



SHOUT, SISTER, SHOUT!

Ten Girl Singers Who Shaped a Century

ROXANE ORGILL

MARGARET K. McELDERRY BOOKS
New York London Toronto Sydney Singapore



Bessie Smith liked elaborate clothes, and especially head wear, in the 1920s. This photo is signed, "To Palmida, my gown designer."

(FRANK DRIGGS COLLECTION)



BESSIE SMITH

Empress of the Blues

BESSIE SMITH was twenty-eight years old when she entered a recording studio for the first time on February 15, 1923. She was wearing a new dress, a gift from her boyfriend, Jack Gee, who had pawned his night watchman's uniform and his pocket watch to buy it. Bessie faced a large cone-shaped horn that protruded from a drapery-covered wall, as this was a time before microphones. The engineer stood behind the wall, peering into the studio from a small window. His job was to watch as a stylus picked up vibrations from the horn and cut a groove in a revolving wax disc—the master from which a record would be pressed.

Recording technology was in its infancy, so there was no editing, no listening to playbacks. Bessie and her piano player, Clarence Williams, simply had to perform a number over and over until the Columbia Records producer, Frank Walker, announced a successful "take."

Bessie must have been nervous: She sang the first song, "Tain't Nobody's Bizness If I Do," nine times, and the second, "Down Hearted Blues," twice, whereupon the producer told everybody to go home and come back the following day.

The next day, on the third take of "Down Hearted Blues," Clarence Williams played the short introduction in steady, if rather plodding, ragtime. Bessie came in a little tentatively, singing, "Gee, but it's hard to love someone when that someone don't love yooo," and gained confidence as

The Blues Aren't Always Blue

The blues is a kind of black American folk music that takes the form of a song or an instrumental piece, often for guitar or piano and, most important, the blues is personal. Whereas a popular song might relate the story of “the doggie in the window” or “some enchanted evening,” a blues song is about the singer’s (or songwriter’s) own experiences.

Usually the personal experience involves trouble of one sort or another: lost love, crime, imprisonment, alcohol, natural disasters. There are humorous blues songs, however, such as “Sorrowful Blues,” in which Bessie sings about having nineteen men and wanting just one more. And there are occasional songs about social protest, like “Poor Man’s Blues,” which Bessie wrote, asking a rich man to give to a poor man in hard times.

The blues were originally sung by ex-slaves struggling to eke out a living after Emancipation, but the feelings expressed—anger, fear, despair, and occasional joy—are timeless and universal. People continue to listen to the blues because when they hear someone else express the feelings that they have, even dark, gloomy feelings, they generally feel a little better. Or, as songwriter W. C. Handy said, “The blues came from nothingness, from want, from desire. And when [someone] sang or played the blues, a small part of the want was satisfied from the music.”

the song went on. By the time she got to “Trouble, trouble, I’ve had it all my days,” she was singing full out, her voice strong and sure.

Walker pronounced the third take “satisfactory”; he did the same with the song on the flip side, “Gulf Coast Blues.” (A 78 rpm record had one song to each side. A singer got paid only for the sides that were pronounced satisfactory, not the rejects.)

Bessie’s record sold 780,000 copies in just six months. She would become the highest-paid black entertainer of her time, and rightly deserve the title “Empress of the Blues.”

Bessie was not, however, the first to sing the blues on recording. Mamie Smith, no relation to Bessie, got there first, in 1920. Mamie used an all-black band as accompaniment—a daring move at the time, since only white bands were recording the new music called “jazz.”

“Crazy Blues,” by “Mamie Smith and Her Jazz Hounds,” was a phenomenally successful record that launched the boom in blues singing and started a whole new industry called “race records”—recordings made by and for blacks.

Although the term “race records” may sound derogatory today, in the 1920s, it was acceptable, even appealing, to blacks. “Race” was an expression of pride; blacks referred to themselves as the Negro race, or “the race,” for short, implying a sense of brotherhood. When records by lady blues singers started selling, record companies were quick to pair the word

“race” with “records” as a way of appealing to black consumers. Most, but not all, of the race records were by female blues singers.

The success of Mamie’s “Crazy Blues” made the recording industry pay attention to the Negro market for the first time. Previously the record business had assumed that blacks couldn’t afford phonographs. Not only could “the race” come up with the money for phonographs—\$28.95 for a Silver-tone windup “Ideal” model from Sears—but it eagerly purchased records, at seventy-five cents apiece, as fast as the companies could make them. When whites discovered the music, they, too, eagerly bought race records, particularly Bessie’s.

If she was powerful on recording, “Miss Bessie” was positively mesmerizing in person. Standing five feet nine inches tall and weighing about two hundred pounds, Bessie walked with the stately grace of a queen. Her eyes shone, and she flashed a bright smile.

“Bessie was a real woman, all woman, all the femaleness the world ever saw in one sweet package,” said Mezz Mezzrow, a friend, clarinetist, and saxophonist from Chicago. “She was tall and brown-skinned, with great big dimples creasing her cheeks, dripping good looks—just this side of voluptuous, buxom and massive, but stately, too, shapely as a hourglass, with a high-voltage magnet for a personality.”

Bessie was born in 1894 and grew up terribly poor in what she described as a “little ramshackle cabin” in Chattanooga, Tennessee. By the time she was nine years old, her father—a laborer and part-time Baptist preacher—and her mother and a brother were dead (probably from illness and lack of medical care, although the reasons are unknown), leaving Bessie’s oldest sister, Viola, in charge of five children.

Bessie Smith in 1936, in a photograph taken by Carl Van Vechten, a white photographer and writer who helped introduce Bessie to white audiences. He wrote: “Her face was beautiful, with the rich, ripe beauty of southern darkness. . . .”

(LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



What's New?

Phonograph

In the 1920s the windup phonograph playing two-sided records became the norm (previously, records had only one side). The first electrical recording, with a microphone, took place in 1925. Phonographs went electric soon after electrical recording was introduced.

Radio

The first radio sets consisted of several components that the owner assembled to make a receiver, and an ear tube for listening. In 1924 the cumbersome system was replaced by the “radio music box,” which was a big hit with consumers. Radio threatened to replace the phonograph because the quality of sound reproduction was better, and the music was free. The first commercial radio station was WWJ in Detroit, established in 1920. By 1929, nearly seven hundred radio stations were operating in the United States, and radio had become a national obsession.

Bessie’s first radio broadcast took place in Atlanta, Georgia, in June 1923, the same month her first record was released.

Jukebox

The first coin-slot machine with electronic amplification and a multirecord changer was built in 1927. Dancing, or “jooking,” to records was especially popular in the South, which gave the machine its name, jukebox. The boxes could be found in bars, restaurants and cafés, variety stores, bus stations, and even barbershops and beauty parlors.

“Talkies”

Talking pictures, or movies, replaced silent films and helped kill vaudeville in the 1920s. The first talking picture was produced in 1927 and was actually a “singie”: *The Jazz Singer*, featuring Al Jolson, the dancer and singer. The first real talkie was *Tenderloin*, an eighty-eight-minute film of which only fifteen minutes were dialogue, in 1928. By 1929, more than eight thousand sound-film theaters were operating in the United States.

Bessie made just one movie, the seventeen-minute *St. Louis Blues*, in 1929. In it, a guy named Jimmy throws her to the floor, kicks and robs her, and she ends up sitting in a bar, singing into her beer about her man with “a heart like a rock.”



A boy plays a record on a windup gramophone (phonograph) in the South in the 1930s.

(LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

Maud Smith, recalled the day the railroad car was delivered to the troupe in a small Georgia town. “Everybody was so excited, and we laughed and carried on as we walked through the car and examined every corner. And what a difference it made—some of the towns we hit didn’t have hotels for us, so we used to have to spread out, one staying here, another one there. Now we could just live on the train.”

The bright yellow car was seventy-eight feet long and had seven state-rooms that each slept four, a kitchen, a bathroom with hot and cold water, a lower level to accommodate thirty-five people, a storeroom for the big tent and the cases of soft drinks, Cracker Jack, and peanuts, and a corridor long enough to transport the tent’s center pole. Bessie often did the cooking herself, working up a pot of pig’s feet or stew for the musicians, chorus girls, prop boys—everybody.

Bessie shared her wealth, supporting her sisters and their children, and eventually buying a house for them near her own house, in Philadelphia. Her sisters responded with an act of generosity: When Bessie and Jack adopted a six-year-old boy, Jack Jr., in 1926, the sisters cared for him while Bessie was on the road, which was most of the time. Bessie also gave lots of money away, to anyone, strangers included, who needed it.

Generous as she was, Bessie was far from saintly. Although she showered her husband with expensive clothes and jewelry, she was frequently unfaithful to him (as he was unfaithful to her), and their fights often turned violent on both sides. Bessie had a terrible temper. If she caught a woman flirting with her husband or one of her lovers, it was nothing for Bessie to pull the woman’s hair out and beat her, sometimes to the point of unconsciousness.

Bessie was especially ornery around white people. Unlike Ma Rainey, whose world was predominantly black people, Bessie, who was more famous, had plenty of contact with the white world. She performed at parties held by wealthy white people, for example. She was suspicious of their welcome, knowing full well that they would never permit a black elevator operator in their home, but they would invite her because she could entertain them. As she was leaving one party in New York, the white hostess stopped her. “Miss Smith,” said the hostess, throwing her

of You.” Or she competed fiercely with him, singing, “Anything you can do, I can do better, I can do anything better than you,” as the real-life, pistol-toting Annie Oakley, star of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show.

In *Annie Get Your Gun* she got to show her softer side when she sang “I Got Lost in His Arms.” Her voice is awestruck, almost sweet as she sings, “And I said to my heart as it foolishly kept jumping all around: I got lost, but look what I found.” “It was Irving Berlin’s lyrics that made a lady out of me,” Ethel said gratefully. (Berlin said, “If you write lyrics for Ethel, they better be good, for if they’re bad everybody’s going to hear them.”) The musical lasted two years and eight months, the longest run of any of Ethel’s shows. Wisely, Ethel had insisted on getting 10 percent of the receipts,

W HAT ETHEL WORE

- ★ In a vaudeville show at the Brooklyn Paramount Theater in 1930, Ethel sang four times a day between showings of the movie and wore a flashy, short black dress covered with shiny jet (dense, black, polished coal) beads and ribbons and bows. “*I was the girl who went all out for everything.*”
- ★ In *Red, Hot and Blue!* (1936), Ethel shimmered in a gold dress of paillettes, or long, narrow spangles. On the back was a bustle decorated with a hen sitting in a nest. After the first performance, Ethel strode into her dressing room, fuming. “*The bird goes,*” she said, grabbing a pair of scissors. “*Any audience gets a laugh out of me, gets it while I’m looking at ‘em.*” She chopped off the hen.
- ★ In *Call Me Madam* (1950), she wore a silver lamé gown with a long train, which she had to pick up and throw between her legs in order to walk. Ethel told the dressmaker, “*I don’t mind a train but you needn’t have given me the Super Chief.*”
- ★ Offstage, Ethel wore good jewelry, buying a “*big wad*” of it after every one of her musicals, to remember the show by. For *Panama Hattie* (1940), the first show in which she got top billing, with her name in lights on the theater marquee, she bought a bracelet of two rows of rubies separated by ETHEL A. MERMAN spelled out in diamonds. After all of her jewelry was stolen in a burglary in 1970, Ethel shopped only at flea markets. When she was invited to the White House, she wore a fake diamond brooch she had bought for three dollars.
- ★ For her everyday dresses, Ethel looked for bargains on Fifth Avenue, for forty or fifty dollars. She favored hemlines at the knee, and pumps with heels to show off her legs to their best advantage. Ethel splurged on evening gowns, which she bought at Wilma’s on West 57th Street. Example: a mink-trimmed chartreuse gown for \$550.



which meant she earned a total of \$4,700 a week, when the average doctor in America was earning \$206 weekly.

Ethel took a businesslike attitude to her work. Later in life, after she sang a concert in London, the audience begged for encores for ten minutes. She thanked them and declined to sing any more. “I haven’t any more music rehearsed,” she said. Theater critic Kenneth Tynan wrote, “Professional to the gilded hilt, she would not insult her admirers by giving them anything less than perfection.”

During rehearsals Ethel noted every word of a director’s instructions in shorthand, typed the notes out at home, and returned the next day fully prepared. As much as she demanded of herself, Ethel was also demanding of others. In *Red, Hot, and Blue!* she was supposed to sing the line, “Here I sit above the town in my pet pailletted gown” (a gown covered in paillettes, or flat, long, narrow spangles). She wanted such a dress to sing in. “But a pailletted gown would cost a thousand dollars!” protested the producer. “No gown, no song,” Ethel replied. She got the gown.

Ethel’s life offstage was as glamorous as the gowns she wore onstage. With Cole Porter and his wife and other celebrities, Ethel moved in a New York social circle known in the press as “café society.” Members of this elite set frequented the top clubs, gave fantastic parties, and stayed out till dawn. Ethel had the roomy apartment she shared with her parents, owned lots of furs and expensive jewelry, but she did remain close to her middle-class roots in some ways. She sold her Chrysler touring car and dismissed her chauffeur, saying she found it was easier to walk or take a taxi. She kept the household accounts herself, accurate to the penny. She called herself a meat and potatoes woman and disdained fancy restaurants, but her favorite drink was champagne.

In the 1940s she settled down a little. Her first marriage, to Bill Smith, an actor’s agent, was over within days, but a second marriage, to newspaperman Robert Levitt, produced two children, Ethel (whose nickname was Ethel, Jr., although she detested it) and Robert, Jr. (called Bobby). The family moved to a ten-room duplex apartment with a huge terrace, in Ethel’s apartment building. She was as attentive to her children as her grueling schedule of eight shows a week would permit, but her marriage faltered. Ethel said that her husband resented his wife being more famous and earning



JUDY GARLAND

The Girl Next Door

THE CAST of teenagers was assembled in costume, on a trolley. The crew was ready to shoot the scene. But one actress was missing, the figure around whom the whole scene would revolve. Twenty-one-year-old Judy Garland was in her dressing room, refusing to come out.

Actress Mary Astor, who was playing Judy's mother, knocked on Judy's door. "Judy, what's happened to you? You were a trouper—once," she said.

Judy didn't reply.

"You have kept the entire company out there waiting for two hours," Mary continued. "Waiting for you to favor us with your presence. You know we're stuck—there's nothing we can do without you."

Judy giggled and said she had heard that from others in the cast.

"Well, then, either get the hell on set or I'm going home," Miss Astor shouted.

Eventually Judy did emerge, and played one of her best scenes, in the movie *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). Judy's riding the trolley with her friends when the boy she is crazy about hops aboard, which causes her to burst into song: "Zing, zing, zing went my heart strings. "Her bright voice sounds at once breathless and secure. Her brown button eyes are shining and she glides through the trolley car. Anyone watching can't take their eyes off of her.

Judy Garland was one of the most difficult movie stars in Hollywood. She suffered from physical and emotional problems, which constantly



Movie stars of the 1940s were expected to be glamorous: Judy Garland posing for a fashion shoot for *Photoplay-Movie Mirror* magazine in 1942.

(MUSEUM OF MODERN ART FILM STILLS ARCHIVE)



Judy Garland was fifteen and Sophie Tucker was fifty when they made a movie together called *Broadway Melody of 1938*. Sophie played Judy's mother.

(BROADWAY MELODY OF 1938 © 1937 TURNER ENTERTAINMENT CO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.)

a script once—and never flubbed a line,” said Joe Pasternak, who produced four of her movies. “She learned a musical number in no time and she gave it her all. Very seldom did you have to make two takes with her. This was very unusual—a normal musical comedy star would take three or four weeks to learn a number.”

Dancer-actor Gene Kelly, who starred with Judy in the movie *The Pirate*, called Judy “the finest all-round performer we ever had in America.” She could not only sing, but she could act, dance, and make people laugh.

Judy Garland was born Frances Gumm on June 10, 1922, to a pair of former vaudevillians who owned a movie theater in the small town of Grand Rapids, Minnesota. Vaudeville was nearing its end, soon to be replaced by the movies, but people still enjoyed vaudeville as “An Extra Added Attraction” at the picture show. One evening the Gumms hired three little girls called the Blue Sisters to perform at intermission, and Frances sat entranced, bouncing up and down, humming along. When the performance was over, she asked, “Can I do that, Daddy?”

A few months later Frances joined her two older sisters at their parents’ theater, singing “When My Sugar Walks Down the Street” and doing a tap dance. At the end she sang “Jingle Bells” by herself, over and over, as the audience asked for more. She was two years old.

delayed production, added to movies’ costs, and generally drove coworkers, particularly producers and directors, crazy with frustration. But when Judy worked, she *worked*, throwing every inch of her five-foot frame into the scene at hand. There was no sign, in any of her thirty-six movies, of the trouble it took for her to make them.

She was a phenomenally quick study. “Judy looked at

“The roar of the crowd—that wonderful, wonderful sound—is something I’ve been breathing in since I was two years old,” Judy said years later, after she had become addicted to several kinds of medication. “It’s like taking nineteen hundred wake-up pills.”

When the Gumm Sisters became an act, it was little Frances who attracted the most notice. “All do so well in their specialties that the discrimination of special mention is hardly just, but the remarkable work of Baby Frances particularly appeals to hearers because of her diminutive size and few years,” wrote a reviewer in Los Angeles. Frances was seven years old.

At twelve, she was “a roly poly girl with eyes like saucers,” according to one observer. She also had a new name. “Judy” came from a popular song with a lyric Frances liked: “If you think she’s a saint and you find out she ain’t, that’s Judy.” “Garland” came about when an actor who thought “Gumm” unflattering introduced the Gumm sisters as “the Garland Sisters,” in Chicago.

Meanwhile, in Hollywood, movie studios were signing up lots of child actors for the happy-go-lucky family pictures that the public wanted to see. Judy got an audition at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), one of the so-called “Big Five” studios, in Culver City, California. “She sang ‘Zing, Went the Strings of My Heart,’ and I almost fell off the piano bench,” said Roger Edens, who accompanied Judy on the piano. “[She] couldn’t read music, but [she] didn’t have to. Her talent was inborn.”

Judy signed her first MGM contract when she was thirteen years old, for one hundred dollars a week for seven years. Astoundingly, considering her later success and MGM’s many renewals of that contract, the studio didn’t know what to do with Judy at first. It took two years for them to cast

Judy Garland at twenty-one, standing on the trolley in the movie *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

(MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS © 1944 TURNER ENTERTAINMENT CO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.)



What's New?

Pop Music on TV

Your Hit Parade went from radio to television in 1950, because, for the first time, more Americans were watching TV than listening to the radio. The most popular feature of the show was Ten Top Tunes of the Week, which might have included a novelty song like Rosemary Clooney's "Come On-a My House," or a romantic ballad like "I'll See You in My Dreams" by Doris Day. The yardstick for selecting Top Tunes was never disclosed, although reference was made to sale of sheet music, jukebox plays, record sales, and performances on radio and television. The show ended in 1959, killed in part by rock and roll and by *American Bandstand*.

American Bandstand went on the air as a live, national TV show on August 5, 1957. The host, Dick Clark, played rock-and-roll records while teenagers danced the latest dances, like the Bunny Hop and the Stroll. By that time, jazz was out of the mainstream and no longer considered dance music, so 20 million kids rushed home from school to watch *American Bandstand* each afternoon from 2:30 to 5:30. The teenagers who appeared onscreen had to be at least fourteen and follow a strict dress code: jackets for the boys, and skirts for girls; and no jeans, tight-fitting sweaters, or T-shirts. Occasionally performers like Connie Francis ("Where the Boys Are") and Jerry Lee Lewis ("Great Balls of Fire") made live appearances, but they always lip-synched, or mimed the words, to records. The show ran for thirty-two years.

catch a performance by one of them, and almost invariably meet his or her "connection," or dealer. In the top New York City jazz club Birdland, the dealer could be found in the men's room with his packages laid out in full view on the windowsill. The Village Vanguard, another premier spot in Manhattan, was even more accommodating; it had a little room the size of a closet behind the stage where musicians cooked up dope and got their fix before going onstage.

Anita's constant companion in the late 1950s was John Poole, her drummer friend who had introduced her to heroin in 1954. "We were spending ten to twelve hours a day looking for [heroin] and playing games. I couldn't guess how much we spent on cosmetics I'd never wear and sundries John would never use just so we could add, 'Oh yes, and hypodermic needles for my vitamin shots.' It was hilarious. Who did we think we were fooling?"

The games ended for Anita when she overdosed on heroin in a ladies' rest room in Los Angeles on March 4, 1968. Fortunately, the friend who had

supplied the drug found Anita unconscious and got her to a hospital, where a doctor jump-started her heart. When she recovered, the drug police were looking for her. She hocked her television set for plane fare and flew to Hawaii, where John Poole was living. He had kicked his own drug habit and encouraged Anita to do likewise, with his help. It took four agonizing months, but she finally succeeded.

What's New?

Transistor Radio

The year 1954 saw the first portable "transistor" radio, powered by small batteries. By 1957 the Sony Company was making a transistor radio that was small enough to fit into a shirt pocket or the palm of a hand. For the first time young people, the transistor radio's major users, had portable sound, which meant they could listen to music of their own choosing, not their parents'. The pocket-sized radio contributed to the rise of rock and roll and the development of Top 40 radio programming.

Longer range, richer tone... and still pocket-size

Save \$3 New \$20.95 ~~23.95~~ **Save \$5** New \$23.95 ~~28.95~~

Save \$3 Tiny 6-transistor 6-tube pocket Radio... Only \$15.95

Cut \$3 Long-range 7-transistor 6-tube in top-grain cowhide... \$36.95

What's New?

Stereo Records

The first stereo LP (long-playing) records were put on the market in 1957, enabling a listener to hear music through two channels of sound instead of one. Manufacturers designed special cabinets for the twin speakers and phonograph that were guaranteed "to blend perfectly with your lovely furniture."

Records, whether 45s or LPs, stereo or not, have a special importance for jazz. Because the music is not written down for the most part, musicians learn jazz by ear from other musicians. As trumpet player Dizzy Gillespie said, in jazz "each musician is based on someone who went before." The medium for learning who went before was—and is—recordings. Saxophonist Lester Young copied various horn players from records in order to decide whom he wanted to sound like. Anita O'Day admitted openly to imitating Billie Holiday's style after hearing her records.

now's the time to buy your Silvertone Stereo Portable

Now You Save \$10 Stereo Hi-fi with AM Radio... \$49.95

Cut \$20 Portable Stereo Hi-fi with FM-AM Radio!... \$129.95

An alternative to the transistor radio was the portable "stereo hi-fi" (high fidelity) record player, seen here in a Sears Catalog from 1961.

(SEARS ROEBUCK AND CO., PHILADELPHIA, PA)

WHAT BETTE WORE



- ★ In the coffeehouses around 1959, Joan wore a prim white blouse, a dark circle skirt to just past the knee, and flat shoes. She wore her hair long and straight, in sharp contrast to the style of the day, the “bouffant,” short hair teased with a comb into looking high and poofy.
- ★ For her first appearance at the Newport Folk Festival in 1959, Joan made a splash in a bright orange knit and crocheted “rebozo,” a long Mexican shawl lined in silk—“*the fanciest bit of clothing I’d ever worn onstage*”—and “gladiator sandals” with thongs that laced up to just below the knee.
- ★ Her concert dress around 1963 was a simple dress, necklace and bare feet. “*The effect was Biblical but gloomy.*”
- ★ For her wedding in New York City in March 1968 she wore a Grecian-style, off-white floor-length dress and no shoes.
- ★ In the 1970s Joan wore expensive suits from I. Magnin and Saks Fifth Avenue, but she felt guilty about having nice things when the world was full of people who had little. “*I try to ease the guilt by getting four of one outfit and giving three away.*”
- ★ To open the Live-Aid concert in 1985, an international event to ease a horrific famine in Ethiopia, she chose a flowing, yellow silk skirt, a cobalt blue blouse, a leather belt with big silver medallions, a necklace made of spoons, and black sandals studded with rhinestones. Her hair was cropped short.

Manager Russo, meanwhile, was not satisfied with a national tour, a Tony Award (for the Palace run) and a Grammy Award for Best New Artist after Bette’s first album, *The Divine Miss M*. He felt that Bette couldn’t be a true “legend” unless she was in movies. The film he found for her was *The Rose*, about a self-destructive rock star, loosely based on Janis Joplin, who died of a drug overdose. Bette took to the script immediately. She understood Rose’s world and, like Rose, had a domineering, manipulative manager. Bette also loved rock music: “It’s loud and screechy and my favorite kind of music.” She sang the concert scenes before live audiences, who were told to “dress 1969” and scream for “The Rose,” not “Bette.” She didn’t sound like a rock singer, but she looked like one. “What a storm of acting!” gushed *New York Magazine* at the movie’s release in 1979.

By then, Russo was gone. Bette had fired him at the end of 1978, saying, “I outgrew my need for drama.” Unfortunately, because Russo had done so much and Bette had been so depend-

ent on him, she discovered she knew almost nothing about the entertainment business. In a television interview in 1980, looking exhausted and distressed, Bette told Barbara Walters, “I’m very close to falling apart.” But she didn’t. An

agonizing seven years passed between *The Rose* and her next successful movie, but Bette slowly took control of her own career. In 1980 she published an autobiographical book, *A View from a Broad*, which was full of jokes and bawdy stories from a world concert tour she took in 1978. In 1982 Bette assembled a completely new road show, De Tour, which featured the entire DeLago family,



Bette Midler as she appeared on her 1998 *Bathhouse Betty* album.

(WARNER BROS. RECORDS INC.)



ETHEL MERMAN

Annie Get Your Gun. MCA.

Original Broadway cast recording from 1955.

The Ethel Merman Collection: There's No Business Like Show Business.

Razor & Tie Music. Diverse collection of songs from musicals and films.

Gypsy—Original Broadway Cast. Columbia.

From 1959.



JUDY GARLAND

Judy at Carnegie Hall. Capitol.

The best of later Garland, recorded live in 1961 (two discs).

Judy Garland—The Best of the Decca Years. Volume 1. Decca.

Early material, including the original “Over the Rainbow.” There’s also a Volume 2.



ANITA O'DAY

The Complete Anita O'Day Verve/Clef Sessions. Mosaic Records

A boxed set of nine CDs. Available by mail and phone order only, from Mosaic Records in Stamford, Connecticut, phone (203) 327-7111.

Anita Sings the Most. Verve.

A straight reissue of the 1957 LP, with the Oscar Peterson Quartet (including John Poole on drums).

Let Me Off Uptown: Anita O'Day with Gene Krupa. Columbia Legacy.

Pick Yourself Up. Verve.

Reissue of the 1956 album, with nine extra cuts. Includes “Sweet Georgia Brown.”



JOAN BAEZ

Diamonds and Rust. A&M.

Includes her best song (“Diamonds & Rust”) about Bob Dylan, and other contemporary folk-rock songs, from 1975.

Joan Baez—The First Ten Years. Vanguard.

Traditional and contemporary folk songs from 1960 to 1970.

Joan Baez in Concert. Volume 1. Vanguard.

Live album from 1962.

Joan Baez—Rare, Live and Classic. Vanguard.

Boxed set of three discs, with notes by Joan, for the serious listener.



BETTE MIDLER

Bathhouse Betty. Warner Bros.

Later Bette, from 1998.

Bette Midler—Live at Last. Atlantic.

The real thing: a 1977 concert, complete with comic material.

Divine Collection. Atlantic.

Includes early material, as well as her hit songs “Wind Beneath My Wings” and “From a Distance.”

The Divine Miss M. Atlantic.

Her debut album, from 1972. Includes “Friends.”

MADONNA

Madonna: The Immaculate Collection. Sire.

From “Holiday” to “Vogue:” Seventeen hits from the 1980s on one CD.

Like a Prayer. Sire.

Madonna’s most serious and consistent album, from 1989.

Madonna. Sire.

Debut album, from 1983.

Something to Remember. Maverick.

A second compilation, all ballads, with just two tracks overlapping

Madonna: The Immaculate Collection.

ON VIDEO:

Madonna: The Immaculate Collection. Warner Reprise.

Madonna Live: The Virgin Tour. Warner Music Video.



LUCINDA WILLIAMS

Car Wheels on a Gravel Road. Mercury.

The CD that was on many critics’ Top Ten and Top Twenty lists for 1998.

Includes “Jackson” and “Changed the Locks.”

Lucinda Williams. Koch.

Reissue of the 1988 Rough Trade album, with six bonus tracks.



Bessie Smith (April 15, 1894 – September 26, 1937) was an American blues singer. Nicknamed The Empress of the Blues, Smith was the most popular female blues singer of the 1920s and 1930s. She is often regarded as one of the greatest singers of her era and, along with Louis Armstrong, a major | read more. Bessie Smith (April 15, 1894 – September 26, 1937) was an American blues singer. Nicknamed The Empress of the Blues, Smith was the most popular female blues singer of the 1920s and 1930s. Bessie Smith, American singer, one of the greatest blues vocalists. Known as the “Empress of the Blues,” she was a bold, supremely confident artist who sang with breathtaking emotional intensity on such songs as “Down Hearted Blues,” “Empty Bed Blues,” and “Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out.” Smith, Bessie Bessie Smith, photograph by Carl Van Vechten, 1936. Carl Van Vechten Estate/Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. LC-USZ62-11788. Known in her