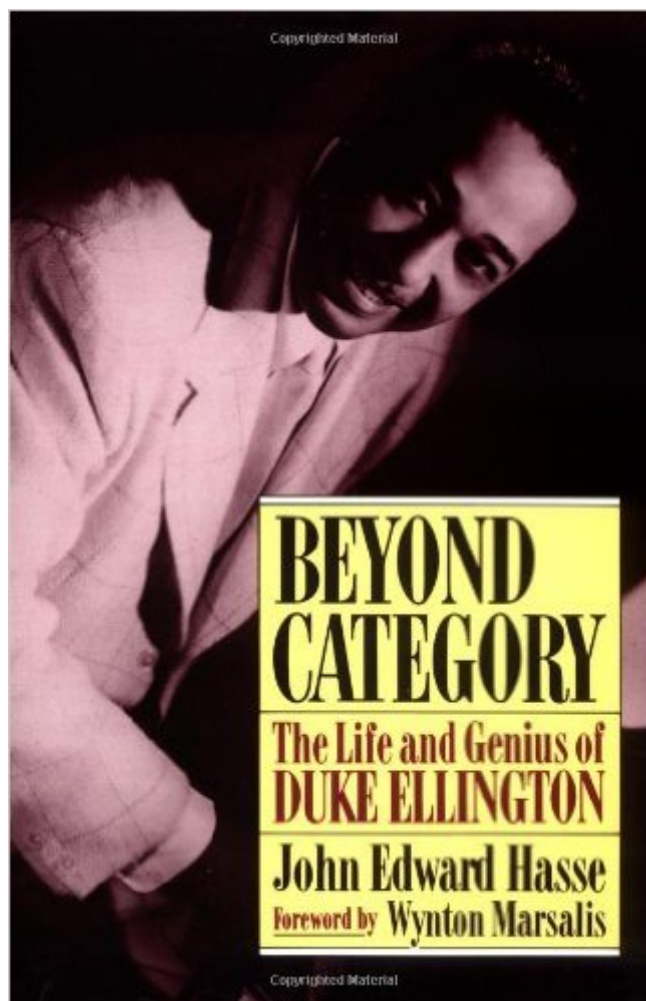


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# Beyond Category: The Life And Genius Of Duke Ellington



## Synopsis

One of the twentieth century's greatest composers, Duke Ellington (1899-1974) led a fascinating life. *Beyond Category*, the first biography to draw on the vast Duke Ellington archives at the Smithsonian Institution, recounts his remarkable career: his childhood in Washington, D.C., and his musical apprenticeship in Harlem; his long engagement at the Cotton Club; the challenging years of the depression; his tours to Europe and into America's deep South, where he helped lower racial barriers; the postwar years when television and bebop threatened to eclipse the big bands; Ellington's own triumphant comeback at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival; his collaborations with Billy Strayhorn, Johnny Hodges, and Ella Fitzgerald; as well as five decades of hits and masterpieces that constantly broke new ground. The art of Duke Ellington was a musical expression of the African-American experience, in all its pain, pride, and glory. He composed his music as he composed his life—with flair, passion, and individuality—and no book reveals the man and his artistic evolution more brilliantly than *Beyond Category*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Beyond Category* is the best introduction to Duke Ellington's life and music. It was created to coincide with a Smithsonian exhibit and it offers a quality professional biography of Ellington's life and times. The author considers Ellington's life a series of problems to solve for his mind. Some of these problems are how to learn piano, how to start a band, how to compose with a partner, how to react to the recording band, how to deal with the loss of key soloists, how to compose larger works

and ends up hitting many of the high points of Ellington's life and works. Most of the new research at the time came from Mercer Ellington's enormous donation of his warehouse of materials for the Duke Ellington collection. Yet as a book intended for a popular audience, the musical content of this trove was not really fully dealt with. Mercer's collection comes through in the fabulous photographs that are interspersed throughout the book. It may have been better to have all the photographs grouped in several sections as not everyone will have time to read the entire book I suppose. One very helpful aspect to the book was that at the end of each chapter there was a guide to key recordings of Ellington's life. This type of material is very helpful to those new to Ellington's life. I found the prose to be clear and adequate although not as lively as some of the other excellent jazz biographies I've read such as Chambers' Milestones. This book gets a 4.5 star rating for anyone new to Ellington. It's accessible, readable, and gives you several ideas to approach the true gold mine of Ellington's music.

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