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Jazzletter

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

August 1996 Vol. 15 No. 8

Faery Tales and Hero Worship

by Richard M. Sudhalter

The following is reprinted with permission of the author and the newspaper from The Baltimore Sun, *May 26, 1996. The writer is a cornetist, recording artist, former UPI European correspondent, and co-author of a biography of Bix Beiderbecke. His latest book is* Lost Chords: The Contribution of White Musicians to Jazz, 1915-1945, *to be published by Oxford University Press.*

One of my favorite sentences in the current literature on jazz was written by an old friend, British trumpeter-historian Digby Fairweather. It's about Bix Beiderbecke.

Bix, says Digby in *Jazz: The Rough Guide* (Penguin, 754 pages, $24.95), "was a man of enormous talent but meager character or self-discipline, and his creative despair, induced by technical inadequacy and lack of vision, made him take refuge in alcohol."

As a judgment it's a bit severe; but it works, stripping layers of exaggeration and wishful thinking from one of the most over-idealized musicians in our jazz century. Leon Beiderbecke, player of cornet and piano, dead at 28 in 1931, was a brilliant musician, an innovator, much admired; but he was also, as Fairweather reminds us, an autodidact, confined by his shortcomings. He wanted to play "serious" music, yet was a poor sight-reader and short on technique. Though he longed to compose, he knew little about harmonic theory, save what his ears told him.

And, rather than assess himself, redefine his goals, then actively seek the training needed to realize them, Beiderbecke drank himself into the nonjudgmental consolation of an early grave.

In viewing his subject this way, Fairweather is — among writers on jazz, at least — something of a contrarian. Even in our age of demystification, deconstruction, debunking, and disclosive debasement, too many jazz chroniclers still cling to a starry, fairy-tale approach not far from hero-worship. In its most extreme forms it idealizes, canonizes, seems most fascinated with, irresponsible and self-destructive behavior.

Reflection on all this surfaces easily during a look through *But Beautiful*, a collection of pieces on jazz by another Briton, Geoff Dyer (North Point Press, 227 pages, $21). That Dyer knows and loves his subject and its players, at least those whose styles engage him, is beyond question; his treatments (is there another name for the meld of fact and fiction he uses here?) appear based on close association with musicians.

But it's hard to avoid wondering just what aspects of the men and their music appeal to this obviously gifted writer. Dyer's narrative visits the volcanic and violent bassist Charles Mingus; bebop piano pioneer Bud Powell, awash in delusion; an emotionally vacant Chet Baker; a sad, self-pitying Lester Young.

Some, notably Baker and alto saxophonist Art Pepper, are junkies, whose addiction disfigures their lives and those of others around them. In each case, what seems to engage Dyer is the pathology, especially as he hears it reflected in the music these people make. Each musician comes across as a prisoner, a passive victim — of society, racism, the music business, and some other, nameless inner torment.

Anything, in other words, that allows him to avoid personal responsibility to himself, to friends and fellow musicians. Above all, to consensual norms of human behavior. Reading about Mingus, for example, we search in vain for the author's acknowledgement that it is simply not acceptable to knock a trombonist's teeth out because you don't approve of something he played, as Mingus reportedly did to the ever-faithful Jimmy Knepper.

And, too, there is Lester Young. Yes, his army hitch was a personal disaster, and no, he should never have been drafted. But Dyer, in common with countless others who have written about the great tenor saxophonist, seems unwilling to ask one key, nagging, question: if Lester knew about the wartime draft, knew he was eligible, how is it that neither he nor any of his Basie band colleagues failed to realize that if someone didn't do something, didn't actively seek deferral, the military would catch up with him sooner or later?

Dyer portrays the officers of Young's army induction board as "knuckle-faced men who each day subjected their jaws to shaving as if they were boots to be polished." A neat metaphor, nicely turned — but to what purpose? To set up a military straw dog, then demolish it for its failure to reverence Young's special ways? Should we not instead be angry, appalled at Young's own personal irresponsibility — which is, after all, what put him at the Army's mercy?

It all goes back to a particularly resilient bit of mythology, the idea of the "artist" as a creature apart, answerable to no authority save his muse. The jazzman as abstraction, as gnostic figure, privy to divine revelation and driven by forces incomprehensible to ordinary mortals.

That forgives a lot: Charlie Parker's lies and endless conning of friends and benefactors; Billie Holiday's failure to honor personal and professional commitments; Art Pepper's stealing to support his heroin habit.

They couldn't help it, could they? they were artists after all, jazz musicians — and, Dyer says in a long essay at the end of *But Beautiful*, there is "something in the form itself which exacts a terrible toll from those who create it."

But all that fails to address the all-important real issue: how does he or she pay the rent? "Let the writers worry about whether or not you're an 'artist'," the great lead trumpeter Jim Maxwell once told a young, self-absorbed colleague. "You just worry about doing your job right, keeping your audience happy. All those folks out there are paying money they've worked to earn, to hear you play. They don't owe you anything: if anything, you owe them something."

It's not Geoff Dyer's fault, all this jazzman-as-tortured-artist

guff. It's been around a long time, and has deep roots: as soon as hot" players, as they were called back in the 1920s, realized that what they were doing might be something special, they began to regard themselves as an embattled, misunderstood minority.

Early jazz writers, many of them driven by the reformist social imperatives of the 1930s left, portrayed black Americans as the echt proletariat of the class struggle; conflating jazz and the blues, they sought to turn the entire mode of expression into a folk utterance, a cry of protest.

The musician, they implied, couldn't be held accountable for his transgressions. He was fighting for his life against the menacing forces of capitalism, exploitation and discrimination. Life, for him, was uphill all the way.

Dyer truly believes that "a sense of danger — of risk — surrounds the history of jazz." He cites "the high casualty rate of its practitioners," and goes on to note how many leading jazz figures have "suffered some kind of breakdown."

An alternative interpretation might suggest that the solipsistic nature of jazz improvisation has provided a handy excuse for more than a few individuals, however gifted, to avoid the rigors of growing up; to remain instead perpetual adolescents, responsible to no one and nothing, save coaxing a sound out of a horn.

It's a sure-fire prescription, in some at least, for social dysfunction; and that's the part so many "civilians", as jazzmen label those outside their orbit, seem to find so compelling. Would Dyer have been drawn quite as irresistibly to the great trumpeter Henry "Red" Allen, who finished work every night at 4 a.m., came home to his wife's prepared dinner, grabbed a nap on the couch, and was up again in time to cheerfully drive his two grandchildren to school?

What of Benny Carter, Milt Hinton, Gene Krupa, Art Farmer, Budd Johnson, Red Norvo, Louis Armstrong, Benny Golson, Hank Jones, Roy Eldridge, Eddie Barefield, Eddie Miller, Rex Stewart, and the others who led responsible, often exemplary, lives?

Would all those who still find Bix Beiderbecke's self-torture so seductive have cared as much about his no less talented musical partner, saxophonist Frank Trumbauer, who showed up for work sober and on time, lived an orderly home life, stayed married to the same woman for 30 years, raised a family, invested his money? Who believed, above all, that the only way to solve his problems was to face them?

Cause to doubt. Too many writers, otherwise bright and perceptive, seem reluctant to hold jazz "artists" to account for the damage they wreak on themselves, on others, on the very health of the music they play. It's easier to romanticize.

I think Digby Fairweather had it just right: Bix Beiderbecke was prodigiously gifted, but betrayed those gifts through failure (or unwillingness) to realize that they conferred neither privilege nor license, but responsibility. His early death, as those of Young, Parker, Pepper, Powell, Baker, Billie Holiday, Lee Morgan, Albert Ayler, and so many others, was not martyrdom. It was simple waste.

A Fellow of Infinite Jest

By Milt Bernhart

Trombonist Milt Bernhart has had a distinguished career in the bands of Boyd Raeburn, Stan Kenton, and Benny Goodman and the studios of Los Angeles. In recent years, he has owned a travel agency, often booking the trips of his fellow musicians. The following piece turned up on the Internet and is reproduced with Milt's permission.

A musician, younger than I by some years, called me the other night and asked me how well I had known Frank Rosolino. He said he was interested in knowing more about Frank as a private person.

We all know about Rosolino's playing — it stands all by its in style and sound and nobody will ever come close to achieving the Rosolino impact, either trombonistically or personally.

The fellow who called me, it turned out, knew Frank well enough, but is still in the throes of despair over Frank's suicide and the shooting of his two sons. This musician is just searching for someone who might have information that would help explain that entire tragedy. I couldn't help him much. But we talked at length about Frank's talent and about the fact that he had never realized much success as a result of that talent.

Frank was always on the edge of financial doom, and this probably had something to do with his final solution. (Solution?) Among his friends and admirers he was known as the one who kept everyone laughing. The "class clown". Can you imagine the shock, then, when the news came? Stupefied, is what we all were. But my caller advised me that the friendly, funny guy wasn't at all the real Frank Rosolino. Inside, it seems, there was a deep, dark chasm where he really lived. It came out, it seems, on rare occasions, but Frank took pains to cover his insecurities over with a thin layer of bubbling and laughter. In some ways, don't we a

It has to do with being alive. I recommend Steven Sondheim's words to his song *Being Alive*. If somebody promised us Paradise, they shouldn't have. But we move through the depressions and make the most of the pleasures when they come. And that's about it. Life is over soon enough, why rush it? But Rosolino took a gun and put bullets into the heads of his two sons and then himself. And I hate him for it. There. I've said it.

In one crazy moment, he wiped out a precious talent and the future of two kids who hadn't begun the journey. I hate him. He had me fooled.

I had run into him a few months before, and he spoke of his disappointment at not getting calls in Hollywood for studio work.

I said to him in a diplomatic way that studio work wasn't what he was meant to do. He could come out on a stage and make people feel good — and all the while make jazz history. I told him that if I could do that, I'd be out touring, doing it. The world was waiting. He needed a manager, I told him, and he should be on the

lookout for the right person to professionally represent him. Not an easy task, but why not?

Frank looked doubtful, but smiled and thanked me. We hugged, and I never saw him again. I heard that his girlfriend assumed managership. I don't think that was what I meant by professional representation.

It all crashed in one moment of insanity. He owned a gun and, according to my caller, he waved it around now and then. Great.

I ended the conversation by advising my caller that Frank could kill himself, but to take the lives of his two sons (one boy lived for a while, blind) was an act of pure hatred for them. What else could it be? My friend disagreed. He thinks it was an act of love.

Sorry. Not in my book. It wasn't love at all — it was hatred. And in the end (and I think I'll cry now), the entertainer was telling us that we didn't count either. All the laughs, all the jokes, and all the love we gave him in return added up to absolutely nothing. I hate him.

But I wish he were here to cheer me up.

Mandelsongs

Shortly after *Man of la Mancha* became a hit on Broadway, I was talking to Mitch Leigh, who wrote its music. One critic had called Leigh, a well-trained musician who had studied with Paul Hindemith a genius. Leigh was incensed. "Genius!" he sniffed. "I'm no genius. The last genius in music was Schubert."

"How do you define genius?"

"An infinite outpouring of melody," he said.

There are untrained musicians who have the gift, such as Irving Berlin and Harry Warren, and trained musicians who don't.

Henry Mancini, on the other hand, was a trained musician who had it. By contrast, Nelson Riddle, also well-trained, didn't. Michel Legrand's orchestrations are exercises in excess, rather like the prose of Lawrence Durrell, but his melodies are exquisite. Antonio Carlos Jobim had the flair.

So does Johnny Mandel. Johnny has it all.

"For many years I didn't think I could do it," he told me once. What has kept some of his songs from becoming the classics they deserve to be is that they are burdened by bad lyrics. One of the worst is that written by Paul Francis Webster and attached to one of Johnny's finest melodies, *The Shadow of Your Smile*. It's awkward. The melody should have had one by Johnny Mercer.

Mercer had written the lyric for Mandel's *Emily*. Cleverly, since there is no useful rhyme for the name, Johnny used an unfolding pattern of sound at the end: "As my eyes visualize a family, they see dreamily Emily too." Someone in the publishing division of Warner Bros. didn't get it and changed it, and the sheet music went out with "they see Emily, Emily too." A lot of singers have recorded it that way. Johnny was everlastingly annoyed about it.

Emily was written in 1964. "It was the first actual pop song I ever tried to write," Mandel said. "It started life as the main theme of *The Americanization of Emily*, a movie with Julie Andrews. The melody sketched her character. Warner Bros. wanted a lyric. They said, 'Who do you want for a lyricist?' I said, 'Can I have anyone I want?' 'Yeah.' I said, 'We might as well start at the top. That's Johnny Mercer.' Johnny came in and put a wonderful lyric to it.

"It was an effortless type of collaboration. The song became a hit, with a lot of records, and I said, 'This is fun.' I've never looked back since. That's when I became a songwriter."

Then why didn't Mercer write the lyric for the theme from *The Sandpiper?* "Well, you know," Johnny told me once, "the first six notes are the same as the opening of Hoagy Carmichael's *New Orleans*. And I'd written with Hoagy and we were friends, and I couldn't do it. Funny part is, Hoagy asked me why I didn't write that lyric. I told him that the two songs had the same opening. Hoagy said, 'They do? I never noticed.'"

And so the main theme of Johnny's score for *The Sandpiper* — a sort of remake of *Rain* (Les McCann dubbed it *The Sandpaper*) in which the seductress is a hippy painter unconvincingly played by Elizabeth Taylor, the schoolmaster she seduces is unconvincingly played by Richard Burton, and the schoolmaster's wife is unconvincingly played by Eva Marie Saint — doesn't have a Mercer lyric. But it has great scenery and a score to go with it.

In 1964, just before it came out, I got a call from Mandel. He was in New York, to sequence the sound-track album. He asked me to keep him company in the studio, which I gladly did. He told me the picture wasn't too good.

A story circulated that Hugo Friedhofer, when working on *The Best Years of Our Lives*, couldn't think of a thing and so scored a painting in a museum. Hugo denied that: he said that he got the *idea* while looking at a picture.

Rumor had it that Johnny had scored the scenery, not the story, in *The Sandpiper* — glorious vistas of sequestered beaches and water hissing as it slides back down the sand and seabirds crying and great towering conifers and cliffs and flying seaspray. The scenery, Johnny said, was his problem in that film: "You could shoot *Birth of a Nation* against that scenery and it would get lost.

"I had seen a print of the movie. Big Sur is a stretch of glorious mountainous coast just south of Monterey that I'd loved for a long time. I wrote this and that and tore up everything for I don't know how long. I finally got desperate and said, 'The hell with it,' and went off and saw some other movie. I have no idea what it was, except that it was unrelated to the story and it let me forget about writing. I went to an all-night coffee shop and the melody came out boom! in one piece. This was in the days when they didn't play music in restaurants all the time."

And that tune made me realize that Johnny Mandel was not only a great arranger but a great and distinctive melody writer.

Tony Bennett fell in love with *The Shadow of Your Smile* and sang it for the executives at Columbia Records. They said it would never go anywhere; the age of rock was here. Tony persisted and

recorded it, with an arrangement by Mandel. It became a big song for Tony, and one of the most recorded songs in American history, rivalling *Stardust* — some say exceeding it.

One of Johnny's favorites among his own melodies is *A Time for Love*. "Because it just happened. It was written for a movie called *An American Dream*, totally unrelated to the song, which was heard in a nightclub. It's the only song I know with an AABA form where each A phrase has a different chord structure. And they're not interchangeable. You can't switch them around, they don't sound right, even though the melody is the same except at the end. It returns to major going into the last part, but you couldn't use the chords from the first A section. It has to have more of a feeling of finality."

This song too is marred by a Paul Francis Webster lyric. Webster wrote some good lyrics, including *The Lamplighter's Serenade* (music by Hoagy Carmichael), the brilliant *Black Coffee*, and *I Got It Bad and that Ain't Good* (music by Duke Ellington). But he contributed two turkeys to Mandel's catalogue.

Two or three singers have told me they won't do *A Time for Love* because of it, as much as they love the melody. It contains such lines as "leaning out of windowsills." You don't lean out of windowsills, unless you're a stone gargoyle; you lean out of windows. And then there's that bizarre phrase, "admiring the daffodils above." Are the daffodils in the sky? Or is the windowsill that of a lower Manhattan basement flat and the song's character, face to the bars, is looking up at a flowerpot across the street on a higher windowsill? But the oddest line is: "A time for holding hands together." That's as opposed to holding hands separately? That's a paraphrase of Ring Lardner's observation on *Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise*. Is that as opposed to an evening sunrise?

By contrast, Dave Frishberg's lyric for *You Are There*, now 18 years old, is gorgeous. Johnny said, "The title happened 'way after the melody was written. One morning the song came out in one piece, totally intact, and I didn't have to change a thing. I said, 'What is it? It sounds like something out of a show.' Except that it was never in a show.'

"The next step was to get a lyric. Four different writers tried and didn't even come close. Then Dave Frishberg tried and nailed it and it became *You Are There*. When it comes to problem-solving, I don't think there's a better writer than Dave. He can write anything. Most people familiar with his lyrics have no idea that this side of him exists. He's capable of infinite compassion, tenderness, and sensitivity. Most of his work that people hear is so funny and satiric that they don't realize this side of him is there."

I am equally in love with a song Johnny wrote with Alan and Marilyn Bergman in 1987, *Where Do You Start?*

"It was not written for any particular purpose," Johnny said. "I came across a poem, contained within a novel. I can't remember the poem any more. Metrically it set off something that made me want to write a melody to it. The poem itself wasn't a very good lyric, but I set it to music. So I gave the melody, without the poem, to Alan and Marilyn Bergman. And they came up with a lyric, *Where Do Your Start?* What they did might be the best lyric about two people breaking up I've ever heard."

The lyric is brilliant, and the combined effect of words and music makes it one of the greatest songs of the last 50 years.

"One of the nicest parts of song-writing," Johnny said, "is that you get to collaborate with so many talented people. The Bergmans and I have enjoyed a relationship that's lasted over 30 years and is still going strong. Our first song was *Sure As You're Born* in 1966. I had no idea that it would result in this kind of collaboration because it started out as a shotgun wedding.

"The melody was written for a detective thriller with Paul Newman called *Harper*. This was the main theme, a long melodic line with a lot of harmonic and rhythmic action underneath it, to give a feeling of tension, agitation, and motion.

"During the 1950s and '60s there was a period known as the title-song era. It began with *High Noon*, which was tremendously successful. The geniuses who run the studios figured out that a song would increase the box-office revenues, so the rule of the day was that every movie had to have a song. That period produced gems like *The Hanging Tree* and *A Town without Pity*.

"When I'd completed the score for *Harper*, Sonny Burke, who was head of the music department at Warner Bros. said he thought the theme had to become a song. He got in touch with Alan and Marilyn Bergman. Sonny said, 'Come to the office Monday morning. We'll have it.' I did, they were there, and they said, 'Here is the lyric.' Marilyn sang it. And much to my amazement, it fit: I didn't believe you could write to that melody."

The Shining Sea also dates from 1966. "That one has a bizarre story attached to it," Johnny said. "It began as a love theme for *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*. It was written to describe a love scene during a glorious sunset on a beach. When I took the theme to Peggy Lee, who is not only the incredible singer everybody knows but an extremely gifted lyricist, she hadn't seen the movie. She didn't even know it was from a movie. She heard the music and a day later called me back with the lyric. It described exactly what was happening on the screen. I said, 'You won't believe what you did.'

"Being intuitive is probably one of the keys to the greatness of Peggy Lee, and it shows up in her lyrics. She must have sensed something, because when I took her to see a preview of the picture, she couldn't believe it. It was exactly the way she had pictured it."

Another of Mandel's collaborators is Paul Williams, a lyricist I like a lot. They wrote *Close Enough for Love* in 1978. Johnny said, "It's is from *Agatha*, a movie about Agatha Christie, whose life was as labyrinthine as the stories she wrote. The song had to characterize her, and so it takes many turns. It runs from minor into major, it works its way up and winds its way down on each phrase. This first phrase is 12 bars, although it is not a blues by any means. When it's repeated, it's only 11 bars, because I

shortened the ending. It seemed like a stage wait. It didn't seem necessary. Then the bridge goes on its own trip. It goes into major, then resolves. When we needed a lyric, Paul immediately came to mind. Most people don't realize what a lyricist he is. When he got hold of it, he did a marvelous job and it became *Close Enough for Love*, a play on the old expression 'close enough for jazz.'"

It is widely assumed that Johnny's most successful song is *The Shadow of Your Smile*. It isn't. *Suicide Is Painless*, written for the movie *M.A.S.H.*, has that distinction. It dates from 1970.

"When I started writing," Johnny said, "one of the first things I heard from other writers was: You can never tell what's going to happen to a song. You never know where it's going to end up. And this is a perfect case in point.

"The song from *M.A.S.H.* started life as a joke. It was written to be sung during the funny last-supper scene in the original movie *M.A.S.H.*, when the Painless Pole, the dentist, has decided that life is over because he can't perform with women any more and he's going to cash it in. Trapper and Hawkeye give him a knockout pill and he's laid out in a coffin. All his friends are walking around the casket to say good-bye. The song was supposed to be played by one of the GIs on guitar and sung by another. So it had to be simple, kind of dumb, with no more than two or three chords. Robert Altman, who directed the film, and I were sitting around talking about it.

"Altman said it should be called *Suicide Is Painless*. He said he'd like to have a try at a lyric, then came back and said he couldn't do it. He said, 'But I've got an idea. I've got a fourteen-year-old kid who plays guitar and is an idiot.'

"So Bob's son Michael wrote a lyric, using a Leonard Cohen song with about two chords called *The Gambler*, as the dummy. The day before we had to pre-record, I didn't have a melody dumb enough. I got desperate and wrote that melody. They made it the theme of the picture, and it became the theme of the television show, and a very important song for me, bigger than *The Shadow of Your Smile*."

But of course. The long televion series based on the movie still runs on TV around the world, and the airplay money from ASCAP is still coming. Movies are forever, Hank Mancini used to say, referring to royalties. So is a lot of television.

John Alfred Mandel was born in New York City November 24, 1925, one of two siblings. A sister, Audrey, died six years ago.

"My mother was a frustrated opera singer," Johnny said. "My grandparents, who were very Victorian, disapproved. Nice girls didn't go on the stage. My mother was very musical, and she was tremendously supportive. My father was a clothing manufacturer, ladies coats and dresses. He was a gentle soul who loved music, loved jazz. He died of a coronary when I was 11."

Johnny started studying music at the age of 12. "I started trumpet and writing simultaneously," he said. The evidence is that he was precocious at both. When he was 14 he went to bandleader and arranger Van Alexander and asked for lessons.

Alexander, whose mother was a concert pianist, was born in New York City in 1915. Thus he was only ten years older than Johnny, but at those ages, 14 and 24, the gap is enormous. Alexander, educated at Columbia University, arranged for Les Brown, Paul Whiteman, and Benny Goodman. He was 21 when he began writing for Chick Webb in 1936, an arrangement of Fats Waller's *Keeping Out of Mischief Now*. "That's where I met Ella," Van said. In 1938 he wrote the musical adaptation and arrangement for *A-Tisket A-Tasket* that was such a huge hit for Ella Fitzgerald.

"At the time I met Johnny I was arranging for Chick Webb," Van said. "I had just started my own band. I was recording for Bluebird."

(That band lasted from 1938 until 1943, playing New York theaters such as the Paramount and Capitol. Van wrote a number of songs, the best-known of which, at one time a particular favorite of jazz singers, was *I'll Close My Eyes*. After folding his band in '43, he moved to California to write for films and television.)

"Johnny contacted me somehow," he said. "He took quite a few lessons with me. There was a lot of talent. I showed him scores, which he didn't know anything about. He took it from there, and look what he's done. And he always gives me credit!"

"I'll tell you what he did for me," Johnny said. "He started me with charts. Van threw me in the water and let me swim. He told me the most valuable thing you can ever tell anyone in this field. He went over to a closet in his apartment on Upper Broadway and pulled out a record he had arranged, and then got a copy of the score from a pile of papers. It was an old Bluebird record, big stuff to me in those days. It was something called *Hooray for Spinach*. He said, 'This is a score. You can see everything that everybody's playing. Here's what it looks like and here's what it sounds like,' and he played the record. And my eyes bugged out. He said, 'If you can set up an association between what it looks like and what it sounds like, that's the whole trick.'

"After that I went to New York Military Academy, where they had a jazz band." As noted in a previous issue, one of his friends at the Academy, which is up the Hudson River from New York City, was Stumpy Brown, Les Brown's kid brother. Les had gone there 12 years earlier, and the other brother, Warren Brown, had also attended the school, all of them on scholarship.

How did this happen?

"I went on scholarship too," Johnny said. "The school was very big on band in those days. It was a marching band, and the director was a martinet. But he was a good martinet, and I learned a lot."

There was also on campus an active dance-cum-jazz band, led by Stumpy Brown, who remembers that Johnny, then 16, effortlessly took down arrangements the band wanted to play from records. When Stumpy graduated, he turned the band over to Johnny, who led it until he graduated.

"Stumpy graduated in '43, and I graduated in '44," Johnny said. He would have been 19.

"During the summers between my junior and senior years, I went with Joe Venuti's band. Then when I graduated, I played trumpet in the band of Billie Rogers, the girl trumpet player who had been with Woody Herman. A very good musician.

"Then I went into the band Henry Jerome had during World War II, which was full of young guys.

"Before that, I gave up the trumpet. Somehow I discovered I was a petty bad trumpet player. I suppose that happened when I started working with professionals, who played in tune. And I realized I wanted to play trombone. So I played trombone with Henry Jerome, and I never played trumpet again.

"While I was in that band, Leonard Garment and Alan Greenspan were in the sax section. Lenny Garment was studying law and Alan Greenspan was taking economics. When Alan Greenspan left to become an economist, Al Cohn took his place." Both of course have had notedly successful careers, and Greenspan is chairman of the Federal Reserve.

Len Garment takes a certain pleasure in telling of his two weeks playing tenor with the Woody Herman band. "I just wasn't good enough," he said. Woody let him go; years later, when Woody was entangled in terrible tax problems, Garment was one of those who tried to help him, though it was to little avail. Garment was counsel to President Richard Nixon, and now is a prominent Washington attorney. He retains many friendships in jazz, and is widely respected and liked.

It is, I think, a clue to Johnny's character that he has remained friends with all of these early associates, including the Brown family, Len Garment, and Van Alexander.

"After Billie Rogers and went into the great Boyd Raeburn band," Johnny continued.

"Then came the Jimmy Dorsey band. I played first trombone in that band, and first in the Buddy Rich band, because I could play high and I could play jazz.

"Then I went into the Alvino Rey band when it had twelve brass. That was an experience. It was like playing inside a cement mixer. Alvino was a wonderful guy to work for and great fun.

"I took a year off and applied to the Manhattan School of Music. They had never had a jazz musician go there. I filled in a lot of gaps in my knowledge of classical music, fugues, canons, and symphonic analysis. I had always listened to this music, but now it made sense to me and I saw there was more to it than a lot of scales. After Manhattan, I went to Juilliard for a semester."

He also studied with Stephan Wolpe, as did Johnny Carisi, and he was one of that group of gifted young musicians who hung around Gil Evans' bohemian pad behind a Chinese laundry, listening to music and talking, dreaming, planning — John Lewis, Charlie Parker, Lee Konitz, Barry Galbraith, Gerry Mulligan, Johnny Carisi, Gerry Mulligan — that led to what is now called the Birth of the Cool recordings on Capitol. Mandel, however, was not one of the writers for those recordings (possibly because he was in Los Angeles, waiting out his union card). And again, he remained friends with all these early associates.

"I went back to Buddy Rich," he said. "I was in three of Buddy's bands. I started out hating him and ended up loving him.

"I wrote for Buddy and I wrote for Artie Shaw's 1949 band, which had Zoot Sims and Al Cohn and Jimmy Raney in it." That band is remembered by those who heard it as one of Shaw's best; there is fortunately some, but not a lot, recorded evidence that they are right. "I've been listening to Artie a lot lately," Johnny said. "Particularly the period when he had Buddy Rich in the band. I think he was the best, and he's been under-rated.

"In 1948, I moved to Los Angeles, where I'd always wanted to be. The union was very exclusionist, because of all the movie studio work, and it took you six months to get your card. You couldn't work at music at all for the first three months. I worked as a shipping clerk and wrote at night. I wrote a lot for Latin bands, and there were a lot of good ones around. That's how I g so far into Latin music. I've always had a love of Latin music, which is why I got into the bossa nova movement so early.

"I was working as a soda jerk in a drugstore at Hollywood and Vine when Woody Herman's great Four Brothers band came in to play at the Empire Room around the corner. The guys would come around to where I was working to eat — I don't know why, because the food was lousy.

"Poor Serge Chaloff got so embarrassed seeing me as a soda jerk that once he ordered a dollar-ninety-eight dinner and left me a five-dollar tip. But the guys kept coming in to hang out with me, and when I wasn't slinging food, I started to write for Woody. I never wrote as much for that band as I would have liked to."

But a Mandel composition for Woody, *Not Really the Blues*, is one that the Herman bandsmen always loved to play, according to Lou Levy and other of its veterans.

"No sooner did I have my union card than I went right back to New York to work in Chubby Jackson's band, playing not trombone but bass trumpet. After that I went into the studios. I was a staff arranger at WMGM, one of the last, and then I wrote f Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows* in the early days of television. After that I went with the Elliott Lawrence band."

He worked with two other arrangers on *Your Show of Shows*. One of them was Irwin Kostal. "Did we ever learn from him," Johnny said. The other half of the "we" was the third arranger: Billy Byers. "Billy was one of the most fantastic musicians I have known," Johnny said. Billy Byers, trombonist and arranger, is almost unknown to the jazz public, in part because he was content to expend much of his brilliant, indeed legendary talent, writing anonymously for, among others, Quincy Jones. Once, in Jim and Andy's, I asked him why he was content to go nameless, as he did, when musicians universally recognized the scope of his abilities. "Quincy's good at the politics and business part of it," he said. "I just want to do my writing."

"Billy used to write on dachon with ink," Johnny said. Dachon is a smooth-surfaced score paper, sometimes called onion skin. Though it is possible to scrape away a false note with a razor

blade, for all practical purposes writing done it on it with ink is unerasable. Billy had a briefcase containing his tools. It was notorious that, under time pressure, he could sit down anywhere, open his briefcase, set up his two little lights, and start writing. "He didn't use a piano," Johnny said. It was also noted that Billy would, on occasion, write a first trumpet part, then a second, and so forth through the whole orchestra, handing them out as he finished them, remembering what he'd done and never assembling a full score. To be sure, he was not the only one who could do that, but it's a pretty nifty trick.

The advantage of dachon was that it was pre-xeroxed. "It was the only way we could get copies of our scores," Johnny said. "That was before the invention of photocopying.

"There was another way you could erase on dachon, besides the razor blade. You could use a Q-tip and Clorox. I was working on something for *Your Show of Shows* in my apartment in New York. I had a page that was just black with notes. I left the room for a minute or two. When I came back, my cat had knocked over the Clorox, and the page was blank. I went back to writing with pencil, and I've never looked back."

We reminisced some more about the musicianship of Billy Byers, especially his incredible ears.

"I'm not sure he had absolute pitch," Johnny said.

"Yes, he did. He told me about it. And he said he could turn it off. If he was playing trombone in a section, he could turn it on or off, adjusting to the intonation of the band."

"I can do that too," Johnny said. "And I have absolute pitch." This led to a long discussion of persistence of pitch in the memory, too obtuse for inclusion here, but interesting to me. He said he has a solid memory for keys in major, but it becomes less certain in minor. I cannot tell you how much I have learned in conversations with Mandel over the years, a lot of it long since internalized.

"One of the most interesting things about Billy," Johnny said, was his incredible power of concentration. There could be chaos around him, noise, shouting, music, and he could just sit there and concentrate and write. We worked on a lot of things together."

"How did you happen to go with Count Basie? I asked.

"In June, I think it was, 1953, I got a call from Basie to join the band on trombone. I joined the band immediately in St. Louis." He was with the band until November, playing and writing. One of his contributions to the Basie book was *Straight Life* and *Low Life*. "The experience was so wonderful that it seemed that nothing could ever come close to it. So after I left the band, I quit playing. I came out to California."

His departure from playing wasn't quite that abrupt, however. He played bass trumpet for a gig with Zoot Sims at the Haig. *Then* he quit.

His writing was immediately in demand, and his reputation. He wrote an album for Frank Sinatra called *Ring-a-Ding-Ding*, another for Peggy Lee of Liebert and Stoller songs, called *Mirrors*. An album of Jerome Kern songs he arranged for singer David Allen (whom he had known since their days with Boyd Raeburn) remains an exquisite rarity in the collections of connoisseurs.

And he began to get into motion-picture composition, including a particular landmark score. Leonard Feather wrote of him:

"Mandel's reputation as one of the most brilliant young arrangers was enhanced in '58 by his underscoring for *I Want to Live*, considered to be the first successful integration of jazz into a movie score."

Hollywood, of course, has always typecast its talent. And Johnny became known for his ability to create suspense in scores, and for a long time he got assignments of that kind. At one point I asked him what he really wanted to do. He said, "Write some great ballads."

In the years since then — and a great many have gone by; I recently figured out that I've known Johnny 36 years — he has indeed done that. Johnny, master arranger and orchestrator, evolved into one of the great writers of beautiful ballad melodies.

"The very first thing I discovered when I began to write songs," Johnny said, "was that for me they break down into two definite categories: the ones that just come naturally and the ones that I have to manufacture and work at and use craftsmanship to complete. Almost invariably, when I look back, the second kind didn't turn out to be good. It was the first kind, mainly, that did.

"I don't know why a song happens, when it happens. If I start to hear it, I've learned enough to let it come out, let it go wherever it goes, and I assume the role of a caretaker in that I want to make sure I've got it down on paper. In essence what you've got to do is stay out of your own way and let it go. Because for some reason it wants to go there. While it's happening, my main thought is, Please let the thing finish itself. Don't let it stop midway and become a fragment. I've got hundreds of great fragments that I can't figure out where to take. The first thing I want it to do is come to a conclusion, or at least come to a place where I can take it and work with it.

"Most of the songs that I've ended up feeling good about have been like that. They happen, and I've learned to let them happen.

"You know, I like writing to lyrics because it pushes me into directions that I might not go otherwise. It's a different way of writing, and it's nice."

This surprised me. I have always believed, and so did Johnny Mercer, that the most lyrical songs are written music first. Most composers cannot set words to music; Richard Rodgers was one of the spectacular exceptions, and did so when he wrote with Oscar Hammerstein. But I think he wrote his best songs when he worked with Lorenz Hart, at which time the melody came first. For the most part composers, when you hand them a lyric, will give you back a drab recitative melody. "I've lost some good lyrics that way," Johnny Mercer once told me.

Mandel said, "I've learned to listen to that thing that happens, whatever it is. And I don't care what it is. I'm afraid if I knew, it would go away.

"I wouldn't want to give anyone the impression that you just wait for the muse and it just comes out effortlessly. This doesn't happen that often. There are many songs that I have had to manufacturer, hack away at, and yet try to make them sound. I can make a song that sounds pretty good, but at bottom I feel that it's a manufactured item. It isn't all gravy.

"For a good part of my professional life, a lot of what I've done is translating colors and emotions that I see on the screen into sound, and I really don't know how I do it. It seems like something that came naturally to me, probably because I used to feel sensations when I heard other people's music. I don't know what the process is and I really don't want to know. Again, the superstition takes over. If I know too much about it I have that fear underneath that it will disappear, although I know that isn't the case. You do best if it's instinctive and you have the chops to do it in the first place. I guess I've always been sort of primitive when it comes to dealing with experiences, and I like doing it by the seat of my pants, like the old pilots — rather than looking at the instruments to find out what I should do. All I know is that I really don't know how to put this in a logical, rational, methodical context at all."

Mandel hasn't written a film score in at least ten years. "I don't do it any more," he said. "It just stopped being fun." He'd rather write an album, like the one he did for Shirley Horn, *Here's to Life,* two or three years ago.

In 1991, he did much of the arranging for Natalie Cole's album of songs associated with her late father, Nat Cole. The album, *Unforgettable*, went almost instantly to the top of the *Billboard* chart. It stayed for a long time, like an unscheduled full moon moving only slowly across the sky. In the title song, *Unforgettable*, she sang a chillingly beautiful duet with her father. Mandel supervised the complex technical process by which this was achieved. Both albums proved that such music, when the industry allows it to, can succeed in the market place.

More recently, Clint Eastwood has proved it too. But using Johnny Hartman records as "source cues" — music that occurs in the story; in this case they're heard on the radio — he made them successful, alas long after Hartman's death.

Billy Byers and Johnny remained close, in both senses of the word: they were neighbors in Malibu. Billy died this last May Day. It was his birthday. He was 69.

The American Society of Musical Arrangers and Composers, ASMAC is almost unknown to the public. It gives its awards to its own. It is a hidden affair, as it were, not the circus the Academy Awards are. This year at its dinner, August 27, ASMAC will give its Golden Scroll Award to Johnny Mandel. (One of the previous winners was Hugo Friedhofer.) And in the same ceremony, the society will present its Irwin Kostal Award posthumously to Billy Byers. It is named of course for the arranger with whom Johnny and Billy worked on *Your Show of Shows*. Billy's wife, Yuriko, will accept it. Last year it went to Van Alexander, its first recipient.

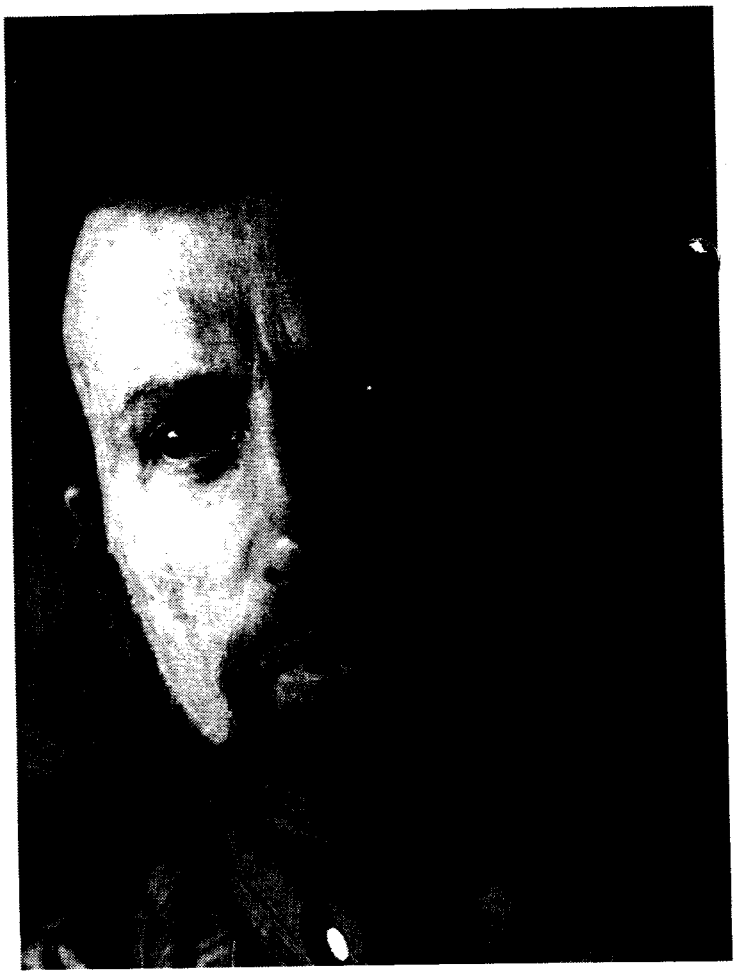
"I was just 81," Van said. "I'm grateful for the road I've traveled. I've had a pretty good ride."

Mandel and I live about 50 miles apart in California. We talk on the phone a lot, it seems. We always did, even when I lived in New York and he in California. Gerry Mulligan's death shook us both badly: we had just been on a cruise with him and Phil Woods, and I have a picture of the four of us. Johnny and Gerry had been friends since even before the days in Gil's pad. "Gerry and I started hanging out together around 1946," Johnny said.

Johnny and his wife Martha have lived in a house in Malibu since 1971. Their daughter Marissa is now 20. The area was heavily populated when they first moved there, but it has grown enormously since then. Their house is sequestered behind a wall and a high wooden gate. Its garden ends at the top of a cliff that plunges down to the beach below.

One day years ago, I was visiting. Johnny and I at the end of the garden at the top of the cliff, listening to the flopping of the surf and the keening of terns and gulls. I thought of *The Sandpiper* and the sights of Big Sur and said, "Do you ever get the feeling here that you're walking around inside one of your own scores?'

Johnny said, "Yeah, I do."



Mandel Photo by John Reeves