

CBS



One of the many surprising things about a suite by Duke Ellington based upon Shake-



speare is that the news of this ambitious undertaking has not really surprised any body. So seasoned are Ellington admirers to his talents, so prepared are they for the unexpected, that the announcements of this suite were greeted with enthusiasm, curiosity, and impatience, but seldom with surprise. It is, of course, idle to speculate upon what might have happened if Ellington and Shakespeare had been contemporaries, but there is no doubt that Duke, who calls himself an "amateur playwright," is a very professional showman. And there is also no doubt that the Bard had rhythm in his soul. The artistic meeting of two great creative men has achieved the results we all hoped for: a new major work by Duke Ellington.

While it is true that Duke visited the Hathaway cottage during his first tour of England in 1933, the spark that ignited Ellington's desire to create a work based upon Shakespeare's characters was his successful appearance at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Stratford, Ontario. Thrilled not only by the performances he witnessed there but by the warm welcome extended to him and his band by visitors to the Festival. Duke began to think, then threaten to write a suite. Another major work, his A Drum Is A Woman, was then being completed and took precedence over other composition. But once started, the new suite survived one nighters and was rushed to completion in time for the Music for Moderns concert at Town Hall in April 1957. Those who heard Such Sweet Thunder introduced will remember its unanimous public and critical acceptance that April Sunday. They will also remember that Duke had not had time to compose the final number in the suite. That number was recorded four days later and is the final selection of this recording.

In Act IV, Scene I, of A Midsummer Night's Dream appear the lines: "I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder." Be it Ellington or Shakespeare who leads you to listen to what Duke describes as his "attempt to parallel the vignettes of some of the Shakespearean characters in miniature—sometimes to the point of caricature." such sweet thunder it most certainly is.



SUCH SWEET THUNDER DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

1 - UP AND DOWN, UP AND DOWN (I Will Load Thom Up And Down) 4 - MADINASHOM)

4 - MADINASHOM BREAT ONES

10 CHINGIGHO - B. Strayborn)

5 - HALF THE FUN TO Ellington)

6 - CIRCLE OF FOUNTHS

10 CHINGION - B. Strayborn)

10 CHINGION - B. Strayborn)

10 CHINGION - B. STRAYBORN

10 CHINGION (D Illington B. Strayhorn)

CBS 84405

SACEM

Drums: Sam Woodyard Bass: Jimmy Wood Piano: Duke Ellington



Notes continued from front cover)

SUCH SWEET THUNDER-The title selection which opens the suite was inspired by Othello and is, to quote Duke again, "the sweet and swinging, very convincing story Othello told Desdemona. It must have been the most, because when her father complained and tried to have the marriage annulled, the Duke of Venice said that if Othello had said this to his daughter, she would have gone for it too." The piece itself features brass in plungers and the sweettalking trumpet of Ray Nance.

SONNET FOR CAESAR-This is the first of four sonnets Duke has included in the suite, scored to coincide with the fourteen-line sonnet form. In this one, Jimmy Hamilton is featured in a slow, imperial piece notable also for Sam Woodyard's hand drumming. The final measures foretell of tragedy.

SONNET TO HANK CINQ-Ellington uses a second sonnet to pay tribute to Shakespeare's preoccupation with history. In it Britt Woodman is featured in a lipshattering trombone solo. Duke notes that "the changes of tempo have to do with the changes of pace and the map as a result of wars."

LADY MAC-This is the first of a number of selections dedicated to single characters, in this case, of course, Lady Macboth. "Though she was a lady of noble birth," Ellington says, "we suspect there was a little ragtime in her soul." And so, a jazz waltz that begins with an Ellington piano solo, continues with a sax ensemble and a pretty interlude by Russell Procope on alto, and then features Clark Terry in three-quarter time. The ominous last chords hint at what else Lady Mac had in her soul.

SONNET IN SEARCH OF A MOOR-This sonnet features Jimmy Wood on bass and opens with what Duke calls a "Hi-Fi" introduction on piano. Clarinets accompany the bass throughout the delicate, rhythmic glimpse of the Moor.

THE TELECASTERS-Side 1 closes with typical Ellington musical license, "We took the liberty," he notes, "of combining characters from two plays. It seems that the three witches and lago had something in common in that they all had something to say, so we call them the Telecasters." The three girls are played here by the three trombones, and lago is Harry Carney's baritone sax, And just to emphasize the loquacity, there are a few moments of very pregnant silence.

UP AND DOWN. UP AND DOWN (I WILL LEAD THEM UP AND DOWN) (Act 3. Scene 2)-Side 2 opens with a piece describing Puck's maneuvres in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Demetrius and Helena, Lysander and Hermia, and Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, were constantly being maneuvered into awkward positions by Puck, who just stood on the side and laughed and said, "Lord, what fools these mortals be." The couples you hear are Jimmy Hamilton and Ray Nance, clarinet and violin, Russell Procope and Paul Gonsalves, alto and tenor saxophone, and Johnny Hodges and John Sanders, alto and valve trombone, Puck is Clark Terry, who plays the famous quotation

SONNET FOR SISTER KATE - Another sonnet follows, this one dedicated to a lady who needs no introduction. It is played by Quentin Jackson, whose trombone-with-plunger reading is in perfect sonnet form.

THE STAR-CROSSED LOVERS - Romeo and Juliet, of course, and a most beautiful melody to describe their love. "This is the sad story of two beautiful people." Duke says, and Hodges' alto as Juliet and Gonsalves' tenor as Romeo give fresh and very moving conviction to their story.

MADNESS IN GREAT ONES - Here is an Ellingtonian parallel to Hamlet's character during the time he was deceiving his stepfather. ("Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.") Hamlet was trying to make him believe he was crazy, and, as Duke notes, "in those days crazy didn't mean the same thing it means now." At any rate, crazy this is with the Ellington orchestra playing a scene that does justice to Shakespeare, "Cat" Anderson is the featured, stratospheric trumpeter who all but disappears into outer space at the end.

HALF THE FUN-Duke's one-line introduction to this number is: "The generally accepted theory is that the mood was specific," And the music matches it as the Ellington flair for an exotic setting and a sensuous musical feeling provide the Nile, the barge, an ostrich fan and -Johnny Hodges.

CIRCLE OF FOURTHS-The final part of the suite is inspired by Shakespeare himself and the four major parts of his artistic contribution: tragedy, comedy, history, and the sonnets, Paul Gonsalves is featured throughout a piece that exemplifies musically the scope of the Bard, progressing by the musical interval of a fourth through every musical key. It is a wild and ingenious conclusion to the Shakespearean Suite.

SUCH SWEET THUNDER, recorded at CBS' 30th Street Studios in New York, is dedicated to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Stratford, Ontario, and to Duke's many Canadian friends. Its first complete performance took place at the Music for Moderns concert at Town Hall, Sunday evening, April 28,

Irving Townsend



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