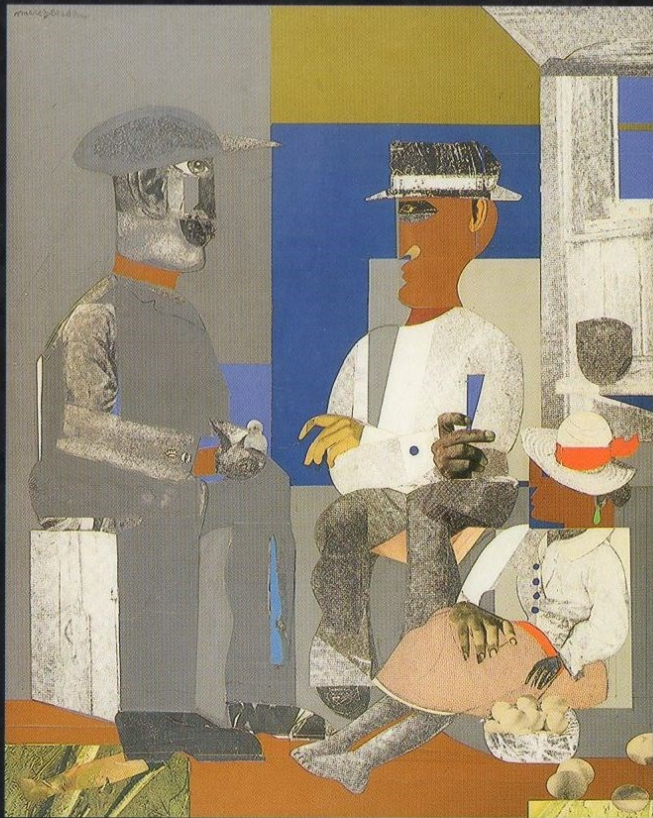


**DUKE
ELLINGTON
LIVE AT
THE
WHITNEY**



Live at The Whitney
DUKE ELLINGTON

Recorded Live at The Whitney Museum,
New York, New York, on April 10, 1972

- 1> Opening Remarks
- 2> Medley: Black and Tan Fantasy/Prelude to a Kiss/
Do Nothing 'till You Hear from Me/Caravan
- 3> Meditation
- 4> A Mural from Two Perspectives
- 5> Sophisticated Lady/Solitude

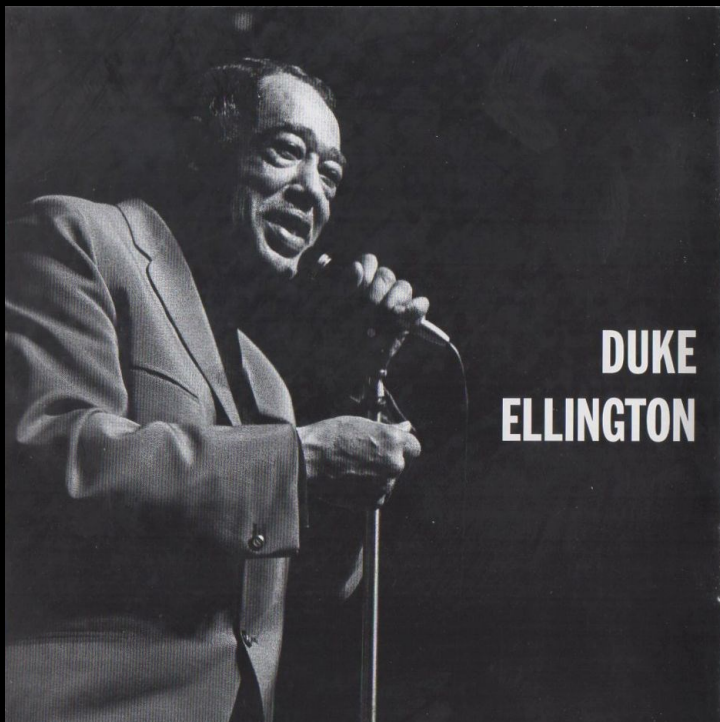
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- 6> Soda Fountain Rag
- 7> New World A-Coming
- 8> Amour, Amour
- 9> Soul Soothing Beach
- 10> Lotus Blossom
- 11> Flamingo
- 12> Le Sturier Velors
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- 15> Mood Indigo
- 16> I'm Beginning to See the Light
- 17> Dancers in Love
- 18> Kixx
- 19> Satin Doll

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And now,"

Duke Ellington would announce during a concert performance with his orchestra, "the piano player!"

Then, looking over his shoulder as if in search of the person he'd just introduced, he'd make his way back to the piano bench and treat his audience to an extended solo excursion, usually on "Rockin' in Rhythm," before cueing the band back in.

Though he was a marvelous pianist, it was only late in his long career that Ellington consented to give solo recitals. There are only three such events that we know of, and they all took place in New York. The first, in 1962, was part of the Jazz Profile series at the Museum of Modern Art, and Duke brought along his bassist, Aaron Bell, and his drummer, Sam Woodyard. The second, in 1964, was presented under the auspices of the Duke Ellington Society at Columbia University's Wollman

Auditorium. Woodyard and new bassist Peck Morrison were on hand, and the Maestro also called right-hand man Billy Strayhorn and mentor Willie "The Lion" Smith up from the audience to spell him at the keyboard.

The third—and last—was the event documented here: a Monday night concert at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in the Composers Showcase series produced by Charles Schwartz. The format of these concerts included discussion by the featured composer of his music, but those who expected a concert-lecture could not have been too well acquainted with Ellington. The great composer-bandleader-pianist, while never at a loss for words, was always reluctant to verbalize about music, especially his own. So, true to form, he let the music speak for him, and, also true to form, he brought his bassist and drummer along. While he most certainly didn't need them to generate rhythm, Ellington was loathe to hold the stage all by himself—perhaps the conditioning of more than a half century of bandleading.

If I remember correctly, the large and enthusiastic audience was seated on risers—the Whitney not then having an auditorium sufficiently capacious for such an occasion. It included *Flamingo* lyricist and old friend and confidant

Edmund Anderson, young Ellington amanuensis Brooks Kerr, right-hand man and noted critic Stanley Dance, and other notable Ellington friends, associates and admirers. The night before, many of us had been on hand not far from the Whitney, at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, to witness a performance of Ellington's most recent version of his "Sacred Concert." This had taken place the day after the band's return to New York from a seven-week tour of the U.S., which had begun immediately upon their completion of a 36-day odyssey that took them from Japan to Taiwan to the Philippines to Hong Kong to Thailand to Burma to India to Ceylon to Singapore to Malaysia to Indonesia, again to Singapore, then to Australia and New Zealand and finally to Hawaii! The night after the Whitney recital, Ellington was in Portland, Maine for a joint concert with the local symphony. Eight one-nighters later, he would celebrate his 73rd (and next-to-last) birthday one day late at Newark's Symphony Hall, greeted by 2,000 school children.

Is there any other composer-performer in history who kept such a schedule? Is it any wonder that the program he presented at the Whitney was off-the-cuff rather than carefully planned? The wonder is how effective it was, how effervescently the fabled Ellington charm flowed that



night, and how well he got those tired hands to work, after some warmup motions.

Ellington structured this recital as he would have a concert with his other instrument, the orchestra. Thus, there was music old and music new, music familiar and music seldom heard, all paced with a master's touch. (It should be noted that this CD does not contain the entire concert, though the sequence of what we hear is in the order performed. Ellington's music is the best documented in the annals of jazz, yet some sources mistakenly give the date of this recital as May 5, and there is disagreement as to what was actually performed. We do know from John S. Wilson's review in the New York Times that "Take the 'A' Train" and "La Plus Africaine" were included.)

What first strikes the listener is the sheer sound Ellington could elicit from a piano. Here he has a fine instrument, obviously perfectly tuned, at his disposal, but that special Ellington touch, as well as his often unorthodox voicings, no doubt developed in years of confronting pianos in varying states of decay and neglect. The occasional hint of stride (full-fledged on the "throwaway" **Soda Fountain Rag**) reminds us of Ellington's roots in the school of James P. Johnson, The Lion, and his somewhat younger contemporary, Fats Waller. But Ellington the pianist had

long since become his own man, with an orchestral conception and love of texture. His approach to harmony is in the full bodied romantic tradition, and he often makes abundant use of chromatics. And of course he almost always keeps the melody in view—Ellington wanted his music to sing.

Some form of **Medley** was always a feature of Ellington concerts—it was, among other things, a practical way to deal with requests. This one is unusual, juxtaposing **Black and Tan Fantasy** (one of the “jungle period” classics) with the tender ballad **Prelude to a Kiss**—both rendered out of tempo. Then comes **Do Nothin’ ’till You Hear from Me** (in tempo, but not yet swing) and the all-time hit **Caravan**, most rhythmic of the four. **Meditation**, from the Second Sacred Concert, had become a favorite keyboard feature for Ellington, nostalgic and ruminative.

A Mural from Two Perspectives is something of a rarity; this may be the only recorded version. It’s a captivating little piece. In contrast, **Sophisticated Lady** and **Solitude** are two of Ellington’s most famous pieces—he could play them in his sleep, but still manages to coax beauty from them. **Solitude** was a particular favorite of his, and he offers elaborate variations. **New World A-Coming**, the

longest piece here, took its title from Roi Otley’s optimistic 1943 book about the future of the American Negro. In its orchestral version, the piano played a featured role, and thus it translates readily and completely to the keyboard. (It was premiered at the December 1943 Carnegie Hall concert.) **Amour, Amour** and **Soul Soothing Beach** are from the Togo Brava Suite, one of Ellington’s last extended works. The 16-bar **Amour** is a dance pattern, and Duke reminds of Monk here at times. **Beach** has a sunny samba flavor.

Billy Strayhorn’s ultra-romantic **Lotus Blossom** became Ellington’s way of remembering his fallen comrade; it was always moving to hear. **Flamingo**, in its fine Strayhorn arrangement and with Herb Jeffries’ stylish vocal, was a big hit record for Ellington. **Le Sucrier Velour**, from the Queen’s Suite, is, according to the composer, “the name the French have for a bird whose song is sweet as sugar and who feels as soft as velvet.” **The Night Shepherd**, from the Second Sacred Concert, was a dedication to Pastor John G. Gensel, who ministered to the New York jazz community for decades, and hits a good groove—Ellington had a marvelous time. More good blues in **C Jam**, where again there are hints of Monk (who loved Duke’s piano).



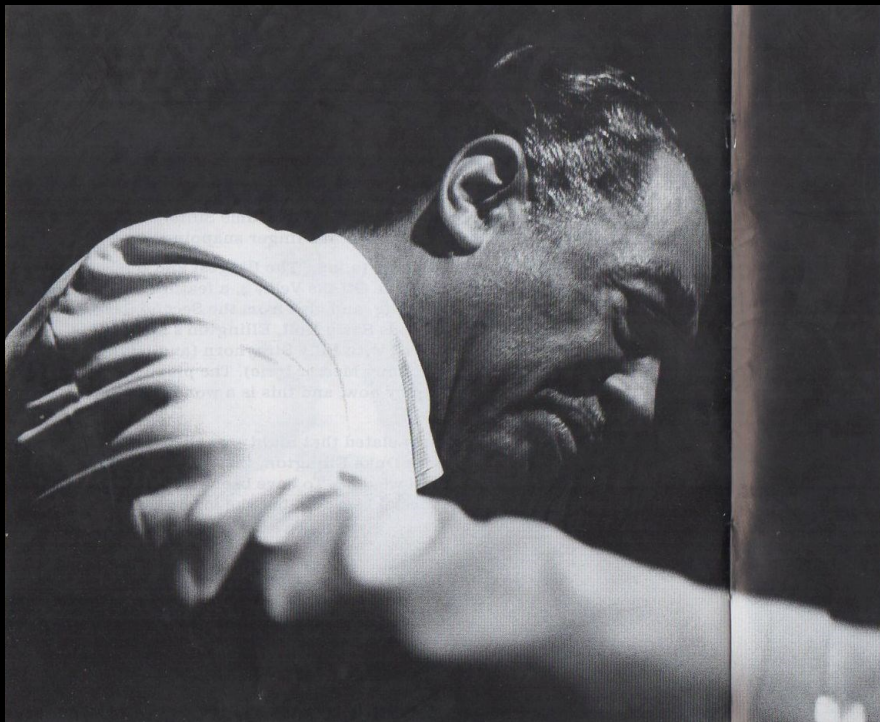
Mood Indigo, a classic, is treated to the richest Ellington hues, while **Beginning to See the Light** becomes the occasion for a sing-along. More audience participation ensues with **Dancers in Love**, from the Perfume Suite, in which it was a piano feature—here, it's finger snapping.

We conclude with **Kixx** (a.k.a. “The Biggest and Busiest Intersection” or “Come Off the Veldt”), a feature for Rufus Jones’ crisp drumming, and also from the Second Sacred Concert. The encore is **Satin Doll**, Ellington’s last big hit tune, co-authored with Billy Strayhorn (and later equipped with a Johnny Mercer lyric). The piano player is fully warmed up by now, and this is a wonderfully loose performance.

We left the Whitney elated that night—as always after spending time with Duke Ellington, that old magician of wit, warmth and wisdom. To have been in his presence was a special blessing, but the music contains all the magic!

Dan Morgenstern

Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University
August 1995



Personnel

Duke Ellington piano
Joe Benjamin bass
Rufus Jones drums

**Recorded Live at The Whitney Museum,
New York, New York, on April 10, 1972**
Digital Editing by Michael Landy at
The Review Room/NYC

Photography: Lee Tanner, The Jazz Image
Art Direction: Hollis King
Graphic design: Alba Acevedo

1. Opening Remarks 1:06**2. Medley: 6:51****Black and Tan Fantasy**

(Duke Ellington-Bubber Miley) EMI Mills Music, Inc. (ASCAP)

Prelude to a Kiss

(Irving Gordon-Irving Mills-Duke Ellington) EMI Mills Music, Inc. (ASCAP)

Do Nothing 'till You Hear from Me

(Duke Ellington-Bob Russell) EMI Robbins Catalog, Inc. (ASCAP)/Harrison Music Corp. (ASCAP)

Caravan

(Duke Ellington-Juan Tizol) EMI Mills Music, Inc. (ASCAP)

3. Meditation 2:39

(Duke Ellington) Famous Music Corp. (ASCAP)/Tempo/Music Sales Corp. (ASCAP)

4. A Mural from Two Perspectives 2:56

(Duke Ellington) Tempo/Music Sales Corporation (ASCAP)

5. Sophisticated Lady 4:44

(Duke Ellington-Mitchell Parish-Irving Mills) EMI Mills Music, Inc. (ASCAP)/Famous Music Corp. (ASCAP)

Solitude

(Duke Ellington-Irving Mills-Eddie DeLange) EMI Mills Music, Inc. (ASCAP)/Scarsdale Music Corporation (ASCAP)

6. Soda Fountain Rag 1:18

(Duke Ellington) Famous Music Corp. (ASCAP)/Tempo/Music Sales Corp. (ASCAP)

7. New World A-Coming 9:03

(Duke Ellington) G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP)

8. Amour, Amour 1:41

(Duke Ellington) Tempo/Music Sales Corp. (ASCAP)/Famous Music Corp. (ASCAP)

9. Soul Soothing Beach 2:51

(Duke Ellington) Tempo/Music Sales Corporation (ASCAP)/Famous Music Corp. (ASCAP)

10. Lotus Blossom 2:35

(Billy Strayhorn) Tempo/Music Sales Corporation (ASCAP)

11. Flamingo 1:35

(Ed Anderson-Ted Grouya) Edwin H. Morris & Co. (ASCAP)

12. Le Sucrier Velors 1:44

(Duke Ellington) Duke Ellington Music (ASCAP)

13. The Night Shepherd 2:45

(Duke Ellington) Tempo/Music Sales Corporation (ASCAP)/Famous Music Corp. (ASCAP)

14. C Jam Blues 3:04

(Duke Ellington) EMI Robbins Catalog, Inc. (ASCAP)

15. Mood Indigo 2:06

(Albany Bigard-Duke Ellington-Irving Mills) EMI Mills Music, Inc. (ASCAP)

16. I'm Beginning to See the Light 1:23

(Don George-Harry James-Johnny Hodges-Duke Ellington) Chappell & Co. (ASCAP)

17. Dancers in Love 2:13

(Duke Ellington) Tempo/Music Sales Corp. (ASCAP)/Famous Music Corp.

18. Kixx 1:35

(Duke Ellington) Tempo/Music Sales Corporation (ASCAP)/Famous Music Corp. (ASCAP)

19. Satin Doll 3:07

(Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn) Duke Ellington Music (ASCAP)





Cover: Eastern Barn, 1968
Romare Bearden (1912-1988)
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Joe Benjamin, bass
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THE NEXT WAVE
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