

This is a pirated album, released in Spain: Art Pepper live at the jazz showcase in Chicago 1977. *With Willie Pickens, Steve Rodby, Wilbur Campbell. While I can't afford to re-issue it here as a cd, I figure it's worth releasing on the basis of some lovely performances.*

This was recorded in '77 in the middle of Art's East Coast Tour, sponsored by John Snyder. The tour ended in NYC, when the earthshaking Vanguard recordings were made with George Cables, George Mraz, and Elvin Jones. In the meantime, Art played here and there with pickup bands. This one one of them.

As I recall, Art didn't get along with Willie Pickens at all. I don't know why, I just remember Art grumbling about him. And when I listen to the first track, Peppercorn, I can certainly hear a lack of sympathy on Willie's part. Again, I don't know why. On the other hand, Art liked Wilbur Campbell a lot, and he just LOVED Steve Rodby -- who might have still been in his teens at this time. He liked Rodby so much, in fact, he brought him to New York for the Vanguard date. It was Elvin who complained. He said

that Rodby was great, but much too green for what was about to happen. At the last minute George Mraz, an absolute genius in every way and quite mature enough for Elvin or anybody else, stepped in, read the hardest charts, and dealt philosophically with Art's total insanity and brilliance.

One more thing. Why so many ballads? Art usually played one ballad a night. On this night, why so many? A mystery. And one more comment. This version of "My Laurie" is nice, but the one Art and his band played in Yamagata blows it away. Mainly because the "bluesish" stuff mentioned in the liner wasn't bluesish enough. In fact the total set lacks funk. But it doesn't lack for beauty! The Trip is marvelous. Imagination is wonderful. Funny Valentine is nice, too, but cuts out early. Maybe the tape ran out?

Anyway, here's the absolutely complete liner that was written by Ricky Cohen:

Art Pepper at the Jazz Showcase in Chicago, 1977
With Willie Pickens, Steve Rodby, Wilbur Campbell
Liner Note by Ricky Cohen

"In '76 I'd made another album for Contemporary. The Trip. The '75 album, Living Legend, was excellent, and I thought, after that, the next album couldn't possibly be as good. It was even better. It got a lot of praise. It's one of my favorite albums of all time, and it pushed me into the limelight a little bit. I got an offer to tour the East Coast. I'd never toured before as an individual. Here I was in my fifties, and I'd finally made it. I was invited to perform at the Newport Festival. I was scared, so I didn't carry any coke with me. I played in Toronto for a week, then New York. On the last day of my appearance at the Village Vanguard, a friend, to my surprise, offered me a taste of coke. I had the money, so I decided I'd use a little bit during the tour. Pretty soon I was staying up all night long, writing music in the toilets of our hotel rooms, sitting on the tile floor, sniffing coke.

"By the time I got to Chicago, I was really strung out on coke. I asked around at the methadone program there if anyone knew a connection. We had rented a car, so I drove all over the city looking for some way to score. I wound up in an industrial area near a methadone clinic, and I saw a black guy and his old lady in an old, beat car. They were stalled or something. I drove over and introduced myself. I asked them if I could help them out. I said, 'You wouldn't know where I could get any coke?' The guy said, 'Yeah'. They took me to an old boarded up building in the black ghetto of Chicago. It was filthy, no running water. We shot the coke instead of sniffing it. I got an outfit.

We went to Boston and Dayton and back to New York. Les Koenig came out from L.A. to record me, three nights, live at the Village Vanguard ... I'd had no sleep in days, hadn't been eating. I'd lost about twenty pounds on this trip. None of my clothes fit me. I shot the rest of my coke, and they practically carried me to the Village Vanguard for the final night of recording!" -- ART PEPPER, from his autobiography Straight Life.

Art Pepper's musical comeback of the mid-'70s remains one of the most successful in jazz history. Despite serving time

in prison and suffering from serious health problems as a result of his heroin addiction, Pepper overcame tremendous obstacles and a decade of musical inactivity. He went on to produce numerous jazz masterpieces. The effects of his erratic living and substance abuse had caught up to him at the beginning of 1969 when he became seriously ill. Pepper entered the Synanon rehabilitation center later that year and would remain there until 1971. It was there that he met his wife Laurie, who would help him reconstruct his life. The saxophonist underwent a successful methadone treatment in 1975 (though he never did become drug free), which led to the prolific final stage of his career (1975-1982). His later work can be characterized by an increased musical maturity and emotional depth. Art Pepper would pass away from liver disease among other ailments on June 15, 1982, at the age of 56. This CD contains a previously unreleased concert recording at the legendary Jazz Showcase club in Chicago, on July 16, 1977. The concert formed part of Pepper's tour of the Northeast during June and July 1977. Record Producer John Snyder promoted and sponsored Pepper's tour, which began in Toronto, Canada, where he was recorded live at the Bourbon Street Club on June 16 (backed by pianist Bernie Senensky, bassist Dave Piltch and drummer Terry Clarke). Pepper then performed in New York at the 1977 Newport Jazz Festival, on June 27 (although some discographies state that this was privately recorded, it has never surfaced). He also performed at New York's Village Vanguard at the end of June, where he would make his legendary recordings a month later (on the nights of July 28-30, backed by pianist George Cables, bassist George Mraz and drummer Elvin 'Jones'). This earlier Village Vanguard performance marked Pepper's very first gig at a New York club as a leader! (He had previously performed in New York in 1969, as a sideman in Buddy Rich's big band.) The next stop on the tour was Chicago.

The Jazz Showcase is widely regarded as the most prestigious jazz club in Chicago. Owner Joe Segal began presenting jazz shows at Roosevelt University in the mid-'40s. He founded the Jazz Showcase club in 1947, and it has served as a Windy City mainstay for top tier jazz musicians for generations. Ahmad Jamal recorded his trio album *Chicago Revisited* at the club in 1992. The Jazz Showcase has changed locations 10 times in its six-plus decades of existence. It relocated again in 2008 to Dearborn Station, where it is currently located.

As stated in the excerpt from Pepper's autobiography, this was his first tour as a single, and the band would change from city to city. The Chicago performance featured three of the city's finest musicians: pianist Willie Pickens, bassist Steve Rodby and drummer Wilbur Campbell. The Jazz Showcase performance marks the only time that Pepper would ever record with any of these musicians. Pianist Willie Pickens was born into a musical family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His mother was an amateur pianist, who encouraged him to begin formal study of the instrument. He earned a teacher's certificate from the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in 1954, and received

a B.S. in Music Education at the University of Wisconsin in 1958. He then moved to Chicago, where he was quickly accepted among the city's top musicians.

"I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When I graduated [from the University of Wisconsin] in 1958, there was a bass player [from Milwaukee] by the name of Connie Milano. He came over to Chicago, and he had a job, and he called me and asked me if I'd like to join him ... at a place called The Domino. And after that job folded I stayed around here, because the atmosphere was really good musically. We had people like Muhal Richard Abrams, we had a pianist by the name of Billy Green, we had Jodie Christian. We had John Young, we had Ira Sullivan, Nicky Hill, Wilbur Campbell. So it was quite an exciting scene here. The musicians were really warm and welcoming to me. I wasn't planning on staying in Chicago, I was headed towards New York, but the scene was just so inviting, so I stayed around!"

- Willie Pickens

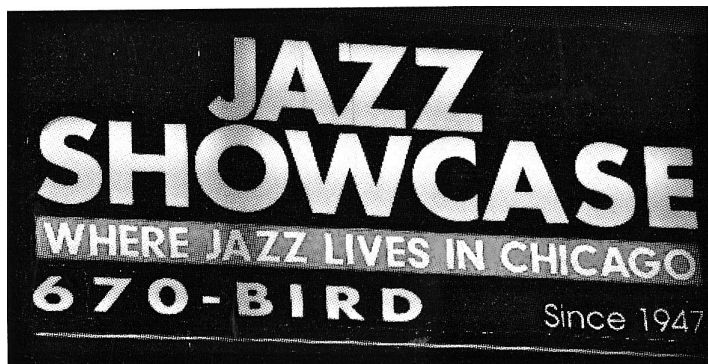
Pickens' debut recordings were made as a sideman for tenor saxophonist Eddie Harris on January 17, 1961, for the popular album *Exodus to Jazz*. Over the next two decades, Willie's live appearances would be limited to the midwest, due to his budding career as a jazz educator. Apart from numerous studio dates with Eddie Harris, Pickens would also record with Bunky Green, E. Parker McDougal, Buddy DeFranco and Vernel Fournier, during the '60s and '70s. He also performed with Sammy Davis Jr., Quincy Jones, and Roberta Flack to name a few. During the '80s he recorded with Billy Mitchell and Cleveland Eaton, among others, and made his first album as a leader in 1987, titled *It's About Time!* (which features Wilbur Campbell on two tracks).

He joined The Elvin Jones Jazz Machine in 1990, where he participated on the albums *In Europe*, *Going Home* and *It Don't Mean a Thing*. Pickens is 78-years old at this writing and shows no sign of slowing down. He remains one of the most respected and in-demand pianists in Chicago.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Pepper's 1977 Jazz Showcase performance is the presence of Steve Rodby who would gain fame as the bassist of Pat Metheny's group. This previously unreleased concert marks one of Rodby's first - if not his very first - known recordings. According to the Tom Lord discography, Rodby's debut recording was as the sideman in an octet under the leadership of keyboard player Les Hooper in Chicago circa 1977. The next entry in his discography was a live concert recording at Villa Park, Illinois, during the summer of 1977. The show featured a 19-piece band under the leadership of trombonist Phil Wilson.

Whether or not this Chicago performance was Rodby's very first recording, it is certainly his first known recording within a small band setting.

"My big break came when the great bass player Rufus Reid, who played in the house band at the Jazz Showcase, moved to New York, so the gig was up for grabs. The owner of the club seemed to like the way I played, and I ended up playing five nights, three sets a night with all these amazing visiting musicians like Milt Jackson, Sonny Stitt and Joe Henderson. The drummer in the house band



had played with Charlie Parker and the pianists were all 30 years older than me and knew so much about music. And here I was this nerdy college kid with a classical background and all I had going for me was my ear and a feel."

Rodby grew up in Joliet, Illinois. His father was a choir director and composer. By the age of 10, Steve would play bass (by ear) while his father played guitar. He studied classical bass with Warren Benfield of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and jazz under the tutelage of Rufus Reid, all this while attending Northwestern University. Shortly after graduating, Rodby received a call from his friend guitarist Pat Metheny, who he had met at a band camp in his youth. Metheny was searching for a new bassist and Rodby was hired during his first audition. He has since played on all of the Pat Metheny Group albums from 1980 on, co-produced a number of the band's albums, and won 10 Grammy Awards with the group. Apart from Metheny, he has recorded with Monty Alexander, Ramsey Lewis, Simon & Bard, Paul McCandless, Chuck Mangione, Fareed Haque, and Lyle Mays, among others. He has also toured with Tony Bennett and Joe Henderson. Rodby is 55-years old at this writing and is musically active in numerous capacities. In his own words, "I hope to make music forever. Teaching, playing, producing ... music's what I'm all about!"

In Steve Rodby's earlier quote discussing his big break in becoming the house bassist for the Jazz Showcase, he was probably talking about Wilbur Campbell when he stated, 'the drummer in the house band had played with Charlie Parker!' Campbell was the most frequently used drummer at the Jazz Showcase, which received regular visits from the likes of Charlie Parker, Art Blakey, Miles Davis, Sonny Stitt, and J.J. Johnson among others. The drummer was also old friends with Jazz Showcase owner Joe Segal, dating back to Segal's earliest days booking bands at Roosevelt University. Campbell was also widely requested by visiting musicians who had either worked with him before or heard of his skills through the musicians' grapevine.

"When Wilbur Campbell would play the drums, he would fill up his solos like somebody was packing a suitcase with as much as he could ... He was one of the great drummers of the world, even though a lot of people didn't know it!"

- Jack DeJohnette

Campbell came up through the legendary program of

Captain Walter Dyett at DuSable high School on Chicago's south side. (Dyett also taught Gene Ammons, Eddie Harris, Von Freeman and Dorothy Donegan!) In addition to being one of the great unheralded drummers in jazz, Wilbur also doubled on vibes and was occasionally used as an emergency pianist. He brought his skills on these other instruments to his drumming, making him one of the most melodic drummers in the idiom (hence DeJohnette's appreciation for him). His debut recording was for a 1955 Chicago date with pianist Andrew Hill (which also featured Pat Patrick on baritone sax, Von Freeman and bassist Malachi Favors Maghostut). His next recordings were for bassist Wilbur Ware's October 16, 1957 session that would be issued on the album *The Chicago Sound* (which also featured Johnny Griffin on tenor sax and Junior Mance on piano). He would then record three albums with trumpeter Ira Sullivan: *Nicky's Tune*, *Blue Stroll* and *Bird Lives!* During the '70s and '80s he would record with Gene Ammons and Dexter Gordon, Howard McGhee, John Klemmer, Kenny Dorham, Muhal Richard Abrams, Sonny Stitt, E. Parker McDougal, Von Freeman, Clifford Jordan, Pete and Conte Candoli, and Willie Pickens. During the final years of his life Campbell would work as the drummer of Von Freeman's quartet which also included Jodie Christian on piano and Eddie de Haas on bass (the group recorded the albums *Never Let Me Go*, *Lester Leaps In*, *Dedicated to You* and *Silvering* - the latter with Louis Smith on trumpet). Campbell's final recordings were for an August 12, 1993 Chicago date with tenor saxophonists Eric Alexander and Lin Halliday that would be issued on the album *Stablemates*. Wilbur Campbell passed away at the age of 73 on December 30, 1999. One of the reasons that Campbell would never gain national prominence was that he never toured, preferring to play around the Chicago area, while maintaining a day job as a substance abuse counselor.

Although Pepper had never performed with any of these sidemen before, it is quite likely that the rhythm section were all working together regularly as the house band at the Jazz Showcase during this period. Unfortunately, this concert would mark their only known recording together. In fact, the only musicians that would record together apart from this performance were Pickens and Campbell. They recorded together for the first time at a 1974 quartet date in Chicago under the leadership of tenor saxophonist E. Parker McDougal. They would record again for McDougal in 1980 for his album *Blues Tour*. Pickens and Campbell's last known collaboration were for the pianist's aforementioned 1987 debut album *It's About Time!* Despite Pepper's unfamiliarity with the band, the group's chemistry was excellent. Much like the band that would be recorded at the Village Vanguard two weeks later, this group sounds as if it had been performing together for years, with truly inspired playing from

The concert was broadcast over the radio, and Pepper was interviewed by the radio presenter mere moments before taking the stage. However, as the music is clearly

of greatest interest we have chosen to place the interview at the end of this CD.

The concert opens with Pepper's composition "Pepper Pot". He recorded the tune for the first time with Stan Kenton's band at an NBC Broadcast called "The Click" in Philadelphia in early February 1948, and again with Kenton's band for a CBS radio Broadcast in Avalon, Catalina Island, California, between July 2 and July 8, 1951. His next recording of the tune was made in Hollywood, California on November 25, 1956. The date consisted of a quartet session under Pepper's name that featured sidemen Russ Freeman on piano, Ben Tucker on bass and Gary Frommer on drums, which would be issued under the title The Art Pepper Quartet. This Chicago performance marks the first time that Pepper would record the tune in over 20 years! He would record it one final time in Los Angeles on December 1 or 2, 1978, for his quartet album Art Pepper Today. On this version at the Jazz Showcase Pepper plays the opening melody and a laidback, swinging solo on alto sax. Pickens continues with an ebullient piano solo followed by Pepper on clarinet trading fours with Rodby for a chorus (with Pickens laying out). Pepper then takes a clarinet solo accompanied only by Rodby for the rest of the tune. This is the only song of the Jazz Showcase concert that features Pepper on clarinet. At the end of the song, a relaxed Pepper tells the audience, "I'm glad you remembered that tune, I had forgotten that tune!"

To which the delighted audience on December 30, 1999. One of the reasons that Campbell would never gain national prominence was that he never toured, preferring to play around the Chicago area, while maintaining a day job as a substance abuse counselor.

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Pepper then went on to announce the next song "My Laurie", which was another of his compositions. In his own words, "This is a tune that I recorded on the next album coming out on Contemporary called No Limit. I wrote it for my wife. It's probably the best thing I've ever written. At least I think so ... " As Pepper mentioned, the tune would, be recorded for the first time on the March 26, 1977 quartet date for the album No Limit. In the album's liner notes, Pepper stated that it was, "sort



of a modal piece. It's based on four changes that last four bars each. At the end, it goes into a bluesish feel for contrast and a down-home finish."

Following this exquisite reading at the Jazz Showcase, Pepper would record it one final time live at the YBC TV Hall, in Yamagata, Japan, on March 14, 1978.

The Jazz Showcase reading of "My Laurie" features Pepper really stretching out. While the original studio version was about eight-and-a-half minutes long, this extended version lasts 16 minutes. It begins as an introspective ballad, with Pepper alternating between powerful moans and languid phrases punctuated by some fiery, biting alto punctuations, over Pickens' floating harmonic textures. Pickens' improvisation is very laid-back and melodic, Art then returns for another solo. Roughly 11 minutes into the tune, the rhythm section swings into a laidback funky blues groove, which Pepper digs into with some truly impassioned blues playing. Only a handful of discographies make any mention of Pepper's Jazz Showcase recordings. However, they only list the existence of the tracks "Pepper Pot" "My Laurie" and "The Trip" which is why many will be surprised by the inclusion here of these versions of "My Funny Valentine" and "Imagination", which also belong to this Chicago performance.

The Jazz Showcase reading of "My Funny Valentine" was the second in Pepper's discography and the altoist's only version as the only horn in a quartet setting. Pepper first recorded it on a July 26, 1976 quintet date under the leadership of Art Farmer, which would be released on the album *On The Road*. The Jazz Showcase reading follows in Pepper's discography. It features some beautiful solo work by Art and Pickens, and sympathetic accompaniment by the band, with Campbell proving a highly sensitive ballad player.

Following the Jazz Showcase reading, Pepper would next record the tune at a Hollywood session on July 30-31, 1980, in a quintet setting under the leadership of Sonny Stitt that would be released on the LP *Atlas Blues, Blow & Ballade*. Pepper would record it one final time in March 1981, as a member of a big band conducted by Al Capp for the soundtrack to the film *Sharky's Machine*.

Pepper first recorded the tune "Imagination" at his January 19, 1957 studio date for his legendary album *Art Pepper Meets the Rhythm Section*, which featured Miles Davis' rhythm section of that period: Red Garland on piano, Paul Chambers on bass and Philly Joe Jones on drums. This Jazz Showcase version would be the next reading of the tune in Pepper's discography, over 20 years later. It begins with a delicate piano intro followed by moving solos by Pepper, Pickens and Pepper again. He would record it for the final time, on the aforementioned date with Sonny Stitt for the album *Atlas Blues, Blow & Ballade*.

The concert's final track "The Trip" is introduced by Pepper who states that he wrote it for John Coltrane and Elvin Jones. Again Pepper stretches out on this 17-minute version, which is primarily a Phrygian vamp with a short bridge. He provides yet another outstanding solo followed by some inspired improvisational work from



Perkins and Rodby, who takes his first and only solo of the set. Pepper returns for another solo where Coltrane's influence can be clearly heard.

The first appearance of "The Trip" in Art's discography is from a live television appearance on Ralph Gleason's *Jazz Casual* TV show, in San Francisco on May 8, 1964. His next reading would be for the album by the same title. In the original album liner notes Pepper stated, "When I play, my hands and my mouth are not hands and mouth, they're nothing but an extension of me, and the horn is the means instead of a voice. The sound that comes out of this thing, this piece of metal is just me saying these things and taking people on a trip. So I wrote this melody, and six-eight time fit itself to my mood. And that's how I wrote 'The Trip'. Whenever I play it, it has kind of a distant, sad, heartrending type feel to it, you know, but yet it's swinging and it's joyful in a sad type of way. In its own way, in its own sadness it's happy and beautiful. Every time I play it, it's like taking someone on a trip. And if the rhythm section is really right and together ... then it's like a trip for everyone, like everyone is on this trip -- thinking and looking off into space, except they're doing it with sounds:" (That is definitely the case on this extended reading.)

The tune would be recorded again live at the Bach Dynamite & Dancing Society in Half Moon Bay, on January 23, 1977. The Jazz Showcase version comes next, followed by a recording of the tune at The Village Vanguard twelve days later (July 28, 1977). The last two entries of the song in Pepper's discography would both be recorded live in Japan: first at the YBC TV Hall, in Yamagata on March 14, 1978 and then at the Shiba Yubin Chokin Hall in Tokyo on July 16, 1979. While the band sounds great throughout, this is clearly Pepper's show. His playing is superb, imbuing each note with tremendous power and emotion. There's a sense of complete self-control, never a rushed note or a well-worn

lick. Jazz critics raved about Pepper throughout his East Coast tour. In Gary Giddins' July 4, 1977 article for The Village Voice titled In Praise of Art Pepper - Art Pepper: The Whiteness of the Wail, he stated that, "His present work is alive with splintered tones, modal arpeggios, furious double timing, and acerbic wit. He continues to play from deep inside ... He plays like a knowing athlete, trained and poised."

Pepper's musical self-assurance is staggering when taking into account his state of mind and body off of the bandstand, as can be seen in the earlier quote from his biography. Yet jazz is filled with these examples of players who soar to the highest heights onstage, while plummeting through downward spirals of

self-destruction in their personal lives. This concert and those of the Village Vanguard feature Pepper at his most brilliant, during one of his darkest periods after having kicked heroin. Fortunately, things improved for Pepper after returning from his tour of the East Coast. As usual, his wife Laurie was a tremendous help in keeping him from getting into all kinds of trouble with dirty drugs, and unsavory characters in dangerous neighborhoods.

Pepper discussed his return to music, among other things in a 1979 interview with Les Tomkins. An excerpt follows: "Alto is just a very hard instrument; there's so few people that play it really well. I feel it's the best one, too, now. At first I didn't feel that way; I wanted to be a tenor player. It took a long time for me to feel that alto was the most expressive of the saxophones.

"... When I finally got into music again, I had a very good background. You never forget this innate thing that you've gone through, learning the technical aspects of the instrument, things like that. You had to reach the point where you were at a long time before, and then you could move on to different things. It took a long time. I didn't achieve it from practicing a lot—just from thinking about music, I was able to learn. The period when I wasn't playing much, I'd put music out of my mind.

"The composing side I just did on my own. I never studied arranging, or anything like that, but I would do it by asking questions of people that did write. So I learned just by doing. When I had my own albums, I would write the tunes, because I felt that if I were playing my tunes I was able to do more what I wanted to do—they were the right frameworks. More so than a song by somebody else—except for certain songs that are really excellent, standards that I really feel and like to play ... Writing is very difficult, when you haven't studied it; notation and such things take longer!"

It is clear that Pepper was as comfortable with the Jazz Showcase material as he was with the superb backing band and the enthusiastic audience. As Peter Keepnews so eloquently explained in the liner notes to the Village Vanguard recordings, "there are times when a gig is just a gig, and there are times when a gig is an electrifying emotional high, the kind of transcendent experience that stays with you maybe for years and maybe forever." To this listener's ears Art Pepper's Jazz Showcase performance is an example of the latter.

"If you have individuality in music, it's something to hold on to!" - Art Pepper
Ricky Cohen (2010)



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