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Letters

I'm most aware of the improbability of jazz as the favorite music of gay people when, strolling down Castro or Polk with my headphones on, listening to perhaps Ellington, Coltrane, or Gary Burton, I see hundreds of other gay men and wonder if any of them ever hear such music.

When I used to sit between the turntables at KJAZ, I wondered whether there were any other gay jazz DJs. It was during my jazz DJ years that I very reluctantly acknowledged my own homosexuality.

In the late 1970s, I sat down at a grand piano in one of Oakland's quiet, secluded gay bars, and played Billy Strayhorn's *Lush Life*. A man came over from the bar, astonished. "When did you learn that tune?" he demanded, amazed at hearing it played in that environment. Like me, he probably thought he was the only gay person in the world aware of the tune.

About the same period, there was the gay "rap" group in Berkeley where I heard a gay musing about how secluded and antisocial his daily life was, and he mentioned listening to KJAZ as one of his oddball preferences. Here was another jazz fan who, like myself, felt that to be gay and a jazz fan was to belong to mutually exclusive minorities.

At an all-gay pool tournament in Los Angeles, I heard a gentleman play a brief sketch on piano that was straight out of Kenton. I made some sort of comment that only a jazz fan could make, and he straightened up. "I was Kenton's road manager," he beamed. Like two Egyptians meeting off the coast of Nome. A couple of years later we met again and I treated him to some vintage Kenton on my little Sanyo. He put on the headphones and I pushed the button; as his face lit up and we laughed, we shared a secret nobody in the bar would comprehend.

At a party at Febe's, the city's oldest gay bar, a guy got into a conversation with me and we discovered that we were not only both Bill Evans fans but also mutual friends of Earl Zindars. It was also in Febe's that I heard a tape including Sarah Vaughan and Bill Evans — the only time I've heard Evans in a gay bar.

I believe that the gay world is more inclusive than most people suspect, but the percentage of music lovers who love jazz — and I mean those who can discern between Barry Harris and Bud Powell, Charlie Parker and Sonny Stitt, Zoot Sims and Stan Getz, Chick Corea and McCoy Tyner, or between the bands of Stan Kenton and Don Ellis — is quite small. Maybe five percent of all music lovers are jazz fans in that category. From within that tiny group of people, trying to uncover another tiny group, most of whom are secretive and withdrawn, would be a research project that would scare away your average social scientist.

Why do all the photos in gay magazines look silly to me? Why don't I like opera, Judy Garland, haute couture, the whole bag? Am I the only gay man in the universe who listens with equal appreciation to Johnny Hodges, Frank Sinatra, Don Byas, Jim Hall, Lester Young, and Thelonious Monk? Probably not, but it seems so.

Gene Miller, San Francisco, California

The Grover Sales article is extraordinary.

Willard Jenkins,
Jazz Coordinator, Arts Midwest
Minneapolis, Minnesota

A Journey to Cologne

Part III

During the last set of the last night in Ottawa, I laughed harder, I think, than I ever have in my life.

There are those people who tap swizzle sticks on glasses during a performance. There are those who sing along with the music. There are those who talk, only too audibly. That night we had one who whistled. Not even tunes, just one neat single tone, usually the fifth of the key. Roger would be playing a solo or I would be singing and from somewhere in the room we would hear that fifth, tidy and steady and in tune. But I couldn't tell where it was coming from.

I had sung two or three tunes in that last set when Roger said to me, "We've been doing our own songs all week, and I'm getting tired of them. Let's do something else. Do *I Thought about You*. You like that."

"But we've never done it!" I said, going into panic. "I don't even know what key I'd do it in!"

"You probably do it here," Roger said. "Four bars." And he began to play an intro and the rhythm section joined him and I had no alternative but to sing it. I got into it, hoping I wouldn't forget the lyrics. So far so good. Roger took a solo, then nodded to me to come back in and take it out. Having got that far on automatic pilot, I depended on it to get me through the rest. There are innumerable funny song titles that float around the music business, titles such as *When You're in Love, the Whole World is Jewish*, and one that is attributed to Zoot Sims, *How Many Times Do I Have to Tell You I Love You?* My favorite is one I got from Jo Stafford, *Meet Me Behind the Library, Honey, I'm Three Days Overdue*. And there are many parodies on existing songs, some of which sink deep into the subconscious. Without intending to, without even thinking about it, with a sort of appalling automaticity, I sang, as I went into that final chorus:

"I turned a trick on a train,
and I thought about you . . . "

The sound system in that room wasn't bad. The words rang out well. Roger's hands paused above the keyboard as he thought, "Did I really hear that?" Then he began to laugh. And

when he did that, the audience, which had a puzzled look on its collective face, realized that they had indeed heard what they thought they had heard. They exploded in laughter. And I, realizing I really had sung that, joined them. From there things went downhill. Nobody in the world can play funnier than Roger Kellaway when he wants to, and at that moment he wanted to. To compound the situation, the whistler started in again, right on the fifth. Suddenly I realized who was doing it, a drunk who had been there all evening with his wife. The man seemed to be staggering sitting down. He sort of rolled around in the chair while his head rolled around on his shoulders, glassy-eyed and whistling his fifth. His wife was one of the homeliest women I have ever seen. I remembered a tune popular in the 1930s, *The Whistler and his Dog*, and it occurred to me to so dedicate the next song. (Later, somebody in the audience told me they thought I had sung, "I turned a trick in a tree.")

I was unable to complete *I Thought about You*. Given the profound communicability of laughter, the more the audience laughed, the more I laughed, and the more I laughed, the more they laughed, and the performance crumbled into chaos. We went into the next tune but I could get through only a little of it. I would look at the whistler and his dog and start laughing again, then try to get that title out of my mind, which only made it worse. I did about a chorus and said to Roger, "You finish it," and walked off the bandstand.

The next day Roger and I flew back to New York on one of the small feeder airlines. The aircraft was a high-winged Fokker, with single seats on either side of the aisle. But the company was not so small that it did not have its own magazine. Roger, who was sitting behind me, leaned around the back of my seat to hand me a copy of it, open at an advertisement. "Have you seen this?" he said.

It was a fashion ad — smiling male and female models wearing sports and other clothing that was bulletproof. For a moment it seemed like something in *National Lampoon* and then I realized it was quite serious. The text described the dashing cut of these clothes that might save you from an assassin's bullet. At first I laughed. Then I thought of John Paul II and Ronald Reagan and Anwar Sadat and George Wallace and John Lennon and Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy and Jack Kennedy and all the lesser political figures similarly cut down whose names we don't even remember. But of course. Ottawa is the capital of Canada, yet has extremely poor service from the major airlines, including even Air Canada, which is government-owned. The seat of the United Nations is New York, so there must be a constant flow of diplomats back and forth between the two cities. What more logical place to advertise bulletproof clothing than on this little airline that offers the only direct flights between the two cities, and thus must be patronized by diplomats from many countries? I thought, "What the hell kind of world has it become?" Well, maybe the reason I was writing this album was right there in that ad.

From New York I flew home to California and a meeting with Sarah Vaughan. The most important matter now was to find out if she would do the project. I called her, and my wife and I drove, one Sunday afternoon, over to her house.

Sass lives next door to composer Allyn Ferguson in a San Fernando Valley community called Hidden Hills. There are two accesses to Hidden Hills, each of them gated. You have to announce your name to a guard who then telephones the house of your destination to get permission for you to enter. The guard called Sass, then waved us on.

She lives with her mother and her daughter Debby, an exquisite beauty with light brown skin and delicate features. There is a faery-like fragility about Debby. She looks light enough to fly. Men, and women too for that matter, are startled when they meet her. Sass recorded Bill Evans' and my song *Waltz for Debby* for her when she was a wee little thing. And now Debby had just graduated — "Thank God!" Sass said — from the University of California at Santa Barbara with a degree in communications. Sass tries to conceal it but you can see how proud of Debby she is. That afternoon, a few minutes after the guard called from the gate, Sass was sitting at her kitchen table with Debby, June Eckstine (Billy's ex-wife) and an actor friend who read the Tarot cards. He told her, "You know a man who is going to approach you about a project that somehow has something to do with religion. You'll do it and you will be remembered for it long after we're all gone."

"That man," Sass told him, pointing to the front entrance, "is about to walk through that door." And a minute or two later I rang her doorbell.

It is one of those homes that center on the kitchen, a big country kitchen. My wife and I joined them at the broad wooden table. I put a tape of the Italian album into a small cassette player, spreading typewritten copies of the English lyrics on the table, and started the tape.

"Sing them for me," Sass said.

"They're not in my range," I said. I had no eyes to sing for Sarah Vaughan.

"Sing them anyway," she insisted.

So I put the tape back to the start. At that point, someone said, "Look!" and pointed at the window and a vine-covered fence just outside it. A great flock of doves was gathering on the fence, in the leaves, and on the sill, like an audience arriving. You see doves occasionally in Southern California, but not commonly, and not in flocks. The symbolism gave us all shivers.

And so for an audience of Sarah Vaughan, her friends, and a flock of doves, I sang the songs, and when I finished, the doves flew away. I swear it. "Oh boy!" Sass said, watching them go.

"Well?" I said.

"They're beautiful," Sass said. "It's a whole new way of

Notice

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writing songs." She had caught it all. She had heard the beauty of Tito's writing. The openness of the forms, the lack of melodic repeats, the absence of rhyme, did not throw her.

We had our singer. I hurried home and telephoned Gigi.

What we did not have was a conductor. Gigi phoned me a few days later. He said that a reporter from the German magazine *Stern* had told him that if we could get Leonard Bernstein for our conductor, we'd get the cover of the magazine.

"Who cares about *Stern*?" I said.

"All over the world, journalists read *Stern*," Gigi said.

"Not the journalists I know," I said. "Besides, we need a conductor who is sensitive to jazz, and I don't think Leonard Bernstein is." As it turned out, the issue was academic: Bernstein was booked up for three years in advance.

During this time, all possibilities of an early Italian premiere for the work — when and if I ever got it written — collapsed. Undaunted as always, Gigi made arrangements for a concert in Cologne to be underwritten in part by the German television network. This, he assured me, was to our advantage. He said we would be far better off working with German television crews. Now what about a conductor. Could I get Andre Previn?

Andre Previn is a different case. Andre is an accomplished jazz player himself. The critics may have damned his jazz playing in the past, but it is indisputable that of all the major symphony conductors in the world, none could even approach him in sympathy for and comprehension of jazz. Andre was an old friend and I could comfortably approach him. I tracked him down and phoned him in England. He was then still conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic — the directorship of the Los Angeles Philharmonic was pending. The project fascinated him, but by now Gigi was locked into a June concert date and Andre was committed to conducting at Tanglewood in June.

Various other names had been suggested to Gigi by one person or another, and then Lalo Schifrin's name was mentioned. Lalo and I have written songs together, including two complete Broadway shows, both of which, to our deep shared chagrin, went unproduced and lie in filing cabinets, though I consider his music for them brilliant. He is a highly accomplished musician, and he had the further advantage of having worked with Sarah Vaughan in the past. I got him on the phone.

"Remember when I called you," I said, "about the poems of the Pope, and asked you who we knew who spoke Polish, and you suggested I call Bronislau Kaper?"

"Yes," he said, sounding cautiously curious.

"Well, you're not going to believe this," I said, and outlined the project as it had thus far progressed and asked if he might be interested in going to Germany with me and conducting.

"Man," he said, laughing, "you and I have been involved in some weird jobs together, but this is the weirdest." He said he wanted to hear the music before making a decision. I mailed him a copy of the Italian album. A few days later he called back, said he liked it, and would indeed be interested in working with us.

All *right*! We had Sarah Vaughan and Lalo Schifrin committed, at least in principle, to the project! And I began to realize how many nationalities were involved in it.

After a conference with the German television people, Gigi set the date for the concert and recording sessions: June 30, 1984. The location had been changed from Cologne to Dusseldorf, which is immediately nearby; indeed the two cities are contiguous. I assumed that the recording sessions would be held *after* the television show and concert, when everyone would be rehearsed to perfection. If only it had been so — the fear and tension that would have been avoided. In the meantime, Gigi said, it was essential that I go to Geneva to write the rest of the lyrics and to consult with Francy Boland about the arrangements. He said he was renting an apartment there for me and Sahib Shihab, who would do all the copy work. I told him I could not come before early April, since I was committed to do a concert and a couple of college lectures.

Sahib Shihab wrote to ask me to buy and bring the paper he would need, because American score paper is much superior to that available in Europe. I sent his shopping list to a composers' supply house in Hollywood. After all, what was a little paper to add to my luggage? When I packed it, it filled two suitcases and weighed a hundred and twenty-two pounds.

I went from Montreal to Milan since, Gigi said, he wanted to consult with me about certain matters of the program and press coverage of the concert. I was sitting in his office waiting for him to get off the telephone when a man with a familiar face entered. But I hadn't seen that face in twenty-two years.

"Sahib?" I said, a little tentatively.

"Yeah," Shihab said, and we shook hands.

It was about then that Gigi announced that he was removing from the project several of the songs I had already translated — *The Crypt*, *Pavement*, which is about St. Peter's in Rome, and *Easter Vigil*. He felt they were too specifically Catholic, and worked against the trans-denominational message we were trying to create. While I could see his reasoning, I was nonetheless disturbed. There was an eerie beauty to Tito Fontana's music for *The Crypt*, appropriate to the words, that I felt we needed. And *Easter Vigil* not only had an odd and interesting melody, it was the only up-tempo tune in the collection. What annoyed me most was that, according to Gigi, the German Calvinists would be put off by the more specifically Catholic references and symbology. I am not Catholic, but I had given myself completely to rendering John Paul II's Catholic sensibilities into English. Damn the Germans! Still doing their censorship thing! What they don't like gets silenced! Six million Jews died in their concentration camps, but what goes too often unmentioned is that eleven million people in all died in those camps, a lot of them Catholic. And so this surrender to a German bias did not sit well with me.

Actually, Gigi wanted to take out still another of the songs, *The Madeleine*, because it dealt with Mary Magdelene at the tomb. But that one, I was determined, was not coming out, Calvinist objections be damned. It was the first of Tito's melodies I had come to love, and it was far and away the most beautiful song of them all. *The Madeleine* would be removed over my dead body. Gigi decided to humor me, saying it could perhaps be done as a sort of encore with piano accompaniment only. He was playing a card from his sleeve: letting me think the subject was still open for discussion. So I decided to play a card from my own sleeve: knowing how much she liked that song, I

would apprise Sass of the situation, suggesting that she refuse to do the concert if it should be removed. This would turn out to be one of the few disputes with Gigi that I would win. Gigi was educated by the Jesuits.

Shihab and I set off by train for Geneva. I was not as yet comfortable with him, and certainly did not foresee that the weeks he and Francy Boland and I were about to spend together would, in retrospect, prove to be among the happiest of my life. His Muslim religion didn't bother me. Ahmad Jamal and Dakota Staton had, early in the 1960s, taken actions preliminary to suing Ralph Gleason for identifying them, in his syndicated newspaper column, with the Black Muslim movement, which was notable chiefly for its open hatred of white people. Ahmad, a likeable and immensely decent man, told me at that time that for him and for Dakota, conversion was a matter of religious conviction. They had, he said, no such hatred of white people. I think that my slight unease with Sahib Shihab came from a suspicion that he might be puritanical. He shattered it just after we crossed the Swiss border.

We had a compartment to ourselves. And suddenly, he sang an outrageous obscene parody of *Bye Bye Blackbird*.

The train rolled on through the Alps. I thought of *The Whistler and his Dog* and "I turned a trick on a train", and laughed. There is a particularly excellent red wine called Dole that is made in French Switzerland, near the rise of the Rhone, but doesn't travel well. They carried it, I learned, on this train. I ordered a bottle and got Shihab to teach me that parody. We laughed our way through the Swiss mountain passes, all the way to Geneva, where Francy met us, and installed us in an apartment that he had sublet from his daughter, Miriam, born in New York City while Francy was traveling with the Birdland All-Stars, and her husband, nicknamed Reoc, pronounced Ray-ock, a French Swiss art teacher.

Sahib Shihab was born Edmund Gregory on June 23, 1925, in Savannah, Georgia. "That's Johnny Mercer's home town," I said one night in the kitchen while we were cooking our dinner.

"That's right," he said, turning the veal sausage as I sipped some Dole. "It was in Savannah, Georgia, that I first came to this planet." There is a dry and surrealistic quality about his humor, as if this existence were merely an illusion, which of course it is. "My parents moved to New York City when I was three, so I know very little about Savannah. My father was a cook on a merchant vessel. When I was twelve I lost my mother. He was on the sea at the time, so I was in the city alone. I did have some family there, and they looked out for me until my grandmother came to collect me and my mother's body. We took her to her birthplace to bury her. Charleston, South Carolina.

"I was already playing saxophone. I was musical from the beginning. I liked the sound of the saxophone and my mother bought me an alto, because that was all she could afford. Elmer Snowden, who had played banjo at one time with Duke Ellington, was a friend of the family, and he knew the saxophone. He was very helpful. He picked out the best one available, and it was a Buscher. My first instrument. And he gave me my first lessons. I played in my first band in New York when I was twelve, just before my mother died. It was led by Luther Henderson.

"After my mother died, I lived in Savannah for a year with my grandmother. I played in the only good band in the town. It was led by a bass player named Larry Noble, and we traveled on weekends. My father came to get me after a year, and we moved to Schenectedy, in upstate New York, where I finished high school. I played in the jazz club there, and had my first child. I was seventeen. I wanted to marry the girl, but my father thought that it would interfere with my education, so that was the end of that idea. My father and mother were very religious, and sang in the church choir. She had a contralto voice and I could pick her sound out easily.

"After high school I went to New York, and for the next three years I played with many of the great artists of that time. Somehow I got to Boston, and I played with the Perry brothers. Ray Perry played alto and was the leader. He also played a most fantastic electric violin. It was the first time that I saw a violin like that. Joe Perry played tenor and Ray Perry was on drums. It was a nine-piece band, and we had a good band. I remember one matinee, Ray asked this piano player to sit in, and I noticed that he never looked at the keyboard. He fascinated me — and everyone else — with what he was playing. And the tempo was swift. His name was Bud Powell.

"On trumpet was a cat named Leonard Graham, who later changed his name and faith. He is now known as Idrees Sulieman. That's how long I've known him. In the band opposite us was a cat named Gerry Mulligan. I was nineteen.

"The world was at war, but being a conscientious objector, I didn't serve.

"Boston was a very clean town then, and I fell in love, my first love, with a very beautiful, brilliant, twenty-one-year-old virgin. This girl I really wanted to marry. And I had the approval of my father.

"I got an offer to go on the road with Buddy Johnson, and I took it. This was the real beginning of my road experience. Buddy had a record that was warm at the time. The song that made the noise was sung by a man whose name I can't remember. It was called *Baby Don't You Cry*. The singer was drafted while we were on the road and the only one who could duplicate his sound was me.

"I left Buddy in Chicago and joined Fletcher Henderson's band. I played second alto until the first alto was drafted. This was my first experience with the hot seat, as I call it. It was also the first time I saw so many sharps. Fletcher had written a chart on *Swanee River* in the key of E, which puts the E-flat horn in C-sharp. This was an experience.

"I also got experience directing the orchestra and the show on the off night. This was Monday. At that time, bands would work for weeks at a time. It was wonderful. We worked a club on the South Side, the old Club Delisa, and then we had a month at another club called Rumboogie. It was here that I got the news that my first love was pregnant. It was a blow for me.

"Roy Eldridge was working at a club called El Grotto, and he needed an alto player. He was going to New York after they finished the gig, so I took the job. This was my first time of meeting Eddie Lockjaw Davis. This was the time of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Miles Davis, Max Roach, Sonny Rollins, and many others. Fifty-second Street was jumping. It was like an oasis of jazz. One could go from one club to another in seconds, they were so close together.

"I was very confused and disappointed with the way people of color were being treated when I met Talib Daoud, a very good first trumpet player. I used to think him strange, because he was always in a hurry, and he always had the New York *Times* under his arm. I wasn't thinking at the time, and I was only interested in the sports page. Therefore I thought him to be

a very intelligent man, and out of reach from the cats, so to speak. One night he approached me while I was standing in front of the Spotlite, a jazz club on 52nd Street. He said that he wanted to talk to me. I couldn't imagine why, but I thought,

'Maybe he has a gig for me,' and I went with him to his pad. We sat down and he started to talk. Everything he was saying made a lot of sense. He lived with his mother, I remember, and in one of the rooms he must have had a thousand books. I remember asking him if he had read all those books, and he said he had. He took me through history, and my eyes were opened.

"We talked of many things, and then he showed me the Quran. There were many Islamic books that he lent me, and once I began to read them I couldn't put them down. I found them most interesting, and full of truth. This was the beginning of my Islamic studies. I was pretty loose in my teens, trying to follow the cats, and doing all the wrong things. I had had very little guidance. After the death of my mother, I got most of my experience in the streets. Talib Daoud presented a whole new world to me, and I accepted it. It was easy for me to understand things of a religious nature because I came from a religious background. I have always believed that there must have been a supreme mind in the making of this vast and wonderful universe, and I found the answers to most of my questions in studying Islam. Would you like to pour me a glass of that wine?" he said, almost ready to serve dinner.

"I thought you Muslims didn't drink," I said.

"I do not always live up to my faith," he replied with a suppressed smile, and I poured him some wine and we had dinner.

The next day he and Francy and I went to lunch in a Chinese restaurant in downtown Geneva. The menu was in French, which Francy and I had to translate for Sahib. Francy had eyes for a certain meatball dish. I said to him in French, "We can't have that, it contains pork, and it's against Sahib's religion." "Ah," Francy said in his growly Belgian accent, "you don't have to tell him, do you?" I immediately translated this for Sahib, and we laughed.

A few days later I got Sahib to take up the story again, as we were walking through a glorious botanical garden near the shore of Lac Leman, looking at the spring flowers in the sunlight. "Talib Daoud was instrumental in bringing the first missionary to New York," Sahib said. "We were so enthusiastic with these truths that we wanted to tell everybody. There were a lot of people willing to listen, but many could not bring themselves to accept the teachings. A lot of people thought that this was another fad, and that it would soon go away. They were wrong about that. I began to realize that it's very difficult for people to face the truth.

"During that time, Art Blakey and a few other musicians decided to get a band together. This was the beginning of the Messengers. It started with eight pieces and grew to eighteen. I remember that the members of the first Messengers were Art on drums, Gary Mapp, bass, Thelonious Monk, piano, Cecil Payne, baritone sax, a tenor man from Brooklyn whose name I can't remember, Ray Copeland, trumpet, Haleem Rashid, trombone, and myself on alto.

"We used to generate jobs by renting a ballroom in the Bronx on Sunday afternoons and having featured guests. On one of these occasions, Charlie Parker was to be the featured guest. We were all looking forward to it. Bird came late to the gig, and then when he showed up he said to me that he wouldn't read the notes, and I said, 'No sweat.' I would play the charts and when a solo came, I would give him a cue, and he would blow. Well. The first solo for alto came and Bird got up and took his solo. When he sat down I thought it was all over, but the people wouldn't let it finish there. I thought to myself, 'Just what is there left for me to say when Bird said it all?' Bird said to me, 'Man, all one can do is play what one knows,' so I got up and played, and the people loved it. Bird gave me courage, and I'll never forget it."

"You know," I said, "I've never known an artist of real worth who didn't have doubts, and they can only be overcome through courage. Paul Tillich, the theologian, said that an act of courage allows you to experience God. How old were you when you became a convert to Islam?"

"Twenty-one," Sahib said. "Many musicians who were in the Messengers accepted the faith also. But very few continued to follow the teachings. I'm still trying to follow the teachings but I'm not doing a very good job of it, I must admit. However, I find it difficult to turn my back on the truth.

"Art was living on 117th Street at the time. We used to have our meetings there. I experienced my first real Muslim at one of those meetings. This man was a dignitary at the United Nations. He came up to Art's house in a Cadillac limousine driven by a man of color. Everyone in the block was on the lookout for this event, because we had talked it up but people didn't want to believe us. When they saw this long black Cadillac stop in front of Art's house, it was a different story. This very distinguished guest got out with a beautiful red fez on his head, and he was very tall. Everyone started to whisper. This man came into Art's house to meet his brothers in Islam, and made prayers with us on a bare wooden floor. His humbleness was overwhelming.

"This man was Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, who was, at that time, a judge on the World Court of the League of Nations, right here in Geneva. This was very impressive to us all. We, the brothers in Islam, used to go all over the city of New York, preaching the message. But many people turned a deaf ear to what we had to say.

"Harlem was jumping at that time. There was Small's Paradise, and Minton's Playhouse, and later came Basie's. The

Apollo theater was the proving ground for many artists. I played in the band behind many artists who are superstars now. I also played in a number of small combos during those rich, beautiful days. Art Blakey, Thelonious Monk, Oscar Pettiford, plus I was on many recordings in the New York area. When Birdland opened, things began to move downtown. This was the time that Dizzy needed a baritone player, because his baritone player was leaving. I didn't have a job, so I bought the baritone player's horn. It was a Dolnet, and the player's name was Bill Graham. That's when I started playing baritone. I worked with Diz for a couple of years and we played Birdland often. I remember making a big-band record date with Art Blakey, and there was this tenor player sitting next to me. When he took his solo, it was something else. His name was John Coltrane. On that date were people like Melba Liston, Jimmy Cleveland, Donald Byrd, Cecil Payne, Kenny Dorham, Ray Copeland. Those were the days, fantastically rich and musical days.

"I came in touch with Talib Daoud again. He had started to manage Dakota Staton, and they married. I became her musical director for a while. Then I joined Illinois Jacquet's band. He had a seven-piece group, and we went on the road. He took the group to Europe, and this was my first time out of the States. He had musicians like Mathew Gee on trombone, his brother Russell on trumpet, I was on baritone, Ossie Johnson was on drums, Johnny Acey on piano, Al Lucas on bass. Sarah Vaughan and Coleman Hawkins were the heavies with us. We toured Europe and finished in Scandinavia. The Swedish people impressed me very much, because I was beginning to lose my faith in mankind at the time. These people had to be putting me on! They were so nice, so understanding. We were only going to be in Sweden for a short time, so I thought it was just an act. I wanted to return and live among these people for a time. My chance came when Quincy Jones called me for a job with a show that was going to play Europe. This was in 1958, and the show was called *Free and Easy*."

I remembered vividly. It was an all-black company doing a remake of the Johnny Mercer-Harold Arlen *St. Louis Woman*. I met Sahib and Melba Liston and Jerome Richardson and Phil Woods and Benny Bailey, all of whom were in that band, just after the show folded. It went broke in Europe, and Quincy had to pawn his soul to Mercury Records to get his musicians home.

Sahib stayed in Scandinavia, settling in Copenhagen, where he married an extraordinarily pretty Danish girl and started a new family. "Do you ever feel a desire to go back to America to live?" I asked one morning when we were having croissants and coffee, in a little cafe that had become one of our haunts, and following the fortunes of Jesse Jackson in the *International Herald-Tribune*. It was in the *Herald-Tribune* that we read Basie had just died, and then that Red Garland was gone.

"Yes," he said. "I'm an American. And that's my home. But I can't go back and just be some nigger."

Gigi arrived from Milan, Nat Peck from London. With Sahib they sat in Francy's small apartment and listened to Clarke-Boland Big Band records, on some of which Nat played trombone. There was something sad about it, like the reminiscences of old soldiers.

Gigi said he needed another tune for our project, he wanted a hit, a big hit. He had asked Lalo Schifrin to submit a tune or two. We went out to lunch and then sat on the quay by the lakeside, watching the great jet of water that shoots two or three hundred feet in the air to no particular purpose. Then Gigi and Nat went away again and Francy and Sahib and I went back to work.

The first problem we faced was that nobody had set keys with Sarah Vaughan. Gigi had been negotiating the terms of her contract with Harry Adesso, her manager, and Sass, quite rightly, would not start work until it was settled. I shouldn't have come here so soon. Had I stayed in California until her contract was signed, I could have gone to her house and set those keys. Now I was trying to accomplish this from halfway around the world by long distance telephone. Sass and I discussed the tunes, and she gave me keys. I could only pray they were correct, because with the size of the orchestra Gigi was planning — about eighty — and the scope of the project, I estimated that at least a quarter of a million dollars would go down the drain in Dusseldorf if Francy's charts should turn out to be in the wrong keys.

The apartment had two bedrooms. In his room, Sahib had set up a trestle table on which to do the copying. I needed a keyboard of some kind. Francy took me to a music shop where we rented a small but adequate electronic instrument, which I set up in my room.

A sense of the frantic was beginning to infuse the project. Every morning, early, Gigi would phone from Milan, first to Sahib and me, then to Francy. These calls began to affect the three of us like Chinese water torture. Their purpose seemed clear: to exert pressure and accelerate the work. In fact they slowed it by breaking the continuity of concentration. It would take two hours or so to find the rhythm again.

I finished another of the lyrics, called *The Children*. It presented a structural problem, which I resolved by using some of Tito's musical material to create a double release, giving the melody an odd but arresting ABBA form.

All at once it seems they grow up.
They find out what love is,
and then they're adults.
Hand in hand they wander,
unaware of crowds that
flow around them,
silhouetted profiles in the sunset.
Their hearts are like
captive birds inside them,
and in the throb of every heartbeat
is the pulse of all mankind.

Silently they sit together
on the riverbank
in the moonlight
by a lonely tree.
The mist hasn't lifted,
the earth is a whisper.

Like April kites
their hearts are soaring
somewhere overhead.

Although it has always been like this,
will it change when at last
they go their way?

Here's another way to see it:
a cupful of light
is poured on a flower,
suddenly uncovering in each of us
an unforeseen dimension.
What has been started within you,
will you some day spoil it,
or will you keep it safe inside you,
always knowing right from wrong?

Lalo sent me two lead sheets by courier. One melody struck me as perfect for a finale — a rousing gospel tune, which brought to the concert a black American Protestant feeling, thereby implying that the issue of man's survival is the common dilemma of all men and all religions. I thought of our planet as viewed from space, and its obvious fragility, on which Eugene Cernan and the other astronauts have commented. Slowly and painstakingly I turned Lalo's melody into a song called *Let It Live*, plagued by uncertainty, reading the lyric line by line to Sahib, in need of his reassurance. Finally, at lunch, I read the first half of it to Francy.

Gigi's calls would come about 8:45. He would say, brightly, "Any progress?" And I would say, "No." He found out that Francy had heard part of the lyric. Sounding hurt, he asked why he was excluded.

Why indeed? Lionel Tiger wrote a book called *Men in Groups* about the almost mystical loyalty and sense of union that occur among men in military units, athletic teams, hunting parties, and other co-operating groups. The film *The Deer Hunter* captured it perfectly. My wife says she envies this quality in men, which does not exist in women, whose behavior, as Gloria Steinem has pointed out, so often is one of murderous competition with each other. Richard Leakey, in *The People of the Lake*, politely takes Robert Ardrey apart for his theory of the doomed killer ape. Leakey says that, to the contrary, altruism has a distinct survival value for the group. If I may take it a step further, I suggest there are two kinds of human being: the primitive sociopaths of all kinds, including many military men (but by no means all of them) and all too many politicians, the speechifying bullies; and a much more evolved being whose sense of duty to the group and ultimately to the whole species produces people like Eve Curie.

We had established a routine. I would go for long walks in the morning, working on the lyrics in my head. Francy and I and Sahib would meet for lunch, then go back to Francy's apartment, where he would ask for my thoughts on the charts and have me set tempi for the songs, which he would note with a metronome and then mark on the charts. He accepted most of my suggestions, particularly as they pertained to the meaning of the lyrics, but he turned one of them down flat: I wanted to use an accordion on *The Actor*, to set up a circus-like ambience. "Absolutely not," Francy said. "I'll do it another way," and he did.

After lunch Sahib would go back to our apartment and copy the parts from Francy's charts in a beautiful hand. And I would go for another walk or, on warm days, sit in the sun in a cafe I found on a stone island right where the Rhone flows out of Lac Leman, and search for ideas I liked enough to write down. You don't write lyrics, you find them. And then at night we would have dinner at one restaurant or another, or Sahib and I would cook, and we'd laugh or talk about sad things. While we were not aware of it at the time, Francy and Sahib and I had become a group. Alec Wilder used to refer to "getting into your bubble" to create. We were in one, together, groping our way toward solutions. Tony Bennett said to me once, "In the immortal words of Erroll Garner, 'Stumble — straight ahead.'"

Before the adventure was over, we were teasing Gigi about his passion for *ordnung*, saying, in the terrifying and chaotic days and then hours before the concert, in fake German accents, "Ve must haff ordnung!" Finally I exasperated him to the point where he said to me, "Without *ordnung*, there would have been no Clarke-Boland Big Band." Quite so. But that is the compact between the artist and the entrepeneur.

In telling Gigi that it took a long time to create a good jazz band in Europe, Kurt Edelhagen was being German. It is not an accident that the Germans have shown the least ability to play jazz of all the peoples of Europe. Edelhagen saw it as a step-by-step (one of Gigi's favorite phrases) plodding process of assemblage and *ordnung*. When Gigi said he could put together one of the greatest bands in history in Europe within a month, it was the impulsive genius of the Italians that spoke. Yes, it took *ordnung* to get the band booked and working and paid, but it took *inspiration* to create it, and Gigi in his argument with Edelhagen had an Italian inspiration that is one of the most fortuitous moments in jazz. The right brain had a vision; the left brain made it come into being. And when that band was burning, Clarke and Boland and Shihab and Persson and the rest weren't *thinking*. They were grooving.

In Geneva, Sahib and Francy and I attained that lovely balance between loneliness and companionship, between tension and relaxation. And, I see now, we didn't want anyone breaking the bubble. Not even Gigi, who had made the adventure possible. And Gigi is a prodigiously creative man who — in common with a lot of artists — doesn't understand the creative process, and whose enthusiasm I misread: he simply wanted to be involved in the work. Now it seems to me that we were unfair to him. But I didn't have time to think it all through then. I was busy. I didn't want him dragging me out of the cave, out into the eye-hurting light of the rational. Yet he would do it every morning, and it would take me hours to get back to the cave. And so I said to him, irritably, "Look, why don't you stay off the telephone and let us get some work done?"

And we didn't hear from him for several days. Francy, with a grin, started talking about "la treve" — the truce. Then one day, at lunch, he said, "La treve est finie. Gigi m'a telephone ce matin." The truce is over. Gigi called this morning.

Francy had played me a tune he had just written. Gigi came up to Geneva for a day, and I said, somewhat to Francy's surprise, "Francy's got a tune I think would make a good opener. Play it for him." Francy played the tune, which was in C-minor, a haunting thing. Gigi liked it immediately.

He went back to Milan and I sat in my cafe, or I walked, and looked for a lyric. Sometimes Francy and Sahib went with me, and Sahib says he saw the lyric take shape in my head as we strolled along the lake front, past the old League of Nations

whose purpose was shattered by the bullies and the jingoists and the soldiers wanting more toys, looking at statues to dead heroes and dead dreams, past a house in which Napoleon had once lodged his Josephine, thinking about Heisenberg, about the Leakeys and their unearthed apes who appear to have been our ancestors in Africa, about man's nobility and cruelty, that cruelty that dragged people from their homes in that self-same Africa to a hideous slavery in America, that bloody history that had given me these two new friends. Sahib says I gathered the materials for the song out of the air as we walked.

There is a beautiful stone railway bridge that crosses the Rhone gorge in a series of tall arches. And there is a pedestrian walk along one side of it. Alone on that bridge one day, leaning on the guard rail, peering down into the clear green waters of the river far below, I saw how the concert should open. And by the time I got back to the apartment, the lyric for Francy's tune was complete in my head.

We come from a distant past
that we've forgotten
And now we look and aspire
to the stars.
We are the mystery
not even we can decipher —
the mystery of man.

A story is told in stone
and broken arrows,
in traces of cities unknown
lost in sand,
in columns and castle walls,
silent and unseeing statues —
the history of man.

A wind stirs in the trees,
like voices in dreams,
and then, just when it seems
we know what it means,
suddenly it's gone.

The miracle is the mind
asking the questions,
seeking to find itself
if it can,
only to see itself
endlessly echoed in mirrors —
the mystery of man.

I phoned Gigi and told him he was now welcome to hear everything: the material was complete. I no longer needed the bubble. He listened to the latest lyrics over the phone, writing them down at the other end. Since English is not his language, it took a day or two for him to understand them. And then his calls became constantly more enthusiastic. How much more time did we need? Not much, I told him. Sahib was anxious to get home to Copenhagen — he had gigs to play — and would finish the copy work there. Francy and I took him to the railway station, and then I was alone in the big old apartment. Francy needed me for consultation, but that was all, and I had nothing to do all day but read, mostly French translations of the American espionage and detective stories Francy adores.

Francy had said almost nothing to me about his wife, who had died two years before this in her early fifties. Indeed, I knew more about her from Gigi than I did from Francy. Not long after Sahib left, we were having lunch in a pleasant cafe all of whose waitresses had become like friends to Sahib and me, a place unknown to me six weeks before and now comfortable and familiar. I watched one of the girls serve a dish of sherbet and found I could not remember the word for it in French. I asked Francy what it was called.

"Sorbet."

Then, after a silence, he said, "At the end, that was all my wife could eat. A little spoonful of sorbet. I watched her wither away." And he talked about her to me for the first time.

Finally the last of the charts were written. It was five weeks until the concert. It hardly seemed worth my going back to California, and Gigi and I decided I should come to Milan and help him plan the concert and talk to the English-speaking press. My one reservation was that I had been away so long from my wife. And Gigi, in one of those acts of spontaneous generosity that I learned are part of his character, said, "Bring her here. I'll send her a ticket."

I told Francy about it. "Ah," he said. "Now you know both sides. It is impossible to stay angry at him. It's maddening."

In those last days in Geneva, there was little for either Francy or me to do. We drove out to little country cafes, sat on terraces and looked at the fields of yellow rape flowers in the foreground of the mountains. Always in his car we listened to tapes, almost all of it pre-bebop jazz. I had forgotten how fluent some of those rhythm sections were. The trips with Francy were a re-education in the jazz of the 1930s and 40s. There was a lot of Lester Young, and Basie, and Ellington.

On the last day I took some pictures of him, sometimes with his tongue stuck out in whatever the Belgians call the gesture we know as the Bronx cheer. There is a tramway station in central Geneva in which there are three life-size bronze statues not of great heroes but of contemporary middle-aged members of the Swiss *bourgeoisie*. One is a man who stands there besides a suitcase. Another, immediately beside the tracks, is a woman who searches in her handbag for money or a streetcar ticket. The third is a man in a cap. He is seated on one of the waiting benches, smoking a short cheroot and reading a newspaper.

Francy thinks these statues are stupid, three realistic monuments to Swiss mediocrity. And so I took a bunch of photos of him with them, staring at the lady with the purse, sat beside the man with the newspaper, leaning nonchalantly on the man with the suitcase.

And then the last day was gone. We took the little electronic keyboard back to the music shop and paid the rental. Then he drove me to the station. "Sahib's gone, and now you'll be gone," he said, and I knew how much he missed his wife. I tried to make him laugh. "At least you'll be alone. I'll be with Gigi!" I would not have dared make that remark to him or Shihab six weeks earlier, when I was still an outsider.

I can still see him, in a knit red sports shirt, standing on the platform of the Geneva station, growing small as the train pulled out for Milan.

(to be continued)