



Phil Woods

Reflections In E-Flat

With A Possible Twenty!

My first recording was made in 1954 with Jimmy Raney and we did it in Rudy Van Gelder's living room. Rudy was an ophthalmologist whose hobby was recording jazz and he had turned his living room (he lived in Engelwood, New Jersey) into a recording studio. Most of the classic Prestige and Blue Note jazz records were made by this man in his former living area. Rudy was the first engineer to record the bass with the microphone in the F hole.

The first music-minus student record was done by Mr. Van Gelder for Jules Colomby's label, Signal. Hall Overton was the leader with Nick Stabulas on drums and Teddy Kotick on bass. My parts were played in the recording booth and heard by the rhythm section using earphones during the rhythm track recording. This gave the accompaniment the rhythmic edge of responding and reacting to a live player even though I wasn't being recorded. I came back later and overdubbed my parts. This was pioneering work in fifties!

My first recording was made in 1954 with Jimmy Raney and we did it in Rudy Van Gelder's living room Rudy was an ophthalmologist whose hobby was recording jazz and he had turned his living room (he lived in Engelwood, New Jersey) into a recording studio. Most of the classic Prestige and Blue Note jazz records were made by this man in his former living area. Rudy was the first engineer to record the bass with the microphone in the F hole.

Thirty-three and a third RPM LPs were new and the first ones were ten inch. I also remember an early experiment with sixteen RPM LPs (two albums on a single disc) but this was not successful with the audience and was quickly dropped.

Rudy was and remains a trifle fastidious in his work habits. During the making of *Pairing Off* Gene Quill popped a can of beer during Kenny Dorham's solo and it sprayed all over the place. Rudy came out of the control booth/pantry area and grabbed the six-pack and tossed it out the front door into a snow bank. This can be heard in bar 330987.

In the late 1950s New York was filled with recording studios. These were magic rooms in a magic time. All of the arranger/composer types were still in "The Apple" and most

recordings of their music used a big band format or some variation of same. Here is a list of some of my favorites:

1. The Church: Located at East 30th Street, this Columbia studio was Glenn Gould's favorite. The room was huge and I remember many dates

there with big bands and large formations. I also remember a date with Lena Horn and Lenny Hayton, her conductor, old man and nice guy. For some reason they put a flute part on my part—I only doubled on clarinet. Danny Bank gave me the bass clarinet part and he covered the flute part. I used his horn. The tune began with a double pianissimo E flat above middle C bell tone on the bass clarinet! Piece of cake for a Juilliard graduate! Quiet in the studio! Lenny gives me the downbeat and out came the most God awful sound you ever heard. It resembled the whimper of a basset hound in a pet shop fire. I apologized profusely and we tried it again—and again—and again! I cracked that sucker about fourteen times before I got it. Embarrassing moment indeed!

2. RCA 46th Street: This was where Quincy Jones did his first album, *This Is How I Feel About Jazz*. It is also where Oliver Nelson did *The Kennedy Dream*. Ken Hopkins was fond of this venue and the sound track for *The Hustler* was done there, as was Antonini's *Blow-Up* with the Herbie Hancock soundtrack. The studio was located right off of 6th Avenue and only minutes from either Charlie's Tavern or Jim & Andy's.

3. Bell Sound: Located on West 52nd Street, this was mostly a jingle studio, but one big band date stands out. It was with Dinah Washington and arranged by Billy Byers. Billy's dates were always special! As each musician showed up he was asked his preferred drinking whiskey and a bottle of same was placed at his stand. At one point Dinah spent forty minutes getting the control booth to record a trombone player snoring from his zonked-out chair.

4. Webster Hall: This was one of the most venerated studios, probably due to its superior acoustics and its genius resident engineer, Ray Hall. This is where Bill Potts' version of *Porgy & Bess* was done. It was also the venue for Oliver Nelson's debut album, *Full Nelson*. Gorgeous sounding room!

5. A&R: This was Phil Ramone's classic studio located on 48th Street right above Jim & Andy's. There was a speaker from the studio in the bar and occasionally it would come to life: "Hey! At the bar! Any trombone players around? We need a sub right away!" Phil Ramone was the one of the first to embrace the new Solid State technology, (he called his record label Solid State) and was responsible for some of the best big band jazz records ever made by the Thad Jones/ Mel Lewis orchestra. A date at A&R could be a nightmare for the contractor however. The contractor was the person who got all participants to fill out their W-2 forms for

the union contract. All dates went through the union in those days. Pre Taft/Hartley had not yet broken labor's back. Break times were spent tracking down the players who usually rushed to the downstairs bar for a taste. Later on Phil opened a bigger studio on 7th Avenue. I recorded *Round Trip* there in 1970. For some reason they forgot to assign an engineer to the session and we scrambled to find someone. It worked out OK, but the machine ran slow on the first tune *Solitude* and the oboe sounds like its performing for a bag of snakes!

6. Fine Sound: Bob Fine's studio was in the Great Northern Hotel on 56th Street. It was a big hotel type ballroom and it had a great sound and the best bar and restaurant.

In the early 60's I bowed to financial pressure and bought a flute. As a double it would have meant an additional 50%. I took it home, put it together, blew a note and immediately fell to the floor in a dead faint! I gave the damned thing to Jim, of Jim & Andy fame, to settle up my bar bill and he gave it to his daughter who became and remains a wonderful flutist. Shortly after this I moved to Europe and became a famous jazz person.

BITS AND PIECES

Add Anthony Quinn to the long list of actors who played a saxophone at some point in their careers. I gleaned this from his new book, *One Man Tango*. Right on Zorba! From an ESPN baseball show "He played that ball like a saxophone—real smooth!" How many times have you seen a sax in some store window with the mouthpiece upside down. Very curious but it doesn't mean anything!

And this last bit from a career guidance PBS program: the producer-composer says to the kids, "Kids! Do you know what a drum machine is? Well, it is a tool that a person like me, with no training

and no appreciable talent can use to make a whole record all by myself. It sounds terrible, but I get to keep all the money! Isn't that neat?"

Yeah—that's neat! Later! §