

Les Baxter His Chorus and Orchestra – Confetti (1958)

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1. *Ricordate Marcellino* 2. *Heartstring Melody* 3. *Dance from Bonjour Tristesse* 4. *The Lonely Whistler* 5. *Mon Amour O Mon Amour* 6. *April in Portugal* 7. *La Panse* 8. *Love Begins* 9. *The Bachelors of Brussels* 10. *Love Theme from A Farewell to Arms* 11. *I Never Had A Dream Like This Before* 12. *The Poor People of Paris*

For some reason, Confetti is one of the more difficult Les Baxter records to find. It is not particularly exotic in that the tunes are from or about Europe (especially France). The musical style is the string-heavy easy listening of his "April in Paris" material. But three whistling tracks make it essential for the whistling-album collector, at least, if not the Les Baxter or easy-listening completist. "Ricordate Marcellino" pays tribute to the whistling master Muzzy Marcellino. Les Baxter's chorus sings on several tracks. Fans of light-hearted "continental" (or dramatic orchestra) music and hopeless romantic types should enjoy it. --- Tony Wilds, Rovi

Les Baxter is a pianist who composed and arranged for the top swing bands of the '40s and '50s, but he is better known as the founder of exotica, a variation of easy listening that glorified the sounds and styles of Polynesia, Africa, and South America, even as it retained the traditional string-and-horn arrangements of instrumental pop. Exotica became a massively popular trend in the '50s, with thousands of record buyers listening to Baxter, Martin Denny, and their imitators. Baxter also pioneered the use of the electronic instrument the theremin, which has a haunting, howling sound.

Baxter studied piano at the Detroit Conservatory and Pepperdine College in Los Angeles. After

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he completed school, he abandoned the piano and became a vocalist. When he was 23, he joined Mel Tormé's Mel-Tones. The group sang on Artie Shaw records, including the hit "What Is This Thing Called Love."

In 1950, he became an arranger and conductor for Capitol Records, working on hits by Nat King Cole, including "Mona Lisa." Around the same time, Baxter began recording his own albums. In 1948, he released a triple-78 album called Music out of the Moon, which ushered in space-age pop with its use of the theremin. Four years later, he began recording exotica albums with Le Sacre du Sauvage.

On his early-'50s singles Baxter was relatively straightforward, performing versions of standards like the number one hits "Unchained Melody" and "The Poor People of Paris," but on his albums he experimented with all sorts of world musics, adapting them for his orchestra. As he was recording his exotica albums, Baxter was also the musical director for the radio show Halls of Ivy, plus Abbott & Costello radio shows; he also composed over 100 film scores, concentrating on horror movies and teenage musicals and comedies, though he also did dramas like Giant.

Baxter's heyday was in the '50s and '60s. Although he continued to compose and record in the '70s, his output was sporadic. Nevertheless, a cult following formed around his exotica recordings that persisted into the '90s. --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, Rovi

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