

The
VOCAL
of
PUTNEY DANDRIDGE

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Born: Richmond, Virginia, Jan. 13, 1902
Died: Wall Township, NJ, Feb. 15, 1946

Introduction:

Believe or not, but Putney Dandridge was one of the great names in Oslo Jazz Circle back then in the fifties. To be fair, it all was based originally on one side of the only British Vocalion 78 rpm., "When I Grow Too Old To Dream" with Roy Eldridge and Chu Berry, our great heroes. The discographies however told us that in his homeland there were not one but twentytwo Vocalion records with starstudded personnel. After hard work I obtained them all and discovered that while the sidemen were among the best the swinging thirties could offer, Putney himself had much to offer, in fact he was in my opinion one of the really great jazz vocalists.

History:

From 1918 until 1926 did regular tours with the Drake and Walker Show. Played in Buffalo for many years; then, during early 1930s, was regular accompanist to tapdancer Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson. Led own band in Cleveland 1932-34. Solo piano spot at Adrian's Taproom from March 1935, then worked regularly in New York - various residencies including long spell at The Hickory House. In 1935-36 recorded many vocal sides with all-star accompaniment (ref. John Chilton).

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE SOLOGRAPHY

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. March 25, 1935

Herman Autrey (tp), Gene Sedric (cl, ts), Putney Dandridge (p, cel, vo), unknown (g), (b), (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Vocalion:

17173-1 Youre A Heavenly Thing 2:43. (FM)

17174-1 Mr. Bluebird 2:49. (FM)

The first recording session represents a modest start with only two titles. The trumpet and tenorsax come directly from Fats Waller's group, and there are good reasons to believe that Putney Dandridge is Vocalion's attempt to compete with Fats' enormous success for Victor. Our first impression is that PD is an original singer, but the material and accompaniment do not inspire to great heights, and probably he is somewhat constrained by his first visit to a recording studio. He also performs on piano and celeste but the results do not make jazz history.

ADRIAN ROLLINI & HIS TAP ROOM GANG NYC. June 14, 1935

Wingy Manone (tp, vo-92264,65), Joe Marsala (cl, as), Adrian Rollini (bsx, vib, xyl), Putney Dandridge (p, vo-92265,66,67), Carmen Mastren (g), Sid Weiss (p), Sam Weiss (dm), Jeanne Burns (vo-92264,68).

Six titles were recorded for Victor, no PD vocal on 92263-1 "Bouncin' In Rhythm", 92264-1 "I Got A Need For You" and 92268-1 "Jazz O' Jazz" but:

92265-1 Weather Man Vocal duet 40 bars. (SM)

92266-1 Nagasaki Vocal 32 and 32 bars. (F)

92267-1 Honeysuckle Rose Vocal 32 bars. (M)

PD's interpretation of "... Rose" shows a very personal singer with humour and rhythmic capabilities, quite fascinating! "Weather ..." has Wingy in front with PD only as giving background comments, not particularly interesting. However, "Nagasaki" is a pure showdown for PD, assisted by ensemble vocal, preceding the recording under his own name with only a few days. The differences are not very great, although in the late scat part there are some nice variations.

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. June 25, 1935

Roy Eldridge (tp), Chu Berry (ts-17730,31), Harry Grey (p-17730), Carmen Mastren (not Nappy Lamare) (g), Artie Bernstein (b), Bill Beason (dm), Putney Dandridge (p-17729,31, vo).

Three titles were recorded for Vocalion:

17729-1 Nagasaki 2:42. (FM)

17730-1 Chasing Shadows 2:36. (M)

17730-2 Chasing Shadows 2:36. (M)

17731-1 When I Grow Too Old To Dream 2:38. (FM)

As said in the introduction, "... Dream" was our introduction to PD, although this is a rather stale tune, and the focus is on Roy and Chu. The highlight for PD himself is "Nagasaki", and enjoying his scatting when he comes in for the second time, one must be rather oversophisticated not to recognize his qualities for creating something different, "come on and kiss your daddy, my sweet, my sweet", just to the point. Back to "... Dream", he really swings it, and the atmosphere is just what vintage jazz could do for obtaining eternal life, though he definitely should not have played piano. "Chasing ..." does not give him much to work on, and the two takes, the only case of such in his recording career, are rather similar when vocal is concerned.

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Aug. 2, 1935

Henry Allen (tp), Buster Bailey (cl, as), Teddy Wilson (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), John Kirby (b), Walter Johnson (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo).

Five titles were recorded for Vocalion:

17934-1 I'm In The Mood For Love 2:46. (M)

17935-1 Isn't This A Lovely Day? 3:10. (M)

17936-1 Cheek To Cheek 3:01. (FM)

17937-1 That's What You Think 2:40. (M)

17938-1 Shine 3:00. (F)

This is the first fully successful session, with a solid rhythm section with Teddy Wilson in charge. PD is now an experienced artist in the recording studio, and seem to relax and enjoy himself more than before. Listen first to "... Mood ...", how he presents the tune in an elegant and highly personal way. Somebody once said that with such musicians around you, anyone could sing. Wonderful accompaniment, yes, but the point is that this inspires a fine artist to show his best. His mocking interpretation of "Cheek ..." is interesting, "come back to Harlem where you belong". On "... Think" he goes straight on your throat, full command of his rhythmic tools, making a great performance out of an ordinary tune. Finally the great highlight "Shine", apart from being a magnificent record in the vintage jazz tradition (listen to Wilson!), he shows that he is both a brilliant entertainer as well as a true jazzman with all the necessary qualities for being remembered.

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Oct. 21, 1935**
 Shirley Clay (tp), Kenneth Hollon (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Clarence Holiday (g), John Kirby (b), Walter Johnson (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo).
 Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

18183-1	I'm On A See-Saw	3:04. (SM)
18184-1	Eeney Meeney Miney Mo	2:53. (M)
18185-1	Double Trouble	2:58. (M)
18186-1	Santa Claus Came In The Spring	2:53. (FM)

Another great session with magnificent accompaniment. "... See-Saw" is of the less important items, not much to be done with this sluggish one. "Double ..." is better, and "Eeney ..." is of course something to be noted, but if it is possible to say it, PD is overdoing it here. The highlight is no doubt the delightful "Santa Claus ...", one of my favourite PD performances. Note how he demonstrates his ability to improvise, presenting the lyrics first in a (almost) conventional way, but coming back for the conclusion, he really takes off!

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Dec. 6, 1935**
 Richard Clarke (tp), Tom Mace (cl, ts), Teddy Wilson (p-18342-44), Dave Barbour (g), Grachan Moncur (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo, p-18341).
 Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

18341-1	You Hit The Spot	2:50. (M)
18342-1	No Other One	2:57. (FM)
18343-1	A Little Bit Independent	3:15. (SM)
18344-1	You Took My Breath Away	2:49. (M)

Some dedicated vintage listeners may bypass some PD sessions because the accompaniment does not seem interesting enough, fair enough, but they will be missing much good music, like here. Worse, they will miss several opportunities to concentrate upon what PD really does with rather secondary music material. Dig how he manages to get something out of the ending of "... Independent"! Or how to combine showmanship with originality on "... Breath Away"!

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. March 2, 1936**
 Richard Clarke (tp), Johnny Russell (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Arnold Adams (g), Ernest Hill (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo).
 Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

18741-1	Sweet Violets	3:04. (M)
18742-1	Dinner For One, Please James	3:11. (SM)
18743-1	A Beautiful Lady In Blue	3:09. (FM)
18744-1	Honeysuckle Rose	3:11. (M)

The comments to the previous session may equally apply here, although possibly the readers are underestimated if I believe somebody should not find this accompaniment interesting. This is a nice session with good vocal and everything included though without the easy-to-remember flashing items. Nevertheless, dig how he sings "... Lady ...", straightforward and swinging, many others contemporaries doing original things like this? I also appreciate his interpretation of good old "... Rose", although his "... suckle"-ing takes it pretty far.

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. **June 1, 1936**
 Bobby Stark (tp), Teddy McRae (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), John Trueheart (g), John Kirby (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo).
 Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

19352-1	It's A Sin To Tell A Lie	2:53. (M)
19353-1	All My Life	3:11. (M)
19354-1	Ol' Man River	2:48. (F)
19355-1	Why Was I Born?	2:50. (M)

PD's sense of humour and drama appeals at least to me. Probably one might state that he is overdoing it at the end of "... River" in a breathtaking tempo, but take "... Lie" as a good and positive example, sounding kind of lacklustre in the song presentation, and then after the horns taking it all mockingly out. Same thing on the two others, and the highlight is "... Born?", dig this one, remember and play Billie Holiday's version and consider how immense variation the art of jazz presents to us!

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. **July 21, 1936**
 Wallace Jones (tp), Charles Frazier (ts), Ram Ramirez (p), Arnold Adams (g), Mack Walker (b), Slick Jones (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo).
 Two titles were recorded for Vocalion:

19588-1	These Foolish Things	2:26. (M)
19589-1	Cross Patch	2:40. (FM)

Only two titles here, nice and swinging enough but the session cannot compete with so many more exciting ones, perhaps the producer realized this and called it a day.

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. **Aug. 3, 1936**
 Henry Allen (tp), Joe Marsala (cl, as), James Sherman (p), Eddie Condon (g), Wilson Myers (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo).
 Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

19645-1	A Star Fell Out Of Heaven	2:37. (M)
19646-1	Mary Had A Little Lamb	2:46. (FM)
19647-1	Here Comes Your Pappy	2:37. (M)
19648-1	If We Never Meet Again	2:41. (SM)

Three sessions with almost the same personnel within two months. "... Heaven" seems to be rather ordinary, but "... Little Lamb" is not; very exciting to have this fascinating childrens' song, so well performed by Roy Eldridge, also given to PD. His dynamics and show abilities come well through, although to imitate the lamb's vocal expressions so closely is a rather dubious attempt of competition. The PD highlight could be "... Your Pappy", here he really swings with the band in his very personal way! However, I have ended up with the slow medium "... Again", admitted influenced by the magnificent trumpet solo here, but the contrast between the almost solemn vocal introduction and the fantastic 'operatic' conclusion is unbearably lovely!!

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. **Sept. 1, 1936**
 Personnel as Aug. 3 except Clyde Hart (p), John Kirby (b) replace Sherman and Meyers.
 Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

19794-1	Sing, Baby, Sing	2:25. (FM)
19795-1	You Turned The Tables On Me	2:39. (SM)
19796-1	It's The Gypsy In Me	2:40. (FM)
19797-1	When A Lady Meets A Gentleman DS	2:39. (M)

Four swinging titles fitting nicely into the mood created a few weeks before. Whether you enjoy most the conclusion of "... Sing" or "... The Tables ..." or for that matter the remaining two is just a matter of taste. Or maybe you end up by digging how he expresses the word "gentleman" in the ride out; possible that was the reason for British Vocalion to choose just this flip side to "When I Grow ..."?!! Who knows, maybe PD was one?!

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Oct. 14, 1936

Personnel as Aug. 3 except Clyde Hart (p) replaces Sherman.

Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

20069-2	A High Hat, A Piccolo And A Cane	2:29. (FM)
20070-1	Easy To Love	2:42. (M)
20071-1	You Do The Darnedest Things, Baby	2:42. (FM)
20072-1	The Skeleton In The Closet	2:34. (FM)

Swing 1936, go for "... A Cane"!! He swings with the band, and he swings the band, and they all have a wonderful time, and god knows how many times I have played this one! Probably they needed to take a rest with "Easy ...", because that one is rather tame, but coming strongly back on "... The Darnedest ...", where PD also speaks the middle chorus instead instead of singing it. Finally a hilarious version of "The Skeleton ...", if you don't enjoy this one, please don't tell me about it (note that I learned, more than half-a-century ago, from Columbia archives that they had the matrix of take 2 of this title, maybe it is still there...).

PUTNEY DANDRIDGE & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Dec. 10, 1936

Doc Cheatham (tp), Tom Mace (cl), Teddy Wilson (p), Allen Reuss (g), Ernest Hill (b), Sidney Catlett (dm), Putney Dandridge (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

20384-1	I'm In A Dancing Mood	2:47. (FM)
20385-2	With Plenty Of Money And You	2:29. (FM)
20386-1	That Foolish Feeling	2:28. (FM)
20387-1	Gee, But You're Swell	2:33. (M)

The final PD session with a different kind of rhythm section, easy flowing with Sid Catlett's drums in charge, and Doc playing better trumpet than anywhere prewar. Four fine vocal contributions of which "... Plenty of Money ..." should be noted for its scat, not heard since "Shine". The highlight must nevertheless be chosen as "... Foolish Feeling", and how this feeling really materializes in the second chorus of his singing, great! Finally, his goodbye phrase is "... You're Swell"; our answer should be "same to you".

Less than two years have passed and Putney Dandridge's recording career is already over. It is wise to assume that he did not manage, after all, to outcompete Fats Waller or Louis Armstrong or other great vocalists of the swing era. Nevertheless his records are extremely well alive this very day. Of course it helps that all PD's records would have been vintage treasures in non-vocal versions because of the personnel and general intelligent production. My humble opinion is that Putney himself made the sessions' atmosphere, made the music great, and was a highly original and very enjoyable jazz singer at a time when jazz had surged to new and hitherto unknown heights.

No further recording sessions.

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