KINGS OF JAZZ

G. E. LAMBERT

Duke Ellington

KINGS OF JAZZ

Duke Ellington

BY G. E. LAMBERT

A Perpetua Book 

A. S. BARNES AND COMPANY, INC.
NEW YORK

Perpetua Edition 1961

A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc.
11 East 36th Street
New York 16, New York

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-16819

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The sources for the biographical data presented in this book are too various to list, but I would like to acknowledge in particular, *Duke Ellington* by Barry Ulanov (Musicians Press, London, 1947) and *Duke Ellington: His Life and Music*, edited by Peter Gammond (Phoenix House, London, 1958), which were the principal sources used.

I would also like to thank the many friends who assisted in various ways towards the completion of this book. In particular, Miss Anne Bradbury and Mr. Percy Buckley for checking the MS.; Miss Bradbury and Miss B. Kenyon for assistance with the typing; and the following local collectors for the loan of records to fill out my own Ellington collection: Alan Buckley, Percy Buckley, Alec Greenhalgh and Tony Whale.

G.E.L.

1. A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Edward Kennedy Ellington was born on April 29th, 1899, in Washington, D.C. His family seem to have been fairly well-to-do, by Negro standards in the American capital, his father being a butler who, at the time of his son's birth, occasionally served at White House functions. Later James Edward Ellington became a blueprint maker for the U.S. Navy, and from all reports he was an easy, relaxed individual. Edward Kennedy was brought up an only child, his sister not being born until he reached the age of sixteen, and the happy atmosphere of his home life during childhood can be gauged from the fact that to the son, as well as to visiting relatives, James Edward was known as 'Uncle Ed'. 'Uncle Ed sure provided for his family,' Duke has said, 'we didn't want for anything.' His mother, Daisy Kennedy, seems to have been a perfect foil for the more easygoing James Edward; a woman of strict principle and, we are told, prim manner. In the Washington of this period, when racial segregation laid very great stress on a Negro family, Ellington's childhood environment must have been unusually happy to have provided the basis of temperament for the relaxed, urbane, master of all situations which he became in later years. Perhaps the index of his childhood is to be found in that strong sense of loyalty which he feels for those close to him and which he demands in turn from his musicians and his friends.

His hobbies as a child followed the usual pattern for a young American of this era—baseball, football and the movies. He has recalled that his first musical memory is of his mother playing *The Rosary* when he was four years old, but though he started to take piano lessons from a lady by the improbable sounding name of Klingscale (other versions of this name have been reported as Mrs. Klinkscale and Mrs. Chinkscale), he derived little satisfaction from the piano at that tender age. Although he played at a church concert given by Mrs. Klingscale, he had little enthusiasm for music and avoided practice whenever possible. Unlike those other members of what have been termed 'jazz nobility', 'King' Oliver, who was so styled by his admirers in New Orleans and 'Count' Basie, named by a radio announcer, Edward Kennedy Ellington had his title bestowed upon him many years before he played jazz. The name, so utterly correct in its definition of the princely manner of the man, was given by a boyhood friend and neighbour at the rather early age of eight!

Duke Ellington spent some three years at what was one of the leading high schools for Negroes in Washington at that time. During the first of the three years or so that he was at the Armstrong High School, Duke's greatest interest seems to have been in drawing, at which he showed very great promise. He also took regular music lessons at the school, later supplemented by private lessons from a Henry Grant of the Dunbar High School, who was also the teacher of both Otto Hardwicke and Arthur Whetsol.

About this time Ellington won a poster contest sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and just prior to his leaving the Armstrong High School in June, 1917, he was offered a scholarship to the Pratt Institute of Applied Arts. This he turned down, presumably on account of his increasing pre-occupation with music, for by this time Duke had come into contact with the house rent parties which were so common a feature of Negro city life during this period. Each large American city had, in those pre-mass entertainment days,

its own favourite party piano players. Chicago's Jimmy Yancey and Cripple Clarence Lofton became known in later years through their recordings, whilst many of the New York rent party pianists became international figures through their later fame in the worlds of jazz and popular entertainment—for example Count Basie, Fats Waller and, of course, *the* pianist of New York in the 'teens and 'twenties—James P. Johnson. Although he was impressed by the local heroes of ragtime piano—men like Clarence Bowser, Louis Thomas, Louis Brown, Lester Dishman and Doc Perry—the prime influence on the young Ellington was without doubt the great James P. Ellington. He has described how he obtained a piano roll of Johnson's famous *Carolina Shout*, and played it on the pianola very slowly so that he could follow the fingering and study the intricacies of James P.'s style. Duke also pays tribute to Doc Perry as the man who taught him to 'read notes, not just spell them out'.

When James P. Johnson came to Washington, so one legend goes, Duke played in a carving contest against him and, with the strong local support in the audience, succeeded in 'carving' the master. Duke has denied this in recent years, and it seems indeed a rather unlikely story, although there is no doubt that around this time Ellington did play at some party and made quite an impression with James P. While still at Armstrong High, Duke took an after-school job at the Poodle Dog Café as a 'soda jerker', and he named his first composition, *The Soda Fountain Rag*. As soon as opportunity presented itself, Duke played this at a local café: he played it straight, as a blues, as a foxtrot, as a waltz and finally as a fast tempo stomp. 'They never knew it was the same piece,' recalled Duke, many years later. 'I was established . . . I had a repertoire.' Subsequently Duke played several jobs as solo pianist and with local bands, the latter along with two other young musicians who were later to find fame as members of his orchestra—Otto Hardwicke and Arthur Whetsol.

In 1918 Duke married Edna Thompson, a girl he had

been friendly with at school and who had helped him with his piano studies; the following year their son, Mercer, was born. At first he worked gigs in the evenings and painted posters during the day in order that his family would be well provided for, but he found that he was more and more able to use his musical ability as a means of income. He had been playing for some time with a group of young musicians and had noticed that the better-known local band leaders had large advertisements in the phone book. Duke bought one just as big as theirs, and before long he and his musicians were handling all the engagements they had time for. During this period a drummer from New York, Sonny Greer, was playing at the Howard Theatre in Washington, and when the Ellington musicians heard him they were impressed by his abilities, and soon persuaded this somewhat colourful character to join them. This was in 1919; Sonny Greer left Duke Ellington's orchestra in 1950!

In 1922 five of this group of young Washington musicians left for New York—Ellington, Hardwicke, Whetsol, Greer and banjoist Elmer Snowden, the pretext being a telegram from Wilbur Sweatman asking Greer to join his band. The job with Sweatman did not last long however, and, although the young musicians hung around New York for some time, work and food were both in short supply. It was during this period that Ellington heard the pianist Willie 'The Lion' Smith, who probably influenced his own keyboard style more than any other single musician during his formative years. Duke also had many opportunities to hear the playing of James P. Johnson and his brilliant young pupil Fats Waller while in New York, and it was Waller who persuaded them to try New York again when they had returned to Washington after three months of scuffling. After playing various odd engagements in New York they were able to land a regular job at a place called the Hollywood Club, later re-named the Kentucky Club. It is doubtful if this group had much to offer in the way of jazz, the line up in the spring of 1923 being Arthur Whetsol, trum-

pet; Otto Hardwicke, alto; Duke Ellington, piano; Elmer Snowden (the nominal leader of the band at this time), banjo; and Sonny Greer, drums. The band spent the next four and a half years at the Kentucky Club, and it was here that Sonny Greer won considerable fame as the man who tipped off the waiters as to which of the customers were to be provided with drinks during those days of prohibition. Most of the customers were acceptable, as the Club was mainly a place for theatre and show-business people, but if anyone looked suspicious the waiter would see Sonny, behind his typically extravagant drum kit, shake his head and for that individual prohibition would be in force even within the Kentucky Club!

After some disagreement with the other members of the band, Elmer Snowden left and was replaced by Fred Guy on banjo, while the leadership of the group passed over to Duke Ellington. Another personnel change which had a greater impact was the addition of Charlie Irvis on trombone. Whetsol and Hardwicke, who recorded prolifically with Ellington in later years, were both 'sweet' rather than 'hot' musicians, and it was Irvis who first added a distinct jazz voice to Ellington's band. He was a rougher player than the Washingtonians; his style partly inspired by the New Orleans trombonists and partly made up of an individual manner of playing with a mute—a sort of embryonic form of the style later perfected by Irvis' successor, trombonist Joe Nanton, and by Bubber Miley, a trumpet player who joined Ellington whilst he was still at the Kentucky Club. The reason that Miley joined Ellington was that, despite the protests of his fellow bandsmen, Arthur Whetsol was going back to Washington to complete his medical studies, and Duke needed a replacement. Bubber Miley was to play with Ellington for six years, and he was without doubt the most influential musician who ever played with the band in his effect on Ellington's music. Miley played muted in almost all his solos, and along with his manipulation of the rubber plunger he would combine growls and blue inflexions, at times seeming to make the

trumpet talk. His style has often been described as 'wa-wa' or 'growl', and he was a very great influence on many younger musicians who adopted this manner of muted playing. Yet Miley's melodic line was also unique and he must be given credit for his part in the creation of several of the finest works associated with Duke Ellington. *East St. Louis Toodle-oo*, *Black and Tan Fantasy* and *Creole Love Call* all bear Miley's name as part-composer, and it is probable that Ellington would have taken a good deal longer in arriving at his own maturity as a musician had it not been for the cathartic effect Miley had on the band, and upon its leader's creations. For Miley, like all good jazzmen, was basically a blues musician, and it was the influence of this infinitely pliable material, more than Bubber's exotic growl, which revolutionized the young Ellington's outlook on music. 'Our band changed its character when Bubber came in,' says Duke. 'He used to growl all night long, playing gutbucket on his horn. That was when we decided to forget all about the sweet music.'[1]

Charlie Irvis left the band in late 1926 and was replaced by Joe 'Tricky Sam' Nanton, whose trombone style was a reflection (on his lower pitched instrument) of Bubber Miley's trumpet. Around this time the band augmented its rhythm section to a quartet by the addition of Bass Edwards on tuba. Three further additions brought the band to the strength we know from its earliest recordings as a complete unit—an additional trumpet player to take the open solos and provide the lead in Louis Metcalf; a tenor saxophonist who was also an able clarinettist in Rudy Jackson; and a second alto, Harry Carney, who had the unusual distinction for that day of doubling on baritone saxophone. The first two did not stay with the band for very long, but Harry Carney's baritone still graces the Ellington bandstand in 1959—thirty-three years after he first joined the band! Throughout the history of the Ellington orchestra Carney has added to the texture of Ellington's scores a deep,

[1] Nat Hentoff and Nat Shapiro (Editors), *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, p. 209 (Peter Davies, 1955).

rich sound which, it seems, only he can draw from the baritone. He is of course the leading soloist on his instrument and one of the most distinguished and accomplished musicians in jazz. This personnel—Miley and Metcalf on trumpets, Nanton on trombone, Hardwicke, Jackson and Carney on reeds, and the rhythm section of Ellington, Guy, Edwards and Greer—was probably the one heard by the impresario, Irving Mills, when he made his historic entry into the Kentucky Club one evening in 1926.

According to Ellington the band were playing *St. Louis Blues* when Mills walked in and, after the number was over, Mills asked Duke what it was. Mills said that it sounded nothing like *St. Louis Blues*—'so maybe that gave him ideas,' says Duke. Mills' version is rather different; the number which attracted his attention was *Black and Tan Fantasy*. 'When I learned that it was Duke's composition, I immediately recognized that I had encountered a great creative artist and the first American composer to catch in his music the true jazz spirit.'[1]

II

Irving Mills was not a musician (despite the large number of Ellington compositions bearing the credit 'Ellington–Mills'), but he is an important figure in the life of Duke Ellington. In having the business and publicity worries handled by Mills, Duke was able to devote the maximum amount of time to composition and the band's musical development. Whatever one's personal opinions of the entertainment business may be, there can be little doubt that the emergence of Irving Mills to take up the business side of the Ellington orchestra was an unqualified blessing, in the social context of the 1920s. Mills, a prodigiously energetic individual, was a song publisher, band manager, publicity agent and, in later years, record company executive. Ellington was served by Mills in all these capacities. Together they formed a company known as Ellington, Inc., and Mills

[1] Ibid. p. 211.

set into motion the means of making Ellington an internationally known figure. First of all Mills arranged a number of recordings for labels better known than the somewhat obscure ones on which the Ellington musicians had thus far appeared. It was through Mills that the band landed the long engagement at the Cotton Club in late 1927, after a theatre owner in Philadelphia had been persuaded to release the band from a contract to enable them to appear on the opening night. The means of 'persuasion' employed was to send a local gangster to the manager in question with the simple proposition, 'Be big, or you'll be dead.' He was 'big', and the band opened on time. For the next few years they were a permanent feature at the Cotton Club, with the exception of a few months in the summer of 1930, when the band went to Hollywood to take part in the Amos an' Andy film, *Check and Double Check*. Significant changes were made in the band during this period, the first being the replacement of tuba player, Bass Edwards with the New Orleans string-bass player, Wellman Braud, just before the band moved in to the Cotton Club. Another New Orleans man in clarinettist Barney Bigard, who had experience with both Jelly-Roll Morton and King Oliver, added his very distinctive voice to the band in January of 1928. In March of that year Arthur Whetsol returned to make the trumpet section up to three pieces, and eight months later Freddy Jenkins replaced Louis Metcalf, adding an individual style and an extremely colourful personality to the band.

The most important personnel change occurred when Otto Hardwicke left in June of that same year. He was replaced by Johnny Hodges, already a distinctive soloist on alto and soprano saxes, and a musician who was, in a few years' time, to become the greatest soloist on his instrument that music has ever known. A remarkably even musician in his constant inspiration and in the unvarying quality of his work, Johnny Hodges is one of the few artists in any field who *never* perform badly.

The environment at the Cotton Club was hardly one

in which the music critics (who were in a few short years to compare Ellington with Delius, Debussy and Stravinsky) would have expected to find a budding genius. For much of the time the band were either playing accompaniments to popular singers of the day, such as Adelaide Hall, Ethel Waters and the Mills Brothers (who were just becoming well known as the first of the vocal quartets), or playing background music to dancing routines. Much of the music played at the Cotton Club was not Ellington material at all, yet during this period he recorded many of the masterpieces which were to bring him acclaim from so many diverse sources. He also recorded many of the popular tunes of the day, some of which were only average by the not particularly elevated standards in this field. Many of these records, however, proved to be gems of orchestral jazz; the section playing, the solos and the scoring showed that Duke could more than hold his own with other large jazz groups, even without the unique compositions which are naturally associated with him.

In February, 1929, Bubber Miley left the band, and Ellington replaced him with Charles Melvin Williams, a young trumpet player from Mobile, Alabama—better known amongst jazz devotees as 'Cootie'. Cootie Williams had made quite an impression on the New York jazz scene during brief periods with the orchestras of Chick Webb and Fletcher Henderson, although his reputation had come solely from his open playing. Ellington hired Williams as a replacement for Bubber Miley however, and, with some assistance from Tricky Sam Nanton, Cootie mastered the growl style of his predecessor, and it was this style with which he became associated in later years. He is also an authoritative player on the open trumpet, with much of the majesty of Louis Armstrong's best work. Indeed Cootie Williams is one of the finest of jazz trumpet players, and the neglect of his work in recent years is one of the least satisfactory aspects of the jazz scene. The story of Bubber Miley's life after leaving Ellington is brief and tragic. He played for a while in the bands of Noble Sissle and Zutty

Singleton, and later formed a group of his own under the sponsorship of Irving Mills to play in the revue *Harlem Scandals*. Although he had been warned that he was tuberculous some time before, in early February, 1932, he had to give up playing because of his condition, and he died on May 20th of the same year. It is said that not one musician attended the funeral of this remarkable jazzman; the only tribute to his contribution to music at Bubber Miley's funeral was a very large wreath of flowers from Duke Ellington.

During their stay at the Cotton Club the playing of the Ellington band was often referred to as 'jungle style'. This was because, although situated in Harlem, the Cotton Club was in actual fact a club for the whites who came uptown to hear and see 'primitive' music and entertainment. The Cotton Club's jungle décor catered for this very taste, and as Ellington's more 'exotic' compositions (i.e. those including 'growl' brass features) were used to back the dances during the 'jungle' sequences, it was not surprising that, with the aid of astute publicity, Ellington's band was soon associated with 'jungle music'. Ellington's titles reflect this tendency for from this period come such titles as *Jungle Jamboree*, *Jungle Blues*, *Jungle Nights in Harlem* and *Echoes of the Jungle*; titles which owe more to the publicity office of Irving Mills than the compositions of Duke Ellington to which they are appended. It is essential to the newcomer to Duke Ellington's music to understand this, for the growl style perfected by Miley and Nanton is a perfectly legitimate development of the 'vocalization' of instrumental tone and inflexion which is so primary a characteristic of American Negro music. It is in fact a part of the blues tradition in jazz, and most emphatically neither a borrowing from nor an impression of African Negro musical idioms. It is rather odd that some commentators have considered the use of 'growl' style by Ellington to be an exotic superficiality, whilst in fact it is one of the most traditional elements in his style. The Ellington band used various pseudonyms when recording for different companies in the 'twenties and

'thirties, and it is a rather ironic commentary on the environment of the band to recall that the first serious attempt at extended composition in jazz, *Creole Rhapsody*, which Duke recorded in 1931, was issued as by 'The Jungle Band'!

In 1930, Ellington finally split with his wife, Edna Thompson, and he was married a second time, to Mildred Dixon, a dancer at the Cotton Club. During this time Duke's parents and his son Mercer lived with him in New York, and the Ellington home was a happy, if somewhat hectic place. In 1929, a few months after Cootie Williams had joined the band, Duke added a second trombonist in Juan Tizol, a musician from Puerto Rico who specialized on the valve trombone. Rarely featured in jazz solos, Tizol was to become a distinctive voice with the Ellington ensemble through his collaboration with Duke in such compositions as *Perdido*, *Caravan*, *Congo Brava*, etc.; numbers which employ (with the exception of the first named) exotic Latin-American rhythms and scoring. In 1932 the trombone section was brought up to the then unheard-of strength of three by the addition of a musician from the West Coast, Lawrence Brown. Brown was already known to jazz collectors through his recordings with Louis Armstrong, and his addition to the Ellington ranks was the cause of the first of those unfavourable uproars created periodically by the critics when a new jazz musician has joined the orchestra. Such influential writers as John Hammond in America and Spike Hughes in England condemned the addition of Brown; it was not that he was considered a poor musician, but it was felt that his personality was too 'sophisticated', his style too 'virtuoso', for the 'essentially direct and simple music' of Ellington. 'It is not that his individuality is too strong,' wrote Hughes, 'just misplaced.' Similar outcries have been made about Rex Stewart (1934), Jimmy Hamilton (1943) and Clark Terry (1951) when they joined the band, and however justified the critics appeared before the results of such changes were heard on record, Ellington has always proved conclusively that he knows better who will fit into his band than the

most perceptive of critics. It is only just to point out, however, that not all commentators have considered that Ellington's output has been uniform in quality through the years. Spike Hughes, for example, considers that from about this period Ellington's music started to decline in quality and that generally his work in the middle and late 'thirties suffered from over-sophistication and too great a concern with harmony. A further addition to the band at this time was vocalist Ivie Anderson, who was the first regular singer that Duke carried with the band. Vocalists have never been Ellington's strongest suit, but on many recordings Ivie Anderson's singing blends well with the band's performances and she is probably the finest singer that he has ever had.

Despite the great commercial success of the band in America and the appreciation of his immense talents as a composer, both in his own country and in Europe, Duke Ellington had, by 1932, become dissatisfied with his mode of living. With the continual commercialism of the Cotton Club, and of other such engagements, the 'high life' which he had led for the past few years began to pall. His friends noticed a new moodiness, a certain cynicism in the manner of this previously happy individual. In his brilliant study of Ellington's personality, *The Hot Bach*, Richard O. Boyer quotes Duke's recollections of this period: 'I'd bring something I thought was good to the music publishers and they'd ask, "Can an eight-year-old child sing it?" I'd bring something new to them and they'd say, "This ain't what we're looking for. We want something like Gazookus wrote last week." I'd see guys writing little pop numbers that were going over big. I didn't see why I should try to do something good. I thought I'd stop writing. . . . If something bad was plugged it would go over better than something good that wasn't. I felt it was all a racket. I was on the point of giving up.'[1] Whether the reputation that Ellington's records had made for him amongst music lovers in

[1] Richard O. Boyer, *The Hot Bach*, reprinted in *Duke Ellington*, p. 56, edited by Peter Gammond (Phoenix House, 1958).

Europe was the deciding factor, or whether the travel and change of environment were the things desired most by Ellington, we do not know, but a European trip was decided upon. In the summer of 1933 (despite Ellington's fear of icebergs) the band set sail for England, the first stage of a European tour.

III

In England, Ellington's reputation rested solely on his records, and the audience for these included not only the lovers of the latest dance music craze, but also a growing band of jazz record collectors and a number of figures of some eminence in the world of European concert music. Such writers on jazz as Leonard Hibbs and Spike Hughes stressed continually the importance of Ellington's music, and the distinguished composer Constant Lambert was a great admirer of his work. In America the composer Percy Grainger had compared Ellington with Bach and Delius, and much was made of this comparison in England. The names of Debussy and Ravel were also bandied about somewhat freely in connexion with Duke's compositions at this time. Of course there was a huge press barrage of publicity of a less esoteric nature promoted by Irving Mills and the British band-leader Jack Hylton, who was organizing the band's European trip. They played variety theatres in various large cities in Britain and also two concerts in London sponsored by the *Melody Maker*, the first of which provoked a bitter controversy. Designed to show Ellington as a composer, the first half consisted of such music as *Echoes of the Jungle*, *Blue Tune*, *Creole Rhapsody* and *Black and Tan Fantasy*. The audience reaction to the muted work of Cootie Williams and Tricky Sam Nanton was that of people hearing a clever piece of instrumental trickery, or some weird novelty, rather than a colourful, integrated part of Ellington's tonal palate. Sensing that the audience were not (when they laughed at Tricky Sam's solos) taking the attitude that he and his critical followers had hoped, Duke changed the programme for the second half and in-

cluded Lawrence Brown's *Trees*, Freddie Jenkins singing and dancing *Some of These Days*, and such popular material as *Minnie the Moocher* and *Tiger Rag*. The serious devotees of Ellington's music were horrified; Duke had 'debased himself'; he had commercialized his art! The most angry voice was that of Spike Hughes, and in the programme of the second concert, which was held three weeks later, the audience were advised by Hughes how to conduct themselves in a concert hall. 'Don't laugh at Nanton,' said Hughes. 'Don't applaud during numbers.' He was promptly dubbed 'the hot dictator', and his part in these events has been constantly maligned by almost all writers who have discussed Ellington's 1933 tour. However strongly one may disagree with the opinions Hughes later expressed about the decline of Ellington's music, there is no denying that if Duke was able to create music worthy of the time and attention of a concert audience, then Spike Hughes was completely right. Ellington did indeed offer music of such quality, the playing of Williams and Nanton being an integral part of this music, and no person in his right mind can consider that to have someone laughing at every muted solo was a desirable state of affairs. Hughes' methods were drastic, but well justified. The attention paid to Ellington's music throughout the European tour must have been pleasing to Duke, yet the last thing that Irving Mills wanted was for Ellington to be considered 'highbrow'. Respect for his music, yes; but Ellington's popularity could be seriously affected by too much of this sort of thing. Nothing sells less well amongst the general public than that which is labelled 'highbrow', and much of the criticism of Hughes' approach came from within the Ellington camp. But this European tour was a good thing for Ellington, as is shown by his statement, 'The main thing I got in Europe was *spirit*; it lifted me out of a bad groove. That kind of thing gives you courage to go on. If they think I'm *that* important, then maybe I have kinda said something; maybe our music does mean something.'[1]

[1] Barry Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, p. 151 (Musicians Press, 1947).

Although in 1932 he was given the annual award by the New York Schools of Music for his *Creole Rhapsody*, the activities of Ellington's band were still largely confined to appearances at the larger night clubs and at dances. In the autumn of 1933 they made their first tour of the South and in 1934 he took part in a number of films—*Murder at the Vanities*, *Belle of the '90s* (with Mae West) and *Symphony in Black*. This was the year in which Constant Lambert's study of twentieth-century music, *Music Ho!*, was published, during the course of which he made the now famous statement that there is 'nothing in Ravel so dexterous in treatment as the varied solos in the middle of the ebullient *Hot and Bothered* and nothing in Stravinsky more dynamic than the final section'.[1] During the time this book was published Ellington was engaged in playing dances for Jim Crow audiences in America's Southern States, and leading his band in brief snatches of third-rate films!

In Christmas week 1934 a new and important voice was added to the trumpet section, that of Rex Stewart, who replaced the ailing Freddy Jenkins. A veteran jazzman, Stewart had played for several years with the famous Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, in addition to spells with McKinney's Cotton Pickers and Luis Russell. Rex is a musician who has been constantly underestimated by the critics, both in his achievements and his influence. Roy Eldridge has stated that Rex was one of the musicians who influenced his playing, whilst traces of the Stewart manner can be found in such diverse musicians as Taft Jordan and Clark Terry. As a voice in the Ellington Orchestra, Stewart's work was invaluable in its versatility, for he commanded virtually *every* style of jazz trumpet, including a masterly adaptation of the Bubber Miley growl style, and a manner which he devised himself of playing with the valves of the instrument half depressed. The partnership of Cootie Williams and Rex Stewart in the Duke Ellington brass section from 1935 to 1940 was one of the greatest in jazz history.

[1] Constant Lambert, *Music Ho!*, p. 156 (Faber & Faber, 1934, and Penguin Books, 1948).

In recent years both men have suffered an undue neglect, yet a recent L.P. featuring the two of them together again shows them still to be amongst the very finest of jazz trumpet players.[1]

1935 saw the dawning of the so-called 'swing era' which began with the success of Benny Goodman's first big band. Duke Ellington's name was so established that at first he was not considered to play the same type of music as the newly established bands of Goodman, Bob Crosby, Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy Lunceford. In addition to this factor it must be observed that the white bands throughout the 'swing' period had the best publicity and the best jobs, at the expense of the coloured orchestras who were almost invariably superior in musical content. But the astute publicity chief of the Irving Mills organization, Ned Williams, went to work to assure the public that Duke Ellington led a 'swing' orchestra, and soon the band was accepted by the public as such. In late 1935 bassist Wellman Braud left the orchestra, and it was a sign of the band's success that Ellington could afford for a few years to experiment with two bass players, Hayes Alvis and Billy Taylor. Both men worked with Ellington until 1938, but early in that year Alvis departed and Taylor remained with the band until the advent of Jimmy Blanton in October, 1939.

Ellington had been told in 1933 that his mother was a sick woman but she refused to go into hospital when advised to do so. Finally she entered Providence Hospital, Detroit, a cancer sanatorium and research centre, early in 1935. Duke arranged his bookings so he could be near at hand and he was with her continuously during the last three days of her life. She died on May 27th, 1935, and her death was a great shock to Ellington—'I have no ambition left,' he told his friends. 'The bottom's out of everything.' It was in the months immediately after his mother's death that Ellington wrote *Reminiscing in Tempo*, by far the most ambitious composition in the jazz idiom at this date, run-

[1] *The Big Challenge*, American Jazztone J1268, 1957 (not available in England).

ning for some twelve minutes and covering four sides of the then standard 10-inch 78 r.p.m. records. Critical reaction was hostile; in America, John Hammond headed his review of the work 'The Tragedy of Duke Ellington'. In England ('I wrote it just for them,' said Duke) Spike Hughes described it as a 'long rambling monstrosity', and Edgar Jackson said frankly that he did not understand the work. Leonard Hibbs also found it dull and meaningless at first, but 'at the same time, I had too high an opinion of Duke to think he would willingly perpetuate anything like the pointless joke that this appeared to be . . .' So Hibbs listened to the work several times, finally coming to the conclusion that it was a significant and worthy piece of Ellingtonia. Would that other critics in the turbulent world of jazz might show such admirable modesty![1]

In 1937 and 1938 Ellington was again associated with the Cotton Club, although he took time off to visit Hollywood and make another film, *The Hit Parade*. One of the numbers played in this film was *I've Got To Be A Rug Cutter*, a typical title of the day, with a hastily improvised vocal trio of Harry Carney, Rex Stewart and Hayes Alvis! Whilst on the West Coast the band played a concert at the University of California, which was the first of a series of concerts at various colleges and universities. But 1937 brought further tragedy for Duke in his family life, for in early November of that year his father died. Once again he was thrown into the depths of depression and for a long time he did little or no composing. In this same year Arthur Whetsol, who had been a friend and associate of Ellington's right from the early days in Washington, left the band. After some shuffling around in the trumpet section Wallace Jones took over the first trumpet chair; although a lead man of great efficiency Jones was no soloist, and Whetsol's delicate trumpet style was a considerable loss to the

[1] For further details of the critical reaction to *Reminiscing in Tempo* see Charles Fox in *Duke Ellington*, pp. 89–90, edited by Peter Gammond (Phoenix House, 1958), and Barry Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, pp. 164–6 (Musicians Press, 1947).

orchestra. In 1938 Ellington wrote another concert work, *The Blue Belles of Harlem*, on a commission from Paul Whiteman for a work for his orchestra. Although this was performed some years afterwards by the Ellington Orchestra at a Carnegie Hall Concert, it has unfortunately never been recorded.

In the spring of 1939 Duke was married to Bea Ellis, shortly after his divorce from his second wife, Mildred. Another long-standing partnership was broken when Ellington split with Irving Mills, signing a new contract with the William Morris agency, and in March of this year Ellington sailed for Europe, this time having to miss out England owing to union restrictions. On the eve of the Second World War the Ellington band covered France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Sweden in a thirty-four-day concert tour. The tour was a success in every way, and, to add to the frustration of English jazz enthusiasts who were unable to hear the band, the musicians called at London on their way back to the U.S.

IV

Before leaving for Europe the band had recorded a song called *Something to Live For*, an Ellington composition with lyrics by a young lyric-writer and musician, Billy Strayhorn. Legend has it that Strayhorn was hired by Duke purely as a lyric writer and that, whilst the band was away in Europe, the young man became fascinated by the Ellington scores which he studied with great interest and enthusiasm. In actual fact Strayhorn had done some scoring for small band dates by the Johnny Hodges contingent before the band's departure. We may deduce from this that Duke already had his mind on the idea of letting this highly talented young musician do some of the scoring for the full orchestra. Billy Strayhorn's compositions became a regular feature of the band's repertoire. Apart from such well-known numbers as *Take The 'A' Train*, *Midriff* and *Day Dream*, he is joint composer of several of the longer concert works,

such as *The Perfume Suite* and *Such Sweet Thunder*. Like Ellington himself, he has always paid great attention to the musical character of the men in the band, and it is often impossible to tell whether a number is an Ellington original or a Strayhorn composition, so closely has the younger man assimilated the Ellington manner. Yet no other musician in jazz has ever been able to achieve anything sounding remotely like the 'Ellington effect', as Strayhorn himself terms it! It was Strayhorn who coined the well known and very perceptive saying: 'Ellington plays the piano, but his real instrument is his band.'

Later in 1939 two other important additions were made to the Ellington band when Duke increased his sax section to five pieces with the addition of the Kansas City tenor player Ben Webster, and bassist Billy Taylor was replaced by Jimmy Blanton. From being the least important member of the reed section, the tenor saxophone had developed under the influence of that great musician, Coleman Hawkins, to a position where it challenged the trumpet as the most important solo instrument in jazz. Every large band, except Ellington's, had by this time at least one tenor saxophone soloist of distinction, and the Count Basie Band had two, in Lester Young and Herchel Evans, whose contrasting styles were an outstanding feature of the Basie group of this time. The only tenor with Duke was clarinettist Barney Bigard, who rarely played the instrument solo, and then in a rhapsodic manner. In Ben Webster Ellington not only selected a musician who is amongst the finest of jazz soloists, but he added a fifth voice to his reed section, which meant further harmonic scope for his writing. Duke discovered another remarkable musician in Jimmy Blanton, who was only eighteen when he joined Ellington in December, 1939. His tragic death from tuberculosis in January, 1942, gave him less than two years in the public eye, yet he is unquestionably the most famous bass player in jazz. He not only revolutionized jazz bass playing, but he set a standard which has never been equalled by any of the fine musicians who have been influenced by

him. Blanton raised the string bass to the standard of a solo instrument, the richness of his melodic line on such records as *Jack the Bear* and *Sepia Panorama* being truly breath-taking, whilst the range of inflexion he achieved on pizzicato bass is equally fantastic. The addition of Webster and Blanton commenced what was perhaps the greatest period Ellington has ever had as a bandleader, his fifteen-piece orchestra containing a magnificent array of varied solo talent. 1940 was one of his peak years as a composer, and amongst the timeless masterpieces recorded during this year are *Jack the Bear*, *Ko-Ko*, *Concerto for Cootie*, *Cotton Tail*, *Never No Lament*, *Dusk*, *Bojangles*, *A Portrait of Bert Williams*, *Blue Goose*, *Harlem Air Shaft*, *Sepia Panorama*, *In a Mellotone*, *Warm Valley* and *Across the Track Blues*. The personnel of the Duke Ellington Orchestra at this time makes extraordinary reading, for in its solo strength alone (which after all is only one facet of the music of this orchestra) it has never been equalled by any ensemble in jazz. The trumpets were Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams and Rex Stewart, the latter having by this time switched to cornet; on trombones Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown and Juan Tizol, the latter on valve trombone; the reeds were Otto Hardwicke (alto sax), Johnny Hodges (alto and soprano saxes), Barney Bigard (clarinet and tenor sax), Ben Webster (tenor sax) and Harry Carney (baritone sax and bass clarinet); Ellington himself of course was on piano, and his work at this period as a band pianist reached a new standard, whilst the rhythm section was completed by Fred Guy (guitar), Jimmy Blanton (bass) and Sonny Greer (drums). An all-star band indeed!

Although in the years which followed Ellington has always led a band of remarkable quality, the 1940 band does represent one of the high-water marks of his career. The first member of this group to leave was Cootie Williams, who had been with Ellington for over eleven years. He was replaced by Ray Nance in December, 1940. Loud were the cries of horror from the band's admirers when the news was heard. Both amongst the fans and fellow musicians

there were mutterings foretelling the doom of the Ellington band. Raymond Scott, leader of a light music aggregation somewhere on the boundaries of jazz, wrote a dirge called *When Cootie Left the Duke* and this sums up very well prevailing opinions of the time. Eighteen years later, with Duke Ellington still the foremost figure in jazz, this seems absurd, yet Cootie Williams had been a leading figure in the ensemble ever since he replaced Bubber Miley in 1929, and his commanding trumpet was to many listeners both the most distinctive solo voice in the band and a formidable link with the orchestra's glorious past. Within the Ellington organization things were not quite so gloomy, as the talented Ray Nance had joined the orchestra and the flow of great music was carried on without a pause. Williams' section mate, Rex Stewart, was an equally adept practitioner of the growl style, although perhaps not so well known as Cootie. As Nance was also a fine soloist on trumpet, in addition to being a proficient violinist and amusing vocalist, the loss was not so great as had been feared. In September, 1941, Jimmy Blanton's terrible illness compelled him to leave the band and his immediate replacement was Jimmy Bryant, who stayed only a few months before being succeeded by Junior Raglin. The following year another mainstay of the band departed in the person of Barney Bigard, and for a year the clarinet chair was filled by Chauncey Haughton, a soloist of little distinction, until he in turn was replaced by Jimmy Hamilton in 1943. The trumpet section was increased to four with the addition of Harold Baker, a distinguished lead man and lyrical solist.

In January, 1943, a 'Duke Ellington Week' was held to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Ellington's début in New York and it concluded with a concert by the band in Carnegie Hall, the first of what was to become an annual series. The centrepiece of this concert was a new extended composition by Ellington, *Black, Brown and Beige*, which ran for forty-five minutes. The critical reaction to this work was mixed, and, owing to a recording ban being in force at this time, it was never recorded in its entirety.

A suite from *Black, Brown and Beige* was recorded in 1944 and more recently two of the movements from this suite—*Work Song* and *Come Sunday*—have received extended treatment on L.P. The complete programme played by Ellington at this first Carnegie Hall concert makes interesting reading today. It was as follows:

Black and Tan Fantasy
Rockin' in Rhythm
Moon Mist
Jumpin' Punkins
A Portrait of Bert Williams
Bojangles
Black Beauty (announced as *A Portrait of Florence Mills*)
Black, Brown and Beige
Ko-Ko
Dirge (a Strayhorn composition, not recorded)
Stomp (actually Strayhorn's *Johnny Come Lately*)
Are You Sticking (featuring Chauncey Haughton)
Bakiff (featuring Juan Tizol and Ray Nance)
Jack the Bear (featuring Junior Raglin)
Blue Belles of Harlem (featuring Ellington on piano)
Day Dream (featuring Johnny Hodges)
Rose of the Rio Grande (featuring Lawrence Brown)
Boy Meets Horn (featuring Rex Stewart)
Don't Get Around Much any More (a popular adaptation of *Never No Lament* which was something of a 'hit')
Goin' Up
Mood Indigo

The penultimate number was featured briefly in *Cabin in the Sky* in which the band had appeared in 1942. A more significant all-coloured enterprise, the show *Jump for Joy* featured an Ellington score and the Ellington orchestra for three months in 1941, with spots for the band's soloists, such as Rex's *Concerto for Klinkers*, an unrecorded successor

to *Boy Meets Horn*. Ellington has dabbled from time to time in writing music for shows, for one of which, *Man With Four Sides*, he also wrote the book.

The personnel changes which were becoming ever more frequent continued in 1943, the most significant of these being the departure of Ben Webster, who was replaced by Al Sears, a capable but less distinguished tenor sax soloist. The trumpet section was in a state of considerable turmoil; Rex Stewart leaving for a short period and being replaced by Taft Jordan; Wallace Jones leaving and the lead trumpet chair being taken over by Shelton Hemphill. A little-known trumpet player by the name of Dizzy Gillespie played for a few weeks with the band in November of this same year. The success of the first Carnegie Hall appearance had been so great that the band was booked again in this famous hall for a second Ellington concert in December, 1943: *Black, Brown and Beige* was given again, but this time in the shortened form we know from records. It is said that the general hostility of the critics persuaded Ellington to adopt this course, and the same reason is given for the quick withdrawal from the band's repertoire of the new work performed at the December, 1943, concert—*New World A-Comin'*.

V

Due to a dispute between the American Federation of Musicians and the recording companies there had been no Ellington recordings (apart from the forces' 'V-Discs') from July, 1942 until December, 1944. It was in this latter month that *Black, Brown and Beige* was recorded, and by this time further changes had taken place. Cat Anderson had replaced Harold Baker, and Claude Jones had come in on trombone for Juan Tizol. Rex Stewart returned to the band, thus increasing the trumpets to five, whilst in the reeds, Otto Hardwicke, one of the oldest members of the orchestra, was replaced by Russell Procope, a veteran of the Chick Webb, Fletcher Henderson and Teddy Hill bands. In 1946 a fourth trombone was added in the person

of Wilbur de Paris, and Oscar Pettiford replaced Junior Raglin on bass. This rapid changing of personnel, a common enough feature with other large bands, was in marked contrast to the stability of the Ellington orchestra up to about 1941. In spite of this the band's character was not impaired and the recordings from this period contain many outstanding works. A new venture for Ellington was the employment of an academic soprano in the person of Kay Davis. At first she was used in wordless accompaniment to other singers in such numbers as *I Ain't Got Nothin' But the Blues* and *Solitude*, but soon Ellington was to score a number of special compositions built round Kay's voice, such as *Transblucency* and *On a Turquoise Cloud.* In 1946 Tricky Sam Nanton died, and the Ellington Orchestra lost another distinctive voice. In August, 1947, Tyree Glenn replaced Wilbur de Paris in the trombone section; apart from being a fine soloist on open trombone and a proficient vibraphone player, Tyree took over the 'wa-wa' solos with the band in an individual variant of the style established by Nanton.

The annual appearances at Carnegie Hall continued and the orchestra were playing an increasing number of concerts throughout the U.S.A. It was a productive period in Ellington's concert writing, *The Deep South Suite* being premièred at Carnegie Hall in November, 1946, and the *Liberian Suite*, which was commissioned by the government of the small West African republic, in December of the following year. In 1948 another recording ban kept the band out of the studios for a few months and during this time Al Sears departed and Ben Webster returned for a brief stay. In the summer of this year Ellington made a short tour of England, but owing to the ban imposed by the Musicians' Union he was unable to bring his band. Therefore he disbanded for a few months and toured with only Ray Nance and Kay Davis, of his own musicians, accompanied by a British rhythm section consisting of Malcolm Mitchell (guitar), Jack Fallon (bass) and Tony Crombie (drums). They were classified as variety artists rather than

musicians, and the reaction amongst jazz enthusiasts was bitter indeed when it was realized that but for such restrictions they would have been listening to the full Ellington Orchestra, rather than just the augmented trio as part of a variety bill or concert package.

The course of the Ellington orchestra during 1949 and 1950 is hard to plot, the changes within the band being so numerous. It is impossible to list these in detail in a book of this size, but the situation can be summarized briefly. Fred Guy left and was not replaced, Ellington having subsequently kept his rhythm section down to three pieces. Ben Webster had not stayed long and the matter of a tenor soloist was not settled until Paul Gonsalves, who had previously played with Count Basie, joined in late 1950. The trumpets wavered between four and five pieces, sometimes the band having to carry two lead men owing to Al Killian's lip trouble. Quentin Jackson came to the trombone section in place of Claude Jones, but Tyree Glenn ceased to be a regular member of the band. For the European tour of 1950 (with the full band this time, but omitting England from the itinerary owing to the union ban) Ellington was without Tyree Glenn and he brought *two* drummers with him, Greer and Butch Ballard. The tenor sax chair was vacant so he signed up ex-Basie tenor man Don Byas, who was resident in Europe, for the duration of the tour. Oscar Pettiford had left and been replaced by Wendell Marshall, cousin of the late Jimmy Blanton into whose old chair he now moved. This was a bad period for big bands and both Count Basie and Woody Herman, Duke's keenest rivals since the mid-forties, had been forced to disband their groups. In February, 1950, he was presented with an award from the magazine *Downbeat*, in addition to which he was presented with a parchment scroll commemorating the fact that his was the only leading band from the magazine's 1949 poll still in existence!

On January 21st, 1951, Ellington gave a concert at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, in aid of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured

People. The centrepiece of the programme was Ellington's new *Harlem Suite*, his first large-scale composition for some years. As long playing records were now a prominent feature of the record industry it was to be expected that the *Harlem Suite* would fare better than such predecessors as *New World A-Comin'* and *The Deep South Suite* which had not been recorded. But before the expected recording session took place the Ellington orchestra underwent the greatest upheaval of its entire career, three key men in Johnny Hodges, Lawrence Brown and Sonny Greer giving in their notice. During the constant shuffling of the previous few years these men, along with Ray Nance and Harry Carney, had comprised a nucleus of long-serving sidemen. Hodges had been with Duke since 1928; Brown since 1932; whilst Greer was the last survivor of Duke's Washington days, a musician who had been associated with him for over thirty years. From the time Lawrence Brown joined the band in 1932, the cry had periodically been raised that Ellington was finished, but now even the most devoted of the band's followers were perturbed. Greer's drumming had latterly been very uneven (hence the second drummer on the European trip the preceding year), but Brown was a long-established solo voice in the orchestra and Hodges was by far the finest soloist on whom Ellington could call. Hasty replacements were made, only one being of a permanent nature in trombonist Britt Woodman who came in for Brown; but even here the situation was still critical as no permanent replacement had been found for Tyree Glenn, who had played only occasionally with the band during the previous year. Help came a month after the departure of the three key men, from a rather unexpected source. When he left the Ellington orchestra in 1944, Juan Tizol joined the Harry James orchestra, and in March, 1951, Ellington not only persuaded Tizol to rejoin the band but also to bring over two jazzmen of note from the James band, in the persons of Willie Smith and Louis Bellson. Altoist Willie Smith had been for some years a mainstay of the Jimmie Lunceford

Melody Maker

Duke Ellington during his early years as a bandleader

Melody Maker

The Duke Ellington Orchestra in the 1930s
Front row: Wellman Braud (bass), Duke Ellington (piano). *Second row*: Otto Hardwicke, Harry Carney, Johnny Hodges, Barney Bigard (saxes), Fred Guy (guitar). *Third row*: Joe Nanton, Juan Tizol, Lawrence Brown (trombones), Cootie Williams, Arthur Whetsol, Freddy Jenkins (trumpets). *Rear*: Sonny Greer (drums)

band and, although prone to a certain vulgarity in long solos, he is one of the finest leaders of the saxophone section in jazz. Drummer Louis Bellson may not have Greer's flair for coloration, but he is a drummer of considerable drive, whilst Tizol, though no jazz soloist, made a welcome return to the band both for his impeccable section playing and for his distinctive way of playing the Latin-American numbers he had written for the band. Although, from the point of view of solo jazz or new compositions, this was not one of Ellington's greatest periods, there is no doubt that a new spirit was alive in the band at this time. Cat Anderson had returned to the band, and with his talents as a high note specialist, Ray Nance's incredible singing and dancing, and the skilled drum solos of Louis Bellson, Ellington's band was a popular concert attraction wherever they played, containing as it did three certain show-stoppers.

VI

In May, 1951, the band played a concert held in aid of the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund in New York, and for the second half they combined with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in performances of Ellington's *New World A-comin'* and *Harlem Suite* in arrangements by Luther Henderson. This last work was recorded under the title *A Tone Parallel to Harlem* in December of that year, by which time the trumpet section was undergoing further changes, but by early 1952 it had settled to a regular four-man team of Ray Nance, Cat Anderson, Clark Terry and Willie Cook, which was to remain unchanged until late in 1957. The other sections continued to undergo changes, however, Willie Smith leaving in June, 1952, to be replaced by Hilton Jefferson, who stayed only six months. He in turn gave way to Rick Henderson, a young musician with a considerable Charlie Parker influence in his style. Back in the 1940s bassist Oscar Pettiford had tried to persuade Ellington to employ several of the bop stylists, but it was not until Clark Terry entered the band in 1951 that Elling-

ton employed any 'modern' soloists. Unlike so many of the stereotyped modern jazzmen, Clark Terry is too individual a musician to be passed off with any period tag. A soloist of unusual distinction, his tone is too warm, his style too witty to be classified with the zombie music of the cool musicians. In January of 1953 Louis Bellson was replaced by Butch Ballard, the drummer who had travelled to Europe as Sonny Greer's deputy in 1950. At this time Ellington was recording for the Capitol label, and in June, 1953, he recorded an album of piano solos—a very unusual departure for him. The constant changes of personnel were unquestionably having an effect on the band's music, and jazz 'standards', arranged by men outside the Ellington organization, were a prominent feature of the book around this time. An album consisting of such material, along with three new recordings of old Ellington numbers, were collected from a number of sessions in 1953 and 1954 and issued under the title *Ellington '55*. By this time Tizol was out and Ballard had given way to Dave Black on drums. Despite the personnel changes and the outside material, jazz critics were agreed that *Ellington '55* was one of the oustanding big band L.P.s for years. It is interesting to note that at a concert at Pasadena in March, 1953, Duke played his old 1937 composition *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*, with a five-minute tenor solo for Paul Gonsalves sandwiched in between the two movements—the same arrangement which was to provoke a near riot at the Newport Jazz Festival more than three years later.

The situation as far as Ellington's recordings were concerned was far from healthy around this time, such hit parade material as *Bunny Hop Mambo* and *Twelfth Street Rag Mambo* being recorded by the band. Ellington had complained earlier to Leonard Feather that no one cared who was in the band any more and that the only reason he had the highest payroll in the world was that he liked to listen to the band himself. Although a new Ellington composition, *Night Creature*, was played by the band and The Symphony of the Air at a Carnegie Hall concert in March,

1955, the situation seems, on the whole, to have worsened. In the summer of that year the band worked for several months in the *Aquacade* show at Flushing Meadows, Long Island, and Ellington not only allowed the band to be augmented by a second pianist, a string section and two girl harpists, but several of his musicians were unable to play in the show owing to union troubles—Willie Cook, Britt Woodman, Rick Henderson, Paul Gonsalves and Dave Black missing this lengthy engagement. Once again the cry went up that the band was finished, but within a year Ellington was to lead one of the very finest bands of his entire career—thus does Duke confound the critics at every turn!

In early 1955 Jimmy Woode replaced Wendell Marshall on bass, and a new drummer, Sam Woodyard, teamed with him to provide a well integrated rhythm section, but the most important change of all was the return of the great Johnny Hodges in place of Rick Henderson. With John Sanders filling the trombone chair vacated by Juan Tizol, Ellington had once more assembled a band of the highest potential; it was the first time for many years that his orchestra could be compared, in the number and variety of soloists, with his bands up to the middle 'forties. An Ellington renaissance was due and for those who had followed the orchestra's fortunes through the years this was announced by a new L.P. recorded in February, 1956: *Historically Speaking, the Duke.* Covering in chronological order thirty years of Ellington compositions, the band's performance on this L.P. confirmed that Ellington had once more a suitably talented group of musicians to interpret his work. The opening number of this L.P. was the thirty-year-old score of *East St. Louis Toodle-oo*, a remarkable instance of the permanent value of Ellington's writing. As Paul Rossiter remarked in reviewing the record in *Jazz Monthly*, '. . . what other leader would dare use a thirty-year-old score today?' At the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival the band scored a tremendous success, provoking a near riot with the performance of the nineteen-year-old *Diminuendo and Crescendo in*

Blue, with a long tenor solo for Paul Gonsalves generating an exciting atmosphere. In the same year the band played at the Shakespearian Festival at Stratford, Ontario, and Ellington was so pleased with the reception he and the band received at this event that he planned to write a Shakespearian suite in appreciation. In this year he also wrote and narrated a TV production for the orchestra, several solo singers and a full choir—the highly controversial work, *A Drum is a Woman*, a parallel to the history of jazz, which was conceived in a characteristically satirical vein.

The following year saw the first performance of his Shakespearian suite, *Such Sweet Thunder*, dedicated to the Shakespearian Festival, and which proved to be one of his finest concert works. Late in 1957, Harold Baker returned to the trumpet section, replacing Willie Cook, and, after scoring a further success at the Newport Festival of 1958, the band set sail for its fourth European tour. By this time the British Musicians' Union had agreed to let in American bands on an exchange basis and, to the delight of British jazz lovers, the Ellington band played its first concert in this country since 1933 when they opened the tour at the Royal Festival Hall on Sunday, October 5th, 1958. Again there were strong criticisms of the band's performances, but this time on the basis of too many solo features, as opposed to band interpretations of Ellington compositions. While it is true that there were several points at which the performances on this tour could be criticized when compared with the recorded output of the band, there could be little doubt that here was the greatest jazz orchestra of the day—as it had been for over thirty long years. Every musician in the band proved his solo capabilities, and the ensemble playing through the great variety of scores Ellington presented at each concert was perfect. The personnel of the present Duke Ellington Orchestra is given below, with the dates of each man's stay with the band in parenthesis:

Ray Nance—Trumpet, violin, vocal (1940–present).
Cat Anderson—Trumpet (1944–1947, 1950–present).

Harold Baker—Trumpet (1938, 1942–1944, 1946–1951, 1957–present).
Clark Terry—Trumpet (1951–present).
Britt Woodman—Trombone (1951–present).
Quentin Jackson—Trombone (1949–present).
John Sanders—Trombone (1954–present).
Russell Procope—Alto, clarinet (1945–present).
Johnny Hodges—Alto (1928–1951, 1955–present).
Jimmy Hamilton—Tenor, clarinet (1943–present).
Paul Gonsalves—Tenor (1950–present).
Harry Carney—Baritone, bass clarinet (1926–present).
Jimmy Woode—Bass (1955–present).
Sam Woodyard—Drums (1955–present).

The vocalist on the 1958 tour of England was Ozzie Bailey (who is to be heard on the *Drum is a Woman* L.P.), and Billy Strayhorn also travelled with the band. When not delivering his witty announcements or directing the orchestra, Duke Ellington sat at the piano and demonstrated his great skill as a band pianist, and as a band *leader* in the truest sense of the term.

VII

To have survived over thirty years as a big name in American show business; to have directed, during the whole of this period, a jazz orchestra of matchless skill; to have composed hundreds of pieces from popular songs like *Solitude* or *I'm Beginning to See the Light*, to full-scale concert works such as the *Harlem Suite* or *Such Sweet Thunder*, in addition to such comparatively minor achievements as being one of the very finest band pianists in jazz and the writer of several scores for musicals; to have done all this and still remain a relaxed and unruffled individual, Duke Ellington indeed must be a remarkable man. Unlike most other bandleaders Duke is easy on discipline. His manager once tried to persuade him to take a stronger line on the matter of advances on the musicians' salaries, and Duke re-

plied, 'I won't let these goddam musicians upset me! Why should I knock myself out in an argument about fifteen dollars when in the same time I can probably write a fifteen-hundred dollar song?'[1] He retains a perfect calm through the most difficult situations—one of his musicians once claimed that 'his pulse is so low he can't get excited, his heart beats slower than an ordinary man's'.[2] Duke himself says, 'You see, I don't worry any more. Everybody thinks those great circles under my eyes are the result of worry. No, no! My bags are the accumulation of virtue and a few hearty laughs. I don't worry.'[3] His calm is reflected in his easy manner and his composure, the loose discipline reaps its reward in the way his musicians are always themselves. Never in the most complex Ellington scores does one hear a mere 'trumpet solo' or 'alto solo'—the part is written not for the instrument, but for the man; for Clark Terry or Cootie Williams, for Barney Bigard or Jimmy Hamilton. Such creative participation by the bandsmen could hardly be *demanded* of them, or enforced by discipline. Tales of the Ellington musicians turning up late for dates are legion (at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival, four of the band were absent during the opening set), but the Duke knows that a rigid, uniform discipline will produce rigid and uniform musicianship, and that is the last thing he requires from his band. The musicians respect him for this, as is shown from Ben Webster's statement: 'Duke is a great guy to work for. He understands musicians better than any leader. He's quick to judge a man's ability accurately, and he can write a piece or concerto for him that will fit the individual man.'[4] Ellington is a man who believes strongly in the integrity of the individual, his output throughout the years always bearing the imprint of his own strong personality. When asked a few years ago if he would consider using strings

[1] Richard O. Boyer, *The Hot Bach*, p. 25, reprinted in *Duke Ellington*, edited by Peter Gammond (Phoenix House, 1958).

[2] Ibid., p. 35.

[3] Barry Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, p. 270 (Musicians Press, 1947).

[4] Quoted by Stanley Dance in *Duke Ellington*, p. 18, edited by Peter Gammond (Phoenix House, 1958).

with his band, as certain other jazz leaders had done, he replied, 'Strings? Positively no! What on earth would I want with strings? What can anybody do with strings that hasn't been done wonderfully for hundreds of years? No, we always want to play Ellington music—that's an accepted thing in itself.'[1]

Duke Ellington is an American Negro, and the sometimes bitter and humiliating treatment handed out to him by the apostles of 'white supremacy' can never have been a helpful factor during his long career. But this very career has been a triumphant acclamation of the rights of his people, amongst whom he is a highly respected figure. He holds the respect not only of fellow jazz musicians but of men distinguished in the world of European concert music. His use of Shakespearian characters as well as Negro work-songs as subjects for his works show the all-embracing versatility of his mind and art. Duke Ellington, drawing at all times on the great musical traditions of his people, has raised his music to a universal level, and the genius which he has brought to his work is of such a magnitude that he has become one of the great artists of the twentieth century, the quality of whose prodigious output would be difficult to match in any field of artistic creation.

[1] Quoted by Alun Morgan from an interview with Leonard Feather in *Downbeat*. See *Duke Ellington*, p. 114, edited by Peter Gammond (Phoenix House, 1958).

2. THE MUSIC

The major figures in jazz have, with very few exceptions, achieved their eminence through the medium of the solo, the ensemble usually being a background before which the soloist creates the essential drama or comedy of the work. The serene, almost mystical poise of Louis Armstrong's greatest work, the profuse, richly creative playing of Coleman Hawkins, and the agonized contours of the incredibly inventive Charlie Parker, all belong to this standard medium of jazz expression. Many of the finest big bands in jazz have been dance orchestras with talented arrangers and soloists who have raised their music above a purely functional level, such bands as those of Chick Webb and Jimmy Lunceford being the best examples of this type. The orchestra of Count Basie in the 1950s is another example, but in its earlier years the Basie band had a somewhat different pattern. Working with simple arrangements this ensemble was able to carry over into the big band a fire and spontaneity more usually associated with small groups, whilst throwing the main emphasis on such great soloists as Lester Young, Herchel Evans, Buck Clayton, Dicky Wells and Harry Edison.

These then are the principal vehicles for expression in jazz: the soloist, working either with a small group of sympathetic musicians or within the framework of a large orchestra, and the arranger, who usually provides in his

scores ample room for individual solos from the members of the band. In a band of the Webb–Lunceford type the arrangement is primarily the vehicle of the band's ensemble ability, in a musical rather than a purely technical sense. Even the best of jazz arrangements, such as those by Sy Oliver for the Lunceford band or those by Neil Hefti for the current Basie orchestra, have a low value as compositions, requiring the interpretation of a great ensemble to give them validity. On the other hand the creations of the great soloists of jazz have far more compositional unity than the arrangers' scores: compare Armstrong's *Potato Head Blues* solos or the alto work in *Parker's Mood* with the best arranged jazz, and the difference in terms of musical substance and structure becomes obvious.

The achievements of Duke Ellington are different from those of other jazz musicians not only in quality, but are of an entirely different order. His orchestra has contained in its ranks a large number of soloists of the highest calibre—even in his best years Basie could not surpass Ellington in this respect—and the context for their work provided by the ensemble is clearly superior to that of any other band in jazz; but the unique quality of Ellington's output lies in his compositions, which are the only jazz scores which in terms of subtlety and structure can be considered important arstistic creations in themselves. The constant emphasis which is placed upon his compositional achievements should not cloud the listener's understanding of the distinction between composition in the academic sense and the means Ellington uses. The European composer writes for a particular instrument or group of instruments and knows, from the standardization of instrumental techniques within the European tradition, that pretty well the same sound will result from the playing of his scores by any one of a hundred symphony orchestras. The conductor's interpretation and the very slight variants in instrumental techniques between musicians of different nationalities are of course variable factors, but they are small indeed when compared with the highly individual approach of the jazz musician to his

instrument. The latter is of course in most cases a creative artist himself, and will interpret his part within the framework of his own style. The likelihood of successful composition becoming a frequent achievement in jazz is therefore remote, for the standardization of instrumental usage that this would entail would rob the music of many of its most valuable characteristics. Duke Ellington's genius is many-sided, and his unique qualities as a bandleader have enabled him to create in his orchestra a medium for his compositions, without in any way impairing the individuality of the jazzmen within the band. In *Jack the Bear* (1940), Ellington builds a work entirely round his soloists, a composition which is typical of its creator while remaining a suitable vehicle for the solosts. This is true of all Ellington's best work, but *Jack the Bear* is a particularly good example as the ensemble is only heard briefly in other than an accompanying role. His understanding of the musical character of the bandsmen has made it possible for Ellington to use his musicians in this way. It is interesting to follow on records the introduction of each new voice into the Ellington band, and the increasingly important parts each new soloist is given as Duke grows to know his style.

II

Although Duke Ellington made a few records in 1925 and 1926 (some with his regular band), the first really distinctive recordings are those from 1927, a year which saw the recording of three pieces still performed by the Ellington orchestra today—*East St. Louis Toodle-oo*, *Black and Tan Fantasy* and *Creole Love Call*. The first two are clearly achievements of the Duke Ellington–Bubber Miley partnership, the style of the trumpeter setting the mood whilst the manner in which the material is organized is obviously Ellington's contribution. *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* opens with what sounds like a slowed-down fugue subject in minims played by the saxophone section, which becomes the accompaniment to Miley's solo. The piece is cast in the

conventional thirty-two bar song form, and the exposition of the main theme is played by Miley in the first eight bars of his solo. The melodic line is characteristic of Miley, with its stuttering, vocalized, repeated notes and unexpected stresses. The second eight bars is a variant hinting both rhythmically and melodically at the change of atmosphere to be found in the release or middle eight, which bursts out in a totally different mood of exuberance expressed both by the solo trumpet and in the changed accompaniment. The brooding atmosphere created by the heavy tread of the saxophone melody is replaced by a slight echo of the trumpet line on Nanton's trombone, the rhythm section also seeming lighter when freed from the lugubrious measure of the saxophones. The final section of this chorus returns to the original theme and mood, the following choruses featuring solos based on a contrasting theme which is stated by the brass section after the solo variations. Neither the rather obviously jaunty tune nor the ordinary sounding solos have the substance to be other than a mere contrast to the opening chorus, and it is only when Miley recapitulates the opening theme in the final eight bars that the record again achieves a distinctive sound—what goes on in between being typical big band jazz of the period. In the Victor–H.M.V. version of *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* (by far the best) Nanton's solo has considerable vigour but little melodic distinction, the other solos by Hardwicke and Jackson adding little to the work as a whole.

The best solution to the problems set by his orchestra at this time is found in *Black and Tan Fantasy*, which achieves a remarkable unity with apparently diverse elements. The work opens with a blues theme in the minor played by Miley and Nanton over a marching beat from the rhythm section; this twelve-bar theme is followed by a sixteen-bar melody played in a voluptuous manner by Otto Hardwicke on alto sax. The music pauses for a moment after this episode, then we return to the twelve-bar blues form for a two-chorus solo by Miley, commencing with a long held high C. Ellington's ragtime-flavoured piano takes a chorus, followed by

Nanton on muted trombone who re-establishes the rather sombre mood of Miley's contribution. Finally Bubber returns with a chorus which raises the pulse of the music to an almost exultant note, only to lead to the famous coda, which is a quotation from Chopin's Funeral March. The two finest early versions of *Black and Tan Fantasy* are the Brunswick of April 7th, 1927 and the Victor–H.M.V. of October 26th, 1927, the former having an altogether more dignified, more sombre sound when compared with the October version, in which at times the exuberance of the performance seems about to destroy the mood of the piece. Miley's two-chorus solo, one of his finest creations, is varied only in detail on these two recordings, the Brunswick having a most suitable accompaniment from the tuba of Bass Edwards. A third version, made for Okeh and released in England on Parlophone, has Jabbo Smith replacing Bubber Miley, and although it contains some very good solo work it lacks the unity of the other recordings; perhaps Smith's solos lack the astringency to offset Hardwicke's sugary reading of the second theme.

Creole Love Call is somewhat different from either of the two works so far discussed. It is a variant of King Oliver's *Camp Meeting Blues*, which Ellington presumably learned from his clarinettist, Rudy Jackson, who played with Oliver before joining him; the number had therefore no direct association with Miley. The arrangement recorded at the same session as the Victor–H.M.V. *Black and Tan Fantasy* made use of the voice of Adelaide Hall in an 'instrumental' way. The opening theme is stated by her strange wordless singing set against three clarinets, Ellington's fine selection of tone colours here being typical. In sharp contrast Miley's muted trumpet takes the next chorus in a beautifully constructed solo, remarkable in its absolute perfection, which is followed by Rudy Jackson who plays the long melody of the second theme with a suitably violin-like tone. The following two choruses consist of simple ensemble arrangements with the reed section playing against the brass, first on saxophones and then on clarinets;

finally Adelaide Hall returns again with a vocal chorus, which concludes the work. Little of musical interest occurs after the first three choruses, but these are so perfect, both in themselves and in their contrast with each other, that even today they remain among the classics of recorded jazz. Bubber Miley demonstrates how much the creative jazz musician can say in twelve bars, in a solo which is a perfect miniature of musical architecture and a study in the use of inflexion and variation of timbre to extend the emotional range and increase the musical tension.

It can hardly be said that any of Ellington's other recordings from 1927 bear comparison with the three already discussed, although *Birmingham Breakdown* and *Washington Wobble* are interesting exhibits in the light they throw on the evolution of the big band. The following year saw a considerable widening of Ellington's scope as a composer and an increase in the solo potential of the orchestra. Nanton and Carney were becoming more important figures within the band, Barney Bigard and Johnny Hodges came in, and Arthur Whetsol brought his distinctive trumpet back to the Ellington ensemble. It was Whetsol's trumpet which took the theme statement of the pastoral *Black Beauty*, perhaps the first notable Ellington work in which Miley does not play solo; Whetsol even indulges in a little growl trumpet on the Brunswick version of this! *Misty Morning*, another successful composition which does not make use of Miley's trumpet, provides in its second chorus the first example in jazz of a section playing a scored, solo-like variant on the theme, an idea considered novel enough twenty years later when it was adopted by the modernists. One of the most interesting of the fast tempo sides of this period is *Hot and Bothered*, an altered version of *Tiger Rag*, wherein the brilliant scoring for the orchestra takes second place to the vivid and colourful use of the soloists in the middle section. The most notable title from 1928 is *The Mooche*, which shows an increasing subtlety in Ellington's use of colour and harmony. The best of the three versions of this number is probably the Brunswick

with its magnificent solo sequence, Johnny Hodges taking a very fine chorus, although the Okeh–Parlophone–Columbia with Lonnie Johnson on guitar is different in detail and perhaps even more evocative in mood. The Victor–H.M.V. has Whetsol doing the growl trumpet passages and is rather spoilt by Greer's irritating use of temple blocks. *The Blues with a Feeling* was cut at the same session as *Misty Morning*, when Wellman Braud appears to have been obsessed with the potentialities of the bowed bass in the jazz rhythm section. It is one of the band's finest blues creations, with superb solo work from Nanton, Hodges (on soprano sax) and Miley. Some of Miley's finest playing is found on lesser sides from this period, notably *Jubilee Stomp* (Victor–H.M.V. version) and *Bandana Babies*; the former containing a superb trumpet solo with a brilliantly taken break. On *Yellow Dog Blues*, Miley plays the rather unmelodic verse, and without straying very far from the theme as written, creates a solo of unusual power and individuality.

Bubber Miley left the band in February, 1929, but before this they visited the studios for another two sessions. The first of these was for Brunswick, and after a rather poor version of *Doin' the Voom Voom*, the band recorded a two-part *Tiger Rag* which is largely given over to the soloists. In addition to a good Miley solo, Freddy Jenkins and Barney Bigard take excellent choruses, Bigard's first solo being one of the finest clarinet solos on record. The second session produced a much finer version of *Doin' the Voom Voom*, which is notable for the colourful scoring of the themes and a vibrant duet between Harry Carney and Tricky Sam Nanton. *High Life* contains further excellent Jenkins and Bigard, both in much the same vein as in *Tiger Rag*, whilst the slow *Saturday Night Function* has solos by Bigard, who was playing superbly at this time, and Nanton, whose blues playing very rarely receives its due from the critics.

The measure of the loss suffered by Ellington when Bubber Miley left the band can be judged from *Flaming Youth*, one of the last sides they recorded together. The performance is notable for its extreme exuberance (although the

number is taken at a medium tempo) and the vigour of the first chorus (Miley's) is never quite recaptured by the succeeding soloists, Hodges and Nanton. The driving, vigorous trumpet with its unexpected turns of phrase and savage attack sets a mood which the remaining musicians are unable to sustain; indeed whenever Miley takes the first chorus in one of the band's recorded performances the contributions which follow (no matter how excellent in themselves) always have a faint air of anti-climax. The emotional climate of the compositions which Ellington created along with Miley is unique, and apparently conveys contradictory moods to different listeners; to some they embody a 'tearful silliness' while to others they are sinister works comparable with the macabre writings of Edgar Allan Poe.

Miley's own genius has been overshadowed by that of Ellington, for in regarding his work retrospectively in the light of his influence on Ellington we are perhaps too prone to ignore the originality of his playing. Yet he is a jazzman of outstanding achievement and it is doubtful whether any other soloist in jazz has created so individual a style with apparently so little influence from other musicians. The Duke Ellington Orchestra has featured other great soloists, men who can justly be compared with Bubber Miley in achievement, but never again was one single soloist in the band to exert such an influence on its style.

III

When Cootie Williams came in to the Ellington band as replacement for Bubber Miley he was not a growl specialist. Ellington's superior taste shows itself here in that he hired a first-class replacement, rather than a second-class musician who played in the Miley style, although much of the book was made up of scores demanding a Miley-style growl trumpet soloist. Cootie's open playing was an immediate asset to the band's solo strength, the trumpet section already including the exuberant Freddy Jenkins, whose solo in *High*

Life was an oustanding contribution, remarkable for its range and phrasing compared with the playing of the majority of jazz trumpet players in 1929. The section was completed by Arthur Whetsol, hardly a 'hot' musician, but a player whose sweet tone and lyrical style had already found a place in Ellington's compositions with his contributions to *Black Beauty* and *Misty Morning*. The brass was rounded off by the trombone of Joe 'Tricky Sam' Nanton, never an outstanding open player, but a fine soloist with the plunger or wa-wa mute. The reeds were led by Johnny Hodges, whose beautifully constructed solos on alto and soprano saxes had at this time an astringent, direct quality which was, in later years, to be replaced by a warmer, more sensuous approach. Barney Bigard, one of the great clarinettists of the New Orleans Creole school, played tenor sax in the section, though rarely soloing on this instrument. On clarinet his tone is most beautiful and expressive, and possesses in the low register a rich, deep sonority which is quite unique. Bigard is an exceptionally agile player, able to move from the low to the high register within a single phrase without the slightest suggestion of incongruity, while the fluidity of his counterpoint when playing against the full band is equally remarkable. In his ensemble playing on many Ellington records Bigard demonstrates the possibilities of the New Orleans clarinet style within a big band, and his playing can be said to be the most successful use of the clarinet in a big-band context. Harry Carney doubled alto and baritone during this period, his work on the latter instrument giving the reed section much of its distinctive quality. For many years Carney was the only major jazz soloist on baritone sax, his rich tone and agile phrasing being beyond the scope of his contemporaries. His warm, good-humoured voice is an integral part of many of Ellington's happiest scores, while in the more sombre pieces Carney's dark sonority is invaluable.

On banjo was Fred Guy (who was shortly to switch to guitar) a reliable but not outstanding musician. Another New Orleans jazzman, Wellman Braud, was featured on

Melody Maker

Duke in a thoughtful mood during the recording of
Such Sweet Thunder

Melody Maker

A recent photograph of Duke during one of his concert appearances

bass, a musician whose contribution to the Ellington orchestra has often been underrated. He did not, of course, possess the melodic style of Jimmy Blanton and his successors, but that yardstick is historically inadmissible when considering a bassist of this era. Braud is capable of swinging the whole band single-handed, even on bowed bass, and his distinctive off-beat slap gives a pleasantly buoyant sound to many Ellington records of the 'thirties. Sonny Greer's drumming may lack the drive of other jazz percussionists, but his subtle and colourful use of cymbals and other accessories added light and shade to the Ellington rhythm section and contributed also to Ellington's range of sounds.

The leader's piano solos on records from this period are oddly paradoxical. Sometimes he will contribute unusual, rather incongruous choruses, which seem to be searching ahead of the band toward styles later to be consolidated in his writing, while in other choruses he will be content to turn out an average solo in a near-ragtime style. There can be little doubt that his imagination was very much concentrated on the band, and the increasing complexity of his scores can be seen by comparing *The Mooche* from late 1928 with any of the recordings from the early part of the year. From this year onwards the deployment of his forces becomes increasingly orchestral, the contrasts of tone colour become more subtle, the harmony takes on more and more what Strayhorn has called 'the Ellington effect'.

Amongst the best records from the period immediately after Miley's departure are *Paducah*, an arrangement of a Don Redman number, and *Cotton Club Stomp*. *Hot Feet*, a popular show tune, receives a really colourful arrangement with a chase chorus by Cootie Williams' scat singing and the growl trumpet of Freddy Jenkins. The latter played the growl solos for a time after Miley left, and he can be heard in this role in *Harlemania* and *Jungle Nights in Harlem*. Cootie was featured on open trumpet on many numbers, including a striking contribution to the mournfully lyrical contingent record of *Saratoga Swing* and a vigorous solo

on the driving *Double Check Stomp* (H.M.V. version). Similar in mood to *Saratoga Swing* but less successful in its ensemble choruses is *Sloppy Joe*, with wordless vocal by Greer; the solo sequence however is notable for one of Bigard's best-recorded solos, preceded by a dreamy, introspective piano chorus by Ellington. A second version of *Saturday Night Function*, released as by 'Sonny Greer and his Memphis Men', has more superb Bigard, the latter playing his famous riff from *Harlem Flat Blues* to much greater effect here than on the 'original'.

Tricky Sam Nanton's work on these records is outstanding, ranging from the poignant blues solos on both versions of *Saturday Night Function* to the tightly-muted ebullient solo on *Hot Feet*. On the latter the sound seems to be forced out of the bell of the trombone *in spite* of the heavy muting, yet the solo rides with a happy buoyancy over the propulsive rhythm of Braud's bass. It is unjust to consider Nanton a mere stylistic shadow of Miley, for the personalities of the two musicians are quite different and are perfectly reflected in their manner of playing. Nanton is really a much more intimate musician than Miley, his work having a remarkable directness; a musician who, for all his clever manipulation of mutes, never suggested mere gimmickry. Although Ellington often used Nanton's wa-wa playing with a perfect aptness, this facet of the trombonist's work had been unduly stressed, obscuring the fact that much of his best work is in such solos as those on *Saturday Night Function*, when the graduations of tone via the manipulation of the mute are slight but telling. The constant alterations of timbre by skilfully judged growls and slurs give the music a remarkable variety despite the melodic limitations of Nanton's art.

Nine months after Cootie Williams joined the band came the first of a series of wonderful growl solos, on *Ring Dem Bells*, which also features fine work by Bigard, Hodges, Carney and Nanton, and concludes with a sort of jazz stretto by the band with Bigard playing against the brass. Cootie's growl style is easily recognizable, there being a certain dry-

ness—one might almost say aridity—about his tone and attack, which sounds far less natural than does Miley's muted playing. The melodic line becomes more concentrated than is the case in Williams' open playing and there is a pronounced tendency to attack certain notes repeatedly, as if shaking the very essence out of a phrase. Indeed the tightness of Cootie's muted work contrasts strangely with his loose open playing, for when the long lyrical phrases associated with his open style put in an occasional appearance, they are delivered with a deep sombre tone, and a pronounced growl. The ascending phrase half-way through his second chorus on *Ring Dem Bells* is a good example of this.

The most popular, and indeed perhaps the most significant, of Ellington's records of 1930 was a slow blues scored for trumpet, trombone, clarinet and rhythm which was called at first *Dreamy Blues*, but later re-named *Mood Indigo*. The two brass instruments are tightly muted and the whole performance is quiet and dreamy in mood, soft and delicate in colour, Whetsol's lead setting the tone of the theme statement. Bigard's rich low-register clarinet plays a second theme in a loose, relaxed manner, followed by Whetsol's sweet-toned trumpet for a further chorus; four bars of unaccompanied piano and a recapitulation of the first chorus and the record is over, but for all its simplicity *Mood Indigo* remains one of the highlights of jazz composition. A mood is created and its essence distilled within the brief space of a three-minute record, with only three wind instruments accompanied by a rhythm section; yet within the limitations thus imposed Ellington achieves an undoubted masterpiece. The Brunswick version of *Mood Indigo* is the best, with the Okeh–Parlophone a close second: the H.M.V. recorded two months later with the full band fails to capture the intimate mood of these two versions, and seems less perfect formally owing to an ensemble variant being played before Bigard's solo, which here lacks the slight shift of emphasis which made it so important a part of the original structure. The number has been recorded several

times in later years by the band (an L.P. version from 1950 runs for fifteen minutes) but on none of these is there any attempt to capture the perfection in miniature of the original recording. Equally perfect in its balanced form, although totally different in mood, is *Rockin' in Rhythm*, a number which Ellington used to accompany dancers at the Cotton Club. The sequence of the themes, the quasi-oriental section featuring Bigard's clarinet and the gruff trombone solo of Tricky Sam are masterly, with a truly classical balance of both instrumental colour and thematic material. Three versions of this piece were recorded within three months—the Okeh–Parlophone of November 8th, 1930, the Brunswick of January 14th, 1931 and the Victor–H.M.V. of two days later. These three versions are worthy of study, for they show the amount of variation worked out by the band on the original framework. The clarinet solo is a set piece hardly varied through the three versions, but the trombone solo, although similar in mood and melodic construction, gives us a remarkable lesson of what is essential in Nanton's art as we run through the three recordings. Some slight variation of timbre or rhythmic accent gives each solo a freshness which is remarkable when we consider the supposedly limited means the trombonist employs. The fact is that it was by such subtle 'vocalization' of the melodic line that jazz was able to evolve from the folk-song of the American Negro as a fully-developed form of musical expression. In this respect the art of Tricky Sam is far more rewarding and instructive than that of many so-called 'traditional' musicians, that is if we study such choruses as these rather than 'atmospheric' wa-wa solos as in *Chloe* or in the *Work Song* from *Black, Brown and Beige*. In the ensemble parts of *Rockin' in Rhythm* too we find variations not only of tempo or phrasing but of the actual material. In the first two versions there is an open solo by Cootie Williams which is replaced on the third by a riff section for muted brass and the saxophone section. There are of course several Ellington numbers which were recorded two or three times during this period and all are

worth noting for the instructional value of the creative approach of the orchestra to the material. Happily, *Rockin' in Rhythm* has been issued in all three versions in this country and the quality is even throughout.

Duke Ellington's music was becoming increasingly complex in texture and harmony, increasingly resourceful in style, its creator achieving a greater mastery over his material. It was almost inevitable that he would sooner or later break out of the limitations of the three-minute dance record and expand the form of his music as well as its harmonic content. The first Ellington composition of this type was *Creole Rhapsody*, a short enough work by today's standards in its six-minute running time, but revolutionary in 1931. The work differs only slightly from many of Ellington's better short pieces of the period, these differences being in a somewhat freer use of the ensemble as a source of thematic variation and in the more complex formal pattern. Much use is made of the soloists and this is remarkably successful considering the nature of the piece, the only blemish being Freddy Jenkins' disastrous *rallentando* just before the final in-tempo section. *Creole Rhapsody*[1] is the first piece of American Negro music which adopted the attitude of European art-music as a non-functional, non-popular creation intended for attentive listening. Obviously enough there had been, prior to this date, much jazz of very considerable artistic value, but it had been conceived as dance music in the main, and marketed as a popular commodity. The musical success of *Creole Rhapsody* is therefore more remarkable when we consider its pioneering nature. Hardly amongst the finest of Ellington's music, it remains still a stimulating record to hear and a piece giving considerable insight into Ellington's musical character.

Two further important Ellington records were made in 1931, *The Mystery Song* with its *pianissimo* theme statement by muted brass, and the magnificent blues, *Echoes of the Jungle*. If some deliberate alliance with the so-called

[1] The Brunswick-Vogue Coral version of this work, which is the one discussed here, is vastly superior to the later H.M.V.

jungle atmosphere of the Cotton Club Shows can be detected in *Jungle Nights in Harlem*, recorded the preceding year, in the case of *Echoes of the Jungle* it seems certain that the title was bestowed on the work after its completion, for it is a blues typical of the Ellington band's work in this form. Sidney Finkelstein has pointed out that the folk-song character of many of Ellington's blues is of a sweeter type than those of the Mississippi blues singers or the Louisiana jazzmen, suggesting that they have their origin in the mountain ballads which have been the source of other jazz standards such as *Careless Love Blues* or *How Long Blues*. Like the latter, *Echoes of the Jungle* is based on an eight-bar theme which is stated by the muted brass at the outset, with an *obbligato* by Johnny Hodges. Finkelstein[1] also points out how Ellington has preserved the 'antiphonal, two-voiced character of the blues'; a typical example of the unique way he has adapted this traditional material is in his use of Hodges on this record, the alto adding a sinuous *obbligato* to complement the music at various points throughout the performance. The major soloist here is Cootie Williams who plays a long solo of thirty-two bars, the first half open, the second muted and in his growl style. The contrast between the singing, lyrical open style and the fierce savagery of his growl manner is very apparent here. After a brief bridge passage by Hodges we arrive at one of those peculiar passages in Ellington's music which seem to be derived less from jazz than from the lower reaches of programme music. The passage in question is a repeated phrase on low-registered clarinet with 'ghostly' *tremolo* effects from Guy's banjo, sounding for all the world like the incidental music to some third-rate horror film of the period. The remarkable thing about the passage, which incidentally Duke had used in *Blues of the Vagabond* two years before, is that it fits perfectly within the context and becomes an integral part of the piece. This section is followed by a wa-wa riff on the trumpets (from *Harlem*

[1] See Sidney Finkelstein, *Jazz: A People's Music*, Chapter 6 (Citadel Press, New York, 1948).

Flat Blues) and a brief solo by Nanton, with Hodges cementing the parts together. The final chorus has the brass again singing the melody, this time against an *obbligato* from the clarinet choir. Vic Bellerby has rightly said that this is one of the finest big-band blues in jazz; indeed it ranks with the finest blues creations in any medium, one of the very best of all Ellington's recordings.

The year 1932 saw yet another Ellington masterpiece, the superb *Lazy Rhapsody* or *Swannee River Rhapsody*, a fragile, soft-toned piece, played with beautiful delicacy by the orchestra, the pastel tones of the muted brass blending with Bigard's clarinet and Braud's softly slapped bass. It seemed inevitable in the 'twenties and 'thirties that when the Ellington orchestra recorded for Victor it should have a less subtle, more extrovert character than in its Brunswick recordings; two popular 'standards' from this year illustrate this well—*Rose Room* for Brunswick by a band obviously the same as that on *Lazy Rhapsody* and featuring Bigard in similar vein, and the clamorous *Bugle Call Rag* which was made in the Victor studios. A study in shifting accents and varied rhythms, this latter arrangement looks forward some years to the so-called 'swing' era; the word 'swing' featured in its true meaning as a verb in one of the band's biggest popular successes, *It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing*, with a period vocal by Ivie Anderson and excellent solo work from Joe Nanton and Johnny Hodges. The year 1932 saw the first of the many re-recordings Ellington has made through the years of numbers from an earlier period, the custom being inaugurated by *Creole Love Call* in a four-minute 'concert arrangement'. This is a superb version of the tune with fine solo work from Cootie Williams and Barney Bigard, the heavy arrangement giving a totally different view of the work than the lightly scored 1927 version.

The addition of Lawrence Brown in 1932 had not only given Ellington a new (and controversial) solo voice but had also raised his trombone section to three pieces. In the *Slippery Horn* of February, 1933, we find him exploiting the possibilities of the trombone trio in a slowed-down

variant of *Tiger Rag*. The whole brass section is featured in the beautifully melodic *Drop Me Off at Harlem*, the constantly changing patterns of brass writing, adding colour to the repetition of the distinctive melody. *Bundle of Blues* recorded a few months later, just before the European tour of that year, is a further contribution in the band's constant output of blues recordings, this time with solos by Cootie, Lawrence Brown, Bigard and Hodges. The best of the four sides the band cut in London is *Harlem Speaks*, but a finer version of this was made in August when the band had returned to America. On the debit side it must be said that parts of this number are ruined by clumsy playing from Brown, a musician whose occasional slips of intonation and errors of taste stand out oddly from his general air of elegance. The other solos on *Harlem Speaks* are excellent, Williams and Hodges being outstanding. Two further examples of Ellington arrangements of other people's material stand out in this year's output: *Dear Old Southland* and *In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree*, the latter a delightfully whimsical version featuring a humorous *obbligato* by Freddy Jenkins to the theme statement, in addition to excellent solos by Nanton and Hodges. Critics had for some years been making comparisons between Ellington's harmony and that of such European impressionists as Debussy, Ravel and Delius; it is said that when Ellington was first told of his similarity to Delius he had never heard a bar of that composer's music. There can be little doubt however that by 1933 he was well acquainted with European concert music and was adding to his harmonic palette techniques from this music. One of the most successful of his 1933 recordings is a work which shows such influence clearly, although it must be stressed that there is no question of outright imitation, the techniques being thoroughly adapted to Ellington's own musical language. The number in question is the oddly titled *Rude Interlude* (so named, it is said, from Mrs. Constant Lambert's renaming of *Mood Indigo* as *Rude Indigo*) which opens with the hints of melody being almost lost in a thick curtain of nebulous harmony, accom-

panied by irregular piano punctuations. Brief contributions by Cootie's angry growl trumpet and Louis Bacon's wordless voice add to the oppressive mood, which is only slightly lightened in the more melodic final chorus scored for the brass and reeds. Another sort of impressionism is found in *Daybreak Express*, a successor to the previous year's *Lightnin'*, a composition which had also expressed Duke's love of trains, and the escape they symbolize to the travelling bandleader.

The year 1934 saw the recording of *Solitude*, one of Ellington's popular songs, but more important than this is the magnificent *Saddest Tale*, a piece of masterly tone painting with a brief lyric chanted by Duke after the striking introduction. In a more vigorous mood is *Stompy Jones*, one of the band's most driving performances, while the blues receive a lighter though still colourful variant in *Blue Feeling*. Both these numbers have superb open trumpet solos by Cootie Williams, and indeed his playing on an otherwise mediocre side, *Troubled Waters*, lifts this movie tune to considerable heights. The versatility of Ellington's art can be judged from his work around this time. From such high-class popular tunes as *Sophisticated Lady* or *Solitude* he would turn to tone painting of a mood of utter despair, as in *Saddest Tale*; from the blues of *Blue Feeling* or the uninhibited joy of *Stompy Jones* to the delicate pastoral tones of *Delta Serenade*, with a theme statement by the soft voices of Bigard's clarinet and Whetsol's trumpet.

IV

The band was strengthened in 1935 by the addition of Rex Stewart, already a veteran of many of the finest jazz orchestras of the preceding years; he had in fact sat in the same section as Cootie Williams in the Fletcher Henderson band at a time when Bubber Miley was still with Duke. A versatile musician, his playing runs from a fierce, biting manner to a lyrical style, passing through a comprehensive mastery of muted techniques and the expression of his

highly individual sense of humour. As has already been noted, the trombones were augmented to three by the addition of Lawrence Brown, who joined veteran Tricky Sam Nanton and the Puerto Rican valve-trombonist Juan Tizol. The reeds had been increased to four with the return during 1932 of Otto Hardwicke, who like Tizol is rarely to be heard in solo. The rhythm section still consisted of Ellington, Guy, Braud and Greer, although Braud was replaced by Billy Taylor during the course of the year, and for some time during the years 1935 to 1938 Ellington was to experiment with the use of two string basses. Rex soon made his presence felt in the band with characteristic passages in *Margie* and *Show Boat Shuffle*, the latter being another successful piece of tone painting. The most arresting Ellington creation of this period was, however, *Reminiscing in Tempo*, a new concert work running for some fifteen minutes.

Whether jazz loses its identity whenever it is deliberately written for the concert stage is an argument which has fascinated jazz lovers for years, and there is certainly something to be said for the view which regards with great suspicion each new move toward European musical orthodoxy. The difference between the concert music evolved by modern jazz musicians in the past decade or so and Duke's extended works is that, whereas the former have almost invariably lost the character of the jazz idiom in the process, Ellington has always retained the warm, flexible manner of jazz phrasing in his writing. *Such Sweet Thunder* is a long way from the blues of a Big Bill Broonzy or a Bessie Smith, but without the tradition they have come to symbolize it could not exist; it has the same roots and speaks the same language. In some ways *Reminiscing in Tempo* is Ellington's nearest approach to European music, yet it remains a work very obviously the creation of the writer of *Lazy Rhapsody* or *Drop Me Off at Harlem*. The principal theme of the work is announced by the trumpet of Arthur Whetsol, after he and Duke have provided a brief introduction. The theme is announced over an *arpeggio* figure on the saxes, and most of the material is worked from this theme

and its accompaniment. The most interesting part of the work is on the third side, where the clarinets are used in the harsh, brittle manner of such twentieth-century composers as Stravinsky or Milhaud, rather than in the warm, lyrical manner more often associated with Ellington. The bleak, swirling, restless despair of this side is to some extent resolved by the conclusion of the work, which fortunately foregoes any 'triumphant' rhetorical ending and returns to the rather passive mood of the opening. The form of the work is loose, in a 'reminiscing' vein as the title indicates, but freedom from the restrictions of the usual simple song forms of jazz composition was obviously welcome to Duke. Although it is not one of his greatest creations from an aesthetic standpoint, *Reminiscing in Tempo* remains one of Ellington's most interesting and revealing creations.

The following year, 1936, saw the first of Ellington's 'concertos' which do not, as the title may suggest to the unwary, attempt any fusion of jazz with the European concerto forms, but are rather compositions designed to present one of the band's major soloists in a featured role. The orchestra does not contend with the soloist or indeed take a major role as is the case in the European form, but rather provides an important background for what are above all portrayals of the musical character of the musicians for whom Duke designed the works. The first two of these were originally titled *Cootie's Concerto* and *Barney's Concerto*, but later re-named *Echoes of Harlem* and *Clarinet Lament*. The former has a hushed, brooding quality as Cootie plays muted over a jerky rhythm on piano and bass, and the later section, when he plays open trumpet, is in a similar mood, with a remarkably dark tone from the lower register of the solo trumpet. *Clarinet Lament* is more of a virtuoso performance, with Bigard playing in every register of his instrument. Outstanding even on so fine a performance as this, are the breaks—perfect examples of how to make the most of two bars of music. Shortly afterwards *Trumpet in Spades* (*Rex's Concerto*) and *Yearning for Love* (*Lawrence's Concerto*) were recorded, but they are much

inferior to the first pair, the Stewart contribution being a rather dull study in trumpet pyrotechnics, the trombonist's piece echoing all too well the sentimental aspect of Brown's playing; both are indeed rather dull compositions. More acceptable than either was *Kissin' My Baby Good Night*, a non-Ellington popular tune of the time with a characteristic vocal by Ivie Anderson and some very good solo work, in particular a beautifully relaxed, lyrical contribution from Rex Stewart. A particularly noteworthy session was that of July 29th, 1936, which produced *Exposition Swing*, an uninhibited stomp; *In a Jam*, with a wonderful duet between Hodges and Williams in one of Ellington's most exuberant records; and *Blackout* (also known as *Uptown Downbeat*), a blues of a rather sinister character, with a sinuous Bigard solo, a snarling contribution from the muted trumpet of Cootie Williams and Hodges' soloing on soprano sax.

From late 1936 until March, 1940, the records of the Ellington band were made for companies which did not, at the time, have an outlet in this country and English enthusiasts were denied knowledge of the band's development. In later years a fair number of the sides from this period have been released here and it has been possible to some extent to put Duke's output during this time in perspective. It was in fact a time of transition, in which Ellington continued the line of development first sensed in such works as the two concertos and *Blackout*, a consolidating of the harmonic advances of the early 'thirties and the blending of such elements with the blues tradition. The year 1937 saw the recording of *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*, a work covering two sides of a standard 78 r.p.m. record which, like the *Black and Tan Fantasy* of the following year, has sometimes been issued on separate discs. The situation with these two works on English records is a typical example of the sort of bungling which record companies are allowed to get away with in their jazz releases. *Crescendo in Blue* was available for a time in the late-1940s on 78, but the original version of *Diminuendo* has never been issued here! During the same period, Part Two

of *Black and Tan Fantasy* was put out with an unrelated coupling, while Part One has recently been issued on an L.P. which omits the second part! *Diminuendo and Crescendo* can be heard in a 1956 version from the Newport Jazz Festival, but the second half was recorded during a near-riot provoked by a tenor sax solo between the two movements and is thus partly inaudible! From 1938 also came the original recording of the most delightful of all Ellington's popular songs, *I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart*, in a superb instrumental rendering which makes the later versions with vocal choruses seem almost sacrilegious. Rex was given a more suitable concerto in this year in the delightful *Boy Meets Horn*, a whimsical study in freak trumpet techniques. Duke paid tribute to Willie 'The Lion' Smith, a pianist who influenced him in his early days, in the sprightly, bouncing *Portrait of the Lion*, which contains delightful solos by Hodges and Stewart. At the same March, 1939 session which produced this side came *Something To Live For*, one of the first fruits of the Ellington–Strayhorn partnership and a record which is often cited as Ellington's own favourite of all his own recordings. Those who are not familiar with the rather odd taste exhibited by many leading jazz musicians should be warned that this is a rather dreary pop number sung by Jean Eldridge and, in the English pressings at least, so badly recorded that any interest in what goes on behind the commonplace lyrics is largely unrewarded. Many interesting sides remain little known to the English collector from this period, these including a new recording of *Doin' the Voom Voom* and a new variant on *Bugle Call Rag* under the name of *The Sergeant was Shy*. Of the sides available here, and not so far mentioned, *Tootin' Through the Roof* is perhaps the most interesting, as it contains a masterly duet between Cootie Williams and Rex Stewart.

With the recording of a session by Rex Stewart and his Fifty-Second Street Stompers in 1936 a new series of contingent records was inaugurated, and in the following three years alone over one hundred sides were cut by small

groups from the band under the leadership of Stewart, Williams, Bigard and Hodges. There is some superb music on these contingent records, the musicians enjoying the less formal surroundings of a small group, as compared with the discipline of the full band, and some of the finest work of all the major Ellington soloists of the period can be found in these miniatures of Ellingtonia. Mention must be made of *The Jeep is Jumpin'* by the Hodges group and *Barney Goin' Easy* by Bigard's, the latter containing magnificent playing by the leader in the lower register of the clarinet.

V

In late 1939 Jimmy Blanton joined the band on bass and Ben Webster came in on tenor sax on a permanent basis, having played with the band on odd recording dates in 1935 and 1936 (he solos on *Truckin'* and *Exposition Swing* from these years). Stimulating as these two highly creative musicians must have been to Duke, their influence alone cannot account for the remarkably high quality of the band's output in 1940, a year in which merely good Ellington records are rare, the norm being excellent. Ellington's approach to his music reached maturity in this year, his attitude to jazz composition becoming more settled. The experiments of the mid-thirties, which had in some cases moved away from the blues in the direction of European concert music, now reaped their full reward. The tendency towards the gathering-in of his various styles into one central manner had become noticeable from about 1936 onward, and in 1940 the blending was complete. To say this is not in any way to disparage his earlier work, for as early as 1930 Ellington had a greater mastery of the jazz orchestra than any other musician before or since. But the Ellington of *Mood Indigo* speaks with a different voice from the Ellington of *Rockin' in Rhythm*, and the same could be said of *Sophisticated Lady* and *Blue Ramble* or, to a lesser extent, of *Reminiscing in Tempo* and *Blackout*. This cannot be said of his 1940 works, a year which saw an even greater mastery

of his self-created idiom, a greater synthesis of his style. Even without Duke his 1940 orchestra would be the perfect jazz group of its size, the superb ensemble work being allied to a matchless combination of great soloists—Williams, Stewart, Nanton, Brown, Bigard, Hodges, Webster, Carney and Blanton. To these impressive ingredients for jazz performance Duke added his own unique scores, and it is hardly surprising that masterpieces resulted. What is amazing is their profusion, for virtually every master cut by the orchestra in this year is a perfected gem.

When *Jack the Bear* was released in England the reaction was one of profound shock—Ellington, it was claimed, had deserted his own music to front a 'swing' band. This attitude is largely explained by the fact that no recordings by the band later than 1936 had been heard by those of the jazz public who did not import American records. This hostility, however, has gradually given way to an acceptance, realized at once by the more perceptive critics, that here indeed Duke had brought the traditions he created in the 'twenties and 'thirties to a new stage of development.

It would be impossible in a book of this size to detail every highlight of this year, and a rapid survey will have to suffice. *Jack the Bear* (the Harlem character who 'ain't nowhere') is a bouncing medium tempo number with Blanton, Bigard and Nanton outstanding; the harmonic mastery of the composer is carried a stage further in the savage *Ko-Ko*, supposedly an excerpt from an unfinished opera; *Morning Glory* features Rex in lyrical vein; *Conga Brava* is a jump number based on the opening Latin-American theme played by Tizol; *Concerto for Cootie*, perhaps the best of all such works by Ellington, has wonderful solo work by Williams, both in his growl style and his majestic open manner; *Me and You* features Cootie, Ivie Anderson, a duet by Hodges and Brown, and some remarkable drumming by Greer; *Cotton Tail* is a powerhouse number featuring Ben Webster and brilliant scoring for the sections; *Never No Lament* (later to be popularized as *Don't Get Around Much Any More*) has fine Hodges and Williams; the tone poem

Dusk is rich in orchestral colour, and has a sympathetic solo by Rex; *Bojangles*, a portrait of tap-dancer Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson, is one of Duke's happiest scores; *A Portrait of Bert Williams* is a sketch of the old Harlem comedian, being entrusted in the main to the solo voices of Stewart, Bigard and Nanton; *Blue Goose* is a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of orchestral tone and solo styles; *Harlem Air Shaft* is a fast, busy portrayal of Harlem, featuring a solo by Rex Stewart which is surely the most vehement on record; *Sepia Panorama* is noticeable for its formal structure and for the fine work of Jimmy Blanton, both in solo and in duet with the piano; *In a Mellotone* is a straightforward swinger, Cootie and Hodges being the soloists; *Across the Track Blues* is a magnificent performance in the form Duke never forgets, the principal soloist being Bigard; the latter again demonstrates his unrivalled skill at taking breaks in *The Sidewalks of New York*, an arrangement of a non-Ellington number, which also features one of Nanton's best latter-day solos.

Even on the numbers on which he does not solo Jimmy Blanton's bass playing is an outstanding feature—note the importance of the string-bass work in *Concerto for Cootie* as an instance of this. Ben Webster, the other newcomer, shows his presence not only in his excellent solos but by the improvement of the saxophone section as compared with its work in the previous year. Yet the greatness of these 1940 recordings lies mainly in the brilliance of the scores, excellent though the solo and ensemble work is. Every passage seems to be perfect in its scoring, in its balance and in its formal structure, the solos receiving beautifully apt backgrounds while an inexhaustible sequence of melody informs each record. This was truly a peak year for Duke Ellington.

VI

The first side the band cut in 1941 was destined to become one of their best-selling records and to replace *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* as their signature tune. This was Billy Strayhorn's

Take the 'A' Train, a medium-fast jump number featuring the excellent trumpet playing of newcomer Ray Nance. Three numbers by Duke's son, Mercer Ellington, were also recorded at this session: *Jumpin' Punkins*, featuring the good-natured voice of Carney's baritone and excellent drumming by Greer, the latter fitting perfectly into the arrangement; *John Hardy's Wife*, with further bouncing Carney, one of Rex's best growl solos and passages for Ellington's piano and Brown's trombone; *Blue Serge* is by contrast a moody, heavy-textured tone poem, featuring Nanton's plaintive trombone half engulfed in brooding saxophone harmonies and Webster's tenor seeming to struggle against the oppressive, heavy atmosphere. The themes of these recordings may be by Mercer Ellington, but the scoring bears the imprint of Duke's unique methods. The scores contributed by Strayhorn (*After All*) and Tizol (*Bakiff*) are comparatively lightweight, but make pleasant enough listening. The best of the popular numbers from this year are *Just A-Settin' and A-Rockin'* with casual tenor from Webster, and *I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good*, sung by Ivie Anderson. This last title featured Johnny Hodges who for the first time employed the exaggerated *glissandi* and slurs which were to become associated with his playing from this period onwards. The concise phrasing of his early solos gave way to a sinuous, smoother manner, which has been used to good effect on ballads and in Ellington's concertos for Hodges. Some commentators have criticized this manner as sentimental and vulgar, but this is far from being the case, for the tone, though rich and sensuous, retains its masculine strength, the phrasing being disciplined by a strongly musical mind. On the session after this Hodges is featured in a typically airy fast tempo in *Jump for Joy*, the title number of Ellington's musical of 1941, which is badly sung by Herb Jeffries.

Although they had switched to the Victor label in early 1940, the policy of recording contingents from the band was continued during the following two years, although not at quite the pace set earlier for Variety and Vocalion. These

contingent sides from 1940 and 1941 are perhaps the best of the whole series, those by the Hodges group being of a superb quality. The oustanding titles include *Squaty Roo* with magnificent Hodges and a driving beat from Blanton, and *Things Ain't What They Used To Be*, a blues featuring incredibly melodic solo work from Hodges and a thoughtful contribution from Ray Nance. Some of Rex Stewart's best blues playing is to be heard on the small band sides under his name, notably in *Mobile Bay* and *Poor Bubber*, while the driving *Subtle Slough* has Rex's growl trumpet playing against low-pitched riffs by the rest of the group, the whole being powered by Blanton's tremendous swing.

In mid-1942 the American Federation of Musicians banned all its members from the recording studios owing to a deadlock between them and the record companies on the matter of recording fees. Before this, however, the Ellington band, now without the great Jimmy Blanton, were able to record some dozen titles, including *Perdido* and *C-Jam Blues*, both of which have since become jazz standards. Despite the large number of recordings by both Ellington groups and other bands in the succeeding years, the original version of *Perdido*, taken at an easy medium tempo, remains the best. Two tone poems were recorded at this time: *Moon Mist* featuring Nance on violin and *What Am I Here For*, with solo contributions from Nanton, Stewart and Webster. Probably the best of the band's 1942 records is a swinging up-tempo twelve-bar blues, *Mainstem*, which once more proves the strength of this tradition, and contains choruses by each of the leading soloists with the exception of Carney.

VII

The A.F.M. ban was in operation until December, 1944, and apart from air-shots and V-Discs we have no record of the band's work during this period. Shortly after the resumption of its recording activities for Victor the band recorded a four-movement selection from *Black, Brown and Beige*. The suite opens with *Work Song*, a movement con-

tinually whipped into tempo by the menacing drum rhythm; Carney and Nanton are featured here. *Come Sunday* is, by contrast, quiet and restful, introduced by Ray Nance's violin and featuring a long, melodic solo by Johnny Hodges over a hushed background. The third movement is *The Blues*, more a painting of a mood than an exploration of the traditional blues form. Joya Sherrill sings the lyrics over stop chords and odd wisps of melody from the band, who later present a twelve-bar theme which leads back to the vocal section, after a coarse-textured solo from Al Sears. The last movement consists of three dances, a fiery *West Indian Dance* and a bouncing *Emancipation Celebration* (the last superbly scored and, incidentally, looking back to the *Dallas Doings* of 1933) being contrasted with the placid smoothness of the final *Sugar Hill Penthouse*. The following year the band recorded the Ellington–Strayhorn *Perfume Suite*, a less important score than *Black, Brown and Beige*, which has to contend with a disastrous opening vocal from Al Hibbler. The four movements portray the character that a woman may take on under the influence of various perfumes, the most successful being the two middle movements: *Balcony Serenade* with its excellent saxophone scoring, and *Dancers in Love*, a satirical miniature played as a piano solo with only string-bass accompaniment. Another concert work from 1945, *New World A-Comin'* was recorded for V-Disc, but is unavailable on commercial labels. Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn obviously had their minds very much on the concert stage at this time, a fact which can be seen from the heavily arranged versions of older Ellington numbers recorded in 1945. The band was carrying no fewer than three girl singers during this year, and they can all be heard on *It Don't Mean a Thing* and *Solitude*. Al Hibbler is fourth vocalist on the latter, which has a Hodges solo accompanied by the three girls singing wordless harmonies! The extravagance of these arrangements is seen in *In a Sentimental Mood* (with Hardwicke's last recorded solo with the band) and *Caravan*, the last being the most swinging version of Tizol's famous number. These

re-makes are capped by a sombre new version of *Black and Tan Fantasy*, with Carney taking the second theme and Nanton all the growl work. In 1946 the band made an album of standard blues themes arranged by Ellington, including good performances of *Memphis Blues*, *Beale Street Blues* and *Royal Garden Blues*; but the finest records from Ellington's last Victor sessions are *Rockabye River* and *Transblucency*. The former is a Johnny Hodges feature, whilst *Transblucency* (*A Blue Fog That You Can Almost See Through*), is an adaptation of the *Blue Light* of 1938 to the wordless singing of the concert-trained Kay Davis.

In the last few months of 1946 the band recorded a number of sides for the Musicraft Company, which leave a lot to be desired, as the recording itself was very badly engineered. Of the concert music the outstanding item is *Happy Go Lucky Local*, a portrait of a wheezy old train which had formed the fourth movement of Ellington's *Deep South Suite*, another concert work only recorded in its entirety for V-Disc. Outstanding among the shorter pieces are two superb feature numbers for Johnny Hodges, *Magenta Haze* and *Sultry Sunset*. Jeff Aldam has dismissed these two works as 'expertly contrived *schmalz*', and it is for some reason fashionable to regard them as unworthy creations. In fact they are delightful miniatures, in which the almost classical beauty of Hodges' melodic line keeps the music well clear of any undue sentimentality. A further 'concerto', this time for clarinettist Jimmy Hamilton, is *Flippant Flurry*, where the general air of nonchalance of Ellington's composition fits perfectly with the cool, academic style of the clarinettist. *Concerto for Four Jazz Horns* (Taft Jordan, Brown, Hamilton and Carney) and *Trumpet No End* feature several soloists playing against the full band, the latter having solos by four trumpeters on the chord sequence of *Blue Skies*, concluding with a truly stratospheric contribution from Cat Anderson. The most amusing of Ray Nance's vocal numbers, *Tulip or Turnip*, was recorded at this time with Ray also playing distinctive trumpet over a superbly scored and swinging band.

Ellington started recording for Columbia in August, 1947, and the change of company certainly meant improved recording on this occasion, although the band were called upon to turn out a high percentage of popular material of dubious merit. The works of true Ellingtonian character which were recorded in this year were of an exceptionally high quality. Two numbers with important solos by Tyree Glenn on trombone are amongst the best of these: *Sultry Serenade* and the blues *Hy'a Sue*, the latter containing one of Johnny Hodges' finest choruses. In Ellington's impressionistic vein we were given *Lady of the Lavender Mist* and *On a Turquoise Cloud*, the latter featuring Kay Davis, while the band demonstrates its power and solo strength in *Three Cent Stomp*, a number with superb scoring for the sax section. Unusual in that they both feature Ellington's piano as the principal solo voice are *The Clothed Woman* and *New York City Blues*. Both are in Ellington's impressionist manner and are somewhat removed from the jazz idiom, the second piece being a study in nostalgia rather than a blues in the jazz sense of the term.

The Liberian Suite was recorded complete for Columbia just before the premiere at Carnegie Hall, but this is one of Ellington's most uneven works. The opening movement is entitled *I Like the Sunrise*, and features a vocal by Al Hibbler which starts the work off very badly, despite the melodic excellence of the theme. The remainder of the suite is divided into five dances, and although there is much music of a high quality the work has little unity and is very uneven in quality. Some of the weakest pages are those towards the end of the final *Dance No. 5* when Tyree Glenn plays some very mediocre passages in a poor imitation of the Tricky Sam Nanton manner. It would appear that it is the scoring which is at fault as Glenn plays well enough in the wa-wa style on other records. The best of the dances is probably the first, which shows that a musician of Ellington's calibre can write excellent music round a tenor solo, by Al Sears, which at times descends into the vulgarity of the rhythm-and-blues style.

Another recording ban kept the band out of the studios for the whole of 1948, and the state of the big-band business probably accounts for the poor material which makes up much of the output for 1949. This year did, however, include an outstanding version of *Creole Love Call*, featuring Kay Davis, which has never been issued in England. In December of 1950 the band recorded four extended scores for Columbia, with which the latter were to inaugurate the jazz section of their L.P. catalogue. One of the pieces recorded was a concert work of some twelve minutes' duration, entitled *The Tattooed Bride*. This work describes the honeymoon of an athletic character who spends the first three days playing such strenuous games that by evening he is utterly exhausted and falls asleep at once. On the fourth night he makes the rather alarming discovery that his bride is tattooed, a fact signalled by the long-held clarinet note during the slow section. The construction of this composition is as ingenious as its programme, the material being worked from the simple theme presented in the opening piano solo. The principal soloist is Jimmy Hamilton, and in a sense the work is a concerto for him, but the most arresting feature of the performance is the playing of the trumpet section, which is in magnificent form. The other three numbers on this L.P. are extended versions of Ellington's standards, the finest being a fifteen-minute *Mood Indigo* with a magnificent Johnny Hodges solo and a passage for the band in 3/4 time, while Harold Baker contributes a gem of a solo to *Sophisticated Lady*, another superb arrangement. The difference between the popular songs of other composers and those by Duke is noticeable when we consider the amount of music Ellington has made over the years from such numbers as *Sophisticated Lady*. The arrangements on this L.P. have been criticized as being too episodic, which is true enough; why certain critics object to this is difficult to understand, for Duke gets more into an 'episode' than most jazz arrangers can manage in several compositions!

The first records by the band in which Smith, Tizol and

Bellson replaced Hodges, Brown and Greer are a mixed bag. The finest are *Fancy Dan*, a whimsical piece built around the soloists (this despite the loss of two of Duke's principal solo voices) and *V.I.P.'s Boogie*, featuring Carney and Hamilton. *Jam with Sam* is an exciting jump number which gets rather out of hand towards the end, while *Monologue* features Duke narrating the slight, whimsical story of *Pretty and the Wolf* over a background of three clarinets. The weakest of all is the Louis Bellson arrangement, *The Hawk Talks*, which had the band running through a powerhouse number of a type more usually associated with Woody Herman's band than Duke's. Whatever his limitations as an arranger, however, Bellson was an inspiration to the band in this difficult period with his excellent drumming; his work sparks several of the contingent sides made around this period, including one of Cat Anderson's Latin-American scores *She*, and *Cat Walk*, a blues featuring Anderson in one of his rare growl solos.

Despite the changes in personnel the band recorded *A Tone Parallel to Harlem* in the December of 1951, a seventeen-minute piece which is perhaps Ellington's masterpiece so far as concert music is concerned. Without any break in continuity or any suggestion of the stringing together of brief episodes, the mastery of Ellington's grasp in this work gives the lie to those who consider him to be a mere miniaturist. There are, of course, episodes of a contrasting nature, but the thematic unity of *Harlem* is such that the impression is one of economy rather than the somewhat lavish spreading out which characterizes such pieces as the *Liberian Suite*. *A Tone Parallel to Harlem* opens with a two-note motive on muted trumpet which forms the germ of the first theme of the work, which goes through several variations, mostly of a dance-like character, before the second theme, a 'spiritual' melody, is introduced on solo trombone. Notice in the development of this theme the excellence of Duke's scoring for the individual voices of Russell Procope's clarinet (in contrast to the way he writes for Jimmy Hamilton earlier) and Harold Baker's singing trumpet. The work

concludes with a mighty climax built out of the two main motives, the tremendous *power* of the band being harnessed in a magnificent surge of sound.

VIII

Although the band had a record in the best-selling lists in Louis Bellson's extended drum solo, *Skin Deep*, 1952 was one of Ellington's least productive years, only re-makes of *The Mooche* of 1928 and *Perdido* of 1942 being of the standard we have come to expect from his recordings. The following year, amid a heavy crash of publicity, Ellington signed for Capitol records, declaring himself well pleased with their policy. Unfortunately things did not turn out as expected, and the band produced during the next few years a flood of popular trash which joins much of the Cotton Club material recorded in the 'thirties as the low-water mark in Ellington's output. *Bunny Hop Mambo* and *Twelfth Street Rag Mambo* vie with the abominable *Blue Moon*, which features Jimmy Grissom, surely the poorest of all the mediocre male vocalists Ellington has carried through the years. Ellington's *Satin Doll* and *Ultra Deluxe* are, along with Strayhorn's *Boo-Dah*, among the best of the singles by the band from 1953, but more interesting than these is the intimate set of piano solos by Duke with bass and drums. For the band, however, the best of the records from the Capitol period is the L.P. *Ellington '55*, a selection of numbers from various sessions in late 1953 and early 1954. Much of the material is of a non-Ellington origin, but three Ducal compositions were re-recorded: *Black and Tan Fantasy* (1927) and *Rockin' in Rhythm* (1930) being new arrangements of old material. The second number receives a wild, abandoned performance, the band playing with tremendous attack and enthusiasm. The third Ellington piece was a new recording of the 1946 *Happy Go Lucky Local* from the *Deep South Suite*. In the intervening years the old engine has become even more rickety, and protests vigorously at the slightly faster ride she makes here. The

brakes are even more rusty. Cat Anderson's trumpet shrieking its protest as the train draws to a halt. Musical portraits of trains are fairly frequent in twentieth century music, in such folk-songs as *Rock Island Line* or jazz numbers like *Honky Tonk Train Blues* on the one hand, and Honneger's *Pacific 231* or Villa Lobos' *Little Train of the Caipira* on the other. But on none of these do we find the affection, humour and warmth of this composition of Ellington's, which can justly be said to be the finest of all such portrayals. The thin trickle of worthwhile recordings in 1954 and 1955 caused one of the periodic cries that Ellington was finished, which was shattered to silence with the appearance of a magnificent new L.P. for the Bethlehem label, *Historically Speaking the Duke*. This was devoted entirely to Ellington originals and featured a band revitalized by the return of Johnny Hodges, and the presence of an excellent new rhythm section. *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* and *Creole Love Call* are the opening tracks, and each of these thirty-year-old compositions is given a superb performance. Ray Nance is featured on the former playing growl trumpet, a role he fills on several numbers in this album. *Stompy Jones* is given over to the soloists, the original score being played behind their contributions. The two trumpets take the honours here, Nance with a warm, softly phrased chorus and Cat Anderson in an exciting high register solo which climaxes the piece. Johnny Hodges is heard on *Creole Love Call*, *The Jeep is Jumpin'* and *In a Mellotone*, his solo on the last-named being outstanding. The solo strength of the band is shown in the fact that neither Clark Terry nor Paul Gonsalves are given a single-bar solo on the whole L.P. The ensemble plays with a great understanding of the rather varied series of compositions they are called upon to interpret and indeed the record is above all a triumph for the band as a unit and for Ellington himself. A second L.P. from the same February sessions, *Duke Ellington Presents*, is less successful, although *I Can't Get Started*, *My Funny Valentine*, *Day Dream* and *Blues* are excellent tracks with good Clark Terry on the last title.

After these two L.P.s for Bethlehem the band returned to Columbia, the first important L.P.s on this label being those from the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival. The long *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*, with the riot-provoking 'interlude' by Paul Gonsalves, is a very exciting performance, but the last half is spoilt by the noise of the audience. It is a significant item in any Ellington discography, however, for the great success of this performance once again pointed out to the general public Ellington's pre-eminence in the jazz world. It also stressed the importance of other factors too long neglected by the currently fashionable modernists, for, as Albert McCarthy pointed out in his *Jazz Monthly* review, 'It is a triumph of a great swinging band and the twelve-bar blues . . . it is also a reminder of what jazz was like before the cool boys ripped out its heart.' In addition to this the Newport recordings include showcases for Harry Carney on *Sophisticated Lady* and Johnny Hodges on *I Got It Bad*, and two more fine blues performances in *Blues to be There* (from the *Newport Festival Suite*) and *Jeep's Blues*. This last is the finest of the Newport recordings, featuring magnificent playing by Johnny Hodges. Johnny was the leader in a superb contingent session for Norman Granz's Clef label recorded four months after the Newport Festival, a series of performances equal to the best of the small group sides from the 'thirties and 'forties. This L.P. opens with a six-minute *Meet Mr. Rabbit*, with Hodges playing some superb blues choruses, and includes a wonderfully relaxed *Take the 'A' Train* and a chamber music version of *Black and Tan Fantasy*. Hodges proves himself once more to be the finest alto player in the history of jazz, while Clark Terry and Jimmy Hamilton are also at their very best. Despite the presence of Strayhorn on piano, the Ellington atmosphere of these recordings is a very large factor in their complete success.

The next L.P. by the band is one on which they are joined by an assortment of vocalists (including a choir!) and extra percussionists, in a performance of the Ellington–Strayhorn television production, *A Drum is a Woman*.

Narrated by Duke, this is a very loose extravaganza on the history of jazz, which has met with a good deal of hostility from critics who have insisted on taking it very seriously indeed. Taken as an intelligent piece of entertainment it is quite acceptable, indeed very enjoyable, and it seems rather absurd to compare this with the *Harlem Suite* or *Such Sweet Thunder*. Ellington was quite obviously attempting something totally different. In between the racy narration and the vocal numbers there are a number of items on which the band play with characteristic excellence, Clark Terry being particularly good in the *Hey, Buddy Bolden* section. Commenting on this L.P. in *Jazz Monthly* Edward Towler suggested that if this is a criterion for Ellington's work in progress, then, of the many qualities which have made him a major figure in twentieth century art, only the originality of his music will remain. It was not a criterion however, for the next Ellington recording was the Shakespearian suite *Such Sweet Thunder*, which ranks with *A Tone Parallel to Harlem* as his finest concert music. The suite is in twelve movements and, with the exception of the rather dull *Sonnet for Sister Kate* and the out of character finale *Circle of Fourths*, all are excellent. Much of the music is written in a mildly satirical vein, for example in the jazz waltz *Lady Mac* who had, according to Duke, 'a little ragtime in her soul', and in *Madness in Great Ones*, a sketch of Hamlet who was, as Duke says, trying to convince people that he was crazy, but 'in those days crazy didn't mean the same thing it means now'. This movement features Cat Anderson playing one of the most remarkable passages in all Ellington's music, where Duke uses the extreme high register playing of which Anderson is the master to most unusual effect. The Romeo and Juliet movement features Johnny Hodges, and, like Hamilton's *Sonnet for Caesar*, is in a more serious mood. The wittiest of all these character sketches is *Up and Down*, where Clark Terry is cast as Puck and dances happily through a movement which makes striking use of Nance's violin in the orchestration. With this superb suite Ellington, Strayhorn and the band have once

more demonstrated their unique abilities, once more shown their pre-eminence in the world of jazz. In a television interview when he was in this country someone asked Duke why, at the age of 59, he still travelled around with his band, rather than living a quieter life, which he could so easily do from his considerable income from royalties on his songs and records. He explained that he is, above all, a writer, comparing his position with that of the many composers who are lucky to hear one performance in a year of their works, while he has his orchestra on hand to play his music whenever he wishes. Duke Ellington is, as he remarked in an earlier interview, in the band business today mainly out of 'artistic interest', and he stresses that 'we stay in it fifty-two weeks a year'. Duke knows that in his band he has what is one of the finest musical ensembles in the world. If this seems a rather sweeping statement, let the reader visualize any other group which could interpret a complex score like *Such Sweet Thunder* and then split into smaller units which could *create* such magnificent music as is heard on the 1956 Johnny Hodges contingent L.P.

The next album after *Such Sweet Thunder* was one of popular standards (only three out of eight titles are Ellington numbers) which, although pleasant enough, does not show off the band to its best advantage. The welcome return of Harold Baker is signalled here by two excellent solos, on *Mood Indigo* and *Willow Weep for Me*. More interesting is the new version of *Black, Brown and Beige*, despite the total failure of the second side, which has gospel singer Mahalia Jackson singing *Come Sunday*, a most unsuitable blending of talents, not in any way assisted by maudlin lyrics. The first three sections, however, contain much of interest, the first two being new scorings of the *Work Song* and *Come Sunday* movements, the last a rather odd blending of the two themes.

The most recent recordings of the Ellington band available as this book goes to press are those in the H.M.V. four-disc set entitled *Ella Fitzgerald sings the Duke Ellington Song Book*, half of which has accompaniment by the Duke

Ellington orchestra. The banal lyrics which have been tagged on to Ellington's themes by a host of hack lyric writers detract, to some extent, from the pleasure the Ellington enthusiast will derive from these L.P.s, and equally out of place is the 'baby talk' scat singing indulged in by Miss Fitzgerald on many numbers. No lover of *Concerto for Cootie* is likely to enjoy its popular variant, *Do Nothing 'til You Hear From Me*, with its inane lyrics, while the listener is even more infuriated when a superb arrangement of *Rockin' in Rhythm* is played by the band with Ella scatting away in the foreground. The music of Duke Ellington is of a quality which can hardly be enhanced by the addition of a popular singer, even the best (and Ella is without doubt the best), and the L.P.s are interesting only when we are allowed to hear the band which plays very well indeed. The most rewarding music in these albums is to be found in the non-vocal *A Portrait of Ella Fitzgerald* which, despite Duke's verbal introductions, seems to have little connexion with its subject, and turns out to be one of Duke's 'lightweight' concert works after the pattern of the *Newport Festival Suite*. A four-disc set of *Duke Ellington plays the Duke Ellington Song Book* would have been a superior proposition musically, although perhaps not so great a commercial success.

IX

Today, as has been the case from 1926 onwards, Duke Ellington leads the finest jazz ensemble in the world, a band unrivalled in its solo strength and ensemble ability. Despite the claims made by lovers of New Orleans jazz on behalf of the bands of King Oliver and Jelly-Roll Morton, the finest ensemble playing in jazz is to be found on the records of the Duke Ellington orchestra. It is beyond dispute that the finest big-band scores in jazz are those of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, the extended compositions no less than the more generally accepted shorter pieces being works of characteristic quality. The Duke Ellington orchestra has without doubt created a greater bulk of jazz masterpieces

than any group in the whole history of the music. These achievements are generally recognized, but it is not so widely appreciated that Duke Ellington is the most truly progressive figure in jazz. Other so-called 'progressive' musicians have been only too willing to sacrifice the basic blues style of the music, in order to utilize the impressive harmonic and formal resources of the European tradition. Ellington for his part has always remained within the jazz idiom in his concert works (with the exception of a few odd piano pieces) because his language is always that of the blues tradition, his harmonic and formal advances being made within this framework.

If such musicians as Miles Davis or Jimmy Giuffre continue to be regarded as the *avant-garde* of jazz, then the music will move closer to the European academic tradition, and the distinctive qualities of jazz will be lost. Much of the music which has followed the bop revolution in jazz has been emotionally sterile, many of the so-called progressive devices having reduced the music to the level of polite tea-dance music, more fitted to the Palm Court than either the concert stage or a Negro dance-hall. No art-form remains static, and a return to the music of the Harlem or the Kansas City of the 1930s is as unlikely as a return to the environment and music of New Orleans in the early years of this century. Younger jazz musicians will naturally evolve a different musical language from that of earlier generations, and no critic worthy of the name would object to this process. What the critic must point out is that as *jazz Saddest Tale* is more progressive than *Boplicity*, *A Portrait of Bert Williams* more progressive than *Django*, and *Such Sweet Thunder* more progressive than *Miles Ahead.*

Duke Ellington's pre-eminence in jazz is not only because of the very high aesthetic standard of his output, not simply due to his remarkable abilities as pianist, composer and bandleader, but also to the fact that he has extended the boundaries of jazz more than any other musician, without abandoning the true essence of the music.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The records listed in the selected discography are intended to give the listener a rounded picture of Duke Ellington's music. The selection has been made with two objects in mind—to give a balanced and representative listing and to cite only music of outstanding quality. Such a basis is bound to reflect the compiler's taste; the author believes that the following selection would, although it is a purely personal choice, meet with the approval of the majority of Ellington specialists. It must be pointed out that the omission of any title is not intended in any way to be a commentary on its quality; the limitation of space has caused many excellent Ellington records to be passed over.

The matter of current availability has not been considered in the selection of these records, for, with so many re-issues and deletions taking place, it is difficult to be certain of the position of any one title in this respect. It would have been absurd to have omitted virtually the whole of the early Victor output, although only a handful of sides from this period are at present in the catalogue. In view of this, and the fact that re-issues often have different backings, there has been no attempt to list 78 backings or the full content of any LP cited, for apart from the space this would have taken up, it is quite possible that by the time this book is published there will have been further re-issues, and the probability is that the titles will bear little relation to the coupling of the old 78's, or the contents of previously issued LP's or EP's.

As the discography is not a complete listing of Ellington's recorded output it has been decided to omit matrix numbers; for this reason and for reasons of space, only American catalogue numbers are given. Records that are no longer in the catalogue are marked with an asterisk.

Acknowledgment is due to *Jazz Directory*, Volume Three (compiled by Dave Carey and Albert J. McCarthy) and the Record Guide in *Duke Ellington* (edited by Peter Gammond), which were the principal sources in the compilation of this discography. The layout is based on that of *Jazz Directory*, which, in the author's view, is both the most logical way of listing jazz records and the one which has received the most universal approval.

Key to Instrumental Abbreviations: *acc* = accompanied by; *alt* = alto saxophone; *bar* = baritone saxophone; *bj* = banjo; *bs* = string bass; *bs-sx* = bass saxophone; *clt* = clarinet; *cnt* = cornet; *d* = drums; *fr-h* = French horn; *g* = guitar; *p* = pianoforte; *sop* = soprano saxophone; *tbn* = trombone; *ten* = tenor saxophone; *tpt* = trumpet; *tu* = tuba; *vln* = violin; *v-tbn* = valve trombone.

NOTES.

(1) Harry Carney has used the bass clarinet from the middle 'thirties onwards, in addition to the more usual B♭ instrument.

(2) From aural evidence it would appear unlikely that Johnny Hodges played soprano saxophone after 1943.

(3) Juan Tizol plays valve-trombone on all records on which he is present, while John Sanders switched to this instrument shortly after joining the band.

(4) Rex Stewart plays cornet on all records on which he appears.

KEY TO LABEL ABBREVIATIONS

LP = 33⅓ r.p.m. Long Playing Record
45 = 45 r.p.m. (standard) record
78 = 78 r.p.m. (standard) record

ABBREVIATION	LABEL	PREFIX	TYPE
Beth	Bethlehem	BCP	LP
Br	Brunswick	BL	LP
"	"	7000 series	78

”	”	8000 series	78
”	”	6000 series	78
”	”	20000 series	78 (12″)
Cam	Camden	CAL	LP
Cap	Capitol	T	LP
Co	Columbia	CL	LP
”	”	2800 series	78
”	”	35000 series	78
”	”	36000 series	78
”	”	38000 series	78
”	”	39000 series	78
Fkwy	Folkways	FP	LP
Mcr	Mercer	1000 series	78
Mus	Musicraft	400 series	78
Ok	Okeh	5000 series	78
”	”	8000 series	78
Vic	Victor	LPM	LP
”	”	LPT	LP (10″)
”	”	22000 series	78
”	”	24000 series	78
”	”	38000 series	78
”	”	20– series	78
”	”	40– series	78
”	”	47– series	45
Vrv	Verve	MGV	LP
X	Label X	LVA	LP (10″)
”	”	LX	LP (10″)

Far more extensive re-issue programmes of Ellington's records have been undertaken in Europe and many of the deleted items are in the catalogue in England and France.

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA:
Bubber Miley, Louis Metcalfe (*tpt*) ; Joe 'Tricky Sam' Nanton (*tbn*) ; Otto Hardwicke (*alt, bs-sx, clt*) ; Rudy Jackson (*clt, ten*) ; Harry Carney (*bar, alt, clt*) ; Duke Ellington (*p*) ; Fred Guy (*bj*) ; 'Bass' Edwards (*tu*) ; Sonny Greer (*d*).
New York City, April 7, 1927

Black and Tan Fantasy
Br BL–54007

Wellman Braud (*bs*) replaces Edwards.

New York City, October 26, 1927

Creole Love Call [1] "X" LVA3037 *
Black and Tan Fantasy
Vic LPM–1393

[1] vocal by Adelaide Hall on this track.

New York City, December 19, 1927

East St. Louis Toodle-oo
"X" LVA3034 *

Arthur Whetsol (*tpt*) added; Barney Bigard (*clt, ten*) replaces Jackson.

New York City, March 26, 1928

Black Beauty "X" LVA3037 *
Jubilee Stomp "X" LVA3037 *

Johnny Hodges (*alt, sop*) replaces Hardwicke.

New York City, June 5, 1928

Yellow Dog Blues Br BL–58012 *

Lonnie Johnson (*g*) added.

New York City, October 1, 1928

The Mooche [1] Co CL–558
Hot and Bothered [1] Fkwy FP69

[1] vocal by Baby Cox on this track.

Johnson out. New York City, October 17, 1928

The Mooche Br BL–58002 *

Johnson returns; Freddy Jenkins (*tpt*) replaces Metcalfe.

New York City, November 20, 1928

Blues with a Feeling
Ok 8662 *
Misty Mornin' Co 35955 *

Johnson out. New York City, January 16, 1929

Flaming Youth Vic 38035 *
Saturday Night Function
Vic 24674 *
High Life Vic 38036 *
Doin' the Voom-Voom
Vic 24121 *

Arthur Whetsol, Cootie Williams, Freddy Jenkins (*tpt*); Joe Nanton (*tbn*); Johnny Hodges (*alt, sop*); Barney Bigard (*clt, ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, alt, clt*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Fred Guy (*bj*); Wellman Braud (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

New York City, March 7, 1929

Hot Feet [1] Cam CAL–459

[1] vocal by Cootie Williams.

Cootie Williams (*tpt*); Barney Bigard (*clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt*); same *p; bj; bs; d.*

New York City, May 3, 1929

Saratoga Swing Cam CAL–459

Arthur Whetsol (*tpt*); Joe Nanton (*tbn*); Barney Bigard (*clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt*); same *bs; d* as last.

New York City, May 28, 1929

Saturday Night Function

Co 2833 *

Note: The above was issued as by "Sonny Greer and his Memphis Men."

Personnel as for March 7, 1929 except Juan Tizol (*v-tbn*) added.

New York City, April 11, 1930

Double Check Stomp

Vic 38129 *

Charlie Barnet (*chimes*) added.

Hollywood, August 20, 1930

Ring Dem Bells [1] Cam CAL–459

[1] vocal by Cootie Williams.

Arthur Whetsol (*tpt*); Joe Nanton (*tbn*); Barney Bigard (*clt*); same *p; bj; bs; d.*

New York City, October 17, 1930

Mood Indigo Br BL–54007

Previous full band personnel, but without Charlie Barnet.

New York City, November 8, 1930

Rockin' in Rhythm

OK 8869 *

New York City, January 14, 1931

Rockin' in Rhythm
Br BL–54007

New York City, January 16, 1931

Rockin' in Rhythm
Cam CAL–328

New York City, January 20, 1931

Creole Rhapsody, Parts 1 and 2
Br BL–54007

New York City, June 16, 1931

Echoes of the Jungle
Vic 22743 *

Lawrence Brown (*tbn*) replaces Tizol; Guy doubles on *g*.
New York City, February 2, 1932

Lazy Rhapsody (*Swanee River Rhapsody*) [1]
Co 35834 *

[1] vocal by Cootie Williams.

New York City, February 11, 1932

Creole Love Call Br 20105 *
Rose Room Br 6265 *

Juan Tizol (*v-tbn*) ; Otto Hardwicke (*alt, bs-sx, clt*) added.
New York City, February 17, 1933

Drop Me Off at Harlem
Co 35837 *

New York City, May 16, 1933

Bundle of Blues (*Dragon's Blues*)
Co 35836 *

New York City, August 15, 1933

Harlem Speaks Co 36195 *
In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree
Co 36195 *

Louis Bacon (*tpt, vcl*) added.
Chicago, September 26, 1933

Rude Interlude Vic 24431 *

Tizol out.
Chicago, January 9, 1934

Stompy Jones Vic 20–1533 *

Chicago, January 10, 1934

Blue Feeling Vic 24521 *

Tizol returns; Bacon leaves.

New York City, September 12, 1934

Saddest Tale [1] Br 7310 *

[1] talking by Duke Ellington.

Arthur Whetsol, Cootie Williams (*tpt*); Rex Stewart (*cnt*); Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown (*tbn*); Juan Tizol (*v-tbn*); Otto Hardwicke (*alt, bs-sx, clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt, sop*); Barney Bigard (*clt, ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, alt, clt*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Fred Guy (*g*); Wellman Braud (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

Chicago, September 12, 1935

Reminiscing in Tempo, Parts 1–4

Co CL–663

Hardwicke and Braud out.

New York City, February 28, 1936

Clarinet Lament (*Barney's Concerto*)

Br 7650 *

Echoes of Harlem (*Cootie's Concerto*)

Br 7650 *

Hardwicke returns; Ben Webster (*ten*) added; Hayes Alvis (*bs*) replaces Braud.

New York City, July 29, 1936

In a Jam Br 7734 *

Blackout (*Uptown Downbeat*)

Br 7734 *

Webster out; Wallace Jones (*tpt*); Freddy Jenkins (*chimes*) replace Whetsol.

New York City, March 5, 1937

New East St. Louis Toodle-oo

Co CL–558

Tizol and Jenkins out; Harold Baker (*tpt*) added.

New York City, January 13, 1938

Prologue to Black and Tan Fantasy

Br 8256 *

New Black and Tan Fantasy

Co CL–558

Tizol returns. New York City, March 3, 1938
I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart
Co CL–558

Baker and Alvis out. New York City, March 21, 1939
Portrait of the Lion
Br 8365 *

BARNEY BIGARD AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

Rex Stewart (*cnt*); Juan Tizol (*v-tbn*); Barney Bigard (*clt*); Harry Carney (*bar*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Fred Guy (*g*); Billy Taylor (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

New York City, June 12, 1939
Barney Goin' Easy Ok 5378 *

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams (*tpt*); Rex Stewart (*cnt*); Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown (*tbn*); Juan Tizol (*v-tbn*); Otto Hardwicke (*alt, bs-sx, clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt, sop*); Barney Bigard (*clt, ten*); Ben Webster (*ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, clt, alt*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Fred Guy (*g*); Jimmy Blanton (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

Chicago, March 6, 1940
Jack the Bear Vic LPT–3017 *
Ko-Ko Vic LPM–1715

Chicago, March 15, 1940
Concerto for Cootie
Vic LPM–1715

Hollywood, May 4, 1940
Cotton Tail Vic LPM–1364
Never No Lament Vic 47–2955

Chicago, May 28, 1940
Dusk Vic LPM–1092
Bojangles Vic LPT–3017 *
A Portrait of Bert Williams
Vic LPM–1364

New York City, July 22, 1940
Harlem Air Shaft Vic LPM–1715

New York City, July 24, 1940

Sepia Panorama Vic LPM–1364

Chicago, September 5, 1940

In a Mellotone Vic LPM–1364

Chicago, October 28, 1940

Across the Track Blues
Vic LPM–1715

JOHNNY HODGES AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

Cootie Williams (*tpt*); Lawrence Brown (*tbn*); Johnny Hodges (*alt*); Harry Carney (*bar*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Jimmy Blanton (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

Chicago, November 2, 1940

Day Dream Vic LPT–3000 *

REX STEWART AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

As for last Hodges group except Rex Stewart (*cnt*); Ben Webster (*ten*) replace Williams and Hodges.

Chicago, November 2, 1940

Mobile Bay "X" LX 3001 *

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

As previous full band personnel except Ray Nance (*tpt, vln*) replaces Williams. Chicago, December 28, 1940

Sidewalks of New York
Vic 47–2955 *

Hollywood, February 15, 1941

John Hardy's Wife Vic LPM–1092

Blue Serge Vic LPM–1364

Hollywood, June 26, 1941

I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good [1]
Vic LPM–1364

[1] vocal by Ivie Anderson.

REX STEWART AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

As for Stewart session of November 2, 1940.

Hollywood, July 3, 1941

Subtle Slough "X" LX–3001 *

JOHNNY HODGES AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

As for Hodges session of November 2, 1940 except Ray Nance (*tpt*) replaces Williams. Hollywood, July 3, 1941

Squaty Roo Vic LPT–3000 *

Things Ain't What They Used to Be
Vic LPT–3000 *

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

Previous full band personnel except Junior Raglin (*bs*) replaces Blanton. Chicago, January 21, 1942

Perdido Vic LPM–1364

Hollywood, June 26, 1942

Mainstem Vic LPM–1364

Shelton Hemphill, Taft Jordan, William 'Cat' Anderson (*tpt*); Ray Nance (*tpt, vln*); Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, Claude Jones (*tbn*); Otto Hardwicke (*alt, bs-sx, clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt, sop*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt, ten*); Al Sears (*ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, alt, clt*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Fred Guy (*g*); Junior Raglin (*bs*); Sonny Greer or Hillard Brown (*d*).

New York City, December 11, 1944

BLACK, BROWN AND BEIGE SUITE
Part 1 *Work Song* Vic LPM 1715
Part 2 *Come Sunday*
Vic LPM 1715

New York City, December 12, 1944

Part 3 *The Blues* Vic LPM–1715
Part 4 *Three Dances*
Vic LPM–1715

[1] vocal by Joya Sherrill.

Rex Stewart (*cnt*) added; Greer on *d*.

New York City, May 11, 1945

Caravan Vic LPT1004 *
Black and Tan Fantasy
Vic LPT1004 *

Shelton Hemphill, Francis Williams, Taft Jordan, Harold Baker, Cat Anderson (*tpt*); Ray Nance (*tpt, vln*); Joe

Nanton, Claude Jones, Lawrence Brown, Wilbur De Paris (*tbn*); Russell Procope (*alt, clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt, sop*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt, ten*); Al Sears (*ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, alt, clt*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Fred Guy (*g*); Oscar Pettiford (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

Hollywood, July 9, 1946

Rockabye River Vic 40–0134 *

Anderson and Nanton out.

New York City, October 23, 1946

Magenta Haze Mus 483 *

Anderson returns. New York City, November 25, 1946

Sultry Sunset Mus 466 *

Happy-Go-Lucky Local, Parts 1 and 2 Mus 461 *

Anderson out. New York City, December 11, 1946

Tulip or Turnip [1] Mus 483 *

[1] vocal by Ray Nance.

Wilbur Bascomb (*tpt*); Tyree Glenn (*tbn*) replace Jordan and De Paris. New York City, August 14, 1947

Hy'a Sue Co CL–6024 *

Lady of the Lavender Mist Co CL–6024 *

Baker out. New York City, October 6, 1947

Sultry Serenade (*How Could You Do a Thing Like That to Me*) Co 38363 *

Harold Baker (*tpt*); Wilbur De Paris (*tbn*) added.

New York City, November 10, 1947

Three Cent Stomp Co CL–6024 *

Lawrence Brown, Tyree Glenn (*tbn*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt*); Al Sears (*ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, clt*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Oscar Pettiford, Junior Raglin (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

New York City, December 22, 1947

On a Turquoise Cloud [1] Co CL–6024 *

[1] vocal by Kay Davis.

Harold Baker, Al Killian (*tpt*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt*); ohnny Hodges (*alt*); Harry Carney (*bar*); same *p*; 2 *s*; *d*. New York City, December 30, 1947

New York City Blues Co CL–6024 *

Harold Baker, Cat Anderson, Nelson Williams, Andrew Fats' Ford (*tpt*); Ray Nance (*tpt, vln*); Lawrence Brown, Quentin Jackson, Tyree Glenn (*tbn*); Russell Procope (*alt, clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt, sop*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt, ten*); Paul Gonsalves (*ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, clt*); Mercer Ellington (*fr-h*); Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn (*p*); Wendell Marshall (*bs*); Sonny Greer (*d*).

New York City, December 18, 1950

Mood Indigo [1] Co CL–825

Sophisticated Lady [1] Co CL–825

[1] vocal by Yvonne Lanauze.

New York City, December 19, 1950

The Tattooed Bride Co CL–825

Solitude Co CL–825

DUKE ELLINGTON AND THE CORONETS:

William 'Cat' Anderson (*tpt*); Juan Tizol (*v-tbn*); Willie Smith (*alt*); Paul Gonsalves (*ten*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Wendell Marshall (*bs*); Louis Bellson (*d*).

New York City, April 17, 1951

Cat Walk Mcr 1005 *

She Mcr 1007 *

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

As last personnel above plus Harold Baker, Nelson Williams, Fats Ford (*tpt*); Ray Nance (*tpt, vln*); Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman (*tbn*); Russell Procope (*alt, clt*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt, ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, clt*).

New York City, May 10, 1951

Fancy Dan Co 39428 *

V.I.P.'s Boogie Co 39670 *

Monologue [1] Co 39496 *

[1] Ellington (narrator) acc Hamilton, Procope, Carney (*clt*) only.

Clark Terry, Willie Cook, Dick Vance (*tpt*) replace Anderson, Ford and Nance. New York City, December 7, 1951

A Tone Parallel to Harlem
Co CL–848

Cat Anderson, Clark Terry, Willie Cook (*tpt*); Ray Nance (*tpt, vln*); Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman (*tbn*); Juan Tizol (*v-tbn*); Russell Procope (*alt, clt*); Hilton Jefferson (*alt*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt, ten*); Paul Gonsalves (*ten*); Harry Carney (*bar, clt*); Duke Ellington (*p*); Wendell Marshall (*bs*); Louis Bellson (*d*).

New York City, July 1, 1952

The Mooche Co CL–830

Tizol out; Rick Henderson (*alt*); Dave Black (*d*) replace Jefferson and Bellson. Chicago, December 29, 1953

Black and Tan Fantasy
Cap T–521

George Jean (*tbn*) added. Chicago, January 17, 1954

Happy-Go-Lucky Local
Cap T–521

Rockin' in Rhythm
Cap T–521

John Sanders (*v-tbn*); Johnny Hodges (*alt*); Jimmy Woode (*bs*); Sam Woodyard (*d*) replace Jean, Henderson, Marshall and Black. Chicago, February 7 and 8, 1956

East St. Louis Toodle-oo
Beth BCP–60

Creole Love Call Beth BCP–60

Stompy Jones Beth BCP–60

In a Mellotone Beth BCP–60

Newport, R. I., July 7, 1956

Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue
Co CL–934

Jeep's Blues Co CL–934

New York City, August 7, 1956

SUCH SWEET THUNDER (Figures in parenthesis indicate the order of the movements.)

Half the Fun (11) Co CL–1033

Sonnet for Caesar (2) Co CL–1033

JOHNNY HODGES AND THE ELLINGTON ALL STARS:

Clark Terry (*tpt*); Ray Nance (*tpt, vln*); Quentin Jackson (*tbn*); Jimmy Hamilton (*clt*); Johnny Hodges (*alt*); Harry Carney (*bar*); Billy Strayhorn (*p*); Jimmy Woode (*bs*); Sam Woodyard (*d*). New York City, October 1956

Meet Mr. Rabbit Vrv MGV–8203

Duke's in Bed Vrv MGV–8203

Black and Tan Fantasy Vrv MGV–8203

Take the 'A' Train Vrv MGV–8203

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

Previous full band personnel. New York City, April 15, 1957

SUCH SWEET THUNDER

Sonnet in Search of a Moor (5) Co CL–1033

Sonnet for Sister Kate (8) Co CL–1033

New York City, April 24, 1957

Such Sweet Thunder (1) Co CL–1033

Lady Mac (4) Co CL–1033

Up and Down (7) Co CL–1033

New York City, May 3, 1957

Sonnet to Hank Cinq (3) Co CL–1033

The Telecasters (6) Co CL–1033

The Star-Crossed Lovers (9) Co CL–1033

Madness in Great Ones (10)
Co CL–1033
Circle of Fourths (12)
Co CL–1033

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carey, Dave and McCarthy, Albert J., *Jazz Directory*, Volume Three (E.F.G.), The Delphic Press, Fordingbridge and Cassell & Co. Ltd., London, 1951.

Finkelstein, Sidney, *Jazz: A People's Music*, The Citadel Press, New York, 1948. See Chapter 6, 'The Experimental Laboratory and the New Jazz'.

Gammond, Peter (Editor), *Duke Ellington: His Life and Music*, Phoenix House, London, 1958.

Hentoff, Nat and Shapiro, Nat (Editors), *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, Peter Davies, London, 1955. See Chapter 13, 'Ellington plays the piano, but his real instrument is his band', and other references.

Hentoff, Nat and Shapiro, Nat (Editors), *The Jazz Makers*, Peter Davies, London, 1958. See Chapter 13, 'Duke Ellington' by Leonard Feather.

Hodier, Andre, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1956. See Chapter 6, 'A Masterpiece: Concerto for Cootie'.

Ulanov, Barry, *Duke Ellington*, Musicians Press, London, 1947.