

JAZZ AROUND TOWN

by Scott Yanow

BOX SETS

While many doomsayers claim that the popularity of downloads will eventually result in the death of CDs, several excellent jazz CDs are released just about every day. Downloads are fine for pop singles but they are no challenge for the many jazz-oriented box sets that gather together classic music from the past, often in deluxe packages. The Christmas season may be over but there is no reason to stop buying presents, particularly for yourself! Here are five box sets that every jazz fan should know about.

The British Acrobat label (www.acrobatmusic.net), which has a rich catalog, has released three noteworthy boxes in recent times. By the beginning of 1960, John Coltrane had recorded "Giant Steps" and led several albums for the Atlantic label. He had left the Miles Davis Quintet and was in the early stages of forming his own quartet but Davis talked Coltrane into returning for one last tour. They appeared together along with pianist Wynton Kelly, bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Jimmy Cobb at 20 concerts throughout Europe in March and April. Fortunately some of the music was broadcast on the radio from the Stockholm, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Munich, Zurich and Den Haag, Holland concerts. While many of these surviving performances had previously appeared in piecemeal fashion on bootleg albums, the four-CD set *All Of You: The Last Tour 1960* has all of the music. The recording quality is excellent, the selections are programmed in chronological order, and the 34-page booklet is quite comprehensive about the Davis-Coltrane musical partnership. The concerts actually received mixed reviews at the time because many in the audience were not prepared for Coltrane's fiery, lengthy and complex solos, expecting the music to be closer to the laidback sounds of *Kind Of Blue*. However, even though Coltrane was a bit bored with the familiar repertoire and dying to finally have his own band, his playing is actually quite brilliant and innovative. Davis sounds fine and the rhythm section always swings. While there are some repeats of titles ("So What" appears eight times), the solos differ greatly from night-to-night. This perfectly-designed package is a major addition to the discographies of both Miles Davis and John Coltrane.

1952-53 is sometimes thought of as an off-period for Duke Ellington. Altoist Johnny Hodges and trombonist Lawrence Brown had left his band, the Swing era was seven years in the past, and work was sometimes a bit scarce. However, as the performances on the three-CD *Rare Live Recordings 1952-3* show, the Ellington Orchestra was as exciting as ever. Much of the music on this set was previously unreleased, including all but one of the 15 selections from a Jan. 5, 1952 concert at the Metropolitan Opera House. With such highly individual soloists as trumpeters Cat Anderson, Willie Cook and Clark Terry, Ray Nance on cornet and violin, trombonists Quentin Jackson and Britt Woodman, drummer Louie Bellson, and the reeds of Jimmy Hamilton, Russell Procope, Willie Smith, Paul Gonsalves, and Harry Carney (not to mention the pianist), this package has more than its share of memorable and bright moments. If you love Duke Ellington, this is a set that has to be acquired.

Tubby Hayes, one of England's greatest tenor-saxophonists, could play with the speed and articulation of Sal Nistico (who he preceded) on uptempo tunes and a great deal of warmth on ballads. In his career he also played vibes, flute and soprano. Due to a weak heart, Hayes died in 1973 when he was just 38 but in the preceding 20 years he made many exciting recordings. The three-CD set *Without A Song* consists of live dates from 1954-73 that cover virtually his entire career. None of the 22 performances (which are generally well recorded) had ever released before. Whether heard as a sideman with Vic Lewis, in all-star settings, teamed with Ronnie Scott in the *Jazz Couriers*, as a guest soloist with big bands, or leading a variety of his own groups, Tubby Hayes shows throughout these stirring performances (which range from bop and hard bop to soul jazz, hints of the avant-garde and post bop) why he is still rated so high.

Dave Brubeck left behind such a rich musical legacy that most jazz collectors already have a strong sampling of his recordings. However *The Complete Storyville Broadcasts* (compiled by Essential Jazz Classics and available from mail order companies) is something special. The three-CD set features the Brubeck Quartet (with altoist Paul Desmond, Wyatt Ruther, Ron Crotty or Bob Bates on bass and Herb Barman, Lloyd Davis or Joe Dodge on drums) broadcasting from George Wein's Boston club Storyville during 1952-54. While the albums *Dave Brubeck At Storyville: 1954* and *Jazz At Storyville* are reissued here in full, there are also five previously unissued early radio broadcasts that include 34 selections plus insightful and witty announcements from the young Nat Hentoff. The magical interplay and counterpoint between Brubeck and Desmond on the broadcasts, along with some colorful playing by the forgotten Herb Barman (who sometimes doubles on bongos) make this release essential and a wonderful look at the early days of the Dave Brubeck Quartet.

Rosemary Clooney is not really thought of as a jazz singer but she loved jazz and sang classic standards whenever she had the chance. *The Rosemary Clooney CBS Radio Recordings 1955-61*, a limited-edition five-CD set from Mosaic (available from www.mosaicrecords.com), will be treasured by her fans. Comprised of studio performances recorded specifically for her radio show and never released on record before, this box has Clooney singing 104 mostly superior songs while joined by a quartet headed by Buddy Cole. Cole, who switches between piano, organ, celeste and harpsichord, had excellent technique and was best on piano although he could be a bit bombastic and corny on organ. However Rosemary Clooney is heard throughout these concise performances in prime form, sounding happy to be free of the need to come up with novelty hits. These selections make a strong case for thinking of her as a jazz singer.