

# COOL AND STRANGE MUSIC!™

Magazine

ISSUE #18

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## SCREAMIN' JAY HAWKINS!

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Interviewed!

**ETHEL SMITH!**

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# The Wonderful World of **WHISTLING RECORDS**

by Basic Hip

We all remember the catchy whistled melody, "The Fishin' Hole," theme from The Andy Griffith Show. Who could forget the memorable Lassie Theme or the haunting whistling solos from those great Clint Eastwood spaghetti westerns? Have you ever tried to "Whistle While You Work"? You might give it a shot next time you have a bad day at the office. "Give A Little Whistle" and Jiminy Cricket will guide you through your troubles.



I've always loved whistling. It is so pure, simple and self-contained. There are no strings to tune, no valves to oil, no case to haul. Just pucker up and blow! But aside from those familiar movie and television tunes, I never knew whistling albums even existed.

That all changed the day I heard Fred Lowery perform the William Tell Overture on the incredibly strange Music CD series, which came out several years ago. His truly musical sound had such a profound effect on me that—to this day—my search for whistling and bird recordings is still going strong.

Here is a brief introduction to some great whistlers and their records. While on the subject, one must not overlook the songs of our feathered friends, inspirations to them all.

### **FRED LOWERY**

Born in Palestine, Texas and almost totally blind since early childhood, Fred Lowery surely is the "King of Whistlers," an amazing virtuoso without an instrument.

Lowery's first ambition was to become a concert violinist, but after hearing a bird imitator at the Texas School for the Blind, he changed his mind and decided to make whistling his career. He spent a few years with the Vincent Lopez orchestra in New York before gaining national recognition as a featured part of Horace Heidt's popular show.

In 1983, John McDowell wrote a heart-warming autobiography, *WHISTLING IN THE DARK: The Story of Fred Lowery, the Blind Whistler*, as told to him by his good friend, Fred Lowery. Ordering information can be found at: <http://pelicanpub.com/poetry/whistling-in-the-dark.htm>

### **Whistling For You (Columbia)**



On these 78 RPM recordings, Fred Lowery displays his astounding abilities as a whistling artist. Musical accompaniment was most often guitar and novachord. Fred also teamed with vocalist Dorothy Rae and the duo enjoyed great success.

### **Whistles For The Birds (Lowery Records)**

A rare 10-inch LP on Fred's very own label. One side of this record features Barbara Fisher teaching Budgie (your parakeet) how to talk. The other side is Fred whistling repetitive training exercises.

### **Whistle A Happy Tune! (Decca)**

This is the album that musically changed my life. One of the best and, thankfully, also one of the easier ones to find. The Anita Kerr Singers provide the vocals on a couple of tracks, too!



### **Walking Along Kicking The Leaves! (Decca)**

This is my personal all-time favorite. A delightful collection of old favorites supported by Owen Bradley and his orchestra. Much of this album has a tropical flavor as some fine Hawaiian-style guitar backs Fred's masterful whistling.

### **Abide With Me Whistles Your Gospel Favorites It Is Well With My Soul**

On these religious albums, Fred's sensitive whistling helps paint musical pictures of God's handiwork. All were released on Word Records in Waco, Texas.

### **MUZZY MARCELLINO**

Muzzy Marcellino started as a young vocalist and guitarist in the early 1930s with the bands of Phil Harris and Ted Fio-rino. A solo appearance as a guest per-

former led Muzzy to becoming musical director of Art Linkletter's popular *House Party* CBS radio and television show. He is most famous for his unforgettable whistling on the soundtrack of the film, *The High and The Mighty*.

### **Birds Of A Feather (Liberty)**



This excellent album, with music by Russ Garcia and his Orchestra, is a tough find. Gorgeous, all-time classic cover.

### **House Party Music Time (Capitol)**

Bright, peppy music from Art Linkletter's *House Party*. Great arrangements by the trio of Bob Walters (piano, vibes, clarinet, sax), Steve Paietta (accordion) and Bob Strahl (bass).

### **Whistling On The Beach At Waikiki (Coral)**

Beautifully performed assortment of island favorites. Orchestra directed by Charles "Bud" Dant.

### **SUSAN ZAGON**

### **Susan Zagon Whistler (Zagon Records)**

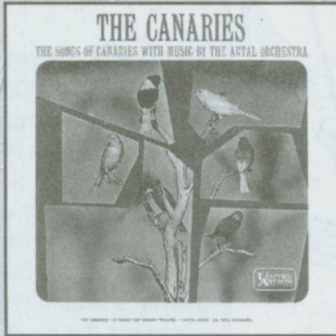
Obscure whistling artist accompanied only by piano. Incredibly strange and wonderful cover.



## THE ARTAL ORCHESTRA

### The Canaries (United Artists)

A unique presentation of the happy, musical sounds of live canaries combined with the melodies of organ and violin.



## MAX K. GILSTRAP

### Adventures In The National Parks, No. 1 (Gilstrap Records)

A former ranger in Grand Canyon and Yosemite National Parks, Max Gilstrap has entertained audiences over the United States with his beautiful bird imitations and vivid descriptions of nature's magnificent wonders.

On Side One of this record, Max tells the listener how they, too, can become a skillful imitator of birds and interpreter of songs. He then demonstrates many bird calls such as the mockingbird, cardinal, tufted titmouse and robin. The side ends with a medley of familiar tunes. All of Side Two is an inspirational spoken word piece, where Max tells the visitor how to get the most out of his trip to a national park.

## RALPH PLATT

### Pipe Organ Melodies With Bird Calls (Zondervan)

### The Birds Sing His Praise Volumes 1 and 2 (Sacred)

There must be something about the great outdoors and the sound of birds



singing in the treetops that can make man aware of his Almighty Creator and inspire artists like

Ralph Platt. Platt, who once toured with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, was also a frequent guest at Youth for Christ rallies, nature clubs and evangelistic crusades.

For over a decade, he whistled the theme song and solos on radio's "Voice Of The Calvary" program. On these record-

ings, he is accompanied by Lorin Whitney, one of the best known organists in the field of religious music.

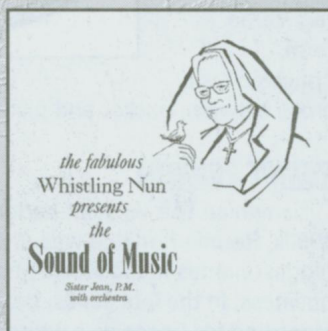
## JOHAN DALGAS FRISCH

### Symphony Of The Birds (MGM)

An industrial engineer, Johan Dalgas Frisch dedicated himself to his ornithological hobby for close to twenty years. His album features wondrous sounds of the birds of Brazil deftly united with specially-made musical arrangements. Selections range from international classics such as "Loch Lomand" and "The Song From Moulin Rouge" to Latin favorite "Tico Tico".

## SISTER JEAN, P.M.

The Fabulous Whistling Nun Presents The Sound Of Music (Ace Recording)



Nun makes a homemade record whistling songs from The Sound Of Music.

## VIRGINIA BELMONT

### Virginia Belmont's Famous Talking And Singing Birds (Virginia Belmont Enterprises)



An internationally renowned authority on pets, Virginia Belmont owned the Belmont Bird and Kennel

Shop in Rockefeller Center, New York City. This record gives tips on care and training of birds in the home. It also presents her incredible Bird Symphony, in which she has trained her canaries to sing on command.

## JIM FASSETT

### Symphony Of The Birds (Ficker Records)

Originally broadcast by Jim Fasset on one of his regular Sunday afternoon programs on CBS radio. Tape recordings of birds in their natural habitat, manipulated

into stunning configurations by lowering pitch and reducing speed. An all-time great record.

## ART COATES

### Whistling Like The Birds (Dot Records)

Another whistling virtuoso that was inspired at a tender age by the songs of birds in the sugar maples growing in his backyard. "Yellow Bird," "Bubbles In The Wine," "Somewhere My Love" and "An Affair To Remember" are among the tracks on this excellent album. Russ David arranged and conducted the music.

## EARLY 1900 WHISTLERS

My brief research turned up very little information from this period. Sybil Sanderson Fagan, Conway's Band, Margaret McKee, Alice J. Shaw, Prince's Orchestra, Arthur Pryor's Band, Alma Gluck and Guido Gialdini all have put out at least one record featuring whistling solos.

## AMERICAN RADIO WARBLERS

### The Original Feathered Stars Of The Air (Arthur C. Barnett, Producer and Distributor)

These canaries were the first ever to broadcast coast-to-coast on a network radio program. This set of four 78 RPM records came with gorgeous paper sleeves. On the back of each sleeve is a wonderful photograph of the caged canaries, surrounding organist Preston Sellers.



## PROVOL'S GOLDEN BIRDS

### Golden Voiced Canaries (Decca)

The Golden Bird Act appeared in most of the large vaudeville theatres throughout the country as a headline act beginning in 1909. Known as "Bell-Tone" singers, these canaries were trained by Mr. Provol to sing in harmony with violin, cello and piano.

## BERT HARWELL

### The Birdcall Game (pressed by RCA Victor for The Richard Railton Company, San Francisco)

This fun and educational game includes a 78 RPM record of birdcalls



## WHISTLING (Cont. from pg. 43)

and narration, 8 full-color National Audubon Society bird illustrations and 16 black and white prints to color or paint. The instructions are simple. 1) listen to the record. 2) guess each bird by his song. 3) color their pictures. Cover folds out into a counter display easel.

### TOOTS THIELEMANS

**The Whistler And His Guitar** (ABC Paramount)

Guitarist and harmonica soloist who once played with Benny Goodman and the George Shearing Quintet. It was on his original composition, "Bluesette," that Toots first presented his unison whistling and guitar playing. On all twelve tracks on this album, Toots plays the same melody on his guitar that he whistles, usually whistling one octave higher. With Dick Hyman on the Lowery organ.

### RON McCROBY

**The Other Whistler** (Concord Jazz)

**Ron McCroby Plays Puccolo** (Concord Jazz)

**Breezin' the Classics** (Pro Arte Digital)

Since he burst on the music scene with his incredible performance at the 25th Monterey Jazz festival, Ron McCroby has wowed audiences internationally through his appearances on *The Tonight Show* and *Merv Griffin*. His registered term, "puccolo" is a cross between pucker and piccolo.

### RONNIE RONALDE

Known as The Voice of Variety in the 1950s, Ronnie Ronalde was one of the biggest names in the world of show business. In the late 1940s, he was recording for Decca as a whistler with an



uncanny ability to imitate bird calls. Later, he added singing and yodeling to his repertoire.

### FIELD RECORDINGS AND TRAINING RECORDS

Dozens of records were made to help the listener identify different bird calls and songs or to assist in teaching pet birds to talk. Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guides and the Hartz Mountain Products series are the most common.

Well, that's all for now. If you made it this far, congratulations! I don't expect many people to share my enthusiasm for these recordings. But if you do find yourself a bit curious, please visit by my website (<http://www.metro.net/basichip/whistling.htm>) to enjoy some sound samples and cover scans.

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