

# KANSAS CITY RAGTIME & BEYOND

Presents

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Paul  
Asaro

Thursday, April 19, 2018

7:00 PM

**Kingswood Senior Living Community**

(directions – page 6)

Admission - \$20 at the door

Students with parents or student ID admitted free

[www.kcragtime.org](http://www.kcragtime.org) or call 913 491 6923

**Recognition**

Kansas City Ragtime and Beyond would like to recognize individuals who volunteer their time to organize the concerts and bring talented musicians to Kansas City.

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Kansas City Ragtime and Beyond would also like to recognize those who have made a financial contribution that helps support the continuation of our concerts and other activities.

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## Paul Asaro

Paul Asaro is known as one of the finest of a select group of pianists performing the demanding two-handed jazz and ragtime piano styles from the first half of the 20th century. The Stride piano of James P. Johnson, Willie “The Lion” Smith and Fats Waller, the New Orleans styles of Jelly Roll Morton, the ragtime of Scott Joplin and Eubie Blake, stomps, boogie woogie and swing, Asaro plays them all with a fine ear for detail, blending the elements into his own personal style. Indeed, many of Paul’s earliest influences were more recent pianists such as Dick Wellstood, Ralph Sutton and Butch Thompson, musicians who worked within these traditions while at the same time developing their own unique approach.

In a career now spanning two decades, Paul has performed at theaters and clubs worldwide and has appeared at such major venues as the Chicago Jazz Festival, Ravinia, the Toronto Jazz Festival, the Festival International de Jazz de Montreal and the Ascona Jazz Festival in Switzerland. He has performed onstage with such musical legends and luminaries as Leon Redbone, Steve Allen, Marian McPartland, Butch Thompson, Jeff Healy and Vince Giordano. He was the featured pianist in the Obie award winning Broadway production of “Jelly



Roll!” including a run in Philadelphia resulting in a Barrymore Award nomination for best supporting actor. Asaro has had long runs as house pianist aboard the legendary New Orleans steamboat “Delta Queen” and in Chicago with Jim Beebe’s band featuring former Louis Armstrong All-Star Barrett Deems and the legendary tenor man Franz Jackson.

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Asaro toured the country for twelve years as accompanist to Leon Redbone, appeared on NPR's "A Prairie Home Companion" and "Mountain Stage" and recorded for Leon's latest studio album. Paul's piano can be heard on two recent albums by singer and guitarist Loudon Wainwright III including the 2010 Grammy Award winning "Charlie Poole Project". Recent appearances include solo and two-piano duets with Butch Thompson and Jon Weber for the Twin Cities Jazz Festival's "Stride Piano Night", an extended solo tour for Allied Concert Services, and onscreen with Vince Giordano's band in the HBO series "Boardwalk Empire". When not on the road Paul holds down the piano chair in the eight piece jazz band "The Fat Babies", performing weekly at the long established Chicago jazz club The Green Mill and at the Honky Tonk BBQ. The group plays a wide variety of jazz from the 1920s through the 1940s and has released two albums to critical acclaim with their Delmark Records release "Chicago Hot" being named one of the best jazz album releases of 2012 by the Chicago Tribune.

We often hear the term "stride piano". **What is Stride piano?**

(The source of the following is Paul Asaro's website: [www.paulasaro.com](http://www.paulasaro.com))

Harlem Stride Piano developed out of the ragtime piano styles of New York City and the east coast, also known as "Eastern Ragtime". The style continued the ragtime tradition of a march-like left hand see-sawing between a single bass note at the bottom of the keyboard, and a chord struck in the center of the keyboard. In general, ragtime pianists only stretch an octave or an octave and a half between the bass note and the chord in the middle. The stride pianists stretch much further toward the bottom end of the keyboard and the wider span gives a much fuller sound. The syncopated figures in the right hand evolved into more varied and complicated patterns involving all manner of thirds, sixths, tenths, chromatic runs, broken chords, glissandos, and tremolo octaves. As it developed during the declining years of ragtime's popularity and during the rise of the jazz age it further distinguished itself from ragtime piano in its sense of "swing" in the rhythm and its increasing use and the complexity of improvisation during performance. Stride piano was an east coast development and differed stylistically from the New Orleans jazz pianists such as Jelly Roll Morton in its voicings and melodic figures.

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**Stride Piano, Pioneers and Developers:**

**James P. Johnson (1894-1955)** Known as the “Father of the Stride Piano” and the “Dean of Jazz Pianists” Johnson was the most important innovator and pioneer of the stride style. He along with Jelly Roll Morton, were arguably the two most important pianists who bridged the ragtime and jazz eras, and the two most important catalysts in the evolution of ragtime piano into jazz. As such, he was a model for Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum and his more famous pupil, Fats Waller. Johnson composed many hit tunes including “The Charleston”, the theme song of the Roaring Twenties, as well as “Old Fashioned Love” and “If I Could Be With You One Hour Tonight”. James P. remained the acknowledged king of New York jazz pianists until he was dethroned c. 1933 by the recently arrived Art Tatum, who is widely acknowledged by jazz critics as the most technically proficient jazz pianist of all time.

Johnson began writing larger scale concert works in the late 1920s (“Yamekraw – A Negro Rhapsody”) and in the 1930s he turned his attention completely to symphonic forms producing works such as “Tone Poem” (1930), “Symphony Harlem” (1932), a symphonic version of W.C. Handy’s “St. Louis Blues” (1937), and the one-act opera “De Organizer” (1939), with lyrics by Langston Hughes. Because his symphonic works proved unpopular and were seldom performed, Johnson’s influence and success are often overlooked, and as such, he has been referred to by Reed College musicologist David Schiff, as “The Invisible Pianist” and by biographer Scott E. Brown as “A Case Of Mistaken Identity”.

**Willie “The Lion” Smith (1893-1973)** Full name: William Henry Joseph Bonaparte Bertholoff Smith. Born in Goshen, NY, “The Lion” is considered to be possibly the most original of the masters of the stride style, usually grouped together with James P. Johnson and Thomas “Fats” Waller as one of the three greatest practitioners of the genre. “The Lion” claimed to have earned his nickname as a gunner during World War I after volunteering to fire a French cannon in **order** to avoid being assigned as a sniper. “I shot those 75s at the Fritzies for forty-nine days without a break or any relief. Word got back about the several hits I had to **my credit** and a colonel came up and said, ‘Smith, you’re a lion with that gun.’ Before long everyone was calling me ‘Willie The Lion’, a name that has stuck with me ever since”. (from “Music On My Mind”, 1964) The Lion played on the first commercial blues recording, Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” in, 1920, a record which kicked off the blues craze



of the 1920s. Despite this success, Smith seldom recorded during the twenties and it wasn't until 1935 that he began to record regularly under his own name beginning with a fine series of small band sides for Decca Records with a group called, "Willie The Lion Smith and his Cubs". A definitive solo piano session for Commodore Records followed in 1939 featuring Smith playing both his own uniquely original compositions and his highly personal versions of various standards. The liner notes his 1958 LP "The Legend of Willie "The Lion" Smith" (Grand Awards Records GA 33-368) state: "Duke Ellington has never lost his awe of the Lion's prowess." It quotes Ellington as saying, "Willie The Lion was the greatest influence of all the great jazz piano players who have come along. He has a beat that stays in the mind." Ellington demonstrated his admiration when composing and recording the highly regarded "Portrait of the Lion" in 1939. Orange County (NY) Executive Edward Diana issued a proclamation declaring September 18th Willie "The Lion" Smith Day in Orange County, the date of the first Goshen Jazz Festival.



**Thomas "Fats" Waller (1904-1943)** The most well known of the "Big Three" of stride piano, having been the prize pupil and later friend and colleague of the greatest of the stride pianists, James P. Johnson. Waller was one of the most popular performers of his era, finding critical and commercial success in his homeland and in Europe. He was also a prolific songwriter and many songs he wrote or co-wrote are still popular, such as "Honeysuckle Rose", "Ain't Misbehavin'", "Squeeze Me", "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now", "Blue Turning Grey Over You", "I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling", and "Jitterbug Waltz". His composed stride piano display pieces include "Handful of Keys", "Valentine Stomp", and "Viper's Drag". Waller copyrighted over 400 tunes, many of which were co-written with the great lyricist Andy Razaf. Razaf described his partner as "the soul of melody... a man who made the piano sing... both big in body and in mind... known for his

generosity... a bubbling bundle of joy". Gene Sedic, a clarinetist who played with Waller on many of his 1930s recordings, recalls Waller's recording technique with considerable admiration. "Fats was the most relaxed man I ever saw in a studio," he said, "and so he made everybody else relaxed. After a balance had been taken, we'd just need one take to make a side, unless it was a kind of difficult number."

#### Getting to Kingswood

Kingswood is at 10000 Wornall Rd. The entrance is on the west side of Wornall a short distance north of I 435. There is parking in front of the facility.

A rear entrance to the area where the concert will be held can be accessed via 99<sup>th</sup> Street, which goes west off of Wornall, approximately 200 yards north of the main entrance to Kingswood. Take 99<sup>th</sup> Street west to the first rotary. Go around this rotary and take the third road. Follow this road to the second rotary. Take the second road off of this rotary and then the first left, which will take you into a parking lot. Go to the far end of this parking lot. Westminster Hall is at the end of this parking lot.

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## KANSAS CITY RAGTIME AND BEYOND MEMBERSHIP

KCRB cannot bring outstanding entertainment to Kansas City without support of those of you who enjoy the music. Admission alone does not cover the cost of our concerts. By becoming a member or donor of Kansas City Ragtime and Beyond you can support our yearly concert series and other activities of this organization, including taking our musicians into schools. Specific donations have made it possible to take Frederick Hodges, Nan Bostick, Bryan Wright, the Barnharts, Carl Sonny Leyland, Brian Holland and Danny Coats and others into schools. Another special donation made it possible for KCRB to support the Vine Street Seven at the 2015 Union Station Memorial Day concert, giving KCRB visibility on the large screens on either side of the stage. Identify a musical event that means something to you or sponsor a musician and help KCRB make it happen! Call Jerry (913 491 6923) for details.

All levels of membership will receive our newsletters. KCRB is a 501(c)(3) corporation and deductions allowable within the tax law apply. Donors at the bronze level and above, will be listed in KCRB newsletters, programs and other literature. Membership and donor levels are listed in the table below.

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Complete the above form and send it and your donation to: Don Grimes, 6606 Hauser, Shawnee, KS 66216

Make checks payable to KCRB.

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*Kansas City Ragtime and Beyond*

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KC Presort

Coming KCRB Concerts

Thursday, April 19, 2018

Paul Asaro

Kingswood Senior Living Community

Sunday, June 10, 2018

Special House Concert

Frederick Hodges and Richard Dowling

Friday, October 12, 2018

Peacherine Ragtime Society Orchestra

Venue to be determined

January 2019

Scott Joplin Foundation Artist in Residence

To be announced