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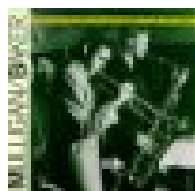
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If you only invest in one Mulligan/Baker album . . .
December 16, 2001

Reviewer: [Paul Dana](#) (San Francisco, CA USA) - [See all my reviews](#)

. . . this is THE one.

Frankly, it's hard to imagine a partnership of two individuals less likely to succeed: Mulligan, New York-raised, formally trained, tall, fair-haired, his theoretician's instincts already refined by years in several influential late-40s big bands and a successful collaboration with Gil Evans/Miles Davis; Baker, on the other hand, a man who would come to be termed "jazz's 'dark angel,'" southwest-born and bred, largely self-taught and instinctive in his approach to music, a "problem child" virtually from birth.

The traits they shared were largely negative: histories of drug abuse and an inability to deal with their "inner demons," lousy tempers, and an incredible talent for fatally sabotaging their personal relationships, intellectual impatience versus an inbred inferiority complex. Even their "instrumental philosophies" were at variance; Mulligan was prone to treat his baritone sax almost as a tenor -- or even alto -- in his approach, while Chet Baker consistently seemed to eschew the arrogant brassiness of most trumpeters of his (or, for that matter, the current) era.

Try to imagine these guys "hanging out" together, or -- a bold leap of imagination -- at a barbecue with their families of the moment. Never mind; it never happened.

What did happen -- thankfully -- is that, for eleven months in the early '50s, playing night after night at The Haig in L.A., Gerry Mulligan and

Chet Baker found common cause -- a lingua franca -- in the music they made together, and in the sound they helped to develop (the so-called "West Coast" or "cool jazz" school), as here memorialized in a selection of remasterings from original Pacific Jazz 78 rpm singles.

There's a very obvious dynamic presented in the selections herein: That, whatever their relationship may have otherwise been (and by all accounts it was, to say the least, rancorous), as soon as they hit the bandstand -- or the recording studio -- they gave themselves over to the music and found themselves uncannily on the same wavelength. The pull of this common wavelength, by the way, is demonstrated in this collection by the inclusion of "Festive Minor," which they performed together at an abortive 'reunion' six or so years after they had gone their separate ways; nonetheless, it shows that they were still capable of finding that common language. And celebrating together.

If you're unfamiliar with the "Gerry Mulligan Quartet Featuring Chet Baker" (as they were originally billed), particularly if your interest was only recently sparked by a couple of selections from "L.A. Confidential" (both of which -- "The Lady Is A Tramp" and "Makin' Whoopee" -- are featured here), this is the CD to start with. Your investment's minimal, the rewards will be great. PLUS . . . if you never go on to pick up the other two Mulligan/Baker CDs currently available (although I suspect you will), you'll still have a solid understanding of their collaboration and its contribution to jazz.

Was this review helpful to you? ☒ yes ☐ no ([Report this](#))

48 of 48 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★☆ **Doing good**, April 29, 2000

Reviewer: ["ornen"](#) (Norway) - [See all my reviews](#)

This album, containing some of the most well-known Mulligan/Baker numbers, sure is doing good. The spontaneous music created by these two extremely gifted men is so timeless and has such a great deal of classic elegance, many people appreciate that, and there seems to be a bit of a sales boom for their music at the beginning of this new millenium.

Respect is due for these two forefathers of the Cool Jazz movement, and there is nothing bad to say about this album. But if I was going to buy only one album by the Mulligan/Baker quartet, it wouldn't be this one, but the Gerry Mulligan - The Original Quartet With Chet Baker

(2CD), where the music is just as fine, and there is more than twice as much of it!

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Maybe the (sorry) essential jazz cd of the Fifties**, July 26, 2004

Reviewer: [K. Neill "memflyken2"](#) (Memphis, TN USA) - [See all my reviews](#)
.....
REAL NAME™

I had been a Baker fan for a few years, and liked GM too, but in my ignorance, I'd never lighted upon this cd until reading James Gavin's wonderful (Deep in a Dream) Baker biography. How one of the most despicable characters in music history could have made such beautiful music is beyond me (and, as he admits, beyond Gavin, too), but by god: Chet Baker had an extraordinary gift which, when combined with the enormous talents of his fellow heroin-addict Mulligan, created a spectacular collaboration on this once-in-a-lifetime cd.

When you read in Gavin's book about the trials and tribulations that Mulligan/Baker were going through in LA as these tracks were being laid down -- Mulligan's conviction and incarceration for possession, remember, ended the quartet's existence, although Chet Baker would make up for not-so-lost time with long stretches in the slammer himself in the years ahead -- it is utterly remarkable that these two lost-in-space cadets got together long enough to do something this remarkable!

If there is a better rendition of Valentine, anywhere, please let me know. In the meantime, Mulligan w/Baker may be the single most essential Fifties jazz cd any novice to the field must buy -- and buy now.

This was where Baker, btw, cut his Funny Valentine chops -- he recorded, methinks, thirty or so versions, at least, of his signature piece -- and anyone who can listen to the magnificent interplay on this cd between two of the greatest of jazz greats who, in 1952-54, had no idea either of them was going anywhere, besides to prison, will make strong men crumble, women weep, and children stand up and pay

attention.... k

Was this review helpful to you? ☒ yes ☐ no ([Report this](#))

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Classical recordings; essential listening for the jazz-fan**, September 25, 2001

Reviewer: Joost.Daalder@flinders.edu.au "[joostdaalder](#)" (South Australia) - [See all my reviews](#)

It is difficult to imagine a serious collection of jazz recordings in which this quartet is not represented. The only quarrel one might have with this CD is that it is not as complete as one would like - but it is, nonetheless, representative, and the music remains irresistibly attractive: fresh, melodious, engaging, original (not least in its orchestration). As Mulligan himself was the first to admit, the idea of a jazz band without piano was not, by itself, new. But the way THIS band was composed and worked certainly WAS new. The interplay between Mulligan and Baker was highly successful, and "made up" for what to some might seem an odd "omission" of a piano, as the baritone and trumpet were very much used as two beautifully interwoven voices. The overall effect was highly spontaneous and inspirational, though these days one would like to hear longer solos (which could not, then, be provided.) Both Mulligan and Baker played great improvised solos, even if short; Baker was probably never more appealing to listen to than in those early years, whether lyrical or crisply fiery, though he still produced good music afterwards. Mulligan changed - in particular, grew more "robust" and venturesome in later years - but did not necessarily play better than he does on these tracks. The other musicians provided excellent backing. This music will not date, even though it is clearly of its time - indeed, provided a milestone, and a sensation, when it was first released.

Was this review helpful to you? ☒ yes ☐ no ([Report this](#))

14 of 18 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Best Spontaneous 2 part inventions in jazz...period**, September 10, 1998

Reviewer: **A music fan**

These 2 created more magic in their 11 months together than a

boatload of others did in their lifetimes....My Old Flame took me 2 weeks to transcribe but it shows Mulligans' and Bakers' interplay was as intricate and brilliant as a Bach invention.

Was this review helpful to you? ☒ yes ☐ no ([Report this](#))

12 of 15 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★☆ **An essential for fans of the West Coast jazz sound!**,
September 8, 1998

Reviewer: **A music fan**

One of the more interesting quartets: sax, trumpet, bass and drums. Tracks here are from sessions that helped form the foundation of West Coast jazz. Mulligan and Baker trade solos against a tight rhythm section. When not soloing, the pair provide melodic support for each other. "Makin' Whoopee" was one of James Goldsmith's smart picks for the soundtrack of "L.A. Confidential." If you've tired of nouveau lounge/martini music, buy this; it's the real deal.

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