



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Carter Harman Collection of Interviews with Duke Ellington

NMAH.AC.0422

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2015

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Carter Harman Collection of Interviews with Duke Ellington
Date:	1991 - 1991 1956,1964
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0422
Creator:	Ellington, Duke, 1899-1974 (Interviewee) Harman, Carter (Interviewer)
Extent:	3 Cubic feet (8 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	The collection captures Duke Ellington's thoughts on music, performing, composing, and his personal history in his own voice in approximately 20 hours of interviews conducted in 1956 and 1964.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Carter Harman in 1991.

Available Formats

This collection has 5 inch open reel audio master tapes and reference cassettes. Some reels have digital reference copies in the Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS).

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Reuben Jackson, archivist, 1991 and Wendy Shay, audiovisual archivist, 2015

Preferred Citation

Carter Harman Collection of Interviews with Duke Ellington, 1956-1964, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research but the mater tapes are stored off-site and special arrangements must be made to work with it. Contact the Archives Center for information at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

Carter Harman, born in 1918, was a music critic, reporter, editor, and producer who was first exposed to Duke Ellington and his music as a young child listening to radio broadcasts during the 1920s. His interest in and passion for Ellington grew and was cemented the first time he saw a live performance. He continued to attend as many Ellington performances as possible, even going to a dance Ellington played in Brunswick, New Jersey in 1943 immediately before he left to serve as a helicopter pilot in World War II. Harman didn't have many opportunities to listen to Ellington while at war, although from time to time he was able to hear the music on Armed Forces Radio and V-discs.

After the war Harman began a five-year apprenticeship as a music reporter for the *New York Times*. In 1952 he became the music editor for *Time Magazine*. He later wrote "my beat was dreamy – covering concerts, operas, the dance, entertainment, and records." Harman's job provided him with the opportunity to meet and interview Ellington. His initial interview was for a short piece for *Time* that focused on the band's new drummer Sam Woodyard. That story led to the possibility of a longer cover story about Ellington.

Harman began work on the feature by flying to Las Vegas where Ellington was performing at the Flamingo. Following a performance he was able to interview Ellington on tape using Ellington's personal tape recorder. This 1956 recording is the first interview in the Carter Harman Collection. Harman spent several evenings with Ellington during which time conducted an unrecorded interview with Billy Strayhorn. He was able to record Strayhorn's impromptu performance of *Lush Life*.

The remaining taped interviews took place during 1964 and were intended to be the basis for Ellington's autobiography to be ghost-written by Harman. The interviews were conducted in a variety of venues, most notably during car rides to appearances around the country. Harman acquired a Ficord portable tape recorder for the project which he operated from the back seat of the car while Ellington spoke into the microphone in the front seat. Harman later discovered that battery problems with the Ficord affected the quality of the recordings so that at times Ellington sounded like "Donald Duke."

Ellington considered Harman a friend and would frequently call him just to chat about topics unrelated to the book project. Ultimately Harman's involvement with the autobiography fell apart and the friendship cooled, although Harman continued to follow Ellington's work and attend performances. In 1973 Ellington published his autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress*, with Stanley Dance assisting with the writing.

Carter Harman moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1957 following his 1956 encounter with Ellington and the subsequent publication of the *Time* cover story. There he worked for the record label, Sounds of Our Times, which was devoted to recording folk music. Harman travelled from San Juan to the United States to conduct the 1964 interviews. He returned to New York and in 1967 became the executive director and producer of Composers Recordings, Inc. He retired from CRI Records in 1984.

Carter Harman died January 23, 2007.

Citation: Harman, Carter. About the Duke Ellington Tapes, unpublished, 1991.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of ten interviews (approximately twenty hours) Carter Harman conducted with Duke Ellington, in 1956 and in 1964. The conversations were wide ranging with Ellington discussing his early years, performing and composing life, his thoughts about music and jazz, orchestra members and colleagues, and race in America. The interviews were recorded in hotel rooms and cars. Billy Strayhorn can also be heard on some of the tapes. Supplemental materials includes an essay by Carter Harman describing his relationship with Duke Ellington and the creation of the tapes as well as a tape summary for each tape.

Arrangement

This collection is organized in four series,

Series 1: Original Audio Tapes, 1956, 1964

Series 2: Master Audio Tapes, 1956, 1964

Series 3: Reference Audio Cassettes, 1956, 1964

Series 4: Supplemental Information, 1991

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Jazz
- Music -- 20th century
- Musicians

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Interviews -- 1950-1970
- Oral history -- 1950-1970

Container Listing

Series 1: Original Audio Tapes, 1956,1964

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0001-1 and 2 Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956 May
2 Sound tape reels

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0002 Ellington Interview 1, 1964
1 Sound tape reel

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0003 Ellington Interview 2, 1964
1 Sound tape reel
[Audio: Ellington Interview 2, 1964 May 30](#)
[Audio: Ellington Interview 2, 1964 May 30](#)

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0004 Ellington Interview 3, 1964
1 Sound tape reel
Notes: **Digital reference copy in Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS).**

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0005 Ellington Interview 4, 1964
1 Sound tape reel

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0006 Ellington Interview 5, 1964
1 Sound tape reel

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0007 Ellington Interview 6, 1964
1 Sound tape reel

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0008 Ellington Interview 7, 1964
1 Sound tape reel
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)

Box 1, Tape AC0422-OT0009 Ellington Interview 8, 1964
1 Sound tape reel
Notes: **Digital reference copy in Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS)**

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Series 2: Master Audio Tapes, 1956,1964

Box 2, Tape AC0422-
MT0001-1,2,3,4,5 Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956
5 Sound tape reels

Box 2, Tape AC0422-
MT0002-1,2,3,4 Ellington Interview 1, 1964
4 Sound tape reels

Box 2, Tape
AC0422-0003-1,2,3 Ellington Interview 2, 1964
3 Sound tape reels

Box 3, Tape AC0422-
MT0004-1,2,3,4 Ellington Interview 3
4 Sound tape reels

Box 3, Tape AC0422-
MT0005-1,2,3,4,5,6,7 Ellington Interview 4, 1964
7 Sound tape reels

Box 4, Tape AC0422-
MT0006-1,2,3,4,5 Ellington Interview 5, 1964
5 Sound tape reels

Box 4, Tape AC0422-
MT0007-1,2,3,4 Ellington Interview 6, 1964
4 Sound tape reels

Box 4, Tape AC0422-
MT0008-1,2,3,4,5 Ellington Interview 7, 1964
5 Sound tape reels

Box 5, Tape AC0422-
MT0009-1,2,3,4,5,6 Ellington Interview 8, 1964
6 Sound tape reels

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Series 3: Reference Audio Cassettes, 1956,1964

Box 6, Tape AC0422-
RTC0001-1,2,3 Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956
3 Sound cassettes
[Audio: Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956 May](#)
[Audio: Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956 May](#)
[Audio: Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956 May](#)
[Audio: Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956 May](#)
[Audio: Ellington Interview, Las Vegas, 1956 May](#)

Box 6, Tape AC0422-
RTC0002-1and 2 Ellington Interview 1, 1964
2 Sound cassettes
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)

Box 6, Tape AC0422-
RTC0003-1 and 2 Ellington Interview 2, 1964
2 Sound cassettes
[Audio: Ellington Interview 2, 1964 May 30](#)
[Audio: Ellington Interview 2, 1964 May 30](#)

Box 6, Tape AC0422-
RTC0004-1 and 2 Ellington Interview 3, 1964
2 Sound cassettes
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)

Box 6, Tape AC0422-
RTC0005-1,2,3,4 Ellington Interview 4, 1964
4 Sound cassettes
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)

Box 6, Tape AC0422-
RTC0006-1,2,3 Ellington Interview 5, 1964
3 Sound cassettes
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)

Box 7, Tape AC0422-
RTC0007-1 and 2 Ellington Interview 6, 1964
2 Sound cassettes
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)
[Audio](#)

[Audio](#)

Box 7, Tape AC0422-
RTC0008-1,2,3

Ellington Interview 7, 1964
3 Sound cassettes

- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)

Box 7, Tape AC0422-
RTC0009-1,2,3

Ellington Interview 8, 1964
3 Sound cassettes

- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [Audio](#)

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Series 4: Supplemental Information, 1991

0.1 Cubic feet

Box 8

Box 8, Folder 1	About the Duke Ellington Tapes 1 Document
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Box 8, Folder 2	Tape Summaries 1 Document
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