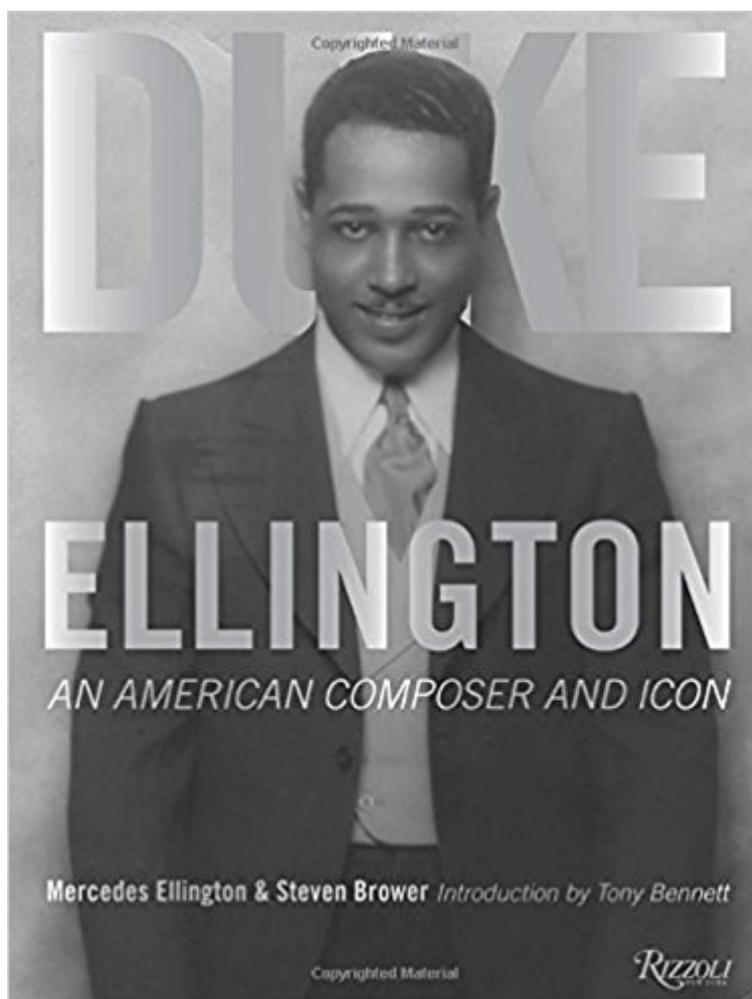


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Duke Ellington: An American Composer And Icon



Synopsis

Beautifully illustrated and unparalleled in scope, this is an elegant visual celebration befitting the life and work of the "prince of the piano." Duke Ellington was the undisputed father of the American songbook. A prolific writer and consummate performer, Ellington was the author of such standards as "Solitude," "Prelude to a Kiss," and "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got that Swing)." With a career that spanned five decades, he is one of the defining composers of the Jazz Age. With unprecedented access to the Ellington family archives, this long overdue book illuminates the life and work of an icon of twentieth-century music from his humble beginnings to his long-lasting success. Every stage of Ellington's career is brought to life, from sepia photographs of his early days in Washington, DC, to colorful playbills from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, his triumphant tours of Europe in the 1930s, and his pioneering explosion of form and genre in the 1940s and beyond. Alongside more than two hundred stunning images, contributions from peers such as Dave Brubeck, Cornel West, Quincy Jones, and Tony Bennett shed light on Ellington's musical legacy, while the voice of his granddaughter Mercedes reveals the character behind the charisma, and the man behind the piano.

Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Rizzoli (March 22, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0847848132

ISBN-13: 978-0847848133

Product Dimensions: 9.3 x 1 x 12.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #849,717 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #244 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Jazz](#) #1124 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Jazz](#) #1312 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Photography & Video > Photojournalism & Essays > Photo Essays](#)

Customer Reviews

Mostly photos (and lots of text about Duke's granddaughter) make this more of an Art Book than a biography or reference book. In the first sentence of Mercedes Ellington's essay that begins this large coffee-table size book, (after a 2 page Introduction by Tony

Bennett), she explains that there have been many books, including well-researched tomes, about her grandfather Edward Duke Ellington, but there has been very little about the grandfather I knew. After reading her essay, which fills 33 pages of this 224 page book, we learn things about Duke but we learn even more about Mercedes, whose father, Mercer, was the son of Duke and Ruth, the woman Mercer never married. We hear about HER early life and HER career as a dancer and choreographer and Duke is only covered when it was an event that Mercedes was involved in. So, don't come to this book expecting to read about Duke's life if you've not read any other books (especially his autobiography). But the book is more than Mercedes' words. Co-Author Stephen Brower has been responsible for Art Books on both Woody Guthrie and Louis Armstrong (a wonderful book) and he has filled most of the pages here with paintings and graphics of the image of Ellington (Duke, not Mercedes). And related items. This is a book to look through more than read. After Mercedes tells her story we are given a 16 page Timeline which is mostly text with one 2x4 inch photo on each page. Following this are images worth 120 pages with a few tribute essays. Some are full page and quite a few are two-page-spreads. Most have limited captions and some none. The last 45 pages consist of sheet music covers and concert advertisements again, nearly all full page. This IS a beautiful book that's for sure and will appeal to dedicated Ellington fans. I loved looking through it but I can't say I learned anything new and it's disappointing that virtually none of the photos are dated or musicians identified. Consider this as a gift for an person who loves the Duke, or yourself, if you are one. I hope you found this review both informative and helpful. Steve Ramm

Great book with lots of photos not see before. Fantastic job. One of my regrets in life is not seeing Duke perform but this book helps. It's on the top of my coffee table!!

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