

Record Reviews

Records are reviewed by Don DeMicheal, Gilbert M. Erskine, Kenny Dorham, Barbara Gardner, Bill Mathieu, Marian McPartland, Dan Morgenstern, Bill Quinn, Harvey Pekar, William Russo, Harvey Siders, Pete Welding, John S. Wilson, and Michael Zwerin. Reviews are signed by the writer.

Ratings are: ★ ★ ★ ★ excellent, ★ ★ ★ ★ very good, ★ ★ ★ good, ★ ★ fair, ★ poor.

When two catalog numbers are listed, the first is mono, and the second is stereo.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW

Duke Ellington

FAR EAST SUITE—RCA Victor LPM/LPS 3782: *Tourist Point of View*; *Bluebird of Delbi* (Mynah); *Isfahan*; *Depk*; *Mount Harissa*; *Blue Pepper* (Far East of the Blues); *Agra*; *Amad*; *Ad Lib* on *Nippon*.

Personnel: Ellington, piano; Herbie Jones, Cat Anderson, Cootie Williams, Mercer Ellington, trumpets, flugelhorn; Lawrence Brown, Buster Cooper, Chuck Connors, trombones; Russell Procope, Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, reeds; John Lamb, bass; Rufus Jones, drums.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

If you have been saving a vintage bottle of *Chateau Lafite Rothschild* or some other kind of ambrosia, the advent of this new chapter in Ellingtonia provides that special occasion you have been waiting for.

There are nine parts to this new work, and if, as in the old days, they had been issued two by two, each would have been hailed as a masterpiece. They can be savored separately or *in toto*, and the music lover who acquires this record may expect it to come to live with him.

Periodically, impatient voices clamor for new Ellington music, little knowing that Ellington's music is constantly new and constantly renews itself. Besides, through the clamor, Ellington is usually at work on something *all* new, and when he is ready, it is performed and, if it meets his standards and the moment is opportune, recorded.

Sometimes, the growth is organic. Portions of this suite have been around since 1963, others have been added in the intervening years, and some, at least to these ears, are brand new. Together, they add up to the most remarkable Ellington achievement in quite some time, perhaps since *Such Sweet Thunder*; though there have been many morsels in between, this is a veritable banquet, a feast.

At the point in a career that Ellington has reached, most artists are not expected to compete with their own past. But Ellington is a special case, and, as an artist whose life-long body of work has achieved permanence through recording and whose past lives on side by side with his present, he is in what to a lesser man might be an unenviable position.

Over the long years of continued creativity, there have always been critical voices who have announced the beginning of the end. The first one, as long ago as 1933, was that of British critic, musician and Ellington admirer Spike Hughes, for whom the knell of doom was the addition of Lawrence Brown's trombone to the band. It didn't belong, he said, and would destroy the character of the Ellington ensemble. There were a lot of appropriate answers to that, not least among them *Slippery Horn*.

A few years later, the doubter was none other than John Hammond, who was led, by the appearance of *Reminiscing in Tempo*, to declare that Ellington had become pretentious—or words to that effect. That was some five years prior to *Ko Ko*. More examples could be added, among them reverse accusations of living in the past. Wisely, Ellington has ignored them all, and made them all obsolete.

As Sonny Greer points out elsewhere in this issue, Ellington has always perfectly understood his obligation to his public as well as his obligation to his art, and has discharged both in a supreme manner. Still, even his staunchest admirers might marvel at the freshness, vitality and creative force of the *Far East Suite*. It is an achievement which would allow him to perform nothing but the *Medley of Hits* for the next ten years without legitimate objection.

To describe this music in detail, to subject it to analysis, is a task for which this reviewer is not suited and towards which he is not inclined. It speaks for itself, and it must be heard. The ensuing program notes are offered only to whet the appetite.

The genesis of the *Suite* in the aural and visual impressions gathered on tours and travels is well described in Stanley Dance's excellent notes, which include many direct quotes from the composer. (If any critic has earned the right to annotate Ellington albums it is Dance, who has never wavered, or bowed to fashion.)

As is usually the case with Ellington, the extra-musical theme is of secondary importance. *Such Sweet Thunder* was most certainly a Shakespearean suite, and the music was related to specific characters and dramatic actions. Yet, one's enjoyment of the music was not at any moment predicated on previous knowledge of these details of inspiration; the music always existed for its own sake, with no hints required.

The same holds true for this new work. To be sure, there is wide usage of exotic and "eastern" colors and devices, but *Isfahan* is Ellington, Billy Strayhorn (and Johnny Hodges) much more significantly than it is Persia, while *Ad Lib* is on Ellington more than on *Nippon*. But if the music moves you to wax romantic about the mysterious East, that's perfectly fine, too. The current vogue for Indian music makes it quite timely.

Just don't expect any tampering here with the basic Ellington idiom. There are no sitars, no ragas, no signs of a Ravi Shankar influence. The language is that of classic jazz and Western music, glory be, and what is Eastern is a spice, a color, a hint—not a graft or affectation.

This is not to say that Ellington not listen to the fascinating musics of countries he visited. He did, and well. But he has not allowed this influence him into attempts to be "authentic," or any such detours. The music authentically Ellington; the experience have furnished a new perspective without fragmenting the unified vision of a personal conception.

The sounds in which this work abounds are the gorgeous sounds of Ellington realized by the unique voice of the orchestra. There are no other sounds there, and one could easily become ecstatic in attempting to describe them. But their warmth, density, sensuousness and beauty have no equivalent in world music.

Suffice it to say that the reeds have never blended more rapturously than, one example, behind Hodges' matching singing on *Isfahan*, a lovely theme. These reeds, together for so long that they think and breathe as one, are the crowning glory of this edition of the disc instrument.

The section's individual components well displayed: Carney, the absolute undisputed master of the baritone, is noble self on *Agra*, a stately song; Gonsalves, whose status as one of the great tenor saxophonists is undisputed, inspired on *Tourist*, with its arresting changes, and on *Mount Harissa*, with gentle swing.

Hamilton's clarinet, with its beautiful tone and impeccable execution, is the voice of the *Bluebird*, a charming piece which bears the stamp of Billy Strayhorn; the clarinetist is also much in evidence on the grand finale of *Nippon*. The nonpareil Hodges, in a blue mood quite different from *Isfahan*, is featured also on *Blue Pepper*. And let us not forget Procope's sterling lead voice.

There is not much featured work in the brasses: Brown has the concluding statement on *Amad*, which is Arabic mood; Cat Anderson's striking presence is felt on *Tourist* and on *Pepper*, and majestic sound of Cootie Williams is briefly to the surface on *Bluebird*. The trumpet section has been stronger, and its occasional unsureness is a blemish minor that it can easily be overlooked. (Perfection is not a necessary virtue of art, while spirit is, and that prerequisite is present.)

Lamb is an exceptional bassist, and he knows how to play Ellington music. He is in the spotlight on *Nippon*, but his contribution is felt throughout. Jones is not the colorist that Sam Woodyard but he is a good musician, and works hard and conscientiously.

One major soloist remains to be mentioned: the pianist in the band. He

not tease us here, but gives generously of himself. *Nippon*, until the last third, is in fact a little piano concerto, or rather, a rhapsody for piano and orchestra, with the emphasis on the former.

The theme and opening passages will delight Thelonious Monk; further on, there is piano playing in the grand tradition such as one rarely hears today—not just the special tradition that evolved in jazz, but the great, expansive, full-bodied classical tradition that began with Liszt and Chopin, ended with Horowitz, but lives on in Rubinstein.

It is a matter not so much of virtuosity (though Ellington has the grand gesture) as of sound and touch. He makes the piano ring and sing, and *Nippon* is an outstanding example of Ellington the pianist.

There is more, too. On the infectious *Depk*, inspired by dancers and an invitation to the dance, Ellington's piano is pitted against the ensemble in a different key, with effervescent effect. His introduction and theme statement on *Harissa* are rich and warm, and he also spices *Pepper* expertly.

(A historical footnote: in the early days of the band, Ellington's piano often swung less than the ensembles or other soloists; today, he can outswing most piano players, hornmen, and rhythm sections.)

Hail, then, to the Duke of Ellington, who has added the colors and textures of the Orient to his brilliant palette, and has given us new riches on top of riches. Hail, also, to Billy Strayhorn, who has enriched his legacy. It is encouraging that music of such strength and beauty can be created in our troublesome times; music that fulfills the uplifting purport of true art.

—Morgenstern

Cannonball Adderley

WHY AM I TREATED SO BAD?—Capitol 2617: *Mini Mama*; *I'm on My Way*; *Why? (Am I Treated So Bad)*; *One for Newk*; *Yvette*; *The Other Side*; *The Scene*.

Personnel: Cannonball Adderley, alto saxophone; Nat Adderley, cornet; Joe Zawinul, piano, electric piano; Vic Gaskin, bass; Roy McCurdy, drums.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

I always enjoy hearing the Adderley brothers' band in person: the combination of spontaneity and discipline, fire and control, humor, gusto, elan, and knowing variety of their music I find irresistible. They use their heads and aim at the gut; as a result, their music very sensitively combines the visceral with the cerebral.

Strong, meaty, soulful playing has always been the group's forte, and there's plenty of it in this set, which preserves much of the excitement the band generates in its personal appearances: the notes tell us the album was recorded "live" during a Hollywood nightclub engagement.

Cannon plays with searing directness throughout the set, turning in particularly forceful work on the first three performances. How he can drive! His playing sparks this group, and the contrast between the blistering frenzy of his work and the more thoughtful, probing cornet playing of brother Nat gives the front line an attractive balance. Nat's banked

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fires provide *I'm on My Way*—composed and arranged by his 11-year-old son Nat Jr.—with much of its appealing warmth, effectively foiling the cutting edge of Cannon's earlier alto solo.

Zawinul I find much more impressive on standard piano than on the electric instrument. The latter seems too limited in timbre and dynamics to lend itself at all well to the demands of accompaniment. True, its percussive nature is suited to the generation of rhythmic excitement, as the thematic statements of *Mini Mama* and *Why?* demonstrate, but in furnishing backing for the soloists on these numbers, the instrument's lack of warmth and tonal variety and the dry, mechanical nature of its sound tell against it.

Zawinul, incidentally, has a pair of attractive originals to his credit in the set, a tribute to Sonny Rollins, *Newk*, and a brief but lovely ballad, *Yvette*.

All in all, quite a tasty, substantial meal of meat-and-potatoes performances from the brothers Adderley and associates.
—Welding

Curtis Amy

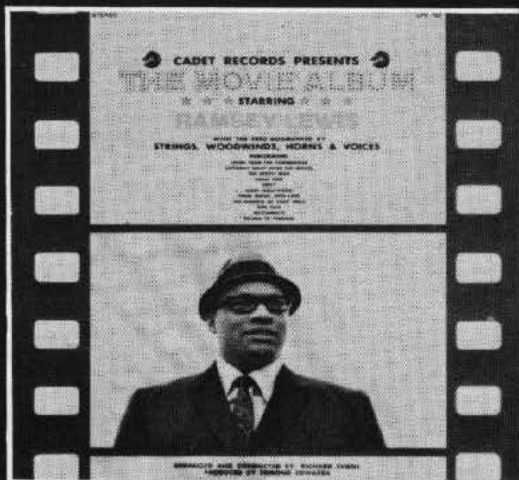
MUSTANG—Verve 8684: *Mustang*; *Shaker Heights*; *Enojo*; *Mustang*; *Please Send Me Someone to Love*; *Old Devil Moon*.

Personnel: Jimmy Owens, trumpet, fluegelhorn; Amy, tenor and soprano saxophones; Larry Cooper, baritone saxophone; Kenny Barron, piano; Carl Lynch, guitar; Edgar Willis, bass; Bruno Carr, drums; Eva Harris, vocal.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ½

Hard-driving, with a front line hewn

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