

THE CURSE OF THE SAXOPHONE

(By Vachel Lindsay in spiteful collaboration with Warren Stoddard.)

When Cain killed Abel to end a perfect day,
He founded a city called the City of Cain
And he ordered the saxophones to play.

But give me a city where they play the silver flute,
Where they play a silver flute at the dawn of day



Where the xylophones and saxophones and radio are mute,
And they play the Irish harp at the end of the day!

When Jezebel put on her tiaras and looked grand,
Her three-piece pajamas and her diamond bosom band
And stopped the honest prophets as they went upon their way,

And slaughtered them and hung them up in her hearty
wholesale way,

She licked her wicked chops,
She pulled out all the stops,
And she ordered the saxophones to play.

But give me a queen whose voice is like the flute,
Queen of a city where the saxophone is mute,
Who can dance in stately measure in an honest, solemn way

When they play the Irish harp at the end of the day!
For the Irish harp moves slowly, though the Irish heart
moves fast,

And both of them are faithful to their music to the last
And their silence after music is the conqueror at last.

When Joshua marched around the walls of Jericho,
He gave his soldiers saxophones and ordered them to blow,
And the great walls shimmered, they shook their shoulders
Until they were heaps of second-hand bowlders.

What did Judas do with his silver thirty pieces?

Bought himself a saxophone and played "The Beale Street Blues."

He taught the tune to Nero, who taught it to his nieces,

And Rome burned down to saxophones that played "The Beale Street Blues."

Now it comes by wireless and they call it news!

When Henry the Eighth of England married his last wife
He carried underneath his coat a well-edged butcher knife.
But he affected to be glad, affected to be gay—
And he ordered the saxophone to play.

But give me a wedding where the silver flutes at dawn
Bring visions of Diana, the waterfall and fawn!
Give me a wedding where the evening harp is singing,
And Irish tunes bring Irish kings, their strange voices ringing
Like songs by William Butler Yeats, or noble Padraic Colum—
Give me a wedding that is decent, sweet and solemn,
Not based on brazen dances or hysterical romances
When they order the saxophones to play!

When John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln the good,
He hid himself in a deep Potomac wood,
But the devil came and got him and dragged him down
below

And took him to the gate and therest you know—
Twenty thousand pigs on their hind legs playing
"The Beale Street Blues" and awaying, and saying:

"John Wilkes Booth, you are welcome to hell,"
And they played it on the saxophone and played it well
And he picked up a saxophone, grunting and rasping,
The red-hot horn in his hot hands grasping,

And he played a typical radio jazz

He started an earthquake, he knew what for,
And at last he started the late world war!

Our nerves all razzed and our thoughts all jazzed,
Booth and his saxophone started the war!



Let us forget this horrible horn.
Let us think of the Irish flute in the morn,
And the songs of Colum and the songs of Yeats,
And forget our jazzes and our razzes and our hates—
Let us dream a slow romance and the slow great wings
Of the good and great sweet Irish kings!