

The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse

A Suite in Eight Parts

Duke Ellington

FANTASY 5983





Fantasy



5983

(5983 A)

PAGE A

DUKE ELLINGTON
THE AFRO EURASIAN ECLIPSE

- 1. CHINOISERIE - 8'13
- 2. DIDJERIDOO - 3'37
- 4. AFRIQUE - 5'23
- 4. ACHT O'CLOCK ROCK - 3'04

(Composed by Duke Ellington)

Distribution Musidisc-Europe

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(5983 B)

FACE B

DUKE ELLINGTON
THE AFRO EURASIAN ECLIPSE

- 1. GONG - 4'42
- 2. TANG - 4'45
- 3. TRUE - 3'35
- 4. HARD WAY - 4'09

(Composed by Duke Ellington)

Distribution Musidisc-Europe

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Duke Ellington

The Afro Eurasian Eclipse

Side 1:

1. Chinoiserie (8:13)
2. Didjeridoo (3:17)
3. Afrique (3:25)
4. Acht O'Clock Rock (1:04)

Side 2:

1. Gong (4:42)
2. Tang (4:43)
3. True (3:35)
4. Hard Way (4:09)

Composed by Duke Ellington
(Tempo Music-ASCAP)

Duke Ellington—piano

Cootie Williams, Money Johnson,

Mercer Ellington, Eddie Preston—trumpets

Booby Wood, Malcolm Taylor—trombones

Chuck Connors—bass trombone

Russell Procope—alto sax, clarinet

Norris Turney—alto sax, clarinet, flute

Paul Gonzales, Harold Ashby—tenor saxes

Harry Carney—baritone sax

Joe Benjamin—bass

Rufus Jones—drums

Recording engineer—Roger Rhodes
(Recorded February 17, 1971, at National Recording Studio, New York.)

Remix engineer—Jim Stern
(Mixed 1972 at Fantasy Studios, Berkeley, under the supervision of Mercer Ellington.)

Art direction—Phil Carroll

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During the last decade of his life, Duke Ellington traveled abroad more extensively than ever before. He was not a sightseer in the normal sense of the word, and he did not go out of his way to view historic buildings or gorgeous scenery, because he just didn't have the time. But he did have an extraordinary gift for sensing the character of nations, the atmosphere of cities, the peculiarities of people, the differences of landscapes, and the tempos of living while more or less, one might say, on the run. The impressions he derived from his observations—and despite those tired, half-closed eyes, he was every bit as great an observer as he was a listener—were translated into music in his own fashion.

He was not concerned with *authentic* reproductions of the music he heard in foreign countries. He told how he felt

about that after he came back from India: "I don't want to copy this rhythm or that scale. It's more valuable to have absorbed while there. You let it roll around, undergo a chemical change, and then seep out on paper in a form that will suit the musicians who are going to play it."

The *Afro Eurasian Eclipse* is explained in the witty speech that introduces this album and "Chinoiserie." It is a speech that Ellington not only enjoyed delivering, but delivered with consummate skill. Audiences enjoyed it too, but were never quite sure at first whether they were being put on or upstaged. Probably not one person in a thousand knew what a didjeridoo was, but there was always laughter when he referred to this instrument of the Australian aborigines. It sounded funny. Could it possibly be risqué? Then his remarks about Down Under and Out Back gave them clues to the context.

A lengthy section of his book, *Music Is My Mistress* (Doubleday), amplifies the explanation given in the speech. Beginning with his "Notes on the State Department Tour, 1963," there is a series of what some superior souls dismissed as "anecdotes." When the recorded music of this period is eventually all released and studied, these notes and journals may, as Ellington anticipated, become more valuable to listeners. The journeys and experiences they describe relate to the music, and account for much of its color, character, and inspiration. Marshall McLuhan's theory about the world going oriental certainly intrigued Ellington, because it confirmed some of his own impressions. More important, it stimulated him to interpret them in music.

"Chinoiserie," the opening selection of this eight-part suite, flaunts its Afro-Eurasian parentage immediately. Quite apart from the mock-orientalism of standard tunes like "Lunchhouse Blues" and "Japanese Sandman," Fletcher Henderson had recorded "Shanghai Shuffle" in 1924, and Ellington his own "Japanese Dream" in 1929. So the playful application of Asian to the African and European ingredients in jazz is therefore not without precedent, but it has probably never before been done so effectively. "Chinoiserie" in fact, was the only section of this suite that was regularly performed publicly, always with enthusiasm, always to an excited reaction. Rhythmically, it returned to a world Ellington knew very well, that of specialist dancers—shake, exotic, and tap—for one of whom he had originally designed another masterpiece, "Rockin' in Rhythm." Once the piano player, the two allos, and the ensemble have set the scene, Harold Ashby enters swinging on tenor. He proceeds to portray—or accompany?—an imagined dancer, agile and uninhibited. When he had finished this version, Harry Carney made an admiring comment:

"Oh! Ash was carrying on there!"

"Yeah, he's ready for the show now," Paul Gonzales added.

"Didjeridoo" derives from an Australian tour where Ellington met and was much impressed by the aborigines, not to mention the robust tones of the long, massive horn they called a didjeridoo. The number this inspired very properly became a feature for Harry Carney's baritone saxophone, which in his hands possessed some of the same qualities.

"Afrigue" is a picture of drum country. Drum solos have become obligatory at most jazz concerts, and the squares in the audience eat them up whether good or bad. Usually, they are rather empty displays of virtuosity, but

the other musicians like them because they can leave the stage for a smoke or a taste while the drummer gets his exercise. Rufus Jones, also known as "Speedy," was at his best in "African, jungle, and oriental pieces" according to his leader, who designed this colorful framework for his considerable prowess.

"Acht O'Clock Rock" is another geographical shift, as the title indicates, but it also procses how contemporary allos leap frontiers. Whether it was eight o'clock in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland was not determined, but the point is the all-pervasiveness of rock. Besides the pianist, the number originally featured Johnny Hodges and Cat Anderson, but by the time it became a corporate part of this suite the soloists were Harold Ashby and Norris Turney.

"Gong" was merely a working title and not intended as the permanent name of the composition that opens the second side. By 1971, Ellington was in the habit of originally giving all his new works four-letter code-titles. Thus "Chinoiserie" was "Schm" on the parts, and "Didjeridoo" was "Didj." What "Gong" (and "Tang" and "True") might have become had the composer lived will of course never be known, so it seems best to continue to abide by the code. As it happens, "Gong" is appropriate enough. The session had begun with a request from Ellington in the studio to engineer Roger Rhodes in the control room:

"Have you got a gong here, Roger?"

"No."

"Can you get one?"

"Yes."

A telephone call later, Rhodes was heard from again, announcing that a nearby instrument rental service was sending a selection of gongs.

"Good. So we shall be able to kick the gong around!"

The Chinese gongs were eventually dubbed in afterwards, and after a good deal of competitive sparring, Ellington insisted on striking the big, Rank-size gong himself, while Rufus Jones was allowed to beat a smaller model. To assuage Cootie Williams's disappointment, he was entrusted with the gong at the end of the next number. It is interesting to note how the members of the reed section are deployed on "Gong." For example, after the passages for flute and clarinet, the two tenors answer Carney's baritone. "True" perhaps marries something of Australia's "Waltzing Matilda" to gospel time, with Paul Gonzales demonstrating how such music can or should be swung. This was a second take. Everyone had appeared well satisfied with the first, until Ellington's voice came over the studio speakers: "Ash says Paul can play better than that!" So he could, and did.

"Hard Way" is for Norris Turney on alto saxophone. During the time he and Johnny Hodges were together in the band, a bond of mutual respect and admiration grew between them. Turney's subsequent playing revealed the influence of Hodges more strongly than before, as in this evocative performance, which incidentally shows how beneficially identities may sometimes merge. Who, as Ellington asks at the beginning, is enjoying the shadow of whom?

—Stanley Dance
author of *The World of Swing*
(Charles Scribner's Sons)