



Duke Ellington

THE GREAT LONDON CONCERTS

- 1 Take the "A" Train
(instrumental introduction) (00:54)*
(Billy Strayhorn) Tempo Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 2 Duke Ellington: Introduction (00:23)
- 3 Perdido (4:02)*
(Ervin M. Drake, Hans Lengsfelder, Juan Tizol)
Tempo Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 4 Caravan (5:20)*
(Edward K. Ellington, Irving Mills, Juan Tizol)
Mills Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 5 Isfahan (4:30)*
(Edward K. Ellington, Billy Strayhorn)
Tempo Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 6 The Opener (3:10)*
(C. Williams, Elwyn Fraser) Tempo Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 7 Harlem (15:01)*
(Edward K. Ellington) G. Schirmer, Inc., ASCAP
- 8 Take the "A" Train (vocal) (3:24)*
(Billy Strayhorn) Tempo Music, Inc., ASCAP

Cover Photo:
Duke Ellington, 1934

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- 9 Mood Indigo (2:49)
(Barney Bigard, Edward K. Ellington, Irving Mills)
Mills Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 10 C Jam Blues (3:19)
(Edward K. Ellington) Robbins Music Corp., ASCAP
- 11 Don't Get Around Much Anymore (3:12)
(Edward K. Ellington, Sidney K. Russell)
Harrison Music Corp., Robbins Music Corp., ASCAP
- 12 Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue (11:21)
(Edward K. Ellington) Mills Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 13 Single Petal of a Rose (4:05)
(Edward K. Ellington) Tempo Music, Inc., ASCAP
- 14 Kinda Dukish & Rockin' in Rhythm (5:06)*
(Edward K. Ellington, Irving Mills) Mills Music, Inc., ASCAP

DUKE ELLINGTON *piano*

Cat Anderson, Roy Burrowes & Cootie Williams *trumpets*
Ray Nance *cornet & violin*
Lawrence Brown, Buster Cooper & Chuck Connors *trombones*
Russell Procope, Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton,
Paul Gonsalves & Harry Carney *reeds* ■ Ernie Shepard *bass*
Sam Woodyard *drums* ■ Milt Grayson *vocals*

(Recorded January 22, 1963 in London.)

*Rolf Ericson & Herbie Jones, *trumpets*, replace Burrowes & Nance.
Ernie Shepard replaces Grayson as vocalist.

(Recorded February 20, 1964 in London.)

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“**LONDON** was the first city we went to on the other side of the Atlantic,” Duke Ellington wrote in his autobiographical *Music Is My Mistress*, “and we could not have had a better stepping-stone to Europe.” London made a big impression on him, just as he and his band did on London. But what with World War II and a protracted squabble between the British and American musicians’ unions, it was fated that they should not return for a quarter of a century. After they played the Leeds Festival and Ellington had been presented to Queen Elizabeth II in 1958, younger musicians in the band were astonished to be confronted by fans bearing autographed programs of the concerts given in 1933. “You guys must really have been playing back then,” they told their seniors.

On that first visit, the band had played at the Palladium, then probably the most prestigious variety theater in the world. They were the major attraction, the thirteenth act on a bill that included comedians, singers and all kinds of entertainers. Although they were a huge success, they got to play only eight numbers in each show, and this was not enough to satisfy musicians and enthu-

siasts already educated in Ellington’s music by records and critics in the jazz press. Dissatisfaction was such that two special concerts were organized at the Trocadero, the largest moviehouse in Europe. Both were sold out to audiences largely consisting of musicians, professional and amateur. For a warm reception and applause beyond applause, veteran Harry Carney once declared there was no comparison until the band went to Buenos Aires in 1968. The concerts were in fact the first genuine jazz concerts performed anywhere in the world, and they set a precedent Ellington was fully aware of when he was able to tour Britain regularly.

The program on this disc actually derives from two performances, one in 1963 and the other a year later. The selection has been made by Mercer Ellington to show how his father expressed appreciation of London audiences with numbers seldom heard and unusual treatments of others more familiar. The debonair humor of the maestro’s announcements was always a big factor in gaining approval, but it is also evident that his band was very much on its toes—and ready to blow—on each occasion.

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After he has been introduced, Ellington assures the Londoners that he and his men do indeed love them madly. Then he pretends they are so hip that he doesn’t need to tell them the name of the opening number, which is **Perdido** in an arrangement they had probably never heard before. Taken at a bright tempo, it makes a good opener with enterprising choruses from Jimmy Hamilton (clarinet) and Rolf Ericson (trumpet) and two from Paul Gonsalves (tenor saxophone), who takes it out in his inimitable, volatile fashion over vigorous band backgrounds.

In complete contrast is Cootie Williams’ conception of **Caravan**. The trumpet player had returned to the band in 1962 after an absence of more than twenty years, during which he had played in Benny Goodman’s and led his own orchestra. He was fifty-two and the years had taken their toll, but he remained a formidable musician, always conscientious and serious about music as his transformation of a very familiar composition attests. Instead of a caravan trotting happily through some exotic, oriental pleasure garden, he seems

to visualize it out on a parched desert under a hot sun, desperately seeking an oasis. A sprightly interlude by Ellington and drummer Sam Woodyard may suggest that it was found in time, because in the last chorus Williams swings out triumphantly.

Isfahan, another sharp contrast, is part of **The Far East Suite**, on which Ellington and Billy Strayhorn collaborated after the band’s tours of the Orient. Ellington remembered Isfahan “as a place where everything is poetry,” so the number was understandably entrusted to his most poetic soloist, alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges. In this, the earliest recorded version, Hodges is all light and grace. In later versions, as though foreseeing Iran’s future, he would invest the music with affecting dramatic tension.

As the audience applauds, a microphone picks up on the leader calling for **The Opener**. This was a flag-waver Cootie Williams brought with him on his return, and it is typical of Ellington that he used the arrangement not at the beginning of the program but in the middle! It has exciting choruses by

Paul Gonsalves and Buster Cooper (trombone) before Cat Anderson (trumpet) enters for his customary exercises in skywriting.

Harlem was written by Ellington as he returned from Europe on the Ile de France in 1950. It had been commissioned as a concerto grosso for the band and the NBC Symphony during the reign of Arturo Toscanini, and it gave Ellington the opportunity, as he said, "to make some statements on the subject of Harlem, the music and the people." The result was unique in his oeuvre, a continuous composition, here fifteen minutes long. In his spoken explanation, he gives a cheerful account of what it is about. (There is a much longer and more detailed one in *Music Is My Mistress*.) Following Cootie Williams' opening pronouncement, the solo voices chiefly but briefly heard in this musical montage are those of Jimmy Hamilton, Harry Carney (baritone saxophone and bass clarinet), Russell Procope (clarinet), Lawrence Brown (trombone), Cat Anderson and Sam Woodyard, the last having a significant place in the coda.

Next, Ellington introduces on stage in typically generous terms his "writing

and arranging companion," Billy Strayhorn, before playing the latter's **Take the "A" Train** which had long before been adopted, with similar generosity, as the band's theme. This "special operatic version" features bassist Ernie Shepard as vocalist. Although his conception owes not a little to earlier vocals by Betty Roché and Ray Nance, it has its own humor and swings effectively. "Our bass," Ellington notes dryly, "is a baritone."

Another unusual treatment follows when **Mood Indigo** virtually becomes a showcase for the nonpareil Johnny Hodges. The great saxophonist is very much at ease here, having undoubtedly heard the famous number on more than a thousand-and-one nights. He creates delightful variations within the traditional framework, and Ernie Shepard's bass—not his baritone—is heard to advantage.

The piano player then leads straight into the well-named **C Jam Blues**, which always serves to review the band's soloistic talents, in this case those of Ray Nance (violin), Cootie Williams, Harry Carney, Buster Cooper and Jimmy Hamilton. It is interesting to note how Ellington incorporated

Cooper's extremely personal trombone style in appropriate contexts, just as earlier he had found the way to use Hamilton's adroit and more legitimate-sounding clarinet in ornamentation of the ensemble in the New Orleans manner, so that the clarinetist and band swung together joyously.

Don't Get Around Much Anymore, whose origin Ellington carefully explains, brings the deep voice of singer Milt Grayson to the fore, proving that the group's resources enabled it to provide music for all occasions and tastes.

Diminuendo and Crescendo, with Paul Gonsalves in the central "wailing interval," is an eleven-minute reprise of the great triumph at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival, where Ellington liked to claim he was "born"! Gonsalves' epic ride is here considerably longer than that at Newport. Try counting out his twelve-bar choruses for yourself. The appeal of his feat was partly visual, like that of drum solos, for audiences enjoyed the spectacle of the impassioned, driven saxophonist pouring out his soul before them. Gonsalves did this well and conscientiously night after night with enormous success, using

parts of the original marathon solo and improvising others according to his mood. If he faltered momentarily, he would invariably regain the rhythmic momentum that would carry him through the storming crescendo into a daring, heroic coda.

The program's intriguing contrasts continue with Ellington's solo performance of **A Single Petal of a Rose**, the beautiful, romantic ballad which, as he reminds the audience, he wrote after his presentation to Queen Elizabeth II in 1958. Nowadays, it is fashionable to emphasize the importance of Ellington as a composer. It is justified, of course, but (especially in academic circles) whatever can be pinned down on paper tends to have an exaggerated value, and in comparison Ellington as a performer is underestimated. He made no claims to virtuosity, but in terms of tones and colors, he drew an unique kind of expression from the piano.

The emotion and awe of **A Single Petal of a Rose** are immediately contrasted with the hard-driving rhythm of his role in **Kinda Dukish**, the preface to an old favorite, **Rockin' in Rhythm**. He was sometimes highly critical of the other members of the rhythm section,

but not of this one, not of this "first-chair" rhythm section that Ernie Shepard and Sam Woodyard completed. Individually and together, the three musicians swing convincingly, building to such a point that the entry of the horns seems for a moment anticlimactic. Then everyone is gripped by excitement, and the performance roars to its conclusion with Cat Anderson soaring high overhead. Curiously enough, the same number, at a somewhat slower tempo and with dancer Bessie Dudley out front, had been a sensation at the Palladium nearly thirty years before.

Ellington must have found the audience response gratifying, but the respect and appreciation were mutual. "To me," he wrote in his book, "the people of London are the most civilized in the world. Their civilization is based on the recognition that all people are imperfect, and due allowances should be made for their imperfections. I have never experienced quite such a sense of balance elsewhere. What is cricket and what is not is very well understood by everybody."

— Stanley Dance

Author of *The World of Duke Ellington*
(Da Capo Press, Inc.)

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DUKE ELLINGTON: THE GREAT LONDON CONCERTS

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Over the years, Duke Ellington performed many concerts and studio sessions which were never available to the public. Having had the opportunity to locate these private tapes, some of which were known only to the Ellington family, others which were stored in the archives of the Library of Congress, it's a great thrill to release such rare and special material.

—Mercer Ellington

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PRODUCED BY MERCER ELLINGTON

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