

Presents

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

COMBO SUITE

ARRANGED BY DUKE ELLINGTON AND BILLY STRAYHORN

PREPARED BY DYLAN CANTERBURY, ROB DUBOFF, AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

FULL SCORE

JLP-7564

MUSIC BY DUKE ELLINGTON AND BILLY STRAYHORN

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DUKE ELLINGTON/BILLY STRAYHORN SERIES

COMBO SUITE (1967)

Background:

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.

The Music:

It's no secret that the end of the big band craze left many a notable bandleader struggling to make ends meet from the mid-1940s on. Even Duke Ellington was no exception to this rule, at times only able to keep his bands afloat due to a steady stream of royalties from his many compositions. During these lean times, Ellington would occasionally form combos of his sidemen to bring into the studio. These combo recordings were mostly kept private until after Ellington's passing in 1974 and served as a quick paycheck for the otherwise underemployed musicians. This suite of six relatively obscure Ellington/Strayhorn compositions (originally strung together under the title *Hi-Fi-Fo-Fum*) was recorded in 1967, but was not released to the public until 1986. The band on this recording was Johnny Hodges on alto sax, Paul Gonsalves on tenor sax, Harry Carney on baritone sax, Cat Anderson on trumpet (who employs a plunger mute through the entire suite), Lawrence Brown on trombone, Ellington on piano, John Lamb on bass, and Rufus Jones on drums. Most of the original manuscripts were simple lead sheets, but this version has been reconstructed to mimic the solo orders, unwritten backgrounds, etc. of the original recording.

Movement 1: Intimacy Of The Blues

Recorded by the full Ellington band around the same time for the Strayhorn tribute album *...and his mother called him Bill*, this movement is easily the best known tune of the suite. Its simple but highly catchy melody and steadily rollicking groove make it an ideal way to start things off. The soloists on the recording are Hodges and Brown, with some likely improvised backgrounds behind each. An optional ending has been included to allow for live performances to avoid attempting the booth fade out of the original recording.

Movement 2: Out South

A plucky Ellington piano introduction leads into a melody that, while similar in tempo and feel to the previous movement, is a bit more gospel influenced and earthier sounding. Once again, Brown and Hodges are the primary soloists, swapping turns on the A sections and bridge of the 32 bar form for each chorus. The melody is stated twice, serving double duty as a background figure for the soloists.

Movement 3: Tell Me 'Bout My Baby

This movement sees the ensemble shift away from a swing feel to a Latin groove. The tune follows a standard AABA form with a twist in the form of 10 bar A sections. Like the previous movement, the melody also serves as solo backgrounds throughout. The soloists this time are Hodges once again and Anderson. The arrangement ends with two extended vamps, one for each soloist. Anderson plays a brief solo cadenza before Ellington chimes in with two ominous chords to finish things up.

Movement 4: Kentucky Ave, CA

The band returns to the blues for this movement, this time in Db as opposed to Eb as before. Ellington plays an 8 bar introduction to set up a melody that can best be described as bare bones - it's clear the main goal here is to just bide time until the solos can begin. Hodges yet again kicks things off with the first solo chorus, followed by a chorus apiece from Brown, Anderson and Gonsalves. On the latter two's choruses, Hodges and Brown play a simple impromptu background. The melody is played 4 times at the end, with Hodges soloing over the top of the ensemble for the 2nd time on. A brief generic bass break sets up Ellington's final piano clank.

Movement 5: Near North

Easily the brightest tempo of the suite, the band launches into the simple but brisk melody right away. This movement serves as a vehicle for Gonsalves, whose bop leanings are perfect for this setting. Gonsalves plays three choruses, with some simple backgrounds from the other horns on his first and third choruses. The melody is never repeated in full, with the ending being a single A section. Gonsalves takes an extended solo cadenza prior to the band's final dissonant chord.

Movement 6: Soul Country

A chunky Ellington piano introduction sets up what is otherwise a rather graceful melody that has some shades of *Mood Indigo* at times. The groove returns to a Latin feel, albeit quite a bit more relaxed than before. The melody once again serves as a background for solos as well. The soloists on this final movement are Brown and Hodges. After a four bar introduction recap from Ellington, the horns play one final ascending line that leads into the warm last chord to bring the suite to a satisfying conclusion.

Doug DuBoff, Dylan Canterbury, and Rob DuBoff

-April 2017

Handwritten musical score for Paul Gonsalves's *Combo Suite*, recorded in 1967. The score is written on two pages of a notebook, with the name "PAUL" written at the top of each page.

The left page is titled "High-Figh-Fo-Fumm" (circled 27) and contains two sections of music, labeled 1 and 2. Section 1 consists of three staves of music, and section 2 consists of six staves. The right page is also titled "High-Figh-Fo-Fumm" (circled 27) and contains three sections of music, labeled 3, 4, and 5. Section 3 is marked "VAMP" and "to VAMP". Section 4 is marked "BRIDGE". Section 5 is the final section on the page.

The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including triplets and syncopation, and dynamic markings such as "p" (piano) and "p." (piano). The manuscript shows signs of being a working draft, with some ink smudges and corrections.

At the bottom of the right page, there is a small stamp that reads "PASSILINI NUMBER 1 12 Stave Medium".

Here is Paul Gonsalves's original part for the first four sections of *Combo Suite*, recorded in 1967.

SCORE

COMBO SUITE

RECORDED BY DUKE ELLINGTON

MUSIC BY DUKE ELLINGTON AND BILLY STRAYHORN
ARRANGED BY DUKE ELLINGTON AND BILLY STRAYHORN
PREPARED BY DYLAN CANTERBURY, ROB DUBOFF AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

MOVEMENT 1 - INTIMACY OF THE BLUES
MEDIUM SWING ♩ = 120

ALTO SAX

TENOR SAX.

BARITONE SAX.

TRUMPET (PLUNGER)

TROMBONE

PIANO

BASS

DRUMS

1 2 3 4

5

A. Sax. *mf* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

T. Sax. *mf* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

B. Sax. *mf* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Tpt. *mf* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Tbn. *mf* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

PNO. *mf* $E^b7(\#9)$ A^b9 $E^b7(\#9)$ A^b9

B.S. *mf* $E^b7(\#9)$ A^b9 $E^b7(\#9)$ A^b9

Dr. *mf* (4)