

## Johnny Hodges - Chronological Classics 1945-1950 (2001)



1. *Mountain Air* 2. *Sumpin' Jumpin' Round Here* 3. *After Hours on Dream Street* 4. *Chili con Carney* 5. *Key Largo* 6. *You're Driving Me Crazy* 7. *Why Was I Born?* 8. *Triple Play* 9. *Who Struck John?* 10. *It Shouldn't Happen to a Dream* 11. *June's Jumpin'* 12. *Violet Blue* 13. *Flower Is a Lovesome Thing* 14. *Frisky* 15. *Longhorn Blues* 16. *Far Away Blues* 17. *Searsy's Blues* 18. *Little Taste* 19. *Let the Zoomers Drool* 20. *Charlotte Russe* 21. *St. Germain-des-Pres Blues* 22. *Good to the Last Drop* 23. *Only Wish I Knew* 24. *We Fooled You*

Johnny Hodges (alto sax) Don Byas (tenor sax) Billy Strayhorn (piano) Al Sears (tenor sax) Taft Jordan (trumpet) Harry Carney (baritone sax) Raymond Fol (piano) Oscar Pettiford (bass) Billy Taylor, Sr. (bass) Shelly Manne (drums)

John Cornelius Hodges began working with Duke Ellington in 1928 and soon became one of the prime voices in the Ellington orchestra. Hodges began leading his own recording ensembles -- actually scaled-down versions of Duke's band -- in 1937. Occasionally sitting in with other leaders like Lionel Hampton, Hodges also led groups of his own, including a quartet at New York's Apollo Club during the summer of 1948 and five of the six bands heard on this first volume of his complete recordings in chronological order. (All records issued under Hodges' name prior to 1947 have been included in the massive Classics chronology of Duke Ellington.) Sandy Williams' Big Eight was one of many ensembles recording for the Hot Record Society -- and one of the very best of them. "Mountain Air" and "After Hours on Dream Street" are slow, smooth, languid, and lovely, with Hodges playing pretty for the people. "Sumpin' Jumpin' Round Here" is a smart strut with a hint of Latin American rhythm built into its caboose. Harry Carney, who fortunately appears on fully half of the recordings reissued here, does some friendly nudging with his horn on this pleasantly stimulating dance tune. "Chili con Carney" is a light bounce honoring the baritone saxophonist without granting him any more solo space than a couple of brief breaks. The next four selections appeared on the small and ephemeral Wax label in 1947. Carney is roundly featured on Jerome Kern's moody existential opus "Why Was I Born?," and Hodges softly interprets Walter Donaldson's "You're Driving Me Crazy" in what must be one of the slowest and most gentle versions of this song ever recorded. "Key Largo" carries a whiff of the Caribbean in its dulcet tones and lapping rhythm. Billy Strayhorn's "Triple Play" is marvelously cool mood music, elegantly rendered by a quintet with the composer at the

piano. When Hodges recorded for the Mercer and Sunrise labels, he included longtime Ellington trombonist Lawrence Brown, Chick Webb's star trumpeter Taft Jordan, up-and-coming tenor saxophonist Al Sears, and a rhythm section of Billy Strayhorn, Oscar Pettiford, and trombonist Wilbur DeParis sitting in on the drums! Each performance is a delight. "A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing" is the classic Strayhorn/Hodges still life. "Longhorn Blues" and "Faraway Blues" both feel like close cousins to "Jeep's Blues." On the second Mercer session Harry Carney replaces Brown, Harold "Shorty" Baker is the trumpeter, and Sonny Greer does wonderful things with the drums. Anyone who wants to hear Strayhorn cook a little on the piano should check out the groove track "Searsy's Blues," which is somewhat of an advanced approach to a boogie. Its tempo reappears exactly on "Let the Zoomers Drool" -- a "zoomer" being hip vernacular for a mooch. Years later, Dave Frishberg liked "A Little Taste" so much that he composed some of his funniest lyrics based on its nonchalant contours. This satisfying CD ends with the first of Hodges' Parisian sessions from 1950, with Raymond Fol sitting in with a pack of Ellingtonians when Duke declined to participate for contractual reasons. These tracks are notable for the presence of trombone ace Quentin "Butter" Jackson and voluntary expatriate tenor saxophonist Don Byas, who blows a splintering run during the crackling strut "We Fooled You." ---arwulf arwulf, AllMusic Review

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