

**LET'S
PUT
THE
AXE
TO
THE
AXIS**

SONGS OF WORLD WAR II

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RF 610

COMPILED BY SAMUEL CHARTERS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE



SIDE 1:

- A1. Let's Put The Axe To The Axis 2:39
(Corday-Mann-Weiss)
Abe Lyman and his Californians
Vocal refrain by The Four Eton Boys
2. The Sun Will Soon Be Setting 2:27
(For The Land of the Rising Sun)
(Lerner)
Frankie Masters and his Orchestra
3. I Left My Heart At The Stage Door Canteen 2:38
(Berlin)
Kenny Baker
4. Milkman, Keep Those Bottles Quiet 2:10
(Raye-De Paul)
The Four King Sisters
5. Mussolini's Letter to Hitler 2:45
(Robinson)
Carson Robinson
6. Hitler's Reply To Mussolini 2:40
(Robinson)
Carson Robinson
7. We Did It Before And We Can Do It Again 2:21
(Friend-Tobias)
Dick Robertson and his Orchestra
Vocal chorus by Dick Robertson and The American Four

SIDE 2:

- B1. Goodbye Mama 2:38 (I'm Off To Yokohama)
(Coots)
Frankie Masters and his Orchestra
- *2. He Wears A Pair Of Silver Wings 3:11
(Maschwitz-Carr)
Kay Kyser and his Orchestra
Vocal Chorus by Harry Babbitt
3. Praise The Lord And Pass The Ammunition 2:45
(Loesser)
Royal Harmony Quartet
4. First Class Private Mary Brown 2:39
(Loesser)
Clyde Lucas and his Orchestra
Vocal Refrain by Paul Steele
- *5. Little Bo-Peep Has Lost Her Jeep 3:02
(Bowne-DeVol)
Horace Heidt and his Musical Knights
Vocal chorus by Donna and her Don Juans
- *6. I Threw A Kiss In The Ocean 3:01
(Berlin)
Horace Heidt and his Musical Knights
Vocal chorus by Donna and her Don Juans
7. Get Your Gun And Come Along 2:39
(We're Fixin' To Kill A Skunk)
(Robinson)
Carson Robinson

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

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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In a way the songs on this record could be thought of as coming at the end of a tradition that had continued for many hundreds of years. Certainly the appearance of topical ballads and songs had been popular everywhere in European culture, and the penny broadsheet poems sold at executions were as much a part of this universal expression as phonograph records were to become in the modern era. The two wars that followed the second World War, in Korea and Vietnam, inspired songs - especially Vietnam - but the songs were different. They were more personal, more directly expressive, closer to poetry than they were to the jingly penny ballad sheets. The tradition that is fading away in the songs here is that of the topical song - the quick, easily grasped response to an immediate event expressed in terms of a conventional popular song. The most recent flurry of topical songs following the death of Elvis Presley suggest that the emotional force still is present in topical verses set to simple melodies; so perhaps the lack of strong topical songs for the last two wars is a reflection of the confusion and ambiguity surrounding them.

It is also possible that songs like "Goodbye Mama (I'm Off To Yokohama)" were partly responsible for the decline of ballads and songs like this. Most of the songs written for World War II were dreadful - simple jingoist ditties that didn't reflect either the war itself or the mood of the nation that was fighting it. As always with topical songs the important factor was speed. The first recording of "Goodbye Mama" was done by the singer Dick Robertson on December 16, 1941, only nine days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The same day he also recorded "We Did It Before And We Can Do It Again," which - however - despite the speed with which it was written and recorded did become one of the songs that stayed popular during the war.

"Goodbye Mama" was written in the immediate wave of revulsion that followed Japan's attack, but it also reflects the kind of

glib racism that was prevalent in the America of the 1940s. Despite the emotions of the time it's still a little difficult to deal with lines like,

"We'll have all those Japs right down on their Jap-a-knees," and the last lines could have come right out of a Hollywood musical.

"Goodbye, mama, I'm off to Yokohama
For my country, my flag, and you!"

Both it and the song "The Sun Will Soon Be Setting (For The Land of the Rising Sun)" also reflected the first wave of optimism that the war would be over in a few months. Perhaps "We Did It Before" had a longer success because it expressed a more general mood of determination. As the war went on and the losses mounted this became the prevalent tone of reassurance.

It is, of course, a cliché that wars are fought on every level of the consciousness, and topical songs function as part of this complicated mesh of emotions. On their simplest level they are often used to encourage laughter at the enemy when he is most feared. During the height of the blitz the British dealt with the fear of Hitler by showing the film collage of "Lambeth Walk," constructed so as to turn Hitler and his troopers into a ridiculous vaudeville dance routine. Americans had been using the "nigger" caricature of the minstrel show to mask their fear of black strength for more than a hundred years with just the same emotional ambiguity. Hitler continued to be feared throughout the war, and as a result there were persistent efforts to laugh him away. Carson J. Robinson, who wrote and recorded the "Letters" between Hitler and Mussolini, did his best to laugh away both of them on one single record. Singing in the late winter of 1942 he was able to report on the failure of Hitler's attempt to capture Moscow, as well as the failure of Mussolini's invasion of Greece. He also adds the more down to earth warning to the German heavyweight boxer Max Schmeling, who had been beaten by Joe Louis and at that time was

known to be in the German Army, that "Brown Bomber Joe" was now in the United States forces.

Robinson was a veteran of many topical recordings and his career went back to the 1920's, when he wrote songs for the king of recorded topical singers, Vernon Dalhart. Like Dalhart he felt that the most important thing for the singer to remember was enunciation - the words are always clear, even if the singing is flat and amateurish. Perhaps, though, the songs sound even more ridiculous when they are presented with considerable professional polish. Songs like "Little Bo-Peep Has Lost Her Jeep" or "First Class Private Mary Brown" become almost surrealistic presented with complete earnestness by ordinary swing groups. "Mary Brown" is intended as a tribute to the women in the new Woman's Army Corps, with the gimmick of the lyrics centering around the play on words between her rank - private first class, with its single arm stripe - and the singer's admiration for her as a first class girl. As he sings, he thought that "P.f.c. stood for 'perfect feminine charm'", and ends with the earnest, "my wonderful WAC!"

The love songs sometimes proved to be more successful than the more rousing patriotic appeals. It was the women who stayed home where they could listen to the radio and buy records; so songs like "I Threw A Kiss In The Ocean" or "He Wears A Pair of Silver Wings" were frankly aimed at them. For the men there were even vaguer songs generally expressing their lonely womanless-ness. There was a Stage Door Canteen, as Kenny Baker described in his recording, and it was a popular symbol for the desire people at home had to help the men who had been taken into the service. The Stage Door Canteen was in New York, off

Times Square, and show business personalities took turns handing out coffee and doughnuts or entertaining or simply listening to the lonely soldiers talk.

Another of the songs on the record also became a wartime standard, and that was the spiritual-type "Praise The Lord And Pass The Ammunition," written by the prolific composer Frank Loesser, who was to go on and write the scores for musicals like "Where's Charley?" and "Guys and Dolls." Like "We Did It Before" its message is sufficiently general to cover many situations, and it also unites the religious motive in the figure of the chaplain with the men in combat. It's also an especially engaging melody which is easy to sing. This was the first recording of it, and though a later version of Kay Kyser was more popular, the song was often sung by the popular "gospel" quartets of the war years.

The war probably would have been more productive of songs and recordings, but during the war years there was a prolonged strike by the musicians' union and there was a ban on recording from the summer of 1942 until virtually the end of the war. Considering the quality of some of the early jingoist efforts it's probably something to be thankful for that the flood was shut off - but at the same time the best of the songs that were recorded did become part of the consciousness that made it possible for the American people to sustain their will over the long years of fighting. There were also other recordings that were done by artists who were not part of the commercial music world and these songs often come closer to the raw realities of the war experience. These are the songs that will be documented in the second volume of these recordings.

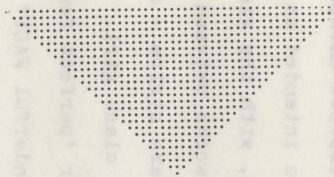
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Abe Lyman and his Californians, Vocal refrain by The Four Eton Boys

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RFS 610 A

2. THE SUN WILL SOON BE SETTING (Lerner) 2:27
(For The Land of the Rising Sun)
Frankie Masters and his Orchestra
3. I LEFT MY HEART AT THE STAGE DOOR CANTEEN (Berlin) 2:38
Kenny Baker
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RFS 610 B

- *2. HE WEARS A PAIR OF SILVER WINGS (Maschwitz-Carr) 3:11
Kay Kyser and his Orchestra / Vocal Chorus by Harry Babbitt
3. PRAISE THE LORD AND PASS THE AMMUNITION - 2:45
(Loesser) / Royal Harmony Quartet
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Clyde Lucas and his Orchestra / Vocal Refrain by Paul Steele
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