

'Off The Record'

By CARL CAUDILL



MR. "B" is the title bestowed upon Billy Eckstine, the popular negro vocalist, and rightly so! The fabulous Eckstine has cut a notch in the Music Americana Hall of Fame that will long be there. I want to tell you about two of his latest numbers but first let me tell you a little about Mr. "B" himself.

BILLY ECKSTINE WAS BORN in Pittsburgh, Pa., and did his first singing chore at a church bazaar when he was 11 years old. He didn't sing again until he was 18 years old and that was at Washington, D. C.'s Howard Theatre in a talent show. From the ages of 11 to 18 he was busy at football rather than Glee Club work. His family had moved to the Capital City and later he moved back to his home town and did some singing in small clubs there. He was on the way but rather slowly.



BILLY ECKSTINE

In 1939, he hit the big time with an engagement at the famous Chicago nite club "Club De Lisa." It was at this same club two years later that Earl Hines, bandleader, heard him and hired him. Billy stayed with the

Hines band for four years and gained quite a following. The following was not confined to the theatre dates but to records too.

Becoming a "personality" with a definite future cut out for him he finally decided to go out on his own. The war came along with the 20 per cent amusement tax and fans stopped going to the clubs of high prices. Singers weren't in demand so Billy used the old noodle and came up with a dance band. Naturally he was the featured male vocalist. Billy also took a few lessons from some of the men he lead and came up playing the trombone. If you can get some of these old Eckstine orchestra platters you'll hear Billy on some instrumental solo work.

In 1944 Billy took the band through the South and it was slightly sensational grossing some one hundred thousand dollars in a short period of just ten weeks. Then came the devoted fan clubs and Eckstine fast was becoming a musical legend. The running of a band became quite a strain and Billy dropped it and went out again on his own. This time he really went to the top fast. He's been there ever since. His records have sold in the millions and never fail to click. Songwriters clamor to get the great Mr. "B" to warble their tunes, since the thinking is that if Billy sings it it's going to be a hit. (This has proven to be true in about 87 per cent of the cases thus far). He is now rated in the top three male vocalists in the nation and consistently stays in the top five.

I met Billy when he appeared here in Kinston with Ruth Brown and Count Basie. He is a likable sort of a fellow that doesn't seem to have been affected by his fame and fortune. He's ready to talk about anything to anybody and you have the feeling that here is a great musician and vocalist with the humility that so many, in his position, seem to have lost somewhere along the way. His latest numbers on M-G-M are I'M IN A MOOD and RENDEZVOUS. The Nelson Riddle band backs him on the former side and the Lionel Newman band on the latter. Both are typical Eckstine records and both are well worth a listen. His fans will "go" for these two fine numbers. You can get it by dropping in at your lo-

cal diskery and asking for M-G-M 55655.

THE CASH BOX is one of three, radio trade magazines and is followed very closely by the members of this profession. The other two are VARIETY and BILLBOARD. I would like to pass along some info from the Cash Box that I think will be interesting to you. This year that magazine held it's annual poll. Disc Jockeys and musicians voted on the most popular male, female, hillbilly and sacred singers as well as bands, mombos and albums.

In the female category it was JONI JAMES, of MGM, edging out PATTI PAGE, of Mercury, by some 2,152 votes, as the most popular female vocalist of 1953. Joni had a total of 61,275 while Patti had a total of 59,123! Quite a stride for a youngster in the business against a seasoned performer like Miss Page!

Joni's latest is FILL NEVER

Army Capt. Needham F. Mewborn, 31, of Ridley Park, Pa., recently received the Commendation Ribbon for meritorious service in Korea. Captain Mewborn, who arrived in the Far East last July, has been serving as a liaison officer with the Korean Military Advisory Group, which offers counsel to the Republic of Korea Army in all phases of training and combat. A 1946 graduate of the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, Captain Mewborn is the son of Mrs. Ronald D. Mewborn of Route 1, Kinston. His wife, Eleanor, lives at 111 N. Swartmore Ave., Ridley Park.

(U. S. Army Photo)

STAND IN YOUR WAY and YOU'RE MY EVERYTHING the latter being a revival. Cash Box also reports that HANK WILLIAMS IS STILL HAILED AS THE KING OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC FIELD. (He died on New Year's Day in 1953.) This is undoubtedly the first time that a man who has been dead dead for better than a year has held down the top spot in record popularity. That's it for this week.

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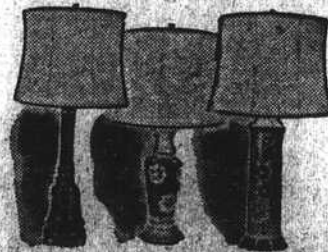
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