

# JAZZ PIANO FOR DANCERS & LISTENERS

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

1. Meditation (Latin, 7:47) by Antonio Carlos Jobim \*
2. Like Someone In Love (swing, 8:33) by Jimmy Van Heusen
3. My Ship (ballad, 10:17) by Kurt Weill (1941)
4. Manha de Carnaval (Latin, 10:27) by Luis Bonfa
5. Days of Wine and Roses (swing, 8:55) by Henry Mancini
6. Willow Weep for Me (ballad, 11:57) by Ann Ronell
7. Blues for Dr. Brown (swing, 14:17) by Bill Jackman

Total Playing Time: 72 minutes, 13 seconds

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

### About the Tunes

#### 1. Meditation (Latin, 7:47) by Antonio Carlos Jobim (1962)

By the early 1960s, bossa nova music from Brasil was sweeping the United States, propelled by the international popularity of Jobim's "The Girl From Ipanema" (1963) and Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd's instrumental version of Jobim's "Desafinado." The beautiful "Meditation" was introduced in 1962, with original lyrics in Portuguese; it was first recorded in English by, surprisingly, Pat Boone.

Like many of Jobim's great songs, the structure of "Meditation" shows similarities to popular American musical forms such as four- and eight-bar melody segments and AABA forms. However, his tunes rarely have the 32-bar length so common in classic American popular tunes. "Meditation," for example, has 40 bars. The first 16-bar segment has no repeats, and nor does the eight-bar middle section. The last 16 bars are similar to the first 16, but with variation. Jobim's "One Note Samba" is also a 40-bar tune with a similar structure.

"Meditation" is often done at a languid tempo, but Bill's Trio does it at an infectious Latin dance tempo. This is one of Bill's favorite tunes, and he starts it off with a pretty arrangement of the melody in the rich lower-middle region of the piano. Like "One Note Samba," the melody of "Meditation" moves in a narrow range. Listen to how Bill's lean improvised lines hover around the essential notes of this beautiful theme. On the next chorus, he sculpts longer lines, but they 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.

Then it is bassist Terry's turn to take what may go down in history as the greatest bass solo ever taken on "Meditation." His solo is beautifully melodic and at the same time makes you want to get up and dance. Bill's pretty accompaniment reflects the theme's essence, and Ron, as usual, is the epitome of sensitivity.

## 2. Like Someone In Love (swing, 8.33) by Jimmy Van Heusen (1944)

Although Jimmy Van Heusen ranks in the top tier of composers of classic American popular music, he does not have name recognition with the general public like George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and Hoagy Carmichael do. For almost 30 years (between 1938 and 1968) he composed an abundance of great tunes of consistently high quality, most of which were introduced in films, stage musicals, or on television. His tunes have been recorded by scores of jazz musicians. Interestingly, jazz musicians have favored Van Heusen's tunes from the 1930s and 1940s more than those from his later period. Jazz favorites from the earlier era include: "It Could Happen To You" (1944) from the film *And the Angels Sing*, "I Thought About You" (1939), "Imagination" (1940), and "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" (1940).

"Like Someone In Love" was introduced by Dinah Shore in the 1944 film *Belle of the Yukon*. When Bill first heard this melody – he can't recall who was playing it – he absolutely fell in love with it. He finds the melody so pretty that he wanted to play it solo before Terry and Ron join in, the only tune in this whole series of six CDs on which he plays a full chorus of solo piano. Like Gershwin, Van Heusen made extensive use of the bass line in composing, and you can hear this bass line in Bill's arrangement of the melody. (To learn the composer's bass line is one of the main reasons why Bill has started the development of each tune in his jazz repertoire with the original sheet music, not a "fake book."\*) Although Van Heusen used the 32-bar form for most of his tunes, a majority of them, including this one, do not have the most common AABA structure, but rather an ABAC structure.

As is typical of Van Heusen tunes, "Like Someone In Love" is very formful, and Bill's improvisations reflect this form. On the first jazz choruses, Bill explores this classic with single-note, right-hand lines. Then for contrast he shifts to the hands-in-unison mode a la Wes Montgomery's octaves style. Then for further contrast, Bill shifts to the "block chord" mode, first playing locked-hands "block chords" in the rich lower-middle region of the piano and then opening up his hands to play full-piano "block chords." This tune is one of Terry's favorites; listen to how he creates beautiful new melodies while still retaining the essential notes of Van Heusen's bass line.

(\* "Fake" books are collections – sometimes illegal – of hundreds of tunes with just the single-line melody and the chord symbols. They do not have the composer's bass line.)

## 3. My Ship (ballad, 10:17) by Kurt Weill (1941)

Born in Germany in 1900, Kurt Weill was the son of the chief cantor at the synagogue in Dessau. Exposed to a broad range of music since an early age, Weill showed an interest in composition in his early teens, when he began to study it with a series of notable teachers. He developed into one of the outstanding composers of the generation that came to maturity after World War I and into the foremost avant-garde theatre composer of the Weimar Republic. He was a key figure in the development of modern forms of musical theatre. (The Weimar Republic was the name of Germany's government from the Treaty of Versailles after World War I until the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.) 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 their collaborations.

By 1933, the political situation in Germany was becoming untenable for Weill. Shortly after the Reichstag fire and the subsequent Nazi election victory, he fled in dangerous circumstances 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 were in New York to present a Weill play, which was postponed; they chose to remain in the United States. (He died in 1950 in New York from a longstanding heart ailment.)

Weill’s first American success was the musical comedy *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938) which included his first American hit song “September Song.” From the early 1940s on, Weill focused his efforts mainly toward Broadway, and through it to Hollywood, and produced innovative and successful works for these two locales. The innovative *Lady in the Dark* (1940) was a resounding success. In its 1941 stage musical version, Gertrude Lawrence (who is on the cover of Bill’s original sheet music) introduced the beautiful song “My Ship,” and Ginger Rogers sang it in the 1944 film version.

Bill loves this melody and its rich harmony and opens with a nice arrangement of it in the lush lower-middle region of the piano. “My Ship” is a very formful tune, which Bill incorporates into his melodic improvisations. On his first jazz chorus, he sculpts pretty small melodies in his right hand. On the next chorus, his lines are longer and fuller as he works in the “double-time” mode, i.e., using 16<sup>th</sup> notes. Then for contrast, he turns to “block chords,” first in the locked-hands style and then in the big full-piano style. Bassist Terry also loves this melody and takes a beautiful solo with sensitive support from Bill and Ron. “My Ship” is a 32-bar tune in the common AABA form. However, it has a lovely eight-bar special ending which Bill plays solo to end this great tune.

#### 4. Manha de Carnaval (Latin, 10:27) by Luis Bonfa (1959)

The classic bossa nova music of Brazil flourished during the decade from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. In terms of quality and quantity of output and of the extent to which his music gained international recognition and stature, Antonio Carlos Jobim was the pre-eminent composer of bossa nova in a way that no composer of classic American popular music ever dominated that idiom. Additionally, many of Jobim’s great songs have become well established as part of classic American popular music; these include “Desafinado,” “One Note Samba,” “Girl from Ipanema,” “Meditation,” “Wave,” and “Triste.”

There were also other great bossa nova composers, even though they were not as prolific as Jobim. Their music too rose to become part of the classic popular music of the world. These composers include: Joao Gilberto, “Little Boat”; Marcos Valle, “So Nice (Summer Samba)”; and Luis Bonfa (1922-2001), “Manha de Carnaval” and “Samba de Orfeu.” The latter two songs by Bonfa were introduced in the 1960 Academy-Award-winning French film *Black Orpheus*. Contrary to what some people think, Bonfa did not compose all the music for *Black Orpheus*. Other major contributors were Antonio Carlos Jobim

and Rossini Pacheco. However, these two tunes are probably the most memorable songs from *Black Orpheus*, particularly “Manha de Carnaval” (“A Day in the Life of a Fool”).

Despite its association with the uninhibited and bacchanalian spirit of Carnival, “Manha de Carnaval” has a very orderly and formful structure. Someone commented after hearing Bill play it that its structure reminded him of songs by Franz Schubert, the Austrian classical composer (1797-1828). It is basically a minor-key, 32-bar ABAC tune; however, its four-bar special ending makes it into a 36-bar tune.

Bill’s Trio does this tune at an easy cha-cha-cha tempo, opening it with Bill playing a pretty arrangement of this gorgeous song (the “head”) in the rich lower-middle part of the piano. Then Bill starts to explore the theme, sculpting out pretty small melodies. On succeeding choruses, he extends his jazz lines, while still keeping them anchored on tune’s structure and essential notes. Then for contrast, Bill shifts to the hands-in-unison mode a la Wes Montgomery’s octave style; in this mode, he is no longer explicitly playing a solid chord so the listener has to hear the harmony in the piano and bass lines. He then locks his hands and explores this lovely tune with “block chords” a la George Shearing in the rich lower-middle region of the piano. Then Bill achieves different coloration with big full-piano “block chords” a la Red Garland.

Then bassist Terry gets a chance to explore this gem’s rich harmony and structure. The result is a solo so melodically beautiful it might distract you while you are dancing cha-cha-cha to the lilting Latin dance beat; simpatico dance-oriented accompaniment by Bill and Ron definitely enhance the experience.

##### 5. Days of Wine and Roses (swing, 8:55) by Henry Mancini (1962)

Born in 1924 and raised near Philadelphia, Henry Mancini was introduced to music at age 8, when he began to study the flute. At age 12, he took up the piano and within a few years became interested in arranging, which he began to teach himself before obtaining formal instruction. After high school, he enrolled at the Julliard School of Music in 1942. Before long however, he was in the Air Force and served until 1946, mostly as a member of military bands. After the war, Mancini joined the Glenn Miller/Tex Beneke Orchestra as pianist-arranger; it was here that he met his future wife, the band’s singer, Ginny O’Connor. They married in 1947, after relocating to Los Angeles.

During the next five years, Mancini worked freelance, mostly as an arranger for dance bands and night club acts but also as a composer of music for radio shows. Meanwhile he continued to study composition with private teachers. From 1952 to 1958, Mancini was employed at Universal as both an arranger and a composer, where he contributed to over 100 films, most notably *The Glenn Miller Story*, *The Benny Goodman Story*, and Orson Welles’ *Touch of Evil*. After leaving Universal, Mancini was quickly hired by producer/director Blake Edwards as composer for a new television series, *Peter Gunn*. Mancini’s theme for the show, in which he utilized the jazz idiom, was a hit, as was his music for Edward’s next series, *Mr. Lucky*.

From the early 1960s to the late 1980s (he died of cancer in 1994 while his last work, a stage musical adaption of his film success *Victor/Victoria*, was still in development), Mancini composed an average of three or four film scores per year, including more than two dozen that were written, produced and directed by Edwards. Many of his songs for these films became independent hits, such as “Moon River” from *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), “Charade” from *Charade* (1963), “Dear Heart” from *Dear Heart* (1964), “Baby Elephant Walk” from *Hatari* (1962), and “A Shot in the Dark” and “Pink Panther” from the 1994 films of the same names.

The first three songs cited above are waltzes (3/4 time), a form which became somewhat of a Mancini trademark. It is noteworthy that Mancini’s waltzes seem to want to remain waltzes and do not convert smoothly to 4/4 (swing) time as do waltzes such as “Tenderly” by Walter Gross (1946) or “Fly Me to the Moon” by Bart Howard (1954). Perhaps this is one reason why not many of Mancini’s tunes are used by jazz instrumentalists. Another reason may be that although tunes like “The Theme from Peter Gunn” incorporated elements of the jazz idiom, their structure and harmony does not offer a flexible framework for jazz improvisation.

“The Days of Wine and Roses” was introduced as a ballad in the 1962 film of the same name. However, Bill had always felt that it sounded better as a swing tune, and his Trio does it at a medium swing tempo, ideal for swing dancing. Most jazz musicians also do it up-tempo. (In fact, this tune does not have enough chord changes to be a good framework for development as a jazz instrumental ballad. For the most part, it has just one chord per measure (i.e., per four beats), and in several instances two successive measures have the same chord. Ideally, a tune should have at least two different chords per measure for development as a jazz ballad, which typically includes the “double-time” mode, i.e., using 16<sup>th</sup> notes. When there is just one chord per measure, a soloist playing a steady stream of 16<sup>th</sup> notes has to play 16 notes on the same chord, making it difficult to create interesting melodies.)

“The Days of Wine and Roses” sits nicely in the rich lower-middle region of the piano, which is where Bill opens the tune with a lush full-bodied arrangement of the melody (the “head”). On the first improvised chorus, Bill works with small melodies, reflective of the tune’s structure and essential notes. On succeeding choruses, he stretches out his single-line right-hand melodies, while keeping them based on the tune’s theme. Then for a contrast of colors, Bill shifts to hands-in-unison mode a la Wes Montgomery’s octave style. 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. The tune’s interesting bass line gives bassist Terry an opportunity to demonstrate that a bass solo can be creatively melodic while still making you want to get up and swing dance; Bill and Ron provide swinging accompaniment.

## 6. Willow Weep for Me (ballad, 11:57) by Ann Ronell (1932)

Many people know Ann Ronell only as the composer of “Willow Weep for Me” and tend to put her in a class of composers who apparently wrote one great tune and then disappeared from the musical scene. Other composers put into this class include Karl

Suessdorf (“Moonlight in Vermont”, 1945), Walter Gross (“Tenderly,” 1946), and Marvin Fisher (“When Sunny Gets Blue,” 1956). In Ronell’s case, however, nothing could be further from the truth. She had a productive and diverse musical career, particularly from the 1930s through the mid-1950s..

Born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1908, she graduated in music and literature from Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and her teachers included Gershwin. In the early 1930s, while Ronell was working on Broadway as a rehearsal pianist and singing coach, she was composing many popular songs, including “Baby’s Birthday Party” (1930), “Candy Parade” (1931), and “Willow Weep for Me” (1932). Her successes as a composer brought her to Hollywood, where she became the first woman to work as a music director and composer for motion pictures. Her film scores included *One Touch of Venus* (1948), which featured songs by Kurt Weill such as “Speak Low.”

Bill had heard numerous jazz musicians, including pianists, do “Willow Weep for Me” in a really bluesy way, and it often sounded to him like they were playing on 12-bar blues frame. However, when Bill got the sheet music, he found out that it was 32-bar AABA tune, the most common structure in classic American popular music. Regardless, many tunes that are not of the 12-bar AAB blues structure can be played in a bluesy way: e.g., listen to what Bill does with Ellington’s and Strayhorn’s “Satin Doll” and Jobim’s “Triste” and “Wave.” So Bill started off trying to improvise on “Willow Weep for Me” in a bluesy way (e.g., “sliding off” of 3rds, 5ths, and 7ths). However, as he played it more and more, it just didn’t seem to lend itself to a blues treatment, so he decided not to push it.

The melody of this tune has a lot of movement, but is anchored on a small number of essential notes that are remarkably close together and that make up the tune’s core structure. After playing a pretty arrangement of the melody in the rich lower-middle part of the piano, Bill starts to improvise on the theme, his pretty small melodies revealing the tune’s almost stationary underlying structure. Then he starts to stretch out the melodies, while still keeping them anchored on the tune’s essential notes. On the next chorus, his jazz lines get fuller and faster as he works in the “double-time” mode, i.e., using 16<sup>th</sup> notes. Then for contrast, Bill shifts to the “block chord” mode, first in the locked-hand style a la George Shearing, then in the big full-piano style a la Red Garland. No matter what mode Bill is playing in, the underlying theme shows through. Bassists, including Terry, love “Willow Weep for Me,” and Terry shows why in his soulful and melodic solo, with sensitive accompaniment from Bill and Ron.

## 7. Blues for Dr. Brown (swing, 14:17) by Bill Jackman (1997)

Bill hardly played the piano at all from ages 10 through 20, but was drawn back to it when he was in college and heard jazz pianists such as Tommy Flanagan, Wynton Kelly, and Oscar Peterson and wanted to learn to play like that. Bill took some jazz piano lessons from the late jazz pianist Arthur Fletcher, who taught him the fundamentals of jazz piano. After this, he was learning on his own via books and experimentation, was playing in the college stage band, and was really catching on to how to play the blues.

All this was cut short in August 1968 by an industrial accident at a plant in Oakland, California where Bill was working for the summer. His left hand got pulled into the chain guard of a conveyor belt, severing more than a half inch off the end of his ring finger and badly damaging the middle finger. When Bill arrived at the old Herrick (now Alta Bates) Hospital in Berkeley, all the tendons of the middle finger had been severed, the bone had been badly broken, and the finger was turned sideways and was cradled in Bill's right hand.

The doctors did not know if they could save the middle finger. Bill told Dr. Sheldon Brown, the hand surgeon who operated on him, that he was a jazz pianist and was just really catching on to how to play the blues. Dr. Brown said he would do all he could to save the finger. Dr. Brown did save the finger, and years later Bill composed this blues he dedicated to him named "Blues For Dr. Brown." (The year given above is the copyright year.)

This is a swing blues, and the tempo and groove are sure to please swing dancers. After playing the melody (the "head") in the rich lower-middle part of the piano, Bill proceeds to explore the gamut of jazz blues piano playing. On the first few choruses, he plays simple, spare melodies in the single-line right-hand mode. Then his jazz lines start getting longer. Then things start getting funky, with the funkiness intensifying on succeeding choruses. Check out his funky octaves and funky thirds patterns. Finally, Bill shifts to big full-piano, Red Garland style "block chords," creating successive choruses of elegant and swinging blues melodies.

Remarkably, on every chorus Bill takes, one can clearly hear a new blues melody. Melody is a top priority for Bill in his jazz improvisations. He believes that the goal of jazz improvisation should be the creation of new jazz melodies based on the original tune (i.e., the theme) you are using. And this applies whether the theme is a 12-bar blues or a 32-bar tune.

All the while Terry has been steady walking his bass and now is ready to make a statement on the blues. Check out the innovative and soulful melodies he creates, all the while keeping the swing dance beat going. Ron provides steady, simpatico support, and Bill moves his accompaniment from the lower-middle, to the upper-middle, and then to the upper region of the piano, lending different colors to Terry's dance-infused solo.

LUPITA LOPEZ JACKMAN