

## JAZZ IN ITALY:

### JAZZ AND HOT SINGERS IN THE 1930s

TRIO VOCALE LESCANO, VITTORIO DE SICA,  
ALBERTO RABAGLIATI, EZIO LEVI,  
MARCELLO MARCHESI, ORCHESTRA CIRCOLO  
JAZZ HOT DI MILANO  
RIVIERA JAZZ RECORDS RJRCD 013

Unwrapping this very welcome CD compilation, I was hoping for either good 1930s swing based on the American model or some interesting European deviations. The tracks repaid certain cultural suppositions: good singing, front line playing, and guitars and violins. These elements were all in the Italian musical tradition and, as you'd expect, these Turin and Milan musicians embraced the new swing music confidently.

But the rhythm section work is a bit different from what you'd expect in relation to Benny Carter, the Dorsey Brothers, and even Art Shaw and His New Music. It's generally more swingy than the British but not as good as the German of the era. In fact, I think they mostly had different sense of aesthetics in mind, didn't dream of, say, the same sort of drummers that I do. Without sounding mechanical the ensembles herein are generally lightly-swinging and precise. These sessions technically are well-recorded and sound better than Stateside studio documents of the period - very clean, with clear separation of instruments but without the acoustically grand and bassy British Decca and EMI efforts of the same decade. Every player hearing the playbacks would be really pleased.

Orchestra Circolo Jazz Hot is a standout, with Pippo Renna's trumpet. The pianist Ezio Levi plays prettily, but obviously didn't grasp the spirit of swing judging by these observed sessions from 1932 to 1936. But he's a good singer, as are Nera Corradi and Marcello Marchesi, and Renna's tasty trumpet holds up the sides.



Vittorio De Sica became a famous film director. You may know of his classic *Ladri di biciclette* (The Bicycle Thief) and his directing Sophia Loren to an Oscar in *La Ciociara* (Two Women). But he's heard here as a young movie star who was also a deeply romantic tenor vocalist. And while the dual pianos backing him are merely adequate and not particularly jazzy, it is a curious pleasure to hear him sing.

Jan Dunk's Rhythm Sisters' tracks are light delights, in the chamber swing style of John Kirby, who himself chose to dance with European influence. Dunk's a good solid strider, welcome after the romanticist Ezio Levi, and Baldo Panfili's trumpet and Ettore Pienotti's clarinet are pleasing too. The tracks are rather rare. Jan & Sisters arrived from the Netherlands in 1938, laid down this session, but then disappeared from the scene.

The Trio Sorelle Lescano records are marvelous. No, not mere copies of the Boswell Sisters or the Andrews Sisters but very musical nonetheless and given a great many bars in which to fill their pretty harmonies. The gals were not as adventurous as the Boswells, but then they didn't have Connee's arranging genius (who else did anyway?), but they had better vocal chops than did the Andrews trio. The Trio Lescano, actually Dutch émigrés, are really worth this CD, a must for those interested in the Italian zeitgeist of this era. Good thing they're on nine of the tracks.

But equally as worthy is the CD booklet's concise history of how jazz vocalisation was embraced by the Italian recording industry, in what was termed *canzone ritmica* (syncopated song). Fascinatingly fab and available via [www.rivierajazz.it](http://www.rivierajazz.it)

--- Andy Simons