

Swingin' Piano 1920-46



NEW ORLEANS, 1935 PHOTO BY WALKER EVANS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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MUSIC LP

Swingin' Piano **1920-46**

SIDE ONE Total Time—22:57

1. Harlem Rhythm Dance (Williams)—
Herman Chittison
2. Ma (Conrad)—Eubie Blake
3. Shim Sham Drag (Wilson)—Garland Wilson
4. St. Louis Blues (Handy)—Albert Ammons
5. Royal Garden Blues (Williams)—Cliff Jackson
6. The Ladder (Turner)—Joe Turner
7. Swingin' (Chittison)—Herman Chittison
8. Sweet Savannah Sue (Waller)—Fats Waller

SIDE TWO Total Time—21:57

1. I Wonder Where My Baby Is Tonight (Donaldson)—
Frank Banta
2. Swanee Blues (Delcamp)—J. Milton Delcamp
3. Usen't You Use To Be My Sweetie (Wendling)—
Pete Wendling
4. I'm Sitting On Top Of The World (Henderson)—
Vera Guilaroff
5. Lucky Day (Henderson)—Edythe Baker
6. Sweet Sue (Young)—Pauline Alpert
7. Mine (Hanley)—Fred Elizalde
8. Alexander's Ragtime Band (Berlin)—Monia Liter

CREDITS

Programming and Annotation: David A. Jasen
Remastering: Carl Seltzer

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COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RBF 46

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Throughout the history of recorded sound, the piano has gotten short shrift. The recording engineers have been mainly responsible for this state of affairs, as they discouraged the use of the piano as a solo instrument to outright forbidding to record it. In the general scheme of things then, piano solos on discs are uncommon and the amount of jazz piano solos are even scarcer. Since "jazz" is hard enough to define, especially when its definitions change with the different types created through the decades, we are happy to present a cross-section of piano solos, taken from both the jazz and pop repertory - from the beginning of jazz piano recording in 1920 through the end of World War II in 1946. The pianists are as diverse as their styles, with Novelty and Stride predominating.

SIDE ONE

Harlem Rhythm Dance was written by the prolific composer-publisher Clarence Williams. Williams himself, a pedestrian pianist at best, recorded this as a band piece with his Blue Five. Chittison's version is more of a virtuosic display. His 1934 recording was made while he was working in Paris, France with Louis Armstrong.

Ma, was written by pop composer Con Conrad in 1921 and given its maiden recording by the ever-fabulous Eubie Blake (1883-) in September of that year. Eubie was at the start of his long and famous career at age thirty-eight.

Shim Sham Drag was Garland Wilson's own composition which he recorded in London, England in September, 1936. He was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia on June 13, 1909 and died in Paris, France on May 31, 1954 where he had been living on and off since the early thirties.

St. Louis Blues is probably the most important and famous blues everwritten. It has been recorded more often and by more people than any other song. What makes it most

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impressive is that the tune today shows no sign of losing popularity. It was originally published by the composer, W.C. Handy (1873-1958) in 1914. In addition to being a blues, the first section was meant to be played as a Tango while the second section could be used as a Fox-Trot, thereby serving both of these new ballroom dances and insuring its continued popularity. Albert Ammons was born in Chicago in 1907 and died there at the end of 1949. Except for a brief period in the late 30's and early 40's when he lived in New York City where he made this recording, he spent most of his life in the city of his birth. He was mostly noted as the partner of Pete Johnson and the team created the Boogie-Woogie vogue of the late 30's. The duo at times became a trio with Boogie Woogie champ Meade Lux Lewis, but Ammons, as you can hear, was easily the most musical and imaginative of the lot. In fact, his great solo here reminds us of the earlier Chicago blues pianist, Jimmy Blythe. They are probably the only ones who had that rocking swing to their playing.

ROYAL GARDEN BLUES was a 1919 collaboration of Clarence (1898-1965) and Spencer (1889-1965) Williams, the former composing the music, the latter writing the lyrics. They were a famous songwriting team who were not related to each other.

To make matters more confusing, they both had sons who were named after their partners. This jazz standard was recorded in 1944 by the very much under recorded and neglected stride giant Cliff Jackson. Clifton Luther was born in Culpepper, Virginia in 1902 and moved to New York City in 1923 where he spent the rest of his life playing in nightclubs. He worked up until his death, which occurred in 1970.

THE LADDER is an original by pianist Joe Turner. He was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1907 and came to New York in the mid-twenties where he played in various bands. During the thirties, he accompanied singer Adelaide Hall throughout Europe. After the second world war, he returned to Europe where he still lives. Occasionally he has come back to New York to perform in clubs. On this 1939 recording, which took place in Paris, France, he is accompanied on drums by Tommy Benford.

SWINGIN' is a Herman Chittison original and recorded in the same Paris that Joe Turner recorded his original. Chittison was born in the small town of Flemingsburg, Kentucky in 1909.

He began playing piano at eight and worked in bands at eighteen. He went to Europe during the 30's where he worked steadily including a tour with Louis Armstrong. He came to New York in 1940 to play in clubs, and was also the pianist on the weekly network radio show "Casey, Crime Photographer." He moved to Cleveland, Ohio for the last two years of his life. He died in 1967.

SWEET SAVANNAH SUE was written by Fats Waller for his revue, Hot Chocolates, for which he also wrote his famous song Ain't Misbehavin'. Fats was born in Harlem in 1904 and died in Kansas City, Missouri at the end of 1943 at the age of 39. He was, by far, the best known Stride pianist of all time, appearing all over the world in concerts, having a weekly network radio show, writing and playing for Broadway shows, acting, singing and playing in Hollywood musicals and making over a thousand recordings. This particular recording was made in 1929 and seemingly overlooked. It demonstrates his full range of tricks and powerful technique. His full-sounding arrangement is incredibly satisfying.

SIDE TWO

I WONDER WHERE MY BABY IS TONIGHT is one of the classics of Tin Pan Alley from 1925. It was written by the prolific tunesmith Walter Donaldson (1893-1947), who crafted another million-selling sensation that same year, Yes Sir, That's My Baby. This contemporary recording was made by the fabulous studio pianist and accompanist Frank Banta (1897-1968), who began making records when he was seventeen years old. His Novelty treatment is filled with the finest and most typical breaks, executed flawlessly.

SWANEE BLUES is a fine 1920 piece performed then by its composer, J. Milton Deleamp. While he didn't make discs, he arranged and performed on over one hundred piano rolls. This is a unique example of his live performance, also filled with Novelty breaks.

USEN'T YOU USE TO BE MY SWEETIE is perhaps the most charming and liting of Pete Wendling's (1888-1974) hundreds of songs. Very much like Deleamp, Wendling was at home making piano rolls, at last count - over eight hundred of them! Consequently, he had very little time to make records. This is one of six selections, this one made in August, 1926. His light touch and bouncy quality makes him an ideal entertaining pianist.

I'M SITTING ON TOP OF THE WORLD was Ray Henderson's 1925 entry, here recorded a year later by sixteen year old Vera Guilaroff, the English-born Canadian who took piano lessons from Montrealer Willie Eckstein.

LUCKY DAY was written by the same Ray Henderson who wrote the above number. This one was composed for George White's Scandals of 1926. When it was imported to London a year later for their revue, Shake Your Feet, American Edythe Baker (1895-1965) learned it and recorded it in London. Although like Delcamp and Wendling, she made many piano rolls, she never recorded discs in the United States and made only a handful in England, where she performed and later married a peer of the realm. As this recording indicates, she was a magnificent pianist and arranger.

SWEET SUE was orchestra leader Victor Young's composition of 1928. Pauline Alpert (1900-) made this incredible recording in 1946. While she can be heard on Ragtime Piano Interpretations (RBF-24), her recorded output is also small. As can be predicted, she made many piano rolls during the twenties.

MINE was written by veteran Tin Pan Alley composer James Hanley (1892-1942) in 1927 and here given a beautiful arrangement by Manila-born Fred Elizalde, who was to become a successful dance bandleader in London.

ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND by Irving Berlin (1888-), was originally published in 1911. It typified to many the ragtime age and became a standard, appearing on radio and television over the years and in many movie musicals. Monia Liter was born in Odessa, Russia in 1906 and became a naturalized British citizen. He was mainly known as the accompanist to English vocalist Al Bowlly, although he spent considerable time in such bands as Nat Gonella's and Lew Stone's. This truly remarkable jazz rendition of 1934 also serves as the climax to this album of Swingin' Piano.

CREDITS

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