

Al Jarreau & NDR Bigband
Ellington

ACT





- 01 Drop Me Off in Harlem 3:48** Duke Ellington
Solo: Ingolf Burkhardt (trumpet)
- 02 I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart 3:52** Duke Ellington
Solo: Fiete Felsch (alto sax)
- 03 Lush Life 6:40** Billy Strayhorn
Solos: Fiete Felsch (flute), Christof Lauer (tenor sax)
- 04 Come Sunday 4:57** Duke Ellington
- 05 In a Mellow Tone 6:02** Duke Ellington
Solo: Ingolf Burkhardt (flugelhorn)
- 06 Take the "A" Train 4:12** Billy Strayhorn
Solos: Tini Thomsen (bari sax), Hans Vroomans (piano), Wolfgang Haffner (drums)
- 07 I'm Beginning to See the Light 3:53**
Duke Ellington, Johnny Hodges, Don George, Harry James
Solo: Frank Delle (tenor sax)
- 08 Sophisticated Lady 4:19** Duke Ellington
- 09 I Ain't Got Nothing but the Blues 4:38** Duke Ellington, Don George
Solo: Peter Tiehuis (guitar)
- 10 I Got It Bad (and that Ain't Good) 6:20** Duke Ellington
Solo: Ingolf Burkhardt (trumpet)
- 11 Satin Doll 3:56** Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn
Solos: Dan Gottshall (trombone), Günter Bollmann (trombone), Stefan Lottermann (trombone), Hans Vroomans (piano)

Al Jarreau vocals

NDR Bigband

Trumpets & Flugelhorns Thorsten Benkenstein, Ingolf Burkhardt, Nicolas Boysen, Reiner Winterschladen
Saxophones Fiete Felsch, Björn Berger, Christof Lauer, Frank Delle, Tini Thomsen
Trombones Dan Gottshall, Günter Bollmann (26 November), Klaus Heidenreich (29 November)
Stefan Lottermann, Ingo Lahme
Tuba Ingo Lahme
Piano, Rhodes Hans Vroomans
E+A Guitar Peter Tiehuis
E+A Bass Christian Diener
Drums Wolfgang Haffner
Conductor & arranger Jörg Achim Keller

Vocals arranger Joe Turano

Executive Producers NDR: Axel Dürr, Stefan Gerdes, Michael Dreyer
Recorded during the European tour, Karsten Jahnke JazzNights,
31 October – 01 December 2016
Recorded at Paradiso in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on 26 November 2016 and at the Opéra
Garnier in Monte Carlo, Monaco, on 29 November 2016
Recorded by Stephan Leppkes and Jens Kunze
Recording Producer NDR: Oliver Bergner
Mixed by Oliver Bergner, Sven Kohlwege and Marc Schettler
Mastered by Klaus Scheuermann

Al Jarreau featured courtesy of Craft Recordings

Photo by Dietmar Vogel and Axel Dürr





Al Jarreau always said he sang Al Jarreau music, and he truly was one of a kind: his six Grammy awards and nineteen nominations as 'Best Vocalist' cover no fewer than three categories – jazz, pop and R&B – in other words, musical genres didn't really concern him. "Music may well fall into categories for other people, and I understand that," he said, "but for me, if I like a song, I have to do it, and that's that. If you come to my concerts, I sit on your shoulder and whisper in your ear. I open minds and walk through many doors." This kind of rich, descriptive imagery evokes the flights of vocal fantasy which his singing was capable of at any moment. He could suddenly take a song in a new and unexpected direction. He used to explain it thus: "If there is a backbone to what I do, it's the jazz vernacular."

Music, sounds and rhythm seemed to flow through him, and no wonder. Born in 1940 into a musical family, he was an above-average student, graduating with a Bachelor Of Science degree in Psychology and subsequently a Master's Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation. And yet music was never far from him. Joining a trio led by pianist George Duke by the late 1960s, he was working towards making singing a full-time vocation in Los Angeles nightspots such as Dino's and the Troubadour.

It was at this point that Siggie Loch, who back then was a high-flying executive at Warner Brothers Records (WEA), and who later went on to found ACT Records, first heard him. "I saw Al Jarreau for the first time in the Troubadour in Los Angeles in 1974 and was instantly hooked by his voice and his stage presence," he recalls. "The next day I went to see Mo Ostin, President of Warner Bros. Records, to convince him to sign him." After encountering initial resistance, Loch was given the go-ahead and Jarreau's debut album for WEA, "We Got By", was released in 1975. "I brought Al over to Germany before he had any success in the U.S.," continues Loch. "Al performed for three nights at the legendary club "Onkel Pö" in Hamburg and I managed to convince Michael Naura, the head of jazz at NDR, to record the third night for live TV broadcast." That show made Al famous in Germany overnight, and ever since that moment, he has always had a special place in the hearts of German audiences. In fact, just a few days later, and with the help of his longtime friend and legendary promoter Karsten Jahнке, Al Jarreau sold out the entire present-day Laeiszhalle in Hamburg. "We Got By" won the German Record Critics' Award and his first German tour sold out large concert halls.



Pat Rains, Al Jarreau, Siggie Loch

It was followed by "Glow" (1976), which again was well-received in Europe, winning a second German Record Critics' Award, but did not do so well in the United States. "That was aimed at 'smooth jazz' audiences," said Loch. "It didn't capture Al in front of a live audience. So I requested that his next release had to be a live album. Mo Ostin reluctantly agreed," and "Look to the Rainbow" was a huge success in Europe, "When it was released in the US it became Al's breakthrough album and won him his first Grammy, so it really is right to say that his career took off first of all in Germany!" says Loch.

Jarreau's long association with NDR prompted Jörg Achim Keller, the former chief conductor of the NDR Bigband (The Hamburg Radio Jazz Orchestra), to suggest a collaboration with the singer in 2016, "Doing a production with Al and Ellington's music was something I had wanted to do since the early 2000's," he remembers. "Al's reaction was very positive from the start." Jörg prepared a list of some hundred Ellington titles and, as Jarreau later recalled, "We just went down the list, and it was a case of, 'Oh, that one works for me,' and 'Let's do this one as an old gut-bucket blues' – what was important for me was to find myself inside the music and maybe make a different kind of statement about Ellington so people could hear the music in a different way from anything they had heard before." In writing the charts, Jörg was careful to respect Jarreau's approach to the material by giving him space. Tracks such as 'I'm Beginning to See the Light' or 'I Got It Bad (and that Ain't Good)' also give the band's soloists headroom to give of their very best. "These are highly evolved, intelligent soloists who can play with anybody in the world," said Jarreau. "They're pushing me, and I love the push, and they're making me sound like a real singer!"

At the initiative and promotion of Karsten Jahnke Konzertdirektion, Al Jarreau and the NDR Bigband embarked on their third European tour together in 2016. "There was still some fine-tuning going on during the tour, from concert to concert," Jörg added with a smile. "He loved doing those ballads – and each one had a different feel. 'Come Sunday' was very important to him, though. That chart was reworked twice before he was finally happy with it! On some songs, he went for a pure ballad style – 'I Got It Bad (and that Ain't Good)', some tunes were put into a pop/R&B-bag ('Lush Life', 'Come Sunday') and he loved that 'old gut-bucket blues' feel of 'I Ain't Got Nothing but the Blues'."



Reflecting on the recording sessions and tour in 2024, Jörg says, "It was Al's style and personality that held it all together. The whole thing was a true combination of Jarreau's and Ellington's musical mastery – it appealed to audiences all over Europe, they loved the programme." This feeling is echoed by Siggli Loch, who caught Jarreau with the NDR Bigband in Paris, "It was obvious that he really enjoyed performing this music and he did it with so much energy and emotion, it was a joy to see and hear. Sadly, Al was to pass away only a few months later."

In many ways, "Ellington" closes a circle: it feels very right that Jarreau's final album should be released on ACT, the label founded by Siggli Loch whose strong and unwavering advocacy for the singer originally set him on the road to superstardom. And the fact that it was recorded by broadcaster NDR and their in-house big band is a fitting reminder that this was the very broadcaster whose TV programme had once made Jarreau famous in Germany overnight. Furthermore, just like "Look to the Rainbow" which was Jarreau's international breakthrough album, "Ellington" was also recorded live, produced by Karsten Jahnke, whose enthusiastic support and promotion of Jarreau dates back to the "Onkel Pö" days through to his passing. Sometimes threads and connections between events which at first appear to be unrelated, but when the result turns out to be not just special and magical, but also meaningful and deeply affecting, as if it was meant to be. It certainly seems so here.

Stuart Nicholson, music journalist & author

The NDR Bigband would like to say "thanks" to:

- Karsten Jahnke, Thorsten Herbig, and his entire team for an amazing tour.
 - ACT Music for their great support.
 - A special thank you goes to the unique human being and artist, Al Jarreau.
- Al, we love you madly!



Al Jarreau featured courtesy
of Craft Recordings



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Ellington

ACT



NDR

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- 10 I Got It Bad (and that Ain't Good)
- 11 Satin Doll

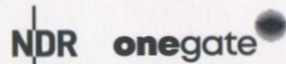
Al Jarreau vocals

Jörg Achim Keller conductor
NDR Bigband

All tracks arranged by Jörg Achim Keller
Executive Producers NDR: Axel Dürr, Stefan Gerdes, Michael Dreyer

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www.ndr.de/bigband



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