

**The**  
**ALTOSAX**  
**of**  
**EARL BOSTIC**

Solographer: Jan Evensmo  
Last update: Feb. 12, 2018, Dec. 20, 2023

Born: Tulsa, Oklahoma, April 25, 1913  
Died: Rochester, New York, October 28, 1965

*Introduction:*

We grew up with Earl Bostic and had a very ambivalent attitude to his music; on one hand we enjoyed his popular echoed recordings very much, on the other his music was not jazz and he was even sort of traitor to 'our' music. Later we modified our views, he was a fine jazz musician until he was 35 years old, and then he was smart, good and lucky enough to have commercial success he deserved very much!

*Early history:*

Started on alto and clarinet whilst at local Booker T. Washington School. Worked with Terrence Holder's band (1931-32), briefly with Benny Moten early in 1933, then enrolled at Xavier University in New Orleans, whilst there became proficient on several instruments, worked with Joe Robichaux (ca. 1934). Left Louisiana, worked with Ernie Fields' band before joining Clarence Olden's band in Columbus, Ohio. Played and arranged for band jointly led by Charlie Creath and Fate Marable 1935-36, then joined Marion Sear's band in Cleveland, subsequently with Clyde Turpin in Buffalo. To New York in January 1938, joined Don Redman in April 1938. Briefly with Edgar Hayes, then own band at Small's from 1939 (occasionally playing trumpet, guitar and baritone sax), also worked with Hot Lips Page's band at Mimos Club, New York, during 1941, later led own band at same venue. Briefly with Hot Lips Page, then joined Lionel Hampton in June 1943, left during following year and formed own band, resident at Small's from August 1944; occasionally worked out of town 'gigs' including residency at Club Bengasi, Washington, during 1947 (ref. John Chilton).

## EARL BOSTIC SOLOGRAPHY

**LIONEL HAMPTON & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Oct. 12, 1939**  
Henry "Red" Allen (tp), J. C. Higginbotham (tb), Earl Bostic (as), Clyde Hart (p), Charlie Christian (g), Artie Bernstein (b), Sidney Catlett (dm), Lionel Hampton (vib, vo).

Four titles were recorded for Victor, one has altosax:

042942-1 Haven't Named It Yet Solo 8 bars. (FM)

Earl Bostic was already a mature artist and an 'old' man when he got his first recording opportunity with one of Lionel Hampton's star-sprinkled studio groups. His brief solo on "... Yet" shows excellent technique.

No further recording sessions until 4 years later:

**LIONEL HAMPTON & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Nov. 21, 1943**  
Personnel probably very similar to below (but definitely including Arnett Cobb, Lucky Thompson (ts)).

Broadcast from the Famous Dorr:

She's Funny That Way Solo 16 bars. (S)

Postscript of Feb. 12, 2018: Found this exciting item on an old cassette!! Very nice altosax solo, typical of EB (and even some Lucky!!).

**LIONEL HAMPTON & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Nov. 29, 1943**  
Bigband personnel possibly: Cat Anderson, Roy McCoy, Joe Morris, Lammar Wright (tp), Fred Beckett, Al Hayes, Michael Wood (tb), Marshall Royal (cl), Gus Evans, Earl Bostic (as), Arnett Cobb, Al Sears (ts), Charlie Fowlkes (bar), Milt Buckner (p), Eric Miller (g), Vernon King (b), Fred Radcliffe (dm), Lionel Hampton (vib, ldr), Dinah Washington (vo).  
AFRS Jubilee no. 53:

Lady Be Good Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (F)

The Major And The Minor Solo 8 bars. (M)

**NYC. March 2, 1944**

Same/similar. Four titles were recorded for Decca, one has altosax:

71826 Chop-Chop Solo with orch 8 bars. (M)

**NYC. March 10, 1944**

Same/similar. Three titles were recorded for VDisc, one has altosax:

The Major And The Minor Soli 8 and 16 bars. (M)

**NYC. March 19, 1944**

Same/similar. Eight titles, no info.

**Summer 1944**

Same/similar. Broadcasts, no information, altosax soli quite likely, please help!!

EB played for one year with Lionel Hampton, but the number of solo incidences is not very high. The by far most interesting item is "Lady ..." with a long solo with most impressing technique. It is obvious that EB is a great talent, and that he is master of his horn, that he can swing, but he has yet to demonstrate that he has got the feeling of true great jazz musicians.

**HOT LIPS PAGE & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Sept. 12, 1944**  
Hot Lips Page (tp, vo), Jesse Brown, Joe Keyes (tp), Vic Dickenson (tb), Earl Bostic, Floyd "Horsecollar" Williams (as), Don Byas, Ike Quebec (ts), Clyde Hart (p, cel-5706), Tiny Grimes (g), Al Lucas (b), Jack Parker (dm).  
Four titles were recorded for Savoy, three have altosax soli, two by EB:

5707-1 Good For Stompin' Solo 16 bars. (FM)

5707-2. Good For Stompin' (NC) As above. (FM)

5707-3 Good For Stompin' As above. (FM)

5708 Lips Blues Solo 12 bars. (S)

EB takes part in several of the excellent smallband sessions from 1944 and onwards. "Good ..." has a solo where he jumps like a rabbit in the first eight and then screams in the next eight, quite interesting but the two (no three!) takes seem to be more or less identical, that is a disappointment. He is rolling the blues on

“Lips ...”, not exactly tasteful but with sovereign technique. Postscript of Dec. 2023: Note that Mosaic has a third take of “... Stompin”.

**BUCK RAM’S ALL STARS** **NYC. Sept. 18, 1944**

Frankie Newton, Shad Collins (tp), Tyree Glenn (tb), Earl Bostic (as), Don Byas (ts), Ernie Caceres (bar), Red Norvo (vib), Teddy Wilson (p), Remo Palmieri (g), Slam Stewart (b), Cozy Cole (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Savoy:

5714	Twilight In Teheran	Solo 16 bars. (F)
5714-alt.	Twilight In Teheran	As above. (F)
5715	Morning Mist	Intro 8 bars. Coda 8 bars. (S)
5716	Swing Street	Solo 16 bars. (M)
5716-alt.	Swing Street	As above. (M)
5717	Ram Session	Solo 24 bars. (FM)
5717	Ram Session	As above. (FM)

EB contributes nicely and swings on this in general very exciting session. His soli on the two takes of “Twilight ...” and “Swing ...” have the same well defined structure, although with small but notable differences. However, on the two takes of “Ram ...” he shows that he is a true improviser after all, listen for yourself! On “Morning ...” he is sweeter than sugar, but he knows his horn better than most.

**HOT LIPS PAGE & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Sept. 29, 1944**

Hot Lips Page (tp, vo), Earl Bostic, B. G. Hammond (as), Don Byas (ts), Clyde Hart (p), Al Lucas (b), Jack Parker (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Commodore, no EB on 4816 “These Foolish Things” but:

4814-1	Six, Seven, Eight Or Nine	As below. (SM)
4814-2	Six, Seven, Eight Or Nine	Obbligato 12 bars. (SM)
4815-1	You Need Coachin’	As below. (FM)
4815-2	You Need Coachin’	Solo 24 bars. (FM)
4817-2	Fish For Supper	In ens 8 bars. (M)

Quoting Dan Morgenstern’s liner notes on Mosaic: “If you think you know Bostic from his later days as a hit maker, think again. His works here show that he was a jazzman; a sensational improviser as well as a stunning technician of the saxophone, from whom young John Coltrane by his own admission learned some important lessons”. About “You Need ...” he says: “He has a hard act to follow, but doesn’t let us down. His breath control is astonishing, and so is his conception – the two choruses are a single musical statement”. And about the alternate take: “And Bostic shows that he’s not playing a “set” solo, though the conceptual framework is the same. The faster tempo finds him just as firm, and he starts his second chorus with trills. It’s not as perfect as the other solo, but exciting”. Well, sometimes I feel there is more technique than true feeling to EB’s soloing, but it is impressive, yes. Fine background playing on “... Nine”, and note his strong ensemble on “... Supper”!

**REX STEWART & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. July 30, 1945**

Rex Stewart (cnt), Tyree Glenn (tb, vib), Earl Bostic (as), Cecil Scott (ts, bar), Dave Rivera (p), Brick Fleagle (g), Alvin “Junior” Raglin (b), J. C. Heard (dm).

Four titles were recorded for ???, issued on English Parlophone:

Big Chief Pawnee	Solo 8 bars. (FM)
Three Horn Parley	Solo 16 bars. (FM)
Dreamer’s Blues	Duet with (tb) 16 bars. (SM)
Shady Side Of The Street	Solo 18 bars. (SM)

An interesting swing session, and EB solos on all items, he is easy to recognize in the uptempo titles “Big Chief ...” and “Three ...”, and even more pleasant going slower with “... Blues” and particularly “Shady Side ...”, the latter one of his nicest soli from this period.

**HOT LIPS PAGE & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Sept. 1945**

Hot Lips Page (tp, vo), Buck Clayton (tp, arr), unknown (tp), Benny Morton, J. C. Higginbotham, Sandy Williams (tb), Earl Bostic, unknown (as), Don Byas, Ben

Webster, unknown (ts), Rufus Webster (p), unknown (elg), (b), Buford Oliver (dm).

Seven titles were recorded for Continental, one has EB:

3404 Race Horse Mama Solo 12 bars. (M)

There is a lot of good musicians to share solo space on this session, and EB gets only one opportunity. This time he opens with one of his screams, identifying himself, and the solo continues in his typical, technical style.

**EARL BOSTIC & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Nov./Dec. 1945**

Roger Jones (tp, vo-615), Benny Harris, Dick Vance (tp), Claude Jones, Benny Morton (tb), Eddie Barefield (cl), Earl Bostic (as), Don Byas, Walter Thomas (ts), Ed Finkel (p), Tiny Grimes (g), Al Hall (b), Cozy Cole (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Majestic:

T614 The Man I Love Solo 32 bars (S) to 64 bars (F) to long coda. (S)

T615 Hurricane Blues Solo 12 bars. (SM)

T616 The Major And The Minor Soli 8 and 32 bars. (FM)

T617 All On Soli 4 and 12 bars. (FM)

EB's first recording session under his own name, and still jazz as we know it, he has not yet developed the concepts that later should give him great fame with King records. However, it is not difficult to understand why he got the chance to record on his own, even to launch himself on a feature number like "The Man ..." with full backing band. There is not the slightest bit on modesty here, from a sensitive slow part to a fast one where he can be exhibiting all his technique, perhaps too much of it. Impressive, except for the coda which is rather corny. Nevertheless this item must be considered one of EB's most important in the forties. When this said, one might prefer to go for the fine, longest solo on "The Major ...". "All On" is mostly technique, while "Hurricane ..." is starting with scream but cools down a bit later.

**HOT LIPS PAGE NYC. 1946**

Hot Lips Page (tp, vo), Earl Bostic (as), John Hartzfield (ts), Danny Barker (g), unknown (p), (b), (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Hub, no EB on "Buffalo Bill Blues" but:

430-B Kansas City Jive Soli 8 and 16 bars. (FM)

Fine altosax soli here, the first so laidback that one may wonder who it is, but on the second, EB's technique comes through, no doubt.

**COUSIN JOE VOCAL ACC. BY**

**EARL BOSTIC's SEXTET NYC. Feb. 1946**

Tony Scott (cl), Earl Bostic (as), Ernie Washington (p), Jimmy Shirley (g), Pops Foster (b), J. C. Heard (dm), Cousin Joe (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Gotham:

116 You Ain't Such A Much Obligato 12 bars. (S)

117 Fly Hen Blues Solo 12 bars. (SM)

118 Lonesome Man Blues Obligato parts. (S)

119 Little Eva Obligato 8 bars. (SM)

Mostly slow background playing here but one good solo.

**EARL BOSTIC & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. ca. March 1946**

Lemon Boler (tp), Tony Scott (cl), Earl Bostic (as, vo), John Hardee (ts), George Parker (p), Jimmy Shirley (g), Jimmy Jones (b), Eddie Nicholson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Gotham:

134 Liza Straight intro. Break to solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. Coda. (F)

135 That's The Groovy Thing Pt 1 Solo 24 bars. (M)

136 Tippin' In Straight 16+8 bars, (tb) on bridge. Solo 8 bars. Straight. (M)

137 Baby You Don't Know It All Solo 12 bars. (M)

**NYC. ca. July 1946**

Same. Four titles:

152	Jumpin' Jack	Solo 8 bars. (M)
153	That's The Groovy Thing Pt 2	Solo 24 bars. (M)
154	The Barefoot Boy	Solo 12 bars. (M)
155	That's The Heat You Gonna Beat	Soli 4, 14 and 16 bars. (M)

These are real jazz recordings, and the most noteworthy is "Liza", played in an extremely fast tempo, too fast maybe, but technically very impressive. From the latter session, "... The Heat ..." is my favourite item.

**COUSIN JOE VOCAL ACC. BY**

**EARL BOSTIC's ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. ca. Aug. 1946**

Unknown (tp-168/169), Tyree Glenn (tb), Tony Scott (cl), Earl Bostic (as), John Hardee (ts), Hank Jones (p), Jimmy Shirley (g), Pops Foster (b), Eddie Nicholson (dm), Cousin Joe (vo).

Six titles were recorded for Gotham, no EB on 164 "If I Just Could Keep Still", 167 "Make Me As Strong As Samson" and 169 "Lightning Struck The Poorhouse" but:

165	When Your Mother's Gone	Straight 16 bars. (M)
166	When The Roll Be Called In Heaven	Intro. (S)
168	My Tight Woman	Obbligato 12 bars. (S)

As you can see, there is little EB here, only some background on "... Woman" should be noted.

**HOT LIPS PAGE**

**NYC. Oct. 1946**

Hot Lips Page (tp,vo), Earl Bostic (as), John Hartzfield (ts), Lannie Scott (p), Danny Barker (g), Carl Wilson (b), George Jenkins (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Apollo, no EB on 3057 "Open The Door Richard" but:

1098	Birmingham Boogie	Obbligato 24 bars to solo 24 bars. (FM)
1099	Gimme Gimme Gimme	Solo 12 bars. (SM)
3058	Texas And Pacific	Obbligato parts to break and solo 16+8 bars, (tp) on bridge. (M)
3058-alt.	Texas And Pacific	As above. (M)

Good altosax soloing on the final Page session.

From now on Earl Bostic is his own master with recording sessions for Gotham and King, pursuing a great career on the border between jazz and popular music. Next session in 1947. The solography conveniently stops here.

*Late history:*

From early 1950s enjoyed tremendous international success as a popular recording artist. Extensive coast-to-coast touring. Moved to Los Angeles. Suffered serious heart attack in 1956, inactive for three years. Returned to touring in 1959, but work was again curtailed by illness. After a period of semi-retirement, he began residency at the Midtown Tower Hotel in Rochester, after playing the opening night he suffered another heart attack and died two days later.

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