The Hudson Review, Inc

Bix
Author(s): William H. Youngren
Reviewed work(s):
Source: *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring, 1975), pp. 87-96
Published by: The Hudson Review, Inc
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3850552
Accessed: 08/02/2012 19:54

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Hudson Review, Inc is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Hudson Review.*

http://www.jstor.org

WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN

Bix

THAT LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND BIX BEIDERBECKE are the two greatest jazz cornetists is a widely accepted fact. But while Armstrong's best work has long had its share of enlightened appreciation, and while there is general critical agreement about the nature of his achievement and the shape of his career, Bix has always remained something of a mystery. By the time he drank himself to death in 1931, at the appallingly early age of twenty-eight, he had an enormous reputation among musicians but was unknown to the general public. Therefore it is not surprising that a legend quickly grew up around him, that the real Bix of the 150 or so recorded performances got shunted aside in favor of a sort of Jazz-Age James Dean, an intense, driven romantic whose vision of perfection made life in the real world intolerable. In Dorothy Baker's 1938 novel *Young Man With a Horn,* which gave the legend its canonical form, a wise old friend shakes his head sadly and says of the hero's collapse: "That note he was going for, that thing he was trying for—there isn't any such thing. Not on a horn."

Nor is it surprising that the "serious" jazz historians who began cropping up in the forties should have been so offended by the legend and its devotees that they created a sort of anti-legend. Their mission, as they saw it, was to tell the American people that real jazz, the only jazz worthy of the name, was not read from arrangements by large, well-rehearsed groups of white musicians working for highly paid leaders like Paul Whiteman and Benny Goodman, but was created spontaneously by small groups of improvising black musicians. That the spreading of this gospel was a useful service cannot be denied. But for poor Bix, who had been born not only white but also solidly "middle-class" (an epithet always used with distaste by jazz historians), and who had actually wound up in Whiteman's trumpet section, the results were disastrous. In *Shining Trumpets* (1946) Rudi Blesh sternly announced:

> Beiderbecke was and is a pervasive influence. A whole school of white playing, which pretends to be jazz, stems from him; but real jazz is a strong music. Objectively considered, Beiderbecke's playing is weak and weakness characterized his life. It permitted him to play in the commercial orchestras of Paul Whiteman and Jean Goldkette; it led him to ruin his life with drink. All of these happenings are a part of his romantic legend. Volitional acts are mistakenly considered parts of his tragic fate. Bix was neither a tragic nor a heroic character; he was a figure of pathos.

Ten years later, in *The Story of Jazz*, Marshall Stearns referred briefly and patronizingly to Bix's "controlled and tasteful" playing, which reflected

his "middle-class Davenport, Iowa, background." Even Gunther Schuller, who is in an altogether different class as a listener and writer, devotes only a skimpy (though very perceptive) seven pages to Bix in his excellent *Early Jazz* (1968), while lavishing far more attention on many far less interesting musicians. Schuller calls Bix "one of the truly great jazz musicians of all time," but brands him as a musical "conservative," a man who "set his expressive sights much lower than Armstrong" and who "could not let himself go emotionally."

Whatever their differences, the true believers in the legend and the debunkers who made up the anti-legend have been united in their failure to listen carefully to all of Bix's best records. The former have swooned over a few of the most famous (and admittedly great) "romantic" solos, like those on the Frankie Trumbauer records of *Singin' the Blues* and *I'm Coming Virginia;* the latter, because they believe that real jazz comes only from small groups improvising freely together, have concentrated on the Beiderbecke records that most nearly meet that requirement: the nineteen sides he made with the Wolverines and two pick-up groups in 1924 and 1925.[1] But these are Bix's least interesting records. How many artists would stand up well if judged mainly by what they had done before they were twenty-two? Even the prodigious Armstrong had at that age recorded only a few very promising solos with King Oliver.

But so far as jazz history is concerned, Armstrong was fortunate in the circumstances of his life. Born black and poor in New Orleans, he learned his horn in an orphanage, did his apprenticeship in the marching bands and on the riverboats, was summoned north by Oliver in 1922, and was soon the toast of Chicago and New York and eventually Europe. Even if you agree that he too sold out to commercialism, that somehow isn't as bad as Bix's joining Whiteman. For Louis to turn showman in the early thirties and spend the next forty years clowning it up merely demonstrates the way blacks are exploited by whites in our culture; but for Bix to join Whiteman is a "volitional act" which demonstrates not only the personal weakness evidenced by his drinking but also a contemptible desire to cling to his middle-class respectability. Or so the story runs, judged by the curious double standard produced by the inverted racism so common in histories of jazz. Moreover, Louis did his best playing just where the historians would expect to find it, with small groups of improvising black musicians, on the Hot Five and Hot Seven records and the great blues accompaniments of the late twenties. By the time he turned exclusively to big-band recording, he was already well on the way to the vaudeville act of his later years. (Though right up to the end there was scarcely an Armstrong performance without at least a few stunning moments.) Bix, on the other hand, did much of his best playing where neither the historians nor the adherents of the legend would expect to find it, on the Goldkette and Whiteman records.

[1] These are now all available on a two-record set, *Bix Beiderbecke and the Chicago Cornetists,* Milestone M-47019.

According to both the legend and the anti-legend, Bix felt increasingly lost and out of place in the Goldkette and Whiteman bands, and it was this sense of isolation that caused the drinking that killed him. But his playing on their records has certainly never sounded as if he felt that way to anyone who bothered to listen to them impartially, free of *a priori* notions about where good jazz (or simply good music) must or must not be found. Therefore it is a pleasure to find that a brilliant and splendidly researched book has at last arrived to tell the true story. The book is *Bix: Man and Legend,*[2] written by Richard M. Sudhalter, an American journalist and jazz cornetist living in England, and based on research by him and by Philip R. Evans, who lives in California and works for the government. Sudhalter writes extremely well, and since, in addition to his own research, he has had the benefit of the interviews that Evans conducted with 684 people who knew Bix, he has not had to rely on the previous writings that helped to create the legend. The result is a book as sensitive in its understanding of Bix's character as it is comprehensive in its documentation of his brief life. As if this weren't enough, there are two long and invaluable appendices, for which William Dean-Myatt joined the collaboration: a chronology, almost day-by-day for the later years, and an extraordinarily detailed discography. There is even a third brief appendix, presumably by cornetist Sudhalter, that clears up once and for all the business about Bix's unorthodox fingering of his instrument. (One's gratitude to Sudhalter and Evans is heightened by the simultaneous appearance of Ralph Berton's silly and meretricious *Remembering Bix,*[3] which is really just the old legend newly tricked out for the swinging seventies, a *Summer of '42* back-dated to the summer of '24, in which a wistful and mysterious Bix provides background music for the thirteen-year-old Berton's sexual initiation.)

The true story is that Bix joined Whiteman not out of an ignoble and self-destructive craving for respectability but because he quite rightly saw that the Whiteman band was the logical next step in his musical education, which he took very seriously. Nor was he driven to drink by the supposedly constraining conditions of the band. His addiction to alcohol had been formed earlier, and while it was certainly aggravated by Whiteman's heavy schedule of theater appearances, concert tours, recording sessions, broadcasts, and one-night stands, Bix fought hard against it precisely because he was very happy playing for Whiteman and wanted desperately to keep his job. When people think of the Whiteman band of the late twenties, they usually think of the onstage photographs, which show almost thirty musicians, or of the absurdly inflated and pretentious "concert" arrangements of Ferde Grofé. But when Whiteman hired Bix, saxophonist Trumbauer, and the superb bassist Steve Brown from Goldkette in the fall of 1927, his idea was not to submerge them in Grofé's scores. His idea—and what else could it have been, considering his

[2] BIX: MAN AND LEGEND, by *Richard M. Sudhalter* and *Philip R. Evans,* with *William Dean-Myatt.* Arlington House. $12.95.

[3] REMEMBERING BIX, by *Ralph Berton.* Harper & Row. $10.00.

shrewdness as a businessman?—was to set them off to best advantage, theirs and his own. Therefore to a staff that already included two arrangers sympathetic to Bix, Matty Malneck and Tom Satterfield, Whiteman added Goldkette's best arranger, Bill Challis, who was a great friend and admirer of Bix's and was used to building arrangements around him. In the scores that the three of them wrote to feature Bix, the full concert orchestra was scaled down almost to jazz-band proportions and the new arrivals were given plenty of opportunity to display their talents. On the best of the resulting records the band plays with accuracy and drive, and the total musical effect, while not exactly jazz and not meant to be, is very satisfying.

I have always had a special affection for the records Bix made with Whiteman, and so I was very pleased, reading Schuller's book several years ago to review it in these pages, to find that he liked them too. In a footnote, and without going on to apply the insight to particular records, he notes that "there is in the best Whiteman performances a feeling and a personal sound as unique in its way as Ellington's or Basie's," and that many of them "are fascinating musical period pieces, at least as significant in their way as many a mediocre jazz performance which happens to possess the proper pedigree." Sudhalter is to be applauded for going still further and putting the issue still more clearly:

> More than three decades of jazz criticism have made a running cliché of denigrating Bix's work with Whiteman. Too little space to "stretch out," overblown arrangements, unswinging rhythm sections, unworthy musicians as accompanists, unsuitable material to play, inadequate recording techniques—whatever the viewpoint motivating such charges, most of them are demonstrably untrue, at least during the orchestra's Victor period. Their assumption of a single absolute standard in judging jazz performance is borne out neither by the facts of jazz history nor by the testimony of the jazzmen who made it. There seems, at root, a tendency to judge Paul Whiteman and his musicians more in terms of commercial success and the "King of Jazz" soubriquet than on the actual merits of the music.

In their partisan struggle to secure a hearing for classic New Orleans and Chicago small-band jazz and for the great blues singers, jazz historians have been understandably shrill and narrow in dealing with figures like Whiteman. Music like his, which is clearly not jazz but has exploited jazz idiom with a commercial success usually denied to jazz, has seemed particularly threatening and offensive to them. But now they have done their work, the desired hearing has been secured, and the reputations of Bunk Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith—not to mention scores of lesser musicians—are firmly established. So everybody should relax. To derive equal enjoyment from a Ma Rainey record and a Whiteman record with Bix is no more peculiar (or inconsistent) than deriving equal enjoyment from Monteverdi and Tchaikovsky. Nobody is going to lose his musical virginity by being exposed to an overstuffed reed

section and a few violins. In fact one of the pleasures of listening to the Whiteman records lies in following the skillfully contrived interplay between jazz and non-jazz elements. It is a mistake to turn off one's ears when Bix is not to be heard; the real fun is to notice the wit and inventiveness with which his dramatic entrances and dazzling vignettes are fitted in among the half-serious allusions to modern "serious" music and the evocations of the Palm Court at dusk.

So Bix was anything but lost or submerged in the Whiteman band, and the accusation is equally untrue of the Goldkette band, though for a different reason. Jazz historians, with their fierce suspicion that any band (and especially any white band) of more than seven pieces must be in some sinister sense "commercial," have always bracketed Goldkette and Whiteman together. But the Goldkette band was not a large concert organization; it was a jazz and dance band that usually numbered a mere twelve pieces. Many of Goldkette's records, like many of Whiteman's, are of wretched pop tunes sung by unfortunate vocalists who should have been left on the Keith-Orpheum circuit. I had always assumed that the tunes were in the band's book and that the vocalists were part of the Goldkette package, just as the Rhythm Boys and a eunuch trio were part of the Whiteman package. But Sudhalter and Evans discovered that both tunes and vocalists were forced on Goldkette by a troglodyte a.-and-r. man named Eddie King, who was still vividly remembered by Goldkette and his men, over thirty years later, with cold fury. They preferred to remember that in October, 1926, when they made the first of their three triumphant appearances at the Roseland Ballroom, they met and conquered the greatest of Fletcher Henderson's bands. Henderson's (and later Duke Ellington's) trumpet-player Rex Stewart ruefully recalled: "We had the best men, the best arrangements. Everything. Then, suddenly, up pops this band of Johnny-come-latelies from out in the sticks—white boys on top of it—and they just *creamed* us."

Happily, every reader of the Sudhalter and Evans book can now discover for himself the delights of Bix's Goldkette and Whiteman records, since French RCA has recently issued a four-record set[4] containing all of the Goldkettes that are of interest and almost all of the Whitemans recorded for Victor (the most serious omission is the great #4 master of *From Monday On*). The fourth record also has a number of previously unissued masters, as does a Broadway LP.[5] The recorded sound is generally good, though some of the RCA sides have had echo effect added.

The most common thing to say about Bix is of course that he had a beautiful tone. Again Blesh gives the standard verdict of the historians: "Much has been written about Beiderbecke's beautiful tone. Beautiful, it was not hot; nor were the attack and rhythm incisive." True (or almost true), if one is thinking of the early records the historians usually have in

[4] *The Bix Beiderbecke Legend,* French RCA 731036, 731037, 731131, and 741093. Distributed in this country by Peters International, 619 West 54th Street, New York 10019.

[5] *The Unheard Bix Beiderbecke,* Broadway 102. Produced by Broadway Records, Box 100, Brighton, Michigan, 48116.

mind, but absolutely untrue if one is thinking of his later work. The Bix of 1924 and 1925 did have—in the limiting sense of the phrase—a beautiful tone. Once you know the later work, his early solos seem self-satisfied and a bit placid, overly planned, taking no chances, inclined to fall into rhythmic ruts. Even the unvaryingly beautiful, ringing tone takes on the air of a starlet's fixed smile. The Bix of the beautiful tone is the Bix of the legend, the Bix so successfully imitated by Red Nichols and others, the Bix of the photograph everyone knows best.

It shows him in a dinner jacket, his cornet planted firmly yet casually on one knee, his handsome, serious face staring with Mona Lisa abstraction into worlds far beyond the camera lens. But as Sudhalter helpfully points out, this picture was taken on an August morning in 1921 when an eighteen-year-old Bix had just donned his first tuxedo to play an afternoon job with a local Davenport band. He was on his way not to Jay Gatsby's mansion but to the grand opening of the Moline, Illinois, State Trust and Savings Bank, just across the Mississippi. The Bix of the great solos looks very different. By now a little puffy and heavy-lidded, he sports a small mustache and seems self-conscious when trying to pose seriously, at ease only when clowning. My favorite picture shows him standing on a railroad platform with Trumbauer on the day in 1929 when the Whiteman band started for the West Coast to make the movie "King of Jazz." His proper three-button suit (a bit tight) is buttoned top to bottom, but his bow tie is askew and a handkerchief spills foppishly from his breast-pocket. One hand is thrust carelessly into a side-pocket of his jacket while the other archly holds a cigarette, his hat is tilted rakishly, his one visible eye is alive with fun, and he smiles the sly smile of a racetrack tout.

Of course one can hear the change in the music. Listen to his solo on the first track of the first of the French RCA records, a vapid tune called *I Didn't Know* that Goldkette recorded in November, 1924, when Bix was having an abortive try-out with the band. Then listen to him on the verse of *Idolizing,* recorded in October, 1926, the first tune from the first session after he had joined Goldkette to stay. All the old on-the-beat squareness is gone, and what one notices is not the famous beautiful tone, but the new tonal flexibility, the lazy insinuating grace, the sensitive teasing of the beat, the sudden flurries of energy and the sudden withdrawals—all of which were to characterize his greatest playing. The point about the later Bix is not that he had a beautiful tone, any more than the point about great lieder-singers like Gerhardt and Schumann and Fischer-Dieskau is that they had beautiful voices. The greatness of their art lay in their ability constantly to vary their tonal quality to reveal the expressive intent of their songs. Just so, the greatness of the later Bix lay in the matchless sensitivity with which he constantly (and quite inimitably) varied his tone to meet the expressive demands of the phrases he was improvising.

The records suggest that his big-band work, far from impeding the development of this extraordinary gift, actually encouraged it. Many of the small-band records he made while he was with Goldkette and Whiteman are of course among his finest. He has more solo space and is

more visible during the ensembles than on the big-band records. But the only musicians with whom the politics of the recording business allowed him to make small-band records were, with few exceptions, his Goldkette and Whiteman colleagues. While perfectly reputable band sidemen, they didn't come within light-years of him as jazzmen. Therefore their inadequacies, and the disparity between them and him, show up more sharply and painfully when they are forced to improvise than when they are reading from arrangements. In the improvised ensembles on the small-band records Bix often sounds as though he is laboring to hold things together, plugging holes left by the others and covering their mistakes. But on the big-band records the arrangements, by supplying him with a fixed and predictable musical frame, leave him free to worry only about his own part. So while there is less of Bix to be heard on the big-band records, what we do hear is more highly finished and more satisfyingly placed in its musical context.

One of the great fascinations of the Goldkette and Whiteman records is in fact to watch Bix's endlessly experimental mind at work as he fits his improvisations to the arrangements that had in turn been tailor-made to fit his improvisatory style. We can see this happening with particular clarity in the many cases where there are two alternate masters of the same tune in existence since Bix, at least when recording, apparently never repeated himself. To take only one example, on Goldkette's *Slow River* his entrance is preceded by a half-chorus scored low for saxes, during which tension steadily accumulates. On the #2 master, only issued in 1936, he perfectly releases the tension by his first notes, which are high, dark, and poignant. Then, in the most beautiful and finely structured of his Goldkette solos, he modulates in eight bars from his initial romantic intensity to a graceful resignation, perfectly summed up in two symmetrical final phrases. But on the originally issued #4 master he takes a different tack. Instead of entering high he enters in mid-range, with a sort of fanfare figure, and so loses the dramatic contrast with what has preceded. Sensing he has got off on the wrong foot, he stumbles through the eight bars, never quite finding his balance. A great deal has been written about the thrill of hearing Bix start forth from the large ensemble—"flashing out of the mire like a snowy egret," as Whitney Balliett once put it. What has not been recognized often enough is that his entrances could not have been so effective if they had not been effectively prepared by the arrangements.

What we hear of Bix on the big-band records, especially those made with Whiteman, is also more various. Knowing only the small-band records, who would have predicted the darting, angular muted choruses on the two masters of *Changes?* Or his hard-swinging muted playing in the famous chase-chorus with Trumbauer on *You Took Advantage of Me?* Certainly no one who had listened to these records could say of his tone that it was beautiful but not hot. Often the arrangements bring out his sense of fun and parody by pitting him against the older faction of the Whiteman band. Listen, for example, to his rollicking ironic commentary on Charles Strickfaden's poker-faced baritone sax on *Sugar,* or to the gusto with which he leads an ensemble that

wipes out the tremulous muted solo of Whiteman's old lead trumpet, Henry Busse, at the end of *Mary*. Hearing him joyously match wits against the arrangements and the rest of the band, one can easily see why he loved the discipline and challenge of working for Whiteman.

What went wrong then? Everyone who knows Bix's work well enough to feel how much we all lost by his death has been driven to ask why on earth this intelligent and ambitious young man destroyed himself. We are now far beyond the romantic nonsense of the legend and the moralistic nonsense of Blesh's talk about "weakness," and the current fashion is to analyze Bix in psychological or psychiatric terms. But the problem is that from all accounts he was, in all respects but his drinking, perfectly normal. In the hundreds of recollections reported by Sudhalter there is not a hint of any pronounced neurotic behavior—until, of course, the very end, after he was broken by alcohol. But how did that come about? Psychological explanations, like theological ones, will always present themselves to the earnest seeker, and the mere absence of supporting evidence has never stopped a psychological explainer from inventing the desired array of conflicts and complexes. Because Bix was well-mannered, sociable, and easygoing, he has been made out to be a "passive" person. But a look at the chronology in the Sudhalter and Evans book makes clear just how active he was, gallivanting around the country in search of the right band at the right time until he settled in with Goldkette. Steve Brown, for a while his roommate with Whiteman, remembers him as finding time for everything but sleep, "like a bee, jumping from one flower to another." Because Bix never married and had a beautiful and formidable mother, there have been dark mutterings about a crippling Oedipal tie. But now we know that he had a long and—given the conditions of his working life—stable affair with a St. Louis girl named Ruth Shaffner, and that shortly before his death he met another girl named Helen Weiss whom he intended to marry.

Even Sudhalter lets us down, for once, when he confronts the question of Bix's alcoholism and subsequent destruction:

> Despite his apparent rebellion against his home town and its way of life, there is little indication that Bix ever really eschewed its deeper values. But in becoming a professional musician over his parents' objections and attempts to stay his course, Bix had violated the Davenport code, and most of his adult life may be viewed as a long unconscious struggle to eradicate a sense of guilt by striving for "respectability" within his chosen field. . . . His ultimate destruction, viewed in this light, was all but inevitable.

This dreary relapse into jargon is a complete surprise, for of course it is Sudhalter himself who has so painstakingly and convincingly shown how much more than mere respectability Bix sought and found when he joined Whiteman. Pretty clearly, he acted not out of an unconscious striving for respectability or anything else, but out of a perfectly conscious striving for

artistic fulfillment that was both intelligently directed and temporarily successful. Thus there is no more need to posit a sense of guilt than there is evidence of its existence. Though he went against his parents' wishes—and who can really blame them for feeling as they did?—in becoming a musician, he was never rejected by his family nor did he ever break with them. His vacations and periods of recuperation were invariably spent in Davenport, and his mother visited him in Los Angeles in the summer of 1929, probably to try and get him to come home and rest. So "rebellion" is not a useful word here, even (or especially) if the rebellion is said to be only apparent. Bix went his own way like any autonomous adult, and his family adjusted to his choice as best they could. Nor is there any hint in the rest of the book as to what "deeper values" of Davenport Bix failed to eschew. He seems to have been a candid, warm-hearted, thoroughly unstuffy man, utterly free of the meanly constricted attitudes we (rightly or wrongly) associate with middle-class midwestern small-town life early in this century.

Since the only evidence of psychological disturbance in Bix is the fact of his destruction, to call that destruction psychologically inevitable is as useless as saying it was destined to happen. Certainly his friends saw nothing inevitable about it. Until close to the end they kept thinking that things might still work out for him. The truth is that alcoholism is a very mysterious form of addiction and will simply not yield to pat psychological explanations. The assumption on which such explanations are based is that alcoholism must always have an antecedent psychological cause: there must have been something wrong with the alcoholic's personality structure or with his relation to his family or to society *before* he became an alcoholic. But E. M. Jellinek, in *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism* (1960), has shown that this assumption is a very questionable one, and is in fact not made by most psychiatrists in countries like France and Chile, where custom and social pressure dictate widespread heavy drinking. In such countries, writes Jellinek, "all but a few psychiatrists believe that alcoholism becomes a psychiatric problem only after the excessive drinker develops an alcoholic mental disorder. In the origin of this 'habit,' they see no psychological or psychiatric involvements." Such social pressure can also exist within subcultures, and since the subculture to which Bix belonged was one in which just about everybody drank hard all of the time as a matter of course, it is at least worth asking whether in his case (and in those of many other jazz musicians of that time) we need to look for any deeply-rooted psychological cause of addiction. In recent years we have seen thousands of young people become addicted to drugs without there being any apparent cause beyond social pressure.

It seems more likely that Bix was destroyed by a failure of self-confidence which was the effect, not the cause, of his alcoholism, and which was hastened by two terrible incidents that were not at all inevitable. In late January, 1929, when the band was appearing in Cleveland, he had a violent breakdown, complete with hallucinations. Ironically, it was probably a withdrawal fit, brought on by a forced

abstention from alcohol during a brief hospitalization for pneumonia the previous month, and perhaps also by a voluntary attempt to cut down after his release. When the band went on to Detroit, he was left in the care of a male nurse. But he escaped, and the day they returned to New York the following week, some of the musicians found him in his hotel room, vomiting and bleeding profusely from a wound in the groin or abdomen. What really happened will probably never be known—indeed it is doubtful that Bix knew. But that was the beginning of the end. After a month in Davenport he rejoined the band for its western trip. But he started drinking again, and at a record date on September 13, he collapsed. (The one last spiritless solo he managed to record that day, on *Waiting at the End of the Road,* can be heard on the Broadway LP.) Despite an apparently successful cure and long periods of abstention, he could never quite bring himself to rejoin the band, though Whiteman himself urged him to do so as late as January, 1931. Seven months later he was dead.

It is of course impossible to say in what direction Bix's genius would have carried him if he had lived. But it does seem a good bet that he would not have wound up at Eddie Condon's, joining the Dixieland stalwarts for decade after decade of *Muskrat Ramble.* As Whitney Balliett has perceptively pointed out, he would probably have been far happier in the company of the great black swing musicians. His last records, made with pick-up groups in 1930, are a mixed bag, and most of the time he sounds tense and exhausted. But there are two sides, both included in the RCA set, that show a Bix who was continuing to experiment and to grow, and that give at least a hint of what might have been: on *Barnacle Bill, the Sailor* he plays a very fast, hot, and rhythmically complex chorus that is years ahead of its time, and on the #2 master of *I'll Be a Friend "With Pleasure"* he has a chorus that starts simply but then grows increasingly oblique and haunting, full of unexpected detours and suspensions. Both are quite unlike his earlier work and make one want to object strenuously to Schuller's labelling him a "conservative." In the few years that he was in his prime Bix Beiderbecke made records that have given, and continue to give, many of us who love jazz some of our most intense and pleasurable musical experiences. The real pain of reading the Sudhalter and Evans book comes from one's realization that his death was no more inevitable than Lipatti's death from leukemia or Cantelli's in an airplane crash: if things had been just a little bit different, he might well have been around all through the thirties, forties, fifties—who can say how long?