

# Ten of My Favorite Songs With Inspirations by Duke

Duke Ellington, the legendary jazz composer, pianist, and bandleader, left an indelible mark on the music world. His prolific career spanned over six decades, and he composed thousands of songs that continue to be celebrated today. In this article, I will explore ten of my favorite Ellington songs, focusing on their unique characteristics, inspirations, and the stories behind their creation.

## "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)"

**Inspiration:** The vitality and energy of the Harlem Renaissance.



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by Dennis Alexander

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This iconic song, written in 1932, encapsulates the exuberant spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. Its driving rhythm and catchy melody have made it a jazz standard, frequently performed and recorded by musicians worldwide.

The song's lyrics, written by Irving Mills, celebrate the importance of "swing," a rhythmic element crucial to jazz music.

### IT DON'T MEAN A THING

(If It Ain't Got That Swing)  
featured in SOPHISTICATED LADIES  
featured in the Broadway Musical SWING!

Words and Music by DUKE ELLINGTON  
and IRVING MILLS

The musical score is presented in four systems. The first system is marked 'Lively' and includes piano accompaniment with chords such as D7, G7, and F7. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with chords like C#7, G7, and F7. The third system introduces a vocal line with the lyrics 'What good is me if I ain't got that swing?' and includes a 'Vamp' section. The fourth system continues the piano accompaniment and includes the final lyrics 'What good is me if I ain't got that swing?' with chords like G7, F7, and D7.

## "Sophisticated Lady"

**Inspiration:** The refined elegance of a woman.

Written in 1933, this elegant ballad paints a picture of a sophisticated and alluring woman. The song's sophisticated melody and lush harmonies create a sense of intimacy and longing. The lyrics, written by Mitchell Parish and Irving Gordon, capture the essence of a woman who exudes grace and poise.



Duke Ellington performing 'Sophisticated Lady'

## "Caravan"

**Inspiration:** The exotic allure of the Middle East.

Composed in 1936, "Caravan" is an exotic and mysterious piece inspired by Ellington's fascination with Middle Eastern music. The song's haunting melody and exotic harmonies evoke images of a desert caravan traveling through the sands. The lyrics, written by Irving Mills and Juan Tizol, add a touch of intrigue and adventure to the song.

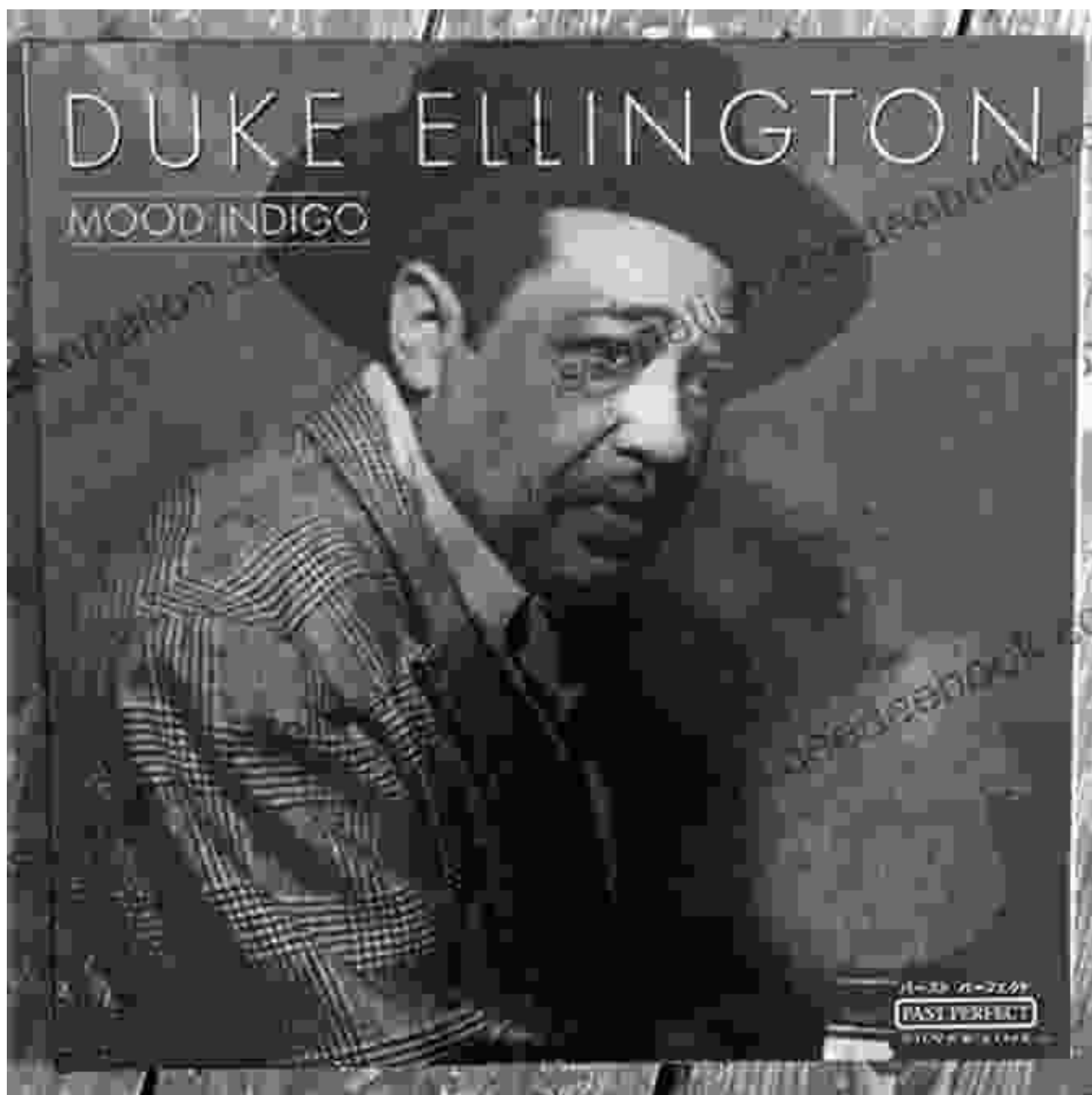


## "Mood Indigo"

**Inspiration:** The deep melancholy of unrequited love.

This haunting ballad, composed in 1930, perfectly captures the pain and longing of unrequited love. The song's slow tempo and minor key create a

sense of sadness and nostalgia. The lyrics, written by Barney Bigard, describe the torment of a heart filled with unfulfilled desires.



Album cover for 'Mood Indigo' by Duke Ellington and his Orchestra

**"In a Sentimental Mood"**

**Inspiration:** The bittersweet memories of lost love.



Written in 1935, this tender and evocative ballad explores the emotions associated with lost love. The song's slow tempo and lush harmonies create a sense of nostalgia and longing. The lyrics, written by Manny Kurtz and Irving Mills, express the pain and regret of someone reminiscing about a love that has ended.



## "Satin Doll"

**Inspiration:** The allure and sophistication of a beautiful woman.

Composed in 1953, "Satin Doll" is a swinging and upbeat tune celebrating the allure of a beautiful woman. The song's catchy melody and playful





This energetic and rhythmic tune, composed in 1941, captures the lively atmosphere of a daily commute on the 'A' train in New York City. The song's infectious melody and driving rhythm have made it a popular choice for big band and jazz ensembles.



## **"Black and Tan Fantasy"**

**Inspiration:** The vibrant energy of Harlem's nightlife.

Written in 1927, "Black and Tan Fantasy" is a dynamic and exuberant piece that evokes the atmosphere of Harlem's vibrant nightlife. The song's complex harmonies and energetic rhythms fuse elements of jazz and classical music.



Cover art for the 'Black and Tan Fantasy' album by Duke Ellington

## "Come Sunday"

**Inspiration:** The importance of faith and spirituality.

Composed in 1943, "Come Sunday" is a powerful and uplifting spiritual that explores the themes of faith and hope. The song's simple melody and heartfelt lyrics, written by Ellington, convey a message of resilience and trust in the face of adversity.



### "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)"

**Inspiration:** The pain and longing of unrequited love.

This poignant and bittersweet ballad, written in 1941, explores the pain and longing of unrequited love. The song's slow tempo and minor key create a sense of sadness and desperation. The lyrics, written by Ellington and Paul Francis Webster, express the torment of a heart consumed by unfulfilled desires.



Duke Ellington singing

Duke Ellington's music continues to inspire and captivate audiences worldwide. His compositions are a testament to his exceptional talent, creativity, and passion for jazz. The ten songs explored in this article provide a glimpse into the rich and diverse legacy of one of the greatest composers of the 20th century. Whether it's the energetic swing of "It Don't

Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" or the haunting melodies of "Mood Indigo," Ellington's music transcends time and continues to resonate with listeners today.

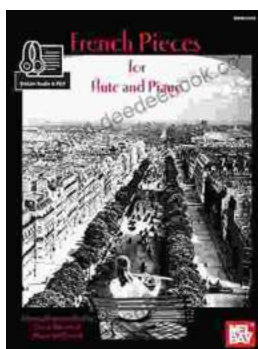


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