

Beiderbecke Family Responds to Reader Article

Written by Letter to Editor

Wednesday, 16 August 2000 18:00

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Brendan Wolfe's article "The Davenport Blues" in the July 19 edition of the River Cities' Reader was interesting reading but contains numerous errors and, as Clinton's spin doctors would say, frequently gives a "false impression. " I'd like to correct some of them.

His first mistake was to use Ralph Berten's book as a reference. Most real students of Bix consider his work right along with Pupi's movie: Bix biographies liberally sprinkled with fiction, which is often demeaning to him and his family. For his next article, I'd suggest he use The Leon Bix Beiderbecke Story, by Phil and Linda Evans, as his source material.

The school Bix attended, Lake Forest Academy, was a prep school, not a military academy – ever. " ... drank himself to death at the age of 28." Bix's drinking undoubtedly affected his health, but as his death certificate documents, the cause of death was pneumonia.

At some point, his name is written as Leon "Bix" Beiderbecke as though Bix was a nickname. It was not.

Bix's family exiled him "because jazz was too black," and "the family ignored and deplored Bix's musical career when he was alive." Those two statements are absolutely false.

Finally, " ... after his death [his family] learned of his fame in the outside world [and] they all developed a tendency to make a prudent buck out of exploiting his memory, shedding crocodile tears over his genius" This is preposterous! His family always loved him. I challenge anyone to cite an example of his family exploiting Bix, his work, or his memory to "make a buck." I might add that none of Bix's recordings, or the thousands of reissues in 78s, LPs, or CDs, has ever paid a cent of royalties to his family or heirs.

As Bix's nephew growing up with his brother, parents, and contemporaries, I learned that Bix was a popular, well-liked man, who was also a musical genius. His contributions on piano and cornet have left an indelible mark on the world of music. To have writers blend his amazing accomplishments with this type of journalistic garbage has always dismayed me and continues to do so.

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