

The Ultimate Jazz Archive Vol.164 – Mel Tormé [1946-1954] [2005]

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01.I Got The Sun In The Morning 02.It Happened In Monterey 03.Born To Be Blue 04.What Is This Thing Called Love 05.Guilty 06.Little White Lies 07.How High The Moon 08.Blue Moon 09.Stompin' At The Savoy 10.Do Do Do 11.Sonny Boy 12.Recipe For Romance 13.It's Too Late Now 14.Got The Gate On The Golden Gate 15.Cross Your Heart 16.You're A Heavenly Thing 17.That Old Black Magic 18.Goody Goody 19.Bewitched 20.It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)

Melvin Howard Torme, 13 September 1925, Chicago, Illinois, USA, d. 5 June 1999, Beverly Hills, California, USA. A child prodigy, Tormé first sang on radio as a toddler and while still in his teens he was performing as a singer, pianist, drummer and dancer. He was also composing songs at an early age and wrote arrangements for the band led by Chico Marx, and composed 'Lament To Love' for Harry James. He also acted on radio and in films and in addition to singing solo, led his own vocal group, the Mel-Tones. In this last capacity he recorded with Artie Shaw, enjoying a hit with 'Sunny Side Of The Street'. By the 50s he was established as one of the leading song stylists, performing the great standards and often working with a jazz backing, notably with the Marty Paich Dek-tette on albums such as Lulu's Back In Town. He headlined concert packages across the USA and in Europe, appeared on television, often producing his own shows, and always delivering performances of impeccable professionalism. Tormé continued in such a vein throughout the 60s and 70s, making many fine albums of superior popular music, on several of which he was accompanied by jazzmen. Among these were Shorty Rogers ('Round Midnight), Al Porcino (Live At The Maisonette), Buddy Rich (Together Again - For The First Time), Gerry Mulligan (Mel Tormé And Friends) and Rob McConnell (Mel Tormé With Rob McConnell And The Boss Brass).

Of all his musical collaborations, however, the best and most satisfying was a long series of concerts and radio and television shows, many of which were issued on record, with George Shearing. Among these albums were An Evening At Charlie's, An Elegant Evening, A Vintage Year and Mel And George 'Do' World War II. In the early 90s Tormé was still drawing rave

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reviews for records and personal appearances, with Shearing, at festivals in California and the Channel Islands, and with Bill Berry's big band at the Hollywood Bowl. As a songwriter Tormé had several hundred compositions to his credit, of which the best known by far was 'The Christmas Song' (written with Robert Wells), first recorded by Nat 'King' Cole and covered by dozens of top popular song artists. As a performer, Tormé often featured himself on drums - for many years he used a drum kit that was formerly the property of Gene Krupa - and he played with unforced swing. As a singer, Tormé's work was touched with elegant charm. His voice, with the characteristic huskiness that earned him the sobriquet 'The Velvet Fog', deepened over the years and by the early 90s still retained all the qualities of his youth, not least, remarkable pitch and vocal control. In his choice of material he never showed anything other than perfect taste and his repertoire was an object lesson in musical quality.

The fact that he also wrote almost all the arrangements of the songs he sang added to his status as a major figure in the history of American popular song. Tormé suffered a stroke in 1996, curtailing a magnificent career which was recognized in 1999 with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. He died later that year leaving a great legacy of recorded music and two very fine literary autobiographical works. --- Colin Larkin, oldies.com

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