



## **Msgr. John Sanders**

Location: N/A

Date: N/A

### **Duke was such a great showman.**

Growing up in Harlem, there was music at the Savoy Ballroom and at different theaters that had Vaudeville. The Harlem Opera House, the LaFayette, the Outhamber, and the Apollo Theater. I will never forget the evening my aunt took me to see Duke Ellington at the Apollo. I was aware that every week they had big bands coming in and out to play the Apollo. Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, you can name them, just a long list of names, week after week. But this night, when I went to hear Duke, I was quite taken back by the way the show began. Usually, there's a movie and then, the movie's over, the theater was darkened. And then a voice would probably say, "And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, The Duke Ellington and his orchestra." And the outer curtain would open, the main curtain, and it's quiet, and all of a sudden you're looking at an orchestra on stage, behind a scrim, a thin curtain that you can barely see through. You see outlines of images, like silhouettes. All scattered on a stage, up on a bandstand and it's darkened and all of a sudden it's a spotlight on maybe a single soloist, maybe a trombone playing a few bars of something like "Caravan." Or, and then it would switch to the middle, Duke standing there with his back to the audience. But you could see this tall figure in the middle playing at a little spinet which was placed on the bandstand under the drums.

### **Trombone and a spotlight**

A spotlight. And then the spotlights would be shifting around this bandstand, catching Duke at the piano, a spinet piano, directing and setting up introductions to prepare for the next selection. And then all of a sudden, you're looking at a trio down in front of the bandstand at a microphone playing something like "Mood Indigo" or "Solitude," three instruments. Maybe a trumpet, a trombone and a clarinet. And then an ensemble piece, you'd see

images all playing together and then again, another soloist on this side of the stage. And this work, what was happening, it was an opening medley of some of Duke's compositions. Different moods, different pictures being created. Something exciting, something brilliant and then all of a sudden something very quiet, whispering. And at. . .

Yes. Duke had a way of beginning his, his portion of the stage show with, with an opening medley just creating different moods and different pictures and seeing soloists or a few musicians then hearing the whole ensemble but only in dimmed fashion. But the sound was beautiful. And the, the, the vision which was a visual treat and, and an audio treat as well. You're listening and watching. And all of a sudden, this medley would conclude. And then the scrim. . .

The medley would conclude, the scrim would go up and Duke would turn around, the lights would come up and there's the orchestra in full view as you see everyone and Duke would step to the microphone and in a warm way greet the audience and begin to play one selection after another. Looking back on it, I realized what he was doing, he was playing a miniature concert. Because his portion of the stage show was just Ellington compositions featuring different men in the orchestra. He had written this one for that particular musician to play, it's a soloist. Maybe like Rex Stuart playing "Boy Meets Horn." Or at a later date, Ben Webster coming forward to take the solo role in "Cotton Tail," an up-tempo swing number featuring the tenor sax. Or sometimes, I'll never forget this, one day, I heard Duke at the Apollo playing "Ajur." It's a quiet, meditative piece, about three minutes in length but three musicians come to the microphone, center stage, and play, a muted trumpet, a muted trombone, and a clarinet. And they play this beautiful melody. The house is hushed? And you realize, you're not listening to another swing tune or popular song. There's more here in these minutes. And what the mood he creates. And then, when it's over,

**You said there's more to it, the music has such depth. How does Duke create this music?**

Listening to Duke and this orchestra on stage, after you hear one selection after another, you become aware that there's a great depth to the things he's written. He has an intent for everything. He may want to write something for the orchestra to show its wonderful ensemble sound and the powerful swinging ability it has. Then again, he may just want to feature a trio of musicians creating a special mood. And you know, you somehow, there's, there's something deep here, there's something very deep here into his writing. You know he's thought about it. What he's going to write. Who is going to play it. How it's going to be played. All this is part of the compositional apparatus, you might say, the makeup. And listening to this op... a stage show after the opening medley and all these musicians coming forward to play solos, to play with each other in small groupings and then play together, full ensemble. When the stage show is over, you just wanted to hear it again, just wanted to hear it again.

**When he was young – classical composer. Cooke told him to go to the Conservatory. Duke said he didn't want to go to the Conservatory because he didn't want to learn what they were teaching.**

Duke Ellington, a real composer, he believed in what he was writing. The orchestra was his instrument. And he wrote for different individuals in that orchestra but the intent there was always something he wanted to convey to the people. Sometimes he just wanted to do something descriptive. All right. Something that would create a picture like the "Deep South Suite." Which was written in the 40's. Or he wanted to maybe celebrate something of, of another country and, and, and share their joy like the "Liberian Suite" in the 40's, premiered at Carnegie Hall. Duke had such purpose. He wanted to write for individuals, for the orchestra, and to create different pictures, different moods, express different feelings. And I think Duke believed that he had this ability to convey something special. He believed in his knowledge of a harmony which he developed. A harmonic language his own. He knew the basics, of course, but he took that and developed it into his own language. He knew the orchestra so well, the colors of each instrument. But not just his instrument. To Duke, a trumpet was not just a trumpet, it was an individual. It was a Hal Baker, a Ray Nance, a Clark Terry, a Cat Anderson. All different sounds, Willy Cooke. A saxophone was not just an instrument, but it was a person. One taste is Harry Carney playing the baritone sax. Johnny Hodges on the alto. Though he was working with colors, with a color, the orchestration and the harmony. All this he had the ability to put together in a composition. He believed in himself. And he felt that, he believed in the orchestra. They understood him so well that they could convey what he was trying to bring forward. They had that ability to respond to Duke. Duke had the trust in them and the results have been just phenomenal.

**You told me about copying for him. He wouldn't just write the melody, he would write the whole orchestration.**

My experience with Duke Ellington was more than just playing the valve trombone, that was enough, just to be a member of the trombone section. But somewhere along the line there, he was told that I could copy. I had copied a, copied an arrangement for Jimmy Hamilton and he encouraged me, why not copy for Duke? Duke loved to have a copyist on the road so that he can have work extracted from his scores copied out and placed on the bandstand right away, maybe that night, or the next night and hear it. So when Duke wrote, he wrote very quickly, but very accurately. When he heard a melody, the melody was already taking shape. Who is going to play this melody? How is this going to come forward? Is it going to be an ensemble statement or is it going to be a statement by Harry Carney with a, a, a brass accompaniment. Would it be just a solo piece for one instrument and then another? He already was conceiving whole ideas. And when he started writing the melody, he put it right on score paper and he would write on various staves. The saxophones on one staff or maybe two. The baritone

sax and the other four on another staff. The trombones on a staff. The trumpets. So he was orchestrating right away. So when you got the score from Duke, it was ready to be extracted, to be copied. He very seldom. . .

### **Copying later. You were saying that he would write out all the trombone parts on one ...**

Staff. Duke had a way of putting everything on a score in a very concise way. Orchestrators usually like a long score sheet where they start from the top, from the flute, woodwinds, brass, right down to the string section, percussion. And each instrument, it's on a line and which the copyist could just copy, right. With Duke, you get a, a, a score which is all together, the musical material, the harmony, the rhythm and the voicing which is so important. The voicing. Who's on top. Who's on bottom. Who's playing the lead. And how to voice the other parts. So Duke had it all there. He showed me how to take a score and to copy for each man in that band the correct part but making sure that the party intended would be played by that individual. So, everything was together. The only thing I had to check with Duke sometimes is where, where were we going from this point, I wasn't sure. Are we going back to letter A? Or go to B and then come back. But he had a way of giving you a road map, so to speak, that you could follow. If you got in trouble, you go to his room anytime, he's always available. But you would copy, extracting, you're taking out from the score a part for Harry, a part for Johnny Hodges, a part for Brit Woodman, trombone or Butter, the third trombone and the trumpets. So that each man had his part. And the name was on the part. It wasn't first trumpet; it was Cat Anderson or another trumpet, Hal Baker, Clark Terry.

### **He hears this all in his head.**

Yeah. As he hears a melody taking shape whether he's sitting on a bus or sitting in a coffee shop or walking to a recording studio, whatever. When he hears a melody, right away he's thinking of orchestra, how it's going to be played, who is going to play it, so when he picks up the pencil and the score paper, he begins to score it right then and there and he doesn't have to sit at a piano to figure out things. He liked to have a piano around, sometimes it's nice. But not having a piano did not prevent Duke from scoring and writing new material.

### **Compose on the road.**

It would not be unusual at night when we finished an engagement, we were on the bus, everybody's settled down, the lights go out, the driver takes off and there's a little conversation after a while and after a while it gets quiet. And the musicians could fall off to sleep. I had a hard time sleeping on the bus at night. It gets ..... with me, but I was always awake it seemed. But, I sat in the seat behind Duke. It was one of these old seat on the bus. Everybody had their seat. And I sat behind Duke and it would not be unusual

for the light to go on over his seat, a little head light, a little over, overhead light and Duke would reach up, there's always a manuscript on the bus. He said, always got to have it, manuscript. And then he would reach up and he would be hunched over his seat, he'd be writing something. And when he got finished, the light would go out and then he would put the manuscript, the manuscript above his seat, overhead. And go on, nod off. But he would write anywhere. He liked to write in his hotel room if he's, after an engagement. When most of us would fall off to sleep, Duke's in his room writing until dawn. He writes, at night. It's fine. It's quiet. The telephone isn't ringing. He doesn't have to see people. And manuscript and he could just go to, sometimes you'd have a little, little piano, electric piano in his room. But most places he couldn't get one, unless you're playing like the Sherman Hotel, a four-week engagement at the Blue Note. Then be sure to have a little piano there that he can just work out things. But not having it didn't stop him. He's forever thinking of something and he wants to hear it right away. That's why having a copyist, an extractor, on the road, he didn't have to wait 'til he got back to New York to call Tom Whaley who was a wonderful copyist, an extractor. Tom knew Duke's scores. He knew where to go and what to do with it. But he couldn't wait after two or one-nighters to get back to New York. He wanted, wants to hear it now.

### **Why does he need to hear it right away?**

It's just like when you create something, you want to see it, or you want to, with a composer, you want to hear it. And Duke had that impatience of a sense, in a good sense, wanted to hear it, don't want to wait until we get back to a, a recor, a, a rehearsal studio. He wants to hear it now. And then he'd know how to add to it if it wasn't complete. But very seldom would Duke have to take the eraser and said no and change things. What he gave me to copy, that's the way it was going to be. One morning I woke up in my hotel room. It was on, doing one-nighters out in the midwest and Duke had a deadline, "Such Sweet Sunder," the Shakespeare suite. Had to have that ready when he got back to New York. And he was writing on the road. And one morning when I got up in my room, under my door there was manuscript. He shoved the score under my door meaning, "John, if you get a chance, would you?" And so, I knew that my day was cut out for me. I always had manuscript in my room and ink and I have to start copying in ink because they have to see it on the bandstand with lights. They can't look twice, they got to see it right the first time. And Duke was so grateful to hear a chorus or an arrangement on the bandstand that night or the night after. And it would just, it was a great thing for him. It, it, it was fulfilling like, you know, like a little boy with a new toy. He can't wait 'til next week to play with it, "Gee, mom, I want it now," you know. And Duke had that wonderful quality.

### **How did he deal with the musicians in the band?**

Coming into Duke Ellington's orchestra, is an event in itself. Just to sit in a chair in that orchestra in some section and to be playing is really something. And, and I've listened to Duke on stage, Paramount Theater, Apollo Theater, Carnegie Hall, different places but when you are in that orchestra, when you come to actually sit down and open up that huge library and begin to play, then you get to meet not only the composer, the orchestra leader, the piano player, the arranger, but you see, you meet the man himself. And my first impression, that night at the Apollo Theater when he said, "Can you," Mercer sent me to see Duke, he said, "Go back and tell Pop that I sent you." Pop, we called him. And I said, and I went back and Duke said, "Can you sit in?" He didn't know me. He only knew that I played at the Savoy Ballroom with Lucky Thompson whom he, he, he respected highly. So he said, "Can you come back?" And I said, "Yes." So I got my trombone and came back for the next show. And what he said, "And I've just gone downstairs, Butter and Bic will tell you what to do." In fact, he went down with me and showed me the opening pieces. And the lights went out and he said, "Well, don't worry, they'll tell you." And so, when we started playing and then we would play an opening number and then when Duke would come out toward the end of the number with the applause, he'd take his bow and he'd turn around, there's a spinet and he'd start playing. And then he looked up and he just looked up as if to say, "Oh, you made it." And the feeling was good. I wasn't nervous. He was going to, I wonder what he's going to, you know, think about me, you know. He just started playing. You're a member of an orchestra, you've got to play music. Here's your part, listen to the others and go ahead. And he made me feel very good. And I found that as I went on some one-nighters with Duke, my first go around with him, just a temporary thing. He never said anything about, you know, he just said, "Come out for a few nights." And I felt comfortable with that. He, he, he didn't know me. He wanted to hear me, maybe. See how it's going to work out. After all, he never met me before, hadn't really heard me. So I went out and I noticed night after night, he'd come on, very pleasant, very low key. He loved to sit at that piano and play with the orchestra. And I got to see how he dealt with the musicians. He respected them and they respected, too. They, they were entrusted with this music. As part of a section, an ensemble or a solo responsibility. And, and they, they gave back. Duke trusted them and they gave back. He treated them very, with great respect. And each one was a unique person.

**Not a disciplinarian. How did he just get the musicians to do what he wanted them to do?**

Playing in Duke Ellington's orchestra is just an experience of, not like any other kind. I know musicians would move around from one orchestra to another, sometimes they'd play with so and so for a while and then maybe someone would call and they would get an offer and they'd switch and be with this orchestra for a while. They kept moving around. When someone went with Duke Ellington, I think they were, they were aware they were with someone very special. This is not just another orchestra leader, but here was a composer. And his music had such quality and such richness and depthness

that they felt privileged to play it. I know that was my feeling. I listened to it for many years, but actually to play it. What an experience. But Duke had a great respect for the musicians. And because they were aware of this, when he had a new piece, they could respond to it. They understood what he was trying to say. They had very little rehearsal. They read very well. Very well, instantly. Right on the spot they could read, sight read a new arrangement. But they could pick it up right away, where he was going with it. And Duke would, you know, go one section to another, lean over, give a little comment, and just before you know it, they just respond. But, as I got into the orchestra more and more, I began to realize that Duke did not expect you, whoever's place you were taking, that now I have to be like so and so. When I came into the orchestra and I began to play the valve-trombone at Juan Tizol's encouragement, Duke did not make it a thing, that hey, you have to do this, or, I never felt pushed to do anything. Never felt pushed to imitate Juan or to walk in his shoes. And I don't think any other musician who came in and whether it be a saxophone player or trumpet player, that he had to be like so and so. He's going to play the music as well as he can. But Duke would listen. Listen to that individual.

### **Billy Strayhorn.**

Part of my experience with, with Duke Ellington, was meeting Billy Strayhorn, arranger, a composer, like Duke. And I was in awe of Billy Strayhorn just as I was in awe of Duke Ellington. The things that he was able to compose and arrange for the orchestra and it would come out like an Ellington, an Ellington sound. But there was that trace of individuality in Strayhorn's music, his composing and arranging. There was that individual strain which you had to recognize and you were aware of it. But Billy had the ability to make this go with Ellington. He was collaborating and helping Duke. And I think because of mutual respect for each other, they were able to work together so closely. Billy's work, in itself, the work of an artist. Duke, Billy was content. Just to help Duke. To do what Duke asked of him for the overall Ellington orchestra sound. Be it a solo piece for an instrumentalist or an ensemble piece, or an arrangement for Ivy Anderson, maybe to sing. Or Herb Jeffries and maybe later vocalist. He would fulfil what Duke would want and that's all he wanted to do. He never wanted to become a giant of, of, in that sense. He was content just to do what he was doing. But it was marvelous.

### **How did Duke feel about him?**

Duke, I think, was grateful for Billy Strayhorn. This is an unusual thing. He's a composer, now. But how many composers, you know, could work with someone else so closely, so successfully and, and accomplish what he wanted to do on the bottom line, a new composition, a new piece of music and utilizing his own compositional skills also with Billy Strayhorn's skills. Duke was grateful for that, to find someone like that who understood him and he could trust him to help him accomplish what he wanted to do. And this mutual respect of each other was the bond, I think, that held it all

together. And it will never, I think, happen again. And the musical world just stands back and applauds it. What a combination.

**In the 30's swing became the thing but Ellington could have turned out swing hits but he didn't.**

Duke Ellington was surrounded by many other orchestras, as I recall, in the 30's and going into the 40's, there were so many other orchestras coming and going it was kind of the swing era. You know, with Benny Goodman coming on the scene. I remember going to see him playing the Paramount Theater with Gene Krupa and Harry James, sing, sing, sing. And the kids are going wild, dancing in the aisles. There was, oh, a fervor, a fever about this whole swing craze and of course other bands followed. Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, of course Glenn Miller, you know. And Jimmy Lunsford, one of the greatest orchestras. Count Basie coming on the scene with his rhythm. It was just marvelous. Don Redman. But Duke, as a composer, not just another orchestra leader, or pianist, as a composer, stood his own ground. He was writing for a special orchestra, these musicians and he was not going to be carried away by a new trend or a new, a new kind of styled, just to say well he was among them. He wasn't worried about whether he's number one or two or three. He wanted to be honest to himself, to what he wanted to do with that orchestra. And so, he just swam through the whole thing and still comes out to be an immortal.

**At the Paramount with Benny Goodman?**

My Uncle was very fond of the, of musicals, going to the movies, catching the Ginger Rogers/ Fred Astaire musicals. And he loved to go to the Paramount Theater to hear the bands play. He took me once with him and we went to hear Benny Goodman and I tell you, it was just marvelous. The, the place was just, there's an excitement. This was something new that was happening. People getting up, dancing in the aisles, you know. And that was the beginning, Benny Goodman, the swing era, Tommy Dorsey, Glen Miller. How many times did I go to the Paramount Theater to hear those orchestras. And then finally, Duke used to play the Apollo most of the time, he began to play the New York Paramount Theater. And I found myself in the audience, listening to Duke. The stage shows were brief. But you had a. a chance to hear a few good selections of your favorite orchestra and when he went to, when Duke went to the Paramount, he brought that quality with him. And there were moments that you said, this is different, this is unlike any other orchestra. So I, I had a wonderful time listening to the, the orchestras playing live from the stage.

**What was Duke's music about? He said he was writing a history of black feelings in America set to rhythm and tune.**

Duke Ellington reached a large audience, they just, people loved his music, his melodies. Melodies that later came with lyrics and became popular songs.

But I think there was, there was an undercurrent in Duke's compositional life. He, he wanted to write music not just to be called jazz music. I think there was something about Duke's compositions, even the titles alluded to it. He was writing about Negro-American music. His people were important to him. And he did it through, through music. And he conveyed the, the, the life of the Negro-American in, in different dimensions. He captured their feelings, their moods, their ups, their downs. At the times of the songs, it showed that Duke was very conscious of people around him. Living in Harlem, he, he, he understood Harlem. He wrote a piece called "Harlem Air Shaft," you know. He wrote things like "Tooting Through the Roof," for, for, for the brass to shine. He caught, from his earliest pieces like "Black and Tan Fantasy" he was already expressing a mood of a people and their struggles and their joys as well as their sorrows. Their good feelings, their bad feelings. Those early pieces with just a small group of men around him began to elaborate and to the full orchestra to become to know it, seventeen or eighteen pieces and writing things like "Black, Brown and Beige." "Black, Brown and Beige," I think in 1943 was a culmination of this movement of writing about Negro-Americans. And "Black, Brown and Beige" like he named it himself was a tone parallel to the history of the Negro in America, beginning with slavery and ending up on Sugar Hill.

### **What's the music like in "Black, Brown and Beige?"**

Duke wanted to capture the mood of the slaves working on the, on the plantation, out in the fields. The first part of "Black, Brown and Beige" is called the work song. And how well he captured that with the band. Making a statement. You just could see this and feel it. And then, with this, there was a religious element. Duke wrote a second movement called "Come Sunday" which was an expression of a people on Sunday relieved of their labors and their toils. They had a chance to pray. To rest, yes, but to pray and ask God to help them. "Come Sunday" was an expression of a longing for liberation, a longing for freedom. And that, that expression with Wontee's opening statement on the valve-trombone with Ray Nance violin and Johnny Hodges stretching up with the full melody, that captured the religious fervor of his people. And then, the music would change, a bright tempo, Emancipation Proclamation, joy, West-Indian dance, yes. They were moving around. They were in the southern states. They were in the West Indies. He expressed all the movements of the, the Negro. Then he began to move north, northward. He began to fill in cities, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, New York. And get into the full stream of Urban life and living. That's why "Sugar Hill," the penthouse, captured that mood, you know, of the whole different living now. But it was, tracing their development and their moving about and now taking place in a society but still being individuals with a certain heritage.

### **Lot of pride.**

A lot of pride in Duke Ellington's music. You can hear it. The early music at the Cotton Club, although I was just a little boy then, but those early

compositions captured the heritage of, of Africa. He brought the African culture into his music, you know. The, you can hear, they called it the jungle music. But the way Duke employed the percussion and the growling trumpets and trombones and the, the, the rough edginess at some times. He was capturing the, the African element. And then he began to utilize that and stretch it out, making it more sophisticated.

**Some people were afraid it was too corrupting.**

Well, there are all kinds of adjectives to describe it.

**Yeah.**

Basically he felt the, he was conscious of the heritage of Africa. And I think that it was just something they wanted to do.

**Finish up the idea of the Cotton Club era. Something erotic and sexy.**

Duke Ellington, in the early stages, we can only identify that, some of us only by what we heard later on recordings. Or if you happen to be listening to a radio or a late broadcast. But I understand Duke's orchestra, the Cotton Club which I never went to. I only know of it through history. He had to write music for a, for a stage show. For a stage presentation. For singers and dancers. And rather than just writing music or an up tempo piece, or a slow piece, Duke brought into that music the, the heritage of Africa. He was very conscious of culture and he brought to his little group then, the sounds that he would relate to the African culture. The way Sonny Greer would play the drums. And the way the trumpet players, Bubber Miley, some of the early trumpet players with Duke, Freddie Jenkins, would play a trumpet with a, with a plunger mute. And Tricky Sam Manton also played a trombone unlike anyone ever heard before. They heard open sounds, they heard an open trumpet, an open trombone. But with Duke, these instruments were muted in such a way that they created a whole new sound. But it was tied in with the sound of the African heritage, the culture. And this was something very new to listeners that they came to hear the shows and hear the Duke. And while he was playing for these shows and backing up the singers and the dancers. There was an individuality being created there which would be the, the launching pad for him to take off and write more pieces of that nature. Like later on, there would be "Our Conger Brother" and other pieces that would have the African culture mixed in with the orchestration.

**Sidney Bechet – throbbing, vibrato, powerful – He was playing Embassy dances.**

Every composer, I would imagine, at some point in his life, had to have someone to strike him in a special way. It was something about a certain musician or another composer that would make him stop and take notice and realize, "I've never heard this before. I like this. I think I want to, you know,

develop my music along this line." And I think Sidney Bechet, a giant figure in jazz was able to strike Duke in a certain way that it gave him a direction, possibly, to go, to follow, something to follow. He, Sidney Bechet had a great influence, I understand, on other instrumentalists, namely Johnny Hodges. But Duke Ellington needed, I think, something to hold on to, someone to look up to, as do most musicians. And perhaps Sidney Bechet's style, when he went to hear him was the, the turnaround, maybe, if he was searching and wondering which way to go. That encounter said this is the way to go. I want to do it this way. And he did it differently because he was a composer and working, writing for an orchestra. But maybe he took the essence of a Sidney Bechet, the feeling, the depthness of what he was doing and made it something of his own. Not imitating, but creating his own with inspiration.

### **Radio in the 30's. What did that mean?**

When I was growing up in Harlem, naturally, my great joy was to go to the theater to hear the orchestras. But you couldn't do it all the time. That was a maybe a weekly or every other week event. But the radio provided a way of being in touch with, with the big bands that, that were around us. And I remember listening to one program specifically, the make believe ballroom, Martin Block was the host of that show. I can, here's with the beginning of the so-called disc jockeys which later came to be. Martin Block would air recordings of great artists, orchestra leaders and singers. He might have, on stage one tonight we have Glen Gray and his Casa Loma Orchestra. Now let's move over to stage two, Guy Lombardo. Then let's move over to stage three, Fletcher Henderson. Count Basie or Tommy Dorsey, you know, and you'd hear all the things, you went from one to another. And it was a delight because all of us didn't have money to buy the records. Course the juke boxes were good if you pass by a juke box on the avenue, you would hear a strain of something coming out. I can remember those things. Pausing to listen to maybe Ellington or Basie or Lunsford coming out from a juke box. But the radio was a savior. And I remember specifically on Saturday nights, Martin Block had a special program. You called it "Saturday Night in Harlem." That night, he only featured the Negro orchestras, the African-American orchestras and he would divide the program up and you'd hear a half-hour of Jimmy Lunsford, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Chick Webb, Ella Fitzgerald, Cab Calloway. He went on and on and every Saturday night you'd listen because after having been to the Apollo, I couldn't wait for Duke Ellington's half-hour.

### **What is a copyist?**

When a composer puts his work on score paper for an orchestra, say of Duke's size, or maybe a theater orchestra or symphony. You have to score it out so that a copyist can take each part and write it for that player in the orchestra, whether it be a violin part or French horn part or a trombone or an oboe, bassoon, what ever. But he has to copy the music accurately. And sometimes he may have to transpose. In other words, not all instruments are

built in the same key. An E flat alto saxophone, whoa. If the composition is in B flat, if the copyist is writing, taking from the score which is in concert key, in B flat, he has to be aware that when he copies this part for the alto, he has to copy it in the key of G. He has to transpose. And so, when you copy, you not only must be accurate in copying the right notes, but if it's a transposing instrument like a trumpet or a saxophone, then you have to be aware of that.

### **Duke Ellington passed away in 1974. How did you feel?**

At the time that Duke was very ill, we were just, I imagine just hoping that he was going to, you know, just pull through it. He, he came to the Stratsford Shakespeare theater early that year, 1994, did a concert, but he wasn't feeling good and we knew about it. We went over to hear Duke and he was so gracious that night. Stanley Dance was in the dressing room and I had over from Bless of Sacrament Parish with some of the priests and the nuns and people in the parish and we heard this concert but we were aware that Duke wasn't feeling well so he didn't stop by the rectory for, we were going to prepare something for the orchestra, coffee and, well, we wondered if we could maybe go backstage and we did. Stanley Dance prepared the way and Duke was gracious to let us come in to his dressing room and say hello. It was wonderful. And then, of course, from February on to May, his condition was going down. And I got a phone call from Helen Dance at Blessed Sacrament in Bridgeport and she said, "John, I think you better come down." All right, at that time, Duke wasn't always taking visitors. He was very private, as you know. And I respected that. But she called that night and I said, "Helen, I'll be right down tomorrow morning." Next morning, just as I was getting ready to leave, she called me, "Duke just passed away." I . . . . . I felt terrible. I think we always feel we never said enough, or did enough for someone so good to you. And it just took everything out of me. However, I did get, you know, news about the funeral at St. John the Divine. So I went down, they asked me, would I do a reading. And I said I'd be happy to. So I went down, St. John's Cathedral, I met Ruth and Pearl Bailey was there and Louis Belson, Ella was there, it was wonderful, the mass. And they asked me to do a reading and I did the best I could. And we all felt a great loss. Father O'Connor, who was very close to Duke, especially at Newport, and other things. I remember Father O'Connor saying something so eloquent. I think he said something like, "Duke, we loved you yesterday. We love you today. We will love you tomorrow." I never forgot that. And that's the way it is. A person is gone, but you keep them alive in your memories and your thoughts, each one of us had a different experience. I still remember looking up in the trombone section when Duke would come on at night, take his place at the piano and he'd look up and just smile. You know, like, we're here together again, aren't we. Come on, let's go. And it was great.

**The End**