

# Laurent Mignard Duke Orchestra

## « Ellington French Touch »



The work of Duke Ellington (1899-1974) is one of the greatest legacies of 20th century.

Considered as the best european ambassador of Duke Ellington's work, Laurent Mignard Duke Orchestra is acclaimed by the press, specialists, musicians and great festivals. Laurent Mignard leads since 2003 this "dream team" of 15 musicians inside a wide language, beyond categories : standards, Suites, Sacred Concert ... The commitment is faithful, creative, and definitely turned towards an enthusiastic audience.

In this new program "Ellington French Touch", Laurent Mignard Duke Orchestra reveals the influence of France in Ellington's work : french songs (that he founded particularly smart), cinema (movie Paris Blues which he composed the soundtrack for), places (Château de Goutelas - Suite), art (Edgar Degas, racecourse scenes), legendary concerts (Antibes Côte d'Azur 1966 ) ...

Laurent Mignard also offers unpublished works, created from Ellington's manuscripts : 2 new pieces for the "Goutelas Suite", 3 full length tracks from "Paris Blues", and the theatre music of "Turcaret" for Jean Vilar's « Théâtre National Populaire ».

This "Ellington French Touch" may reach a wide audience, from neophytes to jazz fans, as an opportunity to (re)discover an exceptional and timeless work.

## TRACK LIST

- 1. The Good Life** La belle Vie, Sacha Distel  
*Sol. : Philippe Chagne, Didier Desbois, Fidel Fourneyron*
- 2. Goof** Goutelas Suite  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta*
- 3. Gogo** Goutelas Suite, never released – from manuscripts \*  
*Sol. : Fred Couderc, Philippe Milanta*
- 4. Gigi** Goutelas Suite, never released – from manuscripts \*  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta, Didier Desbois, Fred Couderc*
- 5. Paris Blues** Movie Paris Blues, never released – from manuscripts \*  
*Sol. : Aurélie Tropez, Didier Desbois, Fidel Fourneyron, Philippe Milanta*
- 6. Battle Royal** Film Paris Blues  
*Sol. : Fred Couderc, Nicolas Montier, François Biensan, Fidel Fourneyron*
- 7. Paris Blues alternate Bed** Film Paris Blues, never released – from manuscripts \*  
*Sol. : Nicolas Montier, Aurélie Tropez*
- 8. Autumnal Suite** Film Paris Blues, never released – from manuscripts \*  
*Sol. : Nicolas Montier*
- 9. Under Paris Skies** Sous le ciel de Paris, Hubert Giraud  
*Sol. : Fred Couderc, François Biensan, Philippe Chagne*
- 10. No Regrets** Je ne regrette rien, Charles Dumont  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta, Fidel Fourneyron, Aurélie Tropez*
- 11. Daily Double** Degas Suite – scene of horse races  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta, Nicolas Montier*
- 12. Comme ci comme ça** Clopin-Clopant, Bruno Coquatrix  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta, Didier Desbois, Fidel Fourneyron*
- 13. A Midnight in Paris** Composition Billy Strayhorn  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta*
- 14. The Old Circus Train** Created in Antibes 1966  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta, Didier Desbois*

\* source Smithsonian Institution Washington

**TURCARET** : 10 tracks composed by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn for the classic play “Turcaret” (Alain-René Lesage), ordered by Jean Vilar, staged in 1961 in Paris - Chaillot. From confidential tape.

- 15. Annonce (Band Call) et Ouverture** Never released  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta*
- 16. Turcaret court** Never released
- 17. Flamant** Never released  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta, Bruno Rousselet*
- 18. La baronne** Never released  
*Sol. : Philippe Milanta, Fidel Fourneyron*
- 19. Madame Turcaret** Never released  
*Sol. : Franck Delpaut, Franck Guicherd*
- 20. Chevalier** Never released
- 21. Frontin (Sempres Amore)** Never released  
*Sol. : Fred Couderc, Fidel Fourneyron*
- 22. La colère de Turcaret** Never released
- 23. Lisette** Never released  
*Sol. : Fred Couderc, Philippe Milanta, Nicolas Montier*
- 24. Turcaret Final** Never released  
*Sol. : Didier Desbois*

## **PERSONNEL**

Didier Desbois (as, cl), Aurélie Tropez (as, cl), Fred Couderc (ts, fl), Nicolas Montier (ts), Philippe Chagne (bs), Franck Delpout (tp), Franck Guicherd (tp), François Biensan (tp, flg), Richard Blanchet (tp), Jean-Louis Damant (tb), Fidel Fourneyron (tb), Guy Arbion (btb), Philippe Milanta (p), Bruno Rousselet (b), Julie Saury (dm), Laurent Mignard (dir).

## **ON STAGE**



The musical depicts an American artist (Nicolle Rochelle, actress - singer - dancer) who discovers the Dukish "French touch", and lives a romance "made in Paris." Duke Ellington himself is invited on stage by the magic of video-art. It testifies, responds to interviews, conduct the orchestra, communicates his values ...

## ***MORE INFORMATION***

1. « Ellington French Touch » booklet by Claude Carrière
2. Turcaret – the play
3. Duke Ellington about France, by Duke Ellington (in “Music is my Mistress” autobiography)

### ***1. ELLINGTON FRENCH TOUCH***

*by Claude CARRIERE, honorary Chairman of « La Maison du Duke » - Duke's place in Paris*

Few American musicians have had as many affinities with France, and Paris in particular, as Duke Ellington. He felt good here for a number of reasons. He was touched by the respect and enthusiasm of audiences who had discovered him in 1933 and would regularly see him back in town over 40 years. French audiences were divided between those who wanted to hear the “Great One” give them the hits they wanted, and those that reproached him for not renewing his repertory. He succeeded in the end in satisfying everybody by mixing with great intelligence the new and the worn out, old hits and surprising innovations. Tireless inventor of beauty, he loved beauty, the charms of the City of Lights, and, even more, the French women, the French cuisine and the great French musicians, from Ravel to Django Reinhardt. Let's make clear a few things straight away. The Duke usually only came for short stays in France, and the few weeks he spent in France in 1960 and 1963 were more studious than touristic... On the other hand, his “alter ego”, his “double“ if you like, Billy Strayhorn who also loved Paris, was able to make frequent visits while Ellington was, night after night, fulfilling his commitments from one town to another in the United States... And the fascination that France and Paris had on them, more than any other place in the world showed up quite frequently in their musical production. It is absolutely logical and legitimate that a French band has consecrated a part of its book in concert as well as in its recordings to the French side of “Ellingtonia”.

It is in any case from the outset that “La Belle Vie” is promised, The Good Life signed by Sacha Distel in the middle of the sixties and which took a world tour via crooners. It was a time when, after several lean years of highbrow (individual) productions, from the triumph at Newport in 1956 to audacious encounters with Coltrane, Mingus and Roach, Ellington, under contract with Sinatra's record label and “to put food on the table”, paid tribute to the big bands from the past, fell under the charm of Mary Poppins or created his very personal vision of current hits, from “Hello Dolly” to some Beatles songs. Strayhorn's arrangement of the Distel song is commendably restrained and brilliantly subtle, in particular when a simple line, played in unison by two trombones and two saxophones, crosses in four descending notes all the chords of the song behind a trombone solo.

Goof, Gogo and Gigi, date from the last period of Ellington's work. He was used to giving names to his works in progress the four letters that sometimes prefigured the final titles. It seems that these three works composed in 1971 were destined to become part of the “Goutelas Suite” recorded on April 27th of that year. The first one, Goof, was made two months later, the other two were left unfinished (bits and pieces can be found in later works), and it is Laurent Mignard himself who has made the effort to “reconstruct” and to finish doing the job so that we can finally hear them. Bravo ! All the more because they are really worth the effort. We welcome in Goof the superb exchanges between a tremendously free sounding piano and a band usually playing in unison... Gogo and Gigi are, on their side, characteristic of a time when the Duke played piano in a minimalist and precise way over spicy orchestral backgrounds with exotic colors. The impassioned days of swing of drummer Sam Woodyard and the

staging of major soloists seemed at that time to be definitively over. The boss had become, in fact, the main attraction in his own group... It was in 1966 that Ellington gave a solo piano charity concert for which the box-office revenue went to the restoration of the village Chateau. Five years later he created and recorded the “Goutelas Suite”.

At the end of 1960 the movie “Paris Blues” was shot by the American director Martin Ritt. It’s the story, of little interest, of the encounter between two American musicians living in Paris, Paul Newman and Sidney Poitier, and two American tourists, Joanne Woodward and Diahann Carroll. Poitier, in the role of a saxophonist, proposes a “concerto” to trumpeter Wild Man Moore played by none other than Louis Armstrong in person, and the local drugged out guitar player by Serge Reggiani... Over and above the clichés of a boring film, and despite the beautiful cast, what we are left with and remember is the often sumptuous music composed by Ellington and Strayhorn, in particular the soundtrack theme “Paris Blues”, in the luminous, and unusual for jazz, key of D major, played here in its original score, but in an intelligent adaptation which combines the LP and film versions. In track 7 we find the same theme, Paris Blues Alternate Bed, a half key up, with new clothes and in entirety while on the screen it is submerged in dialogue and just hinted at. Thanks to Laurent Mignard, another precious discovery found in the archives of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington... We have found ourselves with a familiar theme, highlighted in the encounter at the peak of their careers in 1962 of the Ellington and Basie bands for the album “First Time”. However the Battle Royal that we hear here is closer to the one heard in the film and recorded in Paris in December 1960, with solos added after the fact by Armstrong, Billy Byers (tb), Guy Laffite (tenor sax) and Jimmy Gourley (g). But it was the Ellington band (with some “reinforcements”) that recorded in May 1961 in New York the Autumnal Suite which we hear here in a faithful and colored version, based once again on the Paris Blues theme, but in the key of A flat. It is worth noticing that it was one the first times that a flute was heard in an Ellington band.

The five following tracks allude directly to Paris and France, three of them are considered among the greatest popular songs of the 50’s and 60’s. Sous le Ciel de Paris (Under Paris Skies) made famous by Piaf and Montand –even though I have a personal liking for the Jacqueline Françoise version- is played here, faithfully, as a waltz, with several tasty surprises, notably a crazy trombone part over the last quarter of the first chorus. No Regrets (Non, je ne regrette rien), a song tailor-made for Piaf by Charles Dumont and played over a special arrangement for trombonist Lawrence Brown, who loved Piaf (“la même”) so much that he gave up dinner once to see her on stage at the Olympia in 1961, between two gigs with Johnny Hodges... Comme ci, Comme ça (french title Clopin-clopant), composed by Bruno Coquatrix (manager of the Olympia Music Hall), lyrics by Pierre Dudan, a huge hit by Jean Sablon, Yves Montand and Henri Salvador, with an arrangement that beautifully follows the spirit of the text and makes you feel lazy, despite brutal changes between one section and another. Let’s take note of the creative use of the bass trombone, a new instrument in Duke’s band at the time of the original recording (February 62, a few months after the arrival of Chuck Connors in the band). Just before, on track 11, discover the surprising gallop of Daily Double, on “three feet” at irregular intervals, an amazing battle between the piano, the tenor saxophone and the band, played from beginning to end with brilliance. This track is warranted by being a part of a piece composed and recorded by Ellington along with a part of his band for a movie about Degas (and a few other impressionists) paintings about horse races. Sam Shaw, who had worked with the Duke on “Paris Blues”, had entitled his movie “Degas’ Racing World”. Anthony Queen, Charles Boyer and Simone Signoret were supposed to give their voices for the narration. The project, for lack of money, fell through and the composer found himself gloomy, left only with a magnetic tape which would only be released in 1987, long after his death. It is interesting to know that Edgar Degas had a personal link to jazz: his grandmother and his mother were from New Orleans...

As for A Midnight in Paris it is both the title of the album of French songs revisited the Ellington way and one of Billy Strayhorn’s sublime compositions which can be heard on this album released in 1962, but which had originally been composed for the meeting on record between Ellington and Basie which

happened in the same period. It is a four minutes dialogue between the piano and a sparkling band, each brass part being based on a change of key.

The Old Circus Train was created at the Antibes Juan-les-Pins Festival in July 1966. It is simply a shuffle blues obviously evoking the train, the composer's constant source of inspiration. In the movie "Duke Ellington on the Côte d'Azur" we can see the musicians rehearsing this number in the afternoon while the copyist, Tom Whaley is bustling about. These images are followed by those of the evening concert, on the same number, with, in the forefront, saxophonist Johnny Hodges playing the last nine chorus of a solo made up of about twenty of them, definitely one of his long career's longest... This number is one of the few examples of live tunes premiered on a French bandstand. It was at the request of demanding fans that Duke pulled these sheets of music out of his hat, scores that were clearly unfinished.

The last ten tracks of "French Touch" are a major recording event. It actually constitutes the entire effort of live music written by Ellington and Strayhorn in December 1960 for "Turcaret", an Alain-René Lesage (1668-1747) play performed at the Théâtre National Populaire. It was Jean Vilar's idea (who was at that time managing that great venue) to commission Ellington for the music while he was in Paris to record "Paris Blues". For Vilar, it was a great joy -he liked jazz and admired the maestro- and a source of astonishment: how could this guy from a totally different culture have assimilated so quickly the script, the characters and the style of the times? How could this incredible musician have created during the night of the 29th to the 30th of December between 4 and 7 am, nine of the ten required themes? How, at the very end of the night, could he still be at the piano, playing four hands with Strayhorn, when everybody else was long gone? As expected, critics weren't unanimous. While François Mauriac found the music a bit "grating", Jean-Jacques Gautier, not surprisingly, thought that it had nothing to do with "Turcaret" (Le Figaro 15-16 January 1961). But Elsa Triolet, under the title "Vilar makes Lesage swing" thought that Vilar's idea to give the musical job to Ellington was "crazy, clever and effective" (Les Lettres Françaises, 19-25 January 1961). Retranscribed here from a poor quality tape dating a half-century ago, this stage music played by the "cream" of the French musicians of that time never cease to amaze and captivate. We notice that the "brigadier's knocks" (to indicate the beginning of the play), a theatrical tradition, are replaced by the piano part of Band call, a number Duke used to play at the end of a break to call late musicians. We also notice that Frontin's theme would reappear in Ellington's discography under the title of "Sempre Amore", recorded in 1963 for the album "Afro Bossa". Everybody will also notice that Madame Turcaret was from Normandy...

Let's praise without naming them, since we are informed on each track of the soloists, the extraordinary performance of each member of "The Duke Orchestra": most of them only knew of this music through recordings, all of them, in section as well as soloing, deciphered its secrets and felt its spirit by dint of work and listening. Their most glorious reward is in the systematically enthusiastic welcome of every kind of audience to whom they have been lucky enough to introduce with much talent this most wonderful music.

## **2. TURCARET**

*Alain-René Lesage - Created in « Comédie Française » - February 14th, 1709*

Mr TURCARET, financier, in love with the baroness

FLAMAND, Mr Turcaret's valet

LA BARONNE, young widow and a coquette

Mme TURCARET, Mr Turcaret's wife

LE CHEVALIER, minor Master

FRONTIN, the Knight's valet

MARINE, LISETTE, the Baroness' maids

Mr. RAFLE, Mr Turcaret's assistant (usurer)

Mme JACOB, dealer in toiletries, Mr Turcaret's sister

JASMIN, the Baroness' lackey

Mr FURET, deceitful person

The satire takes a close look at the ruthlessly cynic and ambitious milieu of the early 18th century French bourgeoisie. Mr. Turcaret is a financier with no scruples, uncouth and vain. He has set his wife up in the countryside to be better able to court the Baroness, widowed, young and spendthrift, who, in turn has a crush on a gallant Knight, who himself has the only objective to take advantage of Mr. Turcaret's fortune. Appearances, pretences, lies and treasonous acts are the dramatic impulse of this comedy which offers the best role to the valet Frontin, in love with Lisette, commissioned beside Turcaret by the Knight. The master, the valets and the friends form a vile and obnoxious world which is comic none the less. Fools are fooled and rascals are victims of mischief. The whole fortune built up on vice with such audacity crumbles in the end, but without suppressing the mischievous behaviour under its ruins. The rein of Turcaret is over, the valet Frontin's is getting started ...

### **3. DUKE ELLINGTON ABOUT FRANCE**

*From Duke Ellington's autobiography « Music is my mistress » - Da Capo Press*

#### **THE TASTE BUDS**

France, of course, was a whole new world of culinary delights. When I was at the *Cordon Bleu*, next door to the movie studio where we did Paris Blues, I would always set a tall menu between me and the person next to me who was eating *escargots*. As Skippy Williams says, "Sometimes it be's that way."

Over on the Left Bank in Paris, Billy Strayhorn and Aaron Bridgers and their In crowd used to take us to a place called *Le Paysan* on the Rue de Tournon, where we would have wonderful French soul food. Wine and appetizers would be served, and seated comfortably we would begin on the *Pâté de lièvre* (hare), proceed to the *Rosette de Lyon* (a small peppered sausage), the *Pâté encroûté* (ndlr. en croûte), Billy's favourite *andouillettes*, *boudin* (a blood sausage), the *Omelette Paysan* (with potatoes, onion, and a kind of smoked bacon), the *Tarte Tatin* ... on and on until we were stuffed. On the other bank, we would have our large holiday dinner parties at *Maxim's*, where we would go the full distance to the *crêpes Suzette*. But the real thing was constantly *La Tour d'Argent*, a restaurant that dates from 1582, when it was a *relai de chasse* known as *La Tour de Nestlé* (ndlr. la tour de Nesle).

I happen to love *Beaujolais*, and after concerts in Paris I would often go by my hotel and have my supper and a full bottle of it. Then I would immediately lie down across the bed and sleep five hours or so. People were always looking askance at me: "He likes Beaujolais instead of champagne! Strange fellow, Duke Ellington!"

#### **PARIS**

To me, the people in it are always what make a city. Among those I think of as citizens of Paris was Django Reinhardt, a very dear friend of mine, and one whom I regard as among the few great inimitables of our music. I had him on a concert tour with me in 1946, so that I could enjoy him the more. I always said that Django was a great believer, because a believer is an optimist who thinks of tomorrow, and one of Django's favourite sayings was, "Tomorrow, maybe...". Then, of course, there was Sidney Bechet, who worked with us in 1926, and who much later, after World War II, made his home in Paris, where he became a great popular star. He was another of the inimitables.

I have always had good luck in Paris and with people who come from there. The first time I ever conducted with a baton was when our band accompanied the first personal appearance of another inimitable, Maurice Chevalier, in New York at the Fulton Theatre in 1930. Nearly forty years later, he remembered that occasion when they were celebrating my birthday at a party in the Alcazar in Paris. "You have brought back my youth to me," he said, smiling. Then he presented me with the straw hat he was wearing. It was an expansive and expensive affair with a real Parisian flavor. Baron Edmond de Rothschild and Salvador Dali were there. A huge cake - *en forme de camembert géant, trois mètres de diamètre* - was lowered from the ceiling, the first time nearly on my unsuspecting head! The second time, it made a safe descent, and out from it stepped *trois danseuses nues*, to everybody's intense satisfaction. After that, I was presented with more than two hundred roses by different artists and guests, one at a time. It was a moving and charming gesture. As *Le Figaro* put it next day, they were convinced that "when one has a flower in the hand, one no longer needs to speak English."

In 1960, I was in Paris for eight weeks to write the music for Paris Blues. This was the film in which Louis Armstrong, Paul Newman, Sidney Poitier, Joanne Woodward, and Diahann Carroll appeared. Jean Vilar of the prestigious Théâtre National Populaire had another assignment for me. He invited me to do music for *Turcaret*, a classic play by Lesage that had not been performed since 1709. That was ball, and I recorded it with a band of French musicians. I thought it was great, and we have tapes of it, so someday perhaps we can release it.