



New World Records

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When Malindy Sings Jazz Vocalists: 1938 -1961

New World NW 295

The question of who is and who isn't a jazz singer is perplexing. It's easy enough to note those characteristics that separate the jazz singer from, say, the singer of lieder—the subtler changes in inflection, the greater rhythmic looseness, the more flexible tonal quality—but making the distinction between “jazz” and “popular” singing is trickier.

The problem is part of the identity crisis that jazz has been having for years. On the one hand, jazz is a “popular” music—it was nurtured in dance halls, it is performed in nightclubs, its repertoire has always been heavily stocked with the popular songs of the past and the present. On the other hand, it is a “serious” music, far more so than most popular music, much of which is ephemeral by nature. The jazz musician is committed to improvisation as a means of expression, and the musical context of that improvisation tends to be harmonically sophisticated and often extremely complex—which has nothing at all to do with the concept of the carefully crafted, mass-appeal-oriented popular song.

Nowhere is jazz's identity crisis more apparent than among vocalists, where the distinction between the music's serious and popular sides often blurs completely. Louis Armstrong was a jazz singer, but is his recording of “Hello, Dolly” jazz? Young Armstrong's vocal technique had a profound influence on the style of young Bing Crosby; did this make Crosby a jazz singer? Sarah Vaughan's approach is exploratory, daring, and complex—she rarely sings a melody straight—and so is Betty Carter's. But Carter has practiced her art in relative obscurity, like many jazz musicians, while Vaughan has enjoyed enormous popular success. Does this make Sarah Vaughan less a jazz singer than Betty Carter?

Some would just as soon do away with the term “jazz singer” completely, claiming that it is misleading and confusing. And there are singers who, although they at least partly follow a jazz approach in tone quality, phrasing, and rhythm, shun the use of the word to describe themselves out of fear it will limit their audiences.

The easiest way to make the distinction between popular and jazz singers is to note that although virtually all American popular singers from Crosby (1904-1977) on have been influenced by jazz, some (Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee) have used jazz elements in creating what is essentially a less inventive, more accessible style, while others (like the artists in this collection) are more adventurous, their style closer to the improvisational approach of a jazz instrumentalist. Some of the jazz-oriented singers have achieved popular success—often at the expense of the more creative elements of their music—but at heart they remain more interested in making compelling and lasting music than in straining to capture the public's fancy.

This collection does not profess to offer the definitive history of jazz singing. For a variety of reasons, including the unavailability of certain important material, it can't. It does offer an overview, from the late thirties to the early sixties, of some of the outstanding recorded jazz vocalists, some universally known, some underservedly obscure.

The voice was, of course, the first musical instrument. Vocal music is a significant component of virtually all cultures, and in Africa, where jazz had its genesis, vocal inflection is a key element of many languages. The peoples brought as slaves to America from Africa did not bring musi-

cal instruments; the music they made for themselves was at first entirely vocal (although highly rhythmic). African vocal styles sifted through American culture, and the agonies of the slave experience gradually took stark, compelling shape as field hollers, work songs, and spirituals. It was from these forms that the blues evolved, and it was from the blues that jazz emerged.

In jazz's formative period, when it was focused in (although not limited to) the culturally diverse milieu of early-twentieth-century New Orleans, instruments, specifically those of the marching band, assumed primary importance. But the vocal aspect of Afro-American music was never absent; in fact, it made itself known in the musicians' approach to their instruments. As jazz historian Dan Morgenstern has noted in his book *Jazz People*, "one of the key characteristics of early instrumental jazz was the players' attempts to vocalize their sounds"—to imitate the sound of the human voice, to duplicate the plaintive cry that is unique to the African and Afro-American vocal tradition.

This vocal approach to instrumental improvisation was matched from the start by an instrumental approach to singing. Voices and instruments in jazz have long had a symbiotic relationship, and it is no coincidence that Louis Armstrong (1900-1971), the first truly inventive and influential jazz instrumentalist, was also the first truly inventive and influential jazz vocalist.

Armstrong revolutionized jazz instrumental technique by expanding the range of the trumpet and imbuing his playing with a loose, spirited rhythmic sense that came to be known as swing. And he revolutionized jazz vocal technique by perfecting a style of wordless vocalizing known as scat, in which the voice functions as an improvising instrument, and by treating popular songs with a casual irreverence that gave them new meaning as music.

It has been said that Armstrong invented scat singing when, while recording the song "Heebie Jeebies," he dropped his sheet music and, not knowing the words, started singing nonsense syllables. This story is almost certainly apocryphal, but whether or not Armstrong invented scat, he was the singer most responsible for showing that it could be more than just a gimmick. Although there have been singers who have exploited scat for its novelty value alone, with a master like Armstrong or Ella Fitzgerald it is the purest form of jazz singing.

As Armstrong—whose gruff voice and unorthodox phrasing at first struck many listeners as

unpleasant or difficult—gradually grew in popularity, he was called on more and more to record the popular songs of his day, many of which were banal. The approach he developed to such material is captured by Marshall Stearns in *The Story of Jazz* in this description of the 1931 Armstrong record of "All of Me":

In the middle of his vocal, his accent goes insanely British.... On the surface, Louis is saying: "This is as far as I can get with these corny lyrics without clowning, out of sheer embarrassment." At the same time, by changes in the melody and by unusual accents in the rhythm, he makes the listener suddenly realize that he, Armstrong, is in full, double-edged control of the musical situation, embroidering beautifully on the stereotyped mask, and enjoying the whole affair hugely. In a word: he is the master—not just of the music but also of a complex and ironic attitude, a rare, honest way of looking at life.

This approach had its disciples, of whom the most outstanding was the pianist, singer, and songwriter Thomas "Fats" Waller (1904-1943). Though no great vocal stylist, Waller achieved considerable fame through his interpretations of pop songs, which he treated with outrageous humor and sometimes outright condescension. But for the most part, Armstrong's "complex and ironic attitude" had a more subtle effect on the course of American popular singing. It led to a more relaxed, casual concept, a way of phrasing that marked a radical departure from the stiff, often melodramatic style that had been the norm in white popular music. While Bing Crosby was the first important popular singer to adopt an Armstrong-derived style, the approach soon became widespread. Armstrong can truly be said not just to have defined jazz singing but to have permanently altered the course of all American popular singing.

At the same time Armstrong's style was taking hold, another type of singing was in full bloom out of earshot of white America. The rudimentary blues music—usually performed by singers accompanying themselves on guitar—that took root in rural black America in the wake of emancipation had begun, around the turn of the century, the transition into the more refined "classic" blues style first popularized by Gertrude "Ma" Rainey (1886-1939) and developed to its peak by Bessie Smith (1894?-1937).

Bessie Smith did not exist separately from Armstrong—in fact, he played on a number of her recordings—but her style evolved along different lines. The blues was a crucial element of

Armstrong's music, but it was the essence of Smith's. The power and directness of her vocal style were communicated even in the nonblues numbers she recorded, especially toward the end of her career. (Like Armstrong and Waller, she had to deal with trite material, but unlike them, she transcended the material by treating it with total, searing earnestness.) And her style had an effect on succeeding generations of jazz singers—notably those who specialized in the blues, like Joe Turner and Jimmy Rushing—almost as profound as Armstrong's.

Billie Holiday (1915-1959), considered by many to be the greatest jazz singer of all time, always acknowledged that she took her inspiration from both Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith, and her style can be said to be a synthesis of the best of the two. She regarded her voice as an improvising musical instrument. "I don't think I'm singing," she was quoted as saying, "I feel like I'm playing a horn."

The sordid details of Billie Holiday's life—the struggles, the stormy marriages, the drug addiction, the run-ins with the law, the untimely death—have been told, sentimentalized, and sensationalized too often to bear detailed repeating here. To many people her rocky life and her music are inseparable, and to the degree that jazz is a highly personal art that is true; but it's a good idea not to let the one overshadow the other. As Albert Murray observes in his book *Stomping the Blues*:

Sensational publicity about her personal problems was such that for many people her singing came to represent the pathetic sound of an attractive but wretched woman crying in self-pity. And perhaps some of the torch-type songs in her repertoire seem to suggest the same thing. But the great and lasting distinction of Billie Holiday is not based on her highly publicized addiction to narcotics. . . but on her deliberate use of her voice as an Armstrong-derived instrumental extension.

Murray continues that for all her concern with phrasing like a horn, Holiday "almost always delivered her lyrics not only with verbal precision but with conviction." She was yet another example—perhaps the classic example—of the superior vocalist confronted with inferior material, but her seriousness and her sensitivity to even the most treachery lyrics often brought out depths of meaning unthought of by the lyricists themselves.

Billie Holiday came to prominence during the big-band era—she sang with Count Basie and became the first black vocalist to tour with a white

band when she joined Artie Shaw in 1938. The other great jazz singer to establish herself during this period was Ella Fitzgerald (born 1918), who got her professional start with Chick Webb's band. Her approach was radically different from Billie's. Ella, too, was concerned with phrasing like a horn, but in her case the instrumental approach became considerably more important than the lyrics.

A song's words are not irrelevant to Ella Fitzgerald, but they are not very significant. Although she achieved success well beyond the jazz audience and became popularly known as the "first lady of song," in her approach the sound and the improvisational possibilities of a song's melody and harmony are the prime concern.

Sarah Vaughan (born 1924), whose development closely paralleled that of the instrumental pioneers of what came to be known as bebop or modern jazz (New World Records NW 271, *Bebop*), is in the Fitzgerald mold in that her concern is only incidentally with lyrics. She has, in fact, expanded the idea of voice-as-horn by fully exploiting a voice of uncommon clarity and range. Conventional European standards are largely inapplicable to jazz singing; certainly Billie Holiday cannot be said to have possessed a "good" voice by such standards, but her stature as a jazz vocalist is unaffected. Sarah Vaughan, however, happens to be blessed with a voice that is outstanding by any standards, and over the years she has perfected an improvisation technique that can accurately be called virtuosic, just as Charlie Parker's and Dizzy Gillespie's are.

Taking their cue from Vaughan, other singers have concentrated on the voice's hornlike jazz potential to the virtual exclusion of lyrics—Betty Carter (born 1930) is a particularly gifted singer of this sort. At the same time, there remain those singers who, although their rhythmic and harmonic (against the accompanying chord structure) ideas and improvisatory approach mark them as jazz artists, have retained the kind of belief in communicating verbally as well as musically that Holiday adhered to. Among the contemporaries of Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald, some of the noteworthy examples are Helen Humes (born 1918), Maxine Sullivan (born 1911), and Mildred Bailey (1907-1951). In the succeeding generation, Carmen McRae (born 1924), Abbey Lincoln (born 1930), and Dinah Washington (1924-1963)—who in her heavy emphasis on the blues was a throwback to Bessie Smith—are examples.

Probably the first white jazz singer to exert a significant influence was Anita O'Day (born 1919), who first attracted attention with Gene Krupa in

1941. “Her husky, febrile voice had a *jazz* sound,” Dan Morgenstern has written, “and her rhythmic sense was superior to many an instrumentalist’s.” In her style the sound of the music took precedence over the substance of the lyrics, but not entirely; in her work and in that of her disciples, notably Chris Connor (born 1927), there is an attention to verbal as well as musical nuance that—coupled with daring in tone and phrasing—can often imbue trite lyrics with unexpected meaning.

During the bebop era jazz singing took a couple of tangential paths—the development of scat as an end in itself, with entertainment more than improvisation in mind, and the creation of “vocalese,” lyrics written for jazz musicians’ recorded solos (the stock-in-trade of Eddie Jefferson, King Pleasure, and most notably the vocal group Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross)—that merit a mention, but chiefly as curiosities rather than serious developments.

And since the bebop era there has been relatively little new in jazz singing. Some of the more promising jazz vocalists to come along in the forties and fifties got diverted into overtly commercial, nonjazz undertakings. Then there were those who were never strictly jazz singers, although jazz played an important part in their styles. These include Billy Eckstine (born 1914), who at one point led a big band featuring some of the key figures in the bebop movement during their formative years; Nat “King” Cole (1917-1965), who had established himself as a superior jazz pianist before embarking on his highly successful career as a popular vocalist; and Ray Charles (born 1932), who combines blues and gospel styles with a distinct jazz tinge.

Which brings us back to the question of what distinguishes a jazz singer from a popular singer. Since the advent of rhythm and blues and its influence on rock ‘n’ roll, the lines have blurred anew. The music scene of the seventies has become such a polyglot that it may well be true, as Morgenstern suggests, that “jazz singing as a distinct form,” now being carried on by the “surviving veteran performers,” is destined to pass into history when they do.

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THE RECORDINGS

Side One

Band 1

I Can't Get Started

(Vernon Duke and Ira Gershwin)

Billie Holiday and Her Orchestra: Billie Holiday, vocal; Buck Clayton, trumpet; Lester Young, tenor saxophone; Margaret "Queenie" Johnson, piano; Freddie Green, guitar; Walter Page, bass; Jo Jones, drums. *Recorded September 15, 1938, in New York. Originally issued on Vocalion/Okeh 4457 (mx # 23468-1).*

The greatest example of the symbiotic relationship between voice and instrument in the annals of jazz was the extraordinary combination of Billie Holiday and Lester Young (1909-1959). Their approaches to their respective instruments were remarkably similar and totally compatible in tone, phrasing, harmony, and rhythm.

On this recording, Holiday and a small group made up of members of the Count Basie band (with Margaret Johnson substituting for Basie on piano) perform one of the more durable popular songs of their day. Ira Gershwin's lyrics are typically glib and clever, but Billie—as usual—succeeds in giving them emotional meaning as well, in spite of some uncertainty (she sings "I've got a house and a showplace" instead of "I've got a house, a showplace"). The chief feature of this performance, though, is the way her reading of the tune and Young's—in his introductory passage and solo chorus—echo and complement one another.

The lyrics to this song are available from the publisher.

Band 2

I Left My Baby

(Andy Gibson, Count Basie and James Rushing)

Jimmy Rushing, vocal; Count Basie and His Orchestra: Buck Clayton, Ed Lewis, Harry Edison, and Shad Collins, trumpets; Dickie Wells, Bennie Morton, and Dan Minor, trombones; Earle Warren, alto saxophone; Jack Washington, alto and baritone saxophones; Buddy Tate and Lester Young, tenor saxophones; Count Basie, piano; Freddie Green, guitar; Walter Page, bass; Jo Jones, drums. *Recorded November 6, 1939, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 35231 (mx # 26277-A).*

The simple eloquence of the blues as demonstrated by a master. Jimmy Rushing did some of his best work with the Basie band, which here complements his two choruses with some simple but expertly executed call-and-response passages.

Rushing, a product of the supercharged Kansas City jazz milieu and an effortlessly powerful singer, could, in Dan Morgenstern's words, "make the most lead-footed band swing." Here he achieves empathy with Lester Young, who is heard also on the preceding track. Young plays mournful obbligatos to Rushing's vocal, offering a different perspective on the inextricable relationship between instrument and voice in jazz.

I left my baby standing in the back door
crying,
Yes, I left my baby standing in the back
door crying,
She said, "Baby you've got a home just as
long as I've got mine."

When I leave you baby, count the days
I'm gone,
When I leave you baby, count the days
I'm gone,
Well, there ain't no love, ain't no getting
along.

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Bands 3 and 4

Piney Brown Blues

(Joe Turner and Pete Johnson)

Joe Turner and His Fly Cats: Joe Turner, vocal; Hot Lips Page, trumpet; Pete Johnson, piano; John Collins, guitar; Abe Bolar, bass; A. G. Godley, drums. *Recorded November 11, 1940, in New York. Originally issued on Decca 18121 (mx # 68333-A).*

Careless Love

(Anon.)

Joe Turner, vocal; Willie "The Lion" Smith, piano. *Recorded November 26, 1940, in New York. Originally issued on Decca 7827 (mx # 68395-B).*

Another Kansas City blues shouter, Joe Turner, in two very different contexts. "Piney Brown Blues" is a classic traditional blues. Its four stanzas have little or no relationship to one another, supporting Albert

Murray's assertion that "the concrete information contained in a blues lyric as performed is likely to be largely incidental. The essential message is usually conveyed by the music." Turner's interaction with Hot Lips Page's trumpet and the piano of his Kansas City crony, Pete Johnson, points up another of Murray's observations, that Turner "delivers his lyrics like a tenor sax player in a Kansas City combo." "Careless Love" is not, strictly speaking, a blues, but it is treated in blues style by Turner, if less so by his accompanist, stride pianist Willie "The Lion" Smith.

PINEY BROWN BLUES

Well, I've been to Kansas City,
Girls and everything is really all right,
Yes, I've been to Kansas City,
Girls and everything is really all right,
The boys jump and swing in the broad
daylight.

Yes, I dreamed last night
I was standin' on 18th and Vine,
Yes, I dreamed last night
I was standin' on 18th and Vine,
I shook hands with Piney Brown
And I could hardly keep from cryin'.

Now come to me baby,
I want to tell you I'm in love with you,
Please come to me baby,
I want to tell you I'm in love with you,
Because you understand everything I
do.

I want to watch you baby
When the tears roll down your cheeks,
I want to watch you baby
When the tears roll down your cheeks,
I want to hold your hand
Tell you that your eyes can't be beat.

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CARELESS LOVE

Love, oh love, oh careless love. (*repeat*)
You have caused me to weep,
You have caused me to moan.
Careless love, you have wrecked my
happy home.

You worried my mother till she died.
You caused my father to lose his mind.
(*repeat*)

Now, don't ever drive a stranger from

your door. (*repeat*)
 Don't ever drive a stranger from your
 door.
 Well, he may be your brother,
 Your best friend you will ever know.

Love, oh love, oh careless love. (*repeat*)
 You robbed me out of my silver,
 And all of my gold.
 I'll be darned if I'll let you rob me out of
 my soul.

Love, oh love, oh careless love. (*repeat*)
 Now darn you, I'm going to shoot you,
 Shoot you four or five times,
 And stand o'er you until you're prepared
 to die.

Bands 5 and 6

Ja-Da

(Bob Carleton)

Leo Watson and His Orchestra: Leo
 Watson, vocal; Johnny McGee and Ralph
 Muzillo, trumpets; Paul Ricci, clarinet
 and tenor saxophone; Gene de Paul,
 piano; Frank Victor, guitar; O'Neal
 Spencer, drums. *Recorded August 22*
1939, in New York. Originally issued
on Decca 2959 (mx # 66169-A).

It's the Tune That Counts

(Jan Savitt and Don Raye)

Personnel and recording data same as
 above (mx # 66170-A).

Leo Watson (1898-1950) has not
 yet been mentioned in the notes
 because he stands outside the histo-
 ry of jazz singing; he is unique.
 Obscure and under-recorded during
 his lifetime, he left behind just
 enough recorded evidence to sug-
 gest that his approach to the impro-
 visatory capacities of the voice was
 unlike anybody else's.

The most obvious thing about
 Watson's singing is its humor. On
 first listening, his treatment of two
 unusually silly pieces of popular
 music seems marked chiefly by
 eccentricity and goofy good spirits.
 And certainly that's a key to his
 style; like Armstrong or Waller, his
 approach to such material is to dev-
 astate it musically. But beyond the
 humor is a formidable talent. He was
 one of the most inventive of all scat
 singers, both because of the unusual
 chances he took with melody—
 leaping from octave to octave in “Ja-
 Da,” for example—and because of
 his distinctive approach to lyrics,
 using them as a jumping-off point

for stream-of-consciousness improvi-
 sations that were verbal and musical
 at the same time. Note, for example,
 on “It's the Tune That Counts”—a
 lyric that for all its banality is unusu-
 ally appropriate as a vehicle for
 Watson—how he picks up on the
 “hoy-hoy” refrain and weaves it into
 a verbal tapestry of “Savoy,” “oh boy,”
 “oh hoy,” and, toward the very end,
 an almost perfunctory “ship ahoy.”
 No other singer in jazz has had this
 kind of fun with lyrics; certainly
 none has established such a totally
 personal kind of scat singing. Also
 noteworthy is the literally instru-
 mental quality of his scatting on
 both tracks—the way he imitates
 the trumpet on “Ja-Da” and the saxo-
 phone on “It's the Tune That
 Counts.”

Note: “Ja-Da” is sung almost entirely
 to scat syllables.

IT'S THE TUNE THAT COUNTS

Makes no difference what you sing
 A bit of opera, a bit of swing
 Make it sweet or make it bounce
 Ahoy, it's the tune that counts.

Sing anything that you enjoy
 Ring-a-tingy, hoy, hoy, hoy
 Make it sweet or make it bounce
 Hoy, hoy, it's the tune that counts.

Some folks say this kind of singing is
 sappy
 They might be right in a way
 But any kind of music makes me happy
 It's okay, ahoy, ahoy.

Don't forget the lyrics when you sing
 Raggy-taggy or anything
 Make it sweet or make it bounce
 Hoy, hoy, it's the tune that counts.

(scat)

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Band 7

Robbins Nest

(Sir Charles Thompson and Illinois Jacquet)

Ella Fitzgerald, vocal; Hank Jones, piano;
 Hy White, guitar; John Simmons, bass; J.
 C. Heard, drums. *Recorded December*
23, 1947, in New York. Originally
issued on Decca 24538 (mx # 74393).

Ella Fitzgerald had been on her

own for about seven years when
 she made this recording. Although
 she was a product of the swing era,
 her performance indicates that at
 this stage of her career she was well
 aware of the new ground the
 beboppers were breaking.

“Robbins Nest,” a well-known in-
 strumental vehicle, is an excellent
 demonstration of the instrumental
 qualities of Ella's voice. The tune's
 words (the author of which has
 wisely remained uncredited) seem
 tacked on and are virtually without
 meaning: “Give me something gen-
 tle, / Make it sentimental, / Whatever
 you could suggest, / I'll take Robbins
 Nest,” etc. Fitzgerald gets them out
 of the way with as little fuss as pos-
 sible, then launches into an ex-
 quisite scat chorus that begins with
 an allusion to “Poinciana” and segues
 a few bars later into a highly synco-
 pated reference to “Humoresque,”
 and returns to the lyrics for a daring
 modulation to end the piece. The
 performance illustrates both
 Fitzgerald's prowess as an improvis-
 er and her essential unconcern for
 words.

The lyrics to this song are available
 from the publisher.

Band 8

Blowtop Blues

(Leonard Feather and Jane Feather)

Dinah Washington, vocal; Lionel
 Hampton and His Septet: Wendell Culley,
 trumpet; Herbie Fields, alto saxophone;
 Arnett Cobb, tenor saxophone; Lionel
 Hampton, vibraharp; John Mehegan,
 piano; Billy Mackell, guitar; Charles
 Harris, bass; George Jones, drums.
Recorded May 21, 1945, in New York.
Originally issued on Decca 23792 (mx
72873).

Dinah Washington, primarily a
 blues singer, brought to all her mater-
 ial a deep feeling for the blues and
 what Leonard Feather (who wrote
 this song) has called “a terse, sardon-
 ic quality” that profoundly influenced
 a number of younger female singers,
 such as Esther Phillips (born 1935)
 and Nancy Wilson (born 1937).
 Unfortunately, the bulk of her career
 was devoted to highly commercial
 work that allowed only a glimmer of
 her abilities to shine through.

This performance by the twenty-one-year-old Washington is infused with as much meaning as she can muster in the face of these unusual lyrics. Nonetheless, Washington transcends the words and turns in an emotionally valid, if not convincing, performance.

Leonard Feather is best known as a jazz critic and author—among his books is the monumental *Encyclopedia of Jazz*—but he is also an accomplished pianist and songwriter. His compositions have been recorded by Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and numerous others; including, of course, Dinah Washington, for whom he wrote this and other twelve-bar blues.

I've got bad news, baby,
And you're the first to know.
Yes, I've got bad news, baby,
And you're the first to know,
I discovered this morning
That my top is about to go.

I've been rocking on my feet,
And talking all out of my head,
Yes, I've been rocking on my feet,
And talking all out of my head,
Yes, and when I get through talking
Can't remember a thing I've said.

Used to be a sharpie,
Always dressed in the latest styles,
Now I'm walking down Broadway
Wearing nothing but a smile.
I see all kinds of little men
Although they're never there.
I tried to push the A train
And poured whiskey in my hair.
I'm a girl you can't excuse,
I've got those blowtop blues.

Last night I was five feet tall
Today I'm eight feet ten
And everytime I fall downstairs
I float right up again.
When someone turned the lights on me
It like to drove me blind.
I woke up in Bellevue
But I left my mind behind.
I'm a gal who blew a fuse
I've got those blowtop blues
I've got those blowtop blues.

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Side Two

Band 1

Key Largo

(Benny Carter, Karl Suessdorf, and Leah Worth)
Sarah Vaughan, vocal; Barney Kessel, guitar; Joe Comfort, bass. *Recorded early 1960s, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Roulette (S)R-52118.*

A good example of early Sarah Vaughan can be heard on New World Records NW 271, *Bebop*. In “Key Largo,” which might be called middle-period Vaughan, she meets the unusual challenge of singing with only guitar and bass accompaniment.

In a performance of understated simplicity, Vaughan sings the haunting melody twice, with the guitar dropping out for most of the second chorus. By Vaughan's own standards, she gives a relatively straight reading of the melody, although she works myriad subtle variations on the rhythm; by the conventional standards of popular singing, her performance is harmonically adventurous.

Vaughan got her start in the big bands of Earl Hines and Billy Eckstine but has been on her own since the age of twenty-one. She broke the same kind of new musical ground as instrumentalists like Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker (who were also in the Hines and Eckstine bands)—particularly in harmony, in which she set the example for all subsequent jazz singers.

Key Largo, alone on Key Largo,
How empty it seems, with only my
dreams
Strange cargo may come to Key Largo
But where is the face my heart won't
erase?

The moon tide rolling in from the sea
Is lonely and it always will be
Till you're with me.

And I know I'll stay in Key Largo
Just watching the shore
To find you once more.

(repeat song)

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Band2, 3, and 4

Moonlight in Vermont

(Karl Suessdorf and John Blackburn)
Betty Carter, vocal; Ray Bryant, piano; Wendell Marshall, bass; Jo Jones, drums. *Recorded May 13 or 16, 1955, in New York. Originally issued on Epic LN-3202 (mx # CO-53426).*

Thou Swell

(Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart)
Personnel and recording data same as above (mx # CO-53421).

Can't We Be Friends?

(Kay Swift and Paul James)
Personnel and recording data same as Band 2, except add Jerome Richardson, flute (mx # CO-53429).

Betty Carter is perhaps the purest jazz singer alive. In terms of technique and range she is similar to Vaughan, but whereas Vaughan has devoted a substantial portion of her career to the performance of non-jazz material, Carter has stayed true to a highly sophisticated improvisatory style.

Betty Carter got her start with Lionel Hampton and was once known professionally as Betty Be-Bop. These recordings come from the first album she made under her own name and offer some of her most accessible recorded work. Even at this early stage of her career, however, it is clear that words are even less important to her than to Vaughan or Fitzgerald. Lorenz Hart's lyrics to “Thou Swell” are clever, but Carter glosses over them and, following a Ray Bryant piano solo, gets to the heart of her performance, a partly scatted improvised solo. In later years lyrics would become even less important to her as she developed the instrumental capacities of her voice, already impressive here.

Of the three selections, the straightest is her interpretation of “Can't We Be Friends?” The tune is one of the best known by the remarkable Kay Swift, one of the first and best female American popular songwriters (another Swift hit is “Fine and Dandy”), and who has also been a concert pianist. “Can't We Be Friends?” is a fundamentally light-hearted piece of music, and

Carter respects the intentions of Swift and lyricist Paul James in a sprightly performance marked by effective upper-register work. "Moonlight in Vermont," however, becomes much more sombre in Carter's hands than either the lyrics or music suggests. Her dark, moody interpretation is tremendously effective, although it's unclear just how much it has to do with either moonlight or Vermont.

MOONLIGHT IN VERMONT

The lyrics to this song are available from the publisher.

THOU SWELL

Thou swell! Thou witty!
Thou sweet! Thou grand!
Wouldst kiss me, pretty?
Wouldst hold my hand?
Both thine eyes are cute, too; what they
do to me.
Hear me holler I see a sweet lolla-
paloosa in thee.

I'd feel so rich in
A hut for two;
Two rooms, a kitchen
I'm sure would do;
Give me just a plot of, not a lot of, land,
and
thou swell! Thou witty! Thou grand!

(scat)

(repeat second verse)

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CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS?

I thought I'd found the man of my
dreams,
Now it seems this is how the story ends.
He's gonna turn me down and say,
"Can't we be friends?"

I thought for once I couldn't go wrong,
Not for long I can see the way depends.
He's gonna turn me down and say,
"Can't we be friends?"

Never again, with laughter, with men,
They play their game without shame,
And who's to blame?

I thought I'd found a man I could trust.
What happened, this is how the story
ends;
He's gonna turn me down and say,

"Can't we be friends?"

Why should I care that he gave me the
air?
Why should I cry, he will sigh,
And wonder why.

I should have seen the signal to stop.
Plop, plop, plop, this is how my story
ends.
He's gonna turn me down and say,
"Can't we be friends?"

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Bands 5 and 6

Misty

(Erroll Garner and Johnny Burke)

Chris Connor, vocal; Bill Rubenstein, piano; Kenny Burrell, guitar; Eddie de Haas, bass; Lex Humphries, drums. *Recorded September 13, 1959, in New York. Originally issued on Atlantic SD-8040.*

Love

(Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane)

Chris Connor, vocal; Danny Stiles and Burt Collins, trumpets; Willie Dennis, trombone; Phil Woods, alto saxophone; Ronnie Ball, piano; George Duvivier, bass; Ed Shaughnessy, drums. *Recorded November 16, 1960. Originally issued on Atlantic SD-8046.*

A somewhat underrated singer, Chris Connor is almost certainly the best vocalist deriving from Anita O'Day; some would argue that she is better than O'Day. It can't be disputed that the performances here—one recorded live at New York's Village Vanguard with a quartet, the other in the studio with a medium-big band—showcase a distinctive and inventive vocal style.

Pianist Ran Blake has praised Connor for her "tone... sense of dynamics... rhythmical concept ... her intensity, her use of silence, and her ability to surprise." A perfunctory listen to "Misty" might suggest that she loses the thread of the tune in a couple of spots, but a closer listen shows that she is taking daring chances with the rhythm. On both tracks her husky voice plays with phrasing and melody with the kind of imagination associated with the best jazz singers.

MISTY

Look at me, I'm as helpless as a kitten up
a tree,
I feel I'm clinging to a cloud.
I can't understand,
I get misty holding your hand.

Walk my way, a thousand violins begin
to play.
Or is it just the sound of your love?
The music I hear,
I get misty the moment you're near.

You can say that you're leading me on,
It's just what I want you to do.
Don't you notice how hopelessly I'm
lost,
That's why I'm following you.

On my own could I wander through this
wonderland alone,
Never knowing my left foot from my
right,
My hat from my glove.
I'm too misty and too much in love.

(repeat)

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LOVE

Love can be almost madness.
Love can be insane.
Love can be a life of sadness and pain.
Love can be a summer shower.
Love can be a sigh.
Love can be two hearts that flower and
flower.

It can be fine and free.
But it's true,
It doesn't always happen to you.

Oh, love can be a dying ember.
Oh, it can be a flame that hits in
September,
Maybe then in December
You may not even remember it came.

Love can be a joy forever,
Or an empty name.
Love is almost never, ever the same.
It can be ecstasy,
But that kind
Is not so very easy to find.

Oh, love can be a forceful failure.
Love can bring you pain.
Love that's in the morning may be wild,
But then without any warning it's tame.

Love can be a joy forever, Or an empty
name.
Love is almost never, ever the same.

Band 7

When Malindy Sings

(Oscar Brown, Jr., and Paul Laurence Dunbar)
 Abbey Lincoln, vocal; Booker Little, trumpet; Julian Priester, trombone; Eric Dolphy, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, and flute; Walter Benton and Coleman Hawkins, tenor saxophones; Mal Waldron, piano; Art Davis, bass; Max Roach, drums. *Recorded February 22, 1961, in New York. Originally issued on Candid CJM/CJS-8015/9015.*

A highly forceful, highly dramatic interpretation of four stanzas of Paul Laurence Dunbar's nine-stanza poem, set to music, that slyly suggests the superiority of natural, spontaneous Afro-American singing to the formal European kind. Abbey Lincoln, who was married to drummer Max Roach at the time of this recording, is a rare example of a popular singer whose style became progressively more jazz-oriented as her career developed. Although more concerned here with the lyrics than the music, she has not ignored the instrumental nature of the voice—as demonstrated in the wordless chant that begins and ends the selection.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was a highly influential and revered black American poet whom William Dean Howells praised for his capacity to “feel the Negro life and express it lyrically”—something demonstrated emphatically in this particular poem, which is both evocative and perceptive. Trumpeter Booker Little wrote the arrangement for singer Oscar Brown, Jr.'s highly sympathetic musical setting. (For Dunbar's contributions to black musical theater, see Robert Kimball's notes—p. 1, col. 3—to New World Records NW 260, *Shuffle Along*.)

G'way an' quit dat noise, Miss Lucy—
 Put dat music book away;
 What's de use to keep on tryin'?
 Ef you practise twell you're gray,
 You cain't sta't no notes a-flyin'
 Lak de ones dat rants and rings
 F'om de kitchen to de big woods

When Malindy sings.

Easy 'nough fu' folks to hollah,
 Lookin' at de lines an' dots,
 When dey ain't no one kin sence it,
 An' de chune comes in, in spots;
 But fu' real melojous music,
 Dat jes' strikes yo' hea't and clings,
 Jes' you stan' an' listen wif me
 When Malindy sings.

Oh, hit's sweetah dan de music
 Of an edicated band;
 An' hit's dearah dan de battle's
 Song of triumph in de lan'.
 It seems holier dan evenin'
 When de solemn chu'ch bell rings,
 Ez I sit an' ca'mly listen
 While Malindy sings.

Towsah, stop dat ba'kin', hyeah me!
 Mandy, mek dat chile keep still;
 Don't you hyeah de echoes callin'
 F'om de valley to de hill?
 Let me listen, I can hyeah it,
 Th'oo de bresh of angels' wings,
 Sof' an' sweet, “Swing Low, Sweet
 Chariot,”
 Ez Malindy sings.

Band 8

The End of a Love Affair

(Edward C. Redding)
 Billie Holiday, vocal; Ray Ellis and His Orchestra: Urbie Green, Tom Mitchell, and J. J. Johnson, trombones; Ed Powell, Tom Parshley, Romeo Penque, and Phil Bodner, reeds; Bradley Spinney, xylophone; Janet Putman, harp; Mal Waldron, piano; Barry Galbraith, guitar; Milt Hinton, bass; Don Lamond, drums; string section and choir. *Recorded February 20, 1958, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia CL-1157 (mx # 60467).*

This comes from Billie Holiday's last recording session; it was included in the monaural version of the album *Lady in Satin* but, inexplicably, not in the stereo version.

The session was controversial because many listeners felt that the lush arrangements were unsuited for Holiday and because many also believed that, with or without the arrangements, her voice had degenerated so seriously that the musical value of her work was questionable.

Certainly her voice by this time was considerably less than what it had once been, but vocal equipment was never the point with Billie. Her

distinctive approach remained unchanged, and the weariness and pain reflected in her voice give her performance here (and in the other selections recorded at this session) a poignancy that her earlier work lacked. In some ways this can be said to be the “worst” vocal performance in this anthology—it can't be denied that Holiday hits a number of wrong notes. But for sheer emotional impact, it may well be the best.

So I walk a little too fast,
 And I drive a little too fast,
 And I'm reckless it's true.
 But what else can you do
 At the end of a love affair?

So I talk a little too much,
 And I laugh a little too much,
 And my voice is too loud,
 When I'm out in a crowd,
 So that people have to stare.

Do they know, do they care?
 That it's only that I'm lonely
 And low as can be.
 And the smile on my face,
 Isn't really a smile at all.

So I smoke a little too much,
 And I joke a little too much.
 And the tunes I request
 Are not always the best,
 But the ones where the trumpets blare.

So I go at a maddening pace,
 And not pretend that it's taking its
 place.
 But what else can you do
 At the end of a love affair?

(repeat last three verses)

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Side One Total time 23:37

- 1 I CAN'T GET STARTED (Vernon Duke and Ira Gershwin)2:48
(publ. Chappell Music Co.)
Billie Holiday and Her Orchestra
- 2 I LEFT MY BABY (Andy Gibson)3:13
(publ. Bregman, Vocco & Conn, Inc.)
Jimmy Rushing, vocal; Count Basie and His Orchestra
- 3 PINEY BROWN BLUES (Joe Turner and Pete Johnson)2:55
(publ. Leeds Music Corp.)
Joe Turner and His Fly Cats
- 4 CARELESS LOVE (Anon.)2:50
(Public Domain)
Joe Turner, vocal; Willie "The Lion" Smith, piano
- 5 JA-DA (Bob Carleton)2:41
(publ. Leo Feist, Inc.)
Leo Watson and His Orchestra
- 6 IT'S THE TUNE THAT COUNTS (Jan Savitt)2:38
(publ. MCA Music, a Division of MCA, Inc.)
Leo Watson and His Orchestra
- 7 ROBBINS NEST (Sir Charles Thompson and Illinois Jacquet)2:33
(publ. Atlantic Music Corp.)
Ella Fitzgerald, vocal; Hank Jones, piano; Hy White, guitar; John Simmons, bass; J. C. Heard, drums
- 8 BLOWTOP BLUES (Leonard Feather and Jane Feather)3:31
(publ. Model Music Co.)
Dinah Washington, vocal; Lionel Hampton and His Septet

Side Two Total time 26:25

- 1 KEY LARGO (Benny Carter, Karl Suessdorf, and Leah Worth)3:30
(publ. Granson Music Co.)
Sarah Vaughan, vocal; Barney Kessel, guitar; Joe Comfort, bass
- 2 MOONLIGHT IN VERMONT (Karl Suessdorf and John Blackburn)3:24
(publ. Michael H. Goldsen, Inc.)
Betty Carter, vocal; with group
- 3 THOU SWELL (Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart)1:40
(publ. Warner Bros. Music)
Betty Carter, vocal; with group
- 4 CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS? (Kay Swift and Paul James)2:28
(publ. Warner Bros. Music)
Betty Carter, vocal; with group
- 5 MISTY (Erroll Garner and Johnny Burke)3:14
(publ. Vernon Music Corp. by arrangement with Octave Music Publishing Corp.)
Chris Connor, vocal; with group
- 6 LOVE (Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane)2:46
(publ. Leo Feist, Inc.)
Chris Connor, vocal; with group
- 7 WHEN MALINDY SINGS (Oscar Brown, Jr., and Paul Laurence Dunbar)4:02
(publ. unknown)
Abbey Lincoln, vocal; with group
- 8 THE END OF A LOVE AFFAIR (Edward C. Redding)4:52
(publ. Duchess Music Corp.)
Billie Holiday, vocal; Ray Ellis and His Orchestra

Full discographic information and a complete list of the performers for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to CBS Records for "I Can't Get Started"; "I Left My Baby"; "Moonlight in Vermont"; "Thou Swell"; "Can't We Be Friends?"; and "The End of a Love Affair"; to MCA Records for "Piney Brown Blues"; "Careless Love"; "Ja-Da"; "It's the Tune That Counts"; "Robbins Nest"; and "Blowtop Blues"; to Atlantic Records for "Misty" and "Love"; to Roulette Records for "Key Largo"; and to Barnaby Records for "When Malindy Sings."

Our thanks to Robert Altshuler for making his record collection available to us; and to Dan Morgenstern of the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, and Sam Parkins for their invaluable help.

Program consultant: Richard Seidel
Rerecording engineer: Art Shifrin
Mastering: Lee Hulko, Sterling Sound
Cover art: Yasuo Kuniyoshi. "Juggler." Ink on cardboard.
Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Cover design: Elaine Sherer Cox
Library of Congress Card No. 77-751194
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