

Across the Track Blues

BY DUKE ELLINGTON

Transcribed by David Berger for Jazz at Lincoln Center

FULL SCORE

This transcription was made especially for *Essentially Ellington* 2006:
The Eleventh Annual Jazz at Lincoln Center High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival

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NOTES ON PLAYING ELLINGTON

At least 95% of modern-day large ensemble jazz playing comes out of three traditions: Count Basie's band, Duke Ellington's band, and the orchestrations of small groups. Those young players interested in jazz will be drawn to small groups for the opportunity to improvise and for practical reasons (it is much easier to organize four or five people than it is 15). Schools have taken over the task (formerly performed by dance bands) of training musicians to be ensemble players. Due to the Basie Band's popularity and its simplicity of style and emphasis on blues and swing, the better educators have almost exclusively adopted this tradition for teaching jazz ensemble playing. As wonderful as Count Basie's style is, it doesn't address many of the important styles developed under the great musical umbrella we call jazz. Duke Ellington's comprehensive and eclectic approach to music offers an alternative.

The stylistic richness of Ellington's music presents a great challenge to educators and performers alike. In Basie's music, the conventions are very nearly consistent. In Ellington's, there are many more exceptions to the rules. This calls for greater knowledge of the language of jazz. Clark Terry, who left Count Basie's band to join Duke Ellington, said, "Count Basie was college, but Duke Ellington was graduate school." Knowledge of Ellington's music prepares you to play any big band music.

The following is a list of performance conventions for the great majority of Ellington's music. Any deviations or additions will be spelled out in the individual performance notes that follow.

1. Listen carefully many times to the Ellington recording of these pieces. There are many subtleties that will elude even the most sophisticated listener at first. Although it was never Ellington's wish to have his recordings imitated, knowledge of these definitive versions will lead musicians to make more educated choices when creating new performances. Ellington's music, though written for specific individuals, is designed to inspire all musicians to express themselves. In addition, you will hear slight note differences in the recording and the transcriptions. This is intentional, since there are mistakes and alterations from the original intent of the music in the recording. You should have your players play what's in the score.
2. General use of swing phrasing: The triplet feel prevails except for ballads or where notations such as even eighths or Latin appear. In these cases, eighth notes are given equal value.
3. There is a chain of command in ensemble playing. The lead players in each section determine the phrasing and volume for their own section, and their section-mates must conform to the lead. When the saxes and /or trombones play with the trumpets,

the lead trumpet is the boss. The lead alto and trombone must listen to the first trumpet and follow him. In turn, the other saxes and trombones must follow their lead players. When the clarinet leads the brass section, the brass should not overblow him. That means that the first trumpet is actually playing "second." If this is done effectively, there will be very little balancing work left for the conductor.

4. In Ellington's music, each player should express the individuality of his own line. He must find a musical balance of supporting and following the section leader and bringing out the character of the underpart. Each player should be encouraged to express his or her personality through the music. In this music, the underparts are played at the same volume and with the same conviction as the lead.
5. Blues inflection should permeate all parts at all times, not just when these opportunities occur in the lead.
6. Vibrato is used quite a bit to warm up the sound. Saxes (who most frequently represent the sensual side of things) usually employ a heavy vibrato on harmonized passages and a slight vibrato on unisons. Trumpets (who very often are used for heat and power) use a little vibrato on harmonized passages and no vibrato on unisons. Trombones (who are usually noble) do not use slide vibrato. A little lip vibrato is good at times. Try to match the speed of vibrato. Unisons are played with no vibrato.
7. Crescendo as you ascend and diminuendo as you descend. The upper notes of phrases receive a natural accent and the lower notes are ghosted. Alto and tenor saxophones need to use sub-tone in the lower part of their range in order to blend properly with the rest of the section. This music was originally written with no dynamics. It pretty much follows the natural tendencies of the instruments; play loud in the loud part of the instrument and soft in the soft part of the instrument. For instance, a high C for a trumpet will be loud and a low C will be soft.
8. Quarter notes are generally played short unless otherwise notated. Long marks above or below a pitch indicate full value: not just long, but full value. Eighth notes are played full value except when followed by a rest or otherwise notated. All notes longer than a quarter note are played full value, which means if it is followed by a rest, release the note where the rest appears. For example, a half note occurring on beat 1 of a measure would be released on beat 3.
9. Unless they are part of a legato background figure, long notes should be played somewhat *fp*; accent and then diminish the volume. This is important so that the moving parts can be heard over the sustained notes. Don't just hold out the long notes, but give them life and personality: that is, vibrato, inflection,

crescendo, or diminuendo. There is a great deal of inflection in this music, and much of this is highly interpretive. Straight or curved lines imply non-pitched glisses, and wavy lines mean scalar (chromatic or diatonic) glisses. In general, all rhythmic figures need to be accented. Accents give the music life and swing. This is very important.

10. Ellington's music is about individuality: one person per part—do not double up because you have extra players or need more strength. More than one on a part makes it sound more like a concert band and less like a jazz band.
11. This is acoustic music. Keep amplification to an absolute minimum; in the best halls, almost no amplification should be necessary. Everyone needs to develop a big sound. It is the conductor's job to balance the band. When a guitar is used, it should be a hollow-body, unamplified rhythm guitar. Simple three-note voicings should be used throughout. An acoustic string bass is a must. In mediocre or poorly designed halls, the bass and piano may need a bit of a boost. I recommend miking them and putting them through the house sound system. This should provide a much better tone than an amplifier. Keep in mind that the rhythm section's primary function is to accompany. The bass should not be as loud as a trumpet. That is unnatural and leads to over-amplification, bad tone, and limited dynamics. Stay away from monitors. They provide a false sense of balance.
12. Solos and rhythm section parts without chord changes should be played as is or with a little embellishment. Solos and rhythm section parts with chord changes should be improvised. However, written passages should be learned because they are an important part of our jazz heritage and help the player understand the function of his particular solo or accompaniment. Soloists should learn the chord changes. Solos should not be approached as opportunities to show off technique, range, or volume, but should be looked at as a great opportunity to further develop the interesting thematic material that Ellington has provided.
13. The notation of plungers for the brass means a rubber toilet plunger bought in a hardware store. Kirkhill is a very good brand (especially if you can find one of their old rubber ones, like the one I loaned Wynton and he lost). Trumpets use 5" diameter and trombones use 6" diameter. Where Plunger/Mute is notated, insert a pixie mute in the bell and use the plunger over the mute. Pixies are available from Humes & Berg in Chicago. "Tricky Sam" Nanton and his successors in the Ellington plunger trombone chair did not use pixies. Rather, each of them employed a Nonpareil (that's the brand name) trumpet straight mute. Nonpareil has gone out of business, but the Tom Crown Nonpareil trumpet straight mute is very close to the same thing. These mutes create a wonderful sound (very close to the human voice),

ACROSS THE TRACK BLUES

INSTRUMENTATION:

Reed 1 - Alto Sax	Trombone 1
Reed 2 - Alto Sax	Trombone 2
Reed 3 - Clarinet	Trombone 3
Reed 4 - Tenor Sax	Guitar
Reed 5 - Baritone Sax	Piano
Trumpet 1	Bass
Trumpet 2	Drums
Trumpet 3	

ORIGINAL RECORDING INFORMATION:

Composer: Duke Ellington
Arranger: Duke Ellington
Recorded: October 28, 1940 in Chicago
Time: 3:01
Master Number: BS-053579-1
Original Issue: Victor 27235

Currently Available on CD:
Never No Lament: The Blanton-Webster Band, 1940-1942
RCA Victor Bluebird
82876 50857-2

Personnel: Duke Ellington, piano; Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Joe Nanton, Lawrence Brown, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Barney Bigard, Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick, Ben Webster, Harry Carney, reeds; Fred Guy, guitar; Jimmy Blanton, bass; Sonny Greer, drums.

Soloists: Barney Bigard, clarinet; Rex Stewart, cornet; Lawrence Brown, trombone.

—Clifford Priess, Jazz at Lincoln Center

REHEARSAL NOTES:

- The blues is the heart and soul of jazz, and no one loved the blues more or was more creative with the blues than Duke Ellington. *Across The Track Blues* dates from 1940, a highly prolific and creative period for Ellington. It's hard to imagine a more simple arrangement, and yet it's so expressive and inviting for everyone in the band to contribute from deep within himself or herself.
- After a 4-bar introduction, there are 5 choruses of blues in D. The fifth chorus ends 2 bars early and the 4-bar intro is repeated as a coda. There are three horn sections in the band: saxes, trumpets and trombones. Each gets a chance at a soli chorus. The trumpet and trombone solis serve as call and response with soloists.

- The reason this piece is pitched in D major is to utilize the lowest note on the clarinet (low D concert—his/her low E). Although this is an unusual key for jazz, it will come as welcome relief to the bassist who will have lots of open strings so he /she can relax the left hand a bit.
- The clarinet starts and ends this piece with Duke's melody. It is simple. Barney Bigard embellishes it a bit on the original recording but maintains its essence as well as the call and response and points where it needs to coordinate with the trumpets (**E8** and **E9**). The use of the chalumeaux register is crucial to the arc of the arrangement. Bigard played an Albert system clarinet in the tradition of the New Orleans clarinetists he grew up with. His low, dark, woody sound is a nice contrast to Ellington's comping figures at the top of the treble clef. Notice the call and response structure. The pianist should gauge his/her volume at A to the level of the clarinet—which will probably mean to play a bit softer than he/she did at the beginning.
- The trombone figures at **B** are about slipping and sliding and personality. Again notice how Rex Stewart's cornet solo keeps the call and response going. His tightly closed plunger over the French straight mute (pixie) gets a very pinched and intense sound, which provides a distinct contrast to the warm open trombone backgrounds.
- The reed soli at **C** is written in 5-part harmony. Each player has his/her own note. The saxes must be careful to play up to the clarinet, but not overblow him/her. Vibrato is called for on the long notes—or as the Maestro would say, "Give me some personality." All five parts are melodic and should be played with conviction and integrity as if it were the lead part—actually this concept goes for all of Ellington's music.
- Notice how on the third bar of the trombone solo at **D**, Lawrence Brown ignores the half-step sliding E^b9 in the saxes and rhythm and just stays with the tonic D chord. His A and B created nice tensions against the E^b9 harmony (+11 and +5) while giving the line continuity. Sometimes it is nice to state the substitutions in a solo, and sometimes it is nice to ignore them. Either way, the saxes need to play softly to create a pad for the solo.
- The plunger-muted trumpets need to get nasty in their call and response with the clarinet melody. Using the French straight mute (pixie) inside the plunger will assure a more pinched sound and better pitch and control.
- The drummer should stay on brushes throughout so that the soft colors of the low register clarinet and muted brass will be in focus. The chords are provided for the bassist so he can construct his own line. Jimmy Blanton, the father of modern bass playing, was the bassist on the original recording. Study of his realization of the bass part is de rigeur for all bassists.
- This chart is really a framework for soloists, and yet it provides just enough atmosphere and structure to inspire all the musicians. Ellington said his role was to create settings that would inspire soloists to be great. Nowhere is this more evident.

—David Berger

COMMENTS FROM WYNTON MARSALIS:

Across the Track Blues is an excellent example of how blues harmonies can appropriate the sound of a train—a familiar use of onomatopoeia in jazz music. Be aware of the train sound metaphors. You should embrace the steady, calm, relaxed swing in Ellington's logical arrangement while listening to each other constantly. The bass should have a big sound, but listen to the drums. Reeds and muted brass should take on a real vocal quality in their sound. The clarinet should sound like the old New Orleans clarinetists—full, round, and smoky. Keep the tempo steady and the ensemble sections uniform and crisp.

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CONDUCTOR

Jazz at Lincoln Center Library - Essentially Ellington
ACROSS THE TRACK BLUES

Music by Duke Ellington
 Transcribed by David Berger

Slow swing ♩ = 88
 Alto Sax

[A]

Reeds 1 Alto Sax

2 Alto Sax

3 Clarinet

4 Tenor Sax

5 Baritone Sax

Trumpets 1

2

3

Trombones 1

2

3

Guitar

Piano

Bass

Drums

Solo

Brushes

Cr.

mf

3

D G7 A7 D G7 A7 D G7 A7 D D7

D G7 A7 D G7 A7 D G7 A7 D D7

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Across the Track Blues

Alto

Alto

Cl.

Tenor

Bari.

Tpt. 1

2

3

Tbn. 1

2

3

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

Drs.

Solo - Closed plunger w/mute

mf

mf

mf

f

G7 D D#° A9 E9 A9 D

G7 D D#° A9 E9 A9 D F

G7 D D#° A7 D

Across the Track Blues

3

[B]

Alto

Alto

Cl.

Tenor

Bari.

Tpt. 1

2

3

E E7 A Am E

Tbn. 1

2

3

D F D F G A D G D7 G Gm D

Gtr.

Pno.

D D7 G Gm D

Bass

D D7 G Gm D

Drs.

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Across the Track Blues

Score for "Across the Track Blues" (JLCM05001C). The score is written for a 12-piece band, including Alto, Cl., Tenor, Bari., Tpt. 1 & 2, Tbn. 1 & 2, Gtr., Pno., Bass, and Drs. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with a "C" time signature, indicating common time.

The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 1 through 8, and the second system covers measures 9 through 16. The score includes various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings (f, mf). The guitar part includes a list of chords: A9, G, D, G, A, D, C, D, Em, D7, G7, E7+5, Am7, D, F9, D7, Eb9, D9. The piano part includes a list of chords: A9, G/A, D, D7, G7, E7+5, Am7, D, D7. The bass part includes a list of chords: A7, D, G, E7, Am7, D, D7.

Chord progression for Guitar (Gtr.): A9, G, D, G, A, D, C, D, Em, D7, G7, E7+5, Am7, D, F9, D7, Eb9, D9.

Chord progression for Piano (Pno.): A9, G/A, D, D7, G7, E7+5, Am7, D, D7.

Chord progression for Bass (Bass): A7, D, G, E7, Am7, D, D7.

Across the Track Blues

5

Alto

Alto

Cl.

Tenor

Bari.

Tpt. 1

2

3

Tbn. 1

2

3

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

Drs.

f *mf* *f* *f* *mf* *f*

G7 Em7 D7 F9 D7 Eb9 D9 A7 D7 G7 E7+5 Am7

G7 Em7/A D7 A7 D7 G7 E7+5 Am7

G7 A7 D7 A7 D7 G7 E7 Am7

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D

Alto

Alto

Cl.

Tenor

Bari.

Tpt. 1

2

3

Tbn. 1

2

3

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

Drs.

p

f

Solo - Solotone mute

D

D7

G

Gm7

D

D

E♭7

D7

G

Gm7

D

D

E♭7

D7

G

Gm7

D

Across the Track Blues

7

Alto

Alto

Cl.

Tenor

Bari.

Tpt. 1

2

3

Tbn. 1

2

3

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

Drs.

Solo

E7

Plunger w/mute

mf

Em7

A7

D

D7

D°

D7

3

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Alto

Alto

Cl.

Tenor

Bari.

Tpt. 1

2

3

Tbn. 1

2

3

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

Drs.

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wa

wa

wa

G7

D7

D°

D7

G#°

G7

D7

G#°

G7

D7

G#°

Across the Track Blues

9

Alto

Alto

Cl.

Tenor

Bari.

Tpt. 1

2

3

Tbn. 1

2

3

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

Drs.

B7

E

A7

mf

mf

mf

mf

wa

wa

wa

A7

D

G7

A7

D

Eb9-5

D9

A7

Eb9-5

D9

A7

D

G7

A7

D

Eb7

D7

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Essentially Ellington

The *Essentially Ellington* High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival (*EE*) is one of the most unique jazz programs for high school bands in North America. *EE* extends the legacy of Duke Ellington by widely disseminating his music, in its original arrangements, to high school musicians for study and performance. Utilizing Ellington's music challenges students to increase their musical proficiency and knowledge of the jazz language. *EE* consists of the following initiatives and services:

- **Supplying the Music:** Each year Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) transcribes, publishes, and distributes Duke Ellington charts (along with additional educational materials) to high school bands in the U.S., Canada and American schools abroad.
- **Talking About Duke:** Throughout the school year, band directors and students correspond with professional clinicians who answer questions regarding Ellington's music. *EE* strives to foster mentoring relationships through e-mail correspondence, various conference presentations, and the festival weekend.
- **Sharing Experiences:** Students are encouraged to enter an essay contest by writing about an experience they have had with jazz music. The first-place winner earns the honor of naming a seat in Frederick P. Rose Hall—home of Jazz at Lincoln Center.
- **Professional Feedback:** Bands are invited to submit a recording of their performance of the charts either for entry in the competition or for comments only. Every submission receives a thorough written assessment.
- **Finalists and In-School Workshops:** Fifteen bands are selected from competition entries to attend the competition and festival in New York City. To prepare, each finalist band receives an in-school workshop led by a professional musician. Local *EE* participants are also invited to attend these workshops.
- **Competition & Festival:** *EE* culminates in a three-day festival at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Frederick P. Rose Hall. Students, teachers, and musicians from across North America participate in workshops, rehearsals, and performances. The festival concludes with an evening concert at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall that features the three top-placing bands, joining Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra in an all-Ellington performance.
- **Band Director Academy:** This professional development program for band directors is designed to enhance their ability to teach and conduct the music of Duke Ellington and other big band composers. Led by prominent jazz educators each summer, this short program integrates performance, history, pedagogy, and discussion into an intensive educational experience for educators at all levels.

As of May 2005, *EE* has distributed scores to more than 3,500 schools in all 50 U.S. states, schools in Canadian provinces, American schools abroad, and schools in Western Australia. Since 1996, more than 200,000 students have been exposed to Duke Ellington's music through *EE*.

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For more information about *Essentially Ellington* please contact:

Jazz at Lincoln Center Education Department
33 West 60th Street, New York, NY 10023-7999
(212) 258-9800 (phone), (212) 258-9900 (fax)
ee@jalc.org (e-mail)
<http://www.jalc.org> (web)



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