

the  
sound  
of sonny

RIVERSIDE

CONTEMPORARY SERIES

# SONNY ROLLINS



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REEVES



**RIVERSIDE**

**HIGH FIDELITY**

# *The Sound of Sonny:* **SONNY ROLLINS**

Sonny Rollins, tenor sax; Sonny Clark, piano; Percy Heath or Paul Chambers (on *Side 1, #1 and 4* only), bass; Roy Haynes, drums. (Omit piano on *The Last Time I Saw Paris*; *It Could Happen to You* is an unaccompanied tenor sax solo.) New York; June 11, 12 and 19, 1957.

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|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. The Last Time I Saw Paris | ( <i>Hammerstein-Kern</i> )  |
| 2. Just in Time              | ( <i>Cahn-Styne</i> )        |
| 3. Toot, Toot, Tootsie       | ( <i>Kahn-Erdman-Russo</i> ) |
| 4. What Is There to Say      | ( <i>Harburg-Duke</i> )      |
| 5. Dearly Beloved            | ( <i>Mercer-Kern</i> )       |
| 6. Every Time We Say Goodbye | ( <i>Cole Porter</i> )       |
| 7. Cutie                     | ( <i>Sonny Rollins</i> )     |
| 8. It Could Happen to You    | ( <i>Burke-Van Heusen</i> )  |
| 9. Mangoes                   | ( <i>Wayne-Libbey</i> )      |

In the Summer of 1957, when this album was recorded, SONNY ROLLINS was in the most exciting position a creative artist can possibly occupy: he was swiftly rising to the top in his field. There seemed room for only one argument about his standing in the current jazz picture: was he the bright new star of the year on tenor; or was he already an established master, to be ranked close to the very best on his instrument?

This "problem" was specifically illustrated in the 1957 *Down Beat* poll of thirty-one of the world's leading jazz critics. Tabulation of ballots revealed one quite unprecedented result. In the "New Star" category, a clear cut victory among tenor men had been scored by Rollins. But in the general voting, enough other critics had rated Sonny as *the* tenor (without any reservations about "newness") to place him second only to so long-standing a star as Stan Getz.

This double-barrelled splash marked a quite fitting entrance into the big time for one of the most impressive new jazz figures in many years. There can be no doubt that Sonny is already an artist of major significance; the only question concerns how large his stature and importance can eventually become. As this LP ably demonstrates, Rollins has a big, deep-toned, "funky" tenor sound of the sort that was considered rather out of date in the earlier days of modern jazz, but that now—partly because of the resurgence of Coleman Hawkins, but very largely because of the impact of Sonny himself—has come back into favor. He also has a wealth of fresh and intriguing concepts and approaches to jazz. One of these is a frequent tendency to deliberately play out-of-meter during a solo. Actually, to depart from the strict construction of beats, measures and bars is no more drastic a liberty than the basic practice of varying melody and harmony in jazz improvisation; and of course it is a not uncommon device in current jazz. Some musicians shy away from broken meter simply because you can get to feel pretty foolish if you end up by losing your way, or mislaying the rhythm section's beat. Sonny, however, employs it to an extent and with a degree of effectiveness that raises this device to an art, and may in time turn it into something of a Rollins trademark.

Rollins belongs, by and large, to the so-called "post-bop" or "hard bop" school. At times he has been accused of playing with excessive hardness and harshness. This charge may originally have had some degree of accuracy. But it is never safe to make pat statements about a swiftly maturing artist, and by now it should be clear that Rollins commands a great and growing store of warmth and lyricism. It is true that, like most men who possess true creative fervor, he does not always permit easy or comfortable listening. Critic Ralph Gleason has noted that Sonny's "unusual style" includes "unexpected twists of phrase, a discontinuity of line, great use of space and prolongation of notes," and refers to his tone as "blustering, sometimes like a great angry shout." This is apt, if partial (no one writer is easily going to pin down the full essence of this musician); actually, Rollins is far-ranging enough almost to sound as if he were several very dissimilar men. He can swing lightly (as on *The Last Time I Saw Paris*), can be quite brusque in his interpretation of a tune like the old Al Jolson specialty, *Toot, Toot, Tootsie*, and can achieve a moody feeling suggesting Ben Webster at his best on a ballad like *What Is There to Say*.

As is so often the case with apparently meteoric risers, Sonny has been around for several years: playing, learning, improving. Born in New York in September, 1929, he first studied piano, then took up alto, finally switched to tenor at the age of seventeen and just a couple of years later was working and recording with such as Bud Powell, Art Blakey, Tadd Dameron, and Fats Navarro. By 1955, when he was playing alongside the late Clifford Brown in Max Roach's quintet, Sonny was still only mildly known to critics and public, but musicians had already tabbed him as a man to watch, and young tenor players were busily picking up on his "hard" or (if you prefer) "non-cool" style. Rollins had become a pacesetter: not only was he leading the way towards a new sax sound, but an alarming number of young saxophonists were arbitrarily adopting his almost immobile playing stance!

By 1957, critic Whitney Balliett had termed him a likely successor to the mantle of Charlie Parker, and Gleason had written that Sonny was "revolutionizing" jazz tenor. The *Down Beat* results made it clear that a bandwagon was about to roll. But Rollins seems a deeply serious musician, and in no danger of being ruined by adulation. In the Summer of '57, he had left Roach and was at times in a featured spot with Miles Davis' group, but had expressed an intention to concentrate primarily on further study and on writing for a while. He knows he is good: he'd have to be most insensitive not to realize that—and the confidence to be heard in his horn is probably an important part of his effectiveness. But he seems to realize intuitively that being very good carries its responsibilities, and that he is obligated—both to the music and to himself—to become as good as he possibly can. Unless they find some as-yet-unrevealed way to trip him up, Sonny Rollins appears an excellent bet to be one of the biggest.

## RIVERSIDE RECORDS

In this album, Rollins is working along a couple of, for him, relatively unexplored avenues. In his own words, "almost every album I've been on so far has been blowing eight choruses each on four or five tracks" and so he wanted very much to work in terms of shorter numbers, "more sense of form" and control. It was also his idea to emphasize standards, most of them outside that relatively limited number of tunes that jazzmen work over so frequently these days, such as the old and unlikely *Tootsie* and the new and unlikely *Mangoes* (a recent Rosemary Clooney hit) and *Just in Time* (a current show tune).

To support him, Rollins chose SONNY CLARK, a very promising young pianist from the West Coast, who has worked with (among others) Buddy De Franco; ROY HAYNES, an extremely tasteful drummer who has played with the best—Bird, Miles, Getz, etc.—and since 1953 has provided sensitive backing for Sarah Vaughan; and PERCY HEATH, a bassist of unsurpassed tone and technique best known as a member of the Modern Jazz Quartet. When MJQ commitments took Percy out of town, PAUL CHAMBERS, one of the most notable of the younger bassists and currently with Miles Davis, took over quite ably for the final session.

The quartet format is departed from on only two occasions: *The Last Time I Saw Paris* "strolls" without piano; and *It Could Happen to You* is a rare, bold *tour de force*—played entirely by unaccompanied tenor.