

Changes by Bill Jackman to the Lyrics of the Song “**Early Autumn**” for “**Autumn Leaves**” Concert, September 2026

"**Early Autumn**" originated as the final movement of **Ralph Burns**'* 1946 four-part suite "Summer Sequence," written for Woody Herman and his Orchestra which recorded "Early Autumn" as an instrumental in late 1948. "Early Autumn" became a landmark modern jazz standard largely driven by Stan Getz's legendary tenor saxophone solo.

(* **Ralph Burns** (1922–2001) was an influential American jazz pianist, composer, and arranger best known for shaping the signature, progressive sound of the Woody Herman Orchestra during the 1940s and 1950s. Ralph was born and grew up in Newton, Massachusetts (near Boston). He studied at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. As a native New Englander, Ralph knew about early autumns.)

Origins in "Summer Sequence"

- Ralph Burns composed "Summer Sequence" as an ambitious multi-part jazz concert piece.
- The fourth and final section, showcased the tune "Early Autumn," featuring a slow, haunting melody line.

In 1952, Woody Herman asked lyricist Johnny Mercer to add words to the melody. Woody Herman and his Orchestra re-recorded the song that same year, with Herman taking the vocal duties himself.^[3]

Lyricist Johnny Mercer

Johnny Mercer was one of the most successful songwriters of his time. He wrote the lyrics to more than 1,500 songs, including compositions for movies and Broadway shows. He received nineteen Oscar nominations, and won four Best Original Song Oscars. Mercer wrote most of his lyrics in the second half of the twentieth century but continued writing lyrics in the 1960s and into the 1970s.

"Early Autumn" (1949-published)
Music by Ralph Burns and Woody Herman (1948)
Lyrics by Johnny Mercer (1952)

When an early autumn walks the land
and chills the breeze and touches with her hand
the summer trees, perhaps you'll understand
what memories I own.

There's a dance pavilion in the rain, all shuttered down,
a winding country lane, all russet brown,
A frosty window pane shows me a town grown lonely.

That spring of ours that started so April-hearted
Seemed made for just a boy and girl.

I never dreamed, did you, any fall would come in view
So early, early.

Darling if you care, please, let me know,
I'll meet you anywhere, I miss you so,
Let's never have to share another EARLY AUTUMN.

“Let's never have to share another EARLY AUTUMN.”

The lyrics use the theme of an Early Autumn (which supposedly shuts down all the fun of summer in regions like New England) as a metaphor for a love affair that started so enthusiastically (“so April-hearted”) but then faded. There is hope that their love affair can be revived and that “[they’ll] never have to share another EARLY AUTUMN.”

But is Early Autumn really such a drastic event that it shuts everything down (“There's a dance pavilion in the rain, all shuttered down”) and makes this couple “never [want to] have to share another EARLY AUTUMN.”?

No, apparently Johnny Mercer (who was born and grew up in Savannah, GA and moved Hollywood in 1935) did not research this topic sufficiently. New England summer resorts do **not** close early because of an early autumn. Instead, their closing dates are fixed on a rigid calendar schedule—usually tied to Labor Day, mid-September, or Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples' Day—to transition directly into the lucrative fall foliage "leaf-peeping" season.

Typical New England Resort Season Milestones

- **Labor Day:** Many casual beach snack bars, lakeside rentals, and coastal seasonal operations close right after Labor Day.
- **Mid-to-Late September:** Mountain and northern resorts in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine transition from summer-only amenities (like outdoor water parks or alpine slides) into fall foliage lodging.
- **Columbus Day (Mid-October):** The definitive hard-closing milestone for a vast majority of remaining seasonal New England tourist spots, after which the regional shoulder/off-peak season officially begins.

Some New Englanders dislike an early autumn but others like it.

Some people in the U.S. Northeast, including New England, dislike an early autumn because it cuts short the warm summer weather, causing them to lose warm days for outdoor activities like swimming and hiking. But an increasing number of people in U.S. Northeast prefer an early autumn. As summer heat waves grow longer and harsher due to climate change, many people who once disliked early autumn now welcome it. Cooler autumn weather offers much-needed relief from extreme heat and turns a season many people used to find dull or gloomy into a welcome break.

Items Changed in the original lyrics

“shows me a town grown lonely.”

Johnny Mercer was a famous lyricist, but part of what he wrote for “Early Autumn,” although it sounded good and rhymed and fit the meter, did not correspond to reality or was silly or awkward. In the first half of the tune when he is describing signs of “Early Autum,” he writes that these signs **“shows me a town grown lonely.”**

This is ridiculous. As written above, casual beach snack bars, lakeside rentals, and coastal seasonal operations in New England close right after Labor Day due to the cooler fall weather, and Columbus Day (Mid-October) is the definitive hard-closing milestone for a vast majority of remaining seasonal New England tourist spots, after which the regional shoulder/off-peak season officially begins. But these closed facilities do **not** show **“a town grown lonely.”** They show **seasonal** facilities closed due to the coming of winter.

“any fall would come in view”

In the second half of the tune, referring to the coming of Early Autumn, Mercer writes

“I never dreamed, did you, any fall would come in view”

The phrase “any fall would come in view” sounds awkward or even ridiculous.

Why did Mercer write “any fall would come in view”? Mercer strived for rhyme schemes internally to the line and the end of lines. He started the line with “I never dreamed, did **you**,” so he had to find a word to end the line that rhymes with **“you.”** So, he ended the line with “in **view.**”

Please see my revised lyrics below. My changes fit the meter and rhyme.

Changes are highlighted in red.

I have donated these changed and more sensible lyrics for “Early Autumn” to the Piedmont Center for the Arts (PCA) along with all performing rights accruing to them.

Bill Jackman, August 2026

Note: This document is posted in the Music section
at <https://jackmanstatistics.com/commentary.html>

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Lyrics by Johnny Mercer (1952)

Lyrics revised by Bill Jackman (Aug 2026)

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