

GO

SONNY CLARK / BUTCH WARREN / BILLY HIGGINS

DEXTER



GO GORDON

STEREO
THE FINEST IN JAZZ SINCE 1939

84112 BLUE NOTE

GO! DEXTER GORDON

DEXTER GORDON, tenor sax; SONNY CLARK, piano;
 BUTCH WARREN, bass; BILLY HIGGINS, drums.

Side 1: CHEESE CAKE — I GUESS I'LL HANG MY TEARS OUT TO DRY — SECOND BALCONY JUMP

Side 2: LOVE FOR SALE — WHERE ARE YOU — THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

IN May 1961, Dexter Gordon visited New York for the first time in over twelve years. During the week he was here, he recorded two albums for Blue Note, *Doin' Alright* and *Dexter Calling*. These LPs, the main purpose of his visit, were warmly received by all segments of the jazz fraternity.

A year later, he again journeyed from California to New York, this time as a more permanent resident. I use the term "more permanent" because Gordon has not remained in New York constantly. It became a base of operations for playing excursions to Boston, Cape Cod and Rochester, and, at the end of August, his port of embarkation for England and continental Europe.

During the summer, Dexter did play a number of gigs in New York: a weekend at the Coronet; a Monday night at Birdland; an afternoon at the Jazz Gallery; a concert at Town Hall; and various one-nighters and one-afternooners. Everywhere he met with the same reaction — unbridled enthusiasm. He drew the kind of response that you know is not mere hand service. At the Jazz Gallery, I observed this in an audience that included many younger fans — kids who were not applauding him because he was the fabled Dexter Gordon of the past whom they were supposed to automatically revere. He reached them directly with the expansive emotion in his playing.

Love, warmth and sheer joy are all present in Gordon's sound and attack. It can be heard and felt in the tremendous drive of his up tempo work, the width and depth of his ballads, or anywhere in between. All these affirmative qualities are reiterated in this album. There is also evidence of change, harmonically, in the playing of a man who was known for his harmonic awareness back in the mid-Forties. This is the kind of record that has you starting again from side one, track one, immediately after you have played both sides in their entirety.

Dexter's astute choice of a fine rhythm section was not accidental. These three players worked with him several times during the summer of 1962.

Sonny Clark is a real pro. His accompaniment is alive but never intruding; his solos are articulated with a consistent clarity and contain personal, melodic ideas.

Butch Warren is rapidly establishing himself as one of the best young bassists on the New York scene. His lines swing along with no doubt as to the definition of the notes.

Billy Higgins doesn't beat the drums; he plays them like the musical instrument they collectively are, when in the right hands. His cymbal sound is exhilarating; his ear forever alert.

As a unit, Clark, Warren and Higgins have also been heard to advantage in Clark's *Leapin' and Lopin'* (BN 4091) and Jackie McLean's *A Fickle Sonance* (BN 4089).

Go! gets going with a piece of *Cheese Cake*, a minor-key pattern reminiscent of *Topsy*. Dexter soars like a condor over the Andes, with grandeur and great staying power.

His strength is present on *I Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out to Dry*, a seldom-done ballad he wisely revived, but it is strength with tenderness, carried by a beautiful, masculine sound that is neither Hawkins nor Young, but Gordon.

Jerry Valentine's *Second Balcony Jump* was in the libraries of both the Earl Hines and Billy Eckstine bands. Gordon was in the Eckstine band that played it, but it was Gene Ammons (not Gordon, as indicated in the liner notes on an EmArcy LP reissue) who took the solo on the original National recording. The construction of Dexter's first solo is marvelous and builds to a climax gradually. There's a semi-quote of Jimmy Heath's C.T.A. cleverly worked in. Then Clark plays a blithe, flowing solo before Dex comes back for a second, shorter, but again climactic summation that leads into part of Valentine's old arrangement and an abrupt ending.

The Latin backing for the melody statement of *Love for Sale* may not be exactly bossa nova, but the saxophone is certainly "boss" tenor. When the solos commence, the rhythm section shifts into 4/4. Dexter's playing is as broad-shouldered as he is; Sonny's piano delicate, yet always on solid ground.

Where Are You is another lovely ballad that, fortunately, has not been played into the ground. That huge Gordon sound, once described by Michael James as "cavernous", is again matched by the emotional content of his playing.

The closer, *Three O'Clock in the Morning*, may seem like a strange piece of material for a modern jazzman to play, but Don Byas and Slam Stewart recorded it in the Forties during 52nd Street's heyday. Dexter begins in a loping 2/4 that slides into 4/4. He injects wry humor with quotes from *Five O'Clock Whistle* and *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (at *Three O'Clock in the Morning?*) while blowing forcefully all the time in a substantial medium groove.

Gordon is a great advertisement for live jazz. When he really starts "stretchin' out" on a number, and his long, firmly anchored legs begin vibrating rapidly from side to side, the intense swing of his music has a natural visual counterpart. It's true that you cannot see him in this album but you can feel the impact of his personality as it is poured into his music.

This session was not recorded in a nightclub performance but in its informal symmetry, it matches the relaxed atmosphere that the best of those made in that manner engender. Everyone was really together, in all the most positive meanings of that word. It was so good that Blue Note put these four men in the studio again, two days later. We'll be hearing that one in the near future.

Meanwhile, proceed directly to *Go!* You won't collect \$200.00, but you will get a monopoly of Melody Avenue, Swing Street and Inspiration Place.

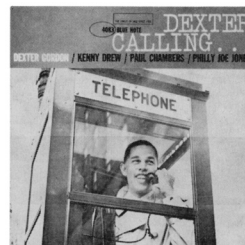
—IRA GITLER

Cover Design by REID MILES
 Photo by FRANCIS WOLFF
 Recording by RUDY VAN GELDER

Users of Wide Range equipment should adjust their controls for RIAA curve.



Doin' Alright — BLP 4077



Dexter Calling — BLP 4083

DEXTER GORDON

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Before being offered to play the role of the troubled jazz protagonist in the compelling 1986 film, *'Round Midnight*, Dexter Gordon met with French director Bertrand Tavernier and producer Irwin Winkler in the latter's apartment in New York. One of the first things Winkler said to Gordon was, "Why doesn't jazz sell?" There was a long pause, and in his man-of-few-words manner, Gordon replied succinctly, "Art form."

Therein lies the essence of Dexter Gordon's purity as a stalwart tenor saxophonist who blew his horn with full-bodied brio and tender grace, and with a balladic melancholy that was sweetened by his gentle soul. At six foot six inches tall, he was truly the "sophisticated giant." For Gordon, it wasn't about fame or fortune, but about artistic expression. This won over legions of Dexter aficionados, from such tenor peers as John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins to record company executives to young jazz musicians today who continue to plumb the depths of his music.

Dexter's widow Maxine Gordon, who grew up in the midst of New York's vital jazz scene in the early '60s and was good friends with Trane's quartet

members, remembers when the 1962 Blue Note album *Dexter Calling* first came out. Coltrane took a copy of the record to drummer Elvin Jones's house

to listen to it and later told her how great they thought it was. In the liner notes to the 1996 six-CD box set, *Dexter Gordon: The Complete Blue Note*



GO!

Sixties Sessions, Blue Note president Bruce Lundvall, who resuscitated the tenor's career when he was calling the shots at Columbia Records in the mid '70s, wrote that Gordon "became a real musical hero for me. He told beautiful stories with every solo. His sound was larger than life. The very essence of modern jazz, the very definition of hipness. And my favorite tenor saxophonist of them all."

Gordon recorded nine albums for Blue Note beginning in 1960, and he said that his favorite of the bunch was 1962's *Go!* Recorded shortly before he exited New York for Europe for the

expatriate life, the six-tune classic features Gordon with a simpatico rhythm section, comprising swinging pianist Sonny Clark (who follows the tenor's every move), rising star Butch Warren (a Washington, D.C. native who became Blue Note's house bassist for a stretch) and easygoing but always on the beat drummer Billy Higgins (who worked with Gordon rewriting much of *'Round Midnight's* script to faithfully portray the jazz life).

But *Go!* is decidedly Dexter's show, beginning with the opening notes of his lyrical, minor-key, muscular, uptempo original, "Cheese Cake," the perfect start to a session where the tenor basks in delicious solo breaks. You can hear the sense of playfulness of the date on such tunes as the ebullient dance "Second Balcony Jump" and the whimsical "Three O'Clock in the Morning" with allusions to both the ringing of the Big Ben in London and his love of the great American pastime with a quote from "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" (he took his performance holiday during the World Series). He calmly ignites

Cole Porter's "Love for Sale" with a bossa open before launching into a solo with an ease and velocity that's void of crunching gusts and exhilarated whirlwinds.

Gordon tops it all off with two deep-souled ballads, "I Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out to Dry" played with otherworldly emotion, and "Where Are You?" that's a personal tale of misery with high pitches of a plaintive tenor. The way the record develops is exemplary—interspersing the happily upbeat with the sorrowfully slow.

Recorded on August 27, 1962 at Rudy Van Gelder's Studio in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, *Go!* was driven by bold and beautiful propulsion—with enough fuel remaining for Gordon and Co. to return two days later to rekindle the action for *A Swingin' Affair*. This time frame stands tall as a period of high artistic creativity of one of jazz's most iconic saxophonists. Indeed, art form was fully the mind-set of the moment.

—Dan Ouellette

