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The "Ellington Effect:" Analysis and Application of Duke Ellington's Compositional Techniques

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This project focused on the composition of thirteen original jazz songs. These songs—three blues compositions, five ballads, and five swing compositions—were composed based on an analysis of selected works by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. In particular, this analysis focused on vital elements such as harmony, melody, and transformation, and song unity. These original compositions have been recorded with the help of Seth Reichert, featuring Jeremy Stern on piano and Max Lazarus on alto saxophone, and will be available for reference.

Duke Ellington is widely considered to be one of the finest composers of the 20th century; his work—and that of his partner Billy Strayhorn—is widely admired by jazz listeners, academics, and average music fans alike. This project sought to pinpoint elements of "The Ellington Effect," the unique, individual sound Ellington achieved in his compositions. While this project was limited in its scope—looking only at composition and not arrangement—it nonetheless spent significant analysis on some of Ellington's and Strayhorn's finest works in the blues, ballad, and swing styles. Of particular interest in Ellington's compositions is the mastery with which he uses and alters melodic motives and provides embellishments to harmonic progressions. Strayhorn, on the other hand, offers significantly more advanced and adventurous harmonic and melodic material.