

# Fancy Meeting You Here: Pioneers of the Concept Album

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*Abstract: The introduction of the long-playing record in 1948 was the most aesthetically significant technological change in the century of the recorded music disc. The new format challenged record producers and recording artists of the 1950s to group sets of songs into marketable wholes and led to a first generation of concept albums that predate more celebrated examples by rock bands from the 1960s. Two strategies used to unify concept albums in the 1950s stand out. The first brought together performers unlikely to collaborate in the world of live music making. The second strategy featured well-known singers in songwriter- or performer-centered albums of songs from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s recorded in contemporary musical styles. Recording artists discussed include Fred Astaire, Ella Fitzgerald, and Rosemary Clooney, among others.*

After setting the speed dial to 33 1/3, many Americans christened their multiple-speed phonographs with the original cast album of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* (1949) in the new long-playing record (LP) format. The *South Pacific* cast album begins in dramatic fashion with the jagged leaps of the show tune "Bali Hai" arranged for the show's large pit orchestra: suitable fanfare for the revolution in popular music that followed the wide public adoption of the LP. Reportedly selling more than one million copies, the *South Pacific* LP helped launch Columbia Records' innovative new recorded music format, which, along with its longer playing time, also delivered better sound quality than the 78s that had been the industry standard for the preceding half-century.

Arriving at the midpoint of the twentieth century, the LP initiated a long-format era in American popular music that lasted just over a half-century. The introduction of the compact disc (CD) in the early 1980s, with its even longer playing time (seventy-four minutes or more), advanced the postwar bias

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toward long formats; for while the LP and single 45s (introduced by RCA Victor in 1949) had previously shared the market, the CD's appearance caused short-format recorded music products to disappear entirely. If pop music fans in the 1990s wanted to own one song (say, Celine Dion's recording of "My Heart Will Go On"), then they had to buy an entire CD (in this case, the original soundtrack recording for the film *Titanic*). The material conditions of buying and listening to popular music during the long-format era encouraged (or forced) listeners to buy popular music in bulk. These conditions faded rather quickly at the turn of the twenty-first century, when ubiquitous high-speed Internet connections enabled the purchase and sharing (or theft) of digital music files online. This development rendered the CD, the final evolutionary stage in recorded music's physical form, an endangered species.

The twentieth century, unlike the present, was a time when the recorded music marketplace turned on the production and purchase of thin, flat, round objects. The arrival of the LP was, arguably, the most aesthetically significant technological change in the century of the recorded music disc. The introduction and early years of the LP, and the question of how to fill the format's expanded time frame, is the focus of this article.

For an anxious music industry, which had to create customers for both long-form popular music and the equipment necessary to play it, the original Broadway cast album seemed the perfect answer to the aesthetic and marketing challenges presented by the newly arrived LP. The 78 format held only three minutes of music per side; for fifty years, recorded popular music had been an art of the miniature.<sup>1</sup> The LP promised more expansive audio

landscapes: about forty-five minutes at its longest, divided about equally onto two sides. Broadway shows in the 1950s usually contained roughly that much music (if the dance music and minor songs were omitted), and the fixed track order of the LP kept the songs in show order. The original cast LP promised unlimited access to the sounds of Broadway; from a comfortable seat at home, albeit with a totally obstructed view, the listener could focus on what really counted: the music, the lyrics, the pit orchestra, and the voices of Broadway's star performers.

Within a decade of the LP's introduction, the cart began pulling the horse. Columbia Records financed the show *My Fair Lady* (1956) and reaped huge profits: the show's cast LP on Columbia (featuring Julie Andrews) topped *Billboard's* album chart for fifteen weeks. One hundred eighty-four original cast albums appeared on *Billboard's* pop album chart between 1955 and 2009.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-two of these reached the top ten; all but one of those appeared between 1955 and 1964. (The outlier was the cast album for *Hair*, released in 1968.) This period – after the LP had made its way into American homes; before the Beatles led a rapid transformation of the format to a youth-oriented vessel of rock artistry – saw the major record labels exploring new ways to deliver popular music to adult audiences, the primary buyers of the LP for the format's first fifteen or so years. While the Broadway cast album was a fairly obvious way to fill forty-five minutes of music in a set order, other organizational principles for the popular music LP were needed.<sup>3</sup>

LPs work best when the delicate needle at the end of the lightweight tone arm is allowed to ride the groove from the edge to the center of the disc without interruption. Dropping or picking up the needle in the middle of a side is always tricky:

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serious phonograph users, concerned for the health of both the needle and the disc's groove, invariably frown on the practice. Satisfying LPs sustain the listener's interest, each succeeding track making sense in the larger whole, the larger whole providing a unified experience that warrants repeat listening or, at least, playing. Except in certain cases, like the Broadway cast LP, the order of tracks on early LPs proved less important than the creation of an overall tone or mood. Thus, the LP developed not as a linear or narrative large-scale form so much as a block of time within which similar recordings were grouped together. Repeated listening to LPs can have the effect of making the order of tracks feel inevitable: listeners learn to anticipate the next track because the order of songs is set. (Listeners raised on LPs know how the brain comes to anticipate the next song in the silence between tracks.) Awareness of whether side A or side B was playing also shaped LP listening. (The CD, with its one very long side, and the CD player, with its anarchic skip and shuffle buttons and its portability, changed the experience of long-form listening appreciably.)<sup>4</sup>

The utility of a unifying theme or concept for a successful LP was recognized by the record industry from the start. Producers did not imagine that listeners wanted to sit through a twenty-minute pop song. Rather, meaningful arrangements of recordings that generally conformed to the three-minute length of the 78 became the norm, yielding a standard of five to six songs, or tracks, per side. The LP emerged as a musical space in which ten to twelve tracks were grouped around an organizing idea or notion, expressed visually on the square-foot canvas of the LP's cardboard jacket or sleeve. (Only with the beginning of the long-format era did images become central to the design of popular music products; album

covers being, in essence, advertisements for the sonic contents inside.) Several strategies or concepts for grouping tracks into an LP during the pre-rock and roll history of the format stand out. These approaches to large-scale LP form shaped the careers of individual performers, the choices on offer to popular music listeners, and the landscape of America's musical history.

One organizational strategy for the LP treated the format as a sonic meeting place where songwriters, singers, and musicians might enjoy sustained interaction unlikely to occur in live performance. These musical encounters, relationships lived out in the recording studio, had to be sturdy enough to yield an LP's worth of tracks. Many studio collaborations on LPs proved revelatory, bringing together performers who might otherwise never have met. (In one case, detailed below, performers sharing an LP met only by way of multitrack recording methods made possible by the introduction of magnetic tape, another postwar innovation that reshaped popular music.) Some of these collaborations introduced a historical angle to popular music, with the LP serving as a means of looking back at the pop music past while making music that tapped into the present. The roomy LP, a format designed for domestic use, widened the terrain of popular music, opening new spaces where artists could express themselves in more expansive ways than was allowed for by the three-minute single, and where listeners could luxuriate in music unlikely to be made anywhere else.

The pioneers of the concept LP that I discuss here created discs best described as casually unified.<sup>5</sup> When experienced in their entirety today, these discs offer long-lasting pleasure, as well as access and insight into a past way of listening. These LPs also demonstrate that rock

musicians of the mid-1960s – groups celebrated in popular music history such as the Beatles and the Beach Boys – did not invent the notion of the concept album or the LP as a unified form; the first generation of pop LP artists and producers did. The major difference between rock concept LPs and the earlier round of pop concept LPs is that the former offered new songs, generally authored by the performers themselves, while the latter mostly took well-known hits from the pre-war decades – Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood tunes from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s – and arranged them in new sonic garb that appealed to adult listeners. On these discs, pop and jazz artists can be heard painting on a large canvas, where a consistent approach to a well-chosen selection of songs yielded, on occasion, a whole that was bigger than the sum of its parts.<sup>6</sup>

In 1953, jazz producer and promoter Norman Granz pioneered the concept LP as musical encounter with the release of *The Astaire Story*, a four-disc set that paired the musical movie star Fred Astaire with an interracial jazz combo led by pianist Oscar Peterson and featuring Barney Kessel (guitar), Alvin Stoller (drums), Charlie Shavers (trumpet), Flip Phillips (saxophone), and Ray Brown (bass). All six musicians were associated with Granz's Jazz at the Philharmonic (JATP) tours and recordings.

Beginning in 1944, Granz released albums of 78s containing live recordings from JATP concerts. These records captured the often raucous exchange JATP cultivated between performers and audiences. The home listener had to remain attentive to his phonograph – constantly flipping and switching 78s – to re-create the concert experience heard on these discs. With their superior sound quality and generous length, LPs promised easier

access to the JATP experience. Indeed, “recorded live” LPs would become an important part of popular music.<sup>7</sup> Studio-made LPs, however, called for a different approach, and Granz's impulse toward crafting longer listening experiences found full expression in the Astaire/JATP set, which exploited the possibilities of the LP as a musical meeting place early in the long-format era. And of course, the group featured on *The Astaire Story* would never have shared the stage at a live performance. Only in the realm of the recording studio could such a meeting take place.

Over the course of a month's worth of recording sessions in December 1952 – Astaire was simultaneously filming *The Band Wagon* at MGM – the group recorded thirty-nine tracks that Granz had selected. With the exception of a few instrumentals, all feature songs connected to Astaire's career on the Broadway stage or in Hollywood films between 1924 and 1953. Granz had Astaire record spoken introductions to several of the tracks, situating select songs within the singer's personal history and/or in jazz history. Jacket copy and liner notes became the natural place for this kind of information with later concept LPs; here, it is part of the listening experience.

Making *The Astaire Story* placed Astaire outside his comfort zone. When making musical films, he was accustomed to rehearsing in seclusion, crafting a complete number for the screen, inclusive of musical structure, choreography, camera angles, and implied narrative. This thoroughly rehearsed routine was then efficiently transferred to film, in manageable sections involving multiple retakes and much post-production finish work. At the *Astaire Story* sessions, Astaire showed up and sang songs he already knew with musicians who already knew each other well. The arrangements were done on the spot. The mikes were live; the still new mag-

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netic tape was rolling; and by the fourth song recorded, a version of George and Ira Gershwin's "'S Wonderful," the group had audibly jelled. Peterson and Kessel trade ideas they had employed on an earlier recording of the tune, and Astaire's vocals provide an added layer, one that is not entirely necessary. The movie star's performance is casual and self-effacing, projecting his awareness that, as a singer among jazz players, this exercise in collaboration was not strictly about him. By the end of the month together in the studio, Astaire was improvising, too. He tap danced to some blues choruses provided by the rhythm section and even played stride piano on the song "Not My Girl" – a tune composed by Astaire – before handing the keyboard back to Peterson.

These concept LPs – sold separately and as a deluxe set including Astaire's autograph – opened a space where the categories of jazz and popular music, alike under stress in the postwar musical marketplace, might productively overlap. *Down Beat's* review recognized the seemingly divided market for *The Astaire Story*, beginning separate paragraphs with "If you're an Astaire fan . . ." and "If you're a jazz fan . . ." Granz valued the divided aspect of the collaboration he engineered, a musical meeting that could have happened nowhere but in the long-form realm of the LP.<sup>8</sup>

Granz's belief that LP listeners appreciated popular song history led to a landmark series of concept LPs released on his new record label, Verve. Organized around songwriters and featuring jazz and pop singer Ella Fitzgerald, the series began with *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Song Book*, an unexpected 1956 best seller. Follow-up discs continued through 1964, anthologizing the songs of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin, George and Ira Gersh-

win, Harold Arlen, Jerome Kern, and Johnny Mercer. Each disc or set of discs was unified musically by assigning a single well-known jazz pop arranger – Buddy Bregman, Paul Weston, Nelson Riddle, Billy May – the task of setting the songs for Fitzgerald's voice. The Ellington set used Ellington's still-vibrant big band; Ellington's longtime collaborator Billy Strayhorn arranged all the charts for Fitzgerald's tracks.

Several factors contribute to the aesthetic completeness of the Fitzgerald *Song Book* cycle of concept LPs. In selecting the tunes, Granz mixed familiar songs from each songwriter's catalog with forgotten tunes. He also had Fitzgerald record obscure verses to well-known choruses. For example, Cole Porter's surprising verses to "Don't Fence Me In" help the listener contextualize this unlikely cowboy tune by the most urbane of songwriters. The pleasures of "Over the Rainbow" are enhanced by the surprise of arriving at its famous chorus only after enjoying its unknown verse. The historical bent of the project is pronounced: it is an education to listen to a Fitzgerald *Song Book* LP, even for listeners who think they know this repertoire. The always "classy" arrangements generally steer clear of trendy beats or gimmicks, giving off a kind of post-swing, jazz-infused pop luster. Because of this, the recordings can be tough to place historically. Big band jazz, minus improvisatory solos, informs much of the sound, with a raft of studio orchestra violins waiting in the wings ready to enter with a sweetening effect. The arrangements are not calibrated for success on the radio – many exploit the soft end of the dynamic spectrum – and reward contemplative listening in a quiet environment. The discs can perhaps be fully taken in only when treated like classical music: attention paid is rewarded again and again. The "classic" status of the Fitzgerald *Song*

*Books* was reinforced in the mid-1990s, when all fourteen discs were rereleased as a box set of CDs, winning the 1995 Grammy Award for Best Historical Album.<sup>9</sup>

Fitzgerald's approach on the *Song Book* series was shaped by the circumstances of its recording and her own flexible musical identity. She recorded the *Song Books* in a hurry, in sessions crammed between tours – Granz managed all aspects of her career at the time – often with almost no preparation.<sup>10</sup> Recording many songs that were unfamiliar to her (and most any listener), songs she would otherwise never have sung, Fitzgerald delivers the lyrics and the tune in a fashion that effectively teaches the songs to the listener. She never calls attention to herself; her jazz phrasing only slightly alters the printed text. Fitzgerald seldom does any jazz scat singing on the discs (except for the Ellington set, which stands out for its pronounced jazz content), and so the full range of her talent is not on display. Instead, Fitzgerald subordinates her own musical inventiveness to the songwriters the discs honor. The strategy proved enduringly satisfying, even if the *Song Books* offer a limited view of the singer. But Granz did not neglect to capture Fitzgerald singing live in this era. The LP *Ella at the Opera House* (1958) affords a useful contrast to the *Song Book* discs. This live disc features much scat singing, with a muffed lyric charmingly negotiated and Fitzgerald's easy relationship with her supporting musicians expressed in chuckling laughter. By contrast, the studio discs get everything just right, with Granz's goal of perfection captured in conversational exchanges between Fitzgerald and the musicians on outtakes included as bonus tracks on the CD reissues (see "Let's Do It" on the *Cole Porter Song Book*).

The long career of singer Rosemary Clooney represents a third example of

the LP as a meeting place for singers, musicians, and songwriters. Clooney was continually active as a recording artist from the early 1940s until her death in 2002. She gained initial fame as a pop singles artist with the dialect novelty hit "Come On-A My House" (1952), which launched her career on radio, record, film, and television. In the latter half of the 1950s, Clooney began making LPs, and she continued to make concept albums for almost the next fifty years. Three albums from her first period of long-form recording are worth a close listen as a group: Clooney with the bands of Duke Ellington and Perez Prado, and a disc of duets with Bing Crosby. On this triptych of LPs, each made under different circumstances, Clooney appears as a masterful and adaptable artist at the center of postwar, pre-rock, jazz and dance-oriented pop. Hearing her on these discs, which together last more than an hour-and-a-half, reveals an artist with the flexibility to shade her sound to new musical environments while always sounding like herself. Her unfailing sense of humor and self-possession allow Clooney to consistently play the right expressive card. The conceptual space of the LP gave Clooney the room to demonstrate her artistry in ways no other venue provided.

In 1956, Clooney collaborated with the Duke Ellington Orchestra on *Blue Rose*, a disc of Ellington and Strayhorn tunes.<sup>11</sup> When the project was proposed, Clooney was pregnant and living in Los Angeles. Her doctors advised her not to travel. Ellington was tied up in New York for several months and couldn't travel either. So Strayhorn acted as go-between; selecting the songs and setting the arrangements with Clooney in Los Angeles, then taking his arrangements east to be recorded by Ellington, then returning west to work with Clooney in the studio, where she added her vocals. Plans to title the

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album *Inter-Continental* were scrapped for fear listeners would be turned off by too much emphasis on the technologically mediated nature of the collaboration.<sup>12</sup>

The Ellington Orchestra's sound was grounded on Ellington and Strayhorn's complementary efforts to weave the individual instrumental voices of the band's roster into unmistakable sonic tapestries. Timbre and texture drove the Ellington ethos, and Clooney, entering this new context, merged her voice into the group. The best example comes on her wordless vocal on the title track, with Clooney singing a horn part and effectively folding herself into the band. At the start of "Mood Indigo," Clooney's wordless vocals are double-tracked, the technology of the 1950s recording studio turning her into a one-woman reed section. The same passage, played by the Ellington reeds, follows, blurring the line between singers and instrumentalists in a manner completely in the band's tradition. Across the album, Clooney uses a soft and supple approach: scooping, sliding, and bending pitches more than usual; letting the microphone do the work of projecting; her rhythmic timing swung to a greater degree than usual as she feels the big beats in the accompaniments, which typically offer sustained, slow-changing chords. Clooney does all this without sounding the least bit mannered. Unsurprisingly, she does no vocal improvisation, sticking to the tune and her underlying identity as a pop singer who delivers words and music with directness and clarity, here in the graceful and iconic jazz setting of the Ellington Orchestra.

In sharp contrast to *Blue Rose's* blue-tinted soundscapes, *A Touch of Tabasco* (1959) serves up red-hot tracks as vibrant as the disc's red and yellow cover. This LP joined Clooney with Perez Prado and his orchestra, the top Cuban band in the United States, then enjoying the Mambo-

craze of the late 1950s. (RCA Victor even marketed the disc with tiny bottles of Tabasco sauce.) Here, Clooney belts it out in Spanish and English. She rides the textured beat provided by Prado's battery of percussion and allows the energy of the band to put an unusually pushed color into her voice. She is always herself, but sounds transformed nonetheless by this sustained association with an exciting "ethnic" style. Fake pop music dialects had made Clooney a star, even though she hated singing "Come On-A My House" and the predictable dialect-laden follow-ups she was forced to make at the start of her career. But on *A Touch of Tabasco*, she sounds completely comfortable and full of vocal vitality.

Most of the tracks are quite short. Few last longer than two-and-a-half minutes; one clocks in at a mere minute-and-a-half. Several reach a dynamic and textural climax only to abruptly cut off, the listener left panting for the next scintillating beat. Prado's layered dance rhythms never repeat themselves from track to track, making *A Touch of Tabasco* a catalog of Latin grooves, several hinting at pop trends to come in the 1960s. On the liner notes, Clooney's husband, the Puerto Rican-born actor José Ferrer, weighed in on the LP's mix of "Mom's apple pie and frijoles," advising the listener that "if, unaccountably, you are surprised by [the album's] easy excitement, devoid of stunts and freak effects, if you are puzzled by the comfortable blend of two apparently disparate talents, that's *your* problem. Me, I just sit back and listen, and in my old-fashioned way, I murmur, '*Loco, hombre, loco.*'"

Clooney's 1958 duet LP with Bing Crosby, *Fancy Meeting You Here*, squares the circle for studio recordings, its rich quality sounding spontaneous even after repeated listening. The concept of the album – articulated in the title song, written espe-

cially for the disc by Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen – takes mostly old tunes about falling in love in exotic places and divides them into effective duets. All the songs sport snappy tempos and come dressed in special lyrics and added counterpoint melodies. A powerful, swinging studio orchestra arranged and conducted by Billy May provides frequently comic support that, at certain moments, verges on the symphonic. It is a meticulously made confection, crafted with care but giving the effect of being blithely tossed off; all in all, a seriously fun piece of popular art.<sup>13</sup>

The final track on both sides of the disc employs the same song, another new tune by Cahn and Van Heusen, called “Love Won’t Let You Get Away.” The side B performance treats the song in straightforward fashion; side A closes with a shorter version, with lyrics that allude to songs already heard on the record. Celebrating the end of side A, Clooney sings, “Here comes another side,” and the pair promises the listener, “We won’t let you get away.” This invitation to flip the record – a reference to the physical form of the LP and an argument that this LP was enjoyed best when heard whole – evokes the world of golden age radio, when Crosby and Clooney were both regular guests in American homes, mixing their songs with friendly patter and jokes. Radio, and the variety television modeled after it, opened endless stretches of time that needed constant filling. The finely tuned *Fancy Meeting You Here* elegantly inserts spoken and sung exchanges for Clooney and Crosby in the spaces within the songs, distilling the essence of personality-driven comedy and music that, in the late 1950s, was fading to silence. The lightly worn virtuosity of the professional entertainer finds its Platonic ideal in the thirty-eight minutes Crosby and Clooney share with each other and the listener on *Fancy Meeting You Here*.<sup>14</sup>

Clooney’s career and personal life crashed and burned in the late 1960s, and in 1977, she published a surprisingly frank memoir of her passage through drug addiction.<sup>15</sup> Reentering a musical market now uninterested in her classic pop credentials, Clooney remade her career. She became a cabaret singer, did old-timer’s tours with other former “girl singers,” and embarked on a sustained LP- and (later) CD-making project that lasted over twenty years.

Signing with Concord Records, a modest jazz label out of Northern California, Clooney released twenty-six albums between 1978 and 2002 (the year of her death). All were concept albums on the pre-rock model, grouping eight to ten classic popular songs around a central idea. With a shift to CD releases in the 1990s, her albums began to average fifteen or so tracks, the longer format allowing for a more expansive exploration of each album’s topic. Clooney did singer salutes (Bing Crosby, Billie Holiday), songwriter song books on the Fitzgerald model (a series of seven discs), collaborations with surviving big bands (Woody Herman and the Count Basie ghost band), historical anthologies (songs from World War II), explorations of song types (ballads, show tunes, the inevitable Christmas LP), a disc of Brazilian bossa nova, and an album of songs about traveling. Several of her concept albums carry personal associations. *Dedicated to Nelson* (1996) salutes the arranger Nelson Riddle, with whom Clooney had an affair in the late 1950s. (She chronicled their relationship in her 1977 autobiography without naming names.) *Mothers and Daughters* (1997) includes a version of “Maria” from *West Side Story* sung to Clooney’s daughter Maria. (Clooney had five children in quick succession in the mid-1950s, and motherhood remained central to her persona across her career.) Clooney’s final album, a live recording

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titled *The Last Concert* (2002), captures a November 2001 performance attended by many family and friends. The previous month, Apple had announced the imminent release of the first iPod, an innovation that would accelerate trends away from physical discs toward a pop music marketplace shaped by digital products, mostly singles. By historical happenstance, good luck, and good health, Clooney managed to make concept albums for almost the full length of the long-format era.

Clooney's Concord discography stands as a year-by-year record of a great singer using the long-format medium to preserve for posterity her way with a song, confident that grouping some classic pop tunes around a simple concept was still a good way to make a successful LP or CD. Clooney's quiet confidence in this approach, and the commitment of her record label to keep the series going, resulted in both a monument to American popular singing and evidence that the earliest solutions to the aesthetic challenge of the LP continued to work until the end of the long-format era.

The age of long-form listening is past. True, any later format can be used like the LP, and recording artists still make "albums," although albums for sale as downloads on the Internet are little more than suggested playlists available at a discount if purchased as a whole. As the CD slouches toward extinction, there is no way of knowing if long-format creativity will be a priority for younger artists and listeners, whose listening practices were not defined by sustained, set-order listening. The listener who longs for the long-format experience can simulate it, of course, although some research is necessary if historical formats are to be recreated in a twenty-first-century recorded music regime that has done away with liner notes and set orders, not to mention

the cover art that was so central to LP culture.

The material conditions that nourished long-form listening are all but gone, but the recordings – at least some of them – remain, repackaged as digital singles obtainable for 99¢, popping up randomly on a streaming service such as Pandora, or instantly accessible (and just as easily dismissible) on Spotify. These fragments and ghosts of the concept album in its early days still bring pleasure, but anyone who wants to experience this recorded legacy in a deeper fashion does well to set the needle in the longer LP groove – even if only symbolically – and let the creative musical meetings of an ended epoch live again in their entirety.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “Albums” of 78s – sets of related discs packaged in heavy, photo-album-like binders, often with specially designed cover art – were widely marketed beginning in the 1930s, and the high-end home audio equipment manufacturer Capehart sold phonographs that played multiple 78s in succession. So, it was technically possible to create a long-form listening experience. The LP not only streamlined the physical process, but also simplified the technological requirements for home listeners and lowered the entry-level cost for consumers wishing to enter the long-format market.
- <sup>2</sup> This tally includes a handful of studio and concert recordings of Broadway scores; see Joel Whitburn, *Top Pop Albums*, 7th ed. (Menomonee Falls, Wis.: Record Research Inc., 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> The LP was well suited to classical music, but classical recordings have never driven the recorded music market; they simply do not generate enough sales. Production of classical discs has always been under a kind of patronage: a label’s pop successes pay for the prestigious losses racked up by the classical division.
- <sup>4</sup> Audio cassettes, introduced in the early 1960s but gaining market share only in the early 1970s, reproduced the sidedness of LPs (sometimes rearranging the distribution of tracks), while also adding portability, especially with the introduction of the Walkman at the start of the 1980s. In some cases, tracks not included on the LP version of an album appeared on 8-track tape releases. The unreliable 8-track format never gained much traction in the marketplace. Unlike the inexactitude of the fast forward and rewind buttons on audio cassette players, use of which was said to harm the tape, 8-track players featured a skip button that moved the listener forward to a new section of the tape. However, 8-tracks did not have the shuffle capabilities of the CD. Cassettes, 8-tracks, and CDs were all ideal for use in cars. The Ultra-Glide, a phonograph mounted on the dashboard, attempted, without much success, to adapt 45 singles for automobile listening during the format’s late 1950s and 1960s heyday. No means to play LPs in the car was ever introduced commercially.
- <sup>5</sup> Other approaches to the early concept LP worth considering include discs made for social dancing in the home and personality-driven discs organized around individual performers. Social dance instructors Arthur Murray and Fred Astaire both released multiple discs intended to help listeners improve their skills with a particular style of dance – LPs of all rumbas or waltzes – and party discs that mixed tempos and dances, providing a soundtrack for good times in the home. My wife’s grandparents enjoyed dancing to such records in the finished basement of their home in 1950s Washington State. Comedian Jackie Gleason pioneered personality-driven instrumental discs in the early 1950s. Gleason’s artistic role in making the records remains unclear, but his success marketing mood music LPs crafted to display adult record buyers’ hi-fi home stereo systems lasted into the 1960s. Frank Sinatra’s concept LPs on Capitol Records, beginning with *Songs for Young Lovers* (1954), centered on the singer’s voice and masculine persona. As late as 1960, Sinatra was producing albums that charted at number one (*Nice ’n’ Easy*). Sinatra made two types of discs: rhythm discs that set the mood for a swinging party (*Come Dance with Me!*, 1959) and ballad discs suggesting late night brooding over love lost (*In the Wee Small Hours*, 1955).
- <sup>6</sup> All the LPs discussed below are available for purchase as CD reissues and through digital download services such as iTunes and amazon.com. Another way to digitally sample these discs is via the (at present) free music streaming service Spotify, which can be searched by album title. Neither CDs nor online versions necessarily reflect the exact content or order of the original LPs and, of course, the break between sides A and B is obscured. In many cases, YouTube features selections from these discs posted by fans of the albums. Search by album title and artist name, always aware that tracks may be mislabeled and accompanying images may be wrong.
- <sup>7</sup> Early live LPs demonstrating a range of styles include *Ellington at Newport* (a 1956 disc that revived Duke Ellington’s career, though it was revealed in the 1990s to have actually been a mixture of live and studio performances, with crowd noises added for effect), *Judy at Carnegie Hall* (a 1961 double-LP of Judy Garland performing for an adoring crowd), and *Live*

at the Apollo (James Brown appearing in 1962 at the iconic theater in Harlem for a similarly vocal audience). Live discs featuring rock and roll musicians would, of course, follow these pioneering LPs.

- <sup>8</sup> For more on *The Astaire Story*, see Tad Hershorn, *Norman Granz: The Man Who Used Jazz for Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 170–172; and Todd Decker, *Music Makes Me: Fred Astaire and Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 315–320.
- <sup>9</sup> The original album art and liner notes were reproduced as well, but the miniature size of the CD relative to the LP made the homage perhaps more symbolic than useful.
- <sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the making of the *Song Books*, see Hershorn, *Norman Granz*, 217–224 and 273–277; and Norman David, *The Ella Fitzgerald Companion* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 107–133. Leslie Gourse collects media interviews and critical reactions to the discs in *The Ella Fitzgerald Companion: Seven Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 51–108.
- <sup>11</sup> Ellington's transition to an LP artist brought forth a diverse series of concept albums. The success of *Ellington at Newport* reinvigorated Ellington's career and led to a series of LPs for Columbia, allowing Ellington to record what he wanted. Among the discs of this period are *Such Sweet Thunder* (musical portraits of characters from Shakespeare by Ellington and Strayhorn), *Anatomy of a Murder* (a film score soundtrack album), *Ellington Indigos* (a Gleasonesque set of ballads in a sustained, bluesy mood), *At the Bal Masque* (described by Ellington scholar Eddie Lambert as a disc of "satirical pop," each track framed with a fake applause track), the *Nutcracker Suite* (a disc's worth of jazz renderings from Tchaikovsky's perennial favorite), and "All American" in Jazz (jazz settings of songs from the score to the Broadway flop *All American*, part of a minor vogue for such discs). *Blue Rose* falls within this body of work created between 1956 and 1962, a period when Ellington sought a place in the adult long-form popular music market. For more on Ellington's LP-making during these years, see Eddie Lambert, *Duke Ellington: A Listener's Guide* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 177–204 and 213–231.
- <sup>12</sup> Rosemary Clooney, with Raymond Strait, *This For Remembrance: The Autobiography of Rosemary Clooney, An Irish-American Singer* (New York: Playboy Press, 1977), 178–180.
- <sup>13</sup> Clooney, Crosby, and May made a follow-up disc titled *That Travelin' Two Beat* (Capitol Records, 1965).
- <sup>14</sup> To hear the three Clooney LPs discussed here in context with the singer's larger career, see Bear Family Records' retrospective anthology of Clooney's complete recorded work from 1946 to 1968, in chronological order on twenty-two CDs divided into three box sets.
- <sup>15</sup> Clooney, *This For Remembrance*.