

The  
**TENORSAX**  
of  
**JOHN HARDEE**  
**“BAD MAN”**

Born: Corsicana, Texas, Dec. 20, 1918  
Died: Dallas, Texas, May 18, 1984

*Introduction:*

To be quite honest I did not notice John Hardee until quite late. However, he surprised me with his fine tenorsax playing with roots in the swing tradition. He certainly deserves to be remembered!

*History:*

Both parents were musical; an uncle, Ashford Hardee, was a professional trombonist. Played piano at local dances, then saxophone with The Blue Moon Syncopators, Florenz O'Harris and Rick Calhoun. Played in Bishop College Band, then spent six months in Don Albert's Band (1937-38). Returned to college until 1941, Army service in Signal Corps Band, stationed near New York City. After leaving army, auditioned for Duke Ellington as a possible replacement for Elbert Williams, but lost to Al Sears. Worked with Tiny Grimes (1946), then led own band. Moved to Dallas in 1949 to become a school band director and led own group in Dallas. In 1975 he appeared at the Nice Jazz Festival, France.

## JOHN HARDEE SOLOGRAPHY

**DICKIE THOMPSON AND HIS BLUE FIVE** **NYC. early 1946**

John Hardee (ts), Teddy Brannon (p), Dickie Thompson (g, vo), Frank Skeete (b), Gene Groves (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Signature:

SRC 141	Hand In Hand Blues	Obbligato 24 bars. Solo 12 bars. Obbligato 12 bars. Coda. (SM)
SRC 142	Taylor-Made Girl	Solo 12 bars. Obbligato 24 bars. Straight 12 bars. (M)
SRC 143	Swing Song	Soli 8 and 32 bars. (FM)
SRC 144	Stardust	Solo 64 bars to long coda. (SM)

One of the most underrated of tenorsax players, John Hardee. Note that he is a ready an "old man", close to 30 years at the time of his first recording session. This explains his primary influence, Chu Berry, nobody like JH ever comes so close in sound to that of the great swing giant. Nevertheless, JH seems to be looking forward rather than backward, there are many modern elements in his playing; although he should not be named a bebopper, a mainstream performer is more suitable. The three first titles are not really remarkable although having good tenorsax. However, "Stardust" is an amazing item, it is a mystery how a "debutant" in a recording studio, with a group of this easy going kind, is given such a vehicle for a feature number. JH plays it very nicely, again quite notable in the Chu tradition, but yet very personal. An interesting encounter with a "new" tenorsax performer!!

**JOHN HARDEE SWINGTET** **NYC. Feb. 28, 1946**

John Hardee (ts), Sammy Benskin (p), Tiny Grimes (g), John Simmons (b), Sid Catlett (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Blue Note:

280-0	Tired	Intro 4 bars to solo 36 bars. Coda 4 bars. (S)
281-0	Blue Skies	Intro 4 bars to solo 64 bars. Solo 64 bars. (F)
282-0	Hardee's Partee	Soli 12 and 24 bars. (S)
282-1	Hardee's Partee	As above. (S)
283-0	Idaho	Soli 64 and 64 bars. (FM)
283-5	Idaho	As above. (FM)

The first Blue Note session presents the Texas tenor JH to great advantage in the slow numbers. Particularly the blues choruses on "... Partee" are great, showing also influence from Ben Webster. "Blue Skies" seems a bit too fast, while "Idaho" features good swing tenor, note the two concluding choruses on the 78 rpm. take.

**EARL BOSTIC AND HIS SEPTET** **NYC. ca. March 1946**

Lemon Boler (tp), Tony Scott (cl), Earl Bostic (as), John Hardee (ts), George Parker (p), Jimmy Shirley (g), Jimmy Jones (p), Eddie Nicholson (dm), Cousin Joe or Pleasant Joseph (vo-137).

Four titles were recorded for Gotham, but no JH.

**JOHN HARDEE SEXTET** **NYC. May 31, 1946**

John Hardee (ts), Bill Bivens (vib), Sammy Benskin (p), Jimmy Shirley (g), Gene Ramey (b), Sid Catlett (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Blue Note:

284-1	What Is This Thing Called Love	Soli 32 and 32 bars. (M)
285-1	Nervous From The Service	Soli 8, 32 and 8 bars. (M)
286-4	River Edge Rock	Intro 4 bars to solo 4 choruses of 12 bars, first 2 are presentation. Solo 6 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
286-5	River Edge Rock	As above but 8 choruses in last solo. (FM)
287-0	Sweet And Lovely	Solo 48 bars. Solo 8 bars to coda. (S)

This is by far JH's best session, not only for Blue Note but in toto!! A session to rank JH high among the post-swing tenorsax performers. Well, post-swing ..., never did we encounter a stylist so close to Chu Berry as here, particularly on "... This Thing" and "Nervous ...". This influence could be noted also on the previous session, but here it is almost like meeting a ghost! My favorite item as a whole is the smoothly swinging "... This Thing", and for a particular highlight note the concluding 8 bars on "Nervous ...". Don't forget the two takes of "River Edge ..." with a lot of excellent blues choruses. Finally a beautiful version of a beautiful ballad, "Sweet ...", here the Chu-influence is not prominent. A golden day for John Hardee!!

**EARL BOSTIC AND HIS SEPTET**

**NYC. July 1946**

Personnel same/similar to March 1946.

Four titles were recorded for Gotham, no tenorsax on "Jumpin' Jack" and "That's The Heat You Gonna Beat" but:

S153	That's The Groovy Thing Pt 2	Solo 24 bars. In ens. (M)
S154	The Barefoot Baby	Solo 12 bars. (M)

There is no doubt about JH's Chu inspiration, judging from "... Groovy Thing" and particularly "... Barefoot ...".

**TINY GRIMES SWINGTET**

**NYC. Aug. 14, 1946**

Trummy Young (tb), John Hardee (ts), Marlowe Morris (p), Tiny Grimes (g), Jimmy Butts (b), Eddie Nicholson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Blue Note:

288-3	C Jam Blues	Solo 24 bars. (F)
289-1	Flying Home Part I	Solo 64 bars. (F)
290-1	Flying Home Part II	No solo.
291-1	Tiny's Boogie Woogie	Solo 36 bars. (FM)
291-2	Tiny's Boogie Woogie	As above. (FM)

Certainly the weakest by far of the JH Blue Note sessions. It has one real highlight, Morris' beautiful stride piano on "... Home Part I", otherwise the whole thing is a lot of noise. JH should have left "... Home" to Illinois Jacquet, but he does not play at all badly on "C Jam ...", and in particular on "... Boogie Woogie". However, the session is quickly forgotten.

**COUSIN JOE ACCOMPANIED BY**

**EARL BOSTIC's ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. Aug. 1946**

Lemon Boler (tp), Tyree Glenn (tb), Tony Scott (cl), Earl Bostic (as), John Hardee (ts), Hank Jones (p), Jimmy Shirley (g), Eddie Nicholson (dm), "Brother Joshua" alias Cousin Joe (vo).

Six titles were recorded for Gotham, but no tenorsax soli.

**BILLY KYLE's BIG EIGHT**

**NYC. Sept. 11, 1946**

Dick Vance (tp), Trummy Young (tb, vo), Buster Bailey (cl), Lem Davis (as), John Hardee (ts), Billy Kyle (p), John Simmons (b), Buddy Rich (dm).

Four titles were recorded for HRS:

1056	H.R.S. Bounce	Solo 16 bars. (M)
1057	Ooh, Baby, You Knock Me Out	No solo.
1058	Date For Eight	Break 4 bars to solo 32 bars. (FM)
1058-alt.	Date For Eight	As above. (FM)
1059	Contemporary Blues	Solo 12 bars. (SM)

I never have understood the recording policies of HRS, the company makes any combination of good musicians un-swing so efficiently! The tenorsax soli, which may have been considered very good, now seem bloodless, as if Dracula had been the studio supervisor. Looking at things with maximum understanding, however, we find some personal tenorsax playing. "... Bounce" in particular has some good rolling phrases. However, rules make exceptions and "Date ..." is one! A very good tenorsax solo, and again you hear the heavy debt to Chu. Postscript of June 5, 2021: Forgot that the HRS-Mosaic album has two takes of "... Eight", exciting, but the differences are not that much.

**RUSSEL PROCOPE BIG SIX****NYC. late 1946**

Harold Baker (tp), Russell Procope (as), John Hardee (ts), Billy Kyle (p), John Simmons (b), Denzil Best (dm).

Four titles were recorded for HRS:

1060	Bottle It	Solo 24 bars. (M)
1061	Denzil's Best	Solo 16+8 bars, (tp) on bridge. (F)
1062	Right Foot, Then Left Foot	Solo 16+8 bars, (p) on bridge. (M)
1063	Four Wheel Drive	Solo 16+8 bars, (p) on bridge. (M)

The "usual" comments to the HRS session can also be used here, unfortunately. The tenorsax soli never get the necessary support to lift from the ground, although the potential seems to be there. "Right Foot ..." may be the best item, while "... Best" certainly is the opposite.

**REV. DWIGHT "GATEMOUTH" MOORE  
VOCAL ACCOMPANIED BY****NYC. Oct. 25, 1946**

Russell Royster (tp), Herman Flintall (as), John Hardee (ts), Sam Benskin (p, cel-199), Tiny Grimes (g), Alvin "Junior" Raglin (b), Eddie Nicholson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for National, no JH on 199 "Christmas Blues" but:

NSC 200-1	Let's Go Back And Try OMT	Break to solo 24 bars. (M)
NSC 201	Love Doctor Blues	Obbligato 12 bars. Solo 12 bars. (SM)
NSC 202	Nobody Knows The Way I Feel TM	Solo 16 bars. (M)

A quite good "rolling" solo on "Love ...", more ordinary on "... Go Back ..." and "... This Morning".

**WALTER BROWN WITH  
TINY GRIMES SEXTET****NYC. 1947**

Personnel probably as session with Rev. Dwight Moore above. Walter Brown (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Signature, two have JH:

354	Open The Door Richard	Obbligato parts. Solo with ens 8 bars. (SM)
357	I'm Loving For You	Intro 4 bars. Obbligato 16 and 8 bars to solo 8 bars. (S)

Very nice playing on "... For You", but "... Richard" is of no particular interest.

**HELEN HUMES ACCOMPANIED BY****NYC. Aug. 1947**

Buck Clayton (tp), George Matthews (tb), John Hardee (ts), Ram Ramirez (p), Mundell Lowe (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Mercury, no JH on "I Just Refuse To Sing The Blues" and "They Raided The Joint", but:

859-1	Jet Propelled Papa	Solo 24 bars. (SM)
859-4	Jet Propelled Papa	Solo 12 bars. (SM)
860	Blue And Sentimental	Solo 18 bars. Coda. (S)

This is a vocal session and the soloing opportunities are few. "Blue ..." is maybe a disappointment, one does not walk easily in the shoes of Herschel Evans! JH plays rather straight, like HE, but never manages to create the dramatic atmosphere of his predecessor, the result is just pretty and soon forgotten. The "... Papa" is in fact a much more interesting performance, loosely swinging and with an ending phrase typical of JH! And the recently discovered alternate take is equally good and twice as long!!

**DAN BURLEY****NYC. Oct. 1947**

James Archey (tb), John Hardee (ts), Dan Burley (p, vo-100), Danny Barker (g), Herman Mitchell (g), Pops Foster (b).

Two titles recorded for Arkay:

DB 100	Chicken Shack Shuffle	Obbligato parts. Solo 22 bars. (SM)
DB 101	Skiffle Blues	Soli 24 and 8 bars. (S)

Nice and relaxed soloing on "Chicken ...", while "Skiffle ..." is too relaxed, close to boring.

**JOHN HARDEE QUINTET**

**Nov. 1947**

Ludvig Joe Jordan (tp), John Hardee (ts, vo-5036), Billy Kyle (p), John Simmons (b), Cozy Cole (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Regent:

RE 5033	Bad Man's Bounce	Soli 8 and 64 bars. (M)
RE 5034	Lunatic	Solo 64 bars. (M)
RE 5035	Can't Help Lovin' That Man	Solo 48 bars to coda. (S)
RE 5036	Baby Watch Your Stuff	Solo 16 bars. Vocal. (SM)

JH is presented with echo on this session and it takes some effort to penetrate this and discover that there is a lot of nice tenorsax playing. The minor "Lunatic" is the most exciting item, and JH plays very well on this one. "... That Man" is taken in an unusually slow tempo, and this solo number for tenorsax is also nice, although great depths are never fathomed. His abilities for simple, easy swinging with r&b flavour is demonstrated on "... Bounce". On "Baby ..." he plays rather straight, preferring to give priority to singing, OK but not at all unforgettable.

**TINY GRIMES QUINTET**

**NYC. Dec. 29, 1947**

John Hardee (ts), George Kelly (ts?-113,114, p, cel-112), Tiny Grimes (g), Lucille Dixon (b), Sonny Payne (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Atlantic:

A111	Profoundly Blue	Solo 12 bars. (S)
A112	Blue Harlem	Solo 12 bars. (S)
A113	That Old Black Magic	In ens. Solo 14 bars. (M)
A114	Boogie Woogie Barbecue	Solo 24 bars. (M)

The famous Charlie Christian item "Profoundly ..." is 'copied' here with good success, and JH is the highlight with a beautiful slow blues chorus. "... Harlem" is almost a clone of "Profoundly ...". "... Magic", however, is not at all magic and is only saved by a few bars of swing, again JH is the highlight, and "... Barbecue" is quite ordinary.

**CLYDE BERNHARDT**

**NYC. Aug. 20, 1948**

Unknown (tp), Clyde Bernhardt (tb, vo), Albert Nicholas (cl), George Smith (as), John Hardee (ts), Sam Price (p), ? Williams (g), Walter Williams (b), unknown (dm). Four titles were recorded for Decca, two issued, no JH on "Pretty Mama Blues" but:

74953-A	My Heart Belongs To You	Solo 16 bars. (S)
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A nice but not outstanding solo on "My Heart ...".

**JOHN HARDEE QUARTET**

**NYC. late 1948**

John Hardee (ts), Al Haig (p), Clyde Lombardi (b), Tiny Kahn (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Sitting In With:

C109	Cobblestones	In ens 32 bars. Solo 88 bars to ens 8. (FM)
C110	Prelude To A Kiss	Solo 16 bars to long coda. (S)
C111	Boppin' In B Flat/Blisters	In ens 40 bars. Solo 56 bars to ens 8. (FM)
C112	Man With A Horn	Solo 48 bars to coda. (S)

JH does not at all make a bad figure as bebop saxophonist; who would really with the magnificent piano backing of Al Haig? Both on "Cobblestones" and "... B Flat" he shows competence in this modern music. However, his heart seems to pump more vigorously on the ballads; JH is fundamentally a child of the swing era. "Man ..." is a solo feature for tenorsax and nicely played, even if we are waiting for him to really stretch out when the record is ended. In "... Kiss" he is preceded by an unusually beautiful piano solo, but he contributes very nicely himself, again paying tribute to Chu.

**BILLY TAYLOR QUINTET**

**NYC. Nov. 20, 1949**

John Hardee (ts), Milt Page (org), Billy Taylor (p), John Simmons (b), Joe Harris (dm).

Three titles were recorded for Regal/Savoy (JH is not present on 4452 "Prelude To A Kiss"):

4450	Misty (Morning) Blues	Soli 12 and 12 bars. (S)
4451	The Bug	Solo 22 bars. (M)
4453	Take The A Train	In ens 32 bars. Solo 24 bars to ens 8. (FM)

The "Misty ..." is the kind of slow blues that is bound to be nice, with good support on piano and organ. Such a setup does not at all work well on "... Train", a quite ordinary piece, although the solo is not bad. The latin "Bug ..." is also quite ordinary.

#### **TINY GRIMES**

#### **& HIS ROCKING HIGHLANDERS**

**NYC. 1950**

John Hardee (ts), probably Freddie Redd (p), Tiny Grimes (g), Ike Isaacs (b), unknown (dm), Claudine Clark (vo-"My Baby's Cool").

Eight titles were recorded for Gotham, no tenorsax on "Howling Blues" but:

TG-11	Hawaiian Boogie	Solo 16 bars. (M)
TG-11	Hawaiian Boogie (alt.)	As above. (M)
TG-12	My Baby's Cool	With ens. (M)
TG-13	St. Louis Blues	Solo with ens 36 bars. (FM)
TG-13	St. Louis Blues (alt.)	As above. (FM)
TG-14	1626 Blues	With ens. (FM)
TG-15	Rockin' And Sockin'	Soli 14 and 14 bars. (M)
	Tiny's Blues	With ens. (FM)
	Tiny's Jump (alt.)	With ens. (FM)
	Am I Blue	With ens. (M)
	Bananas	Soli 12 and 12 bars. (M)
	Bananas (alt.)	As above. (M)

These are certainly not great jazz records, but interesting piano at times. JH does not have many opportunities, in fact only "... Sockin'" and particularly "Hawaiian ..." are of tenorsax interest. Note, however, the latter; here the old master gets though to us, interesting details and two clearly different versions.

#### **JIMMIE MITCHELL**

**NYC. Sept. 12, 1950**

Bernie Peacock, Bobby Smith (as), Julian Dash, John Hardee (ts), Heywood Henry (bar), George Rhodes (p), Rene Hall (g), Lee Stanfield (b), Sonny Payne (dm).

Four titles were recorded for King 4413 not available, no tenorsax soli on "When Summer Is Gone" and "Tonight You Belong To Me".

#### **WYNONIE HARRIS /**

#### **LUCKY MILLINDER AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. Oct. 18, 1950**

Personnel including Big John Greer, John Hardee (ts), Wynonie Harris (vo).

Four titles were recorded for King, all have tenorsax soli but probably by BJG.

No further recording sessions listed in discographies including late fifties, sixties and seventies. However:

#### **JOHN HARDEE**

**Antibes, France, July 26, 1975**

Gene "Mighty Flea" Connors (tb), John Hardee (ts), Gerald Wiggins (p), Bill Pemberton (b), Oliver Jackson (dm).

Seven titles were recorded at Nice Jazz Festival for Black&Blue as "A Little Blue":

Sleep Walking	Soli 7 and 3 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
These Foolish Things	Solo 2 ½ choruses of 32 bars to long coda. (S)
Cruising Along	Soli 8, 64 and 8 bars. (M)

O.D.B.	Solo 10 choruses of 12 bars. (SM)
A Little Blue	Solo 6 choruses of 12 bars. (S)
Upstairs	Solo 7 choruses of 12 bars. (SM)
A New Avenue	Soli 7 and 5 choruses of 12 bars, last with ens. (M)

This session which I found recently on internet is a great and pleasant surprise! Honestly, I did not expect much, after 25 years of absence. However, JH is in very good shape, and he has even preserved his effective and personal vibrato. There is a lot of blues here, and the tempi are wisely kept not too high. Friends of JH will probably be thrilled and pleased at his playing in slow tempo, the old standard "... Things" and the very slow "... Blue" are very nicely performed. There are no excesses here, no attempt to overblow, to show one is young when it is obvious one is not. The blues in medium tempo is played in style, good trombone also, and the accompaniment makes the session swing with some excellent piano soli. Don't misunderstand, there are greater tenorsax sessions to be found, but JH concludes his contribution to jazz history with some music of which he can be very proud.

No further recording sessions.

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