

## **49. Duke and Ellington and Bubber Miley Black and Tan Fantasy (For Unit 6 Further Musical Understanding)**

### **Background information and Performance Circumstances**

- The bandleader and composer Edward 'Duke' Ellington (1899-1974) is widely regarded as one of the leading figures in American Jazz in the period from the 1920s until his death in 1974. The composer of many famous Jazz 'tunes' that are still played today, e.g. 'Mood Indigo' (1930) and 'In a Sentimental mood' (1935), he was one of the first Jazz musicians to recognise the importance of jazz as a vehicle for integrated, structured compositions, inviting comparison with works from the classical repertory. Towards the end of his career, he produced a number of sacred works, notably 'In the Beginning God' and the Second and Third Sacred Concerts.
- He began his career playing in dance bands around Washington DC, before moving to New York in 1923 to join a small band called the Washingtonians. Here he was exposed to the full range of new jazz styles, notably Harlem Piano, the blues, New Orleans and Chicago jazz styles.
- Ellington took over direction of the band in 1924, by which time it numbered between ten and twelve players.
- Many of Ellington's early pieces were written for revues and tableaux staged at the Cotton Club, in Harlem, where the band was in residence for five years from 1927.
- Black and Tan Fantasy is an example of Ellington's 'Jungle' style, created to accompany 'African culture' floor shows at the Cotton Club, and as such had a more expressive and varied purpose than jazz for social dance, allowing Ellington to experiment with sonorities and structures that were new to the genre, so becoming a form of concert music.
- He discovered new tone colours within the big band line-up, extending the 'reeds-plus-brass' combination into a much more imaginative sound world.
- He wrote specifically to exploit the skills of the players in his band. For example, in Black and Tan Fantasy, the Trumpet Solo work is for Bubber Miley (the work's co-creator) and the Trombone solo features techniques favoured by Sam Nanton.
- The number was recorded several times in 1927 for the Okeh, RCA Victor and Brunswick record labels. The song was also featured in the 1929 short film Black and Tan.
- The title refers to the meeting of races in the Cotton Club, a process that Ellington supported, although the quotation at the end of this piece reveals some pessimism about the speed of racial integration in the USA.

### **Performing forces and their handling**

- The line-up for this recording is as follows: Duke Ellington, piano; Bubber Miley and Louis Metcalf, trumpets; Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, trombone; Otto Hardwick, Rudy Jackson, and Harry Carney, saxophones; Fred Guy, banjo; Wellman Braud, bass; Sonny Greer, drums.
  - The piece is in 'Jungle style', featuring heavy drums, low saxophone textures and, most characteristically, the growling sound of Bubber Miley's plunger-muted Trumpet. This 'growl' effect is produced using a combination of straight mute, a 'gargling' noise in the throat, and a plunger mute to shape the sound.
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- The 'dark' sonorities used here, and the focus on the individuality of the improvised solo sections, are all fingerprints, even at this early stage, of Ellington's mature style.

1-12 Chorus 1 (Head- Introduction)	The minor key melody, derived from 'The Holy City' by Stephen Adams, is played in parallel 6ths by muted trumpet and trombone (Miley and Nanton). Pitch bending is noticeable on the Db in bar 7.	The rhythm section (bass, drums, banjo) plays sharply on each beat, with Ellington adding off-beats at ends of phrases. A cymbal crash on 124 links into the next section.
13-28 (Interlude)	A 'sweet' major key alto saxophone melody, consisting of two sets of eight bars, is played by Hardwick with thick vibrato, sultry tone, and pronounced glissandi.	Accompanied by low sustained reed chords. Ends with a series of upward parallel chords in the reeds, with accompanying off-beat damped cymbal crashes.
29-52 (Choruses 2 and 3)	Trumpet solo (Miley) begins with a long held high note, reached via a slide. The rest of the solo (24 bars, i.e. two sets of 12 bars) features growls, wah-wah effects using the mute, and blue notes.	'Stomping' crotchet chords are heard throughout this section. The beginning of piano solo overlaps the end of the Trumpet solo.
53-64 (Chorus 4)	Piano Solo (Ellington) –in 'stride' style, featuring a florid RH melody with alternating bass notes and chords and some octaves in the LH. A wide range of the keyboard is covered here.	The other band members are silent, in order to allow for Ellington's more chromatic piano harmonies
65-76 (Chorus 5)	Trombone solo (Nanton) with plunger mute. Played high in the range, it features glissandi, growls, and at bars 72-73, a 'horse whinny' effect.	Backing reappears but is kept very simple.
77-86 (Chorus 6)	Miley's trumpet solo uses trills, repeated notes, slides and growls, with a limited range of pitches (B natural, B flat, D flat, F, G flat, G natural. The rhythm is pulled around with displaced repetitions of short ideas.	Saxophones re-enter with low chords at 84.
87-90 Coda	Trumpet and Trombone play in 6ths again, quoting Chopin's 'Funeral March'	Low saxophone chords repeat a mournful plagal cadence in Bb minor. 'Dramatic' off-beat cymbal crashes accompany first two bars and cut off the final chord.

## Texture

- The opening and closing sections feature the Trumpet and Trombone playing predominantly parallel sixths.
- Sustained chordal accompaniments, low in their register, are provided by the saxophones in the Interlude (bars 13-28), and from 84 to the end.
- Choruses 1, 2, 5 and 6 feature a simple melody dominated homophonic texture, where the accompanying instruments fill in harmonies underneath the soloist.
- The Piano texture in Chorus 4 features the 'stride' style of accompaniment, used in Harlem piano music and in Ragtime, though it has its roots in the classical tradition (cf Schumann Kinderscenen, Op. 15, No. 3 [NAM, p. 258]).

## Structure

- A 'Head' arrangement, where a harmonised theme provides a chord sequence for subsequent melodic improvisations.
- The Head is a twelve bar blues (initially in Bb minor in the Introduction), played six times in total, the first and second being separated by an independent 16 bar section, in Bb major. The sixth and final chorus is incomplete, being interrupted by the preparation for the ending.
- Piece concludes with a Coda, again in Bb minor. (See table under Performing forces for list of sections.)

## Tonality

The piece begins and ends in Bb minor, but from bar 13 until the coda, at 87, is in the parallel major key of Bb major.

## Harmony

- Most of the piece is based around the 12 bar blues sequence.
- The harmony (changes) of the Head is diatonic and functional, enhanced by 'blues' elements in the melodies (D natural) and pitch bends.
- As the piece progresses, there is more 'advanced' chromatic harmony.
- The harmony includes seventh chords, secondary dominant and substitution chords.
- More 'advanced' classical progressions are found, such as the cycle of fifths at bars 19-20, which takes the music from Bb to Gb.
- The 'foreign' G flat seventh chord at bars 13 and 21 is both a substitution for the tonic Bb chord and fulfils the function of a German augmented sixth, resolving to a B flat major chord in bars 15 and 23.
- Parallel harmonic movement is found in 27-28.
- Substitution chords replace harmonies in the 'standard' 12 bar sequence at bars 37 and 49 (C minor seventh).
- Ellington's piano solo includes a wider range of harmonies, including substitution chords (C7 and F7) at bar 54, diminished 7th chords at bars 58 and 63, and a cycle of 5ths (D, G, C, F, B flat) from 59 (beat 3) to 63.
- Chorus 6 substitutes a minor subdominant chord (E flat minor instead of the expected major) at the 6th bar of the sequence, perhaps foreshadowing the return to the minor for the coda.
- Cycle of 5ths (G7, C7, F7, B flat) at 84-87.
- The coda contains repeated plagal cadences (unusual for jazz) in Bb minor.

## Melody

- The Head melody (1-12) is based on the chorus of the popular late 19th century ballad 'The Holy City', by Stephen Adams. The rhythm is changed (augmented) and the tonality is moved from major to minor, perhaps giving an ironic twist to the (originally) joyous words of the chorus.
- The saxophone interlude melody is more optimistic, being in the major key, but begins with a rather shocking (for the time) passage based around a whole-tone scale (bars 13-14) before settling into a more familiar mixture of conjunct and broken chordal movement. The melody here is more 'European', with some chromaticisms, for example at bars 25-26.
- Miley's first trumpet solo (29-52) takes a more 'bluesy' approach by using notes that clash with the diatonic Bb major harmony of the 12 bar sequence. These include:
  - 'blue' minor 3rds and sevenths (e.g. bars 33 and 48).
  - More dissonant clashes of a diminished 5th (F flat) at bar 41.
  - Miley's solo covers a large (2 octave) range.
- Ellington's piano solo melody is mostly diatonic, but uses some chromatic passing notes to mimic the effect of blue notes, although none are used on the beat, creating a less strong effect.
- Repeated ideas are used in 56 and a turn figure dominates bar 61.
- Nanton's trombone solo is high in the range and uses a smaller range (a 10th). It, like Miley's solo, uses 'blue' 3rds (bar 74) to good effect, as well as the 'horse whinny' effect in bars 72-73.
- Miley's second solo uses a restricted range of pitches (B flat, B natural, D flat, F, G flat, G natural) and features trills, repeated notes and repetitions of small cells, some of which get rhythmically displaced.
- The coda quotes the opening of Chopin's 'Funeral March' from Piano Sonata in B flat minor to provide a suitably downbeat ending.

## Rhythm and metre

- Quadruple time throughout.
- Medium slow (Steady Swing) tempo.
- The seriousness of the opening is underlined by the constant crotchet accented chords which accompany the Head.
- The Saxophone interlude section is enlivened by the use of triplets and by syncopated, swung quavers.
- Miley's solo at bar 29 introduces more complex rhythms still, with triplet crotchets and 'long' upbeat dotted crotchets at bars 36, 40 and 42.
- Ellington's piano solo introduces more crotchet movement in the bass and quaver and occasional semiquaver movement in the treble, again with swung rhythm and some syncopations (see bars 63-64).
- The trumpet solo in Chorus 6 features some repeated rhythmic ideas based around triplet crotchets and semi-quavers.
- A repeated downward arpeggio is repeated four times, each time syncopated to start just before the first or third beat.
- The swung rhythm is abandoned for the sombre mood of the Coda.