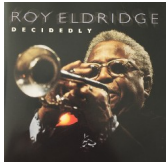


Roy Eldridge - Decidedly (1975)

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1 *Bee's Bloos* 9:51 2 *Lover Man (Oh, Where Can You Be)* 16:36 3 *Undecided* 11:33 4 *Hackensack* 15:10 Bass – Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen Drums – Louis Bellson Guitar – Joe Pass (tracks: 1, 2, 4) Piano – Milt Jackson (tracks: 4), Ray Bryant Tenor Saxophone – Johnny Griffin Trumpet – Roy Eldridge

If a listener picks up a 50-minute jazz album that only contains four songs, he or she will rest assured that the musicians really get a chance to stretch things out. In the case of *Decidedly*, featuring tested players like trumpeter Roy Eldridge, guitarist Joe Pass, tenor Johnny Griffin, and pianist Ray Bryant, this is a good thing. Recorded live in 1975 in Antibes, France, before an appreciative audience, the material is being issued for the first time in 2002. The group kicks off with an Eldridge original, "Bee's Bloos," and settles into a relaxed groove for the rest of the show. A 16-minute take of "Lover Man (Oh, Where Can You Be?)" follows, with lengthy, soulful solos handed in by everyone. Bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen and drummer Louis Bellson offer tasteful underpinning along with a little muscle on "Undecided." The disc closes out with an appearance by Milt Jackson on piano for Thelonious Monk's "Hackensack." It will perhaps seem odd that this swinging set, performed in France while the fusion movement was sweeping the states, will probably have a more receptive audience today than it would have had over 25 years ago. But history, and good taste, are never predictable. *Decidedly* is a lovely live disc, and will be appreciated by fans of any of the participants. ---Ronnie D. Lankford, Jr., AllMusic Review

Norman Granz, legendary label impresario and concert organizer, had his own niche in the Seventies. Take an aging, but estimable swing star; match him with a band built on the talents of younger players; incite some sparks through friendly rivalries both manufactured and

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genuine; apply some promotional spin and watch the greenbacks roll in. Such was presumably the case with this until now unreleased concert recording financed and produced by Granz for a French audience under the auspices of his JATP promotional juggernaut. To be fair, Eldridge was more than deserving of the applause and adulation even though his chops on the date don't seem to match the bountiful brio of his youthful years. His carefully chosen partners recognize his commanding stature and embrace his congenially combative nature in a manner that both inspires and challenges him.

Four lengthy and diversely drawn tracks make up the songbook and each appears custom arranged for maximum blowing potential. Griffin steals the spotlight on the opening Eldridge original "Bees Bloos" following the leader with a solo that is at once rough-hewn, and highly flammable through its alacrity and speed. Eldridge eases into the more stately "Lover Man" muted and a shade tentative, but the blues oozes through, coating the supporting efforts of his partners in a cerulean satin sheen. Pass's gossamer chords float in the sonic space around Griffin's more incessant thematic variations and Bellson's brushes further advance the relaxed mood. The guitarist's later solo proves conclusively why the signifier of 'virtuoso' was so often attached to his name and the same can easily be said for Pedersen's turn, where the bassist make four strings sing with choir-size depth and resonance. Despite its temporal breadth the tune rolls out smooth as silk and each minute seems packed with the right measure of invention and interplay. Monk's somewhat obscure "Hackensack" offers an unusual closer considering Eldridge's credentials, but Griffin's presence in the quintet serves as an arguable explanation. Also surprising is the guest appearance of Milt Jackson who contributes a minimalist piano solo on the track for added color. ---Derek Taylor, allaboutjazz.com

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