

JazzWax

Marc Myers writes daily on jazz legends and legendary jazz recordings

March 13, 2009

The Trombones Inc.: 1958

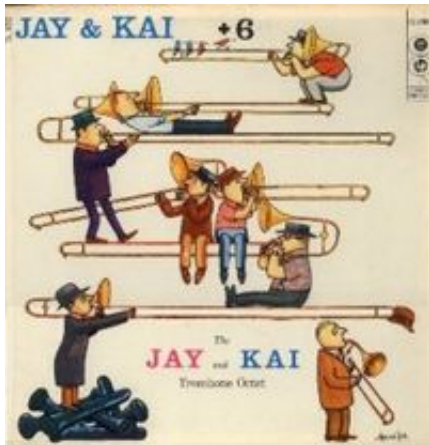
If you're as nuts for trombone as I am, *The Trombones Inc.* is an absolute dream album. Recorded in New York and Los Angeles over several sessions in December 1958, the concept was staggeringly ambitious: Twenty-seven leading trombonists of the day were assembled on two coasts. And like many record company gimmicks back in the 1950s, this album was packaged as a shoot out between East Coast and West Coast bonemen—10 on each coast, with 7 more substituting on different dates.



The East Coast session featured Eddie Bert, Jimmy Cleveland, Henry Coker, Bennie Green [pictured], Melba Liston, Benny Powell, Frank Rehak, Bob Brookmeyer, Dick Hickson and Bart Varsalona—all in one trombone section. They were backed by Hank Jones (piano), Wendell Marshall (bass) and Osie Johnson (drums). The arranger was J.J. Johnson.

(Substitutions on the three different dates included Milt Hinton in for Marshall, and Bob Alexander in for Henry Coker.)

On the West Coast, two different sets of trombonists were used for the two dates. The sliders included Marshall Cram, Herbie Harper, Joe Howard, Ed Kusby, Dick Nash, Murray McEachern, Tommy Pederson, Frank Beach, George Roberts, Ken Shroyer, Milt Bernhart, Bob Fitzpatrick, Joe Howard, Lewis McGreery, Frank Rosolino [pictured], Dave Wells and Bob Brookmeyer (working both coasts!). The rhythm section featured Marty Paich (piano), Barney Kessel (guitar), Red Mitchell (bass) and Mel Lewis (drums). The California arranging was handled by Paich and Warren Barker.



magnificent for different reasons.



This result is about as trombone-y as you can get—and some. The sound is massive, punchy, mellow and wide. The idea for rounding up so many band and session trombonists wasn't new, of course. The concept had already been featured to some degree on *Jay & Kai Plus 6* (1956) and *The Trombone Scene* (1956). But *The Trombones Inc.* certainly was the most ambitious in terms of its size and scope. To arrange distinctly for so many trombones and not wind up with a muddled result required skilled scoring, and Johnson, Paich and Barker did a handsome job. The voicings here are tight and brassy on swingers and rich and soulful on ballads.

Overall, the East Coast charts tend to be breezier and bop-infused while the West Coast arrangements have more of a Kentonesque choral approach. But both groups are

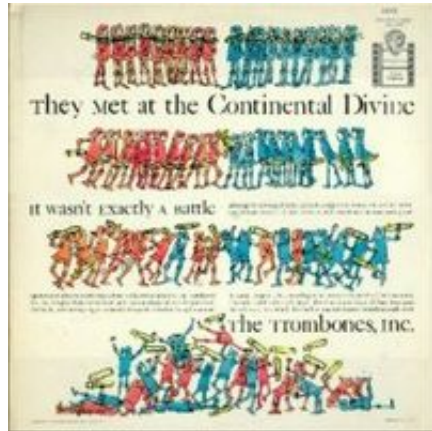


The first six tracks are by the East Coast contingent. Three songs are J.J. Johnson [pictured] originals (*Neckbones*, *Dues Blues* and *Tee Jay*) while the balance are comprised of *Long Before I Knew You* (Sammy Kahn-Jule Styne), *Soft Winds* (Fletcher Henderson) and *Lassus Trombone* (Henry Filmore).

The second half-dozen tracks on the album were by the West Coast crew and are remarkable for their high energy and tight studio writing and attack. The West Coast entries are *It's All Right With Me* (Cole Porter), *Polka Dots and Moonbeams*, *Old Devil Moon*, *Impossible* (Steve Allen), *Heat Wave* (Irving Berlin) and *I Found a new Baby*. Rosolino takes a spectacular solo on *Moonbeams*, which was arranged by Marty Paich [pictured].



After about 10 listens, I'm certainly not going to



declare a winner here. Both coasts have standout performances. For example, the Barker-arranged *Old Devil Moon* (West Coast) is breathtaking, with Bernhart and Rosolino soloing. But so is Johnson's *Tee Jay*, with solos by Rehak, Brookmeyer, Powell, Bert and Cleveland.

I called two East Coast players on the date yesterday to ask about the record session—Benny Powell and Eddie Bert. Benny couldn't recall recording the album: "There were just too many sessions back then," he said while preparing to leave his apartment to hear Hank Jones and Frank Wess at New York's Iridium club.

Eddie did remember the session, though he had not heard the recording:

"I didn't like the date. I can't explain why. I just remember it was a drag. That's what sticks in my mind. We recorded it at Bell Sound on West 54th, and I remember it didn't lay right. It had absolutely nothing to do with J.J.'s writing. There were just too many trombones. Who needed so many? It was a drag. Some dates are like that. Hey, other guys who were may have a different opinion. That's just mine. But in all honesty, I haven't heard it since we recorded it. I'll listen to it tomorrow and give you a call."

It will be interesting to hear Eddie's take more than 50 years later. From the listener's standpoint, the album remains strong and fascinating, especially if you have a thing for the trombone.

What's also amazing about this album is who's *not* in the lineup. Despite pooling 27 leading trombonists of the day, on both coasts, there still are plenty of giants missing, including Kai Winding, Urbie Green, Billy Byers, Al Grey, Britt Woodman, Quentin Jackson and so many others. Man, what an era!

JazzWax tracks: *The Trombones Inc.* can be found only on CD [here](#) as an import on the Spanish LoneHillJazz label. The companion album to *Trombones Inc.* was *Saxes Inc.* (recorded a year later). I'll be turning to that one in a couple of weeks.

JazzWax with Marc Myers—New Show! This Sunday at 10 pm (EDT), tune in on your computer and join me for the second of three radio shows. I will be playing two hours of rare jazz recordings from my personal collection on **Jazz.FM91**, Canada's leading jazz radio station. All you have to do is go to www.Jazz.fm Sunday at 10 pm and click on "listen live" at the top of the screen. I'll also be sharing the intimate stories that jazz legends have shared with me over the past two years.





Dig you then!

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And then you had your 21 Trombones-

<http://www.kendowdy.com/ksdrecords/21tksd.htm>

And before them all -

Benny Morton's Trombone Choir in 1945

Where or When

Liza (All the Clouds'll Roll Away)

Once in a While

Sliphorn Outing

<https://www.wherhouse.com/music/product-detail.jsp?id=824158>

*Liza is the only sample where you get to hear the 4 bones at work, but Where or When was a rambunctious side!

And before that, Glenn Miller's "Sliphorn Jive"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTAJjurglWI>

and

Rug Cutter's Swing

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooWJSsLZRUM>

Posted by: John Cooper | [March 14, 2009 at 03:02 AM](#)

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