

**THE COMPLETE
RECORDINGS**

MONTE EASTER

**VOLUME 1
1945-1951**



**blue
moon**
Blue Series

MONTE EASTER

THE COMPLETE • VOLUME 1 • 1945-1951

1. SR-103-A	AIN'T CHA GLAD (Monte Easter)	Sterling 103	2:42
2. SR-103-B1	EMPTY BED BLUES (Monte Easter)	Sterling 103	2:39
3. SR-104-A	SHE KNOWS WHAT TO DO -2 (Monte Easter)	Sterling 104	2:40
4. SR-104-B	MONTE'S BLUES (Monte Easter)	Sterling 104	2:45
5. SR-107-A	I NEED A GIRL LIKE YOU -2 (-)	Sterling 107	2:47
6. SR-107-B	EVENING BLUES (-)	Sterling 107	2:33

MONTE EASTER AND HIS ORCHESTRA: Monte Easter, vcl/tp with Earl Simms, as; Hubert Allen, ts; Martha Potts, p; Addison Farmer, sbs; Charles Blackwell, dms; ensemble vcl -2.

Note: Despite information in the standard discographies, Sterling 106 ("Time For Jookin'/St. Louis Blues") is as by "Judy Canova with Orchestra Accompaniment", and not by Monte Easter. The accompaniment is definitely not by Monte Easter's band on Sterling 106, and therefore these titles are not included here.

7. AL-147-A	BOOGIE WOOGIE MAN -1 (Monte Easter)	Aladdin 147	2:42
8. AL-147-B	I LOVE MY MAN (Monte Easter)	Aladdin 147	2:40
9. AL-148-A	OOH-LAWDY! LAWDY! -1 (Monte Easter)	Aladdin 148	2:33
10. AL-148-B	IT'S HEAVEN (Monte Easter)	Aladdin 148	2:51

MARY DE PINA with MONTE EASTER AND HIS BAND: Vcl with Monte Easter, tp; Maxwell Davis, ts; Rosetta Andrews, p; Ralph Hamilton, sbs; Charles Blackwell, dms; ensemble vcl -1. *Los Angeles, 14 June 1946*

11. IM-277	WITHOUT YOUR LOVE -1 (H. & H. Tobias-D. Oppenheim)	Imperial 5122*	2:46
12. IM-278	THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER DAY -1 (M. Easter-J.Smith)	Imperial 5122*	2:42
13. IM-279	I'M HUNCHED* -2 (M. Easter)	Imperial 5128, 5168*	2:33
14. IM-280	REAL FINE DADDY* -2 (M. Easter)	Imperial 5128, 5168*	2:23
15.	JUMP BOYS JUMP -2,3 (M. Easter)	Imperial unissued	2:17
16. IM-286	WHAT'S THE USE -3 (M. Easter)	Imperial 5135	2:25
17. IM-287	I WAS MAD -3 (M. Easter)	Imperial 5135	2:52
18. IM-288	THOMAS AVENUE BLUES -3 (Monte Easter)	Imperial 5155	2:35

19.IM-289

SWEET LOVIN' WOMEN -3 (Monte Easter)

Imperial 5155 2:52

MONTE EASTER AND HIS ORCHESTRA or JIMMY DELANEY WITH THE MONTE EASTER ORCHESTRA* or MARY WALLACE*: Jimmy Delaney (J.D. Ware or J.D. Weir), vcl -1; Mary Wallace (=Mary DePina), vcl -2 with Monte Easter, vcl -3/ tp; Earl Sims, as/bar; Hubert Allen, as/ts; Clara Lewis, p; Bernard Carriere, sbs; Sonny Heard, dms; ensemble vcl -4. *Los Angeles, c. April 1951*

Note: the slightly distorted sound on tracks #13+14 is on the original 78.



l to r: Alice Young, p; Jimmy Delaney, ts/vcl; Monte Easter, tp; Gabriel Williams, dms. Los Angeles, c. late 1940s/early 1950s.

I'm Hunched

The Monte Easter Story

by Opal Louis Nations

Part 1

For some extraordinary reason, one that eludes me, Monte Easter's name and contribution to rhythm & blues music have, up until now, been excluded from the pantheon of sepiia pioneers. Apart from the initial Sterling sides, Easter waxed for Aladdin and Imperial with Jesse Mae Robinson and guitar wizard Jimmy Nolen fronting his band. Unless I am mistaken, I have seen only a booted song or two, a fraction of his overall work, including his later release cut for Hunter Hancock's Swingin' label in 1960.

Easter, a happy, jovial gentleman of wit and character, certainly did not deserve to be overlooked. Friends of Easter's say he was an outspoken man, one given to telling what he thought of you. This might have helped in making enemies of those who could have furthered his career. He did not like traveling that much and never wanted to fly to engagements. Easter shared the same undeserved fate as singer Wade Flemons -- both resided in Battle Creek, Michigan, both suffered the same neglect.

Isadore Leonidas "Monte" Easter was born December 15, 1913 in Coffeyville, Kansas, 173 miles south of Kansas City on the Oklahoma border. Luke Easter, the ball player, is a relative. His mother, Clara, was a "high yellow" black and his father, William, a Native American. His first musical aspirations were realized on the family piano, but it was the sound com-

ing from horn players like Louis Armstrong, Clark Terry, and Buck Clayton that most impressed and inspired him.

Easter switched to trumpet and studied under Bill Trumbauer at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. His parents, both schoolteachers, supplied every encouragement. In 1930, after a short stay in Phoenix, Easter, his parents and sister Rylva (now deceased) moved to Los Angeles where Easter studied trumpet under Jimmy Stamps at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music. He undertook advanced tutelage with German-born Dr. Heinier and Lloyd Reese. Easter eased his way into playing for the public by sitting in on weekends at the majestic Elks Auditorium with the George Brown Band. He worked with Lester Young's family group and got to know Lester's niece, pianist Martha Potts, pretty well. Easter then became part of the transplanted Kansas City territory band scene at Curtis Mosby's Club Alabam in 1934-35, sitting in with Harlan Leonard's Kansas City Rockets and with Fess White's outfit. During this time he played in the Ewing Brothers, Bob Parish, Noble Sissle, Roy Clark, Leonard Reed, and with Floyd Ray's band who waxed for Roy Milton's Miltone label in 1945. Easter played taxi dances with the Ewing Brothers (1936-37.)

After playing off and on in other bands, Easter pulled his first band together around 1943. Under singer Bardu Ali's (formerly with Chick Webb) leadership, the outfit played as the house-band at The Lincoln Theatre. The unit featured "Chuck" Thomas on tenor sax who was later replaced by Henry Tucker. Alto player Eric Dolphy, bassist Addison Farmer, and Cleveland-born pianist, arranger, producer Ernie Freeman all played in Easter's band at one time or

another. Blues singer Gloria Shannon, who in 1955 recorded with the Goo Goo Hutchinson Orchestra, also served in Easter's band. Monte befriended fellow Kansas City piano giant, Jay McShann, with whom he later played at Café Society in San Francisco and back in Kansas City during the early 1960s. He became mentor, friend and godfather to Charles Brown and Ernie Freeman, both of whom he has much admired over the years.

Remembering his own experiences on the instrument, Easter often took to talented pianists, gave help and advice and generally brought them along. When the Brown Sisters, proprietors of the Little Harlem Club in Watts (1812 Parmalee Avenue) brought T-Bone Walker to play at their place, Walker worked with Easter's Harlem Swingers for awhile, a partnership which worked out very well. Easter and Walker later shared the same booking agent, Harold Oxley. (The Brown Sisters made a special point of presenting talented women at their club. Regular female acts at this time included blues singer Pearl Traylor, who later hit with "Three Ball Sam, The Pawnbroker Man" on Okeh Records, a rubber-legged dancer by the name of Laura Steele, and singer/comedienne/mistress of ceremonies Lorena Flippen.)

In 1945, Easter formed a band around Jewish singer Judy Canova, with whom he had a brief relationship. (This is not the hillbilly comedienne of that name who starred in scatterbrained movies.) Another member was Earl Sims, who proprietored a radio

repair business. "I took my radio to him to have it repaired.

When I heard he could play alto sax, I brought him into the band," says Easter.

Hubert Allen played tenor sax, Martha Potts, Lester Young's niece, sat in on piano, on bass was Addison Farmer (whom Easter thinks is one of the world's finest bass players), and veteran A & R man and ace saxophonist "Bumps" Blackwell's brother, Charlie Blackwell, filled in on drums. Both Bumps and Charlie were based in Seattle at that point and were friends of Quincy Jones who helped them along.

Easter's band was selected as guest orchestra on the "Joe Adams - Mayor of Melody" radio show over KOWL. Adams was the first black Los Angeles deejay to play blues & rhythm records and feature live acts with any regularity. He later became Ray Charles's manager.

As well as gigs at The Little Harlem, Manchester, Crane's Celebrity and California Clubs, the band managed to get house-band tenure at Club Royal down in San Diego, a gig that was to last two years. After a successful tour of Texas they were noticed by Art Rupe. Rupe, at this time, was recording director for Juke Box Records on West Seventh Street. Juke Box soon became an affiliate of A.E. Middleman's Sterling Records on West Forty-sixth Street in New York. In early 1946, Sterling issued the first of four Easter Orchestra releases that were to stretch over a period of twelve months.

Easter's first release was "Ain't Cha Glad" / "Empty



Bed Blues" (Sterling 103). "Ain't Cha Glad" is Easter's fondest and best remembered recording and never fails to bring smiles to his face. The song opens with a reveille trumpet measure and bounces into a nursery-rhyme type lyric centering on the musical prowess of various members in the band. "Empty Bed Blues" is a knockdown, drag out slow blues moaned by Easter, supported by Earl Sims' strong tenor work.

Three follow-up releases emerged close on the heels of "Ain't Cha Glad" which made waves and produced coin for the juke boxes. Easter asserts that he wrote all his tunes. The fourth and last Sterling release, "Evening Blues" backed with "I Need A Girl Like You," was reviewed in a fall 1945 issue of Billboard: "Leading a lively jam band with his trumpet, it's the husky race singing of Monte Easter that counts most in this cutting, particularly for the slow race blues of a flighty chick who leaves him on the "Evening Blues." At a brighter beat, and with the band boys singing in unison, its delightful Harlesemese ditty for "I Need A Girl Like You". Easter and the band always got high for the sessions, but they stayed clear of booze and hard drugs.

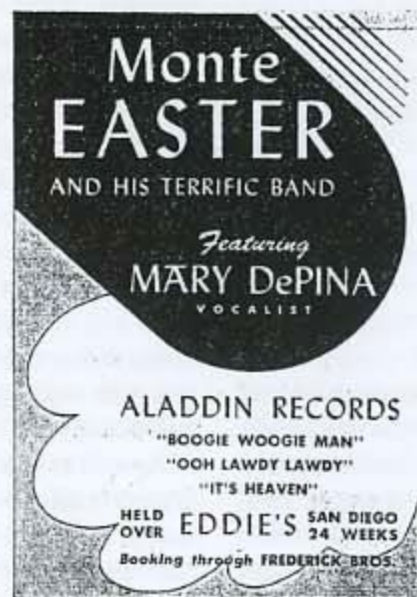
In June 1946, Maxwell Davis had Easter back the lovely Mary De Pina for one Aladdin session. The neat result was four songs that placed Easter in the Billboard Encyclopedia of hit recordings. Easter's

musical interpretations of "Boogie Woogie Man", "I Love My Man", "Ooh-Lawdy! Lawdy!" and "It's Heaven" with Maxwell Davis on tenor sax, Rosetta Andrews (who Easter picked up at Café Society and would work with at Eddie's Café) played piano. Ralph Hamilton played bass and Charlie Blackwell, who sat in on drums, really put the Monte Easter name out there and helped a lot to keep the band working.

Singer Mary De Pina, sadly died of cancer, her career cut short. Easter's tenure at Club Royal ended in 1947. He was replaced by Walter Fuller. In 1948, Easter played as house band at Eddie's Café, a residence that was to last for a year.

Somewhere around this period, Easter got himself involved with Bertram Jackson and The Hollywood Goldsound Orchestra. The Goldsound Orchestra was a seventeen-piece swing-band in the Stan Kenton mold and boasted some of the finest musicians in local music circles. Easter was assigned musical direction while

the Goldsound Production Company, run by Jackson and Bill Singleton, talent-searched for undiscovered singers, dancers and other acts worthy of t.v. exposure. The idea was similar to that of the Arthur Godfrey organization. An October 1950 issue of Billboard mentions Easter as heading up a five-piece combo at weekends at Crane's Celebrity Club. His performance is described as "a trumpeter who blows like mad".



For a brief period Easter worked for the Post Office in Kansas City. But he missed the entertainment business and returned to L.A. After the success of the songs Easter had written and helped arrange for Mary De Pina on Aladdin Records, he began trying to hawk his own charts to other artists. The most notable was "Ain't Nothing Shaking", a song that ended up on the flipside of Amos Milburn's heavy-selling "Just One More Drink" (Aladdin 3093) in 1950. Fans were more interested in Milburn's follow-up record to "Bad, Bad Whiskey" than they were in Easter's raunchy jump vehicle. Easter asserts that he sold the song to Maxwell Davis for \$300.

1951 proved to be the peak year for Easter. Having signed with Lew Chudd's Imperial Records on Hollywood Boulevard, his records would certainly reach a much wider audience. Chudd issued four Ernie Freeman-arranged records on Easter over the course of seven months. None has seen reissue until now. His best remembered song from these two Imperial sessions is "I'm Hunched", based on an expression Easter had heard as a kid, meaning "I'm hip to that jive". His band (The Harlem Swingsters) at this juncture was composed of Monte Easter, trumpet, Earl Sims, alto sax, Hubert Allen, tenor sax, Clara Lewis, piano, Bernard Carriere, bass, and Sonny Heard, drums. Imperial's Lew Chudd or possibly Henri Rene had probably first noticed Easter at The Little Harlem Club where he enjoyed residency alongside the soft-singing tenor Senis Moultry.

Easter moved up to swank dance venues and played at the gala opening of the Uptown Ballroom (formerly The Savoy) at the corner of Fifty-fifth and South Central Avenue with torch singer Dorothy Gavin shar-

ing the bill. Gavin was an old friend of Easter's and both had played in the Floyd Ray and Leonard Reed Orchestras.

Before the Uptown date, The Monte Easter Orchestra had toured with ex-Jimmy Lunceford vocalist Dan Grissom who was enjoying a measure of success with his waxing of "King Of Fools" on Imperial and Linda Hopkins who, having dropped Savoy for King Records, was riding high with "Doggin' The Blues" and "How Can I Go On". The aggregation played the terrace of the fashionable Woodlake Country Club where they performed for the well heeled.

Every Christmas season at the Lincoln Theatre, the Los Angeles Sentinel (an African-American newspaper) organized a four-hour Christmas basket event for the needy. A vast array of major stars usually donated their time to the event organized by disc jockeys Hunter Hancock and Joe Adams in league with John Thomas Gibson, editorial critic for the theatrical segment of the Saturday Sentinel. In June, Gibson passed away, and a whole legion of show biz luminaries pledged their services for the Christmas basket giveaway and memorial program. Admission was 75 cents worth of groceries. Easter played on the benefit alongside such notables as Red Foxx, Jimmy Forrest, Gerry Mulligan, and Benny Carter.

To be continued ...

Opal Louis Nations, April 2001

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