



Duke Ellington And His ORCHESTRA

"The Radio Years" 1940 - 45



Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams (tp); Rex Stewart (cnt); Lawrence Brown, Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, Juan Tizol (tb); Barney Bigard (cl, ts); Johnny Hodges (as, ss); Ben Webster (ts); Harry Carney (bars, cl, as); Duke Ellington (p); Fred Guy (g); Jimmy Blanton (b); Sonny Greer (dr); Ivie Anderson (vcl).

- CBS Studios, New York, June 10, 1940

1. **East St. Louis Toodle Oo** (Ellington)
2. **Ko Ko** (Ellington)
3. **Blue Goose** (Ellington)
4. **So Far, So Good** (Lawrence, Mundy, White)
5. **Cotton Tail** (Ellington)
6. **Concerto For Cootie** (Ellington)
7. **Jack The Bear** (Ellington)
8. **Boy Meets Horn** (Stewart - Ellington)
9. **The Sergeant Was Shy** (Ellington)
10. **Never No Lament** (Ellington)

William Anderson, Shelton "Scad" Hemphill, Taft Jordan, Ray Nance, Rex Stewart (tp); Lawrence Brown, Claude Jones, Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton (tb); Jimmy Hamilton (cl, ts); Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick (as); Al Sears (ts); Harry Carney (bars, cl, bcl); Duke Ellington (p); Fred Guy (g); Al Lucas, Junior Raglin (b); Sonny Greer (dr).
- Recorded at World Studios, New York, August 3, 1945, and first aired by the BBC on Friday the 28th of December 1945 in their "Kings of Jazz" series.

11. **Black And Tan Fantasy** (Ellington)
12. **Mood To Be Wooed** (Hodges - Ellington)
13. **Frantic Fantasy** (Ellington)
14. **The "C" Jam Blues** (Ellington)
15. **Air Conditioned Jungle** (Ellington)
16. **On The Sunny Side Of The Street** (McHugh)
17. **Rockin' In Rhythm** (Ellington)
18. **Take The "A" Train** (Strayhorn)

Down the years, from the 1920s to the 1970s, the music of Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington dominated the world of jazz and his orchestra interpreted his glorious works with intensity and passion. Ellington loved life and he loved people, especially the great musicians who served him so faithfully during a long and illustrious career.

His big band was the voice of his music. No matter what the personnel was, at any given time, the men who played his songs and supported his eloquent piano playing did so with conviction and dedication. They were the proudest and most respected of jazz musicians and no orchestra in the history of jazz and swing has produced so many outstanding soloists for any Ellington band was truly an all-star aggregation. The 1940 and 1945 editions of the Ellington orchestra heard on this CD supply ample evidence of that fact.

This disc contains two complete broadcasts originating from New York City specifically aimed at radio listeners in the United Kingdom. They represent the special way the BBC in London wanted to present Duke's music to a British audience not at all of whom would be aware of the Ellington brand of hot jazz. As such they form a unique chapter in the story of conveying the sound of big band jazz to the masses. Felix Greene was the enterprising, young BBC producer in charge of jazz and swing programmes and since his appointment in 1936, as the head of the Corporation's American programming department, he had demonstrated a keen interest in jazz music.

Prior to the 1940 Ellington programme Greene had produced shows with a wide range of popular material, performed by artists as diverse as Guy Lombardo, Fats Waller and Benny Goodman, who had all appeared on radio relays from the States. "BG" launched the first "America Dances" programme in January 1937 and it was the subsequent series bearing this title

that was to prove a great favourite with British radio listeners and the rest of the Dominion as well since the BBC's shortwave station in Daventry also carried the programs.

These early experiments of short wave transmissions across the Atlantic saw many technical deficiencies. Poor reception, breakdowns in sound etc. led to a decision in 1939, to have all future "America Dances" shows recorded in New York during the actual broadcasts. These "safety acetate discs" were then shipped to London for the BBC to use on all subsequent re-broadcasts of the shows.

When the Duke Ellington orchestra gathered in the CBS Studios in New York on 10th June, 1940 it was the maestro's fourth (and last) appearance in the "America Dances" series. The band had debuted on 29th April, 1938 (the Duke's 39th birthday !) when the BBC relayed a live half hour broadcast from the famous Cotton Club in New York City. The 10 June, 1940 show was first re-broadcasted by the BBC on 26 April, 1941 by using the aforementioned acetate discs.

The broadcast gets underway with opening remarks by the CBS staff announcer and from the first few bars of music it is obvious that you are listening to an exceptional orchestra playing at its peak. The Duke Ellington orchestra of 1940-42 was one of the truly great bands with a library of arrangements penned by the Duke that were quite remarkable in terms of originality and musical concept. The orchestra became known as the Blanton-Webster band in recognition of the indelible contributions from the amazing young bass player Jimmy Blanton, and the highly talented tenor saxophonist Ben Webster. The artistic performance of the unit was unequalled by any other band of the time. This quality stemmed not only from strenght in depth where

the soloists were concerned but primarily because a nucleus of sidemen had been with Ellington for several years.

Stalwarts such as alto saxophonist supreme, Johnny Hodges, fellow reedmen Otto Hardwick and Harry Carney, trumpeter "Cootie" Williams, Lawrence Brown and Joe Nanton on the tronbones, had all been on the payroll for a decade and their considerable combined talents made the band run like a well oiled machine. Not that there was anything mechanical about this unique orchestra for every performance seemed to bring something fresh and inventive to the ears. With two other mainstays, Sonny Greer on drums and Fred Guy on guitar, the orchestra had a powerful, swaggering rhythm and the opening number "Ko Ko" demonstrates this to perfection.

Among other highlights on this broadcast are the two "concert" works, "Concerto For Cootie" (later known as "Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me"), featuring Cootie Williams and the showcase for his fellow trumpeter Rex Stewart, "Boy Meets Horn". However, the standout item for me is the driving version of "Cottontail" written for then newcomer Ben Webster, who displays a majestic tone and technique on the tenor saxophone.

The re-broadcast of the 1940 show was well received in Britan. Writing in the May 3rd, 1941 edition of "The Melody Maker," their radio columnist "Detector" commented: "Ellington's band is still the world's greatest; just as Ellington's compositions and methods of presenting them are such that no one has succeeded in emulating. His music is to-day, as it always has been in the past, the outcome of his own soul and talent".

By 1945 the number of American bands and performers heard on British radio had grown dramatically. Duke's music was aired frequently via the

London station of the American Forces Network and through other transmissions.

The second broadcast is an even more fascinating insight into the workings of the Ellington orchestra. In early August 1945 the orchestra, with several changes in personnel, gathered in a studio on New York's Fifth Avenue. The band was still formed round a nucleus of long serving players, namely Hodges, Carney, Hardwick, Greer, Stewart, Nanton, Brown and Guy. Into the Ellington fold had come trumpeters Ray Nance, Taft Jordan, William "Cat" Anderson and "Scad" Hemphill, new reed man Jimmy Hamilton and trombonist Claude Jones (formerly with the Cab Calloway orchestra). Duke had also returned to his intriguing concept of the mid-30s, ie. two string bass players, this time Junior Raglin and Al Lucas.

The ensuing broadcast took the form of a rehearsal style setting with the listener "sitting in" with the Duke and his men. A realistic sounding relaxed atmosphere was created via background chat among the musicians between numbers and the whole scene was described in a running commentary by Alistair Cooke. Cooke was one of the most distinguished of all broadcasters and was a highly respected figure on both sides of the Atlantic. He later became a household name in Britain for his long running "Letter from America" radio series.

In his introduction to the broadcast Cooke emphasises that the music is designed to appeal to "hot jazz fans". There was an abundance of such followers of jazz and swing in the United Kingdom and they had enjoyed a good diet of their favourite music on the radio since 1939 despite the wartime conditions. Furthermore, grammophone records, music journals and Hollywood films had all played a part in sustaining the fans' interest in "hot music". The loyal following for Ellington's music in particular stemmed from

early in the 1930's and many British enthusiasts had witnessed his visit to their shores in 1933.

As the broadcast unfolds, it is the original compositions for star soloists that again dominate the proceedings. Alastair Cooke, quite rightly, gives credit to Duke's right man, Billy Strayhorn, for his sterling work as composer and arranger. The lyrical alto saxophone playing of the incomparable Johnny Hodges is heard on "Mood To Be Wooed", and he is followed by cornet player Rex Stewart who is featured in "Frantic Fantasy". "The C Jam Blues" is described by Cooke and then Duke is heard directing the orchestra as they construct the number from a 12 bar blues riff. This item really lets the listener get close to how the band prepared its repertoire for performance.

With further solo features and a solid version of "Rockin' In Rhythm", the broadcast comes to a close and a truly remarkable experience it is to hear such an informal but highly professional performance.

Duke Ellington left the world a wonderful legacy of quality music and we shall never see his like again. The songs and the arrangements so lovingly crafted by a pure genius will live on far into the next century. This splendid CD is but a small reminder of his magnificent orchestra and his huge talent as a musician.

BRIAN BELTON (1999)

A long time big band fan and record collector, Brian Belton is an honorary life member of "The Harry James Appreciation Society" and is a feature writer on swing music for "In Tune International" magazine.



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DUKE ELLINGTON

"THE RADIO YEARS"

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Duke Ellington

The Radio Years 1940-1945

1. EAST ST. LOUIS TODDLE-OO 1:09
2. KO KO 2:27
3. BLUE GOOSE 3:20
4. SO FAR, SO GOOD 2:40
5. COTTONTAIL 3:37
6. CONCERTO FOR COOTIE 4:23
7. JACK THE BEAR 3:02
8. BOY MEETS HORN 5:11
9. THE SERGEANT WAS SHY 2:39
10. NEVER NO LAMENT 0:54
11. BLACK AND TAN FANTASY 1:59
12. MOOD TO BE WOODED 4:50
13. FRANTIC FANTASY 5:35
14. THE "C" JAM BLUES 2:19
15. AIR CONDITIONED JUNGLE 4:53
16. ON THE SUNNY SIDE OF
THE STREET 4:44
17. ROCKIN' IN RHYTHM 4:55
18. TAKE THE "A" TRAIN 0:34

AAAD Total time: 59:32

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