



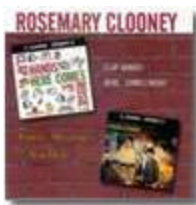
MisterLUCKY

Music

HOME MUSIC COCKTAILS FEATURES



**Rosemary Clooney**  
*Clap Hands! Here Comes Rosie!*  
**Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney**  
*Fancy Meeting You Here*  
 Taragon TARCD 1060  
 Vocals



We feel obligated to say some nice things about Rosemary Clooney after we were particularly ruthless about her boring new book, [Girl Singer](#). We still think, on the whole, she's not one of the greats, but she has made some great records. And now two of her finest are together on one CD and it's time to celebrate.

**Clap Hands! Here Comes Rosie!** Is a collection of peppy numbers with a full orchestra a chorus. The bright arrangements are by Bob Thompson and while the song selection isn't inventive or clever, it's not tired either. The chorus threatens to become a gloopy mess but they're just jazzy enough to be relevant and just campy enough to be enjoyable. The only thing we dislike is *Makin' Whoopee* but we wouldn't like this number by anyone at this point.

As pleasant and enjoyable as **Clap Hands!** is, it's **Fancy Meeting You Here** that earns this CD its five martini rating. Arranged by Billy May, it's a great concept album that actually works. It's a travelogue that goes all over the globe, with extensive stops in Latin America, and ends up being complete entertainment.

In her book, Clooney seems to be trying to hitch her star to Sinatra



while downplaying her relationship with Crosby. She's a fool! He brings out the best in her and she does likewise. By 1958, both Crosby and Clooney were a little out of step with the times but each were at the top of their game. They're almost setting out to prove that their style of music was still relevant, fun and musical and yet they're such seasoned pros, they don't have anything to prove.

Each song is a duet, usually with Bing playing the aggressor or heel and Clooney the lovable lass. It's loaded with what we now call "special material", there's not a song they sing straight. Luckily, the lyrics are clever and conductor Billy May is up to the task of milking everything he can out of a melody. Because each song is a novelty number, it may prove irritating to play this in the background. It needs and deserves your full attention.

Finally we must comment on the beautiful sound quality of the CD. Tarragon must have found a pristine source and they did an excellent job transferring the music to CD.



**LaVerne Baker**  
*LaVerne Baker Sings*  
*Bessie Smith*  
 Atlantic R&B / Blues



LaVerne Baker followed Ruth Brown as one of Atlantic Records divas of rhythm and Blues in the late 1950s. She had a superior voice and had hits like *Tweedle Dee* and *Soul on Fire*. In 1958 she was given the unusual task of recording a tribute to Blues legend Bessie Smith. This may sound comparable to Mariah Carey singing the Stephen Sondheim Songbook. It's not. Baker, and the other blues shouters of her time, didn't emerge out of a vacuum and this album helps trace these roots. And it's good!

On the surface, a certain type of shouter or belter has two modes: on and off. Along with Bessie Smith, we could add Broadway belter Ethel Merman and Cuban songstress Celia Cruz. These loud, direct voices cut through all subtleties and get to the point. A good belter has several shades of nuance that might not be apparent with a casual listen but all of these ladies, to varying degrees are masters of their craft.



LaVerne Baker didn't have quite the goods the other belters had but she's great nonetheless. What's even more interesting is the instrumental backing she gets on **LaVerne Baker Sings Bessie Smith**. While *After You've Gone* gets a modern, almost jazz treatment, most of the tunes have different shades of burlesque. At moments you can almost feel the tassles of Baker's pasties brush your face.

Bessie Smith recorded mostly with just a piano and it would have

been nice to have a cut or two with Baker doing the same, but it's a small complaint.



**Charles Brown**  
*In a Grand Manner*  
*Bullseye Blues*



**In a Grand Manner** is a collection of ten songs featuring Charles Brown and his piano. It sounds pretty clear these ten tracks were alternate takes left over from his four albums on the Bullseye Blues label. A few of the tracks sound a little rough or sloppy but on the whole, it's a treat to hear Charles Brown with just his piano. But then again, it's always a treat to hear Charles Brown.



Brown's association with guitarist Danny Caron was almost as essential to his later sound as his earlier work was indebted to Johnny Moore. Caron's intelligent solos and musical direction helped balance Brown's sometimes fussy piano playing. Still, this album allows you to hear what

was going on in Charles Brown's head as he performed these songs. If you're new to Charles Brown this isn't the best place to start, but if you're a fan, you'll enjoy every minute.

For some reason his song *The Message* (which was a minor hit and an obvious attempt to emulate Percy Mayfield's *Please Send Me Somebody to Love*) is listed here as *Wouldn't It Be Grand*. Anyone else singing this would sound a little silly but one gets the impression that in addition to being a fine vocalist, Brown was about the sweetest guy on earth and this plea for peace and understanding comes off as sincere and sweet, just like Brown.



**Strange Fruit**  
 by David Margolick  
 Forward by Hilton Als  
*Running Press*



## Book Reviews

This small volume was one of the most enjoyable reads we've had for a long time. It's first the story of the song, *Strange Fruit*, that Time stupidly has declared "The Best Song of the Century". It's also a rare insight into Billie Holiday, early civil rights and the making of legends.

The song started as a simple reaction to a photograph of a lynching and from there grew into an






tyning and from there grew into an institution. The story of Holiday's recording, folk singer Josh White's competing version (in Holiday's mind) and the uproar it all caused make fascinating reading.



The book ends with notes on contemporary versions by Dee Dee Bridgewater, Cassandra Wilson and oddly enough, Tori Amos. Holiday created a masterpiece that should be left in its time capsule. However sincere, what's the point?



<p><i>The Martini Rating System</i></p>  <p>© Coconut Grove Media</p>	<p><i>Scientific, Accurate &amp; Easy To Understand!</i></p> <p><b>5 Martinis = Classic</b>  <b>4 Martinis = Great</b>  <b>3 Martinis = Good</b>  <b>2 Martinis = Fair</b>  <b>1 Martini = Poor</b></p>
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