

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

ugly sound; still fewer of whom it can be said that every note, at least on gramophone records, is a thing of loveliness. In that select company may be numbered the lyric soprano Edith Mason." The voice *is* astonishingly beautiful and her command of her upper register is breathtaking. The technique is perfect and the musicality tasteful. Edith Mason was a lovely woman as well. The photographs in the accompanying booklet testify to that. Her recorded legacy is pitifully small, however. Only four arias from her operatic repertoire were recorded. We have three versions of Marguerite's Jewel Song from *Faust* (one acoustic recording which is cut, one electric, and one unpublished version). There are two versions of Butterfly's entrance aria (one unpublished because of a recording flaw on the final D flat), and "Un bel di vedremo" from Mason's favorite role in which she was coached by Puccini himself.

There is a "Depuis le jour" from *Louise* and two versions of "The Last Rose of Summer" from *Martha*. The remaining items are a considerable step down from this repertoire (itself none too highbrow). Two Tosti songs ("Goodbye" and "Serenata") sung in English and accompanied by orchestra are each given in two versions. The remaining bands (save for Mendelssohn's "Oh for the Wings of a Dove") consist of repertoire which is no longer regarded as suitable for concert singers. "Mighty Lak' a Rose," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Carry me Back to Old Virginny," and something called "Dreamin' Time" are sung in phony Southern dialect - one can almost smell the blackface. Cadman's "From the Land of Sky-blue Waters" displays its faded charms alongside the kitschy Orientalism of "Pale Hands I Loved" (the "Kashmiri Song"). One might find some amusement in amazing one's friends with the sheer camp of such a lovely instrument being used for such dross.

Miss Mason made all of her recordings for the Brunswick label between 1924 and 1928. There are twenty-four bands on this CD but only sixteen pieces of music. Most are given in more than one version (acoustic, electrical remakes, and unpublished). Romophone and Ward Marston have done their usual fine job. The sound has remarkable presence and clarity. If it weren't for the slim musical fare, this disc would be a revelation. The booklet accompanying the disc gives complete recording information including dates, matrix numbers, etc.

As John Steane points out in the liner notes for the Claudia Muzio set, "[Muzio's] records have done her good service; which is remarkable, considering what a very odd, and on the face of it inauspicious history she had in her association with the record companies". Her fame rests largely on a set of recordings made for Columbia in 1934/35 when her voice and health were failing. She was only to live one more year and the vocal flaws in these recordings have been pointed out frequently. EMI has released a selection of these recordings (EMI 7697902) as engineered by Keith Hardwick. Despite the mixed critical view of these recordings, her reputation as one of the greats persisted. Another group of recordings made for Edison in 1920-25 have been reissued both on LP and in at least three CD versions. Romophone's edition (Romophone 81005-2) — which was reviewed in the previous issue of the *ARSC Journal* 1994;25[1]:96-98 — is by far the best treatment that this particular collection has received.

The current set contains the recordings from her first extensive recording sessions. While there is some duplication of repertoire with the Edison recordings, there is enough new material to warrant considerable interest. It is unfortunate to say that even the redoubtable talents of Ward Marston have not been sufficient to reduce what is considerably more surface noise than Romophone's previous issues have displayed.

The noise is not by any means overwhelming, the voice is clear and forward, but it is prominent. What we hear is a raw talent that has not yet achieved the artistry and command that would, just a short time later, make an impression that stamped her recordings as definitive. There is the same shortness of breath that would mar her late recordings, choppy phrasing, and uneasy high notes; but still, it is Muzio and we should treasure all of her that we have. There are forty-three selections on the discs. Four are unpublished songs recorded for Edison between 1920 and 1928. There are no duplicate versions or unpublished selections since all the Pathé's were published. This is a worthy companion to the other Romophone Muzio set. It will not need recommendation to Muzio fans, but others might be better served by Romophone's earlier release of her later recordings. *Reviewed by Howard Kennett*

Endnote

1. For a summary of the contents of these CDs, see the Recordings Received column.

Judy Garland: The Complete Decca Masters (plus) MCAD4-11059. Recorded 1936-1947. 4 CDs. AAD.

MCA's new four-CD box-set of Judy Garland's complete Decca recordings is a courageous, lovingly produced splendor. It will also leave those who respect Garland's immense talents, and who love music too, perplexed and somewhat disappointed.

Despite her legendary status, Judy Garland did not record much during her four-decade career. Not counting all the junk collections of television appearances, out-of-copyright studio dates, and bests-of ad nauseam, there were two major commercial recording contracts, Decca and Capitol, and two minor ones, MGM and Columbia. She cut some 79 sides for Decca between 1936 and 1947; for Capitol between 1955 and 1964 she made twelve albums (two of which were released posthumously) and seven singles. She "recorded" for MGM Records from 1946 to 1950, but these were only tunes from the soundtracks of the films she was concurrently working on at Metro. For Columbia she signed a four-side deal in 1953, with one further track in 1960 for Colpix records, an affiliate, as part of the soundtrack to the film *Pepe*. The soundtrack to the 1954 *A Star Is Born* was also released by Columbia. Her MGM and Columbia contracts were restrictive: she was limited by the former to sing only those tunes that made it to the screen and, for the latter, to the questionable artistic judgment of Mitch Miller. Therefore, between 1946/47 and 1955 one of the 20th century's greatest popular singers was adrift artistically. What is more, following the Capitol "London sessions" of August 1960 up until her death on June 22, 1969 she added no new studio albums to her oeuvre, although a 1961 single and 1964 EP were released, and a 1967 soundtrack was recorded. Compared to other popular and jazz singers of her generation, namely Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole and Billie Holiday, Garland's discography is far slimmer. It is further reduced by the fact that she often recorded the same song more than once, this occurring more frequently during her Capitol years than during her Decca tenure. All of this underlines the historic importance of finally having available Garland's complete Decca recordings which constitute her youthful output.

Producer Ron O'Brien must be congratulated for his excellent research, detailed 49-page liner notes, and his quality choice of photos. The booklet provides an in-depth