

**GRANT SIMPSON: STRIDE AND TRUE
(GSM-001) 53.13 min.**

If I Could Be With You (One Hour Tonight); Dollar Dance; Load of "Cole"; You Can't Lose a Broken Heart; On the Street Where You Live; So Beautiful Like You; Stridin' for H.J.; The Pearls; Just as Though You Were Here: How Can You Face Me; Viper's Drag; Just Before Daybreak: Echo of Spring; The Mule Walk; Whitehorse Blues.

Reviewed by John Nelson

If you thought Yukon was part of the U.S.A., you would be mistaken. It is tucked up in the northwest corner of Canada adjoining Alaska. There, in the city of Whitehorse, lives Canada's prime stride pianist, Grant Simpson.

The late Dick Wellstood was an exemplary stride pianist, and to the question "What is stride?" he answered (in part): "Stride playing requires a certain characteristic articulation, for the nature of which I can only refer you to recordings by such as Eubie Blake, Luckey Roberts, James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Donald Lambert."

If you browse on the Internet at www.stridepiano.com, you will find a lengthy article on stride written by Mike Lipskin, and it will tell you all you need to know about this exciting form of piano jazz. He divides some 34 pianists into three groups: Generation One includes those gentlemen listed above, plus Claude Hopkins, Joe Turner, Hank Duncan, and Cliff Jackson. Generation Two includes Mike Lipskin himself, plus Dick Wellstood, Ralph Sutton, Don Ewell, Dick Hyman, Johnny Guarneri, Butch Thompson, and Neville Dickie. (To that list of "household names," I would add Henry "thins" Francis, who is Fats Waller reincarnated.)

Grant Simpson also has some words of wisdom on the Internet printout, and he places himself into category Generation Three of stride piano players – the "modernists." This list includes only two other names familiar to me – Judy Carmichael and Marcus Roberts.

Most of these stride pianists would surely emphasize the rhythmic nature of the format, but Grant Simpson somehow incorporates it into a much more melodic setting and the result is a highly recommended compact disc. The program offers five of Simpson's own compositions, including "Whitehorse Blues" and "Load Of Cole," the latter named for his young son. You will also find Dick Wellstood represented by "Dollar Dance," Fats Waller by "How Can You Face Me?" and "Viper's Drag," and Willie "The Lion" Smith by "Echo of Spring," which goes all the way back to 1935. Jelly Roll Morton is emphatically stated by Mike Lipskin to be "not a stride pianist." Regardless, Simpson includes a memorable version of Jelly's "The Pearls."

Recordings by jazz pianists form a large part of my collection and this Grant Simpson CD will be selected for many repeat playings. One final bone of contention: there is a school of thought that Art Tatum's rather florid style of playing evolved from stride piano. Personally, I think that is a bit of a stretch.

This gem is available by mail-order from Grant Simpson, Box 30043, Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada Y1A 5M2 for CAN \$20 postage included. Phone Simpson at (867) 668-3401 or e-mail him at grant@grantsimpson.net.

sual jazz listener, but for the vintage purist. --- *Perry Huntoon*

STRIDE AND TRUE
GRANT SIMPSON
GSM001

Grant Simpson (p). Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. No date provided.

If I Could Be With You One Hour Tonight/ Dollar Dance/ Load of "Cole"/ You Can't Lose A Broken Heart/ On The Street Where You Live/ So Beautiful Like You/ Stridin' For HJ/ The Pearls/ Just As Though You Were Here/ How Can You Face Me/ Viper's Drag/ Love Of My Life/ Just Before Daybreak/ Echo Of Spring/ The Mule Walk/ Whitehorse Blues. TT 53:11.

Okay, so maybe Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, is not the jazz capital of the world to most folks. But there is a pianist who lives there who couldn't care less about that. He is Grant Simpson, a most talented and capable piano player who is heard to good advantage on this CD. He has chosen his program wisely to display his wares, but the name of the game is *Stride*.

When speaking of favorites and influences, Grant cites James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Ralph Sutton, Dick Wellstood, and Dave McKenna, among others. James P. was a particular favorite if only for his compositions, though not exclusively—JPJ could also play a little. There are four of Johnson's tunes here, a couple of Waller's, one each from Willie "The Lion" Smith, Jelly Roll Morton and Dick Wellstood and five that Grant wrote.

His salute to McKenna comes in the form of two standards, "On The Street Where You Live" and "Just As Though You Were Here." the latter of which he admits to lifting from Dave's Concord LP called *Left Handed Complement*. "On The Street..." is a compliment to McKenna's magnificent walking left hand and "Just As Though..." glorifies Dave's exquisite way with ballads.

Grant Simpson travels quite a bit and perhaps you have had the pleasure of hearing him. If he hasn't come your way yet, you should think about acquiring this CD. If your usual haunts don't stock it, you could get it from his Website: www.grantsimpson.net. In any event, you might pay a visit to the site. It is a nice one and you can sample portions of the CD while you are there. My thanks to Bill Gallagher for getting me on board. --- *Russ Chase*

THE BEST OF THE CONCERT YEARS

ELLA FITZGERALD
PABLO PACD-2405-441

Ella Fitzgerald (vcl) with:

Tommy Flanagan (p) Keter Betts (b) Ed Thigpen (d). June 2, 1972: Night And Day/ Little White Lies/ Raymond Tunia (p) Herb Ellis (g) Ray Brown (b) J.C. Heard (d). November 18, 1953: Body And Soul/ Why Don't You Do Right?/ Oh, Lady, Be Good/ I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good/ How High The Moon/ My Funny Valentine/ Jimmy Jones (p) Bob Cranshaw (b) Sam Woodyard (d). March 26, 1967: It's Only A Paper Moon/ Day Dream/ If I Could Be With You/ Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea/ Paul Smith (p) Keter Betts (b) Bobby Durham (d). October 17, 1983: Willow Weep For Me/ All Of Me/ Blue Moon/ They Can't Take That Away From Me/ 'Round Midnight. TT 66:07.

The tunes on this compact disc have all been issued previously on Pablo. I do not think there is an alternate take here, so that those who have the tracks already will have nothing new to add to their collection.

These issues that state this is the *best* of this or that artist in a particular circumstance bother me no end. Most of the time, I find that my opinion and that of the compiler do not coincide. I do not profess to be a completist of Ella so cannot say if I would agree in this case or not. I do find the material to be quite satisfactory with only one reservation. The one criticism I have of Ms. Fitzgerald's work is that at times she seems to get carried away in her scat singing. One might describe it as "playing to the gallery." This does happen here on a couple of occasions. The work by the instrumentalists is fine throughout.

This CD can then be recommended with the two reservations: (1) all of the tunes have been issued before, and (2) a few lapses in her scat singing. --- *Herb Young*

THE TWO OF US
JOHNNY VARRO
ARBORS ARCD 19292

Johnny Varro (p). Bradenton, Florida, February 4-5, 2003.

If I Love Again/ Lullaby Of Birdland/ This Time The Dream's On Me/ I Could Write A Book/ Beatles Medley: Yesterday; Here, There And Everywhere/ Gone With The Wind/ The Two Of Us/ Lullaby Of The Leaves/ Michel Legrand Medley: Summer Me, Winter Me; Pieces Of Dreams/ The Pearls/ A Sleeping Bee/ Where Is Love?/ Valse/ Blame It On My Youth/ Green

CD REVIEW

GRANT SIMPSON – STRIDE AND TRUE

Grant Simpson (pno)

Burnaby, B.C., Canada, date unknown

1.If I Could Be With You (One Hour Tonight) 2.Dollar Dance 3.Load Of Cole 4.You Can't Lose A Broken Heart 5.On The Street Where You Live 6.So Beautiful Like You 7.Stridin' For HJ 8.The Pearls 9.Just As Though you Were Here 10.How can You Face Me 11.Viper's Drag 12.Love Of my Life 13.Just Before Daybreak 14.Echo Of Spring 15.The Mule Walk 16.Whitehorse Blues

Riverside Recording GS GSM001

The piano has always been one of my favourite instruments to listen to. It is, I think, the only one – maybe together with the acoustic guitar and the organ – on which jazz can be played without any accompaniment. One of the oldest piano jazz styles is STRIDE. It evolved from ragtime and flourished in the twenties in and around New York. The big difference with ragtime was that stride involved a lot of improvisation. We all know the great masters of stride, people like James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Willie “The Lion” Smith, Donald Lambert and later on Ralph Sutton, Dave McKenna and Dick Wellstood, to name just a few.

This CD was made by a stride player from Canada, Grant Simpson. You can read more about him on his website www.grantsimpson.net

Grant is not only a marvellous pianist but also a fine composer like his predecessors in this style. Five of his compositions are heard on this CD (tracks 3, 6, 7, 12 and 16). It is great to find out that, in this age of non-melody so-called “compositions” by most of the occupants of the hit-parade, there are still musicians able to write real songs with melodies one can remember. Fine examples are the two songs Grant wrote called “So Beautiful Like You” and “Love Of My Life”. The rest of the CD features work by great stride composers like James P. Johnson, Fats Waller and Willie “The Lion” and a more contemporary one, Dick Wellstood. In addition to the well-known “If I Could Be With You” and “The Mule Walk” there are two seldom played other compositions by James P, “You Can' Lose A Broken Heart” and “Just Before Daybreak”.

Grant also tackles Jelly Roll Morton's famous “The Pearls” He apologises in his liner notes (which feature his short comments on every track) to the Jelly Roll purists, because in his rendition there is more influence from the New York striders than from Jelly. He should not apologise because the way he plays it he adds a new glance to an already fine song.

Grant acknowledges the influence of Dave McKenna. Indeed, just like McKenna , the way he plays makes you forget there are no bass or drums present. Grant just doesn't need them!

As for favourite tracks...I enjoyed this CD from start to finish, but if I have to mention some favourites I'd say that tracks 6 and 12 along with “On The Street Where You Live” where he demonstrates how a regular popular song can be turned into a stride classic.

The sound quality is just marvellous. It's like Grant is playing right there in your living room.

Grant Simpson was a new name to me but I'll be looking forward to his next CD. If, like me, you love great jazz piano, you shouldn't miss this CD. You can order it from Grant's website.

Marcel Joly



PRIME MINISTER - PREMIER MINISTRE

Dear Mr Simpson

Ferry Bagnall gave me
a copy of your recent CD.

It is terrific - You are
a great talent

It is wonderful listening to
you

I hope to see you either in Whitehorse
or Ottawa

Best wishes
Phant