

LEADSHEET

Lead Sheet: a simple score that provides jazz musicians with the necessary information from which to play and improvise on a song.

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington

was the most prolific composer of the 20th century in both number of pieces and variety of forms. His artistic development was one of the most spectacular in the history of music: more than 50 years of sustained achievement as a composer culminating in his late masterpieces "Such Sweet Thunder" (1957), "The Nutcracker Suite" (1960), and "The New Orleans Suite" (1970).

"Launching Pad" The Early Years



Ellington was born in Washington, D.C., on April 29, 1899. Both of his parents played the piano, and he himself began to learn to play at a young age. As a boy he was as interested in painting and sports as in music, but as a teenager he had begun to win acclaim playing the piano in dance bands at parties and clubs around Washington, and he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to music.

"Rockin' In Rhythm" Swinging in Harlem

By 1923 he had moved to New York City and had his own band, the Washingtonians, which played regularly at the Club Kentucky. From 1927 to 1932 Ellington and his band, which had grown from five musicians to ten, performed at the Cotton Club in Harlem (performances were broadcast across the country). By then they had also made many best-selling recordings, including worldwide hits like "Mood Indigo" (1930).



"Half the Fun" The Strayhorn Legacy

In 1939 Ellington hired a young pianist and composer from Pittsburgh, Billy Strayhorn (1915-1967). Strayhorn composed dozens of pieces in the Ellington Orchestra's repertoire, including their theme song, "Take the A Train" (1941). The very best jazz musicians joined the Orchestra, and sometimes it grew as large as eighteen to twenty players. Ellington wrote music specifically for those individual musicians.



"Take the A Train" Duke on the Road

Ellington wrote music for all kinds of settings - from the ballroom, the comedy stage, and the nightclub to the movie house, the theater, the concert hall, and the cathedral. By the 1960s, Duke and his orchestra performed close to 300 concerts a year before enthusiastic, admiring audiences all over the world. Anticipating the present-day movement embracing "world music," he incorporated themes, ideas, and feelings he picked up in his constant touring into works like "The Far East Suite" (1964) and "The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse Suite" (1971).



"I Let A Song Go Out of My Heart" Reminiscing in Tempo

From the start of his career Ellington displayed enormous inventive powers. The extent of his innovations, still not fully recognized, was such as to redefine the various forms in which he worked. He synthesized many of the elements of American music - the minstrel song, ragtime, Tin Pan Alley, the blues, and American appropriations of the European music tradition - into a consistent style, which though technically complex had a directness, simplicity of expression and intent largely missing

from the so-called art music of the twentieth century.

Ellington's first great achievements came in the three-minute song form of his first records (in the 1920s phonograph records could hold only about three minutes of music on a side). His blues writing resulted in new conceptions of blues form, harmony, and melody. He was also the master of the romantic ballad.



"Blue Feeling" The End of an Era

Duke Ellington died on May 24, 1974. In addition to his nearly 2,000 compositions and innumerable recordings, he left a distinctive personal account of his life and work in his autobiography *Music Is My Mistress*, published in 1973.



Suggested Ellington Discography

Never No Lament: The Blanton-Webster Band - Duke Ellington (Bluebird 82876508572 recorded 1940-1942)
Early Ellington: The Complete Brunswick and Vocalion Recordings of Duke Ellington 1926-1931 (Decca GRD3-640)
Such Sweet Thunder (Columbia 65568, recorded 1957)
16 Most Requested Songs (Columbia Records, CK 57901, recorded 1932-1960)
Louis Armstrong Duke Ellington The Great Summit/Complete Sessions/ Deluxe Edition (Roulette Jazz 7243 5 24546 2 4)
Three Suites (Columbia Records, CK 46825, recorded 1960-61)

Suggested Ellington Bibliography

Music is My Mistress by Duke Ellington (DaCapo Press, Inc., 1976)
The World of Duke Ellington by Stanley Dance (DaCapo Press, Inc., 2001)
Ellington/ The Early Years by Mark Tucker (University of Illinois Press, 1995)
The Duke Ellington Reader by Mark Tucker (Oxford University Press, Inc., 1995)
Jump for Joy by Jazz at Lincoln Center (Jazz at Lincoln Center, Inc., 1999)

Suggested Ellington Videos

Hollywood Rhythm, Volume 1: The Best of Jazz & Blues, Kino Int. Corp., 1929-41.
Duke Ellington, Good Years of Jazz, Video Yesteryear, 1962
Duke Ellington: Memories of Duke, WarnerVision Entertainment, 1968
Duke Ellington in Europe, 1963-64, Green Video, 1980
On the Road with Duke Ellington, Direct Cinema Limited, 1995
Anatomy of a Murder, Columbia TriStar, 1959
Paris Blues, Key Video, 1961