

EMI



HALL OF ELLINGTON



ADELAIDE HALL



HALL OF FAME

ELLINGTON

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Daughter of a music teacher, Brooklyn-born Adelaide Hall started her career in the all black revue "Shuffle Along" in 1921—a hit that ran for 504 performances. She toured Europe in 1925 as one of the stars of the "Chocolate Kiddies" revue. In New York she appeared in "Desires of 1922" and "The Death of Florence Mills" became the star of Lew Leslie's famous "Blackbirds" originating such standard songs as *I Must Have That Man and Baby*. She made her British debut in cabaret in 1931. Adelaide also toured the USA extensively in vaudeville, using such great jazzmen as Art Tatum, Bennie Paine and Joe Turner as her accompanists. For three years she appeared at New York's Cotton Club and then opened her own night-club called "The Big Apple" in Paris. After touring Europe, she finally settled in London in 1938 and then started in "The Sun Never Sets" at Drury Lane. Adelaide had her own radio series and later starred in shows such as "Kiss Me Kate" (1957), "Love From Judy" (1952) and films like "The Thief of Bagdad" and "Night and the City". In 1957 she had a major role on Broadway in "Jamaica" starring Lena Horne, whose own career had started as a chorine at the Cotton Club when Adelaide was the star. Today Adelaide continues to appear in variety and in concert.

A longtime friend of Duke Ellington—she recorded with him in 1927 and again in 1932, and also sang at his Memorial Service at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

Side One

1. JUST SQUEEZE ME

For a man who has such an impressive number of standard songs to his credit, it is perhaps surprising to find that Duke Ellington rarely set out to write a hit. Most of his songs began their lives as instrumentals which he wrote for his orchestra and lyrics got added later.

Just Squeeze Me dates from 1941 when, as *Subtle Slough*, a feature for Rex Stewart's cornet, it was first recorded by a small group, nominally led by Stewart, drawn from within the Ellington Orchestra. In 1946, the full Ellington aggregation recorded it again as *Just Squeeze Me* with the lyrics sung by the Orchestra's resident trumpeter, violinist and comedy man—Ray Nance. His version was funny—Adelaide Hall gives it a sexy "come hither" feeling without losing the humour and for a bonus there is an excellent solo from Tony Coe on tenor.

2. SOLITUDE/ I LET A SONG GO OUT OF MY HEART

Two of Ellington's most famous ballads done in medley form. *Solitude* dates from 1934 and was first recorded by Duke in that year, but without a vocal. For the 1940 re-make Ivie Anderson sang the lovely lyrics, but in the meantime the song had already become a great standard.

I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart is non-vocal on the original full orchestra version from March 1938, but a few days later an Ellington small group under the leadership of Johnny Hodges recorded it complete with vocal by Mary McHugh. Addy captures the appropriate "3 o'clock in the morning when your lover has gone".



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feeling and the whole thing adds up to a classic example of what used to be termed "Torch Singing".

3. IT DON'T MEAN A THING (IF IT AIN'T GOT THAT SWING)

A title that should be deeply engraved on the heart of every aspiring jazz man. It dates from 1932, several years before swing had become the trendy word, and was sung on the original record by Ivie Anderson, the Duke's vocalist from 1931 until 1942. Following an out of tempo verse, this version demonstrates exactly what swing is all about, and if proof were needed of how much Addy and the musicians enjoyed working together this track would provide it.

4. MOOD INDIGO

One of the most foved of all Ellington compositions, it was first recorded for the old Brunswick label on 17th October 1930 as an instrumental under the title *Dreamy Blues*, but when the band moved over to the OKeh label for a session, only thirteen days later, it had become *Mood Indigo* and was sung by Irving Mills, who was perhaps better known as the man who published most of the Duke's songs. At one time it was well publicised as the Queen Mother's favourite song, which must prove something. The mood is similar to *Solitude* and there is a delectable bass clarinet solo from Tony Coe.

5. I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT

One of the biggest hits of the late war years, this was originally recorded by Duke in December 1944 with a vocal by Joysa Sherrill. The tune is credited to Ellington and Johnny Hodges and the lyrics are by Don George, who was the Duke's brother-in-law. Tony Coe leads in on tenor and, after Addy's vocal, spills a chorus with Alan Branscomb's vices before Addy comes back to swing the whole thing out in live style, respecting the meaning of it, if not adhering strictly to the words.

Side Two

1. SOPHISTICATED LADY

The original 1933 recording featured Duke himself at the keyboard in what can perhaps best be described as a rhapsodic mood, and represented something of a stylistic departure for the orchestra which was almost equally loved or hated by Ellington's "bullies" at the time. Mitchell Parish added the lyrics and the resultant creation is a wonderful song full of technical pitfalls for unwary singers, most of whom would blanch at the mere thought of trying to pitch the middle eight correctly. Addy gives it the sort of performance that makes it seem easy and still extracts every nuance of meaning from the words.

2. DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE

Yet another instrumental piece originally recorded in 1940 as *Never No Lament*. A couple of years later, the Ink Spots took it to the top of the Hit Parade both in the US and in Britain and it has been around ever since, usually sung as a ballad. Addy and the boys bring it slap into 1976 with a medium rock beat that was Addy's idea—and how it works!

3. I GOT IT BAD AND THAT AIN'T GOOD

Ivie Anderson sang this one in 1941 and everybody from Sinatra to Ella has done it since, but the first time I recall hearing the verse. Another in the line of classic "torch songs".

4. PRELUDE TO A KISS

One of the loveliest and least known of all Ellington's songs. It was usually a feature for Johnny Hodges, under whose name it was first recorded in 1938 with vocal by Mary McHugh. Addy treats this rare gem with the loving care it deserves and there is a tasty guitar solo by Dick Abel.

5. CREOLE LOVE CALL

This is where it all started for Adelaide Hall and Duke Ellington. She was on the threshold of stardom, he was just becoming established as the leader of the most exciting band in the world, and they met when they were billed to appear at the same theatre. During rehearsals Addy was listening to the band and improvising along with them when the Duke came up to her and said "We're going to record that", and Addy replied "Record what? I don't know what I was singing." Well, record it they did on October 6th, 1927 and the result was the Duke's first major hit and one of the all-time classics of jazz. Adelaide's wordless vocal counterpart to the haunting melody line is one of the most evocative sounds in music and to re-make it seemed almost like sacrilege—for who can improve on perfection? When it came to the point, it was decided not to try in any way to copy the 1927 recording, so Addy reverses her original role by singing the melody while the band plays the answering phrases. Despite a waltz-walk guitar in place of Bubber Miley's trumpet, and a suggestion of a rock beat, this version catches the haunting flavour of the original and makes a perfect ending for the album.

CHRIS ELLIS

Listening to recent recordings by even the finest popular singers, I have often been reminded of a saying current in Italy a century and a half ago when Germany and Austria were beginning to challenge Italian domination of musical Europe: "German accompaniments do not constitute a guard of honour for the melody, but rather a police escort." What this meant was that the emphasis given by German and Austrian composers to the role of the orchestra in opera was inhibiting the singers' former creative responsibilities and prerogatives. I find myself objecting similarly to the emphasis on elaborately and precisely composed instrumental backings in today's vocal recordings, where it frequently seems that it is the singer, when audible, who is doing the backing.

These new Ellington recordings by Adelaide Hall with the informal backing of congenial jazz musicians represent a welcome move in the opposite direction, with the instrumentalists functioning not as a police escort but as a deferential guard of honour. The tracks may sound as if they had been cut thirty years ago, but that's just what I like about them. The songs are as old as that, or older. Miss Hall knows how they sounded then (she was singing them), and her backing group here is successfully intent on supporting and completing her stylistically sure-footed elaboration of tune and text.

HENRY PLEASANTS

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