



DUKE ELLINGTON *Vol. 6* 'Tootin' Through The Roof' Original Recordings 1939-1940

As pianist, composer, arranger and bandleader, Duke Ellington's accomplishments throughout his 49 years (1925-74) as the head of his orchestras are enormous. One of his greatest feats was his ability to hire sidemen with unique tones and styles and somehow blend them together to form a unified ensemble sound.

The band he had in 1939 is a good example of this talent at work. Most big bands of the swing era had at the most three or four top soloists, usually a trumpeter, a trombonist and perhaps two saxophonists. Ellington had eight. Of the six non-soloists, Wallace Jones was used as a lead trumpeter, valve trombonist Juan Tizol was valuable in the ensembles, altoist Otto Hardwick was in the band more for sentimental than musical reasons (since he was an original member of Ellington's Washingtonians in the mid-1920s) as was the largely inaudible rhythm guitarist Fred Guy, Billy Taylor was a fine ensemble bassist and drummer Sonny Greer was an underrated timekeeper who added colour to the band. In other orchestras they would be among the stars but Ellington also had eight very original voices to feature.

Cootie Williams, who succeeded Bubber Miley in 1929, was both a specialist with mutes (achieving colourful tonal distortions) and an excellent open trumpeter. Cornetist Rex Stewart gained fame for his false fingerings and half-

valve techniques in addition to his wide range and wit. It would have been difficult to find two trombonists who sounded more different than Lawrence Brown and Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton. While Brown's technique was impressive and he could play as warmly as Tommy Dorsey, Nanton was able to create otherworldly sounds with his mutes. Clarinetist Barney Bigard had a New Orleans tone and the ability to make complex lines sound effortless. Johnny Hodges was the unrivaled leader among altoists in the 1930s (only Benny Carter was close) and his beautiful tone on ballads made him a major attraction although he could also dig into blues and stomps too. There were no significant baritone-saxophonists before Harry Carney and his huge tone is still the standard among baritonists. And as for the pianist, Ellington was influenced by Willie "The Lion" Smith and James P. Johnson but had developed his own percussive style by the late 1920s and would remain a modern soloist throughout his career.

As 1939 began, Duke Ellington was 39 years old and had been a famous name for nearly a dozen years, ever since he and his orchestra debuted at the Cotton Club in 1927. Renowned for the music standards he had already written, Ellington had played swing before the swing era began, with his 1932 song proclaiming "It Don't Mean A Thing If I Ain't Got That Swing." The

great success of Benny Goodman in 1935 launched the big band era but, rather than being crowded out by the competition of scores of new groups, Ellington's orchestra simply rose above the field, creating music in its own category that could not be copied.

Tootin' Through The Roof has twenty of Duke Ellington's finest recordings of 1939 and early 1940, cut for the Columbia label before Duke switched to Victor. The program begins with *Doin' The Voom Voom*, a song first recorded by Ellington in 1929 and featuring three of Duke's most famous soloists: Cootie Williams, Johnny Hodges and Harry Carney. In addition to spots for Nanton, Carney and Brown, Wallace Jones gets the early melodic lead on *Serenade To Sweden*. One of Ellington's most enduring (and joyful) originals from the period is *Portrait Of The Lion*, his spirited tribute to Willie "The Lion" Smith. *Lady In Blue* succeeds as both dance music and creative jazz, with subtle and expressive playing from Brown, Carney and Williams. The ensembles are in the spotlight during the driving and catchy *Solid Old Man* other than short spots for the contrasting trombones of Brown and Nanton and some fills from the leader.

Ivie Anderson was Duke Ellington's main vocalist during 1932-43 and is considered the best of all of his singers. She is featured on the bluesy *In A Mizz* (one of only two songs on this set not written by Ellington), the rambunctious *I'm Checkin' Out Goo'm Bye*, and the obscure *A Lonely Co-Ed*. Between them, *Bouncing Buoyancy* and *The Sergeant Was Shy* (which is

based on "Bugle Call Rag") have statements from all seven of Ellington's horn soloists with the latter even including a brief spot for Guy's chordal guitar.

In 1939, there were two important additions to Duke Ellington's mighty orchestra that made the big band even stronger. Earlier in the year, Billy Strayhorn joined as Duke's right-hand man, contributing compositions and arrangements in a style similar to Ellington's, filling in occasionally on piano and writing lyrics. In the late summer, Jimmy Blanton replaced Billy Taylor as the band's bassist. Blanton revolutionized the string bass by becoming its first important soloist, improvising with the fluidity of a guitarist and playing inspiring notes in the ensembles and behind the other musicians.

Blanton's presence is very much in evidence from the start of *I Never Felt This Way Before*, playing quiet doubletime lines behind the haunting ensemble. He drives the band on *Grievin'* which is a surprisingly celebratory performance. Ellington would compose and record many musical portraits during this era, with *Weely* paying tribute to Billy Strayhorn, who is heard briefly on piano between the solos of Stewart and Carney. *Tootin' Through The Roof* is climaxed by Rex Stewart and Cootie Williams taking a famous cornet/trumpet tradeoff.

It was a measure of Duke Ellington's great respect for Jimmy Blanton that he chose to accompany his bassist on a pair of unprecedented duets, *Blues and Plucked Again*. This combination of instruments had never

recorded together before in this type of format and Blanton really comes through.

In early 1940, Ben Webster joined the band as Ellington's first major tenor-saxophone soloist. Grouped with Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young as one of the big three of swing tenors, Webster had a sound influenced by Hawkins but a simpler and warmer style of his own. The 14 February 1940 session, which features remakes of four Ellington hits, has Webster heard in short solos on the first three numbers along with singer Ivie Anderson. *Solitude* and *Mood Indigo* are two of Duke's most famous songs while *Stormy Weather*, which is more closely associated with Ethel

Personnel

Tracks 1-10: Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Johnny Hodges, clarinet, soprano & alto sax; Harry Carney, clarinet, alto & baritone sax; Otto Hardwick, alto & bass sax; Duke Ellington, piano; Fred Guy, guitar; Billy Taylor, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 11-14: Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Johnny Hodges, clarinet, soprano & alto sax; Harry Carney, clarinet, alto & baritone sax; Otto Hardwick, alto & bass sax; Duke Ellington,

Waters and (a little later) Lena Horne, was popularized by Ellington early on. *Tootin' Through The Roof* concludes with an inventive remake of *Sophisticated Lady* that gives listeners a final chance to hear the beauty of Hodges, Carney and Brown.

While Duke Ellington's orchestra of 1940-42 is often rated by jazz historians as his finest band, the selections on *Tootin' Through The Roof* show that his 1939-40 edition was quite classic too.

Scott Yanow

— author of eight jazz books including *Duke Ellington, Swing, Jazz On Record 1917-76* and *Trumpet Kings*

piano (except Billy Strayhorn on 'Weely'); Fred Guy, guitar; Jimmy Blanton, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 15-16: Duke Ellington, piano; Jimmy Blanton, bass
Tracks 17-20: Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Johnny Hodges, clarinet, soprano & alto sax; Harry Carney, clarinet, alto & baritone sax; Otto Hardwick, alto & bass sax; Ben Webster, tenor sax; Duke Ellington, piano; Fred Guy, guitar; Jimmy Blanton, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

1. **Doin' The Voom Voom** 2:42
(Bubber Miley-Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35208, mx WM 1031-A
Recorded 6 June 1939
2. **Serenade To Sweden** 3:24
(Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35214, mx WM 1033-A
Recorded 6 June 1939
3. **Portrait Of The Lion** 2:34
(Duke Ellington)
Brunswick m8365, mx WM 1006-2
Recorded 21 March 1939
4. **Lady In Blue** 2:46
(Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35291, mx M 999-1
Recorded 20 March 1939
5. **Solid, Old Man** 2:33
(Duke Ellington)
Brunswick m8380, mx WM 1008-1
Recorded 21 March 1939
6. **In A Mizz** 3:07
(Haven Johnson-Charlie Barnet)
Ivie Anderson, vocal
Brunswick m8405, mx WM 1038-A
Recorded 12 June 1939
7. **I'm Checkin' Out, Go'om Bye** 2:30
(Duke Ellington)
Ivie Anderson, vocal
Columbia 35208, mx WM 1039-A
Recorded 12 June 1939
8. **A Lonely Co-Ed** 3:19
(Duke Ellington)
Ivie Anderson, vocal
Columbia 35240, mx WM 1040-A
Recorded 12 June 1939
9. **Bouncing Buoyancy** 2:43
(Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35240, mx WM 1062-A
Recorded 28 August 1939
10. **The Sergeant Was Shy** 2:44
(Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35214, mx WM 1063-A
Recorded 28 August 1939
11. **I Never Felt This Way Before** 3:00
(Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35353, mx WM 1092-A
Recorded 14 October 1939
12. **Grievin'** 2:53
(Billy Strayhorn-Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35310, mx WM 1093-A
Recorded 14 October 1939
13. **Weely (A Portrait Of Billy Strayhorn)** 3:00
(Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35353, mx WM 1095-A
Recorded 14 October 1939
14. **Tootin' Through The Roof** 2:55
(Duke Ellington)
Columbia 35310, mx WM 1094-A
Recorded 14 October 1939
15. **Blues** 2:57
(Duke Ellington)
Duke Ellington, piano; Jimmy Blanton, bass
Columbia 35322, mx WM 1120-A
Recorded 22 November 1939
16. **Plucked Again** 3:03
(Duke Ellington)
Duke Ellington, piano; Jimmy Blanton, bass
Columbia 35322, mx WM 1121-A
Recorded 22 November 1939

17. **Solitude** 3:00
 (Duke Ellington–Eddie deLange–Irving Mills)
 Ivie Anderson, vocal
 Columbia 35427, mx WM 1135-A
 Recorded 14 February 1940
18. **Stormy Weather** 2:35
 (Harold Arlen–Ted Koehler)
 Ivie Anderson, vocal
 Columbia 35556, mx WM 1136-A
 Recorded 14 February 1940
19. **Mood Indigo** 2:45
 (Duke Ellington–Irving Mills–Barney Bigard)
 Ivie Anderson, vocal
 Columbia 35427, mx WM 1137-A
 Recorded 14 February 1940

20. **Sophisticated Lady** 2:53
 (Duke Ellington–Irving Mills–Mitchell Parish)
 Columbia 35556, mx WM 1138-A
 Recorded 14 February 1940

All tracks except 15 & 16 by Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra

All selections recorded in New York

Transfers & Production: David Lennick

Digital Noise Reduction: Andrew Lang for K&A Productions Ltd.

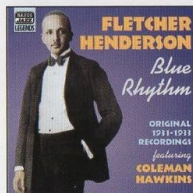
Original monochrome photo of Duke Ellington from Michael Ochs Archives / Redferns

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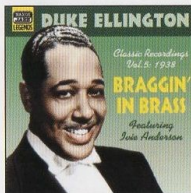


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