

God Bless the Child

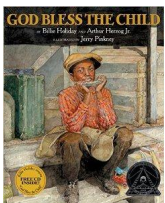
Written by bluesever
Sunday, 17 July 2016 14:49 -

God Bless the Child

On December 30, 1938, Billie Holiday began singing at Barney Josephson's Cafe Society nightclub at a salary of \$75 a week, seven-days-a-week. The gig had been arranged by impresario John Hammond, who, although not Holiday's manager per se, had been instrumental in many strategic career moves for her. Holiday was happy to have a steady New York engagement after being on the road with the big bands of Count Basie and Artie Shaw. Working at Cafe Society was the first time she was able to have complete artistic control over her material. She began singing and recording more standards rather than Tin Pan Alley material that song pluggers insisted she do. Although she quit Cafe Society in August, 1939, the exposure there, plus having a recording in the charts ("Strange Fruit"), enabled her to find work at 52nd Streets clubs such as Kelly's Stables and the Famous Door for much better pay. In 1939 **Billie Holiday** and **Arthur Herzog Jr.** wrote a song called "God Bless the Child."

God Bless the Child

Songwriter and pianist Arthur Herzog, Jr. (1900 – 1983) is responsible for a small number of songs, but what few there are have been performed countless times and recorded by many of the biggest names in jazz, from John Coltrane to Dinah Washington. Herzog's songs were most often recorded by the all-time great vocalist who co-wrote them, Billie Holiday.



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Billie wrote the lyrics after an argument with her mother, Sadie, over financial matters. Just a few years earlier, Holiday had loaned her mom thousands of dollars to open a restaurant and when she found herself in need of cash, Sadie declined to lend her any money. In her autobiography "Lady Sings The Blues," Holiday recalled how, in the course of the row, she uttered the old proverb, "*God bless the child that got his own.*" The singer's anger over the incident led her to turn that line into a starting point for this song.



Billie Holiday sings God Bless the Child

In his 1990 book "Jazz Singing", Will Friedwald writing about the song, labeled it as "*sacred and profane*" as it references the Bible while indicating that religion seems to have no effect in making people treat each other better. The lyrics refer to an unspecified Biblical verse: "*Them that's got shall get, them that don't shall lose, so the Bible says, and it still is news...*" This likely refers to Matthew 25:29 or Luke 8:18.



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God Bless the Child, sheet

"God Bless the Child" is a fairly simple melody that's written in the style of an old-time spiritual. According to the jazz historian Chris Tyle, *"Billie's lyrics tell the story of how everyone is your friend when you have money but that 'empty pockets don't ever make the grade.' Others, including family, may have it but won't help you out when you need it."* The chorus, however, has one of the most engaging chord progressions of the period. This combination of ascending and descending chords creates an atmosphere and emotion that mirror the lyrics as appropriately as perhaps any song of the 20th century.



Billie Holiday

Billie Holiday recorded "God Bless the Child," on May 9, 1941, for Columbia Records, (originally issued on their subsidiary label, Okeh), backed by Eddie Heywood and his Orchestra with Roy Eldridge (trumpet), Jimmy Powell and Lester Boone (alto saxophone), Ernie Powell (trumpet), Eddie Heywood (piano), Johan Robins (guitar), Paul Chapman (guitar), Grachan Moncur II (bass), Herbert Cowans (drums).

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God Bless the Child (film)