Barney Kessel

Guitarist
Family

- Barney Kessel was born Bernard Kessel in Muskogee, OK on Oct. 17, 1923
- Other jazz musicians born in Muskogee include Jay McShann, Don Byas and Claude
Abraham and Ruth Kessel
“How to Play Guitar in 5 Minutes”

• Barney was given guitar lessons every day under the Federal Music Project (Works Progress Administration)
First Electric Guitar

- In 1939, Barney's mother bought him a National electric guitar and amplifier for $150 from Kroh's Music Store in Muskogee.
First Groups

• Barney was in three bands by age 14
• From 1937–1939, Barney played with Ellis Ezell's 14 piece band
Charlie Christian

• Barney was very impressed with Charlie’s solo on "Flying Home"
• “He didn't have any throwaways, no little fills just to create a little side effect”–BK
Move to California

• In 1940, Charlie Christian attends a show Barney is playing in.
• Christian recommended that Barney move to California for better work opportunities.
Barney took a Greyhound bus to Los Angeles, CA in 1942. He auditioned for Ben Pollack for the guitar chair in the Chico Marx Orchestra. "Beer Barrel Polka"
Charlie Barnet

- In 1944, Barney joined the Charlie Barnet Orchestra
- He also played a musician in the short film, *Jammin The Blues*
Artie Shaw

• Barney recorded more than 70 songs with Artie Shaw from 1945–1946
• Artie Shaw Gramercy Five “The Gentle Grifter”
Charlie Parker All Stars

- In February 1947, Barney recorded "Carvin' The Bird" as well as three other tracks with Charlie Parker.
Education

• Method books–
  George Van Eps, Eddie Lang, and Allan Reuss

• Sightreading–
  Clarinet studies

• Arranging and orchestration
• Composition and conducting
Studio Musician

• He worked as a studio musician for Capital Records

Gene Autry
Mahalia Jackson
Barbara Streisand
Frank Sinatra
Dean Martin
Doris Day
Oscar Peterson Trio

• In 1952, Barney joined the Oscar Peterson Trio
• “Ma! (He’s Making Eyes at Me)”
Contemporary Records

• Lester Koenig
In December 1953, Barney recorded Easy Like with Bud Shank (sax), Arnold Ross (piano), Harry Babasin (bass), and Shelly Manne (drums)

• The album includes four originals
• “Vicky’s Dream” (Contrafact)
Kessel Plays Standards

• Quintet with Shelly Manne (drums), Claude Williamson (piano), Monte Budwig (bass), Bob Cooper (tenor sax and oboe)
• “Speak Low”
The Poll Winners

• Barney Kessel, Shelly Manne, and Ray Brown each won the 1956 and 1957 popularity polls in Downbeat, Metronome and Playboy magazines

• “Mean to Me”
Julie is Her Name

• In 1956, Barney recorded with vocalist Julie London and bassist Ray Leatherwood

• "Cry Me a River" sold over one million copies
More Studio Work

• From 1956–1960, Barney Kessel was the head of A&R for Verve Records in Beverly Hills
• Barney signed Ricky Nelson and produced and played on "I'm Walking" (Fats Domino)
• He was a mentor to Phil Spector
• Barney was eventually part of Phil
The Great Guitars

- Kim Bonython originally booked a nine concert tour for Charlie Byrd in 1973
- Throughout the tour, they started to play as a trio
- Usually, Joe Byrd was on bass. Drummers included Wayne Phillips, Jimmie Smith, and Chuck Redd
The Great Guitars

Charlie Byrd, Herb Ellis, Barney Kessel

“Airmail Special”
The End of a Great Career

• On May 20, 1992 he suffered a stroke which brought his career to an end
• "I don't need to play guitar again. From 16 to 68 I only missed 17 days of practice."
• Interview