

The
TENORSAX
of
WALTER BARNEY BENTON

Solographer: Jan Evensmo
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Born: Los Angeles, California, Sept. 9, 1930
Died: Los Angeles, Aug. 14, 2000

Introduction:

I heard Walter Benton first with Clifford Brown and recognized a great but unknown tenorman right away! But 35 years without any recording sessions! What happened to him?

History:

Began playing saxophone in high school. After performing in army bands (1950-53) he recorded in Los Angeles with Kenny Clarke and in a jam session with Clifford Brown and Max Roach. He then worked with pianist Perez Prado (1954-57), making an extensive tour to Asia in 1956. Later he recorded as a soloist in Victor Feldman's orchestra (1959) and with his own group in New York (1960). Performed and recorded bop and free jazz with the adventurous groups led by Max Roach, Julian Priester and Abbey Lincoln before returning in 1961 to Los Angeles, where he worked with Gerald Wilson and later recorded with John Anderson (1966). (ref. The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz).

WALTER BENTON SOLOGRAPHY

CLIFFORD BROWN ALL STARS**LA. Aug. 11, 1954**

Clifford Brown (tp), Herb Geller, Joe Maini (as), Walter Benton (ts), Kenny Drew (p), Curtis Counce (b), Max Roach (dm).

Recording session for EmArcy at Capitol Studios. Four titles were recorded:

10885-R	Coronado	Soli 8, 6, 4, 4x2 and 1 bars pieces in unstructured chase. (FM)
10885-6	Coronado	Solo 11 choruses of 12 bars. Soli 4x4, 4x2 and 1 bar pieces in chase. (FM)
10885-10	Coronado	Solo 9 choruses of 12 bars. Soli 4x4, 3x2 and 1 bar pieces in chase. (FM)
10886-1	You Go To My Head	Solo 40 bars. (S)
10887-1	Caravan	Soli 4 and 128 bars. (F)
10887-2	Caravan (The Boss Man) (excerpt)	No solo.
10888	Autumn In New York	Solo 64 bars. (S)

WB is one of the most underrated or underrecognized of the black tenorsax performers of this period. This is indeed very surprising, listening to his recording debut in such challenging surroundings. On one hand he plays his two ballads very nicely, enjoying to let his sound linger in the air before moving to the next phrase, particularly successfully on "You Go ...". On the other hand he is thrown into the upper tempi with the wolves, he has no problems even with the extremely fast "Caravan", and the two main takes of "Coronado" feature him to advantage. A very promising talent!

KENNY CLARKE**Hollywood, Nov. 1, 1954**

Frank Morgan (as), Walter Benton (ts), Milt Jackson (vib, vo-"... Love"), Gerald Wiggins (p), Percy Heath (b), Kenny Clarke (dm).

Five titles were recorded for Savoy:

4400	Sonor	Solo 32 bars. (M)
4400-alt.	Sonor	As above. (M)
4401	Strollin'	Soli 48 and 4 bars. (FM)
4402	Blues Mood	Solo 36 bars. (M)
4403	I've Lost Your Love	Faint obbligato parts. (S)
4404	Skoot	In ensemble. (M)

The occasion is almost a Modern Jazz Quartet session augmented by two reeds, playing it soft rather than hard bop. WB is prominent on three titles and confirms the fine impression from the previous session. His style has much debt to that of Harold Land, but his three soli nevertheless show individuality. My favourite item is the colourful "Blues Mood". Postscript of Dec. 14, 2017: Note the appearance of an alternate take of "Sonor"!

QUINCY JONES ALL STARS**LA. Feb. 25, 1957**

Buddy Collette, Bill Perkins, Walter Benton (ts), Pepper Adams (bar), Carl Perkins (p), Leroy Vinnegar (b), Shelly Manne (dm).

Three titles were recorded for ABC Paramount:

Bright Moon	Solo 32 bars (last (ts)-solo). Soli 8, 4, 4 and 4 bars. (F)
The Moon Is Blue (The Oom Is Blues)	Solo 24 bars (1 st (ts)-solo). (M)
Medley: Laura	Solo 32 bars to part of coda. (SM)

Excellent session with three very strong tenorsax players, two black and one white, all playing extremely well, pick your favourite! Personally I will anyway like to give attention to WB, this fine musician is so underrecorded. Postscript of May 24, 2019: Note that on "Bright ..." the soli and chases are all with Collette first, then

Perkins, Adams, and last WB (feedback from Mario Schneeberger). Note also that on ABC 702, this item is abbreviated with WB's dismissed!

CLORA BRYANT

LA. June/July 1957

Clora Bryant (tp, vo), Norma Faye (tp), Walter Benton (ts), Roger Fleming (p), Ben Tucker (b), Bruz Freeman (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Mode, issued as "Gal With A Horn", no tenorsax soli on "Gypsy In My Soul" and "Man With The Horn" but:

Sweet Georgia Brown Solo 32 bars. (M)

Tea For Two Solo 64 bars. (F)

Exciting to find this session, but in general it is a bit disappointing, the leader is not quite good enough to sustain interest. Also, WB is underfeatured but takes two typical and very well constructed soli, particularly he is really wailing on "... Brown"!

VIC FELDMAN AND HIS ORCHESTRA

LA. March 2, 1959

Conte Candoli (tp), Frank Rosolino (tb), Walter Benton (ts, timb), Vic Feldman (vib), Vince Guaraldi (p), Scott LaFaro (b), Stan Levey (dm), Willie Bobo, Armando Peralta (bgo), Mengo Santamaria (cga).

Four titles were recorded for Continental, issued as "Latinville", no WB on "Spain" and "Woody'n You" but:

Poinciana Break to solo 32 bars. (F)

Cuban Love Song Solo 16 bars. (M)

LA. March 3, 1959

Same except Rosolino and Levey out.

Two titles, "The Gypsy" and "In A Little Spanish Town", but no WB soli.

LA. March 20, 1959

As above except Al McKibbin (b) replaces LaFaro. Three titles:

South Of The Border Break to solo 16 bars. (FM)

Flying Down To Rio Straight. (SM)

Lady Of Spain Solo 8 bars. (FM)

Latin rhythms can be inspiring to jazz, but in my opinion this session has not an optimal blend, neither in the ensembles and choice of tunes nor in the backing of soloists; the former is just too dominating. WB does not get much attention, and only his solo on "Poinciana" is important.

VIC FELDMAN QUINTET

LA. Dec. 8/9, 1959

Frank Rosolino (tb), Walter Benton (ts), Vic Feldman (p, vib), Scott LaFaro (b), Nick Martinez (dm).

Five titles were recorded for Contemporary:

Poinciana Straight/ens to solo 64 bars to straight/ens. Straight/ens to coda. (F)

Pancho Solo 64 bars. (M)

The Breeze And I Solo 64 bars. (F)

Bullies Bullose Solo 36 bars. Break. (M)

Lady Of Spain Solo 64 bars. (M)

This previously unissued session (why??) is something quite different! The choice of music material still connects to latin, but the playing is not, this is pure jazz! LaFaro swings a real ball with excellent trombone and vibraphone soli as well as many much noteworthy contributions from WB. This "Poinciana" is more colourful than the former one, and all the items here contain long and very interesting soli by one of the underrated tenorsax performers of the era. He has no problems with the ultrafast "The Breeze ...", and his waltzing on "... Spain" is lovely! Don't forget WB!

JULIAN PRIESTER SEXTET

NYC. July 12, 1960

Julian Priester (tb), Walter Benton (ts), Charles Davis (bar), McCoy Tyner (p), Sam Jones (b), Art Taylor (dm).

Six titles were recorded for Jazzland, issued as "Spiritsville" (a seventh title, "It Might As Well Be Spring" is without WB):

Chi-Chi	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
Blue Stride	Solo 40 bars. 40 bars 4/4 with (tb/bar). (FM)
Excursion	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
Spiritsville	Solo 36 bars. (M)
My Romance	Solo 32 bars. (M)
Donna's Waltz	Solo 64 bars. (FM)

WB has an important role on this session, and three titles, "Excursion", "Spiritsville" and "Donna's Waltz", were composed by him. All titles have a medium or slight above tempo, swinging briskly. The tenorsax playing is competent, experimental and interesting, and it seems that WB is looking ahead with ideas taking him beyond the postbop movement, as on "... Waltz". All items are interesting, but for tenorsax highlights try the blues on "Spiritsville" and an evergreen on "... Romance".

MAX ROACH ENSEMBLE **NYC. Aug. 31, 1960**
Booker Little (tp), Julian Priester (tb), Walter Benton (ts), Coleman Hawkins (ts-
"Driva Man"), Jimmy Schenk (b), Max Roach (dm), Abbey Lincoln (vo).
Two titles were recorded for Candid, issued as "We Insist!", no WB on "Driva'
Man" but:

Freedom Day	Obbligato parts. Solo 64 bars. Obbligato parts. (F)
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NYC. Sept. 6, 1960

Personnel as Aug. 31 minus Hawkins plus various (perc).
Three titles, one has WB:

Tears For Johannesburg	Duet with (tp). Solo 64 bars. (M)
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This is strong protest music, fascinating and thought provoking even today, and WB is a very important participant, particularly impressing in uptempo on "... Day".

WALTER BENTON QUINTET **NYC. Sept. 19&21, 1960**
Freddie Hubbard (tp), Walter Benton (ts), Wynton Kelly (p), Paul Chambers (b),
Jimmy Cobb alternating with Al Heath (dm). Note: Information on LP and in
discos differ and all seems to be wrong. Hubbard is present on all titles except
"Lover Man".
Eight titles were recorded for Jazzland, issued as "Out Of This World":

Out Of This World	Solo 64+4 bars. (FM)
Walter's Altar	Solo 5 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
A Blues Mood	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
Azil	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (F)
Iris	Solo 32 bars. (S). Solo 16 bars (SM) to 8 bars and coda. (S)
Night Movement	Solo 8 bars. Solo 112 bars. Solo 40 bars to coda. (F)
Lover Man	Straight 32 bars to solo 32 bars. Solo 16 bars to very long coda. (S)

This session is surprisingly enough WB's only one under his own name, he had deserved much better. With excellent companionship, the results are bound to be very good. Nevertheless I have the feeling that he is somewhat awed by the circumstances, a bit modest, not quite taking full command to utilize all his capabilities. But by all means, here is much of interest. It seems he is most confident in uptempo, and dig his strong soli on "Azil" and "Night ...". Don't take this too literally though, spend also some time with the other items and end up to digest his personal and exciting version of "Lover Man"!

KENNY DORHAM / THE JAZZ LIFE /
MAX ROACH / JAZZ ARTISTS GUILD **NYC. Nov. 1, 1960**
Kenny Dorham, Benny Bailey (tp), Julian Priester (tb), Walter Benton (ts), Cecil
Payne (bar), John "Peck" Morrison (b), Max Roach (dm).
One title, "Oh Yeah Oh Yeah" was recorded for Candid, but no WB.

same date

Booker Little (tp), Julian Priester (tb), Walter Benton (ts), Peck Morrison (b),
Max Roach, Jo Jones (dm).
One title:

Cliff Walk Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars.
Prominently in ens. (F)

Fine follow up to the previous Max Roach session two months earlier. WB's strong and confident solo on "Cliff ..." shows clearly that he is one of the most competent of the modern oriented tenorsax players of the early sixties.

ABBEY LINCOLN **NYC. Feb. 22, 1961**
Bigband personnel including Coleman Hawkins, Walter Benton (ts), Abbey Lincoln (vo).
Seven titles were recorded for Candid, but no WB soli.

GERALD WILSON **LA. Sept. 30, 1961**
Bigband personnel including Walter Benton, Teddy Edwards (ts).
Four titles were recorded for Pacific Jazz, one has WB:

Yvette Solo with orch 48 bars. (FM)

This seems to be WB's last recorded solo. A great loss that this very fine tenorsax player dropped out of the jazz stage.

JOHN ANDERSON ORCHESTRA **LA. 1966**
Bigband personnel including Walter Benton, Teddy Edwards, Harold Land (ts).
Eight titles were recorded for Tangerine, but tenorsax soli by TE and HL only.

No further recording sessions.

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