



Sathima Bea Benjamin on *A Morning in Paris*

'My first thoughts on writing this were how impossible it would be to describe the experience of recording "A Morning in Paris" in February 1963 with the three most magnificent pianists a singer could ever dream of working with. I will try to convey my thoughts, forty-four years later on this, my most magical musical moment of my career as a jazz singer.

To be in the studio with Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and Abdullah Ibrahim at the young age of 23, was absolutely awesome and thrilling. To say I was nervous is an understatement.

Billy Strayhorn (it was my first time meeting him that morning) was the sweetest person you could ever meet. No wonder he was called "Sweet Pea." Ellington looked happy and relaxed, walked straight into the recording booth with the wonderful engineer Gerhard Lehner, and let us know that he was "the producer."

Me, being shy and introverted was lovingly and gently coaxed by Duke's generosity and enthusiasm to be the best I could be. I know I shall never, ever again have such a positively wonderful and ecstatic musical experience.

I have been blessed beyond words, to have Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and Abdullah Ibrahim as my accompanists that "Morning in Paris." Their input in my musical career empowers me forever. I must continue to improve and excel in my career as a jazz singer.

When Ellington brought me to New York City he said to me, "You have talent and imagination - use it in your song and survive." I remember those words and continue to fly under his protective musical wings.'

-August, 2007