

# Rudy Van Gelder and Blue Note Records



Rudy Van Gelder with recording equipment

**Rudy Van Gelder** (born November 2, 1924, Jersey City, New Jersey) is an American recording engineer specializing in jazz.



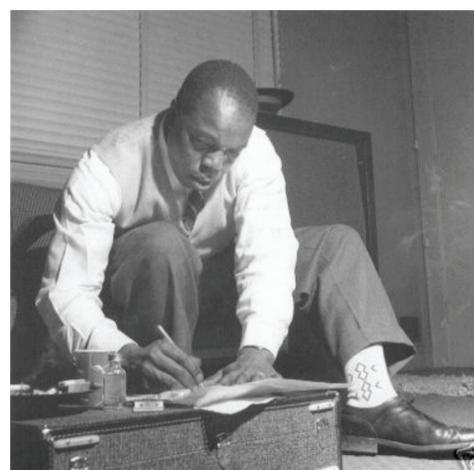
Sonny Rollins Volume II session at Hackensack, NJ on April 14, 1957



Jazz great Lee Morgan taken at Johnny Griffin's "A Blowing Session" in Hackensack, NJ on April 6, 1957.



Doug Watson and Horace Silver Quintet session at Hackensack, NJ on February 6, 1955



Jazz great Thad Jones taken at the Magnificent Tad Jones session in Hackensack, NJ on February 2, 1957

Often regarded as one of the most important recording engineers in music history, Van Gelder has recorded several thousand jazz sessions, including many widely recognized as classics, in a career spanning more than half a century. Van Gelder has recorded many of the great names in the genre, including **Miles Davis**, **Thelonious Monk**, **Sonny Rollins**, **Joe Henderson**, **Grant Green**, **Wayne Shorter**, **John Coltrane**, and many others. He worked with many record companies, but he is most closely associated with Blue Note Records, now a division of EMI.

# Rudy Van Gelder and Blue Note Records (Cont.)



[Pictured: **25 Prospect Avenue** in Hackensack, N.J., now home to the Active Center for Health and Wellness.]

**JW:** Does it make you sad that the house is no longer there?

**RVG:** A little. I suppose when you spend that much time recording history in a place, you sometimes wish you could at least drive by and see it.

**Source:** <http://www.jazzwax.com/2012/02/interview-rudy-van-gelder-part-2.html>



## Early career

Rudy Van Gelder's interest in microphones and electronics can be traced to a youthful enthusiasm for amateur radio. A longtime jazz fan, his uncle had been a drummer for Ted Lewis in the 1920s, Van Gelder first recorded friends in his parents' Hackensack, New Jersey, living room, while working during the day as an optometrist. **The house in Hackensack had been designed and built so that it could also be used as a recording studio.** One of Van Gelder's friends, baritone saxophonist Gil Melle, introduced him to Blue Note Records producer Alfred Lion around 1952. The meeting led to the start of a second career, and as a result, Van Gelder is closely associated with the Blue Note label.

**Source:** <http://blog.americanhistory.si.edu/osaycanyousee/2011/09/miles-davis-rudy-van-gelder-and-a-living-room-recording-studio-part-one-of-two.html>

# Rudy Van Gelder and Blue Note Records (Cont.)



**Rudy Van Gelder** (Illustration by Christopher Serra)



Rudy Van Gelder and Alfred Lion, founder of Blue Note Records jazz label

In 1946, his father decided to build a house in Hackensack, N.J. Mr. Van Gelder asked for a control room with a double glass window next to the living room, which would serve as the studio. His father agreed. “The architect made the living room ceiling higher than the rest of the house, which created ideal acoustics for recording,” he said.

Early clients included singer-accordionist Joe Mooney and pianist Billy Taylor. Then in 1952, Gus Statiras, a local producer, brought baritone saxophonist Gil Mellé to Mr. Van Gelder’s studio to record. Mellé later played the results for Alfred Lion of Blue Note Records in New York. “Alfred wanted more tracks and went to his engineer at WOR Studios to see if he could duplicate the natural sound,” Mr. Van Gelder said. “The guy told him he didn’t know how, and urged Alfred to see the person who had recorded the originals. So he did.”



Before long, Prestige, Savoy, Vox and other labels began booking studio time for LPs. “To accommodate everyone, I assigned different days of the week to different labels,” he said. “But I continued to work as an optometrist, investing everything I made in new recording equipment.”

As the home’s driveway filled with cars, Mr. Van Gelder’s parents added a separate entrance to their bedroom wing to avoid walking in on the musicians. “My parents and the neighbors never complained,” he said. “Only once my mother left me a note asking me to do a better job tidying up.”

**Source:** New Jersey Jazz Revolution By MARC MYERS

# Rudy Van Gelder and Blue Note Records (Cont.)



Horace Silver, "Lee Morgan Volume II" session, Hackensack, New Jersey December 2, 1956



Miles Davis, Hackensack, NJ, 1954



J. J. Johnson (Hank Mobley in background) Johnson's Quintet session, Hackensack, NJ, June 6, 1955.



Max Roach, "Sonny Rollins, Volume 1" session, Hackensack, NJ, December 16, 1956



Lee Morgan "Volume II" session, Hackensack, NJ December 2, 1956



Milt Jackson, Hank Mobley and His All Stars session, Hackensack, NJ, January 13, 1957