

EARL HINES & JIMMY RUSHING **Blues and Things**

New World Records 80465

Pianist Earl "Fatha" Hines and vocalist Jimmy Rushing were almost exact contemporaries (both born in 1903--on December 28 and August 26, respectively). They had never worked together until this record date in 1967, yet they were far from strangers, having first met in Chicago sometime in the late Twenties. Nothing had been planned in advance of this encounter, but there was instant rapport between the two veterans and their colleagues.

Though Rushing receives equal billing here, the net effect of the program is a guest appearance by the singer with the Hines Quartet, which was making its recording debut. And there was still another "first" involved: This was the initial venture of Master Jazz Recordings, a label dedicated to pre-bop jazz. It was an auspicious start.

This edition of the Hines Quartet, the best group the pianist led during the final decades of his career, had been gestating for some time. Saxophonist Budd Johnson, born in Dallas in 1910, had been a key member of the Hines big band from 1935 to 1942, both as a soloist and staff arranger. When Hines was booked (by this writer and David Himmelstein) for the March 1964 Little Theater engagement in New York, we had it in mind to present him with just bass and drums, but he immediately asked if Johnson could be added as a special guest, and they had a warm reunion.

The drummer on that occasion was Oliver Jackson, born in Detroit in 1933, and active on the New York scene from 1957 on. We felt he'd be the ideal drummer for Hines, and the pianist's aide-de-camp, Stanley Dance, agreed. After the triumphal concerts--an extra midnight performance was added on the spur of the moment, and we managed to have it recorded--Hines reverted to his showbiz form, and was next seen in New York in November at Birdland, with an entourage of two ladies (saxophonist Vi Redd and vocalist Ayaka Hosokawa), an organist, and a drummer. But the record dates that were arranged for Hines during his stay included Johnson and Jackson, albeit not on the same session.

When Hines came back to New York the following March, he appeared at the Village Vanguard with Roy Eldridge and Coleman Hawkins and Jackson. At the same venue in June, he had Johnson on board, but the drummer was Jackson's friend and erstwhile partner Eddie Locke (they had performed together in a dance-and-drum act billed as "Bop and Locke" from 1948 to 1953). During this period Hines toured Europe frequently as a single and picked up rhythm sections in various American cities.

In the late spring of 1966 rehearsals began for a Hines tour of the Soviet Union under U.S. State Department auspices. Johnson was in the seven-piece band recruited for the six-week tour, as was Jackson, and for the first time, the experienced bassist Bill Pemberton, a native New Yorker born in 1918. There was excellent musical and personal rapport among these three and the leader, and Pemberton now became Hines's first-choice bassist. But it would still be a while before the quartet became a reality. Jackie Williams was the drummer at most of Hines's East Coast engagements for the remainder of the year, and it wasn't until a three-week stand in Seattle in early 1967 that the foursome finally came together. The results pleased Fatha so much that he decided to make the relationship a permanent one, and for the first time since 1961, there was a working group led by

Earl Hines.

It was a timely move, for Hines was now in sufficient demand to maintain his own group, and this one was sufficiently flexible to fit in with his other commitments. Thus, after a week in Minneapolis, they joined Buck Clayton, Roy Eldridge, Vic Dickenson, Earle Warren, and Sir Charles Thompson for a month-long European tour, packaged as Jazz from a Swinging Era. The schedule, which included a marathon recording session, was grueling, but a day after their return the Hines Quartet opened at a New York nightclub before a glamorous audience that included the Soviet delegation to the United Nations and other diplomats. In May, they again served as the nucleus of a larger entity, this time a big band under Hines's name at the Riverboat in the Empire State Building.

The period just preceding the recording session with Rushing was a busy one: Two weeks in Toronto from June 12; a very well-received appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival on June 30, and a two-week stand at trumpeter Al Hirt's club in New Orleans. Small wonder that this session found the quartet in splendid form, the men attuned to each other in a way that only comes with steady work as an ensemble, and with the additional advantage of a working repertory to draw from.

As for Jimmy Rushing, he certainly wasn't the kind of guest who'd present problems for his hosts. On the contrary, the justly beloved Mister Five-by-Five, so called because he was almost as wide as he was tall, was as easy to work with as a singer could be. He had marvelous timing, excellent intonation, and a straightforward way of phrasing that never threw his accompanists any kind of curve. In his vocal prime (as can be heard on his first recordings, with the fabled Blue Devils and the Bennie Moten Band, and the early ones with Count Basie), he had a high, clear tenor. The author Ralph Ellison, a fellow Oklahoman, memorably described it as "poignantly lyrical" and went on from there: "Steel-bright in its upper range and, at its best, silky smooth, it was possessed of a purity somehow impervious to both the stress of singing above a twelve-piece band and the urgency of Rushing's own blazing fervor."

In those pre-microphone days, Rushing sang into a megaphone, but young Ellison, as he lay in his bed four blocks away from the ballroom where the Blue Devils held forth, could hear Little Jimmy's voice ever so clearly. Time took its toll, however, and by 1967, the once clear-as-a-bell tenor had become frayed and rough around the edges. But the poignancy was still there, and none of the drive and spirit had been lost. And, to quote Ellison once more, "Jimmy has always shown a concern for the correctness of language, and out of the tension between the traditional folk pronunciation and his training in school, he has worked out a flexibility of enunciation and a rhythmical agility with words which make us constantly aware of the meanings which shimmer just beyond the limits of the lyrics."

While these comments apply specifically to the blues, with which Rushing was so closely identified, Ellison rightly points out that Rushing began as a ballad singer. Indeed, in spite of his success with blues material and the public demand for it, Rushing until the very end of his life loved to sing ballads and popular standards. His final album, on which he was given a free hand in choosing repertory, has just one blues among its eleven songs; here, the ratio is one in four.

Rushing always worked well with horns, and Budd Johnson was a masterly accompanist. Though he, like Hines, had never recorded with the singer, they also went way back together—at the session, as producer Bill Weilbacher noted, Rushing recalled that when young Budd got stranded with a band in Oklahoma City, he had fed the musicians free meals at his father's restaurant. (Eating was one of

Jimmy's greatest pleasures in life, and to watch him devour a good meal was a sight to remember. Hines, by the way, was no slouch in the eating department either!)

Hines was more problematic as an accompanist. Mercurial and unpredictable, he excelled as a soloist--in a 1967 interview with Valerie Wilmer, Oliver Jackson noted that "his sense of timing is uncanny; he's got practically perfect time on that piano and that means that *you've* got to do everything perfectly . . . [he] has counter-motion going, and all kinds of counter-rhythms, so whatever you do has got to be right in there, because if you ever get off . . . it's going to be a great struggle to get back to where it's at." As challenging harmonically as rhythmically, Hines was not every horn player's cup of tea. (Coleman Hawkins, for instance, told me that he loved to listen to Hines, but didn't particularly enjoy playing with him, and Roy Eldridge complained that he'd never know where to come in when the pianist played one of his elaborate introductions.) But Hines had a special affinity for singers--among those whose careers he furthered are Herb Jeffries, Billy Eckstine, Sarah Vaughan, and Johnny Hartman--and he gave them great consideration. In any event, his work behind Rushing here is spare and often helpful, and the singer had such rock solid timing that he was unflappable in respect to rhythm.

The program (not in order of recording: The producer noted that Rushing entered the studio after the quartet "had warmed up with several instrumentals") begins with *Exactly Like You*, one of many standards from the fertile team of Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields. This one was launched in 1930 by Gertrude Lawrence and Harry Richman in *Lew Leslie's International Revue*, but it was Louis Armstrong who put it on the jazz map in that same year; Rushing recorded it with Count Basie in 1937. Its chord progression has been the source for countless jazz originals, and Johnson opens with a quote from one of them. Rushing sings two stanzas in his cheerful way, well backed by tenor sax, Hines takes a relaxed chorus with an unusually light touch, and the tenor solo takes its cues from Lester Young, one of Johnson's idols. When he returns, Rushing plays around effectively with the time.

Louisiana is an attractive 1927 melody by J. C. Johnson (a prolific black tunesmith and pianist not to be confused with James P. Johnson); Paul Whiteman's record had Bing Crosby and Bix Beiderbecke to recommend it, and Bix liked it well enough to record it with his "Gang." It was also in the Basie book; the 1940 record had a lovely Lester Young solo, but no Rushing vocal. This version by the quartet is a highlight of the program, opening with three choruses of prime Budd Johnson tenor; he starts ever so softly and builds to a bluesy climax replete with typical hollers. Hines opens with a Morse-code pattern and builds his two-chorus solo almost entirely on single-note lines, spare, thoughtful, and swinging. Pemberton, whose good sound and well-chosen notes have been helpful throughout, gets some solo space, and so does Jackson, trading off with the ensemble riffs. A nice one!

Am I Blue was introduced by Ethel Waters in the 1929 film musical *On With the Show*, and was memorably interpreted by Billie Holiday. It was a Rushing staple--the more surprising, then, that he consistently sang *am* instead of the correct *was* in the line that opens the final eight-bar stanza, which makes no sense in the context of the lyric. But, so be it! He gives the song plenty of dramatic flair, and Budd opens the performance with a couple of bars of "Nobody Know the Trouble I've Seen." Hines offers an abstract half-chorus, and Budd ends as he began. But this is Rushing's show.

Summertime, Selena's aria from *Porgy and Bess*, is a showcase for Budd's distinctive soprano sax, a relatively late addition to his instrumentarium (in the Hines big band, he often played alto,

sometimes clarinet, and even baritone). Hines loved the juicy sound Budd got from the soprano, and certainly remembered the big hand *Summertime* had received at Newport, where it was introduced as a tribute to Sidney Bechet. He opens with a cadenza based on "It Ain't Necessarily So," another memorable theme from Gershwin's opera, then bows to Bechet on the theme statement and jumps the tempo, phrasing emphatically in his upper register and adding growl touches (an acquired taste). Hines bases his solo entirely on "It Ain't...", then tags it and changes the tempo for Budd's re-entry with the original tune, which he varies elaborately for a chorus. He wraps it up with a recap of the opening cadenza, with some echo-chamber effects added, Hines tinkling the other theme behind him. The pianist loved this kind of production, and Budd wasn't averse to it.

Changin' the Blues is a terrific performance--a fast, theme-less twelve-bar blues that changes key every two choruses for Hines's opening ten-chorus romp, well backed by Ollie Jackson's high-hat work, à la Jo Jones. Budd, still on soprano, takes four, all in one key, and then he and the pianist trade fours and twos before going out together. This is an example of how effectively experienced jazz musicians can concoct an original piece on the spot.

Save It Pretty Mama stems from the famous and fabled Armstrong-Hines collaborations of the late Twenties. Don Redman wrote this piece--music and words--and brought it to the December 5, 1928, Armstrong recording session. Louis played and sang it like he owned it, and Redman himself took the vocal when he recorded it four months later with McKinney's Cotton Pickers, which he was then directing. It was a big hit in Chicago, in particular. In 1940, publisher Joe Davis fixed it up with new lyrics, but Rushing sticks to the original here. It was Hines's idea to interpolate another Redman tune, the less well known but very pretty *If It's True* (written in 1933), for a single chorus sandwiched between Rushing's offerings; Budd's tenor states it softly and tenderly, and Hines takes the bridge. He liked those medleys!

Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone was introduced in 1930 by the Chicago singer Bee Palmer, who liked jazz. Hines and the rhythm section bring it on for a chorus of exposition and one of variations--the latter offering a full menu of pianistic devices. Budd's tenor solo is very laid-back--he was relaxed on that day--and he gets a nice assist from Jackson's ride cymbal and uncommonly sensitive Hines touches. The tenorman had excellent control in the upper range of his horn. A tasteful tenor-piano dialogue ensues before Budd devises a cadenza over suspended rhythm and fashions a samba ending.

Hines takes over on his own *One Night in Trinidad*. Tom-toms and arco bass bring him on with the in-and-out-of-tempo theme, Pemberton switching back and forth between arco and pizzicato. The second chorus, in tempo, has the composer painting pretty romantic pictures. The ending is constructed like the beginning, with an added tag and an echo, incongruous yet fitting, of Christmas.

Rushing returns to tackle the venerable *St. Louis Blues*, taking it at a medium-up tempo. Hines handles the introduction by himself and then the others join the singer. Tenor and piano take two each in medias res, and then Little Jimmy starts to belt the blues like only he could, abetted by good riffs. The fade is appropriate--one feels they could have gone on and on. When Rushing hit this kind of groove at a festival or in concert he'd always get a standing ovation. He knew how to turn it on--and so did Earl Hines.

The quartet stayed together until the summer of 1969, touring Europe, Japan, and South America and working in clubs throughout the U.S. and Canada. Then Messrs. Johnson, Pemberton, and

Jackson decided to try it on their own. With pianist Dill Jones, they became the JPJ Quartet, doing very well for themselves and specializing in educational projects. The Quartet disbanded in 1974, its members taking up the threads of individual careers. Hines continued with the quartet format (plus girl singer), but never again reached the musical level attained with the JPJ personnel. It's good that they were captured here in such fine form, and with so congenial a guest.

—Dan Morgenstern

Dan Morgenstern *has been director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University's Newark campus since 1976. A former editor of Down Beat and other jazz publications, he is the author of Jazz People (Da Capo) and has won six Grammy Awards for Best Album Notes. With David Himmelstein, he produced the 1964 concert series at the Little Theater that sparked Earl Hines's rediscovery.*

The following notes are from the original 1967 Master Jazz Recordings LP

Earl Hines and Jimmy Rushing first met in Chicago in the Twenties, although neither remembers the exact date. By then Hines was famous for his classic recordings with Louis Armstrong and Jimmie Noone. And Rushing was on his way up with the Walter Page and Bennie Moten bands that finally became the Count Basie orchestra of the Thirties.

Both Hines and Rushing are sure that July 19, 1967, was the first time that they have ever recorded together. There was a sense of history in the studio as *Blues and Things* was recorded. And as the date unfolded and take after take was recorded of the different songs, everyone felt immensely relieved that finally these two had been brought together to record, after the long forty years since they met in Chicago. Oddly enough, neither had Jimmy Rushing ever before recorded with Budd Johnson, the great saxophonist and arranger who has been so often associated with Hines. But the singer well remembered their first encounter when, as a young upcoming musician, Budd had been stranded with a band in Oklahoma. Jimmy helped the group survive by feeding it in his father's restaurant.

Enhancing the studio rapport that was immediately established among these three veterans were Bill Pemberton and Oliver Jackson, on bass and drums, respectively. Like Johnson, both are regular members of the Earl Hines Quartet, which has performed with great success throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe ever since Hines made his triumphant State Department tour of Russia in 1966.

Earl Hines, is, of course, internationally famous as one of the greatest pianists jazz has known, as a continually creative innovator, and as a performer of dazzling ability, but his bond with singers is often forgotten. Yet it was he who discovered and brought to prominence such singers as Billy Eckstine, Sarah Vaughan, Herb Jeffries, and Johnny Hartman. Moreover, he likes to sing himself! This partly accounts for the sureness and sensitivity with which he accompanies singers of all kinds in all kinds of contexts.

Beyond the fact that Jimmy Rushing is himself unique, several aspects of this particular context were also unique. There had been no prior communication between singer and musicians regarding what he would sing. He entered the studio after the quartet had warmed up with several instrumentals.

"What you going to do, Jim?" Hines asked casually, when greetings had been exchanged.

"How about *Exactly Like You*?"

The tempo decided, the Fields-McHugh song was recorded without more ado, hand signals between the musicians determining its pattern. When a revision of the routine was suggested, a second take was made, of the one heard here. The same thing occurred with Don Redman's *Save It, Pretty Mama*, the lyrics of which were reassembled after several memories had been ransacked.

"Every entertainer in every cabaret in Chicago used to sing it," Jimmy remarked as he and Earl reminisced.

Then, after the spoken dedication to the composer had been agreed, Earl suggested the interpolation of another Redman song, *If It's True*, which Budd Johnson plays with such feeling on tenor saxophone.

Am I Blue and *St. Louis Blues*, on the other hand, were each made in one take, improbable as it may seem. The planning which preceded their recording was minimal.

Everybody knew intuitively what to do. Everything fell into place. Budd Johnson had the perfect quotation to begin and end *Am I Blue*, for which Jimmy set the tempo. Earl, who has played *St. Louis Blues* more times than he cares to remember since 1940 (when he recorded a classic version), came up with a different tempo admirably suited to the singer's delivery. It was the last number of the session, and marvelous exit music, for time was running out. An exhilarating and quintessential jazz interpretation, it swings all the way as singer, pianist, and saxophonist express themselves freshly and forcefully on the familiar material.

The five instrumentals are the first recordings by the quartet to be issued in the United States, and they very handsomely demonstrate its invention, versatility, and musicianship. *Louisiana*, an old favorite well worth reviving, gets a relaxed performance with two attractive solo choruses each by Johnson and Hines, and one for the rhythm men. *Please Don't Talk About Me* is similarly loose and easy, with a fanciful coda of the leader's devising.

Summertime is a tour de force featuring Budd Johnson on soprano saxophone. His interpretation of this, as a tribute to Sidney Bechet, was one of the highlights of the 1967 Newport Jazz Festival. This version, with its tensions and colorful contrasts, is even more dramatic. Another change of pace is provided by *One Night in Trinidad*, an original Hines ballad played by the pianist with bass and drums only. Jackson's introductory mallets and Pemberton's bowing contribute helpfully to a performance that is developed with the richness of insight so characteristic of Hines.

The pièce de résistance, however, is *Changin' the Blues*. Spontaneously conceived between a couple of Jimmy Rushing numbers--to give the singer's pipes a rest--it is an excellent example of how imaginatively Hines can refashion the blues. Continuity and excitement are brilliantly maintained as he drives through ten choruses and five key changes. Then Budd Johnson enters, flying, for four more choruses--on soprano saxophone.

Inspiration in jazz is as unpredictable as lightning. Here, perhaps, it derived from the quartet's pleasure in welcoming such a congenial guest. Or, again, it may have been due to the atmosphere of the whole session, which remained warm and unhurried throughout. The end result, in any case, is an album unusually endowed with the primary jazz virtues.

—Bill Weilbacher

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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The You and Me That Used to Be. Bluebird 6460.
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Produced by Bill Weilbacher and Don Kanter
Recorded by Rudy VanGelder
Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions, Inc., NYC
Cover design: Bob Defrin Design, Inc., NYC

This recording was made possible with grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and Francis Goelet

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BLUES & THINGS 80465-2 EARL HINES & JIMMY RUSHING

1 **Exactly Like You** (Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields) (Aldi Music Publ. and Cotton Club Publ., ASCAP)

Vocal chorus: Jimmy Rushing

- 2 **Louisiana** (J. C. Johnson, Andy Razaf, and Bob Schafer) (Alfred Publ. Co., Inc., Razaf Music, and Record Music Publ. Co., ASCAP)
- 3 **Am I Blue** (Harry Akst and Grant Clarke) (Warner Chappell Music, Inc., ASCAP)
Vocal chorus: Jimmy Rushing
- 4 **Summertime** (George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin, and Dubose Heyward) (George Gershwin Music, Ira Gershwin Music, WB Music, and Dubose And Dorothy Heyward Memorial Publ., ASCAP)
- 5 **Changin' the Blues** (Earl Hines; ASCAP)
- 6 **Save It Pretty Mama** (Don Redman, Joseph M. Davis, and Paul Denniker) (Music Sales Corp., ASCAP), ` interpolating **If It's True** (Don Redman-Penrose-Bently) (EMI Mills Inc., ASCAP)
Vocal chorus: Jimmy Rushing
- 7 **Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone** (Sam H. Stept and Sidney Clare) (Remick Music Corp. and Buren Co., ASCAP)
- 8 **One Night in Trinidad** (Earl Hines) (Lynnstrom Publ. Co., ASCAP)
- 9 **St. Louis Blues** (W. C. Handy)
Vocal chorus: Jimmy Rushing

Earl Hines, piano; Jimmy Rushing, vocal; Budd Johnson, tenor and soprano saxophones; Bill Pemberton, bass; Oliver Jackson, drums.

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