

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

Presents

BEETHOVEN RIFFS ON

RECORDED BY THE JOHN KIRBY SEXTET

ARRANGED BY LOU SINGER

PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY DYLAN CANTERBURY, ROB DUBOFF, AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

FULL SCORE

JLP-5038

MUSIC BY LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN AND LOU SINGER

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JOHN KIRBY SEXTET SERIES

BEETHOVEN RIFFS ON (1941)

Background:

The John Kirby Sextet is one of the more unique and interesting - and sadly brief - success stories of the swing era. Kirby was born in 1908 and spent most of his early years in the Baltimore area. By the late 1920s he was in New York City, playing tuba with various bands, including Fletcher Henderson's. As tuba began to fall out of favor as a primary instrument in jazz, Kirby switched to bass, and soon was playing with Chick Webb and Billie Holiday.

In 1937, Kirby's efforts led to his leading a group at The Onyx Club, one of the mainstays of New York City's 52nd Street, then home to one of the jazz world's all-time most important scenes. Consisting of Kirby, trumpeter/arranger Charlie Shavers, alto saxophonist Russell Procope, clarinetist Buster Bailey, pianist Billy Kyle, and drummer O'Neill Spencer, this group soon began receiving major attention from critics, fans, and other musicians. With some Dixieland roots and beginning their run during the rise of swing, they eventually came to be referred to as "chamber jazz," due to their classical influences and the tremendous interplay between the musicians. Kirby's desire was to establish a truly unique ensemble, distinguished by both individual musicianship and group execution, and to bring symphonic pieces to jazz audiences. Our good friend Nat Hentoff might have said it best: "A unit which was so together that other musicians would come to marvel at the collective precision of it all—the subtlety of dynamics, the stunning ensemble virtuosity, the way the soloist was so integral a part of the continually floating, soaring, driving, whizzing whole."

Shavers was a big part of the band's sound, as his arranging style was ideal to help flesh out and complete the vision Kirby and the others had for the band. Described by Scott Yanow as "a virtuoso with an open-minded and extroverted style," Shavers's bold solos along with his singular and beautiful charts—and the band's ability to execute them—were major factors in the critical and commercial success the group was to achieve. Jazz Lines' Dylan Canterbury says that Shavers's charts "feature an almost baroque quality to their interweaving, chromatic melody lines and softly textured harmony." Shavers wrote the song *Undecided* for the band and it became a hit and a standard, first recorded by the Kirby band.

Referred to as "The Biggest Little Band in the Land," the Kirby Sextet was hugely popular during the late 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, but the World War II era saw the gradual decline of the group. Kyle and Procope served in the armed forces, and health problems plagued O'Neill, who would die from tuberculosis in 1944. By 1945 Shavers was playing with Tommy Dorsey, and only Kirby and Bailey remained from the original lineup that rocketed to success and stardom less than a decade earlier. Kirby tried to keep the band together, but by 1946 it was largely finished. There was a 1950 reunion concert at Carnegie Hall, but it was poorly attended and was a major disappointment for Kirby. Suffering from diabetes which was exacerbated by drinking, Kirby died in Hollywood in 1952 at age 43.

It takes a unique convergence of circumstances for a band to achieve what the John Kirby Sextet did. The group's combination of great talents with varied experience, outsized personalities, and the rare abilities to both shine as soloists as well as work beautifully as accompanists was rare. Combined with their fusing Dixieland, swing, and classical themes and the experience and exposure of 52nd Street during its peak era led the group to great heights during its run. Sadly, they are not as well remembered today as they should be. Exciting, tremendously original, and elegant, the music of the John Kirby Sextet has a place in the pantheon of great jazz, and we are very proud to bring this music to you in its original form.

Doug DuBoff

June 2023



BASS

BEETHOVEN RIFFS ON

FAST

Above is the original bass part that was used by John Kirby for the 1941 recording of *Beethoven Riffs On*.

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BRIGHT SWING ♩ = 240

CLARINET

ALTO SAX

TRUMPET

GUITAR (OPTIONAL)

PIANO

BASS

DRUMS

(IN 2) Cm⁶ Cm⁶/B^b Cm⁶/A Cm⁶/G Cm⁶ Cm⁶/B^b Cm⁶/A Cm⁶/G

(IN 2) Cm⁶ Cm⁶/B^b Cm⁶/A Cm⁶/G Cm⁶ Cm⁶/B^b Cm⁶/A Cm⁶/G

(IN 2) Cm⁶ Cm⁶/B^b Cm⁶/A Cm⁶/G Cm⁶ Cm⁶/B^b Cm⁶/A Cm⁶/G

(4)

1 2 3 4

CL.

A. SX.

GTR. (OPT.)

PNO.

BS.

DR.

Cm^6 Cm^6/B^b Cm^6/A Cm^6/G Cm^6 Cm^6/B^b Cm^6/A Cm^6/G

Cm^6 Cm^6/B^b Cm^6/A Cm^6/G Cm^6 Cm^6/B^b Cm^6/A Cm^6/G

(8)

5 6 7 8