Gene Lees
# Jazzletter

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## Mail Bag

In setting up my will, I found my two sons fighting over who gets my complete set of 29 Super Bowl Programs. (I've attended them all.)

The way to resolve this family conflict is to prevail on you to make me a copy of Volume 1, Number 4, of the Jazzletter. With that issue, I would have a complete set of Jazzletters and my musician son in Kauai would happily accept that as a substitute.

I'm not looking forward to my will being probated in the near future, however, so keep those Jazzletters coming.

Bob Cook, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

*Done. I've sent Bob not a photocopy but the original.*

Thank you for the enlightening article on Don Thompson, gifted composer, marvelous player. You have given us insight into yet another talented, dedicated jazz musician. One of my favorite musical moments of recent years was hearing Don play piano on his composition *Days Gone By* with Rob McConnell and the Boss Brass. We in the Detroit area can often catch Don with various groups via Canadian broadcast stations.

Lorraine M. Hannah, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Thanks for turning me on to Richard Halliburton, of whom I was oblivious. I'm finishing Jonathan Root's biography of him now.

The article on Don Thompson reminded me that George Shearing has been seldom mentioned in the Jazzletter. Perhaps you don't dig him, but he has been one of the major influences in my jazz life, especially the quintet.

What is surprising is that George, though burnt out with the quintet sound twenty years ago, has recorded a new album of the format (*That Shearing Sound*, Telarc CD 83347), which, for me, surpasses everything he has done.

Though it begins and ends with two of his most popular hits and does not much evolve them, his treatment of the compositions of DeRose, Kreisler, Silver, and Bill Evans are ecstatic. The young members of the quintet have inspired him to new heights.

Ogden Plumb, Streator, Illinois

Could you possibly put a notice in your Jazzletter about a project I am working on, collecting Louis Armstrong's letters? The letters are mostly in private hands and thus are hard to locate. The notice should say that I'm interested in photocopies, not originals.

Roxanne Orgill
1249 Bloomfield Street
Hoboken, New Jersey, 07030

*I have a similar request from Anita Evans, Gil's widow. She and the estate are making an extended effort to built a complete and accurate archive of Gil's music and related materials. They are looking for scores, parts, audio and video tapes, photos, correspondence, and mementoes of any kind. The material will be credited to the source, acknowledged by the Evans family, and returned to the donor on request. This material should be sent to the librarian of the estate:*

*David W. Morgan*
*Estate of Gil Evans*
*561 Hudson Street # 65*
*New York NY 10014*
*Fax 212 206-7473*

*And one of the subscribers is trying to locate Harold S. Kaye. Does anyone have a phone number?*

*The following letter was dated November 18, 1995.*

I am a dedicated jazz fan, a seasoned record collector, and a bit of a writer on jazz myself in a local music mag. I have also collected a small but select jazz library over the years, but it is not even close to what I'd like it to be. There are many marvelous books and mags and other kinds of literature created by jazz enthusiasts and connoisseurs in America and all over the world, but of course you can't have them all. I regret that until this very day I wasn't in a position to obtain some of the major ones but I never give up hope, no matter if I'd have to read and enjoy at least one of them in my dying bed.

To fully enjoy that marvelous and most original and most creative music of all, jazz, one needs to read about it and its creators, as much as one can, besides listening to the records and attending live playing or watching it in movies and TV. Reading about it, one also learns about it.

Of course, there is no need to tell you that for a jazz fan living in this part of the world, in social systems and under living conditions such as they were here and still are, obtaining a record, a book or a mag has never been easy. Thus it brings more pleasure and joy when I manage to obtain it from time to time. But things are much worse and more difficult now due to this miserable situation in my country.

Due to this horrible civil war and the effects and hardships it caused, isolation and embargo, devastated economy, unemployment and deep poverty, hyperinflation, lack of all the essential things that make a decent life, mental frustration and depression, loss of any prospects of future, we face a very cruel reality, with many of us literally on the verge of survival. For a situation when most important social and human values are being destroyed and all moral principals violated, when people are deprived of ordinary human needs and simple, small pleasures, it really is hard to make some sense out of life and find something that could be called the future. Many people here could not and that's why we have so many suicides in our midst. To escape the cruel reality, I try to forget with the help of things I love so much, like books and jazz,

which would at least for a couple of hours, before I'd have to go out and face the reality, transfer me into another world, far better and more pleasant than this we live in.

But the last four years, since the misery started, I hardly had the chance to obtain and enjoy a new book on jazz, or a record or magazine.

A while ago I found out about your wonderful publication, Jazzletter, which to my surprise was founded in 1981. I admit I didn't know about it. I also knew very little about your other activities in jazz.

There is no need to tell you how much I am interested in your Jazzletter and how much I'd love to be a regular subscriber to it. But even if I could afford the price of the annual subscription (which is a small fortune in these hyperinflation times) there is no way or means of sending the payment abroad, due to all the connections to foreign countries broken down.

I also learned about your published books of essays, which are also of great interest to me. But in a present situation I can only dream about them. Or dare to hope that you could spare me a promo copy of *Meet Me at Jim and Andy's*, which you might have as an extra copy for your private library maybe.

Can you imagine what it would mean for a deprived fan like me, hungry for quality serious jazz writing? I pray for the day when this country will return to normality again, so I could be in a position to subscribe to Jazzletter or obtain your books in a regular way.

I hope the current peace talks in Dayton, Ohio, bring some progress and improvement from his misery, but there are so many obstacles on the way to final and lasting peace in this land. They can sign anything but the reality after that is what matters. It will take a long, long time before we recover as a people, as a society, as a country. The damage done is enormous, the wounds are deep. God help us all.

Dear Mr. Lees, I'd be grateful to hear from you and enormously happy for a chance to enjoy the aforementioned books. Until I hear from you, I wish you all the best. May the lord lay a special blessing on you and your family. May your prayers for peace and the recovery of my country be with us. God bless you and good luck.

Markovic Miroljub
Varvarin, Serbia

*On reading this letter, I telephoned a friend of mine whose wife is from the former Yugoslavia. She is an extremely intelligent and highly cultivated woman. I read this letter to her. To say that the civil war there has been painful to her is banal; but you will perhaps understand the depth of her feelings when you know her mother was Serbian, her father Croatian.*

*But the focus of her anger is on Serbia, and on Slobadan Milosovic, the ruthless politician who for the sake of his own ambitions launched a civil war and a policy of rape, torture, murder, and imposed starvation that killed 200,000 persons and made two million refugees. A recent five-part TV series called* Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation *included a moment when the voice of the Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic, tell his men on the hills above Sarajevo, "Shell the presidency and the Parliament. Target Muslim neighborhoods — not many Serbs live there. Shell them till they're on the edge of madness."*

*As a Serb, Markovic Miroljub experienced nothing like the horrors of the people of Sarajevo. Interestingly, my friend's wife told me, "Miroljub has a meaning. It means peace-lover." Even the Serbs suffered, she said, from a ruined economy and complete economic and cultural exclusion from the rest of the world. But the Serbs killed 17,000 children in Sarajevo alone.*

*Can you imagine a sniper looking through the scope of his rifle at a little child and calmly killing it?*

*But, she said with a tone of bitterness, "Why did the Serbian people do nothing to stop Slobodan Milosevic? Remember, they re-elected him."*

*New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis wrote recently:*

*"Western politicians and commentators who wanted to close their eyes to the horror in the former Yugoslavia often said that it was caused by 'ancient hatreds'. Americans, they said — or Britons or whoever — should not get involved in such impenetrable ethnic-religious conflicts.*

*"But it was not 'ancient hatreds' that produced ethnic cleansing, rape, and concentration camps. It was men: ambitious men who stirred up extreme nationalist emotions as a way to power. It was one man above all, Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia."*

*This exploitation of nationalist and separatist sentiments is going on in French Canada right now, with the people being manipulated by ambitious politicians such as Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard. American writers and columnists, including Molly Ivins, whom I normally admire, have treated this question rather lightly. They see it as all rather charming, this "polite" Canadian debate. They do not grasp the gravity of the situation on the very border of New York State and Vermont, or the devastating effect a breakup of Canada could have on the U.S. economy.*

*As for whether the United States, Britain, et al have any national interest in the former Yugoslavia, ask yourself a question: did they have any national interest in Germany in, say, 1933? Had they acted, World War II could have been prevented. But Slobodan Milosovic sent a delegation to Moscow before the slaughter began. Russian intelligence assured him that the UN and NATO nations would not intercede. The horrors were unleashed. "It was hard for me to face," my friend's wife said. "But Serbia is as guilty . . . "*

*She looked for the expression in English.*

*"As sin?" I said.*

*"Yes."*

*However, I would point out that the Serbs have no patent on homicidal cruelty. When a man in Utah under sentence of death for murder decided recently to make no further appeals and elected*

*execution by firing squad, men from all over the state asked to be among the shooters. Never underestimate the desire and some men and women to kill; it is restrained only by law. But it is there.*

*I have arranged for some books to be sent to Mr. Miroljub, and I am putting him on the subscription list.*

*Claude Neumann, the Belgian subscriber who recently wrote us such a telling analysis of the infantalization of our western culture, said something to me that sticks in my mind. He said that people who love jazz have a particular kind of sensibility that extends far beyond the music into every aspect of life. He's right.*

# Christmas Cheer
## By Bruce Bellingham

*Columnist Bellingham wrote this piece for the San Francisco Examiner. The Examiner published it in truncated form. Frankly, had I been an editor on the Examiner, I'd have truncated it too, for reasons you will see. But this isn't the Examiner, and herewith — with Bruce's permission — is the unexpurgated version.*

With each passing year, it is less and less likely I'll ever see Claudine Longet on the *Andy Williams Christmas Holiday Special* along with the Osmond Brothers. The Osmond Brothers are now lobbyists for the AARP.

No, all I can find in the channel surf is the wholesome, blond, Norwegian lifeguard-like countenance of John Tesh. I think it's safe to say that John Tesh gives white people a bad name. This comes to mind because I just saw him on TV again — this time in a commercial.

Forgive a little Christmas nostalgia but, sadly, I now realize that at this point I have nothing much to look forward to except old age and more New Age music.

Kenny G is painful to think about. Why is he called Kenny G anyway? It's just like an AA meeting: "My name is Kenny G and I'm a recovering schmuck." He comes to mind because I just saw his Christmas album on sale at Starbucks. The product placement is probably a good sales strategy. The young urban pros who can afford to blow seventeen bucks on a pound of blended beans, specially selected by regional goat herders from Burkina Faso, can certainly spring for Kenny G's soothing sounds, which provide a calm contrast to the jangled nerves often caused by the everyday cutthroat competition in the workplace, mounting credit-card bills, and the terror engendered by reports about the widening hole in the ozone layer — not to mention the symptoms of acute caffeine poisoning.

When I was a kid they used to call it Muzak. Today it is described as New Age. Whatever they call it, it is Cheez Whiz for the ears.

Another New Age star, bolstered by appearances on public television, is Yanni. Make that Yawni. The baby boomers love him. There's no accounting for no taste.

Naturally John Tesh also has a Christmas CD. It's called *Connie and I Think Immaculate Conception Is a Cool Idea.*

Nearly every recording artist makes a Christmas album, but few are any good. There are glowing exceptions. Joe Williams' *That Holiday Feelin'* is one of my favorites. Nat Cole's is classic.

Every country singer has a Christmas album, of course. Country music and Christmas is a happy marketing match. It all started with Gene Autry, who reluctantly recorded a novelty tune called *Rudolph, I told You Before the Christmas Party that You're the Designated Driver.* But on the second take, Gene changed the words to *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and the rest is recording history.

Billy Ray Cyrus is hoping to create a classic with *Honey, I'm Sorry I Kicked Santa's Ass But I Was Drunk and I Thought He Was with the ATF.* Garth Brooks has high hopes for his *I'd Tip My Hat for Jesus but Somebody Put Superglue in My Stetson.*

I particularly like the plaintive holiday ballad from Hank Williams Jr., *Daddy Sobered Up in Time to Die on New Year's Day.* I really think there's a nice message there.

The beautiful young singing sensation Shania Twain has just released *Santa's Got the Blues Because Wynonna Ate All of his Cookies.*

And let's not forget the perennial favorite from Elvis, *Cyanotic Blue Christmas.*

On the pop side, Courtney Love joins the Christmas cavalcade with *Mistletoe, Methadone and Me.* Even Madonna has high hopes for a seasonal single with *Santa, Be Sure to Practice Safe Sex If You Ever Stuff My Stocking.* That's sort of sweet, and Christmas music can do wonders for a flagging career. Ask Neil Diamond. On his Christmas album a few years ago, he recorded *Morning Has Broken,* a song written by Cat Stevens. That gives Neil Diamond the rare distinction of being a Jew who recorded a tune composed by a Moslem for a Christmas collection. The holidays really do inspire that kind of ecumenism.

Even the bad boys of rock, Nine Inch Nails, show a little uncharacteristic sentiment this Christmas with a new release, *I Saw Daddy ----ing Santa Claus and I'd Like to ---- Him Too.*

Then there's Kathie Lee Gifford who has recorded about ten Christmas albums in three years. Her 1995 offering is *No Room at the Inn and Worse, No Tax Shelter.*

Regardless of musical preference, I think it's nice to see how the holidays bring the best out of everyone.

— BB

# Death of a Jazz Musician
## By James Lincoln Collier

Some time ago there was a memorial service for Bobby Pratt at St. Peter's, the jazz church in New York. The room was packed. His family was there, and some friends, and a few jazz fans who had heard him one place or another. But most of the people who came

to say good-bye to Bobby were musicians. Tony Bennett was there, and spoke about the help Bobby had given him when he was a raw kid trying to break into the music business. Doc Cheatham sang a tune that Bobby loved to sing, *I Double Dare You.* Bill Crow didn't play, but he was there, So were Vince Giordano, Marty Napoleon, Eddie Locke, Jackie Williams, Ted Sturgis, Spanky Davis, Ed Hubble, Ernie Hackett, Joe Muranyi, Jim Andrews, and dozens more, including, inevitably, some of the busiest trombonists around town, like Bobby Pring and Joel Helleny. It wasn't a night for fans. It was a gathering of musicians.

Most of the readers of this will not know who Bobby Pratt was; clearly, a lot of the people who came to honor him were more celebrated than he was. But the musicians knew who he was all right, for if there was ever anybody who deserved the term "a musician's musician", it was Bobby Pratt.

Bobby was born in 1926 in South Glens Falls, New York, and grew up around Schenectady. His older brother, Norman, was already a trombonist and jazz buff and he got Bobby started on trombone. Bobby proved to be one of those people who are the envy of the rest of us, a natural. He quickly taught himself the piano, too. By fifteen he was working around Schenectady in clubs and burlesque theaters, and at eighteen he came down to New York, a slim, good-looking kid with a small mustache which, in later years, as his face thickened, made him look like a cross between Paul Whiteman and Robert Benchley.

He became friendly with Charlie Parker, who took him around to places to play, and although Bobby was really a swing player, he gained a command of the new bop music before most jazz fans had heard of it. It was the last years of the big band era. Bobby worked with Charlie Barnet, Tommy Reynolds, Stan Kenton, Georgie Auld, Sam Donahue, Johnny Bothwell, Raymond Scott, and Johnny Richards.

Bobby was really best-known as a jazz-club guy, playing the joints, turning up at jam sessions, subbing here and there. Vic Dickenson would send him to the Village Vanguard to fill in with Eddie Heywood, and he sat in over time with many of the great jazz names of the day.

In 1948 Bobby began to suffer from dental problems and had to give up the trombone. For the next twenty years he worked primarily as a pianist, mostly as a soloist and accompanist to singers. Very quickly he became much in demand. He knew a thousand tunes, with all the right changes, he had a deft, light touch, his time was exquisite, and he was as reliable as a train-man's watch. With Bobby you never worried: it was always there.

As a consequence he worked with the young Tony Bennett, Billy May, Jimmy Dorsey, Billy Butterfield, Jimmy McPartland, Max Kaminsky, Gene Krupa, Wild Bill Davison — the list goes on and on. In time his dental problems eased and he was able to return to the trombone, although it has been said that he never quite got back to the facility of his early days. But the musicians loved the way he played piano so much he never got much chance to take the horn out.

In 1967 he began working at Jimmy Ryan's, one of the few jazz clubs remaining in New York during a dismal time for the music. He stayed on as one leader succeeded the next, and when Roy Eldridge took over the band in 1970, Bobby returned to the trombone, and played it at Ryan's for fourteen years until the building that housed the club was torn down in the get-rich-quick days of the 1980s to make way for a high-rise nobody really needed. At that point he fell back on the piano. But the trombone was his first love, and he would play it for nothing, if nothing else was going. He frequently sat in with Doc Cheatham at the Sunday brunches at Sweet Basil after his own brunch at the Cajun, and he took to coming around to the Art Director's Club, and the Donnell Library lunchtime sessions, where I had the privilege of being the bandstand with him once or twice a week for some ten years. By the mid-1980s Bobby was an inescapable presence in New York, working nine regular weekly gigs, mainly on piano, and sending in subs when something for the trombone turned up.

Bobby appeared on few records and never made one under his own name. The jazz press rarely wrote about him, and then only to mention him in passing as a spear-carrier for some more celebrated musician, although the New York Times, when it was too late, gave him a surprisingly substantial obituary. Bobby was always a little puzzled by the fact that he hadn't been better recognized.

But even though the famous critics — many of them more celebrated than he was — did not recognize his worth, the musicians knew better, knew about his extraordinary harmonic sense, his time, his endless swing.

The musicians who got up to speak about Bobby at the memorial service talked mostly about the largeness of his heart — his kindness, his generosity, his decency, qualities which did not do him much good in the music business.

It was all true. Bobby always was the first to come to the aid of those in need. He stuck it out with his long-term girlfriend through problems that would have driven most men away, and he was quick to show the promising newcomer how New York worked. When Chuck Folds first came to New York it was Bobby who took him around and shoe-horned him into jobs — a competing pianist, mind you. The same was true of Dan Barrett, a competing trombonist, and so many more.

But it was another side of Bobby I would like to celebrate here. Bobby Pratt was, I think, the last of the great romantic jazz musicians. He loved the music for itself, loved listening to it, loved playing it. He could have gone into the studios, at least when there were still studios to go into; and with his knowledge of tunes and his ability to double on piano and trombone, he could have made a lot of money playing the club-date circuit around New York. But all he ever wanted to do was to play jazz. Clothes, cars, money, showgirls, annuities, none of that mattered. He earned a tenth of what many musicians vastly his inferior made, lived in a hotel, ate

whatever was handy — somebody said that Bobby's idea of a gourmet meal was a hamburger and French fries. In the end, even fame didn't matter. He would have liked the profiles in the jazz press given to kids who couldn't carry his case, the reviews in the dailies, the recording dates under his own name, the star billing in the high-priced jazz clubs. But at bottom, that wasn't what it was about. It was the music that counted.

Beyond the music, Bobby was in love with the jazz life. He *liked* the smokey joints, the booze, the company of his peers, the rounds of anecdotes. He was not a story-teller himself, so much; but he had a dry and penetrating wit and would startle you by dropping an uproarious one-liner into an ordinary conversation. He liked the hamburgers at four o'clock in the morning, liked the topsy-turvy hours; he liked being immersed in the world of jazz. Most jazz musicians, by the time they get into their forties and fifties, get fed up with the life. They want to get out of the smokey and small, bad-paying clubs, get on the concert circuit, make some real money for a change, buy a house out in the country where they is something to smell besides beer and cigarettes and late-night sweat. But none of that was for Bobby.

In the end, the jazz life got him. Too much smoke, too much bad food, too much gin, too many sunrises, too many tough gigs, did him in. The doctors warned him, and he cut out the cigarettes, ate salads, drank a little wine. But it was too late, and on January 7, 1994, Bobby Pratt died, aged sixty-seven.

To people who knew him, Bobby was what jazz was all about: the ease, the passion, the good cheer, the generosity of spirit. So they gave him a memorial service at St. Peter's. As usual in the life, and death, of Bobby Pratt, the jazz press was notable for its absence. But the musicians were there.

— JLC

*Grover's Corner*

# The Guinness Who's Who

## By Grover Sales

The *Guinness Who's Who of Jazz* (second edition 1995) drenched me in chagrin over my ignorance of dozens of British and European musicians and aroused profound feelings of inadequacy in one of who has spent half a century laboring as a writer, producer, and lecturerer in the vineyards of God's Music. If I didn't know better, I would suspect the British confederation of jazz experts to be prey to insularity.

Page after page in this latest in a long series of British dictionaries and encyclopedias of jazz regales the readers with musicians unknown to me, particularly of the British persuasion. How could I have been so remiss? How could I have taught jazz to trusting university and conservatory students all these years while remaining unaware of such United Kingdom stalwarts worthy of lengthy Guinness inclusion as Johnny Almond, Martin Archer, Neil Ardley, Julian and Steve Arguelles, and Bill Ashton? That's only the A's.

Getting into the B's, editor Colin Larkin compounds my sense of inferiority with Roy Babbington, Back Door, Ken Bladock, Iain Bellamy, Guy Barker, Alan Barnes, John Barnes, Wayne Batchelor, Django Bates, Gordon Beck, Phil Bent, Chris Biscoe, Bill Bruford, Beryl Bryden, Roy Budd — and the Bugger All Stars. "formed in London in 1980, one of the few bands keeping the faith of free improvisation at a time when this uncommercial genre was probably at its most unsalable."

By the time I worked my way through the Z's, I considered resigning as lecturer in jazz studies at Stanford University due to an insurmountable lack of qualifications.

Lest one assume the Brits are guilty of overweening xenophobia, note that there are exhaustive listings of equally unknown (to me) musicians from the Netherlands, Germany, France, Scandinavia, India, South Africa, and the former Soviet Union.

On the other hand, there are a few omissions. What follows is a partial list of jazz musicians *not* included in what purports to be a comprehensive Who's Who under the imprint of the renowned publishers of fifteen volumes of the *Guinness Encyclopedia of Popular Music*. None of this is surprising in view of the Brits' *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, where Gene Lees and the late Leonard Feather between them found 110 serious omissions. That two-volume work was properly trashed by most of the pre-eminent Stateside critics. But these lapses are mild compared to the Guinness, which passes over nearly 500 musicians who unquestionably belong in any serious Who's Who of Jazz.

The most bewildering exclusions — and I'm not making this up — include Wellman Braud, Ray Charles, Billy Eckstine (whose revolutionary big band helped launch bebop), Jean Goldkette, Ziggy Elman, Glen Gray, Vince Guaraldi, Freddie Guy, (Ellington's guitarist for more than twenty years), Jon Hendricks, Eddie Heywood, Claude Jones, Sam Jones, Johnny Mandel, Dick McDonough, Johnny Mercer, Glenn Miller, the Mills Brothers, Albert Nicholas, Curley Russell, Joe Smith, Arthur Whetsol, and Paul Whiteman.

Also missing: Walter Norris who, aside from distinctive gifts as pianist-composer evident for four decades, should be remembered as the only pianist to record with Ornette Coleman's quartet. Nor do we find Norris' cohort, the Hungarian Aladar Pege, whom Norris described to me as "the greatest bassist that ever lived or is likely to live."

Another puzzling omission, considering the book's obvious obsession with the UK, is the Irish composer-leader Spike Hughes, whose epic 1933 sessions under the name Spike Hughes and his All-Negro (sic) Orchestra, issued only on English Decca, were the first all-star recordings, and included the first jazz flute solo ever waxed, blown by Chick Webb's redoubtable Wayman Carver — likewise omitted from Guinness. (Carver's fellow reedmen in this remarkable session were Coleman Hawkins, Chu Berry, and Benny Carter, who organized the date.)

Also missing: Dave Black, the master percussionist who spent

two years with Ellington; Floyd Smith of the Andy Kirk band, who preceded Charlie Christian as a pioneer of the electric guitar; Michael Moore, described with pardonable hyperbole by Whitney Balliett as "the greatest bassist playing today," once a member of the Bill Evans Trio and a longtime associate of the similarly passed-over guitarist Gene Bertoncini; their frequent associate Roger Kellaway, who *is* listed, but barely, with no hint that he ranks at the very pinnacle of current pianists. Also passed over:

Bill Challis, the ground-breaking big band arranger and transcriber of Bix's piano compositions, and Ellis Larkins, for four decades a premier piano soloist and runaway favorite accompanist of singers from Helen Humes to Ella Fitzgerald. And although this is hard to believe, Ethel Waters and Peggy Lee are likewise absent. So is Frank Sinatra. Perhaps the editor didn't consider him a jazz singer, but an overwhelming majority of jazz musicians, including Nat Cole, listed him as their favorite singer in a survey conducted by Leonard Feather in 1956.

And what kind of singer would you call Mel Tormé, who is left out, as is Jimmy Witherspoon?

Guinness is rich in curious if not dubious entries. Sun Ra is allotted far more space than Fletcher Henderson, Coleman Hawkins, or Oscar Peterson. Kenny G, who by his own admission does not play jazz, rates a longer entry than Jimmy Jones, Irving Fazola, or Luis Russell. Soft Machine, described as "the standard against which all jazz and rock fusion . . . had to be measured", rates more space than Willie the Lion Smith. And when John Hammond, George Wein, and Milt Gabler are, with justification, listed as entrepreneurs, why is Norman Granz left out? How to explain the omission of Supersax or Avery Parrish, whose *After Hours* with Erskine Hawkins has remained a blues standard for more than fifty years? Or the two-bass team of Billy Taylor and Hayes Alvis that preceded Blanton in the Ellington band?

The Guinness is particularly remiss in covering early jazz pioneers. Most of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and Jelly Roll Morton's Hot Peppers are absent. The women have been given particularly short shrift. Missing, besides Peggy Lee and Ethel Waters, are: Pearl Bailey, Yolanda Bavan, the Boswell Sisters, Jackie Cain, Judy Carmichael, Barbara Carroll, Ida Cox, Barbara Dane, Dorothy Donegan, Kay Davis, Lil Green, Adelaide Hall, Marjorie Hyams (vibraphonist with both the Woody Herman band and the George Shearing Quintet, hardly obscure groups), Chippie Hill, Countess Margaret Johnson, Etta Jones, Irene Kral, Julia Lee, Marilyn Maye, Lizzie Miles, Pat Moran, Ella Mae Morse, Ruth Olay, Mary Osborne, Esther Phillips, Terry Pollard, Ma Rainey, Irene Reid, June Richmond, Billie Rogers, Joya Sherrill, Mary Stallings — and Bessie Smith!

Considering the book's emphasis on European as well as British entries, these omissions are particularly puzzling: Sascha Distel, Arne Domnerus, Friedrich Gulda, Bobby Jaspar, Claus Ogermann, Aake Persson, Danny Polo, and Ray Noble who, aside from his work as a bandleader, wrote a number of songs that became virtual anthems in jazz, particularly *Cherokee*.

Space will not permit a complete listing of exclusions, ranging from early New Orleans to the present, but here are some of them:

Tony Aless, Mousie Alexander, Hank D'Amico, Aaron Bell, Artie Bernstein, Louis Bacon, George Bacquet, Guido Basso, Dave Barbour, Joe Benjamin, Skeeter Best, Willie Bobo, Dave Bowman, Will Bradley, Les Brown, Alvin Burroughs, Garvin Bushell, Dolo Coker, Lee Collins, Eddie Costa, Bob Cranshaw, Bill Crow, Walter Davis Jr., Albert Dailey, Bill Dillard, Joe Eldridge, Allyn Ferguson, Med Flory, Don Frye, Joe Garland, Matthew Gee, Big Charlie Green, Al Hall, Eddie Harris, John Hicks, Lonny Hillyer, Will Hudson, Les Hite, Calvin Jackson, Jerry Jerome, Keg Johnson, Deane Kincaide, Hubert Laws, Kid Shots Madison, Matty Matlock, Billy May, Les McCann, Ray McKinley, Punch Miller, Bobby Moore, Marlowe Morris, Spud Murphy, Hall Overton, Walter Perkins, Jerome Richardson, Otis Spann, Jerry Dodgion, Champion Jack Dupree, Bobby Enriquez, Walter Fuller, Barry Galbraith, Babs Gonsales, Brad Gowans, Little Benny Harris, Manzie Johnson, Robert Johnson, Kenny Kersey, Manny Klein, Laurence Lucie, Teo Macero, Fate Marable, Larence Marable, Carmen Mastren, Joe Mondragon, Al Morgan, the Hi-Los, Ed (Moon) Mullins, Jimmy Mundy, Les Paul, King Pleasure, Perez Prado, Julian Priester, Joe Puma, Junior Raglin, Irving (Mouse) Randolph, Reuben Reeves, Rufus Reid, Alan Reuss, Prince Robinson, Adrian and Arthur Rollini, Davey Schildkraut, Elmer Schoebel, Gene Schroeder, Bobby Scott, Don Sebesky, Doc Severinsen, Hymie Shertzer, Joe Shulman, Leslie Spann, O'Neill Spencer, Charlie Spivak, Wilbur Sweatman, Earl Swope, Erskine Tate, Don Thompson, Ben Tucker, Jack Washington, Leo Watson, Chuck Wayne, Harold (Doc) West, Ed Wilcox, Dick Wilson, Phil Wilson (trombone), Shadow Wilson, Richie Williams, Sam Wooding, Eugene Wright, and Leo Wright.

As a further indication that the Guinness book is prone to parochialism, it is largely illustrated with portraits of UK musicians who could charitably be described as, if not obscure at least hardly as noteworthy as the hundreds who were left out: Alan Barnes, Ian Carr, Jeff Clyne, Elaine Delmar, Dave Green, Brian Lemon, Claire Martin, David Newton, Art Themen, and Mike Westbrook.

A dictionary, an encyclopedia, is supposed to be a reference work, useful to those who for whatever reason need information. Such a book is not supposed to reflect the private preferences and prejudices of its compilers. This weakness is common to jazz encyclopedias and dictionaries, but few among them have revealed it as egregiously as this one.

In her review of Bertrand Tavernier's flawed movie *Round Midnight*, Pauline Kael observed that "the French are never more annoying than whey they claim to appreciate our music more than we do."

The *Guinness Who's Who of Jazz* goes the French one better in ranking a host of British and Continental musicians equal if not superior to many of their counterparts in "the Colonies". One wonders how this amazing pastiche was reviewed in its native land,

whose jazz critics, like jazz critics everywhere, would rather catch another jazz critic in a mistake than raise Bix from the dead.

Since the Guiness retails for $25.95, readers would be well advised to stick with the encyclopedias of two more reliable and less parochial Brits: John Chilton and the late Leonard Feather — or to await a new Leonard Feather encyclopedia, to be published by Oxford University Press, which Ira Gilter, Leonard's associate, is now completing.

— GS

# Forgotten Man

Some time earlier, I wrote a piece giving a long list of significant jazz musicians who were all performing in 1960 — and were under thirty-five. When you added in the older players, you saw how rich the jazz community was in those days. The current "jazz revival" offers nothing approaching it.

Now Capitol records has instituted a CD reissue program of singers. This is under the aegis of executive producer Wayne Watkins who, at 38, wasn't even born when a lot of these records were made. The general rubric of the series is Great Ladies of Song and Great Gentlemen of Song.

So far 24 CDs have been issued. They are by Betty Hutton, Mel Tormé, Keely Smith, Bob Manning, Bobby Darin, Dinah Shore, Vic Damone, Nancy Wilson, June Christy, Andy Russell, Sandler and Young, Peggy Lee, Dean Martin, Margaret Whiting, the King Sisters, Kay Starr, Nat Cole, Matt Monro, Al Martino, Dakota Staton, Jo Stafford, Judy Garland, Lou Rawls, and the Four Freshmen.

And that by no means exhausts the vaults of Capitol singers. There is all that Johnny Mercer material too — not to mention the [redacted] catalog by Frank Sinatra during one of the finest periods of his work. And Watkins is beginning a big-band reissue program.

The powerful impression that hit me when Watkins sent me a carton of this stuff was a jolted awareness of how many good singers there were, all recording literate and intelligent songs and all working at the same time in that era from the mid-1940s, when Betty Hutton recorded crazy but clever comic songs such as *My Rocking Horse Ran Away*, through to the last days of Nat Cole. Nat, in case you don't know the story, was essentially the performer who built Capitol; Peggy Lee was another. One day Nat telephoned Capitol and heard the switchboard operator say, "Capitol records, home of the Beatles." Nat, who was a gentleman and gentle man, was reportedly furious. An era was gone. Rock and roll and illiteracy were upon us. Recently I too called Capitol. When I was put on hold, some pop singer intoned "I just broke up with my girl, I just broke up with my girl, I just broke up with my girl," endlessly. There was no other lyric phrase, at least while I was on the line.

The listing above is only of singers on Capitol. When you add in Sarah Vaughan, Marilyn Maye and all the other singers who were on other labels, you begin to see how rich in song the era really was. We thought it could go on forever.

I am pleased to have all these records. I was never a fan of Dean Martin's singing (though very much a fan of his other skills) but the songs on this CD are all quality material. Bob Manning was a little too close to Dick Haymes in sound for his career's good. I always liked Keely Smith, and I was nuts about Nancy Wilson during this period of her work. And Jo Stafford, of course, was one of those who set a standard for all the singers after her.

All these albums are meticulously and intelligently annotated by Joseph E. Laredo, who is in his early thirties.

I was particularly pleased to have the Andy Russell material. Andy was a friend, whom I first met in 1962 in Mexico City when he was the top singing star of the Spanish-speaking world, which is a very big one. He was one of the best singers I ever heard.

But of all these reissues, the one that most pleased me is the Matt Monro package.

Back about 1980, when I had decided I never wanted to write again, I got into a lengthy correspondence with my dear friend Julius La Rosa, who was — and is — one of the best of the singers (Steve Lawrence is another) inspired by Sinatra. We endlessly discussed songs and singers. Julie says he still has our correspondence, both his letters and mine. It forms a pile three or four feet high of single-space typing. The Jazzletter grew out of this correspondence. I realized I was not sick of writing: I was merely sick of writing in restricting standard formats.

One of the conclusions we reached is that Monro was one of the best singers the business ever knew. I sent Julie a copy of the Monro reissue. He phoned me after listening to it, as blown away as I was. "He had it all," Julie said. "Impeccable intonation. Time. A beautiful sound. And that quality actors call vulnerability."

Monro was born Terence Parsons on December 30, 1930, in Shoreditch in the East End of London, which made him a true Cockney, though, Laredo writes, "all traces of the telltale accent evaporated in the recording studio." Indeed it did. The accent in Monro's singing is light, but it is vaguely upper-class. He sings broad British A's. After comes out ahftuh and passing comes out pahssing. Know comes out naoo. His enunciation stands as the most beautiful English I have ever heard from anyone. Ever. It is nothing less than exquisite.

La Rosa and Monro both began singing in amateur performances during their military service, La Rosa's in the U.S. Navy, Monro's in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Corps while he was stationed in Hong Kong. He'd had a miserable childhood, part of it spent in an orphanage. When he returned to Britain, Laredo tells us, he found work first as a truck driver between London and Glasgow, then as a bus driver. He made a demonstration record and began to get a little work as a singer.

In 1959, he was signed to the EMI label by George Martin, who not long thereafter would achieve fame as the producer of the Beatles, ironically the figures most instrumental in bringing that

golden era of song to an end and rendering people like Matt Monro (although to be accurate, there was no one quite like him) obsolete.

Rarely now will anyone make large-orchestra albums of the kind all the aforementioned singers made in those days, and even if you did, you couldn't find radio stations to play them.

Monro had considerable success as a singer of movie themes such as *Born Free* which, I am happy to say, is not on the CD. But Lionel Bart's *From Russia with Love* unfortunately is. That's one of the silliest lyrics I know, and written by a very talented man at that. But this was a period when movie titles were squeezed into song form for the sake of promoting the picture, and some ridiculous songs came out of the trend, including *Green Dolphin Street*. Years ago in New York, when I told the late and wonderfully witty composer Lou Singer (he wrote *One Meat Ball* along with *Sleepy Serenade* and a good deal of fine orchestral music) that I loved the tune and hated the lyric, he said, "How does it go?"

So I recited it to him. After "When I recall the love I found on, I could kiss the ground on, Green Dolphin Street," Lou said:

"Sounds like a commercial for an asphalt company."

This trend reached incredible heights of foolishness. The late Hugo Friedhofer, dean of film composers, suggested that *Towering Inferno* should have a title song, and offered a lyric idea for it:

*I met my love*
*in a Towering Inferno.*
*My heart was on fire*
*and so was my suit.*

Matt Monro did a number of those awkward movie songs.

Also included in this CD is *My Kind of Girl*, a big hit for him. But it's a lame song, and today would be considered so politically incorrect by feminists that it could get its writer, Leslie Bricusse, tarred and feathered. The rest of the 18 songs in the CD are good, including *I'm Glad There Is You, I Get Along Without You Very Well, When I Fall in Love, Laura, Time After Time, When Sunny Gets Blue, When Joanna Loved Me,* and *September Song*.

Some of the tracks are marred by the attempt to accommodate the songs to the new rock rage of the '60s. A whacka-hack guitar backbeat is used in some otherwise beautiful arrangements, along with those dumb triplets with brushes on snare. Sometimes there's that damnable sound of a pick on an electric bass, going gu-gung gu-gung. Had I been doing the new mastering, I'd have mixed that sound down to inaudibility. Fortunately, the quasi-rock rhythm section isn't on most of the tracks. And even when it is, the quality of the charts, most by Sid Feller or Johnnie Spence and one by Bob Bain, and Monro's superb singing overcome these annoyances.

Monro can sing longer phrases than any singer I've ever heard — and this in spite of the fact that he was a heavy smoker. To the best of my knowlege, Frank Sinatra started the business of tying the end of one phrase into the start of the next, which he got from Tommy Dorsey's trombone. But Monro takes the technique far beyond Sinatra. In *Autumn Leaves*, he sings "old winter's song. But I miss you most of all" in a single line, one of long notes at a very slow tempo. It's amazing. And he is a master of the sneak breath, a trick that was taught to me by the opera singer Maureen Forester. Toward the end of one of those long sustained lines, you can slip in a quick half-breath, as opposed to a full lungful, and continue the line seemingly seamlessly.

Monro's voice is rather woody, with something of the texture of a viola. It has a rich bottom, and a big range: In *I Get Along Without You Very Well*, Monro goes up to an E-flat. (Sinatra used to go up to F, and I suspect Monroe could too.) And he doesn't use head tone, something else he has in common with Sinatra: it's full body tone all the way to the top. The vibrato is perfect, just the right width and frequency, and he has great control of it. When he sails into a note in straight tone (strikingly in tune) wit[illegible] vibrato and then turns the vibrato on, it comes in gradually, subtly. And he holds endings forever, without any loss of support or power or variation of pitch. And he can put crescendo on single tones, something that for the most part only opera singers can do.

His time is wonderful. Like Nat Cole, he can advance or retard a phrase at will, and it always comes out right.

There is something else he has in common with Cole: he doesn't mess with the melody. Like Cole and Perry Como, he sings the song as written, with only occasional and always discreet interpretive variations. I wish all the "hip" girl singers of our time would listen to him.

For despite his adherence to the composer's intentions, he gets great emotional depth into his work: that vulnerability that La Rosa spoke of, an unstrained emotionality. Montgomery Clift could do that in acting. The songs are treated — there is no other word for it — lovingly. I don't even like *Ebb Tide*. Robert Maxwell's melody has beauty, but Carl Sigman's lyric reminds me of one of those television commercials in which the young lovers run to each other in slow motion through a field of daisies. Johnnie Spe[illegible]s impressionistic chart and Monro's exquisite reading make the song almost a work of art. And Monro does the best version of Gordon Jenkins' poignant *This Is All I Ask* that I've ever heard

I never met Monro. Some of those who knew him say he was a modest and unassuming man who took his success as a stroke of luck, rather than some sort of deserved endowment from God. He was very well liked.

Joseph Laredo tells us (and I was interested in knowing what had happened to him) that on January 20, 1985, Monro went into hospital for exploratory surgery. He had liver cancer, and it had spread too far for the surgeons to be able to help him. He died February 7. He has been gone a little over ten years.

There is a lot more Matt Monro in the EMI catalog. By the time Monro came along, analog (as we now call it) stereo recording had reached a high level of evolution, and the sound on the CD is excellent. And this CD (Capitol catalog number 29394) is bound to be thrilling to anyone who understands the deceptive art of singing a good song well.

Matt Monro is now something of a forgotten man. It's too bad.