

BUDDY SAVITT

Born Berton Schwarz, 8 April 1931, probably Philadelphia, PA

Died 18 April 1983, Somers Point, New Jersey

Buddy Savitt was the most important roll n roll sax player on the Philadelphia scene between 1957 and 1963. During this period he played on countless Cameo-Parkway sessions. Examples are "Crazy Girl" by Charlie Gracie, "Dinner With Drac" by John Zacherle, "You'll Never Tame Me" by Bobby Rydell and "The Fly" by Chubby Checker. I'm not sure if Buddy Savitt was involved in all four cases, but it is possible. Like most session players from the heyday of rock 'n' roll, Savitt had a jazz background. He began playing the sax professionally while still studying at Matbaum High School in Philadelphia. Around 1948 he joined Elliott Lawrence's Orchestra, followed by a stint in Woody Herman's "Second Herd", with whom he recorded for Capitol. He taught saxophone at Ellis Tolin's Music City and worked casual jobs in Philadelphia, including some at the Blue Note in the company of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Gerry Mullican, among others.

Shortly after starting the Cameo label in January 1957, label owners Kal Mann and Bernie Lowe hired Dave Appell to work with acts, lead the house band and the label's small studio. Appell (born 1922) was already well-established in the music business. He knew all the best musicians in Philadelphia, so assembling a house band for Cameo was no sweat. This band also recorded prolifically on its own, under the name The Applejacks, and had a few instrumental hits on Cameo, the biggest being "Mexican Hat Rock" (# 16, 1958). The big, honking tenor sound was usually courtesy of either Buddy Savitt and / or George Young. Dan Dailey and Fred Nuzzullio played baritone sax. Sometimes Appell would use all four saxes to get a fat sound, which was innovative at that time, at least on rock 'n' roll sessions. Appell himself and / or Joe Renzetti played guitar, Joe Macho and Bob McGraw were the bassists, keyboards were handled by Roy Straigis or Fred Bender (Bernie Lowe played piano on Charlie Gracie's Cameo recordings), and on drums was either Ellis Tollin or Bobby Gregg. Virtually all the hits that came out of Cameo and its sister label, Parkway, featured these same musicians.

Appell also became Kal Mann's main songwriting partner and together they churned out a multitude of big hits, by Charlie Gracie, John Zacherle, Chubby Checker, Bobby Rydell, Dee Dee Sharp, The Dovells, The Orlons and others. Savitt plays the sax solos on hits like "The Twist" and "Let's Twist Again" (by Chubby Checker) and "Mashed Potato Time" (by Dee Dee Sharp). Unlike George Young**, Buddy did not have many releases under his own name. Just one single was issued, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"/"Come Blow Your Horn" (Parkway 857, 1961) and one LP, "Most Heard Sax In the World" (Parkway SP-7012, 1962). Apparently Savitt was contracted exclusively to Cameo-Parkway during this period, for he does not appear on any sessions for other Philadelphia labels, like Swan and Chancellor. After the British Invasion, Savitt left Cameo, went back to jazz and played in a variety of bands. By 1975 he was playing in the Salsoul Orchestra, which had a few disco hits in 1975-77, like "Tangerine" (# 18, 1976). In 1978 or 1979, when gambling became legal in Atlantic City, Buddy joined the house band at Caesar's

Boardwalk Regency Hotel-Casino. He died in hospital in 1983 (aged 52), after being diagnosed with cancer. Buddy Savitt was generally liked and admired by his contemporaries and former students. "A sweet man" (Dee Dee Sharp).

** George Young had one hit (credited to Georgie Young and the Rockin' Bocs), "Nine More Miles (The Faster-Faster Song)" (# 58, Cameo 150, 1958), which was also issued in the UK, on London HLU 8748. Stuart Colman writes in the current issue of Now Dig This : "With each and every modulated chorus the tempo increases to the point where you think you're going out of your mind."