

The album was recorded in the sessions described in the original liner notes which follow. Two of the tracks that appear here- "Fillie Trillie" and "Satin Doll"---were part of the same recording sessions, but were not included on the album originally released, thus are not discussed in the notes that follow.

The album began as a single recording session during which we intended to record three or four of Duke's recent compositions for release sometime in the future. It began early one afternoon in February when the band arrived back in New York from a long stay in Florida, and before we even began, the session was turning into a welcome-home party for Duke. Dozens of fans appeared in the studio, among them Dizzy Gillespie (with trumpet) and Jimmy Rushing, who likes to listen to big bands, and Jimmy Jones, who just happened to be passing by. As the crowd gathered Duke was on the phone calling his group of nine percussionists, and the studio lobby was filling up with kettle drums and xylophones. Chairs were set up for our unexpected audience, and Duke, with the innocent expression of a small boy who has just dropped a match into a gas tank, said, "Let's see what happens:"

Last summer, between jazz festivals, Ellington introduced at New York's Lewisohn Stadium one of the dizzier flights of musical fancy in his long career. From the city's symphonic musicians he drew nine men to play a couple of short pieces written to feature a full set of tympani and a line of vibraphones and marimbas and xylophones long enough to stretch from one side of the large stage to the other. These two pieces, never played since and never titled, were enthusiastically received at Lewisohn, and the percussionists, suddenly liberated from the Fifth Symphony, had a ball. The first piece, "Malletoba Spank," opens our Ellington Jazz Party with a beat and a sound you won't believe until you hear it. If you're listening stereophonically, maybe the best thing to do is to tell you that, from left to right, you are hearing a vibraphone, a xylophone, another vibraphone, another xylophone, a glockenspiel and a marimba, surrounded on one side by the full Ellington band and on the other by an assortment of kettle drums, bongos, a tamborine, and a triangle.

The next four titles constitute a suite Duke wrote during the festival season last year, too late for us to record it before he went to Europe. He calls it Toot Suite and proceeds to play one of the great, driving performances of his career as the band builds section upon section of this four-part suite. The first part is called "Red Garter," and in addition to providing a wild opening section, it features Britt Woodman on trombone. "Red Shoes" follows, continuing the surging force of this music and featuring Jimmy Hamilton on clarinet and Shorty Baker on trumpet. The next section, called "Red Carpet," is itself divided into three sections, principally because its featured soloists drew so much applause we had to stop recording and begin again. The first is Russell Procope, playing a soft, imaginative clarinet solo. Procope discovered a broken key on his clarinet and did his best to avoid using it during the solo until Duke found out what was happening. The boss liked the click of the broken key and asked Procope to end his solo on that

key. It is what Duke calls making use of all available material. The Ellington sax section takes it up next, driving smoothly to Quentin "Butter" Jackson, who offers one of his more inspired and suffering plunger solos on trombone. The final portion of "Red Carpet" is a walking riff beginning softly and winding up with the great band sound, while Ray Nance comments, trumpet in hat, in all the right places.

The final section of the suite is called "Ready, Go!" It begins lightly and at a tempo that has come to mean Paul Gonsalves to Ellington fans. The marathon tenor-sax soloist takes off for what turns out to be his greatest solo moment on records, helped by the long and incredibly timed buildup by the band, which joins section by section to carry Paul along chorus after chorus. At the end of the suite it was clear to us all that this was one of the Ellington band's great performances. We decided to stay all night.

Duke and Diz are united by a mutual regard for each other and a mutual disregard for the more stone-faced brands of jazz. It was time to unite them in performance, and after a period of searching, Ellington found all the parts to one of his originals called "U.M.M.G.," standing for Upper Manhattan Medical Group and dedicated to Dr. Arthur Logan, who was there to hear it recorded. Dizzy learned the piece in no time and led off with an exciting, muted solo. After the full band section, Gillespie returns on open horn this time, and the historic performance ends again with Diz quietly tickling the microphone with his upswept trumpet.

As Duke often says midway in a jazz concert, "It's time for Johnny Hodges." And the familiar "All of Me" is one of the most requested numbers in the Ellington-Hodges book. They had never recorded it before, and nothing else need be said.

Back to the percussionists for the next number, and a title Duke thought of the next morning- "Tymperturbably Blue:" A row of nine tympani was set up to offer stereo fans the unique experience of hearing the full musical scale stretching across the sound spectrum, exploding an Ellington melody in a way you've never heard before. The piece begins with six brass stabs, after which Jimmy Woode brings on the tympani. The swinging xylophone section is not forgotten either, and Jimmy Hamilton solos on clarinet as the figure jumps back and forth. The finale starts with eight brass chords, and, as Duke points here and there among the group, a few last words come from the percussionists. Sam Woodyard, who is Duke's own percussion section, sets a swinging cymbal rhythm.

There was time for one more number. Duke asked Jimmy Jones to sit in on piano, he called for blues he wrote called "Hello Little Girl," and Jimmy Rushing, who knows a few blues choruses himself, came over to clap his hands and set the tempo. Jones and the rhythm section began, with Ellington standing in the center of everything like a traffic cop at a busy intersection, pointing to first one and then another of the members of the party. Rushing comes

on after Jimmy Jones, singing chorus after chorus without even hesitating over a lyric. Next, Dizzy Gillespie follows the wild ensemble with wonderful flights of blues, and for succeeding choruses Duke points to one after the other, until the final all-out last chorus where he simply holds both hands above his head and struts.

We'd been there for eight hours, and it was time to go home. What had started out as an Ellington recording session wound up as a jazz festival, held, fortunately, in a room full of microphones.

It is sufficient for an annotator of jazz albums to provide information not always clear in the music, and it is hoped that he will restrain himself from offering superfluous opinion. If you will forgive me, I would like to add, finally, and in a small voice, an opinion!

It turned out to be the most exciting album of jazz I've ever heard.

Irving Townsend

Produced by Irving Townsend

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