

Esther Mae Scott: Mama Ain't Nobody's Fool. Esther Mae Scott with Ralph Dammann, Bing McCoy, Jerry Mule, Tom Zito, Richie Reiter, Luigi Bingasto, Echo H. Piffko, Vassar Clements, George Motion, Greg Damico, Emmy Lou Harris, Aleta Thomas.

9 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo.

Bomp One (RI 3384). Adalphi Records, P. O. Box 288, Silver Spring, Maryland 20907, 1972. \$5.95.

Reviewed by Michael Taft.

If Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey or some of the other so-called 'classic' blues singers of the twenties were still actively recording today, what kind of records would they be putting out? Although it is pure speculation, there is a chance that their LPs would not be very different from the one featuring Esther Mae Scott. Scott was born in 1893, making her a contemporary of Bessie Smith et al., and, according to the liner notes, she joined the Rabbit Foot Woolcott Minstrel Show in New Orleans in about 1909. However, she soon left the stage and did not continue a performing career, nor did she make any records until this present effort. (Although a singer named Mae Scott recorded two songs for Paramount in 1923 -- "Squawkin' the Blues" and "I'll Get Even With You" --, there is absolutely no reason to believe that this is the same woman.)

This is not to say that Scott sings in the style of the twenties, nor is her repertoire similar to the 'classic' singers' of that period. She is, in fact, quite eclectic in her choice of material, but it might be argued that, if Bessie Smith were still singing, she too would have a radically different repertoire today. A successful performer adapts to the changing expectations of her audience. Although "Gulf Coast Blues," "Mama Ain't Nobody's Fool," and "T For Texas" are all in the traditional blues structure, Scott also sings Fats Domino's "I'm Walking" and the Beatles' "Can't Buy Me Love." One of her gospel selections, "Golden Bells," as well as "Come To Me," have a distinct country and western flavour. Her choice of "Black Jesus" reflects her deep involvement in the civil rights struggle.

According to the liner notes, the album was originally to have a simple acoustical accompaniment, but Scott complained that "It doesn't have any pizzaz," so that on all but one cut she is backed up by a large group of rock, country, and jazz musicians, playing a wide assortment of electric and acoustic instruments. ("T For Texas" was recorded live, making for an interesting contrast to the studio productions.) Again, if Bessie Smith were still recording, she too would most likely want the same sort of "pizzaz" -- i. e., a good number of back-up musicians --, as she was used to recording with the popular jazz accompanists of her day.

The quality of the record is good, but Scott's singing is not too exciting. (How would Bessie Smith sound at the age of 79?) If I could compare her with any singer of the twenties, I would say she sounds like a 79 year-old Lottie Beaman (see Origin OJL 6 or Yazoo L-1018). She is somewhat drowned out on

"Mama Ain't Nobody's Fool" by all the instrumentation. The notes tend to be a bit too romantic for this reviewer's taste, but they do give us a fair idea of who Esther Mae Scott is. The record company should be thanked by all discographers for giving the dates of recording and mixing, the places of recording, and all personnel and instrumentation.

Born in Texas. Thomas Shaw.

11 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo, liner notes by Frank Scott. No. 2801. Advent Productions, P. O. Box 635, Manhattan Beach, California 90266, 1973. \$7.98.

Feel Like Blowing My Horn. Roosevelt Sykes, with King Kolax, Oett "Sax" Mallard, Robert Lockwood, Dave Myers, Fred Below.

10 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo, liner notes by Susan Koester. DS-632. Delmark Records, 4243 Lincoln, Chicago, Illinois 60618, 1973. \$7.98.

I Want a Little Girl. T-Bone Walker, with Hal Singer, George Arvanitas, Jackie Sampson, and S. P. Leary.

8 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo, liner notes by Jim O'Neal. DS-633. Delmark Records, 4243 North Lincoln, Chicago, Illinois 60618, 1973. \$5.98.

Reviewed by Melvin Wade and Margaret Wade.

A number of record companies have re-released individual albums by early blues artists and albums featuring multiple artists which attempt to serve as a reconstruction of the history of the blues. In general, the artists featured in these collections are dead. However, three recently released albums by living artists serve as concrete proof that the blues tradition is still very much in existence. The pressing question, though, is "For how long?" Thomas Shaw, Roosevelt Sykes, and T-Bone Walker are each well over sixty as are other important bluesmen such as B. B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Son House and Mance Lipscomb. The younger bluesmen have developed styles which reflect more diverse musical traditions. Only a few, such as Taj Mahal, have dedicated themselves to the rediscovery and preservation of the blues tradition.

These three albums, taken as a unit, are illustrative of gradations of living blues styles. Thomas Shaw represents the country blues tradition. Typical of country blues, Shaw's style evidences a rough and throaty voice quality, free associational lyrics, vocal patterns similar to ordinary speech and a spare guitar style. Roosevelt Sykes, father of the modern blues piano style, typifies early city blues. His lyrics are more standardized than those of country blues, but an improvisational quality remains in his work chiefly because of his vocal phrasing, spoken endings, interludes and shouts. T-Bone Walker, king of the electric guitar, represents post-war urban blues. It is characteristic of this style to