

What I Love About...

Phil Woods

By Austin Vickrey

Phil Woods - Overview

- Born - November 2nd, 1931, Springfield, MA (Philip Wells Woods)
- Died - September 29th, 2015, East Stroudsburg, PA
- Began playing seriously at age 12. Moved to NYC in 1948
- 1948 - Began study with Lennie Tristano. Studied one semester at Manhattan School of Music and then attended the Juilliard School of Music. Majored in clarinet as there was no saxophone major at the time.
- Worked in various bands before beginning to lead his own groups mostly after 1955: Charlie Barnet, Jimmy Raney, George Wallington, Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra, Buddy Rich, Quincy Jones, Benny Goodman, and many others.

Phil Woods - Overview

- Was called the “New Bird” (name also given to Sonny Stitt and Cannonball Adderley)
- 1968 - Moved to France, started European Rhythm Machine band; leaned toward more avant-garde. Moved back to the U.S. in 1972.
- First successful quintet 1973 - Mike Melillo (piano), Steve Gilmore (bass), Bill Goodwin (drums), Harry Leahey (guitar)
- After 1978, rotating personnel: Tom Harrell, Bryan Lynch, Hal Crook, Hal Galper, Jim McNeely, Bill Charlap.
- Woods’ groups were known for developing their own repertoire and taking chances, being adventurous, not just being “bebop repertoire” bands.
- Received many awards including from Downbeat, Playboy Poll, and 4 Grammy’s.
- 1978 - Founder and board member of the Celebration Of The Arts (COTA), celebrates appreciation of jazz and its relationship to other arts disciplines.
- Married to Chan Parker (Charlie Parker’s common-law wife)

Phil Woods - Impact on me as a musician

- First heard Phil Woods at 15 years old. My private lesson teacher gave me a cassette tape of one of his albums. “Live at the Showboat”
- Phil had such a strong sound, different from my previous influences. The “essence” of Bird but with a brighter sound and a more venturesome vocabulary.
- I listened to that cassette tape for years and years until I wore it out. Every track is filled with exciting, fresh, and significant improvisational vocabulary.

Phil Woods - What grabs me about his music

- His sound and inflection. His sound can be characterized as bright and strong. Judicious use of scoops/bends and vibrato that harken back to Charlie Parker, yet they sound unique to him.
- His creativity with melodic lines, rhythmic feel, and development of ideas.
- His improvising on faster tempo songs is mind-blowing to me. His lines are similar to Charlie Parker's but he seems to mold them to make them his own. To me, his "voice" on the saxophone is extremely recognizable.

Phil Woods - Notable Recordings

- Phil Woods - “Early Quintets” - 1954-1959 - Jimmy Raney, Dick Hyman, Howard McGhee, Roy Haynes, and others.
 - “Consternation” and “Lemon Drop”
- “Phil & Quill” Recordings
- “The Quintessence” - Quincy Jones Orchestra - 1962 - Title track
- “Phil Woods and His European Rhythm Machine” - At the Frankfurt Jazz Festival 1971

Phil Woods - Notable Recordings

- Phil Woods Six - "Live at the Showboat" - 1976 - Won a Grammy for *Best Instrumental Jazz Performance* - 1977
 - *My absolute favorite album of all time!*
 - This is the album on the cassette tape I had when I was a kid. It's a double record album recorded live. Some of his absolute best playing, in my opinion.
 - In grad school, I had a mouthpiece worker reshape my mouthpiece to have a similar sound as the one Phil played.
 - "Cheek to Cheek" - Phil quotes a classical saxophone repertoire piece in his intro improvisation.
 - Out of print but you can find the whole album on YouTube
 - Tracks I love - Cheek to Cheek, Rain Dance (soprano), Brazilian Affair, I'm Late (soprano), High Clouds, How's Your Mama? (Theme)

Phil Woods - Notable Recordings

- Phil Woods Quintet - “Integrity” - 1984
 - “Repetition” - arrangement based on Charlie Parker’s recording of the song with strings
 - “Webb City” - written by Bud Powell (1946)
- PWQ - “Bouquet” - 1987
- Phil Woods - “The Rev & I” - Featuring Johnny Griffin - 1998

Phil Woods - Notable Recordings

- Popular Music
 - Saxophone solo on Billy Joel's "Just the Way You Are" - 1977
 - Solo on Steely Dan's "Doctor Wu" - 1975

Phil Woods - The Take Away

- Known for his various quartets, quintets, appearances on other albums as a side man.
- Significant alto saxophonist in the jazz alto lineage. You can hear the development of “jazz” in his albums and recordings as they span from the 50’s through the 80’s - bebop, post bop, avant-garde, modern jazz, popular music.
- Tons and tons of jazz vocabulary!
- Example of the culmination of creativity, adventurousness, tradition, and innovation in jazz music, performance, and arranging.
- If you play alto saxophone, you HAVE to listen to Phil Woods, period. :-)

Phil Woods - YouTube Links

- Phil Woods - Early Quintets - <https://youtu.be/u4BA0gQkhCo>
- Phil & Quill - <https://youtu.be/atHnWLojL3k>
- Quintessence - Quincy Jones Orchestra - <https://youtu.be/u2hqgJGVMEk>
- Phil Woods and His European Rhythm Machine - Frankfurt Jazz Festival - <https://youtu.be/dW2HV6g1aYk>
- Phil Woods Six - Live From the Showboat - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL82214F54C1D51D8F>
- Phil Woods Quintet - Integrity - Webb City - <https://youtu.be/g0TjnCEqTts>
- Phil Woods Quintet - Integrity - Repetition - <https://youtu.be/Znsg7KVMKh4>
- Billy Joel - Just the Way You Are - <https://youtu.be/HaA3YZ6QdJU>
- Steely Dan - Doctor Wu - <https://youtu.be/w58E2S315a4>