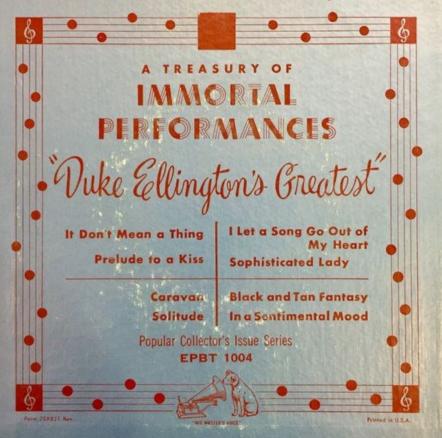
RCA VICTOR 45 Extended Play



From the Treasury of IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES

DUKE ELLINGTON'S GREATEST

Notes by LEONARD FEATHER

In the twenty-five years since he first established a national reputation with his debut at the old Cotton Club, Duke Ellington has enjoyed a dual career. Few of his more casual admirers realize the necessity to differentiate between Ellington the orchestrator and Ellington the songwriter, yet these two channels along which the stream of his success has flowed are generally quite distinct, overlapping only in occasional instances.

Ellington the orchestrator builds works that are designed strictly for his own band, in which counterpoint, the voicing, the interpretation, are as much an integral part of the work as the main melodic line. Ellington the songwriter designs hits with simple single-line melodies, to be played and popularized just as much by other artists as by his own unit.

In this collection, the two Ellingtonian facets are happily combined. Eight of the tunes that helped to establish Ellington among the Berlins and Kerns as a popular songwriter are given up-to-date treatment in the hands of their creator and his perennial collaborator Billy Strayhorn. Some of the tunes here started out as simple instrumental numbers and were later developed into popular songs (Caravan, Sophisticated Lady); others were conceived specifically with the popular song market in mind (I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart); and one number has remained a strictly instrumental Ellington specialty to this day

(Black and Tan Fantasy). All eight are, in their present form, a synthesis of everything that characterizes the Ellington of the 1950's—a figure as unique in modern American music as he was in the 1920's.

It Don't Mean a Thing—The three girl singers who were with Duke in 1945 enter one at a time—in order, Marie Ellington (no relation), Joya Sherrill and Kay Davis. Marie sings the middle eight bars. Taft Jordon takes a trumpet break and Al Sears is heard in a solo, typical of his clipped, rhythmic style. Tune dates from 1931; new Ellington-Strayhorn arrangement from 1945.

Caravan—This 1937 tune was created by Juan Tizol, Puerto Rican valve trombonist who rejoined Ellington in 1951 after several years with Harry James. It gets a rhumba treatment in this later version arranged by Duke; Lawrence Brown, trombone, Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, and Ray Nance, violin, are spotlighted.

Sophisticated Lady—Long associated with Toby Hardwick, former lead alto sax in the band, who first recorded it with Duke in 1933, this makes a vehicle for Duke's piano, Hamilton's clarinet and the trumpet of William "Cat" Anderson, who rejoined Duke in 1950 after a short fling with his own band. Strayhorn made the latter part of the arrangement, Duke the first part.

Solitude—The most famous of all Duke's popular song hits, first recorded by Victor in 1934 as an instrumental and now presented as a vocal specialty featuring all four of the Ellington 1945 singers: (in order of their appearance) Kay Davis, Joya Sherrill, Marie Ellington and Albert Hibbler. Strayhorn's arrangement.

In a Sentimental Mood—Otto "Toby" Hardwick displays his pretty and unusual alto sax tone; Carney's baritone sax lends its full-bodied, tone-color; and other contributions are made by Lawrence Brown, trumpeter Rex Stewart, and the Duke himself, who ends the side on an unexpected sixth. The old arrangement was first recorded in 1935; the later one, by Duke and Strayhorn, a decade later.

I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart—Harry Carney's bass clarinet and Duke's piano, the latter playing a countermelody reminiscent of My Blue Heaven, team to start this side in a charmingly different mood. After eight bars Joya's excellent vocal, brass in hats, and Brown's trombone, maintain the mood. This delightful Ellington-Strayhorn treatment of the 1938 Cotton Club show tune will probably be hailed as the most successful of this whole series.

Prelude to a Kiss—An Ellington piano introduction leads into one of the loveliest and most colorfully supported Carney baritone solos on record. Nance's sensitive violin and some more Ellington piano contribute before Carney returns to close the performance. Ellington-Strayhorn arrangement; 1938 tune.

Black and Tan Fantasy—One of the first notable Ellington instrumentals, co-authored in 1927 by the late Bubber Miley, Duke's first "growl" trumpet specialist, and featuring, in this 1945 treatment, Carney's baritone and the plunger-muted trombone of the late Joseph "Tricky Sam" Nanton. Complete with the funeral-march ending, this is a fine three-minute dose of nostalgia for the older Ellington minor mood of the tune, it draws on the band's greatly advanced tonal resources.



The Collector's Issue Label designates a recording of great historical and musical interest which, although technically not representative of RCA Victor's present day high quality standards, has been reissued in response to widespread public demand.





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