



## Clifton Anderson – bio

*Decade* (Doxy Records/Emarcy/Universal, October 7, 2008)

When Clifton Anderson was seven, his mother took him to see *The Music Man*. The boy was particularly taken by the film's finale, in which dancing bandmaster Robert Preston leads his musicians down a street to the tune of "Seventy-Six Trombones."

"All these trombone players were marching down the street, and they really looked like they were having a lot of fun," Anderson recalls. "I told my mother, 'Mom, I wanna play that.'"

Gloria Anderson informed her brother, jazz saxophone colossus Sonny Rollins, of her son's desire. Rollins soon supplied his nephew with his first trombone.

Fast-forward 17 years. Clifton Anderson, having become one of the most in-demand trombonists in New York City for jazz, pop, R&B, and calypso dates, gets a call from Uncle Sonny to join his band. It doesn't work out at first and Rollins lays Anderson off, but then, a year later, gives him a second chance. Since 1985 Anderson has been a steady member of his uncle's combo, touring the world and recording nine albums with Rollins, the most recent of which, the Grammy-nominated *Sonny, Please* on the saxophonist's own Doxy label, was produced by Anderson.

"I love the trombone," says Rollins, "and Clifton has an uncanny knack of complementing my lines and also of concocting obbligato sections and all of these things. I couldn't find anybody else to do that. It's really been great having that kind of talent playing with me."

With *Decade*, his second album as a leader (and the second CD to be issued by Doxy Records), Anderson further establishes his credentials as one of the most formidable trombone blowers in jazz. As Bob Blumenthal writes in the booklet notes, "*Decade* confirms that Anderson...has plenty to say on his own—that he has developed the strength, personality, and leadership qualities required to stand apart from his legendary boss." The trombonist is scheduling a series of performances with his own group to coincide with the disc's release.

The self-produced CD features six tunes from Anderson's prolific pen, plus his interpretations of the standards "I'm Old Fashioned," "I'm Glad There Is You," and "We'll Be Together Again" and the 1971 hit "If" by Bread. Gloria Anderson was severely ill during the recording of the disc and did not live to see its release. Her son recorded "I'm Glad There Is You" and "We'll Be Together Again" with her in mind. He wrote the fiery blues "Stubbs" as a salute to the late saxophonist John Stubblefield.

Two different rhythms sections are heard on *Decade*. Pianist Larry Willis, bassist Bob Cranshaw, and drummer Al Foster play on six tracks. (Cranshaw and Foster are both longtime Rollins associates.) Pianist Stephen Scott, bassist Christian McBride, and drummer Steve Jordan (Anderson's old friend from New York's High School of Music and Art and frequent Rollins bandmate) anchor three more, and Scott is Anderson's sole accompanist on the tender "We'll Be Together Again." Rollins percussionist Kimati Dinizulu lends his deft touch to many selections. Alto saxophonist Kenny Garrett, who had played on Anderson's previous album as a leader, 1996's *Landmarks* (Milestone), returns for two numbers, and little-known Rollins-inspired tenor saxophonist Eric Wyatt blows on two others.

"I'm hoping that my record really puts him on the map," Anderson says of Wyatt, who also happens to be Rollins's godson.

More than a decade—a dozen years to be exact—separate the release of *Landmarks* and the present disc. "The idea of this recording was to encompass a lot of what transpired within that time and how I have evolved," the trombonist explains. "My playing is very different. I think I have a much clearer voice on the instrument now, and I think the production value is more precise in many ways. Conceptually, the music has grown quite a bit, too, even though the instrumentation is similar. I think things are a little bit more sophisticated on this record."

Anderson was born into a musical family on October 5, 1957. His father was a professional church organist, and his mother played piano and sang solos with church choirs. His eldest uncle plays violin, and his other uncle is the world's most well-known tenor saxophonist.

Raised in Harlem, Anderson was afflicted with asthma as a child, but playing trombone helped him overcome the illness. "It makes you very conscious of how you are breathing, and it increases your lung capacity," explains Anderson, who is thinking about starting a nonprofit organization to teach wind instruments to asthmatic children. Teaching is nothing new for the trombonist, who has given private lessons to students around the world, served as an Artist in Residence at Duke University in North Carolina under noted jazz educator Paul Jeffrey, instructed students throughout the New York city schools, with Jazz Mobile and at jazz camps, and, most recently, worked with the aspiring students of the Jackie Robinson Marching Band.

Trombone, however, was not a high priority for Anderson until he was in his teens, when his godmother gave him a copy of the J.J. Johnson album *J.J.'s Broadway*. "His sound was really incredible," Anderson says. "I didn't know that a trombone could sound like that. I wasn't even sure what instrument it was when I first heard it. There was something about the way that he spoke on that instrument that really compelled me to take a deeper interest in trying to figure out how that instrument could sound that way."

While studying at the Manhattan School of Music (from which he would graduate) with Metropolitan Opera bass trombonist John Clark, Anderson was invited to join Slide Hampton's The World of Trombones. In addition to Anderson, other original members of the still-active ensemble included Steve Turre, Janice Robinson, and Clifford Adams. Anderson worked with the band for three years in the late '70s.

Although he never had the opportunity to record with Hampton, the trombonist has contributed to albums by such jazz artists as Muhal Richard Abrams, Geri Allen, Lester Bowie, Robin Eubanks, and, of course, Sonny Rollins, as well as to sessions by Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, and calypsonians like the Mighty Sparrow, Arrow, Lord Nelson, and Calypso Rose. "I playing on

practically ever calypso record from probably 1978 to '85," says Anderson, who dubbed horn parts over rhythm tracks that had been recorded in Trinidad.

All this studio activity led Anderson to become a record producer himself. "I thought it was fascinating that some records sound good and others sound terrible," he explains. "I started studying the engineers and the producers, what they did, their mic placements, what mics they would use, what studios sounded good, all these things. By the time I was ready to do my own record [*Landmarks*], I knew everything I needed to know to produce it."

Anderson also played an important role in the production of the Rollins CD *Without a Song: The 9/11 Concert*, recorded at the Berklee Performance Center in Boston on September 15, 2001, by combining tapes made from the audience by noted Rollins collector Carl Smith with tapes made directly from the sound board. "I told Sonny," the trombonist explains, "'If we dump Carl Smith's material and what we have into ProTools, we may be able to align them without any cross-fading or other problems.' We couldn't use either one individually. Our version was much too clean; it didn't sound like a live recording. His recording sounded too much like a live thing, so I went into Sony Studios with Sonny and our engineer and we combined the two versions and came up with what is now known as *The 9/11 Concert*. I think Sonny liked the way I handled the recording."

Rollins surely did. *Without a Song: The 9/11 Concert*, which earned a Grammy as Best Jazz Album in 2006, was the last in a 33-year string of albums the tenor titan made for Milestone Records. For the first two albums to be issued for his new Doxy label—Rollins's *Sonny, Please* and Anderson's own *Decade*—the saxophonist chose his nephew as producer. Anderson plays magnificently on both records, and, as is evident from every note he blows through his horn, he's having a lot of fun doing it. ♦

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