



Duke Ellington

NEW YORK CONCERT

- 1 **Take the "A" Train (3:55)**
(Billy Strayhorn)
Music Sales/Tempo Music
- 2 **Satin Doll (4:01)**
(Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Johnny Mercer)
Famous Music Corporation
Music Sales/Tempo Music
- 3 **Caravan (2:57)**
(Juan Tizol, Duke Ellington, Irving Mills)
Famous Music Corporation
EMI Mills Music
- 4 **Skillipoop (6:04)**
(Duke Ellington)
Famous Music Corporation
- 5 **Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall (Duke's Poetry) (0:33)**
(Duke Ellington)
(Doris Fisher/Allan Roberts)
Doris Fisher Music Corp./Allan Roberts Music Co.

- 6 **Blues Medley (5:40)**
Happy-Go-Lucky Local
(Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn)
Famous Music Corporation
Music Sales/Tempo Music

John Sanders' Blues (E & D Blues)
(Duke Ellington/John Sanders)
Famous Music Corporation
Music Sales/Tempo Music

C Jam Blues
(Duke Ellington)
EMI Robbins Music

- 7 **Carolina Shout (The Lion) (2:57)***
(James P. Johnson)
MCA Inc.

- 8 **Tonk (2:08) #**
(Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn)
EMI Robbins Music

- 9 **Things Ain't What They Used To Be (2:29) #**
(Mercer Ellington, Ted Persons)
Tempo Music/Music Sales Corporation

- [10] **Melancholia/Reflections in D (4:08)**
(Duke Ellington)
Famous Music Corporation

- [11] **Little African Flower (2:23)**
(Duke Ellington)
Famous Music Corporation

- [12] **Bird of Paradise (4:00)**
(Duke Ellington)
Famous Music Corporation

- [13] **The Single Petal of a Rose (3:04)**
(Duke Ellington)
Famous Music Corporation

DUKE ELLINGTON, *Piano*

PECK MORRISON, *Bass*

SAM WOODYARD, *Drums*

***WILLIE "THE LION" SMITH**, *Piano*

#BILLY STRAYHORN, *Piano*

DUKE ELLINGTON
A PIANO RECITAL AT THE WOLLMAN
AUDITORIUM, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK, MAY 20, 1964

By 1964, when this recital was given, Duke Ellington had been a famous name in jazz for nearly four decades. He was probably best known as a charismatic bandleader and, in popular terms, as a songwriter. (The high title of 'composer' was not yet so readily on the public's lips.) Some knew him, too, as an arranger, the greatest jazz had produced. Fewer, even more discerning, recognized him as a superior jazz pianist. Although it is seldom mentioned, it is a fact that during the so-called Big Band Era a high proportion of the better jazz bands were led by pianists. One may recall the brothers Fletcher and Horace Henderson, Earl Hines, Claude Hopkins, Bennie Moten, Count Basie, Luis Russell, Alphonso Trent, Jay McShann, Charlie and Buddy Johnson, and later Stan Kenton and Claude Thornhill. Even Fats Waller toured at the head of a big band periodically. And from the time he opened

at the Cotton Club in 1927 until his death in 1974, Duke Ellington led a big band from the piano almost continuously — longer than anyone else in his field.

He took solos in the course of his band's performances and occasionally made solo records during the 78 r.p.m. age, but Ellington was not so prominent in terms of pianistic virtuosity as Fats Waller and Earl Hines, the two major influences on jazz piano in the 1930s. He, like all the other piano-playing leaders, saw nothing demeaning in their professional classification as "band" pianists, for theirs was a special role that required special skills — and much first-hand experience.

Ellington had arrived in New York at a time when the "stride" style of piano was paramount, and he played it well enough to be accepted by the giants of the Harlem school, such as James P. Johnson, Willie "The Lion" Smith and Fats Waller. **Carolina Shout** and

other Johnson compositions were among the numbers he had first learned to play in Washington by the time-honored method of slowing down the mechanism of a player-piano and following the slowly descending keys the piano rolls dictated.

The stride style and its exponents won Ellington's lifelong affection and admiration, but in his later years he responded to requests for performances in the idiom with mock diffidence and explanations about the necessity to "warm up" his left hand. A reluctance to give what might be termed a formal piano recital was also maintained modestly for years, but Capitol's release of an album of piano solos effectively blew his cover in 1953. It contained a handful of his past hits and a half-dozen new compositions, previously unrecorded, all in arresting performances that revealed him as a soloist of mature talent in virtually a new light. "What made him different," Earl Hines subsequently declared, "was that he was not just a stylist and an arranger, but a compos-

er, too." The jazz stylist, improvising on someone else's composition or chord sequence, inevitably tended to transform it in his own image. The band pianist, on the other hand, had to furnish foundation, reminders and suggestions for the band as an ensemble and for its individualists as soloists. In an almost unique fashion, Ellington may be seen as combining and fulfilling three roles at the same time here. The recital given at the Wollman Auditorium in Columbia University on May 20, 1964, was largely instigated by the New York Chapter of the Duke Ellington Jazz Society, many of whose members were audibly present both to encourage their champion and to enjoy his banter and music.

Accompanied by bassist Peck Morrison and drummer Sam Woodyard, Ellington dutifully opens the program with his band's theme, Billy Strayhorn's **Take the "A" Train**, and follows predictably with two of its successes, **Satin Doll** and **Caravan**. Having as it were tested the waters, Ellington then explains the significance

of the next title, **Skillipoop**. "One of its meanings," he says, "is trying to make what you're doing look better than what you're supposed to be doing." After a sprightly piano chorus, the main responsibility is then handed over to Sam Woodyard, whose long solo sequence is presumably offered as an example of successful skillipooping. Like all drum solos, much of its appeal may have been visual, but it is not overly exhibitionistic and, as always, Woodyard swings. The number, incidentally, had been known first as **Jungle Triangle** in Ellington's musical show, **My People**, but was retitled for incorporation in his **Timon of Athens** score.

At this point Ellington is clearly not taking the recital too seriously. He proceeds to recite a recent example of the humorous rhyming in which he took such pleasure, although he infers that Billy Strayhorn had fallen asleep when subjected to it, as follows:

Into each life some jazz must fall,
With after-beat gone kickin',
With jive alive, a ball for all,

Let not the beat be chicken!

Next, he plays an unusual blues medley of **Happy-Go-Lucky Local**, **John Sanders Blues** and **C Jam Blues**, to which the audience responds enthusiastically, possibly in recognition of the fact that so many of the greatest jazz hits have been blues. And then — surprise — he introduces his dear and much-esteemed friend, Willie "The Lion" Smith, to play **Carolina Shout** in honor of their mutual friend, James P. Johnson. It is a nice touch, thus linking past and present in a tribute to the stride tradition, and The Lion delivers with his customary grace and authority. Now he calls Billy Strayhorn forth from backstage. "I can't do this by myself," he cries. Of course not. "This" is **Tonk**, their uproarious party piece, a duet! Unlike most duets by jazz pianists, whose rumble-jumble pleases audiences the way a flashy drum solo does, this one has momentum and a satisfying beat.

Strayhorn's services are retained for Mercer Ellington's **Things Ain't What They Used to Be**, a blues employed

here as background for "the finger-snapping bit" that Ellington subsequently enacted for years to an original entitled **Jones**. The hip instructions on how to "establish a state of abandon," however, were to remain the same.

Hereabouts in our selection of excerpts from the recital, an intermission appears to have been reached, after which we come to the serious business and Ellington plays all alone, without the support of Morrison and Woodyard. **Melancholia** and **Reflections in D** were premiered in the aforementioned Capitol album; **Little African Flower** may well have been written in anticipation of his first visit to Africa in 1966; **Bird of Paradise** was a nostalgic glance at the distant past; and **The Single Petal of a Rose**, inspired by his presentation to Queen Elizabeth II in 1958, was a key part of **The Queen's Suite**, which he dedicated to her. In all of these, a soloist unique to jazz is heard. The strong, firm touch which sounded imperiously through so many raging

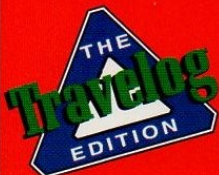
orchestral ensembles, and which stimulated or even reproved his soloists, is still here. So is the love of color, particularly in the sonorous bass notes that remember Harry Carney's indispensable baritone saxophone. Rhythmically, the music is positive and assured, not least on the slow, melodic masterpieces, **Reflections in D** and **The Single Petal of a Rose**. The dynamics are sometimes dramatic, but piquant rather than theatrical. The reflective or reminiscent element in these solos is moving, and in many respects it is singularly revealing of the piano player's inner man.

— **Stanley Dance**
author of *The World of Duke*
Ellington (Da Capo Press)

The Magnetic Recording Laboratory has prepared a master tape from the acetate tapes in the Library of Congress' Valburn collection. The source acetate tapes are on 7" and 10" reels recorded at 7.5 ips. The sound quality is generally good with some tape hiss. The transfer process involved compiling these tapes with minimum equalization in an attempt to avoid altering any musical content. This technical diligence necessitated retaining some of the tape surface hiss since our goal was to enhance what was originally recorded without sacrificing any of the higher frequencies of the music.

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ELLINGTON: NEW YORK CONCERT



Over the years, Duke Ellington performed many concerts and studio sessions which were never available to the public. Having had the opportunity to locate these private tapes, some of which were known only to the Ellington family, others which were stored in the archives of the Library of Congress, it's a great thrill to release such rare and special material.

Mercer Ellington

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A D D

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PECK MORRISON, *Bass*
SAM WOODYARD, *Drums*
***WILLIE "THE LION"**
SMITH, *Piano*
#BILLY STRAYHORN, *Piano*

PRODUCED BY MERCER ELLINGTON
Recorded at the Wollman Auditorium,
Columbia University, New York,
on May 20, 1964

Photo courtesy of the collection
of Mercer Ellington

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