

## Eddie Lang—Flatpicking Pioneer

The May/June 2007 issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* is a special issue that focuses on the “Pioneers of Flatpicking.” The pioneers are the acoustic guitar players who were out there putting a pick to steel strings before flatpicking heroes like Doc Watson, Clarence White, Norman Blake, Dan Crary, and Tony Rice were doing it. In this issue, and in a series of articles that FGM editor Dan Miller has been writing for the flatpicking section of Mel Bay’s *Guitar Sessions* on-line magazine (<http://www.guitarsessions.com/>), the pioneers that have been featured are players like Riley Puckett and Roy Harvey from old-time music; Maybelle Carter, Doc Addington, Jimmie Rodgers, Edd Mayfield, the Delmore Brothers, Hank Snow, and Charlie Monroe for early country music; Lester Flatt, George Shuffler, Don Reno, Jimmy Martin, and Red Smiley from bluegrass music; John Herald from folk music; and George Barnes, Johnny Smith, and Charlie Christian from jazz.

While the names mentioned above were some of the most prominent early pioneers of flatpicking guitar (along with Django Reinhardt and the early Western swing players who were omitted because they had been covered in past issue of the magazine), there are many others that we just didn’t have room to discuss. We are going to try to fix that in future issue of the FGM and occasionally in our month e-newsletter montly lesson. This month we are going to feature a lesson that Joe Carr submitted about the great jazz guitar pioneer Eddie Lang.

### The Roots of Flatpicking Guitar – Eddie Lang By Joe Carr

Picture a gentleman dressed in a tuxedo, playing a 1920s Gibson L-5 guitar. This classic photograph is the image many of us have of jazz guitarist Eddie Lang, born Salvatore Massaro, in Philadelphia in 1902. Lang’s many recordings throughout the 1920s and until his untimely death in 1933 established him as the first significant jazz guitarist.

Lang was the recording guitarist in the 1920s and appeared on recordings by scores of important performers of the era including Paul Whiteman, Hoagy Carmichael, Frankie Trumbauer Bix Beiderbecke and Bing Crosby. He also made solo and duet recordings with guitarist Carl Kress, blues man Lonnie Johnson, and hot violinist Joe Venuti.

Lang recorded as “Blind Willie Dunn” on “race” recordings with Johnson, Bessie Smith and “Blind Willie Dunn and his Gin Bottle Four.” On the Lang/Johnson recordings, Lang often played rhythm to Johnson bluesy lead. The pseudonym “Blind Willie Dunn” was likely adopted to better market recordings to the black audience and to stay clear of those who disapproved of mixed race recordings.

Lang’s 1926-27 duet recordings with jazz violinist Joe Venuti consisted of hot originals that preceded the Reinhardt/Grappelli collaboration by eight years. The Lang/Venuti recordings were influenced by the orchestrated, multi-section jazz of that decade which may be why their music didn’t have the same impact on modern guitarists as the Reinhardt material.

Singer and mega-star Bing Crosby eventually chose Lang to be his accompanist. In 1933, Lang had a tonsillectomy operation and due to complications, died. It is said the Lang’s untimely death (at age 30) weighed especially heavy on Crosby who had suggested the operation.

By the 1930s, most orchestral banjoists had switched to guitar, a testament to Lang’s influence. Sally-Ann Worsfold sums up Lang’s career in the liner notes of *The Quintessential Eddie Lang 1925 – 1932* on Timeless



## Records:

“Within just one year of his death, Eddie Lang’s reputation already had begun to fade. The initial recordings of the Quintet of the Hot Club of France – a group originally inspired by the Joe Venuti Blue Four [including Lang] – introduced the work of Django Reinhardt, whose Romany musical background added another exciting dimension to jazz guitar. Before the end of the 1930s, the amplified guitar style of Charlie Christian, to be heard with the Benny Goodman Sextet, opened up yet further possibilities for the instrument. However, the pioneer achievements of Eddie Lang should not be overlooked. Without any apparent influence or mentor he made all subsequent developments possible. . . This selection, although it merely skims the surface of a remarkable recording career, does illustrate that everything and anything the guitarist cared to play was distinguished by his consummate artistry, superb musicianship, conviction and soul.”

“Pickin’ My Way” is an attractive Eddie Lang and Carl Kress composition from 1932. The guitarists trade solos on this bluesy tune with Lang taking the opening single note lead and Kress providing a signature chord melody. Performed in the key of C, the tune has a second section in Dm that is not notated here. The various positions given are my choices after some experimentation. Feel free to explore other fingering possibilities. This rarely heard tune would be a great addition to your swing repertoire!

Lang’s recording of this tune can be heard at <http://www.redhotjazz.com/lang.html>

# Pickin' My Way

Eddie Lang/ Carl Kress

Musical notation for measures 1-4. Chords: G, C7, G, C7.

Musical notation for measures 5-8. Chords: G, E7, A7, D7.

Musical notation for measures 9-12. Chords: G, C7, G, C7.

Musical notation for measures 13-16. Chords: G, E7, A7, D7, G. Ends with 'Fine'.

(continued on the next page)

17 B m

14 14-12 10 14 13-14-13-14-12 10 14 13-14-13-14

21 A m A7 D7

12 12-10 10-8 12 11-12-11-12-10 8 12 10 12-11 10