

The
TRUMPET
of
LOUIS SMITH

Solographer: Jan Evensmo
Last update: Aug. 22, 2016, Sept. 5, 2021

Born: Memphis, May 20, 1931
Died: Ann Arbor, Michigan, Aug. 20, 2016

Introduction:

On third and final day in New York City in Autumn 1958, after having washed dishes for a week on the ocean liner Oslofjord, we went to the Village Vanguard to hear Horace Silver's group, and it turned out to be the same personnel as listed below, including Louis Smith on trumpet. I remember it was a great night, and that Silver was mightily impressed by two Norwegian teenagers with a bunch of 78s bought at Commodore Record Shop had come to listen to him!

History:

Studied at Tennessee State University, majoring in music, and toured with the Tennessee State Collegians, performing in New York at Carnegie Hall. He eventually transferred to the University of Michigan where he met many of the musicians on the fertile Detroit scene. After playing with an army band (1954-55) he taught at Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta, and that's where he was when he came to New York in February 1957 to record the Transition album that would become his Blue Note debut. After several recording sessions (see below), and working briefly with Horace Silver's group, he returned to teaching, University of Michigan and Ann Arbor's public school system (ref. New Grove Dictionary of Jazz). Recorded again in the period 1978-2003. Suffered a stroke in 2006.

LOUIS SMITH SOLOGRAPHY

LOUIS SMITH

Hackensack, NJ. Feb. 4, 1957

Louis Smith (tp), Cannonball “Buckshot La Funke” Adderley (as), Duke Jordan (p), Doug Watkins (b), Art Taylor (dm).

Three titles were recorded for Transition, later transferred to Blue Note, issued as “Here Comes Louis Smith”:

Tribute To Brownie	Solo with (dm) 32 bars. Break to solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
Brill’s Blues	Solo 8+48 bars. (S)
South Side	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (M)

Hackensack, NJ. Feb. 9, 1957

Same except Tommy Flanagan (p) replaces Duke Jordan. Three titles:

Ande	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. 2 choruses 4/4 with (dm/as). (F)
Star Dust	Solo 64 bars to long coda. (S)
Val’s Blues	Solo 9 choruses of 12 bars. 6 choruses 4/4 with (dm). (F)

Here comes one of the most prominent and least remembered of the many fine trumpeters of the late fifties! Louis Smith has all the necessary qualities to make it real big. Starting out with a well chosen “... Brownie”, he plays three brilliant choruses. Then after a brief ensemble start, he goes into the slow blues with five choruses on “Brill’s ...”, beautiful but with a few not quite perfect choices. Fine soloing also on the medium “... Side”. Stopping after three tunes and waiting five days with a change from one sparkling pianist to another, three more items are produced. A tough start with a very fast “Ande”, actually “Indiana”, but four choruses are played with great ease. Then a conventional ballad, “Stardust”, played as a solo feature with great sensitivity and beauty. Listening to this mature playing it is quite understandable that he got this first opportunity to record, and that later Blue Note picked it up. Closing with the very fast “Val’s ...”, it is, if not before, evident why the album title was chosen; a jam session between the two would not have been an easy ride even for the legendary Clifford Brown!

LOUIS SMITH

Hackensack, NJ. March 30, 1958

Louis Smith (tp), Charlie Rouse (ts), Sonny Clark (p), Paul Chambers (b), Art Taylor (dm).

Seven titles were recorded for Blue Note, issued as “Smithville”:

tk1	Tunesmith / Bakin’	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
tk8	There Will Never Be Another You	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
	There Will Never Be Another You (mono)	As above. (FM)
tk11	Au Privave	Solo 6 choruses of 12 bars. 4 choruses 4/4 with (dm). (M)
tk13	Smithville	Solo 8+12 bars. Solo 3 choruses of 12 bars. (S)
tk16	Embraceable You	Soli 64 and 16 bars to coda. (S)
tk17	Later	Break 4 bars to solo 3 choruses of 36 bars. (F)
tk18	Wetu	Solo 3 choruses of 64 bars. (F)

It took a year for Blue Note to organize LS’ second recording session. Fine variation of tunes, and LS continues to show how great he was. It should be mentioned that he was the nephew of the great trumpeter Booker Little who tragically passed away so early, there were obviously great talent in the family. He plays sparkling three choruses in very high tempo on “Bakin’”, a “Lover Come Back To Me”-clone and on “Later”. Excellent playing also in the medium tempi. Magnificent slow blues on “Smithville”. Finally there is a ballad here, and they cannot be played better than this, “Embraceable ...” with a big, round, soft and beautiful tone, and occasionally the image of Brownie comes to one’s mind. This session can definitely be compared successfully with the first one.

KENNY BURRELL**NYC. May 14, 1958**

Louis Smith (tp), Junior Cook (ts-1,2,8,9,10,12,14), Tina Brooks (ts-1,2,8,10,12,14), Duke Jordan (p-1,2,4,8,9), Bobby Timmons (p-10,11,12,14), Kenny Burrell (g), Sam Jones (b), Art Blakey (dm).

Eight titles were recorded for Blue Note (tk11 "Autumn In New York" without LS), issued as "Blue Lights":

tk1	I Never Knew	Solo 5 choruses of 32 bars. (F)
tk2	Scotch Blues	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
tk4	The Man I Love	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
tk8	Yes Baby	Solo 3 choruses of 12 bars. (S)
tk9	Phinupi	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (F)
tk10	Chuckin'	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. Solo 4 bars. (FM)
tk12	Rock Salt	Solo 5 choruses of 12 bars. (SM)
tk14	Caravan	With ens 1 to solo 2 choruses of 64 bars. With ens to coda. (FM)

One cannot but marvel at the quality of LS' trumpet playing! From the very first bar of the fast "... Knew" to the finale of "Caravan" he plays without weak points, always with great competence and inspiration. All items here are highly noteworthy, just go ahead! For a particular highlight dig the slow blues on "Yes Baby"! Long items, enough blowing space for everybody add to the pleasure. If LS only had left us this session, he would have become a legend.

HORACE SILVER QUINTET**Newport, Rh. I., July 6, 1958**

Louis Smith (tp), Junior Cook (ts), Horace Silver (p), Gene Taylor (b), Louis Hayes (dm).

Four titles were recorded at the Newport Jazz Festival, issued as "Horace Silver Live At Newport '58":

	Tippin'	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. 3 choruses chase with (dm/ts/ens). (FM)
	The Outlaw	Solo 3 choruses of 54 bars. Solo 6 bars. (FM)
	Senor Blues	Solo 24 bars. (SM)
	Cool Eyes	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

Should like to have had a studio session with this group, but there is nothing wrong with this festival performance, except too strong drums. Excellent trumpet playing on all items.

YOUNG MEN FROM MEMPHIS**NYC. Jan. 30, 1959**

Booker Little, Louis Smith (tp), Frank Strozier (as), George Coleman (ts), Phineas Newborn (p), Calvin Newborn (g), George "Jamil Nasser" Joyner (b), Charles Crosby (dm).

Two titles were recorded for United Artists, issued as "Down Home Reunion":

	Blue 'N' Boogie	Solo 5 choruses of 12 bars (2 nd (tp)-solo). (F)
stereo	Things Ain't What They Used To Be	Solo 24 bars (2 nd (tp)-solo). (SM)
mono	Things Ain't What They Used To Be	As above. (SM)

LS has decided to return home and is not heard from in almost twenty years. Great shame because he shows that he could play with the greatest of his contemporaries. On this particular session he is good enough, but it has to be admitted; his more famous nephew shows him some things to think about... Postscript of Sept. 2021: A mono take of "Things ..." exists, another fine trumpet solo by LS!

The next Louis Smith session takes place in 1978, and the solography thus stops conveniently here.