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To Russia without Love Part II

by Bill Crow

Joya Sherrill was a sensation in Moscow, and Benny didn't seem too happy about it. Al Cohn had written a chart combining *Riding High* and *Shooting High* as a sizzler to bring Joya on, with a long intro to give her time to walk across the stage to the mike, a strong opening chorus, and a wonderful shout figure to take her out with. The second number, a Ralph Burns arrangement of *The Thrill Is Gone*, began with a repeated bass figure that Joya wanted me to start under the applause for the first tune, allowing her to begin singing as soon as the crowd got quiet. In Seattle the timing was very effective.

On the first concert in Moscow, the response to Joya was thunderous. The Russians had never seen anyone like her. Joya is an elegant, beautiful woman, with graceful bearing and a rich, mellow voice. She was stunning in her white strapless gown, and the Russians couldn't get enough of her. They loved the Gershwin medley Joe Lipman had written for her, and responded especially well to a prewar Russian popular song, *Katyusha*, that she sang in Russian. Premier Kruschev sent Joya a note saying her singing was "warm and wonderful."

A night or two later, Benny canceled Joya's opener and made her start with *The Thrill Is Gone*. He would announce her, let her walk out with no music, take her applause, and then, after it was quiet again, he would count off the intro, leaving Joya with at least four bars to wait before she could begin singing. It gave her a much less effective entrance but she carried it off well anyway, and was very well received throughout the tour. One of her tunes was a Jimmy Knepper arrangement of *The Man I Love*. We couldn't understand why Benny insisted on also playing that song with the septet. It seemed redundant, and there were a million other tunes we could have been playing.

A letter in Izvestia criticized the "cabaret style" with which Joya sang *Katyusha*, and after that there were always a few in each audience who would whistle their disapproval when she sang it. Inside a bouquet she received at one concert was a note from a Russian fan praising her rendition of the song and claiming that the whistlers were "hired goons".

The only place that *Katyusha* was not welcomed was Tblisi, where the audience stamped and whistled until Joya stopped singing it. They were Georgians, and didn't want a Russian song. It was as if she had sung *Yankee Doodle* in Alabama. She skipped *Katyusha* and went into *I'm Beginning to See The Light*, with the band making up a head arrangement, and she soon had the Georgians eating out of her hand.

One night Benny told me to play the *Thrill Is Gone* intro as straight eighths. It was a shuffle figure Ralph Burns had written to set the feeling of the whole arrangement. It would have sounded ridiculous as straight eighths, so I ignored Benny's order. As I started playing, he walked over and stuck his face right into mine. "Straight eighths!" he yelled.

"NO!" I yelled back, right into his nose. He snapped his head back and nearly lost his glasses. Joya continued singing, and I didn't hear any more about straight eighths.

I wasn't going to screw up her music just because he was jealous of her.

I never heard Benny refer to Joya by name except when he announced her. She was always, "the girl". "Where's the girl? We'll put the girl on next." From the *Benny Goodman In Moscow* album, you would never know that Joya had been with us. Benny specifically instructed George Avakian to omit her material, and told him not to mention her in the liner notes.

George urged him to reconsider.

"It's my album," said Benny, "and that's the way I want it."

Toward the end of our stay in Seattle, Muriel Zuckerman had passed out individual contracts that she wanted us to sign. Most of us had thrown them into our suitcases and hadn't read them carefully until we got to Moscow. When at last we did, we were appalled.

The first page was a standard specification of wages and weeks of employment. But the next several pages looked like army regulations. There were restrictions on our deportment and rules about our behavior toward Benny. We were to agree to obey all of his instructions and be under his command 24 hours a day while we were out of the United States. Those clauses were insulting, but not a serious problem. The one we balked at was an agreement to options on our services, a week at a time, for a couple of months *after we got back to the States*, tying up our ability to book any other work, but giving Benny no obligation to hire us! The clause allowed him to drop the options at the end of any week.

Most of us refused to sign the contracts. We told Muriel that we had no access to lawyers in Russia, and didn't want to sign anything so complicated without legal advice. Muriel countered with a threat to cut off our funds. We were getting our paychecks but we couldn't cash them in Russia. For spending money, Muriel advanced whatever rubles we needed, deducting the equivalent amount from our checks at what Phil Woods referred to as "the Muriel rate of exchange".

Jay kept telling us individually that there would be trouble if we didn't sign the contracts. At one point Muriel refused to advance any more rubles without a signed contract, and Jim Maxwell started making loans to Zoot and Phil from money he had brought along in case he needed to bail out and buy a ticket home. In Leningrad, to protest Jay and Muriel's tactics on Benny's behalf, Jim went on a hunger strike for about ten days, and made the newspapers in New York.

At the concerts, Benny continued to cramp everyone's style. He seemed indifferent to our best efforts, and did what he could to undermine our confidence. His own playing was erratic —

sometimes he sounded wonderful, and sometimes he ran out of gas and just tootled through his choruses, especially toward the end of a show. Terry Catherman attributed this to the tranquilizers he said Benny was taking. In a couple of weeks he had gone through a bottle that Terry had expected to last for the whole trip. Jim Maxwell was surprised to hear this, since he said Benny had never used any crutches. He wasn't a drinker, only smoked tobacco, and had never taken pills. Jim said that the trip was important to Benny, who found being in his mother's homeland a very emotional experience. That may have been part of the reason he was so difficult on the tour. His back may also have been bothering him — he had suffered for years with a slipped disc.

Benny had just turned fifty-three, and I asked Teddy Wilson if he thought Benny's behavior could be attributable to age. I was thirty-four then and thought fifty-three was pretty old.

Teddy snorted. "The man is the same today as he was in 1936," he said. "You just have to learn to ask for enough money to make it worth your while."

I laughed. "Boy, your price must really be up there by this time! Why do you keep taking the job?"

Teddy smiled. "I have a lot of alimony to pay," he said, "and besides, these jobs allow me to play with a class of musician I can't afford to hire myself."

Halfway through the tour, Benny had John Bunch playing with the small groups as well as the band and was using Teddy only on the opening number. John felt bad about it. He considered Teddy one of his musical fathers and thought he deserved more respect.

Benny was killing Joe Newman with kindness. He had given him most of the trumpet solos on the band arrangements, and had him playing on the septet numbers as well. Joe was complaining that his chops were starting to hurt. Mel and I asked Benny to give Joe a break. These people knew Teddy from his records, and would like to hear him play. Why not let him do a trio number? Benny said it was a good idea, and tried it on the next concert.

Teddy played *Stompin' at the Savoy* and *Satin Doll* with Mel and me, and the audience cheered. John Bunch, instead of leaving the stage, had taken a chair next to Joe Newman, right beside the open piano lid. He sat there, beaming with pleasure, and enthusiastically joined in the applause for Teddy.

The trio numbers stayed in the program, but when Teddy was taking his bows, Benny behaved ungraciously towards him, turning his back until the applause died down. He seemed to find it difficult to share applause with anyone.

One night Benny stopped me backstage and said, "Pops, don't you think you ought to be playing in two for Teddy?" (Teddy's left hand usually played a two-four stride bass line.)

"I asked him about that," I told Benny, "and he said he wanted Mel and me to play just the way we always play. He likes to hear the bass in four."

Benny looked a little put out, and said, "I've been meaning to speak to you, Pops, you're trying too hard."

This took me completely off guard. I said, "What the hell does that mean?"

He made his little waffling noise and said, "Uh, just play the notes, Pops."

I was flabbergasted. I thought the rhythm section was sounding great, and up until then Benny had seemed to appreciate it. "Look, Benny," I said, "on the new charts, I'm playing pretty much what's written until we get to the jazz choruses. But when we get back into your old book, those two-four bass parts are dumb, even if Fletcher Henderson did write some of them. This is supposed to be a jazz band. If I play those parts the way they're written, this will sound like a 1936 dance band, and that isn't what you said you were bringing over here."

Benny looked at me, twiddled his fingers, and said "We'll talk about it later, Pops."

We never did.

Sometimes Benny featured Mel Lewis on *Sing, Sing, Sing*. One night, after he and Mel had an argument, he called the number, but told Mel not to take a solo. Mel took one anyway and got into a half-note triplet figure. Benny couldn't find "one," and didn't know where to come back in.

Benny knew Joe Wilder had a repertoire of classical trumpet solos and had told him to have a couple of things ready, but he never asked him to play them. In Moscow he met with a group of Soviet composers, and Aram Khatchaturian was supposed to have written a "jazz fugue" for clarinet, trumpet and orchestra that Benny kept telling Joe they were going to play, but it never happened.

The State Department had used Benny's classical repertoire as a carrot to win his acceptance by the Russians. Some Soviet officials had been opposed to having a jazz band tour their country. They lumped everything from Duke Ellington to Elvis Presley together under the word "jazz," and they had heard about the Newport riot. A jazz artist who also played classical music was a safer bet. Part of the original deal had been for Benny to appear with the Moscow Philharmonic. He was to rehearse with them during our first week there and perform with them during the final week of the tour, when we were back in Moscow. I think he had told them he would do either the Mozart concerto, a Brahms sonata, or something by Prokofiev.

Terry Catherman told us the Moscow Philharmonic was upset because Benny had failed to rehearse with them during our first week there. Benny had told them then that he would do the Mozart, and they had been rehearsing it without him. Benny had Terry send them from Sochi a telegram changing the program to the Brahms. When he changed his mind again, the Russians took it as an insult and cancelled the performance. Terry said Benny seemed relieved not to have to do it.

Our schedule called for three opening concerts in Moscow, five each in Sochi and Tblisi, three in Tashkent, six in Leningrad, five in Kiev, and a final five in Moscow — thirty-two in all. We had been told that the Russian jazz fans were eager to hear us, and we were prepared for mob scenes. Our first audience was courteous, but not avid. What was wrong? Terry Catherman explained that this was the event of the year in Moscow. The announcement that Kruschev would attend had put the official seal of approval on us and any politician in Moscow who hadn't been able to get a couple of tickets for opening night was definitely low on the totem pole. Of the nearly five thousand people in that first audience, only a handful knew anything about jazz.

Premier Kruschev and his wife, U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson and his wife, Anastas Mikoyan and various high Soviet officials were in the place of honor. After the first

number, everyone looked at Kruschev to make sure he was applauding before they joined in. The Premier and his wife left at intermission, sending congratulations and apologies backstage. During the *Anthology of Jazz*, Hal Davis came onstage and displayed huge photo blowups of the jazz stars whose music we were playing. We felt Benny was stretching it a bit to include a Glenn Miller tune in such a small sampling of historic jazz, but that number turned out to be a crowd pleaser: the movie *Sun Valley Serenade* had just been released in Russia and audiences knew Miller's music better than Ellington's or Basie's. After our last number the audience threw flowers that piled up until they covered the front of the stage.

Alexei Batashev, a jazz historian and president of Moscow's largest jazz club, said in his review, "The music was a little bit old fashioned but very entertaining. We applauded Goodman from our hearts, but we expected more. The program was arranged as if intended for an ignorant and unprepared audience." Actually, that was a pretty accurate description of that first audience. At the next two concerts we began to notice a more knowledgeable enthusiasm as the bureaucrats gave way to the jazz fans, and when we played at the 15,000 seat Moscow Sports Palace during the final week of the tour, the audiences roared their approval.

Moscow was more austere than the other Russian cities we visited. The golden domes of the Kremlin churches and the gay colors and fanciful shapes of the towers on St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square created the atmosphere of a fair or an amusement park, but the heavy hand of the government was everywhere, and the Muscovites who spoke to us on the street looked over their shoulders more than people did in the other cities we visited. Only a few years earlier, contact with foreigners had been completely forbidden.

While I was walking around one day, I noticed a cop directing traffic. As I passed him, he blew his whistle at a car that drove by him. I hadn't seen the driver do anything wrong, and he was nearly a block away when he heard the whistle. I was surprised to see him immediately pull over, park at the curb, and come running back to see what the cop wanted. That encapsulated for me the difference between Moscow and New York. The authorities there have power over people's lives to a degree we have a hard time imagining.

Walking around Moscow, some of us were turned back when we headed toward the older neighborhoods with beam-and-wattle houses. Our Russian guides only wanted us to photograph the newer buildings. They seemed to be afraid we would take home evidence of their "backwardness." They pointed with pride to their new buildings, some of which, like the Leningradskaya Hotel where we stayed, were twenty-five story "skyscrapers." But most were housing projects and office buildings with little architectural interest. Many had wire netting rigged above the first floor to protect pedestrians from the facing tiles that the severe winter cold had loosened.

With the assistance of our guides, we explored the Kremlin, the art museums, the GUM department store and the ornately decorated subway stations. But we weren't really able to relax with the Russian people until we left Moscow and flew south to Sochi, on the Black Sea.

Sochi looked like a Mediterranean resort, but there were only two public hotels. The rest of the buildings were sanitoriums, built by various labor unions and operated by the Ministry of Health. Workers who earned a vacation there were given a physical checkup and health regimen as well as a week at the seashore.

We played in an open-air concert hall that seated about 1,700. Above the side walls we could see people sitting in the branches of trees to get a glimpse of us.

The first concert went well and, afterward, Benny gave us a champagne party in the hotel dining room. He apologized for being rough on us and blamed it on the tensions involved in putting the tour together. "But it might happen again," he warned jokingly. Then he proposed a toast, "to a great band."

On the next concert he seemed to have forgotten his toast. He snapped at Mel and Jimmy Knepper about their playing, glared at us, and generally made us miserable onstage. He tried to give Zoot one of Phil's solos but Phil was a little loaded and feeling aggressive. Before Zoot could get his horn in his mouth, Phil jumped up and took his solo anyway.

The authorities in Sochi seemed nervous about us. Security police patrolled the stage door. They rousted a fan who was taping interviews with some of us and confiscated his tape. Terry Catherman was upset because Gallia, the interpreter who was translating Benny's announcements for the audience, wasn't translating Benny's remarks but was just announcing the names of the tunes in Russian. Terry interpreted for Benny on one show but the Russians protested and Gallia resumed her duties. Later Felix took over the job and was able to translate Benny's comments to Terry's satisfaction.

George Avakian had come to supervise the recording of the concerts by Benny's engineer, Carl Schindler. Benny had brought an Ampex recorder and a few Telefunken mikes. The Russians had given him a contract permitting the recording of every concert but someone was doing his best to make the process difficult. George and Carl hadn't been permitted to arrive in Moscow in time for the opening concert and had begun recording on the second night.

Intourist had insisted that George give them an itinerary for himself and Carl before he found out what ours was, and he guessed Moscow, Leningrad and Tblisi, in that order. When he found out our second stop was to be Sochi and sought to change the itinerary, Intourist tried to stonewall him. Terry Catherman had to pull some strings through the embassy to get permission for them to come to Sochi with us. On the second night in Sochi a tough-looking little guy with five o'clock shadow came over to where George and Carl were taping, waving his arms and saying, in Russian, "Turn off the machine."

Notice

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George pretended he didn't understand, and began showing the Russian how the recorder worked. Terry Catherman came over and said, "He's saying you must stop the tape machine, and I think you'd better."

George asked, "Do I really have to?"

Terry said, "Look at the bulge under his arm!" George told Carl to shut off the machine. The NBC-TV crew also had to stop filming.

Terry lodged a protest through the embassy. It took two days to get permission to resume recording. The officials in Sochi were claiming that the contract to record had been signed in Moscow and applied only to concerts in Moscow. After the embassy straightened things out, there was no further trouble about recording. Tapes were made of all the remaining concerts and the TV crew was permitted to continue filming. Benny wasn't happy with the quality of the tapes he was getting and at one point threatened to hire a Russian sound man he said was doing a better job than Carl.

During the last half of the tour, Benny called several rehearsals to try to get a better recording balance, but I guess they didn't help much. George Avakian later said the editing process was extremely difficult. He had to patch together different performances of the same number to avoid extraneous noises, and he had to deal with a different balance on every take.

Our hotel in Sochi, the Primorskaya, faced the Black Sea, and each room had a small balcony. One night a party developed in Jimmy Knepper and Jerry Dodgion's room. Phil Woods was holding forth on the deficiencies he perceived in Benny's personality, improvising freely on his theme. There was a response of amens from the chorus.

Phil combines a romantic soul with a cocky hell-for-leather exterior. He also has great ears, a daring imagination and complete command of his instrument. All this adds up to a very interesting musician, but not one who tends to mince words. At the climax of his diatribe, Phil stepped out on the balcony, stretched his arms into the warm night air, and with a voice made resonant with vodka, announced to the sky, "FUCK YOU, KING!" On the floor below, Benny had stepped out on his own balcony for a breath of air, and heard everything.

We had planned to spend the next day at the beach but at breakfast Jay notified us that there was a twelve o'clock rehearsal. We set up in the open-air concert hall in the bright sun, and Benny spent several hours going over everything in the book that we weren't using. He didn't say anything about what he had overheard the night before but he gave us a lot of significant looks. We hadn't all been at the party but we were all being punished.

He called *Let's Dance*, his theme, and began working on Phil's tone and attack. Then he called *Blue Skies*, and Zoot said, "Oops!"

Benny said, "Just the reed chorus," and Tom Newsom said, "Double oops!"

Benny went over and over it, poking his clarinet right in Phil's ear and playing along with him. "Not like *that*, like this!" Phil was a little hung over and not up to the battle. Benny shouted at him, "You're just one of eighteen men in this band. I'm sick and tired of you thinking you're the only one here who can swing!" Phil said later that he looked at the heavies sitting around him and couldn't remember having thought that. Zoot told Benny to lay off Phil.

"What's it got to do with you?" Benny asked.

"You're pickin' on my roomie!" said Zoot.

Benny told us he wasn't making any money on the tour, and claimed that some of us were making more than he was. He said if we had any gripes, to take them up with Jay. Then he had us get out *When Buddha Smiles*. The chart sounded so old-fashioned that Mel started playing two-beat press rolls on his snare. Zoot turned around and said, "Don't do that, he'll like it!"

Teddy had nothing to rehearse but Benny kept him sitting there. Benny looked over at him and told him to put out his cigarette. Teddy put it out, and Mel immediately lit one up and sat there glaring at Benny. Benny stood there for a minute, then walked offstage. The rehearsal was over. Jay tried to keep us for a few minutes to announce the program for that night, but we all laughed at him. "What's the point?" we asked him. "You know Benny will change it all when we're onstage."

As we were packing up, Jay told Jimmy Knepper that Benny had "demoted" him. He'd been playing the first trombone book, and Benny wanted Wayne Andre to take his chair.

"What's wrong?" asked Jimmy.

Jay told him, "Benny says you're making faces at him."

I guess Benny didn't realize that's just the way Jimmy plays.

The beach at Sochi was a disappointment. The water was almost unbearably cold and there was no sand. The narrow beach was covered with rocks the size of baseballs, and if you wanted to lie down and sunbathe, you had to use a duckboard pallet. Wading was difficult because of the stones underfoot. The people at the beach were very curious about us, and much less afraid to talk to us than they had been in Moscow. There was always someone who spoke enough English to make communication possible when the interpreters weren't around.

One morning there was a tap at the door of the room I shared with Joe Newman. A pleasant dark-eyed young man introduced himself to us as Valentino. He said he was a bass player and presented me with a bottle of Russian brandy and some rubles.

"Please," he begged, "take my address, and when you get home, send me some bass strings and a bridge. I play in a restaurant band, which has no official standing, and I have nowhere to buy supplies."

He was an Armenian who had been raised in Paris, where he had learned English. He had returned to Yerevan to see his father at a time when international travel had been easier and since then hadn't been able to get permission to leave the country again. He had found work in Sochi because life there was "more European". I promised to send him the supplies (which I did, though I don't know if they got to him), and he took me around to the local restaurants and introduced me to the musicians there.

Throughout the tour we noted the ingenuity with which the Russian jazz musicians maintained their instruments. Most musical supplies had to come from the west, and that conduit was open only to official orchestras. The amateurs and non-official professionals had to make do with what they could find. A bass I saw at a jam session in Leningrad was strung with used harp strings. A saxophonist in Tblisi showed Jerry Dodgion a

mouthpiece he had carved out himself. Soviet drummers had real heads only on the side of the drum that was being beaten. The other heads were made of paper.

An alto player in Tashkent handed Phil Woods his horn and asked for his comments. Phil tried it, had trouble getting a sound on it at all, handed it back and shook the man warmly by the hand. "Congratulations," he said. "I don't know how you do it."

We had expected to find some jazz players in Russia, but we were surprised to find that, even though they sounded a little amateurish, they knew all the latest tunes. Willis Conover's Voice of America jazz programs had been getting through. Russian musicians had tape recorders and good collections of American jazz. One guy in Leningrad showed me dubs that had been made many years earlier on an old acetate recorder, using X-ray plates, with holes punched in the center, as substitutes for the unavailable acetate blanks. Playing piano at jam sessions, Victor Feldman saved us from looking ignorant, since he knew the latest things Miles and Coltrane had recorded.

The enthusiasm among the musicians was wonderful, though we didn't run into any really hot groups. They'd been figuring it out on their own and were coming along fine, but they were in a tough climate for jazz. It had no official sanction until shortly before we arrived, and was actively opposed in some quarters. It's difficult for a Soviet citizen to move from one city to another, so the musicians can't gravitate to centers of action and learn from their best players as easily as we do here. And jobs in Russia are controlled by the bureaucracy, which is pretty square.

In Sochi, Valentino made friends with Joe Newman, who gave him a signed record album and a book. As they were walking out of the hotel together, two motorcycle cops pulled up, grabbed Valentino, confiscated his gifts and arrested him. Joe was horrified, and ran into the hotel to get Terry Catherman.

Terry raised some hell through official channels and we saw Valentino the next day among the crowd that came to see us off to Tblisi. But he didn't make any attempt to talk to us.

The food we got in the Soviet Union was generally sad. It ranged from dull to barely edible, with one or two exceptions. Meat was gristly, coffee was poor, vegetables were cabbage and leeks. Meals often looked like they had been prepared by someone who hated Americans. The dark heavy bread they served was nourishing and tasted pretty good. It became the mainstay of my diet.

The food was not only poor. For a big man like Jim Maxwell, there wasn't enough of it. The servings were small, and Jim was happy when one of us left something on his plate that he could scrounge. His food problem was solved by Mr. Konstantinov, our commissary man. A Russian of large proportions, he saw Jimmy cadging someone's uneaten chopped steak and had the interpreter tell him, "From now on you get two of everything. I know what it is to be a big, hungry man."

Konstantinov and the transportation director, a little round man in a wrinkled suit whom we nicknamed "Popsie," after Benny's famous bandboy, referred to us as "the collective" and they were puzzled when we failed to do things as a group. I'd come down for an early breakfast and find a table set with twenty places, and at each one a cup with a soft-boiled egg in it. The eggs were always underdone and so, as each musician straggled in, he'd send his egg back to be cooked another minute and it worked out fine. "Popsie" couldn't figure out why he had only a few people on the bus for museum tours. I explained that we all liked different things, but he kept on trying to fill his bus. The first dinner at each hotel usually featured Chicken Kiev, a mock drumstick made of minced chicken supposed to be cooked with the outside crisp, the center filled with butter. We usually got it with the outside soggy and the center filled with what seemed to be 40W motor oil. Russian science evidently hadn't come up with a very good margarine.

After a couple of weeks of meals where the only green thing in sight was a few thin slices of cucumber, we began to express a longing for some variety in the salad department. Our interpreters laughed. "You should be here in the winter," they told us. "Then, you don't even get cucumbers." We're so accustomed to our supply of fresh fruit and produce in the States that it comes as a shock that a large country like the Soviet Union can be organized in such a way that no amount of money can buy you a head of lettuce. We saw people lining up to buy an orange. No apples. Bananas were unheard of.

The food in Tblisi was somewhat better than the norm, and in Tashkent we were served one meal of traditional Uzbek dishes, mainly rice and legumes, that I found very tasty. In Leningrad we found a couple of restaurants that offered an improvement on hotel food. When we returned to Moscow, Rocky Staples, the chief cultural attache, and his wife Charlotte invited the band to dinner at their apartment in the U.S. embassy compound. They had sent to Denmark through diplomatic channels for all the food we hadn't been getting on the tour — fresh lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, corn, chicken breasts, fruit, nuts, and best of all, fresh milk! We'd been warned off the local milk and I'd been making do with mineral water and sometimes a liquid yogurt that is about the consistency of buttermilk. Some of us had been drinking Russian soda beverages but I found them too sweet for my taste. The one Russian food we all approved of was marozhny (ice cream). Wherever we went, it was delicious.

Teddy Wilson, careful of his stomach, had come prepared. One of his suitcases was filled with tins of sardines. He would come to dinner on the first night in each new hotel, shake his head sadly and say, "No chefs here, either," and retire to his room and his sardines. By the end of the tour he was looking pretty thin.

Teddy always presented himself to his audiences with a genteel dignity that perfectly matched his elegant jazz playing. I was delighted to find he was a warm and friendly person offstage, with a bright intellect and a delightful sense of humor. He liked to party, and his room was often the place to go after the concert. I never stayed long, having no talent for alcohol, and I always liked to be up early, since the morning was the easiest and most pleasant time for me to explore the cities.

It's just as well I didn't stick around for the poker games. I knew even less about cards than Zoot and Phil, who were learning the subtleties of serious poker from John Frosk. Whenever there was time for a few hands, on planes, at concert halls and in hotel rooms, the three of them would start a game, occasionally attracting a few extra players. John told me he never drew any rubles from Muriel for spending money during the whole tour. He used his winnings from Zoot and Phil.

The drinkers would stay up late and we would rarely see them

at breakfast. Teddy wouldn't even show up for lunch. When he turned up in the afternoon, he would be looking very weedy — a gray stubble on his cheeks, a weariness in his walk. By concert time, though, he would have himself pulled together and would appear at the auditorium looking natty, bright, and about twenty years younger. He'd spend a few minutes at the piano warming up, and when the concert began, he really took care of business.

Russian hotels excelled at one thing: counting the towels. When we checked out of the Leningradskaya after the first week in Moscow, there was a big scene. The maids had found some towels missing, and suitcases were opened in the lobby and the errant linen retrieved. The embarrassing thing was that they were such cheap, tacky towels.

The hotel billed Joe Newman for a dime-store glass ashtray that had cracked when he put his travel iron down on it, and a bedsheet with a cigarette burn. (Joe often awoke in the night craving a cigarette, and had nodded off once, burning a small hole in his sheet and a large one in my peace of mind. My roommate was a fire hazard!) Joe paid the bill but demanded the sheet, since they were charging him so much for it. He waited indignantly in the lobby until a maid came down with it, and he carried it in his suitcase for the rest of the tour.

We had all been road rats before and we were able to handle the spartan accomodations we found in Russia. The airline is government owned, the planes all designed to be quickly modified for military use. They had plastic noses with bombardier compartments, and military-style doors with high threshholds to step over. They were much less comfortable than western airliners. The seats were harder, and closer together. The pilots flew military style and landings were rough. They crammed the planes right down onto the runway, and every landing went "wham!" The planes were always parked way out on the airfield and, at airports without jitneys, we had quite a walk to the terminal. I was glad I had a wheel on my bass.

We waited all day at the airport in Sochi for the weather in Tblisi to change. Tblisi is in mountainous country, and fierce cross winds were creating unsafe landing conditions. After keeping us sitting in the airport lounge for thirteen hours, they bused us back to the hotel. We didn't get out until the next day. But that turned out to be our only weather problem during the whole tour.

When we landed in Tblisi, the winds were still pretty strong. I had trouble holding onto my bass as we walked in from the plane. Over the whistling of the wind, we heard someone calling George Avakian's name. Three Armenian newsmen were running toward us across the runway. They had heard George was with us and had come to greet him. George told them that Intourist had put him at a different hotel from the band but they said, "Don't worry about it, come with us." They piled him into their car, drove him to our hotel, and fixed him up with a room.

The next day the local paper published a huge picture of George, Joya and Gene Allen that the newsmen had taken. Because of the picture, George was deluged with Armenians who came to the hotel to see him. He was in the habit of signing autographs in three different languages, in the English, Cyrillic and Armenian alphabets. The Armenians in Tblisi shouted, "Forget the Russian!" George admonished them, in Armenian, to be careful what they said in public; the Russians might be listening. The Armenians said, "Screw them, we're not afraid."

George's parents had lived in Tblisi (Tiflis) until he was about seven years old, and his mother had given him the location of the house that they had owned. One morning George, Joe Wilder and I set out to find it. The street had been renumbered sometime in the ensuing forty years, but by following his mother's directions, we easily found the house. George, speaking Armenian, asked some people in the courtyard of the building if anyone remembered his parents. They found an old lady who had lived there at that time, and remembered George as a child.

Our visit caused a lot of excitement, and the people insisted that we look at all the rooms of the house, which had been broken up into several apartments. George's memory of the place had faded but we were interested to see inside some ordinary homes. George took pictures of everything. (He told me later that his mother had been delighted with them.)

Turk Van Lake also spoke some Armenian. He and George were the underground connection for Armenians who wanted to send greetings to relatives in the States. There were always a few of them hanging around our hotels waiting to speak to George and Turk. Turk also got to meet his aunt Galipse from Yerevan. His mother had located her shortly before our tour after a fifty year separation. Terry Catherman arranged for Turk's aunt and her son to travel to Tblisi to meet him and hear a concert.

Tblisi gave us our first encounter with a different culture in the Soviet Union. The people are loyal Soviet citizens, but they are proudly Georgians, not Russians, and they let you know this right away. (Stalin was a Georgian, and he was still a hero in Tblisi.) The city is very old and sits athwart a group of hills clustered beside the Dura River. Walking around its streets, I felt a sense of timelessness. It couldn't have looked much different there a couple of hundred years ago. Hearing a chorus of voices coming from an open cathedral door, I stepped into its shady cobbled courtyard and stood behind an ancient wisteria vine where I could hear without being seen. An Orthodox service was in progress, with the entire congregation, mostly male, singing the responses. The strength and resonance of the voices was entrancing. I stood there until it was over, and then wandered back to the hotel, and the Twentieth century.

Formal religion isn't prohibited in the Soviet Union, but it isn't encouraged either. There were some operating churches in Moscow and Leningrad, but many have become museums, schools, etc. We saw one that had been turned into a power station. There seemed to be more official acceptance of the church in Georgia. Our guides took us on a trip outside of Tblisi to an old monastery where we met priests with long beards, dressed in traditional robes and square hats.

Victor Feldman took some movies that became popular at parties back in the States because of one scene. While Benny is talking to the priests outside the monastery wall, a little kid comes up to ask for alms. Benny reaches in his pocket and pulls out a handful of Russian coins. He picks around among them, and selects one to give the kid. Just as Benny hands over the coin, Victor reverses the film, making Benny seem to have second thoughts, take the coin back and put it in his pocket again.

Victor was a prankster throughout the tour. His favorite prop was a plastic replica of a puddle of vomit, which he kept rolled

up in his pocket. He pretended to be sick everywhere, on planes and buses, in hotel lobbies and restaurants. But he really got sick in Kiev with a severe case of the dysentery we had all had bouts with at one time or another, and had to be taken to the hospital. After that, he retired his fake vomit.

In Tblisi we spent our free time during the day in a variety of ways. We all did a lot of exploring, of course, and many of us made friends with the local musicians. A few of them arranged for a jam session at the Tblisi Polytechnical Institute, where we played one day for a couple of hours with half a dozen Georgian jazz players while a large crowd of students and teachers listened.

One day we were taken to Tblisi Lake for an afternoon of swimming, and nearly lost one of our interpreters. Jim Maxwell was larking with Nadia. While they were wading, he picked her up as if she were a child and dunked her in the water, not realizing she couldn't swim — and had a heart condition. She passed out. Gallia, her partner, rushed out with some pills. She came around after a few minutes and was okay, but we had been very frightened, and Jim felt terrible.

On another afternoon we were given a private performance by the Georgian national dance company at their theater. They did their whole show for us and then the children who were studying to join the company danced for us. It was Georgian folk dancing performed at a high artistic level. The dancers flew joyously about the stage with grace and precision. The traditional costumes were wonderful, the whole performance a delight. We especially liked a fighting dance in which swordsmen whirled and rapidly struck their weapons against each others' shields as they executed complicated dance patterns and showers of sparks flew on the darkened stage as metal struck metal.

Jay had told us Benny wanted to play a little jazz for them afterwards, and several of us had brought our instruments. When the performance was over, Mel and Turk and I set up center stage as a piano was wheeled in for John Bunch. Benny, Joe Newman and Jimmy Knepper got out their horns and the dancers, who had changed into street clothes, crowded around to listen. Benny looked disturbed.

"No, no," he said, "we wanted to get pictures. Can't they put their costumes and makeup back on?" We were horrified.

"Benny," we said, "don't ask them to do that! Don't you realize how much time and work that involves?" We asked him to let them relax and enjoy themselves.

Reluctantly Benny acquiesced and we began playing *Caravan*. Joe Newman wailed out the melody with Benny and Jimmy making the background riff. Joe danced up and down like an escaped clockspring, urging us into a hotter groove. As Jimmy Knepper began his chorus, Benny saw the photographers coming down the aisle. Jimmy, playing with his eyes closed, was nearly knocked down as Benny shouldered him out of the way and stepped to the front of the stage to strike a pose for the photographers. Mel and I looked at each other in disbelief.

When we finished that tune, Benny began urging "just one or two of the dancers" to get back into their costumes for some pictures.

There were two men in the company who had done a juggling dance with hand drums, and Benny got one of them to play with us for more pictures. It had become a photo session instead of a musical offering. Mel and John Bunch and I refused to continue being a part of Benny's discourtesy and we packed up and went back to the hotel. We felt that, after having been given such a wholehearted performance by the dance company, Benny had treated them shabbily. Rather than giving them our best music in return, he only seemed interested in getting publicity shots. Benny played another tune with Joe, Jimmy and Turk before he left. He complained about the "unprofessional" behavior of those of us who had abandoned him.

Benny had pulled a similar stunt in Moscow, asking some of us to bring our instruments to the birthday party they gave him at the American Embassy. Even though we were guests at the party, we didn't mind playing a little, but Benny acted as if it were a club date he had booked, with us as the unpaid band. We were glad when he went off to talk to the Ambassador and left us to play by ourselves. He was hopeless as far as recreational playing was concerned, and we began avoiding jam sessions where he was to be involved. If he had just played, we could have had fun together, but he couldn't stop being the boss, calling the tunes and deciding who was to play when. And the publicity seemed more important to him than the music.

The newest and most modern structure in Tblisi was the radio building, on the top of one of the hills. In it was a large restaurant with an excellent view of the city. We were invited there by the Georgian Philharmonia for a banquet to follow our last concert.

When the party was announced that morning, Zoot and Phil planned their day so they would be in good shape for the midnight festivites. We boarded "Popsie's" bus at 10 a.m. to be driven to a restaurant outside of town for a shashlik luncheon. Zoot and Phil decided against bringing a jug and, at the luncheon, limited themselves to a glass of wine apiece.

Back at the hotel, Phil wanted to stop by the buffet in the lobby before we went to the concert, to stave off hunger pangs until the party. Zoot wasn't hungry and said he'd hang around their room.

When Phil returned to it half an hour later, he found Zoot sitting in a chair facing a hat he had placed in the middle of the room. He'd been throwing playing cards at the hat, and there were cards all over the floor. An empty whiskey bottle sat beside him. He was smashed. When he arrived at the concert hall he was a one man New-Year's Eve party.

Liquor made Zoot feel like dancing and swinging and he often used it to get himself into the mood to play. If he went too far, he would lose that wonderful control of his fingers that he normally had, yet he could still think of pretty phrases and, as long as he could exhale into the horn, he could swing. He prided himself on being able to play no matter how much he'd been drinking.

He once told me that his dad, a vaudeville hoofer, had been stopped during the Prohibition era by two Los Angeles cops who accused him of being drunk. They gave him an impromptu sobriety test by ordering him to walk the edge of the curb. Zoot said his dad was indeed loaded but he not only walked the curb, he tap-danced it. The cops laughed and let him go.

At the Tblisi concert, the rest of the band had settled down to what had become the serious business of doing our jobs. We had learned from experience not to look as if we were having

too much fun, or Benny would act like it was costing him something. But Zoot was mellow, and ready to swing. He looked a bit bleary but he played his parts with gusto and got the rest of us feeling better. He clapped on the afterbeat and whooped like a cowboy while the brass section was swinging. Benny reminded him several times that they were recording the concert, but Zoot kept whooping it up.

Benny called a septet number (four rhythm, Victor Feldman, Joe Newman and himself). We were grouped to play right next to Zoot's chair at the right end of the sax section. During the first ensemble, Zoot joined in, and after Benny took a couple of choruses, Zoot took a chorus, too. It was a wonderful octet, but Benny felt he needed to put the lid on this little outburst of spontaneity. He had us get out *Stealin' Apples*, Fletcher Henderson's old chart on the Fats Waller classic. We hadn't played it much and Benny correctly surmised that Zoot might have trouble with the reed chorus, on which he had the lead. Sure enough, Zoot fumbled a few bars, and during the applause, Benny gave Zoot his famous "ray." Zoot beamed lovingly back at Benny and explained, "I couldn't see it!"

Georgia is wine country, and Georgians are fond of drinking toasts. Protocol at banquets requires the toastmaster to propose toasts that compliment and flatter the guests, and after each toast everyone is supposed to empty his glass. When the toastmaster has proposed all the toasts he cares to make, he appoints someone else toastmaster, and they start all over again.

The wine glass in front of me at the banquet looked like it would hold a pint and I knew if I emptied it more than once, I'd be unable to walk. I looked around to see how I might avoid drinking without insulting our hosts. There were large bowls of strawberries on the table and some of the diplomats were filling their wine glasses with berries. Aha! I followed suit, and by tilting the glass at each toast while using the strawberries to hide the fact that I wasn't drinking, I was able to stay in the game.

Zoot had rapidly progressed from jolly tippler to sloppy drunk, and we were afraid he would say or do something that would offend our hosts. Phil spent the first half hour at the banquet hissing at him: "Come on, man, shape up! We've got to have some protocol here!"

Mr. Keepiani, director of the Georgian Philharmonia, had begun the toasts. We saluted music, Benny's Georgian mother, friendship, the managers of the tour, the American journalists, brotherhood, peace. (For that one, a dove was brought in.)

After each toast, Zoot would begin to lurch to his feet, feeling the urge to respond with a toast of his own. When Phil and I restrained him, he bad-mouthed us for spoiling his fun. Finally Phil changed his tack. "Okay, mother. If it's going to be juice city, look out, here I come!" He immediately started doubling his intake of wine, trying to catch up with Zoot.

The toastmaster was preparing to yield the floor to Benny. "And now, our guest of honor, a great musician. I give you . . . Benny Goodman!" Right on cue, Zoot threw up all over his jacket front. Jerry Dodgion rose from his chair and kissed Zoot on the cheek. We napkined off Zoot's red uniform jacket as well as we could, and he sat there quietly for a while. Then he nudged me. "From now on," he whispered, "I'm only eating the strawberries." He pointed to his lapel. "Then if I throw up on my jacket again, it won't show!" He sat back, chuckling at his clever plan. Phil bawled him out for losing his cool and his dinner, calling him "unAmerican". Two minutes later, Phil was throwing up.

Benny toasted Georgia, Mr. Keepiani, the band and Zoot, the audiences, Muriel, and Alice ("my most loyal fan"). We were unable to restrain Zoot the next time he was struck with the impulse to respond. He announced loudly, "I wanna make a toast!" Benny yielded to him, and we held our breath as Zoot pulled himself to his feet, raised his glass, and carefully constructed a most courteous and proper toast. He complimented our hosts and their city, and thanked them for their hospitality. When he finished, we all drank up and applauded with relief. Zoot made a courtly bow to the Russians, gave the band a triumphant leer, and collapsed into his chair.

After Zoot's toast, the dam broke. Phil toasted the sax section, Zoot toasted Phil ("my roomski"), someone toasted the trumpet section, someone else the trombones, someone the rhythm section. Then Phil toasted Mr. Keepiani, and apologized for the lack of protocol. "As musicians, we're really all one family," he said, and won everyone's applause. Teddy toasted "peace in the world," the *Time* reporter's wife toasted the muralist who had decorated the walls, and Mr. Konstantinov claimed the last toast, saying we had to get up early to fly to Tashkent in the morning.

Most of us were feeling pretty unsteady by this time, with the exception of Joe Wilder, who doesn't drink. "Popsie" got us on the bus and down the hill to the hotel. In the lobby, Phil got a little loud, so Maxwell picked him up, carried him up to his room, opened the door and threw him at Zoot.

Zoot, having sobered up a little, lectured Phil about his behavior.

Everyone went to bed, but the night wasn't over for some of us. Gene Allen and John Frosk had the room below Zoot and Phil. Gene had collapsed on his bed fully dressed and was sound asleep, but John was kept awake by the noise upstairs. It sounded like they were breaking up the furniture. Shouts of protest in foreign languages could be heard coming from the courtyard. John grabbed the phone and called Zoot. Using a Russian accent, he shouted, "Stop that noise, or I come up there and beat you up!" The noise abated, and John went to sleep.

In the morning, John got the rest of the story. Zoot and Phil had called Jim Maxwell for protection against the irate Russian, and Jim had taken a chair and posted himself in front of their door all night. After Zoot and Phil had checked out, John peeked into their room. A cyclone seemed to have passed through. John looked in the bathroom. On the wall were two footprints, one on each side of the washbasin.

Someone had obviously been trying to tear it off the wall.

(To be continued)