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## Art Tatum/ Ben Webster: The Album

Publisher: **Essential Jazz Classics**

Considering the small community that comprised the American jazz scene in the '50s, it really is amazing that the handful of tunes contained on **Art Tatum/ Ben Webster: The Album** showcase one of the only times they played together. Chalk it up to the different trajectories of their careers before that point, and certainly to the fact that Tatum died shortly after this session. Webster had almost another twenty years left in his career, so one imagines this could have been just an opening salvo before many similar sessions. Dreaming aside, we are lucky to have this great session recording for posterity and packaged smartly here with a set of Tatum solo recordings.



The songs selected for the **Art Tatum/ Ben Webster** session were all classics, including "All The Things You Are," "Night and Day," and "My Ideal." Several, like "Have You Met Miss Jones?" brought with them association with vocalists' interpretations and big band arrangements. Thinking of Tatum and Webster is not a stretch; after all, Tatum sounded like a big band on the keys as well as an incredible song stylist. The Tatum solo numbers are song-for-song ideas from a session played with Webster, showing how Tatum had interpreted these numbers prior to the small group recordings. Listening to Tatum stretch out in the solo reveals how deep his conception of each song truly was and makes it that much more enjoyable listening to his relatively reserved comping behind Webster. Red Callender and Ed Thigpen provide support in the group sessions, on bass and drums respectively.

There's a history lesson in every bar of music on this recording, not least in the contrast between what Tatum and his contemporaries were doing on piano in the '50s. Tastefully comping in a group setting, Tatum can't help revert to that strong, left-handed stride style that makes Callender's bass largely irrelevant. Webster brings a very fluid and swinging style to each song, but the rhythm behind him is always clicking away in Tatum's left hand. In the absence of this reliance on stride in more modern players, as well as the regular amazing right-hand embellishment and hammered arpeggios, marks Tatum as a throwback. Webster was wonderful matched with this style of piano, since his style of soloing elevated melody above all else. Webster was also known for rolling out long, decorated lines, so the textures created between his tenor and Tatum's right hand are absolutely magical.

Although '50s jazz is better known for hard bop and cool jazz, this session contains a wealth of music that would have fit well in even pre-war times. Tatum's one-man-band approach to piano playing is perfectly balanced with his good judgment in the group setting, and Webster will absolutely shine with the breathy strength of his tone in this period. **Art Tatum/ Ben Webster: The Album** contains a pinnacle moment in jazz, and does a nice job filling out the historical context of the extra Tatum solos. Highly recommended.

-Fridtjof, GameVortex Communications AKA M



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