

## JAZZ REISSUES

### THE COMPLETE COUNT BASIE Vol I to 10 1936-1941 CBS 66101

This ten-record box contains, in chronological order, all the existent material that Count Basie recorded for Vocalion and Okeh up to one quarter of the way through the session of 24 September 1941. (There are strong rumors of a second box to continue therefrom). As well as the Orchestra sides that start in March 1939, there are three small group sessions (all superlative) - Jones-Smith Incorporated (1936), Basie's Bad Boys and Kansas City Seven (both 1939). There is also Basie's guest appearance on the first side recorded under Sam Donahue's leadership. In addition to all the original 78 releases, there are also all the existing alternate takes, many of which are previously unissued, and a few items that were never issued at all.

The methodical release of this material is long overdue, since previous microgroove releases in various parts of the world have been haphazard and overlapping. This new French box is certainly methodical, indeed it suffers from being too methodical!

Basie's Band in the Thirties was outstanding for its fine bunch of soloists (Buck Clayton and Lester Young are particularly noteworthy), the idyllically relaxed swing of its rhythm section (Basie, Freddie Green, Walter Page and Jo Jones), and its straight ahead, unpretentious arrangements that left a reasonable amount of room for solo improvisations. However, by the start of the Forties, many of the arrangements were becoming more complex and less musical, leaving less room for the soloists. In general, it is these less appealing complexities that required the most alternate takes, especially those which would appear to be so-called novelty numbers which were probably forcibly peddled in the studio by some unmusical song pusher. Thus, the anti-climax of this box comes on side 19, with no less than five takes of a little ditty called "One-Two-Three-O'Lairy", which is as inspirational as its title suggests. One take of this would be just about acceptable, but five when there is so little improvisation is just absurd. This is the worst case, although several of the other, less interesting, numbers become somewhat tiresome after two, three, or four takes.

This is a shame because there is so much excellent music in this box. It would be nice to be able to sit down and listen to a side at a time without having to skip over uninteresting alternates - you can actually do this on only half of the twenty LP sides. Also the recording quality on most pieces is superb considering their age - all four members of the rhythm section can be heard.

The following approach would surely have been much more satisfying to most listeners and listening collectors:

- (a) Release the three small group sessions on a single LP, including the alternates since they are largely improvised. (What a superlative collection of superlative music that would be!)
- (b) Release just the original master takes of the remaining material in chronological order on as many LP's as it requires.
- (c) Release the interesting alternate takes in chronological order on another series of LP's. I do not know how to define "interesting", except to point out that the alternate "Blow Top" is definitely interesting, whereas the "O'Lairy"'s definitely are not. (Surely there must be a record producer around with good taste and discretion.)

Until that happy day, this box is recommended to those who want a more thorough coverage than the hitherto somewhat random compilations. But resign yourself to a lot of travel between your listening post and your turntable (unless you have one of those programmable jobs that this box is obviously designed for).

Some secondary points:

There are four takes of "Dickie's Dream" by the Kansas City Seven-- except that the so-called take 4 is the same as the master (take 1), but with better sound. Why bother to include both?

A few tracks, notably the alternate "Lester Leaps In" from the same session, suffer from having been deticked by someone without a deticking machine. In other words, noisy clicks have been removed by cutting them out and joining the bits on either sides of the click together. The result is that every so often the music lurches forward as if the rhythm section lost half a beat. (In some music one can get away with this crude technique, but with a rhythm section like Basie's, one would almost be aware of a missing nanosecond.) When this material appeared on the US Columbia Lester Young series, the producer apologized and said that nothing could be done with it. Surely the missing bars could be expanded with blank tape so that the beats as measured on the tape were the same distance apart? Surely the resultant drop-outs would sound better than the lurches? Maybe this could be improved further by filling the gaps with a copy of either side of it? Admittedly, this would be very time consuming and tedious on an analogue system, but it should not be too difficult to program on a digital setup.

Finally, having gone to all the trouble of collecting this material and releasing it in a box, all French CBS have come up with in the way of visuals is just a double-fold leaflet, containing two nice band photos and the discographical information. The tune titles, composers, and publishers (bless their cotton socks) are clearly listed, whereas the personnels are most difficult to follow. Not only are they in the usual non-tabular mess, but one keeps having to add and/or subtract vocalists and/or arrangers as one proceeds from track to track. Since the instrumental personnel remained fairly constant while the vocalist and arranger (including the preferential "none") varied so much, it

would have been better to list the vocalist and arranger with each track. It would also have been very decent and useful to have the soloists listed, since it is they who are, in the final analysis, the most important aspect of this box--in fact, the only reason for this material to be reissued, listened to, and treasured.

#### GIANTS OF JAZZ - TIME-LIFE 3-record boxes

Coleman Hawkins STL-06  
Jelly Roll Morton STL-07  
Jack Teagarden STL-08  
Sidney Bechet STL-09  
Earl Hines STL-10

The earliest microgroove reissues of pre-microgroove jazz material tended to consist of random compilations of a particular artist's best (and not so best) work. These were generally both a good introduction for the novice listener, and nice to be listened to an LP side (or more) at a time. They were, however, frustrating to the collector or deeper investigator since so much material was omitted. Nowadays the tendency is to reissue everything, including alternate takes, in a strict chronological format that is bound to deter the beginner as it often makes for LP sides that are not pleasant to listen to in one sitting. But the desire of the collector and deeper investigator to have access to everything is satisfied.

These Time-Life boxes go back to the old concept of a random selection of a particular artist's best (and not so best) work, and as such are recommended to anyone not cognizant of the music of the artist. They also make for very enjoyable casual listening. But will such random (albeit chronological) compilations be satisfying for long?

They are somewhat billed as being the definitive compilations for each artist--but just go to show that there is no such thing! For example: Some months before receiving the Jelly Roll Morton set, I was asked to compile a radio program of about the same length to celebrate his posthumous birthday. I have virtually all his recordings on various microgroove reissues, so I had access to the same material as did the Time-Life producers, yet only about a third of our selections coincided. Which selection is the more definitive? Obviously I think mine is, since I am as biased as anyone else. To be more objective, Time-Life completely ignored two superb areas--the early piano solos and the Library of Congress recordings. (If there were contractual problems in reissuing this material, a note explaining these gaping chasms would have been expected.)

Another major omission: Coleman Hawkins made superlative music for most of his life, yet the boxed set concentrates on his beginnings in the Twenties and his first maturity in the Thirties. His continuing excellence throughout the Forties is touched upon inadequately, while

all the excellent (and not so) recordings he made in the Fifties and early Sixties are represented by one unexceptional track. Hardly definitive or representative.

Another disturbing aspect of this series is the random choice of the artist (or pseudo artist) to spotlight. It is particularly disturbing to find more modern artists ignored--are we ever going to get the likes of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler? (Hopefully not because of some of their unfortunate flirtations with strings or rock.) Even given the pre-modern bias, I would consider Henry Allen, Teddy Bunn, James P. Johnson, Leo Watson and others long before Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Earl Hines and Jack Teagarden. But then one man's meat . . . .

If you need an appetiser, by all means savor these sets. If you are already into the meat course you will not need them, except that each box cunningly contains one or two very rare items to lure the seasoned collector into buying yet another compilation for just a small percentage of its contents.

For all their imperfections, these boxes are probably the best introductions to their various subjects, especially as the mastering is so superlative and the accompanying booklets are so informative. (Too bad the booklets do not contain a summary list of the contents.) Hopefully, they will induce their listeners to go on to more detailed releases, which hopefully are not too detailed. Surely it is enough for most chronological surveys to contain just the original master takes, with any interesting alternates relegated to a separated series. Exception can be made to this, i.e., putting the alternates in sequence, if (a) the improvisatory content is large compared with the pre-arranged, (b) the improvisations vary considerably from take to take, and (c) there are not too many alternates. In other words, let us long-suffering listeners have releases that not only contain everything of interest in a reasonable order, but that also make for enjoyable listening on an LP side at a time (or, preferably, more).

GENE ROLAND "THE BAND THAT NEVER WAS" Spotlite SPJ-141

Gene Roland Orchestra:

circa 26 piece orchestra including:

Jimmy Knepper (tb) Charlie Parker (as) Al Cohn (ts) Zoot Sims (ts)  
1950/4/3

It's a Wonderful World (x5): Just You Just Me: Unknown tune:  
Stardust (x3)

Charlie Parker Quintet:

Miles Davis (tp) Charlie Parker (as) Duke Jordan (p) Tommy Potter (b)  
Max Roach (dr) (plus Kenny Hagood (vcl) on \*) circa 1948/3

52nd Street Theme (x3): Dizzy Atmosphere: My Old Flame: All The  
Things You Are\*: Half Nelson: Big Foot

A record by the band that never was? The album title infers that the Gene Roland Orchestra never appeared in public--it only existed at six rehearsal sessions, one of which was recorded in part. Recent Charlie Parker discographies have revealed the existence of this material, and at least one Parker fan was eager to hear what this unusual big, big band sounded like. The release of this record at last reveals a dull recording of dull performances of dull music, saved only by the occasional Parker improvisational spots. The band that never was very interesting, perhaps--for complete completists only.

The other side of this record is something else--superlative examples of Parker's improvising from a period that is not well documented. As with several other amateur recordings of Parker, only the sections of the music that featured him were recorded since the enthusiast did not want to "waste" then valuable tape on such relatively lesser musicians as Miles Davis and Duke Jordan. Thus all the performances are incomplete, starting and stopping at somewhat random places according to when the enthusiast thought that Parker was about to start or stop playing. The end result would have been much more enjoyable if the record producer had done a little bit of editing to tidy up the starts and stops that occur in the middle of performances, rather than just issue the original tape unedited. (Also, there are very, very short extracts from Parker solos on both sides of the record that do not really tell us very much.) However, once you get used to all this jumping around, there is some amazing Parker improvising of the very first order to be listed to--enough to make this curious record of previously unissued music an essential purchase, if not a definitive Parker document.

Martin Davidson