

Listening Guide

Strayhorn: *Take the A Train*, by the Duke Ellington Orchestra

DATE OF WORK: Recorded February 15, 1941

FORM: 32-bar song form (A-A-B-A, each 8-bar phrases), in 3 choruses

MEDIUM: Jazz big band (trumpets, trombones, saxophones, piano, guitar, bass, drums); soloists: Duke Ellington (piano), Ray Nance (trumpet)

TEMPO: Moderate; 4/4 meter

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Big band sound, with reed, brass, and rhythm sections. Call-and-response exchanges between the instruments. Syncopated rhythmic character of the themes. Special jazz effects (bent notes, shakes, glissando) by solo trumpet. Closing “fades out,” playing main theme.

Introduction—4 measures, piano (Ellington), with syncopated, chromatic motive and rhythm accompaniment.

Chorus 1 (A-A-B-A)

A—unison saxophones state disjunct melody, in key of C, in interjections from muted trumpets and trombones (8 bars) against steady rhythm accompaniment:



A—repeated (8 bars).

B—contrasting episode in saxophones, with syncopated melody accompanied by low brass and rhythm.

A—saxophones restate main melody with new rhythmic figure from brass against rippling piano figures.

Chorus 2 (A-A-B-A)

Features Ray Nance on muted trumpet, accompanied by saxes and rhythm section; trumpet solo in 2nd phrase, with bent pitches:



Interlude—4 measures, sustained accents as though in triple rather than quadruple meter.

Chorus 3 (A-A-B-A)

A—Saxophones play harmonized version of main theme (4 measures); followed by unmuted trumpet solo (Nance).

A—trumpet solo continues, with sustained chords in saxophones.

B—trumpet solo with countermelodies in saxes and trombones; closes with fanfare without rhythm accompaniment; punctuated by cymbal crash.

A—original theme played by saxophones in new key (E flat); brass interjects, alternating with muted and open notes.

Coda—two repetitions of A (8 bars each), first *mezzo piano*, then softer, with final closing sax riff.