

the only way I can describe it.

SL: 'Rebel Rouser' was in 'Forrest Gump'. Does that make you rich all over again?

DE: No, I think it made Jamie rich! (laughs) I was tricked out of my royalties a long time ago and, apart from some money for the writing, I didn't get anything from that. My wife and I were watching 'Forrest Gump' and all of a sudden here comes 'Rebel Rouser', which was a real surprise. I missed the next couple of minutes of the movie because I was figuring out which version they used and how it was mastered and if it sounded right, and I was very pleased by that. I had to go back and see it again to find out what I'd missed.

SL: You did a film score for 'Broken Arrow'...

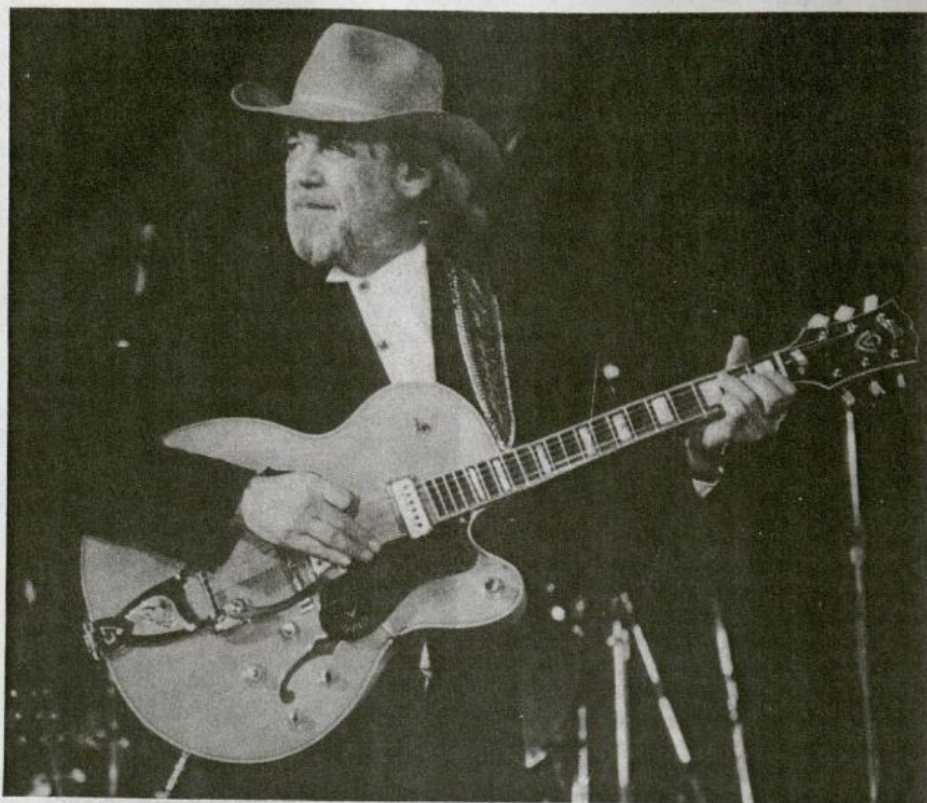
DE: Hans Zimmer rang me and asked me if I would play on this movie track that he was doing. He said, "I would like you to be the music for the bad guy" and I said, "Who's the bad guy?" He said, "John Travolta" (laughs) and it worked out great.

SL: Your new album, 'Ghost Rider', is co-produced with Bob Gaudio from The Four Seasons...

DE: I've known Bob since 1958 when he was with The Royal Teens doing 'Short Shorts'. Then he went to The Four Seasons and we've worked on a few shows down the years. It was fun to see him again and he'd become a successful record producer in the meantime. He said that an instrumental album would be an interesting challenge for him. He wanted to capture the essence of the old records but with a new sound and I think he succeeded.

SL: Had you done 'Ghost Riders In The Sky' before?

DE: I thought about doing it for a long time, but this was the first time I got round to it. We started with a synthesiser and had it build up with jet sounds. We thought they would be more appropriate for the '90s than the cowboys and the cattle. We kept the use of voices to a minimum as we wanted a ghostly sound. We've done it on a TV show over here and that worked out very well, so I'll be putting it in the set.



Duane Eddy - the No. 1 rock n roll instrumentalist with 21 Top 40 hits in the U.K. and 15 in the U.S. (Photo courtesy of Spencer Leigh)

SL: Do you ever see Lee Hazlewood?

DE: We haven't worked together since the '70s but we are thinking of writing some things as he is back in this country, living out west. He is sitting on his ASCAP these days, he gets a lot of money from his old royalties as he wrote a lot of other songs like 'These Boots Are Made For Walkin'' for Nancy Sinatra and 'Houston' for Dean Martin.

SL: Are you coming over here soon?

DE: I would hope so. It's been three years and it's

time for me to return. I would like to do some shows in 1997.

SL: Thanks for answering my questions so fully.

DE: Thanks for talking to me. Take care.

(Thanks to Duane Eddy and Stuart Colman and hello to Arthur Moir, the secretary of the Duane Eddy Circle and editor of the informative fanzine, 'Twangsville'. Contact Arthur at PO Box 203, Sheffield, S1 1XU.)

=Twang!

BARNEY KESSEL

Life On The Third Floor

No-one would deny that Barney Kessel is one of the world's finest guitarists. He is primarily known for his work as a jazz musician, both in his own right and accompanying such luminaries as Ella Fitzgerald and Charlie Parker. His day-to-day income, however, often came from studio recordings with rock n roll performers such as The Coasters, The Platters, Elvis Presley and many others.

I spoke to Barney Kessel for BBC Radio Merseyside when he came to the UK on a tour with Charlie Byrd and Herb Ellis. He was an impressive speaker but he wanted to talk about jazz records and not rock n roll. As the interview progressed, I got more daring and eventually Barney was giving me the answers I wanted and the interview he didn't want to give. As I left his hotel room, he said to me, "You got what you came for, but when you broadcast the interview, please leave in some questions about jazz." I was happy to do this, but now for the first time and for this guitar issue of 'Now Dig This', I am reproducing the full text of what Barney Kessel had to say about his rock n roll days. You may not agree with what he says, but bear in mind that (1) he was there and (2) in terms of sheer musical ability, he outclassed everyone else in the room. Oh, and (3), Barney Kessel may be a supreme musician but he wears the most garish sports jackets I have ever seen. Good taste doesn't run to everything.

In recent years, Barney Kessel has suffered a stroke. The 73-year-old musician is wheelchair-bound and it is doubtful if he will play the guitar again. This must be devastating for someone whose life has been dedicated to playing the guitar.

SL: I first came across your work with the Oscar Peterson Trio. That called for a lot of fast guitar work...

BK: Well, fast is only a part of it. The fastness, incidentally, is what the young guitarists respond to. They think that this is flash, and that flash equals with good. It's only when you're more mature that you realise that it's not how fast you play but what you are saying that counts. If your taste is bad and you have no musical sense but you can play fast, it simply means you can play more rubbish than somebody else. It has no content, no

BARNEY KESSEL interviewed by SPENCER LEIGH

value. Far more players play fast than have a good sense of time, which is one of the rarest commodity in guitar players. There was, incidentally, a guitar player in Nashville who didn't know that the Les Paul records had been speeded up by technology. He spent several

months trying to copy those things at an impossible speed and he ended up in hospital.

SL: Quite often you take a well-known song and improvise upon it...

BK: Well, this is what most jazz people do. It is not living in the past but we find these songs - the songs of Kern, Gershwin, Porter and Berlin - so superior to most of the songs today. If you're going to do a play, you might as well do Shakespeare as there is so much more content to it. I just want to play beautiful songs that have been well conceived by someone with good musical taste. 90% of what I hear today is rubbish. It is only made for the money. It is made to sell sexual innuendoes and to appeal to a drug-oriented society and these songs have no appeal to me. I'm living in the present, but I do like old songs. This is not because of nostalgia, they are simply the best. Good music is timeless, just like Shakespeare, just like Keats and Byron, just like the Rolls-Royce automobile and Sir Laurence Olivier. Time does not deteriorate their worth.

SL: And yet Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra have recorded contemporary songs...

BK: Who knows what their motive was? It might be that they liked them, it might be that the producer insisted that they did that to sell records, it might be that they felt intimidated and said, "I want to reach younger people so I'm going to do something they will identify with." If Frank or Ella did those songs for any reason other than they wanted to do them and they loved them, then they were not true to themselves.

SL: Many would say that you take lovely songs and go away from the melody by improvising.

BK: Anyone who improvises goes away from the melody, but there is an art to improvising that doesn't show disrespect for the song, it re-establishes the song. You have to have imagination and good taste. Some play 'Yankee Doodle' in the middle of some beautiful tune and they are showing off, showing us how clever they are, and that is bad taste.

SL: A lot of your music is based on the blues...

BK: I play blues but in a jazz tradition. Blues reminds me of a deck of cards. There are any number of games you can play, and those cards can be used in many different cultures. Blues is a part of every musical form in western civilisation - in jazz, country, rock n roll, avant garde, heavy metal, whatever. Some use it very primitively and some intellectually with many chord changes. The structure of the blues is such that it offers great flexibility. Sometimes I'll play a slow blues and it's the Barney Kessel who grew up in Muskogee with the black people, sometimes it's the Barney Kessel who played with Benny Goodman and sometimes it's the guy who played be-bop with Charlie Parker. I am not a blues player but the blues is one of the colours in my palette. I'm not wearing sunglasses called the blues, but I play the blues and I love 'em.

SL: Am I right in saying that you played the guitar on Julie London's 'Cry Me A River'?

BK: Yes, I did the whole album, 'Julie Is Her Name', and that was the only song that we spontaneously recorded the day I learned the song. Everything else on that record we had been playing for ten weeks in a night-club so it was very slick, we had it under our fingers. The writer of 'Cry Me A River' had had it for a while and had not found a place for it. It had a special magical quality and I knew it could be a hit. It had honesty, no gimmicks and a certain amount of beauty and simplicity, how more simple can you get than a bass, guitar and voice? The more intimate and personal a recording sounds, the more it sounds as though it is being performed for you. I don't say this to brag, but the way that I played on that album led to an entirely different way to play the guitar by many other guitarists, and that is to treat the guitar as though it were a miniature orchestra. When I'm playing for her, I'm playing textures and harmonies along with the bass that normally a whole orchestra would be playing.

SL: You wrote a US Top 20 hit for Ricky Nelson, 'You're My One And Only Love', and you must have been one of the first musicians to work with him...

BK: I was the first, yeah. I was an A&R man for Verve Records, and Norman Granz wanted me to go into the pop field as well as jazz. He had to make pop records so that the distributors would be more interested in the label. I signed Ricky Nelson when he was 16 - I had to go through his father - and my strategy was simply to make money, to sell records. He was very popular on his parents' TV show and he was a very cute kid. I thought the public would buy anything he did but I tried to make it as good as I could. He'd had no experience as a singer and I chose the Fats Domino song, 'I'm Walkin', because he did that better than the rest. It had a limited range, so he could sing it with more assurance. I wrote a song for the other side which was 'You're My One And Only Love'.

SL: Are you playing lead guitar on the record?

BK: No, I'm in the booth directing the orchestra. There was a wonderful guitarist who played on that though, Merle Travis. He played the same style as Chet Atkins, only he was doing it first. James Burton came along later and I liked what he did on 'Hello Mary Lou'.

SL: In the '50s and '60s were you playing sessions some of the time and doing jazz the rest?

BK: Yes, but most of the time it was working

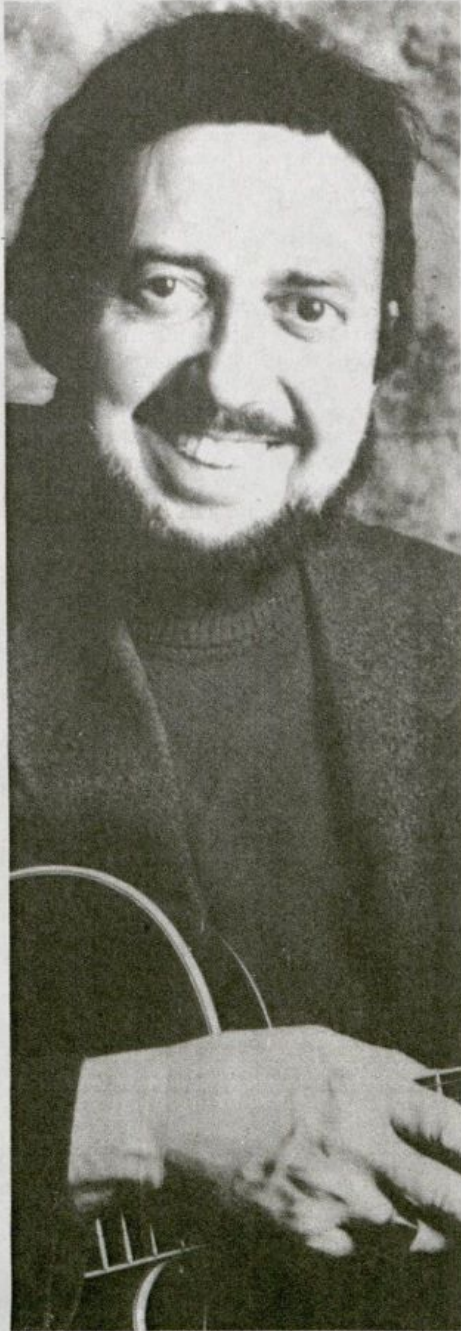
sessions. Not only sessions but the whole gamut of freelance work - commercials for dog food and shampoo and playing in orchestras for dramas. I was selling my musical services, doing whatever I could. It's like having a barber's shop - I was looking for clients to fill the chairs.

SL: Is there anything you're proud of from those days?

BK: Not particularly, it was a means to an end. I liked the people and I didn't dislike the work. If I'd disliked the work, I wouldn't have been there. It would have been madness to go to work each day and be tearing your hair out and not be able to stand it, but it didn't offer me much and I wouldn't classify most of the performers I worked with as professional musicians. They weren't serious about playing music. They were trying to make a lot of money and at the same time trying to live a bizarre life-style. Also, very few of them exhibited any discipline of any kind. They didn't spend any time with their instruments, they didn't practice, they were looking for something that would catapult them to success - a particular way to scream on a record or a distorted sound, anything that didn't require good musicianship. A lot of them sang out of tune and played out of tune and didn't have a good sense of time.

SL: Did you work with Elvis Presley?

BK: Yes, Elvis was a very nice young man with



BARNEY KESSEL (Photo: Jim Marshall)

HOT JUKEBOX ROCKERS!

SONNY WEST

Rock-Ola Ruby

RAY COLEMAN & THE SKYROCKETS

Jukebox Rock n Roll

BILL HALEY & THE SADDLEMEN

Jukebox Cannonball

THE COOK BROTHERS

Jukebox Play For Me

Now available on the Rollercoaster EP

'ROCKIN' THE JUKEBOX'

(RCEP 121)

good manners, but he had trouble in relating to musicians outside his entourage. He was always prepared for our sessions we did and I thought he had a nice voice, especially on the ballads. He had simple tastes and he liked fast takeaway foods - he used to put peanuts in his Coke and he wouldn't have understood the menu in a French restaurant.

SL: Did Elvis strike you as being creative?

BK: No. Most of what he did was emulating black artists in terms of body movements and in terms of singing, but he gained acclaim because here was a white man doing this. Elvis Presley is copying a lot of black artists from the past, but if people want to respond to the third carbon copy of a letter rather than the original that was written, that's their business.

SL: Did he have a lot of presence when he walked in the room?

BK: Yes, but I wasn't in awe of him. I prefer to be in awe of someone with a deeper talent than that. What he did, he did well but he's on the third floor of a magnificent building when the penthouse is on the 80th floor. He's the King of the Third Floor but Shakespeare, Olivier, Marlon Brando, Charlie Parker and the Rolls-Royce automobile are in the penthouse. They're original: the others are doing something that has already been done. Elvis Presley was reading a speech that had already been written and was claiming it as his own. If you read a speech by Sir Winston Churchill, it can have merit if you have a well-modulated voice and you can read it with expression, but you cannot take credit for having conceived the text - and the text is the meat of it. People like Elvis Presley are selling the razzmatazz, the glitter, they are selling the wrapping on the package and in their case, when you open the package, there is very little inside.

SL: What was it like being part of Phil Spector's Wall of Sound?

BK: It was merely a job. Phil Spector had three of everything - three basses, three pianos, three drummers, but he hardly ever had large string sections or lots of brass. He'd try to get a sound so that you couldn't tell which bass was which. A lot of it was trial and error - he would say, "Can you try this in a shuffle rhythm next?" If he liked it, he'd buy it and if not, he'd ask us to do something else. He knew when he heard what he wanted, and I do think that 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin' is one of the best records of its type. It was difficult to make as when you work with a lot of musicians, you compound the possibilities of errors. A lot of people would come down as friends to see what he was doing. They came down as friends but they stole his techniques. Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys came down and he was there to steal, and so was Sonny Bono. A lot of people call him a genius, but the fact that you can make records and make money doesn't make you a genius. If you call Phil Spector a genius, then what word are you going to use for Tchaikovsky?