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Biographical Sketches

**LARRY CLINTON**

# “True Confessions”

by JAY and CHRISTOPHER POPA



He wrote many catchy riff tunes in the 1930s, such as *The Dipsy Doodle*, but when he adapted decades-old classical and operatic melodies into swing songs, he created something really special.

“It was very unusual,” Bea Wain, his featured vocalist, told Christopher in 2004. “I can’t recall that anybody else did it.”

For example, he added lyrics and a light syncopation to a piano piece, *Reverie*, which had been written in 1890 by the French Impressionist composer Claude Debussy, and made it into *My Reverie*, a gigantic popular success for his big band (and one of our Dad’s favorites).

“I thought it was a wonderful thing that he did, and he had to be a darned good musician to be able to do it,” Wain pointed out.

# VITAL STATS



given name Lawrence C. Teats [ legally changed to Clinton ca.1937 ]

birthdate Aug 17, 1909

birthplace Brooklyn, New York

father George Martin Teats, b.Dec 25, 1884, d.Nov 10, 1916

mother Elizabeth "Lizzie" Draper Price Teats, a concert soprano, b.Jul 22, 1887, m.June 28, 1906,  
m.Alfred J Duncan

sister Florence C. Teats, b.1910

half-sister Joyce Evelyn Duncan, b.May 26, 1920, d.Feb 28, 1998

wife Wanda Irene Salik Teats, b.Sept 19, 1915, m.Sept 26, 1931, d.Jan 24, 1994

son Larry Clinton Jr, b.Aug 19, 1940

physical description 5'10", 160 lbs, light complexion, brown hair, blue eyes ( 1940 )

education public schools, Brooklyn, New York

military service U.S. Air Force ( Feb 4, 1943-Feb 6, 1946 )

membership American Federation of Musicians (AFM) Local 802, New York City, New York;  
American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP);  
Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

hobbies flying ( he became a licensed civilian airplane pilot in 1939 ), golf;  
writing science fiction articles

residence Brooklyn, New York ( 1910 ); 110-15 Queens Blvd, Queens, New York ( 1940 );  
231 Dover Rd, Manhasset, Long Island, New York ( 1940 ); Green Valley, Arizona

death date May 2, 1985

place of death Tucson, Arizona

cause of death cancer

Clinton could be considered a swing pioneer, having played, arranged, and / or written originals for the bands of Isham Jones and Claude Hopkins ( 1933 ), the Dorsey Brothers ( 1934 ), Jimmy Dorsey ( 1935-36 ), Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra ( 1936-37 ), and Louis Armstrong, Tommy Dorsey, and Bunny Berigan ( 1937 ).



“I think it’s okay, I don’t see why not,” Wain, pictured above, agreed about the “pioneer” label. “I mean, he was around a long time ago.”

Clinton started his own group in late 1937, recording for Victor, and in less than six months’ time, he was booked six months ahead.

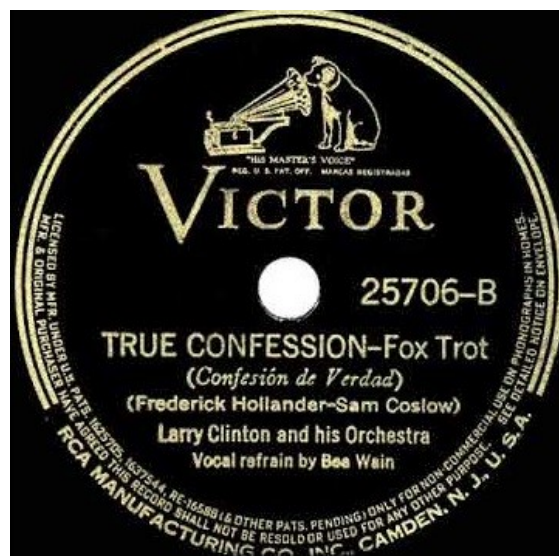
“Well I think his greatest achievements were the arrangements he made, and the fact that he took things like Debussy’s *Reverie* and made a popular song out of it,” Wain commented. “And he did that with several classics and operas. He did *Martha*, the opera, which I also sang, and it was a popular hit.”



Wain, born in 1917, was a member of a couple choral groups which performed, respectively, on the Kay Thompson and Kate Smith radio programs. One day, Clinton was tuned in, as she sang an eight-bar solo.

“I did a lot of singing, choral things. And he heard me on the Kate Smith show. He didn’t see me,” she recalled. “Actually, it was very strange, because . . . I had a call and went to the phone and this man said, ‘My name is Larry Clinton. I’m starting a band and I’m looking for a girl singer and I would like you to make some sides with me.’ Which was really cuckoo [ laughs ], ‘cause I said to myself, ‘He never saw me. He never really heard me, it was just a few bars.’ And he told me to meet him at RCA Victor the next week, he was recording. And he sent me a tune to do, and I did it. And the first time I saw him was when I walked into the studio.”

Even after so many years, she was able to remember the circumstances.



“It was very strange, though, that he sent the tune to me,” she observed. “It was *True Confession*. That was the name of the song. And he asked me on the phone to tell him what key I was going to do it in. And I called him and told him, and he said, ‘Okay, I’ll see you Tuesday at RCA.’”

It turned out that, following that November 5, 1937 recording session, she would remain with the band.

“Oh, we didn’t go into that,” she admitted. “But I sort of took it for granted that we would go on further.”

Sure enough, Clinton was back in touch.

“He said, ‘Our next step is we’re gonna do a sustaining program on NBC.’ I said, ‘When?’ and he told me, and I said, ‘I can’t do that.’ He said, ‘Why not?’ And this was so silly, because, really, it was a tremendous opportunity for me. But I was in the chorus on the Kate Smith show. And Andre Baruch was the announcer, and we were just getting to know each other, and I had a real crush on him. And I figured if I went off the Kate Smith show, I’d never see him again, I was very young [ laughs ].”





Wain already had the chance to work with other orchestras.

“Oh yeah, Benny Goodman had called me,” Wain revealed. “He had heard about me, and asked me if, you know... he didn’t ask me, but he said, ‘Let’s talk about it,’ to sing with his band. Actually, the band thing didn’t mean that much to me. I wanted to sing by myself, and there were radio programs and things like that that I could work on.”

Christopher mentioned the one record she made with Artie Shaw, for Brunswick on September 17, 1937.

“Yeah, that was a favor for a friend,” she responded. “Artie was a friend of mine. Our mothers knew each other. I think they played bridge together, his mother and my mother - and I knew him. And he came to me, I was on the “Hit Parade” at the time. He came to a rehearsal and he said, ‘Gee, I’m in trouble ’cause I got a recording date tomorrow and the girl singer is sick.’ He said, ‘Would you help me?’ I said, ‘Sure.’ He gave me the tune, which was *If It’s the Last Thing I Do*, a pretty ballad, and I met him at the studio the next day, and I recorded it. They put on the label ‘Beatrice Wayne’ [ sic ]. Beatrice is my name and I think they spelled Wain wrong. W-a-i-n is the way my family spells Wain. I think they did it the other way.”





LARRY CLINTON  
And His Orchestra

Management  
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In any event, she took a chance and decided to formally join Clinton and his Orchestra.

“I thought it was a very good dance band,” she reminisced. “I think the rhythms and the beats were wonderful, and I think the people loved to dance with the band, to the band. But the funny thing about that, about my name, is that when I started making records with Larry, they didn’t have room on the label for my name. So they cut it to ‘Bea’ Wain, they cut the ‘Beatrice’ out to ‘Bea.’”



Did anyone at Victor ask her permission first?

“No,” she answered. “I was just a little old girl singer. But that’s the truth, so that’s how my name became ‘Bea Wain.’”



Clinton has been described as a realist, businessman, organized, and well-liked, yet not outgoing.

“He was very intelligent, but he was... what’s the word I want... he was a very quiet man,” she reported. “I was surprised when he became a bandleader, or *that* he became a bandleader, because he really didn’t like standing in front of the band.”



Clinton himself used to say that he had a “10:30 lip,” meaning that his weak embouchure would give out by 10:30 at night.

“You know, he played a few instruments, but none of them were solo instruments,” Wain stated. “I mean, he played, like third trumpet and fourth trombone, just so that he had something to hold on the bandstand. That’s not quite fair, but it’s true.”



He didn't give her any instruction on how he wanted her to sing with his band.



“Absolutely never,” Wain said. “He never told me what to do or how to do it, just handed me the song and said this is what we’re gonna do and what key do you want it in?”

In the summer of 1938, the band was hired to play the season at Glen island Casino in new Rochelle, New York, and it proved to be a turning point.

“Oh, definitely,” she concurred. “I’ll tell you why: when you played at a place like the Glen Island Casino, you had radio wires (they called them) throughout the week. We were on the air at night - usually 10, 11 o’clock at night - The announcers say, ‘And now from the Glen Island Casino, we hear the music of Larry Clinton and his Orchestra.’ And we did a half-hour, let’s say, of dance music. And that made the band, ‘cause people would hear it all over the country. And then when we went on the road, people would say, ‘Gee, that’s the band we heard.’”



One-nighters were part of the scene, and even they could be enjoyable.

“Well, it depends on where we played,” Wain replied. “If we played in an elegant ballroom, it was very nice. We played a lot of colleges, and that was fun. As I said, I was very young. We played at Yale, we played at Princeton, we played the University of North Carolina... you know, we just went on the road, and you went from one to the other. And they all couldn’t wait until the band arrived, because the band became very popular on account of all these radio broadcasts.”



The idea of being a featured vocalist with a name orchestra, up on the bandstand in front of hundreds or thousands of people, sounds exciting!

“What used to happen, we’d be on the bus, and we’d arrive at a ballroom, and just about on time to start playing,” she remarked. “And that was hard. I remember all of this very distinctly. I would dress in the boys’ locker room at a college. The band would start playing and I’d hear my introduction, and I ran out and started singing . . . It was good because the people were wonderful to me.”

For a while, her mother traveled with her on the bus.

“She was the chaperone at the college dances,” Wain explained. “It was really very cute, because all the dances... I’m talking about the senior proms and the dances... they had chaperones. I guess they still do. And they invited my mother to be one of them, which was kind of sweet.”

What other true confessions from the Clinton band or the road did Wain have?

“They left me once, in Mississippi,” she revealed. “They didn’t know I wasn’t on the bus. And, suddenly, they left town . . . And I was in the hotel, waiting to be called. And then somebody says, ‘Hey, where’s Bea?’ And they came running back.”

“There was one time I remember in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania,” she told Christopher. “It was a rough place, that particular ballroom was a pretty rough places, and the crowd was a rough crowd. And when I stood up to sing, a lot of the guys would be standing around the bandstand, kind of, uh... being a little crude. And we had a trombone player who was a wonderful guy and a great musician, and he’d get up and play his horn, pushing the slide out in the audience. I don’t know if you can picture this.”

Clinton had a trombonist named Ford Leary, who also sang novelty songs. Is that who she meant?

“No, I’m speaking of Joe Ortolano. He was the [ band’s ] first [ chair ] trombone player,” she indicated. “On the road was really very difficult, but it was fun. I was married then, I must tell you. And they all knew my husband, and they all knew me and they took care of me. They were really like a bunch of big brothers . . . ‘cause I was a straight kid and they knew it.”

Among the musicians who were a part of the band were Bob Cusamano ( trumpet ), Tony Zimmer ( clarinet / saxophone ), Sam Mineo ( piano ), and Henry Adler ( drums ).



“They were all good musicians,” she affirmed.

Hugo Winterhalter joined in the fall of 1938 and played tenor sax.

“He sure did,” she agreed. “And I didn’t know until much later that he became a bandleader and an arranger.”



Clinton continued to find source material in, for example, the works of Tchaikovsky, among others, from which he wrote and arranged a good portion of his band's music library.

"I think he did most of them," Wain said. "I can't give you a percentage, 'cause I don't know. But I'm sure he did most of them, because that was his thing."



He also wrote many originals which included unison clarinets and trombone-trio glissandos, elements of both swing and sweet bands.

A different kind of inspiration for a Clinton original came from a baseball player.



"Yeah, Carl Hubbell. He was . . . with the [ New York ] Giants. He was a pitcher," she recalled. "And evidently, he threw a pitch that he called 'the dipsy doo,' or 'the dipsy,' or something like that. Larry was a fan of his and he named [ an original ] *The Dipsy Doodle*, which became very popular. The interesting thing about *The Dipsy Doodle*, though . . . We played it on the air a lot. But in those days, if one of the bands recorded a tune, nobody else did it. And Tommy Dorsey recorded *The Dipsy Doodle*, and we never did."

Christopher told Wain that he once read that her father was a big opera fan.

“Oh yeah,” she confirmed.

So what did *he* think of, for instance, *Martha*, which had been adapted by Clinton from Friedrich von Flotow’s 1847 opera of the same name, and featured her vocal?

“Well, he was my father, so he just loved everything I did,” she kidded. “He would walk around the house singing the legitimate operas. I mean, he wasn’t in the business or anything, but that’s what he really loved.”



“Some of the records I made were silly,” she offered. “They were funny songs, and we kidded around with them.”

Did she mean like *Scrapin’ the Toast*?

“Oh, God, that was awful,” she claimed. “We did something called *Ferdinand the Bull*, which was a cartoon character. I did everything: I did ballads, I did swing tunes. I could really swing.”

Besides the big hits, what recordings did she personally enjoy?

“Oh, there was a song at the beginning called, well, the first one... *True Confession*. That was our first record and that was nice. I did something called *The Masquerade Is Over*. I don’t know if you know these tunes,” she said. “I did a few of those classics. After *Martha* was a hit, he took *I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls*, that was an opera.”

Once, at the Victor session which took place on June 3, 1938, Carol Bruce sang in place of Wain.

“Carol was a lovely singer. She was a fairly good friend of mine, and she ended up on Broadway. She did the musical shows,” Wain recalled. “But I had strep throat. I was sick. And that’s when we were at Glen Island Casino. And I was terrible. I was in bad shape, and I couldn’t sing. I had to take off a couple of weeks. He hired Carol to replace me, and she sang at Glen Island for a couple of weeks . . . When the band went on the road, it was Larry Clinton and Bea Wain - my name was in the contracts, which I didn’t know until much later. And if I didn’t appear, they didn’t get paid. So, when he went on the road and I was sick with the strep throat, Carol went, and she had to sign my name, on autographs.”

## RECOMMENDED LISTENING - SELECT LIST

**True Confession** Victor, 1937 / Bea Wain, vocal

**Jubilee** Victor, 1937 / Bea Wain, vocal

**I Double Dare You** Victor, 1937 / Bea Wain, vocal

**The Dipsy Doodle** Associated transcription, 1937 / Bea Wain, vocal

**Martha** Victor, 1938 / Bea Wain, vocal



**I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls** Victor, 1938 / Bea Wain, vocal

**My Reverie** Victor, 1938 / Bea Wain, vocal

**Deep Purple** Victor, 1938 / Bea Wain, vocal

**The Night We Met in Honomu** Victor, 1941 / Peggy Mann, vocal / Howard Gibeling, arranger

**Bolero in Blue** RCA Victor, 1956

**A Study in Brown** RCA Victor, 1956

**In a Persian Market** Everest, 1958

Following an engagement at the Meadowbrook in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, Wain left Clinton's band in early 1939.

"I was only with the band a year and a half," she pointed out. "Many people think I was with it much longer, because we did so much and made so many hit records. But I was married and I was very much in love. And I got tired of being on the road. And I wanted to make more money if I was going to work with him, which wasn't forthcoming. And so I talked it over with my husband and with Larry's manager . . . The other thing is that I had a lot of offers. I had the offer from the 'Hit Parade,' for instance. And I had offers to work in nightclubs, to be an individual. And to work in theaters, but as Bea Wain, not with the big bands. And the money was much, much better. And that's why I left."



Her long and successful marriage to radio announcer Andre Baruch, shown above with her, was admired throughout show business.

"We were very lucky," she said. "He was a *marvelous* man. He died in 1991. We were married for 53 years. And it was *wonderful*, and we worked together a lot . . . I won't say it was easy, but it worked for us. First of all, he was a terrific fan of me. He loved the way I sang and so forth. It was quite wonderful. I miss him terribly."

They had a son and daughter. The son, Wayne Baruch, went into the entertainment business, producing live events.



“One of the things he did, for several years, he produced 'The Three Tenors' [ concerts by opera tenors Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo, and Jose Carreras ],” Wain proudly boasted in 2004. “There was one time that I went to one of the rehearsals, and I was talking to Pavarotti. He was listening to some young, operatic singers. He did a very nice thing. He used to audition these people from all over the country, and he would coach them, he would help them. He would tell them what they did wrong or what they did right, and it was a glorious experience for these singers. And one of the singers sang [ Wain sings a melody ]... this was *Lullaby* from 'Berceuse,' that was also a classic. After that was over, I was sitting next to him - it was in a theater, nobody was in the theater, I mean just him and the singers - and . . . Somebody came over to him and said that I was a wonderful singer. So he said, 'Oh, I'd love to hear you.' I said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, I recorded one of the songs that you sing, that was *Martha*, and also that one of the young singers sang. I said I did a swing version of it. And he said, 'Show me, show me.' And I started to sing it. And he joined in - it was adorable - and he pretended he was a trombone player, and I'd sing la-la-la-la and he'd go [ imitates a trombone ]. And we had a lovely time. That was just a couple of years ago.”



Clinton, meanwhile, joined the U.S. Air Force, entering on February 4, 1943 as a Lieutenant. Upon completion of Flight Officer training at Greenville, Missouri, he became a Flight Instructor on AT-6 and B-25 aircrafts. In June 1945, he was transferred to the China-Burma-India Theater and was co-pilot of a C-46 plane known as "The Hump."

After his discharge in 1946, he became a recording director for a couple small labels, then started another Orchestra and kept it going for a few years.



He also made more records, including "Larry Clinton in Hi-Fi," a 1956 album re-creating his hits in high fidelity, but with a New York City studio band and Helen Ward as vocalist.

"I know that," Wain said. "Well, he was still working around."

With no disrespect to Ward, Christopher expressed his opinion that the logical, preferable choice for the vocals on that LP should have been Wain.

"I'll tell you a funny story," she added. "During that period, Andre and I were on the air in New York, playing records (we were disc jockeys) and I sang live, of course. We had guests on the show and, one time, Larry called and said, 'Hey, I've got a new album. Can I come and be your guest?' We said, 'Of course.' You know, we were friends. And that was the album. And he came on and on the air he said to me, 'Boy, I wish you were on that album.' And I said, 'Why didn't you ask me?' And that was the end of that."

Clinton left music around 1961, and, as a hobby, he wrote science fiction articles. He lived quietly until his death at age 75 in 1985.

"I don't know how Larry would like to be remembered," she admitted. "Just play his music, and love his music."

Wain's singing, happily, continued, and she reached 100 years of age before passing away in 2017.

"Actually, I've had a wonderful life, a wonderful career," she reminisced. "And I'm *still* singing, and I'm still singing pretty good. This past December [ 2003 ], I did a series of shows in Palm Springs, California and the review said, 'Bea Wain is still a giant.' . . . It's something called 'Musical Chairs' . . . I did six shows, in six different venues, and I was a smash! And I really got a kick out of it!"

Along with the other memories she so kindly shared with Christopher, that was her *latest* true confession!

## SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## IMAGE ATTRIBUTION

45guy1 (45worlds.com)

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