



# LOU DONALDSON

"My first impulse is always to describe Lou Donaldson  
as the greatest alto saxophonist in the world."

-- Will Friedwald, New York Sun

Jazz critics agree that "Sweet Poppa Lou" Donaldson is one of the greatest alto saxophonists of all time. He began his career as a bandleader with Blue Note Records in 1952 and, already at age 25, had found his sound, though it would continue to sweeten over the years -- earning him his famed nickname -- "*Sweet Poppa Lou*." He made a series of classic records for Blue Note Records in the 50's and takes pride in having showcased many musicians who made their first records as sidemen for him: Clifford Brown, Grant Green, Blue Mitchell, Donald Byrd, Ray Barretto, Horace Parlan, John Patton, Charles Earland, Al Harewood, Herman Foster, Peck Morrison, Dave Bailey, Leon Spencer, Idris Muhammad, and others. After also making some excellent recordings for Cadet and Argo Records in the early 60s, Lou's return to Blue Note in 1967 was marked by one of his most famous recordings, *Alligator Bogaloo*. Lou's hits on the label are still high demand favorites and, today at age 93, he is its oldest musician from that notable era of jazz. Though now retired, Lou continues to receive applause from fans worldwide who call and write to tell him how much they enjoy his soulful, thoroughly swinging, and steeped in the blues appearances over the years and still love listening to his recordings.

Lou is the recipient of countless honors and awards for his significant contributions to jazz — America's "classical music.". He was awarded the Charlie "Bird" Parker Memorial Medal from the Charlie Parker Foundation in 1975 and was inducted into the International Jazz Hall of Fame in 1993. In 2001, Lou was inducted into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame as a recipient of the esteemed Jay McShann Lifetime Achievement Award. And in 2012, he was inducted into the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame and received the North Carolina Award in Fine Arts, the highest honor his native state of North Carolina bestows to citizens who have distinguished themselves and obtained notable accomplishments in this field. He also received the Ellington Medal from Yale that same year. Lou was designated a Jazz Master in 2013 by the National Endowment for the Arts— our nation's highest award bestowed upon jazz artists

Lou was born in Badin, North Carolina on November 1, 1926 — the second of 4 children born to father Andrew, a minister and graduate of Livingstone College, and mother, Lucy, graduate of Cheyney University. She was a teacher, music director and concert pianist who recognized Lou's expert ear for music and introduced him to the clarinet. He enjoyed listening to the Badin Band led by Director Leo Gabriel who was aware of Lou's interest in the clarinet and sold one to his mother. Lou continues to express appreciation to Director Gabriel for his support and musical guidance along with his mother's tutelage. Lou graduated from West Badin High School in 1942 when at age 15, he matriculated to North Carolina A&T College in Greensboro where he joined the marching band playing clarinet. His education was interrupted when he was drafted into the United States Navy in 1945 during World War II. Lou played in the Great Lakes Navy Band where he would later be recognized by the Naval Training Center Commander in 2003 as one of the first 5000 African Americans allowed to serve our country as Navy Musicians instead of being restricted to the Steward's Branch as previously required because of segregation. While in the Navy, when playing for dances, Lou would also play the alto saxophone. After visiting Chicago several times, he heard of Charlie Parker and, after checking him out, decided that this was the style of playing he would make his own. When he got out of the Navy, Lou completed his education and received a Bachelor of Science degree in May 1948. His alma mater later established the Lou Donaldson Scholarship for Music Excellence in 1972 and awarded Lou an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree in 1982.

Lou moved to New York in late 1949 where he attended the Darrow Institute of Music. He lived in Harlem at 127<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the heart of New York's jazz scene with his new wife, Maker, his longtime sweetheart from Albemarle, North Carolina. She remained his wife and business partner for 56 years until her death in 2006. Together they raised two daughters, Lydia and Carol, and moved the family to the Bronx where Lou still resides. There he penned his signature tunes like *Blues Walk* that are still acclaimed classics today. In retirement, Lou is proud to have written his autobiography and invites inquiries from publishers who agree that his unique life experiences and unabashed criticisms about jazz and the music business should be told.