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The Dedication of Duke Ellington

Considered one of the world's greatest composers and musicians, Duke Ellington was labeled a bright, intelligent, and noble man. He was born April 29, 1899 as Edward Kennedy Ellington, in Washington D. C. As a young boy, Duke was not as interested in music as he was in his later years because ironically he was more fascinated with baseball.

At the age of fourteen, Ellington became interested in ragtime music, which was soon to be his longtime dedication. He began to sneak into Frank Holliday's poolroom, where he became fascinated with the piano. During the summertime, he would search for ragtime pianist performances in D.C.; he also in looked for performances in Philadelphia and Atlantic City, where he vacationed with his mother. While in Philadelphia, Ellington met a man by the name of Harvey Brooks, who became the man behind Ellington's ambitions. When Ellington showed Brooks his piano tricks, right then and there a star born.

In 1917, when Duke was only 18 years old, he put together his first group, "The Duke's Serenaders." At this time Duke became his own booking agent for the band. In 1919 Ellington married and had his first child, a boy, Mercer Kennedy Ellington. Ellington became popular throughout the airwaves. The technology of the radio made listeners all over New York fall head over heels for this man. After this famous stardom, Ellington renamed his band to "The Washingtonians," where they played at exclusive clubs and hotels. The first song of Duke's band to be published on the air was "From the Cotton Club." Ellington and his boys showed off their dedication to music by playing everywhere. London, Cairo, Los Angeles, and Chicago, just to name a few. Queen Elizabeth II and President Nixon were huge fans of "The Washingtonians." The Queen had Duke and the boys play at a ball and the President had them play at a dinner.

Ellington was known as a daring explorer when it came to his composing. Ellington composed and performed right up until his death in 1974 and created over 1,000 orchestrations. The Swing Era, which debuted at Carnegie Hall in 1943, is where Ellington performed wide-ranging piece, "Black, Brown, and Beige." This captured a historical experience for African Americans in a musical aspect. Ellington enjoyed drawing instruments from different sections of the band and putting them together as a whole. Doing this put together rich and unusual sounds. An example would be the song titled "Mood Indigo," which included bass clarinet, muted trumpet, and trombone.

In the 1970's, many of the men in Ellington's band had died, but the band still continued to attract outstanding musicians. After Ellington's death from cancer, his son Mercer took over the band and still created works. Mercer said that his father's main love and desire in the last years of his

life was dedication to his church. "Three Black Kings," is a song that his son finished composing because Duke did not live long enough to finish it himself. "Three Black Kings" was said to be about the black king of the Magi, Balthazar, King Solomon and Martin Luther King Jr. Duke wanted this to be preformed as a ballet, but it later became choreographed by Alvin Ailey and performed at The Lincoln Center.

Mercer spent almost 75% of his own career maintaining the musical heritage of his dad.

Years after his death, even today, people are inspired by Duke Ellington. Famous musicians today have remade some of his works. Paul McCartney preformed "Don't Get Around Much Any More." The Pointer Sister performed "Duke Ellington Melody," and Marvin Gaye performed "Don't Tease Me, Just Squeeze Me." Also after his passing The Duke Ellington Youth Festival and Duke Ellington School of the Arts was later created as well.

Duke Ellington was a man who was dedicated to his music as well as his church. His legacy will live for many years, as a man who envied his work and accomplished a tremendous amount at such a young age.

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