

THE ORIGINAL MEMPHIS FIVE

Compiled and Annotated by David A. Jasen



RBF 26

Side One

1. Memphis Glide
2. Snuggle Up a Bit
3. Railroad Man
4. Pickles
5. Yankee Doodle Blues
6. Ji Ji Boo
7. Hopeless Blues
8. That Big Blond Mamma

Side Two

1. Shufflin' Mose
2. Great White Way Blues
3. Red Hot Mamma
4. I'm Going Back To Those Who Won't Go Back On Me
5. Lonesome Mamma Blues
6. Struttin' Jim
7. Cuddle Up Blues
8. Lots O' Mama

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43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., U.S.A. 10023

CREDITS

Programmed and Notes by DAVID A. JASEN

Mastered by NICK PERLS

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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The exciting, vibrant sounds of the Original Memphis Five are overwhelmingly joyous. Such intensity of happy feelings are rarely met with. The OM5 was unlike any other small jazz band of the twenties. To begin with, they are hardly ever (if at all) mentioned in jazz history books and yet they exerted the greatest influence of all such jazz bands on the public. They did not play at the usual dance halls (or unusual ones, for that matter), nor did they make the obligatory tours which so exhaust musicians. They were a studio group. This meant that they only existed to make records, rather than perform for the public. And make records they did. They made more records than any other group of their time! Just how many they made is still up for discussion, as they recorded for the majority of existing record companies under a host of pseudonyms. In addition to their "official" name, they recorded as Bailey's Lucky Seven, The Cotton Pickers, Jazzbo's Carolina Serenaders, Ladd's Black Aces, Lanin's Southern Serenaders, McMurray's California Thumpers, New Orleans Black Birds, and Tennessee Ten.

As a matter of fact, their "official" name is neither original, they didn't come from Memphis, nor were they always five in number. The founding members, Frank Signorelli (piano) and Phil Napoleon (trumpet) were the original groupies of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the first jazz band to make recordings. They and their friends, Miff Mole (trombone), Jimmy Lytell (clarinet), and Jack Roth (drums) would follow the ODJB from job to job, even to sitting in with their idols when one or several wouldn't happen to show up for the job. Frank Signorelli was the luckiest and actually got to record with the ODJB.

Their prolificity gave them a unique standing in the recording business. Their special sound (mainly emanating from Napoleon) and easy tempos made their music ideal for dancing. In this group, the distinctive sounds occur when the two leaders play a chorus together. Napoleon invariably mutes his trumpet to provide a more intimate feeling which allows Signorelli's sensitive and rhythmic piano backing to provide the basic animation and impetus for the rest of the band. Jimmy Lytell's clarinet is a direct inspiration from the ODJB's Larry Shields but with a fuller tone. Their drive and ability

to ad-lib made their music ideal for listening. As a result, the Original Memphis Five made a profound impression on the record-buying public during the nineteen twenties, one which is still not fully appreciated. This is probably the only jazz group which remained fairly anonymous despite their readily identifiable sound but whose collective record sales were phenomenal.

While the output was unusually large, the OM5's repertoire was not correspondingly large. This is accounted for by the fact that they would record the same tune for a dozen different recording companies. But this apparent drawback affords us the rare opportunity of listening to just how creative they were, as each rendition was a separate and individual one, not just the same "take" issued over and over again.

RECORDINGS:

Side One

MEMPHIS GLIDE, an original composition by Frank Signorelli and Phil Napoleon, stomps off the first side. This performance serves to introduce us to the unique lively ensemble sound of the OM5, the driving lead of trumpeter Napoleon, the snappy interchange between Napoleon and pianist Signorelli, and the ending with which they signed off most numbers. While not achieving the status of a popular hit, it was recorded by them several times.

SNUGGLE UP A BIT is another original effort by the leaders. A more gutsy, bluesy feeling predominates this selection with a decidedly funky piano accompaniment from Signorelli.

RAILROAD MAN is a bouncy, toe-tappin' tune of the early twenties written by Elmer Schoebel, pianist of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. Featuring banjoist Ray Kitchingman, there is a strong trombone interlude by Charles Panelli and then a most delightful Napoleon-Signorelli by-play with Signorelli flying through one of his invigorating runs which typifies his exhilarating sound throughout this period.

PICKLES is another finger-snapper composed by Charles Rosoff. Again, the happy banjo of Ray Kitchingman is heard providing a strong supporting beat. Signorelli's solo clearly establishes him as one of the great pianists in an era of pretty spectacular solo pianists. Even more to his credit is his sympathetic accompaniment overall which helps sustain the vivid OM5 sound.

YANKEE DOODLE BLUES is a 1922 entry by George Gershwin. Hardly what one expected of a Gershwin song, yet the treatment is probably the best this tune ever received. Napoleon establishes the lead from the beginning and keeps it up intensely until the snap ending.

JI JI BOO features a nice cross play between Napoleon and trombonist Miff Mole. Then it's time for the Napoleon-Signorelli duet followed by the rest of the band briskly playing the final chorus with tag ending.

HOPELESS BLUES is neither hopeless, nor is it a blues. One of the brighter efforts of J. Russel Robinson and Roy Turk, it features the clear and inspired clarinet artistry of Jimmy Lytell.

THAT BIG BLOND MAMA is Jimmy Monaco's contribution to the "Mamma" songs of the time (this album features four of them). While there is the very early rhythm-banjo spot of Nick Lucas, the main attraction is the vital Napoleon-Signorelli duet which surrounds it. Ending this side, the larger, fuller sound indicates that which is to come in popular dance music while at the same time the small feature of the duet of the leaders identified the unique OM5 sound to so many listeners.

Side Two

SHUFFLIN' MOSE, another Signorelli-Napoleon original, opens this side with dynamic impact. The Signorelli solo is highlighted by Jack Roth's effective drumming which creates a contrasting shuffle sound. The cohesive ensemble for the rest of the piece demonstrated why they were so popular with the public.

GREAT WHITE WAY BLUES, an inspiration of Signorelli and Napoleon, appropriately enough gives emphasis to their outstanding duet as Napoleon's muted trumpet supplied the driving lead while Signorelli continuously provided incisive yet challenging improvisations.

RED HOT MAMMA is a Fred Rose winner which allows the OM5's collective sound to be firmly established. There is ample room for Signorelli to take a full chorus alone and then have Napoleon join in for another chorus.

I'M GOING BACK TO THOSE WHO WON'T GO BACK ON ME is a real treat for the interested listener in lovely, thoroughly neglected popular music. This is probably the only recording of this number and it's a beaut! Clearly Napoleon had a field-day with it and he received the support to forge ahead all the way.

LONESOME MAMMA BLUES was a terrifically popular piece, in direct contrast to the previous selection. But, here the OM5 give it a lusty, forceful treatment which was a most unusual one for this tear-jerking blues.

STRUTTIN' JIM is another lovely early twenties gem which is totally forgotten today. Its composer was Bob Carleton, who five years had a fantastic smash hit in JA-DA. The haunting chorus in JIM is given fine ensemble treatment typical of the OM5 and yet so untypical of any other group of its time. This song sports an unusually fine verse. The Signorello piano accompaniment to Napoleon's muted trumpet gives way to a rare Signorelli solo which in turn smoothly heralds the band for a rousing finish.

CUDDLE UP BLUES is in the grand tradition of early twenties fast fox-trots masquerading as the then newest fad, "blues." Its composer, M.K. Jerome, was a demonstrating pianist for his publisher, Waterson, Berlin & Synder. Joining the OM5 is vaudeville and later recording star, alto saxophone virtuoso, Rudy Wiedoeft to fortify this performance.

LOTS O' MAMA, another tune by Elmer Schoebel, finishes this tribute to pioneer jazz band, The Original Memphis Five, by featuring the entire group in an intense arrangement allowing for the vivacious group feeling to express itself in a most free-flowing and spirited way. For the first half, Napoleon dominates as usual, with breaks punctuated by Mole. From a beautiful series of harmonies, the band surges forward to the robust conclusion.

SHUTTLE, MOSE, another Signorelli-Mole solo opens this side with dynamic impact. The Signorelli solo is highlighted by Jack Ford's effective drumming which creates a contrasting rhythmic sound. The collective ensemble for the rest of the piece demonstrated why they were so popular with the public.

WHAT WHITE WAYS BLUES, an inspiration of Signorelli and Napoleon, appropriately enough gives emphasis to their outstanding dual as Napoleon's muted trumpet captured the driving beat while Signorelli continuously provided incisive yet challenging improvisations.

RED HOT MAMA is a fast pace winner which allows the OM5's collective sound to be fully established. There is ample room for Signorelli to take a full chorus alone and then have Napoleon join in for another chorus.

I'M GOING BACK TO THOSE WHO WON'T GO BACK ON ME is a real treat for the interested listener in lovely, thoroughly neglected popular music. This is probably the only recording of this number and it's a beauty. Clearly Napoleon had a field-day with it and he received the support to force ahead all the way.

LONGER MAMA BLUES was a terrifically popular piece, in direct contrast to the previous selection. But here the OM5 give it a lusty, forceful treatment. This was a most unusual one for this tear-jerking blues.

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AND SERVICE CORP., 43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C. 10023
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33-1/3 RPM

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