

Feb. 11

A SALUTE TO BLACK HISTORY WEEK

Feb. 15

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10330 Meridian Avenue North
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EDWARD "DUKE" ELLINGTON Composer Musician - 1899-

Edward (Duke) Ellington was born in Washington, D.C. in 1899. At seven years old he began taking piano lessons and continued his musical training with the intention of becoming a performing artist. He attended Armstrong High School where he earned the nickname "Duke" because of his suave manner and meticulous style of dress. Instead of going on to college after graduating from Armstrong High, Ellington decided to pursue his interest in commercial art and his new love-jazz music.

He formed his own jazz group which played for dances and parties in the Washington area. In 1923 Fats Waller persuaded him to move to New York. Duke and his Washingtonians were engaged at Barron's in Harlem and later at the Kentucky Club on Broadway. It was during this period that he expanded the rhythm section and developed unique solo styles. The band hit the big time with an engagement at the Cotton Club on Lenox Avenue, which lasted for two years. *Black and Tan Fantasy*; *Creole Love Call*; *The Mooche*; *Black Beauty* and *Mood Indigo* were a few of the compositions which emerged during this period. In 1932, the year of *Sophisticated Lady*, the band performed at Columbia University at the request of the director of the department of music.



In 1933 the Ellington band made its first European tour. This trip was highlighted by appearances at the Palladium, the Trocadero in London, and the Palais de Chaillot in Paris. His reception in Europe was unprecedented and upon his return to America he found a musical following equally responsive to his creative efforts. *Daybreak Express*; *Solitude*; *In a Sentimental Mood*; *Caravan*; *Prelude to a Kiss* and *Harmony in Harlem* were among the hits which emerged during the band's first successful decade. Movie appearances included: *Murder at the Vanities* and *Belle of the Nineties*, 1934; *Symphony in Black*,

1935 and *A Day at the Races*, 1937.

During the early 1940's Ellington produced some of his most outstanding works. Strayhorn's *Take the 'A' Train*, became the band's theme song. In 1941 the band appeared in *Jump for Joy*, a musical revue which premiered in Hollywood. *I've Got It Bad and That Ain't Good*, was considered the outstanding work from this performance.

Ellington initiated a series of Carnegie Hall concerts in January 1943 with his presentation of *Black, Brown and Beige*. The composition, which ran about fifty minutes, was his first attempt at combining the essential elements of jazz into a work suitable for performance in a concert hall. During his subsequent Carnegie Hall recitals he introduced *Deep South Suite*, *Blutopia*, *Liberian Suite* and *New World A-Comin'*. *Harlem* was played at an Ellington concert in the Metropolitan Opera House in 1951. The Ellington band combined with the Symphony of the Air to premiere his *Night Creature* at Carnegie Hall in March 1955.

The popularity of Ellington was enhanced by his brilliant performance at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1956, which resulted in his appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine. In 1959 he wrote his first movie score—*Anatomy of a Murder*. The following year he wrote the score for *Paris Blues*.

Ellington wrote and produced *My People* for the Century of Negro Progress Exposition in Chicago (1963). He also wrote the music for a Canadian production of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*. In 1965 he performed in the Festival of the Arts at the White House and with the Boston Pops Orchestra at Tanglewood. Later the same year Ellington presented what he regarded as his greatest musical achievement—his first sacred concert. On September 16, 1965 Ellington and Company gathered in the chancel of San Francisco's Grace Cathedral and offered their best in music to the Creator, each in the language of his own instrument. The second sacred concert was presented in the world's largest cathedral, St. John the Divine in New York, before an audience of over six thousand people. Subsequent concerts were presented at St. Mark's in New Canaan, Connecticut and A.M.E. Mother Zion Cathedral in Harlem.

Duke Ellington's creative efforts won him honors in the *Down Beat* and *Metronome* polls and in the *Down Beat* Hall of Fame. In 1966 he was presented with the President's Gold Medal in Madrid, Spain. Yale University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Music in 1967. At a White House celebration on his seventieth birthday, Ellington was presented with the Medal of Freedom by the President. This was a fitting tribute to this genius of twentieth century music.



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