

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER



BEN WEBSTER



Come
Sunday

STORYVILLE



BEN WEBSTER was not exactly under-recorded during his forty-year playing career but he is among that exclusive hierarchy of jazz artists to whose consistent excellence there can never be an over-abundance of recorded testimony.

This album has the merit of offering a nicely balanced and thoughtfully chosen selection of tracks. Four of the tunes are associated with Duke Ellington in whose saxophone section Ben was featured for more than ten years. Our Blues is a choice example of Ben's evocative after-hours style of blues playing.

An additional bonus is the superior quality of the musicians behind Webster on all these tracks, recorded in Copenhagen between 1968 and 1970.

Cole Porter's superbly crafted song *You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To*, written in 1942, has long been favoured as a jazz vehicle because of its stimulating chord sequence. The superb rhythm section here

was the house trio of the Montmartre jazz club in Copenhagen at the time of this recording and is beautifully integrated. Pianist Kenny Drew plays delightful, tripping chords behind Ben's subdued theme statement and NHOP's notes are, as ever, unerringly right. With Al Heath's crisp drumming, the rhythm section provides the perfect foil for Ben's lazy, breathy understatement and the tempo is a joy.

At once you hear the characteristic Websterian devices of falling off the note and also cutting notes short of their written value and trailing them off with a vibrating outflow breath. Webster's note placement is as perfect and finely judged as Basie's.

Stompy Jones and *Going Home* feature Ben with the same fine rhythm section in a big band setting, and they speak impressively of the high standard of Danish musicianship. The Ellington theme *Stompy Jones* is a 16 bar showcase for Ben "the blues and stomp man". With spirited punctuations from the brass team and the spur of a rocking tempo with a strong emphasis on the offbeat, Ben plays some really romping, rasping tenor on this track.

There's more poignant, almost diffident ballad playing on the 1942 Ellington classic to which Webster plays breathy homage. After Bent Schjaerff's four-bar introduction, Ben seems at first to be starting out on Lionel Hampton's *Midnight Sun* as he dispenses with

the theme statement and extemporises from the beginning. It's lazy, laid-back Webster with attentive backing by Schjaerff and the excellent big-toned Danish bassist, Hugo Rasmussen, both of whom also solo effectively.

Cottontail is the great flag-waver from Ben's Ellington days, dating from 1940. From note one the big band gets into easy-swinging overdrive, the unisons precise, the saxophone section rightly-knit in the middle eight and Heath and Pedersen laying down a solid rhythmic foundation. Webster enters unostentatiously, content to coast along for the first 32 bars. But then he stokes up the temperature with some abrasive playing that is reminiscent of Arnett Cobb with Lionel Hampton band.

There are some lively exchanges of fours between brass section and tenor and then a chorus and a half by the saxophone section, impeccably played and featuring the celebrated Ducal bridge before Heath's eight bar break ushers in the last eight of the theme.

The imaginative string writing of Ray Pitts is a feature of *Come Sunday*, which is from Ellington's *Black, Brown & Beige* suite, written in 1943. Webster invests the theme with that introspective melancholy which is so typical of his ballad playing, squeezing sibilant notes through the tenor in a soulful salute to a classic piece of Ellingtonia.

Our Blues has an after-hours feeling, conjuring up drizzling rain and wet, deserted pavements in misty lamplight. The chairs have been stacked on the club tables and it's time to pack up the horn and start the lonely walk home. This is not a mournful blues but a bitter-sweet, reflective expression of that early hours state of mind that hovers between remorse and hopeful anticipation.

Sunday was always one of Ben's great favourites. The quintet takes it at a faster tempo than Ben was usually inclined to set and the piece swings compellingly, with good solos by Hansen, Molin and Pedersen. This is a typical, informal club performance in which Ben's sparse, aphoristic statements contrast with the churning intensity of the rhythm section. There is a totally characteristic "club style" ending which Ben seals with a tongue-in-cheek phrase to finish on the flattened fifth.

Old Folks features another tune of which Webster was extremely fond and he gets delightful support from pianist Teddy Wilson, bassist Rasmussen and drummer Streenberg. Ben caresses the melody lovingly, leaving plenty of eloquent space, as was his custom, and Wilson's chords behind him are perfectly articulated and poised. Wilson contributes a lovely relaxed solo full of elegant touches and rounded off with a thoroughly Wilsonian ascending run.

It is appropriate that this album should end with a ballad because it is as a ballad player that Ben Webster will be remembered. Dizzy Gillespie hit it right on the button when he said: "I've heard Ben play in so many settings but to sit down and listen to him play a ballad – nobody who ever played a ballad does a better job than Ben Webster does on it. I don't care from what age they come in music".

Mike Hennessey

BIOGRAPHY OF BEN WEBSTER

Like Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, Benjamin Francis Webster, the third member of the classic tenor triumvirate, spent part of his musical apprenticeship in the ranks of the Fletcher Henderson band.

A product of Kansas City, where he was born of February 27th, 1909, Webster came to New York in 1932 with the Bennie Moten band. He followed his stint with Henderson by spells with Willie Bryant, Cab Calloway and Stuff Smith, and then in 1935, began an association with Duke Ellington which continued, on and off, for more than ten years.

Webster, the pre-eminent disciple of Coleman Hawkins, has that hallmark that distinguishes the great jazz performers from the simply good – an instantly recognisable style. While adopting the searing blowtorch approach of Hawkins on up-tempo numbers, Webster plays ballads in a highly distinctive way, attenuating the note values and following the sustained notes with a tremolo “wake” of exhalation. It’s a patented websterian flourish.

Just as Lester Young made his principal mark with Basie, so Webster established his reputation in the Duke Ellington orchestra, earning particular acclaim for his solos on the 1940 recordings of “Cottontail” and “All Too Soon”.

Webster had an uninterrupted spell with Ellington between 1939 and 1943 and returned for a few months in 1948. In between he freelanced around Kansas City in the fifties, toured with JATP and recorded prolifically for Verve with Coleman Hawkins, Oscar Peterson, Johnny Hodges and Art Farmer, among others. After a period of relative inactivity in the early sixties, he moved to Europe in 1965, settling first in Holland, then in Denmark.

He worked in clubs and played concerts around Europe and in 1968 made a memorable date with Don Byas for the MPS label. He died in Amsterdam on September 20, 1973.

Described by Barry Ulanov as one of “the warmest and most sensitive of performers”. He will be best remembered as a genuine romantic and a most outstanding interpreter of ballads.

Mike Hennessey

BEN WEBSTER – COME SUNDAY

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | YOU'D BE SO NICE TO COME HOME TO
Cole Porter | 4:22 |
| 2 | GOING HOME
trad. – arr. N.J. Steen | 3:52 |
| 3 | COME SUNDAY
Duke Ellington arr. Ray Pitts | 3:57 |
| 4 | OUR BLUES
Bent Schaerff – Ben Webster | 5:22 |
| 5 | I GOT IT BAD
Duke Ellington | 8:28 |
| 6 | STOMPY JONES
Duke Ellington arr. N.J. Steen | 3:39 |
| 7 | COTTONTAIL
Duke Ellington arr. N.J. Steen | 3:35 |
| 8 | OLD FOLKS
Robinson – Hill | 6:53 |

Tracks 1,2,3,6,7:

Ben Webster (ts), Kenny Drew (p),
Niels Henning Ørsted Pedersen (b), Al Heath (dr)
Recorded in Copenhagen 1968

Tracks 4,5:

Ben Webster (ts), Bent Schaerff (p), Hugo Rasmussen (b)
Recorded in Copenhagen September 16, 1969

Track 8:

Ben Webster (ts), Teddy Wilson (p),
Hugo Rasmussen (b), Ole Sreenberg (dr),
Recorded in Copenhagen September 25, 1970

2xHD Mastering: René Laflamme

2xHD Executive Producer: André Perry

Album cover & insert - concept & artwork: André Perry

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THE 2xHD FUSION MASTERING SYSTEM



In the constant evolution of its proprietary mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.

The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original ¼" 15 ips CCIR master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired from the playback head directly to a Telefunken EF806 tube, using OCC silver cable. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.

The resulting signal is then transformed into high resolution formats by recording it in DSD11.2kHz using a Merging Technologies' Horus A to D converter. All analog and digital cables that are used are state of the art. The 2xHD FUSION mastering system is powered by a super capacitor power supply, using a new technology that lowers the digital noise found in the lowest level of the spectrum. A vacuum tube NAGRA HDdac (DSD) is used as a reference digital playback converter in order to A and B with the original analog master tape, permitting the fusion of the warmth of analog with the refinement of digital.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audiophile sound engineer René Laflamme.

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