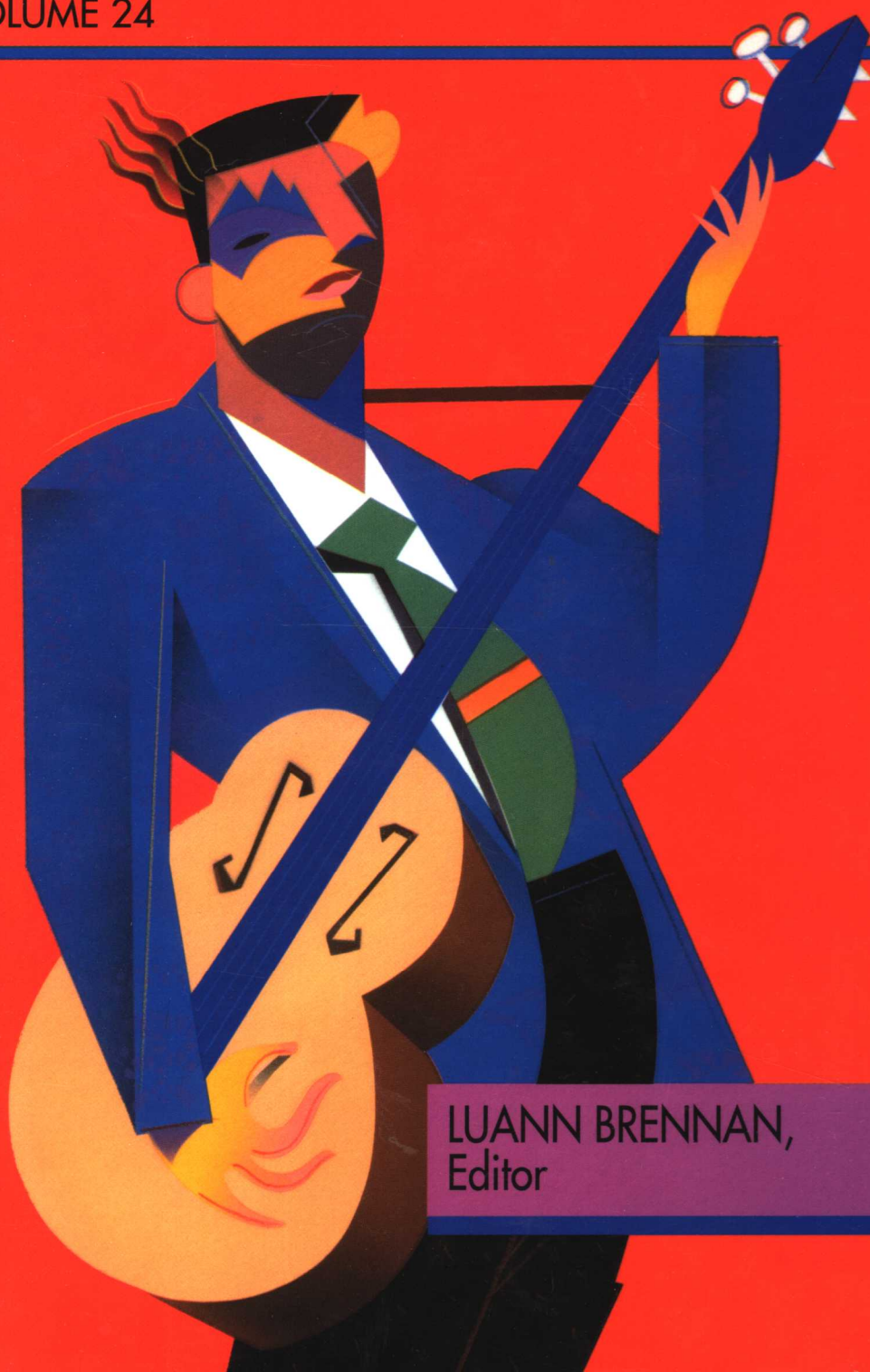


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VOLUME 24

CONTEMPORARY



LUANN BRENNAN,
Editor

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CONTEMPORARY MUSICIANS

PROFILES OF THE PEOPLE IN MUSIC

LUANN BRENNAN, Editor

VOLUME 24

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CONTEMPORARY MUSICIANS

Introduction

Fills the Information Gap on Today's Musicians

Contemporary Musicians profiles the colorful personalities in the music industry who create or influence the music we hear today. Prior to *Contemporary Musicians*, no quality reference series provided comprehensive information on such a wide range of artists despite keen and ongoing public interest. To find biographical and critical coverage, an information seeker had little choice but to wade through the offerings of the popular press, scan television "infotainment" programs, and search for the occasional published biography or exposé. *Contemporary Musicians* is designed to serve that information seeker, providing in one ongoing source in-depth coverage of the important names on the modern music scene in a format that is both informative and entertaining. Students, researchers, and casual browsers alike can use *Contemporary Musicians* to meet their needs for personal information about music figures; find a selected discography of a musician's recordings; and uncover an insightful essay offering biographical and critical information.

Provides Broad Coverage

Single-volume biographical sources on musicians are limited in scope, often focusing on a handful of performers from a specific musical genre or era. In contrast, *Contemporary Musicians* offers researchers and music devotees a comprehensive, informative, and entertaining alternative. *Contemporary Musicians* is published three times per year, with each volume providing information on 80 musical artists and record-industry luminaries from all the genres that form the broad spectrum of contemporary music—pop, rock, jazz, blues, country, New Age, folk, rhythm and blues, gospel, bluegrass, rap, and reggae, to name a few—as well as selected classical artists who have achieved "crossover" success with the general public. *Contemporary Musicians* will also occasionally include profiles of influential nonperforming members of the music community, including producers, promoters, and record company executives. Additionally, beginning with *Contemporary Musicians 11*, each volume features new profiles of a selection of previous *Contemporary Musicians* listees who remain of interest to today's readers and who have been active enough to require completely revised entries.

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In *Contemporary Musicians* you'll find popular features that users value:

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- **Selected discographies:** Each entry provides a comprehensive listing of the artist's major recorded works.
- **Photographs:** Most entries include portraits of the subject profiled.
- **Sources for additional information:** This invaluable feature directs the user to selected books, magazines, and newspapers where more information can be obtained.

Helpful Indexes Make It Easy to Find the Information You Need

Each volume of *Contemporary Musicians* features a cumulative Musicians Index, listing names of individual performers and musical groups, and a cumulative Subject Index, which provides the user with a breakdown by primary musical instruments played and by musical genre.

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We Welcome Your Suggestions

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The Gale Group
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Elly Ameling

Soprano

Described by *Opera Now* as "one of the best loved sopranos of the post-war years," Dutch singer Elly Ameling's remarkable vocal control, purity of tone, and subtlety of interpretation captivated audiences from her debut in Holland in 1961 until her retirement in 1995. She attracted a legion of fans, according to Andrew Porter of the *New York Observer*, by "her freshness, naturalness, ease, and beauty of timbre." Her work displayed wide range. She performed music from the Baroque period to the modern, including Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Bruckner, Mahler, Satie and Faure; but she is particularly renowned for her interpretations of the songs of Schubert and Brahms and for her performances of early music. In all, she has been an influential figure in vocal music of the late twentieth century.

Elisabeth Sara Ameling was born on February 8, 1938 in Rotterdam, Netherlands. As a teenager, Ameling studied voice with several Dutch teachers including Jo Bollenkamp in Rotterdam. She also traveled to Paris to study under Pierre Bernac who encouraged her to perform French songs. When she was 18, Ameling won a vocal competition at 's-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands; two years later she won another in Geneva, Switzerland. At the age of twenty three, in 1961, Ameling held her debut recital in Amsterdam.

Ameling's recording career began in the mid-1960s when she made a series of recordings for the Deutsche

Harmonia Mundi label. The albums were notable for a variety of reasons. Andrew Porter of the *New York Observer* described them as "intimate, gentle, communicative, bold, passionate, or twinkling where necessary; never forced, never exaggerated in expression and with a kind of freshness of discovery that brings each song to life." On them, Ameling showed her ability to sing in a broad palette of musical styles.

The Deutsche Harmonia Mundi records introduced Ameling as one of the premier singers of so-called early music—music composed in or before the seventeenth century, performed using original instruments and vocal techniques. Accompanied by the Collegium Aureum, one of the first early music ensembles, Ameling recorded chamber cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach, C.P.E. Bach, Georg Philipp Telemann, and Georg Friedrich Handel. Ameling's pure voice and precise intonation was uniquely suited to singing early music and her rendering of J.S. Bach's *Wedding Cantata* has been recognized as one of the most beautiful performances of all time. In *Classical Pulse!*, David Patrick Stearns called her "the godmother" of all early music vocalists who followed.

Ameling's early recordings also introduced her as a talented interpreter of the nineteenth century German songs called *lieder*. Stearns described the qualities that made Ameling's first *lieder* recordings so effective. "[Ameling's] girlish timbre, sunny openheartedness and refusal to record anything so glitzy as opera remind us that the basis of the early 19th-century *lieder* movement was folk-inspired poetry, and she never gives it a sense of false sophistication." Ameling would record and re-record classic *lieder* throughout her career.

Ameling's English debut took place in London in 1966 and, two years later, when she was 30 years old, she held her first American performance in New York City. She returned to the United States and Britain regularly and performed in other countries throughout the world. Through her career she concentrated on concerts and vocal recitals, frequently with pianist Dalton Baldwin. She also performed opera occasionally. Her most notable role was Ilia in the Netherlands Opera's 1973 staging of Mozart's *Idomeneo*, a role she repeated with the same company in Washington, D.C. a year later.

But whatever Ameling sang, her warm, unaffected personality brought a light touch to the material. She delivered it with a technique that seemed effortless. Her interpretive freshness exuded wit and charm. Furthermore her linguistic facility further enabled her to sing with confidence lyrics written in German, French, Italian, or English. She was awarded the Edison Prize twice, in

For the Record . . .

Born Elisabeth Sarah Ameling, February 8, 1938 in Rotterdam, Netherlands; studied voice with several Dutch teachers, including Jo Bollenkamp; later studied in Paris with Pierre Bernac.

Won first competition in 's-Hertogenbosch in 1956; won competition in Geneva in 1958; gave first recital at the age of 23 in Amsterdam; made London debut in 1966 and New York debut in 1968; played Ilia in Idomeneo with the Netherlands Opera in 1973, and in Washington D.C. in 1974; performed with several accompanists, but most frequently with pianist Dalton Baldwin; released more than a dozen albums between 1970 and 1998.

Awards: Edison Prize in 1965, Edison Prize in 1970, Knight of the Order of Oranje Nassau in 1971.

Addresses: *Record company*—Harmonia Mundi USA, 2037 Granville Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90025, (310) 478-1311, fax (310) 996-1389; email: info-usa@harmoniamundi.com.

1965, the year of her Schubert recordings, and in 1970, the year she recorded the *Bach Cantata No. 130*. In 1971, she was made a Knight of the Order of Oranje Nassau.

Ameling was frequently in the recording studio in the 1970s and 1980s. Those recordings demonstrated the remarkable range she was capable of. Between 1970 and 1973 she released five albums of music by Johann Sebastian Bach. In 1971 and 1976 she released albums of material by Ludwig van Beethoven. She made an album of Brahms *lieder* in 1972, two albums of the *Melodies* of Gabriel Faure in 1974 and 1975, and recorded *Symphony No. 4* of Gustav Mahler in 1979. She also recorded albums of works by Claude Debussy, George Frideric Handel, Domenico Comarosa, Anton Bruckner, two albums of Christmas songs, and two collections of songs and arias.

1995 was a landmark year for Elly Ameling. She retired from music, her last record was released, and her very first records were re-released. The recordings gave critics the opportunity to look at her career in overview. *Elly Ameling: The Early Recordings, 1964-1968*, a four CD set, showed her at her best for many critics. David

Patrick Stearns described her singing as "a clear prism ... a crystal clear mirror of the composer's intentions." Critics noted that Ameling's performance on her last album, *Songs of Hugo Ball*, recorded in 1991, hinted at the reasons she chose to give up her career at age 57. She no longer possessed what she herself in *Opera News* had called "a very young voice, girlish and pure." Instead, noted David Patrick Stearns, singing the Ball songs, Ameling's voice "seems rough, worn and effortful."

Despite the inevitable changes that age brings to a singer's voice, Ameling could look back on a distinguished, prolific, and successful career. It will serve as a benchmark for future vocalists. Through her recordings she will continue to thrill both old and new fans alike with her unflinching purity of tone, her delicacy of emotion, her adroit mastery of material, and her "visceral outpouring of superb musical instinct," according to David Patrick Stearns. They offer timeless insight into the work of the world's great composers. Few vocalists have devoted themselves so completely and so successfully to the work that Ameling held dearest.

Selected discography

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Johann Sebastian Bach: *Actus Tragicus*, BWV 106, DHM, 1973.

Gabriel Urbain Faure: *Melodies*, DHM, 1974.

Gabriel Urbain Faure: *Requiem*, DHM, 1974.

Ludwig van Beethoven: *Missa Solemnis*, Op. 123, DHM, 1976.

Handel's Messiah Arias and Choruses, DHM, 1976.

Christmas Songs from Europe, DHM, 1977.

Cimarosa's Requiem, DHM, 1978.

Mahler's Symphony No. 4 in G, DHM, 1979.

Christmas with Elly Ameling, DHM, 1980.

Claude Debussy's Ariettes Oubliees, DHM, 1980.

After Hours, DHM, 1982.

Sentimental Me, DHM, 1984.

Soiree Francaise, BMG/DHM, 1986.

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Elly Ameling: The Early Recordings, BMG/DHM, 1995.

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New York Observer, July 23, 1995.

Opera Now, October 1995.

—B. Kimberly Taylor

Vanessa Bell Armstrong

Singer



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Singer Vanessa Bell Armstrong has been praised for her r&b-flavored contemporary gospel music and has met with success in both the gospel and secular realms. She has often been compared with another Detroit native, Aretha Franklin. At times, Armstrong has stretched so far afield of “traditional” gospel music that in the 1980s, she was at times considered too contemporary for gospel. *Billboard*, in a 1998 review of *Desire Of My Heart*—“Live,” wrote, “A lot has changed [since 1988] and Armstrong has stood her ground, emerging with a work that is the perfect summation of gospel’s rich history and its cutting-edge presence in the mix of today’s R&B music.... It took a while, but the world seems to be catching up to Armstrong.”

Vanessa Bell was born in Detroit, Michigan on October 2, 1953. She was raised in the Church of God in Christ, a denomination that had nurtured other gospel greats such as BeBe and CeCe Winans, Andre Crouch, Edwin, Walter and Tramaine Hawkins, and others. In 1957, when she was four years old, Vanessa began traveling with her mother, singing in various churches in the Detroit area, singing. It was clear even at that young age that she had both remarkable stage presence and the vocal control of someone considerably older.

In 1966, when she was thirteen years old, Vanessa was discovered by Dr. Mattie Moss Clark. Clark became her mentor. She began traveling with Clark, singing in her various choirs and sharing the stage with such gospel titans as Rev. James Cleveland, the Mighty Clouds of Joy, the Clark Sisters, and the Winans. Other early influences included Marion Williams, Mahalia Jackson, Inez Andrews, and Aretha Franklin. Armstrong’s first recording experience was an appearance on Donald O’Connor’s 1981 release, *Bring Back Birdie*. Her own recording career began in 1984 when, at the age of 31, she signed with the Onyx label and released *Peace Be Still*.

Career Took Off

In 1987 Armstrong’s career took off in earnest. She beat out stiff competition—including the likes of Aretha Franklin and Patti LaBelle—for the chance to record the theme song for the popular television sit-com *Amen*. Armstrong had her Broadway debut in 1987, captivating audiences in the musical *Don’t Get God Started*. She also made a guest appearance on Tom Jones’ *Move Closer*.

When she signed with Jive Records in 1987, Armstrong began a period of prolific recording activity. Her eponymous album, *Vanessa Bell Armstrong*, released in 1987, yielded the crossover r&b hit, “You Bring Out the

For the Record . . .

Born Vanessa Bell on October 2, 1953, in Detroit, MI; daughter of Jesse Bell, a minister; married with five children.

Began singing in various Detroit area churches at the age of four; discovered at the age of thirteen by Dr. Mattie Moss Clark; sang with gospel performers such as Rev. James Cleveland, the Mighty Clouds of Joy, the Clark Sisters, and the Winans as a teenager; appeared on Donald O'Connor's 1981 release, *Bring Back Birdie*; released *Peace Be Still* in 1984; released *Vanessa Bell Armstrong* album in 1987; recorded the theme for the television sitcom *Amen* in 1987; appeared in the Broadway musical *Don't Get God Started* in 1987; appeared on Tom Jones' *Move Closer* in 1988; released *Wonderful One* in 1990; released *Greatest Hits* and *The Truth About Christmas* in 1990; released *Chosen* in 1991; released *Something On The Inside* in 1993; released *The Secret is Out* in 1995; released *Desire of My Heart: Live in Detroit* in 1998; featured on the 1995 compilation *A Tribute to Rosa Parks*, on John P. Kee's 1994 release, *Color Blind*, and on Kee's 1995 release, *Stand*.

Addresses: Record company—BMG Entertainment/Verity Records, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (212) 930-4000.

Best in Me". Her 1990 release, *Wonderful One*, featured a duet, entitled, "True Love Never Fails," with Jive label-mate jazz guitarist Jonathan Butler. The track was also included on Butler's acclaimed *More Than Friends* album. In 1990, Jive released a CD of Armstrong's greatest hits album along with the highly praised *Truth About Christmas*. In 1991 *Chosen* was released.

The multi-talented Armstrong branched out even further afield of gospel music in the late 1980s when she appeared with Oprah Winfrey in the *Women of Brewster Place*, a made-for-TV movie which enjoyed widespread critical acclaim. Armstrong continued her brisk recording pace; she released *Something On The Inside* in 1993, *The Secret is Out* in 1995, and her first live album, *Desire of My Heart: "Live"* in 1998. Armstrong was a featured guest on the 1995 compilation release *A Tribute to Rosa Parks*, and on two John P. Kee CDs, the 1994, *Color Blind*, and the 1995, *Stand*.

Continual Spiritual and Artistic Growth

Armstrong has continually expanded her horizons and her audience, performing on Broadway and releasing eclectic, contemporary albums such as *Truth About Christmas*, *Something on the Inside*, and *The Secret is Out*. Mainstream entertainment and her music has been praised figures such as Oprah Winfrey, Anita Baker, Luther Vandross, Sheryl Lee Ralph, and Tisha Campbell; artists such as Sandra Crouch and Donna McElroy have found musical guidance and inspiration in Armstrong's music and career.

Desire of My Heart—"Live," released in 1998 on the Verity label, was recorded in Detroit's Perfecting Church, and accompanied by a live video shot during the recording session. The recording shows the spiritual and artistic growth Armstrong has undergone over the course of her career. Its title track was the first song she wrote herself. And while recording the album, Armstrong reconfirmed her life's desire, above all else, to please God. Armstrong was the record's co-producer, also a first for her.

She decided to release a live recording for two reasons: her fans had wanted one for some time, and Armstrong felt it would be a new challenge. Recording in a studio afforded her a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere; the live CD brought Armstrong's fans into the recording process and reproduced the concert experience. The CD was something of a family affair—her father, Elder Jesse Bell, contributed the track "Labor In Vain." Joining Armstrong on the live recording were the Perfected Praise Choir; Perfecting Church pastor Marvin Winans sang with Armstrong and the choir on the powerhouse track "He Is Lord."

An Enduring Classic

Armstrong's career has flourished throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and gives every indication that she will continue to challenge herself and delight listeners. *Billboard's* gospel reviewer brimmed with praise for the live CD, calling it "an enduring classic." Darren K. Greggs of *Love Express* wrote, "It's always a pleasure to see someone continue to grow in their ministry, and that's just what sister Vanessa Bell Armstrong appears to have done. The evidence is manifested in ... *Desire of My Heart—Live*. Each song on this one is powerful and displays the talent that sister Vanessa returns to God in his service."

Whether singing urban contemporary ballads, secular material, powerhouse gospel tracks, or television theme

songs, Broadway hits, or forging into completely new territory, Vanessa Bell Armstrong will continue to astound her fans and to test the limits of her seemingly boundless talent.

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Vanessa Bell Armstrong, Jive/Novus, 1987.

Wonderful One, Jive/Novus, 1990.

The Truth About Christmas, BMG, 1990.

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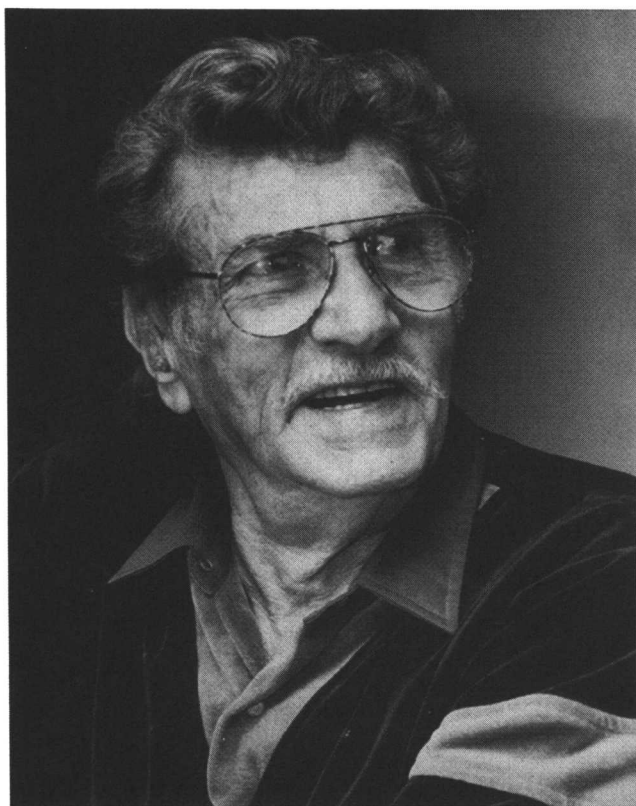
All-Media Guide: <http://www.amg.com>

Additional information provided by the publicity department at Verity Records.

—B. Kimberly Taylor

Ralph Bass

Record company executive, producer



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Record company executive, producer, talent scout, and R&B pioneer Ralph Bass was aptly described by Rolling Stone's David Fricke as one of "the great starmakers of early rock & roll," a "master talent scout," and a "prolific producer" who left his own indelible stamp on the charts of pop music history. During his long and successful career as a producer and Artist & Repertoire (A&R) man for the Savoy, King/Federal, and Chess record labels, Bass was instrumental in discovering, recording, and nurturing the talents of James Brown, Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, Etta James, Moms Mabley, Johnny Otis, Little Esther Phillips, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, Clara Ward, and Muddy Waters. Fricke wrote, "During the Fifties and Sixties, Ralph Bass was one of the most successful producers and talent spotters in the independent record industry." After hearing James Brown's demo tape, which included "Please, Please, Please," Bass quickly signed Brown to King Records in 1956, after driving as fast as possible to Macon, Georgia, through a torrential rainfall in order to arrive before Leonard Chess of Chess Records to the punch. In a late 1980s interview with *Contemporary Musicians*, Bass recalled seeing Brown perform for the first time in a small club in Georgia, crawling on his belly up to women in the audience and moaning, "Please, Please, Please Me." Bass rolled his eyes, and exclaimed as though it had happened the day before, "The women were shrieking with delight! Some looked like they were going to pass out. I knew I had struck gold."

Bass was born on May 1, 1911, to Ralph and Lena (Blaus). He was raised in a liberal Jewish family in the Bronx borough of New York City. He played the violin in high school and later worked as a violinist in various New York society bands. He attended Colgate University and New York University. Bass married Alice Robbins in 1933. They had three children: Michael, Dennis, and Joanne Patricia. He grew interested in jazz and relocated to the west coast, where he took odd jobs to support his family. He worked as a part-time DJ, liquor store owner and operator, and salesman for the Arrowhead and Puritas Water Company before joining Black & White Records as talent scout and producer in the late 1930s. At Black & White, he produced such astoundingly talented musicians such as Dexter Gordon, Lena Horne, and T- Bone Walker. His first major hit was Jack McVea's "Open the Door Richard" in 1947. He later went on to produce the music of Erroll Garner, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus, and Charlie Parker while at Black & White. He racked up numerous r&b hits when he joined Savoy Records in 1948 as their west coast A&R man. At Savoy, he produced recordings by Brownie McGee, Jay McNeely, Johnny Otis, Little Esther Phillips, and Mel Walker. Bass produced three of the top ten biggest r&b

For the Record . . .

Born May 1, 1911, son of Ralph and Lena (Blaus) Bass; raised in the Bronx borough of New York City; played the violin in high school; married, Alice Robbins, 1933; married, Shirley Hall, 1960; children: (by first marriage) Michael, Dennis, and Joanne Patricia. *Education:* Colgate University, New York University.

Worked as a part-time DJ, liquor store owner and operator, salesman for the Arrowhead and Puritas Water Company in Los Angeles, CA, joined Black & White Records as a talent scout and producer, late 1930s; produced Dexter Gordon, Lena Horne, and T-Bone Walker at Black & White; first hit was Jack McVea's "Open the Door Richard," 1947; produced Erroll Garner, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus, and Charlie Parker; joined Savoy Records, 1948 as their west coast A&R man; produced recordings by Brownie McGee, Jay McNeely, Johnny Otis, Little Esther Phillips, and Mel Walker; toured the South with the Johnny Otis Revue; produced Johnny Otis, 1949; returned to New York City, 1951 to head A&R department at King Records; oversaw creation of the King subsidiary, Federal Records; recorded "Sixty Minute Man" by Billy Ward and The Dominoes, "Work With Me Annie" by Hank Ballard and the Midnighters; signed James Brown to Federal Records, 1956; moved to Chess Records in Chicago, 1960 as a staff producer; produced hits by Etta James, Ramsey Lewis, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, and The Violinaires; Chess records dissolved in 1976; Bass worked as an independent record producer after 1976.

Awards: Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 1991.

Addresses: *Home*—601 East 32nd Street, Apt. 500, Chicago, ILL 60616; *Office*—2411 S. Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60616.

hits of the 1950s with Johnny Otis, Little Esther, and Mel Walker. After touring the South with the Johnny Otis Revue and producing Johnny Otis' material in 1949, Bass decided he preferred the raw earthiness of the blues to the jazz of his New York City youth. His tour of the South with Otis also opened his eyes to the racism that many black musicians experienced at the time. As a white man, Bass, hadn't fully comprehended the

racism until he witnessed it on the tour. The blues, r&b, earthy rock and roll, and gospel were all novel and exciting to Bass. Determined to follow his musical interests, he returned to New York City in 1951 as head of the A&R department at King Records.

While at King Records, Bass oversaw the creation of the King subsidiary, Federal Records. There he recorded "Sixty Minute Man" by Billy Ward and The Dominoes, material by the Five Royales, and the notorious "Work With Me Annie" by Hank Ballard and the Midnighters. Bass moved to Chess Records in Chicago in 1960, which was then the nation's seat of the urban Delta-based blues, and worked on hits by Etta James, Ramsey Lewis, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, as well as the pioneering pop-gospel group The Violinaires. As a staff producer at Chess, Bass interacted with and nurtured a vast array of talent, both established and budding. He was especially noted for his unrestrained enthusiasm. When Chess records dissolved in 1976, Bass retired to Miami, Florida, to work at the T.K. Record Company but stayed only two years in Miami before returning to his home in Chicago. Back in Chicago, he worked as an independent record producer, and devoted a lot of time to writing his autobiography—the working title of which was, *I Didn't Give A Damn What the Whites Thought*.

As a producer at Black & White, Bass produced Lena Horne's unforgettable "Call It Stormy Monday." However, his career and musical profile was heightened more in 1947 by a ribald, off-color comedy recording titled "Open The Door Richard"—based on an old vaudeville skit—that Bass cut with Jack McVea and his band. Bass admitted the recording was more a fluke than anything, yet in an interview with *Contemporary Musicians*, Bass recalled it as one of his favorite recordings. As a producer at Federal, Bass released Hank Ballard and the Midnighters' "Work With Me Annie." The single was banned but sold more than a million copies. Bass also produced the original version of the classic r&b standard "Kansas City," originally titled "K.C. Lovin" and recorded by Little Willie Littlefield for Federal Records.

Bass was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1991 where he was lauded for recording some of the greatest performers in black music. His career and success was fueled by a passion for the blues, r&b, gospel, and jazz, as well as a passion for the people who created the music. His charismatic personality and boundless zeal for life contributed greatly to his ability to work with a wide array of performers, and his tried-and-true "golden ear" for new talent gave the world some of the best American r&b, blues, and jazz in the twentieth century.