



(1101-r)

LITTLE BIG HORN

Ruby Braff Sextet

featuring

Ruby Braff, trumpet; Sam Margolis, tenor saxophone; Billy Ryan, trombone; Marty Napoleon, piano; Milt Hinton, bass; Jo Jones, drums

(J-1011)

Of the dozens of "new discoverers" who have flitted through the idiosyncratically sunny world of jazz in recent years, few if any have had as wild an impact as "Mr. Average Joe" as Ruby Braff.

Ruby came onto a good deal of jazz criticism as a colorful jodeler, and finally began being played in any one school of jazz. This twenty-eight year old Bostonian, who has modeled himself as one of our most knowledgeable trumpet players, has been compared to Rex Naylor, Roy Eldridge, Benny Morgan, and even to the daddy of 'em all, Louis Armstrong. To Ruby, this is nonsense. "I'm not in any special groove," he said in a recent interview. "But sure that I've got to be on my own in the field." It's either good or bad... I know that you've got to have a background to be a good musician -- got to know its history, your place in that history, and the position of your music in the world."

This family independent little man with a big bass -- or just "Little Big Man," as he is sometimes called -- is not identifiable as much by special sounds or tricks of phrasing. He is a much more distinctive. What separates him is his Braff performance in the sometimes brutal, sometimes pulsating intensity of his lines. There is no striving for effect in his solo, just direct and honest expression of the jazz spirit.

Born in 1921, Ruby began playing the trumpet at the age of eight and is largely self-taught. He had a private teacher for a short time, but he found the profession's own playing unimpressive and went off on his own, playing professionally for the first time at the age of eleven. During the past few years he became something of a landmark in Braff's jazz style, and would sit in with all kinds of jazz acts and bands from all of them. This is in line with his violent refusal to become a member of any exclusive jazz club. Indeed, he has the uncanny faculty of being at home in classical, swing, or modern jazz environments. His list of favorite trumpeters is an excellent indication of his catholic taste: he likes Louis Armstrong, Rex Eldridge, Bud Allen, Buck Clayton, Dave Gilmore, Bobby Berkley, and Ben Webster.

1958 was the year of the Braff breakthrough. He made his last recordings then and showed some highly realistic comments from the press. The New Yorker put it this way: "... a genuine find who exhibits an impressive

combination of sense, technique, and invention." The most qualified Record Changer had this to say: "His style is his own, and, in writing them, he has combined elements of swing, groove, from Dixie to Dixie." It is hardly surprising, therefore, that during his appearances with Benny Goodman early in 1958 and in subsequent recordings with a B. G. Big Band, Ruby played an much critical acclaim as the King of Being Bored.

For this high ability according the Institute Society asked Ruby to select his own band, something he had not been permitted to do for other recording dates. More than that, he was asked to select his own tunes too, if he wanted to, even write a few as well. With customary good taste Ruby chose for this session a group made up of such unorthodox tunes as Marty Napoleon, piano; Milt Hinton, bass; and on drums, "the greatest," Jo Jones. Both Hinton and Jones have appeared in other Institute Society releases, and on this date they reflected their collective ability to set down as solid and engaging a list as anyone could ask for.

For his associate here was young Mr. Braff selected two of his contemporary tunes -- comparative newcomers to jazz who have been readily making a name for themselves among their fellow musicians during the past few years. On occasion we have the brilliant Billy Ryan, who made them playing one of the best all-around jazz troupes to be heard lately, has been arranging for such TV shows as the NBC "Symposium" and the Arthur Godfrey program. On more than one of Ruby's closest friends and a fellow Bostonian, Sam Margolis. Sam's sensitive playing here runs of the leading position by so many more men these days. Don't these are all his own, and his tone reminds one of Lester Young's. But is that bad?

In all, this is a group that is both and much more than competent. It is a group capable not only of holding together to Ruby's suggestive trumpet improvisations, but of generating a great deal of musical excitement on its own.

Here, then, is one-to-ten-to modern jazz, middle-of-the-road music you might call it, led by a man whose ideas have naturally occurred up this way: "Braff," says their critic, "is a gem."

— PAUL SANICHA

Page 10-11-58