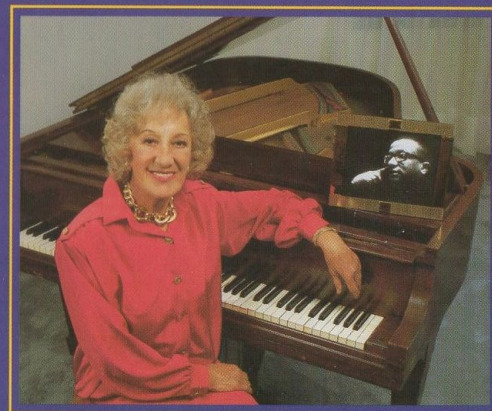




Marian McPartland

plays the music of

Billy Strayhorn



CCD-4326

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Plays The Music Of Billy Strayhorn

MARIAN McPARTLAND PIANO

JERRY DODGION ALTO SAXOPHONE

STEVE LA SPINA BASS

JOEY BARON DRUMS

1. INTIMACY OF THE BLUES (4:21)
2. ISFAHAN (6:41)
3. LOTUS BLOSSOM (3:18)
4. RAINCHECK (3:39)
5. LUSH LIFE (3:38)
6. U. M. M. G. (4:19)
7. A FLOWER IS A LOVESOME
THING (6:18)
8. TAKE THE 'A' TRAIN (3:43)
9. DAY DREAM (3:12)
10. AFTER ALL (5:42)

All selections composed by Billy Strayhorn and published by Tempo Publishing—ASCAP, except "Day Dream," published by SBK-Robbins—ASCAP

All songs arranged by Jerry Dodgion.

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Marca Registrada

Produced by Carl E. Jefferson
Assistant Producer: Allen Farnham
Recorded at Penny Lane Studios, New York
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Recording Engineer: Ed Trabanco
Assistant Engineer: Carrie Wassenaar
Remixed at PER, Hayward, CA
Remix Engineer: Phil Edwards

Mastered by George Horn
Cover Photograph: David Lubarsky
Art Direction: Tom Burgess

Marian McPartland plays a Baldwin piano.
Portrait of Billy Strayhorn on cover courtesy
of Pastor John Gensel.

Marian McPartland has many albums,
cassettes and Compact Discs on the Con-
cord label. For a complete list, please send
for catalog: Concord Records, P.O. Box 845,
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"MARIAN McPARTLAND PLAYS THE MUSIC
OF BILLY STRAYHORN" is also available in
LP and Cassette.



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The fact that Marian McPartland has chosen on this outstanding recording to celebrate the genius of Billy Strayhorn comes as no surprise to me. Born William Thomas Strayhorn and known lovingly as "Sweet Pea" to his cronies, his is a name that is all but inseparable from that of Duke Ellington with whom he composed and arranged over a timespan stretching from the late 1930s until Strayhorn's untimely death in 1967. Mrs. McPartland has in the past given us small doses of her way with a Strayhorn piece and it is nothing less than delicious to have the full recital here.

The collaboration between Strayhorn and Ellington was so closely intertwined during those productive years that telling them apart, even for the most knowing aficionado, was at times all but impossible. How well I remember my own wonder and joy when "Chelsea Bridge" and "Take The 'A' Train" reached my ears. No matter that out in Danville, Illinois, the titles seemed as remote and foreign to me as the Steppes of Russia. Most of the tunes in this set have been recorded by the Ellington orchestra and, like Strayhorn himself, they are at once complex and pure, aggressive but shy, slyly comical but profoundly melancholy. They are also haunting, lonely and relentlessly sentimental.

Never are they facile. Above everything else, they are contrived with matchless intelligence and awareness and will provide musicians for generations to come with a challenge not frequently found in today's jazz world. The Duke has spoken of the Strayhorn honesty. . . not only to himself but to others as well. . . and this quality is also salient in the Strayhorn *oeuvre*. These challenges are met glowingly here. Marian has applied her remarkable talents with her usual assurance and flair, having assembled some fine musicians to round out the sound she desires. The results are pure gold.

The set begins with **Intimacy of the Blues**, a rollicking affair which brings to my mind the term "to signify." In my youth this was a sly invitation to ease into the Dirty Dozens, an exchange of verbiage never meant for Mama's ears and which dates back to plantation days. This is Billy Strayhorn having a ball with a classic jazz form and, like the Dirty Dozens, it becomes a kind of game with the group displaying superb musicianship all the way.

We are introduced to the lovely **Isfahan** by way of Marian's lead on piano which is joined by Jerry Dodgion's fine alto saxophone. Steve La Spina is heard with a faultless bass solo.

One of Strayhorn's last compositions, **Lotus Blossom**, is the first piano solo on this collection. It is played exquisitely here and without frills . . . exactly as it should be.

Raincheck, a staple today in many jazz books, is a flip Strayhorn displaying that special brand of humor again. The entire quartet swings on this one and there are some particularly tasteful exchanges between drummer Joey Baron and bassist Steve La Spina.

Strayhorn's brooding ballad, **Lush Life**, becomes a work for piano, bass and drums. In her forthcoming book, "ALL IN GOOD TIME," Marian has written that knowing the lyrics to a song can often provide the player with a better understanding of the composer's intent, a notion fully evident when one listens to this cut.

U.M.M.G. (Upper Manhattan Medical Group) is slightly reminiscent of Strayhorn's piece, "Tonk." It's an elegant excursion, luring adverturous soloists into dangerously interesting territory. It is handled here with the kind of throwaway perfection typical of Mrs. McPartland.

Strayhorn's abiding sense of harmonics is displayed once more on **A Flower is a Lovesome Thing**, a composition introduced by Johnny Hodges.

The familiar **Take The 'A' Train** (which later became the

Duke's signature) takes off right on time. The group has chosen to allow the melody to surface only after some amusing detours. It swings.

Day Dream, another tune long associated with Johnny Hodges' melting version, is presented as a piano solo, demonstrating once again Marian's total involvement with the musical mosaic laid down by Billy Strayhorn.

One of Strayhorn's loveliest compositions ever, **After All**, quite correctly presents the Dodgion alto again, and is the signoff in this unique recital. Originally a showpiece for Johnny Hodges and the Ellington aggregation, the only accompaniment here is the McPartland piano.

Billy Strayhorn was never a man of many words. When something displeased him about the way his songs were performed he was tactful and gentle in correcting the performer. It was easy to tell when he was delighted. That grin covered his face and the eyes took on a twinkle. I'm sure he'd be grinning that grin at the likes of what Marian McPartland has accomplished in this program. I certainly am.

BOBBY SHORT



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