

**Big Joe Duskin** (February 10, 1921 – May 6, 2007) was an American blues and boogie-woogie pianist. He is best known for his debut album, *Cincinnati Stomp* (1978), and the tracks 'Well, Well Baby' and 'I Met a Girl Named Martha'.



## **Biography**

Born Joseph L. Duskin in Birmingham, Alabama, by the age of seven he had started playing piano. He played in church, accompanying his preacher father, the Rev. Perry Duskin. His family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and Duskin was raised near to the Union Terminal train station where his father worked. On his local radio station, WLW, Duskin heard his hero Fats Waller play. He was also inspired to play in a boogie-woogie style by Pete Johnson's, '627 Stomp'.

In his younger days Duskin performed in clubs in Cincinnati and across the river in Newport, Kentucky. While serving in the US Army in World War II, he continued to play and, in entertaining the US forces, met his idols Johnson, Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis.

After his military service ended, Duskin's father made him promise to stop playing while the elder Duskin was still alive. However, Rev. Duskin lived to the age of 105, and Joe found alternative employment as a police officer and a postal worker. Therefore Duskin, effectively in the middle of his career, never played a keyboard for sixteen years.

With the encouragement of a blues historian, Steven C. Tracy, by the early 1970s Duskin had began playing the piano at festivals in the US and across Europe. By 1978, and with the reputation for his concert playing now growing, his first recording, *Cincinnati Stomp*, was released on Arhoolie Records. The album contained Duskin's cover version of the track, 'Down the Road a Piece'.

He subsequently toured both Austria and Germany, and in 1987 made his

inaugural visit to the UK. The same year his part in John Jeremy's film, Boogie Woogie Special, recorded for The South Bank Show, increased Duskin's profile. In 1988, accompanied by the guitar-playing Dave Peabody, Duskin recorded his second album, Don't Mess with the Boogie Man. In the following decade, Duskin performed at both the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and the Chicago Blues Festival.

His touring in Europe continued before he recorded his final album at the Quai du Blues in Neuilly, France. Several Duskin albums were issued on European labels in the 1980s and 1990s. It was 2004 before Big Joe Jumps Again! (Yellow Dog Records) became his second US-based release, and his first studio recording for sixteen years. It featured Phillip Paul (drums), Ed Conley (bass), and Peter Frampton on guitar.

Duskin was presented with a key to the city in 2004 by the Mayor of Cincinnati. The following year he was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship by the Ohio Arts Council.

Suffering from the effects of diabetes, Duskin was on the eve of having legs amputated, when he died in May 2007, at the age of 86. The Ohio based Big Joe Duskin Music Education Foundation keeps his musical ideals alive by producing in-school music presentations for public school children.