Jazz Information

DUKE ELLINGTON And His Famous Orchestra

The Brunswick Sessions (1932—35). Volume 3.

JAZZ INFORMATION CAH 3003

"I got my first break when I was about seventeen, down in Washington, and Louis Thomas sent for me to play piano one night. Thomas was the leader of a society band whose only competition was Meyer Davis. I was to get a chance to play in his third band on the condition I would learn to play the SIREN SONG well enough to perform it that night.

I spent the whole day learning the tune. When I arrived on the job I found that the band was a legitimate one, they wouldn't play any 'jumps'. The musicians started talking to me about correct chords, and I knew that in a few minutes I'd be sunk. Then somebody requested the SIREN SONG, and in great relief I started plunking out the number. I'd often watched Lucky Roberts who had come down from New York to play the Howard Theatre. He had a flashy style, and a trick of throwing his hands away from the piano. It occurred to me then that I might try doing what he did. Before I knew it the kids around the stand were screaming with delight and clapping for more.

In two minutes the flashy hands had earned me a reputation, and after that I was all set. I got a hunch about having my own band…"

DUKE ELLINGTON
(From "Hear Me Talkin' To Ya")

Born Edward Kennedy Ellington on April 29, 1899, in Washington DC, to a childhood that must have borne little resemblance to those of other jazz musicians - black or white. The young Duke grew up in a middle-class atmosphere of a loving, affectionate family headed by a father who was in service to both the White House and U.S. Navy, and had no lack of money. Nevertheless, music was his life from a very early age, beginning with his tinkering with the school piano's keyboard, leading him to write his first compositions - "Soda Fountain Rag" and "What You Gonna Do When The Bed Breaks Down?" - by the age of 15. Informal tuition with local musicians like Doc Perry and Henry Grant resulted in the Lucky break (if you'll pardon the pun) recalled by Duke above, and after a couple of well-placed advertisements he found himself managing three popular dance bands.

It was not until Duke's son, Mercer, was born in 1919 that he decided to concentrate on his own jazz band, but after meeting experienced jazz drummer, Sonny Greer, Duke chose the best of the available local musicians, which included Otto Hardwick, Artie Whetsol, and Elmer Snowden.

Duke Ellington's Washingtonians played their first engagement in New York City in 1922, returning the following year for residencies in Harlem and on Broadway, and by 1925 the group was sufficiently renowned for Perfect records to record it. The following year, with Don Redman on sax, a further Perfect session and two for Gennett (and a couple more with McKinney's Cotton Pickers) were recorded; there were piano solos for Paramount; and with Bubber Miley now on trumpet, wazed for Blue Disc. By the end of November 1926, the renamed "Kentucky Club Orchestra" with a fully formed classic Ellington line-up, began recording for Vocalion with some of the issues being credited to Duke Ellington's Orchestra, followed by sessions for Columbia/Brunswick, Victor, Okeh, Harmony, Cameo/Romeo, Perfect/Oriole/Banner, and Velvetone/Mills under a variety of names including The Harlem Bell Hops, Sunny and the Deacons, Traymore Orchestra, Earl Jackson & His Musical Champions, The Chicago Footwarmers, Brown Berries, Lonnie Johnson's Harlem Footwarmers, The Whoopee Makers, The Lumberjacks, Duke Ellington And His Cotton Club Orchestra, Jungle Band, Joe Turner And His Memphis Men, Dixie Jazz Band, Six Jolly Jesters, The Ten Blackberries, Harlem Hot Chocolates, and The Memphis Hot Shots. By the end of 1929, the Ellington Orchestra had stockpiled an impressive number of classic sides — almost 150 masters — among them, "East St. Louis Toodle-oo", "Black and Tan Fantasy", "Creole Love Call", "Black Beauty", "Jubilee Stomp", "The Mooche", "Misty Mornin'", and "Flaming Youth".

The amazingly stable personnel of the early Ellington Orchestra was also very nearly completed — only the smooth trombone sound of Lawrence Brown was missing. Tricky Sam Nanton and Wellman Braud had joined in 1926 when Irving Mills began managing the band; Harry Carney and Barney Bigard had joined in 1927; Johnny Hodges joined in 1928; and Cootie Williams and Juan Tizol arrived in 1929 at the expense of Bubber Miley and Otto Hardwick, the latter of whom would return during the spring of 1932.

Success with a musical revue, a Flo Ziegfeld show, and The Cotton Club residency, as well as record sales, led to the expensive purchase of movie featurettes and full length movies such as "Black & Tan Fantasy" (1929) and "Check and Double Check" (1930). In 1931 Duke Ellington was churning out hits with dizzying frequency. "Mood Indigo", "Ring Dem Bells", "Rockin' In Rhythm", "Old Man Blues", "Creole Rhapsody", and "It Don't Mean a Thing" were all from 1930 and 1931.

In February 1932 Duke Ellington And His Famous Orchestra commenced a long spell with Brunswick and Columbia which was punctuated quite often with sessions for Victor and once, during the band's first European tour in summer 1933, for English Decca. By 1935 the band was recording exclusively for Brunswick/Columbia and its various subsidiaries, a situation which lasted until March 1940 when it switched exclusively to RCA Victor/Bluebird for six years except for the several V-Discs it recorded. The tracks laid down for Brunswick and Columbia between February 1932 and March 1935 have not been as well served in reissue terms as the earlier myriad of labels or the later Columbia and Victor sides, apart from a superb, two-volume boxed set from 1963 entitled "The Ellington Era 1927—1940" produced by the redoubtable Frank Driggs. In his introduction to volume one's booklet, Irving Mills wrote:

"From the time I first met him, in 1926, until our relationship ended in 1939, I was as close to Duke as anyone living, outside of his own family. I saw him rise from a position of obscurity to one of world-wide recognition, and I didn't see this from the sidelines as a spectator; as Duke's manager I was proud and happy to be an integral part of the developments, and to watch his mounting success with a great sense of personal satisfaction.

"When I first met Duke he was leading a small group at the Kentucky Club, at Broadway and 49th Street. I remember the occasion well. I was with the late Sime Silverman, the founder of **Variety**, who was out for an evening's relaxation after putting the paper to bed.

"Though the initial impact of Duke as a musician and person was unforgettable, one detail escapes me: I am still not quite sure which tune it was that particularly caught my attention. I've seen it printed that it was his arrangement of "St. Louis Blues" that attracted me, though as I recall it today, I believe it was Duke's own **Black and Tan Fantasy**. In any case, the main point is that I was immediately and profoundly impressed by this young man who, it so became obvious, was not just another pianist or bandleader, but a truly creative artist, with the latent potential for an unlimited career."

Perhaps Mills was simply one of the first to recognise the gift of jazz' first "composer" in the classical sense — who had the facility to lead a big band of already independent and individual musicians for the best part of the subsequent half a century — and who was uniquely able to appeal to the vastly differing Carnegie Hall concert goers and the Savoy Ballroom jitterbugs at one and the same time. As jazz promoter and record label owner Norman Granz once said, "Duke Ellington was the real pioneer in jazz concerts, and he can go into the Apollo or the Savoy and play the same music he plays at a one-nighter for dancing and at his concerts. . . " Duke, on the other hand, always gives the credit of the band's success to his talented and chronically loyal bandsmen. However viewed, the present, three volume set on Jazz Information cab-3001, -3002, and -3003 consisting of the best takes from the Brunswick and Columbia sessions held between February 1932 and March 1935 inclusive, gives in all an opportunity to reassess the first recordings of the complete classic Ellington orchestra: an ensemble that was sometimes wild and free-wheeling and sometimes symphonic and urbane, but always entertaining.

DAVE PENNY - March 1989.

Sources:

"HEAR ME TALKIN' TO YA" — Nat Shapiro & Nat Hentoff (1955)

"THE WORLD OF DUKE ELLINGTON" — Stanley Dance (Da Capo)

"THE BIG BANDS" — George T. Simon (1967)

The booklets accompanying the two volume set "The Ellington Era 1927—40" Columbia C3L 27 & C3L 39 with contributions from Irving Mills and Stanley Dance.

Duke Ellington's trumpets, 1933: Rex Stewart, Cootie Williams, Artie Whetsol.

Cover photo: Duke Ellington & His Orchestra, *1935.*
Duke Ellington, piano (front); Cootie Williams (trumpet), Wellman Braud (bass), Otto Hardwick (alto sax), Lawrence Brown (trombone), Joe Tricky Sam Nanton (trombone), Artie Whetsol (trumpet), Harry Carney (baritone sax), Johnny Hodges (alto sax), Juan Tizol (valve trombone), Fred Guy (guitar); At rear: Rex Stewart (cornet), Sonny Greer (drums), Barney Bigard (clarinet).

Recommended reading:

"MUSIC IS MY MISTRESS" — Duke Ellington (1973)

"DUKE ELLINGTON IN PERSON" — Mercer Ellington with Stanley Dance (1978)

"THE REAL DUKE ELLINGTON" — Don George (1981)

Note: There follows a synopsis of the specific tracks used on this collection. Quotations begining (SD) are from Stanley Dance's comments from the Columbia sets, while those commencing with (DJ) are taken from Derek Jewell's "Duke — A Portrait of Duke Ellington" (1977).

GET YOURSELF A NEW BROOM — The third and last title from this session, all of which feature arguably Ellington's finest vocalist, Ivie Anderson, who was, interestingly, utilised as one of the instruments on most of her features by singing only a chorus and not dominating the songs as most band singers did. She shares her space here with Hodges and Brown.

BUNDLE OF BLUES — (SD) "also known as "Dragon's Blues", is a sequence of marvelous blues choruses by Brown, Bigard, Duke, Williams, and Hodges, with Cootie playing the eight bar theme at the beginning and end. There are organ backgrounds, but the arrangement is spare and is perfect for the simple mood, the mood which Ellington has created in the blues idiom." (DJ) "…a particularly redolent piece of Ellingtonia. Written in 1932, it was, according to Duke, a composite portrait of three women schoolmasters he knew in his youth in Washington. They taught all winter and toured Europe in the summer; he said, 'To me, that spelled sophistication.'"

STORMY WEATHER — Rhythm Tune recorded in 1933, writing about the Ellington band's London Palladium appearance enthused, "Ivie Anderson in a coloured lady who sings "Stormy Weather" as you'll never hear it again." Unfortunately you don't hear it here either, for, although Ivie had some success with the Harold Arlen - Ted Koehler hit and even sang it in the 1933 Ellington short "Bundle Of Blues", the Brunswick recording was an instrumental rendition for, basically, brass with help from Carney and Bigard.

I'M SATISFIED — (SD) "is sung by Ivie Anderson with an advoit obbligato by Bigard and a lively piano accompaniment. Despite the "popular" character of the number, the arrangement is far from simple with its demands for shifting textures and brief interventions by single horns (Williams, Whetsol, Hodges)."

JIVE STOMP — (SD) "is no pun-on. A swinging performance with fine solos by Carney, Williams and Bigard, it is also noteworthy for the early appearance of Sonny Greer's cymbal work. I think it was the first time the word 'jive' was used on a record." Duke says: "Originally, it had a better meaning, and in the scene that inspired the original title, it was a kind of 'the hopper dog'. When it got into the hands of the people, they gave it a different interpretation, just as they did with 'dig', compared, that is, with its original signification in phrases like 'Plant you now, dig you later.'"

HARLEM SPEAKS — (SD) " was written in London, Duke remembers, "around the time of the movie, Africa Speaks." The trip to England in 1933 was a success beyond expectations, the presence of an audience educated in jazz by writers like Spike Hughes and John Hammond being one of the many surprises. And long before Carnegie Hall opened its doors to him, Duke had packed one of London's biggest movie houses with musicians and jazz for a farewell concert of uncompromising jazz. HARLEM SPEAKS is exactly the kind of performance they wanted to hear. It features Williams, Hodges, Jenkins, Nanton, Brown and, in the last chorus, Nanton again."

IN THE SHADOW OF THE OLD APPLE TREE — (SD) "like "Rose Room", is a brilliant example of how Duke can translate and distinguish other writers' material for which he feels an affection. ("Tho', he says, "was the first popular song I ever remember hearing as a child." The performance does not lack humour, yet it remains after more than five decades a marvelously realised jazz concept: Ivie, Freddy Jenkins plays the muted commentary over the rocking saxes in the first chorus, Nanton and Hodges split the second and Bigard rides out above the subtly swinging ensemble in the third."

SOLITUDE — (SD) "another world-famous composition, was written in twenty minutes. "We were waiting to record and someone was late coming out," Duke recalls. "I needed a fourth number for the session and I sketched out this little thing leaning up against one of the studios glass enclosures. Arthur Whetsol later suggested the title" The brass-blue tone, given an appropriately hushed treatment, has a warm solo interlude by Harry Carney." The number, recorded initially the previous January for Victor, enjoyed a long life in jazz, being recorded often in the following decade (baritone saxist Leo Parker having a particular affection for it) and provided a moving conclusion, at the hands of Ella Fitzgerald, to Duke's famed concert series in May 1974.

SADDEST TALE — (SD) "contains one of Duke's rare vocal appearances on record. "A sad song necessarily has to have a sad voice," he insists, "and I figured I sang sad enough to fit the character." A slow, sad blues, naturally, the soloists are Bigard, Nanton, Hodges, Williams and, on bass clarinet, Harry Carney." This sublime blues reached perfection in the 1934 Ellington short film "Symphony In Black" at which time Duke happily surrendered his vocal duty to the young Billie Holiday.

MOONGLOW — Generously recorded by Duke, considering he had written "Lazy Rhapsody" from which this was stolen. Transferred now, into a feature for Hodges and Williams.

SUMP'N 'BOUT RHYTHM — (SD) "is a descriptive title. "The number originally had lyrics," Duke reveals, "but they were never recorded. Some of my titles and lyrics were often unjustly suspected of containing double-entendre, and titles were changed by the record companies. They would call up and ask, 'Are you sure it isn't vulgar?' I got a little tired of that, and one time I gave them what they'd been suspecting straight. And for once they didn't call, and it wasn't changed! But maybe time and the people have altered the meaning as in the case of 'dig' and 'jive'" In this instrumental version, Jenkins and Hodges split the first chorus, Duke takes the second, Nanton answers the ensemble in the third and the last is given over to an ambitious sax quartet and sixteen original bars for the ensemble."

ADMIRATION (STOMP), FAREWELL BLUES, and **LET'S HAVE A JUBILEE** — although recorded only four months after the last session feature some serious reservations to the Ellington non-band trumpeters of long-standing, Whetsol and Jenkins, had been replaced by Charlie Allen and Rex Stewart, while lone bassman, Wellman Braud, was usurped by twin pluckers Hayes Alvis and Billy Taylor. All trumpeters are given a chance to shine on ADMIRATION — a fiery, mid-tempo piece, FAREWELL BLUES spotlights Cootie and Bigard on a 'mover', and LET'S HAVE A JUBILEE is a vocal feature for Ivie Anderson with important contributions from Nanton, Hodges, and Stewart.

GOS TRYCK AB NORSBORG

MARGIE — had been recorded for Victor in 1932 after the first version of (MY) SOPHISTICATED LADY, but was not issued at the time. This version is a fine, laid-back arrangement with plenty of Duke, an amusing conversation between Hodges and Carney, and an interesting intro boosted by Stewart's trumpet.

DAVE PENNY - March 1989

Side A *(Total time 24.36)*

1. **GET YOURSELF A NEW BROOM** (a)
   (And Sweep Your Blues Away)
   (B15308A) Vocal by Ivie Anderson
2. **BUNDLE OF BLUES (Dragon's Blues)** (b-1)
   (B15337A)
3. **SOPHISTICATED LADY** (b-2)
   (B15336A)
4. **STORMY WEATHER** (b-3)
   (Keeps Rainin' All The Time)
   (B15339A)
5. **I'M SATISFIED** (c-1)
   (B13800A) Vocal by Ivie Anderson
6. **JIVE STOMP** (c-2)
   (B13801A)
7. **HARLEM SPEAKS** (c-3)
   (B13802A)
8. **IN THE SHADE OF THE OLD APPLE TREE** (c-4)
   (B13803A)

Side B *(Total time 23.52)*

1. **SOLITUDE** (d-1)
   (B15910A)
2. **SADDEST TALE** (d-2)
   (B15911A) Vocal by Duke Ellington
3. **MOONGLOW** (d-3)
   (B15912A)
4. **SUMP'N 'BOUT RHYTHM** (d-4)
   (B15913A)
5. **ADMIRATION (Stomp)** (e-1)
   (17409)
6. **FAREWELL BLUES** (e-2)
7. **LET'S HAVE A JUBILEE** (e-3)
   Vocal by Ivie Anderson
8. **MARGIE** (f)
   (B16975-1)

PERSONNEL

(a) *New York City, May 9, 1933*
Arthur Whetsol, Charles "Cootie" Williams, Freddy Jenkins *(trumpets)*, Joseph "Tricky Sam" Nanton, Lawrence Brown *(trombones)*, Juan Tizol *(valve trombone)*, Harry Carney *(clarinet, alto sax, baritone sax)*, Otto Hardwick *(clarinet, alto sax, bass sax)*, Johnny Hodges *(soprano sax, alto sax)*, Joe Garland *(tenor sax)*, Fred Guy (guitar), Edward "Duke" Ellington (piano, arranger), Wellman Braud *(bass)*, William "Sonny" Greer *(drums)*. Hodges *(alto sax solo)*, Brown *(trombone solo)*.

(b) *New York City, May 16, 1933*
Same as (a), except Harvey Bigard *(clarinet, tenor sax)* replaces Garland. (b-1) Williams *(trumpet solo)*, Brown *(trombone solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet solo)*. Hodges *(alto sax solo)*. (b-2) Brown *(trombone solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet solo)*, Hardwick *(alto sax solo)*. (b-3) Whetsol *(1st trumpet solo)*, Williams *(2nd trumpet solo)*, Brown *(trombone solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet solo)*, the trombone/trumpet duet is played by Brown & Williams, the baritone sax/trumpet duet is played by Carney & Williams.

(c) *New York City, August 15, 1933*
Same as (b). (c-1) Williams *(1st and 3rd trumpet solo)*, Whetsol *(2nd trumpet solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet obbligato)*, Hodges *(alto sax break)*, Carney *(bass clarinet)*. (c-2) Nanton *(trombone solo)*, Williams *(trumpet solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet solo)*. (c-3) Williams *(1st trumpet solo)*, Jenkins *(2nd trumpet solo)*, Hodges *(alto sax solo)*, Nanton *(1st and 3rd trombone solo)*, Brown *(2nd trombone solo)*. (c-4) Jenkins *(trumpet solo)*, Nanton *(trombone solo)*, Hodges *(alto sax solo, Bigard (clarinet obbligato)*.

(d) *New York City, September 13, 1934*
Same as (b). (d-1) the three-part harmony of trombone-trumpet-clarinet is played by Nanton, Whetsol & Bigard. (d-2) Bigard *(clarinet intro)*, Nanton *(trombone solo)*, Hodges *(alto sax solo)*, Williams *(trumpet solo)*, Carney *(bass-clarinet solo)*. (d-3) Williams *(trumpet solo)*, Hodges *(soprano sax solo)*. (d-4) Jenkins *(trumpet solo)*, Hodges *(alto sax solo)*, Nanton *(trombone bwah)*.

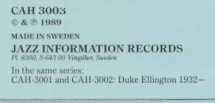
(e) *Chicago, January 9, 1935*
Charlie Allen, "Cootie" Williams *(trumpets)*, Rex Stewart *(cornet, trumpet)*, "Tricky Sam" Nanton, Lawrence Brown *(trombones)*, Juan Tizol *(valve trombone)*, Harry Carney *(clarinet, alto sax, baritone sax)*, Otto Hardwick *(clarinet, alto sax, bass sax)*, Barney Bigard *(clarinet, tenor sax)*, Johnny Hodges *(soprano sax, alto sax)*, Fred Guy (guitar), Edward "Duke" Ellington *(piano, arranger)*, Hayes Alvis, Billy Taylor *(basses)*, "Sonny" Greer *(drums)*. (e-1) Allen *(1st trumpet solo)*, Williams *(2nd trumpet solo)*, Stewart *(3rd trumpet solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet obbligato and solo)*. (e-2) Williams *(trumpet solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet solo)*. (e-3) Nanton *(trombone solo)*, Hodges *(alto sax solo)*, Stewart *(trumpet solo)*, Bigard *(clarinet obbligato)*, Taylor plays tuba instead of bass.

(f) *New York City, March 5, 1935*
"Cootie" Williams, Rex Stewart *(trumpets)*, "Tricky Sam" Nanton, Lawrence Brown *(trombones)*, Juan Tizol *(valve-trombone)*, Johnny Hodges *(soprano sax)*, Otto Hardwick *(alto sax)*, Harry Carney *(baritone sax)*, Hayes Alvis, Billy Taylor *(sax (bassos)*, "Sonny" Greer *(drums)*. Rex Stewart *(trumpet solo)*.

(Gordon Dendle: DUKE ELLINGTON'S STORY ON RECORDS 1932—38 by Lawrence Massagli, Liberty Publishers, and Gunnarson M. Valmark, with additions by Bo Scherman and Benny Aslund)

Remastering by Jack Towers from mint 78 rpm records from the collections of George Hall, Granville Harley, Jack Towers and Jerry Valburn. Song excerpts by Steve Hallindine.

Album production by Jonas Bernholm
(Special thanks to Paul Harris and Steve Hillström)



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In the same series:
CAH-3001 and CAH-3002: Duke Ellington 1932–