



1. **TOURIST POINT OF VIEW** 5:09
2. **BLUEBIRD OF DELHI (MYNAH)** 3:18
3. **ISFAHAN** 4:02
4. **DEPK** 2:38
5. **MOUNT HARISSA** 7:40
6. **BLUE PEPPER (FAR EAST OF THE BLUES)** 3:00
7. **AGRA** 2:35
8. **AMAD** 4:26
9. **AD LIB ON NIPPON** 11:34
10. **TOURIST POINT OF VIEW** (alternate take) 4:58
11. **BLUEBIRD OF DELHI** (alternate take) 3:08
12. **ISFAHAN** (alternate take) 4:11
13. **AMAD** (alternate take) 4:15

All composed by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, except "Blue Pepper" and "Ad Lib on Nippon," composed by Duke Ellington only.

Originally produced by Brad McCuen

Reissue produced by Orrin Keepnews • Executive Producer: Brian Bacchus

Original recording engineer: Ed Begley
 Digital remix, audio enhancement, and digital remastering by James Nichols

Art Research: Liz Fierro • Cover Design: Amy Wenzler
 Photograph courtesy of Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University

Special thanks to Steven Lasker for his usual discographical expertise.

DISCOGRAPHY

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA: Cootie Williams, William "Cat" Anderson, trumpets; Mercer Ellington, Herbie Jones, trumpets and flugel-horns; Lawrence Brown, Buster Cooper, Chuck Connors, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet (and tenor sax); Johnny Hodges, alto sax; Russell Procope, alto sax (and clarinet); Paul Gonsalves, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone sax; Ellington, piano; John Lamb, bass; Rufus Jones, drums. Recorded in New York City, at RCA-Victor Studio "A", on December 19 (a), 20 (b), and 21 (c), 1966.

(Selections are listed here in the order in which they appear on the original album and subsequent reissues, which is presumably the sequence intended by Ellington. Four previously unissued alternate takes follow. Specific recording dates are indicated by letters. Master numbers show the order in which selections were recorded, except for "Bluebird of Delhi," which was initially attempted on the second day but not accepted until the third. Take numbers, which follow the master numbers below, are more fully explained in the reissue producer's notes in the booklet.)

TOURIST POINT OF VIEW (a)	TPA1-9147 Take 7
BLUEBIRD OF DELHI (Mynah) (c)	TPA1-9150 Take 12
ISFAHAN (b)	TPA1-9152 Take 1
DEPK (c)	TPA1-9153 Take 17
MOUNT HARISSA (c)	TPA1-9154 Take 5
BLUE PEPPER (Far East Of The Blues) (c)	TPA1-9155 Take 2
AGRA (b)	TPA1-9149 Take 3
AMAD (a)	TPA1-9148 Take 3
AD LIB ON NIPPON (b)	TPA1-9151 Take 2/4

Originally issued in June 1967 as RCA-VICTOR album LPM-3782 (monaural) and LSP-3782 (stereo): THE FAR EAST SUITE.

TOURIST POINT OF VIEW (a)	TPA1-9147 Take 5
BLUEBIRD OF DELHI (c)	TPA1-9150 Take 8
ISFAHAN (b)	TPA1-9152 Take 2
AMAD (a)	TPA1-9148 Take 5
	Previously unissued.

This reissue has been prepared by turning to the original analog four-track tapes and mixing them to two-track digital form. Re-equalization was applied as needed, but the new mix faithfully reproduces the audio configurations of the original while making full use of current techniques and equipment and eliminating certain inadvertent errors present in the 1967 mix.

The booklet notes that follow are naturally subdivided into three sections — by two writers and covering a time span of almost three decades. Beginning with my comments and explanation of the “Special Mix” aspect of this reissue, we then turn to Stanley Dance (critic, historian, and long-time friend of Ellington) and the still quite valuable liner notes he wrote for the original release of the suite. Finally, an encore by Dance, combining his current thoughts with some reactions to the “new” material included here.

— O.K.

I. Some Notes from the Reissue Producer

Let’s get it straight right at the start: there never was anything seriously—or even very noticeably—wrong with the recording of the magnificent Duke Ellington/Billy Strayhorn collaboration known as THE FAR EAST SUITE. But it does turn out that the original long-play album release of this major work was something less than perfect. And many of us will always continue to feel that, when dealing with the music of Edward Kennedy Ellington, there is no excuse for stopping anywhere short of perfection.

By the end of 1994, following several years of substantial jazz reissue activity, virtually all of the considerable RCA-Victor treasure chest of Ellingtonia was available. But the passage of even classic material into and out of record company catalogues is cyclical in nature—meaning that every now and then you come across the most remarkable omissions. Finding THE FAR EAST SUITE on the short “unavailable” list meant that it was quickly scheduled for early-1995 re-release.

The first step in the reissue process is to locate the original source material and evaluate its condition: can it be used as is; if not, what kinds of physical or audio repair will be necessary? The two-track stereo master tape of the *Suite*, prepared in 1967, seemed to be in acceptable shape. But on first listening, engineer Jimmy Nichols, whose years of experience have been largely spent with contemporary recording rather than historical survivals, sensed that all was not well. For one thing, the "tone" at the beginning of the tape reel (a one-kilocycle beep implanted as a guide to future engineers seeking to duplicate playback conditions) was rather fuzzy, not at all the clear and precise sound he expected. Then, listening carefully, he became aware of a certain amount of distortion: nothing blatant, but a certain out-of-shape, not quite on-pitch sound, particularly from easily affected instruments like clarinet and piano. Nichols quickly reached the conclusion that back in 1967, when the original four-track recording was being mixed down to the two-track tape from which commercial copies were manufactured, the two-track tape machine had not been quite properly aligned. Not a huge error, but the kind of imperfection that, once heard, can never really be ignored.

What we immediately decided to do—if it proved possible—was to return to source and recreate the original mix. (At this point I must digress long enough to clear up a possibly confusing matter of semantics. The process of starting with a multi-track original, which might even have been recorded at many different times and places, and arriving at a seamless and perfectly bal-

anced two-track stereo master tape, is variously referred to by us hip professionals by the verb form "mix," "remix," or "mixdown." Don't be distracted: all mean exactly the same thing.)

Perhaps surprisingly (we were reaching back almost three decades), our request produced, from the midwestern vaults where all such material is stored, the complete set of tapes as originally recorded. Fortunately, the format in use in the mid-sixties was four-track. Anything more complex (very soon thereafter, eight and then sixteen tracks became standard) might have been disastrous: without written data (and such notes were never retained) it would probably have been impossible to recreate the original procedure. And we were certainly not presuming to reinvent or to try to improve on the Ellington-directed mix; our goal was merely to eliminate old error—and also to use 1994 equipment and digital technology to perhaps provide a cleaner, clearer, and more accurate reproduction of what had been set down on tape way back then. As it turned out, the signposts were clear; the original distribution of sound had been direct and logical: the ensemble horn sound had been spread across two tracks, providing a suitable stereo effect; bass and drums were together on a third track; and the various soloists were cleanly isolated on the fourth.

Locating the full set of recording session tapes, and being in a remixing mood, provided another important bonus. In several instances, there were complete alternate takes with rather clear

evidence that they had been strongly considered and close to being accepted. As one example, there were only two takes made of the sumptuous ballad *Isfahan*, performed with the spotlight on Johnny Hodges. It's a number on which the player and the composers are known to have spent much preparation time. The eventual decision was to go with Take 1, but it was obviously a close call. And now that we know there will be no more writing like this from Ellington or Strayhorn and no more playing like this from Hodges, how wonderful to have the luxury of a never-before-heard version! Similarly, there is little difference in quality between two takes of *Amad*—actually, so little that although the recording sheet claims that Take 5 was the one originally issued, evidence on the tape box and on the tape itself strongly indicates that number 3 was really used. In any case, we now supply the stand-by version.

(A note about take numbers: I have indicated these in all cases, primarily for the benefit of collectors who are concerned with such things, but let me warn against taking the numbers too literally. Each numeral does not attest to a separate complete—or even substantial partial—recording. False starts, quickly ended partial takes, and the like usually were awarded their own numbers in advance. I assure you that there are not sixteen other full versions of *Depk*—there are, however, lots of aborted starts. As for doubled numbers, as on *Ad Lib on Nippon*, that merely indicates editing between two takes; in this case, 2 had a dubious final chorus,

3 was a failed attempt at an alternate ending, 4 succeeded, and there are no other complete performances.)

I barely met Duke Ellington (although I know his son Mercer, and did have the pleasure of working with Gonsalves and Hodges on a couple of occasions and made several albums with 1950s bandmember Clark Terry). But now I can feel almost as if I have worked with him, and am certain he would have approved what Nichols and I have done for him. It's a satisfying feeling. . . .

— ORRIN KEEPNEWS, 1995

II. The Original Album Notes

When Duke Ellington left New York on September 6, 1963, he began one of the most eventful journeys of his long career. The next evening, he and his orchestra found themselves in Damascus, the first stop on a State Department tour that was to take them to Amman, Kabul, New Delhi, Ceylon, Tehran, Madras, Bombay, Baghdad and Ankara. Also on the itinerary were Istanbul, Nicosia, Cairo, Alexandria, Athens and Thessalonica, but concerts in these cities were indefinitely postponed when the tragic news of President Kennedy's assassination reached them in Ankara.

"The tour was a great adventure for us on what is indeed the other side of the world," Duke Ellington wrote in *Musical Journal* ("Orientations," March 1964). "Sometimes I felt it was this world upside down. The look of the natural country is so unlike

ours and the very contours of the earth seem to be different. The smell, the vastness, the birds, and the exotic beauty of all these countries make a great inspiration."

More specifically, he detailed lizards, chameleons, camels, cobras, snake charmers, a storm in Bombay, an all-rose sky in Calcutta, the Kandy dancers in Ceylon, and a twenty-piece orchestra in Delhi that used not one instrument familiar to the West.

"I hope much of this will go into music," he continued, "but doing a parallel to the East has its problems. From my perspective, I think I have to be careful not to be influenced too strongly by the music we heard, because there is a great sameness about it, beginning in the Arabic countries and going through India all the way to Ceylon. There are many different kinds of drums, of course, and many strange instruments, and in India and Ceylon they have about ten scales, but the moment you become academic about it you are going to fall into the trap of copying many other people who have tried to give a reflection of the music.

"So far as the rhythms are concerned, I don't think there is anything really new there. Other musicians who had been before us had picked up on all of them. That's another reason why 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 the form that

will suit the musicians who are going to play it. But it really takes quite a bit of doing to decide what to do and what not to do, particularly when you have that big, wonderful and beautiful world over there as a subject. You don't want to underestimate or understate it."

The musical impressions that "seeped out" onto paper from his pen and that of his friend and co-composer Billy Strayhorn were rich and rewarding. Although the impressions were at first concerned with the Near and Middle East, they soon became known to concertgoers under the generic title of THE FAR EAST SUITE. In 1964, moreover, the Ellington band did indeed go to the Far East—to Japan—on a tour which inspired *Ad Lib on Nippon*, the piece which concludes the set. Recorded in December 1966, more than three years after the oriental adventures began, this album is a well-considered collection of the most original material to appear under Duke Ellington's name since AFRO-BOSSA.

Tourist Point of View is the East, fresh to the inexperienced eye of the West—exotic, dramatic and strange, a world "upside down." While the swift rhythmic patterns of John Lamb's bass and newcomer Rufus Jones' drums provide an undercurrent of mysterious excitement, Paul Gonsalves' sinuous saxophone lines reveal the inspiration of unusual chords. This perhaps parallels Ellington's recognition of the fact that Paul, one of the

tour's most successful ambassadors on and off the stand, "makes friends wherever he goes." Some of the color changes here are obtained by Jimmy Hamilton and Russell Procope using clarinets in the reed section, and by Mercer Ellington and Herbie Jones using flugelhorns with the brass.

Bluebird of Delhi, or Mynah, Ellington explains, "was the bird that sang the pretty lick Jimmy Hamilton plays on clarinet. He sang it all the time Billy Strayhorn was in his room. Then, when he left, the bird sounded the low raspberry you hear at the end of the number." Besides the bird, however, we are given its context in a rich orchestral impression. Incidentally, there is no pianist to be heard on this. He was busy conducting.

Isfahan is for the city that has been called the Pearl of Persia. "It is a place," Ellington recalls, "where everything is poetry. They meet you at the airport with poetry and you go away with poetry." The main role in this beautiful, melodic souvenir is accordingly entrusted to the poetic saxophone of Johnny Hodges. *Isfahan*, a Persian poet once wrote, "is half the world."

Inspired by a dance Ellington witnessed in the Near East, *Depk* brings a change of pace and mood. "It was a wonderful dance by six boys and six girls," he says, "and I tried to get the cats in the band to do it. All I could remember afterwards was the kick on the sixth beat." The spirited but intricate arrangement requires an interchange of musical progressions by the section,

thinning out to a statement by Hamilton and Carney on clarinet and baritone saxophone respectively.

The band reached Baghdad just in time for a military coup, during which jets shot up the presidential palace. Later, when he arrived safely in Beirut, the press eagerly sought Ellington's reaction to the experience. "Baghdad?" he said, in a much-quoted reply. "It was swinging!" In striking contrast with this excitement was his first view of Mount Harissa, fifteen miles from Beirut. Crowned by the huge statue of Our Lady of Lebanon, this inspired the serene and swinging *Mount Harissa*, on which his piano and Paul Gonsalves' tenor saxophone are so handsomely featured.

Blue Pepper, or Far East of the Blues, speaks of the universality of the blues. The title might also be a subtle reminder of the time when pepper—to the West—was a luxury import from the East. The definitive solo statement is made by Johnny Hodges, whose muse here differs from that in *Isfahan*.

Agra, Ellington explains, "is our portrait of the Taj Mahal, but we take in a little more territory than that marble edifice dedicated to the tremendous love for a beautiful woman. We consider the room in which the man who built it was imprisoned by his son. For the rest of his life he was forced to live there and look out—at the Taj Mahal." Harry Carney, the nonpareil of the baritone saxophone, imparts great distinction to the noble theme.

Amad is a surging damascene sketch with closely woven writing for the reeds, Lawrence Brown's call to prayer, and the leader's insistent piano emphases. The treatment is relevant to another of Ellington's observations about the State Department tour: "We didn't write for two months afterwards," he said, "because we didn't want to do anything others had done before. The supporting ornamentation behind the main themes is general in color for the whole trip, from Turkey to Ceylon."

This clearly does not apply to *Ad Lib on Nippon*, a long performance with displays of virtuosity by John Lamb and Jimmy Hamilton. The maestro also digs in, perhaps remembering "some cats in Tokyo who were too much." Japan, he claims, sometimes frightens him, "because they have an ability there to do things better than the originals."

Some originals. Not these originals.

— STANLEY DANCE, 1967

III. Some Afterthoughts

When Duke Ellington visited Baghdad, Isfahan and Beirut in 1963, they were part of a world we know more about today. The fact that a military coup was in progress and jets shooting up the presidential palace when he arrived in Baghdad indicates that even then things were not perhaps what they seemed to be. Yet to the eyes and ears of someone as much traveled as Ellington, they were undoubtedly strange.

It was this strangeness, which he and Billy Strayhorn translated—or transmuted—into their own idioms, that gave *THE FAR EAST SUITE* a unique fascination. Of all the original music that they wrote for several 'theme' albums during the era of the 12-inch LP, this is the one experienced listeners are most likely to commend highly. For example, in his book, *Sweet Swing Blues on the Road*, Wynton Marsalis reels off a short list of records of "real jazz" for an enquiring student, and his Ellington choice is *THE FAR EAST SUITE*.

Listening to it today, nearly thirty years after it was recorded at three magical sessions in 1966, it is amazing how rich and satisfying it remains. The addition, too, of four alternative takes helps in understanding the creative process involved. There were only two versions of the exquisite *Isfahan*, but they were born after much earnest discussion between Ellington and Johnny Hodges, particularly concerning those pauses during the performance that add so much significance to the picture of a city "where everything is poetry." No one else ever managed to get it quite right, but no one else had a Johnny Hodges to play it.

Tourist Point of View perhaps had a double meaning as a title, for this was the first recording at the first record session drummer Rufus Jones made with the band. From then on, Ellington always maintained that "exotic rhythms" were Jones's forte.

The first run-down of *Amad* provoked considerable banter. "I wish you wouldn't re-arrange the arrangements, Herbie," Ellington told copyist Herbie Jones. After hearing the playback, he relented somewhat. "It isn't as bad as they said it was," he modestly commented on his and Strayhorn's joint handiwork. And what really amused him about the mynah bird's unedifying raspberry at the end of *The Bluebird of Delhi*, was the fact that it was the only answer the bird ever made to Strayhorn's repeated efforts at conversation throughout his stay.

One can conclude from this collection alone that the United States was seldom so well served in musical diplomacy as it was by Duke Ellington and his orchestra.

— STANLEY DANCE, 1995



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DUKE ELLINGTON / THE FAR EAST SUITE-Special Mix

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

THE FAR EAST SUITE - SPECIAL MIX

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA: Cootie Williams, William "Cat" Anderson, trumpets; Mercer Ellington, Herbie Jones, trumpets and flugelhorn; Lawrence Brown, Buster Cooper, Chuck Connors, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet (and tenor sax); Johnny Hodges, alto sax; Russell Procope, alto sax (and clarinet); Paul Gonsalves, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone sax; Ellington, piano; John Lamb, bass; Rufus Jones, drums. Recorded in New York City on December 19 - 21, 1966.

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Annotation by Stanley Dance and Orrin Keepnews



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DUKE ELLINGTON / THE FAR EAST SUITE-Special Mix