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 obsession.

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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 horn a mile away. You can't put in sweetness and your soul bellowin' ... .

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 — tocky songs better. Guess it's because I had such a bad sad life from so 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

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.

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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-avoided 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' go an' leave me now ... I'm low down, yeah ... don' 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).

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

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

I'm Goin' Away to Wear You Off My Mind (1922) started off by accident. Seated alone, off at a table in the empty Parisian Room, Lizzie suddenly turned to Red, asked him if he remembered this song, hummed it to him. The first time they tried it together is on the record — airy, charged with atmosphere.

another SOUNDS OF OUR TIMES recording by

COOK LABORATORIES — NORWALK, CONN.
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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 horn and a mile away. You can't put in sweetness and your soul bollerin' . . .

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.

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Lizzie could hear the band well, but the band could not hear her; she was in a lower tone, close to the microphone; yet a certain surrealism in music seems 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.

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