

RECORDED BY MOSES ASCH

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FJ 2854

Jazz Violins of the Forties

Stuff Smith · Paul Nero · Joe Kennedy

ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN



NEW YORK CITY, 1934, PHOTOGRAPH BY WALKER EVANS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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SIDE ONE

Stuff Smith Trio

Jimmy Jones, Piano; John Levy, Bass

1. Midway
2. Look At Me
3. Stop-Look
4. Skip It
5. Desert Sands
6. Don't You Think

Total Time: 16:00

SIDE TWO

Paul Nero

1. The Hot Canary
2. Pitzi-Cats
3. As the Crow Jumps
4. The Hep Hippo
5. Patches
6. Desert Sands (Smith)

Total Time: 15:15

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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JAZZ VIOLINS OF THE FORTIES

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DAVID A. JASEN

The violin and "jazz" don't often go together, but when they do and they click, the sounds are very special indeed. And just how different they can be are demonstrated on this album devoted to three jazz masters of the violin, two of them playing their own compositions.

Stuff, born Hezekiah Leroy Gordon Smith in Portsmouth, Ohio on August 14, 1909, was raised in Cleveland. He first worked in a local jazz band in 1924 but graduated two years later into the famous territory band led by Alphonse Trent in Dallas, Texas. Beginning the decade of the 30's, he led his own group of six and was a pioneer of what was going to be small group jazz during the Swing Era. That group came to New York and Stuff began his reputation by taking root at the famed Onyx Club on 52nd Street, the then new jazz capital of the world.

His first recording, 'I'SE A MUGGIN', was made in February, 1936. It gave him a worldwide prominence. His tonal quality was superb, playing an amplified violin which enriched his sound further. His sense of rhythm was also superb and he had a seemingly inexhaustible source of creative inspiration, making his performances always bright and fresh. His singing showed the right amount of crisp phrasing. As a composer, he scored by having Sarah Vaughan record his TIME AND AGAIN.

Throughout the forties, he played and recorded with his Trio. During the 50's, he played small clubs and an occasional

television appearance. In the 60's, he moved to Copenhagen, Denmark, where he played many jazz festivals and concerts throughout Europe. In fact, it was while rehearsing for a concert in Munich, Germany, that he died on September 25, 1967.

Stuff Smith was a unique figure in Jazz history and here are his choice recordings to prove it. On September 8, 1944, Stuff, Jimmy Jones on piano and John Levy on string bass recorded the six original tunes by the leader. They are reissued here for the first time.

Kurt Paul Nero was born in Hamburg, Germany on April 29, 1917. His father, who founded the Violin Teachers' Guild in New York City, gave him his first lessons. He continued his classical studies as a scholarship student at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where he also took lessons in arranging with Johnny Warrington and conducting with Fritz Reiner. From 1937-1948, he split his professional life by appearing with the New York Philharmonic and the Pittsburgh Symphony, while also playing in such diverse dance bands as those led by Jan Savitt and Gene Krupa. During the second world war, he led the U.S. Navy dance band in Washington, D.C.

His most well-known composition was his virtuosic display piece, THE HOT CANARY, with which he opens the second side of this album. It was published in 1949 and remained on the Hit Parade for the rest of that year. It has become a standard part of the pop violinists' repertoire. These recordings were Nero's first and fully demonstrate his remarkable capabilities.

His volatile personality and extraordinary musical personality were reflected in his comment on his extra-curricular activity (he was a licensed pilot): "I enjoy flying, with or without an airplane." From 1948 on, he was a staple on the Hollywood scene, being on the staff of radio networks and movie music departments as well as extensive concertizing.

He suffered from mental illness prior to his sudden death which took place in his doctor's office on March 21, 1958. His jazz legacy is once again available on record.

JOE KENNEDY, JR., (AND THE FOUR STRINGS)

The Four Strings, a unique post World War II instrumental ensemble, was formed in Pittsburgh, Penna. during 1946. The original unit consisted of Joe Kennedy, Jr., violin, leader; Ray Crawford, guitar; Samuel E. Johnson, piano and Edgar Willis, bass. Pianist Ahmad Jamal and bassist Tommy Sowell were latter replacements.

The group served for one year as house band at Local 471, the black Musicians Union that was located in the hill district of Pittsburgh. During this era, "The Strings" made commercials for advertising agencies and completed a series of transcriptions that were utilized as background music assignments for syndicated radio shows.

During 1948, the ensemble continued to perform in numerous local clubs and appeared at Carnegie Music Hall as a major attraction. Mary Lou Williams, upon hearing the quartet, eagerly arranged a recording session. Under her supervision, the album, Trends, was recorded and released by Moses Asch, Director, Asch Recording Company, New York. The talented group received outstanding credit for making artistic contributions to the cultural heritage of Pittsburgh and Folkways Records has reissued Jazz Violins Of The Forties, FJ 2854, which includes two selections by The Four Strings featuring Violinist Joe Kennedy, Jr.



Joe Kennedy, Jr.

Violinist, Composer

Numerous studio credits as performer, arranger-conductor. Staff member, Afro-American Studies Department, Virginia Commonwealth University, Supervisor of Music, Public Schools, Richmond, Virginia.

Featured Artist with Benny Carter:

1978, 1981 Jazz Heritage Series, Smithsonian Institute; 1979, 1981 Japan Tours; 1980 North Sea Jazz Festival, The Hague, Holland and Grande Parade du Jazz, Nice, France.

Recent engagements include:

A Salute to Duke Ellington, Kennedy Center, Television, PBS, plus Concord and Monterey Jazz Festivals, 1981.

Recent recordings include:

Joe Kennedy, Jr., Magnifique, Black & Blue Disqu4s, (France) and featured artist with The Billy Taylor Quartet, Where've You Been?, Concord Records, plus featured artist, The John Lewis Album, Finesse Records.