



Beyond Category: The Life And Genius Of Duke Ellington

By John Edward Hasse

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One of the twentieth century's greatest composers, Duke Ellington (1899–1974) led a fascinating life. *Beyond Category*, the first biography to draw on the vast Duke Ellington archives at the Smithsonian Institution, recounts his remarkable career: his childhood in Washington, D.C., and his musical apprenticeship in Harlem; his long engagement at the Cotton Club; the challenging years of the depression; his tours to Europe and into America's deep South, where he helped lower racial barriers; the postwar years when television and bebop threatened to eclipse the big bands; Ellington's own triumphant comeback at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival; his collaborations with Billy Strayhorn, Johnny Hodges, and Ella Fitzgerald; as well as five decades of hits and masterpieces that constantly broke new ground. The art of Duke Ellington was a musical expression of the African-American experience, in all its pain, pride, and glory. He composed his music as he composed his life—with flair, passion, and individuality—and no book reveals the man and his artistic evolution more brilliantly than *Beyond Category*.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

One of the 20th century's greatest composers, Duke Ellington (1899-1974) led a fascinating life. The first biography to draw on the vast Duke Ellington archives at the Smithsonian Institution, this book recounts the entirety of his remarkable career: his childhood in Washington, D.C. and musical apprenticeship in Harlem; his long engagement at the glamorous, gangster-owned Cotton Club; the challenging years during the Depression; his tours to Europe and into America's deep South, where he helped lower racial barriers; the postwar years when television and bebop threatened to eclipse the big bands; Ellington's own triumphant comeback at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival; his collaborations with Billy Strayhorn, Johnny Hodges, Ella Fitzgerald, and John Coltrane, among others; and of course, the music itself, five decades of hits and masterpieces that constantly broke new ground.

John Edward Hasse serves as Curator of American Music at the Smithsonian Institution, curator of its traveling exhibition *Beyond Category*, and producer and annotator of the boxed set of recordings by the same name.

From Publishers Weekly

"He captured the sounds of trains, planes, babies, and lions and tigers and bears with his orchestra," says trumpeter Marsalis in his poetic tribute to the great jazz composer and performer, Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington (1899-1974). Hasse, curator of American music at the Smithsonian Institution and of a traveling exhibition called *Beyond Category: The Musical Genius of Duke Ellington*, is similarly comprehensive in cataloging the minutiae--meaningful and otherwise--of Ellington's illustrious life and career. Drawing on previously untapped documents made available by Mercer Ellington's donation of his father's archives to the National Museum of American History, Hasse traces the Duke's development from his childhood in Washington, D.C., to New York City's Cotton Club to a career that took him on a seemingly endless tour through North America, Europe and the Near East playing with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Count Basie and John Coltrane. To help those who want to hear the achievement, Hasse ends each chapter with the "Essential Ellington" recordings for the years covered in that chapter. Accompanied by 119 photographs from the Ellington archives, Hasse has written a delightful and finely detailed biography of an American legend at work.

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From Library Journal

Hasse, curator of American Music at the Smithsonian Institution, charts the musical career of jazz giant Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington (1899-1974). Using previously unavailable family papers now housed at the Smithsonian, he admiringly describes Ellington's accomplishments as a composer and bandleader. Hasse includes an account of Ellington's formative years in Washington D.C., his breakthrough at New York's Cotton Club, his heyday during the 1930s and 1940s, and his subsequent successes. The author also highlights the essential Ellington recordings in discrete sections within each chapter. Though offering few new insights or facts about the jazz master, Hasse provides a well-researched synthesis of the extensive Ellingtonia that should serve as a companion to the recent *The Duke Ellington Reader* (LJ 9/1/93). For scholars and fans of American music.

- David Szatmary, Univ. of Washington, Seattle

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Gabriel Badger:

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