

Duke Ellington - Early Tracks From The Master of Swing / 2006 MVD / 85 Minutes / <http://www.mvdb2b.com> / Reviewed 19 August 2006

With these tracks all being "early" in the career of Duke Ellington, it pays to remember that the sound and video quality of them will not be up to the high quality of a number of other concert DVDs. However you take what you can get considering the fact that some of these performances are the only times that we have Ellington performing them at this point in his career. All of the footage present in this DVD (at least, the performance side of things) is in black and white. The tracks are simply identified, with the title of the song being shown. What I would like is if each track had a date and place, to see if there was any evolution in the style of Ellington.

This seems to be the only weakness that one can find on the performance side of this DVD, as the footage cannot be changed any more than it is (the footage cannot be cleaned up, is all I'm saying). I would like to see MVD put out an audio CD of this as well, as some of the tracks on this DVD have a different sound to them than do the studio tracks. These aren't necessarily remixes, but it is interesting to hear the minor changes and nuances of the orchestras that they played with at the time. I like the additional tracks that act as a "bonus" for the disc.

While they seem to be more like advertisements for the rest of the Jazz Classics Collection, the tracks all are done by stars of jazz (Dizzy Gillespie, Les Paul, The Cab Calloway Orchestra). The only thing that I would change about the bonus side of the DVD would have to be the fact that there are no interviews or descriptions about what individuals have just spend an hour to see. I would like to hear a commentary or something about at least one or two of the tracks, but that is just not a function on this DVD. Hell, I would even settle for a two or four page sheet inside the DVD case explaining the reason why these tracks were put together, or maybe a description of the years of Ellington's life that these years encompassed. Still, the DVD is worth its price considering the fact that this footage would be near impossible to find unless one had access to the vaults of a number of television stations and private collectors. Kudos thus has to go to MVD and all those affiliated with the creation of DVD for putting these performances all together in such an easy to get compilation. The great thing about this series is that it seems to have future releases already in the pipeline.

There are tons of famous jazz musicians that individuals could cull together material from and release on a DVD much like that. Add some more material (some background material would be best) to this DVD and one would have something that would be an absolute "must buy".

Rating: 6.1/10

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