

The Essential
DUKE ELLINGTON

MARCH 22nd 1927 to DECEMBER 19th 1927

All instrumental recordings in chronological order



VJM TIMESPAN - THE LIVING HISTORY OF JAZZ

VJ M

VINTAGE SERIES

VLP.72
VW.533
MCPS

Side 1
Mono
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THE ESSENTIAL DUKE ELLINGTON 22-3-27. — 19-12-27

1. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (Ellington, Milley)
2. HOP HEAD (Ellington, Hardwick)
3. DOWN IN OUR ALLEY BLUES (Ellington, Hardwick)
4. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY (Ellington, Milley)
5. SOLILOQUY (Ellington, Bloom)
6. WASHINGTON WOBBLE (Ellington)
7. CREOLE LOVE CALL (Ellington, Milley, Jackson)
8. THE BLUES I LOVE TO SING, Take 1 (Ellington, Milley)
9. THE BLUES I LOVE TO SING, Take 2 (Ellington, Milley)
10. BLACK AND TAN FANTASIE (Ellington, Milley)

L. Wright

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Side 2
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THE ESSENTIAL DUKE ELLINGTON 22-3-27. — 19-12-27

1. WASHINGTON WOBBLE (Ellington)
2. WHAT CAN A POOR FELLOW DO? (Meyers, Schoebel)
3. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY, Take B (Ellington, Milley)
4. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY, Take C (Ellington, Milley)
5. CHICAGO STOMP DOWN (Creamer, Johnson)
6. HARLEM RIVER QUIVER, Take 1 (McHugh, Fields, Healy)
7. HARLEM RIVER QUIVER, Take 3 (McHugh, Fields, Healy)
8. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (Ellington, Milley)
9. BLUE BUBBLES, Take 1 (Ellington, Milley)
10. BLUE BUBBLES, Take 2 (Ellington, Milley)

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 L. Wright
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THE ESSENTIAL DUKE ELLINGTON 22.3.27 TO 19.12.27 VLP.72

Side 1

- X1. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (143705-3) (Ellington-Miley) (a)
- X2. HOP HEAD (143706-2) (Ellington-Hardwick) (a)
- X3. DOWN IN OUR ALLEY BLUES (143707-2) (Ellington-Hardwick) (a)
4. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY (E-4874) (Ellington-Miley) (b)
6. SOLILOQUY (E-4866) (Ellington-Bloom) (c)
- X6. WASHINGTON WOBBLE (40156-1) (Ellington) (d)
- X7. CREOLE LOVE CALL (39370-1) (Ellington-Miley-Jackson) (e)
- X8. THE BLUES I LOVE TO SING (39371-1) (Ellington-Miley) (e)
- X9. THE BLUES I LOVE TO SING (The Blues I Love to Hear) (39371-2) (Ellington-Miley) (a)
10. BLACK AND TAN FANTASIE (40155-4) (Ellington-Miley) (f)

Side 2

1. WASHINGTON WOBBLE (40156-5) (Ellington) (f)
- X2. WHAT CAN A POOR FELLOW DO? (81775-A) (Billy Meyers-Elmer Schoobell) (g)
- X3. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY (81776-B) (Ellington-Miley) (g)
- X4. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY (81776-C) (Ellington-Miley) (g)
- X5. CHICAGO STOMP DOWN (81777-C) (Creamer-Johnson) (h)
- X6. HARLEM RIVER QUIVER (41244-1) (Brown Berries) (McHugh-Fields-Healy) (i)
- X7. HARLEM RIVER QUIVER (41244-3) (Brown Berries) (McHugh-Fields-Healy) (i)
- X8. EAST ST. LOUIS TOODLE-OO (41245-2) (Ellington-Miley) (i)
- X9. BLUE BUBBLES (41246-1) (Ellington-Miley) (i)
- X10. BLUE BUBBLES (41246-2) (Ellington-Miley) (i)

Personnels:

(a) DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS WASHINGTONIANS

Duke Ellington (pno, dir, arr); Bubber Miley, Louis Metcalf (tpns); Joe Nanton (trmb); Otto Hardwick (sop, alto, bar); Prince Robinson & another (cl, tr); Fred Guy (bjo); Henry Edwards (bbs); Sonny Greer (dr). New York, 22nd Mar 1927.

(b) THE WASHINGTONIANS

As for (a) New York, 7th April 1927.
 (c) As for (b) except June Clark (tp) replaces Miley; Rube Bloom (arr.) New York 30th April 1927.

(d) DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Duke Ellington (pno, dir, arr); Bubber Miley, Louis Metcalf (tpns); Joe Nanton (trmb); Otto Hardwick (sop, alto, bar); Harry Carey (clt, alto, bar); Rudy Jackson (clt, tr); Fred Guy (bjo); Wellman Braud (str, bnd); Sonny Greer (dr). New York, 6th October 1927.

(e) As for (d) plus Adelaide Hall (voc). Camden, N.J. 26th Oct 1927.

(f) As for (e) except Adelaide Hall.

(g) As for (f) except Jabbo Smith (tp) replaces Miley. New York, 3rd Nov 1927.
 (h) As for (g) plus Adelaide Hall (voc), originally issued as "THE CHICAGO FOOTWARMERS".

(i) As for (h) except Adelaide Hall and Bubber Miley (tp) replaces Jabbo Smith. New York, 19th Dec 1927.

The twenty tracks which make up this volume cover recordings from March 1927 to December 1927, a short but rich period in the Ellington orchestra's development. Outside of the recording studio, the orchestra was also making its own records into the big time. They continued to play at the Kentucky Club and other New York venues, and also appeared in the "Masini 'Around" revue at the Plantation Cafe. Towards the end of the year a high peak was reached when they commenced a residency at the New York Cotton Club, an association which continued at various times until well into the thirties. Much of the music was required as backing to the many and varied dancing acts who appeared at the Cotton Club, and many of the tracks included here are good examples of this. Ellington himself has told of the circumstances preceding the Cotton Club booking. The orchestra was late in arriving, and so too was the booker. Consequently, Ellington's was the only band he heard, and they got the job. It is conceivable that Cal Followy would have secured the booking, but doubtful that the Ellington genius could have remained under wraps for very long. Listen to the majesty contained here for confirmation of this.

The first three titles are from Ellington's very first session for Columbia. "East St. Louis Tooodle-oo", with its very assured contributions from Miley, is somewhat different to the two earlier versions contained in volume one. "Hop Head" is very typical of the period, and most suitable for dancing. In fact the original 78 added the word Orchestra to the title. The solo routine is rather complicated, but Hardwick, Metcalf and Nanton all solo with authority. These three are again well featured on "Down In Our Alley", which like "Hop Head", is recorded here for the first and only time.

We return to Brunswick for the next track, the initial recording of the celebrated "Black and Tan Fantasy". This is distinguished from subsequent recorded performances by the hypnotic banjo sounds behind Miley's early choruses, and the aggressive brass. So "Sollowry", a composition by the white pianist Rube Bloom, could almost have been written by an Ellington record, and seems a strange choice for an Ellington recording. It is a fascinating performance, although somewhat abused, with the orchestra sounding ill at ease for much of the time. Miley is replaced by June Clark, and this is the only recording by Ellington on which he appears. It has been suggested over the years that all the solo work is by him, but I suspect that Metcalf is the player.

"Washington Wobble" (take 1) is taken from the band's first session for Victor. Solos are by Metcalf, Jackson (clt), Ellington, Hardwick (alto) and Nanton. The stride piano is a little inflated, but effective, and Nanton takes his way halfway through but recovers, probably the reason for another try twenty days later.

"Creole Love Call" Ellington's celebrated extension of Joe Oliver's "Camp Meeting Mile" turns in a classic performance, and the clarinet duo of Jackson and Carey is effective. The two takes of "Blues I Love to Sing" contain much variation. Miley plays an uncharacteristic sweet solo, and Hardwick contributes a very beautiful secondary theme. Adelaide Hall adds magic, although I cannot understand her spoken comment on either take. "And Would The Long Night" seems reasonably close. Not a blues in form, in spite of the title. "Black and Tan Fantasie" is so close to the original live spelling, is undoubtedly the finest of all the early versions. The sparkling recording adds class to a classic performance, with Miley, Hardwick, Ellington and Nanton all in top form. In fact, the original coupling of this and "Creole Love Call" (Victor 2113) — subsequently issued here on HMV X4957) is possibly the greatest concentrated six minutes of Ellington ever released back to back.

Side two commences with the remakes of "Washington Wobble", the fifth take. This version is relaxed and confident, and obviously was the correct choice for the original issue. For the band's first session for Okeh, Miley was replaced by Jabbo Smith, who adds his own individual style to the four recordings. He never appeared on an Ellington recording session again, but nonetheless leaves his mark with much sweet and lyrical playing. His restraint on both takes of "Black and Tan" makes these versions unique. The solo sequence is a little different too. After Hardwick's solo, the two choruses on take B are shared by Nanton and Smith in that order, whereas Jabbo takes both choruses on Take C. I recall that some thirty years ago, it was generally thought by many that two trumpeters by the name of Jabbo Smith existed. True, it is hard to reconcile the delicate playing heard here with the explosive "Jazz Bantz" by the Rhythm Aces. We cannot but admire such versatility. Adelaide Hall returns for "Chicago Stomp Down", with solos by Hardwick, Nanton and Jackson.

We go back to Victor for the final sides of this volume. The clarity of the recordings from this session is truly remarkable for December 1927. "Grown Dearer" (for "Harlem River Quiver" to quote the original title) is typical of the Cotton Club dance routines I mentioned earlier, and is by Nanton, Ellington and Carey. Take one is the original 1927 issue. Take three did not appear until several years later. Less confident than the original version, it contains some interesting variations. Note Ellington's headlong rush into the second chorus, and the brass scoring behind Carey's solo.

"East St. Louis" in this version, is slow and quite the most ponderous of all the early recordings of this title. Miley is superb, and Carey is submerged to such an extent that he almost sounds to be playing a base sax. Even so, I find it completely charming.

Finally, "Blue Bubbles", another likely candidate for a Cotton Club floor show. Take one is the original issue, take 2 remained buried until much more recently. The solos are by Miley, Nanton, Metcalf and Hardwick, who plays alto on the first take, soprano on the second. This soprano outing can only be regarded as a brave experiment, with the player strapped by his own inexperience. I believe this to be the only Ellington recording with a soprano saxophone solo prior to Johnny Hodges joining the orchestra.

GEORGE ELLIS

SPECIAL NOTE

This compilation includes different takes only where some significant musical variation is involved, such as changes of solo, soloist or arrangement. Takes which were originally rejected because of obvious mistakes in performance or recording, are not included; neither are closely-similar duplicates.

Sleeve Design: Stephen Hill

Transcription: John H. J. Wadley

Source Material: courtesy John Wadley, George Ellis.

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DUKE ELLINGTON

MARCH -
 DECEMBER 1927

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