

PREVIN PLAYS DUKE

THE three items that go to make up this programme are taken from André Previn's first solo venture committed to L.P. "André Previn plays songs by Vernon Duke."

One of the world's most superbly endowed and versatile talents, Previn is one of the busiest musicians in America today. Both a jazz and classical pianist, a virtuoso conductor, a film director, and a composer in all existing media, he has very little time away from music in some shape or form.

His classical training and thinking is of great assistance to his jazz interpretations of songs, for his arrangements take the form of variations on given themes rather than long meandering improvisations on well-known standards. Such piano playing I find intensely satisfying. In this solo setting we hear him free and harmonically unrestricted by other musicians. Tempo changes are frequent and you practically sense his mind composing the ideas as he plays.

Here then is the complete musician, a full-bodied pianist using both hands to advantage.

"Cabin in the Sky" opens out of tempo. The tone is rich and the chords delightful. A basic "motif" heralds the in-tempo section which contains some of the most fascinating two-handed work to be heard in a long time. The Tatum influence is most pronounced. The ideas in the second chorus go way out but return to set a quiet mood for a lovely third chorus and a superb coda.

An impressionist out-of-tempo treatment is given "Autumn in New York." The pianist's touch and execution cannot be faulted as the melody, rather than being buried, is woven into a breathtaking pattern of sounds. Few pianists possess the technique and training, and, most important of all, the good taste to play this way.

The closer is a new one to my ears, "The Love I Long For." It owes a debt of gratitude to George Gershwin for its existence, I should think, for its similarity in places to "Love is Here to Stay" is a little too strong to be coincidental. Previn appears in a more "funky" and "bluesy" role on this track playing a mixture of Brubeck, Allison and Previn all "coolly" baked into an attractive dish. He literally digs deep into the instrument to produce sounds, approaching the erstwhile ballad as though it were a jump tune.

It is reported that Vernon Duke was enthused over the album when he first heard it. As he is also a pianist and composer of both popular and classical

music, what finer recommendation could André Previn or you, the prospective listener, wish for?

First Playing: Station 1YA, November 9, 10.30 p.m.

Bill Harris and Friends

Personnel: Bill Harris (trombone), Ben Webster (tenor), Jimmy Rowles (piano), Red Mitchell (bass) and Stan Levey (drums).

Although this session is titled "Bill Harris and Friends" we do not hear much from trombonist, Harris. In fact he plays only on "Crazy Rhythm," and then just for two choruses solo and one and a half in unison with Ben Webster. However, the programme is none the worse for that for his friends are in particularly fine fettle.

"I'm Getting Sentimental Over You" is the first item up and it's presented by Rowles, Mitchell and Levey. They have a quiet ball with this one and their interpretation of the opening phrase of the melody is tastefully amusing. Rowles, an often underestimated pianist, and Mitchell, a bassist with a supple tone and style, take the solos and both make the most of the opportunity. Levey's drumming does not intrude and the whole track adds up to four and a half minutes of pleasant listening.

Jimmy McHugh's lovely ballad "Where Are You?" is left to Ben Webster to interpret. Here is a tenor-player who is more adept than any other at using tone to create fine degrees of shading. And the most surprising thing about him is that he has been steadily improving over the years, until today he probably stands at the zenith of his career.

Although a master when it comes to ballad work, Webster does not make a point of knowing the lyrics, but he does get ideas about approaching a song from hearing singers. "Where Are You?" is a case in point. Sinatra's rendition has influenced Ben's. In the first chorus, taken in slow tempo, he stays fairly close to the original melody and uses the first half of the second to create his own line above the basic harmonies. He returns to the given theme in the middle eight and closes as he began. The support given by the rhythm section is superb.

A medium fast version of "Crazy Rhythm" closes the show. The opening chorus stating the theme is played by Harris and Webster in unison but Bill's effort is somewhat marred by two or three slips. All members of the quintet with the exception of Stan Levey take solos and, sad to say, leader Bill is the weakest of the lot. He has been heard to much better advantage in other settings but it must be admitted it is unfair to criticise his work on the very small portion you are served here.

This programme will be extended when it plays over 1YA, 3YA and 4YA by the addition of "It Might As Well Be Spring" and "Just One More Chance," and—without revealing any secret—"Just One More Chance" is one of the most memorable items ever committed to disc.

First Playing: Station 2YA, November 11, 10.45 p.m.

—Ray Harris

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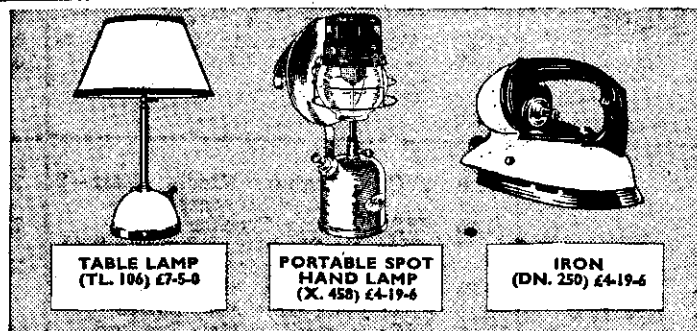


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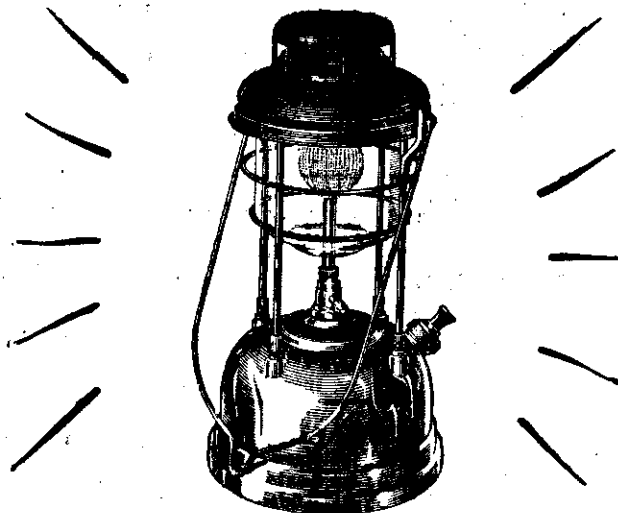
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