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Music

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Peggy Lee
*Rare Gems &
 Hidden Treasures*



Poor Peggy Lee! The age of the compact disc has not been very kind to her body of work. When CDs first came out in the early 1980s, she was one of the last great singers to be featured on the new medium. And when she finally was, it seemed that the same Greatest Hits package was released again and again with very few variations. From the 1940s up until the early 1970s, with one break for Decca Records, Lee recorded a mountain of seminal material for Capitol Records, but you'd think *Fever* was the only thing worth remembering based on her CDs. This is especially odd when you consider how many people really love Peggy Lee. We've never met anyone who doesn't like her. It's instead always admiration of varying degrees.

Very slowly, the situation is changing. This collection, **Rare Gems and Hidden Treasures**, is a step in the right direction but when you consider all the material under Capitol's control, is this really the best we can do? The programming sounds as if it were done by a chimp in proximity of a dartboard with the names of all her songs on it. The sequencing is all over the map. The tunes range from the most beautiful of standards (*While We're Young*) to the most inane of novelty numbers (*Blum, Blum, I Wonder Who I Am*). Before we start pulling

out these "gems and treasures" like the hokey psuedo-gospel of *Light of Love* or the overt camp of the *Babalu*-inspired *Simalau*, why don't we try releasing some of the great Peggy Lee music that hasn't been put on CD yet? And why on earth is there no information on the individual sessions, let alone the recording dates?

Even with its flaws, **Rare Gems** has lots to recommend. The previously mentioned *While We're Young* is a classic. *Ain't Doin Bad Doin' Nothin'* and *Eight, Nine and Ten* both gently swing like mad and *Baby Come Home* is a sweet nostalgic heartwarmer in the *P.S. I Love You* vein, apparently written by Peggy and her guitarist-hubby Dave Barbour. *Farewell to Arms* has a beautiful melody but it's not the anti-war song you might think. Peggy sings about the arms that used to hold her. This made us wince a bit.

Even with its flaws, this is a fun disc. What really should happen is that Capitol should release her entire output on CD. It's the least they could do for one of their most important artists.



Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg
Humoresque
 Nonesuch 79464-2
 Classical



We don't know a hell of a lot about Classical music. We like it. We know the difference between classical, romantic and post-modern. We have a lot of it in our collection. But for us to provide an intelligent, insightful review is as silly as broadcasting an inane quiz show during prime time and expecting America to watch. Oh wait, **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire** is a hit. Therefore, we humbly suggest you get a hold of **Humoresque** by violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg.

Humoresque is Dvorák's instantly recognizable *salon* masterpiece. It was also a film starring John Garfield and Joan Crawford, made in a time, long before the Sing-a-Long *Messiah* was introduced, when classical music was "important". This disc

features the music in the film and it's so clever that it's hard not to love it. Almost every piece is a violin *tour de force*, often with a full orchestra and sometimes with just a piano. It's slightly camp, a bit piss-elegant and always entertaining.

You will recognize, along with *Humoresque*, the *Carmen Fantasie*, *The Flight of the Bumblebee* and probably the *Tristan and Isolde Fantasie*. We actually like *Carmen* and *Tristan* compressed down from the original operas to these long medley formats. From the Great American Songbook are *You Do Something to Me*, *Embraceable You* and *What Is This Thing Called Love*. *Embraceable You* is completely over the top. You can imagine soloist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg in a full strapless evening gown playing her heart out, milking every nuance out of the melody and breaking down and crying after her performance. The two Cole Porter numbers are fine except they have bland, modern vocals by Judy Blazer and her voice is a real mood killer.

In listening to **Humoresque**, your world becomes black and white. The coldwater flat you call home becomes a posh apartment on Central Park West. You no longer roam the halls in your baggy sweats from Walmart. You don the smartest of evening clothes. Your every utterance is loaded with insight and meaning. The beauty of "serious" music obsesses your soul, and yet you remain tortured because your fingers can't produce the exact same sounds that haunt your dreams. A cup of coffee is a nickel.

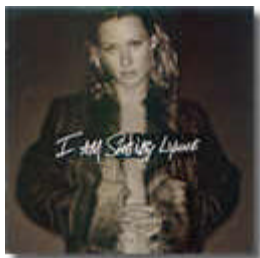
Someone wiser, and more mature, will have to tell us if Salerno-Sonnenberg is as good as we perceive her to be. Her solos are thrilling, and judging from the whole concept of this album, she has a good sense of humor.



Shelby Lynne
I Am Shelby Lynne

Shelby Lynne is an obviously talented country singer who has been trying to figure

Island 314546177-2 Pop



out her place in the sun. Years ago, we reviewed and enjoyed her **Temptation** album. It was a nice Big Band Country Swing *affaire* and while we haven't been tempted to play it again, we left with the firm impression that Ms Lynne was going somewhere.

Apparently a lot of people in the business felt that way. Her various albums have had a bit of this and a bit of that but nothing so far as caught much fire. This new album, **I Am Shelby Lynne**, should have done the trick. Mixing Country and R&B is nothing new but it's an idea that hasn't worked well since Ray Charles' **Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music**. The problem with **I Am Shelby Lynne** is that despite the trappings of R&B, there's very little of it here. There are horns and beats and chorus' that you can sing along with, but it's not soul. The lyrics are trite and the melodies non-existent. One track, *Where I'm From*, starts out as if it's going to be a winner, but by the chorus, Lynne loses steam and the chorus is just a chant, in bad French no less. It's more like a Lynn is trying to join the the popular troupe of modern chick troubadors like Jewel, Tori Amos, Alanis Morissette, et al, when she should be channelling Patsy Cline, Aretha Franklin or even k.d.lange.



**Vince Guaraldi and
Bola Sete**
Vince and Bola
Fantasy FCD 24756-2
Jazz




Vince Guaraldi was an adequate and occasionally very good jazz pianist. Then he, like so many others in the late 1950s and early '60s, went Latin. But rather than just add a bongo or two, Guaraldi developed a beautiful new style that embraced the minimalism of the Bossa Nova while retaining a pop sensibility. His big hit was *Cast Your Fate to the Wind*, an infectious pop instrumental with just a touch of jazz but his standard fare was light, interesting jazz with a touch of pop. A few years later, he'd score big again as the composer of the **Charlie Brown** TV specials, but to our ears, it's his Latin phase that is such a winner.

During this period, he teamed with guitarist Bola Sete and recorded three very good albums, **From All Sides, And Friends** and **Live at El Matador**. The latter two are on this new collection from Fantasy. It's "easy listening" in the best sense. There's nothing too taxing and boiling point is rarely reached, but it's incredibly pleasant without being insipid. The two share solos without stepping on each other's feet and it's obvious that everyone is having a good time.

Vince Guaraldi is one of our heroes and this would be an excellent way to discover him.



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JOHNNY GREEN
and CARROLL GIBBONS
FRIENDS IN HARMONY
by PETER MINTUN



One Day in September of 1933, pianist, composer, arranger and bandleader Johnny Green (1908-1989), one of the youngest and brightest composers of New York's "Tin Pan Alley" telephoned his young bride, Carol Falk, at their smart East Side Manhattan apartment, to ask if she could be able to sail for London with only one week's notice. On the 29th, Carol, Johnny and Johnny's grandmother set sail on the Olympic at the request of performer-producer Jack Buchanan, who was then a household name in British entertainment.

Buchanan had engaged the 24-year-old Green to create the music for his newest musical comedy, **Mr. Whittington** that was to star the producer with the popular Elsie Randolph. Johnny Green's track record for popular songs (*Body and Soul*, *Out of Nowhere*, *I Cover the Waterfront*, etc.) greatly overshadowed the memory of his forgotten Broadway show, produced by famous cartoonist Peter Arno with financier Jock Whitney, called **Here Goes The Bride** (46th Street Theater, November 3, 1931: 7 performances). Green compared Buchanan's assignment to that of the



Johnny "Ever" Green

Gershwin's being hired by Aarons & Freedley to write **Funny Face**, and he enthusiastically prepared the music, some already completed with lyrics by the dependable Edward Heyman, and others which would be written with British writers such as James Dyrenforth (**A Garden in the Rain**) and Douglas Furber, who would have a tremendous hit in the late 1930s with the show **Me and My Girl**.

In England, Jack Buchanan met the three Greens at the dock and the welcome mat was rolled out for them. After settling in the deluxe Grosvenor House on Park Lane, Johnny was in the recording studios of the Columbia Graphophone Co., under the auspices of his American chum, Carroll Gibbons, who was to become one of England's most productive musical figures for three decades. Originally from Clinton, Massachusetts, and five years Johnny's senior, "Gibby" had worked extensively on the London music scene since his arrival in 1924 with the brassless Boston Orchestra that played at the Hotel Savoy. Gibbons later became the co-leader of the Savoy Orpheans and the leader of the New Mayfair Orchestra (preceding the legendary Ray Noble) for the Gramophone Company, Ltd., makers of "His Master's Voice" records. Gibbons made some return trips to America, but ultimately settled in England and took exclusive leadership of the Savoy Hotel Orpheans, recording hundreds of popular songs between June, 1932 and his sudden death (coronary thrombosis) on May 10, 1954. As a composer, Gibbons' most popular songs were *A Garden in the Rain* (1928) and his radio signature *On The Air* (1932) which was appropriated by American bandleaders Rudy Vallée (1933) and Lud Gluskin (1936). Gibbons' piano novelties, such as *Bubbling Over* and *Moonbeam Dance* also achieved some success in Britain.



Carroll Gibbons

Before Johnny Green's first sessions at the London studios of Columbia Records (part of the huge E.M.I. Corporation), he had best been known as an arranger, composer and pianist with the orchestras of Buddy Rogers and Guy Lombardo. It was with Lombardo's brother, Carmen, that he co-wrote the highly successful *Coquette* early in 1928. In the early thirties he frequently worked as piano accompanist to such singers as Ethel Merman, Gertrude Lawrence and Gertrude Niesen, and it was in 1933 with Niesen that his name first appeared as a pianist on a record label (Columbia 2759-D). That year he recorded two of his songs with Paul Whiteman's specialty pianist/singer [Ramona](#) (RCA-Victor 24384). Before sailing for England, Green's own dance orchestra (yet to make records) could be heard on the radio, and he had appeared in a number of musical "short subject" films for Paramount Pictures. His affiliation with Paramount also led to composing the theme song heard at the beginning of Betty Boop cartoons (available today on videocassette). The recording experience Green was to gain in London would act as a training ground for his imminent rise to recording artist and later, Academy Award-winning film conductor Green's first British recording session coincided exactly with his twenty-fifth birthday (October 10, 1933) on which he recorded (English Columbia DB 1262) a most brilliant piano medley of his songs, from his first, *Coquette* (copyrighted when he was nineteen) up through the song that would

become his most popular tune of that year, *I Cover the Waterfront*. About eight months later he would record a similar medley (Brunswick 6920) in New York City, adding a few measures of his newly copyrighted *I Wanna Be Loved* and *Easy Come Easy Go*. It was apparent that Johnny Green's successful streak was linked with Green's first marriage to Carol Falk (April 29, 1930), who had persuaded Johnny (against his father's wishes) to leave the bonds of Wall Street for the unpredictable highs and lows of the music business. One of Green's few attempts at lyric writing produced a minor hit called *Living In Dreams*, written shortly after his marriage. It is also of significance to note that of all of the melodies Green composed during his long career, the ones that would become "standards" were the ones written with lyrics by Edward Heyman (1907-1981), with the possible exception of *Coquette* (lyrics by Gus Kahn) and *I'm Yours* (lyrics by E.Y. Harburg). Another hit, *Out Of Nowhere* was published with a spousal dedication ("To C.F.G.") above the title.

Even though Johnny's very first solo records seem interesting to us today as musical and historical treasures, in 1933 his song titles were vastly better known than his name, and so the Green medley record was issued with the provocative title "HE WROTE BODY AND SOUL." Although the wording certainly clarified what was on the disk, this limited association would irritate Green for the rest of his career. Many years later Green confided how he longed to be remembered with names such as Henry Mancini and John Williams, instead of writers associated with "Tin Pan Alley." For reasons best left to conjecture, his composing productivity would never again equal those successes of the early 1930s.

On Green's second London session (DB 1255) he paid tribute to another of Britain's highest talents, Ray Noble, with a sensuous interpretation of Noble's *Love Locked Out* (written with Max Kester), and to Edward Heyman and Vernon Duke with an intricate arrangement of *This Is Romance* played with a creative dash rarely shown by solo pianists.

Johnny Green loved the piano and at one time he and his wife, Carol owned three in their fashionable Manhattan apartment at 430 East 86th Street (near Carl Schurz Park). In Carnegie Hall on January 15, 1933, Paul Whiteman's Concert Orchestra introduced *Green's Night Club (Six Impressions for Orchestra with Three Pianos)*. Green was at piano "one," and Roy Bargy and Ramona (already associated with Whiteman) performed at the other two. The following month the concert was repeated with the same artists on a Sunday evening in Boston's Symphony Hall. In London the suite was conducted by Stanford Robinson, with Green and Carroll Gibbons on pianos I and II, and the third was played by the regular pianist with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Green's familiarity with "multiple pianos" would make his stay in London much more interesting as well as lucrative: With Carroll Gibbons and a small group called the Boy Friends, Green recorded over a dozen clever arrangements of popular songs of the season for the English Columbia company. Their repertoire ranged from Bernice Petkere's contemplative *Close*

Your Eyes (DB 1263) to medleys from contemporary musical films, including **Sitting Pretty** by Mack Gordon and Harry Revel (DB 1326), Warner Bros.' **Footlight Parade** (DB 1303), **Aunt Sally** (DB 1309), Cole Porter's British show **Nymph Errant** (DB 1297) and, of course, Green's own musicals **Mr. Whittington** (DB 1314) and **Big Business** (DB 1368). The recording highlight of Green's British period was a twelve-inch disk (DX 566) of Gibbons and Green's two brilliant pianos accompanying **Whittington** stars Jack Buchanan and Elsie Randolph with the Savoy Hotel Orpheans, performing selections from the show.



Photographed in the studio of Columbia (Abbey Road, Hayes-Middlesex) are (left-to-right) Carroll Gibbons, John W. Green, and the stars of **Mr. Whittington**, Elsie Randolph and Jack Buchanan. Song-and-dance man Jack Buchanan was also the producer of the show. Date of session: December 20, 1933.

By the time Johnny and Carol Green had left England, several more of his recordings would be released, including *Two Friends in Harmony* (DB 1333), on which the listener actually hears the voices of Carroll Gibbons and John W. Green (his favored billing at that time) as they pretend, in a puckish way, to berate each other's song-writing abilities. About this release, The Gramophone wrote: "These two friends say some very rude things to each other and take liberties with each other's tunes, but the result is so charming that my only regret is that Johnny Green has left us, only temporarily I hope."

The musical organization known as the "Boy Friends" (a name that might be seriously misinterpreted today) was a small group of London musicians carefully picked from the Savoy Hotel Orpheans, which usually included this personnel: Gibbons (piano and occasionally celeste), directing Lloyd Shakespeare (trumpet), George Melachrino (clarinet and occasionally violin), Bert Thomas (guitar) and Jack Evetts (string bass) Several of these musicians were also well known "side men" with Ray Noble's recording orchestra.

Gibbons' and Green's piano styles were well matched, to say the least. Green's Broadway and dance band experience gave him a solid rhythmic foundation and a flair for ornamentation that was flashy without being technical. Carroll Gibbons' daily job at Columbia studios and the B.B.C. was to invent new ways of adding interest to the standard popular songs as they were

released from the publishers and recorded by his orchestra. At His Master's Voice or Columbia Studios, Gibbons accompanied all the great English pop stars of the 1920s and '30s, from Elsie Carlisle to Noël Coward. The Gibbons & Green pianos blended in a style that was far from the mathematical predictability of Green's early idols, Phil Ohman & Victor Arden (the undisputed top American duo-piano team of the 1920s), and their playing did not resemble the impressionistic complexity of the famous European team of Jacques Fray and Mario Braggiotti. Instead, Gibbons and Green presented an attractive, compatible musical package that required little concentration from the listener. While listening to their recordings, one could possibly feel that tapping one's toes too much might cause one to miss some clever musical nuance!

In the words of British discographer Brian Rust, "It doesn't blare or shriek, of course, nor does it mumble. It is essentially civilized music with a character all its own...This is not wallpaper music for a cocktail lounge, with just a piano tinkling away endlessly, decorously, perhaps with an almost imperceptible guitar and bass somewhere far back; this is music for relaxing, for dreaming if you like, but above all, for listening."*

After they returned to Manhattan in February, 1934, Carol and Johnny Green returned to their luxury apartment on East 86th Street. Carol reminisced that those exciting five months in London were not all fun and games, but much hard, creative work for Johnny, who not only created the entire score to **Mr. Whittington** but also wrote (with lyricist James Dyrenforth) the first original radio musical for the B.B.C. Entitled **Big Business**, it produced several attractive tunes including *Repeal the Blues*, *Not Bad*, *An Hour Ago This Minute*, and *What Now*. Fortunately for us, these songs were widely recorded in England so that we may marvel at them in the twenty-first century. In Johnny Green's own words, "That was a very, very glamorous time."

Although the Gibbons and Green records have not been re-issued in their entirety, a few sides appeared on the EMI World records LPs of the 1970s. Currently Vocalion issues Carroll Gibbons and His Savoy Hotel Orpheans. Vocalion 6030 is called **Dinner at Eight** after the song by Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh. Vocalists include Al Bowlly, Harry Bentley, Les Allen and Jack Plant.

(*Quote ©1980 World Records Ltd. "Carroll Gibbons & The Boyfriends" SH 360)

Peter Mintun is a piano player, singer and music historian. When he isn't holding court at New York's Bemmelman's Bar in the historic Carlyle Hotel, he is recording his acclaimed compact discs, rubbing elbows at the Ritz or helping to copy edit MisterLUCKY. You'd be wise to visit his [website](#).