

# Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers

Recorded live at S ngerhalle Untert rkheim, July 15, 1978

## A Great Day in Stuttgart

The “Jazz Messengers”, the ensemble created by the drummer Art Blakey, has been described as the true university, the post-graduate college of jazz. For if Blakey ever began repeating himself, he would shuffle the musicians in his band around, replacing experienced players with highly talented novices. It was a strategy that kept him young – while everyone else grew old. The man known as the Jazz Tiger for his attacking style, was also the great vampire of jazz: not unlike the much less transparent bandleader Miles Davis, the drummer was constantly in search of “fresh blood”. If everyone who had ever played with the Messengers had turned up to play the same gig, they would without doubt have created the best big band of all time. And if they had posed for a group portrait, then it would have had to hang alongside the existing and definitive jazz group portrait, Art Kane’s “A Great Day in Harlem” from 1958. Kane’s picture captures 57 of the leading jazz musicians of their day (possibly of any day), posing outside a house in Harlem. Among them, naturally, is Art Blakey. But our focus is on a Great Day in Stuttgart: Saturday, 15 July 1978. The 58-year-old Blakey, a man of cheerful extravagance and a convivial host, gave a guest performance at the S ngerhalle in Untert rkheim, the suburb of Stuttgart better known for its wine and car production. The ambience was fantastic. And having just undergone a blood replacement, Blakey’s ensemble was rejuvenated: Blakey was joined on stage by Russian-born trumpeter, now US citizen, Valery Ponomarev, David Schnitter (tenor), Bobby Watson (alto), James Williams (piano) and Dennis Irwin (bass). Having survived Blakey’s baptism by fire, they all committed themselves to a life-time of jazz. Today Ponomarev is 71, David Schnitter 64 and Bobby Watson 60; these three remain active. James Williams died in 2004 at the age of 53, Dennis Irwin died in 2008 aged 56.

Max Roach, another jazz drum legend, once said that Art Blakey’s style of drumming had been labelled “thunder” for good reason, and the recording of the Stuttgart concert reveals why: the thunder happens whenever one of his limbs begins to move independently and completely unfettered, as if serving a higher, magical precision: “that poly-rhythmic thing,” Roach used to call it. My favourite track on this LP is Benny Golson’s *I remember Clifford*, an elegy for trumpeter Clifford Brown, who died in a car accident. Benny Golson was a member of the Jazz Messengers in the late 1950s for a short time only, but as composer he was the lynchpin of the Stuttgart concert, responsible also for the C-side track *Blues March*. Golson is also one of the three last surviving musicians who appeared on that “Great Day in Harlem” group photo of 1958 (the other two being Sonny Rollins and Horace Silver; Art Blakey died on 16 October 1990). Golson’s is, if you like, the hidden storyline of Steven Spielberg’s 2004 box-office hit “Terminal”, a movie about a man, played by Tom Hanks, whose ambition is to collect the autographs of all musicians pictured on the group photo “A Great Day in Harlem”. Although he already had Blakey’s signature, he was missing Golson’s, so he travelled to New York without valid documentation and was held for nine months at the city’s JFK airport. If one were to broaden the focus of this film just a little, it would bring into view Art Blakey, the man to whom jazz owes many of its key developments, drumrolls and background stories. So how fortunate we are to have this LP that delivers a short Untert rkheim excerpt in jazz history. It was one day in summer 36 years ago – it was a Great Day in Stuttgart.

**Side A** (21:11)

**1 Jodi**

WALTER DAVIS / 10:36

**2 Body & Soul**

JOHN W. GREEN / 10:34

**Side B** (21:10)

**3 Mishima**

DAVID SCHNITTER / 13:50

**4 Moanin’**

BOBBY TIMMONS / 7:19

**Side C** (19:16)

**5 Blues March**

BENNY GOLSON / 10:20

**6 I Remember Clifford**

BENNY GOLSON / 8:56

**Side D** (19:28)

**7 Hawk Man**

ROBERT WATSON / 19:28

Art Blakey (dr), Valery Ponomarev (tp), David Schnitter (ts),  
Bobby Watson (as), James Williams (p), Dennis Irwin (b)

Original Recording produced by: Dieter Zimmerle / Artistic Director: Helmut Enz / Sound Engineer: Peter Braun / Remastered by: Andrea Walz, Manfred Deppe  
Label Researcher: Sandra Jedlitschky / Label Manager: Marcus Heinicke / Liner Notes: Peter K mmel translated by Alan Seaton / Photos: J rg Becker (cover), Hans Kumpf  
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