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RHYTHM PLANET    JAZZ

## 2 Jazz Classics Reissued by Audiophile Label Speakers Corner

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AUGUST 16, 2017    By **Tom Schnabel**

For some people in life, artisanal luxuries consist of fast cars, fine wine, and designer threads. But when it comes to music and superbly recorded sound, music purists and hi-fi fanatics swear by **Speakers Corner's** "artisanal" releases. Based in Gettorf, Germany, Speakers Corner produces analogue vinyl of the highest order, in case you've never heard me **sing their praises before**. That's because this artisanal label only sources music from the original master tapes—something most record companies no longer do. Most labels go the easier route of using digital files and then seduce buyers with the original jacket covers. For those who just want a cool LP cover and a so-so pressing, that's enough. Speakers Corner, on the other hand, far exceeds what may be passable for the casual listener. It is strictly analogue, and has been for over twenty years.

Two superb new re-releases showcase the Speakers Corner brand. The first is **Chet Baker's *Chet is Back!***, recorded in 1962 at RCA Record's brand new studio in Italy. The title probably refers to the fact that Chet had lived previously in Europe, when he moved to Germany in 1946 at age 16 as a new enlistee in the U.S. Army. He had also visited Italy before when he recorded *Chet Baker in Milan* for Riverside's Jazzland label in 1959. This time around, we hear Chet joined by a cadre of top European musicians—mostly from Belgium—including **Bobby Jaspar** on tenor and flute, **René Thomas** on guitar, and **Benoît Quersin** on bass. Italian pianist **Amedeo Tommasi** and Swiss-born, Paris-based drummer **Daniel Humair** are also featured on this RCA session.



By the 1950s, Chet had already recorded a number of jazz sides for Capitol Records in Los Angeles with **Gerry Mulligan**, **Russ Freeman**, **Bud Shank**, **Jimmy Bond** and other local studio musicians. He had become famous for his legato trumpet playing, languorous vocals, and the brooding photographs taken of him by **William Claxton**. Still, it's interesting to hear him perform with an entirely different group of talented musicians from Europe. His improvisations sound fresh; and his technique never better.



Another recent Speakers Corner release, ***The Jazz Workshop / Four Brass, One Tenor***, features tenor sax player **Al Cohn**.

Though mostly known for his sax duets with the even more famous tenor player, **Zoot Sims**, it should be noted that Cohn was a solid musician in his own right. And unlike Sims, Cohn excelled at sight-reading and arranging. On this album, you'll hear Sims and Cohn pretty much steal the show with their trumpet playing. The recording also features veteran studio brass players like **Bernie Glow**, **Joe Newman**, and **Joe**

**Wilder**, plus big band trumpet veterans **Nick Travis** and **Phil Sunkel**. Together they

provide a nice balance for Cohn's smooth tenor. The rhythm section is also great, with Count Basie alum **Freddie Green** on guitar and pianist **Dick Katz** (famous for his work with **Ben Webster**, **Kenny Dorham** and others). **Burgher "Buddy" Jones** plays bass on the date, with **James "Osie" Johnson** on drums.

Fans of **Ornette Coleman** or **Miles Davis** may not take to this record; it is unabashedly old-fashioned...but in the most wonderful way. It is a pure pleasure to listen to.

It's easy to forget that old-fashioned analogue technology can be better in this age of digital convenience and musical portability. But Speakers Corner's exacting process is a labor of love. In addition to using the original reel-to-reel tapes for their reissues, Speakers Corner LPs are impeccably pressed with state-of-the-art equipment on top-quality 180 gram virgin vinyl, leaving no surface noise as the stylus moves across the grooves. This isn't the easiest way to make a record, but I think it's the best because the end product simply sounds better. This music fanatic loves Speakers Corner.



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