

MCA-1358

MCA RECORDS

Duke Ellington:

THE BEGINNING

VOLUME ONE
(1926-1928)

IMMIGRATION BLUES
NEW ORLEANS LOW DOWN
BIRMINGHAM BREAKDOWN
RED HOT BAND
JUBILEE STOMP
TISHOMINGO BLUES
DOIN' THE FROG
BLACK BEAUTY
THE CREEPER
SONG OF THE COTTON FIELD
EAST ST. LOUIS TODDLE-OO
TAKE IT EASY
YELLOW DOG BLUES
BLACK AND TAN FANTASY

JAZZ
HERITAGE
SERIES



DUKE ELLINGTON: The Beginning
Volume One (1926-1928)
DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

MCA RECORDS

MCA-1358
MG 11128

Side 1

1. IMMIGRATION BLUES 3:00
 2. THE CREEPER 2:47
 3. NEW ORLEANS LOW DOWN 3:04
 4. SONG OF THE COTTON FIELD 3:03
 5. BIRMINGHAM BREAKDOWN 2:37
 6. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO 3:00
 7. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY 3:17
- All Selections ASCAP

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MG 11129

Side 2

1. RED HOT BAND 2:46 ASCAP
2. DOIN' THE FROG 3:16 ASCAP
3. TAKE IT EASY 2:36 ASCAP
4. JUBILEE STOMP 2:41 ASCAP
5. BLACK BEAUTY 3:06 ASCAP
6. YELLOW DOG BLUES 2:47 ASCAP
7. TISHOMINGO BLUES 2:57 BMI

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DUKE ELLINGTON: The Beginning

Volume One (1926-1928)

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Side One

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. IMMIGRATION BLUES (3:36-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 2. THE CREOSOTE (3:47-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 3. NEW ORLEANS LOW DOWN (3:46-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 4. SONG OF THE COTTON FIELD (3:46-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 5. BIRMINGHAM BIRMINGHAM (3:37-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 6. TALK 'EM UP (3:50-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 7. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY (3:37-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |

Side Two

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. BEA BEA BEA (3:46-40:22AP) | Monthly Fields |
| 2. BUMP THE BUMP (3:16-40:22AP) | Monthly Fields |
| 3. TAKE IT EASY (3:39-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 4. JUBILEE STOMP (3:46-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 5. BLACK AND TAN (3:46-40:22AP) | Duke Ellington |
| 6. YELLOW DOG BLUES (3:46-40:22AP) | W.C. Handy |
| 7. THUNDERING BLUES (3:31-40:22AP) | Spencer Williams |

Collector: Stanley Dance
Under Supervision Of MCA Records

Side 1

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. IMMIGRATION BLUES (3:36) | RED HOT BAND (P) |
| 2. THE CREOSOTE (3:47) | SMOKE THE MUSIC (P) |
| 3. NEW ORLEANS LOW DOWN (3:46) | TAKE IT EASY (P) |
| 4. SONG OF THE COTTON FIELD (3:46) | JUBILEE STOMP (P) |
| 5. BIRMINGHAM BIRMINGHAM (3:37) | BLACK HEARTY (P) |
| 6. TALK 'EM UP (3:50) | YELLOW DOG BLUES (P) |
| 7. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY (3:37) | THUNDERING BLUES (P) |

(A) Duke Ellington, piano; Bobberley Miles, Louis Metcalf, trumpet; Joe Natanson, trombone; Otto Hardwick, Harry Carter, clarinet, alto and baritone saxophones; Rudy Jackson, clarinet and tenor saxophone; Fred Gray, baritone; Ben Edwards, bass; Sonny Greer, drums, New York, 29 December, 1926.

(B) As (A), New York, 3 February, 1927.

(C) As (A), New York, 28 February, 1927.

(D) As (A), New York, 14 March, 1927.

(E) As (A), New York, 7 April, 1927.

(F) As (A), William Brown (bass) replaces Edwards, New York, 29 December, 1927.

(G) As (F), Barney Bigard (clarinet and tenor saxophone) replaces Jackson, and Arthur Whetzel (trumpet) replaces Miles, New York, 21 March, 1928.

(H) As (G), Johnny Hodges (soprano and alto saxophones) replaces Hardwick, and Bobberley Miles (trumpet) replaces Whetzel, New York, 5 June, 1928.

"My mother used to play piano, pretty often like Medford, so pretty they'd make me cry," Duke Ellington recalled. "My father played, too, but by ear, and all operatic stuff."

Music thus entered his life very early. In the first two decades of the century, too, public interest in pianists was supplemented by the popularity of the river piano. Ellington heard all the great ones, and all the great ones of the day who visited Washington, where he was born and raised, but the final formative stimulus came in Philadelphia. After spending a summer in Ashbur Park with his mother, he dropped off there one day to see his mother's piano. A friend had frequented.

"So I heard this young kid, Harvey Brooks," he said. "He was swinging, and he had a tremendous left hand, and when I got home I had a yearning to play piano. I went around a couple of piano players, but I couldn't learn anything that they were trying to teach me. Underneath, he experimented on the family piano. "When I was confined to the house for a couple of weeks with a cold or something, he continued." I folded around on the piano and came up with a piece I called *Louis Louis Armstrong Rag*. I started playing this around and it attracted quite a lot of attention.

By this time he was in high school, and when the seniors had a party he was a success playing his composition in every conceivable tempo. His room noted, however, that he had to expand his repertoire, and his second composition was *When You Get Down to It* (*When The Red Shoes Dance*). "In short order," he became well known to such established professionals as Doc Perry, Louis Brown, Lester Dabbin and Sticky Mack, and he also began to work "in about the No. 5 band" for leaders like Louis Thomas and Russell Wonding.

"We moved out into the society world," he went on, "and I remember playing at Mrs. Dyer's, a dancehall where all the society kids used to go. It was then that I started throwing my hands up in the air, trying to look like Lucky Roberts, and they all said, 'Oh, yes, he's a great piano. Send him back again!' The, although I still knew only about four numbers.

"I was getting so by that I had to study some music to protect my reputation. I had had elementary lessons from Mrs. Chickasaw at school, and I used to slow down James P. Johnson piano rolls and copy them note for note. New Dixie Perry taught me about reading, and I took lessons in harmony from Henry Greer."

One of the James P. Johnson members that he mentioned was Caroline Rupp, and his performance of it enhanced his growing fame. On one occasion, when Johnson was playing in Washington, the crowd egged Ellington to get up and follow him with his own interpretation of the number. Local sentiment was so much in his favor that he was considered to have outplayed the great pianist-composer from New York.

Ellington had now become the center of a group of friends and musicians which included Otto Hardwick, Artie Whetzel, Elmer Snowden and the Miller brothers. His experience with other bands had prompted him in a bold step.

"I got an ad in the telephone book myself," he remembered with amusement, "and became a hooker and a handliner. My ad looked out like those of Meyer Davis and Louis Thomas, and I began to get work. A lot of people in Washington then were workers from out of town, and the name looked good to them. They didn't know Meyer Davis and Louis Thomas from Duke Ellington. So it was that I would sometimes send their card for five cents a night and work in them, too."

The Washingtons, in his main group in called, were joined by Sonny Greer, a perambulant drummer from Long Beach, New Jersey. His success in New York under their direction, and in 1927 they began to make an abortive trip to that city as part of a band led by Wilbur Sweatman, a musician known for many years to play three clarinets at once. After staying the night and making themselves known, they went back to Washington. The following year they returned to the big city at the invitation of Sam Walter. After an initial disappointment, they landed a job at Barton's, then the center of nightlife in Harlem, where the few Washingtonians—Ellington, Whetzel, Hardwick, Snowden and Greer—soon made a name for themselves.

Ellington's education as a pianist was resumed, meanwhile, in many cases after four sessions with Willie The Lion Smith, James P. Johnson and Fats Waller.

After several months at Barton's, the little band went downtown to the Kennedy Club on 42nd and Broadway, with business Friday on Snowden's place. This small lounge club was well patronized by show people and musicians, and it was here that Ellington's personal, collectible talent and the engaging personality of his pianist, when Whetzel decided to return to Washington, a substitute replacement was found in Bobberley Miles, a trumpet player who specialized in the use of the plunger mute. The w-o-iff was created with this mute a vital part of "jungle style," an early identifying element in Ellington's music that was well-attuned to the then current, nervous rage for all things African. The standard music repertoire of Earl Charles Iron and then Joe "Tricky Sam"anton comple-

mented Miles' playing admirably, and Ellington was quick to devote highly expressive musical frames for that alone, or to use for every musician of stature who subsequently entered his group. For a time, he was joined by Sidney Bechet, when Ellington was one of the great innovators, and in 1928 a young saxophone player from Boston, Harry Carter, took Otto Hardwick's place as "saxophone." Carter has been with Ellington ever since.

It was during his four years at the Kennedy Club that Ellington created members like *Black And Tan Fantasy* and *Earl St. Louis* made on the collaboration with Bobberley Miles. The drummer, and his imaginative character of these pieces won the band wide renown, and they were eventually called to audition for an engagement at the Cotton Club in Harlem.

"There were four other bands auditioning for the job, and everyone was there on time at 11 o'clock every day," Ellington said. "We didn't get there till 3 o'clock, but we got the job, because the guy who owned the place didn't show up until that time either."

The band opened at the Cotton Club on December 26, 1927, and a new phase in Ellington's career began. The room was much bigger than the Kennedy Club, and it featured spectacular floorshows, so the band was soon built up from six to eleven players. Barney Bigard, a brilliant New Orleans clarinetist, joined early in 1928, and Johnny Hodges, an outstanding alto saxophonist from Cambridge, Mass., later the same year. Another addition from Louisiana was William Brown, a musician whose ancestry recorded him was to be a prominent feature of Ellington records for many years.

The early recordings by the Kennedy Club band on the first side do not show it as it actually was, but as specially expanded for recording purposes. Miles is the dominant voice, closely followed by Nanton, who was obviously learning from his rapidly. There are many examples of Ellington's original mind at work, in for instance in the novel way the performance are recorded, and in the arrangements by Nanton on *New Orleans Low Down* and to Miles in *Earl St. Louis Fantasy*. It is in the latter number, which became the band's theme, and in *Black And Tan Fantasy*, that the development of his compositional gifts most evident.

The second side presents the Cotton Club band and appears with two members written for the show by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields. The second of these, *Harry Carney's* remembers, and recognized a dance by Cozz La Reid. The new instrumental voices of Whetzel and Bigard contribute much to this side, which includes Ellington's fragment *Black Roney* (dedicated to Florence Mills) and collaboration with the entry of Johnny Hodges' soprano saxophone on *Yellow Dog Blues* and his solo on *Talesman Blues*. On these two sides, whether playing clarinet or saxophone, the real action has a new character.

Some of the early alto saxophone solos have been the subject of conjecture, but the identification used in the table of solo numbers have been made by Harry Carter, who was undoubtedly only about the baritone (or bass) saxophone on *Don't Forget The Frog*.

STANLEY DANCE

SOLO ROUTINES

Immigration Blues: Jackson (tenor saxophone), Miles, Nanton, Hardwick, Ellington, Miles, Hardwick (baritone saxophone).
The Creosote: Hardwick, Nanton, Hardwick, Jackson, Ellington, Miles.

Song Of The Cotton Field: Metcalf, Metcalf, Nanton, Jackson, Hardwick (baritone saxophone).

Birmingham Rhythm: Hardwick, Miles, Hardwick (baritone saxophone).

Earl St. Louis Fantasy: Miles, Nanton, Jackson, Miles, Hardwick, Nanton, Miles, Nanton, James P. Johnson, Nanton, Miles.

Red Hot Band: Miles, Nanton, Guy, Nanton, Carter, Miles, Carter, *Don't Forget The Frog*: Nanton, Carter, Nanton, Hardwick (baritone saxophone), Miles, Hardwick or Carter (bass or baritone saxophone).

Talk 'Em Up: Whetzel, Hardwick, Bigard, Nanton, Metcalf, Hardwick, Sonny Hardwick, Metcalf, Bigard, Nanton, Carter, Ellington.

Black Roney: Whetzel, Metcalf, Whetzel, Nanton, Ellington, Bigard, Whetzel.

Yellow Dog Blues: Miles, Hodges (soprano saxophone), Nanton, Metcalf.

Talesman Blues: Nanton and Bigard, Metcalf, Hodges, Miles (Hardwick, Hodges, Carter, Nanton, Carter, alto saxophone, and Jackson and Bigard, clarinet, unless otherwise noted.)

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