

November 1996

Vol. 15 No. 11

Of Ms and Men

When discussion of "ebonics" began in Oakland, California, alarming Jesse Jackson and other black leaders, I took it that the Oakland School District wanted *teachers* to learn "ebonics" in order to teach "standard" English to black children.

I did not at first catch a clause (since abandoned) in the school district's declaration: that "ebonics" was a separate language *genetically* tracing back to Africa. I presume that Jackson and others instantly detected the landmine in that premise. If it were true, Americans of Italian ancestry would manifest a predilection for that language, German Americans for German, and the like. It isn't that there isn't a black southern dialect. There is, and its absorption into American English has enriched the language. But it is culturally, not genetically, determined. Its beautiful poeticism does trace back to Africa. I admire its allusive indirection, a classic example of which, I think, was Don Byas's resignation to Count Basie: "Basie, in one month I will have been gone two weeks."

Anyone who would consider that languages are genetically rooted isn't fit to sit on a school board. It might be a good idea for such persons to pay a visit to London and listen to the cockney accents of all sorts of "black" English families.

Come to that, the very word "ebonics" is a joke. Have you ever met anyone who was the color of ebony?

It seems to have become the fashion for any aggrieved party to think the situation can be alleviated by rewriting the English language. So silly is the women's lib movement in its, alas, all too successful campaign to alter the English language that serious damage has been done to its clarity.

In a short disclaimer at the front of his book *Jazz: America's Classical Music*, Grover Sales wrote: "The term *jazzman* is used interchangeably with *jazz musician* with no offence intended or implied to women, in jazz or out. Jazz in its early days developed a male-dominated community whose players were steeped in a super-macho ethic reflected in their stance, attitude, slang, in the titles of jazz compositions, and in the nature of the music itself. With rare exceptions, women's role in jazz, until quite recently, was restricted to the piano and, most of all, to singing. The increasing role of women in jazz during the past decade as band leaders, composers, guitarists, and horn players is but one of the welcome byproducts of the current liberation movement.

"I feel it does no service to the women's movement to concoct such a trendy contrivance as *jazzperson* . . ."

In one sense, words are meaningless, sounds arbitrarily attached to objects and ideas. But they have roots and origins. Let me give you a quick tour of the French language to show its relationship to English, a relationship that even many bilingual persons haven't given much thought.

You know just by looking at them the meaning of all the -ion words, which are common to both English and French. And by changing the spelling slightly, you can get the Spanish word as

well: *nación*, *inflación*, and so forth. Portuguese, which derives from Spanish, uses a tilde vowel in such words, pronounced as a nasal, which gives you words such as *nacão*. Most words ending in -y exist in French with the e acute, *é*, replacing the y and pronounced "ay": *cité*, *liberté*, and so on. And if you substitute -ad for the *é* of French and the -y of English, you get the Spanish word, as in *libertad*. (In Portuguese: *libertade*.)

You have seen the circumflex mark, an inverted v, over vowels in French. It does nothing to alter pronunciation, which is why the government of France tried to abandon it a few years ago, only to encounter severe opposition, and rightly so. That mark is useful.

Why is it used? For the same reason we use the apostrophe in negative contractions in English, *don't*, *hasn't*, and the like. We have dropped a vowel in such constructions. The circumflex in French indicates that there was once an s after that vowel. And you can understand most French words containing the circumflex by mentally inserting it: *forêt*, *bâtard*, and the like. Sometimes we have imported a word from French twice, the first time when it still contained the s, the other later when it had been dropped. Thus *hostel* and *hotel*. Some of these words require a little interpretation, because in English the spelling has been altered since the word's importation. But you can guess. *Vêpres* is *vespers*, *bête* is *beast*. (It also is slang for *stupid*.) *Fête*, meaning *celebration*, *holiday*, *festival*, is the origin of our word *feast*. We didn't drop the s.

Take any French word that begins with e acute, *é*, and stick an s into it after the *é*, and you have something close to the English word. Thus "école" means *school*. We simply dropped the vowel at the start of such words. Spanish, interestingly, kept both, and so *school* in Spanish is "escuela" while in Portuguese it's "escola". It's all the same word. By the way, people whose native language is Spanish often find it difficult to pronounce such words in English *without* the vowel prefix. You will hear such things as "He is going to e-school."

Here's another. When you encounter a u in French, try substituting an l. *Veau* becomes *veal*. *Peau*, which means *skin*, becomes *peal*, though we apply it, spelled *peel*, mostly to the skin of fruit. (But you "peel" after a sunburn.) All sorts of words yield their meanings with that substitution.

I argue, not entirely ironically, that we all speak bad Sanskrit. Take the Sanskrit *sneigwh-*, the combining form. It becomes *snee* in German, *neige* in French. Turn that w into a v, as in *Wagner*. Play with it a little more and you have *nieve* in Spanish, *neve* in Portuguese. In old English, the word had become *snaw* and now we pronounce it *snow*. But it's all the same word. And, incidentally, Oscar Castro-Neves' name means *Castro-Snows*. And the title of Gil Evans' tune *La Nevada* means "snowfall". An allusion to Claude Thornhill's *Snowfall*?

Our irregular (highly) verb *to be* derives from two separate Sanskrit verbs, one meaning to move, the other to breathe. *Cogito, ergo sum*? No, I move, I breathe, therefore I am. *There are no abstract words*. There are only symbolic applications of words with

concrete denotations. Take the word “encyclopedia.” Have you ever taken that word apart? The first half clearly denotes an encirclement. The second half is related to *pediatrician*. And so the word means an encirclement by children. It’s a teaching tool. And, incidentally, the “ped-” component of the word derives from pou- or pau- in Sanskrit, meaning few or little (*peu* in modern French), and also in suffix form the young of any animal species. The word is the root of the Latin word *puer*, meaning child, and of *puerile* in modern English. It is also the root of the Latin word *pauper*, and also of our word *poor*.

A phoneme may be only a puff of articulated air, but it began somewhere, and has millennia of meaning behind it. You can’t just invent words and shove them at the world. And “ebonics” is one of the worst coinages in years. Excepting, of course, Ms, a term (I can’t call it a word) I absolutely refuse to use.

But the most offensive word in the English language, to me, is *nigger*. Oddly, it has a perfectly legitimate origin. It derives from an older word in English, *neger*, from the French *nègre* and in turn the Spanish *negro*, meaning *black*. But it is so freighted with intended derogation that I cannot stand even the sound of it.

When the Rev. Elijah Mohammed began referring to the “so-called Negro” and demanding the use of the word “black” instead of “negro”, he did nothing so much (as would some of the figures of women’s lib later on) as demonstrate his ignorance of language. In other words: we demand that you all stop calling us black and start calling us black.

This maneuver was meant to contribute to the ending of racial bigotry in America. It was quite predictable that it would do no such thing. Indeed, I think that the racial situation of America is worse than it was twenty or thirty years ago. Revising the English language according to the agendas of various social groups is going to accomplish nothing, except to corrupt the one tool through which we might achieve some understanding: language.

I remember my late friend Lonnie Levister objecting to the word “black”. “I’m not black,” Lonnie said. “I’m brown.”

But the Rev. Elijah Mohammed, leader of a minority group among “black” Americans, succeeded on imposing this revision on the entire English language. When he said sufficiently often and vociferously that the term “Negro” was offensive, newspapers, with characteristic cowardice, caved in and started using the term “black” in its place, as they now use Ms.

But many “blacks” didn’t like it, and, like Lonnie, wouldn’t use it. The term I always heard Dizzy Gillespie use, when the subject came up, was “colored.” And the United Negro College Fund and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People haven’t changed their names.

When it became obvious that the use of the word “black” instead of “Negro” hadn’t brought a golden age to America, it too began to be shunted aside, to be replaced, according to the new demand, by “African American”. But this term is more than misleading: it’s wrong. I know a white woman from South Africa

who is an American citizen. She, much more than any “black” American whose antecedents have been here for generations, is an African American. Anyone from Morocco, Libya, or Egypt, who becomes an American citizen is an African American. Come to that, since research has established that the human race arose in Africa, we are *all* Africans. Some of us just gave up some melanin in order to absorb some vitamin D in cloudier climes.

Aside from anything else, “African-American” is cumbersome, and is too long for newspaper headlines. It will therefore in time atrophy and go out of use.

Now, women’s lib has imposed all sorts of politically correct terms on the English language. And most of them are nonsense.

Let’s start with *Ms*. It has no root whatsoever. *Mrs.* is derived from *mistress*, “a title of courtesy used in speaking of a married woman”, according to the American Heritage Dictionary. *Miss* is a very polite form of address to a young or unmarried woman. Yeah, yeah, I get it, I get it: why should I be categorized according to whether I am married or not? But *Ms* will not solve the problem, any more than *black* or *African American* will get rid of racism. Furthermore, the pronunciation *miz* rings memory bells of ignorant redneck southern speech — it was used in the old comic strip *Barney Google* — and on top of that it is a syllable that I can find in only one other word in the English language: *miserable*.

I daresay that by now you have encountered the coinage “womyn”, introduced by the hard-core nut element of women’s lib. And of course “spokesperson” is well in place by now, although I refuse to use it. The oddest revisionism is the term “chair”. “Chairman” and “chairwoman” have been replaced by “chair”. This is utter linguistic lunacy. Incidentally, this problem does not exist in French. The French have long used the term “madame” rather than “mademoiselle” for any woman of, as they say, a certain age. Her marital status has nothing to do with it. When she becomes older, she is “madame”, regardless of marital status.

To be sure, a few of the revisions are useful. I have noted that actresses often refer to themselves as actors. There is nothing lost in that, and possibly something gained. After all, we don’t refer to doctresses or professoresses. We did, once upon a time, use the term *poetess* and even, for that matter, *Jewess*. Both are gone and good riddance.

On the whole, however, the linguistic tinkering of women’s lib achieves no good, and does much harm. Girls with great boobs and bottoms will still waggle them at men and gain advantage, and girls with lesser endowment will rail against it or suffer silently from observing it as they always have. Sexual flouting by women has never been more obvious than now, and the grim sad story of JonBenet Ramsey indicates that mummies are always going to encourage their little girls to do it, perhaps not as flagrantly as we have seen in those pathetic videos of a precious little girl in tart’s makeup, bought and paid for by mommy and daddy.

Such goofy coinages as “womyn” prompted me to say, five or six years ago, that women’s lib would probably demand the

extirpation of the word "person" because it contained the word "son". Indeed, I hypothesized, the very words *woman*, *women*, and *mankind* should be altered. To achieve utter gender neutrality, I suggested, a woman should be referred to as a *wo-thing*, and humanity should be called *huthingity*. We should all be known as *thingkind*. These problems do not arise in any western language but English, since all nouns in French, Spanish, et al have gender. You do not refer to a house as "it" in French but as "she", and a boat not as "it" but as "he". End of problem. What the idiots of women's lib do not understand is that in language, gender has nothing to do with sexuality.

I was joking when I said the word "person" would be next on the hit list, hardly really expecting that the prediction would come true. But apparently it has done so. Listen to the news on television. When I was a young newspaperman, the use of the word "people" as a synonym for "persons" was absolutely forbidden. But I hear it not only frequently now — "fifteen *people* were injured today when . . . "three people are being sought . . . two hundred people were evacuated today when" — but universally.

In Roman theater, actors wore masks. The term *person* derives from the Latin for mask. One theory is that the masks contained metal amplifiers, to throw the voice, and the word has a relationship to *son-*, meaning sound, as in *sonic*. The word thus means *by the sound piece*, and this came to be applied to the character the actor was playing. Another theory is that the word derives from the Etruscan *phersu*, meaning mask. But it certainly has nothing to do with "son" and the male of the species.

A people is an ethnic entity. The word is not a plural form for person. But you'll hear it incessantly now from Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, every news reporter and "anchor" in the business. Obviously you cannot say, "One people was arrested today when . . ." Then what is the singular of "people"? Person, obviously. Then what is the plural of "person"? Persons.

The deterioration of language in newspapers continues to appall every intelligent elder journalist I know. Grammatical glitches are so common in newspapers that one concludes that linguistic ignorance is no longer the province of the reporters but of the editors who are supposed to correct and teach them. The semi-literate have been promoted.

I am opposed to bilingual education, as that term is generally understood. We have seen what bilingualism is doing to Canada. French-Canadian politicians have used language as a weapon of personal advancement to the ultimate destruction of an entire country. Most of them, by the way, insist that their children have education in English. It is the "masses" they "lead" who, they insist, must learn only French. And their linguistic racism has driven business and money out of Quebec, and indeed driven population out of Quebec, including many who are actually French-speaking.

French is a disappearing language. It will be largely gone within fifty years, dissolved in the ubiquity of English. To destroy

a country, as Canada is being destroyed, for the advantage of cynically manipulative politicians, is one of the most criminal things I have ever seen. Canada will not exist forty years from now, and I'm not sure it can last another twenty.

Quietly, subtly, almost as if avoiding attention, the United States has altered its laws on citizenship. You now can be a citizen of two countries, that of your origin and the United States. Dual citizenship is no longer against American law. But, and this has apparently escaped everyone, Mexico recently passed a law that permits you to retain Mexican citizenship while taking citizenship in another country. You can have a Mexican as well as an American passport.

What does this mean? It means that the people who *really* run North America — not the owned-and-operated politicians whose election gives us the illusion of democracy — have made a decision. Mexico, the United States and Canada are to be fused into a single nation. NAFTA was the first major step in this direction. Double citizenship is the second.

And English will be the predominant language of this new country. It is already spoken more widely than any language on earth. It is the language of air controllers, because you cannot have a Polish pilot speaking his own language to the tower at the airport of Rome. More than half the books sold in Holland are in English; in Sweden the figure is similar. The range of the language was imposed by the British conquests of the nineteenth century; it has been extended and consolidated by the imperialism of the United States and the world popularity of American movies and popular music. The Japanese language is now full of English words.

Do I approve? In many ways I like French more than English. I love the sound of it, and its inventive locutions. But the predominance of English is obvious, and will expand. In China they're teaching English on television. Latin is gone, gone with Etruscan and Sanskrit and the Sumerian language that preceded it. Languages do not last. They evolve. *Boewulf* is incomprehensible to us now, and for that matter Shakespeare's English presents difficulties. A perusal of a copy of the New York Times from 1945 will show you how rapidly English is changing. French will not survive, in Canada or even in France. But a good nation is being destroyed by those who use the paranoia of language, *the fear of learning*, for personal and political advantage. I would hate to see this linguistic divisionism take root in the United States. Spanish and French as second languages? You bet! With my enthusiastic support. Bilingual education? It would be a disaster. Even in bilingual Belgium politicians are manipulating the issue to create a kind of racism, and only for their own advantage, not the good of the country. The United States has, albeit gropingly, tried to pull together peoples from all over the earth. It is the model of what a diverse planetary society could be. It does not need "bilingualism" to tear it apart, certainly not *ebonics*.

To suggest that language is *genetically* determined is extremely dangerous, a reinforcement *from blacks* of the white racist theorem

that "blacks" are a species so alien (and of course, inferior) their brains are built differently. If that is so, then the white racists could argue that blacks are incapable of being engineers, brain surgeons, playwrights, and the like. All they can do is dance and play basketball and talk ebonics, and they got natchal rhythm.

Any anthropologist will tell you that there is no such thing as race. There is only the human (huthing?) race. Otherwise we could not interbreed. The proof lies there. If you want to erase the racial barrier in America, go after the advertising agencies and television. I used to tell Lenny Bruce: it isn't about desegregation of the classroom. Ultimately it's about desegregation of the bedroom.

In "integrated" commercials, the handsome black man (what Oscar Peterson murderously refers to as the TTS, the Token Television Spook) always has a black wife. An Ikea commercial broke that barrier: the young white guy had a pregnant black wife. I saw that commercial once. Once. I repeat: once.

The term Ms has been with us for a while, but it looks as if *ebonics* will get ridiculed out of the vocabulary, laughed into obscurity. Only days after the Oakland School Board disseminated the term, the following went whizzing around the Internet:

Irish American Speak: Leprechaunics. Native American: Kimosabics. Italian American: Spumonics (or Rigatonics). Chinese American: Wontonics. Japanese American: Mamasanics. Polish American: Kielbasonics. Jewish American: Zionics. Russian American: Rasputonics. Spanish American: Flanics. Scottish American: Tartanics. Eskimo American: Harpoonics. German American: Autobonics (or Teutonics). French American: Cornichonics (or Escargonics).

And, finally, Oakland Schoolboard Speak: Moronics.

My Friend Phil

My apologies for being so late with the issues. I've had friends and subscribers calling to find out if I were dead. I'm not. Or at least, not that I've noticed. I had to write a movie.

By the way, if you can't remember whether you've resubscribed to the Jazzletter as its sixteenth year ends, look at the envelope in which this arrived. If there is a date after the address, you have resubscribed. If there isn't, you haven't.

One of my oldest friends in music is Phil Woods. His integrity, his refusal to surrender to the commercial pressures of the music business, his unflinching dedication to art at whatever personal cost, have always been an inspiration to me. Phil is road-worn, wise, and not easily deceived. His observations on life and our times are odd and slanted and funny. I have long wanted him to write an autobiography. Most jazz musicians, it seems, want to write a book, believing that the public will find their lives as incredibly fascinating as they do. But Phil really could write a superb and interesting autobiography.

Phil writes columns for *Saxophone Journal* which he sometimes sends to me. I've selected a few of his reflections on saxophones

and saxophonists. They are reprinted with my gratitude to David Gibson of *Saxophone Journal*.

The Jazzletter's e-mail address is jazzlet@ix.netcom.com.

Woods Lore

by Phil Woods

Chant of the Reed

There is something terribly wrong with a world that can put a man on the moon but cannot make a decent saxophone reed. Reed players spend most of their waking hours playing an endless game of bamboo roulette, and we always lose. When I change my reed the family checks into a motel.

Let's begin at the beginning. At first, man was content to beat on trees and blow on grass, but when *Confirmation* on a hollow log became technically impossible, the saxophone was invented. It uses a piece of wood called a reed, which can cost anywhere from eighty to ninety dollars, if you can find one. You attach this silly piece of wood to a mouthpiece, another silly contraption, by wrapping it with cat-gut. *Confirmation* is still impossible, but life has purpose. We buy reeds, in endless quantities, looking for that magic sound that other, much brighter people will sample and turn into lots of money.

I have been addicted to the same brand of reed for over thirty years and am personally responsible for the obliteration of hundreds of acres of prime farmland which would perhaps have better served man as a means of growing something useful, like food. Once I became so emotionally upset about the company's packaging I wrote them a letter pointing out the error of a larger box containing fewer reeds. I suggested to them that they were not selling corn flakes. Their apologetic response concluded with, "And if you will tell us what instrument you play, we will send you a complimentary box of reeds," which was pretty neat. Gee. A free box of some kind of reed! My ego runneth under. This was a good reed, but all too often had a very short life expectancy. Many of my compatriots felt that there was room between the medium hard and hard for a more robust reed with longevity and center. Nobody listened. Until now.

At our Celebration of the Arts here in Delaware Water Gap, always held on the weekend following Labor Day, Nelson Hill gave me a Vandoren V-16. He said, "Try it, you'll like it." I tried it. I liked it! Eureka! At last, a sensible reed! These reeds feel good, and the percentage of useable reeds is incredible. Somebody is paying attention and I sleep a little better knowing that. The base of the reed is thicker, giving my old, stretched ligature a better grip, and the intonation, always a Vandoren tradition, remains true and spot on.

I am puzzled by the use of rubber ligatures. Rubber is not a musical thing unless it is combined with the rhythm method, like

medium bounce tunes.

Even Gene Quill would have liked this reed. Gene used a tenor reed on his alto mouthpiece. In fact, it was generally an old burned and chipped tenor reed. I once picked up his horn to try his setup and could not get one sound out of it, not a peep. It was like a subway tunnel with a shingle on it. Red Rodney used to say that Bird could play a tomato can. So could Gene!

Red and I were waiting to get paid at a French festival and Red said to me, "Have you seen the Count Di Monnay?" Au revoir, old friend.

Some players manage quite well on a plastic reed. Jackie McLean and Danny Bank come to mind. Once, at an Oliver Nelson recording session, I broke Danny's reed when the sleeve of my pocket caught the tip. I apologized profusely. Danny was in tears and I asked him how long he'd had the reed. "Thirteen years!" I told him it was time to change it. Whatever gets you through the night.

Ollie

Oliver Nelson called me Tubs, or sometimes it would be Jimmie, or we would all be Tubs or Jimmies.

He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 4, 1932, of a musical family. His brother played along with Cootie Williams' band in the '40s and his sister played piano with a combo in St. Louis. Oliver studied piano at age six and sax at eleven. He worked with the Jeter-Pillars and George Hudson big bands in 1947-48 and was very proud to have been a Marine in 1952. He came to New York after graduation in 1958 and that's when I first met him. He was working with the Wild Bill Davis organ trio in Atlantic City. He also played with the Erskine Hawkins band in 1959 and was on the Quincy Jones band with me when we played Birdland in 1960. He didn't have many solos at first, so he went home and wrote a jazz classic, *Stolen Moments*. When the story is finally told on American music, I do hope that Oliver Nelson's name will garner the respect it deserves.

Ollie's first album was *Full Nelson* and I remember how his charts impressed the musicians. In those days the studios were full of cats who could read fly droppings and hear paint dry. All could solo, transpose, and tell a good story either with their horns or at Jim and Andy's bar.

Ollie studied composition and theory at Washington University in St. Louis from 1954 to 1957. Years later — 1970, I think — I was doing a residency with him at the very same school. He told me that when he was a student, he used to eat lunch in his car to avoid the inevitable (in those days) confrontations with the many bigots. He was pleased to be teaching there and felt that, however small, there was progress being made in race relations.

And he was a great teacher! He loved the music of Bartok and Stravinsky and was equally at home with Handel, Hindemith, Bird, and Bach.

This diversity was reflected in his command of the alto sax and tenor sax. He was also a fine pianist. Every serious saxophone player should become acquainted with his *Sonata for Alto Sax and Piano* and *Patterns*.

And he liked to drink! Before every date Ollie would pour himself a giant hooker of Red Label. He hated the taste, so he said, and would down it in one gulp and make the most horrific face you ever saw. Then he would tap the podium and say, "Shall we start, gentlemen?"

A record date with Ollie was always a musical adventure. He didn't write easy. Doubles like oboe and English horn were not uncommon and his use of flutes and clarinets (my double) was exquisite. Check out the Jimmie Smith recording of *Peter and the Wolf*.

I remember one date in particular. The music was surprisingly easy, mostly whole notes, or footballs, as we called them. We finished up the two tunes we had and were on a break, waiting for the copyist to bring the rest of the music. We figured it was going so well we would hit the bar for a taste or two. Well, most of us had one too many and when we got back to the date the next piece was on the stands. It was the first time we had seen *Blues and the Abstract Truth*. The first run-through was a giant train wreck. I have never seen Ollie so angry. It was also the first time I saw these musicians ask for their parts to study at home for the next day's recording, when we played the hell out of the tune.

Oliver Nelson was one of the best orchestrators of his time. After graduating from Washington University, Ollie became house arranger for the Apollo theater and would have to write for every conceivable type of act, from fire eaters to strippers. So when he broke out with *Full Nelson*, he was ready. He had already made the classic small-group record of *Blues and the Abstract Truth*. In quick succession came the Wes Montgomery album *Out of My Head*, then *Michele, More Blues and the Abstract Truth*, and *Fantabulous*.

In 1962 Oliver and I were part of the sax section on an album that was to be titled *Rise Stevens Sings the Blues*. Talk about abstract truths! Gunther Schuller, who was conducting, told me he had tried to moderate Ms. Stevens' operatic vibrato, with little success. He said that she must have studied with Bert Lahr. Ollie and I had brought a bottle of spirits to get through what looked like a long hard day at the office. Gunther eyeballed the jug but didn't say a word. He could have used a taste himself.

We broke for lunch. That's when we heard about the assassination of JFK. The session was cancelled and a lot of us went to Clark Terry's house, which wasn't far from the studio in Long Island. Oliver was beside himself. He called the TV stations, who were all showing the flag, and told them it was no day to fly the colors. We were all stricken, but Ollie was beyond that. Years later, when we did *The Kennedy Dream*, I understood something of the magnitude of Ollie's grief. *Day in Dallas* is a superb piece of writing, as is the whole album, my favorite. This has never been

issued on CD. I wonder why. Maybe someday.

In 1967, when the New York scene dried up and all the work was done by three midjets with Moogs and "Ewis", Ollie moved to Los Angeles and worked on TV shows such as *Six Million Dollar Man* and *Ironsides*. He did the sound tracks to *Death of a Gunfighter* and *Zigzag*.

He also formed a big band that made a great album live from Donte's, the west-coast version of Birdland. It was a very hot record. In late October 1975, he taped a recording for *Million Dollar Man* and died the following morning after suffering a heart attack at his home.

The Brute

"So Phil, do you want to come by for some pork chops tomorrow? We'll hang out and listen to music."

The speaker was Ben Webster, the place Amsterdam, and the year 1969. I had just finished a night with a good Dutch rhythm section at a place called The Paradiso, a youth center in the middle of town. It serves as a gathering place for the Dutch youth and is still open and going strong. The Dutch are very civilized. They were the first to give women the vote, and to this day they maintain a most liberal posture, sometimes to the dismay of their neighbors. But the cost is sometimes high. Amsterdam is showing signs of wear and tear and the city is no longer the pristine delight it once was.

I had just moved to France and was still adjusting. I was doing singles in various venues in Europe and that is what brought me to Holland. I had spent my warm-up time in the basement among the heating ducts, sneaking a poke like a good paranoid American. Shades of *Spinal Tap*. I don't recommend this aberrant behavior, but I was young and avoiding glaucoma. Imagine my surprise when I hit the stage and looked around a room filled with kids doing all sorts of illicit things.

Ben had come in to say hello. We always had dinner together during those Euro-years (1968-1973) either in Holland or, later, Copenhagen. He was sober and dressed to the nines in a graceful gray worsted double-breasted suit with a thoughtful shirt and tie ensemble, a glaze on his skates, and a hat right out of the *Godfather* movie. He was sharp and cool. My Man!

I got his address and showed up at the appointed noon hour. Ben was still in his PJs but greeted me heartily. We had some coffee. This was to be my most substantial meal of the day. We chatted and listened to Duke. Who else? When you were with Ben, you listened to Duke.

He said he was going to order those pork chops. Real thick ones. Did we want any beer to go with them succulent beauties that Ben was going to shake up right before my eyes? I said, "Sure, a couple of beers would go damn good with those porcine delights." Of this I had no doubt. Well, the man delivered the pork chops along with a case of good Dutch Amstel beer, and we were

off. I shall not bore you with all the grisly details of this marathon day.

Ben played some stride piano that always knocked me out. He was a piano player before he was a tenor man and ole Dude Albert "Budd" Johnson showed him how to finger the sax when they met in Texas before Vaseline.

Around midnight Ben collapsed on the rug in the living room, still in his robe, totally messed up. And so was I. I bent over to kiss him goodnight, and as I got up after giving him a harmless peck on his wizened old cheek, he came to and cold-cocked me with a vicious right to the jaw, calling me a faggot! I assumed that the pork chops were out of the question and took my leave.

A year later I was working at the Montmartre in Copenhagen. Ben had left Holland and taken residence in Denmark. He came opening night, sober as a judge. I asked him if he had his horn. He said he just wanted to listen, and he was the model of decorum. Same thing the next night. I asked him if he had his horn; he said he would just listen.

A couple of nights later, here comes Ben, and is he tore up! I could hear him as he crashed through the ring-side tables with his horn. *Now* he brings his horn! Goddamn! He put it together somehow, climbed on the bandstand with considerable difficulty, and proceeded to fall ass-over-tea-kettle right into the drums. He never did sit in. But we did have a lovely dinner the following night.

Ben was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on February 27, 1909. He studied violin and piano. He made his professional debut on the piano with Dutch Campbell. He did all the territory bands and came to New York with the great Benny Moten band. He worked with Benny Carter and Fletcher Henderson in 1933-34. He later went with Willie Bryant, then Cab Calloway. He is best known for his long intermittent association with Duke Ellington between 1939 and 1943.

In the '40s, Ben was the unsocial sheriff on 52nd Street. One night in 1946 I saw him personally eject from the Three Deuces three drunken sailors who had made the mistake of messing with the cute club photographer. Ben threw them into the path of an oncoming cab. That is where the nickname "the Brute" was put on him. He was also known by the sobriquet frog, but I never heard anyone but Sweets call him that to his face.

Ben was in Los Angeles in the '60s but lack of work led him to Europe where he worked more regularly in clubs and concerts around the continent. If you want to know more about this great artist, I would recommend the video called *The Brute and the Beautiful*. This is John Jeremy's very compelling portrait of one of the legends of jazz.

Ben could be very good, or very bad, but all his wrongdoing was as nothing compared to the incredible way he could play a ballad, or one meaningful note on a fast tempo that you never heard before. When I want to hear a song and be touched I listen to Ben Webster. He'll do it every time.

Ben died following a two-week hospitalization in Amsterdam on September 20, 1973. He was a gentle giant and I shall always love and treasure his friendship and his music.

Quill

It was a cold blustery night in the Apple. The wind careened off the canyon walls going right through the lead-sheet I called my winter coat. I heard that the cats were jamming at Teddy Charles' pad, 50th and Seventh, right above the IRT kiosk. As I climbed the funky staircase, the warm sound of a bass playing the introductory ostinato of Sir Charles Thompson's classic *Robin's Nest* warmed my young bebop soul. Teddy was from Springfield, Massachusetts, my home town, and had been the first homey who took on the big city and made his mark. That was with the great Chubby Jackson band, the one with Tiny Kahn on drums. Tiny also wrote most of the book. I remember that Teddy used to play drums. Local folklore had it that his watch couldn't keep time, but on the vibes he was a master improviser and a pivotal figure in the new music.

There seemed to be general bemusement when the cats spotted my raggedy blue corduroy gig bag. Hip stuff for Springfield, but barracuda bait in bop city. Their hale good fellow was met with a "Hi, I'm Phil and I play the sax." This was received with cool nods and almost-smiles. One reason the period was known as cool was because the musicians weren't that warm. They were all world-weary men who knew that life was not a fountain and took every opportunity to demonstrate that fact. I was underwhelmed. Teddy managed a gracious nod and invited me to play. I said later, "I wanted to listen and see where it was at." I recognized Teddy Kotick on bass, Harvey Leonard on the beat-up upright, and Phil Arabia and Frank Isola who took turns on drums. Horn players were scattered about the spacious (by New York standards) loft. Man! This was it! My first session downtown with the heavies!

As I listened I started to relax. I had done my homework and thought I could maybe keep up with the other horn men. They were not raising that much sand and most didn't get off the fence. And then it came around to this alto player I hadn't noticed before. As soon as this cat started to blow I knew I was neck deep in doo-doo. I recognized him. It was Gene Quill. I had heard him with Art Mooney's band at the Valley Arena in Holyoke, Massachusetts. He had a solo on, of all things, *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. He doubled up the time and knocked me out! Quill was hot, fast, loud, and good. All of a sudden I didn't feel so hot. I fought the urge to run as the final ostinato ended the tune.

I introduced myself to Gene and told him how much I enjoyed his work. He nodded politely while looking like he was about to have my E-flat ass for dinner. "You want to play some?"

"Yeah."

"What'll it be?"

"Your pleasure," I replied, nice and polite like my Mom taught me.

"Donna Lee, fast.

"Kick it off, man."

He did and we were gone. We hit that head with the precision of a laser beam. It was like we had been playing together for years! He played ten choruses, I played eleven, he played eleven more, I played twelve. The other horns were just checking out the action. They wanted no part of the blistering tempo. We played 16s, 8s, 4s, and 2s, and when we hit the final head the paint was peeling off the walls. Our eyes met after the tune and smiled.

If all Bird's children are brothers, Gene and I were twins. We played all morning, hit the ham-and-egger, and then went to Charlie's Tavern for some serious hangin' out. And Quill could hang, Jack!

Gene was a great lead alto player as well as a superb soloist. He was the first lead alto to minimize the use of vibrato, hitting the note on the button, no scoop, and only added vibrato towards the end of the note, like a fine contralto. Like Prez! He taught me so well that years later, we couldn't tell which of us was playing lead on many records. My favorite sax section was me, Gene, Al Cohn and Zoot Sims on tenor, and Danny Bank on baritone. Gene was also one of the best sight readers I have ever met. And don't forget his wonderful lead clarinet with Gerry Mulligan's Concert Jazz Band.

Gene Quill was also a funny cat. One night, as he got off the stand at Birdland, some asshole said to him, "Gene Quill, all you are doing is imitating Charlie Parker." Gene handed the man his horn and said, "Here, you imitate Charlie Parker."

Success did not fit comfortably on Gene. He started missing gigs and self-destructing. He slashed his eyeball while with Mulligan (I subbed for him), punched out Johnny Richards, and lasted one set with Benny Goodman. The tales of his tour with Buddy Rich are about what you would expect, given the volatile natures of both. Buddy once sent for Gene so he could fire him again. Sting like a drummer and float like a reed! When Bob Brookmeyer heard Quill had a brain operation he quipped, "They found one?" He was in the hospital and IVs were attached everywhere. He was in intensive care. Bill Potts went by to see him and asked if there was anything he could do for him. "Yeah! Take my place!"

He returned home and only played his horn at choir rehearsals. With the altos, of course. He died on December 8, 1988. I miss him very much.

The Mad Mab

My first experience with a name band was in 1951 when my friend Hal Serra recommended me to Hal Miles, who was contracting a big new band for Charlie Barnet. Once Hal completed his roster he called Charlie, affectionately nicknamed the Mad Mab, to give him personnel.

"Charlie? I got a great band for you, all nice guys."

Charlie's reply was, "Later for that shit. Get me some pricks that can play." Charlie never minced words.

I played fourth tenor, the chair that usually paralleled the baritone sax in fourths and fifths with lots of low B-flats and C-sharps, such fun notes when they are marked *piano*. I rented some horn from Ponte's, an Acme or Silvertone, or some such turkey. I used my alto mouthpiece. Don't ask me why. It was a red Santy Runyon and it looked cool. I was huffin' and puffin' to get those infernal low notes out. Charlie told Hal Miles that he couldn't hear the kid on fourth tenor and I was told to shape up and fulfill my end of the cantus firmus. I just blew harder and I guess it was all right. The secret, I found, was in only breathing out.

We toured the south and did the tobacco warehouse circuit. These were big barns where they held dances. We traveled by caravan and I was allowed to drive once, but I hit a school bus. I just grazed the fender but I was asked to turn in my wings.

Charlie always had mixed bands, and this one was no exception. We had four junkies, six alcoholics, and six vipers.

Charlie always had a great library and commissioned new pieces from Manny Albam, Al Cohn, and other writers of quality. Mad Mab was a rich man whose family had a majority share of the New York Central Railroad, among other blue chip stock holdings. He loved to drink and I believe he had some Native American blood: he could certainly go on the warpath. In those halcyon days, the front of the bandstand was often packed with fans just listening to the music. Pity the poor fan who would have his hands on the edge of the stage. Charlie would stomp on the unsuspecting guy's hands, yelling, "Get your hands off my bandstand!"

He loved to play and lead a band and he could do both very well. He was a great admirer of Duke Ellington and his earlier bands were greatly influenced by Duke. In 1949 he had one of the best bebop big bands. He sure didn't need the money!

Charlie was among the first white leaders to feature black stars extensively — Lena Horne in 1941, Trummy Young, Peanuts Holland, and Oscar Pettiford in 1943. He was a very colorful personality. He was married six times and often made headlines. He was one of the most talked-about figures in jazz in the late 1930s and early 1940s. "Scion of a wealthy family, whose urgings that he become a corporation lawyer were stubbornly resisted, he led his own band on a transatlantic liner at 16." (*Leonard Feather's Encyclopedia of Jazz*.) This could account for the time he tried to steal the Chesapeake Ferry late one night. I guess it was on the way to Baltimore, no tunnel in those days, and the ferry was shut down for the night. We had to restrain Mab, who insisted he had a valid pilot's license and knew the waters well. Water was not the problem. Too much scotch was the problem. He finally got back in his spiffy red sports car with the latest girl singer and we were on our way to the final stop of this arduous tour.

It was a posh country club in Baltimore. It had good acoustics and the band sounded great. The people were well dressed and polite and danced or listened with obvious delight. No more

tobacco warehouses till the next tour! Tomorrow we were going home and would soon be nestled in the bosoms of our loved ones, safe from the perils of the road and crazy band leaders.

We had a great Manny Albam arrangement of *Gone with the Wind*. It began with eight bars of improvised soprano sax by the Mab. Frank Rehak decided to play along with Charlie's improvisation, which by now was a set piece. As we approached letter-A, the veins started to stick out on Charlie's neck. He waved Frank out but Frank dogged every turn of phrase and nuance as he aped Charlie's solo. Charlie started to get very red. Sweat poured out of his twisted forehead as he frantically waved at Frank, who was not to be deterred. As we hit letter A, Charlie turned and attacked the trombone section. Slides flew everywhere as people screamed and ladies fainted. Charlie got off a right cross to Frank's head. Frank countered with a vicious uppercut. Boom! Bang! Crash! The sax section went into *Tea for Two* cha-cha-cha. A wonderful accompaniment to the *bagarre* that raged in the 'bone section. We didn't get paid that night, because Charlie stormed out and away. We eventually got our bread. Mab never stiffed a musician.

On Charlie's next tour, I was hired to play lead alto. Charlie had commissioned Billy May to do a new book, this time with one alto, two tenors and two baritones. Great sound! Mouse Bonad played the extra bari chair and doubled alto on the older charts that required two. Actually he was primarily an alto player, out of New Orleans, and he was a great one. This band traveled by bus and the wheels never touched the ground. It was here that I first learned the art of urinating out of a bus going 80 mph. Try learning that in Berkeley.

I had just done my first album for Prestige Records with Jon Eardley, who was also on Mab's band. Charlie gave us a spot in the show to showcase and promote the new album. Quite a lovely thing to do, and I've always appreciated his support.

I was on leave of absence from Juilliard. My grades were good and all I had to do was play my final exam for graduation. This period coincided with our gig at the Apollo theater in Harlem. We did seven shows a day and I had timed my exam in one of the slots when they ran the movie and shorts and coming attractions. I was preparing the Mozart concerto for clarinet, the Brahms F-minor, and three unaccompanied pieces by Stravinsky. I would practice between shows, and I was ready!

Unfortunately I was also stupid. On the day of my exam I left my clarinet in the dressing room during the first show. When I got off, it was gone. Freddy the Freeloader said if I gave him fifty bucks, he could get it back. So, in a panic, I asked Mab for a draw. He asked me if I knew what the hell I was doing. But he gave me the bread. So now I'm out the clarinet and fifty bucks.

I postponed my exam. I told my teacher what had happened, but he was no help whatever. So I went back to the Apollo and finished the gig and I haven't unpacked since.

— Phil Woods