



Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington

By Terry Teachout

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A major new biography of Duke Ellington from the acclaimed author of *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong*

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington was the greatest jazz composer of the twentieth century—and an impenetrably enigmatic personality whom no one, not even his closest friends, claimed to understand. The grandson of a slave, he dropped out of high school to become one of the world’s most famous musicians, a showman of incomparable suavity who was as comfortable in Carnegie Hall as in the nightclubs where he honed his style. He wrote some fifteen hundred compositions, many of which, like “Mood Indigo” and “Sophisticated Lady,” remain beloved standards, and he sought inspiration in an endless string of transient lovers, concealing his inner self behind a smiling mask of flowery language and ironic charm.

As the biographer of Louis Armstrong, Terry Teachout is uniquely qualified to tell the story of the public and private lives of Duke Ellington. A semi-finalist for the National Book Award, *Duke* peels away countless layers of Ellington’s evasion and public deception to tell the unvarnished truth about the creative genius who inspired Miles Davis to say, “All the musicians should get together one certain day and get down on their knees and thank Duke.”

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Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington By Terry Teachout Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Booklist

Starred Review In the selective bibliography of this comprehensive and well-researched life of America's greatest jazz and popular-music composer and orchestra leader, there are more than a dozen full biographies; memoirs by Ellington himself (however unreliable), by his son, Mercer, and by several band members; as well as innumerable profiles and a variety of ephemera. One might have thought yet another life, admittedly a "synthesis," 40 years after the subject's death might be superfluous. In this addition to our music literature, however, Teachout, drama critic for the *Wall Street Journal* and author of, among other writings, a biography of Louis Armstrong (*Pops*, 2009), abundantly justifies the effort. Though respectful and musically knowing, Teachout presents the famously evasive and not altogether admirable Ellington (among other traits, procrastination, manipulativeness, and incorrigible womanizing) scars and all, including the rarely photographed one (rectified here) on his left cheek, inflicted by his jealous wife. It is Ellington's breathtakingly enormous musical contribution (1,700 compositions, from short pieces to major suites and sacred music) and his gift for collaboration, albeit often appropriation, that is the fitting focus of this important book. Included is a list of "key recordings," all currently downloadable, a perfect accompaniment to one's reading of this entertaining and valuable biography. --Mark Levine

Review

Praise for DUKE

"Compelling narrative flow...poised impartiality. . . . Teachout writes in an earthbound style marked by sound scholarship and easy readability. . . . DUKE humanizes a man whom history has kept on a pedestal."

—The New York Times Book Review

"A thorough and fascinating portrait."

—USA Today

"[a] grand and engrossing biography...Thanks to this frank and sympathetic biography--whose every page is studded with sharp phrases and keen insights--we now seem to know Duke Ellington as well as we ever will or need to."

—San Francisco Chronicle

"Teachout adroitly chronicles how Ellington coaxed from his ensemble such timeless hits as "Mood Indigo." And he adeptly evokes the personalities of the ducal band..."

—The Economist

"an impressively lucid, compact narrative"

—The Boston Globe

"A thoroughly researched homage...Teachout delivers a Duke unlike any we've seen in previous biographies...At last, Teachout affirms that music was Ellington's greatest mistress – and to her, the composer was unrelentingly loyal."

—Essence Magazine

“Swinging.”
—*Elle Magazine*

“This well-researched biography is sure to appeal to longtime jazz fans who revel in their memories of Ellington's work and others who may want to learn more about his fascinating life.”

—*Associated Press*

“Mr Teachout adroitly chronicles how Ellington coaxed from his ensemble such timeless hits as ‘Mood Indigo’ evokes the personalities of the ducal band.”

—*The Economist*

“Descriptively rich, the book is not so much a scholarly tome as it is a delightful and entertaining read. Teachout writes with clarity and verve, presenting an astonishing amount of detail in a flowing narrative that brings to life not just Ellington and his music, but much of American culture of the period.”

—*National Review*

“[A] grand and engrossing biography...Thanks to this frank and sympathetic biography - whose every page is studded with sharp phrases and keen insights - we now seem to know Duke Ellington as well as we ever will or need to.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Teachout's exhaustive mining of archives, including a number of unpublished memoirs of some of the principals in his story, gives the musical history in Duke an impressive heft.”

—*The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

“By penetrating behind the curtain, this author has delivered a book that even those who think they know Ellington will need to read.”

—*Dallas Morning News*

“Teachout does a commendable job of contextualizing Ellington's career.”

—*Austin Chronicle*

“The definitive Ellington biography thus far...valuable...[one of] the most important books of 2013.”

—*The Buffalo News*

“Teachout captures the breadth of [Duke’s] life... with verve and insight.”
—*The Huffington Post*

“Teachout’s book, as in the case of his earlier one on Armstrong, is the masterwork.”
—*Jazz Journal*

“Dimensional, thoughtful, and rigorously researched, Duke is an enthralling read from cover to cover.”
—*BrainPickings.org*

“Teachout...bring[s] a worthy level of scholarship to the telling of the notoriously secretive Ellington’s life.”
—*The Virginia Quarterly Review (Online)*

“With this exhaustive, engaging study of the greatest jazz composer of his era, Wall Street Journal drama critic Teachout solidifies his place as one of America’s great music biographers.”

—*Kirkus, Starred Review*

“Comprehensive and well-researched...important...[an] entertaining and valuable biography.”
—*Booklist, Starred Review*

“Teachout gives much insight into Ellington’s life, personality, working habits, and compositions. This work should appeal to Ellington enthusiasts as well as casual jazz fans.”
—*Library Journal*

“Revealing...Teachout neatly balances colorful anecdote with shrewd character assessments and musicological analysis, and he manages to debunk Ellington’s self-mythologizing, while preserving his stature as the man who caught jazz’s ephemeral genius in a bottle.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Terry Teachout’s biography is destined to be the definitive biography of bandleader, composer, and complex man—Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington.”
—*The American Rag*

“a fascinating account...Teachout gives us a rich portrait of the man, his music and his era..”
--*Tampa Bay Tribune*

Praise for *Pops; A Life of Louis Armstrong*:

“Teachout restores this jazzman to his deserved place in the pantheon of American artists.”

—*The New York Times*

“Thirty-eight years after Louis Armstrong's death, Terry Teachout has made the possible, possible: He has written a definitive narrative biography of the greatest jazz musician of the twentieth century.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“A masterpiece.”

—*Seattle Times*

“Teachout excels at conveying the interplay between Armstrong the artist and Armstrong the entertainer, and at examining the particular challenge of his legacy.”

—*The New Yorker*

“[An] exceptional biography... Upon finishing this definitive biography, the reader is instructed to flip to the discography, download every last song, listen and grin the hell back.”

—*The Washington Post*

Amazon Best Books of the Month, December 2009

“Crafted with a musician's ear and an historian's eye, *Pops* is a vibrant biography of the iconic Louis Armstrong that resonates with the same warmth as ol' Satchmo's distinctive voice. *Wall Street Journal* critic Terry Teachout draws from a wealth of previously unavailable material – including over 650 reels of Armstrong's own personal tape recordings – to create an engaging profile that slips behind the jazz legend's megawatt smile. Teachout reveals that the beaming visage of "Reverend Satchelmouth" was not a mark of racial subservience, but a clear symbol of Louis's refusal to let anything cloud the joy he derived from blowing his horn. "Faced with the terrible realities of the time and place into which he had been born," explains Teachout, "he didn't repine, but returned love for hatred and sought salvation in work." Armstrong was hardly impervious to the injustices of his era, but in his mind, nothing was more sacred than the music.

—*Dave Callanan*

“Teachout turns to another mighty pillar of 20th-century American culture, Louis Armstrong, a black man born at the turn of the century in the poorest quarter of New Orleans who by the end of his life was known and loved in every corner of the earth. ... Teachout brings a fresh perspective... Teachout's portrait reminds us why we fell in love with Armstrong's music in the first place.”

—*Publishers Weekly* Starred Review

“To this fine, exhaustively researched...biography, Teachout brings an insider's knowledge—he was a jazz musician before launching a career as cultural critic and biographer.”

—*National Post* *The Afterword*

"No one does better in exploring Armstrong's social context than Teachout."

—*Montreal Gazette*

"Compelling narrative flow...poised impartiality. . . . Teachout writes in an earthbound style marked by sound scholarship and easy readability. . . . *Duke* humanizes a man whom history has kept on a pedestal."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Teachout is a sensitive writer, and one reason his biographies are moving is that he has obviously been giving himself an education in the realities of American racial history as he writes them."

—*The New Yorker*

"A thorough and fascinating portrait."

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"A thoroughly researched homage...Teachout delivers a Duke unlike any we've seen in previous biographies...At last, Teachout affirms that music was Ellington's greatest mistress – and to her, the composer was unrelentingly loyal."

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"Dimensional, thoughtful, and rigorously researched, Duke is an enthralling read from cover to cover."
—BrainPickings.org

"Teachout does a first rate job... Teachout's book is a worthy read. It successfully brings Duke Ellington and his music back into the public consciousness, reaffirming the man's artistic genius while telling a fascinating story."

—PopMatters.com

About the Author

Terry Teachout, the drama critic at *The Wall Street Journal*, is the author of *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong* and *Satchmo at the Waldorf*, a one-man play about Armstrong's life and times. He lives in New York City.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Alicia Gentry:

Reading a guide can be one of a lot of pastime that everyone in the world loves. Do you like reading book consequently. There are a lot of reasons why people fantastic. First reading a e-book will give you a lot of new info. When you read a reserve you will get new information simply because book is one of various ways to share the information as well as their idea. Second, reading through a book will make a person more imaginative. When you reading a book especially fiction book the author will bring someone to imagine the story how the people do it anything. Third, you can share your knowledge to other people. When you read this Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington, you may tells your family, friends along with soon about yours e-book. Your knowledge can inspire others, make them reading a guide.

Jorge Raines:

People live in this new day time of lifestyle always try to and must have the spare time or they will get lot of stress from both way of life and work. So , once we ask do people have spare time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not just a robot. Then we inquire again, what kind of activity are there when the spare time coming to an individual of course your answer will unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading books. It can be your alternative in spending your spare time, the actual book you have read is actually Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington.

Sally McGarvey:

This Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington is great publication for you because the content that is full of information for you who have always deal with world and also have to make decision every minute. This particular book reveal it info accurately using great manage word or we can state no rambling sentences included. So if you are read that hurriedly you can have whole information in it. Doesn't mean it only provides you with straight forward sentences but hard core information with splendid delivering sentences. Having Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington in your hand like getting the world in your arm, information in it is

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Arthur Johnson:

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