

Preface to the Revised Edition

I began in jazz as a passionate self-taught pianist and record collector at around the age of twelve (after about three years of classical violin). My first Lester Young purchase was the double LP memorial set on Epic (Basie recordings from 1936 and 1939–40), recommended by John S. Wilson in the *New York Times*. When Wilson put together a list of the top 100 jazz recordings (from King Oliver right through Albert Ayler), I trusted him enough to begin collecting them, and got to the Young set toward the end of my college career. Something about Young's solos grabbed me immediately—and never let go! By 1977, I was learning Young's solos on saxophone and transcribing them for my own benefit, and my mentor, composer T. J. Anderson (then chair of the music department at Tufts University, where I'd just begun teaching jazz history part-time), saw in this a potential master's thesis, which eventually, much changed, became this, my first book. It was also T.J.'s inspiration to pair me with another Tufts faculty member, George Stalker, to undertake the computer analysis of Young's solos. I still remember the long hours I spent in the Tufts computer lab entering a numerical code for every note.

Since the book went out of print in 1992, I have consistently received requests for it. As one ages one seems to know less and less, and I am no longer as certain as I was about such things as the definition of jazz. However, I am happy to fulfill the demand for the book's reappearance. I would like to thank the people at the University of Michigan Press, especially music editor Chris Hebert, for their assistance in bringing it back to life, as well as Dan Morgenstern, director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at my campus, and his assistant Esther Smith for their generous help in assembling the photo section from their holdings. Frank Büchmann-Møller and Loren Schoenberg graciously helped me to date some of the photos.

In addition to the new photo section, for this reprint I have made slight revisions throughout the text and placed a short Addendum at the back, in or-

der to correct a few errors and to bring the book in line with the latest research. In particular, the Chronology has been revised, and an Addendum updates parts of the text accordingly. The discography (Catalog of Recorded Works) and LP listing have been replaced by a selective annotated CD listing, because discographies date rather quickly. In 1985 the catalog was by far the most complete listing of Young's recordings available, but in 2004 it no longer makes sense to include it.

The reader interested in discographical details is directed to two more recent works. *You Got to Be Original, Man! The Music of Lester Young*, by Frank Büchmann-Møller (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990; cloth, 544 pp.), consists of detailed reviews of every recording session, whether issued to the public or not, including a description of every single saxophone solo by Young and numerous transcribed music examples. For each session, the author researched the dates and personnel and provides the most recent LP issue where possible. He also offers indexes of names, songs, and music examples.

Lestorian Notes: A Discography and Bibliography of Lester Young, by Piet Koster and Harm Mobach (Amsterdam: Micrography, 1998; paper, 509 pp.), is a comprehensive, unannotated listing of every known recording, issued or not, and every 78 rpm, LP, and CD issue. The book includes useful indexes to musicians, tunes, bands, CDs by label and number, and so on, a guide to published transcriptions of Young's solos, and an extensive bibliography. A useful online discography is at http://www.welwyn11.freereserve.co.uk/LY_notes.htm.

There are a few Young recordings that were only discovered after the above books were published, among them the following.

Verve outtakes listed as unissued in Koster and Mobach are now issued in the complete Young CD set on Verve (see CD listing).

Four formerly unissued Young recordings from 1946 were issued in *The Complete Jazz at the Philharmonic on Verve, 1944–1949*.

Young appeared on Dave Garroway's half-hour NBC radio program on March 6, 1949. Young does not speak, but plays *These Foolish Things*. The band comes in for the final note, which may distinguish this from other known versions.

There are unissued audience tapes in very good binaural sound of the Basie band's sets with Young and Joe Williams in Chicago in 1955, 1956, and 1957.

Young was filmed in 1938 (short silent clips with Basie at Randall's Island, off Manhattan), 1944 (the short film *Jammin' the Blues*) and 1957 (the live tel-

evision program “The Sound of Jazz”). A video documentary about his life, including most of this footage as well as interviews with Young’s colleagues, is entitled *Song of the Spirit: The Story of Lester Young* (1988; directed by Bruce Fredericksen). In recent years a few more films of Young have surfaced.

An armed forces film from 1944 contains a few seconds of the Basie band with Young. Young does not solo but is clearly visible in the saxophone section.

Footage from a film of the 1950 JATP stars, including Young, Charlie Parker, and Coleman Hawkins, has been reissued in several places, for example, on *Great Jazz Performances* and *The Greatest Jazz Films Ever* (DVDs).

A segment from Art Ford’s 1958 jazz television series with Young and Hawkins trading fours on a blues has been released on *Hawkins: The Centennial Collection*, but more footage exists of each artist separately. Young also appeared in another Art Ford show that year with Rex Stewart and others, but only the audio has been issued.

There is also a television film by John Jeremy of England about a “Pres opera,” and there are documentaries that partly deal with Young, such as Bruce Ricker’s *Last of the Blue Devils*. Young has made his way into fictional films, such as the cable TV film of the play *The Resurrection of Lady Lester* by OyamO [*sic*]; Dexter Gordon’s character in the feature film *Round Midnight* (1986) is largely based on Young.

There are two full-length biographies of Young. *You Just Fight for Your Life*, by Frank Büchmann-Møller (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990; 301 pp.), draws upon a vast range of sources to document Young’s movements year by year. The biography is followed by an exhaustively researched chronology listing all of Young’s known engagements, as well as notes and indexes. *Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester “Pres” Young* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002; 530 pages), the result of twenty years of research by historian Douglas Henry Daniels, contains a great deal of new family history from censuses, newspapers, and oral histories as well as extensive notes and a nice photo section that includes a few previously unpublished items. Both of these biographies supersede Luc Dellanoy’s *Pres: The Story of Lester Young* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1987; English translation, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), which nevertheless has some unique details about Young’s visits to Paris in the 1950s. Chris Sheridan’s monumental *Count Basie: A Bio-Discography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986; 1388 pp.) is a very important source for Young’s Basie years.

At the time that I wrote my original preface, I hadn't had a chance to read British journalist and saxophonist Dave Gelly's *Lester Young* (Tunbridge Wells, England: Spellmount Ltd.; New York: Hippocrene Books, 1984; 94 pp.), and I feel I gave it short shrift. His was the first book on Young in English, and though he couldn't benefit from the recent biographical research, Gelly writes with polish and insight about Young's music.

At the suggestion of the late Martin Williams, another mentor, I followed up my first book with another volume, *A Lester Young Reader* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992, out of print), a collection of many significant articles on Young (including those by Gottlieb, Heckman, and Hentoff mentioned in my original preface) as well as all of his known interviews, where possible transcribed anew from the original tapes. But this earlier book still fills a gap because it is the only one to present so much musical analysis of Young's style. I concentrated on the music because I respected Young's feeling that "[my life] was all music; that's all there was" (*Down Beat*, 1949).

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October 2004