

Record Reviews

Records are reviewed by Chris Albertson, Don DeMicheal, Gilbert M. Erskine, Ira Gitler, Alan Heineman, Wayne Jones, Lawrence Kart, John Litweiler, John McDonough, Marian McPartland, Dan Morgenstern, Don Nelsen, Harvey Pekar, Harvey Siders, Carol Sloane, and Pete Welding. Reviews are signed by the writers.

Ratings are: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ excellent, ★ ★ ★ ★ very good, ★ ★ ★ good, ★ ★ fair, ★ poor. When two catalog numbers are listed, the first is mono, and the second is stereo.

Jaki Byard

JAKI BYARD WITH STRINGS!—Prestige 7573: *Music to Watch Girls By; Falling Rains of Life; Cat's Cradle Conference Rag; How High the Moon; Ray's Blues.*

Personnel: Ray Nance, violin (vocal, track 5); Byard, piano; George Benson, guitar; Ron Carter, cello; Richard Davis, bass; Alan Dawson, drums, vibraphone.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

A Jaki Byard album is never predictable. One approaches it with pleasant anticipation, and is seldom disappointed. This particular excursion is one of Byard's most enjoyable in some time. The instrumentation is unique and all participants turn in outstanding performances.

The music is fresh and exciting, and Byard, a great instigator and explorer, is not afraid of venturing into uncharted territory. On *Cat's Cradle*, for example, he gets six different lines, all based on the same changes, going at once—and it comes off. You'll have fun sorting out the six standards, but even if you can't it won't lessen your enjoyment of the music one bit.

If the record has a star, it's the amazing Ray Nance. His *Ray's Blues*, on which he also sings with gusto, is a complete delight and one of the most infectiously swinging performances to reach record in some time. His solo and ensemble work throughout is magnificent, and it is indeed a wonder why so vital and gifted a player has had no LP of his own as yet. Nance doesn't play his soulful trumpet here, but in the concluding passages of *Blues*, the fiddle comes as close to emulating a horn as it has since Stuff Smith left the scene.

Benson shows that there is much more to him than his mastery of the blues. He shines on *Cradle*.

Carter and Davis turn in virtuoso performances and get into an exciting duel on *Cradle*. Dawson is always where he should be, keeping things well anchored.

Byard has much fun with *Girls*, on which he has overdubbed an organ ending. In contrast, his *Falling Rain* is a gentle ballad, and still another side of the pianist's personality is revealed in his funky playing on *Blues*.

If you're in the mood for something different than the usual jams, you'll relish this record. Like Jaki Byard, it has passion, warmth, humor and that too-often absent element of surprise. —Morgenstern

Clare Fischer

ONE TO GET READY, FOUR TO GO!—Revelation 6: *Liz Anne; In Memoriam: J.F.K. and R.F.K.; You Stepped Out of a Dream; Lover Man; Lover Man; Free Ways.*

Personnel: Tracks 1,2,3,5: Fischer, piano. Tracks 4 and 6: Gary Foster, tenor saxophone; Fischer, piano; Bobby West, bass; Jim Keltner, drums.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Fischer is, I am convinced, one of the

great though underappreciated jazz talents of our times. He is a total musician, being equally at home in classical, jazz and popular music. To each of these, he brings perfect understanding and implements this with unerring taste, superb craftsmanship and, above all, imagination of the highest order. (His large orchestra, which I have heard both live and recorded, is sure to be one of the most important jazz ensembles of recent years. His brand new Atlantic album should easily confirm this; hopefully, too, Columbia will eventually issue the big-band jazz album he did for them at the same time he recorded his earlier and extraordinarily lovely *Songs for Rainy Day Lovers*, 9491.)

This recording, however, preserves a number of Fischer's more intimate—though no less committed or daring—jazz performances. *Liz Anne, In Memoriam: J.F.K. and R.F.K., You Stepped Out of a Dream* and the second version of *Lover Man* are unaccompanied piano solos recorded in the familiar surroundings of Fischer's practice room by his close friend John William Hardy. The other two tracks were taped there as well, but Foster, West and Keltner were added. The six performances make a remarkable, immensely satisfying sampling of Fischer's huge musical gifts.

Fischer is one of jazz' foremost melodists, and this fact has seldom been more beautifully displayed on record than in the four piano solos here. They are superlative ballad readings, by any standards you might care to invoke, full of lyrical beauty, warmth, depths of reflection, unceasing invention, and elegance. Always the latter.

Fischer's playing on both versions of *Lover Man* and on Cal Tjader's beautiful ballad *Liz Anne* is incandescent. He illuminates both pieces with some of the most honest, uncloyingly romantic jazz playing I've heard in a long while. His improvisations rarely depart radically from the melodies but reveal, in their rush of imagination and sureness of control, depths and potentialities one would have not thought possible. In a sense, Clare reminds me of Art Tatum in his ability to disclose the fascinating, teeming life lurking beneath the surface of a melody, which requires an artist of Tatum's or Fischer's abilities to set free. In Fischer's case, this is suggested by indirection and understatement rather than by the more overt, torrential and, occasionally, crazy-quilt improvisational flow Tatum set in motion.

Something of the brilliance of the latter infuses Fischer's playing on *You Stepped Out of a Dream*, alone worth the price of the album. This is a truly amazing performance. The first half of the piece consists of a darting, quicksilver flow of invention

that never lets up and which is full of fertile, penetrating, highly imaginative ideas. It is some of the most stimulating pure bop-styled piano on record since the days of Bud Powell, and I invite it to the attention of all who dig solid, creative, impassioned jazz piano (of whatever stylistic persuasion).

The tribute to John and Robert Kennedy is touching; a sensitive and unbatheatic composition illuminated with deep feeling.

One of the most impressive performances on the set is the 16½-minute exercise in totally free group playing aptly titled *Free Ways*. Saxophonist Foster describes it in his urbane, informative liner notes:

"On *Free Ways* all entrances, tempo changes, solo sections, accompaniments, and the ending happened as you hear them. No cues were given physically and I believe that, indeed, no one was purposely watching anyone else during the performance. Listening to the other players, attempting to sense what to play in relation to what else is being played, and then responding on impulse alone was the direction taken here . . . *Free Ways* is almost 17 minutes of pure 'ear' playing, containing, I hope, enough variety to sustain a listener from either camp."

It sure does and is, in fact, one of the most interesting and fully together tracks in an interesting, vital album. It is tribute to the empathetic powers of all four men that the piece possesses the organic unity and flowing sense of inevitability with which it is so thoroughly stamped. It just grows out and up, a perfect illustration of what can happen when four inventive musicians are able to focus their artistry and intuitions on a single goal. Everyone's going in the same direction on these *Free Ways*.

A beautiful, tasty album in every respect and unreservedly recommended. Revelation Records are obtainable from P.O. Box 65593, Los Angeles, Calif. 90065. Get this album, you won't be disappointed.

—Welding

Babs Gonzales

THE EXPUBIDENT WORLD OF BABS GONZALES—EXP 008: *Cool Cookin'; Me; Lullaby of the Doomed; Le Continental; You've Changed; Beginning of the End; Lonely One; Babs' Mood for Love.*

Personnel: Track 1: Clark Terry, trumpet; Johnny Griffin, tenor saxophone; Horace Parlan, piano; Buddy Catlett, bass; Roy Haynes, drums; Gonzales, vocal. Tracks 2-4: Les Spann, flute; Charlie Rouse, bass clarinet; Griffin, tenor saxophone; Parlan, piano; Ray Crawford, guitar; Peck Morrison, bass; Haynes, drums; Gonzales and The Modern Set, vocals. Tracks 4-8: Ray Nance, violin; Parlan, piano; Gonzales, vocals; others unidentified.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ½

Cookin' is a very swinging track from a live session Gonzales hosted at Small's Paradise (other performances by the