

Swing University Spring 2009

Individual Class Listings with Descriptions

LESTER YOUNG with Phil Schaap

Mondays, 3/23; 3/30; 4/6 and 4/13

4-class session: \$125

Tenor saxophonist Lester Young was the primary soloist in the original Count Basie Orchestra and Billie Holiday's favorite accompanist. Phil Schaap, a former neighbor of Young's and a family friend, will teach you the essentials of "Prez"-idential history.

- **WEEK ONE (March 23)**
EARLY LIFE, MUSICAL INFLUENCES, AND EARLY CAREER
Lester Young was born on August 27, 1909 in Woodville, Mississippi and raised around New Orleans. His father was a very early Jazz musician who left New Orleans in 1919, taking a band of family members on the road. Little Lester became the drummer. Lester Young switched to saxophone in his mid-teens. As the 1920s progressed, he became the key soloist in the family orchestra. Soon Young moved on. Highlights on his early career included short stretches with King Oliver and Fletcher Henderson, with Kansas City becoming the center of Prez' musical world. By then, Young was a *tenor* saxophonist.
- **WEEK TWO (March 30)**
LESTER YOUNG IN THE SWING ERA
In Kansas City, Lester Young met and befriended the great Count Basie. Young got on board when Basie took a Swing Era Big Band out of KC to great national success. Young was the most prominent member in that band from 1936-1940, rejoining in 1943-1944. In between those stints Young had tried to lead his own units, but his preferences for small groups at the peak of the Big Band Era limited his success.
- **WEEK THREE (April 6)**
LESTER YOUNG CAREER AFTER WORLD WAR II
It was only after World War II that Lester Young became a star in his own right. Part of his success was his touring with the original Jazz At The Philharmonic, the concertized Jam Sessions produced by Norman Granz. Prez also had hit records throughout the late 1940s. This pattern - small Young led combos, records, and JATP touring - established in the 1940s, remained Lester Young's work regimen for the rest of his life. Lester Young died on March 15, 1959, age 49.
- **WEEK FOUR (April 13)**
THE MUSIC OF LESTER YOUNG
Lester's early playing incorporated the breakthrough of Jazz, itself, in New Orleans, the message of Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives, the saxophone of

Frank Trumbauer, and some flavor of Tram's partner, Bix Beiderbecke. Young was able to establish a second school of tenor sax concept and his 1936-1941 recordings are the epitome of The Swing Era's innovation. Subsequently, Lester Young revised his style and can be heard as directing more attention to the rhythmic plotting of his notes than their pitches and harmonic implication. The music of a weakened Lester Young in his final years can, nevertheless, be heard as a new major period in his art.