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By JOHN S. WILSON

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**T**HE other side of the blues — blues sung by independent, outspoken women rather than the more traditional "victim" types who are always "dyin' and cryin' because my man left me" — will be brought into focus in a Newport Jazz Festival program called "The Blues Is a Woman" at Avery Fisher Hall tonight at 8 o'clock.

The program, which will feature such singers as Sippie Wallace, Big Mama Thornton, Nell Carter, Linda Hopkins, Adelaide Hall and Koko Taylor, with a running narration by Carmen McRae, will, according to Rosetta Reitz, who is producing it, bring what she feels is long overdue acknowledgment to women whose contribution to the history of jazz is "enormous."

## JAZZ EVENTS

Following is a schedule of today's Newport Jazz Festival—New York events:

5 P.M., Carnegie Recital Hall: Mitchel Forman and Martal Solal, pianists.

8 P.M., Carnegie Hall: "Toshiko Akiyoshi and Friends," Billy Taylor, host, with Jack DeJohnette, Dizzy Gillespie, Phil Woods, Curtis Fuller, George Duvivier and the Akiyoshi-Ta-backin' Big Band.

8 P.M., Avery Fisher Hall: "Blues Is a Woman," narrated by Carmen McRae, with Beulah Bryant, Nell Carter, Sharon Freeman, Adelaide Hall, Linda Hopkins, Little Brother Montgomery, Koko Taylor and Her Blues Machine, Big Mama Thornton, Sippie Wallace and the Classic Jazz Band, with Doc Cheatham, Kenny Davern, Vic Dickenson, Panama Francis, Dick Hyman, Jay McShann and Bill Pemberton.

Among those she feels deserve attention are Lil Armstrong, Ida Cox, Ma Rainey, Rosa Henderson, Chippie Hill and Lucille Hegamin, as well as the best known of the classic blues singers, Bessie Smith.

"When I have discussed this with various jazz scholars," Miss Reitz said the other day, "no one has disagreed with me. But it has not been their particular interest. So it's as though I had to take up the sword because nobody was doing it. I thought these women simply were not given enough credit because in that decade of the 1920's when jazz was really being formulated and changing from an entertainment music to an art form, these women were extraordinarily important and instrumental in accomplishing that."

"For example," she continued, "Louis Armstrong was a sideman on records in the 20's with singers like Sippie Wallace, Eva Taylor, Hociel Thomas, Virginia Liston and Margaret Johnson. Those women's records were made as their records. But when they come out now, they're reissued as Louis Armstrong records when, actually, he was not that important on them. That's a kind of interesting distortion that, I think, must be corrected. That's the reason I've got Sippie Wallace coming in at 81, in all her grandeur, to speak for herself."

Despite her fondness for Miss Wallace, however, Miss Reitz found she had a problem.

"She's an old shouter," said Miss Reitz, "and I love that shout. I have all her old records and I'm a big buff of hers. But her most famous song is 'I'm a Mighty Tight Woman,' and in it she



Singers on the program include, from left, Koko Taylor, Linda Hopkins and Big Mama Thornton

sings 'Oh, sweet papa, I'm fallin' on my knees; I'll be your slave.' Well, I couldn't have any of that. It's a gorgeous song, but it just doesn't represent what I'm doing. So she's doing other songs — 'When I Love My Man, I Makes Him Holler' and 'Hard Boiled Mama.'"

When Miss Reitz gets to a singer as well known as Bessie Smith, whose songs will be sung by Linda Hopkins, she is avoiding such overly familiar pieces as "Gimme a Pigfoot" and "Empty Bed Blues."

"I don't want to see her represented in that old cliché way," Miss Reitz declared. "We're going to do 'Young Woman's Blues' — 'Ain't Gonna marry, ain't gonna settle down, I'm a young woman and ain't done runnin' round.' Precisely the sentiments of women today. And 'Safety Mama,' a wild thing. She tells you what to do with your man if he doesn't treat you right: Make him stay at home, make him wash the dishes. Oh, it's so charming!"

Miss Reitz is also fascinated by a

contemporary singer, Koko Taylor and Her Blues Machine, because her blues inspiration does not come from women, but from such male blues singers as B. B. King and Lightnin' Hopkins.

"She's being stimulated by the power thing in the male singers," Miss Reitz said. "She's known in the very heavy-duty blues scene that's current because blues is a kind of instrumentation that male blues singers use — electric guitar, electric bass, piano and drums."

"She sings a song, 'I'm a Woman, I'm an Earth Shaker, I'm a Bail of Fire.' And, oh, boy! It makes that Helen Reddy woman sound like cold mashed potatoes. That woman blows your head off. I had to hang onto my hair."

Miss Reitz came to the blues relatively late in her listening career, after years of listening to jazz to which, she says, she was guided by male friends.

"But at one point in my life," she said, "when I had neither husband nor boyfriend who was telling me what to listen to, I started listening for myself. After having gone through the whole gamut — through Charlie Parker and John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman

and Sam Rivers — I found great comfort and energy in these old blues women.

"For 10 years I worked to support three daughters," she continued. "When I came home from work I had to start work again with the kids — making supper and listening to their homework. I found the thing that I ran to was these women. I put their records on because here I was — a woman nurturing children, and on the job giving to the job and the bosses, and coming home and having to give. So who was feeding me? Well, these women fed me. I feel that I owe them something because I got so much from them that I hope they could nurture other women, too."

Miss Reitz, a writer who was one of the first to write about the loft jazz scene in *The Village Voice* in the early 1970's, decided to write a book about these singers. Working on the book, which is still not finished, led to her becoming a record producer.

"As I was discussing these songs in the book," she said, "it almost seemed as though I was making up the songs to make my point, because these records have not been available. So I decided I better reissue these records so people will know what I am talking about."

The result is two reissues of records by women blues singers, made between 1923 and 1949 — "Mean Mothers: Independent Women's Blues, Vol. 1," Rosetta Records 1300, and "Sorry but I Can't Take You: Women's Railroad Blues," Rosetta Records 1301 (Rosetta Records, 115 West 16th Street, New York 10013).

## Wanted to Get Into the Action

Then, to give the book an added dimension, she decided to get into what she calls "the functional part of this music" — the live performance.

"There are books that have too academic a feeling," she explained. "I wanted to get into the action more, to get involved with the women. I had become an intimate and adviser to many of these women, particularly the older ones — Sippie Wallace, whom I interviewed last year for the Smithsonian Oral History Archives, Edith Wilson and Adelaide Hall."

"I also thought that they should be represented at the Newport Jazz Festival for their contribution to jazz. And when I presented the idea to George Wein, the producer of the festival, he liked it."