



black and tan fantasy

1.20

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Duke Ellington, piano; Bubber Miley, Louis Metcalf, trumpets; Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton, trombone; Otto Hardwick, Rudy Jackson, and Harry Carney, saxophones; Fred Guy, banjo; Wellman Braud, bass; Sonny Greer, drums

- Label: Victor 21137; *The Best of the Duke Ellington Centennial Edition* (RCA 63459)
- Date: 1927
- Style: early New York big band
- Form: 12-bar blues (with a contrasting 16-bar interlude)

What to listen for:

- the growling timbre of Ellington’s horns
- clash between blues harmony and contrasting pop-song material
- the expressive use of mutes by Miley (trumpet) and Nanton (trombone) in their solos
- Ellington’s stride piano

CHORUS 1 (12-bar blues)

0:00 Over a steady beat in the rhythm section, Miley (trumpet) and Nanton (trombone) play a simple, bluesy melody in the **minor mode**. The unusual sound they elicit from their tightly muted horns is an excellent example of **timbre variation**.

0:25 A cymbal crash signals the appearance of new material.

INTERLUDE (16 bars)

0:26 The harmonic progression suddenly changes with an unexpected chord that eventually turns to the **major mode**. The melody is played by Hardwick (alto saxophone) in a “sweet” style, with thick vibrato, a sultry tone, and exaggerated **glissandos**.

0:38 During a two-measure **break**, the band plays a **turnaround**—a complicated bit of chromatic harmony designed to connect one section with the next.

0:42 Repeat of the opening melody.

0:54 The horns play a series of chords, then stop. The drummer plays several strokes on the cymbal, muting the vibration with his free hand.

CHORUS 2

0:58 Over a major-mode blues progression, Miley takes a solo. For the first four bars, he restricts himself to a high, tightly muted note.

1:06 Miley plays expressive bluesy phrases, constantly changing the position of his **plunger mute** over the **pixie mute** to produce new sounds that seem eerily vocal (*wa-wa*).

CHORUS 3

1:23 Miley begins with a pair of phrases reaching upward to an expressive **blue note**.

1:25 The cymbal responds, as if in sympathy.

1:26 In the next phrase, Miley thickens the timbre by growling into his horn.

CHORUS 4

1:47 The band drops out while Ellington plays a cleverly arranged **stride piano** solo.

1:51 The left hand plays in **broken octaves**: the lower note of each octave anticipates the beat.

1:58 Ellington plays a striking **harmonic substitution**.

CHORUS 5

2:11 Nanton begins his solo on tightly muted trombone.

2:15 He loosens the plunger mute, increasing the volume and heightening the intensity of the unusual timbre.

2:27 Nanton precedes his last phrase with a bizarre gesture, sounding somewhere between insane laughter and a donkey’s whinny.

CHORUS 6

2:36 Miley returns for an explosive bluesy statement, featuring quick repeated notes. Each phrase is answered by a sharp accent from the rhythm section.

2:50 As the harmony changes, the band enters, reinforcing Miley's moan.

CODA

2:57 With Miley in the lead, the band ends by quoting Chopin's "Funeral March"—returning the piece to the minor mode.

Perhaps the quickest way to appreciate the amazing progress jazz made in the 1920s is to listen to “Black and Tan Fantasy” back-to-back with Jelly Roll Morton’s “Dead Man Blues,” which also involves a satiric fantasy that invokes death and was recorded the previous year. The differences between them exceed their key musical techniques—Morton’s polyphony and Ellington’s call and response. Far more significant is the difference in perspective. Morton’s piece looked back, celebrating the traditions from which he sprang. Ellington’s looked at the present in a provocative way that promised a vital future.

In the music of Ellington and other composers and instrumentalists who achieved success in the jazz world of Prohibition New York, we hear little deference to jazz’s Southern roots. Their music channeled the city’s cosmopolitanism: it’s smart, urban, fast moving, glittery, independent, and motivated. In liberating jazz from its roots, the Ellington generation is ready to take on everything the entertainment business and the world can throw at it. This sense of a second youth, of a new start, became a motive in the development of jazz, as each subsequent generation strove to remake it in its own image.

ADDITIONAL LISTENING

George Gershwin / Paul Whiteman	<i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> (1927) (Pristine Classical, MP3)
Bert Williams	“Nobody” (1906); <i>The Early Years: 1901–1909</i> (Archeophone 5004)
Art Hickman	“Rose Room” (1919); <i>Art Hickman’s Orchestra: The San Francisco Sound</i> , vol 1 (Archeophone 6003)
Paul Whiteman	“Whispering” (1920); <i>Paul Whiteman: Greatest Hits</i> (Collector’s Choice) “From Monday On” (1928); <i>Bix Restored</i> , vol. 2 (Origin Jazz Library BXCD 04-06)
Fletcher Henderson	“Dicty Blues” (1923); <i>Fletcher Henderson: 1923</i> (Classics 697) “King Porter Stomp” (1928); <i>Fletcher Henderson</i> (Columbia/Legacy 074646144725)
James P. Johnson	“Carolina Shout” (1921), “Keep Off the Grass” (1921), “Worried and Lonesome Blues” (1923); <i>James P. Johnson, 1921–1928</i> (Classics 658) “Charleston” (1924); <i>Carolina Shout</i> (Biograph BCD 105)
Duke Ellington	“East St. Louis Toodle-oo” (1926); <i>Early Ellington: The Complete Brunswick and Vocalion Recordings, 1926–1931</i> (GRP) “Creole Love Call” (1927); <i>Best of the Duke Ellington Centennial Edition: The Complete RCA Victor Recordings, 1927–1973</i> (RCA-Victor 63459)