

Bunny Berigan - beauty, drive, and freedom.

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BUNNY BERIGAN

BEAUTY, DRIVE, AND FREEDOM

It used to be that two trains daily arrived in Fox Lake, Wisconsin, (population 1,100) - the morning train and the evening train. Bunny Berigan's friends waited for the evening train that Friday in early June of 1942.

The train arrived about seven o'clock. Bunny's wife, Donna, pale and alone, sat in the coach; for her it was the end of a weariful, two-day trip. Bunny was in the baggage car, horizontal in a gift casket. Atop the casket was a spray of white orchids. When the trip started in New York there were two clusters of orchids, but souvenir hunters stole one during a stopover in Chicago.

This, then, was the final homecoming. Bunny was back in the tiny Wisconsin town where it all had started about twenty-five years before. Life was gone now, so was the horn. Significantly, he had returned without his horn. It was left behind in New York, near Fifty-second Street, in that other world that he knew: the fragmented, upside-down, night-is-day, neon-lighted world of the jazz musician.

Bunny was born in and grew up in Wisconsin's lake and dairy country; he knew its rural togetherness; its summers; its winters; its open skies; and maybe the country boy never did adjust to Fifty-second Street, and maybe that is why he developed the soul sickness which caused his death at thirty-three.

He had a talent which allowed him to be a professional musician at thirteen - a nationally famous band leader at twenty-eight. At twenty he arrived in New York with little more than an instrument case and a trumpet. Fifty-second Street gave him, overnight, fame, fortune, everything one is supposed to want, but everything wasn't enough so he threw it away.

Perhaps in time, if he isn't already, Bunny will become a jazz immortal like Leon (Bix) Beiderbecke, the tragic cornetist, the original "Young Man with a Horn". Certainly, in Bunny's life is the stuff that makes for jazz immortality: the humble beginning; the giant talent with the unique tone; the skyrocket ride to fame; the disenchantment; the endearing, mortal flaw; the swift decline; ~~and~~ and the early, self-inflicted death.

As Beiderbecke was an integral part of jazz in the twenties, Bunny was an integral part of jazz in the thirties, the decade of the big swing band and the musical giants, Goodman, Miller, Dorsey. All decades are crazy, of course, but the thirties was the decade in which the youth of the country jitterbugged wildly in theater aisles, ignored the exploding bombs they had seen in the newsreels.

Bunny's career, like that of his musical contemporaries, ascended with swing, declined with it. At his peak he led an orchestra which "swung" as well or better than many of the big-name bands of that era. He was named to "all-star" bands; his picture was on the front pages of magazines; he played for royalty; millions heard him play ^{on} ~~the~~ radio; he made numerous recordings, some of which are considered classics.

It was a career that traveled on the wings of song, mainly one song; a simple, little tune which he sang in a quivering, breathless way, like a broken-hearted college boy:

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"I've flown around the world in a plane,
 I've settled revolutions in Spain,
 An the North Pole I have charted,
 Still I can't get started with you."

Lyric finished, Bunny would pick up his trumpet, ~~and~~ point it toward the sky. If you don't believe Bunny was one of the greatest, listen to his horn in "I Can't Get Started", then try and find a trumpet player, any trumpet player, who can even ~~come~~ come close.

"I Can't Get Started" was Bunny's private property, right from the beginning. Perhaps the lyrics of his theme song expressed his own feelings. Perhaps he felt like the guy in the song, who had everything, and nothing, "'cause I can't get started". And, actually, Bunny never did really get started solving the problems of his emotional life.

Bernard Roland Berigan was born in Hilbert, Wisconsin, a small town with a population of less than three-hundred, which lies roughly between Oskosh and Green Bay. Bunny's father, William "Cap" Berigan was of Irish extraction. Bunny's mother, Mary "Mame" Schlitzberg Berigan, was of German extraction. Bunny's older brother, Don, is the ~~the~~ only surviving member of the family. A longtime barber, Don lives in Milwaukee with his second wife and ^{first} their teenage daughter. *ed*

At the time of Bunny's birth, November 2, 1908, "Cap" Berigan was employed as an express agent at the Hilbert railway station. Eight months later, "Cap" took a job as salesman for the Badger Candy Company, moved the family to Fox Lake, which was closer to the center of his sales territory and where relatives on both side of the family lived.

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Besides candy, "Cap" sold cigarets. When the automobile came in he bought a panel truck and sold to the summer guests who rented lake cottages in the area. "Cap" was not inclined toward music. The only musical experience he ever had was in a Decoration Day parade in Fox Lake when he agreed to beat the bass drum.

It was from his mother that Bunny inherited his love of music. Her family, the Schlitzbergs, had a musical tradition which went back to her grandfather, "Old Fred" Schlitzberg, who arrived from Germany with a violin. Mrs. Berigan played the alto and baritone horns; her sisters, Cora and Theresa, also played those instruments; sister, Inez, played the drums; brother, John, specialized in the clarinet but could play practically any wind instrument; Mrs. Berigan's mother played the organ; Mrs. Berigan's father, John Schlitzberg Sr., played the ~~cornet~~ ^{cornet}, ~~the violin~~ the violin, and led the Fox Lake Community Band which was composed of mainly Schlitzbergs.

Grandfather Schlitzberg was well-known in central Wisconsin for his musical abilities. Once he won a State fiddle contest by outplaying a Marty Hayes. Besides his work with music, he operated a furniture store, in the rear of which was the Schlitzberg Funeral Parlor. He also ran Schlitzberg Hall, a community building in Fox Lake, which was used for fraternal meetings and dances.

When Bunny was barely old enough for kindergarten, he was inducted into the Fox Lake Children's Band, another of grandfather's musical promotions. There is a picture of this band. Grandfather Schlitzberg, tall, thin, stern, towers over his young charges. Bunny holds an alto horn almost as big as he is.

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For awhile Grandfather Schlitzberg lived at the Berigan home. One day he brought a violin home, gathered Bunny and Don about him, and told the two boys that whoever learned to play the instrument first, could have it. Bunny won the violin; he was six years old at the time.

Don never did really get interested in music. He toyed with the drums, learned to play by ear well enough to play for a time with Windy Jacobs and his band from Beaver Dam, a town about eight miles from Fox Lake. Don admits that to this day he cannot read a note of music.

The study of the violin gave Bunny his basic musical education. He first received instruction in this instrument from his mother and his grandfather. Later on, ~~he enrolled in "Professor" Wagner's Musical College in Beaver Dam.~~ he enrolled in "Professor" Wagner's Musical College in Beaver Dam. He would journey to Beaver Dam after school. Besides his music, Bunny found plenty of time to explore the nearby woods and lakes and to play sandlot baseball.

As a performer in the children's band, Bunny began to notice an amusing phenomenon: whenever Grandfather Schlitzberg played the cornet his dental plate would float causing his lips and jaw to vibrate. One day, when Bunny and Don were alone in the house, Bunny decided to do an imitation of his grandfather. He lifted his grandfather's cornet out of its case, turned to Don and said: "Hey, Don! Hey, Don! Here's how grandpop plays the cornet."

Bunny blew through the horn. The sounds that came out sounded to Don like "pfft! pfft!". After the imitation Bunny put the cornet back in its case - but not for long. Whatever it is that makes a musician choose one instrument from many made Bunny choose the

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Bunny was given a trumpet and he began to bring the horn along to "Professor" Wagner's violin classes. Actually, Clarence H. Wagner was not a professor; it was a nickname ~~the~~ ^{the} youngsters gave him. Mr. Wagner is still living; he's retired, resides in Fox Lake. At first Mr. Wagner did not think much of Bunny's trumpet playing. He said recently:

"With the violin Bunny was very good. He picked that up very quickly. But with the trumpet he was not so good."

But the violin gradually gave way to the trumpet. Don was beginning to show an interest in the drums and when they had the house to themselves the brothers would crank up the family phonograph and play along with Paul Whiteman, Red Nichols, and Louie Armstrong.

~~It~~ It is a fact that many of the budding jazz musicians of that day, Bunny, ^{Benny} Beiderbecke, and Goodman, to name a few, were inspired by those early jazz recordings and learned to "jam" along with them.

After listening to a particularly inspiring Whiteman recording, one day, Bunny turned to his mother and said: "Gee, Ma, wouldn't it be great if I could play with Paul Whiteman someday?" Mrs. Berigan smiled tolerantly, agreed with him, returned to the unglamorous duties of a housewife. Bunny got his wish - ~~he~~ ^{he} he did play with Paul Whiteman.

Two years after he began ^{to} ~~study~~ study the trumpet, Bunny became a professional musician. In the early Twenties, the beginning of the famous "Roaring Twenties", there was in Wisconsin a big demand for dance bands, particularly bands which play Dixieland style. The "Charleston" craze had penetrated even the Midwest and the dance had become so popular that it was frequently performed at barn



One of the bands which was kept busy in central Wisconsin at this time was Merrill Owen's Pennsylvanians - a five-piece Dixieland combo out of Beaver Dam. The title "Pennsylvanians" was a minomer, all of the band's musicians were local boys. The band was dubbed "Pennsylvanians" one day by a former circus advance man Owen hired to paint advertising posters.

The band often played for dances in Fox Lake. One Thursday night, Owen remembers it was a Thursday night, the Pennsylvanians arrived early for an engagement at Schlitzberg Hall. After the instruments and music stands were set up, Owen took a turn down the main street. He was attracted by music and he came upon a street band which was playing from a portable bandstand. It was Grandfather Schlitzberg and his Community Band presenting one of its Thursday Night Concerts. One of the musicians in the band was a small boy in short pants. As he listened, Owen became impressed by the boy's ability to play the trumpet.

"In those days trumpet players were hard to come by," Owen recalled recently. Owen and his wife now live in suburban Madison. "I asked Bunny if he would like to come down to Beaver Dam and rehearse with my band and see if we could work something out. He agreed. He rehearsed with us for a week after school and after his lessons from Professor Wagner. Bunny couldn't read his part too well at first so we rigged up a C-slide so he could play his trumpet from his violin music."

After the week of rehearsal, Owen hired Bunny for six dollars a night - the going rate for Dixieland musicians at the time. Owen had work aplenty. Shortly after Bunny joined the band, the "Pennsylvanians" played seventy-one successive one-night stands. Transportation was provided by Owen's 1919 Buick, side-curtained touring car. The Buick's running boards carried the

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instrument cases, ~~and~~ the bass drum was tied to the rear spare tire.

Bunny's new job created a minor crisis in the Berigan household. One night Bunny came home from a playing date, petulantly, told his mother: "Ma, I feel so foolish on the bandstand in these short pants and long stockings." Mr. and Mrs. Berigan discussed the situation and it was agreed that the professional musician should be allowed to wear long trousers.

"Bunny was a sensation on the road a month after he joined our band," Owen said. "For a kid it was amazing the way he played that trumpet. All the bands around Fox Lake would have liked to sign him. The Fox Lake and Beaver Dam crowd used to follow us for miles. We drew well. At some of those lake resorts we'd play to two-thousand couples during a week-end."

"Sometimes Bunny'd take off an do passages he had heard on Armstrong or Red Nichols recordings. Then he'd bring his fiddle along and occasionally he'd play a waltz. He also played a valve trombone at this time. And he'd sing, rhythm novelty tunes like # 'Jada', 'Red Hot Mama', and 'Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate'."

Bunny played with Owen for two seasons. During the second season the "Pennsylvanians" had a steady engagement in Milwaukee; their Dixieland music filled the ballroom of Sam Wah's Chop Suey House. Owen still has a photograph of the band which was taken at Wah's. In it Bunny appears as a rather large, angular teen-ager, uncomfortable in a tuxedo.

It was with Owen's band that the name "Bunny" Berigan first appeared. Bernard R. Berigan began signing his checks "Bunny Berigan"

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As far as anyone can figure out, he ~~#####~~ adopted the nickname because he preferred it to "Bernard". Actually, his childhood nickname was "Diddles". As a child he often pointed an imaginary gun at his playmates and cried, "diddle, diddle, diddle".

Another band which was doing well in Wisconsin in the early twenties was led by Cy Mahlberg of Fond du Lac, a city on Lake Winnebago and about forty miles northeast of Beaver Dam. As Fond du Lac is larger than Beaver Dam, Mahlberg's orchestra was larger and more widely known than Owen's. Toward the end of his second season ~~#####~~ Bunny left Owen to go with Mahlberg.

"Mahlberg had been trying to hire Bunny for some time," Owen said. "He offered Bunny more than the six dollars a night I was paying. Bunny was certainly worth more, but I felt that if I gave him an increase I'd have to be fair with the rest of the crew and give them an increase, too."

After Bunny left the "Pennsylvanians", Owen saw him infrequently. Their last meeting was in the Orpheum Theater in Madison years later. Bunny had become a nationally-famous band leader and was on tour. Owen came to ~~the~~ tune the Orpheum's piano. When Owen finished his work he went backstage to see Bunny. Bunny was in his dressing room preparing for a show. When Owen entered two colored band boys, by name, "Little Gate" and "Big Gate", were poised at Bunny's elbows, each inserting a cuff link. Owen and Bunny chatted for awhile. Owen remembers that Bunny spoke of financial difficulties with the band and complained that his booking agents were "taking him to the cleaners".)

At the end of ^{? Doubtful} a season with Mahlberg, Bunny posed another problem for the Berigan household: he announced that he wanted to leave Fox Lake High School and go with the Mahlberg band on an extended tour.

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Bunny's parents did not want him to leave school, but neither did they wish to frustrate what looked like a promising musical career. A compromise was worked out. "Cap" contacted his brother, Robert "Big Bob" Berigan. A drummer, Bob led one of the bands which the Alvin Thompson Agency booked in the Madison area. It was agreed that ~~that~~ Bunny would go to Madison, live with his uncle, attend school there, and play week-ends with Bob's band. There was another advantage in the move, Bunny would be allowed to join the Madison local of American Federation of Musicians.

A good deal of Bob's band work involved playing for fraternity and sorority dances at the University of Wisconsin which is in Madison. During Bunny's bigtime career in New York it was generally assumed that Bunny was a graduate or had least attended the University. Sometimes he was referred to as a "Louie Armstrong with a college education". Bunny's college education was a myth, probably originated by a publicity man. In fact, one publicity release, released just after Bunny organized his big band, wildly asserted that Bunny attended ~~the~~ the University, played violin in the college band, but switched to the more dramatic instrument, the ~~the~~ trumpet, so not to be overshadowed socially by campus football heroes.

No doubt some of the college polish rubbed off on Bunny during those days in Madison, but, actually, he never even completed high school. He left Wisconsin High School in his ^{No} junior year. However, it can be said that Wisconsin High School is connected with the University, not with the Madison Public School System. At any rate, it is doubtful whether Bunny had the inclination or the time for serious book learning, since music was his love.

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There seems to be some question as to just how seriously Bunny studied music. Owen said that Bunny practiced faithfully in his spare hours when he worked with the "Pennsylvanians". But Bob Berigan doesn't recall that Bunny studied or practiced much in Madison. "Bunny was a 'natural'," Bob said. "The only practice I saw him get in was maybe before a dance - he'd take out his trumpet and run up and down the scales a few times.

Also, it was Owen's understanding that early in his career Bunny received instruction in the "non-pressure" system from Forrest Nicola, a respected trumpet instructor who ~~#####~~^{then} had an office in Chicago.

But Bob discounts Nicola's influence on Bunny. Bob said: "Bunny might have gone to Chicago a couple of times if he had a particular trumpet problem he wanted to talk over with Nicola, but that's about all. And I'm sure Bunny never adopted any 'non-pressure' system."

As his nickname, "Big Bob", indicates, Bob Berigan is a big man, close to six feet, three inches tall and he must weigh over two hundred pounds. (Bigness is a Berigan family trait, apparently. Bunny was close to six feet tall as is Don. Don, incidentally, looks a lot like Bunny.) Bob has pretty much retired from the drums - he has a steady job in Madison. He lives with his family in a house which is a few blocks from the State Capitol.

According to Bob, Bunny was an immediate success with the college crowd in Madison. And during the four years he played with Bob, Bunny's trumpet skills improved markedly. "Bunny developed a terrific range," Bob said. "He got so he could hit a low note just a clear, you'd think a trombone had it. He hit clinkers, too, all through his career, but he was never afraid to try the difficult."

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Besides playing with Bob's band, Bunny worked for a time with a "pit" band at the Orpheum Theater in Madison. The experience he received there playing for vaudeville acts probably was invaluable. Vaudevillians are notorious for the sheet music they carry from town to town; it is often torn, stained, pencil-marked, frequently indecipherable; it takes a real musician to figure out just what accompaniment the performer expects.

While Bunny was working at the Orpheum, Bob asked a friend, a musician in the theater band, how Bunny was getting along. The friend replied that Bunny was doing just fine and remarked that Bunny "read" very well. The days of the short pants and the C-slide were now far behind.

Bunny and his trumpet began to gain a reputation in Madison. He became the local boy whom the local citizens predicted would make good. And bigtime musicians began to hear about the young trumpet player. Paul Whiteman said he first heard of Bunny in Madison; Hal Kemp met Bunny at a resort near Madison; and there is a story about a meeting between Bunny and Joseph "Wingy" Mannone, the famous, one-armed trumpet player. The story may be more myth than fact, but it's too good to be disproved.

During an engagement in Madison, Mannone heard numerous, glowing accounts about a young Madison trumpet player. Mannone decided privately that "no kid can be that good", but one night friends prevailed on him to attend a dance where the young man was playing.

"I understand you'd like to hear me play," Bunny said after introducing himself to Mannone.

"It ain't gonna do no good," Mannone replied wearily, "there are only three of us, Bix, Louie, and me."

Undaunted, Bunny mounted the bandstand, ^{pointed} ~~#####~~ his horn at the sky and proceeded to "take Mannone apart". When he had ~~####~~

finished, Bunny returned for Mannone's reaction.

"Man", Mannone said enthusiastically, "now there are four of us."

Most of the time, though, it would be the other way around, Bunny would seek out the musical celebrities whenever they played Madison. One night Bunny, Bob Berigan, and Russ Mohroff, a bass player, drove to a resort near Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, to hear Hal Kemp's orchestra. The "Tarheels" was a band composed of college boys from Kemp's alma mater, the University of North Carolina. The band's drummer then was Skinnay Ennis whose vocal of Kemp's theme, "Got a Date With An Angel" is famous.

Bob Berigan remembers Kemp as a "nice guy" who allowed Bunny and Mohroff to sit in with the band for a few numbers. Later Kemp chatted with the ambitious young musicians, gave them pointers. Two years later, in 1930, Bunny became a member of Kemp's band. The last Bob heard of Mohroff was that the bass player moved to the West Coast and that he had died there.

The incident with Kemp probably helped to convince Bunny and Morhoff that they were ready for the bigtime for soon after that the two packed their instruments and took a train to New York. Bunny was nineteen. Their assault on the great stone city lasted for six weeks. During that time, according to Bob, "they saw a lot of out-of-work musicians and damned near starved to death." "Bunny and Russ." New York did not want them so they retreated to Madison. It would be a year before Bunny would try again.

We see Bunny at this stage of his career as a husky country boy, who was naive, friendly, devil-may-care at times, painfully shy at times, a nice guy who could never be vindictive. That was one side of his personality. On the other, he was quick-tempered obviously ambitious, and certainly he didn't play a "nice guy's horn"; it was the virle, razzy, sometimes "dirty" horn or a musical gambler.

As was noted previously, Bunny was close to six-feet tall. He was well-built; his complexion was light; his eyes were blue; his hair was light brown, almost blond. From the time he could grow he wore a mustache. The mustache served two purposes: it made him appear more mature, ~~and~~ it strengthened the lip. Bunny believed, as do many musicians, that a mustache lends support to the embouchure, the shape and position of the lips and tongue when a tone is produced, while shaving weakens the embouchure. For added strength, Bunny grew on his lower lip a small square of hair about the size of a postage stamp. One of his upper front teeth was discolored. He refused to have it removed lest it affect his tone.

Bunny's lip was one of his strong points. When he was in condition, he could play all night and still produce a tone of high quality. This is in contrast to some trumpeters who have what is called a "ten o'clock lip", that is, their embouchure begins to fade after a few hours of playing.

Booze, which later became such a problem with Bunny, apparently didn't play much of part in his life during those early days in Wisconsin. Neither Merrill Owen nor Bob Berigan remember Bunny bothering much with the stuff. However, Bunny's cousin, Charles Casey, said that as young bucks at dances in Fox Lake,

he and Bunny sometimes carried a flask of homemade liquor. In those days of prohibition you made your own poison. Drug stores stocked flavoring which you added to raw alcohol to make "Bourbon" "Scotch", or "Rye".

As far as girls were concerned, Bunny did not have a serious romance with any of the Wisconsin girls, as far as we know. Bob doesn't remember that Bunny became romantically involved during Bunny's teen-age years in Madison. Bunny did fall in love, and married at an early age, but that was later on and in New York.

Bunny was twenty when he made his second try for the bigtime. He arrived in New York shortly before the stock market crash. This time he was alone, this time he was given an opportunity to ~~show~~ display his talent. Orchestra leader, Frank Cornwell, gave Bunny ~~his~~ ~~first~~ his first steady job in New York. At the time, Cornwell's orchestra was playing a steady engagement at Jantzen's Hoffbrau House a German restaurant. In those first weeks, Bunny demonstrated he was a capable musician and Cornwell retained him.

Besides the fact that it was the site of his first New York job, Bunny had ~~another~~ another reason for remembering Jantzen's; it was ^{that} there he met romance.

Along with Cornwell's orchestra, Jantzen's presented vaudeville. One of the acts that played there was performed by an adagio dance team called "Darrell and Donna". Darrell and Donna MacArthur were from Syracuse, New York; they were brother and sister.

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In the adagio ballet, the dancers do a slow duet in which the woman performs balancing feats with the aid of her partner. In one sequence of the act, Darrell would support Donna on his shoulders, and Donna would bend slowly backwards and strike a pose. In this suspended, upside down position, Donna's eye level was even with the brass section of the Cornwell Orchestra. Each time she came to that position she noticed that one of the trumpet players ^{smiled} ~~smiled~~ at her. It was Bunny.

Bunny was too shy to speak for himself. Instead, he told Cornwell of his interest in Donna. One day Cornwell approached Donna and said, "You know Bunny, the trumpet player, would like to meet you." Whereupon Bunny and Donna were introduced. A double date was arranged in which Donna and Bunny accompanied Cornwell and his wife. Donna recalled recently that on one of those ~~dates~~ double dates the two couples went to Harlem to the Cotton Club.

The romance was interrupted by the exigencies of showbusiness: Donna continued to tour with her brother, Bunny left Cornwell to join Hal Kemp's orchestra, which was then enjoying a successful engagement at the Hotel Taft in New York. Kemp had kept Bunny in mind after the meeting in Fort Atkinson.

Shortly after Bunny joined the band, the "Tarheels" left America for a tour of Europe. In England, that summer of 1930, the Kemp band gave a Command Performance for the Royal Family and became a particular favorite of the Prince of Wales, David of Windsor, now the Duke of Windsor. From there the band went to the Continent where it was well received, particularly in Paris.

One of the interesting events of the tour occurred in the Atlantic on the return trip, sort of a Boston Tea Party in reverse. The "Tarheels" returned on the SS Berengaria. Also aboard was the Prince of Wales. Apparently, the ship's British orchestra became jealous of the the "Tarheels'" ability to please the young prince for Kemp's library trunk containing all the band's sheet music was dumped overboard. The "Tarheels" were equal to the occasion, however. They continued to amuse the Prince. Well-schooled by Kemp, the band was able to play its entire repertoire of forty songs without ~~the music.~~ the music.

When the band returned to America, Bunny left it for a job with radio station WABC. For all its popularity, it is doubtful ~~that~~ that Bunny was happy playing with the "Tarheels". It was what musicians call a "tenor" band, a commercial, society band. (The alltime "tenor" band, of course, is Guy Lombardo's.) The music radio house~~s~~ bands play is also cut-and-dried, but since Bunny had marriage in mind he wanted a job which allowed some home life.

Bunny visited Donna in Detroit where she was appearing in a nightclub. ^{They} ~~They~~ decided to get married; Bunny was twenty-one, Donna, nineteen. The ceremony was held in Donna's hometown, Syracuse. There was no honeymoon. On their wedding night they boarded a train for New York so that Bunny could get back to his job at WABC.

Bunny's work schedule never did allow him much time for leisure. In the eleven years of their marriage, Bunny and Donna ~~had~~ had only one vacation, and that was for only five days at Saranac Lake, New York.

Because of his outstanding talent, Bunny was able to live well in New York, support a wife, and later children, even during the depression when hundreds of unemployed musicians cluttered up the New York sidewalks. Outside of that one reverse, the time he and Russ Mohroff failed in New York, Bunny's career encountered no serious obstacles. He was one of the chosen few. The acclaim and recognition it takes most artists a lifetime to achieve, were Bunny overnight.

To enhance his reputation, and because he loved to play, Bunny played whenever and wherever he could. He was constantly on the move. ~~###~~ Since he was in showbusiness, all jobs were transitory. His job at WABC was the first in a series of jobs he held with radio house bands. From his early days in New York until 1937, when he organized his own band, Bunny's was more or less a free lance career. Not only did he play in radio bands, but in recording studios, ballrooms, speakeasies, jazz joints, jazz concerts - as a solo performer or with trios, quartets, sextets, octets, full-sized orchestras. It is just about impossible to follow his free lance career chronologically because during that period he played with more than fifty musical groups. The musicians he played with read like a jazz who's who. To list a few:

Rudy Vallee, Abe Lyman, Paul Whiteman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Freddie Rich, Chick Bullock, Gene Kardos, Red Norvo, Adrian Rollini, Gene Krupa, Artie Shaw, Dick McDonough, Mildred Bailey, Bud Freeman, Gene Gifford, Bessie Smith, Buster Bailey, Red Allen, Max Kaminsky, Cosey Cole, Jack and Charlie Teagarden, Pee Wee Russell, Mugsy Spanier, Joe Buskin, Red McKenzie, Eddie Condon, Lee Wiley, Gil Sullivan, Danny Klein, Frank Trumbaer, Billie Holiday, Fats Waller, and Ray Bauduc.

Not all the music Bunny and his musician~~s~~ friends played was for the general public. Sometimes they played for themselves at "cutting sessions"(jam sessions). Like the legendary characters they were, they gathered in "after hours" joints ~~##~~ either in Greenwich Village, midtown, or Harlem, played and drank until the practical light of day wrecked the mood.

Bunny made two notable tours during that period, with White^{free lance}man in 1933 and with Goodman in 1935. It should also be noted here that Bunny played with the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra in 1932~~#~~ in the Broadway show "Everybody's Welcome". That was the beginning of a relationship between Bunny and Tommy Dorsey, two of ~~#~~ swing's wild Irishmen, which alternated between warm friendship and fist~~le~~ cuffs (One of the songs in "Everybody's Welcome", incidentally, was "As Time Goes By". The song was reintroduced years later in the film "Casablanca" which starred Humprey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman.)

At twenty-four years of age, Bunny realized a lifetime ambition when Paul Whiteman hired him to play third trumpet. "Pops" Whiteman, "The King of Jazz", had one of the biggest, most popular orchestra of the day. Whiteman's orchestra played a commercial, "symphonized" jazz, but it was presented in a bigtime way. Whiteman made it a point to hire the best possible talent. Most of the "name" musicians have worked for Whiteman at one time or another. Beiderbe worked for Whiteman. Probably the most widely-known Whiteman graduate is Bing Crosby, who, with the Rhythm Boys, sang with Whiteman's band at the beginning of the Thirties.

Bunny played with Whiteman for a year. The Whiteman band was forever making recordings. Whiteman could not begin to recall just what records the band made ~~with~~ ~~###~~ Bunny. However, it is belived that Bunny made his recording debut with the Whiteman band for Victor on "In The Dim Dim Dawning".

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At that time the band also recorded "Look What I've Got", "In a Park in Patee", "Night Owl", "It's Only a Paper Moon", and "Night and Day".

It was on the tour with Whiteman that Bunny saw Wisconsin again; he had not been back since he left to seek his fortune in 1929. The Whiteman crew moved into the Capitol Theater in Madison for a two-day stand. On the second night, Bunny's friends and relatives came to see the show and greet the young man who had made the bigtime. Don Berigan was among the Fox Lake crowd.

"About thirty of us showed up at the theater," Don said. "After the show it was crowded you couldn't get near Bunny's dressing room. It was then I met Bunny's wife, Donna, for the first time and their daughter, Pat, she was about two at the time. After the show we all went down to my grandmother's house in Madison and had a party. Bunny was his old self. After the party we all went down to the Madison station and saw Bunny off on the midnight train."

Whiteman had his problems with Bunny - the same sort of problems he had earlier when Bedierbecke was with the band. Bunny began to take too much drink.

Paul Whiteman
Today lives in New Jersey on his "Walking Horse Farm". He still keeps his hand in the music business by occasionally conducting a jazz concert.

"Yes Bunny took a drink," Whiteman said recently, "but you've got to remember, we were all pretty wild in those days. If you weren't pretty wild, you were pretty square."

In a discussion about Bunny as compared to Beiderbecke, Whiteman remarked that he found their personalities very dissimilar:

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"They were both sweet, wonderful guys. Bunny was more extroverted than Bix. I don't know, I always thought Bix was some thing of a split personality - torn between the sweet and the hot. If you listen to some of that stuff Bix wrote, like "In a Mist", that's pretty close to classical. As far as their playing goes, I think Bunny had more technique than Bix, but Bix was so first with that fine, intimate tone."

Whiteman doesn't recall that Bunny and Bix ever met, but he feels certain that at one time the two did meet. "Bunny was a great admirer of Bix's," Whiteman said, "Bunny probably made it a point to look up Bix when he came to New York."

The careers of Leon Bismarck Beiderbecke and Bunny Berig are similar in many ways. Both came from the Midwest; both came from German stock; both received their first musical instruction from their parents; both learned to play jazz by jamming along with phonograph records; both developed a singular tone; both took to liquor; and both chucked it early, Bix at twenty-seven, Bunny at thirty-three. You can also make the rather simple-minded observation that ^{they} ~~###~~ had similar initials, "BB".

But they were different in that Bix was a genius; ~~#####~~ Bunny was more the "natural" musician.

Beiderbecke, it is said, played his greatest with the Gene Goldkette and Whiteman bands. Sometimes he would be so plastered on the bandstand that a fellow musician would have to hold him by the back of the collar to keep him from falling off his chair.

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Beiderbecke left the Whiteman band in 1930. Later he tried to rejoin Whiteman, but he couldn't stand the strain and had to bow out again. He collapsed after playing a one-night stand in Princeton, New Jersey, and died shortly after that on August 7, 1931, in a Long Island hospital.

With his Victor recording group, "Bunny Berigan and His Men", Bunny recorded Beiderbecke's only published compositions: "Davenport Blues" (after Davenport, Iowa, Beiderbecke's hometown), "Flashes", "In the Dark", "Candlelight", "In a Mist", and "Walkin' the Dog".

After the year with Whiteman, Bunny returned to the WABC house band and he also continued to free lance. The type of jazz that Whiteman presented was on the decline. A new type of music, "swing," was about to burst on the American scene and Bunny would play an important ~~part~~ role.

"Swing" was a merging of traditional jazz ~~with~~ with popular dance music. The man who did the most to popularize this new ^{the} form was quiet, spectacled Chicagoan, Benny Goodman. A pied piper with a clarinet, "The King of Swing", for better or for worse, sent the youth of the nation into a frenzy of jitterbugging.

"Swing" was a revolution; its impact was so great it affected the language and fashions: "Hepcats" in "zoot" suits with ~~pleats~~ "reat" pleats and knee-length key chains, grabbed their "chicks" to "cut" "mean" rugs.

Bunny joined the Goodman band in Chicago in 1935. Bunny's trumpet was a big factor in the rise of the Goodman band. From Chicago the band worked its way West, finally arriving in California where the band received its greatest reception. At the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles the unusual happened: the couples came to dance, but instead they crowded around the bandstand to listen and

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Goodman, Gene Krupa, Bunny, and vocalist, Helen Ward, were the particular favorites of the crowd.

The success of the Palomar engagement attracted national attention to the Goodman band and its individual stars. Bunny was still in California with Goodman when Columbia Broadcasting Company offered Bunny a chance to lead a small radio swing group of his own. Bunny accepted the radio offer, quit Goodman and returned to New York.

Bunny's departure left a void in the Goodman brass section; the void remained until Harry James was hired and even then some critics said that James's trumpet was "less satisfying" than Bunny's. Apparently, Bunny left the Goodman band in everyone's good graces. Gene Krupa said recently that it was his recollection that Bunny "behaved himself" while he was with Goodman, and that Bunny left^{traveling it} the band because he did not like the ~~####~~ involved. Goodman would not discuss Bunny. A few months ago a reporter told Goodman that he was gathering material on Bunny and asked for an interview. Goodman, through his secretary, replied that he was "too busy". The reporter made a second attempt to reach Goodman, but this time the reporter was ignored.

Bunny made a number of recordings with the Goodman Orchestra. For Victor the band recorded "King Porter Stomp", "Sometimes I'm Happy", "Dear Old Southland", "Blue Skies", and "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea". That same year, 1935, Bunny sat in with the Glen Miller Orchestra and cut "In a Little Spanish Town" and "Solo Hop" for Columbia records.

The CBS group which Bunny organized after he left Goodman, "Bunny Berigan and his Blue Boys", became a highly regarded radio jam outfit. The group also recorded for Decca such songs as "Blues", "I'm Coming Virginia", "Chicken and Waffles", and "You Took Advantage

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Technically, Bunny was one of "Red" McKenzie's Jam Bunch" at the Famous Door, which was on Fifty-second Street and which was formerly the Onyx Club. It is no secret that Bunny and McKenzie liked to refresh themselves during the intermissions. Others in the "bunch" were pianist Joe Buskin, a pal of Bunny's; Forest Crawford, tenor saxaphonist; Marty Stuhlmaker, the left-handed bassist; and Eddie Condon on guitar. McKenzie did the vocals.

Besides being a musician, William "Red" McKenzie was a promoter, and character in his own right. A former jockey, he had ridden at tracks in Bowie, Maryland, and Havana, Cuba. When overweight ended his riding, he shopped around for another career. One day in New Orleans he, to use his own words, "took his lean, saddle ass into a jazz joint where a colored band was playing". The jazz impressed him and from then on he was a musician. He organized a strange aggregation called the "Mound City Blue Blowers" in which he played a comb wrapped in tissue paper. Later he became a vocalist and it has been said that McKenzie was Bing Crosby's favorite vocalist.

McKenzie had a high opinion of Bunny's trumpet. "If that man Bunny wasn't such a gambler," McKenzie remarked once, "everybody'd say he was the greatest that ever blew. But the man's got such nerve and likes his horn so much, he'll go ahead and try stuff that nobody else'd ever think a trying."

When Bunny first arrived in New York, McKenzie passed the word to the recording companies that Bunny was a young man to watch. As it turned out, McKenzie was another musician whose way of life caught up with him. He died about ten years ago in a New York hospital, a victim of the same disease which killed Bunny.

The atmosphere was informal at the Famous Door. The musicians would stand or sit, discuss a number, then play it as the mood dictated. They engaged in horseplay, sometimes exchanged instruments: ^hBuskin would take Bunny's trumpet, Condon would sit at the piano, and Bunny would take Condon's # unique and difficult-to-play four-string guitar. Bunny played Condon's guitar well, too. Condon, who now operates a nightclub in New York, still refers to Bunny as a "musician's musician".

One day during the Famous Door engagement, Johnny DeVries, a ^hsongwriter who collaboates with Buskin, came over from Broadway with sheet music from the "Zeigfeld Follies of 1936". A song in the show, "I Can't Get Started" by Vernon Duke, had not created much of a stir, but DeVries liked it and he was anxious to see what the "bunch" could do with it. The musicians toyed with the tune and ~~then~~ a discovery was made: "I Can't Get Started" was a concerto for trumpet.

At first, McKenzie sang the lyrics of the song, but it did not work out too well. Bunny and McKenzie made a record of the song for Decca; Bunny's trumpet was praised, the McKenzie vocal was panned. "Red McKenzie is only fair in 'I Can't Get Started', he's done much better" was one critical comment.

McKenzie was the first of a long line of singers who have tried to sing "I Can't Get Started". None have been able to equal Bunny's vocal, nor have any trumpeters been able to match his trumpet work in the song. In succeeding recordings of "I Can't Get Started", Bunny sang. He recorded the song for Vocalion; this version was reissued on the Brunswick label; then he recorded the song for Victor. Bunny became associat^{ed} with the song and in 1937, when he formed his big band, he took it for his theme.

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While "I Can't Get Started" is Bunny's best-known recording, some say his greatest work is heard for a few brief bars on another record, "Marie", which he made with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra in 1937. The Berigan trumpet comes in just after the vocal in "Marie" it has been said that it is the finest bit of trumpet improvisation ever captured on wax.

By "improvisation" we mean that here Bunny departs from the written music, lets the talent and imagination take over, plays the song as he feels it. Improvisation is nothing new, of course, but in the big bands such as Dorsey's and Goodman's, the musicians were limited in this respect. A soloist could cut out for eight bars only, then he had to return to the written arrangement.

Donna said recently that she did not think Bunny was an official member of the Dorsey band when "Marie" was recorded. It was her recollection that Dorsey met Bunny in a hall outside the Victor recording studio and that on the spur of the moment, Dorsey asked Bunny to sit in with the band.

It was about that time, though, early 1937, that Bunny joined the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. Dorsey, "The Sentimental Gentleman of Swing" was then appearing at Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook Ballroom in New Jersey. The Meadowbrook was famous in the Thirties as a showcase for the big bands. Anyone old enough to remember that era must have fond memories of the fine music that was broadcast from the Meadowbrook.

Bunny's dynamic trumpet was a big asset to the Dorsey Orchestra, just as it had been ~~with the Goodman band~~ with the Goodman band. But, apparently, Bunny was not satisfied. He and Dorsey frequently argued about the policies of the band and just how certain bits of musical "business" should be ~~performed~~ performed. Finally, in exasper

ation, Dorsey told Bunny, effect, that if he knew so much about band leading, why didn't he form his own band.

Aside from their disagreements, though, Dorsey felt that Bunny was ready to lead a band of his own. Dorsey pointed out to Bunny that as a band leader ~~##~~ Bunny stood a chance to make a lot of money. By now Bunny's stature had exceeded that of a sideman, even a sideman with the Dorsey Orchestra. Because of his work with Goodman, Dorsey, his recordings, and his radio work, Bunny had developed a following ^{about} among the general public. Whether he liked it or not, he was ~~####~~ to advance to another rung on the musical ladder.

Donna wasn't convinced the band idea was so sound. It would mean more strain and tension for Bunny who still had not overcome his liquor problem. It would mean travel and the one-night stand. As it was, Bunny was making three to four hundred dollars a week and Donna felt that "that was enough money for anybody".

But Bunny went ahead and organized a Bunny Berigan Orchestra. However, the musicians he hired, with the exception of clarinetist, Matty Matlock, were not particularly talented. The newly-formed band followed the Dorsey Orchestra at the Meadowbrook and it flopped. The contrast between the abilities of Bunny and Matlock, and the rest of the crew proved to be ~~#####~~ embarrassing. The Meadowbrook management quickly eased out the Berigan Orchestra and brought in the Artie Shaw Orchestra.

Obviously, changes had to be made if the band was to survive. In the next few months, Bunny and his manager, Arthur Mchaul, a red-haired, French-Canadian, who had previously managed Dorsey and Goodman, revamped and reorganized. The old crew was dismissed and new talent recruited.

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For the new band Bunny and Michaud hired Cliff Natalie and Steve Lipkins, trumpets; Ford Leary and Frank D'Annolfo, trombones; Syd Pearlmutter, Henry Freeman, George Auld, and Clyde Rounds, saxaphones; Joe Dixon, clarinet; Tom Morgan, guitar; George Wettling drums; Arnold Fishkind, bass; and Joe Lippman, pianist and arranger.

This, then, was Bunny's big band, the band with which he would achieve his greatest success as a band leader. On June 1, 1937, three months after the disaster at the Meadowbrook, the ^{new} Bunny Berigan Orchestra made its debut at the Roof of the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York. The band was an immediate success.

The Pennsylvania Roof was another showcase for swing bands in those days and it was practically unheard of for a new, unknown band to succeed there. The band's success is all the more remarkable because it was preceded by, of all bands, Benny Goodman's. Actually, Goodman helped Bunny get the Pennsylvania engagement. Goodman had heard the Berigan crew, liked what he heard, and praised them to the hotel's management.

The band gained additional impetus from radio. At various times it was heard on three major networks. The Berigan Orchestra played for the Admiration Shampoo program which featured comedians Tim and Irene; made guest appearances on Bunny's old program, "The Saturday Night Swing Club"; and also appeared on RCA Victor and RCA Magic Key programs. When the band went on tour it was heard over a Mutual hookup. A hookup, or "wire", incidentally, is of price less ~~##~~ publicity value to a band, particularly a new band.

The Bunny Berigan Orchestra became known as one of the fastest rising bands in the history of swing. After the Pennsylvania date, the band started to tour, appeared at such spots as the Paradise Restuarant and Paramount Theater in New York, and the Pavilion Royale on Long Island. Often it played to "turn-away" ~~##~~ crowd

Tommy Dorsey had predicted correctly; Bunny began to make big money. Donna said that the band netted fifty-thousand dollars in the first nine months. The Berigans rented two apartments, one of which was fashionably situated off Central Park. Always popular with waitresses and bellhops, Bunny became even more so. After a restaurant meal he often would slip a one-hundred bill under his plate. Relatives, too, were apt to receive sudden bestowals; Don Berigan found two one-hundred bills in his palm after shaking hands with Bunny.

Bunny's musicians also fared well. "We made a lot of money with that band," George Wettling, Bunny's drummer ~~#####~~ ^{recalled.} "People were still finding money hard to get then, so by comparison, we really lived. When we were on the road we all traveled in Chrylers. One guy bought a Chrysler from a certain dealer in New York, so all the car owners in the band had to have a Chrsyler."

"We did a lot of crazy things. Once we pulled into a town in Pennsylvania, went into a hardware store and bought some .22 rifles and ammunition. When we got out on the highway we'd lean out the Chryslers and blaze away at one another. Nobody tried to hit anybody, it was just the idea of having a gun fight."

"I had more fun with Bunny's band than I've had with any outfit I've played with. We had a great esprit de corps. ~~#####~~ There was no hard feelings, no professional jealousies. And we really 'swung' too. Certain tunes we called 'flag wavers'. Bunny would swing and improvise for about twenty minutes, then Joe Dixon would take over for as long, then maybe George Auld or myself, and all the time the band would be gathering momentum. The crowd used to love it."

So it came to pass that at twenty-eight years of age, Bunny Berigan was the leader of a prosperous, nationally-famous swing orchestra. But for how long? How long would he be able to compete in the high-pressure band business and booze at the same time? To make matters worse, his ability to hold his liquor was decreasing. Formerly he could drink before a performance and not show it - now he was publically disgracing himself. Once in a Pittsburgh theater he came onstage to lead his band. As the band struck up the theme, "I Can't Get Started", he staggered, went off the stage and crashed into the orchestra pit. Luckily, a canvas covering broke his fall.

"You'd feel so sorry for him, so sorry", a friend of Bunny's said. "Here was a wonderful guy, a great talent, and he was just killing himself. I was there that day in Pittsburgh when he fell off the stage. He got all wrapped up in the canvas, flailing around. The ushers had to extricate him. What a mess. The band played without him that performance."

Why did Bunny drink? Why did he feel he had to sing the blues? It has been said that he was unhappy working for someone else and uncomfortable as his own boss. The simplest and most logical explanation seems to be is that Bunny was a nice, convivial guy who liked to drink and live it up, but who overdid it and got hooked. He wasn't alone in this respect. It is startling the number of bigtime musicians who have been hooked and killed by alcohol. Dope addiction among musicians has received more publicity, but it runs a poor second to alcohol. As one musician put it: "Alcoholics Anonymous came a few years too late for a lot of guys in the music business."

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To compound his personal problems, in 1938 a rumor began circulating which linked Bunny's name with that of a girl vocalist. This precipitated a climax of sorts which even more greased the skids for the Bunny Berigan Orchestra. The inevitable showdown occurred during an engagement at a New York Theater. The situation became "messy"; Bunny's musicians were aware of the strife, which did not help their morale, and Broadway columnists alluded to Bunny's troubles. Bunny sought escape in the usual manner and a couple of times a physician had to be called in to straighten him out.

Not long after that Bunny broke with his manager, Arthur Michaud. Then on Christmas week of 1938, Bunny ran out of bookings and some of his top men, including Wettling and Auld, went to work elsewhere. After revamping the band, Bunny still had a good crew which included trumpeter, Irving Goodman, Benny's younger brother; Hank Wayland, bass; Murray Williams and Gus Bivona, saxes; Joe Lippman, piano; Ray Coniff, trombone; and Buddy Rich, drums.

Money problems then began to plague Bunny. Early in 1939 he was forced to reorganize again. This time he had a fifteen-piece band with Vic Lauprich, Don Lodice, Larry Walsh, and Gus Bivona, saxes; Bob Jenney and Ray Coniff, trombones; Johnny Napton, Jake Koven, George Johnson, trumpets; Joe Bushkin, piano; Hank Wayland, bass; Eddie Jenkins, drums; Andy Phillips, guitarist and arranger; and vocalists Kathleen Lane and Danny Richards.

Despite the optimistic announcement that "this is the best, the most loyal crew I have ever assembled," the Bunny Berigan Orchestra was a sinking ship. Bunny was finding it increasingly difficult to meet the band's ~~payroll~~ payroll, and his debts were mounting.

~~The reorganized band embarked upon a tour which ended at the Panther Room of~~

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The reorganized band embarked upon a tour which ended at the Panther Room of the Hotel Sherman in Chicago, formerly the College Inn. In Chicago the folly of Bunny's ways would be ~~#####~~ revealed publically and his career as a bigtime orchestra leader just about ended.

The Mugsy Spanier and "Fats" Waller bands were Chicago ^{IN} at that time, frequently the musicians from those bands joined Bunny's musicians at the Panther Room for a "Cavalcade of Jazz". Seemingly, everything was all right, but at the end of the six-week Chicago engagement, fantastically enough, Bunny was flat broke. He did not have even the forty-dollar fee required to file a bankruptcy petition. To give him time to raise the forty dollars, he was allowed to file a special affidavit.

Later Bunny filed the formal bankruptcy petition and listed assets of one-hundred dollars and liabilities of over eleven thousand. His creditors included Music Corporation ~~#####~~ of America, which booked the band; Arthur Michaud, his former manager; the John Wanamaker store in New York; the Greyhound Bus Line; and his ~~#####~~ musicians to whom ~~four-and-a-half~~ four-and-a-half thousand was owed.

By this time most of Bunny's musicians had found work in other bands. To list a few personnel changes, Bushkin joined Mugsy Spanier, Bivona went with Teddy Wilson, and Napton joined Gene Krupa. To add to his troubles, Bunny was fined one-thousand dollars by James C. Petrillo, head of the Chicago Local of the American Federation of Musicians, for "conduct unbecoming a member of the AFM". Petrillo collected the one-thousand dollars, too; that amount was later deducted from Bunny's salary.

Bunny was probably too preoccupied that Fall of 1939 to pay much attention to the news in Europe, but it was then that World War II began. Music reflects the mood of the people, and as the war news became more ominous, Americans found less to "swing" about. The "swinging thirties" was about to give way to the "frantic forties".

After the wreckage of the Chicago disaster was cleared away, Bunny tried to bounce back with another band. But by this time he was physically and mentally exhausted. Just before the band was to play a New Year's Eve date at the Mosque Ballroom in Newark, New Jersey, Bunny collapsed and had to be hospitalized. The band played the holiday date with "Wingy" Mannone substituting for Bunny.

In those last two years of his life, Bunny struggled to get out of debt. It was that struggle, waged when he should have tried to regain his health, which hastened his end. Upon his release from hospital, he organized still another band. But he found he could not make any progress, so rather than struggle along unsteadily, he disbanded and returned as a sideman with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra.

In the early 1940's, the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, according to one jazz historian, was a "highly polished summation of the big band era of the late thirties." The band featured Sy Oliver's arrangements and vocals by the Pied Pipers, Connie Haines, and a thin young man from Hoboken, New Jersey, Frank Sinatra. Business was good at New York's Hotel Astor where the Dorsey band played; the city was crowded with people who had come to see the World's Fair.

Bunny received forty-five dollars a week for living ~~expenses~~ expenses while he was with the Dorsey band. The rest of his salary went to reduce his debt. Bunny had to curtail his big spending. He and Donna and the two children gave up the Central Park apartment and moved to an inexpensive midtown hotel.

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Despite the deprivation, Bunny made a comeback with the Dorsey band. He avoided the bottle and he began to play as before. He made recordings with the Dorsey crew, among them, "East of the Sun". Physical exercise helped him; he worked on his golf game and he caught for the Dorsey team in Wednesday afternoon softball games in Central Park.

There is no doubt that Dorsey tried to help Bunny that Summer of 1940; perhaps because ~~###~~ Dorsey was not above taking a drink himself. The great "Tee Dee" was a complex man, a perfectionist who could be passive one minute, work himself into a monumental, instrument-smashing rage the next. He was the opposite of his brother Jimmy.

Earlier in their careers, Dorsey and Bunny often celebrated together. Once they staged a fist fight on a Fifty-second Street sidewalk. The fight erupted later ~~####~~ in a restaurant when Dorsey unceremoniously dumped a bowl of chowder in Bunny's lap.

But for all his wildness, Dorsey, like Goodman, could stand success whereas Bunny couldn't. After six months on the straight and narrow with the Dorsey band, Bunny stumbled. Dorsey was unsympathetic. He and Bunny argued and it was agreed that Bunny would work elsewhere.

Whatever else he had lost, Bunny still had a name which had some commercial worth. He was able to get backing from ~~##~~ MCA to start a new Bunny Berigan Orchestra. This time Bunny hired Frank Tiffany, Frank Perry, Ray Crafton, trumpets; Sam Kublin, Max Smith, trombones; Eddie Alcock, Andy Fitzgerald, Frank Crolene, Jack Henderson, saxes; Bill Clifton, piano; and Jack Maisel, drums. Marty Stuhlmaker, the bassist who had appeared at the Famous Door with Bunny, also joined the band as did Danny Richards, the vocalist of the previous

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The new venture started well enough. The band was helped by the publicity it received when it played its first engagement in Harlem. Either through coincidence or smart booking, a "jazz war" developed between Bunny's band and the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. The Dorsey crew played to huge crowds at the Savoy Ballroom, while two blocks away, Dorsey's ex-sideman, Bunny, played at the crowded Golden Gate Ballroom.

With this kickoff, the band started on tour. It soon became obvious that it was going to be a tour to nowhere. As the band moved from one-night stand to one-night stand, the strain and travel abraded Bunny's already frayed nerves. To keep going liquor was required - upon awakening a drinkin^g glass full was needed to face the day. His outraged system rejected solids; for over a year he subsisted on soup, for some reason "tomato" soup.

By the Summer of 1941, the band had worked its way down to Atlantic City. There in New Jersey, Bunny found himself in a situation similar to his Chicago predicament; he was broke. Unable pay his hotel bill, the police came and hauled him off to jail. His musicians, who had salary grievances, walked out.

The Bunny Berigan Orchestra had dates to fill the Midwest, but there were no musicians and its leader was in jail. Harry Moss, the MCA executive, straightened out the hotel bill and effected Bunny's release. Then Bunny and his manager, Don Palmer, embarked on a talent hunt. In Trenton they rounded up some teen-age musicians; rehearsed them for a few days, and headed West.

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So now Bunny Berigan, the nationally-known trumpet player and band leader, was reduced to leading what amounted to a high school band. The average age of the musicians in this latest Bunny Berigan Orchestra was nineteen. The drummer was seventeen. The vocalist, who swung out with "Yes, Indeed", "Green Eyes", and "Daddy", the popular songs of the day, was eighteen.

The situation in which Bunny found himself became even more bizarre: he and his teen-age musicians were required to grow beards.

Bunny and his young band were booked at the Buckeye Lakes, Ohio, "Danceteria", a resort. The resort's energetic publicity man devised a scheme in which all the male employees would grow beards, thus become "The Bearded Snake Hunters of 1941". Those employees who were too young or who lacked the necessary hormones to grow beards, were allowed to affix artificial hirsute adornment.

Bunny grew a goatee. The climax of the stunt took place on Labor Day with each of the bearded ~~and~~ snake hunters portraying a character in American history. It is not known what character Bunny depicted or even if he made an appearance that day.

As dreary and degrading as those last months were, the sun did shine through occasionally for Bunny. He was heartened when he received praise from Caesar, and when Hollywood called. "Caesar" in this case would be Louie Armstrong.

Among jazz musicians it is generally agreed that Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong is the greatest "all around" trumpet player to appear in the last fifty years. There are those who disagree, of course and in recent years Armstrong's showmanship has overshadowed his horn; but the excellence of the Armstrong trumpet in the late 1920's and early 30's, his peak years, has not been equalled.

Because of Armstrong's pre-eminence in the jazz field, Down Beat Magazine for several years tried to persuade Armstrong to reveal what six trumpet players he most admired. That Fall of 1941, during a stopover with his band at Huntington, West Virginia, Armstrong got around finally to answering the magazine. He sat down at a typewriter and carefully, patiently typed his words on a piece of yellow stationery which bore the single word, "Satchmo", in the upper left-hand corner.

"Now this question about my opinion about trumpet players that I admire," Armstrong wrote, "that is actually asking an awful lot of me... Because there's so many trumpet players that I admire until there would not be room to mention them on this paper. And to name only six, well that is leaving me on the spot.

"But as you wished, my friend, I'll do my damndest so here goes. First I'll name my boy Bunny Berigan. Now there's a boy whom I've always admired for his tone, soul, technique, his sense of phrasing and all. To me, Bunny can't do no wrong in music."

Armstrong went on to praise Harry James, Roy Eldridge, Shelton Hemphill, and two men in his own band, Frank Galbreath and Jean Prince. That was the first time Armstrong expressed in print his opinion of his fellow trumpeters. He signed the letter: "Am redbeans and ricely yours, Louis Armstrong."

Bunny was still with the "snake hunters" at Buckeye Lakes when he learned of Armstrong's letter: "You can't imagine what a kick that is, especially when it comes from Satchmo, the King," Bunny told reporter, Julian Bach. "All I can say is that Louis, alone, has been my inspiration and whatever 'style' I play you can give Armstrong credit."

Not long after the Buckeye Lakes engagement, the future of Bunny and the teen-agers in his band became even more uncertain: the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. ~~###~~ And the young men and women who danced to "Chattanooga Choo Choo", "Blues in the Night", "Elmer's Tune", and "You Made Me Love You" that winter of 1941, prepared to go to war.

In Hollywood, producer William Dieterle was preparing a jazz film entitled "Syncopation" which would star Jackie Cooper. Cooper would play the part of a trumpet player, who, according to the script, had the qualities of several great trumpet players. The producer decided to hire Bunny to dub in the sound track.

Though he didn't know it, Bunny had less than six months to live when he went to Hollywood in January, 1942. His work in Hollywood points up the surprising fact that right up to the end, though sickly, underweight, a shell of ~~###~~ his old self, his lip had not deserted him - on occasion he could still play a great horn. Bunny's trumpet solos in "Syncopation" are excellent.

To make the music in the film sound more real, the sound track was made in a unique way. The producers recorded the studio band first. Then Bunny, alone on a sound stage, listened to the band's recordings through ear phones, and "dubbed in" his trumpet solos. Later sound engineers "mixed" Bunny's solos with the music of the studio band.

Actually, Bunny supplied the trumpet sounds for three actors in the film: Cooper, Tod Duncan, and Rex Stewart. Stewart, a well-known trumpeter in his own right, would have played for himself, but he left Hollywood before the recording sessions were held.

When Bunny completed the Hollywood assignment, he returned to the job of band leader, a job he should have avoided but would not, or could not; he was still in debt. He played one-night stands right up until three nights before his death. In those last months, the one-night stands the Bunny Berigan Orchestra played were often dismal affairs. A writer for Metronome Magazine heard the Berigan Orchestra play a one-nighter in Connecticut about this time.

"It proved to be one of the most depressing experiences of my life," the Metronome man wrote. "The band was just nothing and compared to Bunny's standards, Bunny's blowing was pitiful. He sounded like a man trying to imitate himself, a man with none of the inspiration and none of the technique of the real Berigan.

"He looked awful, too. He must have lost thirty pounds. His clothes were loose fitting, his collar looked as if it were a couple of sizes too large.

"Apparently, though, he was in good spirits. He joked with friends and talked about the great future he thought his band had. But you had a feeling it would never be. And when intermission came, Bunny left the bandstand not to return for a long time, and some trumpeter you'd never heard of came down front and sparked the band more than its leader had, you realized this was enough, you left feeling awful."

The tour continued on into Pennsylvania and in Pittsburgh, Bunny contracted pneumonia. He was admitted to Allegheny State Hospital in Pittsburgh. During Bunny's illness, Sunny Skylar helped

out by leading the Berigan band. Upon Bunny's release from the hospital two weeks later, his doctor warned ~~####~~ that Bunny would be endangering his ^{life} ~~life~~ if he returned to work without first regaining his ~~####~~ strength. Bunny ignored the warning.

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Bunny's desire to rid himself of debt drove him on, of course, but at the same time it is questionable if he wanted to, or expected to, live long enough to enjoy a debt-free existence. Does a man with confidence in the future predict his own death? Bunny did - almost to the day.

The prediction was made in November, 1941, shortly before Bunny went to Hollywood. Bunny's father, "Cap" Berigan, died that month and Bunny went to Fox Lake for the funeral. That, incidentally, was the last time Bunny saw his hometown. Just before "Cap's" casket was sealed, Bunny walked over and touched his father's hand. "So long, Dad," he said, "I'll see you in six months."

Don Berigan overheard this. "What the hell kind of a remark was that?" Don said angrily. "What's a matter with you, you crazy?" Bunny made no reply; he merely shrugged and walked away. Six months and two weeks later Bunny was dead.

For a brief period after his hospital stay, Bunny got along without alcohol. But then one night on the bandstand he needed it to grease the talent. According to Donna, the band was either playing in Pittsburgh or Baltimore that night, she has forgotten which, when the dancers began to urge Bunny to play more. "More, more", they chanted. Bunny was disappointed in his performance that night and it began to infuriate him that he could not make the sounds come out right. The crowd continued to chant as Bunny's anger with himself increased until, finally, he uncorked a bottle. The liquor loosened him, he returned to the bandstand and played with his old self - confidence.

Another glimpse of Bunny at this time is supplied by Jack Pyle, a friend and fan of Bunny's. Pyle was a spectator at the Palomar Ballroom in Norfolk, Virginia, where the Berigan band played a three-night stand. In a letter, Pyle described a performance Bunny gave on one of those nights. Pyle's letter was included in an article Paul E. Miller wrote for Down Beat after Bunny died.

"I had gone out front to watch the band," Pyle said, "when Bunny walked to the microphone and beckoned for attention.

" 'Ladies and gentlemen', he began, ' I've had a lot of requests this evening to play our theme, 'I Can't Get Started', well, you'll have to pardon me, but I just got out of the hospital a few weeks ago, and I'm not feeling up to par. Now I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll 'try' and play it for you. But remember, if I miss it's your fault.'

"The band broke into that old familiar, introductory strain. There, out front, with his trumpet poised resolutely, stood Bunny Berigan, a man who, although his doctor had told him only a week ago not to play his trumpet for some months, had the courage to attempt the toughest number in the book.

"Bunny didn't miss. He played as I have never heard him play before. You could see he was 'working'. He went through the entire arrangement with flawless precision. When he pointed his horn toward the sky and hit a perfect F sharp above high C, the crowd rose to its feet in a tremendous round of applause which lasted five minutes.

"And Bunny Berigan smiled."

"Was Bunny philosophical enough to know that the end was near?" Miller asked in his article, adding: "I think he was. He had lived his life as he wanted, expressing his whole life through music. No man can do more."

After the swing through Pennsylvania and Virginia, the Berigan band headed North. Bunny stopped off briefly in New York before continuing to Boston where the band had bookings. He was now a grim caricature of ~~himself~~ his former self; he was fatally ill and it showed. During the New York stopover, a musician friend met Bunny.

"My wife and I were sitting in a restaurant on Seventh Avenue, across from the Taft Hotel," the musician said. "Suddenly, my wife said, 'Oh, look, there goes Bunny Berigan'. I had just returned from a date in Buffalo where I had seen 'Syncopation'. I wanted to tell Bunny what a great job he did in the movie so I ran out to the street. 'Hey, Bunny', I called. Bunny was up the sidewalk walking with a couple of guys. He stopped and turned. When I saw his face it was like a scene from the Phantom of the ~~Opera~~ Opera when the mask is suddenly ripped away. His eyes were sunken and discolored, his skin tight and blotched. What a shock. We talked for awhile. I remember he said he was going to Boston."

Donna accompanied Bunny to Boston in the hope that she could keep Bunny away from the bottle. She couldn't. When Bunny started to drink, he and Donna argued and Donna said, "If that's the way things are going to be, I'm going back to New York."

"Little Gate", Bunny's faith colored band boy also departed. "Little Gate", Robert Walsh, had grown tired of being damned for bringing liquor to Bunny and damned if he didn't.

Bunny continued on alone. After it played the Boston area, the band swung South again. The Bunny Berigan Orchestra played its last full engagement on Friday night, May 29, 1942, at the University of Scranton, Scranton, Pennsylvania. On Saturday night the band was booked at Ray Hartenstine's Sunnybrook Ballroom in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. However, the management of the Sunnybrook was forced to refund the admissions because the bus carrying the musicians broke down. Bunny and several musicians, who traveled by car, arrived on time and they staged an impromptu jam sessions for the customers. When Bunny finished playing for that impromptu session, that was it; that night the Bunny Berigan trumpet was laid in its case for the last time.

The band left Pottstown for New York City where it was to appear on Sunday night at Manhattan Center. The band went onstage at the Center, but Bunny was not there to lead it. He had collapsed in his apartment at the Van Courtlandt Hotel on West Forty-ninth Street. Benny Goodman, who was then appearing in New York at the Paramount Theater, substituted for Bunny, and performed with the Benny Goodman Sextet.

Bunny's condition ^{worsened} ~~#####~~ and on Monday afternoon it was decided to remove him to Polyclinic Hospital on Fiftieth Street. Despite the ministrations of the hospital's staff, however, Bunny's strength continued to drain from him and early Tuesday morning, June 2, 1942, Bunny Berigan died. Cause: internal hemorrhage complications resulting from cirrhosis of the liver.

Before he died, Bunny had almost succeeded in eliminating his indebtedness.

Donna heard of her husband's death on an early-morning radio news broadcast. She hadn't been able to sleep that night so she sat up in the apartment and listened to the radio.

"After I heard the news I just sat there stunned," Donna said. "In fact, I was in a daze for two years after Bunny's death. Early in the morning Harry Moss of MCA called on the telephone. He asked if I had heard the news and then he said something about I would have to go to work. Work? Me? Where? What could I do to earn a living? The only trade I knew was dancing and I hadn't done any of that for ten years. There was no money. Bunny left none. The only money I had in the world when Bunny died was two dollars in my purse. There was no insurance, Bunny's auditor allowed the policy to lapse. There was nothing. Souvenir hunters even stole Bunny's pen, cuff links, and tie clasps. I don't know what happened to his trumpet. It had a specially-built mouthpiece. About six o'clock I heard a knock on the door. It was George Zack, (the piano player, and friend of Bunny's.) He was the only one that showed up."

The problem of who would pay for the funeral and burial expenses was solved when Tommy Dorsey came forward. Dorsey also paid for the train fare to allow Donna to accompany Bunny's body to Fox Lake.

* * *

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At the Fox Lake railroad station, Bunny's body was removed from the baggage car and carried to the home of an aunt, Mrs. Days Timms. A wake for Bunny was held that night. A few teen-age admirers hitch-hiked from Milwaukee to Fox Lake to pay their last respects. While Bunny was lying in state, one of the teenagers asked Don for a souvenir to remember Bunny. At that moment a breeze from an open window disturbed Bunny's hair. Don, who had given Bunny his last haircut, picked up a pair of scissors, snipped a lock of Bunny's hair, gave it to the teen-ager.

Bunny was buried the next morning, Saturday morning, about nine o'clock in Fox Lake in an unmarked grave. No one had provided for a gravestone; there wasn't even a grave marker. This condition remained for eight years until one-hundred of Bunny's friends, including Wisconsin members of the American Federation of Musicians subscribed to a monument.

Bunny's manager, Don Palmer, tried to keep the Berigan Orchestra going after Bunny's death. Saxaphonist Vido Musso was installed as leader, but it didn't work out, ~~and~~ and it wasn't long before the orchestra disbanded for the last time.

At that time there was considerable publicity about the various trust funds and benefit programs which some showbusiness personalities said they planned to set up for Donna and the ~~children~~ children. While she did receive some help from those sources, it amounted to very little, Donna said. Bunny's daughters, Patricia and Joyce, went to live with Donna's brother in ^{NY} Syracuse. Donna struck out on her own. Two years after Bunny died, she married George Zasl

Today both Patricia and Joyce are married and both live in the Riverdale section of New York City. One is married to a policeman, the other to a man who is in the electronics field. If Bunny

Donna has not fared too well. In April of this year she was living in an apartment on Chicago's South Side and working as a waitress in a midtown restaurant. She and Zack are frequently ~~####~~ separated since he spends a good deal of his time on the road, particularly at Arizona and Nevada resorts.

A reporter interviewed Donna in Chicago recently. The reporter found her slim, blonde, still attractive. She talked freely of her life with Bunny and, apparently, she harbored no bitterness. During the interview, Zack telephoned. He had just arrived in Chicago and he asked Donna to meet him at a ~~#####~~ ^{downtown} restaurant. Donna agreed and she invited the reporter to continue the interview at the restaurant.

Zack was waiting at the bar when Donna and the reporter arrived. Zack is a tall, square-jawed, red-haired man in his early forties whose voice, when you think about it, resembles that of actor John Carradine. An accomplished jazz pianist, he has made recordings and he has played with Mugsy Spanier's band and Bob Crosby's Bobcats. Zack has strong opinions about jazz and the world in general. He obviously loved Bunny. During the reporter's interview with Donna, Zack became impatient. ~~#####~~

"To write with authority on Bunny you've got to know the motivation, the motivation to play pure jazz," Zack said. "You've got to listen to Bunny's music and you've got to get around and talk to jazz musicians. Talk to the real jazz men, 'the chosen few', most of the musicians who try to play jazz today can't blow their noses."

"Bunny's brother, Don, said he thought Bunny planned to return to 'sweet' music before he died," the reporter remarked.

Zack disagreed: "Bunny wanted to play with a New Orleans 'beat', play traditional jazz. His real love was the small, Dixieland

"Bunny was unhappy because he couldn't play the kind of music he wanted to play," Donna said.

"You've got to have the soul of an IBM machine to play that commercial music all the time," Zack said. "I tried it, but I had to give it up because I didn't want to die a drunk. It's the paper, the wall paper, as soon as they put that sheet music in front of you, you lose. 'Paper music' is different music. That's why I never went with Goodman because I was sick of memorizing 200 arrangements, free for eight bars, then back again."

"What kind of 'beat' did Bunny play when he was at his peak?", Zack was asked.

"New York 'beat'," Zack replied, then he went on to explain: "There's a New York 'beat', a Chicago 'beat', a St. Louis 'beat', a Kansas City 'beat', a New Orleans 'beat', and now with guys like Turk Murphy out there, there's a 'Frisco 'beat'."

The discussion touched on San Francisco and the West Coast and someone recalled that Bunny had played there only a few times, once with Goodman and only occasionally after that.

"Bunny hated the West Coast," Zack said. "When Bunny was out there, there was nothing there. Why for Chris sake it took them twenty-five years to recognize Armstrong!"

"It's a funny thing about the Benny Goodman band," Donna remarked. "In all the things that have been said and written about the band, there is never any mention of Benny's sister, I forget her name. Wasn't she the business brains behind the band?"

Neither the reporter nor Zack knew much about Goodman's sister.

"Bunny was one of the 'greats' along with Armstrong and King Oliver," Zack ~~####~~ averred. "They all had that distinct tone, as distinctive as a face or a fingerprint. Bunny had the lip, the breathing, and the imagination. He could have blown a zazoo and made it sound like something."

"What does Bunny's music all add up to? What was he trying to say with his horn?" Zack was asked.

"Beauty, drive, and freedom," Zack replied. "That's what Bunny said to me once. Bunny's horn had all those qualities, especially 'drive'. Bunny had a drive few of us have."

The reporter's imagination took a wild flight; for a moment he saw Bunny, and all jazz musicians, as supreme idealists, artists, who, through their music, try to depict a world of beauty, drive, and freedom. (A few weeks later in New York the reporter talked to a musician who had played in Bunny's band. The musician said that he had never heard Bunny use the phrase, "beauty, drive, and freedom," and the musician ~~####~~ expressed doubt that the phrase had any significance.)

After a few drinks, Donna, Zack, and the reporter went to the Zack apartment for midnight coffee. The talk continued to be of music and musicians. Donna said that if ever Hollywood made a film of Bunny's life she would like Billy Butterfield to record the sound track. Then Zack remarked that in Chicago there was a young colored trumpeter who played like Bunny, but he was just up from the South, wild, and ~~####~~ nobody had been able to catch him to put shoes on him. Donna offered the reporter the use of the spare room. The reporter stayed for the night, left early the next morning.

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It requires travel to do research on the life of a musician who has been dead almost twenty years. The people who were brought together by Bunny's music are now scattered over the country or are dead. It is also a fact that many of the people who danced to and listened to Bunny's music have forgotten him. The younger generation, the rock 'n roll crowd, of course, never heard of Bunny Berigan.

Things have changed in Bunny's hometown, too. For one thing, the trains don't run to Fox Lake anymore. To get there one must have an automobile or be prepared to take a taxi from Beaver Dam. Most of the Fox Lake crowd that knew has ~~###~~ either died or moved. Bunny's

cousin, Charles Casey, still lives in Fox Lake. Casey will talk about Bunny. He and Bunny were about the same age; they spent their early days together hunting, fishing, sporting about the countryside.

The town of Fox Lake amounts to about a main street. On the main street, Casey runs a saloon and a laundramat. He also does a little art work and sign painting. On the back wall of Casey's saloon, to the right of the bar, there is a photograph of a young, wavy-haired Bunny Berigan dressed in a light suit, dark shirt, and white tie. His right hand and knee support the horn. "Sincere regards to my ~~###~~ 'Cuz' Casey...yours, Bunny Berigan" is written on the photograph. Casey has more photographs of Bunny and news clippings at home in a scrapbook. Casey also has a collection of Bunny's records.

When a reporter arrived in Fox Lake recently to inquire about Bunny, Casey was busy in the community hall helping his teenage daughter and her friends prepare for the high school junior prom. The "Enchanted Sea Junior Prom" was to be held that night from nine to one with music by Ron Harvey and his orchestra. There was a photo of young Harvey on a poster. The reporter meant to ask, but didn't, what instrument Harvey played. A trumpet perhaps?

Casey took time off from the dance preparations to drive the reporter two miles out of town to St. Mary's cemetery where Bunny is buried. Near Bunny's monument are the graves of his father and mother. "Mame" Berigan died in 1944. Casey designed Bunny's monument. It is red granite, was mined in Wisconsin not far from Fox Lake. On the stone there is an outline of a trumpet with the inscription: "Bernard Bunny Berigan, 1908-1942, The Internationally Famous Musician". Bunny's monument is on a hill overlooking the rolling Wisconsin farm land. The land which he loved, the land from which he was separated... by his talent.

The name Berigan isn't dead
 just scrouble around. Let's me to
 it in a year with Young Kaye
 Berigan.