



Gene Ammons & Dexter Gordon – The Chase  
Prestige

Throughout the chronicles of jazz, there have been many great tenor sax duos who have recorded some legendary battle LP's and co-leadership albums that are among some of the greatest records ever made. Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt, Arnett Cobb and Buddy Tate, Al Cohn and Zoot Sims, Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray, Coleman Hawkins and Don Byas, Illinois Jacquet and Lester Young to name a few. This month's choice to begin May is an underrated, but exciting live date featuring two of my favorite tenor saxophonists, Gene Ammons (tracks: A1, B1, B2) and Dexter Gordon (tracks: A1, A2, B1). The Chase (Prestige PRST 10010) was recorded live before a passionate audience at the North Park Hotel on the afternoon and evening of July 26, 1970, during a cross-country tour Gordon was making. The quintet is anchored by Jodie Christian (tracks: A1, B1), John Young (tracks: A2, B2) on piano; Rufus Reid (tracks: A1, B1), Cleveland Eaton (tracks: A2, B2) on bass; Wilbur Campbell (tracks: A1, B1), Steve McCall (tracks: A2, B2) on drums; Vi Redd (tracks: B1) on vocals, and my copy used in this report is the original 1971 Stereo release.

The album opens with the title tune, The Chase is an uptempo tribute to the great tenor duels of the past by Gordon taking off on a vivaciously, spirited theme. Dexter takes the lead solo swinging strongly with a high level of creativity including his famous big top circus quotes. Gene gives the next reading a phenomenal workout, then Jodie displays his exhilaration on a brief interpretation. Wilbur delivers the final word in a vigorous conversation with both horns ahead of the lively finale. The 1940 song Polka Dots and Moonbeams by Jimmy Van Heusen and Johnny Burke is one of the most recorded jazz standards. It's also beloved among pop vocalists with many prominent recordings over the years. This is a quartet feature with Young on the piano, Eaton on bass, McCall on drums, and Dexter as the solitary horn. The foursome opens

with a slow-paced melody led by LTD who produces a sensuous sound from his tenor sax, then picks up the pace slightly for the subtly stated opening statement. Young compliments Gordon with a lovely, rhythmically relaxing solo. Dexter delivers something profoundly beautiful on the closer preceding an elegant ending.

Lonesome Lover Blues is a midtempo reworking of the 1944 composition, Blowing The Blues Away by Billy Eckstine and George Valentine. Eckstine originally recorded it with his orchestra as the B-side of a 78-rpm single. It was a big hit for Billy and both Gene and Dexter were members of his orchestra. Both musicians decided to do a new version of the vocal and they utilize the talents of alto saxophonist, vocalist Vi Redd who was in the audience during their set. However, neither man wrote down the lyrics for her, so what the crowd and listener get is an improvised lyric combination for an imaginative vocal by Ms. Reid with Christian, Reid, and Campbell returning to the rhythm section. LTD and Jug take turns playing a few choruses before Dexter takes an extended interpretation that gives him some meaty material to explore. Gene cuts through the next presentation with a masterful performance powered by the gorgeous groundwork of the trio. Jodie lays down a soulful groove of finger-snapping, toe-tapping verses effectively conveying a carefree mood into the finale led by Dexter and Jug.

The Happy Blues is by flugelhorn and trumpet player, Art Farmer, first appearing on the 1956 Prestige album, Hi Fidelity Jam Session. This tune became a hit for Ammons and when reissued in 1960, was the title song of the reissue album. Here, he is the only horn featured and is supported by Young, Eaton, and McCall. The trio starts with a concise introduction segueing into Gene's opening chorus letting the listener know, they're in for a treat. Jug gives an invigorating, infectious first solo. Cleveland gets his only solo spotlight serving up a brief interpretation with assertive enthusiasm leading to the vibrant finale amid the concert crowd's ovation. The Chase was produced by jazz promoter Joe Segal, who founded The Jazz Showcase in 1947 and is still one of the best places to hear jazz in Chicago. The man behind the dials is Leon Kelert of Lakco Record Company who has worked on blues and jazz albums for Blackbird, Delmark Records, and G.H.B. Records.

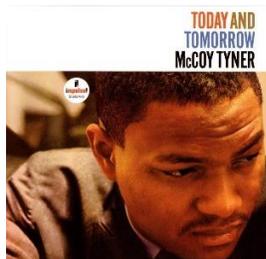
The sound quality on the album is quite good with the instruments providing an impressive soundstage placing you in the audience to enjoy each performance



as if you were there. Dexter is at his peak, Jug is in exquisite form and the splendid musicianship from their bandmates make The Chase a splendid choice to add to your jazz library and well worth the listening time, once you do!

Hi-Fidelity Jam Session (Prestige PRLP 7039); Lonesome Lover Blues (Deluxe Records 2001); The Happy Blues (Prestige PRLP 7039/PRST 7654) – Source: Discogs.com

Polka Dots and Moonbeams – Source: JazzStandards.com, Wikipedia.org



McCoy Tyner – Today and Tomorrow  
Impulse!

I was in the mood to hear some piano jazz a few nights ago when I came across a title I'd not listen to for a while. I've never heard anything by pianist McCoy Tyner that I didn't like and the album up for discussion since his passing on March 7, 2020, is no exception. I placed the record on my Dual 1246 turntable, dropped the stylus, and became immersed in the music of this gifted musician. Today and Tomorrow (Impulse! A-63) was recorded and released in 1964 while McCoy (only twenty-five years old at the time) was still a member of The John Coltrane Quartet. Here, he's featured in three sextet and trio settings each leading an all-star group of Thad Jones on trumpet; Frank Strozier on alto sax; John Gilmore on tenor sax; Butch Warren on bass; Elvin Jones on drums (tracks: A1, A3, B2); Jimmy Garrison on bass; Tootie Heath on drums (tracks: A2, B1, B3). My copy used in this report is the 1972 Stereo reissue (Impulse-ABC Records AS-63).

Contemporary Focus, the first of three tunes by McCoy opens this six-song journey with a rousing collective midtempo theme treatment led by Thad who wails strongly on the opening solo. John and Frank demonstrate their strengths with vibrant enthusiasm for the next two readings. McCoy follows with a briskly swinging interpretation, then Butch and Elvin make the

most of two brief juicy opportunities ahead of the closing chorus and fadeout. Night In Tunisia by Dizzy Gillespie and Frank Paparelli is a jazz standard from 1942 with many notable vocal and instrumental recordings to its credit. Jimmy Garrison and Tootie Heath provide the musical backing for this uptempo trio rendition beginning with an exhilarating theme treatment in unison. The pianist begins the opening statement at a very high temperature of molten intensity. Tootie responds with a riveting performance that has lots of fireworks ahead of the pianist's exuberant finale.

T'N A Blues, also by Tyner strolls in next to end the first side with a relaxed attitude by the sextet on the opening chorus. Gilmore and Tyner are the featured soloists and John goes to work first with an infectious happy groove. McCoy provides the summation on a leisurely paced performance that's very danceable leading to the ensemble reassembling for the coda. Side Two opens with the 1945 jazz standard Autumn Leaves by Joseph Kosma, Jacques Prévert who wrote the French lyrics for the song's original title, Les Feuilles Mortes (The Dead Leaves), and Johnny Mercer who created the English lyrics. The trio exhibits their infectious chemistry on a lively intro that evolves into the sprightly opening chorus. McCoy kicks off the solos with a dazzling display of finger dexterity with a spirited performance of effortless spontaneity. Jimmy steps in next, walking his bass with bristling vitality and tastefulness, then Tyner communicates a few final choruses of brisk dialogue preceding the effervescent reprise and climax.

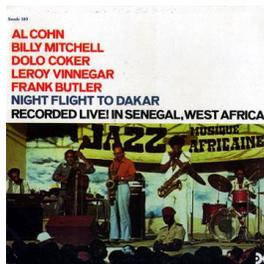
Three Flowers is the leader's longest composition on the album, a mid-tempo waltz offering substantial solo space to himself, Thad, Frank, and John. The sextet opens with a delightfully charming melody and Tyner starts the soloing with an engaging reading possessing incredible beauty and enchantment. Thad follows with a beautifully phrased, cheerfully soulful presentation that's lyrically pleasant. Frank keeps the ingredients stirring on the next solo with inherent high spirits, and buoyant lyricism. John takes the last spot with an exquisite reading that swings with a swagger into the melody reprise and coda. The 1956 jazz standard, When Sunny Gets Blue by Marvin Fisher and Jack Segal brings the album to a close with a thoughtfully tranquil theme treatment led by Tyner. McCoy has the solo showcase to himself and gives an enchanting reading of elegant tenderness bringing the listener home with a gentle closing chorus and culmination.



The recording by Rudy Van Gelder is splendid with an excellent soundstage throughout the treble, midrange, and bass spectrum. Each instrument emerges from your speakers to your listening chair as if you're in the studio with the musicians as they're recording, producing a gorgeous sound reminiscent of his Blue Note recordings of the period. I had the pleasure of seeing McCoy Tyner three times live, twice here in Atlanta where I got to meet him and once at The Village Vanguard in New York City. He was an incredible musician and wonderful man who was never too busy to meet and chat with his fans, yours truly among them. If you're a fan of piano jazz or are looking for a terrific album of Modal Jazz and Post-Bop that's subdued, subtle, and also energetic, I offer for your consideration, Today and Tomorrow by McCoy Tyner. An extremely skilled musician who whether in performance or on record always brought out the absolute best in each of his bandmates.

Autumn Leaves, Night In Tunisia – Source: JazzStandards.com

When Sunny Gets Blue – Source: Wikipedia.org



Al Cohn, Billy Mitchell, Dolo Coker, Leroy Vinnegar, Frank Butler – Night Flight To Dakar  
Xanadu Records

Up next from the library is another recent acquisition, Night Flight To Dakar (Xanadu 185) is the second of two albums recorded during The Xanadu All-Stars' first tour in Senegal, West Africa. It was released in 1982 and the first LP from this tour, Xanadu In Africa was released in 1981. The personnel consist of Al Cohn and Billy Mitchell on tenor sax; Dolo Coker on piano; Leroy Vinnegar on bass and Frank Butler on drums. On four of the five tunes, Cohn is heard on the left channel and Mitchell on the right channel. The album opens with the title tune, Night Flight To Dakar which was composed by Coker in honor of the quintet's trip to Africa and as a tribute to his bandmates. It's a tune the quintet has fun on with a vigorous beat by both

horns collectively leading the trio on a melody presentation as refreshing as a cool drink on a summer evening. Al kicks off the solos with a tantalizing groove; Billy follows reiterating his point passionately on the second interpretation. Dolo digs into the last performance with assurance and conviction, and both saxes share the final two choruses before the closing theme.

Don't Let The Sun Catch You Cryin', the only ballad on the album was written in 1946 by Joe Greene and features just the trio in a subtle rendition that's breathtaking. The theme's presented tenderly and Dolo as the song's only soloist takes each verse with delicate respect tastefully sustained by Leroy and Frank's gentle foundation. It's back to a blowing session for the quintet's first side finale with an uptempo version of Blues Up and Down by tenor saxophonists Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt. This jazz favorite was written in 1950, making its first appearance on a 78-rpm single and reissued on the ten-inch LP, Battle of The Saxes. The song is charged with electricity from the opening notes of the melody. Mitchell gets the soloing underway with untamed ferociousness on the first statement. Cohn's right on his heels fueling the second reading with enthusiastic choruses that are thoroughly enjoyable. Coker launches the next swift-paced performance with a fierce attack. Vinnegar is up next with a rousing chorus shadowed closely by Butler, then taking the next five choruses' in high gear leading to an amazing climax. Butler exchanges the final statement with both saxes putting an exclamation mark on this contemporary jazz classic.

Sweet Senegesele Brown by Billy Mitchell opens Side Two and is dedicated to a woman from Georgia. The song is built on the chords of the 1925 jazz and pop standard Sweet Georgia Brown by Ben Bernie, Maceo Pinkard, and Kenneth Casey. Both Cohn and Mitchell provide two luminous performances, but the showcase here is Butler who has the longest solo at 5 ½ minutes. It's not a bad performance, but his readings on Blues Up and Down and The King are better in my opinion. Coker and Vinnegar provide the propulsive power during the opening and closing choruses, and behind both saxes' readings, but do not solo themselves. The finale is from the pen of Count Basie and became a signature song for tenor saxophonist, Illinois Jacquet. The King is an uptempo cooker giving everyone solo space. The ensemble presents the high-voltage melody collectively, Billy steps in first with a heated solo of assertive virility. Al attacks the second



interpretation with the quickness of motion of a whirlwind. Dolo executes the next reading as a man possessed with rapid-fire agility, then Leroy gives his bass a joyful excursion on the next presentation with unbridled eagerness. Frank ends the readings with one of his best solos on the album while exchanging a few riffs with Al and Billy taking the ensemble home for the finale, ending the album on a high note.

Night Flight To Dakar was originally recorded by American engineer Paul Goodman and he delivers an album with good sound quality. I say good because the one area that fails as you listen is when a musician is talking. You can barely make out what anyone is saying until the very end of The King when one of the guys says Merci Beaucoup to the crowd. Other than that, the listener can expect to enjoy this live performance of jazz as the soundstage from all the instruments is fine and should provide excellent playback on any mid-fi or high-end audio system. I'm intrigued enough to start looking for Xanadu In Africa to give it a detailed listen and I enjoyed the music on Night Flight To Dakar enough to recommend it for fans of Al Cohn, Billy Mitchell, Dolo Coker, Leroy Vinnegar and Frank Butler (who except for his solo on Sweet Senegesele Brown is nearly perfect)!

Battle of The Saxes (Prestige PRLP 107); Blues Up and Down (Prestige 877); Xanadu In Africa (Xanadu 180). The King, Illinois Jacquet – Source: Discogs.com

Sweet Senegesele Brown – Source: Album liner notes by Don Schlitten



The Gigi Gryce Quintet Featuring Richard Williams – The Rat Race Blues  
New Jazz Original Jazz Classics

The multi-instrumentalist (alto sax; clarinet; flute) Gigi Gryce was one of the most exciting and swinging musicians in jazz but is best known as a brilliant arranger and composer during the Hard-Bop era of the early fifties through the mid-sixties. Several of his

compositions have been recorded numerous times and become jazz standards. However, his success as both arranger and writer sometimes overshadowed his abilities as a musician. His 1960 album, The Rat Race Blues (Prestige – New Jazz NJLP 8262) is a splendid quintet session featuring Gryce on alto sax; Richard Williams on trumpet; Richard Wyands on piano; Julian Euell on bass and Mickey Roker on drums. This record also affirms his capabilities as a composer, and his skill as a virtuoso instrumentalist stands out as one of the best LP's he recorded between 1955 and 1960. My copy used in this report is the 1983 New Jazz Original Jazz Classics Mono reissue (OJC-081–NJLP 8262). Side One opens with the title tune, The Rat Race Blues, a fiery uptempo smoker by Gryce with a scintillating introduction by Gigi and Richard soaring over the rhythm section's dazzling groundwork. Wyands cooks on the opening statement with an aggressive attack of his fingers flying fiercely over the keys, making the piano sizzle. Richard opens the throttle further on the muted trumpet for the second solo, heightening the excitement with radiant intensity, then Gigi commands your attention on the closing presentation with an exciting performance.

Strange Feelin' by Sam Finch takes us down to midtempo with the quintet taking the song at a relaxing attitude. Williams steps up first for the lead solo, moving leisurely with a richness in his tone and light springing steps on each verse. Gryce puts his warm-toned alto brand on the next reading exploring some interesting avenues in a tranquil presentation. Wyands reveals his soulful charm and technical facility on the third statement with a notable solo that builds to an ideal climax. The first side concludes with the saxophonist's second original, Boxer Blues beginning with a dialogue between Richard and Wyands preceding Gigi, Julian, and Mickey Roker who complete the chat with a high-spirited beat on the theme. Gryce opens the soloing with a gorgeous, deeply felt interpretation, then Williams delivers extraordinary poignancy and warmth on the next reading. Wyands gives an irresistibly appealing performance on the closer before the reprise and slow fade into oblivion.

Blues In Bloom, the first of two originals by Norman Mapp opens Side Two with a soft-voiced bass solo by Julian that builds slowly into the ensemble's midtempo melody. Gigi goes to work first with a warmth and intimacy in his tone that's exceptionally tender. Williams caresses each note of the second reading with exalted beauty, then Richard wraps up the solos



with a flawless execution of a compelling performance into the coda. The date ends with the second tune by Mapp, Monday Thru Sunday, a slow blues that reaches a medium beat with the front line leading the trio through all seven days of the week in a jazz context. Gryce solos first completely at ease on a beautifully conceived interpretation. Williams maintains a therapeutic tempo on the next reading with a mix of empathy and sensitivity. Wyands gives an intimately delicate performance with a smoothly flowing rhythm on the third reading. Euell gets a moment in the spotlight during the climax to make a brief comment that's impeccably polite.

In my opinion, this is an album that's got it all, excellent musicians, engaging original tunes and great sound that's perfectly acceptable for material over five decades old. It's also the next to last record Gigi Gryce would make before leaving the music scene to become a beloved music teacher in The Bronx until just before his death in 1983. The Rat Race Blues is an excellent title I can recommend and one worth digging for to add to your jazz library. The LP was originally recorded by Rudy Van Gelder with a marvelous soundstage placing the listener's sweet spot in the center surrounded by the quintet. Of the eleven albums this greatly underrated musician recorded between 1955 and 1960, The Rat Race Blues by Gigi Gryce is a pleasant listening experience that's not only a cut above the average LP but one I'm sure, "you won't be able to listen to just once". Please continue to stay safe and take care of yourselves during the Coronavirus pandemic. I'll see you next month and Happy Listening Gang!