“Dr. Herman Green: Jazz Saxophone Legend.” Thus reads the inscription on a brass note on Beale Street, right outside Blues City Café’s Band Box. Inside, you can find the man himself, onstage with FreeWorld. He and his band mates have been playing there every Sunday since they first played at the Band Box in 1991, a testament to their music, professionalism, and reception.¹ But that is just one facet of the man enshrined on the street. Herman Green, who has shared the stage with stars from John Coltrane to Dave Brubeck,² is far more than a jazz saxophone legend. Musically, he is far more versatile than his brass note might have you believe. Herman is a talented multi-instrumentalist who has had success playing jazz, blues, and many other styles. Much of that is due to his approach. He doesn't set out to play jazz or blues. He aims to play music, and entertain while doing. Dr. Green is successful in both, to the delight of his appreciative listeners.

Green’s public profile, however, does not fit his larger than life persona. His incredible musical talent and enthralling history merit chronicling, and some have been up to the task. He has been featured in a number of newspaper and magazine articles, as well

¹ Information gathered from personal interview with Richard Cushing. Further information from the interview will be simply denoted by “Richard Cushing interview.”
as a short video by Mary Nichols documenting his *Beale Street Stories*. His brass note on Beale certainly is an honor, as are his Handy and National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences awards. A Google search for Herman Green, however, fails to include a passable biography in its first page of results. Green lacks even a Wikipedia article. A similar search for FreeWorld is more satisfying, yet still utterly lacking. Even their band website is inaccessible. More information can be found on both Green and FreeWorld by accessing Internet archives of their once functional websites, but fans should not have to track down information on Green or his band in such roundabout ways. Yet another example of the flawed resources detailing Green is a Tennessee House Joint Resolution commending him on his musical career. While quite an honor, the resolution fails to reference the famed Bop City club where Green played. Instead, it cites “Box City,” a hindrance to anyone trying to learn more about Green. In light of these obstacles to obtaining an accurate biography of Dr. Herman Green, I set out to piece together a more complete narrative of his life and music.

**The Beginning**

Herman Green was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee. The music that dominates this city has always been a big part of his life. As such, I would be remiss to ignore how the blues came to Memphis. This city served as a Mecca of sorts for blues musicians. Many of these musicians came from the Delta, where they learned and wrote

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songs indicative of their lives there. Songs were passed from musician to musician, finding new life in new and varied interpretations. The blues remained largely unwritten until W.C. Handy came along.

In 1873, W.C. Handy was born in Florence, Alabama. Though his parents wanted him to pursue the ministry, Handy quickly gravitated toward a musical career. He spent years touring with bands and studying the blues before landing in Memphis with his own group. As an arranger and bandleader, Handy was among the earliest musicians to write out the blues. His arrangements are largely credited with standardizing the blues, which generally follows a few common forms in present day. Handy helped to create the vibrant environment of blues and jazz in which Herman Green would later flourish.

One musician W.C. Handy played with was Herman Washington. A saxophone player, Washington also played with Hulbert’s Lo-Down Houns, pictured above in Figure 1. Maurice “Fess” Hulbert, a prominent Memphis performer, businessman, and apparent collector of nicknames also known as “Mr. Beale Street,” led the Lo-Doun Houns. In 1930, Washington had a son, Herman Washington, Jr., but was murdered when the child was two. After his mother died from tuberculosis, Herman Washington, Jr. was taken in by Rev. Tigner Green, who raised Herman Washington Green (Green would took on his adoptive parents’ surname) with his wife. Rev. Tigner Green, who had married Herman’s cousin, was a preacher as his title suggests.

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7 Decosta-Willis, Miriam, Notable Black Memphians (Cambria Press, 2008), 180-1.
8 Wilemon. "Center Stage: Calvary Episcopal continues annual music series."
While many preachers might tell you that blues was the music of the devil, Rev. Green was supportive of Herman’s blues playing. “Daddy said all music belongs to God. It’s how you live your life what makes it between God and the devil.” Music was part of Herman’s life from early on. His grandmother taught him classical piano, and he was exposed to plenty of music by the Newborn family, a legendarily talented family of Memphis musicians.

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9 Photo courtesy of the Center for Southern Folklore
10 Ibid.
Phineas Newborn, Sr. was a blues drummer. His wife played a large role in raising Herman Green, in addition to their two sons, Phineas Jr. and Calvin. Phineas Newborn, Jr. would go on to international acclaim as a jazz pianist. In addition to Phineas Newborn, Jr.'s work with his own combos, Newborn collaborated frequently with Charles Mingus. Together, the duo even backed the poet Langston Hughes. In 1979, Newborn appeared in a piano trio with Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea at the Montreux Jazz Festival. In the 80's Newborn was largely slowed by his health, and he died in 1989.

The Newborns' younger son, Calvin, was a guitarist. A very talented jazzman by anyone's estimation, Calvin got started playing on the Memphis rhythm and blues scene. "Flying Calvin" was notorious for his energetic playing in those early years, and many attribute Elvis's famous moves to Calvin. In addition to playing with the likes of Freddie Roach, Sun Ra, Earl Hines, and Hank Crawford, Calvin is credited with teaching Howling Wolf to read music. Calvin and Herman Green have played together frequently over the

12 "Richard Cushing interview."
13 Rinzler, "Newborn, Phineas."
years, as newcomers to the Memphis music scene, in Lionel Hampton’s orchestra in the early 1960’s, and again in Memphis after having made names for themselves elsewhere.\textsuperscript{16}

![Image of musicians]

\textbf{Figure 2: Green playing with Sylvester Samples, Phineas Newborn, Jr., and Calvin Newborn}\textsuperscript{17}

Before he traveled the world, Herman attended Booker T. Washington High School. The first black public school in Memphis,\textsuperscript{18} Booker T. Washington produced an incredible number of talented musicians. Here, Herman, Calvin, and Phineas Jr. worked with Professor W.T. McDaniels, a music teacher at the school. In addition to these talented jazzmen, Rufus Thomas, Booker T. Jones, William Bell, David Porter, Stax Maurice White of Earth, Wind, & Fire, and The Bar-Kays were among those to attend Booker T.

\textsuperscript{16} Recording information, Lionel Hampton Orchestra, \textit{Live at the Metropole, New York} (Hindsight, 1994).
Washington. Green did not stop playing when he went home from school. He made his first appearance on Beale in 1945 at the age of fifteen. Green recalls the old Beale Street:

That was a whole different Beale Street. Where Handy Park is, was a big wide-open space and it was the market. People would come from all over and bring fresh vegetables and fruit and any thing else you can imagine and sell all day Saturday in the Market. There would be pick-up trucks loaded with watermelons and dogs running around and a real crowd all over the street. It was where everybody came to see and be seen.

Green met Riley King playing on Beale Street, and when “B.B.” put his first band together in 1947, Herman was his sax player. One way the band made money was B.B.’s gig with WDIA, the historic Memphis radio station. King was hired to play fifteen minutes a day of music followed by a commercial for Pepticon, which Green describes as “about the closest thing you could come to a miracle drug in the 40’s. The commercial said it cured everything: including headaches, backaches, nausea, colds, spots, arthritis, earaches, minor cuts and bruises, and just about anything.” Only later would B.B. discover the tonic he sung about was 12 percent alcohol! King kept the Pepticon band together for other gigs in Memphis and the surrounding regions, but for one such gig, King did not have a guitar.

“Herman [Green] and I broke into his dad’s church and stole his guitar,” B.B. laughs. “I’ve never told it, publicly. We stole the guitar so we could go up to Caruthersville, Missouri, to play a job. What had happened: mine got ... tore up. So we went in Herman’s father’s church. A sanctified church. Took the guitar out. So we went in there and got the guitar. Made it and played; did the job. We got to try to get it back in time to get back in the church. That was the worst thing in the world. We try to break in there without people

21 Ibid.
seeing us. We not trying to take it out now; we trying to put it back in. And
that’s when we liked to have got caught, putting the guitar back in the church.
So we did and put ten dollars in there, so his father never did know what
happened. We had the guitar all night and left ten dollars. I tease him about
it every time. I didn’t know it was in there. It was his idea. ‘You ain’t got no
guitar, we’ll go and get my father’s guitar.’”  

One of the first steady gigs Herman Green got was with the Al Jackson Band in 1948.
He recounts this time:

We were the band for the Palace Theatre. The Palace has been torn down, but
it was right next to where the New Daisy is now. Those were the days, in
about 1948 and 1949, when we had Amateur Night on Beale and the
Midnight Ramble. It would be difficult to try to describe all that went on and
all the different music people and musicians that came to town to play the
Palace. On any given night you might see T-Bone Walker, Big Joe Turner, and
many others that are legends now and gone from us. Rufus had a partner we
called "Bones" and they would warm up the audience with an act called
"Rufus and Bones". They were kind of a black Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis,
with Rufus doing the straight lines and "Bones" doing all kinds of crazy
things. I doubt if you could name any famous black music person that we did
not play with during those days. Ike Turner, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Muddy
Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Johnny Ace, Little Junior Parker, Albert King and just
about everybody else would come to Beale Street, including many of the delta
bluesmen that were unknown then. Later, after I left, Elvis Presley use to
come by, when he was just getting started.  

As the 1950’s rolled around, Green moved to playing with Willie Mitchell and Phineas
Newborn, Sr. at the Plantation Inn. Located in West Memphis, the nightclub drew
exclusively white patrons to hear the black band and vocalists. “I think you could safely say
that we introduced more young white kids to black music than anyplace else in the world,”
says Dr. Green. Some of those same white kids would find their own place on the

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23 Danchin, Sebastian, *Blues Boy: the Life and Music of B.B. King* (University of Mississippi
24 Atwood, “Interview with Herman Green.”
25 Ibid.
Memphis music scene not long thereafter, playing songs popularized by black artists before them. One such artist was Elvis Presley.

While Elvis Presley might have been “the King of Rock and Roll,” Rufus Thomas was the “Crown Prince of Dance.” Thomas is most widely known for his success with Stax Records, on such hits as “Walking the Dog,” “The Funky Chicken,” and “(Do the) Push and Pull.” Before this chapter in his career, he was already a hard-working, multi-talented entertainer who loved what he did. Sam Phillips tapped him to record on his fledgling Sun Records label, and when Thomas gathered a band together, he called Herman Green to play saxophone. The band gathered at the now famous studio on Union Avenue and cut some tracks, one of which was “Bear Cat.” The successful single was a response to Mama Thornton’s “Hound Dog,” which Elvis later covered. “Bear Cat” is cited as one of the earliest rock and roll recordings and helped establish Sun’s sizeable reputation.26

San Francisco Giants

Not long thereafter, Green left Memphis with the military. “Those were the days when everyone had a military obligation and in my day it was also when the Korean War was going on, so I was off to Korea.” In the service, his talent for music was discovered, and he was pulled in to “special services” to play his horn.28 It was during this time that Green got to back Marilyn Monroe. In 1955, Green finished his military tour and headed back to

28 Putignano, “Herman Green Interview.”
the states. He had a stop in San Francisco, and he liked the scene so much he decided to stay. Green was getting more into jazz at the time, and in San Francisco, he was in the thick of things as some of jazz's greatest musicians blazed new territory.  

At the time Green was headed to California, jazz musicians were charting exciting new territory. Many of the players on the San Francisco scene were involved in the creation of West Coast Jazz. The style was a continuation of the Miles Davis-driven cool jazz, but it relied decidedly more upon composition and arrangement. While contentious with some critics, a number of important artists (such as Dave Brubeck, Art Pepper, and Hampton Hawes) embraced the idiom to produce truly compelling work. West Coast Jazz was a significant development in the history and modernization of jazz.

Not long after arriving in San Francisco, Green joined the house band at the Black Hawk, a jazz club in town. Like many of the other places Green would play in San Francisco, the Black Hawk was a center of great music. In 1955, the year before he died, legendary pianist Art Tatum took a residency at the club. Fellow pianist Dave Brubeck and his Quartet of Paul Desmond, Joe Dodge, and Bob Bates used a residency at the club to kick-start what would be an incredibly successful career. Dave Brubeck continued to play

29 "The Early Days of Blues," Herman Green, The Official Website.
at the club after his career took off, and he too is among the many musicians to share a stage with Herman Green.\textsuperscript{33} Some of the live magic from the Black Hawk made its way onto vinyl. Carl Tjader and Shelly Manne recorded classic live albums at the Black Hawk. Two separate, two-volume albums document Miles Davis’ playing at the club, with Hank Mobley, Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers, and Jimmy Cobb filling out his combo. As was the case throughout his career, however, Miles played with many talented musicians, not just his Quintet. It was at the Black Hawk where Green was asked to back Davis.

In addition to the Black Hawk, Green found work at other clubs in town, namely Say When, The Jazz Workshop, and Bop City. He recalls, “At the Jazz Workshop, we opened the place with Cannonball Adderley and it never went downhill from then.”\textsuperscript{34} Say When was also a cool club, and it booked big name jazz talent, but Bop City, where Green led the house band, was where the magic happened. As evidence, look no further than the actions of supremely skilled yet notoriously unreliable Charlie Parker. While he frequently missed paid gigs at Say When, he always made it to the light night jam sessions at Bop City.\textsuperscript{35}

Bop City was known as a musician’s club, where jazz players in San Francisco would go after they got done playing their own gigs. Bop City was located in back of Jimbo’s Waffle Shop, a café in San Francisco’s Fillmore district. Open from 2:00-6:00 in the morning, it borrowed its name from the defunct New York club of the same name.\textsuperscript{36} During his time as a bandleader, Green employed Dinah Washington, who had yet to get her big

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} “The Early Days of Jazz,” Herman Green, The Official Website.
\textsuperscript{35} Liner notes, Charlie Parker, Charlie Parker (Prestige, 1972).
break. She would go on to become one of the most important female vocalists of her time and earn the nickname "Queen of the Blues."

Washington was not the only great singer to join Herman Green’s band on stage. “Frank Sinatra dropped in and sat in with the Band when he was in town, and this was many nights. It’s where I got to know Sammy Davis, Jr. Many of what we would call the great artists of Jazz would come and sit in with the Band, for no pay, just for the fun, the company, and the relaxation.” During this time playing clubs in San Francisco, Green met Lionel Hampton, the prolific vibraphonist and bandleader. In 1958, Herman left San Francisco to join Hampton’s big band.

Lionel Hampton Orchestra

Lionel Hampton was a giant in the jazz world. He came onto the scene as a vibraphonist and continued playing as he charted a lengthy and successful career as a bandleader. Lionel Hampton formed his big band in 1940, and he saw many of jazz’s brightest stars rise through ranks of his groups. The band toured the country, playing concerts and occasionally stopping for other events, such as television appearances. During one of the band’s visits on the Ed Sullivan Show, Herman Green was featured on a solo.

37 “The Early Days of Jazz,” Herman Green, The Official Website.
38 Ibid.
Another engagement of the band was a run at the Riviera in Las Vegas. Green invited his mother to visit him while he was playing in the city, but, despite the city’s lively reputation, was a bit worried about entertaining her. Fortunately, his friend Sammy Davis, Jr., whom he had gotten to know in San Francisco, came to his aid. At one of his shows, Davis reserved a spot at his table for Green and his mother. Davis accompanied them there until it was time for him to hit the stage. If that had not been enough entertainment for the night, Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin then stopped by the table.

In addition to the excitement that came with touring with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, Green’s relocation to New York was important to his musical career. Here he gained experience and made friendships that would shape him as a musician. His proximity to New Jersey allowed him to play the Hammond B3 circuit in the area with Big John Patton, a prolific jazz organist known for his B3 work on the Blue Note label. Patton was switching from piano to organ at the time, a move Green encouraged. Patton and Green also played together around that time with Lloyd Price, who was singing atop the R&B charts.

Herman Green’s New York apartment hosted some of the finest musicians in town, in the form of impromptu jam sessions. Sessions like these are the laboratory for

41 Putignano, “Herman Green Interview.”
experimenting musicians, who try out new ideas that might not fly during professional gigs. The sessions at Green’s place just happened to involve a number of the greatest jazz musicians to ever play. Some of the luminaries to take part in jam sessions at Green’s apartment include Miles Davis (whom Green had backed in San Francisco), Clark Terry, Art Davis, and the legendary John Coltrane.43

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 3: Following a concert in New York: Vince Prudenti, Arthur Hoyl, John Coltrane, Herman Green, and Dave Gonzalez**44

After playing together in Lionel Hampton’s Orchestra, Coltrane and Green continued to see each other on the road and maintained a friendship. Green cites Coltrane as someone he learned a great deal from; “everybody wanted to experiment, everybody wanted to try something new, but there was no one that had that innovation of music like John. Even today when I do a Sax break and I get way out in outer space; I still turn to the others in the band and say, 'Hey, I’m doing my John Coltrane thing'.”45

**Flying Home**

43 “The Early Days of Jazz,” Herman Green, The Official Website.
44 Herman Green, The Official Website (main page)
45 “The Early Days of Jazz,” Herman Green, The Official Website.
In 1963, Herman Green returned to Memphis. This stay would be short-lived, as Green elected to play a second stint with Lionel Hampton's Orchestra, stretching from 1963 until 1967. Green then returned to Memphis in 1968, where he has remained to this day.46

Upon his return, Green did not waste time getting active on the Memphis music scene. In addition to his frequent club engagements, Green became active as a session player on the resurgent recording scene in town. Memphis record companies Hi and Stax had supplanted Sun as the hottest studios in town. Hi featured the sensational Al Green, while Stax continued to produce hit music despite mounting troubles at the label.

It was during this time that Isaac Hayes featured Herman Green on his Black Moses album, recorded at Stax Records. On Hayes' single, "Never Can Say Goodbye," Green appears prominently on flute, both during a solo and in accompaniment of Hayes. Green played on numerous other Stax recordings, often with Nokie Taylor (legendary Stax session trumpeter and current member of FreeWorld).4748 However, I was unable to identify these recordings specifically.

A Green Thumb

Herman Green has always been a teacher. Says FreeWorld bassist Richard Cushing on Dr. Green, "He's gonna be teaching somehow or another, whether he's teaching me, or he's teaching, you know, actual students, he's an educator."49 Though the Dr. affixed to

46 Putignano, “Herman Green Interview.”
47 Personal conversation with Herman Green
49 “Richard Cushing interview.”
Green's name is an honorary one, Cushing notes, "He's got a degree in life." Dr. Green possesses a vast knowledge of music and enjoys sharing it with the players around him. Green shared that knowledge in a formal setting when he taught at Lemoyne-Owen College, a historically black school located in Memphis's Soulsville community. The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences have acknowledged Dr. Green's work in education at the Memphis Premier Players Awards, where he has won Teacher of the Year, as well as Best Woodwind Player and Best Band (with FreeWorld). Another testament to Dr. Green is the success of those who have played under him. Perhaps the most prominent musician Green has mentored is Charles Lloyd. Lloyd was active on the Memphis jazz and R&B scenes before moving west to attend the University of Southern California. Lloyd was a member of Cannonball Adderley's Sextet before embarking as a bandleader. His groups have featured Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, and Gábor Szabó among many others.

Herman Green has played with a number of jazz groups in Memphis, many under his own name. His most active combo to date has been Herman Green and the Green Machine. The band has served as a vehicle for Green's compositions, a torchbearer of jazz in Memphis, and a hotbed of young talent. One of the Green Machine's early pianists was James Williams.

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50 Ibid.
52 Putignano, "Herman Green Interview."
James Williams played with the Green Machine during his time at Memphis State University in the early ‘70’s. He left the band for Boston in 1974, where he taught at the Berklee College of Music for three years. Then, he joined Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers, staying with the group from 1977-1981. Since his tenure with the famed jazz combo, he has played with countless jazz talents, including Dizzy Gillespie, Wynton Marsalis, Sadao Watanabe, and Sunny Stitt—the same Sunny Stitt, in fact, that Herman Green met many years before.\textsuperscript{54}

New York City; September, 1950. When young Herman Green climbed up on the stage inside Harlem’s Mitty’s Playhouse, he thought he had been invited. "I was new in New York," the now 64-year-old Memphis saxophone master recalls, "and Sonny Stitt was onstage playing with his band. They called it 'musician’s jam night,' so at one point I just pulled my horn out, and got onstage. They looked at me funny and Sonny pulled me aside and said, 'What do you think you’re doing up here? Where you from?' I told him, I’m from Memphis.’ He said to me, 'Well, I guess that explains half of it. Son, don ’t you ever get upon somebody else’s stage without being invited first. You have to wait until you’re asked. We have a lot of good players that come out of Memphis that we respect, so just let this be a lesson for you. But if you weren’t from Memphis, I’d be beatin’ your ass right now.'"\textsuperscript{55}

In addition to playing with Stitt, Williams formed the Contemporary Piano Ensemble, a collective of pianists who took turns with a rhythm section.\textsuperscript{56} The group would form the core of Williams’ personnel for recording sessions in the summer of 1992.


\textsuperscript{55} Ron Wynn, “Memphis Jazz Masters: Forty Years With Calvin Newborn and Herman Green,” Shake, Rattle, & Roll (November 1994): 16-17, 27, 30.

Out of these sessions came the *Memphis Piano Convention*, a collection of solo piano recordings in tribute to Phineas Newborn, Jr.\(^57\) The similarly titled and packaged *Memphis Convention* throws a number of rhythm section and horn players into the mix, including Williams' former bandleader, Herman Green. In fact, musicians that have played under Green dominated the session. Williams, Bill Mobley, Mulgrew Miller, Tony Reedus, Donald Miller, and Calvin Newborn all fit that description and appear on the disc.\(^58\)

Pianist Donald Brown followed a similar path to his friend James Williams. Brown studied at Memphis State, played with Herman Green, then left Memphis to replace Williams in Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. Brown taught at Berklee College of Music as well as the University of Tennessee. He has remained active as both a player and composer.

Trumpeter Bill Mobley played in Herman Green's band from 1972-1974. After leaving the band, Mobley continued playing with James Williams for a short while and earned a B.S. from Rhodes College before relocating to Boston. There, he was active in the music scene, took a teaching gig at Berklee (1982-6), played with the Artie Shaw Orchestra under Dick Johnson, and was active with some of his own music projects.\(^59\)

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Pianist Mulgrew Miller also played with the Green Machine in the 1970’s, during his time at Memphis State. After two years at the school, he too left Memphis in order to further pursue his jazz career. He played with Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers for three years and later spent six years with Tony Williams’ quintet, in addition to recording with such greats as Freddie Hubbard, Woody Shaw, and Branford Marsalis.

Tony Reedus, a jazz drummer, was another Green Machine alumnus. He began playing with Green in 1976, at the age of 17. Reedus left Memphis in 1980 to join Woody Shaw’s band, with which he remained until they disbanded in 1984. He went on to do work as a sideman, freelancer, and leader until his death 2008.

While the Memphis Convention featured a bevy of successful Green Machine musicians, they by no means represent the entirety of successful musicians to play under Green. George O. Caldwell played piano with the Machine from 1978-1980. After his tenure with the band, he went on to play with Dizzy Gillespie, Cab Calloway, Quincy Jones, George Benson, Elvis Costello, Nancy Wilson, Max Roach, and Tito Puente.

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60 “Willie Waldman Bio,” *Willie Waldman Music*
Saxophonist Kirk Whalum has enjoyed considerable commercial success after playing with Green. Whalum has played with Bob James, Whitney Houston, and Luther Vandross, Larry Carlton, and Joe Sample. His solo albums have been crossover successes, selling copies and earning Grammy nods. He is currently active as President/CEO of the STAX Museum of American Soul and STAX Music Academy, a Memphis organization dedicated to providing Memphis children music education and chances to perform.

Willie Waldman is yet another musician who got his start with Dr. Green. While a student at Memphis State in the ‘80’s, Waldman met Herman Green at Club Handy, where Green frequently played. Waldman began playing with the Green Machine, but as a young musician was not particularly experienced in playing high-level jazz. He recalls Green telling him, “If you want to keep coming and stinking up my stage you’d better take some lessons!” Waldman thus began taking lessons from Green, who took the trumpeter under his wing. In addition to their collaboration with the Green Machine, Waldman and Green were founding members of FreeWorld.

Waldman left FreeWorld in 1994 to move to California, where he quickly found session work, notably on the hip-hop scene. His first job was playing on a Snoop Dogg album, and he soon found work with such high profile productions as Sublime, Tupac

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64 “Willie Waldman Bio,” Willie Waldman Music
Shakur, Jodeci, Warren G, and the soundtrack for 101 Dalmations. In addition to his session work, Waldman has recorded a jazz album as bandleader and plays with Banyan, an experimental rock band led by Jane’s Addiction drummer Stephen Perkins. Waldman maintains an active tour schedule between his jazz group, Banyan, and other projects, and he brings Dr. Green on tour with these groups from time to time.686970

FreeWorld

In 1986, Richard Cushing, a student at Memphis State, began playing bass with the Moonlight Syncopators, led by guitarist Chris Lea and joined by David Skypeck on drums. The band included a horn section, but for one Wednesday night gig on Beale Street, the horns were not going to make it. Despite their absence, Lea set up a couple of microphones for trumpet and saxophone. The mics went unused for the band’s first set, but during the middle of the second set, two guys came in off of the street, pulled out their horns, and started playing. Those two guys were Herman Green and trumpeter Nokie Taylor, and Cushing still vividly recalls this first time he played music with Dr. Green. From there, Green and Taylor became the Moonlight Syncopators’ horn section.

In the fall of 1987, Willie Waldman enlisted Cushing, Ross Rice, Clint Wagner, and Jimmy Ellis’s help in forming a new band. Waldman and Cushing then paid a visit to Dr. Green at King’s Palace, in hopes that he would help with their new band as well. “We went

68 “Richard Cushing interview”
70 “Willie Waldman Bio,” Willie Waldman Music
after him intentionally because we – as a bunch of young, white, hippie dudes – we wanted somebody in the band that had some credibility, that people knew who they were... We need somebody in the band that was somebody, and Herman seemed like an obvious choice. So we went and asked him if he would help us start this new band and he said [emphatically, in his distinctive, gravelly voice], 'I will do that, but you got to be serious about the music.' So, we told him, 'Yeah, okay. No messin' around.'”

Green joined the band, which was playing every Tuesday at the South End, a downtown Memphis joint that has since burned down. They assumed the name “The Herman Green and Jimmy Ellis Blues Review” until they decided upon FreeWorld a few weeks later. The band quickly won over a “cadre of Rhodes College students and local jam fans,” but in 1988, FreeWorld disbanded when Richard Cushing shifted his focus to Mosaic. Mosaic strictly played original tunes, and in Cushing’s words, “The seven people that came to see Mosaic on a regular basis seemed to enjoy us. But FreeWorld had been this wildly popular thing in the first year. So I ran into Willie at a party and we decided to re-launch FreeWorld in 1990.” In 1991, David Skypeck, who had played with the Moonlight Syncopators and actually worked FreeWorld gigs as a doorman, joined the band on drums. Skypeck, Cushing, and Green have remained with the band ever since, as the band has cycled through horn players, guitarists, and a keyboardists. That same year, FreeWorld was booked Sunday Night at the Blues City Café, a gig they have missed just five times in these past twenty years! The band would not have gotten the job had it not been for Dr. Green.

71 “Richard Cushing interview”
73 Mehr, “As the FreeWorld Turns.”
The original owners of the Café envisioned the Band Box as Beale’s answer to New Orleans’ Preservation Hall – a stage where the old guys would always have a place to play on Beale.

FreeWorld has recorded four studio records and a live album. Their first album was the eponymous *FreeWorld*, released in 1994. They followed that album with *You Are Here* in 1996. 1999 saw the band record *Diversity*, while FreeWorld’s *Live From Memphis* album came out in 2003. In 2008, the band recorded *From the Bluff* at legendary producer Jim Dickinson’s Zebra Ranch Studio. On these CDs, Herman Green is listed as “the Man.” “There’s the core, the Man, and the collective,” Cushing says, “and Herman’s the Man.”

Over this span, Green has featured prominently on a number of other recordings. He recorded two CD’s of his compositions as Herman Green and the Green Machine: 1995’s *Who is Herman Green* and 1999’s *Inspiration: Family & Friends*. While these discs are out of print, you can hear many of these tracks on *The Best of the Green Machine, Vol. 1*, a 2011 compilation. In 2001, Green recorded *Hernando Street Blues* at Ardent Studios with his Memphis Blues and Jazz Quartet. While Green was cutting the album, his playing caught the ear of Jimmie Vaughan, who was recording *Do You Get the Blues?* at Ardent as well. Vaughan invited Dr. Green to play on a couple songs for the album, which won the 2001 Grammy for a Traditional Blues Album. Instead of taking pay for the tracks, Green had Vaughan record a couple tracks on *Hernando Street Blues*.

Currently, FreeWorld is working on new material for a new CD, marking their 25th year as a band. The band’s current members include Matt Tudor on guitar, Nokie Taylor and Charles Ray on trumpet, and Peter Climie on saxophones alongside Green, Cushing, and Skypeck. They truly are an interesting bunch. Matt, who takes the big half of vocal duties,
is a devastatingly talented guitarist who studied at the University of Memphis and New England Conservatory. In addition to FreeWorld, he plays in the band’s side project, Kaleidoscope, with Cushing. Nokie Taylor, who made his name as an outstanding player at Stax, plays trumpet. He also offers occasional vocals and percussion for the group. Charles Ray, the youngest of the bunch, is still in his twenties. A smoking trumpet player, Ray also breaks out his flugelhorn on occasion and delivers solid backing vocals with the band.

Peter Climie has the unenviable task of playing saxophone alongside Dr. Green, but he does it well and with a smile on his face. While Dr. Green sticks the tenor sax, Climie spends some time playing soprano and alto as well. Dr. Green does his thing on saxophone and flute, and you can count on him for distinctive vocals on his composition “Earth Mother.”

David Skypeck keeps the groove on drums, while Richard Cushing rocks his six-string bass guitar. Cushing, between FreeWorld, Kaleidoscope, and other gigs, somehow manages to play upwards of 300 nights a year, spend time with his wife and two kids, and work as a Senior Research Technician in a Developmental Neurogenetics lab in the Anatomy & Neurobiology Department of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center.74

Seeing the Doctor

In August of 2010, I played a concert at Rhodes College with my jazz group. My group was the first to play, while FreeWorld was the headlining act, with a few other bands in between us. Nonetheless, some of the band had showed up and were listening to us when our bassist broke a string. Richard Cushing promptly offered his bass for us to borrow. This was a pretty incredible display from a musician, a group notoriously

74 “Richard Cushing interview”
apprehensive of letting others touch their things. After we got done playing, I stuck around to watch FreeWorld play. The group was energetic, fresh, and most of all, musically impressive. The rhythm section of Richard Cushing, Matt Tudor, and David Skypeck was locked in, and with Green and Captain Phil McGee added to the mix, special things happened. After the show, I stuck around to move equipment and talk to the band. It was here I began hearing stories about Dr. Green’s days playing with jazz, blues, and rock greats. How had I not heard about this great player with a wealth of great stories?

The easiest place to find Herman Green is at Blues City Café’s Band Box on any given Sunday night. FreeWorld takes the stage around 10:30 and plays well until 3 in the morning. The experience is different every time, from the crowd to the music. There are plenty of staples in the band’s repertoire, both classic covers and tunes the band wrote, but they are more than happy to play requests accompanied by a tip. Despite the variety of the shows, they tend to follow a loose, three set format. Each set has its own feel, largely

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informed by the time of night and the crowd at the time. For the first set, the band typically plays a variety of famous blues and soul tracks, with an emphasis on Memphis. They complement that with some of their own tunes, which generally garner more people singing along than the classics they cover.

The first set crowd typically includes a number of visitors from out of town. These visitors really make the experience at times. Perhaps the most interesting group of visitors I have experienced at Blues City Café’s Band Box was a collection of bikers, complete with matching leather jackets to signify their allegiance to the “Rattlesnakes.” They struck up a quick friendship with Dr. Green, and before long, their intimidating leader convincingly petitioned the crowd for tips for the band and his “brother,” Dr. Green. Though unexpected, this encounter was not wholly surprising given Green’s fun, friendly nature.

Between sets, the band members generally take time to grab a bite to eat and a few drinks. One of my favorite experiences with Dr. Green occurred during one of these breaks between sets. I had the pleasure of talking with Dr. Green as he enjoyed some of the Café’s delicious catfish. As he got more comfortable during the course of conversation, he insisted I take a filet. I was happy to discover Dr. Green has good taste in multiple facets of his life.

The second set is a little more low-key. The band lets loose a little more, and the songs stray further from the standard Beale blues fare. Dr. Green often sits out a few tunes to grab a drink, dance with the ladies, and visit with patrons. He truly seems to have more fun than anyone else at the venue, and that is high praise in a happening venue like the Blues Box. Often times other musicians will join the band on stage. In a sense, FreeWorld’s sets at the Band Box really are not far removed from Green’s nights playing at Bop City.
Some of the cities finest players, and on occasion an “out of towner,” frequently come to hear and play with the band. Around 1:45, the band settles in for their final set. By now, everyone in the place is feeling good, and the band is happy to play the night away. The tunes seem to tend further toward funk and jazz than in earlier sets and the band is generally at their most relaxed. By no means does the music suffer, however. FreeWorld rocks Beale Street from 10:30 to 3, each and every Sunday night.

The Man

The quality of Dr. Green’s playing coupled with his longevity is truly remarkable. On top of that, Green has been in the thick of things for countless moments of musical innovation and achievement. He continues to play regularly with FreeWorld, and stay active outside of the band. In June 2011, Green recorded tracks for a new CD with an anticipated October 2011 release. He still makes time to get away from Memphis on occasion, whether to promote his music, play with his old friend Willie Waldman, or tour with Ratdog (Bob Weir’s post-Dead band). Green is both an active musician worthy of note and a living piece of music history. In compiling a more complete biography of Dr. Green, I am continually reminded that I am just scratching the surface of a compelling tale. This biography is not complete, but neither is Dr. Herman Green’s story. If the first 80 years of his life are any indication, Dr. Green has plenty of excitement left in him.
Appendix

Discography

Note: The list below is not a complete discography, but comprises the work I am able to currently attribute to Green. One known omission is Green's session work at Stax, where I understand he did more work than the singular Isaac Hayes track cited below suggests. In addition to the recordings listed, Dr. Green has recorded a new album’s worth of material, with an anticipated release date of October 2011. His band FreeWorld is also assembling material for a 2012 release. Keeping that in mind, the following list is intended to highlight some of the extensive work done by Dr. Green without pretending to be comprehensive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Recording</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>B.B. King</td>
<td>Boss of the Blues (Kent Records 529-5029)</td>
<td>Green appears on baritone sax on this album by the blues legend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Lionel Hampton and His Orchestra</td>
<td>Live at the Metropole, New York (Hindsight 242)</td>
<td>Green joins the vibraphonist as a sax player in his big band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>FreeWorld</td>
<td>FreeWorld (Real Beale)</td>
<td>FreeWorld’s debut, consists of 9 originals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Herman Green and the Green Machine</td>
<td>Who is Herman Green? (Green Machine Enterprises, BMI)</td>
<td>Herman Green enlists his band to play a collection of his jazz and blues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Artist/Songwriter</td>
<td>Album/Track</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>FreeWorld</td>
<td>FreeWorld</td>
<td>FreeWorld’s sophomore effort</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Hair Farmer)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Various artists</td>
<td>Memphis Convention</td>
<td>Green plays saxophone on a track for this James Williams-led session</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(DIW 874)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Green Machine Enterprises, BMI)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>FreeWorld</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>FreeWorld’s third album</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Swirldisc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Jimmie Vaughan</td>
<td>Do You Get the Blues?</td>
<td>Green plays flute on a couple tracks for this Grammy-winning blues album.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Artemis 751091)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Herman Green and the Memphis Blues and Jazz Quartet</td>
<td>Hernando Street Blues</td>
<td>A diverse collection of Herman Green’s music. Jimmie Vaughan appears on two tracks</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Supreme)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Lionel Hampton</td>
<td>Lionel Hampton Revisited</td>
<td>Green appears in the big band for this retrospective album.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>FreeWorld</td>
<td><em>Live from Memphis</em> (Swirldisc)</td>
<td>Recorded live at the Blues City Café on Beale Street.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Calvin Newborn</td>
<td><em>New Born</em> (Yellow Dog 1159)</td>
<td>Green plays sax and flute on this set of straight ahead jazz.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Afrissipi</td>
<td><em>Fulani Journey</em> (Knockdown South Records 011)</td>
<td>Green guests on saxophone for the group's debut album.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>FreeWorld</td>
<td><em>From the Bluff</em> (Swirldisc)</td>
<td>FreeWorld's fourth studio album, produced by Jim Dickinson</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Rufus Thomas</td>
<td><em>Before Stax: The Complete 50’s Recordings</em> (Important Artists 7801)</td>
<td>Herman appears on this collection of Thomas's early recordings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Lloyd Price</td>
<td><em>Lloyd Rocks</em> (Bear Family Records 16999)</td>
<td>Green plays saxophone on some of the tracks from this hits collection of the R&amp;B singer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Album Title</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Various Artists</td>
<td><em>Instrumental Memphis Music Sampler, Vol. 2</em></td>
<td>A Green Machine song is pulled for this compilation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Inside Sounds, ISC-0534)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Lloyd Price</td>
<td><em>Exciting Lloyd Price/Mr. “Personality”</em></td>
<td>Green appears on sax on this pairing of two of Price’s albums from the late 1950’s.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Hoo Doo Records 263363)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Dr. Herman Green</td>
<td><em>The Best of the Green Machine, Vol. 1</em></td>
<td>Compilation of tunes from his two Green Machine CDs, as well as “Earth Mother” from FreeWorld’s You Are Here.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Green Machine Enterprises, BMI)</td>
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