Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges - Plays the Blues Back to Back (1997)

1. Wabash Blues (Fred Meinken/Dave Ringle) 6:30 2. Basin Street Blues (Spencer Williams) 8:05 3. Beale Street Blues (W.C. Handy) 7:39 4. Weary Blues (Arthur Matthews) 6:58 5. The St. Louis Blues (W.C. Handy) 5:51 6. Loveless Love (W.C. Handy) 7:13 7. Royal Garden Blues (Clarence Williams/Spencer Williams) 5:24 Duke Ellington (Piano) Johnny Hodges (Alto Saxophone) Harry "Sweets" Edison (Tenor Saxophone) Joe Jones (Drums) Les Spann (Guitar) Sam Jones (Double Bass) - 2,3,5-7 Al Hall (Double Bass) - 1,4

These distinctive small-group sessions, featuring Duke Ellington as pianist in a blues context, are part of a group of recordings issued under the confusing titles Back to Back and Side by Side, and further reissued under the not particularly distinctive name of Blues Summit. But there should be no confusion about the high quality of music that came out of these sessions -- it is all "cooking with gas" as the expression goes. From the jazz world, it would be difficult to find more profound soloists on traditional blues numbers than the Duke or his longtime collaborator Johnny Hodges, who does some of the most soulful playing of his career here. Also hitting a very high standard for himself is trumpeter Harry Edison and, while musicians are being patted on the back, the Jones boys in the rhythm section should be given a hand. That's Jo Jones (drums) and Sam Jones (bass), so as not to create additional confusion in the Jones-heavy jazz world. The songs all have titles that end in "Blues," with the oddball having "Love" in the title not once but twice. (It's "Loveless Love," what else?) But these songs are just vehicles for playing the blues, a formula that has produced great music many times, and certainly did every time this particular pianist was leading the group. --- Eugene Chadbourne, Rovi

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