

Hociel Thomas and Lillie Delk Christian (1925-1928) [1996]

Written by bluesever

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1 Gambler's Dream 00:02:30 2 Sunshine Baby 00:02:48 3 Adam And Eve Had The Blues 00:03:16 4 Put It Where I Can Get It 00:02:56 5 Wash Woman Blues 00:03:00 6 I've Stopped My Man 00:02:55 7 Deep Water Blues 00:03:05 8 G'wan I Told You 00:03:12 9 Listen To Ma 00:03:27 10 Lonesome Hours 00:03:15 11 Lonesome And Sorry 00:02:32 12 Baby O' Mine (take A) 00:02:32 13 Baby O' Mine (take B) 00:02:20 14 It All Depends On You 00:03:11 15 Ain't She Sweet 00:02:47 16 My Blue Heaven 00:02:51 17 Miss Annabelle Lee 00:02:40 18 You're A Real Sweetheart 00:03:10 19 Too Busy! 00:02:56 20 Was It A Dream? (waltz) 00:02:58 21 Last Night I Dreamed You Kissed Me 00:03:09 22 I Can't Give You Anything But Love 00:03:31 23 Sweethearts On Parade 00:03:14 24 Baby 00:02:59 25 I Must Have That Man 00:03:19
Louis Armstrong - Cornet, Vocals Mancy Carr - Guitar Lillie Delk Christian - Vocals Johnny Dodds - Clarinet Earl Hines - Piano R.J. Jones - Piano Jimmie Noone - Clarinet Johnny St. Cyr - Banjo Artie Starks - Clarinet Hersal Thomas - Piano Hociel Thomas - Vocals

Released in 1996, this 25-track compilation of recordings made in Chicago between 1925 and 1927 by Hociel Thomas and Lillie Delk Christian fills gaps in the early Louis Armstrong story, with cameo appearances by classic jazz heroes like clarinetists Johnny Dodds and Jimmie Noone, banjoist Johnny St. Cyr, and pianists Hersal Thomas, Richard M. Jones, and Earl Hines. Both singers have been posthumously pilloried by critics who deplore Hociel's casual, free spirit approach to timing, pitch, and intonation even while jeering at Lillie for sounding too tame, concise, and sweetly mannered. Hociel Thomas was the daughter of George Washington Thomas, Jr., a pianist who recorded under the name of Clay Custer and who composed the "Muscle Shoals Blues" and the "New Orleans Hop Scop Blues." She was the niece of Beulah Thomas, better known as blues singer Sippie Wallace, and Beulah's little brother Hersal Thomas, a piano prodigy who died suddenly only months after setting up these sessions for Hociel and accompanying her himself. If you're fussy about pitch and intonation, you're listening up the wrong tree with Hociel. She sang intuitively with her heart and let the tones fall where they may. There's something intensely rewarding about this kind of earthy, organic singing, and it should not be judged according to normal standards of musicianship. These are not her complete recordings. There were a handful made before the Okeh sessions that yielded tracks

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one-ten, and another very fine cluster of tunes cut some 20 years later with trumpeter Mutt Carey. What you do get are all of the records she made in the company of Louis Armstrong. As for Lillie Delk Christian, the charge of excessive sweetness is greatly exaggerated and needs to be overruled. Stylistically she belongs somewhere among Ruth Etting, Annette Hanshaw, and other similarly pleasant pop singers from the 1920s, with a polite candor that suggests a background in cabaret and musical theater. She is best on upbeat numbers like "Ain't She Sweet?" "My Blue Heaven," "You're a Real Sweetheart," "Who's Wonderful? Who's Marvelous? Miss Annabelle Lee," and especially "Too Busy" during which she sings a duet with Armstrong, who scats beautiful circles around her. Jimmie Noone interacts wonderfully with the voice, and lucky listeners will experience a completely unfounded sense of well-being. Virtually everyone who has ever pontificated on the subject of Lillie Delk Christian (including Steve Tracy, the author of the mean-spirited liner notes) hastens to complain bitterly about her rendition of "Was It a Dream?" a slow and gentle waltz that was popularized by Fred and Tom Waring. (Bear in mind Armstrong's fondness for Italian opera -- his favorite soprano was Luisa Tetrazzini.) In truth this is a halting romantic ode of breathtaking delicacy, and those who are unencumbered by impatient postmodern cynicism will be moved by its old-fashioned sentimentality, hopefully sensing that an opportunity to hear Armstrong blowing his horn in this kind of a setting is a rare and delicious treat. --- arwulf arwulf, Rovi

There's a big contrast in styles and quality between Thomas and Christian. Both tried (and sometimes succeeded) to create a hybrid of jazz-blues-pop and both have benefited of the presence of Louis Armstrong's cornet. The comparison ends here.

Hociel Thomas comes from a family of musicians. Her father was a renowned pianist and her aunt was none other but Sippie Wallace. I wouldn't be as tough as the liner notes but the truth is that even musicians like Armstrong can't transform more than average material into great performance. And the fact that Thomas often sings in a key where she isn't at ease doesn't help. She often sounds tired and not very implicated. Lillie Delk Christian is more interesting vocally and her material is far superior (I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Ain't She Sweet, I Must Have That Man). That's probably explains why the band gives a better performance. Noone (clarinet) and St Cyr (guitar) enlivens the December 12th session featuring "My Blue Heaven" and "Miss Annabelle Lee" with gutsy accompaniment and fine solos. Armstrong appears six months later for the June 1928 session. This session features the best, "Too Busy" an uptempo number with Armstrong scatting, and the worst of Christian, "Was It A Dream" a waltz that doesn't really give the Hot Four the possibility to express themselves.

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The last recordings lack a bit of swing in the vocal but is saved by a good rendition of "I Must Have That Man". This selection is a nice addition to anyone who's interested in Satchmo's early years and work as a back up band. And despite some flaws and, let's say it, the fact she isn't a great vocalist, Lillie Delk Christian's sides have a certain charm and are appealing enough for a curious listener. ---Fred "Virgil" Turgis, jumpingfrom6to6.com

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