



Research Project: "Jazz Greats"



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## “JAZZ GREATS”

What is my favorite album? ... My favorite album is... It is hard to know where to even start. Quite frankly that would heavily depend on the mood I am at that moment. There are so many absolutely wonderful albums that giving an answer almost seems hasty at best. Although I have had nearly three months to brainstorm and pick an album, I manage to keep arriving to the same conclusion. That being that music's main purpose is to let us express ourselves emotionally and it suits and compliments the mood of the time.

With that said, a narrow list my favorite songs packed into to a single album, seems like such an impossible question. Not unlike being asked which of my sons do I favor most. As much as I'd like to say I am completely impartial 100% of the time to be quite honest that answer would weigh heavily on the day the question is asked. But for argument sake I have chosen “Jazz Greats” it is a CD that has really a great conglomeration of some of my favorite musicians, and nine out of ten songs are among my favorites.

This CD has “Mack the knife” sung by Louie Armstrong, “Take Five” by Dave Brubeck with P. Desmond, “Lazy River” by Pete Fountain, “A-Tisk A-Tasket” by The Chick Webb Orchestra and sung by only one of the greatest singers EVER, Ms. Ella Fitzgerald, “In the Crowd” by Ramsey Lewis, “One O'clock Jump” by Count Basie and “South Rampart Street Parade” by Al Hirt...(sorry but I love him!) “Sing, Sing, Sing” by Louie Prima, and “Satin Doll” by Duke Ellington his piano and orchestra.

The first of my favorite songs, “Mack The Knife” Performed by Louie Armstrong and His All Stars, is actually about as morbid as a song gets. Yet I have loved this song since I can remember and what is so sad that I have always thought that I was singing it right too.

All the time not really knowing what the words actually were or even having a clue what the song meant.

I found it fascinating that having to do research for this project how I did managed to stumble across the words. I also learned that despite the title "A Theme From 'The Three Penny Opera' (Mack the Knife)" I still had no inkling that it was originally a theme song from "The Three Penny Opera." I also had no idea and it has also been re-composition by several artist. According to the <http://tinpan.fortunecity.com/riff/11/frame/m1.html> where I found the words to the lyrics to "Mack the Knife." I still did modified a few of the words after listening to my CD few more times so I can have word for word what Louie sings and this is how the song goes:

**Oh, the shark, has pretty teeth, dear... and he shows them pearly white  
Just a jackknife, has MacHeath, dear.... and he keeps it, out of sight  
When the shark bites, with his teeth, dear.... scarlet billows, start to spread  
Fancy gloves though, wears MacHeath dear.... so there is not a trace, uhm... of red**

**On the sidewalk...Sunday morning... lies a body oozin' life  
Someone's sneakin' 'round the corner... is that someone Mack the Knife?**

**Uhhh from the a tugboat.... by the river.... a cement bags, drooping' down  
Yes, the cement's just for the weight, dear...betcha Macky's back in town  
Look at your Ole Louie Miller, disappeared dear...after drawing out his cash  
And MacHeath spends like a sailor...did our boy's...do somethin' rash?**

**Sukey Tawdry, Jenny Diver, Lotte Lenya, sweet Lucy Brown...  
Oooh, the line forms on the right, dears.... now that Macky's back in town  
Take it Sach!**

**(instrumental)**

A part me can't help despite Capone's passing in 1947 wonder what Capone would have thought of this song. I also can't help to wonder if perhaps he isn't Mack. Also according to this web site another bit of trivia that was fascinated by was how:

since been established, and the pianist does not often veer far from them. The stride-influenced bounce of his left hand, the thickly structured chords of his right hand, the unexpected rhythmic accents, the radiantly singing melody lines--it's all still there, at his fingertips."

Matter of fact it is because of this particular song why I bought this CD to begin with. Little did I know that four of my all time favorite Jazz songs were on it too and a few more I have also grown to love. I also found that "Take Five" according to [http://www.extrapris.com/jazz/dave\\_brubeck.html](http://www.extrapris.com/jazz/dave_brubeck.html): "Boasting the first jazz instrumental to sell a million copies, the Paul Desmond-penned "Take Five," Time Out captures the celebrated jazz quartet at the height of both its popularity and its powers. Recorded in 1959, the album combines superb performances by pianist Brubeck, alto saxophonist Desmond, drummer Joe Morrello and bassist Gene Wright. Along with "Take Five," ... Though influenced by the West Coast-cool school, Brubeck's greatest interest and contribution to jazz was the use of irregular meters in composition, which he did with great flair."

The next song on the CD is "Lazy River" by Pete Fountain and his band. One of the many, many things I find that I love about "Lazy River" is Pete Fountain. I seem to be conflicted on this particular song because I don't know if I love this song because of Pete Fountain...or I love Pete Fountain because of this song. It has been said of Pete Fountain that he is: "As New Orleans as red beans and rice and as gumbo" but this song is New Orleans, I hear it and I immediately picture the New Orleans Creole Steamboat cruising down the Mississippi River, or I begin to picture Mardi Gras and all of it's grandeur with Pete Fountain in the middle of it.

He isn't the only musician that evokes this nostalgia, but the visuals just flood my mind. He as accomplished a musician as he is, also seems to be about as nice and humble as a musician gets. According to Angus Lind of the *Times Picayune* in his article *Times Picayune New Orleans, La.: Jul 6, 2003. pg. 01*: "What has always amazed me is this: Here is this living legend who has had an incredibly stellar career -- including five command performances for three U.S. presidents, 59 appearances on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show," and a performance for Pope John Paul II and a crowd of 400,000 at the New Orleans Papal Mass -- and he is the most down-to-earth guy you'd ever want to meet." I have to say that every time that I have seen Pete Fountain perform (mostly during Mardi Gras) but he does always seem to appear to be happy and loves what he is doing. I have to concur that he is about as nice a celebrity as you are going to get.

There must be thousands or hundred of thousands probably millions even, of amazing singers throughout the history of man-kind, but on this I do stand firm and won't be swayed from this notion but one of the all time greatest singers has got to be Ella Fitzgerald. She has been dubbed so many accolades that is hard to remember them all. The Empress of Jazz, The Incomparable Ella, Elusive Ella, just on and on, and all true. My most favorite duo is she and Louie Armstrong's "Summertime" but despite not having "Summertime" in this particular CD it redeems itself by containing "A-Tisk A-Tasket" This song also being one of my all time favorites. Perhaps it is the most special and sentimental one. Mainly due to the fact that the very first concert my oldest son ever played in, he played a snippet of "A-Tisk A-Tasket." Not only was this his first Jazz song, but every time he hears "Jazz Greats" He always asks to hear this song at least three times, and inspires him to not only practice more, but to play along with

The Chick Webb Orchestra. Which I would have thought that "Take Five" or "Sing, sing, sing" would prompt him to practice, but it is this particular song that he likes to hear over and over and over again and play along with. It fascinates me to no end but doesn't really surprise me because Ella was about as fascinating as a person can be. I absolutely love her incredible pitch and range. In this article I read on her from Phillip D. Atteberry from the *CODA MAGAZINE (Toronto, Canada) May/June 1995, pp. 4-7* He writes:

"Wilfred Middlebrooks remembers the event his way: "About a year before we played Berlin, we were in Minneapolis, and a guy asked Ella to sing "Mack The Knife." She told him she didn't know it, but he pulled out the sheet music and sort of put her on the spot. So she stood behind Lou Levy, who was our pianist at the time, and sang it through, very straight--nothing fancy.

A year later, we found ourselves in Berlin in front of twelve thousand people. We were at the end of a midnight concert. We had played Brussels earlier, flown to Berlin, and been up for twenty-two hours. We were all so tired we couldn't hold our heads up, when Ella turns around and says, 'Let's do "Mack The Knife."' That was like her. She'd go weeks without deviating from the plan, then call for something out of the blue.

"My heart sank. I was too tired. We were in front of too many people to try something crazy, and I knew Ella didn't know the tune, but that never stopped her because she was such a good scat singer. I looked at Paul, and he just grinned. Of course he could play anything, but I was a young cat and needed to run things down once. Paul said, 'I'll start us with the "Here Comes Charlie" vamp in G.' Well I could handle that, so we commenced. And just about the time I started feeling good (after a couple of choruses), Ella gave Paul a hand signal and switched to A-flat. She had great pitch, and I could hear just where she was going, but staying with her was something else. Paul just looked at me and grinned.

"I thought, 'Well, I know she doesn't know this tune, so surely she'll stay put,' but I'll be damned if she didn't change keys again at the end of the next chorus, and the next and the next. We ended that thing in D-flat. It was all Paul could do to keep from laughing at me. I remember thinking at the end of the fourth or fifth chorus, 'Well, she's about as lost as she can get, Louis Armstrong will show up any minute,' because when Ella got lost in a swing number, she usually fell back on her Louis imitation, which was a sure fire crowd pleaser. And sure enough, about that time, here came Louis

I actually have a CD somewhere in this house where Ella sing "Mack The Knife" and although it doesn't say for sure that it is from the Minneapolis performance you can hear how she did in fact let Louie out and started scatting. You can even hear her and the band

laughing. I simply love, love this woman, and as far as her value as an artist she is simply priceless!

The next song in this CD is "The 'In' Crowd" by Ramsey Lewis was a pleasant discovery. I have heard this song plenty of times but I was always certain it was to be the Doobie Brothers performing it. So many of their songs, "China Rose" for instance have almost the same piano intro. To discover that in fact this was a jazz piece I was impressed! According to an article by the *Deseret News, Salt Lake City, Utah: Feb 8, 2004. pg. E.06* it states: "Sometimes called 'the great performer,' jazz pianist Ramsey Lewis has become something of a legend in his own time. After his chart-topping hits "The In Crowd," Hang On, Sloopy," and "Wade in the Water" in the mid-1960s, Lewis garnered three Grammy Awards and seven gold records. I really love how upbeat this song is. According to his web page <http://www.ramseylewis.com/> he is a native from Chicago. He was born on May 27, 1935 and began lessons at the age of four. Although he is classically trained he had migrated towards Jazz. He has toured the country but he has a new project to re-record himself with an apparent classical spin to it. The name of his latest project is "Time Flies." Along with his career as a musician he is also an On-Air Personality on WNUA-FM in Chicago, he certainly is interesting to say the least.

"One O'clock Jump" by William "Count" Basie was surprisingly difficult to research but I did find in a web page by Written by Lisa Carattini Copyright 2002 by PageWise, Inc [http://de.essortment.com/biographywillia\\_rgyr.htm](http://de.essortment.com/biographywillia_rgyr.htm). Count Basie that according to the web site:

In 1950 Basie and his band called it a day, due to the strain WWII put on big bands, but by 1952, he was back in the game. He played in an orchestra that included

saxophonists Frank Foster and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, trumpeters Joe Newman and Thad Jones and the eloquent, rugged blues singer Joe Williams. This group played backup to many legendary performers such as Tony Bennet, Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan, Bing Crosby and Sammy Davis Jr. William "Count" Basie continued to play through the 60's and 70's in a more varied repertoire that included the pop music of the day. He played right up into his 70's, though hampered by illness, he was still irrepressible at the key board until his death in April of 1984.

Count Basie undoubtedly influenced many by his genius. A list of those with whom he had performed with, I believe speaks for his genius. A magnitude of talent such as his simply isn't measurable.

"South Rampart Street Parade" by Al Hirt and his Band, although I have mentioned Pete Fountain as Mr. New Orleans....well, Al Hirt I love him and he could easily be dubbed Mr. Mardi Gras. This song kicks off the official the beginning of Mardi Gras season every year. Just like you know when you hear Bing Crosby's "I am dreaming of a white Christmas" You know Mardi Gras is coming when you hear "South Rampart Street Parade." I think that having mentioned Pete Fountain previously I should mention a quote I read on CNN Interactive Publication Date: April 27, 1999 reporting on Al Hirt's death. Pete Fountain was quoted saying: "He was one of the best trumpet players, all-around the world," said clarinetist Pete Fountain, a longtime friend who also kept his home in the Crescent City. "He had everything--technique, stamina, education." According to this article:

"Al Hirt Born Alois Maxwell Hirt in New Orleans in 1922, he got his first trumpet when he was 6. Classically trained at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, he spent three years in the U.S. Army as a company bugler, then began his professional career in 1946 as a member of Benny Goodman's Orchestra. He later worked with other big bands, including those of the Dorsey Brothers and Ray McKinley..... A real homebody, Hirt tried to organize his career into short tours so he could stay put in New Orleans with his wife and eight kids, near good fishing grounds for sea trout. His base



became his club on Bourbon Street. He was one of the original group that brought a professional football team to the city and he was on the sidelines to play "The Saints" when they took the field for the first time in 1967.

Around this time, Ellis Marsalis Jr. became his pianist and he occasionally had his young son hanging around. It was Hirt who gave young Wynton his first trumpet."

Interesting facts I thought but this isn't my favorite of his songs, "Java" and "Cotton Candy" by far are my favorite of his pieces, but as I mentioned he too is hard to remember and not think of New Orleans and Mardi Gras.

Another native of New Orleans, that graces this CD would be Mr. Louie Prima, and "Sing, Sing, Sing." One song holds so many wonderful solo's is hard not to hear it and want to dance! The syncopation in this song to me is the most memorable and infectious. Louie Prima has in fact proved to be the most difficult to research I had to resort to going to "his official" web site: <http://www.louisprima.com/> © 2003 PRIMA MUSIC, L.L.C. Since I truly have no way of verifying that this is a credible source the only thing I do want to mention is what I do know. Primarily his

longevity in the business a span that ran over seventy years. With an early beginning in Jazz and branched out and adopted to changes like a chameleon, going from main stream jazz to performing in Vegas and continually re-inventing himself to keep up with the times. His tenure alone is note worthy, but if nothing else, to me besides "Sing, Sing, Sing," I'll always remember him as King Louie from Disney's Jungle Book and to this day a hipper character hasn't come along!

Lastly "Satin Doll" by Duke Ellington. There just isn't there hasn't been a more elegant or debonair artists than he. So much has been written about him what more could be possibly said?

Every time I have heard "Satin Doll" it immediately transports me to a Ball, or New Year's Eve celebration. I am not trying to imply that his music is stuffy and awkward or extremely formal.

Simply that music that is that good one should at least be dressed appropriately. I think of my parents waltzing at weddings and wishing I could do the same. Duke Ellington's "Satin Doll" is perfection.

I think a more eloquent illustration of what I am saying is what I found written in a periodical by Don DeMichael for the *Down Beat*. *Chicago: Jul 2004. Vol. 71, Iss. 7; pg. 30, 1 pgs* DeMichael states:

Duke's music is the greatest reservoir for understanding the human condition and also glorifying God through music. Studying Ellington's music is like having a huge epiphany, one after another. Every few years as you learn more about music and the structure of music, about harmonic function, and rhythmical development, the more you realize how individual his voice is. I remember once reading a comment of Duke's saying that if he ever did come up with a rule in his own music, he would break it right away. So I've tried to keep that attitude of making sure I don't get comfortable in what I'm doing as an artist and not settling into one style and one approach of doing things. I keep trying to come up with different environments all the time, whether it's instrumentation or ways to approach rhythm.

So many wonderful songs and incredible musicians on this particular CD. I guess I still would have one heck of a dilemma if asked to pick one single favorite album, but if given no other choice but to choose I think I could very possibly without much opposition listen to this CD for years on end and never grow tired!

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