

Piano Blues Vol. 20 'Some piano player, I'll tell you that' Barrelhouse Years 1928-1933 (1984)

Written by bluesever

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1.- Pine Top Smith - Pine Top's Boogie Woogie 2.- Sparks Brothers - Down On The Levee
3.- Speckled Red - The Right String but The Wrong Yo Yo 4.- 'Boodle It' Wiggins - Evil Woman
Blues 5.- Turner Parrish - Fives 6.- Pinetop & Lindberg - Louisiana Bound 7.- Lonnie Clark -
Broke Down Engine 8.- Cow Cow Davenport - Slum Gullion Stomp 9.- 'Montana' Taylor -
Indiana Avenue Stomp 10.- Pine Top Smith - East Chicago Blues 11.- Speckled Red - The
Dirty Dozen no. 2 12.- 'Jabo' Williams - Fat Mama Blues 13.- Henry Brown & Ike Rodgers -
Blind Boy Blues 14.- Bert M. Mays - You Can't Come In 15.- Pine Top Smith - Pine Top Blues
16.- Davenport & Smith - Alabama Strut Pine Top Smith – piano, vocals (1,15) Aaron
'Pinetop' Sparks – piano (2,6,10) Speckled Red – piano, vocals (3,11) Bob Call – piano (4)
Turner Parrish – piano (5) Lonnie Clark – piano, vocals (7) Cow Cow Davenport – piano (8,16)
'Montana' Taylor – piano (9) 'Jabo' Williams – piano, vocal (12) Henry Brown – piano (13)
Bert M. Mays – piano, vocals (14) Milton Sarks – vocals (2,6,10) 'Boodle It' Wiggins – vocals
(4) Unknown mandolin (7) Ike Rodgers – banjo (13) Mary Johnson – speech (13) Ivy Smith –
speech (16)

Pianist Speckled Red (born Rufus Perryman) was born in Monroe, Louisiana, but he made his reputation as part of the St. Louis and Memphis blues scenes of the '20s and '30s. Red was equally proficient in early jazz and boogie-woogie -- his style was similar to Roosevelt Sykes and Little Brother Montgomery. Although born in Louisiana, Speckled Red was raised in Hampton, Georgia, where he learned how to play his church's organ. In his early teens, his family -- including his brother Willie Perryman, better known as Piano Red -- moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Throughout his childhood and adolescence he played piano and organ, and by the time he was a teenager he was playing house parties and juke joints.

In the mid-'20s Red moved to Detroit, where he played various nightclubs and parties. After a few years in Detroit he moved back south to Memphis. In 1929 he cut his first recording sessions. One song from these sessions, "The Dirty Dozens," was released on Brunswick and

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became a hit in late 1929. He recorded a sequel, "The Dirty Dozens, No. 2," the following year, but it failed to become a hit. After Red's second set of sessions failed to sell, the pianist spent the next few years without a contract -- he simply played local Memphis clubs. In 1938 he cut a few sides for Bluebird, but they were largely ignored.

In the early '40s Speckled Red moved to St. Louis, where he played local clubs and bars for the next decade and a half. In 1954 he was rediscovered by a number of blues aficionados and record label owners. By 1956 he had recorded several songs for the Tone record label and began a tour of America and Europe. In 1960 he made some recordings for Folkways. By this time, Red's increasing age was causing him to cut back the number of concerts he gave. For the rest of the '60s he only performed occasionally. Speckled Red died in 1973. --- Michael G. Nastos, Rovi

Aaron and Marion Sparks made a small number of records during the years 1932-1935 and deserve wider recognition for having introduced "61 Highway Blues," usually associated with Mississippi Fred McDowell, and "Every Day I Have the Blues," a staple of the genre credited to Memphis Slim and forever linked with Count Basie and his star vocalist Joe Williams. Their "I Believe I'll Make a Change" also established a trope that would soon become an essential component in the blues standard "Dust My Broom." Born to Sullie and Ruth Gant on May 22, 1908 in Tupelo, MS, the boys later took on the surname of Ruth's second husband, Carl Sparks. Aaron was a child prodigy who learned the blues from an elderly backroom whiskey peddler named Arthur Johnson. After the family relocated to St. Louis in 1920, Aaron received formal musical training at school and later developed his abilities as a blues and barrelhouse pianist by performing in speakeasies. The Sparks Brothers were dark-skinned identical twins who grew to nearly six feet tall. Aaron is remembered as fairly docile, while Marion's hot temper often embroiled him in fistfights. Both men dealt in bootleg liquor and had police records to prove it. Marion in particular was busted more than 50 times; mostly for gambling, drinking, and disturbing the peace. Their first records were cut in Atlanta, GA on February 25, 1932, using the nicknames Pinetop (Aaron's way of hopefully identifying himself with Clarence Pinetop Smith) and Lindberg, which spoke to Marion's oft-noted ability to dance the Lindy Hop. On August 2, 1933 The Sparks Brothers and several singers from St. Louis followed Roosevelt Sykes to Chicago for a Victor/Bluebird session during which the opening line from "Every Day I Have the Blues" (sung by Elizabeth Washington on "Whiskey Blues") and "61 Highway" made their first appearance on records. On August 24, 1934 Marion Sparks recorded as Flyin' Lindburg with fiddler Bill Lowry and pianist Peetie Wheatstraw. The Sparks Brothers' last known recording date took place on July 28, 1935. Paired with guitarist Henry Townsend, Aaron recorded as Pine Top and Marion as Milton Sparks. Aaron sang on his own sides (one of which is the earliest recording of "Every Day I Have the Blues" under that title) and two of Marion's

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performances have piano accompaniment by Walter Davis. Aaron continued to gig throughout the region, working the 88s at innumerable house parties; in St. Louis saloons with names like the Hole in the Wall and the Dirty Inn, and gigging all over Bloomington, IL with fellow pianist Arthur Henderson. Theories abound as to how much longer Aaron lived after July 1935; the most generous estimate suggests he lasted another ten years before succumbing to alcoholism and other occupational hazards. After serving time for manslaughter following a fracas at a dance in 1936, Marion settled down, got a steady job with a construction crew, and became a mild-mannered, churchgoing husband. He passed away in 1963. Aside from two sides on which Aaron backed Charlie Specks McFadden, the complete recordings of The Sparks Brothers were reissued on one CD by the Document label in 1994. --- arwulf arwulf, Rovi

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