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On Your Own

It is ever more obvious that if good music, and indeed good art in general, is to survive, it will have to be through distribution apart from the major conglomerates that now control them.

The successes of the jazz education movement over the course of the past three decades have been remarkable. But it has long troubled thoughtful teachers in the field that the colleges and universities have been turning out thousands on thousands of musicians with the highest professional credentials and no place to work. The problem is that the system has been training musicians but hasn't been training the audience. With the gradual exclusion of all forms of good music from America's radio stations, this natural medium of education — so incredibly effective in the 1930s and '40s — has played a constantly diminishing role in American musical life. Such efforts as the excellent jazz history course presented by Grover Sales at Stanford University, a course aimed at educating not musicians but the audience, are like far-apart beacons in the cultural night.

The European vision of jazz in America is a limited one, confined to perceptions of musicians who make records and travel abroad. This makes jazz look more or less like a New York City phenomenon. But it isn't. There have *always* been excellent musicians all over America who for one reason or another don't try for the "big time". Jack Teagarden's admiration for the Texas pianist Peck Kelley was fully justified, in the opinion of everyone who heard him, but Kelley hardly ever left the Houston area. He recorded very little and then only late in life. Given the effectiveness of the jazz-education movement, America's cities and towns have all sorts of fine jazz musicians who support themselves playing other kinds of music or even in professions other than music, and go back to jazz when they get the chance.

Jazz was always a music on an adventurous course of exploration, a music with its mind (and minds) always looking to the future. That has been almost completely reversed in recent years, with repertory orchestras "recreating" jazz classics of the past.

The record industry contributes to this process. Much of the current jazz catalog comprises reissues of the work of artists of the past, most of them dead. It is what one musician I know calls "jazz necrophilia". Of the "newer" performers, most of the emphasis is on the bigger-name "young lions" the industry has by assiduous publicity pushed to the fore. Many of them are not even very good. We have nothing resembling the creative ferment that characterized jazz when Orrin Keepnews ran Riverside Records, Francis Wolff and Alfred Lion owned Blue Note, Creed Taylor was producing for Impulse, then Verve and later his own CTI. Norman Granz owned a succession of labels, including at the last, Pablo. Richard Bock owned Pacific Jazz and then several others. All of them have been bsorbed by the major labels, with the exception of Fantasy, which itself absorbed Prestige, Riverside, Pablo, Contemporary, and several more. (Though it is a big company with multiple labels, Fantasy is the only major label without international conglomerate ownership.)

Those days are gone.

The situation is paralleled in the Broadway musical theater, which presents reworked masterpieces such as *Show Boat* or the trash of Andrew Lloyd Webber.

There are similar problems in book publishing, which is not surprising; much of that industry is owned by the same conglomerates that own the major record companies.

The formidable bassist Anthony Cox, after six years of life in New York, recording and touring with Elvin Jones, John Faddis, Geri Allen, Dewey Redman, and others, returned to Minneapolis, where he grew up, to live. In an interview with writer Tom Surowicz, published in the Winter 1997 issue of the magazine *Midwest Jazz*, Cox expressed dismay with a narrow and conformist "bop-is-where-it's-at" outlook in bookers, radio programmers, and record companies.

"I just find it boring, the way jazz is marketed in the U.S.," Cox told Surowicz. "It's different in Europe, you see all kinds of groups. But here at home it's pretty much the same artists on Concord, Verve, and Columbia. It's the same style of music, and it brings out the same audience with the same mentality. It's just flat, it's not exciting to me. And it's really not reflecting what's going on. Even ten years ago, the music was far more diverse than that. It's like corporate music. Personally, I hate it. I'm dead set against this whole conservative movement, this Lincoln Center shit, trying to codify what jazz is. It's all the industry people, and a few individual musicians, who are controlling the taste of everybody."

The record industry reflects little if any desire to break new ground or help develop the talents and reputations of those who might have something valuable to say. This change first was apparent in the 1960s. Joe Rene, then a producer at RCA, told me that in the past he had been allowed two or three years to develop gifted new singers. Now the accountants and lawyers who were gradually assuming control wanted immediate return. Thus such superb singers and Ethel Ennis, Marge Dodson, and Marilyn Maye got started at major labels — and then got dropped.

Now we have reached the point where gifted people, both young and old, have to do it themselves: that is to say, finance and produce their own records, largely sold by mail-order or at whatever live performances the players can drum up. This is going on all over the country. Some of the CDs they make are far fresher than those from the mainstream record industry.

One of the pioneers of mail-order jazz is Mike Longo, who was Dizzy Gillespie's pianist for many years and one of his close friends. In 1970 Mike founded what has grown into Consolidated Artists Productions. One of its CDs, under Mike's leadership, features associates of Dizzy, including Frank Wess, Jimmy Owens, and James Moody. It is titled *I Miss You John*. Another by Mike, *The Earth Is But One Country*, features Dizzy on the title track,

and yet another called *New York '78*, features Mike, Slide Hampton, Curtis Fuller, Randy Brecker, and Jon Faddis, among others. One CD, by an outstanding young guitarist named Adam Rafferty, is titled *First Impressions*. Another is *A Night to Remember*, recorded in concert by Toots Thielemans and Clark Terry in Birmingham, Michigan. The catalog now has 22 CDs.

The most ambitious is a three-CD set, *Another Jewel in Dizzy's Crown*, by the legendary Dizzy Gillespie big band that toured the middle east in 1956 and, a few months later, South America, under cultural-exchange sponsorship by the U.S. State Department. It was co-produced by Dizzy and Dave Usher.

Phil Woods was in that band, with Benny Golson, Nelson Boyd, Walter Davis, Billy Mitchell, Carl Warwick, and Lee Morgan. Usher taped the band in various South American cities. Phil Woods remembers one in particular: "The band arrived in Montevideo at 10 a.m. on a cold banana boat from Buenos Aires. Nobody met us and the band was messed up. We struggled, carrying our own stuff to the hotel. Where was everyone? We wanted to eat and sleep after a heavy hang on the boat. We assumed the concert was that night. It wasn't. It was at 10 a.m., and the whole town was waiting patiently for the band. And that was the best concert that band every gave. Try and figure!"

"All our projects are financed by the artists themselves," Mike Longo said. "Consolidated Artists Productions is a co-operative whose purpose is to *distribute* what the artists produce.

"This is the *only* way we are going to get anything done"

You can send checks for $15 (ask Mike for the price on the 3-CD set) for any or all of the aforementioned to **Consolidated Artists Productions, care of Mike Longo, 290 Riverside Drive # 11D, New York NY 10025.** Mike will also send you the catalog.

One would never think that an artist of the stature of Benny Carter would find it valuable to set up his own label, but Benny has done so in association with Ed Berger, one of the three authors of the two-volume biography-discography *Benny Carter: A Life in American Music*, published by Scarecrow Press and the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers. Benny Carter is one of the towering figures in jazz history, one of the music's major pioneers, and one of its most exquisite exponents even now, in excellent health at the age of ninety. Surely one of the standard trade-book publishers could have grabbed this book, assuring if not massive distribution at least more exposure than it is likely to get under academic sponsorship. But writers face the same problems these days that musicians do, and self-publishing is a growing trend.

But if Carter can get a record contract, there are other major musicians who can't, young and old alike. Joe Wilder, for example. Carter and Berger have set up Evening Star Records, whose name derives from one of Benny's tunes. The catalog at this point contains only four packages, all excellent. Berger is the producer, Benny the executive producer.

The flagship of the four is a two-CD package with Phil Woods and Benny, *Another Time, Another Place*. Recorded live at the Regattabar in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in March 1996, this outstanding album has a rhythm section comprising Sherman Ferguson, drums; John Lockwood, bass, and Chris Neville, piano.

Benny is very high on Neville, who is a Bostonian. Another of the Evening Star albums is devoted to Neville. It is a trio album with Lockwood, bass, and the late Alan Dawson, drums. Benny is a guest on several tracks. The album, recorded in 1993, is titled *From the Greenhouse*. Neville is everything Benny claims.

Then there are CDs by Joe Wilder, surely the most under-rated trumpet player in jazz. An affinity between Wilder and Carter is hardly surprising. They have similar qualities, including exquisitely refined taste and very centered pitch. Wilder played with the New York Philharmonic and in 1968 became principal trumpet with the Symphony of the New World. And this was while pursuing [illegible] estimable career as a jazz player. Wilder's problem, to coin a phrase, is an unwillingness to blow his own horn. Wilder has gone his own quiet way. He's a lot like Hank Jones in refined technique and elevated taste. Maybe it just doesn't pay to be a gentleman. Sherman Ferguson said Wilder never took off his jacket and tie while they were recording *Alone with My Dreams*. As Ed Berger aptly observes in the liner, it's hard to believe that this is Wilder's first album as a leader in 30 years.

The second Wilder album for Evening Star features, among others, Seldon Powell, whose work in the New York studios has precluded jazz recording to such an extent that he could be called Seldom Seldon. I wish there were a lot more of him on records. Wilder, again, plays impeccably.

You can order any or all of these four packages from **Evening Star Records, PO Box 338, Pennington, New Jersey, 08534.** The singles (Neville and the two Wilder CDs) are $17 postpaid, the double set with Benny and Phil Woods $22 postpaid.

Another co-operative has been set up in the Pacific Northwest. D[illegible] Lanphere sent me a copy of the group's catalog, which is very nicely designed. The group's name is PSjamCO, an acronym for Pugent Sound Jazz Marketing Cooperative.

The Pacific Northwest has a thriving jazz movement, one of the healthiest in the country. This was given further impetus when quite a number of established jazz musicians, among them Bud Shank, Leroy Vinnegar, Ernestine Anderson, and Dave Frishberg, settled there.

Chuck Metcalf, a bassist who is president of PSjamCO, says in a foreword to the catalog, "There is so much talent here (compared to the public's willingness to pay to hear it) that resident musicians often lack the support and recognition they deserve despite the best efforts of local enthusiasts.

"In the late '80s, after contemplating others' difficulties getting onto the small labels that are the last hope of 'unknowns' from distant provinces, Dan Greenblatt and I were among the first to decide to self-produce a jazz CD. Soon others followed. By the

mid-90s, we realized that there were some 50 or so of these projects extant in the Pugent Sound region. We also, early on, came to realize that we simply didn't have the resources (mainly time) to effectively market the fruits of our labor. We reasoned that others must share our predicament. Why not, then, band together to do what we couldn't individually?

"About a year ago we queried our peers, propounded a proposal to form a co-operative corporation, jumped through the bureaucratic hoops, and — voila! — PSjamCO."

Some of these CDs are by young performers I've never heard of. On the other hand, one of them features Bud Shank on alto saxophone, Don Lanphere on soprano and tenor, and Denny Goodhew on baritone. This album classically illustrates both the dilemma of getting a fresh recording made and the richness of "regional" talent that remains quite unknown to most jazz fans.

I had never heard of Denny Goodhew, an alto player by background who plays baritone on this CD. He is every bit as good as Lanphere told me was. Don did the saxophone writing.

The rhythm section comprises three more musicians I'd never heard of. And, as is so often the case in these "regional" recordings, the credentials of the players are impeccable. Marc Searles is a pianist of exquisite touch and tone and a lovely lyricism. He is head of jazz studies at the University of Washington. Bassist Doug Miller is simply an excellent player who spent brief periods with Basie and Ellington before settling in the Pacific Northwest. Drummer John Bishop is an alumnus of the University of Oregon and North Texas University, formerly North Texas State.

The CD is very fresh, due in part to writing by Searles, and superbly played. I have no idea how Goodhew sounds on alto, but he plays exciting baritone, and Lanphere's playing, like Bud Shank's, has simply grown with the years.

Curiously enough, this record is probably easier to find in England than it is here. It was issued on the Scottish label Hep. The easiest way to get in the U.S. is to write for it and the others just mentioned: **PSjamCO, 1202 E. Pike St., # 994, Seattle WA 98122.** The price for the CDs in the catalog is $15 postpaid.

Another fixture of the Pacific Northwest is the much-admired (particularly for his harmonic conception) pianist Jack Brownlow, native of Spokane and resident now of Seattle. Despite a background that goes back to a period with the Boyd Raeburn band, Brownlow is virtually unknown outside the Northwest, except to musicians such as Randy Brecker who hear him when they're in town. Until recently, he'd never been recorded. Urged by his friends (including writer Doug Ramsey) he put out a CD on his own label, Bruno, in a trio format, titled *Dark Dance*. You can get it for $15 by writing to **Bruno Records, 2319 North 65th, Seattle WA 98103.** There are really fine performances of standards and two of his own pieces, *Dark Dance* and *For Evans' Sake*, which belong in more repertoires.

One of my favorite singers is Chicago's Audrey Morris. Audrey had a brief shot at a national recording career, but as record-company interest in good songs and singers waned — that is to say along about the time Marilyn Maye and Ethel Ennis and others were getting dropped — she lapsed back into being a regional favorite, usually to be found in some *intime* Chicago club, playing her elegant piano and singing great songs with unaffected simplicity and expressive grace. Audrey has done two CDs, titled *Film Noir* and *Afterthoughts*, for her own label Fancy Faire. *Film Noir* is sold out, but there are still copies of *Afterthoughts* available. The CDs are $15. And she has just recorded a new CD, which should be out soon. You can write to Audrey care of **Fancy Faire Records, PO Box 46125, Chicago IL 60646-0125.**

Which by a sort of enharmonic change brings us to **Laissez Faire Records, PO Box 667, Stroudsburg PA 18360.** This is run by Bob Dorough and his partner, guitarist and composer Stuart Scharf, and the most eminent asset of the company is Bob himself.

Bob's singing is a special taste, but he is assuredly one of my favorites, whether doing material by other writers, such as *I'm Beginning to See the Light*, or his own writing, such as his *I've Got Just About Everything* or the incredibly clever *I'm Hip* which has Dave Frishberg's lyrics and Dorough's music (it is a tribute to Dorough's gift that this one was written lyrics first) or *Small Day Tomorrow*, words by Fran Landesman and music by Dorough. Funny, quirky, poignant, Dorough's work is just brilliant. The catalog includes more recent productions as well as older albums now on CD, picked up when the originating labels let them lapse. These include *Beginning to See the Light*, which contains the aforementioned songs. Write to Bob or to Stuart Scharf at the Stroudsburg address.

For big-band lovers, there's Pete Petersen's Collection Jazz Orchestra of Dallas, Texas. This is an excellent and very large band — six trumpets doubling fluegelhorns, five trombones with bass trombonist Eric Swanson doubling tuba, six saxes, and four rhythm. This produces one hell of a sound. An album by this band, recently released, titled *Night and Day*, suggests the depth of jazz in the forgotten hinterlands. The arrangements are by such fine writers as John Oddo and Sammy Nestico. But some of the freshest and most interesting charts are by Dave Zoller, who is also the band's pianist. Dave may well be the most under-known and under-appreciated arranger in the country. He wrote five of the 11 charts, including those on his own compositions *Dr. Bob* (the reference is to Bob Brookmeyer) and *Exit Only*. The leader and producer of the session is the band's baritone player, Pete Petersen. He recently retired as an American Airlines pilot. One of the fine tenor players in my experience was an Argentine airline pilot who was sitting in at a session I attended in Buenos Aires. He said there was no money in jazz; he played on his spare time, and for pleasure. (A lot of musicians have also been pilots, including Frank Trumbauer — a test pilot for the military in World War II —

Buddy Childers, Gerry McKenzie, Johnny Smith, Percy Heath and Allyn Ferguson. Heath and Ferguson flew fighters in World War II. In Toronto, Clint Ward, retired as an Air Canada pilot (and flew Mustangs in the RCAF), is thinking of going back to arranging and trombone.

The Pete Petersen band is made up mostly of alumni of North Texas State University. And of course, they find it impossible to make a living playing jazz in Dallas. "They play shows, circuses, hotels, whatever they have to," Pete said. "I have so much respect for these guys."

Pete still flies — on private contracts for business. "I fly to pay for the band," he said cheerfully.

The album sells for $15, including postage and handling, which seems to be the standard in all of these projects. You can write to **Pete Petersen, 409 Royal Colonnade, Arlington TX 76011.**

Dave Zoller is probably the least-known first-class arranger in America. His work is fresh and personal, and he writes as well for small groups as for big band. He too has been pressed to produce his own albums. One I would strongly recommend, available directly from the **Jazzletter**, is *Love Song to a Genie*, by the sextet with which he has been working for some time in Dallas. The players are uniformly excellent. Most of them are alumni of North Texas University, the old NTSU.

Zoller is originally from Ohio. After studies at several universities, he settled in 1969 in Dallas. The rhythm section of Zoller's sextet (himself on piano, Chris Clarke, bass, and Bobby Breaux, drums) toured during the 1980s as Al Hirt's rhythm section, spending a good deal of time in New Orleans. Clarke is NTSU and a former student of Richard Davis. Bobby Breaux is a graduate of Loyola University, and has a considerable professional background, including time with Woody Herman. He is a teacher and contractor. Trombonist Chris Seiter is also NTSU. He has worked with Woody Herman, Mel Lewis, and more. He too teaches. Rod Booth, trumpet, is also NTSU, and a Woody Herman alumnus. Randy Lee, who plays alto, tenor, and flute on this recording, also attended NTSU. He has worked with Frank Sinatra and Doc Severinsen and freelances extensively in Dallas. But his jazz playing, according to Zoller, has not been extensively heard on record until this CD. And it certainly deserves to be.

This, then, is the quality of musician you find in Dallas. Like their colleagues in the Pacific Northwest, they complain about lack of audience interest. But Dallas is a good town to live in, and so they stay there, largely unknown outside that bailiwick.

All the compositions are Zoller's. And they are not tunes, simple heads, played in unison and then opened up for blowing. They are through-composed, and some of the most interesting examples of integration of both writing and improvisation you're likely to come across. His writing is harmonically adventurous and protean, reflecting all sorts of styles, including Brookmeyer and Mingus. But this album has strong roots in what some think of as 52nd Street Swing, despite its harmonic and melodic modernism. Dave produced the album and put it out on his own DPZ label.

Yet another musician to venture into self-production is, surprisingly, Roger Kellaway, who is hardly without international reputation. Significantly, Roger said to me a year or so ago, not long after he moved to Ojai, "We've got to stop waiting for things to happen, and make them happen." And in December, 1995, he simply recorded a solo album of his own pieces and put it on his own label, Chintimani, a Sanskrit word meaning mind-jewel or consciousness. He called the album *Soaring*, and the title is most appropriate. That's what he does, soars.

Kellaway is one of the greatest pianists in jazz, and the most idiosyncratic, bringing into his work a huge knowledge of 20th Century "classical" composition. What is heard here is an aspect of his invention that the public isn't too familiar with, although I am due to our long friendship and extensive professional collaboration. I've heard him do this kind of thing by the hour, in what amounted to private recitals. His playing at such times is pensive balladry, free reflections on themes, and since he is a great composer, these themes are always interesting.

I'm not sure this album should even be called jazz. It is much in keeping with what I told Gerry Mulligan — the last time I heard him — his music seemed to have become: late 20th Century improvised classical music. And that's how I would describe the Kellaway album. This is a private pressing. Only 1,000 were made, and there are 200 of them left.

And of course, my own CD is still available. It contains two of the songs Roger and I wrote together, *Tell Me My Name* and *I Love to Make Things Grow.* The musicians include Don Thompson on piano, Neal Swainson on bass, Barry Elmes on drums, Rick Wilkins or Mike Murley on tenor, and Guido Basso on trumpet and fluegelhorn. The musicians sounded so good, after we had been working together for a week, that I felt I had to get them on tape.

The Zoller sextet and Kellaway albums, as well as my own, are available from **The Jazzletter, PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240.** The price is the standard one, $15, including postage. For all of the others, please go to the sources, as listed.

There is one fundamental, and I certainly hope not fatal, flaw to these projects. It is very hard to market music by mail unless it is already known to the audience. When Stan Kenton started his own direct-marketing operation, Creative World, he was selling a major international name, his own. But it is difficult to sell newcomers, no matter how gifted, to those who have never heard, or even heard of, them. Given what appears to be an intelligent and concerted marketing effort, an operation like PSjamCO, Longo's Consolidated Artists Productions, and others, I would suggest, should consider making sampler CDs of the various performers on their rosters to be sold at minimal price, or even as loss-leader promotions, to generate future business. Certainly they cannot hope for help from the radio industry, whose presentation of music and

above all of good music shrinks exponentially.

The time may be approaching — indeed, I think it is already here — when some sort of consolidation of all these excellent efforts can be achieved in order that these entrepreneurs and windmill-tilters can be enabled to help each other.

In the meantime, my heart is with them, and I would entreat your support for their valiant efforts.

Jazz Lives

Remember the photo book I did with John Reeves, *Jazz Lives*? For newer readers, I should explain that it contains photos of 100 jazz musicians, ranging in age from the eldest, including Spiegle Willcox, Doc Cheatham, and Benny Carter, down to some of the youngest, such as Christian McBride and Chris Potter. I wrote the text. When the book was published, every subject in it was alive, excepting Jeri Southern, who died while it was at the printer. Now a number of our subjects are gone, including Dizzy Gillespie, Shorty Rogers, and Gerry Mulligan.

John Reeves is one of the world's great photographers, and his black-and-white closeups of all these persons, reproduced strikingly in duotone, seem to reveal their very souls. Some of John's pictures have appeared in the Jazzletter.

(A lot of jazz fans have obtained autographs of its subjects on the pertinent pages. I wish I'd had the brains to do that.)

Thinking some readers might want copies, I bought up the book's small remaining inventory. The price is $40 U.S., including postage, from **The Jazzletter**. When they're gone, they're gone.

Budd
by Jeffrey Sultanof

Jeff Sultanof is an arranger, conductor, and music editor whose current work involves restorations of Robert Farnon scores, being done with Bob's co-operation. And, with the help of Gil Evans' widow Anita, Jeff has been editing for publication (by Hal Leonard) many of Gil's scores, as well as those of Gerry Mulligan.

The name Budd Johnson may not reverberate in one's conscious like the names of Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Teddy Wilson, Earl Hines, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Eckstine, Tadd Dameron, Thelonious Monk, and Gil Evans, but Budd made music with all of them, taught some of them, and wrote for many more.

Budd was a pioneer — maybe not a great individual influence like Miles, Dizzy, or the Bird, but a key figure who caused music history to be made. He was part of every jazz path from the 1920s through the '60s. Those who heard him play or listened to his writing knew that he was one of the best. His music covered a lot of road miles. Those who knew him personally experienced a happy big bear of a man who showed little pain and had a ball making the music he loved. He blew his tenor all over the midwest and southwest before the big-band era began, encouraged and jammed with the boppers when their language was forming, played in Gil Evans' "comeback" band at the Jazz Gallery, and helped guide Quincy Jones when the latter led a band on the road.

In 1977, I got to know him, hang out with him, and even write an arrangement for him.

In February of 1995 I went looking for an arrangement I wrote back in my college days. I haven't kept much of my writing from that time. I dismissed it as a lot of crap when I moved out of my parents' house a long time ago. But I kept this arrangement, because it was surrounded by a memory. I kept it because Budd Johnson played solo soprano saxophone on my version of *Star Dust*.

I found the arrangement, started singing it in the quiet of my workroom, and heard that beautiful horn again. And I remembered what my thoughts were when the band played it through and I conducted. This was the same man who blew with Armstrong, heard Bennie Moten's band with a young Bill Basie, jammed at cutting contests with Coleman Hawkins, who was there when the music was developing, and who knew the creators of the new sounds.

I once asked Budd a question that caused him to launch into a diatribe against historians. It seemed he had been questioned by a jazz historian, and in the middle of their talk discovered that the guy was taping him without telling him. "Now I'm saving all that stuff for *my* book!" he'd say. He never did write a book of his own. I asked him about his early days, the talented musicians who never received their due, the territory bands he heard that never recorded, such as the Nat Towles band. It was amazing that he remembered all this so clearly. I began to understand that for the men who were still alive, who'd driven countless miles and nearly starved during the worst of the Depression, the men who made that glorious music would always be alive.

Both Budd (named Albert) and his brother Keg (named Frederic) were born in Dallas, Keg in 1908, Budd two years later. Both of them studied music with Booker T. Washington's daughter. Budd was on the road at the age of fourteen, playing drums. Eventually Budd would play clarinet, soprano, tenor, and baritone saxophones.

One of the many things I learned about musicians of that era is that quite a few of them played instruments from families other than the ones for which they were known. Benny Goodman and the Dorsey brothers could play trumpet, many saxophone players doubled on violin, and Murray MacEachern, Dean Kincaide, and Don Redman were arsenals of sound. In Texas, Budd and his brother played in the Gene Coy band. Budd met a young pianist and violinist who loved Budd's playing and asked Budd to show

him the rudiments of the saxophone. The young man soon joined Budd in the reed section of the Gene Coy band. His name was Ben Webster.

Budd was in Kansas City with the George E. Lee orchestra back in 1929, when the Moten band and the Walter Page Blue Devils were the hot attractions of the area. The Lee group was Moten's main rival, and by all accounts was a pretty hot band, with lots of showmanship. Budd is on the four sides the band cut for Brunswick. About this time Keg told Budd of a family band in Minneapolis whose young alto player had just switched to tenor. "He sounds something like you," Keg said. The saxophonist was Lester Young.

Budd later teamed up with Teddy Wilson in Chicago, and they joined Louis Armstrong's orchestra. But Budd's first important recognition in the jazz world came as saxophonist, composer, arranger, part-manager, and talent scout for the Earl Hines orchestra. Soon after he joined the band in 1935, he proceeded to bring in musicians who later became legends. One of these was trumpeter Freddie Webster, cited as having one of the most gorgeous sounds in the history of jazz, and an influence on Miles Davis. Webster made several sides with Sarah Vaughan in 1946, a year before he died. He had gone to high school in Cleveland with Tadd Dameron, and the Hines band played some of Dameron's early arrangements. It was Budd who found Billy Eckstine and brought him to Hines, and it was Eckstine who first told Budd of a young alto player who, he said, was as hot as Benny Carter. Budd later said he tried to get Charlie Parker in the Hines band as early as 1939, but Parker turned the offer down.

Budd always seemed to be where the action was. He'd heard Buster Smith in Texas as early as the 1920s and confirmed to me that Buster was the real influence on Bird. Budd heard Kenny Clarke in 1936 in Dayton, Ohio. He said that Clarke was "dropping bombs" even then. Budd was a constant reminder that bebop was hardly revolutionary, that the elements of the style were all over the place, waiting to be unified by Dizzy and Bird.

Budd left the Hines band before Dizzy and Bird joined it in 1943. He freelanced as an arranger and such leaders as Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Woody Herman, Tony Pastor, and Georgie Auld had Johnson arrangements in their books. Budd was there when the Boyd Raeburn orchestra was making the transition to modern jazz, and he built up that band's book too.

He joined Dizzy Gillespie in a small combo at the Onyx Club on 52nd Street in 1944. Like Coleman Hawkins, he was a veteran jazz musician who welcomed the new music and added some touches of his own. Reportedly it was Johnson who initiated the practice of playing the head in unison instead of in harmony, further distancing bop from the practices of the swing era.

When Billy Eckstine was starting his own band, he wanted to bring Budd in as his partner. The William Morris agency nixed the deal, but Budd was called to become musical director for Dizzy Gillespie, who was leaving Eckstine to form his own big band.

Budd went back on the road, cleaned up the band (he told me that the entire saxophone section was on drugs) and created a fabulous bebop-and-ballad machine. Recordings made for the Armed Forces Jubilee program are the only indication we have of how powerful that band really was. Budd's solo on *Blowing the Blues Away* is absolutely breathtaking.

When the 1950s brought major changes to American music, Budd remained as busy as ever. He wrote arrangements for Dizzy when the latter toured with the Stan Kenton Band. Budd had known Kenton for a long time. He was chief arranger for the Gus Arnheim band when Kenton was the band's pianist; Kenton at that time wanted to study with Budd. In the late 1950s, Budd played in Maynard Ferguson's Birdland Dream Band, and in a wonderful Benny Goodman all-star unit. After a gig at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, the band went on a tour of the Far East sponsored by the State Department.

Budd was especially proud of his association with Gil Evans. He is a featured soloist on Gil's albums *Great Jazz Standards* and *Out of the Cool*. His solos on *Chant of the Weed*, *Theme*, and *La Nevada* are timeless, modern yet traditional, smoking yet cool.

He joined the pit band that Quincy Jones put together to tour in Europe with the show *Free and Easy*. Budd's solos from this period show that he was continuing to absorb new sounds. You can hear them in his solo on *Segue in C* recorded at Birdland when he was a member of the Count Basie band. The following years saw him back with Earl Hines, then leading a quartet, and working with various ensembles led by major jazz figures. In 1977, he led the student jazz band at Queens College (City University of New York) for a semester.

Queens College now has a jazz program led by Jimmy Heath. But when Budd was there, the best that could be said for the jazz program was that it was erratic. As much as they may have wanted a jazz program, there was just no money for it. One year saxophonist and arranger Frank Foster was leading the band and teaching arranging. I had the good fortune of assisting him in both responsibilities, and I used to cut classes to hang out with him. And why not? I was learning more in his company than in the classroom. When Frank left to tour with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis band, I suggested that we get Ernie Wilkins to take Frank's place. Saxophonist Charles Williams called on my behalf and Ernie came down to hear the band as I conducted. He was interested in teaching us, and I spent a wonderful hour or so hanging out with him and looking forward to working with and learning from him. When I registered for his classes, I found out that they'd been cancelled. I was so angry that I withdrew from the school's social life for a while and spent my time at the library. I have racked my brain for the specific memory, but all I can recall now is that someone stopped me in the hall a few months later and told me that Budd Johnson was now leading the jazz band.

I'd met Budd in 1976 at some East Fifties jazz club that's no longer around. Frank Foster was playing that night. I remember

looking around the room between sets and seeing Budd at one of the tables. I was painfully shy at the time, and though it was not easy, I mustered my courage and walked over. He was talking to another musician, but he suddenly turned in my direction, flashed a smile, and said, "Hi." I silently thanked him for breaking the ice, introduced myself, and told him I was a fan and loved his recordings with Gil Evans. He said, "Nobody asks me about my playing with Gil. They usually want to talk about Earl."

"Well," I said, "if I wanted to talk about you in that band, I'd rather talk about your arrangements for Billy Eckstine. Did you do the chart on *Skylark*?"

At that Budd lit up. We talked for ten minutes or so until Frank Foster arrived to say hello to Budd. Budd said, "Hey, Frank, you work with this cat? He knows about a lot of my stuff."

"Yeah, Man," Frank said. "Jeff even heard Harlan Leonard."

Laughter all around. Soon it was time for Frank to play again. I shook Budd's hand and retired to my table.

I was remembering all this as I walked up to Budd at a rehearsal at Queens College to ask if he needed a baritone player.

"I know you," he said. "You're the cat at the club when Frank Foster played. You play the bari?"

"Yes, I do."

"You wanna play?"

"If you're leading, hell, yeah!"

I remember the first chart we played was a stock orchestration on *Four Brothers*. To see Budd standing in front of us as leader made me wail. After all these years, I still can't quite believe that I was in a band led by Budd Johnson.

It was around that time that I started to get serious about writing music and making arrangements. I was listening with voracious appetite to all types of music and starting to understand Duke Ellington's genius. I'd heard Johnny Hodges play the soprano sax on a track called *Blue Goose*, playing it repeatedly to bathe in his sound. The tune's A section sounded a lot like *Star Dust*, and it gave me an idea. At the end of our next rehearsal, I asked Budd if I could write something for the band.

"Oh, you write too? What're you gonna write?"

"You may think this strange, but I'd love to write a chart to feature your soprano sax playing, and I'd really like to do something on *Star Dust*."

He said, "You write it, we'll play it. Just let me know the week before, so I'll be sure to bring my horn."

With my head reeling, I went home, forgot about some Wagner course I was taking, and started to write. The arrangement was an *homage* to Ellington as I tried to explore his sound and find myself in the process. I fussed over that chart for I don't know how long, and then showed it to Budd when it was half through. He liked what he saw and wanted me to finish it.

It took seemingly forever. I complained to Budd that not only did I have to write the thing, I had to copy out all the parts.

"Yeah, man. I know what that's like," Budd said. "When I was starting to write in George Lee's band, I was writing a lot of stuff just to hear it and learn what not to do."

"Budd, what did you get paid for a chart?"

"Nothing. I was just learning."

Then he showed me how he wrote his music.

"I wrote out the entire first trumpet part first. Then I wrote out the entire second trumpet part, and so on."

I'd never heard of anyone writing music this way. It reminds me now that many writers think in individual lines instead of by chord. Gil Evans and Tadd Dameron, for example, wrote individual parts that are beautiful to play. Sometimes when the parts are considered as chordal structures, they include notes that are not ordinarily in the stated chord. Let's say the saxes are playing harmonic figures under a melody, and the chord is G7. If you are writing by individual line, you may hear a line making musical sense with an Eb in the part. But Eb does not belong to the chord G7 chord, unless we treat Eb as enharmonic to D#. We would have to call the G7+5 then. But let us say that the melody clearly has a D in it. It is situations such as this that brought out the genius of Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Bill Finegan, Eddie Sauter, Bill Holman, and Bob Farnon: in dealing with such situations, these composers made the resulting sounds make sense. Ultimately, the music sounded so "right". This echoed the history of Western concert music by further extending the musical language of ensemble jazz. Think of Wagner and the famous "Tristan" chord that foretold the music of Debussy, Richard Strauss, and even Alban Berg. Parallel that with Ellington, where one saxophone part has a G and another has a G# in the same chord. The results were often rich and delicious. Then think of all the composers Ellington influenced.

Many of the best big-band arrangers were players in the bands. When you are in the middle of a sax or brass section, you hear individual musical lines from all sides. Is it a wonder that when Budd wrote his arrangements, he made sure that the part first heard by the ear, the lead trumpet, was solid and worked? Then he wrote the second trumpet, making sure that it complemented the other part. And so on. For arrangers who have never done this, it is a great exercise. I tried it only recently. It caused me to think in different ways musically, as well as disciplining my brain to carry an entire arrangement in my head as I focussed on individual parts. When I think that Slide Hampton wrote all those classic complex charts for Maynard Ferguson without scores, it makes my head spin.

One day Budd and I were talking about the bands he'd written for. He had special memories of Boyd Raeburn and how everyone wanted that band to succeed. Budd wrote for it before George Handy arrived, writing very modern scores. The Raeburn library was destroyed by fire at Palisades Park in 1944, so Budd's things are probably lost. I asked him about Johnny Richards. "Oh," he said, "the man who wrote the thirty-second notes." Johnny wrote very musical but very complicated arrangements that were

challenging to play.

More often than not, Budd had glowing praise for his fellow musicians, and he was thrilled when a name came up that he hadn't heard in years. Clyde Hart's name brought a smile.

"A real talented piano player and arranger," he said. "He and I used to work together a lot." Clyde Hart wrote for Andy Kirk's band. He was another veteran who hung out with the boppers and learned the new music. He died of tuberculosis in his mid-thirties. Budd and he used to write arrangements together.

"Budd, what turned you on to bop? How did you get involved with all these young players?"

"I just liked what they were doing. I liked the way Dizzy and Charlie Parker played, so I listened and got into it."

Simple as that. If you're Budd Johnson.

Each of the ensembles at the college was scheduled to give a concert. Usually ensembles played in the prestigious Colden Auditorium. Our concert was given at an odd time of the day in one of the large lecture halls. The acoustics weren't great for a jazz ensemble but at least the band would be heard with Budd leading it. The college made a tape of the concert, which it probably still has. I offered to introduce Budd to the audience, but he wasn't interested.

"But Budd," I said, "these people don't know who you are. They should know what you've done, who you've played with."

"Ah forget it. Don't bother."

I'm still bothered — bothered that the audience didn't know what a giant was in their midst. Some of the players in the band *still* didn't know who Budd was. He'd never actually played with us, so there was even some condescension.

I remember little about that concert except that Budd had written an arrangement of *The Man I Love* for flute and trombone duet featured with the band. The chart was beautiful to play, and the audience, expecting to hear everything played big and loud, became very quiet, listening intently. We ended with *Four Brothers*. After some students blew some choruses, Budd picked up his soprano and wailed two. It was as if he were saying, "All right, you kids. Listen to the man." I looked at the guys in the band. Their faces were priceless. Several jaws dropped. I guess Budd figured that his horn would tell people who he was. He almost convinced me that he had a point.

A week after the concert, my arrangement was ready. I passed out the parts at rehearsal. The moment these guys saw they were going to play *Star Dust*, they started groaning, telling me that my copying sucked. Budd silenced them: "Hey, this boy's got something he wants to say, and we should give him an opportunity to hear what he wrote." Then he called me over.

"Jeff," he said, "come over and tell me what this means."

His fingers pointed to a modulation in the arrangement. Except that the only one making the modulation was Budd. I wrote the passage for only his saxophone and drums.

"I'm the only one playing here?"

"Yeah, Budd. Just you and the drums. Ad lib on the changes and you create the key change."

"Okay, let's blow."

I counted off. The band started playing my reharmonization of the verse. Finally, the sound of that soprano sax came in on top of my arrangement. All these years later, I hear that horn in my ears, and the way Budd sailed over the band. I remember that I had a hard time concentrating on my chart. His improvisation was incredible, liquid and gorgeous. It was like a private present he gave me as the colors swirled in the air. Even though the band's performance was pretty half-hearted, done in a let's-get-it-over-with mood, Budd had a huge smile on his face at the end of it.

After the rehearsal I said to Budd, "Well, I guess that needs some work."

"Some of it was real good, unusual," he said. "I liked your counterpoint in the middle. I wish we had time to play that again. I'd really like the guys to do it justice."

He gave me a lift home that night, really making me feel like a pro. As he dropped me off he said, "Yeah, man, I really want to give your *Star Dust* another shot."

The school year was ending and I heard that he wasn't feeling well, that he was resting up to go on tour when summer started. When he didn't return in September, I put my arrangement in the closet and went on to something else.

I never saw him again.

Shortly before Budd passed on, he and Phil Woods made an album called *The Old Dude and the Fundance Kid* that sums his playing gifts up as well as any one recording could. This was timeless jazz, played by two masters born twenty years apart: one whom Charlie Parker respected and learned from, the other a disciple of the Bird who blazed his own unique path. This is yet another album that got lost in the shuffle of the record business, long unavailable and with no current plans for reissue. That's a shame.

Budd is still with me in the many arrangements he wrote, in the records he made, and in my memory of our talks and laughter. It is not often that one gets to spend time with a musician who personifies the history of 20th century Afro-American music, and I treasure that more than words can express.

I still hear that horn wailing on *Star Dust.*

And I'm glad I never threw that chart out.

— Jeffrey Sultanof

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