

## HISTORISCHE AUFNAHMEN

by

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Probably one would have to be about my age (thirty) to consider "The History of the Everly Brothers" (Barnaby 2 -BRS-15008) a 'historical' reissue, but I certainly do. The sound of these 1957-60 recordings impressed themselves not only on pop music listeners of the era but also on other musicians; the Everlys' sound, countrified two-part harmony, was one of the most influential and distinctive in the formation of the whole musical area now known as rock. Some of the individual recordings hold up pretty well, too, although others are now uncomfortably corny. This set is actually a reissue of a reissue, since the same two records were published only a couple of years ago when Barnaby was distributed by Columbia. Now the label has been taken over by M-G-M. Most of the recordings are rechannelled stereo, a fact mentioned nowhere on jacket or labels, but the sound is still respectable. Overall I feel this set belongs in any representative pop music collection, particularly in preference to Barnaby's other two-record Everly set, "End of an era."

For many years it has been obvious that there was enough interest in old radio broadcasts and movie soundtracks to justify many commercial issues, but problems of getting legal clearance for the material held such issues down to a handful. Suddenly we are witnessing a flood of such records, issued with and without authorization and mostly by record companies formed especially for such purposes. Little of this material is likely to be listed in Schwann, and keeping up even with the various labels is going to be a tremendous problem for archivists.

Output from two of these many labels has reached me recently. From the Mark 56 label (P.O. Box 1, Anaheim, CAL 92805) I have two of their many recent releases. One of these is of tremendous importance: a two-record set entitled "Gershwin by Gershwin" (Mark 56 641). I am unhappy with some elements of the records' production, beginning with the simple fact that it was issued as a two-record set. One whole side is wasted on yet another issue of the Gershwin piano roll of 'Rhapsody in blue,' and not very well done, either; the remaining material takes less than an hour, and a single-record release would have made more sense. Ed Jablonski's somewhat gushy notes do contain most of the information one would want, but the producers

have mixed a few things up. The listing of Side 2 is completely inaccurate: Band 1, marked 'Concerto in F,' is that, but the last movement only. Band 2, marked 'I got rhythm,' also has a shortened version of 'Of thee I sing.' And Band 3, completely unacknowledged on label or jacket, is a complete performance of Gershwin's 'Second rhapsody,' mentioned and discussed at length in the program notes. Complaints aside, though, what we have here is considerable treasure. There are two complete fifteen-minute Gershwin broadcasts (even including Feen-a-Mint commercials!) and fragments from several other programs. Included are about half of the Concerto in F --the second half of the second movement and all of the third, in rescore version taken from two different radio programs; that Second rhapsody, complete; a complete performance of 'I got rhythm variations,' my own favorite "serious" Gershwin, with a fascinating little discussion in which Gershwin himself explains the intent of each variation; and various performances of Gershwin songs with the composer at the piano. (There is also an interesting little appendix: the song 'Hi-Ho,' sung by Ira Gershwin with Harold Arlen playing piano accompaniment.) In sum, this is one of the most interesting, unexpected, and important record releases in a long time. Most of the sound is pretty bad, but for 1931-35 radio broadcasts it is certainly acceptable.

The sound is surprisingly excellent on another Mark 56 release, "W. C. Fields original radio broadcasts." (The number is apparently 571, but it appears nowhere except on the inner grooves of the record itself; odd production indeed.) No date is given for these Coca-Cola broadcasts, but one could hardly hope for better sound. The routines are not Fields' best, and the mercifully brief opening narrations by W. C. Fields, Jr. are embarrassing; but it is still better than half an hour of genuine Fields, for those interested in such things (like myself.) The record itself is an oddity, a picture record the likes of which I haven't seen except on children's issues for many years. One side is a full color ad for Coke, the other a b&w shot of Fields.

Another new label in the sound-track business is Curtain Calls. These records are priced at \$7.50 each, and can be obtained by mail from Dayton Records, 824 Broadway, New York, NY 10024. First in the series is "Dick Tracy in B-flat" (CC 100/1), a legendary Armed Forces Radio Service broadcast of February 15, 1945, with what may be the

greatest all-star cast ever assembled for a single such occasion: Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore, Harry Von Zell, Jerry Colonna, Bob Hope, Frank Morgan, Jimmy Durante, Judy Garland, the Andrews Sisters, Frank Sinatra, and Cass Daley. The material is variable parody, some of it quite clever and funny, some merely dull; but the spirit of the occasion is infectious, and it might be worth the price just to hear Durante and Garland cracking each other up. The label's other releases feature material from movie soundtracks and broadcasts by three famous female performers: Alice Faye (CC 100/3), Jane Powell (CC 100/4), and Betty Grabel (CC 100/5), all with various other celebrities making appearances. The Faye and Grabel records even include items cut from movies before their releases. I don't care much for the editing on these records--selections follow one another with no pause, sometimes even partially superimposed, and of course there are no bands between selections--but the amount of material included is generous in each case. Sound quality on these records is highly variable, but the best items are good enough to leave one with the presumption that the poorest sound is caused by limitations of the original material. "Dick Tracy" sounds fine all the way through.

Through the years, material from the Commodore label, a late-30's and early 40's jazz venture, has occasionally appeared on rather poor-sounding LPs, under the same label. Now, rights to the Commodore label have been issued to Atlantic Records. Among the early fruits of this new venture is a marvelous two-record set, "Jelly Roll Morton: New Orleans memories & last band dates" (Atlantic SD 2-308), being sold for a "twofer" price. Despite the ominous catalog number, the records are in honest mono, but their sound quality is pretty variable. The 1939 "Memories" set, featuring Jelly Roll's voice and piano alone, sounds particularly odd, the recording seems to have been first dulled by filtering and then echoed up, with more than a trace of distortion present throughout. Most of the 1940 band recordings sound much better, and some of the tracks are remarkably clear and lively, but in some cases where the originals had more surface noise they have been heavily filtered. (At least some of these sides are obviously from commercial pressings, a disappointment since Commodore's 78s were never the best.) In no case does the sound begin to approach the poor quality of the Library of Congress recordings, though. For my taste, some of these recordings contain Jelly's very best vocals, and the five piano solos on side two are certainly among the greatest jazz piano records ever made. Most aficionados like the

band recordings better than I do --for me the additional musicians merely dilute Morton's genius--but they are certainly excellent ensembles, studded with names like "Red" Allen, Albert Nicolas, and Zutty Singleton. This LP set belongs in any representative jazz collection, and the Commodore/Atlantic collaboration would appear to be worth checking out in its entirety.

I try to confine this column to "historical" reissues, but I cannot resist adding my minority report to the chorus of accolades drawn by "The Red back book" (Angel S-36060), performed by the New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble under the direction of Gunther Schuller. One could hardly find a more prestigious jazz scholar, or a finer all-around musician, than Schuller, and his ensemble's performances are certainly smooth and bouncy enough. But nearly all of them are just too fast! Remember Joplin's own admonition, printed on the original edition of "Eugenia": "Notice: Don't play this piece fast. It is never right to play 'Ragtime' fast." And while the piano originals may have been used often for purely musical enjoyment, these band orchestrations were certainly intended for dancing as well as purely musical performance. Yet nearly all the pieces are taken at a fast two-step tempo utterly unsuited for dancing--or, in my opinion, for the music at all. Furthermore, I must accuse producer George Sponhaltz of poor planning. Of the fifteen pieces in the original "Red back book," we are given only seven, along with one ringer and duplications of two of the pieces by the Ensemble's pianist, Myron Romanul, in their piano solo originals. Romanul's playing is percussive and insensitive, and even his piano is blatantly inferior. Can one imagine Angel daring to publish a record of Chopin's piano music banged out on a bad, out-of-tune piano?

RCA Victrola's two-record set devoted to the Flonzaley String Quartet (VCM 7103) is the first LP reissue of this deservedly famous ensemble on their original label. (A couple of years ago, two Beethoven string quartets were reissued on Perennial 2003.) I presume that the two-record format, and the use of the two piano quintets involving famous guest pianists (Bauer and Gabrilowitsch), were all selected to help make this, if not a profitable, at least not too much of a money-losing venture for RCA, and I cannot help approving (although it would be nice if the Brahms and Schumann Quintets did not need to be split so that each is on parts of two records). Of course, all diehard collectors will already have bought this set for its first release, ever, of the Flonzaley's! Haydn Op. 64, no. 5 (the

"Lark,") discovered in RCA's vaults. The two quintet performances fully deserve their legendary status, and the new Haydn keeps them worthy company. Some listeners not acquainted with the Flonzaley Quartet's playing will be surprised by the "modern" quality of the performances: there is hardly any of the pronounced portamento "sliding" from note to note so often heard in nineteenth and early-twentieth century string playing, and the musical conceptions are more forceful than sentimental. This was a most welcome and unexpected release and I suppose it is unfair of me to complain, but the LP transfers, according to RCA's R. Petere Munves "magnificently accomplished" by John Pfeiffer and Edwin Begley, could certainly have been better equalized, and it is certainly distracting to hear the surface noise go on and off, and the sound quality change drastically from one moment to the next, as Begley plays with some kind of filtering device. At any rate, these transfers are so far superior to those on an old private release, MJA-1967-3, of the two quintets, as to warrant instant replacement; the earlier version was in horrible sound and had the Brahms quintet, on one side, so speeded-up that not even my Lenco turntable can bring it down to correct pitch.

Perhaps the greatest catalogers' nightmare I have ever seen is Columbia's two-record set, "Eddie Condon's world of jazz" (Columbia KG 31564). Twenty-seven tracks, dubbed from 1927-47 78s (with one ringer from a 1954 tape), each with a completely different listing of personnel! Heavens! Columbia has, at least, been thoughtful enough to include issue and matrix numbers for everything, but it's still enough to make me thankful that my own venture in record cataloging is long past. The set is a "scrapbook" of music and musicians associated in various ways with Eddie Condon, but he himself is not present on many of the selections and did not even approve of the inclusion of some of them. It is an odd collection indeed, although obviously quite a number of star musicians (Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Bix Beiderbecke, and so on ad infinitum) are present and a great deal of interesting thirties jazz is made available again. The sound, alas, is standard major-label-reissue quality, clear enough but also muffled and filtered to remove that insufferable demon surface noise. Too bad; I prefer the scratch.

Two interesting examples of a rare and nearly extinct species, the seven-inch LP, have come my way recently--both of them priced at \$1.50. Smithsonian ABR-1054 (from Smithsonian Institution Press, 1242 24th St. N.W., Wash-

ington, D. C. 20037) is entitled "Music machines--American style," and feature examples of eight mechanical music makers: a barrel organ, two music boxes, a mechanical reed organ (or harmonium), two player pianos, a player violin and piano, and finally, the one device that eventually made the others obsolete, a cylinder phonograph. From the quality of the reproduction of a Rachmaninoff piano roll and of the cylinder recording, I gather that the producer, A. Alan Botto, has aimed more at a typical than an ultimate reproduction of the original sounds of these instruments, a decision I heartily approve. Whatever you call this, it is a fascinating evocation of an aspect of our musical past, from c.1860 (the barrel organ) to 1925. (Another offshoot of the exhibit<sup>o</sup> that led to the record is a 140-page catalog, with the same title, available from the same source at \$2.75. I have not seen it, but with 200 illustrations it must be worth having!) The other 7" record, Melodiya 33D 00031359/60, is taken from piano rolls of Alexander Scriabin playing his own works: Preludes, Op. 11, nos. 1, 2, 13, & 14; Mazurka in F-sharp, Op. 40, no. 2; Desire, Op. 57, no. 1; Poem in F-sharp, Op. 32, no. 1; and Etude in D-sharp minor, Op. 8, no. 12. These are all taken from Welte rolls, in my opinion the weakest and least reliable of the three major player piano systems (it was also the earliest invention), and the Russian engineers seem to have had in mind the reproduction of the typical sound of acoustic piano recordings in their reproduction. But they are musically about as faithful as one could expect, and the fascination of hearing Scriabin play (he was a great pianist) even in so filtered a form is undeniable. Some of these rolls have been on records before, but I have never heard some of them or seen all of them together on one disc before. I got my copy from: Four Continents Book Corp., 156 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10010, which will also send you a catalog (quite incomplete) of Russian recordings available through them on request.

One of the more unusual records I have heard is "Uncle Wade: a memorial to Wade Ward, old time Virginia banjo picker, 1892-1971" (Folkways FA 2380). This musical and spoken documentary sounds more like a radio program than a record, featuring very tight editing (excessively so for my taste) and quite a number of abbreviated musical fragments which I find quite frustrating to hear. There is undeniable fascination in the spoken reminiscences of

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<sup>o</sup>see ARSC Journal, Vol. IV No. 1/2/3: C. Hoover: Music machines at the Smithsonian.

Ward's niece, Katy Hill, but their documentary value seems to me lessened by their fragmentation and interspersing with bits of music, while the musical value of most of the abridged selections seems to me severely harmed. As something to hear once on the radio this would be interesting enough, but I cannot say I approve of this method for assembling a phonograph record to be replayed and used for serious study.