

Presents

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

ROCK SKIPPIN'
(AT THE BLUE NOTE)

ARRANGED BY BILLY STRAYHORN

PREPARED BY DYLAN CANTERBURY, ROB DUBOFF, AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

FULL SCORE

JLP-7615

MUSIC BY BILLY STRAYHORN AND DUKE ELLINGTON

COPYRIGHT © 1947 (RENEWED) BY MUSIC SALES CORPORATION. (ASCAP)
INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT SECURED. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION.
LOGOS, GRAPHICS, AND LAYOUT COPYRIGHT © 2017 THE JAZZ LINES FOUNDATION INC.

PUBLISHED BY THE JAZZ LINES FOUNDATION INC., A NOT-FOR-PROFIT JAZZ RESEARCH ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO PRESERVING AND PROMOTING AMERICA'S MUSICAL HERITAGE.



THE JAZZ LINES FOUNDATION INC.
PO Box 1236
SARATOGA SPRINGS NY 12866 USA



DUKE ELLINGTON/BILLY STRAYHORN SERIES



ROCK SKIPPIN' (AT THE BLUE NOTE) (1951/1967)

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 Juilliard 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:

Written as a tribute to Chicago jazz club owner Frank Holzfiend, Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington's *Rock Skippin'* (*At The Blue Note*) was initially recorded by the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1951. Played fairly infrequently by the Ellington band after its debut, the song fell into relative obscurity until it was eventually re-recorded by Ellington for the 1967 Strayhorn tribute album *...and his mother called him Bill*. This publication has been based on the 1967 version.

Notes to the Conductor:

The arrangement begins quite simply, with an eight bar plucky piano solo from Ellington leading into the delightfully catchy melody. A trio of trombones handle lead duties during the first two A sections at measure 9, with a playful saxophone riff providing the main accompaniment. The melody is handed off to the woodwinds at measure 19, with Jimmy Hamilton's clarinet gliding over the top of the somewhat dissonant harmonies laid down by the rest of the ensemble. The trombones resume melody duty once more at measure 27, this time with a gentle background figure provided by two trumpets.

The arrangement takes a turn for the bombastic with a rather chaotic ensemble interlude at measure 35. The first four measures feature a bugle-like series of staggered entrances from the trumpets, a descending line from the trombones, and some rhythmic punches from the saxophones battling out for supremacy. Ultimately, however, it is Cootie Williams' plunger muted trumpet solo that wins out, with the ensemble merging together for some dramatic rhythmic hits before handing the spotlight over to Williams for a solo chorus over the entirety of the form at measure 43.

The arrangement begins its slow and gradual wind down at measure 68, returning to the melody's A section which is ultimately repeated four total times. The first time, the trombones play the melody with the saxophones providing the same background riff as they did in the beginning. The saxophones drop out the second time, leaving the trombones to themselves, before the trombones themselves drop out for the third time, leaving the final two repeats for the rhythm section alone. Things come full circle at this point, as Ellington plays a variation on the solo he used to introduce the performance, ultimately fading out to nothing more than one final bass and drum hit.

With the exception of Ellington's solo introduction and conclusion, this is not a transcription; it has been prepared from the original 1951 and 1967 sets of parts, and a score compiled for the 1967 session.

Doug DuBoff, Dylan Canterbury, and Rob DuBoff

- September 2017

Handwritten musical score for "Rock Skipping" (78), featuring parts for Willie Smith and Russell Procope.

Left Page (Smith):

- Handwritten name: *Smith*
- Handwritten number: *78*
- Section: **Rock Skipping**
- Key signature: One sharp (F#)
- Time signature: 2/4
- Measures: 1-8
- Rehearsal marks: A, B, C, D, E, F
- Handwritten note: "to E 1 to 8"

Right Page (Procope):

- Handwritten name: *Procope*
- Handwritten number: *78*
- Section: **Rock Skipping**
- Key signature: One sharp (F#)
- Time signature: 2/4
- Measures: 1-8
- Rehearsal marks: A, B, C, D, E, F
- Handwritten note: "PLAY E 1-8"

Here are parts used by alto saxophonists Willie Smith and Russell Procope for the 1951 recording session.

ROCK SKIPPIN' (AT THE BLUE NOTE)

RECORDED BY THE DUKE ELLINGTON ORCHESTRA

MUSIC BY BILLY STRAYHORN AND DUKE ELLINGTON

ARRANGED BY BILLY STRAYHORN

SCORE

MEDIUM SWING ♩ = 160

PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY DYLAN CANTERBURY, ROB DUBOFF, AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

①

WOODWIND 1: ALTO SAX

WOODWIND 2: ALTO SAX

WOODWIND 3: CLARINET

WOODWIND 4: TENOR SAX

WOODWIND 5: BARITONE SAX

TRUMPET 1

TRUMPET 2

TRUMPET 3

TRUMPET 4

TROMBONE 1

TROMBONE 2

TROMBONE 3

PIANO

BASS

DRUM SET

(SOLO) (CHORDS IMPLIED)

(END SOLO)

mp

mp

mp

(4)

(8)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

