



Matt Monro: totally in control of his music.

Matt Monro The Complete Singles Collection

★★★★★

EMI 50999 606774 2 6 (5-CD)

The singer's singer – his career in a box

This 5-CD box set includes all of Monro's A-sides and B-sides on Fontana, Decca, EMI, Parlophone and Capitol, including 22 tracks that appear on CD for the first time, plus Spanish language singles and a sole French release. Apart from the admirably completist nature of the collection, the set can be highly praised for the quality of its mastering, which has been completed via mono and stereo session tapes and mix-down masters. In fact, the production is a work of love – Monro's daughter, Michele, has been instrumental in its production.

Spanning 130 tracks, this is a unique portrait of the artist, tracking Monro's development from 1956-84: his vocal style and timbral evolution. A singer who, apart from an album devoted to Hoagy Carmichael, bravely avoided the safe option of tackling the Great American Songbook, Monro instead experimented with European composers producing hits such as 1960's Portrait Of My Love, along with popular songs from stage and screen such as the Bond theme, From Russia With Love (1963) and the sublime Born Free (1966). Even when the hits began to dry up in the 70s, Monro continued to develop, perfecting a blend of vocal maturity, presence and the sheer confidence of an artist who was totally in control of his music.

This set also shows that, even when faced with substandard writing the likes of 1956's The Bean Song, Monro could lift such material to a level of respectability with superior phrasing and a jaunty humour. Effortless and easy, he sailed across a song like a yacht over a calm ocean.

Paul Rigby

Q&A Mastering Engineer Richard Moore

Did you have problems collating the masters?

My research involved several record companies on two continents. The US-recorded Capitol material came from the original US mix-down tapes, rather than UK dubs, allowing a number of tracks to be released in stereo for the first time. In one case, The Impossible Dream has been taken from a master tape for the first time since the 60s. In 1973, a dub from a vinyl copy of the song was used for a compilation, and has been used ever since, until this set.

Highlights?

Isn't It A Pity, a George Harrison song, a stunning performance and quite an unusual song for Monro to sing. While much of the arrangement is based on Harrison's version, Monro pulls far more emotion from the song. Some of the swing numbers used as B-sides, such as The Girl I Love and Going Places, are great too and show he wasn't just a great ballad singer. Just A Heartbreak Ago is another highlight – Monro sings country!

Did Monro have a favourite arranger?

While Sid Feller and Billy May were brilliant, they generally had a particular musical style that they excelled in. Johnnie Spence, on the other hand, excelled in every style he attempted. He was also Monro's best friend.

Monro was popular in Spain, then?

[The Spanish] were so impressed that he would bother to record in their mother tongue that it elevated him to phenomenal success. It helped that the songs were good and struck a chord with all Latino listeners – especially in Spain and South America. Monro sang them beautifully on stage, but he was terrified of singing the Spanish language live and tried to avoid it as much as possible. As told to Paul Rigby