

The Mills Brothers - Swing is the Thing - Original 1934-1938 Recordings (2005)

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 23 October 2016 11:29 -

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01. Sweet Georgia Brown 02. Old Fashioned Love 03. Miss Otis Regrets 04. Sweeter Than Sugar 05. Rockin' Chair 06. I've Found A New Baby 07. Some Of These Days 08. Limehouse Blues 09. Lulu's Back In Town 10. Sweet And Slow 11. London Rhythm 12. Solitude 13. Swing Is The Thing 14. Carry Me Back To Old Virginny 15. Darling Nellie Gray 16. Organ Grinder's Swing 17. Caravan 18. Flat Foot Floogie 19. My Walking Stick 20. Funiculi Funicula 21. The Yam 22. The Lambeth Walk John Mills, Sr. - vocals Herbert Mills - vocals Harry Mills - vocals Donald Mills - vocals Bernard Addison - guitar Norman Brown – guitar

Combining the traditional elements of vaudeville and barbershop with more recent developments in the jazz idiom, with their 'Four Boys And a Guitar' billing the Mills Brothers elevated Negro minstrelsy to new heights. And while their 'No Other Instruments except comb and paper...' may at times have been less than accurate, for versatility in contrived orchestral imitation (albeit derivative – it owed something to the Comedy Harmonists) was nothing less than sensational. They were prolific recording artists whose catalogue of seventy hit records between 1931 and 1968 (including the estimated equivalent of five No.1s between 1931 and 1954) places them high among the most popular vocal groups of all time.

During the mid-1920s the trio of brothers Herbert, (1912-1989), Harry (1913-1982) and Donald (1915-1999) would harmonise for their own enjoyment at home in their native Piqua, Ohio. Encouraged by their ballad-singer-turned-barber father John Mills Senior (1882-1967) they were joined by their elder brother John (1911-1936), a talented guitarist who doubled with vocal imitations of bass and tuba, and appeared together in the Piqua area in dances and vaudeville shows. Billed as 'Four Boys And A Kazoo' they improvised their own backing with lifelike imitations of saxophones, trumpets, trombones and a variety of other instruments.

The Mills Brothers' hit records sold globally in large numbers and, like other entertainers of the

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early talkie era, they also endeared themselves to world audiences via radio and films, beginning with Big Broadcast Of 1932 (for Paramount, 1932; co-starring Bing Crosby, Kate Smith, Burns and Allen, Cab Calloway and the Boswell Sisters) in which they reintroduced "Tiger Rag".

In 1935 the Brothers had made another successful screen appearance (in Broadway Gondolier, a Warner Bros musical starring Dick Powell) but in 1936 John Mills Jr. suddenly and prematurely died and their first instinct was to disband. However, John Sr. soon filled the breach and remained with the group until he retired, in 1956, and Herbert, Harry and Donald continued the group as a trio until the 1970s. After 1937, the effects of the Depression had abated and the Brothers made regular tours and appeared on radio and records with Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald and others. Throughout the war years they retained their popularity, not least through their Golden Disc versions of "Lazy River", "You Always Hurt The One You Love" and "Paper Doll" (their biggest hit of all, with sales over six million, after 'White Christmas' this last ranks as the major smash of the 1940s). --- Peter Dempsey, naxos.com

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