



## BARTÓK · ELLINGTON

### Bartók: Sonata for Solo Violin (1944)

- |   |  |            |
|---|--|------------|
| 1 | First Movement: <i>Tempo di ciaccona</i>                 | [10' 12" ] |
| 2 | Second Movement: Fuga — <i>Risoluto, non troppo vivo</i> | [5' 17" ]  |
| 3 | Third Movement: Melodia — <i>Adagio</i>                  | [7' 10" ]  |
| 4 | Fourth Movement: <i>Presto</i>                           | [6' 20" ]  |

### Duke Ellington: Mainly Black \*

(from Black, Brown and Beige Suite/Campbell, Connelly & Co. Ltd.)

- |   |                   |            |
|---|-------------------|------------|
| 5 | Introduction      | [6' 41" ]  |
| 6 | Come Sunday       | [2' 39" ]  |
| 7 | Work Song         | [7' 51" ]  |
| 8 | The Blues (Mauve) | [12' 30" ] |
| 9 | Come Sunday       | [10' 04" ] |

\*with Alec Dankworth double bass

### NIGEL KENNEDY

violin

Recorded: 24-25 February and 9 June 1986, No. 1 Studio, Abbey Road, London

Producer: Andrew Keener

Balance Engineer: Mike Clements

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### NIGEL KENNEDY writes:

*Black, Brown, and Beige* received its première in Carnegie Hall, New York, performed by Duke Ellington and his big band in 1943, and selections from this work were first recorded in 1944, the year in which Yehudi Menuhin gave the Bartók Solo Sonata its première in the same hall. Neither of the performances on this record will bear much resemblance to these memorable premières because in my opinion great music benefits from original interpretation, and being original is something every performer finds it impossible not to be.

The music of Ellington and Bartók has a timeless quality which makes it unnecessary to consult the preferences of past performers, just as the same qualities in Bach's music make it unnecessary to, or even necessary not to, shorten the neck of the violin and mimic the mannerisms of players in the early seventeen hundreds. It was with this attitude in mind that I performed these two great works for this record.

Introducing the record seems to be giving me the excuse to slip in some of my personal opinions about music, but in this case I think that they are relevant because I haven't seen any albums like this in the record shops before, and I

think in this way I can explain why Ellington and Bartók are ideal couplings for each other.

Although civilisation has progressed to the extent that no one now thinks that jazz is music that people make up as they go along because they've forgotten the notes, there are still a few classical music lovers who refuse to accept that jazz has produced and still produces great music. And there are also still a few jazz lovers who adhere to the simplistic argument that classical musicians are just playing notes by someone else and don't have the capability of original thought. In answer to the cynics in the jazz world I ask them to listen to the difference between two great creative interpreters like Gidon Kremer and Isaac Stern playing the same piece. If they can hear the difference, that proves my point. If they can't I conclude that their hearing is worse than Beethoven's and that therefore they come second best to at least one classical musician!

In answer to those who can't accept jazz in any form I put this proposition: jazz is in fact classical music. People like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Weather Report have all produced improvisations or compositions which have been recognised as classics. So in

that respect they are all classical musicians. If 'classical music' means truly great music, the musicians listed above belong in that category. If it doesn't, why should we be interested in it? I certainly believe Duke Ellington is a great composer, and he has been recognised as such by composers and performers in all fields of music. Bartók, in my opinion, is also one of the great composers. He was the only significant one of his generation who could continue along the lines of the great tradition set by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, instead of resorting to mathematical formulae. He is innovative at the same time as making the most profound statements.

It was in fact the Bartók Solo Sonata which I first decided to put on this record. I had played the piece frequently in public and felt that I and the audiences I was playing it to had a special relationship with it. It was thinking of another great work to go with it that presented me with problems in the beginning. There are other great works by Bartók, but none of them seem to match the mental strength of the Solo Sonata. Bartók has such a rich mixture of Hungarian folk-inspired melody integrated with great compositional architecture that most of the compositions by his contemporaries

would have sounded second best alongside it on this disc.

There was one obvious exception to this: Duke Ellington. He also used material inspired by his background and put it into bigger structures, one of the best examples being his *Black, Brown and Beige* Suite.

### Mainly Black

The first difference connoisseurs will notice between the original performance and the one on this record is the title, so here's another long explanation.

When Duke re-recorded *Black, Brown and Beige* in 1958 he omitted the material from the second and third parts of the suite (*Brown* and *Beige*) and used only the material from *Black*. I have done the same (believing that Ellington's judgement was made on musical grounds), except in the case of *The Blues* which comes from *Brown*. I have also created a few improvised sections based on two-chord relationships, mainly from *Come Sunday*, which join the different songs together. Except for *The Blues* and the two-chord passages all the material is from *Black*, so *Mainly Black* implies more about the musical content of the piece.

The other difference is, of course, the instrumentation. The original *Black, Brown and Beige* was written for big

band. Since this started as a solo violin album, I started by trying to arrange *Mainly Black* for violin alone, but apart from the fact that violin is far harder to play unaccompanied than piano or guitar (mainly because chords are less accessible), there was a more important reason for including bass on this record. Even the greatest exponents of solo instruments in the improvised music field lack that electricity given to the music by the fact that two (or more) musicians are listening to each other. In music as great as *Black, Brown and Beige* it was important not to lose that factor. I didn't want it to turn into just a clever violin piece. In music of this kind the bass must have strong rhythm, imagination, and melodic potential, so I feel very lucky that I was able to persuade Alec Dankworth to join me on this project.

Lastly, I must mention the contribution Ray Nance made to the 1958 Ellington recording of *Black, Brown and Beige*. It is some of the most beautiful violin playing I have ever heard, and his inspiration is another important reason why this music should appear on a violin record. In some places I have stuck quite closely to his solos because even in this context his statement is so relevant to the music.

### Bartók: Sonata for Solo Violin

Bartók's Solo Violin Sonata was his second to last composition, and the last major chamber work he wrote. Commissioned by Yehudi Menuhin, it was completed in 1943, a year before Bartók's death.

In his choice of titles for the four movements of his Solo Sonata, Bartók was clearly influenced by Bach. The comparisons technically and compositionally don't go much further than that, because after starting each of the movements in a style formally quite similar to Bach, Bartók's own personality and style soon assert themselves. The comparisons emotionally and musically are far closer. The whole music is far greater and deeper than the sum of the parts, and one can learn and feel more every time one listens to or performs it. This is probably because Bartók's grasp of harmony and musical architecture is on a par with Bach's. *Tempo di ciaccona*. Many musicologists have noticed that the chaconne rhythm is not prevalent after the first few bars. This might be true, but the underlying current of the chaconne is always there and is what holds the movement together. It is in sonata form with a contrasting melodic second subject. It's full of contrast and is particularly adventurous in the

development and recapitulation. *Fuga*. This is a barbaric four-part fugue. After the four fugal entries of the subject and the counter subject Bartók then develops them with increasing variation. It takes quite a few listenings before Bartók's imagination can be fully appreciated; it took me quite a few performances before I could play it! After reaching amazing heights Bartók brings us back to earth with the same menacing minor third which started the movement. *Melodia*. This movement is typical of Bartók's powers of communication through simple melodies. It is in ternary form (ABA). Bartók heightens the sense of space created by the melody by separating each statement with a simple motive played quietly, usually in harmonics. The middle section is played with a mute at a slightly faster tempo, incorporating breezy nocturnal passage work and double stops. The melody is then given a more rhapsodic quality. The movement finishes with the melody stated simply and stratospherically without mute.

*Presto*. To open this movement Bartók uses the same technique as Bach in his prestos. Running sixteenths are used to give shape as well as implying harmony. In this case the mood is very atmospheric. There are two contrasting

Hungarian episodes before the movement ends with considerable bravura, combining all its thematic elements.

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**Alec Dankworth** was born on 14 May 1960, the son of Cleo Laine and John Dankworth. He studied clarinet and saxophone at school and also played the bass guitar. In 1977 he studied clarinet at the Guildhall School of Music and the following year went to Boston, USA, to study bass guitar at Berklee College of Music. There he completed a two-year course in performance. In 1980 he returned to England and started playing the double bass. He joined his parents' quintet and toured the UK, USA and Australia as well as European cities such as Stuttgart, Monte-Carlo, Vienna, Belfast and The Hague.



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