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DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA "IN CONCERT 1960"

The inspired concert performance by Duke Ellington's Orchestra on May 27th, 1960 in Santa Monica, California is captured "live" on this recording. It was a sufficiently special one-nighter in that it recalled the verve of earlier recordings testifying the virtues of Ellington's peak in-person performances, swinging without mercy, aided by outstanding soloists with distinctive instrumental voices. This concert once again demonstrates his commitment to the adage expressed in the song title "It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing."

Through the decades of its amazingly long existence, the band regularly clocked in a tremendous amount of travel miles on the road playing one-nighters. Regarding his heavy touring schedule, Ellington once remarked: "What I'm involved in is a continuous autobiography, a continuous record of the people I meet, the places I see change...By playing one-nighters, I can hear reactions from all kinds of audiences. You get a real contact when you play a phrase and somebody sighs."

Ellington's unrivaled fifty years of artistic development and achievement and his creative output of over two thousand compositions surely earn him the honor as the leading composer in the Western world. The universality of his commanding contributions in music also points to his development as probably the most striking evolution in the arts in America. He produced some of the most original music of the century and is, of course, firmly regarded as a genius—the greatest composer in the history of jazz.

Keying into the year of this concert, at the dawn of the 1960s—it was also the continuation of an Ellington pathway for a cumulative grand tour through the decade into the 1970s. During the 3rd Annual Monterey Jazz Festival, 1960 also brought forth the Ellington-Billy Strayhorn opus Suite Thursday, a tribute to novelist John Steinbeck's Sweet Thursday, set in Monterey's Cannery Row. Other exhilarating works of the year followed, including engaging jazz reworkings of The Nutcracker Suite and Peer Gynt Suite, plus the film soundtrack for the jazz themed Paris Blues.

Momentum of strong interest had been renewed four years earlier when an emotion-packed performance refueled Ellington's rightful lofty position, reflected in

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the readers' popularity jazz polls. This healthy change of regard was due to a fiery late night impromptu jam session on stage at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival during which tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves strung together 27 mind-blowing choruses between the two sections of "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" (circa 1937). Subsequently Gonsalves' celebrated uninterrupted blues solo was named "the wailing interval" and intense interest in the revisitation of the performance was sustained throughout the remainder of his life.

The program of tunes on this disc represents a balance of familiar and seldom heard selections from Ellingtonia. As for "recreations" of his past body of works, they were not aimed at superseding the originals. Ellington viewed them as organic, and from a different perspective at different times; i.e., he refused to submit them to static treatment. In sum, these reinterpretations represent a dynamic on-going positive attitude to performing music. By the 1960s, his insight from deeper experience and wisdom gave his performances an of-the-moment freshness. Along with the cast of extraordinary soloists, the Ellington sound and voicings, this recording documents the undiminished spontaneity and the bright, hard swinging rhythm section mates of bassist Aaron Bell and drummer Sam Woodyard who delivered the requisite goods to the maestro. For this writer's taste, the unparalleled Ellington magic was luckily caught in action!

Turning to the music at hand...logically the authority of the Ducal piano with Bell and Woodyard on "**Take the 'A' Train**" traps attention with an immediate swing feel, reminding there is little to compare with a real live audience experience to enhance communications. If trumpeter Ray Nance's jaunty vocal laced with hipness echoes Betty Roche's wonderful 1956 vocal version, it is because it was indeed adapted by Nance. And it is a ball to listen to Nance! Enthusiasm and a keen sense of coloration infused his trumpet and cornet work. Writer Stanley Crouch describes it well: "...abetted by mutes, plungers and his refined control of open tone, (he) could juggle the puckish, the plaintive, the buffoonish, the high minded, and the translucently exotic." Dig Gonsalves' satisfying solo, the plump, fat sound of the horn sections, and the surging ensemble. And isn't it marvelous to hear Ellington's voice crediting the soloists or anything else at anytime!

Highlights of how "'A' Train" became Ellington's signature tune is interest-worthy to share. A detailed account is recounted by David Hajdu in his 1996 Billy Strayhorn biography, Lush Life: It began with a dispute between the radio broadcasting industry and ASCAP over a fee increase for rights to broadcast music written by ASCAP

members. This conflict precipitated radio stations to give birth to BMI to compete with ASCAP. In turn, the stations wouldn't air any music by ASCAP beginning January 1941. As Ellington's most popular compositions were with ASCAP, and in order to get airplay, he asked his son Mercer and Strayhorn to promptly write a largely new repertoire, with composer credit to them (non-ASCAP writers). In the heat of writing, Mercer said to Strayhorn as he pulled a crunched piece of music out of the garbage: "What's wrong with this?" And Strayhorn responded: "That's an old thing I was trying to do something with, but it's too much like Fletcher Henderson." Mercer flattened it out and put it in the pile of new music. The upshot was that Ellington selected the swinging chart of "Take the 'A' Train" and the rest is history!

"**Red Carpet**" is the third of four parts of Toot Suite (1959) and is subdivided into its own three sections. Harry Carney's powerful baritone saxophone sound carries a lot of weight in the band's overall voice. Russell Procope's clarinet is followed by the shapely lines of the saxes, and Ellington's piano takes it to Booty Wood's smoothly ignited plunger solo on the "syringaphone" with speech like pattern; finally a segue goes into a walking riff while Nance's trumpet notions are fired up.

The last of the three segments of the Newport Jazz Festival Suite is the exciting "**Newport Up.**" Appropriately titled, it is a high flying up tempo flight. It contains a loping parade of cool jazz riffs stretched out with some inventive repetitions and liberal solo space. Co-composed with Strayhorn, it was aimed at this 1956 festival in Newport, Rhode Island. The bass plays a prominent role and Bell gives Ellington the deep anchoring notes he wants; the drums do likewise as Woodyard's ability to drive is a quality Ellington expected. Ellington recaps the soloists proudly.

It's a fresh surprise to hear valve trombonist Juan Tizol's well-known composition "**Perdido**" played with a Gerald Wilson arrangement...resulting in a more assertive leaning to bebop lines, earmarking its conception and rewarding the careful listener with different possibilities of the tune's contours. Also, it illustrates the flexibility and resourcefulness of the soloists as they merge swing into bebop. Listen to Jimmy Hamilton's conceptual adjustments on clarinet and the Gillespie-influenced trumpet statements. The tune's riff-derived melody combined with a slow paced chord pattern is simply a jam session natural.

On "Matumba" (more familiarly known as "Congo Square") there is evocation with minor key chords heard with a rhythmic feel supporting the imagery Ellington promotes in a tale of a pretty girl who stimulates erotic responses at the New Orleans site. Ellington's commentary is both informative and charming, offering the backdrop for the direction of

the music. "**Matumba**" is a movement from the satirical tone parallel to the history of jazz—A Drum is a Woman, a close collaboration of Ellington/Strayhorn. Bassist Bell is openly featured. In 1962 he told writer Stanley Dance about the challenge posed by "Matumba": "It's so unorthodox, and Sam's not playing any definite rhythm. There's no bass part there, and it took me a long time to figure out what to do. Actually I'm playing two against three on it...I didn't just come in and start doing it." This perspective reveals how Ellington had enormous confidence in his talented musicians to enlist their intuition, technical wherewithal and imagination to solve problems—finding solutions that fit and enrich the musical frameworks.

The aforementioned tour de force "**Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue**" is a widely popular choice to close a concert and leaving the audience ecstatic and exhausted with glee. Paul Gonsalves shares the storied genius behind the success of "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue." In the face of speculations made among New York musicians about the ability of the Ellington band to make it in Birdland—a modern jazz venue with high expectations, Ellington called the tune(s) and Gonsalves had never played (107 and 108 in the band book) previously. When the band had finished the first part, Gonsalves told Ellington he'd like to take some choruses between the two parts. After he blew an untold number of choruses, the audience was aroused and went crazy standing on chairs. "We didn't play it again until that time at Newport," said Gonsalves. "We were getting ready to go on when Duke called me in the wings." Ellington instructed him to "play it as long as you like." The screaming crowd was turned on emotionally—it was sensational and triumphant! And check Gonsalves' solo content and musical demeanor on this 1960 trip...it is filled with surprises and, of course, his Coleman Hawkins-influenced horn never stops swinging.

Unarguably the Ellington Orchestra was really in top form that evening in Santa Monica. Gonsalves observed: "One night we may stink, but the next night we might sound wonderful when there's that fusion between guys who feel like playing, when everything's goin' down right, and we're playing his music the way it should be played...then it's the greatest jazz band there is." This concert was one of those super special Duke Ellington nights!!

written by Dr. Herb Wong

Dr. Herb Wong is a noted jazz journalist and radio personality.

1. **Take the "A" Train** 8:30

Billy Strayhorn

2. **Red Carpet** 9:10

Strayhorn/Ellington

3. **Newport Up** 5:04

Strayhorn/Ellington

4. **Perdido (Lost)** 7:14

Ervin M. Drake/Hans Lengsfelder/Juan Tizol

5. **Matumba** 6:19

Strayhorn/Ellington

6. **Diminuendo in Blue &
Crescendo in Blue** 12:34

Duke Ellington

Personnel:

Trumpets:

Ray Nance, Willie Cook,
Ed Mullins, "Fats" Ford

Trombones:

Lawrence Brown, Juan Tizol,
Britt Woodman, Mitch Wood

Saxophones:

Johnny Hodges, Harry Carney,
Paul Gonzalves, Jimmy Hamilton,
Russell Procope

Drums:

Sam Woodyard

Bass:

Aaron Bell

Piano:

Duke Ellington

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Produced and compiled by Bob Edmondson
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