

moans & blues

by Lizzie Miles

LOST MUSIC

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No doubt her beauty, voice and personality were responsible for encountering a full share of "man-trouble" — the essential blues ingredient — and perhaps it was this trouble that sent her back home to New Orleans. Or it may have been something deeper.* At any rate, in her travels she finally found the answer; the cradle of jazz, the fluid cosmopolitan creative culture of her own New Orleans was really *home*. She returned to stay.

Lizzie Miles is one of the very few jazz performers left in our time who lived and sang popularly right through the era of the birth of jazz. Today in the Mardi Gras Lounge on Bourbon St., she is still packing them in. For our ears, her style of singing the original oldtime verse-and-chorus songs is significant. It shows that the blues feeling and spirit did not suddenly come to be applied to the modern music of post World War I; her style now is the same style she remembers having heard in her native New Orleans when these songs were new 40 years ago and more.

Important to us here is the fact that Lizzie does not read music easily. Her singing, like folk singing, stems first from having heard the song as sung by others, and it is thus that we are able to penetrate some of the dark secrets of the pre-Jelly Roll oblivion.

MOANIN'

Lizzie Miles writes: . . . *been tryin' to get them to let me sing soft since I started recording . . . but no, they wanted me bellowin' like a fog born a mile away. You can't put in sweetness and your soul hollerin' . . .*

When she sings, Lizzie is a woman possessed. The trance is for herself as well as for listeners; singing, moaning with half-closed eyes, the spirit is upon her and it is impossible to stop her before the end of the song. The secret of this intensity, the mark of the artist, may lie between modest lines of a letter she wrote: . . . *I sing love songs, sad songs — torchy songs better. Guess it's because I had such a hard sad life from as far back as I can remember is why. Most these songs bring memories.*

In this business after all those years of knockabout and trouble, either you turn bitter and disappear, or you ripen into a remarkable personality. There is no middle ground. Lizzie's oldtime songs (side B) will caress the memory of those of us who are old enough to recall them, irresistibly spark the imagination of us all.

*cf. spontaneous words in "Plain Ole Blues" unrehearsed and ad. lib. from all



" . . . think I'm not happy being as I am?
I just wouldn't be thin or skinny for all the
money in town."

Side A

Memphis Blues*
Can't Help Lovin That Man Of Mine
Jelly Roll†
There'll Be Some Changes Made
Louisiana*
Sugar Blues*
Lazy River

*With Tony Almerico's Parishian Room Band
†Included in binaural edition

Side B

Going Away To Wear You Off My Mind†
Mama's Lonesome For You
I Never Knew What The Blues Were
Papa War's You Tell Me What You Done To Me
Basin Street
Animal Ball
Plain Ole Blues*
When You're A Long Long Way From Home†

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Recorded in New Orleans on Royal Street
Piano Accompaniments: Red Camp
Band Accompaniments: Tony Almerico's
All Stars

When You're a Long Long Way From Home (1914) gives the unaccompanied verse, Liz teaching Red. In this whole collection of songs Red Camp was *flying blind*. No music, just intuition, a poignant sympathetic contrast between old and new. In that old piano Camp instinctively found the wooden bass notes to give the blues punctuation, a real and tangible nostalgia.

Plain Ole Blues (jam) Rarely does bona-fide relaxed uncontrived unconscious jamming get on records. The knowledge that a microphone is *on*, the forewarning of the A & R recording schedule, the desire to perform something "acceptable," all create the wrong circumstantial atmosphere. Here, there is none of that. At the end of the session, not realizing they were being recorded, the orchestra was relaxed partly on bandstand, some sprinkled around among front row tables and chairs. The indefatigable Camp started improvising; guitar and bass joined in, then clarinet, trombone and others from wherever they happened to be. At last stirred to expression, Lizzie Miles came to the microphone.

Lizzie could hear the band, but the band could *not* hear her; she was in a lower tone, close to the microphone; yet a certain surrealism in music stems from her *deliberate* singing whole tones removed from the band pattern. This from an old timer, self-avowedly slightly square in terms of modern jazz. Among many other unique features of this episode are the involuntary *words* in her singing.

*Yes, my baby's gone — gone an' left me all alone
. . . come back home boy, don't leave yo mama all alone — Baby don't go an' leave me now . . . I'm low down, yeah . . . don't leave me now — He say baby mine.*

Way down — here in Dixieland — gonna leave my man . . . I'll make my stand down here in Dixieland.

Can't Help Loving That Man The first time Lizzie tried to sing this song for us in the spring of 1954, she stopped midway, said, *I can't do it — I can't feel it*. Appropriately and intuitively Red Camp punctures the balloon of the lyric with his interjections, and this time the song was finished.

Jelly Roll Jelly Roll Morton made his treatment of this traditional outcry famous in the early 1900's. Lizzie uses several versions in her own special blend — with a dash of Creole French lyrics at the end.

Memphis Blues is the first blues to be published in this country. W. C. Handy wrote it in 1909 as a campaign song called "Mr. Crump" (the name of the would-be Memphis mayor). It's local popularity outlasted the election so Handy published it himself as *Memphis Blues* — setting the pattern for composed blues to follow, such as Handy's later classic *St. Louis Blues* (#1181).

COOK / SOUNDS OF OUR TIMES

long play 1182

BINAURAL EDITION



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Recorded in New Orleans on Royal Street

Piano Accompaniments: Red Camp

Band Accompaniments: Tony Almerico's All Stars

Lazy River • Can't Help Lovin That Man • There'll Be Some Changes Made • Animal Ball • Mama's Lonesome For You • Never Knew What The Blues Were • (Pre-Jazz Blues)

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