



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, he 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: Horace Silver, Clifford Brown, Grant Green, Blue Mitchell, Donald Byrd, Horace Parlan, 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 enjoyed 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 numerous honors and awards for his significant contributions to jazz. 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. Lou was designated a Jazz Master in 2013 by the National Endowment for the Arts— our nation’s highest award bestowed upon jazz artists and is the recipient of countless other honors and awards for his outstanding contributions to jazz — America’s “classical music.”

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 Cheney University who was a teacher, music director and concert pianist who recognized Lou’s expert ear for music and introduced him to the clarinet. He matriculated to North Carolina A&T College at age 15 where he joined the marching band playing clarinet and received a Bachelor of Science degree. His alma mater would later establish the Lou Donaldson Scholarship for Music Excellence awarded to the school’s most gifted jazz musician and presented Lou with an honorary Doctorate of Letters degree. After being drafted into the US Navy in 1945, Lou played in the Great Lakes Navy Band where he would later be recognized by the Naval Training Center Commander in 2003 as a member of the first United States Navy African American Musicians. While in the Navy, when playing for dances, Lou would also play the alto saxophone. After going into 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. Lou moved to New York in late 1949 where he attended the Darrow Institute of Music and lived in Harlem at 127th Street and 8th Avenue with his new wife, Maker, his longtime sweetheart from Albemarle, North Carolina who remained his wife and business partner for 56 years until her death in 2006. Together they raised two daughters, Lydia and Carol, and called the Bronx their home where Lou still resides, and where 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 remains in search of a publisher who agrees that his unique life experiences and unabashed criticisms about jazz and the music business should not be silenced.