



SONDS

Ray Charles  
The Genius of Ray Charles (Atlantic)

These could possibly be the most significant vocal sides recorded since the famous Billie Holiday Commodores. Here, a new side of Charles is shown. He has long been influential and important as a gospel-based blues singer (when not on the strict commercial rock'n'roll kick), not to mention his ever-emerging importance as an arranger, alto saxophonist and pianist.

Now, however, he has revealed himself as a poignant, primitively artistic, blues-infused and sensitive, ballad singer.

On the first side of the LP, Charles is backed by a studio band made up mostly of Basie and Ellington sidemen, and several tracks are swingers. This side opens with "Let the Good Times Roll," featuring a typical Charles rhythm vocal, except for the fact that he is being backed by a swinging big band. Then, without warning, Charles launches smoothly into "It Had To Be You," which gives the listener his first taste of the ballads to come.

The third track returns, momentarily, to the swingers, with what is probably only version of "Alexander's Ragtime Band" ever recorded that gives the song reason for being. On this track only, Ray brings in his Raylettes, female vocal group. This, combined with Ray's phrasing, gives the song an unusual gospel-like air.

After this, he goes into a slow blues written by Macon's own Percy Mayfield. Titled "Two Years of Torture," it is a gutty, old-fashioned blues, backed by a slightly uptown, Basie-ish arrangement.

The next track is another shocker. Over a smooth Al. Cohn arrangement, Ray gives a sensitive and genuinely beautiful treatment to "When Your Lover Has Gone," one of the best, most moving ballad performances I have ever heard anywhere.

Then, to close out side one, Ray kicks off the band into a swinging arrangement of "Deed I Do."

Side two is a complete change of pace. Backed by a large orchestra with a string section, arranged for by Ralph Burns (whom you may remember as the arranger on Chris Conner's great "He Loves (Continued on page 8)

REVIEWS

The Mercer Players triumphed in their fall quarter presentation of Peter Ustinov's **Romanoff and Juliet**.

The cast was superb: there wasn't a bad performance in the lot. Jimmy Prescott was, as he should have been, the leader of the pack. His stage presence, timing and comedy inflexions were flawless.

On the night the play was reviewed (Friday) the audience was treated to theatrical magic early in the first act when, sparked by Prescott, who seemed to lose himself entirely in the role, the cast suddenly took fire and what followed during the rest of the long, 50-minute act was top-flight theatre.

Gary Brantley, as one of the soldiers, gave new meaning to the expression: "funny as a crutch." As the reviewer in the Macon Telegraph said, he made one wonder why Ustinov didn't write the role that way originally.

Ila Kidd was also outstanding, among a stageful of excellent performances.

Then there was the set. Certainly during my years here has never been a more imaginative, professional or spectacular one, and I doubt that there ever has been. If this set and production was any indication of his talents and imagination, then he is indeed a welcome addition to the drama department.

A brilliant beginning for a highly promising season.—HLE

'Lust For Life'

The name of Vincent Van Gogh has always held a special magic for those who know his work and something of his life. His personality can best be described as "beat," with whatever connotations one wishes to give the word. He was a failure as a person. He was not understood by, nor did he understand of fit in with, conventional social groups. Even the somewhat beat bohemians of his day could not abide him for long. He was tiresome, dirty, egocentric and, let's face it, often "nuts." Only his brother Theo loved him, and even his remarkable patience sometimes failed to cope with his strange moods.

Yet, when Vincent (as he signed his paintings) took up a brush and dipped it into paint, his dreary life fell away like a cocoon, and angels guided his hand. Pure sunlight and unbounded love of life flamed from his brush. He lived only in his paintings and stayed alive a few short years only because he could paint. In his darker moods he still painted, imposing his tortured will upon his beloved cypresses and the undulating hills and twisted olive trees of Provence.

Vincent's life could be compared to that of the Yellow Emperor moth. Emerging from its drab cocoon, it soars freely for a short time on its glorious yellow and lilac wings and then is consumed in the flame to which it has fatefully been drawn. So Vincent

transcended his drab existence, really living only in his paint — often yellow and lilac — and was then consumed by the searing sun when he came too close to its secret meanings.

For me, the motion picture, "Lust for Life," compounded the nostalgia I had felt standing in the olive groves of Sant Remy and wandering through the streets of Arles. Great artists condition the way we see nature, and this is particularly true of Van Gogh.

He has identified himself forever with the clear, strong light of Southern France — with its rolling hills and twisted trees. The cypresses of Sant Remy can only be seen now through Vincent's eyes. The people he painted still exist in Arles — the sharp, intent faces, the almost primitive mistrust of "furriners" is still there and their rugged independence even of tourist money is quickly felt.

"Lust for Life" is definitely a superior Hollywood production showing careful researching, a script which improved upon the book, competent if not inspired direction, outstanding casting and make-up and satisfactory acting. A special bow is due to Anthony Quinn as the almost inhuman, yet believable, Gauguin and to Kirk Douglas for his courage in a difficult role.

For the art-lover it was a visual treat and a stimulating exercise in recognition. The mere sight of a disordered studio full of Van Gogh paintings (now worth some fifty million dollars) was in itself a breathtaking experience.

I would have expected Hollywood technicians to achieve more accurate color renditions of the paintings. The "living presence" was lacking even though some photographs were taken from the originals.

Commendation is due those who select the movie programs seen at the Student Center. There has been a fine balance between good popular films and more esoteric fare.

A very satisfactory place has been secured and furnished for showing these films. A set-up so nearly perfect could however still be improved:

An absorbant, black strip is needed on the ceiling directly above the screen to prevent distracting reflections. A step-up platform for seating would allow a better view of the screen. Perhaps this could be built if some campus organization would finance it by a special series of movies with paid-admissions.

—M. D.

"Dark at the Top of The Stairs" The roadshow production of the Eli Kazan-directed "Dark at the Top of the Stairs" was shown to Maconites at the Wesleyan auditorium Saturday, November 21. A packed house attended the play.

It was rumored that a full house would encourage other top attraction to the Macon theaters. If attendance is any indication, Macon wants more top Broadway shows.

It is difficult to believe that Kazan originally produced and directed the rather silly drama. The cast put a great deal of superfluous motion into every part and the centerpiece, Miss Blondell, played the old primadonna who could do no wrong.

The plot seemed to be one of the poorer varieties of the Glass Menagerie—Death Salesman Type. It was all about Sex and Love and Children. Inge said the play "was culled from his memories of the boom days in Oklahoma." It was admittedly a cull.—D. B.

STRICTLY AD LIB

1959, Downbeat Magazine

Not only the biggest news in the music industry, but perhaps the biggest news in America these past weeks has been the exposure, rigging and the breakdown of lies in the television, and radio industry.

With the quiz shows completely credited by the testimony of Charles Van Doren and others that they had been given answers to the questions in advance, a House subcommittee prepared to look into "payola" to disc jockeys — another sordid aspect of broadcasting.

Ralph J. Gleason, noted jazz critic and a contributing editor of Down Beat, thinks there is scarcely an honest disc jockey in the country — the dj's who program jazz not excluded from his scathing evaluation.

Whether this view is extreme or not, there is little doubt that the racket is widespread. Immediately the House subcommittee, headed by Rep. Oren Harris, announced it would look into skulduggery in the record and broadcasting industries, disc jockeys can making loud public cries of

innocence — with a distinct air of protesting too much.

Chicago's Howard Miller made statements to newspapers proclaiming his innocence, and indicated he was ready to point the finger at others, with affidavit evidence that payola was going on.

The House subcommittee prepared to probe payola after Burton Lane, president of the American Guild of Authors and Publishers, told Rep. Harris in a letter that "commercial bribery has become a prime factor in determining what music is played or many broadcast programs and what musical records the public is surreptitiously induced to buy."

The implications of payola are enormous. The low taste in music on the part of teen-agers, so widely deplored by worried adults, is one result. Teen-agers don't get a chance to form their own tastes when paid-off disc jockeys keep ramming the lowest common denominator of music at them — so that the record companies can make the most possible money out

(Continued on page 8)

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