“Inside the Studio, Inside the Score”

Linda Ronstadt and
The Nelson Riddle Orchestra Recording session for the album "For Sentimental Reasons"
2-6PM, July 11, 1985
The Complex
Los Angeles, CA

"Little Girl Blue" Notes:

Section 1 - “Hey George” starts us off and what George Massenburg is telling Nelson Riddle that Peter Asher, the producer, is going to be late. Get used to the cocktail party like din, the type you'd hear at a gathering of old friends. To an extent, that's exactly what you've got here. The best-of-the-best meeting in LA to make money. They're prevailing and taking care of business as master musicians.

Section 2 - This section began with Nelson Riddle clapping his hands to get attention. Why is Nelson shaking his head? This section gives you more rehearsal to ponder, and as such is the longest section.

Section 3 begins with producer Peter Asher starting the control room discussion. There are often so many people talking it's somewhat difficult to pick up on all the opinions in the room. You have the advantage of review of this material as you can go back and forth to capture the interesting bits of dialogue. This is a most interesting look at a made-for-camera procedure used to get things done in a 'collective' environment.

One pithy comment and right on the money was George as he commented to Nelson that the "horns are ringing with the flutes." Upon playing it back, that's exactly what you hear. You may assume correctly that in this case, the word "ringing" is used to mean "out of tune." Peter follows this comment up with the word "crunchy" which means the same thing.

Section 4 starts with an unavoidable and unwanted jump-cut [my bad] in the middle of an idea that Linda was making in the control room, and takes you back to the session itself, eventually giving you one more pass (“Take Four”) to audition, then ends departing like a lamb.
Just some random thoughts...

“The main reason there are so many wrong notes in this piece at the beginning of the session is that shortly before the date the score and the parts were in D Major, the singer’s original choice of key. Terry Woodson is the Terry that Nelson refers to, and is seen here as Nelson’s assistant standing just outside the flutes armed with a score. He was up all night before the session recreating score and parts from D Major to Db Major, one half-step lower.

Why did the key have to change? Within a short period of time before the downbeat, Linda decided it was more comfortable to sing it in Db. There were no machines available in the world, and wouldn’t be for another fifteen or twenty years or so, to fix this inconvenient problem by the pressing of a button. In 1985, music transposition was a laborious task all done by hand. Yet George Massenburg recorded this album in both analog and digital formats. And this is why you’ll see an engineer at each machine hired mostly to make sure the playback is in the right place on each machine.

**Money** notes—money notes are certain notes a singer intones that he or she thinks will resonate with his or her audience. These certain notes may be about dynamics or about phrasing or any number of other musical/lyrical devices or inventions. The note sung on the word “Gold” is one of those notes.

“What you don’t hear in this whole piece is the part where Linda opined that Plas Johnson’s soloing was so good, she would love to hear more of it. Nelson shrewdly made that happen and at the beginning of section 1 (above), announced to the orchestra where the cut was in their parts in order to make it so.

“Throughout this piece and starting from the very beginning, you can tell that Nelson undertook a "hands off" approach with his rhythm section. They did their own thing and he reinforced the fact by only dealing. His back was to them as well as to Linda. And that’s why Linda was conducting the session via the camera feeding to the studio monitors, one which was watched closely by Nelson at the important parts.

You will see things in this piece that I haven't mentioned. Some of it will be like watching paint dry. But some of it seems to come out of nowhere such as Nelson’s comment that "people rely so much on rhythm to play together which is normal, but very self-defeating." This got a good laugh from some of the orchestra members who thought he was kidding. But some were afraid to laugh in case he wasn't.
The good news for students is the amount of relative material out there to check on what and who you see here. First, this album has its own Wikipedia page. Linda Ronstadt, "For Sentimental Reasons" will do it.

MANY of the folks you see here performing have their own Wiki page as well. And I highly suggest you eventually listen to the final version of this piece you're going to spend time with. George mixed it and put the sparkle in it. If you've listened enough to these rough tracks, you'll be sure to hear the sparkle that George gave it.

The final version you should hear is "Little Girl Blue" Linda Ronstadt, provided to YouTube by Elektra Records. That one has the clearest fidelity of the versions I've listened to on YouTube.

Also, use your headphones with this, or your favorite earbuds. Use whatever you trust to get as close as you can to artist intent.