

A DATE WITH THE DUKE

Vol. 5
1945-46



DUKE
ELLINGTON
and his famous orchestra



A DATE WITH THE DUKE

Vol. 5 — 1945-46

FAIRMONT

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS FAMOUS ORCHESTRA

FA-1007

Side 1

33 1/3 RPM

**BACK HOME IN INDIANA (Hanley-MacDonald)
BLUE SERGE (Ellington)
JUMPIN' PUNKINS (Ellington)
ON THE SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET
(Fields-McHugh)
COTTONTAIL (Ellington)**

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Side 2

33 1/3 RPM

**NEW WORLD A-COMIN' (Ellington)
JOHNNY COME LATELY (Strayhorn)
LET THE ZOOMERS DROOL (Ellington-Hodges)**

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Fairmont records would like to extend its thanks to Mel Torme for suggesting this series, for providing the required material from his own very special collection of Duke Ellington's music, and for his perceptive liner notes which tell us much about the mood of the times which produced this large segment of Ellingtonia.

Just prior to Duke Ellington's death in 1974, Downbeat Magazine called me for a quote to be used in their issue honoring the Duke's 75th birthday. I told them that if I were to be stranded on some imaginary desert island, I would survive quite well as long as there were Ellington records to play. Indeed, scarcely a week has gone by without the inclusion of some of Duke's music in my curriculum, either on a professional plane or merely for mandatory listening purposes.

Having spent my early boyhood in the heart of the black (they called it "colored" in those days) community of Chicago, I will never forget the impact of the first Ellington composition I ever heard. It was his initial extended work, written to commemorate the death of his beloved mother, and he called the sad, haunting, dirgelike piece "Reminiscing in Tempo." Written in 1935, it mirrored the frustrating, bitter-sweet life of the American Negro more poignantly than any other music I have ever heard and remains, today, my favorite example of Ellingtonia.

When I got to know the Duke personally, in the late forties, I used to pester him constantly to revive "Reminiscing" and play it, live, for me. One night, he reluctantly capitulated, and his then-current band made the valiant attempt, a performance the Birdland patrons present will not soon forget. It was a shambles. The work was peculiar to an era, the thirties, just as the band that originally played "East St. Louis Toodle Oo" belonged to the twenties.

Duke Ellington spanned several decades musically in his long and productive lifetime, changing personnel, discovering new, exciting, inventive musicians to interpret his unique compositions and orchestrations. I have met Ellington buffs who have no interest in anything the Duke wrote or the band played past 1935. I have known fans who marched only to Ellington, circa 1950 and beyond. For me (and thousands of others, happily), the optimum Ellington organization was that happy aggregate of musicians who formed the Duke Ellington orchestra of the war years — the '40's band!

We all seemed to be doing things with an excess of vigor and enthusiasm in those days, a symptom, perhaps, of the speeded-up pace of living brought on by the war effort. The Ellington band was no exception. Sparkplugged by the likes of Rex Stewart, Cat Anderson, "Tricky Sam," Lawrence Brown, Jimmy Hamilton, Al Sears and Junior Raglan, graced with the presence of stalwart lead men such as Johnny Hodges, Harold Baker and Shelton Hemphill, and imbued with the strangely correct gong-bashing, rim-shooting, spanging, old-fashioned (in the very best tradition) drumming of Sonny Greer, the wartime band sported some of Duke's most enduring compositions as well as his most provocative arranging.

In 1945, with the war grinding down to a merciful halt, America was blessed, on Saturday afternoons, with a series of broadcasts called, "Date With the Duke." From such diverse locales as the 400 Restaurant at 43rd and Broadway in New York City, to the Paradise Theatre in Detroit and the Regal Theatre at 47th and South Parkway in Chicago, from an Army camp near Evansville, Indiana, to the concert stage of the Civic Opera

House, also in the Windy City and on out to the old Casa Manana in Los Angeles, the Duke and his men held forth on a series of broadcasts so memorable I built my life around them on Saturdays, as did most Ellington fans I knew. However, I went my fellow enthusiasts one better.

I had almost every one of the live broadcasts professionally recorded! The immediacy, the spontaneity of those "remotes" was matchless, far more thrilling than the cut-and-dried aura of commercial recordings. I have treasured those airchecks for nearly three decades now, guarding them jealously, playing them sparingly and carefully.

When the Duke passed away, I suddenly wanted to share them with every man and woman who ever idolized him and understood how terribly special he and his sidemen were. This LP, and all the other LPs in this "Date With the Duke" series, is a living testament to the man who, perhaps, did most to change the face of jazz and influence its protagonists therein.

The LPs also amply explore the orchestra itself, with special attention focused on its soloists and its singers. Al Hibbler, Kay Davis, Joya Sherrill, Marie Ellington, Ray Nance . . . they're all here, live and in person. Joya makes a boss out of "The Bug" and nearly starts singing a few bars too soon, and it's wonderful and human and why these records are so exceptional. The ensemble itself, always the looser on commercial records, is even more relaxed on these broadcasts. There are flops, mistakes — there is occasional raggedness to the playing. Forget it! It's not important! The musical content is where it's at, and for me (and you, hopefully), this group of Ellington recordings will be the most satisfying you have ever encountered.

I had the opportunity to work with the Ellington band on two occasions. In 1961, we co-starred at the Indiana Jazz Festival in Evansville, Indiana. It was a night I will never forget.

The audience was at its well-behaved best — about 8000 people, listening intently, ingesting the Ellington diet. They rose and gave him and the band a well-deserved standing ovation. Then it was my turn, and with the band at my back, it all came together for me, as well. Duke used to refer to me, affectionately, as his "First Chair Percussionist" and that night, as on many others, I sat in on drums and played the perennial "Rockin' In Rhythm." It was one of the high points of my career, personally and professionally.

In 1965, Duke and I shared billing at Basin Street East in New York, and I was able to renew warm friendships with Cat Anderson, Jimmy Hamilton, John Lamb, Louis Bellson and the steadfast, protean, talented, gentle man called Harry Carney. Ellington's arranging, the intricate, dissonant voicings, the clustered sax figures, the moody mating of bass clarinet, plunger, trombone and muted trumpet, was like spinach; sometimes it didn't taste good, but it was always good for you. His composing talents encompassed a broad spectrum, from huge efforts like "Black, Brown and Beige" to commercial ditties such as "Satin Doll," "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" (or, as Al Hibbler sings it, "Entymore") and "Solitude."

Well. Enough. Writing about music can never be as nourishing as actually listening to it. So, here it is! The '40's wartime Ellington brood in all its roaring glory, spearheaded by The Man himself.

I miss Duke Ellington. We will never see his like again.

Mel Torme

PLAYABLE ON MONO AND STEREO EQUIPMENT

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Side 1

BACK HOME AGAIN IN INDIANA (3:20)
BLUE SERGE (4:10)
JUMPY PUNKINS (3:31)
ON THE SUNNY SIDE
OF THE STREET (6:04)
COTTONTAIL (4:08)

Side 2

NEW WORLD A-COMIN' (12:58)
JOHNNY COME LATELY (3:10)
LET THE ZOOMERS DROOL (4:43)

All titles — Evansville, Indiana
June 16, 1945

Of General Interest to Collectors:

The major objectives governing the selection of material for this special series are, first, to include every available version of Duke Ellington's great instrumental pieces since those performances represent much more than simply different "takes" made on a single occasion. Only in a few rare instances of unmitigated broadcast quality will a performance of consequence be excluded, and then only when a better recording of the same title is available at another time and place. Secondly, titles of less relative significance, however often they are repeated, will usually be given a single hearing only . . . or, in the instance of some small amount of substantial material, be eliminated altogether. All of the commentary on these broadcasts that does not relate directly to the music has been deleted in the interest of including as many titles as possible on each side. If some of the segues are less than smooth, due to abrupt applause endings necessitated by the editing, we believe the occasional acceptance of this situation is preferable to introducing the additional step in the recording process that would be necessary in order to fade the applause and provide a smoother transition between titles. While in certain instances these decisions might seem somewhat arbitrary, the primary aim throughout the production of this series is to preserve the highest level of artistic merit the name Duke Ellington evokes for most of us. While a continuing investigation of this material and a study of the band's itinerary would indicate that the information contained in Jepsen's "Jazz Records, Vol. 3, CO-EL" is not all inclusive and chronologically inaccurate, we would recommend this volume to all Ellington collectors for what information this pioneering work has to offer, particularly in regard to the changes that occurred in the band's personnel during the period of these recordings. The pleasant task of identifying the soloists thus becomes a little easier.

D. C.

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RE-RECORDING AND MASTERING BY Cecil Spiller
COVER DESIGN BY Alan Pollock

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