

Ellington at Newport The first half of the 1950s was a difficult period for Ellington, who suffered many personnel defections. (Some of those musicians returned later.) But the band made a major comeback at the Newport Jazz Festival on July 7, 1956, when they kicked into a version of "Dimuendo and Crescendo in Blue" that found saxophonist Paul Gonsalves taking a long, memorable solo. Ellington appeared on the cover of Time magazine, and he signed a new contract with Columbia Records, which released Ellington at Newport, the best-selling album of his career. Freed of the necessity of writing hits and spurred by the increased time available on the LP record, Ellington concentrated more on extended compositions for the rest of his career. His comeback as a live performer led to increased opportunities to tour, and in the fall of 1958 he undertook his first full-scale tour of Europe. For the rest of his life, he would be a busy world traveler.

Ellington appeared in and scored the 1959 film Anatomy of a Murder, and its soundtrack won him three of the newly instituted Grammy Awards, for best performance by a dance band, best musical composition of the year, and best soundtrack. He was nominated for an Academy Award for his next score, Paris Blues (1961). In August 1963, his stage work My People, a cavalcade of African-American history, was mounted in Chicago as part of the Century of Negro Progress Exposition.

Meanwhile, of course, he continued to lead his band in recordings and live performances. He switched from Columbia to Frank Sinatra's Reprise label (purchased by Warner Bros. Records) and made some pop-oriented records that dismayed his fans but indicated he had not given up on broad commercial aspirations. Nor had he abandoned his artistic aspirations, as the first of his series of sacred concerts, performed at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco on September 16, 1965, indicated. And he still longed for a stage success, turning once again to Broadway with the musical Pousse-Café, which opened on March 18, 1966, but closed within days. Three months later, the Sinatra film Assault on a Queen, with an Ellington score, opened in movie houses around the country. (His final film score, for Change of Mind, appeared in 1969.)

The Duke Ellington's Far East Suite Ellington became a Grammy favorite in his later years. He won a 1966 Grammy for best original jazz composition for "In the Beginning, God," part of his sacred concerts. His 1967 album Far East Suite, inspired by a tour of the Middle and Far East, won the best instrumental jazz performance Grammy that year, and he took home his sixth Grammy in the same category in 1969 for And His Mother Called Him Bill, a tribute to Strayhorn, who had died in 1967. "New Orleans Suite" earned another Grammy in the category in 1971, as did "Togo Brava Suite" in 1972, and the posthumous The Ellington Suites in 1976.

Ellington continued to perform regularly until he was overcome by illness in the spring of 1974, succumbing to lung cancer and pneumonia. His death did not end the band, which was taken over by his son Mercer, who led it until his own death in 1996, and then by a grandson. Meanwhile, Ellington finally enjoyed the stage hit he had always wanted when the revue Sophisticated Ladies, featuring his music, opened on Broadway on March 1, 1981, and ran 767 performances.

The many celebrations of the Ellington centenary in 1999 demonstrated that he continued to be regarded as the major composer of jazz. If that seemed something of an anomaly in a musical style that emphasizes spontaneous improvisation over written composition, Ellington was talented enough to overcome the oddity. He wrote primarily for his band, allowing his veteran players room to solo within his compositions, and as a result created a body of work that seemed likely to help jazz enter the academic and institutional realms, which was very much its direction at the end of the 20th century. In that sense, he foreshadowed the future of jazz and could lay claim to being one of its most influential practitioners.



**HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS**

**midnight in PARIS**

**DUKE ELLINGTON**

**AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

**A MIDNIGHT IN PARIS NO REGRETS**

**MADEMOISELLE DE PARIS**

**I WISH YOU LOVE UNDER PARIS SKIES**

**THE RIVER SEINE PARIS BLUES**

**JAVAPACHACHA (Apache) GUITAR AMOUR**

**(All of a Sudden) MY HEART SINGS**

**THE PETITE WALTZ SPEAK TO ME OF LOVE**

**COMME CI, COMME ÇA**



Duke Ellington was the most important composer in the history of jazz as well as being a bandleader who held his large group together continuously for almost 50 years. The two aspects of his career were related; Ellington used his band as a musical laboratory for his new compositions and shaped his writing specifically to showcase the talents of his bandmembers, many of whom remained with him for long periods. Ellington also wrote film scores and stage musicals, and several of his instrumental works were adapted into songs that became standards. In addition to touring year in and year out, he recorded extensively, resulting in a gigantic body of work that was still being assessed a quarter century after his death.

Ellington was the son of a White House butler, James Edward Ellington, and thus grew up in comfortable surroundings. He began piano lessons at age seven and was writing music by his teens. He dropped out of high school in his junior year in 1917 to pursue a career in music. At first, he booked and performed in bands in the Washington, D.C., area, but in September 1923 the Washingtonians, a five-piece group of which he was a member, moved permanently to New York, where they gained a residency in the Times Square venue The Hollywood Club (later The Kentucky Club). They made their first recordings in November 1924, and cut tunes for different record companies under a variety of pseudonyms, so that several current major labels, notably Sony, Universal, and BMG, now have extensive holdings of their work from the period in their archives, which are reissued periodically.

The group gradually increased in size and came under Ellington's leadership. They played in what was called "jungle" style, their sly arrangements often highlighted by the muted growling sound of trumpeter James "Bubber" Miley. A good example of this is Ellington's first signature song, "East St. Louis Toodle-oo," which the band first recorded for Vocalion Records in November 1926, and which became their first chart single in a re-recorded version for Columbia in July 1927.

The Ellington band moved uptown to The Cotton Club in Harlem on December 4, 1927. Their residency at the famed club, which lasted more than three years, made Ellington a nationally known musician due to radio broadcasts that emanated from the bandstand. In 1928, he had two two-sided hits: "Black and Tan Fantasy"/"Creole Love Call" on Victor (now BMG) and "Doin' the New Low Down"/"Diga Diga Doo" on Okeh (now Sony), released as by the Harlem Footwarmers. "The Mooche" on Okeh peaked in the charts at the start of 1929.

While maintaining his job at The Cotton Club, Ellington took his band downtown to play in the Broadway musical Show Girl, featuring the music of George Gershwin, in the summer of 1929. The following summer, the band took a leave of absence to head out to California and appear in the film Check and Double Check. From the score, "Three Little Words," with vocals by the Rhythm Boys featuring Bing Crosby, became a number one hit on Victor in November 1930; its flip side, "Ring Dem Bells," also reached the charts.

The Ellington band left The Cotton Club in February 1931 to begin a tour that, in a sense, would not end until the leader's death 43 years later. At the same time, Ellington scored a Top Five hit with an instrumental version of one of his standards, "Mood Indigo" released on Victor. The recording was later inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. As "the Jungle Band," the Ellington Orchestra charted on Brunswick later in 1931 with "Rockin' in Rhythm" and with the lengthy composition "Creole Rhapsody," pressed on both sides of a 78 single, an indication that Ellington's goals as a writer were beginning to extend beyond brief works. (A second version of the piece was a chart entry on Victor in March 1932.) "Limehouse Blues" was a chart entry on Victor in August 1931, then in the winter of 1932, Ellington scored a Top Ten hit on Brunswick with one of his best-remembered songs, "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," featuring the vocals of Ivie Anderson. This was still more than three years before the official birth of the swing era, and Ellington helped give the period its name. Ellington's next major hit was another signature song for him, "Sophisticated Lady." His instrumental version became a Top Five hit in the spring of 1933, with its flip side, a treatment of "Stormy Weather," also making the Top Five.

The Ellington Orchestra made another feature film, Murder at the Vanities, in the spring of 1934. Their instrumental rendition of "Cocktails for Two" from the score hit number one on Victor in May, and they hit the Top Five with both sides of the Brunswick release "Moon Glow"/"Solitude" that fall. The band also appeared in the Mae West film Belle of the Nineties and played on the soundtrack of Many Happy Returns. Later in the fall, the band was back in the Top Ten with "Saddest Tale," and they had two Top Ten hits in 1935, "Merry-Go-Round" and "Accent on Youth." While the latter was scoring in the hit parade in September, Ellington recorded another of his extended compositions, "Reminiscing in Tempo," which took up both sides of two 78s. Even as he became more ambitious, however, he was rarely out of the hit parade, scoring another Top Ten hit, "Cotton,"

in the fall of 1935, and two more, "Love Is Like a Cigarette" and "Oh Babe! Maybe Someday," in 1936. The band returned to Hollywood in 1936 and recorded music for the Marx Brothers' film A Day at the Races and for Hit Parade of 1937. Meanwhile, they were scoring Top Ten hits with "Scattin' at the Kit-Kat" and the swing standard "Caravan," co-written by valve trombonist Juan Tizol, and Ellington was continuing to pen extended instrumental works such as "Diminuendo in Blue" and "Crescendo in Blue." "If You Were in My Place (What Would You Do?)," a vocal number featuring Ivie Anderson, was a Top Ten hit in the spring of 1938, and Ellington scored his third number one hit in April with an instrumental version of another standard, "I Let a Song Go out of My Heart." In the fall, he was back in the Top Ten with a version of the British show tune "Lambeth Walk."

The Ellington band underwent several notable changes at the end of the 1930s. After several years recording more or less regularly for Brunswick, Ellington moved to Victor. In early 1939 Billy Strayhorn, a young composer, arranger, and pianist, joined the organization. He did not usually perform with the orchestra, but he became Ellington's composition partner to the extent that soon it was impossible to tell where Ellington's writing left off and Strayhorn's began. Two key personnel changes strengthened the outfit with the acquisition of bassist Jimmy Blanton in September and tenor saxophonist Ben Webster in December. Their impact on Ellington's sound was so profound that their relatively brief tenure has been dubbed "the Blanton-Webster Band" by jazz fans. These various changes were encapsulated by the Victor release of Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train," a swing era standard, in the summer of 1941. The recording was later inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

That same summer, Ellington was in Los Angeles, where his stage musical, Jump for Joy, opened on July 10 and ran for 101 performances. Unfortunately, the show never went to Broadway, but among its songs was "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)," another standard. The U.S. entry into World War II in December 1941 and the onset of the recording ban called by the American Federation of Musicians in August 1942 slowed the Ellington band's momentum. Unable to record and with touring curtailed, Ellington found an opportunity to return to extended composition with the first of a series of annual recitals at Carnegie Hall on January 23, 1943, at which he premiered "Black, Brown and Beige." And he returned to the movies, appearing in Cabin in the Sky and Reveille with Beverly. Meanwhile, the record labels, stymied for hits, began looking into their artists' back catalogs. Lyricist Bob Russell took Ellington's 1940 composition "Never No Lament" and set a lyric to it, creating "Don't Get Around Much Anymore." The Ink Spots scored with a vocal version (recorded a cappella), and Ellington's three-year-old instrumental recording was also a hit, reaching the pop Top Ten and number one on the recently instituted R&B charts. Russell repeated his magic with another 1940 Ellington instrumental, "Concerto for Cootie" (a showcase for trumpeter Cootie Williams), creating "Do Nothin' Till You Hear from Me." Nearly four years after it was recorded, the retitled recording hit the pop Top Ten and number one on the R&B charts for Ellington in early 1944, while newly recorded vocal cover versions also scored. Ellington's vintage recordings became ubiquitous on the top of the R&B charts during 1943-1944; he also hit number one with "A Slip of the Lip (Can Sink a Ship)," "Sentimental Lady," and "Main Stem." With the end of the recording ban in November 1944, Ellington was able to record a song he had composed with his saxophonist, Johnny Hodges, set to a lyric by Don George and Harry James, "I'm Beginning to See the Light." The James recording went to number one in April 1945, but Ellington's recording was also a Top Ten hit.

With the end of the war, Ellington's period as a major commercial force on records largely came to an end, but unlike other big bandleaders, who disbanded as the swing era passed, Ellington, who predated the era, simply went on touring, augmenting his diminished road revenues with his songwriting royalties to keep his band afloat. In a musical climate in which jazz was veering away from popular music and toward bebop, and popular music was being dominated by singers, the Ellington band no longer had a place at the top of the business; but it kept working. And Ellington kept trying more extended pieces. In 1946, he teamed with lyricist John Latouche to write the music for the Broadway musical Beggar's Holiday, which opened on December 26 and ran 108 performances. And he wrote his first full-length background score for a feature film with 1950's The Asphalt Jungle.

# Duke Ellington and his Orchestra Midnight in Paris

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|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1.Under Paris Skies 2:41     | 7.My Heart Sings 2:03   |
| 2.I Wish You Love 3:50       | 8.Guitar Amour 4:57     |
| 3.Mademoiselle De Paris 3:20 | 9.The Petite Waltz 4:14 |
| 4.Comme Ci Comme Ca 3:03     | 10.Paris Blues 4:21     |
| 5.Speak To Me Of Love 2:02   | 11.Javapachacha 3:56    |
| 6.A Midnight In Paris 3:33   | 12.No Regrets 2:12      |
|                              | 13.The River Seine 2:14 |

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