



**Franz Koglmann
Lee Konitz
We Thought
About Duke**

We Thought About Duke

Ellington As Idea. There was only one Duke Ellington, but there are many different Ellingtons on display within the varied handiwork of his long, fantastically creative career. There was Ellington the entertainer, Ellington the businessman, Ellington the artist. Even as artist, there were various defining areas of work and inspiration – i.e. those scores characterized by improvisation and swing, some which can be heard as compositional tone poems, and still others which were primarily commercial work. It's all the product of a single man, but one with multiple sensibilities, so, if only for the sake of argument, let's consider Ellington not as a style, but as a force; a focal point of musical activity, an intersection of creative factors.

Don't think jazz. Ellington didn't. There's no doubt that he often worked in and was inspired by what we now call the jazz tradition, which was forming itself – and which he helped form – day by day throughout the period of his own lifetime. But he never limited himself to jazz or swing or entertainment. His ambitions went far beyond such boundaries, and he refused to label his work. Many critics have called him the master of the three-minute jazz composition, which could be considered a backhand compliment – not only a way of belittling his larger-scaled works, but in effect qualifying the variegated successes of such self-con-

tained gems of form and mood. (Too often a word like "small" or "miniature" is used with a pejorative connotation – is Webern's music compromised because he limited himself to concise, intricate forms of expression?) Listening to the enormous breadth of Ellington's output over the years one realizes he was creating a new type of music – intense, articulate forms magnificently scored by virtue of a unique view of sound (that is, a personal ear for harmony; the ability to integrate the individual solo attitudes of his musicians, most especially including their specific instrumental timbres; and the development of novel ways of combining and contrasting them though restricted, for the most part, by the instrumentation of the conventional big band). Gunther Schuller has compared Ellington with Ravel, Schönberg, Stravinsky, and Webern in his genius for obtaining "diverse sonorities" with a small (15 pieces or less) ensemble, and making these sonorities an integral part of his compositional aesthetic.

If the music on this disc is any indication, Franz Koglmann understands Ellington as a vortex – a center of energy drawing in inspiration from a wide variety of sources (internal and external) and his compositions flowing out in so many directions. As a composer Koglmann makes use of many of these same sources and resources, including the stability of a regular cast of musicians, which enables him to compose for specific sounds and particular abilities as did Ellington, famously. Still, one would not think that gives him license to rearrange Ellington. We don't look favorably on those who attempted to improve Bruckner by editing or reorchestrating his symphonies, or those who would complete Schubert's "Unfinished," much less those censors who painted clothes on the naked figures in Michelangelo's mural in the Sistine Chapel. Ellington, likewise, is sui generis, and any tampering with his music is heresy.

And yet Ellington himself was not above tinkering with his own acknowledged classics. For just one example, he

altered arrangement (the best being the first, for Okeh, featuring Bubber Miley's menacing trumpet and Baby Cox's vocalese. Subsequent versions found room for solos by Johnny Hodges; the third, for Bluebird, weakly substituting Arthur Whetsol's open horn for Miley's inimitable growl, but with Billy Taylor's tuba an important new presence). By 1940 the arrangement had been expanded even more, and an embarrassingly lame ending had been tacked on. In a 1952 remake even more solo spots were opened for Harry Carney and Hilton Jefferson (Hodges had temporarily left the band), with Ray Nance in the plunger role, Quentin Jackson doing his best to "yah-yah" with the efficacy of Tricky Sam Nanton, and effective use of paired clarinets (Jimmy Hamilton and Russell Procope), Paul Gonsalves' woozy tenor, and an episode of chilling ascending block chords from the pianist. (Fortunately the horrific ending was jettisoned.) After this, *The Mooche* was heard only in concert as the tail of a nostalgic '20s medley including "Black And Tan Fantasy" and "Creole Love Call."

Few others have had the audacity to approach *The Mooche* at all, save with extreme reverence. Even Sidney Bechet produced a faithful rendition, as the authentic growl trumpet and trombone parts, the careful reharmonization – and the lack of a Bechet solo! – branded it as a mood piece, not an interpretive vehicle.

Provocateur Steve Lacy's quartet version with pungent soprano saxes radically reharmonizing the theme proved eerie enough; a later duo found Mal Waldron creating an atmospheric piano orchestration, but they surprisingly softened the second theme. Koglmann's reconsideration of *The Mooche* here provides the key to his approach; the theme is audible, Lee Konitz and Tony Coe evoke the blues on alto sax and clarinet respectively, and valuable guitarist Burkhard Stangl echoes Lonnie Johnson behind Baby Cox on the original. In other words, the motif is the same, an authentic mood is maintained, the colors are similar. But the crucial insertion of rubato sections – passages of rhythmic and harmonic disorientation and recombination – allows Koglmann to develop alternative opinions about Ellington's music, crucially from the inside out.

Koglmann's homage to Ellington is not a case of echoing Duke's themes and simply soloing over the changes, as many talented musicians might do and have done. Nor is it a transcription or a translation, a reduction (despite the reduced forces) or in any way an equivalent of the original conceptions. What he has done is arrange "variations" which dramatically reinvent Ellington in a new context. These are not normal variations in the classical sense. They can be variations of Ellingtonian tonal shades and gestures, as in his reconfiguration of *Zweet Zurzday* from Suite Thursday (prompted by John Steinbeck's novel, a type of musical/literary inspiration Koglmann knows well) and *Love In My Heart*, a lesser item in the Ducal canon, where Koglmann deflates the "pop" quality of the tune with bitonality, unsynchronous phrasing, and an episode of free counterpoint. (On both, Tony Coe reminds us of his empathy for Paul Gonsalves' elastic, chromatic tenor-in *Zweet Zurzday* Ellington called it "... the fog that clouds [the landscape].) They can be variations of mood, as on *Lament For Javanette* (first recorded by a small group under Barney Bigard's name), whose title Koglmann takes literally; the opening and closing trumpet

sings a melancholy air related to Ben Webster's solo on the original, and the tune itself has been reconstructed, altering Duke's original symmetry for a fluid juxtaposition of profoundly blue hues – and his cubist fantasy on *Ko-Ko*, keeping the weight and measure of the brass and the rhythmic motto consistent until they explode into simultaneous perspectives of free counterpoint. Or they can be variations of motif and design. Witness Juan Tizol's *Pyramid*, in which the melody visits another foreign landscape a la "Caravan" in Duke's original 1938 scoring, but Koglmann borrows from the small group remake a few months later under Hodges' name. Konitz's alto strips the theme of its exoticism, and what's left is a linear strain suitable for brass counterpoint and hymn chords behind Konitz's solo. (As a parallel homage to Gil Evans, Koglmann has borrowed the bass line from Evans' 1948 arrangement of "La Paloma" for the Claude Thornhill Orchestra and adapted it to *Pyramid* – Lee Konitz, in the Thornhill band at that time, being the physical and conceptual link between the two.) Then there's Billy Strayhorn's remarkable *Dirge*. Apparently rejected by the composer after its performance at Ellington's 1943 Carnegie Hall concert, its

unmasked sorrow has seldom been addressed so directly in jazz. With the brass scoring emphasizing a Wagnerian funereal tinge and Konitz's solo a comforting balm, Koglmann's resurrection is a moving achievement.

It's appropriate that Koglmann has titled the three original pieces here *Thoughts About Duke*. Though of greatly differing characteristics (the first is a composed score for three brass, the others use its thematic material for open improvisation), they reflect the tonal integrity which Gunther Schuller heard in some of Ellington's unique pieces as structure inseparable from its content (and which Martin Williams labeled "form beyond form"). This in part resulted from the available palette of colors (musicians) Ellington composed with – and is why Lee Konitz and Tony Coe are so valuable here. It's impossible to completely exorcise the echoes of Hodges and Gonsalves, Bigard and the others that haunt this music, no matter how dramatically the material may be reorganized, and Konitz and Coe do not flinch from the challenge; their contributions intensify the connections and contrasts of Koglmann's concept without distorting it.

It may be unusual to offer such non-Ellington material in a program dedicated to his music, but as we have seen this is no ordinary tribute. It is a meditation on Ellingtonian virtues, with the courage and imagination to suggest that Ellington's music is more than mere perfection – it holds still untapped potential for inspiration and interpretation. Through intense interaction with these musicians and Lee Konitz and Franz Koglmann, Ellington's music breathes and changes and evolves. Ellington lives.

Franz Koglmann & Lee Konitz

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Monobiue Quartet

Tony Coe *clarinet, tenorsaxophone*
Franz Koglmann *trumpet, flugelhorn*
Burkhard Stangl *guitar*
Klaus Koch *bass*

&

Lee Konitz *altosaxophone*
on: 1, 3, 5, 6, 9

Pipe Trio

Franz Koglmann *trumpet, flugelhorn*
Rudolf Ruschel *trombone*
Raoul Herget *tuba*

&

Lee Konitz *altosaxophone*
on: 2, 4, 7, 8, 10 (4 without Lee Konitz)

All arrangements by Franz Koglmann; Franz Koglmann's compositions published by Tuhtah Publishing/Suisa.

A co-production WDR, Köln/Hat Hut Records Ltd., Therwil; Digital twentyfour-track recording by Peter Pfister at Tic-Music Studio, Achau on June 6–9, 1994; Mix and CD-master by Peter Pfister; Liner notes by Art Lange; Photo by Josef Werkmeister; Graphic concept by fuhrer vienna; Produced by Ulrich Kurth and Werner X. Uehlinger.

2002, Edition of 3000 CDs.
Printed by Gantenbein AG, CH 4127 Birsfelden
CD manufactured by SDC(Suisse) SA, CH 1337 Vallorbe
www.hathut.com

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| 1 | Lament For Javanette | 5:15 |
| | <i>by Duke Ellington</i> | |
| 2 | Ko-Ko | 4:14 |
| | <i>by Duke Ellington</i> | |
| 3 | Zweet Zurzday | 8:01 |
| | <i>by Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn</i> | |
| 4 | Thoughts About Duke I | 6:30 |
| | <i>by Franz Koglmann</i> | |
| 5 | Thoughts About Duke II | 4:34 |
| | <i>by Franz Koglmann</i> | |
| 6 | Love Is In My Heart | 5:29 |
| | <i>by Duke Ellington</i> | |
| 7 | Pyramid | 5:52 |
| | <i>by Juan Tizol</i> | |
| 8 | Thoughts About Duke III | 4:33 |
| | <i>by Franz Koglmann</i> | |
| 9 | The Mooche | 5:49 |
| | <i>by Duke Ellington</i> | |
| 10 | Dirge | 6:08 |
| | <i>by Billy Strayhorn</i> | |

Total Time DDD ²⁴Bit 56:25

**This recording is dedicated to
Ernst Jandl, the great Austrian
poet and aficionado of jazz.**

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