



Pure Pleasure CL 1198
Duke Ellington's Spacemen: The Cosmic Scene
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Still riding the success of his triumphant concert at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival, Duke Ellington in 1958 decided to reduce his touring orchestra to a nonet dubbed "the Spacemen", and recorded this lone project with them for the Columbia label. Perhaps inspired by the first orbiting satellites, Ellington is not taking cues from George Russell or Sun Ra, whose extraterrestrial inspirations led them to even more progressive paths. This large ensemble is playing mostly standards, but the arrangements and solos carve an integrated yet elasticized concept that allows for a more expanded role for the ensemble's trombonists Quentin 'Butter' Jackson, John Sanders, and Britt Woodman, and select soloists. One in the solo spotlight is Clark Terry on flugelhorn exclusively, putting his fabled trumpet aside. The classic material presented includes clarinetist Jimmy Hamilton's features "Avalon" and "Early Autumn", the slinky stripper pole blues version of "St. Louis Blues" with Ellington's piano taking the lead, and a version of "Body & Soul", with tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves completely extrapolating and re-harmonizing the tune. There's a modified "Perdido", an animated and perky "Midnight Sun" that deviates from any other slow and lugubrious version of the ballad, and "Jones" a real good swinger. There are two originals; the blues bass of Jimmy Woode and the 'bones with plentiful piano from Duke infusing "Bass-Ment", and one of the more delightful of all of Ellington's book, the poppin' and boppin' "Spacemen", a bright happy horn chart led by Terry that is one of the more distinctive Ellington numbers of this time period. It comes highly recommended.

Recording: April 1958 at Columbia 30th Street Studio, New York "The Cosmic Scene" - Paul Gonsalves (ts); Clark Terry (flh); Britt Woodman, John Sanders, Quentin Jackson (tb); Jimmy Hamilton (cl); Duke Ellington (p); Jimmy Wood (b); Sam Woodyard (dr)