

# Free for all by art blakely and the jazz messengers: an album review

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## **Free For All Album Review**

Jazz music originated in the early 1910s from New Orleans, and as it developed and spread around the world many new and distinctive styles arose. The album I chose to review is called Free For All, featuring Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers. The album was recorded on February 10th, 1964, and was released the same year. The record label of the album is Blue Note, and it was produced by Alfred Lion. The genre of this album is typically categorized under hard bop. This album is arguably one of Art Blakey's greatest albums, and this is the first album I'm reviewing in which the drummer is the feature artist. Now that I'm comfortable with Jazz music, I decided to pick an album that focused on the drummer because it's very interesting to observe the style of other drummers, especially a legend like Art Blakey who really paved the way for other jazz drummers in the genre.

The album Free For All of course features Art Blakey on the drums. The rhythm section consists of Cedar Wilson on the piano and Reggie Workman on the bass. In the brass section Freddie Hubbard is on the trumpet and Curtis Fuller is on the trombone. Last but certainly not least, Wayne Shorter is on the tenor saxophone. There are a total of four songs on the album, and each one was written by one of the musicians on the album.

Since the title of the album is Free For All, there was no way I couldn't write about the song "Free For All", which was arranged by Wayne Shorter. The rhythm section kicks off this driving upbeat piece and the tenor, trumpet and trombone join in not too long after. When they enter, there are a couple well-

timed pauses in which Art Blakey provides stunning fills going around the set. Throughout the whole song he refuses to let the tempo slip, and he does many snare comps throughout the entire piece, his comps really complimented the fast paced solos. The first soloist is Wayne Shorter on the tenor sax and you can't help but feel as if he is talking to you. He plays many fast notes packed together and chooses to play a lot of notes that aren't in the scale, however his solo is pieced together so well that even his out notes seem intentional. The second soloist is Freddie Hubbard on the trumpet. He plays around a lot with the dynamics and doesn't concentrate so much on playing too many fast notes, however he does speed up when he's going up and down the scale. Last, but certainly not least, is Art Blakey with a drum solo in which he starts off his solo keeping the rhythm on the ride cymbal and playing extremely fast on the snare (if I am not mistaken), but he quickly moves to the toms, in which he plays at a tempo so quick that it is just mesmerizing to listen too. Art Blakey clearly puts on fantastic show with his solo. The piece ends similarly to how it began, going out with a strong bang leaving you hoping for more!

Taking it down a notch, Pensativa slows the tempo down a notch, but it's light and playful swing feel keeps you interested and even gave me the chills. Art Blakey keeps it simple with a plain swing beat and rim clicks on the snare. The main focus of the beginning of the piece is the trumpet, which starts off the piece with a solo. In the solo there was something I was not familiar with but really enjoyed where the trumpet faded into the trombone for a couple of seconds but then returned to the trumpet. This happened

once a again with the saxophone and it kind of reminded me of trading fours, however the sax and the trombone only came in for a few seconds on the trumpet solo. The next soloist is the saxophone who inserts well-timed pauses, which really allows you to treasure each note, adding a flurry of notes where he feels necessary. The saxophone solo is followed by a piano solo in which the piano is not afraid to experiment with notes outside of the scale. The piece ends with the trumpet taking control, and he does something similar to what I was trying to describe before, which resembled the trading fours. The piece fades out as lightly and playfully as it started, with the piano being the main focus, playing at a slightly louder volume than before. This song truly is wonderful to listen to, however I can't help but admit that I would've liked to hear less of the trumpet and a little more from the other instruments.

I have to say, it's a shame there are only four songs on this album. If I could only own one Art Blakey album, I'm glad to say that I have Free For All. It truly is a timely classic and I enjoyed every second of listening and observing Art Blakey's drumming styles and techniques. Being a drummer I really enjoyed picking him out from the rest, and I tried really hard to listen to the bass, however it is very easy to get carried away with all the other instruments playing over the rhythm section. Art Blakey's drum solos were truly something special (and quite rare) and I soaked up every single second of his playing. This album deserves a 10 out of 10 in my book; I just wish it were longer!