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[Home](#) [Music](#) **Music Review: Art Tatum & Ben Webster - The Album**

"A sinister cabal of superior writers."

Music Review: Art Tatum & Ben Webster - *The Album*




Author: [The Other Chad](#) — **Published:** Jun 15, 2009 at 4:10 am

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Jazz fans take note: the only studio session featuring Art Tatum and Ben Webster has been recently remastered and reissued. The collection, entitled quite simply *The Album*, features renditions of seven jazz standards. Accompanying Tatum's piano and Webster's tenor are Red Callender on bass and Bill Douglass on drums. Recorded September 11, 1956, this is a classic and deserves attention from even the most casual of jazz listeners.

The newly written liner notes feature an essay called "A Late Encounter" that details recording session that brought these two artists together. It is pointed out that Webster and Tatum recorded a few brief tunes together

for a radio show back in June of 1944, but the results were less than memorable for a couple of reasons. Two of the four tunes were showcases for Billie Holiday. The other two basically all-star jam sessions, featuring several additional soloists.

Producer Norman Granz is credited with organizing the session that yielded this fine album. It wound up being Tatum's last recorded work, as he passed away less than two months later. One would never know he was very ill from kidney disease from listening to this work. His trademark sweeping runs up and down the keyboard are as strong as ever, fitting in more notes than would seem humanly possible (but not one of them out of place). Webster's tenor sax, smokey and warm, provides a more relaxed counterpoint. His slightly weary tone, the sound of someone who has experienced a great deal in life, results in a warm melancholy that enriches the music.

Essentially a duet between between piano and sax, Callender and Douglass are more felt than heard. This is to their credit; they know they aren't the focal points of this particular show. As a rhythm section, they achieve the most subtle sound possible. Dipping back a few years, Callender and Douglass are not present at all on the five bonus tracks included on this release. In fact, neither is Ben Webster. Five of the album's seven tunes are repeated as solo performances by Tatum. The idea was to present the album, or at least most of it, in an alternate form. The treat is in hearing the difference in approach that Tatum takes when playing unaccompanied.

The Album, as issued by Essential Jazz Classics, is a superb release that belongs in any jazz collection. The remastered sound is so rich, with minimal tape hiss, it's hard to believe the recordings are more than half a century old. The generous selection of bonus tracks make a classic album even more essential.

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Article Author: [The Other Chad](#)

There are a few things I'd like to clear up right off the bat. For one, I am tired of being told that my life is an "open book." When you think about it, that phrase is actually meaningless, even as a metaphor. ...

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The Album

Release date: 2009-06-02

Publisher: ESSENTIAL JAZZ CLASS

This album by pianist Art Tatum and tenor saxophonist Ben Webster (assisted by bassist Red Callender and Bill Douglass on drums) is often called one of the milestones in recorded Jazz history. ...

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