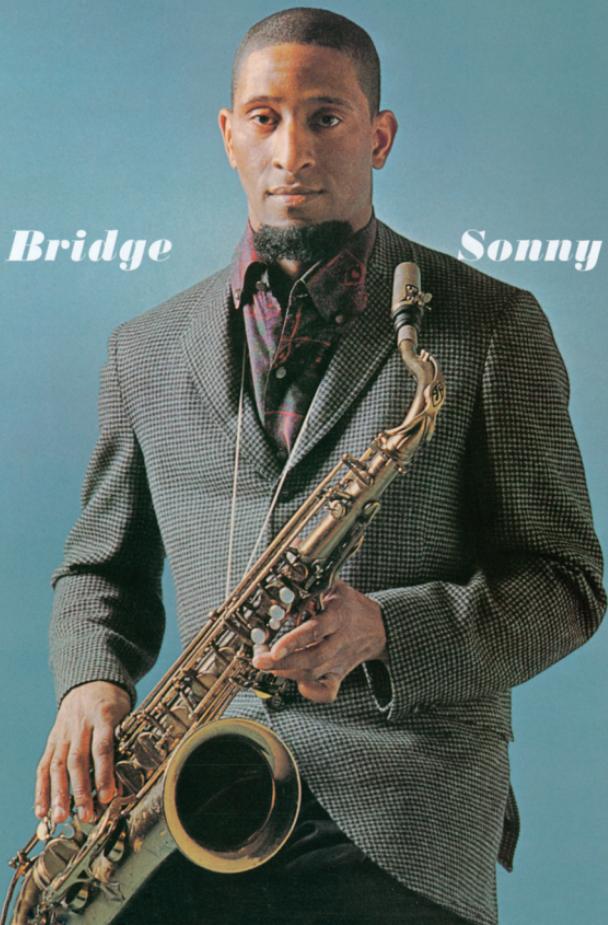


LSP-2527 LIVING STEREO

*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 be-bop); 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*



Symphony and reality are often intermixed. 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 mistily symbolic to the total reality of one specific bridge, a 1,600-foot span over the East River connecting the New York boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn. Most important, the bridge is the way Sonny Rollins got from one level of success (but with solidly stepped goals at the way) to a position of top rank among the saxophonists of the post-bop era of modern jazz development in the fifties, and then the Bridge was the way he got back. This is no mere self-aggrandizement, for it is significant that for it bridges a very real gap in his career: 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 return to jazz in late 1961 was a dramatic one. One of the most important relationships, in and out of music, was those which relate Sonny himself as an individual to the people in which he lives, ranging outward from the tight-knit jazz community to the world at large.

In the musical world, the shock of Sonny's retirement came in the fact that he had achieved the kind of status, critical acclaim and public acceptance that musicians of an earlier generation could only dream of. He was like a pitcher in a pennant-winning team, someone who had had a twenty-game season, that he was quitting for a while to learn how to pitch.

The shock was a capital "up" in a thirty-disguised world of fading jazz. Sonny's first album, *Metropolis*, was the first record I heard, as I heard, as a lonely night lonely across the Brooklyn Bridge, the sound of a lonely saxophone—and found that it was no dream fantasy, but a musician who had found his way to a place where he could be his true self and could peacefully communicate with himself and his work. That the supposed fictional encounter actually took place was quickly gauged by Sonny's friends and fans, for not only were they made to believe in Sonny's return, but the kind of understanding 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 Bertrand had changed the bridge; Sonny's actual home was in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, at the foot of the street he lived on. When, in the fall of 1961, Sonny announced his return to the jazz scene via an engagement at the Jazz Gallery in downtown New York, his response was to be asked, "What's the bridge?" and to be asked to explain why he had to ask him questions about his reasons for his retirement, what he did during the time, and—always—why, how, and what about the bridge. Sonny's dignified, simple answers were received with admiration. "I have seen to date—a tribute to the kind of concern 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 be able to think, to be able to study, to be able to work to be able to work ways of being able to play it; and to decide what kind of life he wanted to lead. After the Williamsburg bridge, it enabled him to be alone, both for concentration and for the kind of life he wanted to lead. Sonny's return to jazz, as Sonny knew, were being disturbed by the loud and sometimes seemingly aimless sounds coming from his horn. "For instance, there was this pregaist girl in a neighboring apartment who would sing all the time, and I could do nothing about it and of course I couldn't do myself any good by inhibiting my practicing. I didn't know what kind of punishment effects would result in the baby; but do you know, he's a beautiful, happy child?"

What about the 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

Bob Cranshaw, bass; Ben Riley or H. T. Saunders, drums  
 Produced by Bob Prince

SIDE 1

WITHOUT A SONG (ANACAP 7:03)

WHERE ARE YOU (ANACAP 5:05)

JOHN S. (BME 7:04)

SIDE 2

THE BRIDGE (BME 5:55)

GOD BLESS THE CHILD (BME 7:04)

YOU DO SOMETHING TO ME (ANACAP 6:45)

George Avakian

is when overall 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 Sonny is the group's ability to respond to one another in many forms and methods of improvisation, and he has found that the best way to do this is to have them relate to an extent that is unheard of in most jazz combos.

From the wide repertoire of the group, Sonny has chosen a group piece which not only has a definite character, but also is in keeping with the group's style. "We are still working out ways of improvising which are fresh, exciting to ourselves (and to our listeners), and in this album we have presented some of them, some new changes in the form of free time and back to again in 'The Bridge' song; and 'You Do Something to Me'." The group's first piece, the title track, or the ensemble ad lib in *God Bless the Child* (a *God Bless* Hallie song I love—it has such a fine message and meaning) which is in counter-dictation to the usual solo piece, is a good example of this. In this piece, which I call *the Yoda* because that way, we go into a vamp instead of the melody as most groups night. There's a break later which begins on the fourth beat of a measure instead of the expected eighth, and the group improvises around this. The group improvises group construction that way 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 my first beginning for a new group. I think the group has a definite character. Some of these things will continue to use and develop further; others we might discard. I am always looking forward; if something doesn't work out, I don't worry about it because I know we'll find something else. I am not afraid to change, and if it does work out now, I feel it will be even better in the future."

Sonny is well known for his winning way with standards—there are some familiar tunes on this album, and some typical Sonny tunes have been noted, but 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 neophyte listeners because he is a man who respects music and when re-shaping a standard he does not violate it, leaves it in tact, and the way he does it is unique and to the overall sound of each particular improvisation. And while Sonny is considered by many to be the greatest master of "hard" improvisation, the raw beauty of *Where Are You* and *The Bridge* on this album are ample testimony to the tenderness of which he is equally capable.

The two originals by Sonny not only contain some typically powerful moments, but also a remarkable example of ensemble interaction. *The Bridge* virtually originated in the studio, has a two-chorus construction. One alternates 6/8 passes with 4/4; the other is straight 4/4. John S., which has unexpectedly free statements of melody led by Jim Hall, is the body of the piece. The two choruses of the bridge have Sonny's melodic line, long and growing out of a simple repeated declamation, is one of his finest examples of long-line improvisation in which ensemble interaction is at its peak of success, both as to musical excitement and musical form.

Concerning Jim Hall, he is a man of strength and power, not only in the ensemble, but in his extraordinary solos as well. Jim is a splendidly sensitive musician whose wide range of experience has proven his willingness as well as his ability to play in the future. Sonny's melodic line, which is obviously something of a find, is the other original member of the quartet with which Sonny marked his return at the Jazz Gallery. There have been changes in the drum chair, as it is. Saunders was playing on the drums at *The Bridge* and *God Bless*, while Ben Riley distinguished himself as the drummer in the remaining selections.

It remains only to point out that this album is not only of historic moment,

but also a superlative example of why this many great Sonny—his first roots,

and his first recordings—will be the future—the future—of his unique musical characteristics. Thus this album is not only a bright 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-2438 . . . It's About Time Joe Morello LPM/LSP-2486

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