

Johnny Griffin - A Blowing Session (1957)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Way You Look Tonight, The* 2. *Ball Bearing* 3. *All The Things You Are* 4. *Smoke Stack* + 5. *Smoke Stack - (alternate take)* Bass – Paul Chambers Drums – Art Blakey Piano – Wynton Kelly Tenor Saxophone – Hank Mobley, John Coltrane, Johnny Griffin Trumpet – Lee Morgan Recorded at the Van Gelder Studio, New Jersey on April 6, 1957 Originally issued as Blue Note BLP 1559.

While listening to *A Blowin' Session* -- so named because of the four horn players featured on the album -- one wonders why Johnny Griffin didn't become a "saxophone colossus" like contemporaries Sonny Rollins, Wayne Shorter, or John Coltrane (who plays on this album). Griffin firm tone and blisteringly fast runs on the tenor sax place him head and shoulders above both Coltrane and Hank Mobley on this set. (To be fair, Coltrane was likely still an active user of heroin and alcohol when this was recorded, prior to the spiritual awakening and subsequent sobriety he experienced in the Summer of 1957, which he discusses in the liner notes to *A Love Supreme*.) As a band leader, Griffin leads a tight group, anchored by two legendary players on the rhythm section: Paul Chambers (bass) and Art Blakely (drums). The four horns come off a bit gimmicky at times, especially during the choruses, and the arrangements are fairly predictable. Either way, Griffin runs a tight ship here. The opener, "The Way You Look Tonight," is the clear highlight, showing off everybody's talents expertly. Otherwise, the remaining three tracks are quite solid, though the covers are a bit better than Griffin's originals ("Ball Bearing" and "Smoke Stack"). Aside from Griffin and the rhythm section, Coltrane's playing shows signs of his emerging and signature style, though he's not quite yet to the place where he could pull off something like "Giant Steps." Lee Morgan is as fluid and forceful as ever. The only weak link here is probably Hank Mobley, who seems dwarfed by the talent surrounding him. All in all, fans of hard bop will find plenty to enjoy about this album, and revel in its all-star lineup. ---yerblues , rateyourmusic.com

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