

THE SMITHSONIAN COLLECTION (OF JAZZ)

- RO01 KING OLIVER'S JAZZ BAND 1923 (two records)
- RO02 LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND EARL HINES 1928 (two records)
- RO03 DUKE ELLINGTON 1938 (two records)
- RO04 DIZZY GILLESPIE "THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMERICAN ARTIST" 1940-1946 (two records)
- RO05 TEDDY WILSON "STATEMENTS AND IMPROVISATIONS" 1934-1942
- RO06 FLETCHER HENDERSON "DEVELOPING AN AMERICAN ORCHESTRA" 1923-1937 (two records)
- RO10 DUKE ELLINGTON 1939 (two records)
- NO03 PIANO MUSIC OF FERDINAND 'JELLY ROLL' MORTON PERFORMED BY JAMES DAPOGNY

This series is produced with the assistance of CBS Special Products, and all the contents - except most of the Dizzy Gillespie and the James Dapogny, are reissues of CBS-owned material (though a couple of items on the Fletcher Henderson would seem to belong to MCA). Their value is thus very dependent on their relationships with other reissues of this material - something that is their main weakness. Apart from the general excellence of the music, their main virtue is in their presentation. All the reissues are programmed in chronological order (usually the best way) and all the relevant discographical information is supplied (though in the almost unreadable jumble that is common to too many jazz reissues). As a bonus there are also pages of photos and notes that contain an abundance of relevant fact and interesting opinions - (only one incorrect fact stands out concerning Max Roach's recording debut).

Overall, the most successful of this series is the one dealing with the earliest music, the KING OLIVER. All of the fifteen Okeh's and four Columbia's are brought together with much better sound than ever before, so that it definitely replaces all previous reissues of this material. (The other half of this glorious band's output, for Gennett and Paramount, is also happily available on VJM 49). The double album is filled out with some 1924-8 sides that Oliver made with various Vaudeville blues singers who almost negate his excellent cornet work, though the remarkable group improvisations of the 1923 band are the essential core of this completion.

The least successful of this series is the JAMES DAPOGNY / JELLY ROLL MORTON since it comprises new interpretations by the former of the music of the latter. For all Dapogny's skills, he will never be as good an interpreter of Morton's music as Morton was - nobody every will be since Morton was both a superlative composer and improviser and his own recordings show how inter-related these two roles were. Since Morton's own recordings of most (if not all) of these pieces exist and are readily available, this project would seem to have been a complete waste of time and effort.

The LOUIS ARMSTRONG / EARL HINES is a sensible compilation since it contains all of their 1927-1928 recorded collaborations available to CBS (except for two of the lesser Lillie Delk Christian items) plus all the Hines unaccompanied solos recorded for Okeh at the same time. The only trouble with this is that it clashes with all previous reissues that cover Armstrong's work (with and without Hines) from around the same period. Certainly it makes a good introduction to Armstrong since it finds him at the top of his game (unlike the recent reissue with the misnomer "Young Louis Armstrong 1932-1933" (RCA AXM2-5519) which finds his trumpet deep in S-H-O-W-B-I-Z and well past his creative period).

CBS used to have a four-record FLETCHER HENDERSON box called - no doubt because the band's arrangements were so dreary and it's soloists so superb - "A Study in Frustration". Most of this new double album was on that earlier set but it does contain a few items that were not (just to annoy people who own the box?). Since it is so frustrating to listen to brilliant snatches of improvisation in the gloom, this good compilation will probably satisfy all but the avid collector. (I am inclined to advocate a technique for this band that I usually disapprove of - namely making up albums of extracted solos, particularly those of Coleman Hawkins.)

Most of the recordings from DUKE ELLINGTON's creative period (1926-1942) belong to CBS and RCA. The French subsidiaries of both of these companies are currently issuing all of their respective Ellington recordings in chronological order. This suffers a bit from overkill since they are including all available alternate takes (which in the case of the Ellington band generally do not add very much to the originals) and the small percentage of dull recordings (generally straight versions of then-pop tunes). What is required is a chronological survey of the original takes of all but the dull items (which can be achieved by skipping through the French series'). These two Smithsonian double albums do not help since (a) they are a drop in the ocean, and (b) they contain some alternates and dull pieces. (They do serve as a reminder of how Ellington, unlike Henderson, managed to integrate good arrangements with good improvisations.)

The TEDDY WILSON is a strange compilation, even allowing for him not being in the same class as the piano giants of his era - James P Johnson and Art Tatum (both of whom had both more technique and, much more importantly, much more emotional content). This single album contains 12 solo and trio performances, about two-thirds of such material from this period, plus just four of his innumerable appearances with small groups both as a leader and sideman. It is unbalanced, it clashes with other more sensible reissues, (and it is not very exciting).

The DIZZY GILLESPIE is an ambitious project as it involves the licensing of material from several labels (RCA is a notable absentee). Alas, things are not as great as they would have been since this issue, along with some of the others in this series, was conceived as a lecture rather than a collection or document. It thus duplicates

numerous other reissues but not in the way that it can replace any of them, which is annoying as it contains some items not otherwise on microgroove (though that should soon be remedied). In other words, it is a sampler and might just as well have been a book or article pointing out where the music is available - this side of it is emphasised by some extracts from recordings that are available in full elsewhere. As a lecture it works fine as we follow Gillespie's unique trumpet style emerging from otherwise uninteresting big bands and culminating in his greatest work in the bebop small groups of the mid-forties.

To sum up: Only the KING OLIVER can be recommended without reservation since it is complete and has the best sound available (not to mention the superlative music). The JAMES DAPOGNY / JELLY ROLL MOR-TON would seem to be entirely pointless, while whether one buys the others depends on what you want and what you already have. Certainly, the LOUIS ARMSTRONG / EARL HINES, the FLETCHER HENDERSON and the DIZZY GILLESPIE can be recommended as excellent introductions to their respective artists, but collectors will find themselves buying double albums for a handful of tracks.

Hopefully, Smithsonian will decide whether they want to serve collectors or lecturers rather than trying unsuccessfully to appeal to them both. That they should devote an album to Teddy Wilson shows that they are prepared to investigate people with lesser reputations, and their intended features on James P Johnson and Jimmy Noone are eagerly awaited (if they do them right). Maybe they will go on to explore such neglected geniuses as Teddy Bunn and Leo Watson before too long.

Note: In Washington DC these records are available at any Smithsonian Museum shop. Otherwise they are just available by mail from: Smithsonian Customer Service PO Box 10230 Des Moines IA 50336

#### COLUMBIA CONTEMPORARY MASTERS SERIES

This series has got off to a very promising start with Columbia issuing material from their vaults (Gerry Mulligan & Lester Young) and acquiring the rights to broadcasts that had only previously appeared on bootlegs if anywhere (Miles Davis and Charlie Parker). The name "Contemporary Masters" is confusing especially as the two most heavily featured artists (Parker and Young) died around twenty years ago. Contemporary of whom? (Maybe Columbia have come to realise that virtually none of their current so-called jazz recordings will be worth reissuing the day after tomorrow).

JC 34804 THE MILES DAVIS / TADD DAMERON QUINTET IN PARIS FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE JAZZ MAY 1949

This material has been circulated on tape between collectors for some time but has never appeared on record until now. It is a most important find since it finds Davis playing with the extroversion that did not appear in his published records until some twelve years later -

showing that his studio recordings, superb in their own right, did not tell the whole story. One is even inclined to go as far as to say that maybe this is the best Miles Davis recording, especially as he has such an ideal front line partner in James Moody. It is therefore strange these 41 minutes were not augmented by the (at least) three other performances from the same source.

JC 34803 GERRY MULLIGAN "THE ARRANGER"

"This album contains previously released material with the exception of some unissued performances". Quite so. The former are the Mulligan arrangements performed by the big bands of Gene Krupa (1946/7), Elliot Lawrence (1949) and Mulligan (1957) which comprise side one. The latter are the additional 1957 Mulligan pieces on side two. One good feature of Mulligan's arranging is his combination of members of different sections to give more color than the average big band with its tedious overuse of screaming trumpet sections. Even so, this music only seems to come to life when Lee Konitz is improvising on the 1957 selections. (The person who transcribed the personnel listings obviously mistook the standard abbreviations for tenor and baritone saxes to mean trumpet and bass sax! Otherwise all the necessary information is there though in the usual jazz jumble as on the other records in this series).

JG 34808 CHARLIE PARKER "ONE NIGHT IN BIRDLAND" (two records)

JC 34831 CHARLIE PARKER "SUMMIT MEETING AT BIRDLAND"

JC 34832 CHARLIE PARKER "BIRD WITH STRINGS"

Most of this material has appeared on various bootlegs, but it is now presented legitimately and in a better format than before. "One Night in Birdland" comprises the whole of the remarkable 1950 session and with Fats Navarro, Bud Powell, Curley Russell and Art Blakey that was previously scattered and semi-duplicated across numerous albums. At last it has all come together so that one can listen to this remarkable evening of music straight off. (Hopefully Columbia will issue the tapes of the other fine band that played that night under the leadership of Miles Davis - that there is so much material from one night indicates that it was recorded not from a broadcast but from a smuggled-in recording machine.) The "Summit Meeting at Birdland" features a 1951 reunion with Dizzy Gillespie and Bud Powell in which everyone plays exceptionally. Also included are Parker's only known recording with an organ trio (Milt Buckner's) and a typical quartet session making three complete broadcasts.

Whilst the above two albums can be recommended without reservation, "Bird with Strings" is best forgotten. Most of its contents are previously unissued, and they should have stayed that way. Hearing flashes of Parker's brilliance against the pathetic/embarrassing writing for strings and oboe is as satisfying as hearing one's favorite concerto played by one's favorite soloist with an orchestra comprised of three kazooes and a jug. That Parker may have wanted to do this does not make it any better by any means. It just goes to show that in spite of his unsurpassed improvisational genius, he was also a human being with failings. I am out of sympathy with those who say that he was so great that

even his warts should be propagated, especially as so many superb recordings have survived him.

CG 33502 THE LESTER YOUNG STORY VOL 1 (two records)  
 JG 34837 THE LESTER YOUNG STORY VOL 2 "A MUSICAL ROMANCE" (two records)  
 JG 34840 THE LESTER YOUNG STORY VOL 3 "ENTER THE COUNT" (two records)

These three double albums are the start of a series that will include, in chronological order, all the performances available to CBS on which Lester Young improvises. An absurd concept, since although Young may have been the greatest improviser on these sessions, he was not the only great one; in fact the high quality of virtually all of these performances is due to the generally high standard of all the soloists. It is thus nonsense to omit pieces from these dates on which Young did not solo whilst including those on which he can be heard for, say, four bars. Needless to say, this new series clashes with all of Count Basie, Billie Holiday and Teddy Wilson. The best way to get all the 1933-42 Holiday sides (including those under Wilson's leadership, but excluding some alternate takes) is to get the five double albums on CBS-Sony SOPH 61-70 with bonus album YBPC 1 - American Columbia could not do better than to copy their Japanese associates. As for the Basies', there is a rumor that French CBS is going to issue them completely in the way they are doing the Duke Ellingtons'. When that happens, the American Lester Young series will be 95% redundant. Until that happy day, this new series does fill some gaps especially as it contains some previously unissued takes - and such beautiful music!

GIANTS OF JAZZ - LOUIS ARMSTRONG - TIME-LIFE RECORDS STL-J01 (3-record box)

King Oliver	1923	Dipper Mouth Blues	Okeh
Fletcher Henderson	1924	Copenhagen	Vocalion
Clarence Williams	1925	Cake Walking Babies From Home	Okeh
Bessie Smith	1925	Cold in Hand Blues	Columbia
Louis Armstrong	1925	My Heart	Okeh
	1926	Gut Bucket Blues	
		Heebie Jeebies	
		Cornet Chop Suey	
Erskine Tate	1926	Static Strut	Vocalion
Lil Armstrong	1926	Georgia Bo Bo	Vocalion
Louis Armstrong	1927	Willie the Weeper	Okeh
		Wild Man Blues	
		Potato Head Blues	
		Ory's Creole Trombone	
		I'm Not Rough	
		Savoy Blues	
	1928	West End Blues	
		Muggles	
		Tight Like This	
	1929	Knockin' a Jug	
		Mahogany Hall Stomp	

	1929	Ain't Misbehavin' Black and Blue That Rhythm Man Some of These Days Dallas Blues	
	1930	My Sweet Sweethearts on Parade	Columbia
	1931	When It's Sleepy Time Down South Blue Again Star Dust	Okeh
	1933	Some Sweet Day	Victor
	1934	On the Sunny Side of the Street Song of the Vipers	Brunswick
	1938	Jubilee When the Saints Go Marching In	Decca

Louis Armstrong with the Mills Brothers	1940	Marie	Decca
Louis Armstrong	1940	2:19 Blues	Decca
	1947	Pennies from Heaven	Victor
	1950	That's for Me	Decca

Available through TIME-LIFE RECORDS, 541 N Fairbanks Court, Chicago, IL 60611, USA Price: \$19.15

Louis Armstrong's playing career falls into two very different periods demarked by an abrupt changeover in 1929. Before that date he was one of the supreme improvisors - certainly the most adventurous in jazz at that time (though not the first or only one as is often absurdly touted). In 1929 the lure of the cash-register seems to have completely perverted all his musical sensibilities to the extent that he never again became more than an embarrassing self-parody. (For one period in the early 1930's, he seems to have been interested in how many high-Z's he could play in a row - surely not the substance of music!)

This three-record box neatly has three sides in each of Armstrong's two periods. The first half is a joy to listen to as his magnificent trumpet work enhances the music no end. (One can, as usual, quibble with the programming - where is "Weather Bird", the tour de force duo with Earl Hines, for instance?) The second half is very difficult to sit through, especially after the first. Why bother to include it? Certainly it makes for a representative sampling of Armstrong, but it does not make for the best. Since there is so much fine Armstrong on record from before 1929, there does not seem to be any reason to preserve the rest - though there are some people who seem to want both the good and bad output of geniuses (just to prove they are human?) who would no doubt relish a recording of Armstrong breaking wind (either end) just because he once did something of note.

All of the worthwhile material included here is on other micro-groove reissues, though not always with the superb remastering. It should turn anyone new to Armstrong's oeuvre on to the better compilations of his better material.

WHO'S WHO OF JAZZ - STORYVILLE TO SWING STREET by JOHN CHILTON  
Time-Life Records Special Edition (free with the Louis Armstrong 3-record box) 370pp

This is by far the best work of its kind. Certainly much better than Leonard Feather's Encyclopedia of Jazz since it sticks to just the facts without any opinions. Also Chilton has done an enormous amount of scholarly research mainly through newspapers and magazines of the period as well as interviewing numerous surviving musicians. The end result is a detailed chronological listing of each musician's musical activities. (We are spared most of the non-musical irrelevances - thank goodness - except in the case of Jack Purvis whose history makes most Hollywood movies seem realistic!)

The criteria for inclusion reflect the sub-title. "All the musicians and vocalists given individual entries were born before 1920. Only musicians born or raised in the USA are included in this volume." One may argue with these limitations, or with some of the omissions of minor musicians, but they generally seem to be reasonable especially as Chilton is working on a second volume to deal with those he left out this time. (The introduction copied from the first edition is no longer valid in saying that the few Jazzmen of modern persuasion born before 1920 have been left out - they are included in this 1978 edition.)

The only drawback of this special edition versus Chilton's own original publication is the omission this time of photographs. But then since music is an aural experience, the visual appearance of musicians is completely irrelevant.

JOHN KIRBY: THE BIGGEST LITTLE BAND 1937-1941 SMITHSONIAN COLLECTION R013 (2-record set)

Buster Bailey	1937	Afternoon in Africa	Brunswick
		Dizzy Debutante	
	1938	Planter's Punch	
		Sloe Jam Fizz	
John Kirby	1938	Rehearsin' fo a Nervous	
		Breakdown	Decca
		From A Flat to C	
		Pastel Blue	
		Undecided	
Buster Bailey	1938	Chained to a Dream	Brunswick
		Light Up	
John Kirby	1939	It Feels Good	Brunswick
		Sweet Georgia Brown (take A)	
		Sweet Georgia Brown (take B)	

		Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes	
		Front and Center	
		Royal Garden Blues	
		Opus 5	
		Blue Skies	
		Serenade	
	1940	Jumpin' in the Pump Room	Columbia
		20th Century Closet	
		Blues Petite	
		Chloe	
Buster Bailey	1940	Pinetop's Boogie Woogie	Varsity
		Eccentric Rag	
John Kirby	1940	Andiology	Columbia
		Can't We be Friends	
		I Love You Truly	
		Coquette	
		Zooming at the Zombie	
	1941	Beethoven Riffs on	Columbia
		Cuttin' the Campus	

The John Kirby Sextet may have been the biggest little band in the land, but it was far from being the most profound. Most of its arrangements were very slick and twee, especially those of themes taken from European romantic music. The solos of trumpeter Charlie Shavers and saxophonist Russell Procope are generally good but not exceptional, certainly not in the same class as those of Frankie Newton and Pete Brown who appear, all too briefly, on some of the tracks made under Buster Bailey's name. Bailey himself was a consistently dreadful improviser - the sleeve notes acknowledge this and suggest that his inclusion in so many bands was due to his remarkable abilities as a sight-reader.

Considering how much superior music was being made in that era, it seems strange that Smithsonian should waste their resources on such a release, especially as John Kirby double albums have recently appeared on both Columbia and Inner City. Is music as lightweight and second-rate as this really worth documenting and preserving?

#### FOLKWAYS REISSUES

"THE DANCING TWENTIES" FOLKWAYS RBF 27  
 "THE TUNEFUL TWENTIES" FOLKWAYS RF 29

The Twenties produced much fine music ranging from Sam Morgan's Jazz Band to Anton Webern's Variations. Alas, none of it is to be found on these two records of miscellaneous dance bands. There are no great tunes, no substantial improvisations, not even any of those zany



dead-pan vocals that make the RCA 1926/7/8 collections somewhat (albeit perversely) enjoyable. The only apparent reason for preserving this ante-muzak would seem to be as a reminder that the Twenties, in common with every other decade, was also responsible for more than its share of dull music.

Martin Davidson