

Liner Notes for *Mystic Memories* (Complete)

The rag *Mystic Memories* took over 15 years to complete. I came up with, and primitively wrote out, the B section (second melody you hear) in 1986. While my earliest composition, *The Shepherd Glen Rag* (1977)—which I wrote in the 6th grade for my Elementary school; it was played on the daily radio show/announcement program that year and for years afterward—was also a rag, I would consider the second section of this piece to be my first serious composition. I had written “tunes” between 1977 and 1986, but they were simple, 32-bar ditties: tuneful, but almost uniformly uninteresting. The first melody of the trio (3rd section, in Eb) came soon after the first. Segue to the year 2003, when I dusted off the B and C sections and first, arrived at the skeleton of the final section while also fleshing out the repeated variation of B that you hear on the recording. Funnily enough, although I’ve heard of this phenomenon from several other composers, it was the A section that took the longest to appear. For a long while I was afraid I had a rag with no beginning. Finally, the linear melody came to me and I was able to complete the piece in time for my recording with Anne (the out-of-print CD, *Romances in Ragtime*). Since I completed the rag in *Mystic*, the name seemed appropriate.

The next track is a swinger I came up with in anticipation of a 2009 recording date I had for Arbors Records featuring some great musicians and inspirations. Among them were Bob Wilber, Bucky Pizzarelli, Antti Sarpilla, Nicki Parrott, Nik Payton, Ed Metz and (ahem) Anne Barnhart. While the recording was comprised of primarily Wilber originals, he invited me to submit some compositions as well. Of the two I brought along, he selected *Across the Pond*—so named for the colloquial way Brits, and those like Bob Wilber who live in England, refer to the Atlantic Ocean—and tweaked a note and a chord before we recorded it (does that mean I should have given him co-composer credit?). Here is its solo piano debut. I especially recall Bucky commenting favorably on the changes. Very nice memory.

I wrote *Love’s Journey* in one sitting to commemorate Anne’s and my 10th wedding anniversary. I think I was trying to show fealty to the love gods who had allowed my relationship with Anne to last MUCH longer than I’d hoped *any* romantic relationship would survive in my topsy-turvy world. She is my life’s partner and my steps, large and small, in this corporeal journey are indeed filled with love. Initially intended to be a piano solo I could play for her, the piece came to life when I adapted the melody for Anne to play on flute. I hope for the honor of writing music for her for decades to come.

The name for the following ballad, *Morning Fog*, came to me 27 years after the melody did! This tune had a long, arduous journey of its own. It began as the sole ballad of a 3-act comedy/musical I wrote in junior high school called “A King’s Home is His Castle.” So although I cite 1987 as the year of this song’s inception, it was really written in 1982-3. I’ve recently gone back to read the manuscript of the play, which *almost* made it to the stage of Sleeping Giant Junior High, but for my inability to do anything but write, act and direct (lighting? Staging? COSTUMES? Those endeavors are for people with *real* talent!). It wasn’t bad, really: a bit too hip for the average middle-schooler and WAY to juvenile for any audience much past puberty but, all in all, writing it taught me a great deal at the time and I’m glad I did

it. Perhaps the best thing to come out of it was the framework for the tune you hear here.

The tune languished for a few years, then, in 1987, while I was a sophomore at Connecticut College, I was invited to share a concert in Harkness Chapel with a senior who, honestly, had some real chops! His compositions were percussive, jazzy and intimidating. At the last minute, I decided that rather than play other people's percussive, jazzy pieces (Gershwin's or Berlin's for instance), I would simply sit down and start noodling with whatever sprang into my head. I made sure that the tone of my music was in direct contrast to the music the audience had hitherto heard by opting for a lyrical, soft approach. For 30 minutes I played around with one random melody after another—the only non-original tune was a ballad by Leonard Bernstein from "West Side Story" entitled *One Hand, One Heart*—finished up and went back to my dorm room to listen to the cassette tape I made of the performance. The quality of the recording was poor and, in retrospect I know that the performance was a bit stilted (I really possessed almost NO technique at that time), but, at the end of the day, I had quite a few new tunes that would be used for future projects, including this one. Not bad for a half-hour's work!

My most recent composition is a tango called *Mediterranean Nights*. Only about 6 months old at the time of this writing, this piece has proved a favorite with every type of audience. I wrote in a section where I can improvise over the changes so each time I present this piece it morphs into something new. I always enjoy incorporating the element of surprise in my compositions. To affect this, I begin each line of the melody with the same phrase and then take it someplace (hopefully) unexpected.

We return to my college years for the next trio of pieces. The first two melodies were themes included in a suite I composed to accompany a live theatrical reading of the celebrated children's book *Freddie the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia. My college friend Derron Wood adapted Buscaglia's book for a performance in Harkness Chapel at Connecticut College. He played the title character, a leaf named Freddie (represented musically by my flowingly naïve, optimistic melody entitled *Freddie*) who is afraid of dying. As fall approaches and he sees leaves around him turn color and fall from his tree, his anxiety increases. It is up to his friend Daniel, a much wiser leaf, to help Freddie through the process toward the inevitable cessation of life. My theme *Daniel* is more deliberate and calm to contrast with the faster, more melodic melody representing Freddie. The third theme occurred at the end of the reading, when we released thousands of leaves, slowly at first and then increasing intensity and number, from the attic of the chapel onto the heads of the audience. I'll never forget how college students and faculty lit up like 6-year old children when they first noticed the multi-colored leaves floating down to them from above. I tried to capture their wonder with *As the Leaves Gently Fall*.

Wilber Wobble was the rejected tune for my CD project with Bob Wilber. I'm not sure if he objected to the "wobble" bit; while he is in his mid-80's he still moves around quite well. It's a stompy, stridey piece so more in line with what people expect from me. I honor one of my heroes, Fats Waller, with the bridge of the tune; he would always compose harmonically straightforward "A" sections for his 32-bar tunes and then write something completely outside for the bridge. I've had

musicians look goggle-eyed at me after playing through the middle part of the tune. Everyone seems to enjoy it though, Bob W. aside, and so, I hope, will you.

The story behind *Aspens on the River* takes us to Sun Valley, Idaho. Each year, the Jazz festival in October draws musicians and listeners from around the globe. I had the pleasure of beginning my string of appearances there in 1994 with the Hot Cat Jazz Band so this year marks my 20th anniversary at the festival. The founders of the event, Barbara and her late-husband Tom Hazzard, gave Anne and me our first chance to appear in public as Ivory&Gold® and were always so encouraging to us. We'll be forever grateful for Tom and Barbara's vision, kindness and support. To commemorate our love for them, I composed this tango in 2003, and we performed it at that year's Finale. I'll always remember Barbara and Tom—he with his forest green smoking jacket—smiling in appreciation as we played their piece for them. One of the immeasurable blessings we have performing music is the chance to meet wonderful people like the Hazzards and so many others around the world. We are truly blessed.

Once the short theme has been stated, *Bluff Point Sunset* becomes entirely improvisatory. I've gone back to listen to its origin as part of the aforementioned concert I performed in 1987 while attending Connecticut College. While the feel is the similar, it might as well be a different piece. It's interesting what changes 27 years can wrought (and not merely musically!!).

I was working on this next composition for quite some time. It's another rag, so each section has to somehow make sense with the other sections. As with most of my rags, one section came to me immediately. In this case, it was the final section, which has an anthem-like quality that needed similarly weighty melodies preceding it. Once I received the news that a dear friend of Anne's and mine, Nan Bostick, had passed away, the rest of the piece arrived in a flood of memories and music. I first met Nan in Savannah, GA in 1994-5 at a ragtime festival. She was working through some piece and cursing up a storm every time she hit a bum note. I recall it was about 3am in the lobby of the hotel in which all the performers were staying and I sat and listened for a couple of minutes. I told her to relax, and Nan would always remind me of my exact words: "The music is in you, lady, you just gotta let it out!" She would tell everyone she met that because I had said that, she started performing and writing and doing shows. When we lost Nan Bostick, we lost a beautiful, feisty, wild woman and my rag reflects her swagger, her dignity, her sense of adventure and my sadness that she has been taken from us. Perhaps when you listen to *Remembering Nan*, the rag will conjure up your own happy memories of a departed loved one.

Morning Fog #2 is the second take of the melody from the play I wrote in junior high. Excepting the initial theme, this version differs entirely from the initial one. I couldn't decide which take I preferred so decided to include both here for comparison.

In my senior year at college, I would spend countless hours playing the Steinway grand in Harkness Chapel, usually from about 1 am to dawn. The acoustics are unbelievably good; the chapel is stone, the pews hard wood. Late one night (or early one morning) a tune came to me that I thought had to be played by two flutes—an irony in that at the time the flute was one of my least favorite

instruments. Luckily, there were some rather good flutists on campus who were willing to play *Riversong* and its companion piece, *Iberian Glimmers*. For this recording, both economics and the fact that I know no one as accomplished as Anne on the flute necessitated that she play both parts (obviously overdubbed). While this means we'll rarely, if ever, have a chance to perform these two compositions live in the manner I intended, I am so pleased with the outcome of the recorded versions. It took 25 years, but now two originals of which I am most proud are finally on record.

I conclude this collection with my *Eagles and Ivories Rag*, written to commemorate the 15th anniversary of a charming annual event under the same name in Muscatine, Iowa. Every January, I act as musical director for a ragtime festival in this small mid-western town. In addition to the music, patrons have the opportunity to view the largest congregation of wintering Bald Eagles in the country; the curves in the Mississippi River running through town, and the resultant fast water flow, discourage ice from forming on the water so the birds can fish during all but the very coldest of winters. Speaking of cold, there is very little in the world colder than Muscatine, Iowa in January but the people are so warm and friendly they more than make up for the harsh weather. Come check it out some year for yourself!

Musically, this final rag is the most programmatic of the lot, with the introduction representing the barren, frozen tundra of the edges of the river and the cracking of ice, followed by the main, raggy theme depicting the movement of the eagles. The second theme, in Am, depicts the birds swooping down for their catch and flying back to the trees to consume their prize. The syncopation disappears for the trio section, a sweeping ballad I hope captures the majesty and awe of the winter climate and the eagles at rest or in soaring flight. We return to the first theme, now with even more action and syncopation, a true celebration of the wonders of this world and my gratitude for being a part of it. I am equally grateful for your being a part of my world, faithful listener. I hope you enjoy.

Jeff Barnhart, Mystic, CT
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