

Jazz of the Forties **Volume One**

Jazz at Town Hall presented by Bob Maltz
Recorded on Saturday, September 21, 1946
Edited and with Notes by George Hoefer
Folkways Records FJ 2841

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Jazz of the Forties; Vol. 1

Sidney Bechet
Vernon Brown
Baby Dodds
Pops Foster
Art Hodes
James P. Johnson
Mezz Mezzrow
Miff Mole
Pee Wee Russell
Muggzy Spanier
George Wettling
J. Windhurst

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

ROYAL GARDEN BLUES

Ensemble

Art Hodes, Pee Wee Russell, Muggzy Spanier,
Miff Mole, Pops Foster, George Wettling

HOW COME YOU DO ME LIKE YOU DO?

Ensemble

Art Hodes, Pee Wee Russell, Muggzy Spanier,
Miff Mole, Pops Foster, George Wettling

CHINA BOY

Sidney Bechet, J. P. Johnson,
Pops Foster, Baby Dodds

SISTER KATE

Miff Mole, James P. Johnson, Mezz Mezzrow,
Baby Dodds, Pops Foster, J. Windhurst

I'VE FOUND A NEW BABY

J. P. Johnson, Ensemble,
J. Windhurst, Baby Dodds

SNOWY MORNING BLUES

James P. Johnson — solo with Baby Dodds

RELAXIN' AT TOURO

Ensemble

Art Hodes, Pee Wee Russell, Muggzy Spanier,
Miff Mole, Pops Foster, George Wettling

DEAR OLD SOUTHLAND

Sidney Bechet — solo, with J. P. Johnson,
Pops Foster, Baby Dodds

SHE'S FUNNY THAT WAY

James P. Johnson, Johnny Windhurst,
Mezz Mezzrow, Baby Dodds, Pops Foster

MAPLE LEAF RAG

James P. Johnson — piano solo,
with Baby Dodds, Pops Foster

JAZZ ME BLUES

J. Windhurst, Mezz Mezzrow, Vernon Brown,
Art Hodes, Pops Foster, George Wettling

THE BLUES

Art Hodes, Pops Foster, Mezz Mezzrow,
Vernon Brown, Pee Wee Russell,
Baby Dodds, Muggzy Spanier

Jazz of the Forties

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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SIDE I

- Band 1: ROYAL GARDEN BLUES (Spencer & Williams)
Ensemble
Art Hodes, Pee Wee Russell, Muggzy Spanier, Miff Mole, Pops Foster, George Wettling
- Band 2: HOW COME YOU DO ME LIKE YOU DO? (G. Austin & Roy Bergere)
Ensemble
Miff Mole, Muggzy Spanier, Art Hodes, Pops Foster, Pee Wee Russell, George Wettling
- Band 3: CHINA BOY
Sidney Bechet, J. P. Johnson, Pops Foster, Baby Dodds
- Band 4: SISTER KATE
Miff Mole, James P. Johnson, Pops Foster, Mezz Mezzrow, Baby Dodds, J. Windhurst
- Band 5: I'VE FOUND A NEW BABY (Jack Palmer & Spencer Williams)
Ensemble
J. P. Johnson, J. Windhurst, Baby Dodds
- Band 6: SNOWY MORNING BLUES (by J. P. Johnson)
James P. Johnson - solo with Baby Dodds

SIDE II

- Band 1: RELAXIN' AT THE TOURO (Muggzy, Spanier)
Ensemble
Art Hodes, Muggzy Spanier, Pee Wee Russell, Miff Mole, George Wettling, Pops Foster
- Band 2: DEAR OLD SOUTHLAND (Turner Layton - Henry Kramer)
Sidney Bechet - solo, with J. P. Johnson, Pops Foster, Baby Dodds
- Band 3: SHE'S FUNNY THAT WAY (Mel Moret - Richard A. Whiting)
James P. Johnson, Johnny Windhurst, Mezz Mezzrow, Baby Dodds
- Band 4: MAPLE LEAF RAG (Scott Joplin)
James P. Johnson - piano solo, with Baby Dodds & Pops Foster
- Band 5: JAZZ ME BLUES
J. Windhurst, Mezz Mezzrow, Vernon Brown, Art Hodes, Pops Foster, George Wettling
- Band 6: THE BLUES
Art Hodes, Pops Foster, Mezz Mezzrow, Vernon Brown, Pee Wee Russell, Baby Dodds, Muggzy Spanier

JAZZ AT TOWN HALL '46

by George Hoefer

The status of an art form can change with the passage of time. It can show progress in two areas, one of which can lag behind the other by years and even

centuries, while in between there is a "blind spot" evidenced by the term popular commerciality. One of these areas is of course the artists themselves who strive forward on one level to better the state of the art, as they themselves interpret their creative impulses. The other, or lagging area, is art appreciation, which is ever more befogged by mediocrity and misinterpretation.

These thoughts were being mulled over on one of those rare days in Manhattan when most everyone who isn't anybody was up in the Catskills or Adirondacks, on the Jersey shore or a square foot of sand at Coney, or maybe just sitting under an umbrella in shorts at a New York Thruway service station. Therefore, the city was hollow and one could relax in the stone caves.

Out across the upper west side roofs, toward the Hudson, from the seventh floor of an apartment house on 72nd street was a commanding view that set a mood for reflection accompanied by music. A cool breeze was coming in from the Atlantic to mitigate the rays from the late summer sun. Adjacent roof tops were sprinkled with occasional sun bathers, readers, and a sewing circle. On a building a half-block away was a man in swimming trunks banging on a typewriter and sending the sound of the clicking keys out on the breezy air waves.

At hand was a record player and two-twelve inch acetates made at a jazz concert held ten years ago in New York's Town Hall. When the music started to emanate out the open window there was a surprising reaction. The sun bathers looked up with an amused interest, those seated in beach chairs started to swing their feet, and the typewriter clicks seemed to come in at a faster tempo. Jazz music, as played by Sidney Bechet, James P. Johnson, Muggzy Spanier, Pee Wee Russell, Wild Bill Davison, Art Hodes, George Wettling, Baby Dodds, and others in 1948 to a small concert audience, has attained in 1958 a much wider appreciative acceptance.

A decade ago one could expect a knock on the door by a summoned police officer if the volume was turned up on the machine while jazz records were being played. The complaints would vary from plain disturbing the peace to being suspected of operating a disreputable good time flat.

Part of the credit for dispelling the false notions regarding jazz that prevailed ten years ago is due to the frequency the jazz names have appeared in Carnegie and Town Hall in formal jazz concert array. Jazz festivals are now held yearly in such locations as Newport, R.I., Stratford, Ontario, French Lick Springs, Indiana, and many other places in the United States and Europe. Television and radio feature regular jazz programs that are no longer disguised as stage shows. People are hearing jazz and liking what they hear.

Along with all the attention and the frequency of jobs, jazz musicians have had a tendency to become blase and "in a rut" about the whole thing. The above has been particularly true of the older jazz men whose creative work attained a peak level many years ago and has remained static through the years. Louis Armstrong is an outstanding example of a jazz pioneer who has played at a steady pace, but has offered nothing new since the 1930's.

Most of the men on Jazz At Town Hall - 1948 are contemporaries of Armstrong. While constantly presenting their unique individual style of jazz interpretation, they have not progressed creatively. Under

an aura of reiteration they have settled down into a monotonous groove. Ten years ago there was the excitement and novelty of playing in the confines where the great classical concert artists usually performed. This 1948 jazz concert for the above reason has a nostalgic sound that reminds the listener of those early spirited concert hall sessions when the artists were still getting their kicks from playing on hallowed music ground. These records have never been issued, or even played, in the intervening years and are therefore a revelation. Even the technical aspects, which are spotty from the pick-up standpoint, take the listener back to when the happy sound of Dixieland jazz forced its way through many obstacles. Today the technical reception of a concert on record is much improved, but the music itself has become blase and non-inspired.

Bob Maltz, who since '48 has put on the famous weekly jazz fests at New York's Stuyvesant Casino, graced his Town Hall bash with the presence of some of the greatest names in jazz history. Over half of the stars are no longer on the New York jazz scene and several of them are rarely heard on records today. Essentially, there were two bands present on that October evening in '48, so there are two names for each instrument. They didn't play as two distinct units, but seemed to mix themselves together as the mood directed.

James P. Johnson, who passed away in 1956, was highlighted playing piano solos on Maple Leaf Rag, the Scott Joplin perennial, and his own famous composition of Snowy Morning Blues. On both of these numbers he was accompanied by two influential rhythm pioneers, Warren "Baby" Dodds, the great King Oliver Creole Band drummer, and bassist, George "Pops" Foster, who started slapping the string bass in New Orleans around the turn of the century. Baby Dodds is living in retirement out in Chicago, while Pops is still banging the bass with Dixie bands on the West Coast. Foster today enjoys the distinction of being the oldest active jazz musician. These two piano solos were made at one of the last public appearances of the beloved James P., whose prize student Fats Waller preceded him in death by over ten years.

Another great blues pianist was present at Town Hall that night in '48, Art Hodes, who has been leading his own small jazz band in Chicago for many years since, but unfortunately has not been making records. His uniquely sensitive blues piano is generously displayed on the Blues, one of those improvised on-the-spot jam numbers that musicians frequently like to fall into, especially, when there hasn't been any rehearsal and the men haven't been playing together regularly.

The alternate drummer on the date is George Wettling whose driving style lifts several of the tunes off the ground. George, who today can be heard in the house band at Eddie Candon's new East Side bistro, was once a student of Baby Dodds, when the latter was featured with Oliver at the Royal Gardens and/or Lincoln Gardens in the Windy City. It is interesting here to compare Baby's old fashioned wood-block, ratchet, and rim shot work, which still had inherent drive, with the masculine aggressiveness of Wettling who learned a lot from Baby.

There were three well known jazz trumpeters on hand. Francis "Muggsy" Spanier featured his famed muted horn on Relaxin' (At the Touro) and later trades choruses with another individualistic star, one Wild Bill Davison. The third trumpet was the youngest musician at the session and a mere lad at the time - Johnny Windhurst, whose style at the time was quite

similar to Davison's. Muggsy is still playing on the West Coast, while Davison and Windhurst base in New York, but are likely to be heard playing the jazz spots all over the country.

On clarinet there were Charles "Pee Wee" Russell and Milton "Mezz" Mezzrow. Pee Wee gets off several tortured squeezed-out choruses that drew attention from the attending audience as evidenced on the crowd pick-up. Pee Wee still continues to amaze the listeners at frequent New York appearances. Mezzrow at the time of the concert was basking in the glory of his book Really The Blues, which had caused a good deal of pro and con among the musicians. Soon after this period Mezz moved to Paris to become a leader of the Panassie school of jazz in France and is still there.

Two trombonists who are still around New York, but appear only on rare occasions are heard copiously on these sides. One, Miff Mole, is in semi-retirement, while the other, Vernon Brown, has been playing in the broadcasting studio bands. Mole is remembered for his jazz trombone with many small recording units, including those of Red Nichols, during the twenties. He was one of the first players to take the slide instrument out of the percussion category and make it a melodic jazz voice. Vernon Brown was one of the original members of Benny Goodman's first swing band that hit the jackpot at the Palomar in Los Angeles in 1935.

The last big name to be mentioned is that of the French idol of today, Sidney Bechet, who was at the time still playing the American jazz circuit featuring his soprano saxophone. The New Orleans-born clarinetist later moved to Paris, married, settled down in a French chateau, and became a jazz playing hero of the Gallic populace. He has since made several flying visits home, but otherwise has completely disappeared from the American jazz scene, except for occasional records waxed in France that find their way to the States. His solo version of China Boy has become a jazz classic and the impact derived from his driving soprano is evident on the version included in this set. He is also featured on Dear Old Southland.

The ensemble sides Royal Garden Blues, How Come You Do Me Like You Do?, Jazz Me Blues, Sister Kate, She's Funny That Way and I've Found A New Baby, are all rousing jam-styled free wheeling jazz. These tunes, popular as melodies of the day during the twenties, have now become jazz classics and are still frequently heard as such, but rarely by the revered musicians who played this 1948 concert in quite the same spirit as herein displayed.

Watching the reception these records were having from the roof top inhabitants of New York on a quiet holiday made it seem a very right thing to do to issue them and add to the available library of recorded jazz.

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