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## Swinging Up the River!

The St. Johns River City Band | no label

By [Jack Bowers](#)

Perhaps the day will come when every decent-sized city in America is home to a Jazz / dance band as good as Jacksonville, FL's seventeen-year-old St. Johns River City Band. And perhaps the day will come when elephants fly. Until then, we'll have to keep on praying for a change in the country's musical climate as we thank whoever is responsible for at least raising the cultural bar on Florida's east coast by establishing and continuing to support the River City Band. While there's nothing hair-raising on the band's debut album, *Swinging Up the River!*, ***every number is invested with an abundance of energy and exceedingly well-played.*** The rhythm section, powered by drummer / leader Rick Kirkland, ***packs a wicked punch, and the other sections are consistently sharp and assertive.*** Thanks to the presence in Jacksonville of the University of North Florida, the River City ensemble also boasts one of the country's finest band singers in Lisa Kelly, the winner in this year's *DownBeat* magazine student music awards competition, who swings confidently while batting a perfect three-for-three on "I'm Beginning to See the Light," "Gentle Rain" and "The Song Is You." How good is she? So good that I don't mind listening to her, which is about the highest accolade I can bestow on any big-band vocalist. I don't mind listening to the ensemble either, especially when it plays classic tunes by Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington / Johnny Hodges, Benny and Ira Moten, Count Basie, Jelly Roll Morton and other Swing Era composers complementing Bill Holman's more contemporary "Keep the Customer Satisfied," Frank Foster's sleek "Shiny Stockings," Sammy Nestico's tempestuous "Wind Machine" and the Gus Kahn / Walter Donaldson charmer, "Yes Sir, That's My Baby" (on which the multi-talented Bill Prince sets aside his tenor sax to offer a saucy flugel solo). Speaking of soloists, there are a number of

admirable ad libbers including Kirkland, trumpeters J.B. Scott and Marvin Ferebee, alto Don Zentz, pianist Doug Matthews, trombonist Marc Dickman and the regal Prince himself (clarinet on “Don’t Be That Way,” tenor on “In the Mood,” “King Porter Stomp” and “Wind Machine”). Little wonder that the St. Johns River City ensemble is not only Jacksonville’s “official band” but the state of Florida’s as well, having been accorded that honor by the state legislature in 1990. *Swinging Up the River!* does nothing to tarnish such an imposing reputation.

**Contact:** St. Johns River City Band, 226 N. Laura St., Jacksonville, FL 33202. Phone 904-355-4700; web site, [www.rivercityband.com](http://www.rivercityband.com)

**Track Listing:** Don’t Be That Way; I’m Beginning to See the Light; In the Mood; Gentle Rain; Keep the Customer Satisfied; King Porter Stomp; Leave Us Leap; Moten Swing; The Song Is You; One O’Clock Jump; Shiny Stockings; Wind Machine; Yes Sir, That’s My Baby (45:44).

**Personnel:** Rick Kirkland, leader, drums; Don Zentz, Nat Michelson, Tommy Satterwhite, Carl Poole, reeds; Bill Prince, tenor sax, clarinet, flugelhorn; Marvin Ferebee, J.B. Scott, Jim Daniel, Ace Martin, trumpet; Marc Dickman, Tim Ornato, Bill Hazlett, Mike Olson, trombone; Doug Matthews, piano; Landon Walker, bass; Lisa Kelly, vocals.

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