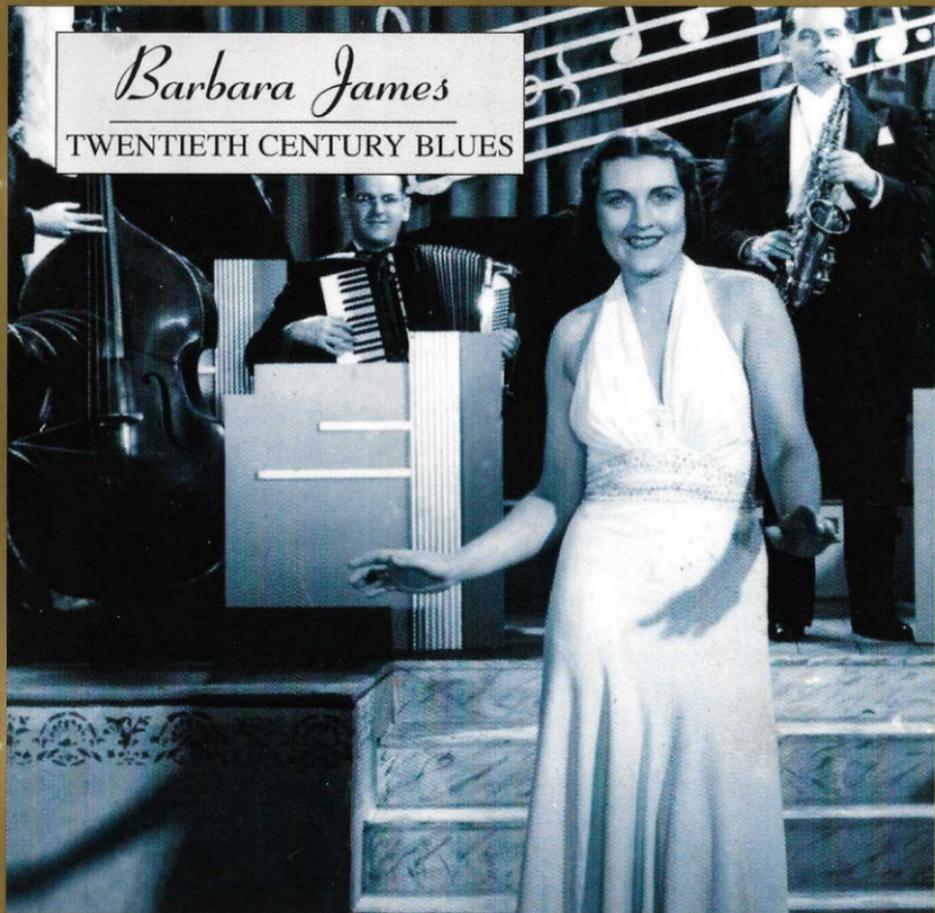


*Barbara James*

TWENTIETH CENTURY BLUES



## TRACK LISTING

1. Twentieth Century Blues (Beryl Newell, pno 13/6/1933)
2. Black Eyed Susan Brown (Beryl Newell, pno 13/6/1933)
3. Let Me Give My Happiness To You  
(Jim Davidson & His New Palais Royal Orchestra 28/6/1933)
4. It Don't Mean A Thing (Frank Coughlan's Trocadero Orchestra July 1937)
5. Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea (late 1937)
6. The Answer Is Love (Dick Freeman & His Trocadero Dance Band March 1940)
7. Good For Nothing (But Love) (Dick Freeman & His Trocadero Dance Band March 1940)
8. I Can't Give You Anything But Love  
(Reg Lewis & Trocadero Band) (issued as Johnnie Tozer & His Swing Band Jan 1941)
9. The Lights Will Shine Again (Abe Romaine & His Orch, 22/5/1941)
10. Sitting Making Faces At The Moon (George Trevere's Australians 19/8/1943)
11. Little Ships Will Sail Again (George Trevere's Australians 19/8/1943)
12. The Smiths And The Jones (Montague Brearley Orch late 1943)
13. Austerity Blues (Albert Fisher Orch 1944)
14. Small Town Boogie (Albert Fisher Orch 1944)
15. Kentucky (National Dance Orch early 1945)
16. So Long (National Dance Orch early 1945)
17. When You Put On That Old Blue Suit Again (National Dance Orch early 1945)
18. Minnie's In The Money (Reg Lewis Orch 1945)
19. Slender, Tender And Tall (Reg Lewis Orch 1945)
20. I Don't Know Enough You (Reg Lewis, piano 11/10/1946)
21. Buster, The Swagman's Daughter (Orchestra (The Sundowners) 1957)
22. It's A Good Day (Reg Lewis, piano & vocal 1960s?)  
If I Were A Bell  
Polka Dots And Moonbeams (piano solo)  
You'll Find Out (vocal duet)  
Give Me The Simple Life  
I'm Gonna Life Till I Die  
Playing Time: 69.46

## TWENTIETH CENTURY BLUES

Barbara James

Australians have long had a love affair with jazz and blues and it is unfortunate that so little of our early jazz recordings survive. We are fortunate that radio broadcast and recorded a large repertoire especially of our most popular singers and bands and 'by hook or by crook' those Dick Traceys of the historical audiophile world have managed to find them and protect them. This is yet another fine testament to their diligence.

Barbara James was one of our best-loved vocalists and she certainly is up there with her American and British counterparts. She was a strong and stylish singer and this excellent compilation captures her perfectly as she sings and swings her way through dance favourites and even some torchy songs. It's easy to close your eyes and imagine yourself transported back to the grand era of the dance palais where men and women dressed to the nines and the orchestras were large enough to pump out music that didn't really need amplification. As the big band strikes up under the conducting baton of a Jim Davidson or Frank Coughlan then up steps Miss Barbara James and the magic begins ...

W.F.

Barbara James

First published Larrikin Entertainment 1996

Executive Producer: Warren Fahey

Masters from the collections of Peter Burgis, Mike Sutcliffe and Barbara James.

Compilation arranged by Peter Burgis, Performing Arts Historian and National Sound Archivist. (Kingfisher: P.O. Box 1660, Port Macquarie, NSW, 2444)

Notes by Jack Mitchell

Photographs courtesy of the Mike Sutcliffe Collection.

Artwork: Festival Art

Sonic restoration and remastering by Rex McLean, Launceston, Tasmania.

Original recordings in this series are preserved in the Australian Institute Of Recorded Sound (AIRS).

Barbara James was arguably Australia's leading popular vocalist for three decades. In the days before artist categorisation became de rigeur she sang everything that came her way. She was not specifically a jazz singer, but she could sing jazz. She sang everything that was popular in the dance and popular field, and when swing became the rage in the middle thirties, she showed that she could swing with the best of them. This of course could only have happened to someone with a thorough grounding in show business and dance band music.

Barbara was born into a family that was not only musical, but part of Sydney's live theatre circuit. In the early years of this century, her parents had a double banjo act on the vaudeville theatre circuit. In the early twenties her father Bill became a band leader at the Bondi Casino dance hall – giving a young Frank Coughlan his first professional job. As a young girl, Barbara was taught by her father to play the banjo, the xylophone and finally the saxophone. At age 11, she did three seasons with Tivoli Theatres as the “child wonder xylophonist”.

In 1926 she was in her father's band at the Casino Dance Hall in Katoomba, which is where she first began to vocalise. Her singing “just happened” but with her musical training and experience behind her, it happened just right. Barbara stayed in Katoomba for four years, singing and playing at the guest houses which were such a big part of the Blue Mountains scene in those days. That's where she first met a young pianist named Reg Lewis, who was playing at a rival dancery. In 1927 she won the title “Maid Of The Mountains” – the local segment of the Miss Australia contest.

In 1930 Brisbane called and she was billed as the “Personality Girl Saxophonist” with Tommy Kane's band at the Carlton. Then followed engagements in Broken Hill, after which she returned to Sydney where she featured on the first broadcast by 2FC under its new ownership by the ABC. She was to be a popular guest on radio shows for many years.

Following a stint at the Cavalier cabaret in King Street she went to Melbourne, singing with Art Chapman's band at the Embassy – Melbourne's first true cabaret. The pianist in this band was Reg Lewis, and after further seasons in Melbourne and Sydney, Barbara and Reg were married in November, 1936. Thereafter, their musical careers were usually intertwined. When Barbara was at the Manhattan cabaret in Sydney, MUSIC MAKER said: “The outstanding feature of the Manhattan entertainment is Barbara James, the vocalist. She is remarkably good – the finest vocalist we have heard in the flesh, male or female.” (Also singing at the Manhattan was a male crooner and future radio celebrity – Jack Davey.)

In July, 1937 Barbara James joined Frank Coughlan's fine swing band at the Sydney Trocadero, and was

associated with the orchestras there on and off until 1941. Reg Lewis was also in the Trocadero bands and they were in demand for casual appearances at the Sydney Swing Music Club and the Newcastle Hot Jazz Club. One of their most requested numbers was a two-out version of Mississippi Mud learned from the recently released Frankie Trumbauer classic featuring Bing Crosby and Bix Beiderbecke. Sadly, we have been unable to trace any recording of Barbara's rendition.

In 1941, Reg and Barbara left the Trocadero – Reg to become musical director at radio 2GB, Barbara as his vocalist. Together they featured on many radio shows (such as Australia Sings) and she also sang with the orchestras at various theatres – the State, the Regent, the Prince Edward and the Capitol were the main ones with resident orchestras. Barbara also freelanced, singing with many other orchestras on other radio programmes.

In 1945 Reg started his Modern Music Club with a seventeen piece swing band. This led to Reg taking over the orchestra at the Prince Edward theatre – a gig that lasted for some four years. His vocalist was of course Barbara James – she had previously sung there when Bert Howell was the leader.

After that they went overseas, working for 31/2 years entertaining US forces in Germany, followed by a stint in Britain. On returning to Sydney, they went into the Colony Club for six months, then to Melbourne again. Whilst working there they did three series of their own radio show Between You And Us, followed by another three series when they returned to Sydney in 1955. By now they were content with casual work – as they were winding down their careers. The last residency of the talented couple seems to have been at the Kirribilli Hotel.

Looking back on her career, Barbara said: “If I had my time over, I wouldn't wish to change one thing – I've had a great life in music”. That life is well illustrated in this CD release which covers the gamut of her career, from her first recording in 1933 through to the radio programme Between You And Us in the late fifties.

Along the way we hear Barbara singing ballads, pops, swing and jazz – as a soloist, as a guest artist with Jim Davidson's Orchestra from the Palais Royal, George Trevaire's recording orchestra and various broadcasting bands, as well as with the Trocadero Orchestras of which she was a regular member. Few singers can boast such a fulfilling career and such a diversity of material. None are more deserving of such a tribute as this CD.

Jack Mitchell

## Other Larrikin 'Australia's Yesteryears' and historical recordings:

- LRH324 'Is 'e An Aussie Is 'e Lizzie?' Australian Stars Of The International Music Hall. Vol. 1
- LRH325 'Boiled Beef & Cabbage' Australian Stars Of The International Music Hall. Vol. 11
- LRH289 'Let The Pianola Play'. Historic Mastertouch Piano Rolls.
- LRH390 'Band In A Waistcoat Pocket'. Historic harmonica music in Australia from turn-of-the-century. Double CD set.
- LRH221 'Historic Recordings' Dame Nellie Melba.
- LRH428 'King Of The Trocadero' Frank Coughlan and his bands.
- LRH427 'Twentieth Century Blues' Barbara James. Sweetheart of the dance palais.
- LRH429 'Stars of Australian Stage & Radio' Vol. One. Various artists
- LRH430 'Stars of Australian Stage & Radio' Vol. Two. Various artists
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- LRH447 'Can I Sleep In Your Barn Tonight, Mister?' Australian hillbilly artists.
- LRH446 'Australia's Yodelling Boundary Rider' Tex Morton.
- LRH445 'I'll Be Hanged If They're Gonna Hang Me' Tex Morton
- LRH448 'Down By The Slip Rail' Young Reg Lindsay
- LRH449 'Australia's Yodelling Cowgirl' Shirley Thoms
- LRH453 'Florence Austral In Opera & Song'. Double CD
- LRH455 'From The Outback To The Ocean' Peter Dawson
- LRH456 'One More Day' Historical player-piano rolls of Percy Grainger

'Australia's Yesteryears' - If you would like to receive information on future historical releases please write to Warren Fahey at Larrikin Entertainment:  
P.O. Box 16, Pyrmont, NSW, 2009, Australia.

Produced in association with the National Film & Sound Archive.

