

Rosvaenge, tenor, Maria Jeritza, sop., Hugo Reichenberger, cond., Sept. 26, 1933)

2. A few manufacturers, notably Denon and

Sony, now offer CD players with pitch controls. Most of them have a range of $\pm 12\%$, which should be more than sufficient.

Reverend Gary Davis/From Blues to Gospel Talk on the Corner; Sally, Where'd You Get Your Whiskey From ?; Crow Jane; Eagle Rocking Blues; Cocaine Blues; Lost John; Samson and Delilah; I Heard the Angels Singing; Children of Zion; Lord I Wish I Could See; Down By the River; You Better Get Right; I'll Do My Last Singing. Reverend Gary Davis, vocal and 12-string Bozo guitar. Recorded 1971. Biograph BCD-123. 50'32".

Skip James/Greatest of the Delta Blues Singers Hardtimes Killing Floor Blues; Sick Bed Blues; Washington D.C. Hospital Center Blues; Devil Got My Woman; Illinois Blues; I Don't Want A Woman to Stay Up All Night Long; Cherry Ball Blues; Skip's Worried Blues; Cypress Grove Blues; Motherless & Fatherless; All Night Long. Skip James, vocal and acoustic guitar. Recorded 1964 (reissues). Biograph BCD-122. 51'19".

Memphis Minnie/Early Rhythm and Blues 1949 from the Rare Regal Sessions (sampler) *Down Home Girl; Night Watchman Blues (two versions); Why Did I Make You Cry; Kid Man Blues; all by Memphis Minnie, vocal and guitar, Sunnyland Slim, piano, bass and drums, unk; *Ludella; by Jimmy Rogers, vocal and guitar, Little Walter, harmonica, Muddy Waters (?), guitar, Big Crawford, bass, Johnny Jones (?) drums; *Hard Work Boogie; Your Evil Ways; I Sit Up All Night; State Street Blues; all by St. Louis Jimmy (Oden), vocal; Roosevelt Sykes, piano, Jimmy Rogers (?) guitar, bass and drums, unk; *When I Was Young; by Sunnyland Slim, vocal, piano; tenor sax, guitar, bass and drums, unk; *Vicksburg Blues; A & B Blues; After Hour Blues; by Little Brother Montgomery, piano; *Sugar Mama Blues; Shreveport Blues; by Pee Wee Hughes, vocal, guitar; harmonica, drums, unk. Recorded 1949; reissued from Regal Records. Biograph BCD-124. 44'12".

Johnny Shines/Mr. Cover Shaker The Devil's Daughter; Look Behind the Door; Two Steps to Hell; The Face in the Courthouse: Blood Ran Like Wine; May I Apologize; by Johnny Shines, vocal and National Steel Guitar. Recorded 1972, previously unissued. Blood Ran Like Wine; I'm Getting Old; Mother's Place; Mr. Cover Shaker; Shotgun Wupin'; Lost Love Letter Blues; Stand By Me; by Johnny Shines, vocal and electric and acoustic guitar, Dave Bromberg, acoustic and electric guitar, madolin, Mark Bell drums, Peter Eckland, trumpet, cornet, Tony Markellis, electric bass, John Payne, reeds, Lou Terriciano, piano, Richard Tiven, vln, Jay Unger, fiddle, Jean Lieberman, Beverly Rohlehr, Jane Simms, choir. Recorded 1974. Biograph BCD-125. 43'23".

These four 1992 Biograph CD releases are a fine addition to that label's already substantial catalog of early jazz, ragtime and blues recordings. Taken together, these four CDs cover styles ranging from country blues, blues and gospel songs, to that Mississippi Delta-to-Chicago continuum which here includes early rhythm and blues as well as the mid-1970s pairing of Johnny Shines with the Dave Bromberg Band. Although not intended to be a set (as with many recent reissue packages), these four discs complement one another nicely and provide the listener an interesting overview of some work by key figures in blues history.

Reverend Gary Davis (1896-1972), from South California, is captured here in a Baker's dozen of recordings made shortly before his death. Davis was one of the most popular of the early country blues singers, although he actually was better known for his renditions of religious songs, both from 19th-century African-American sources and from 20th-century Gospel tunes. Having begun as a blind street singer (a.k.a. Blind Gary Davis) in the Carolinas, and after ordination as a minister and enduring Depression-era hardship in the South, he moved to New York City where his popular career was forged and where these recordings were made.

Five of the pieces are blues tunes, among them "Eagle Rocking Blues" and "Cocaine Blues," long identified with him. Brett J. Bonner, in his highly informative notes to all four CDs, says of Davis that while he tended not to sing the lyrics to his blues repertory after having become a minister, this practice was dependent upon the proximity of his wife. Like many other bluesmen who had gotten religion and like contemporary theologian James H. Cone, Rev. Gary Davis understood the blues-Gospel continuum and the underlying spiritual dimension present in both idioms. Davis sings on four of the five blues here. A sixth "secular" piece is the 19th-century folk tune "Lost John" which affords us an opportunity to hear the telling of a folk-tale through the alternating harmonica-vocal breath-stream practice of African-American storytelling. However, the piece too quickly becomes only an instrumental and is not as satisfying (nor as true to the form) as some of the great tales told in this fashion by Sonny Terry.

The remaining seven pieces are of religious inspiration with texts relating his fervent preaching style. They range from gentle to intense renditions, but among the most poignant is the likely-autobiographical "Lord I Wish I Could See," which begins with the striking line "There was a time when I was blind," and carries on from there. "Children of Zion," "Down by the River," and "I Heard the Angels Singing" are from folk sources while the others are of more recent vintage. "You Better Get Right" has some of the most interesting guitar work, with just a hint of the "Bo Diddley beat" to be felt throughout. "I'll Do My Last Singing" is (like "Lord I Wish I Could See") a personal, almost prophetic, statement - recorded a year before his death - which is a most lovely, heartbreaking tune by itself; the steadily building performance here deepens the musical experience for all concerned. Rev. Gary Davis always insisted on only one take in his recording sessions. These are remarkable musical and spiritual offerings by a gifted musician in the twilight of his career.

Skip James (1902-1969) shared Gary Davis' calling to become a preacher and was ordained in 1931, the same year he recorded seventeen sides for Paramount. But he did not share in the popular acclaim, moving in and out of the larger public spotlight. He was born in Bentonia, Mississippi, and for blues scholars, this indicates a style separate from, though related to, the larger Delta blues styles. Described by Bonner as "Combining a complex picking pattern on the upper strings with deep, somber bass patterns and minor-key tunings, the music possesses an eerie, hollow sound." The singer's use of falsetto added to these guitar techniques makes the sound penetrating and somewhat mysterious.

As exemplified in James' famous "Devil Got My Woman," this style is quite haunting and reminds the listener of the blues-lore about the crossroads, tricksters, and again to quote Bonner sounds "wedged somewhere between the dawn and the night."

It was this same song that launched Skip James' "rediscovery" as part of the 1960s folk boom. He sang it at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964 and he was an instant success. However, as Peter Guralnick has chronicled his story in *Feel Like*

Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'N Roll, after this, James never was able to capitalize on the Newport adulation for a variety of reasons. Fortunately for us, the recordings presented here are re-issues of sessions completed just after the Newport concert date. They capture him in a peak moment.

"I Don't Want a Woman" has a more light-hearted musical feeling about it, although the lyrics are in earnest. "Catfish Blues" and "Motherless & Fatherless" are standards from the Delta "reworked in the distinctive Bentonia style" (Bonner). "Sick Bed Blues" and "Washington D.C. Hospital Center Blues" bring in the autobiographical touch, relating to his treatments for cancer, while "Hardtime Killing Floor Blues" provides a glimpse of Depression-era life and problems. In addition to all these dimensions, we hear expert guitar playing, especially in call-and-response interchanges with his vocal lines and in his impeccable rhythmic foundation-lines, as evinced by "All Night Long" which concludes this exemplary CD.

Memphis Minnie (1897-1973) headlines her CD, but it is really a sampler of 1949 recordings made for the Regal Label and representative of the early Chicago blues school. She is credited with pioneering the ensemble set-up of that approach - guitar, piano, bass, drums, and of course, vocal - and reportedly she was playing electric guitar as early as 1942, winning cutting contests against best bluesmen including Big Bill Broonzy. Memphis Minnie's five tracks are wonderfully exuberant urban blues, demonstrating her musical as well as geographical migration from her birthplace, Algiers, Louisiana. Sunnyland Slim, the only identified sideman on the date, is a perfect foil for her guitar and vocal stylings. He is both very powerful and deeply musical. Shouts, whoops, and laughter personalize this "set" and convey the notion that you are in a South Side club even though these are studio sessions.

Jimmy Rogers, another vocalist/guitarist, is represented by one cut, "Ludella," which features other prominent blues artists: Little Walter on harmonica, possibly Muddy Waters, on guitar, Big Crawford, on bass, and Johnny Jones, drums. This is the shortest track on the CD (2 minutes) but one of the best, a solid in-the-pocket groove underpinning Roger's classic plaint for "Ludella" (or "Maybeline" or countless other figurations of the eternal feminine).

Next we hear St. Louis Jimmy [Oden], a talented songwriter, pianist, and guitarist, whose sidemen include Jimmy Rogers and Roosevelt Sykes on piano. Four selections give a variety of tempos, rhythmic feels, and lyrics for a mini-compendium of the modern Chicago blues repertory-types. "State Street Blues" presumably has Oden himself on the piano.

Sunnyland Slim, who accompanied Memphis Minnie, is heard as the leader of his own band on the single cut "When I was Young". None of the sidemen are identified, but the ensemble sound is closest on the CD to that which was to spawn rock 'n roll in the early 1950s. It is also like the riff-driven jump blues of many jazz and jazz/blues crossover groups of the time.

Following this comes the very soulful piano of Little Brother Montgomery captured on three tracks. He hailed from Louisiana and played on riverboats up from New Orleans to Vicksburg, and one can hear elements of the piano blues tradition, New Orleans influences, and those from the rollicking barrelhouse style. To conclude this disc, there are two slow boogies featuring Pee Wee Hughes on harmonica, guitar and vocal. This provides a nice bridge from the previous piece by Montgomery. These are the most laid-back in terms of tempo but the most "down home" in terms of feeling. All in all, this terrific collection preserves an aural moment in time from many diverse perspectives on the developing Chicago blues style.

Johnny Shines (1915-1992) is represented by music from two sessions, the latest among the group of the four CDs being reviewed here. Six cuts are solo performances featuring Shines on vocal and National Steel Guitar recorded in 1972. They are previously unissued selections from a session released in 1991 as *Traditional Delta Blues* (Biograph BCD-121). With this CD, the serious collector will have all of the pieces recorded in that particular session.

Johnny Shines was born near Memphis, moved to that city when he was seven, and eventually went on to Chicago. In between, he absorbed Southern blues culture, especially the sound of Howlin' Wolf, to the degree that he was even called "Little Wolf" for a time. And he ran with and played with the legendary Robert Johnson whose songs he kept in his performing repertory throughout his career. Shines' original style with its deep indebtedness to these seminal bluesmen is a wonder for the ear to behold. Those who know the forerunners, including many of the less-popularly known Delta musicians, will hear immediately the resonance with that older style and sensibility, replete with thick vibrato in the voice and bottleneck guitar technique, and as well as a most subtly nuanced approach to dynamics, texture and storytelling.

The other seven songs on the CD are from a 1974 session made with the David Bromberg Band. Here the master, imbued with stylistic wisdom created before he was born, shares the wealth with a younger, white band to make recordings Shines himself felt were some of his favorites. On them, the approach is closer to the by-now classic Chicago blues band treatment, with an occasional trace of jazz influence, not surprising given the background of some of the sidepersons (men and women) and that of Shines himself who played jazz for a few years. These are very good, but versatile as Johnny Shines reveals himself to be, for me, the six solo selections comprise the heart and soul of this disc.

To conclude, it should be noted that all four of these featured blues artists have passed on. With such a personal, performative idiom, we can only know their musical presence through CDs such as these which provide real insight into the riches of the blues. *Reviewed by Mark Harvey*

Edith Mason - the complete recordings (1924-1928).

Romophone 81009-2

Claudia Muzio—the complete Pathe recordings (1917-18)

Romophone 81010-2A/B (2 discs)

The name Edith Mason lacks the resonance of some of her more frequently recorded contemporaries. If the lasting fame of a singer is based on recordings then her fame is small indeed. Born in St. Louis in 1891, Mason began her studies in Paris with Victor Maurel. She returned to America to study at the New England Conservatory. Her debut in Boston took place in 1912 as a last minute replacement in the role of Nedda in *Pagliacci*. Her success was immediate. She returned to Paris to study with Edmond Clement. In 1915, Mason made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*. For the next thirty years she was an international star, singing in all the major European houses, Central and South America, the Metropolitan, and her "home" company Chicago. She sang over forty operatic roles, concertized widely, and was admired by the public and the press. Toscanini chose her to sing in his 1935 Salzburg season. In the accompanying booklet, critic Michael Scott is quoted as follows: "At the best of times there are comparatively few singers who never make an