

Brunswick ★



Boswell Sisters

(CONNIE ★ VET ★ MARTHA)

All-star accompaniment including

JIMMY DORSEY

TOMMY DORSEY ★ JOE VENUTI

EDDIE LANG



BRUNSWICK COLLECTORS' SERIES

Album No. B-1003

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COMPLETE ON FOUR TEN-INCH RECORDS

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THE BOSWELLS OF NEW ORLEANS

This is a story about three kids who could read music before they could read print . . . About three excited 'teen-age girls in a hotel room on their first trip to New York, shaking hands cross-handed — the way you do when there are three of you — solemnly swearing to stick together as a team for five years, no matter what happened . . . About three young ladies who married, just as their folks always expected them to, but who love to get together now and talk about the time when they blazed a trail of new music across the United States and Europe — the charming young Boswell Sisters.

Album cover design and typography by Huxley House, New York City

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BOSWELL SISTERS

The story really begins back in the Boswells' big white house in New Orleans, the city where so much of today's popular music was born. As was proper to the rearing of young girls of Southern families, Connee (the baby), Vet (short for Helvetia) and Martha (the eldest) were given music lessons. Mr. and Mrs. Boswell, although not professional musicians, were accomplished performers, and the girls continually heard music played and sung at home from the time they were tiny babies. Nevertheless, after Martha had begun her study of piano and Vet had chosen the violin, it must have surprised the Boswells just a little to find baby Connee mastering the cello — at four years of age.

These were instruments of their own choice, and the girls progressed rapidly in their abilities to play them. They were invited to play at neighborhood parties, family gatherings, church functions and at school. They were the child prodigies of the Philharmonic Society. It was all classical music, of course. They had unknowingly picked the three instruments for which trio music is usually arranged. Even at that early age, though, they were aware of the music sung by the servants in their home, and of the great body of Negro music that the South fostered. Sometimes the girls' parents and their aunt and uncle would sing quartet harmony at the piano. The three little girls listened. Then they tried singing in harmony — privately. They never performed openly at first because they were sure it was wrong, musically — no fourth part. They considered asking a neighborhood friend to sing with them, but it never worked.

Occasionally, they would take a sentimental ballad of the day, or one of the classics they had been studying, make their own three-part arrangement of it in a rudimentary "swing" style and sing it for their music professor, when he called. It confused him at first, but he had to admit that he liked it.

While they were still in grade school, Connee became interested in the saxophone and Vet began to play a banjo. Then the local radio stations heard about the Boswell girls. And when they won four prizes among them in a single radio contest — for piano, violin and sax solos and vocal trio — they began to consider the possibilities of a joint career as professional musicians.

It was a short jump, in time, from grade school to their first appearance in New York — in February, 1931 — as guest artists on the Camel radio program. Mr. and Mrs. Boswell were by no means sure that it was all right for their daughters to appear as professional performers. Besides, there was no one to make the trip with them — they would be alone in New York. They were young. In the end, it was Connee who convinced her folks that it was all for the best.

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All three appeared in New York, after the train ride, with laryngitis. But with the resiliency of youth and the spirit of veteran troupers, they went on with the show.

Afterwards, in their hotel room, excited and a little scared, they talked it over. They were good — they believed in the future and in themselves. They promised each other that there would be nothing now for them but plenty of work . . . and success. For the next five years they would hold together as the Boswell Sisters, and after that they would see . . . Maybe they'd sit down and talk it over. They shook hands as they always did, in a circle, and went to bed.

That was the year they made their first record for Brunswick — *When I Take My Sugar to Tea* — included in this album. Characteristic of their style, it appealed to young people all over the country. It was full of bounce, broke all the iron rules for trio singing, as far as trio arrangement went, and set the style for the parade of vocal trios that was to follow the Boswell Sisters.

The Boswell Sisters made their own style in singing. None of them, for example, is assigned the melody of a song. They all sing part of it — whichever part is best suited to the individual voice. This interchanging of parts makes for better blend in the singing, since no voice ever has to go above or below its natural range to reach a note: there is always another voice to pick it up. For another thing, they never wrote their arrangements. Instead, they would sketch it out, break by break, including all the instrumental parts, rehearse it together, then go to the studio and sing it to the band that was to accompany them. Frequently, they left the instrumental passages and solos entirely up to the musicians, themselves — all of which accounts for the relaxed, free, inventive instrumental accompaniment that you find on these records. Often it took hours — with everybody contributing ideas — to get one side of a record down on wax as they wanted it. But it was always fresh, thanks to the girls' own everlasting enthusiasm for their work and the corresponding enthusiasm which they set afire in the musicians they worked with.

They were never so sophisticated that they couldn't get a thrill out of their fan mail. They saved everything — letters, programs, press clippings, photos. Connee still remembers newspaper articles in which an indignant academician, having heard the sisters sing an operatic number, compared their singing to the rhythmic chanting of savages. Today, when modern popular music happily acknowledges its jungle ancestry — tries, in fact, to achieve some of the same rhythmic beat — the articles become an admission that the Boswell Sisters were a little ahead of their time. It indicates a good reason for the continued vitality of their style and the current value of the records in this collection.

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The youngsters, particularly, and a sizeable chunk of the adult public loved it. In 1932 the girls appeared as regulars on another big air show for Chesterfields and made a picture, "The Big Broadcast of 1932," with Bing Crosby. The following year they toured Europe, then teamed up with Bing again in 1934 for the Woodbury Program and made another picture, "Moulin Rouge." A year later they were back in Europe. On their return, they made "Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round." As Connee says, "While most other kids were learning their ABC's, we were touring the world, singing ours."

In 1936, at the peak of the trio's popularity, they dissolved partnership — almost five years to the day after the Boswell Sisters had first come to New York. The reason was simply that, as in all proper Southern families, the time had come for the daughters of the house to marry. They did, first Vet, then Martha, then Connee. The Boswell Sisters turned to a career of home-making.

CONNIE ON HER OWN

Connee was always a "musicians' musician" anyway, and when the trio disbanded, she continued as a single. Today, still a theatre-manager's dream, she frequently reverts to the trio's original system of sketching out an arrangement, then running over it with the boys at rehearsal. She does this when the band gets to playing too closely to a cut-and-dried arrangement. Connee will stop in the middle of a number, sing an instrumental passage to the band in her own way. The band relaxes. When they try it again, the music sounds better.

She is not typed as to the kind of music she sings. She knows how to handle rhythm songs, ballads and novelties with equal ease and apparent enjoyment. Her stage and radio personality is an amplification of her friendliness and magnetism in private life. She has been invited into more homes in America, through the medium of her records, than any other girl singer of popular music.

Her married life dovetails beautifully with her profession — she married her manager. As is frequently the case with talented people, she has abilities other than the one she is known for. Her oil paintings show professional skill. At one time, she studied commercial art, but her inclinations are toward fine arts.

Connee has achieved stardom solely on the basis of her ability and hard work. Never once has she compromised with her conscience in the use of doubtful devices by which fame is furthered. No giving in just for the sake of peace; if she has an idea for a song or an arrangement — or anything else — that she feels is right, she fights for it. She is simply a swell singer, whose music originates in her heart — and reaches into yours.

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THE RECORDS

WHEN I TAKE MY SUGAR TO TEA

This classic is easily the most famous of all the Boswell Sister arrangements and the one which started them on the road to fame. The record opens with an instrumental introduction by Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey which leads into the verse of the song tastefully sung by the three girls. Following this, Connee sings the opening chorus with excellent phrasing. Next come the brothers Dorsey again with the band picking up the beat for a full chorus. Still in the same tempo, the girls come back to finish the side in a bright rhythmical fashion.

WHA'D JA DO TO ME?

The band introduction to this side vamps directly into the first chorus done almost melodically by our vocalists. The tempo is halved for the verse of the song with each member of the trio taking a solo turn. They continue the slow rhythmical beat into the chorus which follows and close the record in the world renowned Boswell manner. Note the beautiful blend of the three voices thruout this side.

ROLL ON, MISSISSIPPI, ROLL ON

This side opens with solo breaks by Joe Venuti's violin, Jack Purvis' trumpet, Jimmy Dorsey's clarinet, and brother Tommy's trombone, followed by a scat vocal introduction of similar length by the Boswells. Connee then goes into the verse of the song with superb backing by the band and Eddie Lang's solid chords shining thru. In the same bright tempo the girls really take charge and break time very effectively for the first eight of the last sixteen bars of this opening chorus. After this, it's back to the slow time again for the special patter of the song, the trio here simulating a train very neatly. The record closes with a terrific ride-out last chorus by the girls.

SHOUT, SISTER, SHOUT!

On this fine old Clarence Williams standard, all honors go to the Boswells. They do a relaxed first chorus and then Vet and Martha hum a wonderful background while Connee does some great lead singing. This is real three part singing and shows how their early musical training put them far ahead of all other vocal groups. After this, the girls take it in their best rhythm style and then it's back to Miss Connee still in great voice. *Shout, Sister, Shout!* was used by the girls as a theme and one listening proves they knew what they were doing.

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SHINE ON HARVEST MOON

Probably the greatest moon song ever written, this tune was recorded when it was revived in a Broadway hit show. The sisters do the first chorus almost straight and then Connee cuts back to the verse of the song. Supporting her, there is a fine obbligato by Jimmy Dorsey and Eddie Lang keeps things moving with his sure and solid rhythm. Next there is an arranged instrumental bit by the three horns, (trumpet, clarinet, and trombone) and Connee comes back to finish the chorus. The three girls definitely take over the last chorus, tear it down with a lyric of their own, and close with a beautifully accented ending.

HEEBIE JEEBIES

This great old tune harks back to the Boswell Sisters' early New Orleans days. After a special introduction by the girls, Connee goes into the verse in genuine New Orleans fashion. Note the fine trumpet work of Jack Purvis in the background. The trio sings the chorus which follows in a natural hot style to the righteous dixieland accompaniment of the band. The next chorus is done in real live scat fashion and Tommy Dorsey has a field day playing tailgate trombone with the rest of the band still in that good dixieland groove. The girls sing an original tag and close what surely must have been a song all participants enjoyed waxing.

RIVER, STAY 'WAY FROM MY DOOR

A hit of the early thirties, this tune stands up well under Boswell treatment. The Tommy Dorsey trombone, Eddie Lang guitar, and the three girls, make the introduction. From there Connee takes the lead and carries on into the verse of the song. She also solos most of the first chorus, the girls only joining her for the release and on the title line of the lyric. The second chorus is by Purvis on trumpet with the band going all out behind him. The trio comes back for the last half of the song, closing with their usual fine ear-caressing three part harmony.

IT'S THE GIRL

A little known song, this side is great material for our trio and band. It opens fast with the boys playing a vaudeville pit band style introduction. The girls take it from there singing the first chorus in the same bright tempo. The next portion of the record is in slow time with Venuti's fiddle and Lang's guitar setting the mood and Connee giving out on the verse to the incomparable accompaniment of the revered and immortal Eddie Lang. Next it's the girls

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again, in a rock tempo with obbligato by Joe Venuti and stop chords by the band. The boys go into a fine jam session instrumental chorus and the Boswells take the finish of the song in an equally exciting fashion, closing a truly great record.

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