

JEAN SHECKLER BEEBE

My Turn, My Turn, 2010
acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48 in.



photo: rr. jones

BILL ZAVATSKY

Everything Happens to Me

Usually I'm walking around with a tune in my head, a melody that runs in and out of whatever I'm doing—sitting at my desk, thinking, or walking the streets. Today it happens to be “Everything Happens to Me,” an old standard that I've been working on at my keyboard, and which I first played on gigs as a kid. Once, at a jam session, Bobby Arvonio (still entertaining and recording today as Bobby Arvon—look up his web site), one of our local Bridgeport vocalists, sang it with a new set of words that were so outrageous that I'm happy I can't remember them now or I'd be putting them down on this page to my and your utter embarrassment. But that's what musicians used to do—take one of the old tunes and fit it out with a new set of off-color lyrics designed to elicit laughs and, at the same time, show how hip you were. How hip was I? As for as these “alternate lyrics,” I had a dream project in my head for years that I know I'll never get done—which is to collect as many of these “revised” lyrics to songs that I can get my hands on and publish them in a big anthology.

Bill Zavatsky's most recent book of poems is *Where X Marks the Spot* (Hanging Loose Press). His co-translations include *Earthlight: Poems* by André Breton and *The Poems of A. O. Barnabooth* by Valery Larbaud. He was awarded a fellowship in poetry by the Guggenheim Foundation in 2008.

Sometimes they're only a parody of a song title: “*Lover Come Back to Me*” was turned into “*Lover Back Up to Me*.” The tune called “*Brazil*” became, of course, “*Brassiere*”: “*Brassiere*, you hold the things I hold so dear, and when you stick it in my ear, I feel so queer...” The “it” being, well, you get the idea.

“Oh, how we danced on the night we were wed,” a tune that everybody played at wedding parties, became, “Oh, how we danced on the night we were wed. We danced and we danced 'cause the room had no bed.” Another parody made fun of “*I'm Dancing with Tears in My Eyes*”: “*I'm dancing with tears in my eyes, 'cause the girl in my arms isn't you, 'cause the girl in my arms is a boy.*” There are too many of these chestnuts to gather, maybe, and maybe only musicians who actually *know* these tunes appreciate what they and other rascals have done to them. Then, too, they're all off-color and, I guess, “politically incorrect” these days, for which I apologize to the young or tender-hearted among you.

Probably this is as close as I'll get to creating my anthology, which I used to think I'd name (after that old tune “*I'm in the Mood for Love*”): *I'm in the Nude for Love*:

Song Lyrics You Only Heard if You Were in the Band.

If you didn't know that musicians did things like this to stave off boredom or to send up the corny tunes that the world demanded they play, over and over again, in order to make a few bucks from weddings and anniversaries—well, now you know, don't you?