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Roll Back

by Peter Aaron

Sonny Rollins—*Saxophone Colossus*
(Essential Jazz Classics)

Clifford Brown/Sonny Rollins/Max Roach Quintet—*Complete Studio Recordings*
(Essential Jazz Classics)

Art Tatum/Ben Webster—*The Album*
(Essential Jazz Classics)

Red Garland—*The 1956 Trio*
(Essential Jazz Classics)

Lucky Thompson—*New York City, 1964-65*
(Uptown Records)

Dupree Bolton—*Fireball*
(Uptown Records)

If there's one disc that truly befits the Essential Jazz Classics label's name, it's Sonny Rollins's 1956 masterpiece, *Saxophone Colossus*. Alongside *Kind Of Blue*, *Time Out*, and *A Love Supreme*, it stands as one of modern jazz's cornerstones, an album that transcends boundaries and belongs in every collection of fine music. Home to the definitive rendition of the Rollins-penned standard "St. Thomas" and other swaggering gems like "Strode Rode" and "Moritat" (aka "Mack the Knife"), the set remains the perfect entry to the Germantown icon's endlessly fluid and inventive art. This release adds '55's companion LP, *Work Time*, which as well boasts the revolutionary Max Roach on drums.

Before Rollins emerged as a leader, he also worked with Roach in the pivotal hard bop band the drummer co-led with trumpeter Clifford Brown. *Complete Studio Recordings* encompasses that unit's *At Basin Street*, a 1956 studio session named for the New York club where the quintet was then appearing, and that year's *Sonny Rollins Plus 4*, which features the same players. Split equally between hyper-fast workouts (the classic "Pent-Up House") and profound ballads ("Time"), it's a stunner.

One of Rollins's chief antecedents on the tenor was the sublime Ben Webster, whose breathy, caressing way with a romantic ballad borders on blush-inducing. *The Album* pairs the longtime Duke Ellington saxophonist with the man many consider the greatest jazz pianist of all time, the impossibly agile Art Tatum. Cut in 1956, the seven gorgeous tracks here are late-night nirvana, perfect for listening to with your feet up and a beverage of your choosing. Tacked on are five Tatum solo performances from 1953.

Another genius of the ivories was the great Red Garland. The 1956 Trio—'56 was an excellent year for jazz, evidently—features the ex-Miles Davis pianist in the company of bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Art Taylor, and combines *A Garland of Red*, his first outing as a leader, with cuts from the subsequent *Groovy* and *Red Garland's Piano* plus a bonus tune with Philly Joe Jones on traps. Brisk, crisp sprints through "A Foggy Day" and "What Is This Thing Called Love?" are pure delight.

Titles in Uptown's Flashback Series were reviewed in the January-February edition of Roll Back, and the pair here sees the label unearthing still more sessions by two jazz greats. Though he's best known as a robust tenor, saxophonist Lucky Thompson also doubled on soprano, something he does to great effect on the live sets that make up the two-CD *New York City*,

1964-65. Disc one is highlighted by the jumping "Firebug" and sports an octet that includes pianist Hank Jones, bassist Richard Davis, and Cecil Payne on baritone sax; disc two holds a radio appearance with between-song interviews.

Trumpeter Dupree Bolton is one of bop's more obscure figures, a prodigiously gifted instrumentalist whose career was tragically thwarted by drugs and jail time. The aptly titled *Fireball* stars the erstwhile Curtis Amy and Harold Land sideman in the soundtrack to a 1962 TV broadcast led by Amy, as well as two previously unreleased performances with alto saxophonist Earl Anderza and four less-essential 1980 tracks by the soul-jazz band Bolton played with during his prison years. A thick booklet offers fascinating insight into the hard-living horn man's colorful life.—Peter Aaron

Sonny Rollins, Brown/Rollins/Roach Quintet, Art Tatum/Ben Webster, Red Garland:

www.disconforme.com

Lucky Thompson, Dupree Bolton:
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