

Buddy Truax

Music

Man

A black and white photograph of Buddy Truax, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark shirt, playing an acoustic guitar. He is looking down at the instrument. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

featuring
Buddy Truax on guitar, fiddle, & vocals

~
**with Barb (Truax) Izzo, The Playboys, Don Fields
& His Pony Boys, & others**

Among the hundreds of musicians who have favored WDEV with their talents, few could match Buddy Truax – a great guitarist who over the years only became better, whether it was jazz, pop, or country music. He always downplayed his abilities, but there was no question he was a good as it's ever been on WDEV. – Ken Squier, WDEV Owner

Some Thoughts about My Dad ~ by Scott Truax



Since he pretty much says it all with his music, I'll stick to the short version of my most vivid and cherished memories of, not only a great dad, but someone who, I later came to realize, was richly blessed by God with exceptional musical talent that he displayed over the years on many instruments, including tenor saxophone and fiddle. However, he was best known and respected by his family, friends, many followers, and fellow musicians, for his “special style and touch” on the electric guitar.

I remember when I was 4, sitting in the cutaway of Tiny Platt's stand-up bass while the band rehearsed for the next show or barn dance. When the rehearsal was done, Tiny would spin his bass like a top, sending me flying. That was my first real introduction to the music world. A few years later, at the Red Barn in Jonesville, standing on a stool slapping the strings of Max Pelkey's “dog-house” bass, it started to become clear to me. Looking out over a crowd of probably 600 people in a barn that should not have held more than 300, I realized what the draw here was. It was Buddy Truax, and his band, The Playboys. And so it was most every Friday and Saturday night for the next decade or more at the Red Barn in Jonesville, Deuso's Barn in N. Hyde Park, Hartt's Barn in Williston, Hanley's Horse Barn in North Duxbury, Nichols' Barn in Stowe, The Hen House in Underhill Center, and many more locations in Vermont, NY, NH, and Canada. While I knew early in life that Dad was an accomplished musician, it wasn't until later that I realized how truly gifted he really was. Although he enjoyed his years with the Playboys and country music, his real love was jazz, particularly, the musical styles of guitarists Johnny Smith, Tal Farlow, and Howard Roberts.

Throughout the '70s and '80s, everywhere he played you would hear their influences in his distinctive blending the melody notes with the fat, extended jazz chords that he was so well-known for. My sister, Sharon, summed it up best: “I always liked Dad's soft, easy touch on the guitar, like playing from the heart. My favorite memory is of him playing in the kitchen on Sunday mornings. He gave us a love and appreciation of music that will last our lifetimes.” Now Dad's gift of music has been passed on to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

– Thank you, Dad. We love you !

Buddy Truax – Music Man

Whether crooning a country ballad, laying down smooth jazz guitar lines and sophisticated chords, sawing out an old-time fiddle tune, or personalizing a sultry standard on tenor saxophone, Buddy Truax was a major presence on the airwaves, at dances, and in stage shows in Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, and Canada from the 1940s into the 1970s. First with Don Fields and His Pony Boys and later with his own band, The Playboys, Buddy charmed audiences and inspired fellow musicians with his affable personality and musical virtuosity. “It didn’t matter,” says Buddy’s son, Scott, “if it was guitar, piano, sax or fiddle – When Buddy played, everybody listened.”

Sheldon “Buddy” Truax Dunkin, Quebec, in 1923. and his mother organ. His played violin, fiddling old-and hymns for church. Buddy mill songs of that time.” It his whole life. In Canada, on an uncle’s guitar and soon play “The Old Chisolm Trail,” Mine” – “all those old tear jerkers.” Buddy also started playing fiddle.



The Western Aces: Carl Durgin, Buddy, Joe Mayo, Cliff Japhet

was born into a musical family in His father played violin great-grandfather had also time tunes for square dances called it “the old, run-of- the- was music he would remember Buddy began figuring out chords was teaching the uncle how to “That Silver Haired Daddy of

The family eventually moved to N. Troy, VT, and Buddy soon entered talent contests there and in nearby Newport. But it was his singing, not his instrumental abilities, that won the prizes. Sometime between ages 12 and 14 he formed a band, the Newport Ramblers, which he recalled as a “little noisy thing with a banjo, guitar, bass, all that stuff. We played little honky tonk places for 3, 4 bucks a night.” The band also performed at church socials and grange halls, with Buddy fiddling for square dances and singing and playing guitar on popular Country & Western songs learned by ear from the radio.

The guitar became Buddy’s passion. “When I realized I knew my guitar well enough so I could play anything I could sing, I got more of an outlet out of playing the guitar, he recalled. “If I really had wanted to go places, I would have stuck to the singing and let some other knucklehead play the guitar. But those things you learn a little too late.”



I ndeed, it was Buddy's smooth, soothing singing that continued to attract attention, and he had several offers to take his talents to more populous and profitable locales. But Buddy didn't like cities and chose to remain close to home. He did, however, make it at least as far as Keene, NH, where he played Sunday theater shows with Connecticut fiddler Slim Cox's band, the Down Homers.

I n 1940, when he was 16, Buddy met Don Fields, virtuoso Waterbury, Vermont fiddler, saxophonist, and leader of the popular radio and dance band, The Pony Boys (see *Don Fields and His Pony Boys: Last Sessions and Historic WDEV Broadcasts*, MCM 4004), at a barn dance. When the Pony Boys' guitarist failed to show up, Fields asked Buddy to sit in. A few days later, Fields called and asked Buddy to join the Pony Boys. "I walked right over to the [milling] machine and pushed the button and said to the guy, 'I'm all done.' Walked right out and never came back," Buddy recalled.

B uddy liked playing with the free-wheeling Pony Boys . The band had no set arrangements, and Fields let his musicians play as they liked. The repertoire depended on where they were playing, with Buddy sometimes joining Fields on sax for popular numbers or even playing fiddle on waltzes, slow tunes, or square dances. (Unfortunately, no recordings of Buddy's sax playing have surfaced.)



The Pony Boys: Ray Preavy (?), Buddy, Don Fields, Felix Conti (?)

W ith the advent of World War II, Fields moved to Connecticut to work in a factory and turned the Pony Boys over to Buddy. But soon the army beckoned, and in 1942 Buddy headed for boot camp, guitar in tow. For Buddy, as for many rural and small town American youth, the army provided an opportunity to meet and play with musicians from all over the country, some of whom were nationally, and even internationally, known. Assigned to the Special Services Unit, Buddy spent his military service playing the guitar, with "all kinds of people," including trombonist Glen Miller . For the troops, Buddy and his colleagues played "Glen Miller kind of stuff . . . modern dance music." But after hours Buddy and musicians including Mel Powell and other players from

Miller's, Stan Kenton's, and other bands put aside the written parts and arrangements and played improvised jazz.



Jazz “just grew on me,” he recalled. “I got kind of tired of playing the same old chords and the same old stuff.” His Julliard-trained sergeant introduced him to some new ideas, and soon Buddy formed his own band. Buddy couldn’t read music, but he learned quickly, finding that “I had a pretty good ear for it, and it came along pretty good.” Later, he would put his army jazz education to good use when he was called to play with Louis Armstrong at International House, in Newport, along with drummer Cozy Cole, pianist, Earl “Fatha” Hines, and trombonist Jack Teagarden. He also played on at least one occasion with Armstrong, Hines, and Teagarden at the famous Birdland jazz club in New York City.

Discharged from the army in 1945, Buddy headed home to St. Albans, VT. and went to work in a store with his father. One day, a big car pulled up at the store and a guy with a guitar got out. It was country music singer, songwriter, guitarist, and yodeler Wilf Carter, better known as Montana Slim, Canada’s first country music star. Slim invited Buddy to join him on the road. But, again, Buddy chose to stay close to home, wryly recalling that “I’d seen all the road I wanted to

see for a while.” Instead, he played with several local groups including the Bronco Busters, The Old Sheriff, and the Western Aces. In 1950 Buddy re-joined the Pony Boys before deciding to form his own band, the Playboys, around 1953.

Along with ex-Pony Boys Smokey Carey and accordionist Zeke Zelonis, Buddy’s Playboys included his younger sister, Barb, who played rhythm guitar and piano, sang lead on some songs, and joined Buddy for harmony duets. Like Fields’ group and other Vermont cowboy bands, the Playboys wore western clothes and featured current Nashville hits along with pop standards. Barb especially liked Patsy Cline songs, while Buddy favored country crooner Jim Reeves. Hank Williams, he said, “was a little to honky for me.” Still, the band could strike up a hot “Blue Suede Shoes” or “Down by the Riverside” – “show stuff,” in Buddy’s term – that sometimes featured key changes and other ear-catching arrangements. There was always a hot, jazzed-up guitar tune as well. Still, according to Buddy, it was, as at those early talent shows, the singing that got the attention.

It was often grueling as well, as when the Playboys would play a dance in Cherry River, Quebec, get home at 4AM, then get up at 7 to head for Ticonderoga, NY to play a Fish & Game banquet from 11 to 1 before heading to Chazee, NY for a “jitney dance” (where couples pay per 10 or 15 cents per dance) that lasted until 2AM. The next morning, it was back to the WDEV studio for a 9:30 show. “That was a rugged life,” Buddy remarked. “Of course, when you’re young you don’t notice it.”

By around 1962 Buddy had had enough. He disbanded the Playboys to devote himself to running the restaurant he owned with his wife, Evelyn (Emmy) – whom he had met at a Don Fields barn dance. But music remained important to him, and he’d return to the bandstand from time to time into the 1980s with various jazz bands. Fortunately, one of those gigs was captured on tape, and several songs from that night on this CD clearly attest to Buddy’s jazz guitar prowess. He also performed at Vermont colleges and concerts in the mid-’70s with The Jazzman’s Bag, presenting programs on jazz history.



The Western Aces: Buddy (2nd from left), Joe Mayo (accordion)

Buddy and I had talked for several years before his death in 2007 about his doing some recording. Sadly, that never happened. But then Scott contacted me about trying to do something with recordings that had recently surfaced, including transcriptions of WDEV broadcasts, home-made tapes, and local supper-club gigs. I couldn't wait to hear them. Now you can hear some of them too. More than musical mementoes or nostalgic relics, these recordings, despite some of their technical shortcomings, provide ample evidence for the esteem in which Buddy Truax is held by family, friends, fellow musicians, and the lucky folks who heard this humble virtuoso. Buddy could have succeeded in the wider music world but chose instead to let his friends and neighbors throughout the north country be the beneficiaries of his music. We all thank him for it. -- Mark Greenberg, Montpelier, VT, 2011



The Playboys: Buddy, Barb (from left)



Buddy, 1968

Executive Producer: Scott Truax

Produced, Edited, Designed by Mark Greenberg/*Upstreet Productions*

Liner Notes by Mark Greenberg & Scott Truax

Mastering & Technical Assistance by Geoff Brumbaugh/*Common Ground Audio*

Photographs courtesy of Scott Truax and the Truax family

WDEV transcription transfers by Peter Dean

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Country Buddy

1. My Hillbilly Baby - a (Griffin;) :32
2. High As a Mountain - b (Owens;) 2:10
3. Room Full of Roses - a (Spencer;) 4:03
4. Bud's Polka - c (Truax) 1:53
5. Slowly I'm Falling - a (Pierce, Hill;) 1:57
6. Ragtime Cowboy Joe - d (Abraham, Clark, Muir; Alfred Pub Co, Sony ATV Tunes LLC, EMI-Robbins, Sony Tunes Inc./ASCAP) 1:29
7. Cincinnati Rag - a (Traditional/P.D.) 1:53
8. Raggedy Ann - e (Traditional/P.D.) 2:30
9. Rubber Dolly - a (Traditional/P.D.) 1:53
10. Y'all Come -a (Duff;) 1:53

Jazz Buddy

11. The Doll Dance - c (Brown; EMI) 2:07
12. Pennies from Heaven - a (Johnston & Burke; Chappel & Co [Hal Leonard????]) 2:40
13. Bye Bye Blues - c (Hamm, Bennett, Lown, & Gray; Willis Music) 1:54
14. Body & Soul - a (Green;) 2:36
15. You Belong to Me - c (Price, King, Stewart;) 3:00
16. Sweet Georgia Brown -f (Pinkard & Bernie; Alfred Publishing [????]) 4:19
17. Make Love to Me -f (Brunies; Copeland, Mares; Walter Melrose; Norvas; Pollock; Roppolo; Mel Stitzel;) 4:40
18. Perdido - f (Tizo; Alfred Music) 3:43
19. Moonlight in Vermont - g (Suessdorf; Alfred Music) 2:04

- a: WDEV: Buddy (guitar, fiddle, vocals), Barb Izzo (vocals), Bobby Joyal, caller (Rubber Dolly)
- b: WDEV, Nov. 1957: Buddy (guitar, fiddle), Barb Izzo (vocals, rhythm guitar), Lois Carey (accordion), Smokey Carey (bass).
- c: Buddy (lead guitar), Barb Izzo (rhythm guitar)
- d: WDEV: Don Fields (fiddle) & the Pony Boys: Buddy (guitar, vocals)
- e: WDEV, 1959: Buddy (guitar, fiddle, vocals), Barb Izzo (rhythm guitar), Max Pelkey (bass), Bobby Young (accordion)
- f: Blush Hill Country Club, Waterbury, VT, 1977: Buddy (guitar), J. Don Jones (coronet/trumpet); Max Pelkey (bass); Tom Truax (drums)
- g: Buddy (guitar), Billy Arsenault (steel guitar)



Barb & Buddy