

2310 762

The Ellington Suites

"The Queen's Suite"

"The Goutelas Suite"

"The Uwis Suite"



The Queen of England was in London, the Earl of Hereford in Leeds, and Duke Ellington in Las Vegas. It was the spring of 1958, and plans were afoot for a festival in one of Yorkshire's major cities. Yorkshire is rather more than the biggest county in England, many who live in it, and many who live outside it, believe it to be the veritable backbone of the nation. York, rich in historical background, is the official capital. It once rivaled London in importance, but in the course of time Leeds (with neighboring Bradford) became the "capital" of Yorkshire's vital industrial district. To acquire some of the cultural prestige with which York had long been invested was an understandable objective, and a logical choice to organize a festival of the arts in Leeds was the Earl of Hereford, whose stately home lay a few miles to the north. He was, moreover, a cousin of the Queen, and well known as a connoisseur and patron of the opera.

The Earl's brother, the Hon. Gerald Lascelles, was a great lover of jazz, and he was determined that it should be represented at the festival by its greatest musician, Duke Ellington. Since he was unfamiliar with the manners and methods of the music business, he was disconcerted when his overtures were rebuffed by Ellington's agent in New York. What to do? I suggested it might be helpful if my wife called Ellington and explained the situation to him. Having worked for him and recorded him earlier in his career, she knew him well.

On the point of going to bed, Ellington was in a melow mood. He had had a good breakfast and some success at Keno.

"Besides everything else," my wife concluded, "the Queen will be there."

"And you think I should come, baby?" he asked blandly.

"Okay."

Accordingly, the Ellington band descended upon the busy city of Leeds the following October. Paul Gonsalves and Shorty Bark, delayed in Scotland by better whiskey than they were accustomed to, missed the first concert, but the other musicians carried out their duties so well that their absence was scarcely noticed. Johnny Hodges was in a particularly benign mood, having miraculously determined beforehand which all the flash-and-chip suits in the area best deserved his patronage. Ellington, as always, rose to the occasion, responding to the distinguished

audience's applause with wit and charm.

Later, there was a red-carpet reception and a magnificent banquet at the Civic Hall, where Ellington and representatives of the arts from Britain and Europe were presented to Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh. It was remarked that the Queen spoke longer to Ellington than to any of the others, but afterwards he professed himself to have been, for one, at a loss for words. However, when asked how long it was since he last brought his band to England, his customary gallantry returned:

"1933, Your Majesty, years before you were born."

The monarch smilingly demurred, having been thoroughly briefed beforehand.

The following night, at a candlelit supper party given by the Mayor of Leeds, both Ellington and Billy Strayhorn played piano in appreciation of the warm welcome they had everywhere received.

This gracious week-end made such a strong impression that upon my return to New York, Ellington decided to express his gratitude in a wholly novel fashion. He recorded *The Queen's Suite* at his own expense, had a single copy pressed, and arranged for its delivery to Queen Elizabeth in Buckingham Palace. In the years that followed, repeated efforts were made to get this record issued, efforts that were resisted and obstructed by Ellington, who had no intention of sanctioning its release in his lifetime.

The music in the six-part suite is of exceptional quality and was explained by Ellington in his autobiographical *Music Is My Mistress*: "One evening we were a little late leaving Tampa, Florida, on route to West Palm Beach to make a gig. The weather was wonderful and it was just about sunset when, halfway across Florida, we passed a bird. We didn't see it, but we heard its beautiful call. We were a little too pushed for time, and going too fast to stop or go back and thank the bird, so I pulled out my pencil and paper and wrote that lovely phrase down. I spent the next two or three days whistling it to the natives, and inquiring what kind of bird it could have been that sang such a beautiful melody."

Finally, I was convinced it had to be a mocking bird. I made an orchestration around that melody, titled it *Sunset and the Mocking Bird*, and included it in *The Queen's Suite* as one of the "beauty" experiences of my life. Another number that went into

the same suite was written after experiencing a different display of beauty.

"We came out of Cincinnati late one night, took a road to the east on the South Shore of the Ohio River, and got lost while searching for the country club we were supposed to play. We ran into an area where the sultry moon was half-hidden by the trees it silhouetted. We stopped short, for there in this huge arena, with the trees as a backdrop, were, it seemed, millions of tiny lightning bugs, dancing in the air. It was a perfect ballet setting, and down below in a line, like an orchestra pit, could be heard the croaking of frogs. The number this inspired was called *Lightning Bugs and Frogs*."

"I've seen the Northern Lights many times, but one night in Canada, when Harry Carney and I were on route from Three Rivers, Quebec, to North Bay, Ontario, on Route 17, we saw the greatest display of all."

"It seemed to us as though we were two short men standing behind two tall men at a magnificent Radio City while a stage production was on. We could not see the players, only shadows and reflections of performers passing back and forth before a brilliantly lit backdrop. You could see the course of the prima donna, the prima ballerine, the heavy, and all the dancing and show girls, many of them in formation. It was the greatest stage production I've ever seen, and it went on and on until I had occasion to get out of the car. While standing there, I looked up and straight up, over my head the same thing was going on. It was eerie, and rather terrifying. Billy Strayhorn did not see this, but he wrote the music after I told him about it. "*Northern Lights*, to me, represented majesty, whereas *Lo Sucrier Velours* represented beauty. This is the name the French have for a bird whose song is sweet as sugar and who feels as soft as velours. Another movement, *Apes and Peacocks*, was inspired by reading in the Bible about the Queen of Sheba and all the gifts she brought to the splendor of all times. The sixth movement, *The Single Petal of a Rose*, represented wonder."

Ellington was similarly at one time *Brot (for Brothers)*, but another *Gout (for Goutelas)*, but as the heart of the suite it conveys Ellington's overall philosophy. The achievement, the building and the occasion. It is at once serious and playful, and the band of the master being everywhere apparent in the twining, misting tone colors. Turney's lute is highly appropriate here, and at times it is combined with

peerless reed section having a special responsibility, jointly and separately. Johnny Hodges works his magic to great effect in the opening movement.

The Goutelas Suite was inspired by another unique occasion in Duke Ellington's life, an occasion which carried memorable characteristics. A thirteenth-century chateau had been restored in a remote corner of France, and the friends of Ellington involved in the project had invited him to inaugurate the completely renovated living as a *salles de musique* on 26 February, 1966. Fifty children bearing flaming torches lined the approach to the chateau where, before playing, he delivered a short speech:

"I have been an honorary citizen of many cities and countries, but the honor of participating in the inauguration of Goutelas is by far the most moving. To be here to help celebrate the rebuilding of this beautiful chateau by men who came together from the greatest extremes of religious, political, and intellectual beliefs is an experience, and a majestic manifestation of humanism, that I shall never forget. They did not merely make a donation that others might roll up their sleeves to work; they rolled up their own sleeves and worked. To be accepted by these heroic human beings leaves me breathless! Doctors, lawyers, intellectuals, students, Catholic *payeurs*, and communist *ouvriers* had all been united in the work of restoration, and this exemplified the kind of brotherhood to which Ellington felt mankind could and should aspire. He was emotionally touched, and his feelings went into the suite that was premiered five years later at Lincoln Centre in New York.

The language for brass and rhythm is followed by Ellington's first awed impression of Goutelas as he walks through the avenue of torches. *Get-with-it-ness* had several titles, including *Le Brutot*, but eventually came to illustrate the diversity of the workers via Turney's clarinet, Mineerva's alto, Ashby's tenor and Carney's saxophone. Besides all that, the achievement, the building and the occasion. It is at once serious and playful, and the band of the master being everywhere apparent in the twining, misting tone colors. Turney's lute is highly appropriate here, and at times it is combined with

Mineerva's alto and Johnson's muted trumpet, while Carney provides his usual rich foundations. The piano player narrates, introduces and alludes to the storied past; the trombones come and go with their melancholy but sweetly evocative figure; the trumpets sigh like the horns of elliland, first with derelict, then with cup mutes; and the two tenors pace stealthily in unison. The sun rises again for *Having A It*, where Paul Gonsalves and the brass roll up their sleeves.

The UWIS Suite also derives from a period when Ellington's new work was given only four-letter code titles for identification. In this case, the reference is to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where a week-long Ellington Festival was organized and presented by Professor James Latimer in 1972. There were three separate auditoriums for workshops-clinics conducted by the band's musicians, among whom considerable "academic" work was developed, while Ellington was himself in charge of two "master" classes. At night, five different concerts were given, culminating with *Night of Suites*, at which *The Goutelas Suite*, portions of *The Queen's Suite*, and the newly created *UWIS Suite* were performed. The written movements of the last are all presented here. At Madison, a kind of improvised bouquet preceded them: "Solo reflections by the piano player on the beautiful people he had met from or in Wisconsin" was how Ellington described it in his book. "There, too, the polka was played last night. It reminded me," he wrote, "of when, many years before, Yank Yankovic invited our band to participate in a polka ball at which about eight polka bands were playing. I suppose we were regarded as a kind of international attraction, but I had a polka expert write some special arrangements for us beforehand, and when we opened up with them the polka musicians all fell out. Louis Bailson proved himself a terrific polka drummer that night."

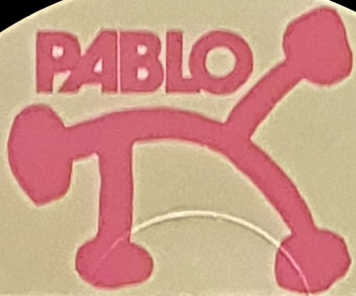
The *UWIS polka (or Klomp)* had been planned a month before. "If I give you back the sawbuck I borrowed from you yesterday," Ellington said one night after dinner, "will you go down to the Betty Record Shop and get me the master being everywhere and some polka records?" Incredulous, I departed on this unexpected errand, and was greatly surprised to find several incredulous salesmen. Upon my



turn. Ellington very much enjoyed my discomfort as he listened for some hours to the records, making very occasional notes, but pointing out all the finer features of polka playing. Although there were hilarious complications during the festival, arising from the fact that Ellington's lady admirers from all parts of the United States had descended on Madison for the week, the Suite itself was filled with happy memories. The composer had a genuine affection for Wisconsin. Besides the friends, he remembered his first train trip from Chicago to Milwaukee (ninety miles in ninety minutes), the circus train at Baraboo, the state's famous cheeses and its ubiquitous beer. The first movement, like *Something in The Goutelas Suite*, is full of orchestral variety and color, and shows how imaginative and adventurous Ellington remained in his seventies. There is a serenely expansive theme, Carney and Ashby being entrusted with the major solo statements. En route, Turney and Procope are heard briefly on alto and clarinet respectively. In the final amusing repartee, Turney plays flute, Minerva piccolo, Carney bass clarinet, and Ashby tenor to background handclapping by the maestro. *Klop* ("polka" spelled backwards and cut down to the obligatory four letters) has Procope, Turney and Ashby on clarinets. Ellington was as much concerned with spirit as with precision on this, and he got the balance he wanted in the studio. "Trombones and baritone 'way down in the last chorus," he directed. "The clarinets are really supposed to be cut front." *Loco-Madi* is yet another testimony to Ellington's abiding fascination with trains. (The soloists are Ashby, Johnson and Turney.) Some of his trains reached their destination and stopped with squealing brakes, but this is closer to his general picture—trains no end, shuffling, hooting and wailing across the great plains, and fading into the American night.

STANLEY DANCE
author of
The World of Swing
(Scribner's).

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FACE A

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GU

THE ELLINGTON SUITES

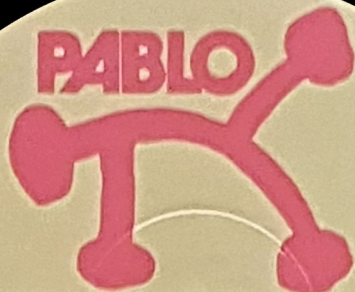
THE QUEEN'S SUITE

1. SUNSET AND THE MOCKING BIRD - 3'46
2. LIGHTNING BUGS AND FROGS - 2'48
3. LE SUCRIER VELOURS - 2'42
4. NORTHERN LIGHTS - 3'33
5. THE SINGLE PETAL OF A ROSE - 4'04
6. APES AND PEACOCKS - 3'00

All titles : Ellington-Strayhorn

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FACE B

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THE ELLINGTON SUITES

THE GOUTELAS SUITE

1. FANFARE - 0'29
2. GOUTELAS - 1'10
3. GET-WITH-ITNESS - 1'52
4. SOMETHING - 5'21
5. HAVING AT IT - 3'30
6. FANFARE - 0'29

All titles : Ellington

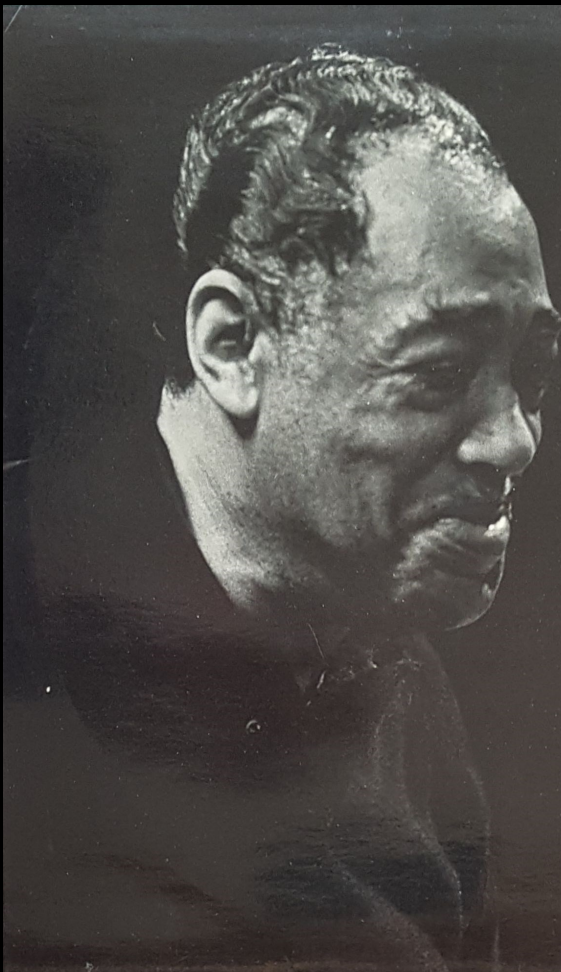
THE UWIS SUITE

1. UWIS - 7'48
2. KLOP - 1'57
3. LOCO MADI - 6'00

All titles : Ellington

DUKE ELLINGTON

Produced by Duke Ellington



Side 1

THE QUEEN'S SUITE

1. Sunset and the Mocking Bird (b)
2. Lightning Bugs and Frogs (a)
3. Le Sucrier Velours (a)
4. Northern Lights (a)
5. The Single Petal of a Rose (c)
6. Apes and Peacocks (b)

(Ellington/Strayhorn)
Tempo Music Inc./ASCAP

Personnel:

(a) Duke Ellington, Piano; Clark Terry, Cat Anderson, Shorty Baker, Roy Nance, Trumpets; Britt Woodman, Quentin Jackson, John Sanders, Trombones; Johnny Hodges, Russell Procope, Jimmy Hamilton, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, Reeds; Jimmy Woode, Bass; Jimmy Johnson, Drums.
February 25, 1959, New York City

(b) as (a) April 1, 1959,
New York City

(c) Duke Ellington, Piano; Jimmy Woode, Bass, April 14, 1959,
New York City

Side 2 (B) 23

THE GOUTELAS SUITE

1. Fanfare
2. Goutelas
3. Get-with-itness
4. Something
5. Having At It
6. Fanfare

(Ellington)
Tempo Music Inc./ASCAP

Personnel:

Duke Ellington, Piano; Cootie Williams, Mercer Ellington, Money Johnson, Eddie Preston, Trumpets; Booty Wood, Malcolm Taylor, Chuck Connors, Trombones; Harold Minnery, Norris Turney, Paul Gonsalves, Harold Ashby, Harry Carney, Reeds; Joe Benjamin, Bass; Rufus Jones, Drums.

April 27, 1971, New York City

THE UWIS SUITE

1. Uwls
2. Klop
3. Loco Madi

(Ellington)
Tempo Music Inc./ASCAP

Personnel: Duke Ellington, Piano, Cootie Williams, Mercer Ellington, Money Johnson, Johnny Coles Trumpets; Booty Wood, Vince Prudente, Chuck Connors, Trombones; Russell Procope, Harold Minnery, Norris Turney, Harold Ashby, Russ Andrews, Harry Carney, Reeds; Joe Benjamin, Bass; Rufus Jones, Drums; Wulf Freedman, Electric Bass, added on LOCO MADI

October 5, 1972, New York City

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