

FILE: JAZZ

GOING FOR ADDS: JULY 5th, 2024

ARTIST: BRIAN LANDRUS

TITLE: Brian Landrus Plays Ellington & Strayhorn

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Brian Landrus translates the music of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn into the language of low woodwinds on his stunning new album

TRACKS

1. Agra 2:47 Ellington/Strayhorn
2. *Chelsea Bridge 2:42 Strayhorn - May 10th Single
3. A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing 5:19 Strayhorn
4. *Daydream 4:22 Ellington/Strayhorn - June 14th Single
5. Praise God 3:29 Ellington
6. Prelude To A Kiss 4:01 Ellington
7. Come Sunday 2:29 Ellington/Strayhorn
8. The Telecasters 2:05 Ellington/Strayhorn
9. Lotus Blossom 2:34 Strayhorn
10. Lush Life 5:44 Strayhorn
11. Isfahan 3:41 Ellington/Strayhorn
12. Star-Crossed Lovers 4:07 Ellington/Strayhorn
13. *Warm Valley 6:55 Ellington
14. *Sophisticated Lady 2:04 Ellington

MUSICIANS

Brian Landrus – saxes, clarinets and flutes

Dave Stryker – guitar

Jay Anderson – bass

Billy Hart – drums

PRODUCTION

Guest arrangers Gregory Hopkins & Ayn Inserto.

Produced by John Kilgore and Brian Landrus

Recorded at Bunker Studio by John Kilgore

Mixed by John Kilgore in August 2023.

Mastered by Alan Silverman

Cover Art by Keith Henry Brown

brianlandrus.com
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Duke Ellington famously professed that when composing for his revered orchestra he wrote for the individual players, not for their instruments. For his stunning new album celebrating the timeless music of Ellington and his frequent composing partner Billy Strayhorn, low woodwind specialist **Brian Landrus essentially reversed that concept.** In order to find his own personal interpretation of the works of Ellington and Strayhorn, Landrus created a virtual orchestra composed of the musician he knows better than any other – himself.

Brian Landrus Plays Ellington & Strayhorn, features Landrus on a full spectrum of instruments: **baritone and bass saxophones, bass and contra alto clarinets, piccolo, and C, alto and bass flutes.** With Grammy-winning engineer and producer John Kilgore, he layers his multi-hued voices into a rich and distinctive orchestral sound that harkens to the lush timbres of the classic Ellington Orchestra while displaying an evocative sonic hue all his own. That tonality is given a brilliant foundation by the **stellar rhythm section** that Landrus has assembled for the occasion: guitarist **Dave Stryker**, bassist **Jay Anderson**, and drummer **Billy Hart**.

While the music of these two legendary composers has been an influence on Landrus throughout his life, it was **playing a concert of Ellington's sacred music** with Berklee professor Gregory Hopkins that sparked this project. **"I heard these masterpieces and thought that there might be room for exploration with the sounds that I could provide them,"** he recalls. "But I didn't want to just do a quartet record of Duke tunes. It occurred to me that **one way to do the music justice would be to use all the woodwinds at my disposal and make something that felt as rich as the originals."**

The colors that these instruments provided guided Landrus in his choice of repertoire for the project, placing an **emphasis on the lyrical and the haunting**, both elements in which the two composers excelled. While their music has always been **praised for its grace and refinement, it also contains depths of mystery and shadows** that add a profound complexity lurking under the surface.

"There's an elegance and sophistication to Ellington and Strayhorn's music," Landrus says. "But it's mixed in with this darker quality that Mingus always recognized – these harmonic rubs and beautiful textures. I definitely wanted to add my own colors to these compositions, but **I wasn't trying to reinvent each song. I felt the unusual timbres of the woodwinds would give them a unique atmosphere** that hadn't been heard before on these tunes. **I let those sonic qualities guide me in the direction that I felt would be most respectful for Strayhorn and Duke."**

The material on *Brian Landrus Plays Ellington & Strayhorn* is a mix of familiar classics and more obscure Ellingtonia. The album

opens with **“Agra,”** from the **1967 *Far East Suite***, its melody a low, resonant moan swathed in airy winds while Hart’s mallets underpin the track with the hypnotic rhythm of a desert caravan. **The suite is also represented by “Isfahan,”** here an affecting blend of ballroom urbanity and streetlight grit. **“The Telecasters” and “Star Crossed Lovers,”** meanwhile, stem from the **Shakespeare-inspired *Such Sweet Thunder***, the former buoyed by Hart’s tap-dancing brushes, the latter a showcase for Stryker’s eloquent lyricism. Landrus returned to **the sacred music that inspired the album** for **“Praise God,”** it’s aspiring woodwinds anchored by Anderson’s stentorian bowed bass.

Strayhorn’s “Chelsea Bridge” and “A Flower is a Lovable Thing” are both iconic pieces, given **an intoxicating quality** in Landrus’ mesmerizing arrangements. His **“Daydream,”** elegiac in the original recording, is **transformed with a bossa nova groove**, Landrus defying gravity with his lilting bari. Gregory Hopkins contributes a wistful arrangement for perhaps Strayhorn’s best-known composition, **“Lush Life,”** opening with gauzy nostalgia before weaving the woodwinds into dancing filigrees.

The album’s second guest arranger, bandleader Ayn Inserto, begins **Ellington’s “Warm Valley”** with cascading lines, then lets Landrus’ breathy baritone sing the melody over an achingly slow ballad rhythm, Stryker’s shimmering chords chiming with Hart’s whispering cymbals. The guitarist also sets the scene for an **entrancing rendition of “Prelude to a Kiss”** and switches to acoustic to pair with Landrus for a tender **duet version of Strayhorn’s “Lotus Blossom.”** Landrus closes the album alone, **essaying a reflective “Sophisticated Lady” on bass sax,** the mammoth tone a wry contrast to the elegant theme.



Brian Landrus Plays Ellington & Strayhorn is not just a testament to the immortality of these brilliant writers but also to Landrus’ orchestrational vision. The album is a celebration of two of America’s greatest composers, viewed through a fascinating and evocative sonic perspective.

[BRIAN LANDRUS, PHD](#)

Multi-Instrumentalist, Composer, Educator – Brooklyn, NY

Multi-instrumentalist and composer Dr. Brian Landrus is an internationally recognized low woodwind artist. Specializing in baritone saxophone, bass saxophone, bass clarinet, contra alto clarinet, alto flute, and bass flute, Landrus consistently places in the *DownBeat* and *JazzTimes* Critics Polls. He was awarded “Rising Star” in *DownBeat* for baritone in 2015 and for bass clarinet in 2021. Landrus’ 2022 release *Red List* gathered an all-star ensemble to raise awareness for endangered species across the globe. His 25-piece orchestral album *Generations* was named

one of the best recordings of the year by NPR, *DownBeat*, *JazzTimes*, All About Jazz and many other international publications. Landrus has performed with some of the world’s great musicians including Fred Hersch, the Maria Schneider Orchestra, Esperanza Spalding, Feist, Rakalam Bob Moses, the Gil Evans Orchestra, The Temptations, Darcy James Argue, The Beach Boys, Donny McCaslin, Ravi Coltrane, and many more.

Based in Brooklyn, Landrus founded his label, BlueLand Records, in 2010.

Landrus is an Associate Professor of Jazz Studies at Berklee (Boston, MA) where he teaches jazz improvisation, composition, jazz arranging, jazz ensembles, and private studio. Landrus earned his PhD in composition at Rutgers University, two Master of Music degrees in jazz composition and jazz performance at the New England Conservatory, and a Bachelor’s degree at University of Nevada Reno. Landrus is an endorsed artist for Selmer Paris saxophones and clarinets, D’Addario reeds, Lebayle mouthpieces, Silverstein ligatures, Kingma flutes, Arista Flutes, Marmaduke Straps, and Woodwind Design Stands.

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