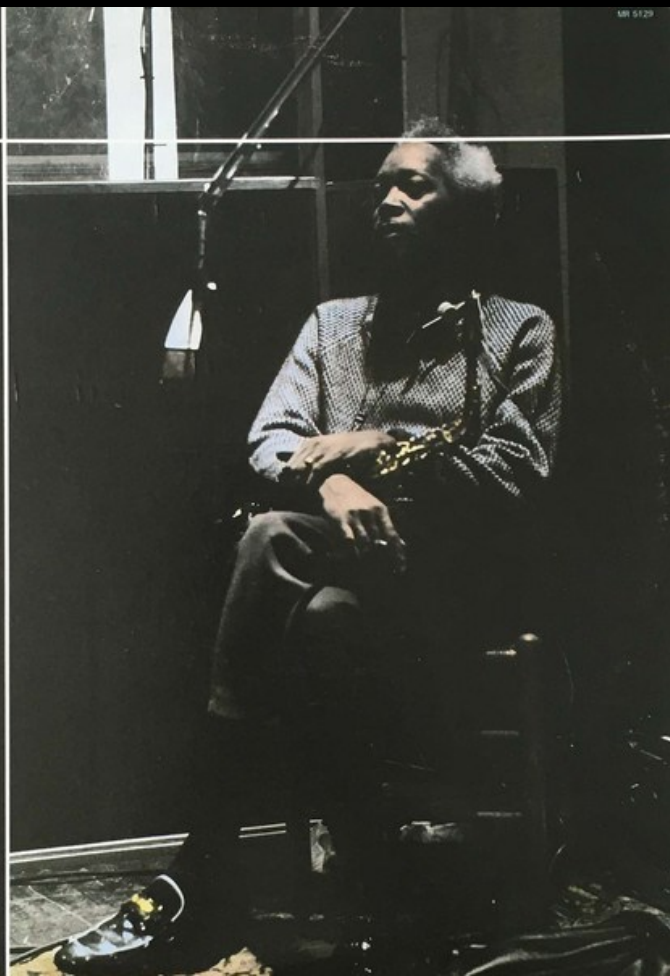


SONNY
STITT

BLUES
FOR
DUKE



MUSE RECORDS





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SONNY STITT
BLUES FOR DUKE

MR 5129

SIDE A

1. C. JAM BLUES 6:07
(D. Ellington) (Robbins Music/Leo Feist Inc./Miller Music) ASCAP
2. I GOT IT BAD AND THAT AIN'T GOOD 7:58
(D. Ellington-P. Webster) (Harrison Music/Robbins Music) ASCAP
3. PERDIDO 4:45
(J. Tizol-H.J. Lengfelder-I. Drake) (Tempo Music) ASCAP
Produced by Elliot Meadow
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MUSE RECORDS

SONNY STITT
BLUES FOR DUKE

MR 5129

SIDE B

1. BLUES FOR DUKE 6:59
(S. Stitt) (Barney Music) BMI
2. DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE 3:45
(D. Ellington-B. Russell) (Robbins Music/Harrison Music) ASCAP
3. SATIN DOLL 7:43
(D. Ellington-B. Strayhorn-J. Mercer) (Tempo Music) ASCAP
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SATIN DOLL 7:43

SONNY STITT, TENOR &
 ALTO SAXOPHONES
 BARRY HARRIS, PIANO
 SAM JONES, BASS
 BILLY HIGGINS, DRUMS

Barry Harris appears courtesy of Xanadu Records

RECORDED ON DECEMBER
 3 & 4 1975 AT BLUE ROCK
 STUDIO, NYC
 ENGINEER: ED KORVIN
 PRODUCED BY ELLIOT MEADOW
 COVER PHOTO: C. EASTMOND

ALBUM DESIGN & PHOTO
 COLORING: RON WARWELL

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Duke Ellington's death in 1974 was followed by any number of written tributes—undoubtedly sincere in their various ways, but for the most part suspiciously belated. Musicians, on the other hand, have never been slow in paying homage to Ellington in words, or playing Ellington **homages** in music. True, Ellington had relatively few direct imitators, at least in the sense of slavish copyists; his innovations were too bold for that, his idioms too distinctive, his textures too complex. But from 1928—when Don Redman arranged "Birmingham Breakdown" for a Chocolate Dandies recording group—Ellington's compositions were "covered" by one musician after another. Ellington was often quite pleased with such renditions: not only did they provide him with composer royalties, but they also typically proved flattering in comparison to his original works. And when Ellington actually preferred a soloist's recomposition to one of his own conceptions—as in the case of Sidney Bechet's 1940 version of "Old Man Blues", he was only too happy to acknowledge that preference. (Plagiarists on the other hand, got rough treatment. More than once, courts of law gave legal recognition to Ellington's immediately identifiable composing talents when other "songwriters" misappropriated them for their own use.)

From Bechet to Redman, from Charlie Barnet to Cecil Taylor—even unto Steely Dan—Ellington's would-be interpreters have covered much of the range of America's music, and certainly not all of that would have fitted into the fabric of Ellington's music. But this would hardly be the case with Sonny Stitt. Stitt's mature style as a soloist was developed in the 1940s, a period when Ellington was not entirely receptive to new trends in solo language. While Stitt was gaining national attention with Billy Eckstine and Dizzy Gillespie, Ellington avoided Stitt's contemporaries—performers in the manner of Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and Lester Young—in favor of his established featured performers and their stylistic peers. By the early 1950s, however, the Ellington band had a small but impressive modernist faction, and there are even two remarkably similar stories (apocryphal, perhaps; they do not appear in Ellington's autobiography) that Ellington attempted to persuade Parker and Fats Navarro to join his orchestra. Parker and Ellington, Navarro and Ellington, Stitt and Ellington—intriguing possibilities once, but now not even that.

But Stitt on the subject of Ellington is no mere possibility. The record in hand offers five of Ellington's greatest popular successes, as interpreted by Stitt and one of the finest rhythm sections it would be possible to assemble. Stitt and Barry Harris together go back to 1957, when the saxophonist became the first major musician from outside Harris' native Detroit to recognize the pianist's talents and hire him for a recording: **Burnin'**, their 1961 collaboration on Argo, has long been a favorite of Stitt specialists.

Today, Harris is far better known than he has ever been before. In the past five or six years, he has probably had more recording opportunities than in all his previous career; but rather than exhausting his invention or leading him to coast on his considerable technique, Harris' new prominence has been paralleled by recordings of remarkably consistent imagination and spirit—such as his offerings here.

Bassist Sam Jones goes back aways with Harris, to their months together as partners in the Cannonball Adderley rhythm section of 1960. Since that partnership, Jones's long stays with Adderley and Oscar Peterson have established his reputation as one of the most reliable of bassists, powerful yet flexible as well. And in Billy Higgins, strong in time and a paradigm of elegant simplicity in modern drumming, we hear a perfect compliment to Harris and Jones and Stitt himself.

For Stitt, this is mostly a tenor session; he plays lower horn on all selections except **I Got It Bad**—once a feature for the great Johnny Hodges. Most of the other Ellington pieces here are blowing-session favorites, and the tenor—with its echoes of Stitt's many duets with the late Gene Ammons—seems more appropriate for such material.

The blues that gives this record its title begins somewhat in the vein of "Parker's Mood", as tenor-piano duet. And though the mood here is more Stitt than Ellington, **Blues for Duke** is a true tribute. For Ellington's territory was **all** of the blues, and beyond; and in blues territory, Sonny Stitt makes himself and his listeners comfortable at home.

—J.R. Taylor