

The Essential
DUKE ELLINGTON
NOVEMBER 1924 to MARCH 14th 1927

All instrumental recordings in chronological order



VJM TIMESPAN — THE LIVING HISTORY OF JAZZ

VJM

VINTAGE SERIES

VLP.71

(VLP.71-A)

MCPS

Side 1

Mono

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DUKE ELLINGTON & HIS WASHINGTONIANS

1. CHOO CHOO (Ellington, Ringle, Schafer)
2. RAINY NIGHTS (Ellington, Trent, Lopez)
3. I'M GONNA HANG AROUND MY SUGAR
(Palmer, Williams)
4. TROMBONE BLUES (Nixon, Williams)
5. GEORGIA GRIND (Williams)
6. PARLOR SOCIAL STOMP (Ellington)
7. (YOU'VE GOT THOSE) WANNA-GO-BACK-AGAIN BLUES
(Turk, Handman)
8. IF YOU CAN'T HOLD THE MAN YOU LOVE (Fain, Kahal)
9. ANIMAL CRACKERS (Coslow, Rich, Link)
10. LI'L FARINA (Smith, Mier)

1, 8 L. Wright 2 Tempo Music 3 FDH

4, 9, 10 Copyright Control

5. Spencer Williams 6 Mills Music

7 Campbell Connolly

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VJM

VINTAGE SERIES

VLP.71

(VLP.71-B)

MCPS

Side 2

Mono

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DUKE ELLINGTON & HIS KENTUCKY
CLUB ORCHESTRA

1. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (Ellington)
2. BIRMINGHAM BREAKDOWN (Ellington)
3. IMMIGRATION BLUES (Ellington)
4. THE CREEPER (Ellington)
5. THE CREEPER (Ellington) - Alternate Take
6. NEW ORLEANS LOW-DOWN (Ellington)
7. SONG OF THE COTTON FIELD (Grainger)
8. BIRMINGHAM BREAKDOWN (Ellington)
9. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (Ellington)

All items Mills Music

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DUKE ELLINGTON VOLUME ONE

VLP.71 (mono)

SIDE 1

1. CHOO CHOO (a) November 1924
2. RAINY NIGHTS (a) November 1924
3. I'M GONNA HANG AROUND MY SUGAR (b) September 1925
4. TROMBONE BLUES (c) September 1926
5. GEORGIA GRIND (c) March 1926
6. PARLOR SOCIAL STOMP (c) March 1926
7. YOU'VE GOT THOSE! WANNA GO BACK AGAIN BLUES (d) 1st April 1926
8. IF YOU CAN'T HOLD THE MAN YOU LOVE (d) 1st April 1926
9. ANIMAL CRACKERS (e) 21st June 1926
10. L'L' FARINA (e) 21st June 1926

SIDE 2

1. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (E-4110) (f) 29th November 1926
2. BIRMINGHAM BREAKDOWN (E-4114) (f) 20th November 1926
3. IMMIGRATION BLUES (E4321) (f) 29th November 1926
4. THE CREEPER (E4323) (f) 29th December 1926
5. THE CREEPER (E4324) (f) 29th December 1926
6. NEW ORLEANS LOWDOWN (E4510) (f) 3rd February 1927
7. SONG OF THE COTTON FIELD (E4511) (f) 3rd February 1927
8. BIRMINGHAM BREAKDOWN (E21841) (f) 20th February 1927
9. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (E21872) (f) 14th March 1927

- (a) THE WASHINGTONIANS: Bubber Miley (cnt), Charlie Ivris (tmb), Otto Hardwick (clt, alto); Duke Ellington (pno, arr, leader); Fred Guy (bjo); Sonny Greer (dms). New York, November 1924
- (b) as (a), but Pike Davis (tp) replaces Miley; Prince Robinson (clt, ten) and Henry 'Bass' Edwards (bbs) added; Greer omitted. New York September 1925
- (c) DUKE ELLINGTON'S WASHINGTONIANS: Harry Cooper, Leroy Rutledge (pns), Charlie Ivris (tmb); Otto Hardwick (alto, bar); Don Redman (clt, alto); Duke Ellington (pno, arr, leader); Fred Guy (bjo); Henry 'Bass' Edwards (bbs); Sonny Greer (dms). New York March 1926
- (d) DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA: as (c), plus Jimmy Harrison (tmb, voc); Prince Robinson, George Thomas (clt, ten). New York, c. April 1, 1926
- (e) DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS WASHINGTONIANS: Bubber Miley, Charlie Johnson (tps); Joe Nanton or Charlie Ivris (tmb); Otto Hardwick (alto, bar); Prince Robinson (clt, ten); Duke Ellington (pno, arr, leader); Fred Guy (bjo); Henry 'Bass' Edwards (bbs); Sonny Greer (dms). New York, June 21, 1926
- (f) DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS KENTUCKY CLUB ORCHESTRA: Bubber Miley, Louis Metcalf (tps); Joe Nanton (tmb); Otto Hardwick (sop, alto, bar); Prince Robinson? and another (clt, ten); Duke Ellington (pno, arr, leader); Fred Guy (bjo); Henry 'Bass' Edwards (bbs); Sonny Greer (dms). New York

When Edward Kennedy Ellington died in May 1974, the jazz world suffered a grievous loss from which it will never fully recover. Following closely upon the death of Louis Armstrong, who at times, like Ellington, had seemed indestructible, it was a time of extreme sadness. Often on such occasions, one hears comments such as "fortunately for us, he left a treasury of immortal performances on record" which is, it seems to me, a very impersonal and selfish viewpoint. All the same it is important that great musical performances be kept available on record. In Ellington's case it is essential. Future generations will be listening and learning about Ellington a hundred years from today, to quote the song title.

Consider the facts. For well over half a century, Ellington's involvement in jazz was of such magnitude that when he died, it became difficult to envisage the future without his inspiration and guidance. Consider too the many post-war concerts in this country. Not always entirely satisfying to the more enlightened members of his audiences, they were nonetheless carefully planned to include the all-time hits because, as Ellington himself admitted, this was what the public had come to hear. It therefore was obligatory for the programmes to include the Paul Gonsalves marathon, the drum solo, and the "dreaded medley" as it became known to the students and collectors. Occasionally, however, there were other delights to the ear, and the unexpected inclusion of "Echoes of Harlem" from 1936 or "Harmony in Harlem" from 1937, was a sure and welcome respite from the over-played items. Naturally, one could always turn to the records for the "once only" masterpieces, compositions hastily written and rejected just as quickly. But in the days of the British concert, LP planning appeared to be almost non-existent, with anything from the twenties to the fifties carelessly thrown together on one release.

Of course, Ellington did not spend a lifetime composing, arranging, playing and listening to jazz without experiencing, and being responsible for, changes in the music. So it follows that "Rocks in Rhythm" when performed in 1954, had very little connection with the delicate sound picture first recorded in 1926. The changes are all there on record, commencing in late 1924 and continuing steadily into the 1970's. Statistics in general are usually cold and uninteresting, but it is fascinating to observe that it would take almost fifty hours to hear each recording one only, and that only goes for the commercially issued 78's.

Today, without Ellington, it is essential that some form of complete reissue programme is formulated on LP and this release brings together the first nineteen orchestral titles in chronological sequence, to lay the foundation stone, as it were. Collected together from the Blue Disc, Pathé, Grammet, Vocalion and Brunswick labels, this LP covers almost two and a half years of the orchestra's development. It takes no more than one hour to play through, but the changes emerge, loud and clear.

"Choo Choo" and "Rainy Nights" would no doubt be considered rather nondescript performances were it not for the solos of Miley and Ivris. However, it is interesting to note in passing that Ellington's fascination with trains comes through right at the commencement of his recording career. The succeeding six titles suffer a little from the absence of Miley, but it would seem that Hardwick scurries about on a variety of reeds during the course of "Georgia Grind" and "Parlor Social Stomp". Cooper, Rutledge, Ivris and Redman all contribute to the already expanding ensemble sound. "Animal Crackers" and "L'L' Farina" find Miley reinstated, and he contributes solos of great quality to both selections. Some doubt exists regarding the identity of the trombonist, but on aural evidence it appears likely that Nanton, and not Ivris, was present.

As side one closes, we come to the end of the acoustic, i.e. pre-electric recordings. The improved recording techniques of the electrical era to be found on the remaining titles give the orchestra a brighter, cleaner sound, but the repertoire is improving too. So we commence with the very first recording of Ellington's early "signature tune", "East St. Louis Tooodle-oo" which, together with "Birmingham Breakdown" was the orchestra's first Vocalion release, a great rarity today, as are most of the remaining titles.

"Immigration Blues" is a beautiful piece of orchestral writing, shows clearly just how fast Ellington was learning his trade. Quite simply it is a masterpiece. By contrast, "The Creeper" bounces along merrily, and both takes contain noticeably different solos. It is the first recorded example of Ellington using the "Tiger Rag" chords as a basis for composition, a device he was to call upon many times as the years progressed.

Two more rarities follow, "New Orleans Lowdown" and "Song Of The Cotton Field" were only recorded on this occasion, and although both are simple orchestral frameworks by usual Ellington standards, they are remarkably inventive, bearing in mind that it is 1927. The later versions of "Toodle-oo" and "Breakdown" conclude this first volume. They were Ellington's first recordings for Brunswick, and history repeats itself as, following Vocalion's example, Brunswick issue them as their first Ellington release.

Finally, a word on the personnel. The details listed here are taken from the latest edition of Brian Rust's discography, which excludes both Rudy Jackson and Harry Carney from all the sessions on side two of this LP. My ears tell me that both players could well be present, but this is purely a matter of conjecture.

GEORGE ELLIS.

Sleeve Design: Stephen Hill
Transcription: John H.J. Wadley
Source Material: courtesy Ron Clough, John Wadley, George Ellis.

Owing to the age and rarity of the original recordings used in the production of this record, some extraneous interference is, in certain instances, unavoidable. Modern transcription techniques combined with skilful transferring have enabled us to overcome the worst aspects of this problem, whilst retaining the best of the original sound. We are confident that any remaining deficiencies will not impair your enjoyment of these important performances.

OTHER JAZZ ISSUES ON THE V.J.M. LABEL

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(mono)

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