

# HEY KIDS, MEET DUKE ELLINGTON

American Jazz Pianist and Composer (1899 -1974)



**Duke Ellington** was born Edward Kennedy Ellington in Washington, D.C., on April 29, 1899.

When Duke was seven years old, his parents enrolled him in piano lessons and encouraged him to practice. Duke would have preferred to play baseball, but he did as his parents' asked and practiced the piano every day.

Duke's mother encouraged him to be well-mannered and elegant. He embraced these characteristics and enjoyed looking dapper, earning him the nickname "Duke" because his sophisticated style gave him the appearance of a young aristocrat.

At the age of 15, while working as a soda jerk at the Poodle Dog Café, Duke wrote his first musical composition. He called it "Soda Fountain Rag."

In high school Duke's music teacher gave him lessons in harmony. He also received tutoring from pianist and band leader Oliver "Doc" Perry, who taught him to read and write music, develop his professional style, and improved his technique.

Jazz musicians were in demand in New York in early 1920's and Ellington wanted to be part of what was happening. He decided to move there and perform with his small band, the Washingtonians. It wasn't long before musicians and critics were noticing that Ellington's music was special. Four years later Ellington was offered an engagement at Harlem's hottest jazz spot - The Cotton Club.

By 1943, Duke Ellington reached a milestone in his career. He was invited to perform a series of concerts with his big band, The Duke Ellington Orchestra, at Carnegie Hall. The compositions he featured at these concerts were so beautifully written that many people believed that the piano was no longer his musical instrument. It was his band.

In 1969, President Nixon threw a party at the White House to celebrate Duke Ellington's 70th birthday. During the event Nixon honored Ellington's lifetime of achievement by presenting him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Duke Ellington died on May 24, 1974, having established himself as one of the greatest jazz artists and composers of all-time.

