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FRISHBERG
I'm Hip

OTTAWA

The art of the lyric has fallen on sad times. Just how sad is seen in the fact that the music department of Oberlin College offers a course on the songs of the Beatles. It does not of course offer courses on Kern, Gershwin, Arlen, Youmanns, Schwartz, Dietz, Harburg, Porter, or Mercer. And indeed if some of the deciding powers there are in their forties, it is possible that they have never even heard of these people. We have been hearing for some time the lament that our young are uneducated — so long, indeed, that we have begun to realize that the uneducated young have moved up into positions of authority, not only in government and journalism but in the sacred halls of academe. In other words, a great many of our educators are themselves uneducated.

Since the rise of radio in the 1920s and then the proliferation of all sorts of devices for the reproduction of music, we've been virtually saturated in popular songs. There is music in the Metro in Paris. In the 1930s, literate songs heard on the radio were memorized, shaping the speech of the young. But since the advent of Elvis Presley in the 1950s, and songs of the ilk of *You Ain't Nothin' But a Hound Dog*, what the young have been exposed to is massive doses of illiteracy.

Senior journalists all over the world tell me that it has become very difficult to find young trainee reporters who can even spell, much less write. This has been so for some time, and now many of the semi-literate have risen in corporations, as they have in the field of "education", so that we have editors who do not themselves have sufficient command of language to correct the work of their even more ignorant juniors.

There is no question that popular music has been a major force in the debasement of language, considerably assisted by television.

All this makes the collected work of Dave Frishberg a sort of sunny little island in a sea of crap. Dave is a national treasure. Foolishly misguided, stubbornly anachronistic, he persists in the folly of writing urbane lyrics and music for songs that range from the corrosively funny (*My Attorney Bernie*, which is about the wearisome invasion of all our lives by lawyers and accountants) to the almost unendurably tender. The only other living lyricist I can think of who has Dave's scope and flair for the eccentric is Jake Thakray in England.

By serendipity, Dave was playing a solo gig in the Cock and Lion Room at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa when I was there. Back in California, I never see him, but now we had several days to hang out, listen to tapes, talk about songs and song-writing, and clamber around in big old locomotives in the transportation museum at the edge of the city.

I was delighted to discover that Dave suffers tortures when writing. It would have been discouraging indeed to find that he doesn't endure the pangs that I do. But such is the seemingly effortless naturalism of his lyrics that I felt vaguely that he must toss them off without worry. There is a complete lack of strain in his work, no matter how clever it is.

One of his songs that particularly fascinates me is the ballad *You Are There*, music by Johnny Mandel. I felt that the girl in the story is dead, although nothing specifically says so. And I thought of her as Irish. This was close: Dave said that he did think of her as dead — and as English. The song was not specifically written for Irene Kral, but Irene was entering on her final time when he wrote it, and she was the first to perform it. Irene was very much loved.

Dave doesn't like to see his lyrics quoted in print, but I have to quote this one.

In the evening,
when the kettle's on for tea,
an old familiar feeling
settles over me,
and it's your face I see,
and I believe that you are there.

In a garden,
when I stop to touch a rose,
and feel the petals
soft and sweet against my nose,
I smile and I suppose
that somehow maybe you are there.

When I'm dreaming,
and I find myself awake
without a warning,
and I rub my eyes
and fantasize,
and all at once I
I realize

it's morning
and my fantasy is fading
like a distant star at dawn.
My dearest dream is gone.
I often think
there's just one thing to do:
pretend the dream is true,
and tell myself that you
are there.

Regardless of whether one notices the craftsmanship involved — kettle's, settles, petals, rose, nose, suppose — the effect on the ear is seductive.

The song is in contrast to Dave's satiric material, which offers some of the tartest social commentary around, although, surprisingly, Dave says he doesn't mean it as such. *The Wheelers and Dealers* portrays the greed of our era, cresting in the lines:

Soon,
we'll all be zoomin'
up to the moon,
to find some peace up there,
and make a home.

But the wheelers and dealers
are getting there first
and setting up shop in the craters,
to eat beyond hunger
and drink beyond thirst,
like unsatisfiable satyrs.

Dave's songs are words-and-music portraits of people and places and situations. One of them is called *Another Song about Paris*, and it pokes fun at all the songs written for that much sung-about city. Another song, *Van Lingo Mungo*, is nothing but a list of great but under-celebrated baseball players. (Dave is a serious baseball freak.)

One of his best-known songs, of course, is *I'm Hip*, an acid sketch of the kind of person who suffers from hipper-than-thou disease. The song has been around for a while now, and it has become, like an F. Scott Fitzgerald story, dated, firmly fixed in its period, and thus, while still funny, a fragrant evocation of a time that has passed: "I even call my girlfriend 'man', I'm so hip . . ."

The lyric, interestingly, was written before the music, a procedure that usually produces something less than interesting melodies. Dave couldn't find a tune for it, so he gave it to Bob Dorough, another of my favorite songwriters, and Bob wrote the music, which uses a lot of bebop cliches, making the song subtly more clever. In performing it, Dave sings every worn-out "hip" ending you ever heard.

Dave is of a school of pianist-singer that includes Dorough, Ben Sidran, Blossom Dearie, and Mose Allison. None of them goes after a conventionally pretty sound. Each is a thorough-going musician, and Dave is in fact a fine straight-ahead jazz pianist, comfortable in all schools. For all these performers, the song, not the singer, is the thing.

Aside from the albums in which he performs as a side man (Dick Sudhalter's *Friends with Jazz*, for example) Dave has four albums currently on the market, *The Dave Frishberg Songbook*, Volumes 1 and 2, on Omnisound, and two on Concord Jazz. An older album, *Oklahoma Toad*, on CTI, is hard to find. They are cornucopias.

The Ottawa gig wasn't the happiest for Dave. The Chateau Laurier is next door to the Parliament Buildings, and Canadian solons, who patronize the room, are no more cultivated, sensitive, or sober than their American counterparts in Washington. It is a dark thought that the destiny of mankind rests in the hands of such boobs. Some nights it was so noisy that Dave threw in the towel and played standards, rather than sing his own material. I remember one drunken lady who walked right onto the bandstand and asked him for *Don't Cry for Me, Argentina.*

She wasn't hip.

A Portrait of Woody

"You know," I said on sudden impulse, "you are a very great man."

"No," said the man in a face I first knew from photos in magazines when I was a boy. "No I'm not."

What prompted the statement was a certain flash I had on the scope of his whole career, and perhaps too the keen awareness that Charlotte was no longer in this house. If I could feel her absence, what must Woody Herman be feeling on this day soon after Christmas of 1984?

"It's tough at times," he said when we talked of her. "I'm all right as long as I keep moving."

He met her in San Francisco when she was dancing in a musical called *The Nine O'Clock Review* and he was playing saxophone in Tom Gerun's band. They were 17. Tony Martin at that time also played saxophone in the band. When Woody turned 50, Martin sent him a telegram saying, "You may be admitting it but I'm not." And now Woody, who was born May 16, 1913, was 71. And Charlotte had been gone more than two years.

She was one of the nicest — there is no other word for it — women I ever knew. She must have been an arresting beauty when he met her. Even in her last years, when her Norwegian redhead's skin had taken on a fine crepe texture, the classic bones in that face kept her quite striking, someone you noticed when you entered a room. And she had a dancer's classic posture. She was kind and soft-spoken, with a dry sense of humor.

Woody had brought her to this house in 1946. He bought it from Humphrey Bogart. It is poised high in the hills above Sunset Strip on one of those narrow roads that twist improbably up the arroyas. From the street it looks like a tiny bungalow but it descends a steep declivity and you enter it, actually, from the top. You glance to the right into the kitchen, then down a curved flight of stairs into a living room that seems taller than it is wide. From the bottom of those steps you see out across a railed deck over Los Angeles, a sea of small buildings washing around curious islands of skyscrapers that were not there when Woody and Charlotte came here. Ingrid, their daughter, was new-born then. Now, after a career of her own as a folk musician in Nashville, she lives here with her husband. Her son and daughter are themselves grown. And Woody still comes home from the road to this house.

Woody broke up the so-called First Herd that year, 1946. Various explanations have seen print, but none of them, Woody told me in some late-night conversation years ago, was correct. He gave me the real reason.

"Is it all right if I tell it now?" I said.

"Sure," he answered.

In that earlier conversation he said, "It had nothing to do with dissension in the band or anything like that. I was destroying Charlotte."

On a December night, after a dance at the University of Indiana, Woody told his men — Chubby Jackson, Flip Phillips, Neal Hefti, Bill Harris, John LaPorta, Don Lamond, the whole fantastic exuberant crew — that it was over.

Some people date the end of the big band era from that December, for that month the bands of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, Les Brown, Jack Teagarden, Benny Carter, and Ina Ray Hutton all broke up, along with Woody's.

He was then at the peak of his fame as well as his young manhood. He was 33 years old. Bandleaders then were movie stars. There were reports that Woody had made the sudden discovery that there were other women in the world besides the girl he had married so young. And Charlotte was stuck here in this house with a new baby. She became what they now call cross-addicted to pills and liquor. "You start mixing Nembutol with booze, baby," he said, "and you're on your way home." (He has an odd gift for colorful metaphor. Years ago he said nightclubs gave him the clausters, and I've been using the expression ever since.)

And so he folded the band and came home. Charlotte joined Alcoholics Anonymous. "She didn't have as many problems as she thought she did," Woody said, with that kind of benign tolerance he extends to the foibles of our species. "She thought alcohol was the problem, but she was really hooked on the pills." Later, when she had it all under control, she would now and then have wine with dinner. In time she gave even that up, and Woody cut his own drinking back to an occasional Heineken's. Woody said to me a few years ago, laughing, "I went to an A.A. meeting with Charlotte and my old band was sitting there."

Woody and Charlotte put the pieces of their marriage back together, and in later years, whenever she could, she would travel with him, all over the world. She accepted the life of hotel rooms and the endless runs down America's long highways. Woody liked traveling by car. I never saw a husband and wife more devoted to each other. There was something special about her attitude to his work. Every musician is only too familiar with the phenomenon of the bandleader's wife, the lady who is hipper than hip and knows how everybody should play and live their lives and who should be hired and who should be fired. Charlotte was the antithesis of that. She had a subtle sense of how close to let people get to her — close enough to make them comfortable, not close enough to jeopardize Woody's authority as leader. She had a way of being warm and distant at the same time.

Woody's retirement after the First Herd lasted seven months. By the time the itch came over him again, the marriage was in good condition and he organized what came to be called, accurately or no, the Second Herd. Of all the great jazz band leaders of the 1930s and '40s, four continued more or less without interruption into the 1970s, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Stan Kenton, and Woody Herman. Basie, Ellington, and Kenton are now gone. Charlie Barnet lives in retirement in Palm Springs. Dizzy Gillespie and Benny Carter are still active, but mostly with small groups. There is, currently, an Artie Shaw band, but it is led by Dick Johnson, although Artie supervised and rehearsed it. Woody coined the term "ghost bands" for those, like the Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey orchestras, led now by someone else. The Shaw band is an anomaly. If it is a ghost band, it is directed by a very live and vigorous ghost. Shaw's semi-emergence from semi-retirement precludes neat historical packaging, as is his wont, but in any case only Basie, Ellington, Kenton and Herman continued more or less *uninterruptedly* (to put a slight strain on the point) into the recent past. And now only Woody, of the four, is left. Of the "sweet" bands, only Fred Waring's, which was really a concert organization, with choir, and Guy Lombardo's, lasted. Both men men are gone.

"Why do you keep on?" I said, knowing full well that he must get this question constantly.

"Two reasons," he said without hesitation. "The first is my love of music. The second is that I have an overwhelming need to make a living."

"The I.R.S.?"

"Yes."

"Are you still paying that?"

"Yes, and it gets bigger. My lawyer is trying to get a settlement for once and for all, and I am hoping he will."

"Can I tell that story too?"

"Sure."

Woody's manager for years was a corpulent diabetic ex-marine — he had been badly shot up on one South Pacific atoll or another — named Abe Turchin. Abe was what used to be called a character. He would sit there in Woody's office in New York, his desk a great mound of paper, watching a football game on television, playing solitaire, carrying on a conversation with some drop-in, then grabbing the telephone and booking the band with consummate ingenuity, coming up with such things as supermarket openings in places you never heard of. He looked not unlike the late Jack E. Leonard, with whom he was in fact friends, and even talked a lot like him. Abe was a fountain of pessimism whose response to any promising situation was (use Jack Leonard's voice to hear it): "It'll never happen, it'll never happen." To the point where one of his friends said one day, "But Abe, we have to believe in something!" We all loved Abe and said he had a heart of gold. And we all knew he gambled. But after all, it was his money. Or was it? For two years during the late 1960s, Abe gambled away the money Woody thought had been paid to the government for his income taxes. When the government stepped in, it was discovered that Abe hadn't filed withholding on the musicians, either. Woody was held responsible for all of it. He came close to going to prison. And he has been paying those taxes ever since. He told Artie Shaw a year or two ago, "I'll be on the road the rest of my life." And Artie said later, "What was done to Woody is cruel."

On another occasion, one of the band's players, who functioned also as its road manager, dropped the payroll on the gambling tables in Reno. At the time I was astonished that Woody not only didn't prosecute him, he didn't even fire him. He said, "If I fire him, I'll never get my money back." That was of course a plausible explanation of his own behavior, but the fact is that it wasn't and isn't in him to take a spiteful action. He is the most forgiving of men, though if he does take it into his mind at last that he dislikes someone, he is immovable about it. Not surprisingly, you would not dare say a word against Woody Herman to the man who dropped the payroll and was allowed to pay it back. He is another member of the phantom Woody Herman Alumni Association whose attitude borders on the reverent. "How do you maintain such equanimity?" I asked.

"Well," Woody said, "I think I learned it from Tom Gerun. It was during the Depression, the end of the Wall Street crash. He got a telegram, right while we were on the bandstand, telling him that he had been wiped out financially. He went white, and said, 'Boys, tonight we're going to have a party.' And we had a band party. I think that had something to do with shaping my philosophy."

The first time I saw the Woody Herman band, probably in 1946, probably just weeks or months before he packed it in and went home to Charlotte, I was struck by his shoes, beautiful black and white loafers. They had a look of levity, almost of flight, and they were for the period very avant-garde footwear. Woody's father made his shoes for him. By hand. Otto Herman, whom I met once or twice about 1962, was a small and (it seemed to me) sweet-natured man, a German-American shoemaker who was in charge of quality control at Nunn-Bush in Milwaukee. Woody's mother was Polish — born in Poland, in fact, and brought by her parents to America as an infant. When Woody took the band to Poland some years ago, the Polish jazz fans knew all about his mother and claimed him as one of their own, as the Russians claim Bill Evans. He was like royalty to them. (American Polish jokes fall flat in Europe. The European image of the Poles is of a quick, intelligent, cultivated, good-looking people.)

One of the first things that happened to Woody on the road, after he left Milwaukee, was getting shot. The Gerun band was playing the Grenada Cafe in Chicago, a front for the Al Capone mob. Every nightclub in Chicago was of course a mob front. It was in fact the Grenada Cafe that Guy Lombardo had played only a few years before when some gunsels entered with Thompsons and wasted the place, sending Guy and the other musicians diving for cover. On the bill at the Grenada with Gerun was Fuzzy Knight, a comedian who would make a name in movies. When they finished work at three in the morning, they would go over to the Grand Terrace Ballroom to hear the Earl Hines band, which worked later than they did.

"One night," Woody said, "we were in the Grand Terrace, feeling no pain. Somebody spotted that Fuzzy had a big diamond on his finger. And we were tipping everybody like it was going out of style. So they figured us for live ones. It was winter, and when we came out of there at five or six o'clock in the morning, it was still dark. We got into my little car and headed back to our hotel. We got about a block when we were stopped by a traffic light. A big.

black sedan drove up, and when that happened in those days, you thought something was going to happen to you. Three guys jumped out. One of them had a gun. And they kept opening the door of my car. It was a roadster, and the side curtains weren't up. So they were scuffling with us, and they wanted us to get into the big car. Well that was the thing that put is in shock, man. We weren't going to go for a ride, right? So everybody starts flailing around with their arms."

"You were fighting them in the car?"

"Yeah, which is the hard way. And finally, seeing that nothing was happening, these guys figured it was taking too much time, and so the one with the gun shot into the floorboards, and my leg happened to be in the way."

"Which one?" I said with an old journalist's concern for detail.

"The *right* one," he said.

"Do you still have the scar?"

"Yeah, where it went in and where it came out."

"It went right through?"

"Yeah."

"Then what happened?"

"We got out of the car, and they started to frisk Fuzzy. The only reason I didn't get knocked out is that I was wearing a Homburg hat. They kept hitting me with something, and the Homburg saved my head. A crowd began to gather. And I began to get bored with the whole thing and I walked off."

"With a bullet wound?"

"Well I was dragging the leg a little. And I ran into this big black cop."

"They had black cops in Chicago as far back as the 1930s?"

"On the South Side anyway."

"Then?"

"He said to me, 'What's the matter with you, boy?' I told him what was happening and said that if he looked he could still see them. He said, 'You're drunk, boy.' But by then the crowd was growing, and those guys took off."

Any musician who has ever thrown up the original tape of a recording session on the machine and heard the between-the-takes chit-chat, the laughter of forgotten conversations, knows the odd feeling of looking down a telescope into time gone. We are confronted suddenly with a curious image of the past: a 17-year-old boy in a Homburg, drinking in gangster speakeasies, and driving his own roadster. The fact is, however, that Woody was already an eight-year veteran of the road.

"When I was a little kid," he said, "working in presentation theater, the vaudevillians had one expression for all audiences. They called them the Great Unwashed. And that's where I gained my first philosophy of the business, at nine years of age."

"You were already playing professionally at nine?"

"No. I was a song and dance kid. I was on the road when I was nine. When I came back from that trip I bought the saxophone and then a clarinet. And started studying."

"How did you get into the business so early?"

"Actually I started before that, in kid reviews in Milwaukee. It was my father, really. He was the one who was crazy about show business."

"So after the shoot-up in Chicago, you went out to San Francisco and met Charlotte, right?"

"Right."

"But you weren't married immediately."

"No. After *The Nine O'Clock Review*, Charlotte was in another show, which traveled across the country from San Francisco to New York, with Barbara Stanwyck and her husband, Frank Faye, who was a very funny man. But he wanted to take a show back to New York, to prove he was a great director and producer, I suppose. And of course, Miss Stanwyck paid the tab. They finally got to New York and the show lasted a week or so.

"Charlotte and I had been romancing over the telephone and by letter. She finished a radio show or something in New York and she stopped in Chicago when I was still with Tom Gerun, and I arranged for her to meet my mother, because I was trying to prepare her. I was going to ask her to marry me. I was doing my midwestern type family business.

"It went on for three years. We were married when we were twenty."

Woody's next band was that of Gus Arnheim, after which he moved to the band of Isham Jones. That move was to set his direction forever.

The Isham Jones orchestra was classed as one of the "sweet" bands. But most such bands were corny, an expression whose origin, according to Artie Shaw, lies in the idea of corn-fed: rural, backward, hay-in-the-hair, as opposed to urban, hip, *au courant*. The Isham Jones orchestra was a sort of hip sweet band. It made use of a clarinet section in ballads in a way that would turn up later in the Tommy Dorsey orchestra. "Oh yes," Woody said, "I think you heard that with Tommy's band. Our chief arranger when I was with Isham was Gordon Jenkins." It was a very good band, with good charts and good players. But Isham Jones, a saxophonist, pianist, and composer with a big ASCAP rating — he wrote *On the Alamo, Swingin' Down the Lane, There Is No Greater Love* (which Woody would later record), *You've Got Me Crying Again*, and *It's Funny to Everyone but Me* — decided in 1936, when he was 40, to quit the business. "I think Isham was at heart just a country boy," Woody said. "He opened a little music store in one of the Los Angeles suburbs. He would go into Hollywood and visit the music publishers and get free sheet music — you know, professional copies. Then he would sell them in the store. With all his money."

Woody and five other members of the band decided to form their own band, as a co-operative. They approached some other musicians, who joined them, and Woody was elected leader. He was 22. This was the so-named Band that Plays the Blues, which recorded for Decca. Arranger Joe Bishop wrote its first hit, *Woodchopper's Ball*, as well as its theme, *Blue Flame*, a conspicuous pun on a notorious locker room prank.

The band lasted nine years. In fact it did not break up but evolved into what came to be known as the First Herd. World War II was under way. Woody said, "As each member was drafted — I don't think anybody enlisted — I bought his stock in the band, and eventually I had all of it. I wanted to do something different with the band. I loved the voicings of the Duke Ellington band, and I got Dave Matthews to write for us. And I got Dizzy to write for us. He wrote one piece called *Down Under* and another called *Swing Shift*. Dizzy also played with us for a short time. I think it was a week we did at the Apollo."

Dizzy also wrote *Woody 'n' You* for the band, but by happenstance they never recorded it. It is noteworthy that Woody admired Dizzy's work as far back as 1943, before the bebop-versus-traditional fuss had really begun. That admiration is reflected in the 1945 Herman hit *Caldonia*. The soaring trumpet-section passage that electrified the band's young fans is actually a transcribed Dizzy Gillespie solo. In the Decca years, Woody made some records with guest soloists Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster, and Ray Nance from the Ellington band — further indication that

he was not interested in having simply another commercially successful orchestra. The transition from the Band that Plays the Blues to the First Herd was, then, more evolutionary than revolutionary. What made it seem revolutionary is that during its period of most rapid metamorphosis, it did not record. The American Federation of Musicians was enforcing Petrillo's folly, the deeply destructive recording ban. By the time it ended, Woody had moved to Columbia Records and he quickly recorded a backlog of material that had built up during the silence, the stuff that startled the fans, not to mention young musicians coming up: *Apple Honey, Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe, Northwest Passage, Caldonia, Goosey Gander*, and *Your Father's Mustache*. The band was wild and yet disciplined, loud, completely musical, irreverent, and very funny to hear and to see, with bassist Chubby Jackson laughing and shouting encouragement to his colleagues and lead trumpeter Pete Candoli leaping on-stage in a Superman costume to play his high-note solos. "Ah your father's mustache" was a catch phrase of the 1920s, an expression of skepticism that for some reason seemed funny, and when the band sang it in unison during the tune of the same name, it was wonderfully silly. There was a touch of Dadaism to the band, and to the young people who caught it, it was irresistible.

To an extent, the band's success was a matter of timing. But the timing was probably not a matter of chance. World War II was drawing to a close that year; Germany surrendered in May, Japan in August. And the band's giddy exuberance was no doubt what the public was in a mood to hear. At the same time, the band's spirit was surely a reflection of that general euphoria — the musicians were feeling it too. Indeed, Dave Tough was fresh back from that gruelling trip to the South Pacific with the Artie Shaw navy band. Woody made the first record for Columbia, *Apple Honey* (the name of an ingredient supposedly in Old Gold cigarets, which sponsored the band in network radio), on February 19, 1945, only weeks before the German surrender that was already known to be imminent, with a personnel that included Sonny Berman, Pete Candoli, Chuck Frankhauser, Carl Warwick, and Ray Wetzel, trumpets; Bill Harris, Ed Kiefer, and Ralph Pfeffner, trombones; Sam Marowitz and John LaPorta, alto saxophones, Pete Mondello and Flip Phillips, tenors; Skippy DeSair, baritone; Billy Bauer, guitar; Margie Hyams, vibraphone, Chubby Jackson, bass; and Dave Tough, drums. With that record, Herman became, although no one knew it at the time, one of the major figures in the history of jazz.

Later Conte Candoli, Ray Linn and Neal Hefti came into the trumpet section, and Tony Aless replaced Ralph Burns when Burns devoted his full time to writing for the band. Shorty Rogers joined them, and Don Lamond replaced tiny Dave Tough, a wealthy and very intelligent man who had a drinking problem and was found on a street, injured by a fall or a beating, and soon thereafter died. He was well-liked and widely admired. Leonard Feather told me recently, "I saw him only a few days before it happened. He looked terribly wasted."

After he dissolved that band near the end of 1946, Woody tried loafing and playing golf in the California sun and recording with pickup groups. The life soon palled and with his marriage seemingly restored to stability, he formed a new band in the fall of 1947, with Burns, Lamond, Rogers, Markowitz, and Marowitz held over from the previous band. The saxophone section included not two but three tenors, the players being Herbie Steward (later Al Cohn), Zoot Sims, and Stan Getz. The baritone saxophonist was Serge Chaloff. Jimmy Giuffre used the three tenors and baritone to get a distinctive sound in a composition he called *Four Brothers*, and Woody would later cut the sax section to that size.

This was the band of *Keen and Peachy, The Goof and I*, and the Ralph Burns suite *Summer Sequence*, from which the song (with Johnny Mercer lyrics) *Early Autumn* was derived. It was another superb Herman orchestra, but it was a band with troubles. "I was so naive," Woody said once with his chuckle, "that I couldn't figure out why the guys were falling asleep on the bandstand."

The heroin fashion was in full grim flower. And that band was extremely strung out. It was also a cocky and smart-assed band. Gerry Mulligan remembers it well. "I wrote a piece for that band," he said, and described the collective attitude. Some of its members looked smug when Woody soloed, because his style was rooted in an older tradition and he wasn't a hip bebopper as they were. And they all awaited their turns to solo. They played clever solos, too. "But Woody's," Gerry said, "was the only solo that had anything to do with the piece."

Eventually, Woody — who somehow combines the deepest naivete with a shrewd perception of people — began to be aware of what was wrong with his collection of sleeping beauties. And he found that Serge Chaloff was the band's druggist, as well as its number one junkie. Serge would hang a blanket in front of the back seats of the bus and behind it would dispense the stuff to colleagues. This led to an incident in Washington, D.C. "Can I tell that story too, now?" I asked Woody.

"Sure, why not?" he said, and laughed at the memory. "But the funniest part of it is Joe Venuti's reaction." And he retold the story.

The band not only looked bad, it sounded bad. And Woody, furious at what had happened to it, had a row right on the bandstand with "Mr. Chaloff," as he called him, emphasis on the first syllable.

"He was getting farther and farther out there," Woody said. "And the farther out he got the more he was sounding like a fagalah. He kept saying, 'Hey, Woody, baby, I'm straight, man, I'm clean.' And I shouted, 'Just play your goddamn part and shut up!'

"I was so depressed after that gig. There was this after-hours joint in Washington called the Turf and Grid. It was owned by a couple of guys with connections, book-makers. Numbers guys. Everybody used to go there. That night President Truman had a party at the White House, and afterwards all his guests went over to the Turf and Grid. They were seven deep at the bar, and I had to fight my way through to get a drink, man. All I wanted was to have a drink and forget it. And finally I get a couple of drinks, and it's hot in there, and I'm sweating, and somebody's got their hands on me, and I hear, 'Hey, Woody, baby, whadya wanna talk to me like that for? I'm straight, baby, I'm straight.' And it's Mr. Chaloff. And then I remember an old Joe Venuti bit. We were jammed in there, packed in, and . . . I peed down Serge's leg.

"You know, man, when you do that to someone, it takes a while before it sinks in what's happened to him. And when Serge realized, he let out a howl like a banshee. He pushed out through the crowd and went into a telephone booth. And I'm banging on the door and trying to get at him, and one of the owners comes up and says, 'Hey, Woody, you know, we love you, and we love the band, but we can't have you doing things like that in here.' And he asked me to please cool it.

"Well, not long after that, I was back here on the coast, working at some club at the beach. Joe Venuti was playing just down the street, and I was walking on the beach with him after the gig one night, and I told him I had a confession to make, I'd stolen one of his bits. Well Joe just about went into shock. He was horrified. He said, 'Woody, you can't do things like that! I can do things like

that, but you can't! You're a gentleman. It's all right for me, but not you!'"

Serge Chaloff, an inventive soloist whose playing had a sweeping balletic kind of phrasing all his own, eventually gave up dope only to die of leukemia. Musicians in Boston, Chaloff's home town, remember him performing in a last concert, seated weakly in a chair but playing beautifully to the end. In time all the addicts in that band gave up dope, becoming collectively a notable refutation of the bleak statistics of heroin recidivism. I asked one of them how he did it. He said that he and the girl he was going with got into a car and headed out from New York across the country. When the withdrawal got too bad, they would check into a motel and she would hold him until the worst sweats and spasms passed. Then they would go on. And then one day he became aware of the sky and clouds and green fields, and of the stars at night, and by the time they got to California, he was clean.

The band recorded some of its best work in California, and did so in a comparatively short time. James Caesar Petrillo, president of the American Federation of Musicians, imposed yet another recording ban, a second body blow to the band business when it was facing other problems. Travel costs were rising. The ballrooms were gradually going out of business. And television would soon phase out the network radio broadcasts that were critical to the bands if they were to build and retain an audience.

The public never really accepted the Second Herd — not, in any event, as it had accepted the First. "It was a very musical band," Woody said. "But the public doesn't want you to change. If you do it enough, of course, you confuse them and sometimes they relent and let you get away with it." Then, too, it was not, as one can see in retrospect, that perfect reflection and expression of a particular public mood, as the First Herd had been. And in time that band too faded away.

And yet Woody never really left the business. Throughout the 1950s, he either led small groups or put together big bands using the libraries of the two Herds and even the earlier band.

Why did Kenton, Basie, Ellington, and Herman survive out there on the road (the revived Les Brown band was essentially a California band, a "territory band" with a national name) when more obviously commercial bands, like that of Kay Kyser, went the way of the passenger pigeon? Because they were jazz bands, Woody says, devoted to their own music rather than the ephemera of commercial pops, and such bands commanded a perhaps diminished but knowing and serious audience.

"This is a grim question," I said, "and you've probably heard it a hundred times, but it's an inevitable one: How do you feel about being the survivor of an era?"

He laughed. "Well, it's led to some rather dubious honors in the last year or so. Let me show you." A further flight of stairs descends from the living room to other rooms. All down the walls or on shelves are the scores of awards and statuettes he has received: honorary citizen of New York State, honorary citizen of Maryland, honorary Kentucky colonel, citations from jazz societies, along of course with the small brass gramophones of NARAS and two or three figurines from an award now forgotten, the little bemustached character Esky, the one-time symbol of *Esquire*, holding a trumpet high in the air and silently blowing his brains out. We returned to the living room and sat down. The afternoon was almost gone and that incredible carpet of lighted beads was coming up in the Los Angeles basin. "Stravinsky," I said, "made the remark that growing old was just a matter of one indignity after another."

"I'm at the stage," Woody said, "if I wake up in the morning, I figure I'm ahead of the game. I've had the 'flu once this year. You have to keep warm. That's when you know you're no longer a boy."

"It's crossed my mind that if you don't make younger friends along the way, you could end up one day with none at all."

"I don't have any trouble there, of course, because of the ages of the young men in the band. It keeps me in touch, and it's a stimulus. We get along just fine — as long as we stick to the subject of music. If we get on anything else, the generation gap starts to get very wide, man."

The average age of Woody's bands has always been about the same, ever since he headed that first band at 22, a short five years after he went out with Tom Gerun. "The team stayed the same," he likes to say. "The coach got old."

It must have been in 1959 that I first actually met Woody. It was in Chicago. I had already spent enough time among actors and other performers to be aware that the public image may have little to do with the private personality. Robert Ryan, for example, played psychopathic villains wonderfully, but he was in private a cultivated, kind, and enlightened man. On the other hand, affable old Arthur Godfrey was a malicious and mean-spirited one. Woody turned out to be unlike my image of him.

He is one of those people who light up, rev up, turn on when they step into the spotlight. And his public personna had struck me as cocky and confident. But take him off the bandstand and you have a quiet, if sharply humorous, man, even a very shy one, until he gets to know someone. He was in his late forties then, and he was still a pretty good drinker, and I got hammered with him one night. All I remember of that evening is his melancholy — a wolf he normally keeps at bay — and his humility. Nor is the modesty an affectation. Some months later, in New York, I went with Marian McPartland to hear him in the upstairs room at the Metropole. He was leading a septet, and a vibrant one, that included Nat Adderley and Zoot Sims. It had all the fire of his big bands. ("All my small groups have sounded like bands," he said at the Christmas of 1984. It was the nearest I ever heard him come to boasting.) Marian and I sat with him after a set, and he said, in I do not remember what context, "I never have been much of a clarinet player." Actually I like his clarinet playing, although I like his alto playing more. But that was when I got the measure of the man and knew how much I liked him.

I do not wish to convey an impression of a milktoast. Woody is capable of scathing wisecracks, although they only seem to come from him if he's been pushed. One incident involved Benny Goodman, who is also unlike his onstage personality, which is that of the friendly bespectacled old uncle. He is notorious for his contemptuous treatment of musicians, including many who are his betters, which threatens to leak into public print — and did during the famous Russian tour with Zoot, Phil Woods, Willie Dennis, Bill Crow, and others. (He is also notorious among arrangers for his poor harmonic hearing, of which Alec Wilder took sarcastic note in his book *Letters I Never Mailed.*) I remember one night when Goodman came by to hear Woody. After a set he made some patronizing comment, and Woody just smiled and said, "Well, that's how it goes, Benny. You could always play that clarinet and I could always organize a band."

Stan Kenton, on the other hand, was much like his bandstand image. Stan contributed less to jazz than his devotees believe but more than his detractors admit. His bands screamed but didn't swing, a point on which you will get an argument from his fans but

not from most of the band's alumni. His bands were stiff because Stan was stiff. He was a friendly and kind man, and I liked him very much. But he was also a grandiloquent man, and about some things very foolish, and he brought himself great pain in the end.

At one point, Stan married a singer much younger than himself. And he had lunch with Woody shortly afterwards. He talked of his happiness and told Woody that he should follow his example and get a younger girl. Woody indicated that he wasn't interested. And Stan said, "Do you *love* Charlotte?"

"Love?" Woody said. "Love? When we were young we loved, very deeply. Now we're getting old, and we understand each other. And yes, I do love Charlotte."

I always had the impression that that conversation had, if not destroyed, at least seriously undermined Woody's respect for Stan.

(Later, a musician traveling with Kenton heard the girl screaming at Stan, "Love you? You're *old*. I married you for my career!" Still later I saw Duke Ellington give her a freeze treatment at a festival. There are two sides of course to any story, and I know people who liked her. In fact I liked her. She committed suicide.)

The Third Herd simply evolved. And I went to work for Woody at that time.

I had left *Down Beat* and moved in 1962 from Chicago to New York to write, both songs and prose. And at first I could not, as they say, get arrested. I was living at the YMCA on West 63rd Street that has served as a landing pad to any number of arriving aspirants, including Tennessee Williams. I was broke, and Woody could sense it, and he asked me to go to work for him as his publicist. He said it would give me a sustaining income and I would have the use of his office at 57th Street and Seventh Avenue.

The band was fantastically good. This was the band with Bill Chase, Jake Hanna, Henry Southall, Phil Wilson, Nat Pierce, Sal Nistico. Their home base in New York was the Metropole, the room at street level. There was no bandstand, only a precarious long shelf behind the bar. There was no place for music stands, and they played from memory, standing up, stretched out in a straight line in a sort of weird super-stereo. How they could be cohesive under the conditions was incomprehensible. But they were, and that band burned. Advances in musicianship since the 1940s were manifest in the fact that they performed *Caldonia* at about twice the tempo of the original recording (you can hear it in an album on Phillips), so fast that Woody stumbled over the time when he sang, "Caldonia, Caldonia, what makes your big head so hard?" When that Dizzy Gillespie unison passage came up, Bill Chase would take the trumpets through it with enormous bite, and then in its second part, he would jump the lead up an octave. Bill was a superb player who later had his own successful group, called Chase. He died in a plane crash.

I have no particular talent for publicity but I believed in that band and I got it a lot of publicity. I like to think that I made a contribution to putting Woody back on the map after the comparative doldrums of the 1950s.

People began to record my songs. A book of mine was published. I was writing for several magazines. Driving into town one day, Woody heard one of my songs on Mort Fega's radio show. He came into the office and said, "Why didn't you tell me you could write lyrics like that?"

"You didn't ask me," I said.

Woody picked up the phone and called Howie Richmond, the music publisher. If not by nightfall, at least within a day or two I had a contract to write songs for The Richmond Organization on a liveable weekly retainer.

On November 22, 1963, I walked into the office to be told by Abe Turchin's nephew, Dick, "The president's been shot!" I thought it was a put-on, until I saw the TV set in Abe's office.

That afternoon Woody was recording one of the several albums he did for Phillips, at Phil Ramone's A&R studio, a door east and upstairs from Jim and Andy's on 48th Street. I went up to the session, numb, like the whole nation. Woody did a take on Bobby Scott's *A Taste of Honey*. But no one felt like going on, and he called the session. That take, however, is in the album, its dark mood of mourning a testament to the way jazz can almost instantaneously reflect public events and express the emotions they engender — just as *Caldonia* and *Your Father's Mustache* were full of the euphoria of the war's last weeks. It was recorded about three hours after the assassination.

It was a few months after that that I told Woody in a restaurant that I was getting busy, thanks in large measure to him, and pressed for time. Like almost everyone who had ever worked for him, I had formed something akin to a filial attachment to him, one I would never lose. By now I knew of a lot of kindnesses done quietly for a lot of people, including a disc jockey who told me Woody had unquestioningly handed him several thousand dollars when the man was about to lose his home.

"Well what's the problem?" Woody said.

"I have all these things to do, and you really don't need me any more."

"But what?"

"But I have torn feelings. I don't want to leave."

"Oh. If that's all the problem you have, I'll make it easy for you. You're fired."

And we had lunch. And that is how I have gone around ever since making the proud boast that I am the only man Woody Herman ever fired.

"It's the way he rehearses a band," Al Cohn said. He was replying to a question I have asked of various people who worked for Woody over the years. How is it that whatever the group, whatever the personnel, even his small combos, a Woody Herman band always, or almost always, sounds like a Woody Herman band, fiery and free, and full of laughter? And several other people, including Nat Pierce, confirm Al's opinion.

When a new chart goes into the book, he lets the band play it down their way, without him. When they have found the groove of the piece, he steps in and edits.

"I'm just an editor," he said to me once. Just? It is a rare ability. And, after the Christmas of 1984, he said, "I concern myself with being a fair editor. I may take letter B and put it where letter A is and put letter C somewhere else. And I may change solos, because it will suit that particular chart better.

"The reason I got that, in the early days, was Ralph Burns, who I thought was one of the greatest talents of all, ever. And the first chart he brought in to me, which was about 1944, was *I've Got the World on a String*. He said, 'Here's this thing I made for you to sing.' It was a tune that I liked and used to sing anyway. Ralph said, 'If there's anything you don't like or anything you feel could be changed, go right ahead.' He said, 'I've done the best I can, but if you can make it better, great.' I didn't even touch that one, nor did I very often with Ralph, but it gave me the courage so that if I could make something better — mostly by pacing — I would do it. Ralph had given me this freedom to do that, and if *he* did that, then I believed I could do it as well as anyone else. It was Ralph who encouraged me, and he was much younger than I."

"It's a mysterious phenomenon," I said. "I understand how a

different feeling is developed from the same piece of material by a symphony conductor, carefully rehearsing, telling them what he wants, then actually conducting the music with his hands. But in jazz, there's comparatively little manual conducting. Yet if you took the same chart to Basie or you or someone else, it would come out sounding different each time."

"Yes," he said.

"I don't know how it's achieved, how the leader's personality gets into the music. A Basie groove is a Basie groove, absolutely distinct."

"Well, Nat Pierce was really into the Basie sound. The whole thing. When he was writing for me, I'd say, 'You can make it sound like whomever you want, I'll fix it so it identifies with *this* band.' That's the way we worked on many things." But he hadn't answered my question: how is it achieved? And I'm not sure he knows.

He has a kind of sixth sense about talent. Once I asked how he kept finding his gifted young people, and he said, "I don't find them, they find me."

But that begs the issue, which is selection, his unerring perception of which ones to choose from all those who apply or are recommended to him. And he can detect the real thing in its most formative stages. He is always touting this young man or that, and he never seems to be wrong. Years ago he hired a young pianist and arranger named Kenny Ascher and urged me to write with him. I didn't; or at least I didn't write much. But Paul Williams (one of the few contemporary lyricists I respect) did, and the charming *The Rainbow Connection* is one result of that rich collaboration. Farther down the road, Woody was pushing the latest young man to sit in the piano-and-arranger chair previously filled by Ralph Burns and Nat Pierce and Kenny Ascher. This was a young man from New Zealand, fresh out of school. To tell the truth, I could not at first hear it. But a few years later, when the talent had matured, it hit me, and still later, when I was working on a small something with Alan Broadbent, I realized that he is indeed one of the truly gifted ones, a shining and under-recognized musician.

Woody's bands are never showcases for Woody, although I can take quite a lot of his Hodges-like alto playing, particularly in ballads. He is not jealous of his own young employes. He is indeed solicitous of them. When a young man comes into the band, Woody usually takes him aside and tells him not to sweat it, just relax and get the feel of the charts. He takes the fear out of the boy. And after the young man has been with the band for a week or two and seems to have unwound, Woody will hold up a finger one night, meaning, "Take one chorus," and he will listen to the boy's jazz playing, without putting pressure on him. And then, later on, he may, toward the end of that one chorus, hold up a finger again, meaning, "Take another one." And the young man is gradually broken in as both soloist and ensemble player.

The Woody Herman band is the great finishing school of American music, and if the economics of the band business and Woody's tortured thralldom to the I.R.S. do not permit him to pay as much as he would like to, and the young men, when they come to the time of making families, drop out of the band to play in the studios or teach on some school faculty somewhere, there are always the others, waiting in line to go on the road with Woody.

"I love bringing them along," he said. "I love seeing them develop. I'm the Vince Lombardi of the bandleaders." It was when I heard him say that, with a quiet pride over all his young men (some of them now in their sixties), that I told him he was a great man. Without the alumni of splendid musicians he helped develop, American music would be very different indeed. His mark on the American and indeed the world's culture is hard to estimate.

"How do you do it, Wood?" I said. "Losing Charlotte, the road, all of it."

"Well, I was raised a Catholic . . ."

And this astonished me. All the years I had known him and I had never known that! But of course; a Polish mother, and chances are the German father was also Catholic. The reason I did not know it is that Woody never lays his personal life on you, never lays his heavies on you. He will listen to yours but he doesn't burden you with his. "Are you still?" I said. "A practicing Catholic?"

"Yes," he said, further surprising me. "I have my faith, and I pray. I went to church the other day."

And I had for so long thought I knew him so well.

I thought then about his early days. With him in the Tom Gerun band was a young man named Al Morris, the one who would change his name to Tony Martin and become one of the big singing and movie stars of the 1930s and '40s. He would go through marriage and divorce and end up marrried to Cyd Charisse, whose ex-husband, Nico Charisse, owned a dance studio where Judy Garland would rehearse. In that show, *The Nine O'Clock Review* was another young dancer named Betty Grable, who would go through marriage and divorce and end up married to Harry James. Three years after Woody met Charlotte, Betty Grable and Tony Martin would be in a movie together, *Pigskin Parade*, in which the young Judy Garland would make her film debut. Garland's sister would marry Bobby Sherwood and then divorce him to marry another musician. Garland wanted to marry Artie Shaw, but at that time he married Lana Turner and Garland married David Rose (and four others) and Artie married, among others, Ava Gardner, who had been married to Mickey Rooney, Garland's friend from childhood at MGM, and Gardner later married Frank Sinatra . . .

La ronde.

Charlotte and Woody alone, it seems, got through it all together and did not participate in this vast erotic rite. Amazing.

"Was Charlotte Catholic too?"

"Yes. She was a convert." That would figure too. With a Norwegian background, she would have been raised Protestant.

"Is that the reason you stayed together?"

"I think the reason Charlotte and I were survivors," he said, humor. We could always laugh at each other." He paused, looking inward, then told me something that will tell you a lot about Charlotte, that lovely woman whose poise after the mastectomies will remain with me. She beat the disease for a few years, too. "She was lying in there," he said, his hand indicating a bedroom off the living room, "a few days before she died, and I was sitting on the bed. And what can you say to anyone in those circumstances? And I put my face in my hands and I started to cry. And she raised her hand . . ." he imitated the gesture, a slow and hesitant lift of the arm . . . "and who knows how much it cost her, and she put it on my shoulder, and she said, 'Straighten up, boy!'"

For a moment then I saw him and Charlotte as 17. God how I hate time. Some people hate rainy days, some hate autumn, and John Decker, the painter, hated sunsets. I hate time.

The next day he was gone, off on the road again, to play a gig through New Year's Eve in Sparks, Nevada, with the Nat Pierce-Frankie Capp big band, then to New York for ten weeks at the St. Regis with a small group until the big band goes out again in the spring. In the cases of Kenny Ascher and Alan Broadbent, he was right and I was wrong: they were big talents, and it took me a while to see it.

But in the case of Woody Herman, I am right and he is wrong. He really is a great man.