

JAZZ REVIEW

Simpatico Accompaniment Sets Off Vocalists

By OWEN McNALLY
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Getting just the right sort of accompaniment is often a problem for even the very best of vocalists. Many a singer has met with Titanic disasters and drowned amid the iceberg crowded seas of commercial arrangements which ooze with syrupy strings, whining guitars and retching brass and reed sections.

Other equally unfortunate singers have been bushwhacked by overly earnest or egotistical sidemen who seem to think they have the divine right to take over a concert or recording session to display their own brilliant (or so they think) wares.

What makes the job of casting for accompanists so difficult is that it isn't just a question of getting musicians who can play well. New York City itself is, of course, stocked with a small city-within-a-city of musicians who can play not just well but extremely well. But aside from the requisite technical skills, a singer's backup band has got to have at least one session's worth of empathy and good taste — qualities that are far rarer than technical facility.

Abbey Lincoln, Ernestine Anderson and Helen Humes, three first-rate vocalists and sophisticated ladies of song, have cut quality LPs on which their talents shine in just such sympathetic settings.

Lincoln finds a kindred soul in saxophonist Archie Shepp in her release on Inner City Records, "Golden Lady." Shepp, a one-time *enfant terrible* of the avant-garde, plays a key supportive role here with much warmth and sensitivity. Other members of Lincoln's "kitchen cabinet" are Roy Burroughs, a trumpeter with the Sun Ra Arkestra, Hilton Ruiz, piano, Jack Gregg, bass, and Freddie Waits, drums. The rhythm section was touring Europe with saxophonist Marion Brown at the time this album was cut in Paris.

Ernestine Anderson on her album "Sunshine," a release on Concord Records, has an equally compatible backup group, which consists of pianist Monty Alexander, bassist Ray Brown and drummer Jeff Hamilton. Anderson came to national prominence some years back during her stint with the Lionel Hampton band. More recently, she has been making a "comeback" in the United States after a long stay in England where



Abbey Lincoln

she built up a big following in Europe.

Helen Humes on her Muse Records release, "Helen," has also found compatible compatriots in a sextet whose frontline consists of tenor saxophonist Buddy Tate and trumpeter Joe Wilder. Tate's Texas tenor is just the right complement for Humes on the blues selections. And Wilder's more laid-back style (Milder would be a more apt moniker than Wilder) is just as sympathetic for Humes' ballad style.

Too often Humes has been strictly typecast as a blues singer. She most certainly is a blues singer, one who honed her craft with the Count Basie Band in 1941 when Tate was a key member of the reed section. But there's more to her style than just the blues, as she shows here on pretty renditions of tunes like "Easy Living" and "Why Try to Change Me Now?"

Besides Tate and Wilder, the sextet includes pianist Norman Simmons, a highly-skilled accompanist who has worked for Carmen McRae and Sarah Vaughan; George Duvivier, a

versatile bassist who has worked and recorded with hundreds of top pop and jazz performers; Butch Miles, the drummer for the Basie Band for five years who is now the chief accountant for Dave Brubeck's fat book of complex, varied time signatures; and Billy Butler, a busy guitarist in studio and Broadway pit bands who played with the rhythm and blues organist Bill Doggett.

Lincoln's "Golden Lady" is the most satisfactory of the three discs. Thanks to excellent contributions by Monty Alexander, Anderson's "Sunshine" is a very close second, losing out by a percentage point taken to the fifth place.

Lincoln, who has also taken the African name Aminata Moseka (a name conferred upon her several years ago by the minister of culture of Zaïre), is a woman of many parts. Not only is she a gifted vocalist, but she is also a composer and actress who has played in several films, including "Nothing But a Man." When she first made a name for herself on the celebrated "Freedom Now Suite" recording with her then husband Max Roach, she was strikingly beautiful and sang in a rich voice redolent of the lush Billie Holiday sound. Still most regal looking, Lincoln has a voice that has matured into an even richer sounding instrument which has retained elements of that Holiday quality but has a grainy, sensual texture all its own.

Lincoln is especially sensual on "Painted Lady," one of three of her own compositions among the LP's six selections. She's at her very best on two other originals, "Throw It Away" and "Caged Bird," both of which are hiply hypnotic.

With his own original updating of the big-toned mastery of Ben Webster, Shepp provides many bright moments in this session. His solos not only succeed in their own right, but also accentuate Lincoln's own well-crafted horn-like lines.

Like Lincoln, Anderson has a warm, naturally sunny sounding voice that lights up with pleasant colorations. Despite that strong touch of Lady Day in her voice, Lincoln has managed to stake out her own musical turf and become an individual stylist in her own right. Anderson, on the other hand, is more overtly derivative, at times sounding a bit like Carmen McRae or Ella Fitzgerald. There's more than a bit of Ella in

"Summertime." And on "Time After Time," Anderson rides a glissando with the grace and panache of Sarah. Although she draws on this rich heritage of jazz singing, Anderson does so in an individual way and produces music that has a validity all its own. There are many pleasant results here, sometimes with rather surprising material.

Among the best of the surprises is her bluesy, finely assertive romp through Fats Domino's "I'm Walking" and a gospel-tinged version of "I Want a Little Boy."

With a little bit of help from her friends, Monty Alexander, Ray Brown and Jeff Hamilton, Ernestine Anderson makes all the sunny tunes shine with much jazz warmth and brightness. "Sunshine" is simultaneously both a good vocal LP and a good jazz piano trio album. Anderson also appears on the following Concord releases with Ray Brown trios, which alternately feature either Monty Alexander or pianist Hank Jones: "Hello Like Before," "Concord to London," "Live at the Concord Jazz Festival" and "Never Make Your Move Too Soon."

Humes is very much at home on the range on Leonard Feather's "Evil Gal Blues," and on a celebration of "There'll Be Some Changes Made." The latter tune is updated with her line, "Come on, ladies, speak up for ERA," along with a dash of rock and roll vamping by the band. Humes' voice has always had a little girl buoyancy to it — that sort of little girl ebullience that always bubbled out of the young Ella Fitzgerald. Yet her inflections make it clear that she's also very sophisticated about the way of the world. She has a perpetually young sounding voice that comes from a well-spring of experience. It's a deceptively small sounding instrument that can express a wide-range of emotion, whether in the blues or ballad forms.

GOLDEN LADY, Abbey Lincoln, featuring Archie Shepp, Inner City Records.

SUNSHINE, Ernestine Anderson, Concord Records.

HELEN, Helen Humes, Muse Records.