

There are minor concerns with both sets. With the Sony, I know of one scholar who will doubtless raise objections to displaying a copy of Anderson's first disc, the 1923 black label of "Deep River," in an RCA Victor company sleeve from about 1940. And I was taken completely aback by Arsenaault's comment that in this same instance Anderson was "the first singer to record what was then known as a 'Negro Spiritual'." Am I missing something, or are Cousins and DeMoss – who recorded "Poor Mourner" for Berliner when Marian Anderson was one year old – somehow not 'singers'?³The 15 discs in the Sony set fit into slots on the inside front and back covers of the book, which is an attractive arrangement, but I worry that as I go in and out of this set – which I plan to be doing a lot – that the slots will begin to weaken, with the discs falling out.

While the restoration work in *Let Freedom Ring!* was a mighty task indeed, one might take issue with the wisdom of producer John Haley's decision of correcting some notes that Anderson missed during the Copenhagen concert. That said, any changes made were invisible to my ears, and I congratulate Haley on the wisdom of stating that such changes were made. Reservations aside, these two releases represent a quantum leap for Marian Anderson over what was I was able to order to prop up her card in my little Tower Records store now nearly thirty years ago. In closing, my thoughts move to a comment from Robert Russell Bennett as quoted in the text of *Beyond the Music – The Complete RCA Victor Recordings*: "I had no desire to listen to "Comin' Thro' the Rye" after Bach, Handel and Mendelssohn, but before I could turn the sound off, she had sung four bars, and two tears were on my cheeks."She already had me there during "Go Down Moses" in the acoustic version, three tracks in on the first disc of the set; it was like hearing the Civil Rights movement a hundred years ago, struggling to be born. And by some yardsticks there are few experiences these days more important than that. *Reviewed by David N. Lewis*

[Note: This review was edited by Journal Editor Christopher King due to a conflict on the part of the Sound Recording Reviews Editor, John Haley.]

Endnotes

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| <p>1. Marian Anderson sings Bach, Brahms and Schubert, RCA Victor Red Seal 7911-2-RG.</p> <p>2. Bloomsbury Press, New York, NY 2010. ASIN: B005IUTDIW</p> | <p>3. Berliner 3010. Reissued on "Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1891-1922," Archeophone ARCH 1005.</p> |
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Alice Faye & Co-Stars, The 20th Century Fox Years, Volume 1, 1934-1939. Sepia Records Limited, SEPIA 1364 (2 CDs).

Betty Grable & Co-Stars, The 20th Century Fox Years, Volume 1, 1940-1944. Sepia Records Limited, SEPIA 1365 (2 CDs).

Alice Faye and Betty Grable were the top two "Fox Blondes" of the 20th Century-Fox film musicals of the 1930s and 1940s (not counting their child star Shirley Temple). The Fox musicals are not as celebrated as the MGM musicals of the same period, but many were

no less box office hits in their time and are fondly remembered by fans of the genre today. Light and fluffy, the Fox musicals never intended to break new ground in the genre. They were escapist entertainment with simple boy-meets-girl stories usually wrapped up in period settings (the turn of the last century) and usually filmed in bright (some might say gaudy) Technicolor. The draw for audiences was not only the colorful settings and costumes but the songs and most importantly, the stars and supporting casts. Fox knew they had a winning formula and ran with it successfully for two decades. These two new deluxe CD sets from Sepia Records put the focus on both stars along with the generous inclusion of co-stars and novelty acts, plus a good dose of instrumentals to even things out. Sets like these that focus on the Fox films have been long overdue for film musical fans. They were worth the wait.

Alice Faye was Fox's first major adult female film musical star. Born in New York's Hell's Kitchen in 1915, Faye had the standard show business beginning, starting off as a chorus girl in vaudeville then graduating to bigger shows like "George White's Scandals." She also made a name for herself via her affiliation with Rudy Vallee on his radio show. Unlike the standard show business beginning, Faye's first film role was a starring one, the female lead in the 1935 film version of the "Scandals" appropriately titled *George White's Scandals*. Similar to the "overnight sensation" plot straight out of the kind of films she would soon make, the leading lady bowed out and Faye, thanks to her association with Vallee, got the role and became a star. It helped that in spite of her current platinum blonde hairdo and saucy 1930s wisecracking-dame manner, Faye had a distinctive, beautiful voice, was a good actress, and was quite photogenic. Her early Jean Harlow look and demeanor were softened by the studio, and by the late 1930s, Faye was Fox's go-to gal for their big budget musicals such as *Sally, Irene, and Mary* and even their disaster epic (with a few songs), *In Old Chicago*, both released in 1938 and both included in the Alice Faye set.

Meanwhile, Betty Grable (born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1916) was on her own typical show business journey although, unlike Faye, Grable got her initial start in films rather than on stage. She bounced around from studio to studio in the 1930s, beginning as a Goldwyn Girl in 1930. She had a short contract with RKO that included small roles in a few musicals such as *The Gay Divorcee* (1934) and *Follow the Fleet* (1936), both starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. She moved to Paramount and was loaned out for what became her first Fox film, the popular 1936 football musical *Pigskin Parade*. The film notably features another future film legend, 14-year-old Judy Garland making her feature film debut. In 1939, Paramount did not renew Grable's contract. She left for New York and found Broadway stardom in a supporting role in the Cole Porter hit "DuBarry Was A Lady" (starring Ethel Merman and Bert Lahr) in which she introduced the Porter classic "Well, Did You Evah?" with future film musical choreographer and director Charles Walters. She then went on a tour. Fox studio chief Darryl Zanuck (already aware of her talents after seeing "DuBarry") saw her, signed her, and the rest is Hollywood history.

Grable's first film under her new contract with Fox was *Down Argentine Way* (1940), stepping in to replace an ailing Faye. She became a star and the two Fox Blondes co-reigned over the Fox musical for the next five years. In spite of rumors to the contrary, the two stars were supportive of each other and enjoyed friendly competition but regrettably co-starred only once, in 1940's delightful *Tin Pan Alley*. A possible reason for Fox keeping two major musical leading ladies under contract was the fact that although having some similarities, the two stars were also quite different. Grable was more of a sex symbol

(especially during the war years) mixed with some all-American patriotism, whereas Faye had a more earthy girl-next-door image. Faye's honey-dipped contralto voice was vocally superior to Grable's, which was more enthusiastic and brassy. But Grable was the stronger dancer with those "Million Dollar Legs." Grable, of course, went on to become the Pin-Up Girl of the 1940s thanks to that famous photo. Faye continued with successful films such as *Hello, Frisco, Hello* (1943), which gave her a signature song in the Oscar-winning hit "You'll Never Know." Hopefully that 1943 classic will also be among the Faye films featured in the upcoming Volume 2.

As great as their successes were in films and on radio, Faye and Grable were contractually prohibited by Fox from entering into recording contracts with the record labels. This meant that their biggest film hits, such as Faye's "You'll Never Know," became hit records on the Hit Parade for other singers. In hindsight, this may have been a factor in hindering the long-term popularity and legacy for both stars. Movie soundtrack albums and singles of performances derived from pre-recordings of what actually appeared in those films were several years away. By the time the soundtrack album genre became popular, the heydays of both Faye and Grable were past. Other film musical stars at other studios, most notably Bing Crosby (Paramount) and Judy Garland (MGM), were allowed to record studio versions of their movie hits and other songs for release in albums and as singles. In Garland's case, MGM Records (formed in 1946) had great success in releasing her soundtrack performances which only added to her unique legendary status. If Fox had done the same, it is possible that both Faye and Grable (and their Fox musicals) would have become more enduringly iconic to the general public today. In spite of the Fox ban (and probably a bit defiantly, too), both Faye and Grable managed to record a few studio singles. Grable recorded "I Can't Begin To Tell You" (1945, Columbia Records #36867), which she first performed in the hit film *The Dolly Sisters* released that same year. She is accompanied on the single by her then-husband, legendary bandleader Harry James, and she sang under the pseudonym Ruth Haag (Ruth was Grable's middle name and Haag was James' middle name). Faye managed to record several singles in the 1930s for the Columbia, Brunswick, and Bluebird labels, but it was not until long after her glory years with Fox that she recorded an album of studio versions of her popular songs, 1962's "Alice Faye Sings Her Famous Movie Hits" (Reprise Records R9-6029) which included, naturally, "You'll Never Know." The album was released in conjunction with her movie comeback in the Fox remake of *State Fair* (1962).

Both of these CD sets are part of a new series from Sepia Records that spotlight the musicals, and musical stars, of 20th Century-Fox, culled mostly from surviving playback and "studio" discs featuring many previously unreleased extended takes and outtakes among other treasures. The results are stunning. Previously, the main sources for most of these performances by both stars were bootleg records in the 1970s and early 1980s, such as the "Silver Screen Star Series" of compilations from Curtain Call Records. The audio quality of those records was dependent on the quality of the film clips used at the time, which made for an uneven listening experience and low fidelity. In Grable's case the UK label Jasmine Records expanded on those previous LPs with two 2-CD sets of similar compilations, "Betty Grable – The Pin-Up Girl" (1997, JASCD 103/4) and "Betty Grable – More from The Pin-Up Girl" (2004, JASCD 137/8). The tracks on those releases were also derived directly from the soundtracks of the films and thus the audio quality was again dubious. A few outtakes had previously debuted on the 1970s series of LPs from Out Take Records Inc., "Cut! Outtakes From Hollywood's Greatest Musicals" (Volumes 1, 2, & 3). Included in that series were Faye

and Grable outtakes (culled from sometimes scratchy playback discs) that included “Think Twice” from *Sally, Irene, and Mary* (1938, Faye) and “I’ll Be Marching to a Love Song” from *Footlight Serenade* (1942, Grable) both of which are included in these new sets. The quality of the recordings in the Out Take LPs was again merely decent and nothing like what has been accomplished in these new sets, thanks to today’s technology.

Alice Faye & Co-Stars, The 20th Century Fox Years, Volume 1, 1934-1939 is the first in the series. The oldest tracks are optical soundtrack recordings of songs from Faye’s debut film, 1935’s *George White’s Scandals*. Sound engineer Robin Cherry has done stellar work remastering the original studio discs, optical soundtracks, radio transcription discs, and in one instance a shellac pressing. The results are a crisp, strong, and consistent mono sound that is truly remarkable, more so when considering the age of the recordings. As the title suggests, included in duets and ensembles with Faye or in solos are Dick Powell, The Ritz Brothers, Buddy Clark (dubbing for Jack Haley), Grace Bradley & The Brewster Twins, Leah Ray, Ben Bernie, Jack Haley, George Givot, Ann Sothorn, Don Ameche, Tony Martin (who married Faye in 1937), Rubinoff, Louis Prima, The Brian Sisters, Jimmy Durante, Joan Davis, Portland Hoffa, The Peter Sisters Trio, and Marjorie Weaver; along with the 20th Century-Fox Orchestra and Chorus. The generous number of tracks from each of the represented films is such that most are mini-soundtrack albums in themselves. This format of including not just the main star’s solos and duets but also those of the other stars, supporting players, and even novelty acts makes for a unique and thoroughly enjoyable listening experience. Missing from the line-up is 1938’s *Alexander’s Ragtime Band* and 1939’s *Rose of Washington Square*. The entire soundtracks for both, remastered from the studio pre-recordings, were previously released. The former was released by Screen Archives Entertainment in 2002 (SAE-CSR-0007) and the latter was released in 1999 by Varese Sarabande. Rather than duplicate those releases, this project’s producer, Bryan Cooper, wisely chose not to include them, making room for more previously unreleased material.

Highlights of the set include “I’ve Got My Love To Keep Me Warm” from Irving Berlin’s *On The Avenue* (1937) featuring Faye with Dick Powell; “You Can’t Have Everything” from the 1937 film of the same name; the delightful novelty song “Think Twice,” which is an outtake from 1938’s *Sally, Irene, and Mary* featuring Faye with Joan Davis and Portland Hoffa; and “You’re a Sweetheart” from the 1937 film of the same name. As the set ends in 1939, it is assumed that *Tin Pan Alley* (1940) which co-starred Faye with Grable, will be represented in the next set.

Betty Grable & Co-Stars, The 20th Century Fox Years, Volume 1, 1940-1944 is the second release of the new Sepia series.¹ The format is the same as with the Alice Faye set, featuring costars and instrumentals, again expertly remastered by Cherry from surviving studio discs, playback discs, and optical soundtracks. Costars and supporting players featured are Don Ameche, the Six Hits and a Miss, The Nicholas Brothers, Leonid Kinsky, the Flores Brothers Trio, Charlotte Greenwood, Leo Robin, Carol Landis, Jack Haley, Robert Cummings, Jimmie Newell, Hilo Hattie, Harry Owens & His Royal Hawaiians, Ben Gage, Cobina Wright, Jr., John Payne, Victor Mature, Harry James and His Orchestra, Carmen Miranda, the Bando da Lua, Charles Winninger, Phil Silvers, The Harmonica Gentleman, George Montgomery, the Robert Mitchell Boys Choir, Phil Regan, The Stardusters, and Charlie Spivak; along with the 20th Century-Fox Orchestra and Chorus.

Highlights of the set include “Down Argentine Way” from the 1940 film of the same name, first performed by Grable and Don Ameche, then reprised by the amazing Nicholas

Brothers (both vocally and terpsichorally) featuring the complete dance music for the first time without the Foley sound effects; the novelty number “Down on Ami Ami Oni Oni Isle” performed with Hilo Hattie from *Song of the Islands* (1942); Harry James’ classic “You Made Me Love You” from *Springtime in the Rockies* (1942); “Take It From There” from *Coney Island* (1943); and “Cuddle Up A Little Closer” from 1944’s *Four Jills In A Jeep* (one of the tracks derived from an optical soundtrack). The set ends in 1944, leaving the door open for another great 2-disc set of Grable’s final Fox films from 1945 through 1955.

The excellent liner notes for both sets were written by the series’ producer, Bryan Cooper. The text includes biographical information about both stars, details about the source materials including an explanation of what “studio discs” are and what they were used for (including the assigned disc numbers for detail-oriented fans), and information about the films, plus colorful photos and poster art. The content of the liner notes is never dull. Cooper provides the right balance of data and historical information with a touch of nostalgia. As noted, the excellent remastering was done by Robin Cherry. The graphics were provided by Ray Leaning of Muse Fine Art & Design. Images were provided by Cooper and Hisato Masuyama.

Alice Faye left 20th Century-Fox in 1945. She was disillusioned with studio boss Darryl Zanuck’s apparent loss of interest in her career. After seeing her role in *Fallen Angel* (1945) extensively cut down in favor of the new Zanuck protégé Linda Darnell, Faye simply walked out of the studio and did not return. Zanuck retaliated but Faye was happy to spend time with her family, having married bandleader Phil Harris in 1941. In spite of the thousands of fan letters asking for her return (and even Zanuck bowing to the public and attempting to entice her back) she did not return until 1962 for a supporting role in the studio’s remake of *State Fair*. By that point, the splashy Technicolor Fox musicals were a thing of the past, as was the studio system that created them, and contract musical performers like Alice Faye were no longer stars.

Betty Grable remained at Fox until 1955. Her biggest hits were *The Dolly Sisters* (1945) which was originally planned to co-star Grable and Faye, but Faye turned it down and a new minor league Fox Blonde, June Haver, took the role; and *Mother Wore Tights* (1947) with Dan Dailey. Those hits will hopefully show up in Sepia’s next Grable set. By 1955 Grable’s film career had run its course as had the big Fox musicals. In addition, the studio had a new Fox Blonde, the biggest of them all, in Marilyn Monroe. Grable had no regrets. While filming 1953’s non-musical *How To Marry A Millionaire* with Monroe and Lauren Bacall, Grable told Monroe “Go and get yours, honey! I’ve had mine!” *Reviewed by Scott Brogan*

Endnote

1. A third 2-CD set from the same team (producer Bryan Cooper and engineer Robin Cherry), *The 20th Century Fox Years – Volume 1 – 1936-1938* (SEPIA 1368) has also been released and will be reviewed in a future issue. It focuses on the variety of stars under contract (or on loan out) to Fox, including Grable, Judy Garland, Don Ameche, Eddie Cantor, Tony Martin, Ethel Merman, George Murphy, and Shirley Temple.