

Julius Monk present FOUR BELOW STRIKES BACK

While I've written the notes for the other Julius Monk releases we've done, which included a history of Mr. Monk and his shows, the original LP release of *Four Below Strikes Back* had a long and fun history by Mr. Monk himself and since no one really spoke or wrote like Mr. Monk, we'll just reproduce his wonderful writing for this release and in a font size that will actually enable you to read them, rather than go blind trying to read the teeny-tiny font on the LP back cover. But just to mention, this was a wonderful cast and it included the nightclub debut for the wonderful Nancy Dussault, and it also includes George Furth, who was a quirky and very funny actor before he became a playwright, giving us the books for the musicals *Company*, *The Act*, and *Merrily We Roll Along*, and his play *Twigs*. We hope you enjoy this marvelous revue, a seemingly lost art – the topical revue – some of which is obviously now very dated, which, for me, is part of the charm. I have taken the liberty of fixing the LP liner notes' many typos and misspellings, otherwise it is pure, unadulterated Julius Monk.

— Bruce Kimmel

Julius Monk's Original Liner Notes

Since the sibling shows (admission three pins/pence for adults) I've discovered not only safety but variety in numbers! And may we thank you, the encouragingly kind acquirers of our "phono-phonetics," who concur that our principle of audience identification – or "instant osmosis" – can transpire, transmute, be portable (without portables), in a word – made preservable. Here, then, off-the-record, is the premise of our cabaret concept: not a division of interest, but a diversion of personalities, to each his own, plus energized ensemble playing, presented in swift succession, hung on a musical hook, with beats assigned for literate playing – but essentially that you, our paying guests, as well as the cast we pay, be entertained.

In our original cabaret concept never do we use – or misuse – the word "revue," which in truth is – or was – quite a different tradition – a rigid theatre form: the 8 sketches; the prescribed introduction of principals; etc. – a tradition as inflexible as our indigenous minstrel show. Rather, in our desire to entertain, we emulate the mid-Victorian supper rooms, "The Late Joys," the first cabaret in London where the gentry sat, supped, and presumably applauded the variety of players presented nightly. The Parisian cave with its existentialists, the Munich politicized cabaret with its caustic cautery are beyond our ken as is/was the West Coast school of iconoclasts who dealt with God and Mr. Nixon – in that order. Certainly we deal with both in our fashion, but privately.

Our first go at entertainer empathy occurred in 1944 at Le Ruban Bleu, where Imogene Coca and Bernie West shared billing and previous knowledge of three duologues and the sketch seed was indeed sewn.

The following season a rarely gifted creative performer, Mike Brown, scoring in his Ruban debut, wrote a witty ensemble finale for the Christmas season. The Norman Paris Trio, a vocal group The Three Riffs, Jane Dulo girl comic, Mr. Brown and this grey party assembled on the wee stage and played our "Merry Christmas Afterpiece," and met with rousing success. The audience, satisfied, swiftly filed out of the club as if we had indeed rung down the curtain. As the Ruban's policy was continuous cabaret, and having no second audience to play to, our finale was regrettably abandoned. But the group's genetics remained germinative, and July 1st, 1947, bore fruition – in a reclaimed early Nineteenth Century Cape Cod Saloon, The Atlantic House, Provincetown, Mass. Coca, Fletcher & Sheidy, Hugh Shannon and self (manipulating 2 spooky uprights) began satirizing current songs of the day – "Dance, Ballerina, Dance," etc. – in nightly ensemble spoofs. A matter

of days (or nights) found Boston critics and columnists sprinkled in our increasing audience, who spread the written word, and jawed jabber completed the cycle. For four successive summers we held the Cape Colony, introducing Dorothy Loudon, Jimmy Komack, Nancy Andrews, Bibi Osterwald and Shirl Conway to the provinceland of our Pilgrim forebears.

Bruce York, the director of the Bermudian Theatre, Hamilton, proposed a tropical revue for his summer season, 1953; and we assembled a valiant baker's dozen with Alice Pearce and Bibi Osterwald our principals, nine days rehearsals, \$700, and superhuman achievements from our composer pianists E.C. Redding and Bud McCreery (who remain current creative contributors). We opened "Stock in Trade" July the tenth for a highly successful seven week season.

After some fourteen-odd years as regisseur of Le Ruban Bleu, I was let out for pasture and grazed for six serene weeks at The Hungry i in San Francisco's North Beach. My return to New York began an association with Irving Haber, who controlled the premises (consisting of a subterranean passage and street level bar of riotous aspect) at 51st Street and Sixth Avenue known as the Playgoers. Haber agreed to indulge my variety vagary, and THE DOWN-STAIRS ROOM and "FOUR BELOW" (in association with Murray Grand and with prudent guidance from John Heawood) was painlessly delivered. Dody Goodman (far above par before Paar), Jack Fletcher (a Bermuda, Ruban and Cape alumnus), Gerry Matthews (teamed with Tom Poston for Ruban debut) and June Ericson (superb soprano also Ruban debut diva), with Murray Grand's and Stan Keen's spellbinding spinets, five splices in a weary traveller, again nine days, \$720, and "material things" both creative and manual provided by faithful friends William Sheidy, Mike Brown, Bud McCreery, Murray Grand, Tom

Jones and Harvey Schmidt, we extend a cordial invitation to the citizens to the stairs and view our wares – March the 4th, 1956.

From the Ides of March to the Dog Days of August we thrived. Our cabaret concept proving artistically and financially feasible, we resumed on September 27th with another spoof: “THE SON OF FOUR BELOW.” Dody having departed, Ceil Cabot, an especial favorite of mine from Le Ruban, began enhancing our lives and filling the void.

April 10th we annexed the street level bar with Blossom Dearie, Annie Ross and Daphne Hellman (and harp) electrifying the club clientele, and alarming unsuspecting Sixth Avenue pedestrians who suspiciously peered at our AGVA antics UPSTAIRS AT THE DOWNSTAIRS. Which brings us to “TAKE FIVE” (October 10, 1957) with Ronny Graham starring, Ellen Hanley and Jenny Lou Law augmenting our perennials, Miss Cabot and Mr. Matthews, and pridefully, may we state, creating a sensation. “Probably the liveliest single nightclub show in the nation.” – LIFE.

“TAKE FIVE” inaugurated our recording collaboration with Offbeat Records, who exclusively record and distribute our on-and-off-the-record goings on. While we were still playing to crowdful capacity, the “girder ghouls” became increasingly insistent and the ultimatum was issued: “Not only the premises go, but you, too.” So we got! (July 3, 1958) – got a new location at 37 West 56th Street, the townhouse of the late merchant prince, John Wanamaker, where decorator Tom Hariss retained and respected the fine Edwardian and has attempted to make this house a home, as well as a theatre-cabaret.

On July 22, 1958, Alice Ghostly opened the new DOWNSTAIRS AT THE UPSTAIRS with singular success, while workmen converted the dining, morning and drawing room into our Pollack Penny-Plain-Tuppence-Coloured” (Ed

Wittstein-Bob Miller adaptation) stage – UPSTAIRS AT THE DOWNSTAIRS.

October 11, 1958: “DEMI-DOZEN” opened our fall season and successfully launched our new Upstairs Room (now occupying the second story) with Jane Connell and George Hall (both Broadway and Ruban grads), joining Jean Arnold, Ceil Cabot, Gerry Matthews and Jack Fletcher in continued performing impeccability. Gordon Connell, who had seen spinet-and-speak tenure in “FOUR BELOW” and “TAKE FIVE,” was pianistically benched with Stan Keen at the Acrosonics.

Over 500 performances were chalked up for “DEMI-DOZEN,” while in a DOWNSTAIRS debut a beautifully bizarre disease, Tammy Grimes, kept the street level throbbing until she “Look(ed) After Lulu” for the first Noel. Succeeding Tammy, Ronny Graham achieved a one-man show of magical madness. Rose “Chee-Chee” Murphy, coupled with Slam Stewart, added an additional dimension to our DOWNSTAIRS doings as did Hugh Shannon’s singspiel and youthful composer-pianist William Roy, whom we coaxed from the hills of Hollywood.

Our piratic parodic, “PIECES OF EIGHT” (September 17, 1959) with the returning triumphant triumvirate: the Misses Connell and Cabot and Mr. Matthews, embellished with newcomers UPSTAIRS, Estelle Parsons (maid of Monitor) and Del Close (splendid survivor of “The Nervous Set”), with Gordon Connell assuming principal stature, and with Messrs. Roy and Norman shifting their pianistics to the head of the stairs. Buddy Schwab, who had so successfully restaged the Cherry Lane’s reproduction of “The Boy Friend,” performed a similar service for “PIECES OF EIGHT” under my direction.

Meanwhile back at the ranch – DOWNSTAIRS – we decided to give another party – or four parties – a whirl, calling it “FOUR BELOW STRIKES BACK

– A Competitive Charade.” Thought we: “What ‘goes’ up, must come down (stairs)” and – voila! – in a trice, yet another ensemble: Jenny Lou Law (a “TAKE FIVE”-er), Nancy Dusssault (in her cabaret debut), and George Furth and Cy Young, their nimble escorts enhanced by the plural pianist, musical director Robert Colston and his colleague, Paul Trueblood. May you enjoy harkening to the singular sounds of our “FOUR BELOW STRIKES BACK.” Why not pay us a visit DOWNSTAIRS and see the sight and sound? We would make you most welcome.

Let me say: “May I render unto Caesar, etc.,” – my gratitude to Miss Dorothy Ross, who has agented our press for lo, these past eighteen years – Irving Haber, who has been such a bounteous brick through brick and thin (audiences, that is) – Word Baker, a talented Texan and my special assistant who has just received a Ford Foundation Grant – luminiferous George Curley, who has so sagely “spotted” all our shows and whom I hold in light, yet great esteem – and to someone up there who possibly likes me and looks after confused Carolinians who seek their fortunes up or downstairs in the city known as New York.

Signed,
His Mark (JULIUS MONK)