



1. **FOR ELLINGTON** (8:01)  
(By John Lewis; MJQ Music Inc., BML)
2. **JACK THE BEAR** (5:04)  
(By Duke Ellington; SBK Robbins Catalogue, ASCAP)
3. **PRELUDE TO A KISS** (5:05)  
(By Duke Ellington, Irving Gordon & Irving Mills; Mills Music Inc., ASCAP)
4. **IT DON'T MEAN A THING** (5:45)  
(By Duke Ellington & Irving Mills; Duke Ellington Music, ASCAP)
5. **KO-KO** (5:44)  
(By Duke Ellington; SBK Robbins Catalogue, ASCAP)
6. **MAESTRO E.K.E.** (5:37)  
(By Milt Jackson; MJQ Music Inc., BML)
7. **SEPIA PANORAMA** (5:32)  
(By Billy Strayhorn; SBK Robbins Catalogue, ASCAP)
8. **ROCKIN' IN RHYTHM** (6:33)  
(By Duke Ellington, Irving Mills & Harry Carney; Mills Music Inc./Duke Ellington Music, ASCAP)
9. **COME SUNDAY** \* (4:11)  
(By Duke Ellington; G. Schirmer, Inc., ASCAP)

\*BONUS TRACK

FULL DIGITAL RECORDING

**THE MODERN JAZZ QUARTET**  
**JOHN LEWIS**, piano; **MILT JACKSON**, vibraharp;  
**PERCY HEATH**, bass; **CONNIE KAY**, drums & percussion

PRODUCED BY NESUHI ERTEGUN

The first time I ever saw Duke Ellington's orchestra," says John Lewis, "it was 1939, when he brought his orchestra to play an engagement at the University of New Mexico, where I was studying."

"Of course I had heard the band on records long before that, and on the radio—perhaps before I was even in my teens. But this was a very special experience. It was before Jimmy Blanton had joined; Duke had two bass players, Hayes Alvis and Billy Taylor. Cootie Williams was still there. It was an extraordinary experience; I was so overawed that I didn't dare to introduce myself to Ellington."

There were, as Lewis noted, important ties between the band and the locale: Lawrence Brown, Duke's perennial trombonist (now the only survivor of that 1939 ensemble) was the son of a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, whose district included Albuquerque. Moreover, Ben Webster, who had joined the band when Lewis heard it again at the University a year later, had gone to school for a while in Albuquerque. "In fact," John recalls, "he was in school with a cousin of mine who was my first piano teacher."

During that second visit, John watched Ellington when he came in during the afternoon to the gym where the gig would be played later. "I think he was writing the arrangement for *Sidewalks Of New York*, and as I looked on from a distance I saw him pass the parts out to Juan Tizol, who copied the arrangement; and they played it that same night. So this was very, very impressive."

By that time, Lewis' fascination with the Ellington sound had induced him to transcribe *Warm Valley* and a few other works directly off the recordings, to be played by the band he was leading at the University. There were occasional glimpses of Duke again through the years; during a vacation in Hollywood in 1941, John got to see the short-lived but widely-praised Ellington musical *Jump For Joy*.

"Much later, around '49, I was playing piano in Illinois Jacquet's band at Billy Berg's. Illinois saw Duke come in the club and asked him to sit in at the piano. Oddly enough, I wasn't very impressed

with his accompanying!

"I didn't really get to know him well until I was working with the Monterey Jazz Festival. Actually, knowing him wasn't that important; for me, in the case of people who are my idols, it's enough just to be familiar with their work. But at Monterey he had to stay over for some TV thing they were doing, and we had dinner backstage together and enjoyed a pleasant conversation.

"Ellington was a master for all time, but the most exciting things that happened for me, I guess, until I went into the Army in 1942, were those pieces in the late 1930s and early '40s; they were all masterpieces, and as you know, I've drawn on them for several of the pieces in this album."

The concept of an album by the Modern Jazz Quartet using material by Ellington (along with two original works inspired by him) has a very special logic, for Lewis and Ellington had one notable characteristic in common. Both men could establish a composition, keep it in the library, then update it continuously over the years in order to keep it fresh and viable. One has only to think how many times John Lewis has rewritten *Django*, or how often Duke found a new variation on *Rockin' In Rhythm*, to realize the degree to which this accentuated their genius.

Veteran Ellington students will observe that John Lewis has not merely gone through the often overfamiliar motions of taking a theme and simply adapting it to the style of the group performing it. His concept transcended that ploy by using, in several instances, substantial renovations of passages not only from the theme but from Duke's original orchestral arrangements.

Anyone who remembers Ellington's *The Flaming Sword* will notice a resemblance between its introduction and the first six notes of John's own work, *For Ellington*. The piece begins as a waltz, with John establishing a singularly hypnotic mood through tremolos and an occasional Earl Hines-like articulation. Milt Jackson's solo in 4/4 doubles the meter, then slows it down. There is one notable moment when the quartet is in suspension, on a diminished chord, just before Percy Heath plays the melody; then the original 3/4 motif with Lewis and Jackson reappears.

*Jack The Bear*, the very first orchestral piece to make prominent use of Jimmy Blanton after he had joined the band (Duke recorded it in March 1940) follows the old version quite closely, with Bags offering responses to John's calls. Percy Heath will remind Ellingtonians of the catalytic Blanton role; the final four bars, in fact, are identical to those on the original. Like so many Ellington works, this has a blues foundation, but its form is more complex than a mere succession of 12 bar choruses.

John sums it up succinctly: "It was so ingenious—instead of just saying, 'Okay, I'll put in a bass solo here,' Duke used Blanton as if he were adding a completely new section to the orchestra. I don't think anybody really caught on to what he was doing or how innovative this was—an astonishing, marvelous concept."

*Prelude To A Kiss*, with John's gentle, Bach prelude-like intro, is of slightly earlier vintage, having been introduced by the orchestra in 1938. Occasional pauses add dramatic impetus to Milt Jackson's tenderly affectionate treatment before John has a solo interlude in the understated manner that has long been one of his most precious personality traits.

*It Don't Mean A Thing* served to introduce Ivie Anderson as the Ellington vocalist in 1932; subsequently it was used as a vocal for countless other singers. "For this tune," John says, "I thought it would be a good idea to give as much to Connie Kay as possible; but I also tried to do something harmonically different with it. Also, we never actually did play the bridge per se, though you can recognize its chord changes."

*Ko-Ko* was one of the all-time Ellington masterpieces. Recorded on the same day as *Jack The Bear*, it was built on a minor blues, in a call-and-response pattern with Milt offering the reply to John's four-note statements. The fidelity to the original is maintained still further by the assigning of Harry Carney's role to Percy Heath. The bass breaks also follow the Blanton lines, leading to a superbly dramatic Lewis-Jackson unison and a magisterial finale. John observes: "This was another instance of Duke's use of relatively little basic material, but exploiting it and expanding it so you feel you can never get enough."

The Milt Jackson composition *Maestro E.K.E.* opens with Milt, supported by John's kicking syncopated accents; John then plays a thematic pattern in breaks and subsequently in straight 4/4. Percy has a simple and effective melodic interlude; Bags returns to the head with piano and bass in appropriate fills, and the minor performance ends on a major chord—something my music teacher used to tell me is a *Tierce de Picardie*.

A half-forgotten fact about *Sepia Panorama* is that Duke Ellington used it for a while as his radio theme, after the original *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* and before *Take The A Train*. This too is blues-based, and again Percy Heath is employed much the way Blanton was in the 1940s version. As in so much of this extraordinary album, one is reminded of the extent to which a hornless quartet has been made to function virtually in the manner of a full orchestra.

*Rockin' In Rhythm* was first recorded by Duke as far back as 1930, but John says he was particularly inspired by the famous Paris Concert album version, recorded in 1963. By that time Duke had added so many choruses of piano-and-rhythm warmup that this segment acquired an identity and title of its own as *Kinda Dukish*. John follows a somewhat analogous pattern, but with the use of riffs with drum breaks in the first chorus, John in two choruses with more breaks, then riffs again, this time with breaks by Percy. Milt has two choruses before we finally get to the actual major and minor themes of *Rockin' In Rhythm*. "Sure," John concedes, "I got the inspiration from Duke to add to the piece by ad libbing for a while."

For the Compact Disc only, John plays a piano version of Duke's empyrean *Come Sunday*, best remembered as a Johnny Hodges passage in the original *Black, Brown And Beige* as introduced by Duke at the first Carnegie Hall concert in 1943. Here (and elsewhere in the album) John instills a little touch of Duke's religious side.

It should be added that these comments are not intended to imply that a knowledge of the Ellington works is essential to either an understanding or appreciation of what John Lewis and his per-

ennial colleagues have accomplished here. It may well happen, on the contrary, that many listeners, fascinated by what the M.J.Q. has achieved, will search out these time-proof Ellington masterworks, some or all of which may have been unfamiliar to them until now. By bringing to these works a new and brilliant face for the future, John Lewis may well succeed in drawing attention to their glorious and ineradicable past.

LEONARD FEATHER

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John Lewis plays a Steinway piano.

Art direction: Bob Defrin

Management: Monte Kay

Recording Engineer: Mike Moran

Recorded at RCA Studio, New York, February 1-3, 1988

CD Mastering by Stephen Innocenzi, Atlantic Studios, NYC.

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EAST-WEST

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**E-W**

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