

By Ray Boomhower

"Never play anything that ain't right. You may not make any money, but you'll never get hostile with yourself."

These words were spoken by black pianist Reginald DuValle in 1916 to a young Hoosier with a passion for music. Following that advice until his death in 1981, Hoagy Carmichael fashioned a string of enduring songs and instrumentals that led to his rise as one of America's foremost songwriters.

Today, Carmichael's work is celebrated in a new four-album set copublished by the Indiana Historical Society and the Smithsonian Institution's Collections of Recordings. *The Classic Hoagy Carmichael* presents 57 recordings of the best songs of the legendary Indiana-born songwriter and composer.

Now available to the public from the society, the album contains performances by some of the great names in modern American music, including Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Glenn Miller, Billie Holliday, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles and Carmichael himself.

The album includes a lavishly illustrated 64-page book detailing Carmichael's life, an evaluation of his music and informative commentary on each of the selections.

"We hope the collection not only serves as a lasting memorial to Carmichael's brilliance, but that it also heightens Hoosiers' awareness and appreciation of our extraordinarily rich musical heritage," said Dr. Peter T. Harstad, society executive director.

Researched, compiled and produced by Dr. John Edward Hasse, curator of American music at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, the album is the product of research spanning eight years. The collection is the most comprehensive record dedicated to Carmichael and surveys his entire career, including his greatest hits and some little-known songs deserving wider recognition.

Born in Bloomington, Indiana, on Nov. 22, 1899, Hoagland Howard Carmichael was the first son of Howard Clyde and Lida Mary (Robison) Carmichael. The young Carmichael's earliest musical influence was his mother, who supplemented the family's meager income by playing piano for dances at Indiana University and for silent movies.

Spending his youth mostly in Bloomington and Indianapolis, Carmichael

A Salute To Hoagy



Courtesy Indiana Historical Society

Hoosier songwriter and performer Hoagland Howard Carmichael's accomplishments are celebrated in the new album, "The Classic Hoagy Carmichael."

grew up with the new century and the new ragtime music. At that time, Indianapolis and Indiana were important centers for ragtime composing and publishing. He formed a jazz band while attending Indiana University and it was there that Carmichael befriended the first great white jazzman, cornetist Leon "Bix" Beiderbecke.

By his own account, in 1927 Carmichael had journeyed to West Palm Beach, Florida to work as a law clerk. While there, he happened to hear a recording of his song, "Washboard Blues," by cornetist Red Nichols' band. It was then that he decided to abandon law and make his way in the music world.

"Carmichael was a singular figure in American song. He wrote in an original style featuring individualistic, jazz-influenced melodies, many of which bear his unmistakable stamp," said Hasse.

He went on to say that Carmichael frequently chose song forms of unconventional lengths which frequently celebrate a simpler time and place. Carmichael was thoroughly American in his approach, drawing inspiration from the music of his native Indiana, and from the jazz of New Orleans, Chicago and New York, said Hasse.

"He (Carmichael) was also a popular performer and recording artist, interpreting many of his songs in an inimitable style. He was one of the first singer-songwriters in the age of mass media, and he moved adroitly into a series of entertainment media: recordings, radio, motion pictures and television," Hasse added.

Carmichael's work can be divided into three phases, said Hasse. From his Indiana years came the songs "Riverboat Shuffle," "Washboard Blues" and the famed "Stardust," which launched him to international fame and eventually became perhaps the most recorded song in history. From his years in New York (1929-1936) came "Lazy River," "Lazybones," "Georgia on My Mind," "One Morning in May" and "Rockin' Chair." From his Hollywood years (1936-1981) came "Two Sleepy People," "Skylark," "Hong Kong Blues,"

“Ole Buttermilk Sky” and “In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening,” which earned him an Academy Award for Best Song in 1951.

Carmichael wrote more than three dozen songs with lyricist Johnny Mercer, whom he called “a perfect butterball of a Southerner.” His other lyricists included Frank Loesser, Mitchell Parish and Paul Francis Webster.

Along with appearing in more than a dozen motion pictures, Carmichael wrote two books of memoirs, *The Stardust Road* (1946) and, with Stephen Longstreet, *Sometimes I Wonder* (1965). In 1971, he was elected to the Songwriters Hall of Fame as one of 10 initial inductees. A year later, Indiana University awarded him an honorary doctorate. After suffering a heart attack, he died in Rancho Mirage, California, on Dec. 27, 1981. Carmichael was returned to his native Bloomington for burial on Jan. 4, 1982.

Selecting what Carmichael classics would be represented on the album was no easy task for Hasse and associate producer Ronald M. Radano. The two men developed a comprehensive list of more than 300 Carmichael compositions. After identifying about 3,000 recordings of his pieces, they then set about obtaining as many of these recordings as possible to evaluate them.

Working from the songwriter’s personal papers at Indiana University, the producers unearthed a number of unknown, unreleased recordings. Because Carmichael’s archives were far from complete, the producers had to issue an international call for recordings. They amassed about 2,000 recordings, evaluated and compared each one, and finally settled on the 57 selections on the album.

The album draws from the vaults of 15 record companies. In addition, the album presents five previously unissued recordings: four unissued recordings that Hasse discovered in the course of his research; and a new recording, specially commissioned for this album, featuring songstress Marlene VerPlanck interpreting Carmichael’s rarely-heard, “Old Man Moon.”

Carmichael performs at the piano in the late 1940s.



Courtesy Indiana Historical Society

Hoagy Carmichael's first film role was in "Topper" in 1937. Pictured from left are: Carmichael, George Humbert, Cary Grant and Constance Bennett.



Courtesy Indiana Historical Society

"The selections were chosen for their classic qualities as compositions and recording performances. The songs on the album have been arranged to tell a tale about Carmichael's active and eclectic life, and the lives his songs have led on their own," said Hasse.

With Carmichael's best songs, Hasse said it was difficult to select a single recording. Consequently, there are two versions each of "Georgia on My Mind," "Lazy River," "The Nearness of You," "Rockin' Chair" and "Skylark."

In the case of perhaps Carmichael's best-known piece, "Stardust," Hasse has included six different recordings. The versions are dispersed throughout the recording. For example, the first side of the collection includes a 1931 recording of the song by Louis Armstrong and the

album concludes with a performance, 53 years later, by another leading trumpeter, Wynton Marsalis.

"Together, these songs offer an impression of the artist and his craft — a sonic portrait of one of America's foremost creators of songs," said Hasse.

The Classic Hoagy Carmichael is available as a set of four long-playing records or three chromium dioxide, Dolby-encoded cassettes and costs \$35 for society members and \$42 for non-members. To purchase an album, write the Indiana Historical Society at 315 W. Ohio St., Indianapolis, IN 46202, or call (317) 232-1882.

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