Alvin Ailey’s modern dance translation of a classical pas de deux captures the sassy sophistication of Duke Ellington’s jazz music. The choreography is elegant and deliciously flirtatious, showing off the dancers’ exuberance and virtuosity as they engage in a playful game of one-upmanship.

Originally created for two of the most renowned dancers in the world, Judith Jamison and Mikhail Baryshnikov, Pas de Duke was first presented as part of the festival “Ailey Celebrates Ellington” at Lincoln Center’s New York State theater in 1976, commemorating the nation’s bicentennial with America’s two great art forms – modern dance and jazz music. Ailey choreographed five sections that capture the sassy sophistication of “The Duke’s” jazz music: the introduction to “Such Sweet Thunder” (1957); the pas de deux to “Sonnet for Ceasar” (1975); the male solo to “Sonnet for Hank Cinq” (1957); the female solo to “Unclothed Woman” (1948); and the finale to “Old Man’s Blues” (1930), which captured the exuberance of the star dancers’ qualities and techniques as the male and female soloists mirror each other toe-to-toe and line-for-line in this playful, good-natured competition. Most recently during Ailey’s 2020 virtual holiday season, an excerpt of Pas de Duke was filmed on top of the iconic landmark Woolworth Building as a breathtaking love letter to New York City. This new production includes an adagio section that has not been performed by the Ailey Company in almost 20 years.

“A test of physical endurance, the pas de deux still challenges performers with its unlikely balance of glittering play and high-powered technical feats from ballet, jazz and modern dance, all set to the soaring, pulsing music by Ailey’s beloved Duke Ellington.”

_The New York Times_

“…one of those special dances that lives in new ways with each new set of performers.”

_The New York Times_

**Duke Ellington**

Born in Washington, D.C. in 1899, composer, pianist and band-leader Duke Ellington was one of the most influential figures in the history of music. In the early 1930’s his band established its fame at the Cotton Club in New York City, with a sound Ellington called “American Music” rather than jazz. In his fifty-year career, the “Duke” played over 20,000 performances in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East as well as Asia, and is best remembered for the over 3,000 songs that he composed before his death in 1974, including _It Don’t Mean a Thing if It Ain’t Got That Swing_, _Sophisticated Lady_, _Mood Indigo_, _Solitude_ and _Satin Doll_. Ellington’s popular compositions set the bar for generations of jazz, pop, theatre, and soundtrack composers to come.
Support for this production of *Pas de Duke* was provided by The Ellen Jewett & Richard L. Kauffman New Works Endowment Fund and Daria L. & Eric J. Wallach.

The original Ailey production was made possible, in part, with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, and by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

Generous support for this production was received from Laren and Jesse Brill.

*Pas de Duke*

Music Credit Information

Music: “Such Sweet Thunder” (1957) *
   “Sonnet for Caesar” (1957) *
   “Sonnet to Hank Cinq” (1957) *
   “Clothed Woman” (1948) +
   “Old Man’s Blues” (1930) *

Composed by: Duke Ellington
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