



1. SERENATA
(M. Parrish - L. Anderson)
2. MY DEAR LITTLE SWEETHEART
(Johnny Smith - George Weis)
3. THE GREEN LEAVES OF SUMMER
(P.F. Webster - D. Tiomkin)
4. THEM THERE EYES
(Pinkard - Tracey-Tauber)
5. DON'T GO TO STRANGERS
(Evans - Kent - Mann)
6. LOVE
(Blane - Martin)
7. WHAT'S THE USE
(Watts - Mosley)
8. WALLFLOWER WALTZ
(J. Segal - M. Fisher)
9. TRUE BELIEVER
(McCoy - Lebowsky)
10. APRIL
11. IF NOT FOR YOU
12. OH, LOVER
(McCoy - Lebowsky)
13. ONE MINT JULEP
(R. Toombs)
14. MAMA, HE TREATS YOUR DAUGHTER MEAN
(Wallace - Lance - Singleton)

BACK IN the Sixties, it wasn't too easy for many of the well-established (meaning, usually, pre-rock) singers to make significant inroads into the pop-singles charts. For the out-and-out jazz vocalists, it proved to be more often than not a downright impossibility...

Mind you, the seemingly impossible did sometimes happen. When even the greatest jazz performers like, say, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Peggy Lee, or Sarah Vaughan managed somehow to chalk up the odd pop hit, here and there for the most part, on their own musical/artistic terms. But with the continued enormous growth of rock (in its incipient and fast-developing forms), the record business had begun to question the automatic use of the admittedly much-used standard-pop material — except, of course, for rock 'n' roll-type 'updating' purposes. Moreover, many of the record company moguls of the period were even daring to urge their non-rock vocal artists to think about making a gradual — sometimes faster than that — switch to more contemporary numbers (complete, often with what the cynics had every right to feel were totally inappropriate accompaniments). Not at all surprising, too, the majority of the established vocal fraternity balked at the kind of propositioning that was to become more commonplace as the Swinging Sixties unfolded.

Sarah Vaughan's move to Roulette Records — after lengthy associations with two major companies: Columbia (1949-1953), Mercury (1953-1959) — came at a period of an already distinguished career, when it seemed not unreasonable to predict she would become an even bigger star. Acceptable to an evern wider — and truly international — audience; an audience which would continue to expand far beyond the confines of her admittedly loyal — and still-growing — jazz following. The type who'd prefer to check out Sarah Vaughan's latest 45rpm single release, rather than the next album, and probably would be less interested in the out-and-out jazz discs.

This is in no way to suggest that Sarah had been hit-less before joining Roulette's fast-growing roster. For instance, in much earlier times, she's scored impressively with titles like "TENDERLY", "IT'S MAGIC" (both from Musicraft) and "MAKE YOURSELF MORE COMFORTABLE" (Mercury), the second of which became Musicraft's most successful release. And despite the breakthrough of rock 'n' roll, she continued to attract the keen attention of the singles-chart collectors, who helped make further Mercury releases into sizeable hits — "HOW IMPORTANT CAN IT BE?", "WHATEVER LOLA WANTS" (a major, sixth place hit), "EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY", "C'EST LA VIE" — all from 1955, the year rock 'n' roll came of age — followed by "MR. WONDERFUL", "FABULOUS CHARACTER" — both from '56 — then, "THE BANANA BOAT SONG" ('57) and "BROKEN-HEARTED MELODY" ('59). Sarah's first really significant UK hit during this period had materialised in 1957, with "PASSING STRANGERS". A warm, straight-down-the-line pop-type duet with close

friend and ex-boss, Billy Eckstine, which retains its popularity today. It had the temerity to return to the British charts a mere twelve years later — and peaking five places higher than in '57, at No.20, into the bargain. But it was to be “BROKEN-HEARTED that would become her highest-placed chart entry in these parts, rising to a most commendable seventh spot during a thirteen-week stay, during the latter part of 1959.

No doubt, Teddy Reig and his fellow producers/A&R executive at Roulette must have harboured high hopes that they could help Sarah Vaughan achieve a similar string of hits when she joined the label... maybe, even, they could effect an increase on her previous Hit Parade entries, both in the States and Britain, as well, of course, as in numerous other international territories.

Sadly, though, it was not to be. In hindsight, it's all too easy to make rash judgements, or to speculate wildly, as to why this great artiste failed to capitalise on those previous triumphs. It might have been that the repertoire (or at least part of it) wasn't really strong enough to make any real impact during those often-torrid musical times... same with the kind of backgrounds provided for her. Totally professional though she was, at all times, perhaps Sarah's heart wasn't always into the task of competing with the Sixties charts, with their almost total orientation towards the younger market. (No chance, either, that Sarah would have agreed to make any artistic compromises, for whatever ultimate gain; not that there is any evidence that Reig & Co. propositioned her in any would-be tasteless gimmicks, for chart-entry purposes). Basically, the reason for the lack of consistent Hit Parade success for Sarah Vaughan during her Roulette Years (or, for that matter, thereafter) was due almost entirely to the overwhelming domination of rock, in its myriad forms. A fate which befall all but a small handful of the great lady's contemporaries, male as well as female.

Though this situation was often less than satisfying for vocalists like Sarah at this time, there was at least the consolation of knowing that, helpful as singles hits could be, they'd graduated to the honourable status of being known, better and better, by record fans who were regular collectors of long-playing albums. A position that the Divine One was to preserve — handsomely and consistently — during her four year Roulette stint. (Like, for example, her magnificent AFTER HOURS set, the first of what is certain to be a solid Vaughan-on-Roulette reissue programme during the foreseeable future, and a series of real importance...)

From the very first Roulette singles session, a regular policy of selecting repertoire, both old and new, appears to have been the order of the day. At that initial date (May 5, 1960), Sarah was offered three new titles — “MY DEAR LITTLE SWEETHEART” music by Johnny Smith, a popular jazz guitarist at that time) “LET'S” and “OOH, WHAT A DAY”, — plus “SERENATA” (first published in 1950,

as a Leroy Anderson-composed instrumental piece, to which Mitchell Parish has subsequently added a lyric). Not too much was to be heard of either “SWEETHEART”, or its flipside “OOH, WHAT A DAY”, although Sarah, of course, sang beautifully throughout both. But she reserved her finest work of the date for “SERENATA”, her second Roulette single release (backed with “LET'S”). And it was Sarah's sublime reading of “SERENATA” which gave her the only real contender for Hit Parade honours during the Roulette days, in Britain at least, where it commenced a brief, three-week stay in the charts at the end of 1960, climbing just inside the Top Forty; then, reappearing, ten places below, at the beginning of February '61, for a solitary one week...

Musical director at the first Roulette session was Joe Reisman. Reisman, a former saxophonist-sideman with the bands of Sam Donahue, Bob Crosby and Louis Prima, has worked as personal arranger for Patti Page (1955-1959); and, for RCA, with Perry Como and the Ames Brothers. An always reliable, if not spectacularly creative, writer, Reisman's sympathetic, uncluttered scores were present at three separate Vaughan dates for Roulette. The second and third occasions took place in January, '61.

From the first of these, came the coupling of “WHAT'S THE USE?” and “TRUE BELIEVER”. The latter an obvious attempt at chart-climbing. At best, an ordinary ditty, that Sarah handles in a capable, if perfunctory, way. The flip — on old Isham Jones — Chrls Newman number — is more her style; not surprisingly, she sounds more relaxed and comfortable. The rather twee-sounding “WALLFLOWER WALTZ”, hardly inspirational fare, receives an undeservedly consummate reading from Sarah. Still, it remained unreleased and neglected for a couple of years. Dallas-born Reisman's final collaborations with Sarah on this particular collection are concerned with three further additions to the singer's discography — and they're even more of a collective rarity than “WALLFLOWER WALTZ”. Indeed, two of the titles taped on this occasion — four days after the previous Vaughan/Reisman get-together — the wistful “APRIL” and “OH, LOVER!”, a Sixties-styled opus, with obvious chart inclinations, were issued back to back, in the US only, and have not been made available again, anywhere, until this time. And “IF NOT FOR YOU”, a period love-ballad that Sarah treats with touching sincerity, is receiving its first-time release in any territory as part of the “THE SINGLES SESSIONS”.

The two other arrangers who feature herein are much better-known — and both have worked with an impressive variety of top rated singers. The veteran Billy May's scores for the Los Angeles session with Sarah, in October 1960, together represent the one-and-only occasion they worked within a recording studio. As an arranger for vocal performers, May's record (no pun intended) already ranked with the best. The credit

list had been impressive indeed: Sinatra, Cole, O'Day, Lee, Tormé, Fitzgerald, Crosby, Clooney, D'Rone... to name but several. The sole Vaughan/May session is interesting also because three of the four titles comprised standard-pop repertoire. And even the one new number — "THE GREEN LEAVES OF SUMMER", a Dmitri Tiomkin theme, written for the 1960 John Wayne movie, *The Alamo*, with a Paul Francis Webster lyric as a bonus — is cast in the classic standard format. Whether or not this October date was intended at the outset to be the first in the completion, later, of another Vaughan-with-big-band album, is not at all certain. Or maybe Teddy Reig thought an all-standard approach — just this once — might result in a chart contender? Certainly, it wasn't to be a totally productive date. "THE GREEN LEAVES OF SUMMER" was indeed mastered, and scheduled to be the 'A' side for a forthcoming single release in the States, with the highly-contrasting "THEM THERE EYES" as the flip. But even this potent pair never became issued in any other country. Moreover, both "DON'T GO TO STRANGERS" and "LOVE", the remaining titles, remained unreleased, anywhere, until the present.

Nothing to do with the quality of the vocalising! Or indeed the efforts of May and his musicians. Sarah's phenomenal control, her distinctive vibrato, and all-round effortless delivery ensures that "GREEN LEAVES" receives at least one definitive interpretation on record. "THEM THERE EYES", previously closely associated with Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong, reconfigures the jazz verb, to wail, vocally speaking. Note, too, the strong alto-sax in the bridge, and Sarah's truly climatic ending... The ballad, "DON'T GO TO STRANGERS", a hit in '56 for Vaughn Monroe, has more superlative control, "LOVE" is well-remembered previously in fine versions by Judy Garland and Lena Horne; it is also a ready-made vehicle for La Vaughan... and, of course, she sails through this kind of breakneck tempo with an almost contemptuous ease.

The third musical director for this set is the redoubtable Quincy Jones. Quincy, not quite 29 when he conducted a presumably star-studded studio orchestra at the early-February session in 1962, was already something of a youthful veteran. A composer-arranger of considerable skills, he'd been associated principally with big-band writing — most notably, Basie, Gillespie, Hampton (for whom he also played in the trumpet section), as well with his own (mostly pickup) outfits. Jones had first recorded with Sarah Vaughan at a Paris record date, in 1958, when he was working for the local Barclay Records company. It's in no way an impossibility that it was he who might have suggested that, for their first studio meeting at Roulette, Sarah should record Rudolph Toombs' blues-based "ONE MINT JULEP" — Jones, after all, is one of Ray Charles' biggest fans, having known that extraordinary talent since both were in their teens. Certainly,

Sarah responds, not only to the built-in rhythmic-emotional contents of the song but also to Quincy's excitement-building arrangement (with room for a torrid trumpet solo). Her own spontaneous aside "Just a little spot of soul, now!" is the perfection summation of a marvellous vocal-instrumental performance. And Sarah wails, in prescribed fashion, on the funky "MAMA, HE TREATS YOUR DAUGHTER MEAN". If there had been any real justice in the early-Sixties record world — which, of course, there wasn't: much like today! — the coupling of these two uplifting performances would have resulted in a single release that roared to the upper regions of any Hit Parade, in no time at all... well, at least we have the great pleasure of hearing both sides, with the benefit of modern-day sounds enhancement, all these years later...

And no matter that not all the material to be found within this most intriguing collection proved to be as inspirational as the Jones-arranged cuts. Let's be thankful that the Roulette vaults continue to be re-examined, with microscopic care, by the redoubtable Michael Cuscuna, and the treasures of one as ineluctably gifted as Sarah Vaughan are made available, once again.

When Sarah died, at her Californian home, on April 3rd, we lost one of the great singing voices of this century. Thank God, the inimitable voice was recorded at regular intervals for most of her lifetime's involvement with music. For those who, even at this stage, are fairly new to the pleasurable pastime of appreciating this unique talent, "THE SINGLES SESSIONS" provides yet another reason to visit your favourite record shop. And as Vaughan discographer, and long-time good friend, Denis Brown, summarises, admirably: "The whole album gives a finely-balanced offering, to delight Sarah's many fans, with numerous standout tracks — and, of course, the added interest of those previously unissued titles..."

Further comment unnecessary. Except the obvious recommendaton to treat this disc with extra care — and play frequently.

With special thanks to Fred Dellar, Denis Brown.

STAN BRITT (Music Week)

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Produced for release by MICHAEL CUSCUNA
All selections except "Serenata" were mixed to digital
from the original 3 track master tapes
at Abbey Road Studios, London
Remix Engineer: TRISTAN POWELL
Photo: DAVID REDFERN

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