

The Great American Songbook: Part 2

Nineteen indelible standards from the era before rock-and-roll comprise this month's installment in a canon of popular song.

By Terry Teachout

“Strange how potent cheap music is,” Noel Coward wrote in *Private Lives*. That droll tribute to the power of popular song has been quoted countless times—but Coward, himself a fine songwriter, overlooked the fact that there was and is nothing “cheap” about the immaculate craftsmanship of the composers, lyricists, and performers who were responsible for the creation and dissemination of what has come to be known as the Great American Songbook. Their collective achievement, which survived the rise of rock-and-roll and continues to flourish, now seems likely to be of permanent significance.

American popular song is inextricably tied up with American popular singing. In order to illuminate the interplay between the two, I have compiled an annotated list of 50 American pop singers of the 20th century, each one performing a different song, all 50 of which are currently available on CD. The first installment of the list, which is arranged alphabetically by singer, appeared last month; this is the second.

Though the list is unabashedly personal, I hope it is wide-ranging enough to suggest something of the stylistic breadth of the pre-rock standard. I also hope it will suggest the ongoing vitality of the pop-song tradition, for along with such legendary figures of the increasingly distant past as Fred Astaire and Bing Crosby, I have made a special point of including a number of younger performers and songwriters whose work is at once recognizably traditional and unmistakably contemporary.

7. Andy Bey: “Someone to Watch Over Me.” Music by George Gershwin, lyrics by Ira Gershwin.

Performers interpret the songs they sing, and sometimes the interpretation becomes part of the song. A case in point is the Gershwin brothers’ “Someone to Watch Over Me,” a medium-tempo tune with a ragtime-y feel that is now almost invariably performed as a ballad—a change that helps to clarify the pentatonic shape of the first phrase of the chorus (“There’s a somebody I’m longing to see”), as well as allowing Ira Gershwin’s typically ingenious rhymes to create their full effect. As a ballad, “Someone to Watch Over Me” long ago became one of the most beloved of Gershwin tunes.

Andy Bey, a jazz vocalist and pianist who all but vanished from sight for the better part of a quarter-century, has now reemerged as a “singer’s singer,” admired by colleagues and critics alike. In his youth, he was a somewhat cloying baritone in the Billy Eckstine tradition, but he later made himself over into a challenging improviser (as well as a pianist of considerable harmonic resourcefulness). His plaintive, gracefully self-accompanied solo performance of “Someone to Watch Over Me” is memorable for its rhythmically free treatment of the verse, one of the Gershwins’ very best (*Ballads, Blues, and Bey*, Evidence ECD 22162-2).

8. June Christy: “Lazy Afternoon.” Music by Jerome Moross, lyrics by John Latouche.

Jerome Moross was one of a small number of American classical composers who also worked in the field of popular music (in addition, he scored several Hollywood films, most notably William Wyler’s *The Big Country*). His best-known song, “Lazy Afternoon,” was written for *The Golden Apple* (1954), a folk opera based on Homer that was successfully produced on Broadway. The languorous, seductive tune, whose perfectly apposite lyric is by the gifted but undisciplined writer John Latouche, promptly established itself as a standard and continues to be heard regularly.

The big bands of the 1930’s and 1940’s served as finishing schools for a large number of pop singers who benefited from their strict musical discipline and often went on to have major solo careers in their own right. June Christy, who sang with Stan Kenton, later made numerous solo albums, arranged by the ex-Kenton staff

composer Pete Rugolo, that served as showcases for her seductively cloudy mezzo-soprano. Rugolo's transparently voiced, modern-sounding arrangement of "Lazy Afternoon" frames Christy's restrained yet expressive singing to fine effect (*Gone for the Day/Fair and Warmer*, Capitol 4 95448 2).

9. Rosemary Clooney: "Do You Miss New York?" Music and lyrics by Dave Frishberg.

Dave Frishberg, who first won recognition in the 1960's as a mainstream jazz pianist, is now better known as a songwriter. Though he started out as a composer of comic songs, he gradually mastered the techniques of the great professionals, plumbing deeper feelings without abandoning the self-deprecating wit that first brought his work to the attention of adventurous singers looking for new material. (In addition to playing piano, Frishberg also sings his own songs in an engagingly creaky voice.) "Do You Miss New York?" is an old-fashioned "list song" whose lyric—a sweet-and-sour catalogue of the salient aspects of life in Manhattan, good and bad alike—takes on unexpected emotional depth from Frishberg's angular, harmonically tart setting.

Many pop singers retire far too late, but Rosemary Clooney is an admirable example of a singer who peaked in the final years of her long career. In the 1950's, she became commercially successful by recording silly ditties chosen for her by the producer Mitch Miller; after a nervous breakdown brought her career to a halt, she metamorphosed into a tougher, jazzier artist who did only the best material. Her 1993 recording of "Do You Miss New York?," a surprising choice for a vocalist of Clooney's generation and background, is an outstanding example of her late style (*Do You Miss New York?*, Concord Jazz CCD-4537).

10. Nat King Cole: "Stardust" Music by Hoagy Carmichael, lyrics by Mitchell Parish.

Most of the great American songwriters active between the world wars were influenced by jazz, but few played it professionally. The most prominent exception, Hoagy Carmichael, worked as a jazz pianist in the 1920's, recording with the cornetist Bix Beiderbecke. The latter's characteristic melodic devices can be heard in the verse of "Stardust," perhaps the most frequently heard of all pre-rock popular songs. (The "verse" is the part of a song following the instrumental introduction and preceding the chorus.) Carmichael was also one of the few songwriters who rarely wrote conventional love ballads. Although "Stardust" is without doubt a love song, Mitchell Parish's lyric is a song *about* a song—an unusual framing device that adds to its distinctiveness.

Nat King Cole, one of the most influential jazz pianists of the 1940's, eventually became a full-time singer, finding even greater popular success in that role. The grainy, dark-hued baritone voice of his middle age, its distinctive coloration deriving in no small part from the cigarette habit that would kill him in 1965, was well suited to romantic balladry, and his tender version of "Stardust," complete with the Beiderbecke-like verse, is rightly regarded as definitive. The cascading, vibrato-laden accompaniment for strings and harp is by Gordon Jenkins, himself an accomplished songwriter (he composed "Goodbye," Benny Goodman's theme song). *Love Is the Thing*, the 1958 album from which "Stardust" is drawn, is currently out of print, but Cole's version of "Stardust" can be heard on an imported collection of his hit records that is available from www.amazon.co.uk, the English affiliate of amazon.com (*Nat King Cole: The Ultimate Collection* EMI 499-575-2).

11. Perry Como: "They Say It's Wonderful." Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin.

Though Irving Berlin could write elaborately ingenious songs, his trademark was a melodic directness that at its best can be reminiscent of Schubert. The sustained line of "They Say It's Wonderful," the hit ballad from *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), is a prime example of this side of Berlin, as is the unmannered lyric. It hardly seems possible that so complete a fusion of words and music could have come from the pen of an untrained, uneducated songwriter—which may help to explain why Berlin was dogged throughout his long life by rumors that he hired other people to write his songs. The real explanation was simpler: genius.

Perry Como is now remembered as the unflappable, somnolent TV personality of the 1950's who specialized in saccharine ballads and mindless novelty songs. This mostly deserved reputation obscures the fact that he was also a superior vocalist with a wonderfully well-placed baritone voice. Whenever he sang good songs, these qualities invariably came to the fore, as in his 1946 recording of "They Say It's Wonderful," whose Italianate

legato and warmth are a welcome reminder that there was more to Como than his Christmas specials (*A Portrait of Perry Como*, Gallerie GALE 448).

12. **Mary Foster Conklin:** “Mad About You.” Music and lyrics by David Cantor.

The current revival of interest in the Great American Songbook has been accompanied by the emergence of several young songwriters who are infusing traditional forms with contemporary content. They include David Cantor, the guitarist for Dave’s True Story, a “lounge” group based in New York City. Though many of Cantor’s songs are ironic tales of downtown Manhattan, he also writes more conventional-sounding, standard-style ballads whose lyrics nonetheless have a postmodern feel. “Mad About You,” for example, is a laconic, disillusioned song about the aftermath of a failed romance, told from the point of view of the angry partner: “For what I once thought so sublime/Was just a perfect waste of time/Suffice to say/That I’m no longer mad about you.”

Mary Foster Conklin, also based in New York, is a singer with a salty, low-pitched voice who blends jazz-based improvisation and the theatrical techniques of cabaret. Unlike many other younger vocalists, she rarely sings about what she calls “old-movie romance,” and she takes a special interest in the work of similarly inclined songwriters. Her recording of “Mad About You,” lucidly accompanied by a trio led by the pianist Bill Mays, emphasizes the ruefulness of Cantor’s lyric. It can be heard on her first album, *Crazy Eyes*, which is available from www.cdbaby.com, an online store that specializes in releases by independent record labels (*Crazy Eyes*, Mock Turtle Music MT00219).

13. **Bing Crosby:** “Make Believe.” Music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II.

Modern American musical comedy begins with Jerome Kern, a classically trained composer who moved away from European-style operetta to help develop a distinctively American form of songwriting. His masterpiece is *Show Boat* (1927), a musical of near-operatic scope which a generation of Broadway songwriters and librettists took as their model. The no less influential book and lyrics are by Oscar Hammerstein II, who later replaced Lorenz Hart as Richard Rodgers’s lyricist. *Show Boat* is studded with standards, among them the light-hearted “Make Believe”; though not performed nearly as often as “Ol’ Man River” or “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man,” it remains one of the most attractive American songs of the 1920’s.

Bing Crosby is the key figure in American popular singing between the wars, a big-voiced balladeer who enlivened his style with the casual zest of jazz. A vocal crisis in the early 1930’s gradually lowered his medium-high baritone to a near-bass, in the process making him more popular than ever, but most connoisseurs prefer his earlier recordings. Among the best of them is his airy version of “Make Believe,” deftly accompanied by the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. It is included on an imported anthology available from www.worldsrecords.com (*Bing Crosby 1926-1932*, Timeless CBC-1-004).

14. **Meredith d’Ambrosio:** “Dream Dancing.” Music and lyrics by Cole Porter.

Cole Porter, a wealthy dilettante who turned himself into a great popular songwriter, is best known today for the arch wordplay of such comic turns as “You’re the Top.” Of far more interest, though, are the love songs in which his sometimes too-clever lyrics are ennobled by expansive melodies that leave no doubt of his thwarted romanticism. “Dream Dancing,” one of Porter’s finest ballads, never quite achieved full-fledged standard status, but it has been taken up by a number of jazz musicians, and is now performed far more often than during his lifetime.

Like Andy Bey, Meredith d’Ambrosio is unknown to the general public but greatly admired by other singers and musicians, and her dozen-odd albums are closely packed with carefully chosen songs of the highest quality. D’Ambrosio’s lightly swinging medium-tempo version of “Dream Dancing” is a good introduction to her whisper-soft contralto voice and unassuming, rhythmically adept style (*South to a Warmer Place*, Sunnyside SSC 1039D).

15. **Blossom Dearie:** “If I Were a Bell.” Music and lyrics by Frank Loesser.

One of the last of the old-fashioned professional songwriters—and one of the few to be equally adept at words and music—Frank Loesser is known less for specific songs than for the scores he wrote for two of the biggest Broadway hits of the postwar era, *Guys and Dolls* (1950) and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1961). A theater man par excellence, he had a special knack for plot-driven production numbers, which is why relatively few of his show tunes are now heard outside the contexts of their shows. One that remains deservedly popular is “If I Were a Bell” (from *Guys and Dolls*), whose well-named lyric rides atop a tune rhythmically interesting enough to have caught the ear of the trumpeter Miles Davis. His 1956 recording made it a jazz standard.

If any vocalist owns “If I Were a Bell,” it is Blossom Dearie, the jazziest of all cabaret singers, who performs a wide and idiosyncratic repertoire of songs ranging from the familiar to the *recherché* (many of the best of which she has written herself). Her high-pitched, wise-child voice and delicately swinging piano playing light up her 1958 recording of “If I Were a Bell,” accompanied by Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen, the rhythm section of the Oscar Peterson Trio. Even better is the slower, slyer solo performance heard on *Winchester in Apple Blossom Time*, an album on the Daffodil label that is currently out of print but very much worth searching out (*Once Upon a Summertime*, Verve 314 517 223).

16. Dena DeRose: “More Than You Know.” Music by Vincent Youmans, lyrics by Edward Eliscu and Billy Rose.

The popularity of Vincent Youmans’s “More Than You Know” is a testament to the sheer durability of American popular song. Written in 1929 for the unsuccessful Broadway show *Great Day*, it remains indispensable to saloon singers the world over. (Michelle Pfeiffer, playing the part of a second-rate pop singer, performs it at an audition in the movie *The Fabulous Baker Boys*.) Nor is its popularity a mere function of its familiarity: Youmans’s wailing melody, with its repeated chromatic ascent to the sixth degree of the scale, is the exact musical equivalent of Edward Eliscu’s sorrowful lyric.

Old standards like “More Than You Know” are made to be reinvented, and Dena DeRose’s recent recording, sung over a Latin beat borrowed from the pianist Ahmad Jamal’s famous arrangement of “Poinciana,” adds fetching freshness to an over-familiar song. Herself a highly accomplished pianist, DeRose started singing out of necessity when carpal tunnel syndrome left her temporarily unable to play; her cool-toned, introspective voice and consistently creative self-accompanying make her one of the most impressive of the younger jazz singers currently appearing in New York City (*Another World*, Sharp Nine CD 1016-2).

17. Jim Ferguson: “The Night We Called It a Day.” Music by Matt Dennis, lyrics by Tom Adair.

Matt Dennis and Tom Adair served in the early 1940’s as staff songwriters for the legendary big band led by the trombonist Tommy Dorsey, for which they wrote such immediately successful standards as “Everything Happens to Me,” “Violets for Your Furs,” and their best ballad, “The Night We Called It a Day.” Though Adair’s lyric is memorable in its own right, it is Dennis’s arresting, aching idealistic melody, with its unexpected initial two-stage leap of a minor ninth, that makes this song a classic.

Many famous singers, including Frank Sinatra, have recorded “The Night We Called It a Day,” but the best version on record is the most recent one, performed by the singer-bassist Jim Ferguson. A light, low-lying tenor with a slight but unmistakable Southern accent and a flawless command of the falsettolike “head voice,” Ferguson doubles as a Nashville-based country musician but his heart is in jazz and standard song; perhaps the finest male balladeer of his generation, he sings with unaffected, irresistible sincerity (*Deep Summer Music*, A-Records/Challenge AL 73201).

18. Ella Fitzgerald: “What Is There to Say?” Music by Vernon Duke, lyrics by E.Y. “Yip” Harburg.

The concert music of the Russian composer Vladimir Dukelsky—including a piano concerto written for Arthur Rubinstein and a ballet score commissioned by Serge Diaghilev—is now forgotten. But once Dukelsky moved to the United States and changed his name to Vernon Duke, he easily established himself as a popular songwriter, collaborating with prominent lyricists on such ballads as “April in Paris,” “Autumn in New York,” and the

evergreen “What Is There to Say?” “Yip” Harburg’s lyric, which famously rhymes “deadlock” and “wedlock,” is undeniably clever, but it is Duke’s long-breathed melody that makes the song a standard—and one with a faint but unmistakable Russian flavor.

Though Ella Fitzgerald was never a particularly striking interpreter of lyrics, her bright, youthful-sounding voice and infallible sense of swing caused her to be ranked with Billie Holiday as the most widely admired of jazz vocalists. Even those who find her singing insufficiently characterized will be impressed by the duet recordings she made in 1950 and 1954 with the pianist Ellis Larkins, a peerless accompanist who brought out the best in Fitzgerald, and especially so in their slow, affectionate version of “What Is There to Say?” (*Pure Ella*, GRP GRD-636).

19. **Helen Forrest:** “Day In—Day Out.” Music by Rube Bloom, lyrics by Johnny Mercer.

Johnny Mercer collaborated with more first-rate composers than any other lyricist in the history of American popular song, almost always to brilliant effect. At home in every genre of songwriting from comedy numbers (“Bob White”) to French *chansons* (“When the World Was Young”), Mercer commingled the colloquial diction of his Southern boyhood with a genuinely poetic sensibility. Among the earliest of his many hits is “Day In-Day Out,” written in 1939 with Rube Bloom, a jazz pianist and composer whose unusual 56-bar tune inspired Mercer to produce one of his most memorable—and passionate—lyrics.

Helen Forrest, the best of the big-band “canaries” of the swing era, worked with the orchestras of Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, and Harry James. Her frankly emotional singing for James made her a star during World War II, but some listeners prefer the less overtly demonstrative style of her earlier work with the Shaw band. Though Shaw disliked pop singers, regarding them as nothing more than necessary concessions to mass taste, there is nothing remotely cynical about the crisply swinging, adeptly phrased version of “Day In-Day Out” he and Forrest recorded together in 1939 (*The Voice of the Big Bands*, Jasmine JASMCD 2545).

20. **Judy Garland:** “The Man That Got Away.” Music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by Ira Gershwin.

Many professional musicians believe Harold Arlen to be the most gifted of all pre-rock American songwriters. He was in no way a “composer’s composer,” having turned out such popular hits as “Over the Rainbow” and “That Old Black Magic.” Even so, his sinuous melodies and jazz-flavored harmonies have a special appeal to musicians—particularly jazz musicians, who respond no less strongly to the rhythmic drive and dark-blue coloration of such Arlen classics as “Stormy Weather” and “Blues in the Night.” Unlike most well-known composers, Arlen worked with a large number of leading lyricists, and his collaboration with Ira Gershwin on George Cukor’s 1954 remake of *A Star Is Born* produced “The Man That Got Away,” one of the greatest torch songs of all time. Arlen’s highly chromatic tune inspired the sometimes superficial Gershwin to write what might well be his most heartfelt lyric.

The horrific story of Judy Garland’s brutal apprenticeship as a child movie star—as well as the no less alarming tale of her drug-sodden decline—has obscured her considerable gifts as a singer-actress. A Jolsonesque belter who could also make the most of a ballad, Garland reached her artistic peak in the early 1950’s. “The Man That Got Away” was written for her at that time, and the performance heard on the soundtrack of *A Star Is Born* is her most fully realized recording. Though she was one of the few major American pop singers of her time to have been largely uninfluenced by jazz, she floats above Ray Heindorf’s studio orchestra with all the fluidity and grace of a swing-era saxophonist. Others have sung “The Man That Got Away” well, but it will always belong to Garland (*A Star Is Born*, Columbia CK-44389).

21. **Johnny Hartman:** “Lush Life.” Music and lyrics by Billy Strayhorn.

Throughout his too-short life, the composer-arranger Billy Strayhorn labored discreetly in the shadow of his illustrious employer and collaborator, Duke Ellington. Jazz scholars have lately begun to disentangle the work of the two men, with the result that Strayhorn is now acknowledged as a significant jazz composer in his own right—as well as one with a much more complete grasp of large-scale musical form than that of his self-taught mentor. Even during his lifetime, Strayhorn won recognition for a handful of songs and instrumental

compositions, the most famous of which is “Lush Life,” a 1939 song for which he also wrote the overripe but adequate lyric. The Ravel-like harmonic language of “Lush Life” speaks to jazz instrumentalists and musically secure singers alike, and since Stray-horn’s death in 1967 it has become a popular standard.

Johnny Hartman was another ripe-voiced baritone in the Eckstine tradition who eventually developed a more personal style. The sardonic edge of his mature singing can be heard in the recording of “Lush Life” he made in 1963 with the quartet of the tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, one of the most influential working jazz groups of the 1960’s. When not experimenting with avant-garde techniques, Coltrane was himself a superb balladeer, and this performance shows both singer and saxophonist at their most accessible (*John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman*, Impulse GRD-157).

22. Dick Haymes: “It Might as Well Be Spring.” Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II.

Richard Rodgers switched lyricists halfway through his career, when alcoholism and a disorderly private life rendered Lorenz Hart incapable of further collaboration. In 1943, with *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II changed the American musical permanently. Building on the earlier achievement of *Show Boat*, Hammerstein created the “integrated” musical, in which songs emerge seamlessly from the dramatic flow and help to move it forward. For all his dramatic shrewdness, however, he was a less sophisticated lyricist than Hart, and the songs he wrote with Rodgers have a very different flavor—more popular in tone, sometimes to the point of faux-naïveté. At their best, though, Rodgers and Hammerstein were capable of producing such genuinely poignant, open-hearted songs as “It Might as Well Be Spring,” written for the 1945 film *State Fair*. Hammerstein’s lyric is a gem, and Rodgers matches it with an al-fresco melody as lovely as anything he wrote for Hart.

Dick Haymes, a classically trained baritone who worked with Harry James and Tommy Dorsey before going solo, was universally admired for his ballads. He sang “It Might as Well Be Spring” in *State Fair*, and his 1945 recording is as unselfconscious as the song itself. But he topped it decisively a decade later, at a time when alcoholism was undermining his own once-spectacular career. In the version he made for Capitol in 1955, Haymes’s voice is considerably darker in timbre, and the slower tempo permits him to phrase more imaginatively. (Johnny Mandel’s exquisite arrangement is also a vast improvement on its predecessor.) No more purely beautiful ballad performance has ever been recorded (*Best of Dick Haymes*, Curb D2-77479).

23. Woody Herman: “I Hadn’t Anyone Till You.” Music and lyrics by Ray Noble.

Record collectors know Ray Noble as the leader of one of England’s most urbane dance bands of the 1930’s, but he also wrote the words and music for a handful of popular songs that have stood the test of time. The best of them—though not by much—is “I Hadn’t Anyone Till You,” a little masterpiece of adroit phrasing whose high quality leaves one wondering why Noble wrote so few songs. (The answer may lie in the fact that he became a popular radio personality after emigrating to the United States in 1935, stooging for the ventriloquist-comic Edgar Bergen.)

The clarinetist and saxophonist Woody Herman led one of the finest big bands of the 1940’s, but he was also an immensely charming singer, comfortable with blues, novelty tunes, and ballads (he sang the vocal refrain on the first recording of David Raksin’s “Laura”). In 1954 he recorded *Music for Tired Lovers*, an album of late-night ballads, accompanied by the Erroll Garner Trio, on which he can be heard singing a marvelously relaxed version of “I Hadn’t Anyone Till You” (*The Jazz Swinger/Music for Tired Lovers*, Collectables Jazz Classics COL-CD-6679).

24. Billie Holiday: “You Go to My Head.” Music by J. Fred Coots, lyrics by Haven Gillespie.

In addition to the handful of giants—the Berlins and Gershwins and Porters—the Great American Songbook also contains numerous works by talented journeymen who were occasionally visited by inspiration. One of them, J. Fred Coots, hit the bull’s-eye twice, with “For All We Know,” a World War II ballad, and “You Go to My Head,” a torch song whose harmonic sophistication has long appealed to jazz musicians. Haven Gillespie’s lyric for

“You Go to My Head” is just good enough, but Coots’s music is splendid—a reminder that more often than not, it is the composer and not the lyricist who spells the difference in the making of a standard.

By common if not universal consent the greatest of all jazz singers, Billie Holiday made the most of an inadequate instrument. Her small, raspy voice was narrow in range, forcing her to rework the melodies of most of the songs she sang—which she did with taste and endless resourcefulness. She was strongly responsive to lyrics, and her youthful singing combined joy and wistfulness to compelling effect. Later on, her interpretations grew more mannered, and a lifetime of dissipation caused her voice to disintegrate well before her death in 1959. But the recordings she made between 1935 and 1939, including a quietly winsome version of “You Go to My Head,” remain nonpareil (*Lady Day’s 25 Greatest 1933-1944*, ASV CD AJA 5181).

25. **Shirley Horn:** “Where Do You Start?” Music by Johnny Mandel, lyrics by Alan and Marilyn Bergman.

Johnny Mandel, who started out as a jazz trumpeter and big-band composer-arranger, eventually moved to Hollywood to write film music, in the process becoming one of the top songwriters of the 1960’s. Though his best-known standard is “The Shadow of Your Smile,” written for the soundtrack of *The Sandpiper*, a half-dozen of his other songs are performed nearly as often. Like Cy Coleman, another jazz musician turned songwriter, Mandel constructs his melodies out of short, riff-like phrases that he expands into cunningly balanced tunes. “Where Do You Start?” one of his most memorable, also has an excellent lyric by Alan and Marilyn Bergman, by far the most commercially successful of the limited number of older, tradition-conscious lyricists who have remained active to the present day.

The singer-pianist Shirley Horn, briefly popular in the early 1960’s, suddenly won full-scale celebrity in 1992 with the release of *Here’s to Life*, an album that teamed her with Mandel (who in addition to his songwriting and film scores has long been one of the most admired of vocal arrangers). Much like Billie Holiday, Horn has a technically limited voice, short-breathed and rough-surfaced, which she uses with uncommon sensitivity, favoring extremely slow tempos. Her interpretation of “Where Do You Start?” is masterly, at once understated and magnetically expressive (*Here’s to Life*, Verve 314 511 879-2).

To be continued

Except as indicated, all of the CD’s mentioned above can be purchased online by viewing this article on COMMENTARY’s website: www.commentarymagazine.com
