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The Worst Gig

by James Lincoln Collier

The music business being what it is, few musicians are able to sort through the welter of parades, boat rides, Italian feasts, dog shows, store openings, ice-dance contests, and fashion shows they have provided music for to pinpoint the one that was actually the worst gig of all. One trumpet player, when I confronted him with this challenge, replied grimly, "They were all the worst gig."

However, occasionally one stands in such bold relief that it makes a claim for itself. Such a one fell my way about [illegible]enty-five years ago.

I was living a short way upstate New York, and working intermittently for a cornet player named Joe Daley, now regrettably deceased. Joe played a very pretty, low-key style which owed a good deal to Bobby Hackett, and he was able to scare up a certain amount of work for his band, which he called Joe Daley's Dixiecats. We played a lot of Elks' Club dances and one winter we had a long run at the Washington Tavern in Peekskill. But mainly we played single engagements in the melange of seedy roadhouses along Route Six, which kept re-opening under new management for brief existences of a few months or so. It wasn't a great band, it wasn't a bad band, it was just one of the thousands of jazz groups that have come and gone in the United States for most of this century.

One day Daley called me. "We got a job for the 17th."

"What is it? A dance or what?"

He paused fractionally. "Just a job."

"Yeah? Come on, Daley, level. The last time you got that tone in your voice we -- "

"No zoos. I swear. No camels. This time we ride in [illegible]mfort all the way."

"Ride where?"

I could hear him sweat. "The Mets game. This fella who runs the Deerfoot Inn where I been drinking, he takes a busload of his regulars down every year. Think of it this way, you get paid for watching the Mets play."

"I thought everybody got paid for watching -- "

"Cut that out," he said darkly. "Just be there. You're not the only trombone player in Peekskill."

When I arrived at the Deerfoot Inn at the appointed time one hot summer afternoon, I found Daley and our clarinetist and banjo player standing by a bus. They were wearing cardboard derbies, sleeve garters, and subdued looks. The clarinetist was holding a metal clarinet. "What's with the tin?" I asked.

"I played this gig last year," he said.

I looked down at my almost-new Conn 6H. "Oh God," I said.

Before I could escape, the sound of a New Year's Eve horn issued from the Deerfoot Inn. The barroom door burst open and a torrent of red-faced baseball fans flooded out, roaring and blinking in the sunlight. They loaded onto the bus a hamper of sandwiches and another of beer the size of howdahs, along with four frightened musicians, one of whom was crouched over a Conn 6H like a bent old man.

Under optimal conditions it is possible to play a slide trombone on a crowded bus, by leaning out into the aisle and eschewing the long positions, which can be done if you play in E-flat and A-flat a lot. But conditions were not optimal. For one thing, the band had been seated in the middle of the bus so that the music could be heard by all. Also in the interest of fairness, the sandwiches had been stowed at the rear of the bus, the beer at the front. Inevitably, the aisle was filled with swaying celebrants wading uncertainly from one end of the bus to the other. In the face of this steady traffic I was constantly forced to suddenly retract the slide, which filled the music with little curlicues and more major sevenths and minor ninths than were actually called for.

Making matters worse, the bus was ancient, and the roads beneath us even more ancient. Between fear and the heat, I was soaked in sweat, my lips as slick as ham fat, and the mouthpiece was skidding around my face in response to the motion of the bus. As long as we held a steady course I managed all right; but whenever we rounded a curve the mouthpiece skated off my lips and belted me in the cheek, and when we went over a bump it smacked me in the eye. Really unforgettable were quick stops. By the time we were half an hour down the road my face was soft and swollen as a sack of ripe plums and my lips were fixed in a permanent bee-stung pout. Playing was a little like trying to whistle through a Parkerhouse roll.

Finally I turned to Daley. "Maybe we should take a break until we get to Shea Stadium?"

"What the hell's the matter with you, Collier? Didn't you ever hear of the show must go on?"

"This isn't a show, it's a pogrom," I replied. "They're trying to murder me. Look at the one with the red mustache. He's insane, you can tell. People are always trying to kill trombone players. They hate them. Remember that time -- "

"They're paying us twenty-four dollars a man," Daley pointed out. "You really want to get killed, stand up and say you don't want to play any more."

"Maybe," the clarinetist said, "you could get up in the baggage rack. If you lay face down, you could work your slide through the slats."

"Are you crazy? My face is all wounded as it is."

"It was only an idea," he said.

So grimly I struggled on, and after what seemed weeks we reached Shea. Whimpering softly from relief, the little band of musicians was herded into the stadium by the celebrants, who were in the jolliest of spirits, skirmishing jovially over pints of whisky and scaling bologna sandwiches at each other. We climbed upward and outward, and at last found our places at the very top of Shea at the farthest end of the left-field foul line, about a mile and half from home plate.

Again in the interests of fairness, the band was placed in the center of the mob. Dead ahead of me was Red Mustache. I was no longer concerned about the destruction of my lips, nor even damage to my horn. What filled me with dread was the

chance that I would pink Red Mustache in the back of the head with my slide. My own survival would thereupon be in the hands of the Almighty, and considering what had gone before, it seemed a dubious reliance.

In any case, by laying my head over to one side like a chicken with a broken neck and sticking with the first three slide positions, I found I could negotiate tunes like *Whispering* and *Roses of Picardy*, which was all the impaired critical faculties of the celebrants required. The real problem was that Red Mustache was constantly in motion, bobbing and weaving, suddenly turning around to scale a sandwich at a pal three rows back, or leaping to his feet at the faintest tremor of excitement from the field below. My only hope was to play the slide around him like a fencer, staying constantly on the alert.

This, remember, was not the Mets of Gooden and Strawberry, but the famous team of Casey Stengel and Marvelous Marv Throneberry, whom the sports writers habitually referred to as Dr. Strangeglove. The opposition was the Giants, who had an aging Willie Mays, but they had been affected by the torpor of the Mets and appeared to have little interest in the proceedings. As the game meandered along purposelessly inning after inning, the celebrants from the Deerfoot began first to grumble, then to snarl, and then to quarrel among themselves, in between times issuing sharply-phrased commands for the band to offer a selection in relief of the aching tedium.

Eventually the Mets managed to eke out a run, mainly through bases on balls. But in the seventh inning Willie Mays tied the score with a home run. A foreboding filled me. The eighth inning passed, the ninth, and the tenth. On the field play grew more listless than ever. The celebrants, now surly and evil, began barking for tunes they had gotten confused with other tunes, whose titles they remembered as *Margie Is a Grand Old Name* and *Did Her Mother Come from Wyoming?*

Ducking and swerving around both sides of Red Mustache's neck, I slogged doggedly on through the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth innings, the excitement raised by an occasional long foul. During the fifteenth inning, Red Mustache, concluding that the real sport of the evening lay in the stands, began conducting the band.

Unfortunately he was back in his seat when Jim Davenport hit a home run for San Francisco, signalling that the end of the evening was nigh. My heart fluttered with joy, and in that ecstatic moment I put my mouthpiece to my bloody lips and essayed a long downward gliss.

Red Mustache could hardly have timed his leap more perfectly. When we got one end of the trombone unscrewed from my mouth and the other from the back of his head, it was clear that Giardinelli's was in for an unexpected little dividend.

Little else remains to be told. Upon reaching the Deerfoot Inn at three o'clock in the morning, I thanked Daley for including me, uttered a shrill cry of gratitude for my twenty-four dollars, and wended my weary way home, occasionally breaking into a high-pitched cackle I could not control.

When Daley got up enough nerve to call me three days later, he said nobody was really sore at me. In fact, it had been one of the best trips ever, and they planned to do it again next year with all the same people.

Except one. As I explained, it was not that I didn't like baseball. It was just that long bus trips weren't my cup of tea.

-- JLC

So Long, Socks

Some time ago I made a decision that I would not run obituaries in the *Jazzletter*. Paradoxically, I became concerned about the aging of so many people who are the living repositories of this music's chronicles. I didn't set out to make this a "historical" publication; I really began it, I think, because I had grown lonely for friends with whom I had lost contact. But the historical record has gradually become its purpose, and I want to get a lot of it down before it is lost. I couldn't run all the obituaries, and rather than be unfair, I decided against publishing any of them. This means that I let the deaths of some very dear friends, Sarah Vaughan, Sahib Shihab, and Robert Offergeld in the last year alone, pass unremarked.

I also decided against publishing poetry about jazz, because the quantity of it that people write is astounding. And since a lot of it is also very good writing, I didn't know how to select it.

Another of my editorial proscriptions was grieving memoirs. It seemed that almost every time someone died, someone else was impelled to express his or her loss in a memoir for which there was no possible outlet except perhaps the *Jazzletter*. Had I printed all these pieces, the publication would have taken on the tone of a dirge. So, rather than select them, I have printed none of them.

I'm going to break my rule to say good-bye to Bobby Scott. Bobby, who was a fervent Catholic, would have argued that some essence of him would be hanging about to hear this farewell. I don't think so. But I must make it anyway, for Bobby was part of the *Jazzletter*. Often when, disheartened by the people who Xerox it, I wanted to fold it and forget it, Bobby on the telephone would make me feel that it was important, that it mattered, and I'd pick up the pieces and carry on.

Bobby wrote a good many fine essays for the *Jazzletter*, his portraits of Lester Young and Gene Krupa being particularly memorable. Now that Bobby's gone, I can tell you how the Lester Young piece was written. For all his bravado, Bobby was intimidated by the act of writing. When his adulatory descriptions of Prez reached some sort of critical mass, I asked him to write a piece about it. He said he didn't know how. I said, "Write it in the form of your letters to me. Send it in parts. When you get to the right point, I'll know, and I'll tell you." The letters started coming, five pages, eight pages, ten pages. The manuscript grew to forty pages. There was a moment that was exactly right, and I sent him a one-word letter: "Stop."

Then I began editing. I rearranged a great deal, but I changed nothing.

Bobby, who was a brilliant composer, arranger, pianist, and singer, got quite excited about writing. Bobby's ego was not small, although how much of it was whistling in the dark I do not know, even now. But he was hardly unperceptive, and he sent me a Christmas card one year on which he had written, "Thank you for making me a better writer than I am." I was deeply touched.

Bobby was, from what he told me, a mixture of Irish, Seminole, black, and I think Jewish. At one time he was a very hard drinker. Once when he was well into his cups, he told me, his mother (the Indian part of him was on her side) said to him tartly, "Which drunk am I talking to, the Indian or the Irishman?" His father was a Broadway actor, who taught him an early skepticism about show business.

He was a very well-trained musician, whose piano reflected gospel and the blues, whereas his compositions often reflected modes other than the major and minor. He was volatile, and there are those who would argue that he was mad. Maybe he was, a little. But it was an inspired madness, full of dark and flashing insights.

Bobby had another life, which I first heard about from the late Nat Shapiro, and then from others, and finally, in bits and pieces, from Bobby himself. Bobby was a mercenary soldier, an expert with weapons, who would disappear from time to time to go to God-knows what jungles and savannas and do things I don't even want to know about. It was as if he channeled his destructiveness into that shrouded side of his life, and his creativity into the music.

Bobby was odd. In New York, in the 1960s, when I encountered him on the street, I would keep the contact as short as possible, because his nervousness bothered me. I never dreamed we would become such close friends. And that happened after I moved to California, and most of our conversations were in long letters and telephone calls.

In 1984, I wrote the lyrics for an album recorded by Sarah Vaughan in Dusseldorf. The suite was a plea for preservation of this planet, based on poems of Pope John Paul II, which I translated rather freely. Bobby was the pianist on that epic session, which I described at the time in a *Jazzletter*. Sass never received the music -- or said she didn't. Now that she's gone, I'll say that I think she was a little negligent. But when she saw the size of the orchestra and the scope of Francy Boland's arrangements, she got scared. I taught her that entire score in three days. But my backups were Bobby and my precious, dear friend Sahib Shihab. I remember Shihab, in frustration, singing her the lines; he'd done the copy work on the score, and knew it thoroughly. And I remember Bobby in the basement of a Dusseldorf hotel playing accompaniment on a spinet while I sang the songs and she sang along with me, trying to assimilate this difficult material. We made it, though.

Six years later, all three of them are dead of cancer. Tell me that's a statistical aberration. Tell me there is no epidemic. Six years later, my memories of those days with those three extraordinarily gifted people are become precious.

Bobby was tall, and very thin. In later years he wore a beard, which was, like his full head of hair, gray-white. He had a heavy Bronx accent. His idol Lester Young nicknamed him Bobby Socks, because he was only eighteen when he joined the Gene Krupa Quartet and toured with Prez in Jazz at the Philharmonic. This got shortened to Socks, and I never called him anything else.

One of our friends told me some months ago that Bobby had cancer. I phoned him immediately. He wanted to know who'd told me, and I declined to say. He didn't want it known. He told me, "I'm going to beat this." He had every reason to. He and his wife Judy had a six-year-old daughter named Amber, who had become the center and meaning of his life.

Bobby's music was not restricted to jazz. He wrote some unbelievably exquisite pieces for the distinguished harpist Gloria Agostini, a full album of them, which will never be issued. Then he wrote some more for her. He also wrote some wonderful music for himself on piano and the virtuoso Brazilian guitarist Carlos Barbosa-Lima, with whom he toured, doing concerts, until his illness overcame him. I have tapes of their work together, which I will treasure until I join him in the silence. It isn't jazz, it isn't "classical" music. I don't know what it is. And I don't care. It's just marvelous, gentle music.

Bobby seemed able to write in any idiom. *A Taste of Honey* and *He's Not Heavy, He's My Brother* are both his.

On November 7, I was having lunch with a friend in an outdoor cafe a few blocks from the sea in Montecito, a suburb of Santa Barbara. A very wealthy suburb, full of movie actors, rock stars, and those who have never worked, and it is awash in cocaine. My friend was talking about music. He said, "I read in the New York *Times* that Bobby Scott is dead." I blanched. I knew it was true.

As I drove home through the mountains, I wished I had another piece of Bobby's to print. When I got home, my wife was sorting through some papers. She said, "Here's a letter from Bobby Scott, and something he wrote for the *Jazzletter*. I think you ought to look at them." I told her the news and she burst into tears. She remembered Bobby taking her to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York and lighting candles with her.

The piece he'd written was about Buddy Rich, also now gone, and of the same thing that killed Bobby. (No epidemic?)

When Bobby proposed the piece to me, he said that he thought Buddy's experience as a Marine Corps drill instructor during World War II ever after influenced the way he ran a band. There is a famous underground tape compiled by musicians on the band bus, in which Buddy berates them, telling them they are unfit to play in a band with him, Buddy Rich, that they are amateurs and replaceable. It seems that almost everybody in the business has a copy of that tape, in which Buddy's screaming begins as funny and then becomes

embarrassing. And it is very much like a drill sergeant out to break a group of recruits to discipline by demolishing their egos.

One of the older musicians in Los Angeles waved that tape aside, and told me a story. He said that Bud once put a band together, mostly young players, for a gig in San Francisco. Bud was delighted by their performance, and bought them cases of beer and liquor for the return bus trip to Los Angeles. Yet part way down the road, he strode the aisle like Captain Bligh, excoriating them for their amateur performance. Then he ordered the bus stopped, and got out, nodding to the older musician to follow him. Bud lit a joint, passed it to my friend, winked, and said, "Don't let on to them. I'll lose my authority."

This suggests to me that Buddy's freak-outs were an act, like that of a drill sergeant. But curiously enough, Bobby Scott didn't pursue this insight in his piece on Buddy, and I wanted him to do so. I can't get him to do it now, and all I can do is tell you about it. I liked Buddy, by the way. A lot.

What follows is Bobby's letter and his reflections on Buddy.

October 1, 1988

Dear Gene:

I've just come back from Spain, London, and Puerto Rico, partly touring with Carlos, and being received well at the festivals. Even sang pop things in Cordova!

But I did record this long suite before I left. I received the dupes on the day of my return. Knowing your inclination toward my harp writing, I have to send you your copy in the first batch to hit the mails. As usual, Gloria turns in a monumental performance of a rather difficult work. It required on her part an understanding, as the form is larger than the short pieces I wrote for her a few years ago, which you have. This suite takes things a bit farther along the road to the bigness of concert works. I also explored some newer sonorities, and, I feel, have succeeded rather well.

Though the suite smells of certain influences, I also see myself, my real self, dancing about inside of it. And I begin to realize that Delius' dictum about capturing tranquility had always struck a nerve in me. Maybe it is why I have always preferred Bill Evans to certain busier players. I no longer want to bring my hostility to the paper I'm writing on. I'll let the immature fellows bowl the listeners over. I just want to whisper in their ears, and maybe approximate the joy there is, and wisdom, in an ancient Gaelic couplet: "Like a candle in a holy place, such is the beauty in an aging face."

Amber grows like a weed, and is just four this month. She is as beautiful as the soft wind of a May day. I've lost a few pounds traveling, but I'll rebound. Age is the pits, I'm afraid, and traveling reminds me, with pain, that I'm not 22 but 52.

My ideal has always been to live myself to death, and I only ask God to grant it to me.

Much love from your pal in the Apple.

Socks

Bud

by Bobby Scott

Buddy Rich's very name could raise hackles.

Do such strivers ever make friends of their less intense colleagues? Bud did have solid friends. Some no doubt were less friends than idolaters. That was to be expected.

Gene Krupa was on the mark when he whispered to me one night, as we watched from the wings of a concert stage while Buddy played a solo, "Nobody ever played that like that before, Chappie, and no one'll ever play like that after he's gone."

Oakland, California, fall of 1955. I was touring with Jazz at the Philharmonic, playing piano with the Gene Krupa Quartet and in the company of giants I respected and enjoyed. I remember two things about that evening's concert.

It was in an armory, and the sound was very live. The promoters had even had to build a stage for us. The audience camp-chaired it. The stage had a flaw in the handiwork. The carpenters had made only one set of steps. It was on the right, and you had to go onstage and off by that route. The stage, furthermore, was high, perhaps ten feet.

During the ballad medley, my dear friend Lester Young mounted those steps and played his enchanting version of *I Didn't Know What Time It Was*. Then, instead of returning by the same way he had gone on, he walked toward the far side of the stage and stepped off into the darkness. He screamed, "Well, I'll be a dirty motherfucker!" and hit the floor.

Poor Prez. He skinned a shin very badly. I rushed back into the dressing-room area. I found him pouring good Scotch on the angry-looking abrasion. I said, "That has got to hurt like hell, Prez."

He grimmaced, kept pouring Scotch on that brown twig of a leg, and said, "Shit! You got to be a *man* about some things, Socks."

Those words hang in my memory. So does Buddy's absurd solo that evening. It was so outrageous a display of technique -- unique to him and his abilities -- that all the musicians who weren't on the stage went out front with the audience, to look up at that raging dynamo, pumping out unbelievable percussion effects that one was not apt to hear again in this life.

Bud was always curt with me. I assumed, I believe correctly, that it was because I was just eighteen years old and he thought I hadn't earned my spurs, and shouldn't be playing with the big guys -- even though he had been playing professionally at least since he was five. Still, when I approached him later that evening, effusively adoring, and asked what had prompted such a display, he smiled that marvelous smile of his, full of the most devilish arrogance, and said, "I saw all my enemies' faces on the drum heads, kid, that's all."

I remember thinking that Bud had so much passion in him that he could have directed it differently and been as much a boon as he worked at being a bane.

Gene Krupa wouldn't break bread with Buddy, and advised me not to do so. That was odd for the Old Man. He never

advised others about behavior. When I asked him, knowing how much he as a drummer respected Bud, why he felt as he did, he told me a story about dining with Bud in a West Coast restaurant. Of a sudden, Buddy decided that a man across the room was staring at him in an unfriendly way. Gene, ever the diplomat and a prince of that noble race called the Discretionary, told Bud that they were who they were, and that the public at large was bound to stare at them now and then, and urged him to go on eating the excellent food.

But Bud wouldn't let it rest. He said the man was staring because he didn't like Jews, or drug-users, or whatever. Disturbed by Buddy's imaginings, Gene began to have indigestion. And then the man got up, came across the room to their table, introduced himself, and said he'd been trying to get Bud's attention because he'd once been a sideman in one of Buddy's road bands. As it turned out, the man was, like Buddy, Jewish. The incident ended in a pleasant reunion.

But Gene swore he'd never eat with Buddy again, and as far as I know he never did.

Ignoring Gene's warning, I invited Buddy to eat with me one evening in New York City. As he had planned to meet his sister that evening, I invited her to come along as my guest as well. Having eaten more meals in restaurants than at home, I rather thought of myself as a food maven. So I suggested La Scala, which was then on Fifty-fourth between First and Second avenues. Bud had never eaten there, and I foresaw a delightful evening in one of the better Italian eateries in the world.

The beginning of the evening was a delight, a chat about weather, family, simple things. The delight ended soon after we sat down. Buddy told the waiter he wanted an order of meatballs, no sauce, in a plate.

His sister and I looked at each other in wonder. I suggested an appetizer, a hot antipasto of stuffed mushrooms, shrimps marinara, and fried zuchini. Buddy shook his head emphatically, and said that if the chef couldn't come up with dynamite meatballs, he'd not touch any other dish on the menu!

I was in a hell of a spot. The gracious owners of the restaurant were friends of mine. They were doing extra duty that evening, working as headwaiters. They were confounded by Bud's meatball order and in fact thought he was jesting. It soon became apparent that he wasn't, and when they counseled him to order something else, he grew only more insistent.

Finally they produced a meatball for him. Buddy sliced it, tasted it, judged it a poor example of the culinary art, and suggested we leave this "joint" and go somewhere else. His sister was so embarrassed she could not look me in the face.

We got up and left. Outside we parted, they to find a place that would please Bud, and me to try to regain my equilibrium. I went back into La Scala, made my apologies to the chef, and ate a marvelous meal in peace.

By Bud's own admission to me later, he hadn't begun to mellow yet. And he did mellow. I know people who insist he didn't. But he did. It's just that to certain people he did not like he continued to show the same hostile face he had always presented.

Gene told me, in the course of that 1955 tour, that he had actually seen Buddy in the latter's vaudeville days, when he was billed as Traps, the Drum Wonder. Gene said he was knocked out by the little boy, who was then about as high as his bass drum. Gene never spoke of Buddy's playing, even in that earlier incarnation as Traps, in anything but superlatives. After describing Buddy's life as a child on the vaudeville circuit, Gene, with his wonderful gentle tolerance, gave me a strange look, asking me silently: How do you think you'd behave if you'd had Buddy's row to hoe?

I was a bit of a precocious kid myself, but I had not, fortunately, been raised as a stage child.

In fact I believe Buddy handled his past and consequent problems better than some other performers I've had the misfortune to work with who had backgrounds as juvenile performers. A few of them never got past sounding like refugees from Major Bowes or the Horn and Hardart Hour. Buddy's social behavior was exemplary except when he encountered a fool, or someone with no sense of what was and what wasn't "good taste". Then he could be guilty of overkill. Bud was quick, and witty, and a master of the put-down. It was dangerous to bait him, and a fool did so at his own risk. Maybe it was because he was a sort of classless human being, a man who observed neither upper nor middle nor working class morality. He could respond in a primitive manner, i.e. with his fists. Though he was little, he was feisty.

Was he, then, an example of the uncommon common man? Were his detractors wrong in thinking they were right because they backed off and "talked over" disagreements with their fellows? I respected Buddy immensely for his *seeming* misanthropy. He didn't take any guff from anyone. And why, indeed, should he have? I don't. And didn't he have an excellent sense of humor to set against that intimidating surface of his? That sense of what was funny balanced him in the eyes of those who seek evenness in another's temperament.

There is an Irish expression about people such as Bud. It is said that they have "more spirit than the flesh can contain." Buddy was always on the go. His feet and hands and lips moved at mach speed, his restless facial muscles full of animation. Buddy's hands in fact were only ever at rest when they were holding drumsticks. For example:

We were walking down an endless corridor in some huge building somewhere, on our way to the stage. Buddy was jawing eagerly, and all the while he kept time and played fills on the walls with his drumsticks! He never let the time slip, and he never let the conversation wane. His energy was awesome, even to me, young then and with a great deal of energy of my own. I could hardly compete with Bud, though.

Bud actually played more than anyone else on JATP, excepting maybe Ray Brown, another warhorse of energy. Nobody ever said it, but Buddy and Ray Brown set the tone of every evening's concert. Buddy was completely consistent, night after night after night.

I marveled at it. And I realized that the shabby criticism of his playing that I had heard from parochial minds was a lie. I guess the musicians who uttered such drivel had never played

with him. They said he was a bull in a China shop. And some said he was a "relic" of the big band era and the booming bass drum.

Well, one need only listen to *An Oscar for Treadwell* by Dizzy and Bird to banish such absurd notions. There was lots of take charge in Buddy's character, to be sure, but that puts off only the persons lacking confidence in themselves and their abilities. Buddy seemed to challenge those playing with him to rise not only to the occasion but to his level of excitement and energy. No one encouraged horn players to higher levels of playing than did Buddy, who often kept up a running commentary during their solos, praising them and shouting encouragement and exultation, all of this punctuated by bass-drum bombs and flashy punctuations deftly laid into the most propitious parts of the bar.

Then he would turn a hundred and eighty degrees to play the most delicate, lacy, wire-brush accompaniment to Ella Fitzgerald's ballads. I was always captivated by this insightful back-up playing, his uncanny understanding of what it was she was trying to accomplish in her segment of the concert. Buddy's understanding went beyond jazz. No doubt because of his background, Buddy understood *show business*.

Buddy believed people should be responsible to their musical gifts.

During the 1970s I saw proof of this. I had begun to work with three daughters of prominent jazz stars who had formed a singing group. One of them was Buddy's daughter. The kids asked me to help them put some things together that they could perform before the public. It was a challenge, and I agreed to help them, and told them I did not want to be paid.

I spent a few hours a week rehearsing them. Once or twice they were late. It was nothing; it didn't even raise my eyebrows. But Buddy was there at one of those late starts, a rehearsal in a club on the East Side. He became loud and caustic, berating the girls for wasting my time. He told his daughter that if it came to his attention that they had done it again, he would insist that I stop aiding them.

I think Bud shared an opinion so aptly expressed by Mahler: "The young, unfortunately, are *not* always right."

Everybody in the jazz world knows Buddy's famous remark on being admitted to a Los Angeles hospital for the last time, with a brain tumor. He was asked if he was allergic to anything. He replied instantly, "Yes. Country-and-western music." I imagine Buddy had few regrets toward the end, even though I am sure he would have preferred to leave us the way Big Sid Catlett, the drummer he admired so, did it: playing himself into the next life. It wasn't granted to him.

There is no question in my mind that Buddy mellowed. In the later years, I ran into him -- literally -- on a street in New York. It was summer, and he wore a simple pullover shirt. When we collided on the sidewalk, my arms went around his waist, and I felt a bit of a tire tube there. I teased him about it. Instead of saying something scathing, he responded almost sheepishly that his recent illnesses had kept him too damn sedentary. His own right hand gave mine a squeeze, and that truculent puss sent me a bumpy smile, his eyes saying what his facial muscles could not.

Everything you got from Buddy had to be wrenched out. For he had a drill instructor's disposition, and he refused to show life even a second's worth of vulnerability.

And he was vulnerable, being human. He loved his family, and he had his passions. But if you joined his band and thought you were going to pot-shot at the old man, you had a lesson coming your way. You'd see no vulnerability, young fellow.

I reflect upon the saying of a Galilean carpenter that "Those who have ears shall hear, and those who have eyes shall see." No doubt He meant truly hear and see. But could it have been something else He was alluding to? Is there not *more* than hearing and seeing? Perhaps it is what is not seen that the perception of such -- even if only inside one's head makes one see without seeing.

Buddy would hate it if he heard me call him a deep person, which I think he was. He thought he was quite normal, quite regular. His gifts, of course, were out-sized and therefore not a subject for discussion. What would one say about his playing other than that no one else could effect what he did with a set of drums? Any number of musicians have attested to this. Oscar Peterson has said that Buddy could sit down to a bad set of drums, "what I call soggy drums," Oscar said, and produce an incredible sound.

I think even Buddy was mystified by his abilities. He said once, "It's as if the Man Upstairs said to my hands, 'Be fast.' And they were."

To watch Buddy perform was to gain insight into the mysteries of strength and balance, for his frame could remain remarkably still while his arms, hands, and maybe more importantly, his third finger, danced like dervishes. Drummers will tell you: the sound seemed always greater than the effort that went into it. Perhaps it had something to do with his wrist motion at the end of the stroke. But his body hardly moved, and for that matter his hands seemed almost lazy. It was an outrageous study in physical contrariness. There were reasons, I am sure, for his lack of showboating antics. But it remains a mystery to me that he could create such a volume of sheer sound with so little movement of his torso. Such an economy of motion.

I never did ascertain who taught Buddy how to play, if indeed anyone did. But if Traps had a teacher, he must have been the best, the exquisite best. It is much more probable, though, that Buddy absorbed what he needed from what he heard in the music around him. Knowing that Buddy was fair, I think he'd have mentioned a teacher had he honestly thought he owed a debt of recognition. I don't think he had a teacher because, for one thing, Buddy couldn't read music. He was more the self-made artist than one who was shaped by someone else. When Krupa spoke of watching Traps in vaudeville, you must understand that Gene was there only to hear him: Gene had no interest in O'Leary's Mules or The Foys or any other vaudeville act.

Once during that JATP tour, in Indianapolis, Buddy came

down with dysentery. I asked him if he'd ever taken Kaopectate. He said he hadn't. I went out into the neighborhood and bought a bottle of it, which I gave him. Next morning I asked him how he felt. He sort of squinted, in a way he had, and said, "Mean as ever, kid," and went on with us to the airport. I wasn't surprised. He hadn't asked my help.

He and Prez were so different in their sensitivities. One night in Canada, Norman Granz told us after the concert that there was a bus waiting to take us to the home of some fan. When I asked for more details, I was told that he was a millionaire who, like Gatsby, gave parties he himself never attended.

The house, in the suburbs of Vancouver, was a mansion with so many rooms that Dizzy Gillespie, making an informal tour of it, almost got lost, finally making his way back to a living room as large as a nightclub where the rest of us chomped on Oriental food. The room reminded me of the Hickory House on Fifty-second Street in Manhattan. It was about the same size and had a bar in the middle.

We ate and amused ourselves. There was no one in the house except the white-dressed chefs in their mobile kitchens of gleaming stainless steel, serving us. Buddy, Roy Eldridge, and Illinois Jacquet set up an impromptu tournament on the regulation-size pool table. Buddy, who had griped all the way to this house, had come alive at the sight of it.

But Lester Young, I noticed after we had eaten, was nowhere to be seen. I was really surprised, because he had boasted of being a regular Willie Mosconi with a pool cue in his hand. This was bravado, of course, in the American tradition of tall-tale telling. And Prez was a first-class actor.

But his absence disturbed me, and while Buddy, Roy, and Jacquet went on playing Chicago and Eight Ball, their voices punctuating the dry atmosphere of that strange unlived-in dwelling, shouting assaults to the polished wood, brass, and leather of the room, I asked if anyone knew where Prez was. They shook their heads. I went out the front door and walked to the silver-sided bus that had brought us to this strange late supper. The door was open. I hollered: "Prez? You in there?"

The answer voice was measured and soft. "Yes, Bobby Socks, I'm here."

I entered the vehicle's dark interior and made out the shape of Lester's pork-pie hat. He was still in the seat in which he'd come here.

"Why aintcha eatin', Prez? The food is aces, I gotta tell ya."

For a time there was no answer, not even a grumble. I walked down the aisle until I stood before my friend. I idolized him. "Whatsa matter, Prez?"

He shook his head.

"You won't get another chance to eat before morning," I said, pleading.

"Socks," he began, so wearily that I knew he was about to impart something I'd be unable to understand fully until long afterwards, "when a person invites me to his home, he meets me at the door and welcomes me."

I don't remember what I said in the effort to excuse the Army-Navy store magnate's behavior. Prez hadn't seized on a breach of protocol as an end in itself. No. There was a point to his behavior. We had sought solicitude among the wealthy, which was (and is) tantamount to fishing for rainbow trout in a drainage ditch or a Bronx sewer.

Such men are said to have sold their souls to the devil in the cash-register wars. That isn't soul. Such a man has sold nothing to the devil. But seeing his own reflection in the face of that devil he finds the plurality, the confirmation, that he needs, so warming that like Narcissus he falls in love with his own vapidity and is asphyxiated by lack of oxygen. His heart forgets how to beat and how to love. He becomes an abstraction, his actions foolishness to those who, like Prez, have yet to drive the wolves from their doors and daily face an unyielding reality.

Roy, Jacquet, and Buddy lacked the child-like quality of Prez. As grown men, they didn't care about their provider's absence. They hadn't honored him with a moment of their thought. When I told Bud about Prez sitting out there alone on the bus, there was a quizzical alignment of his lumpy face and the slightest suggestion of a shrug. "You taste the food, kid? It's good food, ain't it?"

I nodded assent.

"It's like money, kid. Only a fool asks where it comes from."

But Prez was no fool, and I tended to agree with his view of the incident. I wanted it made known to me that I was welcome. But what was important to Buddy, by contrast, was the lack of anyone making him feel *unwelcome*. As long as no one bugged him, no one had to invite him and be charming in the process.

I think Buddy's morality began and ended very close to his person. It included his family and a few old friends. Lester Young, on the other hand, implicitly shared John Donne's view that each man's death diminished his own humanity.

I always sensed that Bud poo-pooed the abstract. He seemed bent on presenting himself as a self-sufficient person who needed the barest minimum of warmth and comfort from others. Perhaps that is why he troubled so many people: his apparent coldness, almost a form of disdain. Given that he insisted he be judged solely on his musical contributions, then he was behaving correctly according to his lights. I don't believe he ever cared much whether I or anyone else thought well of him.

Could this have stemmed from his own understanding of his own uniqueness, which only Prez on that tour equalled? He had no peer. Who could fill the hole his absence would make? No drummer I can think of. I'm sure Norman Granz had a list of substitutes in mind, considering Buddy's record of taking walks in the middle of engagements. There was the famous story of his leaving the Tommy Dorsey band in the middle of a performance at the Paramount. But there could be no replacement.

I remember a flight from Texas to Denver, Colorado, that brought into bas relief the personalities of everyone on the tour, in particular Gene, Buddy, and Prez.

The plane was a Convair, with two engines. Prez referred

to engines as lungs. He hated one-lungers, as he called them, and even two-lungers. We lost one of the lungs on the flight. There was a peculiarity to the Convair's engines, the pilot honestly told me later. He said it was extremely difficult to feather the engines and restart them once they'd shut down.

Buddy went forward to ask some questions of life and death. The pilots shut and locked their door on him. Bud beat a tattoo on it, and he certainly knew how to do that. The stewardesses told us all to cushion our heads, using our belts to hold the pillows to our skulls. Most deaths in the propeller age came, apparently, from head injuries. Why didn't they break out football helmets in emergencies?

Lester was ashen and, given his tender digestive system, was using up all the airbags near his seat. I was as frightened as he was, and had the strange thought that I would get only sideman billing even in the obits. But at least I didn't get sick, like Prez. I was bolstered a little by a half-inebriated Gene Krupa who, sitting next to me, mumbled stoical words, such as "I've crashed before in one of these, Chappie. Don't worry. Those fellows up there flyin' this bird flew missions over Europe through fields of flak and German fighters. Hell, they sure aren't worried. They can set this crate down in a cornfield, believe me."

They almost had to. We were over Kansas when the remaining engine began to falter. This sent Buddy into a higher pitch of shouting concern, and his need for reassurance reached epic proportion. I can see him walking back down the aisle after banging on the cockpit door. The plane was flying at an incline, with the nose up. Flip Phillips began to whistle *The High and the Mighty*. Buddy threatened to beat the shit out of him. Flip is not malicious, and he whistled that only to lighten the mood in the cabin.

And Norman Granz, that traveler of all travelers, slept through the crisis. At last we came down over the prairie airport at Manhattan, Kansas, so slowly that I could count the ears of corn on stalks by moonlight below us. We came to a bumpy and sigh-producing halt on a deserted runway, then taxied toward the tiny terminal. Buddy said he'd flown on his last aircraft and Norman could shove this tour.

Norman tried -- quite sweetly, I thought -- to calm him, but Bud wouldn't let up. Norman was as tired as the rest of us, but he listened patiently to the diatribe, which ended with Buddy's announcement that he would train it to Denver.

That was not possible, of course. Our engagements were often so far apart that the only practical way to get there was by air. Finally Norman had had enough: he told Buddy he would have to fly the rest of the way to Denver. He turned to Pete Cavallo, the tour's bandboy extraordinaire, who was in charge of logistics, and said quietly, "If Buddy doesn't fly to Denver with us, throw his drums in the nearest river."

When morning came, a replacement aircraft had been brought in: another Convair. Buddy had calmed to the extent of realizing all the rest of us were willing to fly. He gave in at last, and we landed in Denver.

Before we left Denver, however, I saw Bud chatting with the pilot who was to take us to our next concert. The man was having a cup of coffee. Bud stood over him, questioning him in detail. The pilot apparently found this amusing, and he was amiable about the grilling he was getting. Finally, he pointed out to Bud that he too had a wife and children waiting for him at home.

Buddy's reactions were always outsized and provocative. No one else making our flight-a-day schedule complained as he did, and they had as much right to gripe over heavy road work as he did. But Buddy was anything but stoical, and his singularity never slept.

I may be doing Buddy an injustice by dwelling on his reactions more than his important direct action, which was his drumming. I have never met anyone whose life was so wrapped up in the playing of his instrument, nor have I met anyone who loved the pure playing of music as much as Buddy did.

And it showed in the excitement he generated and the sheer joy in his face when he was in full flight. To see him in the daytime was to watch a man counting the hours until he could finally get behind his foot-pedals and drumheads. I believe he lived to play. His hands expressed the very rhythms that called out of pulsing blood to be made a reality, a monument to what was so terribly alive inside him, to what could not be contained in the flesh but must exhibit itself and summon up that same pulse in the blood of others.

When Buddy became too ill to play -- and I understand that even had he recovered from the brain tumor, he would never have been able to play again -- I'm sure he wanted out of here, out of this life.

I remember his rejoinder that day on the street in New York when I cautioned him about caring for his health and taking things easier in general and in particular in his drumming. That puckish smile of his suddenly appeared and he shook his head a little in a show of resignation to his defenselessness against fate.

He said, "I gotta *play*, Bobby, you know that."

I realize how much I have changed since I first knew Buddy in 1955. I was inclined to regard his behavior as many others did, and wonder what motivated that strange man who played so well. Now I see that I was a fool, a young fool, who could not perceive the purposefulness of his drive. What I thought was nervousness was pure anticipation before the show. For he was about to pass on to the audience an insight into the workings of an eternal Clock through his own understanding of Time passing, and the excitement of making every second's worth of it into a glowing remembrance with his dazzling hands.

Who was Buddy Rich? It depends who you ask. Certainly there are those who remember him without affection, but I am not one of them.

Buddy was a living exaggeration. Shakespeare's dictum is essentially correct, that the good men do is oft interred with the bones. But recording has changed that. It will not be possible to forget how good Buddy was.

-- BS