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Jazzletter

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Are You Reading Someone Else's Copy?

Each issue of *The Underground Grammarian* contains the above question. It's discouraging, in the struggle to keep a small publication alive, to hear someone say something like, "I just love it. A friend sends me his copies when he's through with them."

In publications supported by advertising, salesmen boast to potential advertisers about how many people read each copy, and to the advertiser seeking exposure of his message, those figures have weight. He is less interested in how many people buy a periodical than in how many see it. An important phenomenon in periodical publishing is what is known as "controlled circulation". This means that the publication is given away, free; its revenues come entirely from advertising, and the more people it can reach, regardless of whether they pay for it, the more money it can charge for its ads. A number of major publications have been built that way. In Los Angeles, the newspaper now known as the *Daily News* began as the give-away *Valley Green Sheet*.

But a newsletter supported only by its subscriptions is in a different situation, and this one in particular. If enough people read it without subscribing to it, it can be put out of operation.

So if you're reading someone else's copy, please subscribe now. If the circulation does not substantially increase by the end of this volume number, this could turn out to be the last year of the *Jazzletter*.

Lenny Gone to Ground

Lenny Breau was an odd little guy, delicate, dishevelled, bohemian, and shy. He had a raggedy mustache and slightly woolly dark hair that was receding from his forehead, and he looked like what he was, French by origin, probably Norman French. Chet Atkins, whose conversation about guitar is liable to range from Charlie Christian through Jim Hall to Segovia and Bream, once called him "the best guitar player in the world today."

Country music has produced some remarkable guitarists, including Hank Garland and Thumbs Carllile, that incredible autodidact who sits there with his guitar lying across his lap, playing with a combination of fingers and thumb pick in the right hand and pressing down on the thing with the fingers of his left, the strings set up in some sort of E-flat major tuning. To hear Thumbs burning out bebop lines in the middle of a banal country-and-western dance tune is strange indeed.

Nor should one underestimate Jerry Reed, whose pursuit of hits and a movie career has caused his early recordings to be forgotten. But in such tracks as *In the Pines, Roving Gambler, The House of the Rising Sun*, and his knock-out performance of *Georgia on My Mind*, we hear how good he really was, and how much jazz had infused his playing. The miscegenation of jazz and hillbilly has long gone on in Nashville, and some of the best of its players are at ease in both idioms.

Lenny Breau came up through country-and-western music, his parents being professionals in the field, and it was Nashville that made him welcome. He is, like Garland, Carllile and Reed, the result of the jazz-country fusion, except that Breau took it a step further and brought into his work the full range of classical guitar technique. Chet Atkins was the first a&r man to give him his head, letting him record for RCA a milestone album in which he showed off his startling, for the time, jazz-classical technique. Gene Bertoncini, who is probably the best living exponent of jazz on the five-finger classical guitar, admires Breau; but then you'll search far to find a guitarist who doesn't.

Lenny was a heroin addict, which is one reason his career never blossomed the way it should have. There were periods when he was simply too unreliable to book, and others when he would disappear completely either to sink into destruction or to withdraw himself from it. He considered himself a Canadian, although he was actually born in Auburn, Maine, on August 8, 1941. He spent much of his career in Canada, in Toronto and Winnipeg, and in the mid-1970s he was in Kililoe, Ontario, of all places. But he would turn up from time to time, playing exquisitely, because, apparently, he never ceased to put in his six or seven hours a day of practice, strung out or not. When I would encounter him, he talked diffidently across that great gorge that separates the strung from the straights, although I had more compassion for his problem than he could possibly have realized.

In earlier times, it was not possible to play jazz on the classical guitar. The sound of the instrument is too delicate to be heard in most jazz contexts; and the amplification in use in regular jazz guitars, a magnetic pickup system, functioned only with steel strings. Until the invention of the ceramic pickup, then, it was not feasible to play group jazz on the nylon-string guitar with that classical technique developed by Sor and Tarrega, among others, and brought to perfection finally in this century by Andres Segovia. Charlie Byrd was among the first to experiment with the classical technique in jazz; but some pioneer work by Al Viola, including an album on Dick Bock's old World Pacific label, is usually overlooked.

At one time I suspected the technique would never be adapted to jazz. I thought that only the release of the string from a plectrum could place a note in that perfect moment to produce the swing without which it isn't — for me, anyway — jazz. I thought that the very nature of classical-guitar articulation militated against a strong rhythmic pulse. Lenny Breau demolished this theory in that first album for Chet Atkins which, at the time, flabbergasted me. Then came Brazilian guitarists like Oscar Castro-Neves to stomp it completely into the ground.

Gene Bertoncini, incidentally, doesn't like the ceramic pickup, and will use the nylon-string guitar only in circumstances quiet enough to make it unnecessary. Otherwise

he uses the amplified steel-string guitar. Lenny apparently felt the same, and when you hear him on the nylon-string guitar, it sounds unamplified.

There is something else the two guitarists have in common: Gene said years ago that we should think of the guitar as if it were a keyboard instrument, instead of in "grips" — the chord positions beginners learn from books published by Mel Bay and others. Lenny repeatedly pointed out that he approached the instrument as if it were a piano. Lenny told an interviewer, "My inspirations have been Ravel, Debussy, as well as Ravi Shankar. However, Bill Evans is my number one inspiration. He was the Bach of his age. I want to play his music on the guitar. Bill was 'way ahead of his time."

Lenny died in Los Angeles at the age of 43 in August of 1984 in murky circumstances. I had heard that he was straight at the time — had finally beaten heroin and everything else and was on his way to the career he richly deserved. At 9 a.m. on the morning of his last day, he called his mother long-distance, his voice full of fear, asking her to send him enough money for bus fare. At 11 a.m. the police found him at the bottom of a swimming pool, and called his mother. They said he was apparently the victim of accidental drowning. An autopsy proved otherwise: he had been strangled before being rolled into the pool. The police know who killed him. His mother knows who killed him. His friends know who killed him. But nobody can prove it, and Lenny's executioner walks around free.

And so Lenny Breau now is a figure of the past. The body of his known recordings is small, alas. Fortunately, he left behind some other recordings that are starting to find their way to the public.

Disc jockey and record producer Ted O'Reilly recorded Lenny at Bourbon Street in Toronto the evening of June 14, 1983, 14 months before his death. He was at a particularly creative peak at the time. The format is duo, the same one favored by Gene Bertoncini and bassist Michael Moore. Lenny worked with Dave Young, an excellent bassist. The material from that Bourbon Street session has been issued on a Toronto-based label in an album called *Quietude*. It's available to Canadian and American readers from Electric Muse Records, 871 Avenue Road # 2, Toronto Canada M5P 2K5, for $9.98 in U.S. currency. The company will pay postage. Overseas readers should check on the price to other countries.

This album will especially please guitar players. Lenny had developed a degree of control over the instrument that, with all deference to the superb guitarists I count among my friends, is unprecedented. His colorations are amazing. There's a chorus in Miles Davis's *All Blues* in which the melody is played entirely in harmonics. Lenny's facility, his unstrained ease, in their use will impress anyone who knows about the guitar. He was, incidentally, playing a steel-string instrument on that gig, a solid-body guitar on which he used a thumb pick, which gave him the advantages of the plectrum while leaving the four fingers free for use in chords and melody.

Lenny is quoted in the liner notes as saying, "A lot of my tunes aren't worked out. They're made up as I go along — and that's taking a big chance. It took me years to analyze the structure of the music, to be able to call up something fast and make it work. I've been listening to Keith Jarrett and his approach to playing the piano is like my approach to playing the guitar. I try for total spontaneity." Yes, it is taking a big chance, and it doesn't always pay off. In one track, a "free" improvisation called *Visions*, we hear the influence of Jarrett. Like so much of Jarrett's work, the music is invertebrate. It simply wanders along, getting lost like a stream in marshland. Built on an E pedal and the E minor sound that is natural to the guitar, it goes on for 13 minutes and 26 seconds. What keeps it from tedium is Breau's incredible lexicon of tone colors. Sometimes, for example, he'll play high-speed passages with damped strings. Other guitarists use the device, particularly in country music, but none I've heard can do it with such facility.

The rest of the album is more conventional — or as conventional as such virtuosic playing can be. In material such as *On Green Dolphin Street* and *Summertime* he plays linear amplified guitar, filling in with chords. Always the amazing thing is the independence of his various functions. Incidentally, the whole album is done with steel-string amplified guitar.

Equally impressive is an album called *Lenny Breau & Brad Terry* on the Livingroom Records label, based in Austin, Texas. It is the company's first and thus far only release, although more of the material left behind by Breau will be issued if this album recovers its costs.

During Lenny's periodic disappearances from the scene, we used to hear that he had gone to Maine to kick his habit, but where exactly I never knew. One of the places he used to stay, as it turns out, was the ramshackle farmhouse of Brad Terry, a clarinetist with whom Lenny first played for the Augusta Jazz Society in March, 1978.

Whenever Lenny would visit Brad Terry, they would play together, sometimes as a duo in intimate concerts, at other times for their own pleasure and that of a few friends in Terry's living room. Fortunately Terry recorded a lot of the stuff, and with good Electrovoice mikes.

I had to get past Brad Terry's playing to listen to Breau. He comes as a total surprise. I had in my head an unformulated image of some local semi-amateur musician whom Lenny probably indulged out of kindness, and perhaps too because his home offered Lenny a retreat, a place to hide from troubles. Wrong. Brad Terry is a wonderfully warm, fluid, responsive, inventive player, far and away the most attractive clarinetist I have heard in years. There aren't, of course, that many people specializing in the instrument these days, so the comparison doesn't necessarily mean much. But please take my word for it, Brad Terry is some other clarinet player.

How has Terry, a handsome bearded 49-year-old, managed to stay comparatively unknown? The fault is that of the record industry, not his. One problem, I think — we have rapidly become friends by telephone — is that Brad can't read. Or can't read much, he says. And he doesn't play all the doubles, which means studio work is out of the question for him. He is left with no options: he can only play jazz. And we all know what a hard road that is, particularly when you specialize in an instrument that has gone out of fashion. Brad says he took the three lessons that came with the clarinet and then pursued it on his own.

The reason he plays clarinet, incidentally, is Benny Goodman. During his high school years in Massachusetts, Brad was close to Goodman's daughter Rachel. When he was at the Goodman home as Rachel's friend, Brad said, Goodman could not have been more cordial. But when they went out to Benny's studio to talk music, it was different. "He made me feel I was less than dog shit," Brad said. This places him in a large and honorable company that includes Teddy Wilson and Gene Krupa.

Somehow Brad survived Goodman's contempt without

giving up the instrument. And the reason Lenny played with him, as one hears immediately, is Brad's sensitive response to Breau's playing, which is perfectly reciprocated. They obviously are having enormous musical fun.

There is another reason for the rapport. Lenny couldn't read either.

I was thunderstruck when Brad told me that. Not that this is unknown in jazz. Everybody knows the old jazz musician's joke: "Can he read?" "Yes, but not enough to hurt his playing." There's a truth in that, of course. Academic training is inherently at odds with the spontaneity and individualism that are at the heart of jazz, although the best players have managed to reconcile them. Nonetheless, good reading is a common skill in jazz musicians. The brilliant players who can't or couldn't read, such as Sidney Bechet, Buddy Rich, Bix Beiderbecke, Wes Montgomery, and Ira Sullivan, are strange and special.

But Lenny sounds as if he had been steeped in the exercise books, playing Sor and Tarrega and the Segovia transcriptions all his life. There are times when his sound tells us how closely he had studied Julian Bream's playing, with its tone-coloring placement of the right hand in relationship to the hole. Working the strings down at the back of the instrument produces a hard, metallic sound; over the hole gives you a warm sound; the farther you move the right hand up the neck the more the instrument sounds like a harp. And Bream will change coloration in the middle of a run. I talked to him about it once. He employs color in his phrasing as a compensation for the small dynamic range of the classical guitar, although, he pointed out, the dynamic range of the instrument is not as small as is commonly supposed. Bream uses tone to enhance the shape and contour of a line. Lenny too had that kind of command. "He could play anything he could hear," Brad Terry told me. And he could, apparently, hear everything.

For the last few years of his life, he had been using a seven-string guitar — not one with a lower bottom string, like that of George Van Eps, but one with an additional A string on the top. He found that stretching an upper E-string that further fourth didn't work, the string soon broke. Brad Terry says that at the end he was using fishing line. This expansion of the instrument enhanced the pianistic effect he was always after.

The album with Terry presents aspects of Breau with which even some of his admirers are not familiar. One of them is his solo work. Since there is no rhythm section, when Terry is laying out, Breau is alone. On the classical guitar, he plays *The Claw*, a demanding Jerry Reed show-case piece that Reed recorded in one of those aforementioned early albums. It's a tune with those dry country eighth notes, but Lenny bends it more toward jazz. I don't think that in this instance he used a thumb pick; it would have produced a hard sound in the bass line in contrast with the softer sound of the fingers. So you can hear how great his classical technique actually was. And that's what you get mostly on this album — Lenny's classical guitar. Whereas he used only the steel-string instrument on the Electric Muse album, on this one he uses the unamplified instrument in most tracks.

Another aspect of his work that we encounter in this album is his sensitivity as an accompanist. Sometimes he walks bass lines with his thumb pick, playing chords behind Brad with his fingers. They are delightful together, Breau with his softness and sensitivity and Terry with his warm tone and unfailing melodicism.

In one track, Lenny sings. It's one thing he did *not* do well. Yet Brad was right to issue the track. The tune is *My Foolish Heart*, which is so strongly associated with Bill Evans. Lenny plays it on the classical guitar. In the first chorus, on which he doesn't sing, we hear how strongly he had absorbed Bill's influence. The touch, the tone, the phrasing, and even some of the voicings hint at their model. In the second chorus, he sort of stumbles through the lyric, getting the words wrong, filling in segments with scat where he can't remember them at all. But ah, what a singer's *accompanist* he was! And there is something poignant about the uncertain vocal.

On the opening track of the album, a blues, Brad Terry whistles a solo. The trick's been done before, and Rob McCrory does it well. But Brad Terry is the best whistler — or should it be whistlist? — I've ever heard. His range is big, his intonation impeccable, his "chops" considerable, his spirit exuberant. Why he hasn't been booked on the circuit of the jazz festivals is beyond me.

The tapes of those Maine sessions rested on a shelf for years. Whenever Brad and Lenny would get together, they'd talk about trying to put them out. During his last visit to Terry's house, Lenny told him, "The tapes are yours, do something with them." The next thing Brad knew, Lenny was dead.

Brad moved to Texas, taking the tapes with him. Finally, in an act that combines courage with folly, and despite the fact that he had no distribution and no way of reaching a public, Brad decided to sell them himself by mail order — the last refuge of those rendered desperate by the glutted distribution system we live with.

The album was put out with the enthusiastic support of Lenny's mother, his brother Dennis Breau, and his son Chet — named, touchingly, after Atkins, who took Lenny into the studio to make that 1969 milestone introductory album. Any profits that accrue for Lenny will be held in trust for his daughter, Dawn Marie.

The album is available from Livingroom Records, PO Box 23251, Austin TX 78735. Brad failed to tell me what he's charging for the record, and he was out of town when I had to go to press. But $10 ought to cover it, with an additional $2 to cover postage and packaging.

It is dangerous in a way to praise things highly. Great praise sets up unrealistic expectations, and sometimes we are disappointed because of them. So take what I've said, assume that I have overstated the merits of Breau's work and these albums, divide it all by two — and I think you will still be pleased by what you hear. Particularly if you are a guitar player.

Drawing as he did on the styles and techniques of jazz, classical, and country-and-western guitar, Lenny Breau covered more ground than any guitarist I've ever heard. Superlatives are treacherous. None of us has heard every guitarist — or clarinetist or violinist — in the world. Nonetheless, Chet Atkins's evaluation of Lenny may have been on the mark.

Notice

The *Jazzletter* is published 12 times a year at Ojai, California, 93023, and distributed by first class mail to the United States and Canada and by air mail to other countries. Subscriptions are $30 a year in U.S. currency for the United States and Canada, $35 to European countries, $40 to other countries. Subscribers can purchase gift subscriptions for $20 U.S for the U.S. and Canada, $25 to other countries. Past issues can be purchased for $20 U.S per year, or $2.50 per issues.

From High Atop . . .

by Steve Allen

(Music: Sammy Kaye type introduction. Up and Fade. *Last Night I Saw You*, 1930s style.)

(Ballroom. Revolving mirror ball. Boy and girl snapping fingers in unison. Singer seated, old-fashioned floor mike downstage. Steve, tight tux, slick hair. Pianist noodles under the following:)

Steve

Good evening, Latvians and Germans out there along the radio airwaves. From the beautiful Lucille Ball Room, high atop the fabulous Del Mafia Hotel, in the heart of downtown Gallup, New Mexico, just a short 45-minute drive from the ball-bearing center of the world, Leavenworth, Kansas, the National Broadjumping Company is sending your way the Rancid Rhythms of Fletcher Castoria and his makes-you-want-to-call-the-cops music.

Yes, direct from the stunning new Laundry Room of the glamorous Caspar Weinberger Hotel, a refreshing two-and-a-half mile swim across Lake Michigas, just underneath the heart of downtown Birmingham, Alabama, where the Ohio River meets the Panama Canal to form the St. Lawrence Seaway, it's another 17 solid hours of danceable, prancеable, horrible melodies on radio.

And now little Spacey Sissek asks the musical question "Smarty Pants?"

Music: Spacey sings "Smarty Pants."

Girl

Smarty Pants,
You're such a rotten little Smarty Pants.
You know there's nothin' you don't know
about romance,
Smarty Pants.
You think you know it all;
be careful or you'll blow it all.
You're such a brain.
You give me such a pain
with that old song and dance.
Girls don't like you;
that big I.Q.
won't get you romance.
Hey, big thinkah,
You're a fink, ya
rotten Smarty Pants.

Steve

Thank you, Francine, that was sickening.

Friends, in case you're just joining our Jerky Jamboree, the Mutual Bumrushing Company is heaving your way the hair-curling selections of Peter Principle and his Twelve Angry Men, coming to you direct from the brand new Locker Room of the mouth-watering fig fields of the 1934 Mississippi State Fair Grounds, on the banks of the old Amazon River, just across from the Pearl of the Orient, Zimbabwe, Rhodesia.

Yes, the Crumbling Block-Busting System is unloading its musical trash right into your living rooms, presenting the brain-numbing selections of John Birch and his Society Orchestra, direct from the breathtaking new Men's Room on the 76th floor of the William Ruckleshouse on the outskirts of Los Alamos, New Mexico, just a thrilling ten-second rocket flight from the cotton-pickin' and chicken-pluckin' center of the Great Northwest, Capetown, South Africa, Yowsah.

And now turn up your radios, roll up your rugs, and plug up your ears, as we listen to lovely Neal Down singing the romantic ballad, "Mouth-to-Mouth Resuscitation."

Boy Singer

I was in swimming,
when quick as a wink,
I was caught in the undertow
and I started to sink.
But you, wonderful you,
were there to save me,
and I'll never forget, my dear,
how you gave me . . .

MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION,
THAT'S WHAT PULLED ME THROUGH.
MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION
BROUGHT ME CLOSE TO YOU.
I OPENED MY EYES
AND THERE YOU WERE, UP ABOVE ME;
UPSIDE DOWN, IT IS TRUE,
BUT SOMEHOW I KNEW
YOU'D LOVE ME.

MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION,
THAT'S WHAT DID THE TRICK.
IT WAS A STRANGE SENSATION,
DID IT MAKE YOU SICK?
THERE WERE PEOPLE STANDING AROUND
LOOKING DOWN AT US ON THE GROUND.
NOW IT'S SWEEPING THE NATION,
MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION.

Steve

Ah yes, isn't he lovely?

Friends, if you're tuning in late, the American Back-Breaking System is shoving down your throats the sweetest music this side of Sodom and Gomorrah, played by the King of Latin Rhythms, Judeo Christian and his Illegal Immigrants.

And it's all coming your way directly from the freshly repainted Broom Closet of Frank Daily's Meadowbrook, high atop the new Flophouse Hilton, built with a 47 million dollar loan from the Teamsters Central States Pension Fund under very questionable circumstances, ladies and gentlemen.

And now, Sammy and his Goyim Gorillas challenge their chops as our romantic lovebirds Linda Lipstick and Modus Vivendi return to offer this lyrical advice, "I Can't Forget that You've Forgotten Me."

Boy and Girl

I can't forget
that you've forgotten me.
Please don't forget
that I forgot
to forget you.

You forgot
that I forget
to forget
the night we met.

Boy

I forgot
you were so pettable.
It was all so — unforgettable.

Both

We can't forget
that we forgot before.
And when forgetting
is forgotten
once more,

Girl

If your heart forgets,
well let it,
if you've forgotten me.

Steve

Forget it!

Girl

But we're not finished.

Steve

That's what you think!

Ah yes, aren't they wonderful. And folks, they're available, because they've just been fired.

Yes, you're listening to another musical massacre by the old King Kong of the Keyboard, Michael Deaver and the Influentials, coming to you from the lovely Interrogation Room of the Mike Wallace Hotel, just a hop-skip-and-a-jump from the International Head Shop Festival, in the heart of the nation's Quicksand Center, Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania.

(Music: "Last Night I Saw You.")

Well, friends, the old clock on the wall says our Saturday Night Dancing Party is on its last legs. So until next time, this is your announcer, Mike Side Mikeside, saying toodle-oo, a bit of a tweet-tweet, a fond *adieu*, a yock-she-mosh, a bit of a pip-pip, a punch in the mouth, pleasant dreams, an *au revoir*, an *auf Wiedersehen*, good night, good bye, lots of health, lots of fun, and lotsa luck.

This is NBC, the National Brainwashing Company.

(Music: UP TO PLAYOFF.)

CU: MIRROR BALL.

Sketches: Diz 'n' Duke

by Bill Crow

In the spring of 1961 I worked a week at Birdland with Quincy Jones' band. I was subbing for Buddy Catlett, his regular bass player, who for some reason had no cabaret card, a document that New York City required at that time of everyone who worked in a night club. Birdland was a primary social center for members of the jazz community, and during a week there you were likely to see everyone who happened to be in town.

One night Sarah Vaughan dropped in, and sat down at the table where a few of us were taking our break between sets. A moment later, Dizzy Gillespie came in and hurried right over to Sarah. "I've just written a play," he said, "and I have to tell you the story." He proceeded to outline the plot. As customers at nearby tables turned to listen, Dizzy included them in his audience.

"The action takes place at Governor Faubus' mansion in Little Rock, Arkansas," he said. In 1961, Faubus was still the personification of southern white resistance to the civil rights movement. "The governor wants to run for national office, and his advisers have told him that he needs to improve his image with the northern voters. The ambassador from Ghana is in town, and the advisers suggest that the governor should invite him to dinner. So the scene is in the dining room of the governor's mansion, with all the finest tableware laid out, and everyone in formal dress. In the place of honor next to the governor sits the ambassador from Ghana, the first black to ever sit at that table.

"Now, here comes the governor's little daughter home from school." Here, Dizzy stepped back a few paces, daintily picking up the hem of his jacket with the thumb and forefinger of each hand, and skipped up to the table, rolling his eyes with prepubescent innocence. "She comes skipping into the dining room, sees this black dude sitting at the head of the table with her daddy, and has a *heart* attack and falls down DEAD on the floor!" Here, Dizzy clutched at his chest and acted out her demise.

"The governor jumps up, runs to his little girl, takes her lifeless body in his arms, and cries, 'Honey, he ain't one of *our* niggers! He's one of THEIR niggers!'"

Dizzy laughed and capered with delight, and everyone but Sarah laughed along with him.

Sarah said indignantly, "Dizzy Gillespie! Are you going to let that poor little girl die?"

Dizzy's face grew serious. He drew himself up regally, swept his hand outward in a gesture of absolute finality, and decreed, "She dies!"

They stared at each other for a long moment, Sarah stern and disapproving, and Dizzy absolute and unyielding. Then they collapsed in laughter in each other's arms.

* * * *

I enjoyed your piece on Ellington. Thanks for writing with respect, but also with your ears open. Duke gave us music to chew on and exult with for the rest of our lives, but it does neither him nor his listeners any service to pretend that it was all pure gold. Much of what he recorded could have benefited from more time for thought, rehearsal, and repeated playing before being released as a finished product. And as you say, the band in person was often sad. But they were hot on plenty of records, and those records have a life of their own. Only the very earliest of them sound dated.

I was fortunate to have heard the band enough times to have caught them on some very good nights. Even though they played some perfunctory renditions of their down-memory-lane medley, they really raised the hair on the back of my neck many times.

I remember Ben Webster coming to sit in with the band at one of the West Side clubs — Birdland or Basin Street West or the Band Box — and what a beautiful rendition he played of *I Got It Bad*, even though he looked drunk and salty. And when he got off the bandstand, Rabbit scowled and announced to those of us standing at the end of the bandstand, "That was *my* tune! The man *knows* that was *my* tune."

When I was in the army at Fort Meade, Maryland, in the late 1940s, Duke opened in Washington, D.C., at a huge place near the Howard theater called the Club Ellington. It didn't stay in business long, but I was there as often as I could get a pass. The place was as big as an airplane hangar. A deep red carpet ran across the room and right up over the risers of the bandstand. Duke sat at the piano over on the left, and began the night with Carney, a rhythm section, and one or two other horns. The band arrived in order of sense of importance, with the trumpet stars getting there for the second set. However many were there, the band sounded fine to me, and it always sounded like Ellington.

High on the wall over Duke's piano was a door giving onto a tiny wrought-iron balcony. Kay Davis would come out on this and sang her vocalises with the band without a mike. The effect was magical. Sonny Greer had the gong and the chimes and tympani he couldn't reach up on the back row, and I sat there round-eyed, trying desperately not to miss a thing.

A drummer I used to know from Seattle, Buzzy Bridgford, told me that he and some other members of the Randy Brooks band went to the Zanzibar in the late '40s to see Duke. The show opened with the band backlit with blue floodlights as they played a moaning opener, and then a pin spot picked up Duke dressed in white tails at a white grand piano, being lowered from the ceiling by four steel cables. Suddenly, something went wrong with the winch controlling the two cables on one side and they stopped, while the two cables on the other side continued to descend. As the piano began to tilt, Duke quickly adjusted his position and hooked a leg around the bench so he wouldn't slide off. Buzzy said it was amazing the way Duke was able to keep his cool and continue to look elegant and superior while the stagehands got the problem solved and lowered him safely to the bandstand.

I remember many of Duke's Newport appearances. The band was almost always roaring there. The famous Paul Gonsalves solo on *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue* went down a little differently than it seems on the album. Gonsalves was sitting in the section, taking care of his part, but was obviously scuffling with the load of alcohol he'd taken on before the job started. Duke gave him a featured solo, and left him out there for chorus after chorus, until he worked off the juice. He played a couple of dozen choruses before Duke took it on out, the crowd screaming as though Paul were going for some sort of record.

I watched Duke solve another problem in his own way at the Blue Note in Chicago. His drummer of choice, Sam Woodyard, had been missing for a couple of days, so Duke hired a local player to replace him. As soon as Sam heard this, he showed up for work. Duke hated to fire anyone, so he let both drummers set up. Sam messed with the time in a way that drove the other drummer up the wall, and he quit after one night. For the rest of the engagement, Sam showed up for work regularly, which was all Duke had wanted in the first place.

I was rehearsing at NBC-TV's Brooklyn studio with the Gerry Mulligan Sextet for a Sunday special we were to be on. When we finished, we found out that Duke's band was in the big studio rehearsing for the Ed Sullivan show. We hurried over and found the band on a break, so we had a good time cutting up touches with the guys. The studio manager called time, and they all headed back to the stand. A minor fuss arose over the fact that that they were all ready to go and had to wait for a tenor player, new on the band, who hadn't come back from the men's room. Cootie Williams made quite a speech about the discourtesy of this guy who was keeping everybody waiting. Finally the tenor man came back, and just as the studio manager started to get the rehearsal rolling, Cootie got up and went to the men's room. If they were going to wait for somebody, it was going to be Cootie!

When I was working with Mulligan's quartet, with Art Farmer and Dave Bailey, we had a concert opposite Duke at Lewisohn Stadium, an outdoor amphitheater up around 136th and Amsterdam. His bass player hadn't showed up, and it was beginning to look like rain. Duke looked at his watch, looked at the sky, and pulled me by the lapel. "Come with me," he said, and walked onstage.

I picked up my bass and followed him, tickled to death. I positioned myself behind the bassist's music stand, which was right at the left of Duke's keyboard. When I reached under the stand to get out the book, Britt Woodman leaned over and said, 'Don't do that — that's all been changed." Meanwhile, Duke was announcing the first tune. "Just hang around in B-flat," said Britt. "We'll tell you when to change."

The trombone section kept me clued in all through the opener, and everything went fine. The next two tunes were old ones I knew, and Duke stayed up in front of the band, seeing I was being taken care of. But when he called a ballad I didn't know, he immediately came to the piano. While playing his own part and taking care of his relationship with the audience, he was careful to point to the piano key that represented my note each time there was a chord coming up that he knew I'd need to know about. He never played my note for me — he just pointed to the proper key a beat or two before I had to play my note. I was able to play the chart as though he had written out the part for me.

I had such a good time playing with the band that Mulligan got bugged. "How come you don't have that much fun playing with me?" he asked.

I did, of course, but you don't play in a constant state of ecstasy with somebody night after night. That was my first chance to play with Duke's band, and it really got me high. I was so set up from playing with Duke that I felt I had 50 percent more than usual to give Gerry.

We ran into the Ellington band again a few months later at the jazz festival at French Lick, Indiana. I was waiting for the elevator in the hotel lobby when the doors slid open and out walked Duke.

"Ah, Mister Crow," he intoned, and gave me a courtly bow. "I never had the opportunity to remunerate you for your splendid assistance at the concert in New York."

I grinned like a fool. "Please be my guest," I said. "The pleasure was all mine."

He accepted with another sweeping bow, and strode elegantly into the dining room.

* * * *

I've been trying to replace three albums I lost when my apartment was burgled many years ago on Cornelia Street. One was on Storyville, and titled *Whooeee*, with Brookmeyer, Zoot, and Jo Jones. Another was *The Street Swingers*, I don't remember the label, with Brookmeyer, Jim Hall, and Jim Raney. The third was a date Al Cohn wrote for a singer named Irma Curry on Columbia. They're all dates I was on, and I'd like to find copies of them for sentimental reasons. If I can find someone who has copies of them but won't part with them, taped copies would be welcome. I also did a couple of Al Cohn big-band dates for Jack Lewis on Vik, but I never got copies of the records and have no idea what the titles were.

Good old Jack, he did good dates, even if the records didn't sell much.

— BC

Goodman

If I never in my life met Benny Goodman, it was not for lack of opportunity. I did not wish to meet him. I had heard too many horror stories about the man, particularly from musicians who had worked for him, whom he treated in ways that passed beyond rudeness into dimensions of the cruel. He poured

contempt on players who were his equals or, as jazz players, his superiors, and made occasional musical mistakes that revealed to discerning professional ears surprising gaps in his knowledge, not to mention his hearing.

He was rude and arrogant as far back as the early 1930s, when Artie Shaw sat in a chair beside him in a New York studio saxophone section — before either of them was famous. Shaw, as usual, had his nose in a book during breaks. Goodman kept asking him what he was reading. At last Shaw showed him: Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class.*

Thereafter he would greet Artie when they met at work each day with "How you doin', J.B.?" and, when they parted, "See you later, J.B." Shaw was not going to give him the satisfaction of asking what it meant, but finally, with a sigh, he surrendered and said, "All right, Benny, what does J.B. stand for?"

"George Bernard," Benny said with a satisfied smile.

It was never hard to discover that Shaw was not fond of Benny Goodman personally. Yet you did not — and do not — put down Goodman's playing to Artie Shaw. The same is true of Woody Herman. And Goodman, Shaw, and Herman were the three great clarinet-playing leaders of the big-band era.

As I have recounted previously, Goodman came by to hear the Herman band at some West Side club in the early 1960s. Woody has been known to say, "I never was much of a clarinet player." And that night Goodman made some disparaging remark about his playing. Woody, who is as widely liked in the business as Benny was not, said cheerfully, "Well, that's how it is, Benny. You always knew how to play that clarinet, and I always knew how to put a band together."

The stories go on and on and on. Benny made almost a ritual of not knowing the names of musicians who worked for him. Some people swear that he could not remember the names of his own kids and called them, as he did everyone else, "Pops". When Arturo O'Farrill began writing for him, Benny wasn't going to be bothered learning so alien a handle as Arturo. So he called him "Chico", the Spanish equivalent of "boy", which in fact is what it means. And he would not desist. The name stuck, and that is why composer Arturo O'Farrill y Theis of Cuba, and a distinguished Havana family, has gone through a life in jazz as Chico O'Farrill.

The highly respected Chicago bassist and violinist John Frigo still remembers vividly an incident that happened at least eighteen years ago. "Benny was going do a concert here, and it was to be filmed for the Ed Sullivan show," John said. "I'd been highly recommended as the bassist. I had two recording sessions that day that I didn't want to lose, not for $64. One was a commercial that could have made a lot of residuals. I asked if my name would at least be mentioned, to make it worth my while. Maybe Benny overheard that. We got to CBS and he said, 'Let's warm up on *Chicago*,' and we started playing. Without turning around, he said, 'Let's tune up.' You tune bass by playing an open string and a harmonic. When it doesn't have a pulsation, you're in tune. I tuned up with my bow, and he said, without turning around, 'Bass player, tune up.' So I tuned up right on the button with the harmonics. There was a long pause, and he didn't turn around. He said, 'I'm still waiting.' So I went through the motions again, I tuned up, right on the harmonics. He said, 'That'll be all. You can leave now.' And then he used on the show a second-rate jobbing bass player."

Goodman told the late Johnny Guarnieri that he was one of the worst pianists he had ever heard, reducing Guarnieri to tears. Charlie Christian and Lionel Hampton consoled him, urging him to pay no attention to Goodman, saying, "You know your instrument and you swing."

Jerome Richardson recalled that when he joined the Goodman band — a young and frightened player who needed the job and appreciated the prestige of being hired by Goodman — Benny would come over and shove his clarinet right down over Jerome's music stand, so that he had trouble seeing his part. Finally, resignedly, Jerome had the courage to push the clarinet aside. He wasn't fired, but he never forgot the incident.

Neither did any of the other saxophone players on whom Goodman practiced this peculiar little initiation by sadism. (Apparently he did this only to saxophone players, since he couldn't easily get at the trombonists and trumpet players in the rear rows.)

The "girl singer", as he called her, always suffered in a Goodman band. Trumpeter John Frosk, who worked for Goodman extensively over the years, says he never saw a female vocalist in the band whom Goodman did not at some point reduce to tears. In her autobiography, Helen Forrest said he was the rudest man she ever met.

Goodman was a musical reactionary who disliked bebop and all its works, undoubtedly because he couldn't play it.

One arranger — who prefers to remain nameless — recalls Goodman playing an E-natural against a C-minor chord at a rehearsal. Thinking it was a momentary lapse, the arranger was surprised to hear him do it when the chord sequence came up again — and he continued to do so, not knowing, apparently, or not hearing that the note was just plain wrong.

The late Alec Wilder was one of those to have a set-to with Goodman. The incident is chronicled in his book *Letters I Never Mailed* (Little, Brown & Company, 1975). The book — which, believe it or not, Alec wrote in about three weeks — is full of wonderful insights into people and music, if you can figure out to whom the letters are addressed. "Dear Rogers" refers to Rogers Sessions, "Dear Mitch" to Mitch Miller, "Dear Frank" to Sinatra, and so forth. You almost have to know who Alec's friends and *bêtes noires* were to get the right fix on each letter. The one on Goodman reads:

> Dear Mr. Goodman:
>
> The arrangement I made for Mildred Bailey of *Sleepy Time Down South*, as you know, had eight measures set aside for a solo by you since your band plays for her on the Camel show.
>
> Your complaint about the unexpected harmony I used not only embarrassed the men in the band, Mildred, and myself but just maybe reveals one of your better-known weaknesses: a bad ear.
>
> I'm not saying that the harmony was the best; I'm simply saying that you would be the last musician to know if it were the worst!
>
> The fact that I studied music for much longer than you did does not make me a better musician than you. But it does imply that I would be less likely to write down a bunch of unmusical harmonic sequences than someone who had studied nothing.
>
> Has it occurred to you that Mildred Bailey is in a position to have her pick of the arrangers? Why, then, did she choose me, if I'm so lousy?
>
> I find your manners detestable, but if you can possibly curb them, I'd be willing to give you a few harmony lessons — yes, give — for free — so the next time we have an eight-measure crisis you'll be able to stumble through it with not only skill but grace.
>
> Alec Wilder

Goodman's place in the history of American music is indisputable. Almost by accident, he became the catalyst that launched the so-called swing era and ushered in a decade when an astonishing quantity of truly superior stuff was the popular

music of the land. There is only one previous era that compares to it, that of Johann Strauss's immense popularity in Vienna, which did not approach the world-wide phenomenon that the swing era became. And there has been none like it since.

Goodman did nothing first. The style of his band had been pioneered by Don Redman, Benny Carter, Horace Henderson, and most particularly Fletcher Henderson. While it has become holy writ in some quarters to say Goodman stole Henderson's music, nothing could be farther from the truth. Henderson's band had failed because its leader had waffled on racial issues, arousing the resentment of black musicians who were in it. Goodman did not steal, he bought Henderson arrangements, and commissioned more. Henderson considered him a savior. And there is no question that Goodman was responsible for saving the Henderson works and giving them the place of honor in musical history that they deserve.

And how his band played them! Only recently I happened to pick up on the car radio the Goodman band's recording of Henderson's chart on Morton's *King Porter Stomp*. It remains an astonishing record, a piece of incredible power and ensemble coherence and irresistible swing. And what ingenious developmental writing! Under Goodman's direction, the genius of Fletcher Henderson is shown in relief the way it never was in Henderson's own recordings.

Those who know what they're talking about tell me Henderson never quite got the knack of recording, and his band therefore never sounded as good on records as it did in person. It is for this reason that the Goodman records of Henderson material are better than Henderson's own.

During the first six months of 1962, I toured South America with the Paul Winter Sextet. A few weeks after we left, a newly organized Benny Goodman band left on a tour of the Soviet Union. We all got back to New York in July, and began hanging out, inevitably, at Jim and Andy's, the now-vanished and still-mourned haven for musicians on West 48th Street. And I began to hear the stories of the Goodman tour from everyone who was on it, particularly Willie Dennis, and from Phil Woods, with whom I would spend occasional weekends at his home out in Bucks County. Several people told me of Phil's cry from the heart on a hotel balcony in the middle of a Tiflis night, which expressed the whole band's sentiments — and which Goodman, also out on a balcony, overheard.

Reports in the New York *Times* and *Time* magazine had described the crunch between Goodman and pianist Byron Janis. Goodman's press people had done their best to make it look like Janis's fault. But the musicians in the band were all in sympathy to Janis.

Some months ago, I fell into discussion of the tour with Bill Crow, recalling to him things he once told me and had for the moment forgotten, including some that give insights into the grim daily life in the Soviet Union.

In addition to being a fine musician, Bill has always been a vivid and perceptive writer, with a flair for capturing character, both personal and musical. I first read his writings in the old *Jazz Review*. More recently he has been contributing a delightful column to *Allegro*, the newspaper of Local 802, the New York chapter of the American Federation of Musicians.

The story of that tour of the USSR has never been written. I felt it was an important historical event and asked him to write it for the *Jazzletter*, there being no other real outlet for it. My only instructions to Bill were to write it to whatever length he felt was right.

Bill rechecked his facts with others who had been on that tour — and found that some of them were still angry, twenty years later. When I received the first draft of the manuscript, I realized that it was more than possible, given Goodman's litigious nature, that he would sue us. But Bill had witnesses to these events, and in view of the story's importance, I decided to print it, whatever the risks. As I was doing the final edit, Goodman died.

In the last weeks of preparing this book — and that's what it is, really — Bill learned of an act of kindness and generosity from Goodman. When drummer Mousie Alexander suffered a stroke, Goodman sent him some money. Singer Art Lund told me that when Vido Musso joined the Goodman band, he couldn't read. Benny sat up with him for six weeks, teaching him the band's book, and Art says Musso always credited Goodman with making him the musician he became. However, when Art had a smash Broadway success in *The Most Happy Fella*, Goodman's lawyers garnisheed his wages for $15,000 on Art's old contract with the band — which Benny had, by verbal but unwritten agreement, released him from. Art holds no grudge. But then, you'd wait a long time to hear Art Lund speak ill of any man.

The day Goodman died, journalists called everyone who seemed a likely source of a quote, from Steve Allen, who played Goodman in a highly romanticized movie biography, to Woody Herman. They were all very tactful. "I said what I had to say," Woody told me. Jazz historian Grover Sales said, "He will be missed as a musician but not as a man." I told KNX in Los Angeles, "I never met a musician who didn't respect him, and I never met one who liked him." And that wasn't, strictly speaking, true: Alec Wilder did not respect him.

Some of the reporters must have felt a bit a shock at the cool comments. In any event, the press did what it always does: turned the obits into glowing paeans.

In the meantime, various people urged me not to publish the Bill Crow piece. One of them said, making me laugh, said, "To those who didn't know Benny, anything you say against him is like insulting Christ. And to those of us who did know him, it's like insulting Mussolini." My several callers argued that it is impossible to fight entrenched legend; people don't like to have their ikons tarnished. They said printing the story would hurt the *Jazzletter*. But I wrote under restrictions for all too many years, and the day I have to start fudging in the *Jazzletter* is the day I fold it.

Furthermore, Bill had worked very hard on the story, and I certainly could not let all his effort come to nothing. Aside from that, I found the story fascinating, and thought you would too.

If I had any nagging doubts about printing it, they were dispelled when I heard a TV newscaster say that Goodman was a "humble and kindly man." Finally, Owen Cordle, the critic and saxophonist, said to me on the telephone, "I don't think this readership is going to be shocked by the story."

If some people are, I'll just have to live with that. And Part One of the story will be in the next issue.