

What I Love About... Cannonball Adderley

By Austin Vickrey

Cannonball Adderley

Overview

- Born - September 15th, 1928, Tampa, FL
- Died - August 8th, 1975, Gary, IN
- Born Julian Edwin Adderley, Cannonball got his nickname from the word “cannibal” for his “voracious” appetite. One of his friends mispronounced the word cannibal as “cani-bol.” The name stuck and over time it became “cannonball.” Parents were educators and his father was a trumpet player.
- From Tampa, FL - Moved to Tallahassee in the early 1940’s when his parents taught at Florida A&M University, where he also studied music and music education. 1948 - after studying music at FL A&M, Cannonball became the band director at Dillard High School in Ft. Lauderdale until 1950. He also studied at the U.S. Navy School of music and directed 2 Army bands before moving to NYC in 1955.

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- 1955 - Originally planned to pursue graduate studies in Manhattan. One night he sat in with Oscar Pettiford's band at the famous **Café Bohemia** and became an overnight sensation in the musician circles of NY. A buzz started that Cannonball was the "heir" to Charlie Parker.
- Later he joined his brother and cornet player, Nat Adderley, to form his first quintet that had little success.
 - Article from 2005 about how the Adderley brothers came on the scene in NYC - <https://www.theledger.com/article/LK/20050619/News/608129814/LL>
- 1957 - Signed on to Savoy jazz label. Was noticed by Miles Davis and asked Cannonball to join him in late 1957.
- 1958 - "Somethin' Else" recording released with Miles Davis as a guest artist. This led to Cannonball recording with Davis on two of his most significant landmark recordings of 1950's hard bop and modal jazz: "Milestones" (1958) and "Kind of Blue" (1959).

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- 1959 - Cannonball reformed his quintet with his brother Nat, which started to become more successful. Adderley continued to lead popular small groups for the rest of his career.
- His interest as an educator would continue to carry over into his recordings.
1961 - Narrated the book *The Child's Introduction to Jazz* on Riverside Records.
- Cannonball's series of quintets would go on to feature multiple jazz giants:
 - Tenor saxophone - Yusef Lateef, Charles Lloyd
 - Piano - Bobby Timmons, Barry Harris, Victor Feldman, Joe Zawinul, Hal Galper, Michael Wolff, George Duke
 - Bass - Ray Brown, Sam Jones, Walter Booker, Victor Gaskin
 - Drums - Louis Hayes, Roy McCurdy

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- Cannonball is known for being primarily an alto saxophonist, but he did double on soprano saxophone on some recordings later in his career.
- Was a kind and generous man who nurtured and promoted young musical talent. He called Wes Montgomery to the attention of Riverside Records, produced the debut recording of Chuck Mangione, and collaborated with a brilliantly young Nancy Wilson.
- Cannonball was also widely known for how incredibly articulate, informative, and engaging he was with his audience and of his music. His wry commentary illuminated the music for his listeners.

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- Later in his career, he began to reflect the influence of “electric jazz” in the early 1970’s.
- A clip from his performance at the 1970 Monterey Jazz Festival was featured in the Clint Eastwood film “Play Misty for Me”
- In 1975 before his death, he appeared in an acting role alongside José Feliciano and David Carradine in the episode “Battle Hymn” from the third season of the TV series “Kung Fu.”
- Cannonball suffered a stroke from a cerebral hemorrhage and died 4 weeks later on August 8th, 1975. He was 46 years old.

Cannonball Adderley - Style of Playing

- Influences - Charlie Parker & Benny Carter mostly.
- Played in the bebop style but also combined with the rhythm-and-blues style of Carter.
- His music wasn't considered groundbreaking like Bird, but he was a masterful technician of the saxophone playing many fast and florid lines with an emphasis on blues inflections.
- Though coming into prominence in the late Bebop Era, Cannonball is often considered a Hard Bop artist, integrating R&B, gospel, and traditional blues into his style, which continued to dominate the musical scene throughout the 1960's.

Cannonball Adderley - Impact on me as a musician

- I first heard Cannonball Adderley on the record “Kind of Blue” when I was in my late teens. I was still obsessed with Charlie Parker at the time so I wasn’t paying too much attention to him yet.
- I really started getting into Cannonball in college. Recordings that made an impact on me I will discuss in the Notable Recordings section. His bluesy inflections were easy to grab onto with my inner ear.

Cannonball Adderley - What grabs me about his music

- It's all about the sound! Cannonball had a beautiful, lush, and vibrant sound. It wasn't too bright or piercing, but very full and round. I've tried so hard to duplicate his sound and I can't come close!
- Articulation - Cannonball was a master of articulation. He had the speed of Charlie Parker, but his lines and articulation (in my opinion) are much more clean and exact.
- Inflection - His inflections are very distinguishable to me and his style is almost instantly recognizable. He employed a rich vibrato on ballads and where needed (Benny Carter meets classical saxophone), his scoops, bends, and even growls have so much character.
- Style - He was assertive on the fast bop and hard bop styles, very fluid and in your face while he could also be subtle and sweet on slower and softer songs.
- HE SWUNG SOOOO HARD!!!!

Cannonball Adderley - Notable Recordings

- “Somethin’ Else” with Miles Davis - 1958 - <https://youtu.be/u37RF5xKNq8>
 - Miles Davis - “Milestones” - 1958 - <https://youtu.be/HJKW7IOjDQQ>
 - Miles Davis - “Kind of Blue” - 1959 - <https://youtu.be/bAC5Vf1REZg>
- “Quintet in Chicago” aka “Cannonball and Coltrane” - 1959 - <https://youtu.be/pcqMZZzxVPk>
- “Them Dirty Blues” - 1960 - “Work Song” - <https://youtu.be/VlepuNi40M8>
- “Quintet at the Lighthouse” - 1960 - <https://youtu.be/tNJmzyxwYOI>
- “Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley” - 1961 - <https://youtu.be/SpqQwbayrzM> (25 year old Nancy Wilson)
- “Sextet in New York” - 1962 - <https://youtu.be/A-8-qSYlrQs>
- “Fiddler on the Roof” - 1964 - <https://youtu.be/8R-yU8c8NxU>
- “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy!” (Live at The Club) - 1966 - <https://youtu.be/bRv9T06Gk74>

Cannonball Adderley - The Take Away

- Key jazz alto saxophone voice rooted in bebop, blues, and hard bop styles.
- Rich vocabulary with distinguishable style and “infectious inflections.”
- Known for his incredible technique, expressiveness, and ability to educate and engage his audience.
- Prominent jazz figure known for the hard bop style of the 1960’s by integrating blues, bop, and gospel styles into his music.