It Don’t Mean a Thing
(If It Ain’t Got That Swing)

Music by Duke Ellington
Words by Irving Mills
Arranged by Ralph Ford

INSTRUMENTATION

Conductor
C Flute (Optional)
1st E♭ Alto Saxophone
2nd E♭ Alto Saxophone
1st B♭ Tenor Saxophone
2nd B♭ Tenor Saxophone
E♭ Baritone Saxophone (Optional)
1st B♭ Trumpet
2nd B♭ Trumpet
3rd B♭ Trumpet
4th B♭ Trumpet (Optional)
1st Trombone
2nd Trombone
3rd Trombone (Optional)
4th Trombone (Optional)
Guitar Chords
Guitar (Optional)
Piano
Bass
Drums

Optional/Alternate Parts
B♭ Clarinet
Vibraphone
Tuba
Horn in F (Doubles 1st Trombone)
1st Baritone Horn T.C./B♭ Tenor Saxophone (Doubles 1st Trombone)
2nd Baritone Horn T.C./B♭ Tenor Saxophone (Doubles 2nd Trombone)
NOTES TO THE CONDUCTOR

Recognized as one of the “standards” of jazz, Duke Ellington’s masterpiece composition has been covered by hundreds—if not thousands—of artists from all genres of music.

This arrangement includes an added twist of stating the first half, or four measures, of the verse in a Latin style, and then answering with the second half (four measures) of the verse in a swing style. For rehearsal purposes, it will be imperative for the rhythm section to rehearse this transition to ensure a smooth change of “feel” between the styles. The key difference in these two patterns is the Latin to swing rhythms in the drums and piano, and the change from a samba-style bass riff to a walking bass pattern. The winds should swing the eighths in the swing section but play eighths more straight and even in the Latin section. These differences become less obvious at a faster tempo.

The wind articulation stays much the same in between the two styles, utilizing long-short (doo-daht) eighth-note patterns. Be sure to exaggerate the $\frac{1}{8}$ dynamic from mm. 32–35, with a big hit and fall-off on the last half of m. 35 leading into the solo sections at m. 36. In general, marcato, or rooftop, markings are detached and accented—think “daht.” Staccatos are short but not clipped or too short.

There are written solos beginning at m. 36 for tenor 1 and trumpet 1. Feel free to cue the backgrounds at your discretion, particularly if the solo section is repeated more than twice for additional solos. As in the verse and throughout the chart, the transfer of styles remains constant. Leading into the ending of the chart, beginning at m. 99, direct the build to start softly and exaggerate to the conclusion. Enjoy a new take on the classic Ellington masterpiece!

Enjoy!

—Ralph Ford
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