ML 4639

ELLINGTON UPTOWN
Duke Ellington

ELLINGTON UPTOWN

Skin Deep
The Mooche
Take the "A" Train
A Tone Parallel to Harlem
Perdido

DUKE ELLINGTON and his Orchestra

Once again Duke Ellington and his Orchestra present a program of full-length concert arrangements of some of their most popular numbers. Three of the numbers are substantial favorites among Ellington devotees, while two of them are relatively recent. Old or new, the same careful craftsmanship is evident in the expressive blend of sound, rhythm and melody that characterizes the Duke's work. Without ever making pretentious claims to effecting a fait accompli marriage of popular and classical music, the Ellington orchestra nevertheless serves as an almost unique ground where imaginative popular thought is controlled by classical traditions. In the development of an Ellington arrangement, no matter how exciting it becomes as it builds, it is a classical procedure.

It has become fashionable, almost imperative, in recent years, for composers and arrangers of serious popular music to make annexing bows to the work of Broadway, Hollywood, Marvel and various others of their respective schools, and this is a good thing since almost all innovations in popular music were worked out classically by these composers. A good deal of nonsense has been written about progressive innovations in popular music that can be stopped cold by even a cursory glance at a Broadway score. The point is that such influences are by no means new or original. Duke Ellington was using them and acknowledging them years before most of today's major young innovationists were able to hum not a tune, but even tap-dance. Some time ago he listed as his favorite composers George Gershwin, Stravinsky, Debussy and Rimsky-Korsakoff, a group from which anyone can draw revealing conclusions.

In this particular collection, Ellington and his orchestra give brilliant full-length performances of a representative program, affording record collectors a chance to re-acquaint themselves with some of the impressive moments of Ellington concerts. Louis Bellson's *Skin Deep* is plainly and simply a tour-de-force, displaying the kind of sharp, stimulating jazzing made the hard way, and offering a fine showcase for Bellson's own remarkable drumming in an extended solo of rare excitement. *The Mooche*, which follows, is a fitting example of the Duke's writing in 1928, refined and polished through the intervening years but never losing its essential period flavor. One of the unique talents of the Ellington band, that throughout changing styles and tastes, of encompassed in their arrangements, the true originality of a composition is never obscured. An occasional echoing chord may be a convention in mid-century tunes, but they do no more obscure the gravely atmosphere of a striking Ellington creation. The new setting of *Take the "A" Train* is not the well-remembered original, but one that blends elements of that classic with new ideas in an ever-interesting recreation. The music, by Betty Roche, serves as a reminder that the big influence has been more than passing, too.

In *A Tone Parallel to Harlem*, one of Ellington's more ambitious forms is demonstrated. The extended suite, most often depicting Harlem and its musical reflections, is one of his favorite forms, and here again finds an agreeable and provocative expression. Long-time fans will remember *Black, Brown and Beige* and the *Liberian Suite*, among others in this recording group, and make their own comparisons. Among the most recent of Ellington scores, *A Tone Parallel to Harlem* represents a summing-up in field of his musical experience, and bids fair to follow the listener as a constantly invigorating pattern of sound. The program comes to a close with an extended arrangement of *Perdido*, a classic in the orchestra's book, now moving into its second decade as a must for any self-respecting group. Light and airy in its present treatment, it spotlights some of the orchestra's outstanding soloists in successive solos. Like practically everything else the orchestra plays, it has been subjected to constant re-arrangement and examination, and it is a safe guess that this will not be the final treatment, fine as it is.

For the continued revision of a score is also an Ellington trade-mark, along with precise musicianship and the minimum effort usual to efficient big band orchestra. Almost every performance finds additions and subtractions, a constant experimentation to find the most expressive way of exciting a number. This is not done in a close-cut out of way, but through group work when an arrangement begins to sound sore to the orchestra, it is a fair chance that it will sound sore to its listeners, too, and the rewriting begins in earnest. The instrumentation changes, the rhythm changes, even the tempo changes, and a new variation on the theme is the result.

The most important date in the Ellington chronology is December 4, 1927, when he and his thirteen-piece orchestra opened at the old Cotton Club in Harlem. At the time, Paul Whiteman was the King of Jazz (sic), and in the sense that Whiteman represented popular music, originally geared for himself, in what essentially was a pseudo-symphonic treatment of the business (sic) business. A lot of brilliant musicians studied from this atmospheric activities, and if any single force can take the credit for the evolution, it would be Duke Ellington's orchestra. An audience which couldn't quite accept the exuberance of a Fletcher Smith or an Armstrong at the time was nevertheless ready to toss out the front-porch ballads and the dancinette novelties, and the blast of fresh air which Ellington and his men let in was a revelation. He created a critic on the late Constant Lambert (an setting to date Ellington an important place in the music of the Twenties, and subsequent writers have been on his generous. Since 1927 the Ellington orchestra has changed radically, and so has popular music, both influencing the other. The evidence of that change and an exciting extension of it is embodied in this program. It remains only for the listener to absorb and enjoy it, surely one of the most agreeable pastimes available anywhere.

Personnel:—

Saxophones: Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, Jimmy Hamilton, Russell Procope, Milton Jefferson
Trumpets: William Anderson, Clark Terry, Willie Cook, Ray Nance
Trombones: Juan Tizol, Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman
Drums: Louis Bellson
Bass: Wendell Marshall
Piano: Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington

Other Columbia Records by Duke Ellington and his Orchestra:

MASTERPIECES BY ELLINGTON. Mood Indigo • Sophisticated Lady • The Tattooed Bride • Solitude. 12-inch "Lp" ML 4418

MOOD ELLINGTON. On A Turquoise Cloud • New York City Blues • Golden Cross • Three Cool Stomp • Hy's Sue • Lady of the Lavender Mist • The Clothed Woman • Progressive Gavotte. 10-inch "Lp" CL 6004 • 45 Set 6-164

LIBERIAN SUITE. I Like The Sunrise • Dances Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. 10-inch "Lp" CL 6073

ENJOY COLUMBIA'S NEW SOUND— COLUMBIA 33⅓ Lp RECORDS

COLUMBIA
MASTERWORKS
ELLINGTON UPTOWN
DUKE ELLINGTON and his ORCHESTRA
ML 4639
NONBREAKABLE
(x"Lp" 12852)
Band No. 1: SKIN DEEP -L. Bellson-
Featuring Louis Bellson, Drums
Band No. 2: THE MOOCHE -Ellington-I. Mills-
Band No. 3: TAKE THE "A" TRAIN
Vocal by Betty Roche
- Strayhorn -
"COLUMBIA" "MASTERWORKS" MARCAS REG. T. M. MADE IN U.S.A.