



Lotta Sax Appeal

*Tag-team session aces Doug James and
Sax Gordon step out with a
new instrumental album*

By Ken Chang

PICK OUT ANY ONE of the classic rhythm-and-blues, urban blues, or jazz recordings of the '40s and '50s, and there will be a sax player on it whose name got buried in the credits but whose horn made a good song great—or a great song perfect. Lee Allen, Maxwell Davis, J.T. Brown, Heywood Henry, Leo Parker—you may not have heard of these guys, but they played on some of the best records that you *have* heard. A quick sampling (out of the hundreds of sessions featuring their work) might include Little Richard's "Lucille" and "Tutti Frutti" (with Lee Allen on tenor sax); Charles Brown's "Black Nights" and Percy Mayfield's "Please Send Me Someone to Love" (Maxwell Davis on tenor); Elmore James's "Madison Blues" and "Hawaiian Boogie" (J.T. Brown on tenor); Big Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" (Heywood Henry on the baritone solo); and Fats Navarro's "Ice Bleeds Red" and Sir Charles Thompson's "Mad Lad" (Leo Parker on baritone).

Of course, the modern blues era has its own roster of unsung sax heroes, and among the best are Doug "Mr. Low" James on baritone and "Sax" Gordon

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Beadle on tenor. Name a top-notch horn-drenched blues album from the past couple decades, and it's likely to feature James's baritone or Beadle's tenor, or both. Try this on for size as a hypothetical top-three: the first Roomful of Blues album (James on baritone), Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson's *I Want to Groove with You* (Beadle on tenor), and Toni Lynn Washington's *Been So Long* (Beadle on tenor, James on baritone). You get the idea.

Between the two of them, James and Beadle have played on over 200 recording sessions, including albums by Duke Robillard, Roomful of Blues, Jay McShann, Pinetop Perkins, Ronnie Earl, Jerry Portnoy, Jimmy McGriff, Ann Peebles, and the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Since the late '90s, the James/Beadle sax section has been the instant-groove machine of choice by Robillard for his various projects as a producer for Stony Plain Records. These have included Duke's recent solo albums *Living with the Blues* and *Blue Mood: The Songs of T-Bone Walker*, as well as Billy Boy Arnold's *Boogie 'n' Shuffle* and Rosco Gordon's *Memphis, Tennessee*.

"I mean, the quality of work that Doug and Gordon have been involved with on all those projects through Duke, it's just of the highest order as far as I'm concerned," noted Stony Plain Records founder Holger Peterson. "They just do it incredibly well. And for me it's just a real privilege to have released all those projects that they've been involved with."

In addition to working as sidemen, James and Beadle have pursued their own solo projects that tend to blur the lines between jump blues, R&B, and jazz. (Not surprisingly, they often work together whenever one of them strikes out on his own.)

After several years of doing session work for Rounder Records during the '90s, Beadle cut two solo albums for the label, *Have Horn Will Travel* (1998) and *You Knock Me Out* (2000), both of which were produced by Duke Robillard. Beadle's discography also includes a live solo album, *Live at the Sax Blast* (issued by Me & My Blues Records), that was recorded at a Regent Theatre show co-headlined by Beadle and Big Jay McNeely during the 2002 Boston Blues Festival.

In 2001, Doug James recorded *Blow Mr. Low*, his solo debut, for Stony Plain with Beadle on tenor and Robillard on guitar. (The session was co-produced by Robillard and James.) Robillard also gave his horn section a chance to lead on the bandstand. It wasn't uncommon, for instance, to see the Duke Robillard Band rearranged onstage—with the horns at the center and Duke to the side—in order to suit a gig slated for Sax Gordon or Doug James.

Beadle has since left Robillard's regular touring band, but the two remain frequent collaborators in the studio and onstage. Meanwhile, Beadle's latest "solo" project is actually a dynamic-duo project with James: a new self-produced, self-released instrumental album titled *Doug James & Sax Gordon*.

"Doug and I have played together for a long time," Beadle explained. "Since '95 or something like that, when I joined

Roomful filling in for Greg Piccolo, who had left the band. So that's when we really kind of hooked up. And, you know, we've been playing together since then, in that band, and then I left to go with Duke Robillard, and eventually Doug left Roomful to go with Duke, too, and we played in that band for a while. So anyway, we have this history of playing together, and we played on a lot of other people's projects, a lot of other people's recordings. And we had our own tunes we would do sometimes—you know I've got my own CDs, and he's got the CD out on Stony Plain, and we would share a show occasionally, do songs from our CDs. And then we'd have to come up with more tunes 'cause that wasn't enough to do the whole night. So we started getting more tunes, having more ideas, and eventually we had enough stuff and we decided to make our own thing, with all original songs."

James and Beadle's stage act, it should be pointed out, often takes the form of two alternating leads. "When Gordon and I do something, it's kind of more like a tag-team thing," James said. "I'll do two songs, and then you come on and do two songs, and that seems to work out fairly well. And we also vaguely insult each other with our announcements."

Beadle and James took the same tag-team approach (but without the insults) when writing material for the new album. Rather than the two of them sitting down to co-write all the songs, each showed up at the studio with his own stash of ideas to bounce off the other. As James recalled, "Basically I just said, 'Well, this way each of us only has to think of half of a CD! And it was really fun to do it that way. So we tried to get sort of different instrumental things that are shorter instrumentals, and have it kind of move along and be pretty entertaining, and just not do any vocals and just see how it goes.'"

"I guess I wanted a little bit to avoid doing all swing things," added Beadle, "because a lot of times when you play saxophone people just assume that you're jazz and swing and jump and all that because you're holding a saxophone. But the saxophone is a part of so much great music that's other than that. There's all kinds of Chicago people—you know, Elmore James and Willie Mabon—and New Orleans people, there's all kinds of great rock 'n' roll, '50s stuff with sax. Great '60s soul stuff. You know, just tons of stuff that's other than what people always associate the saxophone with, and it's all stuff we like."

For James, a big motivation was simply to record something more representative of their onstage act. "On my first record, I had Duke singing some tunes, and Sugar Ray Norcia came in," James said. "On the first album I think everybody sort of does the songs that they always wanted to do—that's what they do on their first record. So it's kind of fun to do that. But there are situations that we're playing that we don't have Duke to sing, or we don't have Sugar Ray Norcia to sing. So we wanted to make something more of what we would be doing if people came to see us doing the stuff live."



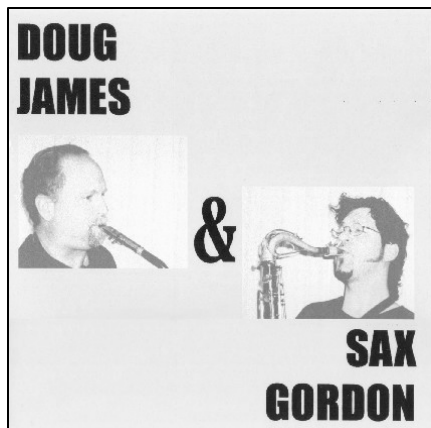
Doug James & Sax Gordon

I now have two CDs that are distinguished by their banana-yellow packaging aesthetics—Freddy King's *Just Pickin'* and the self-titled *Doug James & Sax Gordon*. Chances are they will remain side by side in the KICK-ASS INSTRUMENTALS section of my music library.

In case you're unfamiliar with *Just Pickin'*, it's a two-LPs-on-one-CD reissue of *Let's Hide Away and Dance Away with Freddy King* and *Freddy King Gives You a Bonanza of Instrumentals*, which were originally released in '61 and '65. Skip ahead some 30 years, and we now have saxophonists Doug James and Sax Gordon serving up their own bonanza of instrumentals. Imagine a young Freddy reincarnated as a tenor/baritone sax section, and the music would probably be pretty close to what's on this album: in-the-pocket grooves, catchy hooks galore, sneaky arrangements, and pithy solos crafted by a lean, mean, double-honkin' machine.

On their debut recording as co-leaders, Doug James and Gordon Beadle take an anything-goes approach with one constraint: they make sure not to overplay anything. As a result, their songwriting comes off as sharp and focused, and the listener might be shocked to hear such short, concise solos that never lose their way. Of the 12 original songs here, most clock in at around four minutes or less. On the shorter numbers, each horn might get just a one-chorus solo, but that solo is packed with such energy and sincerity—and phrased so decisively—that there's simply no need to extend it any further.

The album kicks off with "Can't Stand Up," a swinging blues punctuated by Beadle and James trading fours over a stop-



time break. Up next comes a string of up-beat, dangerously catchy numbers ranging from surf to bop to old-time R&B honkers. The styles vary, but each song has its own signature hook, a danceable beat, and, of course, a lotta sax appeal. Also notable is the wonderful interplay between the horns and the guitar. Standouts include "The Bump," written by Beadle, with its loping horn riff matched with an unruly low-end glissando guitar line (the latter played with relish by Ricky "King" Russell); the minor-key "Goin' to California," written by James and featuring a rare whammy-bar binge by Duke Robillard; and "Cool Dude," written by Beadle, with its infectious Freddy-King-Curtis groove.

Neither James nor Beadle considers the boundary between jazz and rhythm-and-blues particularly rigid, and you can hear them express this open-minded sensibility in their playing. For example, "Si," which opens with a straight-ahead bop theme, starts off with James's baritone solo in bop/blues territory, but by the time Beadle gets in his choruses, it's pretty damn close to R&B sax. Similarly, "Buggin'," which starts off with Beadle's "call of the wild" honking

on tenor, plays out like a Big Jay McNeely rocker until James and guitarist Mike DiBari slip in a few jazzy choruses for some contrast. (Purists may scoff, but hey, it's their loss if they can't enjoy music this good.)

And then there's "Steppin'," which boldly defies any attempt to categorize it. Take a sinister sax theme with no chord changes, add an off-kilter zombie beat plus Matt McCabe's nervous right hand on the piano, and what do you get? Answer: Bo Diddley meets the Addams Family on Venus. It's an amazing must-listen.

As you can tell from the titles, most of these songs move along fast and are loaded with fun. (At times, you can almost hear James and Gordon laughing at each other through their horns as they trade fours.) But Beadle and James do leave room for one slow number, "Ol' Henry," that has a tender, almost sobering, soul feel to it. Basically a gospel turnaround tacked on to a HIV vamp, it starts with Marty Ballou's upright bass, and then the torch gets passed around as everyone gets a chorus to testify. Beadle slips into his Gene Ammons/Fathead Newman shoes, while Duke Robillard somehow manages to bridge the gap between Kenny Burrell and Teenie Hodges in just a couple licks. If you didn't already know the credits, you might think it was something from the Hi Records vaults.

Doug James & Sax Gordon is a terrific modern instrumental album that belongs in the same class as Rick Holmstrom's *Lookout!* or Ronnie Earl's *Language of the Soul*. But you can also go back further, to the classic soul and R&B instrumental albums—*Green Onions*, King Curtis's *Instant Groove*, Steve Cropper's *With a Little Help From My Friends*—and I think you'll find that James and Beadle can write and produce music with as much vision, wit, and style as any of those guys.

The recording sessions took place over two days at Duke Robillard's studio (a.k.a. Duke's Mood Room) in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. No "special guests" had to be invited; it was just James and Beadle with an all-star band made up of some of their best friends.

"I guess it's sort of the core of guys from Duke's band or guys who've been in Duke's band," Beadle said. "You know, it's Matt McCabe on piano, Marty Ballou on bass, Mark Teixeira on drums. And we kind of went with three different guitar players, because when we've done our gigs, sometimes we use a friend of mine, Mike DiBari—and he's good at a lot of things, but I guess we used him on a few of the jazzier things. And then Rick Russell, we had come in, 'cause we had some tunes that almost had that sort of Junior Watson kind of a feel, or at least that was what I was thinking of when I wrote some of these things—just sort of a good twangy, splanky sort of roadhouse guitar thing, and we thought Rick would be perfect for that. And then of course we wanted to get Duke in there, and he plays some beautiful things on a couple of different tunes. You know, so Rick, Mike, and Duke—they're all doing something a little bit different. It's actually kind of cool

in that respect to hear each one do their thing, in how they're different and how they do it."

"The engineer, Thom Hiller, has been working with Duke, and he's really been very good to work with over the years," noted James. "Both me and Gordon and have worked with him quite a bit just on the Duke projects. And he did my first record. So it worked out very well with people being able to communicate what they want and what's going on, and Thom's always good for feedback. So it was always just really good—if he thought something wasn't quite there, it's always good to have somebody you trust like that."

The resulting effort is *very* much there, with its catchy instrumental themes, rocking solos, and nothing-is-out-of-bounds attitude. Beadle and James lead the band through classy—sometimes cheeky—takes on blues, bop, swing, soul, and rock 'n' roll. If *Doug James & Sax Gordon* had been released 15 years ago, it would have been on Black Top Records, and it would have fit right in with the music of Ronnie Earl, Clarence Hollimon, Rick Holmstrom, Greg Piccolo, and Ron Levy. (Most probably, Black Top would have re-titled it *Two More Sax-Ual Soul Champs*.)

Two songs on the album that show off James and Beadle's considerable range are "Ol' Henry" and "Goin' to California." The former is crawling soul groove that's soaked to the bone in gospel feeling, while the latter is a wild dive into the depths of surf guitar. The guitar roles on each, which couldn't have been more different, were handled by Duke Robillard with his usual aplomb.

"Duke's like the greatest sideman you could ever have," said James. "[Goin' to California] is more like a surf/James Bond song, and so he does that stuff really well. Duke plays almost all types of guitar very well, so I had him do his whummy bar and stuff. Ventures meets Duane Eddy—that's what I want you to play like.' So, ba-boom, you know, he does this great first take."

The sheer volume of session work by Doug James and Sax Gordon tends to speak for itself—these guys have a big sound and a unique chemistry. As James put it: "We've been doing it long enough that we can sort of make two different notes that maybe you normally wouldn't be doing—but it sounds like more horns that way."

"Doug has the most beautiful, big, huge sound, which, when you're playing in a section, it just makes *you* sound good," Beadle observed. "It just brings a fullness and a solidness to the section sound. So we've been about to do a lot of recordings with just the two of us, tenor and baritone—the records we've done with Billy Boy Arnold and Rosco Gordon, a lot of Duke's things, and a lot of other people's things—where, when we're in the studio, we could hire another person, or overdub ourselves or something, but we just don't. Because the sound is full and big as it is. And that's 'cause he has such a beautiful big sound, and a solidness that's just great."

Beadle also credits James's remarkable memory when it comes to horn parts. With the amount of unrehearsed playing they do with various bands, it always helps when the guy standing next to you happens to have 30 years' worth of charts stored in his head.

"Like Kim Wilson, for instance, will hire us to come play with his band," Beadle said. "And I guess we might know some of the songs, so if the song has a part or something, chances are we'll know it. Or, chances are particularly *Doug* will know it. And I'll lean over to him and say, 'What's the part?' And he'll go, 'Oh yeah, we used to do this back in 1973.' And he still remembers the part. Despite all the conditions that he's been in his whole life, one thing is he remembers every part I think he's ever played. So no matter who calls what song, he seems to know the right thing. And I try to come up with parts, and I listen to a lot of stuff, too. So between the two of us—like I said, if someone hires us to play with the band, and he starts off a song—if we don't know it, we can pretty much get it together pretty darn quick and be on the ball."

The experience factor, James explained, counts for a lot: "Just from playing together, when you just keep doing it, there's less time wasted trying to explain what something is gonna sound like, and the phrasing is really good together, and that sort of stuff that you just can't do any other way except by playing together. So we sort of have that, and so if we're doing impromptu stuff when we're playing with someone else that we never did before, we can make it sound pretty close like we know what we're doing."

In Beadle, James has also found an effective onstage foil—a wailing, jive-talking tenor man to counter his low-key (both literally and figuratively) baritone.

"Playing with Gordon, he's just got so much energy, he kicks ya in the ass," James said. "But basically you end up sort of just hanging on for dear life while he's going crazy out there—it's always inspiring. If you can't get off your ass and blow with Gordon around, you better check into an old folks home, you know...Some friends of mine that I'd known for a while came to see us when we were playing and they were just cracking up, because they were watching Gordon bouncing around and blowing, and they kept saying that I sort of looked like some tired old dog!"

The history between Doug James and Sax Gordon dates back to the late '80s, although the exact moment they met depends on which one you talk to.

"When I was starting out," Beadle recalled, "and playing in Chris 'Stovall' Brown's band—that would have been in '86, '87, something like that—we would occasionally open for Roomful or something. So I had certainly seen Doug and everything, and probably talked to him, but never really got to know him. And I don't know if they were aware of me. Somebody might have told 'em that there was a new, loud, young guy who drinks a lot or something, trying to be like them!"

James's memory puts their first encounter at around '89 or '90. "I think the first time I saw Gordon was when he was playing with Luther 'Guitar Jr.' Johnson," James said. "I think it was at Johnny D's. Yeah, I liked him immediately. We were both from California—I don't know if we got that far the first time around—and Gordon's just out there, easy to meet, easy to talk to, and right in the pocket of the sort of the idea of playing the sax that I love the most."

By the time the two met, James was well into the second decade of his tenure with Roomful of Blues, and he had racked up numerous session credits as a baritone or tenor sax player, as well as a producer and arranger.

"Basically, Roomful of Blues was the first band I was ever in," said James, who joined in 1971. "It was a great band, and people kept coming and going, so it really was like a different thing every couple of years. And we just had a great time, made some great records with some great people—Big Joe Turner and people like that. It was just a great thing."

A completely self-taught player, James took a while to find the baritone sound he was looking for. It wasn't just a matter of practice, but also finding the right influences.

"I was in Roomful for about a year or so when they re-released this Leo Parker stuff on Chess," he said, referring to Parker's *The Baritone Great* LP. "And it just turned me around about what you can do on the baritone, 'cause he's really bluesy. And previous to that I'd really been listening to rhythm-and-blues tenor players. 'Cause at the time there wasn't really somebody that I knew of to really listen to, so I sort of had to find my own way, and then with the Leo Parker thing, I just loved what Leo was doing, and people like Leo and Ronnie Cuber, who are very good jazz players but really great blues players too, and that's the kind of people that I probably sound more like than anybody else really."

Another important baritone role model was Heywood Henry. "That sort of a sound really gave me a lot of where I'm going when I play rhythm-and-blues type of baritone sax," said James. "The guys I'd really liked are the guys that are sort of between bebop and blues, like Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis on tenor

sax, and Arnett Cobb and people like that.”

James’s run with Roomful of Blues was still going strong when Sax Gordon turned up as a sub for Greg Piccolo in 1995. Beadle’s association with the band didn’t last long, but he stayed long enough on tour with them for James to realize that their individual styles really clicked. And when Beadle left Roomful to join Duke Robillard’s band, it seemed to reinforce the uncanny connection between the two sax players, as James had been wanting to get back together with Duke for some time. (Robillard fronted Roomful of Blues during the first nine years that James was in the band.) In 1998, James finally got his wish to join Duke’s band, but there was a slight catch: he would be replacing Sax Gordon.

“The thing was is that when I went and talked to Duke when I was leaving Roomful of Blues to go back with him, I had really wanted to be there when Gordon was with him,” James said. “But that was actually kind of when the opening came: because Gordon had left. So we missed out then. But then Gordon did come back for a while, and that was a lot of fun, and we did lots of recording right then.”

The subsequent string of session work included Robillard’s *Explorer* and *Living with the Blues* albums; Rosco Gordon’s *Memphis, Tennessee*; Billy Boy Arnold’s *Boogie ‘n’ Shuffle*; and *Blow Mr. Low*, James’s first album as a leader.

After leaving the Duke Robillard Band in 2001, Sax Gordon freelanced for a number of bands while also continuing his solo projects with and without James, who stayed on with Duke. Based in Cambridge, Beadle keeps a demanding performance schedule that puts him in a diverse assortment of venues: blues bars, swanky jazz lounges, swing-dance halls, society gigs, jazz and blues festivals.

And that’s just the domestic schedule. Thanks to his prolific session work, his solo albums on Rounder, and the exposure from touring with other bands, Beadle has been able to play regular dates in Europe, either on his own or as a featured act in revue-style tours.

“It’s crazy,” he admitted. “I can go to Europe for the weekends. I just took a couple gigs in Belgium, and if I could just stay there I could pocket all the flight money, you know. But as it stands, I gotta take the kids to school on Monday, so I fly out on a Thursday night and arrive Friday, play Friday and Saturday, fly home Sunday, and take the kids to school on Monday. And then fly out the next weekend again.”

When he’s in town, Beadle tends to fall back on hired-gun gigs as a sideman—partly because he enjoys working in a variety of bands, and partly because the Boston-area blues market can be very “un-Belgian” when it comes to booking his solo act.

“Generally, I like jumping around and playing [with different groups],” said Beadle. “But I feel sort of odd sometimes if one night I’m sounding one way, and another night I’m sounding another way. ‘Cause I think of cats that I’m sort of jealous of, guys that always sound one way. Like Albert King—every time Albert King plays, he plays the same way: he plays like Albert King. Whatever he plays over, he just plays his style. Junior Walker’s like that too. Maceo Parker, too. He makes everything fit his style. Who knows, he could probably imitate other people and play differently, but he’s got it together so that when he presents himself and plays, he’s got that sound and that thing. There’s lots of guys like that. I find myself now, it’s like I’m playing over here with this band, and they’re doing a soul thing, so I’m thinking King Curtis or Junior Walker, and then the next night I’m playing with some slide guitar player doing some El-

more and I’m trying to be J.T. Brown. So it’s kind of a curse. On the other hand, people often tell me, ‘Oh, I can always tell it’s you when you’re playing.’ So maybe it’s okay.”

Beadle grew up in Davis, California, and by the time he was a teenager he had developed a compulsive jamming habit. “I guess I always just wanted to play with people—you know, friends who had garage bands,” he recalled. “Whoever was jamming, I wanted to jam with ‘em. And it wasn’t like people were in their garages or living rooms or basements playing jazz, you know. Where I grew up there were a lot of Grateful Dead bands, so if you wanted to jam you had to be able to play ‘China Cat Sunflower’ and ‘Truckin’ and all that stuff. Fine with me. I’d learn to play the second guitar part or something. And then I go play with some other guys and they’re playing Rush or something like that. Shoot, I can jam along, let me have a crack at it. Because it’s just garage band stuff.

“But I do remember one of the earlier things I got involved with, I remember there was specifically an oldies band, and they were playing all this ‘50s stuff, and even back then I remember thinking this is right up my alley. It was ‘Blue Moon’ and ‘Loco-Motion,’ which has got a great sax solo, maybe some Dion—you know, ‘The Wanderer,’ all that kind of stuff. So that was good, that oldies band. And of course, aside from all this, playing in school there were some old guys that played Dixieland music—‘Basin Street Blues,’ ‘Tin Roof Blues,’ ‘Muskrat Ramble,’ and all that stuff. There were these old retired music teachers, and they would let me play with them. They had these books that you could read the stuff out of, but you could also just jam if you could—some people just never made that jump, and they would just read the parts on the page. But you could be reading the parts on the page and if you felt like you could do something else, you could do it. And it was that traditional jazz, where it’s a big mess anyway sometimes, so you could fool around with your notes and stuff like that. So I was getting to play this old jamming, rockin’, traditional, Dixieland sort of jazz stuff, which is great for a horn player. Just to get used to blowing and improvising and having fun. So I was playing in the school jazz bands, then going out and playing with local blues bands, or local anyone—Dead bands, the rockers, whoever I could play with. But yeah, the oldies stuff probably had the biggest connection to the rhythm-and-blues and the blues that I do now. That was just sort of the stuff that I thought had the best sax.”

As Beadle expanded his listening habits, he started piecing together the canon of the tenor sax greats—Gene Ammons, Earl Bostic, Illinois Jacquet, King Curtis, Stanley Turrentine, Big Jay McNeely, Junior Walker, Willis Jackson—and he mined their records for ideas. When Berklee College of Music came calling, Beadle found his next great training ground: the ‘80s blues scene in Boston.

“I guess when I came around—I got here about ‘85—I somehow immediately found my way to the 1369 club blues sessions,” he said. “‘Earring’ George Mayweather was there, Silas Junior, Chris Brown, Weepin’ Willie, Shirley Lewis. And there were other guys that are passed away now, or gone. Buddy Johnson was a great bass player that used to work with Little Joe Cook. Of course, the Cantab scene has always been just a great training ground, even though it’s maybe not specifically a blues thing. So I learned a lot at the Cantab and at the 1369. There was a guy named Rockin’ Willie, he moved back down to the Carolinas, but he was a great guitar player that always played a tambourine with his foot. So it was Rockin’ Willie and

'Earring' George, Bunny Smith, who was a great jazz and blues drummer. These were, you know, all old guys—but there aren't so many of them around now. Shirley Lewis is still around, and so is Weepin' Willie. But there were more of these 'real' cats around [then], so it just seemed like the jams had more of like a standard. It wasn't just anybody getting up and doing anything; you were really trying to do the *right* thing, because there were these other guys around that were really doing it. So there was something to kind of aspire to, you know, trying to do the right thing so they'd maybe give you a gig. Sometimes it seems like maybe that's lacking now, you know. I don't know if I've changed or the scene's changed, but it seems like maybe it's a little less focused, or less of an idea of what people want to do."

According to Beadle, the defining code for the Young Turks on the '80s Boston scene was one of apprenticeship; you learned the ropes by landing sideman gigs, and your big break came once you hooked up with a national act. (This being the tail end of the LP era, the whole concept of DIY recording was a good decade or so off.)

"I mean, when I was coming up around here, the big thing to do, we all just wanted to get *with* somebody," Beadle remembered. "You know, get with one of the real guys. Every weekend in town, it was just—you know, on the same night, Eddie Shaw could be at the Tam, Johnny Copeland or Marcia Ball at Johnny D's. Someone else could be at Harpers Ferry or something like that. There'd be a number of these people. Then the next weekend, Son Seals would be here, Eddy Clearwater over there, A.C. Reed at Harpers, and Koko Taylor at Night Stage or something like that. We'd sometimes hit a couple of places, catch the first set and hit the next one—just all these touring acts going around and around. And that was sort of the thing to do, we all wanted to get on the road with the somebody, with a real guy.

"Now it's like—I can't blame 'em—the thing to do is to start a band, and everyone's goal is to make their record when they're like 18 and a half years old. Back then it didn't even occur to us. Not that I was prepared to do it [at that age]....I can really recall that it was just not even a thought [to record]. The whole idea was to get with somebody just to try to absorb and learn, and just try to live that life. But it's so different now because they are just less of these guys around."

Beadle's break came in 1989, when he joined Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson's band. Over the next five years, Beadle kept the tenor slot rocking as Johnson's band toured the United States, Canada, Europe, and Central America. Beadle also did his first recordings as a session player for Rounder Records, backing not just Johnson, but also Champion Jack Dupree, Michelle Willson, Dave Maxwell, and Ron Levy.

Three solo albums and countless sessions later, Beadle is still brimming with ideas onstage and in the studio. But he also knows his playing could use some refinements—not so much in terms of notes and phrasings, but in the way he goes about performing. In watching older-generation R&B tenor players like Big Jay McNeely and Joe Houston, Beadle has always been impressed at how efficiently they play onstage—they over-power without overexerting themselves. Beadle got a first-hand lesson in conservation of energy at the 2002 Boston Blues Festival show that he shared with McNeely, who was 75 at the time.

"Jay always seems very relaxed about what he's doing," said Beadle. "I always admired that. He creates all this energy. And

he's pretty darn old now. He was known in the past for playing these tremendous, long, energetic solos, and really driving the crowd wild, you can hear it on that *Live at Birdland* CD. But he creates all that energy while being sort of relaxed. Now, I'm a spaz, I'm up there turning red in the face, sweating, shaking, blowing as hard as I can. But these guys, they create that energy in a relaxed way, and that's something I'm always continually dreaming about—but then I get up there and I just do what I do.

"Junior Walker, too. I saw Junior Walker once on a boat cruise in Boston. You know, a harbor cruise. And I'm not a big dancing person myself, but boy, when he played, it was almost like he was tugging strings attached to your body, making you move. It was so energetic and fun and rhythmic. It was almost like he was making you move. And yet it didn't look like he was trying that hard—in a good way, you know. Saxophone players, if you're on a gig, and someone asks you to play 'Shotgun,' the first thing you do is try to create all that energy by blowing your face off, shaking and turning red and everything. But seeing him do it, he's just relaxed—but the energy was still coming out of him. What a trip that was. The energy was all in the *ideas* and the rhythm of his playing. Just tremendous energy, but not just physical brute force, you know. It was more effective, the way these guys developed their sound and style and approach. It's not just some random thing. It's deep, the way they can work notes and get the sound."

Despite their West Coast origins, Doug James and Sax Gordon may go down in blues history as the Wickedest Horns of the East. Their ability to solo is what gets them most noticed, but there's also a certain wickedness to their vision of how to shape a band's sound. In effect, James and Beadle have enough musical ideas for multiple bands, and part of the fun is seeing (and hearing) what they do next.

"It's the soul thing that I'm sort of leaning toward now," said Beadle. "Aside from the thing I do with Doug, which leans a little bit more toward the swing stuff, I've lately been doing a little band where I've been doing more like rockin' Memphis soul kind of stuff. I put together a little six-piece band. Guitar, bass, drums, and three horns, kind of like the Mar-Keys—two tenors and a trumpet. I copied some old tunes, and I wrote some of my own tunes, and I adapted some of my regular tunes. So came up with a little bit of a new repertoire, got a gig at Chan's, blasted through the stuff, and it was cool as hell. You know, it's sort of a new thing, I'm trying out exciting, showy stuff. So I've done a couple gigs like that, and that feels really good."

In addition to his gigs and his usual session work, Beadle hopes to get more involved with producing and arranging. "I guess I've always been a soloist, sort of a wannabe showoff," he said with a laugh. "You know, trying to pull off the exciting saxophone solo in the song and all that. But I guess the longer I'm in the business or doing this, I'm starting to realize that in order to effectively do that or be that, I want to have control over the context that I'm playing in. It's not just that I want to take the blasting solo—I want to be able to set it up, I want to be able to create the situation, which means arranging maybe not just horns but the whole situation. I'm starting to see how that works. It's not just walking onstage and hitting a high note on the horn. I want to be able to shape the whole thing—

'cause I would like to think that I've got some ideas that could make things sound good."

Those ideas are getting heard as Beadle takes on more arrangement work. He did the horn arrangements for Howard Tate's band when they played at Scullers in 2003, after the release of Tate's *Rediscovered* album. Last year, Chris "Stovall" Brown tapped Beadle to arrange the horns for soul diva Betty Harris's comeback album.

"We did Betty's record, and went down to the Ponderosa Stomp in New Orleans," Beadle recalled. "That was another one that I called Doug for right away, and I just did a section with trumpet, tenor, and baritone. And between Doug's huge bari sound and Scott Aruda's trumpet, that little three-horn section sounds amazing to me. Just really great."

As good as he is with the charts and in the studio, Beadle remains a showman destined for further sexy adventures onstage, whether it be blues, jazz, R&B, or otherwise. On a recent gig with Matt Stubbs at Kitty O'Shea's in Beverly, Beadle was introduced (much to his glee) to the surfabilly revival scene.

"Matt's got this little instrumental band on the side where they were doing a lot of tunes by this group Los Straitjackets," Beadle explained. "Sort of this American-style, I don't know quite what you call it—it's not quite rockabilly but it's kind of related. It's not quite blues. It's not quite Duane Eddy. It's somewhere between Duane Eddy and rockabilly and rock 'n' roll and Link Wray. Anyway, they were doing all those things, and it kind of reminded me of the times I'd be hanging out with the Paladins—over in Europe or somewhere, just a couple times, I'd be talking with Dave Gonzalez. See, the saxophone is so much a part of that music, too. And the guitar players all got it together. There's a million guitar players doing the surf Tex-Mex guitar-instrumental stuff. Guys like Deke Dickerson are so good, and the Paladins. And the saxophone can really be a huge part of it. The rockin' sax—the very *unjazz* saxophone, the low-down stuff. So we were blasting out with that stuff at Kitty O'Shea's with Matt. He was doing this regular Wednesday night and having different guests, and he said, 'Oh, we're just doing instrumentals,' and I said great. I went up and they're doing this, *darr-da-darr-da-da-da*, and I was like, 'Wow! Cool!'

"So that's something I would like to do—I'd like the chance to try to bust over to that scene. I've never seen 'em, but I'm just sort of imagining all those groups like Reverend Horton Heat or whatever. I know—I just *know*—that I could kill in those situations. I guess I gotta schmooze my way into one of those bands. Man, I would love to do that."

Like Beadle, James is also game for some surf-rocking—especially since cutting "Goin' to California" for the new album.

"I got the one tune that's more like surf music with saxes on it, and I'm kind of thinking that would be fun to do more things like that," he said. "But for me, playing with Duke every month is a different thing anyway, so that's always fun, and you just get a chance to try out different stuff. So we'll see how this thing goes with me and Gordon and keep on keeping on what we do."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY: DOUG JAMES & SAX GORDON

As leaders:

Doug James & Sax Gordon (2005)
Sax Gordon, *Live at the Sax Blast* (Me & My Blues, 2004)
Doug James, *Blow Mr. Low* (Stony Plain, 2001)
Sax Gordon, *You Knock Me Out* (Bullseye Blues, 2000)
Sax Gordon, *Have Horn Will Travel* (Bullseye Blues, 1998)

As sidemen (together):

Duke Robillard, *Blue Mood* (Stony Plain, 2004)
Tony Lynn Washington, *Been So Long* (NorthernBlues, 2003)
Duke Robillard, *Living with the Blues* (Stony Plain, 2002)
Jerry Portnoy, *Down in the Mood Room* (Tiny Town, 2001)
Billy Boy Arnold, *Boogie 'n' Shuffle* (Stony Plain, 2001)
Rosco Gordon, *Memphis, Tennessee* (Stony Plain, 2000)
Jimmy "T99" Nelson, *Rockin' & Shoutin' the Blues* (Bullseye Blues, 1999)
Porky Cohen, *Rhythm & Bones* (Bullseye Blues, 1996)

As a sideman (Beadle without James):

Jimmy McGriff, *McGriff Avenue* (Milestone, 2002)
Pinetop Perkins, *Sweet Black Angel* (Gitanes, 1998)
The Deep Blues of Paul Oscher (Blues Planet, 1997)
Jay McShann, *Hootie's Jumpin' Blues* (Stony Plain, 1997)
Dave Maxwell, *Maximum Blues Piano* (Tone-Cool, 1997)
Duke Robillard, *Dangerous Place* (Pointblank, 1996)
Ron Levy, *Zim Zam Zoom* (Bullseye Blues, 1996)
Duke Robillard, *Duke's Blues* (Stony Plain, 1994)
Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, *Country Sugar Papa* (Bullseye Blues, 1994)
Michelle Willson, *Evil Gal Blues* (Bullseye Blues, 1994)
"Earring" George Mayweather, *Whup It! Whup It!* (Tone Cool, 1992)
Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, *It's Good to Me* (Bullseye Blues, 1992)
Jack Dupree, *Back Home in New Orleans* (Bullseye Blues, 1990)

As a sideman (James without Beadle):

New Guitar Summit, *Retrospective* (Q&W, 2001)
Eddy Clearwater, *Reservation Blues* (Bullseye Blues, 2000)
Stevie Ray Vaughan, *Live at Carnegie Hall* (Epic, 1997)
Roomful of Blues, *Turn It On! Turn It Up!* (Bullseye Blues, 1995)
Colin James & The Little Big Band (Virgin, 1993)
Ann Peebles, *Full Time Love* (Bullseye Blues, 1992)
Duke Robillard, *After Hours Swing Session* (Rounder, 1992)
Ronnie Earl & the Broadcasters, *Peace of Mind* (Black Top, 1990)
Greg Piccolo, *Heavy Juice* (Black Top, 1990)
Roomful of Blues, *Live at Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel* (Varrick, 1987)
Ron Levy's *Wild Kingdom* (Black Top, 1985)
Roomful of Blues with Joe Turner, *Blues Train* (Muse, 1983)
The Legendary Blues Band, *Red, Hot 'n' Blue* (Rounder, 1983)
Eddie Cleanhead Vinson & Roomful of Blues (Muse, 1982)
Fabulous Thunderbirds, *Butt Rockin'* (Chrysalis, 1981)
Roomful of Blues, *Let's Have a Party* (Antilles, 1979)
Roomful of Blues (Antilles, 1977; 32 Records, 1992)