



Leon Bix Beiderbecke was born in 1903 to a comfortably middle-class German-American family in Davenport, Iowa. Although, in time, the Davenport Daily Democrat would headline the “7-YEAR-OLD BOY MUSICAL WONDER” who could play any selection that he heard, Bix’s formal

piano instruction was minimal. His empathy with the keyboard was clear, however, and later on he became similarly self-taught on cornet. His parents sent him eventually to Lake Forest Academy, a prep school still extant near Chicago, but he dropped out in favor of the jazz life and was soon gigging around the Midwest. Throughout the 1920’s he played cornet in innumerable venues, joined two well-known dance bands, recorded frequently as a sideman-soloist as well as under his own name, composed five published pieces for piano, and was idolized by other musicians and a growing public. All of this took place during the era of Prohibition, and Beiderbecke, perhaps a victim of his times, succumbed to alcoholism and related illness and died at the age of 28.

1 THINKING ABOUT BIX

I have indeed been thinking about him since I was very young. His music has greatly affected my own, and his brief and mythic span—such artistic mastery, so early a death—taught many of us something about life's beauty and tragedy.

I've performed this original piano piece before on the Reference Recordings album, *Dick Hyman in Recital* (RR-84). It is meant to be evocative of the 1920s, and I have put it to use in various arrangements, among them a piano-cornet duet with Randy Sandke, a concert presentation for six saxophones, and a movement in a score for piano and saxophone quartet, *Novelties*.

2 SINGIN' THE BLUES (TILL MY DADDY COMES HOME)

I heard my first Bix Beiderbecke recording in 1938. My big brother, Arthur, had brought it home from Harvard during a school break, and I own it still: a fragile ten-inch, 78rpm shellac disc, the black and silver Brunswick labels fixed to each side identifying "Singin' the Blues" and "I'm Coming, Virginia" respectively, and crediting "FRANK TRUMBAUER AND HIS ORCHESTRA with BIX AND LANG". The latter was guitarist Eddie Lang, born Salvatore Massaro, I would learn, a colleague of Bix's on many other recordings as well. Trumbauer's "orchestra" was an eight-piece combo drawn largely from the personnel of Jean Goldkette's touring dance band.

Of course, I knew nothing about Bix at the time. I was, however, an impressionable eleven-year old, and I gathered that my brother was on to something important. Perhaps even then I noted that both sides stepped off to a danceable but dignified pace, the sparse arrangements supporting the two soloists, who were clearly the points of interest. Trumbauer's crooning saxophone seemed oily and ironic, while Bix's cornet declamations were of a different character, heroic but laced with tenderness.

There have been other transcriptions of the iconic Bix solo before mine. I am indebted for "Singin' the Blues" as well as other titles to Peter Ecklund's *Great Cornet Solos of Bix Beiderbecke*. However, I've also notated the Trumbauer chorus, which, as Sudhalter, Evans, and Dean-Myatt point out in *Bix, Man & Legend* "fetched as much praise in 1927 and was as widely imitated as was Bix's". I would add that its closing two measures are as puzzling to figure out now as they must have been in 1927.

3 OSTRICH WALK

The tune was written collectively by most of the members of The Original Dixieland Jazz Band (the pianist, Henry Ragas, seems not to have been one of the composers). The recording, released in 1917, must have been one of Bix's earliest models, particularly the cornet playing of Nick LaRocca, who was his first great influence. Ten years later, Bix recorded "Ostrich Walk" with Frank Trumbauer, and it is this version, as arranged by Bill Challis on Bix's ideas, which I follow. As with all of these replicas, I've tried to reproduce Bix's solo exactly.

4 I'M COMING, VIRGINIA

The tune itself has the poignancy of the best of the “southern” songs which Tin Pan Alley writers produced at the time. Others which Bix recorded included “Louisiana”, “Clementine (From New Orleans)”, “Mississippi Mud”, and, a bit less successfully, “There Ain’t No Land Like Dixieland”.

“I’m Coming, Virginia” was recorded about three months after “Singin’ the Blues”, with which it was coupled, with a slightly different roster of musicians. They assembled in the same studio in Camden, New Jersey, known as the Victor Talking Machine Company. In my version I offer a scene-setting introduction and two interpolated piano choruses at the top—the tune has always been a favorite of mine—before joining the original arrangement written by Irv Riskin, Trumbauer’s pianist on the date. In this as well as “Singin’ the Blues” I find Eddie Lang’s support remarkable, particularly in the absence of any bass instrument, and have managed to include in my versions some of his guitar fills. Still, the Bix and Trumbauer solos are the high points.

5 JAZZ ME BLUES

In the interim following the dissolution of the Goldkette band and before joining Paul Whiteman, Bix worked in New York under the direction of Adrian Rollini. He also recorded for Trumbauer and other pickup groups, and in the fall of 1927 cut “Jazz Me Blues” as Bix & his Gang, a six-piece unit with Rollini on bass sax. He had previously recorded this jazz band standard, written in 1921, with his first group, The Wolverines. I follow the form of the later recording and include the classic cornet solo, note for precious note.

6 CANDLELIGHTS

Along with his brilliant cornet improvisations, Bix’s compositions are equally his legacy, particularly the four impressionistic works published as his *Modern Suite for Piano*. While his professional experience in popular music had presented him with the form and phrasing he used on all four, Bix must have absorbed harmonic textures from earlier classical music by Debussy, Ravel, MacDowell, and the works of his mentor, Eastwood Lane. Scriabin may have been an influence as well, as the late pianist Ruth Laredo once remarked to me on hearing “Candlelights”.

All of Bix’s published output was “edited”, understood to mean transcribed, by Bill Challis, an arranger for Trumbauer, Goldkette, and Whiteman.

7 ‘TAIN’T SO, HONEY, ‘TAIN’T SO

The 1928 Paul Whiteman recording used another Challis arrangement, this one featuring a vocal by Bing Crosby, then a member of the male trio known as The Rhythm Boys. Bix has only a short and relatively straight solo, but I’ve always liked the tune and the period arrangement. I follow it closely: the lugubrious basso melody toward the end simulates Trumbauer’s bassoon solo.

8 SINCE MY BEST GAL TURNED ME DOWN

Sometimes the historical trivia of Bixology pile up dangerously. On the recording session of October 25, 1927, which took place once again at the Victor Talking Machine Company studios in Camden, three performances were recorded. After Frank Trumbauer's group had completed the first two, a smaller contingent recorded as Bix & his Gang.

In the most striking part of "Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down", the players apparently recalled a slowing down-speeding up device that most of them had learned as members of the Goldkette orchestra. The peppy tune had been composed for that group by band members Howdy Quicksell and Ray Ludwig. The present performance follows the Bix recording and includes that device.

The other noteworthy element of the original is a long, dissonant glissando by all of the horns, leading into the downbeat. According to Vince Giordano, the contemporary bass saxophonist and bandleader, this was not an original concept but rather something which someone had heard some other group play on some other song—in other words, a meme floating around the receptive environment of 1920's bands. Unfortunately, I could find no convincing pianistic equivalent.

9 IN THE DARK

Like "Candlelights", a similar piece from the *Modern Piano Suite*, "In the Dark" is plotted along the eight-bar units of popular songs in rondo fashion, plus the inevitable coda. Here the published version is presented first, then I follow it with an improvised version of equivalent length.

10 CLEMENTINE (FROM NEW ORLEANS)

With a melody by the ubiquitous Harry Warren, represented here prior to his prodigious Hollywood career, the Jean Goldkette recording was made just before the orchestra disbanded. Bix's vivid performance might well have been what the writer Otis Ferguson had in mind in a 1936 column: "And yet, here is this fantastic chap, skipping out from behind a bank of saxophones for eight measures in the clear and back again, driving up the tension with a three-note phrase as brash and gleeful as a kid with a prank, riding down the whole length of a chorus like a herd of mustangs . . . every phrase as fresh and glistening as creation itself."

11 LONELY MELODY

Rather than paraphrase the arrangement in the Paul Whiteman recording, I preferred to make my own, using the attractive melody, based on an art song of the 19th century by Abraham Grünfeld, and building from a solitary, single note statement to a more contrapuntal improvisation. After the verse, Bix's solo shows up, and then we return to the lonely melody.

12 IN A MIST

The best known of the four pieces which comprise his *Modern Suite*, this is the only one recorded by Bix. Although there are resemblances to the others, “In a Mist” is jazzier, even Gershwin-esque in the 1920’s piano manner, and unlike the others, is steadily rhythmic until its broad-themed second section. The latter was not a part of Bix’s 1927 solo recording, but was said, in *Bix, Man & Legend*, to have been added at the request of publisher Jack Robbins, who wanted to match the appeal of the slow theme of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

13 SWEET SUE (JUST YOU)

Following the demise of the Jean Goldkette Orchestra, Bix and Trumbauer joined Paul Whiteman, whose renown was so prestigious, that membership in that enormous ensemble must have seemed to Bix the pinnacle of his career.

Rather than emulate Whiteman’s 1928 recording of “Sweet Sue”, which I find a less than successful attempt to elevate a rather bland pop song to concert status, I’ve made my own more pianistic arrangement. I keep the basic structure and pick up the original with the brass introduction to Bix’s celebrated muted cornet solo, thence to the grand finale.

14 WRINGIN’ AND TWISTIN’

Beiderbecke, Trumbauer, and Eddie Lang made an unlikely instrumental trio, but they nevertheless produced two recordings as Bix, Tram, and Lang: this one, and the cheerfully titled “For No Reason At All in C”. “Wringin’ and Twistin’”, probably Trumbauer’s elaboration of a theme suggested by Waller, is in the form of the old song “Ja-Da”, often used for comic lyrics. Lang plays his Spanish guitar (the instrument would not be electrified for many years); Bix is on piano, unfortunately recorded in a muffled and distant manner; and Trumbauer floats free on his C-Melody saxophone, a variety now rarely played.

Considering the sort of pianistry associated with Trumbauer’s collaborator, I attempted to add some Wallerian stride to Bix’s keyboard style. At the ending of the original, Bix figuratively stands and delivers a brief cornet flourish, followed by cadenzas on saxophone and guitar. I’ve retained these.

15 FLASHES

The final piece of the *Modern Piano Suite*, “Flashes” seems to want variations to its numerous repeated phrases. Bix, it was well known, seemed disinterested in playing anything the same way twice, so in this performance I’ve let my own variations occur in the same spirit. I’ve also lengthened the introduction to the final Gershwin-esque theme.

16 DAVENPORT BLUES

Bix's first published composition, "Davenport Blues", dates from 1925, when he recorded it as Bix and his Rhythm Jugglers. The session is notable for the presence of one of the jugglers, Tommy Dorsey, who would come to fame in the 1930s and 1940s as the leader of one of the most popular swing bands. The piece, like many others with place-name titles, was only nominally a blues in the definitive twelve-bar form, but it is capable of being played more slowly and more bluesy, perhaps, than might have occurred to Bix at that time.

17 YOU TOOK ADVANTAGE OF ME

My friend Mike Lipskin, the San Francisco stride pianist, lawyer, and record producer, had been in the studio throughout these sessions. Producer Tam Henderson suggested involving him in a four-hand format for our final piece. I thought of Bix's "Louisiana", when Lenny Hayton unexpectedly joins in on the upper part of Roy Barge's keyboard, and of the brotherly chase chorus between Bix and Tram on the latter's recording of "You Took Advantage of Me". With very little preparation but lots of experience to draw on, Mike and I recorded the finale to the album as a duo.

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at Skywalker Sound, Marin County, California

Producers: Dick Hyman, J. Tamblyn Henderson, Jr.

Recording Engineer: Keith O. Johnson

Recordist: Sean Royce Martin

Editing/Mastering: Paul Stubblebine, JTH

Executive Producers: Marcia Gordon Martin, JTH

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Complete listings and secure ordering: www.ReferenceRecordings.com

DICK HYMAN



Throughout a busy musical career that got underway in the early 1950s, Dick Hyman has functioned as pianist, organist, arranger, music director, and composer. His versatility in all of these areas has resulted in film scores, orchestral compositions, concert appearances, and well over 100 albums recorded under his own name. While developing a masterful facility for improvisation in his own piano style, Hyman has also investigated ragtime and the earliest periods of jazz and has researched and recorded the piano music of Scott Joplin, Jelly Roll

Morton, James P. Johnson, Zez Confrey, Eubie Blake and Fats Waller, which he often features in his frequent recitals. Other solo recordings include the music of Irving Berlin, Harold Arlen, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Duke Ellington. Some of his recordings with combos are *From The Age Of Swing*, *Swing Is Here*, *Cheek To Cheek*, and *If Bix Played Gershwin*, plus numerous duet albums with Ruby Braff, Ralph Sutton and others. In a different vein, Hyman was one of the first to record on the Moog synthesizer, and his *Minotaur* landed on the Billboard charts.

Hyman's concert compositions for orchestra include his *Piano Concerto*, *Ragtime Fantasy*, *The Longest Blues in the World*, and *From Chama to Cumbres by Steam*, a work for orchestra, jazz combo, and prerecorded railroad sounds. A cantata based on the autobiography of Mark Twain was premiered with the choral group, Gloria Musicae, in Sarasota, Florida. In a growing catalogue of chamber music compositions, his most recent pieces are *Dances and Diversions* for the Kinor String Quartet, and *Parable for a Parrot*, a trio for the Palisades Virtuosi. Earlier compositions include a violin/piano sonata, a quintet for piano and strings, and a sextet for clarinet, piano and strings. Hyman has been heard in duo-piano performances with Derek Smith, in "Three-Piano Crossover" with Marian McPartland and the late Ruth Laredo, and in pops concerts under the direction of Doc Severinsen.

In years past, Dick Hyman was music director for Arthur Godfrey and orchestrator of the hit musical *Sugar Babies*. He has served as composer/arranger/ conductor/pianist for the Woody Allen films *Zelig*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Broadway Danny Rose*, *Stardust Memories*, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, *Radio Days*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, *Mighty Aphrodite*, *Everyone Says "I Love You"*, *Sweet and Lowdown*, *Melinda and Melinda*, and *The Curse Of The Jade Scorpion*. Other film scores include *Moonstruck*, *Scott Joplin—King of Ragtime*, *Alan and Naomi*, and *The Lemon Sisters*. His music has also been heard in *The Mask*, *Billy Bathgate*, *Two Weeks Notice*, and other films.

In the dance field, Mr. Hyman composed and performed the score for the Cleveland/San Jose Ballet Company's *Piano Man*, and Twyla Tharp's *The Bum's Rush* for the American Ballet Theater. He was also the pianist/conductor/arranger in Ms. Tharp's *Eight Jelly Rolls*, *Baker's Dozen*, and *The Bix Pieces*, and similarly arranged and performed for *Miles Davis: Porgy and Bess*, a choreographed production of The Dance Theater of Dallas. A recent premiere, a dance based on Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, was presented by the John G. Shedd Institute of Eugene, Oregon, and danced by the Eugene Ballet Company.

"Dick Hyman's 100 Years Of Jazz Piano", soon to be available as a set of CDs with DVD, is based on his frequent recital-lecture. New recordings include three duo-piano albums with Ray Kennedy, Bernd Lhotzky, and Chris Hopkins; a trumpet/piano duet album with Randy Sandke; and *Lost Songs of 1936* with Bucky Pizzarelli and Jay Leonhart.

www.dickhyman.com