



# Ellington

## Live at the 1956 Stratford Festival

With  
Clark Terry  
Trumpet  
Harry Carney  
Clarinet  
Ray Nance  
Trumpet & Vocals  
Johnny Hodges  
Saxophone

CD-616  
Historic  
Recording



**MUSIC  
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## THE DAYS WITH DUKE

There is no greater name in musical Americana than that of Duke Ellington, who, over several decades, has innovated, created, and dignified American music with such skill and devotion that his name has become synonymous with the best of the art form.

Ellington's prolific pen has provided such imaginative scores, and the presentation of himself and his orchestra has been so urbane and sophisticated, that he is the obvious subject of reams of stories and interviews. But strangely enough, very little is known of his thoughts and dreams--the inside workings of Duke as a human being. This is not to imply that I know Duke better than anyone else, but I do feel that I have a different frame of reference from most people's. At various times I have been his barber, chef, valet, third trumpet man in his orchestra, and his poker opponent. From where I sit, Ellington fits the description of an iceberg: there's much more beneath the surface than above.

Our initial meeting was unforgettable, at least for me. The scene was Washington, D.C., where we both lived in the north-west section. One hot summer day when I was fooling around the pool at the YMCA (where I had no business, since I couldn't swim), I slipped and fell in. It would have been curtains for Stewart that day, but an older fellow pulled me out. Edward Kennedy Ellington was my lifesaver, and though he has forgotten the incident (and in fact swears that he can't swim), I will remember his rescuing me.

The next time our paths crossed there

was an event we both remember with much amusement. It was at Odd Fellows Hall in Georgetown, where there was always a dance on Saturday night. A lot of us youngsters used to hang around the hall, peeping in the windows at the dancers and musicians. This particular Saturday night there was a quartet working that sounded great to us kids because they played the popular tunes of the day, such as *It's Right Here for You*, and *If You Don't Get It, It's No Fault of Mine*; *Walking the Dog*; *He May Be Your Man, But He Comes to See Me Sometime*. We gaped over the fence, drinking in the bright lights, the pretty girls, the festive atmosphere, and the good music.

Suddenly, I yelled to my buddy, "Hey, that guy playing piano--I know him. That's Eddie Ellington!" And so it was. Although it was a small band, they sounded mellow, especially the leader, Tobin, who was playing the sax, an instrument we had never heard before. Duke was on piano, Otto Hardwicke on bass fiddle, and there was a drummer they called Stickamack.

These dances always started sedately, but as the night wore on and the liquor flowed faster, the tougher element went into action, and the customary fight erupted. This time it was a real brawl, and the Georgetown tough ran the band out of the hall.

Everyone took off but the drummer. Sticks just pulled his switch-blade knife and said, "I don't go nowhere without my drums, an' if you want to fight me, go right ahead. But touch them drums, an' somebody's got to die." Evidently they

believed him because while the other fellows in the band were hotfooting it down 29th Street (with Duke in the lead), old Sticks just sat there chewing his tobacco unmolested.

A few years later, I got to know Duke better. At that time, I was rehearsing with a kid band. Our leader hung out on the corner of Seventh and T streets, which was *the* hangout for Washington musicians then. By tagging along, I got to see all the local big timers--Doc Perry, Elmer Snowden, Sam Taylor, Gertie Wells, Claude Hopkins, and many others. Eddie Ellington had already acquired the nickname Duke by this time, and he, too, hung out on the corner. In fact, he had the added distinction of being "king" of Room Ten in True Reformers Hall, which stood on the same corner. Room Ten was where the teenagers held their get-togethers. I can still see young Ellington playing the piano and fixing that famous hypnotic smile on the nearest pretty girl.

In spite of knowing Duke so long and so well, I almost missed out playing with his band. After we all landed in New York City, although I wasn't the only one he thought would enhance his group (he and Elmer Snowden carried on a tug-of-war over the services of Prince Robinson, who was about the best clarinet and tenor sax man in the city), it became almost a habit with him to ask me to join the band. But I never took him up on his offers. For one thing, I was playing with Fletcher Henderson's band, which I loved, and for another, I had no eyes for the Jungle Band and all that growling mess. During the seven or so years I played with Henderson, we got a kick out of catching Duke's band in a ballroom battle of bands because our shouting, fast tempos always over-

powered Duke's more subtle, original efforts.

It was after I left Henderson and struck out on my own for a brief period that the chain of circumstances began that led me into the Ellington band. Irving Mills, who was Duke's manager at the time, caught my group at the Empire Ballroom and suggested I do a small-band record date for him. The date did not materialize for some time; meanwhile, my band folded, and I joined Luis Russell. After I finally did the record date, I went to Mills' office to collect my check and ran into Duke. There was the usual musicians' repast when all of a sudden Duke fixed me with that hypnotic grin and said, "Fat Stuff, it's just about time you came home. Join my band!" Mills tried to convince me, too, but I still didn't feel I would be happy with the band. Then when they told me the salary was seventy-five dollars a week, I laughed and walked out. Depression or no, I had been earning as much as \$125 a week.

When I arrived home later, I heard Joney, Duke's band boy, yelling up the stairs to my wife on the second floor, "Tell Rex to come down and get fitted for uniforms."

I was not the only one astonished by these words, having just refused the job. Standing in my doorway talking to my wife was Luis Russell's drummer, who gaped open-mouthed at Joney and dashed down the stairs past me. Apparently he rushed right down to Russell with the news that I was going to leave him and join Duke because that night on the job as I started to unpack my horn, Russell said, "Pack it up. You're fired. I've already got your replacement."

So, jobless, I had no alternative--I went down the next day and got fitted for uniforms.



I shudder to think of how close I came to not getting the job that made such a difference in my life.

It wasn't too long after I joined Duke that we embarked on a southern tour. Among the tobacco barns, skating rinks, cotton warehouses, and fields, there were some theaters. Our reception was tremendous, and we were compelled to do many extra shows. It almost seemed like a continuous performance because we would barely finish a show and take a smoke when Jonesy would be yelling, "All on!"

Everybody started looking shaggy behind the ears, which led to some of the braver lads getting a hair trim from each other.

Wallace Jones, first trumpet man, was perhaps the most skilled among the amateur barbers, but his touch was too vigorous for Duke's tender scalp, so I was elected. After that, whenever we were caught in a situation where haircuts weren't available, I would be pressed into service as Duke's barber.

The fellows spent quite a lot of time making sure that they were well groomed. According to the high standards set by Duke, they could do no less, because only an idiot could have missed being aware of the great effort Ellington made to present perfection in every detail.

A memorable example comes to mind. For the very important Congress Hotel debut in Chicago, the Governor (as the fellows sometimes called Duke) outdid himself, outfitting us in crimson trousers, special-made crimson shoes, which set off the white mess jackets, boiled shirts with winged collars, and white ties. Duke was overheard saying, "They may not like our music, but we sure look pretty." We received an

ovation before we played a note. One newspaper critic devoted two-thirds of his column to our appearance and mentioned the incongruity of my battered metal derby. The rest of the brass section had bright and shiny derbies to play their horns into, but not Fat Stuff.

There also was the opening at the Roxy Theater in New York City that was outstanding enough to mention. This was an important date, as we could tell by the way Ellington conferred with so many people. In his dressing room, there were sketches of the stage set. Duke scanned these for days while we were playing the Apollo Theater uptown, and then we were told to go to the tailor for fittings on the new uniforms. Here's what he came up with: cinnamon-brown slacks, chocolate-brown jackets, billiard-green shirts, pastel-yellow ties. Black shoes and socks completed the get-up.

However, at the dress rehearsal at the Roxy, Duke took one look at our color scheme and immediately dashed to the phone and awakened some shirt manufacturer with an order for several dozen shirts of a different color. Then he explained that the original shirts muddled our features under the lights. But we used them on one-nighters later.

As imaginative as Ellington's conception for the organization was, his personal attire was even more avant garde. I shall never forget one effect created when he stepped onstage wearing a black satin jacket, black satin weskit, black-and-white checkered slacks, a custom-made white shirt with a beautiful collar (self-designed), topped off with a beige cravat, and worn with black suede shoes.

Then there was the unforgettable,

show-stopping ensemble he wore at the Downtown Cotton Club once. This had to be seen to be believed. It was on an Easter Sunday, and, as usual, the band played an overture. Then there came a pause as Duke made his dramatic entrance attired in a salmon-colored jacket and fawn-gray slacks and shoes. The shirt, I remember, was a tab-collared oyster shade and his tie some indefinable pastel between salmon and apricot. The audience cheered for at least two minutes.

While Ellington's sartorial *qui vive* has been duly noted and commented on from time to time, there has been no comment in depth about his profound influence on men's fashions. Duke combines the luxurious aplomb of an Oriental potentate with the considered good taste of a true artist. It is not my intention to imply that our friend invented the wrap-around buttonless top coat, the square-toed soft-leather shoes, the large spread collar that became known as the Barrymore, or the other trends that I saw first as he wore them. But it is safe to say that he did, and does, lead, while others follow. Currently, it's the three-inch cuff on his trousers that will perhaps catch on.

It was long ago when Duke was making *Check and Double Check*, his first movie. En route to California, he met the people who ran a theatrical shoe firm in Chicago. He had them make a dozen pairs of a shoe he designed—feather-weight, thin-soled, square-toed. This evolved, over some twenty or so years, into what is now known as the Italian shoe. But at the time, this way-out footwear was a real conversation piece. Duke continued to order these shoes by the dozen, in every imaginable color and leather, and

had soon accumulated so many pairs that he had to have special trunks made to accommodate them.

It was always his custom to change shoes between sets, choosing between the blacks in calf and patent leather, the browns in crocodile, alligator, and suede, and all the other colors in the spectrum. When I attended a few concerts by the band recently, I was amazed that he didn't change shoes. Later I found out the reason. These were the pumps he had worn when he was presented to the Queen of England, and despite their shabby appearance, they now were his favorites.

Another of his idiosyncrasies is his extreme annoyance at losing a button off a garment. I have often seen him abruptly stride off stage to change after a button fell off. During that period when I was with the band, some lucky fellow would be the proud possessor of an Ellington suit or jacket, as Duke would not wear a garment after it lost a button.

In the past, it was always a source of amusement to me when certain newspapers and magazines would publish a list of the best-dressed men of the world. Cary Grant, the Duke of Windsor, etc., would usually lead the polls, but the elegant Ellington never made it, to my knowledge. This unquestionably was a case of being overlooked, or perhaps the arbiters of male styles are not hip enough to be hip to Duke.

While Ellington made no best-dressed lists, the band was innominate music polls. Even his most loyal followers couldn't understand how the band could be so great with such seeming lack of discipline. They wondered how all of this inventiveness and beautiful music could be produced as

bandsmen drift on and off stage, yawn, act bored, apparently disdaining the people, the music, and the entire scene.

I have seen what appeared to be a re-enactment or rush hour at Grand Central Station or the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace on Ellington's bandstand. I have been amused, in retrospect, at one of the bandsmen's chewing gum with great vigor, as he read a book while playing his part. That was my contribution to the disorder. Where else but in Ellington's band could that happen? The ground rules, per se, for musicians just do not apply to these special musicians nor to their leader. He chooses people who best portray his music, regardless of their social attitudes or habits.

This all seems indicative of Duke's character or lack of character, but it is only on the surface. Underneath the obvious, there sits this leader, calmly, analytically observing the various personalities of his troops, man by man. His approach differs with each individual. Right on the bandstand, decisions are pondered, punishments meted out, rewards given on the spot. But all that is evident to the audience is vaguely controlled chaos. I have observed with intense curiosity and awe how this master chess player manipulates the musical pawns on his scene.

It has been said that Duke never fires a man. That is substantially correct. However, once he has decided on a change, a change happens. Duke creates a situation that the fellow finds untenable, and he quits. He gets the message.

Despite the glamour of being with the organization and the generally easygoing atmosphere, there was still plenty to grumble about. The

constant travel, especially the one-nighters, was a sore spot with a lot of guys. The problem of eating was perhaps the biggest headache. Our fare was usually the quickly snatched, cooked-to-death hamburger or something equally vile from the local greasy spoon.

If we played a theater with enough time between shows, Well-man Braud, the Louisiana bass player, sometimes put on a pot of red beans and rice, smothered pork chops, or some other soul-satisfying dish. The fellows were so delighted that Billy Taylor—the band's other bassist, and I decided to pitch in with the cooking. We bought pots and pans and sterno stoves and cooked up a breeze. I'll never forget the time we put on a big frying pan of onions and garlic just before show time, planning to cook liver as soon as the show was over and have a quick dinner. We gave Jonesy instructions to turn off the onions as soon as they were browned. Halfway through the performance, the faint aroma of fried onions began to waft on stage, I turned around and looked at Braud and Taylor, who both stood playing near Duke, Billy had a sickly grin on his face, and Braud was making violent gestures. It wasn't until after the show that I realized he was tying to signal me to go backstage and take the stuff off the stove. Jonesy had forgot, and the dressing room was full of smoke, while the theater virtually reeked of burned onions. The manager was tearing around backstage red-faced and furious. We never cooked in that theater again.

Besides eating the pangs of hunger, musicians also have a need to ease the tedium of travel and kill time while waiting for the show to go on. On trains, buses, or aboard ships, we Elling-

tonians usually had several games of cards going—gin rummy, tonk (a form of rummy), black jack, bridge, red dog, pinochle, and especially stud poker. We favored stud poker over every other game. I held my own as a rule but never cleaned up like Ivie Anderson, the band's singer, or Duke did. They would "win the table" as the boys say, win so much that nobody would want to go on with the game.

My bitter experience came one morning in the middle of the Atlantic. I had won the table and sent almost everyone to his cabin. The game was over with the exception of Duke, who leered at me, sleepy-eyed, across the poker table, saying, "Why don't we have some wine to brighten us up? After all, you won't be able to sleep, winning all that dough."

I was about \$1,500 ahead, so I agreed, feeling invincible. We began toasting each other between bets. That champagne started tasting better and better, and the bets grew bigger and bigger. The next thing I knew, I was in my cabin fully dressed, but I had lost my shirt—I was busted.

Duke is a natural-born winner. He has won every conceivable musical honor, and without question he has earned the tremendous homage that his genius has brought him. He wears his honors lightly and gracefully, never losing sight of his roots and heritage but yet transcending his environmental origins. I have been close enough to and also far enough away from Duke to see the inevitable change in him as a person. His transition from Washington and Room Ten to command performances for royalty was a long and arduous trail, speckled by the various joys and sorrows of life.

And even Ellington is not exempt from the immutable law of change. He grows grander but more introspective. He has apparently learned to give more of himself in public but less in private.

The strain of constantly being on stage has taken its toll, the hassels with band personnel, with bookers, with schemers and parasites who attempt to pinch a bit of the top. These all have caused the famed bags under his eyes to grow baggier. The hail fellow, well met, who was a buddy to his boys is no longer there—and understandably so. As he sardonically proclaims "I love you madly" to his admiring followers, I wonder if he has not subconsciously hypnotized himself into really believing it. But I don't need to conjecture about those of us who played in the band he made great—to us he will always be the Boss, and we do love him madly.

--Rex Stewart  
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AAD

# DUKE ELLINGTON

## LIVE AT THE 1956 STRATFORD FESTIVAL

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|--|--|
| <p><b>1</b> Hark, the Duke's Trumpets! (comp. Ellington) (3:03) Featuring Cat Anderson, Clark Terry, Ray Nance &amp; W. Cook, trumpets</p> <p><b>2</b> Harlem Air Shaft (comp. Ellington) (3:14) Featuring Clark Terry, trumpet</p> <p><b>3</b> Clarinet Melodrama (comp. J. Hamilton) (5:36) Featuring Jimmy Hamilton, cl. and Jimmy Woode, bass</p> <p><b>4</b> Theme Trambene (comp. J. Hamilton) (3:37) Featuring Britt Woodman, trombone</p> <p><b>5</b> Sophisticated Lady (comp. Ellington) (3:57) Featuring Harry Carney, barit. saxophone</p> <p><b>6</b> Take The 'A' Train (comp. Billy</p> | <p>Strayhorn) (7:00) Featuring Ray Nance, vocal and Paul Gonsalves, tenor saxophonist</p> <p><b>7</b> La Virgen De La Macarena (traditional bullfighter's song)(4:37) Featuring Cat Anderson, trumpet.</p> <p><b>8</b> Pretty and The Wolf (also known as Monologue) (comp. Ellington) (2:27) Duke Ellington, narrator with J. Hamilton, R. Procope and H. Carney, clarinets</p> <p><b>9</b> I Got It Bad, and That Ain't Good (comp. Ellington &amp; Paul Webster) (3:48) featuring Johnny Hodges, alto saxophone</p> <p><b>10</b> Harlem Suite (comp. Ellington) (13:20)</p> |
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Total CD time: 54:31

Personnel of Ellington band: Cat Anderson, Clark Terry, Ray Nance and W. Cook, trumpets; Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman & John Sanders, trombone; J. Hodges, R. Procope, J. Hamilton, P. Gonsalves and H. Carney, reeds; D. Ellington, piano; J. Woode; bass; Sam Woodyard, drums

TECHNICAL NOTE: This CD was made from an aircheck recorded on a set of lacquer discs, not on tape. Although every effort was made to improve the original sound with state-of-the-art equipment, some surface noise, distortion, clicks and pops remain from the original source discs.



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