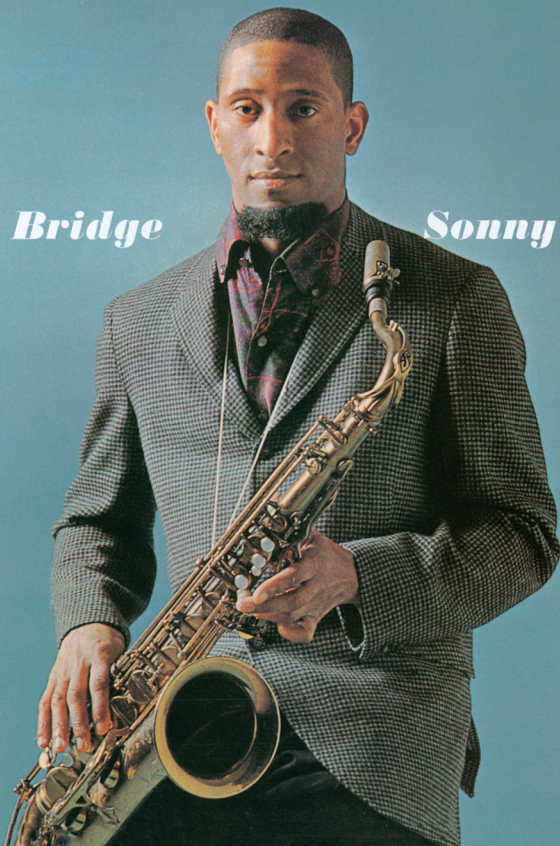


LSP-2527 LIVING STEREO

***The Bridge***

***Sonny Rollins***





# About Sonny Rollins before his dramatic 1959 "retirement":

"Rollins was, among other things, the most influential practitioner on his instrument to come along since Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins; the unofficial head of the hard-bop school (a refinement of bebop); and one of the first of the now plentiful abstract or semi-abstract jazz improvisers."—*The New Yorker*

# About Sonny Rollins after his return to jazz in late 1961:

"He creates sounds that mirror precisely his formidable personality and that are played in such a way as to be well-nigh evangelistically stamped on the listener. . . . One becomes Rollins' follower each time he picks up his horn. Rollins isn't merely back; he is looming."—*The New Yorker*



Symbolism and reality are often interlarded. So it is with the title of this album, for "The Bridge" has many meanings in the life of Sonny Rollins. They range from the nearly symbolic to the totally reality of one specific bridge, a 1,600-foot span over the East River connecting the New York boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn. Musically, the album is a bridge between the Sonny Rollins who rose quickly (but with solidly grounded steps all the way) to a position of top rank among saxophonists of the post-bop era of modern jazz development in the fifties, and the Sonny Rollins to be of the sexties. This is no idle puffery of this album's significance, for it bridges a very real gap—over two years during which Sonny stopped appearing in public in order to study, try out ideas, and take the time to think about himself, his music, and the environment in which he played and lived. Sonny's bridges over this span are many. Some are musical. Others involve personal relationships, in and out of music. Most important are those which relate Sonny himself as an individual to the worlds in which he lives, ranging outward from the tight ones of family, friends and fellow musicians.

In the musical world, the shock of Sonny's retirement came in the fact that he had achieved, after his student, critical acclaim and public acceptance that musicians dream of and so seldom attain. It was like a pitcher on a pennant-winning team announcing, after he had had a twenty-game season, that he was quitting for a while to learn how to pitch.

The bridge with a capital "B" was first heard of in a thirty-day-digest form of fiction by Ralph Boston in the July 1961 issue of *Metronome*, about a jazz fan who, as he walked one sunny night across the Brooklyn Bridge, one lonely saxophone—and found that it was no dream fantasy, but a musician who had chosen the unrequited pedestrian walkway high above the motor traffic to peacefully commune with himself and his work. That the supposed fiction of counter actually took place was quickly guessed by Sonny's friends and fans, for not only were there many signs of him, but the whole idea of this kind of woodshedding pointed to the serious, thoughtful, and slightly mystic Sonny. The proximity of Sonny's apartment to the Bridge also lent credence to this theory. It was all true, except that Boston had changed the bridge: Sonny had actually been playing on the Williamsburg Bridge, which started virtually at the foot of the street he lived on. When, in the fall of '61, Sonny announced his return to the jazz scene via an engagement at the Jazz Gallery in downtown New York, his reappearance was not only big news as a musical event, but the reporters converged to ask him questions about why he was doing what he did during the years—and—always—why, how, and what about the bridge. Sonny's dignified, simple answers were reported with respect in every article I have seen to date—a tribute to the kind of earnest people covering the jazz scene.

Sonny's exit from, and re-entry into, the music business has been clearly and correctly chronicled. In brief, he wanted to get away from the grind to find himself and his playing; to decide what he really wanted to play and to work out ways of being able to play it; and to decide what kind of life he wanted to lead. As for the Williamsburg Bridge, it enabled him to be alone, both for concentration and inspiration, and for the sake of privacy—not for himself but for others who, Sonny knew, were loud and sometimes annoyingly amused by the sounds coming from his horn. "For instance, there was this pregnant girl in a neighboring apartment," Sonny recalls. "I couldn't subject her to all that sound—and of course I couldn't do myself any good by inhibiting my practicing. I didn't know what prenatal effects would result in the baby; but do you know, she's a beautiful, happy child."

What of the musical bridge to Sonny's brilliantly successful past? This album, of course, is it. You will find that Sonny has developed not only as an improviser

\* The difference is really minor; the bridges are not only almost side by side at the Manhattan end, but they are nearly the same length; the Williamsburg is exactly 45 inches longer.



# THE BRIDGE—SONNY ROLLINS & CO. LPM/LSP-2527

with JIM HALL, guitar  
Ben Rishewsky, bass; Ben Riley or H. T. Saunders, drums  
Produced by Bob Prince

SIDE 1

WITHOUT A SONG (ASCAP 5-20)  
WHERE ARE YOU (ASCAP 5-103)  
JOHN S. (DME 7-36)

SIDE 2

THE BRIDGE (DME 5-55)  
GOD BLESS THE CHILD (DME 7-50)  
YOU DO SOMETHING TO ME (ASCAP 4-45)

By George Avakian

in whom over-all shape and form is every bit as important—perhaps more so—than the individual parts of his improvisations, but that he has sought out still more ways in which to accomplish these ends. Particularly of interest to us is the group's ability to respond to one another in many forms and methods of improvisation. The men have been carefully chosen for this purpose, and they respond to it in a way that is neither too tight nor too loose. From the wide repertoire of the group, Sonny has chosen a program which not only is varied in terms of musical materials but in the way the group does with it. "We are still working out ways of improvising which are fresh, exciting to ourselves (and we hope to our listeners), and in this album we have presented some of them, such as the changes in and out of free time and back again in *Pilgrimage* and *Song* and *You Do Something to Me*, which are not set routines but are felt by the group; or the ensemble ad lib in *God Bless the Child* (a Billie Holiday song I love—it has such a fine message and meaning) which is in contra-diction to the usual solo ad lib into the group playing in tempo. Incidentally, while I start *You Do Something* that way, we go into a vamp instead of the melody as most groups might. There's a break later which begins on the fourth beat of a measure instead of the expected downbeat-downbeat, and the ending is one of those improvised group constructions that we try now and then as the spirit moves us.

"These are just some of the unusual improvisational techniques we use, many of which are not in this album simply because this is just a beginning for a new group which already has an extensive repertoire. Some of these things we will continue to use and develop further; and some we might discard. I am always looking forward; if something doesn't work now, I don't worry about it because I know I will either make it go next time, or we'll develop something else. And if it does work, I feel it will be our strength in the future."

Sonny is well known for his winning way with standards—there are four familiar tunes and two originals in this set. As has often been noted, he is not only a master craftsman of improvisation who is looked up to by his fellow musicians and "in-the-know" admirers, but he also has great appeal for pop-culture listeners because he is a man who respects melody, and when re-shaping a tune he does not hesitate to leave significant along the way both as to the melody and to the overall shape of particular improvisations which he makes. He is also a man who has the greatest natural of "hard" improvisation, the rare beauty of *Where Are You* and *God Bless the Child* in this album are ample testimony to the tenderness of which he is equally capable.

The two originals by Sonny not only contain some typically personal Rollins blarneying, but also have structural interest. *John S.* is a bluesy, swinging tune. The strain, has a two-chord construction. One alternates 6/8 passages with 4/4's; the other is a straight 4/4. John S., which has unexpectedly free statements of melody before and after the bridge, has a strong, swinging, bluesy character. Sonny's marvelously built solo, growing out of a simple repeated declaration, is one of his finest examples of long-range improvisation.

The key to the success of these two originals lies in Sonny's sense of structure and his gift for melody. Jim Hall, who deserves respect special billing, is a tower of strength in the accompaniment, and his extraordinary sense of well. Jim is a splendidly sensitive musician whose wide range of experience has proven his willingness as well as ability to fit into all sorts of jazz contexts. He is obviously something of a find, the first original member of the quartet with which Sonny marked his return at the Jazz Gallery. There have been changes in the drum chair in it. H. T. Saunders, who plays so sensitively in *God Bless the Child*, has Ben Riley distinguish himself as the drummer in the remaining selections.

It remains only to point out that this album is not only a historic moment, but also a representative example of the many gifts of Sonny Rollins—his firm roots, present accomplishment, and concentration on the future—are his strongest musical characteristics. Thus this album is not only a bridge from Sonny's past to the present, but a certain promise for the future as well.

Recorded in RCA Victor's Studio B, New York City. Recording Engineer: Ray Hall.

Other RCA Victor albums you will enjoy: Desmond Blue, Paul Desmond with Strings LPM/LSP-4130 . . . It's About Time Joe Morello LPM/LSP-2486

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