Gene Lees
Jazzletter

P.O. Box 240
Ojai, Calif.
93024-0240

December 1994

Vol. 13 No. 12

A Man Nobody Knew
Part II

With the outbreak of war, the North Sea was closed, and Leonard soon learned that there was no way for him to get back to England. He thought: "My God, I'm going to be stuck in Sweden." Sweden was neutral, and would remain so through the war. But it simply was not where he wanted to be. If he could be anywhere other than England, his choice would be the United States. He said:

"I somehow managed to get on the list for a ship called the Rotningholm that was leaving out of Gothenberg. The Atlantic was mined, and we didn't know what the hell was going to happen. Tom Mix was on the ship. Second day out was my twenty-fifth birthday. It was an eleven-day crossing. I got to New York. Nobody knew I was coming."

"Did you have any visa problems?"

"Well I had a passport. And I'd been to New York several times anyway. I don't recall having any problem. Eventually I had to go up to Canada and come back as a permanent resident.

"The second night I was in I spent at Coleman Hawkins' apartment. I called up *Down Beat* to see if the job was still available, and it wasn't. I got a little frantic. I had maybe a couple of hundred dollars.

"I found a room on West 90th Street for five dollars a week.

"Eventually, when things got better, I moved up to West 92nd for seven dollars a week. But in those days you could get breakfast for a dime. Orange juice, two donuts, and coffee. You got lunch for fifty-five cents.

"Benny Carter was back. I saw him and I saw John Hammond.

"I went to work without pay for a magazine called *Swing*. It was a really good magazine that lasted only two or three years. The editor was a young, newly-graduated from Columbia, fellow named Barry Ulanov. Barry and I hit it off very well because we had the same outlook on jazz.

"I got the freedom to write anything I liked. Record reviews. I used a pseudonym. But I was not getting paid.

"I got to make a record date with Hazel Scott, who was then nineteen. That was a group called the Sextet of the Rhythm Club of London. And everybody on it was either of British extraction — Hazel was from Trinidad — or had spent a lot of time in London, like Danny Polo. It was a real nice session.

"I did some other record dates. I did some writing. Irving Mills gave me an office in his office as a sort of staff songwriter. He didn't pay me anything, but I churned out songs, and he got his people like Cab Calloway to record some of them."

Publisher Irving Mills is a somewhat controversial figure in jazz history. He was Duke Ellington's partner. His name is on a number of Ellington tunes as lyricist, but some of the people who knew him say he "couldn't write his own name." That may be; in any case, the lyrics attached to most Ellington tunes, such as *Sophisticated Lady*, aren't very good. The music is not well-served by them. (An exception is Bob Russell's *Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me*, which is excellent.)

But others who knew Mills praised him for his unflagging support of Ellington's music. And he was good to Leonard.

"Between one thing and another I scraped by," Leonard said.

"It was about a year before I started writing for *Down Beat*. I didn't do any one thing at any one time. It had to be the sum total of all these odds and ends, writing songs, producing record dates, writing for magazines, and doing a radio show. I was the emcee of a show called *Platter Brains* that ran on WMCA for three or four years. We had fantastic panels of unpaid people. One week we had Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Lena Horne, and somebody else of that caliber. They had to guess what the records were.

"I parted company with *Down Beat* over some misunderstanding or another. Then I was in limbo. I got a job as assistant to Ivan Black who was the press agent for Cafe Society Downtown and Cafe Society Uptown, which had opened by then. This was about 1941. He only paid me fifteen dollars a week. But I was paid a commission on any accounts I could bring in. We had people like Harry James and Lionel Hampton that I was able to persuade to have me do their publicity. So I was a press agent for a year or two. The big advantage was that Ivan's office was in the same building as Cafe Society Uptown, and I had the free run of both. I could go to Cafe Society Downtown and hear Teddy Wilson's band and Lena Horne and Josh White and all these marvelous people. Many years later, I lived in that building, in the penthouse.

"Through '41 and '42 I was still doing publicity. After leaving Ivan Black, I did publicity for a company owned by Hal Davis and Les Lieber. I worked for a very small salary, just a base, doing record dates and writing songs.

"One of the bands that I think was sort of short-changed by fate, and to me was one of the great bands of the time, after Ellington and Lunceford and Basie, was Charlie Barnet. And you had to hear it in person. That band outswung any of the other bands, except those three. Not that I didn't think Goodman had a good band, but I preferred Goodman's small combo things. I think the things he did with Cootie Williams, Charlie Christian, and Georgie Auld were just fantastic, whereas the big-band things were very good. Artie Shaw had a very fine band, I enjoyed that too. But they still didn't quite achieve the loose feeling that the Barnet band had. It was at its peak around 1939, '40. That was really an incredible band. For a while I did Barnet's publicity. I always felt that he has been kind of bypassed by history, because people just think of him as a second-hand Ellington. But even Duke thought that Charlie did a wonderful job of assimilating the Ellington sound. He didn't resent it. He kind of admired it.

"And that band had its own identity, and Charlie had his own sound on saxophone. It was really a bitch of a band.

"At the end of '42, Duke Ellington, whom I'd got to know very well, hired me to do *his* publicity. He had the first Carnegie Hall

concert coming up. That was very exciting, a labor of love, working for someone I just idolized. He put on that concert in January, 1943. It was one of the most memorable nights ever. He introduced *Black, Brown and Beige.*

"The only magazine writing I was doing at that time was for *Orchestra World,* which was a real crumby paper. It paid virtually nothing. It was just someplace to write. I couldn't get anything else at the time. Then the *Esquire* thing happened.

"I had started doing a course on jazz at the New School for Social Research in New York, with Robert Goffin, who was Belgian. It was the very first jazz history course. Goffin didn't speak very good English, and since I spoke French, he needed me to work with him on this series. We did a course there two seasons in a row, '41 and '42. I've even got photographs of some of that in the basement. We got guests to come down there and perform for nothing, Louis Armstrong, Benny Carter, Mel Powell, Bobby Hackett. It was a great experience.

"Not too long after that, Goffin introduced me to Arnold Gingrich, the editor of *Esquire,* and this whole idea developed between the three of us of having *Esquire* do a poll of jazz by experts. At that time there were only two polls, the *Metronome* and the *Down Beat* polls. And people like Helen O'Connell were winning the polls and Tex Beneke won over Coleman Hawkins. That's the way the polls, or the American public, viewed jazz.

"I thought this was a great idea. We could get some people on the panel of experts who were really hip, including some black people. We could have Langston Hughes, whom I knew quite well, and E. Simms Campbell, the cartoonist, who was also a good writer and quite knowledgeable about jazz. The idea evolved. We were going to have a poll. We were going to have jazz in the magazine regularly. I think David Smart, the publisher, got the idea to have a concert with the winners. That was ambitious indeed. At that time no national magazine did anything about jazz. You couldn't get anything printed. So for *Esquire* to take this on and do a concert on top of it was absolutely unprecedented.

"To make it even juicier, through making it a benefit for the Navy League, they got the Metropolitan Opera House, where nobody had ever presented a jazz concert. And we had the most incredible concert of the winners: Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, Jack Teagarden, Coleman Hawkins, Barney Bigard, Red Norvo, Lionel Hampton, Billie Holiday, Mildred Bailey, Art Tatum, Al Casey, Oscar Pettiford, and Sid Catlett. Orson Welles was the emcee. Another year we did it out here at the Philharmonic, and Danny Kaye was the emcee. But on the first one it was Orson Welles. And part of it was broadcast. It was a tremendous success.

"At this point, I gave up all my press-agent work, because it was a conflict of interest. I couldn't be a press agent and write for *Esquire.* It wasn't work I liked doing in the first place. I did it for less than two years, but the word stuck to me. For years after that people called me a publicist.

"It was about that time, 1943, that I started writing for *Metronome.*" *Metronome* had been primarily a brass band magazine.

"The first person to take it into the Twentieth Century," Leonard said, "was George Simon, who started writing about jazz and dance bands in '35, I think. Barry Ulanov had joined them by the time I did. George was drafted, so I came in to replace him. Then I got a draft call, but I was 4-F. I wasn't an American citizen until 1948, but I was still subject to the draft.

"So Barry and I were running *Metronome,* which was a delightful period of my life. Between that and *Esquire,* I felt I was doing a lot to help some of the modern musicians. And that's when I ran into an absolute avalanche of hostility and opposition. Some really vicious in-fighting. Whole articles were written attacking not just bebop or modern jazz but attacking me for championing it. It became really nasty. I was partly to blame, because instead of sticking to my guns and supporting the people I believed in, I would write satirical articles in *Metronome* by professor McSiegal. Nobody knew who it was although maybe they suspected. I kept it a secret all the time I was writing those articles. But it was just rubbing salt in the wounds. I got a little bit nasty myself."

"I thought they were pretty funny," I said. "Step back a little and look at some kid in Canada reading them. I didn't know they were political. I just found them terribly funny."

"I thought they were too."

"*Metronome* at that time had a certain bite and vitality," I said.

"Barry and I both felt that bebop represented the shape of things to come, and we were the first to champion it — almost the only ones for a while. And this really put people's backs up.

"There were people at that time — this may be hard for you to believe, because you weren't old enough to see what was happening — there were people who said how dare I set up people like Roy Eldridge and Art Tatum as representing jazz. To them, it had to be either Bunk Johnson or George Lewis, or it wasn't jazz. It sort of peaked around 1943."

"Well that's what I call the aesthetic gerrymandering of jazz," I said. "It's one of the plagues of jazz. People say, 'I will draw the borders of jazz. I will say what is and what is not jazz. If it's not my taste, then it's not jazz.' Moveable borders. Wonderful. It remarkably facilitates the imposition of prejudice."

"Oh God, it was a real battle." Leonard said. "It was the time of the battle between what they called the beboppers and the moldy figs. The term 'moldy fig' was coined by somebody who wrote a letter to the editor of *Esquire.* Nobody knows who it was. He used that term to describe the old-time dance bands, and it really stuck.

"George Frazier was one of the anti-bebop fraternity. Another very active opponent was Eddie Condon, who at that time was doing a column, ghost-written by Richard Gehman, in the *Journal-American.* Eddie would come out with these real nasty articles about Sarah Vaughan and Dizzy Gillespie, anybody he didn't like, anybody who wasn't a Dixielander. One time he made some snotty remark about 'this is about as likely to happen as Leonard Feather coming down and playing piano in our club.' So one night I went

down to Eddie Condon's and sat in and played piano the whole set, and he apologized in the column.

"You have no idea what it was like. It was really a very bad time. It was vicious on both sides. I confess, in retrospect, that though I didn't initiate the viciousness, I responded to it.

"The funny part is that most of the people who were my bitterest opponents — among them John Hammond who said bebop was a collection of nauseating cliches repeated ad infinitum — eventually came around to bebop and became quite friendly with me. John became one of my closest friends, but he was one of the most vitriolic. It was pretty much the whole New Orleans-Dixieland critical establishment up against Barry and me.

"Dizzy and Bird had an unbelievable amount to put up with in those days. Some of the greatest bebop records that came out at that time got two-star reviews in *Down Beat*. They got no publicity. And when they finally did, it was a story in *Life* about the horn-rimmed glasses and the beret and all that, not about the music. It was a very rough period for all those musicians. That's why I was proud of the *Esquire* poll. It was the first poll to give an award to Charlie Parker, to Dizzy Gillespie, to Lucky Thompson, to people like Dodo Marmarosa. It was so far ahead of its time that it was fantastic.

"Plus we had a headline in the *Amsterdam News*, the week after the poll came out, pointing out that seventeen of the twenty-four winners were black. In *Down Beat* or *Metronome* polls it was always the opposite.

"I could show you, because I've got the bound volumes in the basement. The *Metronome* poll was a little better, but the *Down Beat* poll was incredible. I don't think Billie Holiday ever won, but Dinah Shore won, Helen O'Connell won. The polls at that time, when I started the *Esquire* poll, were an outrage.

"I deliberately, I admit, slanted the poll, knowing that the people we picked would be more likely to vote for some of the more modern musicians and also for more of the black musicians who deserved to be voted for. That was done deliberately with an eye to righting a wrong that I felt had been going on for quite a long time. It was good not just for black musicians but for the whole modern movement."

"Let me ask you a social question. Do you think a serious interest in jazz inevitably results in an interest in the injustice to the black American?"

"I would think so. It did in my case. It did in John's case and most others. However, there were some exceptions, such as Ralph De Toledano, a jazz fan and occasional writer who became a political right winger. But that's really the exception."

"Well," I said, "if you get interested in the music, you get interested in the history, you get interested in the people, and you soon realize the terrifying outrage they've suffered."

Leonard said, "I invited Andy Kirk to have a drink with me at my hotel, the Hotel Plymouth on 49th Street, about 1936 or so. As we stepped into the elevator the operator said, 'No sir, you'll have to take the freight elevator.' There were other things like that. They had a tremendous impact on me. I would not go to the Cotton Club because they didn't let black people in as customers."

"Well I'm sure I don't have to tell you that in clubs on the South Side of Chicago, black waiters discriminated against black customers on the grounds that they didn't tip well. They wanted the wealthy whites. This was in black-owned clubs. That reflected the structure of the whole society."

"I got to know a lot about American society even during those first visits," Leonard said. "When I came over in 1936 and made that first trip to Chicago to see the editors at *Down Beat*, I caught Louis Armstrong at the Oriental theater. He remembered me from England and he was very friendly. He said, 'Hey, Feather, why don't you come on the road with us and see what America's like?' So I got in the band bus with the entire Armstrong band. Louis was traveling separately, by train or something. And I went from Chicago to St. Louis, and St. Louis to Kansas City, and stayed in black hotels with the musicians. This was before air conditioning. It was, like, 120 degrees in Kansas City. It was an unbelievable experience. In Kansas City, Louis took me down to the boat to see Fate Marable. I met Fate Marable. I went for a ride on the riverboat with him. He and Charlie Creath had the band. Louis had worked with him around 1918. Louis left me there and I made this boat ride. I went back and caught Louis at the end of his gig.

"At that same time, I went with Louis to the Reno Club in Kansas City to see Count Basie, who was still unknown.

"I was associating with a lot of black people, and finding out about the conditions of life, and writing for the *Amsterdam News*.

"I used to deliberately flout the segregation. When I went to Washington to see Jimmie Lunceford, at his invitation, I stayed at a black hotel. When I went down to New Orleans in 1949 to see Louis Armstrong when he was the King of the Zulus in the Mardi Gras parade — they still had full segregation — Louis played in a theater that had blacks on the one side and whites on the other. I sat on the black side. It was my little way of protesting.

"I went through various experiences like that. It probably didn't accomplish anything, but the one thing that did, I felt, was that *Esquire* poll."

"How long did the association with *Metronome* last?"

"I was associated with *Metronome* from 1943 to 1950. In 1950, Ned Williams called me up from *Down Beat* and said, 'How would you like to be the New York correspondent, replacing John S. Wilson?' John had left to join the *New York Times*.

"I had an interesting three-month overlap when I was writing for both *Down Beat* and *Metronome*. I had the Blindfold Test in *Metronome* and all the news stuff in *Down Beat* and then I took the Blindfold Test to *Down Beat* also."

"The Blindfold Test has been copped by a lot of people," I said.

"Oh yes," Leonard said. "It's been copied by magazines all over the world. But I started it. My original reason for doing it had something to do with the battle of the Dixielanders versus the

modernists. Because I felt that if I spoke to musicians who were respected and had no prior knowledge of the record and could not be accused of prejudice, the opinions might carry more weight than my opinion. Because my opinion was already considered valueless by these people. And sure enough, I played a Jelly Roll Morton record for Mary Lou Williams, and she just laughed at it and said it was horrible, it was nothing, and she couldn't stand it. The same thing happened with records I played for people whom one could not contest because they were so respected. This made the traditionalists even more angry at me, because there was no way they could come back at me. I never played a Jelly Roll Morton for anybody and got a positive reaction. He's probably the most overrated musician in the history of jazz. Listen to a Jelly Roll Morton piano solo and you'll hear some pretty bad piano-playing."

"Later you tested Roy Eldridge on whether he really could tell whether the player was black or white. Didn't he say he could?"

"Yes. That's why I did the test. And he did not get even the fifty percent to which the law of averages would entitle him."

"You went to *Down Beat* in . . . . "

"I think April of '51. I worked in various capacities at *Down Beat*. I once worked more or less full-time in the New York office as New York editor. But it held me down. That was about 1953."

"You were still producing records?"

"I was extremely busy as a producer in the late 1940s. I wasn't under contract to RCA, but there was a man named Steve Sholes, an extremely nice man, and he gave me almost carte blanche if I'd come up with an idea. To give you an example, during the height of this bebop thing, when everybody was fighting the inevitable, and Dizzy had only recorded for various independent labels, I talked to Steve Sholes about letting me do Dizzy for RCA as part an album I wanted to call *Bebop*. But they didn't dare to call the album *Bebop* because that word was poison, bad news and uncommercial. So they called it *New 52nd Street Jazz*, which was a euphemism. But it *was* a bebop album, and it included the first session that Dizzy ever made for RCA, for which I put a little all-star group together. We had Don Byas, Milt Jackson — who had those real milk-bottle-sounding vibes at the time — and I think Al Haig, Bill Di Arango, Ray Brown, and J.C. Heard. And not long after that Dizzy signed with RCA and recorded for them regularly for about three years.

"I put Dizzy's first Carnegie Hall concert on. I did that for a lot of people. I produced the first Carnegie Hall concert of Louis Armstrong, of Woody Herman, Dizzy with Charlie Parker as a special guest, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole. I did a lot of concert producing in the 1940s, almost all at Carnegie Hall. I did Dizzy three years in a row, September of '47, December of '48 and '49. For the last one, I couldn't be there because I was in the hospital."

By then Leonard was married to a singer named Jane Leslie. née Jane Larrabee. She was one of Peggy Lee's closest friends. Indeed, she and Peggy were room-mates in Chicago when Benny Goodman hired her. Goodman had heard her singing in a Chicago club. The next day their telephone rang. Peg was not there; Jane took the call. When Peg returned, Jane told her Goodman had called. Peg said words to the effect of, 'Oh yeah, I'll bet," but it was Goodman and she was hired.

Leonard said, "I met Jane . . . I sort of saw her in a couple of clubs that she was working on 52nd Street. She was one of several singers. But I didn't really meet her then. I met her when Peggy Lee called me up at my hotel when I came out to California and asked me if I'd like to come over to her house for dinner with her and Jane and Jean Hazard, who was then Jean Greer. She married Dick Hazard. That was in January of '45. I was out here to produce the *Esquire* concert, the one that Danny Kaye emceed.

"I took Jane out to a place called Shep's Playhouse, where Gerald Wilson had a brand-new band, his first big band. I corresponded with her and phoned her and she came to New York to see me and we got married on May 18, 1945. I had been married briefly in 1941 to a very lovely girl who was unfortunately a little too hip for her own good. And that's all I want to say about that. She's dead now. Cancer. She was a good musician, a pianist."

He and Jane were in a freak accident. They were crossing the road at 96th Street and West End Avenue. The land dips there. West End Avenue drops and then rises again; 96th Street slopes down steeply, bottoms out and then rises a little as it enters Riverside Park. The brakes of a parked car let go. Silently it rolled down toward them and ran over both Leonard and Jane.

"We don't know exactly what happened," Leonard said. "It happened so fast. A whole bunch of people were gathered around. We were picked up by an ambulance. We were hysterical and half conscious on the way to the hospital.

"The accident was November 19, 1949. I was in the hospital for three months with two broken legs and a broken right arm. Jane had a fractured pelvis and concussion. She was in the hospital two months. Most of 1950, I was immobilized, at home in bed, and then on crutches. The first night I could get out — I was living in this penthouse at 1 Sheridan Square — they lifted me and took me down the flight of stairs to the 8th floor where the elevator started, and took me down to Cafe Society Downtown in the basement. It was Charlie Parker's opening night. That was my coming-out party. I didn't become completely ambulatory until almost a year after the accident.

"We sued the car's owner and eventually collected a nice amount of money."

About this period, Leonard had a fairly close association with Charlie Parker. "I'd known Charlie for a long time," Leonard said. "He even played on one of my Sarah Vaughan record dates. I made the first two Sarah Vaughan records for Continental Records, with whom I was doing a lot of dates in '44 and '45. I did the first Dinah Washington date in December of '43 for Keynote. I wrote all the tunes, which became hits, including *Evil Gal Blues* and *Salty Papa* and so forth. That started Keynote as a jazz label. Before that it had been a classical label. I also made the first Etta

Jones record when she was eighteen for Black and White Records. I made the first Melba Liston record.

"In the 1950s I was producing mostly for MGM. Over all, I produced a very large number of records, which people really don't realize. I produced everybody from Duke Ellington on. For two years, '50 and '51 and '52, Mercer Ellington and I had Mercer Records. At one point I did a whole series of piano sessions for Steve Sholes. I did a date out of here with André Previn who had never recorded for anybody except one date for Gene Norman. He was sixteen. I made two tunes with him. I made a session with Art Tatum for RCA, the only one he ever made for them. I did one with Erroll Garner, the only one he ever made for RCA. Several sessions with Mary Lou Williams, by the trio or quintet, all-female. It was a bunch of all-female dates that I did.

"That was another of my big campaigns, against sexism in jazz. Probably 90 percent of the female instrumentalist records that were made in the '40s and '50s, I produced, including a whole bunch of things that Mary Osborne did. I used her on sessions with everybody, Coleman Hawkins, Wynonie Harris, Ethel Waters. And then I did an all-woman band thing on MGM, which really had some good people, including a very fine trumpet player named Norma Carson, who never recorded before or since, Corky Hale on harp, Beryl Booker on piano, and Terry Pollard on vibes, who was a wonderful and underrated musician. Elaine Leyton on drums and Bonnie Wetzel on bass. They became part of a package I took to Europe with Billie Holiday, the only time Billie Holiday toured Europe. We called it *Jazz Club USA*, which was the name of a radio series I was doing for the Voice of America. This was before Willis Conover began *Music USA*. Beryl had a marvelous style. She sounded a little like Erroll Garner. She died several years ago. She was one of the people who never made it, just bad luck.

"Pete Brown was another. I used to record Pete Brown whenever I could.

"In the '50s, I produced for just about every major company. I made a lot of sessions with various groups, including a little band of my own. With Danny Polo and George Chisholm and people like that. One of the last things I made in England was with George Shearing. That was in early '39. He came up to a Rhythm Club session and sat in, and I was very impressed and I called the people at Decca, whom I'd recorded for off and on for several years. We went to the studio and cut several things. On one record, I played piano and George played accordion. It was called *Squeezin' the Blues*. Terrible record. That was the start of a long friendship. I was one of his two required sponsors to get him entry to the United States. I took him all over 52nd Street, and nobody wanted to hire him. Who wants to see a blind pianist? We finally got one night a week at the Three Deuces, and then he started working regularly for $66 a week, with people like J. C. Heard and Oscar Pettiford. Savoy made two dates with him.

"Then George was at the Clique Club, which was where Birdland later was. Downstairs. He had Buddy DeFranco on clarinet, John Levy on bass, and Denzil Best on drums. But Buddy DeFranco was under contract to Capitol, and so we couldn't use him. So I said, 'There's an instrumentation I've used on several dates, piano, bass, drums, vibes, and guitar.' I'd done that with Mary Lou Williams, with Marjorie Hyams and Mary Osborne. I also used it on a Slam Stewart date where I had Johnny Guarnieri, Red Norvo, and Chuck Wayne. That was in 1944; this was in 1949. So I said, 'Why don't I get Marjorie Hyams and Chuck Wayne?' George thought it sounded like not a bad idea. And in the meantime, we knew that MGM wanted him. George said we should use original music for the MGM date. He said, 'You write the music.' So I wrote four originals, including *Life with Feather, Sorry Wrong Rhumba, Midnight on the Air*, and one other, I forget. That was the beginning of the George Shearing Quintet. That was the 31st of January, 1949. A couple of months later he got an offer for the group from Cafe Society Downtown. I produced his sessions at MGM for two years. I produced *September in the Rain*, which was a big hit. The quintet stayed together, with various changes of personnel, for close to thirty years."

"In the '50s, I was writing for *Down Beat* and other magazines, only rarely for *Esquire*. That faded out when Arnold Gingrich left. I was also still doing a lot of song-writing and composing and a little arranging. I once had an arrangement recorded by Basie — my only recorded big-band arrangement. I wrote two for Basie, one of which he recorded. It was a blues called *My Wandering Man*. Helen Humes sang it. I knew nothing about big-band arranging. I had a seventy-five-cent book called *The Frank Skinner Arranging Method*. A friend of mine who was an arranger helped me out. I went to the Woodside Hotel in Harlem. There was Don Redman, there was Buster Harding, there was Jimmy Mundy, all these famous people standing around with their arrangements, waiting for them to be played. And finally Basie said, 'Okay, Leonard, we'll try yours.' It sounded okay. And a week later they recorded it! I got fifty dollars. But that didn't matter, it was just the idea of having an arrangement recorded by Basie. But it was very hard work, because I didn't — and don't — have the knowledge and facility to write a big-band arrangement. I did quite a bit of small-group writing. That I could teach myself.

"I did a lot of blues dates too. I did a Cousin Joe record date. I got Harry Carney and an all-star band for it. I wrote the arrangements and a couple of tunes. I made the session for Alladin records.

"Altogether, I've written a couple of hundred things that have been recorded, some of them numerous times."

In early 1960, I went from Chicago to New York on business for *Down Beat*. During dinner with Doris Wiss, Don Elliott's manager (and, later, wife), I began to feel ill. Doris took me back to her apartment and called Dr. Alexander Schiff, Louis Armstrong's doctor, who lived in the same building. He diagnosed my problem as a severe 'flu and asked Doris if I might stay there for a few

Yes, and called Joe Glaser, Armstrong's manager, who also lived in the building. He lent me a pair of pajamas, and I spent the next two or three days on Doris' sofa in Joe Glaser's pajamas. I telephoned Leonard and told him I was truly in her way. Leonard urged me to come over to his apartment on Riverside Drive. He and Jane put Lorraine on the sofa and ensconced me in her bedroom, where I stayed until I was well enough to travel. I suppose that's when Leonard and I became friends.

Not long after that, Leonard and his family left New York. Leonard said, "In November, 1960, we moved out here to California. I liked the climate, and New York was really beginning to be a bit of a drag. It was also time for Lorraine to go to high school, and we didn't think New York was a very good place. So we moved. Lorraine went to a couple of high schools in the Valley and then she went to Hollywood High.

"I came out here not really knowing what was going to happen. I thought I would concentrate on song-writing, but that proved to be an impossibility.

"André Previn recorded a couple of things of mine. It was a period when he was recording pop songs or standards with a big string ensemble. I have a song in the *Far Away Part of Town* album, I have one in another one, I forget which one. One of the songs of mine he recorded was *Signing Off*, on which I got a lot of very good records by Ella, Sarah, all kinds of people.

"Then I made a lot of good friends out here. In 1962, I met Vi Redd, whom I'd never heard of. Dave Bailey, the drummer, told me about her. I met her family. She was just a very nice person. and I liked her playing. I produced the only two albums that she's made. One was for Atlantic and one was for United Artists, and they're both unavailable."

Another woman whose career he championed is Evelyn Hawkins, now a jazz broadcaster heard from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday to Friday on WDUQ, the Duquesne University radio station in Pittsburgh. Evelyn says she owes her entire career to Leonard. She met him at the 1987 *JazzTimes* convention. She was, she says, completely intimidated at that time, both as a woman and as a black. Leonard encouraged her to write and to pursue a career in broadcasting. He was her constant mentor and adviser from that time on, opening doors for her, reading her writing, listening to airchecks of her radio shows.

From time to time, musicians put him down to her, assuming her agreement. One of them said, "We need you. We don't need Leonard Feather." She was furious.

"I say to them, 'Wait a minute. You wouldn't be talking to me or doing this interview if it weren't for Leonard Feather.' And I think, 'These people don't know what they're talking about.'

"Other than my father, Leonard was the most supportive man in my life. I owe everything to him."

One of the friends Leonard made in California was Jimmy Tolbert, a Los Angeles attorney and Lester Young's nephew.

"In 1961 or '62," Leonard said, "Jimmy was president of the Beverly Hills-Hollywood NAACP. I was the vice president of the branch for a year two. I am a life member of the NAACP. He became my manager and lawyer off and on.

"After we moved to California, I got to see a lot more of Benny Carter, who was living out here. I made a very nice date with Benny for Prestige. I got a fantastic band with Benny, Ben Webster, Barney Bigard, Shorty Sherock, Mel Lewis, Dave Barbour — it was the very last date he ever played on — Leroy

Panel discussion, Chicago, probably 1961. Dave Lambert, Leonard Feather, Jack Teagarden, Gene Lees.

Vinnegar, and Jimmy Rowles. That was a beautiful band. Benny wrote two of the tunes and I wrote two.

"In 1965, Charles Champlin joined the *Los Angeles Times* as arts editor. He knew about me. He had read me in *Esquire* or wherever. I wrote him a letter welcoming him and saying I was available. He started using me on a freelance basis. Within a few months, in January of '66, I started regularly at the *Times*. I've been on a retainer since then and they've given me several raises. They've been very good to me. I've written on other subjects for them. I've written book reviews about civil rights and about the English language, which as you know is a special topic of mine. My column goes to four hundred outlets."

What Leonard did not say then, although he discussed it with [illegible] in private later on, is that he felt a certain prejudice against jazz in the *Los Angeles Times*. He was rarely, if ever, allowed to review books about jazz in the book review section. He would review them in his own column in the *Calendar* section of the Sunday paper. He was also well aware of the huge amounts of space the paper dedicated to rock music compared to that which it allocated for jazz. This of course was a direct reflection of the amount of money spent on advertising of rock performers by the record companies, an illustration of the pervasive compromising effect of advertising on journalism. I never quoted these private observations of Leonard's; to do so could have jeopardized his position at the paper. But Leonard, shall we say, was not entirely happy about the *Los Angeles Times*.

Leonard wrote a total of eleven books in his life, including *The Jazz Years: Earwitness to an Era*, a loose autobiography published by Quartet Books in England. It had the failing of many autobiographies in that it did not assert its author's rightful claim to a place in history. But it was an interesting if unassertive account of an important career. With former *Down Beat* editor Jack Tracy he [illegible]te *Laughter from the Hip*, a book about the humor in jazz. He also wrote *Inside Bebop, From Satchmo to Miles*, and two collections of his pieces from the *Los Angeles Times, The Pleasure of Jazz* and *The Passion for Jazz*. But his major achievement in books was *The Encyclopedia of Jazz*. There were five editions of it, the last of them with Ira Gitler as his associate author. Leonard asserted that he would never produce another one, and I am proud to say that I am the man who undermined his resolve. I engineered a conversaton with Sheldon Meyer, senior vice president of Oxford University Press. Sheldon drew a contract with Leonard to produce a new encyclopedia, again with Ira Gitler as his collaborator. The work contains an unprecedented number of entries, and various writers, including myself, made contributions to it. Ira is completing it now, and its posthumous publication should make apparent for once and for all Leonard's stature in jazz history.

"What are the things you're proudest of?" I asked him.

"I think maybe the *Esquire* thing. Because of what it did for the race situation in jazz. And also because of what it did in drawing attention to jazz in a national magazine and on national radio with the Metropolitan Opera House."

At the end of his life, however, having fought for the rights of black Americans all his life, he was saddened by the anti-white racism increasingly evident in the jazz establishment. It was Leonard who pointed out that of the thirty-nine Jazz Masters awards made by the National Endowment for the Arts, only two had gone to white musicians; after his death the proportion shifted further: it became only two out of forty-two.

Leonard would point out that Robert Goffin was writing about jazz before he was. Like so many who bought into the myth that jazz was discovered by European writers, Leonard was unable to deal with all the important writing about jazz published in America in the 1920s, even in classical music magazines. It was a small flaw in a magnificent man.

"It's been fifty-one years now," he said in 1984. "On a continuous basis, I have been doing the same things, i.e. writing about music and writing music, for fifty-one years, and I've also been on radio almost continuously for most of that time." And when he declined into his terminal illness last summer, it had become sixty-one.

When interviewers called to ask me for statements about him, they usually asked the cause of his death. I said, "The Los Angeles earthquake of 1994."

I am not the only one who believes that. Jane too believes it.

The earthquake threw his record collection, his files, his memorabilia, a lavish treasury of jazz history, all over the floor of his garage. And it put Leonard and Jane out of their home. "I'm not sure I'll live long enough to catalogue my stuff again," he said on one of the last occasions I was with him. He had taken on a rather lost look; he looked fragile.

Jane said that after the earthquake Leonard began coughing.

"He'd had chronic leukemia for five years," Lorraine said. "This had weakened him. He began to have asthma attacks."

Eventually he was taken to Encino Hospital. "It was very rough," Lorraine said. "He was on and off a ventilator. Then my mother began to feel faint."

She too was taken to Encino Hospital. She and Leonard had been in a hospital together in their youth, after that freak accident; now, again, they were in the same hospital at the same time. Jane underwent triple-bypass heart surgery.

Lorraine said, "In the middle of his hospital stay, he had a stroke. He was put back on the ventilator, and that was when I sensed that a deep gloom overtook him, although he would respond when my mom or I came in, or Jimmy Tolbert, who was there virtually every day playing jazz tapes for him on a boom box.

The Jazzletter is published 12 times a year at Ojai, California, 93024-0240. Subscriptions are for the current calendar year, January to December. Subscriptions are $60 U.S. a year to the U.S. and Canada; other countries $70, $80 air mail.

"In the end it was pneumonia that killed my dad. If he had just been left alone, it would have been over a month earlier.

"My father was dying just as my mother was recovering. She had an appointment at the hospital for a checkup. She saw him about two hours before he died."

Peggy Lee phoned me to tell me of the condition of our friend. Then she called to say he was gone. He had just turned eighty.

The next day Benny Carter and I were on the phone, consoling each other.

A few years ago, I was at one of those periodic jazz conclaves. I was sitting in the audience while five or six of the "younger" jazz critics sat at a table onstage discussing what is always discussed at these events, whether the *JazzTimes* convention or any other. There is always much wailing about the state of jazz, much assertion that something must be done about it. It's always the same small group of people, jealous of each other and jealous of the world, and nothing is ever accomplished. I heard a number of wisecracks about older "jazz critics" and it was obvious that the primary target of contempt was Leonard Feather; once or twice he was even mentioned by name. I sat there musing that Leonard knew *everybody* in jazz history, that he didn't write out of acquired second-hand book knowledge, as they did, but out of direct personal contact. He *knew* what Louis Armstrong thought, he knew what Miles thought, because he was close to them. When Dizzy Gillespie first heard Oscar Peterson, who did he call in order to express his wonderment? Leonard Feather. Leonard *knew* Bird and was one of his first champions in print. Who the hell are these people to be patronizing Leonard? I thought. And I never went to one of those events again.

In early November, a memorial service for Leonard was held in Schoenberg Hall on the campus of UCLA. It was filled almost to capacity, which means that about five hundred persons were there, among them Horace Silver, Toshiko, and Orrin Keepnews. Benny Carter and Gerald Wilson both spoke. George Shearing, who was in New York and could not attend, spoke on tape. The Gerald Wiggins Trio performed. Joe Williams sang three selections. Peggy Lee sang *The Folks Who Live on the Hill*, Leonard's and Jane's favorite song, reducing the audience to tears. Sue Raney, with Alan Broadbent as her accompanist, sang *Bring Back the Heart You Stole from Me*, a lovely ballad Leonard wrote, probably in the 1940s.

A year after the earthquake, Jane still is not able to get back into their condominium. A burst water heater flooded much of the house. It is being recarpeted, repainted, refurbished. As soon as she gets back in, she and Lorraine and July Compton, Leonard's assistant, will start cataloguing his records and papers. Present plans are to give them to a university.

Leonard was a gentle man, generous and supportive. He had a dry, subtle sense of humor, the kind of humor you find in A.A. Milne and Kenneth Graham, very English. It is whimsy.

Benny Carter said that while Leonard was considered the dean of jazz journalists, he was much more. "As composer, arranger, musician, record producer, talent discoverer, lecturer and teacher, Leonard dedicated his life to the development and propagation of jazz. His pioneering and persistent advocacy was a major force in helping the music known as jazz to attain the status it enjoys today.

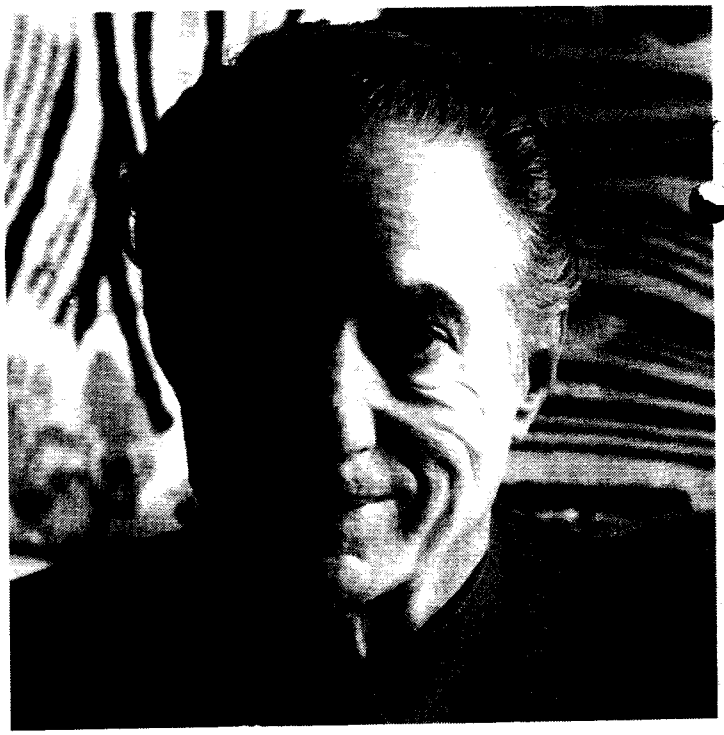
"Our association began in 1936 when Leonard negotiated a contract for me with the BBC. This led to a warm and special friendship between us that endured to his final days. Having been so important in the early stages of my career, he will always be in my thoughts with respect and admiration.

"Leonard's work was always characterized by constructive criticism and willingness to move with the times and recognize and appreciate new trends with honesty and accuracy. Leonard did it his way, and his way may never be bettered."

Peggy Lee said, "Leonard never changed from the time I met him until the last time I saw him. He was a gentle-mannered man, and a very learned scholar of music. You could call him a master. And he had a penchant for telling the truth, even when it hurt."

I do not know who said or wrote this, but it is a simple and great truth: Whenever someone dies, a library burns. In Leonard's case, it was the largest library in jazz history.

It is true that many people hated him. The English critic Max Harrison despised him unreservedly. But many people loved him. The loss to Peggy Lee, Jimmy Tolbert, Benny Carter, Evelyn Hawkins, and me, among others, is large and personal. The loss to the world is immeasurable.



Leonard, 1988 Photo by John Reeves