



STEFON HARRIS AFRICAN TARANTELLA



From *The New Orleans Suite* by Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn
1. Thanks for the Beautiful Land on the Delta 6:01
2. Portrait of Wellman Braud 5:58 3. Bourbon Street Jingling Jollies 3:53

From *The Queen's Suite* by Duke Ellington
4. Sunset and the Mocking Bird 5:44 5. The Single Petal of a Rose 4:55

From *The Gardner Meditations* by Stefon Harris
6. Memoirs of a Frozen Summer 6:54
7. African Tarantella 8:58 8. Dancing Enigma 8:49



STEFON HARRIS
AFRICAN TARANTELLA
DANCES WITH DUKE



**From *The New Orleans Suite*
by Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn**

(D. Ellington-B. Strayhorn) Tempo Music (ASCAP)

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From *The Gardner Meditations* by Stefon Harris

(Stefon Harris) Stefonophone Music (SESAC)

6. Memoirs of a Frozen Summer 6:54*
7. African Tarantella 8:58*
8. Dancing Enigma 8:49*

**These compositions were part of a special commission awarded by The Wharton Center for Performing Arts, Michigan State University.*

STEFON HARRIS vibes
and marimba

XAVIER DAVIS piano *

DERRICK HODGE bass

TERREON GULLY drums *

STEVE TURRE trombone *

ANNE DRUMMOND flute *

GREG TARDY clarinet *

JUNAH CHUNG viola *

LOUISE DUBIN cello

* on all songs except track 5

Produced by
STEFON HARRIS

All songs arranged
and orchestrated by
STEFON HARRIS

"To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present, it must not be considered at all." — Pablo Picasso

"It's not about this generation or that. The issue in art is regeneration." — Duke Ellington

ANY TIME A HIGHLY TALENTED ARTIST decides to re-imagine some fundamental part of his heritage, close attention should be paid, because the most thoroughly important art in any idiom always arrives through the substantial re-imagining of its tradition. When creators with fresh minds return to the familiar or the neglected, one can expect to experience artistry on a plane beyond the ordinary. This is one of those occasions, because there is nothing more interesting than hearing a musician address the work of Duke Ellington, especially the late work that tends to be neglected. Only special musicians realize the importance of that material, recognize its timelessness and understand it as a mirror of cultural awareness, a fanciful sense of utopia in thoroughly human terms, and a spiritual recognition of all the prices and benefits of knowing just what and who one is, as opposed to the various misunderstandings that lead so many down less-than-auspicious paths. As Ellington himself said, "Remembrance of things past is important for a jazz musician." There it is.

Stefon Harris fits the look of a special jazz musician. He shares with many — including Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Lionel Hampton, Roy Eldridge, and Miles Davis — certain things: he a small man in stature whose eyes have the melancholic understanding, the impish humor, and the curiosity that, when backed up by considerable talent and discipline, can result in spectacular things. Musicians and listeners have become accustomed to the spectacular when hearing Harris at work either as a

leader or as a member of the ensemble. Well-trained technically and deeply gifted, Harris soon got a reputation that meant he stepped up rather quickly and was soon recognized as the next man after Bobby Hutcherson and Steve Nelson, who were themselves the next two men after Lionel Hampton and Milt Jackson.

What has always made Harris well worth more than a casual listening is his grasp of the delicate and the fiery. This is a necessary ability that all truly talented musicians

have in common. The upshot is that he will deliver a beautiful ballad rendition at one point. At another, he can lay out the story of bruises and pleasures that can only be told in a certain way through the bottomless blues, which forever remains as deep as the well of the past. Then, when the smoking lamp has been lit, you had better brace yourself for what Duke Ellington called "the jingling jollies" as he commences to swing a hole in the wall. All of those abilities are made obvious, yet again, on this record, which affords Stefon Harris the opportunity to put some of Duke Ellington's work under the microscope of this contemporary musician's talent. Interestingly, there is a much-more-than-lightweight precedent for what this new recording is about, Harris is taking up the conceptual mantle of Charles Mingus, an innovator who swore by the artistic potency of Ellington's music. Like Mingus, Harris is not averse to using difficult harmonies, working in modes, writing for large ensembles, or, finally, re-imagining styles that cross the broad terrain of jazz. In that respect, Harris knows that jazz has always been a modern music of single

importance because it has created its own instrumental effects and techniques, and has brought such new sensibilities to Western music. In the process, it became a major art form. Once a musician matures to that point of understanding, the work of Duke Ellington rises through the mists of misunderstanding or underestimation and is recognized for what it actually is — the broadest rendition and extension of a particular aspect of American culture that the world has heard brought to music

thus far. In those many, many original compositions and arrangements, Ellington laid out his understanding of where he came from and what it had taken to get there in the first place. One of his compositions was entitled "Blues to Be There," which sounded like anywhere.

After years of experimentation, study, and experience in a number of different contexts, Stefon Harris was reborn through his study of Louis Armstrong, whose supreme ability to improvise lyric melody, to impose a blues sensibility, to swing, and to address harmony, made clear all of the grand possibilities of jazz improvising. As with any serious jazz musician, coming to terms with Duke Ellington was inevitable.

In this album, however, Harris not only uses pieces selected from a few Ellington suites but makes use of a couple of selections from a suite of his own, *The Gardner Meditations*, which was commissioned by the Wharton Center for Performing Arts, Michigan State University. Harris might have felt something coming because he was in the studio with his musicians recording selections from *The New*

Orleans Suite when Hurricane Katrina flexed its disruptive and deadly liquid muscles. Duke Ellington's music was a salute to the town in which jazz seems to have begun and the cultural weight of the people from whom it came, perfectly specific and universal at the same time.

Whatever else is said about this music, Stefon Harris is in the process of coming in further contact with the light at the center of an extraordinary music and the human values that it was always meant to express. All we should do is wish him well and enjoy the results of his many accomplishments. — *Stanley Crouch*

Recorded August 29, 30 & 31, 2005 • Recorded, mixed, and mastered at Systems Two Studios, Brooklyn, NY • Engineered by Joe Marciano
Mastered by Mike Marciano

A&R: Eli Wolf • A&R Admin: Keith Karwelles • Product Management: Perry Greenfield • Photography: Clay Patrick McBride • Art direction and design: Gordon H Jee

Stefon Harris plays Yamaha vibes and marimbas and performs with the Stefon Harris Signature Keyboard Mallets made by Vic Firth • **Terreon Gully** plays Premier drums

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Thank you to my wife, Shané, for all your love and support; to my manager, Karen Kennedy; to Bruce, Tom, Eli, Cem, Gordon, Perry, Zach, and the entire crew at Blue Note/EMI, for their continued support of my artistic vision over the years; to Stanley Crouch; to Wynton Marsalis and the staff of Jazz at Lincoln Center; to John Wittman and the Yamaha Corporation Family; to Vic Firth and Neil Larrivee at Vic Firth Inc.; to Bibb Rock Styling; to the staff at The Isabelle Stewart Gardner Museum, for your inspiration; and to Wharton Center for Performing Arts, Michigan State University, for commissioning The Gardner Meditations.

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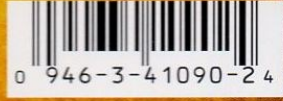
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