

**DUKE ELLINGTON
ORCHESTRAL WORKS**

Duke Ellington, Piano
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
Erich Kunzel, Conductor

MCA CLASSICS

A A D

**compact
disc**
DIGITAL AUDIO

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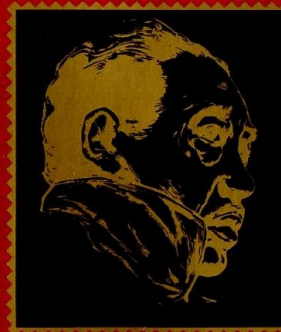
- Poetic Commentary A (1:41)
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- Stanza 3: The Handsome Traffic
Policeman (5:57)

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DIGITALLY REMASTERED

Duke Ellington

Orchestral Works



WITH ERICH KUNZEL CONDUCTING
THE CINCINNATI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Contains bonus tracks of poetic commentary in Ellington's own words.

Duke Ellington

Orchestral Works

Duke Ellington never ceases to voice his disapproval of categories, which he views as a curb on an artist's right to freedom of expression. He always wants to be free to do what he feels moved to do, and not what someone else feels he should do.

Painter, pianist, composer, bandleader, arranger and playwright, his talents have taken him into an astonishing variety of areas during his long professional career. By 1931, he was already thinking beyond the length simultaneously dictated by the 78 rpm record and the convenience of ballroom dancers. His first extended work, *Creole Rhapsody*, was the result. It was followed in 1935 by the longer, four-part *Reminiscing in Tempo*, and in 1943 by the ambitious "tone parallel to the history of the American Negro, *Black, Brown and Beige*. Later the same year, *New World A'Coming* was premiered at Carnegie Hall on December 11th.

This work's title and content were inspired by Roi Ottley's best-selling book on the Negro in America. Ottley looked forward optimistically to better conditions for his people after World

War II, and his final statement was that "in spite of selfish interests, a new world is a-coming with the sweep and fury of the Resurrection." Ellington visualized this new world "as a place in the distant future where there will be no war, no greed, no categorization, no non-believers, where love is unconditional, and no pronoun is good enough for God." His composition emerged as a kind of piano concerto, and it was performed for the first time by the composer and his fifteen-piece band. Subsequently, it was orchestrated for symphonic performance, and Ellington recalls that even Don Shirley, a pianist of prodigious technique, had trouble with a ragtime "lick" for the left hand.

Harlem was written for the NBC Symphony in 1950, during the period when Arturo Toscanini was its conductor. Ellington completed the commission on board the Ile de France as he returned from a European tour. He had long observed his subject with affection, and the resultant composition was undoubtedly one of the most skillful and best-realized of his long descriptive works.

He was well aware that Harlem had a reputation as "a great place for swingers," but he was also at pains to point out that it had "more churches than cabarets," and that its people were "even represented in Congress by a minister." Many colors, textures, themes and rhythms were interwoven in his music to portray the variety of life in the city within a city. Musically illustrated were parades, a group making "civil rights demandments," a funeral procession with "its counterpoint of tears," an out-of-step chorus line "kicking like crazy," an inviting "hip chick" on the corner, the Spanish neighborhood, jazz "spoken in a thousand languages," and people, just people, "some plain, some fancy, some living luxuriously and others not so luxuriously." The opening, moreover demonstrated how "Harlem" ought to be pronounced.

The Golden Broom and the Green Apple was specially written for the 1965 French-American Festival in New York, and was given its first performance at Lincoln Center on July 31st with Ellington conducting. (He was also the pianist that evening in *New World A'Coming*, and narrator in a performance of Aaron Copland's *Preamble for a Solemn Occasion*.) The new work, a modern allegory, was divided into three stanzas, whose significance the composer explained with typically oblique humor:

Stanza I. The Golden Broom: *The Golden Broom is a reflection of the haze we enjoy in the spin of today's whirl, as our luxuriously appointed vehicle (originally designed for the Beautiful*

Rich City Witch) dashes through space with its jet stream magnetizing the golden gleam of material security.

Stanza II. The Green Apple: *As we relax graciously, we love thinking that in spite of how far we have gone to acquire our position of advantage, we still have our Green Apple (naturally grown and owned by the Poverty Strick' Country Chick), the symbol of our potential, our virtues, our God-made and untouched purity.*

Stanza III. The Handsome Traffic Policeman: *In the third movement, we may find the symbol of ourselves in the very Handsome Traffic Cop, flashing his reds, greens and ambers as he stomps his authority around the intersection, where the paths of the Beautiful Rich City Witch with her Golden Broom and the Poverty Strick' Country Chick with her Green Apple will sooner or later converge . . . and the decision has to be made. With only one ticket left in our book, which of the two ladies gets the ticket? (The reason that the Handsome Traffic Cop's book is so depleted and down to one ticket is that all the more desirable ladies prefer to commit their violations at his intersection.)*

Concert appearances together had developed strong bonds of mutual admiration between Duke Ellington on the one hand and Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra on the other. The combination of their talents ensured the warm understanding interpretations found in this album.

STANLEY DANCE

When former Decca staff producer Is Horowitz casually mentioned to me that he had produced a recording of Duke Ellington with Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Symphony, I knew there were great possibilities in such a collaboration. As it were, the masters reinforced my enthusiasm. Recorded in 1970, when sound reproduction was starting its rapid ascent (recently culminating in digital perfection), the tapes boasted a big orchestral sound and clear acoustics. Both the piano and rhythm section, the heart and soul of Ellington compositions, were well represented. I had struck gold.

While Duke was and will always be the heppiest of band leaders, his real genius lay in his writing. And although he probably wasn't responsible for the orchestration (the string arrangements smack of Luther Henderson) I felt that if anyone could pull off the oft-tried and rarely successful hybrid of jazz and symphony, Duke was my man. In fact, to my ears, much of the material on this recording is reminiscent of another composer who combined the two genres with wonderful results: George Gershwin.

The other ingredient that tips the scales in this recording's favor is the conductor. Erich Kunzel's talent for this musical vein—his ability to lead the orchestra with discipline while maintaining "that swing"—was already apparent at the time of this project. Today, he is at the fore of the pops maestros and his recordings with the Cincinnati Pops are crossover chart-toppers.

But, the writing's the thing when it comes

down to it, and there are very few composers left—the name Bernstein comes to mind—who can and are willing to create the vital synthesis of classical and jazz for large orchestra.

This collection is also important due to the fact that, unlike other versions of the material, Duke himself performs and lends insight through the included poetic commentaries. I see this recording, and I think the years to come will bear witness, as valuable as if Beethoven had recorded his "Emperor" Piano Concerto as soloist, or if Gershwin were at the keys for "Rhapsody in Blue." I hope it is enjoyed in the future with as much passion and sense of discovery as I felt.

—Martin Fleischmann

Originally Produced by Israel Horowitz
Reissue Coordination and Supervision of
Digital Remastering: Martin Fleischmann
Remastering Engineer: Doug Schwartz
Reissue Consultant: Joel Hoffner

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Previously released on **DECCA.**

The Duke Ellington Memorial (a detail of which is shown here) will soon be erected in New York City in honor of the Duke and his music. Initiated by entertainer Bobby Short and created by sculptor Robert Graham, the Duke Ellington Memorial will be a permanent monument to Ellington and to the American dream he personified. You are invited to contribute to the Memorial by making a gift to:

The Duke Ellington Memorial
Fund, Inc.
444 East 57th Street
New York, New York 10022



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