

"Ellington Uptown" - Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, Russell Procope (sax); William Anderson, Clark Terry (tp); Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman (tb); Billy Strayhorn, Duke Ellington (p); Betty Roche (voc) Wendell Marshall (b); Louis Bellson (dr); a.o. Pure Pleasure ML4639  
Duke Ellington: Ellington Uptown

Format: LP / standard sleeve

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Even back in the early '50s, Columbia Records took Duke Ellington seriously enough to place this album on its prestigious Masterworks label, heretofore reserved mostly for highbrow classical music and Broadway shows. Also, this LP explodes the critical line that the early '50s was a relatively fallow period for the Duke; any of these smoking, concert-length tracks will torpedo that notion. The young Louis Bellson was powering the Ellington band at that time, and his revolutionary double-bass drum technique and rare ability to build coherent drum solos are put to astounding use on his self-penned leadoff track, "Skin Deep", which was quite a demonstration piece for audiophiles at the time. Old favorites from the Ellington hit parade are given extended treatments, with singer Betty Roche taking the A-train for a bebop-flavored ride, "The Mooche" spotlighting clarinetists Jimmy Hamilton and Russell Procope, and Ellington's boogie-woogie piano kicking off a super-charged "Perdido" for trumpeter Clark Terry. The centerpiece of the disc is a sharply drawn, idiomatically swinging, probably unbeatable performance of "A Tone Parallel To Harlem" that lays waste to any of the 'symphonic' versions that turn up frequently at pop concerts. Another feature of this record is the great sound quality, a benefit of being entrusted to Columbia's best engineers.

