

# The Duke Ellington Orchestra

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington born April 29, 1899 is regarded as one of the most prolific American composers of the Twentieth century. His career spanned more than 50 years and included leading his orchestra, composing an inexhaustible songbook, scoring for movies, composing stage musicals, and world tours. Duke Ellington called his music "American Music" rather than jazz, and liked to describe those who impressed him as "beyond category." He remains one of the most influential figures in jazz, if not in all American music, and is widely considered as one of the Twentieth century's best known African American personalities. As both a composer and a band leader, Duke Ellington influenced millions of people both around the world and at home. He gave American music its own sound for the first time. In his fifty year career, he played over 20,000 performances in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East as well as Asia. Ellington led his band from 1923 until his death on May 24, 1974 at the age of 75. At this point, his son Mercer Ellington took leadership of the band. Mercer was an accomplished trumpet player and composer who wrote many songs for his father's orchestra including the standard "Things Ain't What They Used to Be." In the early 1980s he became the first conductor for a Broadway musical of his father's music, *Sophisticated Ladies*. Under his direction he toured and recorded the Orchestra for the next 22 years until his own death in 1996. At this point the baton was passed to Mercer's youngest son Paul Mercer Ellington who has been leading the orchestra and fearlessly preserving the music and legacy of the great Duke Ellington. The Duke Ellington Orchestra has been performing worldwide for the past 88 years under the guidance of three generations of the Ellington family and will continue to do so for many years to come.

In 2007, The Duke Ellington Orchestra traveled over four continents to play and promote the music of Duke Ellington. The Orchestra was the featured Performer at the prestigious Tokyo Jazz Festival and the Cape May Jazz Festival (one of the longest running jazz festivals in the United States).

In 2008, the Duke Ellington Orchestra again travelled throughout the world including two tours in Japan, Puerto Rico, and a six-week United States West Coast tour. The orchestra performed at the world famous jazz clubs Jazz Alley in Seattle, Blues Alley in Washington DC, Billboard Clubs in Japan, Blue Note New York and Nagoya. The year also included a return to the Cotton Club Tokyo and the closing day performance at the prestigious Heineken Jazz Festival.

In 2009, the Duke Ellington Orchestra returned to Japan and performed with the Colorado Symphony and the Austin Symphony. The Orchestra completed a Far East tour that included Taiwan and its first ever performances in China. In May, they recorded its first studio recording in over thirty years.

The Orchestra had an excellent year in 2010 as well. There was an European tour-- including seven performances in eight Russian cities, and performances in Finland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Bucharest. They returned to Japan and China with a featured performance at the prestigious Beijing Jazz Festival. The Duke Ellington Orchestra also played with the Indianapolis Symphony and the Utah Symphony.

For 2011, the Orchestra conducted a three week tour of Japan and a two week tour of Europe (Greece, Slovakia, Hungary, Germany, and Portugal. The orchestra were featured performers in the Macau International Music Festival and the Gold Key Jazz Festival in Myrtle Beach, CA. Orchestral performances will include dates with The Buffalo Philharmonic, the Detroit Symphony, and the Ft. Worth Symphony.

This year, the Orchestra is scheduled to perform at the Blue Note NYC and the Howard Theater in Washington DC. Featured performances will also include playing at the Hollywood Bowl, the Montreal International Jazz Festival, and the Joy of Jazz in Johannesburg, South Africa.