

From: T. Michael Peay (Judge)

November 1, 2020 ©

To: Jazz Enthusiasts

Re: List of Recommended “Must-Have” Jazz Albums/CDs (Orig'l Draft - Sept. 1996)

(Asterisks * or ** indicate albums of even higher exceptional quality.)

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Thelonious Monk (pianist & composer) – *The Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall* (NYC). The enigmatic Monk introduced to the jazz world his innovative piano style of chord sounds and sense of timing. His novelty came to be widely respected by both fellow jazz artists and enthusiasts. He played mainly his own very commendable compositions. He had many studio recordings and his tunes were very popular, to cite “*Round Midnight*” and “*Blue Monk*” as just two. This album signaled the critical acclaim that he finally won, including being on the cover of “*Time*” magazine. \*

Duke Ellington – *The Legendary Duke Ellington in Memoriam* (This is an excellent, representative compilation of his orchestra’s recordings from the 1950’s). \*

The Modern Jazz Quartet – *The Modern Jazz Quartet European Concert* - This sophisticated jazz quartet brought a whole new look to the image of jazz musicians. They always performed in tuxedos in sync with innovating a creative new approach to playing jazz which highlighted inherently strong synergies between classical music and jazz. They were a truly “cross-over” jazz band. \*

Eddie Jefferson – *Body and Soul* -- Eddie originated “*vocalese*,” a swinging and humorous style of delivering his own witty jazz lyrics. But Eddie could also work magic with a soulful ballad like “*Body and Soul*.” He deserves to be checked out! \*

Ella Fitzgerald – *Ella in Rome: The Birthday Concert (1958)* – Celebrating her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her voice can be summed up in 4 words: “*Truly astounding and unmatched!*” \*\*

Ron Carter (Bassist) – *Standard Bearers*. Featuring several other first-rate artists, who went on to become giants in jazz (H. Hancock, M. Tyner, Red Garland, etc.)

Lorez Alexandria (Vocalist) – *Alexandria The Great*. A diva who masters ballads and blues, and excels in her unique interpretations of them. (Get This !!!!!!!) \*\*

Little Jimmy Scott (Vocals) – *All the Way*. Jimmy's voice is mesmerizing. His way of interpreting songs influenced Marvin Gaye's **and** Nancy Wilson's vocal styles!! \*\*

Miles Davis – *Kind of Blue*. Not having this in your collection would be like not having salt or sugar in your spice collection. More copies of this sold worldwide than any other jazz album. When you hear it, you'll know why. \*\*

Lou Donaldson (alto sax) – *Lush Life*. A key bebop player with virtuosic skills that enable him to play creative spontaneous riffs and other embellishments that others would find challenging. His sidemen, Wayne Shorter (t sax), Pepper Adams (b sax), Freddie Hubbard (tpt) and McCoy Tyner (p), are the best in the business. "You've Changed" and "What Will I Tell My Heart" will seduce you. \*

Red Garland (piano) – *A Garland of Red*. Displays Red's exquisite ability to synchronize unerring left-hand comping & impeccable right-hand improvisation. Virtually unequalled. Yes, you will want to get up and dance, so go right ahead. \*

Johnny Griffin (tenor sax) – *The Cat*. A giant of a bebop man with unsurpassed dexterity on his horn you can count on to always, always swing. This whole album is a total gem, but the intricacy of the tune, "The Count," is alone worth the purchase. The alternating piano chord changes are the backbone of this track. \*\*

Benny Carter (alto sax) – *The Cosmopolite*. One of the indisputably smoothest and finest alto men and jazz composers/arrangers ever to be borne. Loved and respected universally by all jazz musicians. Ella insisted on having him in her band whenever he was available. He was still alive when I composed this list, so I wrote then, "He's getting up in age, so expect thunder and lightning when he crosses over." Check out his, "When Lights Are Low." All the jazz cats love to play it.

John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman (tenor sax) – The album title is simply the name of these two brilliant artists. Much like “*Kind of Blue*” this truly is a super, “*must-have*” album. But, a warning: If you and your spouse or lover do not wish to have any more babies, then do not/not listen to this album when in bed. \*\*

Dinah Washington (vocalist) – *The Dinah Washington Story* (First Issue). This jazz diva was often referred to by her sidemen as “The Queen” because she insisted on perfection from her band musicians. The unique timbre of her voice, coupled with her rich vocal talents and personality, made her one of the most in-demand jazz vocalists of her era. She’s very easy on the ears and captivating. \*\*

João Gilberto (Brazilian male vocalist) – *The Legendary João Gilberto*. The whole album is transcendently lush and quintessentially Brazilian in its rhythm and spirit. Bossa nova at its best. An excellent companion on a long drive or plane ride. \*

Joe Henderson (tenor sax) – *So Near, So Far (Musings for Miles Davis) & Lush Life*. These two highly acclaimed albums merit a joint recommendation, as companion recordings done a year apart. Joe’s first-rate sidemen on these albums and the superb selections they chose to record will have you listening to them repeatedly.

Charlie Parker/Miles Davis (alto sax & trumpet) – *Together*. A true “*must-have*” classic that showcases each artist’s genius in this rare studio collaboration. \*\*

Charlie Parker – *Charlie Parker With Strings*. “Yardbird” (Parker’s nickname) at his finest. The rich, symphonic dimension that the violins and other strings add to Parker’s free-wheeling interpretations of his tunes reveal why record producers often invested the money to produce special albums “with strings” for exceptional jazz artists like Parker. Your ears will not be playing tricks on you. \*

Gloria Lynn (Vocalist) – *Miss Gloria Lynn*. Her first maybe best album. Timelessly beautiful. \*

Erroll Garner (Swing era; pre-bebop) – *The Essence of Erroll Garner*. Garner gained incredible fame for his flawless piano technique flowing seemingly effortlessly up and down the keyboard producing immaculate sequences of startling melodic dynamics. His introductions to songs were considered little masterpieces in themselves. He’s a critical bridge between swing and bebop. \*

Louis Armstrong & Duke Ellington – *The Complete Armstrong/Ellington Sessions*. These sessions form a key part of the pantheon of jazz history that reflect the profound love and respect that each artist had for the other and for their respective musical contributions. Listening to this is like eating comfort food.

Abbey Lincoln – *You’ve Got to Pay the Band*. An eclectic and mesmerizing playlist with several songs that Abbey herself composed plus the lyrics!! The great tenor saxophonist, Stan Getz, is featured and has never sounded better. One of Getz’ last recordings; what an impressive musical calling card to remember him by. \*\*\*

Gigi Gryce (alto sax) – *Nica’s Tempo*. Nica is a reference to the rich baroness in New York who supported so many major jazz musicians, like Monk, in the 1960’s and 70’s. Trust me; buy it at any price you can and check out the two Ernestine Anderson vocals, esp. the delightful “*Social Call*.” Gigi was also one of jazz’s most revered composers and arrangers. This album is unmistakably outstanding. \*\*

[In 2016, I wrote & copyrighted a lovely lyric, the first ever written (entitled, “*Second Chance Hello*”) for Gryce’s hauntingly beautiful melody, “*Hello*.”]

Dizzy Gillespie (trumpet) – (1) *At Newport* and (2) *Dizzy Gillespie at Newport*. This 2-CD set is impressive and memorable, featuring some of jazz’s most notable names (Wynton Kelly, Lee Morgan, Melba Liston, Mary Lou Williams, Quincy Jones, Benny Golson, Al Grey, etc.). Warning! Only play these CD’s on equipment made of asbestos or other non-flammable material. They’re hot !!!!

The History of Chess Jazz – A dazzling and diverse collection of some of jazz’s most premiere artists recorded on this famous studio label. A real treasure trove. \*

Jazz at the Philharmonic – *The First Concert*. All these tracks are fine, but Nat King Cole’s brilliant piano solo on “*Body and Soul*,” with its almost breath-taking

sequence of effervescent flourishes and innovations, is a cut above. The live audience understandably went wild. That performance alone is worth the purchase price. Indeed, the whole series of Philharmonic concerts are gems worth getting and closely listening to. Negligible to no chance you'll be disappointed. \*\*

Steve Nelson (vibraphonist) – *Full Nelson*. One of the finest vibraphonists to pick up a mallet with an ability to interpret the jazz standards with mastery & class.

Cannonball Adderley (alto sax) – *Greatest Hits*. Because Cannonball was such a prolific, high-in-demand jazz artist, his legacy of recordings is huge – as in very extensive. Hence, this compilation of some of his greatest hits offers an excellent introduction to this dynamic, top-drawer artist, who could not only swing (and swing hard) but who was also entertaining and humorous with live audiences. \*

Horace Silver (pianist/composer/bandleader) – *Greatest Hits*. As with Cannonball Adderley above, Horace was also hugely popular with the recording studios and with all the horn players who vied to get him in their ensembles to tickle the ivories. Many of Horace's compositions are now very popular standards frequently heard at jazz concerts. Because his recording legacy is also quite vast, this compilation of some of his best compositions similarly offers an excellent opportunity to appreciate the quality, breadth, and depth of his creative music. \*

Dee Dee Bridgewater (vocals) – *Love & Peace: A Tribute to Horace Silver*. Dee Dee is an undisputed jazz diva whose commanding repertoire of vocal skills are well-suited for this tribute. This album is a true homage to Horace – a “must-have.” \*

Thelonious Monk & John Coltrane – A rare recording of these two mega giants in musical collaboration. An essential desert island companion. \*

Jon Hendricks and Friends (vocalists) – *Freddie Freeloader*. Hendricks is one of jazz's preeminent lyricists who had an uncanny ability to write words that perfectly track popular jazz melodies that he and his coed friends would then sing with impressive harmony to dazzle audiences. Also, his eloquent lyrics always captured the soul or essence of each song, doubling the listener's pleasure. They

were an inspiration for the Manhattan Transfer vocal group. This album is outrageously good and quite entertaining, hence deserving of a star. \*

Clifford Brown (trumpeter extraordinaire) – *Study in Brown*. Clifford was a virtuoso trumpeter, a prodigy recognized as such by literally all trumpeters, who unabashedly kneel symbolically in reverence of him. At age 25, regrettably, he met an untimely death in an auto accident which demoralized the jazz world and prompted the great tenor saxist, Benny Golson, to pen the divinely beautiful melody, “*I Remember Clifford*.” Every serious jazz enthusiast should become familiar with this tune. It may even bring you to tears. Such magnificent, almost dream-like, clarity of Clifford’s jazz trumpet sound has never since been heard. \*\*

Count Basie (pianist) and his Orchestra – *Corner Pocket*. In all honesty, since Basie made no less than 110 recordings, most if not all of them superb, this particular album should be seen as mainly representative of the sheer joy that his orchestral music and clever arrangements will always offer. This album contains several of Basie’s most favorite signature tunes (*Corner Pocket*, *Cute*, and *Lil’ Darling*). \*\*

Joe Henderson (tenor sax) – *The Music of Billy Strayhorn*. Henderson, one of the titans of the jazz saxophone, pays fitting homage to the music of Strayhorn, who was the pianist who collaborated closely with, and was the musical alter ego of, the great Duke Ellington for most of Strayhorn’s adult life. Strayhorn (who composed the hugely popular “*Take the A Train*”) had one of the finest musical pens in the East, the West, the North, or the South. Henderson’s mellow tenor sound is immaculate and perfectly matched for this deserving Strayhorn tribute. \*

Art Farmer (Trumpet/Flugelhorn) & Benny Golson (Tenor sax) – *Meet the Sextet*. This first recording by this hard-bop ensemble was very well received on the jazz scene, thanks to the group’s high-caliber personnel, including young McCoy Tyner on piano and Curtis Fuller on trombone. Many consider this album as reflecting some of “*the best original charts and soloing of the entire era*.” *Every single one of its 10 tracks is a gem*, from “*Killer Joe*” to “*Blues March*” to “*I Remember Clifford*.” Your jazz collection will never be more enriched than by adding this. \*\*

George Coleman (tenor sax) – *At Yoshi's*. Coleman is one of jazz's most energetic, hard-driving, yet fluid saxophonists with a full-bodied sound. And he's never better than when playing before a live audience, such as this one at Yoshi's jazz club in Tokyo. Yet, his renditions of "Soul Eyes" and "Good Morning Heartache" reveal his superlative ability to caress such sensitive ballads. Here, he's joined by three supreme sidemen, Harold Mabern (piano), Ray Drummond (bass), & Alvin Queen (drums). This one is also a real treat.

Gerry Mulligan (Baritone Sax) – *Salle Pleyel Concerts (Paris 1954)*. This features the pairing of Mulligan on his bari-sax and Bob Brookmeyer on his valve trombone, two instruments rarely heard together. Both give a depth of sound in the jazz vernacular that makes for a pleasant change from the norm.

George Shearing (p) w/Ernestine Anderson (v) – *A Perfect Match*. And never has an album title been more accurate than this one. The music produced by this duo is nothing short of serene. All 9 tracks will have you playing them repeatedly. They are so fulfilling; they will leave you wanting more. George Shearing is one of several blind jazz pianists (Lenny Tristano being another) who've won their way into the hearts of millions of jazz enthusiasts because of the unique tones and qualities of their music, and Shearing in particular because of his "block chord" innovations. Perfect company for a rainy or lonely day to fill you with sunshine. \*\*

Tito Puente (piano; vibraphone) and His Latin Ensemble – *Sensación*. This high energy, intoxicating Latin jazz release will have you either immediately up on your feet dancing to its rhythms or impulsively and repeatedly proclaiming "Lord, have mercy", or maybe both. Grammy-award winning Tito can rightly lay his claim to be "Mr. Salsa Meets Jazz." His live stage performances were a wonder to behold. His infectious energy is simply irresistible. But even his steamy slow tempo numbers are compellingly and beautifully delivered. Both sides of Tito can be found on this album. So, not much more need be said about this album than to check it out and then pat yourself on the back for having done so. \*\*

Tito Puente – *Mambo Diablo*. As to be expected, the same descriptive jacket just above also fits this album to a "T." Except that this one also offers the renown pianist, George Shearing, as special guest! All the tracks are wonderful, but the

ones likely to win you over the most are “*Lush Life*”, “*Pick Yourself Up*”, “*No Pienses Asi.*” These reflect such pure essence of elegant Latin jazz. Enjoy !!

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Postscript – Between 1991-1998, while employed full time as a senior State Department legal adviser, I managed to find the time to be a co-producer and co-program host of a popular jazz radio program on WPFW (89.3 FM) in Washington, D.C. It was called “*The Jazz Collectors.*”

My program co-hosts were Brother Ah (Robert Northern), Maurice Ashe, and Alex Leak. We were a match made in heaven and brought great love and dedication to our program. It was unique and was educational, highly entertaining, and focused each week on a specific, carefully selected, well-researched topic (e.g., a jazz instrumental or vocal artist, a particular jazz ensemble, an instrument, a period of jazz history, and an endless array of other creative themes that brought fresh insights to jazz for the listening audience.

Our two-hour live program became so popular that we were approached by National Public Radio (NPR) about the possibility of offering our program nationwide to their NPR affiliate radio stations.

My decision to prepare the original 1996 hand-written list of recommended jazz albums was a result of multiple requests I had received (both in the U.S. and in Europe) for such recommendations. So, preparing that list to hand out to folks proved to be useful for both them (I hope) and especially for me 😊.

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