

**DUKE  
ELLINGTON  
JAZZ VIOLIN  
SESSION**

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WOU 1688  
P.O. Box 48  
Guilderland, NY 12084  
Made in U.S.A.

**DUKE  
ELLINGTON'S  
JAZZ VIOLIN  
SESSION**

WITH  
**SVEND ASMUSSEN  
STEPHANE GRAPPELLI  
RAY NANCE**  
AND  
**BILLY STRAYHORN**



Looking back on the date nearly twelve years later, Ellington's own violinist, the late Ray Nance, had remembered it as "a lot of fun." As a young man in Chicago, he had been taken to Eddie Souths rehearsals by another accomplished violinist, Mill Hinton, now better known as a bassist. Although he was later mightily impressed by Stuff Smith's violent attack and swing, Nance's own approach to the instrument remained more orthodox and closer to Souths. Stephane Grappelli was also influenced by that great, black virtuoso of the violin, and indeed with him and Django Reinhardt as early as 1937 in Paris. It is interesting to note that South himself, despite "legitimate" aspirations and the development of an appropriate and beautiful technique, credited much of his jazz inspiration to Darnell Howard, a violinist in the Earl Hines band when Nance joined it in 1937. The associations were somewhat different in Svend Asmussen's case. Born in Copenhagen, he formed a group patterned on Joe Venuti's Blue Four and was later reputedly influenced by Stuff Smith. Stylistic differences apart—and all three men were clearly affected in the '30s by the paramount influence of Louis Armstrong—Asmussen subsequently took to the viola, which he plays here.

The long, orthodox tradition back of the violin may have had something to do with the reluctance of a large part of the jazz audience to accept the instrument for many years. Jazz on trumpets, trombones, saxophones and clarinets made sense in terms of volume and carrying power in noisy dancehalls and nightclubs, where the sound of the violin was easily lost. Electrical amplification helped bring the instrument literal and figurative prominence. Moreover, the amplifier, as used by Stuff Smith, marked as radical a step for the violin as Charlie Christian's did for the guitar.

Ellington and his right-hand man, Billy Strayhorn, were well informed on all aspects of jazz, in Europe as in the U.S., and since Paris was a city they knew particularly well, it was logical to bring Asmussen there to join the two violinists. The Dane's viola not only gave Ellington a color contrast, but will prove a help to the listener in solo identifications. (The viola is the middle instrument of what is sometimes called the "violin family;" the third being the cello. Pitched a fifth lower than the violin, the viola has a more mellow and slightly veiled tone.)

The program opens fittingly with Ellington's theme, Take the "A" Tram, and after his delightfully unusual piano chorus, the fiddlers are introduced in alphabetical order, chorus by chorus, first Asmussen, then Grappelli, and then Nance. Further to accustom the ear to their various excellences, each is featured individually on the numbers that follow, Grappelli on In A Sentimental Mood, Asmussen on Don't Get Around Much Anymore, and Nance on Da Dream. All

three are lyrical players, but, apart from Asmussen's darker tone and usually more brusque attack, there are recognizable differences between Grappelli and Nance. In general, one could say that the former's tone is sweeter, his approach cooler, his facility greater, and his style distinguished by a penchant for the upper register. Nance, on the other hand, has a warmer tone, a more soulful quality, and, from a jazz viewpoint, more marked rhythmic and conceptual authority. After the first four titles have been heard a few times, there should be no great difficulty in identifying and following each of the three men throughout the program.

The rhythm section is an especial delight. Ellington is inventive, playful and stimulating. Ernie Shepard, one of his favorite bassists, is displayed here to better advantage than anywhere else; he enters into the spirit of the occasion, even slapping the bass on one track and humming a la Slam Stewart on another. Sam Woodyard, excellently recorded, lays a relaxed, swinging and utterly unselfish foundation, offering support rather than egotistical competition to the main protagonists.

On the second side, Russell Procope, Paul Gonsalves and Buster Cooper are brought in for soft, subtle backgrounds devised by Ellington and Strayhorn/the latter being at the piano on his own attractive Pretty Little One and at the beginning of String Along with Strings. There are many other unexpected felicities, such as the buoyant West Indian essay, Limbo jazz, previously recorded with Coleman Hawkins; the pretty line of The Feeling of jazz, as once recorded with John Coltrane; the surprising, Goodmannesque riffs on Cotton Tail; and the memories of Chicago's Savoy in Tricky's Licks.

Here, in short, are more treasures from the musical legacy Duke Ellington bequeathed us.

STANLEY DANCE,  
author of  
The World of Duke Ellington

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**F**ew things could have been better calculated to please Duke Ellington in 1962 than the recording contract Frank Sinatra arranged for him. It was generous in all its terms. It put him in charge of producing albums by his own band, and it made him an a. and r. man in the truest sense of the term. He could seek out artists, new or established, whom he thought worthy of fresh exposure; he could recommend or write appropriate material for them; and he could supervise their sessions. But the appointment was no sinecure, and he lost little time in discharging the responsibility entrusted to him. Previously, Ellington had frequently enjoyed himself in the recording studio as his own boss, but always at his own expense. When his band came into a big city with the expectation of a few days off, the leader nearly always set up a session or sessions for it, so that the musicians on regular salary should earn their bread and the others should not grow rusty. What he called his "stockpile" of recordings was accordingly built up in New York, Chicago, Toronto, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Miami. So as Frank Sinatra probably well knew, he was already thoroughly equipped to carry out his a. and r. duties.

When the Ellington band left for Europe early in 1963, it had already recorded the equivalent of three albums at nine sessions in Chicago and New York, among them "Recollections of the Big Band Era" on Atlantic SD 1665. During the tour, Ellington somehow managed to sandwich between concerts four sessions with symphony orchestras in Stockholm, Hamburg, Milan and Paris, and five more in the last city with Alice Babs, Bud Powell, Dollar Brand, Bea Benjamin, and the musicians heard in this set. The kind of concerts that provided a backdrop to all this recording activity (or vice versa) may be heard in "The Great Paris Concert" on Atlantic SD 2-304.

Ellington was no ordinary a. and r. man. He defied time, seemed unconcerned with the clock ticking on the wall, and always sought original, spontaneous expression. More polished, alternative takes were often rejected because, in his view, the music on them had become "mechanical." The session heard in this album is full of his personal spirit and energy. His energy and drive could, of course, be exacting, and the last sound you will hear on the record is the "Phew!" of an exhausted fiddler. But Ellington was well pleased with his "fiddlers three," no doubt in deference to the precedent set by Old King Cole. He was also a little hurt by the fact that the album was not issued, this being its first appearance. He often mentioned it as an accomplishment of which he was proud, but when asked why it had not been released he would lift his eyebrows with a wry grimace. "Not everyone has your interest and good taste, baby/ he told a sycophantic lady on one occasion.



DUKE ELLINGTON

JAZZ VIOLIN SESSION

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# DUKE ELLINGTON JAZZ VIOLIN SESSION

Musicians:

**Duke Ellington:** piano  
**Stephane Grappelli:** violin  
**Ray Nance:** violin  
**Svend Asmussen:** viola  
**Ernie Shepard:** bass  
**Sam Woodyard:** drums  
**Russell Procope:** also sax  
**Paul Gonsalves:** tenor sax  
**Buster Cooper:** trombone  
**Billy Strayhorn:** piano (tracks 6,9)

Produced by Duke Ellington

Recorded Feb. 22, 1963  
at Barclay Studios, Paris, France



- 1. Take The "A" Train** 4:23  
(Strayhorn)
- 2. In A Sentimental Mood** 3:48  
(Ellington, Kurtz, Mills)
- 3. Don't Get Around Much Anymore** 3:59  
(Ellington, Russell)
- 4. Day Dream** 3:11  
(Ellington, Strayhorn)
- 5. Cotton Tail** 4:39  
(Ellington)
- 6. Pretty Little One** 4:26  
(Strayhorn)
- 7. Tricky's Licks** 3:18  
(Ellington)
- 8. Blues In C** 3:55  
(Ellington)
- 9. String Along With Strings** 6:26  
(Ellington)
- 10. Limbo Jazz** 5:26  
(Ellington)
- 11. The Feeling Of Jazz** 3:23  
(Ellington, Troupe, Simon)



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