

The
ALTOSAX
of
JAMES MOODY

Solographer: Jan Evensmo
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Born: Savannah, Georgia, Feb. 26, 1925
 Died: San Diego, Dec. 9, 2010

Introduction:

It took a long time before I recognized, even longer to appreciate James Moody and his music. His subtle and often introvert playing was simply too sophisticated for a young man who at that time went for more outward directed and groovy stuff. Later I discovered and understood that Moody was one of the greatest performers of all time on his instruments. Listening to his appearance with Johnny Griffin at Molde Jazz Festival, two metres from the stage, became one of my greatest live jazz events ever!

Early history:

He grew up in Reading, Pennsylvania, and in Newark, New Jersey, where at the age of 16 he took up the alto saxophone before changing to tenor saxophone. While serving in the air force (1943 – 46) he belonged to a military band and played in Dizzy Gillespie's orchestra during a performance in Greensboro, North Carolina; after his discharge, joined Dizzy Gillespie on June 14, 1946, playing tenor saxophone. In late 1948 he travelled to Europe, where he toured France, Scandinavia and Switzerland, again took up the alto saxophone, and recorded a version of "I'm In The Mood For Love" (1949) that became a hit recording when it was issued in the USA by Prestige. After moving late in the summer of 1951 to New York, he formed a septet that played a style of jazz strongly influenced by rhythm-and-blues; he toured and recorded as the leader of this group for five years. He made a series of outstanding recordings for Argo (1956 – 63), formed a second group in which he played flute, and worked briefly with Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt; from 1962 to 1969 he played in a small group with Gillespie (ref. The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz).

JAMES MOODY & HIS SWEDISH CROWNS Stockholm, Oct. 12, 1949

Personnel for the (as)-titles: Leppe Sundwall (bass-tp), Arne Domnerus, James Moody (as), Gösta Theselius (ts), Thore Swanerud (p), Yngve Åkerberg (b), Anders Burman (dm).

Five titles were recorded for Swedish Metronome, two have altosax soli by JM:

31	Body And Soul	Solo 32 bars (S) to 16 bars (M) to 8 bars to coda. (S)
32	Moody's Mood For Love	Soli 32 and 8 bars to coda. (S)

Once in a century, somebody creates beautiful art that challenges the establishment. James Moody's first altosax recordings, "Body ..." and "... Love" are jazz treasures to be played in the next centuries. JM has for several years been a prominent tenorsax player, but his lyrical talents have not been quite revealed before he takes up the altosax in far off Sweden. There is something undefinable in these two items, and particularly "... Love", that moves you profoundly. Not surprising that they later got lyrics. Except for a piano intro on "Body ..." and brief solo on "... Love", this is all JM, the others playing a soft background arrangement. Sit down, relax and play these two items, and whether you know them or not, you will be amply rewarded!

JAMES MOODY & HIS BAND Stockholm, Jan. 23, 1951

Leppe Sundevall (bass-tp), Arne Domnerus, James Moody (as), Carl-Henrik Norin (ts), Lars Gullin (bar), Rolf Larsson (p), Gunnar Almstedt (b), Anders Burman (dm). Six titles were recorded for Swedish Metronome, issued on Prestige:

192	The Man I Love	Solo/straight 24 bars (S). Solo 32 bars. (M) to solo 8 bars to long coda. (S)
193	Again	Solo/straight 32 and 16 bars. (S)
194	Embraceable You	Intro to solo 32 bars. Solo 6 bars to long coda. (S)
195	How Deep Is The Ocean?	Soli 32 and 8 bars to long coda. (S)
196	Am I Blue?	Solo/straight 64 bars. Solo 16 bars. Solo 8 bars to long coda. (M)
197	I'll Get By	Solo/straight 30 bars. Solo 12 bars. Long coda. (SM)

Obviously the first altosax session must have made great impression on fellow musicians as well as producer, because now one year later, a similar opportunity for JM's altosax is organized in Stockholm. The emphasis is still on slow and emotional tempi with occasional venturing into medium and some flashing runs. Elaborate arrangements in the background strengthen the impression of great music, and one of the most original and different modern altosax players. This is no session for those who look for action, often rather straight sections, but soft and profound art. All six items have much to offer, although it is impossible to repeat the success of the first session, and I hate to select a highlight, but "How Deep ..." (also with a baritonesax solo!) ranks high.

JAMES MOODY, HIS STRINGS AND RHYTHM Paris, July 13, 1951

James Moody (as, ts), (fl), (oboe), (cl), (frh), (strings), (harp), Raymond Fol (p), Pierre Michelot (b), Pierre Lamarchand (dm), Pepito Riebe (bgo), Andre Hodeir (arr, cond).

Eight titles were recorded for Vogue, five have altosax:

V4058	Si Jolie	Soli 32 and 8 bars to long coda. (SM)
V4059	Chantez Pour Toi	Soli 16 and 32 bars to long coda. (M)
V4060	Une Boucle Blonde	Intro. (S). Solo 24 bars. (M)
V4061	Jackie My Little Cat	Soli 8 and 16 bars to long coda. (S)
V4062	September Serenade	Soli 24 and 4 bars to long coda. (S)

In the tenorsax solography I wrote the following: "A beautiful "forgotten" session! The string and woodwinds arrangements are better than most I have heard of its kind in U. S. sessions, and JM plays with an inspiration it is very easy to understand. Choosing altosax for some titles, tenorsax for others, he creates some of the most beautiful jazz ever made in the early 1950s. Usually there is a slow introduction and conclusion, mostly straight, or free rhythm, and inbetween there is a magnificent chorus in medium tempo. It is as if JM has carried the romantic feeling from Sweden

with him to Paris, a feeling never quite to be retained when moving back to the harder U. S. environment. You must listen to JM here!!". Playing the altosax items now several years later, I stand by my happy feelings. Listen, enjoy and admit that strings can contribute to great jazz if used seriously. Five highlights!

JAMES MOODY QUINTET

Roger Guerin (tp), James Moody (as), Raymond Fol (p), Pierre Michelot (b), Pierre Lemarchand (dm).

Eight titles were recorded for Vogue:

4079	More Than You Know	Soli 16 and 16 bars to long coda. (S)
4080	Deep Purple	Soli 32 and 32 bars. (M)
4081	I Cover The Waterfront	Solo 48 bars. (S)
4082	Moody's Mode	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
4083	That's My Desire	Soli 32 and 8 bars to coda. (S)
4084	Bootsie	Solo 6 choruses of 12 bars. 24 bars 4/4 with (dm). (FM)
4085	Lover Come Back To Me	Solo 4 choruses of 64 bars. Solo 32 bars to coda. (F)
4086	This Is Always	Solo 48 bars to coda. (S)

Only two weeks later there is another altosax session in Paris, for the first time in a 'normal' quintet format. The four uptempi items show that JM's altosax style not always was soft and emotional but fast and furious; dig primarily his long and very fine solo on "Lover..."! But of course, through the four slow items he reinforces the deep and serious impression we already has got through the previous three sessions. Soft ballads like "... Waterfront", "... Always" and the other two rank high on altosax greats!

JAMES MOODY

NYC. Sept.- Oct. 1951

John Grims (tp), Bob Range (tb), James Moody (as, ts), Cecil Payne (bar), John Acea (p), Larry Goins (b), Chink Williams (dm).

Four titles were recorded for EmArcy, two have altosax:

4605	Serenade In Blue	Solo/straight 48 bars to long coda. (S)
4606	Margie	Break. Soli 32 and 8 bars to coda. (M)

"Serenade ..." is perhaps more pleasant than exciting, but the long solo on "Margie" is one of the few medium swinging altosax soli from this period.

JAMES MOODY

NYC. May 21, 1952

Dave Burns (tp), Donald Cole (tb), James Moody (as, ts), Numa "Pee Wee" Moore (bar), Sadik Hakim (Argonne Thornton) (p), unknown (b), Teddy Stewart (dm), Babs Gonzales (vo-9164).

Four titles were recorded for Mercury, three have altosax:

9163	Until The Real Thing Comes Along	Solo/straight 24 and 4 bars. Coda. (S)
9165	Moody's Theme	Solo/straight 32 bars to very long coda. (S)
9166	My Ideal	Soli/straight 20 and 8 bars. (S)

NYC. June 6, 1952

Same except unknown (tb) replaces Cole.

Three titles were recorded for Mercury, two have altosax:

4812	Poor Butterfly	Soli/straight 32, 4 and 4 bars. (S)
4813	My Ideal	Soli/straight 16 bars to 4 bars with (p). Solo 8 bars. (S)

Note: The two versions of "My Ideal" have been studied through the Classics CD. The introduction is different; one has trumpet in the beginning, and also some unmotivated bars with piano. Tom Lord's disco indicates altogether five, possibly even six takes from the two sessions on EmArcy(Jap) 195J-10104, not available. If We will return to this later, please help if you can!!

Regardless of the hunt for alternate takes, this is beautiful altosax playing in slow tempo on all items!

JAMES MOODY**NYC. June 15, 1953**

Personnel as May 21, 1952 plus Bennie Green (tb). Babs Gonzales (vo-9464).
 Four titles were recorded for Mercury, three have altosax:

9464	James Moody Story	Solo 44 bars. (M)
9466	Feeling Low	Soli 32 and 6 bars to very long coda. (S)
9467	Wail Bait	Intro. Soli 4, 16, 4 and 12 bars. (M)

Another beautiful altosax ballad in "... Low" should be particularly noted.

JAMES MOODY**Hackensack, NJ. Jan. 8, 1954**

Dave Burns (tp), William Shepard (tb), James Moody (as, ts), Numa Moore (bar), Sadik Hakim (p), John Latham (b), Joe Harris (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo-551).
 Four titles were recorded for Prestige, one has altosax:

549	A Hundred Years From Today	Solo 32 bars. (S)
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And this one is soft and delightful!

JAMES MOODY**Hackensack, NJ. April 12, 1954**

Personnel as above except Jimmy Boyd (p) replaces Hakim, Iona Wade (vo-564).
 Four titles were recorded for Prestige, two have altosax:

565	Over The Rainbow	Solo 16+8 bars, (p) on bridge. (S)
567	Mambo With Moody	Break to solo with orch 80 bars. (FM)

Although I am not particularly fond of mambos, JM impresses me here, he knows everything! But of course, the delightful "... Rainbow" is most memorable.

JAMES MOODY**Hackensack, NJ. Sept. 13, 1954**

Personnel as April 12 except Clarence Johnson (dm) replaces Harris.
 Three titles were recorded for Prestige:

623-1	It Might As Well Be Spring	As below but tenorsax!!(S)
623-2	It Might As Well Be Spring	Solo 56 bars to long coda. (S)
624	Blues In The Closet	Solo 36 bars. (M)
625	Moody's Mood For Blues	Altosax solo 24 bars to tenorsax solo 36 bars! (S)

Certainly the best of JM's 1954 Prestige sessions! Two magnificent versions of "... Spring", one instrument for each, and who dares to pick his choice? On "Moody's ..." he switches rapidly from altosax to tenorsax, a fine piece of music. And the "... Closet" is JM playing the blues in his own inimical style. Go for this session!

JAMES MOODY**NYC. Jan. 28, 1955**

Dave Burns (tp), William Shepherd (tb), James Moody (as, ts), Numa "Pee Wee" Moore (bar), Jimmy Boyd (p), John Latham (b), Clarence Johnson (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo-688).

Four titles were recorded for Prestige, one has altosax:

687	Nobody Knows The Trouble	Solo 28 bars. Coda. (S)
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Another beautiful piece of music!

JAMES MOODY**Hackensack, NJ. Aug. 23/24, 1955**

Personnel as Jan. 28. Eddie Jefferson (vo-786).

Nine titles were recorded for Prestige, one has altosax:

790	Little John	Solo/straight. (S)
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This nice item is played in an extremely slow tempo.

JAMES MOODY**Hackensack, NJ. Dec. 12, 1955**

Personnel as Jan. 28.

Seven titles were recorded for Prestige, three have altosax:

833	The Donkey Serenade	Solo 64 bars. (F)
836	A Sinner Kissed An Angel	Soli 32 and 16 bars to coda. (S)

837	Wail Moody Wail	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars to 64 bars 4/4 with (tp). Soli 8 and 32 bars. (M)
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The last session of the great Moody-epoch, culminating with the fine Prestige recording sessions 1954-1955. Personally I often feel the large personnel and arrangements are unnecessary, these items are best when JM is playing without much interruption. And here we get a magnificent example in the fourteen minutes long "Wail ..." which is nothing but a jam session involving JM on both horns and his trumpeter!! He starts on tenorsax, but after a trumpet solo he changes to altosax and carries this on to a chase, but changes back to tenorsax in the ending. This item can be considered a great intermediate conclusion of a great period in JM's artistic career.

JAMES MOODY poss. Chi. Feb./March 1956
Personnel unknown but including James Moody (as), not (ts) as in discos.

Two titles were recorded for Cadet, one issued, not available:

9251	Moody's Mood For Cha Cha
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JAMES MOODY Chi. Nov. 1956
Johnny Coles (tp), William Shepherd (tb), James Moody (fl, as, ts), Numa "Pee Wee" Moore (bar), Jimmy Boyd (p, peck-horn), John Latham (b), Clarence Johnson (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo).

Twelve titles were recorded for Argo, eleven issued, one has altosax:

8060	Richard's Blues	Soli 12 and 48 bars to coda. (M)
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Competent altosax soloing without being remarkable.

JAMES MOODY NYC. Jan. 13, 1957
Johnny Coles (tp), James Moody (fl, as, ts?), Jimmy Boyd (p), John Latham (b), Clarence Johnston (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo).

Six titles were recorded for Argo, four issued, one has altosax:

8386	Mean To Me	Soli 32 and 24 bars to coda. (M)
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But this is a swinging one!

JAMES MOODY Chi. Sept. 13, 14 & 16, 1958
Fip Richard, Earl Turner, Sonny Cohn (tp), John Avant (tb), Ethel Merker (frh), Bill Adkins, Lenny Druss (as), James Moody (fl, as, ts?), Vito Price, Sandy Mosse, Eddie Johnson (ts), Pat Patrick (bar), Floyd Morris/Junior Mance (p), John Gray (g), Johnny Pate (b, tu), Red Holt (dm).

Ten titles were recorded for Argo, issued as "Last Train From Overbrook", one has altosax:

9018	Why Don't You?	Solo with orch 32 bars to coda. (S)
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Very nice session and JM is obviously back after more than one year of sick leave. Mostly he plays tenorsax and flute, but there is some very nice altosax on "... You?".

JAMES MOODY Chi. Aug. 1959
Johnny Coles (tp), Tom McIntosh (tb), James Moody (fl, as, ts), Musa Kaliem (bar), Gene Kee (p), John Latham (b), Clarence Johnston (dm).

Eight titles were recorded for Argo, issued as "James Moody", one has altosax:

9671	Daahoud	Straight. Solo 64 bars. (F)
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This is mostly a flute and tenorsax session, but good altosax playing on "Daahoud".

JAMES MOODY NYC. March 4, 1960
Personnel possibly as below.
WADO broadcast "The Symphony Sid Show" from Birdland, James Accardi collection, six titles ("Now's The Time" has not been available), one has altosax:

Daahoud	Straight. Solo 64 bars. (F)
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NYC. June 25, 1960

Personnel possibly as below.
WADO broadcast "The Symphony Sid Show" from Birdland, James Accardi collection, six titles, one has altosax:

Our Delight	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (F)
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NYC. Aug. 20, 1960

Johnny Coles (tp), Julian Priester (tb), James Moody (fl, as, ts), unknown (bar), (p), (b), (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo), Sid Torin (mc).
WADO broadcast "The Symphony Sid Show" from Birdland, James Accardi collection, six titles, one has altosax:

Blue Jubilee	Solo 5 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
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JAMES MOODY**NYC. July 5&6, 1960 & Feb. 16, 1961**

Three different large personnels including James Moody (fl, as, ts), Tommy Flanagan, Hank Jones (p), Torrie Zito (p, arr, cnd), plus (woodwinds) and/or (strings).

Eleven titles were recorded for Argo, issued as "Moody With Strings", three have altosax:

Another Day	Straight. Break to solo 48 bars. (SM)
Dorothea	Straight. (S)
Somerset	Solo. (M)

JM is back on stage again, and these sessions have a lot of nice playing on all three instruments. Although the setting seems quite commercial on paper, the arrangements are tasteful and fine vehicles for an inspired JM, note also excellent flute work.

JAMES MOODY**San Francisco, 1961**

Howard McGhee (tp), Bernard McKinney (tb), James Moody (fl, as, ts), Musa Kaleem (bar), Sonny Donaldson (p), Steve Davis (b), Arnold Enlow (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo-10958,63).

Ten titles were recorded live at the "Jazz Workshop" for Argo, issued as "Cookin' The Blues", four have altosax:

10955	Bloozy	Solo 21 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
10957	Home Fries	Solo 11 choruses of 24 bars. (F)
10959	It Might As Well Be Spring	Solo with orch 40 bars (S) to 32 bars (SM) to 24 bars and very long coda. (S)
10962	The Jazz Twist	Soli 11 and 3 choruses of 12 bars. (M)

I wrote the following for the tenorsax solography: "This is very best JM session of the early sixties, at least the one I dig the most. In an inspired live setting with an excellent backup group (little soloing by others), he plays most altosax and tenorsax to the height of his enormous creative powers. this session is JM plays fantastic altosax on this session, never done it better, an unearthly technique in uptempo and the same utterly personal interpretation on a ballad like "... Spring". All four items are important in the jazz treasury chest; start on "Bloozy" and be overwhelmed and then go for the rest!! And of course don't forget that there are magnificent tenorsax items also!!

EDDIE JEFFERSON**NYC. Dec. 18, 1961**

Joe Newman, Ernie Royal (tp), Jimmy Cleveland (tb), James Moody (fl, as), Johnny Griffin (ts), Arthur Clarke (bar), Wynton Kelly (p), Barry Galbraith (g), Sam Jones (b), Osie Johnson (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo).

Three titles were recorded for Riverside, one has altosax:

Back In Town / I Cover The Waterfront	Intro 4 bars. (S)
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Beautiful.

JAMES MOODY**Chi. Jan. 30, 1962**

Paul Serrano (tp), John Avant (tb), James Moody (fl, as?, ts), Kenny Barron (p), Ernest Outlaw (b), Marshall Thompson (dm).

Eight titles were recorded for Argo, issued as "Another Bag", lots of excellent flute and tenorsax, but contrary to what I have written in the tenorsax solography, I don't think there are altosax soli here.

EDDIE JEFFERSON**NYC. Feb. 8, 1962**

Clark Terry (tp, flh), Ernie Royal (tp), Jimmy Cleveland (tb), James Moody (fl, as), Johnny Griffin (ts), Arthur Clarke (bar), Joe Zawinul (p), Barry Galbraith (g), Sam Jones (b), Osie Johnson (dm), Eddie Jefferson (vo).

Three titles were recorded for Riverside, issued as "Letter From Home", two have altosax:

Things Are Getting Better	Solo 28 bars. (M)
Letter From Home	Solo 16 bars. (M)

Eddie Jefferson's session, but there is space for a couple of fine altosax soli.

MILT JACKSON ORCHESTRA

NYC. June 19, 1962

Bigband personnel including James Moody, George Dorsey (fl, as), Jerome Richardson (fl, ts).

Three titles, "Round Midnight", "If You Could See Me Now" and "The Dream Is You", were recorded for Riverside, but no altosax soli.

MILT JACKSON

NYC. July 5, 1962

Bigband personnel including James Moody (fl, as, ts), Jimmy Heath (ts).

Four titles were recorded for Riverside, but no altosax.

DIZZY GILLESPIE QUINTET

NYC. April 23-25, 1963

Dizzy Gillespie (tp), James Moody (fl, as, ts), Kenny Barron (p), Chris White (b), Rudy Collins (dm).

Ten titles were recorded for Philips, one has altosax:

'Round Midnight

Soli 16 and 8 bars. (S)

This is great!!

JAMES MOODY

NYC. June 17&18, 1963

Bigband personnel including James Moody (fl, as, ts), Thad Jones, Johnny Coles (tp), Hubert Laws (fl), Hank Jones or Bernie Leighton (p), Jim Hall (g), Richard Davis (b), Mel Lewis (dm), Tom McIntosh (arr).

Seven titles were recorded for Argo, issued as "Great Day", one has altosax:

12523 The Search

Soli with orch 92 and 12 bars. (F)

Fine altosax playing in a bigband setting.

DIZZY GILLESPIE QUINTET

Chi. Sept. 11-14, 1963

Dizzy Gillespie (tp), James Moody (fl, as, ts), Kenny Barron (p), Chris White (b), Rudy Collins (dm).

Twelve titles were recorded for Philips, eleven issued, issued as "Dizzy Goes Hollywood", five have altosax:

Main Theme from "Exodus"

Soli 8 and 8 bars. (M)

Love Theme From "Lolita"

Acc. (tp). (M)

Theme From "Lawrence Of Arabia"

Solo 24 bars. (FM)

The Days Of Wine And Roses

Solo 16 bars. (M)

Walk On The Wild Side

Solo 48 bars. (F)

This is Dizzy's session with a lot of fine trumpet playing, but JM in a more modest role. Nevertheless there are some excellent altosax playing here, particularly "... Roses" and "... Arabia".

JAMES MOODY

NYC. Sept. 16, 1963

James Moody (fl, as, ts), Kenny Barron (p, org), George Eskridge (g), Chris White (b), Rudy Collins (dm).

Eight titles were recorded for Argo, issued as "Comin' On Strong", two have altosax:

Fly Me To The Moon

Solo 32 choruses of 32 bars.

Solo 32 bars to coda. (M)

Autumn Leaves

Solo 32 bars (S) to solo 3 choruses. (FM)

Solo 8 bars to long coda. (S)

Again we get the most gorgeous of altosax playing! If I were asked what was JM's most important instrument, I really would have difficulties with avoiding suggesting the alto saxophone!

DIZZY GILLESPIE

Monterey, Ca., Sept. 22, 1963

Dizzy Gillespie (tp, vo), James Moody (fl, as, ts), Hidehiko Matsumoto (ts—"Salt ..."), Kenny Barron (p), Chris White (b), Rudy Collins (dm), Jon Hendricks (vo—"Salt Peanuts").

Eight titles were recorded live at the Monterey Jazz Festival, issued on Douglas Music CD as "Dizzy For President", two have altosax:

I'm In The Mood For Love

Soli 32 and 16 bars to long coda. (S)

No More Blues

Solo 64 bass. (FM)

“No More ...” is not a blues but a Latin piece, good altosax playing. However, the circle is closed with “... Love”, a close recreation, particularly the first solo, of the famous start of this solography. Thus nothing new but an evidence of the impression it made on the world of jazz.

This seems to be a convenient point in time to stop this James Moody altosax solography, but it might be continued later, with your help.

...ooo...