

SONNY ROLLINS/BASS ■ SONNY ROLLINS/TRIO

SIDE ONE

1. WHO CARES?—George & Ira Gershwin3:55
2. LOVE IS A SIMPLE THING—June Carroll,
Arthur Siegel3:00
3. GRAND STREET—Sonny Rollins5:50
4. FAR OUT EAST—Ernie Wilkins4:30

SIDE TWO

1. WHAT'S MY NAME?—David Saxon, Robert Wells3:44
2. IF YOU WERE THE ONLY GIRL IN THE WORLD—
Nat Ayer, Clifford Grey5:08
3. MANHATTAN—Rodgers & Hart4:28
4. BODY & SOUL—Green, Heyman, Sour, Eyton4:17

PERSONNELS

Personnel on Side One: Sonny Rollins, tenor saxophone; Nat Adderley, cornet; Clark Terry, Reunald Jones, Ernie Royal, trumpets; Billy Byers, Jimmy Cleveland, Frank Rehak, trombones; Dick Katz, piano; René Thomas, guitar; Roy Haynes, drums; Henry Grimes, bass; Ernie Wilkins, conductor and arranger; Don Butterfield, tuba. Recorded in New York City, July 11, 1958, at Metropolitan Studios.

Personnel on Side Two: Sonny Rollins, tenor saxophone; Charles Wright, drums; Henry Grimes, bass. Recorded in New York City, July 10, 1958, at Beltone Studios.

Supervision: LEONARD FEATHER.

Reissue Supervision: KEN DRUKER

Reissue Mastering: RYAN SMITH, STERLING SOUND

* * *

In the chapter devoted to the story of the tenor saxophone in *The Book of Jazz* I described Sonny Rollins as "one of the most influential figures since Getz, fashioning his own work from a blend of Lester Young, Charlie Parker and possibly Coleman Hawkins."

It now appears that I was a trifle conservative. Theodore Walter Rollins is the most influential young figure in his field today; I believe he is a source of inspiration for even more young tenor saxophonists than was Stan Getz at the height of his influence (around 1950, the year after Stan left the Woody Herman band and began to win the music magazine polls). And the "possibly" qualification concerning the relationship between Rollins and Hawkins is expendable. There can be no doubt that the fully animated style and sanguine, coursing Rollins tone found some of its impulse in the work of that earliest of the tenor giants.

Rollins is a dedicated artist whose discovery of a personal voice in jazz was the outgrowth of several years of concentrated, calculated experimentation. His first records, with Babs Gonzales in 1948 (only two years after he had switched from alto to tenor) reveal a degree of fluency commendable and at that time unusual for a 19-year-old. The later combo dates with Art Blakey and Tadd Dameron in 1949-50, with Bud Powell and Miles Davis in 1950-51, show a firmer, more confident sound and a great technical control of the horn. When he joined the combo led jointly by Max Roach and the late Clifford Brown, in January of 1956, Sonny found himself established for the first time in a setting that offered a perfect propulsive background, a rhythmically stimulating framework for which his now mature personality was strikingly well suited.

Rollins left Roach in the summer of 1957. By this time the word had spread; the brush-fire enthusiasm that rapidly gains fervor among jazzmen when a new talent is recognized had convinced him that he was ready for the role of leader.

Because he demands nothing less than complete sympathy from those working with him, and because the intense desire for self-expression sometimes is thwarted when he becomes merely one of a convention of soloists, Sonny soon found that the quintet format, no matter how valuable it had been during his days as a sideman with Roach, was not compatible with his desires as a leader. After a couple of weeks fronting a

quintet he dropped the trumpet player; a week later he let the pianist go. Since that time he has worked almost exclusively with a trio, only occasionally letting down his defenses and admitting a pianist into the entourage. A bassist who walks the right notes with a firm, crisp tone can supply him with all the harmonic suggestion he needs, at the same time leaving him greater freedom to say anything he cares to on the horn without fear of contradiction.

For his first session Sonny decided to retain, on one side of his initial LP, the trio setting in which he has worked for the past year; on the other side he arranged to offer a contrasting session that would display his sound, for the first time, with a large orchestral backing.

The bassist on both sessions, trio and Big Brass, was Henry Alonzo Grimes. Born November 3, 1935 in Philadelphia, he is a member of an all-musical family: a twin brother plays tenor, his mother is a pianist and father a former trumpeter. Grimes studied at Juilliard, toured for a while with rhythm-and-blues bands, and in the past two years has gigged with Rollins, Tony Scott, Gerry Mulligan, Charles Mingus and with the Benny Goodman band at Newport.

Charles "Specs" Wright, drummer on the trio date, also is a Philadelphian, born in 1927, and heard in 1949-50 with the Dizzy Gillespie band; in recent years he has toured with Earl Bostic, Cannonball Adderley and Carmen McRae.

The rhythm section on the big band date includes Dick Katz, who played in Sonny's quartet at Birdland; Roy Haynes, the drummer from Boston best known as part of Sarah Vaughan's accompaniment since 1953; and Grimes. Functioning occasionally as section man but more significantly as soloist is the Belgian-born guitarist René Thomas, who now lives in Montreal but was in the U.S. in 1957 playing in a Rollins combo in a Philadelphia night club. Thomas is the favorite guitarist not only of Rollins but of many who heard him during their European travels before he emigrated to Canada a couple of years ago.

The personnel of the brass section is so strong in distinguished names that no elaboration is required here. Though the men function solely as a backdrop, their musicianship is of a caliber that assured the kind of teamwork necessary for an interpretation of Ernie Wilkins' moving arrangements.

Wilkins, a member of the Hines, Basie and Gillespie saxophone sections until the demands for his services as an arranger made him too busy to play, was born in 1922 in St. Louis and studied at Wilberforce University. He has composed and arranged for the bands of Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, and for innumerable New York record sessions. Since Rollins had never previously been served by orchestrations this was of course Ernie's first opportunity to write for him, an association welcomed by both participants and brought to fruition after extensive consultations on the size, shape and nature of the setting Sonny had in mind for his big-band bow.

Grand Street, named for the street in lower Manhattan that houses Rollins' apartment, is an original 16-bar melody by Sonny for which Wilkins provided a big, full orchestration that sets off the brass section's *joie de cuivre*. The minor-key motif is subjected to a pattern of dramatically built intensity in which Rollins' horn plays a carefully integrated role. Nat Adderley's cornet is heard on its own, the only horn solo not played by Sonny on this session, and René Thomas' guitar justifies Rollins' warm praise ("I know a Belgian guitar player that I like better than any of the Americans I've heard," he had said when we were selecting musicians for the date).

Far Out East, composed and arranged by Wilkins, was named in contrast to a very successful album recorded last year by Sonny, titled *Way Out West*. The theme is attractively constructed, starting with clipped four-note phrases and using a harmonic progression that is neither conventional nor predictable. René Thomas is the only soloist besides Sonny.

Who Cares?, a Gershwin standard suggested by Sonny (whose interest in old pop songs and show tunes sometimes surprises fellow-musicians) opens with a melodic, firmly stated chorus, with Don Butterfield's tuba providing a couple of appropriate fills for the gaps in the theme. The theme then doubles and Rollins is rolling, pausing for solos by Thomas and Katz but resuming to pit himself against a gallivanting ensemble that was, to all of us in the studio, a high point of the session. Sonny has such phenomenal control of the horn

that a fast tempo like this, instead of hanging him up, is a challenge leading to more provocative statements, never limited to the endless strings of meaningless eighth notes with which lesser musicians tend to prove they can handle anything over fifty bars a minute.

Love Is a Simple Thing, which might be better described as an old pop song than as a standard, since little use has been made of it except for a version by the Sauter-Finegan band a couple of years ago, is deftly handled in Wilkins' reshaping of the melody. In the opening statement Butterfield's tuba underlines Sonny's melodic statement. In the later passages the light and shade of the brass writing emphasize the effectiveness of Rollins' relocation in this heavily metallic setting.

The trio side, for those who prefer their Rollins on the rocks, opens with another neglected but attractive popular song. *What's My Name?*, written in 1949 by Bob Wells. The arrangement consists mainly of a simple four-bar minor phrase (the last bar of which is wide open) used as both introduction and coda.

If You Were the Only Girl in the World is the kind of song that leads Rollins students occasionally to murmur: "Where on earth did he dig that one up?" It dates from 1914 and was a big hit in its day, as a waltz—which should come as no shock to those already familiar with Sonny's weakness for waltzes. Its 40-bar chorus is divided up, in the opening and closing statements, as follows: eight bars in 4/4 time, 16 bars in waltz time, 16 bars in 4/4 time. The ab lib blowing choruses are all in 4/4.

Manhattan is the most impressive of a large number of takes we made on this Rodgers and Hart standard at various tempos. It consists simply of three choruses by Sonny. Here, as always, his tendency to improvise not merely on the tune's chord pattern but also around its actual melody can be observed to optimum effect.

Body and Soul is a completely unaccompanied saxophone solo—an experiment with which Sonny has toyed before on occasion, and which he described not long ago, in a *Down Beat* interview with Dom Cerulli, as his ultimate goal. In order to compensate for the lack of a rhythmic and harmonic frame of reference we decided to use, for this track, a tune so familiar that the improvisations would never leave the listener wondering what stage of the chorus had been reached. The result is a unique *Body and Soul* that will certainly make a deep impression not only on Johnny Green who wrote it and on the Rollins fans who hear it, but also on Coleman Hawkins, who in 1939 virtually established a tenor saxophone copyright on the song. Hawkins, still constantly scouring the scene for new talents, has expressed great interest in Sonny's work and agrees that he is one of the few new stars who "don't sound like somebody else."

After the last track for this album had been completed, while we were all standing in the control room listening to the tapes played back, Sonny was typically reserved, diffident about his own work. He is the type who, after you have made three takes that sound virtually perfect to everybody, calls out "Let's try just one more." But even Rollins, on hearing these tracks, was willing to concede that they sounded "pretty good"—a rave review by his conservative standards.

Ernie Wilkins, however, probably interpreted the prevailing mood among the assembled musicians when he ventured a comment after listening to *Who Cares?* "I guess I'm going to have to go right home and start about six months' woodshedding," he said. "That is, if I don't just throw up my hands and sell my horn."

—LEONARD FEATHER
(Author of *The Book of Jazz* and
The Encyclopedia of Jazz, Horizon Press)

The comments above were written shortly after these sides were recorded. Since then, Sonny Rollins has become what the cliché experts call "a legend in his own time." He did it the hard way, by retiring completely from the commercial rat race of jazz to spend two years meditating, practicing, perfecting. Today, even more emphatically than when we cut these sessions, it can be said that Rollins' is the keenest, most consistent and hardest-swinging tenor sax in contemporary jazz. L. F.

