

# DUKE'S BIG 4

2310703



**PABLO**



Face 1

D. R.

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**DUKE ELLINGTON QUARTET**

1. COTTONTAIL (Ellington) 4'10
2. THE BLUES (Ellington) 5'20
3. THE HAWK TALKS (Bellson) 5'04
4. PRELUDE TO A KISS (Gordon-Mills-Ellington) 5'35

Produced by Norman GRANZ

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Face 2

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**DUKE ELLINGTON QUARTET**

1. LOVE YOU MADLY (Ellington) 6'32
2. JUST SQUEEZE ME (BUT DON'T TEASE ME) (Gaines-Ellington) 5'58
3. EVERYTHING BUT YOU (Ellington-James-George) 5'16

Produced by Norman GRANZ

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# DUKE'S BIG 4

## Side 1:

1. **Cottontail**  
(Ellington) Robbins Music
2. **The Blues**  
(Ellington) Tempo Music
3. **The Hawk Talks**  
(Bellson) Tempo Music
4. **Prelude To A Kiss**  
(Gordon-Mills-Ellington)  
American Academy of Music

In that bashful advertisement for himself, "Music on my Mind", Willie The Lion says "When Duke came in, I used to set him down to play. He always a good-looking, well-mannered fellow; one of those guys you see him, you like him right away," Which raises the question, for exactly how long can you "set a man down" to play? For The Lion is recalling a day whose sun set in 1923, and here, exactly fifty years later, is that same good-looking, well-mannered fellow still dispensing the same art he brought out of Washington, DC to scatter in the lap of Harlem. It would be patronising to the point of discourtesy to praise Duke for still being able to play as a septuagenarian; on the other hand, one of the hallmarks of genius in all the arts has been the ability to smuggle the gifts of youth across the frontiers of maturity. And in any case, the piano-playing on this album is so fine and exhilarating, to the listener as well as to the three privileged musicians who had a piece of the action, that there are moments when it is hard not to surrender to the tempting proposition that this is still the early afternoon of jazz and the future still infinite.

The repertoire has something to do with it. "Everything But You", for instance, an archetypal Ellington 1940s theme, its superstructure made from the raw material of riff, its harmony flung round it like a cloak. The Joya Sherrill vocal recording of the song passed into my consciousness nearly thirty years ago, and yet Duke, the astonishing, phenomenal, unpredictable Duke, plays it in 1973 with all the zest and muscle of Willie The Lion's yearling. The same incisive certitude of touch pervades "Cotton tail", where the piano promptings behind the guitar solo of Joe Pass are as strongly evocative of a vanished Harlem heyday as Pass's own cadences are of the way Charlie Christian used to tie up the ribbon of dominant-to-tonic resolution. "The Hawk Talks" belongs to a later period in the Ellington canon, to the eleventh or twelfth comeback. I am not sure which, but it is highly instructive to observe how what must have been an unfamiliar theme to some of the group members, flows into familiarity within a few seconds.

As to the rest of the contents of this truly remarkable, phoenixlike album, nobody has so far invented a way of listening to "Prelude to a Kiss" and then not wanting to talk about it. Everything that could be analysed in it has been analysed, any praise that could be showered upon it has been duly showered, and

## Side 2:

1. **Love You Madly**  
(Ellington) Tempo Music
2. **Just Squeeze Me**  
(But Don't Tease Me)  
(Gaines-Ellington) Robbins Music
3. **Everything But You**  
(Ellington-James-George) Tempo Music

### Personnel:

Duke Ellington, piano;  
Joe Pass, guitar;  
Ray Brown, bass;  
Louis Bellson, drums.

in the final reckoning it fulfils the function of all true music by being indescribable except in terms of its own aural shapes. So I will resist the temptation to nominate it as one of the melodic-harmonic wonders of the last fifty years, stop myself from wondering from what mysterious wellspring of experience Duke drew so sumptuous a piece, and content myself with suggesting that one day, long after the doctrinal squabbles of jazz style are dead and buried, it is the kind of Romantic art which "Prelude to a Kiss" represents that will establish Duke as one of the great master-composers of his epoch, not out of jazz but out of music at large.

All the support Duke gets on the album is superlative, and surely these performances mark the apotheosis of Joe Pass as one of the great guitarists of jazz history? The ideas bubble from his fingers, and the cleanliness of the execution at fast tempos is exciting in itself. What is especially educational about Pass's work is the nature of his vocabulary, which looks back to the pre-modern era for some of its time-values and diatonic aphorisms, and is yet steeped in the subtleties of advanced harmonic thought. It is a style which could never have been even conceived, let alone perfected by any musician with even the faintest tint of bigotry in his musical nature.

This album leaves me with one final, overriding impression, which is that Duke is really not much use to the writer on jazz. There is nothing adequate to say about his music, and it would be indulging in extreme literary bad taste to keep floundering with superlatives like wonderful and marvellous all the time. Duke's music has given me great joy ever since the day in 1942 when I first heard Irie Anderson sweetly crooning the lament of "I Got It Bad and That Aint Good", since which moment I have never quite been able to keep my head with regard to the man. I made a supreme effort, for instance, to be detached and objective about these performances, and was doing very nicely till the moment in "Prelude to a Kiss" where the performance moves into tempo, and the guitar states the main melodic theme. Behind that theme Duke's right hand scatters sparkling clusters of notes. Down the keyboard they tumble, like raindrops coursing down a window-pane, and suddenly I recall the grateful exasperation of Andre Previn when he said, "Duke merely lifts his finger, three horns make a sound, and I don't know what it is".



Recorded 1973

Liner notes: Benny Green  
Photos by Phil Stern and Gai Terrell  
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Produced by Norman Granz

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