



After a typical jazz fan has heard thousands of jazz recordings, certain musical revelations tend to stand out in his or her memory. One would probably be the discovery of the extremely fertile imagination of Duke Ellington the composer; another is very likely the jaw-dropping reaction to one's first hearing of Oscar Peterson's formidable technique on piano. It shouldn't be surprising that one of the greatest pianists in the history of jazz would be drawn frequently to material from the vast Ellington songbook to serve as a starting point for his musical explorations.

During his long association with the Pablo label between 1973 and 1986, Oscar Peterson recorded dozens of albums as a leader or jam session participant, surrounded by some of the best musicians in the business. Pablo's owner Norman Granz wasn't stockpiling material to be issued long after Peterson's departure from the label, as all of the music within this compilation had been released by 1990. It was Granz's longstanding desire to record the very best jazz artists as frequently as possible; he typically recorded Peterson several times each year. But Granz was no mere fan who just happened to own his own label; he produced numerous dates featuring Peterson because of his complete confidence in the pianist's ability to achieve the most out of any recording session, with whatever supporting cast had been assembled, whether in the studio or on the concert stage.

Oscar Peterson has recorded countless gems from the Ellington songbook, including songs written by Duke, his son Mercer, Billy Strayhorn, members of the band, or collaborations of two or more musicians from the fold. The ten tracks selected for this compilation represent some of Peterson's most rewarding recordings for Pablo.

The first of two solos in this anthology is "Lady of the Lavender Mist," a rather obscure work premiered by Ellington in a 1947 Columbia studio session and played only a handful of times before it was retired from his book in 1952. While Duke played very little on his original version, allowing the orchestra to portray the colors and moods of this alluring mysterious lady, Peterson takes a

different approach, maintaining the subtle romanticism of the work but adding musical embellishments that add to the appeal of this beautiful but overlooked composition. "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)" comes from Peterson's 1974 concert in Estonia (then part of the U.S.S.R), a song that also might be his way of telling his adoring Soviet audience of his extreme displeasure with Gosconcert (the Soviet concert booking agency) and the lack of first-class treatment a artist of his caliber merited, which is described in depth in Gene Lees's fine biography of the pianist. At first, Peterson slows down the tempo of the piece considerably, then incorporates his Tatum-like runs into a gentle stride arrangement before wrapping things up with a dramatic yet understated conclusion.

Two of the trio tracks feature Peterson with the late Sam Jones and Louis Hayes: "Main Stem," like "Happy-Go-Lucky Local" and "Track 360," is one of Ellington's bluesy rollicking train-like themes, while "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" is accented by Jones's booming bass and the leader's staccato chords and trademark glissandi. Peterson's sparse arrangement of "In a Sentimental Mood," with Bobby Durham taking over for Hayes, proves that a classic song often sounds best with only minor adornments.

The pianist recorded duo sessions with five different trumpeters for Pablo and his pairing with Clark Terry produced the most inspired results. Peterson's jaunty backing to Terry's muted trumpet on "Satin Doll," a song that can sound hacked in the wrong hands, adds to the humor provided by the veteran of the "University of Ellington," as Terry likes to refer to his eight-year tenure with Duke's band. Peterson and Terry are joined by Dizzy Gillespie and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis for a blues-drenched rendition of Mercer Ellington's best-known work, "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," from an outstanding 1977 jam session at the Montreux Festival. Peterson's bluesy disguised introduction provides a moment of suspense before he reveals his choice of song. His lively opening chorus is followed by Terry's sassy muted horn, the gritty wailing tenor sax of Davis, then a typically tongue-in-cheek solo by Dizzy. It is clear that the musicians are inspiring one another to the best of their respective abilities.

The quartet selections include a turbocharged "Cotton Tail," taken from a studio session that included Joe Pass, widely regarded as one of the greatest virtuosos in the history of jazz guitar; Niels Pedersen, the highly regarded Danish bassist whose phenomenal technique and ability to keep up with the blazing tempos which Peterson and Pass often favored made him a valuable addition; and the talented English drummer Martin Drew. Peterson's final Pablo recordings came from his November 1986 stint at the Westwood Playhouse in Los Angeles. With fellow Canadian Dave Young replacing Pedersen on bass, the Peterson quartet's easygoing interpretation of "Perdido" features a series of delightful exchanges between the leader and Joe Pass, then segues into "Caravan," initially introduced at a breakneck tempo by Peterson's unaccompanied piano, with thunderous bass chords and roller coaster right-handed lines. The piece calms down only slightly as the rest of the group joins Peterson, as the solo spotlight briefly flashes on each musician before the leader brings the song to a show-stopping finish.

Finally, Duke Ellington himself introduces Oscar Peterson to a huge audience at the Hollywood Bowl as a special guest during "Take the 'A' Train." Ellington takes the opening chorus and then steps aside for Peterson as the full band winds up its initial chorus. You can hear Ellington shouting encouragement as Peterson works his magic with the band's long-running theme. While Ellington was known to share the spotlight with guests during his concerts, it was a relatively rare occasion for another pianist, other than Billy Strayhorn, to take Duke's place on stage. But then again, Oscar Peterson isn't just any pianist.

Do not be surprised if you soon find yourself looking for all seven releases from which these ten tracks were compiled. If this is your initial purchase of Oscar Peterson's voluminous recordings for Pablo, you have an excellent cross section of his work. It is even more likely that if you have the time and money, you will end up acquiring all of Peterson's Pablo recordings.

—Ken Dryden

Contributor, *All-Music Guide to Jazz*

PACD-2310-966-2

OSCAR PETERSON — PIANO

- 1 MAIN STEM** (DUKE ELLINGTON) EMI ROBBINS CATALOG-ASCAP 5:10
with Sam Jones—bass; Louis Hayes—drums. Recorded by Don Hahn at A&R Studios, New York City; May 25, 1974. From *History of an Artist* (Pablo ZPACD-2625-702-2).
- 2 IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD** (ELLINGTON) DUKE ELLINGTON MUSIC ASCAP 5:09
same as #1, except Bobby Durham replaces Hayes on drums. Recorded February 14, 1973.
- 3 LADY OF THE LAVENDER MIST** (ELLINGTON) TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 4:15
unaccompanied piano solo. Recorded by Don Hahn at A&R Studios, New York City; May 25, 1974. From *History of an Artist* (Pablo ZPACD-2625-702-2).
- 4 DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE**
(ELLINGTON-RUSSELL) EMI ROBBINS/HARRISON MUSIC ASCAP 3:12
same as #1.
- 5 SATIN DOLL** (ELLINGTON-STRAYHORN) DUKE ELLINGTON ASCAP 7:09
with Clark Terry—trumpet. Recorded by Ed Greene and Eric Miller at Cherokee Studios, Los Angeles; May 18, 1975. From *Oscar Peterson & Clark Terry* (Pablo 2310-742/OJCCD-806-2).
- 6 COTTON TAIL** (ELLINGTON) ESTATE OF DUKE ELLINGTON ASCAP 3:12
with Joe Pass—guitar; Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen—bass; Martin Drew—drums.
Recorded by Phil Edwards at Fantasy Studios, Berkeley; November 8, 1983.
From *A Tribute to My Friends* (Pablo 2310-902/OJCCD-908-2).
- 7 MEDLEY:
PERDIDO** (TIZOLLENGSPELDER-ORAKE) MUSIC SALES ASCAP 6:26
CARAVAN (ELLINGTON-MILLS-TIZOL) MILLS MUSIC/DUKE ELLINGTON ASCAP 4:59
with Joe Pass—guitar; David Young—bass; Martin Drew—drums. Recorded live at the Westwood Playhouse, Los Angeles; November 14, 1986.
From *Oscar Peterson Live!* (Pablo PACD-2310-940-2).
- 8 I GOT IT BAD (AND THAT AIN'T GOOD)**
(ELLINGTON-WEBSTER) ESTATE OF DUKE ELLINGTON/WEBSTER MUSIC ASCAP 4:29
unaccompanied piano solo. Recorded live in Tallinn, Estonia; November 17, 1974.
From *Oscar Peterson in Russia* (Pablo ZPACD-2625-711-2).

9 THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE (ELLINGTON-PERSONS) TEMPO-ASCAP 12:42

with Dizzy Gillespie, Clark Terry—trumpets; Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis—tenor saxophone; Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen—bass; Bobby Durham—drums. Recorded live by Val Valentin at Montreux, Switzerland; July 14, 1977. From *Oscar Peterson Jam* (Pablo 2308-208/OJCCD-378-2).

10 TAKE THE "A" TRAIN (BILLY STRAYHORN) TEMPO-ASCAP 5:12

piano solo; with Duke Ellington—piano; Buster Cooper, Chuck Connors, Lawrence Brown—trombones; Cat Anderson, Mercer Ellington, Herb Jones, Cootie Williams—trumpets; Harry Carney, Russell Procope, Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton, Paul Gonsalves—saxophones; John Lamb—bass; Chris Columbus—drums. Recorded at the Hollywood Bowl; July 1, 1967. From *The Greatest Jazz Concert in the World* (Pablo 3PACD-2625-704-2).

Original sessions produced by NORMAN GRANZ
(#7 by Oscar Peterson)

This compilation produced by ERIC MILLER

#7 and 10 remixed to digital by Dave Luke and Eric Miller
(Fantasy Studios, Berkeley).

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OSCAR PETERSON — PIANO

WITH
SAM JONES, LOUIS HAYES, BOBBY DURHAM, CLARK TERRY, JOE PASS,
NIELS-HENNING ØRSTED PEDERSEN, MARTIN DREW, DAVID YOUNG, DIZZY GILLESPIE,
EDDIE "LOCKJAW" DAVIS, AND THE DUKE ELLINGTON ORCHESTRA

ORIGINAL SESSIONS PRODUCED BY NORMAN GRANZ (#7 BY OSCAR PETERSON)
THIS COMPILATION PRODUCED BY ERIC MILLER

RECORDED BETWEEN 1967 AND 1986. ALL SELECTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED.
REMASTERING, 1999—KIRK FELTON (FANTASY STUDIOS, BERKELEY)

TOTAL TIME 65:53 • STEREO/AAD

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