

Record Reviews

Records are reviewed by Chris Albertson, Don DeMicheal, Gilbert M. Erskine, Ira Gitler, Alan Heineman, Wayne Jones, Lawrence Kart, John Litweiler, John McDonough, Dan Morgenstern, Don Nelsen, Harvey Pekar, Harvey Siders, Carol Sloane, Jim Szantor, and Pete Welding.

Reviews are signed by the writers.

Ratings are: ★★★★★ excellent, ★★★★ very good, ★★★ good, ★★ fair, ★ poor.

When two catalog numbers are listed, the first is mono, and the second is stereo.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW

Duke Ellington

70TH BIRTHDAY CONCERT—Solid State SS-19000: *Rockin' In Rhythm*; *B.P.*; *Take the "A" Train*; *Tootie For Cootie*; *4:30 Blues*; *El Gato*; *Black Butterfly*; *Things Ain't What They Used to Be*; *Laying On Mellow*; *Satin Doll*; *Azure Te*; *In Triplicate*; *Perdido*; *Fife*; *Medley*: (*Prelude to a Kiss*; *I'm Just a Lucky So-And-So*; *I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart*; *Do Nothin' Till You Hear from Me*; *Just Squeeze Me*; *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*; *Mood Indigo*; *Sophisticated Lady*; *Caravan*); *Black Swan*; *Final Ellington Speech*.

Personnel: Cat Anderson, Cootie Williams, Rolf Ericson, Mercer Ellington, trumpet, flugelhorn; Lawrence Brown, Chuck Connors, trombone; Russell Procope, Johnny Hodges, Norris Turney, Harold Ashby, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, reeds; Wild Bill Davis, organ; Ellington, piano; Victor Gaskin, bass; Rufus (Speedy) Jones, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

This double album, sold at a special 2-for-1 price and containing an hour and a half of mostly superb music, is one of the outstanding releases of recent times.

Recorded live in Manchester, England in November of last year, it captures the full musical flavor of an in-person performance by the greatest band in the world. The tour during which it was taped was a grueling one, but nobody sounds tired.

Already, the album is a historic document. This particular Ellington band will never be duplicated. Johnny Hodges is gone. (By good fortune, he is well featured here.) Lawrence Brown left after the tour's end, as did Vic Gaskin. Alumnus Rolf Ericson was a temporary replacement in the trumpet section. And there were only two trombones, a shortage for which Ellington compensated by having sixth reedman Norris Turney, a most valuable addition, sit in the section and play trombone parts.

Along with such familiar fare as the *Medley* (never before commercially recorded at such length, yet incomplete—Paul Gonsalves' *In A Sentimental Mood*, one of the highlights, is missing, though the tune is hinted at in Duke's kaleidoscopic piano introduction); *A Train*, *El Gato*, and a great *Things Ain't*, there are new versions of old favorites (*Satin Doll* now features Wild Bill Davis and a sensational Cat Anderson rideout), and several "firsts."

Among the latter: *B. P.*, a jaunty vehicle for Harold Ashby's pleasant, Websterish tenor; *4:30 Blues*, a fine, brooding piece with clarinets in trio and solo (Russell Procope in splendid form); *Laying On Mellow*, well described by its title, and featuring Hodges at a delicious middle tempo, at length and with strength, including a startling swoop unlike anything he ever played; *In Triplicate*, a rousing tenor battle between (in that order) Gon-

salves, Ashby, and Turney, with Paul the winner but Ash and Norris (who plays a booting, jump-styled tenor) holding their own; *Fife* (mis-labeled *Fifi*), a charming bit of whimsy featuring Turney's tasteful, pretty and witty flute; and *Black Swan*, featuring Davis (a new color), Ellington, Gaskin, Jones, and Turney (again on flute; again very good).

Not as new but previously unrecorded is *Tootie for Cootie*, its star in fine fettle. There are echoes of *Echoes of Harlem*, Cootie's very special time, and a superb, Armstrong-tinged cadenza, as fine as the one on *A Train*. Also not new but new to the band is Davis' *Azure Te* (mis-labeled *Azure*, which is a vintage Ellington piece), showcasing the composer and blessed Johnny Hodges. And a highlight of the entire program is *Black Butterfly*, a 1938 masterpiece revived to feature Hodges, who caresses the lovely melody in four and a half minutes of joy and beauty. (Is the brief clarinet solo by Ash or Turney? I think the latter.)

Perdido spotlights Ericson, whose sly, boppish approach sometimes reminds of Clark Terry, whose feature it once was. *Rockin'* is a boss opener, played with fire and drive—the kind of thing most bands would save for a climax—but then, this is the band that starts where most others leave off.

Brown has only two solos: some plunger stuff on *Rockin'*—which utilizes this color, seemingly discarded by all but Duke, who after all helped to invent it, in a manner not the least "dated"—and *Do Nothin'* in the *Medley*. Ironic that this warhorse should be his swan song.

The piano player is amply featured in the *Medley*, on *Rockin'*, *Train*, and elsewhere. This is also a great record for ascertaining just how big a part Duke's piano (and vocal cues) plays in pacing and shaping a performance. What a master at setting the right tempo he is! And quite a piano player.

Nothing is perfect, and we do regret that Harry Carney is heard only on the *Medley* (*Sophisticated Lady*—she doesn't wither) and *Rockin'* (on clarinet, which doesn't really count), and Gonsalves only on *Triplicate* (without a Gonsalves ballad, something is missing). Also, the engineering (or mastering) overbalances the rhythm section, and while Rufus Jones is his usual solid, dependable self and Gaskin sounds fine, we don't need to hear it that well.

But why carp? There haven't been enough Ellington records lately. There can never be enough. Go get this music while you can.

—Morgenstern

Ginger Baker

GINGER BAKER'S AIR FORCE—Atco 2-703: *Da Da Man*; *Early in the Morning*; *Don't Care*; *Toad*; *Aiko Biaye*; *Man of Constant Sorrow*; *Do What You Like*; *Doin' It*.

Personnel: Chris Wood, Harold McNair, flute, tenor saxophone; Graham Bond, alto saxophone; Denny Laine, guitar, vocals; Steve Winwood, organ, vocals; Rich Grech, electric bass, amplified violin; Baker, Remi Kabaka, drums; Phil Seamen, percussion; Jeanette Jacobs, vocals.

Rating: ★★

Well, maybe if the recording was better, the Air Force would sound like a better band. As is, it takes Baker and Company two LP's to tell the same story: repeated riffs, with Bond or Wood or Laine or Winwood doing either avant garde (Bond) or funky (Winwood) things over the horribly muddy ensemble. And, oh yes: the drum solos, obligatory with Baker, on *Toad* and *Do What*. Dunno. Seems like he knows what he's doing, judging from *down beat* interview of April 16, but to these assaulted ears, it still sounds like *Sing Sing Sing*. And sing and sing and sing. . . .

Some interesting concepts in embryo here. *Da Da* is a hard rock line whose melody combines the flavor of a Turkish folk tune with Gospel overtones. *Early* has elements of Northeast Africa and of Louisiana voodoo in it. *Aiko* is basically a West African chant. But they just go on and on, and none of the soloists has enough originality to balance the heavy group playing, which, itself, is too sloppy to provide the requisite drive. Bond has a few moments in *Da Da*, playing free but in rhythm, but his screech work on *Doin' It* over the horn riff is utterly inane. Winwood plays some intriguing figures here and there, but between the flawed recording techniques and the sheer volume of the band, he can connect nothing with nothing.

The vocals are miserable. The words to *Don't Care*, sung by two or 10 of the band, are indiscernible. *Early's* singer was clearly recorded from within a drainpipe. And so on. Lots of talent in this band, but it needs a hell of a lot more woodshedding. And a new engineer.

—Heineman

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young

DEJA VU—Atlantic 7200: *Carry On*; *Teach Your Children*; *Almost Cut My Hair*; *Helpless*; *Woodstock*; *Deja Vu*; *Our House*; 4 + 20; *Country Girl* (medley); *Everybody I Love You*.

Personnel: Steve Stills, organ, guitar, vocals; David Crosby, guitar, vocals; Graham Nash, guitar, vocals; Neil Young, guitar, vocals; Greg Reeves, electric bass; Dallas Taylor, drums.

Rating: ★★

When C, S & N added Y, they made both a valuable expansion and a mistake. The trio had its own sound, an incredibly lovely sound. They write pretty tunes,