

50 Essential Big Band Recordings

Compiled by Dan Miller

This list combines some of the most historically important big band recordings and some recordings that are personal favorites. Represented is every major band, their great soloists and many of jazz's finest arrangers. Thousands of recordings are currently available and it is often difficult for the young player to know where start building a collection. This list is by no means an absolute, but it gives the aspiring musician an excellent resource of swinging big band music.

Notes on the Format: The album title is listed first, followed by the name of the record label.

- 1) **Count Basie**--Complete Decca Recordings 1937-1939 (GRP/Decca)
- 2) **Count Basie**--Complete Atomic Basie (Blue Note/Roulette)
- 3) **Count Basie**--Breakfast Dance and Barbecue (Blue Note/Roulette)
- 4) **Count Basie**--Basie at Birdland (Roulette)
- 5) **Count Basie**--April In Paris (Verve)
- 6) **Count Basie and Frank Sinatra**--Sinatra at the Sands (Reprise)
- 7) **Duke Ellington**--Blanton/Webster Band 1939-1942 (BMG/RCA)
- 8) **Duke Ellington**--Early Ellington: Complete Brunswick Recordings 1926-1931 (GRP/Decca)
- 9) **Duke Ellington**--Carnegie Hall Concerts January 1943 (Prestige)
- 10) **Duke Ellington**--Jazz Party (Sony/Columbia)
- 11) **Duke Ellington**--Great Paris Concert (Reprise)
- 12) **Duke Ellington**--Ellington at Newport (Sony/Columbia)
- 13) **Duke Ellington**--Great Fargo Concert 11/7/1940 (Stash)
- 14) **Maynard Ferguson**--Birdland Dreamband (RCA)
- 15) **Maynard Ferguson**--Message from Newport (Roulette)
- 16) **Maynard Ferguson**--Message from Birdland (Roulette)
- 17) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Complete RCA/Victor Recordings 1937-1949 (BMG/RCA)
- 18) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Birk's Works: Verve Big Band Sessions (Verve)
- 19) **Fletcher Henderson**--1924-1925 (Classics)
- 20) **Benny Goodman**--Birth of Swing 1935-1936 (Bluebird/RCA)
- 21) **Benny Goodman**--Harry James Years Volume 1 (Bluebird/RCA)
- 22) **Harry James**--1937-1939 (Classics)
- 23) **Jimmie Lunceford**--1939-1940 (Classics)
- 24) **Benny Carter**--1943-1946 (Classics)
- 25) **Tommy Dorsey**--Yes, Indeed! (Bluebird/RCA)
- 26) **Lionel Hampton**--1947 (Classics)
- 27) **Stan Kenton**--New Concepts in Artistry and Rhythm (Capitol)
- 28) **Stan Kenton**--Portraits on Standards (Capitol)
- 29) **Stan Kenton**--West Side Story (Capitol)
- 30) **Woody Herman**--Keeper of the Flame: Complete Capitol Recordings (Capitol)
- 31) **Woody Herman**--Woody's Winners (Columbia)
- 32) **Woody Herman**--Herd at Montreux (OJC/Fantasy)
- 33) **Tadd Dameron**--The Magic Touch (OJC/Riverside)
- 34) **Gil Evans and Miles Davis**--Miles Ahead (Sony/Columbia)
- 35) **Thad Jones/Mel Lewis**--Consumation (Blue Note)
- 36) **Thad Jones/Mel Lewis**--Live at the Village Vanguard (Solid State)
- 37) **Thad Jones/Mel Lewis**--Suite for Pops
- 38) **Buddy Rich**--Big Swing Face (Blue Note/Pacific Jazz)
- 39) **Buddy Rich**--Swingin' New Band (Blue Note/Pacific Jazz)
- 40) **Buddy Rich**--Roar of '74 (Groove)
- 41) **Buddy Rich**--Plays and Plays and Plays (RCA)

- 42) **Gerald Wilson**--Portraits (Pacific Jazz)
- 43) **Gerry Mulligan**--Concert Jazz Band at the Village Vanguard (Verve)
- 44) **Capp/Pierce Juggernaut**--Juggernaut Live (Concord)
- 45) **Louie Bellson**--Explosion (Pablo)
- 46) **Bill Holman**--In a Jazz Orbit (VSOP)
- 47) **Terry Gibbs**--Dream Band Volume 1 (OJC/Contemporary)
- 48) **Charles Mingus**--Let My Children Hear Music (Columbia)
- 49) **Toshiko Akiyoshi**--Long Yellow Road (RCA)
- 50) **Charles Tolliver**--Impact (Strata East)

200 Essential Small Group Jazz Recordings 1925-1975

Compiled by Dan Miller

This list comprises two hundred of the most historically important small group jazz recordings. Represented is the work of every major innovator, as well as many of the great stylists. Thousands of recordings are currently available and it is often difficult for the young player to know where start building a collection. This list is by no means an absolute, but combines what I consider to be a complete overview of the masters and their music.

Notes on Charlie Parker Recordings: There are hundreds of studio and live recordings of Parker available. The Dial, Savoy and Verve recordings are the primary ones to seek out. Due to the limitations of pre-1950 recording technology (78 r.p.m. discs), sound recordings were no greater than 3 minutes in length. The many "live" recordings of Parker offer the listener an opportunity to hear Bird unhindered by these constraints.

- 1) **Louis Armstrong**--Complete Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings (Columbia)
- 2) **Louis Armstrong**--Complete RCA/Victor Recordings (RCA)
- 3) **Louis Armstrong**--Ella and Louis (Verve)
- 4) **Louis Armstrong**--Plays W.C. Handy (Columbia)
- 5) **Bix Beiderbecke**--Volume 1 Singin' the Blues (Columbia)
- 6) **Art Tatum**--Piano Starts Here (Columbia)
- 7) **Art Tatum**--Classic Early Solos 1934 and 1937 (Decca)
- 8) **Jelly Roll Morton**--Birth of the Hot (RCA/Bluebird)
- 9) **Coleman Hawkins**--Body and Soul (RCA)
- 10) **Coleman Hawkins**--Rainbow Mist (Delmark)
- 11) **Coleman Hawkins**--1943-1944 (Classics)
- 12) **Lester Young**--"Count Basie" 1936-1938 (Classics)
- 13) **Lester Young**--Complete Aladdin Sessions (Blue Note)
- 14) **Lester Young**--The "Kansas City" Sessions (Commodore)
- 15) **Benny Goodman**--Complete RCA/Victor Small Group Recordings 1935-1939 (RCA)
- 16) **Sidney Bechet**--Best of the Blue Note Years 1939-1953 (Blue Note)
- 17) **Roy Eldridge**--After You've Gone (GRP/Decca)
- 18) **Charlie Christian**--The Genius of the Electric Guitar (Columbia)
- 19) **Benny Carter**--Further Definitions (Impulse)
- 20) **Ben Webster**--Soulville (Verve)
- 21) **Johnny Hodges**--Passion Flower (RCA/Bluebird)
- 22) **Duke Ellington**--Duke's Men: The Small Groups Volume 1 and 2 (Columbia)
- 23) **Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges**--Side By Side (Verve)
- 24) **Duke Ellington**--Money Jungle (Blue Note)
- 25) **Duke Ellington**--Duke Ellington Meets Coleman Hawkins (Impulse)
- 26) **Duke Ellington**--Duke Ellington and John Coltrane (Impulse)
- 27) **Duke Ellington**--Great Times!: Piano Duets with Billy Strayhorn (OJC/Riverside)
- 28) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Complete RCA/Victor Recordings 1937-1949 (RCA)
- 29) **Dizzy Gillespie**--1945 (Classics)

- 30) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Roy and Diz (Verve)
- 31) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Diz and Getz (Verve)
- 32) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Sonny Side Up (Verve)
- 33) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Duets with Sonny Rollins and Sonny Stitt (Verve)
- 34) **Dizzy Gillespie**--For Musicians Only (Verve)
- 35) **Dizzy Gillespie**--Birks Works: Verve Big Band Sessions (Verve)
- 36) **Charlie Parker**--Complete Dial Recordings (Dial)
- 37) **Charlie Parker**--Complete Savoy Studio Recordings (Savoy)
- 38) **Charlie Parker**--Complete Charlie Parker on Verve (Verve)
- 39) **Charlie Parker**--Charlie Parker with Strings (Verve)
- 40) **Charlie Parker**--The Washington Concerts (Blue Note)
- 41) **Charlie Parker**--Boston 1952 (Uptown)
- 42) **Charlie Parker**--Bird and Diz (Verve)
- 43) **Charlie Parker**--Jazz at Massey Hall (OJC/Debut)
- 44) **Bud Powell**--The Amazing Bud Powell Volume 1 and 2 (Blue Note)
- 45) **Bud Powell**--Jazz Giant (Verve/Clef)
- 46) **Miles Davis**--Birth of the Cool (Capitol)
- 47) **Miles Davis**--Relaxin' (OJC/Prestige)
- 48) **Miles Davis**--Workin' (OJC/Prestige)
- 49) **Miles Davis**--Milestones (Columbia)
- 50) **Miles Davis**--Kind of Blue (Columbia)
- 51) **Miles Davis**--At Newport 1958 (Columbia)
- 52) **Miles Davis**--Miles Ahead (Columbia)
- 53) **Miles Davis**--Miles Smiles (Columbia)
- 54) **Thelonious Monk**--The Genius of Modern Music Volume 1 and 2 (Blue Note)
- 55) **Thelonious Monk**--Brilliant Corners (OJC/Riverside)
- 56) **Thelonious Monk**--Monk's Dream (Columbia)
- 57) **Thelonious Monk**--with John Coltrane (OJC/Riverside)
- 58) **Thelonious Monk**--Thelonious Himself (OJC/Riverside)
- 59) **Thelonious Monk**--Misterioso (OJC/Riverside)
- 60) **Art Blakey**--A Night at Birdland Volume 1 and 2 (Blue Note)
- 61) **Art Blakey**--At the Café Bohemia Volume 1 and 2 (Blue Note)
- 62) **Art Blakey**--Moanin' (Blue Note)
- 63) **Art Blakey**--The Big Beat (Blue Note)
- 64) **Art Blakey**--Mosaic (Blue Note)
- 65) **Art Blakey**--Caravan (OJC/Riverside)
- 66) **Art Blakey**--Free For All (Blue Note)
- 67) **John Coltrane**--Blue Train (Blue Note)
- 68) **John Coltrane**--Soultrane (OJC/Prestige)
- 69) **John Coltrane**--Coltrane's Sound (Atlantic)
- 70) **John Coltrane**--Giant Steps (Atlantic)
- 71) **John Coltrane**--Crescent (Impulse)
- 72) **John Coltrane**--Ballads (Impulse)
- 73) **John Coltrane**--with Johnny Hartman (Impulse)
- 74) **John Coltrane**--Love Supreme (Impulse)
- 75) **John Coltrane**--Live at Birdland (Impulse)
- 76) **Sonny Rollins**--Plus Four (OJC/Prestige)
- 77) **Sonny Rollins**--Saxophone Colossus (OJC/Prestige)
- 78) **Sonny Rollins**--Way Out West (OJC/Contemporary)
- 79) **Sonny Rollins**--Freedom Suite (OJC/Riverside)
- 80) **Sonny Rollins**--Tenor Madness (OJC/Prestige)
- 81) **Sonny Rollins**--A Night at the Village Vanguard (Blue Note)
- 82) **Sonny Rollins**--The Bridge (RCA)

- 83) **Fats Navarro**--Complete Blue Note and Capitol Recordings (Blue Note)
- 84) **Fats Navarro**--Goin' To Minton's (Savoy)
- 85) **Fats Navarro**--with the Tadd Dameron Band at the Royal Roost 1948 (Milestone)
- 86) **Clifford Brown**--Study in Brown (EmArcy)
- 87) **Clifford Brown**--Brown and Roach Incorporated (EmArcy)
- 88) **Clifford Brown**--Clifford Brown and Max Roach (EmArcy)
- 89) **Clifford Brown**--at Basin Street (EmArcy)
- 90) **Clifford Brown**--with Strings (EmArcy)
- 91) **Kenny Dorham**--Afro Cuban (Blue Note)
- 92) **Kenny Dorham**--Jazz Contrasts (OJC/Riverside)
- 93) **Kenny Dorham**--Round About Midnight at the Café Bohemia (Blue Note)
- 94) **Bill Evans**--Everybody Digs Bill Evans (OJC/Riverside)
- 95) **Bill Evans**--Interplay (OJC/Riverside)
- 96) **Bill Evans**--Sunday Night at the Village Vanguard (OJC/Riverside)
- 97) **Herbie Hancock**--Empyrean Isles (Blue Note)
- 98) **Herbie Hancock**--Maiden Voyage (Blue Note)
- 99) **Herbie Hancock**--Takin' Off (Blue Note)
- 100) **Charles Mingus**--Mingus Ah Um (Columbia)
- 101) **Charles Mingus**--Blues and Roots (Atlantic)
- 102) **Charles Mingus**--Pithecanthropus Erectus (Atlantic)
- 103) **Charles Mingus**--Tijuana Moods (RCA)
- 104) **Horace Silver**--Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers (Blue Note)
- 105) **Horace Silver**--Blowin' the Blues Away (Blue Note)
- 106) **Horace Silver**--Song For My Father (Blue Note)
- 107) **Horace Silver**--Cape Verdean Blues (Blue Note)
- 108) **Milt Jackson**--Bags and Trane (Atlantic)
- 109) **Milt Jackson**--Bags Meets Wes (OJC/Riverside)
- 110) **Milt Jackson**--Wizard of the Vibes (Blue Note)
- 111) **Lee Morgan**--Candy (Blue Note)
- 112) **Lee Morgan**--The Sidewinder (Blue Note)
- 113) **Lee Morgan**--Cornbread (Blue Note)
- 114) **Wayne Shorter**--Speak No Evil (Blue Note)
- 115) **Wayne Shorter**--Ju Ju (Blue Note)
- 116) **Wayne Shorter**--Night Dreamer (Blue Note)
- 117) **Cannonball Adderley**--In Chicago with John Coltrane (Mercury)
- 118) **Cannonball Adderley**--Know What I Mean (OJC/Riverside)
- 119) **Cannonball Adderley**--Something Else (Blue Note)
- 120) **Art Pepper**--Meets the Rhythm Section (OJC/Contemporary)
- 121) **Art Pepper**--Plus Eleven (OJC/Contemporary)
- 122) **J.J. Johnson**--The Eminent J.J. Johnson Volume 1 and 2 (Blue Note)
- 123) **J.J. Johnson**--with Stan Getz At the Opera House (Verve)
- 124) **Dexter Gordon**--Go (Blue Note)
- 125) **Dexter Gordon**--Doin' Alright (Blue Note)
- 126) **Chet Baker**--The Chet Baker Quartet featuring Russ Freeman (Blue Note/Pacific Jazz)
- 127) **Chet Baker**--Best of Chet Baker Sings (Blue Note/Pacific Jazz)
- 128) **Chet Baker**--Chet Baker and Crew (Blue Note/Pacific Jazz)
- 129) **Wes Montgomery**--Smoking at the Half Note (Verve)
- 130) **Wes Montgomery**--The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery (OJC/Riverside)
- 131) **Wes Montgomery**--Boss Guitar (OJC/Riverside)
- 132) **Sonny Clark**--Sonny's Crib (Blue Note)
- 133) **Sonny Clark**--Cool Struttin' (Blue Note)
- 134) **Oscar Peterson**--West Side Story (Verve)
- 135) **Oscar Peterson**--Night Train (Verve)

- 136) **Gerry Mulligan**--The Original Quartet with Chet Baker (Blue Note/Pacific Jazz)
- 137) **Tadd Dameron**--The Magic Touch (OJC/Riverside)
- 138) **Tadd Dameron**--Mating Call (OJC/Prestige)
- 139) **Lennie Tristano**--Lennie Tristano/The New Tristano (Atlantic)
- 140) **Sonny Stitt**--with Bud Powell and J.J. Johnson (OJC/Prestige)
- 141) **Stan Getz**--Complete Roost Recordings (Roost)
- 142) **Stan Getz**--Focus (Verve)
- 143) **Stan Getz**--Getz/Gilberto (Verve)
- 144) **Jackie McLean**--Jackie's Bag (Blue Note)
- 145) **Jackie McLean**--Swing, Swang, Swingin' (Blue Note)
- 146) **Freddie Hubbard**--Goin' Up (Blue Note)
- 147) **Freddie Hubbard**--Ready For Freddie (Blue Note)
- 148) **Freddie Hubbard**--Hub Tones (Blue Note)
- 149) **Freddie Hubbard**--Red Clay (CTI)
- 150) **Barry Harris**--at the Jazz Workshop (OJC/Riverside)
- 151) **Clark Terry**--Serenade To A Bus Seat (OJC/Riverside)
- 152) **Booker Little**--Out Front (Candid)
- 153) **Booker Little**--Booker Little and Friend (Bethlehem)
- 154) **Eric Dolphy**--Far Cry (OJC/New Jazz)
- 155) **Eric Dolphy**--Outward Bound (OJC/New Jazz)
- 156) **Larry Young**--Unity (Blue Note)
- 157) **Joe Henderson**--Page One (Blue Note)
- 158) **Joe Henderson**--Mode For Joe (Blue Note)
- 159) **Ornette Coleman**--Tomorrow Is the Question (OJC/Contemporary)
- 160) **Ornette Coleman**--The Shape of Jazz To Come (Atlantic)
- 161) **Ornette Coleman**--Change of the Century (OJC/Contemporary)
- 162) **Art Farmer**--When Farmer Met Gryce (OJC/Prestige)
- 163) **Donald Byrd**--Byrd in Flight (Blue Note)
- 164) **Donald Byrd**--Byrd in Hand (Blue Note)
- 165) **Max Roach**--Max Roach Plus Four (EmArcy)
- 166) **Max Roach**--Deeds Not Words (OJC/Riverside)
- 167) **McCoy Tyner**--The Real McCoy (Blue Note)
- 168) **McCoy Tyner**--Inception (Impulse)
- 169) **Wynton Kelly**--Kelly Blue (OJC/Riverside)
- 170) **Herbie Nichols**--Complete Blue Note Recordings (Blue Note)
- 171) **Woody Shaw**--Rosewood (Columbia)
- 172) **Woody Shaw**--The Moontrane (Muse)
- 173) **Curtis Fuller**--Bluesette (Savoy)
- 174) **Jimmy Smith**--House Party (Blue Note)
- 175) **Jimmy Smith**--Back at the Chicken Shack (Blue Note)
- 176) **Jimmy Smith**--Jimmy and Wes: The Dynamic Duo (Verve)
- 177) **Johnny Smith**--Moonlight in Vermont (Roost)
- 178) **Hampton Hawes**--All Night Session Volume 1, 2 and 3 (OJC/Contemporary)
- 179) **Oliver Nelson**--Blues and the Abstract Truth (Impulse)
- 180) **Pepper Adams**--10 to 4 at the Five Spot (OJC/Riverside)
- 181) **Hank Mobley**--Roll Call (Blue Note)
- 182) **Hank Mobley**--Soul Station (Blue Note)
- 183) **George Russell**--Ezz-thetic (OJC/Riverside)
- 184) **Dave Brubeck**--Brubeck Time (Columbia)
- 185) **Grant Green**--Talkin' About (Blue Note)
- 186) **Nat Cole**--Best of the Trio: The Instrumentals (Capitol)
- 187) **Ahmad Jamal**--At the Pershing (GRP/Chess)
- 188) **Ahmad Jamal**--Ahmad's Blues (GRP/Chess)

- 189) **Kenny Burrell**--Kenny Burrell and John Coltrane (OJC/Prestige)
- 190) **Erroll Garner**--The Original Misty (Mercury)
- 191) **Erroll Garner**--Concert By the Sea (Columbia)
- 192) **Lee Konitz**--Subconscious-Lee (OJC/Prestige)
- 193) **Lee Konitz**--Motion (Verve)
- 194) **Lou Donaldson**--The Blues Walk (Blue Note)
- 195) **Modern Jazz Quartet**--Django (OJC/Prestige)
- 196) **Modern Jazz Quartet**--Fontessa (Atlantic)
- 197) **Paul Chambers**--Whims of Chambers (Blue Note)
- 198) **Paul Chambers**--Chambers Music (Blue Note)
- 199) **Oscar Pettiford**--Another One (Bethlehem)
- 200) **Oscar Pettiford**--The New Oscar Pettiford Sextet (OJC/Prestige)