

RUTGERS

Mason Gross School
of the Arts

MUSIC DEPARTMENT

Rutgers University Jazz Lab Big Band

Dr. Anthony D.J. Branker, Conductor

*Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington’s
“Black, Brown, and Beige”*

with special guests

Frederika Krier, violin

and

Trineice Robinson-Martin, voice

Wednesday, February 28, 2024 | 7:30 p.m.

New Brunswick Performing Arts Center
New Brunswick, New Jersey

PROGRAM

Black, Brown, and Beige

Duke Ellington
(1899-1974)

Black (First Movement)

1. Work Song
2. Come Sunday (feat. Frederika Krier, violin)
3. Light

Brown (Second Movement)

4. West Indian Dance
5. Emancipation Celebration
6. Blues Theme Mauve (feat. Trineice Robinson-Martin, voice)

Beige (Third Movement)

7. Various Themes
8. Sugar Hill Penthouse
9. Finale

PROGRAM NOTES

[From the liner notes to the recording of Duke Ellington's *Black, Brown, & Beige* by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis (Blue Engine Records, 2020)]

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington was more than just these four words. He was both innovator and traditionalist, and the world of “Ellingtonia” had no boundaries.

He was an irresistible combination of originality, sophistication, imagination, work ethic, and pure charisma. In spite of his 50 years of traveling up and down the road, he was the most prolific composer of the 20th century with over 2,000 original pieces in his canon. Both a leader and an accompanist, Duke interacted with an expansive and ever-expanding universe of musicians and artists from all over the globe. His conduit to these experiences was the unequaled Ellington Orchestra. Artists of all disciplines as well as international fans from all walks of life loved to be in, around, and with the band. It was a unique assemblage of traveling troubadours chasing the blues away with the good news of freedom.

Duke approached his music with the sensibility of a visual artist. Painting was actually his first love, and as a teen he showed considerable promise. He would eventually be offered a scholarship to [the] Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, but ultimately chose music; for this, the world is madly thankful. He blended atypical configurations of instruments to create a universe of unusual and wholly original sounds, and then went one step further to orchestrate the specific timbres of individual musicians who had been hand-selected for their distinctive sounds and approaches. The titling of compositions such as “Mood Indigo,” “Transblucency,” “Lady of the Lavender Mist,” “Sepia Panorama,” and “Purple Gazelle” speak to his colorful imagination.

Ellington was a theoretician of the first order; the inventor of an original system of blues harmony, timbral harmony, and of connecting vernacular harmonic forms in a very sophisticated way. However, he disliked talking about music theory and said, “That type of talk stinks up the place.” On the other hand, he was very specific about meaning and gave each musician very detailed instructions about what a particular part was meant to evoke.

He and his orchestra’s conversational approach to traveling the deepest philosophical, psychological, and symbolic terrain of Americana is one of the most startling and groundbreaking developments in the history of Western music.

Ellington said, “There is no art without intention.” Whether to entice, intrigue, reveal, entertain, humor, or proclaim, his works always serve a purpose and they always touch you in a very personal way. Form, performer, and performance were fit to function. Work before pleasure.

In 1943, at the precarious and passionate time of the Second World War, Duke composed *Black, Brown and Beige* for a special concert at Carnegie Hall. Already a national hero and creator of a recognized world of sound, it was his most ambitious and longest work, possessing an architecture and complexity far beyond anything he had written...It was written to address Ellington’s most serious concern—the impact and ascendant trajectory of the American Negro experience.

As one might imagine, the piece was not well-received by critics in its time; however, like other works of art that fall dim upon wandering eyes, *Black, Brown and Beige* has received its overdue praise with the passage of time. There are so many great moments of superior penmanship displayed in this piece that one must listen again and again. At each listening you will find some new melody, rhythm, or relationship. Its revelations are endless.

— CHRIS CRENSHAW

It was 8:45 pm on January 23, 1943, when Duke Ellington took the Carnegie Hall stage for the very first time. In the audience was the first lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, along with conductor Leopold Stokowski, soprano Marian Anderson, and poet Langston Hughes. Ellington approached the microphone and introduced the new work he was about to premiere called “Black, Brown and Beige,” and explained that this ambitious three-movement suite would tell “the history of the American Negro.”

Following the performance, one critic stated that the “brilliant ideas it contained would count for much more if scored for a legitimate orchestra,” while another called it “the most ambitious piece ever attempted by a dance band.” Criticized for its “formlessness” and “abrupt musical transitions,” one writer suggested that Ellington make “two dozen brief, air-tight compositions” out of *Black, Brown and Beige*, while another equated Ellington to “the writer of a much-admired children’s book [who] abandons his method when he sets out to write an adult novel and tries to imitate Henry James.” Jazz critics panned his embrace of any European influence (being a jazz musician was something Ellington “should not have been ashamed of”) and his “tampering” with the rhythm (“no regular beat... no jazz”).

At a time when white composers were routinely applauded for integrating “indigenous materials” into their work, Ellington was treated to a condescending criticism that breezily regarded his ambition and unequalled skill as arrogance and “uppity.” Instead of attempting to understand Ellington’s objectives for the piece and to evaluate its merits on those terms, there was more interest in simply stating, “How dare he?” The tactic obviously worked because Ellington was stung by the criticism and only performed the entire piece once more.

While many of the critics were busy trying to dismiss Ellington and *Black, Brown and Beige* by judging the piece through the lens of a strange mixture of superiority (racism towards blacks) and inferiority (deference to European cultural achievements), many informed listeners in the audience immediately recognized its greatness and were moved to celebrate its innovations. Because our general education does not include music—or culture, for that matter—this piece never gained the visibility and audience it deserves. However, it has remained a treasure to those who know.

Black, Brown and Beige is a great and important piece, one that inspires me as both a musician and a human being. As a musician, I experience an exciting and rich universe, a multi-faceted and superbly crafted voyage through a large and important cross-section of the American vernacular: work songs, spirituals, the blues, early New Orleans-style jazz, the circus, the swing era, ballroom dancing, and even the Caribbean-influenced Habanera.

As a human being, I’m inspired by Ellington’s optimistic way with this deeply complicated tale. He called *Black, Brown and Beige* a “celebration of emancipation.” He observed of the Harlem of that time, “On closer inspection, it would be found that there were more churches than cabarets, that the people were trying to find a more stable way of living, and that the Negro was rich in experience and education.” And the most timeless expression of that richness is found in music.

— JOE ALTERMAN

RUTGERS JAZZ LAB BIG BAND PERSONNEL

Saxophones

Ariana Hartunian-Sowa – Alto 1
Aidan Chen – Alto 2
Dominick Dzietyczyk – Tenor 1
Edward Crisonino – Tenor 2
Tristan Voitcu – Baritone
Jeremy Leon – Clarinet

Trumpets

Charlie Barber
Aiden O'Shea
Ryan Colarusso
Julia Guarnaccia

Trombones

Kyle Courter
Stef Haas
Melanie Shultz
Grant Dillon

Guitar

Joe Rinaldi

Piano

Jacob Hurlock

Piano

Jiaming Chen

Bass

Zachary Dessel

Drums

Donald Solomon

Drums

Logan Bogdan

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Frederika Krier is a Grammy Award-Winning German-Romanian electric and acoustic multi-style violinist based in NYC. She holds a degree in Jazz Performance from The Jazz Institute Berlin/University of The Arts Berlin (UDK) and studied with jazz violinist Jörg Widmoser (modern string quartett) as well as musicians such as Jerry Granelli, Chris Dahlgren, David Friedman, John Hollenbeck and Kurt Rosenwinkel. She leads her own bands (Frederika Krier Quartett/Berlin and Molecular Vibrations/NYC) and is co-leader of Laghima (duo violin/live electronics with Gian Luigi Diana) and “Kus & Rika” (duo violin/beatbox with Marc Ruchmann). Frederika toured with famous Danish singer Gitte Haenning and her Orchestra. Furthermore she recorded with Kurt Rosenwinkel, Reign of Kindo, Carla Patullo, and worked with Akua Dixon, Regina Carter, Martha Mooke and the Scorchio Quartet, Philip Glass, Rita Wilson, Phoebe Bridgers, The Patti Smith Band, Jim Cammack (Ahmad Jamal), and Bollywood Superstar Arijit Singh, among many others. She was invited as a guest on stage by Richard Bona and the legendary Family Stone (formerly Sly and The Family Stone).

Dr. Trineice Robinson-Martin serves on faculty at Princeton University, Yale University Institute of Sacred Music, and the Berklee College of Music, and is a specialist in the pedagogy and performance for African American folk-based music styles. In addition to her academic appointments, Dr. Robinson-Martin is an internationally recognized clinician and performer, the creator of Soul Ingredients® Methodology and Voice studio, serves on the national faculty of Gospel Music Workshop of America and LoVetri Institute of Somatic Voicework™. In addition, she is the executive director of the African American Jazz Caucus and board director for the Jazz Education Network (JEN), serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Singing*, and is a member of the American Academy of Teachers of Singing. Her latest album *All or Nothing* was released August 2021 and is available on all digital platforms. Visit www.DrTrineice.com for more information.

Dr. Anthony D.J. Branker is an adjunct professor in jazz studies at Rutgers University Mason Gross School of the Arts, where his teaching responsibilities include graduate and undergraduate courses and ensembles. Previously, he taught at Princeton University for 27 years, where he held an endowed chair in jazz studies and was founding director of the program in jazz studies until his retirement in 2016. He has also served as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar at the Estonian Academy of Music & Theatre in Tallinn, Estonia and was a member of the faculty at the Manhattan School of Music, Hunter College-CUNY, and Ursinus College. Dr. Branker has conducted numerous extended works for large ensemble that include Terence Blanchard's *A Tale of God's Will: A Requiem for Katrina* featuring the Terence Blanchard Quintet plus Orchestra; Claude Debussy's *La Boîte à Joujoux (The Toy Box)* for orchestra and dancers; Wynton Marsalis' *Abyssinian 200: A Gospel Celebration* for choir and big band; Duke Ellington's *Sacred Concert Music* for choir and big band; Michael Philip Mossman's *John Coltrane Suite* and Lalo Schifrin's *Gillespiana Suite* for big band; Ellington's *A Tone Parallel to Harlem* and *New World A Comin'* for orchestra and big band, and has collaborated with the Juilliard Jazz Orchestra on joint big band performances of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's *The Far East Suite* and Ellington's *The New Orleans Suite*. Dr. Branker is an Origin Records recording artist and composer who was named a "Rising Star" composer in *DownBeat* magazine's 62nd & 63rd International Critics Poll. His tenth recording for Origin Records, *Songs My Mom Liked* - featuring Donny McCaslin, Philip Dizack, Fabian Almazan, Linda May Han Oh, Rudy Royston, Pete McCann, and Aubrey Johnson - will be released in June 2024. On April 17, the Rutgers Jazz Lab Big Band will perform a program of Dr. Branker's music for big band featuring Mason Gross jazz faculty members Abraham Burton on tenor saxophone and Dr. Alex Norris on trumpet here at NBPAC.

ABOUT THE JAZZ LAB BIG BAND

The **Rutgers Jazz Lab Big Band** seeks to educate and expose both students and the community to the artistic and historical significance of jazz by presenting repertoire that is representative of the wide spectrum of styles and conceptual approaches found throughout the music's evolution. Students involved in the jazz studies program at Rutgers Mason Gross School of the Arts have the opportunity to participate in a variety of ensembles and academic courses that encourage the study of the historical, social, theoretical, stylistic, and creative issues that pertain to the jazz idiom.

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