

although perhaps he wished to avoid any more duplication of the Daedalion record mentioned above.

Her recorded repertoire was curious as well. She never recorded many of her stage hits, such as "Everybody Loves My Baby," "I Never Knew I Could Love Anybody (Honey, Like I'm Lovin' You)," and "I'd Rather Be Blue." Those songs she did record certainly are not classics (with the exception of her never-issued renditions of "Sweet Georgia Brown"), although some were minor hits and recorded by others, showing at least some contemporary popularity. Nevertheless, she made the most of what she was given, imbuing each song with just the right sense of mood while retaining her unique vocal qualities and accent. Green is at her best on the uptempo songs such as "Won't Be Long" (an inspired performance by both Green and the band) or "We're Back Together Again." Her style was as individual as Ruth Etting's would become, and certainly more so than most vocalists of that era. This is no doubt what made her such a success on stage. While Kay may be going too far to say that "she transcends her place and time to become a voice for today," she is certainly a singer who deserves the wider recognition this release hopes to provide. *Reviewed by Jim Farrington*

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>A discographical footnote: The matrix number listed on the jacket for this song is Victor BVE-41154-3. However, Rust (*Complete Entertainment Discography*, both editions) gives 41153-3, 41154-3 being the matrix for "My One and Only." This is corroborated by Daedalion Records DL001 (1986), another reissue of Jane Green songs. As the matrix number is not etched into the actual disc, we can only assume that this is a small typographical error.

<sup>2</sup>Two earlier Victor takes, from 13 November 1923, were rejected. Some of her later Victor discs were released on HMV, Regal, and Zonophone.

<sup>3</sup>She was born in Kentucky in 1897, not 1900 as given in Rust, and came to the West Coast in 1905 with her mother.

<sup>4</sup>Irene Castle, to judge by her letters to Green, befriended the singer early in Green's career, although in Castle's autobiography Jane Green is never mentioned; neither does she garner any words in Cantor's or Tucker's autobiographies, nor in most standard reference sources for that period

**The Smithsonian Collection of Recordings. American Musical Theatre. Shows, Songs, and Stars.** RD 0-36. Available on record, cassette, and CD.

Attempting to compile a comprehensive anthology of recordings from the golden age of the American musical stage presents a number of thorny problems. Despite the fact that performers often recorded popular songs from hit shows beginning as early as the 1890s, and although most musicals were recorded in America after the original cast album of *Oklahoma!* achieved significant popularity in 1943, there are many missing or inadequate performances. Selecting one track from each of the best of the post-1943 cast albums presents another problem: which of the show's songs best represents it out of context?

Dwight Blocker Bowers, who assembled this collection for the Smithsonian Collection of Recordings, has done a thoroughly creditable, if uninspired, job. In his "Note on the Selections," he explains that these 81 recordings "reflect significant trends, authors and performers" of the musical stage in that "great blossoming of innovation and achievement that occurred between 1898 and 1964." Although virtu-

ally no musical theatre recordings exist from before 1898, Bowers's decision to stop at 1964 seems arbitrary. Clearly, there were fewer true innovations in the American theatre between 1950 and 1964 than since 1964. For example, Stephen Sondheim's extraordinary achievements as a composer and lyricist, beginning with *Company* (1970), unquestionably mean more to the future of the musical theatre than the warmed-over Rodgers and Hammerstein imitations that predominated during the 1950s and early 1960s.

A true golden age of musicals did occur between the late 1890s and the late 1940s, and Bowers has assembled appropriate and interesting examples for most of the significant composers and artists. The primitive early recordings from Victor Herbert and Sigmund Romberg operettas, as well as such legendary performers as Lillian Russell, George M. Cohan, and Al Jolson among others, are available on earlier collections, but in this set they have been lovingly restored, and many are revelations. Although an understandable amount of surface noise proves to be a distraction in a couple of the cuts, most are surprisingly clear and permit the listener closer contact with the performer than earlier releases provided.

Lillian Russell is a particular surprise with "Come Down, My Evenin' Star," her signature song, which she performs with a touching panache. Along with Cohan and several other pre-World War I artists, Russell's performance is taken from her sole visit to a recording studio many years after the fact. The high-pitched, nasal quality of Jolson's "You Made Me Love You" from *The Honeymoon Express*, recorded in 1913, will surprise listeners more familiar with his deeply resonant baritone evident in Jolson's popular 1940s Decca recordings made in conjunction with *The Jolson Story* (1946) and *Jolson Sings Again* (1949), two films based on his life. Other vintage recordings of interest include Eddie Cantor's definitive rendition of "Makin' Whoopee" from *Whoopee* (1928) and Edith Day's charming recording of "Alice Blue Gown" from *Irene* (1919) which includes a bit of dialogue in the middle of the song. Curiously, Day comes off stiffly in "Indian Love Call" from *Rose-Marie* (1924) recorded several years after her assured *Irene* recordings. Some forgotten performers of the era are less effective, especially Anna Wheaton and James Harrod's flat rendition of Jerome Kern and P.G. Wodehouse's "Till the Clouds Roll By" from *Oh, Boy!* (1917) and John Steel's sluggish performance of Irving Berlin's "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody" from *The Ziegfeld Follies of 1919*.

One of the two musicals allotted two tracks is Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's landmark, *Show Boat* (1927). The use of two cuts permits Bowers to include two legendary performers: Helen Morgan, singing "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," and Paul Robeson in his superlative recording of "Ol' Man River." Morgan's vocal limitations matter little thanks to her emotionally potent interpretation of Hammerstein's memorable lyrics. Robeson has become indelibly identified with "Ol' Man River" through his appearance in the original London production, the 1932 Broadway revival, and the 1936 film version. Bowers wisely passed over another available version from an English recording by the song's originator, Jules Bledsoe. Robeson made numerous recordings of the song over many years, and it might have been interesting to have included a later version when Robeson altered the lyrics and his interpretation to convert the song into a pointed political statement.

Despite the familiarity of much of the material, Bowers comes up with a few surprises. "Chain Store Daisy," performed by Ruth Rubenstein from Harold Rome's *Pins and Needles* (1937), and "The Cradle Will Rock," performed by Howard da Silva

from Marc Blitzstein's 1937 show by the same name, are hard-to-find remnants of two unique socially conscious musicals of the 1930s. Most of the cuts from the 1930s are superb, especially Todd Duncan and Anne Brown's dazzling "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" from George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose Heyward's *Porgy and Bess* (1935), Walter Huston's mellow "September Song" from Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938), Ethel Merman's exhilarating "I Got Rhythm" from the Gershwins' *Girl Crazy* (1930), and Mary Martin's insouciant "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" from Cole Porter's *Leave It to Me* (1938). Other recordings from that same era, especially Clifton Webb's overly formal (rolled "r's" and all) "Easter Parade" from Berlin's *As Thousands Cheer* (1933) and Tamara's thinly sung, emotionless rendering of the haunting "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" from Kern and Otto Harbach's *Roberta* (1933), demonstrate all too clearly that the artist who introduced a song is not necessarily its definitive interpreter.

One curiosity from the 1930s, "Friendship" from Porter's *DuBarry Was a Lady* (1939), was not recorded by stars Ethel Merman and Bert Lahr at the time of the original production. It is preserved here in a riotous Merman and Lahr duet interpolated into a 1954 television adaptation of Porter's 1934 musical, *Anything Goes* (an abbreviated radio performance of "Friendship" by the two stars from the 1930s exists, and is of comparable quality). Bowers makes similar adjustments to include *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) and *Pal Joey* (1940), neither of which were recorded at the time of their original productions, but are represented here by excellent revivals recorded during the early 1950s. Fred Astaire's stage musicals, *Lady Be Good!* (1924), *The Band Wagon* (1931), and *Gay Divorce* (1932), appear in versions recorded in England, where the shows were produced following successful Broadway runs. Oddly, Bowers chooses a track from the 1966 revival of Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), despite the existence of a fine original cast recording that demonstrates star Ethel Merman's voice in its prime.

Beginning with 1940, the recordings are undoubtedly more familiar to even the casual listener, although there are some delightful surprises. Ethel Waters' rapturous rendition of Vernon Duke and Jon Latouche's "Taking a Chance on Love" from *Cabin in the Sky* (1940), Irving Berlin's amusing rendition of his own "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" from *This is the Army* (1942), Danny Kaye's rambunctious "Tchaikovsky" and Gertrude Lawrence's sly "Jenny" from Weill and Moss Hart's *Lady in the Dark* (1941), Dooley Wilson's joyous "The Eagle and Me" from Harold Arlen and E.V. Harburg's *Bloomer Girl* (1944), and Harold Nicholas and Ruby Hill's sexy "Come Rain or Come Shine" from Arlen and Johnny Mercer's *St. Louis Woman* (1946), offer ample evidence concerning the diversity and quality of even the lesser-known musicals of the era. From more familiar musicals are Ella Logan's moving "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" from Burton Lane and Harburg's *Finian's Rainbow* (1947), Ray Bolger's perennial "Once in Love With Amy" from Frank Loesser's *Where's Charley* (1948), and Alfred Drake's renditions of "Oklahoma!" from the landmark 1943 musical along with "Where is the Life That Late I Lead?" from Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948). All seem as fresh as ever.

The other musical allotted two cuts is, deservedly and necessarily, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* (1949). Deservedly because it is one of the finest musical theatre scores of its time, and necessarily because the two essential stars, Ezio Pinza and Mary Martin, were given no actual duets. Pinza is represented with the more familiar "Some Enchanted Evening" although his thrilling recording of "This

Nearly Was Mine" would have been a pleasing alternative. Martin's jubilant "A Wonderful Guy" is the best choice from among her songs in the show.

The 1950s and early 1960s offer a decidedly mixed bag, in part because the musical theatre genre was moving into an era of decline. Although Bowers generally selects the appropriate shows, some of his choices of songs and performers are questionable. The selection of the "Runyonland Music/Fugue for Tindhorns/Follow the Fold" medley to represent Lowesser's *Guys and Dolls* (1950) is a disappointment when the title song, or, better still, Vivian Blaine's hilarious "Adelaide's Lament" would have better captured the show's spirit. "Shall We Dance" from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I* (1951) offers both Gertrude Lawrence and Yul Brynner, although this tinny original cast recording hardly presents the stars at their best. Brynner's "King of Siam" comes off better on later recordings, and Lawrence's "Hello, Young Lovers" would have served the dual purpose of evoking the musical's mood while also offering the listener a chance to hear a mellower Lawrence to compare with her "Someone to Watch Over Me" from Gershwin's *Oh, Kay!* (1926) and "Jenny" from *Lady in the Dark*. Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner's *My Fair Lady* (1956) probably deserved more than one cut. The choice of "The Rain in Spain" over several other songs from the show such as "Why Can't the English," "I Could Have Danced All Night," "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face," or "On the Street Where You Live," merely seems to be a way of hearing the show's two stars, Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews sing together. The inclusion of Kay Ballard's "Lazy Afternoon" from *The Golden Apple* (1954) seems oddly esoteric when more celebrated shows including *Can-Can*, *The Sound of Music*, *Silk Stockings*, *Kismet*, *Paint Your Wagon*, *Take Me Along*, *Redhead*, *110 in the Shade*, *Flower Drum Song*, among many others, are overlooked.

As indicated earlier, concluding this set with the musicals of the mid-1960s means that Sondheim, certainly contemporary musical theatre's most significant figure, is represented by only his earliest works as a lyricist, *West Side Story* (1957) *Gypsy* (1959), and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), the latter being the first Broadway production featuring both words and music by Sondheim, but probably his least representative show. The omission of his later works is a serious one, especially since the final side of the collection offers no evidence of his contributions during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Bowers undoubtedly hoped to avoid confronting the musical and thematic challenges to traditional musical comedy posed by Sondheim's later musicals. But his chronicle is missing one of the most significant eras of change, decline, and renewal. Concluding in 1964 also permits Bowers to avoid dealing with the unsettling impact rock music had after the mid-1960s.

But perhaps disappointment is an inevitable reaction to such an anthology for a listener familiar with the modern musical theatre. The great shows are readily available, and it seems there are few undiscovered recordings worthy of inclusion. Recording companies have released similar anthologies of varying lengths, but few have offered as large a sampling as the Smithsonian does here. Two old collections, *This is Broadway's Best* (Columbia, B2WS 1), a two-record gem covering the late 1940s to the late 1950s, and *Show Stoppers* (The Longines Symphonette Society, LS 219 B), a five-record set that covers virtually the same era as Bowers (omitting only the pre-World War I recordings), are considerably more interesting and enjoyable, perhaps because they are not bound by Bower's chronological structure.

*American Musical Theatre. Shows, Songs, and Stars* is elegantly packaged and technically superb. As mentioned previously, the restoration of the vintage recordings is a major achievement. Happily, this is typical of the entire collection which has been vividly reproduced, in most cases, from master copies. The CD version is flawless and a number of the cuts appear richer and cleaner in this collection than on recently issued CDs of the shows.

Bowers also has compiled an excellent 132-page booklet including a brief history of musical theatre before 1900, as well as detailed notes on each show represented in the collection and biographical material on the performers. This information is presented in a concise and detailed manner, with well-chosen and striking illustrations from the original productions and recording sessions. Especially entertaining are the anecdotes Bowers incorporates about each song and performer.

Without a doubt, this collection will be of great interest to anyone looking for an introductory survey of American musical theatre during the first half of the twentieth century. The true connoisseur may have to look elsewhere. *Reviewed by James Fisher* 