



MEL TORMÉ

A Tribute to Bing Crosby

CONCORD JAZZ CCD-4614 • 1994, 62:27

PERFORMANCE **4/8** SOUND QUALITY

As Mel Tormé point out in his liner notes, Bing Crosby revolutionized the way singers sing, trading in the stiff, theatrical style of yore for a relaxed, conversational approach that made use of the new intimacy available from microphones. While he goes overboard in trying to lower Frank Sinatra in comparison (yes, Crosby was the first; but Sinatra was the best), Tormé is right to offer Crosby praise.

Unfortunately, he does it in a strange way. *A Tribute to Bing Crosby—Paramount's Greatest Singer* smartly focuses on the early years of B-B-B-Bing's career, avoiding most of the tunes indelibly linked to him, like "White Christmas," and virtually everything to do with the Irish. But Tormé's vocals are downright puzzling. This ballad-heavy collection finds him crooning in the most negative sense of the word. Time after time, he approaches tunes lugubriously, drawing out notes and melodies to pretty, but pointless, effect. It's as if he'd never learned the lessons Crosby taught about placing the song before the sound of your own voice, about finding the humanity at the heart of a number.

Matters aren't helped by the downright flat string arrangements Tormé produced along with a handful of others. They keep the whole affair at a draggy pace, allowing only the odd solo to poke through with some excitement. Tormé rarely takes a stab at scatting or even moving the song above a slow-medium tempo. All his energy seems focused on drawing out the occasional, arbitrary note for as long as possible. But the only note he maintains is one of boredom.

—Michael Giltz