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Al the Waiter

by Bill Crow

The Half Note on Hudson Street -- in a warehous district of lower Manhattan whose streets were deserted at night -- was one of New York's most congenial jazz clubs. It was operated by the Canterino family, Frank in the kitchen (spaghetti, eggplant Parmagiana and meatball sandwiches), his sons Mike and Sonny behind the bar, and sister Rose in the checkroom. When Mike got married, his wife Judy went right to work in the family business, pitching in wherever she was needed. The only outsider they hired besides the musicians was Al the Waiter, who became a legend with habitutes of the club.

Al became part of the Half Note family after Mike and Sonny got out of the service and convinced their dad that his neighborhood restaurant business could be expanded by putting in music at night. The boys liked jazz, and the groups they booked attracted a barful of serious drinkers and jazz lovers. They expanded into a vacant store next door, taking out part of the wall that separated them, and built a bandstand behind the bar that extended into the new room, which they filled with additional tables and chairs. With Mike and Sonny busy at the bar and Frank in the kitchen, they decided to hire a waiter.

They called an agency, and Al showed up for work in his tuxedo, with two small children in tow. He explained that his wife had just abandoned him, leaving him to care for the kids. Frank fixed them something to eat, Mike and Sonny gave them a table in the corner, and Al went to work. Not long after that his wife came back, took the children and disappeared again. From then on Al lived alone.

Al's last name was Berg, though his cabaret cards bore various names. As a youth he had been known as Al the Gonif in the neighborhood where he lived. Some early difficulty involving the New York City police had permanently stained his record as far as the licensing department was concerned. The cabaret law provided for no legal means of clearing one's record once a cabaret card had been denied or withdrawn. But there were other ways. Al worked at the Half Note for over twenty years on temporary cards, which he got by going downtown periodically to pay somebody off.

Al was cadaverously thin, the effect exaggerated by the absence of several molars. He kept up a constant stream of patter in his New York street dialect as he rushed from tables to bar to kitchen. When Al took an order, he repeated the names of the drinks loudly, but he often came back with something that hadn't been ordered. When he saw a customer take out a cigarette, he would dash over while pulling a match, lit, from the book he kept hooked over his belt. He could reach under his jacket with one hand, pull a match loose and strike it with the same motion, the effect being the sudden extraction of flame from somewhere inside his clothes. He worked in a tuxedo that was not new when he bought it, and he gave it years of hard wear. This constant ignition at close quarters had created a large singed area at the top of his trousers near the spot where he hung the matchbook.

As Al arrived at a table to take an order he would cry, "My greatest pleasure is to serve you!" When he returned with drinks or food he would shout, "Sorry to keep you waiting!" His ministrations were a little overwhelming, and sometimes tended to drown out the music. Though manic and loud, he really was eager to please his customers, and made regulars feel they were part of the family.

Al seemed as hard and brassy as a carnival pitchman, but he had a sentimental side. It was easily evoked by musicians' wives and girl friends. Al's existence away from the Half Note was a lonely one; he lived by himself in a small room on West 20th Street. When a musician brought a female guest to the Half Note, Al became super-solicitous. He would select the best table in the house and establish the couple with every amenity available: clean ash tray, napkins, silverware, salt and pepper shakers, coasters for their drinks. He would hover at the table, suggesting possible food and drink selections, lighting cigarettes, tidying the ashtray. Wives and girlfriends who came regularly would receive candy and greeting cards when they arrived. If anyone turned up with a child, Al would be beside himself trying to think of special treats that he could invent from ordinary bar and restaurant supplies.

Al's favorite was Margo Guryan, who in 1964 became Mrs. Bob Brookmeyer. Bob and Clark Terry appeared regularly at the Half Note with their quintet. Whenever Margo came down to hear the band, Al would produce all sorts of goodies and trinkets to please her. Margo felt a little embarrassed by Al's ministrations. The simplest polite thank you would cause him to double his efforts the next time she came in. When she once started to tell him he was overdoing it he looked so crushed that she couldn't go through with it.

At every holiday season Al chose Bob and Margo as the objects of his sentimentality. If the band wasn't working at the Half Note, the Brookmeyers would receive greeting cards and letters at their Greenwich Village apartment. One Easter a card from Al, decorated with gold foil and glitter-covered flowers, carried this printed message:

You're mighty nice to think of
When Easter Day is here,
But then you're nice to think of
Just any day all year...
And at this Happy Easter time
Good wishes go to you
For just a world of gladness
Today and all year through.

Al wasn't content with this sentiment; it didn't go far enough. After writing in "Mr. and Mrs. Bobby Brookmeyer," he inked in, before the printed message,

From My Heart To You Both Always The
VERY BEST OF EVERYTHING

Then he added extra words to the text, so it read:

You're mighty nice to think of ALWAY'S
When Easter Day is here, AND EVERY DAY
But then you're nice to think of ALWAY'S

Just any day all year AND FOREVER
And at this Happy Easter time AND EVERY TIME
Good wishes go to you BOTH
For just a world of gladness HEALTH SUCCESS HAPPINESS
AND HEALTH
Today and all year through. AND FOREVER
MAY YOUR BOTH LIFE'S ALWAY'S AND ALWAY'S BE AS HAPPY
BRIGHT SUCCESSFULL AND VERY HEALTHY AS THIS MOST BEAUTIFULL
LOVELY BRIGHT HOILDAY WHICH IS CALLED EASTER IS.

Alway's and Alway's
Your Sincere Faithfull
Pal and Waiter
Al

To add even more emphasis, every word Al had added to the card was surrounded with closely spaced little diagonal pen strokes to indicate radiance, and the entire message was surrounded with larger radiance marks.

When Al's generous feelings seized him, he expressed them in letters, always scrupulously addressed to both Bob and Margo. He didn't wish to be misunderstood. He thought they were the ideal couple, and treated them as his family. Al's letters were written in a large flowing hand on blue-lined foolscap writing paper, the pages carefully numbered with Roman numerals. One said:

Mr and Mrs Bobby BrookMeyer.

Hope that my letter to you Both Finds you Both in the Very Best of Health Happiness and also Very successfull in everything that you both do. and Plan to do always.

I hope that you both had a very wonderful Summer.

And I also Wish you both a Very Happy Successfull and Very Happy Winter. and Healthy One. Please let me know What you both Want for Christmas. Please. Thank you very much.

Please Always let me know If You both ever need Anything As it's my greatest Pleasure and Honor to Always give You both the Very best of every thing that you may need or Want always.

And Please never ever Thank me for anything As its my great Pleasure Always to give you both everything.

As soon as I get tickets for the Football Giants Games I will and with the greatest Pleasure Mail them to you. Or if I see you I will give them to you.

Thanking you Both for always being so very nice to me I always Wish to be your both Very Best sincere Friend And always your Both Very Sincere and Very Faithful Waiter

Al

In late December 1964 Al played Father Christmas, sending the Brookmeyers extravagant greeting cards and delivering gifts to their apartment house. After Christmas another letter arrived:

Mr and Mrs Bobby Brookmeyer

I wish that you both had a Very Enjoyable Healthy Merry Christmas. Please always let me know if there is any Very Good Broadway Shows and Very Good Movie Picture that you both would like to see And also any Good Fights Basketball Games Hockey Tennis or any kind of very good Sports Games that you both would like to see And I would Glady and with great Pleasure Get you both tickets to go too see what ever you both enjoy seeing.

But Please be kind enough and give me Two Weeks Notice on what you both would enjoy seeing and also the Day that You both Want to go on So this way I can have the two tickets ready for you both Thank you Very Much.

As its my Very great Pleasure and alway will be to give you both everything and also anything that you both want As I have everything I want and more beside And I want you both to have everything.

And alway go to the Very Best Broadway Shows Movies Fights Hockey Tennis BaseBall Games Basketball Games and Football Games (Giants will be the New Football Champs next year Bobby Did you see the Colts & Brown Game What a Game I had the Browns. I hope you did too.

When my oil Well strike oil Which I own, plenty of acres of Oil Land I will buy you your own Night Club and make you both Very Very Rich As you both Have alway been Very kind and good to Me which I alway appreciate it very much. from my Heart.

Did the Door Man of you Apartment House give you both 3 Big Shopping Bags Thursday Night Dec 24

Please let me know if he did. Thank you both.

Use and Wear evrything Alway in the Very Best of Health and Happiness Always. I hope, that you both like and enjoy everything.

Please Mr and Mrs Bobby Brook Meyer Never Thank Me for anything. As it is and alway Will be my great Pleasure to give you both every thing No Matter How Many Very Good Broadway Shows Movie Picture All kind of Good Sports Games that you both want to see.

I will always and With Great Pleasure get you both tickets to always see as Many and Many of Best Broadway Shows Movies and all kind of Sports Games that you would both Like to see Always

Just Please alway give me Two Weeks Notice the Day and if you both Want to go in the afternoon or night. Just let me know. Thank You. I alway wish to be and remain

Your Very Sincere
Faithfull Friend and Waiter

Al

At the bottom of the last page, surrounded with radiance marks, Al printed:

1965 MAY THE NEW YEAR 1965
JUST BRING TO YOU BOTH
ALWAY'S LOTS OF
HEALTH SUCCESS
WEALTH HAPPINESS
AND ALWAY'S
THE VERY BEST OF
EVERTHING TO YOU BOTH

New Year's Eve brought the Brookmeyers a telegram.

MR AND MRS BOBBY BROOKMEYER
10 WEST 16 ST APT 10C NYK
FROM MY HEART TO YOU BOTH AS THE CHIMES BRINGING IN THIS NEW YEARS MAY IT BRING TO YOU BOTH ALL THE HEALTH HAPPINESS WEALTH SUCCESS AND THE BEST OF EVERYTHING FOR YOU BOTH ALWAYS YOUR SINCERE AND FAITHFUL FRIEND AND WAITER

AL

In early 1965, after trying for years to get a representative of any New York record company to come to the Half Note to hear the band, Bob and Clark finally made a record for Mainstream. Brookmeyer gave Al the Waiter a copy. Al's letter said:

Mr and Mrs Bobby Brook Meyer
I want to thank you both from my Heart For the beautifull Stero Record that you both gave me I will always Play it on my Stero Player
Bobby:
I want to wish you all the Happiness Success and Good Luck on your first Record "called" TO NIGHT [radiance marks] With Clark Terry Roger Kellaway Bill Crow and Dave Baily.
May and I will pray to "God" That it should and will become a Big Smash Hit And over Two Million People Should and Will buy Your Smash Hit Record called TONIGHT [radiance marks] and I Will Personely tell everybody to buy it. Thanking you both for this wonderfull Gift which I thank you both Very much for.
I alway wish to be your sincere Fathfull Friend and Waiter
Al

In April, Bob received a card depicting roses and ferns entwined around a white satin ribbon, with the legend: "To Congratulate You." Bob had just joined the staff orchestra on the Merv Griffin Show, so he assumed that was what had occasioned the congratulations. Added to the printed "best wishes on your success," and thoroughly highlighted with radiance marks, was Al's block-lettered message:
FROM MY HEART TO YOU ALWAY'S THE VERY BEST OF EVERYTHING FOR YOU AND MRS BROOKMEYER AND ALL THE HEALTH SCCESS AND HAPPINESS ALWAYS TO YOU BOTH FROM MY HEART TO YOU
Always your Very Sincere Best Pal and Waiter
Al

Al the Waiter's final note in Margo's collection covered a single page:

Mr and Mrs Bobby Brookmeyer
I am Very sorry that
I couldn't get you both Better Seat for the Ball Game
Please forgive me
Have a Very Enjoyable Time Watching the Ball Game
It always and always Will be my greatest Pleasure to be your Both Very Sincere Pal Friend and Waiter always
AL

How do you like the ZOOM LENSE?

Bob and Margo's marriage came to an end without a great deal of turmoil. Margo said the hardest part was disillusioning Al the Waiter, who had supported their union so avidly. When she remarried, Margo gave me Al's letters and cards in case I should ever want to write about him.

Al called the Half Note one night to say he wasn't feeling well, and wouldn't be coming in. Mike and Sonny heard no more from him for a couple of days, so they decided they'd better go see how he was. They went to his rooming house but got no response when they knocked. Fearing the worst, they broke down the door and found Al had died in his bed. In his tiny cell a giant air-conditioner was going full blast. Mike said it was so cold in the room that if they hadn't found him his body would have been preserved forever. Al's only possessions besides the air-conditioner were a large screen television, a well stocked liquor shelf, a few clothes, and three thousand dollars in one-dollar bills, each bill wadded into a tight little ball and tossed into a drawer.

The Half Note moved to 54th Street in 1972. It lost much of its ambience in the transplant and went out of business before long. The Canterinos went their various ways, as did the groups that had made so much music for them. But, for those of us who were part of the family, the memories are poignant. It takes no effort at all to reimagine the old club and fill it with all the good musicians who played there and all the friends who used to crowd the bar and tables. In those empty streets cobbled with red brick, it seemed, with its warm lights and the smell of its food and the sound of its music, a haven in the night.

And hurrying among the throng, bringing drinks, serving food, lighting cigarettes, Al the Waiter, proclaiming loudly to one and all, "Sorry to keep you waiting! My greatest pleasure is to serve you!"

-- BC

Waiting for Dizzy
Part I

It felt strange, going out there. And we got lost. "This isn't it," Benny Golson said, as the driver of the van pulled into a

parking lot by an office building in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. Art Farmer concurred. It looked unfamiliar to me, but then I hadn't been to Rudy van Gelder's recording studio in twenty-five years and was disoriented by the new buildings along what once was a country highway. I had last come out here for the *Bill Evans with Symphony Orchestra* session that Creed Taylor produced for Verve. That was in 1965.

We left the parking lot and traveled a little farther. Benny said, "I think this is it," and the driver pulled into a lane among trees, running in an S-shape in a mini-woodland and strewn with puddles from last night's rain, and suddenly there was the cement block building with a high-peaked roof that Rudy van Gelder had built a good thirty years ago to capture some of the acoustic qualities of a church. A sign affixed by the door advised all ye who entered here that there was to be no smoking or drinking within these walls. Rudy said cigarette smoke penetrated and damaged recording equipment. Everyone who had ever recorded here knew Rudy's quirks, and one of them was that you never touched his equipment.

"You know," Art Farmer said, in his low slow voice and with a somewhat grave and almost frowning expression he takes on when he is about to lay something funny on you, "Jim Hall and Red Mitchell have the classic story about Rudy. Red went to high school with Rudy. Red and Jim were here doing a duo record. They talked about the sound they wanted, and Red was in the control room with Rudy, and Red said, 'You know, Rudy, maybe if we just put a little more of this in there.' And he touched one of those faders, and Rudy said, 'That's it. You don't owe me anything. Just pack up and get out.'"

Benny laughed. "He pushed friendship a little too far."

"That was it," Art said. "If you touched anything in his control room . . . "

We went into the building. The studio was immediately familiar: the peaked wooden ceiling, the cement-block walls, the recording booth. Rudy still wore cotton gloves when he left the booth to adjust a microphone in the studio. I asked him why he did it. He said, "I'll tell you why I do it. Because it doesn't leave fingerprints on the microphones."

Rudy looked much the same. So did Creed Taylor, youthful -- almost boyish -- at sixty-two. His sandy hair had thinned a little at the back, and he wore slightly tinted glasses. But he showed no sign of the strain of his eleven-year legal battle with Warner Bros. Records, a battle he had won in Santa Monica after the longest civil suit in the history of the California supreme court.

One thing was different, though: the studio was filled with television equipment, high floodlights shining down from suspended tubes of black cloth and making pools of light on the floor around music stands and microphones, and cameras, including a monstrous instrument mounted on a boom. The crew was getting set up.

Creed won a large settlement in that suit; his lawyers had advised him that he could get much more if he wanted to fight further, but he'd said, No, he'd had enough; he wanted to get on with his work, get back to his career, get back to making records. This first session for his CTI label was to be something extraordinary: the first high definition (or hi-def, as it is already being called) jazz video in America and, probably, the world. High-definition television is already on the air an hour a day in Tokyo, and some form of it will probably be in use in America sooner than anyone thinks. With double the number of lines to the screen, it looks like color photos in motion. The vividness is startling. Outside, crews were getting ready for the sessions in a huge video truck next to a generator truck. These cameras were prototypes, and one of them alone was costing $27,000 a day. The mere thought of the cost of this recording made me uneasy.

It was a typical Creed Taylor move: daring and original. Like the *Bill Evans with Symphony Orchestra*, which must have been an expensive album; or Bill's three-piano *Conversations with Myself*, which got Bill his first Grammy; or the Freddy Hubbard *Red Clay* album; or *The Individualism of Gil Evans*, made when nobody in the world thought Gil was "commercial" and which Creed made only because he loved Gil's writing. Or the great Jimmy Smith albums. Or the George Benson recordings.

Creed had called me in California and asked me to come east and work on this hi-def video project. He wanted me to interview some of the musicians, capture if possible some of their personalities and histories on film in segments to be spaced among the musical numbers. It sounded a little nuts to me, but I have great faith in Creed's imagination. He will take chances, go into things with only a faint idea of how they will come out, putting his faith in the people he's working with.

And he had ordered up a varied, to say the least, crew of musicians: among them Art Farmer, Robben Ford, Jimmy McGriff, John Scofield, Marvin "Smitty" Smith, Phil Woods, Bob Berg, Anthony Jackson, Charlie Haden, Bernard Purdie, Tito Puente, Airto Moreira and his wife Flora Purim, Romero Lubambo, Hilton Ruiz, and Dizzy Gillespie. Creed idolizes Dizzy, still remembering in awe the first time he saw him, fronting his big band back when Creed was an undergraduate in psychology at Duke University. He was looking forward to Dizzy's arrival. And he was treating everyone like royalty.

In the past few days, we had discussed the project at length. Creed said, "How do we keep it out of the record-store bins marked 'various artists'? What's the unifying principle?"

"Dizzy," I said. Because of the breadth of his influence, which goes far beyond bebop. Creed agreed that it certainly was one of the principles. Dizzy was to come in on the last day and record two pieces of material.

Benny Golson and I had been talking about Dizzy in the van on our way out here from Manhattan. We were to pick Art Farmer up on the way. Art lives in Vienna now, and he was staying in the apartment of a friend; Benny had recently moved back to New York after many years of writing film scores in Los Angeles.

"Dizzy was talking about Art last night," Benny said. "Dizzy said, 'Did you hear Art's recording of *U.M.M.G.*?'" I assumed he meant *Upper Manhattan Medical Group*. "The first recording of it I heard was Dizzy's, that he did with Duke. He just

happened to come by the studio that day, when they were recording, and he just happened to have his horn. Duke said, 'Take your horn out.' He didn't quite understand the tune, and so Swee'pea, Billy Strayhorn, said, 'Well look, this is the way it goes.' And he played and it was fantastic.

"Dizzy and I talked about an hour on the phone last night. I called him in Atlanta. I told him that many people can follow those who are already taking the lead. But when he came along, he was stepping out into dark places, at some personal risk, I guess -- risk of being ridiculed. Louis Armstrong said something like, 'They play like they're playing with a mouthful of hot rice.' Where's the melody? The bass drum dropping too many bombs. There were all kinds of derogatory things said about them. And now today, it's the standard.

"When John Coltrane and I -- we were together every day during that time -- went to the Academy of Music to hear Dizzy in 1945, and they started to play, we almost fell off the balcony. Because we had been playing with local bands. And we all were used to playing . . . " He sang an example of swing era riffing. "And all of a sudden, Dizzy was playing other things, things we had never heard, and you can't imagine the impact it had on me. I told Dizzy last night that that moment changed my whole life, and I've spent the rest of my life trying to comprehend what it's all about. It's so limitless. It's perpetual. Of course, Dizzy is so modest, I could hear the embarrassment coming through the phone."

Benny said, "He was always didactic. Really. He was a teacher without even intending to be. And Art Blakey, too! All of us who came through that band, we would do anything for him. Freddy Hubbard and I were talking about that the other day. When I left that band, I was in trouble. I could not play with another drummer. I was irritated, I was annoyed, I would get angry, because I wasn't hearing what I was used to hearing. When I joined his band, I was playing soft, and mellow, and smooth, and syrupy. By the time I left I was playing another way, because I had to. He would do one of those famous four-bar drum rolls going into the next chorus, and I would completely disappear. He would holler over at me, 'Get up out of that hole!'" Benny laughed. "He taught us a lot."

We pulled up in front of a building on the west side. Art Farmer emerged and we shook hands and embraced. Benny said to him, "Did you bring your box of chops?" Art laughed. Benny explained, "That's Curtis Fuller's line."

"They're on their way. They'll be here by tomorrow," Art said.

We got into the van and the talk turned back to Dizzy. "He makes no claims whatsoever for himself," I said.

"He gets embarrassed," Benny said. "Like a little boy. I was telling Gene about that *U.M.M.G.* thing that he recorded with Duke, and then you recorded. You know, I was talking to Dizzy last night about the time when he and Charlie Parker were together. He said, 'Do you know what Charlie Parker brought? Charlie Parker brought the rhythm. The *way* he played those notes.'"

"The accents," Art said.

"It's the *way* he played it," Benny said. "It was really a combination of the two. I said to him, 'You were so far ahead that when you first recorded, you had Clyde Hart, who was a stride piano player, and Slam Stewart. It took a while for the rest of the instrumentalists to catch up with what you were doing, and the trombone was the last.'"

I said, "Bobby Scott said, 'The rhythm sections were ten years behind Bird and Dizzy.'"

"That's true," Benny said. "They were playing boom-chank boom-chank." Art chuckled. "Art," Benny said, "you know more than I do, because I never really got to know Charlie Parker and you played with him."

"You've seen the movie, I presume," I said.

"I didn't see it," Benny said.

"Yeah," Art said. "I saw it. It didn't get him, but it's not a crime. Because somebody that big, they should either have more input from somebody who knew him, or else do it fifty or a hundred years later. There are too many people around who knew Bird who are disgusted with the movie. If you didn't know him, well then it wouldn't make any difference. And the guy in the picture is nothing like Dizzy. Dizzy is a guy -- and Bird was too -- when these people walked into the room, you knew there was a presence there. The guy who played the part of Dizzy was very quiet, almost meek, a mousy kind of guy. And Dizzy is nothing like that at all." He and Benny laughed at the discrepancy. "And everyone who knew Bird recognizes that he was very strong intellectually, and had a very strong personality. This guy in the movie came across as somebody who was a little boy, child-like, and never knew what he was doing. Not to take anything away from the actor -- he was a good actor. But he didn't know what he was dealing with. The guy in the movie came across as too much of a victim, a sad guy. Bird had a sense of humor. He wasn't going around crying all the time.

"I remember that when we were living in Los Angeles, there was a little black weekly newspaper called the Los Angeles *Sentinel* that came out with a review of Bird. I read it and I was so surprised that I took it over to where he was staying, and woke him up, and said, 'Hey, man! Read this!' The lady who wrote it said, 'This saxophone player carries himself with the air of a prophet. And he's got a little wispy black boy who plays the trumpet and a bass player with an indefatigable arm.' She said, 'He carries himself with the air of a prophet, but there's really not that much going on.' Bird was sitting up in the bed, reading it, and he said, 'Yeah, well, she's probably okay, but the wrong people got to her first.' She was the girlfriend of a trumpet player out there who wasn't into anything."

Benny said, "One of the most ridiculous things I have heard recently was by a female critic who said Kenny Gee is very much like Charlie Parker. I couldn't believe it. I'm not taking anything away from Kenny Gee but he's nothing like Charlie Parker.'" And Benny and Art laughed.

For me, too, it was the rhythm in the playing of Charlie

Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Having grown up with Wagner and Debussy and Ravel in my ears, the harmony was not startling. There is little in bebop harmony that wasn't in use in European concert music by the end of the nineteenth century. It was the rhythmic shifting to which Bird and Dizzy were prone that startled me. I had grown up loving Edmond Hall and Trummy Young and George Wettling and Big Sid Catlett and the Goodman small groups, and in them the solos tended to fall into comparatively neat bar divisions, two or compounds of two. Even Coleman Hawkins and Charlie Christian had not prepared me for this swift evolution in jazz. Charlie Parker said once in an interview that he and Dizzy and Don Byas and Kenny Clarke and their friends were not rebelling against anything: they simply thought this was the logical way for the music to go.

I never was able to accept the story that they "invented" bebop at Minton's as a thing the "white boys" couldn't steal. It is at odds with Dizzy's character, his spirituality and unfailing kindness. And anyone who credited that story simply doesn't know how skilled musicians hear. Once I was sitting in Jim and Andy's with Marion Evans, the arranger, when a Les Brown record came on the jukebox. There was a particular smoky sound in the brass that the band occasionally used. I mused vaguely that I wondered what it was. Marion said, "Trumpets voiced in thirds, with trombones doubling it an octave down," and he told me what mutes they were using. He'd never heard the record before. Another time I was at the rehearsal of a large orchestra in Los Angeles, as they prepared to perform Alfred Newman's score for *Captain from Castille* at a concert. There is a particular chord in that music that has always caught my ear, and I expressed my curiosity about it to Dave Raksin, who was standing near me. Dave told what the chord was, its inversion, and spelled it all the way up, including what instruments were on the parts. During World War II, Robert Farnon used to listen to short-wave radio from the U.S., to get the latest pop tunes. He'd write them down as fast they want by, line and changes. I don't hear that well, but I know any number of people who do. The ears of Billy Byers are legendary. So there was no way that, in those early days of bebop, people like Mel Powell or Eddie Sauter or Ray Coniff -- any number of people -- could be baffled about what was going down on the bandstand at Minton's. In any case, art is never created out of such petty motivations. And if Bird and Dizzy actually didn't want the "white boys" to know what they were doing, why did they so generously show it to people like Stan Levey, Red Rodney, Teddy Kotick, and Al Haig, and hire them to play with them? I hardly ever remember a time when Dizzy didn't have someone white in his group, whether it was Phil Woods in the mid-1950s or, later on, Lalo Schifrin and Mike Longo on piano.

By all reports, Johnny Carisi was always welcome on that Minton's bandstand, because he knew the tunes. If anything -- and this was always true in jazz -- the idea was to blow anybody off the bandstand who couldn't keep up. One of the men they consistently stomped on was a black tenor player. Dizzy called him the original freedom player -- free of melody, free of harmony, and free of time.

Those rhythmic displacements on the first bop records -- reminiscent of Bach, once you accepted them -- those starts and stops in funny places in the bar structure, so exciting and surprising finally, weren't what I was used to, and when what Bird and Dizzy were doing began to make sense to me, it was a revelation. My God, such fresh and inventive musical minds.

I first knew Dizzy in 1959, or maybe 1960. I was putting together an article for *Down Beat* that in time took the title *The Years with Yard*. Charlie Parker's nickname was, of course, Yardbird, ultimately shortened by most people to Bird. But I have never heard Dizzy refer to him as anything but Charlie Parker, the name in full, or, sometimes, Yard. Dizzy was playing Minneapolis at the time, and I went up there from Chicago with my photographer friend Ted Williams to take the notes and the pictures for the article that would appear over Dizzy's byline. For some reason now forgotten, we were to meet him in a little park somewhere. As Ted and I approached, we paused to watch him for a minute. Lost in some musical thought, Dizzy was softly dancing, all alone there in the sunlight. I never forgot it; it was one of the most poetic things I have ever seen.

I asked Dizzy about his humor on the bandstand, the jokes, the gestures. He said that if he could do anything to set a sympathetic mood in an audience, for his music, he would do it, and if humor would accomplish that end, he had no intention of giving it up. Even then he was announcing that he would like to introduce the members of his group after which he introduced them all to each other. He still does it. It still gets laughs. But sometimes the humor is quite spontaneous.

Once in the 1970s, he appeared in Los Angeles on a bill with Carmen McRae at a hotel that had decided to "try" a jazz policy. Everything went wrong. The sound system was poor, the piano was out of tune. Part way through Carmen's opening half of the concert, the pedals fell of the piano, and her accompanist was thereafter unable to move well through the chords in her ballads. Dizzy grabbed his horn and rushed on-stage to help her, filling the spaces in her phrases. Intermission came. A crew set up the bandstand for Dizzy's half of the performance.

His microphone stand was high, to pick up the sound of his uptilted horn. But whoever had put it there had left the cord spiralled around the stand. Dizzy came out and looked at it. He shares with the late Jack Benny a curious ability to walk onto a stage and stand there doing absolutely nothing and somehow making the audience laugh. He pretended, as is his wont, that he was unaware that they were there as he examined the problem of the microphone stand. He set his horn on the stage, standing on its bell, its body tilted at a forty-five degree angle. And he studied that mike stand and the cord coiled around it from several angles. The audience had begun to giggle softly. Suddenly he picked it up, held the weighted foot of the stand high in the air, and spun it, so that the cord uncoiled itself. The audience exploded in laughter, and at that

point Dizzy affected surprise, as if taken aback by the discovery that he was not alone in the room. He took the mike off the stand, and looked back and forth in mock shock, and then said, "It is twenty years since Charlie Parker and I played Los Angeles." Pause. "It still ain't shit."

The laughter became a roar.

A few years ago, Dizzy changed his embouchure, and now he gets a bigger, fatter tone than he used to. It's acquired a rather velvety quality. I think he paces himself. I doubt that, at seventy-two, he could sustain entire evenings of blazing solos as he did in the late 1940s in front of his big band. But he knows how to handle it.

Someone pointed out to me a while ago that many, perhaps most, of the earlier generation of jazz trumpeters and some of the trombone players sang. Louis Armstrong, Red Allen, Hot Lips Page, Ray Nance, Jack Teagarden, and others would do occasional vocal choruses. Clark Terry still does. Partly it was because they were of a generation that considered they were in show business, they were there to entertain. But I suspect they did it as well as a way to rest their chops. I heard Dizzy in a university concert in Chicago a year or two ago. He played superbly. And then he did two numbers in which he didn't play at all. He clowned a little, and sang -- one of the numbers being, inevitably, *Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac*. And then he went into the closing number, a long burning solo at a fast tempo. He was at the absolute peak of his form, full of surprises, simple melodic phrases alternating with those cascades of notes. And I concluded he had sung those two tunes to give his lip time to rest up for this finale.

He is, aside from being one of the major figures in modern musical history, a very shrewd showman.

The first day of the session was devoted to setting up the sound and the cameras. The musicians ran the material down. Phil Woods had been engaged for the session, but he was on his way back from Europe and Jerry Dodgion subbed for him. The material Benny had written was tough, and Creed realized it was going to be hard on Art Farmer's lip. He wanted Art more for his solo value than as a lead player, and set Amy Roslyn, his secretary, to checking on several potential players to ease Art's burden. There is a softness about Creed that causes him to be very reserved, as if to protect himself from the importuning world; I once took it for coldness. I was wrong.

The summer of 1989 was viciously hot in the northern east coast United States. It rained every second day, at most every third day, and the humidity between rains was almost unendurable, particularly in Manhattan. Those powerful television lights completely overcame the air conditioning in Rudy's studio and turned it into a sauna.

We were all drained at the end of the day, when I rode back to the Omni Park hotel -- where Creed had put most of us up -- with Airto Moreira and his wife, Flora Purim. Flora reminded me of something: that when she and Airto arrived in New York from Brazil in the mid-1960s, they stayed in my apartment for a week or so until they found a place of their own. I had completely forgotten about it; so much for personal memory of history.

The van crossed the George Washington Bridge. The buildings of Manhattan receded to the south in layers of aerial perspective, at last to disappear in the pale humidity.

Airto said, "We were in Europe for two weeks at Ronnie Scott's club with our band, every night, two sets, very late -- we would start at 10:45 p.m., first set, second set one o'clock to two something. We did that for two weeks, then we went all over Europe for almost three weeks with Dizzy Gillespie and an all-star United Nations band. So it was pretty heavy: flying every day, waking up at 6:30 in the morning, going to the airport, the plane leaves at nine, baggage outside the room at six o'clock. Got my luggage stolen, two big bags."

"It was great!" Flora said. "He was forced to buy all new clothes. He finally did it!"

"John Lee, the bass player with Dizzy, is into dressing, so Flora asked him to go with me, saying, 'Don't let him buy any of that cheap stuff!'

Flora said, "It was great working with Dizzy. Dizzy is one of the greatest teachers, without teaching you. He shows you ways of handling life. When he goes onstage, and the music changes, it's so easy, so humorous. Everything is a laugh, it's fun, and if it's not fun, he doesn't want to do it. He's been a big inspiration to us lately. The last year, we've been working on and off with him.

"We're losing a lot of players who are the center, and Dizzy Gillespie is one of the last of them. If Dizzy hadn't come up with his bebop, we wouldn't be here."

Airto said, "He made the fusion of Latin music and jazz. He was the first one who understood it and tried to play with those guys, and did it."

"He's still doing it," Flora said. "Dizzy is still behind the fusion of Latin and jazz music."

Airto said, "He just blew our minds on the road for three weeks in Europe. Flying every day, as I said. We were so tired, we couldn't even rehearse the sound any more. Dizzy would just come in and play, and then everybody felt good, and thinking if this man is playing like this, at least we should play *something*. And very strong. I don't know how he does that, at seventy-two."

Flora said, "His energy level is very high, and what he stands behind is very strong, even though he's very shy to say it. We've done some interviews together, and sometimes people would ask him why he was still doing it, and he would come off with things like, 'For the money.' Which is not true. He doesn't need the money at all. He's a rich man."

"He's made some good money," Airto said.

"He's there," Flora said, "because this is life. This is life to him, and to us. There are different kinds of musicians. There are musicians who make their livelihood emotionally, not just financially. I believe Dizzy is one of them. Art Blakey is another one of them. We look up to them as examples."

The next morning, I rode out to Rudy's with Phil Woods, who'd just got in, and was weary. In Paris, he and Dizzy and

a number of other American jazz musicians had been honored by the government of France. Phil's wife, Jill Goodwin -- she's the sister of Bill Goodwin, Phil's drummer; and they are the children of announcer Bill Goodwin, whom older readers will remember from the network radio days -- said to me once, "Phil's angry at all the right things." It's a remarkably apt description.

Phil said: "Just come back from Paris where Francois Mitterand presented Milt Jackson, myself, Stan Getz, Jackie Maclean, Percy Heath with medals, made us *Officiers* of the Order of Arts and Letters, which is one step above the Chevalier, and Dizzy had already been named Chevalier and Officier, so he was named Commandant. It was neat, man. Danielle, the president's wife, a lovely lady, came to two concerts. Some cats were saying that she understood the changes, she was singing along. She loves *A Night in Tunisia* and all that stuff.

"I was trying to relate that to my country, Bush coming up with a polka band or something.

"But how wild. You go to France and they recognize American jazz. It was kind of neat. I'll show you the medal." He pulled it out, displaying it in its velvet-lined case. "I wore it all the way home on the plane. It didn't impress customs at all. Isn't that something? I got a lot of salutes from the police in France. It helps with your parking tickets. This and two dollars will get you a beer at Jim and Andy's. It's amazing, isn't it, how other cultures accept our music so readily, and here, it's hard to get arrested?"

"Where did you first meet Dizzy?" I asked.

"I met Dizzy in 1956, when we did a State Department tour, first stop Abadan, Iran; next stop Aleppo, Syria; Damascus, Bayreuth. All the trouble spots, all the places that are now on fire, the State Department sent Dizzy. I think if they'd sent him one more time, he could have cooled it all out. But obviously the State Department knew something. That's what always bugs me. When there's trouble in the world, our government recognizes jazz. But the rest of the time, we have troubles with the subsidies and all that. We get the roach, what's left over. The National Endowment for the Arts disseminates huge amounts of money. A category called Folk, Ethnic, and Jazz, splits about ten or twenty million -- a pittance. Most of the money goes for blue-haired ladies listening to Mahler, conducted by some cat from Israel or somewhere else. You go to France and they give you medals, and wine, and dine you, and treat you like an artist.

"I was with Dizzy for the mid-east tour, and then South America. I had known Dizzy before, but only peripherally. When you work with him, you get to know him. But going to Iran first, that was a killer. And they loved the music. They didn't understand the jazz part, but Dizzy has such an important thing. The rhythm, that grabs people immediately. If you don't know anything about bebop. Dizzy is such a master of rhythm, the Afro, the South American. He was the first cat to fuse the jazz and the Cuban and the South American. Dizzy is the cat who discovered that, the first cat who used conga drums and all that, with Chano Pozo. That's a real big contribution of Diz, which is sometimes overlooked -- not by musicians, of course. A lot of people know about the bebop part, but not the rhythm. He loves to play drums.

"When we were in the mid-east, he was out there playing with snake charmers. He'll sit in anywhere -- Carnival in Rio, any drummer, any rhythm. He has an uncanny ability to memorize it or feel exactly what they're doing, and then fitting it into the jazz mode, without prostituting either one of them. He's a rhythmic genius.

"That stick he carries -- did you ever see that, that thing he made out of a stick and Coca-Cola bottle-caps?"

"Yes, I have. In fact, I suggested to Creed that he use it as a visual motif. He called Dizzy, and Dizzy had lost it, Creed had one made for him." There's no name for this instrument of Dizzy's invention. It is a pole with a rubber pad on the bottom. He mounted pop-bottle caps, hammered flat, on nails on a stick. He can stand in a room and bounce that thing and kick it with his toe and stomp a beat with his foot or shake this thing in the air, setting up the damnedest swing you ever heard, all by himself. I just call it Dizzy's rhythm stick.

Phil said, "I once flew back with him on the Concorde. When you travel with Dizzy, it's incredible. He was carrying that stick, right through the metal detector at the airport. The detector flips out with a hundred Coca-Cola caps rattling. And all the control people cheer and applaud: here comes Dizzy with that silly thing! The big stick. He plays it all the way through the airport; you can hear him come a mile away. He gets away with it."

"There was a time," I said, "when we all thought nobody in other countries could play jazz, but not any more."

"No no," Phil said. "That's no longer true at all."

I reminded him of the group he once led, during his long residence in France, called The European Rhythm Machine.

He said, "We used to call it The European Washing Machine. The cleanest band in the west. Look at the people you've got today. Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen. All the way back to Django Reinhardt, Grappelli, Rene Thomas, Daniel Humair. The list is long. They used to say that the horn players were okay, but the line went that the drummers didn't swing, the rhythm sections were inferior to ours. That's no longer the case. It's all over now. There are some Japanese bands that sound great. There's a cat in Japan who copies Miles so closely that when Miles fired his piano player, he fired *his* piano player in Japan. And the jazz clubs of Russia are flourishing."

A few days before this, the crackdown on dissenters had begun in China, and the executions were under way. Phil said, "We were supposed to go to China, but I told my agent to cancel the tour -- and I'd love to go to China. My band is a natural, since we don't use microphones. We're not a fusion band. We play Porter, Gershwin, and what have you. But for the moment I think we'll hold back on that. That's about the only country I've missed."

(To be continued)