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Jazzletter

P.O. Box 240
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June 1990 Vol. 9 No. 6

Mail Bag

I am overjoyed to find someone who shares my enthusiasm for the great Earl Hines. From the night in 1931 when I heard him at Chicago's Grand Terrace Ballroom, I have thought him a most under-rated musician.

I heard Hines' small group just before his death from Parkinson's disease. Hines was greatly limited by the state of his health, yet the spirit of him and his group, and that great smile, made it seem as though he were saying, "Don't feel sorry for me. Have fun and enjoy the music."

About *Bix and Bill*. I was born in Shamokin on the south end of the anthracite coal fields and spent a major portion of my life in Scranton. I remember well the great opportunities to hear the best of live jazz at any of a multitude of small lake-side summer resorts in the area surrounding the Lackawanna and the Lehigh valleys. Before the war, the Pocono resorts looked to Philadelphia and Scranton, and that area would have to be included as well. I can remember only a small fraction of the great bands that grew from the musicians in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Outside talent like Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway did one-night stands where, for $2.20, you could dance from 8 p.m. until 2 a.m.

Scranton had two theaters showing vaudeville, and both bills changed weekly. They had bands as large as Fred Waring's. It was often said that a show that went over in Scranton would be a success anywhere.

I never had the pleasure of meeting Bill Challis. Your article makes me feel really deprived.

Arthur O'Connell, Pebble Beach, California

One of the things I like about the *Jazzletter* history of jazz series is the rich, suggestive way the roots of this sophisticated music are revealed in coal-town dance halls and small-time events and rituals of the popular culture: how the music grew out of the lives of the people who made it. I did some oral history interviews for a book a friend of mine in Seattle is putting together called *The Roots of Jazz in Washington*, and sat amazed as those guys recalled the rich music scene that drew them all together into a fecund mix that produced -- in every corner of the country, I'm learning, not just the New Orleans up the river to Chicago fiction -- such a cultural flowering.

Lynn Darroch, Portland, Oregon

Since I continue to believe that the *Jazzletter* is seriously under-priced, permit me to renew my subscription at what to me is clearly the appropriate price, $200.

Continued success (and, perhaps, overwork!).

Howard Kitt, White Plains, New York

Howard Kitt is an economist.

A number of people have pointed out that private newsletters usually go for much higher prices, since they cater to a select audience and do not carry advertising. Most of the Jazzletter *readers are highly successful, and some are very wealthy. But there are other readers who, on reaching retirement age, find their incomes fixed and limited. A few have told me they could no longer afford the* Jazzletter, *and, reluctantly, would have to leave the subscription list. I put them down for free.*

And there are young musicians struggling to make ends meet.

I don't know what to do about it. One of the problems, still, is the photocopy machine, along with people who pass the Jazzletter *along to other people, who don't pay for it. Publications supported by ad revenues want that to happen; private publications are hurt by it.*

Ms. *magazine has been resurrected in a no-advertising format. Its editors too found that advertising inevitably and inherently is corrupting to the editorial process. For example,* Ms. *in its old form was the first publication to tell the public about toxic shock syndrome. The manufacturers of tampons boycotted the magazine, and continued to boycott it even after the story had broken widely in newspapers. I hope, incidentally, that the women in our readership will look into* Ms. *You can find it now in some of the book-store chains. It deserves support.*

I don't feel I can raise the price of the Jazzletter, *at least not much, though the pressures of the continuing inflation make it harder and harder to keep it alive. If anyone else is inclined toward a magnanimous gesture like Howard Kitt's, please don't hesitate.*

I want to give my strongest support to the worthy project of a United States commemorative stamp for Louis Armstrong.

Armstrong was not only the greatest musician in the history of our only native art form, but he quite single-handedly conquered the world as America's ambassador of music. I am certain that his likeness on a U.S. stamp would be welcomed, not only in the United States but throughout the world.

I am writing to you in hopes that readers will write to the U.S. Postal Service requesting the stamp. Requests should be mailed to USPS, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington DC 20260-6753.

Teresa Brewer, New York City

The Brother

Chicago

The opening segment of the opening night of the Chicago Jazz Festival this year was a memorial to Nat Cole, featuring his brother Freddy. I was uneasy at the prospect, fearing yet another sad exploitation of the dead.

My respect for Nat Cole was boundless. Although I have reservations about polls, on grounds of the impossibility of defining the best in any field, I have often thought that if I were forced at gunpoint to name my favorite jazz pianist, I just might say "Nat Cole." And he was one of my favorite singers.

Not that I admired all the songs he chose. Sinatra built a better repertoire. Cole's collective work as a singer contains far too many so-so songs. Like Perry Como, he sometimes applied a superb talent to material that didn't deserve it.

Mona Lisa is a contrived and vapid song. *Too Young* wasn't too bad, but it wasn't too good either. The same could be said of *A Portrait of Jenny* and *Blue Gardenia* and *Unforgettable* and so many other songs that he recorded. He seemed almost to avoid the great repertoire of Broadway material, which formed the core of Sinatra's output during his best years.

Cole had a mild bent for what I call They Songs. These are songs in which an anonymous "they" tell you all sorts of things about that momentous thing called Life. Such songs are a little like the movie plots about people accused of crimes they did not commit in that the premise is inherently ersatz. They set up straw men that they then knock down. *Mona Lisa* asks if it's only because you're lonely "men" have blamed you. "They" try to tell us we're too young. Of nature boy, "they" say he wandered very far. In another song, Cole sang, "There is a very quiet boy they call the lonely one."

Imagine it. Oh him. Yeah, we call him "the lonely one."

Sophisticated Lady's awkward lyric begins "They say . . . " Even Irving Berlin and Cole Porter occasionally sank to the use of the device. When was the last time "they" told you that falling in love is wonderful? Or various wise men buttonholed you to say, "See here! Do you realize that love's young dream never comes true?" In *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*, Oscar Hammerstein wrote that "they" asked how the protagonist knew his true love was true. Oh sure they did. Then in the last eight, he (or she) says laughing friends deride tears he cannot hide. Before he gets a new girl, that guy ought to get some new friends.

It seemed that Nat Cole was more interested in melodic content than in the lyrics. In any case, the quality of material was secondary to the performance. Such was Cole's musicality that one was mesmerized by his handling of even cotton candy songs. His career, a little like that of Fats Waller, was marked by triumphs of performance over material, of style over content. Unlike Waller, who solved the problem by spoofing the songs, Cole did not make mock of what he sang. He lent it his own dignity, which was enormous. And when occasionally he sang something of genuine merit, such as *When I Fall in Love*, he usually wrapped the song up forever. When in *Star Dust* he was dealing with Hoagy Carmichael's Bixian melody and Mitchel Parrish's lyric -- one of the finest in the language -- he gave the song what for my taste is the definitive performance.

He also had a capacity to infuse novelty material at bright tempos, songs like *Straighten Up and Fly Right* and *Just You, Just Me*, with an incredible lift. *Just You, Just Me* is in an album called *After Midnight* that he made with Stuff Smith, Willie Smith, Juan Tizol, Sweets Edison, John Collins, Charlie Harris, and Lee Young. That album would without question be on my desert-island list of ten. It bubbles, the soloists are all excellent, Cole sings superbly, and some of his most memorable solos (not to mention his punchy comping behind his colleagues) are found in its tracks. That album contains Bobby Troup's *Route 66*. When I drove to California in 1974, I didn't really need a map. Although Route 66 itself was on its way to superannuation, bypassed by the interstate system, the way stations remained the same, and I just listened to the Nat Cole record in my head and followed the road signs: St. Louis; Joplin, Missouri; Oklahoma City; Amarillo; Gallup, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Arizona; don't forget Winona; Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino.

I had mixed feelings over Nat Cole's two careers, regretting that he had seemingly abandoned the piano for his other career as a singer, even though I loved his singing. When I had the opportunity to ask him about it, he said with disarming candor and his gentle charm that the public wouldn't pay him as much to play piano as it did to sing.

Now we know that he never abandoned the piano. Rather he went right on recording instrumental material that Capitol never released.

An identifiable singing style -- and there was never one more identifiable than Nat Cole's -- comprises four central elements: pronunciation, enunciation, phrasing, and inherent vocal quality.

The first three can be imitated, although Cole's phrasing posed special problems to any emulator.

It is pronunciation and enunciation that impressionists reproduce to get their effects. Impressionists have done Sinatra endlessly, reproducing his New York-area dentalized t's and d's and the softened Italian r after consonants, in such words as "dream" and "tree". But the voice itself ultimately escapes imitation. A voice is as individual as a fingerprint, and modern equipment can identify one beyond question. Indeed, one of the reasons voice-responsive computers are not yet in general circulation is that they are sensitive to individual voices. The equipment has to be retrained for each new voice.

Nat Cole's voice was an extraordinary instrument, quite aside from how well he played it. It was a genuinely pretty voice. It was almost a tenor voice, but it had a dark, resonant, baritone undercolor, most evident when he went down to scoop up the low notes.

His enunciation was characterized by an outstanding clarity. And his pronunciation, which I thought was uniquely his, was as distinctive as everything else about him. His vowels were very rounded, and he would give the full value to diphthongs. For example, in *You're Looking at Me* from that *After Midnight* album, "boy" is heard as "bo-ee," with a very full O sound. His enunciation was exaggerated without seeming in any way affected. Finally, there was his phrasing, which was free and, in up-tempo materials, hard-swinging.

Nathaniel Adams Cole was born March 17, 1917 in Montgomery, Alabama and grew up in Chicago. Nat Cole smoked heavily -- a carton a day, according to one of his associates. If you think that's impossible, please note that Talullah Bankhead consumed that quantity, and one of my acquaintances quit smoking when he reached seven packs a day. I

quit at three.

Nat died February 15, 1965, in Santa Monica Hospital, of lung cancer.

I have said repeatedly that no singer would ever capture his sound. Earl Grant tried. Certainly, I believed, no one would ever attain his insouciant time.

I would not, I thought, want to be Nat Cole's kid brother and pursue a career as a singer and pianist. Be an electrical engineer or something. Above all, I would not want to be the opening act of a festival in the town in which Nat Cole grew up and in which, all these years later, he remains a powerful if invisible presence. One would have to be either very foolhardy or very talented and secure in one's identity to do that.

Thursday, August 30, 1990, 6 p.m., the Petrillo Bandshell in Grant Park, Chicago. A crowd well up in the thousands was assembling in the rows of folding chairs in front of the stage. A faint fragrance of the fresh water of Lake Michigan -- so different from the scent of the sea -- was on the air, though when the zephyrs altered you could smell street food from the tents of the vendors nearby: shish-kebab, tacos, barbecued ribs, hot dogs, popcorn. The air was exceptionally dry and clear, and as one looked north beyond the crowd, one was overwhelmed by the L-shaped palisade of skyscrapers, lights in their windows, standing in psychedelic clarity against the fading sky. The only comparable skyline view on this earth is that of Manhattan from the Jersey shore or the Staten Island ferry. And this view of Chicago is lovelier by far than anything New York has to offer. Chicago has space, and its lakefront is mostly parkland. And it has humanity.

The man came out in a beautifully-cut white suit, sat down at the piano, angled his body to the right to face the audience. That was like Nat. But Earl Hines sat that way, and Nat, who worshipped Hines and endlessly watched and heard him at the Grand Terrace Ballroom, no doubt picked it up from Hines.

From the moment Freddy Cole began to play, it was evident that as a pianist he was no clone of his brother. He plays very differently, reflecting all sorts of developments in jazz piano that came after Nat.

But when he sang!

The vocal texture was very similar to Nat's. So too the enunciation, and some aspects of the phrasing, with those dips and shifts of dynamics and emphases that gave Nat's singing such swing.

An imitation? Absolutely not. The moment he spoke, to announce the tunes, you could hear that this was a family accent. And the repertoire was unlike Nat's; it seemed much broader, embracing a great deal of the best Broadway material.

Freddy Cole faced the problem of Nat directly: he spoke lovingly of his brother, and sang some of the songs with which Nat Cole was identified. Here the differences became more conspicuous, particularly in the phrasing. And after a while, you began to notice the dissimilarities in the voices. Freddy's is a little darker, maybe a little heavier, in the low notes, yet lighter at the top. And though Freddy Cole had an ingratiating stage manner, it was not Nat's manner.

He had the audience in his hand. I kept asking myself, Is this man as good as I think he is? And the answer kept coming back: yes. He is an exciting performer. One might compare his relationship to his brother with that of Stan Getz and Zoot Sims to Lester Young. He is the only singer I've heard who has drawn successfully on Nat Cole as a source. He begins there; he doesn't end there. He retained -- or found -- his identity in the process.

After the performance, I introduced myself to him in the dressing rooms underneath the bandshell, expressing my admiration for his work with enough restraint to spare him embarrassment. He said he did some of my songs. We arranged to have breakfast the following morning at the Hyatt Hotel, where he was staying.

The Hyatt, on the south side of the Chicago River a few hundred yards in from the lake, has an open lobby, several stories high under a glass roof. It contains a large coffee shop and an open bar with a white Yamaha baby grand on which some anonymous pianist was playing show tunes with conventional changes. I found Freddy, munching on a muffin, as I entered the coffee shop area. I sat down and ordered coffee. Freddy spoke of his brother with admiration and enthusiasm.

I noted that vocal resemblances are common in families, as witness John F. and Robert Kennedy. The radio announcer Jim Ameche's voice was remarkably similar to that of his actor brother Don Ameche. Not only was the texture of Freddy's voice similar to Nat's, the enunciation, even in conversation, was much the same, though the rhythm was a little different. I'd read that their mother had been a stickler on the subject. Freddy shook his head, sipping his coffee. He said that his brother Ike, also a fine pianist and singer, with whom he sometimes performs, has the same singing and speech patterns.

"I guess we got it from our father," Freddy said. "My father was a minister. My dad insisted that you enunciate. I remember one time I came in from school, trying to be hip and slurring words. That was a no-no. Even my older brother, Eddy Cole, spoke that way.

"Eddy was a fantastic musician. He played bass and piano. In fact, Nat was in his band -- Eddy Cole and the Solid Swingers. Nat played in that band."

Where, then, did the music come from?

"From my mother. My mother was choir director in my dad's church. She had great musical feel. Good piano player. She just had a knack for touching the right gospel song in church. She was an extraordinary musician. If she were judged by today's standards, she'd be right up there among the tops.

"She had an Uncle Fess. I understand he was a musician. His name was Adams. That was my mother's maiden name. So I guess our musical genes came from my mother's side of the family.

"My father's name was Edward James Cole. He used to be at a church here in Chicago called True Light Baptist Church over at Forty-fifth and Federal. We moved from there, when Ike and I were very young, out to North Chicago, Waukeegan,

and this is where we grew up. I was respectful of my father. We all were that way."

"Were you a very close family?"

"Relatively close. We didn't get a chance to see each other that much. Living in different parts of the country, and everybody traveling. When Nat was in and out of New York, I used to see him quite often."

"Did you all play in your father's church?"

"Nat used to play piano in the church. My sister Evelyn played piano in the church. But Ike and I never played in the church. There were five of us, four boys and one girl. We all played piano. Eddy also played bass.

"Eddy was born in Montgomery. Nat and my sister Evelyn were born in Montgomery. My brother Ike and I were born here in Chicago. All of us had piano lessons, but I was the only one who went to university.

"Nat was a fantastic piano player. His music teacher was named Professor Fryer. Nat studied music at Wendell Phillips High School."

"Then he must have come under the influence of Walter Dyett," I said. Captain Walter Dyett, who had at one time been director of the Eighth Regiment Army Band, established a jazz program at Wendell Phillips long before the college jazz education movement was born. His name is legend in the jazz community of Chicago, because his training produced Gene Ammons, Johnny Griffin, Von Freeman, Joseph Jarman, Pat Patrick, Clifford Jordan, Julian Priester, Wilbur Ware, Richard Davis, Victor Sproles, Dorothy Donegan, Wilbur Campbell, Walter Perkins, Dinah Washington, and Johnny Hartman. And that is a partial list.

"Yes he did," Freddy said. "Nat was a very accomplished musician. He could read music like . . . " A snap of the fingers.

"Where did you study?" I asked.

"I went to Roosevelt University here for a while." Roosevelt University is on Michigan Avenue, a few blocks south of where we were sitting. It looks out over Grant Park and the lake. "I left there and went to Juilliard and then went to the New England Conservatory. I was in music ed. I lack six hours of a master's.

"After that I was in New York and Philadelphia. I lived and worked around Philadelphia for a long while, going to all those little towns in Pennsylvania. There was always work, always a gig. I was heavily involved in commercials and what have you in New York for a while. I did a little sub teaching in the schools, just to make some money. I did that, and back and forth, running up and down on Tin Pan Alley, doing demos and working around town. I finally decided to stay in New York in 1957. Sonny Greer was a real big influence on me. He kind of helped me keep my head on straight. Being a youngster in that town, it's not easy. He and Count Basie. But I guess the guy who really showed me the ropes in New York was Babs Gonzalez.

"It's good to have somebody show you. Gonz was a funny man. Good-hearted guy. Aggravated a whole lot o' people. He aggravated the hell out of me sometimes. Especially in the later years.

"I learned a lot from him. It's good for a young man to have someone he can rely on."

"What years were you living in New York?" I asked.

"I was in New York from '58 through 1970."

"I was there then," I said. "Did you go to Jim and Andy's?"

"All the time," Freddy said with warmth. "The *old* Jim and Andy's, on Forty-eighth. Ross Tompkins and I were talking about Jim and Andy's recently. Everybody used to hang out there." We laughed and began counting mutual friends and wondered that we had never met in those days.

I asked Freddy how much younger than Nat he was. Obviously he must still have been a teenager when Nat became a star.

"Twelve and a half years younger," he said. "I was going to high school in Waukeegan.

"We would always be glad when he came home. He used to play the Regal Theater. I remember he played downtown here at the Oriental Theater. The Chicago Theater."

I told Freddy that I'd met Nat only once, when he played Louisville, Kentucky, on a bill with Count Basie. I interviewed him in his hotel room over lunch. That would have been in 1956 or '57. It occurs to me only now that he probably ordered lunch in the room because we would not have been allowed in the hotel restaurant. We talked much of the afternoon away. Sinatra's name came up. Nat said, "The difference between us is that the band swings Frank and I swing the band." And it's true: Nat had a remarkable effect on the musicians around him.

Other than that one half-humorous remark, though, I said, "one of the things I remember about him was his lack of arrogance."

"He was never arrogant," Freddy said. "Talk to a lamp post."

I'd heard an amusing story about Nat. Some time at the height of his career, Capitol arranged for him to do a session in New York with an arranger noted more for commercial success than for talent. Another singer had had a big hit with him, and someone at Capitol, in his infinite wisdom, decided Nat should record with him. The orchestra was assembled. Nat arrived at the date. The arranger gave a down beat and the band ran down the first chart. Nat listened, took off his Tyrolean hat, put it on the piano, sat down, and played the the song. He stood up, put his hat on, said, "That's how the tune goes," and left. Given Nat's unfailing politeness, did Freddy think the story might be true?

"Yes. If it was on a matter of music, yes."

"You've heard the story that some drunk kept saying to Nat, 'Sing a song.' And supposedly Nat, to cool him out, sang *Sweet Lorraine*, and that's how his singing started. Is that story true? Or is it one of those apocryphal tales?"

"Yeah!" Freddy said, laughing. "It's true. I talked with him about it. In fact, one time in Los Angeles, he drove me by the place where it happened. We were coming home from the ball game or something. It was a little barbecue joint by that time. He showed me where the place was."

"But just the same, he had to know he could sing, given your

mother's background as a choir director. And he knew the words. A lot of musicians don't."

"I guess he knew. But during that time, musicians were taught to learn the words to songs. Because you would know how to play better, to learn how to improvise better."

"Lester Young was very strong on that."

"Drummers too. All those guys knew the words to songs. Jo Jones. They could get up and tell you every lyric."

"There's another story that the trio started when the drummer didn't show. Is that story true?"

"I imagine so."

Off in the background noise, the hotel pianist staged a shy little act of rebellion. After dealing with all those show tunes in the manner of Eddy Duchin, he suddenly played Clifford Brown's *Joy Spring*. It startled me.

I asked Freddy then about his sound, the similarity of his singing to Nat's, in the days when he was coming up.

He said, "I'm a little bit more deliberate, I guess, than my brother, because I was really trying to find me within the realm of the way that I sound -- not just having a sound like Nat Cole. I found myself, really, after I was in Brazil. I had a hit record down there, from an album I did in Europe called *One More Love Song*. The song was called *I Loved You*. The Brazilian singers sound as if they're singing directly to you -- each one of them. This really amazed me. I went to see Roberto Carlos. I was like in a stupor.

"Every one of them I heard, Fafa de Belem, Simone. They said I phrase like Brazilian singers.

"To me, singing is phrasing. And that's one of the techniques Nat had. Along with swingin'! A lot of people thought Nat could only sing ballads. But hell, Nat could swing."

Then there was the matter of enunciation. I noted that Freddy and Nat diminish the letter r, at times almost dropping it completely, yet at times hitting it very hard, almost like the Earl of Devon. I sang a bit of the release of *Just You, Just Me* a little as Nat did it, and Freddy joined me in unison. Nat, I noted, sang, "What are you chahms for."

I said, "Where does that come from? Is that the influence of Alabama?"

"I guess so," Freddy said, chuckling. "My mother and father both were born and raised in Alabama. But you know, Chicago is basically a southern town."

"Has it been a curse on you, having a similar sound?"

"I wouldn't say a curse. In a whole lot of instances, it has made me work harder to accomplish what I'm doing.

"The first thing I had to do was learn to live, and not be backed into a corner by columnists or be ashamed of who I am. It wasn't my fault that I was brought here. And I'm very happy to have had a brother. I often have used the expression, 'If there hadn't been Nat Cole there might not be a Freddy Cole for you to ask that question.'

"My father used to say, 'Every tub has its own bottom. You sit on yours.' I worked hard at doing what I do, and I started saying, 'As long as it sounds good, that's all I'm gonna worry about. And let the chips fall where they may.'"

I suggested that for someone else to pronounce words and sound like Nat would be inherently false. But for Freddy to *avoid* his own implicit sound and family accent and speech cadence would be equally false.

"It would be ludicrous," Freddy said. "Then I would be an imposter. I just did an interview with a lady in Washington, on TV last week. She was giving me all these great accolades, and then she said, 'But he sounds like Nat Cole.' And I said, 'Is that a problem with you?'"

"It's been a problem for Frank Sinatra Jr."

"A very talented young man," Freddy said. "A very nice young man. One time in Dallas, he was following me into the Fairmont Hotel. He came in a couple of days early and we got a chance to visit and spend a little time together. He's a nice cat, man."

"You'll hear people say, 'He sounds a lot like his father.' And I say, 'So do a lot of other people. And who's got a better right?'"

"People try to back you into a corner."

"If you sing a lot like Nat," I said, "you certainly don't play like him."

"We play entirely differently," Freddy said.

"Who are the sources?

"I've got many of them. John Lewis would be one of my piano influences. I like John Lewis. Ahmad Jamal, another one of my good friends. Red Garland. Erroll Garner. And one of my best friends, and I love him, Horace Silver. Nice cat. He sure is a beautiful cat. Among singers, I love Billy Eckstine. I learned a lot watching B, about presentation.

"I also liked Dick Haymes. *Good* singer. And of course Ella. And Sarah Vaughan. We were in New Orleans when she died. It got next to me."

"You obviously have a large repertoire," I said.

"We just closed at a club in Washington, D.C., and people said, 'You've been here six nights, and I don't think you repeated a song.'

"I just have a repertoire that way. And my trio is right on top of everything. I do a wide variety. I do a thing I call American composers. A guy coined a phrase for me 'from Broadway to the blues.' I sense the audience.

"But the presentation is what you have to work on. It's not just how good you sound. If you do not know how to present what you do, you're in big trouble. And that's one of the things I like about Billy Eckstine. His presentation."

"Do you ever sing away from the piano? Nat told me that day over lunch that he thought he sang better if he got away from the piano, because otherwise you were splitting the attention between the two."

"It's true," Freddy said. I *like* to do it sometimes. For a while, I was doing basically a stand-up act, and would just go and play a tune or two. I was working a lot of the jet-set clubs when I was traveling out of the country an awful lot. A lot of people said, 'You don't play any more.' Finally, I just said, 'The hell with it, I'm gonna go back and start playing.' Because I enjoy playing."

"I imagine you're aware," I said, "that Nat went on recording

instrumentals all the time he was with Capitol, and that stuff is now going to come out on Mosaic?"

"I know, I know. Nat loved to be in the studio. He just couldn't sit still. He'd be off for a couple of weeks, and he'd call the guys. That's how the *After Midnight* album came about. They were just foolin' around. My favorite in that album is *Blame It On My Youth*. That one and *You're Looking at Me*. *Sometimes I'm Happy* is good too. I play that album all the time. Stuff Smith and Nat were friends from right here in Chicago. He'd call the guys up and go into the studio."

"What did Nat's death do to you?"

"It was pretty devastating. But prior to that, two weeks before, my dad died with complications of a heart ailment. And so we were all in a state of shock for a long while, with both of them gone just that quick."

"I notice you don't smoke. I quit about ten years ago. Did you ever smoke?"

"Yes. But I haven't smoked now in twenty-five years, and I don't even think about cigarets. I quit before Nat died. I was at the hospital in Santa Monica. I'd been coughing, and had a bronchial condition, and Nat said, 'Man, you ought to quit smoking.' And I said I would.

"Later on, I picked Natalie up from the airport. She was coming home from school. She was twelve or thirteen years old. I lit a cigaret, and she said, 'I thought you told Daddy you were going to stop smoking.' So I said, 'Okay,' and threw the cigaret out the window.

"Thank God, I've smoked one cigaret since. And not even a whole one. That was in December of sixty-four, New Year's Eve."

I asked Freddy then about his family. Nat's daughter, Natalie Cole, is of course a big star in her own right. Was the music turning up in Freddy's family too?

"I have two children," he said. "I have a son named Lionel Cole. That's my first name, Lionel. He goes to school here at Northwestern University. He's a good little piano player, twenty-two years old. I have a daughter, Crystal Joy. She's seventeen and she's in high school and we live in Atlanta, Georgia. My wife's name is Margaret. She's from North Carolina." He laughed. "And she doesn't know anything about music!

"We've been living in Atlanta better than twenty years. We like it. I went there on a gig. I said, 'This is the way I want to live.' I went back to New York and told my wife, 'We're gonna move to Atlanta.' We didn't move right away. Being a musician, I had to get my bread together for a down payment. We picked out a house. We moved in March of 1970.

"I don't work in Atlanta much at all. They seem to want to think that I'm a local yokel. I play festivals all over the world but I practically had to get an Act of Congress to get on the jazz festival we're playing in Atlanta next Monday. There's a hotel that wants me to come in there to work, but they want me to come in for no money because I'm local. I say, 'I'm not gonna do it. I'm going to the golf course, that's where I'll be.' There are a lot of good golf courses in Atlanta.

"But Atlanta's a good town. They've made great strides, jazz-wise. They have a whole summer series. They're in the second year of the Black Arts Festival. It's nice.

"I've been out here in the streets, doing various things over the years, going from one town to another, living the life of a musician. It's been good to me. I have no regrets. We work more than our share. All of it hasn't been pleasant.

"You just keep trudging along. I remember one thing Nat told me. He said, 'You never know who's listening to you.' He told me to try to be professional at all times. My father used to say, 'You must carry yourself in a respectful manner in order to be respected.' That lived with me.

"Through it all, nobody could ever say that Freddy Cole ra[illegible] out on a hotel bill, that Freddy Cole didn't pay his musicians. That I was disrespectful to anyone. I just didn't feel that I was going to be the one to tear down my father's name. When I say that, people might say to me, 'What about your brother's name?'

"I say, 'No, Cole. That's my *father's* name.'"

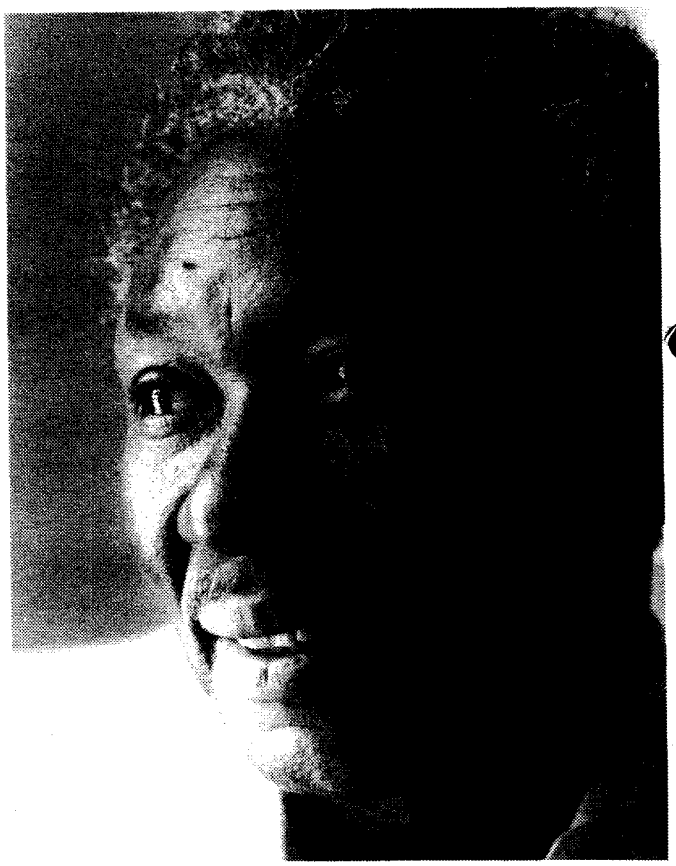

Photo by John Reeves