



Matt Monroe; 'the singing busman', 'the British Sinatra'; call him what you will, but also recognise his ability to coat any song with a sense of style and ease. The latter is most important for, if anyone could justify the term 'easy listening', Matt Monroe would. His interpretations were notable for being unforced, that much he had in common with Bing Crosby. Monroe never stood in the way of a song, he merely provided a platform for it which is the job of any good vocalist. There were no tricks with Monroe, no Whitney Houston-type vocal calisthenics that, once completed, makes you wonder if she's singing a song or gurgling mouthwash before going to bed. Instead, Monroe stood to one side and let the song have the spotlight. Fortunately, for struggling songwriters who sometimes presented Monroe with inferior material, his delivery also lifted the tune to be shown in its best possible light.

A master of the ballad, Monroe could swing, if necessary. Okay, he didn't quite have the sexual danger of a Sinatra, the jazz chops of a Tormé or the ethereal vocal space produced by Nat 'King' Cole but, then, no sane prospective vocal singer would want to for fear of being dismissed as a copyist. Instead, Monroe went for 'smooth'. An approach that enabled the song to speak for itself. In fact, he had a unique place in UK and European popular music. Here was a man who focused more on European culture, rather than the safe option of plundering, as too many vocalists

MATT MONRO

THE COMPLETE SINGLES COLLECTION

2010

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do, the American Songbook. So, with Monroe, we see Lionel Bart instead of Irving Berlin and John Barry instead of Harry Warren. This gave Monroe an edge. Something the majority of his contemporaries lacked.

The best way to get to know Monroe is via this superbly produced five CD box set, via EMI, that includes all of Monroe'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 and French language singles.

According to Richard Moore, who remastered this collection, collating the masters, via multiple sources, proved arduous yet rewarding. "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 sixties. 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."

Spanning 130 tracks, the box set tracks Monroe's development from 1956 to 1984. All the hits are here: 'Portrait Of My Love' (1960), 'From Russia With Love' (1963) and 'Born Free' (1966). There are however, valuable enhancements to Monroe's currently available catalogue. "Some of the mixes were made in the sixties but never released," said Moore. "'How Do You Do', for instance, was mixed at the same time as the

single in 1966 and edited from two takes. The problem was that the stereo version was only pulled from the vaults for use in 1972 and then, according to the tape box, 'edited as per common sense'. But this was not correct compared to the single. The multitrack has long since gone but, thankfully, whoever edited the original stereo mix left the offcuts of the other takes on the reel so I was able to reconstruct the single edit."

During the remastering, microphone pops and bad edits have been digitally repaired. External processing has been kept to a bare minimum, however, which means that audiophiles will be pleased to hear that, apart from thirty seconds on one song, no noise reduction or hiss removal was utilised during the transfer or mastering process and no compression or limiting was used.

Anyone interested in this collection should also look out for the enhanced edition of the recently released biography penned by his daughter, Michele Monroe, entitled 'The Singer's Singer'. This Special Reserve edition is a slipcased version complete with an additional, soft back, volume co-written by Michele Monroe and Richard Moore. It details Monroe's complete record, TV and radio sessions, a worldwide discography and a key studio album overview. This volume also includes an additional CD featuring twenty-two, previously unreleased, rare tracks that are only available via the 'Special Reserve' edition. Search Amazon for a copy. **PR**