

## DUKE ELLINGTON *Vol. 13* 'Jam-a-Ditty' Original Recordings 1946-1947

The accomplishments of Duke Ellington are so remarkable, both in their quality and their quantity, that they put him on his own level. He wrote music constantly for fifty years (thousands of compositions and arrangements), led an orchestra that was constantly at the top of its field, developed his own distinctive piano style, and did all of this while constantly performing, recording, rehearsing and travelling. By 1946 when most of the selections on this collection were recorded, Ellington was 47 and had been leading his orchestra for 21 years, with 28 to go. He was an internationally famous name who was able to persevere despite the end of the swing era and the breakup of the bands of so many of his contemporaries.

During this potentially difficult period, Duke Ellington could rely on the great self-confidence that his mother had instilled in him during his childhood. Born 29 April 1899 in Washington DC, Edward Kennedy Ellington admitted many times that his parents (especially his mother) spoiled him. But unlike many other spoiled kids, Ellington did not spend his life acting as if he expected to have everything done for him. In fact, the upbringing had the opposite effect. He always felt that he should justify the love and affection that his mother felt for him (even after she passed away in the 1930s) and, although he had the knack of looking as if everything was

easy and he never worked, in reality he never stopped working and creating.

Known as 'Duke' since his childhood days due to his classy and smooth personality, Ellington was a professional pianist and bandleader (after a brief flirtation with art) since he was a teenager. He was making a good living in Washington DC when he accepted an offer in 1922 to come to New York and join Wilbur Sweatman's band. When that engagement ended, the money soon ran out and he returned home. But the following year he returned and joined Elmer Snowden's Washingtonians. A money dispute in 1924 resulted in Duke becoming the band's new leader. Playing at the Kentucky Club regularly during 1924-27 resulted in the Ellington sound being born, both in his orchestra and in his own playing. After some early primitive recordings, the Duke Ellington Orchestra began to sound like itself in late 1926. With the help of their manager Irving Mills, the group became the house orchestra at the Cotton Club in late 1927 and very soon they became quite famous.

The Duke Ellington Orchestra both predated the Swing era and far outlived it. Ellington had his own niche by 1929 and his ability to write popular songs that became standards, his innovative arrangements, and the many great individualists in his band that he somehow

blended together in his ensembles kept Ellington popular throughout the 1930s and '40s. Even though historians tend to rate the 1940-42 Ellington Orchestra as his greatest one, the band that he had during 1946-47 also ranked very high. While most big bands of the period, had at the most, five major soloists (one trumpet, one trombone, two reeds and piano). Duke had ten: trumpeters Taft Jordan, Harold 'Shorty' Baker and Cat Anderson, Ray Nance doubling on trumpet and violin, trombonist Lawrence Brown, clarinetist Jimmy Hamilton, altoist Johnny Hodges, Al Sears on tenor, baritonist Harry Carney and the leader on piano.

The first thirteen selections (which are really fifteen if one counts the extended versions of **Happy-Go-Lucky Local** and **Overture To A Jam Session** as two parts apiece) constitute all of Duke Ellington's recordings for the Musicraft label. The swing era may have been ending but there was no reason for the quality of Ellington's band to decline or for him to follow such current musical trends as emphasizing pop vocals or playing bebop.

As if to show off the timelessness of his music, this set begins with a remake of **Diminuendo In Blue**, an ensemble piece first recorded by Ellington in 1937 and which in 1956 would, along with "Crescendo In Blue" and a 27-chorus "interlude" by tenor-saxophonist Paul Gonsalves, cause a sensation at the Newport Jazz Festival. This version is straightforward and features complex harmonies and riffs that partly disguise the fact that the song is basically a

blues. It leaves one wanting more.

**Magenta Haze** is a ballad beautifully interpreted by Johnny Hodges, whose tone on alto has never been equaled. The great pianist-arranger Mary Lou Williams, who was married to Shorty Baker at the time, wrote a few arrangements for Ellington. Her reworking of **Blue Skies** as a trumpet battle (subtitled "Trumpets No End") is her most famous work for the band. At first Taft Jordan, Baker, Ray Nance and Cat Anderson solo in that order and then the sequence gets shuffled around, with Anderson responsible for the high-note work. Hodges returns for another lyrical showcase on **Sultry Sunset**, showing why he was considered the leading altoist in jazz before Charlie Parker.

Duke Ellington was a pioneer in writing and recording extended works. **Happy-Go-Lucky Local** was originally a two-sided 78 and it is one of many Ellington compositions to depict a train ride. While quite picturesque, with Cat Anderson providing the train whistle, it is of greatest significance for the theme that emerges during its final part, a melody 'borrowed' a few years later by Jimmy Forrest (who played tenor briefly with Ellington) and recorded as "Night Train."

The next four compositions (three by Ellington) are not as well known. **The Beautiful Indians Part 1: Hiawatha** is actually a thinly-disguised version of "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing", featuring the booting tenor of the underrated Al Sears. Kay Davis' wordless semi-operatic voice is showcased on **The Beautiful Indians Part 2: Minnehaha**. Billy

Strayhorn's *Flippant Flurry* is a difficult work that is interpreted effortlessly by clarinetist Jimmy Hamilton. Harry Carney, the definitive baritone-saxophonist, shows off his huge sound on the melancholy ballad *Golden Feather*.

*Tulip Or Turnip* has one of Ray Nance's most famous vocals and he sounds quite at home on Don George's hip lyrics; the short solos are by Nance and trombonist Lawrence Brown. *Overture To A Jam Session* is an unusual futuristic piece which has some prominent bass playing from Oscar Pettiford. *It Shouldn't Happen To A Dream* is one of Al Hibbler's better vocals while *Jam-A-Ditty* is an exciting number that has Carney, Hamilton and Brown as the key soloists along with a couple of the trumpeters.

The final five selections on this CD are all taken from radio transcriptions recorded 9–10 June 1947. The Duke Ellington Orchestra has essentially the same personnel as earlier

although Cat Anderson was temporarily out of the band and trombonist Tyree Glenn had joined to fill the spot formerly occupied by the late Tricky Sam Nanton.

*Who Struck John* is a brief blues original featuring Johnny Hodges. *How High The Moon*, a very popular number in 1947, gives Baker and Hamilton some solo space. *Frustration* puts Carney in the spotlight, the swinging *Blue Lou* has a colourful spot for Nance and *Far Away Blues* is a wistful feature for Hodges. *Park At 106th* serves as a fine closer, featuring Nance, Carney, Pettiford and Duke.

This collection, 'Jam-A-Ditty', features the Duke Ellington Orchestra right in the middle of its 48-year prime.

Scott Yanow

— author of nine jazz books including *Jazz On Film*, *Swing, Classic Jazz*, *Trumpet Kings* and *Jazz On Record 1917-76*; has a website, [www.scottyandnow.com](http://www.scottyandnow.com)

1. **Diminuendo In Blue** 2:45  
(Duke Ellington)  
Musicraft 511, mx 5765-4  
Recorded 23 October 1946
2. **Magenta Haze** 2:58  
(Duke Ellington)  
Featuring Johnny Hodges  
Musicraft 483, mx 5766-4  
Recorded by 23 October 1946
3. **Blue Skies (Trumpet No End)** 2:31  
(Irving Berlin, arr. Mary Lou Williams)  
Musicraft 484, mx 5815-1  
Recorded 25 November 1946
4. **Sultry Sunset** 3:06  
(Duke Ellington)  
Musicraft 466, mx 5813-2  
Recorded 25 November 1946
5. **Happy-Go-Lucky Local** 5:27  
(Duke Ellington)  
Musicraft 461, mx 5816-2, 5814-2  
Recorded 25 November 1946
6. **Beautiful Indians, Part 1: Hiawatha** 2:44  
(Duke Ellington—Al Sears)  
Featuring Al Sears  
Musicraft 464, mx 5817-1  
Recorded 5 December 1946
7. **Beautiful Indians, Part 2: Minnehaha** 2:54  
(Duke Ellington)  
Kay Davis, vocal  
Musicraft 464, mx 5824-3  
Recorded 5 December 1946
8. **Flippant Flurry** 2:49  
(Duke Ellington)  
Featuring Jimmy Hamilton  
Musicraft 465, mx 5818-3  
Recorded 5 December 1946
9. **Golden Feather** 2:44  
(Duke Ellington)  
Featuring Harry Carney  
Musicraft 465, mx 5823-1  
Recorded 5 December 1946
10. **Tulip Or Turnip** 3:09  
(Duke Ellington—Don George)  
Ray Nance, vocal  
Musicraft 483, mx 5841-2  
Recorded 18 December 1946
11. **Overture To A Jam Session** 5:32  
(Billy Strayhorn)  
Featuring Ray Nance, violin  
Musicraft 463, mx 5845-3, 5846-3  
Recorded 11 December 1946
12. **It Shouldn't Happen To A Dream** 2:59  
(Duke Ellington—Johnny Hodges—Don George)  
Al Hibbler, vocal  
Musicraft 484, mx 5842-3  
Recorded 18 December 1946
13. **Jam-A-Ditty (Concerto For 4 Jazz Horns)** 2:56  
(Duke Ellington)  
Featuring Jimmy Hamilton, Taft Jordan,  
Harry Carney, Lawrence Brown  
Musicraft 466 & 511, mx 5847-1  
Recorded 11 December 1946

14. **Who Struck John?** 1:29

(Duke Ellington-Mercer Ellington-Johnny Hodges)  
Capitol Transcription B 302, mx 2441-1  
Recorded 9 June 1947

15. **How High The Moon** 2:33

(Nancy Hamilton-Morgan Lewis)  
Capitol Transcription B 302, mx 2439-1  
Recorded 9 June 1947 (2:32)

16. **Frustration** 3:34

(Duke Ellington)  
Featuring Harry Carney  
Capitol Transcription B 304, mx 2445-1  
Recorded 9 June 1947

All selections recorded by Duke Ellington and his Orchestra in New York  
Transfers & Production: David Lennick · Digital Restoration: Alan Bunting  
Original recordings from the collections of David Lennick & John Rutherford  
Discographical information courtesy of Scott Wenzel and *The Jazz Discography* by Tom Lord:  
www.lordisco.com

### Producer's Note

Duke Ellington's Musicraft sides have always presented problems for both collectors and researchers. Pressed on poor quality post-war shellac, they disappeared when Musicraft folded in 1948 and were unavailable until thirteen of the fifteen sides appeared on an Allegro LP in 1955, transferred from the original lacquer discs. Unfortunately, the masters had deteriorated by this time, but some defects such as dropouts were present in the original 78 issues. As well, the band recorded only fifteen selections, leaving Musicraft with an odd side. Thus, **Jam-A-Ditty** was released twice, coupled with **Sultry Sunset** and **Diminuendo in Blue**. Could "Crescendo in Blue" have been intended as the sixteenth side when time (or budget) ran out? To further confuse us, one discography lists "Tell Me, Tell Me, Dreamface" as having been issued on Musicraft 483, but this is simply another title for **Tulip** or **Turnip**.

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

17. **Blue Lou** 3:14

(Edgar Sampson-Irving Mills)  
Capitol Transcription B 302, mx 2440-1  
Recorded 9 June 1947

18. **Far Away Blues** 2:47

(Duke Ellington-Mercer Ellington-Johnny Hodges)  
Capitol Transcription B 304, mx 2448-1  
Recorded 9 June 1947

19. **Park At 106th** 2:30

(Duke Ellington)  
Capitol Transcription B 305, mx 2452-1  
Recorded 9 June 1947

### Personnel

*Tracks 1-5:* Duke Ellington, piano; Shelton Hemphill, Taft Jordan, Francis Williams, Cat Anderson, Harold 'Shorty' Baker, trumpets; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin, vocals; Lawrence Brown, Wilbur DeParis, Claude Jones, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor; Russell Procope, alto, clarinet; Johnny Hodges, alto; Al Sears, tenor; Harry Carney, baritone, bass clarinet, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

*Tracks 6-13:* Duke Ellington, piano; Taft Jordan, Francis Williams, Cat Anderson, Harold 'Shorty' Baker, trumpets; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin, vocals; Lawrence Brown, Wilbur DeParis, Claude Jones, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor; Russell Procope, alto, clarinet;

Johnny Hodges, alto; Al Sears, tenor; Harry Carney, baritone, bass clarinet, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

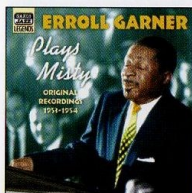
*Tracks 14-19:* Duke Ellington, piano; Shelton Hemphill, Taft Jordan, Francis Williams, Wilbur Bascomb, Harold 'Shorty' Baker, trumpets; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin and vocals; Lawrence Brown, Tyree Glenn, Wilbur DeParis, Claude Jones, trombones; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor; Russell Procope, alto, clarinet; Johnny Hodges, alto; Al Sears, tenor; Harry Carney, baritone, bass clarinet, clarinet; Fred Guy, guitar; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

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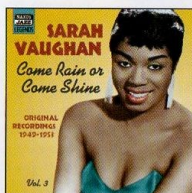
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- Vol.2 **It Don't Mean A Thing** 1930-1934
- Vol.3 **Reminiscing In Tempo** 1932-35
- Vol.4 **Echoes Of Harlem** 1936-1938
- Vol.5 **Braggin' In Brass** 1938
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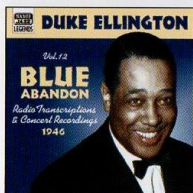
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# DUKE ELLINGTON *Vol.13*

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NOTES AND FULL RECORDING DETAILS INCLUDED

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