Gene Lees
Jazzletter

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Letters

I was playing piano with a trio on the Jersey shore. The drummer and I used to run up to New York on our off nights, which were more numerous than our on nights, to make the rounds. We would start out at the Hickory House, especially if Mary Lou Williams was there. Joe Harbor's, being close, between 52nd and 53rd, a few doors south of the Broadway Theater and directly across from the Birdland doorway, was most often the place we wound up.

Joe's was a place to weave dreams when one was a young musician. Ah, to make that jump from Asbury Park to the Apple, and to join the big studio guys at Joe's bar and talk about the union, or conductors, or record labels – that was good dream material.

When I finally landed a job at Columbia Records, Joe's became a second home and nighttime bank. My job as music editor ran from six p.m. to one a.m. at the Columbia studio at 799 Seventh Avenue. I had made it! I could sit and listen to Tommy Flanagan rap across the bar, and cash checks, and be introduced to such up-and-comers as Bill Watrous by Joe, who always introduced me as a producer from Columbia. How was he to know that I was only doing sequencing and occasional mix-downs for the Columbia Record Club special packages? And who was I to correct him?

I remember Gene Williams there. He also tended bar at Joe's. What a gentle man. Gene had told me of his days as a singer. I'd always imagined him to have a good voice since his speaking voice was so full and resonant. Then one night he was talking about melody, and what went into a good one. He brought up the example of *The Christmas Waltz* and started to sing it, making those pretty skips down to a low G or A-flat that start the song. It was then I realized how good he was, and how much he loved it all.

Joe's bartender was Phil, his son-in-law. A nice man. Phil was not, however, the typical New York bartender who appreciated the telling and hearing of jokes. Each joke he listened to was greeted with the same feigned smile. I remember reviewing memorable restroom graffiti at the bar with an actor friend of mine. My friend wrote out on a napkin the now-famous "Jean Paul Sartre is a fartre." I was absolutely convulsed. Phil came down to see what all the fuss was about. We showed him the napkin, which elicited the smile. He went back to polishing his glasses. Finally curiosity got the best of him and he padded back to ask, "What's a fartruh?"

It was about then that I discovered that Joe's clientele was not limited to musicians. There were also a lot of record guys who frequented the place. Producers. Real ones. I figured I'd better get to know them real quick, the ones from Columbia, that is, lest Joe should see through my cover. I introduced myself to Bob Morgan, a producer at Columbia's Epic label, at the Ho Ho, the Chinese restaurant on the ground floor of 799.

Bob was a great guy, easy to talk to, not one of the label guys who treated Record Club types with disdain (which was all self-imagined anyway). Bob and I became good friends. By the time we walked into Joe's my cover was safe, Joe assuming we had known each other all along. Bob and I did our share of dreaming at the Harbor bar too.

The music business was changing, taste becoming more a thing of the past, good music becoming more difficult to fund in the studio. Bob was at that time producing such artists as Bobby Hackett and Erroll Garner for Epic, as well as people like Bobby Vinton and Tommy Makem. In the true style of the producer back then, Bob covered it all, including the final recordings of Ray McKinley's Glenn Miller band. I had been the pianist for a time in the band for both Ray and Bobby Hackett. Morgan and I imagined a record company which would produce and repackage good music and sell it by mail to those people who were as disenchanted with the changing musical tastes as we were.

Eventually we both left CBS, but not before co-producing an album of Glenn Miller alumni for the Record Club. That was in 1970. We got Bobby, and Ray, and the Modernaires, and as many of the sidemen as we could find. The album was to be sold on television. It failed miserably. Not to worry. It just told us that reunion albums didn't necessarily work. There was still a market out there.

Bob went to Los Angeles and stayed for a number of years, but always stayed in touch as I knocked around the music direct-mail business. When he finally came back east we reminisced about our pipe dreams at Joe Harbor's and went ahead and did it.

In 1983 we started what we called the Good Music Record Company, to distinguish its product immediately from the flotsam which continues to float out of the record companies.

To date there are one million active buyers on our list, and it's still growing at a good clip. Recently we produced a package called *Stage Door Canteen* which features the music of the 1940s, the big bands, and vocalists. It sells for $20. When the whole campaign winds down, it will have sold in excess of 300,000 sets.

They are still out there, those good music people. And many of them are younger than we all realized.

– Ed Shanaphy

In addition to their record label, Ed and Bob Morgan and their associates founded three magazines – Sheet Music Magazine (1976), Keyboard Classics Magazine (1982), and Jazz and Keyboard Workshop (1986). They are all valuable, but the last-named is particularly so to jazz pianists, since it contains excellent analyses of the work of major pianists and accurate transcriptions of solos. If you're interested in subscribing, you can write to Ed care of that publication at 223 Katonah Avenue, Katonah NY 10536.

PRESS RELEASE

BOB WEINSTOCK, founder of PRESTIGE RECORDS, has written and published a jazz flavored erotic romance titled FROM NUTS TO SOUP TO NUTS TO SOUP.

January 11, 1988

Dear Jazz Fan,

I founded Prestige Records in 1949. Miles Davis, Monk, Rollins, Coltrane, Getz, MJQ, Dexter Gordon, Zoot Sims, and Gene Ammons were among the modern jazz artists who recorded for me. In 1971 I sold Prestige to Fantasy, Inc. Today, still, Fantasy maintains the classic Prestige catalog under the original name.

This, my first go at writing, is about a girl who had been brought up on a ranch near Kansas City. Her father was a tough ex-Marine colonel, her mother a blue eyed, blond Swedish stunner. Cee Cee Nilsson Riebock was extremely beautiful. She hadn't been shown any love, only athletic and Marine training by her father. She was prepped to be a beauty pageant queen by Mom. She was tall and strong and attended an almost all black high school where she smashed track records and led Central to the state girls' basketball championship. She won Miss Teenage Kansas City. She never dated, spending her time training to win.

At seventeen, Dad sent her to the rodeo, instead of one of many colleges on athletic scholarship. Cee Cee hated Daddy for that and rejected all men. She had a lesbian affair until leaving the rodeo for Greenwich Village with a gay photographer. He taught her modeling and photography.

In the Village she supported herself as a prostitute, with a dress manufacturer as her regular, plus street pickups. She had inherited millions which she left untouched. Her beauty and sexual patter drove men to premature ejaculation. She wanted to have intercourse when she started in business but as it went along she regressed to lesbianism and prided herself on making all men 'P.E.'s'. No one entered her.

She became a folk singer, joined a country and western band, then turned fashion photographer. She won the competition for modeling a teenage clothing line as Teen Queen. She opened her own fashion photography business. From a group of lesbian models she formed a club called 'the Queers'. They had wild sex and a softball team playing in Central Park.

Cee Cee married Doctor Williamson on a mutual love of horses and riding. It was a sexless marriage. They agreed that Cee Cee keep her own apartment and relationship with the Queers. They moved to Palm Beach and lived at the Tierra Club, a golf, polo, and tennis community. The doctor divorced Cee Cee after she was caught in bed with the female golf pro.

Cee Cee, lonely and depressed at the Tierra club, gave riding lessons to stars and polo players, wrote songs and sang periodically in a Country band. Some construction workers tried to rape her. Finding a knife, she stabbed two to death and slashed another, her virginity saved.

Enter Will Ferguson, a Jazz record producer living in retirement, trading stock market mutual funds with his mathematical formulas, with his long time girl friend, ex-model Tara Bentley.

Tara switched from Will to Venezuelan oil billionaire Renaldo Gonzaga. He payed Tara a small fortune to perform sex with his friends and himself. Tara was paid to have a sex show for Renaldo with Cee Cee. It was their best sex. They fell in love, but decided it best for Tara to marry Renaldo, who now wanted her exclusively. Thrown together, Cee Cee and Will hit it off. Will had always wanted a tall, blue eyed athletic singer with blond hair down to her butt. She was bright and sexy. He called her 'Soup', short for super star. In her collection were Jazz and Folk albums Will had produced. Like her, he loved sports. Rugged and masculine, he turned her on. She sang Cole Porter at a Palm Beach party and he flipped out. He accepted her invitation to move in with her. She wrote a country song to honor the occasion. 'It Took Me 31 Years to Become a Woman Because I Never Met the Right Man'. He was the 'man'. Love and sex are explored with depth and humor. They maintained her virginity til their wedding day. As a friend said recently, 'it's a novel a sex therapist might write'. They played at sex every way but intercourse. Taking Soup's virginity is unique.

Beyond more wild and crazy escapades, the last chapters are so unusual that I'd like to keep you in suspense.

Please get in touch with me if you review books in the public media. I would be happy to send you a copy.

If you have an interest in me as a subject for a story, please call or write.

Bob Weinstock, Boca Raton, Florida

Notice

The *Jazzletter* is published 12 times a year at Ojai, California, 93023 and distributed by first class mail to the United States and Canada and by air mail to other countries. Subscriptions are $40 U.S. per year for the United States and Canada, $50 U.S. to other countries. Subscribers can purchase gift subscriptions for $30 U.S. for Canada and the U.S., $40 to other countries. Subscriptions are on a year-to-year January-to-December basis, in order that all subscriptions fall due at year's end.

Trombone and Tulips

Al Grey has been pushing jazz through a trombone for more than forty years. By the age of sixty-two, men in most professions are approaching retirement, either voluntary or enforced. But people in the arts rarely retire, either because they are doing what they do not out of necessity but out of passion for the work, or because they have never accumulated enough money to retire. Al Grey's motivation is more the former. Early in 1988, after a seven-year partnership with his friend Buddy Tate, Al launched a group whose front line consists of two trombones, the first of that configuration since the group of J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding. The second trombonist is Al's son Michael, who plays a lot like his father. The guitarist is Al Cohn's son Joe.

Al Grey's career has been rich, despite times of frustration, and he has interesting – sometimes funny and sometimes startling – things to say. How many musicians played their way through the bands of Benny Carter, Lucky Millinder, Jimmie Lunceford, Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie?

Albert Thornton Grey was born in Aldie, Virginia, June 6,

1925. The family moved almost immediately to Pottstown, Pennsylvania where Al still lives.

"My father was a musician," Al said on a recent sunny afternoon in Boulder, Colorado. "He played trumpet. I kept wanting to get into his case. Eventually I did and I got the horn out, and I'd try, and nothing would happen. One day I took his horn out and didn't get it back right and bent the second valve. He came home and started beating me until my mother had to run up and grab him and hold him to stop him. He just went off. He didn't mean to. All he could think was that he had a job that night. It's nothing to get a valve fixed today. My mother went out and got a job washing the floor of Lamb's music store. This is in the days when you had to take a pad and brush and get down on the floor and wash it. She washed that floor until she bought me this trombone, a King trombone, Tommy Dorsey model, with a rimless bell. It took her a year. My father began to give me lessons. But by then music wasn't as interesting to me because the kids were out playing baseball. He'd come home and I'd get a whipping then for not practicing. He didn't allow me out. I had to practice until the other kids went in. I found out many years later why. He told my mother, 'Well, if he's going to play, I don't want him to get hit in the mouth.'

"I played in the band in junior high school. Then the teacher said, 'You're a pretty big boy, we need a bass player.' So they put me on the E-flat tuba. Everything was different."

Pearl Harbor came when Al was nineteen, and he joined the Navy.

These forty-seven years later, Al, who is tall, carries not a trace of fat on his lanky frame. He has a wide warming smile, bracketed by deep lines from the nostrils almost to the chin. He has pouches under the eyes, like those of Duke Ellington. He has a loose mustache that is traced with gray, and that fringe of hair that some brass players allow to grow to protect the lower lip. He is of that older school of jazz musician that did not draw a line between entertainment and art and believed in amusing as well as moving an audience. Therefore he is animated on stage, moving with a kind of awkward grace, a little like Pinocchio just after shedding his strings or Ray Bolger as the Straw Man in *The Wizard of Oz.* He wears curious little hats like smaller-brimmed variants on an English bobby's helmet. He has them in several colors, including solid white, solid black, and brown tweed. He wears them onstage, and they go curiously but somehow effectively with his suits, which are beautifully cut, dark, and formal, his blue shirts, and his neat, usually red, ties. His playing is as loose and joyous as his movements.

He is the master of the plunger mute, and he uses it a lot, shaping tones into vocal sounds in the manner of Tricky Sam Nanton who, he says, refused to show him a thing. The attitude was common among the generation of jazzmen ahead of him. Ray Brown tells of asking one of the noted bass players of his youth about the instrument and being told curtly, "We figured it out. You figure it out."

Mutes change the resistance in the embouchure. A harmon or cup mute pushed into the bell makes the instrument a bit sharp, the solution to which problem in a long passage is to push the tuning slide at the top of the horn out a little. But when the rubber plunger is used (sometimes with a small straight mute in the bell) it alters the intonation from note to note, and sometimes within the same note. Thus means the compensation must be made from tone to tone or within the same tone. "Using the plunger is an art in itself," Dick Nash, himself one of the master trombonists, said. "When it comes to the trombone, Al Grey can stand up to anybody."

He never uses the slide for vibrato. He gets the vibrato with the lip. The slide flicks to a position and stops dead and this lovely even vibrato sets in. Al uses the slide for vibrato only in orchestral section work, when he is blending with other players. The measure of Al Grey as a superb player of the instrument can be taken from a 1984 Pablo album he made with J.J. Johnson, titled *Things Are Getting Better All the Time.* It contains some stunning trombone by both men.

The brass instruments amount to lengths of pipe with mouthpieces attached. You sort of spit into the mouthpiece, with the lips tensed, rather as if trying to get a bit of lint or tobacco off the end of your tongue. The resultant buzz resonates through the pipe. The tones available are a consequence of the overtone series, and limited. The bugle is the basic brass instrument, and in theory cannot play all the notes. The bugle calls are selected from the limited group of notes in its vocabulary, essentially the tones found in the major triad, repeated in the octave above. For example, the melody we call *Taps*, heard at military funerals, is built of the second inversion of the major triad. So is the tune we sing to "baby by, see the fly." So are the opening four notes of *For All We Know.*

In Mozart's time, brass instruments could play only the tones of that small vocabulary, and in the key of that vocabulary. To alter this, extensions, or crooks, could be added to the piece of pipe, but the player still was limited to the new key that this lengthening of the tube created, and he was incapable of chromatic playing. The valved trumpet was developed in 1813. In effect all the crooks were added to the horn and connected by valves, which instantly cut these extension in or out. That's essentially what a trumpet is, a form of bugle with all the extension crooks added and linked by a valve system. When you depress different combinations of the buttons, the action lengthens or shortens the resonating air column.

The trombone differs from the valved instruments in that one lengthens the resonating brass column by pushing the slide out, which drops the pitch. There are seven positions, which lower the tones – all the tones of the bugle-call repertoire – by half steps. Seven half-steps, as you can work out at a piano keyboard, add up to tri-tone or flatted fifth (or raised fourth) and thus the positions of the slide exactly divides the octave into equal portions. And they make it possible to play all the notes of all the keys, with the slide in one position or another. Some notes can be played in different positions, though not equally easily.

The trombone is far older than the trumpet. Paintings from the late fifteenth century show the trombone – known then as the sacbut – with the essential characteristics of the modern instrument, but, surprisingly, it was not used much in orchestras for centuries. Beethoven introduced it into symphonic music in the Fifth Symphony, but it really was not part of the orchestra until Berlioz and Wagner began using it. And they had no idea of its potential. Traditional textbooks say that because of the time it takes to move the slide, true legato is not possible on the

trombone. That's because their writers never heard J.J. Johnson or Jack Teagarden.

Jack said that you should be able to play virtually any note in any position. Trombone players say that that's carrying things a little far, but nonetheless Jack, who could do amazing tricks on the horn, once sat at a table in a nightclub with me and played a major scale in closed position. He had begun playing when he was quite small, and his short arms couldn't get the slide down into the lower positions, and so he worked out ways to play many of the tones in positions where they weren't supposed to be.

Al said, "Melba Liston taught me a lot, alternate positions where I was playing legit. This is when we were with Dizzy. I discovered why J.J. played so fast – he used those alternate positions. I used to hang around Melba's house. With Mary Lou Williams and Thelonious Monk and Tadd Dameron. They would get to the piano and play things. Melba and I were very dear and close."

Another, if inadvertent, influence on his playing was the writing of Thad Jones. He said, "You see, Thad didn't know how to write for the trombones at first. We were fighting the slides." The charts extended Al's chops.

Jazz has expanded the scope of a number of instruments, but none more than brass and, in recent years, the string bass. It hasn't done much for the piano, and jazz pianists have had to tag along behind in the control and scope on the instrument of major "classical" virtuosi; most of them will tell you honestly that they haven't yet made it. But on brass, it's different, as it is in pizzicato string bass. Nowhere has the expansion been as spectacular as in the vocabulary of the trombone.

The use in jazz goes back to the tail-gate kind of playing associated with New Orleans marching bands. The bluesy dirges on the way to a funeral followed by the hot soaring numbers afterwards being are elemental in the legend of the music. But the instrument really began to grow in the 1920s. One of the important figures is Teagarden, and then there is a series of great trombonists, including J.C. Higginbotham, Trummy Young and Vic Dickenson. The way Tommy Dorsey opened the way to the highly lyrical use of the horn is a significant element in the expansion of twentieth century instrumentalism.

"I loved all of them," Al said, "but you left out a couple – Jack Jenny and Turk Murphy. I loved Tommy Dorsey's smoothness, but the solo Jack Jenny played on Artie Shaw's *Stardust* impressed me, and Jack Teagarden's *Sophisticated Lady*."

Then came J.J. Johnson, whose significance usually is seen to be his adaptation of bebop to the trombone. To do so required extending the high-speed technique that Teagarden had demonstrated was possible, and J.J. played – and plays – the horn with almost the speed of a trumpet player. J.J.'s facility at this, not to mention his harmonic command, inspired a generation – by now two generations – of brilliant players. After J.J. you get Curtis Fuller, Carl Fontana, Frank Rosolino, Jimmy Cleveland, Jimmy Knepper, Phil Wilson, Bill Watrous and others who would blow Richard Wagner's brassy mind if he could return to hear them.

I guess I've known Al Grey nearly thirty years, but I never him well until this April, when we were room-mates for a week during the annnual Conference on World Affairs instituted in 1948 on the campus of the University of Colorado at Boulder by Prof. Howard Higman, who still organizes it. It's a remarkable event, deliberately cross-disciplinary, with panelists discussing such subjects as nuclear disarmament, the international drug trade, American behavior in Central America, the economy, and the effects of electronic communications. There is a surprisingly large contingent from the jazz world, and among the 105 panelists this year were Leonard Feather, Dave and Don Grusin, Johnny Mandel, Les McCann, Ben Sidran, Al Grey, and myself. Don Grusin and Les McCann kept everyone in laughter. There was a fair amount of jamming, and one formal concert that drew about two thousand students, the musical activity co-ordinated by Spike Robinson, an outstanding tenor saxophonist of the Lester Young-Zoot Sims persuasion, of whom more at a later date. The panelists were farmed out to various homes. The jazz contingent had the good fortune to be at that of Betty Weems, an architect and serious jazz lover whose talent for hospitality is astonishing. Al, Ben Sidran, and I shared an exquisite guest cottage at the bottom of her garden out of whose door we could watch the tulips coming into blossom, a rabbit taking his toll on them, Boulder Creek running full with snow melt, and, on a sidewalk beyond the swift waters, students jogging or strolling or pushing baby carriages. No more than a mile away, the first great wall of the Rocky Mountains rose suddenly out of the prairie.

That week Al and I had a chance to talk often and at length, the results of which follow herewith.

Al Grey's experience in the navy would shape the rest of his life. He was assigned to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, where a number of bands were in training, some of them under the direction of Sam Donahue. But Al didn't get into one of those bands: the armed forces of the United States were strictly segregated, right down to the level of the bands.

"Camp Small was the black camp," Al said. "On our side we had players like Clark Terry, Soupy Campbell, and the Batchman brothers from St. Louis, who had been with George Hudson. We had arrangers like Luther Henderson and Dudley Brooks and Jimmy Kennedy, a guitarist who had played with Benny Carter. We had Pee Wee Jackson who had played with Jimmie Lunceford, and Gerald Wilson. Osie Johnson was my bunk-mate, him up above and me down below, and he would tell jokes all night until they'd come in and threaten to put us on the slackers' squad for not going to sleep. He was a funny, funny man. And played good rhythm.

"But I couldn't get into that band because they already had so many great famous musicians – plus I had been playing tuba. Obsolete. But we had a trombone player that was very famous, Rocks McConnell, from Cleveland. He was playing with Lucky Millinder's band and got a hit, on a song he wrote, *Sweet Slumber*. The royalties started coming in and he just went over the hill one day, and we never saw him again. So I started covering for him in rehearsals when they'd come for inspections. That's how I got into the band, fourth chair. Then they sent us to Hingham, Massachusetts. After boots, I became a musician third class.

"Hingham was another all black camp, an ammunition

depot, where everybody was just about illiterate, from the south, Mississippi, Alabama. These guys could not read. I had to write letters home for them to some of their parents and I knew that some other person, it always sounded like some white person, had to write the letters back, and I would have to read them to them. I showed a few how to write their names. They had to write X for their pay.

"Our job was to practice every day and go out to the shipyards when ships were commissioned and play *The Star Spangled Banner* and a couple of tunes and then get off. We had a good dance band there, a good reading band. I'd learned to read from my father and from school.

"The band was so good we auditioned for Major Bowes radio program. We went down to New York and they put us up in the Teresa Hotel. When it came time to go down and play, it was the greatest thing in the world for us. And they gave us a week's liberty behind this.

"Because of those guys being illiterate, they didn't allow them to go on liberty but every other day, whereas the band was allowed to go on liberty every day. They got angry, saying that we never had to work. Somebody decided that maybe the musicians should work a couple of days. Everybody wrote a letter to President Roosevelt to complain. So they decided to break the band up. They sent us all to different places. I got shipped out to Grosse Isle Naval Air Station, near Grosse Pointe, Michigan. It was great for me, because we could go in to Detroit. And this is where I got a lot of training from great musicians. This was around 1943, '44.

"We would hitchhike in. People were very friendly about picking up the sailors and taking them in to Detroit. First we'd stop at Stroh's Brewery. We'd have a couple of beers and then be on our way to sign in for our rooms at the U.S.O. And whatever passes you needed for whatever show, especially the boxing matches, the U.S.O would give them to you for free. You didn't have to pay no transportation, because you could go free on any public transportation.

"We did have one problem. There was prejudice. Right next to the U.S.O. there was a bar that didn't allow blacks. And eventually some sailors came back who had been to the war. And they really knew that they had no business to be treated like that. They went into the bar one night, and they started to get called names, and they wrecked the liquor stock. Smashed it all. The Navy punished everybody black. They kept us on the base for fifteen days. We weren't allowed to go in to Detroit. This was a big hurt for something you had nothing to do with.

"There were so many clubs in Detroit, the Twelve Horsemen, the Three Sixes, the Bluebird, where Milt Jackson played. He was like the kingpin out there, till he went with Diz. So many musicians. Mostly black clubs. And there was the famous Paradise Theater. This gave me an opportunity to sit and play.

"Duke Ellington came to town. I was so fascinated with Tricky Sam Nanton. I would go to the Twelve Horsemen, where he hung out. He was a very heavy drinker. I said, 'Well, I'll buy you the drinks, just show me what you're doing. He said, 'Uh-unh, I'll play.' I heard what he was doing. But I didn't take no mind — it was many many years before I fooled around with the plunger.

"We had such a good band at Grosse Isle. I would get people to replace me so I could sit in with other bands. If you didn't want to eat on the base, they would pay you subsistence. And at the U.S.O. you'd get all this free food. That's how I was buying war bonds and sending them to my mother.

"I had a problem with my feet that they couldn't fix, so they gave me a medical discharge.

"Lanky Bowman, who was a great alto player of Detroit, led a great band in the pit at the Paradise. A lot of times his band would jump on popular bands that came through. He knew all the best musicians, and he was in with George Clancy, who was on the board of the musicians' union. George Clancy really loved the black musicians and used to give them a break. Give guys a chance. A lot of cities had two locals, black and white, but Detroit had one, Local 5."

"Unlike Chicago," I said.

"Local 208 in Chicago," Al said, "had accumulated a lot of money and built apartments for musicians. So when it came time to join the white local, they didn't want to. They had so much money. They were *forced* to merge. I know a musician who even today lives in one of those apartments.

"Anyway, when I got out of service, Lanky Bowman went and got me a card in the Detroit local that day.

"I found out my mother had saved all the money I'd sent to her, and she told me, 'Here it is, you better get yourself a car,' and I bought a station wagon.

"The day I got out of the service, Benny Carter was losing J.J. Johnson, and gave me his job. The next day I left with the band for Louisville, Kentucky. This is when they had the girl trumpet player, Jean Starr. And Max Roach and Sonny White and Bumps Meyers and Willard Brown and Jimmy Kennedy. That was a powerful band.

"We went to the Swing Club out in Hollywood for a month, and then the Trianon Ballroom out at Southgate. We'd play for a week at a time. The places would be packed. We'd be in California for three months at a time. We played on V-discs, plus we'd go out and jam. Benny played a lot of jobs for the government. We'd get on these C-27s and C-26s and fly to the military bases. We played a club in North Hollywood, the Casa Manana, and then the Swing Club, and the Suzie Q on Hollywood, and the club where Art Tatum worked. Billy Berg's, where Bird and Slim Gaillard — who used to run it — played. Jackie Cooper and Mickey Rooney and all the movie people would come in and want to play. Kay Starr and Lana Turner wanted to sing. Kay Starr became a star, but the guys wanted to jam. These were guys like Teddy Edwards.

"We took a trip with Benny Carter cross-country. That old raggedy bus would get on the hills and we had to get out because it wouldn't make it with all of us on there. We finally got to the east coast, and Benny was just so sick of going on, he said, 'Fellows, that's it, I'm going into the studios.' This was 1946.

"Jimmie Lunceford selected out of Benny's band me and Reynald Jones to go with him. Joe Wilder came with Lunceford. Lunceford made me play Trummy Young, all his parts, exactly like Trummy played them. Trummy was my idol, so it was no problem, I could play those things.

"It was such a great band. Jimmie Lunceford would have you on the bandstand fifteen minutes before hitting time. *He* tuned you up. You didn't take your ear and tune your self up. That

was a must every night with him, whereas with Basie, you'd come on the bandstand five minutes before you hit.

"The music with Lunceford was so different than all the other music I had been playing. With Benny Carter, everything was long. Lunceford would make a dotted quarter maybe a quarter, while Benny Carter might extend it." Al sang two bars of melody evoking Carter's lyrical style. Then he sang the same phrase very drily and with the notes given short value and punched, in the exact manner of the Lunceford band. He said, "It was a drastic change. I'm supposed to be hitting that sucker short, and that took some time.

"Jimmie Lunceford played the black universities and colleges all over the country. We couldn't get to play downtown in New York. We always had to play at the Renaissance and the Apollo in Harlem. We predominantly played for blacks, and that was one of the bad things, we thought – we had such a great band. Sy Oliver was writing for the band, and then Edwin Wilcox came in.

"I stayed with that band until he died, out at Seaside, Oregon. We were playing at the resort at Seaside. They didn't allow blacks in. We were waiting for Lunceford to come back from a record shop where he was signing autographs. He never got back, and that was the end of it.

"After that I went with Lucky Millinder."

I said, "You know, Dizzy told me that although he didn't even play an instrument, Lucky Millinder was a very good bandleader."

"Oh yeah!" Al said. "And he selected *the best* of musicians. And the best arrangers. And this was on a fair basis. If you were white, it didn't matter. If you were good, you could play in that band. It was a mixed band, and he *made* it so. We had Freddy Zito on trombone. Fact, Lucky used to think that blacks couldn't play the trombone. After Tommy Dorsey, Lucky Millinder didn't think blacks could come up with it. Basie thought that for a long period too, until J.J. Johnson came along.

"I'd been singing all of Trummy Young's tunes in the Lunceford band. So Lucky Millinder wanted me to sing too. And I *hated* singing. It was bad enough to sing *Margie* and those tunes, and it was marking me. Lucky made me sing.

"After Lucky Millinder, I went with Lionel Hampton.

"Jimmie Lunceford was a professor of music at Fisk University, and most of his musicians came out of Fisk University. We had to sit up straight all the time, and no clappin' hands and moving your feet.

"So I went from that to Lionel Hampton, where we had a lot of routines where we had to clap our hands, to do all kinds of things. They would turn on fluorescent lights and you'd see all our hands moving in white gloves in the dark. Coming from Lunceford to clapping your hands with the white gloves, I really just didn't think that that had anything actually to do with the music, or the playing. It got to me. I'm a real northerner who went to white schools and lived around whites all my life. Pottstown is one of those really mixed towns. They've really integrated fabulously. So to do the white gloves and all that, I thought it was Uncle Tomming and the minstrel scene. But then we'd do *Airmail Special* and things like that and the music was good. The band would swing. We would get up and walk around the whole block and the rhythm section was still swinging. But it used to kill drummers, wear them out. Even George Jenkins, who was a *powerful* drummer. Then we had acrobats who would go out in the audience playing their saxophones and walk the edges of the seats, jump from the balconies on the stage, and all like this. And, yes, Lionel Hampton had them standing in line waiting to get in. We went on Broadway for two weeks and stayed something like nine weeks.

"All the guys felt like I did. Milt Buckner felt we had so much musical ability that we didn't have to do all that. Hamp eventually cut it out, because he was getting complaints from the NAACP and other people. The era was changing.

"Hamp stopped all that and changed drastically. That's when he got political. Look what happened to him in Madison Square when he came out for Reagan to help him get the black vote. The black people threw tomatoes at him. At that time his greatest friend was George Bush. We had to get on trucks and go play for the Republicans. Although we did that in Count Basie's band for Nelson Rockefeller. That's how Basie got his club established up in Harlem. It made Hamp a big man. He has all these houses now.

"I'll never forget the year we played the inaugural ball for Eisenhower. They had the *Tonight* show band, and James Brown, who had a record out called *I'm Black and I'm Proud* and here we were playing to an all-white audience. And they didn't even want Lionel Hampton's band to set up. The musicians complained and Tony Bennett spoke up for them. So they let the band play for the review for Eisenhower – and the Marriotts and all like this.

"After all those trying times, we looked up with Hamp and now we were playing just about only in white clubs. We're talking about 1948. It was great that Hamp had changed. There was no more handkerchief-head. Some white players came into the band.

"I got fired from Hamp's band. We were playing at the Latin Casino in Cleveland. Hamp had been working an hour or so over each night. This night we had been on overtime an hour and twenty minutes. And we hadn't even gone into *Flying Home* yet! And *Flying Home* meant another half an hour. Dinah Washington walked into and he was playing for her and another singer, Bill Farrell.

"I had a lady I was supposed to see back home, and now the last bus was about to leave. I got off the bandstand, and the whole trombone section got off with me – Benny Powell, Al Hayes, Jimmy Cleveland, and a Japanese guy we had, Paul Hagaki, from San Francisco, who could hit high notes on the trombone that I have not heard anybody else do to this day. The whole section got off! Now Hamp don't even see this, he's doing a trio thing, and then he goes into *Flying Home* and he needs the band, and this thing for the trombones, and there's no trombones." Al sang the passage. "Gladys, his wife, was the *boss*. She said, 'Al Grey's a bad influence on the band, get rid of him.' And so she fired me. Fired the whole trombone section, but they needed some 'bone players, and they let them work out their notice. But I was gone that night.

"I went into New York. I went to Beefsteak Charlie's bar, and ran into Sy Oliver, and he said, 'Hey! What're you doin'?' I said, 'Nothin'.' So that's how I went to work in the studios. I

went to work for Sy Oliver and Dick Jacobs, recording. In those days, there weren't many black musicians in the studios. They were accused of not being able to read. I remember that first date, I arrived, and Sy said, 'Hey, where are your mutes?' He say, 'Boy, you get outa here and get yourself a cup mute, harmon mute, and all that.' That day I recorded on Decca with Ella Fitzgerald, *Early Autumn*. I had eight bars on it.

"I stayed in the studios for a couple of years. But then I knew I would never be a studio musician. Maybe if I hadn't played on the road with a band, I might have settled to it. But I found that playing to four walls every day would never do it for me.

"After that I became the musical director for Bullmoose Jackson, who had been with Lucky Millinder, and then I went with Arnett Cobb, who had a great small group. He had several hits like *Too Old to Dream* and *Dutch Kitchen*.

"But the greatest thing was next, to go to Dizzy Gillespie's big band. This would be '49 to '52. What a band! Come on! We'd come to work twenty minutes before time, warming up getting ready to hit. In the trumpet section we had Lee Morgan, Carl Warwick, we used to call him Bama, Lamar Wright. The trombone section was Melba Liston, Chuck Connors, Rod Levitt, and me. The rhythm section was Wynton Kelly, Paul Wess, and Charlie Persip. The reed section was Benny Golson, Billy Mitchell, Ernie Henry, Rudy Powell, and Billy Root on baritone, who came from Stan Kenton's band. For a while we had Phil Woods.

"This is what I admired about Diz. And Lucky. They didn't care what color anybody was.

"What a band. But Dizzy was losing so much money. To play in that band we all had to take a *drop* in fees. We all got $135 a week, and you had to pay your hotel and all your expenses out of that. I ran into a big, big problem.

"One night were were playing in Birdland. I come off the bandstand. Two white guys came up and said, 'Oh, you're so great! You're a fantastic trombone player. We like your playing!' And then one of them opened his coat and here was a badge. 'We've come to pick you up tonight for domestic problems, and we have to take you to jail and you have to go to court tomorrow.'

"I wasn't sending enough money home for my wife and kids and she had to go and get relief, and she told him that I worked for Dizzy. And these two guys said, 'You play so much. We're going to let you play out tonight, and trust you to be down in domestic court tomorrow morning. We want you down there at seven o'clock tomorrow morning. And sit on the bench until they call your name.' I says, 'Oh my goodness, I have a recording date tomorrow morning at ten o'clock with Sarah Vaughan.' He say, 'You find somebody to play in your place, we don't want to have to come back here tomorrow night, because we know you'll *be* here.'

"So I got a lawyer, Maxwell T. Cohen. He's the one who got the law changed about cabaret cards. He was the lawyer for Dizzy's band. Max went down to represent me. Dizzy had just come off one of those State Department goodwill tours, and it was in the newspapers that he had made a lot of money. Max told the court that my salary was only $135 a week, and I was sending her $25 or $30 a week and after Max got through the court awarded her $15 a week, which wasn't as much as I'd been sending. The court said I should get together with her and get it taken off the record.

"So I said, 'Why would you do something like that, Tina?' I said, 'Let's try to bury the hatchet and I'll try to do better. But I was just trying to become a real great musician.'

"You see, I had a job at home playing bar mitzvahs where I would make $175 to $200 a week. So she wanted to know why I would give this up to go out on the road and pay your expenses out of $135 a week. Then she said she'd tell the domestic court that we were back together and everything was fine.

"Playing with Dizzy, we all loved it. But Dizzy was losing money and finally, in 1952, he had to go back to the small group. We didn't want to leave.

"Lee Morgan and Benny Golson and Billy Mitchell, they were playing, and that enhances you, that inspires you to try and play too. That enabled me to get much faster with my horn.

"From Dizzy I moved to Basie and I was with Basie on and off for almost twenty-one years, from '51 to '76. I did some television with Duke Ellington and recording. We'd be in Birdland in New York and I'd be recording every day.

"I came into Chicago in 1961 with a band that won the *Down Beat* new group of the year, and you wrote about me in *Down Beat*. We had such a great group. I had signed Bobby Hutcherson and we had Billy Mitchell and the drummer was Eddy Williams, from California, and Doug Watkins, who was a great bass player."

"By the way, whatever happened to Doug Watkins?" I asked.

"I'll tell you about that. We played the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco. Doug fell in love with one of the waitresses.

"We came across the country by car. Doug's Peugeot broke down in Texas. Billy Mitchell took all our little money out of our pockets to get it fixed. We went into Birdland in New York. And Doug says, 'I'm in love, and I'm going back to San Francisco with Philly Joe Jones.' And we'd struck it good. We were going into the Apollo from there. And we hadn't received that money back. The night before he left, Billy Mitchell and I almost got into a fight, because he hadn't wanted to bring Doug Watkins to New York, he said New York had so many great bass players. And we were short on our payroll because we had lent this money.

"Doug left for California, and he got out there on the highway and fell asleep, and one of these trailer-tractors wiped him out. We got a telegram at the Apollo that morning.

"Anyway, we came into the Sutherland Lounge in Chicago, to cover for Ahmad Jamal, who was sick. The people lined up around the corner in the snow to see us. We had a hit, *Salty Papa*, and in the *Down Beat* critics poll, we beat out Sonny Rollins for new group of the year.

"Soon's you get a good group, it seems like all other groups try to get that musician away from you. Herman Wright was now our bass player — a cousin to Gene Wright. Terry Gibbs offered him more money to come with him, so we started getting friction there. Miles Davis wanted our drummer, Eddy Williams, and he was threatening to leave. So the overhead ran too big. It was really sad, because we had such a group, and people like Quincy Jones and Gene Roland and Ernie Wilkins were writing for us. Everybody can't write for tenor and trombone. Billy and I broke up the group and I went back to

Basie."

He stayed with the Basie band until Basie had a heart attack, formed a group with Jimmy Forrest, returned to Basie when the band was re- formed, then went out with Forrest again to work all over Europe. The strains of the jazz life finally undermined his marriage, and Al and his wife separated, she to live in a house they own in Philadelphia, he in another house they own in Pottstown, or, more specifically, Stowe, Pennsylvania. Their relationship is cordial, particularly in matters of family.

"I've been a freelance player since '76," Al said. "I was with Jimmy Forrest for a long time, and the past seven years with Buddy Tate. And now my own group with my son Michael and Joe Cohn. Michael was given a chance at study, and he loves it. The family is really together when it comes to that.

"I have four boys. Albert is the oldest. The second son, Ernest, takes care of our house. Mike and Robert are both musicians. Mike plays trombone, Robert plays valve trombone. Like me, as a baby, hearing the sounds, they were determined that they really wanted to be musicians. Michael had a scholarship to Westchester State Teachers' College, but he wanted to go to Berklee. He became so good that in his last year he had a half a year's scholarship.

"We started music in our basement. We had a three-story cobblestone home in Philadelphia. We fixed up the basement so we could play pingpong and have rehearsals. Around the corner from us we had Kevin and Robin Eubanks. They would come over and play with my boys.

"My oldest son, Albert, put together a little band playing rock- and-roll, with Michael and Kevin Eubanks. They got only a dollar a night and put the rest in a kitty. They ended up with so much money they bought a second-hand bus, drums, a whole sound system. Michael went off to Berklee, Kevin went to the Academy of Music. One of them had to go into the service, and Albert inherited the sound system, and now he's a very famous rock disc jockey in Philadelphia, and he calls himself Captain Boogie and he has a partner they call Astro Boy, and they make more money than I could even think of making. Just for one night at the Athletic Club in Philadelphia of playing discs they can make four thousand dollars.

"I'm really excited by the new group I have with Michael and Joe Cohn.

"Michael and Jo Cohn were working around Boston with Alan Dawson. Phil Wilson was Michael's trombone teacher. Mike does something I can't do – circular breathing. Phil taught him that. If he gets hung up, and he thinks his old man is playing too much on him, he'll string me out by hitting on a note and holding it and holding it until the people start to applaud. Then he'll turn his head, 'You see, Dad?'

"And we have a wonderful drummer, Bobby Durham, who hasn't had the recognition he deserves because he has worked so much with singers.

"I really believe so strongly in this new group that I'll go down the drain with it.

"I met Almut Graffe and Henry Graffe, from Frankfurt, Germany, at the Meridian in Paris about nine years ago. They decided to come to America to my premiere at Jean Bach's home in February. They became so impressed by this group. There were so many critics there, and promotion people, and they wanted to know if it was worth it to give up pretty good money as a single to take on a group.

"These people from Germany said, 'Well, we believe in you, and we're going to put some money into escrow for this group. They took out a bank account where I can sign for what is needed for the group. We've worked at Fat Tuesday's in New York, and people came back to hear it again, and we ended up with a sellout on Saturday, just starting off. And we've had good writeups. Now we're getting this recording contract, and so I think it's worthwhile for me to hold out from doing singles. Buddy Tate is doing something different.

"What's going to make the group is arrangers. Johnny Mandel has written some things for me. Don Sickler too. We have some things that J.J. Johnson and I recorded together in 1984. Frank Foster has written some for us and I have and Joe Cohn too.

"Joe Cohn has been overshadowed by his father, and no one knows him until now. I have made up my mind that we're going to record an album of Al Cohn's tunes. Al and I were close. We used to break bread together. This group just has to be heard and I will go all the way with it."

(The album, for Chiaroscuro Records, has been recorded since this conversation.)

"When you've been out here playing with jazz musicians like Louis Bellson and J.J. Johnson and Oscar Peterson, it makes you want to stay in the business for life. Roy Eldridge came to hear Buddy Tate and me one night at Sweet Basil. This was after his heart attack. We came off the bandstand and Roy had tears in his eyes because he couldn't play any more.

"Just think. I'm so happy Roy can sing a couple of numbers and pacify that desire."

Sing a couple of numbers to satisfy that desire. What a sad thing.

Al and I were sitting at a white formica table near the door of the cottage we were sharing. Ben Sidran had just returned, and he sat down on a corner of his bed to listen to us talk. I looked out the open door. The air was perfect, and it was too early in the season for insects. There was that little brown rabbit, searching among the tulips in that springtime Colorado garden, making his living. I had seen him several times in the past several days, and it struck me that he had a lot of nerve to be out there doing that in broad daylight. Had he no sense of danger?

Al heaved a sigh of a sort, and his face suddenly took on a deep sadness, a weariness of all the years on the road. And what he said next made Ben Sidran's eyes meet mine and hold for a moment.

Al said, "I'm just out here trying to be a great musician and make a little peace."

And then the smile returned.