

## JAZZ PIANO FOR DANCERS & LISTENERS

### The Bill Jackman Trio – Volume **5** of 6

1. Seems Like We've Only Just Begun (Latin, 7:34) by Bill Jackman
2. It Could Happen To You (swing, 7:55) by Jimmy Van Heusen\*
3. Moonlight in Vermont (ballad, 11:18) by Karl Suessdorf
4. Speak Low (Latin, 12:24) by Kurt Weill (1943)
5. A Foggy Day (swing, 8:26) by George Gershwin
6. I Can't Get Started (ballad, 10:11) by Vernon Duke
7. The Girl From Ipanema (Latin, 7:38) by Antonio Carlos Jobim
8. On Green Dolphin Street (swing, 8:58) by Bronislaw Kaper

Total Playing Time: 74 minutes, 24 seconds

\* Only the composer(s) of the music are cited.

### About the Tunes

1. Seems Like We've Only Just Begun (Latin, 7:34) by Bill Jackman (1997)  
The Carpenters had a big hit with the song "We've Only Just Begun" in the early 1970s, which they did as a ballad. However, this tune didn't really catch Bill's attention until he heard jazz pianist Monte Alexander do it up-tempo Latin. Bill really liked it that way and decided to add it to his jazz repertoire.

As he began to improvise on it, however, he realized he was changing its structure considerably. So he decided to compose a new tune that would fit the structure he was improvising on. Since he had started with "We've Only Just Begun" and since his tune still bore a resemblance to it, he named it, not surprisingly, "Seems Like We've Only Just Begun." It is an ideal tune for improvising on, not just due to its structure, but also because it has numerous essential notes that are the rich notes of the chord, e.g., ninths.

Bill's Trio does this tune with an infectious cha-cha-cha beat, great for dancing. Fittingly, Bill and Lupita selected this tune for one of the six on their dance video entitled *Dancing to Jazz*. Bill is fond of arranging the melody of tunes in the rich lower-middle region of the piano. However, "Seems Like We've Only Just Begun" wanted to be higher up on the piano, which is where Bill plays it.

On the first jazz chorus, Bill sculpts out lean, small melodies, firmly based on the tune's theme and harmony. On the next chorus, he stretches out the jazz lines, but keeps them firmly anchored on the tune's essential notes. Then for contrast, Bill shifts to the hands-in-unison mode a la Wes Montgomery's octaves style in the lower-middle region of the piano. On his last chorus, he creates pretty melodies with big, lush "block chords." Then drummer Ron Marabuto's takes over. With simpatico accompaniment from Bill and Terry, he creatively explores this new tune's rhythmic possibilities, all the while echoing its melody.

## 2. It Could Happen To You (swing, 7:55) by Jimmy Van Heusen (1944)

During his long and very productive career, Jimmy Van Heusen enjoyed both artistic and financial success. His output was prolific and of consistently high quality, and his tunes have been recorded by scores of jazz musicians. Many of these tunes were originally part of scores for stage, film, or television. In the 1940s, Van Heusen wrote the songs for 16 of Bing Crosby's best-known films, including *Road to Morocco* (1942) and *Going My Way* (1944, from which "Swingin' on a Star" won an Academy Award). In the 1950s and throughout much of the 1960s, Van Heusen continued and even expanded his active involvement in films and television, writing songs such as "All My Tomorrows" and "High Hopes" for the 1959 film *Hole in the Head*, "The Second Time Around" for *High Time* (1960), and "Call Me Irresponsible" for *Papa's Delicate Condition* (1963).

"It Could Happen To You" was introduced as a ballad by Dorothy Lamour and Fred McMurray in the film *And the Angels Sing* (1944). However, most jazz musicians have done this tune up-tempo. Bill's Trio picked a medium swing tempo, sure to delight swing dancers, including Lupita and Bill who picked this tune for one of the six on their dance video entitled *Dancing to Jazz*. The tune opens with a swinging introduction, with Terry already walking his bass. Listen to Bill's rich arrangement of the melody (the "head") in the lush, lower-middle region of the piano. On the jazz choruses, Bill anchors his improvised lines on the tune's essential notes, but his lines tend to descend where the original melody ascends. After making a statement with single-note right-hand lines, Bill shifts to the playing-in-octaves style of Wes Montgomery and Phineas Newborn, Jr. Then it's "block chord" time," first in locked-hand position and then in full-piano style. Terry's soulful bass solo should keep the swing dancers on the dance floor. The Trio ends the tune with the same pattern they opened it with.

## 3. Moonlight in Vermont (ballad, 11:18) by Karl Suessdorf (1945)

There is virtually no information available about Karl Suessdorf other than that Margaret Whiting had a best-selling recording of his song "Moonlight in Vermont" and that guitarist Johnny Smith and Frank Sinatra also had successful recordings of it. Suessdorf is a member of a class of composers who apparently wrote one great tune and then disappeared from the musical firmament. Other composers in this class are Walter Gross ("Tenderly," 1946), Tommy Wolf ("Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most," 1955), and Marvin Fisher ("When Sunny Gets Blue," 1956).

Bill was introduced to this tune by his only jazz piano teacher, the late Arthur Fletcher. Bill had come to Art with some Horace Silver tunes he wanted to learn. However, Art steered him toward tunes like "Moonlight in Vermont" and "All the Things You Are" because he said they offered more flexibility for jazz interpretation than the Silver tunes under discussion.

Art was one of many jazz musicians who have enjoyed using "Moonlight in Vermont" as a framework for their jazz excursions, usually at ballad tempos. The tune is ideal for improvising on ("blowing on"): most measures have least two different chords, and its structure and circle-of-fifths chord changes are conducive to long, flowing lines.

Moreover, many notes of the melody sit on the rich upper notes of the chord, e.g., elevenths. “Moonlight in Vermont” has the common AABA structure, but its A section has an unusual six bars rather than the very common eight. The last A section has a two-bar tag, making for a 28-bar tune. The beautiful eight-bar B section (the bridge) has two key changes and is a fertile launching pad for extended jazz lines.

Like “I Can’t Get Started,” this beautiful melody sits nicely in the rich lower-middle part of the piano, ideal for Bill’s “block chord” arrangement a la George Shearing. Then Bill starts to explore variations on the theme, creating pretty, small melodies, reflective of the tune’s structure and essential notes. Then his jazz lines start to get longer and more intricate. On the next chorus, Bill starts to work in the “double-time” mode, i.e., using 16<sup>th</sup> notes; this tune is so fertile for this mode that Bill take another chorus, unleashing long, yet coherent strings of 16<sup>th</sup> notes that continue to echo the theme.

Then Bill locks his hands and digs into the rich middle part of the piano to explore this classic with “block chords” a la George Shearing. For further contrast, he then shifts to open full-piano mode a la Red Garland. Bassist Terry loves this tune as much as Art did (they made music together since they were teenagers) and finds gorgeous new variations on the melody, with tasteful accompaniment from Bill and Ron.

#### 4. Speak Low (Latin, 12:24) by Kurt Weill (1943)

Kurt Weill is best known in this country as the composer of great tunes such as “September Song” (1938), “My Ship” (1941), and “Speak Low” (1943). However, his place in musical history rests much more on his role as the most influential German composer of the generation that came to maturity between the end of World War I and the election of a Nazi government in Germany in March 1933. During this period, he was the foremost avant-garde theatre composer and was a key figure in the development of modern forms of musical theatre. Weill’s collaboration with Bertolt Brecht (starting in 1927), although short-lived, was one of the most fruitful in twentieth-century music. The popular song “Mack the Knife” (1928) is from one of their collaborations.

Due to his Jewish ancestry (his father was the chief cantor at the synagogue in Dessau) and the political content of his plays, Weill had to flee from Germany under dangerous circumstances in 1933 to Paris with only a few belongings. However, even in Paris a pro-Nazi demonstration occurred at a concert performance of his *Der Silbersee* in 1934. In 1935, Weill and his wife Lenya took up residence in New York.

Between 1935 and his death in 1950, Weill produced a string of innovative and largely successful works for Broadway, and through it for Hollywood. In fact, they were a development in more popular terms of the exploratory stage works he had pioneered in avant-garde theatre in Germany. “Speak Low” was introduced by Mary Martin (of *Peter Pan* fame) in the musical comedy *One Touch of Venus* (1943). Bill’s original sheet music of “Speak Low” features a stunning, full-length photo of Ava Gardner who sang it (via dubbing) in the 1948 film version.

The 32-bar AABA form is probably the most common structure in classic American popular music, with the A and B sections each having eight bars. “Speak Low” has an AABA form, but it may be the only song with this form that has a 16-bar A section, making for a 56-bar tune. The tune’s rich harmony has made it a favorite among jazz musicians: it has “circle of fifths” chord changes, and many of its essential notes sit on the rich notes of the chord, e.g., ninths.

“Speak Low” is most commonly done by jazz musicians with a “straight-ahead” beat and often at a blazing tempo. Bill thinks that such treatments violate this great tune which cries out to be done Latin. Bill’s Trio does it at a solidly danceable cha-cha-cha tempo. Bill loves this melody and opens with a rich arrangement of it in the lush lower-middle region of the piano. “Speak Low” is a very formful tune with a lot of space, and Bill respects this in his improvisations. After working in the single-line right-hand mode, he achieves contrast with a shift to the hands-in-unison mode à la Wes Montgomery’s octave style. Bill then further explores this gem with first compact and then expanded “block chords.” Bassist Terry follows with a melodic, dance-infused solo, with simpatico Latin accompaniment by Bill and Ron.

#### 5. A Foggy Day (swing, 8:26) by George Gershwin (1937)

“A Foggy Day” was introduced by Fred Astaire in the 1937 RKO film *A Damsel In Distress*. In August of the previous year, George and Ira Gershwin (his brother and the lyricist for most of his songs) had moved from New York to Hollywood after signing a contract with RKO film studios. Another 1937 RKO film *Shall We Dance?* introduced their classic tunes “They Can’t Take That Away From Me” and “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off.” In the first half of 1937, George had complained of intermittent dizzy spells, but had continued his busy schedule of composing and performing in public. On July 9, he suddenly fell into a coma. Despite emergency surgery for a brain tumor, George died on July 11, 1937 at age 38.

George Gershwin’s meteoric career was a classic American success story (despite its abrupt and early ending). Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1898 to Russian immigrant parents, Gershwin dropped out of high school in 1914 to work for a music publishing firm on Tin Pan Alley. By the time he was 20, he had become a recognized composer of Broadway shows and by the age of 30 had become America’s most famous and widely accepted composer of concert music. During a little more than two decades, Gershwin composed hundreds of songs for Tin Pan Alley, the Broadway stage, and Hollywood films, many of which became part of classic American popular music and are actively performed today.

Although George was first and foremost a great songwriter, he also composed large-scale concert pieces which bridged what had previously been considered separate idioms: popular (including jazz) and classical traditions, and black American folk music and opera in *Porgy and Bess* (1935). Gershwin got the idea of composing a full-length opera about life among the black inhabitants of “Catfish Row” in Charleston, South Carolina after reading DuBose Heyward’s novel *Porgy*. However, his music had long drawn on black American elements such as blue notes (inflected 3rds, 5ths, and 7ths) and the 12-

bar blues progression. Other large-scale works of enduring appeal are the *Rhapsody in Blue*, the *Concerto in F*, and *An American in Paris*.

Like Jimmy Van Heusen, Gershwin made extensive use of the bass line in composing, as in “A Foggy Day.” (A great advantage of learning tunes for jazz from original sheet music, as Bill always does, is that you learn the composer’s bass line.) This bass line is prominent in Bill’s opening arrangement of the melody, which he plays in the rich, lower-middle region of the piano. A 34-bar tune with an ABAC form, “A Foggy Day” is formful, with prominent essential notes, and Bill’s single-note right-hand improvisations reflect this. To achieve contrast, Bill then shifts to the hands-in-unison mode a la Wes Montgomery (i.e., playing in octaves) and Phineas Newborn Jr. Then for further contrast, he shifts to the “block chord” mode, first in the locked-hands style a la George Shearing and then in the full-piano style a la Red Garland. Its rich bass line makes this tune a natural for a bass solo, as exemplified by Terry’s creative and melodic solo, with swinging accompaniment from Bill and Ron.

#### 6. I Can’t Get Started (ballad, 10:11) by Vernon Duke (1935)

Born in Russia in 1903, Vernon Duke [Vladimir Alexandrovich Dukelsky] studied music there until he fled the Revolution with his family in 1920. Not long after settling in New York in 1922, Duke wrote a piano concerto for Artur Schnabel. During the next decade, he wrote music for ballets, operas, choruses, and orchestras and chamber groups in New York, Paris, and London.

By the early 1930s, Duke was also composing popular music for musical comedies and wrote numerous memorable songs, including “April in Paris” for *Walk a Little Faster* (1932), “What Is There To Say” for the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1934* (1934), and “Autumn in New York” for *Thumbs Up* (1934). His most successful work was the 1940 musical play (and later film) *Cabin in the Sky*, which was performed on Broadway by an all-black cast; it was choreographed by Balanchine and included such Duke classics as “Taking a Chance On Love” and “Cabin in the Sky.”

“I Can’t Get Started” was introduced by Bob Hope in the 1936 revue *Ziegfeld Follies of 1936*. It became the theme song of trumpeter Bunny Berrigan and His Orchestra. This tune has always been a favorite of jazz musicians, who almost invariably render it as a ballad. It is ideal for “blowing on” (i.e., improvising on): it has at least two different chords per measure, and its structure and circle-of-fifths chord changes are conducive to long, flowing lines. Moreover, many notes of the melody sit on the rich upper notes of the chord, e.g., elevenths. This 32-bar tune has an AABA structure, with a great bridge (i.e., the B section).

This beautiful melody sits nicely in the rich lower-middle part of the piano, ideal for Bill’s “block chord” arrangement a la George Shearing. Then Bill starts to create variations on the theme, using its structure and essential notes as a basis. At first, he sculpts out pretty, small melodies. On the next chorus, he unfurls long and flowing, yet coherent lines as he works in the “double-time” mode, i.e., using 16<sup>th</sup> notes. Then Bill locks his hands and dives into the rich middle part of the piano to explore this classic

with “block chords.” Then for further contrast, he shifts to open full-piano mode, playing in a style reminiscent of Red Garland. Bassist Terry loves this tune, as is evident in his creatively melodic solo, sensitively accompanied by Bill and Ron.

#### 7. The Girl From Ipanema (Latin, 7:38) by Antonio Carlos Jobim (1963)

In the late 1950s, the world first began to hear the great songs of Antonio Carlos Jobim. “Desafinado” was presented on a 1959 album by Joao Gilberto, and “One Note Samba” was introduced on Gilberto’s second album. With the introduction of “The Girl From Ipanema” in 1963, which became the best-selling record in 1964 by Stan Getz (saxophone), Joao Gilberto (Portuguese vocal), and Astrud Gilberto (English vocal), the bossa nova craze took hold in the United States. Jobim’s star rose quickly in the 1960s as he composed one great tune after another. By the late 1960s, his music had become part of the repertoire of top international pop and jazz artists. (His lifetime output numbers some 250 titles.)

As the story goes, Jobim was inspired to compose “The Girl From Ipanema” by a beautiful young woman who passed by him each morning on her way to the beach at Ipanema as Jobim worked at composing tunes on his guitar. (Ipanema is a suburb of Rio de Janeiro.) Supposedly, Jobim was too shy to approach her. This is not all fiction: The Girl From Ipanema really existed and when Jobim died in 1994, she attended his services in New York and placed a rose on his casket.

Like many of Jobim’s great songs, the structure of “The Girl From Ipanema” shows similarities to popular American musical forms such as four- and eight-bar melody segments and AABA forms, but Jobim puts on his own stamp on it. “The Girl From Ipanema” roughly has an AABA form, but it has 40 bars, not the 32 bars so common for an American AABA song. The tune has an eight-bar A section, but an unusual 16-bar B section (bridge) with key changes (modulations) every 2 bars. The song is ideal for jazz because its melody naturally sits on the rich notes of the chords, e.g., sharp elevenths. This quality together with its logical structure facilitate improvisation.

Bill had danced cha-cha-cha to “The Girl From Ipanema” many times before developing it for jazz piano, and the Trio does it at this tempo. After playing the melody, Bill begins to explore the tune’s framework with lean, simple lines. On the next chorus, his improvised melodies get longer, but are still anchored on the tune’s essential notes. On his last chorus, Bill creates pretty, simple melodies playing in the big, full-piano mode. His treatment of the tune’s unusual bridge is intriguing throughout. Then bassist Terry takes over. With simpatico accompaniment from Bill and Ron, he delivers a pulsating solo that should keep the dancers on the dance floor and the listeners asking for more.

#### 8. On Green Dolphin Street (swing, 8:58) by Bronislaw Kaper (1947)

Born in Poland and educated at the Warsaw Conservatory, Bronislaw [Bronislau] Kaper was active as a composer and pianist in Warsaw, Berlin, Vienna, London and Paris before relocating to Hollywood in 1940. During the next almost three decades, Kaper wrote scores for more than 100 MGM films. In the mid-sixties, he turned increasingly to

composing for television, e.g., the theme for *The FBI*. His film work includes *Gaslight* (1944), *The Naked Spur* (1952), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), and *Lord Jim* (1965).

A number of his scores included tunes which have become favorites with jazz musicians, e.g., “Invitation,” the theme from the 1952 film *Invitation*. Although not as widely used as “Invitation,” his “Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo” was beautifully rendered by jazz pianist Bill Evans. “On Green Dolphin Street,” the theme from the 1947 film *On Green Dolphin Street*, has been part of the jazz idiom since Miles Davis’ first recording of it. A 32-bar tune with an ABAC structure, it is ideal for improvising on (“blowing on “): its structure, key changes, and circle-of-fifths chord changes are conducive to long, flowing lines. Moreover, key melody notes sit on the rich upper notes of the chord, e.g., elevenths in the B section.

Bill’s Trio starts the tune with a Latin rhythm, but then breaks into a medium swing tempo, perfect for swing dancing. After a nice rendition of the melody (the “head”) in the rich lower-middle part of the piano, Bill starts improvising on the theme, using its structure and essential notes as a foundation. On succeeding choruses, his melodies get longer and more intricate, until he is unleashing strings of eighth-note triplets. (This is noteworthy because eighth-note triplets are under-utilized by most jazz pianists. One of a handful of other jazz pianists today who make significant use of eighth-note triplets is Billy Taylor.)

Then it is “block chord” time, first in the compact, locked-hand style a la George Shearing, and then in the open, full-piano style a la Red Garland. Then it is bassist Terry’s turn, and he convincingly shows what a melodic instrument the bass can be, while still maintaining a solid dance beat. On the melody (the “head”) out, the Trio again shifts between Latin and swing rhythms, and Bill ends the tune with rumbling chords reminiscent of McCoy Tyner.

LUPITA LOPEZ JACKMAN