

Louis Armstrong & Duke Ellington

The Making of The Great Summit

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|---|---|-------|----|---|------|
| 1 | In A Mellow Tone
(Duke Ellington)
a. warm-up
b. take one - complete take | 4:13 | 5 | Duke's Place
(Ellington-Roberts-Katz-Thiele)
take five - Luckey Roberts intro, complete take | 4:17 |
| 2 | I'm Beginning To See The Light
(Ellington-Hodges-James-George)
a. take one - false start
b. take four - two false starts
c. take five - complete take
d. take six - conversation, false start
e. take seven - long false start | 6:55 | 6 | Drop Me Off In Harlem
(D. Ellington-N. Kenny)
take two - complete take | 4:57 |
| 3 | Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me
(Ellington-Russell)
a. take one - rehearsal, working out arrangement
b. take two - discussion, complete take
c. take three - false start | 5:41 | 7 | I'm Just A Lucky So And So
(D. Ellington-M. David)
a. conversation
b. take one - false start
c. take two - complete take, discussion | 4:36 |
| 4 | Don't Get Around Much Anymore
(D. Ellington-B. Russell)
a. take two - breakdown
b. take three - breakdown
c. take four - discussion, false start
d. take five - complete take
e. discussion and rehearsal of ending | 10:42 | 8 | Azalea
(Duke Ellington)
a. take eight - discussion, false start
b. take nine - false start
c. take ten - complete in two sections | 8:03 |
| | | | 9 | Black And Tan Fantasy
(B. Miley-D. Ellington)
a. take three - false start
b. conversation leading to take four
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d. take six - complete take (this ending was used with take four as the master) | 7:13 |
| | | | 10 | Band discussion on Cottontail | 1:09 |

The Making of the *Great Summit*

The discovery, by the intrepid jazz explorer Michael Cuscuna, of hitherto unknown and unsuspected out-takes from one of the most famous summit meetings in recorded jazz, is an occasion for rejoicing. It not only brings us additional doses of vintage Pops and Duke, but also sheds light on how these two giants worked together during that singular encounter.

What is surprising, as we listen to these workouts on ten of the 17 numbers completed at the two sessions, is how quickly and effectively each tune took shape for satisfactory performance. Or maybe not, since the greatest and most experienced arranger in jazz was there, and the material was of his own devising; and the star was one of the quickest studies to ever set foot in a studio.

Digression: A bit later, I again had the pleasure and privilege to observe Louis Armstrong at work in the studio, this time with brand-new material. This was part of the "Real Ambassadors" sessions that joined the All Stars with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, Carmen McRae, and the composer-and-lyricist team of Dave and Lola Brubeck. Perhaps the finest piece in that score was "Summer Song," and it was evident that Dave felt a bit awkward, having to present it to Armstrong sight unseen. Dave gave Louis the leadsheet, sat down at the keyboard and outlined the melody and changes while Louis looked things over, and then hesitated until Louis said, "Let's try it." A tempo was chosen, the composer played a brief introduction, and the singer proceeded to offer not the anticipated first attempt, but what amounted to an interpretation, and a moving one at that. In what seemed like little more than an instant, this great artist had grasped the essence of a sophisticated piece of music and given it perfect life and shape. Tears came to Brubeck's eyes, and this bystander had witnessed yet another Satch miracle, comparable to the "Azalea" one. Here, you're invited to listen in as things take shape; not much has been edited out in terms of studio banter, false starts, comments from the booth (Bob Thiele certainly wasn't awed by the company he kept; there are times when he sounds a bit rude, but that's the way producers tend to be when the clock is ticking) and various, inevitable goofs. Some routines fall into place almost instantly (no problems with "In A Mellow Tone") while others take longer. There are priceless moments, and there are marvelous vocal and instrumental passages (hear Duke's full chorus on take two of "Don't Get Around," or Pops's second vocal chorus on the first complete run through "Beginning To See The Light," for just a couple of random choices). Always, even when he makes mistakes (most of which are mis-cues or verbal mixups

and none of which involve wrong notes, only missed or messed-up ones), Satchmo plays and sings with compelling authority and flawless timing, and even when a take is clearly not going to be mastered, he hits those high ones at the end. This man just didn't know how to coast or slint. And while we can't see it, take my word (and Stanley Dance's—he was surprised 'cause he'd seen Pops in the studio less often than I) when I point out that he delivered all his vocals with the gestures and expressions we know from his public performances—proof positive that this was his natural way of getting into his material, not an act or an affectation.

As impressive in its own way is Duke's pianistic authority—he conducts from the keyboard, he cues, he prods, he eases, he polishes. And what a touch. Want to hear Duke bop a little? Dig the solo on take five of "Duke's Place" (otherwise known as "C-Jam Blues"). Want to hear a little Monkishness? Try "Drop Me Off In Harlem" (after a nice one by Trummy), both the piano solo and the backdrop to Mort Herbert's bass spot. Louis's singing on "Lucky So And So" ... (which begins with some fine conversation and a funny breakdown, turns into a rehearsal, and features a classic mess up of "confidentially") is a lesson in how a masterpiece takes shape—follow up with the master take and you'll see what I mean. "Azalea" reveals that the master, though called take seven, must be a composite. The opening trumpet work is lovely here—more secure than on the master—but the vocal (what impossible lyrics!) gets messed up on the first attempt. The second attempt, however, is perfect—and how about that tag!

As Dance pointed out, Pops seems to know the "Black And Tan Fantasy" routine better than Barney Bigard. Pops dons his straight mute (only one he ever used) for the theme, with Trummy plungered. Barney deserves to have his part trimmed down, but swoops pretty good later on—he's mad! We get a tango beat on the theme by take six, and then Duke plays the shit out of the second strain. The two blues choruses by Pops again pick up on "Muggles" and have great velocity, while Trummy growls in the best Ducal tradition. Those splendid trumpet breaks were incorporated into the master, and hear how Louis responds to Barney's flat ensemble part by putting in some dissonance to make it sound better. "Cottontail" is just a smidgen of studio chatter.

— Dan Morgenstern



Personnel

Louis Armstrong - trumpet, vocals

Duke Ellington - piano

Trummy Young - trombone

Barney Bigard - clarinet

Mort Herbert - bass

Danny Barcelona - drums

Original session produced by Bob Thiele

Recorded at RCA Studios, New York City
on April 3 and 4, 1961

Recording engineer: Ray Hall

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Reissue produced by Michael Cuscuna

Remixed from the original three-track tapes
and remastered in 24-bit/96 kHz by Ron McMaster
All selections previously ubissued.

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