



DUKE ELLINGTON

Vol. 12

"BLUE ABANDON"

1946 Radio Transcriptions & Concert Recordings

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COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

NAXOS
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LEGENDS

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GEMA

ADD

1. Crosstown 2. Magenta Haze 3. The Eighth Veil 4. Blue Abandon 5. Sono
 6. Tip Toe Topic 7. Hey, Baby 8. Fiddle Fling 9. The Unbooted Character
 10. The Suburbanite 11. Moon Mist 12. Double Ruff
 13. A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing 14. The Mooche
 DEEP SOUTH SUITE: 15. Introduction by Leonard Feather
 16. Magnolias Dripping With Molasses
 17. Hearsay Or Orson Welles 18. Nobody Was Lookin'
 19. Happy-Go-Lucky Local

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DUKE ELLINGTON *Vol. 1.2* 'Blue Abandon' 1946 Radio Transcriptions & Concert Recordings

Throughout his career, Duke Ellington's only competition among his fans was with his earlier ensembles. Some listeners preferred his 'jungle band' of 1928 or his swing era group of 1935 while jazz critics often cite the 1940-42 'Blanton-Webster Band' as his finest. The truth is that Ellington continued to evolve steadily through the years in his writing, playing and arranging for his orchestra. While few would say that his 1946 orchestra was his finest, this CD offers compelling evidence that it was certainly up there.

In hindsight, Edward Kennedy Ellington seemed destined for greatness from the start. Born 29 April 1899 in Washington DC, Ellington was constantly encouraged by his doting mother who told him repeatedly that he was special and had great things to accomplish; the youth never doubted her word. Nicknamed 'Duke' due to his classy nature, he thought for a while of becoming an artist but instead found himself attracted to the lifestyle of the pianists whom he saw playing locally in bars and pool halls. Soon he was leading his own band, despite knowing very few songs. Ellington put on a strong front and advertised his ensemble with a big ad in the Yellow Pages, faking his way for a time until he had developed much further with his piano playing.

Duke Ellington visited New York City for the first time in 1922 as part of clarinetist's Wilbur Sweatman's band, but had better luck the

following year as a member of Elmer Snowden's Washingtonians. A money dispute resulted in Ellington becoming its leader in 1924. After three years of working at a low-level club and making some interesting if erratic recordings, it all came together in 1927, particularly when Duke landed the very important job as leader of the house band at the Cotton Club. He was on his way and rarely ever looked back after that.

By 1946 Ellington had not only survived the Depression, the Swing era and World War II, but had thrived during each period. He turned 47 that year and had been widely regarded as a genius for over fifteen years. Dozens of his songs had become standards, he was considered an innovative arranger, and his piano playing was an influence on Thelonious Monk. In addition, he was a household name and, even though big bands were breaking up constantly during 1946, Duke's was in no trouble.

In addition to his commercially available recordings – some of which are on Vol. 11 in this series: *Time's A Wastin'* – Ellington also made a series of transcriptions specifically to be played on the radio. It is from that treasure trove that the first fourteen selections of this collection are drawn.

At the time of the 28 March 1946 session that starts this CD, Duke Ellington's orchestra was larger than usual. He had five trumpeters

although only two were soloists: Taft Jordan and the high-note wonder Cat Anderson. The trombone section was up to four due to the increasingly erratic health of the great Tricky Sam Nanton. The saxophone section had had two acquisitions in clarinetist Jimmy Hamilton and Al Sears to succeed Barney Bigard and Ben Webster. And the rhythm section had held steady, with the great bassist Oscar Pettiford being the best possible replacement for the late Jimmy Blanton. There would be relatively few personnel changes during 1946 although three veterans from the 1920s would be departing.

The opening number is a Johnny Hodges riff tune called *Crosstown*. Hodges, Cat Anderson, Tricky Sam Nanton and Al Sears all have some solo space while the trumpet section displays its power. The beautiful Ellington ballad *Magenta Haze* is a showcase for Johnny Hodges, who had one of the most beautiful tones ever heard. Charlie Parker may have been the new voice on alto, but there was no denying Hodges' sound.

Duke Ellington was one of the first band-leaders to feature a specific soloist on an entire performance, starting that trend in the mid-1930s. *The Eighth Veil* is a feature for Cat Anderson, preceding the eventual commercial recording by five years. While Cat could hit notes higher than anyone at that time, this performance is mostly in the middle register and emphasizes his lyrical side. *Blue Abandon* is an obscure Ellington medium-tempo blues that has driving bass from Pettiford who also takes a fluent solo. Oddly enough while Harry Carney was a member

of the Ellington Orchestra from 1927 until his death in 1975, he never had a really definitive feature. *Sono* comes close, showing off the giant Carney tone along with the influence of Coleman Hawkins. *Tip Toe Topic* is a real rarity, a feature for Oscar Pettiford with the rhythm section that was apparently never played again.

By the time that the Ellington Orchestra gathered to record more transcriptions on 11 July 1946, Ray Nance and Harold 'Shorty' Baker had both rejoined the band after brief absences, giving the orchestra six trumpets and four soloists. Otto Hardwick, an important early soloist with Ellington who had been given little to do during the past decade, had retired and been replaced by Russell Procope who gave the band their first New Orleans clarinet soloist since Bigard although he had previously been best known for his alto playing with the John Kirby Sextet.

Ray Nance, a triple threat on trumpet, violin and vocals, sings *Hey Baby* with Lawrence Brown's trombone helping out a bit. *Fickle Fling* is a likable number that puts Ellington's piano and Hodges' alto in the forefront much of the way. *The Unbooted Character* is an unjustly neglected piece that has spots for Lawrence Brown, Jimmy Hamilton and a tradeoff between trumpeters Taft Jordan (who is muted) and Shorty Baker. *The Suburbanite* is a hyper workout for Al Sears, a very talented tenor-saxophonist who often gets overlooked in jazz history books because his period with Ellington fell between that of Ben Webster and Paul Gonsalves.

In contrast is the beautiful **Moon Mist**, an Ellington ballad not written by Duke but his son Mercer Ellington. Ray Nance (on violin), Hodges and Brown all play beautifully in their distinctive styles. A Billy Strayhorn jump piece **Double Ruff**, has solo space for Jordan, Russell Procope (a rare spot on alto), Baker and Nance. Notice how each of the trumpeters has a different sound. On Billy Strayhorn's **A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing**, there is no mistaking Hodges for anyone else; the composer accompanies him on piano.

The Mooche was composed by Duke Ellington in 1928 and it had been played by the band ever since. This version has spots for Nance, the clarinets of Procope and Hamilton, Hodges and, most importantly, Tricky Sam Nanton who was on the original record. The much-loved Nanton passed away four days later and this was his final recording. Also leaving the band was the largely inaudible rhythm guitarist Fred Guy, whose main significance had been his banjo playing with Duke in the 1920s.

Duke Ellington used his Carnegie Hall concerts in the 1940s as opportunities to perform extended works. His 1946 concert featured a four-part work called **The Deep South Suite**. Leonard Feather's brief verbal introduction was actually recorded in the studio. The suite is an ironic 'tribute' to the South of the time, with **Magnolias Dripping With Molasses** presenting an idealized look, Hearsay being a guarded glimpse of reality and the piano solo on **Nobody Was Lookin'** symbolizing the races getting along fine in the shadows. The final section, **Happy-Go-Lucky Local**, should sound familiar for it would have an independent life when it was 'borrowed' by tenor-saxophonist Jimmy Forrest five years later and recorded as "Night Train!"

On second thought, maybe 1946 was one of Duke Ellington's great years after all.

Scott Yanow – author of nine jazz books including Jazz On Film, Classic Jazz, Trumpet Kings and Jazz On Record 1917-76 (www.scottyand.com)

1. **Crosstown** 2:50
(Johnny Hodges)
Capitol Transcription B-163, mx 801-2
Recorded 28 March 1946, New York
2. **Magenta Haze** 4:25
(Duke Ellington)
Featuring Johnny Hodges, alto
Capitol Transcription B-164, mx 804-1
Recorded 28 March 1946, New York
3. **The Eighth Veil** 3:06
(Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn)
Featuring Cat Anderson, trumpet
Capitol Transcription B-164, mx 805-2
Recorded 28 March 1946, New York
4. **Blue Abandon** 1:51
(Duke Ellington)
Capitol Transcription B-164, mx 806-2
Recorded 28 March 1946, New York
5. **Sono** 4:30
(Duke Ellington)
Featuring Harry Carney, baritone sax
Capitol Transcription B-166, mx 809-2
Recorded 28 March 1946, New York
6. **Tip Toe Topic** 2:04
(Duke Ellington)
Duke Ellington, Oscar Pettiford & Sonny Greer
Capitol Transcription B-166, mx 811-4
Recorded 28 March 1946, New York
7. **Hey, Baby** 2:54
(Duke & Mercer Ellington)
Ray Nance, vocal
Capitol Transcription B-246, mx 1633-2
Recorded 11 July 1946, Hollywood
8. **Fickle Fling** 3:14
(Duke Ellington)
Featuring Johnny Hodges, alto sax
Capitol Transcription B-249, mx 1247-2
Recorded 12 August 1946, Hollywood
9. **The Unbooted Character** 3:29
(Duke Ellington)
Capitol Transcription B-299, mx 1642-1
Recorded 16 July 1946, Hollywood
10. **The Suburbanite** 2:31
(Duke Ellington)
Featuring Al Sears, tenor sax
Capitol Transcription B-250, mx 1642-2
Recorded 16 July 1946, Hollywood
11. **Moon Mist** 3:25
(Mercer Ellington)
Featuring Ray Nance, Johnny Hodges,
Lawrence Brown
Capitol Transcription B-249, mx 1247-1
Recorded 12 August 1946, Hollywood
12. **Double Ruff** 2:52
(Billy Strayhorn)
Capitol Transcription B-247, mx 1654-1
Recorded 17 July 1946, Hollywood
13. **A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing** 3:22
(Billy Strayhorn)
Featuring Johnny Hodges, alto sax
Capitol Transcription B-248, mx 1654-2
Recording 17 July 1946, Hollywood
14. **The Mooche** 4:35
(Duke Ellington-Irving Mills)
Featuring Tricky Sam Nanton, trombone
Capitol Transcription B-248, mx 1656-1
Recorded 17 July 1946, Hollywood

DEEP SOUTH SUITE (19:56)
(Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn)

15. **Introduction** 1:40
Leonard Feather
16. **Magnolias Dripping With Molasses** 4:39
17. **Hearsay Or Orson Welles** 4:42
18. **Nobody Was Lookin'** 2:54
Duke Ellington, piano solo
19. **Happy-Go-Lucky Local** 6:00
V-Disc 750 & 759, mx D6-TC-6644/7
Recorded 23 November 1946, Carnegie Hall,
New York

Transfers & Production: David Lennick
Digital Restoration: Graham Newton
Special thanks to Scott Wenzel
Original monochrome photo of Duke Ellington
from Michael Ochs Archives / Redferns

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Vol.6 Tootin' Through The Roof 1939-1940
Vol.7 Cotton Tail 1940
Vol.8 Jump For Joy 1941-1942
Vol.9 Black Brown And Beige 1943-1945
Vol.10 Air Conditioned Jungle 1945
Vol.11 Time's A-Wastin' 1945-1946

Personnel

Tracks 1-2: Duke Ellington, piano; Taft Jordan, Shelton Hemphill, Cat Anderson, Francis Williams, Bernard Flood, trumpets; Lawrence Brown, Claude Jones, Wilbur DeParis, Tricky Sam Nanton, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick, alto sax; Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone sax, bass clarinet, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Ernest Meyers, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 3-6: Duke Ellington, piano; Taft Jordan, Shelton Hemphill, Cat Anderson, Francis Williams, Bernard Flood, trumpets; Lawrence Brown, Claude Jones, Wilbur DeParis, Tricky Sam Nanton, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick, alto sax; Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone sax, bass clarinet, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 7-14: Duke Ellington, piano; Billy Strayhorn, piano (*track 13 only*); Taft Jordan, Shelton Hemphill, Cat Anderson, Francis Williams, Harold 'Shorty' Baker, trumpets; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin; Lawrence Brown, Claude Jones, Wilbur DeParis, Tricky Sam Nanton, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, alto sax; Russell Procope, alto sax, clarinet, Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone sax, bass clarinet, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 15-19: Duke Ellington, piano; Taft Jordan, Shelton Hemphill, Cat Anderson, Francis Williams, Harold 'Shorty' Baker, trumpets; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin; Lawrence Brown, Claude Jones, Wilbur DeParis, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor sax; Johnny Hodges, alto sax; Russell Procope, alto sax, clarinet; Al Sears, tenor sax; Harry Carney, baritone, bass clarinet, clarinet; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

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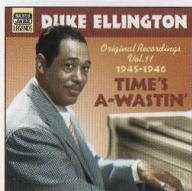
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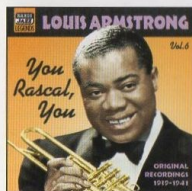
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