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Duke Ellington Starring in "The Evolution of Jazz"

By David Kunstek

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Duke Ellington is considered to be one of the greatest figures in the history of American music. Edward Kennedy 'Duke' Ellington was born in Washington D.C. on April 29, 1899.

His parents were James Edward and Daisy Kennedy Ellington. They raised Duke as an only child, until his sister, Ruth, was born when Duke was sixteen years old.

Duke, even as a teenager had a great talent for music. In the beginning of his musical life, Duke began to take a promising interest in a new type of music that would later be called jazz. Choosing to base his career on a new idea may not have been smart, but Duke did take this chance and in turn became one of the most famous musicians in America.

Duke's first job was at a government office. He was a clerk who received the minimum wage and was barely getting by. He would arrange dance bands for weddings and parties for extra money. His mother taught him how to play the piano. Sometimes he put this knowledge to use and played at a few of the dance parties and weddings.

After Duke's first job, he became more interested in painting and the arts. For a few years he painted public posters. Duke then decided to put together his own band. At this point in his life things started to change for the better for Duke, but not for long. In those days, this new music was just beginning to develop and would later be given the name of jazz. In that time it was considered to be low and vulgar because it was music that grew directly out of the Black culture. In those early years, segregation was at one of its all time worst points in history. I think that is why Duke Ellington was one of the most important individuals to the growth and development of jazz.

During Duke's long career, the new music slowly spread out of bars and saloons, to dance and night clubs and then eventually onto the concert stage.

In time, jazz became a universally recognized form of art and has been said that it is the only real form that has originated from the American soul.

By the 1960's Duke traveled the globe so many times that he became known as the unofficial ambassador to the United States. Duke's band had played in Russia, Japan, Latin America, the Far East, the Middle East, and Africa.

Duke, himself, was an elegant man. When the white people looked down on the black man and his

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music, Duke managed to bring dignity to every one of his performances. Once, the jazz historian Leonard Feather described Duke as, 'an inch over six feet tall, sturdily built, he had an innate grandeur that would have enabled him to step with unquenched dignity out of a mud puddle.'

Duke's private life was something of an enigma. Although he had many friends he never really told them everything about himself. He would often guard his privacy probably because he had so little of it. When he was alone though, he would almost always be arranging the next tune for the band to play, and was always thinking or preparing something for the band to do in the next performance.

Duke attracted some of the greatest musicians to join his band. Because of this it has been said that many of Duke's pieces are almost impossible to exactly duplicate without the personal style of the original musicians. One of the strange things that was known about Duke was that his school music teacher, Mrs. Clinkscales, who played the piano, was always the inspiration for him to just sit down and start tinkering around with a few notes that usually became big hits.

In his band the two, probably most famous musicians were the trumpeter Whetsol and the saxophonist Hodges. As the band became more and more popular, saxophonist Hodges became the highest paid performer in the United States.

The 1920's became known as 'the Jazz Age' because jazz had hit its first great burst of popularity. At that time Duke then added a young drummer named Sonny Greer. A few years after Greer was hired, Duke's band hit a very rough spot. They were often stuck in the street with no money and nowhere to go. Duke and his band often were stuck doing crude recordings just for a few dollars to buy a meal. In the autumn of 1927, luck had crossed paths with Duke again. The manager of Duke's band, Irving Mills, had heard that the prestigious cotton club was looking for a new band and immediately Irving began campaigning for Duke. Duke and his band opened on December 4, 1927 to meet a mad rush of spectators who eagerly awaited to hear Dukes newest pieces. Duke's band became very prosperous and they had their own spot on the Cotton Club floor with special lighting and accommodations. At the year of 1928 the band consisted of Bubber Miley, Freddy Jenkins, and Arthur Whetsol on trumpet, joined with Tricky Sam Nanton, and Juan Tizol on trombone. Johnny Hodges, now on alto sax, with Barney Bigard doubled on tenor sax and clarinet, and finally Harry Carney at seventeen years old joined on bari sax. Carney was known as one of the first people in a band ever to use the bari sax as a solo instrument.

While Duke's band was performing at the Cotton Club, his band participated in more than sixty-four recording sessions.

In 1931 Duke grew so tired of the show-business routines that he decided to try his luck again on his own. When he arrived in New York his band grew to almost three times what it originally had been at the Cotton Club. Duke feared that this would become a very serious problem considering how the stock market crashed in late 1929 and millions of people across the United States were out of work. Somehow, though, most of the entertainment business survived the economic hardships. Ellington's band had appeared on Broadway and had even gone to Hollywood to make a movie. Duke's band was having a hard time performing in the south because of the segregation laws not allowing blacks to eat in white restaurants or finding accommodations that would allow blacks and whites to stay together in a half-decent room.

In 1932 Duke added a trombonist named Lawrence Brown. In the same year, most of the other big bands were adding vocalists to their ensemble and thus Duke felt pressured to do so too. Duke then hired a woman named Ivie Anderson and quickly proved that he had done the right thing.

Then in 1933 his band got a chance to play in Europe. At first Duke was very skeptical of how his

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music would be reacted to just because jazz had its roots in America and the Europeans had a very contrasting style of music. The band managed to talk Duke into believing the idea was a good one. The band's first stop was England. The band was amazed at how well informed they were about their entire past. Even the Prince of Wales came to hear the band play. At the time the prince was an amateur drummer and Sonny Greer Showed the prince how to work the drum set and they played together and in the end were calling each other 'Sonny' and 'The Wale'. All the concerts held in England were sellouts. The band then moved on to Scotland, and then Paris, France where their music was greeted with open arms.

When Duke's band returned to America the band really began feeling the hardship and sorrow of traveling on the road, being separated from loved ones. Also, many of the band members, including Duke, began developing drinking problems and started making some of the musicians lives miserable. What made things worse was the fact that Duke's mother, Daisy, died in May of 1935 that set Duke into a deep depression and he used to sit and stare into space while he talked to himself. Fortunately though, those long pep-talks with himself seem to snap Duke out of his depression.

But despite everything the band survived and in 1946 a saxophonist/clarinetist named Russell Procope joined the band and brought everyone up to a new point of view about traveling on the road. Around the time that Procope joined the band Duke invented a new song called 'Reminiscing in Tempo' and

was not looked upon favorably by critics but it did seem to sum everything up that was written by Ellington from 1931 to 1939 in a combination of gladness, sadness, triumph, and tragedy. But then Duke's friend Arthur Whetsol became and had to leave the band.

Then the future of the band seemed uncertain as the depression continued and millions of people were still out of work. Until around 1935 when the 'Swing Era' hit the U.S. Irving Mills had then formed his own record company in 1936 that boomed with popularity as the demand for big bands playing this new swing music was in intense demand.

Later on Duke hired a lyrical writer named Billy Strayhorn that led a premature death in 1967. But when Strayhorn was with the band he wrote many compositions that often went into the band's book of music. Then in 1942 Duke hired one of the best tenor saxophonists ever and let him play the first tenor sax solo ever arranged by Duke Ellington.

In 1951 Saxophonist Johnny Hodges, trombonist Lawrence Brown, and Sonny Greer left the band together and formed their own band but then in 1955 Sonny Greer returned to the band and stayed with Duke until his death in 1970. And then by the 1950's the Ellington band was carrying on almost alone.

By 1972 the times and styles of the world no longer fit the old time style of Duke's band. The band was not known like it used to be and that could be the point in time I suppose you could say that the band broke up.

Duke Ellington's career spanned the whole history of the birth of the music called jazz. And nowhere in that glorious history is there a man who had more love for music, more respect for his art, than the man they called the Duke.

David Kunstek writes for [Http://www.ShotGlassShelf.com](http://www.ShotGlassShelf.com) - Display Cases for the Shot Glass Collector, and [Http://www.Secret-Deals.com](http://www.Secret-Deals.com) - Every day discounts on Brand Name Merchandise

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John Wayne Took The Good With The Bad

By Stephen Schochet

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For the last twenty years of his life, John Wayne often had a profound effect on people that crossed his path. Meeting him in person for some was like meeting Abraham Lincoln or George Washington. Yet the Duke usually stayed humble and almost always kept his sense of humor.

One time he was out with a group of friends who all were all eating and drinking heavily. The Duke excused himself to go to the men's room and when he came back his pants leg was wet. "Hey Duke what happened?" one of them asked.

"Nothing. Happens all the time. I'm used to it." "What happens?"

The Duke looked annoyed. "All right, if you must know I'm standing in the men's room and there's some yahoo standing next to me and he says 'Oh my god you're John Wayne and he turned. . .'"

Stephen Schochet is the author and narrator of the audiobooks "Fascinating Walt Disney" and "Tales Of Hollywood". The Saint Louis Post Dispatch says, "these two elaborate productions are exceptionally entertaining." Hear realaudio samples of these great, unique gifts at www.hollywoodstories.com.



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