



Falkes Sommerfest

10. Juli 1970

Stadthalle Schmallenberg

In 1970 Duke Ellington played a company gig for the 75th anniversary of the sock and stocking factory Falke in Schmallenberg, a small town (population: 25,000) in the Sauerland region of (then West-) Germany, halfway between Kassel and Cologne. At one point we were asked about the concert and became curious about why and how it happened in the first place. We wrote to Franz-Otto Falke, together with his brother Paul one of the co-owners of the factory since 1951, and asked for the details. It took a couple of weeks, then we received an envelope containing a report by the Falke employee Klaus Fenger who in 1970 was working for Falke in advertising, had been assigned the task of finding an appropriate jazz ensemble for the event and who now shared his very personal memories of how it all came about. We contacted Klaus Fenger in Zambia, Africa where he lives today, organizing bush safaris, to ask him for permission to translate and share his memories of that special event in his earlier career, and he gladly agreed. Franz-Otto Falke provided a copy of the program as well as some photos from the concert and dinner afterwards. Here, then, is the story behind Duke Ellington's concert at Schmallenberg's municipal auditorium on 10 July 1970.

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Klaus Fenger (Zambia)

Duke Ellington in Schmallenberg on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Franz Falke-Rohen company

One morning, early in 1970, Mr. Franz-Otto Falke called on the advertising department to let the staff know of the management's plans to celebrate the company's anniversary. He assured them that this time the event did not have to be as big as the previous double-anniversary of the two subsidiary firms Falke-Strickwaren (later Falke Strick – knitwear) and Meisenburg (später Falke Garne – yarns) at which Kurt Edelhagen's big band and Ian Carter's Wuppertal ballet company had thrilled the audience. This time, then, the management thought of a smaller, nonetheless world-renowned ensemble, something like the Oscar Peterson Trio or the Dave Brubeck Quartet, to celebrate the anniversary of the Falke Group's parent company Franz Falke-Rohen (later Falke Strümpfe – socks).

The employee who was asked to "secure" one of the two bands was known to be a jazz fan and an expert of the scene, both in Europe and in America. This employee, then, called some of the major concert agents only to realize that he would probably have little luck in booking bands like Oscar Peterson or Dave Brubeck for one concert alone in Germany. The concert agents' responses were pretty much identical and all in the negative. Both Peterson and Brubeck had been touring Europe, including Germany, earlier that spring. They had meanwhile returned to America. To book them or a similar act for just a single concert in Germany would have been much too expensive. Thus, the "advertisement guy" briefed Mr. Falke about the state of affairs, who nevertheless decided, let's continue trying.

While the "lightly saddened" employee pondered who else might be a good choice – perhaps the Modern Jazz Quartet with Milt Jackson at the vibraphone or Jacques Loussier who had started a series called "Play Bach" in which he performed classical music in jazz interpretations – he received a call from a smaller agent who told him that he could offer him a very special act, Duke Ellington and his Orchestra, which was celebrated as one of the best jazz bands worldwide and whose bandleader was known as one of the best pianists all over the world.

The employee was overjoyed, and so was Mr. Falke even though he couldn't quite believe the good news. He asked for a couple of days for consideration to reach a final decision.

Finally, there was a meeting in Mr. Falke's home, attended by some gentlemen from the management as well as Mr. G, a friend of Mr. Falke who had made an impact on the so-called Falke style and had organized and commented the company's fashion shows in an inimitable way. While reasons for and against Ellington were exchanged, Mr. G. made the crucial remark: He regarded Mr. F. (the guy from the advertisement department) to be one of the biggest frauds in the company, and he would not believe this whole Ellington business unless he saw the Duke himself on stage in Schmallenberg!

That said, suddenly everybody present agreed to hire the "Duke" with his orchestra and not to celebrate on the small scale originally planned. A big orchestra, though, needed a bigger auditorium. The employee from the advertising department had a lot of work ahead of him.

First came the contract, with strict American regulations: no filming, no recordings, hire the biggest Hammond organ available in Germany, perfect tuning of piano and organ and so on and so forth. Where, though, does one get the biggest Hammond organ? At the German Hammond representation in Hamburg the advertisement guy reached the manager who, when asked for the cost and details of delivery, asked back who would be playing the instrument? When he heard the answer, Wild Bill Davis (again, the best player on his instrument worldwide), the manager replied, "Then we won't charge you for the instrument", the company would just have to pay the much cheaper freight costs.

The next question was, how many people to invite? Answer: about 500 professionals from the textile industry and the fashion press, as well as friends and relatives. What to do, then, so that the guests won't feel lost in Schmallenberg's gigantic municipal auditorium which holds up to 2.400 people? The answer came from an architect who had been involved in developing the Falke Shop System and who designed gigantic colored fabric panels hanging from the hall's ceiling which gave the room a more relaxed atmosphere and made it seem much more intimate.

In a further step, invitations were printed and mailed, hotel rooms reserved and three buffets ordered from leading hotels and restaurants in and around Schmallenberg. The most important preparation, though, was reserved for the performance of the Ellington Orchestra. In all of this many helpful people with experience in organizing company celebrations were of assistance.

The preparations went ahead smoothly. One day Mr. Falke came to the advertising department and asked the employee in charge of the anniversary to go and attend one of the "Duke"'s concerts during his European tour. He should try to talk to Mr. Ellington in person and let him know that his boss, Mr. Falke, was a big admirer of his music and piano style.

The employee was happy to comply, but instead of attending a concert by the Ellington band in one of the big cities he decided to hear it in Luxembourg.

Thus, the Falke "emissary" traveled to Luxembourg where he learned that Ellington did not perform in the capital but in a small town about 30 km outside of the center, in some castle ruins which were used for concerts and known for their splendid open-air acoustics.

In the late afternoon the Falke employee took the packed commuter train to the small town where the concert was to take place. At every stop he asked his fellow travelers whether it was time to get off already. Finally, a young girl took pity on him and told him, "Whenever I get off, you have to get off, too." When they arrived in the small town, the girl (today one would call her a "young woman") gave him the directions to the castle ruins. She also let him know that she lived nearby and, if he liked, why not share the walk to the castle? The young man was very pleased. And while they walked, the Falke guy had the idea to invite the young woman to the concert. Which left the young woman very pleased. She even let him know that she had kind of counted on it.

On the stage in the inner yard of the castle the musicians set up their instruments. The Falke guy found the band's road manager, Willy Leiser, whom he informed of his wish to speak to the "Duke" about the concert in Schmallenberg. Mercer Ellington intervened, the Duke's son who played the trumpet in the orchestra, and commented it might make more sense to talk to his father after the event.

Shortly before the concert started, the young woman arrived. And then the music played. It was a fantastic evening in all of its length. The "Duke" played many of his old standards, but in new arrangements. Probably many in the audience in Luxembourg had never heard Ellington's music with this new sound. In any way, the audience was ecstatic, and asked for a number of encores.

The man from Schmallenberg had a problem after the concert: He needed to talk to Ellington, but he also knew that there was no more train back to Luxembourg. The concert promoters had organized a number of busses, instead. As if on cue, the young woman helped when he asked her to keep the bus driver waiting until he was done talking to the "Duke".

Then he went behind the stage with Willy Leiser and Mercer Ellington where he met a relaxed Ellington who listened calmly when he told him about his boss's request. Ellington smiled and replied, he would probably play a similar concert as in Luxembourg, and he would make sure to play enough piano (winking at his guest). The man from the Sauerland region thanked everybody, said his Goodbye and hurried to the single bus still waiting on the square in front of the castle. The young woman flirted with the driver, one foot on the bus, the other on the ground. "There he comes", she called out to the driver. The

people on the bus smiled. The Falke employee felt happy, traveling back to Luxembourg city. Later he sent his charming hostess a pair of stockings.

Back in Schmallenberg "everything went according to plan". The hall was polished up, the invited guests confirmed their participation – some of them were even willing to come back from their vacation elsewhere in Europe for the event. Then the Hammond organ arrived from Hamburg, as well as the piano tuner from Hagen who was known for tuning both the honky-tonk pianos in the smoky bars of the Sauerland region and the premium instruments in schools and elsewhere.



Programm

Besetzung des Ellington-Orchesters

Duke Ellington

18.00 Uhr Empfang
Leitung & Piano
Edward 'Duke' Ellington

18.45 Uhr Konzert:
Duke Ellington
und sein Orchester
Saxophone
Russel Procope
Harold K. Ashby
Paul Gonsalves
Norris W. Turney
Harry H. Carney

20.00 Uhr Abendessen
vom kalten
und warmen Buffet
Trompeten
Charles Cootie Williams
William A. Anderson jr.
Mercer Ellington

21.00 Uhr Sommerfest
mit der Band:
Joe Lord & Company
Posaunen
Julian A. Priester
Charles 'Chuck' Connors
Mitchell Wood jr.

Orgel
William 'Wild Bill' Davis

Bass
Joseph R. Benjamin

Schlagzeug
Rufus Jones

Gesang
Tony D. Watkins

Es dürfte niemandem mit musikalischem Interesse verborgen geblieben sein, welche Rolle Duke Ellington nicht nur im Jazz, sondern in der Musik im allgemeinen spielt. Im April vergangenen Jahres wurde er 70 Jahre alt. Es gab Doktorhüte, einen Empfang im „Weißen Haus“, ein Festival in Berlin und manches mehr. Die Verdienste und Errungenschaften Ellingtons, viele darunter erst- und sogar einmalig, sind zu zahlreich, um sie hier aufzuführen. Erwähnt sei, daß Duke Ellington der erste Jazzmusiker war, der die Ehre hatte, in Grove's Musiklexikon, dem berühmtesten seiner Art, schon in den dreißiger Jahren aufgeführt zu werden, und daß kein Geringerer als Toscanini ihn bat, für seine Suite, die New York zum Gegenstand hatte, den Satz mit dem Titel „Harlem“ zu schreiben.

Duke Ellington ist ein Vierfaches: Pianist, Komponist, Arrangeur und Bandleader. Es macht seine Einmaligkeit aus, daß keine dieser Funktionen von der anderen zu trennen ist. Zwar wurden viele Ellington-Melodien Evergreens, aber der „Ellington touch“, jenes gewisse Etwas geht eben nur von Ellington und seinen Musikern aus.

Dr. Schulz-Köhn

And then, the big day arrived – 10th of July 1970 – which those present at this Ellington concert continue to speak of.

Mr. Falke had offered to give the "Duke" a lift in the company-owned helicopter from the Düsseldorf airport where the band had arrived in the morning from Scandinavia. Mr. Ellington declined with thanks, saying he would rather take a car. Thus, Falke sent a car. The rest of the band took a bus which had a trailer carrying the instruments.

Around 3pm the "Duke" arrived in front of the hall in Schmallenberg. Mr. Falke had asked to have him brought to his home where he, his wife, his brother and his wife as well as Mr. G. and his wife wanted to meet him for coffee. Mr. Ellington declined with thanks, explaining that he would rather stay with his orchestra – which had not yet arrived. The "Duke"'s bodyguard dropped the hint that Mr. Ellington might want to sleep for an hour, best somewhere behind the stage. Would it be possible to organize a couch? A couch was brought from the living room of the hall's manager. The "Duke" was happy to be able to relax some more. After all, the tour through about 20 cities in Europe was strenuous. Mr. F., the man from the advertising department, conveyed the "Duke"'s request to Mr. Falke who sympathized with Ellington's wish.

In order to ease the approach of the bus from Düsseldorf to the hall, the advertisement guy stood close to the town's entrance. The last stretch of the way the bus had to go at walking speed as a farmer was herding his cows back to the stables through the small town. The musicians were thrilled by the sight. After arrival, the musicians set up their instruments with the help of two band boys and asked for the bar. They were excited when they heard that for them all drinks were

free. Around 6:30pm the first guests arrived. The atmosphere was relaxed from the start. The motto for the anniversary party was "Summer Party at Falke". The main reason for the relaxed mood may have been the excitement about the concert by the Ellington Orchestra, although the good weather in Schmallenberg and the hall's decoration may have played a part in it, as well.

Before the concert Mr. Paul Falke gave a short speech welcoming the guests, and then it all started. Baritone saxophonist Harry Carney who had performed in the Ellington band nearly all of his life, set the tone for "Take the A Train", the orchestra's theme song. Never had anybody in the Schmallenberg hall heard anything like it. The audience was thrilled. But where was the "Duke"? Mr. Ellington liked to have the band warm up without him. Then the maestro entered the stage. The audience welcomed him most warmly which encouraged the "Duke" to welcome the audience in his own humorous way. The band played some well-known standards like "April in Paris", "In My Solitude", "Perdido", "Creole Love Call", "Caravan". Everything sounded very lightly, put into new arrangements, as next to well-tried musicians like Cootie Williams, tp, Cat Anderson, tp, Russell Procope, as,cl, Paul Gonsalves, ts, there were some new and lesser known musicians in the band. Also, Wild Bill Davis at the Hammond organ contributed to the new sound. The audience was thrilled by the lesser known tunes as well. Duke's introductions to the titles and the soloists were a treat for the ear in themselves. He didn't forget to mention some past or deceased members of the orchestra such as Johnny Hodges, as, Otto Hardwick, as,bs and the Cuban valve-trombonist Juan Tizol, all of whom had contributed to the band's development and sound. The orchestra's long-time tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves played some fantastic

solos – perhaps not as long as 1956 in Newport where he had performed a 25-minute chorus.

After 90 minutes without intermission the concert was supposed to end. The audience, though, shouted "One more time". The "Duke" gave one encore, then another, and then sent most of his musicians from the stage. Only two of the wind instruments remained, Bootie Wood on trombone and Harold Ashby (new to the orchestra) on tenor saxophone, as well as Wild Bill Davis on organ, with bass and drums and Ellington at the piano. They played an elaborate piece just with the sextet. Then Davis, Wood and Ashby left the stage. The "Duke" played on, just with bass and drums. And then the bassist and the drummer left as well. Ellington remained on stage, alone, just with the piano. And what happened next was just heavenly. The "Duke" played in top form for another 15 minutes. The audience was enthusiastic.

After the concert the "Duke" insisted on having dinner with the families Falke and Mr. G. and his wife in the middle of the party. After dinner the "Duke" was brought back to Düsseldorf. The orchestra members who had eaten at the bar were brought back by bus as well. Next they all continued to Scandinavia (Oslo or Copenhagen). In the Schmallerberg city hall the guests celebrated into the wee hours of the morning.

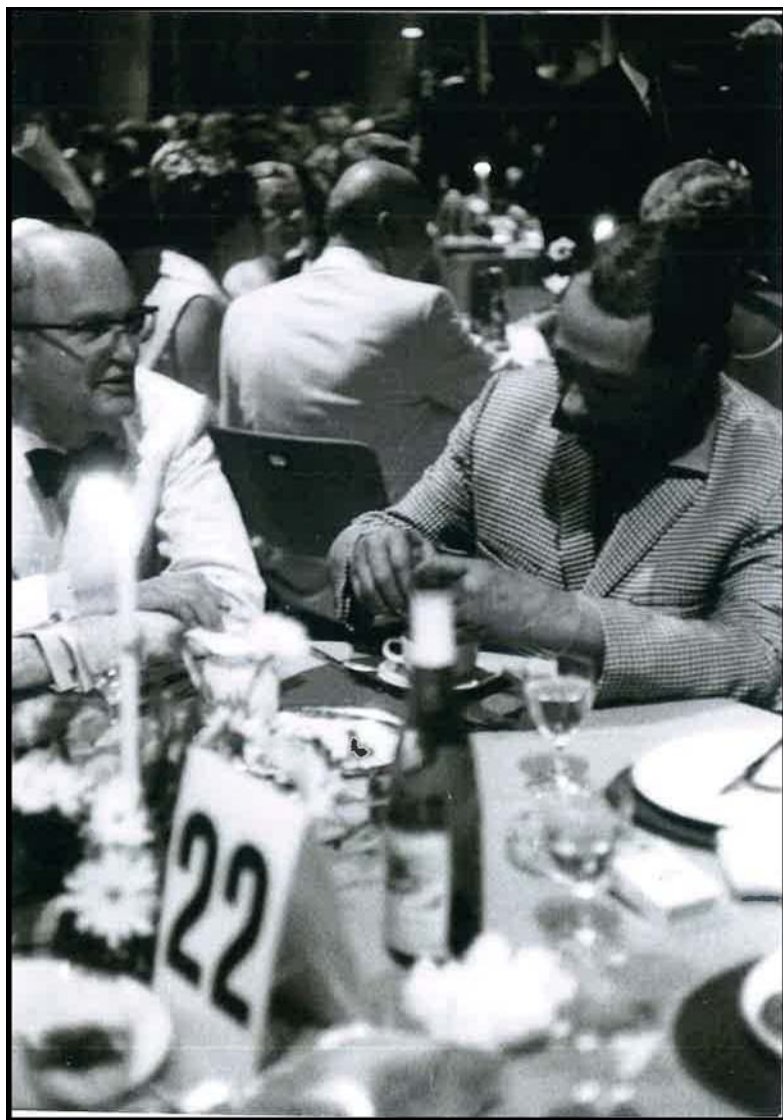
Days later Mr. F.-O. Falke suggested to send those guests who had not been able to attend the summer fest / anniversary a box with 4 LPs – there were no CDs yet. These LPs were supposed to present the musical œuvre of Duke Ellington. The man from the advertising department went to Düsseldorf to get the records. While at Radio Sülz in Flingerstraße – where he found easily what he had been looking for

– he ran into Hans Harzheim, who was one of Germany's top photographers. Harzheim had accompanied the Ellington Orchestra on their complete tour – and been in Schmallerberg as well –, and he was happy to meet the guy from Schmallerberg again. He was still thrilled and told him that the atmosphere and the joy of playing with the "Duke" as well as the orchestra had nowhere been bigger than in Schmallerberg.

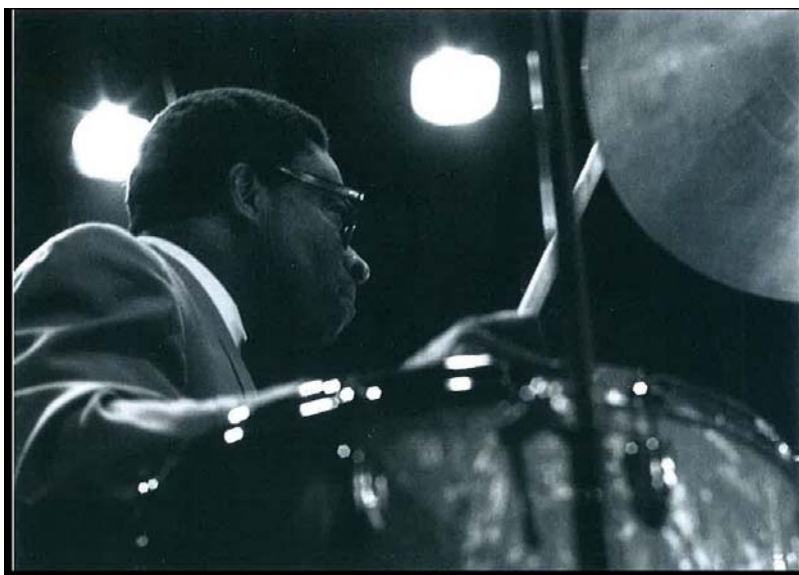
[translated from the German original by Wolfram Knauer; December 2016]













Memory of Ellington's concert in Schmallingenberg:
Author: Klaus Fenger (July 2016)
English translation: Wolfram Knauer
Photos from the collection of Franz-Otto Falke

