

Music Review: Clifford Brown Sonny Rollins Max Roach Quintet - *Complete Studio Recordings*

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Although trumpeter Clifford Brown, saxophonist Sonny Rollins, and drummer Max Roach did play together within quintets, this shared billing is a marketing idea by the Essential Jazz Classics label evidenced by the fact that the two albums making up *Complete Studio Recordings* are previous releases from 1956 identified as Clifford Brown and Max Roach - *At Basin Street* and Sonny Rollins - *Plus Four*. Also, misleading is the word “complete” because the back of the CD makes clear these are actually “The Master Takes,” so the four bonus tracks that appeared on the 2002 release of *At Basin Street* aren’t offered. However, don’t let the taint of commercialism sway you because if you don’t have them, these two hard bop albums are worthy of being identified as Essential Jazz Classics and of a spot in your music library.

Joined by Richie Powell on piano and George Morrow on bass, the five men would only enter the recording studio three times as a unit. There were two sessions for *At Basin Street* in New York on January 4 and February 16, 1956, then one a month later on March 22, 1956 for *Plus Four*. Tragically on June 26, Brown and Powell would lose their lives prematurely at the ages of 25 and 24 in a car accident en route to a gig in Chicago, along with Powell’s wife Nancy, who was driving.

Although *CSR* changes the order the tracks appeared on the original albums, the first nine are all from *At Basin Street*. Naturally, since the quintet is named after them, Brown and Roach have a dominating presence in each song, but the other three demonstrate their talents, particularly Rollins and Powell who take their leads between them.

The horns on “Gertrude’s Bounce” as the song opens and closes bring to mind Christmas. Everyone but Morrow gets a go to take the reins and lead on this opening track. “Step Lightly (Junior’s Arrival)” has a cool beat that swings slowly and effortlessly. “Powell’s Prances” takes off on a tear with Brown almost sounding like a bumblebee as he soars.

Rollins replaces him and keeps the pace humming before Powell steps up. Roach delivers a solo before the band returns to finish off song.

The longest piece at just over nine minutes, "I'll Remember April" finds the men really stretching out, especially a fantastic display by Roach in arguably his best solo of the entire set. When the band returns, Brown and Rollins trade off back and forth. Powell's "Time" is a somber piece and audibly reflects his intention of "the time a man spends just sitting in jail, wondering when he's going to get out."

"The Scene Is Clean" finds the order slightly altered from the previous tracks as Rollins takes the first lead before Brown. The mood created from the quick tempo on their rendition of Cole Porter's "What Is This Thing Called Love?" suggests only the positive aspects of the emotion. Morrow finally gets a bit of the spotlight, albeit brief.

The last five numbers are from *Plus Four* and not surprisingly the five men and the compositions sound very similar to their work in the Brown-Roach quintet. "I Feel A Song Coming" is a quick, uptempo song. The two Rollins compositions are "Pent-Up House" and "Valse Hot." The first is almost nine minutes and features a longer passage with Rollins in the lead. After Brown takes the reins, Rollins and Brown return to alternate exchanges with Roach before giving way to his solo. The band returns, closing out the song repeating the chorus. "Valse Hot" is a waltz with Rollins getting the first lead. "Count Your Blessings" is listed as a bonus track for *CSR* because Brown doesn't appear on it, which creates some separation in my ear from the Brown-Roach quintet.

The brilliance of *Complete Studio Recordings* is that even after more than 50 years the music sounds fresh and modern with every listen.

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