

Odean Pope: Bio

Saxophonist, Composer, Arranger, Educator

Written by Deena Adler

Odean Pope was born in Ninety-Six, South Carolina to musical parents who rooted him in the sounds of the Southern Baptist Church. After moving to Philadelphia at the age of ten, his lifelong study of music began in earnest and was buttressed by The Graniff School of Music and Benjamin Franklin High School's music program.

Odean grew up in jazz rich territory with other Philadelphia notables such as: John Coltrane, Lee Morgan, Clifford Brown, Benny Golson, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy and Percy Heath, Ray Bryant, Bill Barron, Kenny Barron, Archie Shepp, Jymie Merritt, Jimmy Garrison, Philly Joe Jones and Dizzy Gillespie. Coltrane chose Odean to replace him in Jimmy Smith's Group when he left for New York to join Miles Davis. Although he was close to Coltrane and continues to revere his artistry, Odean was always searching for his own musical sound. This led him to study with Ron Rubin, the principal woodwind player in the Philadelphia Orchestra. At a later time he studied at The Paris Conservatory for Music under Kenny Clarke. It was there that he received his Certificate in Orchestration, Modern harmony, African rhythms, Be-Bop Art Forms and Arrangement. He studied with the pianist, Ray Bryant, bassist, Jymie Merritt and was significantly influenced by the brilliant, if not eccentric pianist, Hasaan Ibn Ali. Odean adds, "Then being able to study with Max (Roach) from '79 up until '02, was like going to one of the highest institutions in the whole world."

Integrating several musical influences including the church choir of his youth, Philadelphia jazz and R&B of the 50's and classical woodwind chamber music, led Odean in the early 70's to help form Catalyst, a collective of musicians and music representing his new aesthetic. A two-CD set was reissued in 1999 on 32 Records as: "Catalyst: The Funkiest Band You Never Heard." It was music ahead of its time. In 1979, Odean joined the Max Roach Quartet as a regular member for more than two decades. It was as the tenor man with Max Roach that Odean perfected the techniques of circular breathing and multiphonics, both allowing him to stretch his solo improvisations from dazzling elevations to the throbbing, husky sounds for which he is so well known, to all kinds of delicacy in getting from one to the other. Odean won acclaim from Australia to Japan, even winning "Best Tenor Saxophone Player" at the North Sea Jazz Festival.

Odean works with his trio, (Lee Smith, Craig McIver) quartet and saxophone choir. The saxophone choir is formatted with nine saxophones, and was established by Odean in 1977 and premiered in 1985 with a Soul Note album called "The Saxophone Shop." The saxophone choir has been the realization of his southern legacy; a medium for creating the richly textured harmonic sound that has permeated his musical soul since childhood. Even though he plays clarinet, oboe, piccolo, flute and piano, Odean feels an affinity for the tenor saxophone because it most closely mimics the human voice. He constructs layers of melodic sound by playing within the fourth system in different tone scales using multiphonics, achieving several pitches

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together, for which he is well known. The choir reaches a stunning intensity that is simultaneously one voice and is also, as described by Francis Davis, "harmonically engorged."

Odean has led two musical lives. Whereas his musical legion left for New York, Odean kept Philadelphia as his home base. Having grown up in North Philadelphia, Odean has always felt a strong commitment to his community through working musically with the children. He was musical director of a Philadelphia cultural initiative, "Model Cities." He started the jazz studies program at the Settlement Music School and he continues to give master classes in the School District of Philadelphia, as well as nationally and internationally.

Odean Pope's artistry as performer, composer and arranger has earned him many citations from the City of Philadelphia. Among his many awards are: The Pew Fellowship in the Arts for Music Composition (1992), The Rockefeller Foundation (1992) and several from Chamber Music America.

Odean Pope: Praise

Saxophonist, Composer, Arranger, Educator

"The music (on the Ponderer) is dense but luxuriant, and it moves quickly. Thoroughly propulsive."

Jim Macnie, Boston Pboenix

"Odean Pope's Saxophone Choir hit the groove."

John Diliberto, Down Beat

"The Ponderer wallops you, then surprises you with its subtlety before you can recover."

Village Voice

"Max Roach's longtime saxman Odean Popes Philly proud saxophone ensemble was one of the most explosive units of the 1994 Montreal Jazz Festival."

Willard Jenkins, Jazz-Times

"Tenor man Odean Pope builds a richly arranged environment deserving of the choral moniker on Epitome, the Choir's third CD for Soul Note. An elegant feel is established right away. Pope's own deep, throaty tenor is the horn highlight."

John Corbett, Down Beat

"This recording marks a welcome return for a long silent master and another winning collaboration for Pope and crew."

Michael Rosenstein (One Final Note)

"Charged with the progressive energy of the Avant-garde and tempered by the meditative, soulful communication of the classic jazz tradition, The Mystery of Prince Lasha is worth discovering."

Greg Camphire (ILE Magazine)

"Bask in the excitement of the music."

Mike Shanley (Jazz Times)

"(Odean Pope) continues to be a faithful steward of his muse. His latest trip to The Spirit Room marked another milestone."

Derek Taylor (Bagatellen)

"Pope is simply stoked throughout the set, whether the vehicle is a playfully Monkish romp, a chestnut-flavored ballad replete with a sweeping cadenza or a bristling flag-waver."

Bill Shoemaker (Point of Departure)

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"Any living saxophonist would be glad to take credit for this record."

Ron Sweetman (CODA)

"The writing for the saxophone Choir is brilliant, its musicianship superb...to see Odean Pope and The Saxophone Choir and Trio is to be galvanized by the infinite magic of possibility."

Ron Welburn, Down Beat Magazine

"If John Coltrane was the heavyweight champ of the Tenor Saxophone, then Odean Pope must be the super-heavyweight Champion."

John Chacona, Erie Times, News Showcase Downbeat Magazine Critic

Awards and Honors

RECIPIENT 1991-1992 PEW FELLOWSHIPS IN THE ARTS RECIPIENT

ROCKEFELLER AWARD 1992

CLEVELAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

NORTH SEA JAZZ FESTIVAL #1 TENOR SAXOPHONIST

AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL MUSEUM

PHILADELPHIA CITY PAPER, BEST JAZZ COMPOSER AWARD, 2000

CHAMBER MUSIC AMERICA

CITATIONS FROM THREE PHILADELPHIA MAYORS

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Odean Pope: Notable Collaborations

Saxophonist, Composer, Arranger, Educator

John Coltrane

Clark Terry

Lee Morgan

Louis Bellson

Jimmy Smith

Abby Lincoln

Dr. Art Davis

Rachelle Ferrell

Philly Joe Jones

Jymie Merritt

Elvin Jones

Hasaan Ibn Ali

Dizzy Gillespie

Freddie Hubbard

Chet Baker

Michael Brecker

Benny Golson

Joe Lovano

Grover Washington, Jr.

James Carter Prince Lasha

McCoy Tyner

Khan Jamal

Billy Taylor

Dave Burrell

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Review Courtesy AllAboutJazz.com

Locked and Loaded

Odean Pope Saxophone Choir | Half Note Records

By [Ty Cumbie](#)

On *Locked and Loaded*, Odean Pope and his saxophone choir offer up lush, drum-tight voicings as gorgeous and rich as any golden age big band section, then shift gear from full-throated crooning to full-throttle blowing with no audible effort. The first two tracks, both Pope originals, set the agenda: the standard-ish ballad “Epitome,” which is nearly devoid of improvisation, is followed by the wildly swinging “Prince Lasha,” which is just about all improvisation, and free at that. Pope plays both games expertly on tenor and his inspired choices for counterparts—Michael Brecker, James Carter, Joe Lovano—dig down for their fieriest, most liberated and committed work heard in some time.



Compositionally, *Locked and Loaded* is most entertaining and original on the uptempo pieces—the aforementioned “Prince Lasha,” a strong rendition of “Coltrane Time” and Pope’s jaunty “Muntu Chant” are the standout tunes—but this is pretty much a flawless recording, which is even more impressive given it’s from a live performance.

The less-than-famous rhythm section handles its duties with great skill and brio, and there are several other reed players who didn’t make the marquis, including the underappreciated Philadelphian tenor master Elliott Levin. All the horn playing is first-rate, but it’s Pope’s show and he has no fear of the spotlight. His adept solos, plus one by Brecker that sounds as if he gave it all he had, are highlights.

A very lucky Blue Note crowd got wowed by these shows and some angel saw fit to make a top-shelf recording so we could enjoy it in the comfort of our homes. *Locked and Loaded* ought to make Pope’s reputation even stronger and win him a spot on a few top ten lists.

Track Listing: Epitome; Prince Lasha; Cis; Central Park West; Coltrane Time; Terrestrial; Muntu Chant.

Personnel: Robert Landham, Julian Pressley, Louis Taylor: alto saxes; Elliott Levin, Odean Pope, Terry Lawson: tenor saxes; Joe Sudler: baritone sax; George Burton: piano; Tyrone Brown: bass; Craig McIver: drums. Special Guests Michael Brecker, James Carter, Joe Lovano.

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