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CAPITOL JAZZ
CLASSICS VOL. 12



DUKE ELLINGTON
PIANO REFLECTIONS



DUKE ELLINGTON
CAPITOL JAZZ CLASSICS—VOL. 12
PIANO REFLECTIONS

1. IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD
(Ellington-Mills-Kurtz) ASCAP 2:26
2. THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE
(Mercer Ellington-Ted Persons) ASCAP 2:52
3. REFLECTIONS IN D
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 3:30
- 1** M-11058
(M 1-11058)
4. WHO KNOWS?
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 2:34
5. MELANCHOLIA
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 3:19
6. ALL TOO SOON
(Duke Ellington-Carl Sigman) ASCAP 3:05
7. PRELUDE TO A KISS
(Ellington-Gordon-Mills) ASCAP 3:00

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DUKE ELLINGTON
CAPITOL JAZZ CLASSICS—VOL. 12
PIANO REFLECTIONS

1. B SHARP BLUES
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 2:32
2. PASSION FLOWER
(Billy Strayhorn-Milton Raskin) ASCAP 3:03
3. JANET
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 2:10
- 2** M-11058
(M 2-11058)
4. RETROSPECTION
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 3:55
5. DANCERS IN LOVE
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 1:53
6. NIGHT TIME
(Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn) ASCAP 2:30
7. KINDA DUKISH
(Duke Ellington) ASCAP 2:28

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In the months of April, May and June 1967 a tv film was made of Duke Ellington for the Bell Telephone Hour. Somewhere in a theater, after the closing of the curtain, Ellington sat at the piano and began to play a fast piece of something that sounded like classic ragtime. At a certain point Duke had trouble with its execution, started laughing and said: "That's the first thing I played, that's the Soda Fountain Rag, just the beginning, I can't play it anymore, it's too hard and I can't forget it any more."

Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in Washington on April 29, 1899, the son of James Edward (Ed) Ellington and Daisy Kennedy. His only sister Ruth was born sixteen years later. Mother Daisy played some piano, there is a story of Ellington at the age of four hearing her play the Rosary. It is said he started crying because he found it so beautiful. Anyway, in 1906 he got his first piano lessons from a lady remembered as Mrs. Kingsdale, but he did not exactly dig the things Czerny wrote down for the beginner and quit. He became much more interested in drawing and made considerable progress, especially in the field of posters. This happened during his years at Armstrong High School (February 1914 - June 1917) and he was even offered a scholarship to the Pratt Institute of Applied Arts in Brooklyn. By that time, however, he had discovered ragtime and returned to the piano.

During his later years in high school the young piano player, who was named Duke at the age of eight by Ralph Green, a neighbor, was influenced by Edna Thompson, who played classical piano. She made him study with Ernest Ames, the music teacher at Armstrongs. When he really got involved with music he went to Dunbar High's Henry Grant. Among the pupils were Otto Hardwick and Arno Whitell, who later played alto and trumpet in Duke's band. Inspired by the music of for instance James P. Johnson, who once played in Washington, young Duke Ellington got into ragtime and by 1917 while still at school he was leading his own group, the Washingtonians, and had composed his *Soda Fountain Rag* at the *Poodle Dog Cafe*. He earned so much money that in the year after he left Armstrong he was able to marry Edna Thompson and set up a family. Their son Mercer was born that same year, 1918.

In 1922 it was the same way it is today. You had to get to New York to make it. The first time, the Washingtonians led by Willie but Swenlin failed, but one year later they came back again. Though Fats Waller's telegram "Everything I've done" turned out to be the usual supporter, singer Ada Brown, the famous Black-top, helped them out. Later there were the *Kentucky Club* and Irving Mills who got the band to the Cotton Club and world fame, in 1926. As Elmer Snowden's Newby Orchestra, the Washingtonians cut a test record for Victor on October 18, 1923, some months after their second arrival in New York. In addition to bandleader Snowden and the piano player, the band included Duke's friends Whitell, Hardwick and drummer Sonny Greer, but as the record has not been found we'll never know what the sound sounded like. One year later there is another lost master with Sidney Bechet in the band, but that one we have November 1924: a record company named Blue Disc and singer Alberta Prince. With Sonny Greer's vocal assistance she did *House Rent Party Parlor Social Do Luxe*. We

hear the 25-year-old Duke Ellington play some beautiful stride in the grand Harlem tradition. Stride piano is Harlem's version of ragtime: a jumping bass with the left hand mainly in tenths and the melody in strong rhythms at the right.

Although since the fifties Duke Ellington goes up to the mike, tells the audience that the orchestra is about to perform *Rockin' in Rhythm*, but points out that first "our piano player will steal the show", for many years he was quite reluctant to play solo at length. On October 1, 1928 he cut *Black Beauty* (A *Portrait of Florence Mills*) and *Swanomy River* for Okeh without any accompaniment. And it wasn't until the fifties that Duke began to record regularly with just his piano plus rhythm. Why? When Ellington started out to try his luck at ragtime as a youngster, there was one specific reason. In Washington he had seen and heard rent party piano players like Louis Brown, Doc Pony, Lester Dillman, Clarence Brown and Louis Thomas, as well as James P. Johnson advertising his piano rolls. He had seen their flashing left hand, he noticed the sharp way they dressed and he decided to become a pianist himself because all those men were a great success with the ladies. When Duke Ellington became the famous bandleader, and after he went into the Cotton Club also a great master of ceremonies, he didn't need the piano that much anymore. In 1960, in an interview with Stanley Dance published in *The World of Duke Ellington* (Scriveners, New York) the late alto player Johnny Hodges stated: "I like Duke of course, and as an accompanist he's still was listening to Stompy Jones this morning, on that Side by Side album, and he just got carried away in the last four or five choruses. They look on him now as an arranger and composer, but he's never had enough credit as a pianist. When he wants to, he can really play. He gets a big kick out of playing, but you never can tell how much he's going to play."

Ellington and the band did their first date for Capitol on April 6, 1955 (accident with what turned out to be a classic: *Satin Doll*). One week later, for the first time in his life Duke Ellington began to record extensively as a soloist. No less than fourteen titles, mainly compositions by himself, were taped that year. Five're all on this record.

Five tunes were Ellington standards already: *In a Sentimental Mood*, *At Top Speed*, *Prelude To A Kiss*, *Mercer's Things Ain't What They Used To Be* and Strayhorn's *Passion Flower*. *Dancers in Love* comes from Ellington's *Perfume Suite* and is also called *Musette* or *Stomp for Beginners*. It was composed and first recorded in 1945, but very seldom played in later years. *Kinda Datsih* was a first. Later it served as an introduction for the 1950 composition *Rocker In Rhythm*. The remaining tunes were new as well, and written by Ellington for these sessions.

Duke Ellington started out as a ragtime pianist more than half a century ago. Through the years he developed into one of the finest band pianists using very modern harmony, most of it his own invention, all of it his own conception. But when he wants to, and luckily this happens quite often, he goes back into his own history and plays stride.

MICHEL DE RUYTER
(NOS Radio, Holland)

SIDE A:

- 1. IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD (DUKE ELLINGTON - IRVING MILLS - MANNY KURTZ) 2.26
- 2. THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE (MERCER ELLINGTON - TED PERSONS) 2.52
- 3. REFLECTIONS IN D (DUKE ELLINGTON) 3.30
- 4. WHO KNOWS? (DUKE ELLINGTON) 2.34
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SIDE B:

- 1. B. SHARP BLUES (DUKE ELLINGTON) 2.32
- 2. PASSION FLOWER (BILLY STRAYHORN) 3.03
- 3. JANET (DUKE ELLINGTON) 2.10
- 4. RETROSPECTION (DUKE ELLINGTON) 3.55
- 5. DANCERS IN LOVE (DUKE ELLINGTON) 1.53
- 6. NIGHT TIME (DUKE ELLINGTON - BILLY STRAYHORN) 2.30
- 7. KINDA DUKISH (DUKE ELLINGTON) 2.28

DUKE ELLINGTON TRIO

A4, B1, B2, B4 and B5: Duke Ellington (piano), Wendell Marshall (bass) and Butch Ballard (drums). - Recorded in Los Angeles, April 13, 1953.

A1 - A3, A5 - A7 and B3:

idem, April 14, 1953.

B7:

Duke Ellington (piano), Wendell Marshall (bass), Dave Black (drums). - Recorded in New York City, December 3, 1953.

B6:

idem, add Ralph Collier (conga). - Recorded in Chicago, December 28, 1953.

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