

**Jazz at Lincoln Center Library**

# **Raincheck**

COMPOSED BY BILLY STRAYHORN

TRANSCRIBED BY DAVID BERGER FOR JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

## **F U L L   S C O R E**

This transcription was made especially for *Essentially Ellington* 2002:  
the Seventh Annual Jazz at Lincoln Center High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival.

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Annual High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival



Jazz at Lincoln Center



## NOTES ON PLAYING ELLINGTON

At least 95% of modern-day large ensemble jazz playing comes out of three traditions: Count Basie's band, Duke Ellington's band, and the orchestrations of small groups. Those young players interested in jazz will be drawn to small groups for the opportunity to improvise and for practical reasons (it is much easier to organize four or five people than it is 15). Schools have taken over the task (formerly performed by dance bands) of training musicians to be ensemble players. Due to the Basie Band's popularity and its simplicity of style and emphasis on blues and swing, the better educators have almost exclusively adopted this tradition for teaching jazz ensemble playing. As wonderful as Count Basie's style is, it doesn't address many of the important styles developed under the great musical umbrella we call jazz. Duke Ellington's comprehensive and eclectic approach to music offers an alternative.

The stylistic richness of Ellington's music presents a great challenge to educators and performers alike. In Basie's music, the conventions are very nearly consistent. In Ellington's, there are many more exceptions to the rules. This calls for greater knowledge of the language of jazz. Clark Terry, who left Count Basie's band to join Duke Ellington, said, "Count Basie was college, but Duke Ellington was graduate school." Knowledge of Ellington's music prepares you to play any big band music.

The following is a list of performance conventions for the great majority of Ellington's music. Any deviations or additions will be spelled out in the individual performance notes that follow.

1. Listen carefully many times to the Ellington recording of these pieces. There are many subtleties that will elude even the most sophisticated listener at first. Although it was never Ellington's wish to have his recordings imitated, knowledge of these definitive versions will lead musicians to make more educated choices when creating new performances. Ellington's music, though written for specific individuals, is designed to inspire all musicians to express themselves. In addition, you will hear slight note differences in the recording and the transcriptions. This is intentional because there are mistakes and alterations from the original intent of the music in the recording. You should have your players play what's in the score.
2. General use of swing phrasing: The triplet feel prevails except for ballads or where notations such as even eighths or Latin appear. In these cases, eighth notes are given equal value.
3. There is a chain of command in ensemble playing. The lead players in each section determine the phrasing and volume for their own section, and their section-mates must conform to the lead. When the saxes and/or trombones play with the trumpets, the lead trumpet is the boss. The lead alto and trombone must listen to the first trumpet and follow her. In turn, the other saxes and trombones must follow their lead players. When the clarinet leads the brass section, the brass should not overblow him. That means that the first trumpet is actually playing "second." If this is done effectively, there will be very little balancing work left for the conductor.
4. In Ellington's music, each player should express the individuality of his own line. He must find a musical balance of supporting and following the section leader and bringing out the character of the underpart. Each player should be encouraged to express his or her personality through the music. In this music, the underparts are played at the same volume and with the same conviction as the lead.
5. Blues inflection should permeate all parts at all times, not just when these opportunities occur in the lead.
6. Vibrato is used quite a bit to warm up the sound. Saxes (who most frequently represent the sensual side of things) usually employ a heavy vibrato on harmonized passages and a slight vibrato on unisons. Trumpets (who very often are used for heat and power) use a little vibrato on harmonized passages and no vibrato on unisons. Trombones (who are usually noble) do not use slide vibrato. A little lip vibrato is good at times. Try to match the speed of vibrato. Unisons are played with no vibrato.
7. Crescendo as you ascend and diminuendo as you descend. The upper notes of phrases receive a natural accent, and the lower notes are ghosted. Alto and tenor saxophones need to use subtone in the lower part of their range in order to blend properly with the rest of the section. This music was originally written with no dynamics. It pretty much follows the natural tendencies of the instruments; play loudly in the loud part of the instrument and softly in the soft part of the instrument. For instance, a high C for a trumpet will be loud, and a low C will be soft.
8. Quarter notes are generally played short unless otherwise notated. Long marks above or below a pitch indicate full value: not just long, but full value. Eighth notes are played full value except when followed by a rest or otherwise notated. All notes longer than a quarter note are played full value, which means if it is followed by a rest, release the note where the rest appears. For example, a half note occurring on beat 1 of a measure would be released on beat 3.
9. Unless they are part of a legato background figure, long notes should be played somewhat *fp*, accent and then diminish the volume. This is important so that the moving parts can be heard over the sustained notes. Don't just hold out the long notes, but give them life and personality: that is, vibrato, inflection, crescendo, or diminuendo. There is a great deal of inflection in this music, and much of this is highly interpretive. Straight or curved lines imply non-pitched glisses, and wavy lines mean scalar (chromatic or diatonic) glisses. In general, all rhythmic figures need to be accented. Accents give the music life and swing. This is very important.
10. Ellington's music is about individuality: one person per part—do not double up because you have extra players or need more strength. More than one on a part makes it sound more like a concert band and less like a jazz band.
11. This is acoustic music. Keep amplification to an absolute minimum; in the best halls, almost no amplification should be necessary. Everyone needs to develop a big sound. It is the conductor's job to balance the band. When a guitar is used, it should be a hollow-body, unamplified rhythm guitar. Simple three-note voicings should be used throughout. An acoustic string bass is a must. In mediocre or poorly designed halls, the bass and piano may need a bit of a boost. I recommend miking them and putting them through the house sound system. This should provide a much better tone than an amplifier. Keep in mind that the rhythm section's primary function is to accompany. The bass should not be as loud as a trumpet. That is unnatural and leads to overamplification, bad tone, and limited dynamics. Stay away from monitors. They provide a false sense of balance.
12. Solos and rhythm section parts without chord changes should be played as is or with a little embellishment. Solos and rhythm section parts with chord changes should be improvised. However, written passages should be learned because they are an important part of our jazz heritage and help the player understand the function of his particular solo or accompaniment. Soloists should learn the chord changes. Solos should not be approached as opportunities to show off technique, range, or volume, but should be looked at as a great opportunity to further develop the interesting thematic material that Ellington has provided.
13. The notation of plungers for the brass means a rubber toilet plunger bought in a hardware store. Kirkhill is a very good brand (especially if you can find one of their old rubber ones, like the one I loaned Wynton and he lost). Trumpets use 5" diameter and trombones use 6" diameter. Where Plunger/Mute is notated, insert a pixie mute in the bell and use the plunger over the mute. Pixies are available from Humes & Berg in Chicago. Tricky Sam Nanton and his successors in the Ellington plunger trombone chair did not use pixies. Rather, each of them employed a Nonpareil (that's the brand name) trumpet straight mute. Nonpareil has gone out of business, but the Tom Crown Nonpareil trumpet straight mute is very close to the same thing. These mutes create a wonderful sound (very close to the human voice), but they also create some intonation problems that must be corrected by the lip only. It would be easier to move the tuning slide, but part of the sound is in the struggle to correct the pitch. If this proves too much, stick with the pixie—it's pretty close.

14. The drummer is the de facto leader of the band. He establishes the beat and controls the volume of the ensemble. For big band playing, the drummer needs to use a larger bass drum than he would for small group drumming. A 22" is preferred. The bass drum is played softly (nearly inaudible) on each beat. This is called feathering the bass drum. It provides a very important bottom to the band. The bass drum sound is not a boom and not a thud—it's in between. The larger size drum is necessary for the kicks; a smaller drum just won't be heard. The key to this style is just to keep time. A rim knock on two and four (chopping wood) is used to lock in the swing. When it comes to playing fills, the fewer, the better.
15. The horn players should stand for their solos and solis. Brass players should come down front for moderate to long solos, surrounding rests permitting. The same applies to the pep section (two trumpets and one trombone in plunger/mutes).
16. Horns should pay close attention to attacks and releases. Everyone should hit together and end together.
17. Brass must be very precise when playing short notes. Notes must be stopped with the tongue, à la Louis Armstrong!
18. Above all, everyone's focus should remain at all times on the swing. As the great bassist Chuck Israels says, "The three most important things in jazz are rhythm, rhythm, and rhythm, in that order." Or as Bubber Miley (Ellington's first star trumpeter) said, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

## GLOSSARY

The following are terms that describe conventions of jazz performance, from traditional New Orleans to the present avant garde.

- Break** — within the context of an ongoing time feel, the rhythm section stops for one, two, or four bars. Very often a soloist will improvise during a break.
- Call-and-response** — repetitive pattern of contrasting exchanges (derived from the church procedure of the minister making a statement and the congregation answering with "amen"). Call-and-response patterns usually pit one group of instruments against another. Sometimes we call this "trading fours," "trading twos," etc., especially when it involves improvisation. The numbers denote the amount of measures each soloist or group plays. Another term frequently used is "swapping fours."
- Coda** — also known as the "outro." "Tags" or "tag endings" are outgrowths of vaudeville bows that are frequently used as codas. They most often use deceptive cadences that finally resolve to the tonic, or they go from the tonic to the sub-dominant and cycle back to the tonic: I V/IV IV #IV<sup>+</sup> I (second inversion) V/II V/V V I.
- Comp** — improvise accompaniment (for piano or guitar).
- Groove** — the composite rhythm. This generally refers to the combined repetitive rhythmic patterns of the drums, bass, piano, and guitar but may also include repetitive patterns in the horns. Some grooves are standard (i.e., swing, bossa nova, samba) while others are manufactured (original combinations of rhythms).
- Head** — melody chorus.
- Interlude** — a different form (of relatively short length) sandwiched between two chorus forms. Interludes that set up a key change are simply called modulations.
- Intro** — short for introduction.
- Ride pattern** — the most common repetitive figure played by the drummer's right hand on the ride cymbal or hi-hat.



- Riff** — a repeated melodic figure. Very often, riffs repeat verbatim or with slight alterations while the harmonies change underneath them.
- Shout chorus** — also known as the "out chorus," the "sock chorus," or sometimes shortened to just "the shout." It is the final ensemble passage of most big band charts and where the climax most often happens.
- Soli** — a harmonized passage for two or more instruments playing the same rhythm. It is customary for horn players to stand up or even move in front of the band when playing these passages. This is done so that the audience can hear them better and to provide the audience with some visual interest. A soli sound particular to Ellington's music combines two trumpets and a trombone in plungers/mutes in triadic harmony. This is called the pep section.
- Stop time** — a regular pattern of short breaks (usually filled in by a soloist).
- Swing** — the perfect confluence of rhythmic tension and relaxation in music creating a feeling of euphoria and characterized by accented weak beats (a democratization of the beat) and eighth notes that are played as the first and third eighth notes of an eighth-note triplet. Duke Ellington's definition of swing: when the music feels like it is getting faster, but it isn't.
- Vamp** — a repeated two- or four-bar chord progression. Very often, there may be a riff or riffs played on the vamp.
- Voicing** — the specific spacing, inversion, and choice of notes that make up a chord. For instance, two voicings for G7 could be:



Note that the first voicing includes a 9th and the second voicing includes a ♭9 and a 13. The addition of 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, and alterations are up to the discretion of the pianist and soloist.

## THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

The following are placed in their order of importance in jazz. We should never lose perspective on this order of priority.

- RHYTHM** — meter, tempo, groove, and form, including both melodic rhythm and harmonic rhythm (the speed and regularity of the chord changes).
- MELODY** — what players play: a tune or series of notes.
- HARMONY** — chords and voicings.
- ORCHESTRATION** — instrumentation and tone colors.

— David Berger

*Special thanks to Andrew Homzy for editing.*

# RAINCHECK

## INSTRUMENTATION:

|                         |              |                         |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| Reed 1                  | Alto Sax     | Trombone 1              |
| Reed 2                  | Alto Sax     | Trombone 2              |
| Reed 3                  | Clarinet     | Trombone 3 (opt. Valve) |
| Reed 4                  | Tenor Sax    | Guitar                  |
| Reed 5                  | Baritone Sax | Piano                   |
| Trumpet 1               |              | Bass                    |
| Trumpet 2               |              | Drums                   |
| Trumpet 3 (opt. Cornet) |              |                         |

## ORIGINAL RECORDING INFORMATION:

**Raincheck** by Billy Strayhorn (2:28)

Recorded 12/2/41, Hollywood

*Duke Ellington: The Blanton-Webster Band* (RCA/Bluebird 5659-2-RB)

Otto Hardwick, Johnny Hodges, Barney Bigard, Ben Webster, Harry Carney, reeds; Wallace Jones, Ray Nance, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Lawrence Brown, Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Fred Guy, guitar; Billy Strayhorn, piano; Junior Raglin, bass; Sonny Greer, drums.

## REHEARSAL NOTES:

• An early Strayhorn original, **Raincheck** was, and still is, quoted often in post-bop solos (a bit surprising since it received very few performances by the Duke Ellington Orchestra). This transcription of the original studio recording was made shortly after Strayhorn composed it and was played by—in the opinion of most jazz critics—the greatest jazz orchestra ever. Sadly, however, the great bassist Jimmy Blanton became ill with tuberculosis and eventually died right around the time of this recording; he was replaced by Junior Raglin.

• Normally one player does not make or break a recording, but in this case Blanton's absence is glaring. Raglin is quite lost throughout most of the piece, making the transcription of his part misleading for both study and performance. I have rewritten his part to include Strayhorn's original concept wherever possible. In the more improvisatory spots I have devised a part that will approximate the kind of lines Jimmy Blanton might have played. (An "unofficial" recording of **Raincheck** from a radio broadcast of July 5, 1941, with Blanton does exist.)

• The chorus form is ABAC (eight bars to each section). We start off with an eight-bar introduction over a dominant pedal in the bass followed by a 32-bar melody chorus by the valve trombone. At **E** we have an eight-bar interlude (it's actually just a repeat of the intro). Next is a chorus of tenor solo with brass accompaniment followed by a two-bar break for the piano followed by a half-chorus of reed solo (clarinet lead) and eight bars of loud ensemble developed out of the opening motif of the tune but with new chord changes. Then follows two eight-bar segments of piano solo based on the I-ii-V turnaround. At letter **O** the ensemble section of **L** returns as the coda.

• Just after Strayhorn's death in 1967, Ellington recorded *And His Mother Called Him Bill*, an album of Strayhorn compositions that included **Raincheck**. Using the same chart as he recorded 25 years earlier, Duke extended the form in the following way:

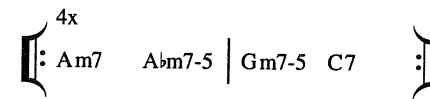
Start at **J** and play through **L**.

Piano solo (play **A** through **D** with the rhythm section only).

DC (Ensemble play from the top of the chart through **O**).

Piano solo (play **A** through **D4** with the rhythm section only).

Then play the following tag ending:



• Poet and philosopher Eli Siegel said, "All art is the making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are all about." For **Raincheck** the prominent opposites are rough and smooth. Right from the top, the brass play accented, choppy rhythms in contrast to the legato eighth notes of the saxes. This is continued at **A** with the legato whole notes in the saxes supporting the choppy melody line in the valve trombone and the similarly choppy answer in the trumpets and clarinet at **A8**. The point of all of this is to make as much contrast as possible; make the smooth parts silky smooth and the choppy parts short and accented. This will give the performance great character.

• An interesting deviation from the swing feel occurs in measure 3 of the introduction. The brass have four consecutive eighth notes with cap accents. These should be played short, accented, and even. The same situation happens at **E3** and **I3**.

• The piano, bass, drums, and soloists need not take their parts literally. What is called for in this piece is simply straight-ahead swinging.

• Dynamics are crucial to this chart. First, the backgrounds are softer than the soloists (valve trombone, tenor, and piano). Second, the ensemble sections must achieve the proper emphasis and climax.

• Although **Raincheck** doesn't contain any high notes for the brass or extremely fast technical passages, this is a very difficult piece to perform well. The sheer number of syncopations, the variety of rhythms, and the subtleties of louds and softs both in large sections and interior lines (ascending lines crescendo and descending lines diminuendo) make for a difficult conciliation between the repetitive and relentless swing of the rhythm section and the constant surprises in the horns. I recommend taking this piece bar by bar, isolating the trumpets, trombones, and saxes, and above all slowing down and then gradually building up the speed. When this chart is played cleanly with lots of swing, it is stunning. With all the modern sophistication evident in this masterpiece, it's hard to imagine that Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie were still a few years away from introducing bebop to the world.

—David Berger

## COMMENTS FROM WYNTON MARSALIS:

- Balance is the big issue in the first eight bars. It's very easy for the reeds to be swallowed up by the brass, so the rhythms must be played meticulously, with notes cresting at just the right time. And our first trumpet must make sure not to get lost in the middle register during measures 6 through 8 of the introduction.
- The drummer is continuously responsible for subtle changes in shading, dynamics, and coloration to enhance the overall flavor of the piece.
- The reed's half notes at letters **A** and **B** must be melodic as well as harmonic. The trombone solo should be jubilant and joyful. It's especially important for band members to focus on the cross-voicings of the arrangement and to keep track of their place within the harmonies. One such example occurs at one measure before **B**, where the clarinet leads the trumpet section.
- This piece provides an excellent opportunity to show students how Duke creates a sense of thematic unity in his compositions. Themes restate and reinvent themselves throughout the arrangement. For example, point out how the introductory material returns at letter **E**. Also note that the trumpets pick up on the trombone rhythm at three before **F**.
- The brass should make sure not to peck at letter **I**. In addition, the reeds should work out how to accent the passage from **J** to **K** to achieve a uniform and swinging sound.
- As always, it's important for parts to be extremely personalized, played with intensity, musicality, and personal feeling. The call-and-response between the reeds and brass at letter **L** should sound like a discussion. At **M** and **N**, the band should listen intently to the piano solo, especially the trumpets, which could easily overpower the soloist. Also, the first trumpet and brass should be careful not to peck at letter **O**.
- Duke creates an interesting ending—highlight the “big four” on the piano. Don't shy away from these rhythms.

CONDUCTOR

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Composed by Billy Strayhorn  
Transcribed by David Berger

# RAINCHECK

Fast swing  $\text{♩} = 213$

Reeds 1 Alto Sax *mf*

2 Alto Sax *mf*

3 Tenor Sax *mf*

4 Tenor Sax *mf*

5 Bari Sax *f*

Trumpets 1 *f*

2 *f*

(Cornet) 3 *f*

Trombones 1 *f*

2 *f*

(Valve) 3

Guitar *f* F Gm F Bb F° Bbm G° C7

Piano

Bass C Pedal *f*

Drums Closed H H *f*

## Raincheck

**A**

Alto *p* *mp*

Alto *p* *mp*

Tenor *p* *mf*

Tenor *p* *mp*

Bari *p* *mp*

Tpt. 1 *f*

2 *f*

3 *f*

Tbn. 1 *Solo* *mf*

2

3

Gtr. F C7 F° F E7 D7 G7 Gb7 F C7 F° F Bb F C7

Pno.

Bass

Dr.