

Eric Dolphy was a true original with his own distinctive styles on alto, flute, and bass clarinet. His music fell into the "avant-garde" category yet he did not discard chordal improvisation altogether (although the relationship of his notes to the chords was often pretty abstract). While most of the other "free jazz" players sounded very serious in their playing, Dolphy's solos often came across as ecstatic and exuberant. His improvisations utilized very wide intervals, a variety of nonmusical speechlike sounds, and its own logic. Although the alto was his main axe, Dolphy was the first flutist to move beyond bop (influencing James Newton) and he largely introduced the bass clarinet to jazz as a solo instrument. He was also one of the first (after Coleman Hawkins) to record unaccompanied horn solos, preceding Anthony Braxton by five years.

Eric Dolphy first recorded while with Roy Porter & His Orchestra (1948-1950) in Los Angeles, he was in the Army for two years, and he then played in obscurity in L.A. until he joined the Chico Hamilton Quintet in 1958. In 1959 he settled in New York and was soon a member of the Charles Mingus Quartet. By 1960 Dolphy was recording regularly as a leader for Prestige and gaining attention for his work with Mingus, but throughout his short career he had difficulty gaining steady work due to his very advanced style. Dolphy recorded quite a bit during 1960-1961, including three albums cut at the Five Spot while with trumpeter Booker Little, Free Jazz with Ornette Coleman, sessions with Max Roach, and some European dates. Out to Lunch Late in 1961 Dolphy was part of the John Coltrane Quintet; their engagement at the Village Vanguard caused conservative critics to try to smear them as playing "anti-jazz" due to the lengthy and very free solos. During 1962-1963 Dolphy played third stream music with Gunther Schuller and Orchestra U.S.A., and gigged all too rarely with his own group. In 1964 he recorded his classic Out to Lunch for Blue Note and traveled to Europe with the Charles Mingus Sextet (which was arguably the bassist's most exciting band, as shown on The Great Concert of Charles Mingus). After he chose to stay in Europe, Dolphy had a few gigs but then died suddenly from a diabetic coma at the age of 36, a major loss.

Eric Dolphy



Last Date

Allegedly Eric Dolphy's final recorded performance -- a fact historians roundly dispute -- this session in Hilversum, Holland, teams the masterful bass clarinetist, flutist, and alto saxophonist with a Dutch trio of performers who understand the ways in which their hero and leader modified music in such a unique, passionate, and purposeful way far from convention. In pianist Misha Mengelberg, bassist Jacques Schols, and drummer Han Bennink, Dolphy was firmly entwined with a group who understood his off-kilter, pretzel logic concept in shaping melodies and harmonies that were prime extensions of Thelonious Monk, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor. These three Dolphy originals, one from Monk, one from Mengelberg, and a standard are played so convincingly and with the utmost courage that they created a final stand in the development of how the woodwindist conceived of jazz like no one else before, during, or after his life. Utterly masterful on his flute during "You Don't Know What Love Is," Dolphy's high-drama vibrato tones are simply out of this or any other world, perfectly emoting the bitter-sweet intent of this song. The ribald humor demonstrated during "Miss Ann" is a signature sound of Dolphy's alto sax, angular like Monk, jovial and more out of the box while he digs in. Where

"Epistrophy" might seem standard fare to some, with Dolphy on bass clarinet it is based on voicings even more obtuse than the composer's concept, bouncing along the wings of Mengelberg's piano lines. The post-bop blues of "South Street Exit" is tuneful while also breaking off into tangents, with Bennink's crazy drumming acting like shooting, exploding stars. As the definitive track on this album, "The Madrig Speaks, the Panther Walks" demonstrates the inside-out concept, with mixed tempos changed at will and a 6/8 time insert with Dolphy's choppy alto merging into playful segments as the title suggests -- a most delightful track. The ridiculously titled "Hypochristmutreefuzz" might be the most understated fare in its more simple angularity, as Schols plays his bass in the upper register while the band dances around him. Last Date is one of those legendary albums whose reputation grows with every passing year, and deservedly so. While it reveals more about the genius rhythm section than Dolphy himself, it also marks the passing of one era and the beginning of what has become a most potent and enduring legacy of European creative improvised tradition, started by Mengelberg and Bennink at this mid-'60s juncture.

Eric Dolphy

Last Date

- 1 Epistrophy 11:15
 - 2 South Street Exit 7:20
 - 3 The Madrig Speaks, The Panther Walks 4:50
 - 4 Hypochristmutreefuzz 5:25
 - 5 You Don't Know What Love Is 11:20
 - 6 Miss Ann 5:25
- Total Time: 45:36

**Transferred from a 15ips two track tape
Recorded in Hilversum (NL) on June 2, 1964
Originally released on Limelight in December 1964**