Wardell Gray - Way Out Wardell (1948)

1 Blue Lou   2 Sweet Georgia Brown   3 Tenderly   4 Just You, Just Me   5 One O'Clock Jump   Wardell Gray - Tenor saxophone Irving Ashby Guitar Harry Babasin Bass Red Callender Bass Vic Dickenson Trombone Erroll Garner Piano   Barney Kessel Guitar Don Lamond Drums Howard McGhee Trumpet Jackie Mills Drums Vido Musso Sax (Tenor) Arnold Ross Piano Ernie Royal Trumpet

This album was recorded live in Los Angeles in 1948, and finds the great Wardell Gray amidst some of the finest musicians of the time. In the late 1940s, the West Coast jazz scene introduced the big band jazz concert idea to the public. At this time in his short career, Gray was starting his ascent and would achieve lasting fame in tenor sax history. The recorded sound on the album is tinny, given that it was recorded in a hall, and the echo is distracting. However, the compact disc cleaned much of this up, and the dueling between the two tenors shines right through. Vido Musso, the other fine tenor here, was with Stan Kenton for a time. His punchy style plays off the smoother swing of Gray. There's also some strong, bright soloing by Howard McGhee, Ernie Royal, Barney Kessel, and Red Callender. The rhythm section swings hard throughout the session, and Gray knows how to ride the wave with a vengeance. He had that effortless tone of Lester Young, and was full with the fire of bop at the same time. His improvisation was prodigious, and he could translate a landslide of ideas through his horn. The genius Erroll Garner, then only 35, renders a fine solo version of "Tenderly." The compact disc version adds the bonus cut "Sweet Georgia Brown." This is what ignited jazz at the summit sounded like in concert in the late 1940s. Recommended. ---Mark Romano, AllMusic Review

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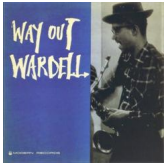
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