Duke Ellington for Solo Guitar
Steve Hancoff
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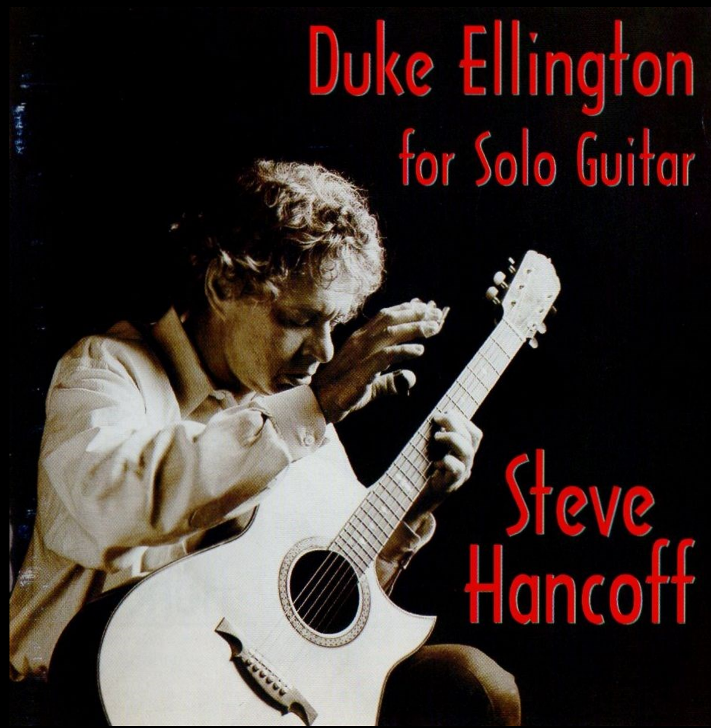
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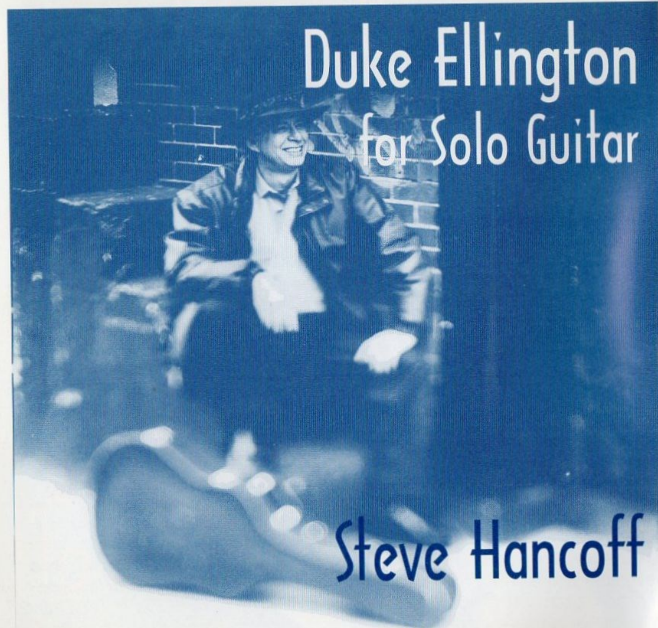


Andre Previn once remarked: "...Duke merely lifts his finger, three horns make a sound, and I don't know what it is!"(1). With Ellington, if you hear just one chord you know right away that it's Duke, but it's almost impossible to say exactly what it is he is doing.

Duke Ellington was an extraordinarily prolific musician and composer. In more than 50 years in the music business, he made more than 1,000 records, and it is safe to say that he composed or had a hand in composing thousands of pieces of music. No one really knows how many because so many of them were never even recorded, and even more astonishing is the fact that many recordings exist that have not yet — 25 years after his death — been released!

I wanted to understand what had happened musically after the New Orleans Jazz era of the 1920's, so I began listening to the great swing bands of the 1930's and '40's. I listened to Count Basie, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Fletcher Henderson, Benny Goodman, et al, and ultimately of course to Duke Ellington. I enjoyed all of them, but it was immediately evident how Ellington's came to be regarded as the pinnacle of swing bands.

So, I got serious about his music, and I listened to a lot of it.

When I discovered the 2-CD set of Duke's OKeh recordings, I must have played through it ten times one weekend. I kept on thinking how this piece or that piece would make for great guitar music. It was at this point that I realized I had the makings of a new CD.

When a piece caught my ear, I had to decide whether I felt I could translate it into a guitar piece rather than a super-imposition of band music onto the guitar. Once I decided a piece was a go, I began to transcribe it, listening until I had a real familiarity with it. Then with the guitar and an old-fashioned Dictaphone— if need be, you can repeat a phrase over and over with a foot pedal, with hands free to play along—, I would figure out and write down everything I heard.

As a piece takes form on the guitar, it develops a life all its own, and attention to accuracy gives way to attention to the details of beauty or swing or whatever feeling the music evokes. Practicing a lot over time is what lends fluency and legato. And the more I practice a piece, the more ideas and insights come my way. And so it evolves, diverging from the original work and becoming a piece of music for the guitar.

The real magic of Duke Ellington's music is in how he achieved his sound, what Billy Strayhorn dubbed the "Ellington effect." Strayhorn's apt observation was that "Ellington plays the piano, but his real instrument is the band."

Playing and traveling together every day, Duke and his men lived in a veritable hotbed of creative energy. "...The band would play until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, and then rehearse until sunrise...They would go through a piece section by section—first the saxophones, then trumpets, next trombones telling each player what to play for four measures. Each player would play his notes and then the section would try it. Then an entire sixteen bars would be practiced in this manner before the whole band would try it. Ellington would have everyone repeat what they'd played a number of times so as to memorize it.... Meanwhile, Juan Tizol might be writing down the notes of what everyone was playing, thereby creating a rough score, Ellington would take the score home and tinker and polish it. The next night the band would play the piece again...."(2).

Duke did not arrange for, say, a generic "saxophone" or "clarinet." Instead, he wrote parts specifically for "Johnny" or "Barney." You can see the names on the lead sheets housed at the Smithsonian. When a new man joined the band, Duke would even re-write the part. He told Nat Hentoff: "After a man has been in the band for a while, I can hear what his capacities are, and I write to that. And I write to each man's sound. A man's sound is his total personality. I hear that sound as I prepare to write. I hear all their sounds, and

that's how I am able to write. Before you can play anything or write anything, you have to hear it"(3). Or better yet: "You can't write music right unless you know how the man that'll play it plays poker"(4).

If the whole-band arrangements define a piece's structure, the solos within are the wings that give it flight. Were they composed or improvised? I think it likely that most of the solos were at first improvised. The more the musicians played a piece and the more used to it they became, the more set their solos became. Steven Lasker, Ellington collector and researcher, goes so far as to suggest that after a recording was made, the men may actually have learned their own solos from the recordings! The reason for doing it that way would have been to please audiences who tended to demand that the band play it the way the audience was accustomed to hearing it on the record.

Putting It On the Guitar

The first thing was to find the most comfortable key. Johnny Hodges' or Cootie Williams' (saxophone and trumpet) solos were usually the anchor for choosing the key because they most often played the melody on these original recordings. I wanted to put their solos in the mid-register of the guitar, both because it sounds most natural to a listener's ear and because playing there lends ease to keeping the bass/rhythm constant and interesting.

Jazz players, following the Bb horns, usually play in flat keys. Jazz guitarists do likewise since they usually play with horns. Fingerstyle guitar players, like classical guitarists, prefer sharp keys because those keys give access to open strings, especially in the bass. Playing in sharp keys enables us better to exploit the entire range of the instrument. So A is much easier than Bb; D or E is more viable than Eb, etc. Also, I have noticed that often the guitar key that works best is usually about a third to a flat fifth up from the original. So if Duke played it in Bb, I'm probably in D or E. D major is the most versatile

key for my style; that's why you'll hear a lot of these in D even though the band probably never ever played there.

To maximize the range of the guitar, I usually diverge from standard guitar tuning by lowering the sixth string to D, especially when I play in D, G, C or F. In G, for example, I can bar at the fifth fret, where low G is on the sixth string, and have easy access to the high B and even the high D, both obviously useful. And, of course, I can have the booming effect of the dominant D on the bottom. Every tuning has its distinctive advantages as well as disadvantages. In the final analysis, though, I found myself tuning the guitar however I could figure out to get the effect, i.e., the notes, I wanted.

Next came the really fun part, the intricacies of arranging. I needed to take into account the limited —compared to a whole band— range of the guitar. So, if I wanted to play a piece two times through, say, I felt it would usually be more musically interesting to play in two different registers of the guitar. When you hear different melodies in different registers — for example, the A2 section of *Misty Morning* —, I am playing both the solo part and the orchestral answer, sort of like both parties of the conversation. When I play in octaves, that may signify that the band played in unison, as in the last section of *After All*. When you hear the guitar playing in its lowest register, that usually means I had Harry Carney's baritone sax in mind. If you hear slides, it's likely Tricky Sam Nanton's trombone I am mimicking. High register might be Barney Bigard's clarinet. Not surprisingly, Ellington's piano solos are all over the place! You get the idea. Doing it in this way, I could not but come to delight in the idiosyncrasies and brilliance of each of Ellington's remarkable soloists.

A book of Steve Hancoff's arrangements, *Duke Ellington for Solo Guitar* , is available from WARNER BROS. PUBLICATIONS 1-800-628-1528

The Pieces

1. Drop Me Off In Harlem — Duke Ellington, 1933
EMI Mills Music Inc; G.Schirmer Inc

Key of G, 6th string to D.

I love the good-timey feel and the catchy melody. The bridge takes the standard circle of fifths chord progression of the Jazz Era, and stands it on its head by making it a circle of fourths, or upside-down fifths.

It seems Ellington was in a taxi with Nick Kenney, a well-known columnist for the *Brooklyn Eagle*, crossing the George Washington Bridge after a benefit concert. Kenney asked Duke where he was going; Duke replied, "Drop me off at Harlem." Nick suggested that there's a great song title. And that's how this piece came to be.

Besides Duke and his band, contemporary Harlem musicians included the likes of James P. Johnson, Luckey Roberts, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Cab Calloway, Charlie Johnson....

Consider Allen Schoener's description of Harlem:

"By 1929, there were 'eleven class white-trade [black entertainers, white patrons] night clubs' and more than five hundred 'colored cabarets of lower rank' according to the *Amsterdam News*. Harlem had about '300 girl dancers continuously working in the joints' and 150 young male dancers, 'fifteen major bands and more than 100 others in action every night.' At the top remained the Cotton Club"(5).

2. Misty Morning — Duke Ellington, Arthur Whetsol, 1928
EMI Mills Music Inc; Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of A

Nobody explored and developed the myriad permutations of the blues like Duke Ellington. In *Misty Morning* the verses are a basic twelve bar blues embellished by a dialogue between the melody and orchestral answer. The

bridge digresses into a more jazz-informed chord progression even while maintaining the blues feel. This is what makes the piece interesting to me.

Artie Whetsol, Duke's first trumpeter, came to New York with Ellington in 1923 as one of the original *Washingtonians*, but he returned home after only two months to finish high school (which legend turned into medical school). He rejoined the band in 1928, probably bringing *Misty Morning* with him. Whetsol stayed with the band until 1938 when health problems forced him to quit.

3. Day Dream — Billy Strayhorn, Duke Ellington, 1940
EMI Robbins Catalogue Inc; Billy Strayhorn Songs Inc; Estate of Mercer K. Ellington

Key of F, 6th string to C

I had the devil's own time putting this one right for the guitar until I thought of playing it in F with the 6th string at C. One of the defining characteristics of the Ellington sound concerns the inversions he used. Tuning down to C enables me to place the defining accidentals in the descending bass line where they belong.

The chords are:	F -	F9 -	Bb7#5 -	A7#5#9,	A7-	Dm-	F7-	Bbm
The bass line is:	A -	G -	F# -	F,	E-	D-	C-	Bb

which to my ear is exquisite and to my intellect pleasing. Another benefit of this tuning occurs at the first chord of the bridge and then again at the beginning of the subsequent two measures. There I can bar the sub-dominant Bbmaj9 (the notes from lowest to highest are Bb-Bb-C-F-A-D) at the 10th fret with a sweeping six-string chord which perfectly expresses the feel of the music. By the way, the amazing chord structure of the bridge is Bbmaj7-B11-E7; Amaj7-Bb11-Eb7; Abmaj7-A11-D7; Gmaj7; which gets you to Gm7 (melody note A!).

Day Dream is the piece that got me rolling on this project. The first time I

heard Johnny Hodges play it, it brought tears to my eyes. Surely he was the most lyrical saxophonist ever to grace the jazz world. In fact, Charlie Parker called him the "Lily Pons of the alto." I am one of many who regard him as Ellington's greatest soloist. Duke wrote, "Especially when he played such pieces [ballads like *Day Dream*] women found him irresistible. As the wife of a fellow musician cautioned her husband, 'Don't leave me alone with Johnny. When I hear him play, I just want to open the bedroom door.' "(6). About playing *Day Dream*, Hodges said, "You're supposed to close your eyes and dream awhile."

4. Move Over —Duke Ellington, 1928
Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of D, 6th string to D

Lonnie Johnson, best known for the incredible guitar duets he recorded with Eddie Lang, was one of the real pioneers of jazz guitar. He had recorded with Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives as well as Armstrong's Savoy Ballroom Five. Johnson sat in with Duke's band several times, once on *Misty Morning* as well as here on *Move Over*. I couldn't resist transcribing both his solos. In *Misty Morning* it is the A3 section; on *Move Over* it is the fifth part.

5. Lament for A Lost Love — Barney Bigard, Duke Ellington, Irving Mills, 1937
EMI Mills Music Inc; Indigo Mood; Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of E

This lovely thing is one of two Barney Bigard clarinet solos I included. (The other is *Blues of the Vagabond*.) Bigard joined the band in 1927 and stayed for 15 years. A New Orleans native, he contributed an unmistakably New Orleans sound — a warm tone, lightness in the upper registers, natural phrasing, smoothly sweeping from low-to-high and high-to-low, flying obligatos...He always made everything he played sound so easy.

I think Bigard's musical concept here was to raise or lower the high melody

note of each phrase by 1/2 step from what the listener expects to hear. Thus, the second beat, second measure is a C natural rather than C# (Am6 rather than A). The second beat, sixth measure is a D natural rather than a D# (B7#9 rather than B7). The first beat, ninth measure is a D# rather than an E (Emaj7 rather than E). And the first beat, tenth measure is a C# rather than a D natural (E13 rather than E7). Even the very last note is one step up from the tonic. To me, the effect is haunting. Also, it is more usual for a piece to be identified by its A section rather than the bridge. In *Lament For A Lost Love* it is the bridge that is memorable for its beautiful, almost Baroque, lamentation.

6. Awful Sad —Duke Ellington, 1928
Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of G, 6th string to D

Whereas I had to struggle to find the best key for some of the other pieces, *Awful Sad* presented rich musical possibilities in two keys, G and E. Whole step scales and augmented seventh chords (actually one and the same) abound in Ellington's music, and they are all over the place in this piece, especially in the breaks. The cumulative effect of this and other musical devices is what created what became known as a "mood piece." Also, the second section manages to make the circle of fifths sound fresh and unique, both because of the accidentals on top of the chords and the bass notes on the bottom.

The chords:	B7b9-	E7#5 -	A9,	D9 -	G
The melody:	C-	C-	B,	C-	G
The bass runs to:	D#-	D-	C#,	D-	G

The story goes that Duke was toodling around with this melody after a gig one night when someone happened by and commented: "Gee, that sounds awful sad." Hence the title.

7. Mississippi Moan — Duke Ellington, Irving Mills, 1929
Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of B minor, 6th string to D

What makes this piece "moan" is the way I slide, bend and attack the notes. While it is probably the least difficult piece on the CD to play, I feel that it is one of the most successful transformations of the band's music to the guitar.

On the original release the band was identified as *Joe Turner and His Memphis Men* because Duke was under contract to Victor, which meant that Victor had exclusive rights to anything released under the name "Duke Ellington." To get around this contractual restriction, the band recorded under many pseudonyms, among them *The Harlem Footwarmers, Frank Brown and His Tooters, Mills' Ten Blackberries, The New York Syncopaters, The Jungle Band and The Whoopie Makers.*

8. Come Sunday — Duke Ellington, 1943
G.Schirmer Inc

Key of A

My idea here was to build from a simple unaccompanied melody through unexpected chording and phrasing to crescendos. I felt that this parallels human spiritual development which is what the piece is about.

Because of technical limitations, 78 rpm records could be only about three minutes long. It was Duke Ellington who first pioneered extended jazz composition and recording in 1931 with the release of *Creole Rhapsody*, recorded on two sides of a record, about 6 minutes long. Then, in 1935, came *Reminiscing In Tempo*, four sides and about 13 minutes' duration. In contrast, his ground-breaking cantata *Black, Brown and Beige : A Tone Parallel to the History of the Negro in America* took all of 44 minutes to perform, and *Come Sunday* is the most memorable song from it. To present it, Ellington rented Carnegie Hall for the evening of January 15, 1943. It was a

sell out. Even though Ellington performed the complete work only three times, *Come Sunday* became a regular part of the band's repertoire.

Near the end of his life, Ellington revealed his feeling that the spiritual music he composed was the most important and fulfilling work he had done.

9. Morning Glory — Duke Ellington, Rex Stewart, 1939
Estate of Mercer K. Ellington

Key of D, 6th string to D

Ellington was blessed with a string of great trumpet players—Bubber Miley, Cootie Williams and, from December, 1935, Rex Stewart. Stewart, who had performed with Fletcher Henderson's orchestra from 1926-1933, created a singular "talking" cornet style characterized by playing and bending notes by pressing the valves down only half way.

I think the kernel of Rex Stewart's idea here was to use an arpeggiated melody on a Bb9 chord ending on C natural instead of the more typical E7 — a flat fifth away from each other — as the conduit between D and A7 at the beginning of the verse.

Regarding *Morning Glory*, this is Duke's version:

"After an all night poker game aboard the French ship *Champlain*, Rex Stewart came up with the idea for this tune"(7).

And here is Rex Stewart's take on it from *Jazz Masters of the 30's*:

The Episode of the Four Deuces and the Three Aces (8)

"This happened in mid-Atlantic during one of the inevitable poker sessions in the Ellington organization. My luck was running good as the seas were running high. One by one the game had dwindled until only two players were left, just Duke and Fat Stuff—that's what Duke used to call me.

"The first face up card that he dealt me was an ace, and I didn't dare look at it too hard because I'd already peeped at my hole card, another ace. His up card was a deuce. In order not to frighten him out before there was something in the pot, I bet in a very mild fashion. My next card was insignificant, but I bet a little stronger in spite of his hitting himself with another deuce.

"The battle was really on when a second ace leapt off the deck, and I had two aces showing against his two deuces. I thought it best at this point to indicate my overwhelming supremacy by betting a sizable sum, and I fully expected Duke to take it, but he didn't concede. He raised me!

"I might add at this point that Ellington's idea of strategy was to hang on until the last card, and then attempt to overpower his opponent with a huge bet unless his opponent's overlay was in sight. So, as I figured out his hand, he had to have either two pairs or three deuces. And if he had deuces back-to-back, it would have been unlikely for him not to have demonstrated his strength by betting stronger. I deduced, therefore, that he had two pairs. So the chance of his catching up with my three aces was remote.

"Bet and raise, bet and raise, until all the money on the table was in the pot. Then, he bet me $50. more! Being out of cash, I put the rights to one of my tunes in the pot. The last card was dealt, and Duke dealt himself another deuce. The boat seemed to stand still as I realized that I had lost the pot—and my tune, *Morning Glory*."

10. Rent Party Blues — Duke Ellington, Johnny Hodges, 1929
EMI Music Inc; Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of E, 3rd string to G#

Tuning the third string to G# enables me to reach a lot of things I otherwise could not, but adds the problem in performance of occasionally breaking the string not designed to go so high! This is such a high-powered, bouncy piece

of music that it just feels great playing it.

Rent parties were a unique feature of Harlem social life in the 1920's. It would typically cost about $1.00 to get in and $.25 for a drink. The host paid his rent from the proceeds.

Duke Ellington:

"[When we first arrived] in New York the gigs were few and far between, but we could always count on Saturday. We could get all the food we wanted and take some home, and a dollar besides....We played the house-rent parties every Saturday might. That was home sweet home(9)."

Willie "The Lion" Smith:

"They would crowd a hundred or more people into a seven room railroad flat and the walls would bulge—some of the parties spread to the halls and all over the building.…The rent party was the place to go to pick up on the latest jokes, jive and uptown news.…The parties were recommended to newly arrived single gals as the place to go to get acquainted....The best time of all at these parties came early in the morning....During these early hours close to dawn the dancers would grab each other tightly and do the monkey hunch or bo-hog. Their shuffling feet would give everything a weird rhythmic atmosphere. The lights would be dimmed down and the people would call out to the piano player, 'Play it, oh play it' or ' Break it down' or 'Get in the gully and give us the ever-lovin' stomp.' Those were happy days(10)."

By the way, in 1955 the great bluesman Brownie McGee, one of my early guitar heroes, wrote the lyrics to and recorded a wonderful song called *Sportin' Life Blues*. His melody is a slowed-down version of *Rent Party Blues*.

11. Beautiful Romance — Duke Ellington, Cootie Williams, 1939
Copyright Control

Key of A

This song, full of open intervals and consonant harmonies and with its gentle swing, sounds to me like a beautiful romance. It's easy to picture Fred and Ginger whirling around the room.

Cootie Williams was seventeen years old in 1929 when he took over Bubber Miley's chair, and he became one of the Ellington greats, learning the growl-and-plunger technique from Tricky Sam Nanton and expanding it.

12. Dusk — Duke Ellington, 1940
Estate of Mercer K. Ellington

Key of E

It is amazing how this piece can evoke darkening dusk itself by means of the serene harmonies that float through, as, for instance, when the melody notes A-B-A sound against the underlying G#7 chord, a truly ethereal dissonance. The theme itself, flowing between E6/9 and C13, provides the framework for using a twelve-tone scale. On the original recording, the last chord of the introduction sounds like a modern cluster. I tried and tried to figure out its component notes, and I asked quite a few musician friends what they thought it was. Nobody got it. I ended up with a B dominant chord, again from low to high, made up of: A, B, G natural, D#, F natural, B — sort of a B7#5#11.

Dusk, After All and Morning Glory are classics from the great Blanton-Webster band. Strayhorn's arrival in 1939, and then the introduction of Jimmie Blanton on bass (1939) and Ben Webster on tenor saxophone (1940) is usually considered the boundary between early Ellington and the more harmonically sophisticated, rhythmically complex Blanton-Webster era.

Jimmie Blanton was a 20 year-old string bass virtuoso when Ellington brought him into the band. Blanton revolutionized jazz bass playing. Besides

possessing great dexterity and range and a fabulous sense of swing, he freed the bass from the then-traditional walking bass style. By incorporating counter-melodies and non-harmonic passing notes that lent a contrapuntal flavor to the music, he drove soloists to unprecedented harmonic explorations. He played side-by-side with the incumbent bassist Billy Taylor for a few months until Taylor walked off the bandstand one night in Boston declaring: "I'm not going to stand up here next to that young boy playing all that bass and be embarrassed"(11). Tragically, Jimmie Blanton, suffering from tuberculosis, had to leave the band in November, 1941, and he died seven months later.

Ben Webster was already somewhat well known as a member of Cab Calloway's famous orchestra when Duke Ellington hired him. He was Duke's first regular tenor saxophonist, and he went on to become was one of jazz' truly great tenors.

13. After All — Billy Strayhorn, 1941
Tempo Music Inc

Key of D, 6th string to D

Another unmistakable sample of Strayhorn magic. Again, as in *Day Dream*, it's the descending chromatic chords of the bridge that knock me out. I referenced two recordings of *After All*, and I liked both of them so well that I combined the two versions. On the original 1941 record the bridge begins by going to the sub-dominant: G6-F#7#5-F6-E7#5-Eb6-D7#5-until you get to Gm6 (melody note A!) to A13. I wouldn't have thought of that in a million years. On the second version the bridge goes to Bb6 instead of G6, so that at the end of the descent you find yourself back at D, an astounding route back to the tonic. This one comes from an incredibly poignant memorial album, ...*And His Mother Called Him Bill*, dedicated to the memory of Billy Strayhorn and recorded only three months after his death at the age of 51.

14. Have A Heart — Duke Ellington, Juan Tizol, Lou Singer, Irving Mills, 1938
EMI Music Inc; Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of D, 6th string to D

Have A Heart uses a similar D-Bb9 device as I noted above in *Morning Glory*, but instead of then resolving down 1/2 step to A7 it rises 1/2 step to B7.

Later on in 1938 a slow version was recorded, which became a standard part of the band's repertoire and was known as *Lost In Meditation*. It was Juan Tizol, the composer of Caravan, who introduced the valve trombone to the jazz world. He was hired by Ellington in 1929 to team with Tricky Sam Nanton to double the trombone section, and he stayed until 1944. Whereas Nanton's sound was the inimitable growl-and-plunger, Tizol's playing was legato as his valve trombone "provided for greater melodic mobility" (12) than Nanton's slide did.

15. Blues of the Vagabond — Duke Ellington, 1929
Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of E minor

I like that there are three distinct sections to this, which gives it the feel of a piece of music rather than a song. And even though each one is different from the others, they fit together like pieces of a fine puzzle to make a whole picture.

16. Reflections In D— Duke Ellington, 1953
Duke Ellington Music/Famous Music Inc

Key of C, 6th string to C, 5th string to G, 2nd string to C (CGDGCE)

In March, 1997, I performed some concerts in Athens. Afterwards, I rented a car and drove around the Greek countryside for a week. I put the arrangement together in my mind while driving all day. Each evening at a new hotel, I pulled out the guitar to try out the day's inspiration. And that's how it took form.

I love the gorgeous, more modern harmonies and dissonances in this. While all the other pieces on the CD are transcriptions of band recordings, *Reflections in D* is an intimate piano solo that Ellington composed when he was 54 years old. The introspection that comes with maturity and life experience is evident here so that you feel that Duke is inviting you into a sort of inner sanctum.

Footnotes

1. Leonard Feather, "Ella Meets The Duke", *Playboy*, November, 1957. Cited by John Edward Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995, p.400.

2. Doron K. Antrim, "Rehearsing with Duke Ellington: This Is How the Duke Rehearses—And It Is One of His Secrets," in *Secrets of Dance Band Success*. ed. Doron K. Anrim, pp.25, 30. Cited by Hasse, p. 251.

3. Nat Hentoff, "Duke Ellington—1938," in the booklet notes for the two-CD set *Braggin' In Brass: The Immortal 1938 Year*. R2K 44395, p.2.

4. Richard O. Boyer, "The Hot Bach", in Peter Gammond, ed., *Duke Ellington: His Life and Music*. London: Phoenix House, 1958. Originally published in *The New Yorker*, Part 1 (June 24, 1944), p. 38. Cited by Hasse, p. 84.

5."Is This Really Harlem?," in *Harlem On My Mind. Cultural Capital of Black America*, 1900-1978. ed. Allen Schoener, p. 80. New York: Dell, 1979. Cited by Hasse, p. 70.

6. Gary Giddins, "Notes on the Music," in the booklet notes for the three-record set *Giants of Jazz: Johnny Hodges*. Time-Life Records TL-J19, 1981. p. 47. Cited by Hasse, p. 245.

7. Duke Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1973, p.150.

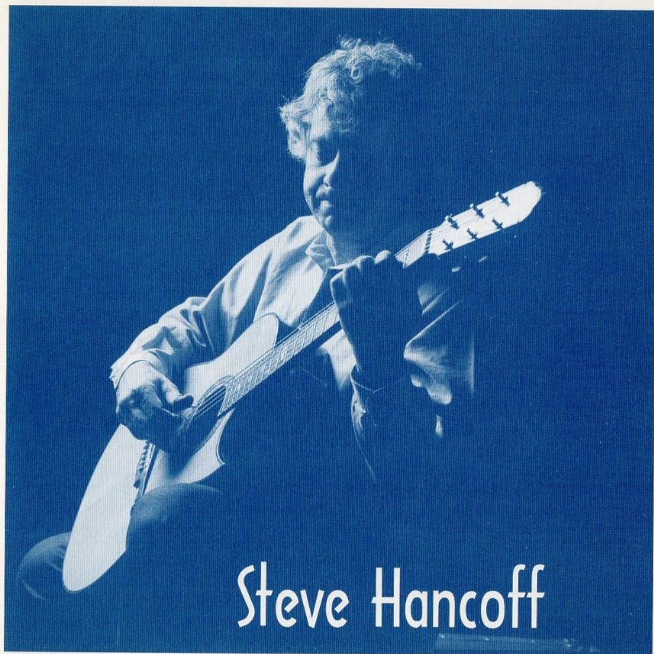
8.Rex Stewart, *Jazz Masters of the 30's*. New York: Macmillan, London: Collier-Macmillan, 1972, pp. 32-33.

9. Don George, *Sweet Man: The Real Duke Ellington*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981, p. 44. Cited by Hasse, p.70.

10. Willie "The Lion" Smith with George Hoefer, *Music on My Mind: The Memoirs of an American Pianist*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964, p. 157. Cited by Hasse, p.70.

11. Ellington, p. 164.

12. Hasse, p.123



"Steve Hancoff's approach parallels Jelly-Roll Morton's notion of 'piano as band.' He translates the complex rhythms and polyphonies of band and piano jazz into the techniques he developed for the guitar." (William Schafer, Sing Out!)

Steve Hancoff began playing the guitar in the 1960's. Swept up in the folk music movement of the time, he created his unique style by adapting what he heard on records for solo guitar, even when there may have been two or even three instruments playing.

Steve began transcribing Scott Joplin's piano rags for the guitar in 1972. Soon after, he attended the first annual Scott Joplin Ragtime Festival in Joplin's hometown, Sedalia, Missouri. For the thrill of performing at the site of the original Maple Leaf Club, he entered the competition. The judges, ragtime luminaries Eubie Blake, Rudi Blesh, Trebor Tichenor, Max Morath and William Bolcom awarded him first prize. Their help and encouragement led to the recording of his first two albums of classic rags on the Dirty Shame label. By this time, Steve was performing in concert, at clubs, and on TV as well as being a featured soloist at traditional jazz and ragtime festivals.

"A brilliant talent and an enthusiastic performer, Hancoff captivated a huge crowd." (Philip Elwood, San Francisco Examiner)

In 1985, Steve recorded his first CD, Steel String Guitar, which featured a wide range of musical styles including Sousa marches, Jelly-Roll Morton stomps, Harlem stride, Tin Pan Alley hits and Appalachian fiddle tunes.

"...Exceptional technique and arrangements and a delightfully eclectic repertoire, brimming with vitality and grace." (Mike Joyce, Washington Post)

"Steve Hancoff's CD is a timeless gem." (Paul Bezanker, Record Collector's Exchange)

It was the chance of a lifetime when music historian and producer Al Rose invited him to New Orleans. There, Al introduced him to the legendary musicians who were present at the birth of jazz. Steve lived in the French Quarter, playing with and learning from these gracious people. This experience inspired his 1989 CD, New Orleans Guitar Solos.

> *"Steve Hancoff proves there is no limit to what can be done with an acoustic guitar in the hands of a master."* (Warren Vache, Jersey Jazz)

> *"In the hands of steel-string guitar virtuoso Steve Hancoff, the guitar is more orchestra than instrument ... a remarkable achievement. ...Hancoff's extraordinary technique is merely a means to a very musical end."* (Mike Joyce, Washington Post)

Since 1993, he has teamed up with the great banjo virtuoso, Buddy Wachter, touring throughout South America, Arabia and South Asia as an Artistic Ambassador in the Arts America program of the United States Information Agency.

> *"One of their concerts is worth twenty of my speeches in creating good will for the United States."* (The Honorable Peter Romero, U.S. Ambassador to Ecuador)

Steve holds a BA degree from St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland, esteemed for its "Great Books of the Western World" program, and a Masters degree in Clinical Social Work. He is a recipient of a Maryland State Arts Council Award for Instrumental Performance. Steve is a Rolfer® and Core Energetics psychotherapist. He is also a practitioner of T'ai Chi Chuan, an avid hiker, adventurer and aspiring whitewater river guide. He resides in Silver Spring, Maryland with his wife Sharon and their son Jacob.

To Sharon Hancoff and Jacob Hancoff

To the memory of Morris Hancoff, Belle Hancoff, Joshua Hancoff, and Gabriel Hancoff

My deepest gratitude to Ida P. Rolf and John C. Pierrakos

Special thanks to Ezra Harris, Eric and Gail Weiss, Gene and Shayna Alexander, Ruth Alexander, Michael Jablow, Danny Gluck, Elly Gluck, Bud Wachter, Peter Melchior, Emmet Hutchins, Cosper Scafidi, Al Rose, Judy Harris, David Thomas Roberts, Alan Hill, Shin-Shin Su, Siegmar Gerkin, Pam Chubbuck, Nancy Haskett

And hats off to Ervin Somogyi, master luthier, for building my guitar; Ann Kuebler, archivist at the Smithsonian Indtitution's National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection; Steven Lasker, the preeminent Ellington collector and researcher; the late Dr. Torkild Vinding, collector; John Edward Hasse, author of Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington; Patricia Willard, Duke's West Coast press secretary, 1949-1974; Greg Lukens for engineering; Bill Wolf, Wolf Productons, for the mastering; Jimmy Katz for the photography; Max Sadtler, Metagrafic, for the graphic design; and the folks at DGM – Robert Fripp, David Singleton, Diane Aldahl, and Hugh O'Donnell – for everything else

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www.stevehancoff.com

Duke Ellington for Solo Guitar
Steve Hancoff

1. Drop Me Off In Harlem—3:03
2. Misty Morning—3:00
3. Day Dream—3:12
4. Move Over—3:06
5. Lament for A Lost Love—2:54
6. Awful Sad—3:29
7. Mississippi Moan—3:25
8. Come Sunday—3:49
9. Morning Glory—3:11
10. Rent Party Blues—3:24
11. Beautiful Romance—2:37
12. Dusk—3:11
13. After All—3:18
14. Have A Heart—2:44
15. Blues of the Vagabond—3:22
16. Reflections in D—6:11

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Duke Ellington for Solo Guitar

Steve Hancoff

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