

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER

2^xHD

JOHNNY HODGES CHARLIE SHAVERS

HALF & HALF



STORYVILLE

In these days, when jazz has turned to consolidation rather than innovation, records by old masters like Charlie Shavers and Johnny Hodges achieve gold standard almost by definition. Sleeve note accolades can often do little more than acknowledge and applaud the fact, for Shavers and Hodges were geni, of course: unflawed musicians, total original minds, two of the great burnished talents that were ablaze in those fiery jazz years. All that we've long known.

What is more interesting, on second thought, is what the two of them shared in common. Both precocious talents, fully matured in their teens, they died within a year of each other in 1971. Both seminal figures: Johnny Hodges, one of the three classic alto-saxophonists in jazz, Charlie Shavers, one of the two or three greatest trumpeters of his (or perhaps any) era; and both with the kind of ripe luscious talent that grows only in the summertime of an art. Both had the gift of making perfection sound easy, and both revelled – with an almost Casanova sensuality – in every tonal, and technical richness that their instrument was capable of. In the stern world of jazz criticism, where (in the old days) wrestling with your art meant wrestling with your instrument too, such carefree mastery led to easy criticism and error: “for Shavers, charges of tasteless gallery-fetching blowing, for Hodges the occasional one-word sentence of schmaltz.” Tight-lipped critics (if that touchy breed still exists) will be relieved to hear that this record presents neither. And probably no record by either artist ever did, for happy revelling in the glories of what musical instruments played well can produce has always seemed (for this writer at least) a healthy, skillful and personal statement of self-expression. This, after all, is precisely how great jazz music is made.

The two masters on this record led separate musical lives publicly. Like most jazz history this is probably (as Henry Ford once remarked) bunk – who can document the meetings on a neon-lit Swing Street, or lonely midnight roads? – But on this record they occupy separate sides and exclusive treatment in this annotation.

So, Shavers first – for me, for one, the most brilliant young man with a horn in jazz history. By the time he joined John Kirby at just nineteen his trumpet-playing was flawless, seemingly unlimited in range and flexibility, and honed with a military precision that somehow never over-regimented his jazz feeling. By then Shavers was one of jazz trumpet's finest technicians; after Charlie, Billy Butterfield was still observing ruefully in 1956, "there's not much left to play!" And that – for anyone who heard him in England with the New Tommy Dorsey Orchestra around 1963, chiming off top G's like bells – sums it up. The top notes and the inspiration – came from Louis Armstrong ("He was swinging before they had a word for it!" Shavers acknowledged) but many aspects of Charlie's art were extra to Louis; the occasional wide Yiddish vibrato, the puckish half-valving and pedal notes, those lion-pounce leaps into super-top register. The pure-gold tone though, the rightness of musical concept, the affection for apposite musical quotation, the ability to fit immediately into every professional music situation were all via Louis to Charlie, and such was the love and debt that when Armstrong died, Charlie Shavers' mouthpiece was buried with him. And when Shavers himself died, two shadowy days later (from throat cancer), he may not, perhaps, have wished otherwise.

If Coleman Hawkins established a tenor saxophone vocabulary back in those carefree roaring days of jazz, then Johnny Hodges did the same for alto. And he did it – another remarkable feat – within the conceptual boundaries of Duke Ellington's Orchestra rather than as a freelance soloist like Charlie Parker or Ornette Coleman. By 1928 he was doing masterfully too, in a perfectly mature style which was to set the standard for alto-saxophonists for fifteen years to come. And despite Charlie Parker's later re-assessment of alto-saxophone vocabulary, Hodges remained – for Parker as well – an unassailable Godhead. "Even now," said Duke Ellington (in *Music Is My Mistress*, W.H. Allen, 1974) "I never met an alto saxophonist who didn't say he was knocked out by Johnny Hodges!" And for musicians everywhere, the Hodges sound must have come high on the list of reasons why.

"Johnny Hodges was a natural," said Earl Hines, "he'd just pick up his horn and there was a beautiful sound!" (S. Dance, *The World of Earl Hines*, Scribner, 1977). But Hodges' gifts were legion: perfect unhurried relaxation in creation, an unfailing sense of time and intensity, that unique melodic concept that somehow combined the best of black, white and blue, and the power and personal authority that led the saxophone section of probably the greatest jazz orchestra ever for nearly forty years. "There was a great feeling of expectancy when our listening audience looked up and saw Johnny Hodges sitting in the middle of the sax section in the front row!" said Duke Ellington (ibid.), and it's a tribute, yet again, to Ellington that he found a way to keep Hodges almost continually there. One of the ways was to allow him the freedom, whenever he chose, to record as a bandleader and soloist in his own right; perhaps it's an indication of their mutual musical need that most Hodges small bands – particularly those ruminative almost prayerful recordings from the 1930's – sound like a respectful echo of Ellington's own musical visions.

On this record, two old masters perform in two settings each. Both, for the most part, are accompanied by Al Waslon, a discreet and highly musical pianist who understands exactly how to let his guest stars shine most tightly, an efficient bassist and drummer, and a prefatory studio announcer whose super-rehearsed superlatives sound a little too good to be true until you remember that true they are. Shavers in just seven tunes parades every banner of this talent; beautifully natural yet harmonically aware improvisation, formidable technique, and that chameleonesque ability to switch, at the flick of a red light, from the serpentine cup-muted temptations of *Embraceable You* to a no-holds barred flaring attack on *What Is This Thing Called Love*. Surely no more perfect trumpet player ever lived. Exactly the same give or take a saxophone, could be said of Johnny Hodges, who crafted his program with the skill of a sculptor and the dignity of a statue.

Homage is paid to Ellington in tune selection, but throughout it becomes plain why Ellington without Hodges was usually like a honeymoon without champagne. The answer is revealed in the spectrum of talent that could produce such poised yet intense grace in *Jeep's Blues* and the forthright strength of *In a Mellow Tone*, which (recorded live) allows us the chance to hear again an embryonic yet recognizable John Coltrane and Shorty Baker's witty rangy trumpet. But it's left to Hodges to spell the magic; it is that which conjures up the vision of those hushed ballroom listeners, silent and staring up in silent wonder at the insouciant weaver of dreams above.

Dig Fairweather, 1981

JOHNNY HODGES CHARLIE SHAVERS

- 1 **PERDIDO** (a) 2:39
Juan Tizol-H.J. Lengsfelder- Ervin Drake
- 2 **JEEP'S BLUES** (a) 2:39
Johnny Hodges
- 3 **ALL OF ME** (a) 1:51
Seymour Simons-Gerald Marks
- 4 **"C" JAM BLUES** (a) 2:17
Duke Ellington
- 5 **I GOT IT BAD** (And That Ain't Good) (a) 2:09
Ben Webster-Duke Ellington
- 6 **IN A MELLOW TONE** (b) 6:58
Duke Ellington
- 7 **BYE BYE BLACKBIRD** (c) 2:24
Mort Dixon-Ray Henderson
- 8 **BREEZING ALONG WITH THE BREEZE** (c) 1:55
Haven Gillespie-Seymour Simon-Richard Whiting
- 9 **EMBRACEABLE YOU** (c) 2:15
Ira & George Gershwin
- 10 **WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LOVE** (c) 2:49
Cole Porter
- 11 **TIME ON MY HANDS** (You in My Arms) (c) 3:32
Vincent Youmans-Harold Adamson-Mack Gordon
- 12 **UNDECIDED** (c) 2:54
Charlie Shavers-Sid Robin
- 13 **I'LL MAKE FUN FOR YOU** (d) 3:35
Charlie Shavers

HALF & HALF



- (a) Johnny Hodges with Al Waslon Trio:
Johnny Hodges (as); Al Waslon (p);
Joe Schmalz (b); Ed Knil (dm)
Recorded in Columbia, Ohio (date unknown)
- (b) Johnny Hodges & His Orchestra; Shorty
Baker (tp); Lawrence Brown (tb);
Johnny Hodges (as); John Coltrane (ts)
Remaining personnel unknown (date unknown)
- (c) Charlie Shavers (tp) Al Waslon (p);
Joe Schmalz (b); Ed Knil (dm)
Recorded in Columbia, Ohio (date unknown)
- (d) John Kirby's Sextet: Charlie Shavers (tp);
Russell Procope (as); Buster Bailey (cl); Billy Kyle
(p); John Kirby (b); O'Neil Spencer (dm)
or Specs Powell (dm)

Liner notes: Digby Fairweather, 1981

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

Album cover and booklet artwork: André Perry • Graphics: Sylvie Labelle





THE 2xHD MASTERING PROCESS



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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