

# UNSUNG MASTERS OF THE MID-CENTURY

## WEST COAST 'COOL JAZZ' TRUMPET

By Dan Smith

**Rarely is a style of music invented by one artist.** You could argue, however, that if saxophone giant Gerry Mulligan doesn't come out to California in 1952 after working on the East Coast with Miles Davis, West Coast 'Cool Jazz' never sees the light of day.

Not that Mulligan, a superb player and arranger, worked in a vacuum upon arriving in Los Angeles. Many of the major big bands were already out here, so there were alumni aplenty in California, looking to succeed swing and bebop with that next great sound.

Having glimpsed a possibility working with Miles Davis on the

1949-'50 sessions that would eventually be compiled as Miles' *Birth of the Cool* (1957) album, Mulligan tried a few combinations before settling on a piano-less quartet that blazed the coolest trail of all out West.

Trumpet soloists were key to this relaxed offshoot of bop, but as with prior installments of our 'Unsung Masters' series, certain artists achieved too much recognition to seriously qualify as unsung. Mulligan's foil in those early sessions, trumpeter Chet Baker, was a terrific musician who received a good deal more

credit for it than our honorees featured here.

These ten trumpet players, most of whom lived, recorded, and died in Los Angeles, helped to create the country's first 'West Coast sound,' although rock and country music would both sport that genre eventually too. Some were minor show-biz stars, mixed in with a librarian, a few rugged individualists, and two Italian-American brothers from Indiana with apparent superhero breeding.

So, maestro? Let the horns ring out for the masterful unsung of 'West Coast Cool.'

### DON FAGERQUIST

Jazz fan or not, nearly anyone who hears a Don Fagerquist solo can discern the uniqueness of his clear tone and nuanced phrasing, whether gracing recordings by bandleaders Shorty Rogers or Dave Pell, singers like Dean Martin or Mel Tormé, or his lone complete album session on the Mode label. One listen to the gorgeous solo on Fagerquist's version of the 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' (1957) standard and you too will mourn that most of the Massachusetts native's late-career work was on Paramount Studios soundtracks before succumbing to kidney disease at age 46.

**WHERE TO START:**

*Portrait of a Great Jazz Artist* (Fresh Sound)



### CARMELL JONES

Out of the soulful, rootsy musical environs of 1950s Kansas City, Kansas, rose this talented player, honing his hard bop chops with well-known local bands before moving to the coast in 1960. The Pacific Jazz label recorded three quality albums by his group, and four on which he played with pianist Teddy Wilson before moving to the Prestige label for his biggest release, the Kansas-inferenced *Jay Hawk Talk* (1965). Jones then moved to Germany for years before returning home to KC in 1980. His excellent early work is captured on a three-disc compilation.

**WHERE TO START:**

*Mosaic Select* (Mosaic)



### CY TOUFF

For a few years of the 1950s, this native Chicagoan played a unique role in 'West Coast Cool,' all the while maintaining his home base in the Windy City. Adding the ungainly bass trumpet to bands led by Woody Herman and Sandy Mosse, he was at his best trading joyful solos with tenor saxmen like Mosse and Herman alum Richie Kamuca. With recordings almost as rare as his instrument is in jazz, Touff did lead Kamuca and others on one excellent album in the mid-1950s with shades of Lester Young and Count Basie.

**WHERE TO START:**

*Primitive Cats* (Fresh Sound)



### DICK COLLINS

Collins had perhaps the most unusual and unsung career of all our 'West Coast Cool' trumpeters, in part because he alone came from Seattle and worked with Concord's own Dave Brubeck before continuing south to the sound's home base. In L.A., Collins was a prized soloist in bands led by Les Brown, Charlie Barnet, and Brubeck alum Paul Desmond, all the while matriculating on a related avocation. Torn between two loves, he got his masters degree and became a music librarian in the 1960s, playing his trumpet only rarely from that point on.

**WHERE TO START:**

*Horn of Plenty* (RCA import)



### JACK SHELDON

If it's possible to win an Oscar and a Grammy for jazz trumpet and still have your playing overshadowed by the rest of your career, that was this Florida native. Though Sheldon had a long, swinging career as both a singing/blowing bandleader and sideman, plus voice work on children's shows, the gig that made him best known was sidekick and eventual music director of TV's 'The Merv Griffin Show.' His vibrant horn is heard prominently in a half-dozen major films, but it was a haunting solo on 'The Shadow of Your Smile' that garnered awards for *The Sandpiper* (1965).

**WHERE TO START:**

*Quartet & Quintet* (Fresh Sound)

### CONTE CANDOLI

A teen jazz prodigy, Candoli was taught largely by his brother Pete, who got him a job with Woody Herman's 'Herd' at 17 while on summer break from high school in Indiana. Conte's long career flourished after graduation alongside Pete in Woody's 'First Herd' before moving on to longer-term associations with Doc Severinsen and, later, Supersax. He toured with Doc and led the trumpet section in Severinsen's 'Tonight Show' orchestra for 20 years. His Dizzy Gillespie-influenced style of soloing is well showcased on Bill Russo's composition 'Portrait of a Count' with Stan Kenton.

**WHERE TO START:**

*Powerhouse Trumpet* (Rhino)



### JON EARDLEY

This native of Altoona, Pennsylvania, wasn't at Gerry Mulligan's side for the birth of 'West Coast Cool,' but is best known for replacing Chet Baker in that quartet once Mulligan emerged from a short jail sentence in late 1953. After showcasing his warm-yet-cool, middle-register sound on several solo records along with Mulligan's in the mid-'50s, Eardley moved to Europe for his remaining decades and made a series of quality recordings there for the Spotlite label in the late 1970s. On these and in his decade with a jazz radio orchestra in Germany, Eardley often switched to flugelhorn.

**WHERE TO START:**

*Quartet, Quintet & Septet* (Fresh Sound)



### STU WILLIAMSON

There wasn't a West Coast jazz band or recording session in the 1950s and early '60s that didn't relish adding the clear, cool tones of a Stu Williamson solo on trumpet or valve trombone. The Vermont native and brother of bop pianist Claude recorded four albums as a bandleader for the Bethlehem label in the mid-'50s, and then played mostly session work before retiring at age 35 in 1968. He worked most with the Stan Kenton, Shelley Manne, and Terry Gibbs bands, and their rereleases may be good place to find his short-lived mastery.

**WHERE TO START:**

*Complete 1956 Studio Sessions* (Fresh Sound)



### SHORTY ROGERS

On history's list of who created 'West Coast Cool' jazz, Milton 'Shorty' Rogers might be second only to saxophonist Gerry Mulligan in influence. The year before Mulligan came west, Rogers' first albums as bandleader, *Modern Sounds* and *Popo* (both 1951), set a tone for the genre. In the prime of a long, prolific career, the Massachusetts native was trendsetting in all aspects of jazz: composing, arranging, and playing (including on flugelhorn). So skilled was Rogers that upon sensing a changed landscape in jazz, he moved his triple threat to a glittering resume of film and TV music for 20 years.

**WHERE TO START:**

*West Coast Jazz* (Proper)



### PETE CANDOLI

Look! Up in the sky! It's a note met by few trumpet soloists ever, but that's where the elder Candoli brother made his high-register living. A uniquely skilled though not particularly modern player, the Indiana native nonetheless was a top-notch contributor to numerous foundational recordings of 'West Coast Cool.' He also led bands of his own, with brother Conte, and a song-and-dance act with his wife, Edie Adams, in a long, busy career. Some still recall Candoli donning a cape and Superman outfit for his stratospheric, trademark solo on Woody Herman's 'Apple Honey.'

**WHERE TO START:**

*Jazz Horizons - Candoli Brothers* (Lonehill Jazz)



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