Lecture 9
The Tenor Titans

Coleman Hawkins (1904 – 1969)

• Born Coleman Randolph Hawkins on November 21, 1904 in Saint Joseph, Missouri
• Commonly regarded as the first important and influential jazz musician to use the tenor saxophone
• Known by some as the “Father of the Tenor Sax”
• While Hawkins is most strongly associated with the swing music and big band era, he began playing professionally in the early 1920s and was important in the development of bebop in the 1940s
• His nicknames included “Hawk” and “Bean”

Early Career
• In his youth, Hawkins played piano and cello
• He started playing saxophone at the age of nine
• By the age of fourteen he was playing around eastern Kansas
• Hawkins joined Mamie Smith’s Jazz Hounds in 1921 with whom he toured through 1923
• From 1923-1934, Hawkins was a member of Fletcher Henderson’s Orchestra
• Hawkins’ playing changed significantly during Louis Armstrong’s tenure with the Henderson Orchestra

The Innovator
• Louis Armstrong’s methods greatly influenced Hawkins’ approach to swing and solo construction
• However, Hawkins started to base his improvisation around a knowledge of chords, rather than melody alone
• In this, Hawkins paralleled pianist Art Tatum and anticipated bebop
• He realized that he could fly above the steady beat without losing the rhythm, and began playing fast, double-time passages

Later Years
• In the late 1940s and 1950s, Hawkins toured with Jazz at the Philharmonic
• He recorded extensively and rose to any challenge (including work with Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, and Max Roach)
• In his later years, Hawkins began to drink heavily and became increasingly neglectful of his health
• He died of pneumonia in 1969

Body & Soul
• Coleman Hawkins & His Orchestra
• Recorded October 11, 1939
• Personnel
  – Jackie Fields & Eustis Moore (alto saxophone)
  – Coleman Hawkins (tenor saxophone)
  – Joe Guy & Tommy Lindsay (trumpets)
  – Earl Hardy (trombone)
  – Gene Rodgers (piano)
  – William Oscar Smith (bass)
  – Arthur Herbert (drums)

*In a Mellow Tone*
• From the album *Night Hawk* with Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis

**Lester Young (1909 – 1959)**

• Born Lester Willis Young on August 27, 1909 in Woodville, Mississippi
• Played tenor saxophone and clarinet
• He is remembered as one of the finest, most influential players on the tenor saxophone
• Responsible for establishing much of the hipster ethos which came to be associated with jazz

**Early Years**
• Young’s father taught him to play trumpet, violin, and drums in addition to the saxophone
• He played in his family’s band in both the vaudeville and carnival circuits
• He left the family band in 1927 because he refused to tour in the Southern United States, where the Jim Crow Laws were in effect
• Young played with Count Basie and Fletcher Henderson during the Swing Era

**“Prez”**
• Since jazz already had a “King of Swing” with Benny Goodman, a “Duke” Ellington, and a “Count” Basie, Lester Young was known as “Prez”
• The name was short for “The President of the Tenor Saxophone,” and was given to him by singer Billie Holiday
• He returned the favor by dubbing her “Lady Day”

**The Original Hipster**
• Young was viewed as an eccentric by those he chose to exclude from his circle
• He dressed distinctively, especially in his trademark pork pie hat
• When he played saxophone, he would sometimes hold the horn off to the right side at a near-horizontal angle, like a flute
• He created his own language that his only friends could understand, but might baffle outsiders
– He famously referring to a narcotics detective or policeman as a “Bob Crosby” (referring to Bob and Bing Crosby if multiple police officers were present)
– A rehearsal was a “molly trolley”
– An instrumentalist's keys or fingers were his “people”

**Later Years**

- Beginning around 1951, Young’s level of playing began to decline more precipitously, as he began to drink more and more heavily
- His playing increasingly demonstrated reliance on a small number of clichéd phrases and reduced creativity
- Young’s playing and health went into a tailspin, culminating in a November 1955 hospital stint following a nervous breakdown
- By the late 1950s, his self-destructive habits had finally taken their toll on him
- He was eating significantly less, drinking more and more, and suffering from liver disease and malnutrition
- He died in the early morning hours of March 15, 1959 at the age of 49

**Lester Leaps in**

- Count Basie’s Kansas City Seven
- Recorded September 5, 1939
- Personnel
  - Lester Young (tenor saxophone)
  - Buck Clayton (trumpet)
  - Dickie Wells (trombone)
  - Freddie Green (guitar)
  - Count Basie (piano)
  - Walter Page (bass)
  - Jo Jones (drums)

**All of Me**

- From the album *The Ultimate Lester Young*

**Hot vs. Cool Round 2: Comparing Coleman Hawkins & Lester Young**

- **Coleman Hawkins**
  - Huge, dark sound
  - “Vertical” improvisations based on his superior knowledge of harmony
  - Rhythmic approach was closely tied to the beat
- **Lester Young**
  - Light, breathy sound
  - “Horizontal” improvisations rooted in the blues
  - Rhythmic conception was loose and floated above the beat
Ben Webster (1909 – 1973)

- Born Benjamin Francis Webster on March 27, 1909 in Kansas City, Missouri
- Considered one of the three most important “swing tenors” along with Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young

Early Career
- Webster learned to play piano and violin at an early age, before learning to play the saxophone
- Once Texas saxman Budd Johnson showed him some basics on the saxophone, Webster began to play that instrument in the Young Family Band (which at the time included Lester Young)
- Webster spent time with quite a few orchestras in the 1930s, including Bennie Moten’s legendary 1932 band that included Count Basie and Walter Page

Webster & Duke Ellington
- In 1940 Ben Webster became the first major tenor soloist of Duke Ellington’s orchestra
- During the next three years he was on many famous recordings, including Cotton Tail and All Too Soon
- His contribution, together with that of bassist Jimmy Blanton, was so important that Ellington’s orchestra during that period is known as the Blanton-Webster band
- After three productive years of playing with Ellington, Webster left the band in an angry altercation, during which he cut up one of Ellington’s suits

Webster’s Sound
- Webster had a tough, raspy, and brutal tone on stomps (with his own distinctive growls), yet on ballads he would play with warmth and sentiment
- Stylistically he was heavily indebted to Hawkins, particularly for his low, muscular tone and his vibrato
- Webster was significantly different from Hawkins in that his sound was sleeker, less aggressive, and much more spacious
- His tone was a later influence on such diverse players as Archie Shepp, Lew Tabackin, Scott Hamilton, David Murray, and Bennie Wallace

Final Years
- In 1964 he moved permanently to join other American jazz musicians in Copenhagen, Denmark, where he played when he pleased during his last decade
- In 1971 Webster reunited with Duke Ellington and his big band for a couple of shows at the Tivoli Gardens in Denmark
- Ben Webster died in Amsterdam, The Netherlands in 1973

Cotton Tail
- Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra
- Recorded May 4, 1940 in Hollywood, California
**Personnel**
- Barney Bigard (clarinet)
- Otto Hardwicke & Johnny Hodges (alto saxophones)
- Ben Webster (tenor saxophone)
- Harry Carney (baritone saxophone)
- Wallace Jones & Cootie Williams (trumpets)
- Rex Stewart (cornet)
- Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton & Lawrence Brown (trombones)
- Juan Tizol (valve trombone)
- Fred Guy (guitar)
- Duke Ellington (piano)
- Jimmy Blanton (bass)
- Sonny Greer (drums)

**Tenderly**
- Ben Webster
- From the compilation album *Jazz ‘Round Midnight: Ben Webster*

**Tangerine**
- From the album *Coleman Hawkins Encounters Ben Webster*
- Recorded October 16, 1957
- Personnel
  - Coleman Hawkins & Ben Webster (tenor saxophones)
  - Herb Ellis (guitar)
  - Oscar Peterson (piano)
  - Ray Brown (bass)
  - Alvin Stoller (drums)