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Florida Avenue and T Street NW

Duke Ellington Statue

DC Native, American Jazz Pianist, Composer, and Orchestra Leader



Duke Ellington Statue



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The Duke Ellington statue is the focal point of a landscaped plaza near the front of the Howard Theatre at Florida Avenue and T Street NW. Born Edward Kennedy Ellington, “Duke” was born and raised in DC where he started taking piano lessons at the age of seven. During the 1920s, Ellington was an established regular with his own orchestra at New York City’s famous Cotton Club. His musical collaboration with fellow jazz legend Billy Strayhorn spanned more than three decades. He hit a second peak of popularity following an appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival in the 1950s. He died in 1974 shortly after his 75th birthday.

The sculpture, titled “Encore”, was created by DC native Zachary Oxman and depicts Ellington seated on a giant treble clef playing a curved piano. Oxman was commissioned to complete the piece by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

The Shaw/Uptown area of the District was chosen as the site of the statue because Ellington spent his childhood and early years of his career in the neighborhood. The adjacent Howard Theater is also an important location. In its heyday it was known for catering to an African-American clientele and played host to many of the great Black musical artists of the early and mid-twentieth century. Duke Ellington inaugurated a new era of jazz big bands on the Howard’s stage.