



# DUKE ELLINGTON

*The Jimmy Blanton era*



## EDWARD KENNEDY "DUKE" ELLINGTON

Director, arranger, composer, piano-player.

1899 He was born in Washington D.C., on April 29, into a middle-class coloured family. His father, who was a butler by profession, personally took care of his son's education, and encouraged him to take piano lesson at a very early age.

1907 Due to his refined manners, at eight years of age he was nicknamed "Duke". He attended one of the best schools in Washington, achieving very good results and excelling in drawing.

1917 He left school suddenly.

1918 He gathered around him a number of musicians who were to achieve fame in his band: Otto Hardwick, Arthur Whetsol, Wellman Braud and Sonny Greer. He married Edna Thompson.

1919 His son Mercer was born. He widened his knowledge of harmony, and learned a great deal from listening to the jazz players passing through Washington.

1921 He visited New York for the very first time where he had the opportunity of meeting his favourite piano-players: James P. Johnson, Fats Waller and Willie "The Lion" Smith.

1923 He returned to New York and settled down there. He formed a group called "Washingtonians" and obtained a 4-year engagement at the "Kentucky Club". With him in the group were Hardwick, Braud and Greer plus two specialists in the use of the mute: Bubber Miley on trumpet and Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton on trombone. He wrote his first jungle-style masterpieces ("*East St. Louis Toodle-Do*" - "*Black and Tan Fantasy*").

1927 He began working together with the impresario-editor Irving Mills.

The group was joined by Louis Metcalfe, trumpet, and Harry Carney, baritone sax. He tried out the voice of Adelaide Hall, using it instrumentally ("*Creole Love Call*" - "*The Blues I Love To Swing*").

In December, Ellington signed a three-year contract with "Cotton Club", the most elegant club in Harlem. In the exotic environment of the club, among nasty looking characters who went around with guns and big wads of banknotes, surrounded by beautiful negro dancers, "with skin as white as snow", the "Duke", completely at ease, performed in front of an elegant audience including rich businessmen, famous actors, film-stars and celebrated musicians, even classical, such as Stravinsky, Stokowsky and Gershwin, who came especially to hear him. It was in this suggestive atmosphere that Ellington drew the perfect inspiration for his music.

1928 The Band acquired strength by the addition of Barney Bigard on clarinet and Johnny Hodges on alto sax ("*Hot and Bothered*" - "*The Mooche*"). Freddie Jenkins, trumpet, also joined the band ("*Misty Mornin'*").

1929 Cootie Williams replaced Bubber Miley on the trumpet.

1930 On the road to success, Ellington took part in a film and launched "*Ring Dem Bells*" which highlighted the musical talents of Cootie Williams.

This was the year he recorded "*Mood Indigo*" a piece for three voices, assigned to the sonority of Whetsol, Nanton and Bigard.

He left his wife and married Mildred Nixon, a dancer at the Cotton Club.

1931 He composed "Rockin' in Rhythm" for the Cotton Club dancers to dance to.

1932 Lawrence Brown, trombone, and the singer Ivie Anderson joined the band ("*It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got that Swing*").

1933 He composed "*Sophisticated Lady*". He went on a European tour to London and Paris.

1934-36 Ellington became more and more popular. One success followed another ("*Solitude*" - "*In a sentimental mood*"). The "Duke" presented a far-reaching composition dedicated to his dead mother ("*Remiscin' in tempo*" - 1935).

1937-38 He wrote other masterpieces: "*Prelude to a kiss*" and "*Caravan*", the second of which he dedicated to the trombone of Juan Tizol.

1939 His partnership with Irving Mills came to an end and he began working with Billy Strayhorn, composer and arranger.

Ellington signed on Jimmy Blanton and Ben Webster.

1940 With Strayhorn's arrangements ("*Conga brava*" - "*Cotton Tail*" - "*Concerto for Cootie*") Ellington's band reached the height of success.

In Autumn, Cootie Williams left to join Goodman's band and his place was taken by Ray Nance. Duke's fans were outraged at this betrayal.

1941 "*Take the A Train*", composed and arranged by Strayhorn became the band's signature tune.

1942 Bigard stepped out and his place was taken by Jimmy Hamilton. Jimmy Blanton died at 21 years of age. Webster left the band temporarily.

1943 Ellington presented his "*Black Brown and Beige*" suite at the Carnegie Hall.

1944-49 During these years, the Duke mainly expressed himself along symphonic lines in search of a cultured image, but his "Suites" were not always favourably received by audiences and the critics. He signed on Cat Anderson on trumpet ("*Trumpet no End*") and Oscar Pettiford on bass.

1950 His son Mercer also joined the trumpet section and later took part in the arrangements and organizations.

He went on an important European tour, with the same success as before.

"Duke" became a legend in his own time. During each concert he told his audience "*I Love You Madly*" which drew warmth and enthusiasm.

1951 He presented "*Harlem Suite*", a work commissioned by Toscanini, at the Metropolitan Opera House.

The band's performance began to suffer after Johnny Hodges and Lawrence Brown dropped out. After so many years with the band, Sonny Greer also left and his place was taken by a white musician, Louis Bellson.

1953-55 Ellington's band was now in a state of crisis and was abandoned by the public in favour of Count Basie.

1956 Johnny Hodges returned to the band.

At the Newport Festival, Paul Gonsalves gave an outstanding performance in an interminable solo composition ("*Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*"). Ellington's popularity began to pick up.

1959 He wrote the sound track for the film "Anatomy of a Murder".

1960 He took part in the Monterey Festival.

1961-65 Ellington worked frenetically. He also performed with such modern musicians as Charles Mingus, Max Roach and John Coltrane. He continued to compose music and go on tours in various parts of the world. He wrote religious suites and concertos which were performed in a number of American and English churches, and also worked with European symphony orchestras.

1966 He went on a European tour with Ella Fitzgerald.

1967 On May 31, his close friend Billy Strayhorn died.

1969 Great celebrations at the White House for his 70th birthday with a reception organized by Nixon.

1970 Johnny Hodges died.

1971-73 Despite his age, Ellington worked non-stop.

1974 He celebrated his 75th birthday in a hospital bed at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Centre in New York. He received mountains of birthday wishes.

He died of lung cancer on May 24, ten days after Paul Gonsalves passed away.

A few months later, his old friend Carney, the most faithful of his musicians, slipped away forever.

His son Mercer tried unsuccessfully to keep the big band together that his father had left to him.



**BLANTON, JIMMY**

bass

**1921** Born in St. Louis, Missouri. The exact date is unknown. Very little is known about his early years, except that he turned to the double-bass after studying the violin, and that he probably started playing with the "Jeter-Pillar" orchestra at the tender age of 16. He gained experience on the river-boats with the Fate Marable formation.

**1939** In the autumn of that year, Jimmy had the chance to play for Duke Ellington, who was thrilled with his talents and took him on immediately. The partnership was very short-lived. Jimmy fell ill with tuberculosis and had to be rushed to a sanatorium in California.

**1941** Jimmy died on 30 July at the tender age of 21.

Despite the shortness of his career, Jimmy Blanton left his mark on the history of jazz. He was a great innovator, and was responsible for the technical evolution of the double-bass. All the great double-bass players, like Oscar Pettiford, Ray Brown and Chrls Mingus, are indebted to him.

Among the evocative recordings that Jimmy has left us, it is worth mentioning his duets with Ellington - "Plucked again", "Blues", "Pitter Panther Patter", "Body and Soul", "Sophisticated Lady" and "Mr. J.B. Blues" as well as some unforgettable orchestral passages from the 1940-1941 period such as "Jack the bear", "Across the track blues", "Sidewalks of New York", "Bojangles", "Jumpin' Punks" and "Sepia panorama".

**PLUCKED AGAIN**

BLUES

New York, November 22, 1939

Duke Ellington (p) - Jimmy Blanton (b).

**BODY AND SOUL**

Mr. J.B. BLUES

PITTER PANTHER PATTERN

SOPHISTICATED LADY

Chicago, October 1, 1940

Same as above.

**WEELY**

New York, October 14, 1939

Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra: Cootie Willi-

ams, Wallace Jones (tp) - Rex Stewart (cn) - Lawrence Brown, Joe Nanton (tb) - Juan Tizol (vtb) - Johnny Hodges (ss/as) - Otto Hardwick (as) - Barney Bigard (cl/ts) - Harry Carney (cl/as/bars) - Duke Ellington (p) - Fred Guy (g) - Jimmy Blanton (b) - Sonny Greer (d).

**KO-KO**

JACK THE BEAR

MORNING GLORY

Chicago, March 6, 1940

Same as above. Ben Webster (ts) added.

**BOJANGLES**

DUSK

Chicago, May 28, 1940

Same as above.

**HARLEM AIR SHAFT**

New York, July 22, 1940

Same as above.

**SEPIA PANORAMA**

New York, July 24, 1940

Same as above.

**IN A MELLOPHONE**

Chicago, September 5, 1940

Same as above.

**ACROSS THE TRACK BLUES**

CHLOE

Chicago, October 28, 1940

Same as above.

**THE SIDEWALKS OF NEW YORK**

Chicago, December 28, 1940

Same as above, but Ray Nance (tp) replaces Cootie Williams. Duke Ellington or Billy Strayhorn (p).

**JUMPIN' PUNKINS**

BLUE SERGE

Hollywood, February 15, 1941

Same as above.

**JUST A SETTIN' AND A ROCKIN'**

Hollywood, June 5, 1941

Same as above. Billy Strayhorn omitted, Duke Ellington (p).

**JUNIOR HOP**

Chicago, November 2, 1940

Johnny Hodges and his Orchestra: Johnny Hodges (as/ss) - Cootie Williams (tp) - Lawrence Brown (tb) - Harry Carney (bars) - Duke Ellington (p) - Jimmy Blanton (b) - Sonny Greer (d).

**"C" BLUES**

Hollywood, September 26, 1941

Barney Bigard and his Orchestra: Barney Bigard (cl) - Ray Nance (tp) - Juan Tizol (vtb) - Harry Carney (bars) - Billy Strayhorn (p) - Jimmy Blanton (b) - Sonny Greer (d).



Jimmy Blanton.

# DUKE ELLINGTON

## The JIMMY BLANTON era

CD 53048  
AAD

1	<b>IN A MELLOTONE</b> (D. Ellington)	3'14"
2	<b>KO-KO</b> (D. Ellington)	2'42"
3	<b>JACK THE BEAR</b> (D. Ellington)	3'14"
4	<b>HARLEM AIR SHAFT</b> (D. Ellington)	2'56"
5	<b>JUST A-SETTIN' AND A-ROCKIN'</b> (D. Ellington - B. Strayhorn)	3'30"
6	<b>SEPIA PANORAMA</b> (D. Ellington)	3'19"
7	<b>JUMPIN' PUNKINS</b> (M. Ellington)	3'39"
8	<b>MR. J.B. BLUES</b> (M. Ellington - J. Blanton)	3'06"
9	<b>BODY AND SOUL</b> (Heyman - Sour - Eyton - Green)*	2'58"
10	<b>BOJANGLES</b> (D. Ellington)	2'48"
11	<b>THE SIDEWALKS OF NEW YORK</b> (C. B. Lawlor - J. W. Blake)	3'11"
12	<b>PITTER PANTHER PATTER</b> (D. Ellington)	2'58"
13	<b>SOPHISTICATED LADY</b> (D. Ellington - I. Mills - Parish)	2'42"
14	<b>ACROSS THE TRACK BLUES</b> (D. Ellington)	2'56"
15	<b>PLUCKED AGAIN</b> (D. Ellington)	2'59"
16	<b>BLUES</b> (D. Ellington)	2'52"
17	<b>CHLOE</b> (G. Kahn - N. Moret)	3'22"
18	<b>"C" BLUES</b> (D. Ellington)	2'49"
19	<b>WEELY</b> (D. Ellington)	2'55"
20	<b>JUNIOR HOP</b> (D. Ellington)	3'06"
21	<b>DUSK</b> (D. Ellington)	3'15"
22	<b>BLUE SERGE</b> (M. Ellington)	3'18"
23	<b>MORNING GLORY</b> (D. Ellington - R. Stewart)	3'15"

TOTAL PLAYING TIME 71'04"

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