

RIVERSIDE

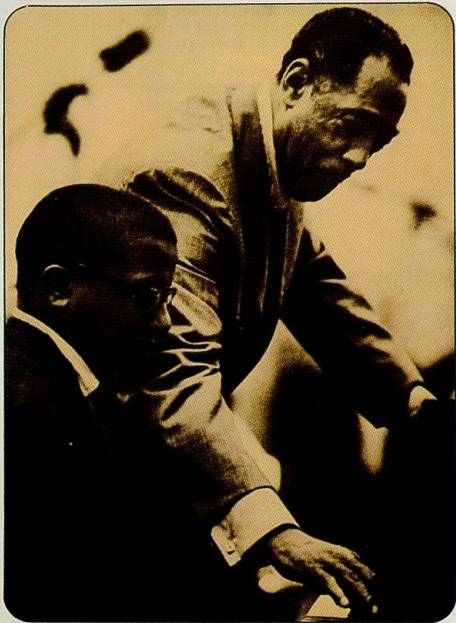
**GREAT  
TIMES!**

**DUKE  
ELLINGTON**

**BILLY STRAYHORN**

*Piano Duets*

475



RIVERSIDE

GREAT  
TIMES!

DUKE  
ELLINGTON

BILLY STRAYHORN

Piano Duets



1. COTTONTAIL 2:51  
(Duke Ellington) SBK Robbins Catalog-ASCAP
2. C JAM BLUES 2:54  
(Ellington) SBK Robbins Catalog-ASCAP
3. FLAMINGO 2:56  
(Grouya-Anderson) E.H. Morris/  
Tempo Music-ASCAP
4. BANG-UP BLUES 3:04  
(Ellington)
5. TONK 2:55  
(Ellington-Strayhorn) SBK Robbins Catalog-  
ASCAP
6. JOHNNY COME LATELY 2:56  
(Billy Strayhorn)
7. IN A BLUE SUMMER GARDEN 4:02  
(Ellington-Strayhorn)
8. GREAT TIMES 2:52  
(Ellington)
9. PERDIDO 2:52  
(Tizol-Lengsfelder-Drake)
10. TAKE THE "A" TRAIN 2:16  
(Strayhorn)
11. OSCALYPSO 2:40  
(Oscar Pettiford) publ. unknown
12. BLUES FOR BLANTON 2:36  
(Ellington-Ellington) Tempo/  
Mercer Ellington-ASCAP

All selections Tempo Music-ASCAP, except as indicated.

Selections #1-4:  
DUKE ELLINGTON—piano  
BILLY STRAYHORN—piano  
WENDELL MARSHALL—bass

Selections #5-8:  
DUKE ELLINGTON—piano  
BILLY STRAYHORN—piano  
JOE SHULMAN—bass

Selections #9-12:  
DUKE ELLINGTON—piano  
BILLY STRAYHORN—celeste (#10-11 only)  
OSCAR PETTIFORD—cello  
LLOYD TROTMAN—bass  
JO JONES—drums

Mastering—Joe Tarantino  
(Fantasy Studios, Berkeley)

Riverside Records  
Tenth and Parker  
Berkeley, CA 94710  
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Every effort has been made to preserve the integrity of the original pre-stereo, analog recordings. The listener should be aware, however, that these transfers from metal or shellac parts contain imperfections which were inherent in the recording equipment and techniques of that time.

ALBUM DESIGN: KEN DEARDOFF.

As musical history this album is priceless. It presents Duke Ellington and his long-time associate composer, arranger, confidant and friend Billy Strayhorn in a series of piano duets. It is the only place (with the exception of one track recorded for *RCA Victor*) where these two musical milestone-makers can be found in piano interplay.

This material was originally recorded late in 1950 by Duke's son Mercer Ellington and jazz critic Leonard Feather, and the first eight selections were issued in limited quantity as a 10-inch *Mercer* album in the early '50's. The embryonic *Mercer* label quickly passed out of existence (whereupon the few existing copies of the LP became much sought-after collectors items, some being sold through the grapevine for \$25 and more). Thus this release on *Riverside* is actually the first full-scale presentation of an album that will surely take its place in the archives of jazz as a memorable "only one of its kind" creation.

The problems involved in assembling and producing this album were monumental. The younger Ellington notes that when *Riverside's* Orrin Keepnews displayed interest in putting such a package together, it brought Mercer face to face with a prodigious re-creation project. Most of the original tapes from the *Mercer* label's several recording sessions had been destroyed some years ago in a fire at the Apex Recording Studios, where they were stored.

"We had a few metal parts (the metal 'mother' disks from which finished records are produced)," Mercer explained, "but mostly we had to go to Ellington collectors for copies of the original 10-inch LP. The next problem was to find discs with little or no surface noise." They succeeded more

than reasonably well, and few listeners are apt to complain about finding a few grains of grit in this historically and musically rare brew.

The idea for duo recording grew, says Leonard Feather, out of *Tonk*. This tune, the only one on the LP that might even loosely be termed "arranged," was often performed at parties by Duke and Billy. The two composer-pianists sat down together and played four hands on one keyboard when two pianos were not available, and the bright, sparkling sound of their music never failed to break up the assembled guests. (Feather took his cue from this party performance to record *Tonk for Victor*). But, according to both Mercer and Leonard, the other duo-piano tracks here were done in off-the-cuff fashion. The two men just sat down in the RCA Victor 24th Street studios and played spontaneously. But it was, of course, the kind of "casual" performance that is only possible after years and years of the closest association and mutual respect and affection. Most of the tracks are familiar Ellington-Strayhorn collaborations. *Cottontail*, *C-Jam Blues*, *Perdido*, *Take the "A" Train*, *Great Times*, *Johnny Come Lately* and *Blues for Blanton* are standards to jazz-and-Ellington devotees. What the two composer-pianists do with these melodies, however, will be a revelation to the majority of listeners.

On first hearing, the album sounds like a dazzling montage played by one man with four hands. So close are the ties between these two men that the music sounds and feels as though it were being produced by one mind and one heart. So closely do the lines inter-twine that it is almost impossible for even a listener familiar with the styles of both artists to separate who is playing what. Most often

it is the brilliant interplay of the two men fitting and weaving together (rather than lead and accompaniment) that astounds and excites the listener.

The entire performance is so unified that Billy Strayhorn confessed, in an interview with veteran jazz writer Bill Coss: "I really have to sit down at a keyboard and play it out myself to know for sure who is playing."

This becomes more understandable when Billy explains his relationship with Duke. He told Coss that "What it comes down to is that, although we feel very differently about life, we really understand what each one of us wants in a composition. As a consequence, Duke can call me and say 'I've got these notes here and I haven't got the time.' I write it out from there." Strayhorn not only knows exactly what Duke Ellington wants in a composition, but also what Duke's band expects and needs. As a result, he says, "Although my style of playing away from Duke and the band is quite different, when I play with the band I play like its leader. I know what Duke would do in a particular section of a composition, and I know the band expects it to happen."

This complete fitting of the Strayhorn style with that of Ellington is really the key to these recordings. A guide to who's playing when can only be given in general terms. In most cases Duke makes the opening melodic statements. The light, airy phrases, touched with suggestions of Tatum and Teddy Wilson (and the French classical impressionists as well—as on *C Jam*) seem most often to be Strayhorn's.

The final four tracks here feature the late Oscar Pettiford. Originally included in another *Mercer*

album, they marked the great bassist's recorded debut on cello, and were probably the first jazz cello performances ever recorded. O. P. had experimented with the instrument during his tour of duty with the Woody Herman band in 1949, when a slow-healing broken arm hampered his bass style. Another unique feature of these particular tracks is the addition of Strayhorn on celeste. The sound of cello and celeste gives a bright, bubbling quality to the numbers on which they are included.

Ellington fans across the country and the world will find this a fascinating set. It deepens and broadens the historical understanding of Duke's work and greatly increases an already-monumental musical legacy.

**JACK MAHER,**  
Billboard



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OJC20 378-2



OJC20 379-2



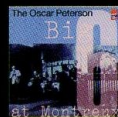
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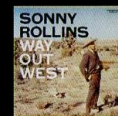
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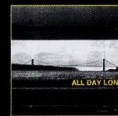
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**RIVERSIDE**®

# DUKE ELLINGTON & BILLY STRAYHORN

## Piano Duets - Great Times!

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|--|------|
| 1. <b>COTTONTAIL</b><br>(Ellington, Duke) SBK Robbins Catalog-ASCAP                | 2.51 |
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| 3. <b>FLAMINGO</b><br>(Grouya/Anderson) E.H. Morris/Tempo Music-ASCAP              | 2.56 |
| 4. <b>BANG-UP BLUES</b><br>(Ellington) Tempo Music-ASCAP                           | 3.04 |
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| 7. <b>IN A BLUE SUMMER GARDEN</b><br>(Ellington/Strayhorn) Tempo Music-ASCAP       | 4.02 |
| 8. <b>GREAT TIMES</b><br>(Ellington) Tempo Music-ASCAP                             | 2.52 |
| 9. <b>PERDIDO</b><br>(Tizol/Lengsfelder/Drake) Tempo Music-ASCAP                   | 2.52 |
| 10. <b>TAKE THE "A" TRAIN</b><br>(Strayhorn) Tempo Music-ASCAP                     | 2.16 |
| 11. <b>OSCALYPSO</b><br>(Pettiford, Oscar) Publ. Unknown                           | 2.40 |
| 12. <b>BLUES FOR BLANTON</b><br>(Ellington/Ellington) Tempo/Mercer Ellington-ASCAP | 2.36 |

DUKE ELLINGTON  
& BILLY STRAYHORN  
Piano Duets - Great Times

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