Gene Lees

Jazzletter

P.O. Box 24
Ojai, Calif
93023

September 1989

Vol. 8 No. 9

Letters

The article on Spike Robinson filled a gap in my knowledge that had bothered me ever since I discovered Spike a couple of years ago on record. It's hard to research these lesser-known jazzmen when you live in a small town with a poor library.

If a man who can play tenor as well as Getz and Sims remains in musical obscurity most of his life, the fact can wisely temper one's own ambitions and expectations. It's those expectations that drag us down.

I've enjoyed your three books very much.

Ogden Plumb, Streator, Illinois

I can't begin to express my feeling about your book *Meet Me at Jim and Andy's*. Outstanding, dynamic, funny, exciting, and tragic. It was like a painting, such warmth from reading it.

Can you shed some light on a singer named Bill Farrell? He had a big voice and recorded for the MGM label from about 1948 to 1945.

William J. McErlean
702 Poplar Street
Coquitlam BC Canada V3J 3K8

I'm trying to form a group dedicated to performing Bill Evans's music and perhaps that of Earl Zindars exclusively. This is hard going since, in this area at least, I seem to be the only one interested.

Do you happen to know the address of an arranger, Tom Darter, who arranged the Evans tunes for the Kronos String Quartet albums?

Win Hinkle
2712 Cady Way
Winter Park FL 32792

Ivie

by Bill Crow

Ivie Anderson sang with bands and revues for ten years before securing a featured spot in Chicago with Earl Hines at the Grand Terrace in 1930. Duke Ellington heard her there the following year and hired her. She became nationally known through the recordings she made with him. She can still be seen and heard in reruns of the Marx Brothers movie, *A Day at the Races*, singing *All God's Chillun Got Rhythm*.

Ivie's trumpet-like voice and sense of rhythmic phrasing fit Duke's band perfectly. Few of her fans knew that she suffered terribly with asthma. She rarely let it affect her performances. Juan Tizol said in an interview, "She had it so bad she would have to go out on the street to get some air because she couldn't hardly breathe, but she could be feeling bad on the stage and go out there and sing, and you couldn't tell she had asthma. She was terrific."

Ivie left Ellington in 1942 when her asthma began to get worse. She bought an interest in an apartment house in California, where she lived comfortably, and she owned a restaurant called Ivie's Chicken Shack. When the urge to sing became too strong to resist, she booked a week or two in one of several nightclubs on the west coast.

I left the Army in 1949 and was playing drums that summer with a quartet (drums, piano, trumpet and tenor saxophone) at the Cirque Club in Seattle when Ivie came in for a week. We had just struggled through the previous week accompanying a comedian and a guy who caught lighted cigarettes in his mouth while blindfolded. I could play enough drums to keep time, but I hadn't learned to play a proper vaudeville long roll, so I received a lot of glares every night after the cigarette act. It was a great relief to discover that Ivie was working alone, and that she just wanted the band to swing for her.

We were lucky that Ken Kimball, our pianist, could read well. Ivie came to the rehearsal with a huge pile of sheet music, saw our faces fall and laughed. "Don't worry about all this! I just want to have the music handy in case I get requests for something we didn't rehearse."

We ran over *Ivy*, her theme song, and five or six Ellington tunes that she liked to include in her show, and then she said, "Okay, whatever else I do will depend on the crowd. Just stay with me."

She would start her show on the bandstand with us, but by the third tune she would be out among the tables, trailing a long microphone cord behind her. She quickly sorted out an audience, finding the right music for them and calling tunes to us. As Kenny quickly searched through her sheet music she would chat amiably with the crowd, easing into a song as soon as she heard her key note.

One night a table of eight was making a lot of noise during her act. Instead of calling them the rude drunks they were, Ivie concentrated the power of her performance on them. They still ignored her and continued to babble loudly among themselves. Patrons at other tables made angry shushing noises, but Ivie said,

"No, don't do that. These people came in here to be entertained, and they don't seem to be enjoying the show. Now, let's go over here and see what's the matter."

She went to their table and talked to them with the tender concern of a nurse ministering to the sick. She got their attention, found a song they liked and sang it for them. They didn't sober up, but they quieted down and paid what attention they could. When the song ended she had the entire audience with her.

Ivie's repertoire was broad, ranging from the Ellington material through folk songs, English art songs, show tunes and the good stuff from tin-pan alley. She phrased everything with a subtle swing that gave each song tremendous power, and made it easy for us to accompany her. We happily followed her strong lead, and she never took us any place that wasn't musical.

For the last number of each show Ivie always put the microphone away and walked to the center of the room among the tables. By this time she had established complete silence and attention. She would sing a final ballad, starting softly and increasing her volume very gradually as the song progressed. By the final phrase her tone had broadened to a cellolike richness, and her last high note was thrilling.

She seemed to be riding high every night, at the peak of her

power. None of us had any idea how ill she was. It was a shock when the news came later that year that Ivie had died in California.

Thanks to the excellent Ellington reissues on compact disc, examples of her sound and her swing are still available. Listening to those tracks recorded so long ago I see her again, a small plain woman with luminous eyes and a voice filled with ecstatic power, filling a roomful of entranced listeners with glorious song. She was terrific.

-- BC

Waiting for Dizzy Part II

We reached Rudy's. Phil and Art Farmer embraced. Art told us a story. Some years ago, late at night, Grady Tate had left Baron's in Harlem. As he was getting into his car, a man pointed a gun at him and demanded his money. Grady emptied his wallet and handed the money over. The man said, "Hey, ain't you Grady Tate?"

Grady admitted that he was.

The holdup man said, "Hey, I've got all your classics."

Grady said, "I've got a new album. I've got some in the back. I'll give you one."

The man said, "No, that's cool, man. I'll buy my own."

Phil and Art and Benny and the others went into the studio and began to rehearse. The tenor player was Bob Berg, from Brooklyn. I had never heard him before: his playing was hot, hard, and beautiful. Flora and the band rehearsed a complex piece by Gilberto Gil called *Quilombo*, which called for her to spit out the words at incredible speed and make them swing. She did it, too, and I was astonished by her. Astonished, too, by how much she had grown since Creed and I first heard her in the 1960s. Airto was cooking all over his complex of rhythm instruments, some of which he invented, working closely with Tito Puente. Airto's beard is now flecked with grey; Tito's full head of curly hair is now white. I talked to him during the lunch break, as most of the musicians and the crew gathered at trestle tables in the shadows of trees to consume the catered food Creed had laid on for them. Though Tito speaks fluent Spanish, his English is unaccented -- or rather, it is that of New York City. "When I went to Juilliard," Tito said, as leaf-shadows made by a hazy sun played on his handsome face, "I came from the navy. I was in the navy during the war. They paid for the lessons. I went to study arranging and composition and conducting -- not percussion. Nothing to do with Latin music. I went to the old school, the one that was on Manhattan Avenue at 124th Street.

"I studied trap drumming when I was seven years old. In the neighborhood in which I lived, in Spanish Harlem, there was a band that I used to sit in with, and a man named Montecino, who is still alive, showed me how to play the timbales. I already had the execution of the drumming, and that helped me to get into the timbales, which I'm very happy I did now.

"Dizzy was probably the first one to bring the Latin rhythms into jazz -- with Chano Pozo. That was '46 or '47. His was the first big jazz orchestra to really utilize these Latin rhythms. Then after that we had Stan Kenton and Duke Ellington, and Woody Herman. I wrote some charts for Woody Herman and we did an album together. I've known Dizzy forty years or more -- not longer than Mario Bauza, of course.

"The band that really started what we now call Latin jazz was the great Machito, who passed away about five years ago. He developed the influences of Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, and Brazil.

"I grew up with a lot of drummers around me in Spanish Harlem. That's where I learned a lot about the rhythms, thanks to Machito -- he was my mentor -- and Mario Bauza, who is still around today and is one of the greatest maestros of our music and knows everything about the Cuban music. He's responsible for a lot of our music being played today."

Mario Bauza plays a significant role in the life of Dizzy Gillespie. Born in Havana in 1911, he is one of the many refutations of the idea that jazz and classical music have always been separate and unrelated streams. He played bass clarinet in the Havana Symphony Orchestra, and then, after moving to the United States, played trumpet with Chick Webb, Don Redman, and Cab Calloway. It was Bauza who brought Dizzy into the Cab Calloway band, where his national reputation began to catch hold. That was in 1939, a year before Dizzy met Charlie Parker in Kansas City, and we may assume that Dizzy, then twenty-two, was introduced to the rhythms of Caribbean music at least that far back.

Later that afternoon, during a break, I heard guitarist Romero Lubambo, an excellent young guitarist from Brazil, talking to one of the camera crew. He is tall, with a full face and sandy hair. He said, "The whole time I was in Brazil, I liked to listen to American musicians to learn how to improvise, how to play jazz. Now I am playing with the great musicians in the world, I think. For me it is fantastic. We used a lot of the American know-how of doing jazz improvising. What I did in Brazil, and what I am doing here, is playing Brazilian music together with the American. For me it is very close, American and Brazilian. Jazz is very influential in Brazilian music and vice versa.

"Until thirty years ago, we didn't have many improvising in Brazilian music. I'm not so old, but it was singing. But not with many improvisation, and then we borrowed the jazz know-how. This is from what I understand.

"Dizzy through his seventy-something years made everybody be happy when they heard his name. Everybody here is happy already, to see him tomorrow. Everybody is looking forward to seeing him laughing and playing, always great. It's nice."

Of all the musicians on this session, the one I knew least -- although I have known him slightly and cordially since his days with Ornette Coleman, was Charlie Haden. We talked the next morning, on the van on the way out to Rudy's. His range as a bassist is extraordinary. He seems to be able to work in any medium of music at all. I asked him how he had come

into music.

Charlie said, "I have country music in my background -- in my life, before it was called country-and-western music. It was called hillbilly music, mountain music, folk music, that came over from Europe to Appalachia and the Ozarks.

"My dad's name was Carl Haden. He started out in this music playing the harmonica and playing guitar, upside-down left-handed. He hitch-hiked all over the country with another musician, named Ernest Harvey. They went to every big radio station in the south and mid-west. This was in the early 1930s, when the radio stations covered vast areas of territory. They were very powerful. He met my mother in Springfield, Missouri. He went to a radio station in Texas, and he sent for her, and she went there and started traveling with him, and they started having children. As the children were born, they were added to the family group.

"I was born in 1937. We were living in Shannonville, Iowa. We were on a radio station called KMA, 50,000 or 100,000 watts. My mom used to rock me to sleep when I was a baby, and she would hum all these folk songs, *Barbara Allen* and things like that. I would hum the harmony with her. She told me all this. When I was twenty-two months old, they put me on the radio show, singing. My father always bragged that I was the youngest person in Iowa to have a social security card. I have a tape of a 1939 broadcast from Shannonville. I'm singing and yodelling on the show, and my dad is the emcee and does all the talking about the sponsors -- Sparkle Light Cereal and Cocoa Puffs and All State Insurance. My mother would sing these great songs.

"I had two older brothers and an older sister. They sang trio things. And I sang. My dad was friends with Jimmy Rogers and the Carters. Mother Maybelle Carter used to come up to Springfield and rock me to sleep and sing for me. She would play guitar for me. She was the early influence of country guitarists. The way she picked the guitar influenced Chet Atkins and all those people who come from that. I feel like I was very lucky, because most of the jazz musicians I know come from large cities. They don't have the experience of, I guess you'd call it, Americana. That's the real music that comes from mid-America.

"We used to play in fairgrounds. We played in evangelists' tents. We would do our whole show in different towns in Kansas, Iowa, Oklahoma. When I was thirteen we went to Chicago. That was a big deal for me. We were on *Don McNeil's Breakfast Club*. I'd never seen a city like that before. We stayed in this big hotel and they interviewed me on the radio and it was really a great experience.

"My relatives all sang, and they played the washboards and the jugs. My grampaw, they called him Buster. His real name was Fielding, Homer Fielding Haden. He played the fiddle on his chest, not under his chin. The roads were not even paved. They were gravel roads, dirt roads. My gramma used to tell me stories about when she was a girl, and she remembered Wild Bill Hickock and Jesse James. When she first met my grandfather, she was eighteen years old and working in a cafe on the square in Ava, Missouri.

"At the time we were doing radio shows, we moved to Springfield, Missouri, from Iowa. My father had a farm outside Springfield. This was, like, 1942, during the war. My father had prize Jersey cattle, chickens. Every time their show came on I listened to it. Then my brother, who was five years older than I was, started playing bass on our show. Later on we moved into the city and went to the studio every day to do the show. He had this big blond Kay bass. I remember going into his room, when he I would get home from school before he did, and I would play his records. It was amazing, because back then in these little stores in Springfield, it was really difficult to get jazz records. But he had Jazz at the Philharmonic, he had Dizzy Gillespie, he had Bird. And I used to sneak up to his room. He would never let me play the records when he was there. And I would get these coat hangers, the bottoms of wooden coat hangers for sticks, and play drums. Then I got real brave and I started playing his bass. I *loved* the bass. I loved what it did to the music. I loved that it just opened the music up and lifted it. Whenever I heard the bass stop, something happened. The fullness and depth weren't there any more.

"The harmonies of jazz really attracted me. The dissonance and the counterpoint and the unusual intervals. I loved it. I didn't know what improvising meant, I just loved it. So I started actually playing with the records on my brother's bass.

"By the time I got to high school, we had moved to Omaha, Nebraska. We had a television show there. This was when TV first started. We had a show once a week. I started playing bass in high school, in the orchestra.

"I wanted to learn how to read music. My dad was self-taught, we were all self-taught. I had always relied on my ear. The band instructor showed me this bass book, and said, 'These are the open strings, these are lines and spaces. It's easy, Charlie, I want you to practice this while I'm gone. I'll be back soon.'

"I had the bow, and I started getting heart palpitations, and I really got scared. I ran to the water fountain in the hall and started drinking water. I was all sweating. I came back downstairs and Mr. Thomas, I think his name was, said, 'Charlie, what in the world's wrong with you?' I said I thought I was having a heart attack. He said, 'Don't be ridiculous, you can't be having a heart attack at fourteen. You're just nervous about reading this music. Just calm down and try to do it.' He stayed there and worked with me.

"My dad was a fisherman. He built this lodge on a lake in the Ozark mountains. I ended up going to high school my graduating year with thirty students in the senior class. Population 400. Forsythe, Missouri. There were three or four students in music there. I asked the music teacher how I could find out about different music schools. By that time I was playing a lot with records at home. There were no musicians to play with.

"I got a piece of classical music, I don't even remember who the composer was, called *Minuet*. I bowed it, made a tape recording of it, and sent it to Oberlin. They awarded me a full scholarship for four years. I was so happy that I was

going to get out of Missouri, for one thing. I wasn't really happy there. It was very racist there. I didn't feel good living there. It was beautiful country, and some good people, but I didn't like it. And then I started investigating other places, and I found out about this school in Los Angeles called Westlake College of Modern Music, which was back then the way Berklee is now in Boston."

We reached Rudy's and Charlie unloaded his bass from the van and went in and started warming up his hands, leaving me to muse on this pervasive influence on Dizzy Gillespie.

In the studio, so hot that I couldn't stay in it for more than a few minutes and wondered how the musicians and camera crew were bearing it, Creed was getting a lot of good music on tape, and in the big truck outside, some vivid images of its makers. Art Farmer recorded a marvelous, sensitive fluegelhorn solo with only guitarist Romero Lubambo for accompanist. He did it impromptu. I was in the control booth with Creed who, with the faintest wisp of a smile, said, "You know, Sigmund Romberg didn't plan this as a samba."

At Newark Airport the next morning, I waited. Dizzy was playing an engagement in Washington, and flying in for one afternoon of this three-day recording. I was thinking about Dizzy's essential character, about the title of one of his finest tunes, *Con Alma*, which is Spanish, meaning with feeling or with soul. It is a wonderfully appropriate title for a tune by Dizzy.

How did this boy, with that curiously elegant natal name John Birks Gillespie, son of a father who abused and beat him in his childhood, who grew up in a society that committed unspeakable acts of racism all around him, and many of them upon him and on his friend Charlie Parker, grow up to be so loving? It has always seemed to me a triumph of the human spirit that anyone born black in America can even bear the company of white people, and for Dizzy, who years ago took up the B'hai religion, to have such love for his fellow man amounts to a miracle. It is not that he is unmindful of the abuses of his people. But he has found laughter even in that. Lalo Schifrin, who was his pianist in the early 1960s, told me of walking up a street with Dizzy in Glasgow or Edinburgh, Scotland. Ocasionally, affecting that very proper English he can turn on or off at will, he would stop someone on the street and say, "Pardon me, my name is Gillespie, and I'm looking for my relatives." He would leave some baffled Scot looking after him as Lalo fell apart with laughter.

His antic humor has been part of his life apparently since he was very young. It dates at least as far back as his early twenties, when he was working in a band in Philadelphia, because someone there named him Dizzy. He no longer remembers who put the name on him, "but," he says, "I'm glad he did." I first heard of him when he got fired from the Cab Calloway band, purportedly for firing spitballs at Cab. But that not only illuminates his life off-stage: it is used very shrewdly on-stage. One of my most vivid memories is of an incident in which his laughter, his clowning, his shrewd showmanship, and above all his kindness, came together on a stage in Canada.

It happened this way.

I was asked to do an evening of my songs at one of a series of concerts sponsored by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation at a place called Camp Fortune in the Gatineau Hills, outside Ottawa. I was told I could use a large orchestra, which meant arrangements had to be written. I chose Chico O'Farrill to write them, because I love his work, and we were neighbors and friends. When Chicago agreed to do the concert, the producer, Peter Shaw, asked him to perform his *Aztec Suite*. It had been written for and recorded by Art Farmer. Peter asked us to track Art down and see if he would join us in the concert, but Art had moved to Europe and we had trouble finding him. Chico, said, "How about Dizzy?"

And I said, "Why not? We can always ask him."

We called Dizzy and he agreed to do it -- which meant that he had to read and learn a by no means simple piece of music in one or two rehearsals. But this presented me with a problem. I am essentially a writer, not a performer. Performance takes certain highly-honed skills that I lack. And there is no more brilliant *performer*, questions of music aside, than Dizzy. I told Peter, "There is absolutely no way I'm going to follow Dizzy Gillespie on a stage. I'll open; he can close." But, Peter suggested, this would set up in imbalance. So Chico and I wrote a new song, in long form, that we could do with Dizzy as a closer.

Dizzy, as it happened, got delayed by weather in St. Louis and missed the first rehearsal. Chico rehearsed the orchestra, with Mike Renzi playing the trumpet part in transposition on the piano, no mean feat in itself. Dizzy got there in time for the final rehearsal, and seemed to be memorizing the Aztec Suite *as fast as he was reading.* That was the afternoon I came to appreciate his consummate musicianship, questions of jazz quite apart.

Well, the evening came, and terrified or not, I sang my half of the concert, apparently not disastrously. The audience was warm, and at the end I said something to the effect that I had never before sung my lyrics in the country in which I was born, and I was very glad to be there. Then I said something like, "Now, ladies and gentleman, it is my privilege to introduce one of the great musicians of our time, Mr. Dizzy Gillespie."

Birks came out on the stage, looking (as is his wont) as if he was startled to find people there -- and there were five or ten thousand of them, I would guess, blanketing the hillside of a natural amphitheater in front of the stage. He took the mike from the stand, gave a long Jack Benny pause, and said, "Damn! I'm glad I'm a Canadian!" The audience roared, and as usual he had them in his hand before he'd played a note. And then he and Chico and the orchestra sailed into the *Aztec Suite*.

He played brilliantly -- this piece he had never played before. There is a gesture he has, a motion, that always reminds me of a great batter leaning into a hit. He has a way of throwing one foot forward, putting his head town a bit as he silently runs the valves, and then the cheeks bloom out in

the way that has mystified his dentist for years, and he hits into the solo. When that foot goes forward like that, you know that John Birks Gillespie is no longer clowning. Stand back.

And that foot went forward a lot that night. At the end of the suite, the audience went crazy. They were screaming. Backstage I said to Peter Shaw, "I'm not going out into that. I'm not that nuts."

But Chico and the orchestra and Dizzy were setting up for the number I was to do with them. Now Dizzy's part was a long one, written out on accordion-folded music paper. He started to put it on his music stand -- and dropped it. It spilled at his feet, and the audience tittered a little. Setting his horn down on his bell, he got down on his knees and started to fold it, like a man trying to put a road-map back the way he found it. When he had it neatly together, he stood up; and dropped it a second time. He did this three times, until Chico and the orchestra and the audience and I were helpless with laughter and the mood at the end of the *Aztec Suite* had faded into the past. He let the laughter die down. And then he introduced me. He handed that audience to me. I couldn't believe the generosity of this; or the cleverness, the canny sense of show.

And we finished the concert and went to a party. It was probably that night that he told me he had never in his life walked onto a stage without feeling at least a little nervous, and that humor helped to break the feeling.

I got thinking about the last time I'd seen Birks *before* Chicago last year. We'd been guests on one of Steve Allen's TV shows in Los Angeles. Three of these shows were shot that day. We were on the first of them, and one guest on the second show was to be Doc Severinsen. Dizzy said he wanted to stick around after we'd finished and hear Doc play. One of the girls in makeup heard him say it, and passed it along to Doc. I heard Doc reply, "Oh boy! That's all I *need* -- Dizzy Gillespie listening to me." A little later he came to our dressing room, and Dizzy greeted him warmly, and they fell immediately into the camaraderie of men in the same profession. They didn't talk about music. They talked about lip salves and medications. Birks said, "I've got something great! Freddy Hubbard turned me onto it." He opened his trumpet case and gave a small package to Doc. "Try it," he said.

It came time for Doc to do his show. Dizzy stood in the shadows, listening. Doc played with a small group. There were none of the high notes, none of the flourishes, you hear during his usual television appearances. He played a ballad, mostly in middle register, the notes sparse and thoughtfully selected. He sounded a lot like, of all people, Bix Beiderbecke. "He's beautiful," Dizzy said, and if Doc in the spotlight had been able to see the smile of John Birks Gillespie in the shadows, he would have felt compensated for all the dismissals of his jazz playing by critics.

I have a very deep love for Dizzy Gillespie. He has contributed immeasurable joy to our troubled era. And to me, he has contributed insight.

These thoughts were in my mind as he got off the plane, carrying the big, square, black case that accommodates his idiosyncratic trumpet, and wearing sandals and a short-sleeved safari jacket.

He grinned, greeted the driver of the van, and our cameraman and sound technician, and got into the back seat. I was in the front seat, leaning over its back, and I suddenly had a wave of emotion. "Hey, Birks," I said, "I'm awful glad to see you."

He went serious. He tapped the middle of his chest, indicating his heart. His goatee is grey now, and so is his head. He said, "Me . . . too!"

I told him Creed had ordered a new version of his rhythm stick made for him; Dizzy had misplaced the last one, made with pop-bottle caps. I said it was at the studio, waiting for him. "Where'd you find that thing originally?" I said.

"I made the first one," he said, and I remembered the first time I'd seen it. He demonstrated it to Jerome Richardson and me, and we were astonished at the polyrhythms he could set up with it. "I made two or three after that." He chuckled. His voice is low and little thick in its texture, with a touch of the south in its accent. He is one jazz musicians whose speech is not like his playing; in fact they are radically different. "That stick was something. I could be at one end of the airport and be walking with that stick, and all the guys knew where I was, from the rattle. Every now and then I would do it, and they'd know where to find me."

I said, "Everybody I've talked to, Phil Woods, Benny Golson, Art Farmer, said you have always been the great teacher. I remember Nat Adderley said once, 'Dizzy's the greatest teacher in the world if you don't let him know he's doing it."

"Is that true? I don't know about that," he said, and I saw that embarrassment Benny Golson had described. This was no affectation of modesty; this was genuine humility. "But what little I do know, I'll give it, any time. So I guess it's not actually someone with a whole lot of knowledge giving it out to people. But anything I learned, I'll tell somebody else. So that's what they mean by that. I will tell anything that I've learned."

"Miles said to me once, 'I got it all from Dizzy.' Art Farmer said that you came in to hear him one night and he realized that everything he was playing, he'd learned from you."

"That's a good question, about those guys. One example is Art Farmer," her said, trying to steer the conversation away from himself. "I made a record with Duke, a Duke Ellington party. I wasn't called to make the record, but I just went by the record date to see all the guys in the band I hadn't seen in some time. And when I walked in, Duke pulled out this *U.M.M.G.*, and said, 'I want you to try this.' So he gave me the part and they played it. And then Strayhorn was there. Strayhorn had to show me a couple of things. There were some very big surprises in that number -- the resolutions at certain parts. Out of a clear blue sky, boom! A-flat minor seventh. And how it got there, you don't know. So Strayhorn came over to the piano and showed me and then I didn't have any trouble.

"But Art Farmer!" The sound of South Carolina was in the way he said it: Aht Fahmuh. Driving in South Carolina two or three years ago, I was slightly startled by a sign on the highway that indicated the direction to Cheraw. It looked so matter of fact. I vaguely thought it should say under the name: birthplace of John Birks Gillespie. "Boy!" Dizzy said. "I heard Art Farmer do it. I just happened to have the radio on, and boy! This guy! He must have spent some time on this number, because he knew every in and out of the progressions, he knew all of the resolutions. Boy, he really operated on that. Like a surgeon. Art Farmer is some fantastic musician. He's so pretty. Some guys can play all the changes, and you don't get the significance of the resolutions going from one to the other. But Art Farmer, he's so gentle. Just beautiful. I'm sorry I made the number. But if I hadn't made the number, Art wouldn't have made it, because he liked the record I made with Duke, and he said, 'I want some of that,' and he went and got it.

"Art Farmer. Nat Adderley. There's some good trumpet players around. I think there are more than in the early days. Because we had a hard core of young trumpet players, like Charlie Shavers, Kenny Dorham, Fats Navarro, and of course Miles is in there and, let's see -- Dud Bascomb. He was a very tasty trumpet player. We used to talk when I was at the Savoy with Teddy Hill's band and Dud was with Erskine Hawkins. We used to say, 'Man! I wonder what it would be to be with someone like Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway.' And he wound up with Duke Ellington and I went with Cab Calloway. So we got two of the best jobs in New York. But that Dud Bascomb!

"And then there was a trumpet player named Little Willie, who played with Buddy Johnson. He was very talented, too. He didn't get a chance to play too much on records."

"Birks, I want to talk to you about the Caribbean, and the Afro-Cuban, and the Brazilian. It's like Phil Woods and others say, you were first jazz musician to get into that music, to combine jazz with these various Latin influences."

"And I'll tell you something," Dizzy said, "the Latin guys play jazz better than the jazz guys play Latin." That was something to think about.

He said, "I was always interested in that music. All of my compositions have a Latin tinge. Every one of them. And that means that I am a lover of Latin music. I remember the first time I went to Argentina, I composed a piece that sounded like their music, called *Tango-rene*. I recorded it with the big band. That was a nice trip. I like Argentina very much.

"This year I was in Budapest. In my hotel they had a gypsy band, with a guy who played violin. He was *bad*, boy. I was supposed to come back after our performance in the theater and play a little bit with them. But that's where the tango comes from -- that area of the gypsies.

"Which reminds me of a time in Africa. I went to Kenya for the State Department for the tenth anniversary of independence for Kenya. They took me to a dance one night. And I heard these guys playing. And I closed my eyes, and it sounded like calypso, the West Indian guys. So when the musicians asked me how I liked the music, I said, 'To tell you the truth, it sounded very similar to West Indian music.' And one of the guys, he say, 'You know, *we* were here first!' I said, 'Thank you very much.'" And he laughed at the memory.

Because it had been so much in recent conversations, I asked him if he'd seen the Clint Eastwood Bird film. I was curious to what reaction, if any, he'd had to the picture's pallid -- by all reports -- portrait of himself. He was tactful. He said, "I've got a copy in the house, but I haven't looked at it."

I asked him what caused that immediate affinity between them when he first heard Charlie Parker in Kansas City, during his time with Cab Calloway.

"The method and music impressed me, the more I heard him play. Because it was so much the way that I thought music should go. His style! The style! Was perfect for our music. I was playing like Roy Eldridge at the time. In about a month's time, I was playing like Charlie Parker. From then on -- maybe adding a little here and there. But Charlie Parker was the most fantastic . . . I don't know. You know, he used to do tunes inside of tunes. He'd be playing something and all of a sudden you'd hear I'm in the Mood for Love for four bars. Or two bars. Lorraine told me one time, 'Why don't you play like Charlie Parker?' I said, 'Well that's Charlie Parker's style. And I'm not a copyist of someone else's music.' But he was the most fantastic musician."

When we got to Rudy Van Gelder's, the camera crew asked Dizzy to wait a few minutes so they could get shots of his arrival. He waited a little, then began to get impatient. He said he wanted to get out and warm up his lip. He waited some more, finally got out, and went directly into the studio, where Benny Golson was rehearsing one of the numbers Dizzy was to record. Everything stopped, and the mood in the place became reverent. Various of the musicians shook his hand, hugged him, and he wore that great embracing grin. Art Farmer beamed; his hair too is grey now. Phil Woods, in a red polo shirt and a small leather cap, grinned, and shook hands: "Sky King," he said. It's his nickname for Dizzy, because he is always in an airplane, going from one gig to another. In fact, though he lived only a short walk from this studio, he wouldn't even have time to go home to see his wife Lorraine before flying back to Washington later today.

"Hey!" Dizzy said, when he saw the rhythm stick Creed had had made for him. "Beautiful!" And he gave it a few experimental shakes.

He left the studio, went out to one of the trailers that were standing by, took out his horn, and began to practice. After a while he came back, and the recording began.

Dizzy played on two tunes, both Latin, and both rhythmically powerful. In each case he mastered the material quickly, and soared off into solos, the notes cascading down from his horn. The takes were interrupted repeatedly. What began to be apparent is that the compound rhythms weren't bothering Dizzy, but the polyrhythms he was piling on top of them were bothering the band. One tune, *Wamba*, kept breaking down

at the same point, and Benny Golson, in a red shirt, would start it again. Dizzy's every solo was totally fresh, unrelated in any way to his solos in the previous takes. The studio grew hotter. Dizzy opened the safari jacket and played bare-chested, always with that uncanny concentration he brings to bare.

The rhythm . . . . the rhythm!

I was in the booth with Creed and Rudy; I couldn't bear the heat of the studio, and didn't know how the musicians were doing so. Dizzy kept playing. "That man is a miracle of neurological organization," I said to Creed.

"That's a good way to put it," Creed said.

The tune kept breaking down; I kept looking at the clock. This was the last day of shooting, with that one camera alone at $27,000 a day . . . . And Dizzy had to return late in the afternoon to Washington. There could be no extensions of the date. The suspense was getting to me. Creed showed nothing; not a flicker of anxiety. He is always like that. I don't know how he does it. Maybe the training in psychology . . . .

And at last it was over. Dizzy did his two brilliant takes. The musicians applauded. Creed went into the studio to thank him. Dizzy packed up his horn. A limousine took him back to the airport.

I said to Creed, who is never ever demonstrative, "Well, are you happy?"

"No," he said with a trace of a smile. "I'm ecstatic."

All the musicians were packing up. Soon the studio was empty. Across a chair lay Dizzy's rhythm stick, the new one Creed had had made, and that Dizzy loved. Creed planned to send it over to his house, a minor gift. The light from above flooded the stick, Dizzy's music stand, and the microphone, set high for his uptilted horn. It was is if the ghost of this colossus were still there.

Throughout those days, I was forcefully struck by the diversity of America that is represented in jazz. When I was a teen-ager, listening to bands and dazzled by the solos of Ray Nance, Cootie Williams, and so many others, some of them -- Zoot Sims, for example -- not much older than I, I wondered if this music was just a job to them, one that got boring from doing it night after night, or if it was a genuine passion.

I learned very early that it is the latter.

Charlie Haden said it as well as I have ever heard it expressed after the last session.

He said, "It's very rare in the recording industry for a producer to place such importance on creative values. Jazz, for so many years, has been treated as a tax write-off for most big record companies. And now, more and more, conglomerate corporations that are in the record business are just looking to sell many many records and make a lot of hits and a lot of money. Which is okay, but it's kind of sad that the art forms and the deeper values are forgotten about.

"That's sad for the jazz musician, and other artists dedicated to their art forms, film-making, poetry, dance, painting.

"I feel it is the responsibility of every one of us to improve the quality of life; to make this planet a better place; to bring deeper values back to the society, which are taken away from the people by the conditioning of mass media, of society's profit-oriented racist-sexist values. People are taught by the mass media what they should like, what they should wear, what they should listen to. And then they are sold these things.

"It's very sad that this music is put on the side, and not many people know about the importance of this art form we call jazz. And the other sad thing is that whenever someone has an opportunity to educate people in film about this art form, they always miss the mark. They never show the brilliance of improvisation and what it really is. They show a romantic story, or a story about drugs, or a story about alcohol, or the perennial image of the jazz musician as a child who hasn't grown up; who cares only about sex and alcohol and drugs and music, and really doesn't have any feelings or opinions or ideas or interests about any other things in life. Which is very sad, because it's not true.

"I think that Creed has done a great thing here, by making this record and also making it a video, so that people can see what we're all about, and what we love, and why we're doing what we're doing: we're actually fulfilling a calling to a responsibility to the universe. And that is to make beautiful music, and bring beauty and deeper values to people's lives, so that they can touch the deeper parts inside themselves. And there will be more of us.

"If the leaders of all the countries of the world were able to sit down and think about these things and to bring this music and these values to the people of the world, there would be a different mentality. The governments of different countries would be concerned about life. They would have reverence for life, instead of placing importance on weapons.

"It's all included in this music, the beauty of all those things. Because improvisation teaches you the magic of being in the moment you're living in. You get a different perspective about life. And you see yourself in relation to the universe in a completely different way. There's no such thing as yesterday, there's no such thing as tomorrow. They're only right now, when you're improvising. The spontaneity is there. When you're touching music, you see your extreme unimportance.

"The reason it hasn't been given more to the public, there's no vested interest, there's no profit being made. Since the beginning of this country, if there's no profit being made, they won't give it to the people.

"That's why government subsidy is really difficult. In Europe, you have a lot of countries that subsidize jazz concerts and musicians. It doesn't happen in the United States and it's very sad. The only thing that is similar to subsidization is the National Endowment for the Arts, which isn't nearly enough.

"People should be able to turn on television and see beautiful music. If I were an alien from another planet, and I landed in Queens one night, and I walked to the nearest house and looked in the windows and I saw the kids sitting on the floor, looking at MTV, I would say to myself, 'My God, is this the best that this country's popular artists have? Are these the best values they have to give to their young people?'

"Values of sequins, limousines, wealth, perpetuated every day

with the whole superstar structure of the music industry. And every time that you bring music with deep values to people, it touches somebody.

"It's the people who have corrupted the music that we have to worry about, that we have to try and change, and one of the ways of doing this is to just keep playing, and to present the music to as many people as possible, because the more people hear this music, the more people are going to be attracted to it.

"And, hopefully, more endeavors will happen like we just did, because it brings great musicians together who usually don't have a chance to play music with each other, and it allows them to feel comfortable and relaxed in improvisation. And, when music is presented on the same level that the music is played, that's the thing that's really meaningful. When it's presented on a level of reverence and respect.

"People have lost their appreciation for beauty. The great thing about this art form is that musicians care about beautiful sound. They want to make their instruments sound really really beautiful. It's so important, beautiful sound -- to be able to hear the beauty of the musician's soul. Every musician . . . they learn their favorite notes, they discover their favorite notes, their favorite sound, and they make their music sound as beautiful as they can for the listener, and that's what makes it so great. It's a dedication and an honesty that you don't find very many places. Improvisation and spontaneity are about honesty. It's completely pure honesty. The musician is baring his soul to the people, and hoping he can touch their lives, in a humble way. Every great musician learns that before they can become a great musician, they have to become a good human being. That's the most important thing, to strive to be a good human being, and to have humility.

"It's like the guy in Washington a few years ago. In the middle of winter, an airliner crashed in the middle of the Potomac River. People were on their way to work in the morning. A guy got out of his car. He saw a woman who got out of the aircraft and couldn't reach the lifeline that was being thrown to her. And he didn't think twice, he jumped into the river and rescued her, and disappeared. Finally someone found him, and said, 'What's your name?' And he said, 'It doesn't matter what my name is, I just did what I had to do.'

"And that's greatness to me."

I got up early the next morning in the hotel and called Phil Woods. Phil and his wife had found me a house for the summer near their own. They live in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania. We got into the car. Phil told me the best way was to go out through the Lincoln Tunnel. I hate the New York tunnels. They give me what Woody Herman used to call the clausters. I'm always afraid the roof is going to fall in and, New York being what it has become, probably some day it will. I wanted to go out over the George Washington Bridge.

Phil said the other route was faster. "Only take us an hour and twenty minutes or so."

"You sure?"

"Promise," he said.

But the whole west side was tied up with traffic because President George Bush was coming to New York for some event or another. And when we got down in the tunnel, the traffic stopped completely.

"Hey, Phil, you promised me," I said.

"It'll be cool," he said.

At last it crawled forward. But hardly had we come out of the tunnel than it stopped cold again on the highway. People shut off their engines and got out and stood around on the cement. I asked a truck driver who had climbed to the roof of his cab to look ahead what was happening. "Ah the president's coming in or something," he said.

Of course. From Newark airport, where I'd picked up Dizzy the day before. The air was as hot and humid as ever. Phil and I stood around on the highway and told music business stories. We were there a half hour or so. The truck driver said, "Next time, I'm voting Democrat!"

And then, on a parallel highway, we saw it, the cavalcade of black limousines with dark glass, the one with the pennant identifying the president's car. How silly. To tie up this traffic like this. Why didn't they fly him in a helicopter to the Pan Am building? What was all this gasoline costing? I wondered if the man in that dark car would ever recognize the contribution of Dizzy Gillespie to the American culture; it seemed unlikely. And if he ever did, it would be for political reasons.

The traffic started moving again; we'd been on our way for an hour and a half. "Phil, you said an hour and twenty minutes!"

Inevitably, we talked more about Dizzy. "The Sky King," Phil said again.

I said, "I think his sense of humor lets him get away with things the rest of us wouldn't have the nerve to try."

"You know," Phil said, "he didn't do any clowning at all this European trip. Occasionally he likes to do jokes and sing and scat. But when we did the All Star thing, which was Hank Jones, Max Roach, Stan Getz, Jack Maclean, Milt Jackson, boy was he playing. Because he knew he was with the musicians who grew up with him, and there was no funny business. He was allll serious, man. Some European critics have said, Ah, Dizzy's chops are gone. I hope they were there that night." Phil whistled. "He was hitting high r's.

"Dizzy changed the way of the world. That music means so much to so many people everywhere."

Phil searched the radio dial until he found a jazz station. We heard a superb pianist whom we could not identify. It turned out to be Kenny Barron. The sky darkened. We were in a cloudburst. I slowed to about thirty miles an hour as sheets of rain swept across the highway and all the crawling cars turned their headlights on. We'd been traveling now more than two and a half hours.

"Phil, you promised me!"

And the sun came out.