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Jazzletter

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Mail Bag

It's 4:30 a.m. and I sit at my typewriter, asking myself, "Have I turned into my grandfather?" As I listen to the current forms that bill themselves as jazz, I wonder where most of the beauty, the lightness, and the happiness have gone. Perhaps, at age 62, I've become one of the dinosaurs, although I hope that isn't the case. On c able radio's jazz channel on cable radio, I hear the equivalent of primal screams being blown through musical instruments, with virtually none of the components that I value in jazz.

I began as a jazz-influenced pianist in the New York area in the [illegible]-1950s, but found studio work attractive and followed the flock to Los Angeles, where most of that work was happening. I then spent the better part of my 34-year tenure in studio orchestras, graduating to being known more as an arranger-conductor. I regret that I failed to allocate enough time to pursue my interest in jazz playing, as it seemed that pencil cramp nullified my technical ability at the keyboard. Retired from the Hollywood scene, I've moved to South Carolina and begun to get back into the jazz scene. My newest album is *Nice 'n' Easy* on Dolphin Records.

My early influences were Billy Taylor, Marian McPartland, George Shearing, Oscar Peterson, and the likes thereof. I heard music as a series of often beautiful chord progressions, where improvisation could lend itself to exalting even further the music of Porter, Kern, Gershwin, et al. These were songs one could tap a foot or snap a finger to, and go out smiling while reveling in the happiness and beauty that were absorbed.

As a listener to the current crop of what's happening, I'm hearing caterwauling soprano saxes, tenor players using a series of controlled squeaks trying to sound like sopranos, percussionists [illegible]ulating a multi-car accident on an L.A. freeway, and trumpet players reaching for the moon and rarely getting there, while the modal undercurrent of harmonic structure seems to add to the interminable length of the work. Has the current crop of young players thrown away all the foundation of the feeling of jazz simply to expand the genre, or as they say, "push the envelope"?

There are people who muse over the fact that jazz is a low-priority commodity whose record sales make up a small, single-digit percentage of the industry. If they continue to bewail the waning interest in the jazz idiom, they should take a good, objective look at the sounds they are putting out. That might answer their questions.

On the brighter side, I wish to commend you for your laudatory essay on Harry Allen. In January I had the pleasure of hiring Harry for the Hilton Head Jazz Festival, and at that time I played a weekend with him at a jazz club in Savannah with bassist Ben Tucker. His harmonic sense is phenomenal and his knowledge of hundreds of tunes dating 'way back is something I rarely encounter. We had a most enjoyable few days, as I grew to know Harry as a person, as well as a musician.

In describing Harry to Tommy Newsom, I said something to the effect that "if there is such a phenomenon as reincarnation, Harry picked up three souls: Getz, Cohn, and Zoot." Never having heard Getz's idea about the perfect tenor player, I can be proud that whatever insight I had has somehow been validated.

If in fact I am becoming my grandfather, then I'll do so with a toast to ol' gramps and to increasingly rare and obscure players who still believe in swingin' and laughin'.

Bob Alberti, Hilton Head Islands, South Carolina

Small Suggestions

A young musician who had just done his first CD called me to ask if I had listened to it. I got the impression he was in his middle thirties. He had an educated, pleasant, reasonable voice. Mostly he wanted my opinion on why radio station KLON was not playing his CD. KLON is the most important station for jazz exposure in Southern California. One of the NPR group, it is about the only jazz station in the region, and its signal is limited at that.

My caller's particular gripe was with Chuck Niles, one of the station's broadcasters. He said that Chuck had not responded to him when he sent the CD. Since Chuck is not only a well-informed broadcaster but a decent human being, I could only reflect that he may have gotten bugged by being importuned.

I pointed out to my caller that every track on his CD was an "original" — he had written *all* the tunes. I told him that when I see by the composer credits that the new artist has written the *entire* album, I sometimes (I should have said "almost always") pass on it. He argued that this was unfair. Experience has taught me that the grade of the ore in such albums is pretty low. I suggested that he would better have served himself and the radio stations had he included some standards.

And again he complained about KLON. He said they *should* be playing his record. I told him that "should" had nothing to do with it. "KLON doesn't *have* to play anything by anybody," I pointed out. "You are soliciting them for free exposure. So it is incumbent upon you to provide them with something they can use."

I told him that if he sent his CD to my friend Fred Hall, whose show *Swing Thing* is on more than 60 radio stations, he assuredly would not play it; he probably wouldn't even audition it.

"But that's unfair!" my caller protested.

"Again, fair has nothing to do with it," I said. "He has to consider the wishes of his audience. It is largely an older audience, and they *like* the standards."

I told him something Dave Brubeck once told me. Dave has had enormous success with albums of his *originals,* but Dave is an established artist; and in his early days, when he was struggling for a foothold, he played standards, and lots of them. And, Dave said, around the world, he likes to open a concert with *St. Louis Blues* because it is so widely known. Once you had the audience, Dave

said, you could take them anywhere. Dizzy Gillespie, you will recall, said something similar to Junior Mance. He played *School Days* for the same reason Dave played *St. Louis Blues*. And Dizzy was a formidable composer whose jazz compositions, like those of Dave Brubeck, have *become* standards. I pointed out to my caller that Rob McConnell has built the international renown of the Boss Brass on standards. And of the ten tracks on Bill Evans' *Conversations with Myself*, only one is an "original".

I can mount an argument *against* playing standards. When they came into being, jazz was in a symbiotic relationship with the superb popular music being produced by Tin Pan Alley, the movies, and Broadway musical theater. That relationship no longer exists, for pop and rock music for the past thirty years have produced the musical equivalent, in Dave Raksin's apt observation, of the finger-painting of children. And Broadway offers us the drivel of Andrew Lloyd Webber. As for the great standards of the past, the work of Kern and Gershwin and Ellington and Arlen, et al, the young audience doesn't know them anyway.

But there is a substantial older audience that *does* know the standards and is reassured by their titles on a CD. Whether they will like the artist is an unknown, but they already know the material. And, by standards, I do not mean exclusively the pop material of the Golden Era; I include compositions by Brubeck, such as *In Your Own Sweet Way* and *The Duke;* Gillespie, such as *Con Alma;* Parker (*Scrapple from the Apple* and *Au Privave*), Horace Silver (*Doodlin', The Preacher*) and Ellington.

The young performer playing something the audience already likes has given himself assistance in making new listeners. If he wants to be known as a composer, he should first establish himself as a player. And, remember, not everyone who can play well is a composer. Indeed, even arrangers are sometimes poor composers. And the new artist hasn't created an audience that waits breathless for his latest composition, as audiences more or less did for the work of Horace Silver.

There is a further reason for playing standards. One of them is that it gives the audience a chance to judge how well you improvise compared with others. One of the elements in evaluating a jazz musician is precisely that one: how well does he know the repertoire? Recording only "originals" suggests that you don't know it at all, and are therefore deficient.

Long ago, when I started to write, I came to understand that the audience owes the artist absolutely nothing. The artist is trying to solicit support. There are no ads in the newspaper saying, "Wanted. New young jazz pianist. Preferably with good grounding in the music's history. Bill Evans (or Horace Silver or Nat Cole or Thelonious Monk; name your favorite) influence preferred. Rewarding career for right applicant." The artist must *create* his audience. And he can do that only by seduction, not by importunate demand. If he plays music that is already seductive to a large share of the audience, maybe the old fogies will spread the word to the younger audience. The audience doesn't want you till it wants you; or rather, it doesn't know it wants you until you make it want you.

And CDs of "originals" don't help you do that — not among reviewers, radio station personnel, or the general audience.

Fred Hall has often commented that every jazz artist should include short tracks for radio play. The logic of that is obvious, but you'd be surprised how often it is ignored. I see any number of CDs by new young performers that contain six or seven tracks, each seven to ten minutes long, and all of them "composed" by the artist. And many of them contain long — one is tempted to say interminable — intros before getting to the tune.

If I ran a record company, and wanted to help young artists succeed, I would require that half the tunes in a CD be standards and half of those should be recorded in short tracks, all of this subject to renegotiation when sales indicated that the artist become established.

The young artist trying to break in who argues that it's a free country and he can play anything he wants is quite right. But he has to recognize that by the terms of that self-same freedom, KLON doesn't have to play anything it *doesn't* want.

And that's the reality.

Bright Laughter: Billy May

Paul Weston used to say that Billy May would be writing the third chart for a record date while the first one was being recorded.

"That's kind of an exaggeration," Billy said. There is a bubble of irreverent laughter in almost everything he says. "No. I would time it so that if the date started at four o'clock in the afternoon, I would finish about five minutes to four on the last tune and give it to the copyist. Paul overstated it a little bit. Or sometimes I would leave it there in the capable hands of Heinie Beau or Harold Mooney, or someone like that who used to help me out."

Further legend has it that he wrote his arrangement of Ray Noble's *Cherokee* right on the Charlie Barnet record date that made it famous. Is *that* story true?

"More or less," he said. "I wrote most of it at home and part of it on the way down to the date. I finished it up on the date. Then after that I wrote *Pompton Turnpike* and a bunch of stuff like that for Charlie."

A bunch of stuff indeed. Billy May wrote much of the book of the Charlie Barnet band when it was at its peak; and made not inconsiderable contributions to the Glenn Miller library as well.

Billy May is, at this point in his colorful life, 80 years old. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on November 10, 1916. The outstanding bassist (and painter) John Heard, also a Pittsburgh native, remarked, "What makes Pittsburgh unique is that they never got rid of their coal miner's mentality, people like the Mellons, Carnegie, Frick, Heinz. These people wanted to bring culture *in*. Thanks to Carnegie, Pittsburgh had the first public library."

Because of the huge endowments left by these industrialists (Andrew Carnegie tried to give away all his money before he died, and failed), Pittsburgh, John says, has always been culturally rich, with young people given exposure to it under excellent conditions: he remembers attending all sorts of free public events as a boy. With unabashed civic pride, he is quick to name the jazz musicians born or at least raised there: Billy May, Ahmad Jamal, Kenny Clarke, Mary Lou Williams, Erroll Garner, the Turrentine brothers, Henry Mancini (from the suburb of West Aliquippa, but trained in Pittsburgh), Earl Hines, Ray Brown, Paul Chambers, George Benson, Joe Pass, Sonny Clarke, Dodo Marmarosa, Jerry Fielding, Ron Anthony, Paul Humphreys — and, he adds, even Oscar Levant. Gertrude Stein was born in Pittsburgh. So was Gene Kelly, who once told me, "I danced in every joint up and down the river valley."

The city was famous for its industrial power, and the smoke it produced. Anyone who grew up there in the 1930s and '40s remembers nights bright orange with the flames of open-hearth furnaces and days so dark with smoke that streetlamps would be turned on at noon, a shirt would be soiled in an hour, and steel-mill effluvia penetrated everything. Henry Mancini said, "The first snowfall always seemed magical. It was lovely when it first came down . . . but it soon became what is called black snow as the soot and fly ash settled on it." The steel industry is now gone, and Pittsburgh, a beautiful city, is a blossoming intellectual center prominent in computer technology and medical research.

"Some of the money must have trickled down," Billy said. "I first learned music in public school. They taught me, when I was in the second or third grade, solfeggio. I learned to sight-read. And I had some piano lessons, but I didn't practice. Then when I got into high school, I had a study period and I learned the intermediate band was rehearsing. So I went around. The teacher said, 'Do you want to try something? Come after school.' One of the kids showed me a tuba. By the next semester I was good enough to play in the intermediate band. I just went on from there."

He went on to become one of the most admired arrangers in jazz and popular music. He also wrote miles and miles of television music, the royalties from which keep him and his wife Doris comfortable in a large home high on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean at San Clemente, California.

"I did a bunch of music for Jack Webb at Warner Bros.," Billy said. "I did a cop show for him, and I did a fire department show. You know how they pay composers for television through ASCAP and BMI — by the minute. You get young producers who are insecure. And they've got a fireman hanging off the building. There's nothing happening, the people are down in the street hollering, and they want you to keep some music going. And it's counting up.

"Somebody just bought a whole bunch of it in Germany. I got a nice fat check about two weeks ago."

Billy's background is substantially German. "My father's father was from the Ruhr Valley and worked in steel mills," he said. "My grandmother was a farm girl from eastern Germany. My mother's people were English and Scotch-Irish. Of all the people in the world, they were all good but the Catholics. That was her attitude.

"My father was in the building trades. He was a drunk, too. I inherited, with my daughter, the same thing. It's passed on from generation to generation. All three of us are sober. My dad was sober for twenty years before he died."

Henry Mancini, Jerry Fielding, and Billy Strayhorn all studied with Max Adkins, who conducted the pit band at the Stanley theater — one of the major stops for bands in the swing era — in Pittsburgh. "I didn't study with him," Billy said. "I met him. But I was too busy making a living. I didn't know Mancini until after the war, when he was writing for Tex Beneke.

"I met Strayhorn in Pittsburgh. Strayhorn understood about classical music. I've never lost my interest in classical music. Strayhorn had the verse of *Lush Life* in Pittsburgh. He used to play it for us. He said, 'I can't think what to do afterwards.' I knew Erroll Garner in Pittsburgh too. Erroll and Billy were friends.

"In high school I fooled around and watched the other guys in the band and I got interested in why they did what they did. I figured out that the valves worked the same, whether it was a tuba or a trumpet. Then I had a pal who was a clarinet player, and I looked at that. Then I took bassoon one year and I ended up playing second bassoon in the high school orchestra, and that was good training. And I had a couple of semesters on string bass.

"One of the kids hipped me up to Casa Loma, and Billy Rausch used to hit a high F every night. It impressed the hell out of me. Still does! They had wonderful arrangements. Gene Gifford wrote most of them. By the time I got out of high school in 1935, I was writing arrangements, trying to copy Casa Loma. But it was a very stiff band, reminded me of Glenn's band." He sang the kind of rigid phrasing one heard in Glenn Miller's up-tempo work. "*Maniac's Ball* and all that. They were too labored. Tonight we're going to be hot! New Year's Eve hot.

"But swing music should be *relaxed*."

By the time he graduated high school, Billy had played something from almost every family of instruments.

"By then I was writing for little bands. In 1935, like now they have rock groups, they had little dance bands. Some of the mothers wanted their sons to become another Rudy Vallee. There were always bands around. The Depression was on, and I was working three or four nights a week, making three bucks a night, playing the trombone.

"Pittsburgh was where Blue Barron got started. Lawrence Welk too, and Sammy Kaye. I got a job with Baron Elliott. Baron Elliott was Pittsburgh's answer to Guy Lombardo. It was a good-paying job — I bought myself a new Chevrolet, $900, that was 1937 — but it was a shitty job. I was playing trombone, and I had it down so while the guy was singing the vocal, I could write an arrangement. We tried to do some of the hot things. Benny Goodman was

making records then, so we had to do things like that. The two trumpet players were great playing Lebert Lombardo . . . . " He imitated the ricky-tick phrasing. "But they couldn't play shit for chords. 'Gimme a G chord!' So I started doubling trumpet. And that's how come I became a trumpet player, 'cause I could belt it for them. When you're young, you've got good chops. So I slowly diminished my trombone playing and increased the trumpet playing.

"I figured out a long time ago that to be a successful arranger, you had to be a decent player to get recognized. But that's all I used it for. I played enough to be established, so I could write.

"And then Barnet came through Pittsburgh. I heard them on the radio, and I thought, 'Oh boy, what a great band.' He had six brass, four saxes, the rhythm section, and himself. They were playing a tune called *Lazy Bug*. I don't know who the hell ever wrote it. So I went out and asked him one night if I could write an arrangement for him. He said, 'Yeah, we're gonna rehearse tomorrow, if you can get it ready.' So I stayed up all night and made it and took it out to him and he liked it and bought it and hired me for six or seven more. So I wrote them and sent them in, but he got married then and broke up the band.

"That was in June or July of '38. Then he put the band back together, and I heard him on the air from the Famous Door just before New Year's Eve. I wrote him a letter and asked for my money. So he called me and offered me a job to come to New York and write four arrangements a week for $70. I took it. It was better than playing for Baron Elliott.

"I checked into the Park Central Hotel with him. I was there for about three weeks. I brought my horns. He said to me one day, 'Do you think you can help me out? One of the trumpet players is sick. Can you work the show?' So I went down to the Paramount theater and played first trumpet for the shows that day, and that cemented my job with him forever. I knew the book. I was able to sit in and play it. I went back to just writing.

"But then Charlie always had it in mind that he wanted four trumpets. Basie came in to New York and played the Famous Door, and he had four trumpets. Barnet came back one night and told me, 'We're going to have four trumpets. Get a coat. Get down to the tailor and have one made like the guys.' We made a new deal for the money, and I said, 'What am I going to do for a book? The book's written for three trumpets.' He said, 'Well you wrote the son of a bitch, you can make up a part.' And I did, I just made it up as we went along.

"That was about August. We were playing the Playland Ballroom in Rye, and that's where we did *Cherokee* and all those things. Right after that we went into the Meadowbrook, and that's where I broke in on fourth trumpet. After that we did one-nighters all the way out to the Palomar in Los Angeles.

"We went into the Palomar. The war had started in Europe on September first. A couple of nights, Phil Stevens, the bass player, ran over to the curtains with a pitcher of water: the curtain had caught fire from the heat of the lights. The management never did anything about it.

"The night of October first, a Sunday night, we were doing a remote broadcast. A fire started, we were off the stand, and there was no one there to throw the water on the curtains, and the whole friggin' ballroom burned down. So it was a good thing I didn't write too many fourth parts, because I had to write the whole library again. Skippy Martin was in the band, playing saxophone. So he and I rewrote the whole goddamn library."

Barnet took the fire philosophically, saying, "Hell, it's better than being in Poland with bombs dropping on your head.' He recorded a tune called *All Burnt Up*.

"After the fire, it took us about six weeks to get the band back together. Everybody lost their horns. We got back on the road and did one-nighters all the way back from California. We played Boston. That was in November, 1939. That was the first time we went in the Apollo theater with Charlie. I think we were the first white band to play the Apollo. We played *Cherokee* and they loved us. We did a bunch of Duke's things. We played the Lincoln Hotel, and did one-nighters."

Barnet was famous among musicians for his wild behavior. Nor did he discourage it in his musicians. That was, by all accounts, the craziest band in the business, and one of the best. Barnet was born to considerable wealth, defied his family's wishes that he become a lawyer, led a band on an ocean liner when he was only 16 — according to Leonard Feather, he made 22 crossings. By 1932, he was leading a band at the Paramount Hotel in New York City. Eventually he became one of the most famous of big-band leaders. He was also one of the handsomest, which helped him indulge his taste for women. Estimates of the number of his marriages run from six to eleven, but six is probably the accurate number.

His sexual escapades were legend. "He liked the dames," Billy said. "We played some one-nighters somewhere around Youngstown, then a one-nighter in Erie, Pennsylvania. The promoter came up and said, 'Now we're gonna have a jitterbug dance.' The contest was going to be between Mrs. So-and-so, the wife of the promoter, and Mrs. Charlie Barnet. We thought, 'Who the hell is Mrs. Charlie Barnet?' And up comes this sleek looking chick, some broad he got out of a house of ill repute in Youngstown the night before. So she's sitting up there on the stand. She was with the band four or five days. We were working all around those coal fields in Pennsylvania, Middleport, Johnstown, and we ended up in Buffalo, New York. We played a battle of music with Andy Kirk.

"We get off the stand, and we're standing around and Andy Kirk's band's playing, and suddenly I notice there's a whole bunch of guys in overcoats standing around us, they've got us surrounded. And one of them says, 'Which one is *Bahnet*?' So we said, 'There, right there.' So they surrounded Barnet. That was the last we saw of the lady. She was a whore, she was a good money-maker for them. That's one of his adventures.

"With Charlie it was New Year's Eve every night."

Barnet acquired the nickname the Mad Mab. Its origin is obscure, but it was so widely used that even the trade magazines used it; Barnet seemed not to object.

Then Billy got an offer from Glenn Miller. This custom of raiding each other's bands for personnel was endemic to the era; Woody Herman ripped Barnet off for quite a number of musicians, including Ralph Burns. There was apparently no resentment, and Woody and Barnet remained friends.

Billy said, "From what I was told, Glenn got wondering about who was doing the writing for Charlie.

"Barnet worked Atlantic City. We were back in New York, then we went to Boston. Miles Rinker was an associate of the Shribman brothers." Cy and Charlie Shribman, based in Boston, booked bands, and backed a good many of them, including Glenn Miller's. Rinker was a brother of Al Rinker, who sang with Bing Crosby in the Rhythm Boys, and Mildred Bailey. "Miles came to me and said, 'When you get to New York, go into Hurley's bar on Sunday night. Glenn Miller wants to talk to you. And don't talk to anyone about it.'"

Hurley's was at the northeast corner of Sixth Avenue and 49th Street. Its history is interesting. It was a true New York Irish bar whose owner refused to sell it when the Rockefellers wanted to build Rockefeller Center. They were able to buy all the land they needed, except this one small rectangle. All their legal coercions failed, and they had to revise the plans for Rockefeller Center. They built it around Hurley's. It still stands there, an architectural anomaly, and NBC personnel make it their hangout.

"So I went into Hurley's bar," Billy said, "and I met Glenn and his wife Helen, and he offered me the job. I tried to work it out, saying, 'Well I'll let you know.' I was going to go to Charlie and ask him if he would match it. But Glenn said, 'No, you gotta let me know right now.' I gave Charlie my two weeks and joined Miller the night Roosevelt was elected in 1940, for the third term.

"Helen was a real nice lady, though she had that little iron hand in there. I liked her very much. I got to know her pretty well after Glenn was gone. I had my band by then and was playing the Palladium and she came in to hear the band. I thought that was very nice of her.

"Actually, there are two versions of the story. Glenn wanted to hire a trumpet player. He was unhappy and he needed a guy in the section. One version is that he wanted Bernie Privin, who was in Charlie's band at the time. Or he wanted me. And he wanted me to screw up his arrangements. So he hired me. Ray Anthony and I joined the band at the same time — November, 1940.

"John O'Leary made sure we were on the train and all that. He was the road manager, and a good one too.

"John was a good Catholic. He was an old man. We'd be riding on the bus, doing the one-nighters up in New England, and Sunday you'd wake up at six o'clock, seven o'clock in the morning, and the bus would be stopped. A nice bright sunny day in New England. And you're outside a Catholic church. And the bus driver was there, with his hat down over his face. He said, 'John O'Leary just went in for mass. We'll be going in a minute.'

"Miller was a good arranger. And he was a number one fixer. You'd get at the rehearsal, and the tunes were running too long, or somebody's key didn't fit, he was a demon at fixing things like that. He wouldn't transpose it, but he'd be able to patch it together so that it was presentable for a program. I learned an awful lot from him when we did those 15-minute Chesterfield shows. 'Cause he was always adjusting them, or cutting them down, or putting them in medleys — you know, he had a lot of hit records — and he'd make them fit the program, and he'd get as many tunes in as he could. And the pluggers were busy in those days; I'm talking 1940 or '41 now. He'd get all the plugs in he could for the guys, and things like that. He was a demon at cutting here, and putting in a bell note there, and then maybe he'd write a little thing for the saxes — dictate it to them — and it would be ready. He really knew how to run a rehearsal.

"But with Glenn, everything was always the same. You'd come to work, you didn't wear the red socks, Jesus Christ, there'd be a big scene. I learned to live with the routine; I was newly married. We were making good money — 1940, '41, I was making $150 a week guaranteed, but some weeks we'd make four or five hundred, because we were doing the Chesterfield show, and working in New York doing the Paramount Theater, and stuff like that. I bought my first house out here with that. Then I made the two pictures with Glenn, *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Orchestra Wives*."

The two films often run on television. If you look closely, you can see a young — he was 25 — and chubby Billy May back in the trumpet section.

"After the second picture," he said, "we were supposed to have some time off. Instead, all of a sudden, we take the train back to Chicago. And that was a surprise. We were going back to work. We were working out of the College Inn at the Sherman Hotel. We were doing the Chesterfield show on network radio three nights a week. And every weekend, we'd go out somewhere, working an army or navy base somewhere. And it soon became apparent that Glenn was scouting around for something. Meanwhile, I had some friends who were publishers. I let it be known that I didn't want to play that much any more, I'd rather be writing. And I got a deal with Alvino Rey and the King Sisters.

"The Miller band had a couple of weeks off. I went down to Philadelphia, did two or three charts for Alvino, and I got a good deal with them. They gave me 150 bucks a week to write two charts. I went back with Miller. We were playing in Youngstown, Ohio. I went in and told him, I said, 'I've got a chance to stay in New York writing and I won't have to travel any more, so I'd like to leave the band.' He said, 'It's no surprise. I'm going into the service, that's why we've been working all these places. I'm expecting a commission to come through any time. I'd like you to stick it out just until the end. Because I don't want people to think the rats are leaving the ship.' That's the term he used.

"So I said, 'Okay,' because he'd been pretty good to me over all. He was a pain in the ass to work for, but the deal was okay. He said, 'I'm going to come out of this war as some kind of a fuckin' hero, you wait and see.' It came out a little different than he planned.

"I think Glenn was an alcoholic. I think he was a dry drunk. He kept it inside of him. I saw him get drunk a couple of times, and he went completely off his rocker. Just for a couple of days.

"Chummy MacGregor was playing piano in the band. He was the first guy that told me about DTs. Chummy would wake up in the morning and there was nothing there to drink, so he'd have to get down to Plunkett's speakeasy. That was the only place you could get it. He'd run down and get a cab. And when he tried to get in, the back seat would be full of lions and tigers, and he would have to run down on the street. Chummy had been dry for six or seven years when Glenn started the band. Chummy was his friend from way back.

"And I know a couple of times Glenn was drunk when we were working a theater somewhere. And he was staggering, emceeing a show, and Chummy didn't let him up. Every time he'd come near Chummy, Chummy would say, 'Whatsa matter, someone hit you with the bar rag, for Chris'sake?'

"'Dry drunk' is an expression in A.A. — when a person stays sober but hates it. He wants to let all that stuff out, but he doesn't know how to do it unless he gets drunk.

"He was a *terrible* drunk. But when he'd go on the wagon, he'd be one of those stiff people. He never learned to be a decent, sober man. He needed a couple of good A.A. meetings.

"I know other people with the same personality. I knew when I drank and I'd stop, I'd grit my teeth, and say, 'I'll stay sober, god damn it!' And then when you'd let go, you went crazy. And A.A. showed me the way to get over that.

"The rest of the time Glenn was kind of mad at the world. He was bitter about everything. Kind of a down kind of guy. Putting things down all the time." Billy affected a grousing snarl: "'Ah for Chris'sake, Dorsey did that.'

"He used to like some of the stuff I wrote. But then he'd get around to Duke: 'Bunch of sloppy bastards.' True, but it was also good.

"When he got the power of being a leader, and got his own publishing company, he got to be a power maniac. He had control of Thornhill, and Spivak, and he controlled Woody, I think. And he controlled Hal McIntyre. He had a piece of Charlie Spivak and a piece of Thornhill.

"I was in the band about two weeks when I got to know Willie Schwartz, who was playing clarinet. Willie used to say about Glenn, 'Fuck him.'

"I've got to tell you a story. After the war, Willie worked a one-nighter with Tex Beneke at the Palladium. It was a Miller memorial. When the band was off the stand, a guy came up to Willie with a shoe box. He opened it. He had some straw or dirt or something in there. He said, 'Do you know what this is?' Willie said, 'No.' The guy said, 'That's the last piece of dirt that Glenn Miller stepped on.' He asked Willie what he thought he should do with it. Willie said, 'Why don't you smoke it?'

"The one guy who had Miller buffaloed was Moe Purtill. As a drummer, his playing wasn't that good, but we liked him as a guy. He was a good guy, and he didn't take any shit from Miller.

"Miller was cruel to Bill Finegan, he really was. He messed with everybody's charts, but especially Bill's. 'That introduction, take that out. Start down here.' Merciless. The intro would be *beautiful*. 'Take that out.'

"I got that treatment too, but on a smaller scale, 'cause I didn't write that much for him." Billy played solos on *Song of the Volga Boatmen* and *American Patrol*, and he arranged *Ida, Delilah, Long Tall Mama, Always in My Heart, Soldier Let Me Read Your Let* and *Take the A Train.* He was co-arranger with Finegan of *Serenade in Blue* and *At Last*. Far the bulk of that book was written by Finegan, including major hits such as *Little Brown Jug* and *American Patrol*, with Jerry Gray making large contributions, including *A String of Pearls,* when he came over from the band of Artie Shaw, who had joined the navy.

"I stuck it out until the end," Billy said. "By the time the band broke up, in Passaic, New Jersey, the NBC band in New York was short trumpet players, and they made a deal of Mickey McMickle and me and somebody else who had an 802 card. So I stayed in New York, working at NBC and sending charts to Alvino.

"I played in the NBC house band. I played on *The Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street* with Paul Laval. I was working there with a wonderful trumpet player named Charlie Margulis. Charlie was a don't-take-any-crap-from-anybody kind of guy. We were playing along and rehearsing in studio 8-H, and Paul Laval was rehearsing the band. He stopped the band because there was a trumpet unison passage. He said, 'Play it alone, trumpets.' So we played it alone. He said, 'Try it once more.' So we play it again. He said, 'Try it one more time, please.' And Charlie Margulis says, '*Why!?*' Like that. And Paul Laval says, 'It isn't together.' And Charlie Margulis says, 'It's together back here.' And Paul says, 'Well it's not together up here.' And Charlie says, 'Well clean the shit out of your ears!'

"What Charlie didn't realize is that up above us is the glass where the twenty-five-cent tours are going through, and they can hear it. That was the last time Charlie worked there.

"Alvino was working around out here. My first wife was a Los Angeles girl, and I thought, 'Well, I'm gonna have to go in the army.' John Best and those guys were already in the service. John went to the South Pacific with Conrad Gozzo and all those guys, in the Artie Shaw navy band. So I came out to California. I was jobbing here. I put my card in for local 47. When I got my draft notice, they found out I'd had asthma when I was a kid, and they never called me again.

"I worked for Woody in the Palladium. That was '43. He

wanted me to go with him. We really got drunk together in the Garden of Allah. I think two or three nights in a row. Woody left. Bing Crosby was going down to San Diego to work at hospitals. They were taking some singers and some dancers and a little Dixieland band to fake everything. Bobby Goodrich was playing trumpet, and Bobby got drafted. They called me to fake on that show, and I did.

"I guess they liked the way I played. I couldn't play Bing's radio show, because I still had some time to wait on my local 47 card. John Scott Trotter, who knew my work, asked me to do a couple of charts. So I wrote for him. I worked some one-nighters with Bob Crosby and Alvino Rey. I finally got my card, and kept on working. I started doing some work for Ozzie Nelson.

"It was a good band. They had a roving baritone saxophone against a cornet, and they used that as a counterline against the whole band. I asked Ozzie who thought that up, and he couldn't remember. Some arranger had figured that out. When they were doing the *Joe Penner Show* — " Nelson played that show from 1933 to '35 " — they were using that even then. And I was always interested in the arranging. The band had really good writing."

I pointed out to Billy that Gerry Mulligan liked that band for just that reason. And I liked it for charts such as *Swinging on the Golden Gate*, which I remember from childhood.

"I enjoyed working for Ozzie," Billie said. "He was a stickler, but he wasn't a bad guy about it, like Miller was. He was a guitar player, and a bad one. He just said, 'That's no good, change it.' He was an attorney. But he knew what he was doing. I ended up playing trumpet for him, then writing for him, and finally conducting for him. I wrote the cues and bridges on the Ozzie and Harriet show on network radio when his kids were so small he had actors playing their parts.

"Meanwhile, I knew the King Sisters, and they were working for Capitol, and some of their husbands were working for Capitol, so I got in there. I knew Paul Weston, and he was music director of Capitol. I did the Capitol children's things, *Bozo the Clown* and all that.

"Then Capitol needed some fox trots for an Arthur Murray package, so I wrote four or five instrumentals. They liked them so well they put them out. And that's when I started using the sliding saxophones.

"With the sliding saxophone effect, they attack the note out of tune and slide into it with the lip. And certain pitches work better than others, so you've gotta know that. An E on the alto will work as well as an E on the tenor, but they're different pitches. And I always had good saxophone players. I had Willie Schwartz and Skeets Herfurt and Ted Nash and guys like that. They knew what they were doing and they knew what I wanted.

"I did a bunch of those albums, *Sort of May*, then *Sort of Dixie*. They were expensive in those days, but they made it into the black."

He made one strictly-jazz album during that period. *Bill's Bag* was made up of charts on tunes he liked by Charlie Parker, Horace Silver, Frank Foster, Benny Golson, Wayne Shorter, and Bobby Timmons.

"And I got in the band business," Billy said. "My first marriage was falling apart, and my drinking was getting to the point where it started to get pretty glamorous. So I made an alcoholic decision and I took the band out on the road.

"Eddie Sauter and Bill Finegan had a good band. I liked their band. We played a battle of music in Canobie Lake, New Hampshire. My band and the Sauter-Finegan band. When we got there, I remembered a while before that with Glenn when we played there. That was in 1942. And John O'Leary, the road manager, introduced Glenn to the guy who managed the ballroom. Mr. Sullivan, I think. 'Mr. Sullivan owns the park and the lumber yard and everything all around.' Glenn said, 'How do you do?' And the guy said, 'It's ten minutes to nine, you'd better get up to get ready to start.'

"So when I played there with Finegan, I thought, 'Jesus, that son of a bitch, I'd better watch out for him.' We got up and played and the Sauter-Finegan band got up and played, and some kid came up to me and says, 'Hey, Billy, you're off for a while. Come on back into the office.' I went back in the office, and I looked around, and I said, 'Where's Mr. Sullivan?' And the kid said, 'Oh he died about four years ago. He left this place to his kids, and I'm one of them. Have a drink, you don't have to get on the bandstand again.' It was the greatest party we ever had.

"I was out on the road about two years, and I realized it was a losing cause. I don't like to be a bandleader, stand up there. I used to use it in my A.A. pitch. I said I didn't want to be a bandleader because you had to stand up there and do *Happy Birthday to Myrtle*. If somebody asked me to play *Happy Birthday to Myrtle*, I'd tell them where they could shove it. And that ain't the way Lawrence Welk does it.

"I ended up selling the band to Ray Anthony — the name, the personal appearance rights. I didn't want to stay in the band business, I wanted to get the hell out. The agencies and everybody were on my back, 'Go on out, you can do great.' And I did. I grossed $400,000 one year. But where did it all go? To get out of that, I sold it to Ray.

"In 1963, booze had started to create some pretty good problems. I was married for the second time. I was working, I was handling everything, and the finances were okay. But I started to feel bad. One day I got chest pains, and I was lying on the bed, smoking, and I had a drink. This was November of '63. My stepdaughter worked in a doctor's office. She said, 'Do you mind if I talk to the doctor about your chest pains?' I said, 'Okay.' The next thing I know I hear a siren. And here come two paramedics. They said, 'Put your cigarette out, you're having a heart attack.' They took me down to St. John's. This was in the days before they had bypasses. I had to lay in the hospital for two weeks. While I was there, I figured I'd try to stop smoking. I was smoking two or

three packs a day. I was able to stop smoking during that period. When I got out, I got to thinking, 'How noble can I get? The least I can do now is drink.' And about four months later I called Dave Barbour, who was a good friend of mine. He was in A.A. I couldn't reach him. But I knew a lady he had helped.

"So through her I arranged to go to a meeting. I had a few inches in the bottom of a vodka bottle, and I figured there's no use in wasting it. So I drank it, and they tell me I really enjoyed that first meeting." He laughed. "The first meeting I went to I met Red Norvo, and a saxophone player I used to get drunk with in New York, Larry Binyon. Good all-round clarinet player. Larry kind of took me over. The guys all called me the next day. That was in July. I didn't actually stop drinking until later.

"The last time I got drunk was at Charlie Barnet's party. Charlie threw a party for his fiftieth birthday, and he hired Duke Ellington's band. It was the night of all nights. It was at the country club in Palm Springs. I remember drinking some martinis before we went. Seeing Duke and everything. When I woke up the next day, I was lying on the floor in my house in Cathedral City. I knew what I had to do. I had to get to a meeting, and I did. That was it. I haven't had a drink since October, 1964."

Some of the finest charts Billy wrote at Capitol were for Frank Sinatra, seven albums in all. "I started working for him, and I started working for Peggy Lee.

"Sinatra's been good to me. I got along with him. The reason is I never got too close to him. I went in and did my job and got the hell out of there. My wife Doris and I have been guests of his. He invited us to go to the symphony with him and Barbara. He's very knowledgeable. I was surprised to find he knew a lot about Scriabin. He's a much better musician than people realize."

The Sinatra albums included *Come Fly with Me, Come Dance with Me, Come Swing with Me*, and four more. Billy worked with George Shearing on *Burnished Brass* and had hit singles with Nat Cole, including *Walkin' My Baby Back Home.*

"Pretty soon," he said, "television came around. The first show I did, or the first you ever heard of, was *Naked City*. I did that for two or three years. Then I went to work for Lionel Newman, and I wrote a bunch of *Batman* sequences. Neal Hefti wrote the theme, and on the cue sheet Lionel listed it as 'Word and music by Neal Hefti.' Lionel was a good cat. I wrote a bunch of *Mod Squad* episodes. Then when John Williams went to Boston, he asked me do some charts for the Boston Pops Orchestra, probably 25 or 30 charts for them.

"I lived up in Cambria for three or four years." Cambria is a beautiful ocean-side community up the coast from Los Angeles; in those days it would have seemed quite remote. "I wrote the Time-Life series, for Capitol Records. They remade the swing era. It was a good gig for me, because they gave me the tapes on Tuesday. I'd take them up and write next week's show, send them in to the copyist, come down and record them on Monday night. They said, 'Would you do a couple of dates for us?' It ended we did one record date a week, and sometimes two, for over three years. They've repackaged them. That was from '69 through '72. It counted on the musicians' pension fund for the guys and for me.

"I did some work for Jack Elliott and Allyn Ferguson when they were writing for television together and had that office on Coldwater Canyon at Ventura Boulevard. I ran into Lou Busch — Joe 'Fingers' Carr — and told him I was in A.A. He'd quit drinking some time before. I said, 'What's new?'

"And he said, 'I'm getting married again.'

"I said, 'Oh? Anybody I know?'

"He said, 'No, I finally kicked the girl-singer habit too.'

"I told that to Jack and Allyn at their office. Dave Grusin was there. He said, 'Where do those guys hold *their* meetings?'"

I first met Billy in that office. I was in slight awe: after all, he had been one of the heroes of my adolescence. Jack and Allyn were in the process of founding what is now called the American Jazz Philharmonic to play scores that partook of both jazz and classical music. A score had been submitted by Frank Zappa. Billy was sitting in an armchair, reading it.

He said, "Look at all the percussion it calls for." And he read the list aloud, culminating in "two garbage cans."

Billy paused a moment and said, "Twenty or thirty gallons?" and I about rolled out of my chair with laughter.

"I'm not doing any writing now," Billy said. "I quit. The last thing I did was a year and a half ago, Stan Freeburg's *The United States of America Volume 2.*

"The last couple of things I did were so different from the way I like to record. Everybody's out in different rooms. The drums are out in the men's room. Who needs that? I did a thing for Keely Smith. The only reason I did it was because they offered me a ridiculous amount of money. We did it at Capitol, and everybody's out in different rooms. I said, 'How can the guys hear?' They said, 'They can listen on their headphones.'

"Screw that. And I don't like the CD sounds at all. I think they're terrible. It sounds to me like all the mixers are young and their idea of a good balance is the Beatles. It's the same thing in symphony; you hear too much pounding."

Billy has had a wispy gray beard for some years now. Of late he has dieted away some weight. He has a sharp sense of life's incongruity, and humor has always infused his writing, whether his compositions or his arrangements, though his ballad writing is always beautiful and sensitive. (The chart on Sinatra's *Autumn in New York* is his.) This bright laughter is perhaps the reason he has not been given the credit that is his due.

Except of course among musicians, particularly arrangers. He is one of the most admired writers in the business. No one will be pleased to learn he has retired.

As an old expression has it: The cats always know.