



## Nancy Reed Dishes on Duke Ellington’s ‘Nutcracker’ and Morris Museum’s new ‘Grinch Suite’

### Transcript

Story by Gina Marie Rodriguez

[MUSIC: “A LITTLE WIGGLE”]

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (00:03):

This is Gina Marie Rodriguez, and you are listening to the Jersey Arts Podcast.

Tis the season. Christmas Time is upon us. And while you may be familiar with “The Nutcracker,” you may not have heard Duke Ellington's Nutcracker. Well, at least I hadn't before I learned of its upcoming performance. Duke Ellington was a jazz composer and band leader in the early 1900s, and he is quite possibly one of the greatest jazz composers of all time. Written alongside collaborator Billy Strayhorn, “The Nutcracker Suite” is a jazz re-imagination of Tchaikovsky's “Nutcracker Suite.”

The Water Gap Jazz Orchestra will be performing Ellington's rendition alongside the new “Grinch Suite,” written by WGJO Director, Dr. Matt Vashlishan. The performance will take place at the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey on December 17th, featuring Ellington's own grandson, Mr. Edward Ellington II as narrator and Mrs. Nancy Reed as vocalist, the performance stands to be an excellent way to ring in the holiday season. I was able to steal a few minutes to speak to Nancy Reed about her experience working with the orchestra as well as her own history with jazz.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:11):

I guess my first question for you is how did you get into jazz? Was that the first genre of music that made you start studying music? What made you fall in love with jazz?

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NANCY REED (01:22):

Since day one, I've had music in my house. My father was a jazz piano player. Every single day of my life, I've heard jazz music because he played every single day. He came home from work and he played. My mother was an opera singer. She wanted to do it a lot, but then they had kids, and so my father also wanted to go out and play, and he did a little bit, and my mother did a little bit also. She was at the chorus in the Met once or twice, so she got to do that. Anyway, hearing jazz, it just spoke to me after a while. At first, maybe you could say I resisted or something, but I liked folk music and rock, which I still do, but then after a while, it's so natural to me and I really love it. I'm so glad I did.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:11):

How would you encourage people who've never listened to jazz before, to give it a shot?

NANCY REED (02:17):

Ellington is a great thing to listen to at first. It's just so natural and melodic.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:23):

Oh, yeah. I agree. I mean, Ellington, Duke Ellington is known as one of the greatest jazz artists.

NANCY REED (02:29):

Absolutely. He wrote a lot of tunes. Yeah. I say, that's all you can do. Give it a shot.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:36):

Well, if you enjoy Christmas and you enjoy music, this is a good time to try jazz.

NANCY REED (02:42):

Yes, it is. It actually is. Yeah. And you have to get caught up in the drama of it with all those, the horns and different instruments, you're bound to get something that you like out of them.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:53):

I think I've only ever seen the Nutcracker Ballet before. Tchaikovsky's Ballet, and I feel weird saying it, but I've had a weird reaction to Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker. I have this physical reaction in that I get palpitations and my heartbeat's really fast, which I am probably not the only person that has

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experienced this, but I get really stressed out when I watch “The Nutcracker.” I know, right? It's weird, but I don't feel that way with Ellington's Nutcracker.

NANCY REED (03:25):  
Right, right.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:27):  
I find it –

NANCY REED (03:27):  
A little more easygoing.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:29):  
Soothing, yeah, easygoing, soothing, smoother.

NANCY REED (03:32):  
Sure, sure.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:33):  
And I don't know if that's just because I don't know if I handle jazz better in general. I don't know what to attribute that to. I keep thinking that it's something about the way Tchaikovsky's, again, this is where the lack of terminology comes in. I want to call it percussion, but it just feels like that. I don't know what is that -

[MUSIC: TCHAIKOVSKY'S “DANCE OF THE SUGAR PLUM FAIRY”]

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (04:07):  
Alright folks, forgive me. I have to interrupt this interview for a second. Is it just me? Is anyone else anxious listening to this? If so, feel free to reach out and let me know, and if not, but you know why this is happening to me also, please reach out and let me know. Okay, back to Nancy.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (04:24):

There's something about it that stresses me out and causes anxiety that I don't have happen when I listen to Ellington's.

NANCY REED (04:33):

Right. Yeah. Like I said, it's a more easygoing thing. I think that's maybe what you're feeling,

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (04:38):

But I really enjoy that. So this would be my first time seeing that live and that's exciting. Can't imagine not enjoying it. I've listened to, like I said, I was researching on the Water Gap Jazz Orchestra's videos, but I've never, I don't know that I've seen an orchestra, any orchestra live. Right. I've watched it on tv. I've seen it on YouTube. But to experience that live is something,

NANCY REED (05:04):

Yeah. Exciting. There's nothing like it.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (05:07):

I know. I know. I'm looking forward to that.

NANCY REED (05:09):

Yeah. When those horns come in on the different parts. Yeah. You're going to dig it.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (05:13):

Yeah. There's something about the horns too that I really like. I'm a big fan, and I think this is actually Matt's instrument, the saxophone. I'm obsessed with saxophone players. I just really, there's something about listening to a saxophone that I really enjoy, and I think part of it is that I know that I have no musical abilities, so I just marvel at people who can do the things that I can't do. And that goes for you too. I mean, I've listened to your music now and your voice is stunning.

NANCY REED (05:43):

Oh, thank you. That's nice of you.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (05:44):

You're welcome. I mean, it's true. I'm not saying anything that's not true. I wish that I could sing, and I've tried taking voice lessons. I think I made it through maybe three lessons with someone.

NANCY REED (05:55):

Oh, just sing.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (05:57):

But it won't be good.

NANCY REED (05:58):

Just walk around the house singing. Why not?

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (06:01):

Well that I do. Yeah. That I do.

NANCY REED (06:03):

You're not trying to make a record, just have fun and sing. That's what I say. You'll get a joy out of it

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (06:09):

For sure. I had a drama teacher. I was a theater major in college, and I had, she wasn't an acting teacher, she was our storytelling teacher. I think that was the class that we were in. But she used to tell us that all the time. She's like, you don't have to be good. You just have to enjoy it. Just sing.

NANCY REED (06:23):

It's true.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (06:24):

So I should be less insecure about that, I guess, because who's listening?

NANCY REED (06:29):

You know what? Nobody else has to enjoy it.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (06:32):

That's true. That's true. Nobody else has to enjoy it. Just me.

NANCY REED (06:35):

No, exactly.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (06:36):

I do. I do walk around my house singing to my dogs all the time. But can you tell me what can audiences expect when they attend this production? What can they look forward to?

NANCY REED (06:46):

Well, 18-piece band, like I said. So some gorgeous music, some nice, beautiful slow stuff. And in addition, some swinging. It's going to be swinging. And then to hear the story, and there's Duke Ellington's grandson right there. That's really exciting, I think. It's going to be a great night. Really.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (07:08):

You brought up Duke Ellington's grandson, and you've worked with Edward before, right? You have one or two albums?

NANCY REED (07:14):

Two, and it's been several years. He's been great and really fun. He's my good friend.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (07:21):

I'm sorry he couldn't join us today.

NANCY REED (07:23):

Me too. Yeah, he couldn't make it.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (07:25):

I'm sad that I didn't get to meet him, but I'm looking forward to seeing him perform at the very least.

NANCY REED (07:31):

Come over and say hello afterwards.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (07:33):  
Okay. Ooh, a backstage invite. Yay.

NANCY REED (07:36):  
Well, there's no stage, is there?

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (07:39):  
Well, you know what I mean.

NANCY REED (07:41):  
Yeah, I do. I do.

[MUSIC: "A LITTLE WIGGLE"]

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (07:46):  
"Duke Ellington's Nutcracker and the New Grinch Suites" performed by the Water Gap Jazz Orchestra featuring Nancy Reed and Edward Ellington II will arrive at the Morris Museum on December 17th at 3 PM. For more information, be sure to visit [morrismuseum.org](http://morrismuseum.org).

If you liked this episode, be sure to review, subscribe, and tell your friends. A transcript of this podcast, links relevant to the story, and more about the arts in New Jersey can be found at [jerseyarts.com](http://jerseyarts.com). The Jersey Arts Podcast is presented by ArtPride New Jersey, advancing a state of creativity since 1986. The show was co-founded by and currently supported by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

This episode was hosted, edited, and produced by me. Gina Marie Rodriguez. Executive producers are Jim Atkinson and Isaac Serna-Diez. And my thanks to Nancy Reed for speaking with me today. I'm Gina Marie Rodriguez for the Jersey Arts Podcast.

Thanks for listening.

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