

ACT

Echoes of Swing BIX A Tribute to Bix Beiderbecke ACT 9826-2

German release date: 14.10.2016

Our perceptions of major figures in music from previous epochs tend to change over the course of time. There may indeed be something of a paradox here, because the innovators of the past are often only truly recognized and appreciated by later generations. The more energetically and decisively a pioneer has broken with the past, the more he (or she) will have been mistrusted and cast aside in their life-times, and the more is required from the rear-view mirror of posterity before they can start to be treated with respect, let alone with honour.

In the case of Bix Beiderbecke, however, we have a happy exception to this general rule. His particular combination of an immensely likeable character with a jaw-dropping talent was enough to ensure that doors would open for him. In his short life-time, both musical colleagues and audiences responded to him with a combination of affection, astonishment and awe. This was in spite of the fact that, in his own serene and unusually gentle way, he was effecting a significant game-change in jazz. There wasn't any sudden break, neither were there factions fighting either for or against him, and yet he was responsible for an astonishing advance in the music. It progressed, it palpably gained in substance through him. There were two explanations for this phenomenon, namely Beiderbecke's disarmingly gentle nature, and the rare clarity that was inherent in his music. This clarity is reminiscent, perhaps, of a mountain stream, or of a diamond, into which light can enter at any moment and be refracted in unexpected ways. For every different direction of the source of illumination, for every angle from which the diamond is observed, there will be a subtly different glint to the light. That desire to multiply and vary the perspectives lay at the heart of our approach to this "Tribute To Bix Beiderbecke."

It was clear to everybody involved in this project that a slavish re-creation of the masterworks of the past would be off-limits. New ways needed to be found to bring ourselves and listeners closer to Beiderbecke's life, to the man himself. So a group of very different musicians was assembled – not entirely at random - to undertake this project. Each of them brought his or her strong individual personality, in order to illuminate the subject from their own particular angle. It would be quite wrong, however, to see this album as an unified and ready-made artistic product from just one drawingboard. This is a balanced collection of completely individual contributions, which add up to a whole that is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Mulo Francel has taken on one of the four impressionistic piano pieces composed by Bix Beiderbecke. Francel is also an adventurous world traveller with a definite 'pasión' for Argentina. Here he transforms "In The Dark" into a tango. The link might be far from obvious at first hearing, but Francel achieves a surprisingly organic metamorphosis. He has created further direct connections to Frankie Trumbauer with his strongly melodic original "Everything That Was," and also in "Happy Feet," arranged as a latin boogaloo.

Chris Hopkins has done an arrangement of the Jobim bossa nova "The Girl From Ipanema," which, one can fondly imagine, might have been the way Paul Whiteman would have treated it. Then he transforms "Jazz Me Blues" into a soul bossa, proving once again his particularly refined instinct for rhythm. Hopkins makes "Thou Swell" time-travel forward into the 1950s, in an arrangement replete with deft counterpoint.

Echoes of Swing
A Tribute to Bix Beiderbecke
Shannon Barnett
Henning Gailing
Mulo Francel
Pete York

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Trombonist Shannon Barnett is equally at home in contemporary, progressive music as she in classic New Orleans jazz. Just as Medecins Sans Frontieres provides humanitarian assistance worldwide, these are musicians "sans frontieres." they transcend the idea that jazz is split into different camps, their ethos is based on tolerance and collaborative benevolence. Shannon has broken down the verse and the chorus of "Blue River" into the tiniest building blocks...she has then taken these and ground them down to a fine powder...and then mixed that powder into modelling clay...from which she has shaped a completely new and original composition: "Nix (nothing) Like Bix!"

For my composition "At Children's Corner" I have taken a glance through and beyond Bix to a composer he revered, Claude Debussy. I have arranged three themes from Debussy's "Children's Corner" in the form of a rondo, and interwoven the tonal language of Bix Beiderbecke with motifs from the French impressionists, all completely within the idiom of the 1920s.

For these sessions we had an unusual and very special rhythm section with two fantastic drummers. They would sometimes substitute for each other, but the best bits were when they transformed themselves on long sections into a virtuoso in-the-pocket swinging octopus. Bassist Henning Gailing was the ideal man for these recordings. Similarly to Shannon, Henning is the man for all jazz styles. He has an unshakeable sense of swing.

Colin T. Dawson certainly had the most difficult task of all of us, but he overcame the demands placed upon him with style - and with room to spare. He did so by staying true to himself, proving himself to be many-faceted and adaptable. He was not just flawless in the role of lead trumpet, he was also a fountainhead of invention in his role as soloist, never succumbing either to the temptations either of the low-hanging clichés or of just copying Bix. Colin availed himself of a silver Schilke cornet for these sessions. It had such a gorgeous, round, warm sound, that all of us at some point could feel the hair standing up on the back of our necks. He also brought to the project a fabulous arrangement of the joint Bix/Trumbauer hit "Singin' The Blues."

It was a highly emotional experience for all of us to immerse ourselves quite so intensively in the world of Bix Beiderbecke. We didn't manage to solve any of the riddles that surround him, and yet I believe that we did somehow get closer to his essence. Even Bix's closest friends would often admit that they could never really figure him out. He would always appear too absent, somewhere far off in one of his daydreams. Bix Beiderbecke's only enemies were the gin - and himself. And yet he had an incredible success, and has absolutely earned his place in jazz history books as one of the greatest geniuses of the music.

Bix Beiderbecke is far from being out on his own. There were other great talents which burned brightly in the jazz age, only to burn themselves out, but his life-story and his nemesis were sotragic, they still have the power to affect one deeply. However, in his case, what remains alongside the confused heap of anecdotes and hearsay are his recordings, all of them made within in a span of just five remarkable years. Here we enter the real world of Bix Beiderbecke, a universe created by a mind of a superior order. Bix's world is filled with clarity and bathed in light.

Bernd Lhotzky (excerpts from the liner notes)

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Photo by Siggli Loch

CD 1: A TRIBUTE TO BIX BEIDERBECKE

- 01 Intro Ol' Man River
- 02 At The Jazz Band Ball
- 03 Everything That Was
- 04 I'm Coming Virginia
- 05 Thou Swell
- 06 (Tango) In The Dark
- 07 At Children's Corner
- 08 Happy Feet
- 09 I'll Be A Friend With Pleasure
- 10 Nix Like Bix
- 11 Singin' The Blues
- 12 The Boy From Davenport
- 13 Jazz Me Blues
- 14 Ol' Man River

Curated and produced by Siggli Loch

Recorded by Stefan Gienger at Mastermixstudio Unterföhring (Munich), August 1 - 3, 2016
Mixed and mastered by Klaus Scheuermann, August 8 - 11, 2016
Mulo Francel appears courtesy of GLM Music

CD 2: BIX BEIDERBECKE ORIGINAL MUSIC

- 01 At The Jazz Band Ball
- 02 I'm Coming Virginia
- 03 Singin' The Blues
- 04 Jazz Me Blues
- 05 Blue River
- 06 Thou Swell
- 07 Clarinet Marmalade
- 08 Way Down Yonder In New Orleans
- 09 Royal Garden Blues
- 10 In A Mist

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Echoes of Swing

Bernd Lhotzky / piano & musical director
Chris Hopkins / alto saxophone
Colin T. Dawson / cornet & trumpet
Oliver Mewes / drums

With

Shannon Barnett / trombone & vocals
Mulo Francel / c-melody saxophone & guitar
Pete York / drums, percussion & vocals
Henning Gailing / double bass

Special guest on "Jazz Me Blues":

Emile Parisien / soprano saxophone

Bix Beiderbecke & His Gang

Frank Trumbauer Orchestra