

## Stuff Smith - The Complete Verve Stuff Smith Sessions (1999)

Written by bluesever

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### Stuff Smith - The Complete Verve Stuff Smith Sessions (1999) (4CD BoxSet)



DISC 1 01. *Hillcrest* (3:42) 02. *The Blues I Know* (5:31) 03. *Skip It* (4:05) 04. *Uh Ruh* (3:32) 05. *My Thoughts* (3:44) 06. *Live And You'll Learn* (4:52) 07. *Night Falls Again* (5:35) 08. *Minuet In Swing* (3:02) [play](#) 09. *Midway* (4:01) 10. *I Lost My Heart By The River* (5:48) 11. *Won't You Take A Lesson In Love?* (4:13) 12. *What I Say* (4:37) 13. *It's Wonderful* (4:03) 14. *Coming Through The Rye* (2:43) 15. *Ja-Da* (4:01)

#### DISC 2

01. *Indiana* (3:25) 02. *Blow Blow Blow* (5:28) 03. *Calypso* (5:31) 04. *I Wrote My Song* (3:19) 05. *Oh, But It Is* (4:18) 06. *Stop-Look* (3:24) 07. *Would You Object?* (2:31)

#### [play](#)

08. *Crazy Rhythm* (2:25) 09. *Rio Pakistan* (11:31) 10. *It's Only A Paper Moon* (8:30) 11. *Purple Sounds* (10:11) 12. *Russian Lullaby* (7:59) 13. *Oh, Lady Be Good* (4:10)

#### DISC 3

01. *Desert Sands* (8:15) 02. *Soft Winds* (6:12)

#### [play](#)

03. *Time And Again (aka, Don't You Think?)* (7:04) 04. *It Don't Mean A Thing* (4:28) 05. *In A Mellotone* (9:53) 06. *I Know That You Know* (9:38) 07. *Heat Wave* (7:29) 08. *Things Ain't What They Used To Be* (6:20) 09. *Body And Soul* (10:27)

#### DISC 4

01. *"S Wonderful* (3:46) 02. *A Foggy Day* (3:19) 03. *I Loves You Porgy* (3:21) 04. *Somebody Loves Me* (3:42) 05. *Strike Up The Band* (2:55) 06. *Oh, Lady Be Good* (2:21) 07. *Crazy Rhythm* (2:49) 08. *The Man I Love* (3:45) 09. *They Can't Take That Away From Me* (5:10) 10. *Love Is Here To Stay* (3:47) 11. *Nice Work If You Can Get It* (4:05) 12. *Old Joe's Hittin The Jug* (2:38) 13. *Blue Violin* (3:05) 14. *Undecided* (2:40) 15. *Nice And Warm* (3:16)

#### [play](#)

16. *Take The A Train* (4:13) 17. *The Red Jumps (take 1)* (2:45) 18. *Up Jumps Sally (tk 11)* (2:24) 19. *Tenderly* (7:10) 20. *Play (aka, Timme's Blues)* (3:50)

Personnel: Oscar Lee Bradley Drums Dudley Brooks Piano Ray Brown Bass Sid Bulkin Drums Kenny Burrell Guitar Frank Butler Drums Red Callender Bass Curtis Counce Bass Dizzy Gillespie Trumpet J.C. Heard Drums Chris Herles Transfers Milt Hinton Bass Shirley Horn Piano Osie Johnson Drums Jimmy Jones Piano Wynton Kelly Piano Barney Kessel Guitar Red Mitchell Bass Ray Nance Vocals Carl Perkins Piano Oscar Peterson Piano Harry Saunders Drums Paul Smith Piano Stuff Smith Violin, Vocals Alvin Stoller Drums Paul E. West Bass

Joe Venuti, Stephane Grappelli, Sven Asmussen, and Eddie South were all great violinists, but their styles were, to varying degrees, tied to legitimate technique. Stuff Smith was the first to develop a purely jazz conception for the instrument. Influenced by Armstrong and others, Smith developed an approach that featured a foreshortened bow-stroke that he felt helped him phrase like a horn. He also modified the classical vibrato along the lines of Louis. But mere technical considerations don't explain the most apparent aspect of his music; he swung harder than not only any other fiddler, but as hard as pretty much anyone you can think of. He achieved prominence when he formed the Onyx Club Boys in 1936. This sextet, which teamed Smith with (Jonah) Jones, was as much jive as jazz, but no one ever said that Fats Waller wasn't great, and the best late-'30's Smith is just as irresistible.

Like many of his generation, Smith had been largely forgotten by the Fifties, but this set should help clarify his position as not just a great swinger but a musical free spirit whose style transcended the swing-to-bop barrier and flirted at times with the avant garde. He certainly didn't mind breaking rules when it came to harmony, his penchant for parallel fifth double-stops being the most obvious example.

He often gets himself into corners that seem inescapable, only to work his way back out by staying his course.

The best of Smith's Verve work, if not his best ever, occurs on the sessions that pair him and Dizzy Gillespie. Both were adventurous, extroverted swingers, and they obviously relished playing together. The rhythm section of Wynton Kelly, Paul West, and J. C. Heard is a perfect blend of swing and modern styles, with Kelly in particularly good form, a big boost to any session. Another great modern blues piano man, Carl Perkins, is catalyst on the quartet sessions originally issued as *Have Violin, Will Swing*, and his presence is also a huge plus. For someone whose approach was so well-defined, Perkins certainly fit well with varied performers. You would think he and Smith had worked together for years.

Two sessions featured a drumless trio, with Dudley Brooks or Jimmy Jones at piano, and somehow this excellent work has remained unissued until now. The elegant Jones had in fact worked extensively with Smith and understood his harmonic thinking well. The sessions used for the album *Stuff Smith* find our protagonist at the helm of a typical Verve group with Oscar Peterson, Barney Kessel, Ray Brown and Alvin Stoller. *Cat on a Hot Fiddle* started out as a

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Gershwin project with a young Shirley Horn on vocals and piano, but evidently the concept was changed and a second quartet session with non-Gershwin material was held. Five unused tracks from these sessions, as well as four very interesting tracks from an unfinished collaboration with Ray Nance, are issued here for the first time. Smith, like most soloists, is heard to best advantage when he is in harness with other lead horses. Even Kessel in unremarkable form sounds good as a foil. We could wish for other blowers of Dizzy's class, but apart from the unmemorable vocal or two, this is all top-flight mainstream jazz. --- Duck Baker, jazztimes.com

It is a shame that Stuff Smith did not live to see the revival of interest in swing violin due to his premature death in 1967, almost three decades prior to the passing of fellow violinist Stephane Grappelli. Almost all of Smith's recordings languished out of print until a two-CD set finally appeared on Verve, soon followed by this more complete four-CD Mosaic collection of Smith's recordings for the label, which adds three completely unissued sessions and five additional previously unreleased tracks.

The first two studio dates were scheduled for release but never put out by Verve, yet the music is simply astonishing. Smith is in top form throughout all ten sessions. The supporting cast is tremendous: pianists include Jimmy Jones, Carl Perkins, Oscar Peterson, Wynton Kelly, Shirley Horn (who was overlooked and credit was originally given to John Eaton, who likely appears on two tracks), and Paul Smith. Bassists include Red Callendar, Curtis Counce, Ray Brown, Red Mitchell, and Milt Hinton; other important musicians are Dizzy Gillespie, Barney Kessel, Alvin Stoller, J. C. Heard, Kenny Burrell, and fellow violinist Ray Nance. Smith plays quite a few enjoyable originals (including his blazing "Hillcrest," the very catchy "Calypso," and the exotic "Desert Sands"), but he also covers an extensive collection of Gershwin songs and other standards from some of the best composers of the Great American Songbook, and classic songs from the playbooks of Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson. While some tracks are clearly stronger performances than others, there is not one song that won't be devoured eagerly by fans of Smith's swinging jazz violin. The detailed liner notes and rare session photographs add to the considerable value of this limited-edition boxed set, which should be considered an essential acquisition by fans of swing. --- Ken Dryden, allmusic.com

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