

2<sup>x</sup> HD  
HISTORIC

# SIDNEY BECHET

Really  
The  
Blues



1945 & 1947  
HISTORIC  
RECORDINGS

STORYVILLE

From the time that Mezz Mezzrow first heard Sidney Bechet playing with the Original New Orleans Creole Jazz Band in Chicago in 1918, he nursed a burning ambition to record with him, inspired by the duets Bechet played with the band's clarinetist leader, Lawrence Dewey.

It took Mezzrow 20 years to realise that ambition, finally achieving his goal when French critic Hugues Panassié made his recording safari to New York in November 1938.

The 12 tracks on this album are of later vintage, a selection from the sides that Mezzrow made in the mid-forties when he was president of the King Jazz record company.



Recalling the Bechet dates in his celebrated autobiography, *Really The Blues*, Mezzrow says: "I was the only white man in the crowd. I walked on clouds all through those recording sessions... How easy it was, falling in with Bechet – what an instinctive mastery of harmony he has, and how marvellously delicate his ear is!"

The Mezzrow-Bechet partnership was a conspicuously one-sided match because Mezzrow had nothing like Bechet's stature as a musician. But he was undoubtedly a good catalyst for Bechet, for whom he had a boundless admiration, and he made no secret of his inability to measure up to Bechet's almost overpowering virtuosity.

Mezzrow once said of one of his sessions with Bechet: "I was ashamed of not being better than I was, to give him the support he deserved and the inspiration, too".

Mezzrow came in for more than his share of adverse criticism during his playing career, and certainly he was never more than a mediocre musician whose intonation was frequently wretched. But anyone who had a hand in helping to ensure that the genius of Sidney Bechet was preserved on record deserves the gratitude of jazz lovers everywhere.

If ever a man qualified as a jazz master it was Bechet. He ranks perhaps as the second greatest genius in jazz history, after New Orleans's most celebrated son, Louis Armstrong.

The most striking element of Bechet's playing is his unremitting continuity of invention. It is as if the music is there inside him, already assembled, and he has only to put the soprano saxophone to his mouth for it all to flow forth in a joyous cascade.

One of the most perceptive portraits of Bechet comes from the pen of Henry Pleasants, who describes his music as "a kind of inspired minstrelsy – joyous, despairing, hopeful, tender, exultant, forceful, compassionate – and always eloquently communicative." Bechet was above all, Pleasant adds, "a jubilant musician, and never more exuberantly inventive than

when he could feel his own fervour in music-making coming back to him from his listeners.”

The opening track here, *Out of the Gallion*, is a celebration of emancipation – “gallion” was a name used for the slave quarter, the Jim Crow section of town. It is in the form of a three-chord, 16-bar theme that gives way to a good old 12-bar blues in B flat. It’s a low-down blues and a perfect vehicle for the wide vibrato and sustained, crying notes of Bechet’s soprano. In the 16-bar segment Bechet’s muscular lines are underpinned by Mezzrow’s low-register harmony.

*Blues of the Roaring Twenties* is a simple 16-bar theme based on Clarence Williams’ *I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate*.

Bechet’s vigorous, trumpet-like soprano contrasts starkly with the watery, wavery clarinet of Mezzrow. Sammy Price has a good honky-tonk chorus and then Bechet returns with that big, searing, bluesy tone before taking the tune out over Mezzrow’s deferential clarinet obbligato.

Like most of the pieces Mezzrow recorded with Bechet, the next track is a 12-bar blues in B flat – *Tommy’s Blues*, dedicated to Bechet’s former partner, Tommy Ladnier. This number is slightly different from the traditional blues in that it moves to a G seventh in the eighth bar, a device much favoured by Count Basie, among others.

Bechet produces some classic blues choruses with a magnificently dirty tone, playing with great power and command lines which became a musical catechism for every traditional jazz band that ever played the blues.

*Minor Swoon*, might alternatively be called *I’ve Found A New Title* because it is based on the Spencer Williams classic, *I’ve Found A New Baby*. After a rather squeaky Mezzrow solo and a ragged chorus from Hot Lips Page, Bechet sails majestically in and, with immense

serenity, shows how it should be done. He then leads a vigorous ride-out chorus over some emphatic rim shots from Big Sid.

On the grounds that the best way to follow a Spencer Williams sequence is to play another one, the next piece is also by Spencer (co-written with Clarence Williams) and has a title which is one of the longest and least grammatical in jazz: *I ain't Gonna Give Nobody None Of My Jelly Roll*. The 32-bar chord sequence offers more scope for Bechet's creative imagination than the 12-bar format and he makes the most of it. Again, it is remarkable how trumpet-like the soprano sounds, particularly when Bechet plays short, staccato phrases.

*Groovin' The Minor* is a really "wailer" of a tune and Bechet captures the melancholy mood perfectly.

The two-part *Really The Blues* is – surprise, surprise! – a blues in B flat which, following the theme, has Bechet, for a change, playing low-register clarinet behind Mezzrow. After an unsteady piano solo by "Sox" Wilson, Bechet moves into the solo spotlight with his rich, resonating vibrato. On the second part of the tune Bechet is back on soprano, playing superb blues choruses with massive authority.

*Funky Butt*, opens with some ringing, gin-mill piano from Sammy Price – or Jimmy Blythe Jr., as Mezz used to call him – backed by Kaiser Marshall press rolls. Pops Foster has two choruses of resoundingly slapped bass and then it's Bechet firmly in the driving seat right to the end, with Mezzrow filling in fitfully behind.

Bechet and Mezzrow play a mixture of unison and harmony on *Perdido Street Stomp*, a 12-bar blues with a four-bar tag and a riff borrowed from Count Basie's *One O'Clock Jump*. This starts off in C and moves up a fourth to F for the solos. It is particularly evident here how well Bechet's sound blends with Mezzrow's, despite the substantial disparity of voicing and volume. It is ironic to reflect that John Hammond persuaded Mezzrow to use tenorist

Bud Freeman instead of Bechet on a 1936 record date for Bluebird, because "the two of you play so much alike that there won't be any contrast"!

The concluding piece, *I'm Speaking My Mind* has a 16-bar theme in F minor which resolves into the relative major (A flat) and becomes... yes, a 12-bar blues. Bechet plays his solos with rasping intensity against an emphatic offbeat from Marshall, his phrases perfectly timed and perfectly timeless.

As Max Harrison has noted, and as these tracks vividly testify, Sidney Bechet was one of the great jazz virtuosi who helped perfect the art of solo improvisations.

Mike Hennessey



## BIOGRAPHY OF SIDNEY BECHET

There has never been a more instinctive, natural musician than Sidney Bechet, the great Creole jazzman from New Orleans who was to the soprano saxophone what Louis Armstrong was to the cornet and trumpet and Coleman Hawkins was to the tenor saxophone.

Born in New Orleans – probably sometime in 1897 – Bechet was captivated at an early age by the sound of the clarinet which his brother, Leonard, played. Charles E. Smith relates in his book *Jazzmen*, published in 1939, that when Bechet came home from school, he would pick up his brother's clarinet and blow it. He practiced thus, unknown to his brother, and made so much progress that his mother got Leonard to listen to him one day. Sidney played one piece – and when he'd finished Leonard told him he could keep the clarinet.

The Bechet brothers played together in a band called Silver Bell and by the time he was 18, Bechet was one of the finest musicians in New Orleans, having played with Jack Carey and the New Orleans Eagle Band. In 1916 he worked with King Oliver and, like Oliver, migrated to Chicago when the Storyville red light district of New Orleans – where many jazz musicians worked – was closed down.

Bechet played with Freddie Keppard, among others in Chicago, and then, in 1919, moved to New York where he joined Will Marion Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra and went with the band on a tour of Europe. Bechet stayed on after the Cook band broke, spent some time in London and played in the Bennie Peyton band in Paris. Thereafter he spent much of his time in Europe, finally settling permanently in Paris in 1951.

It was while he was in London that Bechet acquired his first straight soprano saxophone – the instrument on which he was to become a jazz legend. He made his first recordings in 1923, with the Clarence Williams Blue Five, and subsequently worked with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Tommy Ladnier (whom he first met in Moscow while on a tour of

Europe in 1925) and Noble Sissie, with whom he had a long association.

Perhaps because of spending so much time outside the United States, Bechet never received the recognition there that was due to him during his lifetime. But in France he triumphed. He became a national hero, his recordings of *Petite Fleur* and *Les Oignons* were tremendous hits and a statue in his honour was erected in Juan-les-Pins. He died of cancer in Paris on May 14th, 1959.

Bechet was hailed as "an artist of genius" by the Swiss composer and conductore Ernest Ansermet. He played with matchless passion and commitment and, in the words of Joachim Berendt "a majestic expressiveness". He simply overflowed with melodic inspiration and had vast reserves of musical energy. As Jelly Roll Morton once said, "He plays more music than you can put on paper".

# SYDNEY BECHET

## REALLY THE BLUES

- 1 [Out of the Gallion](#) 3:24
- 2 [Blues of the Roaring Twenties](#) 3:59
- 3 [Tommy's Blues](#) 4:01
- 4 [Minor Swoon](#) 3:03
- 5 [Jelly Roll](#) 3:40
- 6 [Groovin' the Minor](#) 3:21
- 7 [Really the Blues 1](#) 3:11
- 8 [Really the Blues 2](#) 2:52
- 9 [Funky Butt](#) 4:12
- 10 [Perdido Street Stomp](#) 2:20
- 11 [Where Am I](#) 4:43
- 12 [I'm Speaking My Mind](#) 3:44

2xHD MASTERING: RENÉ LAFLAMME  
2xHD EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: ANDRÉ PERRY  
Album cover & insert artwork: André Perry  
Liner notes: Mike Hennessey  
Graphics: Sylvie Labelle

Mezzrow-Bechet Septet:  
Milton Mezzrow (clarinet); Sidney Bechet (soprano sax);  
Oran "Lips" Page (trumpet); Sammy Price (piano);  
Danny Barker (guitar); George "Pops" Foster (bass);  
Sidney "Big Sid" Catlett (drums)

[Track 4: Minor Swoon](#)

Recorded New York, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1945

Mezzrow - Bechet Quintet:  
Milton Mezzrow (clarinet); Sidney Bechet (soprano sax);  
Fitz Weston (piano); George "Pops" Foster (bass);  
Kaiser Marshall (drums)

[Track 5: Jelly Roll](#)

[Track 10: Perdido Street Stomp](#)

Recorded in New York, Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945

[Track 1: Out of the Gallion](#)

Recorded New York Aug. 30<sup>th</sup> 1945

Mezzrow - Bechet Quintet  
Milton Mezzrow (clarinet); Sidney Bechet (soprano sax.  
clarinet); Wesley "Sox" Wilson (piano); Wellman Braud  
(bass); Warren "Baby" Dodds (drums)

[Track 7: Really the Blues \(Part 1\)](#)

[Track 8: Really the Blues \(Part 2\)](#)

[Track 6: Groovin' the Minor](#)

Recorded New York, Sept. 18<sup>th</sup> 1945

Mezzrow - Bechet Quintet  
Milton Mezzrow (clarinet); Sidney Bechet (soprano sax);  
Sammy Price (piano); George "Pops" Foster (bass);  
Kaiser Marshall (drums)

[Track 11: Where Am I](#)

[Track 3: Tommy's Blues](#)

Recorded Chicago December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1947

[Track 12: I'm Speaking My Mind](#)

Recorded Chicago December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1947

[Track 9: Funky Butt](#)

[Track 2: Blues of Roaring Twenties](#)

Recorded Chicago December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1947



## THE 2xHD MASTERING PROCESS



2xHD is a record label which uses its proprietary system to process music masters originally recorded in analog or DSD or other format, to DSD in order to produce a unique listening experience.

The process uses a selection from a pool of high-end audiophile components and connectors. In some cases even using battery power, so as to benefit from the cleanest power source possible. This variable equipment combination custom tailored to each project, creates the most accurate reproduction of the original recording, unveiling information previously masked by the use of EQ, transformers, patch bays, extended cable length etc. The selection of components is critical, as many A/D and D/A converters are unable to pierce through these filters that create a ceiling effect to the sound. The 2xHD system preserves the dynamics of the original master and provides an open feeling to the sound.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audiophile sound engineer René Laflamme, two dedicated music lovers determined to experience only the warmth and depth of the music without hearing the equipment.

2xHD Mastering by: René Laflamme  
2xHD Executive Producer: André Perry

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