

Don Ellis - Essence (1962)

Written by bluesever

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A1 Johnny Come Lately 4:51 A2 Slow Space 4:30 A3 Ostinato 7:00 A4 Donkey 4:34
B1 Form 5:30 B2 Angel Eyes 5:00 B3 Irony 4:18 B4 Lover 3:22 Bass – Gary Peacock
Drums – Gene Stone, Nick Martinis Piano – Paul Bley Trumpet – Don Ellis

The rarest of all Don Ellis sessions, *Essence* matches the trumpeter with pianist Paul Bley, bassist Gary Peacock, and either Nick Martinis or Gene Stone on drums. Ellis, who sought during this period to transfer ideas and concepts from modern classical music into adventurous jazz, often experimented with time, tempos and the use of space while still swinging. His renditions of Billy Strayhorn's "Johnny Come Lately," "Angel Eyes" and "Lover" are quite fresh, he contributes four interesting originals and introduces Carla Bley's "Wrong Key Donkey" (here simply called "Donkey"). This is thought-provoking music that was certainly way overdue to be reissued. ---Scott Yanow, AllMusic Review

A very interesting character, trumpeter and bandleader Don Ellis is probably best known for the big bands he led in the late '60s, which served as a vehicle for his experiments with electronics and unusual time signatures. Albums such as *Electric Bath* and *Live in 3 2/3/4 Time* are brimming with the excitement of an era that was filled with rebellion and a quest for individuality. In his own way then, Ellis brought a new outlook to the big band mold that was way beyond the traditional swing style of earlier prototypes.

Much less is acknowledged or discussed in regards to Ellis as a trumpeter in the years before his big band. Part of this is due to the fact that his early work has been hard to obtain or poorly

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distributed, save for the 1961 Prestige session New Ideas. Following that album and the two Candid sets that precede it would be 1962's Essence, the rarest of the rare in Ellis' oeuvre. Recorded by Dick Bock for his Pacific Jazz imprint, Essence is just now seeing its first reissue as one of just two releases from Mighty Quinn Productions, a new independent label specializing in rarified objets d'art.

Essence is a startling album not only in execution but also in the more perfect insight it gives us into Ellis' developing individuality. The album opens with an up-tempo romp through "Johnny Come Lately and ends with any equally brisk run through "Lover. In between are several free-form explorations that often dispense with timekeeping of a traditional nature. Pianist Paul Bley is in excellent form as he counters Ellis' sweeping statements with his own dense and chordal assertions. On "Irony we even find drummer Gene Stone adding color and texture by dropping coins in a glass (at least that's what I think he's doing). This is heady and experimental stuff, chock full of the sound of surprise, and Ellis and crew are up to the challenge.

Not the typical kind of West Coast stuff that Dick Bock usually cut, Essence is not that much unlike New Ideas (another fine set to check out); it's also vital for the early exposure it gave to Bley and bassist Gary Peacock. Superb sound remastering and a faithful reproduction of the original cover help to make this a precious reissue that Ellis fans will surely want to check out. ---C. Andrew Hovan, allaboutjazz.com

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