Gene Lees
Jazzletter

P.O. Box 240
Ojai, Calif.
93023

April 1989

Vol. 8 No. 4

Now that April's Gone

A number of people who have read *Oscar Peterson: The Will to Swing* have asked about the dedication, which reads: "To Morley Callaghan, for a kindness in a cafe many years ago without which this book almost certainly would not have been written." This is the reason for it.

To anyone growing up in Canada forty years ago, it appeared that Canadians had never accomplished anything. Superman, Batman, The Green Lantern, The Spirit, Dick Tracy, Red Ryder, Flash Gordon, Tailspin Tommie and Smilin' Jack, and for that matter, Frank Merriwell and Tom Swift, were Americans. Our afternoon radio-series heroes were Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy, Don Winslow of the Navy, The Shadow, The Green Hornet, Mr. District Attorney and The Lone Ranger, Americans to a man. So too the comedians who made us laugh and the singers who sang our love songs, all of them American.

In the Niagara Peninsula, we listened to radio stations WGR and WBEN in Buffalo and WHAM in Rochester, and the likes of Count Basie and Tommy Dorsey. All the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation seemed to offer was corn such as *The Happy Gang*, and a belief in our national mediocrity was reinforced by Canada's one famous musical export, Guy Lombardo. We saw nothing to get excited about in the trumpet player on *The Happy Gang*, a folksy song-and-joke show. His name was Robert Farnon, and later he went to England as head of the Canadian Army band for which he wrote some charts the significance of which is known to every major arranger in the western world. But who knew anything about that, or about kids then growing up such as Rob McConnell and Ed Bickert? And for that matter, Oscar Peterson. And Glenn Gould.

So while Robert Taylor resisted the wicked Japs in *Bataan* and John Wayne beat them back in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, we remained insensitive to the tragedy of Dieppe. When Cecil B. DeMille gave a nod to our existence in *Northwest Mounted Police*, an American cowboy, Gary Cooper, had to come up to Canada to show the hapless redcoats how to lasso a Gatling gun and save the day. Come to that, so completely did American entertainment appropriate our Mounties that I thought *Renfrew of the Mounted*, one of the radio serial heroes, *was* an American. I can remember being vaguely surprised to find out that the Mounties were Canadian.

Small wonder that so many of us had an identity problem, one symptom of which was that we approached whatever Canadian art or entertainment there was with a conditioned condescension, imposing our own doubts upon it. That problem, incidentally, left me permanently sympathetic to the black-identity problem in the United States. When all the heroines presented to your young people are in the mould of Jean Harlow and Marilyn Monroe, how can a young black girl see herself as beautiful? When all the blacks in movies are porters are doormen, how can a young black boy aspire to be a test pilot? Or an astronaut. The "black militants" were quite right to fight for integration of television commercials, and Oscar Peterson was quite right to fight for the same thing in Canada, a battle he has at least partially won. I ardently supported him on that issue.

Curiously -- not-so-curiously, actually -- I had no trouble believing that Canadians could paint, because of the achievements of that coterie of artists, led by Tom Thomson, that became known as The Group of Seven. Canada produced magnificent painters and graphic designers, and in my opinion, while it lagged behind the other arts for complex reasons of population and geography, it early became one of the major nations in graphics, and still is. Perhaps it was because I believed that painting was something a Canadian *could* do that I at first pursued this instead of a couple of other natural predilections I seemed to have. At seventeen, I became a scholarship student at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto.

But in my second year, a discontent overtook me. I would spend days at the public library, voraciously consuming -- what else? -- American authors. I read the plays of Robert E. Sherwood and Eugene O'Neill, and the novels of John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson. I read short stories insatiably, including William Saroyan's. (In high school we had read English authors only, along with a bit of Canadian nature poetry such as the gifted Indian Pauline Johnson's *The Song My Paddle Sings*.) I was increasingly doubtful that I wanted to paint; I was being possessed of a desire to write. But Canadians couldn't write, except maybe nature poetry. All we could do was paint pictures of the forests, the tundra and the grain elevators, like Tom Thomson and Lawren Harris (whose work I adored, and still do) and A.Y. Jackson. We were good at that, and cutting wood, and hockey.

Then I came across a volume of short stories called *Now That April's Here*, whose title obviously was drawn from Browning: "Oh, to be in England, now that April's here." I fell in love with them and their author, Morley Callaghan, who it seemed had spent time in Paris with Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Another distant, lofty, foreign eminence. But wait! What was this reference, in one story, to Windsor? And another to Yonge Street? Had one of those foreign writers acknowledged that Canada existed? (Voltaire acknowledged it, in way. He dismissed it as a being nothing but a few arpents of snow, not worth spilling a drop of French blood for.) Had one of them even set a story or two in Canada? And there was something right about the stories, too. The Canadians who turned up now and then in American movies always had British accents, while the Canadians who turned up now and then in British movies had American accents. The tone of these Morley Callaghan stories, the Canadian settings and the dialogue, were on the mark.

I read that book in a sitting. Nothing I had read spoke to me of my country as these stories did. I looked up their

author in a reference book and learned he was indeed a Canadian. I was astounded. And I was too far in to get out, too much in love with his writing to impose upon it my Canadian doubts and preconceptions, too enthralled by the poignant compassion that infused his vivid portraits. I had been trapped into the discovery that a Canadian really could write at the level.

If Callaghan was a Canadian, perhaps he did not live in Paris or London or New York or one of those exotic places. Perhaps he lived in Canada. Maybe even in Toronto. I opened a telephone directory. And there was his name, and an address on Walmer Road. (Walmer Road runs by the Casa Loma, an old castle that gave its name to a pioneering American band.)

I shared a room at that time with a young artist named Harry Harley, who later became a cartoonist. Harry and I had gone to high school together. Harry urged me to call on this Morley Callaghan. What would I say to him? Why should he waste his time on me? But Harry persisted, and finally I went to Walmer Road and knocked on a door as Harry stood on the sidewalk, watching and not allowing me to turn and run. A man appeared. He seemed pretty old to me; he was forty-three.

"Yes?" he said.

"Are you Morley Callaghan?" My hands shook.

"Yes."

"Sir," I blurted, "I think I want to be a writer."

He said, "My son has the mumps, or I'd invite you in. On Bloor Street there's a restaurant called the Varsity. If you'd like to go down there, I'll join you."

Harry and I went there and waited. It was a nondescript cafe, the tables in the booths covered in pale formica. Morley Callaghan appeared, and actually sat down in the booth with us. He was the first famous man I ever met. He talked to me for at least two hours, about writing and writers. I cannot remember anything he said, although I am sure he gave me the only piece of advice you really can give an aspiring writer: keep doing it till you get it right. Did he speak of other deities of his acquaintance, such as Saroyan?

More important than any specific thing he told me was the dim realization that art was made not by gods but by flesh-and-blood human beings, that people like him actually did sit down a typewriters and produce books by patient labor. And the kindness he expended that day gave me a tentative and timid feeling that I just might achieve something.

Within a few weeks of that encounter, I was an editorial assistant at a trade magazine called *The Canadian Broadcaster*, getting a cram course in radio and the dawning medium of television. I interviewed Stan Kenton. Not long after that I was a reporter at the Hamilton *Spectator*, unknowingly reliving experiences Callaghan had known in the 1920s as a reporter at the Toronto *Daily Star*. He had been one of the reporters covering a fire at a resort in Muskoka, and hated it. I worked on the story of the burning of a passenger ship called the Noronic in Toronto harbor, and hated it. He loathed calling on the parents of dead children for photos; so did I.

Rereading recently Callaghan's wonderful book *That Summer In Paris,* which chronicles his relationship with F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway and examines the involuted relationship between those two, I was startled to realize how closely I had followed his pattern. I even worked briefly at the Toronto Daily Star, then went to the Montreal Star, and then to Paris, and at last moved away to Chicago, New York, California. At last I went to *Down Beat* and found myself immersed in the world of jazz. The encounter with Morley Callaghan slipped further into the past. But I never quite forgot it.

Along the way I met a good many of my heroes, some of whom were disappointments, but others among whom, such as Woody Herman, turned out to be as great a human being as I could ever have imagined, and others, nearer to my own age, such as Gerry Mulligan, who became personal friends. A couple of books of mine were published. Then Oxford University Press contracted to publish three volumes of essays from the *Jazzletter*, and I began working on the Oscar Peterson biography. Shortly after the first of the Oxford books, titled Singers and the Song, came out, I was talking on the telephone to Gene Kelly, another of my heroes who turned out to have not feet of clay but, in his special case, feet with wings on.

He teased, "You always sound like my father." Gene's father was from Sarnia, Ontario, and Gene says I talk like him.

"Speaking of Irish-Canadians," I said, "have you read any of the work of Morley Callaghan?"

"Of course," Gene said. "A wonderful writer. I knew him back in New York."

I described my encounter with Callaghan, concluding, "If he had fluffed me off that day, I'm certain that I would never have written anything at all. Never even tried."

"That's a lovely story," Gene said. "Did you ever tell it to him?"

"No," I said. "I never saw him again."

"Don't you think you should?" Gene said gently. "I believe he's still writing.

I suddenly realized I had left a debt unpaid. "Yes," I said. "I'm going to track him down."

It wasn't hard. He was still in the Toronto phone book. I wrote him a letter, tel,ling him the story of our brief encounter and thanking him for that long-ago afternoon that changed my life.

In due course a letter came back. It not only had not been written on a word processor, it hadn't even been written on an electric typewriter. The script was that of an old mechanical typewriter. It read:

"Dear Mr. Lees:

"Your letter delighted me, and what I do remember is that I walked down to a restaurant called the Varsity at Bloor and Spadina. There is a difficulty in talking to a young writer who comes to see you, as I have found out. You discover that all his tastes are utterly alien to yours, and you want to run. You and I must have found a lot to talk about.

"In New York in the forties I went with my friend Bill Saroyan to meet Gene Kelly and Betsy Blair, whom he was

about to marry, and I remember Saroyan saying, 'Don't get this guy wrong. He read a lot.' I liked Kelly and always felt good about his success.

"As for me, I am finishing a new novel. I showed your letter to my son Barry and he was quite moved by it. Isn't it odd how little incidents remain in the mind for years -- like Dostoevski's 'good memory of things' as the way to live?

"I'd be glad to see you if you come this way.

"Ever Yours,

"Morley Callaghan."

Late one morning ten months later, I knocked on a door in Rosedale, a lovely old neighborhood of great old homes that lies between two wooded ravines near the heart of Toronto. There was no answer. A car pulled up in front and a man got out and ascended the walk. We introduced ourselves. Michael Callaghan told me his father often wrote late and slept late. I started to walk away. Michael went into the house, then came out and called me back. I entered the front door. Morley was standing in the hall, wearing a brown sweater and holding a cane. He was somewhat bent by time an by a recent bout of flu.

We shook hands. "I'm the kid who knocked on you door forty-one years ago," I said. "I brought you a book."

I had anticipated that the moment would be emotional, but not this emotional. I was terribly choked.

"Come in, come in," he said, and we went into the living room and st down, he in silhouette against a front window that glowed with sunlight rebounding from new-fallen snow. "How old are you now?" he said. "I'll be sixty next month." I realized that he was eighty-four. He was born in Toronto in 1903.

"Sixty," he said, digesting the thought. "The sixties are good years for a writer -- a conclusion reached by a friend of mind by devious and arcane ministrations. He was a poet unencumbered by fame. I had a very good run in my sixties."

Of course! I had doubtless been thrilled on that long-ago day simply to hear him extemporize English: language flowed from him effortlessly, like a brook. The Irish gift.

I was able to stay only a short time that day. I returned two afternoons later, and since then I have been back a number of times. "Do you want a drink?" he said, and I knew he meant a drink, not white wine or Perrier.

"What have you got in mind?" I said.

"Scotch," he said bluntly, and he went to the kitchen and returned with two stiff ones.

We talked about the death of this wife, Loretto. I mentioned that Gene Kelly's wife, Betsy Blair, had also died. She had been in Saroyan's All the Beautiful People with Gene when Morley met them. He said it had been fun to go about New York with Saroyan, who thoroughly enjoyed his celebrity. We talked about the late writing of Henry James, which he doesn't care for and neither do I. I said I thought Scott Fitzgerald had not stood the test of time, that Hemingway had been overrated in his lifetime and then underrated after his death. Morley eagerly agreed, but added that a fairer evaluation of Hemingway was taking place. He did not think as highly of Malcolm Lowery's *Under the Volcano* as I do. I told him I'd met Faulkner and Saroyan, though neither encounter had compared with meeting him at the house on Walmer Road.

"I've been rereading you," I said. "A lot. Hemingway's writing has a labored simplicity. Yours has an unaffected, and very deceptive, simplicity." Since that day, I have read his mysterious and fascinating new novel, *A Wild Old Man on the Road*. Callaghan achieves arrestingly subtle shades of emotion by almost undetectable means. I'm not sure this has been fully appreciated, even though in the 1930s and '40s, with the support of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Maxwell Perkins, he enjoyed a considerable vogue.

"You know," he said, "I did some of my best stories when I was only twenty-two."

"I know that. When you were first published, you were only three years older than I was when I came to your door."

"I had the problem of a too-early success," he said.

The afternoon waned. Barry Callaghan, whose mumps had prevented my entering the house on Walmer Road that long-ago-day, arrived. Then my brother, David Lees, who is eighteen years my junior and is now a prominent writer, came by to pick me up. My brother and I left together, he marveling at the figures who had crossed Morley's path. Brushes with history do that to you. I remember the vague awe I felt when I met Marguerite Long, who was the first to play many of Ravel's piano works, and Marc Pincherle, the musicologist, who was his friend.

When I got home to California I called Gene Kelly. I said, "I have regards to you from Morley Callaghan." And some circle in my life was completed.

I never did have much confidence, in anything I ever did. Nothing gave it to me until I started the *Jazzletter*. You gave it to me, the people on the list in the March issue.

But I would never have got from there to here without Morley Callaghan, and that's why the dedication reads as it does.

Of Good Guys and Bad

In a way, Joe Smith, president and CEO (by the way, when did that neologism come into use?) of Capitol Records, did us all a favor by giving us a glimpse into the character and mentality of those who run the major record companies. His wonderfuly neutral name has become a metaphor for all big-label executives.

It is, or should be, obvious to all of us that we are not in the same business that they are. I'm not sure we're on the same planet.

These people do not have esthetics; they have bottom lines. The movie companies are no different, nor are the book publishing houses. The reason for the similarity is simple: the ownership of the three industries is the same. And television is part of it. Now that the Republicans are moving toward the total deregulation of broadcasting, a process begun

under Reagan, you can assume that in a few years much of the radio industry will have come into the hands of four or five corporations. As it is, almost the totality of American communications is owned by ten corporations, whose heads -- the CEOs; I just love that the nail-polishing tone of that acronym -- can gather at a table and decide what the public will and will not hear, see, and read. Thoughtful Americans have always feared censorship by government; they failed to foresee censorship by corporation, and the government did nothing to prevent it, since those who get elected to office do so with the support of those very corporations.

Dave Grusin, who is not only a fine musician but a percerptive observer of the music business, as one of the two heads of GRP records, said recently that he suspects that in the foreseeable future, there may well be only two major record companies in America, CBS and Warner Bros.

Warner Communications -- the whole outfit, movie company, record company, book publishing company, and all -- has just been purchased by Time-Life, which already owns, among other vast holdings, Home Box Office. The result is the biggest communications conglomerate in the world. How honestly do you expect Time to cover future scandals in the movie, record, and television industries, unless of course something is done by a rival that is against Time's own interests? Do you expect Time to take any stand against the interests of HBO or Warner Communications? And your local Congressman to rail against the depredations of these industries? Or Time?

If all that is good and valuable in this culture is to survive, it will not be through the good offices of the major record or book-publishing companies. Already an important outlet for serious authors has arisen in the university publishing operations, such as Oxford University Press, which in recent years has put out a rich and valuable collection of books on jazz by almost every important author in the field, and the University of Arkansas Press, which has just published a collection of the excellent essays of Doug Ramsey, *Jazz Matters: Reflections on the Music and Some of Its Makers*, as well as a slim interesting novel called *Long Blues in A Minor* by French writer Gerard Herzhaft. Arkansas publishes what the trade refers to as midlist books. Miller Williams, head of U. of A. Press, translates this: "It means good books that New York doesn't want."

Slowly but surely, a new culture is emerging in America. It is inchoate at present, disorganized, gropings its way. In the field of music, it involves jazz societies, independent labels, and gifted musicians trying to find listeners who are at the same time trying to find them.

Recently I was a panel speaker, along with Gerald Wilson, Buddy Collette, and Leonard Feather, at the Los Angeles meeting of the American Federation of Jazz Societies. Hal Davis, one of its founding members, gave an encouraging insight into what the jazz societies of America are at long last achieving. Jazz societies in the past were so fiercely partisan that they were ineffectual, the Dixieland buffs still reiterating their silly idea that bebop killed the big bands. (Nobody had to play or listen to bebop. Guy Lombardo didn't; he survived.) Evidently that phase is passing, and the jazz societies are becoming an important force in American cultural life.

Hal made the important point that jazz societies must ally themselves with the other cultural organizations in their communities. The fact is that many, many jazz fans in the past actually relished the idea that jazz is a persecuted and despised music. This gave them a glorious sense of their own martyrdom to a losing if not lost cause. With friends like these, jazz never needed enemies. They loved the idea of the separation of jazz from all other arts. But that phase too is past, and more and more people in positions of influence, such as Hal Davis, are turning out to have broad tastes and interests and a certain political dexterity in making common cause with the other arts. The other day the young assistant conductor of the San Diego Symphony visited my house. We sat around listening to jazz, of which he had a prodigious knowledge. He's trying to figure out a format for a concert with Phil Woods.

After the panel, I asked Hal some questions about the group he heads in Sarasota, Florida. It seemed to me there was an object lesson in his, and the group's, activities. Incidentally, Hal was once Benny Goodman's press agent. One of the readers who was most incensed about the Bill Crow essays on the Goodman tour of the Soviet union sent the series in a rage to Hal, who promptly became a subscriber. Hal and I have since become good friends. Hal, who was genuinely fond of Goodman, asked if he might write a piece for us called *The Other Side of Benny Goodman*. Absolutely, I said. I look forward to it, as I'm sure you do.

Hal, it should be remembered, is an alumnus of a major label, Columbia. Charlie Lourie is an alumnus of Warner Bros. I want to tell you what's happened to Charlie and his partner, Michael Cuscuna, since I first reported on their company. After that, Hal will tell you about what he and his friends have accomplished in the last decade in Sarasota, Florida. It is an object lesson for all of us.

Surely there is no one left who hasn't heard the joke about the blind snake and the blind rabbit? This joke went through the business faster than any other in its history. Charlie Lourie told it to me. When, a day later, I tried to tell it to Gerry Mulligan, he stopped me, having already heard it. "And do you know where I heard it?" he said. "In Tel Aviv, from Itzahk Perlman." In case you missed it, here it is:

A blind snake and a blind rabbit bump into each other in the forest. Each is profusely apologetic, explaining that he has been blind from birth. Having found a kindred spirit, the rabbit asks the snake if he would mind feeling him over and telling him what he is, since he has never known. The snake wraps himself around the rabbit, then uncoils and says, "Well, you're furry and you have long ears and legs and a little cute fluffy tail. I think you're a rabbit." The rabbit thanks him; the snake says, "And now, would you mind doing the same for me?" The rabbit runs his sensitive nose and whiskers over the snake and says, "Well, you're low and cold and slimy and you ve got no ears. You must be a record executive."

And now for some good news.

The Making of a Jazz Club

by Hal Davis

Sarasota, Florida

Dick and Maddie Gibson of Denver, Colorado, pointed the way. Before they started their first jazz party twenty-seven years ago, a few not-for-profit jazz clubs were already in existence. But it was the Gibsons, putting individually-hired musicians together in different contexts, who saved the careers of countless jazz instrumentalists.

Now, a quarter century later, this format, the jazz party, has evolved into a circuit across the country, replacing vaudeville and movie theaters (where bands used to play), nightclubs and hotels, as places for musicians to play --and get paid.

For those not familiar with the concept, the jazz party is an event staged, usually over a weekend, by an individual enthusiast, or small club of them. A fee is charged for the entire event. Since the money has been paid in advance, there is no desperate insecurity about last-minute ticket sales. Usually the jazz party differs from the jazz festival particularly in that its purpose is not to attract huge impersonal crowds in great outdoor arenas, but smaller crowds, perhaps five or six hundred people, who hear the music indoors in ballrooms or other suitable locales in comparative intimacy.

No longer does a musician have to sneak into town for the dubious pleasure of playing for a promoter who may, or may not, be able to pay the freight of that evening. Today the musician attending a jazz party, or festival, is hailed as a star by admirers meeting him or her at the airport and driven in style to a motel, hotel, or private home. Every reasonable request is granted by those throwing the party. The money is always there, and so is the crowd, pre-conditioned to cheering each instrumentalist and singer. The jazz parties constitute an underground industry that has grown dramatically in the last ten years. Playing jazz has become a different game.

From the biggest spectacle, the Sacramento Dixieland Festival, which has a two million dollar budget and books a hundred and thirty bands, to the smallest jazz party (and nobody knows which one it is), grass-roots support of jazz has grown to astounding proportions. Billy Taylor has noted that jazz really has a large audience, despite its standing as a relatively small segment of the music business. The members of that audience are more and more likely to belong to a local jazz society or club, paying annual dues and attending a consistent program of concerts presented by the club, and as often as not culminating in an annual jazz party or festival.

The American Federation of Jazz Societies is currently making a study of the economic impact of jazz on a community. Some surprising figures have already come to light. The University of South Florida a few years ago made a study of the economic effect of the arts on Sarasota. It gave the arts a seven-to-one value in dollars. That is, for every dollar expended in support of the arts, Sarasota received seven in return, spent in restaurants, hotels, service stations, and other local business. That is a whopping profit.

More studies are needed, and the AFJS is undertaking them. I can perhaps put matters into perspective by focussing not on the country as a whole but on one city, and one jazz club, the club I know most about, due to my involvement in it: Sarasota.

At the end of 1978, I retired from Grey Advertising after twenty-two years in advertising and public relations and an extensive involvement with music, as a publicist for Columbia Records and later for individual jazz artists. January, 1979, found my wife Evelyn looking for an apartment in Sarasota on the urging of a friend who lived near our summer home in a very rural part of the Catskill Mountains in New York State. She called me in New York to say she'd found the ideal apartment, and we bought into a new community named Pelican Cove.

Sarasota was an unknown to us.

Soon after our arrival, we went to the opera at the Asolo, a charming Eighteenth Century opera house brought here complete from Asolo, Italy. The "orchestra" comprised two pianos, but the production was very good. And the cover of its program bore the familiar signature of graphic artist Alex Steinweiss. "I know him," I told Evelyn excitedly. "He was at Columbia with me before the war. He's a genius." Alex, as I have noted in a previous *Jazzletter*, invented the album cover with an attractive design, as opposed to mere print. I also discovered I knew the president of the opera society that staged this production: Leo Rogers. In New York Leo had operated an engraving shop that worked on Revlon, among other accounts. We'd met when I was doing some temporary work on the Revlon account. I found I had more friends in Sarasota. Composer and conductor Sid Bass turned up next. Sid had played piano in a band I had when we were teenagers. Then I found sculptor Frank Eliscu, who had designed the Heisman Trophy and was familiar to me through the National Sculpture Society. The circle of friends and acquaintance in Sarasota grew.

By the end of that year, we had become aware that something important to all of us was missing from our Sarasota world: jazz. Evelyn and I began inviting neighbors to our apartment to listen to records. And then Jerry Jerome surfaced. This hard-swinging tenorman divided his year between Long Island, where we had first met, and Sarasota. Jerry attended one of our early record sessions, and gave a demonstration of how the clarinet and saxophone are played.

We soon overflowed the apartment. We rented a recreation hall. In February, 1980, convinced that there was a market for jazz in this community, we organized the Jazz Club of Sarasota. Our neighbor Stan Hendricks, a lawyer who loves to play alto and soprano saxophones and worships jazz musicians volunteered his law services to obtain our non-profit charter

Almost immediately we had well over a hundred annua members. We moved into a community room at the Fortune Bank. It seemed time for a live concert.

Our first was at David Cohen Hall, a small room in th Florida West Coast Symphony building. Our first guests were Bucky Pizzarelli and his son John, who volunteered to get u off to a good start and charged nothing but their expenses

When 280 persons, paying five dollars each, overflowed the room, whose capacity was 250, we knew we had arrived. Bucky and John played their brilliant duets in the first half of the concert; for the second half, we added two local musicians, Len Wyatt on bass and Gary Pike on drums. This appearance gave Len, who had played with Jerry Wald before World War II and then given up music for retailing, a fast start back into the music business. The concert was a tremendous success.

Our second major project was the first Sarasota Jazz Festival.

And my first disappointment came when I made a case for joint promotion to both the New College String Quartet and the Florida West Coast Symphony. Both boards threw me out, saying in effect that we should make it on our own -- and then come back. Fair enough. We determined to do it.

We set about organizing our first festival, which was a success, and then the second. We drew enough attendance (at fifteen dollars a ticket) to have the fire department tell us we just couldn't have that many people in Lota Mundy Hall. We moved into Van Wezel Hall, which is much larger. In consultation with us, bassist Jack Lesberg lined up a fine cadre of musicians. Alex Steinweiss designed a superb logo, poster, and program cover, Sid Bass worked on committees, and Leo Rogers gave us the support of the Opera Society.

We were startled by the response. We had tapped a market from Tampa to Fort Myers and beyond. This market was older, affluent, and nostalgic, and not very knowing about jazz and its practitioners. But they were open-minded and eager to learn. We started to wean them away from the belief that a whistler doing *In the Mood* was great jazz.

Our membership kept growing. We instituted live concerts monthly, flying down from New York many of the same musicians who played our festivals. Through these concerts, our club members began to educate themselves on the fine points of quality performances by classic sidemen, young and old. We set up clinics in the high schools during the festivals. We began using local musicians for free community concerts, and others held to benefit local charities. We started our Library Gift Program, donating records and books about jazz to the Sarasota County and Manatee public libraries. We joined the Professional Alliance of Performing Arts, which included the opera and symphony, the New College Quartet, the Sarasota Concert Orchestra, and two theater groups. Our objectives were to spread the word of jazz in the community, and give jazz a higher visibility and status than it had enjoyed prior to the establishment of our society. We found that in the early 1970s, Sarasota had a Suncoast Jazz Club, headed by a prominent lawyer. It failed and folded. We went to the officers of that club and asked what went wrong. With their advice in mind, we programmed our own club meetings.

By the end of our first year, our membership had risen from over a hundred to over a thousand members. By the end of five, we had more than a thoujsand. We held special ceremonies, displayed for the first time a Sarasota Jazz Club flag, and celebrated. Today we have from thirteen to fourteen hundred members who pay $30 annual dues, or $50 for couples, in return for which they get seven concerts a year by top jazz men and women, a bimonthly newsletter, discounts on various jazz events, a Jazz on the Water cruise (which costs extra), a dance (also extra), and various other benefits and activities.

We have given away thousands of dollar in scholarships at the high-school level, helped sponsor an Air Force Reserve band at Van Wezel field, started an annual outdoor presentation of top local bands called Jazz in the Park -- a free concert that drew more than 5,000 people this year -- produce a holiday show for Van Wezel which this year will play the new Naples/Marcos Philharmonic Hall and then our own hall, sold several banks on extending our monthly concerts by producing a commercial presentation the day after, and manage to stage from thirty-five to forty-five free concerts for good causes each year. That includes the only jam session held in the area. Our Saturday afternoon Jazz Club Jams offer three hours of music to a capacity audience, and provide a chance for new professional musicians to meet and impress others so that they may start working in the area. At monthly concerts, we've presented people from Howard Alden through Milt Hinton to Glenn Zottola. We've had Marcus Roberts on piano with the Moffett Brothers on bass and drums, flutist Jan Rosemond with her trio, Scott Robinson, Michelle Hendricks, Lillette Jenkins, Carrie Smith, Lyn Roberts, Ricky Ford, Daniel Ponce, Kirk Lightsey, Grady Tate, Roland Hanna with Terri Lynne Carrington and Clint Houston, etc. Dick Hyman and Derek Smith, very big names here, sell a lot of tickets.

Oh yes, one other thing we did. We put former Benny Goodman drummer Mousey Alexander on the road to play inspirational sessions at stroke and heart clinics. Despite his own heart problem, Mousey kept it up until he died last year.

John Clayton Jr was the music director of our last festival -- the ninth. A big band played John's charts, and brother Jeff Clayton played reeds. Both did well with a clinic for high school musicians, a show for black youngsters up to the fifth grade from Booker elementary school, and a clinic by Brian Torff and John Clayton for young bassists from the symphony.

We have established the Satchmo award, sculpted by Frank Eliscu, to be presented to outstanding names in jazz. George Wein received the first one. Ella Fitzgerald received the award in 1988, and Milt Hinton in 1989.

In 1985, we gave Milt his own festival, a tribute to this remarkable man, our special favorite. Milt's autobiography, *Bass Line*, which is filled with his striking photography, is in a sense his greatest tribute, but we gave him ours, in the conviction that Milt *is* the story of jazz in America, as well as being the most enthusiastic advocate of this art form.

The Jazz Club of Sarasota has one paid part-time employee. Our office is in the opera house. Our activities are funded by dues, ticket sales, private donations, some corporate help, and, most recently, our first grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. On the urging of State Senator Bob Johnson and Jim Smith, head of the department of state government that deals with cultural affairs, Florida has contributed substantially to our health. And this wonderful town has a Woman's Exchange, which annually distributes hundreds of thousands of dollars to arts organizations. They have given us enough

money to buy rhythm instruments for our new elementary-school program on jazz.

We have built a solid core of perhaps twenty-five volunteers who can handle the facets of our operation, including running the office, arranging national and local transportation, bookings, designing stage displays -- our reigning star is Renzie Hamilton, who builds everything in his garage -- and whatever else is required. Backing them we have volunteers who turn out for specific assignments. We keep a log of our activities, hold monthly board meetings, review our future activities and then do critiques on them afterwards.

There are many jazz societies and clubs around the country, doing excellent work in their communities on behalf of jazz. We are in awe of such groups as the Cape Cod, New Jersey, and Pensacola jazz societies, the various Ohio and Pennsylvania organizations, Gainesville Friends of Jazz, HAGS on the Florida east coast, the clubs and societies in Tampa, Orlando, Biloxi, and St. Louis, the Jazz Institute of Chicago, the Denver Jazz Club, the Sedona Festival, the societies in Billings, Montana, and Bismarck, North Dakota, Don Miller in Phoenix, Arizona, and the many clubs in California. We learn much from the way they go about their business, and all of us exchange newsletters and news of festivals.

Multiply what we do in Sarasota by ninety or a hundred and you'll realize that jazz today has the strongest grass-roots support in its history. We push jazz radio programs and try to get record stores to stock product from the companies recording our artists, and keep trying to elevate the status of jazz in our own community and nationally. Record companies and others, including the musical instrument manufacturers, give little support to our efforts. Someday they will.

Many clubs are called "traditional." Others present more varied programs. Still others book contemporary, or what is called contemporary. Some of us argue that Milt Hinton playing anything is contemporary.

But the problem of the younger audience faces all jazz societies, regardless of musical persuasion. If youngsters are not exposed to jazz in their early years, we lose them. That's why we try to work with the lower school grades.

Entering our tenth anniversary year in 1990, we plan a five-night festival, including a night of Symphony Meets Jazz, participating with other organizations in the performing arts in their own areas, doing lectures series, and expanding our community programs to make as many people as possible thrill to this marvelous music as we do. The key to our success has been a an incredible, dedicated group of volunteers. My wife Evelyn has worked as enthusiastically as I have, doing publicity and promotion for the club. Many of our board members are couples who work together as we do. We helped found the Sarasota Arts Council, working with people in all the arts. We anticipate that in a few years we will present the first overall Sarasota Arts Festival.

As all good managements should, we have planned for succession. My successor as president of the Jazz Club of Sarasota is twenty years younger than I, but just as enthusiastic as I. He has a somewhat different viewpoint, but that is as it should be and should take us through the changing jazz market and audience during the next ten years.

Why has Sarasota succeeded where other groups have failed in a few months? We have always made our own way financially, never exceeding our means: we have been creative in action and financially prudent in operation. And we have made common cause with people in the other arts.

-- HD

Life Among the Cartons -- Five Years Later

In 1984, the *Jazzletter* carried a story on a new record label, Mosaic, founded and operated by Charlie Lourie and Michael Cuscuna, two veterans of the major labels who wanted to make available important jazz from the past that was sleeping in vaults. After delicate negotiations with the labels that owned the rights to the original recordings, they started their little company with *The Complete Blue Note Thelonious Monk, The Complete Blue Note Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis*, and *The Original Gerry Mulligan Quartet with Chet Baker* from the Pacific Jazz label. The records, beautifully packaged in black boxes, were made available in limited editions by mail order only. The reasoning underlying this exercise in folly was that while they might not sell in vast quantities, at least Mosaic would receive the full retail price and the money would vanish along the way through the prestidigitation of distributors and other virtuosos of the sticky finger.

The operation had started two years earlier, and its office and shipping room consisted of Charlie Lourie's apartment in Santa Monica, California. Intrigued by the sheer madness of it, I paid a visit to Charlie, a graduate on woodwinds from the New England Conservatory with a considerable background with symphony orchestras and chamber and jazz groups. Great piles of cartons of the little company's product were stacked in the living room of the apartment. Charlie's wife Fran was cooking dinner while his young daughter romped among the cartons. I told Charlie I wanted to write a story about the company for to give it whatever boost I could. We drank a little California red wine and toasted each other and laughed and agreed that Mosaic had about as much chance of surviving as the *Jazzletter*, which was just about nil. "But I'm doing what I want to do," said Charlie, who'd borrowed money from his family to help get this operation going, "and I'm happy."

Mosaic is now seven years old. Charlie has moved to Stamford, Connecticut, and he and Michael Cuscuna have rented office and warehouse space. In 1983, Mosaic did a net business of $80,000. In 1988, it did $800,000. Its catalogue though small and specialized, was both important and exquisite and the company was thriving.

Now Cuscuna and Lourie have started a second company True Blue, which is in effect a jazz record store by mail. The purpose is to acquire the catalogs and selected reissues from labels all over the world and make them available by mail. They are offering the entire current Blue Note catalog, as well

as *The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* in a ten-CD package.

"We started True Blue," Charlie said recently, "because for several years people have been crying to us on the phone, asking if we could get them anything else, because sometimes they'd have to drive fifty miles or more to a record stores. Most record stores have only a token jazz section anyway. We didn't do it at first because we just didn't have the facilities, but we've reached the point where we can provide this service. True Blue is like a St. Bernard dog, going out into the wilderness with a keg of chicken soup." True Blue also offers a 535-page discography of Blue Note, compiled by Cuscuna and Michel Ruppli over a period of several years.

One of the most important packages Mosaic has undertaken is *The Complete Commodore Jazz Recordings*, which is being released in three volumes. Volume 1 alone is an astonishing 23-LP boxed set that includes some superb recordings by Willie the Lion Smith, Bud Freeman, Chu Berry, Billie Holiday, Jess Stacy, Stuff Smith, Coleman Hawkins, and more. Some Kansas City Six material includes a good deal of material by Lester Young at the peak of his powers. This package alone is a simply stunning set, a joyous reminder of what was going on in small-group jazz at the height of the swing era.

The Mosaic packages almost invariably entail complete sets of one kind or another by an artist -- usually his work for a given label. There are two complete sets by Monk (all the records he made for Blue Note and all his Black Lion\Vogue), sets by Johnny Hodges, Art Pepper, Shorty Rogers, Freddie Redd, Chet Baker, Ike Quebec, Paul Desmond, Herbie Nichols, Buddy DeFranco, Bud Powell (all the Blue Notes), Charles Mingus, Sidney Bechet, and others. The catalog that has been developed in seven years is simply amazing, and an inestimable addition to the available documentation of jazz history. Each package includes a booklet containing photos and a history of the recordings. The prices are reasonable.

A while back, when it had become obvious that the days of the LP were numbered, I asked Charlie if he and Michael were going into CDs. He said they were not, since they had acquired rights only to the LP reissue of the material. A year and a half later, that has all changed. SAys Cuscuna: "When the CDs first came out and the companies saw a chance to re-mine their catalogues, they were reluctant to let us issue CDs. But when it became apparent that they would have the same old problems, they relented and let us have them." So Mosaic is bringing on CD the Monk, Mulligan, Ammons and Lewis, Mingus, Chet Baker, DeFranco, and Desmond material.

One of the most fascinating of all their packages is now being assembled. I once told Billy Taylor, "If somebody put a gun to my head and said, 'You must absolutely name your one top-most favorite jazz pianist or die,' I just might say, 'Nat Cole.' Billy said, 'I just might say the same.' Cole's over-whelming success as a singer has obscured his importance and influence as a pianist. It is all through the work of Oscar Peterson and Oscar Peterson, and if you extend their influence in turn on pianists around the world, Cole's stature becomes obvious. He was an utterly joyous pianist, with a wonderfully ebullient bounce, exquisite tone, and lovely lyrical ideas.

After extensive negotiations with Capitol/EMI and the Cole estate, Cuscuna acquired the rights to all the Nat Cole trio material, which by extension includes the quartet with Jack Costanza. Cuscuna said, "There is an enormous amount of unreleased instrumental material, some of his finest work. Obviously he made these records and Capitol didn't want to release them because they didn't want them to conflict with his more commercial records. When we have completed the project, we will be issuing a package of fourteen to eighteen albums, in chronological order. Obviously they won't all go into one box."

Despite the move to CD, it would be unwise for anyone wanting these records to hold back. Lourie and Cuscuna planned from the beginning to limit each set to 7,500 numbered copies, and they are holding to that policy, with CD sales counted in with the LPs to make up that total. Some of the most popular LP sets, including the Monk Blue Note recordings, will not be issued in CD: the LP run is almost sold out. So a lot of this material will not be replaceable on CDs; in any case, the Mosaic pressings are the finest quality.

In those early days of Mosaic, one thing gave me the slight hope that the company might survive: in addition to being idealists about jazz, Lourie and Cuscuna were realists. And above all they were experienced. Lourie had been in the field of artist's management, had spent five years as a marketing executive with Columbia Records, then several more with United Artists Records as head of marketing for the Blue Note label and four years as head of the jazz department at Warner Bros. Records. Cuscuna had an extensive background as a discographer and producer for many labels. It seemed as if they just might know what they were doing; it seems now that they did.

(You can write to Mosaic and True Blue at 35 Melrose Place, Stamford CT 06902. Charlie and Michael will happily send you their catalog and order forms.)

Charlie is philosophical about the record business, recognizing that if real music is to survive in America, it will be through the efforts of independent labels. Charlie said, "The big boys are garbage-mongers. That's what they do, they sell garbage, and they do it very well. They're simply not set up to do what the independents are doing."

I asked Charlie how the comparative success (a success at which any major-label head would laugh contemptuously) of Mosaic has changed his life. Well, for one thing, the cartons are no longer in the living room. Charlie said, "I used to envy people who worked at home, but I found out that it's not all it's cracked up to be. I really like getting up in the morning, shaving and putting on clean clothes and going to an office."

He and Michael expect Mosaic to do a million dollars business next year -- and that is indeed a laughable figure, compared with sales of rock and pop LPs in the tens of millions of units and sometimes dollar sales upward of a hundred million.

"We're getting so big," Michael said with a laugh that mocked the majors, "that we're getting ready to give up jazz."

In a pig's eye. It looks as if Mosaic is just getting rolling.