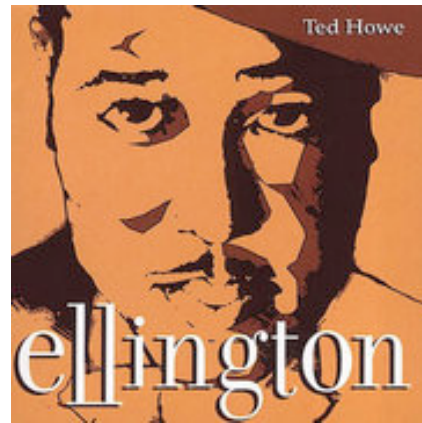


JazzTimes[®]



BY HARVEY SIDERS

This CD—one master paying tribute to another—was almost called Accidental Ellington. It began as a guide to familiarize choreographers for the Ruth Mitchell Dance Theatre, in Atlanta, with Howe's well-known paean to the Duke. After a few first takes, Howe had an epiphany: "I realized we were also making a 'record.'" Duh! When you got it, share it.

I wonder how the dancers' body language has influenced Howe's arrangements of "Caravan" and "Sophisticated Lady." They reveal Howe at his most musically mischievous, toying with tempos and extending parts of the tunes but never losing their clever reharmonizations. "Things Ain't What They Used to Be" and "Take the 'A' Train" show off Howe's tightly knit trio with bassist Neal Starkey and drummer Jerry Fields. "In a Sentimental Mood" has a noir, modal feel to it that Fields expands on with the cajon drum.

Starkey's highlight comes on his lead playing in "Mood Indigo." Howe's high points never end; fluidity like his is rare. "Prelude to a Kiss" is pure reverence, and his solo stride track, "It Don't Mean a Thing," is pure joy.