Ellington, Duke,

Ellington, Duke, byname of EDWARD KENNEDY ELLINGTON (b. April 29, 1899, Washington, D.C.—d. May 24, 1974, New York City), American composer, bandleader, and pianist who is among the most significant figures in jazz history and, along with Fletcher Henderson and Don Redman, was one of the founders of big-band jazz, which led to the swing era.

Ellington studied piano from age seven and in his teens was influenced by ragtime pianists; at 17 he began to play professionally. The following year he renounced the fine arts, toward which his parents had oriented him, to devote himself to jazz.

In about 1923, at the Kentucky Club in New York City, he led a small group that was later the core of his large band. In this period, the group contained Harry Carney, Sonny Greer, and, above all, Bubber Miley and Tricky Sam Nanton. Their tense or piercing sonorities constituted the essential element of the "jungle style" that asserted itself in pieces such as "Black and Tan Fantasy."

Almost without interruption from then until his death, Ellington led a band that was his laboratory for composition, orchestration, and the unique blend of improvisation and orchestration that he mastered with instrumentalists who spent most of their careers with him. He capitalized on the unique personal sounds of outstanding players such as trumpeter Cootie Williams, saxophonist Johnny Hodges, and bassist Jimmy Blanton, using each as a separate tone colour and writing ensemble parts suited to each player rather than writing just for the tone quality traditionally identified with the instrument. Especially characteristic of Ellington was the plunger-muted growl style of trombonist Nanton and trumpeter Miley. Ellington artfully employed wordless female vocals as another tone colour. Unlike his contemporaries, Ellington often broke away from the standard practice of grouping instruments of a kind and writing passages that pitted them against each other (e.g., saxophones versus brass). He instead drew instruments from different sections of the band and voiced them together as a unit, thereby generating rich and unusual sounds such as the well-known "Mood Indigo" voicing of bass clarinet, muted trumpet, and trombone.

More than 1,000 orchestrations were crafted by Ellington, including not only brief big-band pieces but ones for film scores, operas, ballets, Broadway shows, and church services, many involving symphony orchestra, choruses, and dancers. The Ellington tunes most frequently performed by others include "Satin Doll," "Sophisticated Lady," "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "Do Nothin' Til You Hear from Me," and "In a Sentimental Mood." His best-known longer works include Black, Brown, and Beige and Reminiscing in Tempo. Some pieces associated with Ellington were written by his musicians: pianist-arranger Billy Strayhorn wrote "Take the 'A' Train" and "Lush Life"; trombonist Juan Tizol wrote "Perdido" and "Caravan."

As a pianist, Ellington drew from the East Coast stride style of James P. Johnson and Willie the Lion Smith, streamlining it into the swinging and sprightly embroidery style that he used as accompaniment for his improvising soloists and as an additional orchestral colour. The piano style influenced Thelonious Monk, a leading modern-jazz composer-pianist, while Ellington's arranging concepts were
assimilated by Gil Evans, Thad Jones, George Russell, Clare Fischer, Charles Mingus, Sun Ra, and other significant modern composers. In part owing to the showcase Ellington provided for them, several of his musicians had strong impact on jazz styles for their particular instruments: Hodges' approach to alto saxophone ballad interpretation, Blanton's method of hornlike solo lines played pizzicato on bass, and Ben Webster's tenor saxophone approach.


**BIBLIOGRAPHY.**