



Cash Box

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insight&sound

HOLLYWOOD—BARNEY KESSEL: SAILOR ON DRY LAND

Your name is **Barney Kessel** and you don't need a Tijuana Small to know who you are. You picked up your first guitar and tried it on for size when you were 12. It cost 99 cents and you earned it selling newspapers on the streets in Muskogee, Oklahoma in '35. Since then you've sat in with some of the all time redolent jazz giants, guys like **Goodman** and **Petersen**, **Armstrong** and **Shavers**, **Young** and **Krupa**, **Hodges** and **Manne** and **Edison** and **Carter**. You've captured more polls than a panzer division.

Critics usually reach for words like "inspired" and "definitive" when reviewing your albums. You've cut 26 of them on your own in the past twenty years. Now you're about to tape another, one that for lesser talents would be a frightening challenge. But for a guy who has backed almost every recording artist in the world, from **Chevalier** to **Tex Ritter**, the **Righteous Bros.** to **Ginny Simms**, **Astaire** to **Mahalia Jackson**, you figure it's only a matter of drawing on related skills.

You started playing simple oakie songs and mountain music, the sounds that made Muskogee, Okla. Muskogee, Okla. Your first paycheck came from radio station KBIX and you sang and doubled on the mouth organ—tunes like "Red River Valley" and "Strawberry Roan." But a trombonist friend introduced you to the recorded sounds of **Lunceford**, **Basie**, **Goodman** and **Shaw**. Jazz became your "thing" and you started collecting sides by **Charlie Christian** and **Duke**. In '39 you toured with **Louis Welk** (a cousin of Lawrence's), working in North Dakota and Canada. In '42, realizing that to become a professional musician meant moving to L.A. or N.Y., you arrived here not knowing a soul, without a cent in your pocket. You worked as a dishwasher in a drive-in, jamming with local musicians.

A year with **Chico Marx'** big jazz band, another with **Artie Shaw**. In '45 you returned to L.A. to become a free lance musician, a member of the local union and to get in on the "cream" work as a studio guitarist. Since then you've worked in the movie studios, produced and orchestrated several hit sides (including **Rickey Nelson's** first "I'm Walkin'" and **Julie London's** "Cry Me a River"), appeared on national radio and tv shows and been associated with a staggering amount of important people in the business. You're a composer, arranger, A&R man and, along with the late **Wes Montgomery**, considered to be the most accomplished jazz guitarist in our trade. You have toured world's capitals as a featured artist. You've been in some big towns and heard you some big talk. And there is one thing you know.

That all the music that has lived down through the ages is the music that grew in the hearts of people—where they sang it on the street, where they whistled it—where it was in the people before there were instruments.

Now you're working with producer **Jay Spenter** and the **Spencer Davis-Peter Jameson** group, guys involved with a contemporary sound, not alien to jazz, but certainly harder and more amplified. It was Senter, at Spencer's suggestion, who approached you to join the combo for a series of concerts and, eventually, an album or two. Senter feels that your experiences can relate to the contemporary scene, that there is a pool of knowledge that is within you that can be tapped as a documentary of today. You know you don't want to play the way you did 20 years ago. That playing today's music is a matter of orientation, of drawing on your resources—like a sailor used to war tactics who is suddenly commanded to be a foot soldier—with a new uniform but still, utilizing those same brains with the same objectives. It's not a matter of trading jazz for rock or progressive for C&W. It's a matter of a guy who has learned his craft. Of channeling, omitting, stressing values. Relating. That is, communicating.

It's a matter of getting inside the minds of Spencer and Jameson. Knowing them. What's inside their heads, not their fingers. It goes beyond learning licks and passages. You're experimenting. Switching guitars—an SG3 or a Telecaster? Hours of rehearsal. You tested it in Long Beach a couple of months ago, without fanfare and reviewers. The crowd approved—three encores following an hour and a half set. This week you're at the Troubadour. An eternity between smoke clogged bistros. But for Barney Kessel, who has stored up 33 years of musical emotions, it's another gig.



Barney Kessel