



Lee Konitz with Warne Marsh

180₉

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Speakers Corner/Atlantic 1217

Atlantic Records' earliest disc was a 10-inch record and 78-RPM "album" released in 1949. But things really got going for Atlantic in 1955 when this Konitz session was recorded and released as a 12" LP. A handful of other titles were released earlier than this album in Atlantic's 1800 series, but this was the label's departure from traditional jazz and leap into modern jazz. And what a leap! What would any self-respecting jazz record collection be without all those Atlantic Coltrane, Coleman, and Mingus discs? Konitz is the lone survivor of those early Atlantic artists. I last saw him perform (with Paul Bley) in 2000, but he has continued to perform and record as recently as 2018.

While Konitz wandered from label to label more often than those titans, he did record a few excellent titles for Atlantic in the mid 1950s before signing with Verve. This early title is the best of the lot and one of the more collectable Atlantic discs. It has it all—a great rhythm section, excellent sound, and a wonderful William Claxton cover photo. The two sax players, Lee on alto and Warne on tenor, are supported by Billy Bauer on guitar, Oscar Pettiford on bass, Kenny Clarke on drums, and alternatively Sal Mosca or Ronnie Ball on piano. Bauer was an excellent guitar player whose talents ideally suited Konitz's music and he appeared on a half dozen

Konitz recordings. Pettiford and Clarke had few peers in the 1950s and they were equally adept at hot or 'cool' jazz.

Konitz, Marsh, and Bauer were all students of Lennie Tristano. Tristano also recorded for Atlantic, but his performances are on the cold side of cool jazz and his influence today largely stems from his role as improvisation teacher to Konitz and Marsh. There is nothing cold or academic about these performances. The group plays a set of mostly well-known and loved standards, but played like you've not heard them before. Old standards like Gershwin's 'I Can't Get Started' and Earl Warren's 'There Will Never Be Another You' are mixed in with modern classics like Charlie Parker's 'Donna Lee'. Konitz and Marsh sometimes trade off solos, but more often dance around each other in counterpoint, twisting and weaving at a breathtaking pace, with the rhythm section all the while not just keeping pace but driving the whole enterprise along.

The sound of this recording is as good as any jazz recording from this period—big fat mono sound that draws you in and makes you wonder how things went so wrong in the recording studios over the next several decades. The instruments are spread out in a fairly wide (given its mono nature) soundstage and there is just enough depth to replicate how a jazz ensemble should sound. The stars must have been aligned just right for this session. Compare it to Mingus' *Pithecanthropus Erectus* on Atlantic

1237, that was recorded by the same label, with the same recording engineer only six months later, and while both are masterpieces of jazz improvisation, this disc makes the Mingus disc recording quality seem a bit dated. Kevin Gray of Cohearant Audio mastered Speakers Corner's recent reissues of *Pithecanthropus Erectus* and this disc and both are extremely well done.

Lee Konitz With Warne Marsh ticks all the boxes one could ask for in a reissue. In addition to a classic musical performance and great sound, it has a great cover (one of William Claxton's best) and it is an extremely collectable record. Many years ago, a well-known jazz record collector friend tried to get me to part with my minty original pressing. I'm sure he has filled that hole in his collection since then. Had he the patience to wait 15 or so years he would have been equally happy with this great sounding reissue. The cover photo reproduction and sleeve stock are not quite the equal of the original, but the sound is superior.

This is an absolutely essential disc, and has lightened my burden in case of conflagration. I need not carry out my copy of this great disc as I can now simply order a new and improved version. The pigs would truly be in clover if Speakers Corner could reissue Coltrane's *My Favorite Things*. **DD**

RECORDING
MUSIC

