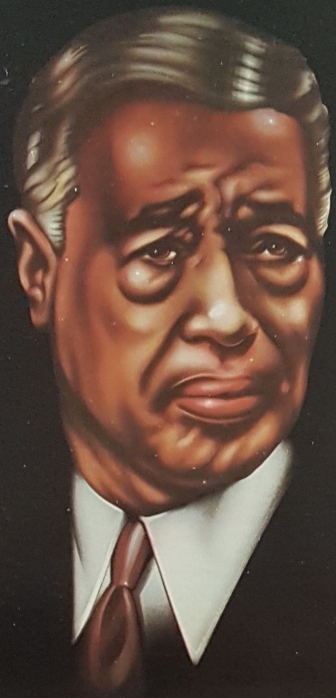


D U K E F E E L I N G T O N

T O G O B R A V A S U P P E



Among the hundreds of hours of music which Duke Ellington has recorded during an artistic lifespan stretching back most of our century, this album contains for me many of the finest and, above all, the most poignant passages. For this, there is a special reason.

When Edward Kennedy Ellington, the Duke, arrived again in England in October 1971, I felt the usual sense of joyous expectation. But there was, too, a chillier feeling in my bones and, I imagine, in those of his thousands of other admirers.

For years, as it seemed, one's writing about Ellington had been a mixture of wonder at the incredible artistic achievements of the man (aged with growing apprehension that one day it must end, Ellington himself was, after all, approaching 72) and his orchestra had retained a totally unique and glorious character for well over 40 years. In 1969, it had been impossible to avoid—in the program notes for his tour—this statement:

"Cautely, one has to ask how long the musical miracle can continue, since Ellington and his musicians are only humans. Every Ellington occasion is, in a sense, special. But as we move into the 1970s, concerts that today become more and more special. The band, and its leader, will have to give up some time."

And now, by 1971, some part of that painful prophecy had come to pass. The orchestra which Duke led lacked three of the stalwarts whose combined service with him exceeded 100 years! Johnny Hodges, of the ravishing alto sax tone, had died on May 11, 1970. The gentle trombonist, Lawrence Brown, and Earl Anderson, the stratospheric trumpeter, had not come on tour. This was perhaps the most savage triple blow Duke's orchestra had ever suffered.

The sense of relief when one heard the band was almost unbearable. Things could never be quite what they used to be with such virtuosi absent. Yet Duke had pulled new wonders from his storehouse. Newer and quite superb Ellingtonians were there—like Morris Turney and Harold Minervo in the sax section. Older slummers like Mitchell "Beaky" Wood had been loved back. There was (as always) a quota of new compositions mingled with the old repertoire. And—most important of all—the orchestra sounded so sparkling fresh it was simply impossible to believe it could be, in terms of human years, so venerable an institution. Just listen to the very first track of this album, "Cotton Tail," and see how this joyful attacking liveliness is transmitted.

The pieces on the album were recorded during concerts in that month of October 1971 at Bristol and Birmingham and I believe the orchestra has rarely played better. And the chief miracle (that word again, for what else can describe the phenomenon?) is that these brilliant performances were not something carefully reworked up and exploited for one special night, but are simply a fair copy of what Ellington's musicians produce night after night, year after year of his unending world safari.

They came to Britain for the concert's trailing clouds of achievement after a four-week tour of Russia, Duke's first, which had been a stunning success. In the opening concert at Leningrad, for example, nine pieces were demanded and played (four ravished the stage). Duke, of course, had told the Russians (in Russian) that he loved them dearly and the "Melody Maker" had reported: "Even the black market did a roaring trade. Five ruble notes (\$5.55) sold for 40 rubles (\$44). A case of free enterprises striking back."

Russia, Japan, Argentina, India, California, Tege, Ginevraschberg — where hasn't he been? Fifty (or more) a year for half a century, dancing, spent cashing round the world. Yet he's created in that time a positive deluge of popular songs, instrumentalists, major tone poems and suites, sacred music, scores for stage musicals, TV and movies. Where has he written them? On the goldfishbowl glass walls of recording studios, in railroad coaches and band buses, on boxes of hotel rooms. Often when Billy Strayhorn, his great collaborator, was alive the job as they created music together would be the telephone.

Everything that he has written can, of course, be played or sung by any competent musician. But his music never sounds so "right" as when it is played by his own orchestra, for he has compassed to suit the skills, genius and idiosyncrasies of the fantastic roster of men who have stuck with him year in, year out—players like Hodges, Harry Carney, Russell Procope, Paul Gonsalves and Cootie Starkins.

Duke himself is a superb pianist: sparse, elegant, surprising. But as Billy Strayhorn said, his real instrument is his orchestra. He has fought through thick and thin to hold that band together since the 1920s and its uniquely personal character—it never needs to use strings or horns or bassoons, yet sometimes sounds as if it's got them—springs from his unmatched artistic determination.

"If I didn't like the way the band played I wouldn't pay so much for the pleasure of listening to it and writing for it," he said.

What Ellington's musicians say about him is pretty remarkable too. Yet it's not praise alone, especially when you consider that Duke's name has been justifiably compared at various times with Debussy, Mahler and Bach and who has been called in various ways one of the greatest living composers by Stravinsky, Porey Delinger and Constant Lambert.

Russell Procope called him an iron hand in a silk glove. And "Ticky Sam" Hunter, for over 20 years his trombonist, said even more eulogistically, "He may be a genius, but Jesus how he eats. He's a loved man, and I believe that his music comes out sounding as if there's love in it.

God knows where to begin discussing the music on this album, which is a very faithful cameo of the bewildering majesty offered by the band on that late—'71 tour. The first thing perhaps is that despite the changes in personnel, the orchestra retains every trait of the Ellington sound. Contrast the lush tones of "Soul Satisfying Beach," the first movement of the "Togo Brava, Brava Togo" suite, with the fantastic rough and "dirty" sound of the saxas on "C Jam Blues"; and listen to the "jungle" feel (which Ellington virtually invented over 40 years ago) on other parts of "Togo Brava."

Second, consider the range of music played. There are standards from the old repertoire like "Cotton Tail," "C Jam Blues" and "In A Mellow Tone," though every one of them sounds different from previous versions. There is middle-period material like "La Pias Belle Africaine," of which the performance here is the best I've ever heard. There is brand-new stuff, including four movements from the extended "Togo Brava" work which was premiered at the Newport Festival of 1971 and written by Duke to honor the silver-and-fringed county which lies sandwiched between Ghana and Dahomey on the western bulge of Africa facing the Equator.

There are also some rather unusual elements for Ellington—music written by hands other than his own and Strayhorn's, like Morris Turner's exquisite tribute to Johnny Hodges, "Checkered Hat," as well as heavy overtones of rock sounds and other contemporary phenomena. Duke lives in our world besides his own, dig?

Duke's music is always seen alive through great soloists as well as the ensemble sound and, whether old or new, the soloists you hear are superb. Look at the long-service big-league list:

To Paul Gonzales on tenor sax belongs the rambunctious "Cotton Tail" and the easy, beautiful "Happy Reunion," at which Duke shouts in appreciation. Cow saysid also make a tenor "swing" on Duke Gonzales'; Russell Procope's clarinet pops up all over the place, including "La Pias Belle Africaine" (in which his long-time's sax is superb) and "C Jam Blues," before the trombonist is "Daddy" Wood, and Gonzales and Costia Williams also take turns, Harry Conniff, the anchor-man baritone sax, is great on "La Pias Belle Africaine," whilst Costia Williams has a soulful ball. He does his famous plunger-mouth act on "In A Mellow Tone," during which he provided to the stage like a giant, and his fat open trumpet tone is splendid on "Got It Bad," where the girl singer is Nell Brockshire.

None of the newer men has done more for Duke than Morris Turner, who was first heard in 1969. He plays yearning alto sax ("Checkered Hat") and tenor, whilst his flate-playing, heard a lot during "Togo Brava" has given Duke's music a new dimension. Harold Minerva, an even new alto player, solos on the rocking "Add," and the sound is explosively post-Chicago Parker. That, for Duke, really is unusual.

Comment upon the final tune on the album I have deliberately left until last. It is the delicate and very beautiful piano piece, "Lulus Blossom," composed by Billy Strayhorn. It concluded many of the concerts (for what else could follow it?) and was quietly played by Duke unaccompanied, a most poignantly expressive memoir of the man who for almost 30 years was Ellington's "alter ego."

It reminds me how great a pianist Duke is, and that was so true of his playing on the 1971 tour. Just listen to the surprising and inspired piano on this album (do you not hear where Thelonious Monk, among others, learned his trade?) and you will know how alive and well, thank God, Ellington is. I shall never forget the sight of Duke in 1971, calmly striding about the stage in double white suit and dark blue shirt, smiling the whole band. I think you will find the sounds on this record equally unforgettable.

DEREK JEWELL, Jazz and Popular Music Critic,
The Sunday Times of London. © 1972 Derek Jewell Ltd.



UNITED ARTISTS RECORDS

SIDE 1
STEREO
UXS-92

Produced by
Noel Walker

DUKE
ELLINGTON

Togo Brava
Suite

- 1. C-JAM BLUES — 4:36
(D. Ellington) Robbins Music Corp, ASCAP
- 2. TOGO BRAVA-BRAVA TOGO SUITE:
PART I-SOUL SOOTHING BEACH — 4:54
PART II-NATURELLEMENT — 6:02
(D. Ellington) Tempo Music ASCAP

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UNITED ARTISTS RECORDS

SIDE 2
STEREO
UXS-92

Produced by
Noel Walker

DUKE
ELLINGTON

Togo Brava
Suite

- 1. TOGO BRAVA-BRAVA TOGO SUITE: (CONCLUSION)
PART III-AMOUR, AMOUR—PART IV-RIGHT ON TOGO — 4:30
(D. Ellington) Tempo Music ASCAP
- 2. HAPPY REUNION — 4:25
(D. Ellington) Tempo Music ASCAP
- 3. ADDI — 3:35
(D. Ellington) Tempo Music ASCAP
- 4. LOTUS BLOSSOM — 2:25
(B. Strayhorn) Tempo Music ASCAP

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UNITED ARTISTS RECORDS

SIDE 3
STEREO
UXS-92

Produced by
Noel Walker

DUKE
ELLINGTON

Togo Brava
Suite

- 1. COTTON TAIL — 4:00
(D. Ellington) Robbins Music Corp, ASCAP
- 2. CHECKERED HAT — 4:10
(N. Turney) Tempo Music ASCAP
- 3. LA PLUS BELLE AFRICAINE — 8:00
(D. Ellington) Tempo Music ASCAP

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UNITED ARTISTS RECORDS

SIDE 4
STEREO
UXS-92

Produced by
Noel Walker

DUKE
ELLINGTON

Togo Brava
Suite

- 1. IN A MELLOW TONE — 3:50
(D. Ellington-M. Gabler)
Robbins Music Corp, ASCAP
- 2. I GOT IT BAD (AND THAT AIN'T GOOD) — 5:10
(D. Ellington-P. F. Webster)
Robbins Music Corp-Harrison Music ASCAP
- 3. GOOF — 2:48
(D. Ellington) Tempo Music ASCAP
- 4. SOUL FLUTE (FLUTE AIME) — 3:05
(D. Ellington) Tempo Music ASCAP

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1. C-JAY BLOVE
2. TALKING
KONKISS MUSIC CORP. ASCAP 4:36
3. TONG BRAVA BRAVA TONG SHITE
AND BOBO BOBINGO BEACH
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 4:34
4. FIVE TON TONNELMENT
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 6:02

5. TONG BRAVA BRAVA BOBO BUIE
AND T. PRINCE, & BOBO
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP
6. TONG BRAVA BRAVA
TONG BOBO BOBINGO BEACH
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 4:30
7. NEPPY OTIONON
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 4:23
8. JODI
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 3:08
9. LOTUS BLOSSOM
DU BAYBORN
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 2:05

10. COTTON TAIL
DU ELLINGTON
RUSSELL PROSGE ASCAP 4:10
11. CHICKENED NAT
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 2:10
12. LA PLUS BELLE AFRICAINE
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 3:08

13. IN A MELLOW TONE
DU ELLINGTON
RUSSELL PROSGE ASCAP 3:08
14. I GOT IT BAD (AND I'M GOOD)
DU ELLINGTON
RUSSELL PROSGE ASCAP 3:08
15. KODI
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 2:48
16. KODI ELITE
DU ELLINGTON
TEMPO MUSIC ASCAP 3:00



PRODUCED BY NOEL WALKER
ARRANGED BY DUKE ELLINGTON

CHARLES "CHUCK" CONNORS, TROMBONE
MALLEOLA FAVORO, TROMBONE
MITCHELL "BOB" WOOD, TROMBONE
CHARLES "CODDIE" WILLIAMS, TRUMPET
JOHN COLES, TRUMPET

MERCER ELLINGTON, TRUMPET
EDWARD PRESTON, TRUMPET
HAROLD JOHNSON, TRUMPET
HARRY CARNEY, SAXOPHONE
RUSSELL PROSGE, SAXOPHONE

NORRIS TURNER, SAXOPHONE
PAUL GONSALVES, SAXOPHONE
HAROLD ASHBY, SAXOPHONE
HAROLD MINERVE, SAXOPHONE
JOE BENJAMIN, BASS

ALBUM DESIGN: DAVID WILLARDSON,
JOHN & BARBARA CASATO

RUFUS JONES, DRUMS
DUKE ELLINGTON, PIANO
BORRIS GORDON, VOCALIST
ON "I GOT IT BAD" AND
"THAT AIN'T GOOD"