



The Hammond B3

An entertaining evening of jazz and swing

Presented by

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A Brief History of the Hammond Organ and It's Roots in Jazz

1928 Through the Early 1960's



Hammond B3

Laurens Hammond

Laurens Hammond's work on the synchronous motor (the rotation of the shaft is synchronized with the frequency of the supply current – 60hz in the US) led him in 1928 to set up the Hammond Clock Company, with six workers, above a grocery store in Chicago. Demand was high and the business soon grew into a large factory.

In 1933, Hammond bought a used piano, and discarded everything apart from the keyboard action. Using the keyboard as a controller, he experimented with different sound-generating methods, finally settling on one, the tonewheel generator. (Small metal discs spin and produce a magnetic field which is picked up and amplified).

Thanks to Hammond's prior manufacturing and engineering experience, his synchronous motor was combined with the tonewheel generator, which was extremely well-engineered. Hammond filed his patent application on January 19, 1934, and the "Hammond Organ" went into production in 1935.

The popular larger tonewheel organs are the B3, A100-A105, & C3. The older D, E, and RT models had a curved pedalboard and other adaptations to meet the needs of classical organists. The same internal tonewheel system was used for all of these models. Smaller spinet tonewheel organs were designed for casual home users with a limited budget.

Don Leslie

In the late 1930's Don Leslie experimented with sound movement and the Hammond organ. He developed a speaker with rotating parts that tossed sound around the room, bringing the sound of the Hammond organ to life. After settling on an acceptable rotation speed, the Leslie speaker was born. **The marriage of the Hammond organ and Leslie speaker lives to this day.**



Leslie Speaker

Fats Waller – jazz pianist, vocalist, entertainer

Waller recorded popular music on pipe organ in the 20's into the early 30's. He started using Hammond for some recordings in the late 30's, helping to popularize it.

Wild Bill Davis

Davis is best known for his pioneering of a jazz electric organ style. Davis, whom Jimmy Smith had reportedly first seen playing organ in the 1930s, was the pacesetter among organists.

Davis was originally supposed to record "April in Paris" with Count Basie's Orchestra in 1955 but when he could not make the session, Basie used his arrangement for the full band and had a major hit. Davis later went on to record "April in Paris" with Duke Ellington.

Milt Buckner

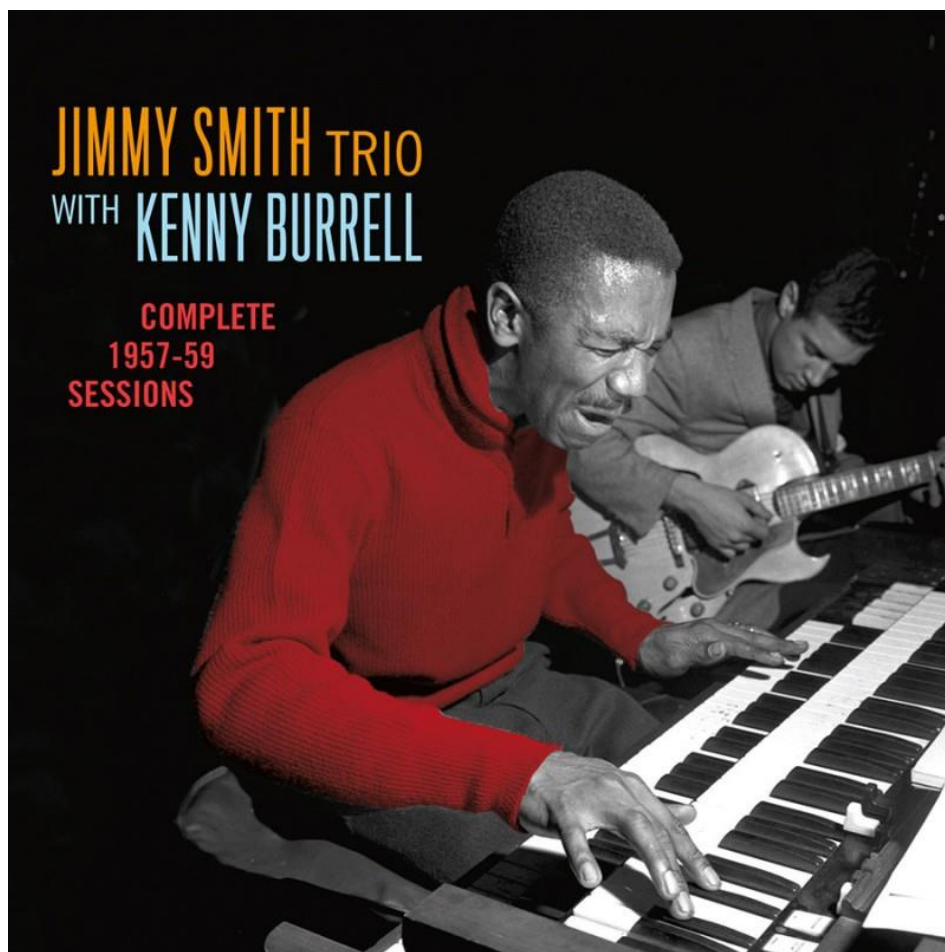
Buckner played in Detroit with Cab Calloway, and in 1941 joined Lionel Hampton's big band. In 1952, he formed his own trio and helped pioneer the use of the electric Hammond organ.

Jimmy Smith

Jimmy Smith began exploring the Hammond in 1951. From 1951 to 1954, he played piano, then organ in Philly R&B bands. He switched to organ in 1954, influenced by Wild Bill Davis.

Smith's virtuoso improvisation technique on the Hammond helped to popularize the electric organ as a jazz and blues instrument. Smith gained world-wide prominence with his second album – THE CHAMP – in 1956, quickly establishing Smith as a new star on the jazz scene.

Smith influenced a constellation of jazz organists, including Jimmy McGriff, Brother Jack McDuff, Don Patterson, Richard "Groove" Holmes, Joey DeFrancesco, as well as rock keyboardists such as Jon Lord and Keith Emerson.



Earl Grant

Earl Grant had a feel for music much the same as Count Basie, and featured that Basie-style on the Hammond organ and piano. He is referred to as the Count Basie of the B3. He was also fortunate to have a voice and singing style very similar to that of Nat King Cole.

1960's Through the Early 1990's

The Hammond Organ Goes on Leave

As we got into the 1970's smaller, cheaper, portable keyboards came into the market, displacing the tonewheel organs with circuit boards. So, for financial reasons, the company stopped manufacturing tonewheel organs entirely by 1975. But even Hammond itself could not match the tonewheel sound with the sounds produced by smaller circuit boards.

Bill Dilks joined Hammond Organ Co in Chicago in Sep 1981, as one of three who toured the US weekly. But the company was already in a downward spiral. Hammond Organ Company in Chicago finally closed its doors in 1985 (some say 1986). The business name went to Australia for 6 years, then became part of Suzuki Music company in Japan. In the late 1990's the product was revitalized due to improvements in circuit technology. Hammond-Suzuki now competes for market share with other companies world-wide who also produce a sound similar to the tonewheel organ & Leslie speaker.

1990's Through Today

Joey DeFrancesco

It took a young phenom named Joey DeFrancesco (born 1971) to put the old Hammond tonewheel organ and sound front-and-center by 1991. Since then, the Hammond organ and a few quality imitators have returned the organ sound to the jazz spotlight.





Hammond-Suzuki B3-MK2 portable



*Viscount Legend Soul
(currently top dog)*



Crumar Mojo

In conclusion...

The new circuit-board organs above are much easier to move. Yet, tonewheel organs are still in regular use in the twenty-first century, which is a testament to the quality of the design and execution of the product.

Some items of interest on the Hammond Organ and Leslie Speaker

