

Woody Herman - The Jazz Masters (1996)

Written by bluesever

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1. Body and Soul 2. Rose Room 3. Early Autumn 4. Caledonia 5. Mood Indigo

Woody Herman was a child performer and singer who took up alto saxophone and became a professional musician in his teens, adding clarinet and soprano sax to his arsenal. By 1936 he took over the core of Isham Jones' orchestra when the leader decided to take time off to focus on composing. The band, which featured Herman's vocals and popular instrumentals, gained recognition in 1937 through their radio broadcasts, and in 1939 they had a hit with "Woodchopper's Ball." By the '40s the band's bluesy character became more swing oriented, influenced by Ellington. Herman, the first to do so, hired female musicians for the band--a trumpeter and a vibraphonist.

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While the nature of big bands necessarily changes with personnel, Herman, a forward-looking musical thinker, purposely gave different characters to his orchestras. The 1944 group, which he called the First Herd, was famous for its progressive jazz, which included the instrumentals “Bijou” and “Wildroot” and Herman’s wild version of “Caldonia”.

The Second Herd, formed in 1947, featured a “cool” reed section from the West Coast comprised of Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, and Herbie Steward on tenor saxes and Serge Chaloff on baritone. The band featured “Early Autumn,” with Getz soloing, and Jimmy Giuffre’s “Four Brothers” which gave this Herd its nickname.

The 1950 Third Herd played more danceable music and had a hit with their arrangement of “Stompin’ at the Savoy.” By 1959 the group had become the Thundering Herd with leanings toward bop and exciting soloists such as tenor Sal Nistico. In the ‘60s and ‘70s Herman hired several young musicians who gave a rockish flavor to the band.

He celebrated his 40th anniversary as a band leader at a 1976 Carnegie Hall concert. Financial woes forced Herman to continue touring until 1986 when he turned responsibility for the orchestra over to Frank Tiberi. – Sandra Burlingame, naxos.com

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