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Jimmy Lynch, Redd Foxx, Skillet & Leroy

Nigger Please, I Ain't Lied Yet, and Two or Three Times a Day

Cult Collectibles

The introduction of the long-playing record in the mid-twentieth century opened up new avenues for recorded sound. Suddenly, classical music could be heard completely, without having to change records every ten minutes. The world was getting ready for prog rock, rock operas, and "mellow grooves."

One of the other benefits of the long-player was the effect it had on comedy. Now comedians had a larger audience, and instead of reaching dozens night by night in a club, comedians could bring their acts to thousands across the country.

Along with the heavy-hitters like Richard Pryor, Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, and Bill Cosby, hundreds more released comedy albums during the last half of the twentieth century, including a more underground industry that might not have been as well-known, but was just as influential.

Independent labels like Laff Records released comedy albums from African-American comedians that were rawer, more taboo-shattering, and just plain filthier than the bigger sellers. These records weren't even openly displayed in stores. You had to know what you were asking for, then hem and haw with the record store clerk like you were buying pornography.

The comedians on these labels, like Rudy Ray Moore, LaWanda Page, Redd Foxx, and many others would have a profound influence on comedy, even if their albums are as hard to find today as they were back when first pressed. Luckily Cult Collectibles has seen fit to remedy this situation by reissuing many of these groundbreaking albums on CD.

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Groundbreaking and influential is all well and good, but the albums are also still really funny.

To those who know Redd Foxx only from his role as loveable but gruff Fred Sanford on the hit show *Sanford and Son*, the reissue of 1978's *I Ain't Lied Yet* will be a surprise. How did Fred Sanford get so dirty? Recorded live, but stitched together from different performances (Foxx mentions President Johnson at one point, then mentions his television show), *I Ain't Lied Yet* presents Foxx as a one-liner king with a sophisticated sense of wordplay ("Sign in the cathouse window: Out to lunch. Beat it."), even if it takes the audience (or listener) a while to catch up. After his joke, "What's the difference between a peeping tom and a pickpocket? A pickpocket snatches watches," you can hear baffled silence for a few seconds before the audience laughs. "This is a good crowd," Foxx says. "Really bright." Actually, Foxx's repartee with his audience is often as funny as his jokes. "You might as well enjoy yourself, the Lord knows you're in here drinking liquor," or "Don't look at me, somebody's gotta tell 'em," should be used by everyone, in any social situation, from now on. While Foxx's wordplay and twisting of the English language are impressive and funny, his recreation of Lincoln's last words, "Goddammit, I told you I didn't want to see that show," show that Foxx could slay with a simple setup.

Foxx's CD conjures an image of Foxx on the stage, standing in one place, possibly seated as he regales his audience with his jokes, Jimmy Lynch's 1977 *Nigger Please* is a bit more dynamic. Opening with a funk intro, Lynch's set is faster paced and has a bit more energy than Foxx's. Lynch (who also performed in most of Rudy Ray Moore's classic films) does great voice work – his old Southern cracker, old ladies, and little kids are funny, even if his stuttering joke goes on a bit too long. "International Lover" is a rhyming toast that should have listeners reaching for the back button to memorize and impress the ladies with at the next social event. The CD closes on an emotional note, with a heartfelt "Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King," a sincere tribute to the civil rights leader. To modern listeners, it sounds out of place for the first few seconds after a half-hour of pussy jokes, but Lynch's sincerity wins the listener over.

Skillet and Leroy also appeared on *Sanford and Son*, and in Rudy Ray Moore's *Petey Wheatstraw*. Their act might be the most traditional of the three discs, with the two partners trading straight man duties. *Two or Three Times a Day* also features LaWanda Page, better known as the church-going Aunt Esther on *Sanford and Son*, here light years away from that persona. Billed as "The Fabulous Soul Clowns," the trio has a loose, meandering, infectious style. Sure, straight lines are repeated a couple times, but when the comedy hits, on bits like "The Monkey and the Yo-Yo," which gets points for being dirty and

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surreal, it hits hard. While not as polished as the other two CDs, *Two or Three Times a Day* has a great, ramshackle charm.

Not only do these albums work as comedy, they also provide a link into a vanished time. However the recordings were produced, they bring back the feel of being in a smoky, tackily decorated nightclub while comedians try every trick they know to get a laugh. And if some of the references or jokes are dated (this is a world full of farmer's daughters, mini-skirts, children asking about body parts, and rattlesnakes biting men on the penis) or somewhat offensive to today's audience (the views on homosexuality are pretty dated, and anyone with an aversion to "the N-word" probably shouldn't be listening), the laughs are still there. Influential, funny, and you can get a history lesson or two!

MVD: mydb2b.com

Scott Adams

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