

Duke Ellington, The Classical Music Composer

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Abstract

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington is one of the giants of the jazz world. Indeed, Ellington along with Louis Armstrong are considered to be the two most important and influential musicians in jazz history. But, could Duke Ellington also be considered a Classical music composer?

Ellington wrote ambitious large scale works that were in large part classically notated. These works include “Black, Brown, and Beige”, “Sacred Concert” and “New World A-Comin’”. His solo piano music should be included in his Classical music catalogue as well. While the listener might expect to hear a chord chart, with improvisation, one hears instead a Classical composition which includes form, structure, and a unique exploration of piano timbre. When one compares Ellington’s recorded performances of his piano compositions, one begins to notice that his performances of the same piece were remarkably similar from one recording to the next.

I will be presenting a paper on Ellington’s important piano compositions. I will be discussing these pieces and including sound files of note-for-note transcriptions of his pieces. It is now time that Duke Ellington assume his proper place in not only the jazz world but the Classical music world as well.