

FROM ANALOG MONO MASTER

2^xHD
HISTORIC

LESTER YOUNG

LESTER LEAPS IN



STORYVILLE

The conventional wisdom has it that Lester Young's playing after his desperately unhappy year in the Army (1944/5) was never again to reach the high creative level it achieved over the first decade of his professional life.

Critics will no doubt debate the issue for many years to come, but the evidence from the 12 tracks on this album, recorded between 1951 and 1956, is that Pres remained an outstandingly gifted, original and swinging soloist right up to the end of his career (his last engagement, incidentally, was at the Blue Note in Paris in January 1959).

The material here consists of air shots from club dates in New York and Washington. On all but three of the tracks, front-line duties are shared with a trumpet player – either Idrees Sulieman, a vigorous bebop exponent who has worked with Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Lionel Hampton, the Clarke-Boland Band and Dexter Gordon, or Jesse Drakes, a fiery, staccato player from New York who played regularly with Lester between 1949 and 1955. It is highly appropriate that the opening track is *Lester Leaps In*, Young's celebrated theme on the chords of *I Got Rhythm* which he first recorded with Count Basie's Kansas City Seven in 1939. The middle eight of the opening chorus is delivered in typically rousing style by Sulieman, but after this it is Lester all the way. He plays the customary stop-time chorus after the theme and builds a solo full of characteristic Pres elements – lazy, laconic lines, reiterated notes and a lovely, loose swing.

Lester always had a marked predilection for certain tunes and this is borne out by the fact that the two opening titles on each side of this album were featured on Young's famous Aladdin recording sessions between October 1945 and December 1948.

This Foolish thing, a well-worn standard written as a 28-bar sequence by Jack Strachey in 1936 but later equipped with an 8-bar bridge, is given new life by Lester's unhackneyed improvisation. He also throws in a rare event where he's concerned – a couple of quotes from *Two Sleepy People*. Lester is the only soloist, with Sulieman just heard at the very end.

Three Little Words is another favoured Pres vehicle which he recorded on many occasions. This is a most spirited version with good solos by Lester and Sulieman. Young's playing on this is an object lesson in economy and style. A consummate master of time and space, he could make the most eloquent statement using just three or four notes over two bars. Nothing he plays sounds contrived or ritualistic and he maintains a good

balance by interspersing the quavers and triplets with long, smeared notes.

Sulieman plays a crackling solo which reveals his admiration for Clifford Brown and the piece is taken to its fade-out ending by pianist Bill Potts who performs more than adequately.

On *Pennies from Heaven*, Lester exhibits characteristic poise and an instinctive feel for right tempos. His playing is unhurried and swings effortlessly; the same languid legato phrasing informs *Polka Dots and Moonbeams*, a beautiful Burke/Van Heusen ballad from 1937 whose melody Lester never seemed to get totally right. On a Verve recording in March 1950 he modified the melody line, and he does the same here.

The concluding track on Side One brings back Idrees Sulieman for a brisk workout on the good old 1918 James Hanley/Ballard MacDonald standard *Indiana*. Lester's solo here is a gem – a thoughtful, considered choice of notes, reiteration of the same note over several bars to build up the tension, the use of unexpected intervals – all the Pres trademarks are there. Sulieman is again in boisterous, boppish form, using long, urgent lines of quavers and triplets and that staccato articulation so characteristic of Clifford Brown.

Another famous Lester original opens side two (track 7). Lester again demonstrates that, with good taste, timing and timbre, the routine can be transformed into the inspirational. That loose, supple legato is an abiding delight. *Jumping With Symphony Sid*, originally recorded by Lester in December 1947 and named for jazz disc jockey Symphony Sid Torin, became a major jazz standard. In this version Pres is content with the barest indication of the theme in the opening chorus before leaping into improvisational mode.

D.B. Blues is a blues with a middle eight and the fine rhythm section here stimulates excellent swinging solos from both Pres and Jesse Drakes, the latter manifesting a kind of composite Howard McGhee-Clifford Brown style and contriving to inject a quote from *A Bicycle Made For Two*. John Lewis's chordal backing is reminiscent of Erroll Garner's on the celebrated Charlie Parker recording of *Cool Blues* in 1947.

Ghost of A chance is a Victor Young/Ned Washington ballad that might have been written for tenor saxophone. Certainly it is much favoured by tenor men and Lester plays it with grace and authority.

Up And Adam, a 12-bar blues in C, is a Young original which has no really identifiable theme. He recorded it for both the Savoy and Verve labels in 1950. Horace Silver contributes some typically percussive piano to this piece.

Another blues follows and Lester again plays some effortlessly eloquent choruses. Notice the typically Lesterian rhythmic figure played on G and B in the first three bars of the second chorus. It's a familiar Young device and it can also be heard in his solos on *Lester Leaps In and Indiana*. Another characteristic Lester riff is to be heard in his fifth chorus – the reiterated D with a D sharp right at the end to lead into the C seventh chord. Also totally typical of Lester's extemporisation is his frequent use of the sixth note (E) and the rallentando ending.

The album ends with a rather attenuated *Tea For Two*, Lester outlining the theme with lazy understatement, as ever.

Recording quality of these club performances is less than exemplary – but there are some jazz exponents whose recorded work would be worth preservation and close attention even if it were cut on corrugated iron with a rusty nail. Lester is one such jazz exponent. As Leonard Feather has observed, it is a duty to preserve his unique sounds on record “for the benefit of a generation that was not lucky enough to hear in person the very special, bittersweet brand of melancholy that was Lester Willis Young”.

Mike Hennessey

Biography of Lester Young

One of the great originals in the jazz hierarchy, Lester Willis Young was without doubt the most influential tenor saxophonist after Coleman Hawkins. A highly sensitive, graceful player, and an enigmatic personality, Young had a winning sense of time and space and a most engaging gift for improvising on songs rather than chord sequences. He played with great feeling for the lyric of a song – which is why he made such a perfect partner for Billie Holiday.

The son of a carnival musician, Lester Young was born in Woodville, Mississippi on August 27th, 1909. He started out on drums and later took up baritone and alto. It was on this latter instrument that he replaced Coleman Hawkins in the Fletcher Henderson orchestra in 1934. “But” he once said, “as soon as I tried the tenor saxophone, I knew it was my instrument.”

His instrument it certainly was, and his inimitable “cool”, understated, virtually vibrato-less style was to prove a powerful formative influence on countless post-thirties saxophonists. He used to say his own main

influence was Frankie Trumbauer and that he developed his light, airy sound by trying to emulate the timbre of Trumbauer's C-melody saxophone.

Writer J.R. Taylor has described Lester Young as possibly "the most original and important soloist to emerge between the Louis Armstrong-Earl Hines and Charlie Parker-Dizzie Gillespie generations." And, felicitously, Taylor refers to the "evenness and placidity" of Young's tone – a tremendous contrast to the swagger and surging power of Coleman Hawkins.

When he was around 18, Lester Young joined Art Bronson's Bostonians and toured with the unit for three or four years. Then, after spells with Walter Page's Blue Devils and King Oliver, he offered his services to Count Basie, "because I figured the band needed a tenor player." Basie hired him in 1933 and, aside from brief intervening spells with Henderson and Andy Kirk, Lester remained in the Basie band until 1940.

It was with Basie that he really established his reputation as a unique solo voice. He made his recording debut at 27 with a Basie quintet for the Vocalion label, the titles including "Shoe Shine Boy" and "Lady Be Good" – both classic Lester performances.

The following year he was featured on the unforgettable Teddy Wilson-Billie Holiday sides that John Hammond produced for the Negro jukebox market. Young developed a deep friendship with Billie Holiday – it was he who gave her the name Lady Day – and recorded some of his most affecting work with her.

In the late thirties and early forties Lester made superlative recordings with the Basie band, in which he shared tenor honours for a number of years with the great Herschel Evans.

After a debilitating spell of Army service in 1944/5 – a large part of which seems to have been spent in detention – Young resumed his playing career, fronting his own small groups and touring with Jazz at the Philharmonic. But, thanks to a combination of spiritual debility, alcoholism, malnutrition and a nervous breakdown, he never quite recaptured his earlier glory. He died in his New York hotel on March 15th, 1959.

Though nicknamed "Pres", Lester Young always said that Coleman Hawkins was the first president of the tenor saxophone. But Young was certainly a close second and, as guitarist Mickey Baker observed, "There was the mark of genius in his simplicity."

Mike Hennessey

LESTER YOUNG LESTER LEAPS IN

- 1 **LESTER LEAPS IN** (f) 3:12
(Lester Young)
- 2 **THESE FOOLISH THINGS** (f) 3:33
(Jack Strachey)
- 3 **THREE LITTLE WORDS** (f) 4:30
(Harry Ruby)
- 4 **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** (d) 2:57
(Arthur Johnston)
- 5 **POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS** (d) 3:33
(Burke - Heusen)
- 6 **INDIANA** (e) 3:57
(James F. Hanley)
- 7 **JUMPIN' WITH SYMPHONY SID** (c) 3:20
(Lester Young)
- 8 **D.B. BLUES** (a) 3:00
(Lester Young)
- 9 **A GHOST OF A CHANCE** (a) 3:42
(Victor Young)
- 10 **UP AND ATOM** (b) 4:20
(Lester Young)

- 11 **BLUES IN G** (b) 5:39
(trad.)
- 12 **TEA FOR TWO** (b) 1:32
Vincent Youmans

- (a) Jesse Drake (tp); Lester Young (ts); John Lewis (p); Gene Ramey (b); Jo Jones (dm). *Recorded at Birdland, New York City, May 19th, 1951.*
- (b) Jesse Drake (tp); Lester Young (ts); Horace Silver (p); Aaron Bell or Franklin Skeets (b); Lee Abram or Connie Kay (dm). Opinions differ regarding the bass player and the drummer, so we decided to give both names. *Recorded at Birdland, New York City, January 15th 1953.*
- (c) Lester Young (ts); Bill Potts (p); Norman Williams (b); Jim Lucht (dr). *Recorded at Olivia's Patio Lounge, Washington, December 8th, 1956.*
- (d) Same as (c). *Recorded at Café Bohemia, New York City, December 22nd, 1956.*
- (e) Same as (d) but add Idrees Sulieman (tp).
- (f) Same as (e). *Recorded at Café Bohemia, New York City, probably December 29th 1956.*

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION



2xHD is a record label which uses its proprietary system to process music masters originally recorded in analog or DSD or other format, to DSD in order to produce a unique listening experience.

The process uses a selection from a pool of high-end audiophile components and connectors. In some cases even using battery power, so as to benefit from the cleanest power source possible. This variable equipment combination custom tailored to each project, creates the most accurate reproduction of the original recording, unveiling information previously masked by the use of EQ, transformers, patch bays, extended cable length etc. The selection of components is critical, as many A/D and D/A converters are unable to pierce through these filters that create a ceiling effect to the sound. The 2xHD system preserves the dynamics of the original master and provides an open feeling to the sound.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audiophile sound engineer René Laflamme, two dedicated music lovers determined to experience only the warmth and depth of the music without hearing the equipment.

2xHD Mastering by: René Laflamme
2xHD Executive Producer: André Perry

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