THE TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH OF LESTER YOUNG

By RON TABOR

"I STAY BY MYSELF. SO HOW DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ME?"[1]

To anyone more than a little familiar with the life of Lester Young, the great African American jazz tenor saxophonist, the title of my essay must seem ironic. For Young's life is more often described, when it is described at all, as a triumph followed by tragedy. This reflects the arc of his artistic career. In the late 1930s, Young burst upon the national jazz scene as a star, even *the* star, of the fabulous Count Basie band. His new sound and radical approach to improvisation, in the context of the innovations of the band itself, set the jazz world afire, paved the way for modern jazz, and influenced hundreds if not thousands of musicians who came after him. Yet, twenty-odd years later, Young died at the age of 49, mostly from the cumulative effects of alcoholism. He had been living in a room in a seedy hotel on Manhattan's 52nd St., then the center of New York City's jazz life, drinking constantly and listening to records, with a woman friend to keep him company.

In some respects, Young's death paralleled that of more than a few prominent figures of the jazz world in the United States. Billie Holiday, the stunning and influential jazz vocalist, died at the age of 44, from the combined effects of alcohol and heroin. Trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke, also an alcoholic, passed away at 28. Charlie Parker, the brilliant founder of bebop, collapsed at the age of 34, as a result of taking as many mind-altering substances as it is possible to take. Nat Cole, gifted jazz pianist and singer, died of a heart attack when he was not quite 46 years old. Wardell Gray, talented bebop tenor saxophonist, was found dead under mysterious circumstances (usually thought to have been a drug deal gone wrong) in the desert outside of Las Vegas, at the age of 34. Pianist and composer Fats Waller died at 39, piano virtuoso Art Tatum at 46, tenor sax giant John Coltrane at 40, singer Dinah Washington at 39.

Yet for a variety of reasons, Lester Young's tragic end has been singled out for particular attention by jazz critics and historians. This is in part, I believe, because in contrast to Charlie Parker, who dropped dead suddenly when he was still at (or close to) the height of his creative powers, and much like Billie Holiday, Young suffered an extended period of physical, psychological, and most believe, artistic decline, which was visible to all but the most obtuse observers. Young's death, in other words, can almost be described as protracted and public.

What is usually accounted for as the cause of Young's deterioration and ultimate demise was the time he spent in the US Army during the last year of World War II, when he was arrested for possession of marijuana and barbiturates and spent a term in the detention barracks. Nobody knows exactly what went on there, but whatever it was, it had a profound impact on the saxophonist. According to most observers, Young emerged from the experience a changed—some say, disturbed—man. Always shy, he became more withdrawn, even paranoid; his drinking rapidly escalated, and he became increasingly neglectful of his personal health. Above all, his playing changed significantly, generally being described as becoming cruder and coarser, at best a corruption of his earlier brilliant style.

One result of Young's post-military career and death has been a debate among jazz critics, historians, and fans over the merits of Young's playing during the post-war period. This controversy can probably best be summed up by the questions: Could Young play as well after the war as he could before? Does his post-war work have any value? Or, in its most extreme version, Could he even play at all? To call the discussion a debate is probably a mistake, if only because the overwhelming consensus of jazz commentators, at the time and since, is that the answer to these questions (or at least to the first two) is an emphatic "No!"

Here are some samples of that opinion:

"And yet, the old Lester Young had gone forever, leaving behind a shattered mirror that occasionally gave the onlookers a glimpse of what he once was if the pieces accidentally came together for a moment."[2]

"At the period represented by these tracks (early 1946—RT) we find him just before he began a decline into a different way of playing which was to lose the electrifying buoyancy

and speed of his earlier work....(H)e had to watch as a horde of youngsters carboned his style and developed it the way he had been unable to."[3]

"When Young died, in 1959, he had become the model for countless saxophonists, white and black, most of whom could play his style better than he could himself."[4]

"Running from the mid-1940s to the present day, there is the evidence of a decline in spirit; his playing style, once so radical and full of fresh ideas, has become more of a routine, and the majority of his record dates seem to be treated with the "just another job" attitude. In this last phase of his career Lester has been financially successful while replaying the various phrases and devices which were once so revolutionary; frequently he has given to sensationalist audiences exactly what they wish to hear (namely, honking noises and other vulgar mannerisms). As a result he has become the victim of an increasing ennui, the tiredness of his appearance overflowing and spreading its way into the once so inventive mind. Nowadays Lester is seldom jogged out of his state of lethargy."[5]

And, at the risk of being tedious:

"But Young's truly productive period ended with his induction into the army in 1944. Although there is some critical opinion to the contrary, his playing after the war seems unusually listless and soft. With Basie his playing was relaxed and subtle; there was no lack of drive or rhythmic intensity. In the postwar recordings Young's notes frequently are played under or well behind the beat. His tone, instead of being warm and personal, simply becomes flabby. There are exceptions, but they are few. The energy that ignited his work of the 1930s was short-lived."[6]

It has been only a handful of individuals who have argued the "other side" of the dispute, that is, have defended at least some of Young's post-war playing. These include the authors of several books about Lester Young, particularly, Lewis Porter, David Gelly, Frank Buchmann-Moller, and Douglas Henry Daniels, as well as others who have written essays, often but not exclusively as liner notes to Lester Young LPs and CDs, among them, Ira Gitler, Nat Hentoff, H. Alan Stein, Aubrey Mayhew, Stanley Crouch, Leonard Feather, Bob Porter, Dan Morgenstern, Barry Ulanov, Loren Schoenberg, H.A. Woodfin, Gary Giddens, and Graham Colombe.

Yet, as much as I admire these Young defenders, appreciate their efforts, and agree with much of what they have written, I believe there is more to say on the subject. It is because of this and because of my personal experience with the life and music of Lester Young that I am writing this essay, as my contribution to the discussion about the man and his music.

My involvement with Lester Young and, more broadly, with the saxophone, goes back a long time. I studied the alto saxophone in grade school, high school, and my first year of college. Although I gave up playing for 40 years (it was, I regret to admit, not a top priority during that time), I continued to be interested in and to listen to jazz, particularly to jazz saxophonists, and to other kinds of music. During my playing years and since, I studied music theory and read widely about music in general and Black music in particular, as well as about Black history and literature. During this time, I also learned about and became increasingly fascinated by Lester Young.

I first heard of Lester when I was a kid. A friend of the family had given my brother and me a set of Columbia Records' three-volume recordings of the famous 1938 Carnegie Hall jazz concert featuring Benny Goodman and his various groups (big band, trio, and quartet).[7] Although I loved all the music, I was particularly impressed by the jam session: Goodman and some members of his band at the time joined forces with Count Basie, Lester Young, and other stars of the Basie orchestra in an extended rendition of "Honeysuckle Rose" (an entire side of an LP). By far the highlight of the outing, as I saw it then and still see it now, is Lester's solo. It's truly fantastic—one of the best he ever played—and he blows everybody away. It always seemed to me unfortunate that Lester came first in the order of soloists rather than last, because, dramatically speaking, once he plays, the jam session is over.

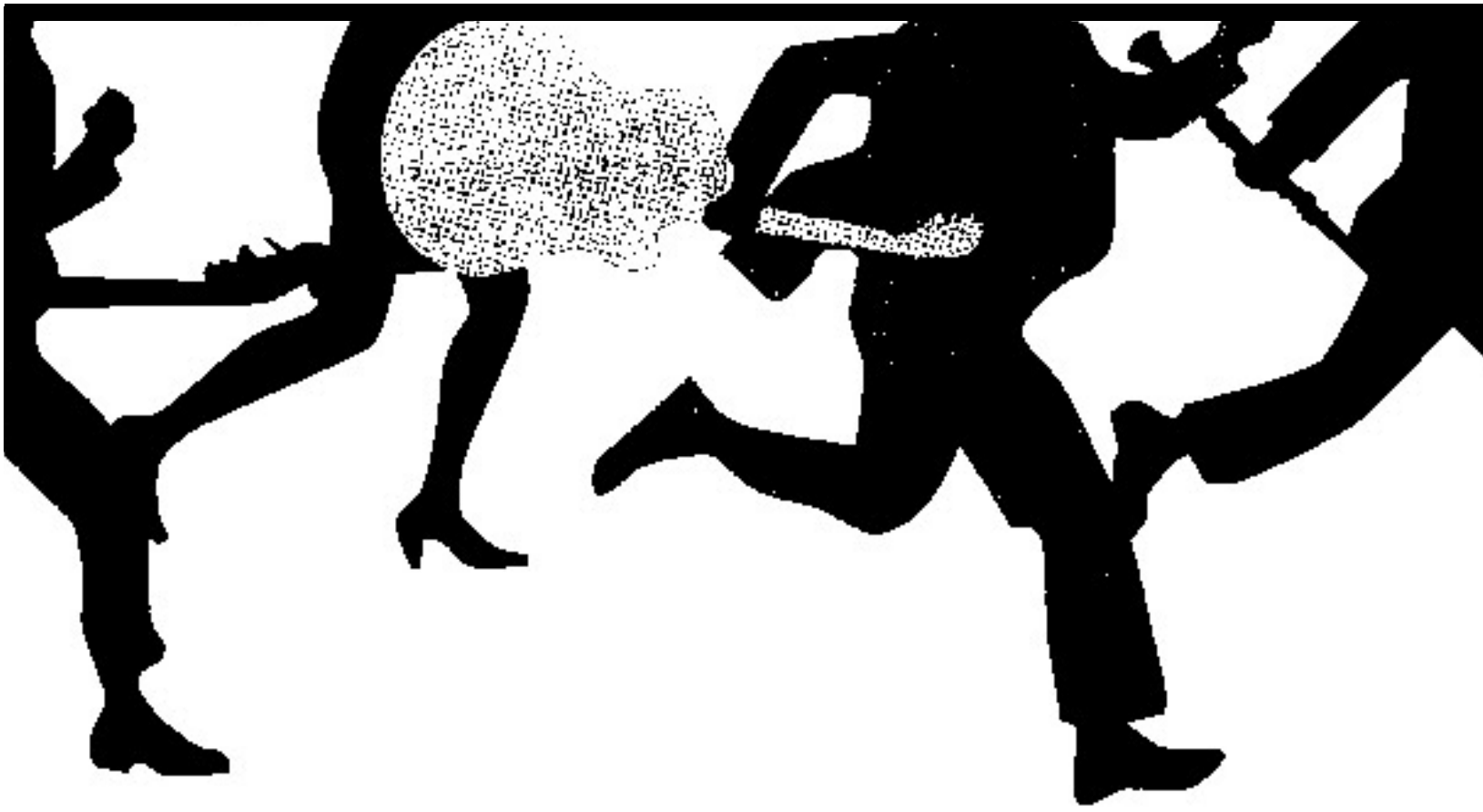
As my interest in jazz increased when I went to college and hung out (and played) with people more knowledgeable than I, I became even more intrigued by Young. I was awed by his work, both solos and obbligato, with Billie Holiday in the mid-late 1930s.[8] (It was she who dubbed him the "President" after then

president Franklin D. Roosevelt. This was eventually shortened to "Pres" or "Prez.") I also remember buying two LPs. One was a Savoy Record Co. reissue, *The Immortal Lester Young*,[9] that consisted (as I found out later from a more complete Savoy anthology) of cuts from three dates, two from 1944, the other from 1949. I particularly noted the contrast in Prez's playing between what turned out to be the earlier dates and the later ones. The other consisted of recordings, made some time after the war (the Prez material sounds like it's from March 1950), of Lester and Charlie Parker (unfortunately, not playing together) on live dates, titled *Charlie Parker/Lester Young: An Historical Meeting at the Summit.*[10]

This (as I was also to discover later) was recorded by an avid fan who had lugged an old fashioned disc recorder to the Savoy Ballroom to hear and record his heroes in person. What an experience that must have been! Although Parker is always astounding, I was especially struck by Young's playing—particularly, the incredible intensity he gets on "Lester Leaps In" and the moving lyricism he displays on "Destination Moon."

My knowledge of Prez increased still further when I moved to Detroit in early 1972. There I spent time with a fellow whose knowledge of jazz (as a listener, not a musician) was considerably greater than mine. He bought me the *Count Basie/Super Chief* LP,[11] a compilation of recordings from 1936 to 1942 by the Basie band, and introduced me to Prez's wonderful playing with Nat Cole's trio from early 1946,[12] shortly after Lester got out of the army. This latter material revealed two interrelated things that were to become even clearer to me later on: one, that Young's playing evolved over the years; two, that the purported hard-and-fast divide in his work between pre- and post-army experiences is too simplistic to be the whole truth.

But what turned a fascination with Lester Young into an obsession was the reissue of his post-war recordings, on the Verve label and others. In early 1977, when I was living in New York, I picked up, shortly after it came out, the Verve 2-LP set, *Lester Young/Pres and Teddy and Oscar,*[13] consisting of an August 4, 1952, session with pianist Oscar Peterson and one from January 13, 1956, with



pianist Teddy Wilson. I have to admit that when I got home and played the records, I was disappointed. It certainly wasn't the old Prez, bouncing around the horn the way he used to. He seemed to labor on the up tempo tunes, his intonation and control were not of the best, and his tone lacked the purity of his earlier sound. Moreover, there was an aura of sadness about the music. Some of the reasons for the changes were explained in Ira Gitler's sympathetic liner notes; nevertheless, I was disconcerted. I even wondered whether I had made a mistake in buying the album. Despite this, there was something about Lester's playing that kept calling me back to listen to it. I played the records every night for weeks, months. And the more I listened, the more I heard; there seemed to be a lot more going on than I had originally noticed. I was first drawn to Lester's playing on the ballads, especially "Prisoner of Love" (from the 1956 session). The deep feeling he evokes on this song overwhelmed me (and still does). Somewhat later, I began to appreciate his solos on the medium tempo numbers and eventually got into the up tempo tunes. Overall, Prez's playing touched me in a way no other jazz musician's did. What may have been lacking in speed, agility, and harmonic sophistication was more than compensated for by his originality and his emotional communication. He was also doing things in his improvisations that were very subtle and that I only noticed after extended and careful listening. A combination of curiosity and a creeping appreciation of Lester's playing prodded me to go out and buy other albums featuring his post-war work. Eventually, I got everything I could get my hands on. With all of Young's post-war recordings, I had the same experience. First, there was disappointment, yet coupled with an urge to listen further; then, getting into the ballads; later, seeing/hearing more and more of what he was doing; finally, addiction; I couldn't get enough of Lester Young.

I wasn't the only one who took notice of Prez at this time. Among the critics, too, there seemed to be a revival of interest in his music and his life. Some reviewers were particularly impressed by the release, on the Pablo label in 1980 and 1981, of LPs made from Lester's date, on December 7, 1956, with pianist Bill Potts and his trio, at Olivia Davis' Patio Lounge in Washington, DC.[14] These were recordings Potts made on the last night of an extended engagement at the club. Although Lester was under contract to record producer/concert promoter Norman Granz at the time and tried to dissuade Potts from setting up the recording equipment ("Oh no Billy...no. Norman will kill me," Prez pleaded), Potts—thankfully—went ahead anyway.[15] Whatever happened afterward between Potts and Granz, a great crime was committed, because this stuff wasn't released for over 20 years. When the material did come out, it had a substantial impact. All of a sudden, at least some of the critics discovered that the post-war Lester Young could still play, and play well; he wasn't just a washed up alcoholic who had no business picking up a saxophone.

The issuing of these records and the re-release of others sparked an upsurge of scholarly interest in Young and his work. This resulted in the books by Porter, Gelly, Buchmann-Moller, and most recently, Daniels' detailed biography, all of which I devoured. A combination of listening intently to Young's recordings and reading about him led me to become both entranced and disturbed by the events of his post-war life. As I did so, I began to get into his existence, to identify with him, and to look at what was happening to him from his perspective. (It didn't hurt that during this time I was experiencing my own problems with alcohol.)

Much more recently, as a result of a romantic involvement with a professional musician (a classical clarinetist), I renewed my active interest in the saxophone, this time, not surprisingly, the tenor. I began practicing again, reading up on jazz/music theory, and teaching myself how to improvise, a task that had gotten interrupted many years ago. In doing so, I faced the quandary experienced by other musicians, particularly saxophonists, knowledgeable about Young's work: how much like Prez should I, or even could I, play? Obviously, despite the decades since his death,

Young's influence, at least to me, is still alive.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the controversy about Prez continues, with most commentators still coming down on the side of denigrating his post-war work. Recently, as I was browsing the Internet, I discovered an article arguing just this position. This point of view used to irk me, but now my reaction is closer to sadness: those who think this way don't know what they're missing. The debate will probably go on forever. For whatever it's worth, here's my contribution to it.

For starters, I would like to present my assessment of Young's position in the history of jazz, particularly the innovations he brought to the music and to its culture. Like much else in this essay, this question has been treated often in the literature about Prez. Nevertheless, I wish to offer my version, both to introduce the issue to those of my readers who may not be familiar with it and because I believe I have something to add to the discussion.

Lester Young has been described as "the most gifted and original improviser between Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker."[16] I don't know if this is true (I really dislike this kind of generalization), but what is the case is that Young was an extraordinarily creative musician and that his influence on the development of the tenor saxophone, on all jazz saxophone playing, and on jazz as a whole was profound. This can perhaps be summed up by two of the other ways Lester has been described by jazz commentators: the "patron saint of modern jazz,"[17] and the idol and inspiration of the boppers.

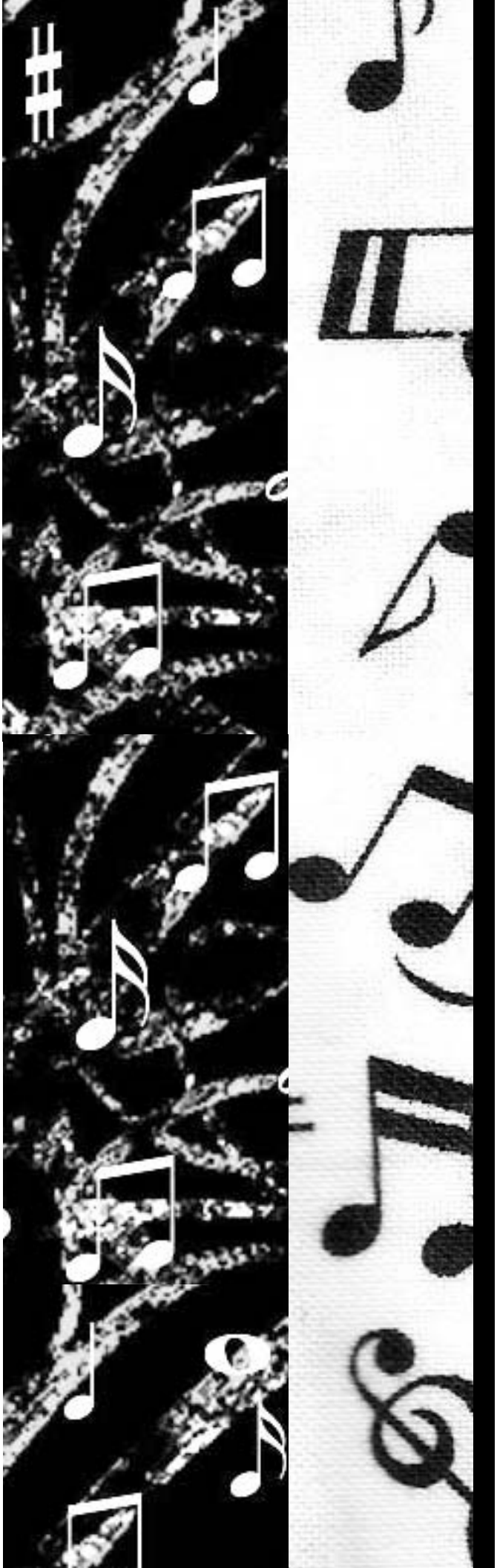
To understand Young's role, it is worth comparing his playing with that of another monumental figure in the history of the tenor saxophone, Coleman Hawkins. Hawkins, also known as Hawk or Bean, is considered to have been the first tenor player to develop the horn as a solo instrument, and thus its first major stylist. Hawkins was an extremely well-trained musician (he played piano and cello, among other instruments, listened to classical music, and had studied music theory, harmony, and composition), as well as a very colorful and charismatic individual. He was the star saxophonist in Fletcher Henderson's bands of the 1920s and early 1930s. Like the man himself, Hawkins' playing was self-confident, even aggressive. He played with a big tone and a pronounced vibrato. He virtually attacked his solos, and his playing usually has a driving, almost relentless, character.

Hawkins tends to play on the beat, hitting almost all of the four beats per measure of the 4/4 time in which most jazz was/is written; his fundamental unit is a dotted eighth note and sixteenth note (played in jazz more like a triplet). His phrasing, in terms of the length of his phrases, tends to parallel the structure of the tune on which he is improvising. Using this as a basis, Hawk's main interest is in the harmonic structure of a song. This is readily apparent in what is probably his most famous recording, the 1939 version of "Body and Soul."[18]

Hawkins had been in Europe for five years (he left the Henderson orchestra in 1934) when he made this record. During his time abroad, he faded from public sight in the US—communications then were not what they are now—which, incidentally, created the space for Lester Young to make his artistic impact. When Hawkins returned to the United States, he stunned the jazz world with his epoch-making solo on "Body and Soul."

Hawk plays only about eight bars (measures) of the melody and then jumps off into an extended and increasingly intricate improvisation that, while melodic, is also and primarily an extended exploration of the harmony and harmonic implications of the song. As a result of this focus, Hawkins' playing has a kind of vertical quality, as he goes up and down his instrument, hitting various notes of the chords he is exploring. His solo, having left the original melody far behind, gets increasingly harmonically complex—eventually involving the upper extensions (9ths, 11ths, and 13ths) of the chords of the tune, as well as chord substitutions and passing chords—and intense as it proceeds, reaches a climax, then subsides at the end. Overall, Hawkins' playing is elaborate, ornate, almost baroque. His skill was so impressive that most tenor players of the time could do no better than to copy him; his style virtually defined what it meant to play jazz on the tenor saxophone. With his self-confidence, musical knowledge, and bravura technique, Hawkins was an act that was hard to beat, or even to match. And nobody did, at least not until Lester Young came on the scene.

Like Hawkins, and perhaps all the great jazz soloists, Young was a competitive guy. But whereas Hawk liked to go head-to-head with the other fellow (there are stories about him going out and buying whatever he had just seen somebody with, say, a watch or a car, only bigger and more expensive), Prez competed by being



different, by going his own way. He developed a style that was unique, and in many ways, the direct opposite of Hawkins'.

First, there was his sound. In contrast to Hawkins', Young's tone is relatively soft and light, at times seeming almost hollow, and features very little vibrato. Instead of overwhelming the listener as Hawkins does, Young shyly "beckoned," in the apt expression of Neil Tesser,[19] the hearer to listen to him. Lester claimed that he modeled his sound, as well as his approach to improvisation, on the playing of Frankie Trumbauer, the only influence on his playing he ever acknowledged. Trumbauer, a white musician who worked with Bix Beiderbecke in Paul Whiteman's orchestra and in other groups, played the C-Melody saxophone. This instrument, which for some reason is no longer played today, is pitched between the Bb tenor and the Eb alto saxophones, above the former but below the latter. In part because of this, Trumbauer's tone, which also featured little vibrato, was relatively light and thin, and this apparently appealed to the young Lester. Trumbauer also, as Young described it, played around the melody of the tune on which he was improvising and told "little stories" on his horn, both characteristics that attracted Prez and which he was to utilize, in his unique way, in his solos. (He particularly liked Trumbauer's rendition of "Singing the Blues.")

Lester's phrasing is also much different from Hawkins'. Whereas Hawkins tends to anticipate the beat, driving it forward, Young almost seems to lag behind it, holding it back, telling it to slow down and take it easy. Combined with his tone, this gives Prez's playing a more "laid back," relaxed, feeling to it. Whereas Hawkins' phrasing tends to be even, Young's is much more irregular. He often comes up with oddly shaped, highly syncopated phrases, resulting in what has been called a "counter-rhythmic flow." Whereas Hawkins tends to play on the beat, and to emphasize the first and third beats of the measures, Prez tends to treat the four beats more equally, and sometimes even stresses the "back beats" (the second and fourth) of each measure. He also occasionally accentuates some of the off-beats of the underlying polyrhythmic structure. And in contrast to the dotted eighth and sixteenth notes characteristic of Hawkins' playing and swing generally, Lester plays more even eighth notes. Beyond this, the length of Young's phrases is more varied than Hawkins'. Some may consist of a few notes, or even just one; others are much longer, extending over many

measures. Overall, his phrasing breaks out of the bounds of the two-, four- and eight-measure limits that characterized most song writing and improvisation prior to him. Thus, he might begin a phrase of his solo in the middle of a phrase of the original tune, then extend it past the end of that phrase and end it somewhere in the middle of the next one, "draped," as one commentator put it, across the bar lines.

The contrast between Hawkins' and Young's playing goes still further. In opposition to Hawkins' harmonic concerns, Young is much more interested in melody and rhythm; he is usually described as a melodic improviser. It's not that he ignores the harmonic structure of a tune. In a sense, he keeps it in the back of his mind, playing in what Gunther Schuller[20] has called a tune's "harmonic zone," while his mental focus is on melodic and rhythmic ideas. Lester's approach is melodic in at least two interrelated senses. Sometimes, he paraphrases the original melody of the tune, weaving in and out of the song, subtly rearranging it melodically and rhythmically. At other times, Young comes up with an entirely new melody that works with—alongside or above—the original. Prez also plays with time in a way that neither Hawkins nor other improvisers of the day did. (This is not surprising, given that he once played drums with the family band.) Often, he'll play the same tone several times in a row, merely varying the duration of the notes, or changing their timbre (by using alternative fingerings), or altering their placement in the rhythmic pattern of the tune. At others, he'll take the notes of a phrase from the original melody and play them again, varied rhythmically; sometimes just displaced, that is, moved forward or back in the measure, and at other times, rearranged. He might also play notes representing a certain interval, then repeat the same interval several times up or down the scale, while also recasting it rhythmically. Occasionally he plays phrases that, when set against the original tune and above his accompanists, imply several distinct rhythmic patterns simultaneously, creating a polyrhythmic feel that goes considerably beyond that previously associated with jazz. In addition, Young is more economical than Hawkins, often relying on rests ("laying out," as he put it)—not playing at all—for a few beats or even measures. Lester is the master of understatement; his motto seems to be: "Less is more." Along with a tendency, particularly on up tempo tunes, to avoid arpeggios (ascending or descending series of notes that represent chords) and instead to play in scales or scale-based figures, these aspects of Young's playing lend his solos a more horizontal feel than Hawkins', creating what one observer has called "linearity."

As I've tried to describe, Young's approach to improvisation is much different from Hawkins' or from those of the other jazz figures who came before him. Lester was endowed with a terrific musical ear, a brilliant and novel conception of melody, and a vivid rhythmic imagination, along with great artistic courage. Together they add up to a powerful sense of freedom in his playing. Whereas others, even Hawkins, seem bound by the rules of what was then considered to be "legitimate" improvisation—what was believed to sound "right" or "good"—Young seems to be "past" or "beyond" the rules. The concept underlying his playing appears to be: if you can make something work—that is, interesting to the listener—rhythmically and melodically, you can

make it work harmonically. To a great degree, Prez is not bound by the harmonic structure of a tune at all. In a very real sense, he plays almost anything he wants (and gets away with it).

Pianist John Lewis, who played with Young in the early 1950s before going on to considerable fame with the Modern Jazz Quartet, put it this way:

"If you have a melodic line that is strong enough, you can build on that design and on the accompanying rhythm patterns without relying on any particular harmonic progression. This is especially true if there's enough rhythmic character. Lester Young has been doing this for years. He doesn't always have to lean on the harmonic pattern. He can sustain a chorus by his melodic ideas and rhythm. The chords are there, and Lester can always fill out any chord that needs it, but he is not strictly dependent on the usual progression."[21]

Most commentators analyze Young's contributions largely in terms of what we have discussed so far—sonority, phrasing, melody, and rhythm—and ignore or downplay his contributions to jazz harmony. (Martin Williams even describes Lester's contributions as "a-harmonic."[22]) This follows from the notion that he was focused primarily on melody and rhythm, and that he tended to ignore the harmonic structure of the tunes he played. While this is true, I think it misses the impact that Prez's playing actually had on the musicians who were inspired and influenced by him. In other words, while I think it is fair to say that Lester did not approach improvisation primarily through harmony, it is not true that his innovations had no harmonic implications or significance. I believe they did, and of a radical kind.

I have already mentioned that Young tends to play in the "harmonic zone" of a tune rather than follow its precise harmonic structure. Instead, he plays through or across the chord progressions (what jazz musicians call the "changes"), setting up varying degrees of tension between what he plays and the melody and underlying harmony of the tune. This gives his playing a kind of tonal ambiguity. As a result, it sounds a bit ethereal, not quite rooted tonally, somewhat like the music of the Impressionists. This is also in part the result of Lester's tendency to emphasize certain notes, such as the 6th and the 9th degrees of the scale of the tonic (the basic tone—or keytone—that defines the key in which a tune is written), that figure in many of the related chords of a given song. In addition, some analysts, including Williams, have noted that Young would often anticipate the chord of a tune, hitting it before it actually arrives or, on the other hand, waiting to play it until well after it has gotten there, thus maintaining the previous chord before implying the new one.

In part because of this, Young would occasionally play notes that, under the rules of previous styles of improvisation, sound "wrong" or "bad," not harmonically legitimate. Yet, somehow he makes them work. Jimmy Rushing, who sang with the Basie band in the 1930s, called them "odd notes." But this term, while not inaccurate in itself, tends to downplay Young's harmonic impact. To explain the significance of this, it is worth discussing a bit of jazz theory.

(Note to the general reader. Although the following five paragraphs are written to be understandable to the uninitiated, you may find them too technical to follow. If you do, you may skip them and take up reading again in the sixth paragraph, the one that begins "What I am getting at here....", without losing the thread of the argument.)

In the traditional style of improvisation, one is expected to emphasize or stress the tones of the chords that underlie the tune upon which one is improvising, and to play only notes that are closely related to those tones. Thus, if the chord of a particular tune at any given point is, say, C major, in improvising one should stress C, E, and G. One may also play what are called the "upper" and "lower" "neighbor notes" of those tones—tones that are one-half step below, one-half step above, and sometimes one whole step above, the chord tones—as long as those neighbor notes "resolve to" the chord tones, in other words, as long as the player, after playing these neighbor notes, lands on the chord tones. For example, if the chord of the tune is C major, one may play B, D or Db (either singly or in sequence), prior to landing on C; or D# or F (singly or in sequence), prior to playing E; or F#, A or Ab (again, either singly or in sequence), prior to playing G. In addition to these neighbor notes, one may play what are called "passing tones," that is, the notes that land between the chord tones in the scale on which the chord is based, here, too, as long as the passing tones lead to the chord tones. (These are often the same as the upper and lower neighbor notes.) Thus, one may play D between C and E, or F between E and G, or A and B between G and C, as long as one winds up on the chord tones. Finally, one may move chromatically, that is, through half steps, between the chord tones. If these rules are not followed, the result does not sound consonant to a musical ear used to traditional (diatonic) harmony; it sounds "wrong" or dissonant. (I am simplifying here, but these rules can still be found in books on jazz improvisation. In fact, no effective improviser plays quite this way. This is a kind of ex post facto explanation of what good improvisers do.)

Now, in his playing, Lester Young "violated" or "broke" these rules (among others). For one thing, when he did play or imply a chord, he tended to treat all the notes of the scale on which a particular chord is based as legitimate and of equal importance. In other words, he didn't always stress the chord tones. Thus, to continue our example, where a phrase of a tune might be based on a C major chord, Young would think primarily in terms of the C major scale for his improvisation at that point, not the C major triad. (As a result, Lester, without necessarily thinking about it this way, would wind up playing or implying chords—9ths, 11ths, 13ths—that were more extended than those usually played at the time.) Beyond this, Lester would occasionally play the upper or lower "neighbor notes" of a chord, but not resolve them, or not resolve them immediately, to the chord tones. In the case of the flatted third and flatted seventh, Eb and Bb, respectively, in the key of C, this was considered OK in traditional jazz playing, since the result is a "blues" feel. But Prez also tended do this with other notes, among them the flatted fifth (Gb, in our example), the flatted 6th (Ab in our example), and the flatted ninth (Db in our example). At times, he might stress these non-chord tones, then afterward resolve them to the chord tones, "sitting" on the Db before playing C, or the Ab before playing G, for example. Or, he might play several non-chord tones in succession and then resolve to the main chord. Sometimes, he just hits these non-chord tones without resolving them to the chord tones at all. On many occasions, Lester seems to ignore entirely the chords the

original tune is based on and instead plays notes in the scale of the tonic (C, in our example). Finally, he developed an arsenal of figures ("riffs" or "licks")—some purely diatonic, others chromatic, some a combination of the two—that he would play right across the chord changes.

As some of these examples suggest, Young had a tendency to play more chromatically than most previous improvisers. While other musicians of the time did use the chromatic scale (which is based entirely on half steps), Lester resorted to it more frequently and in a more radical way. Thus, he might simply play the scale up or down the horn, sometimes as, or as part of, a rapid series of notes, sometimes just as a way of moving around the horn (the scale sounds good in all keys). Moreover, in doing so, he might not end such phrases on the chord tones, as other improvisers might have, but on non-chord tones, such as the passing tones or neighbor notes I described above. He often plays chromatic tones as transitions between chord tones, as the flatted upper neighbor notes I've mentioned. He might also play a figure, then repeat it a half step up, then play it back down a half step, as he did the first time. Or, he might play a riff repeatedly, moving a half step up or down each time, thus creating a series of chromatically ascending or descending figures, which, by implication, represented chromatically ascending or descending chords. (This was to become a major feature of bebop.)

When these devices are put together, they create solos that occasionally sound dissonant or "odd" to a listener accustomed to traditional harmony. If done by accident or poorly, the result seems to be merely some "wrong notes." But when they are done well, as Young did, they might sound "weird" but surprisingly effective. Together with Young's other innovations, they are what made his playing, particularly in his years with Count Basie, seem "way out," and "advanced." (It is important to note here that Young's use of chromatics, however much more radical it may have been compared to other swing players, was something that was added on periodically, as a kind of seasoning, to a style that was, at bottom, diatonic. This is to become important when we discuss Lester Young's relation to bop.)

Young's harmonic innovations do not seem to have been theoretically conceived; he just heard them in his head and played them. From what I can surmise by listening to him and from what I've learned of the facts of his life, Lester was not a theoretically inclined or even a particularly knowledgeable player. Like many musicians from the early periods of jazz, he played primarily by ear, and the chromatic and other non-chord tones he hit sounded good to him, even if (probably, because) they might be somewhat shocking to the listener. In fact, I suspect that it was largely because Young was not well versed in music theory (along with his musical imagination, ear, and guts) that enabled him to "break the rules" the way he did. (Lester's brother, Lee, a drummer, remarked that Prez would comment that he didn't want to know the chords of the tunes on which he was improvising because he might find them too confining.[23])

What I am getting at here is that while Lester may not have approached his solos harmonically, his playing did have harmonic implications, and these, in turn, had a profound impact on the theoretically inclined younger generation of musicians who would develop bebop. Charlie Parker, usually credited, with Dizzy Gillespie, as the originator of the new jazz form, claims to have been only "brushed" by Young, that is, not greatly influenced by him (although he admits to admiring his playing). But this sounds specious (if not outright dishonest) to me, even discounting the (perhaps apocryphal) story that, after being razzed off the bandstand by fellow musicians during one of his first outings, Parker spent some months memorizing and practicing (probably in all the keys) Lester Young solos, two and three times as fast as Young played them. To me, Charlie Parker sounds like a "jacked up" version of Lester Young.

What I suspect happened was that Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and the other boppers-to-be were so impressed with Prez's playing that they went home, transcribed and memorized his solos, analyzed the things in them they liked (including and in particular his chromatic innovations), generalized them, and developed new ideas based on them (and then practiced like hell).

This conjecture is at least partially confirmed by a comment of one of Parker's biographers:

"The twelve Lester Young solos contained in the record collection became Charlie's case-book. The records were already well played, 'Lady Be Good' so often that the grooves were beginning to break down from the pressure of the steel needle and heavy pick-up head.... Charlie learned each solo by heart.... Charlie broke down Lester's method."[24]

An anecdote recounted by alto saxophonist Lee Konitz (himself greatly influenced by Young) seconds this:

"I was on tour with Charlie once and I was warming up in my dressing room—I happened to be playing one of Lester's choruses—and Bird came noodling into the room and said, 'Hey, you ever heard this one?' and he played 'Shoe Shine Swing' about twice as fast as the record. He knew all that. I believe he's probably whistling it up in heaven right now."[25]

Phil Schaap, jazz historian, record producer, and DJ for jazz station WKCR in New York, made a very similar point about the relation between Lester Young's playing and bebop. Back in the 1980s, during one of the station's annual Lester Young/Charlie Parker festivals, I heard Schaap state that the starting point of bebop was the repeated chromatic figure Prez plays at the end of his solo on the "Honey Suckle Rose" jam session I mentioned above. I am not sure if Schaap's contention, taken literally, is correct, but I agree with the thrust of his comment: Lester's playing had a powerful effect on the harmonic (as well as other) aspects of what would become bebop. Prez was not the only person playing a more "advanced" swing style, one that utilized more sophisticated harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic concepts than were in vogue in the 1930s—Coleman Hawkins and Don Byas on tenor saxophone, Roy Eldridge on trumpet, Art Tatum on the piano, and Charlie Christian (in fact, a Prez disciple) on guitar, come to mind—whom the boppers admired and copied, but he was, I believe, the main one.

Dexter Gordon, often considered the first to develop a fully bebop style on the tenor, described the boppers' attitude toward Young this way:

"Hawk had done everything possible and was the master of the horn, but when Prez appeared we all started listening to him alone. Prez had an entirely new sound, one that we had been waiting for, the first one to really tell a story on the horn."[26]

(It is worth noting that my opinion is not universally shared. If I interpret him correctly, Scott DeVeaux, in his *Birth of Bebop*, sees Coleman Hawkins, of the older generation of musicians, as having the major influence on the harmonic ideas of the boppers, with Lester Young offering a kind of corrective in the direction of flexibility and ambiguity.)

Young's influence on the boppers was not just musical. As most commentators have noted, Prez had his own very distinctive personal style. He was the first "cool" guy—laid back, knowing but broad-minded, observant but quiet, "hip." He also affected what some have called a "fey" or "effeminate" manner, although there is no indication that he was gay. He didn't care for loud, rude, or aggressive people, and tried to avoid confrontations. For a time, Prez held his saxophone thrust out in a non-conventional 45-degree angle (possibly to make more room for himself on the bandstand). He also dressed differently from others. He preferred loose-fitting yet very stylish clothes, double-breasted suits, pants extremely well-creased. In contrast to the fedoras that were then in vogue, he wore a pork-pie hat. (After his army experience, some observers noted, he wore it tilted further and further down over his forehead, as if to visually convey his darker mood.) And he was the first jazz musician to wear sunglasses. Prez also smoked marijuana, and, probably from some point in the mid 1930s, drank.

In addition to his dress and personal style, Prez had his own private language. He might have "eyes," even "bulging eyes," or "no eyes" for something, meaning he liked it or not. "Bells!" or "Ding-dong!" meant something was wrong. He would interject expressions of his own devising, such as "vout" or "oodestaddis," at various points in his conversation, and add the suffix "eroony" after words. White men were "gray boys." The police were "Bing and Bob." He referred to musicians' fingers as their "little people." When greeting someone, he would ask, "How are your feelings?" To play another chorus was to "have another helping." If someone Lester didn't care for arrived, he would say, "Von Hangman is here." When he experienced racial prejudice, he would comment, "I feel a draft." He was the first person to use the word "bread" for money and coined many of the other slang terms that were later to become common, such as "cool" and "dig." A typical Prez expression might be, "Eyes for the gig, but how does the bread smell?" (I like the job but how much money are they offering?) Lester also liberally sprinkled his speech with profanity, although those who knew him insisted that there was nothing aggressive about it. He gave other musicians colorful names, often dubbing them "Lady," whether they were male or female. Thus, Billie Holiday became "Lady Day"; tenor saxophonist Paul Quinichette, "Lady Q." Pianist Charles Thompson became "Sir Charles," presumably because of his dignified manner. He often referred to club owners, promoters, and interviewers, as "Prez." Overall, Young's language was highly metaphorical and elliptical,

a very personal variant of the already metaphorical and elliptical Black English. It was often so allusive that people who didn't know him couldn't understand what he was talking about.

Lester's personal affectations were, like much else about him, copied by many others. They were the models for the personal styles—primarily a rebellious stance toward society—and the dress, language, and drug taking of the boppers, and later, the beatniks of the 1950s,[27] and the hippies of the 60s.

As all this suggests, Lester Young was unique, and in many different dimensions. It was very important to him to "be original."

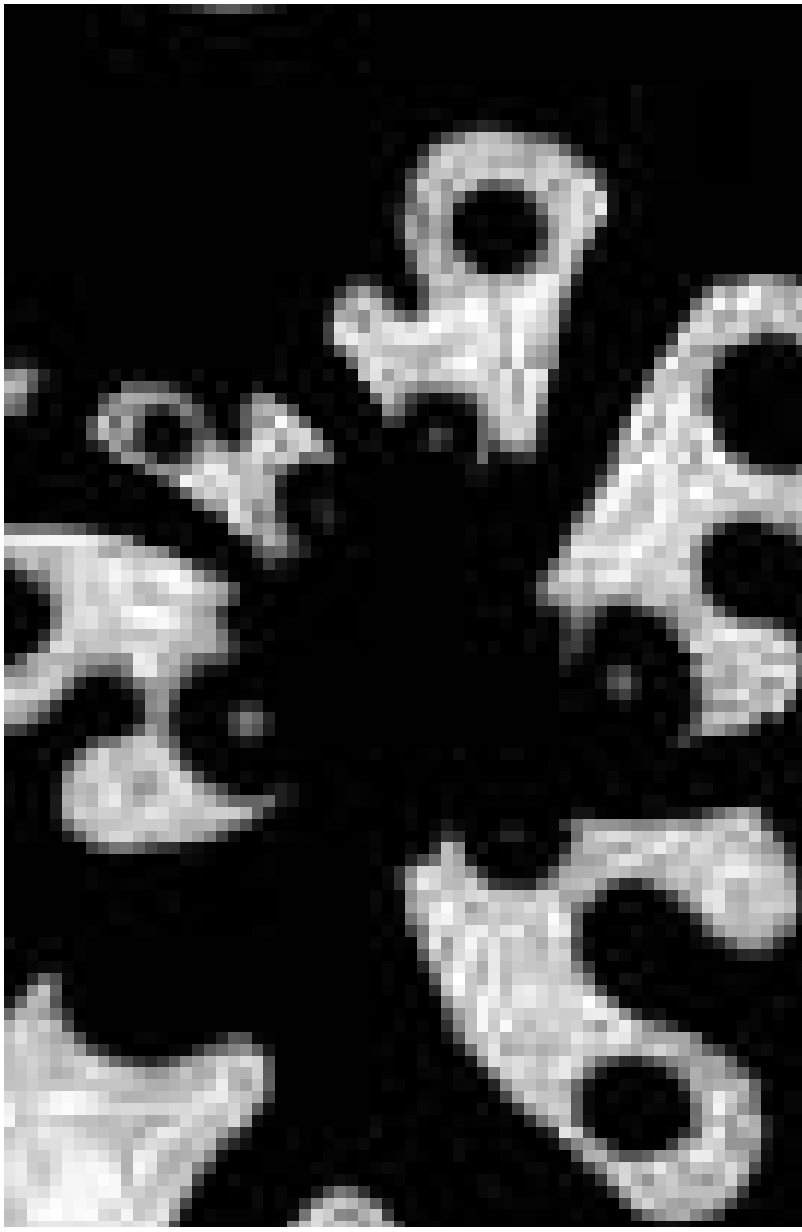
"You've got to have a style that's all your own. A man can only be a stylist if he makes up his mind not to copy anybody. Originality is the thing. You can have tone and technique and a lot of other things but without originality you ain't really nowhere. Gotta be original."[28]

It was as if Prez consciously viewed his whole person—his music, his personal style, his dress, his language, his very being—aesthetically, as a work of art. In this sense at least, Lester Young was a Nietzschean man.

With this as background, we can now turn to the controversy about Lester Young's post-war playing.

One of the reasons the dispute over Young has never been resolved is, I believe, that in many respects the proponents of the two points of view have talked past each other, that is, have not fully confronted the points of their opponents. And this, it seems to me, is largely because the terms of the discussion have not really been made clear, more precisely, because the criteria according to which the disputants evaluate Lester's post-war playing have not been agreed upon. Virtually all commentators admit that after the war, Lester's playing changed greatly, and generally not for the better. So, what are people arguing about?

Another reason the controversy continues is, in my estimation, that many of the defenders of Young's post-war playing tend to mince their words. For one thing, whether out of concern for Young's privacy or a sense of decency, they often describe his drinking and its impact on his playing in euphemistic terms. As a result, they seem to be evading the issue. In addition, fans of



Lester's post-war work often seem defensive, as if they are ashamed to admit that they like his playing when their judgment is so contrary to the common run of critical opinion.

My own view is that Lester Young's post-war work—*taken as a whole and judged according to conventional criteria*—was not as good as his playing prior to his experience in the military. This should not be surprising. After all, in the period after his release from the army, Young began drinking extremely heavily, and his alcohol consumption was soon what most people would consider to be "out of control." (J.R. Taylor describes Lester's use of alcohol as "methodically excessive."[29]) To put it bluntly, after the war Prez, along with smoking pot, was drinking his brains out and was almost always bombed when he performed. (In fact, he was probably high during most of his waking hours.) Moreover,

Lester's drinking would eventually have serious effects on his health, resulting in several hospitalizations during the course of the 1950s, malnutrition (he virtually stopped eating), insomnia, chronic pain, and nerve damage, and would ultimately cause his death. In addition, Prez's alcoholism and the circumstances of his life had a profound impact on his state of mind, making him increasingly depressed—angry, bitter, and sad. To top everything off, he had, by his own admission, stopped practicing.[30] How could all this not have had a negative influence on his playing?

In fact, the changes in Lester's work during the post-war period are fairly obvious, and many of them are, at least according to traditional standards, negative. To help clarify the discussion, and to lay the basis for my own positive evaluation of Young's post-war playing, I would like to offer my view of them.

Before doing so, I would like to indicate three interrelated caveats here.

The first is that, contrary to the conception of a stark divide between his pre- and post-army work (good vs. bad), Lester's playing in fact evolved throughout his entire career. A careful listening to him during his first stint with Count Basie, for example, reveals that by the end of that period, that is, by late 1940, his playing is different from what it was earlier. Among other things, his tone is heavier and he is not playing as many "odd notes." By the mid 1940s, his playing (fantastic, in my opinion), such as with small groups led by Basie and Johnny Guarnieri,[31] and in the film short, "Jammin' the Blues,"[32] shows even greater changes. His tone seems denser—darker and "smokier,"—and his phrasing is considerably different from what it was before (among other things, he plays more notes and uses more scalar figures). Thus, if one views Prez's career as a whole, his post-war work can be seen to be, at least to some extent, a logical extension of his pre-army playing, and not something that comes totally out of the blue. Thus, while I do think there is some kind of dichotomy in his career, it is not as defined as it has often been portrayed.

My second caveat is that I do not believe Young's playing with the Nat Cole trio, once thought to have been recorded in December 1945 but now known to date from late March or April 1946[33], should be lumped in with his other post-war work. To me, it sounds qualitatively different from both his playing before and his other playing after his army experience. In my opinion, what Lester does on these tracks ranks among the very best that he ever did, including the material from his first period with Count Basie. For whatever the precise reasons (his musical affinity with Cole, his immediate reaction to being out of the army, his lack of familiarity with the post-war jazz scene), Prez plays extraordinarily well on this date. Among other things, his playing seems to be both the most relaxed and the most technically proficient and impressive of all his post-war recordings. While it is true that he is no longer ahead of the pack in terms of the historic development of jazz, he is certainly not lagging behind. And while he is not playing bebop, his work is not lacking in speed, dexterity, ingenuity, and sophistication.

My third caution is that the tendency of Lester's playing to evolve increased significantly during the post-war period. So much is this the case that, although a long-term path of evolution can still be discerned, his work becomes rather inconsistent, even erratic. Prez sometimes sounds different from one recording session to the next. His work also differs substantially between live venues (many of which were dances) and dates in the recording studio. Even during a single recording session or live date, Lester might sound great on one or more cut, and just so-so, or downright poor, on others.

Having said all this, I do think the traditional conception of some sort of qualitative division between Lester's pre- and post-army playing is valid, and that, as I said, taken as a whole and judged according to conventional criteria, his post-war playing is not as good as his earlier work. Let's look at this in more detail.

Probably the most obvious change in Young's playing is in its overall impression or "feel." Young's pre-war work, certainly that of his first period with Count Basie, from 1936 through 1940, sounded light, quick, and happy—even enthusiastic—poised and polished, relaxed and self-confident, without being slick. (Phil Schaap has called it "buoyant.") While his playing from the mid-40s has a somewhat darker emotional tone, it is still upbeat. Prez has great facility over the entire range of the saxophone and at every tempo, and he seems to be bursting with new, daring ideas. While it is not true, as one analyst has written, that he never repeated himself (this is impossible for a jazz musician), it is true that he was extremely creative. On top of an overall ease and enthusiasm in his playing, Lester seems to enjoy toying with his listeners—sometimes coming up with strange yet beautiful

phrases and hitting those occasional "odd notes," at other times just playing the melody straight—daring them to guess what he'll do next. There is a real panache to his playing, and he is obviously having a great time.

After the war, this feel is gone. Young's playing generally sounds heavier, sometimes very much so, and the overall mood is no longer upbeat, but "down": he is definitely not happy. Overall, his work cannot honestly be called poised or polished, relaxed or self-confident, and he is certainly not bouncing around the horn. There is very little panache.

Beyond this change in the feel of Lester's playing are specific changes that are worth noting.

(1) First, there's his tone. In contrast to the pure, light, almost vibrato-less sound of the 1930s, or the somewhat heavier but still smooth tone of the mid '40s, Prez's post-war sound is usually thicker, often darker, denser, coarser, and grittier, but sometimes anemic and even wispy. He uses more vibrato and his tone is occasionally breathy. Rather than being mellow and pleasing to the ear, it frequently has an edge to it and at times even sounds harsh.

(2) Lester's intonation is sometimes questionable; to be blunt, he doesn't always play in tune, particularly in the upper and lower ranges of the horn. In at least one case (I am thinking of his record date of December 1, 1955[34]), these intonation problems are particularly noticeable.

(3) There is a noticeable decline in Lester's speed and dexterity, his ability to move around and play complicated riffs on the horn. Initially, this is only apparent when he plays extremely fast tunes, but later on, it is noticeable when he plays at more moderate tempos. He sometimes seems to be struggling to keep up, much of what he plays seems simple, even simplistic, and he rarely sounds technically impressive. In the very late recordings, say, those from 1958 and early 1959, his agility has declined so significantly that, when coupled with his tone and other aspects of his playing, it is downright painful to hear him.[35]

(4) Prez's post-war playing is much more repetitive than his pre-war work. Unlike earlier, he does not seem to be overflowing with new ideas that he can't wait to play. Particularly on the up tempo tunes, he often reverts to certain set phrases, figures that come easy to him, riffs that, as musicians say, lie "under his fingers."

(5) His phrasing, in terms of the length of his phrases, is generally more conventional than before.

(6) As I suggested above, his post-war playing has a much different emotional quality than his pre-war work. Rather than being happy, upbeat, buoyant, it is now much more likely to be agitated and insecure, angry, bitter or sad, and toward the end of his life, wistful and resigned.

(7) As I also indicated, Lester's post-war playing no longer demonstrates the qualitative consistency of his earlier work. Prior to his experience in the army, even as his playing evolved, Lester's work is of an extremely high quality night after night, recording date after recording date, year after year. In the post-war period, this is no longer the case.

(8) Young is no longer in the "front rank" of jazz innovators. He seems to have been overtaken and left behind by the boppers and the post-bop musicians. Rather than being "modern," "advanced," "far out," "cool," his playing now sounds primitive, dated, old-fashioned, as if caught in a time warp. Moreover, he doesn't even sound as "advanced" or as "modern" as he once did; he appears to have regressed.

As a result of these changes, I do not think it can be seriously contended that, judged by conventional standards and viewed as a whole, Young's post-war work was of the same quality as his earlier playing. So on this level, it seems to me, those who contend that Prez was not as good after his army experience as before are right. And I think it is necessary to admit this up front, particularly if one is interested, as I am, in defending his post-war playing.

Yet this admission does not mean that Young was finished, that he couldn't play at all, or that his playing was so poor that it is not worth listening to. After all, Young was not a conventional man, and by all accounts, he became even less so during the post-war period. So, to judge his playing according to conventional standards is not to do him justice. At the very least, it leaves something out. Personally, I greatly prefer listening to Prez's post-war work than to his previous stuff. While I certainly agree that

his early playing is both fantastic and of epoch-making significance, and that this is not generally true of his post-war stuff, I believe that much of his post-war material is wonderful. To be sure, it is, like the man himself, very eccentric—even bizarre—and this, I believe, is one of the things that have prevented so many commentators from appreciating his playing. I'd like to discuss what I see, admire, and am even amazed by, in his post-war material.

However, before doing that, I think it would be useful to step back and look at Young's experience in the army and the general situation he faced after he was discharged and throughout the rest of his life. This will put his post-war playing in context and help us understand why he wound up playing the way he did.

After dodging the Selective Service agents for some time (he wasn't the only jazz musician to do this),[36] Lester was drafted in September 1944. He was 35 years old, at the outer limits of draft-age eligibility. He was also, by profession and by temperament, totally unfitted for life in the military. For one thing, he had always been a rebel and hated being ordered around. (When Prez was 10, his father temporarily kicked him out of the family band because he was faking rather than reading his parts. He also ran away several times to escape beatings at the hands of his father, who has been described as a "firm taskmaster.") For another, the jazz life is not conducive to inculcating military-style discipline, and Lester, by all accounts, was less disciplined than many. Finally, Prez's health was not of the best. He smoked tobacco and marijuana and drank hard liquor, and I suspect the only exercise he got was carrying his saxophone around (not counting playing, of course). He also occasionally suffered from some kind of seizures and was discovered to have syphilis. Even if he were totally unknown to the bureaucrats handling his processing (although he did have a national reputation at the time), why he wasn't culled out during the physical and psychological examination process is hard to fathom.

In addition to this, Young was not allowed to play in an army band. Why? There were military bands throughout the service (the most famous being Glenn Miller's Army Air Force band), staffed by hundreds (thousands?) of musicians, most of them a lot less capable than Lester Young. Why wasn't he allowed to play? The accounts of musicians, including trombonist Jimmy Cheatham, who were with Lester at the time, blame this on the conductor of the regimental band, a Black officer from a middle-class background who didn't approve of Prez or his lifestyle. Although these friends, including Basie drummer Jo Jones, would sneak Lester in for rehearsals, he was never officially allowed to play in the band.

Further complicating things for Young was the racial dimension. The US Army at the time was a very racist institution: Black soldiers were assigned to segregated units and were usually not allowed in combat. Most domestic military facilities were located in the South and many officers were Southerners; these Southerners and most of the others were probably bigots. As Black people were treated abominably throughout the country, one can imagine (maybe not!) how brutally they were treated in the military. Beyond this, Prez, by all accounts, was intolerant of racism and extremely sensitive to racial insults. Indeed, he had left the family band when his father announced they would be touring the South. (Although Lester was born in Woodville, Mississippi, and had spent part of his youth in and around New Orleans, the family eventually moved to Minneapolis, where they found the racial climate more congenial.) On a Southern military base, which is where he wound up, Lester would have quickly gotten himself labeled as "uppity," that is, insufficiently docile and obsequious to whites and unappreciative of white supremacist norms. Given this, it seems inevitable that he would have attracted negative attention: somebody waiting to get him. Somebody did.

After being inducted and undergoing basic training in California, Lester was assigned to Fort McClellan in Alabama. There, he fell while running an obstacle course and hurt his back. He was hospitalized, underwent surgery, and was given barbiturates for the pain. In an interview at the hospital, Lester admitted that he smoked marijuana, took barbiturates, and drank. After three weeks, Lester was released and was sent to battalion headquarters for special service. Since he was still in pain, he obtained more barbiturates, this time illegally. One day, an officer noted that he was not doing well and asked him what was the matter. Lester replied that he was "high." This prompted a search of his locker, where marijuana, barbiturates, and a liquid containing alcohol were found. Lester was arrested, tried, and, despite all the extenuating circumstances, convicted of possession of controlled substances. He was sen-

tenced to one year in the detention barracks, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and a dishonorable discharge.

(Some, including Jo Jones, have suggested that behind the drug charges was another, much more serious offense—miscegenation—and that the original sentence was five years confinement. During the search of Lester's locker, an officer noticed a picture of a white woman. When they asked him who it was, Prez replied that it was his wife.[37])

To make matters worse, Lester was sent to do his time in Fort Gordon, Georgia, where the racial climate was even worse than in Alabama. Things were so bad there (although he was allowed to play in a band) that once, when out on a work detail, he tried to escape, but (wisely) decided to go back. Aside from this, it is not known what happened during Young's incarceration (there are claims that he was regularly beaten by drunken guards, at one point nearly dying as a result[38]); he always refused to talk about it. Although he was released two months early, the entire experience had a profound impact on him, making him bitter, alienated, and paranoid. Later, Prez described his experience as, "A nightmare, man, one mad nightmare."[38]

As if his travails in the army weren't enough, when Lester returned to the civilian world, the jazz scene was in the process of being totally transformed. Swing was on the way out, bebop was coming in. The big bands were breaking up, being replaced by smaller groups. And jazz, once essentially a dance music performed primarily in dance halls and large nightclubs, was moving into smaller venues, where it became an art music, increasingly technical and sophisticated, and played to be listened to, if not analyzed and studied.

This had a profound impact on the musicians. For one thing, the mere downsizing of the ensembles (from big bands to small groups) meant that many players were thrown out of work. The demise of swing made matters more difficult, particularly for the musicians steeped in that style, that is, the overwhelming majority of the players. To be commercially viable, one either had to learn how to play bop (or later, one of the various post-bop styles) or go into "Rhythm and Blues," popular music based on the blues, Black gospel music, and swing-style jazz, and played primarily by, and at first marketed almost exclusively to, Black people. (The term "Rhythm and Blues"—R&B—was originally a commercial/marketing category; the previous expression was "Race Records.") But since even here, small groups, usually backing vocalists, were the norm, there was not enough room in the field for the hordes of swing musicians suddenly looking for work. Beyond this, a lucky few might get jobs in the film, radio, recording, and (eventually) TV studios, but this was an option that was effectively closed to most swing musicians. (There were very few of these positions available, while many of the players were deficient in the reading and other technical skills needed to do this type of work and/or lacked the connections to land the jobs.)

Thus, for most jazz musicians to remain in business, one needed to play bebop. But this was not as easy as it might sound. To appreciate this, one must recognize that, at the time it emerged, bop was a radical break from previous styles of playing. Up to that point, jazz had evolved relatively smoothly. Its early forms—New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, New York, and the other regional styles from the 1920s and early 1930s—had morphed rather easily into the looser, more relaxed (and more arranged) swing style of the middle and late 30s. The change did not involve a significant increase in harmonic/theoretical sophistication, and most of the musicians were able to make the transition without greatly altering their styles and approaches to improvisation. (They did have to be able to read the arrangements.) The segue from swing to bop, however, was much different. So radical was the new form—in sound, speed, rhythmic feel, and harmonic complexity—that once bop was accepted by the listening public and the critics, it almost immediately rendered all of the older styles obsolete. To audiences and swing musicians alike, bop at first sounded truly weird, more like noise than music. Whereas swing, even when played fast, was smooth, relaxed, mellow, and romantic, bop was the opposite—jagged, frenetic, dissonant, harsh. Moreover, most of the swing musicians probably didn't have a clue about what the boppers "were doing"— how they got the effects they did (and, at least at first, probably didn't care).

So, for musicians of the older school to play bebop meant overcoming considerable obstacles. One was the likelihood that many (most?) of the older players didn't like the new music. Even if a musician could get past this, there was then the question of learning to play it. This was no small matter. For a swing musician, playing bop meant revamping his/her entire style, not an easy thing to do after years of playing.

Much of improvising involves having a lot of material—motifs, figures, riffs—under one's fingers, ready (as a result of practicing) to be played without thinking too much. This is particularly the case on up tempo tunes. To learn a new style involves jettisoning the old riffs and learning a set of new ones (or at least greatly modifying the old ones). This requires hours of practice. To make matters worse, bop is much more harmonically sophisticated than swing and requires a much more thorough knowledge of music theory than most swing musicians had. Swing could be learned—both playing band arrangements (many of which were not written down but were memorized, so-called "head arrangements") and improvising—on the job. This is definitely not the case with bop. First, a body of theory has to be mastered, then hours of practice are necessary to incorporate this knowledge into one's playing, unlearning old habits and learning new ones—new chords, new chord changes, new scales, new riffs. In addition, bop phrasing is much different from swing, much more rapid, and more angular. Swing phrasing sounds hokey and corny when playing bop. Since phrasing is so fundamental to one's style—it is the equivalent of talking—to unlearn one manner of phrasing and to fully adopt another is a lot harder than it might sound. Beyond all this, there is the rhythmic dimension. Bop has a much different rhythmic feel than swing and this too has to be assimilated. Last but by no means least, to play bop effectively requires having a far better technique—the ability to play complex, sophisticated figures at very rapid tempos—than most swing players had. In terms of brute "chops," Parker, Gillespie, and the other top boppers blew the vast majority of the swing players away.

Because of these and other issues, learning to play convincingly in the new style would have been very difficult for most swing musicians, and would have been harder still if one had to go out and earn a living, as most did, while doing so. As a result, only a very few of the older musicians made the transition to bop. Probably the majority never tried, while most of those who did try never really sounded comfortable in the new idiom. Even someone like trumpeter Roy Eldridge, whose playing had been influential in the development of the new form (Dizzy Gillespie cites him as his major influence), did not, after giving it serious thought, attempt to play it.

The post-war difficulties confronting swing musicians in general were even more daunting for Black players. American society at the time was profoundly racist, and to make matters worse, the racial climate became even more hostile with the conservative political and cultural reaction that characterized the post-World War II period. Many of the jobs available to at least some of the white musicians, such as in the studios and in the club date business (playing at dinner clubs and resorts, and for birthdays, weddings, bar mitzvahs, confirmations, etc.), were closed to Blacks. Thus, despite the fact that the bop innovators were Black, and that they had consciously developed the new style as a cultural expression of Black nationalism (specifically, as an attempt to stymie the process of white appropriation and commercialization that previous jazz had been subjected to), the bebop-induced transformation of jazz in the post-war period destroyed (ironically) the careers of many Black musicians.

As a result of the circumstances I have discussed and perhaps others I may have missed, many jazz musicians, white as well as Black, quit playing altogether.

This was the musical situation Lester Young confronted when he got out of the army in late 1945. It might appear at first glance that Prez would have had a relatively easy time adapting to it. After all, he was one of the most advanced musicians of the swing era, his playing had, by almost all accounts, inspired the boppers, and he was one of the few of the older generation who were accepted by them. But this would not necessarily be so. For one thing, I believe that Young, like most swing musicians, did not have the theoretical sophistication necessary to play bop convincingly. He also did not approach improvisation in the manner conducive to playing that style. Bop's most challenging innovations were harmonic: exploring the higher partials of traditional chords, thinking in terms of substitute chords for the traditional ones, utilizing scales other than the three—major, minor, and chromatic—upon which traditional jazz playing had been based.

As a result, to play bop one needs to think harmonically/theoretically. But Prez's style, as we saw, was rooted mostly in melody and rhythm; he played primarily by ear and did not think harmonically. Not least, bop is predominantly chromatic, and while Lester often utilized the chromatic scale, his playing, as I mentioned above, was basically diatonic. Thus, while Young did play in a more modern vein than most swing players, for him to play in a fully bebop style would have required changing his entire approach—no small order for any musician, but a particularly tough proposition for someone who experienced what he had in the army.

Yet, this assumes that Lester actually wanted to play bop. Although he welcomed the development of bebop, supported the young boppers and hired many of them to play in his combos, and often played bop-like tunes, this was almost certainly not the case. As I've emphasized, it was very important to Prez not to copy anybody; he was a man who believed that the most important quality in any artist, and certainly in a jazz musician, was originality. Yet now, with the onset of bop, was he supposed to copy the boppers? It would have gone against the deepest facets of his personality.

An additional reason Lester would not have wanted to play bop was the fact that the new style was no longer, as swing was, a dance music. Instead, with the onset of bop, jazz increasingly became a high-brow art form. And this in turn encouraged a drive toward still more theoretical sophistication: the use of increasingly complex harmonies, the utilization of different modes (non-diatonic scales), and the exploration of different time signatures, etc. As jazz evolved this way, people, particularly, the younger generation, started dancing to other forms of music, specifically, to Pop, Rhythm and Blues, and later, to Rock 'n' Roll. Paralleling this was a change in the social nature of the jazz audience. Swing was a music of the working class and poorer or more marginal sectors of the middle class. (The more comfortable sectors of society tended to look down on jazz, given its association with Black people, and with alcohol, marijuana, and sex.) With the demise of swing and the ascendancy of bebop and the post-bop styles, the jazz audience becomes increasingly middle class,

increasingly white, and increasingly sophisticated, eventually settling in, among other places, on the college campuses.

This development was to have a negative effect on Lester Young, for despite his role in paving the way for bop and modern jazz as a whole, Lester remained, in his own estimation and in fact, a swing musician. ("I play a swing tenor.") He especially loved to play for dancing and was, as I hear it, most comfortable in that kind of setting.

"I wish jazz were played more often for dancing.... The rhythm of the dancers comes back to you when you are playing," he once remarked.[40]

In addition, Lester Young was, at bottom, a deeply romantic player (and became even more so as the post-war period progressed), and bop is definitely not a romantic style. As a result of these changes, Prez was increasingly a fish out of water, playing in and to a musical milieu in which he no longer felt at home.

Beyond these circumstances, there was something else that was to have a specific, and very destructive, impact on Prez in the post-war period. This was the fact that so much of post-war jazz, starting with bop, was rooted in the innovations that he had brought to the music, and that, more specifically, so many of the post-swing musicians had, in one way or another, based their playing on his. (In 1957, Bill Simon described Lester as the "most emulated tenor man of the last 20 years."[41])

I have already mentioned that much of bebop was an extension or elaboration of aspects of Lester's playing. Equally if not more important, virtually an entire generation of young tenor saxophonists developed their styles by copying him. First and foremost, there was Dexter Gordon. On a date from either the summer of 1943 or the late summer of 1944,[42] a young Dexter Gordon sounds like a clone of Lester Young. Gordon, at least, went on to develop his own distinctive sound and approach. But a large number of other tenor players of the time, many of them white, based their mature playing even more directly on Young's: Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Herb Steward, Al Cohn, Jimmy Giuffre, Allen Eager, Brew Moore, Warne Marsh, Bill Perkins, Bud Shank. Young Black players also chose that route: Wardell Grey, Gene Ammons, Paul Quinichette, Frank Foster, Frank Wess, Harold Land, Hank Mobley, Junior Cook, among others.

But it wasn't only tenor saxophonists who copied Lester. Alto players—Paul Desmond, Art Pepper, and Lee Konitz, for example—and baritone players, such as Gerry Mulligan and Serge Chaloff, also imitated him.

Not only was Prez's sound (smooth, little vibrato) a model for all these musicians, they also copied his manner of phrasing and even his specific riffs. (Virtually all modern jazz conceptions of sonority and phrasing stem from Young.) The way I hear it, 90% of the tenor saxophonists (and many of the alto and baritone players as well) active during the 1950s, including or even especially those playing in the studios, sound like copies or derivatives of Lester Young; this Prez-derived style was almost the generic form of tenor saxophone playing in that period and for many years after. Beyond this, whole types of modern jazz, such as the "cool" and "West Coast" schools, were built on aspects of Young's style. I also believe that the modal and free-style forms of jazz that developed in the 1950s and '60s ultimately derive from Young. Although he tended to utilize only the major, minor, and chromatic scales (and very occasionally, the whole-tone scale), Lester's approach to improvisation is essentially modal, or scalar, rather than chordal, while his tendency to play independently of the chord changes certainly influenced the free-jazz players.

Nor was Young's musical influence limited to jazz. Large numbers of the saxophonists heard on R&B and Rock 'n' Roll recordings were also powerfully influenced by Young. This is often traced through Illinois Jacquet, whose solo on Lionel Hampton's band's 1941 cut of "Flying Home" is usually considered to be the first R&B saxophone solo. But I suspect many R&B horn players were directly inspired by Prez: Lee Allen, Herb Hardesty, Alvin "Red" Tyler, King Curtis, among others. I hear Lester's playing in the work of Junior Walker from the 1960s, and in the playing of R&B and rock horn players down to this day. In the post-war period, there were so many saxophonists playing like Lester that, as he once put it, he couldn't get a job playing like himself. Everywhere he turned, there were guys playing his stuff. And not just his sound and his phrasing; riffs he had played years before were being played over and over again, worked into the ground. Brilliant, radical ideas used, perhaps only once, to spice up a solo had been turned into formulas, cliches. (As my brother, a guitarist, once commented, Prez's style was "eminently copy-able.")

To top everything off, at some point Young's post-war playing began to be poorly received by the critics. I believe that, at least at first, this was not entirely a judgment of his playing on its own merits. I suspect that the critics' reactions to Prez's post-war work were greatly influenced by the contrast between his playing and that of the boppers and his other young disciples, specifically, that Lester's playing wasn't as chromatic as theirs, or, to put it more generally, that he didn't sound as "modern" as they did. To the critics, the young musicians who had copied Lester played his style better than he did. This was not only because, as some have seen it, they were playing ideas he had once played but subsequently discarded. It was also because many of his imitators also incorporated, to one degree or another, the more elaborate harmonic innovations of bebop. By and large, the younger musicians were more theoretically knowledgeable than Prez (many had attended the Juilliard School of Music or similar institutions) and were more practiced, more technically proficient, than he was. As a result, to most of the critics and listeners of the time and since, and to most jazz historians, their playing sounds more sophisticated, more advanced, than his. (In many ways, their playing sounds like the logical, almost inevitable, development of his style.) It was perhaps understandable that most swing musicians would sound outdated compared to the boppers and the post-bop players, but for the great, "far out" Prez, the boppers' idol, to

Left to right: Ronnie Free, Mose Allison, Lester Young, Mary Lou Williams, Charlie Rouse, Oscar Pettiford, mid-1950s.

Left to right: Billie Holiday, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Gerry Mulligan, about 1955.

seem so was noteworthy. Making things even worse for him was the fact that his rival, Coleman Hawkins, did manage to make the transition to bop, playing it in his own distinctive way. In contrast, Prez, the man who once could keep up with, or surpass, anybody, now sounded old-fashioned and outplayed. It must have been shocking.

In sum, after a devastating experience in the army, Lester returned to a jazz world in a state of flux, a horde of young players copying his style (both musical and personal; the boppers' imitation of him amounted to a parody), and, very soon, the majority of jazz critics panning his playing. What was a guy to do in these circumstances?

To understand what happened to Lester's playing, it is essential to recognize that his conception of originality involved more than just not copying anybody else. It also meant not copying himself. When he was once asked why he didn't play the way he used to, he replied:

"I can't do it. I don't play like that any more. I play different. I live different. This is later; that was then. We change; move on."[43]

With this in mind, I would argue that Prez's response to the situation that he found himself in was to move in a different musical direction entirely. Or, to put it more elaborately, I contend that the changes in Lester's playing, including many of those deemed negative, were not merely the inadvertent results of his declining physical and psychological state (although they were that, to be sure). They also represented an active choice on his part. In short, he chose to play the way he did, and this choice developed into a new and evolving self-conception, a new idea of what he represented as an artist. It's as if he cedes the ground to his imitators (he "drops out") and heads off into new territory. It is essential to recognize this if one is to truly understand Prez's post-war playing. Lester was/is often criticized for failing to develop his style the way his imitators had. But this assumes that he wanted to. In fact, Lester did develop his style. He just didn't do it in the way most of the critics expected or desired.

To a great degree, the opportunity to move in a new direction was made possible by the fact that Young was spared the necessity of scrambling for a living for much of the post-war period. After his release from the army, he came under contract to Norman Granz, a relationship that lasted, in one form or another, until Lester's death. Prez toured regularly with Granz's Jazz at the Philharmonic, traveling jazz concerts that played in symphonic halls and similar venues around the country, and eventually in Europe, where he and the other musicians in the troupes reached a wider audience than they had before. While the circumstances of these concerts were not always conducive to having Lester play his best (particularly on the up tempo numbers, when he often gave the audiences what he thought they wanted, e.g., honking; on the other hand, his ballads are always superb), the tours did offer him regular gigs, guaranteed him, at least for a while, a substantial income, and boosted his popularity. During this time, Lester was also able to travel with his own small groups and to record regularly on Granz's various record labels. Whatever one might say about Granz,[44] he remained loyal to Lester to the end of the saxophonist's life, recording him periodically despite Prez's declining health and eventual loss of commercial viability.

I would now like to explain why, as I wrote above, I much prefer listening to Lester's post-war music than to his earlier work. I recognize that to those who denigrate Lester's playing of the post-war period, this statement must sound truly absurd. Yet what I say is true, and here's why.

One reason I prefer listening to post-war Prez is that one more often gets the chance to hear him play lengthy solos. Of course, this is not the result of his playing per se but of other factors: that he was playing with and fronting his own small groups; that recording technology had changed—Long Play 33 1/3 rpm records replacing 78s—thus allowing the recording of lengthier cuts; that Lester's live dates were often recorded on portable recorders and then transcribed to LPs. Whatever the cause, these circumstances gave Young the chance to develop his ideas at greater length (and to explore new territory)—in lengthier solos during more extended renditions of tunes—than he had before.

Leaving this aside, the facet of Prez's post-war music that I relate to most is its affective quality. While Lester's earlier playing had definitely been soulful, his post-war playing is even more so; it is extraordinarily expressive. This is particularly true of his treatment of ballads. Such slower tunes with romantic lyrics give Lester the opportunity to explore a variety of emotions. I've already mentioned "Prisoner of Love," which to my knowledge he only recorded once, on the date with Teddy Wilson in 1956.[45] There is also "That's All," from his December 1, 1955 session,[46] "This Year's Kisses" (from the LP, *Jazz Giants '56*[47]), recorded, incidentally, the day before the January 1956 date with Teddy Wilson), and "Our Love Is Here To Stay," also from the date with Wilson. Among my other favorites are ballads that he recorded several times and which were a basic part of his repertoire during the post-war period: "Polka Dots and Moonbeams," "These Foolish Things," "Stardust," "I Cover the Waterfront," "Ghost of a Chance," "I Can't Get Started," "Blue and Sentimental," "I'm Confessing (That I Love You)," "There'll Never Be Another You." When he plays these tunes, Prez almost always gives deeply moving renditions. It is certainly true, as Phil Schaap has noted, that Lester's post-war work is no longer buoyant, and that much of the emotional content of his playing is down—angry or sad. But, to me, whatever his playing may have lost in this regard is more than made up for by the strength of the feelings he evokes and explores in his solos.

It is not only the ballads that are so expressive; almost everything he played has this quality. Among the other tunes I

admire for their affective (and other) content I would single out "Almost Like Being in Love," which he recorded many times. However, my very favorite is "You Can Depend on Me," from *Jazz Giants '56*. (Compared to the earlier version of this tune which he recorded with Count Basie, with Jimmy Rushing doing the vocal,[48] the song here is considerably slowed down; in fact, it is almost a ballad.) The other soloists on the date, Wilson, trombonist Vic Dickenson, and Roy Eldridge, sound very good, but when Prez starts his solo, he goes into outer space. He does nothing fancy, just leaves the original melody behind, and blows one beautiful phrase after another, utilizing a minimum of notes, some long tones, and a lot of rests, weaving it all together into an incredible song. What he does on this tune is amazing, and, in my opinion, nobody else—not Louis Armstrong, not Charlie Parker, not Sonny Rollins, not John Coltrane—comes close. While the Lester Young of 1956 may not have been able to play as he did 20 years before, the Lester Young of those years never played anything like this.

I believe the emotional character of Lester's playing has often been overlooked; and where it is noted, even by fans of his post-war work, it is often misunderstood. In his generally sympathetic notes to the CD compilation, *Lester Swings*,[49] Dave Gelly describes Prez as "emotionally transparent," and goes on to explain that he was not capable, when it came to playing, of hiding his feelings. This is certainly true, but I think it misses the point, insofar as it implies that the affective nature of Prez's post-war work is accidental. On the contrary, I believe the expressiveness of Young's playing is intentional; it is something he is aiming at, something he is working for. I don't think it is recognized just how difficult it is to establish, maintain, and then develop an intense feeling throughout a song. Just one wrong note can ruin the effect, yet Lester rarely (if ever) plays that one wrong note. In other words, what Prez does on these kinds of tunes may seem simple, but it takes real skill. It's not a matter of just feeling sad and picking up the saxophone. To me, post-war Prez is the king of soul. In this realm, harmonic sophistication doesn't matter; in fact, too much stuff can detract from the emotional impact. As a result, when other musicians, even the acknowledged masters of modern jazz, play ballads, they usually sound as if they are working to express the feelings they are aiming at. When Prez plays, he never seems to strive for the feelings; what one hears *are* his feelings; he's *in* the feelings; he's *there*.

Another thing I admire in Lester's post-war playing is his very original melodic imagination. Prez has a unique sense of melody. He comes up with truly odd, yet lyrical phrases and strings them together in a very creative way. The result is what might be called "strangely beautiful." As a result, each time I listen to him, it is always a new experience; I always find something I hadn't heard before.

Central to Lester's melodic conception is in a powerful sense of melodic continuity—a consistency of approach that he maintains throughout a given rendition of a tune. This is crucial to his concern with emotional expressiveness. Many bop and post-bop players, who focus their attention on the harmonic structure of a song, tend to downplay or even to be indifferent to the tune's emotional quality. As a result, they do not value such consistency. They go from one set of riffs to another, often totally disconnected from each other, exploring the harmony of a tune—playing the chords, their inversions and upper extensions, hitting substitute and passing chords, utilizing the chromatic, whole-tone, diminished, and other scales —and displaying their (often awesome) theoretical knowledge and technique. In contrast, Lester, who lacked such knowledge and technique, foregoes the pyrotechnics to maintain a consistency of melodic ideas in the course of a song, thus guaranteeing the establishment and maintenance of the emotional quality he is aiming at.

Jo Jones, Count Basie's innovative drummer during Lester's years with the band and a member of several of Young's touring groups of the 1950s, described it this way:

"But Lester has continuity. He tells a story. A lot of the little kiddies today aren't saying anything. They'll start talking about Romeo and Juliet and in two measures, they're talking about William S. Hart."[50]

An early example of these characteristics of Lester's post-war playing, and of the contrast between him and the younger, more modern players, can be heard in the Jazz at the Philharmonic concerts from January 1946[51]. On the faster numbers, such as "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Blues for Norman," the boppers, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and/or Howard McGhee, definitely outplay Young. Lester plays very well, but he doesn't have the tools—the harmonic sophistication, the technical brilliance, the sheer speed—to sound as "advanced" as they do. But when it

comes to the ballads, such as "The Man I Love" and "I Can't Get Started," Prez is superior. Here, as I mentioned, the fancy stuff gets in the way. In "I Can't Get Started," for example, although Parker succeeds in achieving a certain level of feeling, he jumps from one phrase to another, breaking up a sense of continuity. (He also can't resist showing off his technique.) In contrast, Prez maintains a unity of phrasing throughout his solo, establishes and develops a definite mood, builds to a little climax and then closes out. When it comes to this type of playing, the boppers can't compete. Yet, Lester gets even more expressive over the coming years.

Further contributing to the emotional quality of Lester's playing is his ability to make his saxophone sound like a human voice. His choice of phrasing and his ability to manipulate the sound of his instrument often make it seem as if he is singing the words of the tunes he is playing. Those who knew him insist that Prez had such control that he could actually talk on his horn.

As Jo Jones attests:

"Lester would play a lot of musical phrases that were actually words. He would *literally* talk on his horn. I can tell what he's *talking* about in 85 percent of what he'll play in a night. I could write his thoughts down on paper from what I hear from his horn. Benny Goodman even made a tune out of a phrase Lester would play on his horn—'I want some money.' "[52]

This description is consistent with Lester's belief that to really play a tune well one had to know the words.

"A musician should know the lyrics of the songs he plays, too. That completes it. Then you can go for yourself and you know what you're doing. A lot of musicians that play nowadays don't know the lyrics of the songs. That way they're just playing the changes."[53]

This tends to put at least some of Lester's apparent inconsistency of tone in a different light than that in which it is often viewed. Neil Tesser, in his notes to the LP compilation, *Lester Swings*,[54] criticizes Prez for the "pinched tightness" in the upper register of his horn during his rendition of "Polka Dots and Moonbeams." But to me, rather than being disconcerting, as Tesser describes it, Lester's tone here lends his solo a very intense feeling. He seems to be crying when he plays this passage, and he makes me cry when I hear it. Nor, as Tesser's terminology implies, was this sound something accidental; I believe it was purposeful, something Lester was striving for.

(When I imagine Prez playing a ballad in a dark, smoky nightclub or dance hall during the post-war period, I see him working his mouth around his mouthpiece, as if to caress it, changing his embouchure as he plays [a technical "no-no"] to get the vocal effects he wants.)

While maintaining melodic continuity and manipulating his sound, Lester also manages to do some very intricate things with his phrasing. Quite often, he phrases in such a way that he seems to be talking to himself: he plays one phrase and then follows it with another one that "answers" the first one, and then, perhaps a third one that answers the second; later on, he might refer to the original phrase once again. Prez might also begin a phrase and then end it in such a way that the last part of the phrase is the beginning of a new phrase, which then continues past the first one, creating, in effect, two distinct yet overlapping phrases. He might begin a chorus with a particular phrase, then follow it with a phrase that is similar to the first one but played with different notes,

then play a third phrase that maintains the same rhythm but is played with still other notes, so that the original phrase evolves through that part of his solo. He also comes up with phrases that are so rhythmically intricate (among other reasons, because he is phrasing between the beats or because he plays figures that are rhythmically independent of the underlying meter) that they are almost impossible to sing or to transcribe (or to describe). Despite all this, Prez always knows where he is and always lands on his feet. Although in terms of the length of his phrases Lester's post-war playing may seem less radical than his pre-army work, in others ways his phrasing is much more daring.

Another aspect of Lester's post-war playing that I appreciate is his ability to take a tune and change it just enough so that his version has an entirely different emotional content than the original. The original is still recognizable, but it has been significantly altered. Take "It's Only a Paper Moon," from Young's second Aladdin recording session, in early 1946.[55] As usually played/sung, such as by Nat Cole, the tune has a light, cute feel; it's pretty, but of no great moment. Now listen to Prez's version. It's the same song, but not quite. Just by upping the tempo (the cut has an R&B feel, in part the result of an arrangement using backup horns) and changing a few notes, the tune has been turned into something else. It is no longer cute and fluffy, but something much more intense, more meaningful. And Lester maintains this altered emotional content throughout his improvisation. (His solo also shows how creative he can be with some very simple musical devices, such as descending scales and repeated notes.) Many other tunes from the same Aladdin recordings reveal this type of modification, for example, "After You've Gone" and "Lover Come Back To Me." Particularly on "After You've Gone" (which, to be frank, took me a long time to be able to appreciate), Lester achieves an extreme level of feeling here, real anger. (The trill he plays at the very end of the cut sounds like he's giving somebody—the army?—the raspberry!)

Listen, also, to Young's version of "On the Sunny Side of the Street," from the LP *Pres Is Blue*,[56] one of several recordings of live dance dates. The original song was meant to be happy. But here, too, by making a few changes—slowing the tune way down and altering some notes—and through his intense tone, Lester has totally transformed it. It is now very emotional, very sad, yet still the same melody. On the same LP, "Three Little Words" is comparably handled. In this case, another light, upbeat tune is turned into something much more expressive—angry, bitter (and with some truly bizarre figures). "Pennies From Heaven" undergoes similar treatment. And Prez's version of "Stardust," played somewhat faster than he usually does, is out of this world.

In addition to what I have discussed so far, I am continually struck by the composed character of so many of Prez's improvisations. As Lewis Porter, in his book, *Lester Young*,[57] has discussed in some detail, much of Prez's work suggests that he thought about his solos as complete wholes, from beginning to end. At the most basic level, they have a dramatic structure: they start out easy enough, but then build in intensity toward a climax and close with a denouement. This is apparent in his two versions of "It's Almost Like Being in Love" from the December 1956 date with Bill Potts and his trio.[58] They both begin relatively relaxed, but progressively gain in power and then climax in striking figures during the last eight measures of each solo. (It's amazing, also, to note that a guy who was no longer practicing and who was drinking himself to death could pull such figures, particularly the one heard on Volume II of the series, out of the hat.) Or, listen to his version of "I Cover the Waterfront," from the album, *Lester Young/Pres*.[59] Played faster than it often is and with a dark, piercing tone, Lester's solo mounts to such intensity that one of the men listening and talking by the bandstand (the venue sounds like a dance) gets so excited that he starts shouting. Finally, on the same album, Lester's rendition of "These Foolish Things,"[60] which really plumbs the emotional depths through the amazing sound Lester gets on his horn, also builds to a pow-

erful climax, (which is, incidentally, a paraphrase of part of his solo on his Aladdin recording of the same tune that was analyzed by Andre Hodeir in his *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*[61]).

(As far as I have been able to figure out, many of the live dates that I have been discussing were recorded in early 1950, probably March. Much, but not all, of it has been put together in a three-LP compilation, *Lester Young/Jumpin' at the Savoy Ballroom*.[62])

The composed nature of Lester's playing is also reflected in a tendency to play thematically. As Porter has indicated, his playing throughout his career reveals this thematic character. This tendency is even more important in his post-war work. In some places, such as at the beginning of the fourth chorus of his wonderful version of "There'll Never Be Another You," from the CD, *Lester Young/Pres in Europe*,[63] his initial phrase evolves through four subsequent variants, each played somewhat differently than the previous one. Beyond such local thematic development, Lester often stretches this type of treatment across several choruses. For example, he occasionally establishes specific motifs at various points during the first chorus of an improvisation, such as at the beginning of the tune, at the start of the bridge, or at the end of the song, and then echoes them at the same points in his later choruses. Sometimes these phrases are simply repeated. At other times, they are slightly altered. At still others, after he has played the particular phrase a couple of times, the next time the place where it has been played occurs, Lester might play something entirely different, thus surprising the listener. (He does this in his solo on "Perdido" on the LP set of live dates at the Savoy Ballroom.[64]) To someone not paying attention, it may sound as if Lester is merely repeating himself. But if one listens closely, one can hear how the phrases are utilized to further the thematic development of his solo.

Another example of this technique can be heard particularly clearly in one of his versions of "DB Blues" from a live date at Birdland, NYC, May 19, 1951.[65] Here, Lester plays what seems to be the same figure in the last four measures of each chorus. But careful listening reveals that the riffs, although similar—they are all descending and all syncopated—are in fact quite different. This, too, serves to unify his solo thematically. (This solo, interestingly, also sounds "boppier" than others of this period, suggesting that, had he wanted to, Lester could have played more like the boppers than he actually did.) Prez does something very similar on his really swinging, almost R&B version of "One O'Clock Jump" (from the LP, *Lester Young/Pres Lives!*, a reissue of live Savoy Recordings[66]). On "I'm Confessing," from the date with Bill Potts (Volume II[67]), Lester utilizes the same technique but at a different place in the tune. He starts the bridge of each chorus with what sound like the same few notes. Indeed, they are the same notes (they sound like they are from the corresponding phrase of the original tune), but they are rearranged—melodically, rhythmically or both—each time.

As a result of these and other, similar devices, each of Young's solos represents a unique interpretation—melodic, rhythmic and emotional—of a song, as he tells his "little stories."

The composed quality of Lester's playing goes beyond any given tune. John Lewis noticed that his solos evolved from week to week.

"He would play the same songs in each set on a given night, but he would often repeat the sequence the following week this way: if he had played 'Sometimes I'm Happy' on Tuesday of the preceding week, he would open 'Sometimes I'm Happy' with a variation on the solo he had played on the tune the week before; then he would play variations on the variations the week after, so that his playing formed a kind of gigantic whole."[68]

Yet, despite its composed nature, Prez's playing is also very spontaneous. In any given performance or recording date, or even on any given solo, Lester is likely to go off in totally unexpected directions. For example, when playing one of his own compositions, say, the up-tempo blues, "Up and At 'Em," he might play several notes or even a whole measure of the initial statement up an interval, then return to the original version. He might also end his solo at a point where it seems totally up in the air, at a phrase that seems to require another phrase to complete it, or on the 5th of the tonic chord instead of on the tonic itself, or even on a non-chord tone. Or, when it is time for him to begin his solo after one of his sidemen has played, he may not play at all for several beats, or even several measures, before coming in. Prez also occasionally shapes his solos in surprising ways. On many tunes, he first plays the song "straight," that is, the way, or close to the way, it was originally written, before beginning his improvisation on the next chorus. But sometimes Lester cuts this basic statement short. For example, in "Taking a Chance on Love," from the 1956 date with

Teddy Wilson,[69] Prez starts his improvisation just after the bridge of his statement of the original tune and ends this first chorus after the bridge when it next occurs; he then repeats this through two more choruses. Thus, his improvised choruses begin and end three-quarters of the way through the original tune, rather than at the beginning, as is standard for jazz musicians. (This solo is an excellent example of how Lester can simultaneously paraphrase the original tune and create an entirely new melody. One can always tell what song he is improvising on, yet what he is actually playing is a new, wonderful melody all his own.)

Trumpeter Roy Eldridge said this about Lester's spontaneity:

"Another thing about Lester is that everything he did was natural. His playing wasn't a planned sort of thing. With most of the cats, I almost know what's coming next. They play, in a sense, in patterns. But Lester was likely to go in any direction."[70]

Speaking of spontaneity, Prez's playing at live dance venues, such as the 1950 dates at the Savoy Ballroom, sounds very different—and, in my opinion, qualitatively better—than many of his studio recordings from the same period. Prez plays exceptionally well on these gigs—his playing is exciting, daring, and very emotive —and the audiences are obviously having a ball. True, his tone is not the old "pure" sound; instead, it is rough, piercing, even harsh, but it is powerfully expressive. Prez does some amazing things on these dates and swings like mad. There's nobody in jazz who has ever played like this! Aside from the tunes I've already mentioned, listen to "In a Little Spanish Town" and "I've Got Rhythm."[71] (Surprisingly, I've never heard this stuff played on jazz radio. In fact, I've heard extremely little of post-war Lester Young on any of the jazz stations. Did the critics ever hear this? Were any of them there? If they were, were any of them listening?) Significantly, when Prez plays some of the same tunes in the recording studio in roughly the same period, for example, his rendition of "In a Little Spanish Town" from the March 8, 1951 date recorded by Granz,[72] he is not nearly as good. Why? Is it because he was less comfortable in a recording studio rather than at a dance? Or because he was hung over from the night before? Who knows?

I believe that Lester's spontaneity in part arises—ironically—from the fact that he was not as well practiced as the younger musicians who played bop and the post-bop styles. They do extraordinary things on their instruments but, to me, they sound as if they are practicing, as if they are playing riffs they've played a thousand times before. In contrast, Prez sounds much more spontaneous, more natural, as Roy Eldridge put it. The materials he uses may not be harmonically sophisticated, and his riffs, at first listen, may seem simple, but Lester never sounds like he's practicing.

Young's playing as a whole during the post-war period has this spontaneous character. I referred above to the apparent inconsistency of his work. Undoubtedly, some of this was caused by his declining physical and mental state. But much of it was consciously intended. I continue to be amazed by Prez's ability to change both his sound (and what sounds he gets!) and his phrasing (but not his basic approach to improvising) at various points during his post-war career. It's as if he is periodically refashioning his style.

The purposeful nature of these changes is revealed by his comment:

"So I've developed my saxophone... to make it sound just like a alto, make it sound like a tenor, make it sound like a *bass*, and everything, and I'm not through working on it yet. That's why they get all trapped up, they go, 'Goddamn, I never heard him play like this.' That's the way I want things."[73]

Lester's spontaneity is apparent in the many ways he plays the blues, for which he had, as he put it, "great big eyes." Sometimes he plays the blues in a relatively funky style, as in "Back to the Land," from the 1946 session with Nat Cole,[74] "Big Eyes Blues," from a live date in Chicago in April 1950[75], "Red Boy Blues, from the December 1, 1955, date with Oscar Peterson,[76] and "Pres Returns," from the 1956 session with Teddy Wilson.[77] Sometimes he plays in an almost R&B style, as the various versions of "Jumpin' With Symphony Sid" and "Up and Adam" (there are many spellings of this tune). At other times, he manages to play the blues without hitting any, or hardly any, of the traditional blue tones, as in the very intense "Blues" from the *Charlie Parker/Lester Young: An Historical Meeting at the Summit* LP.[78] One of the things I am most impressed with when I hear Lester play the blues (and almost everything else, for that matter) is the very originality of his conceptions. He comes up with novel—sometimes real-

ly odd—approaches to the blues, then maintains them throughout his improvisations.

Prez's playing was spontaneous in large measure because he was into expressing his feelings. He played the way he felt at any given moment, and how he felt changed from year to year, month to month, week to week, day to day, moment to moment. (Those who knew him contend that the slightest incident—a chance remark, someone walking into a room—could cause him to close down.) And that's what one hears in his playing. Because emotional expression was so important to him, virtually everything else is subordinated to it. That's why Lester rarely sounds like he is performing for an audience; he just plays.

Lester Young and Roy Eldridge.

Because of this spontaneity, and because of the other characteristics of his work during these years, Lester Young is always recognizable. Despite the fact that there were so many musicians who were influenced by him and so many guys copying him outright, Prez always has a very distinctive style and never sounds like anybody else. It is interesting to note in this regard that very few of Lester's legion of imitators among jazz musicians ever truly mastered his method of improvisation. Instead, they took his tone, his style of phrasing, and his phrases, and integrated them into a much more traditional—harmonic—approach. As a result, they don't really play his style (let alone better than he did himself, as some have contended); they play a superficial facsimile of it. Some of the R&B horn players do come close to Lester's "a-harmonic" method, but only at the cost of much of his complexity.

If anything, Prez's playing seems to get simpler as he gets older. As post-war jazz gets increasingly sophisticated and increasingly technical, Prez moves in the opposite direction. His minimalism becomes even more noticeable, more extreme. This may be, at least in part, the result of his declining physical condition. It may also be because he doesn't have the tools to be sophisticated or technical. Part of it, too, may simply be a reflection of his desire—his deep need—to be different. But Lester also seems to be trying to tell the younger musicians (and perhaps the critics) something. More stuff—more elaborate harmonies, more technique, more notes—may not be more meaningful; it may be less so. I suspect that Prez viewed jazz as moving away from its roots and from what he

saw as the essential musical values: swing, beautiful melodies, feelings, honesty—in short, emotional communication—and he was determined to defend those roots and those values.

A comment Lester made much earlier to Basie band-mate Herschel Evans is apt here. When Evans teased him about his sound, that he sounded like an alto saxophone player, Prez tapped his head and replied: "There's things going on up there, man. Some of you guys are all belly."[79]

Prez's reunion with Count Basie at the Newport Jazz Festival in the summer of 1957[80] demonstrates this contrast in emphasis between Lester (and some of his fellow swing-era veterans) and the younger musicians. After emcee John Hammond gives a lengthy introduction of the Basie band of the 1950s (the group consisting mostly of young modern players that Basie put together after he disbanded his swing outfit), the orchestra plays a modern arrangement of an up tempo blues. The band sounds like the powerhouse it was (although I find the number too loud and over-arranged). Afterward, with Jo Jones taking over as percussionist, Lester is introduced (after almost being overlooked by Hammond) and blows a beautiful, lyrical rendition of "Polka Dots and Moonbeams." (I like the way he paraphrases the melody in his first chorus, then paraphrases his paraphrase in the second.) After this, Prez and the band play a very up tempo version of "Lester Leaps In," a tune Lester and the earlier incarnation of the band first recorded in 1939.[81] Here, too, using very simple material, Lester (along with Jo Jones and Basie), gets the band really swinging—far more, in my opinion, than in the piece the band opened with. Notice, in particular, how Lester rhythmically plays with, and against, Basie and Jones, as if they're talking to each other. Notice, also, Lester's long, almost flat, phrases, his use of repetition, and a couple of his "odd notes." The number builds to a powerful climax and then, after Lester's coda, everybody—the crowd, the band, Basie, Jones, Young, Hammond—goes crazy. (Who's that laughing at the end, Jones?) Next, Basie's former vocalist, Jimmy Rushing, comes out, and with him, Young, Jones, and Basie leading the way, they play an incredible version of "Sent For You Yesterday" (also recorded by the original Basie band[82]). Rushing's singing is fantastic, while Lester's solo is a model of minimalism; it shows how to swing, and to get everybody else swinging, by playing the fewest notes possible. (Notice how in his second chorus, Prez gets into hitting some of the blue notes—here, the various microtones between the flatted third

and the third—in as many different ways as he can. And listen to how tastefully he plays behind Rushing's singing.) After another blues number, the band and Rushing perform a wonderful version of "Evenin'," likewise recorded in the 1930s[83] (with yet additional impressive playing behind Rushing and another fine solo by Lester).

At the end of the set (and the festival), with Illinois Jacquet and Roy Eldridge joining in, the band plays a rendition of the old Basie warhorse, "One O'Clock Jump."[84] Lester leads off the soloists with a great solo—complete with odd notes, played with alternate fingerings (they sound like "neck tones," keys played with the palm of the left hand that are usually used with the octave key to play the highest notes of the saxophone's normal range, but here played without the octave key), and some hard to reproduce, syncopated phrases. The other soloists, particularly Roy Eldridge, keep the band swinging, and the number, when it is over, brings down the house.

To me, what makes the date come alive, what makes the band really jump, are the old guys: Rushing, Jones, Eldridge, and Young (plus the unsung hero of the Basie rhythm section, guitarist Freddie Greene)—by this time, musical has-beens—along with Basie. They know how to swing, and how to communicate emotionally, far better than the younger, theoretically more sophisticated musicians. And Prez's playing here is incredible. This is 1957, a year and a half before his death! Don't tell me—or anyone in the band or in the audience—that he couldn't play! (Dave Gelly, in his book, *Lester Young*, describes Lester on this date as "barely able to play."[85] Are we talking about the same stuff?!!! Did he listen to it?!!!)

In this context, it is worth considering Lester's recording date, from February 8,1958, with Eldridge and former Basie trumpeter, Harry Edison, along with Hank Jones on piano, Herb Ellis on guitar, George Duvivier on bass, and Mickey Sheen on drums, issued on the LP *Laughin' To Keep from Cryin'* (and CD with the same title).[86] On two of the cuts, the blues "Salute to Benny," and "They Can't Take That Away From Me," Lester plays the clarinet, something he probably hadn't done, at least not on record, for 20 years. On initial hearing, Lester's playing is disturbing. His tone is fuzzy in the instrument's lower register (sounding much like a beginning clarinet student's), and occasionally he squeaks crossing the break between the lower and upper registers. Moreover, Prez plays very slowly. This may have been why Lewis Porter described the results of this recording session as "very disappointing."[87] Aside from Lester's poor health at the time—the years of drinking have really done a job on him—I suspect the chief reason for the technical deficiencies in his clarinet playing is that he probably hadn't touched the instrument in a long time. Much more than the saxophone, the clarinet is not an instrument that you can just pick up after years of not playing it and expect to sound technically proficient. (In particular, the embouchure required to play the clarinet well requires far greater strength and

Lester Young and Harry Edison (art by SYL).

control than that needed to play the saxophone.) But, if one can get over the initial shock and really listen to what Prez is doing, one can hear just how amazing his playing is. Many of the classic Lester Young devices are in evidence, just slowed way down: the tendency to play through or across the changes, the use of scalar riffs, the long, linear phrases that overlap the bar lines, the use of rests, the repetition of notes and of intervals, the establishing and developing of themes, the playing and displacement of motifs, the overlapping phrases, etc., etc. There is even the occasional "odd note." Above all, there is the minimalism, this time, taken to the extreme. And what feeling he gets! This stuff is beautiful. At a time when jazz has become very sophisticated, Prez is clearly giving the younger musicians a music lesson: "Less is more."

Listen, also, to the more up tempo blues cut "Romping" on which Lester plays the tenor. Here, too, Prez's tone is poor—it sounds like he has spit under his reed—and his intonation is questionable. But if you can get into it, his solo is marvelous. Among other things, it is amazing to hear how he toys with the two trumpeters as they play riffs behind him. (He does something similar on "Gigantic Blues" on the *Jazz Giants '56* album.[88]) Just by subtly altering his timing—when and how he plays, repeats, and/or alters certain phrases or even single notes—he trips them up. It's very funny, and it shows that despite his precarious health and all that has happened to him, Prez still has a great sense of humor.

Lester's playing on a date a year later in Paris, his last recording and perhaps the last time he ever played, has similar qualities. It has been titled, appropriately, *Le Dernier Message de Lester Young* (The Last Message of Lester Young).[89] By this time, Prez was so boozed up that he had given up eating, hardly ever left his hotel room, and was in constant pain. (Along with its other deleterious effects, alcohol corrodes tissues, among them the linings of the stomach and the esophagus.) And, aside from being physically very weak, he was tired, depressed, and extremely withdrawn. Despite all this, Lester's playing is tremendous, so sensitive and full of feeling, indeed, the last message of Lester Young. In many of these cuts, one can hear very clearly how Lester utilizes the original tunes in his improvisations. He sticks pretty close to the original melodies, but rearranges and regroups the notes to create striking melodic and rhythmic effects. My favorite is "I Can't Get Started," particularly the end of the last chorus and his little coda; it's so sad, as if he's saying goodbye to the world. Prez made this recording on March 4, 1959, just days before his death. It's amazing what he could still do.

At this point, I would like to summarize several of the points I have been making about Lester Young's post-war playing. The first is that many aspects of his work that might appear to be inadvertent, such as his often coarse sound or his inconsistency, were in fact intentional. This was confirmed to me by an anecdote that a friend of mine, a TV/film director and producer, once told me. On one of his jobs, he met a sound engineer who had recorded Young during the 1950s. The man said that when they were setting up the microphones, Prez told him he wanted two of them by his horn, one up near his mouthpiece, the other down by the bell. This suggests that Lester *wanted* the breathiness, the spit under the reed, and the other imperfections in his sound to be recorded (he called it the "vroom"); in other words, rather than hiding things that a conventional musician would see as flaws, Prez wanted to make sure that they were heard.

Second, much of what Lester does is a lot more difficult than it seems. It might appear to a casual listener that when he plays, he isn't doing much, that what he is doing is simple, that he's just blowing, repeating his ideas, not caring about his tone, etc. But this is definitely not the case. Much of what Prez does takes great skill. It just sounds simple, in part because what he plays makes so much sense: it sounds so apt, so logical, that it seems as if it had to be this way.

Third, many of the things post-war Lester Young was into require a great deal of thought. In improvising on, say, a ballad, where he paraphrases the original song, Lester must think simultaneously about the original tune (including the lyrics), and how his own melody relates to it. He must think about the linear continuity of his solo and its thematic/dramatic development, which requires him constantly to keep in mind what he has already played. He also has to think about the various rhythmic devices, many of them quite complicated, that he incorporates into his improvisation. And he has to think about setting up and maintaining a consistent mood. Not least, he has to make sure that it all works, however generally, harmonically. Thus, despite his emotional and physical state, post-war Prez remained an extremely thoughtful musician. Lewis Porter has described Prez as an "intuitive" player, in the sense that Lester does not theorize, that is, think theoreti-

cally/harmonically, about what he is playing. But this should not be taken to mean that Lester doesn't think while he is improvising. Prez is definitely thinking, and in a very sophisticated way.

Fourth, as this should suggest, Lester did not think about music the way most other jazz musicians did. Whereas most jazz players, particularly the modern ones, think primarily in harmonic terms, about the chord changes and what to play over them, Lester focuses on other things. The fact that he didn't think harmonically/theoretically freed his mind to focus on these other matters.

Finally, post-war Prez was into a lot of brilliant, albeit weird, stuff. But because these things were so subtle (so "deep"), because they were not "in," and because it takes careful and extended listening even to notice them, very few people heard what he was doing. Here's a guy playing his heart out, and hardly anybody was listening. This is particularly true of the critics. They may have thought he sounded crude and dated (even corny), but he was way past them.

To a considerable degree, Lester Young, like virtually all the old-style musicians, was a victim of the trendiness and faddism of jazz at a particular stage in its history. From the mid-1940s to the late 1960s, it seemed as if jazz were evolving in a consistent direction, specifically, toward ever greater theoretical sophistication and technical prowess. Jazz's evolution at the time seemed almost teleological. During this period, most of those jazz musicians who did not move in the same way, who did not "keep up" with the times, who were not "modern," were ruthlessly criticized, dismissed or just ignored by the critics. (Certainly when I was in college, among the serious jazz fans I hung out with, anything dating from before bop, even someone as great as Louis Armstrong, was definitely passe. Even to this day, one rarely hears music from the 1930s, let alone the 1920s, on the jazz radio stations.)

Prez was not the only one to suffer from this trendiness. In fact, only a few of the old-school musicians were able to survive commercially. One was Count Basie, who, as I've mentioned, disbanded his old band, put together a new one composed of younger players, and hired modern-style arrangers to write his charts. (Interestingly enough, Basie's piano playing remained pretty much the same as it had always been.) Another survivor was Louis Armstrong, who dissolved his big band and returned to playing small group New Orleans-style jazz (known by whites as "Dixieland"). Fortunately for him, Armstrong, unlike most other jazz musicians, was a showy performer, who sang as well as played, and who had a public style that many whites found congenial. As a result, he was to remain extremely popular, including among people who otherwise had little or no interest in jazz, throughout the post-war period. This popularity, along with doing "good will" tours for the State Department during the Cold War, enabled him to remain commercially successful until his death. Duke Ellington, with his composed, almost orchestral, music, also managed to remain viable. A very few others, such as Coleman Hawkins and alto saxophonist/trumpeter Benny Carter, transformed their styles and managed to keep up with the younger modern generation. But they were the exceptions.

Although Lester, thanks in large measure to Norman Granz, was able to keep playing and recording until the end of his life (although I doubt he was making Granz much money), he was a victim of the same process, in the sense that he was written off by the majority of the critics. Yet, in the 1970s and 1980s, many of the older styles began making comebacks, being revived by younger musicians, such as tenor player Scott Hamilton. Still later, swing itself experienced a popular revival. Perhaps had he lived long enough, Prez, too, might have become acceptable again, maybe even valued. Instead, he had to suffer through years of the critics' disapproval, even disdain.

Throughout his life, Lester Young was a very misunderstood man. This is reflected in the critical literature about him, even in material written by people who are sympathetic to him. For example, Lester is usually described as competing with the boppers and his other young disciples. This may be true in the sense that he was often placed in situations—such as the Jazz at the Philharmonic concerts and in other venues—where he had to play side by side with the younger players and was therefore being compared to them. (In many of these situations, particularly on very fast tunes, his playing often sounds insecure.) But if it means that Lester was trying to play bop, this judgment couldn't be more wrong. In the same vein, Prez has been pictured as copying the style and figures of the boppers. While he may occasionally have played a particularly bop-identified figure or wrote and played bop-style tunes, such

as the "Bebop Boogie," this judgment has the process backwards; the boppers had copied him. Lester has also been seen as being caught between jazz and R&B. But this assumes that Prez was trying to decide which of the two commercially-defined genres he was trying to establish himself in. Young may well have been searching for something, but I doubt he was looking to see which commercial category he was trying to accommodate to. If anything, Lester was anti-commercial; if the trends were going one way, he'd go the other. (In light of this tendency, it was very fortunate that Young had had the opportunity to hook up with Count Basie during the 1930s, for Basie, while being a great musician, also had a knack for putting together and leading commercially successful outfits. If this hadn't happened, Lester might never have gotten any recognition, while the Basie band would never have been nearly as good.) Similarly, Prez is generally seen as being the first modern jazz musician. But this is only partly true. Although he sounded more modern than most other swing musicians of his day, to my ear, he rarely sounds fully at ease in a modern setting.

Lester's attitude toward those who copied him also seems to have been misjudged. While he is on record as saying positive things about some of his disciples, I would surmise that his real opinion was negative. Jazz critic and record producer Leonard Feather described it as "paradoxical" that Prez, when was asked who his favorite tenor players were, named only one of his imitators, Stan Getz.[90] But why should this be so hard to understand? A guy gets ripped off by hordes of young players (many of whom get more recognition and make more money than he does) and he's supposed to like their playing! A man whose prime artistic value is originality is supposed to admire people who have copied him! I'm surprised he even included Getz on his list.

When he was once asked by an interviewer which of the younger tenor players he particularly liked, Lester at first insisted that he liked them all. But when he was pressed, he replied:

"They all sound the same to me. Y'dig? Because most of 'em all went to Juilliard, you dig, and whoever that teacher was, he taught 'em all the same thing. This one will start playing it, this one will pick it up and play the same thing. In my mind, where's the individual who's gonna come out and play for himself? Like, if you have thirteen people and the teacher teach all thirteen of them, you mean to tell me out of thirteen he can't get *one* individual?[91]

Probably most important, Lester's post-war work as a whole has been profoundly misunderstood. Yet, Prez may have intended this, at least in part. Many of those facets of his playing that have been seen as defects might have had another purpose beyond the ones I've discussed. They may have been meant to protect himself from the Philistines, from the shallow, "trendy" people who chase the latest fads. I suspect that his musical eccentricities, like his personal ones, were designed to keep the vultures away: first and foremost, those players who could think of nothing better to do than to copy him; and secondly, those critics who analyzed his playing to death, picking it apart in order to put it down. What to do? Answer: play in a way that no one will copy and that will totally befuddle the critics.

But Lester was only partially successful in this attempt at self-protection. Despite what some have written, specifically, that the younger generation had copied Prez's style from the 1930s and mid-'40s, this is not entirely the case. Lester's post-war playing was also imitated. Listen to Stan Getz and Gerry Mulligan playing "Let's Fall In Love, "from the 1956 LP, *Stan Getz Meets Gerry Mulligan*,[92] and compare that with Young's version from 1950 (on the LP, *Lester Swings*). Getz' and Mulligan's phrasing of the tune is a carbon copy of Lester's. (They also sound like carbon copies of each other: On one side of the album, Getz and Mulligan play their own instruments; on the other side, they switch, and I can hardly tell the difference.) Listen also to Paul Quinichette. His tone and phrasing are obvious imitations of post-war Prez.

Lester was also imitated in the very songs he played. Drummer Jo Jones remembers:

"Another thing about Lester is his choice of tunes. He's often a year or a year and a half ahead of everybody else. He catches something on the radio he likes, and he starts playing it—like 'How High the Moon.' He and Marlowe Morris were playing it at Minton's before it became so widely popular in jazz. He was the one who first started playing 'Polka Dots and Moonbeams' and 'Foggy Day' again. He finds things that have meaning to him, and soon, other people are playing or singing them again."[93]

Lester was more successful in putting off the critical Establishment; very few of them picked up on what he was into. But unfortunately, the critics are often career makers and breakers, and by alienating them, Prez hurt himself commercially. He thus put himself in an unenviable and ultimately unviable position. Increasingly eccentric, both personally and musically, he made it virtually inevitable that he would be misunderstood. His stance, I suspect, also led to severe internal conflicts. On the one hand, he was chagrined, if not bitter, over his poor reception by the critical mainstream, over the fact that he had not received the recognition he deserved (and that none of his imitators had ever thanked him). On the other, he was, in many ways, thumbing his nose at those critics, telling them where to go, what to do with their criticism. Such an emotional conflict could only have exacerbated his depression.

Those who promote the standard judgments of Lester Young misread what the man was about. Lester Young is neither a modern nor a swing musician. He plays neither jazz nor R&B. His playing sounds modern in the 1930s and archaic in the 1950s. He's an instrumentalist who phrases like a singer, a jazz musician who's into melody rather than harmony, at a time when harmony is in and melody is out.[94] He's a jazz player who's into feeling, when jazz has become very technical. ("I don't like to read music," he once said, "just soul.") A brilliant amalgamation of bizarre affectations and brutal honesty, Lester Young was beyond the traditional categories; he was his own category, sui generis.

So what was this category, what was the new and evolving self-conception that Lester developed in the post-war period? I see post-war Prez as a kind of wandering minstrel, a troubador, a bluesman, singing on his horn, traveling around, relating what he's seen, what he's experienced, and what he thinks, and especially, what he feels, about it. (When I hear some of the great blues harmonica players, such as Sonny Boy Williamson, play, I think of Lester. Who influenced whom?) And just as you don't want a bluesman to sound pure, refined, and polished, you don't get that in post-war Prez, Instead, you get the grit, the dust, and the grime of the road, the insides of jails he's seen, the beatings he's received. He's not just telling little stories on his horn, as he described Frankie Trumbauer. He's telling *his* story, the story of his life. It may not always be pretty, but it's him.

And in telling his story, Lester Young also offered his opinion of American society of the time—how it treated musicians, how it treated Black people, how it treated all those who were not rich and powerful. Post-war Prez was a one-man rebellion against the crassness of the music business and of the United States as a whole, a personal resistance movement against the country's commercialism, its shallowness, its faddism, its racism, its unjustness, and its brutality. And this in an era when patriotism was at an all-time high, when everything American was being praised to the skies, and when those who thought otherwise were being marginalized, intimidated, jailed, or killed. Small wonder he suffered the fate he did.

It was not just musically that Prez expressed his counter-cultural attitudes. He was often criticized for hiring young, immature players for his combos, for giving them too much time to solo, and for sharing the pay from the jobs equally with them. While these groups were often poorly received by the critics (criticized, among other reasons, for being "poorly integrated"), they always swung, and it's clear from the live material that everybody—musicians, dancers, and listeners—always had a great time. When Lester traveled with Jazz at the Philharmonic, he wouldn't stay with the rest of the troupe at their hotel, but would go off to a Black-owned establishment in the local Black community. He often refused to fight with nightclub owners and promoters who cheated him. He gave away his money and opened his home to those musicians who needed help. In these and other actions, Lester revealed a spirituality, a generosity, and a radical egalitarianism that were also quite unusual for the times (or any time). He took many young bop players under his wing—the number of modern jazz musicians who played with Prez is large—pianists Junior Mance, Freddy Jefferson, Joe Albany, Dodo Marmarosa, Gildo Mahones, Hank Jones, John Lewis, Horace Silver, Argonne Thornton/Sadik Hakim, trumpeters Jesse Drakes, Howard McGhee, Shorty McConnell, and Idress Suleiman, and drummers Connie Kay and Roy Haynes. He gave them exposure (many went on to far greater fame and fortune than he), showed them the ropes, and gave them ample time to solo, even if it increased the critics' distaste for his playing.

He once said:

"In fact, sometimes I get bawled out by people who want to hear me play more, but I believe that if you're paying a man to play,

and if that man is on the bandstand and can play, he should get a chance to tell his story."[95]

I see Prez as a kind of anarchist—a true individualist—a kind, generous man, who gave freely of his time, his money, his knowledge, and his beautiful music, and who desired only that each person might have the space to express himself—to do his own thing—and in exchange to be allowed his own. It was unfortunate that it was so difficult for him to achieve this.

As Jo Jones put it:

"Lester was too tender, he was too tender. He just didn't like to see nobody, not one human being, mistreat another human being."[96]

John Lewis said the same thing differently:

"Lester is an extremely gentle, kind, considerate person. He's always concerned about the underdog. He always want to help someone."[97]

A young woman from Chicago who knew Young remembered:

"About Lester, once I had made known to him my own personal attitudes on various things, he would take it into consideration, not by strictly conforming but by not pressing *his* divergent attitude on these things. This fell into his overall philosophy that he expressed as 'to each his own.' I don't recall that he ever forcefully tried to talk me—or anyone that I observed—into anything or out of anything."[98]

Lester himself said:

"What you do is your business, what I do is my business."[99]

Although Lester Young had little formal education, he was a true philosopher. He may not have been adept at the art of survival, especially in the dog-eat-dog music business, but he knew what he was about. This is revealed in a conversation he had with Willie Jones, a drummer who worked with him in the last two years of his life:

"You have good technique, Lady Jones, but what's your story?" said Young. "What do you mean?" asked Jones. Lester goes on, "I mean, a musician is a philosopher and a scientist, and he uses the science of music to project the particular philosophy he subscribes to, so you have good technique, but what's your story?"[100]

Prez also told Jones: "Go down to the audience, see what the plumber is thinking, what the carpenter is thinking, so when you go up on stage you can help tell their story."[101]

It takes great strength to stand against the prevailing wind. And for a while, Lester had that strength. But ultimately, the post-war scene wore him out. Along with the fact that he had been so copied and that his playing had been so poorly received by the critics, he was particularly bothered by racism, by segregation, by the various racial slights he (and all Black people) experienced.

In an interview Young gave in France shortly before he died, he commented, "They want everybody who's a Negro to be an Uncle Tom, or Uncle Remus, or Uncle Sam—and I can't make it.... But it's the same all over, you dig? It's fight for your life, that's all. Until death do we part, you got it made."[102]

He was also disturbed by the racist nature of the popular music business, in which Blacks are often the innovators, while others, usually white, copy the pioneers, make the innovations palatable to white people, market the product, and wind up with the fame and/or the fortune. Lester was especially irked by the fact that many of his imitators (Stan Getz and Paul Desmond?) were getting more work, were making much more money, and were so much better known than he was.

Drummer Connie Kay, who, like John Lewis, later became well-known as a member of the modern Jazz Quartet, commented:

"Was Lester depressed? Lester was depressed like all black musicians in the States that are talented and not appreciated, man. If you're not strong enough, it'll get to you. You go around the world and see how other artists are appreciated and accepted and you wonder. Here's a guy who is talented, who's considered a genius, and what is he getting out of it? He's got to work like a dog to keep two cents in his pocket and feed his family and keep a roof over this head. And you see people less talented, and they're out there making it."[103]

During one of his hospitalizations during the 1950s, Lester was warned that if he didn't stop drinking he would die. But he kept at it; he seemed to have lost the will to live. Although he was married, had children, and was living in a modest house in Queens, NY, in early 1958 he moved out and got a room at the Alvin Hotel on New York's 52nd Street, across the street from the jazz club, Birdland. (Mary, his wife at the time, believed he wanted to be where the action was.) There he spent his days with Elaine Swain, drinking, listening to records, and waving to his friends, real and imaginary, that he saw on the street. Ms. Swain and several other acquaintances tried to revive his interest in life—to dilute his booze, convince him to eat, and get him playing again. He perked up for a few months, signed with a new record company, and got some more work. But these efforts ultimately failed. After returning from his last gig in Paris, Lester Young, the President of the Tenor Saxophone, died on March 15, 1959, at the age of 49, largely forgotten by the jazz world to which he had contributed so much.

This is the tragedy of Lester Young. But what is the triumph I alluded to in the title of my piece? As I see it, Prez's triumph rests in the fact that, despite everything he went through, despite all his heartache and suffering, he never succumbed artistically. To the end, he stood up against the trends, against the fads, against the prevailing opinion, against the critics. He stood up for himself, for the right—the duty—to be original, to be his own person artistically, and, therefore, for everybody's right to be who and what one is. And he stood up for the fundamental human values in music; beauty, swing, honesty, feeling, communication. To me, Prez is a powerful example of the will to resist, and to represent, through this resistance, an alternative way of living. Along with his incredible music, that is a great triumph, and I love and admire him for it.

Of all the wise things Lester Young was heard to have said, this might be his epitaph:

"IT'S GOT TO BE SWEETNESS, MAN, YOU DIG? SWEETNESS CAN BE FUNKY, FILTHY, OR ANYTHING. BUT WHICH PART DO YOU WANT?"[104]

Postscript:

In writing this piece, I am not really trying to convince anybody that what I say about Lester Young is true. I merely hope to get a few people (maybe just one person) to really listen to his post-war work, to try to get into it, and hear what he's doing. One can't listen to Lester the way you listen to other jazz musicians. You have to listen very carefully or you won't get anything at all. The question is not how Prez sounds in terms of traditional criteria; the issue is: Do you get it? Does he speak to you? He speaks to me.

NOTES

1. Lester Young, in an interview with Francois Postiff, *Jazz Hot* (Paris) 142, April 1959, pp. 11-13, new transcription by Postif and Lewis Porter, in Lewis Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London, 1991, p. 189.

2. Michael Brooks, notes to Volume 5 of Columbia Records' LP compilation of Young's recordings with Count Basie, *Lester Young-Volume 5, Prez/Evening Of A Basie-Ite* Columbia 34849

3. Steve Voce, notes to the LP, *Coleman Hawkins-Lester Young*, Spotlite SPJ 119.

4. Whitney Balliett, "Pres," *The New Yorker*, February 23, 1981, pp. 90-100, reprinted in *American Musicians: Fifty-Six Portraits In Jazz*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, pp. 234-240, reprinted in Lewis Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 75.

5. Raymond Horrick, *Count Basie And His Orchestra*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1957, reprinted by Negro Universities Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1971, quoted in "Reconsiderations," by H. A. Woodfin, originally published in *Jazz Review*, July 1959, reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 302.

6. Don Heckman, "Pres and Hawk: Saxophone Fountainheads," Downbeat, January 3, 1963, pp. 20-22, reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit, pp. 262-3.

7. *Benny Goodman/The Famous 1938 Jazz Concert, Volumes 1*,2&3, Columbia Records, CL 814, CL 815, CL 816.

8. *Lady Day/Billie Holiday*, Columbia Records, CL 637.

9. *The Immortal Lester Young*, Savoy Record Co., MG 12068. This material is available on CD, *Blue Lester/Lester Young*, Dennon Records/Nippon Columbia Co. Ltd., SV-0112, LC 0337.

10. *Charlie Parker/Lester Young: An Historical Meeting At The Summit*, CP/Parker Records, Apex Record Corporation, PLP 828.

11. *Count Basie/Super Chief*, Columbia Records/CBS, G 31224.

12. Available on CD, misleadingly titled, *Lester Young Trio*, Verve 314 521 650-2.

13. *Lester Young/Pres And Teddy And Oscar*, Verve, VE-2-2502, manufactured and distributed by Polydor, Inc. This material is available on two CDs: *Lester Young With The Oscar Peterson Trio*, Verve/Polygram Records, Inc., 31452 14512; *Pres And Teddy/ The Lester Young-Teddy Wilson Quartet,* Verve/Polygram Records, Inc., 422-831270-2.

14. *Pres/Prez/Lester Young In Washington, D.C. 1956*, Pablo Records: Volume I 2308-219; Volume II 2308-225; Volume III 2308-228; Volume IV 2308-230. This plus additional material is available on 5 CDs: *Lester Young In Washington, D.C., 1956*, Volumes 1-5, Pablo Records/Fantasy, Inc. I do not have the complete set. I have one CD that has most, but not all, of the material from Volume I, plus some cuts from the other volumes: Pablo/Warner Music France/Fantasy, Inc., 06301 54192. I do have the other four volumes: Pablo Records/Fantasy, Inc: Volume II 25218-6881-2; Volume III 25218-6901-2; Volume IV 25218-6963-2; Volume V 25218-6993-2.

15. Potts tells the story in his notes to the first volume of the set, *Pres/Lester Young In Washington, D.C., 1956*, ibid.

16. Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, Oxford University Press, cited in Williams' notes to the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz,* Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC., 1973, p. 28.

17. Bill Simon, notes to the LP, *Count Basie At Newport*, Verve, UMV 2619. The material on this LP, plus additional cuts with the Basie band without Young, is available on CD: Verve/Polygram Records, Inc., 1779-44994-2.

18. *Coleman Hawkins/Body And Soul*, RCA Victor Vintage Series, LPV-501.

19. Notes to the 2-LP compilation, *Lester Swings*, Verve, VE-2-2516. The material on these LPs is available on two CDs: The *Lester Young Trio*, op. cit.; and *President/Lester Young/The Complete 1936-1951 Small Group Sessions*, Volume 5, 1949-1951.

20. Quoted in Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth Of Bebop*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1997, p. 112.

21. Quoted in Nat Hentoff, "Lester Young," in *The Jazz Makers,* ed. Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, Rinehart and Co., New York, 1957, pp. 243-275, reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 71.

22. Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, op. cit., cited in Williams' notes to the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, op. cit., p. 28.

23. Lee Young, interview with Patricia Willard, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 36.

24. Ross Russell, *Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker*, Quartet Books, New York, 1972, pp. 90-91, in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 271.

25. Dave Brubeck and Lee Konitz, "A Conversation with Two Jazz Musicians," *Northwest Review* 1, no. 3, Spring 1958, p. 48. This solo—"Shoe Shine Boy" mm. 23-24 of Lester's second chorus—turns out to be the source of the first phrase of "Ornithology" (an original and often played tune by Parker—RT). Notes to Louis Gottlieb, "Why So Sad, Pres?", *Jazz: A Quarterly Of American Music*, ed. Ralph Gleason, no. 3, Summer 1959, pp. 185-196. Reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 223.

26. Leonard Feather, "Prez," *From Satchmo to Miles*, Stein and Day Publishers, New York, 1972, p.121.

27. For an excellent discussion of Young's influence on the Beat

Generation of the 1950s, see Douglas Henry Daniels, *Lester Leaps In, The Life and Times of Lester "Pres" Young*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2002, pp. 377-380.

28. Alan Morrison, "You Got to Be Original, Man," *Jazz Record*, July 1946, pp. 8-9, quoted in Frank Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight for Your Life, The Story of Lester Young*, Praeger Publishers, New York, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1990, pp. 142.

29. Notes to the LP anthology, *Lester Young/Pres, The Complete Savoy Recordings*, Arista Records, SJL 2202.

30. Nat Hentoff, "Lester Young," in *The Jazz Makers*, ed. Nat Hentoff and Nat Shapiro, op. cit., in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 163.

31. This material is available on *Lester Young/Pres, The Complete Savoy Recordings*, op. cit., and on CD: *Lester Young/The Super Sessions*, Charly Records, Ltd., Le Jazz CD 36, LC 8477.

32. This material is available on CD: *Lester Young/Jammin' The Blues*, Definitive Records, DRCD 11117.

33. CD: *Lester Young Trio*, op. cit.

34. *Mean To Me/Lester Young*, Verve VE-2-2538. This material, along with a lot of other stuff, is available on CD: *Lester Young 6tet/7tet*, Lone Hill Jazz, LHJ 10187. Judging from the problems with his intonation, the difficulty he seems to have on the very up tempo blues, and the oddness of his musical ideas, I suspect Prez was very high when he made these recordings. (Booze has a deleterious effect on your coordination, while pot tends to send you to weird places, idea-wise.) He would enter the hospital—probably to get himself "dried out"—shortly afterward. Although it took me some time to appreciate Lester's playing on this date, I really enjoy it now.

35. Buchmann-Moller, in *You Just Fight for Your Life,* suggests that this decline in technical proficiency resulted from Young's syphilis, which may not have been treated while he was in the army or afterward. There is also reason to believe that the beatings he may have received while serving time in the detention barracks may have affected his coordination. Bassist Gene Ramey suggests this. (See note 38, below.) I believe Lester's extraordinary level of alcohol consumption plus his lack of practicing are sufficient to explain it.

36. This account is based mostly on Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight for Your Life,* op. cit., pp. 117-130, and on Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, op. cit., pp. 250-264.

37. Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, op. cit., pp. 262-263, and Leonard Feather's notes to the 2-LP set, *Lester Young/The Aladdin Sessions,* Blue Note Re-Issue Series, United Artists Music and Record Group, Inc./ BN-LA456-H2. This, plus additional material, is available on CD: *The Complete Aladdin Recordings of Lester Young*, Blue Note/Capitol Records, Inc., 2438-32787-2.

38. Bassist Gene Ramey, interview with Sterlin Holmesly, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas; bassist Rodney Richardson, interview with Dale Smoak, "Rodney Richardson: Interview—Part One," *Cadence*, November 1989, p. 17, in Daniels, op. cit., p. 263.

39. Alan Morrison, "You Got to Be Original, Man," *Jazz Record*, July 1946, p. 9, in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight for Your Life,* op. cit., p. 128.

40. Nat Hentoff, "Pres," interview with Lester Young in *Downbeat*, March 7, 1956, pp. 9-11, reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., pp. 161-162

41. Bill Simon, notes to the LP, *Count Basie at Newport*, op. cit., UMV 2619

42. Reissued on CD: *Lester Young Trio*, op. cit.

43. Response to a question put by Allan Morrison of *Ebony* magazine, quoted in Hentoff, "Lester Young," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 73.

44. And there are things to be said. On the positive side, Granz played a major role in integrating jazz during this period. He insisted that his touring troupes be racially mixed and that Black and white musicians stay at the same hotel. On the other hand, Granz never showed much imagination in the formats of either his traveling concerts or his recording of Young. At the very least, an LP of Prez doing just ballads would have been great, but it was never done. Granz also never recorded Lester with strings, as he

had Charlie Parker, despite the fact that Lester wanted to be recorded in that type of setting.

45. *Pres and Teddy/The Lester Young-Teddy Wilson Quartet*, op. cit.

46. *Mean to Me/Lester Young*, op. cit., *Lester Young 6tet/7tet*, op. cit.

47. *Lester Young/Roy Eldridge/ The Jazz Giants '56*, Verve, VE-1-2527. This material is available on CD: *Lester Young/The Jazz Giants,* Verve/Polygram Records, Inc., 42282-56722.

48. This is available on the 3-CD set: *Count Basie/The Original Decca Recordings*, MCA Records, Inc./GRP Records, Inc., 11105-0611-2.

49. *Lester Swings*, Verve 314 547 772-2. This is not the same compilation as the LP with the same title. Incidentally, I think one of the tunes on the CD is misidentified. The cut may have started at as a blues, but it seems to morph into "Jeepers Creepers."

50. Quoted in Hentoff, "Lester Young," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 64.

51. Two-LP set, *Bird And Pres: The '46 Concerts*, Verve VE-2-2518.

52. Hentoff, "Lester Young," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 64.

53. Hentoff, "Pres," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 162.

54. *Lester Swings*, VE-2-2516, op. cit.

55. *Lester Young/The Aladdin Sessions*, op. cit.

56. *Pres Is Blue*, CP/Parker Records, Apex Record Corporation, PLP-405-S.

57. Lewis Porter, *Lester Young,* Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1985.

58. *Lester Young in Washington, D.C., 1956*, Volumes II and IV, op. cit.

59. *Lester Young/Pres,* Everest Records, FS 287. This cut is available on CD: *Lester Young/Lester Leaps In*, Just Jazz/Passport International Productions of CA, Inc., 01050-10592.

60. I do not have this cut on CD.

61. André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1956.

62. *Lester Young/Jumpin' at the Savoy Ballroom*, Autofidelity Enterprises, AFE 3-8. Some of this material is available on the CD: *Lester Young/Lester Leaps In*, op. cit.

63. *Lester Young/Pres In Europe*, HighNote Records, Inc., (originally released on Onyx Records), HCD 7054.

64. This cut is available on the CD, *Lester Young/Lester Leaps In*, op. cit.

65. *Masters of Jazz, Volume 7*, Storyville SLP-4107. This material is available on CD: *Lester Young/ Masters of Jazz, Volume 7*, Storyville, 17101-41072.

66. *Lester Young/Pres Lives!*, Arista Records, Inc., SJL 1109, also available on CD, "*The Pres/Lester Young,*" Jazz Immortal Series, Volume Two, SV-0180.

67. *Lester Young in Washington*, D.C., 1956, Volume II, op. cit.

68. Balliett, op. cit., in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

69. *Pres And Teddy/ The Lester Young-Teddy Wilson Quartet,* op. cit.

70. Notes to the LP, *Laughin' To Keep From Cryin'*, Verve Records/Polydor, UMV2694. The musical material and the original notes are available on a CD with the same title, Verve/Polygram Records, Inc., 31454-33012

71. *Lester Young/Jumpin' at the Savoy Ballroom*, op. cit. I do not have these cuts on CD.

72. LP: *Lester Swings*, op. cit., CD: *President/Lester Young/The Complete 1936-1951 Small Group Sessions*,

Volume 5, 1949-1951, op. cit.

73. Interview with Francois Postif, op. cit., in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 179.

74. CD: *Lester Young Trio*, op. cit.

75. LP: *Lester Young/Pres Lives*, SJL 1109, op. cit.; CD: *The Pres/Lester Young*, op. cit., SV-0180.

76. *Mean to Me/Lester Young,* op. cit., *Lester Young 6tet7tet*.

77. *Pres and Teddy/The Lester Young-Teddy Wilson Quartet*, op. cit.,

78. *Charlie Parker/Lester Young: An Historical Meeting at The Summit*, op. cit.

79. Billie Holiday, quoted in *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, ed. Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, Rinehart & Co., New York, 1955, p. 310, in Hentoff, "Lester Young," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 56.

80. LP/CD: *Count Basie at Newport*, op. cit.

81. This is available on CD: *This Is Jazz 11/Count Basie*, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc., 7464-64966-2.

82. *Count Basie/The Complete Decca Recordings*, op. cit.

83. LP: *Count Basie/Super Chief*, op. cit. I don't have this on CD.

84. For an earlier version, see: *Count Basie/The Complete Decca Recordings*, op. cit.

85. Dave Gelly, *Lester Young*, originally published in the UK by Spellmount Ltd., Tunbridge Wells, Kent, 1984, first published in the US by Hippocrene Books, Inc., New York, 1984, p. 73-74.

86. LP/CD: *Laughin' to Keep From Cryin'*, op. cit.

87. *Lester Young*, op. cit., p. 28.

88. LP: *Lester Young/Roy Eldridge/The Jazz Giants '56*, op. cit. CD: *The Jazz Giants,* op. cit.

89. *Le Dernier Message de Lester Young,* Gitanes Jazz Productions/Universal Music, S.A. France, 31458-95572. Reissue of the Verve LP 8378, Universal Music, S.A., France.

90. Leonard Feather, notes to the LP: *Lester Young/The Aladdin Sessions*, op. cit. The original notes are included with the CD: *The Complete Aladdin Records of Lester Young,* op. cit.

91. Interview with Chris Albertson, op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 170. There is an anecdote about Lester Young on his last tour with Jazz at the Philharmonic, recounted by Buchmann-Moller, that is relevant here:

While the bus was on its way to Detroit from Willow Run airport, most of the musicians tried to take a nap during the hour's journey. Lester was catnapping in an aisle seat when Sonny Stitt took out his saxophone and began walking up and down the aisle playing all his licks. "Nobody paid any attention to him," Stan Getz recalls "so finally he went over to Lester and said, 'Hey, Prez, whadda you think of that?' Prez, his eyes half closed, said, 'Yes, Lady Stitt, but can you sing me a song?' " (Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight for Your Life,* op. cit., p. 199).

92. *Stan Getz Meets Gerry Mulligan*, Verve, V/V6-8535.

93. Hentoff, "Lester Young," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 67.

94. Beginning at some point in the post-war period, Lester began listening almost exclusively to pop vocalists; he was a big fan of Frank Sinatra and Jo Stafford.

95. Hentoff, "Pres," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, p. 161.

96. Interview with Milt Hinton, January 15, 1973, Jazz Oral History Project, in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight for Your Life,* op. cit., p. 52.

97. Hentoff, "Lester Young," op. cit., reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 49.

98. Hentoff, "Lester Young," ibid. p. 59.

99. Interview with Francois Postif, op.cit., in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 188.

100. Interview with Willie Jones, New York, November 16, 1985, in Buchmann-Moller, *You Just Fight for Your Life,* op. cit., p. 193.

101. Interview with Willie Jones, in Buchmann-Moller, ibid., p. 212.

102. Interview with Francois Postif, op. cit., in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 181.

103. Graham Colombe, "Presidents Ain't What They used to Be," originally published in *Into Jazz*, London, April 1974, pp. 8-10, reprinted in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 97.

104. Interview with Francois Postif, op. cit., in Porter, *A Lester Young Reader*, op. cit., p. 189.