

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

Night Creature (1974 / Ailey Company Premiere – 1975)

Choreography: Alvin Ailey
Restaged by: Masazumi Chaya
Music: Duke Ellington
Costumes: Jane Greenwood
Costumes recreated by: Barbara Forbes
Fabric dyeing of costumes by: Elissa Tatigikis Iberti
Lighting Design: Chenault Spence

“Night creatures, unlike stars, do not come OUT at night – they come ON, each thinking that before the night is out he or she will be the star.” – Duke Ellington

In *Night Creature*, Alvin Ailey’s classically influenced choreography juxtaposes with Duke Ellington’s jazz idiom. One of Mr. Ailey’s most popular works, the dance captivates with Ailey’s sensual nighttime rituals, propelling the movement into a fast-paced climatic catharsis using slow jazz walks, boogie woogie, and ballet arabesques to create prowling patterns and communal configurations.

The ballet first premiered on the 1974 television special “Ailey Celebrates Ellington,” and two years later the buoyant ballet was included in a stage version of the program in August 1976 for a two-week New York season at Lincoln Center. *Night Creature* is the definitive Ailey homage to the exuberance of The Duke’s jazz – a joyful and kinetic celebration of Ellington’s music. With stunning brilliance, the ensemble undulates and rejoices in the nocturnal beat of Ellington’s jazz.



AAADT in Alvin Ailey’s *Night Creature*.
Photo by Paul Kolnik.

“One of Mr. Ailey’s happiest works. **It has a joyful pulse, a sophisticated entente** with its sophisticated music that carries on the best of the Ellington tradition.”

The New York Times

“...delectably sassy...”

The New York Times

“This remains **one of Ailey’s best curtain raisers**, and the company throw themselves into its elf-like spirit with only rhythmic measure containing their dance abandon.”

New York Post



Duke Ellington. AP Images.

Duke Ellington

Duke Ellington called his music “American Music” rather than jazz, and liked to describe those who impressed him as “beyond category.” He remains one of the most influential figures in jazz, if not in all American music and is widely considered as one of the twentieth century’s best known African American personalities. As both a composer and a band leader, Ellington’s reputation has increased since his death, with thematic repackaging of his signature music often becoming best-sellers. Posthumous recognition of his work includes a special award citation from the Pulitzer Prize Board.

Duke Ellington influenced millions of people both around the world and at home. He gave American music its own sound for the first time. In his 50-year career, he played over 20,000 performances in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East as well as Asia.

Simply put, Ellington transcends boundaries and fills the world with a treasure trove of music that renews itself through every generation of fans and music-lovers. His legacy continues to live on and will endure for generations to come. Winton Marsalis said it best when he said, "His music sounds like America." Because of the unmatched artistic heights to which he soared, no one deserved the phrase "beyond category" more than Ellington, for it aptly describes his life as well. He was most certainly one of a kind that maintained a lifestyle with universal appeal which transcended countless boundaries.

Duke Ellington is best remembered for the over 3,000 songs that he composed during his lifetime. His best-known titles include "It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing," "Sophisticated Lady," "Mood Indigo," "Solitude," "In a Mellotone," and "Satin Doll." The most amazing part about Ellington was his creativity while he was on the road. It was during this time when he wrote his renowned piece "Mood Indigo," which brought him worldwide fame.

When asked what inspired him to write, Ellington replied, "My men and my race are the inspiration of my work. I try to catch the character and mood and feeling of my people."

Duke Ellington's popular compositions set the bar for generations of brilliant jazz, pop, theatre, and soundtrack composers to come. While these compositions guarantee his greatness, what makes Ellington an iconoclastic genius, unparalleled visionary, and what has granted him immortality are his extended suites. From 1943's "Black, Brown and Beige" to 1972's "The Uwis Suite," Ellington used the suite format to give his jazz songs a far more empowering meaning, resonance, and purpose: to exalt, mythologize, and re-contextualize the African American experience on a grand scale.

Duke Ellington was partial to giving brief verbal accounts of the moods his songs captured. Reading those accounts is like looking deep into the background of an old photo of New York and noticing the lost and almost unaccountable details that gave the city its character during Ellington's heyday, which began in 1927 when his band made the Cotton Club its home. Ellington once said, "The memory of things gone is important to a jazz musician," and the stories he sometimes told about his songs are the record of those things gone. But what is gone returns, its pulse kicking, when Ellington's music plays, and never mind what past it is, for the music itself still carries us forward today.

Duke Ellington was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1966. He was later awarded several other prizes, the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969, and the Legion of Honor by France in 1973, the highest civilian honors in each country. He died of lung cancer and pneumonia on May 24, 1974, a month after his 75th birthday, and is buried in the Bronx in New York City. At his funeral attended by over 12,000 people at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Ella Fitzgerald summed up the occasion, "It's a very sad day... A genius has passed."

This production was made possible, in part, by a grant from Ford Foundation and with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Night Creature **Music Credit Information**

Song: Night Creature

Movement I: Blind Bug

Movement II: Stalking Monster

Movement III: Dazzling Creature

Composed by: Duke Ellington

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