

BOOKER ERVIN

"The Book Cooks"



PHOTOGRAPHY BY:
STEPHEN HAAS

Foreword & Notes From
Original Vinyl Release

BOOKER ERVIN

The Books Cooks

There has been a lot of talk about “soul” lately. It has repeatedly cropped up as an alternate phrase for “funk.” Nothing is wrong with either word except when what they are used to describe is a synthetic brand of the characteristics they are supposed to represent...

There is nothing contrived about the kind of playing that comes jolting out of the tenor saxophone of Booker Ervin. If you are familiar with the way life has confronted him and, in turn, the way he has reacted, you know that he has a great quantity of “soul.” It is natural that this is expressed in his playing. Ervin’s style is a shouting, sometimes screaming, sometimes tender thing which is just as likely to come out in long tones as in rapid flurries.

Booker Telleferro Ervin was born in Denison, Texas on October 31, 1930. His father played trombone and his mother belonged to a holy roller church. When Booker was eight, he took up the trombone in grade school and played it until 1943. From that time until 1950, he gave up music. Then, on entering the Air Force, he began playing tenor saxophone. On the island of Okinawa, he led his own combo and thus began the Odyssey of Booker Ervin.

After his discharge in 1953, Booker returned to Texas but in 1954 journeyed to Boston for studies at Schillinger House. His next move was to be New York but illness set him back several giant steps to Denison instead. By 1955 he was ready again, touring the South, Southwest and West with Ernie Field’s band Leaving Fields in 1956, and he gigged around Dallas with James Clay. After going to Chicago with Lowell Fulson, he returned to Dallas for three months at the Harmony Lounge.

Ervin then headed for Portland, Oregon, but never reached his destination. Stopping off at Denver to see a friend, he was offered a job and played there for eighteen months. He remembers: “It was my first chance to really start playing changes because the guitar player on the gig could play all the modern originals.”

At the same time, Booker began studying engineering because he didn’t feel secure about a career in music. He stopped blowing to concentrate on school but soon realized that this wasn’t what he wanted. After three months at the post office, he was convinced that he had to play and that was all there was to it. He left at the end of 1957 and went to Pittsburgh with a drummer from the Smoky City who had been stationed in Denver. In Pittsburgh, because of the union, he worked in music for one week out of the six months he was there.

Undaunted, Ervin, a man of patience and fortitude, finally made it to New York in May of 1958. Pianist Horace Parlan, whom he had met in Pittsburgh, and saxophonist Shafi Hadi took him down to sit in with Charles Mingus. Trombonist Jimmy Knepper was leaving the group, so Booker worked the last two days of the engagement. Mingus promised to call him in November. By that time, Ervin was working in Horn & Hardart but Mingus did call and Booker joined him. He was with the group until February, 1960, except for a gig with Roland Hanna at the Five Spot in the fall of 1959.

As a kid in Texas (and haven’t a lot of good tenor men come out of the Lone Star State), Booker Ervin heard Count Basie but wasn’t really aware of it. Later he did become aware of Lester Young, then Dexter Gordon and Sonny Stitt; finally Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane. In striving for originality, Booker has not copied these men although he has learned from them. For instance, there are areas of sound where he and Trane coincide but their methods of attack are different.

When I asked Mingus about Booker, he said: “He swings – he always has a definite swing whether he is playing on or behind the beat. And he has a way of playing whole

notes – tied notes – lines of whole notes and making them into a melody.”

After paying dues in various bands and on day jobs, Booker feels he would like to have his own group. This recording unit may not be the one he will have when his aim is fulfilled but it is a good start.

Zoot Sims is one player who never has had to wear a “soul badge” on his chest to let us know that he is a warm, blues-rooted, deeply moving player. His horn has always spoken effectively for him. Although he and Booker play in different styles, they complement each other rather than clash. The exchanges in *The Book Cooks* (a possible subtitle might be *And Zoot Boots*) are an example of the spontaneous kind of spirited blowing that is usually confined to private jam sessions.

Tommy Turrentine is a trumpeter from Pittsburgh who most recently was with Max Roach’s group. His playing here far exceeds anything I heard him do then.

Another Tommy, Flanagan, has established himself as one of the best pianists in jazz since coming to New York in 1956. Equally effective in solo or accompaniment, he fuses with George Tucker and Dannie Richmond to produce one of the hardest driving rhythm sections I have heard in many a measure. Tucker, heard with Jerome Richardson in 1959, has more or less been the “house” bassist at The Playhouse since. Richmond has been a vital force in the Charlie Mingus group at the Show Place.

- IRA GITLER

"THE BOOK COOKS"



1. THE BLUE BOOK (Booker Ervin)

The Blue Book is a lament. Tucker has the intro. After the theme, Flanagan, Ervin, Turrentine and Sims solo in that order.

2. GIT IT (Booker Ervin)

Listen to the way they propel Ervin's opening blues, *Git It*. Solos are by Turrentine, Sims, Flanagan, Ervin, Tucker and Richmond

3. LITTLE JANE (Booker Ervin)

The pretty *Little Jane*, showing Ervin's Mingus influence, opens side two. After some stark playing by Booker, Turrentine, Sims and Flanagan also solo. Tucker is as strong as an ox.

4. THE BOOK COOKS (Teddy Charles)

The side closer is the earlier-mentioned *Book Cooks*. Ervin, Turrentine, Sims and Flanagan solo before Booker and Zoot take off.

5. LARGO (Booker Ervin)

Ervin's composition, *Largo*, is a quartet number featuring the leader and his pianist in a subdued vein.

6. POOR BUTTERFLY (Golden-Hubbell)

Booker carries the melody of *Poor Butterfly* before going into his improvisation. Turrentine, Sims and Flanagan follow.

If your taste is for modern jazz with emotional power, I think you will appreciate it when Ervin's servin'. There is no doubt that the Book Cooks!

- Ira Gitler

..... THANKS FOR LISTENING!

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