



Four Symphonic Works by **DUKE ELLINGTON**

American Composers Orchestra Maurice Peress, Conductor

1 Black, Brown and Beige Suite
Orchestrated by Maurice Peress

Work Song
Come Sunday
(Frank Wess, Alto saxophone)
Light
Richard Chamberlain, Trombone

2 Three Black Kings
(Les trois rois noirs)
Orchestrated by Luther Henderson

King of the Magi
King Solomon
Martin Luther King
Jimmy Heath, Tenor and soprano saxophones

3 New World a-Comin'
for Piano Solo and Orchestra
Orchestrated by
Maurice Peress after the
original jazz band score
by the composer

Sir Roland Hanna, Piano
Stephen Hart, Clarinet

4 Harlem
for Jazz Band and Orchestra
Orchestrated by
Luther Henderson and
Maurice Peress

Jon Faddis, Trumpet
Bill Easley, Clarinet
Ron Carter, Bass
Butch Miles, Drums

Maurice Peress, Conductor
American Composers Orchestra
Dennis Russell Davies, Principal Conductor
Paul Lustig Dunkel, Associate Conductor
Robert Chausow, Acting Concertmaster
Eugene Moye, Principal violoncello
and additional guest artists:
Joe Temperley, Baritone saxophone
Walt Weiskopf, Alto saxophone

Maestro Peress wishes to thank the following "without whoms":

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Duke Ellington is known for his jazz band compositions—a body of work spanning over fifty years which indisputably established him as the first among jazz-inspired composers and among the greatest of American composers of all persuasions, or, as the Duke would say, “without category.” But there also exists a substantial body of large works: ballets, concerti, tone poems, film scores, even an “*opéra comique*.” Starting in 1943, Ellington prepared the first of several annual Carnegie Hall concerts with his own orchestra. For each of these he composed at least one extended work, symphonic in proportion and intention, if not in instrumentation. This recording includes two of these in their symphonic form—*Black, Brown & Beige* and the piano concerto *New World a-Comin’*—as well as two symphonic works not originally written for his jazz band—*Harlem*, commissioned by the NBC Symphony in 1950, and *Les trois rois noirs* (Three black kings), commissioned by the Dance Theatre of Harlem.

BLACK, BROWN & BEIGE

Among the papers of Duke Ellington held by his sister Ruth Boatwright, there appears a thirty-three page verse narrative, entitled *Black, Brown & Beige*, by Ellington. It traces the history of an African named Boola, and tells of his arrival in America by slave ship, of his servitude in a strange and beautiful land, his emancipation and his discovery of the blues. We then move to Harlem; Duke describes its many ironies and its hope for a new world ‘a’ comin’, the promise of equality, heralded by the Second World War. That Ellington read a great deal of scholarly history about his people is evident throughout. Yet, in the midst of a tale of cruelty and degradation, Ellington creates in his characters a positive sense of self. They are people endowed with a rich and ancient civilization believing in ultimate justice and with a gift for finding joy in love and living:

Honest toil was not without reward.
Had not this toil restored
Those muscles of steel that rippled ‘neath
The Black satin smoothness of his skin?
Has not the sun erased the ravages
Of that tortuous nightmare
That brought him here?

The narrative *Black, Brown & Beige* is Ellington’s philosophical metaphor for black survival

in a white world. It very well could have been the original program for his music of the same title which he called “a tone parallel to the history of the American Negro.” An enigmatic and complicated work, made all the more difficult to fathom by the disarmingly comfortable tonal palette and rhythmic flow of a jazz band, *Black, Brown & Beige* is a signature piece for Ellington, but rarely performed. It was, after all, a first attempt at a long, sustained work—originally 57 minutes in length—by a master of the short form. By 1950 and *Harlem*, we find Duke in greater control of his material, but he never gave up on *Black, Brown & Beige*. He recorded it in 1944 and continued performing sections into the ‘60s. In 1963, he allowed it to be published in score form, to my knowledge the only extended work of his so honored during his lifetime. It was shortly after that I met Duke and proposed the idea of a version for symphony orchestra. Little did I realize this was to be yet another chapter in the saga of *Black, Brown & Beige*, which, in retrospect, emerges as a work-in-progress. When one considers the implication of its title, perhaps this was inevitable.

The Suite includes “Work Song,” “Come Sunday,” and “Light.” Together they make up the opening “Black” section of the original work. With the exception of “The Blues,” they are the strongest and most “symphonic” of the seven movements. The “Work Song” theme depicts the ax chop, as well as the after-grunt—the back beat—of hard labor. Ellington manipulates this motive masterfully, first by transforming it into a faster, swingier bassline which begins an ever-evolving development climaxing when all the “evolved” themes are joined. There is a trumpet quartet cadenza followed by an Ellington benchmark, a Tricky-Sam Nanton “jungle sound” plunger trombone solo, played here by Rick Chamberlain. Perhaps it is the lone triumphant voice of the runaway slave Long John, depicted in a classic work song: “like a Turkey in the co-orn, he’s gone, long gone...”

“Work Song” flows into “Come Sunday,” which was described to me by Duke as a scene where black folks are standing outside a church they cannot enter, enjoying the music and harmonizing along, praising the universal God of all men. The haunting alto saxophone solo, made famous by Johnny Hodges and interpreted here by Frank Wess, is followed by a violin variation, originally conceived by Ray Nance, a trumpeter in Duke’s band who was first trained as a violinist. The rush of a train returns us to the mysterious “Come Sunday” theme, one of Ellington’s favorites, and to which words were later added for the first commercial recording of *Black, Brown & Beige* in 1944. It also emerges thirty years later in his Sacred Service. A transitional phrase and a trumpet cadenza lead us into the happy-go-lucky “Light,” a variation on “Work Song” ending with a final quote of “Come Sunday”—this last, a 1969 idea of Duke’s, to give the three movements a proper close.

THREE BLACK KINGS (LES TROIS ROIS NOIRS)

Three Black Kings was intended for the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Ellington and Arthur Mitchell must have come up with a scenario, because in 1973 the Duke began giving Luther Henderson a short score from which he was to prepare a ballet (symphonic) orchestration. Somehow the project foundered; but after the composer's death in 1974, his son Mercer, who had continued to direct Ellington's projects, completed the work and asked Henderson to score it up for jazz band and symphony orchestra. This has been revised for symphony with jazz soloist—on this recording, the wonderful Jimmy Heath on tenor and soprano saxophones. The three movements represent a King of the Magi, Balthazaar; King Solomon, son of King David and Beersheba; and Martin Luther King, represented by a rare, if appropriate, Ellingtonian treatment in Gospel style.

NEW WORLD A-COMIN'

On December 11, 1943, for the second time, Ellington brought his orchestra to Carnegie Hall and presented a "twelve-minute piece" (actually, it is closer to fifteen) for piano solo and jazz band. Ellington describes the work in his autobiography *Music Is My Mistress*:

The title was suggested by Roi Otteley's best-selling book of the same name. Otteley looked forward to better conditions for the Negro following World War II.... A New World is A-Coming with the sweep and fury of the Resurrection... I visualized this new world as a place in the distant future, where there would be no war, no greed, no categorization, no non-believers, where love was unconditional, and no pronoun was good enough for God.

In the 1960s the work appeared in a new, much-changed version for piano solo and symphony orchestra, parts and score for which are lost. There never existed a solo piano part, except in Ellington's head. In the spring of 1983, I was approached by Mercer Ellington to reconstruct the original version for piano solo and jazz band, which I did from a recording of the 1943 Carnegie Hall concert, including the actual solo piano part as played by Ellington. This was presented at the Kool Jazz Festival that summer. The symphonic orchestration on this recording follows this version exactly and, most importantly, includes Ellington's original virtuoso solo piano part. The final cadenza was improvised in the studio by Sir Roland Hanna in keeping with two grand traditions, the 18th- and 19th-century practice of composer/soloists and virtuosos when playing concerti, and the 20th-century practice by jazz masters such as Ellington and Hanna.

HARLEM

In the White House appointment logbook of President Harry Truman, the following entry appears:

12:30 pm Mr. Duke Ellington
(Mr. Ellington personally gave to the President the original manuscript of his contribution toward the new musical suite commissioned by Toscanini, "Portrait of New York Suite."
Arranged by Mr. Niles at the request of Mr. Ellington)

If this description is accurate, *Harlem* was to be part of a group commission by the celebrated conductor, who was not known as a champion of American music. Duke, a master title-giver, described the work as a concerto grosso for jazz band and symphony orchestra. He similarly described his *Queenie Pie*—already a wondrously ear-catching name—as an *opéra comique*. While neither of these works exactly fits the classical description, their subtitles nevertheless help raise one's expectation for more than just another Broadway musical or jazz-inspired orchestra piece.

Concerto grosso was more likely Ellington's way to get his orchestra into the center of Toscanini's celebrated NBC Symphony. This would assure that the music would be interpreted in a true jazz style, but it does not fulfill the traditional idea of a concerto grosso wherein the group—the Duke Ellington Orchestra—is pitted against the symphony. For whatever reason the work was not performed by the NBC Symphony—not exactly. Duke recorded *Harlem* with the band alone in 1954. And one year later, after Toscanini had died, Don Gillis, Assistant Conductor to Toscanini and a fine composer of crossover works himself, appeared with the Symphony of the Air (the members of the old NBC now trying to go it alone) in Carnegie Hall and performed *Harlem* with Duke's orchestra. This recording is of a newly edited and reworked orchestration that follows the original exactly, with the exception that the two, mostly redundant, brass sections are integrated into one.

In *Harlem*, we see Ellington as having learned from his *Black, Brown & Beige* experience. It is in one completely integrated movement, the first part of which is held together by the word *Har-lem* (a minor third), intoned by the growl trumpet. The second half is built out of the strict funeral dirge (Duke refers to an Elks Band) which begins as an eight-bar blues for three marvelously interwoven clarinets and builds to a climax combining both thematic ideas.

Ellington, who makes no apologies for its programmatic inspiration, described *Harlem* as follows:

...The piece of music goes like this: (1) Pronouncing of the word "Harlem," itemizing its many facets—from downtown to uptown, true and false; (2) 110th Street, heading north through the Spanish neighborhood; (3) Intersection further uptown—cats shucking and stiffing; (4) Upbeat parade; (5) Jazz spoken in a thousand languages; (6) Floor show; (7) Girls out of step, but kicking like crazy; (8) Fanfare for Sunday; (9) On the way to church; (10) Church—we're even represented in Congress by our man of the church; (11) The sermon; (12) Funeral; (13) Counterpoint of tears; (14) Chic chick; (15) Stopping traffic; (16) After church promenade; (17) Agreement *a cappella*; (18) Civil Rights demands; (19) March onward and upward; (20) Summary—contributions coda.

I once attended a rehearsal of *Harlem* led by Ellington, with the Symphony of the New World. To the tympanist (Elaine Jones), who was asked to improvise the cadenza leading into the "contributions coda," Ellington commanded, "take us all the way back to Senegal."

All of the Ellington symphonic compositions on this recording—*Harlem*, *New World a-Comin'*, *Three Black Kings*, *Black, Brown & Beige*—are about his African American heritage. Perhaps this is true of all of his music. In a man ostensibly apolitical, who was not known for marching in protest or making waves, we find a remarkable singlemindedness about his music. By virtue of his birthright, Ellington had a mission. And in some fateful way he enjoyed an enviable position in being free to write directly about his deepest concerns, for an audience Black, White or Beige that was, and is still, deeply involved.

Maurice Peress

Conductor MAURICE PERESS knew Ellington personally and worked closely with the composer on the Symphonic Suite from *Black, Brown & Beige*, which was premiered under his direction by the Chicago Symphony at Ravinia in 1970. He also prepared with Ellington the vocal score of *Queenie Pie* for the National Educational Television Opera in 1974. More recently, Peress adapted and developed additional Ellington material for the opera's production in Philadelphia and Washington, DC, and the forthcoming one in New York.

Maestro Peress was assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic under Bernstein in 1961. Then followed music directorships of the Corpus Christi, Austin and Kansas City Orchestras. Since 1984, he has been a professor at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College. In the past four years, he has done several reconstructions of works from what he calls "the golden age of America's vernacular inspired music," the 1920s-'40s: Gershwin's stage musical *Strike Up the Band*; Carpenter's *KrazyKat*; Antheil's *Jazz Symphony*; Ellington's *Come Sunday and New World a-Comin'*; and the landmark Paul Whiteman Aeolian Hall Concert of 1924, at which was premiered the *Rhapsody in Blue*. The last, in its Musicmasters version (MMD 60113T/14L), was awarded a special "1987 Recording of the Year" by *Stereo Review*.

A conductor who always championed American music, Peress gave premieres of works by Amram, Corigliano and Bernstein (*Mass*, which opened the Kennedy Center in 1971). He is particularly pleased that the American Composers Orchestra and Musicmasters have committed to making a long-held dream a reality: the presentation of Ellington's larger works under the best conditions—great orchestra, great recording, great soloists—thereby expanding the perception of Duke Ellington, an original genius, who did it all.

LUTHER HENDERSON's talents include composing, arranging, conducting and performing. He has worked on over two dozen Broadway productions in these various capacities. For *Ain't Misbehavin'*, he was the original pianist as well as orchestrator, arranger and musical supervisor; and for *Lena Home: The Lady and Her Music* he was the musical consultant. As dance arranger and/or orchestrator, his Broadway credits include: *Flower Drum Song*, *Do-Re-Mi*, *Funny Girl*, *Hallelujah*, *Baby and No, No, Nanette*, as well as the ballet *Three Black Kings* composed by Duke Ellington.

Like many a brilliant idea, the one to create the **AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA** originated over a good meal. In October 1975 composer Francis Thorne, then newly appointed executive director of the American Composers Alliance, and conductor Dennis Russell Davies were at a Soho restaurant discussing plans for the 40th anniversary of the ACA. As Davies recalls, "We started talking about the fact that American orchestras don't play very much American music as part of their regular programming, and that led to the idea of an orchestra that would fill that gap, so that audiences would at least have the opportunity to hear what was there."

Soon thereafter Thorne enlisted the support of ACA president Nicolas Roussakis. Davies agreed to serve as principal conductor and music adviser, and Paul Dunkel signed on as assistant conductor, principal flutist and orchestra contractor. Musicians with a strong commitment to contemporary music were hired to play in the orchestra. On February 7, 1977 the inaugural concert was held. By all accounts the concert was so successful that, in Thorne's words, "we just had to keep it going."

Programming of ACO concerts is admittedly and proudly eclectic, with geographic, stylistic and temporal diversity all factors. While its aim is to present the symphonic music of all periods of American history, its orientation is necessarily toward the contemporary, since by far the largest body of American orchestral music has been composed in the 20th century. The ACO has received a special award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and a Letter of Distinction from the American Music Center, and ASCAP's annual prize for adventuresome programming nine times. In 1983 the ACO was singled out by ASCAP as being the orchestra that has done the most for American music in the United States.

SIR ROLAND HANNA, pianist, was born in Detroit in 1932. His father was a preacher in a Sanctified Church, where Roland was first exposed to rhythm and blues-tinged music. After his discharge from the Army, he played in clubs all over the United States, until 1954 when he began his formal training as a pianist—first at the Eastman School of Music, later at The Juilliard School. As a member of Benny Goodman's band, Hanna appeared at the Newport Jazz Festival, the Brussels Worlds Fair and in a 1958 European tour. He became musical director and accompanist for Sarah Vaughan, and performed and recorded with Charles Mingus, Richard Davis and Gerald Wilson. In 1967 he became the regular pianist with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra, touring Europe and Japan in that year and the Soviet Union in 1972. He

later formed his own trio and appeared in concerts and clubs throughout the country, as well as in Europe, Asia and Africa.

After a benefit tour in Africa for young African students in 1969, Hanna was knighted in 1970 by the late President of Liberia, William Tubman, for humanitarian interests and the furtherance of the education of young Africans. Hanna is also a composer, whose works include *Midtown Suite*, Sonata for cello and piano, *Perugia*, *Child of Gemini Suite*, *Mediterranean Seascape*, *Song of the Black Knight*, and *Morning*. He has published a series of books containing his own compositions as well as a method book in the *Bill Lee Jazz Series*.

JIMMY HEATH, saxophonist, composer and teacher, has performed with nearly all the jazz greats of the last 40 years, from Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis to Herbie Hancock. Performing with him in one of his big bands were John Coltrane, Benny Golson and Johnny Coles. He has performed on more than 75 record albums, seven with the Heath Brothers and eight with the Jimmy Heath Quartet. Fifty of one hundred compositions have been recorded by other jazz artists. He received a Grammy nomination in 1980 for *Live at the Public Theater*, recorded with the Heath Brothers on the Columbia label. Heath has taught Jazz Studies at Housatonic College, City College of New York, Jazzmobile and the New School for Social Research, and is a professor at Queens College. He received an honorary doctorate in 1985.

Born in Kansas City in 1922, **FRANK WESS**, saxophonist, is one of jazz's most versatile reedmen, as well as an important arranger and composer. His early associations include the orchestras of Billy Eckstine, Eddie Heywood, Lucky Millinder and Bullmoose Jackson in the late 1940s. In 1953, he joined Count Basie, quickly becoming a mainstay of the Basie powerhouse, both as an instrumentalist and an arranger. Wess added flute to his arsenal, and is credited with introducing that instrument to the modern jazz idiom. After leaving the Basie organization in 1964, Wess turned to free-lance work and has since been in constant demand in the studios. In the mid-1970s, he played regularly with the New York Jazz Quartet, which he helped found, and in the 1980s with such repertory groups as Dameronia and the American Jazz Orchestra. In 1981, Wess toured Japan as a member of the Benny Carter All Stars. At home in virtually any musical setting, Wess is capable of evoking a wide variety of moods from his saxophone—from big-toned and hard-swinging to fleet and boppish.

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FOUR SYMPHONIC WORKS BY DUKE ELLINGTON

MMD 60176L

Four Symphonic Works by DUKE ELLINGTON

American Composers Orchestra • Maurice Peress, Conductor

- 1** **Black, Brown and Beige Suite (18:04)**
Orchestrated by Maurice Peress
Work Song
Come Sunday
(Frank Wess, Alto saxophone)
Light
Richard Chamberlain, Trombone
- 2** **Three Black Kings**
(Les trois rois noirs) (19:11)
Orchestrated by Luther Henderson
King of the Magi
King Solomon
Martin Luther King
Jimmy Heath, Tenor and soprano saxophones
- 3** **New World a-Comin' (13:47)**
for Piano Solo and Orchestra
*Orchestrated by Maurice Peress after the
original jazz band score by the composer*
Sir Roland Hanna, Piano
Stephen Hart, Clarinet
- 4** **Harlem (15:23)**
for Jazz Band and Orchestra
*Orchestrated by Luther Henderson and
Maurice Peress*
Jon Faddis, Trumpet
Bill Easley, Clarinet
Ron Carter, Bass
Butch Miles, Drums

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