Gene Lees
Jazzletter

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

January 1995 Vol. 14 No. 1

Robert Farnon Revisited
Part One

Fifty years ago in London, as the World War II was grinding to its close, a young Canadian army captain named Robert Farnon, a former jazz cornet player, was turning out a series of arrangements and compositions that for the rest of the century would profoundly influence arrangers around the world, nowhere more than in the United States. He is indeed the most influential Canadian musician ever born. Despite the admiration in which he is held in other countries, despite the fact that in Britain he has received the Ivor Novello award five times, no major Canadian magazine has ever so much as published an article about him and he has never received an important award in his native country. Ann Murray has been given the Order of Canada; he has not.

There were in England at the time three bands of the Allied Expeditionary Force, established on the direct order of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The British Band of the AEF, as it was called, was led by George Melachrino. The American Band of the AEF — the name it eventually acquired after several previous designations — was led by Captain, later Major, Alton Glenn Miller, as he signed his official military correspondence. The Canadian Band of the AEF was led by Captain Robert Farnon.

All three bands had something in common: they used more or less standard dance-band instrumentation augmented by string sections. It was the kind of orchestra no civilian dance-band leader could afford. But in the military, where money was not an object and the musicians were in uniform anyway, the leaders of these bands, none of them more than Miller, were able to reach out and commandeer all the available talent they wanted.

Miller had the biggest name and the biggest band, peopled by musicians of the stature of Mel Powell on piano, Ray McKinley on drums, Peanuts Hucko on tenor, and Bernie Privin on trumpet. And because of the huge pool of superb American musicians Miller was able to draw on, his was the best of the three bands.

Farnon said recently, "In our band we had a great number of musicians but not many very good ones. Five trumpets, five trombones, six saxophones, rhythm, and a big string section. But some of the fiddle players held their instruments down on the chest. No kidding. Some of them said, 'I can't read, I'll just listen to you' to the man next to them.

"Our string section wasn't anywhere near up to the standard of the Miller band. He had guys out of the New York Philharmonic." And the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and many other major organizations.

His wartime band was the best Miller ever led, and in the opinion of Ray McKinley, with whom I discussed this recently, it was "the best band ever to play popular music in America, and probably in the world."

But the best writing was that being done for the Canadian band. The Miller band had a number of arrangers, led by Jerry Gray. All the Canadian band's charts were written by one man, Bob Farnon, and given the heavy schedule of the band — four or five broadcasts a week on the BBC, as well as concerts and dances for the troops — the sheer quantity of his output is amazing, all questions of quality aside.

The reverence in which Farnon is held by arrangers and other musicians, not to mention singers, is unlimited. They have long referred to him as the Governor, or just the Guv, and I heard one arranger say in a radio interview, "He is God."

When someone unfamiliar with Farnon's music asked Rob McConnell who he was, Rob said, "He is the greatest arranger in the world."

André Previn long ago called Bob "the world's greatest string writer." André told me once that when John (then Johnny) Williams was a young studio pianist in Los Angeles, he asked a question about string writing. André gave him a Farnon album, telling him to take it home and listen to it. Late that night, Johnny called him back to ask what the hell Farnon was doing at such-and-such point in one of the tunes. André said, "I don't know, but if you figure it out, call me back."

Years later, when I was about to write a piece about Bob, I ran into John Williams at Shelley's Manhole, where the late Hugo Friedhofer — the dean of film composers and another of Bob's friends and admirers — and I had gone to hear Bill Evans. To be sure my memory was accurate, I asked John if the story was true. He said, "I don't remember, but say it is anyway. I'd be honored merely to be mentioned in the same breath with Robert Farnon."

Johnny Mandel, one of the most brilliant composers and arrangers jazz has produced, said:

"Most of what I know is based on having stolen everything I could from Farnon. I'll say that right off. I've listened to him and tried to approximate what I thought he was doing. He made strings sound like they always should have and never did. Everybody wrote them skinny. He knew how to write them so that it could wrench at you. I'd never heard anybody like him before and I've never heard anybody like him since. We're all pale imitations of him, those of us who are influenced by him."

When, in January of this year in Miami, Eileen Farrell was overdubbing voice on orchestra tracks recorded in London — her fourth CD with Farnon arrangements — I asked her how these albums had come about. She is one of the world's great opera singers, but she has a taste for popular music and sings it well, even as she approaches her seventy-fifth birthday. She replied:

"In interviews, people have always said, 'You've done opera, you've done television, you've done radio, is there anything that you'd like to do next?' And I'd say, 'The one thing I want to do before I die is to make a record with Robert Farnon.'

"One day I said it to Shirley Cowell." Shirley Cowell, who lives in Miami and New York City, has used her wealth to finance records of high quality that would otherwise, in this age of rock and rap, never get made. One of these was an album last year by Lena Horne. Eileen continued:

he does with the chords, and his phrasing, is not to be believed. And he has such great musicians in London, and of course they just adore him.

"I was talking to Margaret Whiting the other day, and she asked what I was doing in Florida. When I told her, she said, 'You're recording with God!'"

Farnon, who was born in Toronto July 24, 1917, is two years shy of eighty. His hair has long been white, and he has become quite portly. He continues to work on a schedule of writing and recording and, in Europe, concerts, that would crush far younger men. Comparatively recent albums include one with George Shearing, *How Beautiful Is Night*, named for one of Farnon's pieces, released on Telarc in 1993, as well as Joe Williams' 1994 *Here's to Life* on the same label. Gitanes records has issued a J.J. Johnson album, *Tangence*, recorded with Farnon in London last July. In 1992 Reference Records issued a new recording of the suite drawn from Bob's score to the movie *Captain Horatio Hornblower* and other concert music, including the *Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra* and the exquisite *A la claire fontaine.* And of course older works continue to be reissued. In 1993 Reprise brought out in CD an album with Farnon charts called *Sinatra Sings Great Songs from Great Britain*, recorded in London in 1962.

Bob said:

"He wasn't in the best of voice. He had just come back from a world tour, and then he'd been doing two concerts a night at Festival Hall for Children's Charities. He came down to the studio to record at two o'clock in the morning. There were people everywhere. They were beside me on my podium. I could hardly move for fear of stepping on their hands. They were seated on the floor, crawling in amongst the players. I never saw anything like it. He loved it. But he just wasn't happy with his own voice."

Sinatra never allowed the album to be released west of the Atlantic, and it remained in a limbo of legend until the 1993 CD edition.

The body of Farnon's work in all genres has been enormous. But the actual scores have been treated with criminal negligence by the various publishers through whose hands they have passed, including Chappell and Schirmer. Many of them are available only in incomplete versions or poor photocopies. Some were lost in a fire at Chappell's in London. They have at last found a savior. Jeff Sultanof, a forty-year-old American with a prodigious background as composer, arranger, and music editor — who wasn't even born when some of these charts and compositions were written — has been working as a labor of love, with Bob's involvement and co-operation, to restore them.

Meanwhile, a highly active Robert Farnon Society with members all over the world continues to publish its *Journal into Melody.* (The title is a play on that of one of Bob's compositions, *Journey into Melody.*) Last month the *Journal* editors put out their 120th issue. And one of the society's members is working on a full Farnon discography, a huge job.

Farnon, of mixed Scottish-Irish background, is the second of three brothers. Brian, the oldest, was long the music director of Harrah's casino in Lake Tahoe. Dennis too is a composer and arranger. For some time he lived in the United States, where he made big-band records. He is chiefly remembered in the U.S., however, for scores to the Mr. Magoo movies and the Bullwinkle television cartoons, all of which make him a great deal of money. He married a Portuguese girl and lived in Lisbon for some years, but after her death, he met a girl from Holland and moved there with his three children. He still lives and works there.

Brian is six years older than Bob, Dennis six years younger.

"Both our parents were musical," Bob said. "My mother play[illegible] very nice piano, and my father played violin. They used to have musical evenings, which were so nice. They'd bring over a cellist and play trios. We'd sit at the top of the stairs, just Brian and myself, and listen to them play. It seeped into our blood."

Brian, who, being the elder brother, remembers some of Bob's childhood better than Bob does, said, "My mother was a really fine classical pianist who couldn't fake her way out of a bag, but she could read anything. My dad played sort of a hoedown Irish fiddle, strictly self-taught. And he sang pretty good, too, in a typical Irish tenor style. There was a friend of his named Lou Hargreaves. He was a barber in a little town just north of Toronto. Every Sunday he would come down, bring his wife and bring his cello, and they'd be in the front room. And we would be listening to it, wondering where it came from."

There must be a longevity gene in the Farnon family. Brian, who was born November 27, 1911, is now eighty-four and he speaks with the voice of a man of perhaps forty. The calcification of the vocal chords, which causes that high brittle sound in the voices of so many older people, just hasn't happened. He is wi[illegible] laughs exuberantly, and remains fully committed to life, although he retired from his job at Harrah's in 1984 after twenty-five years there. He lives in Stateline, Nevada.

"My father died when I was twelve and Bob was six," he said. "He left my mother with five children. Nora was the oldest, at thirteen. He left my mother an insurance policy that was probably worth twenty thousand dollars, which at that time would be a fair amount of money. But she was conned out of it by some guy selling her shares in a chinchilla farm somewhere up in the northern part of Ontario. Naturally, she lost all the money, and she had to go to work.

"We were in such bad shape that we had to move out of the place we were living and go to live with my mother's mother, in the heart of Toronto. Her maiden name was Menzies. Scottish. We moved then to the east part of Toronto, near the Woodbine race track. Do you remember the Laura Second candy stores?"

"Sure," I said. "There are still a few of them left."

"There *are*?" Brian said in amazement. "Well, my mother

worked at one of the Laura Secord stores, behind the counter, selling candies. We needed the money. I got one year of high school and then had to quit. I got a job at Weston's biscuits at, I think it was, nine bucks a week, pushing a cart around.

"One day my mother and I went to a movie, a double feature. Between the pictures, a guy came onstage playing a banjo with a gal in the pit. Then he put it down and picked up a saxophone. Then they had the second movie. As we walked home, she said, 'What did you think of the saxophone and that banjo?' I said, 'They sounded all right.' I wasn't the slightest bit interested. She said, 'Well, if you work hard at your job and they promote you, I'll rent either one of those, and you can learn to play it, if you like.' I said, 'Oh that's nice,' and I forgot completely about it.

"But fate's a strange thing. Two months later they did promote me from the factory into the office, into the cost department. I probably got two bucks a week more. I told my mother I was now in the office. She hugged me and said, 'You *are*? Well now, what about those two instruments?' I'd forgotten all about it. She said, 'Would you like to try one?' I said, 'Well, I don't know.' She said, 'Why don't you try one?' She said, 'Which one do you want?' I said, 'Well let me try the banjo.'

"Well, when you start to play the banjo, the steel strings almost kill your fingers. I said, 'No, this hurts my fingers. Let me try the saxophone.'

"She rented a saxophone, a King she got somewhere. I started, and I liked it. I practiced on it and practiced on it.

"Now Bob at the time was going to school. He said to our mother, 'If he can have something, why can't I?'

"She said, 'All right, I'll rent something for you. What do you want? He said, 'I'd like to play the drums.' So she rented him a drum set. That's how he got into the music business. At that time there was no such thing as music in schools. Nothing. Bob took a few drum lessons and he got himself a set of vibes, from where I don't know. All of a sudden I'm hearing these good melodies coming out of the vibes, he's playing a bit of jazz on it — all self-taught. Not a lesson."

Brian insists that those few lessons on drums amount to almost all the formal musical education Bob received; everything else was self-taught. In this Bob is like another Toronto-born arranger who has had enormous influence, Gil Evans.

"I found the fingering on the saxophone," Brian said. "My mother being a fine piano player would get a sheet of piano music and play it, and I would try to find the corresponding note on the alto. That was fine as long as I was standing there playing with my mother. But then a friend of mine who played tenor sax said, 'Why don't we play some duets?' He got some alto and tenor duets. But when I tried to play the alto parts, I was in the wrong key. It's a different transposition. He finally got me a saxophone method. I taught myself the fingering and that's how I got in the business. I formed a little band right in that neighborhood, around Woodbine and Balmy Beach Canoe Club.

"The young fellow I played duets with played tenor. We got hold of another guy who played alto. We had three saxes, a trumpet player, trombone, tuba, piano, and Bob played drums. We rehearsed and sounded pretty good and we asked one of the people at the Balmy Beach Canoe Club if they'd listen to us. They did and they said, 'Yeah, you sound okay. We'll give you some work.'

"Some of the people from Malvern Collegiate started coming around." Malvern is a high school with some interesting alumni, the most famous by far being Glenn Gould. "We started getting some dates. We got a job at a Masonic temple. We played there every Saturday night.

"One night a lady said, 'I have a summer place up near Sarnia, named Crinnian's Grove.' She offered us a job. We accepted it and played there for the summer season. They did no business at all. We starved. As a matter of fact, my mother went up with us and did the cooking for us. We broke the band up and went back to Toronto. Then we worked again, a job at the Hotel Embassy. We played there for a while.

"Then we got a job at the Silver Slipper, near the Humber River. We had a pretty good band. Somebody heard the band and liked it and we got more work."

Bob said: "Brian was the influence on me and Denny. When I was twelve, Brian got me into his dance band playing drums. Denny fancied the trumpet." And Bob was laboriously teaching himself how to write.

Then came a significant gig.

When Bob was fifteen, Brian's band played at the Brant Inn. The Brant Inn, in the tiny town of Burlington, was a nightclub on the shore at the exact western end of Lake Ontario. Its elaborate decor affected the look of the deck of an ocean liner. It was one of the key locales in the circuit through Ontario where name bands played. Burlington is now a large city, and where the Brant Inn once stood there is a big apartment building of red-brick construction in a style that might be called North American Ubiquitous.

Bob's *modus operandi* was to write out each part separately, the different sheets spread out on a table and even the floor.

"I'd write a note here, a note there. It took ages," Bob said. "I had never heard of a musical score. Don Redman's band came to the Brant Inn. And Don Redman showed me a score. What an eye-opener that was. That simplified everything! And from then on I wrote scores."

Bob's only other formal training, beyond those drum lessons, was a few lessons in counterpoint with Louis Waizman, the librarian of the Toronto Symphony. Bob said, "I don't mean to be immodest, but he was teaching me what I already knew. He was telling me formally what counterpoint was."

Bob played drums with Brian's band for about three years. Then: "I fancied playing a melodic instrument, and Jimmy Reynolds, who was a trumpet player, gave me one of his old cornets and I learned the fingering and I gave up the drums for the rest of my playing days."

While they were playing the Silver Slipper job, Geoffrey Waddington was forming a band to play in the Imperial Room of the Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto, a grand old palace owned by the Canadian National Railway.

Brian said, "He auditioned me and auditioned Bob and we joined his band at the Royal York. Bob was doing some pretty good writing. Bert Pearl was the pianist in the Geoffrey Waddinton band."

"That was really the beginning," Bob said. "I never looked back."

Born in England and raised in western Canada, Geoffrery Waddington began studying violin at the age of seven. He won a scholarship to the Toronto Conservatory of Music and toured as a violinist. In 1922, he became a conductor on radio station CKNC, and when the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation took over its facilities in 1933, he became the new network's music director. He formed that band to play at the Royal York in 1933. And that's when Bob joined him.

"About 1937, Bert Pearl did a program for the summer season at the CBC," Bob said.

It was a reflection of a bizarre national characteristic that the CBC would not let the show that Bert Pearl founded be referred to as *The Bert Pearl Show*, although that was the name Farnon thinks it should have had. It was given the faceless name *The Happy Gang*. In the arts in Canada, and particularly at the CBC, one was supposed to be anonymous and grateful that you were even allowed to make a living.

The Happy Gang stayed on the air for twenty-two years, from 1 to 1:30 p.m. five days a week, and Bob was with it from the time it started until he joined the army in 1943. I have often said that I never heard Bob Farnon play trumpet — or cornet — but I realize that can't be true, because I occasionally heard the show when I was home sick from school, and furthermore, its personnel played a concert in a lacrosse stadium in St. Catharines, Ontario, where I grew up. I was there. I simply never heard him play jazz.

The show had an improbable instrumentation, including piano, violin, electric organ, and cornet, and a singer named Eddie Allen, and I thought the music was pretty corny. "On one occasion," Bob said, "we advanced the clocks ten minutes in the studio, and when Bert thought we were on the air, we all started swearing. It was a terrible thing to do to him. He had a hangover, and he was a nervous guy anyway." Pearl, like so many Canadians of talent, went to the United States, working in TV production in Los Angeles, where he died.

During Bob's period with Geoffrey Waddinton and the Happy Gang, he started doing studio work as well. And one of the jobs he held was in a CBC orchestra led by Percy Faith, who, like Bob and Gil Evans, was born in Toronto, in Percy's case nine years earlier than Bob, on April 7, 1908. And Percy had a deep influence on Farnon. "I learned a lot from Percy," Bob said. "I admired him very much. I admired his taste. He especially taught me what to leave out. I studied his writing. I was playing second trumpet and the jazz solos, and I appreciated his inner lines, which were so nice. These were the things that rubbed off on me."

Percy's later career was enormously successful. He was proud of the fact that every one of his albums for Columbia Records, his arrangements of current pop material, made money. But they are compromised albums, since some of the songs he arranged were trash, and his is a curiously blunted career. He rarely got the chance to show how good a composer he was, and the only instance of it on record that I know of is the album on Columbia (long since out of print) of his score for a soap opera of a movie called *The Oscar*. It is a superb score, and, interestingly, shows his skill at counterpoint, with marvelous inner lines. This is something he shares with Bob Farnon and Gil Evans.

Percy had a far more extensive academic background than Bob. Like Glenn Gould and unlike Bob, he was a product of the Toronto Conservatory of Music. But like Bob, he studied for a time with Louis Waizman. Neither Glenn nor Percy had affection for the Toronto Conservatory. Glenn told me once, "Whatever musician I am, it is in spite of, not because of, the Toronto Conservatory." And Percy said, "I was ready to jump two or three years ahead of what they were doing. But I was told by my harmony teacher, 'You must learn the basics. You must learn Bach, all the preludes and fugues, on the piano, then orchestrate them for string quartet, for brass quartet. Learn Beethoven. Learn that foundation, and then when it's become a part of you, forget it and go on."

Percy first worked as a pianist in Toronto theaters and dance bands. He began conducting for radio in 1931, and when the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was organized, he went to work for it almost immediately. Wonder of wonders, they let him attach his name to the show. It was called *Music by Faith*. Possibl he got away with it because the title seemed allusive to religion. From the very beginning Percy used not dance-band instrumentation but the "classical" kind of orchestra for which he later became known in the United States, with traditional woodwinds rather than a sax section. Percy hired Bob for the show; Bob was seventeen.

When I told Percy that Bob had always said that he, Percy, was one of his great influences, he said, "The strings were always quite busy in anything I wrote. But the trumpets had many, many bars' rest, and I gather that Bobby did a lot of listening.

"I had added six girls to the orchestra. I wanted certain sounds. The budget wouldn't allow for extra percussion and woodwinds, and I found I could get girls to sing for five dollars each per show. They did nothing but vocalise at first, in conjunction with three or four flutes plus a vibraphone and celesta. We got a great sound. People thought it was an organ or some kind of electronic instrument."

My memory is that Percy said he hired six singers; Bob says the group was sixteen. Whatever it was, it was apparently effective.

"Once this clicked," Percy said, "The CBC suggested, 'Since you've got them, why don't we hear something with lyrics?' So I turned the girls over to Bobby, and I said, 'Let's do one number a week.' But since we were so avant-garde, I said, 'I don't want any ballads. Let's do nothing but out-of-left-field tunes like *Where Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone?'* So Bobby started writing these vocal arrangements for me, and they were fantastic. With the band and six girls, it really swung."

A legend persisted in Toronto music circles that Bob would set an empty chair beside him in the brass section, and, while the orchestra was rehearsing for a broadcast, use the tacet passages in the trumpet charts to write vocal arrangements on that chair. Both Bob and Percy confirmed the story. Percy said that he and the other musicians found it disconcerting.

"After one of our broadcasts," Bob recalled, "he took me out into the lounge and said, 'Bobby, I wish you wouldn't do that. I find it somewhat soul-destroying to watch.' It was naïvete on my part. I didn't realize it was bothering him. But I stopped doing it.

"I could never understand that," Brian said. "Here's this guy sitting there, with all these notes going on around him, and he's writing something else.

"At one time we were doing a radio show on CBC for Cashmere Bouquet soap. Bob wanted to start writing bassoon parts. The nerve people have when they're young! So I got hold of a bassoon and taught myself the fingering. Bob wrote some easy stuff and we put that in the show. It must have been *so* bad!

"We were playing at a place called Lake Chemong, up near Peterborough, with probably nine guys. This was the first time I really got an inkling of how great Bob wrote. He brought to a rehearsal one time an arrangement of a Duke Ellington tune, something so full of close harmonies, almost everybody in the band playing a different note. At that time I thought, 'How can this guy think of these things and put them down?' He was probably seventeen. When he was twenty-one he wrote his first symphony."

This piece, actually titled *Symphonic Suite*, was premiered January 7, 1941, by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and later was performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Bob's *Ottawa Symphony* was premiered a year later by the Toronto Symphony.

Percy Faith would become yet another element in the exodus of Canadian talent. He told me that in 1940, a CBC executive ordered a cut in the budget for *Music by Faith*, even though it was one of the few Canadian radio productions to be carried regularly on an American network. And Percy — and Bob — were writing things that predate by many years the wonderful Morton Gould string arrangements of standard songs; indeed, they augured the movement that became known, somewhat inappropriately, as mood music.

Percy Faith had a crusty streak. And he was angered by the budget cut. By an accident of timing, the National Broadcasting Company was auditioning conductors to replace Joe Pasternak, who had just died, on the *Carnation Contented Hour*, a program dedicated to what the British call light music. Percy, then thirty-one, auditioned in Chicago. He was hired for the summer, was confirmed as conductor that September, and gave up his position as, in his own grim words, "the token Jew of the CBC." Percy was always a little bitter about Canada, even though when he was well along in his American fame, he would be invited back to do concerts.

But his pioneer experiments with the "classical" orchestration of popular music were behind him before he moved to the States. "As a matter of fact," he said, "as late as 1955 I recorded some arrangements that were, practically note for note, arrangements I did in Toronto in the 1930s." And, he said, Bob's vocal arrangements were far ahead of their time.

Percy recalled that Bob once played drums on *Music by Faith*. "Our drummer was Harry Nicholson," Bob remembered. "He got sloshed one night and cracked up his car and they put him in the jug for a week. So I played drums for Percy."

"And quite creditably," Percy said.

"Well I knew Percy's book anyway, so it wasn't that difficult," Bob said. "During all the time I was a session musician, working with Percy and Sammy Hershenhorn and other conductors, I was also with *The Happy Gang*," Bob said. "I played vibraphone as well as trumpet with *The Happy Gang*, though I didn't play all the tuned percussion."

In 1939, Dizzy Gillespie came to Toronto in the Cab Calloway trumpet section. Bob Shuttleworth, a pianist and dance band leader, invited to his home some of the Calloway musicians, including Dizzy and Cozy Cole. "That's where I first met Dizzy," Bob said.

The musicians began jamming.

"I'll tell you something about that night that Bob won't tell you," Brian said.

"Even though he's incredible, Bob's kind of shy and doesn't want to push himself forward. He was just sitting there, like I was, enjoying it. Finally, somebody said, 'Bob, why don't you play something?' Bob said, 'No, I just want to listen to Dizzy.' Dizzy said, 'Come on, play.' So Bob played. And after it was over, Dizzy said, 'I don't feel like playing trumpet again for the rest of my life.'"

But he did resume playing, with Bob. "We jammed all night," Bob said. "We became firm friends and always were."

Never having heard Bob play jazz, I once asked Dizzy about that night. He said Bob was a marvelous trumpet — or cornet — player and, chuckling, added, "I'm *glad* he gave up trumpet."

"We met just before the war," Bob said.

The war began for Canada in September of 1939. Geoffrey Waddinton went into military service and became the music director of the Canadian Army show, a recruiting show that played across Canada. Bob said, "Geoffrey wanted me as the arranger of all the music. I wouldn't go in unless they gave me an officer's

rank, so they gave me the equivalent of Geoffrey Waddington's, which was captain. No more than a month after I enlisted, I received my call up.

"I replaced Geoffrey as musical director when he left. That was in 1943.

"The show, after it played Toronto and right across Canada, went overseas. I stayed behind, forming another unit of different small groups which were to go to not exactly the front line but pretty close to it, spread across Europe as the Allies advanced. They were groups of ten or twelve men, to work with dancers or singers.

"Teddy Roderman went with one show," Bob noted pointedly.

Teddy was a superb trombonist, born in Toronto in 1924. After the war, he was known not only as a solo and ensemble player in jazz and dance bands but at one point as first principal trombonist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. He died of cancer in Hollywood, Florida, in 1980; he is remembered with affection and respect by every musician who knew him.

"That's how our band, the second band, started," Bob said. "We were months at the Victoria Theater in Toronto, rehearsing.

"When we got to London, we didn't break up into small units at first. We started to do BBC broadcasts, five or six a week, and we became known as the Canadian Band of the Allied Expeditionary Forces. Miller was already there.

"Miller had that big orchestra with strings and broke it up into a swing band as well as smaller units. We did the same sort of thing. We had a choir show and a Dixieland band show and a string show. That's how we were able to do so much entertaining in one week. There was a lot of writing to do as well as a lot of organization."

There was another American band in England at the time, a navy band led by Sam Donahue. It was the successor to the band Artie Shaw had organized and led in the South Pacific, where it had undergone hardship, sometimes performing in forward areas under Japanese sniper fire and sleeping under ponchos in the rain with the GIs. When Shaw was given a medical discharge — among other problems, a shell explosion had destroyed one of his eardrums — along with Dave Tough and some others, Donahue was assigned to continue the band. Testimony to its excellence under his leadership comes from many sources. Farnon is one of them. "Just between you and me," he said, "it was the best band of the lot. It was a swinging band. It had great players. A lot of the guys in our band who were good jazz players would go over and play with them when they could."

Glenn Miller flew to England on June 21, 1944, and reported to SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force). The band came by troop ship, disembarking June 28. Miller at first stayed at the Mount Royal Hotel in London; the band was billeted in a block of requisitioned flats in Chelsea. Miller felt the band to be very vulnerable: one flying bomb hitting the flats could wipe it out entirely. Miller immediately began efforts to move the band out of London to Bedford, a wartime center for BBC broadcasting. It was said by some that Miller was personally afraid of the flying bombs. But in the first place, any rational man would be; and in the second, Ray McKinley told me that if Miller had had his way, the band would have been playing at the front lines at the earliest possible time. And perhaps Miller was prescient. Soon after the band left London, a bomb did land near the flats where they had been living.

When the Canadians under Farnon arrived, they were allowed no such luxury: they stayed in London through all the bombing.

Farnon and Miller could not have been less alike. Miller was a martinet. Bill Finegan, who wrote for Miller's pre-war band and later, with Eddie Sauter, co-led the startlingly innovative Sauter-Finegan Orchestra, told me recently, "Glenn was cruel." When I quoted this to Ray McKinley, who is now eighty-four and has been ill in the past year — he lives in Largo, Florida — he paused for what seemed like a long time, then said slowly, "No. Cold is a better word." Miller had high connections in the military, took his rank very seriously, and used both.

Farnon's style was different. He was unimpressed by the military and identified himself with his men. He had a taste for practical jokes. In the days when men's trousers had buttoned flies, it was a sophomoric joke to walk by someone and flip his fly open with a crooked finger. Bob would do this during inspections and then say to the bandsman with mock severity, "Soldier, you're improperly dressed." The band found it funny.

One of the band's trumpet players was Fred Davis, who after the war gave up music for a career in television. Fred had a small gig on the side, playing with a combo drawn from the larger orchestra at a British officers' dance. For some reason, the band's pianist couldn't make the job. Fred asked Bob if he would fill in on piano. Bob donned his battle dress. The British and Canadian battle dress — from which the Eisenhower jacket was derived — was identical for officers and enlisted men. Only the insignia on the shoulder denoted the difference. Thus Bob in battle dress seemed at a casual glance to be an enlisted man. But three crowns, or pips as they are called, said he was a captain.

Hardly anyone had arrived for the dance. A young British lieutenant started to badger Fred Davis to start playing. Fred protested that there wasn't an audience yet. The lieutenant continued his harangue. Bob got slowly up from the piano, walked to the front of the bandstand, and shoved his shoulder under the young man's nose. Fred Davis and the other musicians remembered the incident long afterwards. Even Bob remembers it: "He slunk away with his tail between his legs. We never saw him again that night. It was a great feeling, that."

It is the only incident anyone remembers of Bob pulling rank.

Legends about him abounded after the war. One of the musicians told me that Bob would listen to short-wave radio from the United States, take down the new songs in rapid notation, and arrange them for the band's broadcasts before Miller or Melachrino even got a look at them.

Percy Faith's story of Bob's writing one chart while playing another lends credibility to another of the tales. "You are aware no doubt," I said to him in 1984, "that you are admired by a lot of musicians for a non-musical reason, namely the reputation you had for being adept with the ladies."

"Are you running that tape recorder?" Bob said with mock alarm and a touch of laughter.

"Yes."

"You're quick, aren't you?"

"Yes. Now, there's a story I heard about your powers of musical concentration — compartmentalization of thought. I was told that the wartime band was rehearsing and you were sitting at a table writing something else and somebody came up and said that your wife was arriving from somewhere and your girlfriend from somewhere else, and you said, 'Put my wife in such-and-such a hotel, put the other in such-and-such, and send them both flowers,' and went on writing."

"Oh," Bob said, laughing, "that's not true. At least I don't think it's true. Well, wait a minute. It could have happened. You know, I once had three girls all named Pat. And I didn't have any trouble at all. It was easy to go from one to the other."

"And what is your wife's name?"

"Pat!" Bob said.

"That's what I thought. Is she one of the three Pats?"

"No!"

"Does she know about your colorful past?"

"Oh sure. Of course. And I know about hers too." The laughter lasted what seemed a long time.

One reason for Eisenhower's appointment as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force was his reputation for diplomacy. He had to co-ordinate the work of men of high ego, particularly General Bernard L. Montgomery on the British side and General George C. Patton on the American. This gift of diplomacy extended into questions of morale and entertainment.

The American, British, and Canadian forces were integrated under his command. He told SHAEF Command, well before the D-Day invasion of the Continent on June 6, 1944, that he wanted to set up a radio service for these forces, with regular broadcasts on the BBC, mostly of music, variety shows, and news. The contents of these broadcasts would reflect the ratio of these forces that constituted the main armies of the AEF: 50 percent American, 35 percent British, and 15 percent Canadian. These broadcasts were to be beamed only to the troops, and would not even be announced until late on D-Day. They went on the air the next day, June 7. The technicians were all from the BBC, and a BBC transmitter in Devon was used. The announcers were drawn from the three countries. The program material was provided by the U.S. Armed Forces Network, the BBC, and the CBC. Much of the material was on transcriptions, large discs revolving at 33 1/3.

And when Glenn Miller and what was then called the Army Air Forces Band arrived, arrangements were immediately made for them to broadcast live on this new network. But the brilliance of the Miller band soon brought pressure from the British press, particularly the music press, demanding that its programs be broadcast to the British civilian population as well. This was soon arranged, and all three bands, Miller's, Farnon's, and Melachrino's were heard throughout England. Miller was already a household name in Britain; the obscure Canadian Robert Farnon soon became one.

In December the Miller band was to move to the Continent. On December 4, Miller wrote to his brother Herb saying, "By the time you receive this letter, we shall be in Paris, barring of course a nose-dive into the channel." He really does appear to have been prescient.

Miller planned to go on ahead of the band. On December 15 Miller and Colonel Norman Baessell left for Paris in bad weather in a Norduyn Norseman, a single-engine high-wing monoplane piloted by Flight Officer John Morgan. The band went to Paris three days later. Miller's plane had disappeared but, Ray McKinley told me, the band was not informed of this for more than a week. As far as the musicians knew, Miller simply hadn't arrived. Pre-recorded material with Miller's voice announcing it continued to be heard on the BBC, sustaining an illusion that Miller was alive.

Farnon said, "The three bands were to do a Christmas show together. Our band and the Melachrino band were at the Queensbury Club in London. Miller was supposed to do the broadcast from Paris. The audience at the Queensbury Club were getting very restless, so I first played our book through, the whole show that we were supposed to do on the broadcast. Then Melachrino did his. And we still didn't go on the air. And then finally the news came through that Miller was missing and Jerry Gray was going to take over and do the show. About two hours late, that Christmas show was broadcast."

The war ended eight months later — fifty years ago this May.

And Bob faced a decision. The men of the Glenn Miller band shipped home. The Canadian band stayed on.

There was little for Bob to go home to. He had a name now as an arranger and composer in Britain, none in Canada. There was no film industry, and no music industry — certainly no recording industry — to speak of in Canada. Nobody was going to offer him the kind of large orchestra he liked to write for. As Percy Faith put it, "When you've lived in a penthouse, you can't go back to a shack."

"Of course," Bob said when I told him that. "Percy could never have gone back. I saw the opportunities in England for writing for film. And that was my crowning ambition, to write a movie score, even though I knew nothing about it."

But first he had to get over the emotional effects of the war, all that he had seen of London under the flying bombs. He orchestrated the French Canadian folk song *A la claire fontaine*. It was one of the most affecting and effective of all his pieces, serene and

beautiful and pastoral. "I wanted to forget about all the horror of the war, all the bloodshed," he said. "And that seemed a good way to do it."

And then his dreams began to come true.

"Even when I was still in uniform," he said, "I was asked to do a couple of scores for Crown film units — war epic jobs. One of the film composers, Allan Gray, asked me to write the title music for a film. That helped a bit. And then I met a lady who would be my third wife, Pat. She was a casting director for Herbert Wilcox, and I badgered her for ages to get me in there, even just writing one cue. Eventually, in 1947, Wilcox made a musical called *Spring in Park Lane*. And he had to drop his music director, who was a bit of a fuddy duddy. So Pat finally succeeded in getting me in to do that score." Released in 1948, the film, starring Anna Neagle and Michael Wilding, is a well-regarded comedy that still turns up on television, and of course makes royalty money for Bob. As the late Henry Mancini — another Farnon admirer — put it, discussing the royalties composers receive on even their oldest film scores, "Movies are forever." Hank's estate still gets money from his music for *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

"That started my film work," Bob said. "I did three films with him, all musicals, as composer, orchestrator, and conductor.

"We were working at Elstree, where Warner Brothers were starting to make films. The Warner Brothers people heard the musicals I did for Herbert Wilcox and asked me to do the score for *Where's Charley?* with Ray Bolger. They were very pleased with that. I asked them could I do a dramatic picture. They said, Yes, and they gave me *Captain Horatio Hornblower*."

The film, starring Gregory Peck and set during the Napoleonic wars, a sea saga bearing a vague resemblance to the life of Lord Nelson and based on a novel by C.S. Forester, came out in 1951. The score contains one of Bob's loveliest pieces, the *Lady Barbara* theme. It is also one of his most performed.

But film composers, with a few exceptions such as Henry Mancini, remain anonymous figures to the public. Bob now had a name in Britain, thanks to the BBC.

"The big wig at Chappell Music was named Teddy Holmes," Bob said. "He came down with a movie director friend of his to hear one of the army broadcasts, one of the symphonette things I wrote. They were fairy tales. One of the pieces was *Jumping Bean*, although it did not have that title at the time.

"The war ended in 1945, but we had to hang around and do a lot of performing for the troops. I was demobbed in the spring of 1946 and stayed in England. Even before the war was over, I went up to see Teddy Holmes and went to work.

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.

"Teddy Holmes had the Queen's Hall orchestra doing movie music recordings. He asked me if I would like to write something for the Chappell library. I first wrote a thing called *Willie the Whistler*. He liked it, and I went on to do *Portrait of a Flirt* and other things. Eventually I wrote more than five hundred compositions for the library.

"It wasn't long after the war that the BBC asked me to do a regular broadcast, an hour every Sunday. I wrote six or seven charts a week. It was a lot of writing. But then, when you're that age, you can do it.

"I continued to do that for BBC for a long time, with Vera Lynne. And that got me into Decca. Vera Lynne was so big then. She was called the Forces' Sweetheart, because she was the favorite of the troops."

The Decca relationship began with arrangements for various British singers, Gracie Fields as well as Vera Lynne among them. Finally the Decca executives said, "How would you like to do an album of your own?" He gave them in an instant Yes.

"Some of the charts I recorded," he said, "I'd written for the BBC. Ones that had turned out well. After that I did no more vocal albums. It was all orchestral from then on."

English Decca was a separate company from American Decca. And when they decided to enter the American market, they could not use that name. They incorporated a new label for North America, one that became known for superiority of sound and quality of pressings, London Records, putting out LPs by the Ted Heath band and some small jazz groups, such as the Jack Parnell Trio. I bought quite a number of those records, astonished to find that the British could play jazz at all, and even more so, that they could play it well.

But I did not become aware of the Farnon albums until the early 1950s. I was not the only one discovering them. I have never met an arranger from that time to this who did not have some or all of those albums: *Flirtation Walk, Cocktails for Two, Light Easy, By a Waterfall, Keep Your Sunny Side Up, Something to Remember You By, Stardust, From the Emerald Isle, From the Highlands*, and *Porgy and Bess* among them.

The instrumentation on those albums was usually strings, two cellos, five saxophones doubling woodwinds, harp, percussion, including vibes, and rhythm section, and *Porgy and Bess* was for full symphony orchestra.

"The English musicianship was in some respects remarkable," Bob said. "They were the best readers. They still are. Fantastic. It's always been my contention that the American musicians can *interpret* our style of music so much better, but the British read it so much better.

"It's better now. They finally got the message."

And they developed people like the remarkable bassist Chris Lawrence, who is on most or all of the Farnon records of recent years, and drummers like Martin Drew and the late Kenny Clare.

(To be continued)