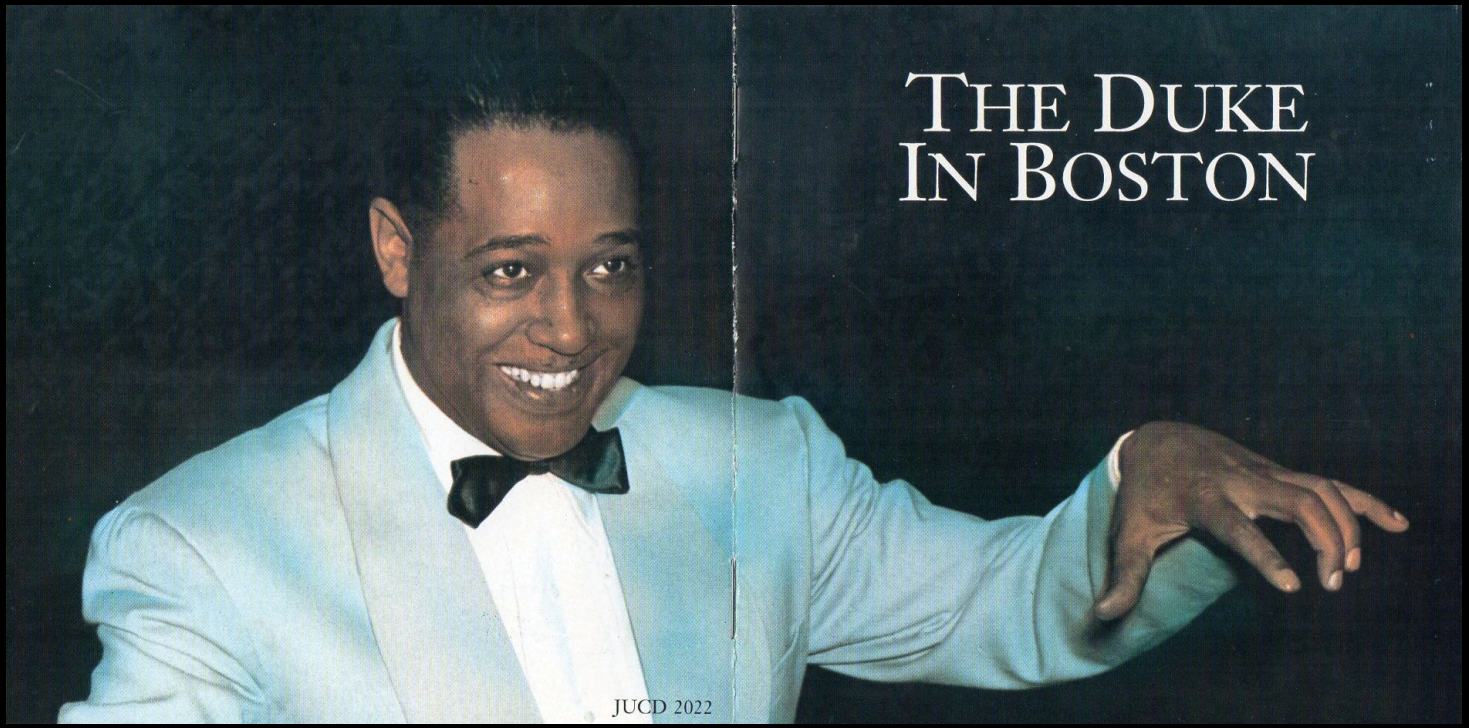

THE DUKE IN BOSTON

JUCD 2022

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JAZZ UNLIMITED

Cootie Williams, Rex Stewart, Wallace Jones (t), Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, Juan Tizol (tb), Barney Bigard (cl, ts), Otto Hardwicke (as), Johnny Hodges (as, ss), Harry Carney (bar, cl, as), Duke Ellington (p), Billy Taylor (sb), Sonny Greer (d), Ivie Anderson (vo).
Ritz Carlton, Boston, July 26, 1939

1.	**East St. Louis Toodle-Oo** (Ellington)	1:01
2.	**Jazz Potpurri** (Ellington)	3:01
3.	**Something To Live For** (Ellington-Strayhorn)	3:32
4.	**Old King Dooji** (Ellington)	2:45
5.	**In A Mizz** (Johnson-Barnet) -vo IA	3:06
6.	**Rose Of The Rio Grande** (Leslie-Warren-Gorman) -vo IA	3:19
7.	**Pussy Willow** (Ellington)	3:57
8.	**You Can Count On Me** (Maxwell-Myrow) -vo IA	2:49
9.	**Way Low** (Ellington)	2:43

Jimmy Blanton (sb), replaces Taylor, Herb Jeffries (vo).
»Southland«, Boston, January 9, 1940

10.	**East St. Louis Toodle-Oo** (Ellington)	1:07
11.	**Me And You** (Ellington) -vo HJ	2:46
12.	**Grievin'** (Ellington-Strayhorn)	3:37
13.	**Little Posey** (Ellington)	3:06
14.	**My Last Goodbye** (Howard) -vo HJ	3:08
15.	**The Gal From Joe's** (Ellington)	3:36
16.	**Tootin' Through The Roof** (Ellington)	4:58
17.	**Day In, Day Out** (Mercer-Bloom)	4:16
18.	**Merry-Go-Round** (Ellington)	2:23

The Duke in Boston

Back from a successful spring tour in Europe, Duke Ellington and his orchestra, riding a wave of popularity, played several major theater dates interspersed with one-nighters before opening at Boston's Ritz-Carlton Hotel on July 24, 1939.

It was a marvellous group. By this time Ellington had artistic control of his orchestra, having parted ways with manager and promoter Irving Mills, who, especially earlier in their relationship, to some extent had influenced the make-up and style of the band. Ellington, at one of his creative peaks, had perfected the three-minute composition necessary for phonograph records of the day, before the advent of long-play records. Further, the poise, collective sensitivity, and precision of this orchestra can be credited in part to the fact that most of these remarkable musicians had played together long enough to establish an envious cohesiveness and *esprit de corps*.

»Duke Streamlines: Now Dispensing 'Whispering Swing' at Boston's Ritz-Carlton,« declared an *Afro-American* newspaper headline of August 12, 1939. Then in what surely was a publicist's excess, the article announced, »Duke Ellington has developed a new style of playing muting his brasses, and muffling his reeds, to produce a soft kind of music, for which he is being billed as 'Duke Ellington and His Whispering Swing.'« One can understand the »whispering swing« come-on, for given the setting, the patrons would be hip yet relatively dignified Bostonians who while not Savoy Ballroom lindy-hoppers were not stuffy Brahmins either. On this night of July 26 broadcast there is some plunger and muted brass work, but the swinging orchestra and its soloists were hardly »whispering.« Still, much of the controlled exuberance of this music can be credited to outstanding brass playing, collective and individual.

The opening theme, *»East St. Louis Toodle-Oo,«* was first recorded in

1926. Its main melody has been attributed to Bubber Miley, the first in a succession of Ellington »growl« trumpeters, with whom he shared the copyright. Others trace the tune to the band's reported habit of singing »Oh, Lee-wan-*do*!« whenever they passed a Lewando Cleaners advertisement in their New England travels. In any event, underlying this melody of disputed parentage is a flowing counter-theme, over the whole of which Cootie Williams makes mysterious pronouncements on trumpet.

»*Jazz Potpourri*,« its basic riff structure no more remarkable than that of other riff-based pieces popular at the time, is elevated to remarkable status by the trumpet of Rex Stewart, the clarinet of Barney Bigard, the trademark plunger trombone of Joe »Tricky Sam« Nanton, and the overall vigour of the ensemble. The piece likely well served its purpose – to get the folks out on the floor, and it for some time stayed in the orchestra's book as a reliable selection for dancers. »*Pussy Willow*,« another riff tune played later during the broadcast, was also ostensibly for the dance hall. Solos by Stewart, Brown, and Hodges spark the performance, but, unlike »*Jazz Potpourri*,« this piece did not remain long in the orchestra's active repertoire even though it, too, was appealing music for dancers.

The lovely »*Something To Live For*« is an appropriate change of pace and mood after the brisk opener. Recorded several months earlier with Jean Eldridge singing its lyrics and Billy Strayhorn on piano instead of Ellington, here the melody is a showcase for the articulate, lyrical trombone of Lawrence Brown. Although it is sometimes referred to as their first collaboration and was copyrighted later in 1939 with Ellington and Strayhorn as composers, Ellingtonia historians claim that Strayhorn had written »*Something to Live For*« after his high school graduation for an essentially amateur revue and that it was one of the compositions that so impressed Ellington when he met Strayhorn.

The announcer's introduction of »*Old King Dooji*« suggests a false concept of the time: that the jungle was both a »primitive« and exotic place. While it is a suitable medium for Johnny Hodges, the »local boy with the band,« and has some interesting rhythm spots, the composition scarcely replicates anything African. Socio-cultural anthropological hindsight aside, Hodges' solo, so ably counterpointed by Cootie Williams' trumpet, is all too brief. The rest shows the various orchestra sections to advantage in several cleverly woven passages.

Ivie Anderson's assurance and purity of tone more than make up for the uninspired lyrics (and perhaps too brisk tempo?) of »*In a Mizz*.« Obviously an accommodation of patrons' expectations in such a setting to hear Tin Pan Alley type songs, it illustrates what stellar musicianship and Ellington's imaginative scoring, in this instance for the reeds especially, could do for potentially undistinguished material. So great were Anderson's talent and her sensitivity to lyrics and melody, that it is sometimes interesting to ponder whether a piece of music was right for Ivie Anderson or if she made it right for herself. In the case of another of her vocals on this broadcast, »*You Can Count on Me*,« with its impressive reed voicings, convincing lyrics, and engaging melody, the match of material and artist seems inevitable.

»*Rose of the Rio Grande*« was a solo specialty for Lawrence Brown. Here, however, he shares the spotlight with Anderson, who demonstrates her relaxed skill on up-tempo numbers. Brown's logical, virtuoso variations on the tune over linear chords and section counterpoint challenge the assertion that a true jazz musician will always »make it new,« for his solo remained virtually unchanged over the years with no diminution of its vitality and appeal. Later Ellington was to include Brown's »*Rose of the Rio Grande*« among »the great jazz solos musicians have made on popular tunes.«

»*Way Low*« is one of Ellington's more sombre works, its opening chords establishing a plaintive mood that is sustained by Bigard just before time interrupts Brown's contribution. Although it's now good-bye time

for late night radio buffs miles and miles away, one can imagine happy dancing and glorious music under the stars well into the wee hours of the Boston morning.

Months later, on January 9, 1940. the brass continues to shine, this time from Boston's Southland Theatre Restaurant. Although not immediately noticeable on this broadcast, an important change has recently occurred: Jimmy Blanton, who would revolutionize bass playing, is in the orchestra. According to Ellington, so good was young Blanton that co-bassist Billy Taylor, who a while back had shared the bass responsibilities with Hayes Alvis and who was a premier bassist of his day, left the orchestra by simply walking off the bandstand at the Southland in the middle of a set. Another addition is male vocalist Herb Jeffries, known as »the Bronze Buckaroo« in the limited world of Negro motion pictures of the day.

The opening theme is again *»East St. Louis Toodle-Oo.«* Strayhorn had joined the Ellington aggregation as a lyricist but was shortly to become as well a priceless arranger-composer and Ellington's musical alter ego. But his artistic impact at this time had not been realized, and it would be 1941 before his *»Take the 'A-Train'«* would replace the present theme.

The band hits a sprightly groove with *»Me and You,«* a captivating tune featuring Jeffries crooning in the style of the day, followed by a Brown solo and Bigard obligato. One might notice what Ellington termed Sonny Greer's »embellishments,« in one instance here the just-right »ting« of what seems to be a cow bell, and one might notice a relatively lighter beat by Blanton, though no less propulsive than that of his predecessors Wellman Braud and Taylor. Again by listening carefully, this time to the last chorus of the next selection, *»Grievin',«* on may hear another bit of Blanton. Sensual-toned Hodges is the first griever, carrying the melody and then the obligato over the ensemble's melody. He is followed by Stewart, not one to bear grief quietly, who shouts his anguish. Finally the ensemble with the aid of Brown and Bigard gradually comfort all concerned.

Oops! »Little Josie« is really *»Little Posey.«* It pays tribute to Freddy »Little Posey« Jenkins, the spirited, crowd-pleasing little trumpeter who joined the band in 1928, stayed until 1934, and returned briefly in 1937 before illness caused him to retire to Texas and eventually begin a long career in public service. (Incidentally, Stewart, who in a sense took Jenkins' place in the orchestra, had played with him in the band at Wilberforce University in the 1920s. Shelton Hemphill and Ben Webster, both destined to play with Ellington, were also there at the time. But that's another – and interesting – story.) *»Little Posey«* features the brass section, of course, and the dependable Brown on solo trombone. Exchanges with the section are by Bigard and Harry Carney. And who else but Tricky Sam would be playing that tailgate-y, braying trombone that verges on the satiric-comic.

»My Last Goodbye« is just the sort of ballad so suited to Hodges' unique musical personality and for which he was without equal. Jeffries, a natural baritone, again in the manner of the times (shades of Orlando Robeson!) sings the lyrics in tenor register replete with fashionable falsetto. Settling into its groove, Hodges displays his riffing and »noodling« abilities in *»The Gal from Joe's,«* copyrighted with Ellington as composer and Irving Mills as author. The four-person reed section holds its own in a polyrhythmic conversation with the brass section. In its repetition of and slight variations on its riff motif toward the end, the composition hints at a bolero.

After a sort of fanfare that Ellington was to use later to lead into an obligatory medley of his by-popular-demand compositions, *»Tootin' through the Roof«* features Ellington stride piano, exchanges between reeds and brass, an interlude by Bigard, and »hot« choruses by Hodges and Brown before getting down to the major business at hand, trumpet

pyrotechnics by Stewart and Williams. In their two-measure exchanges, Stewart's angular and Cootie Williams' more subtle statements are wonderful foil for each other. Their triple-tonguing, close-harmony, ascending duet near the end is nothing less than exhilarating.

Trombonist Brown calms things down a bit with *»Day In, Day Out,«* a popular non-Ellington song. He first »whispers,« if you will, the melody through a mute, then after an ensemble chorus returns to the melody, this time on open horn. Throughout, his conception, taste, and execution are characteristically impeccable.

The dancers having had a chance to glide about the floor, the set closes with another swinger, *»Merry-Go-Round.«* By turns Brown, Hodges, Stewart, and the trombone section vie for the brass ring before a general quieting down of things as Fred Cole, the announcer, bids the radio audience farewell for the night.

These recorded broadcasts contribute importantly to the preservation of the music of the first great Ellington full orchestra – a confident, immensely talented, joyous, cutting-edge group that had defined the inimitable phenomenon known as *»Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra.«* Enjoy!

Theodore R. Hudson
December 1992

A long-time Ellington aficionado, Hudson is a Behind-the-Scenes Volunteer at the Duke Ellington Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.


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Total time – 53:14

Complete discographical information inside!

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