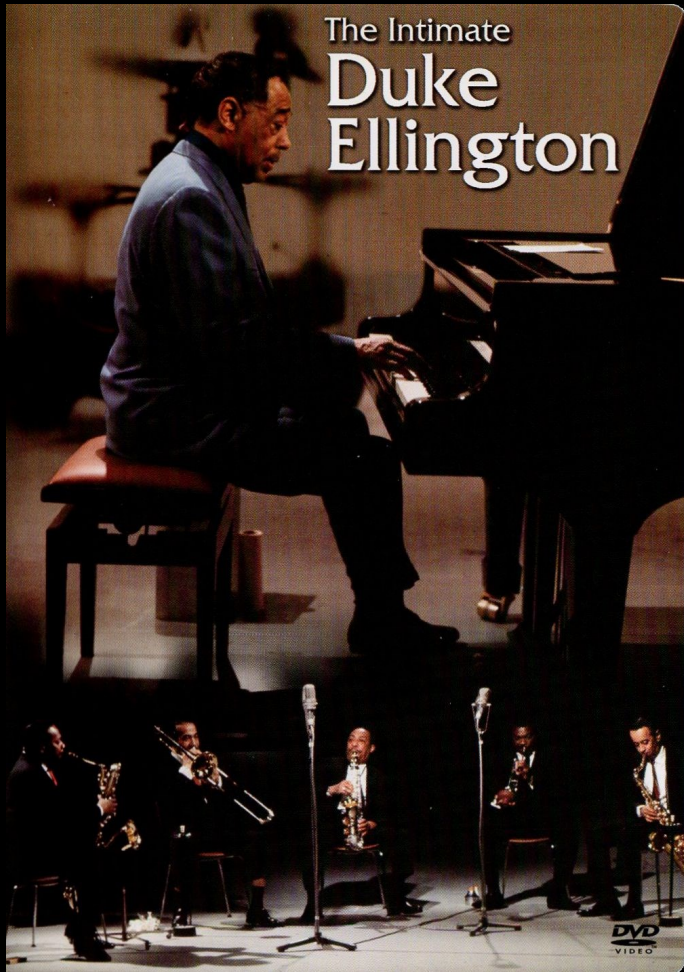


The Intimate
**Duke
Ellington**



On Jan. 23, 1967 when Duke Ellington filmed the two small-group sets that were broadcast on Danish television and are now available on this release, the 67-year-old pianist-composer-arranger-bandleader could look back at a remarkable lifetime of achievements.

Born Apr. 29, 1899 in Washington D.C., Ellington had originally trained to be an artist but was so intrigued by the local ragtime and stride pianists that by 1917 he was a fulltime musician even though he only knew a handful of songs at the time. Inspired initially by the piano rolls of James P. Johnson and both the personality and the voicings of Willie "The Lion" Smith, Ellington led bands around his hometown until 1922 when he had a brief but unsuccessful trip to New York City. The following year he returned, working with banjoist Elmer Snowden's Washingtonians until an argument over missing money resulted in Ellington becoming the band's new leader. Both the orchestra and Ellington's writing greatly improved during their period at the Kentucky Club (1924-27) and the group made its first records during this period.

1927 was the breakthrough year for the Ellington band because late in the year they passed an audition and became the house band at the Cotton Club, playing for elaborate stage shows and broadcasting regularly on the radio. Soon they were rightfully being billed as Duke Ellington's Famous Orchestra.

In the 40 years to follow, Ellington wrote thousands of songs, scores of which became standards. His piano style evolved from stride to swing to a more modern percussive style. His arrangements were consistently innovative and unpredictable. And his orchestra, featuring very distinctive soloists that he blended together in unusual ways, was utterly unique and always ranked at the top. Despite some hard economic times in the early 1950s, Ellington was able to keep his big band together nonstop even while nearly all of the swing era orchestras had to break up.

By 1967, Duke Ellington (who would live until 1974) had been universally recognized as a genius for decades. Most of Ellington's recordings,

performances and film appearances were made at the head of his big band. The two half-hour shows that comprise this release are therefore quite unusual for they showcase Duke with an octet drawn from his orchestra and as a piano soloist. The former set features an all-star group comprised of trumpeter Cat Anderson, trombonist Lawrence Brown, altoist Johnny Hodges, tenor-saxophonist Paul Gonsalves, baritonist Harry Carney, bassist John Lamb and drummer Rufus Jones along with the pianist-leader. The same group two months later when Ellington's European tour was over would record the album *Intimacy of the Blues* in New York.

The octet set is a series of individual features for four of the five horn players. Johnny Hodges (1907-70) was one of Duke's most popular soloists during his two lengthy stints (1928-51 and 1955-70) and he was equally skilled at caressing ballads, playing blues and romping on medium-tempo tunes. After the band plays a brief one-chorus version of Ellington's longtime theme "Take the 'A' Train," the altoist is in the lead on Billy Strayhorn's "Passion Flower," and "The Jeep Is Jumpin'." Hodges, whose tone was always consistently beautiful, on "Passion Flower" contrasts a sensuous and romantic melody statement (caressing each note) with a humorously disinterested expression on his face. He swings easily on a concise rendition of "The Jeep Is Jumpin'."

Few sidemen have ever been as loyal as Harry Carney (1910-74), who was with Ellington from the time he joined in 1927 until his death 47 years later. The first great baritone-saxophonist, Carney's huge tone set the standard for the baritonists to follow. He was also among the first jazz musicians to master circular breathing. By taking in quick bursts of air and storing them in his cheeks while exhaling in a steady stream, he was able to play a note forever, as he shows on this version of "Sophisticated Lady" which he concludes with a 90-second breath.

Cat Anderson (1916-81) was arguably the greatest high-note trumpeter ever, able to hit notes even higher than Maynard Ferguson. In fact, he was fired from trumpeter Erskine Hawkins' band because he overshadowed the leader. Ellington

loved writing for Anderson in ensembles and Cat had many features during his periods with Duke (1944-47, 1950-59 and 1961-71). "Tippin' and Whisperin'" is a bit unusual for this medium-tempo blues unexpectedly has Anderson sticking to his middle-register, using a mute and ending notes a la Count Basie's Harry "Sweets" Edison.

Paul Gonsalves (1920-74) was with the orchestras of Count Basie (1946-49) and Dizzy Gillespie prior to spending his last 24 years with Ellington. His warm breathy tone on tenor was a bit reminiscent of his predecessor Ben Webster but he had an unpredictable and harmonically adventurous style. At the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival, his 27 choruses on "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" practically caused a riot and gained headlines throughout the jazz world. In contrast, on "Happy Reunion," the emphasis is on Gonsalves' sound and his ability to uplift ballads. He also has an opportunity to show off his melodic side on "Satin Doll."

The uptempo blues "Jam with Sam" features Cat Anderson playing muted, with a plunger and hitting some screaming high notes at its conclusion. There is also a chorus aplece from Gonsalves, Carney, Hodges and Lawrence Brown (1907-88). Brown, who was with Ellington during 1932-51 and 1960-70, had a dignified sound and impressive technique that made him a key trombone soloist with Duke for nearly 30 years, even with his nine-year "vacation." A brief version of "Things Ain't What They Used to Be" (with Hodges in the lead) concludes this enjoyable look at some of Ellington's all-stars.

The other half of the release, recorded the same day, is one of the finest showcases on film of Ellington the pianist. Unlike virtually all of the other jazz pianists who matured in the 1920s (other than Mary Lou Williams), Ellington continued evolving with time, constantly updating his style and sounding modern.

Ellington interprets "Le Sucrier Velours" (from his Queen's Suite which was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth) and Strayhorn's beautiful "Lotus Blossom" as unaccompanied solos. On a brief version of "The Second Portrait of the Lion," taken as a duet with drummer Rufus Jones, Duke pays tribute both to his early idol Willie

"The Lion" Smith and his roots in stride piano. "Meditation" finds Ellington at his most thoughtful and introspective.

The lesser-known "On the Fringe of the Jungle," a minor blues, gives the other members of the rhythm section a chance to be featured. Bassist John Lamb (1933-), who was with Ellington during 1964-67, always displayed a strong sound, a melodic solo style and the ability to interact closely with the pianist. Rufus "Speedy" Jones (1936-90), a spectacular drummer who takes seven choruses on this piece, had already sparked the bands of Maynard Ferguson (1959-63) and Count Basie (1964-66) before becoming a major force with Ellington (1966-70).

But even with all of the fine players heard on these two programs, the ultimate star is Duke Ellington, who steals the show on "Mood Indigo" and an extended version of "Take the 'A' Train." "Mood Indigo" is a timeless classic from 1930 that Ellington would perform at nearly every performance during the next 43 years. This version of "Take the 'A' Train" has Duke playing not only his standard opening solo (on which he turns the song into a waltz) but much of the band arrangement before he slyly emphasizes a dissonant note, refusing to resolve it at its conclusion, leaving the listener wanting more.

Duke Ellington's enormous contributions to music are remarkable. This release allows today's listeners to see as well as hear Duke in prime form, playing the music he loved.

—Scott Yanow
Author of *Duke Ellington, Swing, Bebop, Afro-Cuban Jazz, Trumpet Kings and Classic Jazz*



The Intimate Duke Ellington

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Duke Ellington's 50-year career (1924-74) was full

of accomplishments as a highly original pianist, an innovative arranger, a prolific composer and the leader of a timeless orchestra full of individualists. On occasion through the years, he recorded with a small group from his orchestra or as a piano soloist, but Duke was rarely ever filmed in that capacity. This release features a couple of rare exceptions.

On January 23, 1967, Ellington filmed two half-hour programs for Danish television. The first show has him jamming with an octet taken from his orchestra including such greats as altoist Johnny Hodges, tenor-saxophonist Paul Gonsalves, baritonist Harry Carney and trumpeter Cat Anderson. Highlights include "The Jeep Is Jumpin'," "Sophisticated Lady" and "Jam with Sam."

The second program puts the focus on Duke Ellington's piano, in solo and trio performances that include "Lotus Blossom," "Mood Indigo" and a definitive version of "Take the 'A' Train." Always a modern and distinctive soloist, Ellington is seen creating brilliant improvisations full of strong melodies, subtle surprises and his sly wit. —Scott Yanow

Includes liner notes.

Copenhagen Octet Session

1. Program Start; Take the "A" Train
2. Passion Flower
3. The Jeep Is Jumpin'
4. Sophisticated Lady
5. Tippin' and Whisperin'
6. Happy Reunion
7. Satin Doll
8. Jam with Sam
9. Things Ain't What They Used to Be

Copenhagen Solo/Trio Session

1. Program Start;
Le Sucrier Velours
2. Lotus Blossom
3. The Second Portrait
of the Lion
4. Meditation
5. On the Fringe of
the Jungle
6. Mood Indigo
7. Take the "A" Train;
End Credits



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Duke Ellington



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