

RITUAL ART BLAKEY

ART BLAKEY, drums;
JACKIE McLEAN, alto saxophone;
BILL HARDMAN, trumpet; SAM DOCKERY, piano;
SPANKY DeBREST, bass.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 LITTLE T*
(Donald Byrd) 8:45 | 6 TOUCHE
(Mel Waldron) 6:15 |
| 2 EXHIBIT A*
(L. Sears/A. Blakey) 6:45 | 7 WAKE UP
(Leo Sears) 5:06 |
| 3 SCOTCH BLUES
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COMMENTS
ON RITUAL
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| 5 SAM'S TUNE
(Sam Dockery) 5:48 | |

*Does not appear on L.P. configuration
Total Time: 61:44

The classic Blue Note albums which span the mid 1950's to late 1960's were recorded directly on to two track analog tape. No multitrack recording was used and consequently no mixing was required. Therefore, this CD was made by transferring the one step analog master to digital.

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Ritual

THE JAZZ MESSENGERS
FEATURING **ART BLAKEY**



COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

may never fully realize and appreciate Art Blakey's contribution to music. The drummer, who scared the hell out of everyone with his thunderous, musical approach in the mid-forties be-bop incubator known as the Billy Eckstine band, seemed to come equipped with his own innate style, a style that he developed and honed with the years. He created his own vocabulary on the instrument built upon spirit and power and geared to follow every nuance of even the most complex arrangement and to conduct each soloist with dynamics that build carefully from chorus to chorus. His rising press roll, that clipped, incessant hi hat, his loose shuffle beat, his variation of the Latin beat using the bell of the cymbal, his mallet work, the flutter effect on the rim of the snare drum, splash cymbals that sound more like gongs: these are just a few of his many signatures. Blakey plays loud, but it's never bombastic. And he plays loud only within the dynamics of a piece. Listen to the way he builds tension and builds with each succeeding chorus of a horn solo, then suddenly seems to suck it all in to an abrupt stop, kicking off the piano solo softly. He is the most musical and orchestral of drummers.

Although Art Blakey was drafted into leading a big band called the Messengers for a short time in the forties, he did not become a real band leader until 1954. Since then, he has led a group with no let up. And as band leader, he has exposed and nurtured some of the finest soloists and composers of the past 25 years, grooming many to become band leaders in their own right. He told me recently, "There was a time when Cedar Walton just wanted to remain a sideman. I told him that he wouldn't do that in my band. He had to get out there and find some young musicians and bring them along. Sometimes you've got to push the guys out the door. But when they are ready to start their own bands, they've got to. That's how the music perpetuates itself." And Blakey has been out there 53 weeks a year doing more than his share for 26 years. He shows absolutely no signs of stopping.

His first band in early 1954 with Clifford Brown, Lou Donaldson, Horace Silver and Curly Russell lasted only a few weeks, but Blue Note recorded one amazing night at Birdland, the results of which have been issued on Blue Note 1521, 1522 and 473. If that band was not a commercial success, it did awaken in Blakey his extraordinary ability to lead a band. In November, Blakey, Hank Mobley, Kenny Dorham and Doug Watkins were gathered together for a Horace Silver date (Blue Note 1518). The results were extraordinary. The music that those five men made became the prototype for the earthy hard bop sound that would dominate jazz for the next 12 years. They loved playing together and soon decided to form a co-operative band which Horace dubbed The Jazz Messengers. Donald Byrd later replaced KD, but that basic band lasted until May, 1956. Blakey kept the name.

By the autumn of 1956, Blakey had organized a new band with Jackie McLean, Bill Hardman, Sam Dockery and Spanky De Brest. The group had a second phase of existence when Johnny Griffin replaced McLean in March of '57. With McLean, Blakey recorded for four labels between December, 1956 and March, 1957, capping off that run with a fifth that included both reedmen.

Coming off of the all star Jazz Messengers, it was rather daring of Blakey to present a band which contained only one established musician. Jackie McLean had worked and recorded with Miles Davis, George Wallington and Charles Mingus and had made his first album as a leader prior to joining Blakey.

Hardman is a strong, lyrical trumpeter who has never really received the recognition that he deserves. After his tenure with Blakey, he worked with Charles Mingus, Horace Silver and then began a long association with Lou Donaldson. He would later rejoin the Jazz Messengers in 1966, 1970 and 1975. He currently co-leads a band with Junior Cook and has made a beautiful album, *Home*, on Muse Records.

During their tenure with Blakey, Hardman and Jackie recorded together on three of McLean's albums and one by Mal Waldron. The trumpeter also appeared on the extremely rare *Hank Mobley Sextet* (Blue Note 1568) that same year and on Lou Donaldson's *Sunny Side Up* (Blue Note 4036) in 1960, both long out of print and well worth seeking out.

Sam Dockery and Spanky De Brest were seldom heard from after their stints as Jazz Messengers although they appeared locally around Philadelphia for several years after.

Although McLean, Hardman and Dockery contributed tunes to the band, it was perhaps because of youth that Art commissioned Mal Waldron and Gigi Gryce to write and arrange for the group. Waldron contributed *Dee's Dilemma*, *Potpourri* and *Mirage* as well as *Touche*. Gryce, an excellent and prolific writer during this period, sometimes wrote using the nom de plume Lee Sears, who was in fact his wife. *Wake Up* and *Exhibit A* are two such tunes.

1957 was an amazingly active year for jazz recording. Led by Blue Note and Prestige, the independent jazz labels were many, and all were active. And most major labels were dabbling in the music more heavily than usual. With such a high degree of interaction among musicians in the studio, many tunes would have a variety of incarnations, sometimes being recorded two or three times in the same month.

Duke Jordan's *Scotch Blues* dates back to January, 1954 when the composer recorded it in a trio context. In late 1955, he recorded a quintet version with Blakey at the drums. Then in February, 1957, the version on this album was recorded. For some strange reason, Blakey repeated the same tune with the same band in the same month for an album on Chess Records. A year-later both Jordan and Blakey participated in Kenny Burrell's version on *Blue Lights* volume one (Blue Note 81596).

The other tune that Art repeated on the Chess date was *Exhibit A* which drummer Art Taylor also recorded in February with Jackie McLean on the date. Both this and *Wake Up* were recorded a few months later by the Gigi Gryce-Donald Byrd Jazz lab.

Mal Waldron recorded his *Touche* shortly after the Jazz Messengers session with one of those typical Prestige all star groupings. Donald Byrd's *Little T* was recorded first by another edition of the Messengers in June of 1956 for CBS. But that version still remains unissued, so the tune had its debut on Lee Morgan's first Blue Note album (1538) recorded later that year. Kenny Drew, who is on the unissued CBS version recorded it for Riverside Records in mid 1957 with the composer on trumpet.

All of this provides for a lot of enjoyable comparison listening, but is also a testament to the lasting quality of the material at hand.

The recurrent problem of musicians throwing together heads for every record date has deprived a lot of great material from being fully exposed and fully explored. And why the 7000th version of

Green Dolphin Street when people like Gryce, Jimmy Heath, Tadd Dameron, Horace Silver and so many others have given us standards of our own.

The only tunes here that weren't in heavy circulation were Dockery's *Sam's Tune* and Owen Marshall's *Once Upon A Groove*. Marshall was a Philadelphia trumpeter and pianist who had already written and arranged several compositions for Lee Morgan's first two Blue Note albums. Max Roach recorded one of his tunes in 1958. Beyond that, nothing has been heard from this musician on the national jazz scene.

Blakey's own percussive composition *Ritual* is in several movements and best explained by his recorded comments. Except for a few notes from the horns at the beginning and end of the piece, the members of the Jazz Messengers play percussive instruments. McLean is on the principal cowbell, while DeBrest plays a lower pitched cowbell. Dockery plays maracas and Hardman is on claves.

After Johnny Griffin replaced McLean, Blakey recorded three more albums with the working band, the last in October, 1958 just before Griff's departure. He did not choose to record again with his working band until he could present yet another all new and equally powerful edition of the Jazz Messengers. Well, he outdid himself with the October, 1958 record *Moanin'* (Blue Note 84003), with Benny Golson, Lee Morgan, Bobby Timmons and Jymie Merritt. Golson was later replaced by Hank Mobley and finally by Wayne Shorter. But that band with its amazing book of Golson, Mobley, Shorter, Morgan and Timmons tunes lasted until mid 1961, recording frequently for Blue Note. There is no doubt that it was one of Blakey's finest ensembles.

It is perhaps because the McLean/Griffin-Hardman-Dockery-De Brest group was sandwiched between the original Jazz Messengers and this band that it received far less attention. But it was a tight, cooking band with a front line of neglected master musicians.

MICHAEL CUSCUNA

Original session Produced by
GEORGE AVAKIAN

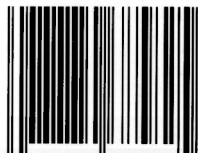
Produced for Release by
MICHAEL CUSCUNA

Recorded in New York City on
January 14, 1957 (#1, 4, 5, 6) and
February 11, 1957 (all others)

Cover Painting by JOHN ALTOON
Digital Transfer by RON McMASTER

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