

**BEATING THE PETRILLO BAN: The Late December 1947
Modern Sessions
Ace CDTOP2-1273 (Two CDs: 63:23; 68:35)**

CD One: THE EBONAIRES: Waterboy -1/ I'll Never Do It Again -4/ The Old Folks At Home -1; HADDA BROOKS: Poor Butterfly -1/ Old Fashioned Love -3/ Take Me -1/ The Best Things In Life Are Free -1/ This Will Make You Laugh -3; A Sailboat In The Moonlight -10/ Why Was I Born -1/ Mary Lou -1/ Moonlight On the Ganges -1; AL 'CAKE' WICHARD: Gravels In My Pillow -1/ His Majesty's Boogie -1/ Cake Jumps -2/ T.B. Blues -2; GENE PHILLIPS: Snuff Dipping Mama -1/ Gene's Guitar Blues -2/ Broke And Disgusted -1/ Royal Boogie -1; ART SHACKELFORD: The Glory Of Love -2/ Play Fiddle Play -2/ The Jazz Me Blues -4/ Beatin' The Ban-1

CD Two: AL 'CAKE' WICHARD: Connie Lee Blues -2/ Big Fine Girl -1/ That's Your Red Wagon -3/ Sweet Lovin' Baby -1/ Grandma Grandpa -1/ Geneva Blues -1/ Piece Of Cake -2/ Boogie Woogie Baby -2; HADDA BROOKS: Anna Lucasta -3/ I Can't Get Started -5/ I'll Get By -2; LITTLE WILLIE JACKSON: Little Willie's Boogie -1/ Shasta -1/ Baby -1/ Someday, Somehow, Somewhere -2; BUTCH STONE: My Feet's Too Big -2/ Put Your Brake On Mama -5/ Little Girl -1/ Baby Face -4; MADAM IRA MAE LITTLEJOHN: Lonesome Road Blues -1/ He'll Make The Way -2/ What More Can Jesus Do -1/ Go Devil, Go -1/ See Jesus -1/ My Record Will Be There -1



The story behind this CD is a simple one. The recording industry had been caught by the AFM recording ban of 1942-1944 without a stockpile and when a further ban was declared to start on 31st December 1947 no one wanted to be caught out this time. Modern recorded 130 masters by sixteen different acts over thirty sessions in the last two months of 1947. (I am of course copying this data from Tony Rounce's comprehensive and detailed insert notes.)

In the event the ban lasted less than a year. Fifty-nine of the 89 masters Modern recorded in December 1947 remained unissued and the increasing speed of changes in musical fashion meant they stayed that way . . . until the arrival of the collector market. This compilation offers one take of each r&b, jazz and gospel title recorded in the last two weeks of 1947 (masters MM766 through MM829), assembled from original acetates in the exact order of recording with 'pertinent' studio chat retained. Other takes of some have appeared on Ace CDs, but previously unissued or unreissued takes are used where available (except where noted below). And that's all some of you need to know, isn't it?

Only three of four undocumented titles by the Ebonaires and only the three takes issued here have survived. Rounce describes them as halfway between the Inkspots and the Gates. They are beautifully crafted with a touch of the Robeson's on 'Waterboy', the others are rather more poppish. Presumably by typo rather than design the notes give alternative dates of 17th and 19th December for this session. The latter is probably correct.

Three of the Hadda Brooks tracks are alternative takes of material issued on Modern. All the other titles were unissued at the time. Thanks largely to Ace, Hadda long ago ceased to be one of the most underrated musicians in African-American music and there is nothing here that doesn't serve to validate that re-assessment, though she still suffers from falling across the boundary of blues and jazz in a way uncomfortable to pigeon-holders, and which leads to her vocal sides being excluded from 'Blues

Discography', where in truth they do not in fact belong. On this CD, even the four instrumental sides are definitely jazz rather than blues.

The new takes of 'Take Me' and its session mates will ravish fans of Hadda Brooks the jazz singer as much as the previously unheard 'I Can't Get Started' and 'I'll Get By'. Her rhythmic poise is breathtaking. These jukebox length vignettes were made to a formula, vocal chorus, half chorus of guitar with the trio, half-chorus concluding vocal. All feature exquisite guitar solos and obbligatos. It comes as a surprise when comparing previously issued takes (mostly on 'That's Where I Came In', Ace CDCHD1046) to find that not only the instrumental passages and obbligatos differ, but invariably also the details of Hadda's vocal treatments. She certainly didn't feel the need to be word-perfect. Rounce wonders why Jules Bihari never selected a take of the wistful 'This Will Make You Laugh' for issue. Perhaps the tone of her handling of the all too relevant lyrics was a little too near the realities of their relationship. Its implications can hardly have been lost on him.

Nothing was issued from 22nd December even though 'Sailboat' was taken to ten takes. Hadda audibly has a cold and Tony Rounce suggests this as the reason. Even so, 'Why Was I Born' was then taken to seven takes before vocals were abandoned in favour of single takes of two instrumentals. These were obviously not contenders for commercial issue and are a precious survival of another side of Hadda, romping through two vintage pop tunes in a decidedly anachronistic manner. Duplicated Hadda Brooks master 810, issued on Ace CDCHM889 as 'Eight-Ten Boogie' does not appear here and it is presumably now thought that 'I'll Get By' is the only authentic matrix 810.

Al Wichard's contribution is classic r&b. The first takes of 'Gravels In My Pillow' and 'His Majesty's Boogie', with vocals by Duke Henderson, are the only surviving takes not previously issued. 'T.B. Blues' features Jimmy Witherspoon. This is the version of 'Cake Jumps' with the full tenor chorus. If only we knew who it was by! On 'His Majesty's Boogie' Henderson shouts "Oh, pick it, Sonny, blow it," apparently at the tenor player, which may or may not be a clue.

The Gene Phillips sides are in the same idiom. All feature Phillips's brilliant guitar and I am very glad, and so will many others be, that the audible acetate deterioration did not deter issue of this alternative take of 'Gene's Guitar Blues'. 'Snuff Dipping Mama' and 'Broke And Disgusted' both have extremely traditional and very intense muted trumpet obbligatos to the vocals. The wailing alto sax solo on the latter is a high point too. 'Royal Boogie', a solos-all-round riot, is the same take that appears on Ace CDCHM894, where it is said to be superior to the issued take (reissued on LP CHAD239), which it is, but . . .

Guitarist Art Shackelford is a technically adept mystery man who seems to have had no existence outside the studio, but I'm guessing the few researchers who have cared have looked in the wrong place. His Sextette turn in lightweight jazz with businessmen's bounce rhythms and a decided novelty character in places. Though Modern eventually issued six 78s of the band they do not appear in the most comprehensive discographies or even the contemporary *The Jazzfinder*. Tony Rounce speculates that he may be a pseudonymous musician who was under contract to another label. A *Billboard* advertisement found by Rob Ford markets one of the 78s in a western swing context and while they are not that this is certainly a white band. The untitled number Ace have named 'Beatin' The Ban' is the best of a dull bunch and features a saxophonist whose playing points towards rock'n'roll and a clarinetist who should have been in a better band.

CD Two opens with another classic session by Wichard, all but two of the eight previously unissued takes, and six of them with vocals by Jimmy Witherspoon. Whether you call it late swing or early r&b or just blues or whatever floats your boat, this is music almost beyond criticism, about which only hyperbole is

possible, and hyperbole is boring. Curiously Ace have chosen to use the same take of 'Big Fine Gal' as on their Al Wichard set (CDCHD1233) leaving their LP take (found on CH92) still unissued on CD as far as I can discover. The second duplicated track is 'Piece Of Cake', here heard in the 2:40 version appearing second on CDCHD1233. We now have four takes of 'Geneva Blues' to wallow in, all different and all well worth attention. I commented when reviewing the Wichard set (*B&R* 244) that this session is crammed with first-rate solos by unidentified musicians. This version of 'That's Your Red Wagon' has an exceptionally weird and wonderful tenor sax solo, more coherent than the issued take.

Little Willie Jackson, a blind alto saxophonist out of the Joe Liggins band, is another whose playing almost defines the bluer swing we call r&b. These are said to be all alternative takes to those issued at the time or previously issued by Ace. Clearly these were well-worked-out routines with only differences of detail but the tenor soloist on 'Little Willie's Boogie' is improvising to some effect. 'Someday, Somehow, Somewhere' is only a different take if Jules Bihari muttered "You got it" off-mike at exactly the same moment at the end of two takes and I do find this hard to believe. Very obviously in the line of Johnny Hodges to Tab Smith to Earl Bostic, Jackson is nonetheless an original voice whether wailing the blues or rhapsodising through 'Shastra'. ('Little Willie's Boogie' has accidentally been attributed to Hadda Brooks on the back insert, but hopefully few will be misled.)

Butch Stone was moonlighting from the Les Brown band with some of his fellow bandsmen. Only the four titles included have survived from a possible nine and only one take of each, all already issued in the 'Mellow Cats' series. They are some way from the mere triviality of Art Shackelford but if Wichard and Phillips and Jackson define the merits of r&b, grouping these tracks alongside them makes very clear the difference between musicians raised in a tradition and playing from the heart and professional musicians being fashionably hip. It's all very jolly but devoid of emotional involvement, which is why they sound so much more rooted in their time than the African-American material. I'm afraid that at this date the burlesque use of 'black' vocal mannerisms does leave a nasty taste. Tony Rounce reckons them aimed at the Louis Jordan market but, quite apart from the vocals, it seems unlikely the subterfuge (if it was) would fool many African-American customers and I think rather of Fats Waller anyway. It's hard to believe 'Baby Face' was ever hip and the comedy aspects of the vocal suggest other possible markets altogether. Which said, these would sound better in less overwhelming company.

After this, the visceral shock delivered by the amazing Ira Mae Littlejohn almost makes me feel that chronological order may actually have been a mistake. (Not really, Mr Rounce. Honestly, I don't mean it!) She is practically making her debut because of the technical difficulties, now triumphantly surmounted, of copying a badly bent acetate. Whatever it took, guys, it was worth it. Tony Rounce's comparison with Arizona Dranes hits the nail right on the head, in respect both of the animated (Rounce's understatement) vocals and the pounding, inspired piano. A major artist is here revealed to the world in her full glory. The riotous 'Go, Devil Go' has appeared before, but believe it or not it is not the best of Ira Mae Littlejohn.

Despite the rather pointless repetition of the unimportant Butch Stone sides which virtually all potential purchasers will already have (surely there is no audience for this for whom the 'Mellow Cats' series is not equally essential), this is a feast for the ears. When you think what Ira Mae Littlejohn's 'What More Can Jesus Do' would fetch as a 78 if there was one, what is there possibly to cavil about? May we have the previous fortnight please? And the fortnight before that?

Howard Rye