



# Ellingtonia



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William McFadden, Editor

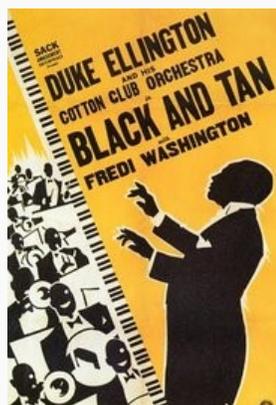
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## Third preservation of Ellington on film National Film Registry Adds Duke's Black and Tan To 2015 Selections

The [National Film Preservation Board](http://www.nfb.gov) was established at the Library of Congress in 1989. Since then its [National Film Registry program](http://www.nfb.gov) “selects 25 films each year showcasing the range and diversity of American film heritage to increase awareness for its preservation.” In December, one of the first short sound films—in which Duke Ellington and His Cotton Club Orchestra happen to star—1929’s *Black and Tan* (frequently identified as *Black and Tan Fantasy*) was designated for permanence.



Already preserved in the Registry are the 1942 “Soundie” short, *Jam Session*, and the 1959 feature film with an Ellington/Strayhorn score, *Anatomy of a Murder* (with cameo of Duke as ‘Pie Eye’).

As *Black and Tan* is described by the Film Registry:

*In one of the first musical short films to showcase African-American jazz musicians, Duke Ellington portrays a struggling musician whose dancer wife (Fredi Washington, in her film debut) secures him a gig for his orchestra at the famous Cotton Club, where she’s been hired to perform, at a risk to her health. Directed by Dudley Murphy, who earned his reputation with Ballet Mecanique — considered a masterpiece of early experimental filmmaking — the film reflects the cultural, social and artistic explosion of the 1920s that became known as the Harlem Renaissance. Ellington and Washington personify that movement, and Murphy — who also directed registry titles St. Louis Blues (1929), another musical short, and the feature The Emperor Jones (1933), starring Paul Robeson — cements it in celluloid to inspire future generations. Washington, who appeared with Robeson in Emperor Jones, is best known as Peola in the 1934 version of Imitation of Life.*

Other movies selected include [Ghostbusters](#), [Top Gun](#), [Being There](#), and [Hail the Conquering Hero!](#)

## Happy New Year 2016!

### This Saturday Night . . . OUR HOLIDAY ‘HOMECOMING’ PARTY!

Yes, it’s time for our Society’s annual celebration of the new year, where some of the world’s finest, most beautiful people make merry, united by their love for all things about Duke and Strays.

But we’ve missed you! Haven’t seen you in a while. So can we call this a homecoming, because you’re going to give the festivities a “one more once,” and party with the rest of us ‘regulars?’

Things get going in our regular digs at **Grace Lutheran Church, 4300—16th Street (at Varnum St.), NW, Washington, DC 20011** on:

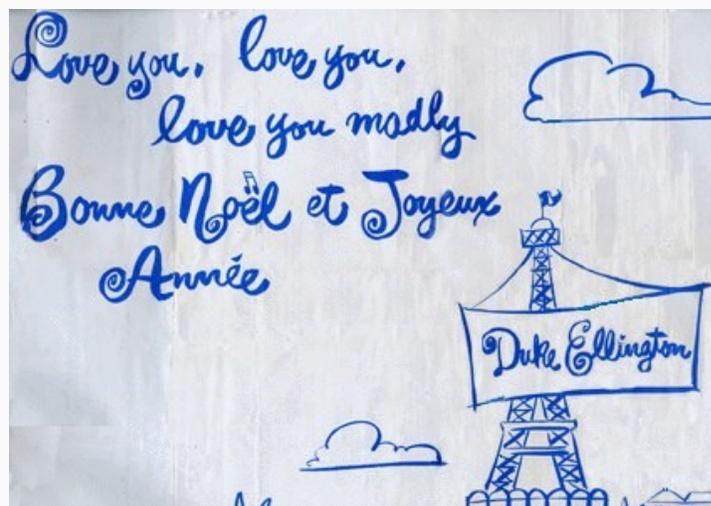
**Saturday, 2 January 2016—7:00 PM.**

*Remember that the Holiday Homecoming Party is a pot luck supreme. Please bring your best for our table, but even without a dish, bring yourself. Because all of us kids want you to know we do love you madly! Management will handle the libations.*

By all means, **bring a guest** along. What better way to attract prospective Society members?

**Next Meeting:**

**Saturday, 6 February 2016—7:00 PM**





## The 24th International Duke Ellington Study Group Conference

May 19-23, 2016 ♦ New York City

Sponsored by The Duke Ellington Center for the Arts (DECFA)

*DECFA is pleased to announce the 24th International Duke Ellington Study Group Conference, celebrating Ellington's legacy on the stage, on the screen, in the church, and in the club. This multifaceted, four-day congress brings together artists, scholars, and Ellington aficionados from around the world in multiple sites across New York City and features one full day devoted to the latest research on Ellington's life, career, and music.*

*The Conference will be based at St. Peter's Church, which is located at 619 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10022. Off-site visits and locations will include New York University, Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Jazz Museum in Harlem, Birdland Below, and supper club Moscow 57.*

Panels led by eminent scholars and artists will be devoted to specific themes such as:

- *Playing Ellington:* The creativity in and challenges of analyzing and performing Ellington's work
- *Where's Billy?* Products and politics of compositional collaborations in Ellington's music
- *(If) A Drum is a Woman:* Gender and sensuality in Duke's music
- *Duke Who?* Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center's Essentially Ellington project
- *Growing up Ellington:* Keeping the legacy progressing in the 21st Century
- *Film Fancies and Fantasies:* From shorts and *Cabin in the Sky* to *Anatomy of a Murder*
- Exploring *Jump for Joy/Queenie Pie/The Beggar's Opera* and more!



Other scheduled features for this "awe-inspiring event" will include:

- Opening Night Gala where you'll meet jazz devotees from around the world and Ellington family members.
- Historic reunion of producers and performers from Broadway productions that featured Duke's music.
- Performances by world renowned artists and Broadway celebrities.
- Guided bus tours and excursions to Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Cotton Club, the Apollo Theater, the Ellington Statue, Duke Ellington Boulevard, plus Harlem speakeasies and nightclubs frequented by the Duke.
- Screenings of rare footage from documentaries, performances and family archives.
- Beyond Category Awards Luncheon (honorees to be announced by the DECFA Board of Directors).

*The **Call for Papers** will be in effect through January 15, 2016. Proposals are invited for 20-minute papers or presentations that will be followed by 10-minute discussions. Selected participants will be notified in February.*

**Additional details—and a special video message from DECFA President/Founder Mercedes Ellington and Conference Chair Michael Dinwiddie—covering registration, event tickets, hotel discount, venues, transportation, and Call for Papers can be accessed by clicking [this link](#) or the Conference logo at the top of this page.**

**A select few items  
Smithsonian Displays Strayhorn**



On December 5, **Rusty Hassan** filed the above photo and reported, “While at the Smithsonian American History Museum with Sondra and her quilts I wandered around and discovered this Billy Strayhorn exhibit. So appropriate after all the Strayhorn tribute performances that **Vernard Gray** put on, and just days after his birthday anniversary to see some of the original scores.”



Serendipitous, indeed. Although for the numerous times he’s been mentioned and praised in these pages, Vernard’s photo has been missing. Until now, that is. Again, our thanks for producing *Celebrating Strayhorn* throughout the District and Baltimore, all year long during *Strayhorn Centennial 2015*.

**“Dramatis Felidae”** (To Use Our Man’s Term in *MIMM*)  
**About Our Members . . .**

A very nice gentleman named **Dick Spottswood** has come all the way from Naples, FL (via email) to say, “Every issue of *Ellingtonia* makes me homesick. When you next present neglected DE masterpieces, consider either or both sides of the “Bakiff” - “Giddybug Gallop” coupling from 1941. Between the Tizol trombone and Nance fiddle on the first title, and maniacal speed of the second, it’s a record that absolutely gave buyers their money’s worth.” Dick also wants you to know, “I seriously miss the Ellingtonians!” Same for us to you, Dick.

Our November feature on *Strayhorn 100* celebrations prompted the following lovely compliment from closer to home in the person of **Barbara Young** who writes, “What a pleasure to read about the ‘A-Train’ thing in  
(Continued on next page.)

*In Memoriam*

**Theodore A. Shell, DDS**

**October 26, 1915—December 27, 2015**

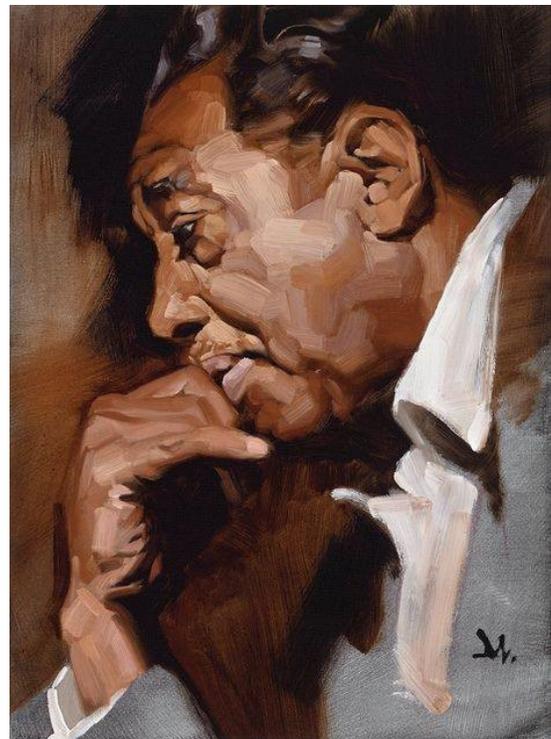
It is with tremendous sadness we report that our beloved **Dr. Ted Shell**, the last of the founding members of our Society, passed on Sunday, December 27.

Tentative funeral arrangements are being made for **Tuesday, January 5, 2016** at Dr. Shell’s place of worship, **Grace Lutheran Church** (16th & Varnum Streets, NW District of Columbia).

The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. extends its deepest, heartfelt condolences to **Marion Shell** and Family.

Kindly remember the sentiments expressed in these pages only last November—on the occasion of Ted Shell’s 100th birthday:

*Dr. Ted Shell, for your unmatched devotion to the world of Duke Ellington, and for all you’ve accomplished for it and for us, your Society salutes you—in our hearts, on our minds, through our prayers, and with love!*



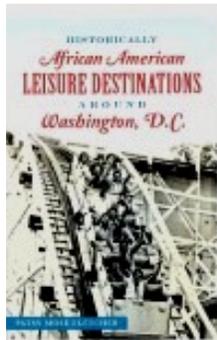
Portrait by **Gregory Manchess**  
Posted on **Facebook** by ‘Art Gives Me Life,’ December 21.

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

New York! Hooray for everyone up there who put it together! And once again, thanks to your dear newsletter, without which I would not have known a thing about it! THANKS!”

Last month’s mention of Ruth Ellington’s 100th birthday was appreciated out in California by **Claire Gordon**, who adds, “I knew her well; palled around with them as a couple. She always referred to Duke as ‘Edward’.”

One of our Society’s newest members, **Patsy Fletcher**, has written and just published a book—*Historically African American Leisure Destinations Around Washington, DC* (History Press). - which was launched earlier this month. Patsy would like you to know her latest work is now available on—guess where?—Amazon.com.



Representing our Society in Fargo (North Dakota)-Moorhead (Minnesota) is **Dr. Yvonne Condell**. Just prior to publication of the December *Ellingtonia* she was thoughtful enough to send us an article entitled, “Puttin’ up the Duke” clipped from the November 2 Variety section of *The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead*.

In a well-researched piece by staff writer John Lamb ([jlamb@forumcomm.com](mailto:jlamb@forumcomm.com)), the 75th anniversary of the legendary **Jack Towers** recordings of Ellington and His Orchestra at Fargo’s Crystal Ballroom is commemorated through local archives, reminiscences from local residents, the Jack Towers NPR and *City Paper* interviews, Eddie Lambert’s Fargo LP liner notes, even Dan Morgenstern’s 2010 *New York Times* obituary for Jack. Mr. Lamb has crafted a most impressive telling of the “Fargo” story from both accurate historical and local perspectives. As the article is available exclusively to online *Forum* subscribers, Society members will be able to individually read the clipping at our regular meetings beginning this month.

Dr. Condell’s accompanying note states, “Duke is still beloved in our community. There are several persons who were in attendance at his 1940 Fargo engagement.

“Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN are twin towns separated by the Red River of the North.”

For all members of The Duke Ellington Society, Inc. who have paid dues for 2016 (and beyond), we make this small expression of deep gratitude for your continuing support and collaboration. Thanks to you, we are able to “keep on keepin’ on” and doing all we can to ensure that “Ellington Is Forever.”

## Nobody Slept in December . . . *Spur-of-the-Moment Program A Hit* by **Mr. Saturday Dance**

Anecdotes serious and comic, participatory discussion, great music (capped by a live performance), and a casual atmosphere (facilitated with some silly fun) will provide the reader with an inkling of what the December meeting was like. It could have been worse.

On the previous evening the Society president was notified of an immutable out-of-town commitment for the program host which would be elongated through the weekend. Several options were considered, and the more than 8,000 individual selections downloaded to the presidential hard drive would be mined for a playlist of vocalists known and less known performing the music of Edward and William, with or without The Orchestra.

For example, Sonny Greer’s vocals on “Moon Over Dixie” (1938) prompted the question of how an individual so worldly and urbane could sing of yearning for “a cabin in the cotton” and suppress any irony.

Ever wondered how Cootie Williams’ singing voice sounded? There were two examples from Ellington small groups in the 1930’s: “Ain’t the Gravy Good?” and “Dry Long So,” the meaning of which was duly explained. We were also treated to assorted renditions from Joe Williams, Sinatra, Sassy, Hibbler, Ella, Ivie, Rosie Clooney, and Pops. **Paul Schneidmill** topped-off the fun with an excellent tenor saxophone reading of Mel Tormé’s “The Christmas Song.”

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

Please Send Your Payment to:

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

Our dues remain a bargain:

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

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

#### THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

*In Memoriam* Theodore A. Shell, Founding Member

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