

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 Four are unpublished songs recorded for Edison between 1920 and 1928. There are no duplicate versions or unpublished selections since all the Pathé's were published.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

accounting of Garland's association with Decca. It contains new information concerning her discovery by Decca founder Jack Kapp, the embarrassment of the Bob Crosby orchestra at being associated with her first Decca release and their refusal to have the band's name placed on the label, the studio musicians who played on specific sessions (including Spike Jones, Skitch Henderson, Billy May, Joe Venuti, Billy Butterfield and George Van Eps), and the exact dates and times for all of her 30 sessions. O'Brien also includes eleven alternates, three of which had not been included on previous MCA releases that contain "B" or "C" takes (*Judy Garland: From The Decca Vaults* [MCA-907]), a 1984 LP-only, and *Changing My Tune* [MCAD-10504], issued in 1992. One of the new alternates, "Blues In The Night," does not come from the Decca archives but from the personal library of Mrs. David Rose.

Contrary to the prevalent amalgam that the Decca sides were merely the commercial versions of tunes employed for her MGM screen appearances, most of the titles Garland recorded at Decca she never recorded at MGM. There are only 35 Decca sides that she sang on film. It is to the credit of Decca executives that they allowed Garland to record many standards outside the MGM mold which she would never record again in later years.

For today's listener, the most troubling - and annoying - aspect of the current collection will be the extreme noise levels of the transfers. Although the credit page indicates that there was an audio restoration consultant, Steven Lasker, who prepared the disc-to-digital transfers, no use of such computer techniques as Cedar or "NoNoise" seems to have been applied to these half-century old recordings. This is particularly evident in the pre-1943 recordings, such as "You Can't Have Everything," "Sleep, My Baby, Sleep," "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" and "The Birthday Of A King," where the deteriorated condition of the metal mothers or acetate lacquers causes the records to sound harsh. No doubt this is due to the passage of time and the popularity of Garland over the years. That is to say, what with the numerous LP reissues, the masters were surely in better shape 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

Is it justified to release recordings which will shock a good many listeners in the name of maintaining the purity of the original master, whatever the condition it is in? Otherwise stated, do modern computer techniques alter the original recordings? This is a vast subject of moral debate. This writer, as a result of having worked recently with Robert Parker, is poorly placed to criticize the MCA sound aesthetic. There are, however, certain reflections which these untouched transfers bring to mind. First, a record company reissuing archive material must decide, first and foremost, to whom or to what it wants to be faithful. The people at MCA have decided that tinkering in any way with the best sources they have available is cheating on the public and betraying the original recordings. This is a courageous point of view. The opposite view is that the unrestored MCA transfers of 1994 are not what these discs sounded like at the time of their release, so just what are they being faithful to: the original performances or what the ravages of time have done to them? This is the point Robert Parker has made: technology must serve to "unlock performances" from the confines of time. Putting 50-year-old masters onto compact disc to be played on sophisticated amplifiers and loudspeakers is like inflating a 16mm film into 35mm and then projecting it at Radio City Music Hall. It's not going to look good. Is it not morally acceptable to "suppress" the effects of modern sound reproduction technology by the use of other sophisticated computer technology in order to more accurately reproduce as faithfully as possible (and this is where the "He's playing God" remarks can be heard) performances as they were heard at the time they were recorded? When you use modern technology to

erase the effects of modern times on the Sistine Chapel, you arrive at Michelangelo's work as it was seen by his own contemporaries.

Those who were looking forward to discovering new Garland/Decca sides will be disappointed. It is a pity that the test recordings Garland did with her sisters and mother in March 1935 have not survived; neither have the two rejected solo sides she cut in November 1935, "All's Well" and "No Other One". According to Emily Coleman's *The Complete Judy Garland*, which admittedly is not always accurate, an early version of "Swanee" was recorded in July 1939; this is not mentioned in the session notes. Insofar as the alternates, even if Garland admirers can only rejoice in the fact that in the past few decades (and the past ten years in particular) MCA has released a total of some 20 alternate tracks, several having been issued mistakenly as "A" takes when in fact they were alternates, the attentive scholar hasn't the slightest idea of how many alternate takes MCA has in their vaults for each title. Last, it would have been useful to note the exact source (master, safety, disc-to-tape transfer) of each recording, as was done in the 1991 Billie Holiday/Decca set. Contrary to the claim that these are masters, for the transfer of "Over The Rainbow" and "(Dear Mr. Gable) You Made Me Love You," so-called mint 78 rpm pressings were used. That means that the masters for these two recordings are no longer in satisfactory condition. This is a sad state of affairs. On the positive side, MCA engineers have corrected the pitch on several titles, most noticeable of which are "On The Sunny Side Of The Street" and "That Old Black Magic," giving them a pristine quality compared to previous issues.

Garland's interpretive powers grew immeasurably between the 1936 swing classic "Stompin' At The Savoy" and the world-weary "Falling In Love With Love," her last recording for Decca in 1947 and one which remained unlogged and unheard until two years ago. The insistence with which both Decca and MGM put Garland into the role of a swinger rings somewhat falsely today, their reasons having more to do with Swing Era sellability than Garland's innate penchants. Garland was only 14 years old in 1936 and it no doubt would have been inappropriate for her to continue doing torch songs à la Helen Morgan, as was her wont during her vaudeville days ("Bill" - one of the lost 1935 test records - and "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" were two of her staples in the late 1920s and early 1930s). This is not to say the adolescent Garland could not sell a "hot" number, and her recordings of "Stompin' At The Savoy," "Swing Mr. Charlie," "Cry, Baby, Cry," "It Never Rains, But What It Pours," as well as the swinging traditional numbers such as "Wearing Of The Green" and "A Pretty Girl Milking Her Cow" in the fashion of Maxine Sullivan, are confounding for a girl her age. Nor can her forays into the blues and standards, especially during the time she was married to David Rose, be called totally convincing despite the best intentions. It can only be regretted that she did not record such early 1940s titles as "Buds Won't Bud," "On The Sunny Side Of The Street," and "That Old Black Magic" a few years later. When one compares Billie Holiday's 1935 recording of the blues "Saddest Tale" with Duke Ellington when she was 20 years old and Garland's 1941 "Blues In The Night" with the David Rose orchestra at age 19, it is obvious Garland was living in an insulated world and it would require a bit more living to attain the maturity to interpret a larger repertory. On the other hand, if, by miracle, Garland had not had her screen career and she had become just one of the girl singers of the 1930s and 1940s, one wonders what she might have gone on to do based on her delicious recordings of "Oceans Apart," "A Journey To A Star" and "This Heart Of Mine." But at root, Judy Garland was a ballad singer. The delicacy and depth of her voice could best be heard on numbers where she did not apply all the power and zest her voice naturally possessed. It was in the numbers from the mid-

1940s that Garland's bottomless vulnerability and all-encompassing sensitivity bloomed. The 1943 "Embraceable You" is a prelude of things to come. Two Decca recordings have always struck this author as being the quintessential Garland: "It's A Great Big World" from the 1946 MGM film *The Harvey Girls*; and perhaps her greatest recording of her entire career, "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas" from the 1944 *Meet Me In St. Louis*. In the former, one cannot but recall The Gumm Sisters, Garland's vaudeville act with her sisters and mother, and her waltz through life in a cold, cold world. In the latter, the simultaneous mix of resignation and hope Garland exudes is a deeply moving experience. The song, through Garland's heart-wrenching art, becomes an expression of the lightness and burden of life, an ode to the importance of maintaining illusion in face of the disillusionment of life. It is the admission that perhaps hope is merely muddling through *now*. These two recordings illustrate the multiple levels of interpretation Judy Garland could attain and guarantee her permanent place in the history of American popular music.

Judy Garland died exactly 25 years ago. During her lifetime and since her death, she was labeled Miss Show Business and has been called the World's Greatest Entertainer. But this is to miss the point, for Garland was more than entertainment. Hers are living, stimulating and, in the end, disturbing interpretations that shed light on the multi-mirrored facets of man's soul. Garland's deeply felt humanity made her talent more than just a talent to amuse.

These Decca recordings are the most serious effort to date that allow the public to bear witness to Judy Garland's artistic contributions. It is hoped that other projects, such as the release of her 1930 Vitaphone recordings, her complete Capitol records, a complete set of the neglected radio performances, and the 1961 Newport Jazz Festival date, will follow. Until then, the MCA box is the definitive reference. *Reviewed by Lawrence Schulman.*

Folksongs of the Louisiana Acadians Arhoolie CD 359

Ukrainian Village Music: Historic Recordings 1928-1933 Arhoolie Folklyric CD 7030

Street Music of Panama: Cumbias, Tamboritos, Mejoranas Original Music OMCD 008

The 34 on-site recordings of ***Folksongs of the Louisiana Acadians*** were made in 1954 by Dr. Harry Oster who also provided the extensive and excellent annotations and commentaries.

This is the traditional music of the descendants of the first French Colony established in North America in 1604 from provinces of northern France, Brittany, Normandy, and Picardy. Although officially granted many rights by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the British immediately demanded that the Acadians "take an unrestricted oath of allegiance to the British crown or leave Acadia without taking their possessions." When the Acadians refused, they were deported without their property to various places in the U.S. and Canada where they were not welcomed. Most ended up in Louisiana, joining other Frenchmen there.

Their traditional culture ("Cajun" is a colloquial shortening of "Acadian") has been under attack in recent decades by intermarriage, the reluctance of their children to speak French, and their preference for North American popular culture, including