



# THELONIOUS MONK plays the music of Duke Ellington

THELONIOUS MONK, piano  
OSCAR PETTIFORD, bass

KENNY CLARKE, drums

This unusual and remarkable album, recorded in 1955, was, at the time, a "first" in several ways. It was the first twelve-inch contemporary jazz LP issued by **Riverside** – making it a very suitable starting point for what has become a distinguished list of jazz albums. It was also the first of several highly significant and widely appreciated LPs recorded for **Riverside** by Thelonious Monk. Lastly, it was planned as the start of a campaign that has long since been won: a campaign to overcome the fears of those who had previously made the mistake of feeling that Monk was "too difficult" and "too far out" for them. To bring him to the attention of this broad audience seemed doubly desirable: it would bring pleasure and rewarding musical stimulation to many previously self-depriving listeners; and it could help gain for Monk the broad and deep credit and acceptance that he deserved as one of the true creative giants of jazz.

This compact, in which Thelonious for the first time offered a program entirely made up of standard material, appeared at first to leave some reviewers a bit confused and discomfited – perhaps because they were unable to adjust their stereotypes of Monk as a "mad genius" to conform with the reality of his ability to interpret the works of another composer inventively, lucidly and with respect. Actually, the premise of the LP was simple enough. It derived from a conviction that a good part of the problem of the jazz artist who (as was at that time the case with Monk) is considered excessively "far out" is tied in with the playing of material that is unfamiliar to the "average" ear. This is not to deny the vast importance of original compositions in jazz creativity. But it can be extremely helpful to know the precise structural and melodic starting point for a musician's improvisations. Communication between performer and audience is, fater all, rather important; and to perhaps more listeners than might care to admit it out loud, the initial identification of knowing the tune can turn out to be at least half the battle.

To give this compact a certain unity of mood, and to insure worthwhile material for Monk to work with, it was suggested that the standard compositions he'd stick to be selected from the works of Duke Ellington, himself a major force for a quarter-century, and certainly a man for whose achievements most jazz modernists have more than a little respect. Thelonious readily approved the whole idea. He retired briefly with a small mountain of Ellington sheet music; in due course he reported himself ready for action: and thus this LP was born.

Although Monk surely remains his usual unfettered musical self here, he has not make the mistake of treating Duke's compositions merely as vehicles. They have too much character and strength for that; they serve in each case to suggest a logical direction for Monk to travel. Thus, for example, **Black and Tan** is fittingly treated as a funky blues, **Caravan** becomes a weird flight of fancy, and **Solitude** – played as an unaccompanied piano solo – is a mood-piece of almost painful poignancy.

Thelonious is aided to no small degree by two exceptionally gifted associates. Oscar Pettiford is among the finest bass players around today; he has probably done more than anyone since Jimmy Blanton to create and shape the modern bass style. Kenny Clarke worked with Monk in the house band at Minton's during the early-1940s days when bop was first developing; he deserves to be ranked near Thelonious, Bird and Dizzy among the basic formulators of modern jazz, and he remains high on anyone's list of top drummers. These three men begin with the dicided advantage of knowing each other and each other's music so well that fitting together is almost a matter of instinct. With such support, and with the rich fullness of Ellington's music to work from. Thelonious is able to display at their best his distinctive and remarkable attributes; a firm, swinging beat; a spare, precise, yet actually highly lyrical approach; flashes of sardonic humor; and an unequalled flair for unexpected but thoroughly logical improvisation.

"Thelonious Monk plays Duke Ellington" has proved to be a pioneering album. Its significance has by now been recognized, and over the next few years several succeeding LPs (offering Monk's treatments both of standards and of his own brilliant originals) met with ever-increasing success and near-unanimous acclaim. Also, Thelonious' increasing frequent appearances at concerts, festivals and night clubs helped bring him more and more firmly to the fore. By the Summer of 1958 (to pick out a specific reference point), Monk was drawing record-breaking crowds in his

second lengthy stay at New York's Five Spot Cafe, and his resurgence had even gone so far as to captivate that formerly skeptical group known as "the critics" – he had won out over Erroll Garner as top-rated pianist in the 1958 **Down Beat Critics' Poll**.

Such happenings have led us at **Riverside** to recognize that Monk's audience – which is a still-widening one – has clearly become many times broader than it was when this compact was first issued. With this new audience in mind, we have now repackaged these eight classic Monk performances – using as the cover a reproduction of "The Repeat of the Lion," a striking painting by the French "primitive" modernist Henri Rousseau.

Monk's other **Riverside** LPs include – **5 by Monk by 5**: Thelonious Monk Quintet; with Thad Jones (RLP 12-305). **The Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall** (RLP 12-300). **Misterioso** (RLP 12-279) and **Thelonious in Action** (RLP 12-262): Thelonious Monk Quartet; with Johnny Griffin. **Mulligan Meets Monk**: Thelonious Monk and Gerry Mulligan (RLP 12-247). **Monk's Music**: Thelonious Monk Septet; with Coleman Hawkins, Art Blakey, John Coltrane (RLP 12-242). **Thelonious Himself**: solo piano (RLP 12-235). **Brilliant Corners**: Thelonious Monk, with Sonny Rollins, Ernie Henry, Clark Terry (RLP 12-226). **The Unique** Thelonious Monk (RLP 12-209).

He is also featured on – **In Orbit**: Clark Terry Quartet, with Thelonious Monk (RLP 12-271).

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THELONIOUS MONK / PLAYS DUKE ELLINGTON

- 1 IT DON'T MEAN A THING IF IT AIN'T GOT THAT SWING** 4'36  
(MILLS-ELLINGTON)
- 2 SOPHISTICATED LADY** 4'27  
(ELLINGTON)
- 3 I GOT IT BAD AND THAT AIN'T GOOD** 5'52  
(WEBSTER - ELLINGTON)
- 4 BLACK AND TAN FANTASY** 3'23  
(ELLINGTON - MILEY)
- 5 MOOD INDIGO** 3'13  
(ELLINGTON - MILLS - BIGARD)
- 6 I LET A SONG GO OUT OF MY HEART** 5'39  
(NEMO - MILLS - ELLINGTON)
- 7 SOLITUDE** 3'41  
(DELANGE - MILLS - ELLINGTON)
- 8 CARAVAN** 5'55  
(ELLINGTON - MILLS - TIZOL)

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