

Javon Jackson

Javon Jackson was born in Carthage, Missouri on June 16, 1965. His family moved to Cleveland and then settled in Denver. Jazz was always in the air at home, his parents being big fans of Ahmad Jamal and Gene Ammons, and Jackson took to the music early.

Starting on the alto saxophone, Jackson was soon enamored with Sonny Stitt, whose prodigious technique and constant flow of rhythmically charged ideas was an early role model for the aspiring player. As Jackson got older, he became interested in the work of other major saxophonists like Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson and John Coltrane. Jackson began playing, with Billy Wallace, a pianist who had played alongside Sonny Rollins in a Max Roach band in the 50's. In the McDonalds All-American Band, where he was now playing tenor saxophone, Jackson met Brandford Marsalis. Encouraged by Marsalis to attend the Berklee School of Music in Boston, Jackson moved east.

In his years at Berklee (1984-1986), Jackson studied with the eminent saxophone instructor Joe Viola, saxophonist Billy Pierce, and pianist Donald Brown, two former members of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. Brown was instrumental in eventually getting Jackson a spot in Art Blakey's legendary band. After sitting in with the Messengers at Mikell's, a New York club where Blakey often played in the 80's, Jackson so impressed Blakey that he was asked to join the band. The years with Blakey were professional and personal highpoints for Jackson. "I wouldn't be where I am today without him. Blakey taught me to be a man, he taught me how to be a leader."

Jackson stayed in the Messengers, playing alongside such gifted players as saxophonist Kenny Garrett, trumpeters Terence Blanchard and Wallace Rooney and pianist Benny Green, until Blakey's death in 1990. He then went to work with the Charlie Haden Liberation Orchestra, Nat Adderly, Richard Davis and others, including the bands of two legendary figures of modern jazz: trumpeter Freddie Hubbard and drummer Elvin Jones. Jackson also cut one recording for Criss Cross (featuring Jones as a sideman) and has since played with Cedar Walton and Ron Carter. "Leaders like Ron Carter and Elvin Jones are like Art Blakey," Jackson says. "They approach each set as if it were the last time they will ever be on stage." Jackson can be heard on Carter's recent Blue Note release Mr. Bow-tie. In 1994, Jackson recorded his first Blue Note session as a leader, When The Time Is Right, featuring pianist Jacky Terrasson and produced by famed vocalist Betty Carter. For One Who Knows followed a year later and utilized Fareed Haque, Peter Washington, Billy Drummond, and Cyro Baptiste. His new record A Look Within, which was produced by Craig Street, will be released in Europe shortly, and will feature Dr. Lonnie Smith and Cassandra Wilson.

Recently, Jackson has been playing with the Blue Note All-Stars which includes saxophonist Greg Osby, pianist Kevin Hays, drummer Bill Stewart and trumpeter Tim Hagans. Jackson's goals are straight forward and pure. "I have to find a way to carve my own little space. I'm just trying to keep improving as a player and to keep taking chances. And trying to stay fresh."