Gene Lees
Jazzletter

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Letters

The piano survey was fascinating, and I'm delighted that you went to the trouble of undertaking it.

For some reason my own list didn't include the third category, favorites — possibly I didn't understand the original question. Anyway, the five I would list under that heading, in no particular order, are Oscar Peterson, George Shearing, Dick Hyman, Roger Kellaway, and George Cables — whom, by the way, I would cite as the most underrated pianist.

My only regret is that you didn't get votes from Peterson, Shearing, and Hyman, which would have rounded out the total to an even fifty in addition to giving us some valuable information.

Leonard Feather, Sherman Oaks, California

The Grover Sales article, *The Strange Case of Charles Ives, or: Why Is Jazz Not Gay Music?*, is extremely interesting, and very perceptive.

Joe Lopes, Los Angeles, California

A fascinating article. I was blown away by it. I was noticing this phenomenon as far back as the 1940s.

Johnny Mandel, Malibu, California

Thank you for the *excellent* articles in the November and December issues. Keep up the terrific writing. And your choice selections of the writings of others is outstanding in every way — thought-provoking, to be sure.

During my twenty-two years as director of jazz studies at North Texas State University, there was never a known instance of homosexuality among our hundreds of jazz students. Not one. I think if there had been, it would have come to my attention.

Leon Breeden, Denton, Texas

It should be realized that until recently, admitting one's homosexuality was just not something one did.

Jazz has always been known as masculine music. However, in recent years more and more women have become avid fans. As for women musicians, it is true that many are gay.

I do know any number of homosexual men who like Charlie Parker and also love show music. However, I am hesitant to mention their names. It so happens that three are music critics.

I think the whole subject is ludicrous. Who cares whether a musician is straight or gay?

Harriett Wasser, New York, New York

It is an event when the *Jazzletter* arrives. I have saved them all and have at different times been interested, intrigued, warmed, bored, enlightened, inspired and deeply touched by your writing and the gifts you allow your readers to share.

Life goes on with me, and it is good. Fortunately, for the first time in years I have *overpaid* the IRS, and thus there is a little surplus. Therefore I am enclosing a check for gift subscriptions to Dartmouth, the University of Washington, Washington State, and Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma.

My band of six MDs and a marine engineer, called The Ain't No Heaven Seven, progresses and learns and is doing quite well.

One facet of playing jazz that you have touched on that deserves re-emphasis is the access that performers have to each other because of their creating and playing, access that is unique and simply not available through more usual day-to-day interchanges. Aside from the music per se, this interpersonal involvement has been and continues to be (increasingly) the major fulfillment of my playing music with this group of people. And I daresay that is the same with them. To have played a song well, and to have added a new creative wrinkle, provides a sense of accomplishment that is difficult to match in other endeavors. Having the privilege of playing jazz, yes, even if it is traditional "mouldy-fig" jazz, has enriched and empowered my day-to-day life.

So keep up the excellent work. I'm happy to be one of your applauding readers.

Terry Rogers MD, Seattle, Washington

Terry Rogers is a full-time physician and part-time alto saxophone player.

March is the month of renewal and the month of dying. This March we lost Kenny Clarke, who was seventy-one, and Zoot Sims, a too-young fifty-nine.

Paris mourned Klook, and forty musicians, including Cedar Walton, Johnny Griffin, Pepper Adams and Max Roach, played for Klook, Daisy, and Laurent. Max played a melodic drum solo with all the fire of eternal youth, which is the compensation that jazz gives to its faithful.

A few days later, Art Blakey played in concert. His sixty-five-year-old spirit and fire are as young as his very young musicians. His is tempered by wisdom and experience.

A few days after Zoot died, I heard Clark Terry, Frank Foster, and Charles Fox, who played with Bird and is, as they say in France, of an age. Their drummer, a very young Terri Lyne Carrington, played with all the authority of Elvin Jones. Jazz has no age and keeps us all young.

But our giants are dying. They are international treasures and should be honored, subsidized, and recorded now. It's too easy to render homage after they have left us. We salute them after death with a week of tribute on the radio and a spate of reissues and bootleg recordings, which benefit the record companies.

A mass at St. Peters means nothing if you can't get a gig while you're alive — nor would a postage stamp honoring you, if the U.S. government ever got that hip. The Swedish government put out a Lars Gullin stamp, but at least they considered him a national treasure and subsidized him while he was alive.

I think of all our giants who died never knowing that they would be celebrated in our culture and memory. Now's the time to honor our living heroes. Let us pay tribute to Diz, C.T., Dexter, Buddy Tate, Budd Johnson, Max, Roy, Benny Carter, Cleanhead. All heroes. Giants still walk the earth. We should all say "Thank you" while we have the chance.

Jazz has no age, so it is easy to forget that the years are passing. I'd like to say, personally, "Thank you, guys, for a half century of the best memories and the very best of times. You still fill my life with joy."

Chan Parker Woods, Champmotteux, France

The First Typewriter Quintet

Recently I read yet another reference in a newspaper to jazz musicians as a shy and inarticulate lot.

I cannot imagine which among them the writer had, in his lifetime, talked to. Duke Ellington? Dizzy Gillespie? Paul Desmond? Gerry Mulligan? Lockjaw Davis, Bud Freeman, Mundell Lowe, Richard Hadlock, Jimmy Woode, Pepper Adams, Dave Tough, Scott LaFaro, Charles Mingus, Bobby Scott, Artie Shaw, who speaks Spanish, Art Farmer, who speaks German, Clare Fischer, who speaks Portuguese and German, Oscar Peterson, who speaks French, Sahib Shihab, who speaks Danish, Johnny Mandel, Joe Williams, Bill Evans, Dick Wellstood, who has a law degree and speaks Chinese, Richard Sudhalter, who has had a totally separate career as a reporter and foreign correspondent, Chuck Folds, who used to be an editor at *American Heritage*? Rob McConnell, who is almost as famous for his acerbic wit as for his music?

The fact of the matter is that jazz musicians are, on average, a highly articulate group. They are often extremely well read. They perceive and think subtly and deeply, although they are often cautious — not shy — about whom they share their insights with. If they know you, they'll talk your ear off. I have already dealt, in one of the early issues of the *Jazzletter*, with a tendency of jazz musicians in the old days to let outsiders *believe* they were dumb, in both senses of the word. But this was an affectation, growing out of slavery in America — the camouflage of one's intelligence as a way of lying low. It was a bit of an act, that hey-baby-wha's-happ'nin' manner, which eventually developed into a sort of self-satirizing in-joke. Anyone deceived by it didn't know jazz musicians very well. While I have known a few musicians who fit the shy-inarticulate mould, they have been the exceptions. And even then, you never knew when they were merely taciturn, rather than inarticulate.

Once, in the mid-1960s, I was driving back to New York from a concert at the University of Pennsylvania with Coleman Hawkins and some other musicians. The concert had been booked by Abe Turchin, and I was driving Abe's Cadillac. (We can guess where he got the money for it.) I did not know Coleman Hawkins well at that time, did not know that he was an art lover and an intellect of substance, and I was terribly impressed by the mere fact that I was in a car with one of the gods of my adolescence.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike on the down trip had been dangerously foggy, and now, late at night, I decided to go home by a freeway that was rather new. Bean told me I was making a mistake, that this route would take us through every tiny town along the way, and we would not get back to New York until dawn. I told him I had stumbled on this road a year or so earlier, driving in from Chicago, and that it would take us straight home.

I was right. He sat beside me in the front seat, quietly watching all those exit signs to various communities as we made swift smooth time. "Damn," Bean said after a while. "We used to have to go through all these little towns. Now you just read about 'em."

You may call that laconic, but hardly inarticulate.

Anyone who browsed in the mail I receive would be disencumbered forever of the notion that jazz musicians are "shy and inarticulate". Not only do they write well, most of them type well, as I pointed out four years ago. I had a letter the other day from Larry Bunker, which struck me not only for its diction and perfect punctuation but for impeccable typing. Many of the letters I receive can be turned, with only slight editing, into excellent little essays about music and life, particularly the musician's life. A common quality is the jazz musician's love of his work and fascination with that of his colleagues.

If generalities are to be made, I would say that jazz musicians are almost compulsively articulate. I offer in this issue five pieces of evidence to this effect, five pieces of writing by musicians. The first, by trombonist Mike Zwerin, is excerpted with permission from his forthcoming book, *La Tristesse de St. Louis*, to be published by Quartet Books, London. This is followed by an essay by pianist-composer-lyricist-singer Dave Frishberg, which he wrote for *Listen*, the magazine of the University of North Carolina's public broadcasting station WUNC, after concerts in Raleigh-Durham by Dave, Bob Dorough, and Blossom Dearie; some reflections on language and music and his own career by pianist, arranger and composer Clare Fischer; an essay by drummer Al Levitt, who has been living in Paris since 1975 and who, like Mike Zwerin, writes for various European magazines; and a memoir by still another fine pianist, Eddie Higgins.

Dare I call them them the First Typewriter Quintet? Nah, that's a lousy pun, and I'll resist it. Should I say they've never played together before? I'll resist that one too. But I will say, without fear of contradiction, that they've never appeared together in print before.

* * * * *

In the next issue, I'll begin a four-part account of the album based on poems of John Paul II which I wrote for Sarah Vaughan and which we recorded in concert in Germany in June, 1984. Many people who have heard it believe it is her finest work. I am too close to it to make that assertion with confidence, but I do share the opinion. The orchestra we had, eighty players, was incredible, including in its personnel Art Farmer, Rolf Ericson, Benny Bailey, Idrees Sulieman, Sahib Shihab, Sal Nistico, Ed Thigpen, Jimmy Woode, Chris Lawrence, Bobby Scott, Tony Coe, Jiggs Whigham, the Van Lier brothers from Holland, and Gianni Basso from Italy. Francy Boland wrote the arrangements and Lalo Schifrin was the conductor. I wrote two new songs for the project, one with Francy and the other with Lalo.

Working with these people, and particularly with Sass, was one of the most indelible experiences of my life. I would like to share it with you, and by the time I have completed the four parts of the story, the album should be out in America (it is already out in Italy), and you can, as it were, attend that remarkable concert in Dusseldorf with us.

The Sadness of St. Louis

by Michael Zwerin

PARIS

On the Cote d'Azur in the autumn of 1940, Charles Delaunay, secretary general of the Hot Club of France, received a letter from a friend in Paris who told him that all of a sudden the city seemed to be overflowing with jazz fans. On his way north, Delaunay passed through Dijon. He saw posters announcing concerts by Fred Adison and Alix Combelle. Odd. Jazz had rarely left the capitol before the war. The hall was packed and bursting with joy and applause.

Delaunay organized a concert in the Salle Gaveau on December 19. The program included the stars of French jazz, including Django Reinhardt and his new quintet with Hubert Rostaing on clarinet replacing violinist Stephane Grappelli, who was in London. It sold out. But Delaunay was impressed with more than mere numbers. Before the war *tout Paris* in tuxedos and gowns had fallen asleep to Duke Ellington in a

sold-out Salle Pleyel. Now the audience was young, alive, happy — you could feel a certain solidarity. Delaunay repeated the program a few nights later and it too sold out.

Delaunay had read *Mein Kampf*. He had no illusions about Hitler: "I knew that sooner or later the Nazis would ban jazz, which they did after the United States entered the war. They called it 'decadent Jewish Negroid Americano jungle music.'

"I told the musicians, most of whom used to come regularly to listen to records and jam in the Hot Club offices on Rue Chaptal, 'Go on playing the same songs, whatever you like. Just change the names.'"

So *St. Louis Blues* became *La Tristesse de St. Louis*, and *Honeysuckle Rose* became *Le Rose de Chevrefeuille*, and *Sweet Sue Ma Chere Susanne*. Delaunay emphasized in interviews and articles that jazz was now an international phenomenon, a mixture of European (French first), African, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon influences.

An aperitif named "swing" came on the market during the German occupation of France, not such a swinging time.

Etes-vous Swing? and *Mon Heure de Swing* were hit songs. The sartorial fad modeled after Cab Calloway's zoot suits was called *swing*, and the youngsters who wore it, *les petits swings*, came to be known as *zazous* after Calloway's scat-singing syllables — *zazouzazou hey!*

Zazou boys wore pegged pants with baggy knees. High-rolled collars covered their hair. Long checked jackets several sizes too large, dangling key chains, gloves, stick-pins in wide neckties, dark glasses, and Django Reinhardt mustaches were all the rage. The girls wore short skirts, baggy sweaters, pointed painted fingernails, necklaces around their waists, bright red lipstick. Both sexes smoked Luckies, frequented Le New York Bar, and cried, "*Ca Swing!*"

Don Byas, reluctantly leaving the Count Basie band and unable to find words for his resignation: "Basie, in one month I will have been gone two weeks."

"Swing" became a password. To swing was really zazou. Singer Johnny Hess was crowned King of Swing — even more ersatz royalty than that other King of Swing. Les petits swings related to swing — the music — the way the hippies later related to hipsters. All image, little substance. Ersatz was king.

Zazous were considered decadent by Germans and French alike. They were also bringing a lot of heat down on the music whose name they had co-opted. "We tried to keep our distance from the zazous," recalls Delaunay. The Hot Club sponsored lectures, produced concerts, records and a magazine, *Jazz Hot*, throughout the Occupation, though with shortages of paper, ink and printing facilities and with so much political and social heat, the magazine dropped its title and appeared in shortened form on the back of concert programs. In 1941, Delaunay wrote, "The interpretation some give to swing is becoming dangerous for our music, their abuses risk leading to the banning of jazz itself."

Hoping to avoid repression, using propaganda for positive ends, he went on to criticize "a turbulent, uneducated youth which, under the pretext of being swing, thinks itself permitted the worst excesses."

Since the time of slavery in the United States, swing has been a metaphor for that disorderly robust state called freedom. And at no time was it more symbolic than under the Occupation.

The late Polish writer Leopold Tyrmand tells of the time in 1943 when he listened to a recording of Sidney Bechet's *Really the Blues* during a "clandestine jam session" in Frankfurt. The uniformed German soldier sitting next to him to him bragged, "It's my record."

"Why do you like this music?" Tyrmand asked him. "What does it make you think of?"

"Free people," the German answered. "Don't ask me why."

Delaunay's concert programs either left the word "jazz" out completely or qualified it as "Jazz Francais". He told the Germans that jazz had French roots in traditional New Orleans Creole airs and that, for example, *Tiger Rag* was based on *Praline*, a Nineteenth Century quadrille. The Germans wanted French collaboration and went out of their way to respect French culture.

At the end of the *drole de guerre* in 1940, the clean, lean, blue-eyed and clear-headed Germans had attracted French collaboration. *Collaboration* was not yet a dirty word. Collaboration implied realistic affirmative action.

In his book *French and Germans, Germans and French*, historian Richard Cobb explores its ambiguities: "There existed on both sides ties of friendship that had been created in the interwar years; and, finding themselves, almost overnight, in control of the complicated administration of a capital city — an event for which they had never planned . . . the Germans sought out in the first place those Frenchmen and Frenchwomen they already knew. A German railway engineer would seek out his opposite number, a German detective would have contacts in the *police judiciare* . . .

"One of the young (German) university graduates, who was all at once to find himself in charge of Paris publishing, had written a thesis on a French literary theme and had spent several years as a *lecteur d'Allemand* in the University of Toulouse. He embarked on his new task with a sense of personal excitement, for it offered him a unique opportunity to come into close personal contact — sometimes daily — with all the leading figures of the Parisian literary scene. To see him merely as a censor, the obedient instrument of the *Propaganda Staffel*, would be to oversimplify a relationship that was much more personal and vital. He wanted to get to know as many novelists and poets as possible, and to publish as many of their works as he could. In both aims, he was extraordinarily successful; and at the end of an idyllic four-year stay in the French capital — a city he loved — he could look back to a publishers' list of enormous distinction and variety. His concern throughout had been . . . to see into print the works of a host of authors whom he admired and liked."

Jazz had something more than the other arts, a certain purity and honesty, that brought "enemies" together under conditions of mutual trust. Many Germans told me that anybody who liked jazz could never be a Nazi, which seems to be generally true. Dutch and Belgian musicians working in Germany during the war jammed with the young members of the Frankfurt Hot Club, formed in 1941. Nobody was accused of collaboration. One Dutch band sneaked the three dots and a dash V for Victory figure into their arrangements.

If you look a little closer, there are exceptions. Werner

Notice

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Molders, swing fan and Luftwaffe ace, switched on the BBC when crossing the Channel to catch a few minutes of Glenn Miller before bombing the antenna. (He later persuaded Hitler to add some swing to German radio.)

But the sound of freedom which the soldier next to Tyrmand heard somehow put jazz above the fray, neutralized it, changed the rules.

"I knew many German musicians who had been in Paris before the war," says the Guadeloupian trombonist Al Lirvat. "Now they were back as soldiers. We talked about music, we played together. I felt no racism coming from them. I never knew anybody who had any trouble for being black, no black person I knew went to a concentration camp. One cafe had a sign in the window, 'No Jews or Niggers', but that was the French who did that. The French were much more racist against blacks than the Germans."

Lirvat worked in La Cigale in Montmartre. He says that the manager did not want to hire black musicians because he was afraid the Germans did not like *gens de couleur*. There had been a scene in Dijon. A French woman who refused to date a German officer was later seen with a black musician. Their band had been fired for it.

The leader, a Camerounais who spoke German, complained to the German authorities that the owner of the La Cigale was keeping French citizens from working because they were black. According to Lirvat, a German official who liked jazz issued a permit. "And I can tell you," Lirvat said, "that not only was there never a problem, but the Germans were happy to hear us. They applauded. We had a special authorization to play jazz. If it had been illegal, the authorities would have stopped German soldiers from coming there. We had good relations. We never talked politics. We talked about music and the weather."

Have you ever remarked how all authority (kings or republics) imagine that they have only to order work to be done, and it will be forthcoming? They set up prizes, encouragements, academies, and they forget only one thing, one little thing, without which nothing can live: the atmosphere.

— Gustave Flaubert, 1853

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They had special authorization?

"Yes. We knew we were playing music that was banned, but we had it in writing. The word 'jazz' was written on our permit. That's all we played. The French owners were nervous but the place was always full of Germans. There were plenty of Germans who just liked good music. We didn't go out of our way to be friendly. You never knew when you'd fall on some racist nut, but that's not all that different from now."

Delaunay adds: "There were a lot of Germans who liked jazz. Don't forget that. The officials may have suspected what was going on, but they had more pressing worries. We used to have jam sessions in our clubhouse cellar on Rue Chaptal and one German officer often came to sit in on piano. He knew a lot of Fats Waller tunes. He couldn't do that in Germany."

Yes, you could — even in a concentration camp. The Ghetto Swingers were formed in Theresienstadt, an old fortress turned into a model camp to impress the Red Cross. The band's theme song was *I Got Rhythm*. In a 1960 *Down Beat* magazine, surviving Ghetto Swinger trumpeter Eric Vogel described their leader-clarinetist Fritz Weiss as "one of the best jazz musicians of prewar Europe. We had quite a good band. We played with swing and feeling, mostly in the style of Benny Goodman."

The Ghetto Swingers appeared in a Nazi documentary about "the good life" in Theresienstadt, but after the film crew and the Red Cross left, the band went on the road to Auschwitz.

Jazz musicians are outlaws if they are serious about what they are doing. There is no valid reason to play this music other than love — outlaw motivation in a money-oriented society. Gypsies, who generally refuse to abide by society's rules, are considered outlaws by regimented systems. A Gypsy jazz musician is a double outlaw. Survival is not easy. Django Reinhardt more than survived.

A relatively obscure culture hero before the war, he became a superstar overnight. People whistled his song *Nuages* in the street and his name was on the walls of Paris. He lived in sumptuous apartments, gambled in posh casinos, ate in the best restaurants. Bombs frightened him, however, and he lived near the Pigalle metro stop, the deepest in Paris, just in case.

"He was as well known as Maurice Chevalier," Delaunay says. "When he came to town for a concert, people knew that something was going to happen for a change." Even though he was a Gypsy — 500,000 of whom died in the camps — his fame protected him. There was increasing pressure for him to tour Germany, something he desperately wanted to avoid. He resisted by continually raising his price, but time ran out and he tried walking into Switzerland. He was caught. The police found his English Society of Composers membership card. This by itself could have been enough to have him convicted of espionage. The German officer began his interrogation with a smile, "Mon vieux Reinhardt, que fais-tu la?", and freed him with a warning. Another German jazz fan.

Demand for swing music was so great that sidemen quickly became leaders, Saturday night amateurs full-time sidemen. The Americans had gone home, competition was light, and just about any European who could blow a chorus of the blues had all the jazz gigs he could handle.

About the time Swiss clarinetist Ernst Hollerhagen walked into the Schumann cafe, where he was working with Teddy Stauffer and his Teddies in Frankfurt, clicked his heels, raised an arm and greeted his friends with a "Heil Benny!", Luftwaffe Oberleutnant Dietrich Schulz-Koehn was marching along the railroad tracks near St. Nazaire with three other officers. Four American officers came towards them. Small-arms fire could be heard in the distance. The 1944 winter was cold. The men danced and blew on their hands. The day was grey, like on old print of a black-and-white war movie. This was a sideshow, and these men had minor roles. The main theater had moved to the Fatherland.

A hundred thousand German soldiers were cut off and worn out here on the Brittany coast. The Allies were prepared to let them starve, but civilians were starving too and the Red Cross arranged evacuation negotiations along these tracks. They had been going on for an hour or two a day for two weeks now. The soldiers on the opposing sides got to know each other, took photographs of each other, and traded the prints.

An Afro-American officer who had been admiring Schultz-Koehn's Rolleiflex asked, "How much do you want for that camera?"

"It's not for sale." The lanky bespectacled German liked Americans, particularly Afro-Americans. He was more than pleasant about it, but he liked his camera too. But as a matter of fact, there was something he wanted. Schulz-Koehn pulled himself up straight and adjusted his leather coat. It was worth a try. "Do you have any Count Basie records?"

Toward the end of the war, Lulu of Montmartre ran a club called La Roulette featuring Django Reinhardt. Like a lot of clubs, she closed her doors at curfew time and ran a party until it lifted at dawn. English was spoken as well as French and German at Lulu's. Gestapo officers sat alongside British secret service agents, all of whom had their taste for swing in common.

His inaccessibility had made Django something of a legend in the United States, where the press had reported several rumors of his death. Right after the Liberation, he played at an army party. Considering America the big time, wanting badly to appear there, Django tried hard to please. He was, however, quite cool answering an official who asked how much he would want for an American tour.

"How much does Gary Cooper make?" he asked. "I want the same thing."

— MZ

A Footnote

Like everyone else with a love of jazz, and a certain fascination with its mythology, I had heard the story of the German officer looking for Count Basie records during negotiations. About 1960, fifteen years after the war, when I was editor of *Down Beat*, the German jazz impressario and writer Dietrich Schulz-Koehn came to Chicago, and it was my not unpleasant duty to be courteous to him.

Over lunch, I asked him if he had heard the story, and knew whether it was true. Yes, he assured me, it was true. I asked how he could be sure, and he said, "Because I was that officer."

Perhaps three weeks later I was in New York, this time having lunch with my friend Alan Morrison, who was the New York editor of *Ebony* magazine, a warm and pleasant man who was a great friend of jazz and who, I'm sorry to say, died some years ago. I said, "I had a strange experience recently." And I told him of asking Schulz-Koehn about the incident in Brittany.

Alan smiled softly and said, "Did he tell you who the American officer was?"

"No," I said.

"I was."

— GL

The Blue Angel Crowd

by Dave Frishberg

A few weeks ago I spoke on the phone with composer Johnny Mandel, whose catalogue includes *Emily, The Shadow of Your Smile, A Time for Love,* and a dozen other familiar songs with meat on their bones. He and I have a song together, *You Are There.* "Do you realize," I asked him, "that there are now eight recordings of *You Are There*? I don't think I've seen a penny on it, have you?" He laughed and said, no, he probably hadn't. Then he asked me who had recorded it. I began to list from memory: "Let's see. Blossom Dearie, Irene Kral, Sue Raney, myself . . ."

"Well no wonder," Mandel interrupted. "You're talking about the Blue Angel crowd."

The Blue Angel crowd. Perfect. The song freaks.

I hadn't thought about the Blue Angel for so long. Back in the late 1950s, when I had just arrived in New York City and begun to work as a pianist, there were maybe a dozen of those chic little East Side supper clubs — "boites," I guess they're called — that featured singers or singing pianists with the emphasis on esoteric repertoire. There was Le Ruban Bleu, the Apartment, the Living Room, L'Intrigue, and, of course, the Blue Angel. There was Bobby Short, Bobby Cole, Blossom Dearie, Felicia Sanders, Charles DeForest, Charlie Cochran, Mabel Mercer, and a bunch of other names I remember but you probably wouldn't.

You could sit at the bar until four in the morning and hear songs you never dreamed existed. I heard *Fly Me to the Moon* for the first time in one of those clubs. Likewise *Lucky to Be Me, My Gentleman Friend, Too Late Now* — a whole encyclopedia of words and music that would stick to my ribs, and remain a most valuable part of my musical consciousness for the rest of my life. I first heard Blossom Dearie when she and Annie Ross were doing an act together at Julius Monk's Downstairs. The first time I heard Bob Dorough perform was at a grim little place called the Dickens Room on Lexington Avenue at 39th Street.

It was around then that I began to accompany singers, and my own repertoire began to bloom. I started to notice who was writing the good melodies and designing the stylish structures, how the good lyric writers made it happen, who were the harmonic heavyweights. I found out about Leonard Bernstein and Alan Jay Lerner. When I discovered Frank Loesser, it was like finding a gold mine. I began to get hung up on this three-minute art form.

Looking back on it now, I can see there was a certain cultishness about what I am now pleased to call the Blue Angel crowd. Generally speaking, I'd say they were singers who preferred very simple unobtrusive accompaniments, and chose not to dress up the songs with elaborate or tricky arrangements. The song was the thing. They took pride in their personal arcane repertoires.

And the customers were part of the Blue Angel crowd too. Song freaks just like the singers, they were often pretty hip. Much too polite to request a song by title. "Gershwin tonight?" they would smile. Gershwin was like a steak dinner to them, Irving Berlin like a nice bowl of chicken soup. Nourishment.

But the music business was changing fast. The day of the professional songwriter was drawing to a close, as recording entrepeneurs worked hand in hand with independent radio broadcasters to market disposable songs that became quickly obsolete. Folk musicians, young amateur performers, and rhythm and blues artists could supply the small record labels and local radio stations with all the material they needed. There was suddenly more music than any of us really wanted to hear. I remember from a college economics course the principle called Gresham's Law, which I think states that when cheap currency is permitted to flood the marketplace, it drives the good currency out. I think Gresham's law was operating — and operates still — in our musical marketplace. But, in fairness, I should tell you that I got a D in that economics course.

I guess the most illustrious survivors of that stubbornly artistic Blue Angel bunch are Bobby Short and Blossom Dearie. Bob Dorough and I have been around long enough to qualify as bona fide survivors, but I would say our activities were centered elsewhere — Dorough's as a writer/producer in the recording studios, mine as a pianist in the jazz clubs.

But among the current crop of song freaks — today's Blue Angel crowd, if you will — Dorough and I will eagerly claim charter membership. Who else have we got here? There's Susannah McCorkle, Jackie Cain and Roy Kral, Carole

Sloane, Carol Fredette, Richard Rodney Bennett, Shirley Horne, Sue Raney, Mike Palter and Lynn Jackson . . . and all the others who act as curators for *the repertoire*. This is not to ignore Carmen McRae, Sarah Vaughan, Peggy Lee, and the Chairman of the Board. But these are *stars*, don't you see, a different group entirely. However, this *is* to ignore Linda Ronstadt, Toni Tenille, Willie Nelson, and anybody else who thinks all you got to do is sing *Don't Blame Me* and you're a connoisseur. This is the Blue Angel, baby. You got to show me some I.D. . . .

One thing's certain. There are fewer and fewer places for the B.A. crowd to do their stuff. That fact made the demise of Stephen's After All in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, all the more melancholy. I don't think I'm stretching it when I say there are probably not more than half a dozen places, and Stephen's was one, in the Western Hemisphere that do a first-class job of presenting vintage American pop music. (I still don't know what to call it. Cabaret? Too limited a term. Quality pop music? Myopic, not to mention arrogant. Classic pop? Too confusing.)

I despise jazz.

— Paul McCartney

Well, anyhow, I can't complain. I'm hearing my songs played on the radio with increasing frequency. Public radio mainly. Even some of those "cult" recordings of *You Are There*. Because even though the Blue Angel, Stephen's After All, Nancy Steele's L'Intrigue, Trudy Heller's Versailles, even though they've all closed shop, the old Blue Angel crowd has found a home. It turns out to be public radio. I'll bet that's where eighty-five percent of my airplay is taking place.

If Blossom, Dorough and I had any doubts that we had an audience on public radio, they were dispelled by the astonishing turnout at our concerts in Raleigh, sponsored by the *Spectator* and WUNC. It was quite a reception we received. I'm still sailing on it. Like the old saying, I guess we're world famous in Raleigh-Durham.

And the old Blue Angel's still open for business.

— DF

One Man's Road

by Clare Fischer

When I read the *Jazzletter*, I am constantly amazed that I find myself so stimulated. I envy the forum you have created, whether for getting something off your chest or for fine humor. I laugh, sometimes so strongly I'm sorely conscious of doing it by myself. I cry, thankful that I *am* by myself. I get angry over some inequity you are dealing with. Never have I responded so often to so much from a single source.

You touch on many areas that seem to strike similar experiences in my own life. Language seems to be my undoing. I have, as you have, had interesting experiences in foreign languages. I see such parallels between music and language. But that which is so important to me doesn't seem to mean much to anyone else. And so I know what it is to be a minority in this world.

In whatever area of endeavor — physics, medicine, music, you name it — less than ten percent of the people have real insight and capability. Though the remaining ninety percent are stamped, licensed, approved, given degrees and other approbations by the State, you will search long and hard to find a really good doctor, a really insightful professor, a good musician. Most of them are going through the motions, teachers who have nothing to teach contriving to give the illusion of teaching and firmly convinced that they are doing so. The ninety percent are of course the democratic majority and, as such, make up the membership of the American Medical Association, the American Bar Association, and N.A.J.E. In this democracy where everyone is equal, few people perceive how unequal we are.

Ears, for example. Most people do not have accurate or perceptive hearing. Each person evaluates what he hears convinced he has the total.

Language goes through its degeneration in a variety of ways, but one of the most common is through not hearing accurately. In old English, those words which we now spell with *wh* were spelled *hw*, and even though some scribes transposed this to *wh*, we continued to pronounce the aspirated h before the w, thus being able to differentiate whale (hwale) from wail, why from Y, what from watt, and where from ware. One of the funniest examples of this deterioration occurs in an Angie Dickenson toothpaste commercial. She does not pronounce the h in "whitest", and since she pronounces intervocallic t like d, "whitest" comes out "widest". Who wants wide teeth? And who wants to save the wails?

The same thing happens with harmonies. People hear to a degree commensurate with their level of understanding. Many are incapable of transcribing solos or arrangements from records because they fit what they hear through what they understand.

The worst ramification is the effect the unperceptive ninety percent have on the insightful ten percent — the American Medical Association fighting off innovative ideas and procedures from the minority; the following of musical styles in vogue by the many and the squelching of the individuals in music. The majority go through the motions, convinced they are playing music. And that is a description of this year's Grammy awards!

When I was a young musician, having first listened to Meade Lux Lewis, Fatha Hines, Nat Cole, Art Tatum, and Bud Powell, I paid attention to pianists. Subsequently I found more interest in the horn players and composers — Hawkins, the Duke, Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster among them. They were mostly sax players, and alto sax players at that. I followed Diz and Bird most devotedly and vividly remember the marvelous unfolding of the bop period. But I soon tired of that unperceptive majority who were aping Parker.

I had a strong black influence in my early years, and worked at the age of fifteen at a Crispus Attucks American Legion Hall with an all-black band. I wore what we called drapes during that period, the only time in my life that I was clothes conscious. I was ostracized by my high school class because of my "mixing". I only knew that this music was alive in a way that contrasted sharply with so much "white" music. I listened only peripherally to the Dorseys and Glenn Miller, being more interested in Ellington, Basie, Henderson and — out of Chicago — King Kolax.

When I went on to college, I roomed with students from Latin America, especially a Puerto Rican by the name of Roberto Fortier. This, the late 1940s, was the heyday of the mambo, and could he dance! I was besieged by Tito Puente, Machito, Tito Rodriguez and many others. I listened, but did not myself attempt to play this music.

It was about this time that I heard Lee Konitz for the first time and, developing now along more sophisticated lines myself, I embraced his work as a devotee. I mean *everything* he touched brought response of the strongest kind. I transcribed his solos by the dozen. I copied them on vellum so that I could

give them to others. This is the one player who influenced me most.

I never cared for Lennie Tristano. He seemed too stiff and tight-assed for me. Lee was loose, with a melodic angularity and harmonic originality. Then what happened? Lee was the talented ten percent pressured by the democratic majority. "He played a lot of notes, but he didn't swing." He did not receive the acclaim he deserved because the ninety percent said Bird Bird and nothing but the Bird. He didn't sound like Bird. He didn't play like Bird. He was an absolutely original voice.

The era of black political awareness was dawning, and although jazz had been one of the first areas where black-white equality was practiced, now a strong exclusionary attitude set in among many black jazz musicians. Some of it was conscious, some of it was unconscious, as in a wonderful quote from Gerald Wilson in a college listening course: "This was one of the better non-black bands."

To be a white jazz musician in certain circles at that time, one had to carry a passport with visa. Lee Konitz, the sensitive Jewish kid, began chasing after his "black soul", as he was quoted in *Down Beat*. The result? He has changed radically from what he was originally. He lost his genius and is now indistinguishable from any number of saxophone players. He uses a plastic reed, is capable of squawking, and at times can play extremely out of tune.

Jazz was and is a street music, but as each generation has played it different elements have entered it at different levels: greater instrumental technique, more sophisticated harmonies, more complicated rhythmic structures and those who react against them — starting with the bop-Dixie conflict and growing, ever growing, until each part has split off from the main stem to the point where there is no main stem. The latest thing seems to be fusion, which many see as a development of jazz but which I contend is a development of rock and roll.

With all this divergence, and knowing that there is no one jazz that is universal, one tries to maintain that element necessary to function totally — self-confidence. To some it comes early, existing in youthful naivete. To others, like me, it comes late.

I started out to be a classical composer and got sidetracked into jazz. I have been as influenced by Bach, Bartok, Berg, Prokofiev, Shostakovitch, Stravinsky, Dutilleux, Schoenberg, as I have by Ellington, Bud Powell et al. When I play the blues I fuse Meade Lux Lewis' old chord changes with Duke Ellington colors voiced via Stravinsky. I feel I am more influenced as a pianist by what I have explored or developed as a writer, and more influenced by composers than pianists.

When I came to Los Angeles in 1958 I spent much time in East L.A. finding out what Latin music was made of. I had known instinctively that what I heard jazz musicians play for Latin was ersatz. During this period I met and played with Cal Tjader. I wrote several albums for him. Then raising a family took over my life, and I became heavily involved with studio music. For about ten years I did that almost exclusively. When I did play in public the press usually said, "Studio musician fronts jazz group." And all the while I thought I was a jazz musician who played in the studios. Finally, about eight years ago, after a hiatus in Latin jazz of fifteen years, Cal asked me to record and play again with his group. At this time in my life, my late forties, I started with my own group, Salsa Picante, and with my vocal group 2 + 2.

Suddenly everything in my life coalesced — my interest in the Latin culture, my self-confidence, and above all, feeling good about what I was doing.

Unless the instrument is a beauty, I do not play the piano now. I prefer electric pianos, digital pianos, and organ, because the sound sources are so exciting. Plus, with amplification, you don't have to beat your arthritic knuckles to the bone fighting drummers whose dynamic sensibilities are of the Mack truck variety.

Every player has to find those aspects of his own work that are unique in order to believe in himself. When you at last know you are good but do not manifest conceit in talking about it, it seems to me that maturity sets in. I have ample technique, but there are those whose chops leave me in the dust. There are those who play faster and swing harder than I do. But I know my strengths: harmonic voicings and harmony in general, sensitive and innovative melodic turns, with my own sense of rhythmic phrasing.

I'm in virgin territory, blazing my own trails. After years of being influenced by others and developing my own voice out of all of it, I now at fifty-six find myself influencing others. And that's scarey. Here I am, not completely established myself and others are utilizing my stuff before everyone knows where it comes from!

— CF

Did You Ever Play with Bud Powell?

by Al Levitt

PARIS

Not very long long ago, someone asked me that question. I thought for a moment and answered, "Yeah, only once. I think it was in Fontainbleau."

In 1957, we had a group that played every Saturday and Sunday afternoon at the Club St. Germain. In it were Barney Willen, tenor saxophone, Luis Fuentes, trombone, Sacha Distel, guitar, Rene Utreger, piano, Paul Revere, bass, and myself on drums. At the time, Bud Powell was appearing there nightly with Kenny Clarke and Pierre Michelot for a two-week engagement, to be followed by J.J. Johnson.

One day Barney and our rhythm section were approached by Marcel Romano, who in those days was a kind of Parisian version of Norman Granz, and we agreed to play a concert in Fontainbleau in which we were to accompany J.J. and Bud.

When the day arrived, we all met in front of the club on rue St. Benoit. We were to make the short trip together with the instruments in a large American station wagon. I think it was a Chrysler. It was a very big car, with enough room for everything and everyone. We greeted each other, J.J. was very friendly and outgoing, but Bud just glared and didn't say a word.

It was about a sixty-kilometer drive from Paris to Fontainbleau and lasted about an hour. The trip was pleasant. We enjoyed some nice conversation and a few jokes, but Bud just glared out his window and didn't say a word.

When we arrived, we unloaded the instruments, checked out the hall, set up, tried the sound system, and retired to the dressing room to decide on a program. Barney, Rene, Paul and I had been playing together fairly regularly, so we just selected a few tunes from our usual repertoire. J.J. made a list of his tunes and keys, but Bud just glared and didn't say a word.

We opened the concert as a trio — Rene, Paul and myself. After two tunes, Barney joined us to make it a quartet for two more tunes. The announcer brought on J.J. and he played three tunes with the rhythm section. The audience was very receptive, and the music felt good. The acoustics were fine, and we could hear ourselves and each other. We received a warm response and then took an intermission. J.J. thanked us and complimented the rhythm section. It was a real pleasure to play with him. He's a master of his instrument and his time and

feeling were beautiful. Refreshments were provided for us backstage and we all had something, except for Bud, who was sitting in a chair, still glaring and still not saying a word.

It was getting close to time for the second half, in which Paul and I were to start as a trio with Bud. Paul approached me and asked if I had any idea what we were going to play. I answered, "No," and looked toward Bud. He was still sitting in his chair, glaring and not saying a word. Paul and I looked at one another, aware that we were both very tense and anxious about what would happen next.

The intermission was over. The announcer was introducing Bud Powell. The audience applauded enthusiastically. Upon hearing his name, Bud rose from the chair and started briskly toward the stage, passing within inches of Paul and myself. He was still glaring, and he still hadn't said a word.

We felt even more tense than before and hesitated, actually frozen in our tracks. Bud had nearly reached the stage when he realized there was no one coming behind him. He approached us, wearing the most terrified and insecure expression on his face, and said, "Aren't you guys going to play with me?" Paul and I were shocked. Bud was even more frightened than we were. The realization broke the ice, and we said, "Sure, Bud, let's go." We followed him on stage, still with no idea of what we were going to play.

Bud called a tune and a key, both of which were standard, so there was no problem. We played four or five tunes as a trio. Then J.J. and Barney joined us to make it a quintet for the finale.

Bud's trio set was on fire, and then he provided some of the most stimulating comping you could hope to hear behind the horns. The concert was a great success and everything worked out fine.

We packed up our instruments and left. Outside, as we were loading the station wagon, I noticed a young guy who had gone up to Bud and was trying to explain in limited English how much he had enjoyed seeing and hearing Bud Powell in person. He asked Bud if he could have the honor of shaking his hand. Bud just stood there, with both hands in his pockets, glaring and not saying a word.

The return trip to Paris was nice. Everyone was pleased with the results we had achieved, but Bud was just glaring out of his window at the darkness and not saying a word.

When we arrived in St. Germain des Pres, we said goodnight and remarked what a pleasure it had been, and we parted, going our separate ways. Bud just stood there glaring and didn't say a word.

— AL

Or Opposite Oscar Peterson?

by Eddie Higgins

During one of the many times in the late 1950s and '60s I worked opposite Oscar Peterson at the London House in Chicago (fourteen times in twelve years, to be exact), he and Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen were having a particularly hot night. Even when one or another of them wasn't "on", the trio was awesome — in my opinion the greatest piano trio in the history of jazz. And on this occasion, they were all on, and the total effect was just devastating.

After they had finished their third encore to a five-minute standing, whistling, screaming, stomping ovation and left the bandstand, it was my unenviable task to follow them with *my* trio. I was proud of Richard Evans and Marshall Thompson, and we had developed a good reputation of our own among the various groups with whom we shared the bandstand in those halcyon days. But there wasn't anyone who could have followed Oscar Peterson that night. I mean, there was, I swear, smoke and steam coming out of the piano when the set ended.

Well, I did what I was being paid to do, but with that sinking feeling you get when you're down two sets to love, the score in the third set is two-five, and you're looking across the net at John McEnroe.

After a lackluster set of forty minutes, which seemed like three hours, we left the stand to polite applause, and I started to look for a hole to climb into. Oscar had been sitting with friends in Booth 16 — remember? — and as I attempted to sneak past him into the bar, he reached out and grabbed my arm.

"I want to *talk* to you," he said in a grim tone of voice.

I followed him out into the lobby of the building, which of course was deserted at that time of night. He backed me up against the wall and started poking a forefinger into my chest. It still hurts when I think about it.

"What the hell was *that* set all about?" he said.

I started a feeble justification but he cut me off. "Bullshit! If you couldn't play, you wouldn't *be* here. If I *ever* hear you play another dumb-ass set like that, I'm going to come up there personally and break your arm! You not only embarrassed Richard and Marshall, you embarrassed *me* in front of my friends, just when I had been telling them how proud I am of you, and how great you play.

"I know we're having a good night, but there are plenty of nights when you guys put the heat on *us*, and if you don't believe me, ask Ray and Ed. We walk in the door, and you're smoking up there, and we look at each other and say, 'Oh oh, no coasting on the first set tonight!' So just remember one thing, Mr. Higgins, when you go up there to play, don't compare yourself to me or anyone else. You play *your* music *your* way, and play it the best you have in you, *every* set, *every* night. That's called professionalism." And he turned and walked back into the club without a further word.

I've never forgotten that night for two reasons. It was excellent advice from someone I admired and respected tremendously. And it showed that he cared about me deeply.

I'm still making a living playing the piano, and, believe it or not, playing jazz for the most part. It's more of a struggle now, after thirty-five years, than it was at the beginning, but I attribute that to two factors mostly.

One, I insist on living where I want to — Miami in the winter and Cape Cod in the summer — instead of where I should live in order to further my career, New York City. Two, the thirty-year dominance of rock, country, disco, Top Forty, and other forms of musical primitivism (I don't *care* who does it; it's still musical primitivism) has just about dried up the venues for the kind of music I play, with the exception of a few remaining holdouts in the big cities. For example, in all of South Florida, with a population of close to seven million people, there are three jazz clubs at present — two in Miami and one in Fort Lauderdale. So I've had to start traveling a little: traditional jazz festivals, at which I dust of my Dixieland repertoire and my stride and boogie-woogie chops; Chicago, which is still a place I can work just about any time I want; and infrequent trips abroad. I try to fill in the gaps with "casuals" (L.A. jargon), "the outside" (Miami jargon), "jobbing" (Chicago jargon), "general business" (Boston jargon), and whatever they call it in New York.

It's a tough way to make a living, but as Med Flory said in that same issue of the *Jazzletter* with your piece on Oscar, you're never completely happy doing anything else. So you just do it.

Drop a line if you have the time, and if you don't, I understand completely. Your friend always,

Eddie