

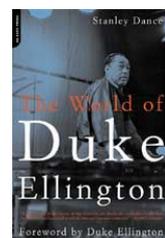
STANLEY FRANK DANCE (K25-28)

He was born on 15 September 1910 in Braintree, Essex. Records were apparently plentiful at Framlingham, so during his time there he was fortunate that the children of local record executives were also in attendance. This gave him the opportunity to hear almost anything that was at hand. By the time he left Framlingham, he and some friends were avid record collectors, going so far as to import titles from the United States that were unavailable in England.

By the time of his death, he had been writing about jazz longer than anyone had. He had served as book editor of *JazzTimes* from 1980 until December 1998, and was still contributing book and record reviews to that publication.

At the time of his death he was also still listed as a contributor to *Jazz Journal International*, where his column "Lightly And Politely" was a feature for many years. He also wrote for *The New York Herald-Tribune*, *The Saturday Review Of Literature* and *Music Journal*, among many other publications.

He wrote a number of books : *The Jazz Era* (1961); *The World of Duke Ellington* (1970); *The Night People* with Dicky Wells (1971); *The World of Swing* (1974); *The World of Earl Hines* (1977); *Duke Ellington in Person: An Intimate Memoir* with Mercer Ellington (1978); *The World of Count Basie* (1980); and *Those Swinging Years* with Charlie Barnet (1984).



When John Hammond began writing for *The Gramophone* in 1931 he turned everything upside down and Stanley began corresponding with Hammond and they met for the first time during Hammond's trip to England in 1935.

The arrival of Louis Armstrong in 1932 and Duke Ellington in 1933 provided Dance with his first opportunity to hear two performers in person who would forever be artists he revered. In 1979, he talked about his first contact with Ellington: "*Melody Maker* organized a special concert for its readers at the Trocadero in London, then the largest movie theatre in Europe. This was 1933 and the place was jammed. For over an hour the band played an uncompromising program that caused enormous excitement." In his words, "I was hooked for life."

Dance was involved with the family tobacco business by this time, but clearly jazz was his passion. At the time, there were no histories and no encyclopaedias. The opinions and ideas of a small band of writers were paving the way for things to come. When Hughes Panassie and Charles Delaunay founded the bilingual *Jazz Hot* in 1935, Dance contributed a piece on Teddy Wilson. Hammond was also a contributor, as was a former debutante from Toronto who had already been organizing concerts and writing for *Down Beat*, Helen Oakley, who was to become his wife.

In 1937, Dance paid his first visit to the U.S. In a whirlwind period of a couple of weeks, he managed to hear every big band of importance except Bob Crosby, Red Norvo, and Andy Kirk! During the day, he was often in the recording studio where Irving Mills was recording small jazz groups for his Variety label. Helen Oakley often supervised the sessions.

That was also the year that Delaunay and Panassie founded the Swing label. Dance went to Paris to attend recording sessions as often as possible. He had a fondness for the French fans of the period. In terms of defining his own values for jazz, Dance was increasingly drawn to the writing of Panassie and he credited him with "a better ear than any other critic I know" adding that he "was almost always in complete sympathy with his views."

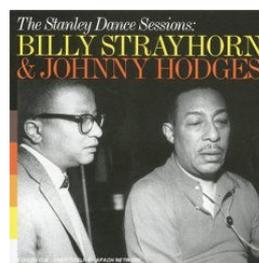
The outbreak of WW II put everything on hold. Panassie was active in the French Resistance while Helen Oakley served in Africa and Italy with the OSS, the forerunner of the CIA. Dance served from 1937-45 in the Observer Corps, part of the air defence system for Great Britain.

In 1946, he began writing for *Jazz Journal* (with the first issue) and came to the U.S. once again. He managed to hear Ellington at Carnegie Hall, the Lionel Hampton band, then featuring Arnett Cobb, and

the fall tour of Jazz At The Philharmonic. He also went to Toronto to meet Helen's family. In January, 1947, they went to England and were married. Over the next decade, Dance made occasional trips to the U.S., but apart from his involvement in the family business, he was writing for English magazines on a regular basis. It was during this time that he coined the term "mainstream." Mainstream was intended to identify performers who were not playing either traditional jazz or bebop. Since good jazz, regardless of style, "swung," to describe someone as a swing player seemed redundant. Dance himself used the term "casually and briefly" and felt that "for a time it was an adequate label." His intent was to identify players who had made considerable contributions and were still in their prime, making vital music yet were not being recorded.

His meeting with Sir Edward Lewis at a 1958 party has become part of the lore. Lewis was the head of British Decca, and Dance "started to beef about the fact that the only jazz his labels were putting out was "progressive" or "Dixieland," while artists such as Earl Hines, Dicky Wells, and Coleman Hawkins were being ignored. He had the ear of the right man since Lewis was the one who sent Spike Hughes to America in 1933 to record some of the same people. The next morning, Lewis called Dance, saying he had made a good point. Dance volunteered to supervise the recordings. The albums would be issued on the Felsted label in a series dubbed Mainstream Jazz.

The recording sessions, done in January and February, 1958, produced albums by Buster Bailey, Cozy Cole/Earl Hines, Coleman Hawkins, Budd Johnson, Rex Stewart, Buddy Tate, and Dicky Wells. The music was a reminder of the still-vibrant abilities of these men. The Hawkins album, *The High and Mighty Hawk*, was a masterpiece. While the albums were not available on a U.S. label, they were available as imports from many specialists. During 1959, he returned to do two more Felsted albums. A second Dicky Wells album was one of them. The other was a Johnny Hodges album, issued under Billy Strayhorn's name, also featuring Shorty Baker, Butter Jackson, and Russell Procope. It was also during 1959 that Dance took the big plunge. He sold the family business and moved his family to Connecticut. Helen helped to orchestrate the transition as they moved into one of her father's homes in Rowayton.



After the move, one of his first assignments was to produce some albums for English Columbia. From these sessions, recorded during 1959 and 1960, came albums by Harold Ashby (his first), Chris Barber (pictured on left with Stanley Dance), Booty Wood (with Johnny Hodges and Dicky Wells), and Harry Carney (a nine-piece band of Ellington men). There were sessions with Buddy Tate and Emmett Berry that split a 12-inch LP and two anthologies featuring Vic Dickenson, Shorty Baker, Johnny Letman, Buster Bailey, and others in quartet settings. Only the Wood and Ashby albums have been issued in the U.S. It was also during this time that he produced Mainstream for RCA/Camden (half a big band led by Andy Gibson and half a sextet including Vic Dickenson, Shorty Baker, and Jimmy Forrest) and *Ellingtonia Moods and Blues* by Johnny Hodges and Paul Gonsalves for French RCA.



In addition to all this activity in the recording studio, Dance spent much of the 1960s writing. He wrote newspaper columns, magazine articles, and record company liner notes. He did concert reports, club openings, and record reviews.

His long friendship with Ellington paid dividends, since LPs by Ellington, Hodges, and other members of the band became a veritable franchise for Dance. Together with Leonard Feather he won a Grammy Award for his liner notes for *The Ellington Era, Volume One* (Columbia) in 1963. Other Grammy nominations for liner notes were for Earl Hines' *The Grand Terrace Band* (RCA, 1965); *The Duke Ellington Era, Volume Two* (Columbia, 1966); Ellington's *The Far East Suite* (RCA, 1967) and the Ellington compilation on *Giants Of Jazz* (1979).

His closeness to Ellington increased after Billy Strayhorn's death in 1967. He was soon travelling with the band and reporting their activities from points across the globe. He helped Ellington with his biography *Music Is My Mistress*.

Dan Morgenstern met Dance in 1957 and began writing for *Jazz Journal* on his recommendation. In 1964, Morgenstern and writer David Himmelstein began promoting weekend concerts at the Little Theatre in New York. After a strong start with Coleman Hawkins, Dance suggested Hines to them as a possible attraction.

There was some question as to whether Hines would travel from California, but Dance convinced him that such an appearance could be beneficial. The resulting concerts were a smashing success. The New York press was overwhelmingly enthusiastic and recordings were done for Focus, RCA, and Columbia. After 40 years in the music business, Hines had a brand new career in front of him.

Hines insisted that Dance handle his business. So, in his mid-50s, Dance reluctantly became a manager. He handled the bookings and negotiated the record deals for Hines until the pianist's death in 1983. In short order, Hines became the most recorded artist in jazz. There were roughly 90 LPs recorded during the period 1964-81, an absolutely astonishing output. Many of the albums, especially those for Black Lion and Master Jazz, were produced in whole or in part by Dance.

As the '60s turned into the '70s, Dance began to concentrate more on books, yet he never gave up liner notes. His final set of notes, completed in January 1999, was for an Australian CD by Joe Temperley.

As a critic, Dance tended to advocate what he liked. He disliked bebop and made no bones about it. In his writing you can find laudatory praise for Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, and many others associated with bebop but not all that often. He could be petty, but more often than not he took the high road. Not that he would avoid an argument. He had many more of them than most critics. Swing, a full, warm, individual tone, and melodic character in improvisation were cited by Dance as his most important criteria in judging a jazz performance.

"Everybody's critical standards are the result of experience, but the impact of musical experience is probably felt most strongly when you are in your teens or 20s. All through the '30s, the music seemed to me to be progressively improving, but after WW II it began what I consider a steady decline."

Ultimately, Dance was less interested in criticism than interviewing musicians. The stories in his books are generally told by the musicians themselves and the voices of those musicians stay intact. He didn't dress up commentary to dramatic effect. He also contributed interviews to the Smithsonian Institution Oral History project.

After Ellington's death, Dance assisted Mercer Ellington in dealing with the "stockpile": an enormous amount of private recording produced by Duke dating, in some cases, back to the '50s. He helped place a goodly amount of this material with reputable record labels and the results were dozens of posthumous albums by Ellington units large and small. He also co-authored Mercer Ellington's book, which won an ASCAP- Deems Taylor Award in 1979.

In 1979, he decided to move to California. To help finance the move, he sold most of his LP collection, about 2,200 LPs. You can tell a lot about a person's tastes simply by finding what he keeps on his shelves. Dance had complete runs of Earl Bostic and Bill Doggett LPs, two artists who were never covered by American critics. There were marvellous albums, usually on small labels, from countries all over the world, by artists who were unknown to the general public. There were some wonderful blues records. It was a highly unusual collection because the contents were so specific.

During the California years, Stanley and Helen provided advice and encouragement to the Sweet Baby Blues Band of Jeannie and Jimmy Cheatham. That unique ensemble seemed, for its time, to best represent the musical values that Dance had championed all his life. On one occasion, he actually joined the notorious "glee club" and contributed a backing vocal to *Sometimes It Be That Way* from the 1987 album, *Homeward Bound*.

In 1995, the Stanley F. Dance and Helen Oakley Dance Archive was established at Yale University. The collection is focused on Ellington. The contents consists of correspondence, LPs, tapes, and memorabilia, even including a pair of Duke's cufflinks given to Dance by Duke's sister Ruth after Ellington's death.

He died on 23 February 1999 in San Diego, California. Following his death a biography of his life and work has been published in digital form.

