



Sassy with her Trio

Sarah Vaughan possessed one of the most wondrous voices of the 20th century. She had a huge range, was always perfectly in-tune, conveyed a wide variety of emotions, and could apparently sing anything. She had the technical tools to become a major opera singer but, fortunately for the jazz world, she preferred to swing.

Coming out of nowhere and sounding unlike anyone who had preceded her, Sarah Vaughan was one of the last great singers to emerge from the swing era. She caught the tail-end of the period by being part of the Earl Hines big band in 1943 and Billy Eckstine's orchestra the following year. Although the strike by the Musicians Union resulted in her not making any recordings with Hines and just a single title *I'll Wait And Pray* with Eckstine, those associations changed her musical life. In both cases, the sidemen included Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker just before bebop exploded on the jazz scene. After listening to them on a nightly basis, Vaughan (who had strong training as a pianist), became the first singer to fully understand bop. The influence of those days can be heard in her phrasing and choice of notes even on her more pop-oriented recordings.

A major attraction from the start of her solo career due to her amazing voice, Sarah Vaughan soon became an international star and her popularity never declined. She recorded prolifically, loved to tour, and always hired the best sidemen, preferring to work with a trio. She could wrap her perfectly controlled vibrato around a ballad yet was also one of the best scat singers.

Live & S'Wonderful features Sarah Vaughan in three very different settings over a seven year period. First at 29, she sounds particularly youthful during her appearance at Birdland on the *Stars In*

Jazz Series in 1953. The program had her sharing the spotlight with Erroll Garner so she uses Garner's rhythm section (bassist Wyatt "Bull" Ruther and drummer Fats Heard) along with her regular pianist John Malachi who she had met when they were both with Billy Eckstine's orchestra.

Vaughan's biggest hit at the time was *Tenderly*, a beautiful ballad that she had made into a standard. Her wide vocal range is displayed on this slow sensuous version and her low notes are particularly impressive.

Next, she digs vigorously into *I Get A Kick Out Of You*. Since it was the early 1950s and Cole Porter's lyrics were considered risqué, at least for *live* radio, she substitutes the word "perfume" for "cocaine" in the line "some get their kicks from cocaine."

A dramatic version of *You're Mine, You* precedes a romp through *Perdido*. While Ella Fitzgerald used *Perdido* primarily for scatting, Vaughan's exuberant version is more tied to the lyrics but no less swinging.

Sarah Vaughan's 1956 performances are at Zardi's Jazzland, one of Los Angeles' top intimate supper clubs of the era. On *The Nearness Of You*, she puts on a performance worthy of an opera singer, making every note count during her emotional rendition.

Sometimes I'm Happy features her swinging happily with some delightful variations during the second chorus.

Since Vaughan at the time had one of her finest trios (pianist Jimmy Jones, bassist Joe Benjamin and drummer Roy Haynes), they have two opportunities to be showcased on instrumentals. Duke Ellington's *Just Squeeze Me*, finds Jones in excellent form and there is some impressive bass playing by Benjamin, who would get a chance to

be in Ellington's band in the late 1960s.

Vaughan sings *Mr. Wonderful* with enthusiasm and effortlessly switches keys during a Latinized version of *That Ole Devil Moon*.

The Trio is again featured, this time on *How Am I To Know?* and display a special togetherness throughout.

Tenderly makes a second appearance, and Vaughan do to the programs coming to it's conclusion, sings an unusual one-chorus version of *Linger Awhile*. This well-rounded set finally concludes with a joyful interpretation of *S' Wonderful*.

Having heard Sarah Vaughan in two club settings, the 1960 performances feature the singer at the New York Jazz Festival performing before over 15,000 fans at Madison Square Garden. Joined by pianist Ronnell Bright, bassist Richard Davis and drummer Percy Brice, Vaughan shows that she is at home in every situation, sounding quite confident throughout the concert and singing at her most creative. On *What Is This Thing Called Love?*, she also scats the melody of *Hot House* and riffs passionately during the third chorus.

Gone With The Wind is given probably the most dramatic version that the ballad ever received. In contrast, *All Of Me* is very playful as Vaughan twists the tune around and makes it work for her.

Sarah Vaughan completely changes the melody of *Don't Blame Me* and constructs an adventurous statement, nailing every note.

She breezes through an uptempo version of *Just One Of Those Things* before showing why she owned *Misty*. The Erroll Garner tune was already a standard as an instrumental but few vocalists could sing those wide intervals so perfectly, particularly the low notes. However, Sarah makes it all sound effortless and natural, as well as giving the

lyrics a special feeling.

The concert concludes with a performance of *Sometimes I'm Happy*. Sarah follows the melody statement by scatting seven wild choruses. Her sound is glorious, her inventive use of different syllables propels the music forward, and the notes she chooses are worthy of the best trumpeters and saxophonists at their most inspired. After the audience makes it obvious that they want more, Vaughan returns for three additional choruses that do not repeat any of the ideas from the previous seven. This is some of her most exciting scatting ever and, taken as a whole, the 1960 set features her at the peak of her powers.

The music heard throughout *Live & S'Wonderful* would be the highpoint of most singer's careers, but Sarah Vaughan was capable of greatness every time she opened her mouth.

Scott Yanow, author of ten books including *The Jazz Singers*, *Trumpet Kings*, *Jazz On Film*, *Swing* and *Jazz On Record 1917-76*.

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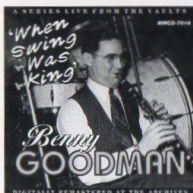
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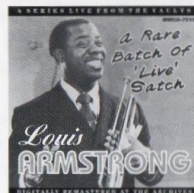
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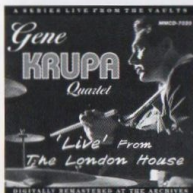
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Discography:

3/31/53 - BIRDLAND, NYC -

- 1) Tenderly (2:59)
(Gross-Lawrence)
- 2) I Get A Kick Out Of You (3:18)
(Porter)
- 3) You're Mine, You (3:08)
(Green-Heyman)
- 4) Perdido (3:13)
(Tizol-Drake)

Personnel: John Malachi - piano, Wyatt
"Bull" Ruther - bass, Fats Heard - drums,

5/21/56 - ZARDI'S JAZZLAND, HOLLYWOOD, CA

- 5) The Nearness Of You (3:07)
(Carmichael-Washington)
- 6) Sometimes I'm Happy (2:16)
(Robin-Grey-Youmans)
- 7) Just Squeeze Me - Trio (3:44)
(Ellington)
- 8) Mr. Wonderful (3:36)
(Bock)
- 9) That Old Devil Moon (2:28)
(Lane-Harburg)
- 10) How Am I To Know? - Trio (3:06)
(King-Parker)
- 11) Tenderly (2:31)
(Gross-Lawrence)

- 12) Linger Awhile (1:18)
(Rose-Owens)
- 13) S'Wonderful (2:27)
(Gershwin-Gershwin)

Personnel: Jimmy Jones - piano, Joe
Benjamin - bass, Roy Haynes - drums

6/2/60 - NEW YORK JAZZ FESTIVAL, MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NYC

- 14) What Is This Thing
Called Love? (2:09)
(Porter)
- 15) Gone With The Wind (3:03)
(Wrubel-Magidson)
- 16) All Of Me (2:27)
(Simon-Marks)
- 17) Don't Blame Me (3:03)
(McHugh-Fields)
- 18) Just One Of Those Things (2:52)
(Porter)
- 19) Misty (4:11)
(Garner-Burke)
- 20) Jammin' On Sometimes
I'm Happy (7:25)
(Robin-Grey-Youmans)

Personnel: Ronnell Bright - piano,
Richard Davis - bass, Percy Brice - drums

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Sarah Vaughan - 'Live' and S' Wonderful

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- 3) *You're Mine, You* (3:08)
- 4) *Perdido* (3:13)

5/21/56 - ZARDI'S JAZZLAND, HOLLYWOOD, CA

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- 7) *Just Squeeze Me- Trio* (3:44)
- 8) *Mr. Wonderful* (3:36)
- 9) *That Old Devil Moon* (2:28)
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- 11) *Tenderly* (2:31)

12) *Linger Awhile* (1:18)13) *S' Wonderful* (2:27)

6/2/60 - NEW YORK JAZZ FESTIVAL, MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NYC

- 14) *What Is This Thing
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- 15) *Gone With The Wind* (3:30)
- 16) *All Of Me* (2:27)
- 17) *Don't Blame Me* (3:03)
- 18) *Just One Of Those Things* (2:52)
- 19) *Misty* (4:11)
- 20) *Jammin' On Sometimes
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Complete Discographical
Information On The Inside

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