

The  
**TENORSAX**  
of  
**HENRY BRIDGES**  
**“HANK”**

Solographer: Jan Evensmo  
Last update: May 19, 2015

Born: Oklahoma City, ca. 1908  
Died: 1986

*Introduction:*

Playing the exciting Harlan Leonard records from 1940, we discovered quickly that the orchestra contained two fine tenorsax players, with Henry Bridges as possibly the most important one. His solography was part of Vol. 2 in my Jazz Solography Series (1975).

*History:*

Played in local bands with Charlie Christian, then with Christian, toured with Alphonso Trent (1938) and played in Leslie Sheffield's Band (1939). Featured with Harlan Leonard from September 1939 until being called up for service in the US Army. Led service band in the USA and Europe, after demobilization moved to California (ref. John Chilton).

## HENRY BRIDGES SOLOGRAPHY

**HARLAN LEONARD AND HIS ROCKETS** **Chi. Jan. 11, 1940**

Edward Johnson, William H. Smith (tp), James Ross (tp, vo, arr), Fred Beckett, Richmond Henderson (tb), Darwin Jones (as, vo), Harlan Leonard (cl, as, bar, ldr), Henry "Hank" Bridges, Jimmy Keith (ts), William Smith (p), Effergee Ware (g), Winston Williams (b), Jesse Price (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Bluebird, five feature HB:

044589-1	Rockin' With The Rockets	Solo 16 bars. (M)
044590-1	Southern Fried (Hairy Joe Jump)	Solo 8 bars (last ts-solo). (M)
044591-1	Contact	Solo 16+8 bars, orch on bridge. (M)
044593-1	My Gal Sal	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
044594-2	Skee	Solo 12 bars. (FM)

Jazz history is full of first-rate musicians who have never received the renown they deserved. Tenor saxophonist Henry Bridges is certainly such a one. He belongs definitely to the Kansas City tradition, but with his own quite personal style. When listening to his soli, one is easily reminded of the Basie saxophonists Lester Young and Herschal Evans and also of Hines' Budd Johnson. However, Bridges has more than enough personal characteristics to deserve to be called an original and creative musician. He often uses very large intervals and is not afraid of exploring the whole range of his instrument. On his first recording session one notices particularly "... Sal". Here he takes a complete and very interesting chorus in which his rich sound is somewhat Evans-esque. There is nothing amateurish to his style, and probably Bridges was a more than competent musician during the last part of the nineteen-thirties without having the opportunity to record. "Contact" is also a remarkable piece. There is much Lester-like phrasing to be heard, but with a very personal flavor. His use of "dirty" notes in the lower register is a kind of experiment which predates its common acceptance by almost a decade. The rest of his soli here are even and good. Note particularly "... Fried", a brief piece demonstrating his typical way of "dragging" his phrases.

**HARLAN LEONARD AND HIS ROCKETS** **Chi. March 11, 1940**

Same, except Stanley Morgan (g) replaces Ware. Myra Taylor, Ernie Williams (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Bluebird, three have HB:

047796-1	I Don't Want To Set The World OF	Solo 8 bars (1 <sup>st</sup> ( ts)-solo). (FM)
047797-1	Ride My Blues Away	Solo 24 bars. (FM)
047799-1	Parade Of The Stompers	Solo 32 bars. (M)

Several interesting soli to be heard here, with "Ride ..." as the most outstanding. He presents a firm, driving playing which seems quite epoch-making. The romanticism of the thirties is far away, and the new ideas of the forties are pushing ahead. The second chorus in particular clearly points forward to the style of Illinois Jacquet. Bridges' strength is not so much in melody as in rhythm and harmony, and he uses these daringly to great advantage. "Parade ...", a kind of rhythmic game, is a good example of this. Note also the introduction to this solo which is logically and cunningly built. The remaining solo, "... Fire", is rather ordinary.

**HARLAN LEONARD AND HIS ROCKETS** **Chi. July 15, 1940**

Personnel as March 11, except Billy Hadnott (b) replaces Williams.

Six titles were recorded for Bluebird, five have HB:

053206-1	Rock And Ride	Solo 16 bars (1 <sup>st</sup> ts-solo). (M)
053206-2	Rock And Ride	As above. (M)
053207-1	"400" Swing	Solo 16 bars (1 <sup>st</sup> ts-solo). (M)
053209-1	My Pop Gave Me A Nickel	Solo 26 bars. (FM)
053210-1	Please Don't Squabble	Solo 12 bars. (M)
053211-1	A-La-Bridges	Soli 32 and 14 bars to coda. (S)
053211-2	A-La-Bridges	As above. (S)

This session is probably the most interesting of the four which Bridges made with Leonard, also because it presents two opportunities to study alternate takes. The most outstanding number is "A-La-Bridges", a feature number for tenor saxophone and a close parallel to Evans' "Blue And Sentimental" with Basie. It is a very pleasant number indeed, with lots of beautiful music. The two takes do not differ much from each other in the main context, but several details identify them easily. It is difficult to prefer one to the other. It certainly would have been rewarding to have had more slow recordings by Bridges, but alas, these are all which exist with this great but largely unknown tenor player. The two takes of "Rock ..." do not belong among his greatest soli, but the differences are abundant enough to mark the inventiveness of the soloist. Finally, there is a charming and modest solo in "... Squabble", a good and driving one in "My Pop...", while "... Swing" sounds somewhat lacking in concentration.

**HARLAN LEONARD AND HIS ROCKETS** **Chi. Nov. 13, 1940**

Personnel as July 15, 1940, except Walter Monroe (tb), Winston Williams (b) replace Beckett and Hadnott.

Eight titles were recorded for Bluebird, seven issued, five have HB:

053638-1	Dameron Stomp	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
053638-2	Dameron Stomp	As above. (FM)
053639-2	Society Steps Out (Rachmaninoff Jumps)	Solo 64 bars. (F)
053640-1	Mistreated	Solo 12 bars. (M)
053643-1	Keep Rockin'	Solo 16 bars. (FM)
053644-1	Take 'Um	Solo 24 bars. Solo 84 bars partly with orchestra to coda in halved tempo. (F)

Already we have arrived at the last of the four Leonard sessions, and we must leave Henry Bridges to the oblivion (or almost so) of the postwar years. A lovely swinging blues chorus in "Mistreated" and three fresh, well constructed pieces in fast medium are interesting enough. However, "Take 'Um" and "Rachmaninoff ..." are the most valuable from a historical point of view, being the most up-tempo of his soli. "Rachmaninoff ..." contains two excellent, forceful and driving choruses, and the reasons for rejecting the record are not to be found in the work of Bridges (nor yet with any other obvious defects). "Take 'Um" contains 7 choruses in a row. There are some minor defects to be heard, but they are unimportant, and the soli demonstrate his easy rhythmic approach to the music. Seen melodically, the solo is not particularly interesting, but it seems happy and "bigband-ish". With "A-La-Bridges" it completes a composite picture of a personality and an important tenor saxophonist who still has his admirers.

**JULIA LEE AND HER BOY FRIENDS** **LA. Sept. 1946**

Geechie Smith (tp), Henry Bridges (ts), Julia Lee (p, vo), Nappy Lamare (g), Billy Hadnott (b), Sam "Baby" Lovett (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Capitol:

1369-3	Julia's Blues	Solo 24 bars. (M)
1370-3	Lies	Solo 18 bars. (S)
1371-1	Gotta Gimme Whatcha Got	Solo 24 bars. (FM)
1372-4	When A Woman Loves A Man	Intro 4 bars. Obligato 4 bars. (S)

**Same**

Personnel as above except Lucky Enois (g) replaces Lamare.

Four titles were recorded for Capitol, three issued, two have HB:

1376	Oh Marie	Solo 16 bars. (FM)
1378	A Porter's Love Song	Soli 8 and 8 bars. (FM)

Six years have passed since the famous recordings of Harlan Leonard and his Rockets with HB as the most prominent tenorsax soloist, with great promise. Too bad HB slipped into obscurity with this session as the only small band evidence of his capabilities. The session in general is very nice with good vocal and trumpet, and HB makes fine contributions. Still playing in the Kansas City and Prez tradition, he is not unaware of modern developments, and I seem to note a Dexter influence, for instance in the opening of "Julia's Blues". Still, HB has got his own thing, and his sound is the same as in 1940 and clearly recognizable. All items on these dates have

important tenorsax contributions, and it is only so sad that HB is never heard soloing again in his "own" style.

**CLIFFORD BLIVENS**

**LA. 1949**

Vernon Smith (tp), Marshal Royal (as), Henry Bridges jr. (ts), Charles Waller (bar), Lee Wesley Jones (p), Louis Speiginer (g), Billy Hadnott (b), Rudolph Pitts (dm), Clifford Blivens (vo).

Three titles (or more) were recorded for Swingtime, no tenorsax on "Korea Blues" but:

Fat Man Boogie	Solo 36 bars. (M)
Fat Man Boogie (alt.)	As above. (M)
If I'm Wrong	Solo 20 bars. (M)

Although I cannot recognize HB's style here, the playing is "fat" and strong and well above the average r&b level, quite noteworthy.

**PEPPY PRINCE & HIS SUGARMEN**

**LA. April 1950**

Henry Bridges (ts), Jackie Glenn (p), Frank Pasley (g), probably Eddie Davis (b), Peppy Prince (dm), The Flames (vo-quartet).

Two titles were recorded for Selective:

SE79	Sugar Man Pt 1	24 bars with (vo-q) to solo 12 bars to 44 bars with (vo-q). (M)
SE80	Sugar Man Pt 2	Solo 24 bars to 24 bars with (vo-q). 24 bars with (vo-q). (M)

Interesting discovery with HB playing almost all the way through, mostly joined by the vocal quartet. His style is easily recognized in the three solo choruses, and he seems to be in excellent shape.

**HELEN HUMES ACC. BY**

**MARSHAL ROYAL AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

**LA. May 9, 1950**

Personnel including Henry Bridges (ts).

Four titles were recorded for Discovery but no tenorsax soli.

**DAMITA JO**

**LA. May 21, 1950**

Bigband personnel including Henry Bridges (ts). Damita Jo (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Discovery, not available.

No further recording sessions.

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