



Edward Kennedy Ellington

April 29, 1899 - May 24, 1974

Washington, District of Columbia

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington died in New York City on May 24, 1974. He was seventy-five. Born in Washington, D.C., on April 29, 1899, he took a city piano style on the road and built an orchestra that was itself the instrument: Blanton, Hodges, Strayhorn, and decades of one-night stands that looked like glamour from the seats and like logistics from the bus.

He called the music American music, not a category to be filed under someone else's hyphen. Sacred concerts, suite-length works, and dance dates sat in the same book. He wrote in hotel rooms and on trains, leaving fragments for Billy Strayhorn and the band to finish in the only rehearsal that mattered - the next set. Washington taught him elegance as a form of work; New York was the later stage, the Cotton Club's compromises, and the long afterlife of the suites.

This memorial names Washington, the hometown. He died in New York. He is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, not far from other names the century filed as monuments. The orchestra, which outlived him for a time, was the grave he would have recognized.

He composed on the road because the road was the job. Sacred concerts in cathedrals and dances in armories used the same brass. Washington still claims the elegance; the Bronx claims the stone. The band book, if it could be kept in one place, would be the truer interment. He said the band was his instrument and meant the payroll as well as the chords. Woodlawn took the body. The road took everything else. Washington still teaches the posture; the suites still refuse a single category.

Services

Died in New York on May 24, 1974. Interment at Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx. Washington, D.C., is the hometown this page names.

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