

Erskine Butterfield & His Blue Boys – Tuesday At Ten (1941)

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1 Tuesday at Ten 2:15 2 Zoot Suit 2:22 3 Blackberry Jam 2:58 4 Something's Bound to Happen 2:15 5 Lighthouse 2:20 6 Monday's Wash 3:03 7 J. P. Dooley III 2:15 8 Boogie Beat'll Get You 2:22 9 You Should Live So Long 2:09 10 Flying Home 2:28
Erskine Butterfield - leader, piano, vocals Bill Graham - trumpet Jimmy Lybell - clarinet Haig Shepherd - bass Sam Weiss – drums

The professional career of this pianist and prolific recording artist began when he wandered into the publishing offices of then-successful recording artist and composer Clarence Williams with hopes of selling a song or two. It was the mid-'30s, and whatever songs Erskine Butterfield had on tap at that time have been forgotten, since Williams wasn't ready to publish them. Williams did recognize the man's musical potential, however, hiring Butterfield right then and there as a pianist, and according to legend teaching him to play the blues. That Butterfield might have been lacking in that musical department makes sense in the perspective of his entire career. While some of his eventual hit recordings came out of the boogie-woogie camp, Butterfield continually attempted to come up with something more sophisticated, adding aspects of classical and jazz to his creations. He can be credited with helping to invent the style of "cocktail piano", but it was a notion that the public did not embrace at first in the early days of rock & roll. Thus, the recording companies he was involved with eventually left him by the wayside, one of many talented players who were sidetracked by the rock avalanche.

After a period of working as Williams' manager, Butterfield went out on his own and signed his first publishing contract in 1939 with publisher, songwriter, A&R man, and label owner Joe Davis. The two developed a cordial relationship that would last for several decades and result in dozens of excellent recordings. By 1940, Butterfield was hosting several radio broadcasts and had received dabs of print publicity. In the next years he cut some 40 sides for Decca with Davis producing, and became known as the "Singing Vagabond of the Keys." Some of the tunes Butterfield recorded at this time were co-writing ventures with Davis, who used the name Leslie Beacon on these records. "Two-Faced Man" might have been a title meant to describe this habit

of hiding behind aliases, but Davis had so many of them that "Forty-Faced Man" would have been more accurate.

The pianist was innovative in utilizing Black and White musicians together in his combo, to the point where an article by Eve Ross in the Orchestra World publication mentions that Butterfield was "the only Negro pianist we know of on the air with an entire radio show of white folk built around him." The small bands that appear on Butterfield's Decca sides would be worth mentioning regardless of skin color. These combos were brilliant, featuring players such as clarinetist Jimmy Lytell, guitarist Carmen Mastren, and bassist Haig Stevens. Meanwhile, other artists also began cutting Butterfield's hit original compositions such as "Foo Gee," and royalties began pouring in. In 1943, pianist Deryck Sampson recorded an EP of four Butterfield tunes including the tasty "Blackberry Jam" and "Boogie de Concerto," an inkling that the maestro was becoming more ambitious in his musical philosophy. The following year, Butterfield recorded pieces such as "Piano Cocktail" and "Fantasy in Blue," usually arriving at the studio in such an advanced state of preparation that everyone involved got to go home early.

He was also drafted that year, but this certainly didn't put an end to his musical activities. His combo at Fort Dix included talented inductees such as guitarist Slim Furness from the Three Keys, drummer Eugene Brooks from the Eddie Heywood band, and bassist Lynwood Jones from the Loumell Morgan Trio. Royalties continued coming in from other artists recording Butterfield's compositions as well. Pianist and singer Kirby Walker cut the self-explanatory "Goin' on an Errand for Uncle Sam".

Following the war and throughout changing musical styles, Davis was the only producer who attempted to keep Butterfield working, bringing him into the studios in the mid-'50s after the pianist had been absent from recording for several years. Once again he had a crack band including dynamic saxophonist Sam "The Man" Taylor and drummer Panama Francis, credited as Butterfield & His Blues Boys. Some of this material was not released until the mid-'80s, however, and that which did see the light of day immediately was considered to be dated by a listening public entranced with rhythmically more assertive artists such as Fats Domino. The 1957 album Piano Cocktail was Butterfield's final collection of recordings to be released during his lifetime. --- Eugene Chadbourne, allmusic.com

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