

ralph j. gleason rend hommage à...

DUKE ELLINGTON



LOVE YOU
MADLY



A CONCERT OF
SACRED MUSIC
AT GRACE CATHEDRAL

DVD
VIDEO



ralph j. gleason celebrates...

DUKE ELLINGTON



LOVE YOU
MADLY



A CONCERT OF
SACRED MUSIC
AT GRACE CATHEDRAL

"The best years of all our lives were spent listening to Ellington's music."
– Ralph J. Gleason, 1974

That we have these valuable documents of Duke Ellington – we have Ralph J. Gleason to thank.

As newspaper columnist with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, as *Rolling Stone* magazine co-founder, as a radio host and a TV producer, Gleason's career pioneered a path for all music journalists who followed. From the '40s through the '70s, his passion for music was all-embracing and his insight almost always unerring (he had no issue publicly confessing to a critical gaffe). To generations of music fans, he preached a consistent message: that music could, at its best, express the deepest of human emotions and speak the most universal of truths.

Gleason's first love was jazz, an ardor grounded by an insider's appreciation of the reality of gigs and sessions and making ends meet. By the late '60s, he was also championing a style of music he termed "adult rock." To the impressive litany of legends he knew first-hand — Louis, Miles and Coltrane – he appended the names of newcomers like Janis, Santana and the Jefferson Airplane.

Yet, as the saying goes, no one forgets their first love. Even as Gleason's list of heroes grew, one name remained at the top: Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington. Gleason first heard the bandleader as a teenager while scanning the radio dial in the late '30s, quarantined with the measles. Duke's soulful, bluesy and elegant sound sparked a fervor in the youth that matured into a religious intensity. "It never seemed to me that there was anything odd in considering Duke's Commandment 'It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing' on a level with some of the historic Ten."

Small surprise Gleason would choose *Celebrating the Duke* to be the title of his last collection of writing. From his earliest journalistic efforts, he had celebrated and explained Duke for and to a succession of generations, in columns, on the radio and via a pair of nationally-broadcast documentaries he produced in cooperation with San Francisco's KQED and NET public television network. It would be wholly accurate to call *A Concert of Sacred Music and Love You Madly* two parts of a long-overdue valentine from Ralph to Duke, dated 1965.

Before Gleason trained the cameras on the bandleader that year, '65 had already proven eventful in the Ducal Calendar (a Gleason term) – eventful both in what happened (like the return of drummer Louie Bellson to the fold) and in what didn't. Duke's nomination for a Pulitzer, the first for a composer in the jazz idiom, was denied, generating controversy and a most memorable rejoinder from

a more bemused than slighted Duke: "Fate is being kind to me. Fate doesn't want me to be too famous too young." Then there was the Sacred Concert.

Duke dubbed it "The most important statement his orchestra had ever done," (from over 3000 original compositions he would come to write). Two years previously, he had agreed – after much consideration — to compose and perform music to mark the long-awaited consecration of San Francisco's Grace Cathedral. The grand Gothic structure on panoramic Nob Hill had been stuck in a decades-long, start-stop rebuilding process since the city's devastating 1906 earthquake. It was finally completed in '64, and the year-long Festivals of Grace that followed had already seen Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preach from the pulpit, Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem" and various theatrical presentations take place, and a jazz Mass written by pianist Lalo Schifrin for a small group and 68-piece chorus offered (with John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* and Lalo Schifrin's *Jazz Mass* also delivered in '65, it seems that was the year for spiritual jazz endeavors).

On September 16, it was Duke's turn. 2000 packed the cathedral to hear the 15-piece Ellington Orchestra and special added guests perform his Sacred Concert, a suite of divinely-inspired selections culled from various stages of his career. From his 1943 "Black, Brown and Beige" suite, "Come Sunday" was interpreted three times, by altoist Johnny Hodges (check his gaze as he surveys the vaulted expanse), by San Diego's Herman McCoy choir, and by gospel singer Esther Marrow. "Ain't But the One" (sung by Jimmy McPhail with choir backing) and "David Danced Before the Lord With All His Might" (with Bunny Briggs tapping and Jon Hendricks scatting) came from the 1963 Broadway show *My People*.

Composed by Duke specifically for the Grace Church consecration, "In the Beginning God" is based on a six-note motif, and featured a noted solo by tenor saxist Paul Gonsalves and a lyric imagining time before time: "no birds, no bees, no Beatles." The second part of the concert proved only slightly less sacred than the first, and just as inspiring; the highlight clearly being Duke's solo star-turn on "New World A-Coming." After the successful event, praise poured in from expected sources – *Downbeat*, *Saturday Review* and (naturally) the *San Francisco Chronicle* – as well as offers to Duke to reprise his tribute to the Divine.

Over the next few years, Duke presented the Sacred Concert in various cities and churches, tightening, polishing and eventually recording it in New York City's Presbyterian Church. Yet the looseness of its premiere and high-fidelity of the audio recording (apparently front row attendees heard little of the performance due to the church's acoustic peculiarities) provides Gleason's program a large part of its charm, and intensely historical value. Deriving its title from Duke's signature concert-end sign-off, *Love You Madly* was the first full-length documentary on the

maestro. It's a stunning example of how an intimate, moment-in-a-life portrait – for that's what it truly is — can convey as much as today's sweepingly comprehensive, photos-and-footage career overviews. With little more than one club gig (at San Francisco's Basin Street West), the Grace Cathedral performance (only a bit), a backstage interview (Duke supine, a towel over his eyes) and various shots in hotel rooms and buses, Gleason caught all the sophistication and humor, popularity (check the front row pulchritude of his audience) and charm of his childhood hero.

There's so much that comes through Duke's words: how timeless melodies came to him, how he keeps his band together, why he prefers to travel in Harry Carney's sedan. The program also proves how constantly hard at work he was, even in '65. A favorite moment: Duke's lesson in finger-snapping, in establishing "a state of non-chalance." In his speech, one can hear the rhythm of life. In his face (watch as he listens intently to a tape of Billy Strayhorn), one can feel all the joy and tenderness of his music.

Of course, there's also Gleason's own informed-yet-economic commentary, speaking volumes and allowing maximum room for Duke's thoughts and music. Significantly, the maestro himself helped shape his televised portrait: "In keeping with Ellington's own semantic wishes, the accent will be on 'music' not 'jazz,'" reported *Downbeat* in announcing the hour-long documentary which was broadcast in '66, and earned an Emmy nomination a year later.

Highest praise came from Duke himself. "Both friends and critics have told me that this is the most honest public presentation of me that has been done," he wrote in his memoir *Music is My Mistress*. "It was Ralph Gleason's grace and his unselfishness in interviewing that made this show unique."

A year before he died in '75, Gleason wrote of Duke and the various musicians to whom he was led: "I have learned more from them than I ever did in any classroom and their art has given me faith in creativity and in life itself that no pulpit has ever offered." Gleason remained a student to the end, learning, listening and sharing his discoveries through any means he could.

Thanks, Ralph.

— Ashley Kahn, June 2005

Ashley Kahn is author *Kind of Blue: The Making of the Miles Davis Masterpiece* (Da Capo Press) and *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album* (Viking).

In 1965, when my father, Ralph J. Gleason, produced these two Duke Ellington documentary films, "Love You Madly" and "A Concert Of Sacred Music At Grace Cathedral", I was 12 years old and not much of a jazz fan.

But even I could see the joy and energy which infused my father at this opportunity to translate his journalistic enthusiasm for his idol Duke Ellington to film.

Ellington, himself, impressed even a jazz appreciation-challenged 12 year old with his grace and style, seeming more cool than anyone I'd ever met.

Ellington, in his autobiography *Music Is My Mistress*, called these "...the best film about Duke Ellington ever made..." (they were originally envisioned as one film). I think that's, in part, due to his respect for my father's knowledge and understanding of his life and music; prompting him to be much more open and relaxed with my father than he was with other documentarians and journalists, which is reflected in the films, themselves.

Here is Duke Ellington at his most natural.

Together, my father and Ellington created a film record of Duke Ellington that is truly deserving of its legendary status. We hope you enjoy watching and listening to them as much as my father enjoyed making them.

Toby Gleason
Jazz Casual Productions, Inc.
Berkeley, CA
2005

Toby Gleason is a 35 year veteran of the music industry. He has worked in sales, marketing, promotion, management, production and post-production, licensing, marketing and as a research consultant, writer, radio host and producer. He is a nationally-credited freelance voice-over performer and manages his late father's collected works as president of Jazz Casual Productions, Inc.



DUKE
ELLINGTON



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**VOUS TENEZ ENTRE LES MAINS UN MORCEAU D'HISTOIRE :
DEUX FILMS CONSACRÉS AU LÉGENDAIRE DUKE ELLINGTON,
PRODUITS PAR L'ILLUSTRE ÉCRIVAIN JAZZ RALPH J. GLEASON.**

Love You Madly est un portrait d'Ellington datant de 1965 incluant des prestations et des interviews du légendaire bandleader. Les performances live ont été enregistrées à plusieurs endroits, au Basin St. West Jazz Club, au Jazz festival de Monterey en 1965, ainsi qu'à l'occasion de son premier concert de musique sacrée à la Cathédrale Grace.

Ce documentaire a été décrit par le musicien lui-même dans son autobiographie comme étant « ... le meilleur film jamais réalisé sur Duke Ellington »

Morceaux inclus :

ROCKIN' IN RHYTHM
TAKE THE "A" TRAIN
FAR EAST SUITE + IN MY SOLITUDE
SOPHISTICATED LADY + SATIN DOLL
COTTONTAIL + MOOD INDIGO
JEEP'S BLUES + THE LORD'S PRAYER
COME SUNDAY + LOVE CAME
THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE



A Concert of Sacred Music At Grace Cathedral est un document très rare. Filmé à la cathédrale le 16 septembre 1965, c'est le premier de ce qui allait être une série de trois concerts de musique sacrée exécutés par Ellington entre 1965 et 1973. Ces titres rassemblent des éléments de musique classique, de jazz, spirituels et gospel, mais aussi de blues et de danses, et ont été joués dans des églises et des cathédrales dans le monde entier.

A ec des ersions de :

OVERTURE TO BLACK, BROWN AND BEIGE
TELL ME IT'S THE TRUTH
IN THE BEGINNING, GOD
AIN'T BUT THE ONE
NEW WORLD A-COMIN'
THE LORD'S PRAYER
COME SUNDAY
DAVID DANCED BEFORE THE LORD



Inclus également des notes de livret par l'écrivain spécialiste de jazz Ashley Kahn.

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