



# The Duke Ellington Society (TDES, Inc.)

Celebrating the music of Duke Ellington

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 7:30PM  
 Saint Peter's Church; 54th St. & Lexington Ave

## Harlan James: Who Was Jelly Roll Morton--And Why Should We Care?



From 1923 to 1928, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton (1890–1941), a prime exemplar of New Orleans–style music, was one of the hottest names in jazz, a pianist, composer, arranger, and bandleader, who signed a contract in 1926 with the prestigious Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA Victor).

Today, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton is remembered primarily as the colorful old character who claimed to have personally invented jazz in 1902, and his musical legacy is pretty much neglected, known mostly to scholars and specialists.

Pianist–composer and TDES member and former vice president Harlan James, who believes that there is much of value for Ellingtonians in Morton's recorded output, will

present an overview of Morton's life, career, and musical works at the meeting on January 21.

Harlan says, "Ellington and Morton, on the personal level, had little in common; they really didn't have much use for each other. But Morton is a significant precursor of Ellington—a master of melody, harmony, and rhythm who manifested great care and ingenuity in crafting performances that made the best use of the 10-inch 78-rpm recording format. His electrical records still sound vibrant and engrossing, and even if his music isn't your idea of jazz, the quality and vitality of the performances is undeniable. In fact, there is a fascinating link between Morton and later developments in New Orleans music as manifested in the areas of rhythm and blues, rock and roll, and funk, and we'll examine that. Primarily, we'll listen to the music." As in his earlier presentations, Harlan will demonstrate musical points at the piano and perform a few complete compositions by or related to Morton.



*Photo by Richard Ehrenzeller*

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