

The
TENORSAX
of
ROBERT CROWDER
“LITTLE SAX”

Solographer: Jan Evensmo
Last update: Nov. 30, 2017

Born: ca. 1912
Died: no info

Introduction:

After listening to Robert Crowder's soloing on the Lionel Hampton session for Victor in 1938, we knew there were more to the tenor saxophone than we had believed ...

History:

Worked in Milwaukee during the early 1930s, then with François Mosely's Louisianians (1932), with Punch Miller at the Harlem Club, Chicago (1933). With pianist Leo Montgomery and his Creole Playboys (summer 1934), then toured with François Mosely. Joined Horace Henderson in July 1937, then with Earl Hines 1938-1940. With Walter Fuller (September 1940), with pianist Fletcher Butler (early 1941), and Coleman Hawkins in Chicago (April 1941), then again with Earl Hines. Quit touring and settled in Chicago.

ROBERT "LITTLE SAX" CROWDER SOLOGRAPHY

LIONEL HAMPTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA **Chi. Oct. 11, 1938**

Walter Fuller (tp), Omer Simeon (cl, as), George Oldham (as), Budd Johnson, Robert Crowder (ts), Spencer Odun (p), Jesse Simpkins (b), Alvin Burroughs (dm), Lionel Hampton (vib, p, vo).

Three titles were recorded for Victor, two feature RC:

025866-1	Down Home Jump	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
025868-1	Fiddle Diddle	Solo 8 bars. (M)

Robert Crowder is one of the most pleasant surprises on tenorsax from the late thirties. With "Down Home Jump" he enters the recording jazz scene with electrifying energy. The record is one of the best with Hampton's pick-up groups, this time with personnel from the Earl Hines Orchestra, and with a magnificent drum backing from the great Alvin B. His incredible cymbal and high-hat playing whips "Little Sax" into a hilarious solo of great personality. The influence from Chu and a certain resemblance to Robert Carroll are evident, but RC certainly seems to be standing on his own two legs. "Fiddle ..." would have been equally important if the solo had been twice as long. A very interesting recording debut!

EARL HINES & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Dec. 4, 1938**

Personnel probably similar to below.

Bill Savory collection, broadcast, one title:

	Time Out	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
--	----------	--------------------

A colourful and swinging solo following Budd Johnson, and we can only wish there had been more Hines broadcasts.

Note: The liner notes of the fine Earl Hines album for Mosaic are not always in agreement with my identification of tenorsax soloists. Take a look and judge for yourself! Give feedback!

EARL HINES AND HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. July 12, 1939**

Walter Fuller (tp, vo), Milton Fletcher, Edward Sims (tp), George Dixon (tp, as), Edward Burke, John Ewing, Joe McLewis (tb), Omer Simeon (cl, bar), Leroy Harris (as, vo), Budd Johnson (cl, as, ts, arr), Robert Crowder (ts), Earl Hines (p, dir), Claude Roberts (g), Quinn Wilson (b, arr), Alvin Burroughs (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Bluebird, two feature RC:

038258-1	Grand Terrace Shuffle	Solo 8 bars. (F)
038259-1	Father Steps In	Solo 32 bars. (FM)

Chi. Oct. 6, 1939

Personnel as July 12, 1939.

Six titles were recorded for Bluebird, one features RC:

040477-1	'Gator Swing	Solo 8 bars (2 nd (ts)-solo). (FM)
----------	--------------	---

Although these soli cannot quite compare with those on the previous session, they give further evidence of a personal artist. The strong, persistent vibrato is very characteristic, but maybe it is emphasized too much. The soli are interesting, but the demands of the big band seem to have priority, and one gets the feeling that RC's capabilities are not exploited. What about slower tempi?

EARL HINES AND HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Feb. 13, 1940**

Earl Hines (p, dir), Walter Fuller (tp, vo), Milton Fletcher, Edward Sims (tp), George Dixon (tp, as), Edward Burke, John Ewing, Joe McLewis (tb), Omer Simeon (cl, bar), Leroy Harris (as, vo), Jimmy Mundy, Robert Crowder (ts, arr), Claude Roberts (g), Quinn Wilson (b), Alvin Burroughs (dm), Billy Eckstine (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Bluebird, two have RC:

047056-1	Deep Forest	Soli with orch 16 and 14 bars. (M)
047058-1	Number 19	Solo with orch 16+8 bars, orch on bridge. (FM)

NYC. June 19, 1940

Same, except Shirley Clay (tp), Budd Johnson (ts) replace Fletcher and Mundy.

Seven titles were recorded for Bluebird, one has RC:

051524-1 Topsy Turvy Soli 8 and 8 bars. (FM)

The feeling of unexploited possibilities is persisting from the 1939 Hines sessions. "Number 19" has a fine, colorful, swinging solo showing what RC could do. "Topsy ...", however, is not very successful, and "Deep ...", which is arranged by RC, does not give him much opportunity to improvise. I dare to venture that he must have been capable of cutting the majority of his contemporaries, but we will never know.

EARL HINES & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Nov. 17, 1941

Pee Wee Jackson, Tommy Enoch, Jesse Miller (tp), George Dixon (tp, bar), George Hunt, Joe McLewis (tb), Gerald Valentine (tb), Leroy Harris, Scoops Carry (as), Willie Randall, Robert Crowder, Budd Johnson (ts), Earl Hines (p), Hurley Ramey (g), Truck Parham (b), Rudy Traylor (dm), Billy Eckstine, Madeline Green, The Three Varieties (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Bluebird, one has RC:

068401-1 The Jitney Man Solo 6 bars. (FM)

Postscript of Nov. 30, 2017: Sorry, but this brief but nice solo was by mistake omitted earlier.

NYC. March 19, 1942

Similar. Four titles but no RC. Note, however, that he is the arranger of "Stormy Monday Blues".

ROOSEVELT SYKES AND HIS HONEYDRIPPERS Chi. July 12, 1951

Oett "Sax" Mallard (as), Robert Crowder (ts), Roosevelt Sykes (p, vo), unknown (g), Ernest Crawford (b), Armand "Jump" Jackson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for United (note: United 129 from Aug. 21, 1952 may also have RC), one has tenorsax:

U1002 Lucky Blues Solo 12 bars. (S)

Nothing here is reminding us of the important swing tenorsax player from the Lionel Hampton and Earl Hines recordings more than a decade earlier. This is a simple, quite ordinary blues saxophone, however with an unusual old-fashioned vibrato to make it slightly personal. But of course it is interesting from an academic point of view, and Sykes is a good singer.

EDDIE BOYD AND HIS CHESS MEN Chi. 1952

Robert Crowder (ts), Eddie Boyd (p, vo), Robert Jr. Lockwood (g), Alfred Elkins (b), Percy Walker (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Chess, three issued:

4310 Blues For Baby Obligato parts. (S)

4311 Cool Kind Treatment Obligato parts. (S)

4313 Rosalee Swing Solo 24 bars. (M)

However, this is better! Good blues in medium tempo on "Rosalee ..." and some good background playing should be noted.

EDDIE BOYD AND HIS CHESS MEN Chi. Oct. 10, 1952

Robert Crowder (ts), Eddie Boyd (p, vo), Robert Jr. Lockwood (g), Willie Dixon (b), Percy Walker (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Chess:

U7486 24 Hours Obligato parts. (S)

U7487 Hard Time Getting Started Solo 12 bars. (M)

U7488 Best I Could Obligato parts. (S)

U7489 The Tickler Soli 24 and 24 bars. (M)

U7489-alt. The Tickler As above. (M)

Yeah, here RC really swings again after all, compared to the Sykes session, this is something quite different! Dig his solo on "... Started"! And "The Tickler"s are really flying high, compare the last soli on the two takes and note the differences, more exciting blues tenorsax has rarely been made!!!

EDDIE BOYD AND HIS JAZZ MEN**Chi. Feb./May 1953**

Robert Crowder (ts), Eddie Boyd (p, vo), Lee Cooper (g), Willie Dixon (b), Percy Walker (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Chess, "Four Leaf Clover" and "Third Degree" have straight background only but:

U4373	That's When I Miss You So	Solo 22 bars. (M)
U4376	Back Beat	Solo 24 bars. (S)
U4376-alt.	Back Beat	As above. (S)

On these blues items, one can easily hear the old jazzman coming through, both items have quite noteworthy tenorsax playing. But the two takes of "... Beat" are very much similar.

EDDIE BOYD AND HIS JAZZ MEN**Chi. Sept. 24, 1953**

Personnel as above except Robert Jr. Lockwood (g) replaces Cooper.

Four titles were recorded for Chess, 7559 "Rattin' And Runnin' Round" has straight background only but:

U7558	Tortured Soul	Obbligato parts. (S)
U7560	Just A Fool	Solo 24 bars. (M)
U7561	Hush Baby Don't You Cry	Solo 24 bars. (M)

This is the last opportunity to witness the talents of a great, underrated and underrecorded tenorsax player. Although one is far away from the days of Hampton and Hines, the old fire is still there!

No further recording sessions on tenorsax but:

THE OTIS RUSH BLUES BAND**Chi. Dec. 28/29, 1965**

Robert "Sax" Crowder (as), Otis Rush (g, vo), Luther Tucker (g), Ernest Gatewood (b), Jesse Green (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Vanguard, five issued:

Everything's Going To Turn Out Alright	Solo 32 bars. (SM)
It's A Mean Old World	In ens. (SM)
I Can't Quit You Baby	Obbligato parts. (S)
Rock	Solo 24 bars. (M)
It's My Own Fault	Solo 20 bars. (S)

Obviously RC has been active all the time up till now, because the few examples he gives of his altosax playing is very high quality. Particularly his almost two choruses on the utterly groovy "... Fault" is a good demonstration. Sorry he disappeared from view.

...ooo...