

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN THEATER SERIES: Cole Porter's Anything Goes (DRM 1-0284); George & Ira Gershwin's Lady, Be Good (P 14271); Ziegfeld Follies of 1919 (P 14272). Available from Smithsonian Customer Service, P. O. Box 10230, Des Moines, Iowa 50336. \$6.99 each plus 90¢ postage and handling charge.

The Smithsonian has inaugurated its theater series with three interesting pieces of Americana, although none of the three may be sufficiently impressive to the general public to allow for a continuation of such a series. In the cases of Lady, Be Good and Anything Goes there have been too many other issues of much of the same material as well as put togethers of revivals and "made for records" specials. The question to be considered in both cases is "was there enough material available to justify the album?" In the Cole Porter score eight out of a possible 15 songs are represented with two songs performed twice and one given three renditions. The Gershwin score fares somewhat better with ten songs in fourteen cuts out of a possible fifteen songs (one of the numbers on this disc is from the British production and possibly shouldn't be included in the count). From the Follies we have 17 songs, some of which are questionable.

The major difference between the Porter and Gershwin scores is, I think, the material itself. The songs are more interesting in Lady, Be Good. This may be for the performances or perhaps the result of four lyricists and two composers involved. The source material is varied with items drawn from the English recordings of Fred and Adele Astaire and members of the English cast, Cliff Edwards, duo-pianists Victor Arden and Phil Ohman and Gershwin himself playing on radio broadcasts as well as piano rolls. Reprises of the songs, arranged in chronological order are different enough from earlier versions to make them truly interesting. With Anything Goes they seem to exist for filler reasons alone. Ethel Merman, The Foursome and Cole Porter notwithstanding, the English cast is not truly on top of the material and it becomes rather pedestrian in their mouths. The true gem of the latter collection is Ethel Merman's spirited rendition of Blow, Gabriel, Blow recorded in 1947. It stands out jarringly from the rest of the recordings, but it livens things up for the moment. It is followed by Jeanne Aubert's version and this weakens the effectiveness of the song.

In both cases a great deal of the assembled materials has been and still is available on other sources. While it is nice to have all the available material gathered together on one disc, that really does not seem enough. In both cases the item which wins me over is the notes. Four pages of detailed information concerning the songs, the show's history and excellent photographs make the albums gems. Once again, thanks to Edward Jablonski's well-ordered jottings, Lady, Be Good emerges tops, although Richard C. Norton ("a New York City banker by day") does provide interesting information.

The most curious item is the Ziegfeld Follies of 1919 with "music by

Irving Berlin and others." This disc is the caviar to the crackers and cream of the two earlier discs. Its 17 items taken separately are marvelous songs performed by masters of the art. Eddie Cantor sings five, Bert Williams six, John Steel three and Van and Schenck three. The hits are standards: You'd Be Surprised, Mandy, A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody and I've Got My Captain Working for Me Now all by Irving Berlin and My Baby's Arms by Joseph McCarthy and Harry Tierney of "Rio Rita" fame. The problem with this "archival reconstruction of the original production" is that it isn't what it claims to be. Many of the songs were not officially in the production; a number of songs are sung by people who did not sing them in the show and none of the women in the show recorded any of their numbers. The recording is entirely vocal and all the vocals are male. There are no recorded sketches or monologues and nothing, as indicated, by Marilyn Miller, Delyle Alda, Eddie Dowling, Johnny and Ray Dooley or the Ziegfeld chorus. The work done by Carl Scheele, John M. Raymond, Jr. and Stanley Green in presenting a "version" of a Follies is fun and certainly worth a listen, but don't expect to come away from this record with a feeling of having been there. Even the accompanying photos on the six pages of fascinating notes only make one wish for a more complete experience. Still, of the three albums in this series this is the most exciting and fulfilling.

In all three cases the sound has been cleaned up to allow the clearest possible reproduction. In the case of the American Anything Goes material this has flattened out the highs and left an additional dullness on the material. With the Follies recordings, however, it seems not to matter.

Hopefully the Smithsonian will issue additional records in this series, searching more carefully for projects of merit which, having never been attempted before, are crying out to be done. And in parting, I can only hope that future issues will include more inspiring covers...even if only to boost interest and secure sales.

J. Peter Bergman