

Sophisticated Lady

ELLINGTON
À LA
CHARLIE NORMAN

Featuring Lee Gaines

SIR
SHARP INTERNATIONAL RECORDS





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SIDE A
33 RPM STEREO
TK 792
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SOPHISTICATED LADY
ELLINGTON À LA CHARLIE NORMAN
featuring Lee Gaines

SIDE A

1. I don't mean a thing (D. Ellington) 3.20
2. In a mellotone (D. Ellington) 3.25
3. I got it bad (D. Ellington) 4.45
4. Squeeze me (D. Ellington - L. Gaines) 3.05
5. Prelude to a Kiss (D. Ellington) 3.05

*All arrangements by
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SIDE B
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SOPHISTICATED LADY
ELLINGTON À LA CHARLIE NORMAN
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SIDE B

1. Just a-sittin' and a-rockin' (D. Ellington - L. Gaines) 3.25
2. Rockin' in Rhythm (D. Ellington - H. Carney) 3.30
3. Sophisticated Lady (D. Ellington - M. Parrish) 3.35
4. Things Ain't what the used to be (M. Ellington) 4.10
5. Come Sunday (D. Ellington) 3.55

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— Ever since *The Maestro* passed away, there seems to have been a slight but clearly noticeable tendency from the so-called Cultural Elite, at least in Scandinavia, to hail *The Duke's* succession of formidable Sacred Concerts at the expense of his "lesser" works.

— Well, this collection is just another humble attempt to set the matter straight. We just want to prove, one more time, that *Edward Kennedy Ellington* also was one helluva writer of really beautiful "pop songs" — if you pardon the expression...

Mr. Karl Erik Albert Norman — "Charlie" to most Scandinavians, ever since the 1940's — laughs sardonically at his own use of the term; obviously, "pop songs" of the Eighties have a somewhat different shape, harmonically as well as melodically.

But when Charles Norman moved out from obscurity in his Swedish home province of Dalarna and on to fame and some fortune in Stockholm, pre-war Berlin and points in between, *The Duke*, along with *Fats Waller*, *Albert Ammons* and *James P. Johnson*, was *The Man*.

In those days, there were only two kinds of Music, to quote Ellington himself: good music, and bad.

That, of course, still holds true. But at the time when most of the tunes between these covers were penned, *The Duke* was the Epitome of Greatness. Today, the media and the record companies like our vision with initial pay.

At this writing, there seems to be a renewed interest in *Duke's* "pop songs" — a spark ignited by the successful and ingeniously produced Broadway show *Sophisticated Ladies*, with Ellington's son *Merce* fronting the musical activities.

It may be a coincidence that ALL of the compositions featured in this album have a predominant position in the show. And then again, it just MAY be visual and audible proof of Charlie's own knowledge of Ellingtonia.

The guy insists that his busy touring and playing schedule unfortunately has not permitted him to go to New York since the show opened in March '81.

(Time out here for a little reminder: the *Duke* himself never ever made it to Broadway. His closest attempt, "Jump for Joy" (1941), with lyrics mostly by *Paul Webster*, was stranded way out of town, West of the Rockies...)

Speaking of *Duke Ellington* lyrics: how many Ellington followers are aware of who wrote what in terms of those intricately "Dukish" words in songs like "Sophisticated Lady" (lyrics by *Michelle Parrott*), "Prelude to a Kiss" (*Iring Gordon*), "Rockin' in Rhythm" & "It don't mean a thing..." (*Duke* himself, with publisher *Iring Mills*)? Or that *Johnny Mercer* helped out with that fairly recent *Duke* hit of 1953, "Satin Doll"?

Here, Charlie Norman reacquaints us with another Ellington

lyricist: bass singer *Lee Gaines*, of *The Delta Rhythm Boys*.

Yes sir — Gaines is on publishing rights records both for "Just a Sittin' and a Rockin'" and "Squeeze Me" (1964). Another remarkable feat, in a career that has taken Gaines and his *Delta* into their fifth decade of professional longevity.

Today, Gaines is the only "original" *Delta* left in the group. Residing in Paris, he's still very much part of the Swedish show-business scene, returning almost annually to renew fond memories of that first visit in '49, resulting in resounding record hits, sung in Swedish.

— I guess we met two years later, Charlie remembers. We were with the same record company at the time, and they wanted me and my group to accompany *The Deltas* on a follow-up record. "I'm in red linen slugs" — "In a red little cottage". As a result, they had another hit on their hands.

— I've stayed in touch with Lee Gaines ever since, and for this record, I thought it a good idea to bring him up from Paris and have him do his two "own" numbers, plus, of course, "Come Sunday".

I still love that seemingly bottomless, deep, murky bass voice of his...

A brief run-down of this particular piece of Ellingtonia, brought together by Charlie and Lee (mostly with the help of some friends, including young Mr. Norman, *Janice* bass, and *Ronnie Gardiner* drums):

• "It don't mean a thing" — features the Norman trio in full flight, in perfect accordance with the rest of this best-of-all-jazz titles. After a mallet-spiced *Gardiner* intro, Charlie gives us a taste of his "stride" prowess — and sure enough, "it's got that swing..."

The song was virtually the theme of an era, premiered in 1932, with a vocal by *Ike Anderson*.

• "In a Mellotone" is another trio outing, with Charlie giving us familiar glimpses of his by now well known conception of certain Mr. *Erroll Garner*. The tune is a vintage memory of that great 1940 Ellington band, but was adopted, in the 50's, by *Cosmo Sini*'s equally marvellous outfit.

• "I got it bad (and that ain't good)" was actually conceived as a "popular song", written for the 1941 score for "Jump for Joy" (mentioned above). Charlie Norman gives it a somewhat more "down home" touch than the serious silliness of the *Ike Anderson* — *Johnny Hodges* original version.

• "Squeeze Me" is another reminder of the same "Jump for Joy" score. Except that the tune was titled "Subtle Slough" in '41, had no Lee Gaines lyrics as yet, and served as backup for a team of comic dancers in the ill-fated show. 40 years later, it's one of Ellington's most recorded compositions. Note Gaines' tongue-in-cheek duet with himself!

• "Prelude to a Kiss" — another immortal Ellington standard, its probably greatest recorded version stemming from 1938, with *Johnny Hodges* playing soprano. Here, Charlie is his lyrical best, with a compassionate solo version.

• "Just a sittin' and a rockin'" — has Lee Gaines in the forefront, with "piano-in-the-background", to quote a typically understated Ellington album title of yesteryear. And oh — if you don't understand what's happening when Gaines momentarily leaves that catchy melody, you should know that Lee is giving us his vocal conception of *Ben Webster's* serene sax solo of vintage 1941!

• "Rockin' in Rhythm" is one of juncture saxophonist *Harry Carney's* few but famous contributions/collaborations with *The Duke*, written in 1933.

• "Sophisticated Lady" was, when it first appeared, Ellington's first "conventional" (Sitar (AABA) hit composition, 1933. When the *Duke* wrote it, he saw the song as "a composite picture of my childhood lady teachers back home in Washington who worked and then spent holidays in Europe." The lady in *Mitchell Parrott's* lyric is somewhat more Mase'...

• "Things Ain't what they used to be" — an often quoted truth ever since *Duke* refuted his son *Merce's* contribution to the band book, originally named "Times A' Wastin'." Anyway you look at it, Charlie is what he used to be — and more...

• "Come Sunday", finally, is one of Ellington's most spiritual hymns, and of course the most well known theme out of *Duke's* gorgeous suite "Black, Brown & Beige." From his magnificent *hero's* depth, Lee Gaines gives the song a statuesque bearing.

Hans Frilund
EXPRESSEN

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All arrangements by Charlie Norman



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