

## Juini Booth

by Sean O'Connell



'70s



'10s

Much can be said about a musician by looking at his employers. By the time bassist Juini Booth was 30 his resumé included experience alongside

some of the most significant jazz artists of the '60s and '70s. His innate sense of time and reliability as a role player has given Booth a career of which most people could only dream.

Born in Buffalo on Feb. 12th, 1948, Booth began skipping school to make dates with Chuck Mangione and his brother Gap while he was still a teenager. Inevitably Booth broke off for Manhattan where he befriended drummer JC Moses at the East Village club Slugs. Moses, who lived only a few blocks from the venue, introduced Booth to some of his friends: Hank Mobley, Paul Chambers, Kenny Dorham, Philly Joe Jones. "Here's this little young guy hanging around. So they found a use for me," recalls Booth. That use turned out to encompass everything from Ron Carter's castoff gig catching curveballs from Coleman Hawkins at the Village Vanguard to a lifelong affiliation with the Sun Ra Arkestra. "Sun Ra was an amazement. It was not a band for the faint hearted. And it still isn't."

While still a teenager Booth received his greatest education by replacing Reggie Johnson in Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. For two years he crisscrossed the country, five to a car, with every instrument case strapped to the roof, playing every night alongside Blakey's thunderous hi-hat. "He taught me something," says Booth. "He gave me some muscles." Unfortunately, due to a little problem with the IRS, Blakey was dealing strictly in cash during Booth's tenure and no recordings were ever made of that band.

Eventually Booth left the group to join Messenger alum Freddie Hubbard - a band he would subsequently quit and rejoin three times. Following his first stint Booth set out for a change of pace in California where he befriended drummer Shelly Manne and was never at a loss for work. "I got to play with all the West Coast guys - Bud Shank, Buddy Collette, Harold Land, Gerald Wilson." While enjoying the Pacific air Booth landed two life-changing gigs in a week: a night outside San Francisco with Cannonball Adderley's quintet and a set with Thelonious Monk at the 1969 Monterey Jazz Festival. "It was an incredible week,"

recalls Booth. "I could have died and gone to heaven. I didn't really know any of Monk's songs but Monk liked it."

After a year of fun and sun Booth returned to New York, debunking a rumor that had spread quickly. "Milt Jackson said to me 'Juini, there's a rumor you're dead.' I came back and everybody's doing a double take, like they'd seen a ghost." In New York, Booth played on Gary Bartz' *Harlem Bush Music* albums, participated in the avant garde loft scene and rejoined Hubbard's band for another few paychecks before joining up with Tony Williams' Lifetime. "Things were changing. I started playing electric bass. My ears rang for ten years after that." This unit also went regrettably unrecorded but there are a few bootlegs circulating of the Lifetime band in Europe with Booth hiding in the shadow of his amplification with organist Larry Young in a keffiyeh seated behind him.

His time with Williams, like many of his other gigs, was short-lived and Booth returned again to New York, picking up work with pianist McCoy Tyner, who had spent nine months as a Messenger. "I was off and on with McCoy for five years. We did some duo gigs and trio gigs," says Booth. "His left hand. It would break the thickest strings on the piano. Way down at the bottom. I had to get out of the way sometimes." After a few recordings Booth's restless bass led to work with Elvin Jones. "It was loud but it was musical." He appeared on *Time Capsule* alongside Kenny Barron and George Coleman before striking out on his own again.

Starting in the early '80s Booth began focusing on solo bass work, earning recognition from the International Society of Bassists and National Endowment for the Arts. Although he still occasionally performs solo Booth can often be found on the fringes of Alphabet City playing an electric bass with his band I Led 3 Lives at ambient space-lounge Nublu.

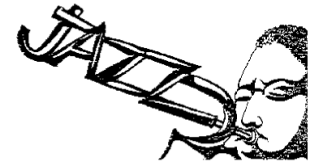
Despite 40-plus years in the business Booth still looks like the youngest guy in the room playing a blend of house, reggae and swing well into the morning. But for all his accomplishments Booth is not just sitting around talking about the good old days. He is focused on the future with plans for a solo record and other projects that will take him around the world but always, inevitably, back to New York.

"I'm a loft session Wildflower. I'm a Sun Ra satellite. I'm a Coltrane-ite. I'm a Jazz Messenger. I'm a Tony Williams Lifter. I'm all these things. I look at it and I say, 'Well, that's wonderful' but it also says that I never did something of my own. And this I'm trying to change." ❖

For more information, visit [juiniboost.com](http://juiniboost.com)

### Recommended Listening:

- Sonny Simmons - *Music from the Spheres* (ESP-Disk, 1966)
- McCoy Tyner - *Enlightenment* (Milestone-Fantasy, 1973)
- McCoy Tyner - *Atlantis* (Milestone, 1974)
- Chico Freeman - *Beyond the Rain* (Contemporary OJC, 1977)
- Steve Grossman - *Way Out East, Vol. 1&2* (Red, 1984)
- Charles Gayle - *Ancient of Days* (Knitting Factory Works, 1999)



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## LEST WE FORGET

## John Jenkins (1931-93)

by Donald Elfman

For every celebrated musician in the jazz world, there are countless others who, for one reason or another, fall well beneath the radar and gain only some small local acclaim or disappear into anonymity.

Alto saxophonist John Jenkins is not exactly anonymous but this Parker-inspired player made very few recordings and had a career that was but all too brief. Still, connoisseurs know him and his limited recorded output serves as evidence of a talent to be experienced. Interestingly, in 1955, he twice replaced Gigi Gryce - in Cleveland and Chicago - in groups led by Art Farmer. Here was an early indication of Jenkins' prowess as a postbopper.

John Jenkins was born in Chicago on Jan. 3rd, 1931. He studied with noted teacher Captain Walter

Dyett at the great music program at DuSable High School. (Others who passed through the program there included Gene Ammons, Von Freeman, Joseph Jarman, John Gilmore, Wilbur Ware, Dinah Washington, Johnny Hartman, Richard Davis and many others.) Jenkins' first instrument was the clarinet but he later switched to the alto. Joe Segal, who later ran Chicago's famous Jazz Showcase club, ran a series of popular jam sessions at Roosevelt College and Jenkins played in those from 1949-56.

Jenkins played, but did not record with, Charles Mingus in 1957 and in that same year made his only albums under his own name (he had moved to New York). *John Jenkins and Kenny Burrell* was done for Blue Note and finds the saxophonist and guitarist as co-leaders with the phenomenal rhythm section of Sonny Clark (piano), Paul Chambers (bass) and Dannie Richmond (drums). Jenkins wrote three originals of a hardbop nature and his playing deeply reflects the influence of Charlie Parker.

In the same year, Jenkins also recorded: *Alto Madness* (Prestige) with Jackie McLean; *Jenkins, Jordan and Timmons*, with Clifford Jordan and Bobby Timmons (Prestige) and *Star Eyes* with Donald Byrd (Savoy). As a sideman in 1957 he was one of the Prestige All-Stars under Teddy Charles and also recorded with Hank Mobley, Paul Quinichette, Clifford Jordan, Herbie Mann and Wilbur Ware. All of these leaders and these labels recognized an inspired and passionate musician but, alas, after some sideman work through the early '60s and a few dates with organist/singer Gloria Coleman, John Jenkins pretty much dropped out of music.

Jenkins worked as a messenger in New York and sold jewelry and brass objects to make a living. He briefly took up the alto again in the early '80s, did some playing on the streets and, in 1990, recorded at Condon's with fellow Chicagoan Clifford Jordan in the latter's big band. Jenkins died Jul. 12th, 1993. His is a voice that still deserves to be heard. ❖