Gene Lees
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93024-0240

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In Search of Gerry Mulligan
Part III

Gerry Mulligan was born April 6, 1927. Earl Hines and Louis Armstrong had not yet made the records that permanently defined jazz as the art of the soloist, and the Duke Ellington band would not open at the Cotton Club for another eight months. Though the Paul Whiteman band was immensely popular, the so-called big-band era had not dawned. Benny Goodman was still with Ben Pollack. The Casa Loma Orchestra would not make its first recording for another two years. And network radio had just come to being. Some people still owned crystal radios.

Like Gerry, I grew up, ear to the radio, on the sounds of the big bands in the 1930s. Network radio was an incredible cultural force, presenting — live, not on records — music of immense cultural diversity, almost every kind of music that America produced, and making it popular. Network radio made Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman famous and, a little later, Glenn Miller. It made Arturo Toscanini and James Melton household names. On Saturday afternoons, the broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera could be heard everywhere from the Mexican border to the northern reaches of Canada.

A day before our conversation, Gerry and bassist Keter Betts and I participated in a panel discussion directed by Steve Allen (a former jazz disc jockey and himself a product of radio) on the general state of jazz. I was surprised at the universally gloomy prognosis on our musical culture.

Eras are never neat. How long jazz has been with us depends on how you define jazz. If you refer to Buddy Bolden's music, which you have never heard (nor has anyone else) or Scott Joplin's rags, as jazz, then it begins early in the century. Others would call this earlier music proto-jazz. But jazz begins at least by the late teen years of the twentieth century. If you define it even more strictly as the art of the great, improvising soloist, then it begins in the 1920s, and its principal founding figure is Armstrong. As Dizzy Gillespie said of Armstrong, "No him, no me." That's why Dizzy was hurt when Armstrong denigrated bebop at first, although later Armstrong changed his mind; that's why Dizzy got down on his knees and kissed Armstrong's hand at the Monterey Festival.

So if you accept Armstrong as the defining figure, then jazz was, as Bud Freeman used to argue, born in Chicago in the 1920s. Gerry Mulligan was born with jazz, just before the big-band era.

Again, it is hard to date the era. Its first stirring occurs in the 1920s, and the principal city of its birth was Detroit, with its speakeasies and the bands run by Jean Goldkette, including his own band, the Orange Blossoms (which became the Casa Loma orchestra) and the stunning McKinney's Cotton Pickers, of which Benny Carter was for a time a part.

The big band era lasted roughly ten years, from 1936 to 1946, when the major orchestras began to disband. If you want to push it back to the 1920s, with Whiteman, Goldkette, and early Ellington, then it is longer. And its influence persists, with the fundamental format of trumpets, trombones, saxophones, and rhythm section still in use. The evolution of that instrumentation is like that of the string quartet or the symphony orchestra: it works, and will live on. But as a vital part of America's commercial entertainment, the era has long since ended.

It was an era, as Woody Herman used to say, when "Jazz was the popular music of the land."

Steve Allen was gloomy about the future of the music because he is gloomy about the condition of broadcasting. When I asked him if he had said, "Radio was theater of the mind, television is theater of the mindless," he said, "I don't know whether I said it, but I certainly agree with it."

Many years ago, Gerry said to me that the wartime gasoline tax had helped kill the big bands. And a thought occurred to me: I said, "Wait a minute, Gerry, the kids who supported the bands didn't have cars, and since they weren't making them during the war, our fathers certainly were not inclined to lend theirs." And it was precisely during the war years that the bands were most successful, even though many of the best musicians were in the armed forces. The dance pavilions and ballrooms were packed during those years with teen-agers and uniformed servicemen and their girlfriends.

How did we get to the ballrooms and dance pavilions? On street railways and the interurban trolleys. Bill Challis and his brother Evan told me that along the trolley line from Wilkes Barre, where they were born, and Harvey's Lake, Pennsylvania, which is about twenty-five miles away and where they now live, there were five dance pavilions in the 1920s. The trolley is long since gone and there are no dance pavilions whatever in that whole area.

The street railways and interurban trolleys were bought up by a consortium that included the Chandler family, owners of the Los Angeles Times, bus and truck manufacturers, and road-builders. They deliberately dismantled the street railways and interurban trolleys in order to create the automobile culture that has become the curse of the planet. They did it for profit. And with the interurban trolleys gone, it was difficult for young people to get to the dance pavilions. Cars were scarce after World War II: none had been built for years, and the conversion of industry back to automobile manufacture was not rapid. If you calculate the amount of land required to park 2500 cars, which is what it takes to transport an audience of 5000 or 6000, and work out the taxes on it, you will see how impossible it would have been for the dance pavilions to continue in an automobile culture.

And network radio was dying as the broadcasting industry discovered how immensely lucrative television advertising could be. Radio was abandoned to the disc jockeys, and the disc jockeys began seeking the lowest common denominator of public taste to attract ever larger audiences. Radio became a force of incalculable cultural destruction, and still is.

When the big-band era ended and the musicians went into nightclubs to play in small groups, their admirers followed them,

for they were now over twenty-one and could go to places where liquor was served. But a younger audience could not follow them. A few nightclubs tried to solve the problem. Birdland had a bleachers section where young people could sit without drinking liquor. But this was at best a Bandaid, if you'll pardon the pun, and knowing the names of the musicians was no longer an "in" thing for young people. They were turning at first to *How Much Is That Doggy in the Window* and *Tennessee Waltz*, then to *Blue Suede Shoes* and *Hound Dog*. The Beatles were coming.

The exposure of jazz to a new young audience was restricted. Thus you will find that far the largest part of its audience today comprises older people. There are some young admirers, to be sure, and they always give one hope. But the music is hard to find; they must seek it out. It is no longer common in the culture. It is not on the radio in most areas. KJAZ in San Francisco is about to go off the air; KKGO in Los Angeles years ago became a classical music station. If it hasn't already happened, you will soon be able to drive down the West Coast from Portland Oregon to Long Beach, California, where you finally pick up KLON, an NPR station, without being able to find jazz on the radio. Unless you can get KLON, you hear no jazz on the radio in Los Angeles County, which collectively is the biggest city in America.

You have to keep in mind that the young people listening to the radio today are not the children of Elvis Presley fans, they're the grandchildren of Presley fans. Woody Herman's body lies in obscurity; Graceland is a religious shrine.

Considering that there have been jazz programs in universities and high schools, thousands of them, for the last thirty years, one would have expected an explosion of jazz creativity, both in quantity and quality. It hasn't happened.

When I met Gerry Mulligan in 1960, he was only thirty-three years old. I know lists are boring, but I would ask you to read this one: Pepper Adams, Nat and Cannonball Adderley, Gene Ammons, Benny Bailey, Dave Bailey, Chet Baker, Kenny Barron, Keter Betts, Ruby Braff, Bob Brookmeyer, Ray Brown, Ray Bryant, Monty Budwig, Larry Bunker, Kenny Burrell, Frank Butler, Donald Byrd, Conte Candoli, Frank Capp, Ron Carter, Paul Chambers, Sonny Clark, Jimmy Cleveland, Jimmy Cobb, Al Cohn, John Coltrane, Junior Cook, Bob Cranshaw, Bill Crow, Kenny Davern, Arthur Davis, Miles Davis, Richard Davis, Alan Dawson, Willie Dennis, Gene DiNovi, Eric Dolphy, Lou Donaldson, Kenny Drew, Allen Eager, Jon Eardley, Don Ellis, Booker Ervin, Bill Evans, Art and Addison Farmer, Joe Farrell, Victor Feldman, Maynard Ferguson, Clare Fischer, Tommy Flanagan, Bob Florence, Chuck Flores, Med Flory, Carl Fontana, Vernel Fournier, Russ Freeman, Dave Frishberg, Curtis Fuller, Stan Getz, Benny Golson, Urbie Green, Gigi Gryce, Jim Hall, Slide Hampton, Herbie Hancock, Jake Hanna, Roland Hanna, Barry Harris, Hampton Hawes, Louis Hayes, Jimmy and Tootie Heath, Billy Higgins, Bill Holman, Paul Horn, Freddie Hubbard, Dick Hyman, Frank Isola, Chuck Israels, Ahmad Jamal, Clifford Jordan, Richie Kamuca, Connie Kay, Wynton Kelly, Charlie Kennedy, Jimmy Knepper, Lee Konitz, Teddy Kotick, Steve Kuhn, Steve Lacy, Scott LaFaro, Pete La Roca, Lou Levy, Mel Lewis, Melba Liston, Booker Little, Dave McKenna, Jackie McLean, Mike Mainieri, Junior Mance, Johnny Mandel, Herbie Mann, Warne Marsh, Don Menza, Jymie Merritt, Billy Mitchell, Blue Mitchell, Dwike Mitchell, Grover Mitchell, Red Mitchell, Hank Mobley, Grachan Moncour, J.R. Monterose, Buddy Montgomery, Jack Montrose, Joe Morello, Lee Morgan, Sam Most, Paul Motian, Dick Nash, Oliver Nelson, Jack Nimitz, Sal Nistico, Marty Paich, Horace Parlan, Sonny Payne, Gary Peacock, Duke Pearson, Ralpha Peña, Art Pepper, Walter Perkins, Charlie Persip, Oscar Peterson, Nat Pierce, Al Porcino, Bill Potts, Benny Powell, Seldon Powell, André Previn, Joe Puma, Ge[illegible] Quill, Jimmy Raney, Frank Rehak, Dannie Richmond, La[illegible] Ridley, Ben Riley, Red Rodney, Mickey Roker, Sonny Rollins, Frank Rosolino, Roswell Rudd, Willie Ruff, Bill Russo, Don Sebesky, Bud Shank, Jack Sheldon, Sahib Shihab, Wayne Shorter, Horace Silver, Andy Simpkins, Zoot Sims, Jack Six, Jimmie Smith, Victor Sproles, Alvin Stoller, Frank Strazzeri, Ira Sullivan, Grady Tate, Arthur Taylor, Toots Thielemans, Edmund Thigpen, Bobby Timmons, Cal Tjader, Ross Tompkins, Cy Touff, Nick Travis, Stanley Turrentine, McCoy Tyner, Leroy Vinnegar, Cedar Walton, Wilbur Ware, Randy Weston, Bob Wilber, Phil Wilson, Jimmy Woode, Phil Woods, Reggie Workman, Eugene Wright, and Leo Wright. What do they have in common? They were all actively performing in the United States in 1960, the year I met Gerry. And they were *all* under the age of thirty-five. And that is by no means a complete list.

Max Roach, Sonny Stitt, Terry Gibbs, Sarah Vaughan, Paul Desmond, and Shorty Rogers were thirty-six, and other major figures, such as Dave Brubeck, Milt Jackson, and John Lewis were under forty. Indeed, if you add to the list all those under forty wh[illegible] were at the peak of their powers, factor in all those who were n[illegible] well-known to a national public, such as Gene Allen, Wayne Andre, and Phil Bodner, all the excellent jazz players of Chicago, such as Jodie Christian, Eddie Higgins, and Larry Novak, whose names have never made it into the encyclopedias, and then remember that almost all the pioneering and founding figures, including Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Don Redman, Benny Carter, and Earl Hines, as well as such lesser figures as Frank Signorelli, were alive, you see that the depth of jazz in the United States in that year was astounding. The problem is that we took it for granted, and looked on genius as a commonplace.

By comparison, the jazz revival of Wynton Marsalis, Terence Blanchard, Mulgrew Miller, Antonio Hart, and a handful more, is very shallow indeed. This is not to say that there are no excellent young players, such as Benny Green, who has just turned thirty. Christopher Potter is a vital young tenor player, barely into his twenties. Winard Harper is, in my opinion, one of the finest drummers in the history of jazz, combining power and energy with incredible finesse. And there is a twenty-two-year-old pianist in

Los Angeles named Brian O'Rourke who blows me away.

But none of these figures is original, and whereas the Ellington music was a constant adventure in innovation and the bands of the 1940s were ceaselessly pushing into the future, all that is now embalmed in the Jazz at Lincoln Center program. Ellington's music was creative; what is going at Lincoln Center amounts to resurrection. The jazz of the past has become, truly, a classical music, disinterred from its original context.

You start to wonder if jazz has at last run its creative course, as Oscar Peterson a few years ago predicted it soon would. Not that the new reconstituted food doesn't contain nourishment for a younger audience that is just now discovering jazz. But it hasn't much savor to those who grew up in its great age of innovation and remember its unmistakable individualists. And Gerry Mulligan has lived through almost the entire history of jazz, as Eubie Blake, when he died at a hundred in 1983, had lived through half the history of the United States since the end of the American Revolution in 1783. History is shorter than we think.

In any case, it is against that background that one must understand Mulligan, who was one of the most original voices in jazz and is, if anything, a far better musician now than he was in 1960. I heard him with his new quartet a day or two before our conversation, and was astonished at the subtle integration of solos to composition: his work as writer-player is even more tightly woven than it was in 1960. Reflecting on it, I must weigh in consideration his family's engineering background. Certainly it was influential on Red Mitchell that his father was an engineer.

Given the pessimism of our panel discussion, it was inevitable that Gerry and I would continue on the subject.

To jazz musicians, of course, the question "Where is jazz going?" has always been anathema. Stan Kenton is purported to have replied, "We're going to Kansas City," but the story is probably apocryphal. I put more trust in Bob Brookmeyer's reply to the question: "Down 48th Street to Jim and Andy's." That sounds like Bob.

But a new question arises. Where has jazz gone? I put it to Gerry. He replied:

"Where jazz has gone relates to where the country has gone. It's pretty hard to separate the progress of one without taking the other into consideration.

"There are a number of things going on in our society that we wonder how they're going to turn out. We have no way of knowing what the effects are because we've become a society of guinea pigs, trying out new technologies. We've had a whole century of it, and God knows where we are. A rather precarious psychic state. By that I mean the numbers of things that have changed, not just in the ways people live but in the ways their minds work.

"I've been conscious of it lately because, doing university level courses of jazz history, I've found it's very hard to get people to imagine the world that musicians inhabited in 1910 as compared to 1990. It's hard for people to imagine how different everyone's life was, how life must have been before there was artificial music being thrown at them from every side. All along the way, there were the good and bad accumulations of the various technologies and the industries that grew out of them and the effects that they've had. Many of the effects of the phonograph record and radio were the very elements that made jazz develop the way it did; they probably were responsible for making it into an art form and not just being forgotten as an offshoot of popular music, something of a passing character.

"There were, even early in the century, statements that jazz was immoral and would lead to the breakdown of society as we know it." He laughed. "Listen, with the outcome we see, the state of our popular music, they may well have been right.

"However, I make a big distinction between what jazz was and is and what's going on in popular music.

"At this end of the game, where big business is involved with exploiting whatever available audiences there are — and you usually start with the kids now — they've affected people's thinking about what music is, what music should do, how music should be used, and what music sounds like. So, unless you take the one into consideration, you can't figure out the other.

"Sometimes, of course, I wonder if it's just the usual generational sour grapes. A young generation comes along and they tend to put down what you're doing. You look at 'em with a kind of jaundiced eye and say, 'Well, young whipper-snappers, in my day they said jazz was an immoral music and now they're saying it about rock.' After you examine that, one has to carry through to what has happened to the content and the intent of popular music. Two elements come to mind. One is the music itself, which, a great deal of the time, as you know if you ever see MTV, is calculated as a destructive force, breaking down the good old enemies, the middle class, the bourgeoisie, and all of those causes of all our troubles. It's a music that's based on raw emotion, or at least the illusion of raw emotion. This is very prevalent in that music, easy ecstasy. There's the matter of volume: if you do it loud enough it sounds like you're having fun. And distortion. The day that somebody discovered the intensity that happens to the sound of a guitar when you overamplify it, they created a new world of easy access to excitement. You don't have to work for it, you don't have to think about it, you don't have to develop a craft, man. It's there, it's built into the vacuum tubes and the transistors. The equipment.

"Then there is the actual content of the words. We see a couple of generations that have grown up on a dissatisfaction, a disaffection, with the society that produced them. You only have to watch sitcoms to realize that the parents are always bumbling idiots and the children are all smart-talking, wise-cracking little bastards. So we've got an odd view of what our culture is and should be. These forces don't give a damn. The people who are exploiting our kids don't care about the effect. In fact they'll fight to the death to prove to you that violence on television doesn't have anything to do with violence in the streets.

"If people are so busy convincing themselves of nonsense like that, how can you persuade them to assume responsibility for anything? This has become the key to our time. It's always: It's not my fault. We have become a nation of victims. It's always somebody else's damn fault. This is what has led to all this political correctness crap. You mustn't hurt anybody's feelings! Bullshit, man. What has that got to do with the real world?"

"The television people," I said, "try to convince you that their commercials can alter public behavior by selling products, but the entertainment part of their programming can't. It's a total contradiction in their position. It's nonsense."

"Well, there's a lot of the texture of our social structure that is just as contradictory. This is why you can't say what is going to happen to jazz without observing the society that produces it.

"There are a couple of things that have come out of the educational things I have done. I've been very interested to learn how it appears to other people, usually younger than I am. People come to some of these college classes because they want to go to school or they're interested in the subject. But a lot of it has to do with students who are looking for an easy credit." He laughed. "It's fascinating to see how people react to their own time, to see how aware they are that they're being ripped off, to see whether anything can be done about it, or to contemplate the future. There is a lot of questioning about where we're going. We see immense changes going on in the United States and don't know what to make of it all.

"One thing I do know: in the States, people are terribly insular. Jazz musicians, a lot of us, travel around the world a lot, so we see a great deal more of the world than the average Statesider. We come home and realize that people have a very, very unrealistic view of the world. We're politically awfully naive, and we are being manipulated at all points by the press and various other special interest groups. It's an oddity. I don't know whether to worry about the suppression and repression from the right or the left or whether just to accept them both as the enemy equally and try to protect my niche in the middle. Because I know that I am the enemy. Anyone who walks the middle ground is gonna have very strong enmity from both sides."

I mentioned that Nat Hentoff had written a new book whose sub-title is: How the left and the right relentlessly censor each other.

Gerry said, "That's interesting that a writer like Nat should arrive at that, because when he was first writing, he was very much a writer of the left. My feeling was always: I don't care what color the uniform is and I don't care whether your ideology is leftist or rightist, man, when you come around and tell me what I can and can't do, it amounts to the same thing. I don't care if you're beating me up in the name of Lenin or Hitler, it hurts with the same kind of bruise."

I said, "I met someone to whom that actually happened, a Hungarian symphony conductor, I can't think of his name. He told me, 'I've had my nose broken twice, once by the Nazis and once by the Communists, and it felt exactly the same both times."

"Perfect. I sometimes wonder if this is why Americans have dedicated themselves to such sloppy dress. Dress styles today have gotten to the point of grotesque. A lot of these things, it's very hard for me to get a grasp on. You read the expensive magazines and you see the advertisements of the expensive companies. Giorgio Armani, he's got these beautiful young men lying out on the beach — with torn jeans! Wait a minute, man? What are you trying to sell here."

"Torn jeans," I said.

"Anything to be in!" Gerry said. "It's a peculiar time. But then I wonder what it must have been like to live through some of the strange transition periods of cities or countries. Germany in the twenties must have been an insane place to be. And then in the thirties, the insanity came out of the closet. There have been a lot of times like that, the idiocies. Look at Bosnia. What must it be like for intelligent people to live through this? Or Argentina under the colonels? We've had such insane things happen in the world. And I wonder why. Why? Why do people want to do that to each other?"

"Well, that's what I wrote recently in the medical piece. In one sense, the world consists of two kinds of people: those who truly believe in free speech, and those who believe that free speech consists in the right to say anything that they agree with. In another sense, it comprises those who believe life is competitive and those who believe it is co-operative. There is almost invariably a relationship. Those who truly believe in free speech are essentially co-operative, and move by consensus after debate. A lot of the others, those who believe life is competitive, think that you have no right to disagree with them and if you do, they have the right to destroy you. Bingo: Sarajevo. Rwanda."

Gerry said: "The Puritans of New England would meet strangers at the city limits, and if they were Quakers or Catholics they'd grab them and put them to the stake, because they were heretics. And always with the admonition, 'I'm going to burn you at the stake, but understand, this is for your own good.'"

"You've got the same thing with the anti-abortion people on an overpopulated planet, what I call the kill-for-life crowd, like the guy who shot that doctor in the back."

"Absolutely!" Gerry said. "It's taking on the kind of ridiculous stature that one would expect. This is why the whole movement for political correctness is a dangerous thing."

"Frightening, terrifying."

"It is the justification of the suppression of other people's rights and opinions in what appears to them to be a good cause. And I say, 'Whatever reason you burn me at the stake, I'm sorry, the cause is not good enough.'"

"We can't talk about jazz alone, I agree. We have to talk about the evolution of the big bands, the movie industry, network radio, which were all interlinked. Bands on radio, bands in the movies, playing songs from Broadway shows. Network radio, which young people today cannot grasp, was a major linking force in the

American culture . . . "

"Absolutely," Gerry said.

" . . . whereas later, disc jockey radio became a force of destruction."

"Absolutely. That's exactly what I'm talking about. The effect of radio in the early days, when it was still struggling to find its audience and find itself, was good. But the man who invented Top Forty radio . . . "

"Todd Storz of New Orleans," I said.

"I'd rather not know his name," Gerry said. "I'd rather think of him as someone anonymous hanging by this thumbs somewhere."

"No, he's probably swinging in a penthouse. Or a mansion."

"It's rather remarkable," Gerry said. "He succeeded in destroying radio and music with one idea."

When I was at Down Beat, I met all the founding figures of jazz, most of whom were still alive. I had conversations with Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Don Redman, Ben Webster, Benny Carter, and many more. But Gerry not only knew them all, he recorded with a great many of them. What Gerry and I know of early jazz history comes largely from the people who made it.

I said,"When our generation is gone, there will be no more direct oral links. Future writers will be getting it all from secondary sources, such as newspaper and magazine clippings and previous books, some of the material very unreliable and sometimes downright wrong."

Gerry said: "I remember John Lewis and I walking down 55th Street one day. We'd left Gil Evans' place and together and were having a conversation. Finally John said, 'Gerry, there's one thing you've got to understand. Jazz as you and I know it and love it will die with our generation.' And I of course reacted with indignation, saying, 'How can you say that, John?' And on and on. He just smiled like the sphinx and said, 'Remember this. We grew up playing with these men. We've had the chance to sit and play with them as professionals, we traveled with them, we know them, and knew how they thought and arrived at it. After we're gone, it will all be hearsay and records.'"

I said, "Bill Crow told me once that the older musicians told him that on record sessions in the 1920s, drummers had to back off, because if they played hard, it would jump the cutting needle. So we can't really know how those rhythm sections sounded live."

"Sure," Gerry said. "Because of these lectures I've been giving, I've been doing a lot of listening to old things, in some cases to records I'd never heard before. I've become very conscious of what those drummers were doing. A lot of those dates through the twenties were done with brushes, brushes on telephone book, anything to make an illusion of propulsion without knocking the needle off track. You seldom could hear the bass, which is mostly, I think, why the guys used tuba or bass saxophone, 'cause they had to be heard."

"Rollini, for one."

"Rollini was already into something else. He was a line player. I didn't remember hearing him. I probably did when I was a kid, because I listened to all those bands on the radio every night, and Rollini played with a couple of bands I remember hearing. But later on I had a record of Red Nichols' band, with Jimmy Dorsey on clarinet, Miff Mole on trombone, Adrian Rollini on bass sax, Joe Sullivan on piano, and I think it was Davey Tough on drums. There were two sides of an old ten-inch that Jon Eardley gave me. He said his father had made a copy for me. And it was *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. The first side starts out as a slow thing, with Joe Sullivan playing it as a kind of a blues piece. And you turn it over and they take it up and make it into a swing piece. And Adrian Rollini plays an entrance to his chorus on it, which knocked me over, because it sounds so much like an entrance of Charlie Parker's on *Blues for Norman*, recorded on one of the Granz tours." Gerry sang the Parker passage. "It was almost the same phrase that Adrian had played on that record."

"Do you think he might have heard it?"

"That could be, because Bird was all ears when he was a kid."

"He said he hired Chet Baker because his playing reminded him of Bix."

"I loved Louis's comment when he heard Bix. I have to paraphrase. He said they were aiming for the same thing. Which seemed very odd to people, because their styles were so totally different."

I said, "Everybody talks about how pretty Bix played. But he had a real sting on the edge of his tone."

"Oh yeah. But we can only have the impression we get from the records. This is something I was very conscious of, listening to the records he made with Frankie Trumbauer. Those were intricate arrangements. And they were intended to be — highly sophisticated music. And again, they suffered because they had to hold the rhythm section back. So it's likely that those things neither sounded nor felt quite the way they do on the records. Bix's sense of style and form alone were obviously unique. I would love to have heard his sound.

"You know, Bird had an incredible ability to sail through pretty complicated progressions, especially if the progressions were going somewhere — not just a sequence of chords, but a true progression. I was listening to some Tatum records the other day and it suddenly dawned on me: I wonder how much time Bird spent listening to Tatum? Because Tatum could do that. He could do the *damnedest* transitions, and the damnedest alterations. It will make your hair stand on end! And even when he was doing it fast, it was such a remarkable sounding thing."

"Red Rodney said he thought Bird was primarily an ear player, rather than playing from total digested knowledge."

"I'm not so convinced of that. I think Bird was an ear, mind, heart player. Whatever it took. And he had a tremendous amount of facility in a lot of directions. He had so much facility, I've always thought he really didn't know what to do to survive. He

didn't know how to be a beginner again. He needed to move on from where he was. It wasn't satisfying enough. And he became more and more frustrated. He loved a lot of different kinds of music. He loved things like Debussy's *Children's Corner*. Whenever he would come by Gil's place, he would want to listen to some parts of the *Children's Corner*."

"I was told he loved Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite*."

"Oh God yes! We were *all* hooked on the *Scythian Suite*. It was the Chicago Symphony, and it was a dynamite recording of it. It's a wonderful, dynamic piece. It was a youthful piece of Prokofiev's. There are a few pieces that different composers wrote around the time *The Rite of Spring* was written, but so much has been said about the outrage caused by *The Rite of Spring*, this supposedly chaotic music, that people didn't pay much attention to other pieces, such as Debussy's *La Mer*. It created its own stir, but it would have created more stir if it hadn't followed the Stravinsky by a couple of weeks. And I think the *Scythian Suite* was another. But it's a piece that just swings relentlessly from beginning to end. It has a momentum, a forward propulsion to it, through all the movements, through tempo changes and everything. And that particular recording was very good. I've heard a lot of recordings of it since then, but it's impossible to get that one any more. Every time I see a recording of it, I buy it. But I'm always disappointed. I say, 'That's the wrong tempo!' One man's opinion."

And he laughed, as he is wont to do.

None of this invalidates the music to those who are just discovering it. If an audience now in its forties, growing jaded with a rock-and-roll that has now survived for forty years, which is four times as long as the big-band era, and has not advanced much musically from Bill Haley and his Comets, is discovering jazz and saying Oh wow! to young players whose every influence Mulligan and other older jazz musicians can instantly detect, that's all right. Imitative jazz will doubtless continue for some time.

But Gerry and I and the others of our generation lived through an era of innovators, Hines and Tatum and Wilson and Cole and Powell and Evans, Hawkins and Webster and Young, Armstrong and Berigan and James and Dizzy and Miles, Redman and Carter and Sauter and Evans, each with a thumbprint you could not miss. I can detect Benny Carter in two bars; no one of the new generation has that kind of individuality, and if I happen on a Marsalis solo in the middle, I am liable to think it's Clark Terry or Dizzy or Miles. At least for a moment until I sense the emptiness.

For Dizzy and Miles and Clark spoke in their own voices; many of the younger players are speaking echoes.

I try to resist thinking about the 1960s, but sometimes I can't help it, and I remember all the friends Gerry and I have lost, including Zoot and Mel Lewis and Nick Travis and Willie Dennis, all of whom were in Gerry's Concert Jazz Band.

When I wrote a piece about the end of the big-band era, which is in my book *Singers and the Song*, I used a phrase of Johnny Mercer's *Early Autumn* lyric. I called it *Pavilion in the Rain*.

This essay, Gerry told me later, caused him to write a tune he called *I Heard the Shadows Dancing*. Then Nancy Marano told Gerry she wanted to record the tune. Gerry called and asked me to put a lyric on it. I realized as I studied the melody that a lyric could not possibly be made to rhyme except in the last two lines.

I remembered seeing some of those abandoned pavilions on beaches and in parks, where the ferris wheels no longer turned. There is an abandoned roller coaster just across Harvey's Lake from the house where Bill Challis lives. I wrote the lyric, and Nancy recorded it with Eddie Monteiro on accordion and Gerry on baritone in an album for Denon. The lyric goes:

A ferris wheel abandoned,
a silent roller coaster,
a peeling carousel
whose painted horses revolve no more.

Within a grove of willows,
in shadows made by moonlight,
a dance pavilion dreams,
its shutters fastened, the music gone.

It dreams of bygone dancers
who filled the floor with motion
and fell in love to songs
that almost no one remembers now.

The ferris wheel reverses,
the carousel runs backwards
The horses start to prance,
the roller coaster begins to roar.

Then softly from a distance
the blended sound of trumpets,
and saxophones and drums.
A wondrous music returns and then
I hear the shadows dancing once again.

Gerry today is as slim as he was in his youth, but he wears a beard and the strawberry blond hair has gone as white as paper. Does he have regrets? Who doesn't? I daresay he regrets that he and Miles Davis never got to do the tour they had planned to perform the *Birth of the Cool* music. Miles got sick, precluding it, and Gerry toured without him.

Another regret, apparently, is our abandoned Diamond Jim Brady project. A few years ago I asked if he still had the music. He had lost it. The lyrics? I lost them. The script? Gone.

"We should have finished it," he said on the phone recently.

Other regrets?

"I wish I'd gone to music school."