

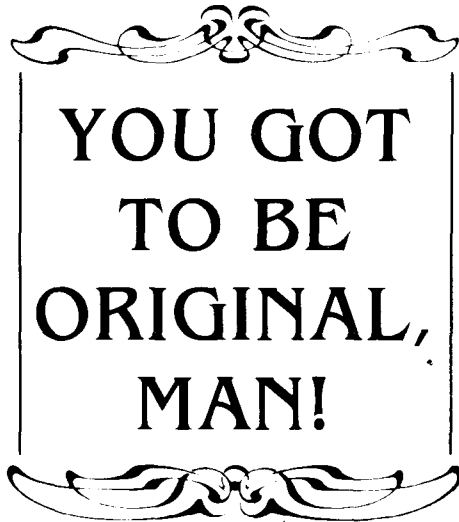
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YOU GOT
TO BE
ORIGINAL,
MAN!

The Music of Lester Young

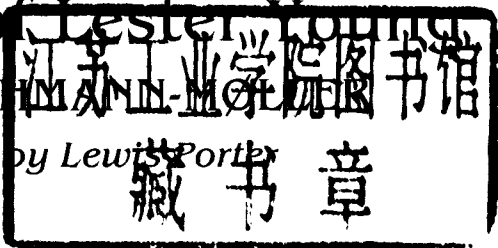
FRANK BÜCHMANN-MØLLER

man!



The Music of Lester Young
FRANK BÜCHMANN-MOLLENBACH

Foreword by Lewis Porter



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Foreword

Lester Young's life and music are the stuff of legend. There is not a jazz fan anywhere who does not know that Young was the "Pres". But maybe there is too much legend and not enough factual knowledge. It seems that very few of the younger fans and musicians have actually heard Young's music, or, even if they have, they don't understand how earth-shattering that music was in its day. And most people know that he died an alcoholic, but they do not know that he was one of the greatest wits ever. These two volumes by Frank Büchmann-Møller are desperately needed in order to set the record straight. The first is by far the longest and most accurate biography of Young ever done. It includes many new interviews with his friends and colleagues conducted by the author. It also clarifies the chronology of Young's career, presenting for the first time a complete description of his every movement from his birth in 1909 to his death in 1959. In order to do this, Büchmann-Møller has gone back to the old newspapers, oral history tapes, and other original sources and actually reconstructed Young's life story, filling in many previous unknown gaps.

The second is a complete guide to Young's recorded legacy, a "solography" (as author Jan Evensmo describes this type of work) which includes a description and critical review of Young's solos not only on every issued record, but on every scrap of private and unissued material. Here again, the author's research talents are evident. Building on the listing in my book on Young, he adds recently discovered items never before mentioned anywhere, and for the known items he has filled in previously missing recording dates and personnels. This volume will also provide great enjoyment to those who can follow sheet music, because it includes notation of about 80 of Young's great solos, and excerpts of as many more.

Mr. Büchmann-Møller is a professional librarian and a jazz saxophonist, and his dual qualifications as researcher and musician are reflected in these two meticulously prepared books. By combining a detailed biography with a full solography he has produced the most complete general introduction to Young's life and work. Young's star continues to shine. There are fanatic "Presophiles" all over the world and

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even a Lester Young Society in Virginia. His most devoted fans are those who were lucky enough to have seen him in performance, but recent record reissues and the 1986 film "Round Midnight", which was largely based on Young's life and dedicated to him and Bud Powell at the end of the credits, have certainly expanded that audience and created some younger fans. These two superb volumes will cause Young's star to shine even more brightly.

Lewis Porter
Rutgers University

Preface

This book came into being as a result of my work with the Lester Young biography You Just Fight for Your Life. Originally, sections on Young's style of playing were to have been included in the biography, with certain of his recordings featured. While I was working on the manuscript, Lewis Porter's Lester Young (1985) was published, and as this included an in-depth analysis of Young's musicianship, I concentrated instead on his life and career in my biography. By this time, however, I had collected so much of Young's music that I decided also to develop a "solography", or detailed descriptive account of all the music obtainable, which would complement my biography and Porter's study so that together the three books would provide full access to Lester Young and his music.

You Got to Be Original, Man! describes every solo played by Young, published or unpublished. The aim has been to make the solography exhaustive; even so, it has not been possible to listen to a few unissued recordings, either because the music has been lost, or because the owners were unwilling to share the music with me.

The 251 recording sessions are enumerated and organized chronologically, from November 6, 1936 in Chicago to March 11, 1959 in Paris.

Each session starts with a discographic introduction, containing a title for the recordings under review, the names of the musicians involved, and the date and place of the recording. Where applicable, it is specified whether the recordings are from a concert, radio, or TV. After this the songs are listed, together with their matrix numbers if studio recordings as well as the record label of the latest or most complete edition of the session involved.

There follows a description of the individual numbers in which Lester Young plays solo or which are otherwise worthy of note - for instance, if he accompanies a soloist with an obbligato. Each analysis begins with the title of the song, its form in brackets, and the eventual number of takes, after which there is a breakdown of the number in its entirety, listing the individual soloists, so that Lester Young's solo can be seen in its proper context. Finally Young's solo is described, with a brief critical assessment.

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The analysis is sometimes supplemented by extracts written down in musical notation; in certain cases this applies to the entire solo. It should be stressed that judgments passed on solos are mine alone and that whether a solo is transcribed or not has no bearing on its critical merit. Practical conditions and subjective opinions have guided the selection: for example, certain solos are easier or more difficult to write down, others contain especially interesting turns of phrase, some are characteristic of his playing at some special period, and others are just plain beautiful.

It is impossible to notate jazz precisely, and this is especially true of Lester Young's music, as he sometimes retarded certain figures in terms of the basic rhythm and sometimes did the opposite. Lewis Porter took great pains in his book to analyse these features and has developed a method of describing them in musical notation. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen the simple, usual form of notation, but I would recommend that the music be listened to at the same time as studying it.

The following special signs are used:

- ~~~~ = strong vibrato
- ↘ = descending pitch
- ↗ = ascending pitch
- ↘↗ = descending pitch immediately followed by ascending pitch
- > = accent
- = short note

Phrasing is also indicated. The phrasing marks are not slurs, indicating that all playing is legato within them, but express the idea that they contain a musical phrase or sentence.

The solos have been written for a B^b instrument, which means that tenor saxophone players, for example, can listen to the music and "play along with" Lester Young at the same time. The corresponding chord progressions have also been written for a B^b instrument.

Access to musicians and song titles is facilitated by a Song Index and a Name Index, both of which key items to the numbered sessions. The Index of Transcribed Solos refers to pages containing complete solos. Numerous additional excerpts and other short musical examples are included in the book but not indexed.

The following abbreviations are used in the discographic information:

as	=	alto saxophone
b	=	bass
bars	=	baritone saxophone
clt	=	clarinet
cnt	=	cornet
cond	=	conductor
dr	=	drums
el-g	=	electric guitar
fl	=	flute
g	=	guitar
org	=	organ
tb	=	trombone
tp	=	trumpet
ts	=	tenor saxophone
vcl	=	vocal
vib	=	vibraphone
vln	=	violin
vtb	=	valve trombone

The Addenda contains information about music received after the official deadline.

Acknowledgments

For giving me access to Lester Young's music - issued or unissued - and for various forms of help I am grateful to the following persons: Arne Astrup, Roland, Baggenæs, Hans Brincker, Jan Evensmo, Georges Frank, Henrik Müller, Bob Porter, John Rowland, Michel Ruppli, Norman Saks, Claude Schlouch, Loren Schoenberg, Chris Sheridan, Thierry Trombert, Jerry Valburn, Erik Wiedemann, and Dan Morgenstern and Ed Berger at the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.

A very special thank you goes to Lars Christiansen at Holte Music Library, whose qualified comments on the manuscript were invaluable; to Arnvid Meyer at the Danish Jazz Center, who traced and found obscure LP's in Europe and the United States; and to Lewis Porter for his enthusiastic and selfless help in all areas, particularly his efforts to get hold of unissued music. Porter's professionalism has been of great importance for the carrying out of this project. I also wish to thank the Danish Music Council, the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, and the Funen Association of Jazz Musicians for grants making my visits to New York and Oslo possible. I am grateful to Finn Henriksen, who transcribed many solos for me; to the typing office at Odense University; and especially to John Irons, who transformed my limited English into readable language, took great pains to explore and utilize the possibilities of the computer music program and who worked indefatigably at making the book as good as possible.

Finally, I acknowledge my great debt to my wife, Emmy, whose infinite inspiration, backing and sympathy proved so valuable for the final accomplishment.

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The Recording Sessions

(1) JONES-SMITH INCORPORATED

Carl "Tatti" Smith (tp), Lester Young (ts), Count Basie (p), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (dr), Jimmy Rushing (vcl).

Chicago, November 9, 1936

C-1657-1	Shoe Shine Boy (Shoe Shine Swing)	CBS 66101
C-1657-2	Shoe Shine Boy (Shoe Shine Swing)	CBS 66101
C-1658-1	Evenin' (vcl JR)	CBS 66101
C-1658-2	Evenin' (vcl JR)	Unissued
C-1659-1	Boogie Woogie (vcl JR)	CBS 66101
C-1659-2	Boogie Woogie (vcl JR)	Unissued
C-1660-1	Lady Be Good	CBS 66101
C-1660-2	Lady Be Good	Unissued

The date has hitherto been given as October 9, but this is due to an error in the Vocalion files. The preceding session, with master numbers C-1647-56, took place on November 4 and the following took place on November 12, with master numbers C-1662-64. Two takes were recorded of each number, but the inissued masters have been lost.

John Hammond took the initiative for these recordings and remembers that the "conditions were primitive. The studio was a small room - about twelve feet by fifteen - in an office building across from the Drake Hotel. It was too small for a grand piano and it lacked the acoustical paneling and soundproofing that are standard today. I had one engineer. He operated both the control panel and the recorder which etched the sound onto the wax master. There were only two mikes, of which I chose to use only one, and the acoustics were so poor that the thump of the bass drum, together with the resonance of the string bass, occasionally caused the needle to break the grooves of the disk." [1]

Shoe Shine Boy (AABA) (take 1)

Count Basie begins with a 16 bar introduction, the first 8 bars solo, and the next 8 accompanied by Page. The tempo is fast, and Basie continues his solo through the first

SOLOGRAPHY

chorus, in which Jo Jones completes the rhythm section. Lester relieves Basie as soloist and plays 2 whole choruses, very unusual for that time, because of the restricted time of the records. "Tatti" Smith is next in line with a single chorus, after which follows a chorus with chases between Basie, Lester and Smith in the first 16 bars, with Jo Jones soloing in the bridge. The last A of this chorus is a collective ride-out, and the number is taken to an end by a series of 2-bar breaks for all five members of the band, concluding with a collective ride-out.

From the first bar of his solo, Lester's playing radiates a strong authority. He is filled with self-confidence and bubbles over with the delight of playing. The phrases replace each other with effortless ease and together create one logical whole. Already at this stage, he shows a unique sense of form.

He plays in long lines - one of his hallmarks - and the first phrase fills out all 8 bars of the first A. The second begins with two short statements, each consisting of an upward leap of an octave, before he waves along the bridge. In this he plays some phrases with an idea that, in outline, must have been arranged beforehand, because we see them later on in the next take and in recordings with the whole Basie band of "Roseland Shuffle" and "Shoe Shine Swing". The idea is that each 2-bar phrase begins with an accent on the first beat by both Lester and Jo Jones, but Lester teases Jo the second time by accenting the previous half beat, so Jones comes a little too late with his beat on the snare drum. From the bridge, Lester swings along in phrases consisting of light figures, giving a delightful contrast to the arrangement in the bridge.

In the next chorus he takes up and develops a new idea in the first A and, in the first half of the next 8 bars, he plays one of his many tricks - he changes the accents between the strong and the weak beats. This time he plays two dotted crochets in every second bar of the bridge, and Jones emphasizes his idea on the snare drum. The last A begins with a strong sentence played directly on the beat, developing into some smoother figures and diminishing in intensity with a downward phrase before handing the solo over to Smith.

Lester is so fond of playing that he continues under the trumpet solo with short riffs in the A's. There is a fine coherence in the chases and the final, surprising, breaks bring this piece to a happy conclusion.

1 **A1** = 260

G E7 Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7

5 **A2**

G B7 E7 Am7 D7 G G E7

10

Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7 G B7 E7

15 **B**

Am7 D7 G B7 B7 E7 3

20

E7 A7 3 A7 Am7 D7

24 **A3**

G E7 Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7 G B7

30 **2A1**

E7 3 Am7 D7 G G E7 3

34

Am7 3 D7 G E7 Am7 D7 G B7

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38 E7 Am7 D7 G A2 G E7 Am7 D7

43 G E7 Am7 D7 G B7 E7 3 Am7 D7

48 B G B7 B7 Am7 3 E7

53 A7 A7 Am7 3 D7 G E7 A3

58 Am7 D7 G 3 E7 Am7 D7 G B7 3

62 E7 Am7 D7 G

Shoe Shine Boy (AABA) (take two)

The second take has exactly the same construction as the first take, but the tremendous conclusion succeeds best on take 1, which was also the take originally issued. Lester's solo can be seen as an extension of his first one, because some of his ideas emerge here, but are played differently.

♩ = 260
R1

G E7 Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7

5

G B7 E7 Am7 D7 G G E7

10

Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7 G B7

14

E7 Am7 D7 G B7 B7

19

E7 3 E7 A7 3 A7 D7

24

D7 G E7 Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7

29

G B7 E7 Am7 D7 G G E7

34

Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7 G B7 E7

39

R2

Am7 D7 G G E7 Am7 D7 G³ E7

44

Am7 D7 G B7 E7 Am7 D7 G

49

B

B7 B7 E7 E7

53

A7 A7 D7 D7

57

R3

G E7 Am7 D7 G E7 Am7 D7 G B7

62

E7 Am7 D7 G

The first 16 bars are played with a fine logic, like a long, coherent sentence. The bridge consists of nearly the same phrases as in the first take, but the accent is here on the preceding beat, the upbeat, instead of the downbeat. The last A of this chorus begins with the idea from the first bars of take 1, but played a sixth higher. The first A of the second chorus develops from a series of unison E's, and the second half of the next 8-bar phrase begins with an octave leap, like at the beginning of the second A of his solo on the first take. The bridge consists of four 2-bar phrases, beginning with a triplet that leads over to an upgoing phrase over nearly two octaves, and Jo Jones gives a rim shot on beat 4, right after Lester's last note of the sentence. The solo is also here brought to an end by a phrase that starts with a strong and convincing statement, which gradually diminishes in intensity until Smith takes over.

Both solos are more than convincingly played in a fresh and elegant way, with an enormous drive and swing, making it difficult to choose which of the solos is the better.

One of the first musicians that learned from Lester was Charlie Parker. He used one of Lester's phrases as a springboard for his own composition "Ornithology", as can be seen from comparing the first couple of bars of that number with measure 23-24 of Lester's second chorus of take 1:

Ornithology:



Shoe Shine Boy:



Evenin' (AABA)

This pretty little g-minor piece by Rushing is played at a medium tempo and starts with 4 measures introduction, followed by the first two A's played by the rhythm section, after which Lester comes in and plays the bridge. Basie takes over for the last A of the chorus, before Rushing sings two choruses. In the latter one, Smith and Lester are backing him up with riffs in the A's, while Lester plays obbligato in the bridge. Rushing finishes the record with 2 more A's, with the wind players repeating the riffs in the concluding 8 bars.

Lester's obbligato is not well recorded, probably because he is too far from the microphone, and his solo is too short, only 8 measures, to make any real impression. It begins fine, with two very swinging phrases, and concludes with a downward double-tempo run (infrequently heard from Lester at that time) and a couple of triplets played over the triad.