



STORYVILLE

Duke Ellington

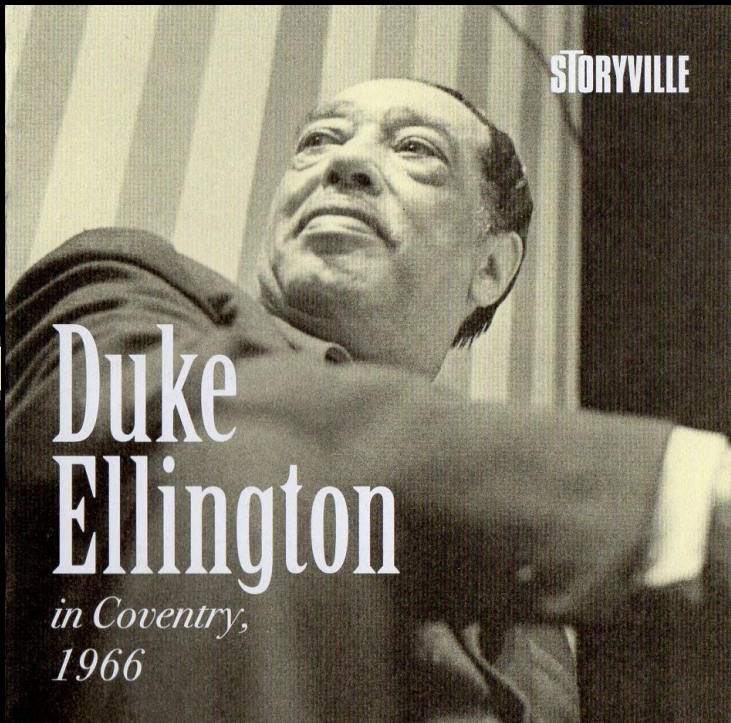
*in Coventry,
1966*



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n**cb** 

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I do not think there was much jazz music played in European churches in the 1960s, or before. But Duke Ellington's so called Sacred Concerts changed it, and nowadays churches in Europe often are used for concerts with every kind of good music, like it has been the case in The United States for many years.

Duke Ellington's sacred concerts had many incarnations, more than the three on the commercial records: *The First* (1965), *The Second* (1968) and *The Third* (1973). At concerts Ellington often made changes in the proceedings – let out some numbers, and played others, and altered the succession of numbers played. The soloists could be different too. Likewise at Coventry Cathedral on a winter's Monday, February 21st 1966.

The city of Coventry is situated in the west midlands of England, and the history of the cathedral goes back to 1434. The name of the cathedral is St. Michael's Cathedral (since 1434), but now it is generally better known as Coventry Cathedral. During the second World War the city was heavily bombed, and the cathedral was seriously damaged. A new cathedral was consecrated in 1962, combining what could be rescued from the old building with a new building, designed by Sir Basil Spence.

From the end of January Duke Ellington and his orchestra was touring Europe, sometimes joined by Ella Fitzgerald, giving concerts in many of the major cities of Europe, and touring England for a couple of weeks in February, with concerts a.o. in London, Liverpool, Manchester and Coventry.

The Coventry concert had its centrepiece in *In The Beginning God*, but apart from that it was no ordinary sacred concert: Two numbers, *Come Sunday* and *Tell Me It's The Truth* would have a vocal on the issued record and in other performances of *A Concert of Sacred Music* the previous year, but were purely instrumental here – and the two numbers following *In The Beginning God* had no connection to a religious theme.

The concert boasts of a premiere and only performance of a new Ellington composition *Come Easter*, a near premiere of another new Ellington piece *West Indian Pancake*, the first known performance of which took place only a couple of weeks before in Copenhagen, Denmark, and one of the first performances of a piece which would become an important part of many concerts during the following years *La Plus Belle Africaine*. With him on the day in Coventry Cathedral were some highly professional British vocalists, The Cliff Adams Singers and the baritone singer George Webb, giving the performance a special quality, which the band acknowledged by playing on the top of their game.

The concert was filmed for TV, and part of it was telecast. Two numbers were regrettably omitted from the TV production, but are on this CD, a powerful version of *Light (Montage)* from *Black, Brown And Beige*, and the above-mentioned *Come Easter*.

The first number at the concert, *New World A-Comin'* was originally written for a Carnegie Hall concert, December 11th, 1943, with a reference to Roi Ottley's socio-economic book of that title, with its rather optimistic view of the future for African-Americans in the US. The piece was generally played midway through church performances of the first sacred concert. Here it is played as a sort of an overture to the band's performance, setting the mood, and preparing the audience for the more explicit religious theme to come. Duke delivers a great performance here, carving out the different themes and dynamics of the piece. After the piece he explains the meaning of the title in this context, as "an anticipation of a place in a distant future ... where there is no war, no greed, no categorisation, and love is unconditional, and there is no pronoun good enough for God".

The next two pieces *Come Sunday*, and its development *Light (Montage)*, both come from Ellington's 1943 suite (or symphony, you might call it) *Black, Brown And Beige*, representing a dream of freedom connected to the Christian faith.

No vocal soloist in *Come Sunday*, the soloists are Chuck Connors on the trombone, Jimmy Hamilton on the clarinet (playing the role of Ray Nance on the violin from the 1943 performance), Cootie Williams on the trumpet, and of course the high spot, Johnny Hodges on the alto sax. Cat Anderson plays the transition leading to *Light*, originally the conclusion of the *Black* part of *Black, Brown And Beige*. It is mainly an orchestral piece, a brilliant combination of themes from the first two parts of *Black*, and played here with an overwhelming and powerful swing, that does not fail to impress the audience, as you can hear from the applause. The soloists heard are Cat Anderson, Lawrence Brown on the trombone, and the outstanding bassist John Lamb.

Come Easter is a new rather solemn number, written by Duke for the occasion, and only played here in Coventry. It's mainly orchestral with intro by Duke, and short solo passages by Jimmy Hamilton,

Harry Carney and Paul Gonsalves. This is indeed a welcome addition to the Ellington legacy.

Tell Me It's The Truth, sometimes just called *The Truth or True*, was premiered almost exactly a year before, a gospel like tune, with Johnny Hodges, Cat Anderson and Lawrence Brown as the soloists. When it became part of The Concert of Sacred Music, performed for the first time in Grace Cathedral in San Francisco in September 1965, it had got lyrics (by Ellington) sung by Esther Marrow. At this concert it was purely instrumental, had no trumpet solo, but solos by Johnny Hodges and Lawrence Brown, with a delightful duet between the two in the first chorus.

The first performance in 1965 of *In The Beginning God* (the first four words in the bible, as Duke points out in his introduction) began with a piano intro by Duke, then a vocal recitation (by Jon Hendricks). By the time of the Coventry concert Harry Carney with his majestic baritone sax had claimed the spot as the one pronouncing the theme first! He is followed by Jimmy Hamilton on the clarinet. George Webb takes over on vocals and recitation. Then comes Paul Gonsalves who

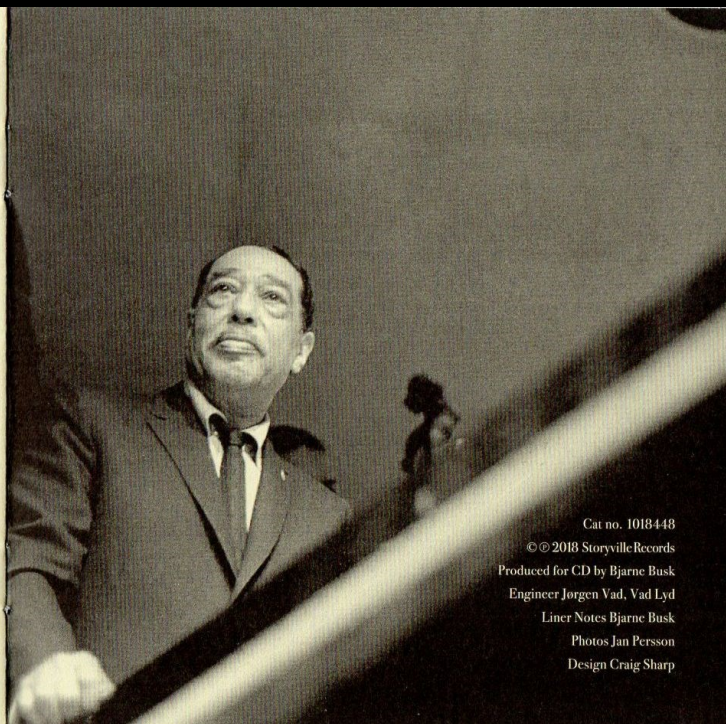
solos and plays along with the excellent choir, The Cliff Adams Singers. The audience applauds, but the proceedings are only halfway, the choir coming in with a beautiful vocal accompanied by John Lamb on the bass. More applause, and Sam Woodyard leads in to the next section of the piece, which has solos by Jimmy Hamilton and Cat Anderson. The last section starts with a narration by the Cliff Adams Singers accompanied mainly by Duke and Sam Woodyard, leading to Sam's drum solo. Then John Lamb is again brought into focus accompanying the choir for their last vocals.

After this performance Duke announces an encore, *West Indian Pancake*. "The scene is in the West Indies", he says in his introduction. "This great big fat sun is about to set in the mist over the horizon. It looks like a big West Indian pancake". After the intro by Duke and the band Paul Consalves is the soloist, with an interlude by Jimmy Hamilton and Harry Carney. With its gospel song rhythm, the piece seems totally in sync with the overall spiritual theme of the concert.

"We would like to do another encore, if you don't mind. This number is titled *La Plus Belle Africaine*",

Duke says, and the last number of the concert is started without further introduction. It was a rather new piece of Ellington's, the first known performance being from Paris only three weeks before. It was performed at almost every European concert on this tour, and by the time of the Coventry concert the band and its soloists were familiar with the piece. Duke, Sam Woodyard and Jimmy Hamilton introduces the piece by playing the first theme, the band and Sam Woodyard play the second theme, sort of an interlude, which is repeated several times throughout the composition. John Lamb solos con arco on the first theme, and after the band interlude, Harry Carney takes a long solo on the third theme. Jimmy Hamilton comes back with a solo on the first theme, which finishes the piece. Great solos by great soloists, but to me Duke himself together with John Lamb and Sam Woodyard have the most important part of the arrangement, coloring the piece with their constantly commenting and driving accompaniment, and thus giving a proper conclusion to a unique concert in Coventry, England 1966.

—BJARNE BUSK



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Duke Ellington in Coventry, 1966

1. *New World A-Comin'** — 9:13
2. *Come Sunday* — 5:56
3. *Light (Montage)* — 5:42
4. *Come Easter* — 3:38
5. *Tell Me It's The Truth* — 3:22
7. *In The Beginning God (gw, cas)* — 20:39
8. *West Indian Pancake* — 5:02
9. *La Plus Belle Africaine* — 12:03

Total time — 65:37

* *Duke Ellington solo piano*

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

*Cat Anderson, Cootie Williams, Herbie Jones,
Mercer Ellington (tp), Laurence Brown,
Chuck Connors, Buster Cooper (tb),
Jimmy Hamilton (cl, ts), Russell Procope (as, cl),
Johnny Hodges (as), Paul Gonsalves (ts),
Harry Carney (bars, cl, bcl), Duke Ellington (p),
John Lamb (b), Sam Woodyard (dr),
George Webb, Cliff Adam Singers (vo)*

*Coventry Cathedral, Coventry, England
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