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Jack in the Woods

"You spend half your life tryin' to get to the big city," Ben Webster said to me one night at the bar in Jim and Andy's, "and the other half tryin' t'get out."

That was one of the bits of lore I absorbed in that unforgotten hostelry, right up there in a class with Sonny Taylor's immortal "De second t'ief is de smart t'ief."

The younger jazz musicians, like younger artists of all kinds, keep coming to New York to make their mark, for even today it's in the Apple that one has to do it. To be sure, as a cultural entity New York today encompasses much more than Manhattan, and there is a significant enclave of young jazz players over in Brooklyn.

In the old days, even the established jazz players lived in or near Manhattan, because they were busy in the daytime playing studio gigs. But those days are gone. There are no more big-orchestra dates with people such as Tony Bennett and Sarah Vaughan and Marilyn Maye. And the jingles dates are done with synthesizers.

So there is little reason for the established jazz musician to endure the pressures and frustrations of life in Manhattan -- or for that matter Los Angeles -- and so the last decade has seen a dispersal of jazz musicians from the major centers. Now they can live quiet lives in quiet places and, in our post-railway age, fly to the festivals and concert dates and occasional nightclub gigs. Bud Shank lives in Port Townsend, Washington, Gene Harris in Idaho, J.J. Johnson in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Herb Ellis in Arkansas (near a golf course, needless to say). Hank Jones lives a couple of hours out of the Apple on a farm near Cooperstown.

In a little closer, perhaps an hour and a half out of New York, there is a little community of jazzmen in the Catskills, in the general vicinity of Woodstock. Warren Bernhardt, Jimmy Cobb, Dave Holland, and Jack DeJohnette live nearby.

Jack lives in a house you'd never find unless he met you with his car near the highway and guided you up winding graveled roads through the wooded hills. It is near a small community with the rather sweet name of Willow. The house is modern, but rustic, built of bare wood. Jack's two dogs rushed to meet me. A winter thaw was in progress, and sun was on the snow.

The living room is large, and high, with a peaked wooden ceiling and large expanses of glass. It was washed in light that afternoon. Jack's wife Lydia, an artist, who did the paintings on two of his album covers, including *Special Edition*, was not at home. It startled me to think that Jack was nearing 50. (He turned 50 August 9.) I still think of him as one of the young fellows. Inspired by Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, Elvin Jones, and Tony Williams, he assimilated all the sources he admired and has become a powerful influence himself.

I met Jack in Switzerland in mid-June of 1968, when he was with Bill Evans. I arranged that booking of Bill's trio at the Montreux Jazz Festival, then a charming and intimate event, not the gaudy circus it became and remains. I can pin the date down because the trio recorded at that time, and I took the photo of the castle of Chillon that is used on the cover of the resulting album. Bill was standing with me. The sessions was June 15, 1968.

I suggested to Jack that since he was himself a pianist, working with Bill must have been a particular pleasure, and for Bill, in turn, it must have been a joy to work with a drummer who was a pianist. (Another of Bill's favorite drummers, Philly Joe Jones, also played piano, and well.)

This prompted Jack, sitting on the piano bench with his back to the keyboard of his own grand piano, there in the woods near Willow, to slip into an effortless dissertation on the Bill Evans Trio -- Scott LaFaro, Paul Motian, and Bill -- when Jack was coming up in his native Chicago. His voice is low and almost diffident, soft and a little froggy. Jack is a handsome man, with a round and very youthful face.

"I guess the concept of the bass the way Scott played it was not so much unusual -- people like Mingus were playing with the fingers before Scotty was discovered," Jack said. "You had Jimmy Blanton. I think had Danny Richmond been a different kind of drummer, he might have had the kind of interplay with Mingus that you got with Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian. People like Gary Peacock might have pre-empted that. That combination of Bill, Paul, and Scotty shifted the emphasis of time from two and four. The way Paul broke up the time. He played sort of colored time rather than stated time. As opposed to what Miles would do. So that they made it in such a way that when they did go into four-four, it was kind of a welcome change. Then they'd go back into broken time.

"I remember the effect it had on rhythm sections in Chicago, because I was at the time a pianist, playing with a bassist who also played cello. We would sit up nights late, listening to the trio records. I noticed the rhythm sections in Chicago started playing that way. So I saw that influence start happening, where the time was broken up.

"I had a drummer with me named Art McKinney, who was doing things like Paul and Tony Williams were doing. This whole concept of broken time freed up the rhythm sections. It created a dialogue in rhythm sections as opposed to just the solid rhythm section like Wynton Kelly and Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb. Then you had Tony Williams, Ron Carter, and Herbie Hancock.

"After that everybody followed that concept.

"It affected me on piano. Especially the voicings. If you listen to how Wynton Kelly played after Bill left Miles, he's playing those voicings like Bill.

"Because Miles wanted those voicings. Those pastel, transparent chords brought light into the music. Everybody -- Keith

Jarrett, for one -- was influenced by that spirit of the way Bill would voice things."

I told Jack that Larry Bunker had said that when he first joined Bill and would try to play figures that would fit what Bill was doing, probably in the heads and out-choruses, Bill would immediately change it.

"I never had that problem," Jack said. "I always played against the music anyway. Because, being a pianist, I always hated drummers who got on top of a rhythm. If you repeated a phrase, they'd answer you back. I don't like that call and answer kind of response. I played my own ideas, which is what Paul did. And you have a dialogue. You play your own personality, you play your own ideas. That's what Eddie Gomez and I did, and Tony Williams, and all the drummers and bass players who participated in the freer aspect of the interplay between drums and bass and the soloist."

I asked about Jack's family.

"My mother was a poet. She wrote songs. My uncle was a jazz deejay named Roy Wood, who became president of the National Association of Black Broadcasters. He was my influence into jazz. My father wasn't living with us. He was in California and just provided financial support. And I went to visit him. I had a half-sister. So I was the only kid.

"The piano was one of the things they gave you -- piano and violin. My first experience with a piano teacher was horrific. It's a wonder I still had a love for music. This was an old fogy guy. If you didn't play the right notes, he'd smack your hands. He was crazy. I'd be in tears. I told my mother I didn't want to take piano. I was about four.

"My grandmother had a friend who lived around the corner who was a graduate of the American Conservatory of Music. She had at that time a real innovative, state-of-the-art way to teach kids where it was fun and interesting. She'd have little recitals at her house, give you gold stars and incentives. That got me turned onto playing the piano.

"I got into drums in high school, because we didn't have a piano in the marching and concert band. I played bass for a semester and then switched to drums. I started playing both of them around Chicago, I worked on piano and drums. I came to New York in 1966 with the idea of playing both of them. But I got hired on drums, so I decided to stick with that and make that my forte and bring out the piano later. I was in my early twenties. My first job in New York was with John Patton, and my second job was with Jackie MacLean. I freelanced around. My first international job was with the Charles Lloyd Quartet. I was with him about two years.

"I worked with Stan Getz for a while. Between the times I worked with Stan and with Miles, I worked with Bill. I know because I left Bill to go with Miles. I joined Miles in '69, and I was on the *Bitches Brew* album. Then I did a lot of freelancing. I worked with Betty Carter, I worked with Abbey Lincoln, Joe Henderson, McCoy Tyner. I worked for a week with Monk, which was a great treat, at Club Barron uptown in Harlem. I worked there with Walter Booker, Charlie Rouse, and Monk. That was great. I had a good time."

I told Jack I was amazed that anyone who plays piano as well as he would switch instruments. "I would think it would be such a rich love," I said.

"Well it is," Jack said. "It still is. I still maintain it. But I felt that I had more to contribute as a drummer at that time. I still intend to contribute to the piano aspect of it, in terms of composing. I'd like to record some more piano records, and maybe do some special performances at some time when I've been able to woodshed and get it the way I want it. I haven't regretted making the drums the main instrument.

"It was almost a prophecy come true. When I was in Chicago, I worked with Eddie Harris. I filled in with Eddie once when he had the *Exodus to Jazz* record. Harold Jones played drums in the piano trio with me. So I had both references. I've played with a lot of drummers, so I know from the aspect of a soloist what a lot of different drummers do. I worked for a week with Eddie, filling in for Harold. Eddie always liked my drumming. I went out on the road with him a few times. We played a week in Philadelphia, at the Show Boat Lounge, I think it was. Eddie was a multi-talented person himself. Eddie is more intelligent than a lot of people give him credit for being. He's very intuitive. He understands the business end of it. He wouldn't keep me steady with him, because he said, 'Well, man, you gotta make up your mind which one you're gonna play.' He said, 'I play piano, I play French horn, I play vibes, I play everything else, but you've gotta make your mark on one. Yeah, you play good piano, but drums, I'll tell you, if you stick with drums, you're gonna make a lot of money.'

"I said, 'Nah, I want to play both.' And I continued. And then when I got to New York, something just said, 'You're gonna make your mark as a drummer.'

"Now Eddie plays the piano and the saxophone and he's singing -- after telling me to stick to one instrument! Eddie's always complaining about something. He complained about New York and the hostility of New York. He said, 'What do you want to go to New York for? The people are so *cold* there.' I think he's not happy unless he has something to moan about -- but a talent! He just had a natural knack for all the instruments. There are just some people who can do that. Like Ira Sullivan. Ira is another genius. I saw him with Red Rodney. Red Rodney said to me, 'We'll be playing these things, and I'll look over at Ira, and he's playing the wrong fingering, but the right notes are coming out! It just blows me away.'"

I told Jack about a semi-mythical incident in which some musicians took Ira into a pawnshop and turned him loose on all sorts of instruments, all of which he would pick up and immediately play. It is part of the jazz folklore of Chicago, but I've

never known whether the story is true.

"He's just gifted, very gifted," Jack said.

"It was always said he couldn't read," I noted.

"I think Ira can read a little bit. I don't think he's ever been a fast reader. He knows notes. He teaches down in Florida."

I said, "In those cases where they say someone can't read, it usually turns out that they can read but can't read fast."

"Well I'm one of those!" Jack said, laughing.

"Bill Evans was a *freaky* reader," I said.

Jack said, "Oh yeah. I saw him look down a whole score and play it. Herbie Hancock does that too. Some guy had written a piece, all sorts of clusters, Herbie played it first time down. Classical complex stuff. Bill was amazing. Stan Getz was another guy. Stan read, but he claimed he didn't know anything about changes. But he had a natural ear! Stan heard the melody of something and played off the melody, but what he played is amazing. I heard a tape of Stan with (drummer) Terry Lynn Carrington and (bassist) Anthony Cox, who worked with John Scofield for a while. There was a young pianist on it and his youth was pushing Stan, and Stan was playing stuff like Wayne Shorter, unbelievable stuff at break-neck tempos. And Stan was just floating through it. And Stan jokes with me, he says, 'Jack, you never played for me, you were just there for the money!' And I say, '*What* money?'

"Gene Ammons was an amazing sight-reader. He'd see the music, look at it, and throw it on the floor.

"The thing I loved mostly about Stan was the sound. All those guys who came out of Lester Young. Stan came out with his own originality. Stan moved with the times. He kept young people with him. But his lyricism was the most beautiful thing! Like Bill! They had this thing, this ability to play and interpret a melody. Play a ballad, and play delicious stuff, and just play the melody, play the song, tell the story of the song!"

"I remember long ago in Chicago," I said, "Donald Byrd and I used to hang out a lot and he said, 'After 15 years in this business, I've come to the conclusion that the hardest thing is to play straight melody and give it feeling.'"

"Yeah!" Jack agreed. "That's what the young, especially the young black musicians, are now discovering -- all of a sudden. They have all the chops they need, they can play as high, as fast, as low, as they want, and especially trumpet players. I was watching this program on television on black entertainment. Ramsey Lewis has a show. It's a half-hour format. It's one of those things where, again, they cram everything into this half hour. You have to come on the show and bring a clip of your stuff, because you don't actually get a chance to play. So Ramsey interviews these players. They had the Harper Brothers on, they had Marlon Jordan, Kent Jordan, these young New Orleans new breed of musicians. He was playing a ballad, and he was saying, 'You play a ballad, and you see people go *Aaaaah*, and that's what I want to do, move people.' The younger kids have the chops, but now they're not so much trying to show it off but to go inside and dig. Draw something out of the music."

"Speaking of guys who play several instruments, I was talking last week in Toronto to Don Thompson . . . "

"Oh, he's amazing!" Jack interjected.

"Well, apropos of your point about young people who can play all the notes in sight, Don said he thinks a lot of the young bass players did not really learn the lesson of Scott LaFaro . . . "

"Yes," Jack said.

"Don said they're playing high on the instrument, and fast, but they forget, he said, how melodic he was . . . "

"Yes!" Jack said.

"And how supportive he was."

"Yes!" Jack affirmed. "That's important! To learn to be supportive! When it's time to fly, you fly!"

"Jazz is unusual in the arts since it's a co-operative."

"Well it's supposed to be," Jack said, laughing. "That's not always the case!"

"How long have you been working as a leader?"

"I guess my first album as a leader of a group was with a group called Directions, on Prestige. The group included Alex Foster, Peter Warren, and John Abercrombie. That was my first band. That was maybe in '75.

"I did a lot of travelling last year because I was on tour with an all-star band I put together with Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny, and Dave Holland. Prior to that I made an album called *Parallel Realities,* which was my most biggest selling -- I guess it was the most accessible record I'd recorded. I had a group called Special Edition, which is my present band, with people like David Murray and Arthur Blythe, along with Peter Warren. I had Howard Johnson and John Purcell. And Rufus Reid joined the band. I had Chico Freeman also. The current group, which has been together for the last three years, has Greg Osbie, a fine pioneer of the alto and soprano saxophone, Gary Thomas, who is a young giant of the tenor saxophone and flute. I am using a young keyboardist named Michael Caine that I'm excited about. Before Special Edition, I had an all-star group with Eddie Gomez, Lester Bowie, and John Abercrombie, called New Directions. We recorded two albums for ECM, one of which won the Grand Prix du Disque in France. The Parallel Realities record won the album of the year last year in Japan.

"I've been doing a lot of recording, touring, and writing. I want to get more involved in producing.

"Johnny Griffin said that jazz is not a trend, jazz is a life style. You have to live the life, whatever that consists of. Doing it full time, you're constantly living on the edge. That's changed now that we're in recession. People who had corporate and white-collar jobs are now finding themselves out of work. If you're fairly successful, and it seems like I am, you're freelancing. I think jazz is suffering quite a bit in the United States, but it's

doing very well in Europe and Japan. So a lot of the musicians record for European and Japanese labels, and are actually being supported and working in the other countries.

"The work is minimal, harder, here because the emphasis is on commerciality. The instant return, rather than looking over the long haul. With the Gulf war, the recession, and the Savings and Loan business, America is learning the hard way. They have to experience it.

"But the American spirit is resilient, and people will learn by their mistakes and start to plan for the long haul rather than the short gratification. I think it was necessary to go through that period of greed. It's yin and yang. The universal sequence of life *is* that, pushing and pulling. Good and evil, good and evil. We have free will to distinguish between good and evil. We're the only species that has to learn from its mistakes. We have to learn by doing. That's the only way we grow. And jazz is the perfect example of that, because a lot of mistakes of jazz have become the catalysts for innovation. Things that weren't intended. Mistakes can have a positive effect on things. There's a price to pay for them. But if the lesson is learned and you build off those mistakes, build a stronger foundation to counteract the mistakes by taking stock, you go forward."

I told Jack, "I was talking to Max Roach the other day. Max seems curiously optimistic . . . I don't mean unrealistic, because he's perfectly aware of what's going on in the country . . . but I've never heard Max in quite that mood. Max seemed to feel a little as you do, that the country may have learned something."

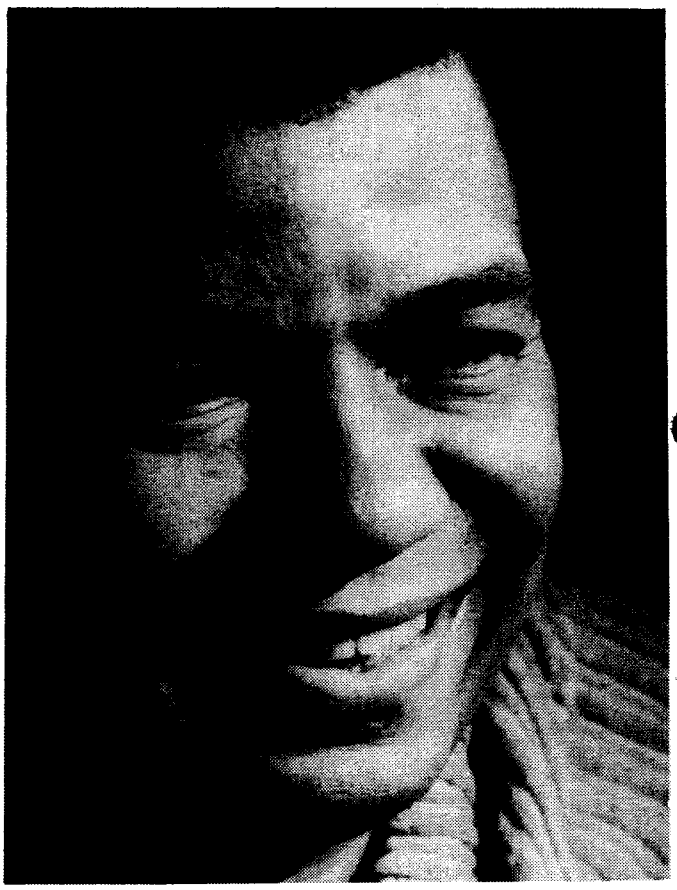
"Yes," Jack said. "America, with all its bulk and greed and bigotry, there's something about this experiment that still hasn't reached its fruition. The experiment has a potential. The potential is here in America. That's why everybody looks to it. You still have the right to make a decision that people may not have in, say, China. Russia has to go through the same thing that this country went through -- the Civil War, with all those states seceding, and then becoming a united states of their own. They all have to get their nationalism together, and then come together. They've got to work that out. Here, we're ahead of that. It's very complicated to get all these nationalities in one country and try to address all those needs. But they will be addressed. It's just hard to deal with masses of people and make sure every person is taken care of. It's still an experiment in America, but it has the potential to lead in a positive way: to learn from the mistakes and greed, to learn to help the less fortunate. And to learn a spirituality, which has been missing for the last ten or twelve years.

"After 'Trane died, the spiritual aspect of the music went out the window. We have this commercial radio format. Coltrane put the spiritual aspect into the music. That's the element I hope we get back to, because we do need a spiritual renaissance, not necessarily from a religious point of view, but from a cosmic point of view. Not going to some retreat and meditating and talking about peace and love. We have *work* to do. *How* we work is what matters. I think we need to learn how to work less and produce more, so we're not doing this workaholic thing. You can test yourself in a way that is not stressful. We need to lighten up on the stress and learn that we can have more power with ease, with more relaxation, with more concentration, and get the job done more thoroughly and much faster, even though it might seem slower.

"In our computer information age, we have to learn to sort it out from nonsense, from the trivial. We have to learn how to slow down and let things take their time to build -- like, young musicians or writers or poets or playwrights or dancers, who haven't had time yet to build. Flowers. I think it's very important to learn how to let time do the growing, let something age. You get wisdom."

I mentioned something Max Roach had remarked to me. Max said, "If we can't make it here, we can't make it anywhere."

"The American experiment," Jack said, "cannot be said to have failed, because it hasn't been completed."



Jack DeJohnette *Photo by John Reeves*

The Fire This Time

The Return of Red Mitchell

Part I

In January, 1954, Red Mitchell was on tour in Sweden with, among other performers, Billie Holiday.

"We were all very impressed with the honesty and fairness in Sweden," he said. "I to this day wish that Billie had thought to move over there. I think she would have lived a lot longer. As Ben Webster did, as Dexter Gordon did, as a lot of American expatriates did. Dexter moved to Copenhagen. Ben moved first to Amsterdam, and then Copenhagen.

"We were being driven around Stockholm the first day in a stretch limo. Billie thought they were just showing us the nicer parts of town. She said, 'Take us to the slums, I want to see the slums.' Somebody said, 'There are no slums.' And she said, 'What?'

"And somebody else said, 'There's no Beverly Hills, either.'

"And then I reacted to that. I said, 'No slums, no Beverly Hills? Is this just Stockholm you're talking about?'

"They said, 'No, it's like that all around Sweden, every city.'

"I thought, 'Jesus! Dis mus' be de place.'

And eventually Red did what Holiday did not: he moved there. One of the greatest bassists in jazz became part of that colony of jazz expatriates living and working in Scandinavia, a group that included Edmund Thigpen, Ernie Wilkins, Kenny Drew, the late Sahib Shihab, and the late Thad Jones.

Now, after 24 years there, Red Mitchell and his fourth wife, Diane, have returned to America, taking residence in what is rapidly becoming a new colony of semi-exiles, the Pacific Northwest, jazz musicians living in the states of Oregon and Washington, among them Red Kelly, Bud Shank, Leroy Vinnegar, and Dave Frishberg. Red Mitchell lives now in Salem, Oregon, Frishberg in Portland. "Dave says," Red remarked, "that it reminds him of San Francisco in the '50s. And Leroy loves it."

Back in the 1950s, two names loomed very large on the bass: Ray Brown and Red Mitchell, idols of other bass players. Mitchell has to be accounted one of the most influential of jazz bassists, in a line with Walter Page, Jimmy Blanton, and Charles Mingus, if only because one of his protegees, Scott LaFaro, influenced just about every younger bass player since his death at 24 -- ironically, almost the same age Blanton died. But more bassists have obvious audible debts to LaFaro than to Mitchell, who remains, as Mingus did, a phenomenon of one.

No one sounds like Mingus. No one sounds like Red Mitchell. What makes his playing so really odd is that he approaches the instrument as if it were a saxophone, extracting from it melismatic vocal effects, glissandi that bespeak enormous strength in the left hand. At times he will play bottom notes on the first and third beats of the bar and then strum the rest of the chord on two and four on the top three strings, using the backs of his fingers a little like one of the techniques used in flamenco guitar.

He has a huge sound, producing tones that last forever. He does things on the instrument that no one else does, and possibly no one else can do. He has long been looked on as something of a curiosity because he tunes his bass in fifths, not the conventional fourths. One of the things one would not figure out for oneself is that the tuning could actually affect the sound of his instrument by altering the nature of its resonance.

"With his scientific mind," Roger Kellaway said recently, "that tuning would make perfect sense." I did not at first understand what Roger meant. Kellaway played bass professionally before he played piano. Red played piano before he took up the bass. (Another formidable musician who plays both bass and piano -- and several other instruments as well -- is Don Thompson.)

Kellaway and Mitchell have lately been doing a great deal of duo work, in Scandinavia, New York City, and, most recently, San Francisco, where they recorded an album for the Concord label's distinguished Maybeck Hall series. Prior to that, they played two evenings at the Jazz Bakery, the excellent recital series that singer Ruth Price has developed in Los Angeles. I drove into town to hear them, and listened to two sets in a state of mind that can only be described as awe. It was some of the most brilliant jazz I have ever heard, a wildly imaginative dialogue between two master musicians at the peak of their inventive powers.

Keith Moore Mitchell was born September 20, 1927, in New York City and raised in New Jersey. He worked with Jackie Paris and Mundell Lowe in 1948. He played both piano and bass with Chubby Jackson's big band in 1949, bass with Charlie Ventura, toured and recorded with Woody Herman from 1949 to January of 1951, worked with the Red Norvo trio from 1952 to 1954, recorded with Billie Holiday and Jimmy Raney, and then went with the Gerry Mulligan quartet. He played with Hampton Hawes from 1955 through 1957, then had his own quartet. He played with Ornette Coleman in 1959. For a number of years he was principal bassist in the studio orchestra at MGM, and was, along with drummer Frank Capp, a member of the Andre Previn trio.

Red and I have been friends by mail and telephone for years, yet we had never met. He is a bearded, red-haired man of mixed Scottish and Irish background who, he says, has always had an affinity for Scandinavia, perhaps because of some dim and distant ethnic memory: the Vikings circumnavigated Europe, leaving a blond strain behind them in Italy, Sicily, and Ireland. They founded Dublin. I walked up to him as he was setting up before the performance, introduced myself, and drifted into conversation as if we had grown up together.

I asked about his brother, Gordon, long known to jazz fans as Whitey Mitchell, himself a fine bassist. But such was Red's luster in the profession that Whitey hardly ever got a review that didn't mention that he was Red's brother.

Whitey, or Gordon, Mitchell, was and is an extremely funny man. He had a card printed that read:

Whitey Mitchell
bassist
Yes I'm Red Mitchell's brother.
No, I haven't seen him lately.

Some years ago I ran into him and said, "Have you still got that card?"

"No," he said, "I've got a new one." And he handed it to me. It read:

Whitey Mitchell
bassist
Formerly Red Mitchell's brother.

I effectively destroyed Whitey's career as a bassist. It happened this way. Once while I was editor of *Down Beat*, I ran into him in New York. Whitey had worked with Gene Krupa, Gene Quill, Herbie Mann, and in Oscar Pettiford's big band. Like many jazz musicians, he occasionally worked for Lester Lanin. The music was ghastly but the money was good. He told me some hilarious stories about his experiences with that band. I suggested that he write an article about it. I said I'd print it. He did, and I printed it in 1961 under the title *My First 50 Years with Society Bands*. Lenny Bruce read it and wrote Whitey a fan letter. Whitey was so astounded and thrilled by the letter (which to this day he has in a frame on a wall) that he became a comedy writer, enormously successful in Hollywood, and a movie producer. "Whenever he gives a seminar for young writers," Red told me, "he tells that story and gives you eternal thanks for starting his career."

I told Red a story I did *not* print. In those days it would not have been possible. Gary Cooper's wife hired Lester Lanin for her husband's birthday party. Lanin brought a few key men to California with him, among them Whitey Mitchell. A contractor put the rest of the band together, no doubt some of those people of the caliber of Mel Lewis and Bud Shank, probably in blue jeans and bright shirts and loafers without socks, and of course the first thing they tried to do was make some of those cornball charts swing. After the rehearsal, Lanin's road manager found the maestro lying on his back on the bed in his hotel room, hands folded on his chest, mumbling and muttering incoherently. Thinking Lanin was having a fit, the manager said, "Lester, Lester, what's the matter?"

"I'm praying," Lanin said, "to almighty God to save me from these sons of bitches!"

The expression he used was harsher than that, but even now I would be reluctant to print it.

When I'd finished telling the story, Red laughed, and said, "Do you know how my brother finally left Lester Lanin? Lanin said to him, 'Do you know what the trouble with you is? You're not playing in the middle of the beat.' And Gordon said, 'Do you know what the trouble with you is? You're full of shit.' And that ended the relationship."

Gordon, formerly Red Mitchell's brother and formerly Whitey Mitchell, took to his typewriter and has never looked back. After the gig with Roger at the Jazz Bakery, Red and his wife spent two days with him, then got into the car and drove up to Ojai and spent two more days here, during which time his marathon eloquence kept me enthralled.

"I was told," I said, "that you left the United States after the Sharon Tate murders." I remembered the period vividly. I was visiting Los Angeles from New York, and everyone in the show-business world was frightened, afraid that the murders had been committed by somebody on the inside. Steve McQueen had taken to carrying a gun. The mood in Los Angeles was eerie.

"It wasn't just the Sharon Tate murders," Red said. "My second wife and I were living in a neighborhood that the Manson Family was working. I think they robbed our garage. They killed an older couple, the Biancas, right across Los Feliz from where we lived. It was just part of the overall violence that was going on.

"It was really the *institutionalization* of the violence and racism, from the White House down to the subway, that bothered me. I had about six good reasons. About six things happened to me all within a short time. One was the breakup of my second marriage. One of them was the decision not to any longer participate in what I considered to be this vicious cycle, in which the real violence on the street, the violence perpetrated by the government in Viet Nam, and all of it, was being reflected in the media. And we were playing this violent music for shoot-'em-ups. Some of us were saying, Oh we're just reflecting reality as it is, all artists have to do that, and others were saying we're contributing to it.

"The truth is, it's a two-way street. It reflects and it causes. And it *resonates*. That's when it really hurts, when it gets into a resonant circuit -- when the capacitance is right and the induction is right for a particular frequency, and it builds up to a peak." Ah. Here was the first hint of the scientific thinking Roger Kellaway had mentioned.

"And I just did not want to be a part of that cycle any more," Red said.

"I had given up on democracy in the United States of America. I had reached the point where I didn't think democracy would ever work here -- I didn't think it had ever seriously been tried. It's a republic, after all."

I said, "Ed Thigpen was here for a couple of days recently. He quoted you as saying you didn't think the American public was qualified to vote."

"Yeah," Red said, "I said that. I say the same thing that the white racists say in South Africa about the black majority, that they're not qualified to vote. I think they're wrong; I think I'm right.

"I don't know about now. We just came back. We'll see. But when something happens like the moving of the venue of the Rodney King case to Simi Valley?"

Red, having lived in Los Angles, is well aware of the character of the Simi Valley. It's redneck city, and it is also the bedroom community where several thousand Los Angeles cops, present and retired, live, influence the community, and vote. To those of us who live in the orbit of Los Angeles, the change of venue itself, before the trial ever occurred, was shocking. To begin with, did anyone seriously suggest that we in Ventura County didn't see that videotape of the beating, when we get all the L.A. TV stations and read the Los Angeles newspapers? The population of Ventura County is only 2 percent black, well below the national average and still further below the Los Angeles figure. There were no blacks on the jury, and only one Hispanic. Two of the jurors, both women, were from Ojai, and one of them is a member of the National Rifle Association. I was completely unsurprised by the verdict.

"And when you see on television," Red said, "that it was Rodney King who was actually on trial, and those people were not his peers, I start to lose faith again. I start to think, 'Well, wait a minute! Even if the government prosecuted all four of these cops on civil rights violations, took it all the way, appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, I'm afraid the Supreme Court might hand down the same decision.'"

"Sure," I agreed. "You have an extremely reactionary Reagan-Bush Supreme Court. The minorities could always resort to the appeal to the Supreme Court and they no longer can, because it is a racist Supreme Court, even with a black man on it."

Red said, "I was going to say, especially with Uncle Thomas sitting there.

"There was another reason I left. I was terrorized by the police, living in Los Angeles. You didn't have to be black to be literally terrorized by the cops in Los Angeles. I was stopped and harassed four times with no reason.

"There were other reasons for moving to Stockholm. I noticed the quality of the jazz players in Sweden immediately. Later on I found it isn't only the jazz players, it's the opera singers, and the choirs, and the symphony orchestras too. The musical standards there are extremely high. As phenomenal as their tennis standards."

"And also visual design," I said. "Why is this?"

"I have no idea. I have really tried to figure that out for 24 years now. And I have no idea."

"Equality of opportunity won't do it?"

"I don't think that's *enough*."

"You have obviously retained your respect for the country."

"Oh yes! And I must say, the last few weeks before we left, they showed a lot of respect for me and us. The last week we were there, we were doing a recording at the radio, and we got interrupted just before we were to go into a real heavy blues, somebody called out from the booth and said, 'Hey, Red, there's a phone call for you.' I said, 'We're just ready for the take!' We'd just drawn in our breath. They said, 'No, it's important, you better take it now.' So I went into the booth, and it was the secretary of the minister of culture saying that the government had voted me a Royal Medal. Illis quorum in the eighth degree. I said, 'What is *that*?' I still don't know. I still don't know how and when it's gonna be presented. Usually the king presents it. I found out I was the first jazz musician to get it. What it means roughly translated is, for one who has earned it.

"And then a few days later, a classical composer, Jan Carlstedt, called me and he said he was nominating me for honorary membership in the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. I said, more or less, 'What's that?' He said, 'It's an old society, and we're voting in May. And you shouldn't be disappointed if you're not voted in on your first nomination. Beethoven wasn't voted in till his third nomination.' I said, 'Thank you.'

"I still love the country, and I think they love me there. The last couple of months -- I don't know whether it had to do with the announcement that I was leaving -- we broke attendance records everywhere we went, with all kinds of different groups. The last month was the busiest I'd ever had in Sweden. Among other things, Joe Pass and I did a live album as a duo in the main jazz club in Stockholm. In September, we had opened a new really first-class jazz club in Copenhagen, called Copenhagen Jazz House, in English.

"We had family reasons for coming back, too. My main reasons is that we both sensed -- and I checked it out with some of my more successful colleagues, like Clark Terry and Dizzy -- that there's an increased interest in the music, and love for it, here in this country, and that's gone up from whatever it was in percentage. In 1968 it had to be point zero something, and it's gone up to even three, four, five percent of the population that hears and loves jazz. That's plenty! Out of 250 million people?

"And, finally, I had begun to see racism in Sweden too. The very thing they deplore about America -- that Gunnar Myrdal condescension toward our society -- was turning up there. They have a word in Swedish for the darker peoples from the Mediterranean. It means 'black heads.' They're having problems with minorities all over Europe, and I don't think they should point the finger at us the way some of them do."

Red and his wife said they had attended a seminar by the black American writer Toni Morrison at the American Center in Stockholm.

Red said, "Someone at this meeting asked her if, being a black woman in America, she really felt American, and she said, 'Never more than right now.'"

I said, "Benny Golson told me recently that in Italy, an Italian journalist asked him, 'How come you have a white bassist?' And his answer was, 'This interview is terminated.'"

"That's lovely," Red said. "I may have to use that one day."

"I am perpetually astonished by European condescension toward us," I said. "Their assumption they know us because they've been to the movies."

Diane, Red's very attractive wife, who has a master's equivalent in sociology, said, "I realized that within a year after I lived in Sweden. I was a real activist in the '60s. I was upset over the Cambodian invasion especially. I worked 18-hour days on committees and all that stuff. And then you get to Europe and you're sitting there, and you're being personally blamed for this Viet Nam war. I said, 'Wait a minute, you're just sitting here on you asses, I've been working my butt off, taking risks by running up and down the California campuses. I could have gotten picked up by the FBI or whatever. You sit here, self-righteously accusing me of being responsible in this war.' And if you put the United States down, you win points, you win friends. And I got really tired of that. I must say, I very much love Sweden, their respect for education, for culture, and decency."

Red said, "I was prepared for that when I went over to Sweden, but I didn't get draft number one."

"You were putting the U.S. down," Diane said. "More than I was, I think."

Red drew a thoughtful breath. "I wasn't putting the whole country down. I certainly wasn't putting my friends down."

"You were saying the American people aren't qualified to vote," Diane said. If you say that, they'll *love* you over there."

"I said that the *majority* of American people were not qualified to vote."

"It isn't as good an aphorism," I said, laughing. "But certainly they're less informed than peoples in other countries. First of all, they've been taught such erroneous history. My baritone player friend Les Rout, who became a historian, put it simply. He said history was not taught in this country to acquaint people with reality, it was taught to instil patriotism."

"That's right," Diane said.

"But that's reasonably true of all countries," I said. "The Russians are just beginning to learn the truth of some of their history, the Germans don't want to know their recent history, and what is taught in Japan is false. But in few countries is this as obvious as in the United States. This country is the only country I know, excepting Japan, that is its own religion."

Red said, "I think the cause of all racism and all war is simply a misperception of what I call Instinct Number 1 -- the deepest-seated instinct we have, survival of the species. Of course, survival of the individual is linked directly to that. But first things first. I think Instinct Number 1 is the survival of the species.

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"And I think individuals will sacrifice themselves willingly if they really think they're doing it for the survival of the species. Unfortunately, it's very easy to misperceive who's in the species and who's not. For example, was Hitler in the species? Was Hitler a human being, or not? Was he outside the realm of humanity or not? You have to accept the fact that Hitler was a human being.

"Unfortunately, we all come from the same gene pool, Gene, sorry about that.

"I hope this doesn't sound like an oversimplification. It is in fact simpler than any answer I've heard from anybody else, and I haven't heard anybody shoot it down yet. If you want the bottom note, ask a bass player. I think the root cause of all racism and all wars is a misperception of Instinct Number 1. I accept the definition of instinct that I read in a book by a Swedish dog researcher. He said that instincts are a priority list reflexively built into a species with preservation of that species in the number one spot. I accept that.

"However, mother nature gave us this urge that the species should survive, but she never gave us the information about who's in it, how big it is, who's out of it. That's a matter of our individual perceptions. And it's very easy for us to perceive another group of people whose behavior is not within our ethical code as outside the species. Another species. To be killed at all costs.

"I don't think America could have done what it did in Viet Nam if they hadn't been capable of depersonalizing the Viet Namese people and thinking of them as short tan members of another species."

"Gooks, slopes," I said. "And earlier there were krauts, nips, japs."

"Don't forget Commie. We have all those names. Lenny Bruce used to say, 'Let's get together, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, black, white, everybody, let's get together and beat up on the Puerto Ricans."

"And if the cops can call them niggers and Mandingos and gorillas in the mist, they can beat, choke, and kill them without a quiver of conscience."

"I think it starts with the home," Red said. "The neighbors aren't bringing up the kids right. And it gets to the extreme example, was Hitler a member of the human race? And unfortunately he was. We have to take that into consideration. We all have those possibilities."

"There was no racism in our house," I said. "My father spoke fluent German, although he was English. We weren't taught quote tolerance. It was just in the air. I was lucky."

"I was lucky too," Red said. "My father was one of the world's leading opera nuts. He actually studied singing, he had a season ticket to the Met from 1921 to '65 in the best seat in the house, right in the middle of the family circle. He learned some of five or six languages in order to sing the roles right."

(To be continued)