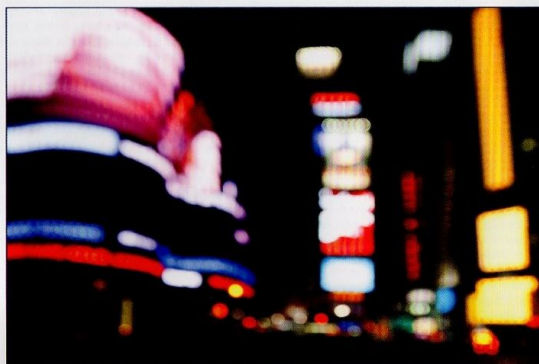


AMERICAN CLASSICS



**DUKE ELLINGTON**  
**Black, Brown, and Beige**

Harlem • Three Black Kings • The River • Take the 'A' Train  
Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra • JoAnn Falletta



## Duke Ellington (1899-1974)

Harlem • Black, Brown, and Beige • Three Black Kings • The River • Take the 'A' Train

Harlem • Black, Brown, and Beige

On 29 April 1899, Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington was born into a modest, working class family in Washington, D.C. His mother and father were both pianists, and young Edward followed suit, with piano lessons from age seven. During those formative years he was especially attracted to the bright sounds and upbeat rhythms of dance music and the lyrics and tunes of traditional American songs. In his early teens, a boyhood friend came up with the moniker "Duke," given Ellington's rather formal personal style. At the same time, Duke began to play in local dance bands, all the while experimenting with original pieces, including the *Soda Fountain Rag* in 1914. The clever motif hinted at Ellington's lifelong fascination for snappy and evocative titles.

During his long career, Ellington was celebrated as a major big-band leader, pianist and composer from the 'Roaring-20s' through his passing on 24 May 1974. The Duke's many honors include the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded at the White House in 1969.

Ellington's trove of hit-tunes and recordings (*Sophisticated Lady*, *Mood Indigo*, *Satin Doll*, etc.) are perhaps best-known among about a thousand pieces, including hundreds of jazz-inspired works for diverse genres including vocals, big-band, film, opera, ballet, sacred pieces, Broadway shows, theater music and instrumental suites.

Throughout his life Ellington made frequent reference to the famed Cotton Club, the high-stepping center of Harlem nightlife which had launched his own career and those of many jazz artists from the era. In 1950 Duke paid tribute to his roots with a jazz portrait titled *Harlem*. He later added a provocative sub-title to the piece — *A Tone Parallel to Harlem*. Orchestrated by Maurice Peress, the piece is replete with emotive effects. At the opening, grandly scored brass shred the air with avant-garde timbres worthy of Carl Ruggles and Charles Ives, followed by an extended centerpiece of soulful

'down-home-blues.' In turns, the sonic canvas blends back to the modern realm, highlighted by flourishing percussion and brazen colors at the close.

Reflecting his view that music could deliver a message from the national experience, in the early 1930s Ellington conceived *Black, Brown and Beige*, a tribute to the nation's African-American heritage. As usual, Duke was cryptic about a title. With a coy wink he sometimes referred to the work as *B, B and B*, and for each facet he provided a particular color code. For the premier of the piece at Carnegie Hall in late January of 1943, the composer provided brief descriptions of each movement.

*Black* pays homage to the tradition of African-American faith in prayer and hard work, and includes a people's work song and the spiritual phrases of the tune *Come Sunday*.

*Brown* offers tribute to the African-American soldiers who fought and gave their lives in the Civil War and World Wars I and II. Originally set in three sections, the music offers American folk themes including *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, *Yankee Doodle* and *Swanee River*, with a trace of New York blues near the close.

*Beige* is an evocation of the Renaissance in African American music, conjuring the night life of Harlem. Ellington noted: "The music portrays the contemporary Negro and his plight in the United States between two world wars and during the second. The 1920s meant Harlem gin-mills, the Charleston, the party life, the lonely plight of the single drinkers, and the sad tinkle of a people lonely under the night-life tedium." The composer added that the music also represents "...an awareness of the war and the importance of the Negro's participation in his country's destiny, ending with patriotic phrases revealing that Black, Brown, and Beige are truly Red, White and Blue."

After the first performance of *Black, Brown, and Beige* (fifty minutes in duration), Ellington derived the current suite, which was then orchestrated by Maurice Peress.

## Les Trois Rois Noirs (Three Black Kings) King of the Magi • King Solomon • Martin Luther King

Scored as a ballet, *Les Trois Rois Noirs* was the last score to emerge from Ellington's prolific pen. Left unfinished at his death, the work was completed by Ellington's son, Mercer, who noted:

"My father first intended it as a eulogy for Martin Luther King, but then decided to go back into myth and history to include other black kings. The opening movement represents Balthazar, the black king of the Magi. King Solomon is next, with the song of jazz and perfume and dancing girls and all that, then the dirge for Dr. King. The piece owes its inspiration to a stained glass window of the three Kings my father saw in the Catedral del Mar in Barcelona."

## Suite from 'The River' The Spring • The Meander • The Giggling Rapids The Lake • The River

In 1970 Ellington was commissioned by the American Ballet Theater to write a new stage work for dance, with choreography by Alvin Ailey. In all, nine scenes de ballet were initially sketched for piano and big-band, then recorded by Ellington for reference. The tableaux were adapted for full orchestra by Ron Collier, five of which are recorded here. *The River* is as much tone poem as ballet, and offers contrasting scenes along the great Mississippi River. In Ellington's autobiography, *Music is my Mistress*, he describes the various imagery which inspired the music:

*The River Suite* begins with *The Spring*, which is like a newborn baby. He's in his cradle — spooling, spinning, wiggling, gurgling, squirming, squeaking, making faces, reaching for his nipple or bottle, turning, tossing and tinkling all over the place.

In *The Meander* he is undecided whether to go back into the cradle or pursue his quest in the wake of the big bubble. There he is, rolling around from one side to the other on the floor, up and down, back and forth, until he

sees the door, the kitchen door, and looks out into that big backyard. "This must be the biggest world in the world," he says. "Look at all that space out there!" So he dashes out of the door and now he is into...

*The Giggling Rapids*, and he races and runs and dances and skips and trips all over the backyard until, exhausted, he relaxes and rolls down to...

*The Lake*, which is beautiful and serene. It is all horizontal lines that offer unrippled reflections. There it is, in all its beauty, God-made and untouched, until people come — people who are God-made and terribly touched by the beauty of the lake. They, in their admiration for it, begin to discover new facets of compatibility in each other, and as a romantic viewpoint develops, they indulge themselves. The whole situation compounds itself into an emotional violence of the vortex to come. The lake supports them until, suddenly, they are over the top and down...

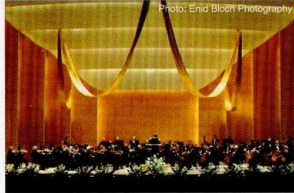
*The River*, which gallops sprightly and, as it passes several inlets, broadens and loses some of its adolescence. Becoming ever more mature, even noble, it establishes a majestic wave of monumental cool as it moves on with rhythmic authority. At the delta, there are two cities, one on each side, and there is always something on one side of the river that you cannot get on the other. Sometimes it's bootleg booze, or hot automobiles, or many other things.

## Take the 'A' Train

*Take the 'A' Train* was Duke Ellington's iconic theme song, a setting which became famous around the world after the outbreak of World War II. The sassy tune was written by jazz composer Billy Strayhorn in 1939. While the title refers to the subway system in New York, the 'A' title became a reference to the spirit of America as the nation rallied itself to the call of duty in Europe and across the Pacific. The piece ranks among the most widely arranged and recorded standards of all time.

Edward Yadzinski

## Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra



The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1935 and makes its home in Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Landmark with an international reputation as one of the greatest concert halls in the United States. Through the decades the orchestra has grown in stature under a number of distinguished conductors including William Steinberg, Josef Krips, Lukas Foss, Michael Tilson Thomas, Julius Rudel, Semyon Bychkov, and Maximiano Valdés. As Buffalo's cultural ambassador, the BPO has performed across the United States, Canada and Europe, including concerts at Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Boston's Symphony Hall, San Francisco's Davies Hall and 22 appearances in Carnegie Hall. The orchestra's European tour included two sold-out performances in

Vienna's Musikverein, and concerts in Milan, Geneva, Zurich and Frankfurt, among other venues. The BPO performs 120 concerts annually and is heard by millions on radio broadcasts across the United States and beyond on American Public Media's *Performance Today*. For more information, please visit [www.bpo.org](http://www.bpo.org)

## JoAnn Falletta



JoAnn Falletta serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and Virginia Symphony in the United States and Principal Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland. She has guest conducted over a hundred orchestras in North America, and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa and is the Principal Guest Conductor of the Brevard Music Center of North Carolina. Recipient of the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductors Award, winner of the Stokowski Competition, and the Toscanini, Dilson and Bruno Walter conducting awards, Falletta has also received eleven ASCAP awards and serves on the U.S. National Council on the Arts. A champion of American music, she has presented nearly five hundred works by American composers including over one hundred world premières. Her Naxos recordings include the double GRAMMY® Award winning disc of works by John Corigliano and GRAMMY® nominated discs of works of Tyberg, Dohnányi, Fuchs, Schubert, and Respighi.

For more information, please visit [www.joannfalletta.com](http://www.joannfalletta.com)

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**NAXOS** DUKE ELLINGTON: **Black, Brown, and Beige** 8.559737

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78:30

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**NAXOS**  
CLASSICS

# Duke ELLINGTON

(1899-1974)

- |    |  |       |
|----|--|-------|
| 1  | Harlem (orch. Maurice Peress) (1950)   | 14:27 |
|    | <b>Black, Brown, and Beige – Suite</b><br>(orch. Maurice Peress) (1943)      | 18:29 |
| 2  | Black  | 8:25  |
| 3  | Brown  | 5:26  |
| 4  | Beige  | 4:38  |
|    | <b>Three Black Kings – Ballet</b><br>(completed by Mercer Ellington)* (1943) | 18:10 |
| 5  | King of the Magi   | 4:44  |
| 6  | King Solomon   | 6:27  |
| 7  | Martin Luther King   | 6:59  |
|    | <b>The River – Suite (orch. Ron Collier) (1970)</b>                          | 21:04 |
| 8  | I. The Spring  | 3:30  |
| 9  | II. The Meander  | 3:57  |
| 10 | III. The Giggling Rapids   | 3:00  |
| 11 | IV. The Lake   | 7:18  |
| 12 | V. The River   | 3:19  |
| 13 | Billy Strayhorn (1915-67), arr. Ellington:<br>Take the 'A' Train† (1939)     | 6:19  |

Sal Andolina, Clarinet\* and Alto Saxophone\*†  
Tony Di Lorenzo, Trumpet† • Amy Licata, Violin†  
**Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra**  
JoAnn Falletta

Recorded at Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo,  
New York, USA, from 9th to 11th May, 2012  
Produced and engineered by Tim Handley

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Edward Kennedy 'Duke' Ellington wrote some of the twentieth century's greatest Big Band music, but he also wrote in a variety of forms. The boisterous and evocative *Harlem* pays tribute to Ellington's roots, *Black, Brown, and Beige* sets work songs and spirituals, whilst the suite from *The River* shows his genius in writing for the stage. *Three Black Kings*, scored as a ballet, was left unfinished at his death, but shows no lessening of invention. Ellington's arrangement of Billy Strayhorn's *Take the 'A' Train* became famous around the world after the outbreak of World War II, and ranks among the most widely recorded standards of all time.

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