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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### *The Blackwell Guide to Blues Records.*

Edited by Paul Oliver. Cambridge, MA, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Reference, 1989. vii, 347 pp., index, bibliography.

English blues scholar Paul Oliver has edited and contributed one chapter to a useful guide to early through contemporary blues recordings, stressing current or recently available collections. Emphasis, in his words, is on "the best examples of blues records in each of a number of broad categories," which are selected and discussed by Oliver and eleven other specialists. They are as follows.

Paul Oliver:	Songsters and proto-blues
David Evans:	Early deep south and Mississippi valley blues
Bruce Bastin:	Texas and the east coast
Daphne Duval Harrison:	"Classic" blues and women singers
Mike Rowe:	Piano blues and boogie woogie
John Cowley:	the 1930s and the Library of Congress
David Penny:	Rhythm and blues
Paul Garon:	Postwar Chicago and the north
Bob Groom:	Down-home postwar blues
Dick Shurman:	Postwar Texas and the west coast
John Broven:	Louisiana, New Orleans and zydeco
Jeff Hannusch:	Soul blues and modern trends

Each chapter includes a background discussion of trends, influential performers, and records cited for inclusion. A total of 480 items are included, primarily LP discs in single or multiple sets with cassette and compact disc issues cited when available. Along with general discussions, annotations follow most citations.

A book like this will be of immediate use to libraries and sound archives wishing to compare their holdings with these citations; it will certainly help secure a place for many items which are unlikely to gain librarians' interest otherwise. Individual fans and collectors will have their attention called to many deserving (no, not deservedly!), obscure issues of important music. However, a difficulty the book fails to address is the means of obtaining many scarcer items, particularly those produced overseas by small labels with limited distribution. One-stop operations like Roundhouse in Boston, or Down Home Music in El Cerrito, California, both do good work along these lines and surely comparable agencies are found in Europe, all of whom could have been profitably cited and briefly discussed.

A related problem the user may encounter stems from publication of this book during the twilight phase of the LP record. It took about seven years for microgroove records to completely displace 78s after the introduction of the LP in 1948. Compact discs and, to a lesser extent cassettes, have taken a comparable period of time to supersede microgrooves. Thus, any broad reference work is hampered by the possibility that its comprehensiveness exists only at the time of publication, since new records are constantly being published and old ones withdrawn from sale. Since this book was prepared, two major blues labels are pushing the LP into the past: Rounder and Arhoolie have already abandoned the LP and now publish only in CD and cassette formats. More and more LPs may well become hard to find as this book goes into general circulation.

A third problem arises vis-a-vis archival sets, especially with regard to reissues processed from pre-1950 disc masters or pressings. In many cases, remastering has been performed inadequately, either by amateurs or by otherwise competent engineers who have no idea what a 78 rpm disc should sound like. While preparing this review, I thought about grumping because the book rarely alludes to the problem; on second thought it seemed to me that such attention would be counter-productive precisely because the problem is so pervasive. As CDs grind into second gear in the 1990s, consumers properly expect better sound reproduction, and we can only hope that many of the editions cited in this book will be replaced by new ones of higher quality.

Do not construe the foregoing as criticism of Paul Oliver and his contributors. An ideal time never arrives to publish a guide like this one, which by and large succeeds in what it sets out to do. Oliver and colleagues have written an informative and entertaining guide to the world of blues, with insights which will provoke both new initiates and veterans. *Reviewed by Dick Spottswood*

***A Benjamin Britten Discography.  
Studies in History and Interpretation of Music, 31.***

By Charles H. Parsons, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, 247 pp. \$59.95.

The previous issue (*ARSC Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 34) examined the second volume of Michael Gray's *Bibliography of Discographies* for classical music. The key point was put this way: "If one is going to tackle the discography of a composer or performer, it would be smart to look up the previous attempts (the least one can do is improve on them)." I had already made the same point in "Clues to Composer Discography."

If only Charles Parsons had checked Benjamin Britten in Gray's first volume! He might have winced at the fourteen listings up to 1975, but he would have noticed that just one of them had any notation of serious content (i.e., dates of recording and release), and it was 58 pages long. It was compiled by the present writer.

I find too little satisfaction derived from updating a discography for a second edition, so I have ignored Britten while new recordings, even of his late works written after 1975, proliferated. Since someone else has taken my Mahler discography (word for word) and added ten years of new entries to it, Parsons might have done the same thing for Britten without any objection from me, but he didn't. For Britten I listed about 420 items up to 1975; Parsons lists about 620 items up to late in 1989, but he omits 140 items that I had found. That's not counting folksong arrangements, which he omits.