



## DUKE ELLINGTON AT BIRDLAND - 1952

### (a) DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Cat Anderson, Clark Terry, Willie Cook (tp), Ray Nance (tp,v,vo), Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman, Juan Tizol (tb), Jimmy Hamilton (cl,ts), Hilton Jefferson (as), Russell Procope (as,cl), Paul Gonsalves (ts), Harry Carney (bs,b-cl), Duke Ellington (p,narration), Wendell Marshall (b), Louis Bellson (d), Betty Roche, Jimmy Grissom (vo).

"Birdland", New York City, November 20, 1952.

(b) As for (a), but recorded "Birdland", New York City, November 24, 1952.

1. TAKE THE A TRAIN (Strayhorn) (a)	1:16
2. THE MOOCHE (Ellington, Mills) (a)	5:31
3. HOW HIGH THE MOON (Lewis, Hamilton) (a)	5:38
4. THE TATTOOED BRIDE (Ellington) (a)	6:25
5. Medley: (a)	
SOLITUDE (De Lange, Ellington, Mills)/LULLABY OF BIRDLAND (Shearing)	5:33
6. TAKE THE A TRAIN (Strayhorn) (a)	1:04
7. LULLABY OF BIRDLAND (Shearing) (a)	3:13
8. TAKE THE A TRAIN (Strayhorn) (a)	3:24
9. PERDIDO (Tizol) (a)	5:07
10. Leonard Feather (spoken introduction) (a)	1:18
11. MONOLOGUE (Ellington) (a)	3:16
12. THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE (Mercer Ellington) (a)	7:08
13. TAKE THE A TRAIN (Strayhorn) (b)	1:45
14. CARAVAN (Ellington, Mills, Tizol) (b)	3:43
15. DO NOTHIN' TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME (Ellington, Russell) (b)	2:11
16. C JAM BLUES (Ellington) (b)	4:35
17. CREOLE LOVE CALL (Ellington, Miley, Jackson) (b)	3:49
18. JUST SQUEEZE ME (Ellington, Gaines) (b)	3:47
19. TAKE THE A TRAIN (Strayhorn) (b)	3:27
20. LULLABY OF BIRDLAND (Shearing) (b)	1:21

Notes: Alun Morgan.

Photo: Courtesy Rolf Dahlgren.

Layout: Chris Olesen.

Produced for CD release:

Karl Emil Knudsen.

Printed in Denmark.

TOTAL TIME 73:34

When Duke Ellington was playing at Birdland, the self-styled "jazz corner of the world" on Broadway and 52nd. Street at the end of 1952, the National Broadcasting Company decided to celebrate Duke's 25 years as a band leader with a series of "Silver Jubilee" broadcasts from the club. In fact it was a celebration of the most important turning point in Ellington's career, his successful auditioning for the job of providing the music at the Cotton Club. Years later Duke recalled that day back in 1927: "four or five bands were auditioned for the job. Everybody should have been there at noon, but we didn't get there until 3 o'clock. I was running around scraping up the rest of the guys. We only had a six-piece band at the time instead of the eleven that the Cotton Club wanted. But we got the job! And the reason we got it was because Harry Block, the guy who said 'yes' or 'no', he was late too, so he didn't hear any of the other bands. So that's how the thing came about. Good luck is being at the right place at the right time, doing the right thing before the right people". Duke started at the Cotton Club on the 4th. December, 1927. "The waiters were betting two to one that we wouldn't be there for three days, or something like that" he recalled, "but we stayed there for five years!"

By the time he celebrated his Silver Jubilee at Birdland Ellington had become recognised not only as an international figure in the world of jazz but as one of America's most important and original composers of the Twentieth Century. The unique sound of his orchestra came about through the highly individual voices of the players, men such as Arthur Whetsol, Cootie Williams, Tricky Sam Nanton, Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster and Jimmy Blanton. None of these was in the band for the Birdland booking; Blanton, Whetsol and Nanton were dead, the other three had left to carve out careers for themselves as band leaders in their own right. In fact Hodges, who joined Duke in May, 1928 shortly after the Cotton Club opening, had left Duke 18 months before the Birdland engagement to lead his own small band. His departure gave Ellington the impetus to refurbish his orchestra and he enticed three important men away from Harry James band, an event which later became known as the "Great



James Robbery". Willie Smith took over the leadership of the sax section and the featured alto role, trombonist Juan Tizol (who had been with Duke from 1929 to 1944) came back into the brass team and Louis Bellson occupied the drum stool after a succession of short-stay percussionists (including Philly Joe Jones). By the end of 1952 Smith's place had been taken by another outstanding alto saxist, Hilton Jefferson. ("Jeff's got a helluva sound!" enthused Duke when Hilton came into the band in April, 1952.) The month after the Birdland booking Duke did his last recordings for Columbia before signing up with Capitol in April, 1953. His star was again in the ascendant and he had more than regained some of the popularity he had lost right at the end of the Forties.

The music is presented here as it was played at Birdland complete with a "station break" in the middle of the November 20th. transmission (which accounts for two versions of *Take the A Train* and *Lullaby Of Birdland* occurring in close proximity). After the signature the band segues into *The Mooche*, a tune which goes back to the Cotton Club days. (Duke's first recording of it was in October, 1928.) Dramatic as always, *The Mooche* has some atmospheric clarinet work from both Russell Procope (the more prominent of the two) and Jimmy Hamilton; Quentin Jackson plays the wa-wa muted trombone solo and Ray Nance's trumpet is heard in the theme statements. *How High The Moon* may have been chosen as a salute to the groups normally to be found at Birdland. In fact the Ellington band does not play the *Moon* melody but launches straight into Benny Harris's tune based on the same chords, *Ornithology*. Duke then Paul Gonsalves solo followed by the two choruses of "fours" by trumpeters Ray Nance, Clark Terry and Willie Cook (in that order); Jimmy Hamilton (clarinet), Britt Woodman, Louis Bellson and Gonsalves again are heard before the end. Ellington premiered *The Tattooed Bride* at a Carnegie Hall concert in November, 1948 and recorded it in the studio two years later for the "Masterpieces By Duke Ellington" album, his first twelve-inch LP. At Birdland Duke played only the second part (a feature for Jimmy Hamilton's clarinet) of the work, an attractive piece which seems to bear little connexion, musically, to the story Ellington claimed

he was portraying. Duke sets the scene for Jimmy Grissom's vocal version of *Solitude*, a popular number since it was first recorded in 1934. Grissom was the Ellington male vocalist from December, 1951 up to March, 1958. The female singer was Betty Roche, a fine vocalist who was never well represented on record when one considers the length of her service with the band (August, 1942 to April, 1944 and again from December, 1951 to February, 1953). One of the reasons was that her first stint with the Duke coincided almost exactly with a recording ban in America. Here she can be heard in all her glory on three vocal choruses taking up the major part of the long version of *Take The A Train*. Immediately prior to that the band plays a three and a half chorus version of George Shearing's tune dedicated to the "jazz corner of the world" and recorded by the Shearing Quintet for the first time in July, 1952. *Lullaby Of Birdland* uses the chord sequence of the tune *Love Me Or Leave Me* and the soloists here are Paul Gonsalves and Clark Terry (with Cat Anderson joining in the high notes at the end of Clark's solo). *Perdido* became Clark Terry's property when he joined the band in 1951 (he was to remain for eight years); apart from Ray Nance, who is heard in the middle-eight of the first chorus, this is a showcase for Clark's highly individual and expressive trumpet. He was surely one of the greatest of all trumpeters to work with any Ellington unit. *Monologue* is the first part of the three-part *Monologue, Duet* and *Threesome* but the third part got retitled *VIP's Boogie*. *Monologue* was also sometimes called *Pretty And The Wolf* but whatever the name, it remains a very amusing and philosophical piece; there seems to be a world of experience built into Duke's final pronouncement of "yes baby, yes baby!". The final *Things Ain't What They Used To Be* has a string of solos from Russell Procope, Willie Cook, Britt Woodman and Paul Gonsalves before the transmission fades out but over the top of the music comes evidence of the social occasion which the Birdland booking had become. Present that night were Skitch Henderson and his wife, jazz personalities Steve Allen and Al 'Jazzbo' Collins, pianist Noro Morales and doubtless many more who were prevented by time restrictions from adding their good wishes to the Duke.

The "Silver Jubilee" broadcasts from Birdland continued and this compact disc contains the CBS transmission four nights later, opening as always with Billy Strayhorn's *Take The A Train* (with Ray Nance on trumpet) then moving into Juan Tizol's *Caravan*. Nance switches to violin and Jimmy Hamilton's clarinet obbligato to Tizol's trombone solo adds to the mysterious atmosphere. An unidentified musician adds some additional percussion effects. Jimmy Grissom recalls Al Hibbler with his one-chorus vocal on *Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me* then Duke takes over the microphone to tell us the names of the soloists on *C Jam Blues* (Nance on violin, Willie Cook, Paul Gonsalves, Quentin Jackson and Jimmy Hamilton). Duke first recorded *Creole Love Call* (with Adelaide Hall) a few weeks before he started work at the Cotton Club in 1927 and it was to remain in the Ellington library right up to the end. Here it is Willie Cook on muted trumpet in the opening two choruses (and listen out for Harry Carney's bass-clarinet as part of the accompaniment in the second) then a snarling, heated Ray Nance and finally Russell Procope's clarinet. Duke acknowledges the presence in the audience of Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Hodges before dedicating *Squeeze Me* (a feature for Ray Nance on trumpet and vocal) to Mrs. Hodges. Betty Roche repeats her unique version of *Take The A Train* (with the band joining in the vocals) before the transmission is faded out during *Lullaby Of Birdland*.

We are fortunate that Duke was able to go on creating superb music and leading his fine orchestra for more than 21 years after celebrating his "Silver Jubilee" at Birdland. (He died on May 24, 1974.) It was not just luck that caused him to be in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing before the right people; a lot of it was simply pure genius.

ALUN MORGAN  
(February, 1993)



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