

JAZZ

By Brian Cullman

SHORT TAKES

Summer has traditionally been a time when record companies go into a holding pattern, waiting and watching; it's cheaper (and cooler) to go into the vaults than into the studios, and so summer brings on reissues, anthologies, collections, compilations and best-ofs, and this summer has produced a bumper crop, the best in memory.

First and foremost is **Ray Charles's** *A Life In Music* (Atlantic Deluxe), a five-record set that spans his (first) tenure at Atlantic—roughly 1952 to 1960. Charles may not have invented rhythm & blues, but it's hard to imagine what rhythm & blues would have been like without him; he was able to combine the sophistication of Nat Cole and Charles Brown with the wail of Big Joe Turner and the jump-blues of T-Bone Walker and added to that mix an unerring sense of gospel (not just a sense of spirit and salvation but a yearning to throw both your sins and your strengths straight at the Lord and have done with it, the strange and simple longing to get out of this life alive).

Five records are barely enough to cover Ray Charles's invention and style (his years at ABC in the early 60s deserve another five albums), and this set mixes his best-loved songs ("Lonely Avenue," "What'd I Say," "Yes Indeed," "Hallelujah I Love Her So," a live version of "Drown In My Own Tears") with his most adventurous instrumentals ("Soul Meeting" with Milt Jackson, "Cosmic Ray," "The Genius After Hours") and with any number of unremembered or half-forgotten gems ("Sinner's Prayer," "What Would I Do Without You," "Losing Hand"). The talent and the spirit on these records is simply awe-inspiring, and Atlantic deserves a tip of the hat for the elegance and care that went into this set.

Other releases on Atlantic Deluxe are almost as successful. Blues guitarist **Albert King's** *Masterworks* draws most of its strengths from his classic album *Born Under A Bad Sign*, though his recent recordings with Allen Toussaint still show a lot of fire. King's sound and style are far better known than he is; Eric Clapton lifted King's solo on "Crosscut Saw" almost verbatim from "Strange Brew" and you can hear King's pure tone in Johnny Copeland's recent work.

This release may bring Albert some deserved attention.

The Coasters' *Young Blood* is the best retrospective of the great old band (and there must be half a dozen *Best Of The Coasters* and *Coasters' Greatest Hits* floating around) mostly because it carries the group through the late 60s with songs like "D.W. Washburn" and "Down Home Girl" instead of simply ending in the late 50s. These are some of the wittiest and most peculiar songs in the language, with characters like Smokey Joe, Little Egypt, Jones and Charlie Brown that have all slipped into our collective memory.

Professor Longhair's *The Last Mardi Gras* is a live two-record set recorded in 1978 by Albert "I'm better than Elvis, yessir!" Goldman. If you can ignore Goldman's fatuous and self-serving liner notes (I obviously can't), it's a pretty good record, far better than *Live On The Queen Mary*. The album was recorded at Tipitina's, the New Orleans club named for Fess's most popular song, and features the good Professor backed by a sloppy but eminently spirited band (which includes Tony Dagradi, now tenor saxophonist with Carla Bley and, under his own name responsible for two less than memorable albums on Gramavision).

Atlantic Deluxe also planned late September releases of works by **Philip Glass** (*Einstein On The Beach* and *Dance*), **Duke Ellington**, **Woody Herman** and **Lee Konitz**. Which is all welcome, but if Atlantic plans to reach into their vaults they could really reach in and rescue Otis Redding, Ruth Brown, Carla Thomas, Johnnie Taylor, Aretha and even little Bobby Darin. [I thought this was supposed to be a jazz column—Ed.] Oh, and Ornette!! Save Ornette! [Whew.]

RCA has released three two-record sets of the **Tommy Dorsey/Frank Sinatra** sessions out of some perverse obligation to be definitive. While I defy anyone to listen to all eighty-three cuts without registering Republican and hanging around debutante parties, it's actually refreshing to hear a young Sinatra crooning away without the ring-a-ding style of his 50s albums or the world-weary-I-done-it-all cynicism of

his later work. What you hear is a callow young man in love with his own voice charming his way through the dreadful and the exquisite songs of the early 40s. What you also hear is the enormous debt so many rock singers owe Sinatra—not just David Bowie, but Jim Morrison (try "Crystal Ship").

PolyGram Classics has begun reissuing great classic Verve albums from the late 50s and early 60s all in their original covers. **Dizzy Gillespie's *Have Trumpet, Will Excite*** is a buoyant, open-hearted record, more good-natured than groundbreaking. Backed by Junior Mance on piano, Les Spann on flute and guitar, Sam Jones on bass and Lex Humphries on drums, Dizzy plays that rarest of musics: a happy man's blues. **Ella Fitzgerald's *Ella In Hollywood*** is a sassy live date from the Crescendo, a small nightclub, in 1961. Backed by the ever-tasteful Jim Hall on guitar, Lou Levy on piano, Wilfred Middlebrooks on bass and Gus Johnson on drums, Ella is in top form, gliding effortlessly through passages that would leave lesser vocalists in the dust. Sometimes it seems a little too effortless; Ella never tears a song apart the way Billie Holiday or Sarah Vaughan will, ripping through the gloss of a lyric or a melody to get to a song's dark heart. But she is a formidable stylist and often finds her way through to other and less primal secrets, the secrets of a chanteuse. *Cool Heat—Anita O'Day Sings Jimmy Giuffre Arrangements* is a bit less successful. **Anita O'Day** has a pure and graceful voice, but her mannerisms seem dated (fair enough; I don't think anyone will be able to listen to Bow Wow Wow's Annabella or X's Exene twenty-five years down the road). She may not transcend her era, but Giuffre's warm and supportive arrangements do. Giuffre is a sorely underrated saxophonist and arranger and should be heard more often.

Duke Ellington's *The Girl's Suite & The Perfume Suite* (Columbia) shows that even the Duke had his off days. Roy Eldridge's *Roy Eldridge—The Early Years* (Columbia) shows the scrappy trumpet player leading his own band as well as soloing with Teddy Wilson's orchestra, Gene Krupa and Mildred Bailey. Eldridge brings the best out of the