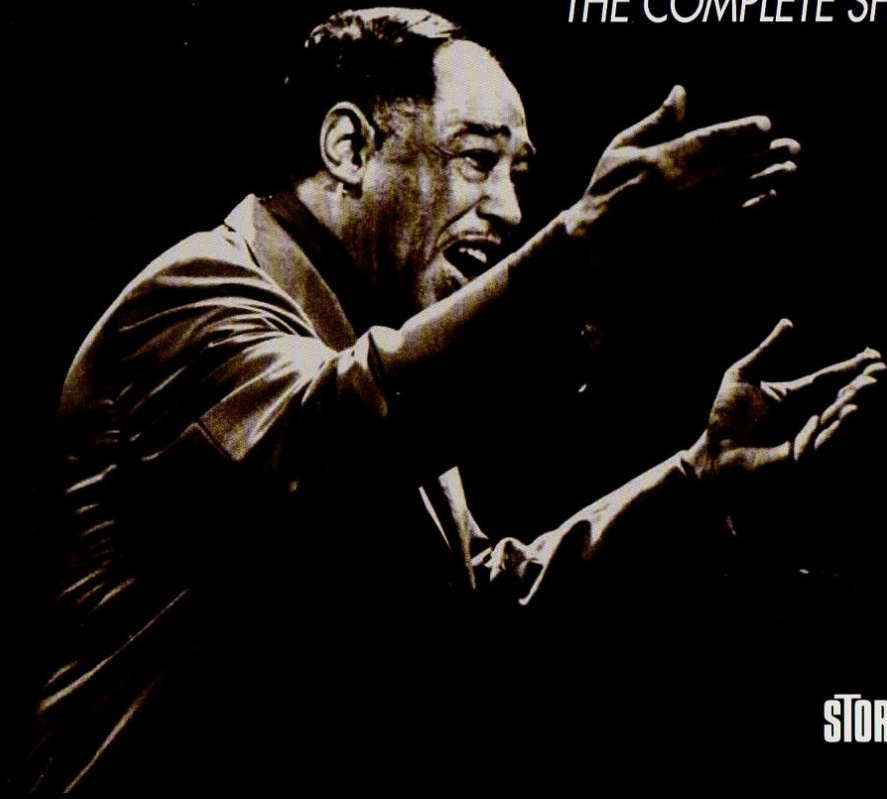


DUKE ELLINGTON'S MY PEOPLE

THE COMPLETE SHOW



STORYVILLE



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DUKE ELLINGTON'S MY PEOPLE

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CD
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THE COMPLETE SHOW

DUKE ELLINGTON'S MY PEOPLE

THE COMPLETE SHOW



STORYVILLE

DUKE ELLINGTON'S MY PEOPLE - ORIGINAL CAST - THE COMPLETE SHOW

1. **Jungle Triangle #1** Duke Ellington 2:24*
2. **Come Sunday** Duke Ellington 3:16
3. **Will You Be There/99% Won't Do**
Duke Ellington 3:11
4. **Ain't But No One** Duke Ellington 2:51
5. **David Danced** Duke Ellington 2:58
6. **Heritage (My Mother, My Father
And Love) #1** Duke Ellington 3:21*
7. **After Bird Jungle** Duke Ellington 3:34*
8. **Montage** Duke Ellington 6:56
9. **My People (Soap Box)** Duke Ellington 3:05
10. **The Blues Ain't** Duke Ellington 5:50
11. **Blues At Sundown** Duke Ellington 2:15*
12. **Walking And Singing The Blues**
Duke Ellington - Lil Greenwood 2:36*
13. **Working Blues** Duke Ellington 2:01
14. **My Man Sends Me** Duke Ellington 1:21
15. **Jail Blues** Duke Ellington 1:58
16. **I Love My Lovin' Lover**
Duke Ellington 2:24*
17. **Jungle Triangle #2** Duke Ellington 3:45*
18. **King Fit The Battle Of Alabam**
Duke Ellington 3:24
19. **King** Duke Ellington 5:20*
20. **Purple People** Duke Ellington 1:39*
21. **What Color Is Virtue** Duke Ellington 2:50
22. **Purple People - Music** Billy Strayhorn 2:09*
23. **Piano Blues Overture**
Duke Ellington 2:52*
24. **Strange Feeling**
Duke Ellington - Billy Strayhorn 4:06*
25. **Heritage (My Mother, My Father
And Love) #2** Duke Ellington 2:57

Total time:79:08

*An * indicates a piece or take not on the original issue.*

Collective personnel:

*Bill Berry, Ziggy Harrell, Nat Woodard, Ray Nance (tp);
Britt Woodman, Booty Wood, John Sanders (tb);
Russell Procope, Rudy Powell (as & cl); Harold Ashby,
Pete Clarke (ts); Bob Freedman (bs), Jimmy Jones
(cond. & p), Billy Strayhorn (cel & p), Joe Benjamin (b),
Louis Bellson (dr), Emmanuel Abdul Rahim AKA
Juan Amaibert (cg), Joya Sherrill, Lil Greenwood,
Jimmy McPhail, Jimmy Grissom, The Irving Bunton
Singers (voc), Bunny Briggs (tap dancing),
Richele Le Noir Guilmetet (narration),
Duke Ellington (narration).
Directed by Duke Ellington.
Chicago, August 20, 21 & 27, 1963.*

DUKE ELLINGTON'S MY PEOPLE - THE COMPLETE SHOW

This CD is living history. It's history because of the historical events it commemorates. It is living because of the music, beautiful, strong and worthwhile in it's own right - now as 50 years ago.

For the first time we have here in splendid studio recordings the show as it was staged in Chicago in August 1963, with over 40% more music than there was on the original LP and later CD reissues.

1963 was the centennial of the Emancipation Declaration, as issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1st in the second year of the civil war. The proclamation declared, that "all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free". Even if the declaration only directly applied to the rebellious states, it became a symbolic event, and made the ongoing civil war a war for freedom as well. And black men were accepted into the Union army and navy, thus joining this fight for freedom.

To celebrate the centennial an exhibition "A Century of Negro Progress" was presented at McCormick Place, Chicago from August 16th to September 2nd 1963, and Duke Ellington was invited to make a contribution to

the exhibition. The resulting show "My People" was conceived, written and staged by Duke Ellington, as the advertising billboard read, to be presented at the 5,000-seats Arie Crown Theatre twice daily on workdays, with three shows on Saturdays and Sundays.

According to Mercer Ellington there wasn't enough money involved to support the Duke Ellington orchestra, so a 16 piece orchestra, conducted by Jimmy Jones, who also had the piano chair, played instead. This brilliant band, which included many former and future Ellington band members had a central role in the show, and was put onstage to contribute to the overall visual picture on the huge scene, together with the choir The Irving Bunton Singers, The Tally Beatty Dancers, The Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre and the soloists, including tap-dancer Bunny Briggs, and singers Lil Greenwood, Joya Sherrill, Jimmy McPhail and Jimmy Grissom.

In his autobiography "Music Is My Mistress" Duke Ellington writes about the show: "Working from all angles at once in music and the theatre was the greatest kind of fun for me. I wrote the music, words, and orchestrations for My People, directed it, and did everything but watch the loot, which was good for the

people who did. – I was writing the music for this show and for the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, Stratford, Ontario, production of *Timon of Athens* at the same time. This meant going to Stratford to work, flying into Chicago to rehearse the choirs of Irving Bunton and Charles Moore [choir master], doing my one-nighters with the band in between."

Mercer Ellington adds: "He not only constructed the lighting and everything else on stage, he painted the sets, and drew out the whole." (Interview 1990).*

In an interview conducted by me in 2001, congas player Emmanuel Abdul Rahim (AKA Juan Amalbert, which he called himself at the time) tells about the production: "Tally Beaty, choreographer in *My People* recommended me to The Maestro, to play and write percussion for *My People*. He [Ellington] came to me personally, and asked me to join the band. There were three recording dates - at night after the performance. We played at day and went to the studio at night. He had Tom Whaley and the pianist Jimmy Jones.

Ellington was both at the rehearsals and at the performances. Jimmy did the conducting at the theatre, and Ellington did the conducting in the studio - with Billy Strayhorn. Billy Strayhorn was also on the recording, playing celeste. Tom Whaley did the copying of the

music, in fact Tom Whaley was the alter ego. He was the man who stayed up all night, rewriting the music, or orchestrating it for Ellington for the next day. All of the music for *My People* was written. On stage he [Ellington] was still writing it. There was a little room with a piano on stage with a curtain. While we were rehearsing the music he was still in there, writing, and Tom Whaley was still around getting the music copied, so we would have it the next day."

Duke Ellington wrote the lyrics and most of the arrangements himself. Billy Strayhorn wrote one number for the show, the background music for *Purple People*. Strayhorn's piece *Strange Feeling* from *The Pertume Suite* by Ellington-Strayhorn, was considered for the show, and recorded with the band. Eventually none of these two numbers were used. They are included here as bonus tracks. Billy Strayhorn did however have a role in the production, rehearsing the band and the choir, when Ellington had other commitments, and he was credited on the theatre billboard and the LP sleeve with the words "Orchestra under the personal supervision of Billy Strayhorn".

The musical numbers and their succession on this CD strictly follow the only known live recording of the show, as it was performed on the 25th of August 1963. This recording was found on a cassette tape in Mercer Ellington's collection.



Jimmy Jones, Tom Whaley & Billy Strayhorn

The sound quality of the tape is very poor, and unfit for a commercial release, but the tape is invaluable to document how the show was performed. All numbers on the tape except two were also recorded in the studio during the three recording sessions in Chicago August 1963, the 20th, the 21st, and the 27th, so it has been possible to recreate the (almost) complete performance in great sound quality. One missing number is an introduction to the show played by Emmanuel Rahim on congas, ending with the *Jungle Triangle* motif played by the band. As it forms a very strong sort of "African" opening of the show we - the CD producers - have taken the liberty to put an outtake of *Jungle Triangle* as the starting number, to establish the intended frame of the show. The other "missing" number is a version of *Guitar Amour*, known from the 1961 film *Paris Blues*. No proper substitute for this has been available. It seems to have been added late during the production, probably as music for a dance number. Some pieces (*Come Sunday, Montage, and The Blues Ain't*) originated in the 1943 suite, *Black, Brown and Beige*, and are heard here in new arrangements. Other pieces were specifically written for *My People*, and later recycled in other connections.

Duke Ellington stated in an interview August 1963 in *Down Beat* Magazine that the show was conceptualized in two parts, the spiritual

aspect of African American life, and the blues, reflecting the daily trials and tribulations of work and love. On a more detailed level the show seems to be in five parts: The African background (1), the spiritual section (2-5), the historical section (6-9), the blues section (10-16), and the modern section (17-21) with the civil rights movement and the color issue. As always Duke Ellington in *My People* chose the strategy to emphasize the positive achievements of black people to American life, like in his *Soap Box* piece, rather than to protest against injustice. And when he did protest, he would do so in a subtle way, like in the allegorical tale *Purple People*, or the closing number *What Color Is Virtue?*. The piece most directly dealing with the ongoing civil rights fight and protest movement is *King Fit The Battle Of Alabam*. But also here he chose the positive angle, making the piece a tribute to one of the key figures of the movement, Martin Luther King.

Duke Ellington did meet Martin Luther King in Chicago. Marian Logan (civil rights activist and wife of Ellington's doctor Arthur Logan) tells in an interview by BBC: "I introduced him to Dr. Martin Luther King on a windy corner on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Martin is sitting in his limousine, and he looks up, and he sees Edward [Duke] and jumps out of the car. And he runs over to him and they embrace like they were old friends...[Edward] said let's go over

to McCormick Place, where Strayhorn was rehearsing the cast [of *My People*]. He says: Strays, put on "Bam". And they came out with King Fought The Battle Of Birmingham, and that was the song Edward had written. King was very moved." *

Ellington himself said about the show in an interview 1963 for *Variety*: "Only one minute of social protest is written into its script, because while this aspect warrants notice, it unfairly tends to overshadow the continuing contribution of the Negro to American life. *My People* is definitely not political. It has social significance, but the accent [is] on entertainment." *

The theme of the exhibition in Chicago was to show "a century of negro progress", and this was exactly what Duke Ellington wanted to accomplish with his show, in a way that was entertaining as well as thought-provoking. Listening to *My People* almost 50 years after the centennial I think it is clear that he succeeded in both. For me, who only knew the show from the incomplete LP issue, *My People* stands even stronger now, when we hear it almost as complete as it was conceived.

*Quotes from Stuart Nicholson, *Reminiscing In Tempo* (Sidgwick & Jackson 1999).

Here is a rundown of the numbers on this CD. An * indicates a piece or take not on the original issue.

1. *Jungle Triangle* #1 (rec. August 20th, track - 60).*

The show starts off with a "sort of Afro dance number" as Ellington described it in *Music Is my Mistress*. The music was mainly a congas solo by Emmanuel Rahim, with the band playing the *Jungle Triangle* motif at the end. A recording of this was not found on the studio tapes, so instead we have put an outtake of *Jungle Triangle* as the opening number, to indicate the intended "African" start of the show. It is a very good performance, only interrupted by Duke because someone was talking in the studio. Emmanuel Rahim, Louie Bellson and bassist Joe Benjamin give it all the rhythmic intensity and sharpness of the original congas solo. Rudy Powell is heard on clarinet, and Bill Berry is the trumpet soloist.

2. *Come Sunday* (rec. August 20th, track - 22).

The Irving Bunton Singers do a beautiful rendition of this new arrangement of a classic Ellington piece, originally a part of *Black, Brown and Beige*. Billy Strayhorn plays celeste, and Jimmy McPhail is the vocal soloist. Jimmy McPhail's vocal was dubbed in after the choir had been recorded.

3. **Will You Be There/99% Won't Do**

(rec. August 21st, track - 14). It is a song about living up to the ten commandments of the Bible. We hear The Irving Bunton Singers again first a *capella*, then - in 99 % - with a beautiful band backing. Contrary to the originally issued version of the piece, where a couple of lines in 99 % were omitted, this version is complete.

4. **Ain't But No One**

(rec. August 20th, take - 5). Jimmy McPhail is the vocal soloist, with The Irving Bunton singers. The theme of this up-tempo number has some resemblance to Al Sears' part of Dance no.1 from Ellington's Liberian Suite. Great big band arrangement.

5. **David Danced**

(rec. August 20th, track - 49). Up tempo version of Come Sunday, featuring the tap-dancing of Bunny Briggs, depicting the biblical tale where "David danced with all his might before The Lord". This arrangement was later to be used in Ellington's First Sacred Concert. Bill Berry is the trumpet soloist, and we also hear The Irving Bunton Singers and the drumming of Louie Bellson. Bunny Briggs' tap-dance was dubbed in afterwards. Perhaps as a comment to those who opposed tap-dancing in the church, Duke Ellington wrote in Music Is My Mistress: "Every man

prays in his own language, and there is no language that God does not understand."

6. **Heritage (My Mother, My Father And Love) #1**

(rec. August 20th, track - 53 and -58). * Love was a central theme of Ellington's life, and this is Duke Ellington's tribute to the love of his family and his upbringing. This was a most personal song for Ellington. Joya Sherrill is the vocal soloist here, reciting and singing the way she did in the theatre. On the original LP-issue, the narration was skipped, and the vocal soloist was Jimmy McPhail. That version is included on this CD as bonus track 25.

7. **After Bird Jungle**

(rec. August 21st, track - 4). * Unfortunately I have no information as to the meaning of the title, and its function in the show. One can imagine a sensual dance number? It is a beautiful new piece of Ellingtonia in its own right, never before issued. Rudy Powell is the soloist on clarinet.

8. **Montage**

(rec. August 20th, track - 51 and - 71). Bill Berry plays the opening trumpet-cadenza, and Ray Nance follows up with plunger mute. This montage is based on the 3rd part of Black, called Light from *Black, Brown And Beige*, where Ellington combined the Work

8

Song theme with the Come Sunday theme. Ellington takes great advantage of the choir in this new arrangement, which also embodies Will You Be There at the end of this splendid performance. It's a special treat to hear how he uses the choir in a similar way to how he would use for instance the sax-group.

9. **My People (Soap Box)**

(rec. August 21st, track - 20). Here Ellington sort of sums up the contributions of "his people" to the history and growth of The United States. At the theatre Bunny Briggs was the one who stood upon the soapbox and spread the word, doing at fine job. But Duke's own version is the definitive one, and he makes this narration the center of the entire show. At the end of the piece he makes an elegant introduction to the blues section to follow: "The blues are the accompaniment to the world's greatest duet, a man and a woman goin' steady. And if neither of them feels like singin' 'em, then the blues just vamp till ready."

10. **The Blues Ain't**

(rec. August 20th, track - 33). The blues section from Black, Brown And Beige, sung by Joya Sherrill, with sensitive tenor-sax playing by Harold Ashby, who later was to become a permanent member of Duke Ellington's orchestra. The Blues Ain't is not a blues in the traditional sense, only the middle

instrumental theme, later to be known as Carnegie Blues, is written within the 12 bars formula. The lyrics can be said to be some of Duke's most effective.

The blues sentiments are further explored - sometimes in a humorous tongue-in-cheek way - in the following tunes, all 12 bars blues, except Blues at Sundown. The songs are arranged in the play in such a way that we alternately hear the male and female aspect of - as Ellington put it - "the world's greatest duet".

11. **Blues At Sundown**

(rec. August 20th, track - 14). * "My baby's quittin', so I'll be gettin' blues...at sundown." This Ellington song originated in 1951 as a vehicle for singer Lloyd Oldham. When Jimmy Grissom joined the band later that year, he made the song his own.

12. **Walking And Singing The Blues**

(rec. August 27th, track - 10). * Effective big band arrangement, and great blues singing by Lil Greenwood, who also wrote the lyrics to this strong and self-assured woman's blues: "You gave me the sack... you are waitin' for me to come crawling back, with tears runnin' down my cheek. But I ain't lookin' back, I'm on a one way track, and I ain't 'bout to be that weak. Hey, I'm walkin'..." The lyrics of this song bring to mind Gloria Gaynor's song 15 years later "I will survive",

9

which deals with the same theme of a forsaken woman, who takes her life into her own hand. It's Billy Strayhorn at the piano, and probably Rudy Powell on sax.

13. Working Blues

(rec. August 20th, track - 91).

This blues, and the following Jail Blues is sung by Jimmy Grissom, and accompanied by a small band consisting of Booty Wood on trombone, Harold Ashby on tenor-sax, Joe Benjamin on the bass, Louie Bellson on drums, and Jimmy Jones on a "prepared" piano, to give the authentic flavour of a small late-hours joint. Beautiful blues playing by all involved. The singer is "...working hard to buy my gal the biggest house in town...if she don't marry me, I'll burn it down to the ground".

14. My Man Sends Me

(rec. August 27th, track - 14).

Lil Greenwood delivers the risqué blues verses in the great tradition of the blues singers of the jazz-age, accompanied by the big band conducted by Jimmy Jones with Billy Strayhorn at the piano.

15. Jail Blues (rec. August 20th, track - 93).

Same small band as in Working Blues. The singer is in jail, and can't help imagining his girl friend with another man. In *Music Is My Mistress* Duke Ellington wrote about Jimmy Grissom: "He was a hit in the blues segment

My People, where he sang with all the believable nuances expected of a blues singer. He always looked very young, yet when he sang the blues you had to believe that he had suffered every incident in the heartbreaking lyrics. In addition to that, he had a street-scene, give quality that demanded his recognition as a worldly man who had given his heart in vain."

16. I Love My Lovin' Lover

(rec. August 27th, track - 19).*

Harold Ashby's tenor-sax has the first say here, Lil Greenwood sings the forsaken lover theme, and Ray Nance blows a fine blues chorus. On the original record a different, very short take was used, without instrumental solos.

17. Jungle Triangle #2

(rec. August 20th, track - 62).*

This is a brilliant band piece, which was also used in *The Timon of Athens* suite under the title *Skillipoop*. Emmanuel Rahim on congas, in fact the whole rhythm section, has a prominent role here. The soloists are Rudy Powell on clarinet with a mighty glissando, followed by some growling, and Bill Berry on trumpet. (*Jungle Triangle* was not on the original LP issue of *My People*, but appeared years later on a MFD5-LP set).

18. King Fit The Battle Of Alabam

(rec. August 20th, track - 42).

The opening is unforgettable: "Martin - Luther - King fit the battle of - bam - bam - bam!" This must be the most openly political song Ellington ever made. Using the biblical story of Joshua before the walls of Jericho as a reference he makes a parallel to the racial confrontation in Birmingham, Alabama in April 1963. The high pressure water hoses and police dogs used by Eugene "Bull" Connor, the city police commissioner against peaceful demonstrators, take the place of the walls of Jericho, and the leader of the demonstrators, Martin Luther King takes the role of Joshua. Characteristic of Ellington he gets some humour into the violent events: "Now when the dog saw the baby wasn't afraid / he pulled his uncle Bull's hose and said / That baby acts like he don't give a damn / Are you sure we're still in Alabam?"

19. King (rec. August 21st, track - 24).*

This is an up-tempo instrumental version of King Fit The Battle Of Alabam, that gives space to the brilliant soloists of the band. Jimmy Jones starts on the piano, then comes Bob Freedman on baritone sax, Ray Nance on trumpet, Pete Clark on tenorsax, Booty Wood on trombone, Rudy Powell on alto sax, Bill Berry on trumpet, Britt Woodman on trombone, Russell Procope on clarinet, all 2 choruses each, with a band chorus in between each soloist, finishing with Harold Ashby on tenorsax for no less than 10 choruses with the band rocking behind him.

20. Purple People (narration)

(rec. August 21st, track - 12).*

This narration is performed by Joya Sherrill's daughter Richelle Le Noir Guilmenot. It's a symbolic tale about the green people and the purple people fighting, until both have lost, and all are dead with blood everywhere - no green blood, no purple blood, all the blood is red. The tale makes the introduction to the closing song, the only piece where color is the explicit issue: What Color Is Virtue?.

21. What Color Is Virtue

(rec. August 21st, track - 18). *

"What color is virtue, and what color is love?" Joya Sherrill takes the spoken intro and is the soloist with the Irving Bunton Singers. We also hear several of the musicians in the band taking turns behind the vocals. The soloist, the band and the choir makes this a rousing finale. As Ellington said in a BBC interview 1964 (quoted from Stuart Nicholson): "We send them out of the hall, the theatre, on our closing number, What color is love, what color is virtue? which is the big question. If you answer the question, it says everything you want to say."

Bonus Tracks:

22. Purple People - Background Music

(rec. August 27th, track - 3)*

This lovely Billy Strayhorn melody in three parts is played by two clarinets (Rudy Powell

together with either Rusell Procope or Bob Freedman). It starts with a fugue, and we hear the big band in the middle part. This is the only complete take of all three parts together, and you can hear somebody counting the time in between the parts.

23. Piano Blues Overture

(rec. August 20th, track – 88).*

This piece, played by the same quintet that played Working Blues and Jail Blues, may have been intended to introduce the blues section of the show. However it was not used. Great low-down blues playing by Jimmy Jones, Harold Ashby and Booty Wood on piano, tenor sax and trombone respectively, and the rhythm of Joe Benjamin and Louie Bellson.

24. Strange Feeling

(rec. August 20th, track – 77).*

Jimmy Grissom sings Billy Strayhorn's original lyrics. This song was first used in Ellington's and Strayhorn's The Perfume Suite from 1944. At the end of this arrangement we hear the tenor sax of Harold Ashby. The song was intended for the show, probably for the blues section because of its love theme, but eventually not used.

25. Heritage (My Mother, My Father

And Love) #2 (rec. August 21st, track – 8).

This version of Ellington's love song, sung by Jimmy McPhail, was put on the original record. In the show the vocals were handed over to Joya Sherrill, whom we hear on track 6.

Jimmy McPhail and the band however does a great job on the song, so this version of one of the key songs of My People makes a proper ending of this CD.

Bjarne Busk



*Notes Bjarne Busk.
Produced for CD by
Bjarne Busk & Anders Stefansen.
Engineer Jørgen Vad.
Photo Jan Persson.
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**On this CD we are in Chicago,
August 20, 21 & 27, 1963.**

“Duke Ellington’s arguably most important show – My People – staged and recorded in Chicago in 1963, is presented on this CD for the first time in its complete form.”

1. **Jungle Triangle #1**
2. **Come Sunday**
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17. **Jungle Triangle #2**
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19. **King**
20. **Purple People**
21. **What Color Is Virtue**
22. **Purple People - Music**
23. **Piano Blues Overture**
24. **Strange Feeling**
25. **Heritage (My Mother, My Father And Love) #2**

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