



JIMMIE BLANTON

chez Duke Ellington

1940-1941



MDD 012

DUKE ELLINGTON AND JIMMIE BLANTON WITH JOHN SCOTT TROTTER AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Duke Ellington (p) - Jimmie Blanton (b), acc. by John Scott Trotter & his Orchestra.

NBC Studios, "Kraft Music Hall" broadcast, Los Angeles, Ca., Oct. 9, 1941

1 **Take The A Train** (B. Strayhorn) 2'05

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams (tp) - Rex Stewart (cnt) - Lawrence Brown, Joe Nanton (tb) - Juan Tizol (vtr) - Barney Bigard (cl, ts) - William White Jr. (as, cl) - Johnny Hodges (as, ss) - Ben Webster (ts) - Harry Carney (bar, cl, bcl) - Duke Ellington (p) - Fred Guy (g) - Jimmie Blanton (b) - Sonny Greer (d) - Ivie Anderson (voc) - Billy Strayhorn (arr).

CBS Studios, New York, BBC broadcast, June 10, 1940

2 **Jack The Bear** (D. Ellington) 3'02

3 **Cotton Tail** (D. Ellington) 3'37

4 **The Sergeant Was Shy** (D. Ellington) 2'40

Same, except Otto Hardwick replaces White.

Eastwood Gardens, Detroit, Mich., NBC broadcast, July 29, 1940

5 **I Don't Mind (All Too Soon)** (D. Ellington) 3'44

6 **Harlem Air Shaft** (D. Ellington) 3'16

Same, July 30, 1940

7 **Rose Of The Rio Grande** (H. Warren, E. Leslie, R. Gorham) 3'06

Same, Canobie Lake Park, Salem, N.H., NBC broadcast, Aug. 17, 1940

8 **Ridin' On A Blue Note** (D. Ellington) 3'56

Same, Aug. 19, 1940

9 **Stompy Jones** (D. Ellington) 2'44

Same, Hotel Sherman, Chicago, Ill., NBC broadcast, Sep. 10, 1940

10 **Bojangles** (D. Ellington) 2'38

Same, Sep. 13, 1940

11 **Solid Old Man** (D. Ellington) 2'52

Same, Sep. 21, 1940

12 **Jig Walk** (D. Ellington) 1'54

Same, Sep. 26, 1940

13 **Little Posey** (D. Ellington) 2'31

DUKE ELLINGTON AND JIMMIE BLANTON WITH TROTTER ORCHESTRA

Same as 1, NBC broadcast, NBC Studios, Los Angeles, Ca. Jan. 16, 1941

14 **Jumpin' Punkins** (D. Ellington) 1'46

DUKE ELLINGTON AND JIMMIE BLANTON

Duke Ellington (p) - Fred Guy (g) - Jimmie Blanton (b) - Sonny Greer (d).

Casa Mañana, Los Angeles, Ca., MBS broadcast, Feb. 16, 1941

15 **Jive Rhapsody** (D. Ellington) 3'20

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Same as 2, except Ray Nance (tp, voc) replaces Williams.

MBS broadcast, Casa Mañana, Los Angeles, Ca., Feb. 20, 1941

16 **Moon Mist** (M. Ellington) 3'23

DUKE ELLINGTON AND JIMMIE BLANTON

NBC Studios, "Kraft Music Hall" broadcast, Los Angeles, Ca., May 29, 1941

17 **Stomp Caprice** (B. Strayhorn) 2'56

Same plus John Scott Trotter and His Orchestra & Choir

18 **Frankie And Johnnie** (trad.) 2'27

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Same as 16, Trianon Ballroom, South Gate, Ca., KHJ broadcast, mid June, 1941

19 **In A Mellow Tone** (D. Ellington) 2'38

20 **Sepia Panorama** (D. Ellington) 2'43

Same, RCA Studios, Los Angeles, Standard Radio Transcriptions, Sep. 17, 1941

21 **Chelsea Bridge** (B. Strayhorn) 3'06

22 **Frankie And Johnnie** (trad. arr. by B. Strayhorn) 3'06

BEN WEBSTER - RAY NANCE QUINTET

Ray Nance (v), Ben Webster (cl) Fred Guy (g), Jimmie Blanton (b), Sonny Greer (d).

Private recording, Los Angeles, Summer/Autumn 1941

23 **The Sheik Of Araby** (T. Snyder, H.B. Smith, F. Wheeler) 4'22

Total 69'24

Production artistique : Claude Carrière. Mise en page : Isabelle Marquis. Traduction : Jean Szlamowicz. Transferts et restauration sonore : Art et Son Studio. Gestion des archives : Jean-Claude Alexandre. Photo X. Remerciements à Claudette de San Isidoro, Philippe Baudoin, Daniel Baumgarten, Laurent Mignard, Serge Mignard, Jean-François Pitet et Daniel Richard qui ont également contribué à l'acquisition du « Fonds Clavié ».

MDD 001: D. ELLINGTON "The 1962 MOMA Recital" - MDD 002: D. ELLINGTON "Stockholm, June 1963"
 MDD 003: D. ELLINGTON "Paris, March 1964" - MDD 004: D. ELLINGTON "Les Girls" 1958-1963"
 MDD 005: D. ELLINGTON "Welcome to the Clubs" 1956-59 - MDD 006: "RARE STRAYHORN" 1941-65
 MDD 007: D. ELLINGTON "Elvin chez Duke" Jan. 1966 - MDD 008: D. ELLINGTON "Violin Session" Feb. 1963
 MDD 009: D. ELLINGTON "The Great 1963 Paris Concert" - MDD 010: D. ELLINGTON "Mingus chez Duke 1953"
 MDD 011: D. ELLINGTON "Theatre - TV - Cinéma 1960-66"

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La Maison du Duke

« En 1939, nous jouions au Coronado Hotel de Saint Louis. Un soir, après le concert, les musiciens entreprennent la tournée des clubs encore ouverts. Ils atterrissent dans un petit club, au deuxième étage du restaurant de Jesse Johnson, où ils entendent un jeune contrebassiste et font le bœuf avec lui : c'était Jimmie Blanton.

Billy Strayhorn et Ben Webster se ruent vers mon hôtel et débarquent dans ma chambre en délirant sur ce type. Je suis obligé de me lever et de retourner avec eux écouter ce prodige. Je suis emballé, comme les autres. Jimmie, qui avait surtout joué avec sa mère, qui était pianiste, avait une expérience limitée du grand orchestre. Mais on s'en fichait. Tout ce que nous voulions c'était cette sonorité, ce swing, ces notes précises au bon endroit pour pouvoir flotter sur la mer aventureuse de l'espérance avec la pulsation et l'assise rythmique qu'il assurerait derrière nous.

On l'a convaincu de venir le lendemain soir jouer quelques morceaux avec nous. Il a fait sensation, c'était décidé, il nous fallait ce contrebassiste. Il a rejoint l'orchestre alors qu'à l'époque, Billy Taylor, un des as de l'instrument occupait le poste. Je me retrouvais donc avec deux contrebasses ».

Ainsi s'exprime Duke Ellington dans ses mémoires, « Music Is My Mistress » (Slatkine & Cie). La suite de l'histoire c'est, au beau milieu d'un *set*, Billy Taylor qui reballe son instrument et s'en va. « Il faut être un très grand homme pour s'incliner ainsi devant meilleur que soi », ajoute Ellington. Car Blanton, musicien de génie, allait chez Duke révolutionner le rôle de la contrebasse, non seulement en en faisant un instrument soliste au même niveau que les autres mais en assurant un accompagnement d'une infinie richesse mélodique et d'un swing irrésistible, avec un son d'une grande plénitude.

Son influence allait être universelle et cruciale. Né le 5 octobre 1918, il venait d'avoir 21 ans, son séjour chez Ellington, à partir de la fin octobre 1939, allait s'achever le 2 novembre 1941. La tuberculose allait l'emporter le 30 juillet 1942. Ces deux courtes années marquèrent un apogée dans l'histoire du Duke et dans celle du jazz en son entier. L'orchestre, renforcé par ailleurs par l'arrivée du ténor Ben Webster et de l'arrangeur/compositeur Billy Strayhorn, allait créer, fruits de la plume plus féconde que jamais de son chef, une formidable série de chefs-d'œuvre. On en trouve ici une dizaine, dans des versions *live* qui n'ont parfois pas encore trouvé leur titre définitif (pages 5 et 16) et qui diffèrent des versions officielles. Nous avons voulu en effet vous faire entendre ces pièces (souvent rares) réalisées pour diverses stations de radio et qui éclairent le génie de Blanton (Jimmie, tel qu'il l'écrivait lui-même et non Jimmy...). Les autres morceaux faisaient partie du répertoire quotidien de la formation : *Stompy Jones*, *Solid Old Man*, *Little Posey* etc.

Malgré une qualité technique parfois médiocre, grâce au travail admirable de notre ami spécialiste du son, on perçoit bien les audaces de cet artiste hors pair, son swing mirobolant (page 10, 12, 19 notamment), son invention mélodique (*Sepia Panorama*, les duos avec piano, dont la page 1, dernière trace enregistrée de Blanton), son culot rythmique (*Chelsea Bridge*). Et tout le reste à l'avenant. Nous avons réuni ces enregistrements (certains peut-être ne vous sont pas inconnus) pour que Blanton trouve sa vraie place aux oreilles de tous.

Claude Carrière

"In 1939, we were playing the Coronado Hotel in Saint Louis. After the gig one night, the cats in the band went out jumpin' in the after-hours joints. They landed up in a hot spot on the second floor of Jesse Johnson's restaurant, where they heard and jammed with a young bass player—Jimmy Blanton.

Billy Strayhorn and Ben Webster dashed over to my hotel and came into my room raving about him. I had to get up and go with them to hear him, and I flipped like everybody else. It seemed that Jimmy had done most of his playing with his mother, a pianist, and his big band experience was limited. But we didn't care about his experience. All we wanted was that sound, that beat, and those precious notes in the right places, so that we could float out on the great adventurous sea of expectancy with his pulse and foundation behind us.

We talked him into coming down to the hotel the next night to play a few things with us. He was a sensation, and that settled it. We had to have him, and he joined the band, although our bass man at the time was Billy Taylor, so there I was with two basses!"

This was Duke Ellington's account of the Jimmie Blanton discovery as told in his memoirs, "Music Is My Mistress". The rest of the story goes like this: in the middle of a set, Billy Taylor simply packed up his instrument and left. "It takes a really great man to bow down before someone who's better than you", Ellington added. And indeed, as part of Duke's band, the musical genius of Blanton would go on to cause a revolution in the way bass was played, making it a soloist's instrument on a par with the others but also providing a backing full of melodic richness and unstoppable swing with a plentiful tone.

His influence was going to reach everyone. Born on October 5th 1918, he was just 21: his tenure with Ellington started at the end of October 1939 and ended on November 2nd 1941. Tuberculosis would claim him the 30th of July 1942. Those two short years were a distinct climax in the history of Duke's band and in the history of jazz as a whole. The orchestra was also beefed up by the tenor sax of Ben Webster and the composer and arranger Billy Strayhorn, producing a series of absolute masterpieces under the influence of the leader's composing inspiration. Here are ten of them, in a live setting, sometimes without a definitive title (tracks 5 and 16), and sounding very different from the official versions.

We wanted to present pieces (some of them very rare) that had been played for various radio stations that set off the genius of Blanton (Jimmie, according to his own spelling and not Jimmy...). The other tunes were part of the well-established songbook of the band—*Stompy Jones*, *Solid Old Man*, *Little Posey*, etc.

Despite the audio shortcomings of the original recordings, compensated by our sound man's admirable work, the unrivalled audacity of the artist can be quite clearly heard, and also his incredible swing (check out tracks 10, 12, 19, among others), his melodic invention (*Sepia Panorama*, the duets with piano, including track 1, Blanton's last recorded trace) and his rhythmic boldness (*Chelsea Bridge*). And the rest is at the same level. We brought together these recordings (and you may know some of them already) so that Blanton could be acknowledged as he should by everybody.

Translated by Jean Szymowicz

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Texte de Claude Carrière et informations discographiques à l'intérieur.

English sleeve notes inside. Cover: Photo X.

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