

## NEW FACES IN FOLK MUSIC

**D**URING the 1920s and 1930s, the halcyon days of folk, blues, and gospel recording, companies actively sought talent and recorded freely and prolifically. The results in most cases were uniform; there was a comparatively small percentage of outstanding artists, a high degree of mediocrity, and a lesser degree of pedestrian efforts. Today, thirty or more years later, there has been a twofold result of the recordings made so many years ago. In the first place, the legacy handed down by the artists of this bygone era has become a textbook and guideline for the artists currently active in the same or related fields. Secondly, the recording activities of today's companies not only equal or rival past efforts but in many instances, most notably the folk and gospel fields, have far surpassed even the wildest expectations of recording company executives.

Because of the plethora of present-day recording companies, wider reaches of talent, of varying qualities and degrees, have been afforded opportunities that were denied artists in previous years. Today, in strikingly similar fashion, the results have mirrored the period 1920-40 in the musical and creative qualities involved in the various performances. This writing is devoted to some of the individuals responsible for the recorded results.

The Prestige Record Co., through its Bluesville line, has not only recorded artists of established reputation (Lightnin' Hopkins, Big Joe Williams, Rev. Gary Davis, Lonnie Johnson, etc.) but has brought delight to the heart of the collector as a result of its activities in the area of "new faces." In most instances the recordings have been made in the native surroundings of the artist; Memphis, Tennessee, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Clarksdale, Mississippi, are but a few of the represented areas. The two men representative of the famous Clarksdale "delta" area are Robert Curtis Smith (*Clarksdale Blues*, BV 1064) and the singing barber, Wade Walton (*Shake 'Em on Down*, VB 1060).

While neither of these young (mid-thirties) men is in a class with other great artists from the same locale (Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton, Elmo James, John Lee Hooker), they are nevertheless representative of the poetic

and emotional forms employed by past singers from the region. Walton, who is not quite as dynamic as Smith, has an awareness of the musical traditions of the "delta" which is borne out by his choice of material. "Forty-Four," "Kansas City Blues," "Rock Me Mama," and the title song are all items generally associated with the Clarksdale area. His guitar playing accompanies his vocal renditions, and he is outstanding with his partially sung, partially narrated autobiographical piece, "Parchman Farm." His strongest point, however, is his plaintive, evocative harmonica playing. Smith, a farm hand and laborer, and the father of eight children, shows unusual poetic creativity and exhibits a guitar style gleaned from the prevailing styles of the area. His blues ballad devoted to the present-day evils of Mississippi farm life, "Council Spur Blues," is a detailed piece of subtlety, touching yet mockingly leering at the same time. "Rock Me Mama," Memphis Minnie's "See My Chauffeur" ("Me and My Chauffeur"), and "I Feel So Good," the latter generally associated with the late Big Bill Broonzy, are among the tracks included.

Smokey Babe (*Hottest Brand Goin'*, BV 1063) originally from the Mississippi "delta" area and now living in Louisiana, is a vigorous, energetic artist in his early thirties whose forcefulness and use of dynamics clearly manifest themselves in this recording. His guitar style is a brilliant, blues-for-dancing one and exults in the original purpose of the country musician—dance music. The album title, a singing "commercial" extolling the virtues of "Royal Gasoline," his employer, and the service station at which he is employed, is a wry and topical comment concerning the everyday activities of the artist. The tone is an unusually fine example of a "happy blues." A boll-weevil ballad, "Insect Blues," a train piece, "Locomotive Blues," and an example of the almost extinct bottleneck technique, "Ocean Blues," are but a few of the happy sounds contained in this notable release. Pete Franklin (*Guitar Pete's Blues*, BV 1068), thirty-six years old and from Indianapolis, Indiana, has a guitar style strongly reminiscent of Leroy Carr's great partner, the recently deceased Scrapper Blackwell, and a crisp barrelhouse-blues piano style. Although somewhat imitative in

both areas, he is possessed of a number of fine qualities. His piano and vocal stylings on expatriate Curtis Jones's "Lonesome Bedroom Blues" and his guitar work on Carr's "Prison Bound" are particularly illuminating and hopeful efforts. For the most part his program consists of material from the repertoires of other artists—Carr, Blackwell, Dr. Clayton, Joe Pullum, and Tampa Red.

Blind Snooks Eaglin (*That's All Right*, BV 1046), twenty-six years old and from New Orleans, has suffered his affliction from birth and plays both six- and twelve-string guitars in a rhythmically exciting manner. His musical approach has been shaped primarily by two sources—phonograph records and the radio. His voice is a hoarse, grainy one and he has unusual aptitude for taking diverse material and developing it into intensely personal statements. Eaglin's outstanding quality is the "rock-solid" beat with which he always accompanies himself. Ray Charles's "I Got a Woman," and Tommy McClennan's classic "Bottle Up and Go" and "Fly Right Baby," are typical of his material.

Doug Quattlebaum (*Softee Man Blues*, BV 1065) was discovered in Philadelphia working on an ice cream truck, peddling his wares and using his talents as a blues artist to advertise his presence in the neighborhood. While not an artist of major status, Quattlebaum, who performs with an old steel-bodied National guitar, is a fine example of stylistic shaping by urban, rural, and gospel forces. His emotional performances, musical approach, and verbal intonation belie the fact that he is a youthful thirty-five years of age. Performing in this older, classic tradition, he is further evidence that in the last analysis the blues although dying, are "goin' down slow." Memphis Willie B. (*Hard Working Man Blues*, BV 1048) is by far the oldest of all of the "new faces" discussed here. A volatile individual in his fifties, he is one of a score of fine artists who have somehow remained unknown and previously unrecorded. Performing in a style typical of others who have come out of the Memphis area, he is equally adept, instrumentally, at both mouth harp and guitar. His singing has much to recommend itself and his talent for evincing intense emotional experiences is masterfully fulfilled. He recently appeared in concert in New York with

two legendary Memphis artists, Furry Lewis and Gus Cannon, and performed in a talented and vigorous manner that left little doubt that he is an artist of major stature who has not deserved his hitherto experienced anonymity. The twelve selections presented are all original compositions.

American traditional music has enjoyed the greatest rise in the renewed recording efforts of the many active companies. An increased interest in mountain and country music, especially in urban areas, which has directly contributed to the rise of the so-called city-billy, has unearthed a number of artists of major stature. Probably the most important and talented "discovery" is "Doc" Watson. Watson, from Deep Gap, North Carolina, performs with incredible virtuosity on guitar, mandolin, five-string banjo, autoharp, and harmonica. Blind from birth, he sings in a typically countrified way and his guitar technique is truly dazzling in both flat-pick and finger-picking styles. He has, of late, become a sort of demigod among aficionados of mountain music due to extensive personal appearances and concerts. Presented with *The Watson Family* (Folkways FA 2366), he is an exciting and stimulating new talent. "The Train that Carried My Girl from Town" is extraordinarily well conceived and exhibits only a few of his many facets. Continuing in the mountain tradition, *The Music of Roscoe Holcomb and Wade Ward* (Folkways FA 2363) presents two men who have been performing in the style for many years. The former, a native of Daisy, Kentucky, who plays five-string banjo and fine blues guitar, is about as good a recorded example as is available to illustrate the raw beauty present in this neglected art form. He is a superb document. Ward is from Independence, Virginia, and plays both fiddle and five-string banjo in the manner synonymous with "old-time music." He does not sing, but his instrumental proficiency is so staggering that it more than makes up for the lack of vocalizing. The Dillards (*Back Porch Bluegrass*, Elektra EKL-232) are a foursome from Salem, Missouri, and include the two Dillard brothers, Douglas and Rodney, Dean Webb, and Mitchell Jayne. Although this is their first recorded effort, it easily establishes them in a class with the best of such units currently active. A recent New York appearance visually corroborated this, with the banjo playing of brother Doug attaining star status with his near-flawless technique. The group demonstrates drive and intensity that are at times overwhelming. Their interpretations of traditional material ("Ground Hog," "Reuben's Train," and Grandpa Jones' "Rainin' Here this



Mark Spoelstra—"a musical rarity."

Morning!") and many originals ("Deulin' Banjo," "Cold Trailin'," and "Banjo in the Hollow") will delight all aficionados of this highly percussive, powerhouse type of mountain music. They are a professional group, totally refreshing and assuredly destined to make their impact felt on the current musical scene. Mark Spoelstra (*The Songs Of . . .*, Folkways FA 2444) is a Californian in his early twenties who plays twelve-string guitar and who has absorbed the style of the early ragtime and country blues guitarists. In many ways he is a musical rarity, especially since he is one of the few young artists actively attacking the twelve-stringer who does not show the overpowering influence of the "King of the Twelve-String Guitar," Huddie Ledbetter. Spoelstra's style is much more blues-oriented than is usually the case with the instrument. An infectious melodic attack, an excellent blues-intoned vocal style, and sharply defined solo runs all contribute to the debut recording of this promising youngster. "Stranger's Blues," an amalgum of various blues verses, "Buckcer's Choice No. 2" and "The Times I've Had," two instrumental solos, and the traditional "Corinna" are the high points of Spoelstra's achievements.

Among women singers, there have been an unusually large number who uncomfortably follow the same musical pattern, consistently lacking in imagination and originality. One young lady who definitely does not fall within the aforementioned category is Carolyn Hester (Columbia Stereo CS 8596, Mono CL 1796) from Texas, who sings as well as she looks. Though this particular re-

cording does not transmit her talents to their fullest extent, it does serve notice of things to come. Judy Henske (Elektra EKL-231), a charter member of Dave Guard's ill-fated "Whiskeyhill Singers," is a singer-commedienne making her solo debut with this album. Regardless of how one feels about the extent of her talent, she is anything but dull. Her choice of material is varied and contains a number of unusual and interesting items; "Ballad of Little Romy" and "Hooka Tooka" are two of them. Lynn Gold (Warner Bros. W 1495), a sensitive soprano who is well traveled in the folk "coffeehouse" circuit, shows great promise and a talent deserving of greater exposure. With a lyrical voice and an unobtrusive guitar style, she stands head and shoulders above many less deserving but better known artists. Plaintive ballads are most certainly not mistreated by Miss Gold; the tender "Melora Ballad" alone is enough to recommend this effort. Dennis and Rogers (. . . *Sing Folk Hits of the 60's*, Crescendo GNP 88), a husband-and-wife team from England, treat a group of contemporary favorites, none of them in particularly outstanding fashion, the up-tempo numbers having a slight edge in quality over the ballads. Shelby Flint (. . . *Sings Folk*, Valiant 403) is a young lady who best typifies the style and technique employed by most such folk artists; lyrical, almost breathless presentations of standard-fare ballads. Unfortunately, these performances are marred by an aspirated sound that greatly detracts from what might otherwise have been a successful program.

The foregoing has been just a sampling of the vast field of new faces and recordings. It is quite possible that tomorrow's "giants" will be produced as a direct result of this renewed interest in American music.

—LAWRENCE COHN.

### ***Pre-Christmas Recordings***

**November 30—Full Recordings  
Section (Accent on Opera)**

**December 7—News and Reviews**

**December 14—Mid-Month Recordings (with annual Critics' Poll)**

# RECORDINGS REPORTS: JAZZ LPs

## TITLE, PERSONNEL, DATA

## REPORT

Milt Buckner: *The New World of Milt Buckner*. Buckner, organ; Gene Redd, vibes; Bill Willis, bass; Phil Paul, drums. Bethlehem BCP 6072, mono and stereo, \$4.98.

One of the best-equipped of the jazz organists, Buckner has been playing the "feared" instrument longer than most. Of the ten performances here—all musicianly and well arranged—half are sedate versions of popular successes, the others vigorous interpretations of blues and jazz material. Gene Redd, an accomplished musician, makes a welcome appearance on vibes, welcome not only as a change from the customary tenor saxophone. For sampling, try "Why Don't You Do Right?," "Take Five," and the translation of Miles Davis's "All Blues."

Herb Ellis and Stuff Smith: *Together!* Ellis, guitar; Smith, violin and vocal; Bob Enevoldsen, tenor saxophone and valve trombone; Lou Levy, piano; Al McKibbin, bass; Shelly Manne, drums. Epic 16039, \$3.98; stereo, \$4.98.

Stuff Smith is a major jazz artist who, neglected by the record companies, has long languished on the West Coast. Returned here thanks to John Hammond, he plays with the intense drive and marvelous vitality that have always made his music so enjoyably distinctive. His two Armstrong-like vocals suggest the desirability of a meeting with Ray Nance, who sings similarly and is his only real rival on jazz violin. Herb Ellis, a refreshing soloist, contributes a warm, appropriate accompaniment, while Al McKibbin's bass foundation is outstanding in its richness, assurance, and swing.

Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie: *Ella and Basie!* Ella Fitzgerald, vocal; Count Basie, piano, organ, and leader, with his orchestra. Verve V6-4061, \$4.98; stereo, \$5.98.

Ella Fitzgerald was clearly exhilarated by the occasion, the swinging beat of Count Basie and his men, the songs, and the wholly appropriate arrangements of Quincy Jones. The record presents a uniquely felicitous grouping of jazz talent, and also proves that Basie's is the ideal accompanying unit for the singer. It is not just a matter of restoring Ella to her rightful milieu, for this band does more for her than even Chick Webb's, with which, incidentally, she also sang "My Last Affair" years ago. The modesty and sensitivity of Basie's own piano and organ playing are an inspiration in themselves, and the band and soloists rise to the occasion splendidly. No one, surely, will dispute, after hearing this record, that Miss Fitzgerald is a jazz singer, especially after hearing the incredible "Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall." The record, unreservedly recommended, is unlikely to be topped for swinging happiness this year.

Frank Foster: *Basie Is Our Boss*. Foster, tenor saxophone; Al Aarons, trumpet; Eric Dixon, flute and tenor saxophone; John Young, piano; Buddy Catlett, bass; Phil Thomas, drums. Argo 717, mono and stereo. \$4.98.

Four of Basie's men, with a couple of Chicago residents added on piano and drums, turn in six somewhat routine performances here. Foster furnished two originals ("Vested Interest" and "May We"), the scoring, and the energetic, hard-toned tenor solos, which in several instances show a decided Coltrane influence. The flute solos are by Eric Dixon, not Frank Wess, and young Al Aarons plays confident trumpet with a good brassy sound. John Young, in Basie's place, is a competent substitute, but he wisely attempts no imitation.

Grant Green: *Feelin' the Spirit*. Green, guitar; Herbie Hancock, piano; Butch Warren, bass; Billy Higgins, drums; Garvin Marseaux, tambourine. Blue Note 4132, \$4.98; stereo, \$5.98.

This unusual set of five spirituals played by "modern" jazz musicians begins with the old New Orleans favorite, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," which is redefined with a not unattractive beat. Green's limpid tone and singing lines are well suited to the songs, for whose melodies he reveals a considerable and persistent affection. His and pianist Hancock's improvisations emerge tastefully from the melodic context, and they are a good deal more inventive than is apparent at first hearing. Except for the brisk version of "Go Down Moses" and one or two unduly repetitive interludes, a pleasant, reflective atmosphere prevails.

Earl Hines: *Earl "Fatha" Hines*. Hines, piano, accompanied by big band directed by Ralph Carmichael. Capitol T 1971, \$3.98; stereo, \$4.98.

"Idolized beyond all others in American music" by Stan Kenton, Earl Hines exercised a great influence upon the piano playing of Nat Cole, who regards him as "the Louis Armstrong of the piano players." These liner endorsements do him belated justice, and Capitol is to be congratulated on bringing him back into the limelight. Unfortunately the mock-Basie arrangements by Ralph Carmichael and the competent but characterless playing of a West Coast big band are not at all inspiring. In addition, tempos and treatment often suggest a deliberate attempt at popularization, but there are passages on numbers like "Little Girl," "Rosetta," and "Deep Forest" that reveal a great artist and an undiminished talent.

Sonny Rollins and Coleman Hawkins: *Sonny Meets Hawk!* Rollins, tenor saxophone; Hawkins, tenor saxophone; Paul Bley, piano; Henry Grimes or Bob Cranshaw, bass; Roy McCurdy, drums. RCA-Victor LPM 2712, \$3.98; stereo, \$4.98.

Mutual respect between the two saxophonists is musically manifest throughout the album. Rollins has, in effect, built an extension on the parent style of Hawkins. He has also extended the workable range of his instrument. Some of his high notes are hard on the ear, but his playing in the lower register often sounds like, and is moving in the same way as, bowed bass. His brusquely tongued notes recall saxophonists of the early Twenties, but they are used, not illogically, for emphasis in attack. Hawkins appears to have been stimulated by the encounter. He plays beautifully and the more rhapsodically. Identification is no problem, but stereo makes possible a reduction of Rollins's rather overpowering volume when desired.

Jimmy Smith: *Any Number Can Win*. Smith, organ, with big band and trio. Verve V6-8552. Kenny Burrell and Jimmy Smith: *Blue Bash!* Burrell, guitar; Smith, organ; Vince Gambella, guitar; Milt Hinton and George Duvivier, bass; Bill English or Mel Lewis, drums; Art Marotti, percussion. Verve V6-8553, each \$4.98; stereo, \$5.98.

Given the resources of the Hammond organ, the addition of a large band as on the first record may seem an extravagance, yet just how exciting the combination can be is handsomely shown on "G'won Train" and "Blues for C.A.," both arranged by Billy Byers. Guitarist Kenny Burrell gives Smith sensitive support on each album, but in the quartet context of "Blue Bash" and two titles on V6-8552 his lucid, understated commentary is particularly appealing. The individual style that Smith has developed is hornlike, full of blues sounds and phrases, and extremely positive in its rhythm. He uses it with more and more finesse.

T-Bone Walker: *T-Bone Walker*. Walker, vocal and guitar, with accompaniment by small jazz groups. Capitol T 1958, mono only, \$3.98.

The customary division of blues into country and urban categories leaves undefined the position of heavily jazz-influenced singers like T-Bone Walker and Joe Turner. This excellent collection from the Forties, made with small bands which included Bumps Myers (tenor saxophone) and Karl George (trumpet), exhibits Walker at his best—a convincing, versatile singer and a dramatically exciting player of the electric guitar. The single-note runs and tolling chords on the slow "West Side Baby," for instance, complement his singing to perfection. Material and tempos are well varied, but he is always in command. The extremely infectious character of the shuffle rhythm on the opening and closing tracks is in large part due to the thrust of his guitar. It is interesting to recall that twenty years ago records like these figured prominently on the trade's popularity charts.

—STANLEY DANCE.