

The
PIANO
of
MARGARET JOHNSON
“COUNTESS” “QUEENIE”

Solographer: Jan Evensmo
Last update: Oct. 6, 2011

Born: Chanute, Kansas, Sept. 28, 1919
 Died: Kansas City, July 13, 1939

History:

Quote from Linda Dahl: “Stormy Weather – The music and lives of a century of jazz women” (Quartet Books, 1984): “... but Countess Margaret, the other ‘girl pianist’ was a Kansas City performer who showed great promise. Known as ‘Countess’ or ‘Queenie’, Margaret Johnson was born in 1919 and by the age of fifteen was leading her own band. During her teens she also worked with Harlan Leonard’s territory band and often jammed with Lester Young, who was then approaching stardom in Count Basie’s orchestra in Kansas City. According to Mary Lou Williams, Johnson ‘was a friend of Lester Young, and when I was sick for a time, Andy Kirk sent for her to take my place. The tour got her, I fear, for she died of t.b. before she had done very much, though I hear she was very good.’ Margaret Johnson died in 1939, at the age of twenty. Her recorded work, limited to one session, ‘reveals a mature style (derived from Basie), an assured manner and a clean technique,’ according to one writer (Ross Russell).”

MARGARET JOHNSON SOLOGRAPHY

BILLIE HOLIDAY & HER ORCHESTRA **NYC. Sept. 15, 1938**

Buck Clayton (tp), Dicky Wells (tb), Lester Young (cl, ts), Margaret “Queenie” or “Countess” Johnson (p), Freddy Green (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (dm), Billie Holiday (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

23467-1	The Very Thought Of You	Intro 4 bars to acc. (vo) 32 and 6 bars. (SM)
23468-1	I Can’t Get Started	Acc. (vo) 32 and 16 bars. (SM)
23468-2	I Can’t Get Started	As above. (SM)
23469-1	I’ve Got A Date With A Dream	Acc. (vo) 32 and 8 bars. (SM)
23469-2	I’ve Got A Date With A Dream	As above. (SM)
23470-2	You Can’t Be Mine	Acc. (vo) 32 bars. Solo 8 bars to acc. (vo) 16 bars. (SM)

There is not much to add to the history section above. There is only one brief solo here, and one intro, the rest is accompaniment. MJ seems very competent, but whether she has a personal style is difficult to say. I do not think she sounds much like Teddy Wilson, as has been suggested.

No further recording sessions.

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