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Jazzletter

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December 1989 Vol. 8 No. 12

Apologies

I want to thank everyone who wrote to express the concern that the *Jazzletter* might have ceased to exist. The biography of Lerner and Loewe proved time-consuming. I spent nine months in the New York area researching and writing it, sometimes sixteen hours a day. Each aspect of their lives and work led me into absorbing new areas of research. I was exhausted by it, but the book's done and due out in November. I'm back to the *Jazzletter* and getting caught up on the issues. They'll be along shortly, and I apologize for the hiatus.

One of the Jones Boys

The question of nature versus nurture is particularly vexed in music. There is a bit of suggestive evidence that abilities in athletics and music may be inherited. But if parents love music and the children take after them, how can you determine whether genetics or exposure have played the more significant role?

Capable siblings, from the Dodds brothers to the Heath and Marsalis families, are by no means unusual in jazz history; and for that matter, recent years have seen the emergence of the gifted sons of accomplished fathers. Even when the parents were not professional, you will hear time after time some variant on this:

"Both my mother and father were musical. This is not to say that they played professionally in any sense. They didn't. My father played guitar a little and my mother a little piano. That was about the extent of it. At least they had a beginning influence. They influenced us to think in terms of music, whereas if they had not been musical, who knows where our energies would have gone? I think they impressed us, inspired us, to go as far as we could in music."

The speaker is Hank Jones, and the "us" in question comprises three of the finest musicians in jazz, in chronological order Henry, Thaddeus, and Elvin.

I had known Elvin well during his period with John Coltrane. And I knew Thad moderately well, particularly toward the end of his life when his writing had attained such levels of brilliance. He died in 1986 of a cancer about which he told almost no one. I had never really known Hank.

He lived quietly, and was never seen leaning on the bar of one of the New York musicians' taverns. And now he lives nearly two hundred miles out of New York City, on a hilly stretch of farmland. I ran into him backstage at a concert one evening, and he piqued my curiosity, this pianist of exquisite taste, with his open, gracious and unsuspicious manner. He struck me as a man at peace with himself.

And so I sought him out. I called to tell him I would be driving from Buffalo to New York City, and if it were convenient for him, I would like to drop by for an hour or so on the way.

I got off the New York State Thruway at Herkimer and headed south, then drove five or six miles out the road that runs west from Cooperstown, best-known as the home of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Cooperstown is about sixty miles almost due west of Albany. The country there is a matter of creeks and small lakes and round eroded hills, some of it farmland and some of it woodlot, at that time all browns and grays under a lowering sky, though some of the branches were faintly colored by the first hesitant buds of spring.

As evening deepened, I turned into a dirt road off the highway, found the right mailbox, then ascended a long blacktop driveway to a white clapboard house into which was built a two-car garage. A second garage, also white, had doors for four cars. Between the two buildings, a basketball practice backboard on a thick metal pole leaned away from the driveway about thirty degrees from the vertical.

Hank greeted me at the front door and led me into a large paneled living room, where he introduced me to his wife, Teddy. Hank is dark. Teddy is very light, and in a rational society she would be called white as a matter of simple description. This is pertinent to something Hank said. After we had spoken briefly and I noted her accent, I said, "You're certainly a southerner."

"South Carolina," she said, adding that when she goes home to visit, her friends think she sounds like a northerner.

Hank urged me to join them at dinner. I said that first I had to reserve a motel room somewhere. Hank and Teddy said that had been taken care of: they had set up their guest room for me. I protested only feebly; almost immediately I felt as if I had known them a long time.

I asked what had happened to the basketball backboard in the driveway.

"No comment," Hank said with mock gravity, and Teddy giggled.

"No comment," he repeated.

"Don't tell me the wind did it," I said.

"No comment." As Teddy's laughter grew more helpless I realized I had stumbled onto a family tale.

Teddy said, "The funny thing is that when I hit it, it didn't even bother the car!"

"No comment."

"I backed the car into it," Teddy confessed, still laughing. "I must say, the ground was very wet."

"No comment," Hank said yet again, and at last burst into laughter himself.

"Who plays?"

"My daughter Cecelia," Hank said. "In high school, her coach thought her ability at basketball would get her an athletic scholarship to college."

Teddy said, "I played basketball until I was in my thirties."

"Where's your daughter now?"

"She finished four years of college, and now she's thinking about going to law school," Hank said.

Most jazz encyclopedias give his birthplace as Pontiac, Michigan. Hank was born August 31, 1918, in Vicksburg, Mississippi. His parents moved to Pontiac when he was a few months

old. He was the third of ten children, eldest of the boys. The brothers and sisters after him were born in Pontiac, an automotive city. Thaddeus was born on March 28, 1923, Elvin on September 9, 1927. A brother, Paul, who lives in Detroit, plays piano, though not professionally.

"Elvin is one of twins," Hank said over dinner. "He had a twin brother who died as an infant of an infection. He was two or three months old. I had an older sister, Olive, who was a tremendous pianist, playing concerts at the age of twelve. She was skating on a lake and went through the soft ice and got caught in the current underneath the ice and drowned. She was, I think, the most talented of our family. It was something my mother never got over.

"As brothers, there was a certain familial closeness. We weren't that close on a playing level. Thad, Elvin and I did only two recording dates that I can recall. That's all. There was a six-year difference between Thad and me. Between Elvin and me there is a nine-year difference."

Their father had narrow ideas about music, Hank said. "He thought all my energies should be directed toward playing in the church. He thought playing jazz was the work of the devil.

"Most of the people that I grew up knowing were church people. They were very deeply religious. They frowned on anything that wasn't connected with the church. Rock music wouldn't have had a chance in those days. I think rock, blues, and that kind of thing, have always been around. But it certainly wasn't played in church services. One of my uncles was a minister in what they called at that time the sanctified church. And the music they played in the sanctified church was kind of finger-popping music. It was totally alien to the kind of music that was played in the Baptist church where I grew up. And I really grew up in the church. One of the earliest memories I have was reciting a poem in church. It was my first exposure to an audience. It was long before I ever tried to play a note on the piano. That was it. The church was a part of our lives. It was a seven-day part of my father's life. Every single day. He was very sincere about it, deeply deeply religious.

"This kind of staid, conformist approach to music began to change a little later on. We used to get quartets of singers from Detroit, which was twenty-five miles away, who gave concerts at our church, the Trinity Baptist Church in Pontiac. They brought a new style of singing, which later you heard in Aretha Franklin. It was a little bit left of center. This kind of Gospel singing was more of the hand-clapping revival, jubilee kind of singing. This, I think, started a new trend. It had a great influence on the musical thinking in Pontiac. It may or may not have started in Detroit, but certainly Detroit was one of the focal points of that new trend of singing in the church. It became less Gospel, more -- not secular but jubilee. It became more rhythmic. It still retained the religious flavor."

What secular music was he listening to as he grew into music in the 1920s?

"I could hear Louis Armstrong on records. I heard a lot of blues singers on records, a lot of guitar players who played blues very well. One of the first bands I heard was Duke Ellington, the Mills Blue Rhythm Band. And I think Don Redman. Don Redman played with McKinney's Cotton Pickers out of Detroit, one of the best little-known bands ever organized. I think Don had a lot to do with it. Also the Jimmie Lunceford band, one of the major bands of the day.

"I had the sheet music of Bix Beiderbecke piano compositions like *In a Mist*. Bix left a lasting impression, partly through Bill Challis, who transcribed his piano pieces. I remember when I first played *In a Mist*, I was very much impressed by the harmonic changes, which I thought were a complete departure from anything I'd heard up to that time. He had this immense talent for harmonic organization and melodic integration. He put everything together so well. I think he created a style, and it had a tremendous influence on the thinking of the arrangers of the day, via Bill Challis and via his solo work."

He paused a moment, then said, "I wonder who Bix liked?"

"According to people who know more about him than I do, it was Nick LaRocca of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band."

Hank said, "It just proves that nothing and no one exists in a vacuum. Somebody is always influenced by someone else.

"I had a very good teacher, Pauline McCaughan. When I was taking lessons from her, she was still going to high school. There again was another great, great talent. She had a marvelous singing voice. She later came to New York and was then in *Carmen Jones*, which was an adaptation of *Carmen*. She was a tremendous singer, in addition to being a wonderful pianist and teacher. Later on I had several other teachers.

"I played a few nightclubs in Detroit, but nothing significant. I played actually more in Flint than Detroit, in various nightclubs and dancehalls and with local bands. I worked with a singing group called the Melody Lads, a very good group. We sang at a number of places in and around Detroit. We did a two-week engagement at the Fox theater. The group was that good. We did an engagement in a church outside of Detroit. The church was composed of a congregation none of whom was as dark as my wife. This is a fact. When we came in, it must have been like they were slumming. Very strange. Why would they all be so light? So that tells you a story right there. There's really nothing new.

"When you have a race -- in the U.S. the white race -- that has a majority of numbers, it is bound to occur. When a country grows to the point where this is no longer an important or influential factor, then that country probably has arrived as a nation, a really integrated nation, without reference to color or difference of race.

"I would venture to suggest that discrimination, segregation, have occurred throughout history in all countries. What we're going through now in this country is, I believe, a repetition of what has gone on throughout history. Hopefully it will resolve into the kind of world that we know can exist, but which takes time to mature. When that happens, the nation as a whole will begin to make real progress. Because all those things, which are now standing in the way of progress, will be behind. They occupy too much of a person's thinking, to the exclusion of the things that really matter: scientific progress, educational

progress, artistic progress.

"But that's what that church was like. It tells you something.

"After Detroit I moved to Cleveland, where I worked in a small band in Cedar Gardens, with the line of chorus girls and the comedians and the fights on Sundays. It was a very strange period. Then I went to Buffalo, playing in a small bar called the Anchor Bar. I understand it's still there. A wonderful Italian restaurant. That's when I first heard Art Tatum.

"Art Tatum played in a bar across town called McVan's. Our club closed before his club closed. So we used to go over and catch his last show. After his last show, Art would go to a restaurant downtown and hang out, play till eleven o'clock the next day. I went with him every morning that I could. I guess that was his method of practicing. And the owner would set a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer beside him.

"In 1944 I moved to New York, and I studied with Yascha Zaidy."

His training was extensive, disciplined, and classical. You can hear it in his technique. I posed a question, one I had asked Oscar Peterson, who studied with Paul DeMarkey, who had studied in Hungary with Istvan Thoman, who had studied with Liszt. Given Oscar's discipline in the Baroque and Romantic keyboard literature, would he, had the doors been open to him, have become a concert pianist? Oscar replied that, no, he wouldn't; the creativity of jazz was too appealing to him. I asked Hank, "Since you had similar training, do you think you might have gone in a different direction if you'd been white?"

He said, "If I'd had *enough* of the formal concert training, I might have thought about it. In fact, that's what my mother wanted me to do. Andre Watts came two generations later. As you correctly stated, the door was not open. In fact it was slammed *tight* in those days. Witness what happened to Marian Anderson in Washington, D.C. I might have given it some thought, even so, because there might have been opportunities in Europe that may not have existed in this country."

Sometimes, at record dates, I have heard Hank warming up on Chopin.

The traces of a religious upbringing are still apparent. He always says grace at table, he never smoked or drank, and he doesn't seem to use profanity. His manner is always that of a gentleman, in both senses of the word, and he has a whimsical sense of humor that breaks into his conversation in slow chuckles and sly asides followed by "Only kidding, only kidding." He is highly articulate, a characteristic he shares with most jazz musicians, speaking easily and unhesitatingly. He talks as he plays, another characteristic common in jazz musicians. His enunciation is lovely, like his articulation on the piano, and he speaks in musical rises and falls of pitch, pauses as he thinks something through alternating with long clear phrases. If these are his ideals on the piano, and they obviously are, inevitably they would inform his talk.

He is slim and moderately tall and quite handsome, with a wide mouth and lively eyes. The only sign that he was approaching seventy-two was the grey that tinged his mustache and hair. He does not move like a man that age; there is no touch of that arthritic caution that inhibits, even if only slightly, the movements of most men in their seventh decade.

There is nothing wrong with his memory, either. I couldn't remember where we first had met. He reminded me that it was at a Johnny Hartman record date, produced by Bob Thiele at Rudy Van Gelder's studio in New Jersey. Hank had been the pianist on that session, which took place in the mid-1960s.

Hank said, "Johnny never seemed to get anywhere. He had the greatest voice. You could compare him with Dick Haymes, even Perry Como. So relaxed. He used to do some pretty tough things. I worked an engagement with him at Michael's Pub. He was doing some difficult things. He was good looking, and pleasant. Easy to work with. But it never happened."

After Teddy cleared away the dishes, she brought out a plate of fruit-cake, saying, "This cake is five years old." I assumed from this that it was soaked in booze, which Hank confirmed with a chuckle and:

"If I eat this fruit-cake, my observations might become a bit garbled."

By now I could see that if I let him, he would talk about others, not himself. I asked what happened after he started studying with Yascha Zaidy.

"I went to work with Hot Lips Page on the recommendation of Lucky Thompson, who had joined that band six months or a year earlier. All during the preparation -- Cleveland, Buffalo -- I had been promised that job. Hot Lips was working the Onyx Club. It was almost the end of the war, and just about the end of Fifty-second Street. When I got there, there was about eight months or a year of it left. I got to play on Fifty-second Street. I worked with Lips for about three months at the Onyx, and then I went on the road with him in a big band, a three-months tour of the south, one-nighters, the roughest way you can do it.

"Lips was a blues player. He liked Louis Armstrong. There were several trumpet players who came along about that same time, King Kolax, Frank Humphreys, Hot Lips Page, one or two others, who all played more or less like Louis Armstrong.

"That tour wasn't easy. It was a trying time.

"I remember very clearly that whenever we would go to a town, inevitably we would go to the section where most of the black people lived. You would see signs saying 'Boarders accepted' or 'Roomers accepted'. We would stay in private homes or small hotels that catered to musicians.

"During the war, things began to change almost imperceptibly for the better. It wasn't that noticeable at the time. I remember those cheap hotels -- the Milner hotels, a dollar a day and all the cockroaches you could eat. The better hotels were not available to us. Segregation was rife. It was the order of the day. You could not break that line. You had to eat in segregated dining rooms, you traveled on segregated buses, you traveled on segregated trains, you drank from segregated water fountains. Even if you had your own bus,

and you wanted to stop for a sandwich, you had to send somebody in the back door of the restaurant and get the sandwiches to take out. Most musicians, especially the younger musicians today, really can't conceive of this, but believe me, it happened.

"There was one instance where it didn't happen, and we were the most surprised people in the world. We were on a train going from Fort Worth to San Antonio in Texas. We were sitting in a segregated coach. Three or four of us decided that we would like to go back and have something to eat. Whether it was segregated or not, we wanted to have something to eat. So we went to the dining car, about three cars back. The waiters were standing around in nicely starched white coats, and I guess we had questions on our faces. They said, 'Please have a seat. Anywhere you want.' This was strange. It happened in the middle of Texas in the middle of that period when there was intense segregation all over the south and even parts of the north as well.

"We were standing in a railroad station waiting to take a train. In Mississippi, I think. Our luggage was at the end of the platform at ground level. And a guy with a truck came along and ran over it. He could see perfectly well that there was luggage there.

"After Hot Lips Page I worked with Andy Kirk. Shirley Green -- it sounds like a girl's name but it wasn't -- was a very fine tenor saxophone player, an excellent player. I often wondered what happened to him. Ben Thigpen, Ed's father, played drums. He had been with the earlier group, Andy Kirk and his Clouds of Joy band with Mary Lou Williams. We did the Apollo theater, we did the State theater in Hartford, the Royal theater in Baltimore. We did a couple of dances. Then I went with John Kirby in the time Charlie Shavers and Buster Bailey were in the band. It was a great little band. I first heard the band when I was in Michigan. They used to broadcast every Sunday afternoon, so it was kind of a thrill to me to work with them.

"When I first heard bebop, I was partially confused, because it was different. I'd never heard anything like it. It seemed to be the way to go. I wasn't going to be a seer and predict that this would be the wave of the future, but I did see it as a departure and a step forward, interesting harmonically. It required prodigious technique to do it properly. The players who were playing it all had that -- Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell.

"It seemed to be a logical development. It employed the same chords that had always been used, but in different progressions. When I first came to New York, I listened to them. Monk, a little bit. Not as much Monk as Bud Powell. And a few others. There weren't too many around. I thought it was definitely forward-looking. I guess my assessment was correct, because it is still with us.

"There was a line a division. There are many turning points in the history of jazz in this country, if jazz is the right term to use. I don't know about it."

"You and Benny Carter and Duke Ellington and quite a few other people."

"As a matter of fact, *Down Beat* ran a contest to find another name for it. Remember that? They came up with 'crew cut'."

"As opposed to 'long hair'. That was before the rockers grew long hair."

"I suppose it had some logic to it. But 'crew cut'? To describe jazz? One of the reasons I have some reservations about the word 'jazz' is that, according to most historians, it was a derogatory term to describe the kind of music played in so-called bawdy houses of the day. It has a sort of negative connotation. I wish there was another term. And it's limited. Jazz is a much bigger field than any particular style. It encompasses a multitude of styles, all embodied within the term . . . we won't say it!

"It comes down to personal taste. Jazz is many things to many people. There are a lot of people who like what we call off-the-wall jazz. It doesn't seem to have a lot to say to people like myself, but hey, I'm not the final authority. I can only speak from my personal preferences. I have my personal preferences, my wife has her personal preferences. I don't tell her what to think, although if she doesn't think the way I think, well then, things could go very badly for her." And he and Teddy laughed.

"I think the bottom line is personal preference. I think, however, that people who review music, critics, have an obligation to report things more objectively regardless of personal preferences. I think a reviewer has an obligation to report things of a technical nature. This affects everybody, no matter what style. The technical proficiency, or lack of it, perhaps determines the degree of enjoyment.

"That's an obligation. We all have obligations. I have an obligation to try to perform at peak level at all times. I don't always do this. Maybe when I'm not doing this, a critic sitting in the audience might say, 'Well this didn't happen the way it was supposed to happen.'"

I suggested that you can be wrong about your own work, and not only when you thought more highly of it than the critics. You could underestimate it.

"Yes," he said. "One reason is that maybe at the time of the performance you are very close to it and have in mind what you wanted to do. Maybe you almost did it, but you knew what you wanted to do and in your own mind you didn't accomplish that objective. So it's a sub-criticism of something you tried to do and didn't think you did. On the other hand, it also could happen that the listener felt that whatever you did satisfied a certain standard that he or she had in mind. It's a hard question. There are two sides of it, maybe more than two."

I said, "Maybe you don't achieve what you tried to, and do achieve something else you didn't notice you'd achieved."

"That's true. Things are happening so fast. Your mind is racing ahead of your body. Whatever you play at a given time, you're already thinking beyond that, you're into the next four bars or maybe thinking of the end. Maybe you forget what you just did, it's already happened, it's already in the past.

"But getting back to bebop, if we can use that term, which

I'm not too crazy about either, there weren't an awful lot of people around playing it. One reason is that technically it was very difficult to play and play well, and coherently. This may be the key to the whole thing. If you're going to play a style, it has to be believable, and in order for it to be believable, it's got to be understandable. In order for it to be understandable, it's got to be coherent. *Somebody*'s got to know what you're trying to do. That's what separates the men from the boys. Those guys who were playing it were so capable that there was no question about what they were trying to do. Either you understood it or you didn't. And if you understood it, then that was the way to go. If you didn't understand it, nobody was going to convince you that it was right.

"*I* thought it was right. I could see the correlation of the harmony to melody, I could hear the harmony they were playing, even though my knowledge of harmony was extremely limited at the time -- then as now!" (Before taking this disclaimer seriously, one might look at the lead sheets of the tunes Hank writes.) "But at least I could figure out the direction they were going. It made sense to me. And still does. I listen to some of those old records and I'm still amazed by what those guys do.

"And the tunes Charlie Parker wrote . . . Nothing could be compared to them in originality. *Confirmation* . . . . The melody and the harmony were perfectly integrated. It had movement. It had excitement. It had originality -- it was different from anything ever heard before. I guess that's why it became such a bebop standard."

He suggested that the rhythm sections, excepting some of the drummers, particularly Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, weren't up to what Parker and Gillespie were doing. I told him of Bobby Scott's remark that the rhythm sections were ten years behind Charlie Parker.

"If not more," Hank said. "Some of the bassists, and I don't want to name them, I could never understand it. We have all agreed that this kind of playing and harmonic thinking were at least a generation ahead of anything that had been done previously. I think we're really talking about bass players of that time."

He soon found himself surrounded by the boppers. In 1945, he joined the -- for its time -- revolutionary band of Billy Eckstine.

"We had Fats Navarro in the band," he said. "I remember once we had occasion to sit down and talk on 110th Street, Central Park North. We sat there on a bench by the low stone wall. We started talking about guys who were hooked on narcotics, and we agreed that this was a terrible thing to do and musicians should know better than to get into that sort of thing. All the time I didn't realize that Fats was hooked. And that was what took him away. A *great* trumpet player.

"I also worked with Coleman Hawkins at the Spotlight on Fifty-second Street. In that band were Miles Davis and Max Roach. Not a bad band! We did a lot of dance dates around the northeast."

"Dance dates?" I said, a little incredulous.

"That's right," Hank said, and laughed

"Miles playing dance music?"

"That's right. Coleman Hawkins had a lot of these dates. And he paid very well."

"But the idea of Miles playing dance dates . . . ."

"Incredible, isn't it?" he said, laughing again. "He probably wouldn't even admit it today. All the engagements with Coleman Hawkins were very educational.

"I also worked with Billy Daniels. He'd done *Black Magic* by then.

"In 1947, I joined Jazz at the Philarhmonic. We used to do two tours a year, in the spring and in the fall. During the four and a half years I worked for them, I must have done just about every major city in the country. While I was with JATP, I joined Ella Fitzgerald." (He was to be her accompanist for several years.)

Hank was present at Carnegie Hall on the 1949 night when Norman Granz introduced Oscar Peterson as a visitor from Montreal and sent him onstage with Ray Brown. Oscar astounded the audience and the press, and his international career was launched. So was a friendship between Hank and Oscar, who always cites Hank among his favorite pianists.

"Oscar and I and Norman Granz planned to make a two-piano LP together, pretty much as I did with George Shearing for Concord a year ago," Hank said. "For some reason we couldn't get it off the ground. Probably the fault was as much mine as anyone else's. I'll take the blame for that one. There were certain things I wanted in the contract that I couldn't get in there. Oscar and I will probably still do that album. That's one of my ambitions, one of my priorities, and I hope Oscar feels that way too. It came up at Oscar's home in Toronto, when I was visiting.

"After Jazz at the Philharmonic, I worked with Tyree Glenn at the Embers and at the Roundtable. I worked with Artie Shaw with the New Gramercy Five, which included Artie, Tal Farlow, Irv Kluger, Tommy Potter, Joe Roland. That was a very interesting period. We did Las Vegas, East St. Louis, Cleveland. It didn't last long, but it was very interesting. I must have worked with Tyree twice. The second time Lester Young and my brother Elvin were in the band. I remember once Lester was sick and didn't come to work. It was the end of the week and I took his money over to him at the Alvin hotel. He must have died the same year. That must have been about the same time I went to work at CBS.

"Let's see. Oh. Yes. I also worked with, you should pardon the expression, Benny Goodman." Again there was laughter; but there was no malice in the remark. "I worked with Benny off and on for almost twenty years. I would get calls from his office to do single engagements. In 1957, I worked with the big band. I went to the Far East with him for the State Department. Everybody got along with Benny for shorter or longer periods. Not necessarily longer periods. I always had great admiration for Benny for his musical ability. The man could play the horn, there's no question about that. Even during the CBS period, when I had a free day, I would sometimes go with Benny.

"I did the Jackie Gleason and Gary Moore Show and Ed Sullivan shows, and some others you've never heard of. I used to do a Dixieland jazz show on the radio, and a more modern jazz show too. We had Hal McKusick and Trigger Alpert. The drummer was either Specs Powell or Sonny Igoe. I was at CBS from 1959 to 1974. Close to fifteen years.

"I wasn't able to go on the road all that time. When CBS closed down the music department, no more staff orchestras, everything became open. I had the option of going out. I did a lot of recordings. They were coming out of my ears. Then I began to do tours, festivals. I did the festival at Nice for about four years. I went on a tour of Japan with Marian McPartland and John Lewis. It was the first time I'd been there since 1957, when I was there with Benny Goodman. I've been back nearly every year since then, sometimes twice a year. There hasn't been any lack of work, I must say. I've had to turn down a lot. I did a lot of jingle dates.

"About five and a half years ago, I moved up to this part of the country. That canceled automatically all the jingle dates. You can't go four hundred miles round trip for a jingle date. When I go in to New York to do an album, I stay at a motel in New Jersey, because the parking's easier."

"And it's a little safer," I said. "You may come back and find you still have your hubcaps."

Again the laughter: "And also your wheels, your motor. I came out of Bradley's one night. I was parked on Tenth Street. Teddy and I walked back to the car between sets, and there's a guy sitting in the car. He'd gone through the glove compartment. He jumped out and ran. And he left his gloves behind. Lousy gloves. I still have them." And still more laughter.

"After CBS, I got a lot more calls. The recordings I've done lately are mostly my own dates, trio recordings, for Concord and for Japanese companies.

"J.J. Johnson worked for ten years or more in Hollywood, writing scores for TV and movies. They tell me those deadlines in Hollywood are murder. I think that had a lot to do with Oliver Nelson's death. I think it takes a deadly toll on some people. Oliver couldn't take that physical strain. It led to drinking, and he did a lot of it, and he was overweight.

"I think when you finally do come back to playing after years in the studios, you have such a wealth of musical ideas to express that it wants to come forth all at once. At CBS I was in a more or less restricted kind of environment, playing a lot of show music, oom-pah, oom-pah. It didn't stretch my musical mind; it was all there on paper. When I left CBS, it was almost like starting over again. You had to rebuild your muscles for playing again, mentally as well as physically."

I looked at my watch. I couldn't believe it; it was after midnight. I apologized for keeping Hank and Teddy awake, they protested that I had done no such thing. They showed me to a room with a king-size bed. I could hear them, though faintly, still talking as I fell asleep.

There was a bright light on the drawn curtains when I awoke. The ground was covered with thick fresh snow. Great wet snowdrops were still falling, and the sky was lost to sight. I wondered if I would be able to leave.

Hank and Teddy were already awake, and I could smell breakfast, bacon and sausage and grilled liver. The conversation resumed as if it had never been interrupted. I wake up quickly, and so apparently does Hank. He made jokes about her coffee, insisting she had once made a pot of it that you could stand a spoon in. It was just my kind of coffee. Obviously Hank loves to tease her; obviously she loves him to do it, though occasionally she gets her own back at him.

While he was out of the room, I asked her if they farmed these 277 acres. "Oh no," she said. "He wanted to. But I said, 'You'd better make up your mind. Are you going to be a musician or a farmer? You can't be both.'" He told her he wasn't ready to give up music yet, and that was the end of his agricultural aspirations.

When he returned, I mentioned that on the car radio the previous day, I'd heard a Teddy Wilson solo performance of *Ain't Misbehavin'*. I said, "He was playing a moving bass line, rather intricate figures built out of the harmony."

Hank said, "I've never heard Teddy take that particular approach. But when you're playing solo you have poetic license. You can do just about anything you like, and make it come out. If you're lucky!

"Your conception of harmony changes over the years, as you gain experience. Your concept of melody changes too. You start to think more involved, complex melodies, sometimes not within the thirty-two-bar frame. You start thinking in terms of the overall melody -- the story you're trying to tell -- instead of confining yourself to thirty-two bars, or eight bars. Your harmonic conception changes greatly. I think that's what's happened to Oscar Peterson, and I think it's what's happened to me, on a much lesser scale. I think the more technical ability you have, the more complex the harmony. I think it changes in direct correlation to that, because you can conceive many more complex patterns, more complex harmonic ideas. Sometimes it is even more than a thirty-two bar pattern. It could be a forty-two, forty-four, sixty-four-bar pattern. The number of bars doesn't seem to be as important as the ideas that you're trying to express. That's the prime consideration.

"The first pianist that I really became aware of, I think, was Duke Ellington. Then Earl Hines, Fats Waller, then Teddy Wilson, then Art Tatum. Over the years other pianists, Tommy Flanagan, Barry Harris, Bill Evans, Dorothy Donegan So many, some not so well known. Oscar Peterson. Oscar Peterson is head and shoulders above any pianist alive today. Oscar is at the apex. He is the crowning ruler of all the pianists in the jazz world. No question about it.

"There are some younger pianists around. I'm thinking of James Williams, Mulgrew Miller, Kenny Barron, and still younger ones. Roger Kellaway is an exceptional pianist. We both were judges in the Thelonious Monk contest in Washington, D.C., a couple of years ago. We each had to play a little bit of a solo in places. I got to hear him better, and much more intently, and I was very much impressed with his approach. He has delicacy but a definite firmness. Whatever

he's trying to say comes through very clearly. He plays almost effortlessly.

"One of the characteristics of the best of them is that these pianists, beginning with Teddy Wilson, Art Tatum, then Oscar Peterson, play bass lines so highly developed that they provide perfect support and foundation for whatever is happening in the right hand. Without that bass line, the right hand would have no meaning. It would be floating in the air, by itself. The harmonic foundation, the harmonic justification for the right hand, is in the left hand. I have never understood how certain pianists can completely abandon the left hand, almost as if it were tied behind their backs. If you're building a house, you start with the foundation. This is an over-simplification, I realize, but it might illustrate the point. You've got to start somewhere. With music, you start with the root of the chord. You build on that. If you don't, you've got no foundation. Even if it's a slab house, without a basement, you have to start with the foundation."

Let me suggest that you go back to the point where I mentioned the bass line of Teddy Wilson's *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Notice how Hank starts on the subject, explores several other ideas and discusses other pianists, and then returns to the point from which he departed: bass lines. That is parallel to the way his musical thinking flows across the eight-bar and even thirty-two-bar lines. He then developed the point about solo playing into this:

"Nat Cole was one of my idols. One of Oscar's too. Nat was a great influence on a lot of people. His tone and his attack were quite different. That was a departure from his original style. The way he plays when he's really relaxed, or maybe thinks nobody is listening. I once went up to Andy Kirk's apartment, where Nat used to stay. He was well-known by then. He was working a series of theater engagements with Andy Kirk's band. I went by to see Andy for some business reason, and I heard someone playing the piano. I thought maybe it was a Tatum record. I peeked around the corner and there was Nat, playing like Art Tatum. I was totally amazed. I didn't think he played that way. It was a very relaxed Tatum sound. He may have changed his style to accommodate the vocal style he used, and also the trio style.

"Because as much as I loved Tatum, I loved him better playing solo. When a pianist is playing a certain way alone, you have to assume that the style that he uses with a group is something that he does to accommodate the other musicians in the group.

"That simple style Basie used was the only thing that would cut through the band sound, fit the holes. Basie was a very intelligent musician."

"You mentioned Roger Kellaway," I said. "You know that experimental band Thad had in Europe toward the end of his life. Roger played piano in it at a festival. When he got back, I asked him how he, as a composer, felt about Thad's writing. He thought for a moment and said, 'I think Thad Jones may be a genius.' And Roger doesn't use that word lightly."

"I think he was," Hank said. "I don't like to talk about him and Elvin because they're my brothers."

"Talk about them," I said.

At first with a touch of reluctance, Hank resumed, "Thad was an outstanding talent. Before Thad came on the scene, with his arrangements and with that big band he had with Mel Lewis, I didn't hear these things from anyone else. It was a completely new approach. I think Thad would be the first one to tell you that he was greatly inspired by Duke. But he didn't sound like Duke. The writing was innovative, it inspired the other musicians. I don't know of anybody who has had the influence that Thad had on the thinking of arrangers in maybe the last fifteen years. I think his influence will be felt for a long, long time. Perhaps as much as Duke and Billy Strayhorn. Completely original. Arrangers now are beginning to think that way. You hear little traces of Thad in a lot of things current today. That's one of the hallmarks of greatness, isn't it, that your influence can be felt long after you're gone.

"Elvin is an innovator of the first order. He has influenced a whole generation, or two, and even past generations of drummers. There's just no way to describe his playing. Elvin is the only one who could explain what he's doing. I get the impression that he's using a multiple, multiple series of triplets -- triplets upon triplets, a whole pyramid of triplets. To me that's what his style is based on. As a drummer he could explain it a lot better than that. There's no question that he's an innovator, he's a stylist. A drummer I just worked with in California, Jim Plank, an excellent drummer himself, said he loved Elvin. I have not met a drummer yet who doesn't like him, even the drummers who don't play like Elvin. They say his style is completely original."

I said, "Thad once gave me an interesting description of the difference between the Ellington and Basie bands. He sort of waved his hands in parallel, and said that the Basie band came right straight at you, and the Ellington band had a broader sound, like Technicolor and CinemaScope or Cinerama. Another thing he said: he said Basie had an uncanny feel for tempos, he said Basie could walk on a bandstand at a dance and without even trying one number, get such a feeling for the audience that the first thing he played was exactly right for them."

"Basie was like that," Hank said. "The ability to pick tempos is a rare, rare talent. For bandleaders or anybody else, but particularly bandleaders. If the tempo is not right, then everything sort of falls apart. Basie really had it. I was on a record date with Illinois Jacquet. We were recording a tune called *Black Velvet*, which later became *Don't You Go 'Way Mad*. We could not find the right tempo. It was Basie's date. They had me there because Basie couldn't be there at the time the date started. Jacquet could not find the right tempo for this tune. Basie came in about an hour and a half after the date started, and stomped off a tempo. That was the tempo. That was it. Fantastic.

"Basie was one of the two people I've worked with who had this great ability to pick right tempos. The other was Benny Goodman."

Hank showed me a discography of his work that a Japanese researcher had compiled. It was well over three hundred

pages. He has recorded with seemingly everyone. I noticed that he had recorded with Chet Baker. I said that Baker's work had evaded me in the early years. Only later did I become captivated by its spare, selective simplicity.

"He was a great player," Hank said. "Chet Baker's playing affected many people, from the standpoint of its simplicity. Probably this is the best testimonial to his over-all artistry. His playing was simple -- perhaps! But he had complex chords in mind. He may have been dancing all around, but he was conforming exactly to the chord progressions of the tune, or of the tune as he had *arranged* the chords. It only appeared to be simple. This is probably the best expression of an artist -- when the artist can make something appear to be simple. And yet underneath, it was complicated harmonically."

I said I'd been told that Baker couldn't read. Hank said, "I find it hard to believe. He gave me a set of chord changes. Perhaps he didn't put them down, but he certainly knew what he was doing. I think he could read. The worst you could say is that he had a terrific ear. People say that Erroll Garner couldn't read, but Erroll played some of the most fantastic things. I would settle for not being able to read if I could play like that. Erroll had a wonderful way of playing that made you feel happiness. Fats Waller had that quality, although the style was not the same. But they had this quality of making you feel good. You got into the spirit of it.

"You know the joke about Louis Armstrong. Knowing Louis, I think he really said it. Somebody asked if he could read. He said, 'Not enough to hurt my playing.' Or was it 'Not enough to help my playing'?"

I mentioned Wes Montgomery, who swore to me that he couldn't read and had no idea what chord symbols meant. And of course Bix Beiderbecke read badly if at all.

Hank said, "These people who couldn't read had exceptional ears, highly developed. They had an ingrained sense of harmony, and perhaps were writing the harmony as they played. It just proves that the ability to read is not absolutely necessary. It helps. You certainly couldn't hold a studio job or go to a recording date and play a sheaf of music sitting on your stand. On the other hand, the guys who can do that are not always the guys who can sit down and play the most interesting solos."

"Well," I said, "Clark Terry told me once that when he was in the *Tonight Show* band, he could read like a shark because he was doing it every day, but when he left and went out just to play jazz, his reading slipped."

"True. You have to read all the time to keep that skill. When I was on staff at CBS, my reading developed."

Breakfast was over. I drank some more of Teddy's powerful coffee. The snow had stopped. From the front window of the house, beyond a long sloping lawn, all white, and a large pond, black in the snow, you could see that the highway was clear. I quoted to Hank something the Chicago pianist Fred Kaz had said to me long ago:

"My music has what my life does not: emotional freedom."

Hank said, "Music offers a means of emotional outlet. That is not practical in normal life. I don't want to sound dogmatic about this, I'm no psychiatrist. I feel that sports serve somewhat the same purpose: an activity that provides emotional outlet that is not practical in real life. I think there's something there."

I almost could hear the unfinished thought. I said, "Then it's crossed your mind too that there must be a strong correlation between emotional repression and high blood pressure in the male black population."

"Oh yes. Along with the realization that you're repressing something that should not have to be repressed, because there's a certain inequity involved, a certain denial of rights. More and more, though, I think you will see this manifestation of repression of feelings diminish, as the whole scene changes, as more and more people are given means to express them. When there's nothing to repress, I think you'll see high blood pressure gradually diminish in black men. They have been slighted. They traditionally have had to bear the brunt. Hopefully this will diminish in the future. You always have to have hope, even though the hope is not necessarily justified.

"I think it's possible to overcome it, if you have it within yourself to keep a cap on your emotions without repressing them, without allowing them to build to the point where they need to be repressed, and not having the freedom, the outlet for them to escape.

"Music does that in a sense. It allows you an avenue of expression. Emotions can be transposed into musical thought, musical feeling. There's a transfer that goes on between emotions and musical expression."

The snow in Hank's long driveway was turning to slush. I gathered my things from the guest room. It was now mid-afternoon.

I mentioned that there had been a controversy of late over the claim by European writers and critics that Europeans were the first to recognize and appreciate jazz and the growing body of evidence that this is not so.

Hank said, "I disagree with the notion that Europeans initially appreciated jazz more than Americans. I don't think there's ever been a problem of appreciation. The problem has been, and is, that jazz has not been adequately compensated. They forget that musicians who play jazz for a living have to play jazz *for a living*. Jazz has never been adequately compensated for in this country. That is not to say that it has been adequately compensated for in Europe either. That is the universal problem with jazz, with the possible exception of Japan."

I bade my farewells to Teddy. Hank walked me to the front door and we shook hands. "Drive carefully," he said.

I walked out past the tilted basketball pole and got into the car. The road wound south through the Catskills, magnificent under the fresh snow. Wide white ski trails descended through the pines on the mountains. A soft rain started and it seemed likely that the winter was over.