ML 4418 MASTERPIECES BY ELLINGTON

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Mood Indigo • Sophisticated Lady • The Tattooed Bride • Solitude

DUKE ELLINGTON and his Orchestra

Rarely in popular music does a composition earn the status of a masterpiece. There is so much that is ephemeral, and so much that is worthless, that the few lasting and memorable pieces shine like the well-known stars in a singularly naughty world. Duke Ellington's contributions to this small galaxy are among the brightest and most secure, and four of the finest have been chosen for this collection. Although a few titles the Duke has been responsible for an occasional romp, the best of his work has been such as to inspire the warm admiration and envy of other working composers and orchestra leaders, and his place among the jazz immortals has long been assured.

Three of the compositions in this group are vintage Ellington, from one of his most creative periods. Three are *Mood Indigo* of 1931, *Sophisticated Lady* of 1933, and *Solitude* of 1934. *The Tattooed Bride*, showing many contemporary influences, dates only from 1950, but, like the others, is completely Ellington in its conception. These recordings, incidentally, were the last made before extensive changes in orchestral personnel took place early in 1951. But most important in the consideration of the compositions is the fact that never before have they been available at full-length on records. At last, nine eight minutes' worth of each arrangement has been obtainable for the utilization and enjoyment of musicians and public, but the complete, concert-type arrangements that have consistently dazzled Ellington fans have simply been impractical for ordinary record purposes. Thanks to Long Playing records, these great Ellington settings can now be heard at last in their entirety.

Even the most casual listening attests to the fact that Ellington has again and again revised these settings. Not content to let them rest on their original merits, he has added and subtracted, using an eclectic approach (in the better sense of the word) to polish and enlarge them. There is still to be found the supremely mellow sound that is the Ellington trademark. There is the almost singular texture of a splendidly proficient orchestra. There are still the long, arm-crazy melodic lines. But with all these, there is an added experimentation with harmonies and rhythms that increases the amount of already-fascinating music.

Always an innovator, Ellington has clearly selected the best of the present-day trends and worked them into his own musical scheme. The modern thinking of *The Tattooed Bride* is echoed again and again in these arrangements of the earlier numbers, broadening their scope as both popular music and as music with recognizable claims to serious attention. Ellington once hired George Gershwin, Stravinsky, Debussy and Rachmaninoff as his favorite composers, a significant group of choices to remember in listening to his music. Gershwin, the inspired melodist, also showed a masterly preoccupation with intricate rhythms and colors. Stravinsky, certainly the most important influence in modern classical music, is an experimenter of the first order, continually exploring rhythms and textures in his compositions. Debussy is the master of Impressionism, inflecting delicate themes in a grizzly mix of articulate grace. And Rachmaninoff, whose his claims to a composer, was a master of orchestration. These revealing choices give the clue to the basis of Ellington's music, and to its immediately intuitive appeal: melody, rhythm, delicacy and color.

Moreover, the Ellington orchestras have always been virtuoso groups, capable of superb ensemble playing and inspired solo work. Through the years, from his initial success in 1927 up to the present, changes in personnel have been infrequent. This has given the group a continuity and a unity that is achieved generally only by the great symphony orchestras. The musical thought has been consistent and general, and has given the orchestra's experiments a group origin and execution that are as polished as they are rare. For the Ellington orchestra has compelled serious musicians to take note. Concerts in Carnegie Hall and at the Metropolitan Opera House have been reviewed by responsible critics, and the orchestra's European fame is of surpassing stature. Recently Ellington was commissioned by the Republic of Liberia to write a composition signalling its centennial, resulting in the provocative Liberian Suite. Other notable Ellington works include *Black, Brown and Beige*, and the score for the musical *Boggie's Revenge*.

Born in Washington, D. C. on April 29, 1899, he earned the name Duke in high school, for his exceptionally neat dress and fastidious manners. Edward Kennedy Ellington took only a few piano lessons, but became proficient enough to acquire a job as jazz pianist in Washington cafes during the first World War. At the same time, he became a member of a large orchestra organized by Russell Wooding to give Sunday night concerts in the nation's capital.

Later, he became the leader of one of Oliver "Doc" Perry's orchestras, and in 1922 he joined Elmer Snowden's orchestra, where he met trumpeter Arthur Whetsol, drummer Sonny Greer and saxophonist Otto Hardwick. Had he played with Wilbur Sweatman's band, and sometime obtained outside engagements with a five-piece group known as the Washingtonians, including the above-named players, with James Wiley as second trumpeter and trombonist Charles Irvis.

In 1924, he moved to New York and began playing at the Kentucky Club with his own orchestra. His fame began to spread, and soon publisher Irving Mills stepped in to foster the growth and promotion of the orchestra. On December 4, 1927, Ellington opened at the Harlem's Cotton Club in Harlem, and here the singling orchestra of his music really burst into the limelight. The startling arrangements, the unforgettable originals poured forth in rich profusion, and the orchestra was securely established as one of the great organizations in music: a popular success, and a critical success. This record presents, for the first time in full-length recorded arrangements, four of the finest Ellington scores, typical of the adventurous and lovely intelligence that the Duke has brought to popular music. Each is genuinely a masterpiece, and each, obviously, could only have been created by Duke Ellington and his orchestra. —GMD

Recorded December 18, 1956

Piano
Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn

Saxophones
Russell Procope, Paul Gonsalves,
Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton

Trumpets
Nelson Williams, Andrew Ford,
Harold Baker, Ray Nance, William Anderson

Trombones
Quentin Jackson, Lawrence Brown,
Tyree Glenn

Drums
Mercer Ellington

Drums
Sonny Greer

Bass
Wendell Marshall

Vocalist
Fresse

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-Ellington-
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-E. DeLange-I. Mills-Ellington-
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