

## The Duke At Fargo

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Liner notes from *The Duke at Fargo 1940: Special 60th Anniversary Edition* (Storyville STCD 8317/17)\*

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.<sup>1</sup>*  
-T.S. Eliot

Ten years past, the curtains parted at the opulent Cotton Club, in New York City's Harlem district, to reveal Duke Ellington & His Jungle Band, resplendent in their showman's suits. The band, positioned behind the sepia-colored dancers and an emcee in blackface and minstrel attire, performed a stagershow for celebrities, gangsters and other mature, white wealthy new Yorkers. The gentlemen in tuxedos and the ladies, dressed to the nines, paid their \$1.50 admission and crowded around clothed tables, stashing their prohibited liquor underneath. The same piano player, the same drummer, four, the only four out of five, saxophonists, two, the only two out of three, trombonists, and not one of the same trumpet players at Fargo, North Dakota opened the Cotton Club show with their theme song East St. Louis Toodle-Oo.

Forget time future from 1940 on, pay your \$1.50 admission and walk into time present, sixty years ago, the Crystal Ballroom in Fargo, North Dakota on November 7, 1940. You are early. Barney Bigard, Ivie Anderson and several other band members sit on the stage around a card table, pursuing their favorite pastime--playing cards. Only a new face, Ray Nance, is eagerly dressed in the band uniform of matching striped ties, light sports coats and dark trousers. Two young Ellington fans/engineers, Jack Towers and Dick Burris, busily set up their three microphones: an RCA Dynamic mike stage center for the soloists. Their wives Rhoda and Leora, seated in the midst of the audience, gleefully observe their husbands in nirvana. All are living in the moment and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Four Quartets*. "Burnt Norton." T.S. Eliot.

no one, not the engineers, the band, the audience or even Duke Ellington himself, is conscious of collectively creating the first location recording of a live jazz concert and transforming a routine dance date into a historic occasion in the life of the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

"The band is at its most typical on a one-night stand, a dance date, when it can relax and play anything in its extensive library. Stage shows are strictly commercial, strictly for applause."<sup>2</sup> Although permission for the recording was secured from the William Morris Agency, the results were never intended to be released to the public. The band, aware of the recording, nonetheless diminuendos and crescendos in a relatively un-self-conscious performance. Many ephemeral moments heighten our sense of participation. The instrumentalists warm up by practicing their parts before songs or rehash a bungled part to repair their mistake afterwards. Ellington calls out in astonishment an admonishment. But the most compelling components of the Fargo dance date may be what we cannot hear or, even for those present, see-- the palpable synergy between the audience and the band, and the unspoken language of their hearts and souls.

The Fargo recording did, however, document an event so startling that it was likened to the "Sphinx leaving Egypt."<sup>3</sup> For Cootie Williams has left the Duke to join Benny Goodman's band. "I feel like the fond parent who has reared a barefoot boy into young manhood, and, after finally getting shoes on him, and, eventually a collar, necktie and long pants, sees him desert the old homestead in a newfound spirit of independence," was Ellington's spin. "I am sure it is not a question of salary since there is so little difference between what I offered Cootie to stay and what he accepted from Goodman. I assume that the obvious distinction of working with a white band was the determining factor in his decision."<sup>4</sup> Behind-the-scenes, Ellington actively abetted Williams' so-called desertion. After the initial offer to Williams from Goodman's brother Irving, Ellington encouraged Cootie to negotiate. Even at \$200.00 per week,<sup>5</sup> Ellington cautioned him, "Only for the sextet. You'll get lost, sitting there in

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<sup>2</sup> "The Rhythm Section." *Esquire Magazine*. By Leonard Feather & Paul Eduard Miller. 1946.

<sup>3</sup> "After 6 months with Benny G, Cootie Williams Like it Fine." *The Afro-American*. March 8, 1941.

<sup>4</sup> "Cootie Williams Joins Benny Gooman." *Jazz Information*. Volume 2, Number 7. October 25, 1940.

<sup>5</sup> "Cootie Williams Leaves Duke: Will Play for Benny Goodman." *The Afro-American*. November 2, 1940. [Author's note: No payroll records are extant for the 1940 Ellington Orchestra. The "Pay Role" for a six one-nighter week ending February 26, 1942 lists the highest paid band members. Stewart, Bigard, Hodges and Anderson receiving \$125.00.]

the band."<sup>6</sup> Williams accepted a one year contract beginning on November 9, 1940 at the Manhattan Center in New York City, occasionally subbing in Goodman's big band during his tenure. In one year, Williams phoned Ellington, "I'm ready for my job. The year's up. He said, 'Oh no! You're too big now. You can make a whole lot of money. Go ahead on. I don't need you right now. Time I need you, I'll let you know.'"<sup>7</sup> As Ellington did, in 1962, twenty-one years later.

It was rumored that Wilbur de Paris and Taft Jordan were also in the running for Williams' position but it was the little-known Ray Nance who received the phone call from Billy Strayhorn with an invitation to meet the Duke. After working with Earl Hines and Horace Henderson, Nance had recently retired from road work. In hometown Chicago, he was appearing at Joe Hughes De Luxe club, a venue for female impersonators, when the composers recognized the four-for-one package wrapped up in his slight figure. Subsequently nicknamed "Floorshow," the trumpet and violin player, singer and dancer figuratively filled the chair left vacant since 1934, not by Williams, but by Freddie "Little Posey" Jenkins, the band's first trumpet showman.

Many people, including Ray Nance, declared Fargo as his debut. It was not. The two Pullman cars that carried Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra and their equipment arrived in East Grand Forks, Minnesota on November 5. In Winnipeg, Canada on November 6, Ray Nance, Rex "Stuart" and "Herbie Jeffrey" among other band members autographed a fan's program.<sup>8</sup> Warming up Nance on the bench would be uncharacteristic of the Ellington modus operandi so most likely Nance's tenure began on the band's first stop out of Chicago, East Grand Forks, Minnesota. Ben Webster remembered wearing gloves on stage to keep warm at Fargo but that also must have occurred on an earlier gig. It was unseasonably warm when Jack Towers and Dick Burris unloaded the portable acetate disc player, one speaker and three microphones with stands to record the Fargo dance date. Ellington was late and by the time his permission for the recording was obtained, the band was halfway through the first song of the evening. *It's Glory*.

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<sup>6</sup> Cootie Williams. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Cootie Williams. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1976.

<sup>8</sup> DEMS Bulletin. Spring 2000.

Duke Ellington Orchestra recorded live at the Crystal Ballroom, Fargo, North Dakota, November 7, 1940.

Rex Stewart (Cornet)  
 Wallace Jones (trumpet)  
 Ray Nance (trumpet, violin, vocalist)  
 Joseph Nanton, Juan Tizol, Lawrence Brown (trombones)  
 Barney Bigard (clarinet, tenor sax)  
 Johnny Hodges (alto & soprano saxes, clarinet)  
 Otto Hardwick (alto sax, clarinet)  
 Ben Webster (tenor sax, clarinet)  
 Harry Carney (baritone sax, clarinet)  
 Duke Ellington (piano)  
 Fred Guy (guitar, whistle)  
 Jimmy Blanton (bass)  
 Sonny Greer (drums)  
 Ivie Anderson and Herb Jeffries (vocalists)

## DISC I

### SET ONE

#### **It's Glory** a.k.a M'Monia

Soloists: LB, BW

The parts to It's Glory titled M'monia in Ellington's band library are worn and stained signifying more frequent use, than for its two recordings in 1931 and at Fargo. Possibly It's Glory lived as a set opener in the intermittent years; the ad lib sections for short solo statements, rather than a title strongly associated with a particular soloist, provided the flexibility necessary for a band introduction and warm-up. Right from the beginning, the fresh course is mapped; two titles familiar from older recordings, It's Glory and The Mooche, have undergone significant changes.

#### **The Mooche**

Soloists: RS, JH, JN, BB

The original Mooche, recorded on October 1, 1928, dripped with sorrow but this new version eerily mimics the Harlem slouch walk it purportedly described. But beware pedestrians, for these are some mean streets. Rex Stewart growls in response to the clarinets as Sonny Greer's tom-toms add to the menacing effect. Johnny Hodges and "Tricky Sam" Nanton enhance the illusion with the only avenue of escape opened up by Barney Bigard's filigrees

during the blues theme. In a night rich with treasured performances, Hodges and Nanton deserve special attention here. Recorded over 100 times after Fargo, this unique take on *The Mooche* never reappeared and the arranger is uncertain. Ellington was clearly beginning to disassociate himself from an overt jungle sound that, so exotic in the 1920s-1930s, now bordered on *passe*. His new young audience responded to the darkness and updated urbanity of *Ko-Ko* and perhaps Ellington, enamored as well, assembled this piece work fashion with Billy Strayhorn or another arranger since the tacked-on theatre ending clashes with the preceding arrangement.

### **The Sheik of Araby**

Soloists: LB, RS, BW

Ellington resurrected *The Sheik of Araby* after it developed a second life as a feature in the 1940 film *Tin Pan Alley*. Shortly after Lawrence Brown's arrival expanded the Ellington trombone section to three in 1932, his first feature, *The Sheik of Araby*, was recorded on May 16. Brown developed his solos in a way that was as unique as his sound. "Whenever I would be given a solo, where the whole number depended on me, I had a system which I used to try to perfect these solos. I wouldn't get up and just play anything that came across my mind. I would first go into a study, without the horn, I would mentally play the lead, I mean the theme, then with slight deviations, and then with more deviations and then hear where the band would come in and make embellishments. And when I got through with this routine, I could hear myself play the number as I wanted to hear it."<sup>9</sup> In the spring of 1932, Sidney Bechet visited the band in a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania recording studio, at Ellington's request, to teach Johnny Hodges his set chorus on *Sheik of Araby*.<sup>10</sup> Apparently at that time, Juan Tizol copied the notes that are heard here in the unison reed section led by Hodges on soprano saxophone.

### **Sepia Panorama a.k.a Night House**

Soloist: JB, RN, LB, RN

As the announcer from KVOX radio introduces the band and the approximately thirty minute radio broadcast begins, Duke Ellington join his men for the first time at 9:00 PM over the brief strains of *Night House*, re-titled by Dinah Shore to *Sepia Panorama*.<sup>11</sup> The band's current theme song, bridged their first, *East St. Louis Toodle-Oo* dropped six months previously, and next and last theme song *Take the 'A' Train* adopted early in 1941.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Brown. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1976.

<sup>10</sup> Sidney Bechet: *Wizard of Jazz*. By John Chilton. Paperback Edition. Da Capo Press. 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Duke Ellington. Interview with Willis Conover. 1965.

**Ko-Ko**

Soloists: JN, JB

Ellington's masterpiece Ko-Ko is simultaneously the peak of his jungle style compositions and, with its modern harmonics, polyrhythms and dissonance, the first wind of a new storm. A deceptive variation of one of Ellington's favorite vehicles, the twelve-bar blues, the rhythmic energy is here supplied by Jimmie Blanton. The Ellington Orchestra works as a unit on Ko-Ko but rather than blending, the distinct voices form a provocative mix. The individual interpretations are not breaks or showcases but form an integral part of the whole instead. As in a bolero, each chorus builds in intensity, a method Ellington returned to in his "gut bucket bolero" Bula from Afro-Bossa recorded in 1963. (Re-released in 2000 on Duke Ellington: The Reprise Studio Recordings). Blanton's entrance in September 1939 and his soul mate Ben Webster's in February 1940 inspired Ellington to create some of his greatest works to feature them. The already elevated level of play by the musicians as individuals and the unit as a whole ascended to even more remarkable heights. The Blanton-Webster era, the label tagged on the period from 1939-1942, is considered by many to be the absolute peak of the Ellington Orchestra's fifty-year existence, with 1940 being the crowning year.

**There Shall Be No Night**

Soloists: WJ, BW, HJ

Billy Strayhorn's voice has already been heard, un-attributed, as co-contributor to Sepia Panorama. In There Shall Be No Night the Strayhorn sound is heard from start to finish for the first time. "My first big band arrangement I did for Ivie Anderson [was] called the Jim-Jam Jumpin' Jive. Well as a result of that arrangement, he gave me charge of all the singers. I had done a little arranging in Pittsburgh, very little, in fact I had done enough to discourage myself. One day Duke sent me two pieces and he said, 'Arrange these, we are recording tomorrow at 10:00!' So what could I do? I learned fast. He liked those two, he thought they were kind of nice so he didn't do any more small band arrangements. He gave it all to me."<sup>12</sup> There Shall Be No Night suggests the strength of Strayhorn's subsequent work but right around the corner was a Flamingo recorded seven weeks later. When asked the most significant change in the field of jazz, Ellington responded, "Billy Strayhorn coming out of school and going into jazz. He's always changing people. After Flamingo, which was a very big success for us, arrangers became more, what?, elaborate in their

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<sup>12</sup> Billy Strayhorn. Guest Appearance at New York TDES (The Duke Ellington Society) meeting, 1963.

ornamentation."<sup>13</sup> The Bronze Buckaroo Herb Jeffries later adopted it as his signature piece. Jeffries, the only surviving member of the band, still claims a flamingo, not a stork, brought him to his parents' house!

### **Pussy Willow**

Soloists: RN, JH, BB, JB

After the rhythm section and the five reeds jauntily launch into Pussy Willow, Nance moves into all of the solo space formerly housed by Williams and Brown in the 1939 recording. Blanton's solo moves the piece forward but it is Sonny Greer who drives it. Greer's larger than life persona delights even through oral history interviews. Perhaps the force of his personality and his flashy drum kit overshadowed his magnificent drumming since his name is often inexplicably left out of the discussion on influential jazz drummers. Despite his display of tools, which Ellington spotlighted on a raised platform, Greer eschewed pyrotechnics and excelled at what might be considered the three "T"s of drumming, Timing, Timing, Timing. In Pussy Willow, he adds excellent tone as well as he relentlessly but subtly propels the band. The technology of that time restricted playing time to approximately three minutes per record side. Pussy Willow illustrates how severe a limitation that was; this title's place in the Ellington oeuvre climbs after hearing the composer's cut. At the Fargo dance date, most of the songs familiar to fans from issued recordings are extended by adding longer introductions and endings and, creating more solo space within the song. Unfortunately, Pussy Willow dropped out of sight after Fargo either because it was an Irving Mills publication or a feature for Cootie Williams.

### **Chatterbox**

Soloists: RS, LB, JH, RS

Ellington could do so much with so little as exhibited in the Rex Stewart feature Chatterbox. All he needed was an eight bar blues, his dependable reed and brass sections, the subtle but powerful rhythm section and a soloist who had something to say. Ellington introduces the staccato riff and the band jumps in, punching it out for Stewart to ride over. Ellington's fondness for a pertinacious brass riff is evident and will show up again in this concert.

### **Mood Indigo**

Soloists: WJ, DE, WJ, DE, WJ

The three horn introduction to Mood Indigo is so familiar, we might forget that the original 1930 version is considered a breakthrough composition of the

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<sup>13</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

twentieth century. That voicing is so extraordinary, we might forget that it is, at heart, a great melody that would endure through many permutations in the Ellington Orchestra. In this version, Ellington allots himself some solo space, executing his trademark sweeping arpeggios and difficult runs that abrogate the criticism that he was technically inferior to his contemporaries. Wallace Jones' delicate sound brings a delicious edge to this performance as if something will imminently shatter and that tension deepens the contemplative air implicit in its lyrics. Mood Indigo rarely suffered from repetition and here the band subtly shades their accompaniment. Jack was really sweating this one out for fear of running out of disc space but happily caught the wistful ending. The plethora of breathtaking soloists throughout the fifty-year life span of the Ellington Orchestra may have obscured the superb section work necessary to make a big band swing. Weak, tentative or inattentive section playing can undermine an entire piece, no matter how brilliant the solo. The rarely featured flexible Jones made his impact as both a section leader, establishing the attack and tempo, and at times as follower by consistently blending in and staying under the lead. Jones migrated north from Baltimore, Maryland to New York in the mid-1930s, beginning his career with cousin Chick Webb's band. Wallace's tenure from 1936 until 1944 when he was drafted, encompassed the span dates for the longest creative peak of the Ellington Orchestra, 1939-1943. Ellington claims he established drummer Webb as a bandleader. If so, Webb's gratitude was magnanimous indeed; Jones, Johnny Hodges and Cootie Williams, after a brief stopover with Fletcher Henderson, migrated from Webb's band to Ellington's.

#### **Harlem Air Shaft** a.k.a Once Over Lightly

Soloists: JN, RS, BB

Originally titled Once Over Lightly, Harlem Air Shaft was possibly not composed to describe the noises ricocheting and the smells emanating between Harlem tenements or what Ellington called "one big loudspeaker." Most New York residents heard cacophony when leaning out their window; the fact that he heard patterns of sound is one element of Ellington's genius. Not a child prodigy at the keyboard, Ellington's creativity first exhibited itself through visual artistry deemed worthy of a scholarship to the Pratt Institute in New York. Fortunately for the fate of American music, he chose sound as his palette. "I could play with music as long as I wanted because anything that happened was a bonus, you know? Because I was no musician. My real talent was art, you know? Anything I got out of music I always figured was a gift. I mean it was just something that, you know, like a prize package, like something you got in a bag of popcorn, you know? A surprise. I mean I never



felt that this was, you know, my talent. I never thought this was really the thing."<sup>14</sup>

If Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra played baseball, they would be on a winning streak. If they played basketball, they would be "unconscious" but by any definition this team is really swinging for what's wrong with "on"? Harlem Air Shaft. Recording sessions with their repetitive takes and seclusion from an audience cannot capture the esprit de corps a band develops when on stage. The brass blows in and the reeds hit it with gale force forming a wall of sound that must have lifted the audience off its feet. Their bandleader spontaneously releases a euphoric "Ah!" and in a chain reaction all the sections explode in turn. Even the loss of a trumpet, presumably Nance, does not interfere with the over-all effect. Every man nails his break neatly with no grandstanding to detract from the sense of unity.

### **Ferryboat Serenade**

Soloist: IA

Now dressed in her band "uniform," a long white dress, the lovely Ivie Anderson and the band sail into Strayhorn's arrangement of a 1939 Italian song, Ferryboat Serenade. Recently popularized by the Andrews Sisters, it is ultimately too trite to remain in the band's repertoire. Because of her musicality and engaging personality more than her eleven year tenure, Anderson was the only female vocalist who earned the distinction of being considered a band member. Without sacrificing one whit of her femininity, she held her own among that male cast of characters. Anderson loved to gamble and played all night card games with the men. She usually won.

### **Warm Valley**

Soloists: JH, WJ, JH

Standing in the gorge of the Columbia River, Ellington looked north towards the Cascade Mountains and was so inspired by the physical resemblance to certain contours of a woman's anatomy, that he composed Warm Valley for his sultry balladeer Johnny Hodges. The final number of a set was designed for couples but after Hodges' sensuous interpretation they might find more on their minds than slow dancing and hand holding. In fact, Hodges is so hypnotizing that the sterling background could be ignored. Positioned behind the piano, guitarist Freddy Guy carries out his duties including steadily strumming the chord changes for the band members' benefit and freeing Ellington from the rhythm chores. Guy is audible here.

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<sup>14</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

A few notes of the chaser signal the crowd that the set is over. With their headphones on during the set, Jack and Dick were unable to determine the quality of the recording so they used the ten to fifteen intermissions to check the discs and make necessary adjustments. Later in the concert, several band members interrupted them to hear specific cuts from the previous set.

## SET TWO

### **Stompy Jones**

Soloists: BB, RS, HC, LB, BB, JN

Ellington began each set with something friendly and saved the challenges, for his audience and his band, until later in the set. An ensemble warm-up, no tight section play and brief statements from the soloists, combine to make Stompy Jones an ideal opener. This versatile jam tune, with its sixteen bar chorus, had many legs and after the big band version in 1934 was also recorded by Barney Bigard and Johnny Hodges small groups. Rex Stewart inherited most of Cootie Williams' leads, with Nance acquiring the leads for Pussy Willow and Sepia Panorama. Jones led the trumpet section and most of Williams' sections parts were handled by Nance. The Ellington men generally ignored new band members leaving them to sink or swim on their own. The reeds perched on wooden chairs in a row across the front with Harry Carney closest to the edge of the stage; the trombones, closest to the audience, and trumpets sat in one row across the back with Sonny Greer behind and to the right of them. Unfortunately for Nance, he was positioned farthest away from the only helpful band member, Harry Carney, and one can only imagine Nance's frustration attempting to locate a part or even the title for a piece!

### **Chloe (Song of the Swamp)**

Soloists: JN, BB, LB, RS, BW, RN

Evidence in the Duke Ellington Collections indicates that Strayhorn and Ellington sometimes worked from published sheet music when orchestrating new arrangements for popular songs of the day. One such song is Chloe (Song of the Swamp). Ellington's introduction is uncharacteristically vapid and possibly sets the course for this lackluster rendition. However, on the signal "Now!" from Ellington, Nanton rescues Chloe by oozing out some primordial ya-yas worthy of a swamp creature. Originally orchestrated by Strayhorn with Cootie (sic)?? to play trumpet, Stewart fills in nicely but the band embarks on an over-sentimental journey, playing with atypical sweetness to the detriment of Strayhorn's challenging arrangement. The version recently recorded on October 28, with Webster and Williams soloing, is appropriately subdued but

not mawkish. Hodges leads the reeds on soprano saxophone in the last known recording of "Rab" on that instrument. Most likely Hodges abandoned the soprano to eliminate the demands of occasional section leads. In 1940, the "mysterious collaboration,"<sup>15</sup> as Strayhorn dubbed his relationship with Duke Ellington, was in its nascent stage. Consistent with the informal tradition of the music and theatre business, Strayhorn arranged six songs but received credit for just one, *Chloe (Song of the Swamp)*. With the exception of *I Never Felt This Way Before*, he most likely arranged all Anderson's and Jeffries' tunes, several of the Ellington standards and had contributed introductions or endings to still others.

The compositions Strayhorn brought with him in 1939, including *Something To Live For* and *My Little Brown Book*, had not yet been worked into the repertoire. In 1941, with the success of *Flamingo* and the adoption of *Take the 'A' Train* as the band's theme song, some of Strayhorn's contributions began to surface in the public eye. Study in the Smithsonian Institution's Ellington Collections illuminates Strayhorn's position as Ellington's writing companion, and his distinct style is now emerging. Some resistance has followed, possibly because it requires some Ellington fans and a few scholars to dislodge from their memory a long-held association between one man and one song. The musicians in the band accepted "Swee' Pea" as one of their own. Billy Strayhorn was simply the most important man in Duke Ellington's life and he loved him without reservation. Their life-changing influence on each other may never be quantified; we do know that their collaboration enriched American music beyond measure.

### **Bojangles** a.k.a. *Portrait of Bill Robinson*

Soloists: DE & JB, RS, BW, BB, DE & JB

Beginning with *Black Beauty* a.k.a. *A Portrait of Florence Mills* in 1928, Ellington composed musical vignettes of black artists or historical figures whose contributions to African-American heritage he particularly admired such as Bill Robinson. Most Americans recognized Robinson from his recurring role as a tap dancing butler in Shirley Temple films; few knew him as an avid crusader for actor's rights and the first solo tap dancer to star in white vaudeville theatre. Ellington served as an honorary pallbearer at Robinson's funeral in 1949 along with Cole Porter, Jackie Robinson and Irving Berlin. Unlike some other Ellington compositions which require of the imagination for the sound to match the word image, *Bojangles* fits its title. As a

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<sup>15</sup> Billy Strayhorn. Guest Appearance at New York TDES (The Duke Ellington Society) meeting, 1963.

composition, the repeating harmonies and sharp section interjections reverberate with a dancer's taps on a solid floor. Unfortunately, the band is still unable to recapture their previous gusto even after Ellington exhorts them "Play, Play, Faster." Greer switching the beat to the rims and Webster's solo prove to be the catalyst. Bigard, again, brilliantly knits another level of texture over, under, and around to great effect. The instruction "ad lib" sprinkles Bigard's parts. The notes Bigard could choose with Ellington's confidence but the composer scripted where or when.

### **On The Air**

Soloists: JB, JH, RS, BB

Each title in the repertoire received a number, usually written or stamped on the upper right hand corner, and the band members used the numbers for identification more often than the title. As Ellington pronounces the title of the piece through the notes in his introduction, someone, most likely Harry Carney, picks up the cue and calls out the number for the band. A great deal of shuffling through the foot high stack of manuscripts at their feet ensues while Ellington extends his vamp to cover. Ellington, mindful of their recent slump, reminds the men they are "On The Air" and this swinging composition remains identified only by that title. Similar to You Took Advantage Of Me with elements of Rug Cutter's Swing, the band kicks into this piece after Blanton's lead-in with familiarity and snap. Blanton's break gives Hodges time to travel to the mike to offer his usual glib comments. Ellington, happy with the band's renewed vigor lets out a "Yeah!" and the Orchestra responds with a lesson in how the simple use of dynamics, in this case reducing the last chorus to a whisper, can enhance a number.

### **Rumpus In Richmond a.k.a. Brasserie**

Soloists: RS, LB, RS

Known to the band as Brasserie or #40, Stewart's opening salvo gets the band's attention for the brass feature Rumpus In Richmond. More complex than it sounds, Brasserie would certainly keep band members' eyes on their music stands. Ellington's shift to diminished chords before the clarinet solo prompted Barney Bigard to write out the individual notes of the chords on his part. The abbreviated second set uncharacteristically ends with this up-tempo piece, followed by Stewart's "That's All Folks!" chaser.

## **SET THREE**

### **Sidewalks of New York a.k.a East Side, West Side**

Soloists: JN, BB, RS, SN

The Ellington band acquired a reputation, deservedly so, for straggling onto the stage. Once settled, they strut onto *The Sidewalks of New York*, flaunting Ellington's superior arrangement like a well-oiled machine. Comparing these versions to the studio recordings from this time is another thread spun at Fargo. Developed and significantly altered through rehearsals on stage for the December 1940 recording, *The Sidewalks of New York* lost the bite the band gives it here. The brass and reeds pour themselves into their section and ensemble work, as they do most of the night. Ellington rarely noted tempo or beat on his scores, but on "SNYC" he marked the off-the-beat rhythm which gives this 1890s classic its sass. "Jeep" designated Hodges' part although Ellington usually wrote "Rab." Ellington always wrote for the specific sound of an instrumentalist, the level of detail often includes drawing an arrow to one note in a background chord to assure the right man got the job.

### **Flaming Sword** a.k.a Shiftail

Soloists: DE, RS, JT, JN, JT

"If you dig shish kabob, you can get the image of the College Inn, the Sherman House [Chicago] in 1940 when those cats were dressed up in these Far Eastern outfits, the waiters, and walking around with flaming swords and your meat flaming and it was very picturesque. And it inspired this title *Flaming Sword*."<sup>16</sup> After the opening fanfare, Greer indeed sets a Latin Rhythm, albeit a less frenetic one than the October 17 recording, while the reeds' maintenance of the riff anchors the brass feature. For the carnival effect created by the tinny reeds contrasted by the boisterous 'bones, no closed quotation marks—should they come after bones? Hardwicke, Carney, Webster and Hodges were all instructed to switch to clarinet, but most likely only Bigard and Hardwicke did so here. Ellington's portrait of a bon vivant should have been confiscated as an advertisement for the famous Panther Room of the Hotel.

Because they were written by a man and for men who were not conventionally trained musicians, the music manuscripts contain nuggets for all who listen. The Ellington effect was about more than notes, how to play those notes was equally important. For example, in the closing fanfare in *Flaming Sword*, and only then, Ellington doesn't want the brass to sustain one whole note for four counts and then in the next bar play the note one octave higher. Ellington doesn't want them to slide or slur up the octave. The score and parts instruct them to "whip" it. And you can hear them do just that. Neither the composers nor the band members regarded the scores and parts as historic documents.

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<sup>16</sup> Duke Ellington. Interview with Willis Conover. 1965.

Trace evidence indicates that the Ellington Orchestra's musical legacy floated like flotsam and jetsam amidst their daily existence. The music manuscripts also functioned as place mats, coasters, ashtrays, handkerchiefs, memo pads and, of course, their little black books.

### **Never No Lament a.k.a. Don't Get Around Much Anymore**

Soloists: LB, JH, LB, JH

Juan Tizol and Lawrence Brown independently recalled that Never No Lament developed from a Johnny Hodges obligato against the melody in an unrecorded version of Once In A While, Duke Ellington remembered its genesis in a Memphis, Tennessee room, equipped with a piano, and showing off for "a real pretty girl I knew down there."<sup>17</sup> No matter where it originated, Never No Lament is a highlight of the Fargo concert. "Johnny come up and blew," Jack remembers, "and when he got through he went over and talked to Duke and some guys in the band and went back to the mike,"<sup>18</sup> arriving at the exact nanosecond of his musical entrance. Johnny Hodges tossed off his solos with such marked insouciance yet they spark the seeds of passion within us. And with Lawrence Brown, as well, who roars in commiseration. His performance on Never No Lament is the only Hodges statement we have, or for that matter may need, on the author of this melody.

### **Caravan**

Soloists: JT, BB, RN, JT

Just one year earlier, the Orchestra had completed their second European tour and Ellington introduced Caravan to an audience studded with royalty. "I saw in the program where Caravan was the second or third number. So I passed word over there, you know? Tell him don't play Caravan now. 'Cause I'm a little nervous. To leave it on for later on. He didn't pay no attention. He said to me, 'Don't worry about nothing. I'm behind you. I'm behind you.' So he was there and announced my name and the composer. Caravan played by Juan Tizol.

You know, I couldn't even get up to the mike at the front of the stage! I got up and my stomach was going I don't know like what. I finally, I ended up playing the melody which I thought I could play. But I was scared to death and I was shaking. I was almost sick. Oh you got to get nervous with those kind of people around."<sup>19</sup> Presumably not intimidated by royalty here, Tizol's solo is

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<sup>17</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

<sup>18</sup> Jack Towers. Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Project. June, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Juan Tizol. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1976.

clear and steady, essential traits to the character of the trombone section as well and especially important in this rendition of Caravan. Layers of silt could describe the background here but Mississippi mud might suit better. The drumming dominates, however an opportunity arises to hear how Greer uses his imagination like an author describing places unseen to darken the mysterious air and then brighten the mood. Webster's solo occurs during the switch to another disc. Although it was technically feasible in 1940 to set up two recording tables on location, link them together and cut over to the next disc recorder uninterrupted, Jack brought just one from South Dakota State College. The immeasurable value of the Fargo recordings suffers little from occasional lapses to accommodate the equipment.

### **Clarinet Lament** a.k.a. Concerto For Barney

Soloists: BB & RS & JT, BB

Barney Bigard's embellishments, glissandos and just plain noodling have enriched the Fargo performance beyond the limited descriptor New Orleans style and added another texture worthy of a separate listening. Ellington built an infrastructure on which his soloists could erect higher and higher stages, ultimately arriving at a plateau they might not have on their own. The shape, structure and mood of their concertos were discussed but the feature artist selected the notes. As it was also their choice to adhere to the recorded version in future performances or change it. Perhaps Bigard was still infected with an exotic mode, since he, Stewart and Tizol stretch out a Spanish/flamenco tinged introduction. Otherwise Bigard whirls through his concerto on the same staggering course as the 1936 recorded version. "If he wrote anything for you, it fit you like a glove, you know? And you're really at home while you're playing it. It's not something that he was just taking from his head and making it--trying to see how difficult he could make it or anything. No. No, it wasn't like that."<sup>20</sup>

## **DISC II**

### **Slap Happy**

Soloists: HC, RN, HC, JN, HC, JN, HC

Not coincidentally, Harry Carney's feature reflects his virtuosity and his good nature. Carney loved parades, carnivals and the simple pleasures of life and he rarely spoke of his playing even though he is considered by many to be the finest baritone saxophone player in the history of jazz. The first exponent of

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<sup>20</sup> Barney Bigard. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1976.

circular breathing, a technique which allows continuous playing without taking a breath, Carney had many tricks in his bag; here he wittily slap tongues the ending. Beginning in the late 1940s, Carney drove Ellington separately to gigs and his payment was a priceless commodity, Ellington's friendship. "Harry and I don't talk much," Ellington said, "So I can just dream and write."<sup>21</sup>

Consider Ellington and Strayhorn two of the first environmentalists for their conscientious recycling of songs and song fragments. For example, Strayhorn retrieved his composition *Pretty Girl* from the "archives," changed the title to *Star-Crossed Lovers* and it became the love theme in the 1956 Shakespearian Suite also known as *Such Sweet Thunder*. Stated generally and simplistically, Strayhorn composed and orchestrated a piece from beginning to end, incorporating the internal dynamics and considering the entire flow of the work, often resulting in a score in its final form. Ellington also orchestrated as he wrote but his scores are composition drafts and he auditioned the piece with the band before making the final decisions. Sometimes in the writing Ellington forgot his preference for a soloist to have eight bars rest before his break and he was reluctant to drop a note from the preceding section. "If it's written it all belongs," he explained. Despite his claim that "I have no precious notes that I can't get rid of."<sup>22</sup>

Ellington seldom changed notes or instrumental voicings but he did interchange and eliminate entire sections and his scores are riddled with cross outs and arrows. That's not to say that Ellington ever disposed of these sections.

### **Sepia Panorama** a.k.a. *Night House*

Soloists: JB, LB, RN, LB, RN, HC, JB, BW

*Sepia Panorama* could have been just such a discarded section that Ellington fleshed out into an entire composition, comprising a twelve bar blues mostly featuring Blanton, a sixteen bar phrase for three soloists, contributed by Strayhorn, and a twelve bar blues played twice by Ellington & Blanton, twice by Webster. It then repeats in reversed order from Ellington and Blanton's duet. Voila! A new work. Jimmie Blanton's position in front of the piano, and close to the microphone allows us to clearly hear him throughout--an incalculable benefit of *Fargo*. Even today, bass players generally take up residence behind or to the side of the piano. What a show of confidence from

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<sup>21</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

<sup>22</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.



Duke Ellington to this young man who brought about a "renaissance in bass playing."<sup>23</sup>

Jimmie Blanton's solos sing in a way unheard of before in jazz. By realizing the solo qualities of a double bass both in accompaniment and breaks. Blanton laid groundwork for all future bassists to follow, particularly in bebop, and cast out many lines for other instrumentalists as well. At twenty years of age, he was equally capable of contributing appropriate accompaniment for the band on the older pieces and standards as well. The roster of musicians whose lives were cut short by substance abuse is sad. The loss of Jimmie Blanton to tuberculosis in 1942 is tragic. He had already fulfilled his promise; who, on listening to the Fargo recording, doesn't stop to wonder where else he could have taken us?

### **Boy Meets Horn a.k.a. Stew-Burp a.k.a. Twits and Twerps**

Soloists: RS, HC, RS

"Now we come to one of the psychological facets of our performance. As I said before this is opening night for Ray Nance and, of course, he being a trumpet player, Rex Stewart came up to do a stirring performance to demonstrate the high level of performance expected of trumpet players. I didn't remember Boy Meets Horn was so slow in tempo. But I think it's a good performance."<sup>24</sup>

Between inheriting most of Cootie Williams' leads and filling his own chair, Rex Stewart has been a busy man; but as Ellington suggests he reserved some energy for his feature. The sustained note in the middle of this piece leaves the listener gasping for a breath. According to Ellington scholar Andrew Homzy, Stewart accomplished the miraculous pedal toned ending by relaxing his embouchure allowing him to descend two octaves below the range of classical limitation. Boy Meets Horn is, on the surface, all about Rex Stewart but true to the Ellington norm, the ground beneath fertilizes the imagination. Written to highlight Stewart's halfcocked valve technique, the background of spare punctuation alternating with a melodic riff both offsets and draws attention to Stewart's work. Billy Strayhorn, wrote in the four bar introduction, literally, by adding it above the A section on the 1937 parts titled Stew-Burp.

### **Way Down Yonder In New Orleans**

Soloist: IA

Used as a setting for the wildly popular Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance team in the 1939 film, *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, Way Down Yonder In New Orleans moves at a quick clip. Anderson's revolving door repertoire

<sup>23</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

<sup>24</sup> Duke Ellington. Interview with Willis Conover. 1965.

satisfied the public's desire to hear popular songs of the day and no matter what the tune, Ivie Anderson put her songs over. "Doll! She was a doll from A to Z," Sonny Greer recalled, "Like it was yesterday. Ivie Anderson. When she came on the stage from the side, and walking straight. Look like a million dollars and swishing! Before she said a word, she got the people in the palm of her hand. I tell you Loretta Young, how she used to come through the door and swish? She stole that off Ivie."<sup>25</sup>

### **Oh Babe, Maybe Someday**

Soloists: RS & IA, IA

Greer and Anderson developed quite a routine on stage but here Stewart, chatting through his horn, and Ivie banter to start. Many of Anderson's features were #24 in the band book and several simply say "Ivie's Number." Is it possible that the reeds pulled out the wrong parts? Carney's on the right track though and bulldozes through an intricate ending unfazed by his lost section mates. Another thrill of the Fargo concert, is to hear the instrumentalists replay their botched parts after the song as they do here.

### **The Five O'Clock Whistle**

Soloists: IA & BB, RS & IA, IA

Everybody's having fun in Strayhorn's swinging arrangement of The Five O'Clock Whistle. This tune disappeared from the Ellington repertoire after Fargo but was a hit for Glenn Miller, Erskine Hawkins and Ella Fitzgerald. In one of Jack's photographs, a large wooden train whistle sits on the piano. Since Ellington lays back on this tune, a common practice on Strayhorn arrangements, maybe he supplied some of the whistlin'; other band members seem to be calling "poor old Papa" home as well.

Herb Jeffries Segments. Another fanfare announces male vocalist Herb Jeffries. Seven microphones stood on stage at the Crystal Ballroom. Three for the recording, two for the broadcast and two for the public announcement system. So no wonder Jeffries, alas, sings into the PA system microphone and his vocal is barely audible. Jack and Dick Burris realize this and shut?? off the recording. Unfortunately, we miss Jeffries' fine tone and interpretation of Call of the Canyon, a Strayhorn arrangement, and All This and Heaven Too. These brief segments are all we will ever hear of these two titles, for they along with Ferryboat Serenade and Way Down Yonder in New Orleans, Wham (Re-Bop-Boom-Bam), and the closer God Bless America were only known to have been performed by the Ellington Orchestra at Fargo. Again Ellington

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<sup>25</sup> Sonny Greer. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1976.

and Strayhorn have kept their ears attuned to the vicissitudes of popular taste, picking up *All This and Heaven Too*, the theme song from a 1940 film, and *Call of the Canyon*, a best seller for Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller, from the *Hit Parade*. The Herb Jeffries segments assuredly served their purpose though for Ellington closed another set with ballads suitable for cheek to cheek dancing.

## SET FOUR

### **Rockin' In Rhythm**

Soloists: DE, RS, LB, RS, HC, JN, RS

For new and old listeners alike, the Fargo recording maps out many future excursions. Tracking *Rockin' in Rhythm* through its forty-three year and over 275 recordings history would be a hardy trek. The original 1931 recording seems polite in contrast to this and later, even looser, ones. Most renditions carried the same elements: the use of the pep section (Two trombones, two trumpets) to carry the riff; piercing trumpet interjections; clarinet crescendos and some raucous trombones, all set against an antiphonal background. A whole other avenue opens up in pursuing the development of Ellington's piano introduction.

Lengthened and developed since 1931, probably to use as a set opener, by 1953 Ellington's piano introduction evolved into the set piece *Kinda Dukish* which was recorded separately. Nance is lacking the pixie mute necessary for the pep section resulting in an uneven sound. Nanton adds interest though by whinnying and neighing in his unearthly way. Attempts to duplicate Nanton's inimitable voice result in flattery and/or homage since it has yet been done. Nanton guided the techniques he used to create his odd sound through sleight of hand. And that sound, so rooted in his West Indian background, and informed by the early, catholic influences in jazz will most likely never be replicated. The Fargo recording particularly magnifies the importance of Nanton, Bigard and Greer as ensemble players. The texture, tone and selection of their routine and ad lib contributions lift the group dynamic and at times redeem an otherwise sloppy or run-of-the-mill rendition.

### **Sophisticated Lady**

Soloists: OH, DE, LB

"Toby was in and out and in and out. Toby did a lot of living you know,"<sup>26</sup> is how Duke Ellington described his reed section leader Otto Hardwicke. All of

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<sup>26</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

his men were artists and as such Ellington accepted their peculiarities as part of their art. Ellington never fired anyone except \_\_\_\_\_, it is often said, with different names filling in the blank. However, he did dismiss band members, usually by making an offending band member's life so miserable that they would eventually quit. Hardwicke left of his own accord in 1946, and this time did not return. He retired from music shortly afterwards.

The mood abruptly shifts from the rowdy to the rococo and gives us our only long look at Otto Hardwicke's tone. "Sophisticated Lady. That's one of those things where everybody jumps in and helps out, but mainly I had a theme which I played all the time which is the first eight bars. And Otto Hardwicke played the release." Each man received \$15.00. "That check cancels you out. You never know when you have a good coming number on your hands, so in fact, we didn't even care. We just was doing something that we wanted to do."<sup>27</sup> In the Ellington Collection's business records, band members are paid regularly for "arrangements" in addition to their salaries. Hardwicke and Brown do play as if in loving guardianship of *Sophisticated Lady*. The band slides like silk behind and around but never in front of their exquisite duet. Brown displays his wondrous versatility by leaping from sublime to spectacular within seconds. Nicknamed the "Deacon," Brown's sustained high note at the end just might have required divine intervention.

Ellington's long piano interlude is not as interesting as the trills and arpeggios he tags on to support Brown's solos. But perhaps that is a view formed by hindsight. Beneath the mystery of who was the sophisticated lady, this composition must have held special significance to Ellington. In his final years, he seemed reluctant to leave it and often performed it as a solo or part of a trio in combination with *Solitude*. "I'm fundamentally an accompanist," Duke Ellington explained. "Anyone who attempts to do orchestration should be mainly an accompanist. Particularly when so many soloists are involved. You have to think of ornamentation. It should not interfere with what is being said."<sup>28</sup>

On stage, the composer put down his pencil and the piano became his performance shaping tool. Although Ellington took piano lessons as a child, presumably from a Mrs. Clinkscales in Washington, DC, his piano artistry developed on the job. It presents a formidable challenge to find one instance where Ellington's piano playing intrudes by even a note. Nevertheless,

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Brown. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1976.

<sup>28</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

Ellington interpolated whatever proved necessary to strengthen a performance. In *Mood Indigo*, Ellington gently lays down a bed of chords and soft ornamentation to support Wallace Jones' fragile tone. In the beginning of *Never No Lament*, he picks up specific notes when a trumpet player can't find his part. In *Caravan*, he reminds the reed section of the correct phrasing for their riff. All accomplished without one sheet of music.

### **Cotton Tail** a.k.a. *Shuckin' and Stiffin'*

Soloist: BW

Benny Goodman's band skyrocketed to national success after the Palomar, California Ballroom broadcast in August 1935, sparking the battle of hot jazz bands and sweet commercial bands. The Ellington band was smokin' from its inception, but in 1940 popular success mandated a hot soloist. Ellington's sizzler was, no doubt, tenor saxophonist Benn Webster. In *Cotton Tail*, Webster displays all the necessary characteristics of a hot soloist, speed, an urgent sense of rhythm, agitated syncopation, eager anticipation of the beat, and an earthy tone. Some of the audience, largely drawn from the student body of North Dakota State College of Fargo, had jammed ten deep in front of the stage, maybe in anticipation of hearing and seeing this scorcher. From Webster's heralded solo to one of the most exhilarating reed choruses in jazz history, rumored to be scored by Webster himself, they were not disappointed.

"Ben Webster was given so many solo responses because the cats in the band wanted to hear him blow. When you see a guy's got a lot of solos it's because the cats in the band enjoy it. And it's my position to see that the cats in the band are happy. So when it comes their turn to come to the microphone, they too will feel that they have something to blow up to."<sup>29</sup>

### **Whispering Grass (Don't Tell The Trees)**

Soloist: JH

Sixteen years later, Ellington needed to cool down the Newport Jazz Festival crowd after Paul Gonsalves' searing tenor work on *Diminuendo and Crescendo In Blue*, he did so by bringing on Johnny Hodges to play *Jeep's Blues*. As we can see from Fargo, that was not a new strategy but an old trick. The fierce competition among big bands for the public's attention was keenly felt by Ellington. "I was worried about those bad boys like Charlie Barnett!"<sup>30</sup> ? Does Barnett have two "t's" in the notes? Ellington confessed. One way to respond was adding other band's popular hits to his play list such as

<sup>29</sup> Duke Ellington. Interview with Willis Conover. 1965.

<sup>30</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

Whispering Grass (Don't Tell The Trees), a recent best seller for The Ink Spots. Hodges heats the air in quite another manner than Webster did in Cotton Tail by seductively building the tension against a soft minimalist backdrop. Hodges insisted his numbers be featured last in the set.<sup>31</sup> When Hodges approached Jack to replay a number, he requested a title featuring Ben Webster, Webster asked for a Hodges number. Whether out of respect or a sense of competition we may never know. "I can just look up and see Duke with his pork pie hat on," Jack remembers, "He wanted to hear Whispering Grass."<sup>32</sup>

### **Conga Brava**

Soloists: JT, BB, BW, RS, JT

A copyright search conducted at the Library of Congress disclosed fifty-six compositions credited to Juan Tizol. Of these, at least twelve were in the Ellington repertoire at various times including Perdido and Bakiff, recorded the following year. Tizol also moonlighted as the main copyist for the band from his entry in 1929 until Tom Whaley Whaley was hired for that specific purpose in 1942. Despite the musical skills necessary to extract the parts from a composer's score and transpose the keys for the individual instruments, Tizol did not orchestrate his compositions. Typically, he wrote just the melody line, signed himself as co-composer and handed Ellington a lead sheet, who then arranged it.

Latin music has always peppered the jazz canon but periodically it pops up in the public consciousness like a brand new thing. In 1940, the conga dance resurged and Ellington asked his Latino expert Juan Tizol to create a composition to feed the latest trend. This is no Tizol toss-off though, as Ellington sets his theme in a challenging arrangement demanding expertise from his world-class musicians. The rhythm section set the stage with charisma as Blanton masterfully decompresses the history of Latin music in jazz into three repeated notes. Tizol, doing what he does best, clearly states his enigmatic theme, shifting between major to minor keys. At first Webster's solo interpretation seems incongruous but on repeated listening it belongs. The pep section really fits into the overall scheme, as do the individual sections.

Cong Brava, Across The Track Blues, Sepia Panorama, Flaming Sword, and I Never Felt This Way Before published by Robbins Music, were dropped from the band book when Ellington formed his own publishing entity Tempo

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<sup>31</sup> Mercer Ellington. Smithsonian Oral History Project. 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Jack Towers. Smithsonian Oral History Project. June, 2000.

Music in 1941, headed by his sister Ruth. Ellington had recently signed with Robbins Music to make the initial, and dramatic, break from Irving Mills Publishing. Mills was the white man a black band needed in the 1920s and '30s and he served Ellington well by placing him in Hollywood films, running interference for organized crime, and engineering his first European tour, an artistic and public relations coup. If publishing records from the 1920s and 1930s are taken at face value, Irving Mills could go down in history as one of the greatest lyricists of that time for co-composer credit is the price he exacted for his management. Ellington absorbed the lesson of that business arrangement.

### **I Never Felt This Way Before**

Soloists: BW, WJ, HJ, LB

Although Ellington transferred the duties of vocal arrangements to Strayhorn, *I Never Felt This Way Before* indicates no weakness in this category. Precisely scored, this exquisite piece would fall apart if not executed exactly. After his introduction, Ellington borrows one man from each section, Wallace, Tizol and Bigard, to set an indigo mood. After Jeffries begins his vocal, a little late and on the wrong microphone, Nance enters on violin for the first time in the evening underscoring Jeffries' vocal with supreme sensitivity. Jeffries croons wonderfully, however, this Ellington ballad stood on its own without lyrics. Ellington intended this as one of his closing numbers--on the back of the score he sketched a six-measure "chaser."

## **SET FIVE**

### **Across The Track Blues**

Soloists: DE, BB, RS, LB, BB

Like the tiers in his personality, Ellington's best compositions can be enjoyed on their surface layer or plumbed again and again for the endless interest underneath. He distilled the complex into something quite simple and turned a drop of water into an ocean as he does in the pinnacle of his blues compositions *Across The Track Blues*. That urban child, "the King of Harlem" rolls out a blues that reeks of the rural South on a steamy summer day. The economical soloists, most notably Barney Bigard, seem to deliver their languid solos from a rocking chair on the porch. But don't be seduced, instead examine the perfect symmetry of this twelve bar blues.

### **Honeysuckle Rose**

Soloist: RN, violin

While in high school, Nance felt lost in the violin section, first he tried the mellophone and later the trumpet in his search for an instrument that would "project more, in other words be louder."<sup>33</sup> Ironically, the violin may be the instrument on which his voice was the most influential. Again, the repertoire turns 180 degrees; this time from the perfectly planned to a head arrangement. The rhythm section jams on Honeysuckle Rose while Nance gets his amplification in order. And then, in his first recorded violin solo for the Ellington Orchestra, Nance animates this standard. The band revels in still another ingredient being added to their mix and in the end respond with an impromptu accompaniment. Later, an arrangement developed for Honeysuckle Rose and it remained in the repertoire until 1969.

### **Wham (Re-Bop-Bam)**

Soloists: RN, RS

Ellington and Strayhorn were quick to employ Nance's vocal talent as well, especially his ability to deliver a novelty song lightly but without silliness. It appears the men read Wham (Re-Bop-Boom Bam) directly from Eddie Durham's stock music arrangement of his own composition, possibly supplied by Nance.

### **Star Dust**

Soloist: BW

From Fargo, North Dakota, you would have to dig a hole to China to find the bottom of Ben Webster's well. Out of the smoldering ashes of Cottontail, rises the melody of Star Dust and an interpretation of the lyrics so profound that the words become superfluous. "Ben may have sounded a lot like 'Hawk' (Coleman Hawkins) here," Ellington remarked. "Ben was deliberately doing this,"<sup>34</sup> suggesting homage instead of imitation. "The band had never heard it [Star Dust]," according to Jack. "It was something that Ben and Blanton had worked up as roommates. Ben kept after me to have a new record ready to get this number. When I flipped the disc over, I missed the first few notes. The rhythm chirped right in and soon the trombones get into the thing. Of course, they knew the chords to Star Dust, a little bit of reeds in there too. They filled in pretty good there!"<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ray Nance. Guest Appearance at New York TDES (The Duke Ellington Society) meeting. 1963.

<sup>34</sup> Duke Ellington. Interview with Willis Conover. 1965.

<sup>35</sup> Jack Towers. Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Project. June, 2000.



### **Rose Of The Rio Grande**

Soloists: LB, IA, LB

Lawrence Brown returns with exuberance on master song smith Harry Warren's *Rose Of The Rio Grande* joined by Ivie Anderson. By this late hour, the band is no longer on a job, they have entered the spiritual plane where the conscious no longer exists. Brown's relatively wild tailgating belies his "mustard" personality<sup>36</sup> and the band soars to raise this from jam session quality to something quite noble. In 1965, Ellington stated that Brown performed this with "great reluctance"<sup>37</sup> because there was no arrangement. No doubt Brown grew tired of this piece but Ellington did orchestrate "Rosie" and Brown's performance is more than cooperative.

### **St. Louis Blues**

Soloists: RN, BB, DE, IA, BW, JN, RS

"They called jazz that raggedy music in New Orleans,"<sup>38</sup> and the beginning of *St. Louis Blues* confirms this notion but like the development of jazz, this phase is quickly dispelled as Bigard proves nothing is shabby about his playing. Anderson's command of the tune, turning it into a blues holler, is enlightening. Behind Anderson's vocals, Webster begins his buildup and constructs a solo that relates the history of jazz, past, present and future. Nanton catches right on, pushing the band towards its grand finale.

### **Warm Valley**

Although Ellington has not yet developed his *Love You Madly* closing, he graciously thanks the audience over the strains of soon-to-be released *Warm Valley*.

### **God Bless America**

How fitting that an orchestra led by Edward Kennedy Ellington completes the evening with a tribute to their country, *God Bless America*. From his nation's melting pot, he culled a band that symbolized to millions of people around the world, an American's right to freedom of expression. But perhaps Sonny Greer said it best, "I was there. I didn't read that. I was there baby! God is my judge. I was a part of that. I made millions of people, I was part of an organization

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<sup>36</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

<sup>37</sup> Duke Ellington. Interview with Willis Conover. 1965.

<sup>38</sup> Duke Ellington. Carter Harman Collection of Ellington Interviews. 1964.

that made millions of people happy. Duke Ellington was a legend. He carried the dignity and the prestige of the colored race all over the world."<sup>39</sup>

*What we call the beginning is often the end,  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.*  
-T.S. Eliot<sup>40</sup>

#### ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

ANNIE KUEBLER served as archivist at the Institute of Jazz Studies from 2001 until poor health forced her retirement in February 2012. After surviving near-fatal burns in a house fire, she launched her archival career at the Smithsonian, where she helped process the monumental Duke Ellington Collection. At IJS, her first of many accomplishments was the organization and cataloging of the Mary Lou Williams Collection, the Institute's largest and most significant, for which she received a commendation from the National Endowment for the Humanities for her leadership on the project. Annie is remembered fondly by the countless students she mentored, researchers she assisted, and her friends and colleagues at IJS and throughout the jazz world. She died on August 13, 2012 at the age of 61. In her memory, *JJS* reprints these notes which convey not only her life-long love of music in general and Ellington in particular, but her warmth and passion.

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<sup>39</sup> Sonny Greer. Rutgers/NEA Jazz Oral History Project. 1979.

<sup>40</sup> *The Four Quartets*. "Little Gidding." T.S. Eliot.