

PAUL WHITEMAN'S BOYS: Paul, 1st row left end; Bix is 6th from left also 1st row; 3rd from top in vest, Charlie Margulies

Tone Poem: BIX

by Amy Lee

A word or two about Amy Lee and Tone Poem: Bix

It all started, this Bix thing, when a musician Amy knew in college used to sing Bix choruses to her. Then he gave her Bix's piano pieces (published by Robbins). Later—miraculously—she found herself on the staff of *Metronome* with an assignment to do a series on the Goldkette band.

That's how she met many of the musicians who worked with Bix. She learned about him from them. And from many others, and from Paul Whiteman, and from his family in Davenport—his mother, brother, sister—other relatives, and friends, and townspeople.

The titles of Bix's four published piano pieces seem to typify his short, ephemeral sort of life. She has used them as headings for the chapters.

As for Amy: you already know she was on *Metronome* (early 1940's). Most of the rest of the '40's she was in the music field as reporter-reviewer-feature writer—on *Down Beat*, with the National Association of Music Merchants, on *Music Business*. She was also writing for *The Christian Science Monitor*.

In April 1957 she joined the staff of *World Outlook* magazine, a monthly published by the Methodist Board of Missions. She covers Methodist-supported social-work, interracial, and educational projects throughout the United States and writes a monthly feature on the United Nations.

For nearly two years she has been jazz reviewer and feature writer for *The Christian Science Monitor*.

P.S. She always wanted to play in a jazz band on the Mississippi, but having missed the boats, Amy found some teenagers in her home area and got a job with them on piano. That was in the '40's, too. They had a great 16-year-old on clarinet and soprano sax: Bob Wilber. Played a lot of dancing school, yacht club, and wedding gigs—Amy still does once in awhile. She studies now with pianist Hank Edmonds.

P.S. again. Amy also wrote for *Art Hodes'* once flourishing little magazine, *The Jazz Record*.

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?

—1 Cor. 2:11

CANDLELIGHTS . . .

Bix Beiderbecke . . .

a name that rolls off the tongue
The way the notes rolled from Bix's horn.
He was made, not of flesh and blood,
But of rhythm and life and soaring song.
Bix didn't have to learn music.
He knew it.
It was his living and breathing and being.
Such living and breathing and being
takes no thought
of time or trouble or tomorrow . . .
Easy is the moment.

* * * *

Standing on the levee . . .
in Davenport, Iowa,
That evening in June 1941, watching
The ferry coming across the Mississippi
from Rock Island,
Was to expect Bix along any minute,
in his springy, toed-out walk,
horn in a newspaper under his arm . . .
The paddle wheel at the back of the ferry
kicks up a mild wake,
propels the chunky boat along.
A big, new-painted excursion boat lolls
proudly 'longside the levee.
It's nearly shoving-off time,
people
are swarming up the gangplank
for a moonlight sail
down river.
The air is warm, the night sky soft,
the river beckoning.
The ferry pulls up at the Davenport
levee.
Its dancing deck fills
with boys and girls.
On a small stand at one end,
the five-piece band
beats off for a tune:
maybe it's *Honeysuckle Rose*, maybe
it's *Jazz Me Blues*—
doesn't matter—
feeling's right, the beat easy . . .
Good way to spend an evening,
around the music
and fun
on the river . . .
Good way to play, too,
in a little jazz band
on the river,
to a steady beat and a good tune
swinging free . . .

* * * *

x's coming to Davenport,
to the big house at 1934 Grand Avenue,
(third child and second son born to the
B. H. Beiderbeckes)
was on the tenth day of March, 1903.
was a time of new sounds
mingling with old,
a motor's cough under the clang of
anvils,
psalms rising out of saloons,
far-off chant of the German Kaiser,
claiming power,
coon-songs fretting the tempo set to
"Old Black Joe" on the parlor organ,
hammocks under shade trees, and
band concerts in the parks,
long summer evenings on wide
verandas,
a mouth organ's reedy serenade spiral-
ing with the dust
from a buggy meandering toward
night . . .
t first, of course, Bix's coming
mattered only to the family,
only theirs the knowing of his child ways
that never really changed
after he'd gone out to make music
in the world . . .
t heart forever the Bix of three
afraid when neighbors laughed too
loud at him
(meaning no harm—he was so *cute*).
At their door he'd stop and say,
"Don't laugh."
Running innocently across a newly
painted porch,
Crying by the smashed statue in
the parlor,
"Baby boke Daddy's dolly."
ct in this world of puzzle
there was escape:
there was music—
organ tones his mother touched to life
Sunday morning at the Presbyterian
Church . . . voices of his Grandpa's
"Mannerchor" . . . his father's zither . . .
best of all the piano in the parlor when
his mother played it . . .
ll the time he teased her to play for him
—especially his favorite, *Mr. Dooley*—
hile he sat on the floor, knees "akimbo,"
hitching back in time to the music
until he landed under the parlor table.
here he stayed, unaware
of time or place . . .
* * * * *
is own music-making began with Liszt's
Hungvian Rhapsody, No. 2.
oo little to climb on the stool,
e stood at the piano, reached up to the
keys
nd pulled forth the notes,
o the astounded delight of all who
heard and told him so
in nickels, oranges or candy . . .
* * * * *
indergarten was for Bix . . .
another place
o make music.
iding down the banister one day,
e was stopped midway by teacher's
"No!"
n he slid to the bottom, climbed off,
and smiled up at her,
"Now what can I play for you?"
ready he was "news."
e was the little boy
who played the piano.
e made the papers. Said one:

"Yesterday was the fifth birthday of
Master Leon Bix Beiderbecke, the bright
little son of Mr. and Mrs. B. H. Beider-
becke . . . and the event was celebrated at
Miss Alice Robinson's kindergarten in
School No. 9 by his little classmates. A
handsome birthday cake with lighted
candles, sent by Mrs. Beiderbecke, was
brought into the kindergarten room by
Master Bix, while the little folks sang
with a will, 'Happy Birthday to you.'
'Then with the extra candle 'to grow on'
left lighted, the cake was cut . . ."

* * * * *

For music . . .

Bix looked everywhere
wherever there was a piano,
wherever there was someone
to play, someone
to listen.

With one finger of the right hand
he could pick out melodies,
Soon, with one finger of the left,
add bass.

The original harmonies and rhythms he
concocted
Were to marvel at.

His "Uncle Albert" Petersen, a Daven-
port bandmaster,
Saw and heard the things Bix was playing,
all on the black keys,
And the word "genius" kept saying itself
to him.

For Bix's stunts on the piano were
beyond belief.

Talk of him grew . . .

*How could he know so much at
that age?*

How could he play like that?

He made the press again:

"SEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY MUSICAL
WONDER!

"Little Bickie Beiderbecke Plays
Any Selection He Hears!

"Leon Bix Beiderbecke, aged seven
years, is the most unusual and the most
remarkably talented child in music that
there is in this city. . . . He has never
taken a music lesson and he does not
know one key from another, but he can
play in completeness any selection, the
air or tune of which he knows.

"Little 'Bickie', as his parents call him,
has always had an ear for music. When
he was two years old Mrs. Beiderbecke
says that the child was able with one of
his chubby fingers to play the tune of
'Yankee Doodle.' It was not as distinct,
by any means, as he can play now, but
even then the tune could be detected as
it was running through the child's mind.

It must not be understood that he still
plays with one finger and one hand. He
plays every selection that he learns as
completely in the bass and treble as it is
written. In fact, so acute is his ear for
music that if his mother plays a piece in
another key than that in which 'Bickie'
has always played it, the child will sit
down and play the piece in exactly the
same key with proper bass accompani-
ment.

"As a rule, however, if he hears and
learns the air of a new piece he will play

it in one or two, and sometimes three or
four flats. In fact, he plays most of his
pieces in flats. •

"The child has a love for music. It is
such a satisfaction and delight to him that
if he is a little out of sorts, as any child
occasionally is, his spirits are always
brightened by a suggestion from his lov-
ing mother that they go to the parlor and
play a little on the piano.

"When 'Bickie' is playing the piano,
he never looks at the keys; he never
watches his hands. To one watching and
listening to the child playing the piano,
it might seem that the child's mind was
not on what he is playing, because his
eyes are centered upon objects about the
room or he is looking into space with
apparently no thought of the piece he is
playing. But a careful observation of that
gaze and of the child indicates that his
mind is absorbed in the music, in the
melody that he is playing.

"'Bickie' attends the Tyler school on
Grand Avenue, across from the Beider-
becke home, and whenever Prof. Otto
comes to the school he plays the violin
and calls upon Bix to play the accom-
paniment on the piano.

"Mrs. Beiderbecke is a gifted pianist
and the child hears and has always heard
music at the home. His mother is contem-
plating engaging an instructor, even at
the child's tender age, for the reason that
she fears that his playing will become too
mechanical and that he will never fancy
playing by note."

* * * * *

He tried the note way,
About a year,
With a Davenport teacher.
Soon this teacher saw Bix's talent
lying deep within him,
like a wellspring,
forever rising and bubbling over
of itself . . .

How can you teach a wellspring
to pour forth its water?

How can a wellspring,
practice bubbling?

The teacher advised against the lessons.
Bix could play without practicing.

He did not have to pound the piano

into submission

or labor over it

long hours.

As soon as his fingers played one happy
bit, another would beckon to him,
and another.

How could one young boy ever hope to
catch all this music
in 88 keys?

* * * * *

IN A MIST . . .

Bix appeared one day . . .

at Uncle Albert's door.

He was fifteen, and he had something
shining in his mind and in his hand.

He said, "I can buy this cornet for \$15."

"Do you want to buy it, Bixie?"

"Yes. I'd like to take lessons on it. Will

you teach me?"

"Why, of course, Bixie. But what about your piano?"

You have a great future, my boy as a concert pianist."

Bix shrugged. "I think I could have more fun with cornet."

He bought the cornet, but he never showed up for lessons.

* * * * *
New tempos tensed the air, faster, freer, ears ringing with gun-fire and *Over There*

listened to nervous new brassy sounds, "laughing" trombones, spinning from parlor victrolas . . .

On the "vic" his brother had bought Bix listened to the feverish new music of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the band that used no notes, five men making up tunes on tunes out of their heads.

He picked up his horn, put it to his lips . . .

He could play right along with the Dixieland Band.

He felt their music and the way they were playing it . . .

The months and music mingled . . .

At school . . .

Bix, Esten Spurrier (another cornet player), and a couple of other kids had a little jazz band of their own.

They practised in the gym after school—*Ostrich Walk, Fidgety Feet, Tiger Rag*—jazz borne up the river from New Orleans,

jazz they heard on records, on the boats, in vaudeville, on visits to Chicago.

Same time Bix went along like any high school kid,

Playing baseball, tennis—won the Tri-Cities' championship at sixteen—

Helping a bit down at the East Davenport Fuel and Lumber Company where his Dad was manager,

Reading a lot,

letting his mother do his botany for him, ("even had to press flowers"),

Thinking music . . .

dreaming to symphonies on the "vic" . . .

On days no one was home,

He'd take his horn, sit by the hour in his pajamas

in front of the victrola, exploring music . . .

Once he bought a little blank tin disc, blew onto it

first a melody of his own making, then added parts: with one cornet he sounded like four cornets playing four-part harmony . . .

He watched his brother struggling to learn sax

so they could play together.

"Say, how do you finger that?" he finally asked.

In two days he was playing it.

His brother gave up.

One night two of the Petersen boys

driving past a dance hall near

Davenport slowed down . . .

above fiddles and oom-pah they heard a cornet.

The player was faking—playing without music the right notes in the right places.

They pulled up.

"That's Bixie!"

It was Bixie, all right, standing up in front of a local dance band,

and the stuff he was getting out of his horn was paralyzing the lips and fingers of every musician in the band.

Uncle Albert didn't believe it when they told him.

How could it be Bix? He'd never had a lesson!

Uncle Albert watched the seeds of Bix's genius sown wilder and wilder.

He kept advising study.

The old fear became new—"he might never fancy playing by note."

* * * * *
One happy bit after another . . . catch it if you can . . .

* * * * *
Bix was always late for dinner . . .

And one night in early summer later than usual.

The family had finally gone ahead without him.

After dinner, his father, mother, brother and sister

gathered on the big front porch in the long twilight

to worry and wonder.

Where could he be until this time?

Into the deepening night, up from the river,

Floated the sound of a calliope,

Nearer the boat edged to Davenport's levee,

louder rollicked the steam-pipes.

The Beiderbeckes looked at each other and nodded.

Bix would be home shortly.

My, but couldn't he play it, though!

* * * * *
Always coming home late . . . always chasing music . . .

* * * * *
Waiting, wondering, thinking of the talk around town.

His father would turn to the family, time after time,

and ask in despair,

"What is this Bix has?"

* * * * *
Week-end nights Bix hung around local dance bands,

Waiting for a chance to sit in, play a few choruses.

A musician in Carlyle Evans' outfit had a little short cornet

Bix liked.

Evans played at the Davenport Coliseum, and there Bix bee-lined.

The minute the boys in the band spied him, they'd say,

"Hey, here comes that Beiderbecke pest again!

Quick, hide the horn!"

* * * * *
Not much use hiding horns from Bix.

He always found them sooner or later.

And after jobs, he and a gang would pile in the open touring and blow

cornet through the streets.

Davenport shuddered.

Some noise.

* * * * *
Seeing the drift of Bix's living, the Beiderbeckes

tried a horn-hiding tactic of

their own:

they sent Bix to Lake Forest Academy near Chicago.

How could they know they were sending him into the boiling pot of jazz?

In the Windy City were

King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jimmie

Noone, Johnny Dodds, Leon Rapallo

. . . New Orleans jazz men making

Chicago burn with new fire.

At Lake Forest . . .

Bix made the football and baseball

teams,

The glee club and orchestra, but

another orchestra, advertised

in the 1921-22 Yearbook,

took up his mind.

The ad read:

FOR YOUR DANCE

CY - BIX

ORCHESTRA

Cy Welge Bix Beiderbecke

711 Central St. 1934 Grand Ave.

Evanston, Ill. Davenport, Ia.

Chances to play were all around.

He needed a union card.

* * * * *
Bix's mother phoned Art Petersen at the Davenport local of the musicians' union.

Art was on the examining board.

"I thought it might be easier for Bix here than in Chicago," she said.

The day the exam was scheduled,

Art gave the board a little pep talk

about his "cousin" Bix and his cornet.

"The kid might be light on reading,

but he has some talent as a 'jazzer,'

be too bad

to turn him down."

Coolly, the board summoned Bix.

"Where's your cornet?" they asked

when he came in empty-handed.

"Oh," Bix smiled at them, "I'm taking

the exam on piano."

He played some semi-classical things,

and passed.

* * * * *
Nights and weekends Bix would sneak

out from Lake Forest

To play—often with five musicians

calling themselves the Ten Foot Band

It got so there was nothing but music

making sense to him.

He gave up Lake Forest altogether

for playing . . .

on a lake boat from
Chicago to Michigan City . . .
on a riverboat out of Davenport,
his horn
bouncing notes against the low ceiling
and out
over the waters of the Mississippi,
notes of the tunes born of jazz,
blues from New Orleans and the river,
some slow and haunting, some
fast and hot . . .

Into them all
Bix wove beauty, into
the melodies or into the chords.

For his family's sake . . .
he took another look
At books at the University of Iowa.
No go.
Chicago and the boats had opened the
door of jazz to him,
music of improvisation,
vagabond music,
finding shelter where it could—
on the boats, in saloons,
dance halls, dives . . .

Jazz gave Bix a freedom,
freedom to dream away time,
freedom to play as the spirit drove him.
It gave him, too,
its underworld night spots,
bootleg liquor, violence,
the play-all-night-sleep-all-day beat
of its hours . . .

Chasing the notes,
not knowing where he was going or
why, just pick up a horn and blow
and feel joy . . .
music and booze mixed
behind the law's back . . .

Couldn't say no, not polite, to
"Have another!" "Play another!"
No nickels, oranges, and candy
now—the praise came in bottles.
Make every jam session
when crowds left dance halls and clubs
empty of noise, and there were
just a few men on the stand, and
a bottle,
and hours of charged music stilled
only when the first dismal dawn light
dragged the horn from lips too numb
to blow another note . . .

Careless of self, untidy, forgetful,
just blowing and listening,
harmonies and rhythms.
jumbles of sound—Ravel, Eastwood
Lane, Armstrong, MacDowell,
Bessie Smith, Debussy—
Capture the glory
on piano, on cornet,
any little old cornet
wrapped in a paper bag, or
a newspaper,
lost or left behind most times . . .

Glimpses of him here, then somewhere
else,
Flashes of the fabulous cornet, flashes
of piano . . .

FLASHES . . .

There was that night . . .
Ester Spurrier and some other
musicians stopped for a bite in
Bloomington after a job.
While they were eating, the door
opened suddenly.
In breezed a campus red-hot in a slicker.
He walked past them to the piano.
At the sound of it, "Spur" and the
others stopped eating.
After a little, they got up, went over
and hung around the piano.
Pretty soon they were talking to the
player.
He said his name was
Hoagy Carmichael . . . he'd been
hearing a cornet player in Chicago
he couldn't get off his mind.
"What's his name?" they asked.
"Bix Beiderbecke."
Hoagy, a student at Indiana U., began
booking Bix and the Ten Foot Band
(now eight men and renamed the
Wolverines) for college dates around
the Midwest.

It was a band for Bix.
They didn't read music,
just read each other's eyes.
Wherever they played dancers stopped
dancing, crowded around the
bandstand.
Wolverine records began to sell.
When the band hit Broadway in 1924
and played the "Movie Ball,"
In the crowd of jazz musicians around

the stand was the king of the trumpet,
Louis Armstrong . . .

* * *

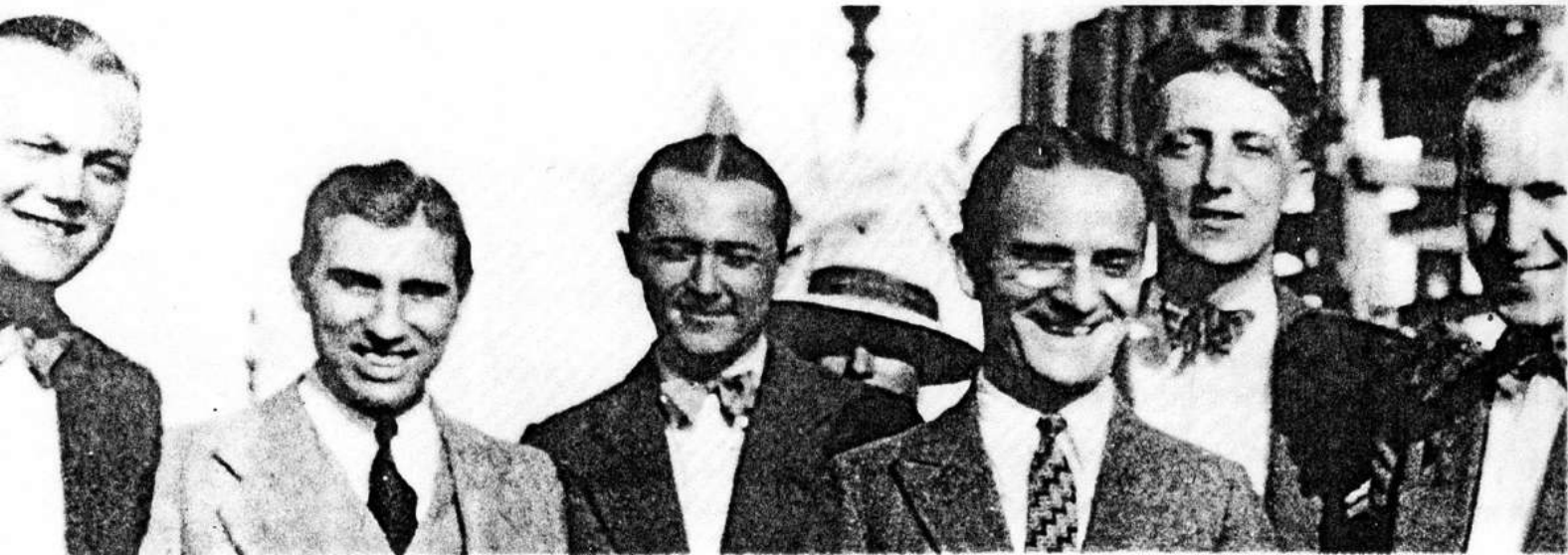
In Davenport they heard Bix
had left the Wolverines,
gone down the river with his cornet
to join a band in St. Louis.
The leader was Frank Trumbauer
and he played C-melody sax.
At the Arcadia Ballroom there.
He and Bix talked to each other
on cornet and sax
a year or so,
till it was time to move on.
Summer of 1926 they packed up for
Hudson Lake, near South Bend, Indiana
to join some guys from the
Jean Goldkette band in Detroit . . .

Summer the *Indiana Stomp* shook dance
hall floors, and girls wore white sailor
hats that said, "Out for a Good Time!"
sailor hats Bix liked to
point his horn at and "shoot"
while the drummer hit the
woodblock with his stick . . .

Summer they said Bix played
The greatest horn of his whole career.
Played it
Night upon night,
Sitting cross-legged by drums and piano,
Light overhead
beating down hot and bright
on a beat-up horn . . .

Played it
To musicians swarming down Sunday
afternoons from Chicago—Davy
Tough, Bud Freeman, Joe Sullivan,
and Eddie Condon—
to hang on every note that soared
out of that cornet,
any old cornet he
happened to have, it didn't matter,
it always sounded the same.
After the job, back at the cottage,
where the bachelors lived out of cans
and bottles,
Pianist Itzy Riskin would play the
old cheese-box of a piano,
for Bix rolled up
in mosquito netting on his bed,
groaning in ecstasy at the music:
Debussy, Lane's *Adirondack Sketches*,
his favorite MacDowell, *Epilogue* . . .
Days Bix spent humped over the same
old cheese-box piano,

BIX (third from left) and FRIENDS



Chasing notes of a piece he never
could finish,
a piece that was finally
In a Mist . . .

Summer's end and Bix joined
The big Goldkette band at Detroit's
Graystone Ballroom.
The phrases that leapt from his horn
Were captured and written into band
arrangements by arranger Bill Challis.
Bix was one of three trumpets now,
in a band of fourteen men.
If his solo flights were fewer,
He was still with musicians who felt
the music
the way he did . . .

Some nights the band split into two
groups, one to play waltzes,
one—with Bix on piano—to play jazz . . .

There was symphony, too: at a special
concert for Bix and the other boys in
the band

The Detroit Symphony performed
Ravel's *La Valse*.
Bix was news again in Davenport.
The local press noted release of a
Gennett record, *Davenport Blues*
by Bix and his Rhythm Jugglers:
"Besides directing his own orchestra,
he is also in the ensemble of Jean Gold-
kette's Recording Orchestra of Detroit.
Any of the Gennett records made by Bix
and his orchestra, or any of the Gold-
kette Victor records can be heard at the
Harned and Von Maur victrola depart-
ment, which is managed by C. B. Beider-
becke, who proudly boasts that he is
Bix's older brother."

The band toured New England, barn-
stormed in the East, spiked the dance
tempo of college hops—Cornell,
Penn State, Notre Dame—
tilted in battles of music with
Duke Ellington, Roger Wolfe Kahn,
Vincent Lopez . . .

That winter another "king" stood among
the crowds to listen—
Paul Whiteman.

On its 1927 spring tour
the band played Young's Million
Dollar Pier in Atlantic City . . .

The "king" stopped by again: this time
Paul Whiteman batoned the boys
through *St. Louis Blues*
to great applause . . .

The applause at New York's Roseland
Ballroom, a few weeks later,
Was only from musicians:
It was the night the Goldkette band,
in tears, broke up.
What did dancers know or care about
improvisation?
Paul Whiteman . . .
grabbed Bix, Trumbauer, others
And placed them conspicuously
among his fiddles, reeds, and brass.
He also took Challis
Who continued to "arrange" Bix . . .
But it was not the same . . .

In his "symphonic jazz" Whiteman let
the world know he had
"The World's Hottest Trumpet Player."
The spotlights blazed . . .

* * * * *

IN THE DARK . . .

The harmonies in Bix's head . . .
and heart
Hadn't stopped beckoning,
But they seemed farther and farther
away.
At the piano, alone,
He'd come closer to them, catch some . . .

Respite from the exhausting
Whiteman pace—the road, records,
broadcasts, records, rehearsals,
concerts—he played *In a Mist* on the
stage of Carnegie Hall in a Whiteman
concert. "Greatest moment of my life,"
he told his mother . . .
*have a future, my boy, as a concert
pianist . . . more fun with cornet . . .*

He was with the
musical circus boxed and crated in
headlines, shipped on trains, planes . . .
fitful sleep caught between shows,
on jumps,
waking weary and jumbled . . . noise,
smoke, "speaks," crowds, clapping
hands . . .

Bouncing the notes out, gallantly,
notes that sounded too small
in the band's vast hubbub,
sure, lyrical notes, as always,
notes that cried sometimes . . .

Trying with one little cornet
to lift the band's cumbersome weight
and make it swing . . .

Trying with whiskey to quench the
thirst of the spirit . . . clapping
hands . . . for him,
world's hottest trumpet player,
didn't even finger his horn right,
used his own fingering,
never learned the right way,
didn't have to . . . just blow . . . easy . . .
ovation at the concert in Clinton,
Iowa . . . local boy makes good . . .
"Don't laugh" . . .

Six months later Bix came home,
at Whiteman's expense,
to rest, recover his health.
Came home to this:

DANCING

To-night and Sunday

DANCELAND BALLROOM
Jimmy Hicks and his Orchestra
featuring
—"BIX" BEIDERBECKE—
"Hottest Trumpet Player in the
Country"
Gentlemen, 50¢ — Ladies, 25¢

The Beiderbecke "pest" had become
the local bands' bait.
"Hire us," they'd bargain, "we'll have
Bix Beiderbecke."
And Bix would go . . .
Couldn't say no—not polite—couldn't

disappoint anyone . . .
Came home to find
his old pal Esten Spurrier still playing
cornet around town, the way they
used to.

They played some jobs together,
got kicks out of trivial tunes
Bix could make important . . .

Came home to lonesomeness
in a town where few were interested
in the things he was, or talked about
the same things, or wanted to.

Came home to confess
to Uncle Albert and Art Petersen
he couldn't understand
all the fuss about him in the Whiteman
band, billed as the world's hottest
trumpet player, when all the time he'd
been sitting next to two fine legitimate
trumpet players who made him afraid
to blow his horn . . .

Said the life was tough, thought he'd
give it up.
Uncle Albert urged him to.
"Be a pianist, Bixie."
Be a pianist . . . yeah . . .

But he took his horn back to New York
in March, 1931 . . .
made some records, did a few
broadcasts, played some dates . . .

The music came harder and harder, and
sometimes not at all.
Musicians saw what was happening, and
their minds were heavy with the
sight . . . no, not Bix . . .

One early-summer night he had a job at
Princeton with a pick-up band.
Ignoring a cold, he forced himself to go:
*the leader had promised
Bix Beiderbecke.*

From the pneumonia that soon overtook
him there was no escape . . .

When the wire reached Davenport
summoning Mrs. Beiderbecke to
New York, she knew . . .
in the night of August 6,
Bix left his horn behind
for the last time . . .

* * * * *

The Beiderbeckes don't sit on the porch
of the big house at 1934 Grand Avenue
anymore, waiting for Bixie, worrying
about him, wondering where he is,
playing the piano somewhere,
playing calliope on a riverboat . . .
there aren't riverboats as there were
then . . .

Mrs. Beiderbecke moved into a hotel,
the house was too much with
Mr. Beiderbecke gone, and Bix's sister
and her family living in the East . . .

But through those years before her
passing in 1952 Mrs. Beiderbecke had
peace of mind . . .
*"I didn't have to wonder where Bix
was"*
*"There was a St. Louis conductor who
thought Bix was amazing and
wanted him to stick to classical
music"*

*"Bix was enraptured with symphonies
... the minute one was put on the
victrola he was 'out'. . . He took me
to a lovely concert in Carnegie Hall"*

He was always news, but the once good
press had turned bad: Bix and his
drinking . . . over and over they wrote
it . . .

Did it not hurt?

*"Where there's music, there's never
discord, that is, among the
musicians, the dancers might be
different"*

*"I didn't appreciate his greatness,
but his brother did"*

Bix's brother—Big Bix they call him—
is in charge of the cemetery out on
Eastern Avenue . . .

every so often people come to see
Bix's grave . . . sometimes
he tells them who he is.

Now and then "Spur" used to drop over
of an evening,

to listen to Bix records,
just as others, far from Davenport,
listen

to the bright flashes of horn,
his four piano pieces—

*Candlelights, In a Mist, Flashes,
In the Dark—*

On the handful of records
left to play . . .

* * * * *

Down at the levee . . .

in Davenport, Iowa,

The ferry moves away from shore and
swings out into midstream.

Small craft, swift-running motor boats,
cut paths in and around it.

Davenport's buildings catch and hold
the sunset light.

The evening star
hangs low in the west.

The band drifts into a sentimental "pop"
tune . . .

Strains float back to those standing or
strolling on the levee

or sitting in their parked cars.
The big excursion boat lets go of land.
Laughter, like handkerchiefs, flutters
over its four decks,

The water churns up behind
as it starts its trip
through the dark waters, past
the park, past the men pitching quoits,
past cottage lights low among the
trees on shore . . .

Lights dance high on the bridges.
In the distance, lights of a carnival
ferris wheel, circling high,
dazzle . . .

It was a good way to spend an evening,
around the music
and fun
on the river . . .

Good way to play, too,
in a little jazz band
on the river,
to a steady beat and a good tune
swinging free . . .

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Friends pay respect

(left to right)

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