

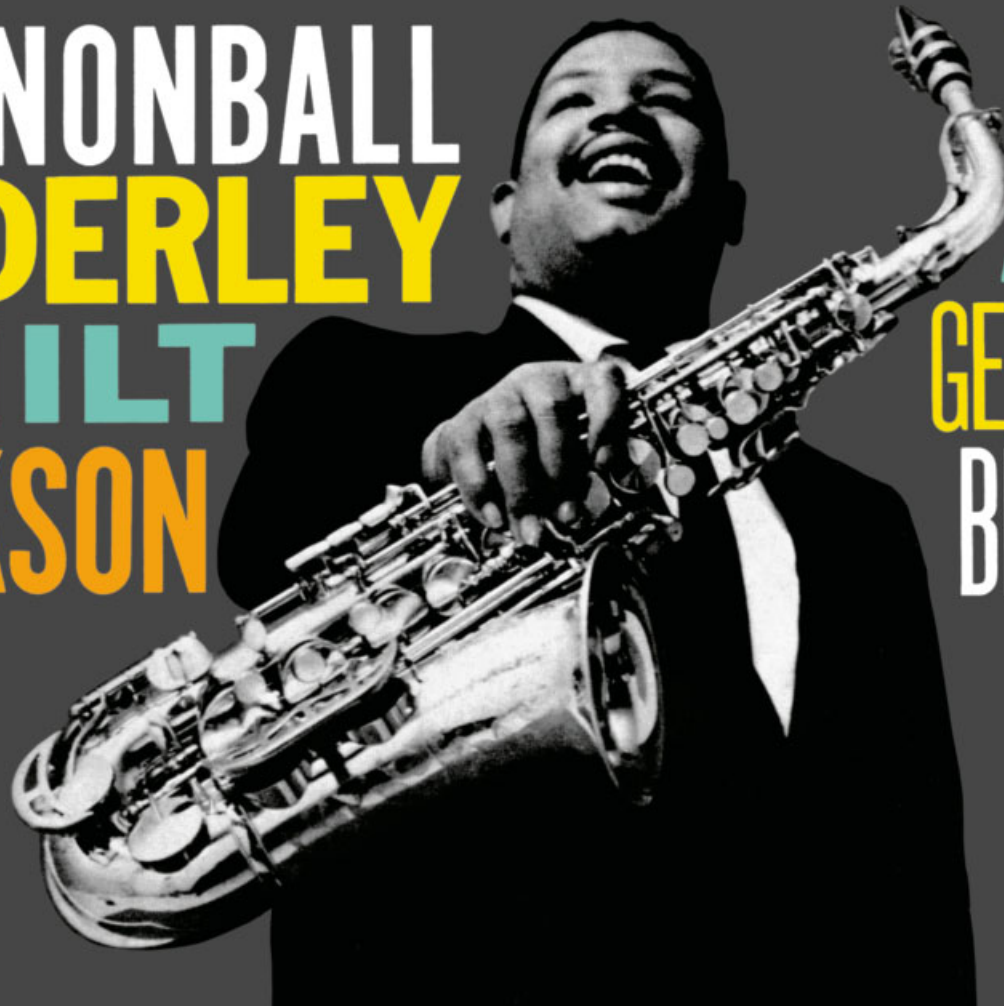
RIVERSIDE

CONTEMPORARY SERIES

1128

CANNONBALL
ADDERLEY
WITH MILT
JACKSON

THINGS
ARE
GETTING
BETTER



CHARLES STEWART—PAUL BACON

Things Are Getting Better

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Blues Oriental 5:01
(Milt Jackson) MJQ Music-BMI | 6. The Sidewalks of New York (take 5) 7:00
(Lawlor-Blake; arr. J. Adderley) Orpheum-BMI |
| 2. A Few Words :44 | 7. Sounds for Sid 6:27
(Julian Adderley) OJAC-BMI |
| 3. Things Are Getting Better 7:14
(Adderley-Langdon) Orpheum Music/OJAC Music-BMI | 8. Just One of Those Things 6:48
(Cole Porter) Warner Bros. Music-ASCAP |
| 4. Serves Me Right (take 5) 4:50
(Buddy Johnson) Sophisticate Music-BMI | * 9. Serves Me Right (take 4) 4:38
(Buddy Johnson) Sophisticate-BMI |
| 5. Groovin' High 5:22
(Dizzy Gillespie) Universal MCA Music-ASCAP | * 10. The Sidewalks of New York (take 4) 5:15 |

* bonus tracks not on original LP (mono)

On more than a few occasions, well-intentioned producer congregations of ultimately incompatible “all-stars” have ranged from the competitive mediocrity of most sports all-star games to just plain wrong. But when Orrin Keepnews brought Milt Jackson onto a Cannonball Adderley record date on October 28, 1958, the producer certainly knew what was up, and the resulting record title *Things Are Getting Better* could not have been more prescient. This is a sublime recording for several reasons, not least of which is the happy compatibility between Cannonball Adderley, his special guest Milt Jackson, their fluid drive, and all-galaxy rhythm section of pianist Wynton Kelly, bassist Percy Heath, and drummer Art Blakey. Cannon and Wynton’s playing relationship was to reach its zenith five months later on the March 2, 1959 recording of “Freddie Freeloader” for Miles Davis’s monumental *Kind of Blue*; Milt and Percy Heath were locked in from their longstanding Modern Jazz Quartet membership. Meanwhile Art Blakey, the quintessential Jazz Messenger who had first encountered Bags in early ’50s Dizzy Gillespie units, contributed his irresistible beat to this well-matched assemblage. One is left asking ‘does it get any better than this’? Based on the joy in Cannonball’s face expressed in Chuck Stewart’s classic cover shot, it seems the title of this date must have been running through Adderley’s head as he contemplated this opportunity.

The musical upbringing of Adderley and Jackson certainly suggests some measure of commonality. Cannonball, who had just turned 30 at the time and whose life was cut tragically short at age 46 by a ravaged heart valve, is the son and older

brother of jazz cornetists, in fact his whole family was music-immersed. Milt Jackson, who came up in the crucible of Detroit's historic jazz scene, first sang gospel duets with his brother Alvin at the tender age of seven, switching to the piano at 11 and the vibraphone in his teens. They each have Ray Charles in common, which in part explains their soul bona fides; Floridians Cannonball and his brother Nat prepped with the great bandleader back when Ray lived in Tallahassee, FL; Milt made both *Soul Brothers*, and *Soul Meeting* (Atlantic), and *Just Between Us* (Columbia) recordings with Brother Ray.

Originally billed as their first encounter, this was actually Cannon and Bags's second recording as they'd come together under Quincy Jones's baton for Milt's *Plenty, Plenty Soul* date for Atlantic Records in January '57. No matter, they are clearly an exceptionally matched pair, a fact borne out on this record. Both come by the blues and 'that healin' feelin' of the black church honestly. Milt Jackson's initial instrument was his voice, and later the guitar, performing in a touring gospel quartet as a young man long before mastering the vibes. Little is reported of Cannonball's childhood church immersion, but the gospel tinge was always part of his rich, full, eternally optimistic alto (and later soprano) saxophone playing, as well as his composition work. For those reasons alone the producer of this session, NEA Jazz Master Orrin Keepnews, bowled a strike putting this date together.

Besides the musical kinship of this pairing, which starts with their mutual immersion in the blues, Cannon and Milt's sonic rapport begins with the wonderful compatibility of the leader's buoyant and tuneful alto saxophone with Milt Jackson's

lustrous vibraphone. When Bags got serious about his instrument as a young aspirant he made the conscious decision to separate his sound from the prevailing Lionel Hampton approach by slowing the vibrato control on the instrument. That singular and quite influential sound, which gives Jackson an uncanny sense of dynamics, enables and encourages the round tone and easeful velocity of Adderley; those sonic groove drops of Milt's sound pallet pair beautifully with Cannon's always cheerful sound. These are two musicians who knew the groove intimately; they loved the blues and she heard their cry.

The first selection, Milt Jackson's "Blues Oriental," opens with a Far East motif as purely an appetizer for the blues course to come. "Things Are Getting Better," from Wynton Kelly's "churchy" chords, achieves the kind of bounce stemming from Blakey's shuffle and Heath walking the dog that is the essence of what it means to *swing*. Proto R&B bandleader-songwriter Buddy Johnson's "Serves Me Right" is delivered in its two takes as a gorgeous lament of the love-that-got-away variety. Following Jackson's intro, Cannon rises from the mist like a regretful predator lurking for a second chance. "Groovin' High," is a familiar bebop anthem from the book of Dizzy Gillespie that's pure grits and gravy for Jackson's clean, briskly swinging solo, the very soul of articulation on his instrument.

The familiar strains of "Sidewalks of New York" are invested in the Sunday morning joys of one of Gotham's gospel houses of worship. Meanwhile Adderley's "Sounds for Sid," with its passionate alto cadenza opener, is credited by Keepnews's original notes as being "dedicated to a favorite disc jockey"; not sure

which of the triumvirate of legendary platter spinners Cannon meant, but whether it be Chicago legend Sid McCoy, Philly's fabled Sid Marks, or bebop chronicler Symphony Sid, whichever of these historic deejays it is, he's paid an azure homage; and being a longtime jazz deejay I recognize the honor in these chords. "Sounds for Sid" also finds Wynton Kelly co-signing the tribute with a particularly pungent solo.

The closing essay on Cole Porter's timeless classic "Just One of Those Things" is a brisk bit of high spirited business that brings an apt closer to what the producer's original notes humbly understated as "fundamentally, a 'blowing' date in the best sense of that much-abused term." But this record is clearly much more, particularly given the successful partnership formed by the blues firm of Adderley & Jackson, each of whom were hall of fame representatives of the essence of the groove factor during their time as the respective histories of each have readily borne out.

—Willard Jenkins
May 2013

Willard Jenkins is a journalist-broadcaster-presenter based in Washington, DC; his latest book is *African Rhythms*, the autobiography of Randy Weston.

The main function of this album, clearly enough, is to bring together for the first time two of the most notable of today's jazz artists, with Milt Jackson heading a most distinguished supporting cast working here under the leadership of Cannonball Adderley.

The "all-star" session seems always to be in fashion, regardless of the hard fact that friction (or even chaos) rather than special inspiration is apt to be a fairly likely result of indiscriminately throwing big jazz names into the same recording studio. There is, however, nothing necessarily fatal about "star" recording, if only someone remembers to pay attention to basic rules like making sure the artists involved happen to be really musically (and personally) compatible. Because this rule has been obeyed here, the juxtaposition of Cannonball, Milt, and this rhythm section was a fully valid one, full of intriguing possibilities that, we think, turned into actualities in the recording.

Both Adderley and Jackson are striking individualists. Cannonball is regarded as primarily a formidable improviser (although some of his recent work, as on Riverside's *Alabama Concerto* LP, has given sharp indication that there is a great deal more to the man than just that). Bags, although he first brought his vibraharp onto the scene in the hot-and-heavy bop days of the late 1940s, is generally thought of in terms of the context in which he has worked steadily since 1953: as a key member of the Modern Jazz Quartet. You might think of these two, in the course of their respective normal working nights, as being at rather widely separated parts of the current jazz spectrum: Jackson, with the intricate and cerebral MJQ; Adderley, throughout 1958, featured with Miles Davis's blowing sextet. But the fact is that both men are far too talented and wide-ranging as musicians to be proper subjects for any such typecasting.

Bags and Cannonball belong together for several reasons—not the least of which is that both eagerly welcomed the opportunity to get together. There is also the fact that both are firmly "modern traditionalists": musicians with an awareness of jazz roots and with, in both cases, a strong rhythmic sense and an emphasis on the beat as a basic part of their playing pattern. Above

all, there is one other very fundamental meeting ground on which these two come together. Both are, deservedly, highly regarded as practitioners of the blues; and it is the spirit, sometimes the specific form, and always the “soul” of the blues that furnishes the prevailing mood for this album.

Operating in this “soul” groove, and with the mutual respect and admiration these five men feel for each other as a most important element, this turned out to be one of the most relaxed and instinctively well-integrated of record dates. The lineup was a carefully selected one: starting with the basic premise that he’d be working with Bags, Cannonball felt that the other three were clear-cut and necessary choices. Art Blakey, of course, is one of the most important—and most swinging—of today’s drummers; the firm and sensitive bassist, Percy Heath, has played regularly alongside Jackson in the MJQ; Wynton Kelly, best known for his work with Dizzy Gillespie’s recent big band and as Dinah Washington’s favorite accompanist, is considered by fellow musicians as just about the best of the younger “funky” pianists.

Cannonball contributes two themes: the earthy number that gives the album its appropriate title; and a slow-blues “Sounds for Sid” (dedicated to a favorite disc jockey) that is so strictly in a lights-out mood that—except for one bulb—it was recorded that way. He also provided the airy modernizing of “Sidewalks of New York.” Bags came up with the unusual “Blues Oriental,” and also set everyone straight on the changes for Dizzy’s memorable composition of the early-bop era, “Groovin’ High.”

This is, fundamentally, a “blowing” date, in the best sense of that much-abused term. It serves, among other things, to show just how much can happen when some very good men are at their ease and feeling in very good form.

—Orrin Keepnews

These notes appeared on the original album liner.

Cannonball Adderley—alto saxophone
Milt Jackson—vibes
Wynton Kelly—piano
Percy Heath—bass
Art Blakey—drums

Original recordings produced by **Orrin Keepnews**
Recorded by Jack Higgins at Reeves Sound Studios,
New York City; October 28, 1958.
Cover photograph—**Charles Stewart**
Cover produced and designed by **Paul Bacon-Ken Braren-**
Harris Lewine

Reissue produced by **Nick Phillips**
24-bit Remastering—**Joe Tarantino** (Joe Tarantino Master-
ing, Berkeley, CA)
Booklet Notes by **Willard Jenkins**
Editorial—**Rikka Arnold**
Project Assistance—**Abbey Anna, Chris Clough, Nick Ehnat**
Design—**Andrew Pham**

Milt Jackson appears through the courtesy of Atlantic
Records; **Art Blakey** courtesy of Blue Note Records.



RIVERSIDE 60

- 1 **BLUES ORIENTAL** 5:01
- * 2 **A FEW WORDS** :44
- 3 **THINGS ARE GETTING BETTER** 7:14
- 4 **SERVES ME RIGHT (TAKE 5)** 4:50
- 5 **GROOVIN' HIGH** 5:22
- 6 **THE SIDEWALKS OF NEW YORK (TAKE 5)** 7:00
- 7 **SOUNDS FOR SID** 6:27
- 8 **JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS** 6:48
- * 9 **SERVES ME RIGHT (TAKE 4)** 4:38
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MILT JACKSON—vibes
WYNTON KELLY—piano
PERCY HEATH—bass
ART BLAKEY—drums

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Reissue produced by **Nick Phillips**

24-bit Remastering—**Joe Tarantino** (Joe Tarantino Mastering, Berkeley, CA)

Booklet Notes by **Willard Jenkins**

There were few more logical pairings during the heyday of studio blowing dates in the 1950s than this parley of alto sax phenom Julian “Cannonball” Adderley and vibes giant Milt Jackson. Each man epitomized virtuosity, hard-charging swing, and blues-based passion. This is their only official recorded meeting (Adderley once employed the *nom de disque* Ronnie Peters on a Jackson album), made even better by the nonpareil support of the Wynton Kelly/Percy Heath/Art Blakey rhythm section. Among the gems of a program that includes two alternate-take bonus tracks and a few evergreen standards are Adderley’s celebratory title tune, the soulful Buddy Johnson ballad “Serves Me Right,” and an amble over “The Sidewalks of New York.”



RIVERSIDE 60

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RIVERSIDE

STEREOPHONIC

Things Are Getting Better: CANNONBALL ADDERLEY with MILT JACKSON

JULIAN 'CANNONBALL' ADDERLEY, alto sax; MILT JACKSON, vibes; WYNTON KELLY, piano; PERCY HEATH, bass; ART BLAKEY, drums.
New York, October 28, 1958

SIDE 1

1. Blues Oriental (4:55) (Milt Jackson)
2. Things Are Getting Better (7:07) (Julian Adderley)
3. Serves Me Right (4:42) (Budd Johnson)
4. Groovin' High (5:16) (Dizzy Gillespie)

SIDE 2

1. The Sidewalks of New York (6:57) (Lawlor-Blake/art. Julian Adderley)
2. Sounds for Sid (6:20) (Julian Adderley)
3. Just One of Those Things (6:41) (Cole Porter)

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A HIGH FIDELITY STEREOGRAPHIC Recording — Riverside-Reeves SPECTROSONIC High Fidelity Engineering. Produced, and notes written by, ORRIN KEEPNEWS. Engineer: JACK HIGGINS (Reeves Sound Studios). Cover produced and designed by PAUL BACON-KEN BRAREN-HARRIS LEWINE. Back-Liner photographs by LAWRENCE N. SHUSTAK. (Cover photograph by CHARLES STEWART, shows Cannonball Adderley with his King Super 20 Silectronic Alto Sax.

RIVERSIDE RECORDS



Milt Jackson

PHANTOM SPEAKER

RIVERSIDE STEREOPHONIC

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