10 *'In a Mist'—the legendary Bix.*

Jimmy McPartland: To me, Bix—well, that was it. What beautiful tone, sense of melody, great drive, poise, everything! He just played lovely jazz.

Hoagy Carmichael: I was interrupted by the arrival of a slight, extremely young kid who had just come in.

'Hoagy, meet Bix Beiderbecke.'

'Hello,' Bix said through slightly reddened lips. He didn't pay much attention, though his eyes and silly little mouth fascinated me.

When he had gone, George leaned over to me. 'You ought to hear that kid play; he's going to be tops some day. He's got ideas, but his lip is still weak.'

'Where's he from?'

'Davenport, Iowa. He's up here now going to Lake Forest Academy. He says he's liable to get kicked out any day, but not because he comes to town every night to listen to jazz bands.

'He's nuts about Ravel and Debussy's stuff.'

'Sounds like a goof.'

'He is. He used to go on the boats and play the steam calliope. Then he heard a couple of guys named Louis Armstrong and King Oliver.' George stopped. 'His folks wanted him to be a concert pianist. And has that kid got an ear! He can tell you the pitch of a belch!'

Wayne H. Rohlf: First, I would like to state that I attended the same high school in Davenport, Iowa, that Bix did. I have played in bands with him and was one of his personal friends, as well as a friend of his brother, and tried to act as a kindly adviser to young Bix. Bix played pretty knocked-out piano when he was in high school, although he couldn't read a note. In fact, I don't believe he ever learned to read piano music.

It was while in high school that Bix took a fancy to the cornet. He asked his uncle, Al Petersen, a local band leader, if he would give him lessons if he bought a cornet. His uncle failed to give him much encouragement, figuring that it was just a young boy's passing fancy. The next time Al visited the Beiderbecke home, young Bix was taking choruses on the favourite tunes of the day.

Bix would sit in with all of the local bands and played on a truck with a high school jazz band at football games. He also played with the orchestra at Iowa University and Lake Forest Academy and then joined the Wolverines and eventually joined Jean Goldkette's ork. It was while Bix was with Goldkette that he learned to read music, and his teacher was none other than the famous Freddy Farrar, and, as far as I know of, Freddy is the only real teacher that Bix ever had.

Hoagy Carmichael: It's the summer of 1923. We took two quarts of bath-tub gin, a package of muggles, and headed for the black-and-tan joint where King Oliver's band was playing. The King featured two trumpets, piano, a bass fiddle and a clarinet. As I sat down to light my first muggle, Bix gave the sign to a big black fellow, playing second trumpet for Oliver, and he slashed into *Bugle Call Rag*.

I dropped my cigarette and gulped my drink. Bix was on his feet, his eyes popping. For taking the first chorus was that second trumpet, Louis Armstrong. Louis was taking it fast. Bob Gillette slid off his chair and under the table. He was excitable that way.

'Why,' I moaned, 'why isn't everybody in the world here to hear that?' I meant it. Something as unutterably stirring as that deserved to be heard by the world.

Then the muggles took effect and my body got light. Every note Louis hit was perfection. I ran to the piano and took the place of Louis' wife. They swung into *Royal Garden Blues*. I had never heard the tune before, but somehow I knew every note. I couldn't miss. I was floating in a strange, deep-blue whirlpool of jazz.

It wasn't marijuana. The muggles and the gin were, in a way, stage props. It was the music. The music took me and had me and it made me right.

Louis Armstrong was Bix Beiderbecke's idol, and when we went out the next night to crash an S.A.E. dance where Bix was playing with the Wolverines, I learned that Bix was no imitation of Armstrong. The Wolverines sounded better to me than the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. Theirs was a stronger rhythm and

the licks that Jimmy Hartwell, George Johnson and Bix played were precise and beautiful.

Bix's breaks were not as wild as Armstrong's, but they were hot and he selected each note with musical care. He showed me that jazz could be musical and beautiful as well as hot. He showed me that tempo doesn't mean fast. His music affected me in a different way. Can't tell you how—like liquorice, you have to eat some.

Ralph Berton: My brother had already heard people talk about an orchestra of young musicians which was playing in Indiana—the Wolverines—and he became their manager. In fact, apart from Bix, the other musicians in the orchestra were rather mediocre. I heard them for the first time at the Gary Municipal Beach Pavilion at Miller Beach in Indiana. It was in 1924. Their first records at that time were just beginning to make themselves known.

Hoagy Carmichael: It was nearing the Christmas holidays. Bix blew into Indianapolis and asked me to go down to Richmond with him to hear him make some records. He phoned me at my house and I hurried down to pick him up, in my new Ford, a Christmas present to myself.

When I found him he told me that he was on his way to make some records for Gennett, the same outfit that had made our record in the fall. I was delighted to go.

Remembering my own nerve-racking experience, I thought it would be doubly pleasant to be there with no worries of my own. I asked Bix who was going to be with him on the date.

'We're going to make some records in "slow-drag" style,' Bix said, 'and I've got some guys who can really go. Tommy Dorsey, Howdy Quicksell, Don Murray, Paul Mertz and Tommy Gargano. They are going to drive from Detroit and meet me.'

'Boy,' I exclaimed, 'that's really gonna be somethin'. What are you gonna make?'

'Hell, I don't know. Just make some up, I guess.'

'How about me driving you over tonight?'

'That'll be swell,' Bix said. 'The guys are bringing three quarts. . . .'

We got to the studio and sat around for a while and the bottles got lighter and finally Bix started doodling on his horn. Finally, he seemed to find a strain that suited him but by that time everybody had taken a hand in composing the melody, though as

the bottles got still lighter nobody seemed to have a definite understanding of what that melody was.

I have a photo of that group on that day. Bix is leaning against the piano, his legs crossed, and you see him in half-profile. He looks so young, like a little boy, like Little Boy Blue—and he blew. Tommy Dorsey, beside him, bespectacled even at that early age, is slumped in a chair, his trombone at his mouth. The rest of them are in various negligent poses, waiting.

As far as I could see, they didn't have any arrangement worked out, or tune either for that matter, but when the technician came in and gave them the high sign, they took off. Away they went. Away down.

They named the piece *Davenport Blues* in honour of Bix's home town. It was done in lazy 'jig style' and, as the dead soldiers were racked up, their music grew screwier and screwier.

Toddlin' Blues was the next number, and, by the time it was finished, they were having a little trouble staying in front of their horns. But the effect was wonderful. They used the 'I'se acomin' ' strain from *Old Black Joe* and there were among them those who were soon 'a-comin'. ' A few years later three of those six boys who got together to blow jazz were gone. Little Joes, all.

Jimmy McPartland: Bix Beiderbecke—he had just about everything that I looked for in a musician. And when he came up on those Wolverines records, why, me and the rest of the gang—we just wore the records out.

We copied off the little arrangements, and what was going on in the ensembles. One thing was definite that we would never do—copy any solo exactly.

We didn't believe in copying anything outside of the arrangement. An introduction, ending, a first ending or an interlude, we would copy those, naturally. But never a solo. For instance, if Bix would take a solo, I wouldn't copy that. I would just play the way I felt.

But I was tremendously influenced by Bix, and hearing the Wolverines was a step forward for all of the gang. We got their numbers off, and added them to our repertoire.

My brother had found a job for the band, with Tesch, Bud, Lannigan, Dave North and no cornet, at radio station WGN. They called the band the Blue Flyers, and they were doing great.

I was going to join the Flyers when I received a wire one fateful day from Dick Voynow, pianist and manager of the

Wolverines. It read: CAN YOU JOIN WOLVERINES IN NEW YORK REPLACING BIX BEIDERBECKE AT SALARY OF EIGHTY-SEVEN DOLLARS FIFTY PER WEEK QUERYMARK STOP ANSWER IMMEDIATELY STOP.

I learned later that Bix had received an offer from Goldkette.

Of course, I showed this wire to everybody. Though I patted myself on the back, I was feeling doubtful. Was it a gag? Was someone playing a joke on me?

All the guys said, 'No, you're crazy! Sure, it's real. Take it; it's the greatest honour in the world.' So I said I would. They advised me to wire right back, and I did: SEND TRANSPORTATION STOP I ACCEPT THE JOB STOP. MCPARTLAND.

The rail fare was thirty-two fifty from Chicago to New York; that was third-class coach, no Pullman or anything. And that was exactly the sum Voynow sent me. Dick Voynow was handling all their business, and he said to leave immediately.

Well, I left that same night—with just my bag and my little beaten-up cornet. It *was* beat-up, too, and getting worse and worse. As I pressed the valves it would go clank, clank, clank. Gee! A noisy affair!

Taking Bix's place was the biggest thing that had happened to me. The Wolverines were *the* jazz band in the country, so far as we were concerned. And Bix—as I say, I had never met him, but just hearing him play was enough.

I've heard many great trumpeters since those days, but I haven't heard another like Bix. Somehow or other his style, the cleanliness and feeling, was lovely.

Let's call him the master and leave it at that.

I finally got into New York about six in the morning. It was the first time I'd been there in my life, and a beautiful hour to arrive. From the station I called up Dick Voynow, who said, 'Hop in a cab and come to the Somerset Hotel.' I got over there and started talking to Voynow. He 'phoned Bix, who was just coming in, pretty high.

So I met Bix.

The Wolverines were rehearsing that afternoon, and by the time I got there I was very nervous. Of course, I had memorised all the arrangements from the band's records, and when Dick asked what I wanted to play, I said: 'Anything. *Jazz Me Blues*, *Farewell*, *Riverboat Shuffle*, *Big Boy*. Anything.'

They said, 'Do you know all those tunes?'

I said, 'Sure.'

So Voynow said, 'Okay, let's go!' And he beat off and I just

started right in. I knew all Bix's lead parts—so BOOM! I must have surprised those guys; their chins dropped, and everything else.

I played their routine, took my solo where Bix used to take his. And when the number was finished they patted me on the back and said, 'Great, kid,' and all that stuff. It made me feel good; I was no more nervous—got my cockiness back.

We went through some more tunes and I was in, right then and there.

Now Bix, from the first, had been very reticent. He didn't say anything until the rehearsal was over. Then he came over. 'Kid,' he said, 'I'll tell you what you do. You'll move in with me. I like you.'

That was what he said. So I moved in with Bix.

As we roomed together, he was able to show me the different tunes and arrangements the band had, coach me in certain little figures he used in his playing. Then, at night, we would go to the job—the Wolverines were working at the Cinderella Ballroom on Forty-eighth and Broadway—and play the tunes together.

Yes, for about five nights we both played in the band. First Bix would take the lead, then he'd play second in with me to break me in. He was an enormous help and encouragement, and I got to admire the man as much as the musician.

I must tell you about his generosity to me, a complete stranger to him until I took his place in the Wolverines. After a few days he asked me, 'How can you blow a horn like that? It's a terrible thing.'

I've told you that my cornet was beat, had leaks in it and everything. But I had not realised how horrible it was until Bix took me over. At that time, he was using a horn called the Conn Victor cornet—a long model cornet and a beautiful thing. He had me blow it and it sounded great.

Said Bix, 'You need a horn like this, Jimmy, come on out with me.' Out we went to see Voynow, who gave Beiderbecke some dough. Then we went over to the Conn company, where Bix picked up four or five horns and tried them out. Finally he said, 'This is the one, Jim, for you.'

He just gave me the cornet—period. So that I would have a good instrument to play. I remember him saying, 'I like you, kid, because you sound like I do but you don't copy me. You play your own stuff; you're a good guy.'

That was nice, you know, coming from him. I had patterned

my playing after his, but had tried to develop my own self at the same time. That was what we believed, in the Austin gang in Chicago: play the way you feel, yourself!

George Johnson: The Wolverines' records had become generally known, by musicians particularly. Vic Berton, who had just finished playing with a Chicago theatre orchestra, came down to Indianapolis with an offer to engage the band—for the month of August. This offer filled in the time until our engagement at the Cinderella Ballroom.

The Cinderella was one of the finest dance halls in New York, located at Forty-eighth and Broadway, in the heart of all that is worth while in the amusement line in that city. Opposite us, playing alternately, was Willie Creager's orchestra, the first of four orchestras that played opposite us during the four months we played there.

It was only natural that we in the band looked forward with great pride and no little doubt to our next job at the Cinderella. Pride, because in less than a year as a definite organisation, we were to play in a first-rate spot on Broadway, an achievement rarely attained by any orchestra; doubt, because all our playing had been to audiences decidedly different in the matter of musical appreciation. This, in spite of the fact that Red Nichols, Miff Mole, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, Frank Trumbauer, and others were playing with different orchestras in the New York district.

There were a few Dixieland combinations in the smaller dance halls and cafés but no combination similar to ours, nor any with a similar style, and for this reason we all looked forward with great anxiety to our opening.

The day before we opened, several of us attended the Hippodrome Theatre, where Ray Miller's orchestra was playing a short booking before their opening at the Arcadia Ballroom, just two blocks from the Cinderella.

Miff Mole, Ruby Bloom (whom I had met the year previous in Chicago), and Frank Trumbauer, my personal choice for saxophone royalty, were with Ray. It was our first opportunity to hear them in person. You will understand our enthusiasm when I mention that we all let out a yell that all but drowned out the band when Miff took his first break, and were all summarily ejected from the theatre. We went around backstage, where I asked for Ruby and where we were introduced to Frank and Miff. The latter was very surprised to learn that we were the cause of

all the noise in the theatre. He had thought someone was giving him the bird.

From then on, during our stay in New York, we rarely missed the opportunity of hearing Miller's band on the nights when we started and finished early and they played late, and they came to the Cinderella as frequently.

At that time, Ray Miller's orchestra was the first of the large bands to mix a little hot music with the general run of heavy orchestrations, and their hot music would have been a great hit at the present time.

Our contract at the Cinderella was for thirty days, with two options of ninety days and one year. From the very start we were well received, and the word got around Broadway that the Wolverines at the Cinderella were something new and different.

Famous musicians came to listen and were eager to sit in, just as we had been in the days of Friar's Inn in Chicago. Most frequent of these was Red Nichols, who at that time was just coming under the influence of Bix's genius. Red probably will not like this statement, but it is my personal opinion that much of Red's playing today is the direct result of the absorption of ideas gained from listening to and playing next to Bix, together with the learning, note for note, of Bix's recordings. Even before we had landed in New York, we had heard a recording of Red's called *You'll Never Get To Heaven With Those Eyes*, in which he used Bix's chorus in *Jazz Me Blues* note for note.

Bix was a fountain of ideas that were spontaneous, as unexpected to himself as they were to us, while Red's playing has ever been methodical and carefully thought out, with each note planned ahead. Each was an artist, but Bix had the natural flow of ideas which, once played, were discarded and never used again. There were too many as yet unplayed to bother with repeating.

Our first month was replete with new experiences, being the first trip to New York for any of us. Well received, our option was taken up and we knew we were set until January first. We rehearsed new numbers and made our first New York recordings, *Big Boy*, on which Bix played a piano chorus for the first time on record, and *Tia Juana*, about which the less said the better.

Bix spent most of his time after working hours sitting in with some of the Dixieland combinations in town. He always claimed that the five-piece combination was the ideal one.

When we had been in New York a month, Bix gave his notice and joined Frank Trumbauer in St Louis.

Jimmy McPartland: The next time I saw Bix was when I'd become the leader of the Wolverines and the group was now composed mainly of the Austin High gang. It was quite a combo, and everybody came around to hear us, especially Louis Armstrong.

Louis was playing then over at the Sunset Café, which started later than us and went on till 4 a.m. or so. He came over two or three evenings a week and sat in back of the band, listening to us and chuckling all over the place. He was about twenty-five then.

Pee Wee Russell, Bix and Frankie Trumbauer were working down at Hudson Lake, about eighty miles south in Indiana. Every Monday, their night off, they would come up to hear us. When we got finished, we would all go off together and catch Louis or Jimmie Noone—another of our favourites. Sometimes we sat in with Louis at the Sunset, or with Noone at the Apex. The Apex Club was one of the regular stops.

Bix also made a point of taking me to hear Ethel Waters. It was 1927, I think, and she was in a show called *Miss Calico*. She sang, man, she really sang. We were enthralled with her. We liked Bessie Smith very much, too, but Waters had more polish, I guess you'd say. She phrased so wonderfully, the natural quality of her voice was so fine, and she sang the way she felt—that knocked us out always with any artist.

Frank Trumbauer: I had the band at the Arcadia Ballroom in St Louis in 1926. Bix and Pee Wee Russell were with me. That was the stopping-off place for all the musicians who passed through. Needless to say, the band was just a little over the heads of the public in general at that time.

Charley Horvath made me an offer to conduct the Goldkette at Detroit, and when I mentioned bringing Bix with me, he wasn't sold on the idea, as he explained that Bix was around Detroit for some time and nothing happened. I refused the offer unless Bix could come along; so Charley reconsidered and told me I would have to be responsible for him, as he did not think it would work.

He didn't know what Bix and I had been doing. Bix could not read very well when we started. We taught him all that was possible in the time we had. Bix thought and played in concert, even on a B-flat instrument. We started him on violin parts—then taught him to transpose the violin parts to trumpet—and at last we gave

him trumpet parts alone, and he was doing pretty well with them. At least he was in there trying. He was saving his money, had plenty of clothes, and was playing golf and looked wonderful.

We had a fine understanding and could anticipate what the other was about to do on his instrument. We sat at the piano for hours and worked things out; and if you would like to hear some of the inspiration for *In a Mist*, play *Land of the Loon*. He loved Eastwood Lane and Cyril Scott. I don't remember ever sitting down to listen to popular records; generally we listened to symphonies that we liked. A few of the things that most of the boys didn't know was that Bix got to the point where he could read pretty well.

He had a love life that very few people ever heard of. This girl still cherishes the things she hears about Bix, and she has a wonderful reason to do so. If she ever wants her story to be told, I feel sure she will let me tell it.

I seem to be wandering from the point a bit. We folded the band and went to Detroit to join Goldkette; and to say that the band was a 'killer' would be putting it mildly. Don Murray was everything Russ Morgan said he was, and a little more. He would bring a basket of beer and sandwiches to rehearsal, and he and Quicksell drove me 'nuts.' As I was conducting the band, I would ask the boys to make a cut on some arrangement, and Murray would take me at my word and actually cut that part out with a pair of scissors—his parts all looked like an old lace curtain. And if you wanted to put something back that was previously cut out, Murray would yell, 'Oh, no you don't! Look at my part; you cut that out once.' Now what would you do in a case like that? I roomed with Murray for a while, until I couldn't stand the ladders and red lanterns he and Quicksell would bring home.

Russ Morgan: There are just no two ways about it—the old Jean Goldkette band was the greatest band ever brought together! No band of today can compare with it. Why, when we played in the old Roseland in New York, we would give out with such tunes as *Tiger Rag* and *Riverboat Shuffle* on Saturday night and then play concerts in church the next Sunday morning!

I'll never forget our closing night in the Roseland. There were musicians from out of fifty-two different orchestras in the audience. After the last number was played, the people refused to leave the floor and the management had to call the cops in order to get the band off the bandstand.

When we arranged our music, we always gave Bix a newspaper

to read for his part. He couldn't read music, anyway, and he would go off and smoke during rehearsal. And then, after we had played off the score, he would return to his chair, doodle a little, and then fill out his part with some of the most beautiful notes you ever heard. I can't recall ever hearing any clinkers or bad notes. Bix, you might say, was the cellophane wrapper around our basket of fruit.

Everybody loved Bix. The guy didn't have an enemy in the world. But he was *out of this world* most of the time. I remember one time three of us went out to play golf early in the morning and we came across Bix asleep under a tree. The night before he had decided to play some twilight golf and had lost all his golf balls. So he just laid down and went to sleep. We woke him up and he finished the course with us.

Frank Trumbauer: When Bix and I played the Graystone Ballroom, and Whiteman was in the balcony, I was leading the band. Backstage, after a set, Bix said to me, 'That is our next move. I hear the big boy is getting his kicks, at least so the boys tell me.'

One of the things most people have forgotten was the next band we were in. Adrian Rollini set up a band of All-Stars for a café—I believe the name was New Yorker. Frank Fay was the main attraction; Patsy Kelly was a stooge; and Franklin was the piano player. Well, we all know where Fay is today; also Patsy Kelly; and Franklin. Anyone who has ever been around the Paramount lot can tell you who he is. Needless to say, most of Fay's stuff was too fast for the public, even when we played the Strand Theatre in New York. This band contained Joe Venuti, Eddie Lang, Morehouse, Rollini (leader), Frank Signorelli, Murray, Bix, and myself and others.

Bix and I joined the Goldkette band on the same day. Also the All-Stars and the Whiteman band on the same day. When we joined 'Pops' Whiteman at Indianapolis he said, 'Boys, I hope you will be happy. I pay more than any other leader because I want the best, and I have to keep the best happy. Go get a red coat and sit in the next show.'

Bix went to the brass section with no idea of what was going on, and I sat in front with the saxes; and I was just as groggy as he was. A great many stars of the times were in that band: Bing Crosby, Jack Fulton, the Dorsey brothers, Challis, Grofe and Strickfadden—you people should know the roster of the band at that time—1927.

Whiteman, during the show out in front—rightfully proud—pointed to Bix; the spotlight hit him. 'Take the next one,' yelled Pops. Bix looked over to where he thought I should be and smiled and cut one that cooled all the boys. I took the next one, and we didn't get fired, at least.

Pee Wee Russell: I first met Bix I'd say in the latter part of 1926. That was in the Arcadia Ballroom in St Louis. Frankie Trumbauer had the band there and he had brought Bix down from Detroit where both had been working with Jean Goldkette. This was a summer job and we worked the season at the Arcadia. After we finished the season we went to Hudson Lake. You see, this was a Goldkette unit. We had the book and Jean was at the office from where he sent bands out. I had heard Bix on records before—those Gennett records with Tommy Dorsey and Paul Mertz and the other guys—and I had heard him in Chicago. There used to be a band at the Rendezvous that Charlie Straight had. Those were the speakeasy days and Bix used to come late and play with that band. It would sometimes go to seven or eight in the morning. But I had never worked with Bix until St Louis.

Sonny Lee, who later played with Jimmy Dorsey, was playing trombone with this band at the Arcadia, and Sonny used to live at my home. I came home one afternoon and there was Bix with Sonny in the living-room playing Bix records. It gave me a kick—a big thrill to have Bix in my home. Among musicians, even at that time, Bix had a reputation. Very few of us understood what he was doing; even in Chicago only a limited number did. In fact, it was the guys like Krupa, Goodman, Sullivan, Freeman, Dave Tough and Tesch, naturally, that really appreciated him. The other musicians, like in St Louis, understood what he was doing on a much smaller scale. And as for the management, he wasn't even featured with the band.

The thing about Bix's music is that he drove a band. He more or less made you play whether you wanted to or not. If you had any talent at all he made you play better. It had to do for one thing with the way he played lead. It had to do with his whole feeling for ensemble playing. He got a very large tone with a cornet. Records never quite reproduced his sound. Some come fairly close but the majority don't.

Then there were the men he usually recorded with. He had a hard time with some of those records. I don't mean that the men

he recorded with weren't musicians. I mean he wasn't in bad company, but they didn't belong in a jazz band and Bix had been raised in jazz. So it was all due to them that a majority of the records didn't quite catch what Bix could do. But Bix's disposition wasn't one to complain. He wasn't able to say, I don't like this guy, let's give him the gate and get so and so. He was never a guy to complain about the company he was in. Like I say, they were good musicians and they could make it with Goldkette where they were supposed to do certain things. But they weren't for jazz.

Without a doubt, music was all Bix lived for. I remember we used to have a Sunday afternoon thing at the Arcadia Ballroom. Ordinarily the band would complain about the extra work, but Bix would really look forward to it. He said he liked to see the kids dance on Sunday afternoon. He liked to watch them do things like the Charleston, et cetera. He said he liked it because the kids had such a fine sense of rhythm. And, in their way, the kids knew what Bix was doing. They knew he was doing something different because he made them want to dance.

We used to have little head arrangements, written by some of the men in the band. They were good musicians in the band. We had a bass player, for example, from the St Louis Symphony for a while. We would do little things once in a while so drastic or rather so musically advanced that when we had a damn nice thing going the manager would come up and say, 'What in God's name are you doing?' I remember on *I Ain't Got Nobody* we had an arrangement with five-part harmony for the three saxes and the two brass. And the writing went down chromatically on a whole-tone scale basis. It was unheard of in those days. 'For God's sake!' the manager would yell out—and naturally we couldn't explain it to him. That sort of music became more or less of a novelty with the people though. And they'd say at times, 'Play those awful things!' Bix was instrumental in things like that. Most of the writing at that time was done by Bud Hassler. He was a tenor player.

As for Bix's compositions, this is the background of *In a Mist*. Tommy Satterfield, who was working with the Skouras brothers at that time, I don't know if anybody knows this story—Tommy had an office and did all the scoring for the large pit bands. Being an arranger, he took a liking to Bix and what he was doing and he took down *In a Mist* for him. You see, Bix played it for him on the piano. It was the first time that the song had ever gotten

written down. I think Ferdie Grofe helped Bix with *Candlelights* later and some of the others.

Bix had a miraculous ear. As for classical music, Bix liked little things like some of those compositions of MacDowell and Debussy—very light things. Delius, for example. Then he made a big jump from that sort of thing to Stravinsky and stuff like that. There'd be certain things he would hear in some modern classical music, like whole tones, and he'd say, why not do it in a jazz band? What's the difference? Music doesn't have to be the sort of thing that's put in brackets? Then later it got to be like a fad and everybody did it, but they wouldn't know what the devil it was all about.

We would often order a score of a new classical work, study it, and then request it from the St Louis Symphony. And we'd get ourselves a box for those concerts when they did a programme we all liked. It would be Bix, Hassler and I. We'd haunt them to play scores that we wanted to hear. Stuff like the *Firebird Suite*.

Rudolf Ganz was conducting at that time. We got to know him. We had the connection through Trumbauer's bass player. There was a soloist clarinet in the St Louis Symphony, Tony Sarlie. I used to try to get him to teach me, and I studied with him a little. I wish I had studied more.

Anyway, we'd get those requests in. We weren't exactly like jitterbugs. It was on a different scale. I guess you could call us a different type of jitterbug. At least we were trying to learn something. And we wanted to hear these scores played well. You see, we knew what was supposed to happen because we had taken the scores with us and followed the work with them. Later on, Don Murray, Bix and I used to go to concerts in New York. Murray was a very, very clever arranger. He and Bill Challis.

Paul Whiteman: Bix Beiderbecke, bless his soul, was crazy about the modern composers—Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Ravel—but he had no time for the classics. One evening I took him to the opera. It happened to be *Siegfried*. When he heard the bird calls in the third act, with those intervals that are modern today, when he began to realise the leitmotifs of the opera were dressed, undressed, disguised, broken down and built again in every conceivable fashion, he decided that old man Wagner wasn't so corny after all and that swing musicians didn't know such a helluva lot.

Pee Wee Russell: I think Paul Whiteman will bear me out on this story. Anyway, we were all living in the Forty-fourth Street

Hotel in New York and there was a concert at Carnegie Hall. I forget what the programme was. Whiteman had a box for it, and on that night his band was doing the Chesterfield House. Whiteman invited Bix and Murray, and Bix invited me and, at the last minute, Whiteman said he couldn't make it. So the three of us were quite despondent and we ordered some more whisky. Whiteman called back and said, 'Bix, I called the place and told them it was okay for you to use the box.' So we stopped in to celebrate our new thing and we drank some more whisky. We were feeling pretty good. We were dressed for the part and enjoying it immensely.

When we were in the box, I remember Don Murray was sitting right on the edge of his chair. There were lorgnettes all around us. We smelled awful bad, but we looked good. So Murray was sitting on the edge of his chair—remember we had all been celebrating—the chair slipped and Murray fell off. Bix and I were gentlemen enough to not notice anything. We were on our best behaviour. Murray quietly got up and sat down again on the edge of his chair. At intermission, Don apologised profusely. After intermission, in the middle of the next movement, Murray became excited—the chair slipped again—and he fell off. Bix and I didn't say a word. Neither did Murray. We pulled apart the curtain that led into the box and we left. None of us saying a word to each other. We went into a bar and stood there drinking. You see, we were ashamed and were conscious of the other people at the concert. It was no fault of Murray either. But at that bar at first we still didn't say a word—we didn't want it to be any more embarrassing for him that it already was. Finally, Murray started berating himself so we told him not to.

Jimmy McPartland: Bix didn't talk much, and there was certainly no conversation when a record was on. After it was over, we'd talk about how the chords resolved and, in Stravinsky or Holst, how different and interesting the harmony was.

He did like to talk about Stravinsky, Holst, Eastwood Lane, Debussy. I remember, about 1929 in New York, he took me to a Stravinsky concert at Carnegie Hall given by the New York Philharmonic. We used to talk about writing a jazz symphony. The plan was to give the soloists a terrific background with a good beat and then let them take off. Nothing ever came of the idea, but, as you know, he was very interested in writing. I wish he'd put down on paper more of what I know was in his head.

At sessions he'd often show me sections of what he'd written

—things that later became *In a Mist*, *Flashes*, et cetera. He'd play a section and ask what I thought of it and then would play it another way to see if it could sound better.

In his own cornet playing, Bix could read well enough but was never a quick sight reader. He'd practise a part over by himself and then play it skilfully with the large band. Actually, he could create better than those guys could write.

As for why he never switched to trumpet, he used to say that the trumpet had a 'pee-wee' tone. One thing about his jazz records is that I think it's remarkable he sounded as good as he did, carrying all that dead weight he had for accompaniment.

Bix contributed a lot to jazz. I think he helped bring it polish. He made it more musical. His technique was excellent, his intonation was great. So was his harmonic sense and his application of it on the cornet and piano. He was the first man in jazz I heard use the whole tone or augmented scale. I think almost any jazz musician—besides all the brass men—have one way or another been influenced by Bix.

One thing we talked about a lot was the freedom of jazz. People used to ask Bix to play a chorus just as he had recorded it. He couldn't do it. 'It's impossible,' he told me once. 'I don't feel the same way twice. That's one of the things I like about jazz, kid, I don't know what's going to happen next. Do you?'

Louis Armstrong: And the first time I heard Bix, I said these words to myself: there's a man as serious about his music as I am . . . Bix did not let anything at all detract his mind from that cornet and his heart was with it all the time.

I shall never forget those nights in Chicago, when Bix was with the great Mr P. W. and I was playing for Joe Glaser at the Sunset at Thirty-fifth and Calumet Streets. That's when Earl Fatha Hines, Tubby Hall and Darnell Howard was in the band. It was Carroll Dickerson's band. That's when the Sunset was really jumping.

Bix came through with Mr P. and they opened up at the Chicago Theatre. I shall never forget that incident because I caught the first show that morning . . . hmm . . . I had to stay up all night to do it.

But Bix was in that band and this was the first time I witnessed him in such a large hell-fired band as Mr Whiteman's . . . I had been diggin' him in small combos and stuff. Now my man's gonna blow some of these big time arrangements, I thought . . . and

sure enough he did . . . as soon as I bought my ticket, I made a beeline to my seat because the band was already on, and they were way down into their programme, when the next number that came up, after the one they were playing when I came in, was a beautiful tune called *From Monday On* . . . My, my, what an arrangement that was.

They swung it all the way . . . and all of a sudden Bix stood up and took a solo . . . and I'm tellin' you, those pretty notes went all through me . . . then Mr Whiteman went into the Overture by the name of *1812* . . . and he had those trumpets way up into the air, justa' blowing like mad, but good . . . and my man Bix was reading those dots and blowing beautifully . . . and just before the ending of the overture, they started to shooting cannons, ringing bells, sirens were howling like mad, and in fact everything was happening in that overture.

But you could still hear Bix . . . the reason why I said through all those different effects that were going on at the ending you could still hear Bix . . . well, you take a man with a pure tone like Bix's and no matter how loud the other fellows may be blowing, that pure cornet or trumpet tone will cut through it all . . . all due respect to the men.

After the show, I went directly around backstage to see Bix, and say hello to a few of the other musicians I knew personally. After a long chat and when they went on the stage for their next show, I cut out and went straight to a music store and bought *From Monday On* . . . and put it with the rest of my collectors' items of his.

The recordings from *Singing the Blues* on down to *In a Mist* . . . they all collectors' items. . . .

When Bix would finish up at the Chicago Theatre at night, he would haul it out to the Sunset where I was playing and stay right there with us until the last show was over and the customers would go home.

Then we would lock the doors. Now you talking about jam sessions . . . huh . . . those were the things . . . with everyone feeling each other's note or chord, et cetera . . . and blend with each other instead of trying to cut each other . . . nay, nay, we did not even think of such a mess . . . we tried to see how good we could make music sound which was an inspiration within itself.

After a while we would sort of rest up and Bix would get on the piano and play some of the sweetest things . . . real touching . . . that's when he was getting ready to record his immortal *In a*

Mist . . . the tune is still fresh today, as it was then . . . you couldn't find a musician nowheres in the whole world that doesn't still love Bix's *In a Mist*.

Armand Hug: I first met Bix in the fall of 1928. He had already left Frank Trumbauer and Jean Goldkette and had joined Paul Whiteman's orchestra on a tour of the United States. When the Whiteman orchestra came to New Orleans, Monk Hazel, Eddie Miller and I went backstage to chat with Bix during the intermission. I can remember Whiteman passing while we were talking with Bix, and Monk said, 'Listen, Paul, if you don't let Bix play more horn we're going to tear this place down.' Whiteman smiled and very obligingly replied, 'Don't worry, I'll let him take over when we go back on.' During the rest of the programme we heard wonderful jazz.

At that time, Bix's piano composition *In a Mist* had not yet been published and I had been trying to learn it from the records. I'd been having trouble with it and I asked Bix to show me how it went. Bix sat down next to me at the piano and began playing the parts with which I'd been having trouble. I shall remember that piano lesson as long as I live.

Another tribute to his genius came one evening when Bix sat in with King Oliver's Band at the Plantation Club. Lynn Harrell, of Dallas, Texas, who was present that evening says that tears rolled down Oliver's face and Oliver said that Bix was the greatest he had ever heard. Louis Armstrong, who was playing second trumpet with Oliver at the time, was also high in his praises of the boy from Davenport.

Jimmy McPartland: Sometime before I began to travel with Ben Pollack, Bix had already joined Paul Whiteman. They were on a tour and were heading for Chicago. I got a call at eight one morning from Bix. He'd left his tuxedo at the cleaners in the last town, and he asked if he could borrow mine. Then and always he could have anything I had.

All during the date at the theatre, a troupe of us gathered between shows and at night at the Three Deuces and jammed. Bing Crosby would play the cymbals or the drums if there were no drummer. Bix always preferred to play piano at a session, and this time he asked me to play his new Bach cornet, the best horn he'd ever had.

I fell in love with it, and Bix asked, 'Would you like to have a

horn like this?' He took me over to the Dixie Music House after the next show, put down one hundred dollars and said, 'That's all the money I have with me. But I guess you can scrape up the other fifty. You can give it back to me sometime.'

I'll never forget that week. We played almost all the time he wasn't on stage. I never did see the tux again. Do you think I cared? I still have that horn, by the way. Bix warmed it up at the theatre for a few shows, then I used it for some time. Now my four-year-old grandson, Dougie Kassel, has it.

People have asked me often what Bix was like as a person. Well, he was very reticent. His main interest in life was music, period. It seemed as if he just existed outside of that.

I think one of the reasons he drank so much was that he was a perfectionist and wanted to do more with music than any man possibly could. The frustration that resulted was a big factor, I think.

Pee Wee Russell: As I said, Bix was not one to complain about the company he was in. He was a very gentle man. He had a very, very good sense of humour. For him there was nothing better than a good laugh. He was a perfectionist for himself in music though I don't say he became despondent if he ever missed a note, but he'd swear like anybody does when he missed one.

Mezz Mezzrow: Late in '27 sometime, Bix suddenly fell into town. He was playing at the Chicago Theatre with Paul Whiteman's orchestra, and, soon as we got the news, Eddie Condon and I shot over to knock him some skin. He came backstage with Bing Crosby (Bing was singing in Whiteman's trio, The Rhythm Boys, with Harry Barris and Al Rinker). The first thing he said when he dug us was, 'Come on, let's go get a drink.' Down through the Loop he led us, along State Street, until just off of Lake Street we met up with a blackened-up old store that looked like it had been condemned before the Chicago fire. A peephole slid open, an eye appeared in the hole and gunned Bix; then the door swung open like a switch-blade. I guess the mug of that bottle baby was known to every peephole attendant in the Western Hemisphere.

Jimmy McPartland: My last period of association with Bix was in New York. The Pollack band hadn't been working for almost two months. Eight of us, including the Goodman brothers, were in one hotel room, and we were really scuffling for food. Then

at a cocktail party on Park Avenue I ran into Bix who'd just come back into town with the Whiteman band. I told him that this was pretty ironic. Here I could get all the drinks I wanted for free but didn't have enough money for a sandwich.

Bix took me into a corner and pulled out two hundred dollars. I told him ten was enough but he said, 'Don't worry about it, kid. You'll be making money soon. Then when you see your way clear, you can pay it back.' I did, in about eight months, after I'd been working for some time in the pit for *Sons of Guns*.

In the last months of his life, I'd see Bix quite often at a little speakeasy on Fifty-third Street called Plunkett's. Most of the musicians hung out there. I'd see him, too, backstage whenever Whiteman played town. We'd jam in the dressing-room with Bing always on the cymbals or a snare drum.

At Plunkett's we'd sit and talk. Bix was ill, looked bad, all swollen up. He drank, didn't eat, stayed up late, got very depressed. Whiteman had sent him home to Davenport for a while, but it didn't seem to help.

I remember one night he had a very bad cold, and he was broke besides. I told him to go home and stay there until he got over the cold and lent him some money. 'Thanks, kid,' he said, 'I'll be all right. I've got a job at Princeton in a couple of days.' That was the last I saw of Bix. Naturally, I cried when he died. I loved him both as a person and as a musician.

Pee Wee Russell: As for what caused Bix to destroy himself, well, in that era, naturally where he started, around Indiana, there was that thing with the hip-bottle and the gin—the 'twenties and all that stuff. Later, when he had acquired a name, he could get a bottle of whisky any time of day or night. Now Bix enjoyed a drink but he was human too. Everybody likes privacy. Privacy enough to sleep and eat. But it was impossible for him to get any. There were always people in his room. They would knock on the door even at 6 a.m., and it was impossible for him because of the kind of person he was to insult anybody, to say get out of here.

I remember how, at one hotel, he used to leave word that he wasn't in. So some fellows would check into the hotel, take a room on the floor below Bix's room; then they'd come up and rap and pound on the door and you'd have to answer. He even had a piano in the room, and, when he had a spare moment, he'd try to get a composition started, but with all those people always hanging around he didn't have a chance. In a sense, Bix was killed by his

friends. But I think the term is being used loosely. Because they weren't his friends. They were the kind of people who liked to be able to say, 'Last night I was up at Bix's and oh, was he drunk! Gee, you should have seen his room!' You know that type of people. They wanted to say they were there. I don't think I have to say any more about that type of people. And Bix couldn't say no. He couldn't say no to anybody.

I remember one Victor date we did. Bix was working in the Whiteman band at the time. He had hired me for the date but rather than hurt anybody's feelings he also hired Jimmy Dorsey and Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey and everybody.

Every time somebody would walk into the door at Plunkett's, the bar we hung out at, Bix would say, 'Gee, what am I going to do?' So he'd go up to the guy and hire him for the date. He didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings. So he went way over his budget and we had to scrape cab fare to get back from the date.

Bix came from a good home life. He had the best. His people were very well-to-do. Anything more I could tell you about Bix is all history anyway and has been written about.

Hoagy Carmichael: Bix was sick. Whiteman had sent him home and he had come back again to New York, but he hadn't rejoined Whiteman's band and that had hurt him. He was drinking pretty hard, and staying to himself in his hotel room for days at a time. His only recreations were moving pictures such as *Wings* and *Hell's Angels*. He was crazy about flying; occasionally he would visit the city morgue.

Jazz was dying and the man who was its epitome was dying, too. He worked occasionally on his piano compositions. *Flashes, Candlelights, In the Dark*. Whiteman's arranger, Bill Challis, came at times to get them on paper. Thanks to Bill, these beautiful things were preserved. The darkness was closing in on Bix and he didn't seem to care.

I went by Bix's room one day. I met a maid in the hall. 'What's the matter with that fellow, anyway?' she asked. 'Who is he? He hasn't been out of his room for three days.'

Tell the maid. Who is he?

I looked at the maid's black face. 'Just a guy,' I said. I went on to his room.

'Hi, Hoagy.' Bix was lying on the bed. He looked bad, there was something missing, as if part of him were already 'in the dark.'

'Hi, Bix.' I sat down. I was uneasy. 'How's it goin', fellow?'

Bix smiled wanly. 'What are *you* doing?'

'Been listening to the publisher's theme song: "*It's Not Commercial.*" '

Bix looked away and then I heard his voice. 'Don't worry, boy. You're . . . ah, hell. . . .'

'Get out your horn. Let's doodle a little.'

He shook his head. 'Ran into a girl the other day,' Bix said, 'she's going to fix me up in a flat out in Sunnyside.'

'Swell. Get out of this dump and you'll feel better. You might eat something.'

He looked at me and the veil went from his eyes for a moment. 'How's for bringing her over some night?'

'Sure, any time,' I said.

And Bix brought the girl and came to my apartment one night. We didn't have a drink, we didn't talk music, and it soon became apparent that this girl had no idea who Bix was. And then the terrible thought struck me—I didn't know either.