

ENSEMBLE

LAURENT MIGNARD DUKE ORCHESTRA

ELLINGTON'S HEIRS

TEXT MARTY GRAVEROL PHOTO SHAKUNTALA



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Laurent Mignard has lived with Duke Ellington ever since the day Frédéric Charbaut, artistic director of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés Jazz Festival, commissioned from him the reproduction of the concert given at the Paris church of Saint Sulpice in 1969. Except that no partition by Ellington exists. Trumpet player and composer Mignard first identified by ear the repertoire involved. It then took him nine months, working almost day and night, to transcribe one hour and 45 minutes of sacred music.

ELLINGTON WROTE FORBIDDEN THINGS

The Duke doesn't let go of those who get very close to him. The concert was a success, and the orchestra formed in 2003 for the festival discovered a musical vein to explore. It's not a matter of a simple artistic opportunity; the musical and human profundity was irresistible. "As I went along identifying thing, I was more and more taken by the quality of the music," says Mignard. "Ellington wrote forbidden



things that sound extremely good, and I realized that, beyond being a musical work, it's a matter of posture and personal values."

The Laurent Mignard Duke Orchestra offers six theme programs as a way of approaching works that are more or less well known. "Panorama" traces the route of the indispensable standards since the 1940s, affording the opportunity

to touch on all of the Duke's facets. "Ellington French Touch" presents him through a video, and he's the one who starts off the concert. The evening touches on his relationship with France, notably with a Suite for a stage play, "Turcaret", the only music Ellington wrote for the stage, which he presented as a gift to Jean Vilar of the Theatre National de Paris, without even registering the rights.



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“Jazz is too small a word to contain all that we would like to do,” the Duke used to say. Another program replays “Battle Royal”, a commission from Columbia and a legendary album recorded with Count Basie in 1961, on which The Count Meets the Duke, each with his respective orchestra. The personal posture of Ellington comes through in each of the programs, as it does in “Duke Ladies”, which goes back to the made-to-measure arrangements he did for female singers. “Musically there is a constant search for elegance, for seduction, in the restraint rather than in assertiveness or violence,” says Mignard. “As master of ceremonies, he has incredible delicacy and tact, just as he does in showcasing the soloists.”

The Duke Ellington Center for the Arts, founded and presided over by Mercedes Ellington (daughter of Mercer and granddaughter of Duke) decided to create an international Ellingtonian community based on two pillars: their New York foundation and the triptych initiated in France by Laurent Mignard, composed of the Duke Orchestra, the Maison du Duke (an association that federates and organizes various projects) and, since 2012, the Provins Duke Festival (the first European festival dedicated to Ellington). The foundation sponsors LMDO concerts, including the upcoming tour dedicated to Ellington’s

sacred music, which is scheduled for twelve cathedrals in France in October. Mercedes Ellington will participate onstage with other American artists.

Laurent Mignard recognizes the sacred character of the Oratorio: “When Ellington speaks about God, he has a disarming simplicity: he carried a Bible, he prayed every night. The Oratorio is his testament work.” Mignard recalls that Ellington never had the opportunity to write the musical comedy that he dreamed of playing on Broadway.

A CONSTANT SEARCH FOR ELEGANCE AND SEDUCTION



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He also had a project for an opera about “his” people, but a black man couldn’t create an opera in New York in the 1940s. With the video link, you can discover how the signature sound and the posture of the soloists in an Ellingtonian orchestra make perfect sense. Each musician plays in his own way, with his own sound—from Philippe Milanta’s piano to the clarinet of Aurélie Tropez—and you might think that they are not in place, but from a distance, the ensemble creates a coherence that brings a mosaic of sonorous contrasts. If the LMDO musicians each also have their own careers, together they incarnate the sound of a unique composer and orchestra leader—the one that, according to Miles Davis, every musician should get down on his knees and thank. Beyond category, the Duke might have said... ■

FESTIVAL JAZZ À ST-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS TUESDAY MAY 20, 2014

DUKE ELLINGTON, GOSPEL AND SACRED MUSIC

Grand concert in honor of 40 years of heritage from the master.

Music director: Laurent Mignard.

Special guest: Emmanuel Pi Djob, preacher, singer and composer.
Saint Sulpice Church - Place Saint Sulpice,
Paris 6th. 9 p.m.

A BLACK MAN COULDN'T CREATE AN OPERA

