

# 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, Dan Morgenstern, Don Nelsen, Harvey Pekar, Harvey Siders, Carol Sloane, Jim Szantor, 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.

## George Benson

THE OTHER SIDE OF ABBEY ROAD—A&M SP 3028: *Golden Slumbers; You Never Give Me Your Money; Because, Come Together; Oh! Darling; Here Comes the Sun; I Want You (She's So Heavy); Something; Octopus' Garden; The End.*

Personnel: Freddie Hubbard, Mel Davis, Bernie Glow, Marvin Stamm, trumpets; Wayne Andre, trombone; Phil Bodner, Hubert Laws, Sonny Fortune, Jerome Richardson, Don Ashworth, reeds; Herbie Hancock, Bob James, Ernie Hayes, piano, organ; Benson, guitar, vocals; Ron Carter, Gerry Jemmott, bass; Ray Barretto, Andy Gonzales, percussion; Ed Shaughnessy, Idris Muhammad, drums; string quartet; Don Sebesky, arranger.

Rating: ★★★★★

There are a lot of nice things on this smooth pop album: Benson's fine guitar and pleasant singing; the craftsmanship of the studio ensembles; some first-rate Beatles songs.

As is customary when Creed Taylor produces, the album is conceived as a whole and every detail is well planned and executed. There are no cheap recording tricks; the thing is tastefully done.

But the thing itself is a problem. Benson's great talent has not been handled well on records. Columbia made a fair start but seemed to lose interest; Verve overproduced and commercialized him, and A&M has been grooming him as Wes Montgomery's successor. But there was and will be only one Wes Montgomery.

However, Wes didn't sing, and Benson sings very well indeed. His *Oh! Darling* is a gas; he dispenses with the original version's amiable touch of satire, turning it into a straight r&b ballad in a style somewhat like Nat Cole out of Ray Charles (and Nat was Ray's man), but with definite George Benson touches. Those who remember *I Wonder* will like this—that kind of feeling. Maybe his singing will enable Benson to really get his guitar across to the people.

Some of his playing here is excellent. On the intro to *I Want You*, he sounds startlingly Django-like, and on this, the most jazz-flavored track, there is nice obligato and solo work by Hubbard. The guitarist's pretty and inventive melodic improvising in *Money* is perhaps his best solo spot on the LP.

*Something*, one of the best pop tunes in a long, long time, almost makes it on the strength of the melody and Benson's good playing, but flutes and strings needlessly pretty it up, and I'd like to have heard Benson sing more of this demanding song than just the short bridge. On *Here Comes*, the string quartet is prominent, voiced in rich Borodin style, with just a touch too much sugar.

This pleasant album will probably appeal neither to jazz nor Beatles fans, and is of interest mainly for Benson's singing. *Oh! Darling* would make a great single. The LP seems tailored to the sort of people

depicted in *Playboy's* guides to the swinging life—but do they really exist any more, if indeed they ever did? —Morgenstern

## Charlie Christian

SOLO FLIGHT WITH THE BENNY GOODMAN SEXTET, SEPTET & ORCHESTRA—CBS 62 581: *Solo Flight; Rose Room; Flying Home; Star Dust; Shivers; The Sheik of Araby; I Surrender Dear; Memories of You; Boy Meets Goy (Grand Slam); Honeysuckle Rose; I've Found a New Baby; Royal Garden Blues; Benny's Bugle; I Can't Give You Anything But Love; As Long as I Live; On the Alamo.*

Collective personnel: Cootie Williams, trumpet; Goodman, clarinet; George Auld, tenor saxophone; Lionel Hampton, vibraharp; Fletcher Henderson, Count Basie, Johnny Guarneri or Kenny Kersey, piano; Artie Bernstein, bass; Nick Fatool, Harry Jaeger or Jo Jones, drums; full Goodman band on tracks 1 and 10.

Rating: ★★★★★

Nobody makes much money on reissues these days, and this seems true of major companies as well as the minor ones serving specialized interests. The former do it with little enthusiasm and view it as one of those responsibilities that must be met; the latter do it for love of the music and expect little financial reward.

The majors own most of the choice items. Columbia, Victor, and Decca have served jazz well in the past decade, but the reissue boom seems to have passed its peak. Unfortunately, the valves are being shut while many treasures still remain in the pipes. What is the answer?

The answer may be for the U.S. majors to let their always more active English, German and French branches carry the reissue burden for awhile but allow product that does not duplicate material already in domestic circulation to be imported and sold in this country in record stores.

Peters International, a New York import house, and American and French Columbia (CBS over there) have made such an arrangement, and this brilliant LP is one of its first fruits. Issued about three years ago, its introduction into the U.S. market now just about completes the fabulous recorded legacy of Christian.

It introduces to LP for the first time (in the U.S.) the following: *Rose Room, I Surrender, Boy Meets Goy, I Can't Give You Anything, New Baby, and Solo Flight.* (An alternate take of *Solo Flight* was issued on CL 652). The other tracks have been out of print since CL 500 was dropped about 10 years ago.

It's difficult to know where to start with something like this.

Take Goodman. One is hard pressed to find examples of his studio playing that are more consistently alive and fresh 30 years later. From this collection of brilliant performances, I would single out *Royal Garden*, which receives a gently prodding but intensely swinging reading

that contrasts sharply with the usual rip-em-up Dixieland treatment. Goodman rises to the heights in a stabbing, snarling, twisting, growling chorus that winds and slithers like a great serpent of sound.

Christian infused the Goodman quintet—which was somewhat at sixes and sevens after the loss of Gene Krupa and Teddy Wilson and the direction they gave Goodman's first small groups—with new life and made it a group to be spoken of in reverent tones, as one talks of the Hot Seven or the Original Basie Band or the Miles Davis-Gil Evans teamwork. Perfect empathy!

Listen to the guitarist's intricate lines weaving through the fabric of *New Baby* or the floating stream of sound drifting through the band's riffs in *Solo Flight*. One looks in vain for a superfluous note or a misplaced stroke.

All this plus Cootie Williams in several economical but intense muted choruses. There aren't many records around serving up the kind of jazz potency gathered here. Get it. See! —McDonough

## Miles Davis

BITCHES BREW—Columbia GP26: *Pharaoh's Dance; Bitches Brew; Spanish Key; John McLaughlin; Miles Runs The Voodoo Down; Sanctuary.*

Collective Personnel: Davis, trumpet; Benny Maupin, bass clarinet; Wayne Shorter, soprano saxophone; John McLaughlin, electric guitar; Chick Corea, Larry Young, Joe Zawinul, electric piano; Dave Holland, bass; Harvey Brooks, Fender bass; Larry White, Jack DeJohnette, Charles Alias, drums; Jim Riley, percussion.

Rating: ★★★★★

Listening to this double album is, to say the least, an intriguing experience. Trying to describe the music is something else again—mainly an exercise in futility. Though electronic effects are prominent, art, not gimmickry, prevails and the music protrudes mightily.

Music, most of all music like this, cannot be adequately described. I really don't want to count the cracks on this musical sidewalk—I'd rather trip over them. Fishures, peaks, plateaus; anguish, strange beauty—it's all there for a reason. And it can be torn up for a reason.

To be somewhat less ambiguous—but to list only my lasting impressions: Maupin's bass clarinet work generally; the eerie echo effect employed on Miles' various phrases throughout *Brew*; the rhythm section's devices during parts of *Brew* (highly reminiscent of Wagner's *Stegfried's Funeral March* from *Goetterdaemmerung*); Shorter's solos on *Key* and *Voodoo*; the electric piano work on *Key*; Miles' lyricism on *Sanctuary*, and McLaughlin on *McLaughlin*.

Parenthetically, my liking for recorded Miles came to an abrupt halt with *Ne-*