

**NAXOS**  
**JAZZ**  
LEGENDS

# FATS WALLER



TRANSCRIPTIONS

*Vol. 2* **1939**

# FATS WALLER *Vol.2*

## The Original 1939 Associated Transcriptions

Although a few devout incense-wavers at the altar of Jazz still carp at his humour the boisterous Fats Waller remains one of the most popular of all the great jazz performers, admired even by those who are not otherwise fans of such music. Seldom obtrusively virtuosic, his delivery is so fluent, so uninhibited that we tend to take his technical skill for granted - his ebullience which carries all before it has brought jazz to a wider fraternity, assuring Fats a place in the Hall of Fame along-side Armstrong, Ellington, Bechet and very few others. Individuality was his keynote and despite accusations of commercialism, this colossal pianist, organist, vocalist, songwriter and comic never forgot that he was also an entertainer. The Cheshire cat grin, the antics, the sarcasm and self-mockery were all part of an act that never undermined the power of an awesome left hand.

Thomas 'Fats' Waller was born in Waverley, New York on 21 May 1904 but as both of Tom's parents were natives of Virginia he also had the South in his soul. Edward Martin Waller, his father, a preacher at the Harlem Abyssinian Baptist Church hoped vainly that his son might follow in his footsteps; his mother, Adeline, sang and was both a skilled pianist and church organist. As a child Tom was close to his mother and sang hymns to her accompaniment at the harmonium, which by the age of five he had also mastered. As a teenager already dubbed 'Fats', a

rotund young Thomas Waller played violin and piano in the orchestra of Public School 89. At the same time, amid pronouncements of 'Devil's music' from his over-zealous father, he avidly devoured the latest ragtime and the Harlem stride rhythms popularised by Willie 'The Lion' Smith (1897-1973) and his own preceptor James P. Johnson (1894-1955).

After a spell as an organist and pianist at various New York silent-movie theatres, during the mid-1920s Fats first unleashed his outgoing, larger-than-life personality upon an audience as a vaudeville pianist-entertainer. Leading a trio in Philadelphia, he also worked with Erskine Tate in Chicago and appeared and made records with the Fletcher Henderson and Ted Lewis orchestras in New York. His work as a composer which had already begun around 1922 produced an intermittent trickle of characteristic piano solos - by the mid-1930s these included "Viper's Drag", "Handful Of Keys", "African Ripples", "Clothesline Ballet", **B Flat Blues**, "Zonky", "Alligator Crawl", "Russian Fantasy" and several others which would remain unpublished for the duration of his lifetime. Although he recorded prolifically from 1922 on, he was not particularly well-known outside New York - but by 1931 radio had remedied that.

In terms of composition, from the late 1920s he also delivered a more commercially-inspired stream of fine songs, mostly in collaboration with

Spencer Williams (1889-1965), Clarence Williams (1898-1965) and Andy Razaf (1895-1973). With Razaf as his collaborator he first found fame with the Broadway shows *Keep Shufflin'* (1928) and *Hot Chocolates* (1929) which first introduced such immortal standards as **Ain't Misbehavin'** (his first real hit, in November 1929, this was selected for the NARAS Hall of Fame) and **Honeysuckle Rose**.

Although he made no commercial recordings between March 1931 and 1934, Fats gave frequent broadcasts - from early 1932 until early 1934 he had a two-year contract with WLW in Cincinnati and from mid-1934 his own regular CBS Monday and Thursday night venues on 'Rhythm Club', a Saturday night organ program and, on alternate Sundays, guest appearances on Columbia Variety Hour. Moreover, the global distribution of the recordings he made with a five-piece band dubbed 'Fats Waller & His Rhythm' (he signed an exclusive contract with Victor, in 1934) had by mid-decade placed him in the top flight of entertainers not just in the USA but also in the international market. There was, apparently, little or no rehearsal of numbers prior to our star's studio recordings - just a short run-through then 'in the can', with re-takes a rare occurrence.

During 1935 Fats appeared in two movies and in sales of his recordings to the white market he outstripped all other black jazz artists. That year, as an adjunct to his radio activities, and extraneous to his contract with RCA, he began a kind of moonlighting, recording 16" radio transcription medleys, the first pseudonymously as 'Flip Wallace' for Muzak-Associated (see Naxos

Jazz Legends 8.120577). A few other (non-Victor) sides, again captured on acetate (from the Rudy Vallee and Magic Key shows) afford glimpses of Waller in 1936 but comparatively little of the 'on air' Waller remains from this heyday period. By 1938 he was broadcasting regularly from New York's Yacht Club and that year, for Associated, he recorded the program here newly remastered for CD from the original acetates. In content the titles to some extent duplicate the commercial Victor discography, but the piano solos - especially the resurrection from Raymond Hubbard's 1916 *Big Show* **Poor Butterfly**, the two Vincent Youmans standards and his own **Handful Of Keys**, apart from their rhythmic vitality display a certain ambient quality and afford Fats greater scope for playful asides..

*Peter Dempsey, 2003*

**Also available in the  
Naxos Jazz Legends series ...**



**Fats Waller  
Vol.1**

8.120577

1. **The Moon Is Low** 3:00  
(Arthur Freed–Nacio Herb Brown)
  2. **The Sheik Of Araby** 2:48  
(Ted Snyder–Harry B. Smith–Francis Wheeler)  
Fats Waller, vocal
  3. **B Flat Blues** 3:12  
(Fats Waller)
  4. **Honeysuckle Rose** 3:20  
(Andy Razaf–Fats Waller)  
Fats Waller, vocal  
Associated 60,130-B, mx ZZ-2143
  5. **Ain't Misbehavin'** 3:31  
(Andy Razaf–Fats Waller–Harry Brooks)  
Fats Waller, vocal
  6. **Sweet Sue – Just You** 2:28  
(Victor Young–Will J. Harris)  
Fats Waller, vocal
  7. **Nagasaki** 2:26  
(Harry Warren–Mort Dixon)
  8. **Lonesome Me** 3:55  
(Andy Razaf–Fats Waller)  
Fats Waller, vocal  
Associated 60, 133-A, mx ZZ-2144
  9. **I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby** 2:49  
(Fats Waller–Alex Hill)  
Fats Waller, vocal
  10. **The Spider And The Fly** 2:39  
(Andy Razaf–Fats Waller–J. C. Johnson)  
Fats Waller, vocal
  11. **After You've Gone** 3:04  
(Henry Creamer–Turner Layton)  
Fats Waller, vocal
  12. **Tea For Two** 4:04  
(Vincent Youmans–Irving Caesar)  
Associated 60,134-B, mx ZZ-2145
  13. **Poor Butterfly** 3:32  
(Raymond Hubbell–John L. Golden)
  14. **St Louis Blues** 2:52  
(W. C. Handy)
  15. **Hallelujah** 3:09  
(Vincent Youmans–Leo Robin–Clifford Grey)
  16. **Handful Of Keys** 2:53  
(Fats Waller)  
Associated 60,133-B, mx ZZ-2146
- Tracks 1–11: Fats Waller & His Rhythm.  
Tracks 12–16: Fats Waller, piano solo
- All recorded 7 August 1939 for Associated Transcriptions, New York
- Transfers & Production: David Lennick  
Digital Noise Reduction: Graham Newton  
Original monochrome photo of Fats Waller from Redferns

## Personnel

FATS WALLER AND HIS RHYTHM:

**John Hamilton**, trumpet; **Gene Sedric**, clarinet, tenor sax; **Fats Waller**, piano, vocal; **John Smith**, guitar; **Cedric Wallace**, bass; **Slick Jones**, drums

8.120692

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Transfers and Production by David Lennick  
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NOTES AND FULL RECORDING DETAILS INCLUDED

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Design: Ron Hoares

Total  
Time  
50:36

ADD



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