

The Ecumenical Ellington

What occurred in the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine on New York's 110th Street and Amsterdam Avenue at 1:00 P.M. on Memorial Day, May 27, 1974, was that rarest of happenings—a funeral that was not funereal, a solemn ceremony of separation that commemorated the triumph of a life, not its submission to death. It was broadcast *in toto*—meaning recorded on tape and audible to all who want it.

It could hardly be otherwise with "Duke" Ellington. His life was recalled not only in such eloquent words of tribute as those of Stanley Dance, printed herewith, but also by the sounds that resounded through that life, eloquently recalled through the ceremony in the musical tributes of Earl Hines, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Taylor, Jo Jones, Joe Williams, Mary Lou Williams, and McHenry Boatwright.

If Duke's life was made of music, the music was made of the stuff of that life itself—its youth and age, its joys and sorrows, its aspirations, hopes, disappointments, and fulfillments. It began saucy, self-assured, with "Soda Fountain Rag," when Duke was a teenage

soda jerk working in Washington, D.C.; vibrantly physical in the years of his first great successes; responsively compassionate to the needs of his people at the time when it was appropriate; eventually, enriched and regenerated by his experience, to communicate faith through "Sacred Concerts" unlike any others ever heard.

It should be noted that when Ellington asserted the belief that something he wrote was directed to "my people," he didn't mean people of color—but just "people." And when he spoke of music, it was not in terms of serious or popular, light or heavy, short or long. His heart leaped up when he beheld the likes of Florence Mills (in 1928) or a lovely beach in Togo (in 1970), with results that poured forth in "Black Beauty" and "Togo Brava, Brava Togo."

Ecumenical has had a particular, special meaning in recent times, which is valid in itself. It also has a wider, general meaning—"pertaining to the habitable world, universal"—which applies to Ellington as it would to few others of our time.

IRVING KOLODIN

Citizen of the World

by Stanley Dance

It is hard to do justice in words to a beloved friend, especially when the friend was a genius of the rarest kind.

So, first, the basic facts of his temporal existence:

Edward Kennedy Ellington, "Duke" Ellington, born in Washington, D.C., 1899, died in New York, 1974.

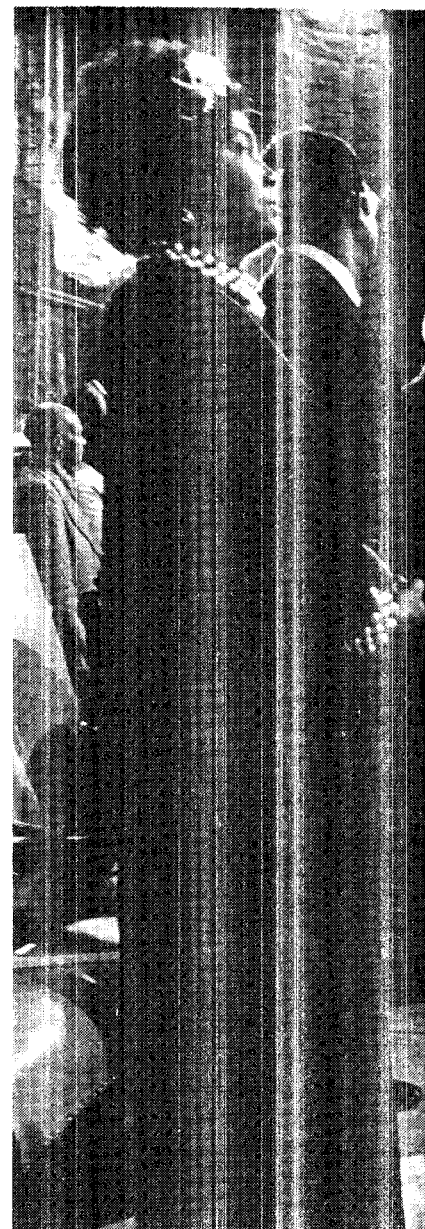
Now, some might claim him as a citizen of one or the other of those cities, but he was not. In the truest sense of the phrase, he was a citizen of the world. That is a cliché perhaps, but how few are those who *deserve* it as he did. He was loved throughout the whole world, at all levels of society, by Frenchmen and Germans, by English and Irish, by Arabs and Jews, by Indians and Pakistanis, by atheists and devout Catholics, and by Communists and Fascists alike.

Stanley Dance is author of The World of Duke Ellington and was associated with Mr. Ellington for many years.

So, no, not even this city, in which, as he said, he paid rent and had his mailbox—not even New York can claim him exclusively for its own.

Of all the cities he conquered—more than Napoleon, and by much better methods—I remember particularly Buenos Aires when he went there the first time. He had played his final concert and sat in the car outside the theater before going to the airport. People clutched at him through the opened windows—people who were crying, who thrust gifts on him, gifts on which they hadn't even written their names. It was one of the few times I saw him moved to tears.

As a musician, he hated categories. He didn't want to be restricted, and although he mistrusted the word *jazz*, his definition of it was "freedom of expression." If he wished to write an opera, or music for a ballet or a symphony, a Broadway musical, or a movie, he didn't want to feel confined to the idiom in



Allen Green: Gamma

Funeral service for Duke Ellington

which he was the unchallenged, acknowledged master.

As with musical categories, so with categories of people. Categories of class, race, color, creed, and money were of noxious to him. He made his subtle, telling contributions to the civil rights struggle in musical statements—in "Jump for Joy" in 1941, in "The Deep South Suite" in 1946, and in "My People" in 1961. Long before black was officially beautiful—in 1928, to be precise—he had written "Black Beauty" and dedicated it to a great artist, Florence Mills. And with "Black, Brown, and Beige" in 1943, he proudly delineated the black contribution to American history.

His scope constantly widened, and right up to the end he remained a creative force, his imagination stimulated by experience. There was much more to



memorated the triumph of life."

ad to write, and undoubtedly would have written, but a miraculous aspect of his work is not merely the quality but also the quantity of it. Music was indeed his mistress. He worked hard, did not spare himself, and virtually died in harness. Only last fall he set out on one of the most exhausting tours of his career. He premiered his third "Sacred Concert" at Westminster Abbey for the United Nations, did one-nighters in all the European capitals, went to Abyssinia and Cambodia for the State Department, and returned to London for a command performance before Queen Elizabeth. When people asked if he would ever retire, he used to reply scornfully, "Retire to what?"

His career cannot be described in a few minutes. Where would one start? With the composer, the bandleader, the pianist, the arranger, the author, the

playwright, the painter? He was a jack-of-all-trades and master of all he turned his hand to. Or should one start with the complex human being—at once sophisticated, primitive, humorous, tolerant, positive, ironic, childlike (not childish), lionlike, shepherdlike, Christian...? He was a natural aristocrat who never lost the common touch. He was the greatest innovator in his field and yet, paradoxically, a conservative, one who built new things on the best of the old and disdained ephemeral fashion.

I certainly would never pretend that I knew wholly this wonderful man, although I spent much time in his company and enjoyed his trust. The two people who knew him best were his son, Mercer, and his sister, Ruth, and their loss is the greatest of all. Otherwise, his various associates and friends knew different aspects of him but never, as they readily admit, the whole man.

Song titles say a good deal. "Mood Indigo," "Sophisticated Lady," "Caravan," "Solitude," "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "I'm Beginning to See the Light," and "Satin Doll" are part of the fabric of twentieth-century life. But the popular song hits are only a small part of Duke Ellington's priceless legacy to mankind. His music will be interpreted by others, but never with the significance and tonal character given it by his own band and soloists, for whom it was written. In that respect, his records are the greatest of his gifts to us. Here one can enter a unique world, filled with his dreams, emotions, fantasies, and fascinating harmonies. He brought out qualities in his musicians they did not always know they possessed. He had the knack of making good musicians sound great and great musicians sound the greatest. As the best arranger in the business, he was able to furnish them with superb backgrounds, and as one of the most inventive—and underrated—of pianists, he gave them inspiring accompaniment. He was, in fact, more of an inspiration than an influence, and though he made no claim to being a disciplinarian, he ruled his realm with wisdom.

The importance of this realm did not go unrecognized, and he was by no means a prophet without honor in his native land. He celebrated his seventieth birthday in the White House, where President Nixon bestowed the highest civilian honor upon him, appropriately the Medal of Freedom. Presidents Johnson, Eisenhower, and Truman had all

recognized his achievements in different ways. No less than 17 colleges conferred honorary degrees upon him. Other high honors came to him from Emperor Haile Selassie, from France, and from Sweden. His likeness appeared on the postage stamps of Togo and Chad.

Withal, Duke Ellington knew that what some called genius was really the exercise of gifts that stemmed from God. These gifts were those his Maker favored. The Son of God said: "Fear not. Go out and teach all nations. Proclaim the good news to all men." And Duke knew the good news was Love, of God and his fellow men. He proclaimed the message in his "Sacred Concerts," grateful for an opportunity to acknowledge something of which he stood in awe, a power he considered above his human limitations. He firmly believed what the mother he worshiped also believed—that he had been blessed at birth. He reached out to people with his music and drew them to himself.

There must be many here who can testify to his assumption—conscious or unconscious—of a father's role. Those he befriended are legion. His sense of family embraced not only the members of his band throughout the years but also people from all walks of life whose paths crossed his. Wherever or whenever he could, he personally resolved for those about him problems involving doubts, anxieties, illness, and grief. Loyalty was the quality he greatly esteemed in others, and it was generously reciprocated by him.

It is Memorial Day, when those who died for the free world are properly remembered. Duke Ellington never lost faith in this country, and he served it well. His music will go on serving it for years to come. □

In place of a fee Stanley Dance has requested that an appropriate donation be given to the Duke Ellington Memorial Fund for Cancer Research at the Presbyterian Hospital, 622 West 168th Street, New York, N.Y. 10032.

**ANSWER TO MIDDLETON
DOUBLE-CROSTIC NO. 52**

**RICHARD ARMOUR:
GOING LIKE SIXTY**

Triceps are the only muscles in which I can and do take pride. In other areas, which I do not offer for feeling by strangers or even close friends, I am about what is expected of a person my age. In other words, flabby.



Photographs: Dena Kaye

Cheung Chau—Dim sum sold by strolling vendors, money stamped Hell Bank Notes.

China Without a Visa

by Dena Kaye

A few miles from China, atop a mountain set in the South China Sea, a thick white mist enveloped the Buddhist monastery of the Precious Lotus. From my crow's-nest on a nearby hill, I watched the tip of its yellow roof disappear. As this cotton puff veiled my vision of the grounds, all the sounds seemed to be amplified: wind rushed in like breaking waves, birds chorused their staccato song with operatic bravura, and the monks' hymn echoed across the valley.

This ethereal picture of mountain

peaks swathed in clouds, painted for centuries by Chinese artists, is seldom the vision associated with a visit to Hong Kong. Rather, this trading post of Asia, born as a British colony out of the opium traffic in the 1840s, has been dedicated to turning a dollar. For the tourist, it has been a bargain counter where custom-made suits cost half the stateside prices, Ming porcelain went for the cost of five-and-ten china, and jade baubles were as reasonable as glass jewelry.

Indeed, 1974 is the Year of the Tiger, a symbol of hard work that, along with the season's winning horse at Happy Valley racetrack, running under the

name Money Talks, may well be a personification of Hong Kong's purpose in life. As Richard Hughes, eminent Australian journalist who makes the city his headquarters, has said, the Hong Kong formula for success is "low taxes no controls, quick profits, hard work laissez-faire."

While this equation may still work in the marketplace, the traveler may want to revise his reasons for a visit. Hong Kong prices, in spite of a five-to-one conversion rate with the U.S. dollar, have now reached inflated American and Western European levels. Duty-free advantages are often negated. And official Hong Kong tourist-office guidebook warn against fraudulent bargains. But with the diminished savings, perhaps the deeper fascination of Hong Kong will emerge.

IF HONG KONG is no longer a shopping arcade worth a trip halfway round the world, surely it remains a repository of things to see. I inspected such sight as the New Territories, once considered the agricultural outback of Hong Kong the village life of some offshore islands and on Hong Kong island itself, those hallmarks of Chinese culture—herb medicine stores, restaurants with provincial cuisines—and ventured out to Aberdeen, the city of the boat people.

Coiners of instant phrases have called Hong Kong Instant China. The closes you can get to Mao's domain is the New Territories, a 365-square-mile hinterland that is actually on the Chinese mainland. It was added to the British colony by a lease from the Chinese in 1898, an agreement that will expire in 1997. But no one despairs about the date. Most consider it an artificial deadline. The New Territories shares a 20 mile land frontier with China. The line of demarcation is the Shum Chun River best seen from a special lookout point called Lok Ma Chau. A thick verdant belt, sliced by beds of water, leads up to a muscular mountain range. "That is China," the guide says. The vista could be anywhere, but it is China, and that somehow gives it a certain cachet. Memories of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, and Han Suyin's stories flood the mind.

A thousand years ago, the New Territories was a tropical forest inhabited by tigers, crocodiles, and elephants. Today this backyard of Hong Kong provides glimpses of Old China—medieval walled villages, men patiently following teams of water buffalo, long lines of women