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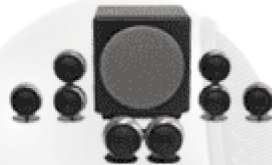
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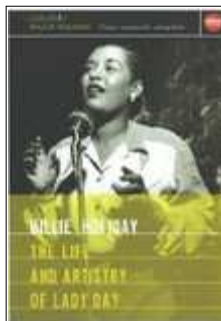
DVD Video Reviews



Billie Holiday - The Life and Artistry of Lady Day (2004)

An informative bio of the superb jazz singer, plus several film clips.

Published on June 08, 2009



Billie Holiday - The Life and Artistry of Lady Day (2004)

Documentary on the vocalist
Studio: Idem Home Video 1115

Video: 4:3 B&W

Audio: PCM mono

No region code

Extras: Discography, Lyrics, List of her own compositions, Bibliography, 4 scenes from the Hollywood movie *In New Orleans* - in which she

performs
Length: 65 minutes
Rating: ****

There are several DVDs on Billie Holiday available and countless reissue CDs. While I haven't viewed all of them, this one has the best brief filmic bio on the unique singer I have seen. Details are given of her seriously troubled life, including her terrible childhood, early prostitution, and heroin addiction shared with both of her husbands. The labels and covers of many of her famous recordings are shown to aid in jogging one's memory about them. There are clips from a Duke Ellington musical short in which Billie acted and sang, as well as an emotional clip of her performing her controversial *Strange Fruit* at a Boston club shortly before her death in 1959. John Hammond, who had discovered her originally and signed her to Columbia, steadfastly refused to record her *Strange Fruit* as being too incendiary. (Holiday is sometimes given credit for composing *Strange Fruit*, but it was actually written by a Bronx schoolteacher who later adopted the children of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.)

Billie Holiday

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There are also excerpts of Billie singing on the 1957 *The Sound of Jazz* CBS-TV special that is probably the greatest video presentation of jazz ever. (Available on DVD.)

Most of the clips are of good quality, except for one washed-out example when she sang with Count Basie. The sound is always good mono, though. Her scene with Louis Armstrong from the film *In New Orleans* is a delight, as are the other three clips from this movie. Billie resisted her role at first because she played a black maid in the film. The image quality here is improved over other Holiday DVDs I've seen with this footage.

- John Henry

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