

Flying Home, by the Kentucky Jazz Repertory Orchestra

Reviewed by Mike Richardson

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[Hepcats Swing Dance Club](http://www.luv2swingdance.com)

(www.luv2swingdance.com)

Lexington, KY

(Note: this review is written from the perspective of a Lindy Hop and Balboa swing dancer; and an avid music collector that loves the big band music of the swing-era for both dancing and listening to.)

The Kentucky Jazz Repertory Orchestra (KJRO) has produced a CD that should make Lindy Hop and Balboa swing dancers, jazz music enthusiasts and those that enjoy authentic music of the big band swing-era jump for joy. This CD is a truly outstanding achievement, accomplishing two difficult tasks: the songs are played true to the original version; and KJRO adds fresh energy, depth and clarity to the recordings. And on top of all that, the sound recording quality is superb. This CD should certainly be a staple of swing dancers and swing dance DJ's everywhere.



Of the 24 tracks on this CD, 18 are by bands considered among the greatest of the swing-era: Duke Ellington (7), Benny Goodman (3), Count Basie (3) and Jimmie Lunceford (2). Also represented are three charts by Harlan Leonard and single arrangements by Lionel Hampton, Artie Shaw, Harry James, Nelson Riddle, Benny Carter and Glenn Miller.

Let's look at these songs by individual big band.

Duke Ellington

KJRO is no stranger to the music of Duke Ellington, as evidenced by their 1999 release *Ellington Celebration*, a retrospective of Ellington's music from the 1920's through 1970. That CD contains several noteworthy tracks, such as *Stevedore Stomp*, *Ring Dem Bells*, *Rockin' in Rhythm*, *Drop Me Off in Harlem*, *Merry-Go-Round* and *Daybreak Express*. (Swing dancers should get a copy of *Ellington Celebration*.)



For this CD, KJRO once again does justice to the genius and music of Ellington with seven recordings spanning the 1930's to the 1960's.

Jive Stomp, at 212 beats per minute (bpm), should become a favorite of Balboa dancers everywhere. The highlights of this 1933 tune are the call and response between the baritone sax, originally played by Harry Carney and expertly re-created by Lisa Osland, and the brass sections.



There are also fine solos from the trombone, trumpet and clarinet,

played in Ellington's unique style by Jim Grubbs, Rick Cook and Gordon Towell. For dancers, there is a neat break near the end of this song, one of my favorites on this CD.

Rockin' in Rhythm is Ellington's 1963 remake of his classic 1930 release. This song exhibits Ellington's special talents and shows why he is revered in jazz - only Ellington could remake his own classic 33 years later and create another swinging monster of a song.

This version is played faster (216 bpm) than the original and has a much fuller sound and feeling, given the larger ensemble that plays the tune. Of particular note are the trombone solos, played with vitality and energy by Jim Grubbs and Jeanie Lee; the clarinet solo, played by Miles Osland; and the trumpet solo by Mark Clodfelter. The entire band rocks out in rhythm on this piece -- always a big favorite at [Hepcats](#) events.

The next three tracks come from Ellington's band of 1940, often considered his best. There were several seasoned members on board, to include Cootie Williams, Rex Stewart, Barney Bigard, Johnny Hodges, Sonny Greer, Harry Carney, Juan Tizol, Fred Guy and Joe Nanton. Recent newcomers included bassist Jimmy Blanton, Ben Webster on tenor sax, and Billy Strayhorn, pianist and arranger.

In a Mellowtone, recorded by Ellington in 1940, has been covered by numerous artists and bands with different arrangements, but this version by KJRO shows that the original version often remains the best.

Of note on this recording is the agile sound of the upright bass, originally played by Jimmy Blanton. Blanton was one of a handful of swing-era bassists that developed the potential of the bass, improvising new harmonic textures, while still maintaining a solid beat and rhythm for the band. Tragically, Blanton died of tuberculosis a short two years after this recording.

Also of note on this recording are the trumpet and alto sax solos, originally played by Rex Stewart and Ben Webster, re-created by Rick Cook and Miles Osland -- and played beautifully. At 133 bpm, this chart is classic Ellington.

Jack the Bear. This 1940 release once again showcases the upright bass talents of Jimmy Blanton, expertly re-created by Kevin Kehrberg. The bass keeps a steady beat for fine solos by the clarinet, "growling" trumpet, baritone sax and trombone, originally played by Barney Bigard, Cootie Williams, Harry Carney and Joe Nanton and re-created by Gordon Towell, Rick Cook, Lisa Osland and Jim Grubbs.

At 154 bpm, a fine composition played in authentic Ellington style by KJRO.

Sepia Panorama. The last song of this 1940 grouping is a slower tune at 110 bpm, but one that swings nonetheless.

The original piece featured Jimmy Blanton on bass, along with Juan Tizol and Cootie Williams on trombone and trumpet. Harry Carney's solo on the baritone sax came in nicely with the brass sections. Ellington and Ben Webster had smooth solos on piano and tenor sax. Once again, KJRO members Kevin Kehrberg, Brad Kerns, Rick Cook, Lisa Osland, Dick Domek and Dave Anderson beautifully re-create those solos.

Perdido is another fine chart written by Ellington's trombonist Juan Tizol in 1942 and played at 130 bpm.

After a short piano introduction played by Ellington, Harry Carney set the tone for this chart with a subdued but still swinging baritone sax solo, followed by fine trumpet solos by Ray Nance and Rex Stewart; and a tenor sax solo by Ben Webster. Junior Ragland proved an able replacement for Jimmy Blanton on bass. KRJO soloists Dick Domek, Lisa Osland, Rick Cook, Rich Byrd and Gordon Towell keep it swinging on this famous Ellington chart.

Solitude. We go back to 1934 for this Ellington instrumental. This piece is not really a ballad, but a chance to listen and enjoy a sophisticated arrangement. Sit back and enjoy the beautiful solos, especially the baritone sax solo by Lisa Osland, as KJRO re-creates this Ellington gem.

Benny Goodman

Benny Goodman is represented on this CD by three songs:
Swingtime in the Rockies, *Sing, Sing, Sing* and *Don't Be That Way*.

Swingtime in the Rockies is one of the best, if not the best, track on this CD. KJRO records the version played by Goodman's band at their famous January 16, 1938 Carnegie Hall concert. The band that Goodman took to Carnegie Hall is considered by many to be one of his best. Trumpeter Harry James and drummer Gene Krupa were very talented and both went on to lead their own big bands. Other notable sidemen in this group were Jess Stacy on piano, Hymie Schertzer on alto sax, Art Rollini on tenor sax and Ziggy Elman on trumpet.



Swingtime in the Rockies is a very difficult chart for a band to play well; very few big band orchestras would even attempt to play this song. KJRO's technical expertise and ability to make the difficult seem easy and effortless come through on this arrangement.

The song is played at a red hot 264 bpm and KJRO is tight and swings really hard. The song gives ample room for a fine tenor sax solo originally played by Art Rollini and played with gusto on this recording by Gordon Towell. Of course, this song is famous for two other solos. First, the clarinet solo, originally played by Goodman and re-created with energy and drive by Miles Osland. And secondly, Rick Cook on trumpet hits the roof in the finest Ziggy Elman fashion, helping bring the song to a close. You need time to catch your breath after this track.

This is one great song, well worth the price of the CD alone. For a real treat, come to a [Hepcats](#) event and hear KJRO perform this song live!

KJRO's recording of *Sing, Sing, Sing* is the best version of this song on the market by a contemporary big band. The band brings energy and a driving sense of rhythm, from the opening drum solo, originally beat out by Gene Krupa and re-created on this track by Jim Campbell, to the "Christopher Columbus" call and response section that really sets this chart apart from others.

Played at 233 bpm, KJRO does justice to this classic “killer-diller” song. This song always gets people up on their feet dancing and clapping (for the right reasons) when KJRO plays it at a [Hepcats](#) events.

Note that *Sing, Sing, Sing* is sometimes referred to by Lindy Hop and Balboa dancers as “the song we love to hate”. To put it diplomatically, I’ve heard a number of bands play this song that just weren’t up to the task. Perhaps Goodman’s original version is such a well known song that experienced Lindy Hop and Balboa dancers can easily perceive if the band playing the song does not possess the musical abilities necessary to play the chart properly.

None of that applies to KJRO’s version of *Sing, Sing, Sing*. If you want to play *Sing, Sing, Sing* at an event, spin the version from this CD.

Don’t Be That Way was one of Goodman’s most requested songs, and it’s easy to understand why. KJRO’s recording of this tune at 168 bpm is first-rate. As expected, Goodman is prominently featured on the clarinet; Miles Osland re-creates the clarinet solo with Goodman like precision and swing. There is also a fine trumpet and an especially swinging, but relaxed, trombone solo, both re-created by Rick Cook and Dave Henderson.

Count Basie

For the Count Basie Orchestra, KJRO provides three pieces that swing hard: *Doggin’ Around*, *It’s Sand, Man!* and *Jumpin’ at the Woodside*. The first two have not been recorded by a contemporary big band or repertory jazz orchestra that I know of.



Doggin’ Around is special, one of the best tracks on this CD. Recorded by Basie in 1938, this is a relentlessly swinging song at a quick 246 bpm. Let’s say it right up front – this is a dynamite song.

There are several great solos in this arrangement. First is the very difficult opening piano riff (and subsequent piano solos) all played effortlessly by Dick Domek. Also featured are fine also sax solos played by Miles Osland; tenor sax solos by Dave Anderson and Gordon Towell; a trumpet solo played by David Hummel; a baritone sax solo played by Lisa Osland; and a drum solo played by Jim Campbell. All the soloists from KJRO really shine in this number. An all-around notable performance by KJRO, worthy of the great Count Basie band.

The title of *It’s Sand, Man!* supposedly comes from the practice of vaudeville dancers spreading sand on the stage to help them slide their feet when they danced. Imagine that, dancers wanting to slip and slide on the dance floor!

This song swings, although there is a “modern” feel as compared to Basie’s late 1930’s tunes – a little bit of be bop comes through. As one would expect, KJRO expertly plays the song true to Basie’s style on the original arrangement at 193 bpm. Of note on this track are the piano solos by Dick Domek; one can easily visualize Basie tapping the ivories. And the tenor sax solo, originally played by Buddy Tate and re-created by Gordon Towell, gives the last third of the song a full and rich feeling.

The opening piano riff of *Jumpin' at the Woodside* is undoubtedly one of the most famous opening riffs in all of swing music. The name of the tune comes from the Woodside Hotel in Harlem, where Basie's band conducted rehearsals in a basement room, often into the wee small hours of the morning. It was at these rehearsals that Basie worked up the arrangement.

The song is famous for its sense of suppressed excitement, continuing to build with a series of riffs aided by a piano solo, a swinging muted trumpet solo and then a hard driving tenor sax solo. The song wraps it up with a kind of musical duel between the clarinet and a growling trumpet.

KJRO is right on form and plays this chart with an intensity that matches the original recording. Dick Domek starts it off in the Basie style with the opening piano riff; Miles Osland brings it with alto sax and clarinet solos; Rick Cook and Gordon Towell show their chops on trumpet and tenor sax solos. The entire band swings on this song, but also gets all the nuances for each section for this difficult arrangement, played at a quick 239 bpm. KJRO once again pays homage to the Count Basie Orchestra as they nail this arrangement. Hard to top this classic for dancing and listening.

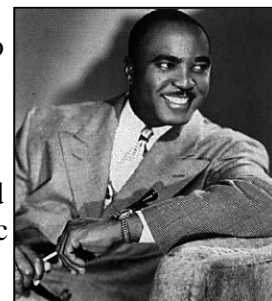
Jimmie Lunceford

For a band that was considered one of the top bands of the swing-era, the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra is not well known to today's general jazz music public, especially in comparison to the bands of Ellington, Basie and Goodman. However, many Lindy Hop and Balboa dancers (and DJ's) are certainly aware of Lunceford's music (I try to play at least one or two of Lunceford's songs at [Hepcats](#) swing dances).



The Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra was famous for what was known as the "Lunceford bounce" (or the "Lunceford beat") and that "bounce" really appealed to dancers of the swing-era (although non-dancing jazz music critics of the day sometimes had a problem understanding the "bounce"). Many bands tried to imitate Lunceford's music, style and showmanship, to include Tommy Dorsey (who hired Lunceford's famous arranger, Sy Oliver), Harry James and Glenn Miller. But nobody was really successful in capturing the essence of the Lunceford Orchestra.

Jimmie Lunceford died in 1947, and there was a short lived attempt to continue the band under the direction of new leaders but that venture ended after about two years. Not long after that, a number of swing-era musicians tried to re-create Lunceford's music. This included the aforementioned Sy Oliver and Billy May. The results were close (and in high fidelity, which was good), but did not totally capture the music or the spirit of the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra.



A few contemporary bands have recorded some Lunceford tunes, but the results are generally disappointing. In 1991 the American Jazz Orchestra, founded by musician John Lewis and jazz music critic Garry Giddins, and consisting of some top musicians from the New York City area, recorded several of Lunceford's songs. But they found their results lacking. Lewis noted that his orchestra had no problem re-creating the music of Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson and Benny Carter, but the Lunceford sound was elusive. Giddins further noted that "Lunceford is ultimately untouchable".

The most recent band to give Lunceford's music a try is the Jimmie Lunceford Legacy Orchestra, hailing from the Netherlands and directed by Robert Veen. The band does a fine job, but they admit their recordings are not re-creations but more of a tribute to Lunceford's music.

So how did KJRO do in re-creating the music of the great Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra? Overall, pretty good. For this CD, KJRO applies their talents to two of Lunceford's best charts: *For Dancers Only* and *Lunceford Special*.

For Dancers Only is a swing-era classic and was often identified as the theme song for the Lunceford Orchestra. Sy Oliver, composer and arranger of the song, noted that it was a riff based tune. "All the melodic lines in it," Oliver explains, "were things the guys in the band played all the time. It was sort of a compilation of riffs."

The 1937 version of the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra was probably Lunceford's best. The band boasted of a number of sidemen that had been with the band almost since its arrival on the scene as a legitimate big band orchestra in the early 1930's. This included a powerhouse rhythm section second to none consisting of Eddie Wilcox, Moses Allen, Al Norris and Jimmy Crawford on piano, bass, guitar and drums. Trumpet players included Sy Oliver, Eddie Tompkins and Paul Webster; Elmer Crumbley, Russell Bowles and Eddie Durham on trombone; and Joe Thomas, Willie Smith, Earl Carruthers, Dan Grissom and Ed Brown on saxophone.

The original 1937 recording is a little under three minutes, but at dance or concert settings the band would often expand the song to six, nine or even 12 minutes. The Lunceford Orchestra also used the song at many of their "battle of the bands," either as the first song of the set to establish and "mark their territory" or as the last song to emphasize and really punctuate the "Lunceford bounce." Oftentimes the song was played faster in such live settings, both as a challenge to the other band and as a result of the excitement level rising as the connection between the band and the dancers intensified.



KJRO's recording of *For Dancers Only* proves that a contemporary big band with the original arrangement and the right personnel can accurately re-create the music of the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra. KJRO is right on the money on this track. The drum work, originally played by Jimmy Crawford, helps keep the overall rhythm heavy, but not overpowering; you can really feel that "Lunceford bounce."

This chart, played at 151 bpm, originally featured great solos by Joe Thomas on alto sax and Paul Webster and Eddie Tompkins trumpet, using the solos to drive the band to a new height at each succeeding riff. Miles Osland, Mark Clodfelter and Rick Cook are outstanding as they re-create the solos. As the name implies this song is ideal for dancing, but it's also a lot of fun to listen to and enjoy. If you don't like this tune, you should check your own "bounce" – or heart pulse.

Lunceford Special is one of my favorite tracks on this CD. KJRO once again captures the spirit of this "killer-diller" song. This 1939 chart, arranged by Eddie Durham, is a very quick 242 bpm – not to worry, just jump on and enjoy the ride.

The opening riff by the upright bass, originally played by Moses Allen, tells you something special is indeed afoot -- and the band doesn't disappoint as it begins to build a lean, mean swinging machine with displaced accents.

Next come the solos -- especially noteworthy are the trumpets, saxophone and trombone solos, originally played by Eugene "Snooky" Young, Joe Thomas and Trummy Young, and played in the Lunceford style on this CD by Rick Cook and Mark Clodfelter, Miles Osland, Brad Kerns and Dave Anderson. KJRO soloists really nail these solos. This song never eases up and swings hard right to the end, with another fine trumpet solo hitting 'em high to bring it all to a close. A great song.

Lionel Hampton

Born in Louisville, KY Lionel Hampton's 1942 recording of ***Flying Home*** is one of the more recognizable songs on this CD, and a favorite not just for **Hepcats** in Lexington, KY, but Lindy Hop and Balboa dancers all over the world. And of course the song was a sensation during the swing-era and had a reputation for raising the excitement level of dancers and audience members to fever-pitch.



In a passage from his *Autobiography*, Malcolm X relates how a swing dancer at the Savoy Ballroom in the Harlem district of New York City was so affected by Hampton playing *Flying Home* that he jumped from the second floor balcony, trying to fly. And in Connecticut the police asked Hampton not to play the song for fear that the second floor balcony in the theater would collapse when the audience members began to dance and move to the music.

For this recording, KJRO is true to the original arrangement and the music is indeed flying high at 192 bpm. The tenor sax solo, originally played by a then 20 year old Illinois Jacquet, is admirably re-created by Gordon Towell, who is more than equal to the task. Jacquet's solo is often noted as one of the first examples of the beginnings of the rhythms later known as "rock 'n' roll" and "rhythm and blues".

Even more famous than Jacquet's solo are the two trumpet solos, originally played by Ernie Royal. Those solos are pushed higher and higher by the vibraphone, originally played by Hampton and re-created on this track by noted Swedish vibraphone virtuoso Anders Astrand. Mark Clodfelter is outstanding on trumpet as he hits the sky on both solo sequences --- ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta TAA! --- playing each to the hilt. Very impressive!

Harlan Leonard

Harlan Leonard led a fine big band orchestra in the 1930's and early 40's, primarily based out of the Kansas City area. The band never got the big break that would have catapulted them to national recognition.

KJRO provides a much overdue recording of three wonderful songs from Leonard's library: *Skee*, *Too Much* and *Hairy Joe Jump*. All three recordings are true to the original recording, and provide a freshness and energy which exhibit the maturity and hard-swinging abilities of the Leonard orchestra.



Skee and *Too Much*, at 204 and 182 bpm, are particularly good charts for Balboa. *Skee* features some fine Kansas City style swinging solos by Miles Osland on alto sax, Jim Grubbs on trombone and Dick Domek on piano. This song provides the listener an idea of the impressive music produced by Harlan Leonard.

Too Much is another swinging chart. KJRO plays this one in the Leonard style, nice and relaxed but swinging hard. Featured solos on this track are Rick Cook on trumpet, Dave Henderson on trombone, Gordon Towell on tenor sax and Kevin Kehrberg on bass. All the solos are played tight and in the somewhat "jumping" style of the Leonard band.

Hairy Joe Jump (not sure where that name came from!), played at 173 bpm, is a really fine mid-tempo song. Two solos each on trumpet and tenor sax by Rick Cook and David Hummel, and Gordon Towell and Dave Anderson, plus Dick Domek on piano make this a real gem of a song.

One of the services KJRO performs with this CD is the ability for listeners to realize just how many good big bands there were in the swing-era, but never became famous. Thanks to KJRO for providing this much overdue recognition to **Harlan Leonard and His Rockets**.

Artie Shaw

A very successful big band leader, it's well known that Shaw was uncomfortable with all trimmings and trappings that came with being the equivalent of a "rock star" in the 1930's. Whatever his feelings about stardom, Shaw's bands could swing, and *Back Bay Shuffle* is a prime example.



The piece was originally provided to Shaw in 1938 by Teddy McRae, who at the time was playing tenor sax for the Chick Webb Orchestra. Back Bay was a train station in Boston and McRae described the saxes as sounding like the wheels of a train, coming into the station.

After the opening riffs, Shaw jumps right in and is featured on the clarinet, re-created by Miles Osland. The clarinet solo is followed by trombone, trumpet, piano and tenor sax solos, all expertly re-created by Jim Grubbs, Rick Cook, Dick Domek and Gordon Towell

in the light but hard swinging style of what was probably Shaw's best band. At 193 bpm, this tune is a fun number for dancers and listeners alike.

The Others

Of the remaining four selections on this CD, two showcase the vocal talents of Angie Ortega, a recent University of Kentucky graduate.

On the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe features Ortega in top form on the **Harry James** version of this well known song. James' version originally featured Maysville, KY native Rosemary Clooney. Rick Cook re-creates Harry James' original trumpet work on this track. At 129 bpm, this is a fun song to listen and dance to, with a somewhat slower but still swinging tempo.

I Thought About You was originally a Frank Sinatra tune arranged by **Nelson Riddle**. This arrangement really spotlights Ortega's smooth but strong vocals. Miles Osland and Rick Cook nicely complement Ortega's vocals with their flute and trumpet work. At 116 bpm, this song is a pleasure to enjoy, nice and easy on the dance floor, or just taking in the great vocals of Angie Ortega.

A special note. Angie Ortega was the featured vocalist at several KJRO and [Hepcats](#) events (she sometimes played saxophone with the band!). We wish her well in her future endeavors and hope she gets a chance to come back to Lexington for a visit, and maybe even perform with KJRO.

Ill Wind was recorded by another big band leader vastly underappreciated today, **Benny Carter**. This song features ample opportunities for the piano and saxophones, played by Dick Domek and Miles Osland, to be expressive and paint a very pretty musical picture. At 68 bpm, this is a nice song to sit back and enjoy, or get your partner close on the dance floor.

And lastly, for the **Glenn Miller** fans, KJRO offers an instrumental version of one of Miller's most commercially popular songs, *Chattanooga Choo Choo*. At 144 bpm, this is a nice song at the mid tempo range.

To sum up, this is one of the best CD's released since the end of the big band swing-era that authentically re-creates the music of the original big band orchestras of the 1930's and 40's.

Many thanks to Miles Osland and Dick Domek for the immense amount of time and effort that went into this CD. They both had full time teaching loads and very busy performing schedules during the recording and pre-production of *Flying Home*. Their dedication to not just performing but recording this music is laudable.

What's next for KJRO?

In the liner notes to this CD, Gunther Schuller, author of *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945*, is quoted as stating that "Any music that isn't heard live must ultimately die".

With the release of their first CD in 1999 and this CD in 2009, plus concerts and the frequent collaborations between KJRO and the [Hepcats](#) in Lexington, KY, co-directors Miles Osland and Dick Domek and all the past and current members of KJRO are certainly doing their part to keep the great music of the big band swing-era alive. KJRO not only keeps the music alive of well known artists such as Duke Ellington and Count Basie, but brings much needed recognition to some underappreciated bands of the swing-era, such as Harlan Leonard and Jimmie Lunceford.

So what's next -- or what could be next for KJRO? It would certainly be fitting if a number of other deserving bands from the swing-era could get their just and overdue recognition and have their music benefit from the talent, special abilities and expertise of KJRO. I'm thinking of bands led by artists such as Fletcher Henderson, Chick Webb, Willie Bryant, Edgar Hayes, Lucky Millinder, Erskine Hawkins and the Mills Blue Rhythm Band.

Wouldn't it be magical to hear KJRO bring to life.....

Yeah Man!; Big John's Special; Wrappin' It Up, by **Fletcher Henderson**.

Lindyhopper's Delight; Let's Get Together; Heebie Jeebies, by **Chick Webb**.

Rigamarole; Long Gone From Bowling Green, by **Willie Bryant**.

In the Mood (the original version); *Swingin' in the Promised Land*, by **Edgar Hayes**
(note: Hayes was born in Lexington, KY in 1904).

Mason Flyer; Little John's Special, by **Lucky Millinder**.

Riff Time; Swingout; Swingin' in Harlem, by **Erskine Hawkins**.

There's Rhythm in Harlem; Harlem Heat; Back Beats, by the **Mills Blue Rhythm Band**.

So all you swing dancers, jazz music enthusiasts, big band music lovers – get your copy of this CD and support KJRO. If you're in the Lexington area, attend one of KJRO's swing dance collaborations with the [Hepcats](#), or one of KJRO's concerts. Support the musicians that keep this great music alive.

And let's hope that it's not another 10 years before KJRO releases another CD!