

# Art Deco Blues

## By Tony Burke



Co-producer and leading authority on Paramount Records Alex van der Tuuk told B&R: "The concept of the Second Volume is moved to the Art Deco period and inspired by 1939 RCA Victor table model phonograph.

It is something that was envisioned last year while we were in the process of producing the first box. It is more like what could have become of Paramount had it existed long enough until the 1933 - 1934 Chicago World Fair.

"As with the previous box, there is a USB drive containing 800 songs, as well as advertising material, many which I had not seen before and colour large format sheets from the F.W. Boerner company and St. Louis Music Company etc. Two books, one covering the story of Paramount from

In **B&R 284** we featured the first deluxe package of Paramount recordings, released by Third Man Records in conjunction with Revenant Records. That epic set featured six vinyl albums, two books, and a USB drive with 800 tracks. Third Man Records is of course owned by the White Stripes' Jack White.

A two-volume series 'The Rise And Fall Of Paramount Records 1917 - 1932', was promised and dubbed an 'omnibus of art, words and music'.

The first limited edition set was housed in a 'hand-sculpted cabinet-of-wonder' - a beautifully produced wooden cabinet housing its contents.

Now the second volume is available - and things have moved on into a new era.

'The Rise And Fall Of Paramount Records Volume Two, 1928-1932' focuses on the label's later years, a period when Paramount was more focused on blues recordings including Geeshie Wiley, The Mississippi Sheiks, Willie Brown, and King Solomon Hill.

This time the packaging is based on what Paramount 'might have been' - gone is the hand crafted wooden box - this set is housed in an aluminum container.

Revenant's Dean Blackwood says the design came from the shift that had happened at the time in the U.S.A. "We didn't want Volume Two to be a strict bookend to Volume One," he says. "That's not an honest reflection of the design themes. The 1930s was the beginning of industrial design coming to the fore with its own brand of modernist design; rather than embracing exotica, our version was around this streamlined modern version of Art Deco. The machine was the source of America's might and standing in the world, our capacity as an industrial power that connected the vast plains of our country and even other nations - that's really where we found our sweet spot."

The set packaging draws from two distinct sources - the hollow-body resophonic guitars that National String Instrument Corporation began manufacturing in the late 1920s and the RCA Victor Special Model K, a portable electric phonograph designed in the early 1930s.

Blackwood says the overarching purpose was to give Paramount a treatment on a par with the label's role in early American music. "Our guiding question was what would Paramount have done if they gave a shit - which they didn't - and had the money that one of their more well-heeled rivals like RCA Victor had? What would things have looked like?"

Like its predecessor, Volume Two has six vinyl albums, two books complete with biographies and Paramount art and promotional artwork, a USB drive loaded with all the music and more than ninety Paramount adverts from the Chicago Defender.

"We have so few home grown art forms," says Blackwood "This is one of them, and this is the only label that was really capturing what we sounded like then. Why isn't this housed in museums along with our other arts and letters? This is our attempt to enshrine that permanently in the psyche - that this is one of America's great cultural products that we want to be available in a form that befits its greatness."

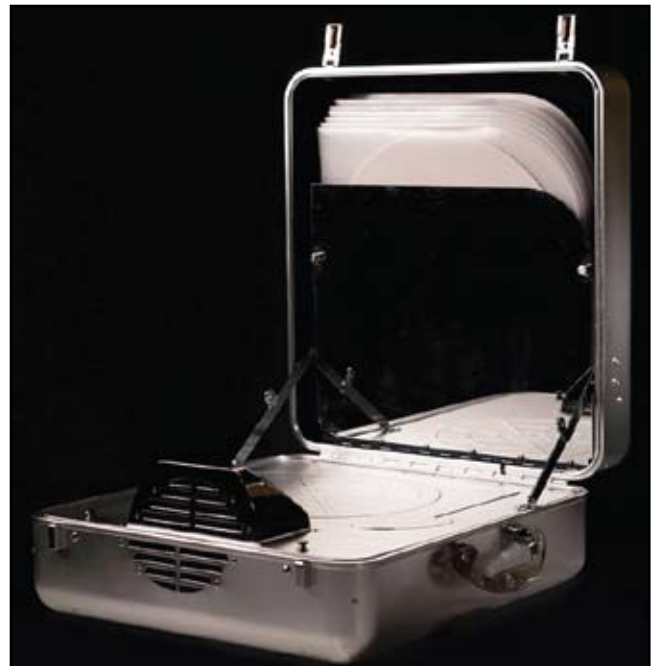
1928 to 1932. The second section in the book again has many illustrations although we did not overdo on the label section.

"The second book is the Field Manual with the bio-discographies, illustrated by Tony Mostrom (who offers his original work for sale as soon as the box is out). Again, a set of six LPs will represent part of the 800 songs.

"We have tried to get the best possible sound on the USB drive and vinyl albums and there will be a few surprises! We were able to locate a copy of Reverend Dickenson's Pm 13011 (one of the unknown Paramounts) with 'It's Your Time Now' and the wonderfully named 'Dry Cleaning The Skunks' as well as long hidden tests by Charles Avery and Frank Palmes. Another rarity by Oliver Cobb on Paramount 13002 will be reissued from the original, as well as the super rare Scottdale String Band. All four tracks will be on this set."

"All in all", says Alex "it is a great box covering a lot of blues, country, jazz and an occasional dance band".

Illustrations courtesy of Third Man Records.



Replica of an RCA Victor Special Model K portable electric phonograph that houses Volume Two.