

The
ALTOSAX
of
JOHN JENKINS

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Born: Chicago, Jan. 3, 1931
Died: July 12, 1993

Introduction:

I have to admit I had never heard of John Jenkins until into my mature years, but then I found his personal style very interesting and he certainly deserves his soloography and recognition. Through a brief period of seven months in 1957, he participated in several recording sessions with the cream of his contemporaries, and he was obviously considered a great talent. Why he quit in the middle of success is not known.

History:

Jenkins initially studied clarinet in high school but switched to saxophone after six months on the instrument. He played in jam sessions led by Joe Segal at Roosevelt College from 1949-1956. He played with Art Farmer in 1955 and led his own group at the Bee Hive in Chicago in December that year. In 1957 he played with Charlie Mingus and recorded two albums as a leader. He played as a sideman with Johnny Griffin, Donald Byrd, Hank Mobley, Paul Quinichette, Clifford Jordan, Sahib Shihab and Wilbur Ware in 1957 (not the late 1950s and early 1960s as stated), but essentially dropped out of music after 1962, aside from a few dates with Gloria Coleman. After leaving the jazz world he worked as a messenger in New York and dabbled in jewelry; he sold brass objects at street fairs in the 1970s. After 1983 he began practicing again and playing live on street corners; shortly before his death he played with Clifford Jordan (Wikipedia).

JOHN JENKINS SOLOGRAPHY

SONNY BLOUNT / JOHN JENKINS **Chi. Nov. 11, 1950**

John Jenkins (as), Sonny "Sun Ra" Blount (org).
Two titles, issued on Transparency CD 0316, disc 5:

5:58	Cocktails For Two / Tenderly	Straight 32 and 7 bars (NC). (S)
4:32	The Phantom	Straight. (S)

An interesting historical document with regard to Sun Ra, but for JJ only of academic interest. Although "The Phantom" is highly experimental, the bad sound quality prohibits any relevant comments. The altosax contributions on "... Two", and "Tenderly" before the acetate runs out, are straight with no particular personality.

SONNY BLOUNT / JOHN JENKINS **Chi. March 17, 1951**

John Jenkins (as), Sonny "Sun Ra" Blount (org), Wilbur Ware (b)..
One title, issued on Sun Ra "Eternal Myth ..." box set:

Sunny's Place	Solo 24 bars. Straight 8 bars (NC). (M)
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Sadly there are bits of missing audio during JJ's solo, because this is a very nice and groovy one in the Bird tradition. The concluding straight is strongly related to "Now's The Time".

SULLIVAN / FARMER / JENKINS **Chi. 1955**

Art Farmer (tp), John Jenkins (as), Ira Sullivan (ts), Norman Simmons (p), Victor Sproles (b), Vernell Fournier (dm).

Three titles were recorded at the Bee Hive Lounge (James Accardi collection):

4:05	Cherokee (NC)	No solo. (F)
5:31	Farmer's Market (NC)	Solo 13 choruses of 12 bars. (F)
1:20	Tea Pot (Sweet Georgia Brown) (NC)	Solo 64 bars (NC). (F)

A very interesting discovery, only too bad that all three items are only fragments. "Cherokee" has only space for IS, who does not appear on the other two items. JJ (and AF) is heard successfully playing fine fast blues on "... Market". "Tea ..." has a normal start, proceeding with JJ, but his very fast solo is unfortunately not completed.

TEDDY CHARLES / IDREES SULIEMAN / JOHN JENKINS / MAL WALDRON **NYC. April 14, 1957**

Idrees Sulieman (tp), John Jenkins (as, comp-1191), Teddy Charles (vb), Mal Waldron (p), Addison Farmer (b), Jerry Segal (dm).

Five titles were recorded for New Jazz / Prestige (a sixth title without JJ), issued as "Coolin'":

1188	The Eagle Flies	Break to solo 64 bars. (M)
1189	Bunni	Soli 64, 4 and 2 bars. In ens. (M)
1190	Reiteration	Solo 64 bars. (M)
1191	Song Of A Star	Break to solo 64 bars. 32 bars 4/4 with (tp). (FM)
1192	Staggers	Breaks. Solo 3 choruses of 40 bars. (F)

"Blowing In From Chicago" as a famous album title told it! Yes, here it happens again, an excellent altosax artist coming for a few months, then flying back into obscurity. Although he is introduced to Waldron's complex world and must have had some hard time to adapt to the arrangements, he seems to have few problems, at least the final results are very promising. The three first items have a rolling medium tempo, and the altosax soloing is confident and inspired, except for "Reiteration", where it seems to struggle somewhat. "Song ...", his own composition according to liner notes, is also fine, although a few brief fluffs towards the end. He also throws himself courageously into the very fast "Staggers", perhaps the most exciting item on the session. A very interesting recording debut, and note that JJ is really no youngster but a musician of 26 years and lots of experience.

HANK MOBLEY **Hackensack, NJ. April 21, 1957**

Donald Byrd (tp), John Jenkins (as), Hank Mobley (ts), Bobby Timmons (p), Wilbur Ware (b), Philly Joe Jones (dm).

Five titles were recorded for Blue Note, issued as "Hank":

tk2	Easy To Love	Soli 64, 4 and 4 bars. (F)
tk3	Fit For A Hanker	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
tk4	Hi Groove, Low Feedback	Solo 2 ½ choruses of 32 bars. (M)
tk5	Time After Time	Solo 16 bars. (S)
tk9	Dance Of The Infidels	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. Soli 4, 12 and 12 bars. 5 choruses 4/4 with (ts/tp). (FM)

To be asked to record for Blue Note, and to record with Hank Mobley and Donald Byrd, must quite obviously mean that one is considered interesting, and promising! JJ fits nicely into the group with competent soloing all over. The highlight is his slow 16 bars on “Time ...”, very beautiful. I have the feeling he has to concentrate to do Mobley’s challenging own compositions, “Fit ...” and “Hi Groove ...”, and “Easy ...” is not the best vehicle for JJ, but “... Infidels” is a colourful piece of music with the three horn men alternating with each other, 12 and 4 bars, exciting!

JACKIE McLEAN Hackensack, NJ. May 3, 1957
Jackie McLean (as, comp-1245), John Jenkins (as, comp-1242,43), Wade Legge (p), Doug Watkins (b), Art Taylor (dm).
Six titles were recorded for Prestige, issued as “Alto Madness”:

1240	Bird Feathers	Solo 14 choruses of 12 bars. 8 choruses 4/4 with (as-JML) to fade out. (FM)
1241	Easy Living	Soli 8, 8 and 8 bars. (S)
1242	Windy City	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (F)
1243	Pondering	Soli 4, 64 and 4 bars. (M)
1244	The Lady Is A Tramp	Solo 2 choruses of 48 bars. 48 bars 4/4 with (as-JML). (FM)
1245	Alto Madness	Soli 3, 3, 2 and 2 choruses of 12 bars. 8 choruses 12/12 bars to 8 choruses 4/4 to 2 choruses 2/2 to 16 bars 4/4 to fade out. (M)

What an alto saxophone fireworks!! To quote Ira Gitler’s liner notes: “This session has the vitality and emotion that we have come to expect from the young practioners in the Parker tradition. Due to the idiomatic similarity of their styles and the fact that playing together causes a mutual transference of traits, McLean and Jenkins are difficult to tell apart in many instances. Jackie’s sound is softer than usual here but is still harder than John’s. John is closer to Bird in phrasing”. To avoid monotony they have chosen a variety of vehicles, “Bird ...” and the album title “... Madness are blues, the latter lasting 11 ½ minutes. An uptempo “Windy ...” at one extreme, the slow “Easy ...” on the other, the latter structured so that JJ only takes the three bridges. Both altosax players seem to be in their very best shape, and I shall not be the judge of who is the better player, they should be considered equals. All six titles are highly satisfying, so dig this session!!

PAUL QUINICHETTE’S NEW STARS Hackensack, NJ. May 10, 1957
Curtis Fuller (tb), Sonny “Red” Kyner, John Jenkins (as), Paul Quinichette (ts), Mal Waldron (p), Doug Watkins (b), Ed Thigpen (dm).
Four titles were recorded for Prestige (a fifth title, 1250 “Circles” is without JJ), issued as “On The Sunny Side”:

1251	Blue Dots	Solo 36 bars. 24 bars 4/4 with (as-SK). Solo 24 bars. (F)
1252	On The Sunny Side Of The Street	Solo 24 bars. (S)
1253	My Funny Valentine	Soli 36, 16 and 8 bars to long coda. (S)
1254	Cool-lypso	Soli 64 and 48 bars. (M)

JJ shows his greatness in slow tempo on this session, foremost the very beautiful “... Valentine” together with trombone, but also “... Sunny Side ...” together with Quinichette, lovely performances! On the blues “Blue Dots” he is battling with another altosax player, also quite competent but not fully up to JJ’s standard. Also “Cool- ...” has very good altosax playing. Interesting and important session.

CLIFFORD JORDAN ALL STARS Hackensack, NJ. June 2, 1957
Lee Morgan (tp), Curtis Fuller (tb), John Jenkins (as, comp-“St. John”), Clifford Jordan (ts), Ray Bryant (p), Paul Chambers (b), Art Taylor (dm).

Five titles were recorded for Blue Note:

tk4	St. John	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
tk5	Not Guilty	Solo 2 choruses of 28 bars. (M)
tk6	Blue Shoes	Solo 4 choruses of 16 bars. (M)
tk8	Beyond The Blue Horizon	Solo 64 bars. (F)
tk9	Juba	Solo 24 bars. (SM)

Good session this one with blowing space to everybody, although nothing really remarkable happens. JJ solos competently on all items, and the highlight for me is the blues on “Juba”, this item should have been at least twice as long!

SAHIB SHIHAB

NYC. June 6, 1957

John Jenkins (as, comp-70069), Clifford Jordan (ts), Sahib Shihab (bar), Hank Jones (p), Addison Farmer (b), Dannie Richmond (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Savoy, three issued as “The Jazz We Heard Last Summer”:

70068	SMWTFSS Blues	Solo 36 bars. (SM)
70069	Rockaway	Soli 64 and 4 bars. (FM)
70070	The Things We Did Last Summer	Soli 32 and 16 bars to coda. (S)

JJ starts the solo sequence on “... Blues” and takes three fine choruses before he lets Jordan continue. Competent uptempo playing on his own composition “Rockaway” but some slight problems in bar 16 and following. The highlight of the session is however his very beautiful ballad playing on “... Last Summer”, simple but with great feeling!

JENKINS / JORDAN & TIMMONS

NYC. July 26, 1957

John Jenkins (as, comp-1323,26), Clifford Jordan (ts), Bobby Timmons (p), Wilbur Ware (b), Dannie Richmond (dm).

Six titles were recorded for New Jazz/ Prestige, five issued:

1322	Cliff’s Edge	Solo 2 choruses of 34 bars. (M)
1323	Princess	Solo 64 bars. (M)
1324	Soft Talk	Soli 4 and 2 choruses of 32 bars. 2 choruses 4/4 with (ts). 2 choruses 4/4 with (dm/ts). (F)
1325	Tenderly	Solo 32 bars to long coda. (S)
1326	Blue Jay	Solo 7 choruses of 12 bars. (M)

Whether this is JJ’s best session I dare not say, but I believe it is the most interesting session as a whole that he participates in. Everybody play their utmost here, making the session a great pleasure, and it also one of Cliff Jordan’s greatest sessions. JJ’s version of “Tenderly” is typical of his style and full of emotion, showing that he in 1957 belonged to the very best on his instrument. His composition “Princess” is an original one, and he starts the solo proceedings with a defiant, inspired solo. He also has written “Blue Jay”, an original blues, and leads the way through seven fine choruses. Finally, you cannot find anything less soft than the fast “Soft ...”, and JJ (and CJ) really lets loose on this one. The chase they do here is the session highlight and could be a fine introduction to JJ’s alto sax playing for those who do not know it, in fact, this session was my first encounter, inspiring me to go further and be acquainted with his music!

JOHN JENKINS

WITH KENNY BURRELL

Hackensack, NJ. Aug. 11, 1957

John Jenkins (as, comp-“Motif”, “Sharon”, “Chalumeau”), Sonny Clark (p), Kenny Burrell (g), Paul Chambers (b), Dannie Richmond (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Blue Note:

From This Moment On	Straight. Solo 2 choruses of 68 bars. Straight. (F)
Motif	Solo 8 bars. Solo 2 choruses of 44 bars. Solo 8 bars. (M)
Everything I Have Is Yours	Soli 32 and 32 bars to coda. (S)

Blues For Two	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
Sharon (mo tk)	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. 32 bars 4/4 with (dm). (FM)
Sharon (st tk)	As above but solo 2 choruses. (FM)
Chalumeau (mono tk)	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (M)
Chalumeau (stereo tk)	As above. (M)

Intense and inspired altosax playing on this session with an excellent rhythm section. Although JJ's technique not always is good enough to express his ideas, like occasionally in the fascinating but very fast "... Moment ...", his emotional strength gets through, as on "Blues ...", where his knowledge of Bird is evident. He also writes fine songs, like "Motif", an AABA with 12 bars A's. As a highlight, there is no doubt that his beautiful version of "... Yours" is a very strong candidate, dig this one!

JOHN JENKINS & DONALD BYRD Hackensack, NJ. Sept. 10, 1957

Donald Byrd (tp), Curtis Fuller (tb), John Jenkins (as, comp-70118,19,20), Tommy Flanagan (p), Doug Watkins (b), Art Taylor (dm).

Five titles were recorded for Regent/Savoy, issued as "Jazz Eyes":

70118	Rockaway	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
70119	Orpheus	Break to solo 64 bars. (M)
70120	Honeylike	Solo 5 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
70121	Darn That Dream	Soli 32 and 16 bars to long coda. (S)
70122	Star Eyes	Straight 8 bars. Break to solo 2 choruses of 36 bars. Straight 8 bars. (M)

Five months have passed since JJ came to NYC. and its recording studios, this time also with a most brilliant group, and he never played better! He has a personal style, full command of his instrument, highly creative and inspired. His blues on "Honeylike" is a good example, as well as the old beautiful vehicle "Star Eyes". His ballad playing on "Darn ..." places him among the most promising of newcomers (although as mentioned earlier, he is not that young), and it becomes less and less understandable why he suddenly left the jazz scene. In fact all items here have excellent altosax playing, so dig this session!

WILBUR WARE QUINTET NYC. Oct. 16, 1957

John Jenkins (as), Johnny Griffin (ts), Junior Mance (p), Wilbur Ware (b), Wilbur Campbell (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Riverside:

Beware	Solo 2 choruses of 24 bars. (M)
Desert Sands	Break to solo 2 choruses of 44 bars. (FM)
Latin Quarter	Solo 2 choruses of 24 bars. (M)
Lullaby Of The Leaves	No solo. (SM)
Mamma-Daddy	No solo. (F)
31 st And State	Solo 2 choruses of 16 bars. (SM)

NYC. Nov. 18, 1957

Same except Frank Dunlop (dm) replaces Campbell.
One title ("Body And Soul" is without JJ):

The Man I Love	Solo 32 bars. (M)
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Groovy session based upon the brilliant bass of Ware, but playing time to JJ is sparsely allotted. Since this is the last opportunity to hear JJ, such a promising altosax player, we should note his fine soloing also here, particularly on "Desert ..." and "... State". "... Love" is perhaps a bit disappointing, since he only gets half a chorus (last part). Anyway, we have to wonder what happened to him? Why did he choose to withdraw from music just when he got so many recording opportunities to show he was one of the more interesting altosax performers around?

No further recording sessions until 33 years later!:

CLIFFORD JORDAN BIGBAND

NYC. Dec. 1990

Dizzy Reece, Dean Pratt, Don Sickler, Joe Gardner (tp), Kiane Zawadi (tb, euph), Benny Powell (tb), Charles Davis, John Jenkins (as), Clifford Jordan, Junior Cook, Lou Orenstein, Willie Williams (ts), Robert Eldridge (bar), Ronnie Matthews (p), Ed Howard (b), Tommy Campbell (dm).
Ten titles recorded live, issued on Mapleshade as "Play What You Feel", but no JJ soli.

No further recording sessions.

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