

Illinois Jacquet

Jacquet, Jean-Baptiste. Tenor saxophonist also known as Illinois Jacquet (pronounced ZHA-KAY) was born October 31, 1922, in Broussard, Louisiana and died July 22, 2004, in Queens, New York. Inspired by such great jazz pioneers as Lester Young, Herschel Evans, and Coleman Hawkins, Jacquet would become a major influence on many later sax players, most notably John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman.

Born in Louisiana to a Sioux-Indian mother and a French-Creole father who was a railroad worker and part-time bass player, Jacquet moved with his family to Houston, Texas, before he was one year old. By the time he was a teenager, Jacquet already was performing with several notable musicians.

From 1939 through part of 1942, he played with the Houston-based Milt Larkin band. The group did a stint in Chicago from 1941 to 1942 and also played at least one performance at the Apollo Theatre in New York City. In 1942, Lionel Hampton hired the nineteen-year-old Jacquet to replace the great saxophonist Lester Young. On May 26, 1942, Jacquet performed what would become a legendary solo during the recording of the tune "Flying Home." His solo, which he later attributed to divine inspiration, occurred when Hampton unexpectedly called on Jacquet in the middle of the tune. The solo became so popular that it was considered preferable for tenor players to learn and perform Jacquet's original solo, rather than to improvise an "inferior" one. This recording of "Flying Home" was so well known, that it would later appear on the soundtracks to three different movies.

Jacquet left Hampton in 1942 to join Cab Calloway's band. The only recordings available from this period are radio transcriptions, because of a recording ban enacted by the American Federation of Musicians. In 1944, Jacquet took part in the first "Jazz at the Philharmonic" concert presented by Norman Granz in Los Angeles. Jacquet joined the Count Basie Orchestra in 1945 but left in 1946 to join the Jazz at the Philharmonic tour.

It was during the mid-1940s that Jacquet became famous for his unorthodox, and sometimes controversial, sax playing technique. Known for exploring the widest ranges of his instrument, he was noted both for "honking" in the lowest register and for using harmonic notes, which were far beyond the traditional range of the instrument. Jacquet also became known for repeating the same note over and over for several minutes at a time. His squealing high notes and repeated honking were panned by many critics, but he became quite popular with audiences of the "Jazz at The Philharmonic" concerts. Jacquet would come to be known as one of a group of tenor saxophonists called the "Texas Tenors," which included Herschel Evans, Arnett Cobb, and Buddy Tate.

In 1947, Jacquet formed his own band, with whom he continued to be active for more than fifty years. In 1983, Jacquet was invited to speak at Harvard University, where he was so well received that the school appointed him to a brief tenure as an artist-in-residence. In 1991, he



became the subject of a documentary film, *Texas Tenor: the Illinois Jacquet Story*. Jacquet, who had played for presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, performed with President Bill Clinton in June 1993. Jacquet's last performance would be on July 16, 2004, at the Lincoln Center in New York City. He died of a heart attack only six days later.

It is worth noting that, while he is often remembered for his use of unorthodox techniques in jazz, Jacquet also recorded many beautiful ballads and blues inflected tunes that show strong evidence of his Texas roots.

Grant Mazak