

James Spaulding Biography

James Spaulding, alto saxophonist and flutist, is an extraordinarily gifted musician. His sound on both the alto and flute retain a distinctly different voice, played with such expression on either instrument as to seem an altogether different language. Spaulding's alto digs deep, raw and full of vitality, extracting the full range of possibilities of his instrument – melodically, rhythmically, and dynamically. His electrifying flute playing retains a classical poise and elegance, equally lyric but drawing from a different spot in the sonic wellspring. Without copying or emulating jazz greats of the past, musically, Spaulding is a modernist with solid roots in classical jazz, but his over-all concept incorporates much of the broad jazz heritage.

Spaulding's musical training started early, as he came from a musical family in his place of birth Indiana (his father was a professional musician who played the guitar and led his own big band, traveling throughout the country). James began playing a bugle when he was in grade school. He later took up the trumpet and saxophone on his own, and while in high school studied clarinet. He made his professional debut at age 11, playing around Indianapolis with a rhythm "n" blues group. From 1954 to 1957, Spaulding was in the army playing in service bands. When he was discharged, he settled in Chicago where he performed in clubs leading his own group, and had a stay with the Sun Ra Orchestra. He also furthered his flute studies there at the Chicago Cosmopolitan School of Music. In 1962, he arrived in New York City and made his first recording as sideman on a Freddie Hubbard album entitled Hub Tones on the Blue Note label.

In 1963, he met and married his wife, Jean Wheeler. They have three daughters, Gemma, his step daughter and their two daughters, Gina and Yvonne. Subsequently, he was associated with notables such as Bobby Hutcherson and Max Roach, to name only a few.

In the late 60s, the family moved to New Jersey where James attended school under the GI Bill at Livingston College, Rutgers University, where he taught flute as an adjunct professor; and became a member of the Ellington Orchestra, but left to complete his studies. While at Livingston, James also recorded his first album as leader, entitled James Spaulding plays the Legacy of Duke Ellington on the Storyville label. In 1975, he received a bachelor's degree in music.

Spaulding has been recorded on over 100 albums, with legendary musicians ranging from Sun Ra to Louis Armstrong. For many years he was among the busier sideman and his unique alto saxophone style can be heard on recordings now considered classics. He appeared on the Blue Note label with artists such as Wayne Shorter, Duke Pearson, Grant Green, Hank Mobley, Stanley Turrentine, Horace Silver, Sam Rivers and McCoy Tyner. He can also be heard on Atlantic records with Max Roach and Richard Davis. He has been a member of the Freddie Hubbard Quintet, The Sun Ra Arkestra, The Duke Ellington Big Band under the leadership of Mercer Ellington, The David Murray Octet & Big Band, and had a short stay with the World Saxophone Quartet, to name a few. James has more recently produced a 2-volume set CD under his own label Speetones Music Co. The music was recorded live on July 29th and July 30th, 2000, at the Up Over Jazz Café in Brooklyn, N.Y. Volume 1, Blues Up & Over and Volume 2, Round To It, have both been released.

James continues to work as a soloist playing clubs and jazz festivals, and as a one-man band working with a roster of musicians who share his vision to perform this music in the tradition of the great innovators of this sound commonly called "jazz." The musicians who share in this performance experience become a part of this "one" collective musical embodiment called "Expressions."