

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

Presents

ISFAHAN

FROM 'IMPRESSIONS OF THE FAR EAST SUITE'

ARRANGED BY BILLY STRAYHORN

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

FULL SCORE

JLP-7403

MUSIC BY BILLY STRAYHORN

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ISFAHAN IFROM IMPRESSIONS OF THE FAR EAST SUITEI (1964)

Background:

Even though the name of William Thomas Strayhorn is hardly unknown, 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 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 enough to invite 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:

This arrangement, first known as *Elf*, was originally written sometime in 1963. It was first recorded in New York on July 18, 1963. The title had been changed to *Isfahan* sometime before the Duke Ellington band's performance on the English television program *Jazz 625* on February 20, 1964. While on tour in Europe during that year Ellington introduced several pieces as *Impressions of the Far East*. At that time the *Suite* consisted of *Amad*, *Agra*, *Bluebird of Delhi*, and *Depk*. *Agra* and *Bluebird of Delhi* written by Strayhorn and *Amad* and *Depk* were written by Ellington. As the notion for a full-length suite began to take shape several more pieces were composed: *Ad Lib on Nippon* and *A Tourist Point of View*, both composed by Ellington, and *Mount Harissa* and *Blue Pepper*, possibly composed by both Ellington and Strayhorn (scores have not been located for these two movements; hence, authorship is in question). *Isfahan* was recorded on December 20, 1966 to be included in the *Far East Suite*.

This is an alto saxophone feature, written to showcase Johnny Hodges. The alto saxophone part is as-written by Billy Strayhorn. We encourage the soloist to interpret the music as he/she sees fit, rather than mimic Hodges. As such we have resisted the temptation of including a transcription of Hodges's performance. While we feel solo transcriptions are important for educational purposes, playing them within the context of a performance of this work may not be desirable. A piano part has not been included; however, chord changes have been indicated in the bass part.

This tune wound up becoming a standard, having been recorded more than 200 times. The Ellington band, however, never revisited the arrangement after the 1966 recording.

Jeff Sultanof, Doug DuBoff, Rob DuBoff, and Sonjia Stone

- December 2014

This is Billy Strayhorn's sketch score, completed in 1963. Originally titled *Elf*, it had been renamed *Isfahan* in advance of the Ellington band's performance on the English television program *Jazz 625* in February, 1964. One can see that Strayhorn refers to Johnny Hodges as "Rab," short for "Rabbit," which was his nickname. Strayhorn usually wrote his scores in this format and then turned them over to the Ellington band copiest Tom Whaley who would then extract parts.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on five systems of five-line staves. The title "ISFAHAN" is written at the top right, and "ELF" is written above the first staff. The score is written in a shorthand format, with notes and rests represented by letters and symbols. The first system includes a circled letter "A" and the word "SAXUNISO" written above the second staff. The second system includes a circled letter "B" and the word "Bar." written above the second staff. The third system includes circled numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. The score is written on a piece of paper with "PARCHMENT BRAND No. 22 - 12 lines Wide Spaces PRINTED IN U.S.A. Belwin Inc. New York U.S.A." printed at the bottom.

RH

ELF

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a saxophone part, likely for Johnny Hodges. The score is written on ten staves. The first two staves contain the main melody, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, with various slurs and accents. There are several performance markings, including a circled 'B' and a circled '3' indicating a triplet. The score ends with three empty staves, suggesting the piece is incomplete as noted in the text.

This is Johnny Hodges's part. One will notice that the part is incomplete: the shout section and recapitulation of the melody is not indicated. Often Ellington band arrangements were left seemingly incomplete. It was understood that direction by Ellington or Strayhorn would be provided in advance of performance or recording. Typically the musicians would commit instructions to memory and not necessarily transfer that to the printed page.

Isfahan

From 'IMPRESSIONS OF THE FAR EAST SUITE'

Score

By Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn
Prepared for Publication by Peter Jensen,
Dylan Canterbury, Rob DuBoff, and Jeffrey Sultanof

slowly ♩ = 60
[1]

The score is for the piece 'Isfahan' in 4/4 time, marked 'slowly' with a tempo of 60 beats per minute. It begins with a first ending bracket [1]. The instrumentation includes Alto Sax 1, Alto Sax 2, Tenor Sax 1, Tenor Sax 2, Baritone Sax, Trumpet 1-4, Trombone 1-3, Bass, and Drum Set. The Alto Sax parts feature melodic lines with dynamics like *mf* and *p*, and articulation like *Subtone, No Vb*. The Trombone and Bass parts provide harmonic support with chords such as $D^b_{<7}$, $B^b_{<7}$, $B^b_{7(\#5)}$, E^b_7 , $A_{<7}$, A^b_7 , $A^b_{7(9)}$, and $D^b_{<13}$. The Drum Set part uses brushes and is marked *pp* and *sim.* with a 4-measure phrase.

[9]

A. Sax 1
A. Sax 2
T. Sax 1
T. Sax 2
B. Sax
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3
Bs.
Dr.

G>7(5) C7(9) F>6 A>7(5) D7(9) G>6 G>7(5) C7(9) F<9 E<9 E<9(b) D<9

(4) (8)

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16