Gene Lees
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Down Beat Days

Sibelius, reputedly, was the author of the observation that "no one ever erected a monument to a critic." Whoever said it first, musicians have repeated it with relish ever since. Society has not of course been conspicuously generous with monuments to musicians, either.

One can understand an artist's resentment of the critic. His career, his very livelihood, can hang on the opinion of someone who may or may not know what he is talking about and, even assuming that he does, whose esthetic philosophy may or may not accord with his own. And some critics, I grant, are blithering idiots. But criticism, for all its faults, is, as Virgil Thomson put it, "the only anitdote we have to paid publicity." And musicians and other artists incline to slight the serious work done on their behalf by men they rarely bother to thank. The writings over the years of Leonard Feather, John S. Wilson, and Whitney Balliett—to say nothing of the scholars and commentators in Europe—have given jazz the chronicle the musicians themselves never bothered to write. It is valuable beyond estimate, and Leonard's *Encyclopedia of Jazz,* the later editions of which have been written in collaboration with Ira Gitler, is in itself a monumental work to which future generations will owe an enormous gratitude. Incidentally, Leonard is feeling discouraged about his encyclopedias and the difficulty of gaining adequate distribution for them, and thinking that he may not produce an *Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Eighties.* We will all be the less if he doesn't.

Last month in Chicago, a critic died. He was my friend. As it happens, I'm the one who turned him into a critic. With all deference to Mr. Sibelius, I would like to say a few words about Don DeMicheal.

I met Don in Louisville, Kentucky, shortly after I joined the staff of the Louisville *Times* as its classical music critic. I got the job only because one of the reporters, assigned to review a concert by the Louisville Orchestra, fell asleep and then panned the performance of something by Beethoven when in fact there had been a last minute program change and the orchestra had played Tchaikovsky. On the reasoning that the paper needed someone who knew a little more about music than that, or at least cared a little more about it, Norman Isaacs, the managing editor, imported me from the Montreal *Star.* (The reporter whose moment of somnolence changed the course of my life is now one of the finest correspondents of the New York *Times.*)

I settled into my job and eventually became drama and movie critic, and entertainment editor as well. My principle assignment was covering the Louisville's Orchestra's program of commissioning and recording new music by contemporary classical composers. For three years I assiduously attended not only the concerts but the rehearsals too. I would hang out with the musicians from the orchestra and discuss the new pieces in detail. Most of them did not like most of the music very much, but a gig is a gig and they played it and played it well. It was during this time that a suspicion dawned on me that the European classical-music tradition was, if not ended, at least seriously off the rails.

The moment I hit town, of course, I began searching out the local jazzers. I became friends with an excellent pianist named Don Murray, with whom I studied harmony and composition. Don played in a trio with a bassist-lawyer named Gene Klingman in a downtown bar called Riney's. At some point I mentioned that I had done a little singing, and they asked me to sit in. The people apparently approved, because they would ask me to do it night after night. So reticent was I that I would sit on the piano bench beside Don, scroonched down so no one could see me. I really didn't know what I was doing in those days and, I suspect, I had terrible time. In my insecurity I would wait for the chord and then make the phrase. I can't bear that kind of behind-the-beat singing, which is why I have no taste for a certain style of jazz singer.

Don and Gene had a friend, a vibes player and drummer named Don DeMicheal. DeMicheal had a group that played for dancers in some little roadhouse out on the edge of town. The group sounded not unlike the Modern Jazz Quartet, which was perhaps inevitable in view of its instrumentation and DeMicheal's admiration for Milt Jackson. I liked Don's playing. I liked his drumming, too: it had a loose, comfortable, Cliff Leeman kind of feeling. Don had a peculiar habit. He always played drums in his stocking feet. I have never seen another drummer do that. He said it enabled him to feel the pedals better. He used to drive his car that way too.

There was something interesting about him, something hidden, and I got to know him better. It required a little pulling. Perhaps this had to do with the fact that he was Italian, by ancestry, in an area in which there did not seem to be many Italians. And he was by birth that very rare bird, an Italian Protestant. So I suppose he was an almost perfect example of the outsider, at least in that part of the country. But there was something more, although I didn't know it then: Don had an intelligence that he had not yet found the courage to explore.

Don's love of jazz was as deep as that of anyone I have ever known. He had a wonderful collection of old 78 records, some of them extremely rare. Finally I asked how he had acquired it. He told me that when he was a little boy, he would go into the colored neighborhoods of Louisville to knock on doors and ask people if they had any old phonograph records they didn't want. And in attics and basements he uncovered forgotten treasures and bought them for five or ten cents each. I wonder what some of those people thought of the little black-haired white boy who was interested in such old music.

Those were bebop days, and like so many others among us, I had limited interest in the older jazz. Don loved it all, and played it all. One day I was denigrating Dixieland, laying out the reasons I found it uninteresting, and Don said mildly, "That's all true, I suppose. But it sure is fun to play." That brought me up short, and every musician to whom I have quoted that remark has agreed with him. (A few years after that, at the Monterey Jazz Festival, I heard Zoot Sims say that he rather liked the Dukes of Dixieland. Two or three other musicians jumped on him, demanding to know how he could possible like their music. "Well, you know me," Zoot said. "I haven't got very good taste." Zing.)

My job at the paper was in some ways uncomfortable. Norman Isaacs, in addition to being managing editor, was president of the Louisville Orchestra. The Rockefeller Foundation had committed substantial moneys to pay for its commissions and its recordings. And the more I studied that music, the more it seemed like an intelligently structured emptiness. Years later in Hollywood, Hugo Friedhofer dismissed Elliott Carter with one brief, harsh phrase: "Rich boy's music." It was a description that fit much of what the Louisville Orchestra was playing: certainly little of it was music that aspired to communicate to people.

To tell what I thought to be the truth about it, however, I had to word my reviews *very* carefully since I was under the command of a man who was president of that orchestra.

Rolf Liebermann came to town for the premiere of an opera of his based on Moliere's *School for Wives.* I had already become aware of the diplomatic skills of many of the contemporary "serious" composers and Mr. Liebermann was a master politician who, in a few days, had successfully charmed the entire musical establishment of Louisville, including Mr. Isaacs.

I attended rehearsals and then the performance, and I thought that that opera was one of the most boring pieces of crap I had ever heard. But I knew that I would not be allowed to say so. And so I resorted to the tactic of damning by faint praise. And Mr. Isaacs, thinking that I could not possibly be right in my lack of enthusiasm for so eminent and respected a composer, re-edited my copy, removing all my reservations, all my "rathers" and "somewhats" and "howevers", so that the review was deftly transmuted into a glowing one.

The opera later went on to New York, where the critics, to my considerable satisfaction, tore it to pieces. Mr. Isaacs later also went on to New York where he is now chairman of the National News Council, which examines complaints of malpractice in American journalism.

The situation was anomolous. The paper—meaning Mr. Isaacs—had no interest in jazz. I was not allowed to write articles about Don DeMicheal or Don Murray, because they worked in bars, for money. The Louisville Orchestra, however, was a non-profit organization, and therefore I could write about that and indeed was required to. I did manage to establish a weekly record column, in which I got away with reviewing a certain amount of jazz along with the classical music. But it seemed to me strange that in the United States, a nation in which profit is almost a religion, the non-profit could get all the free coverage it wanted. Indeed this is true today, and if you can have yourself declared a non-profit organization, you can even get free "public service" announcements on radio and television.

But there was more to the situation than that. After all, the paper had its business section, covering the activities and decisions of Reynolds Aluminum and other companies whose purpose was profit, and a sports section, covering professional sports, whose purpose most assuredly was profits. And I was required to cover the movies and even print those AP stories from Hollywood by Bob Thomas blandly chronicling the activities of movie stars. What was the difference between these enterprises and Riney's bar or the little roadhouse where Don, standing over his Deagan vibes, set for slow vibrato, was putting out some music that I found more interesting than most of what was coming out of the Louisville Orchestra?

The difference was—and is—this: those enterprises *buy advertising.* And so the separation of advertising and editorial departments that most newspapers claim as the very cornerstone of their ethics is more apparent than real. And if you've wondered why rock and the most mindless kind of popular music get extensive newspaper coverage when jazz gets so little, simply take note of how much advertising the pop-rock industry buys.

It's a shuck, it's a rig, and if you want newspaper coverage, you can get it in one of two ways: become a non-profit organization; or *buy ads.* There are some exceptions, but this pattern is all too common in the entertainment and arts sections of American newspapers.

DeMicheal used to say that I had a Machiavellian mind, partly, I suppose, because I had urged him to read *The Prince*—not in order to practice its tactics but in order to detect them when someone is trying to practice them against you.

It was becoming apparent to me that Don was plagued by some kind of inner doubt. I think he was going through an awakening, a suspicion that he might have more substance than he had ever had the ego to believe, and that life might hold more for him than he had thus far dared to aspire to. For what Don really did for a living was bake buns.

He played his gigs in the evenings and afterwards went to work in a bakery—a little business which, if memory serves me, was owned by his family—and all night long he baked hamburger buns that were delivered next morning on contract to the White Castle hamburger chain of Louisville. Remember those delicious old White Castle hamburgers, filled with wet fried onions, that you bought by the sack for a dollar a dozen? Well Don used to bake those buns in Louisville and since I loved those hamburgers, God only knows how many of Don's buns I ate during the three years I lived there.

In 1958, I was awarded a Reid Fellowship, $5,000, which in those days was a fair sum of money, and it provided me with a luxury I had never known: a year in which to simply study music and drama and all the things I loved, and I took my wife and newborn son and went to Europe to do it.

When I got back to Louisville the following spring, DeMicheal was still playing his gigs. Something in him, however, had changed. He told me that he had been taking an extension course in sociology at a division of the University of Indiana in Jeffersonville, which lies just across the Ohio River from Louisville. Thereupon began a joking argument between us that never ended. "Sociology," I used to kid him, "is the elaborate compilation of statistics to demonstrate the perfectly obvious."

Don had written a term paper that he asked me, with a certain diffidence, to read. At that time I had been writing for a living for

Surprises

Things I've learned from the *Jazzletter:*

- A high portion of jazz musicians and jazz fans can type—about 40 percent.
- Jazz musicians are extremely stable people. Out of a sampling of 400 Los Angeles jazz and studio players, only four had moved between 1978 and 1980, according to their addresses as listed in the union book. One of them moved only two blocks. Chico O'Farrill has lived at the same address in New York for 18 years.
- Doctors are jazz fans out of proportion to their presence in the population. A lot of doctors write poetry.
- Jazz fans tend to be of high income, high accomplishment, high intelligence, and broad interests. A lot of successful businessmen are former musicians.
- Five'll get you ten I am the only man in the world who has read the Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago union books from cover to cover. Joan Jett, Lenin Castro, Byzantine Christ, and Eddie R. Zip are all members of Local 47. Lothar Beer is a member of 802.

ten years and Don had never written anything at all.

I read the paper with great interest. It was an examination of a jazz group from a viewpoint of sociology, and in it he hypothesized a phenomenon he called "rotary leadership". In the course of an evening, he wrote, the leadership of a group keeps passing from one player to another—and the leader at any given moment is not necessarily the soloist.

A few weeks later, Norman Isaacs reprimanded me severely and unfairly for something that was not my fault. The anger this inspired caused me to stay awake for seventy-two straight hours, writing job applications to every newspaper I could think of. And then a friend of mine, a press agent for the Walt Disney studios, told me that Don Gold had just resigned as editor of *Down Beat.* Dom Cerulli had simultaneously resigned as New York editor.

I thought I could handle the New York job, and that was the city where I most wanted to be anyway. So my friend placed a call to Charles Suber, the publisher of *Down Beat,* and shoved the phone at me. A week later I found myself not in New York but in Chicago, editor of a magazine I had read dutifully as an adolescent jazz fan.

I encountered a demoralized magazine. George Hoeffer had been hired for the New York office, and although he was a faithful collector of information, George was not and never would be a journalist. I soon learned that I had only two men to turn to—Jack Tynan, the Irish-born west coast editor who worked out of an office in Selma Avenue in Los Angeles that is well-remembered by the jazz musicians of California, and Ted Williams, a photographer who had at one time been on the staff of *Ebony.* Both men became my close friends, and still are. Jack was a pillar of strength. An experienced and extremely skilled journalist and a fast and excellent writer, he could turn out copy in incredible quantities to help me fill a magazine whose purpose was unclear and whose direction had been lost. And Ted Williams was my guide to the jazz world of Chicago. He was, and is, a great photographer, but his greatest gift to me was his sense of humor: he could always make me laugh at the idiocies I was perpetually encountering.

Billie Holiday died the day I arrived. Somehow I had to get coverage of her death and scrape together an issue out of whatever material was in the inventory. George Hoeffer, good jazz-loving George, was no help. The piece he sent me about Bille's death, written probably when he was drunk, was a furious excoriation of the injustices and anguish of her life, so filled with profanity that I couldn't use it. I made phone calls and wrote a new piece.

I worked eighteen hours a day during those first weeks and somehow got the issues out. I had no assistant and no art director—the owner of *Down Beat,* John Maher, being a man with a just reputation for parsimony. He didn't even want to pay for photographs. He expected me to get them all from the record companies for nothing.

I made the judgment that if I were ever to have the budget the magazine needed, I would have to improve its quality *alone,* so that I would be one up on him. He was an Irish Catholic and a Republican, and when John F. Kennedy, Democrat, for whom Maher had a great hatred, became the first Irish Catholic president of the United States, I was amused by his torn loyalties. He was a very handsome man, avuncular and charming, and always beautifully dressed. He knew nothing about music. He was a printer who had acquired the magazine by default when its previous owners were unable to pay their bill. That, by the way, is one of the little-known tragedies of jazz.

Down Beat's special annual volume was about to be put together, and I had to look for material for it. I remembered DeMicheal's essay on "rotary leadership" and I called to ask if he would be interested in rewriting it into an article. He was, of course, happy to do so. I edited the new essay and printed it. It was Don's first published work.

I then asked Don to be Louisville correspondent for the magazine, and he began to send me tidbits of information about jazz activities there. One time he included an item about the legendary blues singer Blind Orange Adams.

When the next issue came out, DeMicheal phoned me in panic. "That was a joke!" he said. "It's just a pun on Blind Lemon Jefferson. Lemon-Orange, Adams-Jefferson, get it? I thought you'd get a laugh and then take it out of my copy!"

"Too late now," I said, and started to laugh.

When I talked to Jack Tynan on the phone, he too laughed—and shortly sent in an item about Blind Orange Adams making an appearance in Los Angeles, which I printed. I then dropped a few items about Blind Orange into the Chicago copy and soon, between DeMicheal, Tynan, and me we had the non-existent Mr. Adams appearing at rent parties and other functions all over America.

The magazine was improving steadily, and finally, with Chuck Suber's help, I managed to convince John Maher that we needed more staff. I was authorized to hire an assistant editor and—later on—an art director as well. I gave the matter considerable thought. Don's knowledge of traditional jazz was a strength where I had a weakness. I called him in Louisville and asked if he would be interested in tossing up his job in the bun factory, packing up his drums and vibes and his wife and son, and moving to Chicago to be my assistant editor. I think he was stunned. But he said, "Yes."

We may live without poetry, music and art;
We may live without conscience and live without heart;
We may live without friends; we may live without books;
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.
—Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton (1831-1891)

Don was an excellent assistant, He was a worker and he was a learner, and he took a great load off my shoulders. He quickly learned the mechanics of putting a magazine together and freed me to concentrate on the broader aspects of editing it.

Everyone who had worked at *Down Beat* had left with a seething hatred of the magazine. I had to try to quell it, or at least neutralize it. I asked John S. Wilson, one of the critics I respected most, if he would write for the magazine again. John was only too aware of John Maher's penurious ways, but he agreed to do so. I also asked Ralph J. Gleason to write for the magazine again—one of my mistakes, incidentally, since Ralph had an inordinate ego and an unshakable conviction that no one in the world but he knew anything about jazz. One day I took on, as a contributing writer, a young woman named Barbara Gardner. She was the first woman jazz critic on a national jazz magazine, and to the best of her knowledge or mine, the first black. In New York I found a gifted young man named Eddie Sherman and put him to work writing a humor column called *Out of My Head* under the byline George Crater. It immediately became the best-read feature of the magazine, rivalled only by Leonard Feather's *Blindfold Test.*

The career of Blind Orange Adams blossomed during those years. Soon there was mail about him, and DeMicheal went so far as to rent a postal box and set up the Blind Orange Adams Appreciation Society. Eventually, this would lead to a problem.

Don blossomed, too. He was tall, with a slight stoop. He had a long face, sharp features, straight dark hair, and a deep-toned

Mediterranean skin. And he had a sense of humor beyond anything he had ever revealed in Louisville.

We used to hang out with all the Chicago musicians—Johnny Pate, Eddie Harris, Art Hodes (who became a particularly close friend of Don's), George Brunies, Dick Marx, John Frigo, Ahmad Jamal, Ira Sullivan, Cy Touff, Joe Farrell, Johnny Griffin, and so many more. Don tended to hang with the older school of musicians, I hung with the beboppers, but the division was not strict. Don deepened my understanding of the older styles of jazz. But he was also close friends with John Coltrane.

One night he was hanging out with John at the Sutherland Lounge. John played a quirky melodic figure that puzzled DeMicheal. After the set, he sang it to John and asked him the reason for it. "Oh *that,*" John said, "I was just trying to get the rhythm section to tighten up."

Don had lunch with Paul Desmond, Dave Brubeck, and Dizzy Gillespie. Both Dizzy's quintet and the Brubeck Quartet were about to go to Europe. Dizzy suggested that they do a concert together in Berlin, then tour France, Scandinavia, the Far East... "Ah yes," Desmond said. "Today Germany, tomorrow the world." DeMicheal chuckled over that for days.

At that time, *Down Beat*'s office was on the fourth or fifth floor of an old building at 203 West Monroe Street, just west of the Loop. A wrecking crew set to work tearing down a similarly venerable building across the street from us. Some of those old buildings were exceptionally well made, and day after day the big

Hugo Friedhofer (1901-1981), standing drunkenly atop a table at some Bohemian San Francisco revel when he was 24 years old: "Oh God! It's taking us all so long to die!"

crane would swing its great steel wrecking ball and smash in some more of the wall, pulverize more of the reinforced concrete. And every day at noon, on our way to lunch, Don and I would stop for ten minutes or so among all the other sidewalk superintendents to contemplate the slow progress of this destruction.

One day we came out to observe that the process was almost completed. The ruins were now only about one story high, and falling fast. The ground around was a plane of broken brick and other rubble. And suddenly Don pulled a folded paper from the inside pocket of his suitcoat, began shoving the other gawkers aside as if on urgent business, and ran toward the ruins yelling at the top of his voice, "Wait a minute! We've got the wrong building!"

Once I wrote something in *Down Beat* that Charles Mingus didn't like. Mingus was of course prone to threaten with dire physical consequences anyone who aroused his ire. He once pulled this on Oscar Pettiford, who knocked him flat on the spot. On another occasion, he sent a threat to Oscar Peterson, who replied, "You can tell Mingus that if he so much as raises a finger to me—death! Nothing less. Death!" One young saxophonist in his group was so afraid of Mingus that he carried a holstered .32 automatic on the bandstand. In truth, I liked Mingus, and some of his most aberrant actions struck me as the funniest possible responses to a world that is flagrantly insane. And I never actually knew him to hurt anyone. But he threatened to, and he was big.

And so I got a call from Mingus in New York, objecting to what I had written. He was calm at first, but his rage gradually rose, and finally he screamed, "You're a dirty white motherfucker!" And he hung up.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, he called back. "Gene? This's Mingus. I shouldn't have spoken to you that way. We should be able to discuss this like gentlemen." And then his anger took over again, and he began to crescendo, and finally, with another scream of "You're a dirty white motherfucker!" he hung up again.

This happened several more times in the course of the morning, and always he ended with the same epithet and hung up. Finally, he introduced a variant. "I feel like getting on a plane," he said, "and flying out to Chicago, and coming up to your office, and I'll pick you up and throw you over all the desks and then run down and catch you, so I don't break your puny back." Believe me, that's verbatim: so colorful a speech is not readily forgotten. Then, after calling me a dirty white motherfucker yet again, he hung up, and I heard no more from him.

I told DeMicheal what had happened and, when Ted Williams came by to deliver some photos, told him about it as well. Ted suggested we go out that night to hear Oscar Peterson and forget it. But late that afternoon, our switchboard operator said, "Gene, there was a call from the airport from a man called Mingus. He says he's on his way in to see you." (Only later that evening did I find out that DeMicheal had put her up to it.) Five o'clock arrived, and still no Mingus.

That evening Ted and Don and I went to hear Oscar at London House. After about the second set, Oscar and Ted and I were sitting in a booth, discussing *l'affaire* Mingus. And Ted said, "I don't know what you're so upset about, Gene. I don't think anybody takes this seriously, except you and Mingus." Oscar choked with laughter. And Ted said, "Anyway, to make you feel better, I brought you something." And he pulled out a sap, a police blackjack probably obtained from some cop. "Carry this for a while," Ted said. I did, too. But Mingus cooled off and when I saw him next, we were on cordial terms again.

Don was playing gigs around Chicago, on both vibes and drums. And Blind Orange Adams was becoming the legend we always had claimed he was.

At that time, I used to hang out a lot with Eddie Harris. And Eddie, who had grown up in the church, would sing funny satires on the blues as we rode around from one club to another, visiting friends.

One day I got a letter from a New York label, specializing in authentic folk music, saying that they were anxious to locate Blind Orange Adams, because they wanted to record him! I tried a desperate ploy. I wrote to the company, saying that Blind Orange didn't trust white people. And the only ones he would deal with were DeMicheal and me. He would agree to do the album only if DeMicheal and I produced it. And I planned, of course, to record—Eddie Harris.

The company smelled a rat. They became insistent about meeting Blind Orange. I can no longer remember what we did to resolve the problem, but I seem to recall that Don wrote a story about his death in a car crash.

Don taught me things, and I taught him things. We were a good team, and we put out a good magazine, with the help of Jack Tynan and many more. Don told somebody once that I was the toughest son-of-a-bitch he had ever worked for—and that he had learned everything he knew about writing from me. I have received few compliments I prize as much.

And he was a good critic, because he had learned to write well, and he was a *musician.* You can hear him on drums in some recordings with Art Hodes. He had his opinions—we all do—but he was fair, and he knew his subject.

The situation for me was becoming increasingly untenable. John Maher—the Old Man, as everyone called him—was perpetually pressuring me not to put black musicians on the cover. Once, in a fit of exasperation, I pointed that out of the magazine's own popularity poll winners, 34 of 37 were black.

Maher insisted that black faces on the cover hurt magazine sales

in the south. And I said, somewhat hyperbolically, "Southerners don't listen to jazz anyway, they listen to hillbilly music." As Don put it: "We don't have but two readers in Atlanta."

One day Lou Didier, president of the magazine—a position somewhere between Chuck Suber, the publisher, and the Old Man—came into my office and said, "Mr. Maher says to tell you: absolutely no more Negroes on the cover."

"Then you go back to Mr. Maher," I said, "and tell him something for me: I quit."

Didier went into Chuck Suber's office and told him he'd have to reason with me because I was going to resign.

"Why?" Chuck asked.

And Lou told him.

"Then you can tell Mr. Maher something for me too," Chuck said. "I quit too." Chuck Suber, whom I already considered a friend, gained my undying respect that day. And so the racial issue lay dormant, at least for a time.

But the issue that finally tore it for me involved our art director, Bob Billings. I had hired Bob, an extremely imaginative young artist, away from *Playboy,* and if *Down Beat* was a handsome magazine during the years DeMicheal and I were there, the credit goes to Bob Billings. Bob gave it a fresh look, and I am constantly looking at magazines, even today, and seeing design tricks, little things with graphics, that Bob invented at *Down Beat.*

Maher was always talking about "broadening the base" of the magazine—which meant covering bad music and putting people like the Kingston Trio, who had nothing to do with jazz, on the cover. And he was always complaining about the budget. He was also always taking members of the staff to expensive lunches and dinners. He enjoyed spending money at such times, the *grand seigneur* dispensing his largesse to his underlings. But he was tight beyond belief about salaries and the magazine. He didn't need money, but jazz desperately needed a good magazine.

He would call staff meetings in his office and pontificate on the three subjects about which he knew so little: publishing (which is not the same as printing); journalism; and jazz. We'd come out of these meetings, DeMicheal and I, shaking our heads. "My God," Don said once, "it feels as if we just spent an hour in Alice in Wonderland."

The Old Man went on one of his periodic cut-the-budget surges. He told me we would have to fire Bob Billings. Correction. He told me that *I* would have to fire Bob Billings. I defended Bob as an invaluable contributor to the magazine; the Old Man said he contributed nothing. (Nothing? I had laid that magazine out *myself* before Bob arrived, and the layout was a full-time job.) He told me I had two weeks to give Bob his notice.

The NAMM convention was held in Chicago—the National Association of Music Manufacturers. *Down Beat* used to put out—and still does—a daily publication during the days of that convention, made up largely of the publicity handouts the manufacturers gave us. We always assembled the entire staff, including the advertising people, from the east and west coasts to do it.

One of the advertising men was trying to screw Chuck Suber out of his job, and since rumor had spread that I was about to resign—I had mentioned to a few people that I'd quit before I'd fire Billings—all sorts of sly maneuvers were under way in the hotel suite rented by the magazine.

In fact I had already written my resignation. It was in my pocket. I went with Jack Tynan to lunch at London House and asked him if he wanted my job. He was, in my opinion, the man best qualified for it. Jack said, "Are you crazy? I wouldn't have your job on a platter."

And so we headed back to the hotel. I thought about all the dirty little tactics going on. Jack said something to me and I said, "Shut up! I'm writing a song."

"You're writing a *what?*" Tynan said.

"A song," I said. "Cool it. Let me think."

When we reached the hotel suite, Tynan entered first. I left the door open behind me, stood at military attention, saluted, and sang a march I had composed in my head between London House and the hotel. I have never yet had the nerve to sing it in a nightclub, although Roger Kellaway recently wrote me a chart on it, but that day, in full Nelson Eddy voice, mindful of all the skullduggeries around me, I sang it:

It's National Fuck-Your-Buddy Week.
Don't hesitate to use the shaft.
And during this National Fuck-Your-Buddy Week,
just shove it all the way up to the haft.

During this National Fuck-Your-Buddy Week,
be resolute and ruthless and you'll win.
It's easy once you learn it:
just shove it in and turn it.
It's National Fuck-Your-Buddy Week.

And so I left *Down Beat.* I went for a while to South America, and six months after that rhyming resignation I wrote *Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars,* a fairly direct translation of Antonio Carlos Jobim's *Corcovado.* After that I wrote a lot of songs in New York, with Jobim and others, some of whom I had known before and some of whom I met in Jim and Andy's. Don was my successor, and he was a good editor. He ran the magazine differently than I would have, but as Art Farmer said when he formed his own group after leaving Gerry Mulligan's, "When I'm with Gerry, it's my job to play for Gerry's group. In my group it's my job to play for my group." Sometimes I wrote articles for Don, and then I worked for him.

Whenever Don came to New York, we'd have dinner together and laugh. Years after I left the magazine, he told me he still got an occasional letter to the Blind Orange Adams Appreciation Society.

One evening in Jim and Andy's, I said something about when I had fired Ralph Gleason. "What'd'you mean, *you* fired Gleason?" Don said. "I fired Gleason. Don't you remember? Your last day there, I asked you if you had any parting words of advice, and you said, 'Yeah—fire Gleason.' And I did."

Frank Kofsky, in a book about jazz and black nationalism, said that Gleason was fired from *Down Beat* for being pro-Castro. Since Don is not here to correct the record, I want to do it for him. Don fired Ralph Gleason—and had I stayed at the magazine a few more weeks I'd have done it myself—for being a prima donna about any editing done to his prose, which was usually slapdash, sometimes incoherent and sometimes even ungrammatical; for writing over length; and above all for missing deadlines. Castro had nothing to do with it, although I am sure Ralph circulated that story to explain away his dismissal.

One evening Don called me from Chicago. "The Old Man's dead," he said.

"So?" I said.

"Is that all the reaction you have?"

"Yeah," I said. "Everybody dies." Don had nurtured a strange fantasy that one day John Maher would turn control of the magazine over to him. I told him at the time that he was out of his mind and should re-read Machiavelli.

Eventually Don too left *Down Beat.* He worked for some years for an engineering magazine. I had circulated a memo to those

who wrote regularly for *Down Beat* saying, as best I remember, "The first purpose of a magazine is to be a good magazine, whether it is about music, sports, or collecting butterflies. If it is not a good magazine, readable, reliable, and entertaining, it cannot serve the needs of its subject." Don learned that, and learned it well, and so he was an extremely good editor of an engineering magazine. In later years, while maintaining a separate career as a musician, he worked on a magazine concerned with the collection of *objets d'art*. That is not as far-fetched as it might seem—not for a little boy who went through Louisville asking for dusty old records that nobody much valued but he.

Up to the end, he played with such musicians as Kenny Davern and Dick Wellstood and Art Hodes and in 1981 appeared at the North Carolina jazz festival. He earned their respect as a musician, as he had earned mine as a writer and as an editor.

I never knew his wife very well and hardly knew his son at all. The world Don and I shared was one of professional cameraderies. It was a musical world, a journalistic world, and sometimes a humorous world. Don died February 4, 1982, of liver cancer. He was 53.

Mark Twain said once that every man is a genius if you can only place him. I have done some things in my life of which I am proud, others of which I am not. Don DeMicheal's career is one of the things I am proud of. I have an intense love of talent and once, out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw some, and I gave a man a chance.

And at least Don DeMicheal didn't die baking a bun in Louisville.

Fingers IV

The Duchess of Bedworthy is one of the major minor figures in jazz history. Though not a musician herself, she had an influence on the music's development that is nothing less than puzzling.

Little is known about her early life in England. Ivor Novello denied to his dying day ever having met her. Leonard Feather's failure to mention her in his *Encyclopedia of Jazz* must be considered a major oversight—if it *was* an oversight—in an otherwise estimable and scholarly work.

She was descended on her mother's side from a chambermaid of the mistress of Charles the Second and through her father from Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. Her grandfather was raised to the peerage for smuggling Limburger cheese into England for Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's homesick consort, and gefilte fish for Disraeli.

Always a lover of American music, the duchess—Blinky, as she was known to her intimates—tried when she was in her twenties to induce the Scots Guards pipe band to march to a medley of Cole Porter tunes. Later she almost succeeded in arranging a Fats Waller concert by the band of the Coldstream Guards, but at this point her family became incensed on learning she had been spending weekends at Stonehenge with the members of both bands. Despite her protestations that she was merely engaged in research on the fertility rites of the Druids, she was sent on remittance to America. "After all," her Aunt Mathilda said at the time, "we had the Yanks for four years. It's only fair."

Arriving in New York, Blinky immediately made her presence felt among the denizens of 52nd Street. In her continuing efforts in behalf of Anglo-American relations, she offered to put up her own money to record an album to be titled *Charlie Parker Plays George Formby*. Tadd Dameron reportedly was writing a chart on *Me Auntie Mabel's Knickers Have Got Holes in the Back* when Bird disappeared. She never heard from him again, except for a picture postcard from Camarillo.

Nothing daunted, the duchess then tried to promote an LP to be called *Duke Ellington Meets Gracie Fields* and another—one of her more imaginative projects—titled *Joe Albany Plays Melachrino*. Nothing came of either venture, although Duke told her he loved her madly.

The duchess was frequently seen at Minton's and the Apollo during this period, urging her favorites on with cries of, "I say, too much!" and "Far out, what?" But for several years after that, her movements can be traced only intermittently. It is known that she spent some time in Ottawa, where her efforts to get the band of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to record favorite selections from *Rose Marie* earned her *persona non gratis* status with the Canadian government.

It was during this period that the duchess became strung out on M&M's. At the age of 42, she kicked her habit on the Rockefeller alcohol substitution program, and in six months lost more weight than Charles Mingus and Jackie Gleason combined. But the years of neglect had taken their toll and when she next turned up, she was modelling for the Allbright brothers. Then, in a desperate fight to restore her dignity, she flew to Brazil for plastic surgery—a face-lift so extensive that it had the unexpected though not unwelcome side effect of raising her bustline four inches. The operation left her face permanently in B-flat.

Shortly after her return from Brazil, she met Fingers Wombat for the first time. She had dropped by the Semihemidemiquaver to catch a set by Isabel Ringin. Settling at her favorite table with a coterie of admirers, she saw Fingers, hunched in his characteristic cadaverous curve over the keyboard, and said, "My word!" Fingers, catching a glimpse of her at the same moment, said, "Outasight."

Introduced after the set, the duchess and Fingers felt an immediate rapport and repaired to a dark corner of the club. It was so dark that Fingers took off his shades to see her, then put them back on. Blinky poured out her heart to Fingers, whose playing, she said, she had found obtuse, remote, inaccessible and obscure—all qualities that she admired. She told him of her struggle to overcome her M&M habit, her trip to Brazil, and her operation.

Wild with enthusiasm, Fingers said he would like to record an album in her honor and immediately sketched an outline on the back of an AFM envelope containing a notice that he was behind in his union dues. The tunes would include *That Face, You've Changed, Black and Blue, Smile, Elevation, Groovin' High,* and *Tummy Tucker Time*. As a tribute to her face-lift, he told her, he would use as a unifying motif an altered major-seventh chord— F-A-C#-E.

Blinky—Fingers was already on a first-name basis with the duchess—was aglow at the prospect. But Fingers fell into a melancholy, thence into a swoon. When the duchess asked what was troubling him, he said, "Money," and showed her his contract with Honest Records. Blinky assured him that money was no problem: she would finance the album.

The next day, Fingers made plans to reassemble his old octet. This was to prove more difficult than he anticipated. Switzer Land had joined the Flower Children and was now convinced he was a geranium. Tom Bone had abandoned music to become a surgeon. He had in fact made history as the first man ever to perform a pre-frontal lobotomy on himself, thus becoming the only person ever to be featured on the covers of both *Metronome* and *The American Journal of Neurology*. He was no longer interested in music and spent his days quietly in an office with an "Out to Lunch" sign on the door.

Fingers finally elected to record in a trio context and began rehearsals with bassist Simi Lowe and drummer Willie Rushmore.

(to be continued)