

Tell Me Your Troubles

Songs by JOE
BUSHKIN



VOL. 1



I FIRST MET JOE BUSHKIN

at a glamorous Beverly Hills party when I was fifteen years old. My folks let me tag along on our visit from New York. It was quite a scene. I remember my eyes popping at the assortment of Hollywood starlets, my jaw dropping while meeting Steve McQueen, and convulsing at Jonathan Winters zaniness on the patio. I even met my namesake, the songwriter Bob Merrill, who told me how he came to write “(How Much) Is That Doggie in the Window?” for Patti Page. But what really made this party a truly *happening* bash was the man swinging away on the living room Steinway, Joe Bushkin. He hadn’t been hired to play, he was one of the invited guests and the center of attention, playing, singing, cracking wise, and all the guests loved him. At one point, we were introduced and I told him I played the trumpet and loved Louis Armstrong. His eyes lit up and he sat me down next to him on the piano bench, where I got an unforgettable lesson. “I don’t the play piano, kid,” he told me, “the piano plays ME.”

Over the years, we’d go hear him when he was in town at the Café Carlyle, or the St. Regis Roof, and I doubt he remembered

me from that night. Then one day in 1989, my mom ran into Joe at the funeral of a mutual friend, and he invited her to a party he was giving. Joey asked after me and was insistent that I come along.

When we arrived at his maisonette overlooking the East River, the party was in full swing with Joe at his Bechstein and the great Johnny Smith on guitar. As we mingled, I met a bright, attractive young blonde named Christina. She said she was studying at Columbia. It turned out she was Joey's youngest daughter. And it further turned out that my attendance had been requested in order to introduce us. Knowing full well that blind dates have a tendency to go horribly wrong, I was encouraged by the fact that Christina was friendly, smart, funny, gorgeous, and the daughter of a legendary Jazz musician, who would be in town for a few weeks before returning to Santa Barbara, where he resided with his wife Francine.

During that time, we'd often go out to hear music—Les Paul at Fat Tuesday one night, Sarah Vaughan at the Blue Note. Joe would invariably sit in and we'd hang backstage after the shows, always ending up for a late bite at his home-away-from-home—P.J. Clarke's, where the front booth was always available for him.

Christina and I got to spend a lot of time together—but we'd only really hung out with Joe. When it finally came time for him to return home, we both exclaimed “Alone at last!” A year later, we were married in Santa Barbara, and today we have four boys who all have fond memories of their grandfather and a love for his music.

Joe used to say, “There's not much call for my kind of music anymore,” and after years on the road, he was content to enjoy retirement at his ranch overlooking the Pacific. But he did miss the action, so I encouraged playing situations in which he would feel comfortable, like Jazz festivals. The audiences loved him, and I enjoyed watching his youthful exuberance return the minute he got behind the keyboard. From L.A.'s *Jazz Bakery*, to New York's *Tavern on the Green* and many stops in between, Joey would never fail to bring an audience to its feet with his singing, playing, stories, one-liners, and pure, unadulterated charisma.

I quickly became familiar with many of the great songs Joe wrote over the years. I couldn't help it—he was a relentless song pluggger. He had boxes and folders of lead sheets and charts,

and I was like a kid in a candy store combing through the yellowed paper that often contained undiscovered gems. Fortunately, many of his songs were recorded and widely known, but there were some that were not. That is what this album project is all about.

By day, I ran Hip Pocket Recording Studios in Manhattan, and we had a great Yamaha grand piano in our Studio A. Joe would stop by and we'd try to record some tunes, but he'd invariably spend most of the sessions regaling everyone with his endless supply of stories. I knew I had to book a formal session, so one day in 2003, we went into the studio with his favorite guitarist Howard Alden and the drummer Duffy Jackson to capture what would be his last recording of



“Oh! Look at Me Now” which he wrote for Sinatra when they were in Tommy Dorsey’s band. Joe’s tempo for the song had increased over the years, but I suggested we slow it down to the tempo of Sinatra’s later version from the 1957 album *Swingin’ Affair* on Capitol, arranged by Nelson Riddle. Thankfully those tapes survived, and are included as the first song on this album.

Joe would jokingly introduce **“Oh! Look at Me Now”** as “a medley of my hit,” but he actually wrote other songs that made the charts, including **“Hot Time in the Town of Berlin”** by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters. In the second volume of his trilogy, *Bing Crosby: Swinging on a Star, The War Years, 1940-1946*, Gary Giddins describes how the recording came about:

Joey Bushkin, the wired, fast-talking, Bronx-born jazz pianist, who built a profuse and swinging style on the framework of Teddy Wilson (and played respectable trumpet after his idol Louis Armstrong), spent two years with Tommy Dorsey’s band, during which he

wrote a signature hit for Sinatra, “Oh! Look at Me Now,” before heeding the draft. The song he provided Bing and the Andrews befitted the moment perfectly. The Crosby-Andrews rendition of “Hot Time in the Town of Berlin” was the No. 1 record for six weeks in the fall, and the first to say what everyone was thinking—the war was practically over. The Americans had liberated France and were heading west, taking “a hike / to Hitler’s Reich” to “change that ‘heil’ / to ‘gimme some skin.’” The performance and the harmonizing are loose, impulsive, and happy. Bushkin, who married an heiress and lived the life of a country squire, enjoyed commercial success in 1955 with a mood music album (*Midnight Rhapsody*). He accompanied Bing on concert tours in his last years. Joey lived to 87 despite or because of a fixation on pills (he traveled with a pharmaceutical suitcase) that inclined him to occasionally rush the tempo. Bing liked him so much that he secretly kept another pianist on call in case the rushing got out of hand; it never did.

Ironically, the Yanks never did end up marching into Berlin, the Russians beat them to it. Nevertheless, the song was one of the biggest hits during World War II. Joe often told the story of bringing the song to Bing, who agreed to record it, but skeptically told him “Joe, that song isn’t going anywhere.” It sold over a million copies.

Bing’s son Harry Crosby—a friend and neighbor—used to perform on the road with his dad when Joe was his musical director in the late 70’s. One evening, his mom Kathryn was in town, and over dinner at their house it struck me that no one would be more appropriate to sing our remake than she. I am so grateful to Kathryn for joining us on this project. Her wonderful energy channels the spirit of her late husband with great authenticity.



In 1959, Joe jumped at the chance to team up with Johnny Burke, the prolific lyricist of such hits as “Misty,” “Pennies from Heaven,” “Here’s That Rainy Day,” and “Swinging on a Star.” At the time, his collaborator Jimmy Van Heusen had begun writing with Sammy Cahn, so Burke relocated from Hollywood to Manhattan.

“When Johnny got to New York, he got in touch with me and we got into a routine,” Joe once reminisced. “We’d meet for lunch every day, and afterwards we would write some songs, with me playing and him just staring out the window. I’d play something for him, or he would come up with a title, and then I’d go from there, writing the opening line of the title, or at least getting the title on a closing line. Johnny was a good piano player and sight-reader, he could play the tunes as a songwriter would play them. I would go up to his penthouse on 57th Street

and Johnny didn’t want me to play my melody onto a tape. He wanted me to play the tune for him over and over, because he said I changed it slightly every time, just enough to make a difference to him.”



Some of their other songs together, “When You Walked By” and “The Indian Sign,” were recorded by Nat “King” Cole for Capitol, but “**Wise to Myself**” was never recorded, and Joe had given up on its becoming known, hence his spoken introduction we included from a live performance in San Francisco. Many thanks to the suave cabaret stylist Eric Comstock for helping bring to life another Bushkin treasure that we hope will reach new ears.

Louis Jordan survived the demise of the big band era in the mid-40s thanks to his economical “Tympani Five” small group format that combined his engaging novelty vocals and alto sax playing with a “Jump Blues” style, earning Jordan the nickname “King of the Jukebox” and a popularity among both black and white audiences. “**Boogie Woogie Blue Plate**” was a 1947



NICKI
PARROTT

creation by Bushkin and DeVries that perfectly suited this style, and rose to the top of the charts after its release. Joe often remarked that the opening melodic phrase was identical to the melody of Tommy Dorsey's "Well, Git It!" written by Sy Oliver. When Oliver apologized to Joe for swiping the lick, Joe demurred by telling him, "Sy, don't worry, you can't copyright the blues!" That certainly wouldn't happen in today's litigious world. Our version features trombonist Wycliffe Gordon singing the verse introduction, and bassist Nicki Parrott provides a sassy vocal portraying the waitress calling out the orders to the chef in 1940s-style shorthand.

The tender ballad "**Tell Me Your Troubles**" was probably one of Bushkin's greatest songs that never got the attention it deserved. On a Mitch Miller radio broadcast in 1950, Joe performed the song with his trio and mentioned that it was scheduled to be recorded by Sinatra. For reasons that are lost to history, that never came to pass, but it was later recorded by Joe Williams with the Count Basie Orchestra. For our recording, the brilliant pianist Laurence Hobgood arranged the song in $\frac{3}{4}$ time with some lush tenor sax work by Harry Allen.

Joe and his wife Fran were good friends with the playwright Garson Kanin and his wife at the time, the actress Ruth Gordon. Always on the lookout for potential lyricists, Joe convinced Garson to collaborate in 1950, and the result was four songs. "**Girl Wanted**" was originally titled "Boy Wanted" and written for a female, yet George and Ira Gershwin had written a song by the same name in 1921 for a forgotten musical, and its relative obscurity must have led the Bushkin/Kanin songwriting team to think they had gotten there first. For our version, Eric Comstock reversed the gender orientation for a facetious rendition that may not be entirely politically correct, but a fun excursion that harkens back to the days when it was okay for songs of this type to unabashedly solicit romance.

Joey and Louis Armstrong were the best of friends since the 1930s when they first crossed paths at house parties in Harlem. On a visit to Chicago in 1947 with his fiancée Fran, Joe went to the Half Note to hear Louis and his All-Stars. When Satchmo learned of their impending marriage, he told his pal “Josep Huss” that he wanted to give them a wedding present. Instead of shopping for silverware, he suggested Joe bring in a song for his recording session the next day for the new film *A Song Is Born* starring Danny Kaye. Louis would record the song on the “B” side of the title track, and Joe would get a nice royalty since the record was expected to do well with all the Hollywood promotion behind it. Joe returned to the hotel after the show, and stayed up all night writing out “**Lovely Weather**” on the hotel stationery, the latest song he and Johnny DeVries had conceived. Although the recording by Louis was in a slow swing tempo, the song



seemed well-suited for a bossa nova treatment, and Howard Alden and Laurence Hobgood provided a lovely setting for the nostalgic, romantic lyric, with silky tenor sax flourishes from Harry Allen.

Satchmo would always drop by the Bushkin residence when in town to visit his pal “Josep Huss” for some good eats supplied by their cook Daisy B.

Brown and a jam session would inevitably erupt. One such occasion—Louis’s 50th birthday party—was captured on a wire recorder that Joe had acquired, ever the early techno adopter. Louis requested that Joe and Johnny DeVries write a song for him about New Orleans to add to his repertoire. The result was “**Goin’ Back to Storyville**” commemorating the infamous red light district of New Orleans where Louis was born at the turn of the century. Fittingly,

I caught up with Wycliffe Gordon and Adrian Cunningham in the Big Easy where they'd been on tour, and we channeled the spirit of Satchmo at a studio on Euterpe Street, just a few miles away from that notorious district which inspired the song.

Gary Giddins recounts a great story in the first volume of his trilogy, *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams, The Early Years, 1903-1940*, involving Joe and Bing discussing Louis Armstrong:



Bing Crosby was the first and, for a while, the only white singer who fully assimilated the shock of Armstrong's impact, and his loyalty never wavered. Joe Bushkin, the pianist and leader of Bing's quartet, recalled that he once said, "I gotta tell you, Joe, do you realize that the greatest pop singer in the world that ever was and ever will be forever and ever is Louis Armstrong?" Bushkin said, "Of course, I love Louis's singing." Bing said, "It's so simple. When he sings a sad song you feel like crying, when he sings a happy song you feel like laughing. What else is there with pop singing?"

In the late 50s, Joe reunited with Johnny DeVries to write a new song for Frank Sinatra at the urging of Capitol A&R man Frank Military. With a gorgeous, classically-styled string arrangement by Nelson Riddle, **"Something Wonderful Happens in Summer"** was recorded on May 20, 1957 and released by Capitol as a single, which became a modest hit that summer. The chord progression is identical to their first hit song for Sinatra, "Oh! Look at Me Now" – although in a different key, with a different bridge and in a ballad tempo. Clearly, the thinking was "It worked then, maybe it'll work again!" Our string arrangement by John Van Eps, adapted from Riddle's original, envelops the rhythm section of Rossano Sportiello on piano and Howard Alden on guitar.

The final song on this album, “**Man Here Plays Fine Piano,**” was commissioned by *Esquire* magazine, which in those years bestowed annual Jazz awards. Bushkin and DeVries came up with a song that described the journey of a young piano prodigy—a Swing Era version of Joey Alexander. Recorded by Benny Goodman and released by Columbia in January of 1947, the track of course featuring Bushkin playing the part of said prodigy.

Because *Esquire* magazine no longer gives out Jazz awards, we elected to bestow the reference on *Downbeat* magazine, which does. Pianists John Colianni (center), Rossano Sportiello (right), and Laurence Hobgood (left), all take solo choruses on the track, and then trade fours before Colianni closes things out.

The bookends to this album are remembrances of Joe by Frank Sinatra and Red Buttons, who both knew him well. Coincidentally, they each offer hilarious pharmaceutically-themed anecdotes that refer to his stammer, which was cured by Joe’s psychiatrist Dr. Mort Hartman thanks to LSD therapy in the early 1960s. Red and Joey were lifelong pals who met in the Army Air Corps during WWII, and his poignant tribute is taken from a memorial concert in Los Angeles a few months after Joe’s passing on November 5, 2004.



Joe Bushkin indeed played fine piano, but he was also a great songwriter, and this album is the first part of our mission to make that case and breathe new life into these classics.

BOB MERRILL
NYC, March 2017

1.	FRANK REMEMBERS JOE	0:52
2.	OH! LOOK AT ME NOW (FEAT. JOE BUSHKIN)	3:48
3.	HOT TIME IN THE TOWN OF BERLIN	2:49
4.	WISE TO MYSELF	3:35
5.	BOOGIE WOOGIE BLUE PLATE	5:00
6.	TELL ME YOUR TROUBLES	5:35
7.	GIRL WANTED	3:58
8.	LOVELY WEATHER	4:56
9.	GOIN' BACK TO STORYVILLE	6:10
10.	SOMETHING WONDERFUL HAPPENS IN SUMMER	3:41
11.	MAN HERE PLAYS FINE PIANO	5:03
12.	RED BUTTONS REMEMBERS JOE	3:48

MUSIC BY JOE BUSHKIN; LYRICS BY JOHNNY DEVRIES, EXCEPT (4)
BY JOHNNY BURKE AND (7) BY GARSON KANIN

This project is dedicated to my wife Christina and
our sons: Christopher, Alexander, Chas and Jamie

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Judson, Maria Bushkin Stayve and Tippy Bushkin

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Kathryn Crosby
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Richie Cannata
Perry Margouleff





LOUIS ARMSTRONG

LUCILLE ARMSTRONG

EDDIE CONDON

FRANCINE BUSHKIN

JACK TEAGARDEN

JOE BUSHKIN

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SPECIAL GUESTS
KATHRYN CROSBY
ERIC COMSTOCK
WYCLIFFE GORDON
NICKI PARROTT
BUCKY PIZZARELLI
AND JOE BUSHKIN

VOLUME 1



BUCKY
PIZZARELLI

BOB MERRILL

JOE BUSHKIN



SHANNON
DAY

KATHRYN
CROSBY

LISA
GARY

BOB
MERRILL

BOB MERRILL VOCALS, TRUMPET, CORNET, & FLUGELHORN

HOWARD ALDEN GUITAR

NICKI PARROTT BASS & VOCAL (5)

STEVE JOHNS DRUMS

HARRY ALLEN TENOR SAX

LAURENCE HOBGOOD PIANO (6, 8, 11)

JOHN COLIANNI PIANO (3, 5, 9, 11)

ROSSANO SPORTIELLO PIANO (10, 11)

ADRIAN CUNNINGHAM ALTO SAX & CLARINET

LISA GARY, SHANNON DAY BACKGROUND VOCALS (3)

ARRANGEMENTS BY **BOB MERRILL, LAURENCE HOBGOOD** (6, 8), & **ERIC COMSTOCK** (4, 7)

SPECIAL GUESTS

JOE BUSHKIN PIANO (2)

KATHRYN CROSBY VOCAL (3)

BUCKY PIZZARELLI GUITAR (5, 9)

ERIC COMSTOCK VOCAL & PIANO (4, 7)

WYCLIFFE GORDON TROMBONE
& VOCAL (5, 9)

DUFFY JACKSON DRUMS (2)

RECORDED 11/30 & 12/1/2016, TRADING 8S,
PARAMUS, NJ
ENGINEER: CHRIS SULIT
STRING ARRANGEMENT BY JOHN VAN EPS
SARAH BRIGGS, MATTHEW CHOW VIOLIN
SARAH BLEICHFELD VIOLA
NATE STEELE CELLO
STRINGS RECORDED AT NORTHFIRE
STUDIOS, AMHERST, MA
COVER PHOTOGRAPH: ALEC HARRISON

ADDITIONAL RECORDING 1/3/17,
THE MUSIC SHED, NEW ORLEANS
ENGINEER: ADAM KEIL
COVE CITY STUDIOS, 1/20/17
ENGINEER: JOHN ARBUCKLE

TRACK 2 RECORDED AT HIP POCKET
STUDIOS, NYC, 6/03
ENGINEER: BUTCH JONES
EDITING: WES HOVANEC

PRODUCED BY BOB MERRILL
MIXED BY JAY NEWLAND
GRAPHIC DESIGN: IAN CAREY
SPECIAL THANKS GARY GIDDINS



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ALSO FEATURING

LAURENCE HOBGOOD ♦ HOWARD ALDEN
ROSSANO SPORTIELLO ♦ STEVE JOHNS
JOHN COLIANNI ♦ HARRY ALLEN
AND ADRIAN CUNNINGHAM

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