

DUKE ELLINGTON *Vol. 8*

'Jump For Joy' Original Recordings 1941-1942

In 1941, the year that Duke Ellington turned 42, his band was in the middle of one of its greatest periods. With Ellington assisted by his new right-hand man composer-arranger-pianist Billy Strayhorn, and featuring such relatively new additions as tenor-saxophonist Ben Webster, cornetist-violinist Ray Nance and the remarkable bassist Jimmy Blanton, his orchestra was recording one gem after another.

The Duke Ellington Orchestra had actually been in its prime for at least fourteen years at that point. Ellington, born 29 April 1899 in Washington DC, was a natural-born leader in addition to being a musical innovator. Although he had originally thought of becoming an artist, when Ellington watched local stride and ragtime pianists perform, saw the joy of their music and began to envy their lifestyle, he knew that music was the field for him. Duke learned stride piano from slowing down James P. Johnson piano rolls to half-speed and got his career off to a fast start by taking out a large ad in the *Yellow Pages*. Never mind that he actually knew very few songs at the start; Ellington became a bandleader. He sent out several different ensembles to various jobs around town and made brief appearances with each one, playing the two or three songs that he knew.

Ellington learned quickly and by 1922 was a

strong enough musician to make his first visit to New York, playing with clarinetist Wilbur Sweatman. After that engagement ran out, Duke returned to Washington DC. But the following year he was back in New York as a member of banjoist Elmer Snowden's Washingtonians and this time he stayed. In 1924 when a money dispute resulted in Snowden being ousted, Ellington became the group's leader. By then he was developing into both a skilled pianist and an adventurous arranger-composer. The Washingtonians worked mostly at the Kentucky Club during 1924-27. By the time they successfully auditioned for a job as the house band at the Cotton Club in December 1927, Ellington was ready.

The regular radio broadcasts from the Cotton Club led to Duke's band being accurately billed as Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra. Ellington became a household name and was among the first jazz musicians to be universally thought of as a genius. An underrated pianist, Ellington wrote unusual and highly original arrangements, penned a couple dozen standards in the 1930s alone and blended together a band of unique individualists into a unified group sound.

A quick rundown of Ellington's personnel at

the beginning of 1941 reveals why Ellington and Strayhorn were so inspired in their writing. Ray Nance was a triple threat on cornet (where he was Cootie Williams' successor), violin and as a singer. Cornetist Rex Stewart used a self-taught half-valve technique to achieve unusual sounds. The trombone section featured the smooth virtuosity of Lawrence Brown and the colourful distorted tones of Tricky Sam Nanton. Johnny Hodges was the top altoist in jazz, Harry Carney virtually made the baritone into a solo instrument, Barney Bigard was a major clarinetist and Ben Webster ranked with Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young as one of the big three of the tenor. Not to be left out among the soloists were Ellington himself and Jimmy Blanton, the first modern bass soloist. Also valuable in the background were lead trumpeter Wallace Jones, valve trombonist Juan Tizol, altoist Otto Hardwicke, rhythm guitarist Fred Guy and drummer Sonny Greer. While most big bands of the swing era had three or perhaps four key soloists, Ellington had ten.

Beginning this collection of the best of Ellington's 1941-42 recordings is the original version of his theme song **Take The 'A' Train**. Penned by Billy Strayhorn and permanently replacing Duke's original theme "East St. Louis Toodle-oo", this piece is particularly notable for Ray Nance's classic cornet solo which has become an integral part of the song.

The next three numbers were all written by Duke's 21-year old son Mercer Ellington. Although none became as well known as

Mercer's most famous original, "Things Ain't What They Used To Be," they each have their memorable moments. **Jumpin' Punks** has spots for Bigard, Carney and Greer although Blanton's bass lines often steal the show. **Blue Serge** is quite melancholy and, even with short spots from Nance, Nanton, Duke and Webster, it is primarily a gloomy tone poem for the full ensemble. Much more light-hearted, **John Hardy's Wife** is an obscurity well worth bringing back, featuring colourful statements from Carney, Stewart and Brown.

Duke Ellington recorded relatively few unaccompanied piano features until the 1950s. He sounds nostalgic, melodic and relaxed on **Dear Old Southland and Solitude**. **Just A-Settin' And A-Rockin'** is a joyful ode to rocking chairs. Webster dominates the performance although Nanton, Bigard and Nance also help out.

For a few months in 1941, Duke Ellington was involved in staging and performing regularly in a civil rights musical, *Jump For Joy*, that was way ahead of its time. Although the production never made it out of Los Angeles, several of its key numbers by Ellington and lyricist Paul Francis Webster were immortalized in recordings. **Chocolate Shake** has a tricky melody that Ivie Anderson handles effortlessly. Herb Jeffries, who had become famous due to his hit recording of "Flamingo" and is amazingly still active as of this writing at the age of 93 (sounding 63), is in fine form on **The Brown-Skin Gal** and the infectious **Jump For Joy**. The

hit of the show was **I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good**, which ranks with Ivie Anderson's best recordings and has a pair of gorgeous melody statements from Johnny Hodges.

Billy Strayhorn's picturesque **Chelsea Bridge** (with the composer on piano) became a permanent part of Ben Webster's repertoire after he starred on this initial recording. Juan Tizol, who can be heard briefly in the lead on "Chelsea Bridge", wrote **Perdido** which became a jam session favorite and a staple of *Jazz At The Philharmonic* a few years later. This rendition features Carney, Stewart, Webster and Nance. The romantic ballad **Moon Mist** gave the band an opportunity to feature its first violin soloist, Ray Nance, along with Hodges and Brown. **The 'C' Jam Blues**, one of the simplest melodies ever written (consisting of just two notes), benefits from four-bar breaks that introduce the soloists and background figures that add to the piece's momentum. Nance (again on violin), Stewart, Webster, Nanton and Bigard add to the jam session atmosphere.

Tragedy struck the Duke Ellington Orchestra within the next month as Jimmy Blanton was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He never recovered and passed away on 30 July 1942 at the age of 25. It would be more than a decade before any jazz bassist played at his level.

Junior Raglin took Blanton's place with Ellington and the band continued recording memorable numbers. **What Am I Here For** has both a catchy melody and a very danceable tempo; Nance, Stewart and Webster are among

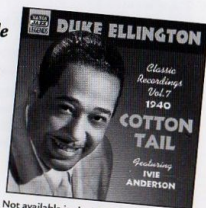
those heard from. Strayhorn's **Johnny Come Lately** feels complex but also inspires some hot solos from Brown and Nanton. **A Slip Of The Lip Can Sink A Ship** has topical lyrics for Ray Nance to sing and a nice spot for Hodges. Hodges is in the spotlight during much of **Sentimental Lady**, which would be renamed "I Didn't Know About You" after it gained lyrics a couple years later. This set concludes with the hard-swinging **Main Stem**, which gives Stewart, Hodges, Nance, Bigard, Nanton, Webster, Brown and the full Ellington Orchestra one final time to shine.

Great as the 1941-42 Duke Ellington Orchestra was, the band still had 32 more memorable years to go.

— Scott Yanow, author of eight jazz books including *Jazz On Film, Swing, Bebop, Trumpet Kings and Jazz On Record 1917-76*

Also available
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1. **Take The 'A' Train** 2:57
(Billy Strayhorn)
Victor 27380, mx PBS 055283-1
Recorded 15 February 1941, Hollywood

2. **Jumpin' Punks** 3:36
(Mercer Ellington)
Victor 27356, mx PBS 055284-2
Recorded 15 February 1941, Hollywood

3. **Blue Serge** 3:23
(Mercer Ellington)
Victor 27356, mx PBS 055286-1
Recorded 15 February 1941, Hollywood

4. **John Hardy's Wife** 3:32
(Mercer Ellington)
Victor 27434, mx PBS 055285-1
Recorded 15 February 1941, Hollywood

5. **Dear Old Southland** 3:28
(Henry Creamer-Turner Layton)
Duke Ellington, piano solo
Victor 27564, mx BS 065604-2
Recorded 14 May 1941, New York

6. **Solitude** 3:33
(Duke Ellington-Eddie DeLange-Irving Mills)
Duke Ellington, piano solo
Victor 27564, mx BS 065605-1
Recorded 14 May 1941, New York

7. **Just A-Settin' And A-Rockin'** 3:38
(Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn)
Victor 27587, mx PBS 061285-1
Recorded 5 June 1941, Hollywood

8. **Chocolate Shake** 2:55
From *Jump For Joy*
(Duke Ellington-Paul Francis Webster)
Ivie Anderson, vocal
Victor 27531, mx PBS 061318-1
Recorded 26 June 1941, Hollywood

9. **I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good** 3:27
From *Jump For Joy*
(Duke Ellington-Paul Francis Webster)
Ivie Anderson, vocal
Victor 27531, mx PBS 061319-1
Recorded 26 June 1941, Hollywood

10. **The Brown-Skin Gal (In The Calico Gown)** 3:17
From *Jump For Joy*
(Duke Ellington-Paul Francis Webster)
Herb Jeffries, vocal
Victor 27517, mx PBS 061339-1
Recorded 2 July 1941, Hollywood

11. **Jump For Joy** 2:54
From *Jump For Joy*
(Duke Ellington-Paul Francis Webster-Sid Kuller)
Herb Jeffries, vocal
Victor 25717, mx PBS 061340-1
Recorded 14 May 1941, Hollywood

12. **Chelsea Bridge** 2:57
(Billy Strayhorn)
Victor 27740, mx PBS 061687-2
Recorded 2 December 1941, Hollywood

13. **Perdido** 3:17
(Juan Tizol)
Victor 27880, mx BS 070682-1
Recorded 21 January 1942, Chicago

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14. **Moon Mist** 3:02
(Mercer Ellington)
Victor 27856, mx BS 070684-2
Recorded 21 January 1942, Chicago
15. **The 'C' Jam Blues** 2:41
(Duke Ellington)
Victor 27856, mx BS 070683-1
Recorded 21 January 1942, Chicago
16. **What Am I Here For?** 3:29
(Duke Ellington)
Victor 20-1598, mx BS 071890-1
Recorded 26 February 1942, New York
17. **Johnny Come Lately** 2:43
(Billy Strayhorn)
Victor 20-1556, mx PBS 072439-1
Recorded 26 June 1942, Hollywood
18. **A Slip Of The Lip** 2:57
(Luther Henderson Jr-Mercer Ellington)
Ray Nance, vocal
Victor 20-1528, mx BS 074783-1
Recorded 28 July 1942, Chicago
19. **Sentimental Lady (I Didn't Know About You)** 3:05
(Duke Ellington)
Victor 20-1528, mx BS 074782-1
Recorded 28 July 1942, Chicago
20. **Main Stem** 2:54
(Duke Ellington)
Victor 20-1556, mx PBS 072438-1
Recorded 26 June 1942, Hollywood

Transfers & Production: David Lennick
Digital Restoration: Graham Newton

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

Personnel

DUKE ELLINGTON & HIS FAMOUS
ORCHESTRA Except tracks 5-6

Tracks 1-4, 7-15: Wardell Jones, trumpet; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin; Rex Stewart, cornet; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombone; 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 (except track 12: Billy Strayhorn), piano; Fred Guy, guitar; Jimmy Blanton, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 5-6: Duke Ellington, piano solo

Tracks 16, 17, 20: Wardell Jones, trumpet; Ray Nance, trumpet & violin; Rex Stewart, cornet; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombone; 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; Junior Raglin, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

Tracks 18-19: Wardell Jones, trumpet; Ray Nance, trumpet & violin; Rex Stewart, cornet; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombone; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Chauncey Haughton, 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; Junior Raglin, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

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DUKE ELLINGTON Jump For Joy

LEGENDS 

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9. I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good 3:21
10. The Brown-Skin Gal (In The Calico Gown) 3:11
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NOTES AND FULL RECORDING DETAILS INCLUDED

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Design: Ron Hoares

Total
Time
63:26

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LEGENDS  DUKE ELLINGTON Jump For Joy

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