





## DUKE ELLINGTON AT THE HOLLYWOOD EMPIRE

1. **Solid Old Man** (Ellington) 3:28
  2. **Singin' In The Rain** (Brown) 6:06
  3. **Three Cent Stomp** (Ellington) 4:06
  4. **Tulip Or Turnip** (Ellington - George) 2:59
  5. **Take The "A" Train** (Strayhorn) 8:15
  6. **Hy'a Sue** (Ellington) 3:53
  7. **"C" Jam Blues** (Ellington) 3:22
  8. **Passion Flower** (Strayhorn) 4:11
  9. **Clementine** (Strayhorn) 2:58
  10. **Just A-Sittin' And A-Rockin'** (Ellington - Strayhorn) 3:17
  11. **One O'Clock Jump** (Basie) 1:56
  12. **Unbooted Character** (Ellington) 4:59
  13. **Paradise** (Strayhorn) 4:48
  14. **How You Sound** (Ellington) 4:14
  15. **It's Monday Every Day** (Robin) 3:17
  16. **Caravan** (Tizol) 5:15
  17. **Cotton Tail** (Ellington) 3:44
- Total time 71:05

### PERSONNEL:

Shelton Hemphill, Al Killian, Francis Williams, Harold Baker, trumpets; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin & vocal; Lawrence Brown, Quentin Jackson, Tyree Glenn, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet & tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, alto sax; Russell Procope, alto sax; Ben Webster, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone sax; Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn, piano; Wendell Marshall, string bass; Sonny Greer, drums; Al Hibbler, vocal; Burley Smith, announcer.

Sessions probably recorded "live" at the Hollywood Empire, Los Angeles, February 1949.

With the end of World War II, jazz achieved a maturity exemplified in the fact that its originators were old enough to be grand-parents - if they were still alive. By 1949, when these recordings were made, Duke Ellington was fifty years old. He had witnessed many changes in jazz and popular music ranging from ragtime and blues through the jazz age following World War II, the swing era and the newest - and seemingly radical - development, be-bop.

By 1949, big bands were on the wane. Many were to fold altogether and the following year would see even the great Count Basie giving up his trademark orchestra for a small group. Ellington had been dealing with his own problems - and solving them: gone were Barney Bigard, Ben Webster, Cootie Williams, Fred Guy, Jimmie Blanton, Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, Juan Tizol, Otto Hardwicke and Rex Stewart from the great 1940 band, which many consider the apogee of Duke's career.

Consider this: Ellington had literally created "Chairs" in his orchestra - not unlike "Chairs" in a university whereby an expert scholar brings prestige and honor to the organization and helps continue its great tradition. And while Ellington had always prided himself in writing specifically for his musicians, the Duke knew that he needed to find replacements for the Clarinet Chair, the Plunger/Growl Trumpet and Trombone Chairs, and the Tenor Sax Chair among others.

One Chair had recently been eliminated altogether - that of the Guitar. For the others, Ellington sought out younger musicians and often had to do with an inadequate substitute until a suitable, permanent replacement had been found. In the case of the Tenor Sax Chair, it seemed the best solution was to re-hire Ben Webster - Webster re-joined a few months before these recordings were made and, once and for all, left shortly afterwards.

Compositionally, Duke continued to write interesting, brilliant and challenging music through this period - the most important being "The Tattooed Bride" for the last Carnegie Hall concert and another widely acknowledged masterpiece, "Harlem", in the near future.

Thus, the recordings on this CD capture Ellington in a transitional phase - but, as always, producing exciting music. Admitting a few minor exceptions, almost half of the compositions heard here were never played again by Ellington - most of those having been premiered in the studio for his then

new Columbia Records contract in 1947 or at his November 13, 1948 Carnegie Hall concert. It was time to finish writing the paragraph, turn the page and begin a new chapter. What follows is an accompaniment to the music captured here in the new year of 1949.

Part 1 from "Jubilee" transcription # 336

What we hear on this recording might be the last time Ellington played "Solid Old Man". From its first studio recording for Brunswick on March 21, 1939, it seems the piece remained active in the orchestra's repertoire for the next seven years - even appearing in the program of Ellington's 4th Carnegie Hall concert on January 4, 1946.

The tune, a wild romp/stomp in a minor key, is simple and direct in its AABA construction. The 'A' section pits riffs from the trumpets against the saxes with trombonist Lawrence Brown moving in on the bridge and even taking over the melodic interest when the 'A' section returns. The second chorus features the saxes with a descending melody reminiscent of the opening to Mercer Ellington's 1941 tune, "Jumpin' Pumpkins".

Tyree Glenn takes the third chorus and demonstrates why many consider him to be the trombonist who most thoroughly imitated the difficult nuances of Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton's plunger work. Nanton died in 1946 and it wasn't until a year later that Ellington found a suitable replacement in Glenn.

Ellington's piano precedes an interlude dovetailed onto the preceding bridge and seems to predict a melodic idea heard in Charles Mingus' 1956 watershed composition "Haitian Fight Song" - yet another example of the Duke maintaining and leading the avant garde in jazz music.

The "out-chorus" reprises the opening melody which Ellington then develops into a dramatic, dynamic conclusion of such power which few other bands of the time could meet. On this point, it seems to me that only Dizzy Gillespie's 1945-1950 big band could approach the intensity of Ellington's.

"Singin' In The Rain" is a song remembered today because it was featured in a 1952 MGM movie of the same name which starred the fabulous dancer, Gene Kelly. However, we should know that this innocuous, if not trite, ditty was composed by Nacio Herb Brown with words by Arthur Freed for an early sound film, Hollywood Revue of 1929. The song was performed in the film by Cliff Edwards - AKA: Ukulele Ike & the voice of Disney's Pinocchio - along with The Brox Sisters, Charles King, Gus Edwards, Marie Dressler, Bessie Love and Polly Moran. As to why Ellington would add such a banal tune to his repertoire in the late 1940s is difficult to understand - even considering that Judy Garland sang it in a dog of a 1940 movie called Little Nellie Kelly. [Of which one wag proclaimed: "Little Nellie Kelly is the only film in which Judy Garland died."] Two takes of "Singin' . . ." were made on November 14, 1947 for Columbia records and it was occasionally featured in his club and dance sets prior to the 1949 Hollywood Empire residency. The last known performance of this arrangement is from September 3, 1949, when it was recorded from another residency at "The Click" in Philadelphia.

In this version, Johnny Hodges begins, stating and embellishing the melody to the accompaniment of Ellington and the rhythm section - and, as we hear throughout these recordings, the tapping of many feet. The second chorus introduces the rest of the sax section playing the melody in unison while Hodges floats in and around with an obbligato which seem deceptively easy-going. In the third chorus, Hodges gives way to Tyree Glenn in what seems to be a simple "head arrangement" - until the full band barges into the matter with a torrent of notes signaling the beginning of the 1947 studio arrangement and which sounds nothing like an Ellington score.

Returning for another solo, Hodges shifts gears into a more virtuosic and aggressive mode followed by Ray Nance, who begins his solo with a quote from the trumpet solo in Igor Stravinsky's ballet music, Petruska. From there, Nance moves into a more abstract, expressionistic style similar to that of Cootie Williams' of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Finally, Nance closes his statement with a brief flourish of virtuosity more accomplished than what he has attempted in the studio two years earlier. The rather ordinary scoring for the full orchestra preceding Nance's second statement trots out a quotation from Lionel Hampton's 1945 "Hey! Ba-Ba-Re-Bop" - among others heard throughout the arrangement.

Lawrence Brown begins the next solo which is, un-typically, different than the studio recording.

Furthermore, Brown spills over into Carney's solo playing a counterpoint which draws from a phrase heard in both "Blue Cellophane" and "Boy Meets Horn" - and which in turn seems inspired by the French horn solo from Richard Strauss' tone poem, "Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche". [Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks]

Surely, the tune - constructed on only two chords - gets more than it deserves from Ellington's performance. As to the arranger? Dick Vance comes to mind, but it could be the work of any competent arranger of the time.

Those who love Ellington's music are always amused by the title, "Three Cent Stomp" which celebrated the cost of United States first class letter postage - that is 3-cents during the years 1932-1958. When playing this piece today, the title should be inflated to "Thirty Seven Cent Stomp" - still a bargain considering how much pleasure we get from Ellington's music. The first known recording of this piece was made on April 20, 1943 while Ellington was in residence at the Hurricane in NYC. "3¢ Stomp" was recorded in the studio for Columbia on November 10, 1947 and, seemingly, last played during his residence at the Hollywood Empire - as heard here recorded in the winter of 1949.

Based on one of Ellington's favorite chord progressions - that of the second strain from William H. Tyers' "Panama" - and used as the foundation of his 1934 "Stompy Jones" (among others), "Three Cent Stomp" is but 16 measures - incidentally, the same length as the chorus of "Singin' In The Rain".

Always a bit startling, is to hear Jimmy Hamilton soloing on tenor sax as he does here in a style as rough-and-ready as his clarinet solos are refined and sophisticated. Before that, we hear an introduction which sports a bit of imitative counterpoint and a "tuneless theme" which poses Harold Baker against responses from the sax section. Tyree Glenn blows an open-horned solo here - beginning with a quote from "Please", a pop tune from the 1930s-

Ray Nance gives us another "Cootie" flavored solo after which he cheerleads Wendell Marshall's bass solo. Also note the incisive chords Ellington scored for the accompaniment in this chorus. Especially interesting is the short stab in the 9th measure which Ellington duplicates on the piano -

but lets it ring creating an effect that is subtle, masterful and magical. Another example of the Maestro's genius demonstrated through the most simple of means.

Al Killian takes over the absent Cat Anderson's high note chorus before the saxes play two sets of "soli" passages - that being an intricate melodic line harmonized à la the famous "Cottontail" chorus. A reprise of the imitative counterpoint from the introduction sets up Hamilton's sax solo, followed by more exciting high notes of Killian as he rides out the last chorus. The excitement generated by the power of the Ellington orchestra - fueled by a 5-piece trumpet section - appropriately sent the audience into a thunderous roar of cheers and applause.

Ray Nance comes forward - without his trumpet - to the accompaniment of more tapping feet and a groovy introduction to sing one of Ellington's funniest songs, "Tulip or Turnip". Lyricist Don George who also wrote the words to "I Ain't Got Nothin' But The Blues" and "I'm Beginning To See The Light" for Ellington - but probably made more money with "The Yellow Rose Of Texas" - is often overlooked as a clever, witty lyricist, perhaps one of Ellington's best. George is also noted for his book "Sweet Man: The Real Duke Ellington" (1981), a ribald memoir of his times with the Duke from 1943 until 1974.

After Nance's vocal which juxtaposes moonbeams and mudpies, bankrolls and I.O.U.s, Lawrence Brown steps forward with a solo unusual for his use of double-time fast notes in the last half. The cup-muted trumpet solo is by Harold Baker who took over the "Sweet Trumpet Chair" established by Arthur Whetsel. After an instrumental passage, Nance returns to sing it out and "direct the band". Certainly the centerpiece on this CD is the "Extended Version Of Take The 'A' Train". The well known story of Billy Strayhorn's best-known composition does not need to be repeated here. Suffice to say, it became Ellington's theme song; is often played by contemporary big bands in a variety of arrangements ranging from exact transcriptions to creative interpretations; and still serves as a favorite for jam sessions.

The beginning of this performance is exactly what we have heard countless of times. A bit different, however, is Nance's first solo - and especially his choice of mute - but his following open-horn solo is more familiar. The next band passage, with some discernible noodle-ing possibly from Duke's

"guest" saxophonist, is newly scored material before we hear the last eight measures (repeated) of the standard arrangement. From this point on, everything is new, compared to the famous studio recording. Jimmy Hamilton plays a brilliant full chorus solo on clarinet demonstrating his advance conception of the "new jazz". Rather untypically, he completes his solo four measures before the end of the chorus. The explanation for this is made at the beginning of the following tenor sax solo - it is again by Hamilton, who needed time to switch instruments (as well as styles, since he plays the larger instrument in quite a different manner).

The next two choruses are by trumpeter Al Killian, who was close to Dizzy Gillespie's be-bop concept. Note that Ellington's longtime drummer, Sonny Greer, becomes more prominent in Killian's second chorus. Unfortunately, Greer's "new" beat does not swing and the effect can, at best, be considered counterproductive. The following piano solo doesn't sound like Ellington - it must be by Strayhorn - which signals a double-time rhythm at the end of his chorus. This brings the band into a final up-tempo chorus which closes with a cadenza from Harry Carney who ends on his lowest note - an unresolved D-flat which leaves listeners waiting for the final 'C' chord.

#### Part 2 from "Just Jazz" transcription # 46

With "Hy'a Sue", we reach the first blues piece on the CD. First recorded in California for Columbia on August 14, 1947, this piece never gained any currency as a popular favorite - perhaps because the Columbia recordings never got the distribution and advertisement of even those Victors recorded just a year earlier. However, the Duke believed enough in the piece, that he kept it in his repertoire until at least 1962 - Ray Nance and Paul Gonsalves even chose it for their Black Lion quintet session in 1970. At the Hollywood Empire, we get a better performance than the studio recording. The tempo is a bit faster and Jimmy Hamilton, again on tenor sax, takes places originally assigned to both him and Johnny Hodges - and is thus allowed to stretch out over more choruses (4). The noisy final chorus and Hamilton's cadenza are also more exciting than the ending on the original record. Note also the duet after the theme. Here Tyree Glenn and Hamilton use their instruments to converse. Sue might have been outraged - or "turned on" - by their vocabulary.

'C' Jam Blues is one of those pieces which defines Ellington's genius. Who else would have been so bold as dare to compose a melody with only two notes? Incidentally, Thelonious Monk, another innovator and great admirer of Ellington composed a three note blues called "Raise Four". Here, the sax section "evolves" Ellington's opening with a little bend or turn in the long note beginning the third measure of the famous riff tune. Although in sunny California, Harold Baker reminds us of the time of year when this recording was made by quoting "Chestnuts Roasting Over An Open Fire" at the beginning of his solo - or was another Ellington admirer, Mel Tormé in attendance? The remainder of the soloists lining up to have their say are: Webster, Glenn, and Hamilton who quotes Monk's "52nd Street Theme". Throughout this piece, Sonny Greer demonstrates why Ellington kept him in the band for more than 25 years. Greer swings, fills, and punches - an impressionistic colorist rather than a mere picket-fence painter.

And speaking of impressionism, Billy Strayhorn moves to the piano to introduce a new arrangement of his "Passion Flower". Like Ravel and Debussy, Strayhorn utilized upper chord extensions of the 9th, 11th and 13th to give his music a dreamy atmosphere and less connected to a particular tonality. In several respects, "Passion Flower" may be seen as a sequenced variant of its composer's "Chelsea Bridge".

As with Strayhorn's arrangement recorded for Victor on July 3, 1941, it remained a feature for Johnny Hodges. What helps make this version strikingly different is Jimmy Hamilton's flurried obbligato during the first three statements of the 'A' theme. Throughout this arrangement, Strayhorn utilizes the orchestra in a more dense and complex orchestration. On the last chord Strayhorn plays an ascending chromatic figure allowing Ellington to slide onto the piano bench and prepare for the introduction to the next piece.

With Ellington now on the piano, we hear him setting up the entry for the band to another Strayhorn composition, "Clementine" - recorded in the studio for Victor on July 2, 1941, but known to have been in the orchestra's repertoire since at least February 13 of that year. Featured soloists on this infectious swinging piece are Hodges and Harold Baker who, utilizing half-valved notes, pays tribute to the "Chair" established by Rex Stewart.

"Just A-Sittin' and A-Rockin'" is announced as a feature for Ben Webster. The only other soloist is Tyree Glenn - again brilliantly taking the role of Joe Nanton. Note how bassist Wendell Marshall demonstrates his kinship with Jimmie Blanton in the introduction and ending.

Ellington's tribute to his friend, and leader of the only other great big band to survive through six decades, presented in an arrangement of Count Basie's theme song, "One O'clock Jump". Unfortunately, we are only able to hear the opening theme and a bit of Webster's solo before the recording is cut off.

Part 3 from "Jubilee" transcription # 361.

Just as dark eyeglasses - shades - determined "hipness", so did footwear. Boots - not the rubber impregnated ones used by Canadians trekking in the frozen north - of elegant design and finest leather helped indicate how far one had climbed up the ladder of cool. Thus, an "un-booted character" was a square and needed to be avoided in social circumstances. Nonetheless, Ellington felt this kind of person needed to be immortalized in music - as he had done so for other characters such as "Stompy Jones", "Jack The Bear" and "John Hardy's Wife".

Lawrence Brown and Jimmy Hamilton are the featured soloists preceding a duet of Harold Baker and Ray Nance engaging in series of "chase choruses". It's interesting to note how Duke reverts to the older practice of a break in the rhythm here - and this break is then used as a bit of comedy which brings the piece to an unexpected unbooted finish.

Of all Ellington's musicians, baritone saxophonist Harry Carney defined the Ellington sound. Cootie Williams, Johnny Hodges, Rex Stewart, Ben Webster, Cat Anderson and many others came and went but Carney alone remained a pillar, from the 1920s to the 1970s, setting the sound of the sax section - if not the entire orchestra. Lore has it that Charles Mingus once tried to hire Carney for a session. Ellington heard about it and supposedly offered Carney \$1,000.00 not to go. Mingus' alternative was to hire two baritone saxophonists to match Carney's massive sound. Billy Strayhorn's "Paradise" is a virtual concerto for Carney which was premiered at the November 13, 1948 Carnegie Hall concert. For some reason, Ellington never recorded it in a studio. Five concert or club perfor-

mances were fortunately recorded, the last one being in Germany on May 29, 1950.

The structure of "Paradise" is a simple 32-bar AABA format with an introduction, interlude and ending. However, the shape of the melody, harmonic language and orchestration put it far beyond what other jazz composers of the time were writing. Decades later, we hear echoes of Strayhorn's - and Ellington's - innovations in the works of people such as Thad Jones, Bob Brookmeyer and Carla Bley.

Rare in Ellington's oeuvre are pieces which acknowledge or copy trends and fashions in jazz. Yet, "How You Sound" is clearly Ellington's take on be-bop which had surfaced as a distinct idiom by 1945. The rather pointillistic melody draws something from Dizzy Gillespie's "Groovin' High" and was presented as the second movement of a suite called "Symphomaniac" premiered at the same Carnegie Hall concert as "Paradise". (Replace the 'S' with an 'N' to understand Duke's pun.)

Oddly perhaps, Ray Nance blows the trumpet solo while a more appropriate choice "Al Killian" plays an ensemble part. Nance, however, does quote Gillespie's "Anthropology" in his solo - but that aside, Nance is Nance. Besides Killian, Jimmy Hamilton was perhaps the most "authentic bopper" in the band. Jazz History has overlooked Hamilton's abilities as a clarinetist who was at least equal to Buddy DeFranco in terms of negotiating the tempos, harmonies and rhythms of bop. As we hear on this track, flat-fifths and oo-pap-a-dow have been easily mastered by Hamilton.

One final point, as a composition/orchestration, "How You Sound" is far more complex and developed than most everything recorded by the bop big bands of the late 1940s. This is another Ellington piece which should be revived in performance today.

Vocalist Al Hibbler is considered to be Ellington's best male vocalist after Herb Jeffries. Singing "It's Monday Every Day", we hear the blind singer easily negotiating the melody against the dissonant harmonies of Strayhorn's arrangement - which was first recorded for Columbia in Hollywood on September 1, 1947. Lawrence Brown is the only instrumental soloist in this short arrangement - about a chorus-and-a-fourth when you factor out the intro and ending.

Little needs to be said about the last two pieces on this disc - "Caravan" and "Cottontail" - as they

became staples in the Ellington repertoire and were performed by a wide variety of large and small bands ranging from jazz to pop to country and western, novelty and symphonic groups.

Ellington made many arrangements of Caravan - each one seemingly having one more dissonant note added to that of before. The soloists heard here are Lawrence Brown, Jimmy Hamilton and Ray Nance on violin who quotes the French national anthem, "La Marseillaise".

"Cottontail" utilizes the original 1940 arrangement with a few low trombone parts added behind Webster's second chorus and an extended ending to give the guest soloist some more blowing room. As the rhythm section begins the rabbit-tempo'd introduction, the announcer makes a point of saying "that's Duke on piano". Ellington and Strayhorn could both imitate each other and in this case, the Duke plays in a lithe and precise manner more associated with the younger man. Later, as in the original recording, a piano solo follows Harry Carney's brief statement. Again, the scales and rhythms employed sound more in the realm of Strayhorn's touch and technique. Could this be Strayhorn filling in as Ellington moves to the front of the orchestra to direct the exciting climax?

One of the things that keep us returning to Ellington's music is the "Mystery". Some great artists present their work with great clarity and comprehensibility. Others bury aspects of meaning and communication deep in the texture and context of their work. With regards to the latter, we are compelled to listen again-and-again - each time deriving some new detail of understanding which may even help to understand the "Mystery" within ourselves.

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Total Time: 71:05

### ORIGINAL 1949 TRANSCRIPTIONS

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