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September, 2023

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The ATJS Jazz Messenger is circulated mostly by e-mail, and is published as we have an important message or gather enough material to assemble a new issue. We are starting our 2023-24 season, as good an occasion as any to crank out a new issue.

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## President's Message by Dave Stoddard



I was a young lad when I began playing the cornet in early 1961. I was born into a family of musicians. Some of you heard my older brother Ed play trombone with the ATJS All-Stars in June, 2006. My first exposure to the music was from a dixieland band that Kennett High School band director Pat Canfield put together to play in the school auditorium pit while the stage was being prepared for the next concert band. Ed played with that group. Mr. Canfield led three concert bands—the Elementary, Junior and Senior Bands. I thought the school jazz combo sounded pretty hot.

About this time Ed brought home a record of Pete Fountain and other New Orleans All-Stars. Some of these recordings can be found on the Internet. The players numbered some of the best traditional jazz musicians working in New Orleans in the 1950s, and I was fascinated. The trumpet players were Tony Almerico and George Girard and I was blown away by both of them. Needless to say, in the 1960s any resemblance between my playing and theirs was strictly coincidental.

By the time I was in high school the dixieland band was gone and I played in the Senior Band, the Brass Choir, a big band called the Blue Embers and a small group playing Tijuana Brass arrangements. My entry into traditional jazz had to wait until I got to the University of North Carolina. The Imperial Jazz Band got started in October, 1970 and stayed together until the fall of 1974. I played trumpet and flugelhorn and led the band in 1970-72. Banjoist Bob Leary left for Cape Cod and the band could not find a suitable chord player.

In those days I was battling lip trouble which led me first to the tuba and later to the trombone. I had no idea that one day I would be trying to hold the Austin Traditional Jazz Society together and keep traditional jazz alive in Austin, Texas. Playing and studying traditional jazz has been one of my passions, and I hope I have encouraged others to generate some passion for the music as well.

Recently I screened a documentary on the great modern jazz bassist Ron Carter. I was struck by one of his comments:

“It’s still seeing the music fight for survival. I’m still part of that. How long do I want to be fighting for the survival of the music, or part of the struggle of people who are trying to make the music remain vital to someone else’s life, which is how long music lives.”

It’s that way with ATJS. Traditional jazz is not mainstream music. You are hard-pressed to find it on TV or radio (although some good vintage stuff is played by Dennis Campa in his show Adventures in Sound on KOOP-FM). Traditional jazz is approachable, and can be enjoyed on many levels. People who attend an ATJS concert for the first time are often surprised by the musicianship and good sounds they encounter. It is one of the reasons we offer free jam sessions and include free passes with membership cards. We need to bring in people who, having heard the music, want to come back.

Our problems with ATJS continue. The pandemic took quite a bite out of us, and we continue to need more members, money and Directors. However, let's keep in mind why we are here at all. We serve a wonderful music genre that needs all the exposure and support it can get. We are fortunate in having a small but talented corps of musicians who can bring festival-quality jazz to our stage. As we begin a new season, enjoy the music and bring anyone who might have an interest in listening and/or dancing to an afternoon of traditional jazz along. Our membership builds one couple or person at a time.

Sincerely yours,  
David H. Stoddard  
President

## Thanks to our Poster Hosts!

Every month, the Society puts up posters for its concerts. Here are our current poster venues.

Music & Arts  
Round Rock, TX  
Cedar Park, TX

Westbank String Shop  
6301 Manchaca Road  
Austin, TX

Austin Public Library

Strait Music Company North  
13945 Research Boulevard  
Austin, TX

Atria at the Arboretum  
9306 Great Hills Trail  
Austin, TX

Better Than New Band Repair  
1402-C Chisholm Trail  
Round Rock, TX

Fresh Plus Grocery  
2917 West Anderson Lane  
Austin, TX

Phil's Ice House  
13265 North US 183  
Austin, TX

Upper Crust Bakery  
4508 Burnet Road  
Austin, TX

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## Current ATJS Board of Directors

Dave Stoddard	President
Don Denzin	Recording Secretary
Nancy-Jane Griffith	Director
Becky Maddox	Director
Bill Troiano	Director
Dave Bedrich	Director

Nominations for additional Directors and the annual Society election will take place on Sunday, September 10 during the concert at Ben Hur Shrine Temple.

## Local Traditional Jazz Events

Every month the Society sends out a MailChimp listing local traditional jazz events. If you know of people who might like this calendar, please have them send an e-mail to [info@atjs.org](mailto:info@atjs.org) or refer them to the Society website at [www.atjs.org](http://www.atjs.org). The schedule is posted there as well.

The website has many interesting features, including photos from past concerts, information about traditional jazz, and postings of past Jazz Messengers.



## 2023-24 Schedule

September 10	Swing Shift
October 15	Violet Crown Serenaders
November 26	Jam Session 1
February 4	Colin Hancock and the Joymakers
March 17	Vic's Hot Six
April 14	Jam Session 2
June 9	Silver Creek Jazz Band

All concerts are from 2 to 4:45 p.m. at Ben Hur Shrine Temple, 7811 Rockwood Lane, Austin, TX (near West Anderson Lane and the MoPac).

### **Bix Beiderbecke and the Growth of Solo Improvisation**

Dave Stoddard, September, 2023

Early jazz records are worth a listen. The recordings in this article are all available on YouTube. If the URL doesn't work, go to YouTube and enter the title line into the search box.

Jazz benefitted greatly from the growth of two mass media in its early days. These were phonograph records and commercial radio. When I started playing traditional jazz in the early 1970s, people were alive who had either played jazz in the 1920s or heard it being played. They are pretty much all gone now. The radio broadcasts have long since disappeared into the ether, leaving only the recordings made of them remain to show what they sounded like.

Records were important because they allowed people who bought them to listen to jazz musicians and bands they might never get a chance to hear live. A hundred years after the fact, they are our window on how jazz developed in its early days. It's an invaluable but imperfect look. Numbers of notable jazz pioneers never recorded (Buddy Bolden), made recordings, all of which have since been lost (Emmett Hardy), or recorded so late in their careers that the recordings do not come close to matching their reputations (Freddie Keppard).

In addition, early jazz recordings require some patience and even re-training of the ear because of the imperfections of early recording techniques, and the limitations they put on performers. Numbers of sources tell us that bands approached the music far differently on a bandstand than they did in a recording studio. The standard 78 rpm record lasted about three minutes, not a long time. Many traditional jazz bands perform ensemble verses and choruses, followed by solos by most or all of the instruments, followed by a closing chorus, or even verse and chorus. That invariably lasts longer than three minutes.

Early recording devices were acoustical. That is, a diaphragm inside a horn picked vibrations from the performance and transmitted it to a metal needle which cut a groove into a wax record. The wax record was used to make a metal master, from which 78 rpm records were stamped. The best acoustical recordings were made by Victor and Edison.

Fidgety Feet Original Dixieland Jazz Band June, 1918  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=596e4IgXQcY>

Let's listen to an early and influential jazz recording. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band was a quintet from New Orleans. They were the first jazz band to make commercially-released records in 1917. They caused a sensation in popular music in New York and their records sold very well. The ODJB was fortunate to be recorded by Victor. In listening to Fidgety Feet, one is struck by the successful recording of drums, something not duplicated successfully by other labels until the mid to late 1920s.

One also hears collective improvisation—the three lead horns achieve an ensemble sound with the trombone and clarinet playing alternate lines against the melody set forth by the cornet. There are “hot” breaks, places where four of the players drop out for a measure or two and the remaining player plays a very brief solo passage. However, there are no improvised solos. Even with the three minute limitation of the recording, the ODJB plays ensemble jazz throughout.

Bix Beiderbecke was born in Davenport, Iowa in 1903. New Orleans riverboats with live hot dance bands called at Davenport. It is believed that one of Bix's early influences was the New Orleans cornetist Emmett Hardy, who died at an early age of tuberculosis. Hardy was known to have played on the riverboats and played in a lyrical style somewhat akin to that developed by Bix Beiderbecke. Bix also acquired some ODJB records and listened to them over and over.

Bix Beiderbecke played cornet and piano. He had a keen ear for music, so much so that he played mostly by ear and was years learning how to read music properly. He became fixated on music at an early age and did poorly in school. His parents sent him to Lake Forest Academy near Chicago. Bix was expelled from Lake Forest for poor grades and his habit of sneaking off to Chicago to hear jazz bands, including the Creole Jazz Band of King Oliver.

Bix developed into a competent dance band musician, and hooked up with a successful dance band called the Wolverine Orchestra. It was so named because it had a very limited repertoire and in the course of an evening played the same tunes numbers of times. One of these was Jelly Roll Morton's Wolverine Blues. All of the arrangements were worked out by ear.

The Wolverines were good dance band musicians, much in demand for dances throughout the Midwest. The only other Wolverine to have a substantial career as a jazz musician was Bix's eventual replacement on cornet, Jimmy McPartland. The band started out with eight musicians: cornet, clarinet, trombone, tenor sax, piano, banjo, tuba and drums.

In 1924 the Wolverines made a series of trips to Richmond, Indiana to record for Gennett Records, a division of Starr Piano Company. Harry Gennett built his own recording device after taking a correspondence course. The recordings themselves were quite good for their day. The distant sound on many of the records came from the pressing of the records, a process which was not so good. Some latter-day recording engineers have been able to clean up the sound and make the recordings sound more clear. Fidgety Feet was re-mastered by Harry Oakley and sounds surprisingly good.

Fidgety Feet Wolverine Orchestra February 1924  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JVG-oV4eIw>

On Fidgety Feet, we hear a much larger sound than that achieved by the ODJB. The music flows more smoothly here than on the ODJB recording, and is not as stiff and ragtime-oriented. In addition to the brief solo breaks, we get a nice half-chorus low-register solo from clarinetist Jimmy Hartwell.

Jazz Me Blues Wolverine Orchestra February, 1924

[Jazz Me Blues - Wolverine Orchestra \(Bix Beiderbecke's first solo on wax\) \(1924\) - YouTube](#)

Recorded on the same day in 1924, Jazz Me Blues features Bix Beiderbecke's first recorded solo. This solo was a considerable departure from the string of ensemble choruses in many early jazz records. It was in some ways a trend-setter for Beiderbecke's solo style. It is melodic, but has very little to do with the melody of the chorus. It is played in the middle register of the cornet—no virtuoso fireworks here! The phrases are nicely developed. Transcriptions of this and other Bix solos were transcribed and published, and this solo still has influence today.

Riverboat Shuffle Wolverine Orchestra May, 1924

[Riverboat Shuffle - Wolverine Orchestra \(Bix Beiderbecke\) \(1924\) - YouTube](#)

Hoagy Carmichael wrote Riverboat Shuffle (originally titled Free Wheeling) in 1923. This was its first recording. Bix plays an exquisite solo on this one, highlighted by taking a break by letting a long tone trail off into silence. His is the only full-chorus solo on the recording. There are a number of hot breaks.

Royal Garden Blues Wolverine Orchestra June, 1924

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf1Rsk0Ero>

Royal Garden Blues, a longtime jazz standard, gets unusual treatment on this recording. For a start, the tempo is much slower than most renditions. Bix's solo begins on a high whole note and works its way through the chord structure. While the solo does not feature any blues figures, it is a notable and plaintive statement. Jean Pierre Lion, a Bix biographer, refers to it as “a poetic solo, which had no equivalent in the recorded jazz music of that time.”

Big Boy Wolverine Orchestra October, 1924

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5ZD2wWEGiY>

By this time in 1924, the Wolverine Orchestra was recording in Gennett's New York recording studio, a better recording venue than the studio in Richmond, Indiana. Bix Beiderbecke was about to leave the Wolverines for the Jean Goldkette Orchestra. Big Boy opens with a free-wheeling opening solo chorus by Bix Beiderbecke. After the full band plays the verse, we hear a chorus by tenor saxophonist George Johnson, followed by a rare Bix Beiderbecke piano solo. During the piano solo, Bix's cornet was held by Jimmy McPartland, his successor in the Wolverine Orchestra. One can readily hear that the band has come a long way since February. The collective improvisation in the ensemble is much more swinging than the stiff, raggy sound of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

Singing the Blues Frank Trumbauer and his Orchestra April, 1927

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8FPCVybNoI>

Frank (Tram) Trumbauer was a much-admired C-melody saxophone player who played with Bix Beiderbecke in several ensembles, most notably the Jean Goldkette and Paul Whiteman Orchestras. Trumbauer was a steady musician who was married and drank sparingly, in contrast to many jazz musicians of the day. He was protective of Bix, whose drinking and late hours were notable throughout much of his all-too-brief jazz career. Trumbauer accepted Whiteman's offer to join only if Bix was hired, too.

Singing the Blues was recorded under Trumbauer's name while he and Bix were with Goldkette. The ensemble had some notable players in addition to Bix and Tram. Jimmy Dorsey played clarinet and alto sax, Miff Mole played trombone and Eddie Lang was on guitar.

The group had an odd omission—no bass instrument. Lang's guitar was a highly effective accompaniment/collaboration to the solos of Trumbauer and then Bix. Jimmy Dorsey also plays a nice clarinet solo. This is Bix's signature improvised solo, and was played virtually note for note by Rex Stewart in a recording of *Singing the Blues* by the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra in 1931.

Royal Garden Blues Bix and his Gang October, 1927

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SFV-ThKQ-Q>

Bix cut a number of small-group sides under the name of Bix and his Gang. Here is a rendition of *Royal Garden Blues* which stands in sharp contrast to the 1924 Wolverine Orchestra version. For a start, the recording is electrical and has much higher fidelity. The improvisation, both during ensemble passages and during solos, is quite good. Bix's solo is less plaintive and more conventional here, though quite good. The recording is greatly enhanced by the presence of Adrian Rollini on bass saxophone. Rollini was a xylophonist who took a liking to bass sax and quickly mastered it. He played excellent bass lines and was sometimes the best soloist in a band.

Sorry Bix and his Gang October, 1927

[Sorry \(Remastered\) - YouTube](#)

Here is one of the best of Bix Beiderbecke's New York small-group recordings. The greater emphasis on soloing is evident. *Sorry* opens with a lovely soloistic opening chorus by clarinetist Don Murray, who dances around the melody. The full band sails through the verse, after which trombonist Bill Rank and Bix split a chorus, each taking sixteen bars. Adrian Rollini once again makes an excellent contribution.

From Monday On Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra (Three Takes) February, 1928

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4BDs7Rn4hE>

The Paul Whiteman Orchestra has often been derided by jazz historians for being overblown and not very jazzy. These recordings show that at its best the Whiteman ensemble was capable of playing some very hot music. This URL leads you to three takes of *From Monday On*, each very much worth a listen. Bix plays an improvised opening chorus on all three takes, each solo markedly different. Bix often remarked that he never played the same thing twice. The excellent Bill Challis arrangement has Bix playing behind a hot violin trio chorus. The first take has Steve Brown on string bass and the second two takes have Min Leibbrook, a Wolverine Orchestra alumnus, on tuba.

At this point Bix Beiderbecke had been making jazz records for four years. Sadly, his career was in slow decline at this point. He recorded some good jazz solos in 1928, but they became fewer and fewer as time went on. Bix was a heavy drinker and in 1928 his health began to give out. He suffered what appears to have been an alcoholic collapse in Cleveland on November 30, leading to a stay in a New York sanatorium until some time in January, 1929.

Bix also suffered from alcoholic polyneuritis and walked with a cane throughout 1929. On September 13, 1929 Bix fainted during a recording session with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. When Bix missed the following day's recording session Whiteman sent him back to Davenport to recover. Whiteman kept Bix's chair in the orchestra open against his return, but he never did. He returned to New York in 1930 and played and recorded sporadically. In August, 1931 he died at the age of 28 from lobar pneumonia.

During his career, Bix Beiderbecke was known mostly to a host of admiring musical colleagues, a few jazz journalists and some hot jazz fans. Even though he recorded with Paul Whiteman on records which sold

very well, he was only one of a number of notable Whiteman sidemen. The records he cut with the Wolverine Orchestra and Bix and his Gang sold only modestly. The 1928 Okeh record with *Ol' Man River* and *Wa-Da-Da* sold about 3,000 copies. A typical Whiteman record sold upwards of 30,000 copies.

Bix had a lasting influence on a host of jazz cornet and trumpet players, both white and black. Louis Armstrong, who played in a bravura, blues-oriented style much removed from Bix's introspective approach, was a great admirer. Toward the end of Bix's tenure with Whiteman, a player named Andy Secrest who played in Bix's style was hired. Secrest at first played Bix's solo lines when Bix was absent, and eventually took over the Bix chair.

After his death Bix became a jazz legend, both for his melodic playing and for his unfortunate lifestyle and early death. Contemporaries insist that the recordings of the day do not capture the full beauty and purity of Bix Beiderbecke's tone. One can only wonder about this—the recordings themselves are quite notable. Bix Beiderbecke was an avid follower of contemporary classical music, especially works composed by Eastwood Lane and Maurice Ravel. He explored alternate harmonies, and can be said to anticipate some aspects of modern jazz.

Bix Beiderbecke's records are still in print, and some of the electronic remasterings of them, particularly by John R.T. Davies, has increased their fidelity and made them more listenable. A fuller listen to the recordings of Bix Beiderbecke is as close as a session on YouTube, or an Internet purchase of some of his collected recordings.



Bix Beiderbecke (1903-31)

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presents

## Swing Shift



**Come for an enjoyable afternoon of listening and dancing to a fun-time New Orleans style jazz band.**

Sunday, September 10 from 2 to 5 p.m. at Ben Hur Shrine Temple, 7811 Rockwood Lane in Austin.

**Admission:** \$12, College students with ID, and members of Austin Jazz Society: \$5.00. Tickets may be purchased at the door. **ATJS** concerts are family-friendly.

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