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Come Back Last Summer
Part Two

"By this time it was Christmas, the end of '52," Kenny said. "I left Canada at the end of September or early October.

"I read that they needed helpers in the post office for the Christmas mail. So I got a job doing that. But meanwhile I'd met Doreen on the telephone. The young Scotsman used to go with Doreen's girlfriend, unbeknown to the guy he was living with. Doreen rang up one day to say that her girlfriend couldn't make this date with the Scotsman. So being young and stupid, I suppose, I started to kid around with her on the phone, and eventually I said, 'You send me a picture and I'll send you a picture.' We sent each other pictures and decided to meet for a date. That's how I met her. I didn't say two words on the first date. She must have thought, 'What the hell is this?'

"I wore a zoot suit and all, because it was still my Canadian influence. With big shoulders and draped trousers!" He laughed. "I must have looked weird in London! But for some reason she liked me.

"I remember one night I came in. The homosexual was hugging a young ballet dancer still in his tights. It kind of embarrassed me, and I thought I'd better start thinking about getting out of here.

"So I got myself a flat and started earning a little bit of money at the post office, getting stronger with Doreen all the time. Then I found Archer Street. This was about the end of January. It was like a market, where every Monday afternoon hundreds of musicians went, and you just stood, and you got work from somebody you knew, or whatever. I started to meet a few musicians there, and eventually somebody said, 'Do you want a job, fourth trumpet?' I said, 'Yeah, I'll take it!' So I got a job with Roy Fox. He was American or Canadian. He was quite famous in England as a commercial bandleader. I got a job with him. He liked jazz, and you'd get to play jazz solos in his band. Doreen and I got married March 28 of that year. I had only known her about five months."

"Yeah, I remember I was getting letters from you," I said. "Not only had you precipitately taken off for England, you'd precipitately got married. I was even more shocked. And I felt responsible! I thought, 'Oh my God, what have I done!' Here you were married, and I thought it's all my fault!"

"Well," Kenny said, "I was quite hopeless with ladies in Canada. I had known a couple of girls, but nothing . . . . I was completely hopeless."

"I remember the address on your letters. You lived at Bethnal Green."

"Gales Gardens," Kenny said. "Which is no longer there."

"Now when did you go with Carl Barriteau? You and Art Ellefson." Art Ellefson is an outstanding Canadian tenor player, unknown in the United States.

Carl Barriteau, born in Trinidad February 7, 1914, grew up in Maracaibo, Venezuela. He moved to London in the late 1930s and played with Ken (Snake Hips) Johnson's West Indian Swing Band. He formed his own recording group in the middle of World War II and entertained British and American troops after the war, in Europe, North Africa, and Southeast Asia.
"I'm not sure when I went with that band," Kenny said.

"Wait a minute, I can pin it, because it was the year I came over to visit," I said. "You were with that band in 1954."

"Carl was great," Kenny said. "I loved working for him. I really shouldn't have taken the job, because I didn't have the chops for it. It was a really hard book. There was a front line of about five people. I'd met Art Ellefson. He was born in Moose Jaw. He came over from Canada unbeknown to me, about two weeks after I did. I met Art in the local jazz clubs. We got to like each other right away. He was the best man at my wedding. He was with Carl Barriteau. The trumpet player left, and Art recommended me. I was still in a very nervous state in those days. The broadcasts were live. I wouldn't do them. I told Carl, 'I'll be in the band but I just couldn't do the broadcasts.' My nerves were so bad.

"But I enjoyed it very much. It was hard."

During Kenny's early years in England, I continued writing, and even sold a few short stories, still believing in those days, as all young journalists did, that only fiction really mattered. One of my stories sold to an English science fiction magazine called Nova, which then was well known. In the story, I imagined that in a future age of space flight, the life of a wife would be rather like that of the wife of a skipper on one of the New England whaling ships in the age of sail. The men would be gone for months and perhaps years. The editor of the magazine, mistaking my first name, wrote a blurb on the story saying, "Miss Lees, a Canadian, captures the woman's viewpoint the way no male writer ever could." I never let that editor live it down, and we became friends by mail.

The man was E.J. (Ted) Carnell, a prominent science-fiction editor in England at that period. He was a former dance-band guitarist and loved music.

One morning I got called over to the city editor's desk. The Montreal Star wanted me to fly to Europe with the Royal Canadian Air Force, as it was called in those days, to write a series of stories on the Canadian forces attached to NATO. I was delighted. Why, I might even get to see Paris! And I would certainly get to see Kenny. I asked if I might take my vacation time on arriving, and then go back to work.

Transatlantic flight still was a little exotic in that year, 1954; indeed transatlantic travel by any means was not all that common. I decided not to tell the only two friends I had in England, Ted Carnell and Kenny Wheeler, that I was coming. I would walk in on them casually, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. We flew in a North Star to Goose Bay,

Labrador, then to Reykjavik, Iceland, and then onward. The aircraft was almost empty. The pilot asked me if I wanted to take the co-pilot's seat. I sat there peering through the night at the great horizon ahead, which gradually grew pale and on which at last in the early morning a dark streak appeared. "Ireland," the pilot said, and I remember being amazed that man could take off into the air and travel all this distance and find a predetermined destination. Ireland was real, and it was right where the maps said it was! It looked so green below.

I checked into a Canadian air force base, drank with some of the pilots -- they flew Saberjets then -- and next morning went into London. I telephoned Ted Carnell's office. "I'm terribly sorry," a secretary said, "but Mr. Carnell is out of the city for several days." Lovely. I come all this way and the guy isn't in.

Go to Part Two of the plan. Walk in on Kenny. So I asked for directions to Bethnal Green, took the tube and emerged above ground. I found the address in a little street of brick row houses. I knocked at the door and Kenny's young wife answered. I introduced myself. She said that Kenny was on the road with the Carl Barriteau band; he'd been gone for some time. My plans had gone up in flames. She invited me in.

I had already discovered that Canadian dollars went a very long way. When Doreen told me the Barriteau band was playing Manchester, I said, "Well how would you like to go up to Manchester with me to see Kenny?" I wanted to see the city anyway, because my father came from Manchester.

"She thought you were mad, you know," Kenny told me. "But she liked you." And she agreed to go. Leaving nothing to hazard this time, I had her phone Kenny in Manchester and arrange for him to meet the train.

"She said you were whistling on the train," Kenny said. "Just for her to go out of Bethnal Green at that time was an experience. She's traveled a lot since then, but she'd never been anywhere at that time. She enjoyed the whole adventure. It was something completely new for her."

"I was probably whistling Charlie Parker licks," I said. "*Salt Peanuts*, no doubt. Or *Hot House*."

"You can imagine all the sideglances of the people on the train," Kenny said.

Kenny met the train. We went to several hotels in search of a room for me. Manchester was still recovering from the wartime bombing, there were unexpected green spaces where buildings had once been, and hotel rooms were scarce. By the time Kenny had to go to work, I still hadn't found a room. We went to his gig. I remember the musicians laughing during the breaks. They said Carl Barriteau had such powerful chops that he could play clarinet louder than a whole brass section.

At the end of the evening, Kenny suggested that I might find a room at the theatrical boarding house somewhere on the edge of the city where the musicians were staying. I went there in a car with Kenny, Doreen, and some of the musicians. Alas, there was no room. It was growing late. I told Kenny that I would find something, somehow, and left. It had begun to rain, and I felt as if I were catching cold.

I found a telephone booth and tried to call a taxi. I did not know that you did not call a cab in Manchester at three in the morning, at least in those years. I stood, increasingly miserable and exhausted, in that telephone booth by a main road, not knowing what to do. A great bus loomed out of the night, and I ran out to flag it down. Alas, its head sign said Charter. To my surprise, it stopped. It was empty. The driver, who had a Lancashire accent like my grandfather's, said he was returning from a tour to Scotland, where he had left his passengers. He offered me a ride. He drove to various hotels in downtown Manchester, with me the sole passenger in his enormous bus, and at last pulled up in front of a hotel I had tried earlier. He urged me to try again.

It was a small hotel, right on the bank of the Irwell River, whose name I knew from one of the Marriott Edgar music-hall recitations. What I had thought would be a great river was a narrow canal. In the hotel's lobby, which was rather small, I approached a short, slight elderly man in a black uniform, and told him of my problem.

He said to me in the accent I'd grown up hearing, "The' wur a chap that wur supposed to cum 'ere last night. 'Appen 'e won't turn up now. I'll let you 'ave 'is room."

I went out and thanked the bus driver, who refused my offer of compensation for his kindness, wished me well, and drove off.

At the small desk in the lobby, I signed the register. My benefactor, who was probably about 50, said, "Y'know, you don't look all that well, young man."

"I think I'm catching a cold," I said.

"Wot you need is a nice cup o' tea," he said, and poured some from a pot. And, he said, this too would probably help: he poured a hooker of Scotch into it. It certainly did help. As it warmed me, I felt a growing sense of safety.

The man sat down near me. "So ye're from Canada, are ye?" he said.

"Yes."

"Tell me," he said, "d'ye 'ave much trouble with yer Indians?"

"The only Indians I've ever known were some kids I went to school with," I said, truthfully.

"Well then, d'ye 'ave much trouble with yer gangsters?"

I said I didn't know much about gangsters. The questions were odd.

"D'ye think they'll ever send a man to the moon?" he said.

This, remember, was 1954. "Well, yes," I said. "Within four or five hundred years, I expect they will." I had no idea that man would enter space before the decade was out and that men of my own generation would make the first trips to the moon.

"But what makes you ask that?" I said.

"Cum 'ere," he said, crossing the lobby to open a set of double doors. "We've got a convention of those chaps that writes that stuff." He threw a wall switch and lighted a ballroom. All around the room were tables on which there were models of rocket ships, and on easels there were cover illustrations for science-fiction magazines. I blanched.

"My God," I said. "Let me look at your register."

Ted Carnell was in the room next to mine.

Ted was startled and delighted when I introduced myself the next morning. I stayed two or three days, hanging out with science-fiction writers. One of them was Arthur C. Clarke. And Ted Carnell and I remained fast friends until he died some years later.

Intrigued by Arthur Koestler's fascination with coincidence, I have often wondered what the odds were against my being booked by absolute chance, after leaving Kenny that night, in the room next to the only other person I knew in all Britain.

I went on from there to the Canadian air bases at Gros Tonquin and Metz. I got orders from the paper to go to Paris and write stories on the crisis in the government of Pierre Mendes-France. Paris! My God! I checked into the Hotel California, across the street from the Herald-Tribune, and went to work, using the Herald-Tribune's office and a typewriter, never foreseeing that in time Paris would become a second home to me.

I worked there for several weeks, then at last went home to Montreal with the air force. In the spring of 1959, by a sequence of coincidences I became managing editor, and later editor, of Down Beat.

"What was happening to you during those years?" I asked Kenny.

"I was with Ambrose for a while. After Carl Barriteau, I was with Tommy Whittle, jazz saxophone player." Whittle, a Scot -- a notable number of Kenny's musician friends in England were Scots -- also went through the Barriteau band. Whittle joined Ted Heath's post-war band. Kenny said, "Tommy had a real jazz band, eight pieces. He appeared at my door one day and said, 'Would you like to play in my band?' I guess that was the first real jazz band I played in. We had people like Keith Christie and Joe Temperley, who is now quite a big name in New York." Temperley, a brilliant baritonist, is also a Scot, born in Fife September 20, 1929. "That was a very enjoyable situation," Kenny said. "It lasted for a couple of years.

"I also did a couple of nightclub jobs in London, from 10 at night till 4 in the morning. I got an all-night bus back to Bethnal Green. That's when they still had the ladies on the street in London." He pitched his voice high: "'Like a good time, Dearie?'

"There was a great atmosphere in London in those days. When they took the ladies off the street, it somehow seemed to coincide with the downfall of London. All that sexual thing went underground and inside. It somehow seemed to coincide with, to me, the deterioration of London.

"After Tommy Whittle, I did various nightclub jobs. But they were commercial. Except you could learn a lot of tunes in a job like that, either a quintet or quartet. You had to come up with new standards.

"I went with Johnny Dankworth in '59, and he went to Newport in May or June."

"July," I said. "Fourth of July weekend." I had been with Down Beat about eight weeks at the time. "You came over to the Newport Festival with the Dankworth band, and I saw you there. That was five years after I'd last seen you, and seven years after you moved to England. It was probably the first band to come over on the exchange from England."

"I think it was," Kenny said. Due to a curious squabble between their respective musicians' unions, groups from the United States were not allowed to perform in England and English groups were not allowed to work here. Eventually some sort of compromise was achieved, and the Dankworth band was one of the first groups, if not the first, to make the trip to America. The problem in this imbalance was that American musicians were well-known in England, but British groups were not well-known here and thus were hard to sell to American audiences.

"I was playing the fourth trumpet chair," Kenny said. "I had a couple of solos. I think the whole band was frightened to death of Newport. Nothing like that had ever happened before. Seeing all the big names around. The English mentality is not like the American. The Americans, generally, when they see somebody sitting in the audience with a name, they'll say, 'Oh, I'll play my best for him.'"

"Not necessarily," I said. "One night Stan Getz came in to hear the Woody Herman band, and an excellent young saxophone player just fell apart when he had to play a solo. The Americans may conceal it better. But I think at that time, the European jazz players tended to be very intimidated by the Americans. It used to be said that the European rhythm sections were no good, but that's no longer true. There are lots of good rhythm-section players in Europe."

"Well, even in the old days," Kenny said. "I listen to some of the old records, and the people like Phil Seamans, they were good. But there weren't many of them.

"Kenny Clare was the drummer with the Dankworth band at that time. He just lived for the drums. He was one of the top session drummers. I think he just wanted to be a jazz drummer, but never really got the chance.

"After that Dankworth started to write for films and commercial things. He started to use people from the band on some of those films. Gradually he got more and more into films and television. Cleo was starting to come up." Cleo Laine, Dankworth's wife, started as the band singer but increasingly she was a star in her own right.

"The next time I was in England," I said, "must have been

1964 or '65. I came to England and worked with Dankworth for a bit. He wrote the score for *Darling*, and asked me to put a lyric on the title theme. He and Cleo had an old converted inn out in the country, and I went out there for a few days and wrote the lyric. That film came out in '65."

"I don't think I saw you then," Kenny said. "I started to get into the studios too, through the odd session with Dankworth. At that time, there was a lot of studio work around, so I got a into that. I was never one of the top calls. Those guys were working three sessions a day, recording or TV or something. My limit was about six or seven a week, which still gave you a good wage to live on, much better than the average man.

"I studied a bit with Richard Rodney Bennett. He was a great teacher. The first thing he did when I walked in was to say, 'Sit down, I'm going to play a lot of different musics for you. You don't have to tell me what composer it is, just tell me what you like and what you don't like.' I thought that was a great way to start. We got into serial writing. I wrote some pieces for flute, oboe and clarinet on a three-note series, which were accepted by the Promotion of New Music Society and performed, but I never heard them.

"After a while I said, 'Do you think a musician needs counterpoint?' He said, 'Yes, but I would be too bored to teach it to you.' That's when I went to study with Bill Russo, who lived in England and had a regular Saturday morning band.

"He was a very stimulating man. His lessons were great. He got very angry if you didn't come with a lot of work done. You didn't even have to pay in cash. Instead you could do editing. That's when I realized how important it was to be neat. He would give you scores to edit. If the dynamic wasn't just under the note, you put a tick beside it. All the little things like that. If the crescendo didn't go right to where it was supposed to. It spoiled me. Because music after that, I realized, is so messy. Most people didn't take care in sessions that things were right. With him, what was there was perfect.

"I studied baroque counterpoint with him. He was a wonderful teacher. That helped me a lot. But after a couple of years he went back to the States.

"Then I started to get busy. A lump came up in my mouth, and I thought, 'That's it, it's cancer.' But it was an impacted wisdom tooth and it set up a pouch of poison. I was in the hospital two or three days, but they said, 'You won't be able to blow a trumpet for about three months.' There was a big hole, and they put this packing in. Which was okay, except when they had to put a new one in and pulled the old one out. It was like they were pulling out something from the bottom of your toes.

"Mentally, it was a great period. Because Dankworth said, 'While you can't work for three months, would you like to write an album for the band?' That's when I wrote that album called *Windmill Tilter*. It turned out to be one of the most productive three months of my life. For all this music I'd been sort of hearing and wanting to write for a big band did sort of come together for that album. That was made in 1967." The album, based on *Don Quixote*, is now out of print, but at the time it went far to establish Kenny as an arranger and composer.

"By this time," he said, "I was a much better trumpet player and not quite so nervous. But I still couldn't play what I guess you might call bebop, although it was my roots. I was never a good bebop player. I was getting very frustrated, because I wanted to play more, and in Dankworth's band you got maybe two 32-bar solos a night.

"It got to the point where I didn't care what kind of music I played as long as it was jazz of some kind. So I went up to the Little Theater Club, and I heard these guys playing what they called free jazz, and I hated it on sight. But I went a few times and eventually they asked me to sit in. And it was great. I don't know whether I enjoyed it, but it felt therapeutic. When I finished, I felt like I'd got rid of something. I wouldn't say it was good or bad.

"I got more interested in free music. Those guys, people like John Stevens, Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, Barry Guy, who are now kind of the fathers of the free jazz movement in Britain, were in touch with the free jazz players in Europe, and that's how I got my entry into Europe -- through free jazz.

"After many years of that, somebody said to me, 'Oh, I didn't know you played changes.'"

He'd been playing bebop, or a form of it, with Joe Harriott, Ronnie Scott, Tubby Hayes, and others. But by the early 1970s, he was considered one of the most important figures in the free-jazz movement. Yet he retained his links to a more traditional jazz, working in groups led by Ian Carr, Mike Gibbs, and John Taylor. He played in the Clarke-Boland Big Band in Cologne and wrote for Maynard Ferguson's British band. He co-led, with saxophonist and clarinetist Tony Coe, a group called Coe Wheeler & Co., and with singer Norma Winstone and the Manchester-born pianist John Taylor formed a group called Azimuth. He has worked with the Globe Unity Orchestra, the Anthony Braxton Quartet, the United Jazz and Rock Ensemble, and the Dave Holland Quintet. It seems there is nothing in modern jazz that he hasn't played. One of the best descriptions of his playing and writing comes from Ian Carr. Carr, yet another Scot, has an extra insight into Kenny's work because of his own trumpet and fluegelhorn skills. Despite that curious comment on why Kenny went to England, he obviously understands Kenny's playing:

"He became a complete brass virtuoso with a technical mastery of trumpet from the lowest to the highest registers, and tremendous stamina. He composes and arranges for very large ensembles and for small groups, and both his playing and his writing have a powerful individual atmosphere which has spawned many disciplines -- a kind of buoyant, romantic melancholy. Immensely self-critical, he finds it easier to like his

writing than his playing, and has said, 'I don't have any solos of my own that I like completely, only those that are not as bad as others . . . perhaps the solos on *Dear Wan* I can live with.'"

Kenny told me, "I'm trying to get simpler. I think having a strong technique helps you to get simpler. I am trying to get clearer and simpler. A lot of people shake their heads and say, 'I haven't a clue what he's trying to do.' But a lot of people do understand it. I couldn't put it into words. It's not strict bebop, but it's bebop rooted. Louis is the grandfather and Dizzy's the father of it all."

"You must be aware of your technique."

"Well it's got to do with relaxing," Kenny said. "I'm learning more how to relax when I play, and that's why it's better. You ould never be as tense as I was years ago and improve, that's for sure.

"I never got much chance to play conventional jazz. Then somebody played me a record of Booker Little, and that helped me a lot. He sort of opened up for me a new way, his compositions and his playing. They were different, but they were still bebop. So I thought, 'Oh, you can do things differently and still be in the tradition.' That gave me courage to search out and have faith in my own thing and not feel guilty because I couldn't play strict bebop. And I found that the one helped the other. If I did get a normal sort of jazz gig, with tunes, I felt the free jazz helped that, and also that helped the free-jazz gigs. Somehow the free jazz helped loosen me up on changes, and those gigs brought my playing in free jazz in a bit, where it was more controlled."

"Well," I said, "you're talking about the artist getting rid of inhibitions, and I know that you and I had plenty of them. How repressed were we all in Canada? I've talked to Christopher Plummer about this. He said, 'It's a wonder any of us got out f there with any of our talent intact.' The one thing you're not supposed to be in Canada is different. God forbid you should want to be visible. Humility is the Canadian ideal.

"Maynard Ferguson lives down the street from me in Ojai. I saw him at his mailbox one day. I slammed on the brakes and leaned out the window and said, 'Hey, Maynard, why did the Canadian cross the road? To get to the middle.'

"He was hanging on the mailbox with laughter.

"Tell that to an American and all you'll get is a blank stare."

One of the things that amazes everyone about Kenny is the sheer effortless volume of his playing. His long-time associate at the Banff School of Fine Arts, Don Thompson, told me that Kenny a few years ago made a guest appearance with a big band in Toronto. Its members were essentially the same people who play with Rob McConnell in the Boss Brass, and that, needless to say, is some powerful brass section. Kenny rehearsed one of his compositions with the band, and then said in his reticent way, "I think I'll play a little on this." He picked up his fluegelhorn and drowned the whole brass section.

"Kenny's an absolute original," Don said. "He can play one note and you know it's him. He's two people. He's that quiet person, and then when he picks up his horn, he just explodes, like a giant. The power of his playing -- and his harmony, and his writing, and everything -- are so intense that it's scary.

"There's something rhythmically he does that is strange. His phrases don't end or start when you think they're going to. They always go where you don't expect, notes and rhythms and everything. Nothing is ever what you think it's going to be. You can't predict anything."

Red Rodney told me, "Kenny Wheeler to me is one of the most magnificent of all the trumpet players we have. He's very lyrical and he's very modern, with a melodic bent in everything he does. He's a cult hero of all the young, up-and-coming players. And I'll tell you, I'm part of that cult. I love him."

Saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom said, "What I hear is sincerity -- and a unique voice. Kenny Wheeler could be playing a trumpet, or a saxophone, or a violin, I could tell it's him. It's his voice coming through that instrument. And he has a great deal of harmonic imagination, which I find very refreshing, in his music, in his orchestration, and in his own playing. It's almost completely lyric. And it's effortless. The virtuosity is invisible, and that's the way it should be. The instrument disappears. The fluency of that instrument sounds so easy.

"There's magic in him."

She had been engaged to do a concert tour with Kenny a few months hence. She said, "I just can't wait to stand beside that horn and listen to him."

Saxophonist and composer Bill Kirchner said, "He's the most in-tune fluegelhorn player I ever heard."

Brazilian trumpeter Claudio Roditi said, "Kenny Wheeler keeps improving. I've been following him for many years. He just keeps getting better and better."

One of the people who has worked with Kenny is John Abercrombie. John told me:

"At ECM I recorded with different people. I recorded with Dave Liebman and I did my own record with Jack DeJohnette and Jan Hammer before Jan Hammer went over into rock and roll. Then Manfred Eicher, who founded ECM, called me up one day and said he wanted to do this project with Kenny Wheeler, and Kenny wanted to use guitar, either me or Ralph Towner. Ralph Towner plays acoustic, nylon-string classical guitar. I play electric guitar. Then I figured Kenny maybe didn't know what either one of us really sounded like. He didn't seem to care whether it was electric or acoustic. As a result we both wound up on the album.

"It was mostly me, because ultimately I think he wanted somebody to comp and play more like a piano. That's when I first met Kenny. I remember getting together in a little hotel room in Oslo with Kenny and Dave Holland. Kenny played me

some tapes of music he'd done, and showed me the music he planned to record. I looked at it and said, 'This looks interesting. This looks hard.' I took it back to my room and worked on the voicings and tried to understand what he wanted. We did the album in a day. It's called *Dear Wan*. It's a neat record. That was with the Norwegian saxophone player Jan Garborek. Dave, Jack DeJohnette, Jan, Kenny, and myself. Ralph Towner played on one or two pieces.

"I've always said this about Kenny's tunes. They're hard. But they're so melodic, and they make so much sense, that you can play them. For me they're not impossible. Kenny writes a tune that's got all these odd-ball chords, but it's held together with this gorgeous melody.

"Have you heard *Windmill Tilter*? It's a great record. All English musicians. John McLaughlin is even playing guitar on it, when he was playing more traditional sounding things. It's an amazing record. You can hear where Kenny's going to go. The first time I heard it, I said, 'Kenny, you sound a little like Booker Little on this.' And he said, 'He was one of my big influences.'

"I've done three albums with Kenny now, and we've also done several tours. I'm just amazed at how strtong he plays, and how consistently he plays. I was saying to Randy Brecker, 'Kenny plays so strong. So loud -- so much sheer volume that comes out of the horn is incredible.' I asked Randy as a trumpet player if he had any idea why Kenny plays that way. We thought maybe he just hears that way. We thought he hears the trumpet as vocal, like a voice. I can't even describe it. Most guys play *in* the time. Kenny just plays *across* the time, almost consistently. It almost reminds me, althought it doesn't sound like it, of a rock-and-roll guitar player. When I play the guitar loud, it gets a sustained, singing quality. And I almost think that's what Kenny goes for. He goes for this powerful sound. It's lyrical, but it's powerful. It's not quiet and timid. It's very forceful.

"The *leaps* he makes! He'll be playing a line and then leap into another register. Kenny told me he felt he'd never really mastered bebop. And I think he goes beyond bebop.

"And he's totally self-effacing.

"According to John Taylor, who's very close to Kenny, when they did the big-band tour of England for his sixtieth birthday, Kenny was amazed at how many people came out."

Kenny remarked to me at one point, "Well to me, if you haven't got sound and time, you might as well forget it. You have to have both of those before anything else."

I said, "There's something about your approach to pitch that I can't figure out."

"I never do have trouble with intonation," Kenny said, "unless somebody in a band starts to say, 'Well we're not really in tune.' Then I'm completely lost. Because once you decide prematurely to do this and say, 'I'm flat,' you have a problem. I never touch my tuning slide from one session to another. Something in the lip must adjust it. Especially when you're playing with a bass player like Dave Holland, who is very strong on pitch, and you've got that underneath you. It makes it a lot easier.

"You're apt to get these people in big bands saying, 'Look, fellows, we're behind.' I can't do those things pre-conceived. I'm behind, okay, I'll rush everything. I can't do that. You just play, and the intonation is right or the time is right, and that's why I say that sound and time are the main things. When I say sound, I mean not only a good quality sound but the intonation as well. You can't think about time."

In 1990, Kenny sent me a two-CD album he'd made for the ECM label, titled *Music for Large and Small Ensembles*. The musicians on the sessions included John Abercrombie, guitar; John Taylor, piano; Dave Holland, bass; Peter Erskine, drums; Norma Winstone, vocal lead; Derek Watkins, Henry Lowther, Alan Downy, and Ian Hamer, trumpets; Dave Horler, Chris Pyne, Paul Rutherford, and Hugh Fraser, trombones; Ray Warleigh, Duncan Lamont, Evan Parker, and Julian Arguelles, saxophones; Stan Sulzman, tenor saxophone and flute; and of course Kenny on trumpet and fluegelhorn.

I put it on the stereo system and started across the living room. In the first bars of the opening -- in which you can hear the evidence of the baroque counterpoint he studied with Bill Russo -- I paused. The first side of the first CD is a seven-part suite for big band. As it unfolded, going into the second and third parts, I became transfixed, standing utterly motionless as I listened.

In Part II of the suite, titled *For H.*, Kenny comes in on fluegelhorn. He can do things with the upper register of that instrument that no one else can do. Whereas virtuoso brass players climb to high notes, Kenny seems to start above the register of the instrument, up in the inaudible range, and then come diving down, like an aircraft breaking out of clouds. It's eerie, and he does it all the time.

But above all, as the suite unfolded, the writing mesmerized me.

I thought, "This may be genius."

I have had no cause to revise that initial impression.

"What about the big band writing?" I asked.

"About '69 or '70," he said, "I got the feeling I would like to write for a big band that involved the various styles of the people I'd been playing with. I'd always admired Keith Christie, who was known as a traditional player, although I would not have called him that, and Evan Parker and Derek Bailey who were free-form players. And I liked Norma Winstone. But I didn't want to have a band singer. I thought about writing for her like a horn in the band. And that's how I got started with the big band. BBC gave you one half-hour broadcast a year, and they don't pay for rehearsal time. So you've got to ask the guys to do

free rehearsal. I guess I must have done that since 1969 probably about 15 or 16 times in 20 years."

He used Winstone as a wordless lead on the sections.

"I realized I had to use some studio brass guys. It was three trumpets in the beginning and three or four trombones, and I had a mixed front line of trumpet, voice, and a couple of saxophones. I had to use some studio guys. I wanted some people whose intonation was good. The drummer I had was Tony Oxley, who's been doing a lot of playing with Cecil Taylor, and he'd played with Bill Evans. He's a great drummer, but he doesn't conform at all, he's very loose. For these sessions guys, it was very difficult, playing in a band like this, a combination of inside and a lot of outside playing. The drummer never gave you 'one'. It used to be really funny, to look at all their feet going in different places. 'I've got 'one'! I've got 'one'!' But I loved the effect of it, I thought it was great, the whole looseness of this big band. I never thought, 'Well, I'm doing something new here.' But I guess it was new, having more like a quartet rhythm feel rather than a tight feel. I couldn't stand that tight big-band feeling. I liked the idea of good quality music played very loosely -- I guess getting more towards Ellington, a bit.

"Since then the big band has probably got less free and more conventional."

I said, "You're aware, surely, of the stature you've acquired."

"Well, amongst musicians," he said. "It's nice to be accepted by a lot of musicians. Maybe in the last two or three years I could feel the media getting a little more interested. But they still find little ways to put me down. As if I don't really know what I'm doing. In Canada and England, particularly."

I said, "But the most vicious criticism in the world is written in England and Canada. They love their Parliaentary put-downs, and William S. Gilbert wisecracks. The French are a bit the same way. The easiest trick is to make yourself look clever by derogating somebody else. They rationalize that they're here to educate the public. They're here to aggrandize their own careers. And frequently they're failed artists. I don't think they really know how to praise. They don't have the chops to do it."

Kenny said, "It's almost like, Well, we've said enough good things, we'd better say something put-downish."

"Listen, Kenny," I said, "I've got to tell you a story."

Back in the late 1960s, I attended a party at Willis Conover's New York apartment just off Central Park West in the West 80s. I remember that among the guests were J.J. Johnson and Friedrich Gulda. I found myself in conversation with a very pretty young woman. We began talking about psychoanalysis. She said she was in analysis. I said I'd had my shot at it, and knew why, but what were her reasons?

"It has to do with my profession," she said.

"What do you do?"

"I'm an actress." And she was in her first important Broadway play. She said that she was trying to overcome her deep feelings of inhibition, because inhibition just won't play on the stage. And of her analysis, she said, "I'm finding out that it has less to do with Freudian childhood problems and more than I realized with the town I grew up in. It was a terrible, a bigoted little town. You can't imagine."

"Oh I think maybe I can," I said. "Have you ever read *Winesburg, Ohio*? In some ways all small towns are alike."

"Not like this one," she said. She described a dreadful high school where there was no music, no drama society, nothing of any cultural value whatever. She said that because of her love of the arts, she was made to feel like a freak.

"Sounds just like my high school," I said. "Where did you grow up?"

"Oh, a place you've never heard of," she said.

"Try me," I said. "Where?"

"A place called St. Catharines, Ontario."

Kenny's sister Helen, who is divorced from one of Kenny's friends of our youth, Bill Jelley, works as a secretary in the engineering department at City Hall in St. Catharines. In charge of all the water and sewer histories, she is the one who watches most closely over Kenny's history. She has every record he ever made.

She told me that Kenny's son and daughter are named Mark and Louanne. I haven't seen Doreen since our strange odyssey to Manchester.

Helen said, "Louanne is named after Doreen's mother, who was named Louise. The 'Anne' comes from my middle name. Mark works for a travel company. Louanne is married to a businessman who owns a restaurant in London. They have a villa in Portugal.

"Doreen is just what Kenny needs, a totally different temperament. She's very outgoing and easygoing. Seldom gets upset. Kenny can get very up-tight. He can get very moody, Ken. She knows how to keep him on an even keel. The thing about Kenny is that he knows when he's been that way, moaning and groaning, and he always apologizes. He knows when he's got down and got everybody else down.

"I think it's because Kenny has such deep feelings about things. The saddest thing was when Dad died. Dad died January 12, 1983. It was just before Kenny's birthday. Kenny flew over from England. We didn't want him to come. It was a long way to come. He wanted to. We kept Dad laid over an extra day, so Kenny could be here. Kenny went to the funeral parlor all on his own. I remember walking in and seeing Kenny sitting all by himself by the coffin, just staring. It was such a sad picture, to see him. Kenny was so upset by Dad's dying."

I told Helen that I have been bothered all my life by Kenny's move to England. Would he eventually have found his way to the United States and found an earlier and greater recognition?

"Maybe if you hadn't suggested it and he hadn't gone to

England," Helen said, "he'd have come back to St. Catharines. And that would have been a catastrophe for him."

And that consoled me. Perhaps in the end, Ian Carr was half right. It was not in search of a non-competitive world that Kenny went to England. Indeed, the jazz world of the United States is not as gladiatorial as Carr seems to think. You need only see the way colleagues close ranks and rush to assistance when a jazz musician is in trouble of any kind. But England is a softer country than the United States. Kenny had no precognitive intuition about the right place for him. He went to England almost by accident because I said something in the Cafe St. Michel.

But what if the musicians had asked him to sit in that night?

"I couldn't have done it anyway," Kenny told me recently. "My hands would have been shaking."

To return to St. Catharines would indeed have been catastrophe for him. Had he done so, he might have ceased playing forever.

"Doesn't it seem ironic," I said the day after he made the album with Don Thompson, "to be recording jazz in Toronto all these years after being ignored here?"

"Yes, it does, really," Kenny said. "I had a walk around the east end yesterday, and the streets came flooding back from when I was a kid. I still don't feel anything in Toronto, I don't feel I'm any kind of celebrity, although the last time I played, the place was packed. I played with Dave McMurdo's big band. But the times I played before, about three times in ten years, nobody came. I wonder what would happen if I played in Toronto now, whether anybody would come."

"I think the Canadian condescension to Canadian talent is still here," I said.

Kenny said, "One critic in England, speaking about ECM artists, accused them all of being very rich. Which certainly is not true. I've just got a little house, I'm not rich."

"For all the years I've lived in the States," I said, "I still feel the identity with Canada."

"Yeah, I do too."

And so he comes home regularly. Sometime in the early 1970s, when I was living in Toronto and, having overcome at least some of my fear of performing, doing a lot in television, Kenny came home. It was a rainy summer. Kenny lamented that he liked to come home to sit in his mother's back yard in St. Catharines and soak in the sun. This summer it hadn't been possible. I said, "It's a drag. It's been like this all summer, and yet last summer was just beautiful. Endless sunshine."

And with his slightly bizarre sense of humor and slightly English accent, he said, "Well then, I guess I should go back to England and come back last summer."

Kenny and Don Thompson have been among the most important teachers at the Banff School of the Arts. Don tells me that between them, they have produced about 75 percent of the finest younger jazz players in Canada. Renee Rosnes passed through that school.

I thought this was typical of Kenny, who by then was in his fifties: he told his wife, "I think perhaps by now I may know enough to teach."

When I told him that I was pleased for him, he said in that shy way that hasn't changed since we were in high school, "I just wish it had happened maybe ten years earlier." I couldn't help remembering the two us in the St. Michel, he with his horn on his lap, yearning to play, and no one asked him.

But the best Kenny Wheeler story I know came from our drummer friend Rod North.

During one of Kenny's periodic returns to St. Catharines, he went with Helen and Bryon Ball, his nephew and son of his sister Mabel, to a jazz club. One of the musicians recognized him and started an effusive introduction from the bandstand. Something to this effect: "Ladies and gentlemen, we have with us tonight a real jazz celebrity!"

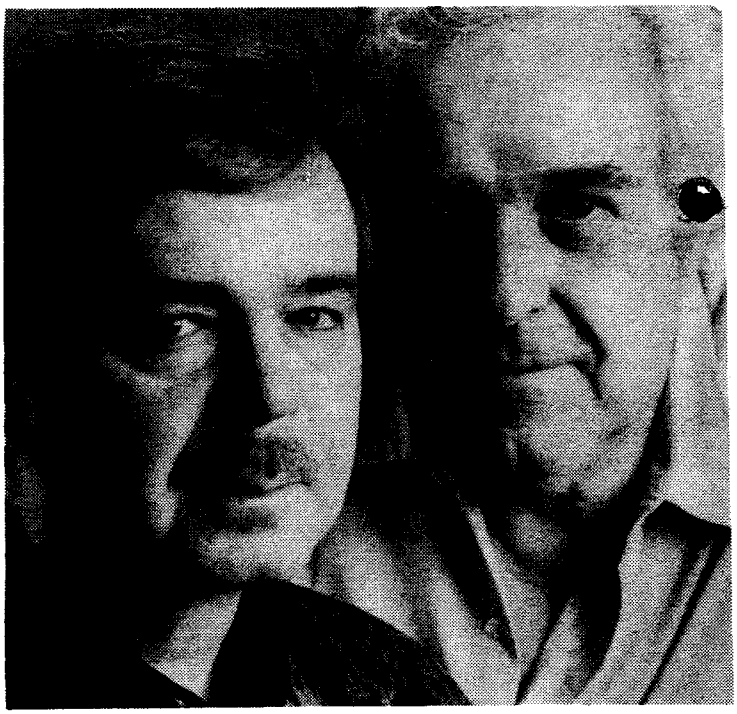
Kenny sank lower in his chair.

"A man who left St. Catharines to become one of the great jazz musicians of our time!"

And Kenny sank lower still.

"Ladies and gentlemen, may I present . . . Mr. Kenny Wheeler!"

Kenny jabbed Bryon with an elbow and said, "Stand up!"



Kenny and me photo by John Reeves