

**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 north-west 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.