

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER

2^xHD
FUSION

DUKE ELLINGTON

TAKE THE "A" TRAIN

STORYVILLE

There can hardly be a more evocative sound in the jazz pantheon than Duke Ellington's four-bar piano introduction to *Take the A Train*, his signature tune from 1941 and, appropriately, the opening track on this album. Nothing establishes with greater certainty the fact that we are in Ellington country, the colourful, magical, enchanted realm of magenta hazes, sepia panoramas, black and tan fantasies, indigo moods, and mellow tones – the world of the musical black, brown and beige.

There are those who hold that the vintage years of the Ellington Orchestra were from the late twenties to the early forties – and this may well be the case as far as musical innovations and influence are concerned. But the orchestral sides here offer abundant evidence that improved recording techniques and a more contemporarily oriented rhythm section do nothing to detract from the inspirational quality of the Duke's music. The band swings mightily on *A Train* over the steaming cymbals of Sam Woodyard and the rock-steady pulse

of Aaron Bell. This is a classic arrangement – as familiar as the tune itself. The bridge in the second chorus, with Ray Nance's muted trumpet set against tightly harmonized saxophones and Woodyard firing rimshots on the fourth beat of the bar, has preservation order on it. The piano player, as Duke liked to call himself, opens *Blow Boy, Blow*. A 12 bar blues. With a two-chorus solo, then as Woodyard chops down on the off-



beat, Paul Gonsalves slides in, sibilant and serpentine, getting strong chordal backing from Ellington. You'll hear Gonsalves employing a favourite device of fashioning a two-bar phrase and then repeating it a semitone up. Listen, too, to a characteristic ducal arranging effect – building up the excitement with increasingly obtrusive ensemble patterns behind the soloist, climaxing in that five-note two-bar brass figure.

If only because Ellington was inclined not to spotlight his solo piano artistry all that extensively on record and in concert, the next track is particularly appropriate for an album which seeks to capture the quintessential Duke. What's more, it presents Duke's interpretations of some of his most celebrated compositions. The piano player in the Ellington band was certainly no slouch, and if there are imperfections here and there in this segué selection of nine compositions, then it is almost certainly due to the fact that Duke's composing and arranging pre-

occupations left him little time to hone his piano technique.

Accompanying himself with a certain amount of distracted grunting, Duke parades those familiar Ellington characteristics – that jagged descending run (as at the entry to the bridge of *Satin Doll*), the walking tenths in the bridge of *Mood Indigo* and the dense, dissonant chords. There's a flamboyant run at the end of *Indigo* to lead into *I'm Beginning To See The Light* at a fast tempo. Duke notches up some applause for his spasmodic stride interlude here. Another highlight is *Sophisticated Lady*, once one of Duke's most brilliantly constructed pieces with an outstandingly original chord sequence and a resolution from middle eight to last eight which is a triumph of compositional ingenuity.

Things Ain't What They Used To Be, a great Ellington flag-waver from 1941, opens with Harry Carney's magisterial baritone indelibly underlining the theme. This piece was always a great

shuffle-rhythm specialty of the Ellington band and, once again, the orchestration, with that "Do-me-so-do" riff behind the alto of Johnny Hodges is as much a part of the work as the basic melody. Hodges plays a beautiful solo here, full of restraint and subtle colour, and the band stokes up the temperature with increasingly assertive backing figures.

Another famous intro leads into *Satin Doll* an Ellington-Strayhorn-Johnny Mercer collaboration from 1953 – and this performance features some smokey Gonsalves and some articulate pizzicato from Aaron Bell who also has the last word with low glissando from the seventh up to the keynote.

New World A Comin' is a 1943 piece whose title is taken from a book by Roi Ottley which predicted a social revolution for the blacks when the Second World War was over. It is an extended showcase for Duke's piano – an impressionistic composition with a majestic piano intro. It is full of rippling runs

and imaginative chords and Duke seems thoroughly composed and assured – as, indeed, he generally tended to feel when in Paris. Again that descending ducal run is heard from time to time and at one stage he introduces a jagged little left-hand figure against which he sets some brilliant right hand inventions. His concentration and commitment are underlined here and there by a sustained hummed monotone. Altogether a bravura piano performance.

For *VIP Boogie*, it is back to the shuffle rhythm again and the dark brown baritone of Carney leading into a superb saxophone ensemble exercise. Carney solos most handsomely and there follows an airy saxophone section chorus with Hamilton's clarinet on top. Then Hamilton solos against trumpet and trombone riffs and "bombs" from saxophones. The piece ends with a splendid Hamilton cadenza which climaxes in a sustained E flat while the Duke makes his way multi-lingually, and somewhat falteringly, through

three and a half counts of ten.

The Good Years of Jazz features Duke's piano set against that illustrious saxophone section at a most therapeutic, easy swinging temp. After a mellow unison trombone chorus, the muted brass swap brisk phrases with the saxophones, and then the piano player sets his seal on the proceedings with a very definitive sustained bass F.

It is quite impossible for one album to capture the full flavour and rich diversity of Duke Ellington's music and orchestra, but the eight tracks here offer a remarkably well-balanced sample of the prolific repertoire – the immortal compositions, the arresting arrangements, the outstanding soloists and, not least, the distinctive solo work of the piano player, Edward Kennedy Ellington, the Duke who became King of Orchestral Jazz.

— Mike Hennessey



A brief history of Duke

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington was an American jazz pianist, composer, and bandleader. He is regarded as one of the greatest jazz composers and a prolific performer of his time. Most of his musical works on instruments set standards for others, which were later adapted into songs. This renowned jazz musician exhibited his excellence in film scores and classical compositions too. Considered a very important personality in the history of jazz music, he liked to call his music 'American Music' instead of jazz. A

bandleader, pianist and a composer, Ellington was nicknamed 'Duke' by his childhood friends for his gracious and well-mannered behavior. He was truly a genius in the sense of instrument combinations, arranging jazz and improvising music that made Ellington stand unique among other composers of his time. His reputation as a composer and bandleader is intact even after his death. He collaborated with many others and wrote more than one thousand compositions and many of his extant works became a standard in jazz music. Ellington and his orchestra saw a major career revival after an ap-



pearance at the Newport Jazz Festival, Rhode Island, in July 1956. He recorded for most American record companies of his time and performed in several films and composed several stage musicals. With his creative genius, Ellington elevated the perception of jazz to an art form on a par with other traditional musical genres.

Duke Ellington influenced millions of people both around the world and at home.

- 1966 Duke Ellington received the President's Gold Medal from President Lyndon Johnson
- 1969 President Richard M Nixon presented Duke Ellington with the Medal of Freedom
- 1973 Duke Ellington was awarded the French Legion of Honor
- 1986 A Has a United States Commemorative stamp with his image on it was issued
- Duke Ellington received 13 Grammy Awards
- Duke Ellington received the Pulitzer Prize



DUKE ELLINGTON

Take the A Train

- 1 TAKE THE A TRAIN (Strayhorn) 3:00
- 2 SATIN DOLL (Ellington) 3:24
- 3 THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE (Ellington) 2:43
- 4 BLOW BOY BLOW (Ellington) 4:29
- 5 VIP BOOGIE/JAM WITH SAM (Ellington) 5:33
- 6 THE GOOD YEARS OF JAZZ (Ellington) 1:23

BONUS TRACKS: PIANO SOLO – DUKE ELLINGTON

Recorded in France, February 25, 1966

- 7 Medley 10:19
IT DON'T MEAN A THING (Ellington)
SATIN DOLL (Ellington – Strayhorn – Mercer)
SOLITUDE (Ellington – De Lange – Mills)
I GOT IT BAD (Ellington – P. Webster)
DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE (Ellington – Russell)
MOOD INDIGO (Ellington – Bigard – Mills)
I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT
(Ellington – James – Hodges – George)
SOPHISTICATED LADY (Ellington – Parrish – Mills)
CARAVAN (Tizol – Ellington – Mills)
- 8 NEW WORLD A COMIN' (Ellington) 8:27

TRACKS 1-6

Harold Baker, Bill Berry,
Ed Mullens, Cat Anderson (tps)
Ray Nance (tp, vin),
Leon Cox, Lawrence Brown,
Chuck Connors (tbs),
Jimmy Hamilton (cl, ts),
Russell Procope (cl, as),
Johnny Hodges (as),
Paul Gonsalves (ts),
Harry Carney (bars, b-cl),
Duke Ellington (p), Aaron Bell (b),
Sam Woodyard (drm)
Recorded NYC, January 9, 1962

TRACKS 7-8

Duke Ellington piano
Recorded France, February 25, 1966

2xHD Mastering: René Laflamme
2xHD Executive Producer:
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Album cover and booklet concept
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THE 2xHD FUSION MASTERING SYSTEM



In the constant evolution of its proprietary mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.

The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original 1/4" 15 ips CCIR master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired from the playback head directly to a Telefunken EF806 tube, using OCC silver cable. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.

The resulting signal is then transformed into high resolution formats by recording it in DSD11.2kHz using a Merging Technologies' Horus A to D converter. All analog and digital cables that are used are state of the art. The 2xHD FUSION mastering system is powered by a super capacitor power supply, using a new technology that lowers the digital noise found in the lowest level of the spectrum. A vacuum tube NAGRA HDdac (DSD) is used as a reference digital playback converter in order to A and B with the original analog master tape, permitting the fusion of the warmth of analog with the refinement of digital.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audiophile sound engineer René Laflamme.

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