
BST-84003
MOANIN' ART BLAKEY AND THE JAZZ MESSENGERS
STEREO
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BLUE NOTE

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ART BLAKEY
AND
THE JAZZ MESSENGERS

LEE MORGAN, trumpet; BENNY GOLSON, tenor sax; BOBBY TIMMONS, piano; JYMIE MERRITT, bass; ART BLAKEY, drums.

MOANIN'

ARE YOU REAL

ALONG CAME BETTY

THE DRUM THUNDER (MINIATURE) SUITE
FIRST THEME: DRUM THUNDER
SECOND THEME: CRY A BLUE TEAR
THIRD THEME: HARLEM'S DISCIPLES

BLUES MARCH

COME RAIN OR COME SHINE

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Blakey, though he sometimes coats his verbal messages with a surface of sardonic humor, is in deadly earnest about selling his audiences on the importance of the music he represents. To one audience he pleaded: "Jazz is worth more to this country in foreign aid than all the billions of dollars the government can spend. It's American through and through. I beg of you, support jazz. I'm not proud, I'm begging you on my *knees* to support your own music." And in St. Louis, explaining one night to a noisy crowd that he couldn't rise above them by playing louder, because he didn't have a rock and roll band, he added, "We play modern jazz, and to understand it you must listen. We study, we rehearse. The Jazz Messengers are very serious about getting the music across to you. If you don't want to listen, maybe the person sitting next to you does."

Fortunately, in the year or two that have elapsed since Art gave vent to these outbursts, the musical climate has warmed perceptibly to jazz in general. During the recent past Art's message has been transmitted by a succession of new and well-equipped solo talents; the group has retained its simple two-horns-and-rhythm format and remains a reflection of its leader's personality, no matter who may be standing in the front line or flanking Art in the rhythm section.

Of the personnel heard on these sides, the horns of Lee Morgan and Benny Golson are too familiar to Blue Note fans to need any introduction, as is Bobby Timmons' piano. There, is, however, one newcomer in the house, an artist talented and promising enough to deserve a momentary spotlight and a biographical bow. He is bassist Jymie Merritt.

Born in 1926 in Philadelphia, Jymie was still in school when he first heard Jimmy Blanton on the classic Ellington records and was inspired to study bass. The opportunity to follow the Blanton tradition was delayed by a period in the service, but soon after his resumption of civilian life in 1946 he began to study concert bass with a member of the Philadelphia Symphony, as well as spending three years at the local Orenstein School. After gigging with Tadd Dameron, Benny Golson and Philly Joe Jones in 1949, he went on the road with Bull Moose Jackson. This was the first of a series of rhythm and blues jobs — he was with Chris Powell just after Clifford Brown had left the group, and from 1955-57 spent much of his time touring the south with B.B. King. But there were opportunities to play jazz between these jobs. Commuting from New York to Philadelphia he played with Sonny Stitt, Lester Young and Roy Eldridge. Merritt, who joined Blakey in the fall of 1958, names Ray Brown, Charlie Mingus, Oscar Pettiford, Al McKibbon and Paul Chambers as his favorites (*after* Blanton, that is).

The session racks up a self-challenging achievement by starting right out with a climax, for it would be difficult to improve on the groove established by Bobby Timmons' composition *Moanin'*. The first chorus is the quintessence of funk, based on the classic call-and-response pattern, with Bobby's simple phrases (focused on the tonic) answered by the horns and rhythm punctuations on straight, churchy pairs of chords (B Flat and F). Notice how simply Lee's solo opens, fanning out slowly in impact and intensity until by the first release he is swinging in a more complex fashion. Two choruses each by trumpet, tenor and piano are followed by one on bass.

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Along Came Betty, a wistful theme played by the horns in unison, was inspired not by the personality but, curiously, by the walk of the young lady for whom it was named. An attempt was made in the composition to capture "the musical effect of her grace and femininity." If the music reflects her gait accurately Betty walks at a moderate pace with evenly placed, legato steps. Notice in Lee's chorus the wry simplicity of the first few measures in his last eight bars. Benny, too, tends to underplay in his solo, while Art's subterranean swells at bars 8 and 16 are the only changes of pattern in an otherwise unbroken and unflaggingly efficient rhythmic support. The Bobby Timmons chorus, which at this tempo could have been a clutter of sixteenths, bases itself more on a triplet feel in its single-note lines. The gentle mood is retained as the horns resume for the final chorus, ending lightly and politely as they began.

The second side opens dynamically with Golson's *Drum Thunder Suite*, which was born of a desire on Art's part to play a composition making exclusive and dramatic use of mallets. Since mallets automatically tend to suggest thunder, the title was selected, says Golson, before a note was written.

The work is in three movements: the first, *Drum Thunder*, is self-explanatory, with contributing thunderclaps by soloists Morgan, Golson and Timmons serving as bridges between the Blakey statements. The second movement (subtitled *Cry a Blue Tear*) is designed in sharp contrast, with a Latin feeling ("so that Art could show how subtly and effectively he can shade"). The third theme, *Harlem's Disciples*, is a funky melody in which the only strict rhythm girders are Art's sock cymbals. A brilliant moment of tension is created by the piano solo, with horn backing, before the front line takes over to lead into the concluding drum solo.

The implications of *Blues March* are clear from the first measure. An attempt is made here (with considerable success, it seems to me) to fuse some of the spirit of the old New Orleans marching bands with the completely modern approach of improvisation as it is felt by the present-day soloists featured here; at the same time the theme, with its slight bugle-call orientation, has a period quality that ties the work together in a unique and compelling manner. It is rewarding to study the way in which Art supports the solos by trumpet, tenor and piano with a heavy four-four rhythm that escapes any suggestion of thudding monotony, yet retains the marching mood established by the introduction. Timmons' solo is quite striking in its gradual build from a simple one-note line into an exciting chordal chorus.

Come Rain or Come Shine is a reminder that Blakey has found the secret of reconciling the hard-bop temperament of his band with the melodic character of a typical standard tune. The melody is slightly rephrased through the use of syncopation, the horns introduce it in unison and the soloists take over for a quartet of choruses—Timmons, Golson, Morgan, Merritt—that are no less a reflection of the Messengers' essential qualities than anything else in the set. The magnificent pulsation of yet another superbly integrated Blakey rhythm section is heard to maximum effect on this track, it seems to me; indeed, one is reminded again how much of this quintet's real identity, regardless of who happens to be playing with it or writing for it at any given time, is in essence a mirror of the personality of its leader. Merritt's chorus here is remarkably melodic, never just a bass chorus, but a solo that could have been played no less valuably on a trumpet, saxophone or piano.

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Cover Photo by BUCK HOEFFLER
Recording by RUDY VAN GELDER

Users of Wide Range equipment should adjust their controls for RIAA curve.

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Cover Photo by BUCK HOEFFLER. Recording by RUDY VAN GELDER.
Mastered by BERNIE GRUNDMAN, 2012.

ART BLAKEY AND THE JAZZ MESSENGERS

The first onstage school of jazz ultimately opened for long-term session with drummer Art Blakey who enlisted young players to his revolving-door group, The Jazz Messengers, not only to teach but also to continually refresh himself and his band with new energy, excitement and especially repertoire. (During a 1954 live session, *A Night at Birdland*, Blakey remarked during the set: "I'm gonna stay with the youngsters. When these get too old I'll get some younger ones. Keeps the mind active.") The Messengers was co-founded in the early '50s by Blakey and pianist/talented songwriter Horace Silver, who bowed out in 1956 to pursue his solo career.

Throughout its existence, the Messengers served as the proving ground for dozens of greats, from tenor saxophonist Hank Mobley to trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. A select sampling of impressive musicians who learned at the feet of the bass drum and elevated at the high hat of Blakey: pianists Wynton Kelly, Keith Jarrett, John Hicks, Cedar Walton, James Williams, Benny Green; saxophonists Jackie McLean, Lou Donaldson, Gary Bartz, Johnny Griffin, Branford Marsalis, Donald Harrison, Bobby Watson, Kenny Garrett; trumpeters Clifford Brown, Woody Shaw, Freddie Hubbard, Donald Byrd, Terence Blanchard; bassists Wilbur Ware, Reggie Workman, Doug Watkins; guitarists Bobby Broom, Kevin Eubanks. Quite a crew.

Blakey had an uncanny sense of bringing fresh-to-town artists who made their marks on the Messengers as rising stars, who then left for greener

MOANIN'

pastures—which was fine with the leader because that's how the in-and-out personnel policy of the group worked. School 24/7, grinding tours, playing to top form with no slouching, then graduation and hopefully onward and upward.

One of the greats that Blakey mentored was tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter, who in the late '50s to early '60s became the music director of the band and primary composer. He delivered several new songs to the Messengers set list, including "Chess Players," "Lester Left Town," "Children of the Night," "Ping-Pong," "On the Ginza" and "Mr. Jin" among many others. After five years (a long term) with Blakey, Shorter jumped ship and joined Miles Davis' soon-to-be-classic quintet.

Shorter's work gave new life to Blakey's band, but none of his tunes were as seminal and long-lasting as the batch of compositions that were released on the Messengers' 1958 classic, *Moanin'*. The album stands as one of jazz's all-time recordings, largely because of its tunes, including the hip and swinging "Moanin" by 22-year-old pianist Bobby Timmons that opens the date and four songs by 29-year-old musical director and tenor saxophonist Benny Golson: the relaxed "Along Came Betty," "Blues March" (complete with Blakey's military drum beat opening the number), the lyrical "Are You Real?" and the powerful "The Drum Thunder Suite." A hard-bop cover of the Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer tune "Come Rain or Come Shine" closes the six-pack. Quintet personnel on the date also includes very young trumpeter Lee Morgan (soon to be a huge Blue Note star in his own right) and bassist Jymie Merritt.

"Moanin,'" "Along Came Betty," "Blues March" and "Are You Real?" are all played to perfection by the band and not only deservedly became integral to Blakey's songbook, but have also found their place in the jazz canon. However, often overlooked is the compelling three-movement drum piece Golson wrote for Blakey who stars with gusto. "The Drum Thunder Suite" opens with mallet thunder with the horns driving the storm, continues with the Latin-tinged middle section and the closing funky melody that features Morgan on a clarion trumpet solo.

It's rare that a jazz album—let alone a pop album—includes so many "hits." That's what Blakey accomplishes on *Moanin'* with ease, swing and rumble.

—Dan Ouellette, 2012