

# Jimmy Smith, jazz organ pioneer

By Chris Macias  
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+ Pioneering jazz organist Jimmy Smith died Tuesday at his Phoenix home. He was 79.

Smith single-handedly introduced the Hammond B-3 organ as a legitimate jazz instrument. His performance style, an earthy blend of soulful grooves and harmonic sophistication, featured some of the funkier playing in jazz history.

A statement from Verve Records, Smith's longtime record company, said Smith apparently died of natural causes. Services are pending.

Smith was active until his final days. A duo album featur-

ing Smith and fellow jazz organist Joey DeFrancesco, *Legacy*, is to be released Tuesday. To celebrate *Legacy*, the two were booked at Yoshi's jazz club in Oakland from Feb. 16-20. The concerts will now feature DeFrancesco and others paying musical tribute to Smith.

Smith was born in Norristown, Pa., and taught himself to play piano as a child. At age 9, he played boogie-woogie piano and won first place on *Major Bowes' Amateur Hour*, a national radio show.

Smith was inspired to switch to the organ after seeing Wild Bill Davis play the instrument in the 1940s. Soon, Smith was doing for the organ and jazz

what Charlie Christian had done with electric guitar.

Smith favored the Hammond B-3 organ, known for its thick, down-home tone. Smith played as if he had four hands, whipping through melodies and chords with his right hand and "walking" a bass line with the left. His feet danced on the B-3's pedals, complementing the mix with volume swells and expressive accents.

Smith informed his playing with bebop jazz's complexity and cool approach. His recordings for such labels as Blue Note, Verve and Riverside — including *Back at the Chicken Shack*, *Midnight Special* and *Rockin' the Boat* — set the standard for organ-based jazz.