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Jazzletter

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Enough Already

Miles Davis used to complain about the interminable solos John Coltrane took. John is said to have replied that sometimes he just didn't know how to quit.

"Try taking the horn out of your mouth," Miles reputedly growled.

The story is probably true. It fits Miles.

The Letters columns of the *Times* of London and other British publications are among their most fascinating attractions. People of enormous expertise write compellingly interesting letters on all sorts of subjects both popular and exotic. These letters in turn generate replies that are equally intriguing. And so it grows. But in time these exchanges achieve a scope and size and length that presents the editors with serious problems.

And at such moments, the editor or editors will announce, "This correspondence must now cease."

And thus it is with all the contributions on Benny Goodman. Red Mitchell called me from Sweden about the story of The Sweater. Red says it happened not in New York City but at Goodman's home in Connecticut. The players, Red said, were himself, Frank Capp, and Andre Previn, and the lady in question was Helen Ward. But we could spend an enormous amount of time clearing up that story alone. Maybe it happened twice.

One of the most interesting letters I received was from Hal Davis, who was a close friend of Goodman's and for some time his publicist. Hal was on the Russian tour, and was in Goodman's hotel room when Phil Woods made his now famous balcony pronouncement. Hal assures us that it was distinctly heard in Goodman's room.

Hal had a warm, long, and close friendship with Goodman and was the obvious candidate to be the most infuriated reader. On the contrary, Hal said that while his vision of the tour was different from Bill Crow's, his "truth" and Bill's "truth" were equally valid. Ah! Sigh. A rational man.

There's a letter from Hal in this issue. Oddly — or perhaps not so oddly — it has nothing to do with Goodman.

A number of letters were in hearty agreement with the piece titled *B.G. and the Soil of Fascism*, which turned out to be particularly timely in that it came out just before Ollie became the latest man-with-all-the-answers for a public seeking escape from freedom. In Ventura County, where I live, a man in the oil business took a full-page ad in the local paper in support of Oliver North, and denounced the Congress as "a bunch of left-wing politicians; and they border on the edge of being communists." Not even at the height of McCarthyism, I think, has American democracy been in such danger. And if it goes in the United States, it goes everywhere. The other open and liberal societies cannot survive unchanged if, in its fanaticism about Soviet fascism, America becomes its moral equivalent.

Now, there's a flaw in my *B.G. and the Soil of Fascism* piece. I failed to mention the most obvious similarity: the use of the scapegoat. When unhappy Germans, suffering through the social disorder and poverty that was the result as much as anything of the clumsy compromise between Clemeanceau's vindictiveness and Wilson's idealism, became desperate about Germany's condition, a demi agogue — and a comparable example of seductively articulate nationalism we have not seen until North — was able to convince them that it was *somebody*'s fault, and if you could only get rid of that somebody, the troubles would go away. The somebody was of course the Jews. We know Hitler did about it.

Dwight MacDonald has referred to "the German weakness for theory, for vast perspectives of world history, for extremely large and excessively general ideas." He might not have ascribed this defect to the Germans alone if he had heard the "testimony" of Oliver North, and, for that matter, listened to a few of the logically sloppy speeches of the Sportscaster.

Now, the people who have insisted in defiance of all evidence that bebop killed the big bands are exactly like the Nazis of Germany in the desire to blame someone for changed conditions with which they are unhappy. Get rid of them damn progressives and cools and beboppers, and the big bands will come back. Things will be just like they were. Right? Right. Salute the flag.

And that's the point that slipped by me.

Johnny Mandel once described the *Jazzletter* as a Jim and Andy's of the mail. And that is what it should be, and what I want it to be: a conversation. An exchange. It's not my publication, it's ours. But somebody has to exercise a little discipline, and the task falls to me.

As intriguing as the recent conversation has been, after clearing off the current correspondence we're going to take the horn out of our collective mouth. Or, as they say in Britain, "This correspondence must now cease." Or, as we say in America, "Next case."

Letters

Wrong. You know two people (at least) who know the words to Jack Armstrong's theme.

If you had unresolved questions about old radio music, you should have called your Kansas buddy. When I was growing up in Des Moines, I had several prolonged illnesses that put me up close to all those programs. Here is a fast scan of some of the radio themes:

Backstage Wife: *The Rose of Tralee*; Big Sister: *Valse Bluette*; Burns and Allen: *The Love Nest*; The Count of Monte Cristo: *The Sylvia Ballet* of Delibes; Dick Tracy: *Toot Toot Tootsie*; Dr. Christian: *Rainbow on the River*; Escape: *Night on Bald Mountain* (Moussourgsky); The FBI in Peace and War: Prokofiev's March from *Love for Three Oranges* (did J. Edgar Hoover know they were using a Soviet composer to hype his outfit?); Easy Aces: *Manhattan Serenade*; First Nighter: *Neapolitan Nights*; The Green Hornet: *Flight of the Bumble Bee* (Rimsky-Korsakov); Hilltop House: Brahms' *Lullaby*; I Love a Mystery: *Valse Triste* (Sibelius); John's Other Wife: *The Sweetest Story Ever Told*; Just Plain Bill: *Darling Nellie Gray* and *Polly Wolly Doodle*; The Lone Ranger: *The William Tell Overture* (Rossini), with bridge music from *Les Preludes* (Liszt); Lorenzo Jones: *Funiculi Funicula*; Moon River: *Caprice Viennoise* (Kreisler) with bridge music from Debussy's *Clair de Lune-; Mr Keene, Tracer of Lost Persons: Someday I'll Find You* (Noel Coward); Mert and Marge: *Poor Butterfly*; The O'Neills: *Londonderry Air*; Orphans of Divorce: *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*; Our Gal Sunday: *Red River Valley*; Pepper

Young's Family: *Au Matin*; Pretty Kitty Kelly: *The Kerry Dancers*; Road of Life: Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony; The Romance of Helen Trent: *Juanita*; The Shadow: *The Wheel of Omphale* (Saint-Saens); Sherlock Holmes: *The March of the Ancestors* (based on Gilbert and Sullivan's *Ruddigore*); Stella Dallas: *How Can I Leave You*; The Story of Mary Marlin: *Clair de Lune* (Debussy); A Tale of Today: *Coronation March* from *The Prophet* (Meyerbeer); Valiant Lady: *Estrellita*; When a Girl Marries: *Serenade* (Drigo); Young Widder Brown: *In the Gloaming*.

As for *Mirth and Madness*, which featured Jack Kirkwood and Ransom Sherman as performers and writers, one of their musical directors was Jerry Jerome, a tenor man who saw action with Glenn Miller and, I think, Benny goodman before going into the studios in the 1940s. You can hear him on Lionel Hampton's *Gin for Christmas*, outclassed by the group but still swinging.

Another very hip program was *Casey, Crime Photographer*. Last scene of every show took place in a bar across from the *Morning Express* newsroom. There, Casey explained to everybody how he knew that the ballistics report was forged, or whatever, while in the background, sometimes moving into the foreground, was this very nice stride piano playing by Herman Chittison. Teddy Wilson was on it for a while, too. One cursed night in my young life, I turned off the radio to cram for an exam, and my friends told me later that the whole Casey episode I missed had been written around Herman and his playing.

Turning now to another burning social issue you have raised: How can we of the electorate be sure that the reporters who are dispatched to check out the marital fidelity of our candidates for public office are themselves capable of determining the truth? How can a journalist who never fools around anticipate and see through all the devices a politician, skilled at philandering, can put in the way of his investigation?

Clearly, only journalists who can themselves be certified as experienced adulterers, wise to every trick in the book of deceit, should be sent on such important missions. And of course any reporter (or editor) who is so lacking in ambition as to fail to get certification from a duly appointed state board of adulterous journalists should be refused admission to or dismissed from the profession.

Here's hoping that our journalism schools will perceive the need for appropriate training in this area, and throw out those boring course on how to write a sentence to make room for the curriculum that cub reporters really need if they are to go places in the media.

Bill Fogarty, Leawood, Kansas

Journalist Bill Fogarty is editor of *Implement and Tractor* magazine.

The stories are priceless. I recall my own dealings with him, as a relatively inexperienced concert promoter a dozen years ago. I went to the airport to guide the great man through customs and immigration. The immigration official — primed by a Benny Goodman album from my own collection — smiled warmly as he arrived, carrying only an overnight suit bag and his clarinet.

"Welcome to Canada, sir. And the purpose of your visit?"

Goodman scowled at him and replied, "Business!"

And business it certainly was. On arrival at the hall, my sound man was sharply instructed to remove all the microphones except one — his. The band assembled: Bobby Hackett, Peter Appleyard, Urbie Green, Grady Tate, and Hank Jones. The Massey Hall Steinway had just been tuned, and this expectant promoter was sitting contendly in the front row waiting for the sound check. The show was sold out and, now, nothing could go wrong.

Goodman counted in the band and one beat into the first bar, he called a halt. "Piano!" he accused me, with a look that would have stunned an elephant at forty paces.

"What's wrong with it?" I stuttered.

"Sharp!" he said, walking firmly off to the dressing room.

The hapless tuner, who did the job regularly for the Toronto Symphony, had tuned it the way the orchestra liked it — "slightly brilliant," and just a touch off A 440. And Goodman, standing between piano and Peter Appleyard's A 440 vibes, was trapped in the middle.

Finding a piano tuner at 6:30 on a Saturday evening, with doors due to open for a sold-out show at 7:45, was not easy, but somehow it was done nearly by show time. Backstage, Goodman moodily scraped his clarinet barrel with sandpaper, and consumed two bottles of excellent French wine — some $30 a bottle, back then, an unexpected addition to the budget. And while he didn't solo very much, he played an excellent show. I'll always remember Hackett, smiling at me after the show, and whispering,

"Don't worry about it, he's just a fussy s.o.b."

The pleasure the *Jazzletter* has given this unrepentant rock and roller (go on, start listening to Louis Jordan!) has been consistent since the first issue, and the lift it gives me, and the broadening of my musical horizons, are things I'll always be grateful for. Cheers.

Richard Flohil, Toronto

Dick is editor of The Canadian Composer.

The other night Clare Fischer performed a concert in Mexico City. Solo. One of the songs he played was *Turn Out the Stars*. Before he played that lovely tune, he recited your lyric, explaining that it was the lyric that had attracted him to the music. Clare, or your words, received an enthusiastic ovation. The audience response to jazz is heartwarming, even though the monetary gain is not — but that is for another time. (The Spanish word for "gig" is "hueso", bone. That says a lot.)

The *Jazzletter* finally caught up with me. They are still letters from home. Until I saw the index in the December issue, I had no idea I had missed an entire year! How frustrating to read all those very passionate letters in reaction to the Goodman story and not have my own opinion as to whether Bill should be lynched or awarded a Pulitzer!

Maxine and Dexter Gordon have been living about two blocks from us here in Cuernavaca. His health has improved greatly since they have been spending winters here. He spends his time getting massages, taking acupuncture, and drinking strange herbal brews (he has a 90-year-old *bruja*, wizzard), and watching the Mets on TV. They have gone back to the wars until next winter. I kind of miss them already.

I finally have a lab set up in Mexico City and am producing some prints. I've been shooting print ads and commercials for eating money, but it *really* feels good to be making prints for *me* again, instead of some art director. You know that any photos I have, they're yours.

A friend turned me onto Robertson Davies and I have been impressed reading some of his essays and lectures. I am about to tackle one of his novels. What do you think of him? Love,

Ted Williams, Cuernavaca, Mexico

Ted Williams is one of the greatest photographers in the history of jazz. He first became known to musicians when he was on the staff of Ebony. *Later, when he was freelancing in Chicago, he shot a lot of* Down Beat *covers for me, including superb portraits of Lambert-Hendricks-Ross, Art Farmer and Benny Golson when they first formed the Jazztet, Oscar Peterson, and*

Cannonball Adderley. We covered many festivals and concerts together, and I watched him add to a collection of magnificent prints that are nothing less than a treasure. That lonely photo of Lester Young that accompanied Bobby Scott's essay on Prez in the Jazzletter *is Ted's; so is the pensive shot of Duke Ellington standing over the keyboard. It is a serious oversight of the publishing industry that Ted's photos have never been been a collected in a book.*

After Chicago he lived in Mexico for several years, not so surprising a move in that his mother was Mexican. Still later he did an extended tour of duty in Viet Nam as an AP combat photographer. His personal memoir of the war, his private collection of pictures, hundreds of them, was lost on a ferry boat to Macao. He lived for several years in Los Angeles doing commercial work, and about a year ago, disappeared on us. Friends will be glad to know where he is.

Alec Wilder turned me onto the superb Robertson Davies.

In answer to Grover Sales' query, "If a Steinway falls in a forest . . . ? I think I may have heard it.

Stationed in the exec offices of Radio Tokyo was rough duty, but one day a correspondent buddy said, "Wanna hear the prettiest piano you ever heard?" Sure.

So we jeeped up into the foothills of Fuji. Up a narrow, treacherous, winding road until it stopped. I asked where the piano recital might be and was told to proceed about 400 yards straight up the rocks and rills to a small paper house so neatly crafted by the Japanese. Taking our shoes off, we scrunched down on the floor in front of a Steinway concert grand almost bigger than the house.

A beautiful young Eurasian girl played Chopin, as they used to say, "like a man."

I'm not too sure about the thermal currents from the Hump. But I never could figure out how that Steinway concert grand got to that hilltop — and in tune!

I have to chide you for classifying *One Man's Family* as a soap opera. I worked on it six of its twenty-seven years and not only was it never daytime but in all those years never sold a bar of soap, unless people rushed out and bought some when brother Paul talked to sister Claudia in the shower. And *I Love a Mystery* was written by Carleton E. Morse to give his *Family* actors some relief from their weekly family chit-chat. *Mystery* was on five days a week for fifteen minutes.

I would suspect that many daytime soaps were inspired by the *Family*, but most of the books refer to it as a "serial drama".

Mike Dutton, KCBX, San Luis Obispo, California

When I was a page boy at CBS back in 1935, *Our Gal Sunday* broadcast from the 23rd floor. Abe Goldman, a short, chubby, excellent accordionist, played the theme music.

We had an elevator standing by for the final notes of his theme. Abe came dashing out the studio, expressed to the lobby and the street, where he had a car and chauffeur waiting. They zipped to the left turn on 51st and Madison, zoomed through Fifth Avenue, turned into NBC and Rockefeller Center. There they had an elevator waiting. Up he went, into an NBC studio, where he was just in time to play the opening bars of the NBC soap that went on the air just after Sunday signed off!

And that's how it was in the good old radio days.

Hal Davis, Sarasota, Florida

I've just read the story of Madame Chiang's piano. As I entered the world with the name of Steinway, I was naturally interested. I had never heard the story before, and intend to share it with my two brothers, who are still consultants with Steinway & Sons — having sold the company some 15 years ago. It's a lovely tale.

My husband was one of those pilots flying The Hump.

Betty (Mrs. Schuyler) Chapin, New York City

The story about Madame Chiang's Steinway is priceless. Having just finished reading Sterling Seagrave's excellent history of the Chiangs and their related cronies, *The Soong Dynasty*, I really appreciated it.

John Baxter, KSOR, Ashland, Oregon

Oops!
1. Joel *McCrea.*
2. Theremin.
3. Claude *Akins.*
Love ya.

Truman Fisher, Pasadena, California

And while we're at it, it was Kay Summersby *with whom Ike was playing slap-and-tickle. And it's Ondes Martinot, not Marinteau.*

As for the album to which Lou Gottlieb rightly referred as very significant because it is from the transition period between swing and bop it's Charlie Parker, Birth of the Bebop: Bird on Tenor, 1943. *It's on Stash Records, 611 Broadway, New York NY 10012. It has had excellent reviews. If you can't find it in stores, write to Stash.*

The piece on "music" in film and on TV is priceless and has some of the strongest truth in it that I have seen — ever.

Leon Breeden, Denton, Texas

Professor emeritus Breeden was head of the jazz program at North Texas State University.

Oh Joy! Oh Rapture! Your essay *Ted Turner Meets Ma Perkins* was pure ambrosia. You touched several bases — nostalgia for the days of radio, the synthesizer mess, the yuppie / rock 'n' roll mentality and the idiocies of TV news and advertising. I love it, I love it! After all, my favorite oxymoron is "rock 'n' roll artist."

Then I read *B.G. and the Soil of Fascism* and delighted in your savaging of the "uninhabited windbreaker." That passage alone, starting with "vapid marionette," was worth the price of my subscription many times over.

Keep on keepin' on. There are a lot of us out here to whom the *Jazzletter* is a lifeline of sanity in a sea of craziness and ignorance; a beacon of intelligent morality in the darkness of know-nothingness. I sometimes wonder if the human race is not entering on a new Dark Age. If so, this publication is, in its own small way, holding on to the values of humane enlightenment which it took so many centuries to achieve. Plus you make smile many times and laugh out loud once in a while, and that in itself is a godsend. Your friend,

Eddie Higgins, Mashpee, Massachusetts

Why does your work make me cry? And make me send money to the S.O.S.? The answer to the last is easy. I owe singers. The answer to the first is Ella Mae Morse.

Dear Andy Russell. Your piece was lovely. It may contain some inaccuracies. I don't think he followed Sinatra on the Hit Parade. Old man Hill wasn't that stupid. He knew he had had the services of the number one popular singer and made the astounding and smart decision to put Lawrence Tibbett on to

bridge the gap between number one and whomever came next.

And when you say the *Hit Parade* moved out here in the mid-1950s, you may be right if you refer to the TV *Hit Parade*. But the radio one came out in 1946. I know how that happened. Sinatra was out here doing a picture. A duplicate orchestra was hired and his three numbers or so, conducted by Axel Stordahl, were piped in while we did the rest in New York. Mark Warnow and I planted a rumor in the columns that the HP was moving to California and not much later it happened. It made sense because it saved the cost of the other orchestra. I think, although I'm not positive, that Andy was on before Frank.

Three issues of the *Jazzletter* in one week. They were fascinating, though I mourn Fingers Wombat, the funniest character in the history of music.

Lyn Murray, Pacific Palisades, California

Lyn's diaries, from 1947 through 1982, have just been published by Lyle Stuart under the title Musician: A Hollywood Journal. *His prose is as graceful as his music, and funny, and the book is full of keen insights.*

I spent one year working in the jazz industry in New York. I chose to return to the midwest and to jazz radio. I had long believed that NYC was the international center of "hipness." I should have known better. Hipness knows no boundaries, as demonstrated by the diverse geographical sampling of correspondence you print. It took me a year to learn that hipness and happiness can be right in your own home turf. Your recent issues with all the correspondence amplified my feelings.

I had meant to write to you over a year ago regarding the Sarah Vaughan album *The Planet Is Alive: Let It Live*. The Challenger exploded the day I had planned to premiere the record on my evening jazz program on WKSU-FM in Kent, Ohio. I did not change my plans. I played it in its entirety. What better selection to celebrate their bravery?

Linda Yohn, WEMU-FM, Ypsilanti, Michigan

DOC
by Chuck Folds

New York City

By 1972, having played piano a dozen years in New York jazz clubs, I thought I'd worked with every great swing-era trumpeter who was still around town. But I had one to go, one I'd never met, knew nothing about, and with whom I would have the longest association of all.

In October of that year I was sounded for a gig with a new sextet called the Countsmen, and a few days later at Wollman Auditorium of Columbia University I beheld Adolphus Anthony (Doc) Cheatham. Six feet tall and lean, he was smoking a big cigar and wearing argyle socks of one color combination, a plaid sport jacket of another, ditto shirt and tie. I wondered who was this old character, and whether he would hold his own with fellow Countsmen Earl Warren, Bennie Morton, Franklin Skeete, and Jo Jones. I was told by Phil Schaap, the Columbia student who'd formed the band, that Doc was a substitute for Buck Clayton.

Then I heard him play. He seemed to be able to do anything he wanted on the horn — long full notes in any register, subtle smears, nimble runs, and a tone of unusual clarity. And such taste and gentleness of spirit. He'd often begin a solo with a surprise, such as following another player's forceful ending with a quiet, high, muted note that would hang in the air a few seconds before dropping to the usual solo line. He showed a perfect intuition for contrasts.

Why didn't I know of this remarkable man? I'd listened to a lot of jazz records in my life — I was thirty-four then — and had never heard a solo by him. I later found out that ninety-five percent of Doc's recorded work had been written parts in trumpet sections. He'd been Cab Calloway's first trumpeter for eight years in the 1930s. He'd also been first trumpeter with Chick Webb, Sam Wooding, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Benny Carter, Fletcher Henderson, and Teddy Hill. He'd recorded with Billie Holiday in Eddie Heywood's sextet, but had played written ensemble arrangements. As for those few records on which he'd played solos or obligatos, I'd somehow missed them. And during my early years in New York, when I was working at Eddie Condon's with Buck Clayton, Ruby Braff, and Max Kaminsky, and at the Metropole with Red Allen and Shorty Baker, Doc was out of the jazz scene, working mostly in Latin bands.

He went to the Latin bands because mainstream jazz work seemed to be drying up in the '50s. And he'd chosen to be a first trumpeter early in his career because it let him swing a whole band. To him that was more important than taking solos.

But he did have a solo talent. He simply put it on hold for about forty years. He started getting it together around 1966, when he worked a year in Benny Goodman's quintet. Then on occasional jazz gigs toward the '70s, he asked his young friend Phil Schaap to tape his solos so he could study and improve them. He was on his way.

With that Countsmen gig I was hired as the band's regular pianist, and because Buck Clayton was having chops problems Doc stayed on as trumpeter. I began to notice other things about him. He improvised in a flexible style that made him easy to accompany. And after some of the concerts he'd walk with me toward my subway stop, out of his way, just to stretch his legs and chat. For a man of sixty-seven, he was unbelievably vigorous. You'd have taken him to be in his early fifties.

Doc has the gift of youth like no one else I've known. Why, even in his late seventies he'd walk home two thirds the length of Manhattan, carrying his trumpet case. He stays in tiptop shape. He's never cared for liquor, and smokes only an occasional cigar. His mother lived into her eighties, his father to his late seventies. Both maternal grandparents were full-blooded Cherokees. His father's father was a renegade Choctaw who settled in Cheatham County, Tennessee, and took the name of the white landowner for whom the county had been named, and whom he worked for as a slave.

Doc thinks young and doesn't let little things bother him. I've hardly ever seen him lose his sense of humor.

It became clear on those Countsmen walks that we were getting to be friends. We'd amble down a street, he'd spot a nifty sports car and ask me what I thought of it. I know rather little about cars, but whatever I'd say he'd listen to carefully, never interrupting. Doc's charm as an entertainer is due in part to this patience. He is a man of inner tranquility and can't help but put an audience at ease.

In mid-1973 I left the Countsmen and I lost touch with Doc for a while. When we got back together two years later I was in for more surprises: he was playing even better, he'd started making the rounds of jazz festivals, and he'd also started to sing.

We landed a steady weekend trio gig in Watchung, New Jersey, with Jackie Williams on drums. We held onto it for nearly five years, putting in subs when we got something more lucrative. The gig was at O'Connor's Beef 'N' Ale House, in a large room where customers waited to be paged for their dinner seating. This meant that when Doc was using the mike, he could be cut off by the maitre d' at the master control; and it happened during one of his first vocals there, on *Laura*. He'd no sooner got the "L" out when he was blitzed by, "McIntyre, Stuhlmacher, Ferguson, Howell, Muldoon!" Our music crumbled to a halt, but after the last name

Doc went jauntily on to "aura is the face in the misty light..."

Doc says it was a patron of O'Connor's who first encouraged him to sing. It took him a while to build up his confidence, and it didn't help that he was turned down when he wanted to add a vocal to a record date. But he persevered, lucky for us all. He has a resonant low tenor voice, clear enunciation, and sure pitch, and he approaches a lyric in a way like Fred Astaire, tossing it off by sometimes half singing half talking it. He'll dramatize a thought by slightly speeding up a phrase and then lingering over a word with the crisp articulation of a stage actor. His voice is apt to rise now and then, as if he were more asking a question than making as statement: "Laura...?" He rolls his r's without sounding affected, and he puts a wise smile into every line, even in the sad songs. Those of us who were in on those formative months knew that he was a natural singer, and that here was a second talent untapped all his life.

Doc had finally been recognized for his trumpet solo ability —he was a hit at Nice and other jazz festivals year after year —but only in very recent years has he been widely showcased for his singing. Though great in a jam session he can also command a stage on his own, interweaving trumpet, vocals, and personality. Doc comes from the Complete Entertainer tradition of Louis Armstrong and Hot Lips Page and Red Allen and Roy Eldridge, and he is best presented in situations where he can combine his talents. He certainly was ready to add singing to his act before we'd been at O'Connor's a year. (One promoter who has fully presented him since then is Jack Kleinsinger, producer of the local *Highlights in Jazz* concert series.)

What's unusual about Doc's new success in jazz is that it was happening to a man not in his forties, or even fifties, but in his *seventies*. And to a man who, at that time in life, was still looking for new ways to express himself, and who was playing the most physically demanding of musical instruments. How many other trumpeters have lasted that long, playing that well?

One reason Doc still had a good upper register is that he'd used a non-pressure embouchure since he started, around 1920, a good two decades before that unorthodox approach was endorsed. He has a jagged upper tooth line and was wary of the strain a regular embouchure would cause. It was a lucky choice: the old approach has had deleterious effects on most trumpeters who've used it into their middle years, while Doc in his seventies continued to soar above ensembles like a young man.

Even the way he holds his horn suggests he means business —pointing it to the heavens, head titled back, arms akimbo. He does it for a purely functional reason, though. He says an aunt who gave singing lessons once told him he'd breathe and project better that way. You should hear him in a lofty room: while his longer notes buoy to the ceiling he gently bounces some of the shorter ones off the upper walls, as if he were playing a kind of relaxed musical jai alai. In the concert hall at Coopertown, New York, his short drop phrases conjured up a bird exploring the rafters. We once did a midday gig in the perfume section of Lord and Taylor's spacious department store, which Doc made sound like at least an auditorium. He'd have been right at home in the Parisian salons of Chopin's time, which had gloriously high ceilings.

Doc used our steady O'Connor's gig to build a repertoire. He sang all four choruses of *Manhattan* and kept your interest throughout. He did obscure songs Louis Armstrong had recorded, like *I Double Dare You* and *I'm in the Market for You*. He did the most poignant version of *Trav'lin' All Alone* I've ever heard. He came up with all but forgotten numbers like *Lonesome and Sorry and Peggy*, a song done in the '20s by McKinney's Cotton Pickers. Along with his constantly developing trumpet solos he evolved a bandstand presence that was uniquely his own, that stood out like a fine jewel.

I suppose his most requested song has been *I Want a Little Girl*, to which he adds a lyric chorus of his own:

I want a little girl to press my clothes
and sew on all the buttons and darn my hose.
That's the kind of girl
I want to fall in love with me.

Then he says, as an aside, "Maybe I'm looking for her mother." And in the bridge he divulges a prime enthusiasm:

Lemon meringue is my favorite pie,
I always ask for more.
Rhubarb, strawberry, lady fingers too —
and don't forget my sweet po-ta-to...pie!

Remember Jughead in the *Archie* comic strip? That's Doc —eat a ton but don't gain a pound. He likes to cook and thrives on variety. He's told me of dozens of breakfasts, all mini-banquets and none the same. Once at O'Connor's I saw him polish off a banana split the boss brought him at the end of the night, then order a steak to take home for a late snack.

Doc's appetites in general are large. He enjoys traveling and meeting people, and on a European gig he's up early every morning to explore the city around him. That zest for life instantly communicates to an audience and gives his performance an added sparkle. But it's a subtle effect, with no raising of the voice, no grandstanding. He just follows his gentle, whimsical nature and ends up charming anyone who pays attention.

The ladies *adore* him. One, Amanda Ochoa, married him in 1951, becoming his third wife. They'd met that year in Argentina, her country, where he was working with Perez Prado. They're still together and have two children and three grandchildren.

During those O'Connor's years Doc was trying to find our trio a gig in Manhattan. He was proud of our little group and extremely loyal — you could never find a nicer leader. Jackie Williams calls him "one of the angels."

In 1977 he got us a month at Crawdaddy, the New Orleans restaurant in the Roosevelt hotel. The bosses liked Doc's playing and singing so much they had us back four times in the next two years. But our real break came in the summer of 1980, when Doc got a call to bring a quartet to Sweet Basil, the Village jazz club, for a month of Sunday brunches. The logical addition to our trio was bassist Al Hall, whom we knew and liked and had often played with through the years. Al fit hand in glove with us from the first note, and the owner of the club, Bill Carico, was so taken with Doc and our camaraderie that he asked if we'd stay on as a regular Sunday attraction. This despite poor business those four Sundays.

When we accepted he promised to give the venture a long time to mature, and within a few months he even gave us a raise. Business steadily improved. The following summer Bill sold the club to Mel Litoff and Phyllis Weisbart, two compassionate promoters of jazz, who told us that virtually nothing would change through the new ownership. We're still there, and over the past couple of years business has been sensational.

There's something about Sunday afternoon gigs. People are at their friendliest and soberest, and with someone like Doc to make them feel comfortable, a rapport develops between band and audience that can be quite special. Doc saw this right away and began to work on yet a *third* talent. He started talking casually to the audience, telling them he'd loved Billie Holiday but couldn't get to first base with her. He'd rap about his Cotton Club years with Cab Calloway, remembering the songwriters who used to come up there — George Gershwin, Harold Arlen, Walter Donaldson, J. Fred Coots. He honed his stage presence more and more and now wins newcomers over in a matter of seconds.

The word spread about this extraordinary entertainer, and around his eightieth birthday — he was born June 13, 1905, in Nashville, Tennessee — we were visited by a *CBS Sunday Morning* camera crew. They taped us for a profile on Doc that Charles Kuralt had planned. A year later we were taped again, this time for a Phil Donahue show on sex. All the director wanted was *Let's Do It* with Doc's vocal, which would be used as continuity music for a long part of the show. Another nice thing that came our way was a record date for a Canadian mail-order company, a record date, incidentally, on which Doc was *asked* to sing.

Doc continues to build his repertoire. He's particular, though, and usually won't attempt a vocal unless he can find something in a song that relates directly to him or that he can turn into humor. "I've got no business trying to sing those crooner's songs," he told me. But he did choose to do *I've Got a Crush on You*, and partly because he could make a little joke. After the phrase, "Could you coo?" he turns to Jackie and asks, "What does that mean, Jackie?" Audiences love it; it relieves the tension of taking everything seriously. In *Let's Do It*, he has the same sort of fun: "Al Hall says up in Boston even beans do it."

One song Doc immediately liked was *I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home*, a sixteen-bar gem from the '40s I showed him a few years ago. He quickly learned it and the following Sunday played and sang it for the first of many, many times. I knew this obscure song from a folio Bobby Hackett had given me. It has the kind of understatement that Doc relishes. So he chose it for his featured number in a 1984 London tribute called *The Cotton Club Remembered.* Filmed by the BBC at the Ritz Hotel, and turning up of late on PBS in this country, the concert also featured Cab Calloway, Max Roach, Adelaide Hall, the tap dancer Chuck Green, and the Nicholas Brothers. But it was Doc who stole the show.

For Doc's eightieth birthday celebration, Mel and Phyllis hired our quartet to do the whole preceding week, and they asked Doc to invite performers he'd like to have as playing guests, different ones each night. Most memorable was the night the late Maxine Sullivan sang with us. I'd worked a lot with that dear, dear lady and loved to accompany her, but it was a kick to let Doc play the fills. No wonder he was chosen to back up Billie Holiday on the 1957 *Sound of Jazz* TV show —his stockpile of moods and textures is amazing. He was so resourceful behind Maxine that I thought I was hearing other human voices, their inflections melding with hers. I've rarely heard such unity between a singer and an accompanist. And then there were the vocals they did together. Maxine was not known for working long sets on her own jobs, but that night she had so much fun you almost had to get the hook to get her off the bandstand. It was the most sublime night of song I think I've ever experienced.

Listening to Doc's obligatos that night brought back some conversations we'd had about Duke Ellington and how badly Doc had wanted to work with him. I've never heard another trumpeter who hadn't worked with Duke sound so much as if he had, especially when Doc uses a mute or the plunger. Yet it's no imitation of Bubber Miley or Cootie or anyone else; it's all Doc. He does remind me, though, in his tone and his sad sweet feeling, of another of Duke's early trumpeters, Arthur Whetsol. They're stylistic cousins, so to speak, and come to think of it, Doc would have been an excellent choice to continue that kind of trumpet sound after Whetsol left the band. But Duke didn't call him — until 1972, for a trip to Japan. And as luck would have it, Doc was recuperating from a hernia operation and had to say no.

(Duke is very much with us in spirit at *Sweet Basil.* We do an elaborate medley of his tunes in contrasting moods and tempos and often use it to close a set. Doc has also recently been doing an Ellington song you rarely hear sung, *Drop Me Off in Harlem.* What's more, our bartender, Edward, is Duke's first grandson. And one of our frequent visitors is Edward's Great Aunt Ruth, Duke's sister.)

During that birthday week for Doc, we had a bizarre Friday. Our scheduled guests didn't show, and Doc was actually relieved. He'd been recording every day for most of the week, sleeping three hours a night, and that day he'd done two dates and missed any chance of a nap. I'd never seen him look so beat, and I was worried about him. He didn't need the excitement of a night of exuberant jamming. So I suggested that he coast as much as possible. We'd pick up the slack with trio numbers, drum solos, whatever.

Well, halfway through the first set, who walks in but Jon Faddis, Dizzy Gillespie's protege, trumpet case in hand. Doc beamed. He went into high gear. He said, "Get out that horn, man, and let's play!" Jon was then thirty-two — forty-eight years younger than Doc. In five minutes they were doing upper-register chase choruses on *Struttin' with Some Barbecue*, Doc grabbing adrenalin from God knows where and keeping up with that young trumpet monster. He didn't play as high as Jon, but his tone was fuller and purer. Their friendly competition went on for half an hour and Doc never let up. Afterwards he sat with Jon, all smiles, asking how things were going.

Which raises a point about Doc and younger musicians. He's always encouraged them, whatever styles they play. And he's listened to and been influenced by such younger trumpeters as Fats Navarro and Clifford Brown. In the early '50s, when Doc was working in a Boston Dixieland band, Charlie Parker would come by on his night off to sit in with him. A number of modern jazz players have come down to Sweet Basil to catch Doc, and been delighted. The late Philly Joe Jones dropped in several times, as have Max Roach and Roy Haynes, just to name some drummers. Doc seems to appeal to everyone.

We're now in our eighth year of Sunday brunches and Doc, at eighty-two, shows few signs of slowing down. He's had a couple more hernia operations, but he's still liable to come to the gig just off a plane from another gig, with no sleep. As usual, he'll sail through this afternoon. And if he hasn't played or practiced all week, you'd never know; he's one of those uncommon brass players who seem to have natural chops. Oh, he'll complain to me that his horn sounds muffled or tinny or something, but damned if I can hear it.

Doc is always standing tall, breathing easy, and smiling when he sings our closing song, which is either *I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home* or *It's the Little Things that Mean So Much*, Teddy Wilson's theme song for his 1939 band, which included both Doc and Al Hall. Then Doc will tell everyone, "We hope you liked our little offering this afternoon, and if you having nothing to do next Sunday, do it *heah*, at the Sweet Basil, with Chuck Folds on piano, Al Hall on bass, and Jackie Williams on drums."

Then Jackie will ask, "And who are you?"

Doc will wait a couple of seconds and say, "I'm Walter Cronkite" (sometimes it's Charles Kuralt or Bishop Tutu), and he'll wave goodbye to a laughing, cheering audience.

Then he'll turn to me and say, "Boy, am I starved." — CF

Chuck's father, Thomas M. Folds, was chairman of the art department at Northwestern University, then dean of education at the Metropolitan Museum. Chuck worked for him as a writer and pre-editor. From 1966 to 1969 he was on staff at American Heritage *as a writer and editor.*