

words of praise for the efforts of the label's owners, Jon Horwich and John William Hardy (neither of whom I've ever met, spoken to, or corresponded with, by the way). These men surely won't get rich by enabling some fine but underappreciated musicians to cut LPs without commercial concessions, but they are performing a valuable service for jazz.

Ortega is not an undiscovered Charlie Parker but he certainly can be considered a fine musician. A veteran jazzman at 41, he has played with Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, Gerald Wilson and Don Ellis, among others, but is virtually unknown to most jazz fans.

The selections on this LP, cut in Nov. 1966 and Jan. 1967, show that Ortega has obviously been influenced by Parker, but also by John Coltrane and/or the new-thing jazzmen. I'm not sure why no pianist was used; maybe so that Ortega would not be limited or inhibited in making his choice of notes. The saxophonist has an advanced harmonic conception, and a pianist would possibly have gotten in his way.

Ortega's style, then, is a rather unique blend of traditionally modern and avant garde elements.

In addition to being an original performer Ortega is an excellent technician. He executes long, complex lines very cleanly. His tone is rather small but pure and penetrating. He plays well in all registers; his fine upper-register work is particularly impressive. He is an impassioned improviser who likes to play a lot of notes and often swings very hard.

However, this LP leaves something to be desired. Two of its tracks, *Pizzicato* and *Arco*, are unaccompanied solos by Domanico. *I Love You* is an alto saxophone and bass duet. The other selections are by Ortega, West and Goodwin. The fact that so few musicians are used limits the variety of tone colors and textures. The Elvin Jones Trio has a similar instrumental makeup, but Joe Farrell plays three horns whereas Ortega plays only one. (Actually, Ortega can play several instruments and did so on a Bethlehem LP in 1958-9.) Also, the Jones trio arrangements are more interesting than the ones used here.

As this is an album featuring improvised solos, Ortega and Domanico have a great deal of responsibility. Ortega is fairly inventive as well as original, but his work here is not varied enough. *On My Buddy*, *I Love You* and *'Tis Autumn* ('*Tis Autumn* is mislabeled *G*, the *Key* and vice versa on my copy) his approach is pretty much the same: he begins in a calm manner but then gets into his multi-note lines. Sometimes I get the feeling that he's playing a lot of notes partly because he enjoys demonstrating his technical command.

*Pizzicato* shows that Domanico has fine technique, but viewed as a piece of music, it doesn't make it. It doesn't go anywhere; Domanico sounds like he's doing exercises. *Arco*, which sounds somewhat like a modern classical selection, is better developed and more interesting. Domanico has a rich, dark bowed tone.

West performs capably in the rhythm section and turns in some good, thoughtful solo work. Goodwin's comping is restrained and sensitive; he is a musical drummer.

I liked this record, but on Ortega's next—and I hope there is one—it might make sense to include another good hornman and/or place more emphasis on the arrangements.

Revelation records are available from P.O. Box 65593, Los Angeles, CA 90065.

—Pekar

### Jimmy Smith

THE BOSS—Verve V6-8770: *Some Of My Best Friends Are Blues*; *The Boss*; *This Guy's In Love With You*; *Fingers*; *Tuxedo Junction*. Personnel: Smith, organ; George Benson or Nathan Page (track 4 only), guitar; Donald Bailey, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★½

This is the best Smith LP, from a jazz standpoint, in quite some time. Recorded live at Paschal's La Carousel club in Atlanta, it captures the organist in some inspired moments, and even those who think they know his playing well will hear some things they ain't heard before.

At his best, as he is through most of



this album, Smith remains in a class by himself. A master of time, tempo, touch and taste (the first three always, the latter whenever he wants it that way) Smith can make the electric organ's musical liabilities into assets. A dynamo of energy and a wellspring of ideas, he can outswing most bands, big or small, with two hands and a pair of feet unmatched by any competitor.

Smith created a new vocabulary for the jazz organ, and he keeps adding to it. On *The Boss*, for example, he introduces new sounds achieved by phenomenal fingering dexterity, as if in defiance of the latest electronic inventions.

Moogs, Synkets, what have you—Smith has them all beat, because he has *humanized* his mechanical monster, making it sing and dance, shout and stomp, and always swing, baby, swing.

Smith is one of the very few truly gifted jazz artists who has become a popular success in the fullest sense. For this, he has on occasion had to pay; there are times when he deliberately jettisons his better musical instincts and relies on milking devices and simplifications.

But then he'll do something incredible, like the title track here, and you have to forgive him. The modal *Fingers* is almost

as good; *Friends* is a slow, rocking blues that gets a groove; *Tuxedo* a mellow visit with an old standard (also a blues), and *This Guy* a gentle return to earth after the spaceflight of *The Boss*. Benson's best solo is on that track, but Smith almost obliterates the memory of it when he takes over. Bailey and Page also give good support, and it's hard to believe there's no bass player. The recording is good, and captures some hip audience reactions. *The Boss* is boss.

—Morgenster

## BLUES 'N' FOLK

BY PETE WELDING

*The Young Big Bill Broonzy* (Yazoo 1011)

Rating: ★★★★★

Big Bill Broonzy, *Big Bill's Blues* (Epic 22017)

Rating: ★★★★★½

Blind Lemon Jefferson, *Volume Two* (Milestone 2007)

Rating: ★★★★★

Bo Carter, *Greatest Hits, 1930-1949* (Yazoo 1014)

Rating: ★★★★★½

The recent emphasis on modern urban blues has tended to override the earlier interest in prewar and rural blues forms, but the latter have not been wholly eclipsed, as these recent releases suggest. In fact, there's just as much, if not more, activity in prewar blues reissues as ever, with the ongoing programs of origin, Yazoo, Historical and Biograph Records occasionally being supplemented by those of Epic and Milestone.

As a result of his 1950s adoption of the stance of "folk singer," the late Mississippi-born singer-guitarist Big Bill Broonzy has been consigned to virtual limbo by current blues enthusiasts, whose interests lie almost wholly with the latter-day commercial electric product. Broonzy, they feel, was something of a sham and his music irrelevant. This lopsided view takes little account of Broonzy's phenomenally successful and important career as a commercial bluesman in the years 1927-48, when he was one of the most in-demand blues musicians around, making more than 250 recordings under his own name as well as serving as accompanist on literally hundreds of others.

In many respects, Broonzy was the prototypical urban blues musician, a nonpareil singer, a magnificent composer, many of whose songs have gone into blues tradition, and one of the most unflinchingly inventive and modern guitarists the idiom has produced.

These two recently issued LP collections of Broonzy's pioneering prewar recordings should do much to set matters straight—assuming that young blues fans take the trouble to listen to them.

The Yazoo set concentrates on the earlier phase of Broonzy's career and spans the years 1928-35; the 14 selections comprise solo performances, and two-guitar and piano-and-guitar duets with a variety of supporting musicians, all of extraordinarily high levels of artistry and of great