**Duke Ellington**

**Edward Kennedy** "**Duke**" **Ellington** (April 29, 1899 – May 24, 1974) was an American composer, pianist, and bandleader of a [jazz orchestra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_band), which he led from 1923 until his death in a career spanning over fifty years.

Born in [Washington, D.C.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington,_D.C.), Ellington was based in New York City from the mid-1920s onward, and gained a national profile through his orchestra's appearances at the [Cotton Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton_Club) in Harlem. In the 1930s, his orchestra toured in Europe. Though widely considered to have been a pivotal figure in the history of jazz, Ellington embraced the phrase "beyond category" as a liberating principle, and referred to his music as part of the more general category of American Music, rather than to a musical genre such as jazz.

Some of the musicians who were members of Ellington's orchestra, such as saxophonist [Johnny Hodges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_Hodges), are considered to be among the best players in jazz. Ellington melded them into the best-known [orchestral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orchestral_jazz) unit in the history of jazz. Some members stayed with the orchestra for several decades. A master at writing miniatures for the [three-minute 78 rpm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gramophone_record#78_rpm_recording_time) recording format, Ellington often composed specifically to feature the style and skills of his individual musicians.