cabin and how things have changed, and they'd made it a drive-in. There were many outspoken comments about the disadvantage of being in the South for Blacks. During the run of the show, and I was there, we had something like five or six bomb threats from people who threatened to do something or harm people in the show. When it closed, it closed to a standing-room. only house.

Yet you say in your book that your father was very much anti-Communist. Did he have any kind of mixed feelings about Paul Robeson, for example?

No. You know why he was anti-Communist? Because he was so religious, and anything that downed religion had to be wrong. And I have no way to feel that that was not a correct way of thinking. Aside from that, he liked the idea of one day becoming rich, he hoped. He liked the idea – that as a young man, he went in the back door of the White House to visit his father; eventually, he was invited in the front door. So he liked the idea of being someplace where this was possible, where he could have the opportunities to achieve it. I think particularly, after our tour in Russia – though he never made a comment about it – he felt that the day we arrived in Copenhagen, it was the greatest was a breath of fresh air that he'd had in a long time.

I know that on his tours, and at other times in his life, he was always put in the position of having to defend the United States' policy toward Black people. Did he ever feel the government was using him, in Dakar or other places on his tours and would you talk to him about it?

I figure – I feel the same way. When we went to Black countries, he was being used as a diplomat, to cement social relations. When we were sent to Iron Curtain countries, we were sent there to counteract the propaganda that the Black man in the United States was downtrodden. And it was an after-example of how a person could be Black and could still become successful, and also to show that there was more than one type of person, and that not everybody who's a Black who got up there on a soapbox and made speeches on adamancy and militancy; but there was somebody who could be genteel and still persuasive.

But that patriotism of his, you feel, was really heartfelt, was a hundred per cent?

Yes. But he was an objective person. I mean that he knew that some time or other, when he was on a Pullman in the South, someone was liable to call him "George" or something like that, and he'd get very angry about it. But by the same token, he also could be heard in conversation to admire the South for its frankness, because in the North there was an equal feeling which was always underlined, and you never knew if you were or weren't in the presence of it. So it was a thing that was with us then, and in a sense it's with us now.

Did he feel kind of caught by surprise by what was happening in the'60s in this country, with the freedom-rides and the sit-ins? Did he feel out of his element?

No, it isn't that. He became very careful, because I think the most trouble he ever got into racially came as a result of the discussion he had with his own people, the very incident I was telling you about: he made the statement that Blacks weren't ready. So he felt that if he made normal, general statements – there's no words. If you look at articles and interviews that he had, I'd say, easily some thirty years before he passed away, you'll find that it's very difficult to take things out of context and turn them into a negative capacity. I think this is what he had in

mind more than anything else, when he went through interviews, unless he felt he was being interviewed by a person who had great intelligence and great respect for him.

Was that another factor in his break with Mills, perhaps? I've noted in some of my reading that a friend of his, Edmund Anderson, was pressuring him to go onto the concert stage, and that Mills was holding him back, and was not too keen on his making a "social significance thrust," in your father's own words.

Well, Edmund Anderson, I think, has a tendency to pour luster on himself by stating that he was so close to Ellington in certain relationships, which he wasn't. I mean, he was associated with him, and Ellington had a friendly attitude toward him. As far as knowing about him inside and personally, he knew nothing. This goes for many people who have written books about Ellington. It went for a book that was written several years back, one of the first biographies that was made. It was Barry Ulanov who wrote the book. And Barry professed the knowledge of Ellington from the inside, and put things in the book that he expressly did not want to be there, and also some things that were not true. One of the guys who made a very derogatory comment about *my* book, and stated that he knew Duke Ellington better than I do: the only one somebody could have done that was to have slept with him, and he was not one of his women!

In 1965, of course, the Pulitzer Prize Committee rejected you father's nomination for an award in music. I realize, by his public statements, he kind of tossed it off. Did he feel that rejection very deeply? Was it a very important award to him?

No, I don't think so. Of course he would love to have been presented the Pulitzer Prize. But it didn't enrage him nearly as much as the early years when Howard University turned down an honorary degree to him.

I note they didn't give him a degree until 1971, well after all the white universities.

Right. And in those days, it had been successive at each year that he deserved it, and all those years they turned it down.

Among all those hundreds of awards that he got, which ones would you say he considered the most important?

The Legion of Honor from France. The Spingarn medal. And also the medal that he got from the White House.

You mention in your book that there was a kind of paranoia about the man. You recall, I think it was the term you used, communists or homosexuals, or whoever was trying to get in the way of his career. Was this something that grew more pronounced late in his life, or do you feel he felt from even his early career that there were conspiracies?

I think it became more pronounced in his life, as it probably is developing in me at this point! I know what it is, and I think we all go through it, whoever's in entertainment. Sometimes maybe it's because you want to rationalize to yourself why you're not making as much progress as you think you should. Or because there are certain breakthroughs that you don't achieve, because you're too knowledgeable. You don't give up what you'd give up as a novice, and as a result, you don't get that much push behind you by certain people who have better interest. We fought for years to own the name of Duke Ellington, Incorporated. To own it completely, and of course we do. The idea is, if I went out and made a deal with somebody for fifty per cent that I'd be getting then would be much more than I'm making now! But somehow there's a pride or a tradition that you want to hold to. It's like a man who starts a department store: he doesn't want his children after him to take the department store and sell it out and sell him down the river. It took him years to build it, and why give it away? I think it's this knowledge. It's like, the worst person to put in the army is the guy who's been there for twenty years and goes out and comes back because he knows too much about how to get around and catch up with who's doing wrong, and so forth. So as a result, many times you have a person who is, like they say, too smart for himself, because he doesn't take chances or he wants absolute guarantees before he moves a foot; and as a result, if you can't take a chance on yourself, a lot of people don't feel

like they should take a chance on you, either. But I realize that the great part of entertainment now is investment. I mean, a new star is created because three or four big people get together and they say, "Okay, let's put up $200,000 apiece to promote this name, because there's a great talent." If you're coming along, and you don't have that kind of promotion, you're working at a disadvantage. so, basically, this is not what I refer to when I say that it's a matter of conspiracy. But I'll always remember, in some religious material somewhere along the line, it says you have to watch out for the fallen enemies of your father who got back up, and these are the people I face from day to day.

In your capacity as band manager while your father was still alive, you seemed to really emphasize the discord within the orchestra. Do you feel that that was exaggerated, or was there really quite a falling out?

Just like I mentioned, Cootie Williams and Cat Anderson: we'd call them bookends, because they kept their backs toward each other during performances and never spoke a word to each other when they came off. They just hated each other's guts, and there were several people in the band who really did not like Ellington himself. They hated each other, but they had to admire the talent that existed in the person who sat next to them. The reason I don't go further on that subject about the dislikes and likes of who was involved, is because many of those people are alive. Cat and Cootie, I mean, I'm close to, so I can talk about them if I want to. It's like family. But some of the other guys, they're around, and you just don't do it.

But somewhere along the line in the history of the band, it just ceased to be a cooperative venture, where everybody was in it together?

It's a troupe of ballerinas. Each one is born to be her own star. And in this thing, they feel it's temporary in order to coexist. But each one has in mind becoming his own individual talent. And I think, as the years went by, instead of the camaraderie developing because they stayed with Ellington so long, they had passed by their own opportunities, and they blamed it on him, and detested him for keeping them there.

Yet when they left the band, they rarely found themselves admired as they were when they were in the band.

Yes. It was a platform he'd prepared for them.

One final question I want to ask you, regarding publishers from the '40s onward. Tempo Music in 1940, is that right?

Yes. Actually, Duke Ellington set the company and gave it to her [Ruth Ellington, his sister] to run, because the company would never have gotten to first base, if it didn't have the band as a vehicle to come up with the hits. And almost immediately, one year, Tempo broke through with three big hits in a row: *Perdido*, *Take the 'A' Train*, and *Flamingo*.

At the same time, he was being published by Robbins, right?

No, the Robbins contract had ceased by that point.

I see. So it was Tempo all through the '40s and 50s?

Yes, and once in a while, he'd make a separate deal with someone, like something special he might record, and do a song and share the rights with. Somebody like [Sid] Kuller. or maybe Johnny Mercer, or whatever, and once in a while you'd see that. But there had to be something very special about it.

But basically, ever since 1940, it's been Tempo, unless he went outside with a collaborator?

Yes. He felt he didn't get any promotion unless he did it himself, so why give to somebody else what you yourself have?

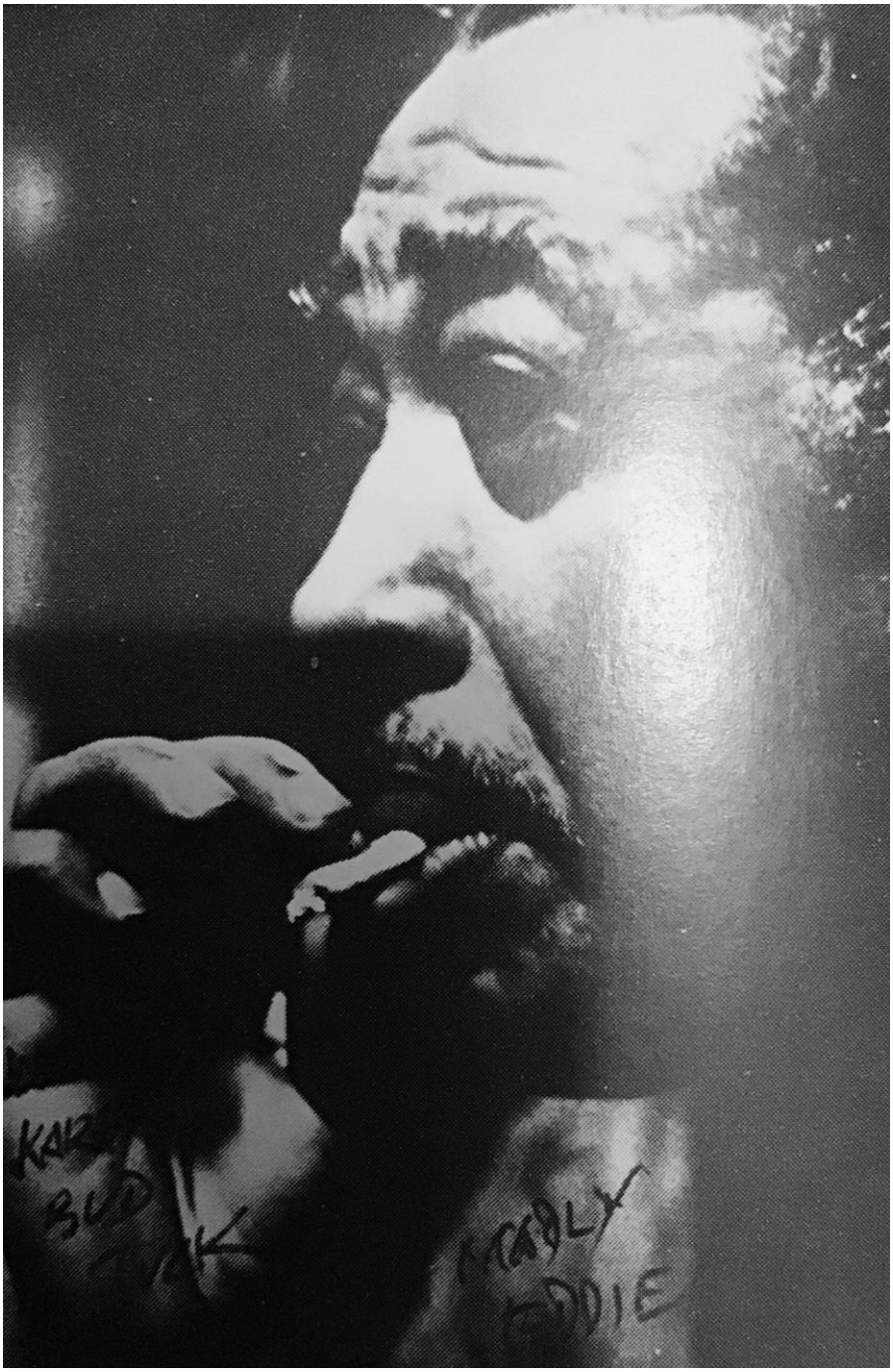
Little Wilson and Big Eddy: Where and When?

Gareth Evans

Whilst flicking through the first volume of Anthony Burgess' autobiography, *Big Wilson and Little God* recently, I was surprised to be reminded of the following words, "… in 1972, on a plane

from New York to Toronto, I found myself sitting next to Duke Ellington." The meeting, I thought, sounded like an intriguing one but I also recalled Burgess' capacity for misremembering and inventing details of his past life and so I approached the task of researching exactly when and where this meeting might have come about with a degree of caution.

My first line of enquiry was to consult a couple of biographies I had on the writer: the first by Roger Lewis; the second by Andrew Biswell. Ellington's name does not appear in the index of either book and neither biography makes reference to Burgess being in North America in 1972. The writer, though was characteristically busy during this period. Biswell makes mention of his various projects and activities at the time: "With *MF* [a novel] completed, Burgess resumed his script-writing duties, which left him with almost no time to think about another novel. Nat Shapiro, the Broadway producer of *Hair*, asked him to write the lyrics for a musical based on *Les Enfants du Paradis*. In August 1971 he completed the words and music for a theatrical version of *Ulysses.* There was talk of a theatrical film about Harry Houdini, for which Burgess agreed to write an outline. The composer Stephen Schwartz proposed to collaborate with him on a musical version of *The Transposed Heads*, the magical, Orientalist novel by Thomas Mann. An American theatre requested a stage play about Christopher Marlowe. Lord Birkett asked for a rewrite of 'Uncle Ludwig', a proposed film about Beethoven, in which Richard Burton or Rod Steiger is supposed to have played the composer. Another film producer paid Burgess for a script based on Alec Waugh's novel *A Spy in the House.*' Whatever Burgess might be accused of as a writer and human being, it's not a lack of ambition or output. Indeed, in this respect, he resembles



A photograph Ellington mailed from Japan to friends, signed 'Eddie.'

Anthony Burgess in a Seventies publicity shot.

as something which more fully integrated words and music such as *The Transposed Heads.* Indeed, Burgess' reference to Ellington in his book is introduced by way of his musings on the British composer and critic Constant Lambert (a figure, of course, who played a significant role in promoting Duke as a 'serious' composer through his book *Music Ho!*) Burgess claims that he was present at the first performance of Lambert's *Rio Grande* on 12th November 1929 in Manchester. Burgess observed that, "the rhythms of jazz were used wittily" and praises Lambert for being a "fearless reconciler of what the academies and Tin Pan Alley alike presumed to be eternally opposed." This, in turn, reflects Burgess' own musical background which was that of the autodidact from a working class Mancunian background who eventually studied music at university and went on to compose many pieces in the Classical tradition. Of his early studies, Burgess observed, "Once I had mastered the elements of Debussyan harmony, I found it easier to turn myself into an improvisatory player of popular music than a Beethoven recitalist. Wrong notes could be interpreted as 'blue' notes…" Again the similarities with Ellington (i.e. the creative tension

Ellington who at about the same time was embarking upon tours of the Soviet Union and South America, hosting a series of lectures, seminars and performances at the University of Wisconsin as well as composing and performing music from various suites based on his foreign travels, large scale religious works and a ballet, with an (unrealised) opera (*Queenie Pie*) percolating in the background. One thing which is noteworthy about the list of Burgess' projects is how many of them are connected with music: whether as a starting point, like 'Uncle Ludwig' or

between the formal and spontaneous) are marked.

This information was all well and good, but I was no nearer to establishing the precise date of the meeting between these musical and literary titans. It was at this point that I turned to the Holy Trinity of reference material for Ellington enthusiasts: Vail's *Duke's Diary,* Stratteman's *Film by Film* and David Palmquist's *The Duke Where and When*. To my disappointment none contained any reference to a meeting between Burgess and Ellington but there is record of Duke being in Toronto on Thursday 22nd and Friday 23rd June (the only occasion he visited the city that year) in all three. If we take Burgess' comments in his autobiography at face value, the occasion on which they would probably have shared the flight from New York to Toronto was Wednesday 21st June (a day for which none of the three sources above records any definite activity) although Thursday 22nd is also a possibility. Had Duke been on that flight with Burgess, I imagine the bags

Airquay Terminal, Toronto airport before it opened in 1964 and as it would have looked when Burgess and Ellington arrived there.

beneath his eyes would have been almost as large as those carried onto the plane by his entourage! The previous couple of days had been gruelling even by his standards: having played a one nighter with the orchestra in Pennsylvania on Sunday 18th June, he then flew to Honolulu with his nephew Stephen James for the American Federation of Musicians convention. A direct flight would have taken the best part of twelve hours. The following day Duke was the recipient of an honorary gold card life membership to the

Sheraton Hotel, Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1972.

Musicians Union at the AFM convention at the Sheraton- Waikiki Hotel. At the presentation made by Hal Davis, he stated, "Delegates, we will depart momentarily from our scheduled business to honour a most important guest. He is one of us and he is a symbol we all aspire to in the musical profession. He arrived in Honolulu last night and must return to New York this afternoon." Duke took great pleasure in receiving the awards which were bestowed on him in the last decade of his life (there is an entire chapter devoted to listing them in *Music Is My Mistress*) but to travel such a great distance when he could surely have sent someone else as his representative seems extraordinary- especially when one considers that he had another international flight to endure within 48 hours. But that had become the nature of his life by now. Perhaps he thought this was normality or had forgotten what it was like to live any other way. On the other hand, maybe he travelled so far because he was especially moved to be recognised by his fellow musicians…

And so, having returned from Hawaii, Duke came to be on a plane from New York to Toronto on, most probably, Wednesday 21st June, sitting next to a man who, within the last year, had suddenly become possibly the most famous living author writing in the English language. After years of graft, turning out novels, short stories, plays, translations, poems, articles and reviews (sometimes of his own novels under pseudonyms!) Anthony Burgess (born John Wilson, hence his autobiography's title *Little Wilson and Big God*) found himself in the curious position of being an international celebrity. What had catapulted him to such a position had been a

work he had written almost a decade previously: *A Clockwork Orange*. Stanley Kubrick's film of the dystopian novel had been premiered in New York in December 1971 and opened in London in January 1972. The film soon became notorious: in March 1972, during the trial of a 14-year-old boy accused of the manslaughter of a classmate, the prosecutor referred to *A Clockwork Orange*, suggesting that the film had a macabre relevance to the case. The film was also linked to the murder of an elderly vagrant by a 16-year-old boy in Bletchley, Buckinghamshire, who pleaded guilty after telling police that friends had told him of the film "and the beating up of an old boy like this one". Roger Gray, for the defence, told the court that "the link between this crime and sensational literature, particularly *A Clockwork Orange*, is established beyond reasonable doubt". The press also blamed the film for a rape in which the attackers sang *Singin' in the Rain* as "Singin' in the Rape". Christiane Kubrick, the director's wife, has said that, at that time, the family received threats and had protesters outside their home. The film was eventually withdrawn from British release in 1973 at the request of Kubrick. In the meantime, Burgess as the author of the novel, had been dragged into the furore but as a man who was never backwards in coming forwards to make public pronouncements about issues such as the nature of good and evil, free will, and censorship, he seemed only too pleased to expound on them on late night tv panel discussions or in broadsheet newspapers (in the form of an article, normally dictated to the newspaper office in London from a hotel lobby in Monte Carlo or some such, after the collection of his fee, obtained in a brown envelope, from the receptionist).

What was the precise nature of Burgess' visit to Toronto? He had, for a number of years (and to his growing disillusionment), done the rounds as a lecturer/ public speaker at the university campuses of North America. He was, as I have mentioned, now something of a tv personality who was apt to pop up on talk shows (normally with his trademark cigar). He was also a Shakespearian expert whose works were suffused with references to The Bard: is it possible that Burgess was travelling to the Stratford (Ontario) Shakespeare Festival, via Toronto, in his capacity as Representative British Boffin? Perhaps he was in Canada to indulge his interest in all three pursuits...

For his part, Ellington, was going north of the border to keep on keeping on. On Thursday 22nd June he recorded eight pieces (mostly popular numbers) for the stockpile at the Sound Center in Toronto. The following day he played a concert with the orchestra at the city's O'Keefe Centre before returning to the States to play in Seekonk, Massachusetts. Business as usual.

In *Little Wilson and Big God,* Burgess expands upon the meeting with Duke and describes how Ellington "spoke almost with tears of the stature of [Constant] Lambert." Whilst Duke would, no doubt, have still felt indebted to Lambert and other 'highbrow' composers who recognised his talent early in his career, this sounds rather uncharacteristic of him. Perhaps the tears in his eyes were from fatigue or Burgess' cigar smoke or from having to listen to him banging on about diphthongs, the Cyrillic alphabet and The Great Vowel Shift. Burgess tells us in his autobiography that he was present at the premiere of Lambert's *Rio Grande,* as a child in Manchester in the late Twenties, and he selected the piece as one of his Desert Island Discs. The writer also remembers Ellington explaining that he "had learned much from both Delius and Debussy." This seems entirely plausible: on the right occasion and to the right people (i.e. those he wanted to impress, or rather those who he thought wanted to be impressed), Duke was perfectly capable of waxing lyrical about his debt to the 'Classical Cats' although he had become, by this stage of his life, more inclined to deliver his usual homily about the meaninglessness of musical categories to those who sought to press him too hard on his Classical musical influences and credentials. Indeed, the final subject of their conversation recalled by Burgess is Duke's "scorn for the old musical divisions." I can almost hear Duke declaiming, "Anthony, you see, we only recognise two categories of music: good music and the other sort."

As far as I can tell, there is no record of Ellington ever having referred to his meeting with

Burgess. It's possible he wouldn't have recognised him at first… In that event, it's absolutely certain, in my mind, that a character as forceful as Burgess would have made Duke very well aware, at the earliest opportunity, of just who he was sharing a first class plane cabin with! Perhaps they simply didn't get along (although Burgess' account suggests otherwise, the writer could be insensitive to the moods of others.) For his part, Duke, if he disliked an individual, had a habit of simply 'ghosting' them (Jelly Roll Morton being a good example). Both men were charismatic, verbose and liked to hold court so their personalities might have grated...

But I hope that they did 'hit it off' in the two hours they would have been together. Assuming that they did, what else might they have spoken about on the flight, apart from what Burgess tells us about? Had Burgess seen Ellington in concert? He'd probably have had the chance, at some point, on his tours in the early thirties and late forties and thereafter. He doesn't mention them in his books. Had Duke read any Burgess? Unlikely, I think. In contrast to Billy Strayhorn, there isn't

Ellington arrives at an airport (Heathrow London, England) in 1969- one of the hundreds he passed through in the sixties and seventies.

much evidence that Duke was a bookish man, apart from studying works on black history and The Bible (which he claimed to have read from beginning to end on three occasions). Which takes us onto the subject of religion. Both men were followers of the Christian faith- at least Burgess had been as a boy. Burgess would regularly remind anyone who cared to listen of his- lapsed-Catholicism (a theme he managed to shoehorn into many of his novels). This and his northerness were often identified by Burgess as the reason he had become a 'cultural outcast' in his native England (despite the many column inches he was invited to fill in newspapers and magazines and his frequent appearances on the television and radio). Ellington was brought up in a Methodist (on his father's side) and Baptist (on his mother's), black middle class household and had been reflecting his ecumenical Christianity for some years in the Sacred Concerts. As well as having a spiritual dimension both men possessed a carnal side to their personalities. Did Burgess discuss his first wife's drunken infidelities (he did so regularly with mere acquaintances) as well as his own? Did Duke respond by detailing his sexual conquests (something which, from all accounts, would have been quite out of character)?.. Did the two men get along so well that as the plane touched down in Toronto a collaboration was suggested? Perhaps Ellington would have been invited to contribute to one of the many projects Burgess was then working on- or vice-versa? An Anthony Burgess libretto for the Third Sacred concert, at least, would certainly have been a tantalising prospect.

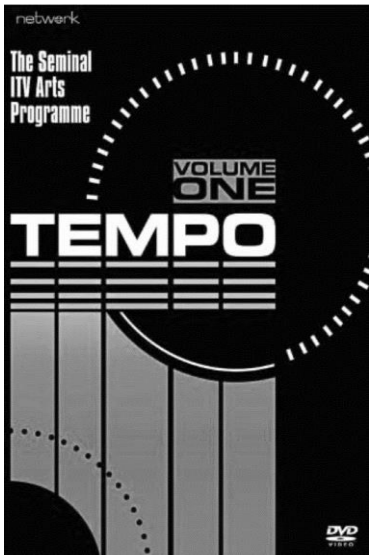
For anyone who is curious enough to have a listen, here is a link to some of the music composed by Anthony Burgess:

https://open.spotify.com/album/60Ef0EViHC81tDwW8d7XXz?si=KrudR8asShGSULCLCc-b2g

---

In Review

Meet The Duke: Part of the Tempo Volume One DVD



There are a number of interesting feature length documentaries on Duke Ellington, available freely on YouTube (links below) which will probably be familiar to most *Blue Light* readers. These include: Ralph J Gleason's *Love You Madly* (1965), *On The Road with Duke,* filmed in 1966 and released in the United States on *The Bell Telephone Hour* in 1967; the two part *A Duke Named Ellington* from 1988, produced and directed by America's first black tv anchor, Terry Carter; and *Reminiscing In Tempo* from 1991, written by Geoffrey C Ward and Robert S Levi. All of these offer an interesting overview of Duke's career, include interviews with The Maestro and have footage of the orchestra in concert and of Duke 'behind the scenes.'

Meet The Duke is a 'Tempo' documentary (which had been dormant in the vaults for decades until it was released in 2013) made by Granada for ITV in 1966 which aimed to give viewers a 'fly on the wall' glimpse of Duke the musician and man as well as providing, through narration and interview, a story of his life and career.

'Tempo' was an Arts documentary series which ran between 1961 and 1968 through a decade which saw a creative explosion within all aspects of the performing arts. Its concept and style of presentation, influenced by Cinema verite and the French New Wave, allowed an almost open-ended

remit, enabling it to cover subjects as diverse as cinema, dance, photography, writing, and jazz music. At a time when television, and ITV in particular, was being criticised for dumbing down, 'Tempo' – as much as any other series – showed that the new channel could indeed be highbrow whilst still remaining populist – a philosophy and outlook that was to continue into the 1970s and beyond with its successors *Aquarius* and *The South Bank Show*.

The show featuring Ellington was part of the 'Entertainers' series which also included a profile of the young Tom Jones. The thirty minute programme was produced by Mike Hodges who had recently made the transition from technician and would within a few years be directing *Get Carter*, arguably Britain's greatest gangster film. Hodges, who had spent two years of his national service on the bottom deck of a mine sweeper was representative of the the new class of people who were becoming involved in the Arts. The show's director, Helen Standage, was also a sign that things were changing in what had hitherto been an industry which employed men almost exclusively. The third name on the credits at the start of the show, Alan Dell, perhaps represents an older era- he would eventually become best known for *The Dance Band Days* and *Big Band Era* on Radio 2 which catered mainly for fans of easy listening rather than jazz enthusiasts.

The show was first broadcast on 6th March 1966. Earlier that day, ITV had shown *Comedy Bandbox* which 'starred David Nixon' (a performer unknown to me) along with 'some of the biggest names' in the business. This juxtaposition between a show which looked back to the previous century and one which looked to the decades ahead demonstrates the state of flux that British television and society was in at the time.

The Duke Ellington orchestra (perhaps the last great Ellington band) was, in February 1966, touring the UK with Ella Fitzgerald. The band played in London, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol and Southend. On Sunday 20th February Duke found the time to visit the Granada TV studios in London to be interviewed by Derek Jewell for the programme before playing two sets at the Hammersmith Odeon in the evening. Jewell, who Duke refers to familiarly as 'Derek' is the author of a highly enjoyable but less than reliable oral memoir on Duke published in the late Seventies. He was a noted broadcaster whose interest spanned the gamut of Anton Webern and Rick Wakeman. He always seemed to nave been a pretty avuncular individual and, I think here, most of the time he just about manages to get the right balance between asking questions which would engage the jazz novice and interesting the jazz enthusiast.

The opening shot (the piece is in black and white throughout) which looks like it might be an outtake from a Goddard movie, sees Duke in the back of a chauffeur driven car somewhere presumably in central London. It is fun to spot the bowler hatted men and 'Littlewoods' department store through the car window in the background.

We then hear a bit of narration about Duke's early life: rather than the usual story about his piano teacher being Mrs Clinkscales, the name we hear is 'Thomas' (it's not made clear whether this is the first or second name). Derek Jewell runs through some questions which will be familiar to anyone who has seen a few interviews with Ellington but it's worth being patient because Duke's response to the request to know where his nickname came from is supremely droll. Fats Waller, Willie 'The Lion' and James P Johnson all get name checked as they usually did when Duke discussed his early years as a musician before Jewell's 'How many tunes have you written?' causes Duke understandable bemusement.

The subject then moves onto Billy Strayhorn who, by this stage, was battling the cancer which would kill him the following year. Duke declares that he is, 'the most important member of the band' and that 'he has been a tremendous influence on me.' By now it was probably apparent to Ellington as well as Strayhorn that his musical partner was not going to live for much longer but Ellington, of course, does not betray any sense of that. Duke goes on to describe Strayhorn as 'a great editor… extremely honest.' He had made similar comments before. For all his taciturnity, it seems that Strayhorn had an inner strength (an integrity?) which Duke admired and earnt his respect as musician and man.

There follows, after some Ducal noodling at his Steinway, nice shots of the band members: most of them middle aged or elderly. For those of us not lucky enough to have seen the band live, it's always good to see the band members backstage in a relaxed setting: to see what they are wearing and eating and who they are talking to… Another Ellingtonian witticism is used over the montage of musicians tuning up: 'What we do for a living is what most people do for a vacation: travel'

It was perhaps inevitable and right that the interview would cover the racial situation in the States at the time. As usual, Duke chooses to deflect rather than engage with politics and refers to his 'social significance' projects like *Jump For Joy* which he ascribes to both 1948 and 1958. Interestingly, he once again mentions his 'completed' opera, *Boola* Duke is on record as having done this on quite a few occasions. Perhaps he still thought he would have time to finish it. Certainly, he was still full of ambition to complete this piece which from all of the current evidence doesn't seem to have been much started and one wonders whether he really believed it himself. Gunther Schuller remembered an all night session he spent with Duke during which they discussed this very project but the composer and conductor and friend of Ellington concluded reluctantly, at the end of their talk, that the opera would never see the light of day. And so it proved.

The interview concludes with some questions about his relationship with Mercer and Duke is cordial but evasive. He seems to take genuine pride in Mercer's conservatory education and in his brief stint as a bandleader but swerves when invited to comment on whether father has influenced son musically.

The final shot returns the viewer to the backseat of the car with Duke buttoned up in an immaculate over coat against the British winter. As the car fills with cigarette smoke, the narrator's doleful voice intones: 'It is depressing to think that however much he may have influenced jazz and contemporary music generally, the Ellington Tradition will one day cease to exist.' A statement which could provoke plenty of debate…

The DVD to which this programme belongs also contains profiles on such luminaries as Orson Welles and Yehudi Menuhin as well as now obscure figures like Zero Mosel and Lynne Seymour. Each show is fascinating both as a presentation of the entertainers concerned and as a reflection of British media and culture at the time. The DVD's (there are two of them) have a combined running time of 5 hours and are currently available for £5.99 on Amazon… Oh, I almost forgot: there's also a great programme devoted to Stan Tracey!

Links to documentaries on YouTube:

https://youtu.be/hBa8bXIg_ro?si=WYeoU7xk0Sgcxi5p
Love You Madly

https://youtu.be/swvEsprdrh0?si=e3UJZ5RZb3FsRMsm
On The Road With Duke Ellington

https://youtu.be/X6zIT42Z-WE?si=d9f5FCeAK2QvZj3A
A Duke Named Ellington'

https://youtu.be/XIlRgnp-Cs0?si=ky81VZc2hoTLNT7v
Reminiscing In Tempo

Five Poems

Robin Thomas
Billy Strayhorn's Journey was previously published in *Robin Thomas - A Distant Hum,* published by Cinnamon Press (2021)
All Too Soon was published as *Warm Valley* in *Robin Thomas - The Weather on the Moon,* published by Two Rivers Press (2022)

All Too Soon

i.m. Ben Webster and Johnny Hodges

Smooth, soft, melodic as a nightingale, by increments
more forceful, taking the rhythm by its scruff, now the roughest you ever heard, snorting and spluttering.

His smile the widest, his voice the gentlest, as he cleans and
wipes, looks fondly at and packs his horn away and disappears
into the Harlem night. He'll take his horn to his room. He'll go and eat.

He bursts in
cane thrashing air -
beer, whiskey,
tumblers, glasses, bottles
explode off the bar.

Hodges finds him, retrieves his coat and hat, his cane, leads him out
like a beast of burden. Finds him another bar where he can sob.

Johnny Hodges and Ben Webster playing the saxophone.

Black Brown and Beige

Black, Brown and Beige, by far Duke Ellington's longest work to date, was performed as a benefit concert for the Russian War Relief organization at Carnegie Hall in New York in January 1943. Most critical response was negative, and the work was never again performed whole.

I Work Song

Sandwiched between Mimi and Toscanini
under a distant classical ceiling,

facing New York's finest, concert-garbed:

the Ellington band:
Hodges fingers
Anderson whispers
Carney slumps
Sears sits upright, peers up.
Entrance of Ellington, his public smile.
tom-tom-tom-tom and
sixteen different sounds, one sound

swell to fill this time and space.

II Come Sunday

March of sad waves
Rolling hills of liquid despair

Ship riding swell, swims, turns to anchor

Moans in swell as boat is loosed

She had taken in, on the coast of Africa, 336 males and 226 females, making in all 562, and had been out seventeen days, during which she had thrown overboard 55

looses boat, run of ropes,
plash, bob, loose of ropes

The men therefore, instead of lying on their backs, were placed, as is usual in full ships, on their sides, or on each other. In which last situation they are not unfrequently found dead in the morning.

loose of ropes, turn from ship, slip from ship
boat rides wave, rides along waves
is up, pause,
slides down

They were all branded like sheep with the owner's marks of different forms

Slides down wave, rides waves and,
dark above the shingle, the shore, the jungle,

jungle dark over sand, over shingle, over breakers
breaking white on yellow sand

The only exercise of the men-slaves is their being made to jump in their chains; and this by the friends of the trade, is called dancing.

Yellow sand, shingle sighs, jungle dark,
dark and green over yellow sand
scrunch of keel on shingle.

III The Blues

The blues ain't nothin' but a cold grey day
And all night long it stays that way

The concert,if that's what you call it
Audience came to hear this!?

Ain't nothin' like nothin' I know
Ain't bin nowhere
where it's welcome back again

The concert, if that's what you call it
Fuse jazz with Art Music?!

Ain't nothing but a dark cloud marking time
Aint' nothing but a black crepe veil,

The concert, if that's what you call it!

ready to wear

IV Three Dances

Duke Kills Carnegie Cats!
Famed Soloists Slick, Click;
Carnegie Kicked.

Nanton leans
Stewart reaches
Webster unhooks
Nance slumps
Thank you, thank you,
Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.
You're very sweet, very gracious, very beautiful,
very generous and I do want you to know
That we do love you madly.

Billy Strayhorn's Journey

Take the A Train

Hull up cuts the surface water beating the prow slaps rhythmically as dark blue hull sears through waves slapping in rhythm screw beats rhythm drives the boat through green through translucent blue through flecks of sun orange flickers of deep brown the spray translucently dancing against solid glistening dark blue shears through surfaces, black shape below.

Upper Manhattan Medical Group

Currents twist and loop past fantastic boulders leaning in sand of curious intensity, mixed and separate, stark and faint while sea plants of hallucinatory silhouette slip and tangle, seaweed, dark and secret, streams.

Blood Count

A thirty-two bar poem

He wrote it in that hospital bed
as dissolution stalked -
simple and beautiful - defying
what gripped his throat
without cease. Simple,
and oh, so beautiful;

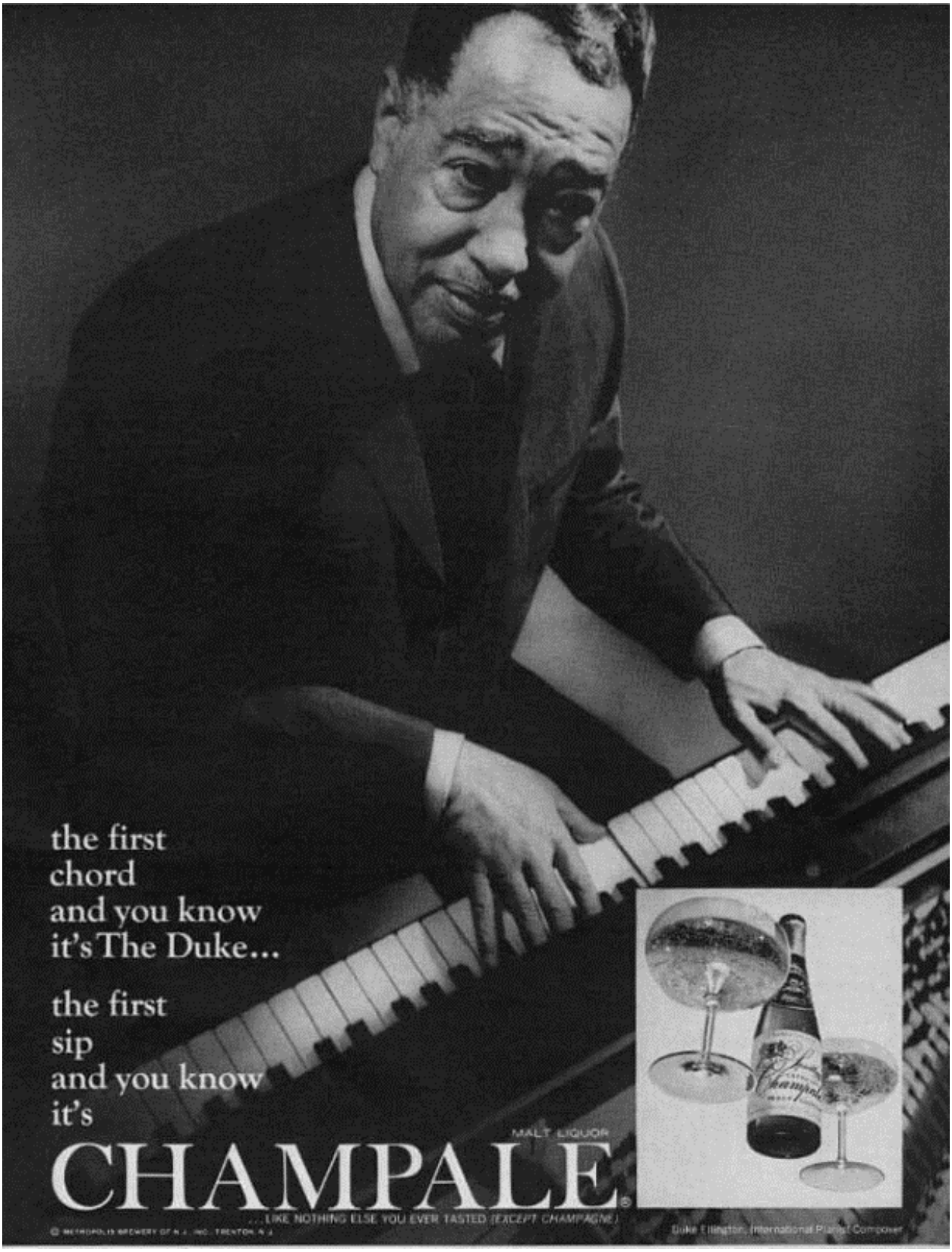
now Hodges plays it,
as Strayhorn wrote it, straight,
letting the beauty of it
fall from his saxophone,
the beauty of it, his, their
love, their time, their music,

Hodges, private, not
speaking what's
private until
he cannot but
shout
tear
his hair
sound cry
grief,

just as Strayhorn wrote it, straight,
just letting it issue from his instrument;
his mouth, his fingers forming
those beautiful sounds,
that denial, those memories,
now remembrance.

Rock skipping at the Blue Note

Chocolate snap,
snap, fish rise, bite,
flap, holy
choir
time
stop.
Satan! Leave me, leave! Let me,
aah, no! Fish
rise, bite, flap, chocolate
last piece, snap.


the first
chord
and you know
it's The Duke...
the first
sip
and you know
it's
MALT LIQUOR
CHAMPALE®
...LIKE NOTHING ELSE YOU EVER TASTED (EXCEPT CHAMPAGNE)
Champale
Duke Ellington, International Pianist Composer

Editor's selections

The Duke Ellington Song Book

Big Band Sunday Lunchtimes at Dean Street

Sunday, 07 July 2024
1PM (Doors open 12PM)
PizzaExpress Jazz Club (Soho)
£35

https://www.pizzaexpresslive.com/whats-on/the-duke-ellington-song-book

The Echoes of Ellington orchestra, was formed to celebrate the Duke's music, and to bring it, by live performance, to a modern audience. Jazz enthusiasts the length and breadth of the U.K. and later on in Europe and the United States, have been amazed by the group's ability to get inside the scores and really bring out the Ellington flavour. Today, the orchestra is in its finest incarnation yet, with highly specialised virtuoso players on all the instruments who understand intimately the nuances put on the page by the Duke. This concert will focus on the great hits- expect to hear *Take The A Train, Satin Doll, Mood Indigo, Caravan, Don't Get Around Much Anymore, Sophisticated Lady*, and all your other Ellington favourites!

This concert is conducted and presented by clarinettist Pete Long, who over the years has built a reputation as the pre-eminent big band front man in the United Kingdom today. Vocalist Sara Oschlag joins the Echos of Ellington Orchestra. Her stage presence, expressive voice and effortless sense of swing have made her a firm favourite with musicians and audiences alike. Her Ella Fitzgerald interpretations of the Duke Ellington Song book have amazed and entertained audiences across the UK. Here she is in intimate vocal mood with her trio.

This will be an inspiring and enjoyable way to spend a Sunday Lunchtime in the company of great musicians making wonderful music.

Strictly Smokin' Big Band: Ella & Ellington feat Alice Grace

Sun 02 Jun 2024 2PM
City Varieties Music Hall, Swan St, Leeds LS1 6LW
£23

https://leedsheritagetheatres.com/whats-on/ella-and-ellington-2024/

Sat 08 Jun 2024 8PM
ARC, Stockton Arts Centre
Dovecot Street, Stockton on Tees, TS18 1LL
£20

https://arconline.co.uk/whats-on/strictlysmokinbigband/

Sat 22 Jun 2024 7:30PM
Haddington Corn Exchange, EH41 3DS
£20.50 incl. booking fee

https://thebrunton.online.red61.co.uk/event/2814:254/2814:372/

Get ready to swing the night away with the Strictly Smokin' Big Band as they bring to life the timeless music of Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington. The show's projected backdrop explores the intricacies of these greats, their music and various collaborators. Plus, with vocalist Alice Grace leading the charge, you'll be transported back to a golden age of jazz.

CEFC - Duke Ellington, Come & Sing!

Saturday 8th June 2024
10:00AM - 1:30PM, Free
Union Church & Community Centre, London, N8 9PX

https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on/weston-park/union-church-community-centre/cefc-duke-ellington-come-sing/e-akoopr

Come and join singers from Crouch End Festival Chorus, directed by David Temple, for a community workshop to sing Sacred Concert by Duke Ellington. You don't have to read music, but scores will be provided.

CEFC is a local choir with a passion for singing. We want to share this fun with you.

CEFC - Ellington & Glass

Saturday 20th July 2024
7:30PM
King's College Chapel, King's Parade, Cambridge, CB2 1ST

https://cambridgesummermusic.com/csmfestival2024/

This concert is presented as part of the Cambridge Summer Music Festival.

David Temple conductor

Roland Perrin & The Blue Planet Orchestra

Zoë Brookshaw soprano

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel

Hörst du nicht, Abendlich, Im Wald - from Gartenlieder

James McCarthy

A cappella choruses from 17 Days

Philip Glass - Three Songs

Duke Ellington - Sacred Concert

Celebrating their 40th anniversary, the acclaimed Crouch End Festival Chorus bring a very special programme to the splendour of King's College Chapel.

Under the baton of their co-founder and Music Director David Temple OBE, they perform Duke Ellington's 'Sacred Concert', blending traditional religious musical forms with the language of jazz. The piece has a long association with Cambridge after Ellington and his band performed it at a concert in Great St Mary's Church in 1967.

The sublime choral music of McCarthy, Glass and Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel promise to make this an unforgettable event.

Portslade Recorded Music Society Jazz Royalty: Count Basie and Duke Ellington

Tuesday, 4th June 2024

7:30 PM, Admission £3, includes tea, coffee and cakes

Loxdale English Centre, Locks Hill, Portslade BN41 2LA

Information: Richard Richardson (Chairman): 01273 328722

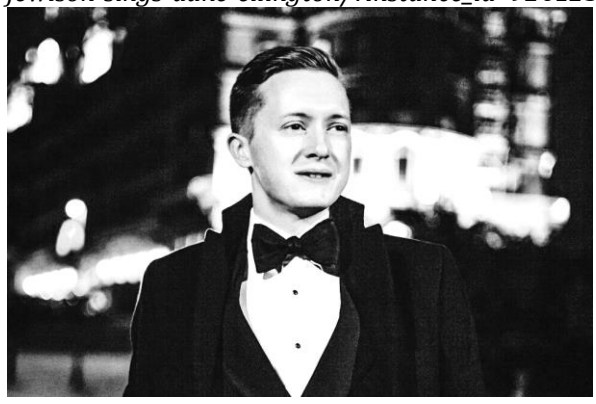
https://www.bh-arts.org.uk/event/jazz-royalty-count-basie-and-duke-ellington/

Presented by Richie Richardson, Hon. Chairman

Sam Jewison Sings Duke Ellington

Sun 9th June 2024, 5pm
Crazy Coqs @Brasserie Zedel,
20 Sherwood Street,
London, W1F 7ED
£25

https://www.brasseriezedel.com/events/sam-jewison-sings-duke-ellington/?instance_id=926125



Following multiple sold-out appearances, Sam Jewison returns to Crazy Coqs to celebrate the 125th birthday of Duke Ellington!

The singer and pianist cast his gaze over the extraordinary output of an undisputed icon of American jazz, with songs including "Take the 'A' Train", "I Got It Bad (and That Ain't Good)", "Mood Indigo", "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)", "Satin Doll", and many more.
From his beginnings at the Cotton Club during the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, through to his legendary 1956 Newport Jazz Festival performance, and culminating in his twilight years' creation of the "Sacred Concerts", Ellington remained at the forefront of jazz throughout his life.

His contributions to the Great American Songbook continue to inspire new generations of artists, with Jewison's fresh interpretation of Ellington's best-loved songs on display here.

Described as "a Renaissance Man in a Jazz World", Jewison's vocal prowess and pianistic virtuosity have seen him tour internationally. He headlined the 2020 ReGeneration Festival in Florence and the BBC Radio 3 Christmas Special in 2021. He played at the award-winning Nevill Holt Opera House in June 2022 and made his EFG London Jazz Festival debut the following November.

He has performed at iconic London venues, including Camden's famous Jazz Café, Westminster Abbey, and the Royal Opera House, where he made his sold-out recital debut with "The Composer in Hollywood" in March 2022. Jewison returned to the ROH in January 2024 with "The Composer on Broadway".

Big Band Bash 4 - Harmony in Harlem plays Duke Ellington

Sat 15th June 2024, 7:30pm
The Maltings, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4BB
£18.00 + £1.51 booking fee

https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/booking/select/UhDPiJWVBnIX

The Big Band Bash presents HARMONY IN HARLEM with a fantastic concert of music made famous by DUKE ELLINGTON. Featuring Jane Mayo on vocals, HARMONY IN HARLEM is recognised nationally as one of the foremost purveyors of the Duke Ellington sound. A concert not to be missed!

Frank Griffith Gigs

https://www.frankgriffith.co.uk/

Date/Time: 10 May, 7.30PM
Venue: The Gallery. 455 Smithdown Road, L15 3JL
Featuring: Frank Griffith and Poetrio. Mike Hughes,drums, Ben Parkinson, Keys. Jazz amongst the Poets
Info-www.smithdownsocial.co.uk
Admission: Free

Date/Time: 12 May , 3-5PM
Venue:Hightown Pub and Kitchen, Alt Road,Hightown, Liverpool, L38 0BA.
Featuring: Frank Griffith Trio
Info- 0151 929 2492
Admission: Free

Date/Time: 7 July , 3-5PM
Venue:Hightown Pub and Kitchen, Alt Road,Hightown, Liverpool, L38 0BA.
Featuring: Frank Griffith Trio
Info- 0151 929 2492
Admission: Free

Date/Time:13 July, 8PM
Featuring: Frank Griffith Trio with Mike Hughes-vibraphone, Tom Sykes piano
Venue: Zeffirelli's. Compston Road, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 9AD
Info: www.zeffirellis.com.
01539 433845
Admission: £4

The (Electric) Piano Player

Apart from his achievements as a pianist, bandleader and composer, Duke Ellington is remembered for a number of 'firsts' in jazz. He was the first jazz artist to compose a piece of music (*Creole Rhapsody*) which exceeded a single side of a disc, the first to record a twelve inch lp (*Masterpieces* for CBS), the first black artist to appear on the cover of 'Time' magazine (Dave Brubeck having been the first jazz musician) and the first whose likeness adorned a nation's stamps (Togo, 1967). These facts have, by now, become almost synonymous with the Ellington brand… However, there is another significant first for which Ellington is far less celebrated: he was the first musician to be recorded playing an electric piano in a recording studio (preceding more likely candidates such as Sun Ra and Ray Charles by a matter of months) and the story of how Duke came to be a pioneer of electric jazz is as interesting as it is unlikely.

The Rudolph Wurlitzer Company, usually referred to as simply Wurlitzer, was founded in Cincinnati in 1853 by German immigrant (Franz) Rudolph Wurlitzer. The company initially imported stringed, woodwind and brass instruments from Germany for resale in the United States. Wurlitzer enjoyed initial success, largely due to defence contracts to provide musical instruments to the U.S. military. In 1880, the company began manufacturing pianos and eventually relocated to New York.

It quickly expanded to make band organs, orchestrions, player pianos and pipe or theatre organs popular in theatres during the days of silent movies.

Wurlitzer also operated a chain of retail stores where the company's products were sold. As technology evolved, Wurlitzer began manufacturing jukeboxes, and it eventually became known more for making jukeboxes and vending machines (which are still produced by Wurlitzer) rather than for musical instruments.

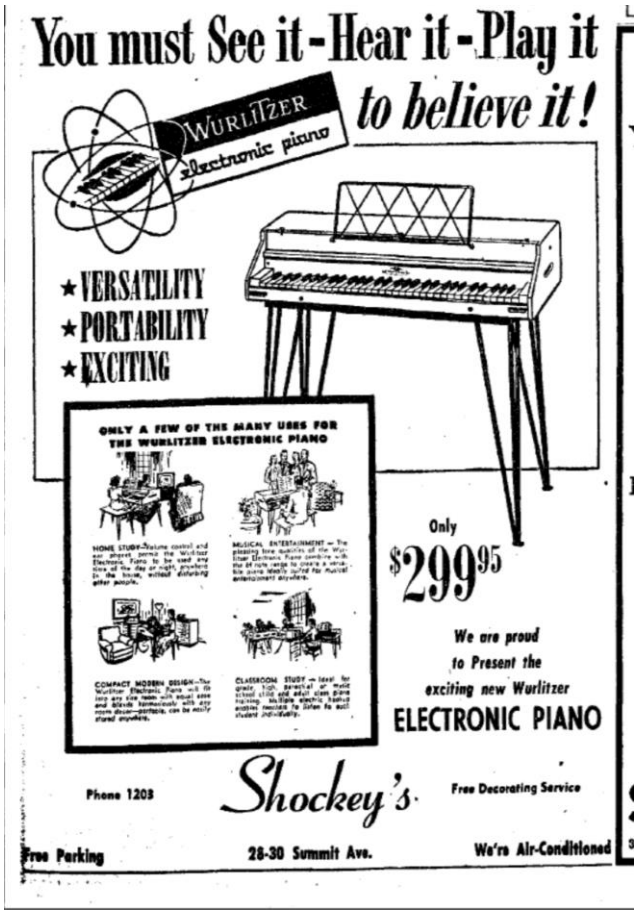
In the mid fifties the company was keen to exploit US consumerism and expanded its range into electric instruments which led to the production of the Wurlitzer electric piano. It

was manufactured and marketed by Wurlitzer (with various updates) from 1954 to 1983. Sound was generated by striking a metal reed with a hammer, which induced an electric current in a pickup. Over the years the design of the instrument underwent many changes, but certain basic concepts were constant, and present in this very first distributed model. It was an electro-acoustic, amplified instrument that required a speaker or headphones to be heard above a whisper. The piano almost always consisted of 64 notes, skipping the top and bottom octaves of a standard piano. The tones were always produced by a miniaturised piano action, including felt hammers hitting, not strings, but small, tone-producing, tuned spring-steel 'reeds', of successively shorter length, that vibrated in an electrostatic pickup. This length-scaling of the reeds was always exactly the same, even as width, thickness and shape/taper of the reeds changed. The sound evolved over the decades, but was always intrinsically similar in character, somewhere between 'barking' and bell-like although, unlike an organ or a synthesiser, the instrument didn't have a variety of voices, its one sound was always capable of dynamics and a degree of musical expressiveness.

The instrument was invented by Benjamin Miessner, who had worked on various types of electric pianos since the early 1930s. The first Wurlitzer electric piano was manufactured in 1954. Originally, the piano was designed to be used in the classroom, and several dedicated teacher and student instruments were manufactured. However, it was quickly adapted for more conventional live performances, including stage models with attachable legs and console models with built-in frames.

The Wurlitzer Electric Piano Model 110 was, the first Wurlitzer electric piano to be marketed, and is now extremely rare; it had been replaced by the Model 111 within months. (It was preceded by the almost mythical and possibly unnamed Model 100, a prototype which was displayed, but may not have been sold.)

By the time the 110 had become commercially available, Duke had reached the terminal moraine of his two year contract with Capitol. Things had got off to a bright start with the recording of arguably the band's final standard, *Satin Doll* but had atrophied thereafter (the trio recordings are a notable exception) so that many of the recordings were reworkings of old hits, arrangements of standards or attempts to cash in at the jukebox. Ellington was even hiring outside arrangers such as Buck Clayton, Dick Vance and Gerald Wilson. This unsatisfactory situation must have been caused, at least in part, by Billy Strayhorn's increasing estrangement from Ellington; irked by the alterations being made to his arrangements and the lack of recognition for his compositions. In addition, it was a time of important changes in personnel: Louis Bellson and Willie Smith left before Ellington joined Capitol; Johnny Hodges and Sam Woodyard are in the band on the first post-Capitol recordings.



For his part, Duke had become more disillusioned with Capitol as his contract had gone on. He perceived a lack of interest in promoting the band, as though he had become, amongst the

growing demand for loud, amplified, blues based music, 'yesterday's man…'

And so it was that 18th and 19th May 1955 were to be Ellington's last days in the Capitol studios in Chicago. To this day, the exact details of what was recorded on which of the two days is disputed but five tracks which make use of the electric piano have come down to us: *Coquette, Discontented Blues, Once In A Blue Mood, Lady Be Good,* and *So Long*. Appearing with Duke on the session were vocalist Jimmy Grissom, Ray Nance (trumpet), Quentin Jackson (trombone), Russell Procope (clarinet/ alto sax), Jimmy Woode (bass) and Dave Black (drums).

The music itself does occasionally have a desultory sound to it, perhaps created in part by the low morale of the musicians (this had been a thin time in terms of bookings and sales) and the sometimes disconcerting incongruity of the electric piano as played by Duke. The Capitol piano sides of a year earlier proved beyond doubt Duke's facility and imagination as a pianist which would lead a critic as esteemed as Gunther Schuller to claim that he was one of the greatest pianists of the Twentieth Century, regardless of category. On the Wurlitzer, though, Duke sounds like the novice he certainly was. There are several occasions on which we can hear him attempting to hammer the keys in the way he would a conventional piano if he were attempting to vary the pitch or volume. What results, of course, is largely the extraneous, non- musical noise of Duke's fingers (fortissimo) on the plastic keys!

On Coquette (a song made famous by Jimmie Lunceford) Grissom is not nearly so mannered (and objectionable) as he could sometimes be and Procope provides some nice clarinet fills after Nance's characteristically tasteful plunger work at the start of the number.

Discontented Blues has an attractive, jungle style, brooding opening which, to my ears is then undermined by the anti-climax of the electric piano. Procope, Nance and Jackson all acquit themselves well in their solos without really raising the temperature and although the final bars reestablish the moody ambiance, they leave the listener thinking that more could have been made of this number.

In his excellent liner notes to the Mosaic boxed set, Stanley Dance writes of the slow, melancholy instrumental, *Once In A Blue Mood* that "the music sounds like conversation overheard. The musicians exchange views on subjects of interest to them and comfortably, undisturbed by any necessity to impress others." Fair enough, I suppose, but this does sound very close to damning with feint praise.

The somewhat moribund mood changes with Gershwin's *Lady Be Good* which had been especially popular with jazz audiences since Ella Fitzgerald sang a scat chorus in her version of the song recorded in 1947. Jimmy Grissom follows her example, not unsuccessfully, and it is interesting to hear Procope on a lusty alto. Nance quotes a Gillespie lick towards the end of the number. This is the Ellingtonians bopping it up and, it seems to me, the recording from the session which had the most potential for commercial success.

So Long, an Ellington original, has been interpreted as a valedictory 'fingers up' from the composer to the record company. It's a pop song of the most perfunctory kind, musically and lyrically, whose chief interest is in the poetic subtext that Duke was sending to Capitol.

These five numbers recorded on a May Thursday in Chicago, a couple of months after Charlie Parker's death and a year before Elvis' recording of *Hound Dog* represent a turning point for Ellington. His contract at Capitol terminated seemingly by mutual consent, he would be playing the infamous Acquashow in Flushing Meadow in a little over four weeks. The following year, however, would see Hodges and Strayhorn come back to the fold and the triumphant 'return' (sans electric piano!) at Newport…

Depending on how one wants to look at this very brief chapter in Duke's story it could be argued that his electric flirtation had either a negligible or a profound impact on the rest of his career. He very rarely played the instrument again, in concerts or in studio recordings (Brian Koller of Duke-LYM informs me that the New Desor (page 1458) lists Duke on electronic piano on a total of only 19 different titles). An important exception to the general acoustic keyboard rule was in the Second Sacred Concert where Duke

plays it on *Something About Believing* and *It's Freedom* (presumably to create a gospel sound) with considerably more self assurance and subtlety than he had a decade earlier. Later in the Sixties, if he required an electronic keyboard sound, normally on rock oriented tracks, Duke deferred to 'Wild' Bill Davis' organ (it should be noted, by the way, that Billy Strayhorn had played this instrument as early as 1st June 1951 on a Johnny Hodges led date). However, from more-

or- less the time that he first used the Wurlitzer in the studio, Duke was accompanied by one on his travels around the world. Unlike a traditional piano (of any sort), of course, it was an instrument which was portable and could be assembled quickly in a hotel room. Ellington, always an inveterate noodler and trier out of new ideas at a keyboard in the small hours after gigs, must have composed hundreds of hours of some of the Twentieth Century's most important music with it perched at the end of or on his bed.

As for the rest of the 'Wurlitzer in Popular Music' story… While Duke Ellington may have been the first to recording on a Wurlitzer Electronic Piano, jazz pianist-composer-bandleader-Saturnite Sun Ra was probably the first musician to have *commercially released* recordings with the instrument, including an early 1956 studio session or two. (There also exists an unreleased 1955 acetate from him on the instrument.) Sun Ra's 110 can be heard, with a very flat F# reed, on the early 1956 track *Medicine for a Nightmare* (two of the existing three versions, one of which may have been the 1956 Saturn single version); on a version of *A Call for all Demons,* on his backing to the eccentric, 1956-released Billie Hawkins single *Last Call for Love,* on *Springtime In Chicago*, and on a later-released outtake of the track *Super-Blonde,* re-titled *Supersonic Jazz.* It can be heard, retuned, on the slightly-later 1956 tracks *India, Sunology (pts 1 and 2)*, and at chipmunk-style double-speed on *Advice for Medics,* which were released on the 1957 LP *Super Sonic Jazz.* It's all over his next December 1956 sessions for *Sound of Joy* and would be the instrument with which he was principally identified thereafter.

In May 1956, Wurlitzer opened a new 100,000-square-foot factory in Corinth dedicated to making electric pianos. Ray Charles' crossover smash *What'd I Say?* in 1959 popularised the instrument with pop and rock audiences and various models continued to be produced here until 1964, when it expanded to an additional plant in DeKalb, Illinois. Production later expanded once again this time to Logan, Utah.

By the mid Sixties the Fender Rhodes, with its softer sound, was providing stiff competition for Wurlitzer and Miles Davis' keyboard players Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett and Joe Zawinul all made use of it and contributed to the ascendency of this keyboard in the fusion era. As a consequence, in the late 1970s, costs were cut by Wurlitzer management in an effort to increase profitability. By the end of the decade many musicians had started to use digital synthesizers instead of the Wurlitzer. The last model, the 200A, was discontinued by 1983. In total, around 120,000 instruments were produced. The Corinth factory finally closed in October 1988. 'Baldwin,' who had bought Wurlitzer the previous year, demanded that all of the plant's records, including designs for the electric pianos, were destroyed…

The Wurlitzer used by Ellington in the final years of his life (now kept at the Smithsonian Institute)

A few questions remain in my mind, surrounding this singular Ducal recording date:

1. Who suggested the use of the electric piano in the first place? Duke, Capitol or someone else?
2. Where did the Wurlitzer come from? Was it provided by Capitol, a gift from the instrument makers, or had Duke bought it himself?
3. Why were the numbers recorded at the date not released at the time? Was Duke dissatisfied with them on artistic grounds, did Capitol not see any commercial potential in them or were they a casualty of the rift which seemed to have developed between Ellington and Capitol?

Are any *Blue Light* readers able to provide answers or suggestions?

The author would like to thank David Palmquivst, Brian Koller and Robb Holmes for their assistance in writing this piece.

Here's a link to the 5 recordings from 19th May 1955

https://youtu.be/T1Y5bPcyVb8?si=4hA9SbDPoOxBP8cv

G.E.

Remembering Daisy Kennedy Ellington:

Mother of Duke Ellington

January 4, 1879 - May 26, 1935

Fred Glueckstein

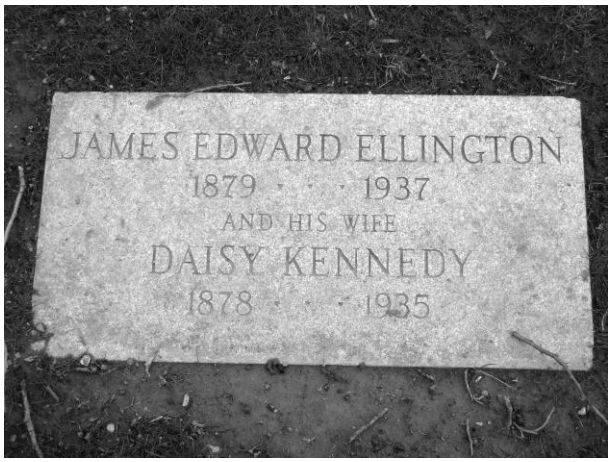
Daisy Kennedy Ellington

On Saturday June 8, 1935, the newspaper *Afro-African* reported funeral services for Mrs. Daisy Kennedy Ellington, 56, mother of Duke Ellington, were held on Wednesday afternoon at 1:30 at Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, 16th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. The Rev. Walter Brooks officiated. Duke's mother had died in Wayne County, Detroit at the Koch Sanitarium on May 26, 1935 after an illness lasting about six months. Daisy Kennedy Ellington was returned for funeral services to the family's home town of Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Ellington's body laid in state for two days at Jarvis Funeral home, where thousands of persons viewed it. The parlors were filled to capacity with floral wreaths sent from hometown friends and many stage celebrities. A large wreath of calla lilies and orchids was sent by special messenger from New York by Cab Calloway and his wife. Sprays from the Mills' Blue Rhythm Band and Samuel Jesse Brizzell were also sent by special messenger.

An hour before the funeral services began the street was filled with spectators keen to get a glimpse of the funeral activities of Duke's mother. There were fifty cars in the funeral procession. It was reported Mrs. Ellington was a member of the Masonic order and the Young Women's Protective League. Phillip Murray sang at the ceremonies.

Interment was in the Harmony Cemetery. Originally, the Columbian Harmony Cemetery, an African-American cemetery, was located at 9th Street NE and Rhode Island Avenue NE in Washington, D.C. It was constructed in 1859 and was the successor to the smaller Harmoneon Cemetery in downtown Washington. However, the Columbian Harmony Cemetery no longer exists as it was closed in 1959. Its graves were relocated to National Harmony Memorial Park at 7101 Sheriff Road in Landover, Maryland.



The *Afro-African* reported that Mrs. Ellington was survived by her husband, James Ellington, two children Edward Kennedy (Duke) Ellington and Ruth Ellington; a grandson, Mercer Ellington; two brothers, John and James Kennedy of Philadelphia; three sisters, Miss Ellen Kennedy, Mrs. Florence Hartgroves, and Mrs. Marie Letcher.

The Life of Daisy Kennedy Ellington

As the future matriarch of the Ellington family, Daisy Kennedy was born to James William and Alice Kennedy on January 4, 1879 in Washington D.C. Daisy was one of ten children, five boys and five girls. She came from a middle-class family and completed high school, which was considered a remarkable accomplishment at that time.

According to the family, Daisy's father, James William Kennedy was born a slave on a plantation in King and Queen County Virginia, and the illegitimate son of the owner and a slave woman. As a young man, James fell in love with a fellow slave named Alice, who was also of mixed blood, part African and part Cherokee.

Their relationship was broken up when James's master freed him, as slave owners often did with their mixed-race sons. James then emigrated to the District of Columbia. After Emancipation, he returned to Virginia and brought Alice back to Washington. Their first child, Daisy, was born on January 4, 1879. She was later described as light-skinned, very pretty, soft-spoken and cultivated.

In his autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress*, Ellington describes Daisy's father, James William Kennedy as a captain in the District of Columbia police force, and the book includes a picture of him in uniform. However, A. H. Lawrence in *Duke Ellington and his World* writes there were no black senior officers in the D.C. police until Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, and there is no confirmation in the census reports that James William Kennedy held that occupation.

Lawrence explains: "Some African-Americans were deputized police officers for special events in the black community, and it may be under those circumstances that Daisy's father held the title."

Daisy Meets James Edward Ellington

James Edward Ellington was born on April 15, 1879 – the same year as Daisy - in Lincolnton, North Carolina. In 1886, James and his family moved to Washington D.C. They were among thousands of blacks who had moved north for a better life from the rural and semirural towns of the South between the Civil War and World War I.

James's mother found employment as housekeeper and receptionist to Dr. Middleton F. Cuthbert, a prominent white physician listed in the District Social Register. At age seventeen, James Edward, or J. E. as he was known, was hired for Cuthbert as a coachman, a driver of a horse-drawn carriage. Over time, J.E. advanced to butler and by 1919 to caretaker and general handyman.

As a result of his position with Dr. Cuthbert, J.E. had a great deal of influence in the black community. Sometimes, he got work as a caterer and a few times served as a butler for catered events at the White House. Later, J.E. made blueprints for the United States Navy. Soon, he met and courted Daisy Kennedy.

Daisy Kennedy and James Edward Ellington were married on January 3, 1898. Between 1898 and 1921, the Ellington family lived in fourteen locations all in Northwest Washington. They first lived with Daisy's parents at 2129 Ida Place (now Ward Place) NW, in D.C.'s West End neighborhood.

In Daisy's first pregnancy, the child was stillborn, or died shortly after birth. Afterwards, Duke Ellington came into the world as Edward Kennedy Ellington on April 29, 1899, in Washington, D.C. Sixteen years later, on July 2, 1915, Ruth Dorothea Ellington was born.

When Duke was old enough, he was sent off to Sunday School. "I didn't understand it so much then in spite of the fact that it gave me a wonderful feeling of security. Believing gave me that. As though I were some very, very special child, my mother would say, 'Edward you are blessed. You don't have anything to worry about. Edward you are blessed.'"

Beloved and Devoted Mother

Both of Duke's parents were pianists. Daisy primarily played parlor songs and rags by note,

and James preferred operatic arias by ear. When Duke was five years old, Daisy listed his age as six so she could send him off to the Garnet Elementary School. Because she sent him at an earlier age, Daisy secretly followed him to school every day. She often waited for him outside the school building at the end of the day.

In his autobiography, Ellington, who loved baseball, tells of the time a boy was demonstrating his skill at batting. When Duke turned around he got hit in the back of the head. His mother saw it happen, hurried to the street and immediately rushed him to the doctor. As a result, in order to forgo baseball, Daisy decided he should take piano lessons.

"My piano teacher, Mrs. Clinkscales (that was really her name), got paid several times a week for these lessons Ellington wrote, "but I missed more than I took, because my enthusiasm for playing ball, and running and racing through the street. That I remember very well, because when she had her piano recital with all her pupils in the church, I was the only one who could not play his part."

In 1914, at the age of 15, Ellington's interest in the piano was rekindled when he listened in Philadelphia to a promising pianist named Harvey Brooks. Ellington was impressed by Brooks's "swinging" rhythm and his tremendous left hand. He remembered: "When I got home, I had a real yearning to play, I hadn't been able to get off the ground before, but after hearing him I said to myself, 'Man, you're just going to *have* to do it.'"

In 1917, or possibly early 1918, Ellington formed his own group and named it The Duke's Serenaders. Early on, the group comprised two to four players: Ellington on piano, with drums, banjo or guitar, and saxophone. "I played my first date at the True Reformer's Hall, on the worst piano in the world," Ellington remembered. "I played from 8 P.M. to 1 A.M. and for 75 cents. Man, I snatched that money and ran like a thief. My mother was so proud."

Daisy Rushes to New York

On July 2, 1918, Duke Ellington married his high-school sweetheart Edna Thompson in Alexandria, Virginia. In early 1919, their son Mercer was born. Over the years, Edna had suspicions about Duke's goings-on with other women. On one occasion, she suspected Duke had been with another woman and actually threatened him with a gun.

On another occasion, Edna exploded when she learned that Duke had an affair with a Cotton Club dancer. She told Duke that she would "spoil those pretty looks," and slashed the left side of Ellington's face with a razor. The crescent-shaped scar ran from just below his ear, barely missing his acoustic nerve, to a few centimeters from his lip.

Leaving her husband and Ruth in Washington, Daisy rushed to New York as soon as she learned about Duke's condition. She and Duke quickly went searching for a new place for them to live, and quickly decided on a seven-room apartment at 381 St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem.

By September 1929, Duke, Daisy, J. E., Ruth, and Duke's girlfriend Mildred Dixon, were living there. Ruth said Daisy was overjoyed to be back caring for her son again, waiting each day for him to come through the door and shout, "Mother, I'm home to dine!"

Daisy at the Cotton Club

Duke Ellington played at the Cotton Club from 1927 to 1930, and sporadically through the next eight years. It was located on 142nd Street and Lenox Avenue (1923–1936), then briefly in the midtown Theater District (1936–1940).

The club operated during the United States' era of Prohibition and Jim Crow era racial segregation. Black people could not patronize the Cotton Club, but the venue featured many of the most popular black entertainers of the era including Ellington.

Ellington developed a warm relationship with Cotton Club management including George "Big Frenchy" DeMange and Herman Stark. They would play cards every night after the show closed. Ellington would take the opportunity to make minor requests.

One night Ellington brought up a subject that had been troubling him for some time. His mother had seen him on Broadway on three separate occasions but was unable to see him at the Cotton Club. Stark said nothing, but quietly passed the word that "respectable Negroes" would from that time on be welcome at the club.

The following evening Stark personally escorted Daisy, J.E., Ruth and Mercer to their table. “We got there early, as soon as they opened,” Mercer remembered. “We had dinner, heard the band and went home.”

Daisy very much enjoyed being part of Duke’s success. “After a couple of thousand of people stopped applauding,” Ruth said, “she was still applauding.” Duke remembered her standing and waving her handkerchief at him when he came out to take his bow at the end of *Show Girl*.

Diagnosed with Cancer

While the Ellington band was in California in April and May 1934, Daisy was diagnosed with cancer. Her physician prescribed radiation therapy. She concurred under the condition that Duke not be told. However, Mildred Dixon told him of his mother’s condition.

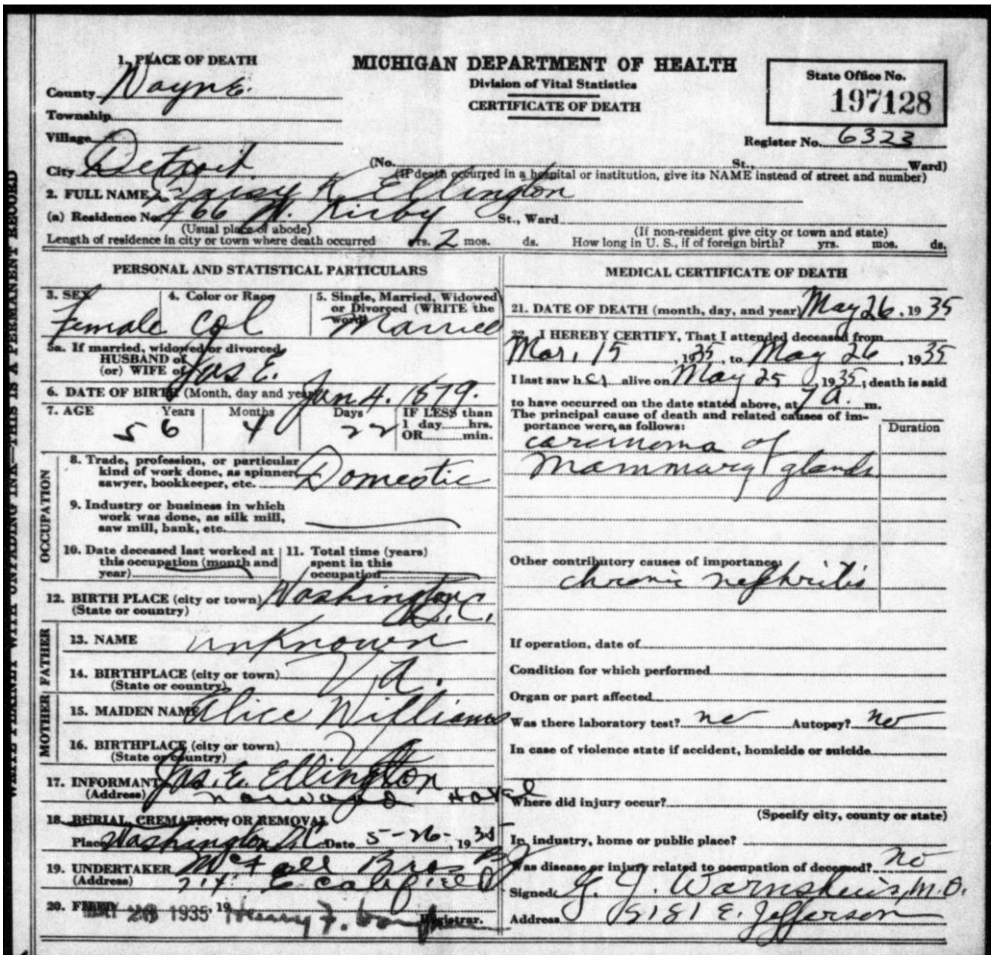
“In what would become a life-time pattern for him, on hearing the distressing news, he simply refused to believe it or do anything about it,” wrote A. H. Lawrence.

By the second week in May, Daisy’s condition worsened. Over her objections, Duke was called on the road during the week of May 11. The band was playing the Palace Theater in Youngstown, Ohio. It was then that Ellington was finally forced to confront the gravity of his mother’s illness.

Duke convinced his mother to have one of her sisters bring her to Detroit, Michigan. The band was booked for a one-week engagement at the Eastwood Gardens, a suburban Detroit dance hall. He arranged for Daisy to have a private room on the train. Duke met them at the station when they arrived the morning of May 17, 1934. Daisy was treated at Provident Hospital. On admission, Daisy was already dying and the hospital staff could do little.

A.H. Lawrence writes what happened. “According to Sonny Greer, as soon as the band finished its last set at the dance hall, Ellington would take a quick bow and leave the stage. A waiting taxi would take him to the hospital. Most of the time was spent holding his mother’s hand and praying. Jonesy [Richard Bowden Jones-Duke’s valet] would bring him a change of clothes in the morning. He would leave in the evening, go to work, and the cycle would be repeated the next day.” Daisy then entered a sanitarium.

Daisy Kennedy Ellington died on May 27, 1935. As reviewed earlier, her funeral was held in Washington, D.C. Duke arranged for 3,000 flowers valued at over $2,000. The iron casket cost $3,500 and weighed 1,000 pounds. It required twelve men to carry it.


MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Division of Vital Statistics
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

State Office No. 197128
Register No. 6323

1. PLACE OF DEATH
County Wayne
Township
Village
City Detroit (No. St., Ward) (If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number)

2. FULL NAME Daisy K. Ellington
(a) Residence No. 466 W. Kirby St., Ward (Usual place of abode) (If non-resident give city or town and state)
Length of residence in city or town where death occurred yrs. 2 mos. ds. How long in U. S., if of foreign birth? yrs. mos. ds.

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3. SEX Female
4. Color or Race Col
5. Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced (WRITE the word) Married
5a. If married, widowed or divorced HUSBAND of (or) WIFE of Jas E.
6. DATE OF BIRTH (Month, day and year) Jan 4. 1879.
7. AGE Years 5 6 Months 4 Days 22 IF LESS than 1 day hrs. OR min.
OCCUPATION
8. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as spinner, sawyer, bookkeeper, etc. Domestic
9. Industry or business in which work was done, as silk mill, saw mill, bank, etc.
10. Date deceased last worked at this occupation (month and year)
11. Total time (years) spent in this occupation
12. BIRTH PLACE (city or town) (State or country) Washington D.C.
FATHER
13. NAME unknown
14. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) (State or country) VA.
MOTHER
15. MAIDEN NAME Alice Williams
16. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) (State or country) VA
17. INFORMANT Jas. E. Ellington (Address) Norwood Hotel
18. BURIAL, CREMATION, OR REMOVAL Place Washington D.C. Date 5-26-1935
19. UNDERTAKER McFall Bros (Address) 717 E. Columbia
20. FILED 1935 Registrar.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

21. DATE OF DEATH (month, day, and year) May 26, 1935
22. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from Mar. 15, 1935, to May 26, 1935
I last saw her alive on May 25, 1935; death is said to have occurred on the date stated above, at 7 a.m.
The principal cause of death and related causes of importance were as follows: carcinoma of mammary glands
Duration
Other contributory causes of importance: chronic nephritis
If operation, date of
Condition for which performed
Organ or part affected
Was there laboratory test? no Autopsy? no
In case of violence state if accident, homicide or suicide
Where did injury occur? (Specify city, county or state)
In industry, home or public place?
Was disease or injury related to occupation of deceased? no
Signed G. J. Warnshuis, M.D.
Address 5181 E. Jefferson

Mercer Ellington wrote of his father: "His world had been built around his mother, and the days after her death were the saddest and most morbid of his life … he just sat around the house and wept for days."

Duke said: "When my mother died, the bottom dropped out. I had no ambition. Before that I'd compete with anyone." In his autobiography, he wrote: "After my mother passed, there was really nothing, and my sparkling parade was probably at an end." It was written that it was a loss from which Duke never fully recovered.

Reminiscing in Tempo

Gradually, over the summer of 1935, Duke began to recover and pulled himself out of despair. Seven weeks after his mother's passing, he began composing a piece in her memory. The composition is called *Reminiscing in Tempo*.

On Thursday, September 12, 1935, Duke Ellington and His Orchestra recorded *Reminiscing in Tempo* for Brunswick Records in New York City. The orchestra included: Duke Ellington (piano); Arthur Whetsel, Cootie Williams (trumpet); Rex Stewart (cornet); Joe Nanton (trombone); Juan Tizol (valve trombone); Barney Bigard (clarinet); Johnny Hodges (soprano sax/alto sax); Otto Hardwick (alto sax/bass sax); Harry Carney (clarinet/alto sax/baritone sax); Fred Guy (guitar); Hayes Alvis, Billy Taylor (bass), and Sonny Greer (drums).

Reminiscing in Tempo was recorded in 4 parts in 2 takes each. It was Ellington's longest composition to date (13 minutes) and occupied four record sides.

John Edward Hasse in *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* wrote: "*Reminiscing in Tempo* was the grandest piece he had yet written-occupying *four* record sides-and can be seen as an effort to break out of the commercial realm, just as he fought to break musical barriers and limitations."

Ellington noted that *Reminiscing in Tempo* comprised two more sides than Creole Rhapsody. He said: "Irving Mills had twice as much trouble with the record companies, who threatened to throw us out of the catalog." In the end, *Reminiscing in Tempo* was recorded. It is a beautiful composition and tribute to his mother Daisy.

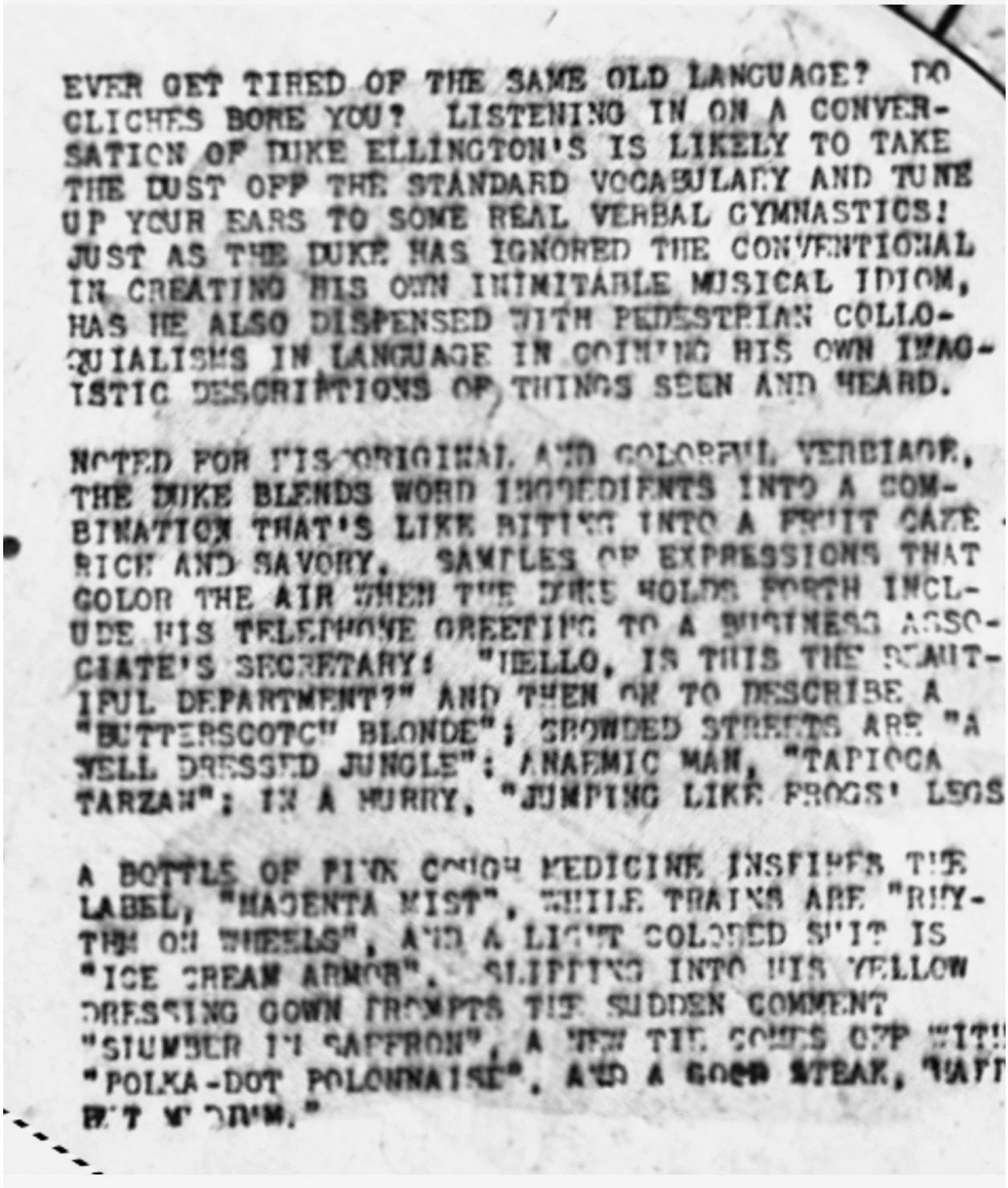
Daisy Kennedy Ellington should be credited with significantly contributing to Duke's historic standing in the history of music. As a pianist, she arranged early piano lessons that introduced Duke to music. It can be argued that Daisy's early musical support for her son opened the door for Duke Ellington to eventually become a famous jazz pianist, composer, and leader of his world-renown orchestra.

Note to reader: Ellington's superb composition *Reminiscing in Tempo* can be found in Duke's CD of the same name. It includes 20 of his famous pieces. The CD is a companion collection of the Public Broadcasting Service, the American broadcaster that televised an Ellington biography. The CD is produced by Columbia/Legacy 1991.


DUKE ELLINGTON
ATTENTION ALL YE COMMONERS OF THESE UNITED STATES. GATHER CLOSE AND LISTEN TO THE TALE OF THE DUKE.. THE DUKE OF ELLINGTON... THE ONE AND ONLY DUKE WHOSE ORIGINALITY HAS SWEPT SONG AFTER SONG ACROSS THE NATION, WHOSE IMPASSIONED BAND-LEADING HAS MADE MUSICAL HISTORY. GATHER 'ROUND AND LISTEN TO THESE NEVER BEFORE TOLD ANECDOTES OF MUSICDOM'S NOBILITY...
THE QUESTION, DUKE, WE'D LIKE ANSWERED NOW, IS WHAT'S YOUR HOBBY..AFTER LAST PERFORMANCE BOW?
HOBBY? WELL, I'M A COLLECTOR ..AND I DON'T MEAN OF ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR! FOR INSTANCE...
I LIKE TO COLLECT CLOTHES! THAT'S HOW I BECAME KNOWN AS "DUKE" WHILE IN A WASHINGTON, D.C., HIGH SCHOOL. AT MY LAST COUNT I HAD MORE THAN 200 SUITS AND 600 TIES!


SO A SHOPPING WE DO GO-- WITH DUKE. . .
DUKE, HERE'S A SHARP ITEM! REAL COLORFUL!
YOUR TASTES ARE MINE . . I NEVER SAW YOU MISS!
THIS IS OUT OF THIS WORLD, DUKE! NEAT AND CLEAN!
YOU'RE UNCANNY. JUST WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY MYSELF!
PARDON ME, MR. ELLINGTON, BUT ISN'T THAT YOUR BLIND VOCALIST, WITH YOU?
YES!
BUT HOW CAN A BLIND MAN PICK SUCH EXCELLENT CLOTHES?
WELL, I THINK YOU CAN PUT IT DOWN TO HIS SENSITIVE FEELINGS. HE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SEE, IN OUR SENSE OF THE WORD, BUT THERE'S A SIXTH OR SEVENTH SENSE ABOUT HIM THAT CAN TELL GOOD FROM BAD!
AND THOUGH AT CLOTHES HE LOOKS-- DUKE CERTAINLY COLLECTS A LOT OF BOOKS...
TELL THE SALESMAN JUST HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING BLIND!
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO SEE! I FEEL THAT IF I COULD SEE I WOULD BE VERY DISAPPOINTED. I HAVE A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE OF THINGS AS I THINK THEY SHOULD. MAYBE THEY'RE REALLY NOT THAT WAY!
I THINK I'M PROUDEST OF MY 800 VOLUMES ON THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE NEGRO RACE! FROM THESE I RECEIVED INSPIRATION TO WRITE MY TONE POEM "BLACK, BROWN AND BEIGE"!


BUT JUST A MOMENT.. WHAT'S THIS!
GET ME 27221!
ANYTHING ELSE?
WHAT'S 27221?
BEFORE YOU GET ANY WRONG IDEAS, I'M NOT PLAYING THE NUMBERS! 27221 REFERS TO "SOPHISTICATED LADY" WHICH I RECORDED. I NEVER CALL MY DISKS BY NAME.. BY NUMBER ONLY!
AND IT TAKES A TERRIFIC MEMORY, TOO, FOR DUKE HAS RECORDED OVER A THOUSAND SONGS...
RECENTLY, DUKE DECIDED TO GIVE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AN OPPORTUNITY HE DIDN'T HAVE AND...
I HAD TO LEARN THE HARD WAY VIA HONKEY-TONKS AND CABARETS. YOU THREE ARE THE FIRST WINNERS OF MY SCHOLARSHIP TO THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC. CONGRATULATIONS.
COMPOSER, BAND LEADER, HUMANITARIAN, DUKE ELLINGTON HAS BECOME AN IMMORTAL AMERICAN FIGURE...
WHAT I LIKE MOST IN LIFE IS COMPOSING AND WATCHING PIECES OF MUSIC GROW, FRIENDLY STRANGERS, AND IMPROVISING WITH MY BAND!
Strictly!! ELLINGTONIA



Cartoon strip by A C Hollingsworth (1948). The African-American illustrator was one of the foremost illustrators of comics and magazines of his day. This was one of a series devoted to jazz musicians published in *Juke Box* magazine.

Back Cover: Photograph of Duke Ellington which appeared in 'The Glasgow Herald' from the press conference, Central Hotel, Glasgow prior to the concert at the Odeon (14th February 1967). Thanks to DESUK chairman Mike Coates for bringing my attention to this: here is the link to the article which it accompanied:
https://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/18261763.duke-ellington-selfish-toymaker-1967/
Mike's sister-in-law can be seen (partly hidden) at the top right of the photograph.

Blue Light