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Other Voices

Congratulations on your piece *Of Ms and Men* and the discussion of ebonics.

And I all but jumped for joy on reading the profile on Julie La Rosa. First, because he's a singer I admire and of whom I'm very fond. But there's another dimension to it as well.

The ongoing feminization of America has vandalized a number of useful distinctions. Among them seem to be clear understanding of the specific essences brought to the table by male and female. We never subscribed to the concept of interchangeable "gender roles" by which either sex can discharge the functions historically performed by the other. I've always felt that the polarity itself (with all the infinite internal gradations) was invaluable, offering different perspectives, thought processes, methods, objectives. No arbitrary valuation of one at the expense of the other, mind you. Just different — and complementary.

One of the things I've most admired about Julie La Rosa is that he is a strong and honorable man, in the truest, most traditional sense of those words. They draw on embattled definitions: a man as a creature of directness, strength and resolve; also, where called for, of gentleness and compassion. Such men don't *learn* sensitivity through carrying a papoose through the supermarket or taking special classes on how to resist the urge to pinch some woman's behind. They *know* it, understand it. Live it.

The association of men with boorishness, with brutality and violence, the idea of a man as little more than an overgrown boy, seems a curious and, I suspect, particularly American aberration. Dealing with the world from a man's viewpoint can be a graceful thing: no macho display, no gladiatorial posturing; instead just a dignity and steadfastness, a belief in the imperishability of virtue.

In the years I've known La Rosa I've sensed these qualities in him, and admired them. And wished there were more performers in his business like him. Ironically, more than a few of those whose musicianship he admires could learn much humanity from him. I salute him: not merely as a singer, but as a man.

As for Harry Allen:

Back in the early '80s, I worked a couple of summers at a seaside joint in Narragansett, Rhode Island, called the Coast Guard House. Harry Allen, then barely a teenager, would come in with his father and uncle, who would then importune the band to let him sit in for a few tunes. He didn't know many, and what he did know was still inchoate; but he'd play with fervor, and what struck me was how deeply the kid wanted, needed, to do it right. Well, I worked with him (and George Masso, to make it a Rhode Island reunion) for the first time in years a while ago at the Pizza Express in London. On the spot I became a believer. Harry is well on his way to becoming the very best around, his stature growing almost by the day. For all the media blather about Young Lions and other pubescent life forms, I truly believe it will be the Harry Allens who carry the important message forward.

Richard M. Sudhalter, Southold, New York

Cornetist Sudhalter was at one time a European correspondent for UPI. He is the co-author of a biography of Bix Beiderbecke and is completing a new study of jazz history.

While your two-part article *While You Weren't Watching* has your usual clarity of thought and meticulous structure, it leaves the reader who accepts your premises the choice of responding with impotent despair or with a fatalistic shrug and a turn to more pleasant topics. Yet neither of these responses is constructive; they only drive the ethos of the artistically educated further toward being a marginalized, self-pitying, backward-looking tribe of elitists. In this sense, the article does a disservice. You seem to miss that the tools to buck the trend of trash exist within your audience and within the new and changing technologies that are redefining the methods and economics of communications.

The cultural race to the bottom that began in the 1950's is traceable to several factors, some of which are: the enormous rise in postwar Western prosperity concentrated in the middle class; the orientation of social policy away from judgments based on race and religion and toward equal economic and educational opportunity; the baby-boom demographics that created millions of new consumers in families with the means to spend. While these phenomena greatly increased the average standard of living, they also contained a cultural subtext that art should not be exclusive. People needed to "find their own voice" and the sound of that voice shouldn't be judged by old, plutocratic standards of artistic worth.

Rock and roll has steadily attracted listeners because it is easy to play, and sends the cultural subtext that what one plays will be judged by fluid, subjective and lenient standards. The ease of performance invites identification by its listeners, who get at least to fantasize themselves playing to large stadiums, if not roll the dice on a rock career of their own. The consequent feelings of liberation in listeners explains a lot of rock's commercial success; in that context, rock's encouragement of experimentation with drugs and sex follow as special (albeit large) cases of encouraging greater individual freedom. This progression has caused trouble in a *reductio ad absurdum*: if some freedom is good, more must be better, and is certainly more profitable for purveyors of the message. The end result is a race in the cultural marketplace that goes to the one offering consumers the greatest freedom to debase themselves.

It's time for vendors of quality art to use the marketing tools that have been so successful for the vendors of trash. Objections that this would sully the integrity of the artists fall before one major example: Tony Bennett. Over the last few years, Tony has become bigger than ever and has reawakened enthusiasm for the

jazz vocal ballad among the young. Backed by an astute, thoroughly modern marketing campaign, he shows that integrity and mass popularity can co-exist. It is vital that more jazz artists master the art of marketing art today, to avoid restriction to only the loyal, but dwindling audience from the 20th century heyday of jazz.

The second weapon to promote quality in art is to immediately study and learn the implications and methods of new communications technologies. The cost of access to large amounts of digital communications capacity is dropping precipitously to commodity levels, as are the software and hardware tools needed to create music and art in the digital medium. This combination presents historic opportunities for artists to obtain and fill their own distribution channels for their own work. The established communications companies are hoping no one notices that their franchises face overwhelming by high-performance communication technologies contained within inexpensive household appliances. The power of this trend far outweighs the monopolistic ambitions of the media megacorps, though currently things look scary with the consolidation of so many well-known media houses. The point being that established media houses are becoming obsolete and irrelevant.

The new will displace the old. By doing so, the new may just make the artistic culture of old new again.

— Tim Wood, San Francisco, California

Tim Wood, a computer consultant, is Helen Keane's son.

I'm sure every jazz musician struggling to survive in New York or any other city would love to have a high-priced publicity campaign like that of Tony Bennett. Look what a lavishly funded publicity did for the career if Wynton Marsalis. And I have yet to meet a musician, or anyone else, who would object that a heavy publicity campaign would sully his integrity. As Chico O'Farrill once said, "If a record company wanted to spend the money, they could put Stravinsky on the charts."

But jazz artists do not have the money Tony does, and the record companies aren't going to provide it. Big companies that still record jazz are reluctant to spend much on record dates, much less promotion, and the small independents can't afford it. I know many jazz artists who are financing their own albums simply to get the necessary exposure, as noted in the December 1996 issue. And, as we have examined before, there are very, very few American radio stations playing jazz, and with corporate takeovers there will be fewer still. I'll give you a figure from my own experience: I make more royalties by far on my songs in Europe (both mechanical and performance royalties) than I do from the United States and Canada combined, and more from Japan than all the rest of the world put together.

The boom in jazz sales, which is indeed going on, is heavily in CDs of albums that are now thirty and forty years old. The old masters are the competitors of the aspiring young; the young record buyer doesn't know the difference.

Incidentally, those in close to the situation say that Tony's return on all that publicity has been nowhere near the cost of it.

The greatness of Orwell's 1984 *lies not in that its prognosis came true but that it didn't. It helped us to some extent to mitigate the conditions it hypothesizes, and still informs us — as when, for example, we see the U.S. realigning alliances out of cynical expediency. If what I wrote reduces someone to despair or a fatalistic shrug, that's their problem. And I did not present premises, I presented facts. If the piece was depressing, it was meant to be. Maladies aren't cured by pretending they don't exist.*

As for "orientation of social policy away from judgments based on religion and toward equal economic and educational opportunities," I haven't seen it, not with the actions of fundamentalists (Jewish and Muslim alike) in Israel, the Arab countries, and certainly the United States, where a ruthless Christian "right" has more power than ever before — witness arson destruction of black churches, the bombings of abortion clinics and the murder of their doctors, all in accord with "God's will" — along with the proliferation of militias. And then there's Pat Robertson. As for equal educational opportunities, current projections are that by 2015, only half those who want to go to university in the United States will be able to afford it. The others will be squeezed out. The destruction of the American middle class, with growing inequality, is one of the topics of the day.

But your point about the new media of communications is well taken, and all sorts of musicians are already "into" it. I could not live without hope; computer technology, which you predicted to me when you were maybe fourteen, gives it to me.

Although you don't formally publish obituaries, it is disturbing how often you have to write about friends and colleagues who are no longer with us. I guess that's part of the dues some of us older folks have to pay for staying around. In most cases you are referring to musicians whose accomplishments and otherwise were at least reasonably well known, but there are some losses that do not necessarily have immediate meaning for most of your readers. But that doesn't lessen the importance of the loss or diminish the need for seizing the occasion to do some serious remembering.

As you and I and at least a few other admirers of Bill Evans know quite well, it is accurate to say that without the efforts of Helen Keane, there would have been a lot less of Bill. I mean that quite literally. Without Helen as friend and bully and above all as a *manager* who put a full measure of the best possible meaning into her definition of that word, the incredibly talented and equally incredibly self-destructive Mr. Evans would not have had too much chance of surviving even into the late 1960s.

I believe it was at your suggestion, or insistence, that Helen took on the job as Bill's personal manager. (I know I didn't have the guts or imagination to invent the idea, and it's hard to think of anyone else they would have paid that much attention to.) It was rare enough, back then, for our industry to even grudgingly accept the idea of a woman in a decision-making role. But when the woman looked as good as Helen, that was way beyond the

comprehension of almost all of us chauvinist pigs.

Consequently, I guess, she was almost always a tough customer to deal with. But she was also an incredibly honest, fair-minded, candid, and loyal human being — and those are probably even rarer characteristics in our beloved music business than elsewhere. I first became aware of Helen about forty years ago, when I received a letter complaining that Riverside Records had not provided an overdue royalty statement for a client of hers. That was a typical enough introduction, but we went on from there to an association that had a hell of a lot of mutual respect in it. During the time that she was managing Bill and I was producing him, we never had any troubled recognizing that we were both on the same side — his. In later years, when she became his producer at several labels, I was legitimately proud of her work. In the '70s, when Bill and I were both at Fantasy Records, Helen and I went so far as to plan to co-produce an album of his. And she did let me intrude somewhat on the first Bill Evans-Tony Bennett record (the only time I've ever accepted the usually meaningless credit "executive producer"). More than anything else, I appreciated the fact that when we had no professional ties, we managed to get together at times for dinner and much talk about a lot of the people we know, some of whom we liked and probably more we didn't.

If she had done nothing more than protect Bill from various sharks and — to the extent that it was possible — from himself, Helen would have been memorable. It was a long, hard war. In the end she had won the battle against his heroin addiction, but eventually lost to cocaine.

But Helen also did valuable work over the years as manager and producer for quite a number of artists. I won't try to make a full list, because that way you always omit the damnedest names. But I do vividly recall Mark Murphy (there was one recording session that included a very early Gene Lees lyric) and Helen's strong belief in essential people like Kenny Burrell, Art Farmer, and Joanne Brackeen. Of course she will be best remembered for the association with Bill. That's as it should be.

At the very end, drained by a lengthy struggle with cancer, she was eagerly preparing to be my consultant and back-up and, I'm sure, needler and devil's advocate in the preparation of a multi-CD box involving newly-legitimatized Evans material that over the years had been surreptitiously recorded by a serious fan at Bill's old New York hangout, the Village Vanguard. I do know that when she first learned about the tapes, she bawled the hell out of the guy. But in our last conversation, she was complaining that I had been brought in, rather than her, to put together the package.

She was tough, pace-setting, argumentative, always interesting, never complacent. She was an individual. She was a wonderful antagonist for those rubber-stamp lawyer and accountant types that have come to be the standard music-business executives. She will be missed by many, but I guess one point of this letter is to note that she would be appreciated and missed by a lot more people if only they had the opportunity to know what she accomplished.

Orrin Keepnews, San Francisco, California

Orrin is right. And I have been more or less avoiding the subject. Helen always wanted me to write a *Jazzletter* about her. I'm sorry to say it's being done when she can no longer read it.

Bill Evans used to tell people that I was responsible for his career, which was flagrantly untrue. I contributed two things to his career. I put him on the cover of *Down Beat* when he did not yet have a wide following; this was after hearing *Everybody Digs Bill Evans*, which Orrin produced. And I introduced him to Helen Keane, and then twisted her arm to become his manager. I did *not* discover Bill. Mundell Lowe, Red Mitchell, George Russell, and Orrin Keepnews did. All I did was help.

She was born Helen Reed February 16, 1924, in Morristown, New Jersey, the daughter of Ralston Reed MD and Charlotte Reed. Her mother had been a famous New York model; indeed, Helen told me, her father fell in love with her picture in a magazine. She said that after her father died, the family found all sorts of uncollected bills, bills to patients with little or no money that he had simply let slide. He was that kind of doctor.

Helen used to go to high-school dances with Anthony Sciacca, born June 17, 1921, also in Morristown. Later he changed his name to Tony Scott. Such is the small circle of jazz that Tony later was one of the first musicians to hire Bill Evans, born in nearby Plainfield, New Jersey. Helen's one sibling, an older brother, Robert Reed, was a radio electronics engineer for RCA.

Helen's aunt — her mother's sister, Nell Carrington — had been a Broadway showgirl. I met her once or twice, a charming woman. A portrait of her adorned the cover of the original sheet music of *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles*, which, in a frame, hung in Helen's living room. Years later Joshua Logan and I were browsing in a second-hand shop in Santa Monica, California, where I found, in a pile of old sheet music, another copy of it. I bought it immediately and sent it to Helen. Her aunt had never married. Some of her wealthy stage-door-Johnnies had given her stockmarket advice and apparently enough money to take advantage of it. She was comfortable; she played the market, apparently quite well. Helen told me that her father had had a mistress, and her mother was involved with a Frenchman. The family spent summers at a home they had in Sea Girt, New Jersey; I was left with an impression of sunny seashore days. Last year, when at the Metropolitan Museum in New York I saw the astonishing exhibit of the work of Winslow Homer, I came to think he was the greatest American painter, and the most misunderstood. I was taken by his paintings of girls on beaches, painted around 1869 and '70. One titled *Long Branch, New Jersey*, shows two young women with parasols standing in a wind on a bluff overlooking the sea. The era was decades before she was born; but there was something about that group of pictures that made me think of Helen when she was about seventeen, and, as she told me late in her life, boy

crazy. Long Branch is not far up the coast from Sea Girt.

She was seventeen in 1941. That year she went to work as a secretary at MCA, the largest talent-booking agency. Some of the executives, she told interviewer Linda Dahl, took an interest in her, and one of them said he was going to make her the first woman agent in the history of the business. She was simplifying. Marlon Brando was the proximate cause of her promotion. Brando was an MCA client, and, according to Helen, he was disoriented by the sudden fame brought by his work in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It opened in November, 1947. He took a liking to her, and soon would answer only her phone calls: he gave her a coded ring signal. Because Brando was so hot, her boss said, 'Well I guess we've got no choice but to make you an agent.' Hollywood summoned, and Brando made *The Men*, then the film version of *Streetcar*. She described how he sat in her apartment, pouring out his fears; she said she was pregnant, so that would have made it late 1951. After he left for California, he was always calling to ask her to find work for down-on-their-luck actor friends.

Another early client was Harry Belafonte, then trying to make it as a jazz singer, then singing folk songs with a vocal group. Helen urged him to try it as a single, booking him into the Blue Angel and the Village Vanguard. His success reinforced her position as an agent.

She had been briefly married to a man named Jack Keane, whose surname she retained, and now was married to movie actor Donald Curtis. After their son Christopher was born on February 10, 1952, she found it increasingly difficult to go out to clubs at night to look at talent, and she moved to CBS, booking acts for various shows, including that of Garry Moore. She auditioned about 50 persons per week, in the process discovering Jonathan Winters, Carol Burnett, Artie Johnson, and Dom DeLuise. One man she auditioned was Boris Karloff, whom she always remembered as a soft and gentle man. He confessed that he had always wanted to be a singer, and that's how she booked him on TV — singing *September Song*. It was an inspired stroke.

Helen booked Chris Connor on the Garry Moore show; later she would produce records by her. She also booked Toshiko Akiyoshi and Marian McPartland, using the gimmick that they were *women* pianists, and foreign at that.

She stayed six years at CBS, divorced again, married comedy writer Gene Wood, and gave birth to Timothy on March 16, 1958. Not wanting to be away from the children, she opened her own management office in her apartment in the yellow brick building at the northeastern corner of 96th St. and Madison Avenue. She would live and work in that apartment all the rest of her life. Her first client was the gifted actor-choreographer-painter-set designer Geoffrey Holder, then working on Broadway in *House of Flowers*. When Geoffrey married the ballet dancer Carmen DeLavallade, Helen became her manager too. Carmen remained her client and one of Helen's most trusted friends, until Helen died. Helen was notable for the length of her professional relationships. She was Bill Evans'manager for 18 years, his record producer for 13. It is one of the longest artist—manager relationships in jazz.

I returned from Latin America after touring for six months with the Paul Winter Sextet. In Brazil I wrote translations of some of the Antonio Carlos Jobim songs. Arriving back in New York in July 1962, I went everywhere with them — *Corcovado* and *Desafinado* among them — only to meet with rebuff. One person who saw no value in them was John Hammond. I am apparently a minority of one in lack of admiration for John Hammond.

Beverly Mooney, who worked for Orrin Keepnews at Riverside Records, urged me to talk to Helen Keane, and arranged an introduction. We went to Helen's apartment. She was tall, blonde, arrogant, self-important — and beautiful. Like Doris Day, she had Dutch ancestry, and indeed she was sometimes mistaken for Doris. We clashed instantly, and I should have recognized the signs. I was thirty-four, she was thirty-eight. By then she was divorced for the third time. She would never marry again.

Helen told Linda Dahl, who quotes her in *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazz Women* (Limelight Editions, New York, and well worth reading), the following, and if she had not done so I would not be telling it now: "Along the way — " along the way nothing! it was in July, 1962, and she never forgot it and neither did I " — I met a man named Gene Lees. He had just left his editorship of *Down Beat* magazine. After he came to New York we met, fell in love, and were together for years."

Since we fought and broke up so often, it is hard to say how long the close relationship lasted, but I would put it at seven years, and some sort of relationship existed until she died.

"Right away he said, 'I want you to hear Bill Evans, the pianist. You should be his manager.' Now, I knew Bill Evans' work, because I never stopped loving jazz and listening to jazz."

No, she didn't know Bill's work; she wasn't lying, but memory plays tricks, particularly elision, on all of us. I played Bill's Riverside LPs for her, to familiarize her with his work. When she was enthralled by them, and when I had softened Bill up by telling him about her, I took her to hear him at the Village Vanguard.

She told Dahl: "Bill and I met (that night) and liked each other immediately. So for 18 years we were together."

It wasn't quite that simple; but then one tends to simplify when being interviewed. In those days Bill resembled Helen's brother, who had contributed to her interest in jazz by taking her to see big bands at the Paramount theater in New York. And in the Vanguard that night, she resisted my urging that she become Bill's manager. His playing was rapturous, of course. She said, "Oh no! This is the one that could break my heart."

We left, went to Jim and Andy's, and sat in one of the rear booths, one of those by the two telephone booths. I pressed her, and she began to weaken. Without proper management, I knew, Bill was going to die of his heroin habit. Someone was always saying to me, "You've got to do something about Bill. If he goes on, he's going to die!" And I would say, "Why *me*?"

We arranged a meeting with Bill, and Helen asked a practical question: Who was his manager by contract at that point?

Bill told us he was under contract to two different managers. One of these was Joe Glaser, president of Associated Booking Corporation and long Louis Armstrong's manager. If you'd lived in Chicago, his home town, as I had, you knew that Glaser was all mobbed up. He had been a fight promoter and fight fixer for the Capone people. I didn't like Glaser on principle, and he was one hard cookie. American Federation of Musicians regulations forbade anyone from being both manager and booker, but it was a rule honored as often in the breach as the observance. You could get away with it, in theory, so long as you collected only one commission. But who knew what share of Armstrong's income actually went to Glaser? The other person holding a management contract on Bill was Bert Block. Bill was always trying to hustle money, whether as advances or loans. Orrin once said it was easy to turn down Philly Joe Jones for one of those heroin advances, because Joe (whom I just loved, by the way) was an unabashed crook. But Bill would sit in Orrin's outer office, pathetic and gentle, and he was almost impossible to turn down. When Bill said he had contracts with both Joe Glaser and Bert Block (who was married to Barbara Carroll; later Helen would produce CDs for her), Helen didn't know what to do. I did.

Herman Kenin was then president of the American Federation of Musicians. A year or two before, when I was still editor of *Down Beat*, I had helped him and the union out on some issue. After the horrors of James Caesar Petrillo's tyrannical presidency, I thought Kenin was just what the union needed. I knew him moderately well and liked him. I asked him to have lunch with me, explaining that there was a contract problem that involved Local 802, which had ratified the two contracts. Herman had someone from 802 accompany us to lunch. I showed him the contracts.

He looked them over with lawyer's eye, and said, "There's no question, it's a union mistake. Which one do you want cancelled?"

I almost held my breath, and said, "Both."

He said, "All right," and that was the end of it. Helen became Bill's manager. In all the years they were together — from then, probably the autumn of '62, until his death in 1980 — they never had a written contract.

Helen told Linda Dahl: "Bill was struggling, and I was able to struggle with him because fortunately my income from Geoffrey and Carmen was considerable. And then I took on Alvin Ailey." Ailey was a brilliant dancer and choreographer. "So I was very active in dance, and I was able to give the dedication and commitment to Bill without starving to death."

She brought order into Bill's life, and our lives — his, Helen's, Ellaine's, whom everyone took to be his wife, although they were simply living together — became interwoven. Helen was particularly fond of Ellaine. She was as strung out as Bill, and those who condemned her didn't consider that she didn't get that way until she met Bill, or how brave she was in fighting their habit.

Bill left Riverside Records early in 1963. And Orrin, though his move was involuntary, left it too: it went broke in the summer of 1964. But the catalogue he had built with Monk, Bill, Cannonball Adderley, and more, now held by Fantasy, is one of the richest in jazz. Bill and Ellaine took an apartment in Riverdale.

I was in love with Helen's kids. Chris was ten, that summer I met Helen, Tim was four. When she had to be away, I would move over to her apartment to take care of them or bring them to mine.

I had a small basement apartment on the east side of West End Avenue between 70th and 71st streets, acquired from the arranger and composer Ron Collier when he returned to Toronto after a period of study in New York. I took over the rental of a spinet piano as well; Bill and I wrote *Turn Out the Stars* on that piano. It startles me to see that the six-CD boxed set recorded over several nights at the Village Vanguard is titled *Turn Out the Stars*.

That apartment had brick walls painted white and a small courtyard. Somewhere or other, probably in a shop in Greenwich Village, I had picked up a small sign, which hung on one wall. In patriotic stars-and-stripes lettering, it read: *Fuck Communism*. Chris gasped, then laughed, a little self-consciously, and said, "Has my mother seen that??"

"I don't know," I lied; we had often cooked dinner there.

And then Chris said, "I didn't know grownups *knew* that word."

I used to take them to the Central Park zoo, and once or twice on the Staten Island Ferry, to watch the towers of Manhattan grow small in the distance and then large on the return voyage. The city looks like it is floating on the water and should sink of its own incomprehensible weight. Once I took them to the Statue of Liberty. If you've never been there and suffer in the least from acrophobia, I suggest you avoid it. It is hollow, of course, its copper shell hanging on a tangled complex of girders, and you ascend by a winding, narrow, metal staircase. It is so narrow that people must ascend single file. I think Chris was ahead of me and Tim behind. The higher we climbed, the more unstable the structure seemed to me, and I was suppressing a panic attack. I couldn't let them know what I was feeling. The higher we climbed, the worse it got. We reached the top. They thought it was all very wonderful. We began the descent. I never let them know how frightened I was. I was never so glad to have feet on terra firma.

Once I arrived at their apartment to find Chris building a model airplane. He was cutting the flash away from the plastic parts with a double-edged razor blade. I gave him hell, admonishing him never to use a razor blade again. I said I would get him an X-Act-O knife, and in the meantime I would trim the flash for him. My hand slipped and I slashed my left thumb open to the bone. I was pouring blood. Helen wrapped my hand in a towel, and Chris and Tim walked me around the corner to Mt. Sinai Hospital, where a doctor sutured the slash. I never notice the scar, faint now, without thinking of those two little kids, worried in the street.

Bill Evans would die in Mt. Sinai Hospital.

By now Helen had become, with me, an habitue of Jim and Andy's. She met many of the musicians she would later manage or produce during this period. She had dealt extensively with singers and comediennes, whom she found neurotic, to say the least. She asked me why musicians seemed so much more stable.

I surmised that it was because they were less subject to whim and fashion. They were like photographers in that whatever they learned had permanent value; it was beyond the ephemeral. Not, I assured her, that there weren't plenty of neurotic musicians.

Bill signed a contract with Creed Taylor at Verve Records. I have never to this day figured out why the records Creed made with Bill were so different in style from those Orrin had made with him. Both were patient in the studio, letting Bill do what he wanted. But the records were simply different: each group excellent, vital to understanding the career of Bill Evans, but different. One difference, of course, is that Verve had the financial weight of MGM behind it and if Creed wanted to do, say, an album such as *Bill Evans with Symphony Orchestra*, a project with Claus Ogerman, he could do it. And when Bill came up with an idea of playing three pianos in an album that became *Conversations with Myself*, which would consume an immense amount of studio time, Creed could do that too.

Piano is one of the most difficult instruments to record, because of the transient response problem. I had heard about recording at 30 inches per second, instead of the industry-standard 15 ips. I suggested that the album be made this way. Recording at that speed consumes far more than double the amount of tape, and those reels were expensive, about $225 each. You have to switch reels often, because you don't dare run out of tape in the middle of a tune. To my amazement, Creed accepted my suggestion. The engineer was Ray Hall, and he captured Bill's tone magnificently.

I have a vivid memory of Creed Taylor shoving the cue sheet along the console and tapping his finger on the timings of the various foundation tracks of the *Love Theme from Spartacus*. The track that was finally issued is 5:05. Helen and I immediately noticed that despite retards and rubatos, the timings did not vary by more than a second or so.

One night Helen and Creed and I went to the Village Vanguard to listen to Bill; I think Creed's wife was with us. Now Creed has never been much of a drinker, but for some reason the evening was celebrant. I had until then perceived him as aloof and cool. Not after a few drinks. Somehow we ended up at Creed's house somewhere in the Village. By now well lubricated, Creed asked if we wanted to see his pride and joy. Whatever it might be, we said yes. We went down to his basement — and discovered his electric trains. The installation was quite elaborate, and for a long time Helen and I stayed in the basement with Creed, getting more loaded and running his electric trains. When it was, I suppose, getting close to dawn, we insisted it was time to leave. I remember Creed with his arms around our respective shoulders, urging us to stay the night. We left, though. I never again saw Creed as cool and aloof, and he and Helen and I remained close.

Eventually Creed told us he was leaving Verve and its umbrella company, MGM, to produce for A&M. Later he set up his own label, CTI, for which he would in time produce some distinguished records. Bill's contract with Verve had some time left to run. Panicking, Helen said, "But who's going to produce Bill?"

I said, "You are."

She felt completely unequipped to do so. I assured her that she had spent enough time in the studios to know how to run a record session and she certainly had the business experience and acumen to negotiate the deal and budget a project. She approached Creed; Creed backed me up on my opinion. Later, she would tell interviewers that Creed Taylor and I made her a record producer, and I think that's true.

I remember a time she and Bill and I spent together in Switzerland. If you have the first Bill Evans at Montreux album, with its photo of the chateau of Chillon on the cover, that is part of it. She and I and Bill were standing together when I took that shot.

Helen showed me Fire Island, the Hamptons, parts of New England. I showed her Switzerland and Paris. Paris and New York and Chicago are the three cities I feel are home. She was enraptured by the city during our few days in Paris; I showed her as much of it as I could. Later, with Bill, she became inured to travel abroad: South America, Japan, all the countries of Europe, Israel.

Helen and I had much in common, and friends we enjoyed, among them Alec Wilder, Judy Holliday, and Gerry Mulligan. But there was one major problem: her temper. It was volcanic and irrational. Sometimes she took it out on her kids, and I would leap to their defense, which at least had the effect of diverting her anger to me. When I would, in calmer moments, beg her to give it up, as one quits smoking, she would argue that it was difficult to battle with the bastards who control the music business all day and then put on a sweet cloak of femininity in the evening. There was some truth to that argument, but it made the sudden flare-ups no easier to endure. I once said you could hear our fights in Fort Lee, New Jersey, but that was hyperbole: I doubt that they were audible for more than three blocks. We were perpetually parting and then, in some chance encounter, at Jim and Andy's or the Village Vanguard or somewhere, the cycle would start all over again. When a fight would start, I would walk out her front door, which infuriated her. She called it "taking a Gene Lees walk."

And we could fight about the most trivial things. Once she said that Lalo Schifrin couldn't write melody to save his life. I disputed that point, and the argument rapidly became shrill. I headed for the door and went out into the hallway, on the sixth floor. I had to wait for the elevator, and she screamed at me, the volume rising. And finally she threw an empty beer can at me. It bounced off the back of my head with a resonant and rather musical *bong* and I started to laugh so hard that I leaned on the wall and slowly slid down it until I was sitting on the floor, helpless, and she was

sitting in the doorway, similarly out of control with laughter. I went back into the apartment and we changed the subject; years later she and I would chuckle over that incident.

The relationship ended for all practical purposes in 1970 when I moved to Toronto, where I stayed for four years before settling at last in California. Yet we never lost touch.

When Bill recorded for Fantasy a duo album with Eddie Gomez (which Helen of course produced), I was particularly struck by the beauty of the *Hi Lili Hi Lo* track, which he had dedicated to Ellaine. I called him to congratulate him on the album and particularly on that track. I asked him to convey my best to Ellaine. He said, "Didn't anyone tell you?" and, after a long pause, "Ellaine took her own life."

Later I learned that she did this after they both quit heroin and Bill met someone else. She threw herself under a New York City subway train. Bill was on the road; Helen had to identify her body.

There would be long periods of time when I had little contact with Helen, though I would see Tim from time to time, particularly after he settled in San Francisco and became a computer expert. Once, when he was small, and showed a high resistance to learning to tie his shoes, I determined that he would do so. Helen went away for a weekend and left the kids with me. I told Tim that I would show him over and over and over how to do it. It wasn't that a kid that smart couldn't learn; he didn't want to. I would show him, and show him again, and eventually he cried and I reassured him and showed him again and told him that before his mother returned, he would know how to tie his shoes. In 1985, soon after I got my first computer, Tim came down from San Francisco to visit, and spent a weekend trying to teach me something beyond the most primitive operations on the damn thing, and I kept thinking it was revenge for the shoe tying.

But then Helen and I would start speaking again. She would call to ask me to write liner notes for some project or other, such as the boxed set of Bill's complete Fantasy recordings, or a CD she produced with Joanne Brackeen or Art Farmer or someone. (She adored Art.) The conversations were often warm and friendly, but I was always careful: talking to Helen was not unlike a cautious stroll through a minefield. I heard once that she tore a strip off Judy Bell of TRO, the Richmond Organization — publisher, along with much of the Jobim and Aznavour material, of Bill's music. For Helen to excoriate her was uncool, for, as one musician put it, "Judy Bell is almost a saint."

Helen went through a mastectomy. For a time, it held. And then the cancer returned. When it was obvious that the prognosis was bad, she called me. She was weak from chemotherapy, and knew what lay ahead. She had much that she wanted to tell me for the record. I sublet an apartment in New York for a month, and spent almost ever day with her, taping everything she wanted to say about her life and career, hours and hours and hours of it. I will in time transcribe all of it. I was devastated by her condition. She had always been athletic, working out regularly at a gym. She had strong arms. But now she was terribly weak. There is a little coffee shop about forty feet from the doorway to her building. I would take her there for lunch, trying to get her to retain at least a little nourishment; but the nausea from the chemotherapy made it difficult, and once she was so weak that I wasn't sure she could make it back to her building. But then there would be good, or comparatively good, days and we would go to better places.

Eventually I had to get back to California. Tim kept me posted on her condition. She was angry at me because I had forgotten to call her one day when I said I would.

I am unshakably convinced that if Helen had not become Bill's manager in 1962, we would have had only about six more months of his work. The Creed Taylor albums and the superb albums she produced with Bill for Fantasy and Warner Bros. would not exist.

Then one day it came: Tim called to tell me she was gone.

He and Chris arranged a memorial service in New York. I was unable to attend, although I was in New York at that time. I was to emcee a concert by the Woody Herman band at Carnegie Hall that night, and we had rehearsal and sound check during the service. I simply couldn't go. I understand it was a lovely and sensitive service.

Helen was always to me the archetypical New York woman. She combined brains, a certain knowingness, perception, and tough-mindedness with a sensitivity she never allowed the business world to see. I have seen Helen cry more than a few times, with physical pain (I once had to put her in a hospital in abdominal agony), with weariness, with frustration, with disappointment. Orrin Keepnews told me that once the two of them were having a heated battle over something or other on the telephone and he suddenly realized she was crying. At such moments one got past the armor of independence and resiliency she wore so convincingly, and encountered the soft femininity within it.

We went through a whole period of history together. We endured the Cuban missile crisis together. Knowing New York City must be ground zero, I wanted to rent a car, gather up her and Chris and Tim and get the hell out of town. She absolutely refused, and since I wouldn't leave without them, I spent much of that week in Jim and Andy's, absorbing Moscow mules, of all things, with Bob Brookmeyer, to mute the apprehension.

We went through the Kennedy assassination together, spending those days in front of her TV set, trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. That was one of the times I saw her weep. And she didn't weep alone. We watched the police riot at the Democratic National Convention, and as the cops pounded away with their batons, she screamed at the TV screen: "These are *our children!*" She had been showing left liberal sentiments for some time, but that annealed them. Her hatred of racism was intense and naked.

We went through the first New York blackout together. I noticed that the pitch of the dial tone on the telephone was

dropping, and then the lights went out in my apartment. I knew that this was massive, and hurried to a nearby convenience store to buy candles. I couldn't call her because the phones were out. So I walked across Central Park, along with hundreds of other persons. The ambience was curiously jolly. The air was so clear and crisp that you could smell the autumn leaves, and the towers of Central Park South stood in flat black silhouette under a brilliant full moon. Helen and I reassured the kids that nothing serious was wrong, and we ate cold food and talked all evening by candlelight.

We went through the first garbage strike. Trash piles grew in the street to the point where Martha Glaser, Erroll Garner's manager, said with only slight exaggeration that she could walk right out of the window of her apartment. The garbage piled high in the alley below Helen's kitchen. There was no point in carrying bags of it down to the street, so Chris and Tim and I would wrap it tight and sail it out the window. Others were doing the same all over New York City. People called it air-mailing the garbage. Somebody mailed their garbage to City Hall, and someone else got the idea of gift-wrapping it and leaving it exposed on the seat of the car from which, predictably, somebody stole it.

One weekend Helen and I drove up the coast to visit her kids, who were at summer camp. On the way back, we stopped at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. A heavy fog came in, and it was cold. I was about to turn forty, and without knowing it I was facing what the French call *la crise de quarante*, the crisis of forty. Many men have told me of passing through it. I felt incredibly bleak. It seemed my whole life had been a waste. I thought my nerves would surely crack, and I was shaking and cold. I said, "Helen, am I going to make it?" and I didn't mean career.

I remember the softness of her voice. She put a gray blanket across my shoulders and her arm on top of that and said, "I don't know."

It was the only answer I could have accepted; sunshine platitudes would not have been credible. The fog lifted, the sun came out. On a road by the shore, we picked up a hitch-hiking twelve-year-old boy who had one of those little circular surf skimmers and we went to a beach with him. He stayed with us all afternoon and tried to teach me the knack of that skimmer, and I found consolation in watching him and the other children play: they, or at least most of them, would still be here when I was gone.

We stayed another night and next morning drove back to New York City, which by now was my home.

Years ago my mother bought three pictures in a second-hand store for about 75 cents each. She wanted the frames; I was fascinated by the pictures. They were watercolors of New York City, probably done in the 1920s. The color quality was so good that I had to put them under a magnifying glass to be sure they were only prints.

Verve has twice reissued *Conversations with Myself* on CD, once in 1984 and again this year. It has been remastered. In the first version, the highs had been rolled off to make the sound rather dark. The new version has the opposite fault. The sound is brittle, ping-y, with much more tape hiss than its predecessor.

I was listening to it the other night, looking at those pictures I got from my mother of a New York I never knew, the New York of John Dos Passos' time — by the time I got there to live in 1962, the great glass coffins had begun to replace the little shops and restaurants and brownstones.

I felt I was again there in the studio with Helen and Creed, looking through the glass at Bill in the dim light of a household floor lamp, making magic. That was 1963. I could not remotely have foreseen this moment in 1997 in a California house in the evening, listening to this music yet again. I was in two times at once.

Helen died April 22, 1996, at Cabrini Hospice in New York City. In accordance with her wishes, she was cremated and buried alongside her parents in the family plot at Mystic, Connecticut. On June 23, 1996, the memorial service arranged by Chris and Tim was held at St. Peter's Lutheran, the "jazz church," in New York.

I gave Helen to Bill, and Helen gave Bill to the world.

And, as Helen used to say, that's not chopped liver.

Helen and Bill at Fantasy Studios, Berkeley, California.
Photo courtesy of Fantasy Records