

# *Dixieland Jazz in the Forties*

*Muggsy Spanier Group*      *Frank Signorelli Group*



FOLKWAYS RECORDS FJ 2853

Side One

**MUGGSY SPANIER GROUP**

recorded by Moses Asch,

1. Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down
2. Muskogee Blues
3. Rosie
4. Take Me To The Land of Jazz
5. I'd Climb the Highest Mountain
6. Red Hot Mama

Side Two

**FRANK SIGNORELLI GROUP**

1. Memphis Blues
2. Saxophone Joe
3. Darktown Strutter's Ball
4. Sour Puss Hannah
5. Limehouse Blues
6. Between and First Hello  
and the Last Good-bye

©1978 FOLKWAYS RECORDS AND SERVICE CORP.  
43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., U.S.A. 10023

PROPERTY OF  
FOLKLIFE PROGRAM  
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

*Dixieland Jazz  
in the Forties*

*Muggsy Spanier Group*

*Frank Signorelli Group*

ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER PHOTO BY WALKER EVANS,  
MAIN STREET ARCHITECTURE, SELMA, ALABAMA, 1935

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FJ 2853

# Dixieland Jazz In The Forties

## Annotated by David A. Jasen

The 1940's were a very mixed-bag, musically speaking. It was the time, of course, when the big bands were at their height, when a new jazz sound called be-bop demanded attention, and, simultaneously, when the early Dixieland jazz band had a revival.

This dixieland revival took two forms: where the original jazzmen came to perform anew; and where young practitioners came to the fore having been stimulated by the original sounds. This album is devoted to the first kind - a true revival from those great pioneers who still had something musical to say. The first side is a tribute to the fine cornetist, Muggsy Spanier, who began recording in 1924 with his Bucktown Five. The second side brings back the extraordinary pianist, Frank Signorelli, who started his recording career with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1921 and formed his Original Memphis Five (see RBF-26, The Original Memphis Five) later in that same year.

The dixieland band started out with the cornet, trombone, clarinet, piano and drums. Soon were added a banjo and tuba. Later the alto, then tenor saxophone joined in. So, from five pieces the band grew until it eventually had nine pieces. Everyone knew the basic tunes and so improvised collectively. As the band developed, it attracted natural virtuosos thereby creating solos which broke up the ensemble jamming. This gave each band member a chance to shine as well as show how well he could join in maintaining a group sound.

SIDE ONE

Francis "Muggsy" Spanier was born in Chicago, Illinois on November 9, 1906. He began his professional career playing cornet in Sig Meyer's band in 1922 and jobbed around Chicago until 1928 when he joined Ray Miller's orchestra in October. The following year famed clarinetist, Ted Lewis, asked him to join his band and where Muggsy made an outstanding contribution. He left Lewis at the end of 1936 to play with Ben Pollack's band. He formed his own "Ragtimers" in 1939 where he recorded sixteen tunes which established that group as one of the finest ever to record! From 1940 through 1964, he led various groups and guested with many large bands. Throughout the fifties, he played with Earl Hines in San Francisco, where he made his final home. Ill health forced his retirement and he died in Saucalito, California on February 12, 1967.

Charles Ellsworth "Pee Wee" Russell was a contemporary of Muggsy's, born in Maple Wood, Missouri on March 27, 1906. His family moved to Oklahoma where he studied violin, piano, drums and clarinet. Concentrating on the latter instrument, he found himself on a riverboat playing with the Deep River Jazz Band. He started with Herbert Berger's dance band in 1922, making his record debut with that orchestra two years later. He played with Frankie Trumbauer and Bix Beiderbecke during the following two years and came to New York in 1927 where he joined many of Red Nichols' recording groups. Like most active musicians of his time, he played a variety of reeds with such leaders as Paul Specht, Donald Voorhees, Ben Pollack, and Louis Prima. He began his long association with Eddie

Condon in 1937 where he played with Bobby Hackett, Bud Freeman, George Brunis, Wild Bill Davison, Miff Mole, James P. Johnson, Billy Butterfield and Muggsy Spanier. Known primarily for his "Nicksieland" music (named after the famed Greenwich Village watering-hole which featured traditional jazz), he played with many of the greats of his time. He was active until his death which occurred in Alexandria, Virginia on February 15, 1969.

Vic Dickenson, another who was born in 1906, in Xenia, Ohio on August 6, started his distinguished professional life on trombone with The Elite Serenaders in 1921. Jobbed around the Ohio Valley throughout the twenties with such bands as Don Phillips, Willie Jones, and Speed Webb's legendary group. He came to New York City with Zach White's Chocolate Beau Brummels where he made his first recording as vocalist on Luis Russell's "Honey That Reminds Me." During the thirties, he was with Blanche Calloway, Claude Hopkins, Benny Carter and then Count Basie's great band. Played with many groups as a free-lance throughout the forties and fifties which sported such players as Sidney Bechet, Frankie Newton, Eddie Heywood, Bobby Hackett, Henry "Red" Allen. He also played jazz festivals in Europe, joined Eddie Condon for scattered jobs, made many recordings, and appeared with The World's Greatest Jazz Band. He is still (at this writing) very much in demand with traditional jazz bands.

Cliff Jackson, a much undervalued pianist during his lifetime, was born in Culpepper, Virginia on July 19, 1902. He moved permanently to New York in 1923 where he worked steadily in groups and as a soloist until he died

there on May 24, 1970. It was unfortunate that he made very few recordings, which makes these performances an especially great treat, as we hear his superb stride piano clearly.

Bob Casey was born in Illinois on February 11, 1909. He started playing banjo as a teenager and became a string bass player (as we hear him on these recordings) in 1929. He made Chicago his home base in the thirties, playing with Wingy Manone and also as a staff musician for the N.B.C. affiliate. He joined the famed Muggsy Spanier's Ragtime Band. This series of recordings then constitutes a reunion with Muggsy. Bob came to New York in 1943 and became a regular at Nick's. He retired to Florida in the late fifties, but keeping musically active with such groups as The Dukes of Dixieland during the sixties and early seventies.

Drummer Joe Grauso was born in New York City in 1897 and became a professional musician when he turned fourteen, accompanying Frank Signorelli for silent movies and dances. He mainly worked in vaudeville during the twenties. From 1941 until his death in New York on June 11, 1952, he played and recorded with the Condon crowd, Art Hodes, Billy Butterfield, and, of course, with Muggsy.

This recording session took place in New York City on May 27, 1946 but reaches as far back as 1919 for Pete Wendling's tune, "Take Me To the Land of Jazz." It is certainly not a typical session either for song titles or for band members. These highly seasoned musicians came together and had a jazz band ball.

SIDE TWO

Frank Signorelli was born in New York City on May 24, 1901. Having taken two piano lessons from his cousin Pasquale he began his professional career playing in dives from Chinatown to Coney Island. He loved the sounds of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, bought their records, hung around the dance halls where they performed, joined them replacing J. Russel Robinson, and with Phil Napoleon, formed the Original Memphis Five to recreate the ODJB. From 1921-26, they made more recordings than any other jazz group and under a vast number of pseudonyms - the exact amount still undetermined! Spent most of his time in recording studios and playing for radio shows in New York. He performed with all of the greatest white jazz players of his time. In his spare moments, he composed pop tunes with the banner year 1935 seeing his eventual standard, "Stairway to the Stars." Perhaps his greatest tribute as a pianist-arranger came in 1938 when he was asked to join Paul Whiteman's orchestra and share piano chores with famed composer-pianist-arranger, Roy Bargey (see also RBF-35, Roy Bargey: Piano Syncopations). Throughout the forties, he worked in many groups such as this one and the fifties found him playing in various clubs around Greenwich Village. He continued to free-lance in the sixties, making commercials and appearing in television studio orchestras. He died in his Brooklyn, New York home on December 9, 1975.

Gordon Griffin was born in Binghamton, New York on October 31, 1915. He took trumpet lessons from the age of twelve. Joined Charlie Barnet's band in 1933, went with Joe Haymes, Benny Goodman and Jimmy Dorsey. Most of his time, however, was spent as a staff musician for the CBS

network. He did much free-lance recordings with Mildred Bailey, Teddy Wilson and Miff Mole. Currently he runs a school with Pee Wee Erwin for trumpeters.

Al Philburn, long known in New York City as a trombonist, was born in Newark, New Jersey on August 24, 1902. He joined Eddie Elkins' band in 1924 and has worked steadily ever since. Much time was put into recordings when he worked under Ed Kirkeby in his many groups, especially with The California Ramblers. Staff musician at NBC and recordings took up most of his time. He worked with Tony Parenti (who was also at NBC) and had his own dixieland band at the World's Fair in 1964. He remains active in recording work.

Nick Caiazza, tenor saxist with many big bands, was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania on March 20, 1914. He worked in Muggsy's famous Ragtimers, then with Woody Herman, Will Bradley-Ray McKinley, Bobby Hackett, Teddy Powell, Alvino Rey, recorded with Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden, Hot Lips Page, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman and Billy Butterfield. Since the late sixties, he has joined the faculty at the Berklee School of Music in Boston.

Chauncey Morehouse was born in Niagara Falls, New York on March 11, 1902. He grew up in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania where he accompanied his pianist-father on drums for the silent movies. Veteran percussionist, he is still active in New York recording studios, having played with virtually every well-known musician in New York. He started his career with Paul Specht in 1922, then joined the bands of Howard Lanin, Ted Weems and Jean Goldkette. He did much radio work in addition to all of his recordings. He is still in great demand as accompanist, appearing with such diverse groups as the Goldman Band.



Joining this recording group were Al Franzel on clarinet, Haig Stephens on Bass, and Art Gentry on all vocals except the last tune which features Bert Frohman.

SIDE ONE - Muggsy Spanier Group

1. Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down
2. Muskogee Blues
3. Rosie
4. Take Me To The Land of Jazz
5. I'd Climb the Highest Mountain
6. Red Hot Mama

SIDE TWO - Frank Signorelli Group

1. Memphis Blues
2. Saxophone Joe
3. Darktown Strutter's Ball
4. Sour Puss Hannah
5. Limehouse Blues
6. Between and First Hello and the Last Good-bye

For Additional Information About  
**FOLKWAYS RELEASES**

of Interest

write to



**Folkways Records  
and Service Corp.**

43 WEST 61 ST STREET NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10023



Chauncey Korbouse was born in Niagara Falls, New York on March 11, 1902. He grew up in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania where he accompanied his father on drums for the silent movies. Veteran percussionist, he is still active in New York recording studios, having played with virtually every well-known musician in New York. He started his career with Paul Specht in 1922, then joined the bands of Howard Lamb, Ted Weems and Jean Goldkette. He did much radio work in addition to all of his recordings. He is still in great demand as a