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15. Solitude
16. Creole Rhapsody (Parts 1 & 2)



DUKE ELLINGTON

“It Don’t Mean A Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing)” Classic Recordings, Vol.2: 1930–1934

The most prolific of the American jazz “creators”, composer, bandleader and pianist Edward Kennedy ‘Duke’ Ellington was born in Washington, DC, on 29th April 1899. The son of a butler at the White House and US Navy blueprint-maker, he had a comfortable, genteel, God-fearing, middle-class Afro-American upbringing, attending the Garnet Elementary School from 1905-1908, Garrison Junior High School from 1913 to 1914 and the Samuel H. Armstrong Technical High School from 1914 to 1917. He first took piano lessons as a child and in his teens he studied harmony, wrote tunes for the piano and assiduously attended the Howard Theatre, where he heard Luckey Roberts and other jazz keyboard giants. His father, James Edward, while not decrying devotion to ragtime piano-playing, hoped Duke would be more gainfully employed as a graphic artist. After leaving technical college in 1917, Duke briefly ran his own sign-painting business, but that same year after making his solo piano début, played with Louis Thomas’s band at society dances and house parties. In 1918, with drummer Sonny Greer and tenor sax-player Otto Hardwick, he formed his own first band, Duke’s Serenaders, which purveyed “irresistible jass (*sic*)” to its clientele of “select patrons”. In 1922, the trio moved to New York; they played in Wilbur Sweatman’s band while Duke, in his spare moments, also gleaned credits of stride from James P. Johnson and Willie ‘The Lion’ Smith. Late in 1923, with Elmer Snowden, he formed his own band, the Washingtonians. The same year, in collaboration with lyricist Joe Trent, he scored the successful revue *Chocolate Kiddies*. Starring Josephine Baker and Adelaide Hall, this show was also subsequently well received in Berlin.

After a four-year sojourn at New York’s Holiday Inn, Duke realised that the fashion was changing from hot jazz to a more dance-orientated style. In 1927, when he graduated from his residency at the Kentucky Club on Broadway to the Cotton Club in Harlem’s

Lennox Avenue, the Ellington ‘Jungle Band’ was well known at all the best East-coast resorts and elite New York night-clubs as a band which in some measure satisfied a demand for both. The band, which eventually grew to a twelve-piece, would retain its first residency at the Cotton Club until 1931, benefiting immeasurably from the connection. Ellington’s growing renown was further strengthened by the astute exploitation campaigns instigated by his white manager, the music-publisher, onetime bandleader impresario Irving Mills (1894-1985). Mills organised Ellington’s regular radio appearances, his presence in theatre shows on and off Broadway (in the 1929 Ziegfeld musical *Show Girl* and the following year at the Fulton Theatre on 46th Street with Maurice Chevalier), his prestigious – and prolific – recording contracts with Victor, Brunswick and others (under various colourful pseudonyms) and his early film appearances, in *Black And Tan* (RCA, New York, 1929) and in RKO’s Amos ‘n’ Andy comedy *Check And Double Check* (Hollywood, 1930).

By 1931, when the big-band swing era began to take off, the ‘Duke Ellington’s Famous Orchestra’ was already a top US concert attraction. The records they made at this time coincide with the start of Ellington’s most creative period. They fall into three basic categories: hot dance; slower, smoother, more romantic ballads (also designated for the dance market) and experimental essays in instrumental tone-painting. In each category, while some were Ellington compositions, many were up-tempo arrangements of film-songs and standards by other popular composers. From 1930, under the heading “hot”, one might place *Sing, You Sinners* and *St. James Infirmary* (billed on disc as by The Harlem Hot Chocolates – really the Jungle Band renamed) and from 1932 *It Don’t Mean A Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing* (featuring Ivie Anderson, universally admired as Ellington’s finest vocalist, this song serves as a sort of “prelude” to an era).

Into the smooth category fall versions of W. C. Handy’s 1914 classic *St Louis Blues* (with vocal by Crosby, both takes enjoyed wide circulation), *Sophisticated Lady* and *Solitude* (much-loved Ellington tunes perhaps better known through their words) and such well-known Harold Arlen–Ted Koehler standards as *Stormy Weather* and *I’ve Got The World*

On A String (this last enhanced by another fine Ivie Anderson vocal). Among the "experiments" (the Cotton Club afforded Duke plenty of opportunity for experimentation) we find **Creole Rhapsody** (extended over two sides, this corresponds in duration to various experimental LP recordings Duke also made for Victor around this time), **Creole Love Call** (not dissimilar to the Adelaide Hall vocal version of 1927, but more instrumentally integrated), **Lazy Rhapsody**, **Blue Ramble** and **Lightnin'**.

By the end of 1932, Ellington and his men had traversed the United States in one-night stands. In March 1933 they returned to the Cotton Club to mount the revue *Cotton Club Parade*. Generally rated their best revue to date, this starred Ethel Waters who first aired **Stormy Weather**, the song which the Mills Blue Rhythm Band played on the quayside as the Ellington Orchestra sailed from New York aboard the S.S. Olympic on 2 June 1933 bound for Southampton and the first leg of their first European tour. Under the auspices of bandleader and promoter Jack Hylton (who raised personal guarantee of £40,000), the orchestra prefaced its flying tour of Great Britain with a début appearance at the London Palladium and gave a forty-five minute BBC Radio broadcast (14th June). From this visit date the characteristic Ellington instrumentals **Harlem Speaks** and **Hyde Park**, two of four titles recorded for Decca.

Peter Dempsey, 2001

Photo: Duke Ellington and his Orchestra at the Cotton Club, New York, c.1930
(Frank Driggs Collection / Archive Photos)

1. SING YOU SINNERS (Harling-Coslow)
The Harlem Hot Chocolates; Irving Mills, vocal
(Hit of the Week 1045; mx 1045-C) Rec. March, 1930, in New York 2:33
2. ST. JAMES INFIRMARY (Primrose)
The Harlem Hot Chocolates; Irving Mills, vocal
(Hit of the Week 1046; mx 1046-D) Rec. March, 1930, in New York 2:34
3. IT DON'T MEAN A THING (IF IT AIN'T GOT THAT SWING) (Ellington-Mills)
Duke Ellington and his Orchestra; Ivie Anderson, vocal
(Brunswick 6265; mx B 11204-A) Rec. 2nd February, 1932, in New York 3:07
4. ST. LOUIS BLUES, TAKE 1 (Handy)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra; Bing Crosby, vocal
(Brunswick 20105; mx BX 11263-A) Rec. 11th February, 1932, in New York 4:25
5. ST. LOUIS BLUES, TAKE 2 (Handy)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra; Bing Crosby, vocal
(Brunswick 20105; mx BX 11263-B) Rec. 11th February, 1932, in New York 4:23
6. CREOLE LOVE CALL (Ellington)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra
(Brunswick 20105; mx BX 11264-A) Rec. 11th February, 1932, in New York 4:04
7. LAZY RHAPSODY (Ellington)
Duke Ellington and his Orchestra
(Brunswick 6288; mx BX 11205-B) Rec. 2nd February, 1932, in New York 3:08
8. BLUE RAMBLE (Ellington)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra, Cootie Williams, vocal
(Columbia 35834; mx B 11866-B) Rec. 18th May, 1932, in New York 3:10
9. STORMY WEATHER (Arlen-Koehler)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra
(Brunswick 6600; mx B 13339-A) Rec. 16th May, 1933, in New York 2:59

10. LIGHT'NIN' (Ellington)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra
(Columbia 35835; mx B 12344-B) Rec. 21st September, 1932, in New York 3:05
11. SOPHISTICATED LADY (Ellington)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra
(Brunswick 6600; mx B 13338-A) Rec. 16th May, 1933, in New York 3:10
12. HARLEM SPEAKS (Ellington-Mills)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra
(Decca M-438; mx GB 6039-2) Rec. 13th July, 1933, in London 3:04
13. HYDE PARK (Ellington)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra
(Decca M-439; mx GB 6038-2) Rec. 13th July, 1933, in London 2:54
14. I'VE GOT THE WORLD ON A STRING (Arlen-Koehler)
Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra; Ivie Anderson, vocal
(Columbia CB 625; mx W 265051-2) Rec. 15th February, 1933, in New York 3:18
15. SOLITUDE (Ellington-Mills-DeLange)
Duke Ellington and his Orchestra
(Victor 24755; mx BS 80149-1) Rec. 10th January, 1934, in Chicago 3:30
16. CREOLE RHAPSODY (PARTS 1 & 2) (Ellington)
Duke Ellington and his Orchestra
(Victor 36049; mx CRC 68231-2, 68233-3) Rec. 11th June, 1931, in Camden NJ 8:26

Transfers and Production: David Lennick
Digital Noise Reduction: Graham Newton

Personnel

March, 1930 · 11th June, 1931:

Duke Ellington, piano; Arthur Whetsol, Freddy Jenkins, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Joe Nanton, trombone; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Johnny Hodges, clarinet, soprano & alto sax; Harry Carney, clarinet, alto & baritone sax; Barney Bigard, clarinet, tenor sax; Fred Guy, banjo; Wellman Braud, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

2nd & 11th February, 1932:

As above plus Lawrence Brown, trombone

18th May, 1932 · 21st September, 1932 · 15th February, 1933:

Duke Ellington, piano; Arthur Whetsol, Freddy Jenkins, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Johnny Hodges, clarinet, soprano & alto sax; Harry Carney, clarinet, alto & baritone sax; Otto Hardwick, alto & bass sax; Barney Bigard, clarinet, tenor sax; Fred Guy, guitar, banjo; Wellman Braud, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

16th May, 1933 · 13th July, 1933:

Duke Ellington, piano; Arthur Whetsol, Freddy Jenkins, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Johnny Hodges, clarinet, soprano & alto sax; Harry Carney, clarinet, alto & baritone sax; Otto Hardwick, clarinet, alto & bass sax; Barney Bigard, clarinet, tenor sax; Fred Guy, guitar; Wellman Braud, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

10th January, 1934:

Duke Ellington, piano; Arthur Whetsol, Freddy Jenkins, Cootie Williams, Louis Bacon, trumpets; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Johnny Hodges, clarinet, soprano & alto sax; Harry Carney, clarinet, alto & baritone sax; Otto Hardwick, clarinet, alto & bass sax; Barney Bigard, clarinet, tenor sax; Fred Guy, guitar; Wellman Braud, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

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David Lennick

As a producer of CD reissues, David Lennick's work in this field grew directly from his own needs as a broadcaster specializing in vintage material and the need to make it listenable while being transmitted through equalizers, compressors and the inherent limitations of A.M. radio. Equally at home in classical, pop, jazz and nostalgia, Lennick describes himself as exercising as much control as possible on the final product, in conjunction with CEDAR noise reduction applied by Graham Newton in Toronto. As both broadcaster and re-issue producer, he relies on his own extensive collection as well as those made available to him by private collectors, the University of Toronto, the International Piano Archives at Maryland, Syracuse University and others.

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