

Tony Bennett's famous hits ...

♪Once Upon A Time...♪

I met Tony Bennett in New York City at the famous 21 Club. It was a busy lunch time two days before Christmas of 1963 and the staff put him on the service elevator with me, special treatment for a celebrity, believe it or not. To be kept from the bother of other diners on the main elevator, only to wind up riding with me. I was on my way up to the top floor to work on a punched card sorter in the club's office. Tony didn't object to my presence. ♪*A Stranger In Paradise*♪, I was a young repairman wearing a business suit, hopefully on my path from ♪*Rags To Riches*♪. My tool bag was made to look like a knowledge worker's attaché case. Tony Bennett was shorter than I expected, and he wore a suit that would have cost me two or three month's salary. I just stood there trying to look like it was not the first time I had come within a half mile of a world-famous celebrity. Without a mirror on the elevator, I could not know if I was successful. But I think I ♪*Put On A Happy Face*♪.

Just the two of us ascended in the tiny elevator car. I had stepped on in the basement, having come in from the street through the waiters' locker room, stamping the season's first snow off my cheap shoes. He got on at the first floor, headed for the private dining rooms on the third floor while I continued to the fifth. We spoke not a word. He hummed something while I cleared my throat. Just as the elevator stopped at his floor, I said, "I must tell you something, ♪*I Left My Heart In San Francisco*♪.

The doors opened and he stepped out without acknowledging my attempt at conversation. He may not have heard me.

I was twenty years old and from a small city farther upstate. I knew a little piano, but never thought to ask Mr. Bennett if he needed an extra accompanist who could play just about any Chuck Berry song in the key of C. And not much else. It might have been time for the aging crooner to consider updating his repertoire. If he could do ♪*Sing You Sinners*♪, he could certainly include Chuck's classics like Maybellene and Roll Over Beethoven. Forcing his voice up to the key of C should have been no problem for a professional.

Frankly, I'd probably work for free. And carry his bags. I could even try to transpose to A.

I wasn't very realistic at age twenty. It's a wonder I ever got any work done. On that morning, the most important thing rolling around in my mind was not whether I could remember the wiring circuits that controlled the little magnets that pushed down the long thin blades just in the nick of time to send a punched card to the correct pocket on the sorter machine. I was ♪*Younger Than Spring*♪ and my mind kept wandering to the snow falling on the streets of Manhattan and how pretty it looked.

To some people snow is not pretty. I have to say I began to lean in that direction as I got older. But in my early adulthood ... a period I now more honestly label my late childhood ... snow was gorgeous. It would bring to mind a pretty girl with red cheeks sitting on a toboggan wearing a pink scarf and tight jeans. My thoughts jumped to later, sheltered from a snowstorm in a dimly lit café, hunched over mugs of cinnamon-laced hot cider, her blue eyes and flaming red hair tugging on my heart as I sat in ♪*The Shadow Of Her Smile*♪. Still later, a dark sky arched high above a street lamp shining down on the snow covered sidewalk as our feet crunched along, bodies shivering inside our clothes, anxious to get to her apartment to enjoy each other's warmth. ♪*For Once In My Life*♪, I was in love.

♪Where Do I Begin?♪ It is probably true that the last person you would expect to make a mature decision about a potential lifetime mate would be an unrealistic older child of twenty who couldn't remember whether the little magnets that sent a punched card to the correct pocket were powered by a pulse from the cam contact or the detector switch. More alarming, I didn't care about cams and switches and detectors that morning. I went back down the elevator and out into the middle of West 52nd Street to build a snowman. But of course there is absolutely nowhere you can build a snowman on West 52nd Street, except perhaps on the roof of a parked car. **♪Just In Time♪**, I stopped myself from making a mess on top of a very plain late model automobile when I realized I was approaching an unmarked police car.

What I remember best about the girl is she was nice to me. Most young women I met at age 20 looked right through me as though I was a sheet of glass, like the door in the office building they pushed aside and went through each morning. To get upstairs to a job, to earn money, to buy pretty clothes, to attract a man like me. But not me.

In our twenties, most boys and girls were unaware we were simply at the age for chasing after someone else's life we wanted to share. **♪That Old Devil Moon♪** had a simple reproductive battle plan that demanded we couple soon, while we still might live long enough to raise human children to the age of their own coupling. We humans had no better game plan than a **♪Firefly♪**.

Most of us ran around and tried to look smart, pretty or handsome. We hoped to meet the one who would serve our fancy, and maybe even our needs. **♪I May Be Wrong♪**, but I probably had no idea what my real needs were.

One definite need was to eat, so I went back upstairs to my job and **♪I Got Rhythm♪**. I finally came to understand the music of the spheres, the interposer magnets and how to set 8 thousandths of an inch adjustment on the card feed blade. **♪Maybe This Time♪** I would remember to turn off the power before probing the circuits.

For many of my friends, their one true love or a reasonable facsimile eventually showed up. Or they got tired of searching and settled for companionship or sex. Some gazed with new eyes over old ground that held past partners. And if their old lovers were now spoken for, one could certainly find the old personalities wrapped around new candidates. Some of my friends hoped what didn't work in the past would work now. **♪They Can't Take That Away From Me♪**, they said. Many were disappointed to find you unlearn a good lesson at your own peril.

Evidently all of us believed five or six dates at the movies or tucked into a booth in a quiet bar were enough to form the basis of a lifetime commitment. Some of us were right.

Biology pounded at the door and families, parsons, chapels, gown makers, formal attire renters and honeymoon destinations coaxed young lovers toward cementing their union. One of **♪My Girl's♪** friends had already married a boy who sold hot dogs downtown in an office building to earn money to buy her pretty clothes that made her attractive. **♪But Not For Me♪**. I wanted the girl who promised she'd sail away with me on a ship called the **♪The Good Life♪**.

"For us," I told her, "it's **♪A Time For Love♪**."

♪This I All I Ask♪," she answered, **♪I Wanna Be Around♪**."

♪Because Of You♪," I said, "I will never walk that **♪Boulevard of Broken Dreams♪**."

♪The Best Is Yet To Come♪," she said.

Tony Bennett may have said the same each of the three times he married. I still feel that way after nearly fifty years of marriage. And if Tony and I met again on an elevator, we might agree that for us, the birds, the bees and the marriage industry, **♪The Music Never Ends♪**.

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The Windswept Press
Murrells Inlet, South Carolina
www.windsweptpress.com