



TRIBUTE TO DUKE ELLINGTON



*Live at the Montreux
Jazz Festival, 1974*



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The death of Duke Ellington on the 24th May 1974 came as tremendous shock to the jazz fraternity. Duke had always such an aura of immortality about him that his demise was totally unbelievable.

The shock waves were still felt around the world when the *Piano Summit* I had assembled appeared at the eighth Montreux Jazz Festival, just over a month later on Tuesday 2nd July. It seemed appropriate to dedicate the performances to Duke's memory and I asked each of the artists to pay homage to the master in their own particular way.

Randy Weston said about his tribute to his friend and mentor "Ellington is one of the greatest musicians and composers in history and certainly a major influence on modern music in the twentieth century. He influenced me a great deal as a

pianist, but in a late-blooming kind of way. As a boy, in the forties, I listened a lot to Ellington, but I didn't quite understand the music. His musicians, people like Johnny Hodges and Jimmy Blanton, got to me first. Thelonious Monk was also a great influence on me, although I actually had a percussive, rhythmic style of piano before I heard him. When I *did* hear him, I relistened to Duke and realised that their styles had a great deal in common."

Randy's playing here, related though it is to the Willie "The Lion" Smith-Ellington-Monk lineage, is lean and self contained. Its timing, tone and touch are particularly noteworthy. It's emotional, but never gushingly so, and its sparseness is perhaps its greatest strength. Listen, for example, to how the pianist recreates the sound of the Ellington brass, even suggesting the

sonorities produced by their various mutes, with a handful of close-voiced notes. "This tribute," he says, "is something I felt very deeply, very spiritually. It was strictly improvised; I didn't have a set format or know what particular combination of tunes I was going to play. In this particular cluster there's a blues which I wrote for Duke, in there with *Sophisticated Lady*, *In my solitude*, *Take the A Train* and various other things."

Michael Cuscuna writing about this very special evening noted "One of the most rewarding musical nights that I have ever spent was Tuesday, July 2nd, 1974. Rolling into Montreux, Switzerland after a day of meetings and travelling, I walked right into the festival's piano night, which had the underlying theme of serving as a tribute to Duke Ellington.

Jay McShann and Earl Hines did

amazing and vital sets, typifying two great eras of jazz. But it was Roland Hanna's performance that transfixed and stunned me. Hanna has had occasional trio albums through the years and worked as a featured sideman with the best of them, but never had I heard and appreciated his art as much as on this magic night of solo piano. He was truly original and outstanding. Through the entire evening, I kept hoping that someday these performances would make their way onto disc for permanent preservation." Well, happily we *can* rely on this disc *Take the A Train* and *I got it bad* from Roland's pulsating performance that evening!

Satin Doll was chosen by the irrepresible Jay McShann for his salute to the Duke. It is a beautiful and reflective version of this ageless Ellington classic. "Hootie" displays a

wealth of keyboard technique and an obvious appreciation of Ellingtonia on this and the subsequent perennial *I'm beginning to see the light*.

And so on to the genius that was Earl Hines. "Fatha" was over seventy years old on this occasion, wearing the mantle of "the greatest living jazz soloist of his era" with dignity. Who else was there to usurp him from the piano bench at a gathering of jazz keyboard men?

In Earl's case the tribute took on a more personal slant, for Earl and Duke, apart from being fellow members of jazz's aristocracy, had been close friends for many years. Hines decided to call upon the audience to help him out with his beautiful reading of the 1934 Ducal ballad *In my solitude*. He asked them to hum the melody when he nodded to them. "Don't sing, just hum the tune. And

remember you'll be on record!" he reminded them. The result was a triumph of impromptu audience participation with the Montreux crowd obeying instructions to the letter. An extended blues by Ellington was called for as the second part of the tribute and Earl eased into *Don't get around much any more*, this time without any assistance from the audience. In settings such as this Hines could take advantage of the lack of time limitations to move the performance through a number of mood changes.

Over the years Earl developed an infallible sense of showmanship which in no way affected or detracted from his own musical achievements. He was of the generation which believed that the audience deserves to be treated with respect and, if necessary, provided with hand and foot-holds during the course of an extended improvisation.

He paid careful attention to programming and appreciated the need to give his audience from time to time, tunes they knew. When it comes to pure pianistic ability then Earl possessed orchestral power in his hands; he could fill out the harmony with rich chords and his ear was so good that it is an education to examine even the most flamboyant "tricks." When he sets up one of those incredible tremolo figures with his right hand, as he does here towards the end of *Don't get around much any more*, notice the casual way in which he will raise or lower by a semi-tone a note in the treble in order to make a tune fit against the tremolo without a discord. It smacks of arrogance but Earl had no other way of playing for he was a true professional and one hundred per cent a musician.

Cecil Percival Taylor's astounding

technique and energy coupled with the ferocious and percussive nature of his playing tends to obliterate the fact that Cecil has roots too.

Duke was one of Cecil's main influences, indeed in the early 1950s he had worked with bands led by Johnny Hodges and Lawrence Brown. Cecil's pianistics are relatively restrained in his cameo Montreux performance of *After All*, which was the last part of *Silent Tongues* his tribute to Duke and other dead heroes.

After All wraps up these memorable tributes to the Duke. Edward Kennedy would surely have been thrilled by these heartfelt tributes by five masters of the keyboard.

Alan Bates
(Earl Hines material by Alun Morgan)

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BLCD760208

SOLO PIANO BY
RANDY WESTON, SIR ROLAND HANNA, JAY McSHANN,
EARL HINES, CECIL TAYLOR

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <u>RANDY WESTON</u> : A DEDICATION
TO EDWARD KENNEDY
ELLINGTON <i>Weston. 8.22</i> | 5. <u>JAY McSHANN</u> : I'M BEGINNING
TO SEE THE LIGHT
<i>Ellington, George & James. 3.32</i> |
| 2. <u>SIR ROLAND HANNA</u> :
TAKE THE A TRAIN
<i>Strayhorn. 6.07</i> | 6. <u>EARL HINES</u> : IN MY SOLITUDE
<i>Ellington. 7.51</i> |
| 3. <u>SIR ROLAND HANNA</u> : I GOT IT
BAD (AND THAT AIN'T GOOD)
<i>Ellington & Webster. 7.21</i> | 7. <u>EARL HINES</u> : DON'T GET
AROUND MUCH ANY MORE
<i>Ellington. 10.58</i> |
| 4. <u>JAY McSHANN</u> : SATIN DOLL
<i>Ellington, Webster & Strayhorn. 6.41</i> | 8. <u>CECIL TAYLOR</u> : AFTER ALL
<i>Taylor. 2.50</i>
<i>Playing time: 53.58</i> |

Recorded live at the Montreux Jazz Festival
2nd July 1974 with the kind co-operation of
Claude Nobs
Recording Engineers: Stephan Sulke &
Chris Pennycate

Produced by Alan Bates
Photography: D.F. Photo Archive
Design: Malcolm Walker

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Distributed By:

2840 Diepholz - Germany
☎ 0 54 41 / 2081 - Fax 0 54 41 / 78 33
USA: P.O. Box 3 - Little Silver - NJ 07739 (USA)
☎ (908) 5 30 68 87 - Fax (908) 842 - 50 41

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