

JUNE 2018



BIG BAND NEWS

by Music Librarian **CHRISTOPHER POPA**

What a Good Month for Collectors !



This is a great month for big band collectors, for several reasons.

First, not one, but two excellent compact discs on the Sepia label feature high fidelity and stereo recordings by no fewer than nine name bands: Will Bradley, Freddie Slack, Ray McKinley, Stan Kenton, Les Brown, Harry James, Billy May, Woody Herman, and Ray Anthony. Both CDs show the exemplary care for which Sepia is known, including original album artwork and other archival illustrations, succinct notes, complete session personnel, and recording dates. Because of that care, either title could be “compact disc of the month.”

For me personally, the “Will Bradley-Johnny Guarneri Band: live echoes of the best in Big Band Boogie & Boogie Woogie on the 88 by the great Freddie Slack” (Sepia 1326) is especially appealing, offering wonderful recreations of 24 big band boogie woogie hits, including their own *Beat Me Daddy (Eight to the Bar)*, *Down the Road a Piece*, *Cow Cow Boogie*, and *Pig Foot Pete*. Plus, as a bonus, there are two sides, *Boogie Woogie Washerwoman* and *Rock-a-bye the Boogie (Put the Eight Beats to Bed)* by their former colleague Ray McKinley.

Only eight of the total 26 selections have ever appeared on a CD before, and with the playing time almost 79 minutes, the disc is packed with as much music as possible.

That’s not to slight “Dance to the Bands!: With Bonus Tracks” (Sepia 1327), another must-have if you like swing.

The sound is good, but what surprised me was that none of the selections were done in the famous Capitol Tower near Hollywood and Vine, as it wasn’t opened until after these recordings were made.

There are five bonus selections which enhance the CD, including one of the dynamo drumming of Buddy Rich guesting with Woody Herman, Les Brown’s *Take Back Your Mink* from “Guys and Dolls,” a Billy May with a Latin flavor, and a pair of songs by Stan Kenton featuring vocalist Ann Richards.

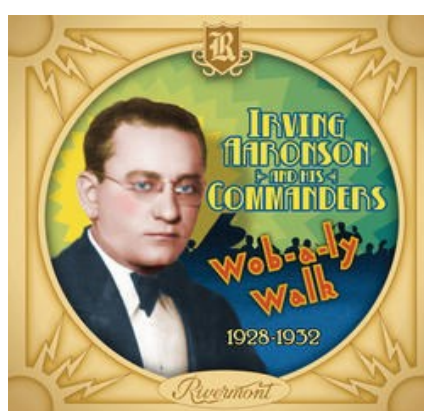
I also think it’s commendable that Sepia has included a Necrology of the personnel of the six bands heard on the album, as a small honor of their talents.

Also, look for the archival images of the bandleaders near a Capitol microphone, and the color photo of Ray Anthony and his brother, Leo, in 2018. (Anthony, now age 96, is the only one of the bandleaders on the CD who is still alive.)

Its “extras” like these which set Sepia apart from other labels, certainly much better than most of the so-called “collector’s labels” out there. I can only hope that big band aficionados will recognize and appreciate the difference.



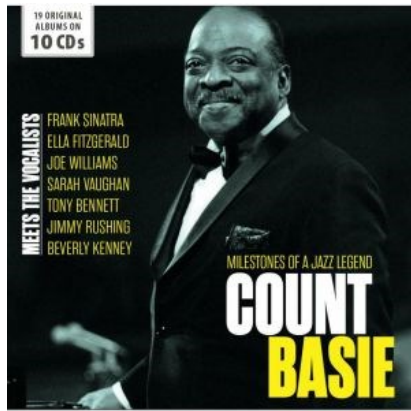
More of Ralph Flanagan’s recordings for the revived Bluebird label and RCA Victor are gathered on “Swing To,” Sounds of YesterYear DSOY 2103. Twenty-eight in all, many featuring vocalist Harry Prime. Until Flanagan organized a touring band, he used top studio men on his records, as you can see from the names listed on the cover of this CD.



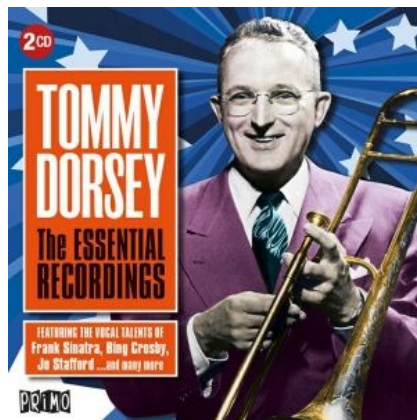
Normally, Irving Aaronson and His Commanders are out of the scope of my website, save for the fact that his band at various times included such future big band figures as Artie Shaw, Tony Pastor, Chummy MacGregor, and Red Jessup. This CD, “Wob-a-ly Walk: 1928-1932,” Rivermont 1168, is actually the second of four planned collections of Aaronson’s complete recorded works—though it may take a while for all four to come out, as the first portion was issued back in 2011. Anyway, included in this serving are two rare titles with Shaw, *Why Have You Forgotten Waikiki?* and *Moonlight On the Colorado*, recorded in Chicago on August 22, 1930 and originally released as Brunswick 78 rpm 4883. They are, in fact, the only two Aaronson recordings that Shaw was on, contrary to various published discographies.



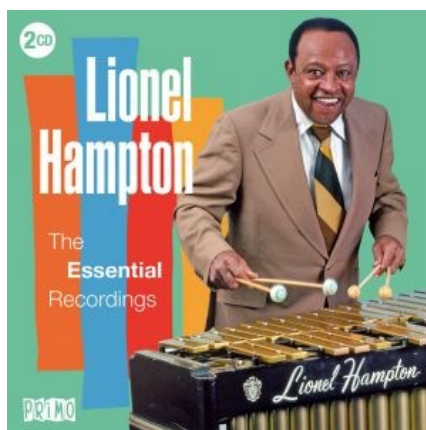
A 10-CD (!) Milestones of Jazz Legends set, “Duke Ellington And His Vocalists,” catalog no. 600457, contains 11 albums total, including such singers as Betty Roche and Joya Sherrill, along with many guest stars.



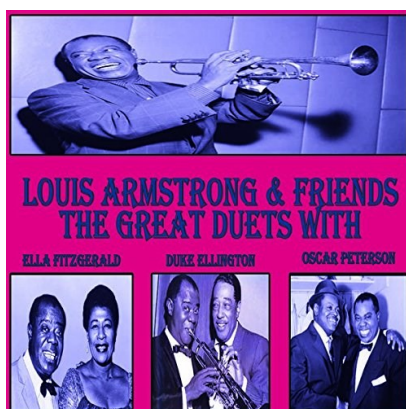
If you thought the Ellington was a lot, the same label has a 10-CD Count Basie box, number 600460, with the content of 19 (!) LP albums. The expected Jimmy Rushing and Joe Williams are joined by Sinatra, Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, Sarah Vaughan, and Beverly Kenney. Actually, the Kenney vocals were done with pianist Jimmy Jones and a group of Basie sidemen.



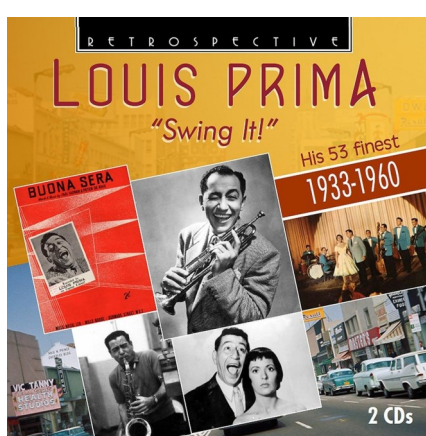
Very familiar ground is covered by the Tommy Dorsey “Essential Recordings” 2-CD set (Primo PRMCD 6235). TD’s Victor and RCA Victor sides like these have been on CD many times in the past, and, to me, it would be preferable to buy them on an authentic RCA (Bluebird / BMG / Sony, whatever the case may be) compilation.



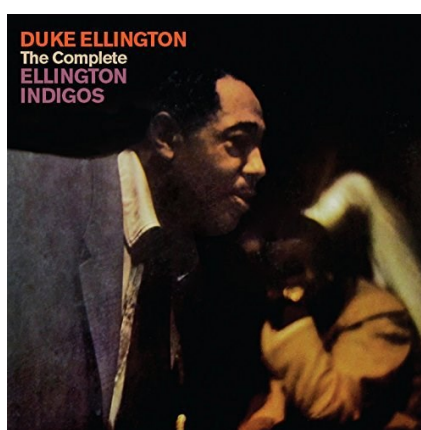
Another great band, Lionel Hampton, is presented on a new, 2-CD set, “The Essential Recordings” (Primo PRMCD 6239). I do like the colorful cover, but my feeling would be similar to the Dorsey set; the Hamptons can still be located on GRP or Decca Jazz or even Time-Life, so why this? And as with other collections like this, it’s someone’s opinion which are the “essential” ones. You may or may not agree.



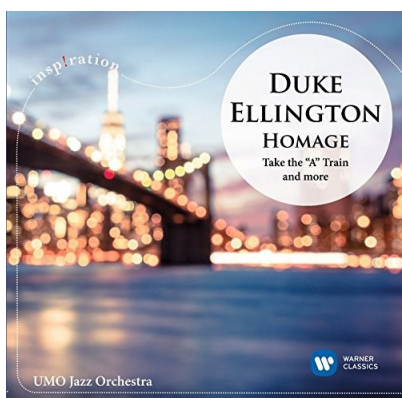
I think the proportions of the top photograph on this Louis Armstrong “Great Duets” 2-CD set on the AAO Music label are off (it looks like they stretched it side-to-side too much). The 30 selections would be enjoyable, but with Verve having done their impeccable multi-disc Armstrong CD sets recently, those should get your attention and priority instead.



Another Louis — Mr. Prima by name — is heard on a 2-CD set (Retrospective RTS 4326) with 53 recordings from 1933 to 1960. There are many Prima CDs available, but what makes this a little different is that his early recordings are not usually combined with his later things in the same package. This includes his New Orleans Gang, his mid-’40s big band, him with Sam Butera & The Witnesses, and a single tune from Dot, *Wonderland By Night*.



Other than a slightly different cover, this CD, “The Complete Ellington Indigos” (Poll Winners Records 27374), is pretty much a duplicate of a 2011 release on Phoenix Records, no.131514. Both have 19 tracks, including alternates of *Mood Indigo*, *Autumn Leaves*, and others, and both are “digitally-remastered.” So what is the point? Is it because the Poll Winners remastering was done in “24-bit”? I said before that record labels need to be very careful about what has come out before on CD. To me, there is no need for senseless repetition / duplication, when so many other things are neglected.



The new CD shown above is not by Duke Ellington, but it's music associated with him as an "Homage," played by the UMO Jazz Orchestra, a Finnish big band founded in 1975. The album, on the Rhino Warner Classics label, includes such tunes as *Take the "A" Train*, *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*, *Satin Doll*, and *Rockin' in Rhythm*. I'm not saying that this isn't a project which comes from respect or that the musicians don't play well, it's just that I am always hoping that there'll be a new CD by The (Official) Duke Ellington Orchestra led at the moment by pianist-arranger Tommy James. I'm glad that a major label is interested in something like this, but they could have sought out the authorized Ellington ensemble—which should be able to play Ellington's things better than anyone else.



Another reason that June is a good time for big band fans is the 44th Annual Jazz Record Collectors' Bash, being held on the 22nd and 23rd of this month at the Hilton Garden Inn Edison / Raritan Center in Edison, New Jersey.

You'll certainly see some well-known faces among the buyers and sellers, like Messrs. Weiner, Eigo, Goodhope, and Conrad shown below.

Notice the t-shirt with the "Peanuts" cartoon, stating "I still miss Benny Goodman"?

\$20 covers buyers' admission for both days, but other options, including spending the night at the Inn, are available. There's more information at jazzbash.net or contact Art Zimmerman via zimrecords@msn.com