

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA CHAMBER JAZZ
CONCERT FEATURING:
SELECTIONS FROM DUKE ELLINGTON'S
"IMPRESSIONS OF THE FAR EAST SUITE" AND
"BLACK, BROWN, AND BEIGE"**

Wednesday, March 1, 2023
Concert Hall
7:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

Selections from Duke Ellington's
"Impressions of the Far East Suite" from 1964 Duke Ellington
(April 29, 1899- May 24 1974)
William (Billy) Thomas Strayhorn
(November 29, 1915 – May 31, 1967)

Tourist Point of View Duke Ellington
Blue Bird of Dehli Billy Strayhorn
Isfahan Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn
Depk Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn
Blue Pepper Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn
Agra Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn
Ad lib on Nippon Duke Ellington and Jimmy Hamilton

INTERMISSION

Selections from Duke Ellington's
"Black, Brown, and Beige" from 1943 Duke Ellington
(April 29, 1899- May 24 1974)

Movement 1, Part 1: Work Song
Movement 1, Part 3: Light
Movement 2, Part 1: West Indian Dance
Movement 2, Part 2: Emancipation Celebration
Movement 3, Part 1: Various Themes
Movement 3, Part 2: Sugar Hill Penthouse
Movement 3, Part 3: Finale

110th Program of the 2022 - 2023 season

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA JAZZ ENSEMBLE PERSONNEL:

Christopher Kozak, Director

Stephen Michaels, Alto I
Megan Amrine, Alto II/Clarinet
Ben Tippett*, Tenor I
Kody Mincey, Tenor II
Jackson Smythe*, Baritone/Alto

Ryan Winston, Lead Trumpet
Copeland Scott*, Trumpet
Josh Ogle, Trumpet
Travis Quesenberry, Trumpet
Adriana Ezekiel, Trumpet

Torren Kasper, Trombone
Matthew Willingham, Trombone
Connor Baggette, Trombone
Walker White, Bass Trombone

Jackson Doyle*, Guitar
Steven Hensley, Piano/Keyboards
Casey Derringer, Electric Bass
Wyatt Pettry, Drum Set

*denotes Undergraduate Jazz Studies Major

Biography:

Duke Ellington influenced millions of people both around the world and at home. In his fifty-year career, he played over 20,000 performances in Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East as well as Asia. Simply put, Ellington transcends boundaries and fills the world with a treasure trove of music that renews itself through every generation of fans and music-lovers. His legacy continues to live onward and will endure for generations to come. Wynton Marsalis said it best when he said, “His music sounds like America.” Because of the unmatched artistic heights to which he soared, no one deserves the phrase “beyond category” more than Ellington, for it aptly describes his life as well. When asked what inspired him to write, Ellington replied, “My men and my race are the inspiration of my work. I try to catch the character and mood and feeling of my people.”

Duke Ellington is best remembered for the over 3,000 songs that he composed during his lifetime. His best-known titles include: It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing), Sophisticated Lady, Mood Indigo, Solitude, In a Mellow Tone, I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart, and In a Sentimental Mood. The most amazing part about Ellington was that he had some of his most creative periods while he was on the road. Mood Indigo was supposedly written while on a road trip. Duke Ellington's popular compositions set the bar for generations of brilliant jazz, pop, theatre, and soundtrack composers to come.

Though he is a household name for his songs, Ellington was also an unparalleled visionary for his extended suites, composed with Billy Strayhorn. From Black, Brown and Beige (1943) to The Far East Suite (1966) to The Uwis Suite (1972), the suite format was used to give his jazz songs a more empowering meaning, resonance, and purpose: To exalt, mythologize, and re-contextualize the African-American experience on a grand scale.

Duke Ellington was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1966. He was later awarded several other prizes: The Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969 and the Legion of Honor by France in 1973, the highest civilian honors in each country. He died of lung cancer and pneumonia on May 24, 1974, a month after his 75th birthday, and is buried in the Bronx, in New York City. His funeral was attended by over 12,000 people at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Ella Fitzgerald summed up the occasion: “It's a very sad day. A genius has passed.”

William Thomas Strayhorn is hardly unknown, but his presence in the world of Ellingtonia has always been shrouded in a bit of mystery. It is only within the last ten years that mystery has been solved. The history of the family of William Thomas Strayhorn goes back over a hundred years in Hillsborough, NC. One set of great grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. George Craig, lived behind the present Farmer's Exchange. A great grandmother was the cook for Robert E. Lee. Billy, however, was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1915.

His mother, Lillian Young Strayhorn, brought her children to Hillsborough often. Billy was attracted to the piano that his grandmother, Elizabeth Craig Strayhorn, owned. He played it from the moment he was tall enough to reach the keys. Even in those early years, when he played, his family would gather to listen and sing. Originally aspiring to become a composer of concert music, he was heavily involved in jazz and popular music by the time he was a teenager, writing a musical while in high school and playing gigs locally with a trio. His father enrolled him in the Pittsburgh Musical Institution where he studied classical music. He had more classical training than most jazz musicians of his time.

In 1938, he met and played for Duke Ellington, who was sufficiently impressed and invited Strayhorn to join him in New York. Neither one was sure what Strayhorn's function in the band would be, but their musical talents had attracted each other. By the end of the year Strayhorn had become essential to the Duke Ellington Band; arranging, composing, sitting-in at the piano. Billy made a rapid and almost complete assimilation of Ellington's style and technique. It was difficult to discern where one's style ended and the other's began. Strayhorn lived in Duke's apartment in Harlem while the Ellington Orchestra toured Europe. Reportedly, Strayhorn studied some of Duke's scores and "cracked the code" in Ellington's words. He became Duke's musical partner, writing original music and arrangements of current pop tunes. In the early fifties, Strayhorn left the Ellington fold briefly, arranging for Lena Horne and other singers, and writing musical reviews. By 1956, however, he was back almost full-time with the Ellington organization until his death from cancer in 1967.

Some of Strayhorn's compositions are: Chelsea Bridge, Day Dream, Johnny Come Lately, Rain-check, and My Little Brown Book. The pieces most frequently played are Ellington's theme song, Take the A Train and Ellington's signatory, Satin Doll. Some of the suites on which he collaborated with Ellington are: Deep South Suite, 1947; the Shakespearean Suite or Such Sweet Thunder, 1957; an arrangement of the Nutcracker Suite, 1960; and the Peer Gynt Suite, 1962. He and Ellington composed the Queen's Suite and gave the only pressing to Queen Elizabeth II of England. Two of their suites, Jump for Joy, 1950 and My People, 1963 had as their themes the struggles and triumphs of blacks in the United States. Both included a narrative and choreography. In 1946, Strayhorn received the Esquire Silver Award for outstanding arranger.

In 1965, the Duke Ellington Jazz Society asked him to present a concert at New York's New School of Social Research. It consisted entirely of his own work performed by him and his quintet. Two years later Billy Strayhorn died of cancer on May 31, 1967. Duke Ellington's response to his death was to record what the critics cite as one of his greatest works, a collection titled *And His Mother Called Him Bill*, consisting entirely of Billy's compositions. Later, a scholarship fund was established for him by Ellington and the Julliard School of Music.

Strayhorn's legacy was thought to be well-known for many years as composer of many classic pieces first played by Ellington. It was only after the Ellington music collection was donated to the Smithsonian Institute that Strayhorn's legacy was fully realized. As documented by musicologist Walter van de Leur in his book on the composer, several compositions copyrighted in Ellington's name were actually Strayhorn's work, including entire suites, and particularly *Satin Doll*. Ironically, perhaps his most well-known song, *Lush Life* was written during his years as a student in Pittsburgh. The Ellington band never officially recorded it.

In recent years his legacy has become even more fully appreciated following research and biographies by David Hajdu and Walter Van De Leur, which led to properly crediting Strayhorn for songs previously credited to Duke or uncredited. Billy Strayhorn wrote beautiful, thoughtful, classic, and timeless music, and was brilliant as both a composer and an arranger. While enhancing Ellington's style of striving to showcase the strengths of his band members, Strayhorn's classical background elevated the group and its sound even further and helped the name Duke Ellington become eternally synonymous with class, elegance, and some of the greatest American music ever known.

Background of The Far East Suite:

The *Far East Suite* is one of the more interesting and unique creations in the Ellington/Strayhorn oeuvre. It's a reflective, evocative, virtuosic, impressionistic aural tour through the East (mostly the Middle and Near East as many have pointed out over the years) as seen through the eyes and ears of two men who were musical visionaries and who had musicians behind them who were capable of vividly enunciating their visions. The Ellington Band went on a State Department-sponsored tour in 1963 which took them to Syria, Jordan, India, Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon), Pakistan, Iran (then Persia), Lebanon, and Turkey.

These travels-along with a 1964 tour of Japan-served as the primary inspiration for a musical suite. This concept piece had a long and complex development. The first iteration, then known as *Impressions of the Far East*, was initially performed in early 1964 in England and consisted of four movements: Ellington's *Amad*, and *Depk* and *Agra* and *Bluebird of Delhi* by Strayhorn. By the time *The Far East Suite* was recorded in December of 1966 it had grown to its final length of nine pieces. These pieces had various origins and sources of inspiration; some were even previously written at least in part. The overall cohesiveness and maturity of the suite can partly be attributed to its long gestation period, as pieces were refined and re-worked over a lengthy period of time. They came together to form what is generally considered to be one of Ellington and Strayhorn's masterpieces; it can also rightfully be seen as the swan song of their historic collaboration, as Strayhorn was very ill when it was recorded and passed away just over five months later.

When completed, The Far East Suite was meant to convey the excitement and awe felt by the band when traveling to lands that were truly foreign-exotic and totally different from what most of them had experienced before. It's all there in the music—themes, motifs, form, harmonic progressions, and ideas that convey exhilaration, joy, sadness, and various musical incantations of the mystery of life in the East.

Background of Black, Brown, and Beige:

Duke Ellington's *Black, Brown, and Beige* remains one of the seminal works of his legendary career. Described by Ellington as being a "tone parallel to the history of the American Negro," it was easily the most ambitious project of his career upon its composition over the course of 1942. Ellington commenced work on this magnum opus shortly after the conclusion of one of his other early experiments at longer musical forms, 1941's jazz musical *Jump For Joy*. Surprisingly, the piece was only performed in full on three occasions: a sneak peak debut at Rye High School in Westchester County, NY on January 22, 1943, a premiere performance at Carnegie Hall the following night, and finally at Boston's Symphony Hall on January 28. From this point forward, the band would only perform individual movements, as Ellington felt that the overall length and subject matter of the piece would make it inaccessible to most audiences.

At first, the piece received, at best, mixed reception from critics and audiences alike. Many expressed skepticism over Ellington's desire to tackle more challenging, long-form musical material, with critics from several newspapers expressing their beliefs that Ellington was getting in over his head attempting to merge jazz with more "artistic" forms of music. This lukewarm reception would come to be disregarded by the time Ellington entered the studio in 1958 to record a revised version of the suite in full, this time featuring edited sections to feature renowned gospel vocalist Mahalia Jackson. This version received much more widespread critical acclaim than the original performance, and is considered to be one of the cornerstone entries of the Ellington discography.

Black, Brown, and Beige represents several major innovations in the world of jazz. It was Ellington's first major attempt at a long-form composition, consisting of three main parts in a quasi-symphonic structure, with instrumental soloists oftentimes being cast in roles that were more akin to opera than traditional big band writing. The work also tore down political and cultural barriers, as it openly attempted to present jazz in artistic rather than popular terms, as well as celebrating African American culture while doing so. These key innovations make *Black, Brown, and Beige* stand out as a transcendental work of not just Ellington's expansive catalogue, but Western music in general.

Acknowledgments:

Thanks to Ken Kimery, John Hasse, and the Duke Ellington Collection in the Archives Center of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Doug DuBoff, Dylan Canterbury, and Rob DuBoff
- February 2018

Liner notes from The Jazz Lines Scores

Directed by **Chris Kozak**. **The University of Alabama Jazz Ensemble** provides a professional atmosphere for students interested in the many aspects of jazz. This award winning group has performed at numerous jazz festivals, including: Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival, Mobile Jazz Festival, Wichita Jazz Festival, Fairhope Jazz Festival, Twilight Jazz Festival in Athens, GA, and the inaugural Jazz Education Network Conference in St. Louis, MO to name a few and performs throughout the region in schools and conferences. Its repertoire covers musical styles from the 1940s to contemporary arrangements, including those written and arranged by students. This group is the nucleus for the Hilaritas ensemble. A sample of the guest artists that appeared and were featured with the Ensemble include: Matt Wilson, Dave Douglas, Donny McCaslin, Jeff Coffin, Lew Soloff, Andy Martin, Rachel Eckroth, Randy Brecker, Dizzy Gillespie, Sim Flora, Jon Allred. The Jazz Ensemble is open by audition to any University of Alabama student, regardless of major.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Gianni Schicchi

Thursday, March 2

7:30 p.m., Bryant-Jordan Hall

Gianni Schicchi

Friday, March 3

7:30 p.m., Bryant-Jordan Hall

Gianni Schicchi

Sunday, March 5

3:00 p.m., Bryant-Jordan Hall

Chamber Music Tuscaloosa-Quartets Plus

Sunday, March 5

5:00 p.m., Concert Hall

Faculty Recital Series: Piano

Monday, March 20

7:30 p.m., Concert Hall

University Choirs Spring Concert I

Thursday, March 23

7:30 p.m., Concert Hall

Scenic Ventures

Sunday, March 26

3:00 p.m., Bryant Jordan Hall

Spring Faculty Composition Recital

Saturday, April 1

7:30 p.m., Recital Hall

2 o'clock Jazz Concert

Tuesday, April 4

7:30 p.m., Concert Hall

ONE NIGHT ONLY

Tuesday, April 4

7:30 p.m., Bryant-Jordan Hall

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