

**The**  
**ALTOSAX**  
**and other reeds**  
**of**  
**RUDY WILLIAMS**

Born: Newark, New Jersey, 1909  
Died: Sept. 1954

*Introduction:*

Rudy Williams was never identified as an important alto sax player when I grew up with Oslo Jazz Circle, and the Savoy Sultans was not high in demand. However, considering him now, he was in fact one early musician toying with the new modern ideas, and it is interesting to seek out the details of his career.

*History:*

Began playing sax at the age of 12. From 1937 until June 1943 was featured with Al Cooper's Savoy Sultans, then worked with Hot Lips Page (June 1943), Luis Russell (September 1943), Chris Columbus' band (December 1943). Formed own band in February 1944, briefly with Henry Jerome band, then from August 1944 with Dud Bascomb's band. Short spell with John Kirby sextet from June 1945, then from September of that year led own band at Minton's, New York. Toured Far East with U.S.O. Show from December 1945 until July 1946. In 1947 worked with the Jazz-in-Bebop Orchestra, formed own band during following year. Led in New York (1948) and in Boston (1949-50). Reformed own band for further residencies at Hi-Hat Club, Boston (spring 1951), then worked in California with Illinois Jacquet and with tenorist Gene Ammons. From late 1951 until spring 1952 did four months' tour of service bases in Far East in band which started the tour with bassist Oscar Pettiford as leader. Returned to U.S.A. and again worked with own band and free lanced. Lost life in an underwater swimming accident (ref. John Chilton).

*Message:*

Tom Buhmann has written the interesting and informing article: "The Baddest Alto Player Walking In New York – The Life And Music Of Rudy Williams, 1909 – 1954", appearing in IAJRC Journal vol. 49 no. 1 (Spring 2016), with supplements in vol. 49 no. 3 (Fall 2016).

## RUDY WILLIAMS SOLOGRAPHY

**AL COOPER & HIS SAVOY SULTANS** **NYC. Sept./Oct. 1937**

Personnel probably as Decca recording session July 29, 1938 below.

Film short "Rooftop Frolics", reported to be made shortly after The Sultans made their debut at the Savoy Sept. 6, 1937, released Nov. 1937, one title:

Looney Solo 32 bars. (FM)

Rudy Williams makes his first appearance on a film short and takes a colourful altosax solo, quite different from that on the Decca session, almost one year later.

**TIMME ROSENKRANTZ**  
**AND HIS BARRELHOUSE BARONS** **NYC. May 27, 1938**

Rex Stewart (cnt), Billy Hicks (tp), Tyree Glenn (tb, vib), Russell Procope, Rudy Williams (as), Don Byas (ts), Billy Kyle (p), Brick Fleagle (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (dm), Leo Mathiesen (arr), Inez Cavanaugh (vo-23503,04).

Four titles were recorded for Victor, two have RW:

23502-1 A Wee Bit Of Swing Solo 32 bars. (FM)

23505-1 The Song Is Ended Solo 16+8 bars, (cnt) on bridge (2<sup>nd</sup> (as)-solo). (FM)

Fine swing session with Rudy Williams' first appearance in a recording studio. His playing is dynamic and enthusiastic with very good command of his instrument on these two uptempo titles. His style is jumpy swing style, and one might get the impression that he gets carried away by his music, it controls him instead of the opposite! Anyway, it is a very interesting debut!

**AL COOPER & HIS SAVOY SULTANS** **NYC. July 29, 1938**

Al Cooper (cl, as, bar, arr, dir), Pat Jenkins (tp, vo), Sam Massenberg (tp), Rudy Williams (as), Ed McNeil (ts), Oliver Richardson (p), Grachan Moncur (b), Alex Mitchell (dm).

Five titles were recorded for Decca, two have altosax:

64361-A Looney Soli 30 and 8 bars. (FM)

64362-A Rhythm Doctor Man Solo 8 bars. (FM)

**NYC. Aug. 19, 1938**

Same. Helen Proctor (vo-64467,69).

Four titles, three issued, two have altosax:

64468-A Jeep's Blues Solo/straight 12 bars. (S)

64470-A You'll Never Miss The Water Solo 8 bars. (M)

The Savoy Sultans gave RW a firm place to develop through five years. On these first session he continues to play with his typical enthusiasm. The best solo seems clearly to be the brief 8 bars of "... Doctor ...", well constructed. "Looney" shows an artist full of inspiration but perhaps without a clear direction where to go, and one may question his sense of taste. Some of the same may be said about "... The Water". He opens the "... Blues" in a nice and personal way.

**AL COOPER & HIS SAVOY SULTANS** **NYC. May 24, 1939**

Al Cooper (cl, as, bar, arr, dir), Pat Jenkins (tp, vo-65632), Sam Massenberg (tp), Rudy Williams (as), Sam Simmons (ts), Cyril Haynes (p, arr), Paul Chapman (g, vo, arr), Grachan Moncur (b), Alex Mitchell (dm), Evelyn White (vo-65633).

Four titles were recorded for Decca, two have altosax:

65630-A Stitches Solo with ens 32 bars. (M)

65631-A Jumpin' At The Savoy Solo with ens 16+8 bars, (p) on bridge. (M)

**NYC. Oct. 16, 1939**

Same. Evelyn White (vo-66777), Pat Jenkins (vo-66776).

Four titles, three have altosax:

66774-A Little Sally Water Solo with ens 24 bars. (FM)

66775-A Jumpin' The Blues Solo with ens 24 bars. (FM)

66777-A When I Grow Too Old To Dream Solo with ens 22 bars. (FM)

Here are many good examples of RW's pretty wild style, jumping quite staccato,, at other times enthusiastic outbursts. There is no doubt about RW's originality as an improviser, but it is not always obvious how he thinks about what he is doing. The five soli above together demonstrate quite clearly both his positive sides but his musical taste can in my opinion be questioned.

**AL COOPER & HIS SAVOY SULTANS NYC. March 29, 1940**

Al Cooper (cl, as, bar, arr, dir), Pat Jenkins (tp, vo-67434), Sam Massenber (tp), Rudy Williams (as), Irving "Skinny" Brown (ts), Cyril Haynes (p, arr), Paul Chapman (g, vo, arr), Grachan Moncur (b), Alex Mitchell (dm), Evelyn White (vo-67435).

Four titles were recorded for Decca, two have altosax:

67433-A Frenzy Solo 32 bars. (F)

67435-A Wishing And Crying For You Solo with ens 10 bars. (M)

On "Frenzy" we have one of the most prominent examples of RW's altosax artistry, tailored to the jumping style of the Sultans. This listener is somewhat reserved towards the band's concept, but it was a great success, leading to many followers in the years to come. RW is not a subtle executor but a wild man on his instrument, and this solo is typical. "Wishing ..." also has an interesting and typical solo.

**AL COOPER & HIS SAVOY SULTANS NYC. Feb. 28, 1941**

Personnel as March 29, 1940 except George Kelly (ts, vo) replaces Brown.

Four titles were recorded for Decca, three have altosax:

68753-A Norfolk Ferry Solo 6 choruses of 12 bars,  
last 4 choruses with ens. (F)

68755-A See What I Mean? Solo with ens 24 bars. (M)

68756-A Jackie Boy Solo with ens 16 bars. (M)

"Norfolk ..." must be considered one of RW's most forceful contributions, almost a feature number for altosax. He pours out chorus by chorus with firm determination, and there can be no doubt about his popularity at the Savoy Ballroom. Perhaps more important is the observation on the two other titles that he also know how to calm down with fine melodic work, and also that there are occasional small details showing that RW is aware of the developments towards modern jazz.

**AL COOPER & HIS SAVOY SULTANS NYC. Dec. 29, 1941**

Personnel as Feb. 28, 1941. Betty Roche (vo-70113), George Kelly (vo-70114).

Four titles, three have altosax:

70111-A Boats Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars,  
partly with ens, to coda. (M)

70112-A Fish For Your Supper Solo 16 bars. (M)

70113-A 'At's In There Solo 8 bars. Break. (M)

On RW's final recording session with the Sultans, there is a very interesting and quite long solo on "Boats" that should be particularly noted. The two other items also support the feeling that RW has matured and is ready for new challenges.

**JAM SESSION NYC. May 1941**

Joe Guy and another (tp), Rudy Williams (as), unknown (ts), (p), (b), (dm), Hot Lips Page (vo).

One title was recorded at Minton's Playhouse:

5:57 Old Yazoo Solo 64 bars. (FM)

RW was one of those pioneers of modern jazz meeting at Minton's and Monroe's for jamming and developing the new ideas. Dan Morgenstern says it this way in his liner notes: "He's adventurous, strongly influenced by the eccentric side of Willie Smith, and unusually dissonant for this period". It is difficult to take this as a compliment, and listening closely to his solo here, he is more enthusiastic than really successful with his playing, throwing out inspired constructions which however have little in common with the coherence of the great Bird.

**JAM SESSION****NYC. May 1941**

Hot Lips Page, Joe Guy (tp), Rudy Williams (as), Don Byas, Kermit Scott (ts), "Tex" (p), Charlie Christian (g), Nick Fenton (b), Kenny Clarke (dm).

Date suggested to be May 8.

One title was recorded at Minton's Playhouse, 230 West 118<sup>th</sup> Street, by Jerry Newman:

10:20 Stompin' At The Savoy Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

RW is again throwing himself into the nightly battles and is full of inspiration and ideas but not always so good at implementing them logically into a musical wholeness. His soloing may be considered more interesting than really good.

**JAM SESSION****NYC. May 1941**

Hot Lips Page, Victor Coulsen, Joe Guy (tp), Rudy Williams (as), Don Byas, Kermit Scott (ts), Allen Tinney (p), Charlie Christian (g), Ebenezer Paul (b), Taps Miller (dm).

Date suggested to be May 6.

Two titles were recorded at Clark Monroe's Uptown House on 198 West 133<sup>rd</sup> Street by Jerry Newman:

Guy's Got To Go / I Got Rhythm No solo. (M)  
 4:51 On With Charlie Christian / Lips Flips Solo 64 bars. (FM)  
 Stompin' At The Savoy

These items are not complete and on "... Go", RW is not of those found worthy of recording or issuing, as on the Esoteric 10" which starts with Page's solo. However, on other issues an altosax solo precedes Page, possibly not complete with only two choruses presented. Issued as "On ...", this is also "... Savoy" with active and inspired playing similar to the other two preserved soli.

**DON BYAS****NYC. Aug. 17, 1944**

Charlie Shavers (tp), Rudy Williams (as), Don Byas (ts), Clyde Hart (p, cel), Slam Stewart (b), Jack Parker (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Savoy (one more without RW):

5700 Savoy Jam Party Pt 2 Solo 24 bars. (FM)  
 5701 Savoy Jam Party Pt 1 Solo 24 bars. (FM)  
 5702 1944 Stomp Solo 16 bars. (FM)  
 5702 1944 Stomp (NC) As above. (FM)  
 5704 Bass C Jam Solo 24 bars. (FM)

Far from the Sultans and three years away from Minton's, RW joins the massive record production of the middle forties. Quoting Dan Morgenstern's liner notes: "I always liked his slightly "sour" tone, and the solo on "Savoy ..." (5701) really shows his affinity for Parker" and on "... Stomp": "... and Rudy again doffs his cap to Bird; not many altoists could do that so well in August 1944, but as we have noted, Rudy was into this approach on his own long before". An important RW session. Postscript of Jan. 31, 2018: Had forgotten the aborted take of "... Stomp", but this happens just before the end, so the altosax is intact, a quite different solo.

**DUD BASCOMB****NYC. Dec. 1944**

Personnel given in discos: Wilbur "Dud" Bascomb (tp), Steve Pulliam (tb), possibly Rudy Williams, Joe Evans (as), Paul Bascomb, John Hartzfield (ts), Robert Harley (p), Isaac McFadden (g), Nick Fenton (b), Charles Simon (dm).

However, Tom Buhmann thinks that RW had left the Bascomb brothers' band at this time and led his own band from November 1944 at The Spotlite.

Four titles were recorded for DeLuxe, but no RW to be heard.

**DERYCK SAMPSONS ORCHESTRA****NYC. probably Oct. 18, 1945**

Rudy Williams (as), Deryck Sampson (p), Leonard Gaskin (b), Harold "Doc" West (dm), Mabel Lee (vo), Stepin Fetchit (comedy).

Soundie, "Baby Don't Go Way From Me", RW can be seen on screen, and an altosax is heard on the soundtrack, but way in the background ... no way to know for sure if it is RW, but my guess is, "yes" (Mark Cantor).

**BABS' THREE BIPS AND A BOP****NYC. Feb. 24, 1947**

Rudy Williams (as), Tadd Dameron (p, vo, arr), William "Pee Wee" Tinney (g, vo), Arthur Phipps (b), Charles Simon (dm), Babs Gonzales (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Blue Note:

296-1	Lop-Pow	Breaks. Solo 32 bars. (M)
297-1	Oop-Pop-A-Da	Soli 12, 8 and 8 bars. (M)
298-3	Stompin' At The Savoy	Solo 32 bars. (M)
299-2	Pay Dem Dues	Solo 32 bars. (M)

This is an important RW session inasmuch as he gets ample solo opportunities. The rhythm section is clearly connected to the swing era, while RW's altosax is influenced by modern trends. He plays with strength, inspiration and a personal style, but the results are not really that sensational, compared to some of his more well known contemporaries on this instrument.

**SIR CHARLES THOMPSON**

**NYC. Dec. 29, 1947**

Joe Newman, Taft Jordan (tp), H. B. Mitchell alias Benny Morton (tb), Rudy Williams (as), Bob Dorsey (ts), Tate Houston (bar), Sir Charles Thompson (p), Hank Morton (g), John Simmons (b), Shadow Wilson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Apollo, altosax on one title:

1307-1	Harlem Jump	Solo 18 bars. (M)
1307-2	Harlem Jump	As above. (M)

According to Sir Charles, and discographies, the altosax player on this session is Pete Brown. Eddie Bert has however maintained that it is RW, quoting Bnny Morton as his source. Listening seems to support this information, and he is definitely not Brown.

**HELEN HUMES ACC. BY**

**BUCK CLAYTON'S ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. Dec. 31, 1947**

Buck Clayton (tp), Scoville Brown (cl), Rudy Williams (as), Teddy Wilson (p), Jimmy Butts (b), Denzil Best (dm), Helen Humes (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Mercury, one has RW:

1643-2	Flippity Flop Flop	As below. (SM)
1643-3	Flippity Flop Flop	Obbligato 12 bars. (SM)

Not much space for RW on this pleasant session, but typical background on this single item.

**EDDIE DAVIS ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. 1948**

Shad Collins (tp), Milt Larkins (tb), Rudy Williams (as), Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis (ts), Dave McRae (bar), John Acea or Earl Knight (p), Gene Ramey (b), Butch Ballard or Shadow Wilson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Sittin' In With, but no RW.

**TADD DAMERON SEXTET**

**NYC. Oct. 2, 1948**

Fats Navarro (tp), Rudy Williams (as), Allen Eager (ts), Tadd Dameron (p), Curley Russell (b), Kenny Clarke (dm).

Broadcast from Royal Roost, two titles:

Good Bait	Solo 32 bars. (M)
The Squirrel	Solo 36 bars. (M)

**NYC. Oct. 9, 1948**

Same. Two titles:

The Tadd Walk	Solo 64 bars. (F)
Dameronia	Solo 64 bars. (FM)

**NYC. Oct. 16, 1948**

Same. Three titles:

Anthropology	Solo 64 bars. (F)
Our Delight	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
The Tadd Walk	Solo 64 bars. 64 bars 4/4 with (tp/ts). (F)

**NYC. Oct. 23, 1948**

Same. Four titles:

Our Delight	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
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Good Bait	Solo 32 bars. (M)
Eb-Pob	Solo 32 bars. (M)
The Squirrel	Solo 48 bars. (M)

RW's participation in this group of master players indicates that he must have had a certain status in the modern jazz milieu of the late forties. Note however that this seems to be his last appearance on the altosax. His style has definitely modified since the period of the Sultans, even compared to the Gonzales session only 1 ½ years earlier. He plays more restrained, not venturing into extended choruses of which he has not quite control. It seems he tries to be as integrated as possible into this legendary tp/ts cooperation. The results are as good as they could be expected to be, considering that RW does not quite have technique nor harmonic strength enough to match these challenges. The last session seems to be his best; this one also has generally more pleasant tempi than the others.

**EDDIE "CLEANHEAD" VINSON** **NYC. May 1950**

Rostelle Reese (tp), Cornelius Tate (b-tp), Eddie Vinson (as, vo), Rudy Williams (ts), Orrington Hall (bar), Milton Larkins (p), Dave Richmond (b), Rudy Nichols (dm).

Four titles were recorded for King, two have RW:

K5905	Peas And Rice	Obbligato 24 bars. (SM)
K5906	Big Mouth Gal	Obbligato 24 bars. (SM)

These tenorsax obbligati are highly enjoyable, groovy and inventive!

**ILLINOIS JACQUET** **LA. Jan. 18, 1951**

Russell Jacquet (tp, vo), Joe Newman (tp), Ernie Henry (as), Illinois Jacquet (ts), Rudy Williams (bar), Johnny Acea (p), Leonard Gaskin (b), Lee Abrams (dm).

Four titles were recorded Clef, one has RW:

494-4	Later For The Happenin'	(bar)-Solo 24 bars. (M)
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The first of a very few baritonesax recordings, ok but not particularly remarkable.

**GENE AMMONS** **NYC. June 29, 1951**

Bill Massey (tp), Elisha Dabney (tb), Gene Ammons (ts), Rudy Williams (bar), Clarence Anderson (p), Earl May (b), Teddy Stewart (dm), Sally Early (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Prestige, "Ammons Boogie", "Echo Chamber Blues", "Sirocco", "Fine And Foxy", no baritonesax soli but heard prominently in the ensembles.

**BENNIE GREEN** **NYC. Oct. 5, 1951**

Bennie Green (tb), Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, George "Big Nick" Nicholas (ts), Rudy Williams (bar), Teddy Brannon (p), Tommy Potter (b), Art Blakey (dm).

Seven titles were recorded for Prestige, six issued, two have RW:

222	Flowing River	(bar)-Solo 12 bars. (S)
227	Sugar Syrup	(bar)-Solo with ens 7 choruses of 12 bars. (M)

A pleasant bluesy baritonesax solo on "... River". "Sugar ..." is a kind of honking feature number for RW, not that exciting really.

**JAM SESSION** **Philadelphia. Nov. 4, 1951**

Red Rodney (tp), Charlie Parker (as), Rudy Williams (ts), Teddy Brannon (p), Bonnie Wetzell (b), Roy Haynes (dm).

Five titles, "Cool Blues", "Out Of Nowhere", "This Is Always", "Now's The Time" and "Scrapple From The Apple", were recorded at Reynolds Hall, Veteran's Hospital "by a Charlie Parker enthusiast who recorded or kept only Parker's soli and precious few bars with the other participants".

**HOWARD MCGHEE** **Guam, Pacific Islands, late 1951 – very early 1952**

Howard McGhee (tp), J. J. Johnson (tb), Rudy Williams (ts), Skeeter Best (g), Oscar Pettiford (b), Charlie Rice (dm).

Concert, recorded by AFRS, later brought to Hi-Lo Records by HMcG, then sold to Savoy, three titles, no RW on "Medley" and "Harvest Time" but:

Lady Be Good / Riff tide	Soli 64, 4, 4 and 4 bars. (F)
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**same place, Jan. 17, 1952**

Same except unknown Philipino (b) replaces Pettiford.

Eleven titles, no RW on 404 “Body And Soul”, “Don’t Blame Me” and “Stormy Weather” but:

401/402	How High The Moon Pt 1&2	Solo 64 bars. (F)
403	Stardust	Solo 16 bars. (S)
405	12 <sup>th</sup> Street Bop/Rag	Solo 32 bars. (F)
406	The Man With A Horn	Solo 48 bars to long coda. (S)
	Perdido	Soli 8 and 64 bars. (FM)
	One O’Clock Jump	Solo 24 bars. (FM)
	Stompin’ At The Savoy	Solo 64 bars. (F)

A concert under pretty unusual circumstances! RW is using the tenor saxophone here. The results are rather uneven; in uptempo he manages “... The Moon” quite well, except the excesses at the solo end, the brief “... Rag” in fact also. His taste in “Perdido” and “Lady ...” might however have been more convincing, and although he swings his old “... Savoy”, he makes little impression. It is therefore a pleasure to note his warm and emotional playing in “Stardust” and particularly his only feature number, the ballad “... Horn”.

**FREDDIE MITCHELL**

**NYC. 1952**

Personnel including Rudy Williams (as, bar).

Two titles were recorded for Mercury, no RW on “Delicado”, while “Perfidia” has not been available.

**NYC. 1952**

Same/similar. Two titles, no RW on “Later Gator”, while “Blue Coal” has not been available.

**JOHNNY HODGES & HIS ALL STARS**

**NYC. Dec. 11, 1952**

Emmett Berry (tp), Lawrence Brown (tb), Johnny Hodges (as), Ben Webster, Rudy Williams (ts), Teddy Brannon or Leroy Lovett (p), Barney Richmond (b), Al Walker (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Clef/Verve, one has RW:

955-7	Latino	Solo 12 bars (1 <sup>st</sup> (ts)-solo). (M)
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Although the competition is heavy, RW does an able tenorsax job here.

**AL HIBBLER VOCAL ACC. BY**

**LEROY LOVETT & HIS ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. Sept. 30, 1953**

Joe Wilder, Bobby Johnson (tp), Ted Kelly, Dickie Harris (tb), George Dorsey, Pete Clark (as), Stafford Simon (ts), Rudy Williams (bar), Leroy Lovett (p), Lloyd Trotman (b), Bill Smith (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Clef/Norgran, one has RW:

1327-3	You And I	(bar)-Solo 8 bars. (SM)
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RW’s recording career concludes with a brief but pretty baritonesax solo, stylistically very different from his altosax starting point fifteen years later.

No further recording sessions.

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