



DUKE ELLINGTON *Vol. 11*

Time's A-Wastin' Original Recordings 1945-1946

Jazz historians generally think of Duke Ellington's orchestra of 1940-42 as being his finest. During that period, Ellington and his close associate Billy Strayhorn wrote gem after gem that perfectly framed the many unique members of the Ellington big band. However, as this collection shows, 1940-42 was only one of the band's peak periods, for it was on the same high level during 1945-46, even as the swing era was coming to an end.

By mid-1945 when this set begins, Edward Kennedy Ellington was universally considered a musical genius. Dozens of his songs were standards not only in jazz but in the pop music world. His arrangements made their own rules and featured unusual-sounding ensembles that on occasion had trombones voiced higher than trumpets and baritonist Harry Carney playing the high note among the saxophonists. Somehow Ellington and Strayhorn were able to mix together both virtuosos and primitive players to create a unified group sound, but Duke had already been consistently performing musical miracles for the past twenty years.

Born 29 April 1899 in Washington DC, Duke Ellington was always encouraged by his parents to express himself through his artistic skills. After a brief period of flirting with the idea of becoming an artist, Ellington was attracted to

the lifestyle of the barrelhouse and stride pianists who he saw performing locally. Soon he was learning how to play stride piano by slowing down James P. Johnson piano rolls to half-speed. It was not long before he was leading his own band in Washington DC, despite the fact that he only knew a few songs.

After a short period in New York in 1922, playing with clarinetist Wilbur Sweatman's band, Ellington returned the following year as pianist with banjoist Elmer Snowden's Washingtonians. By 1924 he was the leader and, although most of the Duke Ellington's Orchestra's first recordings only hint at what was to come, by 1926 their 'jungle sound' was coming together, featuring tonal distortions from trumpeter Bubber Miley and trombonist Tricky Sam Nanton. After he began recording prolifically in 1927 and his orchestra became the house band at the Cotton Club, Duke Ellington was on his way to becoming world famous.

Having led his band for more than a decade before the Swing era, Duke Ellington was very much in his own musical world, not bothered at all by the competition from the many newer groups that were formed in the 1930s. And when most of the swing bands began struggling and in many cases breaking up during 1945-46, Ellington sauntered on, able to keep going due to

the royalties from his hit songs and his fame. His band in mid-1945 had no less than ten distinctive soloists (trumpeters and cornetists Cat Anderson, Taft Jordan, Rex Stewart and Ray Nance, trombonists Tricky Sam Nanton and Lawrence Brown, clarinetist Jimmy Hamilton, altoist Johnny Hodges, tenorman Al Sears and baritonist Harry Carney), not counting the pianist.

This set begins with the greatest hit of Mercer Ellington, Duke's son. **Things Ain't What They Used To Be**, which in 1945 was briefly known as **Time's A-Wastin'**, is a definitive medium-tempo blues that for decades would be a showcase for Johnny Hodges, a masterful blues player. The solo trumpeter is Taft Jordan and trombonist Lawrence Brown really digs into his two choruses.

I'm Just A Lucky So And So was a hit for Ellington and singer Al Hibbler and this is the original version. Hibbler, who is heard at his best, is greatly assisted by Hodges, Brown and the brilliant bop bassist Oscar Pettiford.

Duke Ellington was a pioneer in expanding beyond the three-minute limitations of 78s and writing extended works. While his first 'double-sided' record was a 1929 version of "Tiger Rag", he later stretched out with such compositions as "Creole Rhapsody", "Reminiscing In Tempo" and the marathon "Black, Brown & Beige". At his December 1944 Carnegie Hall concert, Ellington debuted his four-part 11½ minute **Perfume Suite**. Each movement was written to musically depict how a certain type of perfume would affect women. **Balcony Serenade**

(inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*) is romantic, **Strange Feeling** is a feeling of unease and emotional violence, the playful **Dancers In Love** (the best-known of these sections and a song that had a life beyond the suite) is naive joy and **Coloratura** is sophisticated. Featured along the way are Cat Anderson (contributing particularly assertive solos on trumpet), Lawrence Brown, Ellington, bassist Junior Raglin and, on **Strange Feeling**, singer Al Hibbler.

The next two selections are particularly unusual. Billy Strayhorn, who was in Ellington's shadow during most of his career, rarely recorded. However on **Tonk** and **Drawing Room Blues**, Ellington and Strayhorn are heard on a pair of piano duets, sharing the same piano. **Tonk** has Strayhorn playing in the upper register while Ellington strides on the lower notes. Tightly arranged yet spontaneous in spots, the music is quite advanced, a cross between modern classical music, James P. Johnson and Gershwin. **Drawing Room Blues** is more relaxed although it is impossible to figure out which pianist is playing which part; apparently they changed places a couple of times during the performance.

The next six selections feature Duke Ellington compositions performed by his orchestra during 9-10 July 1946. The band had temporarily expanded to nineteen pieces with six trumpeters and four trombonists including Tricky Sam Nanton who was heard on his final sessions before his death. **Rockabye River** has fine bass work by Oscar Pettiford and Johnny Hodges in the lead much of the way with Cat Anderson

contributing some growling trumpet. The exuberant **Suddenly It Jumped** includes some stride piano from Duke, shouting trumpet by Taft Jordan, effective clarinet from Jimmy Hamilton and some nice bass breaks for Pettiford. The semi-operatic wordless voice of Kay Davis is heard in memorable form on the haunting **Transbluency** which has some beautiful harmony featuring Davis with a muted Lawrence Brown and Jimmy Hamilton.

Just Squeeze Me (But Please Don't Tease Me) immediately became a standard after this initial recording was released. Ray Nance, a distinctive trumpeter and violinist, sings the piece with sly wit. The obscure **A Gathering In A Clearing**, which features Cat Anderson's trumpet, was briefly known as "Hometown" and sounds like it could have been a hip church hymn. Al Hibbler returns for **Pretty Woman** (an abstract version of "Ja Da") and this time the trumpet soloist is the lyrical Harold 'Shorty' Baker.

The last six numbers are unusual in that they contain no Duke Ellington songs, five of the tunes are dixieland standards and three are W. C. Handy classics. Of course these renditions, while retaining the original themes, are effortlessly turned into Ellingtonia. **Memphis Blues** (featuring Hodges, Anderson and

Hamilton), **St Louis Blues** and **Beale Street Blues** formed a W. C. Handy medley in concerts of the era. **St Louis Blues**, which has a Marian Cox vocal, feels slightly boppish in spots and has a booting tenor solo from Al Sears while **Beale Street Blues** is taken slower than usual and includes spots for Hamilton, Shorty Baker and Ray Nance (at its conclusion). **Royal Garden Blues**, normally a freewheeling jam piece, has some particularly inspired writing for the ensembles by Ellington. Taft Jordan, Harry Carney and Al Sears are key players on **My Honey's Lovin' Arms**, with Ray Nance taking the joyful vocal. The closing **Swamp Fire** has some impressive bass playing from Oscar Pettiford along with statements from Hamilton, Sears and drummer Sonny Greer.

While many of the big band leaders were grappling with possibly breaking up their orchestras in 1946, Duke Ellington still had another 28 years of major accomplishments to go during his remarkable career. And as these twenty selections demonstrate, very few bands were in his league during 1945-46.

Scott Yanow – author of nine jazz books including Jazz On Film, Classic Jazz (the 1920s), Swing, Bebop, Trumpet Kings and Jazz On Record 1917-76

1. **Time's A-Wastin' (Things Ain't What They Used to Be)** 3:05
(Duke & Mercer Ellington-Don George)
RCA Victor 20-1718, mx D5-VB-518-
Recorded 30 July 1945, New York
2. **I'm Just a Lucky So And So** 3:10
(Duke Ellington-Mack David)
Al Hibbler, vocal
RCA Victor 20-1799, mx D5-VB-949-1
Recorded 26 November 1945, New York
- THE PERFUME SUITE (11:45)**
3. **Balcony Serenade** 3:07
(Billy Strayhorn)
4. **Strange Feeling** 3:11
(Duke Ellington)
Al Hibbler, vocal
5. **Dancers In Love** 2:19
(Duke Ellington)
6. **Coloratura** 2:57
(Duke Ellington)
RCA Victor 20-4711/2, mx D5-VB- 507-1,
505-1, 519-2, 506-2
Recorded 24 & 30 July 1945, New York
7. **Tonk** 2:46
(Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn)
Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn at one piano
RCA Victor 27-0145, mx D6-VB-1518-1
Recorded 10 January 1946, New York
8. **Drawing Room Blues** 3:36
(Billy Strayhorn)
Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn at one piano
RCA Victor 20-2327, mx D6-VB-1519-1
Recorded 10 January 1946, New York
9. **Rockabye River** 3:00
(Duke Ellington)
RCA Victor 40-0134, mx D6-VB-2093-1
Recorded 9 July 1946, Hollywood
10. **Suddenly It Jumped** 2:45
(Duke Ellington)
RCA Victor 20-3135, mx D6-VB-2094-1
Recorded 9 July 1946, Hollywood
11. **Transbluency (A Blue Fog That You Can Almost See Through)** 2:57
(Duke Ellington)
Kay Davis, vocal
RCA Victor 20-2326, mx D6-VB-2095-1
Recorded 9 July 1946, Hollywood
12. **Just Squeeze Me (But Please Don't Tease Me)** 3:19
(Duke Ellington-Lee Gaines)
Ray Nance, vocal
RCA Victor 20-1992, mx D6-VB-2096-1
Recorded 9 July 1946, Hollywood
13. **A Gathering In A Clearing** 3:08
(Duke Ellington-Cat Anderson)
RCA Victor 20-4821, mx D6-VB-2097-1
Recorded 10 July 1946, Hollywood
14. **Pretty Woman** 2:43
(Duke Ellington)
Al Hibbler, vocal
RCA Victor 20-2325, mx D6-VB-2099-1
Recorded 10 July 1946, Hollywood
15. **Memphis Blues** 3:00
(W. C. Handy)
RCA Victor 20-2325, mx D6-VB-2127-1
Recorded 3 September 1946, Hollywood

16. **St Louis Blues** 2:57
(W. C. Handy)
Marian Cox, vocal
RCA Victor 20-2327, mx D6-VB-2129-1
Recorded 3 September 1946, Hollywood
17. **Beale Street Blues** 2:52
(W. C. Handy)
RCA Victor 20-2326, mx D6-VB-2117-1
Recorded 9 August 1946, Hollywood
18. **Royal Garden Blues** 3:06
(Clarence & Spencer Williams)
RCA Victor 20-2324, mx D6-VB-2131-1
Recorded 3 September 1946, Hollywood
19. **My Honey's Lovin' Arms** 3:10
(Herman Ruby-Joseph Meyer)
Ray Nance, vocal
RCA Victor 20-3135, mx D6-VB-2126-1
Recorded 3 September 1946, Hollywood
20. **Swamp Fire** 2:51
(Harold Mooney)
RCA Victor 20-1992, mx D6-VB-2130-1
Recorded 3 September 1946, Hollywood

Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra, except tracks 7 & 8

Transfers & Production: David Lennick · Digital Restoration: Graham Newton

Original monochrome photo of Duke Ellington from Michael Ochs Archives / Redferns

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Orchestra Personnel

Tracks 1 & 3-6: Duke Ellington, piano; Cat Anderson, Shelton Hemphill, Taft Jordan, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin, vocals; Tricky Sam Nanton, Claude Jones, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick, alto sax; Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone & alto sax, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Junior Raglin, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Track 2: Duke Ellington, piano; Cat Anderson, Shelton Hemphill, Taft Jordan, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin, vocals; Tricky Sam Nanton, Claude Jones, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick, alto sax; Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone & alto sax, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 9-14: Duke Ellington, piano; Cat Anderson, Shelton Hemphill, Frances Williams, Taft Jordan, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin, vocals; Tricky Sam Nanton, Claude Jones, Wilbur DeParis, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick, alto sax; Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone & alto sax, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 15-20: Duke Ellington, piano; Cat Anderson, Shelton Hemphill, Frances Williams, Taft Jordan, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin, vocals; Claude Jones, Wilbur DeParis, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick, alto sax; Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone & alto sax, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

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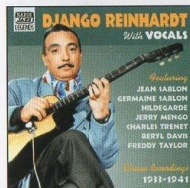
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LEGENDS

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