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Wardell Gray

A Sinner Kissed an Angel

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Wardell Gray (1921-1955) was an American jazz tenor saxophonist who straddled the swing and bebop periods. Today often overlooked, Gray's playing displays a unique style, an unmatched tone and a strong presence.

Gray grew up in Oklahoma City and later Detroit, Michigan, where having played in a handful of local bands he was hired by Earl Hines - this was a big break for the 21 year-old Gray, as the Earl Hines Orchestra was not only nationally-known, but it had nurtured the careers of some of the emerging bebop musicians, including Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. Wardell spent approximately three years with Hines, and matured rapidly during this time. He soon became a featured soloist, and the band's recordings show a relaxed, fluent stylist very much in the Lester Young mold.

He left Hines late in 1946, settling in Los Angeles; soon after arriving there, he recorded the first session under his own name. In Los Angeles, Wardell worked in a number of bands including Benny Carter, the blues singer Ivory Joe Hunter, and the small group that supported singer Billy Eckstine on a tour of the West Coast. But the real focus in L.A at this time was in the clubs along Central Avenue, which was still thriving after the boom years brought about by the huge injection of wartime defence spending. Here Wardell found his element, playing in the mainly after-hours sessions in clubs like Jack's Basket Room, the Down Beat, Lovejoy's and the Club Alabam.

It was in the Central Avenue clubs that Wardell held his tenor battles with Dexter Gordon. These two were ideally matched; Wardell's light sound and swift delivery were more than a match for Dexter's big, blistering sound, and their tenor jousts became a kind of symbol for the Central Avenue scene. Gordon later recalled: "There'd be a lot of cats on the stand but by the end of the session it would wind up with Wardell and myself... His playing was very fluid, very clean... He had a lot of drive and a profusion of ideas".

Excerpt of biographical notes from Wikipedia - full biography online

Transfer notes

This album came about as one of those happy accidents - a Sunday afternoon leafing through a collection of old LPs donated to Pristine unearthed two volumes on the Esquire label, entitled "Wardell Gray Memorial", which together make up the selection of studio and live recordings presented here. My initial aim was to rework the rather poor sound quality of the original recordings for my own pleasure, but the results far exceeded my expectations - hence the present issue. Gone is the primitive, almost telephonic sound of the originals - in its place a fuller, much brighter sound that really allows the performers to sing, judicious use of Ambient Stereo and a convolution reverb which recreates the acoustic of the Birdland jazz club in New York also help contribute to a fabulously lively and spontaneous sound that really brings this long-forgotten saxophonist's great music back to life. **AR**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
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WARDELL GRAY

A SINNER KISSED AN ANGEL

A COLLECTION OF LIVE AND
STUDIO RECORDINGS 1949 - 1953
IN FABULOUS NEW 32-BIT
XR RETRASTERS

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A SINNER KISSED AN ANGEL
WARDELL GRAY

WARDELL GRAY

1 Twisted (3:07)

2 Easy Living (4:25)

3 Southside (3:22)

4 Sweet Lorraine (4:09)

Recorded 11 November 1949

5 Blue Gray (2:47)

6 Grayhound (3:04)

7 A Sinner Kissed an Angel (3:11)

8 Treadin' (3:51)

Recorded 25 April 1950

9 Move (9:46)

10 Scapple from the Apple (9:03)

Recorded live at the Hula Hut,
Sunset Strip, Los Angeles, California
27 August 1950

11 April Skies (3:01)

12 Bright Boy (2:46)

13 Jackie (2:31)

14 Farmer's Market (2:47)

15 Sweet and Lovely (3:15)

16 Lover Man (2:22)

Recorded 21 January 1952

17 So Long Broadway (3:09)

18 Paul's Cause (2:54)

19 The Man I Love (3:07)

20 Lavonne (2:52)

Recorded 20 February 1953

tenor sax

Al Haig piano
Tommy Potter bass
Roy Haynes drums

Phil Hill piano
Johnny Richardson bass
Art Madigan drums

Dexter Gordon tenor
Sonny Criss alto
Clark Terry trumpet
Jimmy Bunn piano
Billy Hadnott bass
Chuck Thompson drums

Art Farmer trumpet
Hampton Hawes piano
Harper Crosby bass
Larry Marable drums
Robert Collier conga

Teddy Charles vibes
Frank Morgan alto
Sonny Clark piano
Dick Nivison bass
Larry Marable drums

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XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Transfers from Esquire LPs
32-016 and 32-023

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of **Wardell Gray**

NB. There is at least one terrible
edit in the live recordings - this is
as presented on the original LP!

Total duration: **75:29**

For a full catalogue visit
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