

## RECORD REVIEWS

The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, selected and annotated by Martin Williams. Scott Joplin, Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, James P. Johnson, Billie Holiday, Lester Young, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, et al. 86 selections, portions in stereo, vocal and instrumental. Descriptive notes, 46 pp., bibliog., discog., music, photos. Smithsonian P6 11891. Six discs, boxed set. Available from W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10036. \$20.00.

Reviewed by John Hasse.

The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz is by far the best historical anthology of jazz recordings ever issued. Although Folkways and Decca have released anthologies covering the history of jazz, and Columbia, Riverside and Verve, among others, have issued partial histories on record, none of these companies were able to cover the entire history of jazz recordings made for numerous record companies. Anthologizing from a number of labels required an institution outside the commercial recording industry. The Smithsonian succeeded admirably: the 86 selections were taken from the active and inactive lists of 18 record companies. It's interesting that almost half the selections were originally recorded by Columbia--25 items, or RCA--16 items. If one wished to purchase all the selections, (s)he would have to buy 66 LP's on at least 20 different labels, for a total cost of approximately \$300. In that regard, the \$20 price makes this set a remarkable bargain.

The set is not intended for the jazz scholar or for the jazz aficionado who has a large record collection. It is intended as an introduction to jazz for the layman or beginning student of jazz. Its greatest utility will be as a tremendous educational tool for teachers, libraries, and archives, and it ought to be in every library in the nation. If one had to choose a single book or record album as an introduction to jazz, this Collection should be the one.

On what can this set be evaluated? In a sense the music itself is beyond criticism, since all the recordings are significant. The major aspects to be evaluated, then, are the selection and the documentation. Selection is a highly subjective matter, of course, and no two jazz authorities could ever be expected to agree on what recordings constituted the pinnacle of recorded jazz.

One could complain that Martin Williams, who selected and annotated the Collection, included too much Thelonious Monk and too much early material, too little John Coltrane and avant-garde, no George Russell, that he could have chosen a better Bessie Smith piece than "St. Louis Blues", that some of Louis Armstrong's most significant recordings--such as "Muggles" and "Beau Koo Jack"--are omitted. But by and large Williams' selection should be commended, for he included all the seminal figures of jazz, as well as all the major styles of jazz from pre-jazz to the avant-garde.

The attractive accompanying booklet, 12" x 12" and 46 pages in length, includes numerous photographs, an annotated bibliography, a guide to obtaining jazz records, a brief history of jazz, and suggestions on listening approaches. The major part of the booklet consists of discussions of each of the 86 selections. The discographical information for each item is rather good, but omits the names of the composition publishers and licensing organizations, the timings, and the matrix and take numbers for those sides originally released on 78 rpm.

Whereas much of the writing on jazz has been anecdotal or biographical, Williams has consistently sought to raise the level of discussion to the music itself; he has become one of the two or three best writers and critics of jazz. Though his comments here are mostly musicological and not ethnomusicological, they are generally very good. The documentation must be some of the most extensive documentation ever to accompany a record set.

The sound quality is excellent. Columbia engineers again worked their magic on eliminating hiss and noise and yet preserving original fidelity.

One consideration not mentioned by Williams and, indeed, ignored by most jazz writers is that of sample. Isn't the history of jazz almost always confused with the recorded history of jazz? Or are they for all practical purposes synonymous? What excellent and potentially widely influential jazz musicians were never recorded? Of the recorded musicians, what important solos were never recorded?

Since Williams' goal was to pick some of the very best or most classic of all recorded jazz, he did not include any outright "poor" selections, which would have been instructive. This lack of concern for a representative sample shows a difference between the musicologist and the ethnomusicologist or folklorist, who would have been more likely to include some unexceptional items.

One point which Williams makes in his essay is the extreme importance of the blues, both as a fundamental element in the

genesis of jazz and as a pervasive influence--in form and feeling--throughout jazz. This, as Williams notes, can be traced through the recordings, as can another pervasive formal element of jazz--call and response.

There are three kinds of call and response: between ensembles, between ensemble and soloist, and between soloists. The first type, antiphonal, can be heard between the brass and reed sections of Count Basie's band on "Doggin' Around". The second type, responsorial, can be heard between clarinetist Barney Bigard and the ensemble on Duke Ellington's "Harlem Air Shaft". And an example of the third type, which might be termed "contraphonal", occurs on Louis Armstrong's "Hotter Than That", when Armstrong and guitarist Lonnie Johnson "trade" bars in an exciting exchange.

Heard chronologically, the selections reveal--among other things--expanding ranges and colors for the various instruments, an increasing role for the rhythm section, a departure from and return to collective improvisation, a series of successive subdivisions of the basic rhythmic pulse or beat, increasing freedom and complexity of melody, and an underlying dialectic between improvisation and composition.

Though jazz is often viewed as a series of revolutions--a telescoping into 60 years of the kind of developments for which Western art music has taken centuries--one must also be aware of the continuity of tradition in jazz. Individualism of tone and expression, spontaneity and improvisation, blues tonality, blues and call and response forms, swing, the primacy of rhythm, and what Gunther Schuller has called "the democratization of rhythmic values" are elements of jazz which--as the recordings in this set reveal--pervade the music throughout its history and give it a unity and definition.

Fortunately, this marvelous and authoritative collection has received widespread acclaim. Many newspapers and at least one of the wire services carried reviews, and the Music Educators Journal broke its policy of not reviewing records in order to discuss and praise this set in its March 1974 issue (pp. 119, 120, 122, 124). This attention is gratifying to those who have been championing jazz; and the recognition of jazz by at least one government agency, the Smithsonian, is also gratifying, though long overdue.

The Collection of Classic Jazz has apparently been successful enough for the Smithsonian to plan other anthologies. Word comes from Martin Williams that the Smithsonian "has plans for both 'folk' and blues albums". If these albums, also, prove successful, perhaps the Smithsonian can be persuaded to anthologize

recordings of black gospel music and white country music--styles whose developments largely coincided with those of the recording industry and whose histories are also largely documentable through recordings. Gospel and country music are significant enough--both in themselves and in their influence on other styles of music--to warrant similar authoritative anthologizing.

However, as crucial as recordings are for documenting the history of music, they are inherently limited in that they can present only the aural portion of a performance. What is needed is a film or film series on each of the styles of American vernacular music. Although most American musics have not been very carefully or extensively documented on film, there is a considerable amount of jazz on film. Much of the footage is from commercial motion pictures, such as St. Louis Blues with Bessie Smith, or Paris Blues with Louis Armstrong.

This footage would have to be supplemented with out-takes from the major studios, with newsreel, documentary and educational film footage, and with kinescopes and video tapes from the television networks and other sources. Such a film or film series would of course be limited in how much of jazz history it could present; but most of the major figures of jazz are on film or video tape--including Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Lester Young, and others.

As is the case with recordings, probably only a non-profit institution such as the Smithsonian could obtain the necessary cooperation from the many film and broadcast companies and archives. Hopefully, the Smithsonian would also shoot some of its own footage of important jazz artists still alive--before it is too late and the chance is lost forever. However, since many of the significant musicians are already dead, the project would be not so much a film history of jazz, but a history of filmed jazz. It would nonetheless have considerable educational utility and value. After the masterful Smithsonian Collection of Jazz, Martin Williams, how about a major encore?

On the Road Again: an Anthology of Chicago Blues 1947-1954.  
Floyd Jones, Snooky and Moody, Delta Joe, Little Walter Trio,  
Baby Face Leroy Trio, Othum Brown, Johnny Shines, John Brim  
Trio, J.B. and his Hawks.

15 selections, vocal, monaural, reissues, liner notes by John Harmer and Frank Scott.

Muskadine No. 100, Advent Productions, P.O. Box 635, Manhattan Beach, Calif. 90266. \$5.98.