

## JIMMY RUSHING ALL STARS Who Was It Sang That Song?

New World Records 80510

Jimmy Rushing was a great friend of Master Jazz Recordings. It is probably correct to say that there never would have been a Master Jazz at all, had it not been for Jimmy.

Our first venture in jazz was a private party held in New York City in May of 1967. Some weeks before, we had journeyed to the Half Note Cafe in lower Manhattan with our friend Donald Kanter, who was in town for the weekend from London.

Jimmy was in wonderful voice that night, responding to an enthusiastic audience, leading it on, responding again, and leading it further on and on in the kind of performance which he so often gave, feeding upon itself, accelerating from set to set to a kind of final super climax when it was almost light outside and time to find a cab on Hudson Street and try finally to go home and sleep.

We were immensely exhilarated by all of this and somewhere along in the evening, between sets, approached Jimmy and asked him if he would stage an informal jazz party for us. The answer was "yes," subject to working out the details. In due course, we became fledgling jazz entrepreneurs. The party was held on May 28, 1967 before an enthusiastic audience of about seventy people. The band included Jo Jones, Gene Ramey, and Dickie Wells as well as Buddy Tate, Emmett Berry and Bill Spooner. The music went on until after three in the morning and it was hard even then to get the players or the audience to stop—a memorable evening. But it was not recorded: Great as it was, it was gone forever. This seemed tragic to us, and to everyone else who was there.

So we then discovered how one forms a recording company, with the thought that if we held another jazz party we would want to record it. Master Jazz Recordings, Inc., was duly formed in the summer of 1967, and our first record venture involved Jimmy, but not in the party context. One doesn't hold private parties in the heat and intensity of a New York summer, but one does record Jimmy Rushing with the Earl Hines Quartet if one has a chance, and we did it on July 16, 1967. This first recording venture was then released as *Blues & Things* (MJR 8101, reissued on New World 80465-2).

At about that time we began to make plans for another jazz party. It was held on October 30, 1967, in Studio A of Fine Recording, Inc. Studio A had, in other, more opulent days, been the grand ballroom of the Great Northern Hotel on West 57th Street in Manhattan. It retains an air of rather elegant inconsequence common to many grand ballrooms of the period. There was enough recording impedimenta strewn around to suggest that gala evenings and long gowns were a thing of the past, and the room itself was dominated by an omnipresent back-lighted control room at the rear. There was a small stage on which our musicians performed, and this dominated the jazz party as some one hundred and twenty-five guests stood or sat just before it. An ancillary attraction was the bar, which was set up along a wall between the bandstand and the control room. Guests and musicians alike removed themselves to this outpost as the evening unfolded and a subsequent sense of enhancement seemed felt by all.

This is the second LP to be released from the session. The first was called *Gee Baby, Ain't I Good to You* (MJR 8104). This LP is very much like the first. Jimmy sings on four of the tracks and the fifth is all instrumental. But, as always, Jimmy is the total jazz singer, and it is almost as though he is another solo

horn, dominant, but taking a similar role. All the other horns solo fulsomely—we are impressed now, as we were then, by the excellence of these performances.

In retrospect, it is hard to recapture all the emotions of that evening. There was considerable excitement in the room because this was a reunion of vintage period Basie Men—Rushing, Wells, Clayton, and Jones. Perhaps it was even more a reunion for those who had participated in the remarkable series of jam sessions recorded under Buck Clayton's leadership for Columbia ten years earlier. Perhaps, we thought at the time, they will all come together to record again and again.

But it will never happen this way again. Jimmy Rushing passed away on June 8, 1972. So this recording is a last one of its kind, and we are all the lesser for that.

The last time we heard Jimmy sing was at the Half Note in the spring of 1972. His health had been none too good, and when I asked him how he was that night, he gave me a straightforward look and said that it was up and down and that his doctor didn't want him to work more than a night or two a week and then only if he felt up to it. Then he said that the toughest part was to climb the three or four steps up to the behind-bar stage, but once there he sat down to sing, and that was all that he really wanted to do anyway, and if he couldn't do that, what difference did it make at all.

When the bass player, a younger man, came in, he brought both an acoustic bass and a Fender. I noticed this because it was always Jimmy's preference to perform with Eugene Ramey. Over the years Jimmy had had his problems with pianists, and with bassists and drummers too. But if he could work with Ramey he was confident that whatever else came along, he'd get by, because he could ignore it if necessary and concentrate on the big full Ramey tone and its absolutely dependable rhythmic support.

This night the bass player was not Ramey. But everything seemed to be going on well enough. Then a string on the acoustic bass broke and Zoot Sims came over and asked Jimmy if he minded the Fender, because the bass player had broken a string but he had his Fender as a backup in case that happened. The Half Note piano was often out of tune and some notes were occasionally broken, and it was hard to hear because the drums were between the piano and the soloists. And the drummer that night was a bop drummer, superb, but rather longer on pyrotechnics than on concentrating tastefully on the beat, accenting and helping the singer.

"Sure, Zoot," said Jimmy, "that's all right about that Fender. Let him play what he wants to play. It's all right with me." It was certain that from Jimmy's viewpoint, the rhythmic underpinnings would be even more dubious with the Fender, but it was all right. He'd find a way to make do, feeling not too well, not hearing the piano through the bop drummer, over the Fender. Almost everything was always all right with Jimmy—he was that kind of person. And in spite of the problems, Jimmy was terrific that night, rising above it all, compelling the audience to attend and admire his work, making people and himself happy.

This is Jimmy's record. We listen to it with a real feeling of loss. To us, Jimmy was special, both as a jazz musician and as a human being. In all our dealings in jazz, we have never encountered an individual so universally liked as Jimmy. He was, it seems, the kind of human being we all wish we were, and he was this kind with a graceful effortlessness that belittles those of us who remain.

Master Jazz has recorded other musicians and released still more material in the years that have passed

since this LP was made. And, overall, this was a happy and instructive, if not especially profitable, experience. But it all started with Jimmy Rushing, his remarkable talent, and the idea that it might be fun to have a jazz party with Jimmy and our friends. What fun it was!

### **A note on the CD version of *Who Was It Sang That Song?***

This CD version of *Who Was It Sang That Song?* contains three new songs from the Rushing jazz party that have not previously been released. These songs are "Deed I Do," "Almost Home," and "Moten Swing."

The way that *Who Was It Sang That Song?* and these three additional tracks came into being is a story worth telling.

As the liner notes to the original LP release relate, the Rushing jazz party was recorded before a live audience in the Fine Recording Studio on West 56th street in Manhattan on October 30, 1967. At that time, in common with many other record producers, it was my custom to leave the master tapes generated in a recording session on file at the studio in which the recordings had been made. (We usually kept a mono dub of the master tapes in our possession.)

When the time came to edit a master tape for use in physically producing finished LP records, it was a simple matter to return to the studio and go to work. This is the procedure that we followed in 1968 when we edited the first LP released from the recordings made at the Rushing jazz party—*Gee Baby, Ain't I Good to You* (MJR 8104).

By 1972, when we got around to preparing *Who Was It Sang That Song?* we discovered that Fine Recordings was no longer in business, and that all the master tapes that it had held on file—including what remained from the Rushing jazz party—had been destroyed. We had not been singled out—hundreds of other master tapes had been thoughtlessly destroyed.

The only trace that remained of the Rushing jazz party music was the mono dub in seven little white tape boxes that I had remembered to carry home, five years before.

Because multiple-track stereo recordings typically allocate individual recording tracks to individual instruments or groups of instruments, a great deal can be done in the editing process to overcome problems of level and balance in the resulting "mixed" sound. This is done especially for live recordings, as they are produced without the benefit of alternate takes or the study of playbacks, and so forth.

My first reaction to all of this was simply to say that we were sunk—that no usable master recording could be edited out of the mono dub tapes.

However, I had long since learned that if one is going to be in the recording business in a serious way, the first requisite is to find a superior engineer.

We came to know Roger Rhodes in 1968 through the good offices of Stanley Dance. Roger had a lot going for him—he was a jazz bass player, and a good one. He was Duke Ellington's preferred engineer

in New York. He worked very hard to keep up with and beyond the state of the recording art. And he was smart and personable and, as I discovered, terrific to work with, always willing to put up with the innocent ignorance of an amateur in the recording studio.

To make a long story short, everything that you hear on this CD is derived from the mono dub recording of the Rushing jazz party. Unfazed by the quality and age of the materials at hand, Roger has succeeded in doing full justice to what we heard so many years ago, live, in 1967. If it hadn't been for Roger Rhodes and his magic, neither the original LP release of *Who Was It Sang That Song?* nor this CD would ever have come into existence.

—Bill Weilbacher, December 1996

Bill Weilbacher is president of Master Jazz Recordings.

### **SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

*Basie Beginnings: Benny Moten's Kansas City Orchestra.* Bluebird 9768.

*Blues and Things.* Earl Hines and Jimmy Rushing. New World 80465-2.

*The Essential Jimmy Rushing.* Vanguard VCD 66/65.

### **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Basie, Count and Albert Murray. *Good Morning Blues.* New York, Random House, 1985.

Clayton, Buck and Nancy Miller Elliott. *Buck Clayton's Jazz World.* New York, Oxford University Press, 1987.

Ellison, Ralph. *Shadow and Act.* New York, Random House, 1964.

Producer: Bill Weilbacher

Engineer: George T. Piros

Original LP mastering: Roger Rhodes, National Recording Studios, Inc.

Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions, Inc., NYC

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**WHO WAS IT SANG THAT SONG? 80510-2**  
**THE JIMMY RUSHING ALL STARS**

- 1 *Baby Won't You Please Come Home* (C. Williams & C. Warfield, publ. by Pickwick Music Corp., ASCAP)
- 2 *"C" Jam Blues* (E. K. Ellington, publ. by SBK Robbins Catalog Inc., ASCAP)
- 3 *I Surrender Dear* (H. Barries & G. Clifford, publ. by EMI-Mills Music Catalog Publishing, ASCAP)
- 4 *Deed I Do* (F. Rose & W. Hirsch, publ. by Range Road Music & Quartet Music Inc., ASCAP)
- 5 *Almost Home* (S. C. Thompson, publ. by Sir Charles Publishing Co., BMI)

The Blues

- a. *Stormy Monday Blues* (B. Eckstine, E. Hines, B. Crowder, publ. by Warner Brothers Music Publ., ASCAP)
- b. *Jelly Jelly* (B. Eckstine, E. Hines, publ. by Warner Brothers Music Publ., ASCAP)

*Moten Stomp* (B. Moten & B. Moten, publ. by Peer International & Fisher Music Co., ASCAP)

*All Of Me* (S. Simons, G. Marks, publ. by Marlong Music Co., ASCAP)

Jimmy Rushing, vocals  
Buck Clayton, trumpet  
Dickie Wells, trombone  
Julian Dash, tenor saxophone  
Eugene Ramey, bass  
Jo Jones, drums  
Sir Charles Thompson, piano

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