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HRX®

# DICK HYMAN

*From the Age of*

# SWING

PHIL BODNER
URBIE GREEN
MILT HINTON
BUTCH MILES
BUCKY PIZZARELLI
JOE TEMPERLEY
FRANK WESS
JOE WILDER

# From the Age of Swing

## THE CONTINUUM HOLDS


L–R: Milt Hinton, Joe Temperley, Phil Bodner, Dick Hyman, Joe Wilder, Butch Miles, Urbie Green

Imagine the scene: six, maybe seven guys, grouped around a single microphone in a dimly-lit, very cramped recording studio. It's summer – it's always summer – and the place is airless, stuffy. Of course there's no air conditioning.

One or two in the group have acknowledged the heat by discreetly turning back their white shirt cuffs. Maybe one free spirit – drummer? tenor player? – has even stripped to his undershirt. No t-shirt, mind: these are the old singlet-style ones, perhaps webbed in the weave.

They talk softly, rehearse a bit: a little background here, an ensemble figure there, laughter at some not-quite-audible wisecrack – until all at once the red control-room light goes on and it's time to get down to business.

Did it really happen that way, back in the glory days? Was that what the fly on the wall saw when Johnny Hodges and Harry Carney, Buck Clayton and Lester Young and Teddy Wilson set about making music for the ages?

It's comforting to think so. We, all of us, nurture our romantic imaginations carefully these days, in an age when romance of any sort, in art as in life, languishes in more-or-less constant eclipse. Music is, after all, a tough, often gritty way to make a living, and a blend of historical knowledge and plain common sense suggests that perhaps it's always been that way. That, in fact, it may have been even tougher half a century ago, especially if you happened to be Black.

But at that great a remove it's tempting to revise and reconstruct such realities in an image we prefer. Especially when the music makes so willing an accomplice: Black or White, tough-minded or tender, it still worked off romantic imperatives, aesthetic principles in place since the 19th century. For all the variations of technique and temperament, musicians agreed on what constituted beauty, what a good tone was, the difference between a fine melody and a dog. Even across lines of style and form there was consensus.

And above all, there was joy.

But hold on: lest we get ahead of things let's first construct a matrix, a specific historical frame of reference. The music under scrutiny here was made by instrumental groups, large and small, in the years roughly between 1935 and America's entry into World War II. It had evolved in the '20s and early '30s out of a multiplicity of sources: small-band improvised jazz as heard, with diverse regional accents, in New Orleans, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, New York; dance orchestras, whose arrangers had sought ways of organizing and reproducing its timbres, textures and rhythmic vitality for larger groups of instruments; "novelty" music, much of it for piano, which had incorporated some of the harmonic innovations of contemporary Europe. Tin Pan Alley, vaudeville, ragtime and the blues; movies and the Broadway musical stage.

It had all jelled at mid-decade as something people were calling "swing" – though (as had been true of "jazz" before it) most Americans had little or no concrete idea what the word actually meant. For them, if there were trumpets and

Bucky Pizzarelli

saxophones involved, it was swing. If names such as Benny, Bunny, Cab, Count or Duke were even indirectly attached to it, odds were it was swing. Above all it was, for just a moment, the main popular music of the United States of America. Generations since, brought up on the notion that a pop star is somebody who sings (and, latterly, with electric guitar in firing position), often think this a strange notion. Can it be that all those guys in tuxes, sitting up there in neat little rows on their two-foot-high risers, were pop groups?

Well, yes. Yes indeed. And their main business was providing entertainment. That the entertainment was also first-rate music made for a kind of divine coincidence.

Of course that's not all there was. There were also those moments when musicians were free to concentrate on just making music, making it their own way – sometimes loudly, sometimes in just a whisper. Sometimes very informally and sometimes in precise, fine-tuned arrangements. That could happen on the job, or at some after-hours spot in Harlem – or, occasionally, in somebody's living room. It could also happen in a recording studio, as a few soloists out of the Goodman, Ellington or Basie bands dug into some new and very personal material. If Teddy Wilson, say, did a date for Brunswick, he'd look around, see who was in town, and put together little group; sometimes it was the only chance such guys got to play together.

All of it – but especially those small-focus gatherings and what they achieved – delineates what we now identify as The Age of Swing. Helen Oakley Dance, who organized dozens of such sessions during the '30s, gives us a glimpse, a verbal snapshot, of a small Ellington unit on such occasions. "Nothing was ever planned," she writes, "nor even dreamed up beforehand. Duke would seat himself at the piano, confident and relaxed. Johnny Hodges' insouciant attitude, adopted for the occasion, would alter Duke's expression, summoning a smile, and [Harry] Carney would smile back. 'Where do we go from here?' Duke might inquire mildly."[1]

The answer is there on the records, hundreds of them, extraordinary in their number and timelessness. But it didn't last long: by 1950, as far as the public was concerned, it was gone. The musicians were still there, of course, many of them playing as well as – even better than – ever. But the world was different; new fashions, in jazz as elsewhere, had shouldered aside the old. Bebop – complex, exciting, responsive to mid-20th century tensions and stresses – had snared a new generation of musicians. Swing remained, but now only as one music, one language among many.

Dick Hyman and dozens of his contemporaries grew up multilingual. Bebop spoken here? Sure, nothing to it; just have a look at him playing piano on the only extant film of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie together. Dixieland? Stride piano?

Bix Beiderbecke retrospectives? Ragtime? Of course: all part of the polyglot nature of late 20th century jazz life.

But time and change bring their own, often unanticipated, insight. It's said, in fact, that as we get older we more or less automatically sort things out, begin finding essences, recognizing eternal verities. Examining what really matters to us, and why we do what we do. It's this most natural of processes that has led Dick Hyman back to his own musical wellsprings, the secret (ofttimes not-so-secret) dwelling places of the heart.

And that, in great measure, is what this record is about.

It documents, says Hyman, "the roots of a lot of us who are still playing this way, or who have returned to playing this way, playing tunes that have been our favorites for decades now. All of us are, in a sense, returning to pre-bop roots."[2]

But theirs is unmistakably present-tense music. The past plays a role, yes, but as part of a continuum, an unbroken line of development in each participant, and in their efforts as a group. *From the Age of Swing* speaks of a halcyon time, sure enough, but largely by reaffirming its accents, attitudes, textures and flavors in the present. Right now. Today.

Hyman set his sights here on twin peaks, the Basie and Ellington recording groups: the easy relaxation of the former, the ingenuity and structural perfection of the latter. Essences, aspects, interaction of soloist and ensemble. Sometimes tightly ordered, sometimes off the cuff.

"Let's just say it's the kind of swing that I'm fond of: what I like to do, wanted to do here. The original records represent for me a kind of framework, a kind of arranging, that's always spoken to me. I like the idea of a definite structure, within which soloists can speak their minds, but all of it as part of one overall fabric. There were examples of this sort of thing in the so-called West Coast style of the '50s, but I wanted the basis of what we did to be the idiom of an earlier time."[3]

We behold The Age of Swing, then, as more than just a time, a way of identifying a few years in the life of 20th century America. It's also a message, a *Botschaft,* both from afar and from as near as the sensibilities of the men gathered to record on this day. One of them, bassist Milt Hinton, was part of the glory days, was actually there making history alongside the hallowed names. For him it's personal experience, countless *tableaux vivants* lovingly preserved in memory. For Hyman, it's to greater or lesser degree inherited: through listening and watching, absorption and association. Learning on the bandstand from the great elder statesmen. A legacy now, living in them, and continuing into the future, in those who will learn from them.

But learn what? Swing, as musicians understand it, is ultimately a litany of intangibles, resistant to definition. Is it, as Basie once said, little more than "some good things put together that you can really pat your foot by"?

Perhaps Freddie Green, whose rhythm guitar was so indispensable to Basie's kind of swing, put it better. Said he: “I think swing is a thing you reach at a certain period of the music, when the audience says, 'Well, they're sure swingin!' You reach a certain point when everything is going together, and everything is going well, solo-wise and ensemblewise."[4]

That's a little closer, in that it suggests a bond, an almost mystical covenant, between music and listener, musician and dancer, musician and musician. Any musician who's ever felt that communality of experience, the electricity surging in closed circuit between bandstand and dance floor when things are right, understands implicitly.

Part of it, but only part, has to do with tempo. There are optimum tempos, blendings of speed and overall feel that speak to listeners on a purely visceral level, making them move, making them want to dance. "I think Basie and his cohorts found, literally discovered, certain tempos that physiologically work," says Hyman. "Even if there were no dancers, the music itself, at those tempos, has the power to make the musicians dance in their own way.”[5]

That's a subject dear to the heart of drummer-bandleader David "Panama" Francis. Night after night, he's said, he'd watch dancers at Manhattan's Rainbow Room, where his nine-piece Savoy Sultans were a steady fixture during the ‘70s and early ‘80s. "I knew, just knew, which tempos would get 'em out there. It got so we could play an intro, just a few little bars, and they'd be out of their chairs and on the dance floor."[6]

It's that exact a science – and yet a highly relative one. Historian-scholar James T. Maher, keen student of the interrelation between jazz and popular dance, cites Coleman Hawkins' observation that a tempo appropriate for a piece on one given occasion might not be right for a different audience the following evening.

"I perceive it more as an empirical thing," he said recently. "Basie and his musicians played for dancers for, what, sixty years? So did Guy Lombardo, for that matter. Growing up with dancers, with that closed circuit, became part of the training, part of what resulted in that intuitive sense of tempo."[7] Eventually it enabled Basie and others to fine-tune the calibrations even away from the ballroom environment, the circuit intact between player and music. That's certainly the case with the opener, an off-the- cuff B-flat blues Hyman calls, appropriately, “From the Age of Swing.”

'I turned to Butch Miles and said, 'Give me a Basie tempo. And that was all we needed to get us started." Miles certainly understood: his four-plus years as Basie's drummer had made that a matter of instinct. "Milt Hinton and Bucky Pizzarelli locked right in, and we were off and running."

Bennie Moten's great Kansas City orchestra ran into trouble trying to record Eddie Barefield's arrangement of "You're Driving Me Crazy" at their marathon Victor session of December, 1932. "It was too long," the saxophonist said, "it

wouldn't fit on the record." So Barefield simply lopped off the first chorus, stating Walter Donaldson's melody, and considered a new title. The band had recorded a "Moten Stomp" (an entirely different piece) during the '20s; why not call this one "Moten Swing?" They did – and so it has been ever after.[8]

Frank Wess

Eddie Durham, another Moten alumnus, always cited "Topsy" as the first piece he wrote for Count Basic's band when he came aboard in 1937. They'd been friends since Kansas City, but Durham had worked with Cab Calloway, Andy Kirk and Jimmie Lunceford before winding up with Basie.

"Topsy" is the kind of simple yet inviting 32-bar structure jazzmen love: eight bars in D-minor, a second eight shifting to G-minor and back to D-minor, and a straightforward bridge opening on a D-major chord and moving around the circle of fourths, returning to D-minor.[9]

Hyman pays appropriate respects to Basie; but the hero of this performance, if heroes there be, is Bucky Pizzarelli, whose unamplified guitar provides the kind of heart-beat pulse Freddie Green imparted to more than four decades of Basie rhythm sections.

("Topsy" had its moment as a pop hit in 1958, thanks to a record by drummer Cozy Cole – with Dick Hyman as organist and arranger of a band which also included trombonist Urbie Green. "An unaccountable hit but a big one," says Hyman with just a hint of a smile. "We even appeared on Dick Clark's TV show, synching it.")

Hyman's scoring of "Moonglow"suggests a small Ellington group, and that's just right -– a double homage, gift-wrapping some fine poetic justice. Will Hudson and Eddie De Lange never denied lifting their 1934 standard pretty much intact from Duke's 1932 "Lazy Rhapsody"; all Hyman's done is take things deftly back to source. Joe Wilder's succinct trumpet evokes longtime Ellingtonian Harold "Shorty" Baker.

"Them There Eyes" exploits Frank Wess' fusion of Lester Young's understated lyricism and the more full-blooded utterances of Coleman Hawkins, twin stylistic avatars of pre-bop jazz tenor sax. But Frank, who came up as part of the great Basie band of the '50s, does things his own way. "I had him in mind from the start," says Hyman, "and for that very reason. He combines all these great traditions, but never sounds like anyone but himself." "Mean to Me" inevitably evokes Lester and Billie

Holiday, and their nonpareil 1937 record with Teddy Wilson. But the essence here, quite properly, is Frank Wess.

"Dooji Wooji," recorded at a 1939 date under Johnny Hodges' leadership, is a blues – but a blues with a difference. It's among the most vivid of small-band Ellington pieces, due in no small measure to its bass ostinato, a hill-and-dale figure in in triplets. The sound, the insistence, of it conjures forth an eldritch landscape, perpetually half in shadow, saturated with an air of incipient menace.

Hyman uses the figure well, reinforcing the mood by giving Phil Bodner's alto the ensemble lead played by Hodges on the original; Joe Temperley's baritone, with its echoes of Harry Carney, deepens flavor and atmosphere.

If "Dooji Wooji" is a blues, perhaps "Soft Winds" can be termed a *faux*-blues. At 16 bars it's not really the blues, but its chord sequence works and feels like one; many players, in fact, switch to the 12-bar form after an opening melody chorus or two, reverting only at the end. Bodner's lead lends the ensemble a quality like a reed section with punch, trumpet, trombone and baritone filling out the inner parts.


"I Know What You Do" (and what does that title suggest?) is a sleeper, a little-known item from a 1939 Hodges record date. It's a 32-bar tune, melody and chords redolent of both the Ellington-Hodges "Rent Party Blues" and, a bit more distantly, "Louisiana Fairy Tale," a 1935 pop tune recorded, unforgettably, by Fats Waller. Hyman takes it considerably slower than the original, replacing Hodges' melody statement with an impeccably Ellingtonian piano chorus. Joe Wilder wields his plunger skillfully here: in common with Doc Cheatham and their late colleague Sidney De Paris, his plunger work has a lyric quality quite unlike the harsher accents of such Ellingtonians as Bubber Miley, Cootie Williams and Ray Nance.

Bodner solos on alto in a clean, light-toned style reminiscent of Hilton Jefferson, who played with

Duke in the '50s, during one of Hodges' periodic flings at leading his own band. He shares a chorus with Joe Temperley's baritone.

"'Deed I Do," "Rose Room" and several of the others are repertoire staples at the dozens of jazz parties Hyman, Bucky, Milt and others play throughout the year. "They're a shared legacy," he says. "Anyone can call a certain list of songs – good, proven standards – and assume that we all know them. They're all from about the same period, all from this era. All built to last."

All, in other words, from The Age of Swing. The continuum holds: and, given the vitality so happily in evidence here (and the recent arrival of a brand-new generation of players accomplished in this most timeless of idioms), there's every reason to suppose it always will.

– RICHARD M. SUDHALTER

ENDNOTES:

1 Dance, Helen Oakley. Notes to *The Duke's Men: Small Groups, vol. I*. Columbia Legacy, C2K 46995.

2 Hyman, Dick. Conversation with the author, Aug. 15, 1994.

3 Hyman, Dick. Conversation with the author, as above.

4 Basie and Green quoted in Dance, Stanley, *The World of Swing*. New York: Scribner's, 1974.

5 Hyman, Dick. Conversation as above.

6 Francis, Panama. Conversations with the author, 1975-85.

7 Maher, James T. Conversation with the author, Aug. 26, 1994.

8 Information from various Barefield conversations with the author between 1975-85.

9 Basie, William "Count" (as told to Albert Murray). *Good Morning Blues*. New York: Random House, 1985.

## PERFORMERS:

**DICK HYMAN**
*piano*

**PHIL BODNER**
*alto saxophone / clarinet*

**URBIE GREEN**
*trombone*

**MILT HINTON**
*acoustic bass*

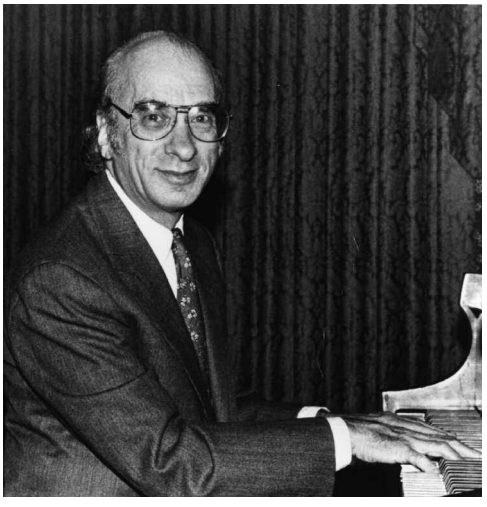
**BUTCH MILES**
*drums*

**BUCKY PIZZARELLI**
*rhythm guitar*

**JOE TEMPERLEY**
*baritone saxophone*

**FRANK WESS**
*alto saxophone*

**JOE WILDER**
*trumpet / flugelhorn*



# Dick Hyman

A longtime student of jazz piano history, Dick Hyman has previously recorded the works of Eubie Blake, Jelly Roll Morton, James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington and other early jazz pianists. His interests extend to other areas as well, and in a varied career he continues to be a composer, conductor, arranger and organist. He has provided scores for numerous films and television programs and has performed or arranged for countless recording sessions both under his own name and in support of other artists. Mr. Hyman has composed film scores for *Moonstruck* and various Woody Allen vehicles, as well as original scores for leading dance companies.

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Recorded: May 24-25, 1994
at Concert Hall A, SUNY Purchase, New York
Producer: J. Tamblyn Henderson, Jr.
Engineer: Keith 0. Johnson
Piano: Baldwin SD-10
Session photos: JTH
Design: Bill Roarty / JTH

HRx® FIRST EDITION NOVEMBER 2010 REFERENCE RECORDINGS HR-59

1 **From the Age of Swing** *5:01*
Hyman/Hinton/Pizzarelli/Miles 1994

2 **You're Driving Me Crazy/ Moten Swing** *4:23*
Walter Donaldson 1930
Benny and Buster Moten 1933

3 **Topsy** *6:06*
Edgar Battle/Eddie Durham 1937

4 **Moonglow** *3:22*
Will Hudson/Eddie DeLange/ Irving Mills 1934

5 **Them There Eyes** *4:49*
Maceo Pinkard/William Tracey/ Doris Tauber 1930

6 **Dooji Wooji** *6:02*
Duke Ellington 1939

7 **Soft Winds** *5:18*
Benny Goodman/ Fletcher Henderson 1940

8 **What Is There To Say?** *4:45*
Vernon Duke/ E.Y. Harburg 1934

9 **'Deed I Do** *4:40*
Fred Rose/Walter Hirsch 1926

10 **Rose Room** *4:28*
Art Hickman/ Harry Williams 1918

11 **I Know What You Do** *3:22*
Johnny Hodges 1939

12 **Mean To Me** *5:31*
Fred Ahlert/Roy Turk 1929

13 **I'm Getting Sentimental Over You** *3:10*
George Bassman/ Ned Washington 1932

14 **From the Age of Swing** *4:41*
(alternate take)

Total Time 66:08

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