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DUKE ELLINGTON - THE PIANO PLAYER

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DUKE ELLINGTON / THE PIANO PLAYER



Recorded New York - Paris - Tokyo - 1961-1971

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On this CD you will find something special: Duke Ellington on solo piano. The recordings are all unissued up to now, and come from the Duke Ellington "Stockpile", which consists of recordings made through the years at Duke Ellington's own expense, and kept by him and his estate for later use.

Duke Ellington made relatively few piano recordings without his orchestra during his long career. And when he did, it would normally be in duo or trio settings, for instance the duos with Jimmy Blanton 1939-40, the trio recordings for Capitol in 1953 and for Columbia in 1961, the Money Jungle trio with Mingus and Roach in 1962, and the duets with Ray Brown in 1972, to mention some. Only very few recordings with Duke alone at the piano have been issued. And these are recordings made at concerts such as the one from Columbia University in 1964 and from Goutelas-en-Forez, France in 1966 (the latter can be found on Storyville STCD 4106).

His piano playing was often heard in the orchestra pieces, where his introductions and comping never ceased to impress and move the listener. And the recordings of new works in progress, where he sometimes played the solos himself on the piano, before they eventually were assigned to one of the other musicians in the band, illustrate that he without any doubt was one of the bands best and most original soloists.

The late Billy Strayhorn coined the phrase "Duke Ellington plays the piano, but his real instrument is his orchestra". This phrase of course helped to understand and appreciate the musical wonders Duke Ellington created with the band, making him, as band member Ben Webster put it "The world's greatest arranger". But it also tended to make one forget how great a piano player he really was, a true stylist and originator.

This CD with never before issued piano recordings by Duke therefore is a real treat, mostly studio recordings of piano solos, plus some quartet recordings with piano, organ, bass and drums of great intensity. But for all the rarity of this CD the best thing of all is that it makes great listening.

The proceedings start off with **Meditation**, recorded at the start of an otherwise small group session. It is an attractive melody, which Duke often

played at concerts, setting a mood for opening up the mind. In 1968 it fittingly became a part of The Second Sacred Concert. This recording is only the second recorded performance of the composition and the longest one.

Single Petal Of A Rose is a similar moody, pensive piece, once a part of The Queen's Suite. The recording presented here is taken from a telecast from 1962. Duke loved to play this piece live, and never failed in getting the audience under his spell.

The **Blues** that follows come from an informal session round the time of recording the music for the film "Paris Blues" in 1961, probably march 1961. On the tape box, a small tape, was handwritten "Flamenco Piano", and the tape had this delightful blues in two versions, of which this is the first "take", and a duet with Billy Strayhorn of the piece from Paris Blues, that was played as a flamenco guitar solo in the film, and later named "Guitar Amour". The sound quality of the duet however was too bad to make the piece suitable for issuing.

The recording of the two following pieces took place in Tokyo during the band's tour to Japan in June and July 1964. This is the premiere recording of Nagoya, a piece that later was to become the 3rd part of the suite Ad Lib On Nippon. The rendition here has all the magic of Duke Ellington's piano sound, as have the next small medley with an Unidentified Title coupled with a few bars of Little African Flower (Fleurette Africaine).

The next two recordings come from a very special session. Duke Ellington was in Paris in March 1967, and together with some other pianists living in Paris at the time, he made a tape "Pianists in Paris play for Billy Strayhorn". Billy Strayhorn was at the time very ill from the cancer that would be fatal just a few months later, and the tape was sent to him in USA as a greeting and a homage. The other pianists were Aaron Bridgers, Joe Turner, Stuart De Silva, M. Sardaby, Claude Bolling and Errol Parker. Duke's 3 pieces were Meditation, and a medley with two tunes: T.G.T.T. (Too Good To Title) which was a premiere performance of this piece, followed by **Little Purple Flower**, also composed in 1967.

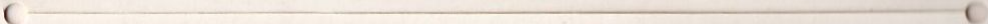
The suite that follows this sterling performance by Duke is a solo piano version

of **The River – a Ballet Suite**. This version is issued here for the first time. Duke Ellington had been commissioned by The American Ballet Theatre to write the music for a ballet, to be choreographed by Alvin Ailey. Ellington and Ailey agreed on Ellington's idea of writing a ballet based on water, as an allegory of life, entitled The River. As it often happened Duke was late in getting the music finished, and Alvin Ailey was getting desperate. On May 11th 1970 Duke made a piano recording of 6 of the ballet's parts, thus giving Ailey something to work with, and later in May and June he made band recordings of these parts and 5 more. The ballet, though not complete, was premiered in New York on June 25th to enthusiastic reviews. Duke had made it once again. The story of The River uses the Mississippi River as an allegory of birth and rebirth, starting with the spring of the river, like a newborn baby, and ending (in the final version) with the river running into the sea, to come back again as rain over the mountains to create a new spring. Rarely has the originality of Duke's piano mastery been more clearly demonstrated than here. Each note is essential.

The three quartet numbers that finishes this CD were all recorded in February 1971, with Wild Bill Davis on organ, Joe Benjamin on bass, and Rufus Jones on the drums. The pieces are all new compositions by Duke. The first and the second one, were both recorded in the middle of a recording session with the band rehearsing some new music, later to become The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse. It seems obvious that these blues numbers, Riddle (or Ripple as it was called on another tape-box) and the Untitled Blues, on a tape box just called track -22, were taken as a chance to stretch out and just blow, in the midst of demanding recordings of the new written music. The third quartet number, recorded 12 days later was similarly made after having recorded some new band numbers. (Another quartet blues from the same date can be found on the CD "Togo Brava Suite" (Storyville STCD 8323)). The version here was the last recording of the day, and Joe Benjamin was the one who had the last say with a beautiful coda, demonstrating once again, that Duke always had good bass players in the band.

Bjarne Busk

Duke Ellington's legendary "stockpile, the collection of tapes with the band, recorded at Ellington's own expence during the last 20-30 years of his life, continues to offer the most exquisite music, unissued until now.
On this CD we are in the years of 1961-71



DUKE ELLINGTON – THE PIANO PLAYER

1. **Meditation #1** 5:14 (Duke Ellington)
2. **Single Petal Of A Rose** 2:55 (Duke Ellington)
3. **Blues #1** 2:37 (Duke Ellington)
4. **Nagoya** 8:10 (Duke Ellington)
5. **Unidentified title/ Little African Flower**
(Fleurette Africaine) 1:30 (Duke Ellington)
6. **Meditation #2** 4:46 (Duke Ellington)
7. **T.G.T.T./Little Purple Flower** 6:38 (Duke Ellington)
- THE RIVER – A Ballet Suite:** (Duke Ellington)
 8. The Spring 3:20
 9. The Run 2:46
 10. The Meander 2:36
 11. Grap (The Giggling Rapids) 2:48
 12. The Lake 3:36
 13. Stud (The Neo-Hip-Hot Cool Kiddies Community) 2:25
14. **Riddle** 7:01 (Duke Ellington)
15. **Blues #2 (-22)** 6:47 (Duke Ellington)
16. **Blues #3** 4:04 (Duke Ellington)

Total time **67:37**

Duke Ellington (p- 1 – 13) Duke Ellington (p), Wild Bill Davis (org),
Joe Benjamin (b), Rufus Jones (dr) (14,15 & 16)

1. Recorded New York, December 28, 1966
2. Recorded New York, December 14, 1962, Telecast NBC, Merv Griffin Show.
3. Recorded, possibly Paris, France, March 1961
- 4 & 5. Recorded, Tokyo, July 1, 1964
- 6 & 7. Recorded, Paris, France, March 10, 1967
- 8–13. Recorded, New York, May 11, 1970
- 14&15. Recorded, New York, February 11, 1971
16. Recorded, New York, February 23, 1971

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