


A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's face, likely of African descent, shown in profile. The skin is dark and textured, with some highlights catching the light. The person's features are partially visible, including the nose and cheek. The background is dark and out of focus.

BLACK BROWN & BEIGE

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA WITH WYNTON MARSALIS



**MY BAND IS MY
INSTRUMENT
EVEN MORE
THAN THE
PIANO...**

- DUKE ELLINGTON

WE LIVE IN AN AGE DEFINED BY NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND A RAPID-FIRE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ACROSS THE GLOBE.

Things change by the second... including our tastes and opinions. One could say that something sounds good, and in the next second that good thing is old news. So much attention is given to the next moment that we are driven to innovate, create, and permeate new theories, gadgets, incantations, devices, and other types of modern craftsmanship at a dizzying pace.

Caught up in that provocative novelty, we easily overlook the abundant gifts that come from solid foundations rooted in tradition, history, substance, and sustenance.

Tradition is the ritualized repetition of important actions, symbols, and creeds that are meaningful to a group, an organization, or an individual. **History** is an examination of past events. **Substance** demands an insistence on the importance of facts. And sustenance is the ability to hold and share a substantive sound, idea, or value across an expanse of a long period of time.

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington was more than just these four words. He was both innovator and traditionalist, and the world of “Ellingtonia” had no boundaries.

He was an irresistible combination of originality, sophistication, imagination, work ethic, and pure charisma. In spite of his 50 years of traveling up and down the road, he was the most prolific composer of the 20th century with over 2,000 original pieces in his canon. Both a leader and an accompanist, Duke interacted with an expansive and ever-expanding universe of musicians and artists from all over the globe. His conduit to these experiences was the unequalled Ellington Orchestra. Artists of all disciplines as well as international fans from all walks of life loved to be in, around, and with the band. It was a unique assemblage of traveling troubadours chasing the blues away with the good news of freedom.

Though we see him front and center at the piano, Ellington’s orchestra of motley virtuosos was his identity. He once said, “My band is my instrument even more than the piano... I’m something like a farmer... He plants his seed and I plant mine. He has to wait until spring to see his come up, but I can see mine right after I plant it. That night. I don’t have to wait. That’s the payoff for me.” And it remains a grand and glorious payoff for all of us who enjoy the fruits of his genius.

Duke approached his music with the sensibility of a visual artist. Painting was actually his first love, and as a teen he showed considerable promise. He would eventually be offered a scholarship to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, but ultimately chose music;

for this, the world is madly thankful. He blended atypical configurations of instruments to create a universe of unusual and wholly original sounds, and then went one step further to orchestra the specific timbres of individual musicians who had been hand-selected for their distinctive sounds and approaches. The titling of compositions such as “Mood Indigo,” “Transblucency,” “Lady of the Lavender Mist,” “Sepia Panorama,” and “Purple Gazelle” speak to his colorful imagination.

Ellington was a theoretician of the first order; the inventor of an original system of blues harmony, timbral harmony, and of connecting vernacular harmonic forms in a very sophisticated way. However, he disliked talking about music theory and said, “That type of talk stinks

up the place.” On the other hand, he was very specific about meaning and gave each musician very detailed instructions about what a particular part was meant to evoke.

He and his orchestra’s conversational approach to traveling the deepest philosophical, psychological, and symbolic terrain of Americana is one of the most startling and groundbreaking developments in the history of Western music. Ellington said, “There is no art without intention.” Whether to entice, intrigue, reveal, entertain, humor, or proclaim, his works always serve a purpose and they always touch you in a very personal way. Form, performer, and performance were fit to function. Work before pleasure.



**THERE IS
NO ART
WITHOUT
INTENTION**

- DUKE ELLINGTON

In 1943, at the precarious and passionate time of the Second World War, Duke composed *Black, Brown and Beige* for a special concert at Carnegie Hall. Already a national hero and creator of a recognized world of sound, it was his most ambitious and longest work, possessing an architecture and complexity far beyond anything he had written. His previous extended pieces were *Symphony in Black*, *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*, *Reminiscing in Tempo*, *Creole Rhapsody*, and *Jump for Joy*. Though these pieces were well-crafted and further distinguished Ellington from other jazz composers, musicians and critics encouraged him toward the less-ambitious format of the three-minute recording. *Black,*

Brown and Beige, however, was decidedly different. It was written to address Ellington's most serious concern—the impact and ascendant trajectory of the American Negro experience.

As one might imagine, the piece was not well-received by critics in its time; however, like other works of art that fall dim upon wandering eyes, *Black, Brown and Beige* has received its overdue praise with the passage of time. There are so many great moments of superior penmanship displayed in this piece that one must listen again and again. At each listening you will find some new melody, rhythm, or relationship. Its revelations are endless.



When it came time to rehearse and perform this masterpiece in 2018, we all came to the bandstand with the intention to call upon tradition, innovation, history, present-ness and substance for the sustenance of Duke and his artistic vision.

“Black” recalls the work song used to get through the tough days in the fields. And, as only Duke can only do, he employs various grooves, sudden time changes, pensive moments, and go-for-broke swing to give the tint of optimism to this seemingly hopeless experience. He constantly reminds us of “the beginning” by returning judiciously to the main theme in various iterations throughout the movement. Eli Bishop contributes his thoughts on violin alongside Paul Nedzela.

“Brown” deals with the Negro’s participation in the Revolutionary, Civil, and Spanish-American Wars. Everything culminates with “The Blues,” interpreted here with great depth by Brianna Thomas. Duke develops things by contrasting the “lighter attitude” of the young folks’ aspirations with the trumpet and trombone duet pushing the band through, only to be interrupted by the elder duet of baritone and tenor sax, who make plain the social progress yet to be achieved. The thought of freedom papers enters the fray as the hopeful trumpet and trombone come back and celebrate what they think is a new beginning; instead, the new beginning is revealed to be only a false hope as the dreams of the

slaves and soldiers wither under the stern masters of Reconstruction, Jim Crow, lynching, and other monstrosities designed to impede progress. This is all summed up on “The Blues,” with tense chords, mournful wails, and sudden shrieks (led by Victor Goines’ clarinet); When we hear the dreaded slam of a floor tom with low woodwind accompaniment, we realize that the doors that should have been opened by past sacrifices have been shut.

“Beige” represents the beginning of a new era in the Negro community. The movement to affluence, recognition, and rising prosperity is highlighted by a flowing lyrical waltz played by Kenny Rampton on the trumpet and then by Elliot

Mason on trombone. The high point of “Beige” is “Sugar Hill Penthouse.” It begins with the piano in the stars and ends with a swinging 4/4 iteration of the waltz theme by the clarinet-led saxophone section. This coda is the most masterful woodwind writing in all of jazz.

Duke believed that there were few absolute endings in life. He hated to finish pieces. It’s hard to believe that this movement was unfinished because the finale is so grandiose, but it seems that Ellington wrote the overture into the end of the piece instead of the beginning. This is wholly in keeping with his practice of challenging conventions by often doing the opposite of the established rule and making definitive common-sense decisions.



During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s amidst some Afro-American movement away from integration towards self-segregation, Duke would broaden the definition of his identity to say, “THE People ARE MY People.” This evolution in his thinking can be attributed to the expansion of his world through travels all over the globe. Musicians of all cultures and generations loved and venerated him. Miles Davis said, “At least one day out of the year all musicians should just put their instruments down and give thanks to Duke Ellington.”

Duke Ellington represented the highest of American cultural aspirations. His generosity of spirit and way of doing things lifted everyone around him. When he wanted to make a change in the band, rather than letting someone go, he would hire a new musician to

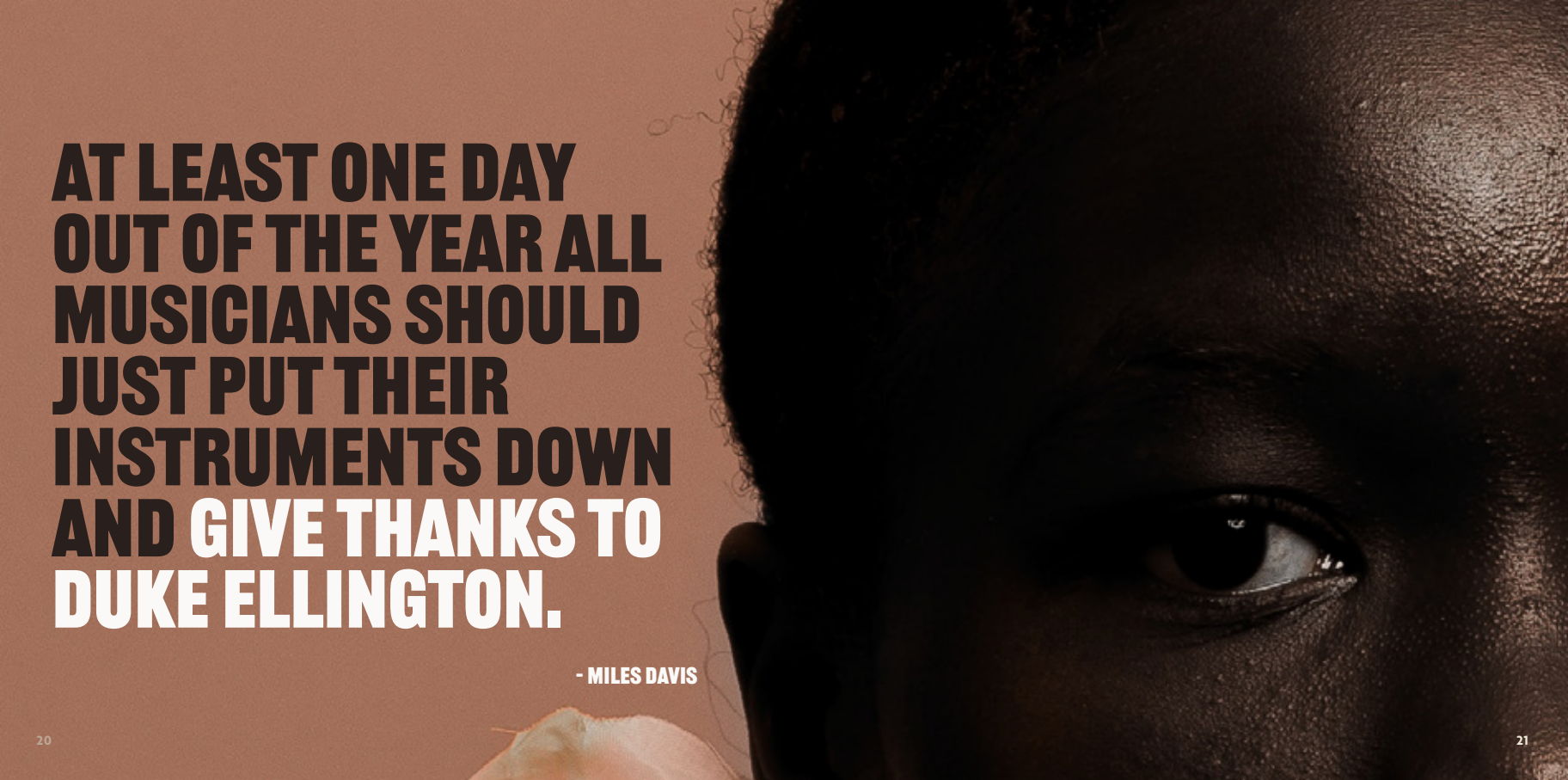
play alongside the one he wanted to leave. Eventually, they quit of their own volition. Ellington only fired two musicians in his 50 years as a bandleader—Ben Webster and Charles Mingus—and both of them went to their graves with an abiding respect and love for him and his music.

In 1972, at Yale University, there was a gathering of some of the most notable musicians in jazz including Duke. When the word got out that black artists were on campus playing music to raise money for an African American music program, a bomb threat was called in. Police ushered everyone out including Dizzy Gillespie and his sextet. But Charles Mingus stayed inside, alone with his bass, playing “Sophisticated Lady” as if to imply: “Racism planted that bomb, but racism ain’t strong enough to kill this music!

If I’m going to die, I’m ready, but I’m going out playing Ellington.” Duke Ellington stood in the crowd with a smile on his face. That’s love, respect, and dedication.

Our Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra was founded with transcriber/trumpeter David Berger recruiting and conducting many Ellingtonians who played in Duke’s great band from the mid-50s to his passing in 1974. They taught us how to play this music. It was my intention as a transcriber and conductor to be true to the spirit of Ellington. We sought to make every performance sing and dance with the spark of invention and play with love, respect, and dedication. That’s what Duke’s achievements demand and it’s what he deserves. Hallelujah!

—CHRIS CRENSHAW



**AT LEAST ONE DAY
OUT OF THE YEAR ALL
MUSICIANS SHOULD
JUST PUT THEIR
INSTRUMENTS DOWN
AND GIVE THANKS TO
DUKE ELLINGTON.**

- MILES DAVIS

IT WAS 8:45 PM ON JANUARY 23, 1943 WHEN DUKE ELLINGTON TOOK THE CARNEGIE HALL STAGE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME.

In the audience was the first lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, along with conductor Leopold Stokowski, soprano Marian Anderson, and poet Langston Hughes. Ellington approached the microphone and introduced the new work he was about to premiere called *Black, Brown and Beige*, and explained that this ambitious three-movement

suite would tell “the history of the American Negro.”

Following the performance, one critic stated that the “brilliant ideas it contained would count for much more if scored for a legitimate orchestra,” while another called it “the most ambitious piece ever attempted by a dance band.” Criticized for its “formlessness” and “abrupt musical transitions,” one writer suggested that Ellington make “two dozen brief, air-tight compositions” out of *Black, Brown and Beige*, while another equated Ellington to “the writer of a much-admired children’s book [who] abandons his method when he sets out to write an adult novel and tries to imitate Henry James.” Jazz critics panned his embrace of any European

influence (being a jazz musician was something Ellington “should not have been ashamed of”) and his “tampering” with the rhythm (“no regular beat... no jazz”).

At a time when white composers were routinely applauded for integrating “indigenous materials” into their work, Ellington was treated to a condescending criticism that breezily regarded his ambition and unequalled skill as arrogance and “uppity.” Instead of attempting to understand Ellington’s objectives for the piece and to evaluate its merits on those terms, there was more interest in simply stating, “How dare he?” The tactic obviously worked because Ellington was stung by the criticism and only performed the entire piece once more. This

recording is part of the ongoing campaign to right that wrong.

I’ll never forget the first time I heard about the piece. I was a 19-year-old undergraduate jazz piano major telling a trusted teacher about my experience listening to one of Ellington’s Sacred Music suites for the first time. “You want to hear some really great shit?” he asked, almost in a whisper. “Check out *Black, Brown and Beige*.” It felt like he was letting me in on a great, big secret. In many ways, he was.

While many of the critics were busy trying to dismiss Ellington and *Black, Brown and Beige* by judging the piece through the lens of a strange mixture of superiority (racism towards blacks) and inferiority (deference to European cultural achievements),

many informed listeners in the audience immediately recognized its greatness and were moved to celebrate its innovations. Because our general education does not include music—or culture, for that matter—this piece never gained the visibility and audience it deserves. However, it has remained a treasure to those who know. Hopefully more will now discover it, thanks to this wonderful release.

Black, Brown and Beige is a great and important piece, one that inspires me as both a musician and a human being. As a musician, I experience an exciting and rich universe, a multifaceted and superbly crafted voyage through a large and important cross-section of the American vernacular:

work songs, spirituals, the blues, early New Orleans-style jazz, the circus, the swing era, ballroom dancing, and even the Caribbean-influenced Habanera.

QUITE A FEW UNIQUELY SPECIAL, WARM FEELINGS EXIST ONLY IN JAZZ

As a human being, I'm inspired by Ellington's optimistic way with this deeply complicated tale. He called *Black, Brown and Beige* a "celebration of emancipation." He observed of the Harlem of that time, "On closer inspection, it would be found that there were more churches than

cabarets, that the people were trying to find a more stable way of living, and that the Negro was rich in experience and education." And the most timeless expression of that richness is found in music.

There are quite a few uniquely special, warm feelings that exist only in jazz, and I feel many of them when I listen to *Black, Brown and Beige*. The fact that the piece does feel a bit disjunctive at times, with transitions often appearing seemingly out of nowhere, strikes me as a positive, not a negative. The "Various Themes" section is a fine case in point. Lots of exciting surprises! *Black, Brown and Beige* has a spunky personality, and I dig it.

I marvel at Ellington's ability to compose so many scripted parts that sound improvised. And it's a real tribute to the Jazz at Lincoln Center

Orchestra (JLCO) that the Ellington "feeling and effect" jump off this recording. Of course, we hear the usual cast of JLCO musicians, but the conducting of Chris Crenshaw and the standout authenticity of several millennial musicians are revelatory.

From 26-year-old Eli Bishop's beautifully soulful, yearning violin during "Come Sunday" to 21-year-old Sam Chess's original way with Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton's solos to Brianna Thomas's quietly powerful, haunting vocals on "Blues Theme," there are many original and heartfelt statements from our younger generation. Indeed, great music truly transcends time.

Ellington was a lifelong soldier against the negative stereotypes that still permeate American entertainment. In everything from dress to language to compositions, he purposefully spoke to the deepest human concerns.

He believed quality to be a form of Civil Rights protest, and he was always calibrated toward finding and showcasing the light.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated, “Jazz speaks for life. The Blues tell the story of life’s difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph. This is triumphant music.”

While great music is timeless and poor criticism isn’t, there’s something eerily familiar today in the 1943 criticism of *Black, Brown and Beige*. The work serves as an incredibly timely reminder to always look for the light, even (or perhaps especially) if we feel it slipping away. To quote Dr. King once again, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

—JOE ALTERMAN

JAZZ SPEAKS FOR LIFE... THIS IS TRIUMPHANT MUSIC.

- MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



I.

BLACK

1. WORK SONG

Solos: **PAUL NEDZELA** (baritone saxophone)
KENNY RAMPTON (trumpet)
SAM CHESSE (trombone)
SHERMAN IRBY (alto saxophone)

2. COME SUNDAY

Solos: **ELLIOT MASON** (trombone)
KASPERI SARIKOSKI (trombone)
TED NASH (alto saxophone)
ELI BISHOP (violin)
DAN NIMMER (piano)
SHERMAN IRBY (alto saxophone)

3. LIGHT

Solos: **MARCUS PRINTUP** (trumpet)
WYNTON MARSALIS (trumpet)
CARLOS HENRIQUEZ (bass)
ELLIOT MASON (trombone)
PAUL NEDZELA (baritone saxophone)

II.

BROWN

4. WEST INDIAN DANCE

Solos: **MARION FELDER** (drums)
VICTOR GOINES (clarinet)
ELLIOT MASON (trombone)
KENNY RAMPTON (trumpet)
WYNTON MARSALIS (trumpet)
PAUL NEDZELA (baritone saxophone)

5. EMANCIPATION CELEBRATION

Solos: **WYNTON MARSALIS** (trumpet)
SAM CHESSE (trombone)
CARLOS HENRIQUEZ (bass)
DAN NIMMER (piano)

6. BLUES THEME MAUVE (FEAT. BRIANNA THOMAS)

Solo: **JULIAN LEE** (tenor saxophone)

III.

BEIGE

7. VARIOUS THEMES

Solos: **DAN NIMMER** (piano)
KENNY RAMPTON (trumpet)
ELLIOT MASON (trombone)
JULIAN LEE (tenor saxophone)

8. SUGAR HILL PENTHOUSE

Solos: **DAN NIMMER** (piano)
PAUL NEDZELA (baritone saxophone)
JULIAN LEE (tenor saxophone)

9. FINALE

Solos: **DAN NIMMER** (piano)
SHERMAN IRBY (alto saxophone)
MARCUS PRINTRUP (trumpet)
RYAN KISOR (trumpet)



PERSONNEL

THE JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA WITH WYNTON MARSALIS

2017-18 CONCERT SEASON

REEDS

Sherman Irby (alto saxophone)

Ted Nash (alto saxophone)

Victor Goines (tenor saxophone, clarinet)

***Walter Blanding** (tenor saxophone)

Julian Lee (substitute for Walter Blanding)

Paul Nedzela (baritone saxophone)

TRUMPETS

Ryan Kisor

Marcus Printup

Kenny Rampton

Wynton Marsalis (music director)

Jonah Moss

TROMBONES

***Vincent Gardner**

***Chris Crenshaw**

Elliot Mason

Kasper Sarikoski (substitute for Vincent Gardner)

Sam Chess (substitute for Chris Crenshaw)

RHYTHM SECTION

Dan Nimmer (piano, bells)

Carlos Henriquez (bass)

Marion Felder (drums)

James Chirillo (guitar)

CONDUCTOR

Chris Crenshaw

SPECIAL GUESTS

Eli Bishop (violin)

Brianna Thomas (vocals)

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Post Producer and Mixing Engineer
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Autumn Goodman (16, 17)

Liner Notes
Chris Crenshaw and Joe Alterman

**Did not perform at this concert*





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The mission of Jazz at Lincoln Center is to entertain, enrich, and expand a global community for jazz through performance, education, and advocacy.

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