



the **Duke Ellington** orchestra

New meeting expected to be as interesting as previous

By Victor Mikhailov

Forty years on, the Duke Ellington Orchestra returns to Minsk

Such events happen rarely in the country's musical life. Were they to become more common, they wouldn't be so significant. The arrival of the Duke Ellington Orchestra is surely an impressive musical event, standing among the most memorable of recent years. In fact, this is only their second trip to Belarus; the famous band previously toured Minsk back in the 1970s. At the time, it was the first such visit by celebrated jazz musicians to the Soviet Union. Despite the lack of musical freedom, even in official circles, the arrival of the Western band was seen as favourable. The 'cold war' between the Soviet Union and the West was set aside for the orchestra's tour of the USSR.

As the band's plane landed in Leningrad, they were welcomed by a large orchestra marching along the summer field, performing Duke Ellington's music. Wherever the American musicians performed, tickets were sold out. Even the official newspaper of the USSR Communist party — *Pravda* — generously praised Ellington and his orchestra. Its musical critic was impressed by 'their invaluable feeling of lightness', writing that the musicians appeared on stage 'without any special ceremony, just coming one after another — like friends gathering for a jam session.'

Duke Ellington loved the Soviet Union, recollecting, "Do you know that some of our concerts there lasted for four hours? Nobody complained — neither audiences nor stage workers — not even the orchestra musicians. Russians came to listen to our music — not for any other reason. They encored us ten or, even, twelve times."

Of course, a similar atmosphere was observed in Minsk, where full houses were gathered. It seems impossible to choose the correct words to reveal the mood of jazz lovers on meeting such a celebrity. Nevertheless, the focus was on the highest level of musical performance. Ellington was a great composer: an experimentalist and pioneer of 20th century music. He once said, "I'm madly inconstant. I can never stop at what I've done, ever wishing to try something new." His artistic path was full of discoveries. He

could create rhythms even from the jungle, conjuring up any mood, and was a master of academic European musical forms: suites, rhapsodies, and ballet and operarias. His original orchestra performances hugely influenced the development of 20th century culture, affecting every significant jazz orchestra — directly or indirectly. Ellington changed the role of contrabass, tenor and baritone-saxophone in the big-band. Moreover, for the first time, he began using the human voice as an instrument.

Of course, Ellington had his own artistic approach as an arranger. Many of his works were true 'small concerts', specially created to better reveal the individual mastery of a performer-improviser. He composed for the orchestra's musicians, taking into account their individual style. He sometimes returned to his old compositions, creating them anew, but never stuck to a single manner. None of his recorded works were treated as the final version, needing no further perfection

the French, Germans, British, Irish, Arabs, Jews, Pakistanis, Hindus, atheists and believers. He was simultaneously accomplished, yet simple. He was joyful, positive and tolerant, yet ironic. He was easy-going and a sincere Christian. He was an inborn aristocrat who knew how to behave with people. As his biographer, Stanley Dance, said, "Duke was a great innovator in his field and, simultaneously, a paradoxical conservator, building new compositions from

Soviet Union. Almost all Soviet musicians emulated this orchestra's performances, which were a great model for them. Duke Ellington's visit to the Soviet Union in 1971, as part of his global tour, was the brightest event in the musical life of the country. His route included Leningrad, Minsk, Kiev, Rostov-na-Donu and Moscow. We have numerous posters advertising concerts today but, in those years, the 'iron curtain'

of the Duke Ellington Orchestra was only matched by Glenn Miller's band." In the 1970s, Duke Ellington was at the height of his career. He was 70 at the time but his artistic forces were flourishing. Like most of those from Black families, he had no musical or, even, secondary education. However, he achieved global recognition and success. Today's Duke Ellington Orchestra is also 'Black' in its essence, featuring true virtuosos, who continue Duke's traditions.

"Many musicians have performed with the Orchestra. However, Duke always selected them individually, choosing those who matched his spirit. The present head of the band was invited by Duke Ellington's son," says Mr. Botnovsky. The Orchestra's deep roots allow its musicians to keep pace with the times while accenting classical jazz. Soon, the band shall celebrate its 100th birthday. "The Duke Ellington Orchestra is a jazz model," asserts Mr. Botnovsky. "A meeting with this band helps us to understand the core of this musical branch. I think that both professionals and amateurs gain great enjoyment for their performances. The orchestra is connected with the birth of jazz, which is of amazing importance."

Minsk is the only venue for the Duke Ellington Orchestra within the CIS, as it has no plans to perform in Moscow, St. Petersburg or Kiev. Its April performance in the Belarusian capital completes its tour through Eastern Europe. It is then to go west, to Portugal. There is no doubt that lovers of the famous musician are sure to gather at the Minsk concert, arriving from Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic States. They won't miss the chance to enjoy such superb jazz.



or development. Each piece expressed his individuality and his legacy is huge. He registered around a thousand songs, most of them forming a 'golden collection' of jazz. According to American critic Scott Yanow, his discography exceeds 600 discs. For the longevity of his popularity, Duke Ellington occupies a leading position worldwide.

Duke Ellington was adored all over the globe, by

old, while despising transient fashion."

Professor of music and famous conductor Vyacheslav Botnovsky is the Dean of the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts' Musical Art Department. He says, "Duke Ellington's significance in the development of jazz music and jazz history is huge. Of course, as no one else, the Duke Ellington Orchestra influenced the development of jazz music in the

prevented such promotion." Nevertheless, the concerts were so popular that it was extremely difficult to buy a ticket for them.

At that time, interest in jazz was progressing in the USSR. However, for some time, this musical branch was almost banned in the country. Duke's concert inspired people's interest. "Jazz bands visited Minsk to give concerts," recollects Mr. Botnovsky. "However, the level

Delicate work amazes

By Alexey Vasnetsov

Visitors to Belarus' National History Museum need microscope to enjoy exhibits of Russian Lefty

Master Vladimir Aniskin creates miracles; among them is a tender rose, perched on a single hair, made from dust. Other wonders include an aerodrome for 20 planes on a poppy seed and copies of state awards on the face of

a grain of rice. The Russian left-hander's works are usually housed in St. Petersburg's Museum of Micro-miniatures — the only one in Russia. Almost half of Mr. Aniskin's amazing works are on show in Minsk at present: 22 pieces in all.

"Only classical pieces are duplicated — such as fleas wearing shoes and camels in the eye of a needle," smiles the exhibition's curator, the

regional representative of the Russian Lefty Museum in Belarus, Oksana Gatskaya. "A microscope is placed by each exhibit, since few can be viewed with the naked eye. No school of micro-miniaturisation exists, so each master independently learns how to create his works. Nor do generations pass their secrets along. For example, to repeat the *Rose in Hair* miniature, Mr. Ani-

skin asked Russian Nikolay Syadristy for permission. Mr. Aniskin's rose is unique in how it is made, despite being a copy."

The master actually makes his own tools and holds his breath while working, since even an exhalation can destroy his work. Mr. Aniskin also has his own discovery: household dust. It is colourful (rather than grey) under the microscope and



Exhibits hardly viewable without microscope

can be used to add colour to miniatures, processed using his secret technology. He has

two hand-made tools: a lathe and grinder, which are both smaller than a child's palm!