

THE BIRTH OF SWING: Bob Bernotas



He led the first important jazz big band. He and his chief writers laid the musical foundation for the "Swing Era." As staff arranger for Benny Goodman he played Merlin to the so-called Kind of Swing, the true creative power behind the throne. Yet while others became rich and famous from his innovations, **Fletcher Henderson** never reaped the fruits of his immense talent. And so, the career of this pioneering bandleader-arranger is aptly characterized by the title of the essential box set, ***A Study in Frustration: The Fletcher Henderson Story*** (Columbia/Legacy C3K 57596, three CDs, total playing time: 3:13:53). This compilation - reissuing a long unavailable four-LP collection - presents sixty-four of Henderson's best recordings from 1923 to 1938, made primarily for the Vocalion and Columbia labels.

The earliest sides, like 1923's "The Dicty Blues," are more interesting historically than musically. Overall, the playing by both the ensemble and the soloists - even the soon-to-be-great tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins - tends to be stiff and cloying, and the writing is archaic and repetitious. At that point in the young history of this music King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band was well ahead of Henderson's in terms of swing, and Jelly Roll Morton's various groups were far more advanced with regard to improvisational originality and formal creativity.

Then, in October 1924, Henderson brought Oliver's second cornetist - the original "young lion" of jazz, Louis Armstrong - to New York and made him the centerpiece of his band. On numbers like "Shanghai Shuffle," "Copenhagen" (a strong Don Redman

chart), and "Everybody Loves My Baby," Armstrong's commanding presence and advanced approach raise him far above his colleagues. But by the time Armstrong left in November 1925, Henderson's sidemen and arrangers had absorbed his rhythmic and solo concepts, and collectively the band took a huge musical leap forward. For instance, on the strikingly fresh and modern "The Stampede" (1926), the swing, articulation, and timbre of Coleman Hawkins' solo chorus, the Louis-inspired trumpet solos of Rex Stewart and Joe Smith, and the overall spirit of the performance would have been inconceivable before Armstrong's critical thirteen-month tenure with Henderson's band.

Through the rest of the decade Henderson's men continued to make steady progress. Don Redman's splendid "Hop Off" (1927) offers a strong sample of the riff-based writing that Redman pioneered and Henderson refined, and illustrates the band's growing ensemble mastery. (This was one of the last charts that Redman wrote for Henderson before he left to become musical director of McKinney's Cotton Pickers, building it into one of the finest bands of the day.) A 1928 head arrangement on Morton's "King Porter Stomp" features a string of sophisticated solos by Hawkins, trumpeters Bobby Stark and Joe Smith, and Jimmy Harrison, an influential trombone pioneer who died of cancer in 1931 at the age of thirty-one.

In the early 1930s Henderson began to take on more of the writing duties, updating and developing Redman's work, particularly his use of riffs and antiphonic, "call and response" passages between the reeds and brass, a formal element derived from the music's African roots. In just a few years Benny Goodman would attain huge commercial success popularizing these ingredients - playing Henderson's arrangements - among a mass audience. And by the start of the 1940s, these devices would become codified into an easily imitated, all too predictable swing formula.

Still, sides like "The New King Porter Stomp" (1932), Henderson's reworking of his 1928 version and, perhaps, the band's finest recorded moment, testify to the freshness of his work during its time. Taken at a brisker and more suitable tempo, the infectious riffs are handled with a marvelous collective spirit and there are masterful solos by Bobby Stark (building on his opening statement from four years earlier), Hawkins (who is even better than before), Rex Stewart, and two superb trombonists, Sandy Williams and J.C. Higginbotham, the latter in a striking pair of climactic choruses. Higginbotham is also heard in a completely self-assured, thirty-two-bar statement - a rare feature for a trombonist in those days - on "Honeysuckle Rose" from that same December 9 session.

As he did by hiring Armstrong in 1924, Henderson, in 1933, again demonstrated his ear for the most progressive currents in jazz when the band recorded his brother Horace's arrangement of Coleman Hawkins' unique composition, "Queer Notions." Hawkins was a diligent student of music theory, and his piece, avant-garde in its use of haunting whole-tone progressions, showcased the band's two most advanced soloists, the eminent saxophonist himself, of course, and the brilliantly resourceful trumpeter, Henry "Red" Allen. (Allen's two-chorus solo on the 1933 remake of "King Porter Stomp" is, by far, the highlight of an otherwise rather perfunctory cover.)

By this point Hawkins had emerged as Henderson's primary - and highest paid - soloist and he dominates the first part of the single-disc reissue, *Tidal Wave* (Decca GRD 643, 1:02:27), which offers all of the band's recordings from its two brief stints with the Decca label in 1931 and 1934 (and so, fills in key gaps of *A Study In Frustration*). But while the 1931 material is shaped by the saxophonist's formidable presence, Henderson could also call upon such distinctive voices as his trumpet veterans Stark and Stewart, and trombone newcomers Claude Jones and Benny Morton, all of whom solo strongly on these eight tracks. Also heard to advantage, both here and in the Columbia set, is the fluid tuba of John Kirby, who soon would become one of the era's finest string bassists.

In early 1934 Hawkins quit the band and spent the next five years in an eventful and lucrative European idyll. His chair was filled, briefly and unhappily, by Lester Young. It seems that Young's light tone and relaxed, profoundly un-Hawkins approach to the tenor displeased his new bandmates - although not Henderson, who in vain defended the new man against his detractors. But the pro-Hawkins partisans hounded the sensitive Young out of the fold and back to Kansas City, where he eventually landed in the budding and, for him, more suitable band of one William "Count" Basie.

Henderson replaced Young with a more "acceptable" Kansas City tenor man, Ben Webster, a big-toned Hawkins disciple who is featured abundantly among the dozen September 1934 tunes (plus one alternate take). Also heard in solo roles are Henry "Red" Allen's ever-inventive trumpet (especially superb on "Limehouse Blues"), the stiff, cliché-riddled clarinet of Buster Bailey (who always sounds like he's warming up), the smooth alto saxophone of Hilton Jefferson, and Claude Jones' solid trombone. Alto master Benny Carter, an alumnus of Henderson's 1920s units, makes a joyous guest appearance on "Liza."

These are the archetypal Henderson arrangements that, in large part, defined much of big band jazz in the 1930s. In classic numbers like "Down South Camp Meetin'" and "Wrappin' It Up," as well as Horace Henderson's wonderful "Big John's Special," strong, yet subtle, riffs support soloists, brass and reed sections converse in call-and-response passages, and an infectious exuberance is ever-present. Soon Benny Goodman would acquire these charts, hire Henderson to write even more, rehearse them to joyless perfection, and, in the process, change "swing" from a verb into a noun. This music never sounded better than it does right here, in the loving hands of its creator.

Despite his musicianship and vision, Henderson was a poor disciplinarian and an even worse businessman. In 1934, not long after these records were made, he had to disband his orchestra and began writing full-time for Goodman. But he reorganized it in late 1935 and, at this point, *A Study In Frustration* resumes the story.

The following March, Henderson's reformed unit produced one more bona fide masterpiece in brother Horace's arrangement of "Christopher Columbus." Soon virtually every swing band, black and white, good and indifferent, would have a variation of this

chart in its book. (In fact, Goodman recorded virtually the same arrangement for Victor, in a considerably less daring performance, *seven days earlier!*) But this is the prototype and it has much to admire, notably the rocking drive of the opening and closing ensembles - propelled by drummer Big Sid Catlett - and terrific solos by two of the jazz's emerging masters, trumpeter Roy Eldridge and tenor saxophonist Chu Berry. The overall performance, unfortunately, is somewhat marred by another of Buster Bailey's squealing, unswinging, anticlimactic clarinet solos.

Sadly, "Christopher Columbus" and the two other fine sides waxed that day - Fats Waller's "Stealin' Apples" and Edgar Sampson's "Blue Lou," another mid-'30s big band staple - signified a sort of "last hurrah" for Fletcher Henderson. Over the next decade and a half he continued to work in Goodman's shadow, while trying to keep a succession of failing bands together. Henderson's frustrations finally came to an end on December 29, 1952, when he suffered a fatal stroke on a Manhattan street corner. "The day Fletcher died he had one of his biggest audiences out here on the street," his wife, Leora, recalled bitterly, "what with the ambulances and the oxygen tanks."

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To recap our story so far: In October 1924 Louis Armstrong joined Fletcher Henderson's young big band and taught and them how to swing. By the end of the decade, Henderson's men were teaching all the other New York bands. And among the fastest learners was the promising ten-piece (and growing) unit lead by a transplanted Washingtonian pianist, **Duke Ellington**.

Early Ellington: The Complete Brunswick and Vocalion Recordings of Duke Ellington, 1926-1931 (Decca GRD 3-640, three CDs, 3:22:26), comprises approximately one quarter of the band's output during that pivotal five-year span. (Most of the remainder was done for the Victor and Okeh labels.) This fascinating three-disc set documents, in both music and - thanks to Steven Lakser's meticulously researched notes - text, the emergence of a major jazz orchestra through both small steps and giant leaps.

Judging from the first of two versions each of "East St. Louis Toodle-o" (featuring the wonderful growl trumpeter, Bubber Miley) and "Birmingham Breakdown," both recorded in November 1926), the Ellingtonians still had much to learn in the areas of swing, ensemble playing, and - aside from Miley and trombonist Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton - solo facility. Rhythmically these early sides exude a sort of "up-and-down" feeling, peppy, but stiff and lacking that subtle forward motion that defines swing. In fact, that dreaded word, "corny," is awfully hard to avoid.

By the time the band re-recorded these tunes in early 1927 the ensembles had grown somewhat tighter and most of the solos have become a bit more distinguished. But the relaxed swing feeling that Henderson's band had mastered by this point was slower to develop. For example, the April 1927 "Black and Tan Fantasy," compared with the definitive Victor performance waxed the following October, seems rather sluggish and

lacks the latter version's dark humor. Still, despite their flaws these tracks do exhibit the compositional sophistication and collective exuberance that were to become the hallmarks of classic Ellingtonia. The swing feel would come in time. What Duke really needed at this point was some better musicians. And he got them.

In the fall of 1927, Harry Carney began his forty-seven-year tenure with the band, at first playing mostly alto saxophone and clarinet instead of his one-of-a-kind baritone. (Lead alto Otto Hardwick still was doubling on the nearly obsolete bass sax.) Around the same time, a listless tuba player was supplanted by Wellman Braud's strong, supple string bass, which enhanced the swing element a hundred-fold. (Nevertheless, drummer Sonny Greer's mushy time would remain a chronic problem until he finally left the Duke in 1951.) And shortly after the start of the new year, Ellington brought in Barney Bigard to play section tenor and solo clarinet, a welcomed relief from the numb-fingered squealers that plagued the band's earliest sides.

These new and improved parts - along with lead trumpeter Arthur Whetsel, in for the erratic Miley - were in place by March 1928 for the invigorating "Jubilee Stomp" (where the new Hardwick-Carney-Bigard saxophone section sounds especially fine) and the delicate "Black Beauty." By mid-year, Hardwick had left for a four-year hiatus and was replaced by Johnny Hodges, who, for most of the next four decades, would serve as the band's most distinctive soloist. Happily, this set includes Hodges' first two solos with Duke, on W.C. Handy's "Yellow Dog Blues" (playing soprano saxophone) and Spencer Williams' "Tishomingo Blues" (on alto).

At last, Ellington had assembled a band worthy of his genius. By now his players, individually and collectively, had learned the lesson of swing, and that inspired him greatly. On "The Mooche," a classic from October 1928, he exploits three of the most vivid colors on his palette: Hodges's sultry alto, Bigard's rich chalumeau register, and dark growls by the prodigal Miley. The following January Ellington attempted his first "extended work," a nearly six-minute exploration of "Tiger Rag" that covered both sides of a ten-inch 78-RPM record and was highlighted by two fleet solos by Bigard, the lively, staccato trumpet of recent addition Freddie Jenkins, and one of Carney's first baritone outings, as well as some tightly executed section work by the trumpet trio of Whetsel-Miley-Jenkins.

By February 1929, chronic alcoholism had forced Miley out for good. (He died in 1932 at the age of twenty-nine.) His replacement, a twenty-year-old Cootie Williams, came into the band with a big tone *à la* Louis. Coached by trombonist Nanton, one of the original masters of the plunger mute, he learned the rudiments of Miley's growl style and developed them into one of the most expressive and identifiable trumpet voices in the history of jazz. A few months later, Ellington opened up new harmonic possibilities when he added valve trombonist Juan Tizol, a well-schooled, versatile musician who could blend not only with fellow trombonist Nanton, but with the three trumpets or three saxes, as he often was called upon to do.

In July 1929, this re-fitted ensemble recorded Duke's richly scored arrangement of Fats

Waller's "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue." Bigard weaves obligatos through Williams' muted theme statement, then Nanton's plunger-and-pixie-mute effects invoke the tune's theme of loneliness and despair. Unfortunately, Duke's double-time bridge on the last half-chorus is strangely inappropriate and jarringly out of place, breaking the otherwise solemn and somber mood.

Two September 1929 tracks featuring tap dancing and hokum by the renowned entertainer, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, set the pattern for most of 1930-31, when the band's Brunswick sides included a surprising amount of non-Ellington material. Some of it is not bad. Two takes of "When You're Smiling," sport a vigorous opening chorus by Nanton, a chase between Williams and Hodges, a brash statement from Jenkins, and a bubbly out-chorus with Hodges soaring over the ensemble. Unfortunately, an inept, witless vocal by Duke's manager, music publisher, and arch parasite, Irving Mills, spoils what should have been a delightful track.

And there are some real lemons. Too many promising sides are ruined by lame vocals by the deservedly forgotten Dick Robertson. True to its title, "Accordion Joe" adds a (most unwelcome) guest accordionist - in two takes, no less - and the result is exactly what you'd expect. The intruder also infects "Double Check Stomp," an instrumental which, at least, has a fine Nanton plunger solo and some characteristic Hodges. And a piano duet on "Twelfth Street Rag" between Ellington and Bennie Payne, best known for his solid work with Cab Calloway's band during the 1930s and '40s, is a bad idea from start to finish - fancy, overripe, and precious.

Yet, mixed among this dreck is an indisputable masterpiece, the original version of "Mood Indigo," recorded on October 17, 1930 by just three horns (Whetsel, Nanton, Bigard) and four rhythm. Maybe Ellington did cop the sweet, unforgettable melody from Bigard - and where did Bigard get it from? - but what he did with it was pure Duke. The deceptively simple three-part harmony testifies to his originality as both an orchestrator and a manipulator of sound and timbre. Who else would have assigned the bottom line to the clarinet, voiced *below* both the trumpet and the trombone? Then there is the ingenious bridge, in which the melody passes from one horn to the next and then the next.

In 1990, Mercer Ellington was asked to name his father's most important work. He did not choose one of Duke's ambitious "tone parallels," his programmatic suites, or any of his three sacred concerts. "From the standpoint of artistry or theory," Duke's son replied, "I think that would be 'Mood Indigo.'" It is hard to disagree.

The period moves to a close with another all-time classic, a version of "Rockin' in Rhythm" from January 1931 - Ellington first recorded it for Okeh the previous November - featuring Williams, Bigard, and Nanton in top form. By that point, swing had become second-nature to the Ellingtonians. In a year they would define the entire era in a single song title: "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)."

Later that month, Duke took another stab at extended composition with his six-minute,

two-sided recording of "Creole Rhapsody." Despite its occasionally rambling interludes and disconnected secondary themes, this is still a significant work, a bold step toward transcending the formal boundaries imposed by the 78-RPM record. As the next four-and-a-half decades proved, few artists in any field would transcend as many boundaries as did Duke Ellington.

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So, by the dawn of the 1930s, swing was the thing. New bands, most of them built on the Henderson model, began to attain new heights of proficiency, musicianship, and popularity. And, for a brief, but glorious, moment, the band that made the most out of Henderson's innovations was led by drummer **Chick Webb**. He was a tiny, hunchbacked man who, legend has it, barely could reach the pedal of his bass drum. But this little giant was the spark plug that ignited one of the decade's most spirited ensembles. Starting in 1933 Webb and his men held court in Harlem's Savoy Ballroom, the famed "Home of Happy Feet," where they played for, and took inspiration from, the most demanding and discerning dancers in the world.

Spinnin' the Webb (Decca GRD 635, 57:29) presents some of Webb's finest Decca instrumentals from the years 1929-1938, including such infectious Edgar Sampson arrangements as "Blue Lou," "Go Harlem," and a bona fide swing masterpiece, "Don't Be That Way." It's tempting - and instructive - to compare Webb's 1934 version of Sampson's tune with Benny Goodman's commercially successful rendition of 1938. But in truth, there is no comparison. (The same can be said of their respective handlings of virtually the same arrangement on Sampson's "Stompin' at the Savoy." Webb's version was recorded for Columbia and is not part of this collection.)

Goodman's treatment is technically precise and tastefully rendered. There is nothing *wrong* with Goodman's version, except that he plays it too safe, with all the sharp edges rounded out and the jagged spots smoothed over. Webb's performance, while no less well-played, is the essence of big band jazz, a daring, hard-driving, energetic recording that sounds as vital today as it did more than seven decades ago. In short, where Goodman's "Don't Be That Way" is correct, Webb's is essential.

This set also features some demanding writing by the much overlooked arranger Charlie Dixon ("The Naughty Waltz" - in 4/4 time! - "Harlem Congo," "Squeeze Me"), all of it impeccably rendered by the ensemble. There also are plenty of first-rate soloists - trumpeters Bobby Stark and Taft Jordan, ex-Henderson trombonists Claude Jones and Sandy Williams, and saxophonists Edgar Sampson and Elmer Williams - while the supple bass lines of John Kirby provide constant pleasure. But the heart of the band was Webb himself.

On the flag-waving "Clap Hands! Here Comes Charlie," the relaxed "Squeeze Me," Benny Carter's intricate chart on "Liza," and everywhere else, Webb's flawless time, subtle sense of swing, and deft juggling of a vast array of percussion sounds placed him at the pinnacle of big band drumming. (Incidentally, "Liza" was released as the B side of

a slight novelty tune that, in 1938, became a surprise hit, brought fame to a shy, twenty-one-year-old girl singer named Ella Fitzgerald, and haunted her for the rest of her career; happily, "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" is *not* included in this set.)

As the decade progressed, the Savoy Ballroom became the arena for a series of legendary "Battles of the Bands" in which Webb and his men took on all comers, enjoying a home court advantage that the New York Yankees would have envied. Old-time hipsters still talk about the night of May 11, 1937, when Goodman brought his band, at the peak of its popularity, onto Webb's turf. In short order the so-called "King of Swing" was trounced by the King of the Savoy. "He just cut me to ribbons - made me feel awfully small," Gene Krupa, Goodman's flashy drummer, recalled with awe. "When he really let go, you had a feeling that the entire atmosphere in the place was being charged."

Then, on January 16, 1938 - the same night as Goodman's historical Carnegie Hall concert - before an overflow, sellout crowd, Webb's men battled Count Basie's upstarts, barely a year and a half out of Kansas City. Observers were split as to who came out on top - as if that sort of thing mattered - but were unanimous in lauding the caliber of music produced by both sides. (The Carnegie mob had no idea what they missed.) "At least we didn't get run out of there," Basie mused, years later.

Webb and his band were riding high when, in the spring of 1939, he fell ill with spinal tuberculosis. In great pain, Webb valiantly tried to keep going and collapsed during a gig. He was operated on, but the prognosis was poor. On June 16, with family and friends gathered at his bedside, Chick Webb smiled his crooked smile and announced, "I'm sorry, I gotta go!" And he was gone. For the next couple of years Ella Fitzgerald fronted the band, but it was not the same without its gallant little dynamo. When Ella went out on her own in 1942, one of the most celebrated bands of the 1930s faded into memory.

[Consumers please note: Track 20 is not "In the Groove at the Grove," as claimed in the liner notes, but a repeat of track 12, "The Naughty Waltz." How do blunders like that get by?]

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During the Swing Era many big bands, good, bad, and (like Webb's) excellent, came and went. But looking back, it is now clear that, from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, there were three exceptional, incomparable, and hugely influential jazz orchestras: those led by Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and **Jimmie Lunceford**. Drawn from 1935-1937, ***For Dancers Only*** (Decca GRD 645, 58:21) offers a representative sampling of the Lunceford band's vast output for the Decca label.

While most other leaders built their bands, to a greater or lesser extent, around star soloists, Lunceford founded his on neatly crafted arrangements filled with dynamic contrasts and impeccable section work. He developed Henderson's call-and-response,

brass-versus-saxes, solos-and-riffs formula into a true orchestral concept that remained unmatched until the arrival of Count Basie's 1950s powerhouse. Trumpeter-arranger Sy Oliver's easy, three-chorus treatment of "Swanee River" typifies the Lunceford band's style.

In the first chorus, staccato, muted brass stroll through the familiar theme against a legato saxophone countermelody. The second chorus shifts the focus to an ornate saxophone soli, contrasted with open brass in the bridge. An eight-bar interlude from Elmer Crumbley's wah-wah trombone leads into the third chorus, where Willie Smith's alto saxophone peeks out of the ensemble. After an ethereal piano bridge the muted brass return and carry the tune into the coda, where Oliver's growling trumpet interjects an ominous note into the pastoral mood. And underlying it all is a relaxed, yet compelling, two-beat feel, the defining rhythmic trait of the Lunceford idiom.

Through the 1930s Oliver emerged as the band's primary arranger. (He produced fifteen of the twenty charts included in this set.) But in the summer of 1939, Oliver left Lunceford to join Tommy Dorsey, and proceeded to reshape TD's competent, but lackluster, dance band into a genuine swing unit built on the Lunceford model. For instance, he insisted that Dorsey hire a baritone saxophonist, a hallmark of Lunceford's rich ensemble sound (in contrast to the harmonically top-heavy Henderson-Goodman sonority). Oliver's signature charts - "For You," "Yes, Indeed," "Well, Git It," "On the Sunny Side of the Street," and, from 1944, "Opus No. 1," the last great Swing Era instrumental - contributed greatly to TD's fame and fortune. (A skinny Italian kid from Hoboken, New Jersey, named Sinatra, also had something to do with it, but that's another story.)

Getting back to Lunceford, he was a well-schooled musician who could play numerous reed instruments, but, except for a tiny number of early sides by the band, he stuck with the baton. Still, Lunceford took pride in his own musical and personal discipline, and expected the same from his players. But apparently he also could take a joke. In the vocal coda to "Hittin' the Bottle," ingeniously arranged by trombonist-guitarist Eddie Durham, Oliver delivers a gentle jab at his leader's temperate ways: "*Everybody - except Jimmie - hits the bottle.*"

Lunceford met his future lead and jazz alto saxophonist Willie Smith and pianist-arranger Ed Wilcox while he attended Fisk University in Nashville. After graduation, he taught music and athletics at Memphis' Manassas High, where two more soon-to-be stalwarts, bassist Moses Allen and drummer Jimmie Crawford, were his students. Having earned a genuine fatherly respect from these talented young men, Lunceford, ever the teacher, molded them and their colleagues into a well-rehearsed, disciplined, uncommonly stable unit. (Eight of the ten players who were in the band when Sy Oliver joined Lunceford in late 1933 were still with him when Oliver left almost six years later, and many stayed well into the '40s.) Yet, for all their precision and polish, Lunceford's men, as these tracks demonstrate, never forgot how to swing.

They also knew how to entertain and, judging from a stack of witty, well-played novelty

numbers, had fun doing it. A Mills Brothers-like vocal trio on "My Blue Heaven," another fine Oliver chart, is set up by strong ensembles and brief, but solid, solo statements. "He Ain't Got Rhythm," Oliver's take on an all-but-forgotten Irving Berlin movie song, gets a boost from Joe Thomas' big-toned tenor and good-natured vocal. On "I'm Nuts About Screw Music," Ed Wilcox's intricate arrangement keeps up a running commentary on the wacky lyric, appealingly sung by Willie Smith. And then there's Oliver's deliberately hokey treatment of the looniest tune of them all, "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down," complete with calliope effects and a boardwalk hawker: "*Anyone wish a bag o' popcorn, salty peanuts, Hershey choc'late!*"

But the musical highlights of this collection are two Sy Oliver masterpieces. On the delightful cameo, "Organ Grinder's Swing," Oliver employs an astounding range of timbral colors and combinations - a "Mood Indigo"-like horn trio, his own growling trumpet over Jock Carruthers' strident baritone saxophone, celeste and temple blocks, bluesy guitar over whisper-soft saxes - to illuminate the childlike, folkish melody. Then, there is "For Dancers Only," from June 1937, one of the defining moments of big band jazz, an object lesson in ensemble power, which is not necessarily synonymous with volume, and collective swing. To call this the artistic zenith of the Swing Era is not to say that it was all downhill from here. But it never got any better.

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