

MATT HOLBORN - FOR STUFF

APRIL 16TH 2025

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Anthony Barnett (Stuff Smith's Biographer)

Matt Holborn's *For Stuff* is a record influenced by the music and life of jazz violin's unsung grandfather, **Stuff Smith**.

Stuff Smith (Hezekiah Leroy Gordon Smith) was an African American jazz violinist playing in and around New York from around the mid-1930s. He was featured in the famous 1958 photograph by Art Kane, *A Great Day in Harlem*, played and recorded with Nat King Cole, Oscar Peterson, and Ella Fitzgerald, among many others, and was a co-writer of the songs "Youse a Viper" and "It's Wonderful."

With *For Stuff*, Matt set out to create an album of original music that reflects Stuff's sense of swing, his unconventional and irreverent approach to the violin, and his seemingly unwavering dedication to the violin as a jazz voice. Stuff's playing style, uncommon to most violinists past and present, embodied pure, unadulterated jazz.

Matt is joined by a band of young London stars of swinging jazz: **Fraser Urquhart** on piano (*Stella Cole, Georgia Cecile*), **Simon Read** on double bass (*Nigel Price, Adrian Cox*), **Joe Dessauer** on drums (*Ewan Bleach*), and guest guitarist **Alex "Honey" Boulton** (*Giacomo Smith, Adrian Cox*).

This is Matt's first album as a leader under his own name, but he has many original collaborations with jazz manouche outfits *The London Django Collective* and *Latchepen* under his belt. Described as "playful and inventive" and "offering something fresh and exciting while working broadly within the gypsy jazz template" (The Jazzmann UK), Matt's work has also been praised for its "intelligent compositions, flawlessly executed standards, and impeccable performances" (London Jazz News UK).

Matt leads a varied and unique career for a violinist. As well as running his UK-based outfit, The London Django Collective, he has played with some of the world's top Django-style musicians, including Paulus Schaffer, Sebastien Giniaux, Giacomo Smith, and Dave Kelbie. He is currently playing in comedian **Bill Bailey's** live band during his 2025 West End run. Matt has also performed with Chaka Khan, Nubia Garcia, and The BBC Concert Orchestra through his work with the Nu-Civilisation Orchestra. In addition to performing, Matt teaches jazz strings for the jazz education organization Tomorrow's Warriors and has been the host of the educational The Jazz Violin Podcast since 2018.



Listen

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/cc1zzf54hip3oxbnzlkwy/ALHAhXhslGAhOJs4Q2_y7j4?rlkey=l3wvpcgne80njqwsy0tav2x0p&st=gyc5v135&dl=0

Watch

<https://youtu.be/GGDMxBveoWQ?si=hZIT3Km2EMhNEfz8>

(Private Links)

<https://youtu.be/27yDdlz1wNw?si=5muvfrOjN7mJAXHx>

Track Listing

Yune' June (M.Holborn) 3.21
Squawkin (M.Holborn) 4.31
Desert Sands (S.Smith) 5.06
Fable (M.Holborn) 4.34
Centre Left (M.Holborn) 3.26
Stop-Look (S.Smith) 3.49
Big Red (M.Holborn) 3.57
Avon (M.Holborn) 2.59
I Don't Stand A Ghost Of a Chance with You (V.Young) 5.15

Runtime: 36 minutes and 48 seconds.
Recorded, mixed and mastered by Benedic Lamind at The Fish Factory London

Matt Holborn-violin
Fraser Urquhart-piano
Joe Dessauer-drums
Simon Read-bass
Honey Boulton-guitar (Tracks 3, 6 and 8)

<https://youtu.be/MKimRfaMsb0?si=l6PMeZjyHFAWzZ>



Liner notes by Anthony Barnett (Stuff Smith's Biographer)

Matt Holborn's *For Stuff* is a wonderful tribute. It's almost possible to envisage these pieces as previously unknown Stuff Smith takes, for they are as fresh as possible while paying non-imitative homage to how Stuff himself played. Each time Smith performed the "same" tune, it was never truly the same. There are only two actual Smith compositions in this set: "Desert Sands," in which it might be said guitarist Honey Boulton is heard playing somewhere between Barney Kessel and Herb Ellis, both of whom Stuff recorded the tune with in 1957, and "Stop Look." Yet traces of Smith can be heard elsewhere too: notably, Matt's "Yune' June" is pretty much a contrafact of "Ain't She Sweet" (Ager, Yellen), recorded a couple of times by Smith in Europe. Smith also recorded Victor Young's "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance With You" (lyrics by Ned Washington and Bing Crosby). I've always considered "Desert Sands" to be a major signature of Smith's, and it pains me to recall how, at a club just outside Copenhagen, when Smith asked me what I would like him to play, I called for "Take the 'A' Train" when I could have called for "Desert Sands." One of several retrospectively important questions I failed to ask him was why he never played this wonderful composition again after his permanent move to Europe in 1965. The remaining tunes in this set are Matt's originals. "Big Red" was Stuff's affectionate name for his favorite violin. It was based on a Guarnerius and not too long ago, with the

help of violinist David Schulman, it was established as the work of Bernard J. LeBlond of Battle Creek, Michigan, made in 1946 under Smith's oversight. It is now owned by Dutch-Surinamese violinist Yannick Hiwat.

"Fable" is named after AB Fable: Violin Improvisation Studies, the CD label which has released scarce and previously unissued recordings by Smith, Eddie South, and many others. Now revealed, I believe for the first time in writing, "Fable" consists of my initials "AB" surrounded by the first and last letters of "fiddle." But, hold on a minute, Hezekiah Stuff, forgive me, for here's what you said on a 1967 tape for the opening of your unfinished autobiography, *The Human Side of Jazz*: "Number one. I am a violinist. I'm not a fiddle player. [laughter] I'm a violinist. I play the violin my way. That's the way I think it should be played. I mean according to the type of music that I play."

I haven't said too much about Matt's playing or about his wonderful musicians. Smith also said, elsewhere: "And then the greatest thing of all-Music. And, Man, here I can't tell you anything at all because music starts when words leave off and who tries to talk words about it is missing the whole point."

Matt Holborn's *For Stuff* is a warm, affectionate, and original tribute. Stop Look? Listen. Anthony Barnett
www.abar.net