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COLEMAN HAWKINS/The Hawk Relaxes





THE HAWK RELAXES COLEMAN HAWKINS

COLEMAN HAWKINS tenor saxophone
RONNELL BRIGHT piano KENNY BURRELL guitar
RON CARTER bass ANDREW CYRILLE drums

1 I'LL NEVER BE THE SAME 6:08	5 MOONGLOW 5:58
2 WHEN DAY IS DONE 4:24	6 JUST A GIGOLO 5:04
3 UNDER A BLANKET OF BLUE 4:35	7 SPEAK LOW 6:39
4 MORE THAN YOU KNOW 4:09	

DESPITE THE INHERENT MODESTY of its title, *The Hawk Relaxes* is far more than merely a tenor saxophonist—albeit one of the greatest who ever lived—at his ease. Recorded for Prestige's Moodsville subsidiary, the album presents Coleman Hawkins (1904-1969), paterfamilias of the tenor and one of its master balladeers.

As he grew older, Hawkins often made it a point to perform with much younger musicians, in order to keep his work fresh. Pianist Ronnell Bright, 30 years old at the time of this recording, was the oldest of Hawkins's accompanists herein, while drummer Andrew Cyrille was, at just 21, the junior partner. With the multifaceted guitarist Kenny Burrell and bassist Ron Carter, at the dawn of what would be a ubiquitously brilliant career, rounding out a highly simpatico group, Hawkins adroitly weaves his way rhapsodically through seven timeless popular songs that lend themselves to his signature harmonic brilliance.

I remember the sessions well, I remember how the musicians wanted to sound, and I remember their reactions to the playbacks.

Today, I feel strongly that I am their messenger. —RUDY VAN GELDER

Recorded by RUDY VAN GELDER at Van Gelder Studio, Englewood Cliffs, NJ; February 28, 1961.

Supervision by ESMOND EDWARDS. Remastering, 2005—Rudy Van Gelder (Van Gelder Studio).

All transfers were made from the analog master tapes to digital at 24-bit resolution. Notes by JOE GOLDBERG. Total Time 37:00

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COLEMAN HAWKINS

COLEMAN HAWKINS tenor saxophone
RONNELL BRIGHT piano KENNY BURRELL guitar
RON CARTER bass ANDREW CYRILLE drums

If ever an album did not need liner notes, this is that album. Notes are written for several reasons: to introduce an unfamiliar performer; to explain difficult music; to provide an after-the-fact justification for a result that might better have been justified properly in the recording studio. Obviously, none of those reasons obtain here. It is reasonable to assume that the major soloist on this LP is familiar to the jazz audience; neither the music nor its interpretation is difficult; and I happen to think that the results are warmly delightful, so there is no need to say that Musician X got lost and could not find the studio, or that his wife was expecting a baby momentarily, or that he inadvertently put his foot through Musician Y's bass drum, thus forcing Musician Y to develop a new style on the spot. It should be enough to say, "This is Coleman Hawkins playing ballads," and let it go at that. If printed in large enough type, this statement—which really conveys all the essential information not contained in the box at the upper left—would consume all the available space. Or else it could be written five hundred times, like they used to do in grade school.

But it has become mandatory that there is a certain amount of space in the back of a jazz LP that is supposed to be filled with more-or-less meaningful words, these words to lie somewhere in the nebulous area between good journalism and a straight sales pitch. So there are several approaches which could be taken. One could write the history of Coleman Hawkins, but that has been done a thousand times, so let it pass. Or one could quote from ecstatic reviews of other Coleman Hawkins albums, and there are more than enough of those to fill up this space, but they are not this Coleman Hawkins album, so let that pass, too.

There remain, it seems to me, only two things that need to be said. One is in the nature of biography. This year, for the first time *Down Beat's* critics' poll included a Hall of Fame category, a judgment which had previously been left exclusively to the Readers. The Critics, faced with that choice for the first time, voted

Coleman Hawkins into the Hall of Fame. And about time.

The other item that comes to mind is the *Down Beat* review of Hawkins's previous album in the Moodsville series, *At Ease with Coleman Hawkins* (Prestige/Moodsville vol. 7). It is, to my mind, a lovely record, similar to this except that there is no guitar, but the reviewer put it down simply because it was what it was—a quiet, relaxed, after-hours kind of ballad date. Background music, if you will.

It occurs that not all the people who feel the need of background or mood music in their lives are partial to the kind of music that, simply because it has no mood, is packaged to fill that need: Mantovani, Percy Faith, Melachrino, George Feyer, and so on down the interminable list. But it is enjoyable to have music playing while entertaining friends, doing chores around the apartment, or just relaxing, and some of the finest jazz I know seems to me to serve that purpose admirably: the Ellington combos of the late Thirties, Django Reinhardt, the less formal outings of the MJQ, and the quartet record that Ben Webster and Art Tatum made together would comprise a beginning list.

Of course, none of this music was recorded for background purposes, but that is not a necessary condition. For instance, if the various ballad performances which Miles Davis recorded for Prestige were ever collected into a single album, the result would undoubtedly be one of the most poignant mood music sets of all time.

The real point, then, is this: that such music can serve admirably as background, if you wish, but can also command your exclusive attention in the way that Mantovani never could, nor was he ever meant to.

It is somewhat the same situation as with a motion picture background score, and to use Miles Davis again for an example, the difference is roughly that between his improvised score for the French picture *Frantic* and what generally turns up on TV private eye shows.

THE HAWK RELAXES

I'LL NEVER BE THE SAME
WHEN DAY IS DONE
UNDER A BLANKET OF BLUE
MORE THAN YOU KNOW

MOONGLOW
JUST A GIGOLO
SPEAK LOW

So it seems strange to me there should be complaints if Coleman Hawkins chooses to record a ballad set, and have it labeled mood music. Surely, one of the several reasons for his enormous stature as a jazz musician is his ability to establish a mood—a genuine mood rather than an ersatz one—an ability which he possesses to an even greater degree than Mantovani. And as far as the matter of ballads goes, I seem to remember a Coleman Hawkins recording of "Body and Soul."

What the situation boils down to, basically, is that music, along with several other art forms, is often criticized on the basis of what it is not, rather than what it is. I am aware that this is an old argument, and even one that has been dragged out from time to time to justify things which needed a great deal of justification (as this LP does not), and even though it should be obvious that a dish is not a chair, certain critics persist in inquiring rather loftily, just why is this particular dish not a chair? If asked well enough, and with enough conviction and verbal ingenuity, there is no real answer to such a question, except perhaps to drop one's jaw in amazement, and if asked well enough, some people will be taken in by the argument to the extent that they might tend to forget that the question never really should have been asked in the first place.

There is another point to be made, a point implicit in the title of this album, *The Hawk Relaxes*. Too often recording has come to have a do-or-die atmosphere about it. One has visions of the A&R man whispering into the musician's ear. "You are etching this one for posterity, buddy." Of course, if there is any foolproof method for assuring that nothing at all will happen musically, that is the method. Coleman Hawkins is far from the best example to use of a musician who would be intimidated by such an approach. At this late date, it is doubtful that the recording situation holds any perils at all for him. And it is for precisely this reason that he is admirably suited to make an

album such as this. He comes to the studio with no tension or fears because he is Going To Make A Record; what he brings to the job at hand are his talent, his taste, his professionalism, and his tenor saxophone. But it is true of almost any artist that sometimes when he is consciously striving for something of importance or significance, the resulting tension can cause him to fail. Sometimes, of course, just that tension can make him go beyond himself and create on a level he might not otherwise be capable of, but that is a dangerous game to play, one with many pitfalls. It is often in a casual, relaxed situation such as this, with no pressure and no commitment other than to play as well as he can on the particular afternoon in question, that the best work will be achieved.

Perhaps this has turned into a defense of a recording philosophy. That, apparently, was needed. Some mention of the rhythm section is needed, too: Ronnell Bright, piano; Kenny Burrell, guitar; Ron Carter, bass; and Andrew Cyrille, drums. They are all young modern musicians, and it is a tribute to them as well as Hawkins that there is no discrepancy between his style and theirs. But to say that would be to venture into another area that has been covered countless times—how Hawkins always has his eye out for young musicians, how he has helped them, how well he is able to play with them. But, to go back to where we began, there is nothing new to say about Hawkins nor does he need any sort of defense. The only thing new about him is the new, fresh thing that is created every time he plays a song. Therefore, there are seven new, fresh facets of the Coleman Hawkins talent on this record. And that is all that has to be said about it.

—Joe Goldberg
original liner notes

I WAS THE ENGINEER on the recording sessions and I also made the masters for the original LP issues of these albums. Since the advent of the CD, other people have been making the masters. Mastering is the final step in the process of creating the sound of the finished product. Now, thanks to the folks at the Concord Music Group who have given me the opportunity to remaster these albums, I can present my versions of the music on CD using modern technology. I remember the sessions well, I remember how the musicians wanted to sound, and I remember their reactions to the playbacks. Today, I feel strongly that I am their messenger. —**RUDY VAN GELDER**

THE HAWK RELAXES REVISITED

EITHER I WAS RIGHT THE FIRST TIME, or else I have developed very little in nearly half a century. Or might it simply be that, as the Founding Fathers said, some truths are self-evident. In any event, when asked to supply new notes to this reissue of an album of Coleman Hawkins playing standards with a rhythm section, I thought there might not be that much to say about it. An album of ballads by the man who recorded "Body and Soul," possibly the most famous of saxophone improvisations—what more need be said? And indeed, when I looked at my original notes, there was this first sentence: "If ever an album did not need liner notes, this is that album."

So. Shall we try it again?

Here is how historian Gunther Schuller begins his essay on Hawkins in his book *The Swing Era*: "It is difficult to think of anyone in jazz who has had a greater influence on his contemporaries than Coleman Hawkins. . . . He founded a veritable dynasty of tenor saxophone players, not to mention a number of formidable altoists and baritonists. . . . Hawkins' mesmerizing hold on all who followed—except for Lester Young—was overwhelming, permanent, and unquestioned. One very large reason for this pervasive dominance is the extraordinary fact that Coleman Hawkins virtually invented the jazz saxophone, at least the tenor saxophone."

And since Hawkins, who rescued the instrument from circus and marching bands, there have been two great sources from which jazz saxophone flows—Hawkins, and, as Schuller notes, Lester Young. Which

is to say, vertical and horizontal. Another way of saying the same thing would be harmonic and melodic; Hawkins playing never-ending arpeggios and Young floating above the bar line. But this was said about Hawkins: "He's the person who played the tenor saxophone, who woke you up and let you know there was a tenor saxophone", and the person who said it was Lester Young. But by 1961, when these recordings were made, the two preeminent saxophonists in jazz were Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, both of whom had done their initial important recording for Prestige. To some people, Coleman Hawkins was a bit of a back number, playing behind the bar in the carnival atmosphere of Manhattan's Metropole.

But you wouldn't know it to look at him. When he came to Rudy Van Gelder's studio to record he always wore a suit and tie, usually a white shirt, and a hat. He was a patriarch and he knew it.

Usually, unless it was a Swing Era date, he worked with younger musicians. That was nothing new for him; Hawkins was one of the first to hire Thelonious Monk. On this session, the pianist is Ronnell Bright, an obvious choice for a ballad date, given that he went on to become the arranger and conductor for Sarah Vaughan, Lena Horne, and Nancy Wilson. The guitarist Kenny Burrell appeared on many Hawkins sessions around this time. Drummer Andrew Cyrille made a reputation among the avant-garde, working with Cecil Taylor. And of course, Ron Carter became a member of the Miles Davis Quintet that included

Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, and Tony Williams.

The repertoire all comes from the classic age of American songwriters. The one surprise is "When Day Is Done," which harks back to an earlier time of parlor recitals and more extensive use of sheet music. With that exception, this could almost be a dance record, and it should not be forgotten that Hawkins spent a lot of time in the dancebands of Fletcher Henderson and the Englishman Jack Hylton. This meant that his training went back to the days when jazz still performed a social function—playing for dancing. Probably the most overt nod to this is the inclusion of "Moonglow," which was a big hit for Artie Shaw.

The pickup nature of the group also harks back to the days when Hawkins traveled the land as a single, a paladin, playing with local rhythm sections wherever he went.

And given all that, what one notices first is the smooth ease of the performances. The album was recorded in one session. There can't have been many retakes. But there is never a moment when Hawkins seems to be straining for effect, or losing his way.

Here is how Whitney Balliett describes his achievement: "Hawkins invented the tenor saxophone in the way that Richardson invented the novel: he took an often misunderstood instrument and made it work right for the first time."

In discussing the celebrated "Body and Soul" recording, Gary Giddins gets more specific: "One of the most celebrated improvisations in music, and a gauntlet tossed at every other saxophonist in jazz. There is nothing to compare with it. For two choruses and a brief coda, Hawkins rhapsodizes over the chords, never even hinting at Green's melody after the first seven notes, and the profusion of ideas, the sustained tension, the incomparable rhythmic authority build dynamically, phrase after phrase."

It is a huge accomplishment, and much of it has to do with tone. To return to the two fathers of jazz saxophone, Hawkins and Young, notice how they sound so little like each other that they hardly seem to be

playing the same instrument. And between the two of them stood Ben Webster, who sometimes seemed to be playing his own breath as much as his instrument.

In the second half of the century there are Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, both derived from Hawkins but quite different from one another, and, at the other end of the spectrum, Stan Getz, who once famously said, "Anyone who doesn't play tenor sax like Lester Young is wrong." And even Coltrane, often accused of deliberate ugliness, once said of Getz's ravishing tone, "We'd all sound like that if we could." (Let me add that a young Sonny Rollins was impelled to play the tenor by seeing a photograph of Hawkins, in one of his beautiful suits, holding his beautiful horn.)

One major difference between the two schools is Lester Young's statement that he always learned the lyrics of a ballad he intended to play. There is no indication that it ever occurred to Coleman Hawkins to do anything like that. A song to him seemed to be a series of chords to be negotiated, to be transformed into a string of arpeggios. It might be this that made those players who came after him, starting with the hugely influential Dexter Gordon, take from both Hawkins and Young.

So, here we have Coleman Hawkins in 1961, when the talk was of Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy, doing what he did, playing with magisterial confidence. He was gone a few years later, but time has not yet dimmed his accomplishment, nor is it likely to.

—**JOE GOLDBERG**

June 2005



1 I'LL NEVER BE THE SAME

(Malneck-Signorelli-Kahn) EMI Robbins Catalog/
Gilbert Keyes Music-ASCAP 6:08

2 WHEN DAY IS DONE

(DeSylva-Katscher) Warner Bros. Music/
Stephen Ballantine Music-ASCAP 4:24

3 UNDER A BLANKET OF BLUE

(Livingston-Symes-Neiburg) Hallmark Music/
Music Sales-ASCAP 4:35

4 MORE THAN YOU KNOW

(Younmans-Rose-Eliscu) WB Music/LSQ
Music-ASCAP 4:09

5 MOONGLOW

(Hudson-DeLange-Mills) EMI Mills
Music/Scarsdale Music-ASCAP 5:58

6 JUST A GIGOLO

(Caesar-Casucci-Brammer) Chappell &
Co./WB-ASCAP/G.E.M.A. 5:04

7 SPEAK LOW

(Weill-Nash) Chappell & Co./
Hampshire House Publ.-ASCAP 6:39

COLEMAN HAWKINS tenor saxophone

RONNELL BRIGHT piano

KENNY BURRELL guitar

RON CARTER bass

ANDREW CYRILLE drums

Recorded by RUDY VAN GELDER at
Van Gelder Studio, Englewood Cliffs, NJ;
February 28, 1961.

Supervision by ESMOND EDWARDS

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