



Duke Ellington

Louie Bellson Ellington- Strayhorn Suite Hawk Talks Skin Deep



Teo Macero, Maurice Peress and Louie Bellson.

PHOTO BY LESLIE E. CARPENTER

1 **HAWK TALKS** (3:53)*
(Louie Bellson) M.U.S.I.C., ASCAP
(Mass Unity Sounding in Concert)

2 **SKIN DEEP** (4:25)*
(Louie Bellson) M.U.S.I.C., ASCAP

BLACK, BROWN & BEIGE

(Edward K. Ellington) G. Schirmer, Inc.

BLACK

3 **Work Song** (7:25)

4 **Come Sunday** (5:55)

5 **Light** (6:48)

BROWN

6 **West Indian Dance** (2:32)

7 **Emancipation Proclamation** (2:08)

8 **The Blues** (4:45)

9 **BEIGE** (14:22)

ELLINGTON-STRAYHORN SUITE*

(Louie Bellson) M.U.S.I.C., ASCAP

10 **European Skallyhoppin'** (4:09)

11 **Portrait of Billy Strayhorn** (8:04)
(Harold Danko, *Piano solo*)

12 **Sketches** (6:27)

Louie Bellson and His All-Star Orchestra

Maurice Peress Conductor • **Louie Bellson** Drums and Percussion

Joe Williams
Vocals

Clark Terry
Trumpet Soloist

Frank Wess
Lead Alto Sax, Flute

Phil Bodner
Alto Sax, Clarinet, Flute

Bill Easley
Lead Clarinet, Tenor Sax

Scott Robinson
Tenor Sax Soloist

Joseph Temperley
Baritone Sax, Bass Clarinet

Marvin Stamm
Lead Trumpet

Robert Millikan
Lead Trumpet

Barrie L. Hall
Trumpet, Plunger Soloist

Anthony Kadleck
Trumpet

Britt Woodman
Lead Trombone

Arthur Baron
Trombone, Plunger Soloist

Alan Raph
Bass Trombone

John Beal
Bass

Harold Danko
Piano

Gene Bertocini
Guitar*

Dave Bergeron
Lead Trombone*

Lesa Terry
Violin Soloist

Ted Nash
Tenor Sax*

*Louie Bellson works only

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM BY MAURICE PERESS

With the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of *Black, Brown and Beige*, I had been proposing that MusicMasters make a new digital recording of the 1943 original. Unknown to me, the master drummer and composer Louie Bellson had been talking with MusicMasters about recording his *Ellington-Strayhorn Suite*, written while he was with Duke's band in the 1950s. We were brought together and our projects were merged. Louie's Big Band, augmented with Ellington alumni—among them baritone saxophonist Joe Temperley, trombonists Britt Woodman and Art Baron, trumpeters Barry Lee Hall and Clark Terry, and Bellson himself—assembled to record the works from October 20-22, 1992. As an added bonus, one more Ellingtonian, Joe Williams, agreed to sing his interpretation of *The Blues* section from the movement entitled *Brown*.

Black, Brown & Beige

HAWK TALKS, SKIN DEEP

It was Juan Tizol who first told Ellington about a fabulous young drummer that he was working with in the Harry James band. And so in 1951, when Tizol rejoined Ellington, he brought with him the master drummer and composer Louie Bellson. Bellson stayed with the band for two years and continued to work with the Duke afterwards as well. It was Bellson that I saw sitting in front of his drums in front of the New York Philharmonic in August 1965 when Duke conducted the world premiere of his *Golden Broom and Green Apple*. I was the assistant conductor that summer. Louie recalls arriving at the first rehearsal to find there was no drum part written for him, which is the way that Ellington normally worked with drummers in his band, but "...this was The New York Philharmonic!"

Louie Bellson was born into a musical family. His father Luigi Balassone owned a music store in Moline, Illinois, where he also taught. Each of the four boys and four girls in the family learned to play several different instruments. "I taught trumpet and trombone as well as drums," Louie recalls. "By the time I was thirteen, I had to know every aria from every opera. I had to learn the symphonies as well as the basic drum techniques."

It is no wonder that Bellson has always composed. He studied theory with Roy Knapp, who was also the drum teacher of Krupa and Rich. With Buddy Baker, a brilliant composer with the Disney studios, he studied composition and orchestration.

Hawk Talks, originally a vehicle for Harry "the hawk" James, and *Skin Deep* were recorded by Ellington while Louie was with the band. Clark Terry, our soloist, was also in the band at the same time. When Clark came to our session and saw the title *Hawk Talks*, he began scatting it verbatim after thirty years of not having heard it. So he not only does the honors in the solo chair but plays along with the sax section and comments on plunger throughout in the great Ellington tradition.

Skin Deep is a percussion showcase for Bellson himself. It makes full use of his innovative devise of double bass drums.

BLACK, BROWN AND BEIGE

Duke Ellington had been planning to compose a significant concert work about the history of Africans in America for at least a decade before he was invited to appear at renowned Carnegie Hall for the first time. It was known that he had an opera in mind. What was not known is that he had been writing a libretto in the form of a long narrative poem entitled *Black, Brown and Beige*, a copy of which has turned up in the archives of his sister and publisher, Ruth Ellington Boatwright.

The poem follows a mythical African named Boola through 300 years. It begins with his enslavement, then traces his life in America from colonial times through emancipation, to the "Black Metropolis" Harlem and into the second World War. Ellington adjusted his plans, and thus fate determined that when *Black, Brown and Beige* would finally be expressed in music, it would be by his orchestra of marvelous jazz artists alone. Ellington announced at the concert given on behalf of Russian War Relief on January 23, 1943 that his *Black, Brown and Beige* was "a tone-parallel to the history of the American Negro."

The 1943 audience and the critics were unprepared for so serious and extensive a work, as lengthy as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and coming from the master of short form. While Ellington never again found the occasion to play the work in its entirety, he did record large sections and recycle tunes such as *Come Sunday*. Most significantly, he chose the first movement, *Black*, for his contribution to the White House Festival of the Arts given by President and Mrs. Johnson in 1965. As Ellington's stature continues to grow, so does interest in this, his most deeply felt composition for the concert hall.

BLACK: Work Song, Come Sunday, Light

All of the work's titles and subtitles come from the poem. The opening lines read:

A message is shot through the jungle by drums.
Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!
Like a tom-tom in steady precision.
Like the slapping of bare feet across the desert wastes.
Like hunger pains...

And the music of *Work Song* does indeed begin with kettledrums in steady precision. But it is only after six pages depicting Boola's catastrophic experiences with the torture and displacement of slavery that he relates the origin of the work song:

Out of this deep dream of freedom
Evolved the only possible escape—
Freedom of expression in song.
Out of this great need for freedom
The work song was born.
Not a song of triumph. Not a song
Of burden. A song punctuated
By the grunt of a heaving pick
Or axe. A song punctuated by the swish
And thud of a sledgehammer...

The opening theme of *Work Song*, stated by the trumpets and saxophones in unison, becomes a *leitmotiv* that reappears throughout the rest of the work. Whether the music depicts Harlem or the Blues or going off to war, the *Work Song* theme is woven into the fabric, a reminder of the Black roots shared by all African-Americans, black, brown or beige... to which Stanley Crouch, writer, critic and Ellingtonian, adds "bone."

In the *Work Song* section itself, the long baritone sax solo is based upon this theme. It sounds as if it were improvised, but, like all of the "improvised" solos throughout *Black, Brown and Beige*, it was written out in the score by Ellington. The theme is transformed into a jazz fanfare for the trumpet quartet. It appears in a bass "improvisation" and finally as an evocative plunger trombone solo, beautifully rendered here by Art Baron.

Work Song ends with a transitional phrase setting the mood for the second part of *Black, Come Sunday*:

Came Sunday. Boola was irresistibly drawn
To that pretty white house with the steeple
So tall, shining there in the sun. Everyone
Who entered there was scrubbed and polished
And all dressed up. How happy they seemed!

When the white voices inside rang out
In triumph... the blacks outside would grunt
Subdued approval. When the white voices inside
Were raised in joyous song, the blacks outside
Hummed along, adding their own touches. Weaving
Gorgeous melodic, harmonic, rhythmic patterns.
Thus the spiritual was born. Highly emotional
Worshipping of God in song.

When I worked with Ellington on an orchestration of a suite from *Black, Brown and Beige*, he was very insistent that the closing solo of *Come Sunday*, which was so hauntingly played by Johnny Hodges, not be played by another alto saxophonist for fear they might be tempted to imitate rather than create. I have thought a lot about this and asked Clark Terry, one of our cherished jazz creators who was with Ellington for almost a decade, to play the closing solo on flugelhorn. I suspect Duke would have approved. The jazz violin solo is lovingly played by Clark's niece, Lesa Terry.

A trumpet cadenza (played by Barry Lee Hall) picks up the mood of *Come Sunday* and leads us into *Light*, a joyous release:

Oh, well, here's something new... Let's sing
About this. Our work lightens... our song lifts...
But the spiritual slips in and out as we see
And learn new things. Boola worked
And dwelt in song.....

The slave song broadened, covering all things
Sometimes soft... sometimes loud. A rainbow
Of color, complete with pot of gold. Paradise
To come. On their way to heaven in tempo.
The pulse, the beat was ever present.
Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

BROWN: West Indian Dance, Emancipation Proclamation, The Blues

In the poem, *Brown* depicts the several battles that Blacks fought: against the colonials in the Indian rebellion of 1652, against the British in 1770 by Haitian troops at Savannah and again in the War of 1812, against Spain in the Spanish-American War, but above all, beside the Union Army in the struggle that led to Emancipation.

So Ellington writes three sequences around this saga. The first, *West Indian Dance*, comes out of Boola's reaction to Haitian drums:

... the echo of Africa
Was loud here
Tropical jungles. Savage drums...
Religious drums... sexual drums...

... his blood and his music had been fused
Within the new and startling sound that stirred
Him to (the) bottomless pit of his soul.

West Indian Dance ends with a quote of the tune *Yankee Doodle*. Indeed, one of the privileges of victory in 1770 was to play the song of one's enemy in his presence.

Emancipation Proclamation, the second sequence of *Brown*, celebrates the ultimate victory of all these battles, freedom. But Ellington tempers this elation, reminding the reader that while...

It was sweet to be one's own!
A sad note was sounded in the hearts of old folks...

Now instead of enjoying their retirement, they would be thrown off of the farms and plantations where they had spent their lives. Ellington expresses these conflicting emotions by juxtaposing a swinging, celebrational music... the sheer joy of hard won freedom... with a series of duets for plunger trumpet and trombone (Hall and Baron). Duets that blend, duets that bicker and finally a duet that totters off, shaking with age and resignation.

The poem also describes a new kind of music, the result of the love triangles that surfaced when Black soldiers returned from the Spanish-American War to find their ladies with another man:

A medal hung proudly from his chest,
But where were her arms for his head to rest?
And soon he learned someone had to lose
—That's how Boola got the blues.

"The Blues...
The Blues ain't..."

The Blues—The first two lines of the song come from the poem. Ellington wrote the rest of the text as well. Joe Williams, perhaps the greatest blues singer who ever worked with the Duke, still refers to Ellington by his given name, Edward, and brings a deep understanding to this closing sequence of *Brown*. Tenor-man Scott Robinson's rendering of the "improvised" interlude, originally played by the great Ben Webster, belies the fact that he wasn't even born in 1943. Note that the final lick of the solo quotes the *Work Song*.

BEIGE: (Jungle Music/Hot Harlem), (Bitch's Ball), Sugar Hill Penthouse: Waltz, Cy-Runs, Rok Walz, Last of Penthouse, Sugar Hill Penthouse Reprise, (Fanfare), Come Sunday, (Anthem), Medium Stride, (Codetta/Out Chorus)

The poem *Beige* begins:

Harlem! Black Metropolis!
Land of mirth!
Your music has flung
The story of "Hot Harlem"
To the four corners
Of the Earth!

Other descriptive phrases leap out of the poem, such as "... primeval beat of the jungle... scorching... primitive jungle calls... wild... joyous... exciting as Stravinsky." It is obvious that Ellington captured these vivid images in the opening music of *Beige*.

But the poem soon turns from "Hot Harlem" to a cooler Harlem, angry and bitter at unending bigotry and exploitation, a Harlem of community pride and self-knowledge.

Yes, Harlem!
Land of valiant youth,
You've wiped the make-up from your face, *
And shed your borrowed spangles. *
You've donned the uniform of truth,
And hid the hurt that dangles
In heart and mind. And one by one
You've set your shoulders straight
To meet each challenge and to wait
Till justice unto you is done!

(* These two lines refer to the cork-black and glitter of minstrelsy.)

From here on Ellington's music departs from the sentiments of the poem. For these we have to go to Ellington's later masterwork for jazz band and orchestra, *Harlem*, written in 1950.

However, there are several clues and a few titles that appear in the (unpublished) manuscript that suggest what the rest of the music of *Beige* is about.

Clue one. We know that Ellington had intended to include in this movement a sung section that paraphrased the very last lines of the poem:

The black, the brown and the beige
Is ready for the chance to wage
The fight for right 'neath the red, white and blue!

Clue two. Following the jungle music, we hear a Harlem stride piano. We are suddenly transported over 300 years, from the African roots of Boola to party time in Harlem. The piano is playing a tune that Ellington wrote in his teens, *Bitch's Ball*.

We are at a farewell party for soldiers on furlough. The party is taking place in the most fashionable section of Harlem, Sugar Hill. The titles tell us about the music being played and more: *Waltz*, *Cy-Runs* (could this be an interruption of the dance by a siren?), *Rok Waltz*, *Last of Penthouse* and *Sugar Hill Penthouse Reprise*. All of these dances derive from the jungle music. Just as the central metaphor of the poem shifts from Boola to Harlem, the jungle theme now replaces the *Work Song* as the new *leitmotiv* for *Beige*. After the last dance, *Sugar Hill Penthouse Reprise* (itself a slow fox-trot version of *Waltz*), we hear a fanfare.

It is time to go. A morning church bell introduces a reprise of *Come Sunday*; its final "amen" cadence in the trombone aches with nostalgia. The "amen" is picked up and expanded by the piano until it explodes into a patriotic finale. A stirring anthem is sounded in the trumpets above while the baritone sax and trombones below strut through themes from the entire score. The Harlem stride piano returns to introduce the final shout-chorus. We hear bits and pieces of *Come Sunday* and *Work Song*.

I envision the young soldiers and their ladies brimming with the emotions of love, God and country. As they part, a final trumpet scream blots out all doubts and fears.

ELLINGTON-STRAYHORN SUITE

The *Ellington-Strayhorn Suite* was inspired by Bellson's experiences with the band. The first movement, *European Skallyhoppin'*, is about frantic one-nighters on the continent. In his solo stint Clark Terry plays a two-fisted trumpet and flugelhorn duet with himself. Pianist John Danko is featured in the lyrical *Portrait of Billy Strayhorn*, a veritable concertino for jazz pianist and orchestra. Bellson closes the *Suite* with *Sketches*, an atonal movement which he describes as impressions of himself sitting at the keyboard with Ellington or Strayhorn sharing ideas about voicings and harmonies. Clark is again the trumpet soloist. Note that at one point all five saxophonists stand and improvise simultaneously.

—Maurice Peress



HISTORICAL NOTE

Having been present at the Carnegie Hall premiere of *Black, Brown and Beige* (I was hired by Duke to do promotional work for him), I can relate very closely to this brilliant reincarnation for which Louie Bellson and Maurice Peress deserve much credit.

A slight correction: the work was not performed only once in its entirety. Actually, it was previewed the night before Carnegie Hall, when we heard it at a high school in Rye, New York. At that time Duke acceded to a suggestion that the heart-on-sleeve patriotism of "Black, Brown and Beige fighting for the red, white and blue" be eliminated.

The entire work, but for that deletion, was performed at Carnegie Hall, then a week later in Boston, and I believe once more about a month after that. Subsequently, as Mr. Peress states, he only used excerpts. I always regretted that he was unnecessarily discouraged by the reviews of music reporters, who in those days knew absolutely nothing about jazz and were not qualified to criticize him. I am delighted that a half century later, with this splendid recording, a masterpiece will take on an entire new lease on life.

— Leonard Feather

LOUIE BELLSON has worn hats variously as drummer, band leader and composer. Bellson's career started at an early age when he won a drumming competition in 1940 and went on to play with Benny Goodman at the age of seventeen. After military service in World War II, he went on to become one of the most prominent big-band drummers, playing with Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington, who played many of his early arrangements and to whom he returned to play for special performances. It is his partnership with Duke that inspired the *Ellington-Strayhorn Suite* heard on this recording. As leader of his own highly respected bands, Bellson has directed some of the great players of the era, and in fact, composed many of the scores for his own bands as well as for other jazz groups and orchestras. Mr. Bellson has recorded several discs for MusicMasters.

American conductor **MAURICE PERESS** has long been associated with innovative and unique projects, including his recent highly acclaimed reconstruction of the 1942 Paul Whiteman Aeolian Hall Concert which premiered Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. A specialist in what he calls "the golden age of America's vernacular-inspired music" of the 1920's through the 1940's, Peress has also been associated with productions of Duke Ellington's *opera comique*, *Queenie Pie*, as well as Ellington's symphonic works *Harlem* and *Black, Brown and Beige*, and the piano concerto *New World A-Comin'*, which he conducted at the first International Festival of the Arts in the Summer of 1988 (previously released on MusicMasters #7011-2 *Four Symphonic Works by Duke Ellington*). It should be noted that Mr. Peress worked closely with Duke on an orchestral suite of music from *Black, Brown and Beige*.

Mr. Peress's championing of American composers includes premieres of works by Corigliano, Feldman and Amram. Mr. Peress also conducted the American premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* at the inauguration of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Since 1984 he has been on the faculty of the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College.

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LIMELIGHT DUKE ELLINGTON: BLACK, BROWN & BEIGE 522 429-2

Duke Ellington

Black, Brown & Beige

Louie Bellson

Ellington-Strayhorn Suite
Hawk Talks • Skin Deep

**Louie Bellson and
His All-Star Orchestra**
Maurice Peress, conductor
with

Joe Williams, vocal (The Blues)

Clark Terry, soloist

Executive Producer: Hold That Tyger
Produced by Teo Macero
Engineered & Mixed by Glen Kolotkin
Edited at BMG Studios
Piano by Baldwin • Design by Kristen Stephen
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