

**The**

**ALTOSAX**

**of**

**WILLIAM CRISS**

**“SONNY”**

Solographers: James Accardi & Jan Evensmo  
Last update: March 22, 2021, Nov. 26, 2022

Born: Memphis, Tennessee, Oct. 23, 1927  
 Died: Los Angeles, Nov. 19, 1977

*Introduction:*

Sonny Criss was not very well known among is in the early days, and I (JE) personally became seriously interested and fascinated by his great playing a few years ago, sorry!

*History:*

Worked mostly in Los Angeles, where he lived from 1942; in 1946 he played in Howard McGhee's band with Charlie Parker and Teddy Edwards, then worked with drummer Johnny Otis, Billy Eckstine, and Gerald Wilson. After touring in a band with Parker under the auspices of Norman Granz's Jazz at the Philharmonic (1948) he played during the 1950s with Eckstine (1950-51), Stan Kenton (1955), Howard Rumsey's Lighthouse All Stars and Buddy Rich (1958); he also led groups of his own. From 1962 to 1965 he lived in Europe, recording, performing and broadcasting. When he returned to Los Angeles, however, he had difficulty finding steady work; after recording several times in the late 1960s he spent much time in community service. In 1973-74 he toured Europe, and in 1975 he resumed recording. He took his own life (ref. New Grove Dictionary of Jazz).

## SONNY CRISS SOLOGRAPHY

**BIG JAY McNEELY** **possibly LA. late 1945 / early 1946**  
 Sonny Criss (as), Big Jay McNeely (ts), Hampton Hawes (p), Buddy Woodson (b),  
 Leon Moore (dm).

One title is known to exist, coming from an acetate from SC's personal collection – the same source as the unissued Portland recordings with Al Killian and Wardell Gray:

Dark Eyes	Straight 32 bars. Solo 32 bars. Straight 16 bars. (M)
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This scratchy acetate is the first example of Sonny Criss' altosax. The sound quality prohibits detailed analysis, but his sound is immediately recognizable, and the intensity so typical of his playing is already there. Being only 18 years at the time, he is truly amazing.

**HOWARD McGHEE SEXTET** **Pasadena, Ca., ca. March 1947**  
 Howard McGhee (tp), Sonny Criss (as), Teddy Edwards (ts), Hampton Hawes (p),  
 Addison Farmer (b), Roy Porter (dm).  
 AFRS Jubilee programs No. 238/239 from McCormack General Hospital, two titles  
 recorded (one more title "Body And Soul" without SC) (alternatively LA. and the  
 "Hi-De-Ho Club"):

The Man I Love	Soli 16, 64 and 16 bars. (F)
Ornithology	Solo 32 bars. (FM)

The sextet presents a young and very promising Sonny Criss, only 19 ½ years old but already an accomplished alto saxophone artist. His soloing on "... Love" is an amazing performance, the tempo is very fast, but he plays with a confidence only Parker and Stitt could show at this early stage of modern jazz. He also plays a good solo on "Ornithology". SC certainly was at this early time one of the most promising young altosax talents.

**BILLY ECKSTINE** **LA. April 21, 1947**  
 Billy Eckstine (vo, vtb), Ray Linn (tp), Gerald Valentine (tb), Sonny Criss (as),  
 Wardell Gray (ts), Warren Bracken (p), unknown (g), Shifty Henry (b), Tim  
 Kennedy (dm).  
 Eight titles were recorded for National, but no SC.

**HOWARD McGHEE & HIS ORCHESTRA** **LA. Spring 1946**  
 Personnel usually given as following: Howard McGhee, Gerald Wilson (tp), Vic  
 Dickenson (tb), Sonny Criss (as), Teddy Edwards, James King (ts), Jimmy Bunn  
 (p), Charles Mingus (b), Roy Porter (dm). However we cannot hear any altosax,  
 any second trumpet, nor trombone at all!  
 Four titles, "Sweet Potato", "Hoggin", "Blues A La King" and "Night Mist" were  
 recorded for Melodisc, but no altosax soli.

**ERNIE LEWIS ALL STARS** **San Francisco, ca. Summer 1946**  
 Personnel has often been given as: Ernie Royal (tp), possibly Sonny Criss (as),  
 Wardell Gray (ts), unknown (p), Ernie Lewis (g), Vernon Alley (b), possibly Roy  
 Porter (dm). However, this is wrong. The wardellgray.org website gives the correct  
 personnel as: Ernie Royal (tp), Jerome Richardson (as), Eddie Taylor (ts), Ernie  
 Lewis (p), Earl Boatley (g), Vernon Alley (b), Earl Watkins (dm).  
 Two titles were recorded for Pacific, no altosax solo on "Vernon's Alley Blues"  
 but Solo 32 bars (FM) on "Hit That Jive Jack". It is easy to understand that this fine  
 solo has been attributed to Sonny Criss.

**"JAZZ SURPRISE"** **unknown**  
 This LP, Crown CLP5008, has three items, "Fall Out", "Wailin'" and "Scratch"  
 where the discos list Sonny Criss in the personnel. All have altosax soli but, as far  
 as our ears permit us to judge, not by SC.

**GENE NORMAN'S JUST JAZZ CONCERT** **Pasadena, Ca., April 29, 1947**  
 Howard McGhee (tp), Sonny Criss (as), Wardell Gray (ts), Dodo Marmarosa (p),  
 Red Callender (b), Jackie Mills (dm).  
 Three titles were recorded live at the Civic Auditorium:

Be Bop / Dizzy's Fingers	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. 64 bars 4/4 with (tp/ts). (F)
Groovin' High	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
Hot House	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

Excellent followup of the AFRS session earlier and SC creates three fine personal, flowing and confident altosax soli. Guess he is inspired by his prominent fellow musicians with gorgeous tenorsax. Note the colourful chase on “Be Bop” and how SC starts the second chorus here!

### **HOLLYWOOD JAZZ CONCERT**

**LA. July 6, 1947**

Collective personnel: Howard McGhee, Al Killian (tp), Trummy Young (tb), Sonny Criss (as), Wardell Gray, Dexter Gordon, Teddy Edwards (ts), Hampton Hawes, Russ Freeman (p), Barney Kessel (g), Red Callender, Leroy Gray, Harry Babasin (b), Ken Kennedy, Connie Kay, Roy Porter (dm), Earl Coleman (vo-“...Soul”).

Nine titles were recorded at “Elk’s Auditorium”:

The Hunt / Rocks ‘N’ Shoals	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
Bopera / Disorder At The Border	Solo 9 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
Back Breaker	Solo 5 choruses of 32 bars. (M)
Blow, Blow, Blow / The Creep	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. 2 choruses 4/4 with (ts-WG). (M)
Bopland / Byas-A-Drink	No solo. (M)
Jeronimo / Cherry-Coke	Solo 3 choruses of 64 bars. (FM)
Bop After Hours	Solo 24 bars. (S)
Body And Soul (NC)	No solo. (S)
Rifftide (0:53)	No solo. (FM)

This famous concert gives SC ample opportunities to play, and he is in very good shape. This is not beautiful music but hard bebop, and his altosax playing fits into the proceedings. Long soli on five well known standard tunes although with camouflaged names, mostly in medium tempo, and although his repertoire is limited and he thus often repeat himself, the playing is enthusiastic and inspired, flowing easily, and with no modesty with regard to his more famous fellow musicians. As an extra benefit, he takes two strong and personal blues choruses in very slow tempo on “... Hours”. A few minutes of tuning, where SC is heard, followed by introduction of personnel, also exist.

### **AL KILLIAN SEXTET /**

#### **SONNY CRISS ALL STARS**

**probably Hollywood, Summer 1947**

Al Killian (tp), Sonny Criss (as), Wardell Gray (ts), Charles Fox (p), Shifty Henry or Ernie Shepard (b), Tim Kennedy (dm).

Six titles, AFRS Jubilee No. 242/243, all except “... Jump” issued on Xanadu as “The Sonny Criss Memorial Album” (note: these are not from Portland Oct. 17, see below):

Blue Lou	Solo 16 bars. (FM)
The Creep	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
Out Of Nowhere	Soli 12 and 12 bars. (FM)
Semi-Quiet /Sonny’s Bop	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
Blue ‘N’ Boogie	Solo 24 bars. (M)
One O’Clock Jump	60 bars duet / 4/4 with (ts-WG). (M)

Rather brief performances that could (almost) have fitted into the 78 rpm. format. The rhythm background here is hard, possibly overamplified, reducing listening pleasure, too bad because SC plays quite competently. “Blue ...” and “Blue ...” are not that interesting, and the arrangement of “... Nowhere” is rather awkward, but “The Creep” and “Semi-Quiet” has each a full chorus of good quality. The unissued “... Jump” is a mess, possibly a warming up, with SC fooling around with Wardell.

### **AL KILLIAN SEXTET**

**Portland, Oregon, Oct. 17, 1947**

Al Killian (tp), Sonny Criss (as), Wardell Gray (ts), Charles Fox (p), Ernie Shepard (b), Tim Kennedy (dm). Date has also been given as Oct. 8.

Four titles, live recordings, possibly from the Savoy Club, coming from SC’s own collection, unissued:

Lover Come Back To Me	Solo 64 bars. (M)
Blue ‘N’ Boogie	Solo 9 choruses of 12 bars. (M)

Blow, Blow, Blow / The Creep Solo 64 bars. (M)

Unknown Title Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

Historical recordings with great music, also by SC, or so it seems, because the acetates are in very bad shape.

#### **JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC**

**LA. Nov. 22, 1948**

Howard McGhee (tp), Tommy Turk (tb), Sonny Criss (as), Flip Phillips (ts), Al Haig (p), Tommy Potter (b), Jeremiah Cranston "J. C." Heard (dm), Gene Norman (mc). AFRS "Just Jazz" transcription, recorded in Shrine Auditorium (James Accardi collection), two titles:

12:55 Perdido Solo 5 choruses of 32 bars. (M)

9:02 Lover Come Back To Me (NC) Solo 3 choruses of 64 bars. (F)

Postscript of March 2021: SC is magnificent here, possibly the star of the group! Unfortunately "Lover..." is almost spoiled by heavy talking, covering around two-thirds in the middle of the solo. With effort though it is possible to follow the proceedings.

#### **BIG JAY McNEELY**

**LA. Feb. 1949**

Personnel falsely presented to include Sonny Criss (as).

Date falsely given in Mark Gardner's SC discography as 1946.

Four titles were recorded for Exclusive, but no altosax to be heard.

#### **JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC**

**NYC. Feb. 11, 1949**

Collective personnel: Fats Navarro (tp), Tommy Turk (tb), Sonny Criss, Charlie Parker (as), Flip Phillips (ts), Hank Jones (p), Ray Brown (b), Shelly Manne (dm). Concert at Carnegie Hall, the opening night of 8<sup>th</sup> national tour, SC solos on six items:

11:21 Leap Here Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

11:16 Indiana (Ice Freezes Red) Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

15:27 Lover Come Back To Me Solo 3 choruses of 64 bars. (F)

A rare JATP combination, one that we would have liked to hear more from! Not only does it feature the great Fats Navarro, but to have SC together with Bird is something quite special. He does not at all seem awed by the presence of those giants but plays his own things with great conviction. Starting on "Leap ...", a variation on "Perdido", he takes fully four convincingly choruses, following up with a good "Indiana", although he repeats some of his favourite phrases so often that it gets questionable. Going uptempo on "Lover ...", he has no problems but plays a magnificent long solo, and it is just a mystery that this enormous talent did not make it as one of the key figures in modern jazz.

**same**

Same except Charlie Parker omitted, Ella Fitzgerald (vo-"Perdido").

Same concert. SC solos on three titles:

3:54 Unidentified (NC) Solo ca. 56 bars (NC). (FM)

13:34 Perdido Solo 6 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

7:12 How High The Moon Solo 3 ½ choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

These items are unissued but contain equally important music compared to those above. The unidentified tune has "Cherokee"-changes with 36 bars chorus, and the start of SC's solo is missing. There is some great altosax (and trumpet) playing on "Perdido" and "... Moon".

#### **JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC**

**Pittsburgh, PA. March 4, 1949**

Tommy Turk (tb), Sonny Criss (as), Flip Phillips (ts), Hank Jones (p), Ray Brown (b), Shelly Manne (dm), Ella Fitzgerald (voc).

Private recordings exist of the entire concert at Syria Mosque. Five titles (Criss and Turk not present on "Perdido"):

Leap Here Solo 5 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

Znarg Blues Solo 14 choruses of 12 bars. (F)

I Can't Get Started Solo 32 bars to coda. (S)

Flip's Idea Solo 3 choruses of 36 bars. (F)

Perdido Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)

Postscript of Dec. 2022: Fine follow-up of the JATP concert three weeks earlier. With regard to the faster items, there is not much to add; SC seems very serious and dedicated to his music. The highlight however is "... Started" where his originality and deep emotions really comes through to you.

### **BIG JAY McNEELY**

**LA. April 1949**

Personnel falsely presented to include Sonny Criss (as).  
Date falsely given in Mark Gardner's SC discography as 1946.  
Four titles were recorded for Exclusive, but no altosax to be heard.

### **SONNY CRISS QUARTET**

**LA. Sept. 22, 1949**

Sonny Criss (as), Hampton Hawes (p), Iggy Shevak (b), Chuck Thompson (dm).  
Four titles were recorded for Clef:

272-6	Calidad	Straight 2 to solo 3 choruses of 12 bars. Straight 2 choruses to coda. (M)
273-4	Tornado / Wee / Allen's Alley	Solo/straight 1 to solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. Solo/straight 32 bars to coda. (F)
274-1	The First One	Solo/straight 40 bars to solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. Solo/straight 32 bars to coda. (F)
275-3	Blues For Boppers	Solo 36 bars. (S)

This session is in fact SC's first in a proper studio environment under his own name. He has also composed all titles. The result is a first rate session with excellent rhythm backing, and the sound quality gives us the chance to hear that his tone is in the process of developing into something new and very personal. There is no longer, if it ever was, any possibility of mistaking him for Bird, their sounds are very different now. Two fast uptempo items, and two blues, a medium "Calidad" and a beautiful and very slow "... Boppers", this is SC at his very best!

### **FLIP PHILLIPS & HS ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. Sept. 26, 1949**

John d'Agostino, Buddy Morrow, Tommy Turk, Kai Winding (tb), Sonny Criss (as), Flip Phillips (ts), Mickey Crane (p), Ray Brown (b), Shelly Manne (dm).  
Date also given as Feb. 11.

Four titles were recorded for Clef, no SC on 289 "Blow, Flip, Blow" and 290-4 "Lazy River", but:

288-4	Swingin' For Julie And Brownie	Solo 16 bars. (M)
288-?	Swingin' For Julie And Brownie	As above. (M)
291	Flips Idea / Symphony	Solo 36 bars. (F)

Good but not outstanding altosax soloing here.

### **WARDELL GRAY / SONNY CRISS**

**LA. Aug. 27, 1950**

Clark Terry (tp), Sonny Criss (as), Wardell Gray (ts), Dexter Gordon (ts-except "Kiddo"), Jimmy Bunn (p), Billy Hadnott (b), Chuck Thompson (dm), Damita Jo (vo-"... Love").

Three titles live from the "Hula Hut Club", Sunset Boulevard:

Kiddo / Scrapple From The Apple	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (M)
I Can't Give You Anything But Love	Obbligato parts. Solo 32 bars. (M)
Jazz On Sunset / Move / Paison Trot (NC)	Solo 64 bars (NC). (F)

SC is heard clearly behind the vocal on "... Love" and takes a flashing solo multi-run solo ("quoting New Grove: He was capable of playing dazzling runs with such effortless grace that they never sounded ostentatious"). Although he also demonstrates this on "... The Apple" and "Move", resulting in impressive soli, sometimes it can be too much.

### **SONNY CRISS**

**LA. Oct. 12, 1951**

Joe Newman (tp), Bennie Green (tb), Sonny Criss (as), Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis (ts), Bobby Tucker (p), Tommy Potter (b), Kenny Clarke (dm).  
Five titles were recorded live at the Shrine Auditorium, issued as "Intermission Riff":

Intermission Riff	Solo 48 bars. (FM)
How High The Moon	Solo 8 bars. Solo 6 choruses of 32 bars. Solo 8 bars. (FM)

Perdido	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
Body And Soul	Solo 8 bars. (S)
High Jump	Solo 1:40. (F)

This is a very noisy session, and SC's playing seems forced and in fact rather unpleasant.

**JIMMY WITHERSPOON VOCAL  
ACC. BY MAXWELL DAVIS' BAND**

**L.A. 1952**

Sonny Criss (as), Maxwell Davis (ts) and others.

Two titles were recorded for Modern, no SC on "I'll Be Right On Down" but:

Oh Mother Dear Mother	Solo 16 bars. (S)
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A pleasant surprise, an elaborate and very nice altosax solo here!

**WEST COAST JAM SESSION**

**Inglewood, Ca., March 24, 1952**

Chet Baker (tp), Sonny Criss (as), Wardell Gray, Dave Pell (ts), Jerry Mandell (p), Harry Babasin (cello), Bob Whitlock (b), Lawrence Marable (dm).

One title was recorded live at the Trade Winds Club:

Out Of Nowhere	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (M)
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This time "... Nowhere" gets the time it needs, and SC plays with raw intensity, note also his vibrato, something that Bird never had. The solo cannot be said to have the coherence of really excellent works, but it demonstrates SC's dedication to his art; no safety measures but go for it.

**JAM SESSION**

**Inglewood, Ca., April 21, 1952**

Sonny Criss (as), Wardell Gray (ts), Marty Paich (p), Harry Babasin (cello), Bobby Whitlock (b), Lawrence Marable (dm).

One title, "Jumpin' With Symphony Sid", was recorded live at The Trade Winds Club, not available.

**BILLY HADNOTT & HIS ORCHESTRA**

**L.A. April 26, 1952**

Sonny Criss (as), Rudy Pitts (vib), Ernie Freeman (p), Oscar Moore (g), Billy Hadnott (b), Buddy Reed (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Federal:

F248	Ooh Chica	Solo 24 bars. (M)
F249	Limehouse Blues	Acc. (vib) 32 bars to solo 64 bars. (M)
F250	Junk Wagon	Straight 12 bars to solo 24 bars. (SM)
F251	My Ideal	Solo 32 bars to long coda. (S)

This session is a nice surprise! SC is definitely the main performer, and based on the personnel we suspect that Earl Bostic may have been background inspiration. "Ooh ..." and "Junk ..." are maybe not that exciting but have quite acceptable blues choruses. "Limehouse ..." however is almost a feature number for SC, who plays with great energy here. Finally "My Ideal" which is completely a feature number, a magnificent sweet and slow chorus, great discovery!!

**HARRY BABASIN ALL STARS**

**Inglewood, Ca., June 16, 1952**

Chet Baker (tp), Sonny Criss, Charlie Parker (as), Donn Trenner (p), Russ Freeman (p-"Indiana"), Harry Babasin (b), Lawrence Marable (dm).

Four titles were recorded live at the Trade Winds Club:

14:40	The Squirrel	Soli 8 and 13 choruses of 12 bars. 14 choruses 12/12 with (tp/as-CP). (FM)
6:12	Irresistible You	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
11:13	Indiana / Donna Lee	Solo 6 choruses of 32 bars. Solo 4 bars. (F)
10:00	Liza	Soli 4 and 1 choruses of 32 bars. (F)

This is one of the really great jam sessions, forty minutes of historical and musical importance. SC and Bird were recorded before with JATP, but this is on a higher level. Both seem to be in excellent shape and pour out chorus upon chorus with great ease in informal conditions. Everything is uptempo here, and a few titles with moderate tempi might have done it, but who are we to judge and to demand? One might be tempted to compare SC and Bird, but the philosophy of the solography is not to compare the musicians, although the temptation itself may tell something about SC's qualities. He never played better in high tempi than here, and all four items are just gorgeous. Bird is starting the proceedings on all items than "The

Squirrel”, on this one SC manages to take two long and intense soli before his companion gets started. However, after Bird’s solo the possible highlight of the session appears, a chase where they, together with Chet, exchange one by one chorus, exciting! Note that a possible intended chase on “Indiana” ends up in chaos. Conclusion: This session is a must for all lovers of Sonny Criss, and Bird!!

**AL HAIG** **Inglewood, Ca., Aug. 4, 1952**

Chet Baker (tp), Ted Ottison (tp-“... April”, “... Brown”), Sonny Criss (as), Jack Montrose (ts), Les Thompson (hca-“Avalon”), Al Haig (p), David Bryant (b), Larry Bunker (dm).

Seven titles were recorded live at the Trade Winds Club, no SC on “Bernie’s Tune”, “My Old Flame”, “Avalon” and “I’ll Remember April” but:

There’ll Never Be Another You	Soli 64 and 32 bars. (M)
How High The Moon	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. Solo 4 bars. In ens. (F)
Sweet Georgia Brown	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (F)

Another jam session with much good music. SC takes a pleasant solo in medium tempo but uses his technique with flashing runs. On “... The Moon” and particularly the very fast “... Brown” he really needs this technique, the latter has probably never been played faster, but SC is flowing easily on the top of everything, amazing and exciting! Sometimes though one might feel that he depends too much on the technique instead of using the empty spaces for contrast.

**SONNY CRISS** **Inglewood, Ca., Sept. 4, 1952**

Sonny Criss (as), Gil Barrios (p), David Bryant (b), Billy Snyder (dm).

One title was recorded live at the Trade Winds Club:

Strike Up The Band	Straight 1 to solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. Solo 4 choruses to coda. (F)
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Another excellent example of SC’s ability to play in a very fast tempo!

**GERALD WILSON & HIS ORCHESTRA** **San Francisco, Feb. 8, 1954**

Personnel including Gerald Wilson (tp, arr, cond), Ernie Royal, Walter Williams (tp), Melba Liston, Henry Coker, Robert Wagner, Trummy Young, Bob Collins (tb), Bill Richardson (fl), Sonny Criss, possibly Willie Smith (as), Teddy Edwards (ts), Gerald Wiggins (p), Red Callender (b), Lee Young (dm), Bill Renault (vo). Guest stars: Wardell Gray, Zoot Sims, Stan Getz (ts).

Eleven titles were recorded live at San Francisco’s Veterans Memorial, seven issued, two have altosax (note: three additional titles exist, but no soli by SC):

5:45	Hollywood Freeway (short version)	Chase with (as-??) 68 and 12 bars. (FM)
4:08	Sea Breeze	Soli with orch 2 and 2 bars. (S)

This is a problem. First of all the other altosax player does not at all sound like Willie Smith, much more in SC’s own style. Second is that although the tune as introduced by the orchestra is an AABC with A=12, B=8, the guys do not improvise on that; after an 8 bars introduction there are four full twelve bars choruses. The first and third seem to be played by SC. Anyway, they are good both of them!

**BUDDY RICH** **LA. Aug. 26, 1955**

Harry “Sweets” Edison (tp), Sonny Criss (as), Jimmy Rowles (p), John Simmons (b), Buddy Rich (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Norgran/Verve, issued as “Sonny And Sweets”:

2454-1	Sonny And Sweets	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
2455-8	The Two Mothers	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. (F)
2456-1	A Smooth One	Solo 4 choruses of 16 bars. (SM)
2457-3	Broadway	Soli 8 and 64 bars. (M)

With a few exceptions, most of what we know from SC’s playing stems from concerts and informal sessions. Listening to him now with good studio sound, after a few years of absence, in a proper mainstream setting far from bebop, it is obvious that he has matured and also changed his sound profoundly. It has got a sore, very personal tinge, a development similar to that of Zoot Sims in his later years, most obvious in slower items like “... Smooth ...”. Note that “Sonny And Sweets” is actually “Oscar’s Blues” (Blues in the Closet)! Leaving these considerations, his playing here is excellent in all tempi, and note how Rich for once plays softly with brushes, making the rhythm section’s work perfect. A quote from the liner notes is interesting: “For all the fretting that took place in the late 1940s between the bebop

believers and what was then the mainstream, it seems remarkable how easily it was all resolved by Granz's willingness to ignore the differences and simply let the styles integrate naturally".

### SONNY CRISS

**LA. Jan. 26, 1956**

Sonny Criss (as), Kenny Drew (p), Barney Kessel (g), Bill Woodson (b), Chuck Thompson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Imperial, issued as "Jazz U. S. A.":

981	Easy Living	2:22. (SM)
982	Criss Cross	3:42. (F)
983	Willow Weep For Me	3:48. (S)
984	Alabamy Bound	3:10. (F)

Something has happened to SC, and all for the good!! With due respect, his playing before has been extremely intense, with the very fast tempi as his main vehicles. Now it seems that he has matured. Not that he has quit playing fast, as evident on "Criss ..." and "Alabamy ...", but items like "Easy ..." and particularly the very beautiful "Willow ..." give us something new and strengthen SC's image as one of the major altosax players.

### SONNY CRISS

**LA. Feb. 24, 1956**

Sonny Criss (as), Kenny Drew (p), Bill Woodson (b), Chuck Thompson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Imperial, issued as "Jazz U. S. A.":

1012	Something's Gotta Give	4:28. (FM)
1013	These Foolish Things	6:00. (S)
1014	West Coast Blues	5:00. (S)
1015	Blue Friday	2:42. (M)

**LA. March 23, 1956**

Same. Four titles:

1034	More Than You Know	3:08. (S)
1035	Sunday	3:51. (M)
1036	Sweet Georgia Brown	2:52. (F)
1037	Ham's Blues	2:32. (FM)

The change has come for good, SC has been a better, more comprehensive artist, showing an aspect of sensibility well hidden before. His sound in slow tempi is unique and has nothing in common with other big altosax names, carrying a sorrow that cannot but make a profound impression on the listener. The three slow items here are major art works, run and buy the CD "The Complete Imperial Sessions" as soon as you can!! The blues on "West Coast ..." is magnificent!! His intensity seems to be used in a more constructive way, as for instance "More ...". And a more beautiful "... Things" than this one would need tight research. And for those who prefer the 'old' SC, "... Georgia ..." should cover their needs!! Let me repeat and strengthen; these are some great and historic sessions!!

### SONNY CRISS

**LA. July 10, 1956**

Sonny Criss (as), Sonny Clark (p), Leroy Vinnegar (b), Lawrence Marable (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Imperial, issued as "Go Man!":

1084	Summertime	4:01. (M)
1085	Memories Of You	3:46. (S)
1086	Wailin' For Joe	2:42. (FM)
1087	How Deep Is The Ocean	2:57. (SM)
1088	The Blues For Rose	2:30. (M)
1089	The Man I Love	3:18. (F)

**LA. July 31, 1956**

Same. Six titles:

1090	Until The Real Thing Comes Along	4:02. (S)
1091	Blue Prelude	2:35. (S)

1092	After You've Gone	3:39. (F)
1093	Come Rain Or Come Shine	3:50. (S)
1094	Ornithology	3:06. (FM)
1095	If I Had You	2:41. (S)

A change of rhythm section (which one do you prefer?) but the same magnificent quality, twelve items with the most beautiful altosax playing imaginable. There seems not to be necessary to single out anyone in particular, play them according to your own taste, enough ballads to choose from! For a small detail, note the coda of "Memories ..." and "... Prelude"! Finally, "The Man ..." and "After ..." show that SC's development has not at all damaged his uptempo playing.

#### **SONNY CRISS**

**LA. Aug. 21, 1956**

Sonny Criss (as), Larry Bunker (vib), Sonny Clark (p), Buddy Clark (b), Lawrence Marable (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Imperial, issued as "Sonny Criss Plays Cole Porter":

1101	What Is This Thing Called Love?	5:43. (M)
1102	Night And Day	4:42. (M)
1103	Love For Sale	2:44. (SM)
1104	Just One Of Those Things	2:47. (FM)
1105	Anything Goes	3:11. (M)
1106	I Get A Kick Out Of You	2:47. (F)

**LA. Oct. 3, 1956**

Same. Four titles:

1155	Easy To Love	3:15. (SM)
1156	It's All Right With Me	3:08. (F)
1157	I Love You	4:11. (SM)
1158	In The Still Of The Night	4:18. (F)

There is really nothing much to add to the Imperial sessions above, except that the presence of vibraphone makes for more variation. SC continues to play beautiful music, and one might be seriously attempted to be more familiar with his later works.

#### **ROY PORTER QUINTET**

**Hollywood, 1957**

Sonny Criss (as), Roy Porter (org. p, vo), Buddy Woodson (b), Al Barte (dm).

Four titles, "Wow", "Got A Funny Feelin'", "Minor Moods", "Love You", were recorded for Debonair, not available.

#### **SONNY CRISS QUARTET**

**LA. Nov. 25, 1957**

Sonny Criss (as), Hampton Hawes (p), Buddy Woodson (b), Chuck Thompson (dm).

Four titles were recorded at TV-show "Stars Of Jazz" program #73 (two additional titles, "Day In, Day Out" and "Skylark" are without SC), three issued on Calliope, "The Blues" is on YouTube:

Easy Living	Soli 32 and 16 bars to coda. (SM)
Willow Weep For Me	Soli 48 and 8 bars to coda. (SM)
Wailing For Joe	Straight 32 to solo 64 bars. Straight 32 bars to coda. (F)
The Blues (NC)	Solo 10+60+4 bars (NC). (S)

This session presents a great quartet! "The Blues" is one long altosax solo, full five choruses with the beginning missing and fade out, having the most inspired and happy sounding blues, and at the end of the fourth chorus, the live audience obviously senses that it is part of something unusual and very exciting! Nevertheless this should not overshadow the other three items, excellent quality, fitting well into the impression we get from the Imperial sessions.

#### **BUDDY RICH QUINTET**

**Wildwood, NJ. July 21, 1958**

Personnel probably as below.

Five titles were recorded at the Mardi Gras Club:

7:49	Four	Solo 6 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
6:18	Walkin'	Solo 7 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
3:58	Undecided (NC)	Solo appr. 32 bars. (NC). 5 choruses of 4/4 with (dm/tb). (F)
11:02	D & E	Soli 8 and 64 bars. (SM)
9:43	Pent Up House	Solo 4 ½ choruses of 32 bars. (F)

SC teams up again with Buddy Rich in a dynamic quintet, and he is playing magnificently here. Even in high tempi he has guided his intensity into a slightly more laidback mode, and the soli on "Four" and "... House" are highly noteworthy. Surging chase on "Undecided", including the fine trombone player. Exciting to hear him play the famous "Walkin'" with a searching and sore approach. Finally the groovy "D & E" in a pleasant bouncy tempo, a great performance! Fine sound also on this date!

### BUDDY RICH QUINTET

**NYC. Nov. 7, 1958**

Ola Hansen (tb), Sonny Criss (as), Kenny Drew (p), Phil Leskin (b), Buddy Rich (dm). Date/year falsely given as 1955 and 1956.

CBS broadcast from Birdland, two titles (SC not present on "If I Were A Bell"):

Four	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. 6 choruses 4/4 with (dm/tb). (F)
In A Prescribed Manner	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (F)

A colourful date at Birdland! SC plays very energetic and highly exciting as always on both titles, and the long chase on "Four" with Buddy's dynamic drumming is really something!

**NYC. Nov. 8, 1958**

Same, with The Dave Lambert Singers (vo-group-"Ev'ry Day").

MBS "Bandstand USA" broadcast, four titles, no SC on "Ev'ry Day" but:

The Cinch	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
I Don't Want To Be Kissed	Solo 64 bars. (M)
Our Delight (NC)	Break to solo 88 bars to fade out, last 44 bars behind announcer. (F)

Nothing much to add to the preceding day, except to emphasize that this is an inspired and very exciting group with excellent soloing by all participants. Note also an unusual fast tempo on "... Delight".

### SONNY CRISS

**Chicago, possibly March 1959**

Ola Hansen (tb-items 2,4-7), Sonny Criss (as), Wynton Kelly (p), Bob Cranshaw (b), Walter Perkins (dm).

Seven titles were recorded for Peacock, issued as "At The Crossroads":

Sweet Lorraine	Soli 32 and 18 bars to coda. (SM)
You Don't Know What Love Is	Solo 16 bars. (S)
I Got It Bad	Soli 32 and 16 bars to coda. (S)
Sylvia	Solo 6 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
Softly As In A Morning Sunrise	Solo 64 bars. (M)
Butts Delight	Soli 8, 64, 4 and 4 bars. (F)
Indiana	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. Solo with ens 32 bars to coda. (M)

Another great session with SC masterly playing in all tempi, and all items are highly noteworthy.

The Sonny Criss Solography will temporarily and conveniently stop here, since there are no new sessions until Paris, Oct. 1962. Hopefully to be continued later.

