

RECORDINGS REPORTS: JAZZ LPs

TITLE, PERSONNEL, DATA

REPORT

Louis Armstrong and Dave Brubeck: "The Real Ambassadors." Armstrong's band; Brubeck's quartet; Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, and Carmen McRae, vocals. Columbia OL 5850, \$4.98; stereo OS 2250, \$5.98.

An original musical production by Mr. and Mrs. Dave Brubeck, this turns out to be an ambitious vehicle for the talents of that Ambassador Extraordinary, Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong. It celebrates the recognition of jazz by the State Department and dwells with hope and good will on the future benefits to be obtained in cultural exchanges. The high spot is the moving and daring conception of "They Say I Look like God," on which Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross essay Gregorian chants and provide a memorable background to Satchmo's sober reflections. There are two good ballads, duets by Armstrong and Carmen McRae, and passages of fine trumpet by the master. His introduction to "King for a Day" is certainly of royal quality. On the debit side are the under-recording of Trummy Young's voice and occasional ponderosities from the rhythm section.

Hank Crawford: "From the Heart." Crawford, alto saxophone; John Hunt, Phil Guilbeau, trumpets; Dave Newman, tenor saxophone; Leroy Cooper, baritone saxophone; Sonny Forrest, guitar; Edgar Willis, bass; Bruno Carr, drums. Atlantic 1387, \$4.98; stereo, \$5.98.

Crawford here leads a contingent from the Ray Charles band through nine unpretentious but pleasing performances. On one ("Stoney Lonesome"), there are solos from Phil Guilbeau and Leroy Cooper, but the others resolve into showcases for the leader's alto saxophone, and very neat showcases they are. It is a welcome change to hear such well-prepared and well-executed backgrounds from a small jazz group. Though Crawford shows an unmistakable grasp of "modern" phraseology, he "sings" and wails at these slow and medium tempos in a way which connects directly with an older and warmer tradition.

Johnny Griffin and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis: "Tough Tenor Favorites." Griffin and Davis, tenor saxophones; Horace Parlan, piano; Buddy Catlett, bass; Ben Riley, drums. Jazzland JLP 76, \$4.98; stereo \$5.98.

Griffin and Davis employ a formula that has been popular ever since Count Basie came East with Lester Young and Herschel Evans in his band. Outwardly they are dueling tenor saxophonists, but the contrast in their styles is such that tension is reduced to the point where one is more conscious of mutual esteem than of rivalry. Davis, for instance, stretches out to advantage on the relaxed tempo of a number like "How Am I to Know," whereas Griffin clearly relishes the high speed of "Ow."

Neal Hefti: "Jazz Pops." Hefti, arranger and conductor, with thirty-piece orchestra. Reprise R-6039, \$3.98; stereo, \$4.98.

Hefti's orchestra consists of five trumpets, five trombones, five saxophones, five flutes, four French horns, bass, guitar, drums, vibes, bongos, and, occasionally, conga. His stated aim was simply to produce "a good music album," and he has certainly succeeded. The arrangements are colorful and never overstuffed except for a few bars on "Coral Reef" where the French horns lumber gracelessly. The playing is clean and the recording excellent, but the soloists, apart from Gerald Wilson on "Moanin'," are bland and lacking in personality proportionate to the rich orchestral context.

Ramsey Lewis: "Country Meets the Blues." Lewis, piano; Eldee Young, bass and cello; Red Holt, drums. Argo LP 701, \$4.98.

Obviously inspired by the success of Ray Charles's Country and Western expedition, some of the numbers have sticky strings and girlish voices, but on others the Ramsey Lewis Trio is set before exciting backgrounds of flutes and saxophones arranged by Oliver Nelson. Particularly striking is a version of Willie Dixon's "I Just Want to Make Love to You" on which Eldee Young comes to the fore with his cello. Lewis's piano effectively emphasizes the superiority of the blues no matter how sentimental the climate.

Odetta: "Odetta and the Blues." Odetta, vocals; Buck Clayton, trumpet; Vic Dickenson, trombone; Herbie Hall, clarinet; Dick Wellstood, piano; Ahmed Abdul-Malik, bass; Shep Shepherd, drums. Riverside RLP 417, \$4.98; stereo \$5.98. "Sometimes I Feel like Cryin'." Same personnel except that Hall is replaced by Buster Bailey and Shepherd by Panama Francis. On some tracks Leonard Gaskin replaces Abdul-Malik, and Tedell Saunders (harmonica) is added. RCA Victor LPM 2573, \$3.98; stereo, \$4.98.

On some of these blues Odetta sounds mean, ragged, and hungry enough to recall singers like Bessie Smith and Rosetta Howard. On others, such as the ludicrous "Empty Pocket Blues," she sounds like an internationally famous "folk artist." The solos and obbligati by Buck Clayton, however, are consistently superb. He plays on every number on the Riverside album and on five on the Victor, and he plays real blues with much feeling and imagination. Also distinctly enjoyable are Dick Wellstood's knowingly sympathetic piano accompaniments and the unleavened humor of Vic Dickenson's trombone commentaries. "Special Delivery" on the Victor is not to be missed.

Reuben Phillips: "Big Bad Band at the Apollo." Phillips, alto saxophone and director; with fourteen-piece band. Ascot 13004 \$3.98; stereo 16004, \$4.98.

The house band at Harlem's Apollo theatre provides an agreeable surprise with the eleven instrumentals on this record. Six were written by the leader and at least two of them show an awareness of Count Basie and Neal Hefti, but the band has a rugged personality of its own, as well as an enthusiasm rare today. Elmer Crumpley, a veteran of the Jimmie Lunceford orchestra, is outstanding in his plunger-muted trombone solos. "Money" Johnson growls forthrightly on trumpet, too, and there are good solos from Billy Butler, Jimmy Powell, Jesse Drake, Adriano Acea, and Alva McCain.

Billy Taylor: "Impromptu." Taylor, piano; Jim Hall, guitar; Bob Cranshaw, bass; Walter Perkins, drums. Mercury MG 20722, \$3.98; stereo SR 60722, \$4.98.

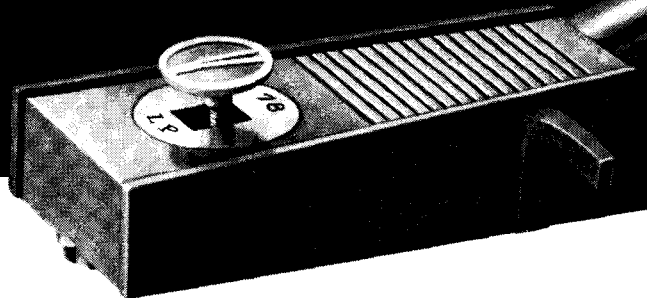
Billy Taylor never makes a bad record, but this is above his high average. His clean, polished piano style tends to make his most involved passages sound easy, but it does not disguise his firm and infectious beat. The presence of Jim Hall was probably an added filip, for this is a fresh and rewarding set all the way from the well-titled opener, "Capricious," with its *bossa nova* references, to the closing bars of the last number, "At La Carrousel." Wrapping it up, the pianist doubled on typewriter and sent in a fine set of notes.

Joe Turner: "Jumpin' the Blues." Turner, vocals; Pete Johnson, piano; with accompanying septet and quintet. Arhoolie R 2004, \$4.98.

The formidable team of Joe Turner and Pete Johnson return here in reissues of twelve sides recorded on the West Coast during 1948 and 1949. The rocking band on eight of them includes the brothers Art and Addison Farmer. Turner sings superbly in his usual bold and insolent fashion. No other blues singer mixes defiance, joy and, sorrow so adroitly. Johnson, one of the greatest blues pianists, accompanies him expertly and takes off for himself on four boogie-woogie specialities.

—S.D.

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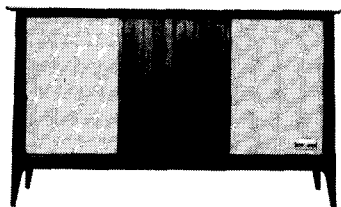


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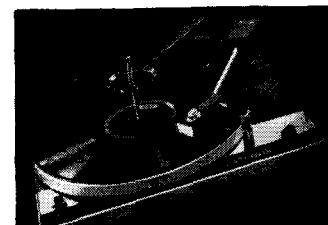
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*The quality goes in
before the name goes on*

Rockin' Chair Lady, Barrelhouse Gal

MILDRED Bailey was one of the greatest jazz singers, a legend in her own time, and a witty woman of taste, temperament, and keen appetites. Though her voice was little, she herself was big. Her weight was a burden and a humiliation over which she persistently triumphed.

To understand the artist, it is necessary to understand the woman. Her light, sweet voice was appropriate to the lovely, slender girl she had once been. It had the innocence and invulnerability of a youngster with ideals, and when this quality was brought to lyrics like those of "Squeeze Me," there was a curious but satisfying contradiction. No other singer has had a voice quite like hers. The nearest, that of Helen Humes, is richer and more vital, though it has a similar soaring quality.

Mildred wanted to be the person who went with the voice, regardless of the incompatibility of flesh and spirit. It wasn't success she looked for in the mirror, but the inner person she constantly projected as she sang. Nor was she vain about her small feet and ankles. She was just grateful for them, and she could dance like mad with the wit and mockery of Negro dancers in the 1930s. A compulsive eater, she remained more gourmet than gourmand. Yet, since she was frustrated to a considerable degree in her need for life and love, and in gaining recognition for herself, eating became an instinctive method of consolation. "What's troubling you?" is a question doctors often ask of those—even children—who overeat.

She was gay, however, and very good company. Her highly charged personality, like Dizzy Gillespie's or Louis Armstrong's, stimulated everyone. She had a fine, penetrating sense of the ridiculous, such as many jazzmen have, and her fast wit was often directed at those who stepped on her toes artistically. Always in the vanguard of those perceptive to jazz, she roused musicians and brought out the best in them. Her musical and critical tastes were highly developed and she encouraged what was good; but little that was bad escaped her, and her rages often stemmed from the poor musicianship of others.

She was born Mildred Rinker in Tekoa, Washington, where her mother, who was part Indian, saw to it that she was well acquainted with Indian songs.

In later years, she referred to this musical background, and the wide range it required, as being very valuable in her subsequent career. When the family moved to Spokane, she, her three brothers, and a neighbor, Bing Crosby, became very much involved with the jazz of that time and place. She married young, moved to Los Angeles, and was divorced there.

IN 1929, she was hired by Paul Whiteman, largely as a result of the enthusiasm of her brother Al and of Bing Crosby, who were part of Whiteman's vocal trio, the Rhythm Boys. The girl singer with the big jazz group was to become a commonplace in the next decade, but one with an unmistakable jazz sound in an orchestra like Whiteman's was then distinctly novel. Her version of one of Hoagy Carmichael's most famous songs soon won her the title of "Rockin' Chair Lady."

While with Whiteman, she met Red Norvo, a xylophone player. They left the band together and were married in 1934. Two years later, Norvo formed his own big band with Mildred as vocalist. Known as Mr. and Mrs. Swing, they were popular during the hectic years of the Swing Era, but from 1940 onward she worked chiefly as a solo act. Though eventually divorced, they remained good friends until her death in 1951.



Bailey—"a curious but satisfying contradiction."

Continuing the most estimable of jazz reissue programs to date, Columbia has now released a three-volume set of Mildred Bailey's "greatest performances, 1929-1946" (C3L 22). As produced by John Hammond and Frank Driggs, the records admirably illustrate her career and art. They include her first recording, with guitarist Eddie Lang ("What Kind o' Man Is You?"), and one of her last, with pianist Ellis Larkins ("Lover, Come Back to Me").

Some of the earlier material results from the popularity of Negro musical shows in the 1930s, when not a few white songwriters were engaged in composing songs appropriate to Negro singers performing before predominantly white audiences. If some of the lyrics sound inappropriate for Mildred Bailey, it should be remembered that to most recording executives of the period the issue was simple: these were lyrics of jazz songs and she was a jazz singer.

HER acceptance as a jazz singer was in fact, complete; yet she had the humility to refuse to sing at the same concert as Bessie Smith. Her attitude toward racial problems was always progressive. In her accompaniments, she normally used the best musicians available regardless of color. As early as 1935, she was recording with a thoroughly integrated group and singing at a benefit in aid of the Scottsboro Boys in Harlem's Savoy Ballroom. And musicians still recall with a grin the name of one of her 1939 recording combinations: Mildred Bailey and Her Oxford Greys.

The Oxford Greys were Mary Lou Williams (piano), Floyd Smith (guitar), John Williams (bass), and Eddie Dougherty (drums), and the spare accompaniment they provided was in the best of taste. They gave her the maximum in relaxed support without seeking to draw the limelight upon themselves, and she worked over old numbers like "There'll Be Some Changes Made," "Arkansas Blues," and "You Don't Know My Mind" with joyful craftsmanship.

Another session, made for the British Parlophone company by John Hammond in 1935, was of classic perfection. Her four accompanying "Alley Cats" were Johnny Hodges, Bunny Berigan, Teddy Wilson, and bassist Grachan Moncur. The warmth and rapport in the four performances—"Someday Sweetheart," "Squeeze Me," "Honeysuckle