

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

SUMMER 2016

Every year at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, we adapt a school theme that shapes our conversations, curriculum, and creativity for the year. This year's theme "The Legacy Continues..." reflected our aim to build on last year's achievements, while remaining true to our mission to nurture and inspire passion for arts and learning in talented students who might not otherwise have an opportunity to develop their artistic skills. The achievements of the Class of 2016 are a true testament to the importance of the well-rounded education we provide – 98% of our seniors graduated, 97% were accepted to college, and the class earned a cumulative total of \$12.4 million in scholarships.

Compared to last year, Ellington's College Summit Program worked with five times as many students and their families. Among the many generous scholarships our graduates have received, many of them full rides, are two particularly prestigious honors: The Posse Foundation Scholarship awarded to Matlhodi Sebolai, who will be attending Bucknell University, and the George Washington University's Stephen Joel Trachtenberg Scholarship awarded to Sakiya Walker. Other notable institutions Ellington graduates will be attending include Yale, Juilliard, Howard University, Smith College, University of Richmond, Temple University, Berklee College of Music, Carnegie Mellon University, Cooper Union, NYU, and University of Southern California.

Ellington students are provided with academic and artistic opportunities to achieve more, succeed, and beat the odds. One such student is Jordan Harris, who studied Theatre at Ellington and has been accepted to six universities, including Yale, Brown, Harvard, Fordham, University of Minnesota and University of Oregon. He will be attending Yale in the fall. As the class valedictorian, Jordan spoke at the 41st commencement ceremony, electrifying the crowd with his stirring speech on resilience, destroying stereotypes and making an impact in the world. Below is an excerpt from his remarks.

Many in society fear young individuals like us – bold, passionate, outspoken, aware, artistic, different. Especially those of us who are black males. The stereotype says that we are not supposed to be high school valedictorians. But we are. Or get into Juilliard. But we do. Or play the piano well enough that we get to meet the famous cellist Yo-Yo Ma. But we do. Or perform for heads of state.

But we do. Within the walls of Duke, we are not unusual; we are celebrated. But out there, in greater society? Many will see just another black male and make assumptions about who we are. The wrong assumptions. How do I know this? Trayvon Martin. Tamir Rice. Mike Brown. Gone because of what the stereotype says. Potential destroyed in seconds because of the stereotype.

The prophet James Baldwin said, "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time." Unfortunately, this is still true. And over the past four years we have taken the narrative that has played out in this country in politics, education, media, and law enforcement, and used it as the basis for raging in both academics and arts classrooms. We have had countless classroom and hallway debates about how to move through a world designed to knock us down at every turn. We have written and performed pieces that reflect the sheer pain of the injustice that we have witnessed. It makes no sense that in our graduation year – 2016 – 51 years after the Civil Rights Act, 54 years after James Baldwin's statement about constant rage, that society is still not ready to welcome us with completely wide-open arms.

Each of us has a responsibility — to ourselves, to our parents and families, to those at Duke who molded and shaped us — to walk boldly out into the world with all the passion and resilience that the last four years have built up in us and to use our art to make an impact. To make an impact that starts turning this world around, destroys stereotypes, knocks injustice on its head, and instead moves society toward building, lifting, honoring, and believing in the potential of all. It is on us to ensure that those who come after us can walk into a safe, positive world, free of rage, and ready to soar.



Valedictorian Jordan Harris with Ellington Head of School, Desepe de Vargas.

YEAR AT ELLINGTON

The halls at Ellington

are temporarily quiet for a few weeks as the last of our students have finished exams, juries, recitals, readings and master classes. Yes, we have wrapped up another year at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts – and what a year it has been! Thanks to ongoing support from members of the community, Ellington has continued to give its talented and passionate students the education, training, opportunities and support they need to grow as artists and citizens. In return, with the encouragement and inspiration of our incredible faculty and staff, they have amazed us with their artistry, insight and compassion for the world around them.



Literary Media & Communications students at a masterclass with writer, activist, and educator Nikki Giovanni.

This year, Ellington students shared their talent and social activism with the community through performances, exhibitions, and writing and new media showcases held across the city. At the top of the school year, Ellington's vocal jazz group, the Mellow Tones, opened for Kendrick Lamar's sold-out Kennedy Center concert with the National Symphony Orchestra, garnering glowing reviews. Our students returned to the Kennedy Center numerous times throughout the year to



The Mellow Tones with award-winning rapper Kendrick Lamar at the Kennedy Center.

perform in concerts featuring spoken word, opera, show choir, theatre, dance, vocal music and jazz. In April, Ellington's New Washingtonians Jazz Ensemble took part in DC's International Jazz Day festivities, performing both at the White House and at the opening ceremony in DuPont Circle – a performance that was cited by the *New York Times* as a highlight of the day's events.



Radical Elite performing at the Funk Parade in DC.

Ellington's performances this year were not limited to illustrious concert stages – students also performed at community events, at Howard University's Homecoming Parade and the Funk Parade, and at local venues such as THEARC. The Ellington Theatre remained the primary venue for many Ellington performances including the Theatre department's gripping production of "The Story", which won Best Play, Best Featured Actress (Azariah Barker) and Best Lead Actress in a Play (Saran Bakari) at the Cappies of the National Capital Area. Ellington's annual Opera Workshop production was also staged at the Ellington Theatre and featured promising singers Samira Plummer and Asia Haynie, who are both winners of the Virginia E. Hayes Williams Opera Prize.

Our visual artists, photographers and curators exhibited their work in a variety of spaces, including the Chevy Chase Community Center, DCCA Gallery, Pepco Edison Place Gallery, Washington Printmakers Gallery, Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, and the African American Civil War Museum. Visual Arts students provided artwork for two occasions at the White House: the White House Holiday Tour Book and a sidewalk mural for the kick off of the First Lady's *Better Make Room* campaign.



Visual Arts students and faculty with their Better Make Room mural at the White House.

Ellington's writers excelled at numerous writing competitions this year, including winning multiple awards at the Writopia Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and the Larry Neal Writers' Competition – notably the Teen Fiction Award for Celia Caldwell for "We Are Just Neighbors". Visual Arts student Anahit Kanayan wrote and illustrated a children's book that won first place in the B'nai B'rith *Diverse Minds Writing Challenge*. Her book, "My Family is Different" will be professionally published and distributed to local schools, libraries and community organizations. Finally, Ellington's annual *Horwitz Playwriting Competition* culminated in a professionally produced reading of Nia Boulware's winning play "Children of Porcelain Dolls" – an insightful story about family secrets.

Ellington students have also traveled across the country to competitions and conferences. The Dance Department participated in the International Association of Blacks in Dance conference in Denver, taking part in performances, talks, and master classes, as well as auditions where Ellington students received over \$100,000 in scholarships to university and professional summer dance programs such as Joffrey Ballet, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance and Dance Theatre of Harlem. Instrumental Music students traveled to Boston to the Heritage Music Festival, where all our musical ensembles – as well as some individual students – won awards, resulting in the department winning the Sweepstakes Award. Likewise, the Show Choir, which also had the recent honor of performing for Secretary of State John Kerry, won multiple awards at the Show Choir America competition in Florida, including the Grand Prize.

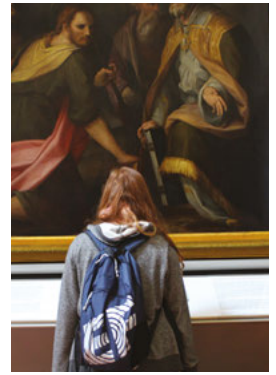


Instrumental Music faculty with awards from the Heritage Music Festival.



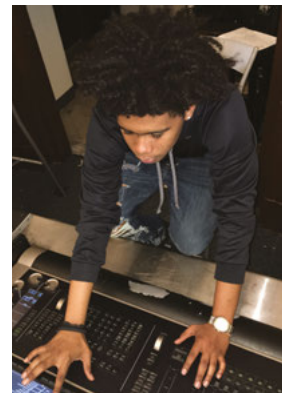
The Show Choir with Secretary of State John Kerry at a luncheon he hosted for the Nordic Heads of State.

Ellington also recognizes the importance of international travel for our students to broaden their horizons and learn firsthand about other cultures and forms of artistic expression. In the fall, the Vocal Music department's Sophisticated Ladies and Show Choir hosted students from the Australian Girls Choir and the Adolf Fredrik's Music School of Stockholm, Sweden. The Show Choir continued their exchange with the Adolf Fredrik's Music School with a trip to Stockholm in the spring to attend classes, perform, and build on their friendships and artistic collaboration. Museum Studies students traveled to Rome over spring break to tour its many museums and cultural sites. This summer 19 Ellington students and an Ellington staff member will join other students and educators on trips as part of the DCPS Global Education Program. Ellington will be represented in 14 different countries, including Spain, Peru, Costa Rica and Senegal.



A Museum Studies student taking in art while in Rome, Italy.

Finally, we would be remiss in not mentioning our Technical Design & Production department which provides the sound, light, set design and technical support for every production, rehearsal, and recital at Ellington. Students have received hands-on training and taken part in numerous master classes with professionals in the field. In August, a select group will participate in a Feld Entertainment sponsored internship at their Florida headquarters.



A Technical Design & Production student at work.

Summer remains a busy time at Ellington. Six of our arts departments will be running summer intensives for current, incoming, and prospective students. Staff will also be preparing for the annual Shepherd's Retreat and planning for the next school year. This level of dedication is what sets our faculty apart. Just recently, two of Ellington's faculty members – Davey Yarborough and Marta Reid-Stewart – received The Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Award for 2016.

We are beyond proud of all we have accomplished and look forward to continuing to provide our deserving scholar-artists with diverse opportunities to enhance their learning experience at Ellington. We hope you will remain advocates of arts education and steadfast supporters of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and its fundraising arm, The Ellington Fund. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do!