

THE BIGGEST LITTLE BAND IN THE LAND:

THE JOHN KIRBY SEXTET 1938-1951

By

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A Thesis submitted to the

Graduate School–Newark

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Jazz History and Research

written under the direction of

Professor Lewis Porter

and approved by

Newark, New Jersey

May 2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Biggest Little Band In The Land: The John Kirby Sextet 1938-1951

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This thesis explores my assertion that the swing era John Kirby Sextet is one of the most unjustly overlooked influencers and progenitors of Bebop, Cool Jazz and Third Stream Jazz. Their singular knack for writing and performing intricate, methodical arrangements and compositions, their consistent individuality, their tightly controlled limits on solos without sacrificing creativity, the insistent swing of the rhythm section, the harmonic daring and acrobatic virtuosity of the soloists all combined to leave an astonishing imprint on Jazz music. The beginnings of Bebop can clearly be heard in the solos of Charlie Shavers and Billy Kyle. As well, the three-man rhythm section, sans guitar, and the multiple examples of tempi too fast for dancing are harbingers of the Bebop style to come. The tuxedoed and controlled style of performance presaged the suits and control of the Modern Jazz Quartet. Their explorations and mining of classical themes and counterpoint predate the Lennie Tristano efforts of the middle forties. This is all during the heyday of large jazz groups, rampant institutionalized racism, an ASCAP ban, a recording ban and a world war.

Their body of recordings is nothing short of incredible and in this work I hope to point out exactly why I feel that way.

Acknowledgments and Dedication

The steady, expert mentorship of Doctors Lewis Porter and Henry Martin have been a constant source of inspiration and I thank them both profusely for their guidance, sharing of knowledge and advice. As well, the staff of the Institute for Jazz Studies have been absolutely marvelous in their skillful advice and timely help and guidance. Alan Williams, Wayne Roberts, Claude Tissendier, Don Byron, Tom Lord and John McDonough were all also instrumental in the assemblage of this information.

I would also like to thank Anatol Shenker of Classics Records without whose painstaking compilation of the chronological output of the Sextet I would likely never have known about them. Lastly, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my wife, Kim Alexander for helping make a long overdue sabbatical a reality and remaining a tireless supporter and cheerleader of this effort. I would like to dedicate this work to the men of the John Kirby Sextet:

John Kirby, Charlie Shavers, Billy Kyle, Russell Procope, Buster Bailey and O'Neill Spencer.

A finer sextet there has never been.

I hope I have shed some light on your incredible story.

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The John Kirby Sextet: The Biggest Little Band In The Land

Chapter I – Introduction

In the fall of 2008, on the occasion of John Kirby's 100th birthday, I attempted to put together a tribute concert of his sextet's music at Chris's Jazz Café, a local Jazz club in Philadelphia. While the club was willing to give us the stage time, wrangling musicians who could approach playing a passable yet respectful rendering of the charts I transcribed proved to be impossible. That said, I have had the great thrill of performing them as parts of other gigs and even recorded a couple. That experience alone is worth the price of admission but also having carefully listened to those musician's efforts over

many years has left me wondering why an in- depth look at this seminal small group has yet to be done.

Certainly there are biographies of the individual musicians lengthier than those to follow but this is not merely a biographical narration. In the following pages, I will attempt to deconstruct and demystify several key pieces and hopefully make a fine point on my assertion that the John Kirby Sextet was one of the most, if not THE most important small pre-Bebop jazz group. Their combined virtuosity both in performance and writing were leagues beyond almost all groups of their size and the likes of their stage presence and approach were not to be seen again until the advent of the Modern Jazz Quartet some fifteen years after the Kirby Sextet's first recordings. The intricacy of their lines combined with their harmonic daring predates even Bebop by seven years.

It has been stated somewhat pejoratively that the sextet's adherence to a formula, not expanding their improvisatory space within tunes and continuing to mine classical themes for subject materiel, were the reasons for their demise. While there may be some small truth in that here and there, I assert that jazz then, and even more so today, is a big tent. There should have been room for many, many expressions of the jazz psyche then and I should hope there is today.

The Sextet Proper

Charlie Shavers, Trumpet and arrangements

Buster Bailey, Clarinet

Russell Procope, Alto Saxophone

Billy Kyle, Piano and arrangements

John Kirby, Bass and arrangements

O'Neill Spencer, Drums

Origins of the Sextet

It should be noted that by 1934, three of the Sextet's members were in Fletcher Henderson's Band: Bailey, Procope and Kirby. Bailey and Kirby were sidemen on numerous recordings in 1936 with Henderson and even a young Roy Eldridge. Much of the sound and their uncanny precision comes of course from their innate musicianship but also significantly from these many years learning the Big Band language and becoming expert at it.

In the early spring of 1937, John Kirby was working the Britwood Club on Lenox Avenue in Harlem, which was next door to the Savoy Ballroom. The band was led by Kirby and Trumpeter Frankie Newton and also featured Pete Brown on Alto Saxophone and Don Frye on Piano and was called the "Uptown Serenaders."¹

April 1st 1937 finds ace sidemen Bailey and Kirby waxing six sides with Billie Holiday and Teddy Wilson. Star maker John Hammond once said, "He is by far the best bass player around. It had to be Kirby on the first Teddy Wilson-Billie Holiday recording date."² There is some astonishing playing and singing by all involved on this date.

All through 1937 and early 1938, two or three members of the eventual Sextet continually ran into each other on sessions. On September 17th 1937, Bailey, Kirby and Spencer (along with Pete Brown, Frankie Newton, Don Fry and James McLinn) recorded "Dizzy Debutante" under the recording moniker of "Buster Bailey's Rhythm Busters." This was the proto-sextet and most certainly presaged the sound to come.

With Midge Williams (aka Maxine Sullivan,) on October 1st 1937, we find Bailey but also Billy Kyle and John Kirby. On the 22nd, Charlie Shavers replaces Frankie Newton and now it's four of the six! We find Bailey with Shavers and Kirby with Billie Holiday in May of 1938 and on a May 15th trio date for O'Neill Spencer, it's Bailey and Kyle. That's Bailey having played with every member of the eventual Sextet by mid May of 1938. On another Midge Williams date about a month later, we see the classic line-up nearly complete: it's Shavers, Bailey and Procope with Kyle and Spencer.

I should hope it was a thrilling day on September 29th 1938 when the Sextet along with Red Norvo, Mildred Bailey, the Three Ickes and Terry Allen recorded six sides for Columbia. Even though all six members had played together numerous times, this is the first time they were all in the same room at the same time as far as I could discern.

On October 28th 1938, they would record as John Kirby's Onyx Club Boys for the first time. This date would produce 5 sides for Decca; "Rehearsin' For A Nervous Breakdown," "From Ab to C," "Pastel Blue," "Undecided" and "By The Waters of Minnetonka." Shavers penned and arranged 3: "Rehearsin'," "Undecided" and "Pastel Blue." Kyle contributed the masterpiece "From Ab to C" and Kirby arranged the 1911 Thurlow Lieurance classic, "Minnetonka." Of course, "Undecided" would go on to be one of the catchiest and longest-lived riff-based swing era tunes. Apparently, when it came time to put a title on the matrix sheet, Shavers didn't have one so he used *undecided*. This was the first recorded version of this tune.

In 1939, the Sextet would go on to record for Vocalion and later Columbia, some of the snappiest, cleverest, tightest most musical moments of that banner year in the history of swing. At sessions in January, May, July, August and October the Sextet

would record (among other masterpieces of small group swing), “Front and Center,” “Opus 5,” “Blue Skies,” and “Little Brown Jug.”

The Sextet proper

The first iteration of what would become the classic sextet started their run at the famous Onyx Club in May of 1937 when they were tapped to replace Stuff Smith. Smith’s brand of Jazz in general and particularly at the Onyx was raucous, swinging and loose. Good time music played by some great practitioners to be sure and a notable contrast to what the Sextet would bring to the room. The Onyx Club had been a staple of “The Street” since it’s first incarnation at 35 West 52nd street right after prohibition ended in 1934 and then moved to 72 West 52nd street where it burned down in 1935. Owner and former bootlegger Joe Helbock rebuilt it and reopened it on July 13th 1935 with Kirby as one of the house musicians. The personnel of the first proto-edition of the Sextet were Kirby plus Frankie Newton Trumpet, Pete Brown Alto, Don Frye Piano, Leo Watson Drums, Teddy Bunn Guitar and Buster Bailey on Clarinet. About a month after their start, Watson climbed out from behind the Drums and picked up a Trombone. He was a rank amateur but very enthusiastic and apparently only got in the way sometimes.³ Kirby’s band mate from his five years with Lucky Millinder, O’Neill Spencer, was his replacement. Significantly, the nascent sextet also acquired a singer, Marietta Williams, better known today as Maxine Sullivan. The writers of the sextet’s repertoire; Kirby, Kyle, Shavers and Lou Singer, were certainly bringing all their considerable experience as swing musicians to bear on the task at hand. Many of the conventions of Big Band Swing are evident in all the earliest recordings. It is also fairly evident that some of the

more compositionally adventuresome recordings of several years previous would have been known to these musicians and just as likely influenced their more unusual pieces. Songs like “Queer Notions” and “Chant of the Weed” along with some of Ellington’s “Jungle Band” records come to mind. As well, some of Reginald Foresythe’s pieces from the middle 1930’s certainly sound like they are coming from the same sound vault. (Kirby recorded four sides with Foresythe in 1935.)

On August 6th 1937, Kirby, Sullivan and most of the band recorded Claude Thornhill’s swing arrangement of the old folk song, “Loch Lomond.” It was a hit, made a star of Maxine and it’s success occasioned further shifts in personnel.

In October, an apparent lover’s quarrel between Kirby and Newton over Maxine occurred in the middle of the Onyx club. Some say it was over the attention of the singer and some say it was over musical matters but either way, Newton stormed out. (Kirby and Sullivan would elope⁴ shortly thereafter, the next March.) The great drummer Sid Catlett who would play and record with Kirby after the war, was there, and apparently heard and saw the entire thing. He immediately ran over to another nearby club and convinced another Millinder sideman, the great Charlie Shavers to come over to the Onyx and check out Kirby’s band. Newton was of course a good trumpeter but he was certainly no Charlie Shavers. Frye was soon replaced with Billy Kyle and Leo Watson quit and they didn’t replace him. Almost simultaneously, the success of “Loch Lomond” was affording Sullivan bigger and better opportunities and she took them. In late winter, Pete Brown was offered a chance to lead his own group, which he took, and Kirby replaced him with an old friend from Fletcher Henderson’s band, Russell Procope. They

would significantly leave out the guitar chair. The classic sextet was now in place and would remain steadfast for the next four years.

In these early days, an unusual opportunity allowed the Sextet to work out their repertoire and gel as a unit. Owner of the Onyx, Helbock, paid the Sextet half salary to rehearse in the Onyx on weekday afternoons. Not only did this tighten up the Sextet musically without the pressure of nightly gigs, but from the owner's perspective, it kept a popular group from leaving his club and going to the Hickory House or the Famous Door or the Yacht Club, all within spitting distance of 62 West 52nd street.⁵

Nevertheless, in September 1938, the Sextet moved to the Famous Door which then led to them playing up and down 52nd street. During this time, one, two or even three of them would record as side men for other musicians, particularly singers like Sullivan and Mildred Bailey as well as a few Blues singers. And as previously mentioned, they would begin their recording career as a Sextet a few days before Halloween 1938.

In the fall of 1939, the Ambassador Hotel East in Chicago came calling for an engagement at the famous Pump Room which of course, occasioned Shavers penning of "Jumpin' In The Pump Room" recorded February 26th 1940 in Los Angeles. This would have been during their stint at the Trocadero in L.A. After that it was back to New York for gigs at the Waldorf Astoria and Copacabana, the Copley Terrace in Boston and notably at the Zombie Room at the New York World's Fair⁶. Once again, from the pen of Shavers, this gig was marked by the composition of "Zoomin' At The Zombie," recorded on July 9th 1940 in New York for Okeh records. It is an indication of the

heights to which they had ascended that small jazz groups, and an African American one at that, were taking the stage at these very prestigious and swanky white nightclubs.

Flow Gently, Sweet Rhythm

Flow Gently, Sweet Rhythm was the radio show Sullivan and Kirby were given in 1939. “This was the first and only black band ever to have a network sponsored radio program.”⁷ It aired from April 7th 1940 until January 12th 1941 on Sunday nights on CBS and also featured the Golden Gate Quartet. The show only lasted for 15 minutes at a time but they certainly made the most of it. It was during this time that Shavers and Kyle, (at Kirby’s suggestion), began writing gently swinging arrangements of well known classical melodies to go along with their blues, boogie and swing charts. Said Kirby about their classical treatments, “I believe that symphonic pieces can be handled by a jazz combination in such a way that serious music lovers won’t throw up their hands in despair crying ‘sacrilege.’ We can give tasteful treatment to all these classical things but with the big swing band it would be hard to avoid the hackneyed and to me, not very tasteful swinging of the classics that some bands do.”⁸ It was during their time on the radio show that they and Maxine Sullivan met and worked extensively with Lou Singer. Singer was responsible for at least one Kirby Sextet original; “Bugler’s Dilemma” and many of their jazzing the classics adaptation-arrangements. Sullivan remarked in a 1970 interview: “A musician called Lou Singer did a number of things for me. “If I Had A Ribbon Bow” was his. I recorded “Molly Malone” and “Who is Sylvia?” Singer did quite a bit of Kirby’s arranging, especially transcriptions of the classics. They were off the beaten path. When

they did a pop tune, they hardly sounded different from any of the more popular swing bands. But when they swung and the “Anitra’s Dance” or the Shubert thing they had something that was theirs.”⁹ Lou Singer arranged non-classically themed tunes for the Sextet as well such as: “Close Shave,” “It’s Only A Paper Moon,” “Fifi’s Rhapsody,” “Night Whispers,” “Keep Smilin’,”

Kirby even wanted to add a Bass Clarinet doubling Flute but that never came to pass. It was for these particular kinds of arrangements that the Sextet was to become renowned and it was, as we shall see, because of just these type of treatments that they’d overstay their welcome on jukeboxes, turntables and the airwaves.

ASCAP and swinging the Classics

A possible genesis of the aforementioned “swinging of the classics” Kirby mentions has a start with the ASCAP/major network battle over licensing fees in 1939. According to Radio World magazine,¹⁰ this episode literally changed American Music and the Kirby Sextet was right there at the start. The Kirby Sextet’s many swing classics were as mentioned, mostly arranged by Lou Singer but both Kirby and Shavers did a few as well.

Victor Herbert, the very notable composer of operettas and musical pieces of all sorts, along with John Philip Sousa and Irving Berlin were instrumental in creating the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) on February 13th 1914. Herbert testified to congress in 1909 on behalf of composers and performers and as a partial result of this testimony and others, the 1909 Copyright Act was passed. Now for the first time, officially, composers and performers would be paid royalty and licensing

fees for sales of their recordings. In 1909, that would have meant cylinders and one-sided shellac records. Herbert would remain Vice President and Director until he passed in 1924. He also won a landmark case in the Supreme Court in 1917 and as a result, composers now had a legal right to charge performance fees for public performance of their music. Herbert was such a so important to ASCAP that they erected a statue of him in Central Park in 1927.

The task ASCAP set for itself was to enforce the 1897 and 1909 Copyright Laws which essentially ensured that anyone performing music for profit must have the consent of the Copyright owner. In the beginning, because most all “legit” music performance took place in theatres and the like, ASCAP could just collect royalties from owners based on a percentage of sales at the box office. With the advent of radio around 1922 however, it became impossible to know the number of ears listening to the broadcasts. Cue decades of back and forth and haggling and recriminations. Led by Zenith president, Eugene F. MacDonald, a pioneer Chicago broadcaster, early radio broadcasters formed the National Association of Broadcasters (N.A.B.) in 1925 whose sole purpose was to deal with the music licensing issue.

ASCAP set a blanket 5% fee tied to station’s advertising revenue in 1932. This became the accepted formula throughout the 1930’s despite the burden placed on broadcasters and despite many efforts to negotiate better terms. In 1940, ASCAP announced it was going to triple it’s fees and everything fell apart. Radio’s assertion that exposure on the airwaves helped popularize new music and boost sales was not untrue, however, ASCAP remained unmoved. Apparently, dramatic action was required.

During the run of “Flow Gently, Sweet Rhythm,” in September 1940 at the convention of the N.A.B., leaders in the industry decided that a demonstration of radio’s reach and influence was needed to send a message to ASCAP. As of January 1, 1941, most radio stations and ALL the networks would boycott ASCAP licensed music. Very quickly, seemingly overnight, one million ASCAP tunes disappeared from the airwaves.

Back in 1939, again around the very genesis of the Kirby Sextet, the N.A.B had created Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) as radio’s very own music licensing agency and set aside one and a half million dollars for the creation of new music compositions. They of course focused on signing composers who weren’t already signed to ASCAP so they could release their music to radio stations at a much more favorable rate. Of course all the big names were with ASCAP and as a result, many unknown and less than excellent composers were signed. As a result, when the boycott went into effect, BMI was short tunes by a long shot. Here is one of the exact moments that American Music changed forever.

To have enough music for programming, broadcasters turned to other sources and everything from classical themes to hillbilly tunes to foreign tunes to “race” records hit the airwaves. Whether beneath their dignity, (race records, hillbilly records), or boring, (public domain classical tunes and foreign tunes), ASCAP had spent years passing on these type of acts. “They played songs from the public domain, such as familiar melodies derived from classical works, and old American standards like “I Dream of Jeanne with the Light Brown Hair.” (Time Magazine said that song was played so much that Jeanne’s hair turned grey.) And they performed foreign music that wasn’t licensed by ASCAP, especially Latin American standards like “Perfidia” and “The Breeze and I.”¹¹

Into this vacuum stepped the recently formed and developing Kirby Sextet.

The ASCAP boycott had very far-reaching effects. Famous theme songs of famous radio shows like Jack Benny's "Love In Bloom" and Burns and Allen's "Love Nest" could not be used. Some clever programmers used classical themes from the public domain like "The William Tell Overture" for the Lone Ranger and "Flight of the Bumblebee" for the Green Hornet. In the record industry, recording artists new that their ASCAP songs would not be heard so, along with Kirby's Sextet, major stars like Glenn Miller created swing version of public domain classical songs like "American Patrol" and "Song of the Volga Boatmen."

The New Year's Day boycott was so significant that the Department of Justice got involved and investigated everybody (ASCAP, BMI, NAB) for "criminal monopolistic practices." In February 1941, ASACP signed a consent decree agreeing to offer broadcasters blanket and per-piece licenses. As with all things business and legislative, a few more months of back-and-forth were necessary before rates were finally settled. As an example, at the end of the summer of 1941, "ASCAP had signed an agreement with NBC for 2.75% of net time sales on network broadcasts and 2.25% for local station programs."¹² This was less than ½ what ASCAP had been getting before the boycott.

In October 1941, the boycott officially ended and American popular music returned to the air. But all was not as it had been. Those may have been the most important ten months of 20th century American music history. "Race" music turned into rhythm and blues, then rock and roll, Latin music became a national craze and "Hillbilly" music turned into the more refined "Western" music, which in turn became Country

music. The Kirby Sextet was right in the thick of this seminal moment in American popular music history.

After the demise of the radio show, the sextet (with Sullivan) were regular guests on the “Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street” show and on the very popular “Duffy’s Tavern” comedy show.

It was during these heady days for the Sextet that they became known as “The Biggest Little Band in the Land,” a sobriquet that would follow them for many years. In December 1939, *Down Beat* called the band “one of the smartest, one of the most subtle and one of the most versatile jazz combinations in the world today.”¹³ They were collectively, one of the best-known small Jazz groups at the time. During this time, it’s been suggested that Kirby may have been the best known bassist in America and no wonder, from 1940-1944 *Down Beat* readers voted the Sextet “Best Small Jazz Group in America” right behind the Goodman Sextet. (In 1941, by only 150 votes!)¹⁴ In a *Down Beat* interview Kirby said of his/their approach: “I believe that jazz to be good should be restrained and organized. For that reason I don’t believe in in-and-out jamming. If a band these days ever expects to gain any recognition it must be on more than its ability to ‘get off.’ With that idea as my basic thought, the boys and I realize that the only way we can gain distinction apart from our ability to improvise is to develop a distinguishing ensemble style and to prove by arrangements and our ability to execute them that the band is musical and versatile.”¹⁵

The End is Nigh

Sadly, at the height of their popularity, in 1941, Sullivan and Kirby divorced and with that, so did their professional relationship.

As if that wasn't jarring enough, O'Neill Spencer began suffering emotional problems and took a break from the Sextet and was replaced by Specs Powell until early in 1942. Spencer collapsed on the gig on stage at the Apollo theatre in 1943 and died of tuberculosis in July of 1944. Bill Beason then stepped in on Drums. To add insult to injury, Billy Kyle was drafted in 1941 and Russell Procope in 1942. Clyde Hart and George Johnson replaced them, respectively. Years later, Charlie Shavers was known to have said, "What really killed off the John Kirby Sextet was the Japanese."¹⁶

While the war was on, Kirby did find first-rate subs and continued to make V-Discs and transcriptions. Among the "subs" were the aforementioned Sid Catlett, Benny Carter (one of Kirby's most steadfast friends), Ben Webster, Clyde Hart, Dizzy Gillespie, Hilton Jefferson, Budd Johnson and 28 year-old Hank Jones. After the war, Don Byas even recorded a few sides on Tenor with the Sextet, making it a Septet.

After the war in early 1946, Kirby rounded up all the surviving Sextet members and added a new young singer, Sarah Vaughan but to little avail, for four sides on Crown. On January 9th 1946 the revamped Sextet with Clarence Berenton replacing Shavers and Bill Beason drumming recorded "I'm Scared," "You Go To My Head," "I Could Make You Love Me," and "It Might As Well Be Spring" with Sarah Vaughan. The Sextet only ever recorded eight tunes with vocals in its eight year recording history: "Pastel Blue" with drummer Spencer singing in 1938, the "crew" vocal "Wondering Where" in 1941,

(re-recorded by Don Byron in 1996), and “Slowly” and “My Old Flame” with Shirley Moore on April 26th 1946 in addition to the four sides with Vaughan.

The tight, fiercely swinging Sextet’s sound had become passé. Still he persisted but without the caliber of musicians he had had before. It was the same intricate, difficult book and without rehearsals (a usual occurrence at this time), the resulting performances were less than they could have been. Kirby’s diabetes was becoming more and more of a hindrance and he began to drink more and more which only exacerbated the decline of his health.

On December 22nd, 1950, brokered by Harlem businessman Norman McKnight, Kirby mounted a performance at Carnegie Hall as another attempt at a comeback. This concert featured all of the original Sextet members save the deceased Spencer who was replaced by the stalwart Sid Catlett. Despite the great repertoire on display that night; “Pastel Blue,” “Undecided,” “Dawn on the Desert,” “Move Over,” “Flamingo,” and the amazing arrangement of “Royal Garden Blues,” the concert was sparsely attended. The poor reception hit Kirby hard and badly damaged what was left of his reputation.¹⁷

Apparently not so at their previous engagement there in 1941. On April 23rd 1941, the Kirby Sextet performed as a part of a “Café Society” concert at the august concert hall. That concert featured besides the classic sextet, Art Tatum, Red Allen, Eddie South, the Golden Gate Quartet and a young Lena Horne. They only played three tunes: “Rehearsin’ for a Nervous Breakdown,” Lou Singer’s “Double Talk – A Fugue” and Shaver’s swingin’ arrangement of Debussy’s “Suite Bergamasque.” The 1950 debacle must have really stung.

Most of the members of the Sextet appeared in the 1947 Film “*Sepia Cinderella*.” It is the only film of the Sextet I could find.

“*Sepia Cinderella* is a 1947 American musical race film directed by Arthur H. Leonard. The film is notable for musical numbers by vocalists Billy Daniels and Sheila Guyse, and for a brief guest appearance by former child star Freddie Bartholomew, who is onscreen as himself for five minutes, telling gags to recharge his post-war career. It also marks the big screen debut of Sidney Poitier, as an unaccredited night club extra.”¹⁸ Notable also are the opening credits with the Kirby Sextet playing “Broadjump” in the background. Also, later in the film, they appear in a nightclub scene in which they perform “Can’t find A Word To Say” which, like “Broadjump,” it seems they never recorded either in a studio. If it is not “live” on the soundtrack, it is very, very close. In the nightclub scene, a very nice duet between Shavers and Catlett take place. There is virtuosic playing all around. In these scenes we see Shavers, Kyle, Procope, Bailey, Kirby and Catlett. “Honey Child those boys sure can play!” Spoken by the grandmother character after the Sextet performs “Broadjump”; Truth in dialog for sure.

He stayed in New York for a few months and gigged with Red Allen and Buck Clayton and then in 1951, moved to California with plans to reform a sextet on the coast but he died of a heart attack (made worse by his diabetes), nearly penniless on June 14th 1952 before that could happen. Leonard Feather wrote in *Down Beat*: “The news of his death was not merely sad, it had a pitiful quality in its finality. It made you feel that there was nothing left for Kirby but to die. For one of the cruelest aspects of show business is that when you have scaled the heights there is no way for you to go but down and the descent is even harder and more depressing than the way up.”¹⁹

This would be the end of the Sextet as we know it.

Gone but not entirely forgotten however.

Chapter II – Small Group Jazz in the 1930's (Overview)

It turns out that the very first Jazz recording ever made was in fact, a small group; A Quintet in fact. It also turns out the “Big Band Era” was an anomaly in Jazz history, albeit a crucial one. Both before and after the large Jazz ensemble’s heyday, small Jazz units reigned supreme in terms of orchestration and forces mustered to make Jazz music. The Kirby Sextet occupies a peak in the development of the Jazz small group for their ability as swing musicians and their repertoire and arrangements. Notably also, they were not a small unit cut from a larger one. As we saw in the Sextet’s biography above, these men all came from different Big Bands and had spent years honing their craft with other musicians and the decision to create a book for six of bespoke arrangements with their particular instrumentation was on purpose. They were not a “super” group thrown together to sell records. They were a working six-piece band with their own repertoire, quite different from their small unit contemporaries. As we will see in detail below, the reasons for this specialty are found in the crafty arrangements and concise solos and overall polish and swing. They did not have exclusive bragging rights for any of the attributes listed above but were the only ones with ALL of those attributes. That is the chief reason for their unmistakable sound.

The Sextet had been working together since May of 1938 with the classic lineup. Thinking for moment about what contemporary songs they would have heard and what the general music world was like as they began to get the book together, some true gems and hallmark events were happening.

Car radios were fairly standard by 1938 and the Jukebox business had mostly rebounded from its losses during the height of the Great Depression. Speaking of the depression, it turns out there was actually a recession from 1937-1938 and despite efforts by money managers and the Roosevelt administration, the country didn't fully pull out of either until the economy was jump-started by World War Two. Record sales were steadily climbing as well although they had yet to reach 1927 levels. Still, radio and jukeboxes were very common especially in New York City where the Sextet was developing and where all six musicians had lived for years. The power of radio to popularize swing and Jazz had been proven just three years previous with Benny Goodman's Palomar Ballroom broadcast during prime listening time. That began an upward trajectory for Goodman as well as a turbocharged upward trajectory for Swing Music in general in the popular ear. This culminated in the January 16th 1938 performance of Goodman's band at Carnegie Hall. It is still 78 years later, a mark of a musician's ability or of a style or genre's importance to perform in that august space at 881 7th Ave in New York. Swing music had *arrived* by 1938.

To get an idea of the musical environment Kirby and his men would were wading into, below is a partial list of songs and compositions from 1938. As I was making the list, I didn't get past the first five before shaking my head in disbelief at the prodigious compositional talent of the songwriters, composers and lyricists represented here. It was out of this fecund, lush, musical womb the Sextet emerged.

There were standards and swing classics such as: "And The Angels Sing," "Big Noise From Winnetka," "Cherokee," "Don't Be That Way," "Falling In Love With Love," "Flat Foot Floogie," "Hawaiian War Chant," "Heart And Soul," "Hooray For

Hollywood,” “I Can Dream Can’t I,” “I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart,” “I’ll Be Seeing You,” “Jeepers Creepers,” “Jumpin’ At The Woodside,” “Love Walked In,” “San Antonio Rose,” “Sent For You Yesterday,” “September Song,” “Spring Is Here,” “Thanks For The Memory,” “Two Sleepy People,” “Undecided,” “We’re Off To See The Wizard,” “You Go To My Head” and “You Must Have Been A Beautiful Baby.”

There were Classical premieres of which Kirby in particular would have been interested and known about: Barber’s Adagio For Strings, Britten’s Piano Concerto, Copland’s Outdoor Overture and Billy the Kid ballet, Piston’s First Symphony, Shostakovich’s First String Quartet and his Suite for Jazz Orchestra No. 2 and Orff’s Carmina Burana, to name but a few.

Examining the Jazz oriented small-groups of the 1930s who would have been the Kirby Sextet’s competition reveals some true shining moments of musicianship, swing and compositional/arranging prowess.

It was an amazing time to be a Jazz small group to be sure. It also is likely the Sextet members would have been aware of all of these tunes and groups to follow and very aware of some. (Procope played on the Newton number). I am making these distinctions to highlight just how very different the Kirby Sextet sounded than all of these amazing efforts.

For an astonishing exercise, play these in the order below and then follow with the Kirby Sextet’s Royal Garden Blues or Opus 5 or Jumpin’ In The Pump Room. The difference is palpable. Tight, focused, precise, swinging, musical, it’s all there.

Some particular bright spots in small group Jazz directly preceding the Kirby Sextet would include:

1936 “Shoe Shine Swing”– Jones-Smith Inc.

A Basie small group with Lester Young’s recording debut. The easy swing of this group is infectious.

1936 “ ‘Taint No Use” – Stuff Smith and his Onyx Club Boys

This is Kirby Sextet’s direct predecessor at the Onyx. As great as it is, it’s also loose and bluesy; a great style but quite different from the Sextet.

1936 “Here’s Love In Your Eye” – Teddy Wilson & his Orchestra

Here is a proto-Goodman small group with Gene Krupa and Lionel Hampton. The Goodman small group of 1939-1941 narrowly bested the Kirby Sextet in Downbeat polls year after year. #1 and #2 for 4 years straight. This is certainly as polished as Kirby but the New Orleans style accompaniment of the horn section is not as composed or controlled. Again, a beautiful style beautifully executed but still different than the Sextet.

1937 “Wabash Stomp” – Roy Eldridge & his Orchestra

No doubt, Shavers and Procope heard this. Compositionally, it’s an interesting vehicle. The three Saxophone plus Trumpet front line is unusual and it seems to have only two chord changes until the little ii-Vs at the end of the phrases. Very creative, just like the Sextet.

1937 “Alabamy Home” – The Gotham Stompers

A “super group” of sorts with an Ellington horn section, a mostly Chick Webb rhythm section (save for Ellington’s bassist Billy Taylor and the Mills Brother’s

Guitarist, Bernie Addison.) The *bounce* of this group as well as Johnny Hodges and Barney Bigard's treatment of the solo space is certainly reminiscent of some later Kirby Sextet efforts.

1937 "There's No Two Ways About It" – Frank Newton & his Uptown Serenaders

A group of musicians from the Onyx Club with whom Kirby would play and replace: Frank Newton, Don Frye, Pete Brown and here is Russell Procope playing a part without soloing. This is likely very close what the band sounded like when Kirby joined them at the Onyx.

1937 "Chuberry Jam" – Chu Berry & his Stompy Stevedores

There are elements of this arrangement that are reminiscent of some of the Sextet's work; the out chorus horn section line, the easy bounce of the rhythm section... to name two.

1938 "Echoes of Harlem" – Cootie Williams & his Rug Cutters

One of the many Ellington small groups here re-cutting an Ellington Orchestra tune. The parallels with Kirby's "Dawn On The Desert" are unmistakable as is the muted trumpet lead.

1938 "Jungle Drums" – Sidney Bechet & his Orchestra

This was cut a few weeks after the Kirby Sextet recording debut but Spencer would have heard this and they all would have been aware of this unit as they were appearing at Café Society down in Greenwich Village while the Sextet was simultaneously starting their run at the Onyx, a few subway stops away.

Rival #1 The Benny Goodman Small Group

“Benny Goodman's formidable work in front of the big band made him one of the world's most popular musicians, but his work with these "chamber jazz" groups made him one of the world's most respected musicians.”²⁰

As mentioned above, the Kirby Sextet came right behind the Goodman group for several years in the “Small Combinations” category of the Downbeat Reader’s Poll. There is no denying that the Goodman small group was eminently musical and eminently swinging perennially.

“Instead of being dance music, this small-group swing showcased the individual and collective talent of the musicians involved--and the talent and telekinetic interplay of these men were considerable to say the least.”²¹

The stars of Sextet were likewise featured and justly celebrated for their creativity, skill, prowess, swing and spirit and like the Goodman group, were not particularly concerned about dance-ability. “Like Goodman, pianist Teddy Wilson was a superior technician who never let technique come before spirit or emotion. Drummer Gene Krupa and vibraphonist Lionel Hampton provide the energy and drive. Meanwhile, Goodman's total mastery of the clarinet gave him the freedom to soar effervescently, growl menacingly, and swing majestically--and to make it all sound effortless. A revolutionary set, without even considering the social implications of being the first racially integrated band. Perfection never sounded so playful.”²²

While the Kirby Sextet was not integrated, as mentioned above, they were the first and only black band to have a nationally sponsored radio program and after 1939, almost always performed in either white or black tailed tuxedos in the swankiest white

clubs and ballrooms. Both are remarkable steps for black musicians of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Rival #2 Artie Shaw's Gramercy Five

For the sake of sheer creativity, Shaw's band-within-a-band, his Gramercy Five, bears mention as the more esoteric Kirby Sextet numbers are sometimes eerily reminiscent of some Shaw's contemporaneous work.

Of course, the Kirby Sextet never even had one million selling record and the Gramercy Five had at least two but still, the work of the two groups in terms of creative arranging, musicality and swing are comparable.

The G5s earliest sides from 1940 bear several similarities with the Sextet's contemporary work, Harpsichord notwithstanding. Check out the descending line at 2:26 in "Special Delivery Stomp" and then the Kirby Sextet's "From Ab to C." "Dr. Livingstone, I Presume" from the same session is somewhere between Ellington's Echoes of Harlem and Kirby's "Dawn on the Desert," again Harpsichord and Guitar notwithstanding.

As well, the influence of the Kirby Sextet on the G5 can be heard on "Grabtown Grapple" from 1945 both in the cup muted trumpet of Roy Eldridge and the insistent, forward-leaning swing of the rhythm section. Further examples abound from other 1945 G5 sessions.



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Rival #3 Raymond Scott Quintette

Much has been made of a link between these two groups and some parallels do exist. It's a more tenuous connection than some have suggested but there is no doubt the two leaders were aware of each others efforts and the two Sextets musicians knew each other for certain. It's widely known for instance that Charlie Shavers worked for Raymond Scott at the CBS Orchestra in the middle 1940s, while he was still in the Kirby Sextet.

Scott's "Quintette" of six musicians got its start about a year before Kirby's Sextet and really did its most analogous work for only two years between 1937 and 1939. Still, there are parallels.

Both groups deemphasized improvisation to a degree not seen in other contemporaneous groups. In almost all of both groups output, improvised solos are eight, 12 or 16 measures long at most. With the Kirby Sextet, longer solos are heard on

transcriptions of radio broadcasts but in general, it seems improvisation was a compositional device for variety in an arrangement more than any opening for a musician to express himself. With Scott's group, it seems to be a similar case but perhaps even more calculated. Looking at Scott's career, it feels like music and swing music in particular was a timely vehicle for him to experiment in public. If he were alive and writing today, it would likely be samples and hip-hop or EDM or whatever micro-genre was most likely to yield results. Despite the outrage of Jazz purists of the day, focusing more on the composition and arrangement than on individual soloist contributions was a legitimate response to the evolution of Jazz in the late 1930s. This idea certainly did not and has not died out in the ensuing decades. Gil Evans and Stan Kenton and Maria Schneider and the Concert Jazz Band come to mind.

Classical re-imaginings are another metric through which some parallels exist. Both Scott and Kirby were criticized at the time for besmirching the Olympian grandeur of MUSIC by "swingin the classics." Still, in the work of neither band do I hear anything but respect for the melodies of the greats. When the preciousness of a melody is tweaked as in Scott's "In An 18th Century Drawing Room," I hear it as a reasonable response to the powdered wig fanciness of some Classical era music. Of course, Kirby responded to that particular tune with "In A 20th Century Closet" a few months later, which becomes a meta-jab at the wig wearing 18th century musicians. In the Kirby Sextet's "Charley's Serenade," the true pathos of that amazing Chopin melody is revealed in the writing and performance. As deep as it is to hear that on the Piano as originally intended, the Sextet's treatment is a sublime masterpiece. Contrast this with Scott's original, "Suicide Cliff."

The ache of despair is palpable in the bended pitches of the trumpet and some fairly serious emotional depth is reached in this three-minute masterpiece.

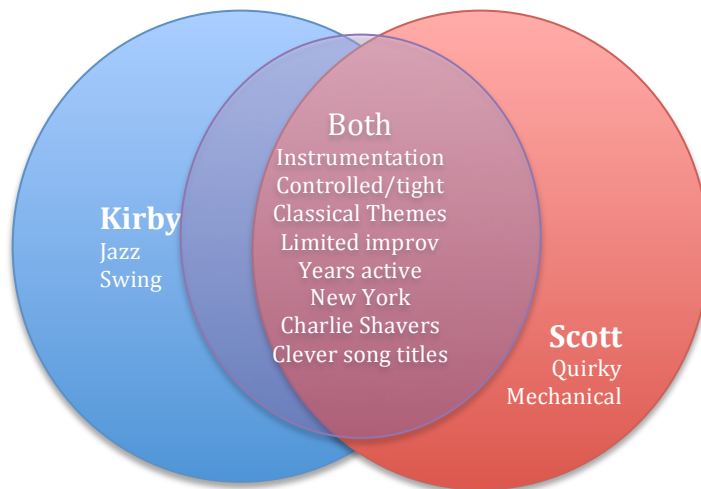
Another way the two groups find themselves on the same continuum are the demands of the music and the tightly controlled, precise way their music was performed. Scott of course, famously insisted on memorization of all his charts and it seems Kirby only asked for that on rare occasions (Carnegie Hall, Sepia Cinderella etc.) Still, the precision of both groups is astonishingly similar.

To a greater degree in the Kirby Sextet than Scott's, both leaders deemphasized their own parts within their groups. Neither led from the front as did Goodman, Shaw, Nat Cole and other contemporaries. While Scott did run semi-tyrannical rehearsals, he never took solos on the Piano. As well Kirby has a few breaks here and there in the recorded output but no solo features. This was unusual for the time for a leader to be in the background and both were on purpose.

Still even with an almost identical instrumentation, (Kirby alto saxophone, Scott, tenor saxophone— otherwise identical), the two contemporary group's styles are instantly recognizable and different enough as two sides of a three dimensional coin. Kirby, a little more swing and a little more Jazz, Scott, a little quirkier and a little more through-composed.

As mentioned in Chapter IX, the incredible Clarinetist Don Byron included both Kirby's and Scott's group's pieces on his 1996 album "Bug Music." Hearing them back-to-back with modern recording resolution, the parallels AND the differences are easy to discern even for a casual listener.

Because of the many parallels both musical and temporal, these two Sextets will likely often be mentioned in the same breath. Imagine if you will a Venn diagram with both Sextets, leaning toward one another until parts of one fade into parts of the other. That is how I see it.





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Chapter III – John Kirby

Born John Kirk in Winchester, Virginia New Year's Eve 1908, John Kirby would change his name, his instrument and reinvent himself to become one of the most sought after sidemen of the early swing era and in the process, helm one of the most well-rehearsed, meticulously musical small jazz groups of all time. Given up for adoption by his mother Dolly Kirk while very young, John was eventually taken in and raised at 442 North Kent Street, in Winchester by Reverend Washington Johnson and his wife, Nancy and his half sister Mary. John's Principal at the Winchester Colored School, (later renamed Douglass School in 1916), started him on Trombone around 1917. Professor Powell Gibson would play an important role in John's life for many years after, particularly regarding his daughter. John's formal education ended about 1923 and it was then that he met Mary Moten of nearby Airmont, Virginia. They were married on August

25th, 1925 most likely as a result of her pregnancy since their daughter Yvonne Constance Kirk was born on December 14th, 1925, some four months and change later.²³

John's reinvention began in earnest sometime in 1926 when he lit out for Baltimore, (allegedly from where his father hailed), essentially abandoning his new wife and daughter and changing his name. Kirby's grandson, Alan Williams in his biography states that, "it must have been a "come-hell-or-high-water, I'm going to become a musician" type attitude." Kirby later stated in a magazine profile that "the music of Bach always spoke to me and I learned to read music just as it was written." Whether his written musical literacy was through Powell Gibson or mostly self-taught, it was rare for a musician like young John Kirk from his humble beginnings to show up in a big city like Baltimore reading and playing by ear in 1926. During his stay in Baltimore, he stayed with the famous patron of Baltimore musicians, Georgian Jackson and it is said she had a picture of John on her wall years later and referred to him as her adopted son.²⁴ In these pre-professional musician days, Kirby did jobs that were open to "colored" people in Baltimore in those days: shoe shining, horse grooming, and newspaper selling. As he made it out of his teens, he "realized that Baltimore was no place for him or any Negro, so he wangled a job as a Pullman porter on the Pennsylvania Railroad."²⁵

Kirby's feelings about his mixed race also likely figure into his reasoning regarding his wholesale reinvention. A word about passing....²⁶ "Passing is the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different than their own, which may include racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexuality, gender, religion, age and/or disability status."²⁷ "Passing may result in privileges, rewards, or an increase in social acceptance, or be used to cope with difference anxiety. Thus, passing

may serve as a form of self-preservation or self-protection in instances where expressing one's true or authentic identity may be dangerous.”²⁸ It is evident from first hand accounts by Rex Stewart and others that Kirby was adept at navigating this liminal space between the races. The degree to which this figured in the Sextet's ability to book engagements at some of the most exclusive rooms in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles is not to be overlooked. Kirby was often mistaken for white and definitely played this card on many occasions.

The day after Christmas 1929 finds Kirby in New York and seems to be Kirby's first recordings as a sideman with Bill Brown and His Brownies. Notably, on the A side track “What Kind Of Rhythm Is That?,” Kirby plays Tuba (very well incidentally), and bass. On the B-side, “Zonky,” it's the same and even at this early date, he seems to really have a great sense of time, swing and rhythm. To have arrived in New York from the sticks after a short metamorphosis in Baltimore and be this accomplished already speaks to Williams' aforementioned assertion of Kirby's determination to succeed as a musician. After a stint with Brown at the Star Ballroom on 42nd street, among others, Kirby gigged at Brooklyn's Bedford Ballroom with Charlie Skeets and at the Alhambra Ballroom in Harlem with John C. Smith's Society Band.

Again, according to Williams, the great early Trombonist Jimmy Harrison heard Kirby play and suggested his employer, the great Fletcher Henderson, give him a try. During this time, Kirby began to take lessons from the great Pops Foster and Ellington's bassist, Wellman Braud as the Tuba was starting to fall out of fashion as a bass instrument in a Jazz band.

A first hand account of Kirby's first days in the big city is recounted by the great Rex Stewart: "To us would-be sophisticates in Smack's Band, John's innumerable questions about every and any thing were at first a big joke, especially when he'd ask some question like what time could you catch the subway or why did some drugstores remain open all night. On looking back, I can appreciate his curiosity as an indication of the alert mind he later proved to have."²⁹ In his chapter on Kirby in his fantastic book *Jazz Masters of the 30s*, published in 1972, 5 years after Rex's untimely passing, Stewart recounts several amusing episodes from Kirby's first big-time professional gig with Fletcher Henderson. Among them is another telling episode which highlights the particular difficulties of black jazz bands of the time and also Kirby's ease in negotiating the liminal spaces between the White and Colored worlds. While the Henderson Band was engaged in a Tidewater Virginia town, they were surprised at the lack of hospitality usually afforded such a famous act. According to Stewart, "The Payoff, in which Kirby figured, came after the dance. "We tried to buy gasoline for our bus only to find our money was not acceptable. John spotted a five-gallon can, slipped out of the bus, and walked boldly into the station, seeming to have come from down the road. In real down-home accents, he demanded gas for his stalled car. The attendant took care of him at once, explaining that he only pumped gas for white folks and added that they'd lynched an uppity Negro two nights before. We drove down the road a bit, picked up John, and had a good laugh at Kirby's outwitting prejudice. Later, when we realized how close we had been to a dangerous situation, the laughter died down and turned into admiration for John."³⁰ Other early episodes pointing out Kirby's missteps are recounted by Stewart and

according to him; Kirby prevailed because of his musicianship, intelligence and earnestness despite his unsophisticated and gauche early demeanor.

Most of Kirby's time between 1938 and 1942 was spent on the Sextet; wrangling musicians, writing arrangements, copying parts, securing gigs, negotiating travel and recording sessions. During the rest of the war years, Kirby continued to record with various configurations of his Sextet, (members mentioned above), and aside from some late May 1944 sessions with Eddie Condon and Coleman Hawkins, pretty much continued to try to book the various combinations of musicians despite travel restrictions and the like. On March 30th 1945, now in Los Angeles, Kirby recorded four sides with the Capitol International Jazz Men whose members included besides Kirby, Bill Coleman, Buster Bailey, Coleman Hawkins, Nat Cole, Oscar Moore, Max Roach and Kay Starr. What a line-up! 1946 brought more re-recordings of Kirby favorites like "Schubert's Serenade," "Move Over" and "Close Shave" with yet another iteration of the Sextet. His recordings of January 9th 1946 were with Sarah Vaughan and were popular enough in their day to be repackaged as a set of 78 rpm records.

Los Angeles seems to have been a place he liked and as mentioned above, he relocated there in 1951 ostensibly to restart a West Coast version of his Sextet. According to his Grandson, Alan Williams, "He planned a trip to California and asked Guitarist Jimmy McLin to go. Former Sextet member Shavers, who had a job lined up in Los Angeles, agreed to be a passenger in John's big, black, Cadillac. Shavers was anxious to get him out of New York City. John wasn't working and people were looking at him as though he had never achieved anything-as though he was nothing. With the

help of friends like Shavers and Benny Carter, he got a few jobs on the West Coast.”³¹

(See transcript of email communication with Kirby’s grandson below)

In the early spring of 1951, Kirby had gigs with Red Allen and Buck Clayton as well as with a Rhythm Trio he picked up in Milwaukee, this last group at the Capital Lounge in Chicago.³² (See transcript of phone interview with Wayne Roberts below)

Apparently, Kirby was penurious while in Los Angeles and living on Harvard Boulevard. He ran around trying to secure an agent and generally trying to get work but “no one seemed interested.”³³

Alas, his diabetes mixed with his penchant for drink exacerbated his deteriorating condition and he passed on June 14th of that year. His third wife, Margaret, survived him.

Below is a scan of the Bass part to “9:20 Special” from the original band books of the Kirby Sextet found in the Benny Carter collection at the Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington D.C. The books are incomplete but a surprising number of charts remain. When Kirby passed, he was nearly penniless and his friends got together enough money to give him a proper and respectful sendoff. It is said that was living in near squalor on Harvard Boulevard in Los Angeles at his death and that “packing crates were used as end tables in his small apartment.”³⁴ Benny Carter was his friend in life and death as he had played with the Sextet and appeared to be one of the only close friends he had nearby. It appears that what possessions Kirby still had with him, went home with Carter and at some point, Carter’s papers went to the Smithsonian and Kirby’s band books along with them.

After that is the opening statement of Kirby's arrangement of "Blue Skies." In both, we glimpse the skill and adroit musicianship of John Kirby, Bassist, The John Kirby Sextet.

Handwritten musical score for Bass, titled "9:20 Special". The score consists of ten staves of music, featuring various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as "Solo" and "p". The notation is handwritten and includes some corrections and annotations.

1.

Bass 218

Blue Skies

Irving Berlin
Transcribed by Wayne Roberts

The bass line for 'Blue Skies' is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The piece begins with a melodic phrase marked *mf*. The first section, labeled **A**, consists of 4 measures with chords Fm and C+7/E. The second section contains five measures with chords Ab/Eb, Bb7, Ab, F7/A, and Eb7. The third section contains five measures with chords Fm, C+7/E, Ab/Eb, Bb7, and Ab/Eb F7. The fourth section, labeled **B**, contains four measures with chords Ab, Eb13(b9) Ab, and a 7-measure rest. The fifth section, labeled **C**, contains five measures with chords Ab/Eb, Ab, Bbm7, and Dbm/Fb. The final section, labeled **D**, contains four measures with chords Fm, C+7/E, Ab/Eb, and Bb7.

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Chapter IIIa – John Kirby’s Reputation as a Bassist

Recently, some Jazz scholars have weighed in on Kirby’s relative merit as a bass player.

First of all, I was somewhat taken aback that anyone at any time would have regarded Kirby as anything other than a first-rate bass player, albeit one deserving wider recognition. To my ears and those of some others, Kirby’s recorded output even from his earliest days with the Fletcher Henderson band was always adequate and occasionally inspired and eminently swinging. The recorded record shows multiple examples of Kirby’s pushing the boundaries in his own way, sustained long quarters in 1932, broken up lines in 1935, double stops in 1936, interesting, creative, swinging bass lines in 1939. Some point to Milt Hinton’s less than charitable comments but it appears these may have been prompted by a personal gaff and not a musical one. On a personal note, I have done and performed on the bass, quite a few Kirby Sextet transcriptions. I can tell you from first hand knowledge that one must have somewhat prodigious skills on the upright to play his lines cleanly and swinging-ly.

Some excerpts from the discussion follow from email exchanges.

From January 25th 2016 Dan Morgenstern wrote:

"Kirby was great tuba man but rather weak bassist, no bottom, all surface..."

This comment engendered quite a lively exchange both agreeing and disagreeing with this assertion.

From January 26th Heyman Matthias wrote:

“Spinning it in a different direction (my apologies) but true as Dan’s remark might be (“Kirby was great tuba man but rather weak bassist, no bottom, all surface...”) I must add that Kirby was a more sophisticated bassist than he is often given credit for. Lewis Porter once pointed out a track to me (the title escapes me) in which Kirby played harmonics (not the first bassist to do so, but still rather rare,) and another rarity in 1930s bass playing is double stops, which he uses as part of the ensemble scoring (perfect fifths) and as a solo device (perfect fourths) in “The Turf.” Another aspect of his playing I appreciate very much is how he embellishes his accompaniments, as can be heard to good advantage in “You Showed Me The Way” (also uses double stops) and “Miss Brown To You,” both with Holiday. The only bassist I’ve heard using such extensive embellishments (and more tasteful, IMO) during that same period is Walter Page, e.g., “He’s Funny That Way,” to stay with Holiday.”

Again Morgenstern on the 26th:

“Re Kirby as bassist, this from Ed Berger's "Basically Speaking: An Oral History of George Duvivier": I was more aware of John Kirby as a leader than as a bassist. He had a fantastic sextet. John's playing was sufficient onto the day for the group. He was able to play the parts--a good bassist but not a great one. The tuba had been his forte; he never devoted as much time to the bass as he had to the tuba.... Think George was being very gentlemanly here in his choice of words...”

Matthias on the 27th

“Re Kirby’s popularity because of his band rather than bass playing: I have no doubt that that’s why he rates that high in the polls. For the exact same reason we find Bob Haggart (w/ Bob Crosby) and Artie Bernstein (w/ Goodman, another underrated bassist IMO) also high up in the ratings, alongside many now forgotten names that played in the (white) name bands, e.g., 1939 Metronome Poll: Jack Ryan 7th (w/ Louis Prima), Gene Traxler 9th (w/ Dorsey), Hank Wayland 10th (w/ Berigan), etc. To be fair, the polls also include many names now held in high esteem, including Blanton, Hinton, Page, etc.”

“Re musicians being tactful about peers: good point, but the context of the Simmons and Hinton articles reveals that they were not specifically asked about Kirby, they singled him out themselves (alongside others they liked for different reasons, such as Blanton for “solos and for tricky stuff,” as Simmons puts it (M&R, April 1941, p. 32)). Surely there must have been something in his playing they liked at that time, for they could have mentioned many others such as Bernstein. Or was Kirby such an influential guy you best held him close? Maybe a high-ranking union man? I’m not that familiar with his character or personal life.”

“Now, this has to do with Kirby’s reception (by peers and listeners,) but what about the music itself? As I mentioned earlier, several of his bass lines display quite innovate and experimental things (double stops, embellishments, harmonics,) although these have more to do with “tricks” rather than laying down a solid beat. Still, I personally would not simply brush him off as a non-bassist.”

From Lewis Porter on Jan 29

"I can't explain the attitudes of fellow musicians toward Kirby's playing, but on some recordings his playing is amazing. One of the recordings I mentioned to Matthias is Teddy Wilson with Billie Holiday, June 1936, It's Like Reaching for the Moon. During the first chorus Kirby doesn't do much, but as soon as Billie starts to sing, his playing is energetic. At ca 1:45, Kirby does some hopping and plays double stops, and he plays two harmonics around 1:57. His playing through to the end of the recording continues in this vein, really remarkable, esp for the time period.:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81q6Xb-mdIY>"

And Kenny Berger on Jan 30

"I can't figure where all the negativity about Kirby's playing is coming from. The quality of his work varies across different recordings, but the stresses of the road and of a jam-packed daily schedule would take a similar toll on anyone, and let's not forget that the technical aspects of recording the bass were still in flux at the time. On "How'm I Doin'" by Duke Wilson and his Blackberrys from 3/11/32 which is the Henderson crew under a pseudonym, his sound is full and rich with a degree of sustain in his walking quarter notes that was ahead of its time, and he occasionally breaks up the walking rhythm in a way that sounds as though Oscar Pettiford had been transported to a swing era Harlem dance band. Rex Stewart's Jazz Masters of the Thirties contains a great anecdote about the light-skinned Kirby saving the Henderson crew's bacon by posing as a southern cracker to obtain gas for the bus after it had run out. The Kirby sextet had a subtle and generally unacknowledged influence in the Bebop era through Bird's frequent

quoting of the opening phrase from Shavers's "Dawn on The Desert," one of those phrases often treated as a lick by younger players unaware of its origin as a quote."

In the end, it seemed that the esteemed Jazz Historian, Dan Morgenstern was unmoved in his opinion.



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Chapter IV – Charlie Shavers

Charles James Shavers was born August 3, 1920 in New York City and passed on from throat cancer July 8, 1971, two days after Louis Armstrong his long-time friend and idol. He was only 50 years old. His last request was that his trumpet mouthpiece be buried with Louis.

It is both touching and fitting that one of the greatest of the 20th Century sidemen go out in this way. Among his credits as a sideman are listed names both enormous and familiar and less familiar but still significant. Names like trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie, Roy Eldridge and Hot Lips Page clarinetists Benny Goodman, Johnny Dodds, Sidney Bechet, Artie Shaw and Jimmie Noone, leaders like Lucky Millinder, Raymond Scott, and Charlie Barnet. He's on records with Coleman Hawkins *and* Don Byas, Teddy Wilson, Cozy Cole, Erroll Garner, Red Norvo, Earl Hines, Woody Herman, Tommy Dorsey, Charlie Ventura, Lionel Hampton, Ziggy Elman, Fred Astaire, Oscar Peterson, Georgie Auld, Gene Krupa, Louie Bellson, Jackie Paris. His sideman credits for singers

alone include Trixie Smith and Maxine Sullivan but also, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday Carmen McCrae, *and* Sarah Vaughn. Tom Lord's discography is three pages long and is a virtual who's who from the swing era until 1971.

Shavers was also a first-rate composer ("Undecided") and arranger (more about that below.)

He started on piano and then banjo before trying the trumpet. In 1936 he was asked to join the John Kirby's Sextet as trumpet soloist and arranger. While he was only 16, he told the agency he was born in 1917 so he could work. His work with the Kirby Sextet will be discussed in depth later but suffice to say, it was a seminal time for Charlie both as a player and as a composer/arranger. In 1944, while still with Kirby he began playing sessions in Raymond Scott's CBS staff orchestra. In 1945 he left John Kirby's band to join Tommy Dorsey's Orchestra, with whom he toured and recorded, off and on, until 1953. During this time he continued to play sessions at CBS, played with the Metronome All-Stars, and made a number of recordings as trumpet soloist with Billie Holiday. From 1953 to 1954 he worked with Benny Goodman, and toured Europe with Norman Granz's popular West Coast Jazz at the Philharmonic series, where he was always a crowd favorite. He went on to form his own band with Terry Gibbs and Louie Bellson. He also had a notable young cousin in Fats Navarro who paid great heed to his famous uncle during his formative years.

Shavers' work for the Kirby Sextet constitutes about 60% of the arrangements the group performed and recorded. Partly because of the ASCAP / Broadcasting difficulty and partly because Kirby asked for it, some of Shaver's arrangements for the Sextet were of "swung" classical themes. Kirby and Billy Kyle also contributed and it seems Kirby

and Shavers sometimes collaborated on classical arrangements along with the sadly almost forgotten Lou Singer. The first recordings of the classic lineup include five numbers, four of which are originals and one arrangement of a song from Thurlow Lieurance from 1878. “Rehearsin’ For A Nervous Breakdown,” “Pastel Blue” and “Undecided” are all Shavers originals while “From Ab to C” is a Billy Kyle number and “By The Waters Of Minnetonka” is a Shavers arrangement of the aforementioned Lieurance number. Of these of course, “Undecided” became a standard and is still performed today. I must say that after having listened to the complete output of the Kirby Sextet what with all the Shavers numbers, I am quite certain I could have guessed he wrote it even had I not been told. It has the subtle swinging ease of his best work. The lyric, by Sid Robin, while occasionally clever, is almost unnecessary because the rhythm of the melody is so much *of* the swing era. Check out where the word “and” falls in the second measure of the first phrase for example.

UNDECIDED

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Words by Sid Robin
Music by Charles Shavers

Moderately

C F9

First you say you do and then you don't, and then you say you will and
Now you want to play, and then it's no, and when you say you'll stay, and that's
If you've got a heart and if your're kind, then don't keep us a - part. Make

D7 Dm7 Ab7 G7 1. C A7 Dm7 G7

To Coda

then you won't. } You're Un - de - ci - ded now, so what are you go - na do? _____
when you go. }
up your mind. }

2. C Gm7 C7 Gm7 C7

I've been sit - ting on a fence, and it does - n't make much sense, 'cause you

F Am7 D7

keep me in sus - pense and you know it. _____ Then you prom - ise to re - turn. When you

Am7 D7 G7 D.C. al Coda

don't, I real - ly burn. Well, I guess I'll nev - er learn, and I show it. _____

CODA C

Shavers brilliantly contrasts the longer, flowing phrases of the A sections with the jaunty rhythm of the bridge. Also note the winking blue note in ms. seven. It's so catchy, it's no wonder it became a hit when Ella Fitzgerald sang it.

Charlie Shavers was also justly renowned for his prowess, stamina, inventiveness and creativity as a Trumpet player. Here is but one example:

On August 10th, 1939, the John Kirby Sextet recorded four classic sides for release on both Vocalion and Columbia records. Among these was the sextet's first recording of Charlie Shavers' arrangement of the Irving Berlin chestnut, "Blue Skies" as

arranged by John Kirby. The record was released as Vocalion 5187 with their famous and intricate arrangement of “Royal Garden Blues” on the A side.

Shavers’ solo comes at about the 1:27 mark after a clever call and response between the horn section and short solos by Billy Kyle on Piano. With his signature cup mute inserted, Shavers begins by outlining the descending tonic arpeggio as pick-up into the first measure. (Example 1.) The first two measures of the form, Shavers firmly establishes the Fm tonality as the bass descends in half steps, using the harmony as follows: Fm/F – C+7/E – Ab/Eb – Bb7/D. Although he is not outlining the changes per se, the tempo allows our ears to hear both the solid Fm and the changing chords as one statement. In ms 4, his descending Bb7 arpeggio contains the flat 5 blue note which would become almost cliché within 10 years. The use of this non-chord tone was certainly heard before this recording but in a few short years, the progenitors of bebop would end melody phrases on the flat five as well as improvised solo passages. Setting up the tritone at the end of the phrase became a hallmark of the early bebop sound. A great example is the last measure of the bridge in the Dizzy Gillespie classic “Bebop” with a final anticipated G flat is the flat five of the C7 chord. Other examples abound.

At the end of measure four, Shavers starts a four measure phrase that emphasizes the flat five while truncating the rhythmic figure before cleverly bringing us back to the tonic Ab, employing a clever rhythmic use of three against four. A descending F harmonic minor scale over the dominant of the relative minor, C7 takes us to the second eight measures of the form. Here, Shavers makes great use of the tonic and third of the changing harmony to outline the harmonic motion. The highest tessitura of the solo comes next as he arpeggiates up to a high C in ms 13 before descending stepwise and

landing squarely on the flat nine of the true dominant, Eb7, right on the downbeat of ms.

14.

The last two measures of this solo contain a phrase so catchy; it could be the motif of its own tune. As he lands firmly on the low tonic, he brings this 16-measure statement to a satisfying close.

Regarding the phrasing, Shavers negotiates the 16-measure unit with an eight-measure phrase followed by two four-measure phrases in a small masterpiece of spontaneous composition. The cohesiveness of his ideas point to his already well developed thematic sense.

That he could be so cogent in such a confined and limited space is a great miniature metaphor for the output of the entire sextet. Imminently swinging, controlled, considered and tuneful, this arrangement and Shaver's navigation of the changes reflect the great appeal of the Sextet's music in this era.

Example 1

Blue Skies

(Shavers solo '39)

Berlin/Shavers

The musical score for 'Blue Skies' (Shavers solo '39) for Tpt. is presented in 4/4 time. The score consists of 16 measures, organized into four staves. The key signature is two flats (Bb and Eb). The chords and melodic lines are as follows:

- Measure 1: Fm chord, melodic line starting on Bb4.
- Measure 2: C+7/E chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 3: A^b/E^b chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 4: B^b7 chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 5: A^b/E^b chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 6: F7 chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 7: Eb7 chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 8: A^b chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 9: C7 chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 10: Fm chord, melodic line starting on Bb4.
- Measure 11: C+7/E chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 12: A^b/E^b chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 13: B^b7 chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 14: A^b/E^b chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 15: F7 chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.
- Measure 16: Eb7 chord, melodic line starting on Eb4.

It is likely Shavers played this tune many, many times in his career and this arrangement in particular. With multiple month stands at Café Society and The Onyx Club, this had to be a staple of the set. Considering that, it is fascinating to note in this radio transcription two things: one, Shavers is less polished and more searching and two, it's a complete chorus so he has more time to realize any themes that may have occurred to him.

Comparing the first 16 measures of this 1943 solo, we find Shavers in fine form but also hinting at pieces of a sound that would come to be more widely known as Bebop in a very short time. It is probable that Shavers heard colleagues experimenting with this.

After a stock pickup, a descending arpeggiated figure gives way in measure five to one of those moments that hint to my ears of things to come, especially the figure in ms. five and six. Descending arpeggios followed by chromaticism are rife in classic Bebop and this lick in particular feels right at home in that style. The second eight finds Shavers again outlining changes cleverly and again employing a chromatic figure in ms. 11. Shavers' mastery of rhythmic effects, three against four, uneven phrase lengths etcetera are evident across ms. 12 and 13 as he again arpeggiates on a Dm7b5 (as does the bass!). This substitution of the half-diminished chord a tri-tone away from the tonic (which is the next measure), is another key element of the Bebop style.

As we heard in the previous excerpt, he rounds out the first 16 measures with a catchy descending arpeggiated lick that puts a nice conclusion on his statement. The bridge rather quickly becomes another story in terms of cohesiveness and line but that is another issue.

His phrasing in this solo is also masterful. At the outset, he plays the first four-measure phrase as a descending cycle and then proceeds into a closing answer that is very be-bopish. His next phrase begins with rests but then continues as a five-measure idea answered by a three-measure tag. There is brilliant use of unusual phrase length here. Continuing on, Shavers' next eight is an idea unto itself and rises to the high C for a great high point in the statement. The last eight is another cycle with triplets, here performed with alternating fingerings: on the F, it's open – 1-3 in quick, every-other-note progression and on the Eb, it's 1 then 1-3 in the same manner. Tricky. Following in measures 29 and 30 he echoes his idea in measures 14 and 15.

It is worth mentioning that in this iteration, the piano drops out and it's just very, very light brushes on the downbeat and a really swinging pas de deux between Shavers' cup muted trumpet and his boss Kirby's bass. It's a nice contrast in the arrangement and the fact that we can still easily hear the outline of both the tune and the changes is a testament to the skill and giant ears of these two veteran swing masters.

Example 2

Blue Skies

(Shavers solo '43)

Berlin/Shavers

Tpt

1 2 3 4
 5 6 7 8
 9 10 11 12
 13 14 15 16
 17 18 19 20
 21 22 23 24
 25 26 27 28
 29 30 31 32

‘Coronation Hop’ and ‘Showcase.’ All feature Shavers and all sound unlike anything any Goodman or Krupa small groups of any period recorded. They sound like the John Kirby Band with Goodman or Krupa as sidemen.”³⁵ After listening to these sides multiple times, I am in complete agreement with Mr. McDonough.

Chapter V – Billy Kyle

William Osborne “Billy” Kyle was born on Bastille Day, 1914 and died on February 23rd, 1966. In those ensuing years, Kyle moved forward the boundaries of harmonic sophistication in jazz soloing on the piano, wrote several fantastic tunes, played with a host of influential groups and spent 13 years as one of Louis Armstrong’s All Stars. Bud Powell and Dave Brubeck both praised him no end and both looked to him in their formative years. He passed in February 1966 of a heart attack.

His contributions to the John Kirby Sextet, of which he was a founding member and held down the piano chair from 1938 until he was drafted into the Army in 1942. Those four years were the golden era for the sextet and Kyle was a key part of that high water mark.

Kyle said in 1940 in the magazine *Music and Rhythm*, “Kirby was after me for many months and finally wore down my resistance. I am now glad I made the change. I particularly like this type of small combination in which we use a great deal of careful arrangement (although hardly any of it is ever written down.) In fact, I prefer this type of small band to jam combinations, and I don’t generally like jamming at all. I prefer a little law and order in my music.”³⁶

Of the several tunes Kyle penned for the sextet, “From Ab to C,” from 1939 stands as an astonishing testament to his command of harmony and his melodic sophistication. The melody also presages the extended harmonic language of the Be-Boppers who would make such an impression a few years later.

From Ab to C

(horn score -melody)

Billy Kyle
1939

13

Sim.

Tpt

Cl

Asx

Changes

mf

13 $A\flat^9$ $D\flat^9$ $F\sharp^9$ B^9 15 E^7 A^9 16 D^7 G^9

17 C^6 C^6/E 18 F^6 $F\sharp\dim^7$ Cm^6/G 19 C^6 20

f

21 $A\flat^9$ $D\flat^9$ 22 $F\sharp^9$ B^9 23 E^7 A^9 24 D^7 G^9

Ab to C (melody)

This musical score is for a piece titled "Ab to C (melody)". It is written for a four-part vocal or instrumental ensemble (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in 4/4 time. The key signature is one flat (Bb). The score is divided into three systems, each containing four measures. The first system (measures 25-28) features a melody with triplets and a bass line with chords: C6, C6/E, F6, F#dim7, Cm6/G, and C6. A box with the number "29" is placed below the first measure of the first system. The second system (measures 29-32) continues the melody with chords: E7, A9, and A9. The third system (measures 33-36) concludes the melody with chords: D9, C13, Db13, D7(#11), and Eb9(#11). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, beams, and accidentals.

25 C⁶ C⁶/E 26 F⁶ F[#]dim⁷ 27 Cm⁶/G 28 C⁶

29

29 E⁷ 30 31 A⁹ 32

33 D⁹ 34 C¹³ 35 D^b13 D7(#11) 36 E^b9(#11)

Ab to C (melody)

37

37 A^b9 D^b9 38 $F^\sharp9$ B^9 39 E^7 A^9 40 D^7 G^9

41 C^6 C^6/E 42 F^6 $F^\sharp\dim^7$ 43 C^6/G 44 C^6

As we can clearly see above, Kyle's harmonic sophistication was quite developed by this first Kirby Sextet recording. It has been noted a few times that the cycle of 5ths chromatic harmonic movement in the first four to eight measures was perhaps first used by Art Tatum on 10/9/1934 on the third chorus of "After You've Gone." After listening myself, it is true and Kyle certainly would have been aware of it. Still, it is remarkable that he made a tune out of something so obviously "Bopish" several years before that style came into popularity. "Ab to C" after all is a variation on "I Got Rhythm" changes as can plainly be seen in the fifth-eighth measures of the A sections and the bridge. What Kyle does with the horns is also clever. He has the Trumpet syncopate the moving harmony on measures one to four while the clarinet and alto saxophone play what to my ears may be one of the first true Bebop lines ever recorded that wasn't an improvisation. They then end the A section with a very close to the key, tuneful release. On the last two measures of the A section, we see one of those moments that turned heads and ears in 1939 and every time my band plays this tune. The descending triplet triads are flashy, smooth, swinging and singing. It is a beautiful moment.

The Bridge is closer to swing the Bebop and ends with a nice chromatic climb back to Ab. The last A section is a repeat of the first, complete with proto-bebop line intact.

Overall, it is a masterful swinging, sophisticated composition that nicely illustrates Kyle's particular harmonic mastery and genius.

Here is his solo on the only contemporary recording of this amazing tune.

45 Solo

C6 Ami Dmi G7 C Ami G7/D G7

C6 C6/E Fmi6 C6/G C6

C6 Ami7 G7/D G7 (-3) sfz

C6 C7 Fmi6 C/G C6 (p) end Solo

Notice how right from the first measure of this 16 measure solo, Kyle is swinging hard, laying on the octave “C”s before finishing out the catchy lick with chromatically aided passing G# before leaping a 6th to come back down and anticipate the C major and finish the phrase in measure five. He then answers his own query and finishes out the

first eight with same lick from measure five, down an octave. In the second eight, he plays with the string upper neighbors of the C and G before once again sounding the pentatonic C-A-G-C lick. He finishes out the solo with a display of chops and accuracy as he descends down the piano in triplets. The descending phrase over Fm6 starts on the 6th then arpeggiates down through the harmony to a passing Ab. The last D, C, Ab triplet is in the left hand and resolves to the root of the C/G chord while the right hand plays a two measure lick to end on the tonic pitch and the third (E) in the left hand. Almost all solos in the Kirby Sextet oeuvre were short like this one. Nevertheless, as Kyle shows here, there can be, and as is often the case, great artistry and no little lack of harmonic skill in “saying” what you want to say in your solo with only 16 measures at a bright clip. Swinging, tuneful, harmonically interesting and the soul of brevity are certainly hallmarks of the sextet as is beautifully illustrated by Kyle’s solo here.

To my knowledge, this tune has only been recorded 4 times; once by the Kirby Sextet in 1939, once by the long-lived British saxophonist Harry Hayes a few years later in 1946, once by another British Clarinetist-Saxophonist, Bruce Turner in 1962 and by Philadelphia’s Hoppin’ John Orchestra in 2014. Both the Hayes and Turner iterations are approximations or arrangements and the 2014 recording is a direct transcription with original solos. For a tune as great and catchy as this, it is surprising it didn’t become a standard.

Chapter VI – Russell Procope

Born on August 11th, 1908, Russell Procope grew up in the famous San Juan Hill neighborhood of New York City and was a classmate of Benny Carter, (who would also play with the Sextet and become one of Kirby's best friends.) Procope began his musical education on violin before switching to clarinet and alto saxophone. At the age of 18, Procope got his first professional job with Billy Freeman's Orchestra and a mere two years later recorded with Jelly Roll Morton. Throughout his long career, he also played with Chick Webb, Tiny Bradshaw, Teddy Hill, Joe King Oliver and Willie Bryant as well as the great Duke Ellington. From 1931-1934, Procope played in Fletcher Henderson's very influential orchestra and upon its disbandment, he and some of his Henderson band colleagues joined his old friend Benny Carter's Band. However, it was in Duke's band that Procope became a household name amongst the Jazz cognoscenti.

In 1938, Procope replaced Pete Brown on alto saxophone in the Kirby Sextet and thus rounded out the classic Sextet personnel. He played and recorded with the Sextet until 1942 when he joined the Army and then again for a time after the war in 1945. All of his sides with the Sextet are on alto saxophone.

In 1946, Procope joined the Duke Ellington Orchestra, subbing for Toby Hardwick one night in Massachusetts and was on the band until Duke's passing in 1974. While with Ellington, Procope became a clarinet star alongside Jimmy Hamilton. The two musicians had markedly different styles as one can hear on Duke's "Idiom '59." The high regard in which musicians held Procope is probably best summed up in a quote from Duke Ellington on his 38-year tenure. *From Music Is My Mistress*, Duke says, "He was an utterly sober and reliable musician, always to be depended upon."³⁷ Russell passed on

January 21st 1981 of a heart attack, apparently right in front of his apartment building in New York City.

Procope recorded one album under his own name, *The Persuasive Sax of Russell Procope* on London Records and while some of his earliest work sounds a bit like Benny Carter, by his time with the Sextet, Procope had developed a distinct singing, lyrical style that always swung very hard.

Here is Procope's solo on "From Ab to C" with the John Kirby Sextet:

From Ab to C
(Russell Procope Solo)

W. Kyle
1939

Over what are essentially rhythm changes, Procope does a fine job of outlining and arpeggiating the harmony throughout the solo. Starting out on the b5 blue note as a lower neighbor tone, he arpeggiates the descending Cm7 chord before a nice chromatic roll across the Fm and finishes the phrase with a pentatonic 5/6/1. The answer to this

motif continues in measures three and four. Another two-measure questioning motif is answered by a flurry of triplet chromaticism. It's hard to know what he was thinking here and Kirby and Kyle give little help in outlining obvious harmony. One might guess that it's a iii-vi-ii-V two-measure phrase and if so, Procope's scalar note choices are pretty incredible. In addition to blazing through the triplets, he once again makes use of the A to Bb half step, lower neighbor across the horn. Notice it twice in measure seven. The next four measures find him questioning and answering himself with both falling and rising last notes before finishing out with some choppy chord tone licks and a nice diatonic / pentatonic phrase to finish on the tonic.

Below is another sixteen-measure masterpiece of lyricism and economy. The tune is the old standard "It's Only A Paper Moon" which was a jam session favorite even then. It is likely Procope and the others played this tune many times before they recorded it. It was recorded on July 25th 1941 at the Victor Studios in New York City. It was among the Sextet's first sides for Victor along with it's B side, "Fifi's Rhapsody" and "Close Shave" / "Bugler's Dilemma." Lou Singer who also composed "Bugler's Dilemma" arranged all four of these sides.

Procope's solo starts at the 00:45 mark.

He begins the solo with a climb up the scale from 5 to 1 before rounding out a five-measure phrase that hovers very close to the tonic G major save for a few chromatic passing tones here and there. It's quite tuneful which presages the rest of the solo. In his second phrase beginning on measure nine, Procope introduces a leit motif that he will develop and worry three more times. It's a b6 – 6 – 1 lick that he finishes off in measures

12 and 13 with a pentatonic lick into the last four measures of the solo. The high point and emotional peak of the solo comes in measure 14 with repeated high G's followed by a bluesy line in two octaves before a very lyrical 6-7-2-7-1 resolution. Overall, the solo is a tuneful, melodic, tonal little display of lyricism from Procope.

It's Only A Paper Moon
(Russell Procope Solo)
Victor 27498A 7/25/41 New York City

ASX *mf* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 *f* 15 *decresc.* 16

In yet another display of musicianship and creativity, Procope takes the first solo on Charlie Shavers' "Zoomin' At The Zombie." This is a fantastic number all around and was written to commemorate their stand at the Zombie Room at the 1939 "World Of Tomorrow" New York World's Fair.

Zoomin' At The Zombie
(Russell Procope Solo)
Okeh 5761 New York, July 9 1940

C. Shavers
1940

00:49

Here we hear and see Procope arpeggiating at breakneck speed but as usual, making it seem effortless. His first statement across the dominant and into the first measure is a nice motif by itself as he makes use of upper and lower neighbor tones on the dominant before firmly establishing the Fm tonic with a downward Fm arpeggio. He answers this with a downward Db arpeggio and then a scalar passage still seems to descend all the way to measure eight and the tonic again. The next eight measures, Procope stays close to the chord tones but is decidedly less interested in outlining the chords with chord tones alone. He waits a breath at measure nine before winding out a nice line of 6/3/1/6 (once again an outline of the DbM), then descends in a scalar fashion once again landing on the third and fifth of the Fm chord on successive quarter notes to let the melody breath a bit. He finishes out this very cogent and swinging statement with an Ab, G, F, Db, C, Bb line over the Db and C7 harmony and then over the final Fm of

this solos, plays Ab, Bb repeated then to low F then once again, outlining the harmony climbs to the octave F, the Ab and G. He ends with a nice dominant sounding tiny phrase that once again, favors the chord tone in the first two beats (Ab over DbM) and then cleverly finishes this downward leaning solo with a downward CM arpeggio. All told, it's 16 measures of a great deal of downward motion that never seems to hit bottom. It was instructive to play this solo with no accompaniment and clearly hear the chord changes moving right along, so clearly is he stating his improvised melody.

Many, even most of Procope's solos with the quintet are short like these three. But, like I've stated before, when the economy of real estate on which to make an improvisatory statement is so limited, only truly gifted improvisers can craft such beautifully swinging and harmonically sophisticated miniatures.

Chapter VII – Buster Bailey

William C. "Buster" Bailey was born on July 19, 1902 in Memphis Tennessee. Besides his amazing work with the Kirby sextet, which we'll explore below, he also shared a teacher with Benny Goodman (Franz Schoepp.) Buster played with W.C. Handy for two years starting at the age of fifteen, and with The Vendome Orchestra of Erskine Tate from 1919 until 1923. During this time (1921), he made his first recordings with Mamie Smith and Her Jazz Hounds. I'd like to point out that by 1924, Bailey had made recordings with almost all the important early "Blues Ladies": Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, Trixie Smith, Sippie Wallace, Ma Rainey. He then joined King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. During his time with King Oliver, became friendly with a young Louis Armstrong and in 1924, followed Armstrong when he joined Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra. In 1925, Bailey recorded two solos under his own name for the first time with Clarence Todd Piano and Buddy Christian, Banjo.

During the later 1920's Bailey's mastery of the clarinet became complete and he jobbed around as respected sideman with many of New York's finest bands including Perry Bradford and Clarence Williams. He toured Europe in 1927 with Noble Sissle and then back home, with Dave Nelson and Edgar Hayes. He was back with Noble from 1931 until 1933. After a short reunion with Fletcher Henderson, he started working with John Kirby.

In 1934, Bailey recorded with Red Allen and this would prove to be a lifelong relationship. Ever the sideman, Bailey also performed and recorded with the Mills Blue Rhythm Band and in 1937 with Midge Williams (Maxine Sullivan) and Her Jazz Jesters

among many, many others. After his time with Kirby, Bailey briefly led his own band before joined Wilber de Paris for a couple of years. In the early 1950's, Bailey played with Big Chief Russell Moore but spent most of the 50's with his old friend, Red Allen. Bailey was in Wild Bill Davison's band from 1961 until 1963 and with the Saints and Sinners from 1963 to 1964. His old friend Louis Armstrong came calling in 1965 and Buster joined the All Stars. He played with Louis until he passed from a heart attack on April 12th 1967 at his home in Brooklyn.

Buster Bailey played hundreds of amazing solos in his long and illustrious career as a sideman. During his time with the John Kirby Sextet from 1938 until 1946, Bailey was in every recording, all nearly 300 of them. As with every soloist in the Sextet, choosing which solos to highlight was both impossible and very easy; they're all fantastic. Drop a needle and find treasure. Here are two I really like:

Vocalion S-220A (64709) **From Ab to C** 10/28/38

From Ab to C
(Clarinet solo)
Buster Bailey, Clarinet

Kyle

As almost always with the Sextet, solos are short but also almost always contain some very interesting lines and harmonic choices. Bailey rips into his break with gusto. Kyle and Kirby both hit a G at the beginning of the break, the dominant of the current key. In two measures, we'll be in Bb, down a step, so Bailey outlines the dominant of the new key for the first seven note run before arpeggiating VI, ii and V to set up the down beat in Bb. Clever; he's taking our ear to the new key all by himself. He lands on the down beat in the third of the Bb6 chord (to make sure we have settled firmly in the new key) and then plays another nice vi – ii – V line before once again sounding the definitive note of the tonic with a ripped up octave leap. Staying up high on the D and then falling

back down, he then pokes out two accented C's (the 9th here,) finishes the lick into the Eb – Edim by again, a strong hit on the 3rd of the Eb chord and then a descending arpeggio of most of the Edim chord, which leads us into yet another break. This time, we're headed to Eb.

On this break, Bailey climbs across the Bb tonality with a nice motif of 1 5 1 2 – b3 (5) b3 3 and continues in the next measure starting on 3 and more or less moving chromatically up to, once again, the key note of the Eb chord, the G.

Essentially, the 8-measure solo is across “Rhythm” changes and it's great example of Bailey's ability to say a great deal with very little chart real estate. The two breaks are particularly clever and as one can hear and see in the ghosted notes in the transcription, he swings like mad as usual.

Here is Bailey's solo on "20th Century Closet"

Columbia 36000 4/22/40

20th Century Closet
(Buster Bailey Clarinet Solo)
April 22 1940 Columbia 36000

The musical score is written for a clarinet (CL) in 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody starts on a half note F4, followed by a quarter note G4, and then a series of eighth notes. Chords F, Gm7, C7, and F are indicated above the staff. The second staff continues the melody with a half note F4, a quarter note G4, and then a series of eighth notes. Chords F, Gm7, C7, and F are indicated above the staff. The third staff is marked 'Sim.' and shows a more complex, flowing melodic line. The fourth staff is marked '(Shavers solo)' and shows a continuation of the melodic line with a final flourish.

This Shavers-Kirby tune was a response to the Raymond Scott's "In an 18th Century Drawing Room" from 1939.

After a sweet introductory melody statement in measures 1-3, Bailey stays in the blues mode over the ii-V7-I of the rhythm section highlighting the flat three at two strong points in the line. The thrill of this miniature masterpiece comes in measure nine and continues, uninterrupted through the downbeat of measure 13. In this flowing and swinging line, Bailey sails through, in, out and around the diatonic major with an upper or lower neighbor blue note here and there. His final three-measure and a beat-and-a-half line continues the stepping pattern introduced a few seconds before and ends on a semi-

chromatic four note lick to end the idea. It is also very nice phrasing in that he starts the long line at measure nine on the downbeat, finishes the idea on the downbeat of 13 and then gives us a cogent three-measure idea to close his thought and get out of the way of Shaver's solo which follows.

Chapter VIII – O’Neill Spencer

Spencer was born in Ohio in November 1909 and found his way to Buffalo, where he played with Al Sears, and finally to New York. He lost a bet in 1939 with Drummer George Wettling, then with Paul Whiteman, on whom would get married first. Spencer got to the alter just a few days after Wettling. But it would be a short marriage. Starting in 1942 tuberculosis sent him to the hospital with growing frequency and finally caused his collapse on stage at the Apollo theatre in June 1943. He died just over a year later on July 24 age 34.

Some of Spencer’s most impressive work with the Sextet can be found on tunes like “Royal Garden Blues” before the out chorus, and “Front And Center.” Spencer mainly used brushes in almost all the recordings with occasional use of sticks on the hi-hat stand (“Royal Garden Blues,”) mallets on the snare with the snares off (“Dawn On The Desert,”) and with them on, (“Rhumba In The Dark.”) The crucial combination of Spencer’s “front of the beat” brush and hi-hat work along with Kirby’s in the pocket bass lines *and* Kyle’s propulsive pseudo-stride style give tunes like “Jumpin’ in the Pump Room,” “Zoomin’ at the Zombie,” “Sweet Georgia Brown” and “Move Over” an amazing forward-leaning swing that is irresistible. The tempi of several of the aforementioned tunes are too fast for dancing and once again, the Kirby Sextet presages the Bebop era with it’s disregard and outright contempt for a danceable feel. There might have been two or so other contemporaneous drummers besides Sid Catlett that could have replaced Spencer (Specs Powell’s efforts are adequate at best.) Krupa of course could have and perhaps Davey Tough and certainly Chick Webb but the Kirby Sextet’s intricate

“boutique” swing was perfectly served by O’Neill Spencer during his tenure with the group.



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Chapter IX – Legacy and Conclusion

Leonard Feather, a long time fan and supporter of the Sextet, seems to have been the first to mount a retrospective. He organized a session featuring Shavers, Kyle, Bailey, Procope and Sullivan in 1955 but time was short and the materiel was less than it had been.

In 1959 and 1960, California reedman Dave Pell produced two John Kirby Sextet tribute albums: *I Remember John Kirby* and *The Big Small Bands*. Both albums included multiple Kirby Sextet tunes. In addition, the liner notes include a first-hand reminiscence from Pell and his cousin, drummer Roy Harte. “When I was 13 years old the first group I ever got together was a little John Kirby style band. I played clarinet and my cousin, Roy Harte, play drums. We were too young to hear the band at nightclubs, but we’d get the stock arrangements as soon as they came out. We were at Lincoln high, in Brooklyn. Later on, when we looked a little older, we sneak into Kelly’s Stable on 52nd St. and spend a quarter for a Coke at the bar and stay all night. They had three groups: Kirby’s, Coleman Hawkins’, and the intermission act was the King Cole Trio!”³⁸ Roy Harte then continues, “Kirby occasionally played the Savoy ballroom in Harlem. There was a fire escape in back of the bandstand, and Dave and I used to climb up it so we could at least hear the band. And of course I tried my best to play like O’Neil Spencer and Dave modeled his clarinet style after Buster Bailey!” These albums feature besides Pell and others, Marty Paich, Art Pepper, Mel Lewis, Jack Sheldon, Red Mitchell, Shelly Manne and one Kirby’s best friends, Benny Carter. Modern Hollywood superstar movie composer John Williams (here as John Towner Williams, probably to distinguish him from his famous father, drummer Johnny Williams of Raymond Scott’s Quintette.) Pell takes some liberties with the addition of trombone players and not quite faithful transcriptions in every case but overall, both records are loving tributes to the Sextet.

A tribute concert was held on May 25th 1974 in Carnegie Hall and was fairly well received and featured Sy Oliver on Trumpet as well as organizer of the tribute sextet. “In 1974, Newport Jazz Festival impresario George Wein, in association with Carnegie Hall,

formed the New York Jazz Repertory Company, a precursor of the Jazz at Lincoln Center repertory program headed up by Wynton Marsalis. With four musical directors - arrangers Sy Oliver and Gil Evans, and pianists Billy Taylor and Stanley Cowell - and a pool of 100 players, the NYJRC undertook an ambitious 15-concert series spread out over five months in its first year. One of those was this John Kirby Sextet tribute concert, led by trumpeter-arranger Sy Oliver, as part of a program called "52nd Street Revisited."³⁹

In 1996, star clarinetist Don Byron included 6 Kirby compositions/arrangements on his excellent *Bug Music* album: "Frasquita Serenade," "St. Louis Blues," "Wondering Where," "Bounce of the Sugar Plum Fairy," "Charley's Prelude" and "Royal Garden Blues." Also in 1996 noted New York Bassist Wayne Roberts organized a series of Kirby "recreations" complete with white tuxedos al a Joe Hellbock and carefully transcribed Kirby tunes. Ben Ratliff of the New York Times in a 1999 article about the recreation said, "Mr. Roberts, a bass player, calls his band the Onyx Club Sextet and captures the super-concentrated energy of the Kirby repertory, as well as a few non-Kirby jazz standards. On Monday night, the Kirby music in his set included "Bugler's Dilemma" (a playful piece conjuring a start-and-stop fanfare,) "Front and Center" and teasing versions of such classical pieces as Schubert's "Serenade" and Dvorak's "Humoresque." Mr. Roberts, with the drummer Arnie Kinsella and the pianist Bill Mays, kept the rhythm narrow and tight; he was not updating the swing feeling of the original. In Shavers' original arrangements, to which Mr. Roberts's band stayed faithful, the music is thin and high-pitched; tenor saxophone and clarinet play lines in unison, and the horns rarely rise above their even, clear legato. The music's abundant short, stimulating effects were

brought off well: in the crowded arrangements of "Jumping in the Pump Room" a piano chord hangs alone in the air for half a bar; in "Close Shave," the notes were spelled out sequentially by the front line of three horns. Mr. Mays sounded relaxed amid the claustrophobic music; he found a way to etch it with his own small improvisations. It was sweet, rollicking stuff, giving off the temper of chaos but never getting out of hand."⁴⁰

As mentioned, I transcribed a number of Kirby sextet numbers and recorded 2 of them in 2008 and 2014: "Dawn on the Desert" and "From Ab to C."

French clarinetist Claude Tissendier has recorded several Kirby tunes and re-imaginings of Kirby tunes on two records, one from 1985 and the digital release included seven more tunes. In an email interview Tissendier responded to my question about his method with this: "For transcribing, I used my ears alone in the first time. Some years later, I found a publication of some Shavers originals but they were lightly modified to be easier to play (specially the trumpet part). And at least, I went to Smithsonian and I photocopied all the parts. I never found any score."⁴¹ Also in France, "the sextet is commemorated by the band Kirby Memory,⁴² with vocals by Flora Sicot. In the UK, trumpeter Enrico Tomasso played John Kirby arrangements with his Swing Six at the Naturist Foundation Jazz Festival in 2010, following success at a concert at the Cadogan Hall, London, with a group led by Richard Pite."⁴³ Echoes of Swing is another European group performing great versions of Kirby tunes and Kirby inspired tunes.

In 1993 Kirby was inducted into the Big Band and Jazz Hall of Fame.

Kirby's Grandson, Alan Williams wrote a lovingly constructed slim biography and filled in many holes and gaps in the Kirby story with his 1996 book, *Fall From*

Grace: The John Kirby Story. Additionally, Williams has been instrumental in starting “John Kirby Days” in Kirby’s hometown of Winchester, Virginia from 2004-2009 and from 2010-2013, the “John Kirby Jazz Fest.”

On January 17th, 2003, as part of BBC Radio 3’s Jazz Legends Program, Host Julian Joseph and Jeffery Smith spend a good hour discussing the group.⁴⁴

Around 2005, Jazz @ Lincoln Center produced a transcription of “From Ab to C” as part of its Essential Jazz Editions, Music of the 1930’s Part I. It was both fun and instructive to compare my 1996 transcription to theirs.

“Critic Robert Goffin and has written of the sextet’s consistent individuality, it’s methodical arrangements, it’s harnessing of the soloist and it’s striking contrast in style to the original spirit of New Orleans. He has pointed out how Kirby sought to create a group personality through somewhat cerebral yet highly rhythmic orchestrations and how the band achieved such tremendous cohesion as a result of the musician’s long-standing familiarity with each other’s playing. In this way the “Chamber Jazz” of the John Kirby group presaged many of the cool jazz ensembles of late 1940s and early 1950s, particularly those of Lennie Tristano.”⁴⁵

I couldn’t agree more. As well, the great Big Band chronicler George Simon said of them during their heyday, “(they are) the daintiest and lightest swinging band of the year.”⁴⁶ Whitney Balliett compared their skill and refinement to Ellington, Goodman and Basie. In the 1978 Smithsonian Jazz Collection, J.R. Taylor said, “the overall Kirby sextet style held several harbingers of ‘modern jazz’ to come: Kyle’s harmonic

substitutions, Shavers' rhythmic subdivisions, the rhythm sections lack of redundancy and the lightness of the trumpet-alto-clarinet front line."⁴⁷

In closing I feel strongly that a comprehensive listening to the output of this incredible Sextet can only leave one wondering why they aren't more famous even today. At multiple times throughout the soloist's oeuvre, hints at what was to come (Bebop) are everywhere, especially as noted in "From Ab to C." Shavers, Kyle, Bailey and Procope in particular have an advanced harmonic sensibility even as early as 1938. The group's ensemble sense, precision and swing could only rarely be matched and even then only by other giants from the Ellington, Goodman and Shaw groups and even so, not as consistently. Consider also that almost all rhythm sections of that time had a guitarist. Kirby explicitly did not and this too, presaged the three man rhythm sections to come during the Bebop era. The lightness and freedom with which they could play was partly because they didn't have a guitar player chunking along on every beat. Elements like Shavers' use of the cup mute, the tight voicings, tuxedos, repertoire and "chamber style" performances as well as their tightly contained precision, anticipated the approach of the "Birth of the Cool" sessions, some early Third Stream efforts and certainly the Modern Jazz Quartet.

¹ McDonough, John. Liner notes to The John Kirby Sextet Vol. 1, *The Complete Associated Transcriptions, Vol. 1 1941 Jazz Unlimited 2047 1999*. Compact Disc

² Williams, Alan. *Fall From Grace-The John Kirby Story*. Pensacola, FL: Alcoral Books, 1993

³ “

⁴ “Kirby Elopes.” *Down Beat*, August 1 1941 2

⁵ Sudhalter, Richard M. *Lost Chords: White Musicians and their contributions to Jazz 1915-1945*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999

⁶ The Zombie Room was inside the Beachcomber restaurant at the 1939 New York World's Fair. It was part of the Polynesian themed restaurant craze of the late 1930s and was owned by Milton Prosser. Prosser owned many restaurants (including the famous Copacabana) and claimed to have invented the Zombie cocktail, (and thus the name of the showroom inside the restaurant). Prosser was sued and lost over the origins of the iconic rum and lime drink.

⁷ Sudhalter, Richard M. *Lost Chords: White Musicians and their contributions to Jazz 1915-1945*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999

⁸ Toll, Ted. "Kirby Unit Congas, Minuets, Rhumbas or Jumps at Will." *Downbeat*, August 1939

⁹ Shaw, Arnold. *52nd Street: The Street Of Jazz*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1971 pg. 101

¹⁰ <http://www.radioworld.com/article/this-boycott-changed-american-music/275788>

¹¹ “

¹² “

¹³ James Russell, “Kirby Sextet Wows Audience,” *Downbeat*, December 1939.

¹⁴ McDonough, John. Liner notes to The John Kirby Sextet Vol. 2, *The Complete Associated Transcriptions, Vol. 2 1941 Jazz Unlimited 2047 2002*. Compact Disc

¹⁵ Toll, Ted. "Kirby Unit Congas, Minuets, Rhumbas or Jumps at Will." *Downbeat*, August 1939

¹⁶ Joseph, Julian, prod. “Jazz Legends.” *John Kirby Jazz Legend*. BBC Radio 3. 8 May 2013

¹⁷ McDonough, John. Liner notes to The John Kirby Sextet Vol. 3, *The Complete Associated Transcriptions, Vol. 3 1941 Jazz Unlimited 2047 2002*. Compact Disc

¹⁸ Overview of “Sepia Cinderella,” Turner Classic Movies

¹⁹ Leonard Feather, “John Kirby,” *Downbeat* June 1967

²⁰ Greilsamer, Marc. Liner notes to The Complete RCA Victor Small Group Recordings of Benny Goodman, RCA Victor/BMG 09026-68764-2 1997. Compact Disc

²¹ “

²² “

²³ Williams, Alan. *Fall From Grace-The John Kirby Story*. Pensacola, Fl: Alcoral Books, 1993

²⁴ Williams, Alan. Phone interview. December 2014

²⁵ Stewart, Rex. *Jazz Masters of the 30s*. New York, New York. Da Capo Books 1972. pg. 151

²⁶ Hobbs, Allyson. *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*. Harvard University Press, 2014

²⁷ Ginsberg, Elaine. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Duke University Press, 1996

²⁸ Leary, Kimberlyn. "Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory."

²⁹ Stewart, Rex. *Jazz Masters of the 30s*. New York, New York. Da Capo Books 1972. pg.152

³⁰ Stewart, Rex. *Jazz Masters of the 30s*. New York, New York. Da Capo Books 1972. pg. 155

³¹ Williams, Alan. Phone interview. December 2014

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- ³² Roberts, Wayne Phone interview. April 2015
- ³³ Williams, Alan. *Fall From Grace-The John Kirby Story*. Pensacola, Fl: Alcoral Books, 1993
- ³⁴ “ “ pg. 91
- ³⁵ McDonough, John. Liner notes to The John Kirby Sextet Vol. 3, *The Complete Associated Transcriptions, Vol. 3 1941 Jazz Unlimited 2047 2002*. Compact Disc
- ³⁶ Robert Crandall, “Kirby Sextet On the Air,” *Music And Rhythm*. December 1940
- Leonard Feather, “John Kirby,” *Downbeat*. June 1967
- ³⁷ Ellington, Edward K. *Music Is My Mistress*. Garden City, New York: Da Capo Books, 1974
- ³⁸ Feather, Leonard. Liner notes to *Dave Pell Remembers John Kirby and the Big Small Bands JazzCity Series*. Fresh Sound Records 2259 2011. Compact Disc
- McDonough, John. Liner notes to The John Kirby Sextet Vol. 2, *The Complete Associated Transcriptions, Vol. 2 1941 Jazz Unlimited 2047 2002*. Compact Disc
- ³⁹ Milkowski, Bill. "John Kirby Sextet Tribute Band." Program notes. *John Kirby Sextet Tribute Band*. Carnegie Hall, New York NY. 25 May. 1974. Print.
- ⁴⁰ Ben Ratliff, "JAZZ REVIEW: The Kirby Repertory, Short and Sweet," *New York Times* , 12 March 1999, sec. C, p. 5.
- ⁴¹ Tissendier, Claude Email interview. March 2015
- ⁴² Scott, Flora. Email interview. March 2008
- ⁴³ Ernest V. Heyn, “Sunday Highlights,” *Radio and Television Mirror*, December 1940
- ⁴⁴ Joseph, Julian, prod. “Jazz Legends.” *John Kirby Jazz Legend*. BBC Radio 3. 8 May 2013
- ⁴⁵ Gioia, Ted. *The History Of Jazz*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011
- ⁴⁶ McDonough, John. Liner notes to The John Kirby Sextet Vol. 2, *The Complete Associated Transcriptions, Vol. 2 1941 Jazz Unlimited 2047 2002*. Compact Disc
- ⁴⁷ “ “

Appendix 1 – Discography

[K2485]

John Kirby And His Onyx Club Boys : Charlie Shavers (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) Russell Procope

(as) Billy Kyle 64708-A

64709-A

64710-A 64711-A

64712-A

(p,arr) John Kirby (b) O'Neil Spencer (d)

New York, October 28, 1938

Rehearsin' for a nervous breakdown [Home made]

FromAflattoC

Pastel blue [Blue dilemma] (ons vcl) Undecided

By the waters of Minnetonka

De 2367, (E)M30340, (Aus)Y5705, Vocalion (E)S226,
Br (E)03203, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26, Classics
(F)750 [CD], Decca GRD-646 [CD]

De 2216, 4206, (E)M30350, (Aus)Y5705, Vocalion
(E)S220, Br (E)03202, LAT8167, Odeon 286368,
Classics 750 [CD], Decca GRD-646 [CD]

De 2367, (E)M30340, Vocalion (E)S226, Br (E)03203,
Classics (F)750 [CD]

De 2216, (E)M30350, (Aus)Y5372, Vocalion (E)S220,
Br (E)03202, Odeon 286368, Giants of Jazz
(It)LPJT26, Classics (F)750 [CD], Decca
GRD-646 [CD]

De F7806, Classics (F)750 [CD]

Note: Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26 titled "1938-1941 : The biggest little band in the land"; see various flwg sessions to January 15, 1941 for the rest of this LP. Decca GRD646 [CD] titled "52nd Street Swing - New York in the 30's"; rest of this CD by others. Classics (F)750 [CD] titled "John Kirby 1938-1939"; see flwg sessions to October 12, 1939 for the rest of this CD. First 4 titles also on Collector's (Swi)12-4, Collector's (Swi)5002, MCA (F)510071 & Smithsonian Coll R013.

First 4 titles also on MCA 1234 titled "The swinging small bands : 1937-1939"; rest of this LP by others. All above titles also on Brunswick (G)87525.

[K2486]

John Kirby And His Orchestra : same pers New York, January 9, 1939

23935-1 It feels good [It feels so good]

23936-1 Effervescent blues 23937-1 The turf

23938-1 Dawn on the desert

Voc/Okeh 4624, Parlophone (E)R2658, DP175, Br

(F/G)A82145, Col CG33557, Smithsonian R013,
 CBS 450167-1, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26,
 Musica Jazz (It)MJCD1089 [CD]
 Voc/Okeh 4624, Parlophone (E)R2658, DP175, Br
 (F/G)A82145, CBS 88134, 450167-1
 Voc/Okeh 4653, Parlophone (E)R2674, Odeon
 (F)A272275, Col CG33557, CBS 450167-1
 (same issues)

Note: All above titles also on Collector's (Swi)12-3, 5001, Classics (F)750 [CD]. All
 above titles also on Columbia 472184-2 [CD] titled "The biggest little band in the land";
 see flwg sessions to January 15, 1941 for more titles; rest of this 2 CD set by Maxine
 Sullivan, May 1 & August 1, 1940. All above titles also on Definitive (And)DRCD11168
 [CD] titled "The John Kirby Sextet - Complete Columbia & RCA Victor
 Recordings." Columbia 47184-2 [CD] = Columbia (F)472184-2 [CD].

[K2487]

24677-A Anitra's dance

. 24678-A Sweet Georgia Brown (*)

. 24678-B Sweet Georgia Brown

New York, May 19, 1939

Voc/Okeh 4890, Tax (Swd)m-8016, Col ML4801,
 Harmony HL7124, CBS 450167-1, Classics (F)750
 [CD], Col 472184-2 [CD]

Meritt 8, Smithsonian Coll R013

Col 36001, Collector's (Swi)12-3, (Swi)5001,
 Tax (Swd)m-8016, Col CG33557, Smithsonian R013
 CBS 450167-1, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26, Classics
 (F)750 [CD], Col 472184-2 [CD]

<http://www.lordisco.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/tjd/LeaderDetail?lid=14425> Page 1
 of 12

TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

24679-A Drink to me only with thine eyes 24680-A Minute waltz

Voc/Okeh 4890, Tax (Swd)m-8016, Collector's
 (Swi)12-4, 5001, CBS 450167-1, Classics (F)750
 [CD], Col 472184-2 [CD]

Voc/Okeh 5542, Parlophone (E)R2892, DPE-91, Odeon
 (Nor)D3756, Collector's (Swi)12-3, 5001, CBS
 450167-1, Classics (F)750 [CD], Col 472184-2 [CD]

Note: Harmony HL7124 titled "Intimate Swing"; see various flwg sessions to January 15,

1941 for the rest of this LP. All titles, except (*), also on Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2488]

24944-A Serenade (Schubert) (*) 24945-A Front and center

. 24946-A Royal garden blues

. 24946-B Royal garden blues (*)

24947-A Opus 5

(unissued)

Voc/Okeh 5520, Conqueror 9505, Parlophone

(E)R2772, Col ML4801, CG33557, CBS 450167-1,

(Aus)DO2438, Harmony HL7124, Smithsonian R013,

Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26, Classics (F)750 [CD],

Col 472184-2 [CD]

Voc/Okeh 5187, Conqueror 9505, Parlophone

(E)R2733, (Sp)B71066, (Swi)PZ11104, Col

(Aus)DO2438, Collector's (Swi)12-3, 5001, Tax

(Swd)m-8016, Smithsonian R013, CBS 450167-1, Col

CJ40833, History 20.3017-HI, Classics (F)750 [CD],

Col CK40833 [CD], 472184-2 [CD]

Col CG33557

Voc/Okeh 5048, Conqueror 9504, Parlophone

(E)R2725, Col (Aus)DO2052, Odeon (F)A272267,

(Nor)D3716, Col ML4801, Harmony HL7124,

Smithsonian R013, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS 450167-1,

Classics (F)750 [CD], Col 472184-2 [CD]

New York, July 28, 1939

Note: Columbia CK40833 [CD] titled "The 1930's - the small combos"; rest of this CD by others. All titles, except (*), also on Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2489]

24995-A Impromptu 24996-A Blue skies

24997-A Rose room

24998-A I may be wrong (but I think you're wonderful)

New York, August 10, 1939

Note: Columbia/Legacy C2K52454 [CD] titled "A tribute to black entertainers"; rest of

this 2 CD set by others. All above titles also on Classics (F)750 [CD], Columbia 472184-2 [CD], Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

Voc/Okeh 5570, Parlophone (E)R2892, Col (Can)C14, Odeon (Nor)D3756, Tax (Swd)m-8016, Col ML4801, Harmony HL7124, CBS 450167-1

Voc/Okeh 5187, Conqueror 9505, Parlophone (E)R2733, (Aus)B71066, (Swi)PZ11104, Collector's (Swi)12-3, 5001, CBS 450167-1, Smithsonian R013, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26, Franklin Mint GJR063

Col 36000, Parlophone (E)R2806, Collector's (Swi)12-3, 5001, CBS 450167-1

Voc/Okeh 5048, Conqueror 9504, Parlophone (E)R2725, Odeon (F)A272267, (Nor)D3716, Tax (Swd)m-8016, Collector's (Swi)12-3, 5001, CBS 450167-1, Col/Legacy C2K52454 [CD]

[K2490]

WC2781-A WC2782-A

Little brown jug Nocturne

Chicago, IL, October 12, 1939

Voc/Okeh 5570, Col (Can)C14, Collector's (Swi)12-3 (Swi)5001, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS 450167-1, Classics (F)750 [CD]

Voc/Okeh 5520, Col ML4801, CG33557, CBS 450183-1,

WC2783-A

One alone

Humoresque (Dvorak) Serenade (Schubert)

Classics (F)750 [CD]

Voc/Okeh 5605, Col (Can)C42, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS 450183-1, Classics (F)770 [CD]

(same issues)

Col 36001, ML4801, Harmony HL7124, Smithsonian RL013, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS 450183-1, Classics (F)770 [CD]

WC2784-A WC2785-A

Note: Classics (F)770 [CD] titled "John Kirby 1939-1941"; see flwng sessions to January

15, 1941 for the rest of this CD. All above titles also on Columbia 472184-2 [CD], Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2491]

same pers LA-2161-B Jumpin' in the pump room Col CG33557

[K2492]

26757-A Jumpin' in the pump room 26758-A Milumbu

26759-A You go your way 26760-A 20th Century closet

Okeh 5661, Smithsonian RL013, CBS 450183-1, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26

Col 35920, (Can)C206, (Swd)DS1430, Parlophone (E)R2791, Col ML4801, CG33557, CBS 450183-1 Voc/Okeh 5542, CBS 450183-1

Col 36000, Collector's (Swd)12-3, (Swd)5001, CBS 450183-1, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26
Los Angeles, February 26, 1940

New York, April 22, 1940

Note: The above session is a re-make of one held in Los Angeles on February 26, 1940. All above titles also on Columbia 472184-2 [CD], Classics (F)770 [CD], Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2493]

26854 Temptation 26855-A Blues petite

26856-A On a little street in Singapore 26857-A Chloe [Song of the swamp]

New York, May 27, 1940

Note: All above titles also on Columbia 472184-2 [CD], Classics (F)770 [CD], Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

Okeh 5661, Col CG33557, CBS 450183-1

Okeh 5805, Col (Can)C102, Col CG33557, ML4801, Harmony HL7124, CBS 450183-1, Smithsonian RL013, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26

Okeh 5761, Col (Aus)DO2212, CBS 450183-1

Okeh 5632, Smithsonian RL013, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS

450183-1

[K2495]

Charlie Shavers (tp,arr)

26997-A Andiology 26998-A Can't we be friends ?

26999-A Then I'll be happy 28000-A I love you truly 28001-A Frasquita serenade 28002-A Sextette (cs arr)

Okeh 5805, Col (Can)C102, Col ML4801, CG33557,
Harmony HL7124, CBS 450183-1, Smithsonian RL013
Col 35920, (Can)C206, (Swd)DS1430, Parolophone
(E)R2791, Collector's (Swi)5002, Epic SN6042, CBS
450183-1, Smithsonian RL013, Giants of Jazz
(It)LPJT26, History 20.3017-HI
Col 35999, Collector's (Swi)12-4, (Swi)5002,
CBS 450184-1
Col 36165, (Swd)DS1478, Collector's (Swi)12-3,
5001, Smithsonian RL013, Col CG33557, CBS 450184-1
Okeh 5705, Col (Can)C63, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS
450184-1
Okeh 5705, Col (Can)C63, Tax (Swd)m-8016,
Collector's (Swi)12-3, CBS 450184-1
New York, July 9, 1940

28003-A Coquette Col 35999, Parlophone (E)R2806, Collector's (Swi)5001, Epic
SN6042, Smithsonian RL013,

CBS 450184-1 28004-A Zoomin' at the zombie Okeh 5761, Col (Aus)DO2212, Col
ML4801, Harmony

HL7124, Smithsonian RL013, CBS 450184-1

Note: All above titles also on Columbia 472184-2 [CD], Classics (F)770 [CD], Definitive
(And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2496]

John Kirby And His Orchestra - Maxine Sullivan, 1940 : Charlie Shavers (tp) Buster
Bailey (cl) Russell Procope (as) Billy Kyle (p) John Kirby (b) Cozy Cole (d) Maxine
Sullivan (vcl)

Lang-Worth transcriptions, New York, 1940-1941

Loch Lomond (ms vcl) Humoresque (3) If I had a ribbon bow (ms vcl) Given the

lady That lonely tune (ms vcl) Rustle of spring (1,2) Who is Sylvia ? (ms vcl) Arabian nightmare (2) There I go (ms vcl) Valse Red River Valley (ms vcl) I give you my word (1) Haydn gets hep The same old story (ms vcl) (1) Feeling in a mellow mood (3) As the tide was flowing in (ms vcl) Bounce of the sugar plum fairy Blue fantasy (1) Raggle-taggle gypsies (ms vcl) Yours forever Molly Malone (ms vcl) Amapola [Pretty little poppy] Effervescent blues Call me happy If I had a ribbon bow (ms vcl) Down on the Riminent (3)

Circle CCD47 [CD]

Circle CLP47,

CCD47 [CD]

Note: Circle CCD47 [CD] titled "Loch Lomond - Maxine Sullivan, John Kirby and his Orchestra 1940-1941." (1) these titles also on Jazz Panorama (Swd)LP5. (2) these titles also on Blue Heaven BH5-507 titled "Music of an era." (3) these titles also on Polydor (E)236.523/4/5, Alamac QSR2421.

[K2497]

The Biggest Little Band In The Land - More 1940-41 : *Maxine Sullivan And John Kirby* : same pers.

Front and center Oh ! no John (ms vcl) Calm as the night (ms vcl) Valse, Opus 64 Twentieth century closet

Pol 236523, Alamac QSR2421, Circle CCD125 [CD]

Blue Heaven BH5-507, Circle CCD125 [CD]

Circle CCD125 [CD]

Lang-Worth transcriptions, New York, October 10, 1940

[K2498]

same pers.

Lang-Worth transcriptions, New York, November 18, 1940

The heart you stole from me (ms vcl) Circle CCD125 [CD], Jasmine (E)JASMCD2543 [CD]

<http://www.lordisco.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/tjd/LeaderDetail?lid=14425> Page 4 of 12

TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

Revolutionary etude (cs arr) - Polonaise, Opus 53 (cs arr) -

Last night the nightingale woke me (ms vcl;jk arr)

-

Note: Last 3 titles also on Jazz Panorama (Swd)LP5, Blue Heaven BH5-507.

[K2499]

same pers.

Lang-Worth transcriptions, New York, December 18, 1940

The lass with the delicate air (ms vcl;jk Circle CCD125 [CD] arr)

Mood in question Double talk Milumbu - Pomaine - You mean so much to me (ms vcl,*)

-

Blue fantasy

- , Baldwin Street Music (Can)BJG-502 [CD]

- , Baldwin Street Music (Can)BJG-502 [CD]

Baldwin Street Music (Can)BJG-502 [CD]

Note: Baldwin Street Music (Can)BJG-502 [CD] titled "The Many Moods of Charlie Shavers 1940-1952"; listing "O'Neil Spencer (d); rest of CD by Charlie Shavers, Raymond Scott. All titles, except (*), also on Blue Heaven BH5-507. See January 20, 1941 for additional titles on Circle CCD125 [CD].

[K2500]

John Kirby And His Onyx Club Boys : same New York, January 15, 1941

29508-1 Bounce of the sugar plum fairy 29509 Beethoven riffs on 29510-1 Double talk 29511-1 Cuttin' the campus

Col 35998, Collector's (Swi)12-4, (Swi)5002,

Smithsonian RL013, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS 450184-1

Col ML4801, 4-20-G, CG33557, Harmony HL712,

CBS 450184-1, Giants of Jazz (It)LPJT26

Col 35998, ML4801, Harmony HL7124, Tax (Swd)m-8016

CBS 450184-1

Col 36165, (Swd)DS1478, Collector's (Swi)12-3,

(Swi)5001, Tax (Swd)m-8016, CBS 450184-1

Note: All titles from Columbia ML4801 also issued on Columbia GL502 titled "John Kirby and his Orchestra." All above titles also on Columbia 472184-2 [CD], Classics (F)770 [CD], Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2501]

Charlie Shavers (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) Russell Procope (as) Billy Kyle (p) John Kirby (b)
O'Neil Spencer (d) Maxine Sullivan (vcl)

Lang-Worth transcriptions, New York, January 20, 1941

Prelude for trumpet [Charlie's prelude] Jazz Panorama (Swd)LP5, Circle CCD125 [CD]
(cs arr)

Ida (sweet as apple cider) - - The peanut vendor (1) - -

Note: (1) this title also on Blue Heaven BH5-507.

[K2502]

Temptation

Rehearsin' for a nervous breakdown

Echoes of Harlem Then I'll be happy

Collector's (Swi)12-11, Jazz Unlimited
(Dan)JUCD2047 [CD]
Classic Jazz CJ22, Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2047
[CD]
Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2047 [CD]
-

Associated transcriptions, New York, May 19, 1941

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TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

066895-1

066896-1 066897-1 066898-1

New York, July 25, 1941

Vic 27568, HMV (E)B9289, RCA (G)LPM10016,
(F)FXM1-7124, NL89484, Collector's (Swi)12-4,
5002, Reader's Digest RD4A-017, (E)GJAZ-A-039,
RDS9796

Vic 27568, HMV (E)B9289, RCA (F)FXM1-7124,
(F)NL89484, Collector's (Swi)12-4, (Swi)5002, New
World Records NW250

Vic 27598, HMV (E)B9278, (Swi)JK-2830,
 RCA (G)LPM10016, (F)FXM1-7124, (F)NL89484,
 Reader's Digest 619-EM-G (from an album)
 Vic 27598, HMV (E)B9278, (Swi)JK-2830,
 Collector's (Swi)12-4, (Swi)5002, RCA
 (F)FXM1-7124, (F)NL89484

Chloe [Song of the swamp]

By the waters of Minnetonka Ebony rhapsody Little brown jug Close shave

Mr. Haydn gets hep Tweed me down

Serenade Fantasy in blue Arabian nightmare The Kerry dance Original dixieland one-step
 Minute waltz

Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz Unlimited
 (Dan)JUCD2047 [CD]

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2047 [CD]

Note: Classic Jazz CJ22 titled "John Kirby: Biggest Little Band in the Land"; a 2 LP
 set. Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD] titled "Original 1941-44 Radio Transcriptions"; see
 September 26, 1941, October 7, 1942, November 19, 1943, March 21, 1944, and August
 18, 1944 for additional titles; dates for some titles are incorrectly listed on this CD. Jazz
 Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2047 [CD] titled "John Kirby And His Sextet, Vol. 1"; see
 September 26, 1941 for rest of CD. The Kirby group recorded many of the same
 selections for Associated, World and Lang-Worth transcriptions as well as Columbia or
 Victor 78's.

Close shave

Bugler's dilemma (ls arr) It's only a paper moon Fifi's rhapsody

Classic Jazz CJ22, Jazz Unlimited
 [CD]

Classic Jazz CJ22, Jazz Unlimited
 [CD]

Classic Jazz CJ22, Jazz Unlimited
 [CD]

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2047 [CD]

(Dan)JUCD2047

(Dan)JUCD2047

(Dan)JUCD2047

[K2503]

Lou Singer (arr) added

Note: All above titles also on Classics (F)792 [CD] titled "John Kirby 1941-1943"; see flwg sessions to 1944 for the rest of this CD.

All above titles also on RCA (F)ND89484 [CD], Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2504]

John Kirby And His Orchestra : Charlie Shavers (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) Russell Procope (as) Billy Kyle (p,arr) John Kirby (b) O'Neil Spencer (d) Cozy Cole (d-1) replaces O'Neil Spencer, and possibly other tracks , Maxine Sullivan (vcl)

World transcriptions, New York, c. summer 1941

Rustle of spring (take 2) (1) (os out) Rustle of spring (take 3) (1) (os out) Ida (1) (os out) The peanut vendor (1) (os out)

It feels so good Blue fantasy - - -

Circle CLP14,

CCD14 [CD]

Collector's (Swi)12-10, Circle CLP64, CCD14 [CD]

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TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

Whirlaway - Arabian nightmare - Rose room - Rehearsin' for a nervous breakdown - Echoes of Harlem - Original dixieland one-step - Charlie's prelude - Beethoven riffs on - Bounce of the sugar plum fairy - Rustle of spring - Peanut vendor boogie -

-- -- --

Royal garden blues

V-Disc 237, Collector's (Swi)12-10, Fonit Cetra (It)VDL1013, Circle CLP64, CCD14 [CD], Classics (F)792 [CD]

Note: All titles from Collector's (Swi)12-10 also on Jazz Anthology (F)30JA5179 titled "John Kirby and his Band 1940." Collector's (Swi)12-10 titled "The John Kirby Band." Circle CLP14 titled "John Kirby and his Orchestra - 1941." Circle CLP64 titled "John Kirby and his Orchestra - 1941-1942."

Circle CCD14 [CD] titled "John Kirby and his Orchestra - 1941-1942."

CLP14 -

CLP64 -

[K2505]

same pers

Ida Close shave One alone Then I'll be happy Coquette

20th Century closet Milumba Frasquita serenade Dawn on the desert Front and center

World transcriptions, New York, c. summer 1941

Collector's (Swi)12-11

Collector's (Swi)12-11, Circle CLP14, CCD14 [CD]

--- V-Disc 237, Collector's (Swi)12-3, 12-11, Fonit Cetra (It)VDL1013, Circle CLP14, History 20.3017-HI, Circle CCD14 [CD], Classics (F)792 [CD] Collector's (Swi)12-11, Circle CLP14, CCD14 [CD], Polydor (E)236.523/4/5

Note: Collector's (Swi)12-11 titled "The John Kirby Band." All titles from Circle CCD14 [CD] also issued on Jazz Anthology (F)550252 [CD].

[K2506]

John Kirby And His Sextet : Cozy Cole out Associated transcriptions, New York, September 26, 1941

Cuttin' the campus Rhumba in the dark Lolly gaggin' Move over

See what you did Down on the riment

Whirlaway Wondering where Begin the beguine Can't help lovin' dat man

Sextette from "Lucia"

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2047 [CD]

-

-

Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2047 [CD]

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

Classic Jazz CJ22, Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

-

-
Collector's (Swi)12-11, Jazz Unlimited

(Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

Classic Jazz CJ22, Collector's (Swi)12-11, DJM

(E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Jazz Unlimited

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TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

[K2507]

[K2508]

World transcriptions, New York, c. fall 1941 ?

Schubert's serenade V-Disc 499 Toselli's serenade -

Double talk

Flamingo Fefe's rhapsody Bugler's dilemma

Charlie's prelude Blues petite

(Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

Classic Jazz CJ22, Collector's (Swi)12-11, DJM

(E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Jazz Unlimited

(Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

-
Classic Jazz CJ22, Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052
[CD]

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

-

Note: Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD] titled "John Kirby and his Sextet, Vol. 2";
see November 19, 1943 for rest of CD.

John Kirby And His Orchestra : Charlie Shavers (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) Russell Procope
(as) Billy Kyle (p,arr) John Kirby (b) Specs Powell (d) Lou Singer (arr)

067977-1 067978-1 067979-1 067980-1

Night whispers (ls arr) Tweed me Move over Wondering where

Vic 27667, LEJ-1, RCA (F)FXM1-7124

- - , RCA LEJ-7

Vic 27712, HMV (E)B9284, RCA (F)FXM1-7124

- - -
New York, October 7, 1941

Note: Last 3 titles also on RCA (G)LPM10016. All above titles also on RCA (F)NL89484, Classics (F)792 [CD], RCA (F)ND89484 [CD], Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD].

[K2509]

Charlie Shavers, Buster Bailey, Russell Procope (vcl)

071900-1 071901-1

071902-1 071903-1

071903-2

Keep smiling (cs,bb & rp vcl,ls arr) Comin' back

No blues at all St. Louis blues

St. Louis blues (*)

Vic 27890, Stash ST116, RCA (F)FXM1-7124,
(F)NL89484, (G)LPM10016, Classics (F)792 [CD]
Vic 27890, Collector's (Swi)12-4, (Swi)5002, RCA
(F)FXM1-7124, (F)NL89484, (G)LPM10016, Classics
(F)792 [CD]

Vic 27926, HMV (E)B9310, Collector's (Swi)12-4,
(Swi)5002, RCA(G)LPM10016, (F)FXM1-7124,
(F)NL89484, Classics (F)792 [CD]

Vic 27926, HMV (E)B9310, Collector's (Swi)12-4,
5002, RCA (F)FXM1-7124, NL89484, PM43259, LJM1008,
History 20.3017-HI, Reader's Digest RD4A-017,
(G)GJAZ-A-039, RDS9792, Classics (F)792 [CD]

Vic (G)LPM10016, RCA (F)NL89484

New York, February 11, 1942

Note: One take of Mx. 071903 also on Reader's Digest (E)GJAZ-A-039. All titles, except (*), also on Definitive (And)DRCD11168 [CD]; date listed as February 2, 1942 on this CD; date listed here from Rust. All above titles also on RCA (F)ND89484 [CD].

[K2510]

New York, October 7, 1942

Original dixieland one-step Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD] Blue petite Classic Jazz CJ22

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TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

Note: This date would appear to be a false or dubbing date as the AFM strike was in force at this time.

[K2511]

John Kirby And His Orchestra : Charlie Shavers (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) George Johnson (as) Clyde Hart (p) John Kirby (b) Bill Beason (d)

. VP340 Do you savvy ?

. VP341 Tunisian trail Tunisian trail

VP434 9:20 special

VP434 Crossroads

New York, c. early November 1943

V-Disc 103, Alamac QSR2421, Classics (F)792 [CD]

- - - , DML (E)DJML049,

Trip TLP5802, Classics (F)792 [CD]

(unissued)

V-Disc 143, Jazz Panorama LP11, Joker 3112,

Classics (F)792 [CD]

V-Disc 143, Jazz Panorama LP11, Joker 3112,

Classics (F)792 [CD]

Associated transcriptions, New York, November 19, 1943

DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Jazz Unlimited

(Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2

[CD], Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Classic Jazz CJ22,

Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz Unlimited

(Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Jazz Unlimited

(Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Classic Jazz CJ22,

Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]

DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Classic Jazz CJ22,
Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]
DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Classic Jazz CJ22,
Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]
DJM (E)DJML049, Trip TLP5802, Classic Jazz CJ22,
Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz Unlimited
(Dan)JUCD2052 [CD]
Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz Unlimited
(Dan)JUCD2058 [CD]
Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz Unlimited
(Dan)JUCD2058 [CD]
Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz
Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2058 [CD]
Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz Unlimited
(Dan)JUCD2058 [CD]

[K2512]

Duke's idea It feels so good Shoo shoo baby

Tunisian trail Old fashioned love Birth of the blues Blue skies Manhattan serenade

Do you savvy ? Zoomin' at the zombie John Kirby special [J.K. special] Comin' back

Note: Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2058 [CD] titled "John Kirby and his Orchestra, Vol. 3"; see following session and August 18, 1944 for rest of CD.

[K2513]

[K2514]

Minute waltz At the crossroads Perdido

Peanut vendor

Associated transcriptions, New York, March 21, 1944

Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]
Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2058 [CD]
Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz
Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2058 [CD]
Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD], Jazz
Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2058 [CD]

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TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

John Kirby And His Orchestra : Dizzy Gillespie (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) prob George Johnson (as) unknown (ts) Clyde Hart (p) John Kirby (b) Bill Beason (d)

Broadcast "Aquarium Restaurant," New York, May 19, 1944

Close shave Taking a chance on love Yesterdays Honeysuckle rose I'm coming home Oh
what a beautiful morning Rose room Irresistible you Perdido

Note: Jazz Panorama titled "Jazz Of The Forties."

Jazz Panorama LP11, Masters of Jazz (F)MJCD86 [CD]

[K2515]

unknown location & date, poss from this period

Can't we be friends? V-Disc 883, Collector's (Swi)12-3, Classics (F)792 [CD]

Note: According to Sears "V-Discs," Charlie Shavers is not present.

[K2516]

Ben Webster (ts) added, replaces unknown (ts)

[K2517]

Broadcast, New York, May 22, 1944

I'm coming home Yesterdays Oh, what a beautiful morning Rose room

Dizzy Gillespie (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) George Johnson (as) Ben Webster (ts) Ram
Ramirez (p) John Kirby (b,dir) Bill Beason (d)

Irresistible you Perdido Rose room

Masters of Jazz (F)MJCD86 [CD]

-
-

Hot Lips Page (tp) replaces Dizzy Gillespie

Broadcast "Aquarium Restaurant," New York, May 24, 1944

[K2518]

[K2519]

K.C. caboose Passepied

Rose room No love, no nothin' Andiology

Jazz Panorama LP11

Broadcast, "Aquarium Restaurant," New York, June 21, 1944

Jazz Archives JA15, Cicala (It)BLJ8038, Archives
of Jazz 3801152 [CD]

Broadcast, New York, June 14, 1944

Note: Archives of Jazz 3801152 [CD] titled "Ben Webster-A tribute to a great jazzman";
see flwg sessions for more titles; rest of this CD by others.

[K2520]

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TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

Charlie Shavers (tp) replaces Hot Lips Page

Broadcast, "Aquarium Restaurant," New York, July 12, 1944

Amor K.C. caboose Honeysuckle rose (*) Passepied B flat special

Note: (*) This title also on Cicala (It)BLJ8038.

[K2521]

Jazz Archives JA15, Archives of Jazz 3801152 [CD]

- -

Charlie Shavers (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) George Johnson (as) Ben Webster (ts) Clyde Hart
(p) John Kirby (b) Bill Beason (d)

Associated transcriptions, New York, August 18, 1944

BL18 BL19 BL20 BL21

Note:

I'm scared (sv vcl) You go to my head (sv vcl) I can make you love me (sv vcl) It might
as well be spring (sv vcl)

Crown 107, Atl LP116

109, -

118 108, -

Desert night B flat special I'll make fun for you Amor 9:20 special Taking a chance on love Gavotte Kansas City caboose Boogie woogie Dengoza Passepied

Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]

Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]

Storyville (Dan)SLP4073, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]

Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]

-- Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]

-

Classic Jazz CJ22, Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]

-- Tax (Swd)CD3714-2 [CD]

-

Note: The recording date for some of these titles has also been listed as March 28, 1944 or April 18, 1944. All above titles also on Jazz Unlimited (Dan)JUCD2058 [CD].

[K2522]

Emmett Berry (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) George Johnson (as) Budd Johnson (ts) Ram Ramirez (p) John Kirby (b) Bill Beason (d)

New York, April 26, 1945

. 760 Passepied Asch

. 761 Mop mop

357-

357-2, Collector's (Swi)12-4, (Swi)5002

357-3, Alamac (It)QSR2421

357-1, - , Pol 580022

762 K.C. caboose

. 764 Maxine Dengoza

. 765 9:20 special

767 J.K. special

Asch

- , Collector's (Swi)

Asch 357-3, Alamac (It)QSR2421

-

12-4, (Swi)5002

Note: All above titles also on Classics (F)964 [CD] titled "John Kirby 1945-1946"; see flwg sessions to September 3, 1946 for rest of CD.

[K2523]

John Kirby And His Orchestra : Clarence Brereton (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) Russell Procope (as) Billy Kyle (p) John Kirby (b) Bill Beason (d) Sarah Vaughan (vcl)

New York, January 9, 1946

All above titles also on Riverside 2511, Gue G1418, Musidisc 30CV-1201, Spinorama 114, Scepter CTN18029, London (E)HBU1049, REU1065, Classics (F)964 [CD].

[K2524]

<http://www.lordisco.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/tjd/LeaderDetail?lid=14425> Page 11 of 12

TJD-Online: John Kirby 12/9/14, 11:50 AM

Shirley Moore (vcl) replaces Sarah Vaughan

New York, April 26, 1946

- . 366 Desert sands
- . 367 Move over
- . 368 Slowly (sm vcl)
- . 369 My old flame (sm vcl)
- . 370 Close shave

Disc 5043

5041

- 5042

- 371 Campus 5043

Freedom blues (1)

Note: (1) Issued as by "Buster Bailey's Six." All above titles also on Classics (F)964 [CD].

Baronet TR1

Apollo 762, Alamac QSR2421

[K2525]

R1058 R1059

Note:

New York, c. 1946

Sampson and De-lie-lah Natchez ball

Both above titles also on Classics (F)964 [CD].

[K2526]

George Tait (tp) Buster Bailey (cl) Hilton Jefferson (as) Hank Jones (p) John Kirby (b)
Bill Beason (d)

New York, September 3, 1946

- . BL22 Ripples
- . BL23 Peanut vendor boogie
- . BL24 Schubert's serenade
- . BL25 Sextette from Lucia

Crown 108 107

118, Allegro (E)ALL737

109

Note: All above titles also on London (E)HB-V1049, Classics (F)964 [CD].

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Appendix 3 – Complete Bibliography

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"Curfew Cuts LA Spot, Kirby in Weekends." *Down Beat*, April 1 1945 5

"Disc-Corner." *Schlagzeug*, #29 January 1960 36

"Glaser Handles John Kirby Unit." *Down Beat*, March 1 1944 1

"Hamp and Kirby Double at Door." *Down Beat*, October 15 1943 2

"John Kirby Clicking At Famous Door." *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 31 1938 16

"John Kirby disparaît." *Jazz Hot* #69 September 1952 18

"John Kirby död." *Orkester Journalen*, July 1952 6

"John Kirby In Boston's Copley." *Down Beat*, February 11 1946 22

"John Kirby May Turn on Heat." *Down Beat*, January 1 1944 16

"Kirby Band Returns." *Metronome*, March 1941 8

"Kirby Cuts Four New Victor Sides." *Down Beat*, August 15 1941 15

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Appendix 4 – List of Classically themed tunes recast by the Sextet.

- “Anitra’s Dance” – Grieg/Singer
- “Beethoven Riffs On” – Beethoven/Singer
- “Bounce of the Sugar Plum Fairy” – Tchaikovsky/Singer
- “Fantasy Impromptu” – Chopin/Young
- “Frasquita Serenade” – Lehar/Shavers
- “Gavotte” – Massenet/Singer

“Humoresque” – Dvorak/Young

“Natchez Ball “– Mendelssohn/Singer

“Nocturne” – Grisell/Young

“Prelude” (Charley’s Prelude/Prelude for Trumpet) – Chopin/Shavers

“Revolutionary Etude” – Chopin/Shavers

“Schubert’s Serenade”– Schubert/Shavers

“Sextet from Lucia – Donizetti/Singer

“Suite Bergamasque” – Debussy/Singer

“Toselli’s Serenade” – Toselli/Young

“Valse, Opus 64” (Minute Waltz) – Chopin/Young

Appendix 5 – Email and Phone interview transcripts

7 May 2015

From Alan Williams, grandson of John Kirby

“1. To answer your first question, I don't know. I found out that his music was in DC through Wayne Roberts. (*Disposition of his instrument*)

2. Kirby and Shavers left New York around March or April the year he died. Through the help of Benny Carter, he got some gigs on the West coast. I have to assume he had his bass with him then. According to the book, Procope was perhaps the last person to see him alive. And, according to Procope, they talked about getting things together again. Because Procope, Shavers and Benny Carter (who paid for the funeral and furnished the Smithsonian with Kirby's band book), I assume one of them would have known the disposition of the bass. I never pursued it. I also have to assume the tuxedos were rented. (*Disposition of band books and tuxedos*)

3. Kirby's social environment (Winchester approximately 20,000 residents, 700 were black and many were multi-racial) was the perfect place to cultivate his musical aspirations. He was raised by a black Baptist minister, he played piano, took up trumpet from Professor Powell Gibson and his biological father was white and from Baltimore. Kirby, like so many people who simple have a choice of colors, learned to use it to his advantage very early in his life. By the time he played for Fletcher Henderson he was a seasoned veteran. I found the story about Fletcher's gig in a Tidewater town very

interesting. Kirby's daughter (my mother - Yvonne) used to tell me stories about her "passing" situations. Good listening material. When you consider that fact that for most of Kirby's career - many musicians, writers, entrepreneurs, managers, etc., thought he was white.

(Comments on Passing)

I hope this helps. Email me anytime. Also if you know any good attorneys, let me know. I am the executor of the John Kirby estate at Sony Music.

Stay in touch."

9 May 2015

Phone interview with Wayne Roberts, selected notes

- 1982 earned Master's from Julliard
- First introduced to Kirby by an older female Jazz record collector on his street about 1990
- He had never heard of any "bass player leaders" and thought "right away, this guy plays nothing like my early influences Slim and Slam" especially in his use of the more modern technique of using the side of the fingers instead of the tips.
- Around 1996 began the process of assembling charts and musicians and transcribing tunes using a cassette player and manuscript paper and a piano
- With John Coliani on European Broadway tour in 1996, he read rough versions of the tunes. Later the same with Kenny Washam and Warren Vache.
- Back in New York, secured a gig for the "new" sextet at the Firebird Café. Phil Shaff was in attendance
- Roberts also mentioned O'Neill Spencer's fast hands on "Beethoven Riffs On" and "Sweet Georgia Brown."
- Regarding the Sextet's influence on later styles, Roberts points to the obvious three way influence of Charlie Shavers, Roy Eldridge and Dizzy Gillespie "particularly in their phrasing and use of chromaticism."

6 May 2015

Email with Claude Tissendier, European Jazz Clarinetist

"Dear colleague,

I am sorry but I am not very helpful.

1) Unfortunately I don't know anybody knowing deeply this music.

2) For transcribing, I used my ears alone in the first time. Some years later, I found a publication of some Shavers originals but they were lightly modified to be easier to play (specially the trumpet part). And at least, I went to Smithsonian and I photocopied all the parts. I never found any score.

3) I don't know anything about the Kirby's bass.

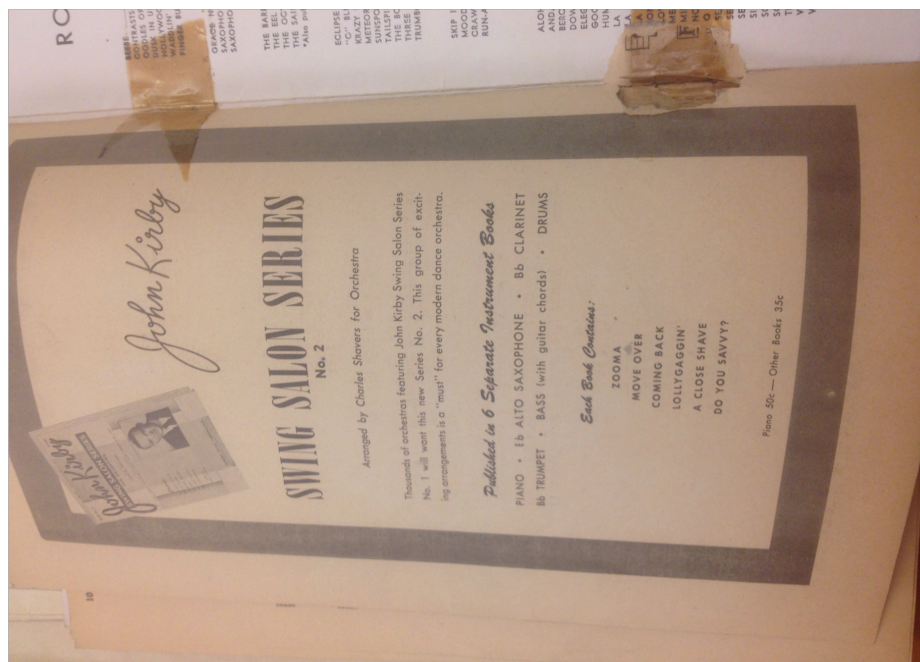
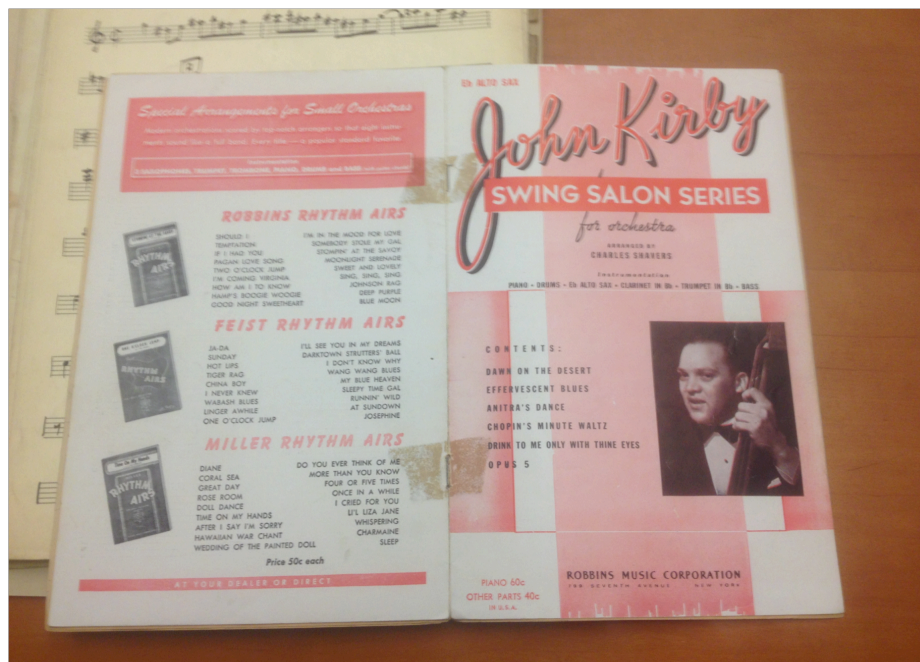
You can find a publication of "from Aflat to C" at Marina Music.

This music is so exciting: enjoy it !

Good luck, Claude Tissendier"

Appendix 6 – Rare Documents Of Note

From the Benny Carter Collection, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum Of American History, Washington D.C.



Plano ... Down on the Desert

[illegible]

Programs from both Carnegie Hall Performances April 23rd 1941 and December 22nd 1950.

SPIRITUAL	Water Boy Kenneth Spencer , Bass Calvin Jackson , Piano
CHARLES GOUNOD (1818–1893)	Faust: Il etait temps (Mephistopheles' Serenade) (1856–1859) Kenneth Spencer , Bass Calvin Jackson , Piano
CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)	Suite bergamasque: Clair de lune (iii) (1890) John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone Billy Kyle , Piano O'Neill Spencer , Drums
LOU SINGER (1912–1966)	Double Talk - A Fugue John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone Billy Kyle , Piano O'Neill Spencer , Drums
CHARLIE SHAVERS (1917–1971)	Rehearsin' for a Nervous Breakdown John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone Billy Kyle , Piano O'Neill Spencer , Drums
NICOLO PAGANINI (1782–1840)	Violin Concerto No. 2 in B Minor, Op. 7: La campanella (iii) (1826) Eddie South , Violin Stanley Facey , Piano
CYRIL SCOTT (1879–1970)	Two Pieces: Lotus Land, Op. 47, No. 1 (1905) Eddie South , Violin Stanley Facey , Piano
FRANK WORTH (1903–1990)	Valse Tzigane Eddie South Ensemble , Jazz Combo
FRANK ZIEGLER	Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 106 (1846–1851)

December 22nd 1950

CARNEGIE HALL

Friday, December 22, 1950 at 8:30 PM
Main Hall

John Kirby and His Band

Presenter: Unknown presenter

CHARLIE SHAVERS (1917–1971)	Pastel Blue John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
CHARLIE SHAVERS (1917–1971)	Undecided (1938) John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo Buster Bailey , Clarinet John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
CHARLIE SHAVERS (1917–1971)	Dawn on the Desert John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
CHARLIE SHAVERS (1917–1971)	Mover Over John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
TED C. GROUYA	Flamingo John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo Joe Bailey , Vocalist John Kirby , Contrabass

	Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
SPENCER WILLIAMS (1889–1965)	Royal Garden Blues John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
RICHARD RODGERS (1902–1979)	South Pacific: Bali Ha'i (1949) Juanita Hall , Vocalist
RICHARD RODGERS (1902–1979)	South Pacific: Happy Talk (1949) Juanita Hall , Vocalist
JUANITA HALL	Love Can Hurt You Juanita Hall , Vocalist
HARRY AKST (1894–1963)	Am I Blue (1929) Juanita Hall , Vocalist
WILBUR DE PARIS (1900–1973)	I'll Take that New Orleans Music Wilbur De Paris and His New Orleans Jazz Orchestra , Jazz Combo Wilbur De Paris , Trombone
JELLY ROLL MORTON (1890–1941)	Milenberg Joys Wilbur De Paris and His New Orleans Jazz Orchestra , Jazz Combo Wilbur De Paris , Trombone
WILBUR DE PARIS (1900–1973)	Call of the Blues Wilbur De Paris and His New Orleans Jazz Orchestra , Jazz Combo Wilbur De Paris , Trombone
SPENCER WILLIAMS (1889–1965)	I Found a New Baby (1925) Wilbur De Paris and His New Orleans Jazz Orchestra , Jazz Combo Wilbur De Paris , Trombone
FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)	Schubert's Serenade John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano

	Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
CHARLIE SHAVERS (1917–1971)	That's John Kirby's Chick John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
FOLK SONG	Otchi chernia ("Dark Eyes"; Russian) John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo Charlie Shavers , Trumpet John Kirby , Contrabass Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
HARRY WILLIAMS (1879–1922)	Rose Room (1917) John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
SID CATLETT (1910–1951)	Mop Mop Sid Catlett , Drums
CARRIE BOND (1862–1946)	I Love You Truly John Kirby and His Orchestra , Jazz Combo John Kirby , Contrabass Charlie Shavers , Trumpet Buster Bailey , Clarinet Billy Kyle , Piano Sid Catlett , Drums Russell Procope , Alto Saxophone
ANONYMOUS	Medley of Hit Recordings The Orioles , Vocal Ensemble
JELLY ROLL MORTON (1890–1941)	Tin Roof Blues Wilbur De Paris and His New Orleans Jazz Orchestra , Jazz Combo Wilbur De Paris , Trombone
WILLIAM H. TYERS (1876–1924)	Panama Wilbur De Paris and His New Orleans Jazz Orchestra , Jazz Combo Wilbur De Paris , Trombone