Gene Lees
Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

January 1998 *Vol. 17 No. 1*

The Tragedy: Chet Baker

Irving Bush, whom we heard from in the last issue, was in an Army band with Chet Baker. He contributes to this issue a wry memoir of that experience.

One of the most disturbing movies I have ever seen is a documentary on Baker. He was a pathetic figure, one of the most abject junkies in jazz history, always cadging money, hocking his horns. Once he showed up for a gig in Italy not only without a horn; he didn't even have shoes. The impresario bought him a pair and found him a horn.

The film shows his deterioration, going from stills of him in his smooth-skinned youth to a ravaged, wrinkled, and prematurely old man. I consider Chet Baker an enormously under-rated musician. I didn't always get the point of his understated music. But one day I came to love the gentle, lyrical beauty of his playing and the trusting sensitivity of his singing.

His boyish good looks were widely noted, and it was thought that he could be a movie star. Hollywood was looking him over. He had it all, this fair-haired gifted young man from Oklahoma. Why did he throw it away? To know that one would have to know the names of his demons.

Legends about him abounded, most of them evoking the out-of-it dopester of jazz folklore. One of the best-known jokes:

A road musician returns to his hotel to find the room reeking of marijuana. His roomie, kneeling, ear to the floor, signals him to come and listen. The musician puts his ear down and says, "I don't hear a thing." The other musician says, "I know, man, it's been like that allllll day."

Chet Baker, by the evidence, had that quality. One widely-told tale had Baker meeting, at a record date in Italy, pianist Romano Mussolini, son of the dead dictator. Chet supposedly said, "Nice to meet you. Sorry to hear about your old man."

The story sounded too much like a bop joke to be true. Then I was writing lyrics on a project in Germany. The singer was Caterina Valente. I asked if she had ever heard the story. "It's not only true," she said, "I was *there*. But it was at the start of a concert tour, not a record date."

I never saw Chet Baker play and laid eyes on him only once. He came into Jim and Andy's in New York, looking ravaged, asking for a few bucks from other musicians. He made it to the age of 59. It's hard to imagine how.

Chet Baker died in Amsterdam on May 13, 1988, in a fall from a hotel room. It is widely believed that he was thrown. The gangsters of Holland are said to be among the most brutal in the world.

The Tale of Fort Huachuca

By Irving Bush

I first met Chet in California in July of 1951. He was serving his second term in the U.S. Army with the Sixth Army Band at the Presidio of San Francisco. I had just finished six months of gruelling advanced infantry basic training at Camp Roberts, California. The Korean war was in full swing and I was thankful to be assigned to a band.

Chet (at the time everyone called him Chetty) was playing third cornet in the concert band and third trumpet in the dance band. He was also playing after-hours clubs in the sleazy Filmore district of San Francisco. Sometimes Chet would get together with a rhythm section. Occasionally, André Previn, who also was stationed at the Presidio, would sit in on piano. What a great combination. What a treat. It should have happened more often.

Chet and the band leader, Chief Warrant Officer "Neat Nate" Commack, a rather good Dixieland cornet player, never got along too well. Chet's relaxed military demeanor and limited reading prowess finally resulted in Neat Nate having him transferred to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He was assigned as a bugler to play taps at military funerals. Within a few weeks Chet went AWOL and returned to San Francisco. After about a month, a colonel from the Inspector General's office made a threatening speech to the Sixth Army Band. He said the Army knew that Private Baker was in the area and if any band members were seen with him, they would be in deep trouble. That same evening, two other band members and I had a clandestine meeting with Chet. We apprised him of our concerns for his welfare and thought it would be in his best interest to turn himself in before the Army classified him as a deserter. Chet said he had an interesting story to tell the Army if and when he surrendered.

Here is Chet's version of The Tale of Fort Huachuca.

"It was a stormy and windswept day at the cemetery outside the fort. The wind was blowing the sand and dirt around with such force that you couldn't see the sky. I was the bugler assigned to play the damned call, but my mouthpiece and bugle were full of sand. A few strange sounds came out and finally I had to stop playing. It was hopeless. Suddenly the wind stopped blowing and dust settled. The clouds opened up. The sky was blue and a voice from above the clouds and sky said, 'Chetty, split.' And here I am. How about that, guys? Good, eh?"

Silence.

Finally, I think we all blurted out, "No, Chetty, not good."

"Jesus," Chet said, "I thought it was a good story. Besides, it

just might be true."

I said, "Chetty, if you tell that to the Army doctors, you'll be in the funny farm for the rest of your life."

Several days later, Chet did turn himself in and within a few weeks he was a civilian again. He was discharged on what the Army called a Section 8 — a person "unfit" for military service.

Shortly after Chet and the Army parted company, he played at the Tiffany Club in Los Angeles with a saxophone player by the name of Charlie Parker.

During the early part of 1952, the Sixth Army Band was playing a series of concerts in the Los Angeles area. At one concert I noted that Chet was in the audience. After the performance, several of the band members, including myself, were talking to Chet, joking about the Army and putting him on about making the difficult adjustment to civilian life.

When the conversation broke up, Chet took me by the arm and said he needed some money to buy some pot. He mentioned he had acquired a New York Calicchio trumpet from a former Army band member who was in the stockade at the Presidio. The trumpet player, now a prisoner, gave Chet a pawn ticket for the trumpet, which was now in Chet's possession. Chet said he wanted one of my Martin trumpets. The Martin plus fifty dollars and the Calicchio was mine. I had another Martin Committee model that I liked very much, but I also liked the Calicchio. Finally I said, "Thirty dollars and we're in business."

Chet said, "Great."

I gave him one of my Martin trumpets and thirty dollars.

"Follow me to my pad at the beach and I'll give you the Calicchio," he said.

I got in my car, pulled up behind Chet, and we were off. I had heard of his maniac driving tendencies, but this was like Le Mans. I finally lost Chet in the traffic and gave up the chase.

A few days later I learned that Chet was living in a small house in Redondo Beach. Chet, and, I hoped, the Calicchio trumpet. We finally found the house, parked the car, and went to the front door. On the door was a sign, *Wet Paint*. I rang the bell and Chet answered. He seemed a little surprised but said, "Come on in, but don't touch the door. The paint's still wet."

He introduced us to his girlfriend and future wife, Charlene.

"I'm sorry you lost me the other day. I forgot you were following me and by the time I remembered, you were nowhere in sight."

He went into another room and brought back the Calicchio trumpet. The brass was dull with tarnish.

"Wow," I said. "What happened to the lacquer?"

"Well," Chet mumbled, "yesterday I was painting. When I finished I used some paint thinner to get the paint off my hands and forgot to wash it off. I practiced for a while and then I noticed the thinner must have taken off most of the lacquer. It looked horrible, so I got more thinner and rubbed the rest of the lacquer off, making it all one color. It looks pretty good, don't you think? Sort of well worn-in, shall we say."

I gulped. "Okay, Chetty, anything you say."

We all said our goodbyes and Marilyn and I left for home. She was really steamed, but I told her: "You have to understand, Chetty is Chetty and you have to accept that."

"I still don't understand," she said.

Shortly after that memorable evening, Chet connected with Gerry Mulligan and the rest, as they say, is history. To the best of my knowledge, Chet used that same Martin trumpet for quite some time, perhaps years. He later endorsed trumpets for the Martin company, as did other jazz greats, such as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Dorham, and Pete and Conte Candoli.

I gave my other Martin trumpet to a good friend who was being sent to Korea. When he returned to the United States, he confessed that he'd pawned the trumpet in Tokyo and never had the money to get it back.

Those old Martins were great trumpets, and I don't think there are many left. I wish I still had one.

— Irving Bush

The Triumph: Clark Terry

In May of 1955, just before Derby Day, I took up permanent residence in the United States, arriving in Louisville, Kentucky, to become classical music critic and later music and drama editor of the Louisville *Times*. One of the first things I did was to seek out the best local jazz musicians, both black and white. That was after I assimilated the shock of seeing, on my arrival, signs on the toilet doors of the Louisville and Nashville Railway station that said Colored and White. But there were other shocks as well, some of which I would understand only in retrospect. For example, when in 1956 I was to interview Nat Cole at lunch, he invited me to his hotel and he ordered our lunch sent to his room. He was such a gracious man, elegant and somewhat shy, and I was in such awe of his talent that I did not then ponder the significance of this. It had been only days before this that he had been attacked on a stage by racists in Alabama, his native state. As far as I can remember, he never mentioned the incident and I didn't ask. We talked about music, throughout a long and lovely afternoon, and much of what I learned from him affects me to this day. It was only later that I mused on why we had lunch in his room, rather than the restaurant. The answer is only too clear. Under considerable pressure, Louisville had desegregated its school system — the first southern city to do so, by the way — and had partially desegregated its hotels. It was all right, apparently, to let some of Them stay at your hotel, hidden away in Their rooms. But They must not eat in your restaurant.

Nat Cole and I would not have been allowed to enter the dining room.

He knew this. I didn't. I was not long out of Canada. It is not that there was no prejudice in Canada. But it was not, as Oscar Peterson has pointed out, the same. There was no segregation of the school system. And there was no entrenched, institutionalized, and lethal system of social separation. Dark stares and covert

discrimination were the lot of Oscar Peterson, not near escapes from lynching, as in the life of Clark Terry. In Montreal, my late friend Cedric Phillips, a pianist and singer from Barbados, and I could go to restaurants and bars together and no one bothered us. But Nat Cole and I could not have gone to that dining room in Louisville.

One of the things I encountered in Louisville was the richness of southern black speech. One of my friends there was a guitarist named John Woods, whom I have never forgotten. He was also a janitor at my newspaper. When John — and any other black friend — and I wanted to listen to records together, I had to enter my apartment building, go back and open the fire escape door at the rear of the Adams House, as that apartment building was called, and sneak up the fire stairs.

John not only was a very good guitarist, he had an incredible flair for language. This southern richness of speech, I have concluded, comes from two traditions, the Irish and the African. Out of this have come some wonderful writers, Carson McCullers, William Faulkner, and William Styron among them.

John one day was talking about a girl he had once loved. This was not sexual boasting, which I detest, but a romantic remembrance. He talked of her passion. He said that when he was making love to her, "she like t'clawed de paper off de wall," and, he said, "When I took it out, she groaned, like I took a knife out of a wound." Gawd-*damn*! That is poetry, not pornography.

It was in Louisville that I first encountered the term *motherfucker.* It shocked me deeply. When I hear it used in a movie set in, say, the 1930s, I find it disconcerting, because it was not in widespread use before, perhaps, the 1960s. What made the term so electrifying is that it seemed to refer to the ultimate and Oedipan taboo, fucking your mother. But that is not what the term means. It is a black term applied to whites, an echo of slavery: it means the monster who fucks *my* mother. Whites who use it don't know that this is the meaning; but then I doubt that many blacks know it either, just as young blacks do not know the term *ofay* for a white, piglatin for foe. It has almost vanished, and using it will betray your age, exactly like other once-hip terms such as *groovy. Dig,* on the other hand, has become part of American speech, as has much black vernacular transmitted through white jazz musicians to other white entertainers and thence to the vast white American — and eventually world — audience. If the extent of black influence on American and world music is little remarked, even less so is the influence on the English language. You'll see *latch onto* in the New York Times; it was once inside black speech.

My involvement in jazz, which is not something I sought but something that was in a sense inevitably imposed on me, has enriched my life with an enormous number of black friends. It also enriched my language (as my involvement with French, Spanish, and Portuguese did too) with not only vocabulary but also an altered sense of locution.

It has, however, presented me with a dilemma, both as a writer and as an editor. Realizing the ignorance of most whites about black speech, I often found myself tempted to edit quotations so that a white reader would not ascribe ignorance to the subjects of my pieces. This caused a subtle falsification. For example, double negatives are forbidden in English, on the rather dubious theory that two negatives produce a positive, a logic more appropriate to algebra than to language. Black Americans commonly use double negatives. They serve to intensify a given statement.

Grover Sales once did a retrospective on the career of Dizzy Gillespie for his jazz history class at San Francisco State University. Dizzy was there, moved to tears by it. One of the students asked him a question about jazz and serious music. Dizzy took exception to this, as well he should have, saying, "Men have died for this music. You can't get no more serious than that."

There is a temptation to alter that to "You can't get more serious than that," or, going further, the pedantic "You can get no more serious than that."

But either is wrong, misrepresenting Dizzy and in any event weakening his powerful rejoinder. What he said was as right as his choice of notes in his playing.

Somewhere or other, John Steinbeck wrote (and this is close to the quote), "Deprive the working man of his profanity and you make him mute indeed."

Thus it is with black speech. And there is much about black grammatical revisionism that is logically sound. Blacks frequently do not use the -s at the end of the third person singular. They are quite right about this; we should dump it, for English is not an inflected language, and this last vestige of present-tense inflection has no function. So too the -m at the end of whom, an attempt to impose case endings on a language to which they are now not natural. I would note, however, that Clark Terry uses "whom".

In quoting Clark shortly, I will alter nothing, except to excise occasional redundancies that occur in anyone's conversation, editing that I apply to my own writing.

Some years ago, writing a magazine article about him, I gave a lot of thought to the life and work of Clark Terry. I reflected on the classical trumpet literature, on the use of the instrument in all sorts of pre-jazz music, pondered his astounding flexibility and effortless expressivity, and concluded that he must be the greatest trumpet player in history. Not just jazz history, history. He is so individual that one can identify him not just in two or three bars but in two or three notes. Sometimes in one note.

Clark does a circus turn whose complexity is not always appreciated. He'll play trumpet with one hand, fluegelhorn with the other, in duets with himself. He does so with a joy and exuberance that is incredibly infectious, as indeed is all of his music. It must be remembered that his fingering is ambidextrous. But more to the point, he seems to be partitioning his mind. It may be fun to watch and hear; it is deeper than it looks, and it tells us something about the remarkable brain and neurological organization of Clark Terry.

Yet my admiration goes far beyond music. I will say something that will cause many musicians to say, "Yeah, baby!"

It is this: I don't like Clark Terry; I love Clark Terry.

I have no trouble understanding black Americans who hate whites. They're no mystery to me. But Dizzy Gillespie, Duke

Ellington, and Count Basie, all devoid of racism, are a mystery. So is Clark Terry.

Clark Terry, like every other black in America, has had to suffer white racism all his life. But he is one of the very few black Americans to speak out openly against black racism, particularly in jazz. Some black Americans, among them Spike Lee, have denied that it exists, saying blacks are incapable of it, a fatuous casuistry. For, as Oscar Peterson's sister Daisy said, when I was researching Oscar's biography, "Show me a race that is without racism." Oscar too has fought black as well as white racism. But no one has been as diligent, ardent, and outspoken about it as Clark Terry. He told me some years ago that his favorite drummer, for engagements in Los Angeles, was white. "And I get a lot of criticism from the Brothers for it," he said.

Over the years, I have been careful in interviewing "black" musicians about discussing race. It is not that I hesitated to discuss it. Much to the contrary. It is an area of deepest worry and interest to me. But precisely because of that interest, I came to wonder if I was guilty of, as they saw in law, leading the witness. And so in these conversations and interviews, I did not raise the subject, wondering if the subject could be avoided. It could not. Not ever.

In the 1960s, when jazz musicians made their New York headquarters in a bar called Jim and Andy's on the south side of 48th Street, just east of Sixth Avenue, Clark Terry was working in the NBC *Tonight* show band under the leadership of Doc Severinsen. I did not know then that he and Doc were especially close friends.

Rockefeller Center, where the show was taped, is one block up Sixth Avenue from where Jim and Andy's stood. J and A's, as we called it, which might have been named the Institute of Osmotic Learning, has long since been effaced, replaced by one of those undistinguished glass-and-steel verticalities that have stripped the character out of central Manhattan. Doc was often in there. So was Clark. I used to talk with him almost daily. The exchanges in Jim and Andy's were endless, and insights burgeoned and blossomed in one's mind. Many of mine came from Clark.

He was always busy, with the *Tonight* show band; with the quintet he and Bob Brookmeyer led in the early 1960s; with the Gerry Mulligan Concert Jazz Band (his recorded duet with Mulligan on *News from Blueport,* naming various cities through quoted song titles, is one of the wittiest bits of music I know); with guest appearances on the recordings of an enormous number of musicians; and with studio engagements of all kinds, up to (or down to) performances on the kazoo. And always the sunshine when Clark entered the Gymnasium, as Gary McFarland called J and A's.

Roger Kellaway played piano in the Terry-Brookmeyer quintet for two and a half years, starting in 1962, and made two albums with Clark, and did a good deal of studio work with him, back in the era when jazz musicians could pay the rent, even very high rent, by such engagements. Roger said, "Clark Terry is consistently one of the most up, positive human beings I have ever known. I can't remember a negative conversation, ever. He is always a joy to be around.

"And the music! Delightful, inventive, lyrical, and full of Clark's sense of humor. I have always looked forward to playing with him. It is one of those can't-wait-to-do-it situations."

When I see Clark at all now, it is for a few minutes between sets somewhere. We share as a greeting a whispered obscenity, a private joke that I will not tell you. But last fall, Clark played on the cruise of the S.S. Norway. We both had the 'flu, and spent a lot of time together, if only in commiseration. Much, but not all, of the conversations that follow occurred on that ship at that time, mostly in Clark's stateroom.

Whence this incredible flexibility? Is it a consequence of his having begun his career by playing a garden hose? I think perhaps it does.

Clark Terry was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on December 14, 1920, the son of a laborer at Laclede Gas and Light Company, the seventh of eleven children, seven of them girls. Before Clark's birth, one girl died. Clark's brothers never escaped the destiny of their father. Clark alone did.

In the history of music you encounter families in which music is the accepted and even expected profession: the two Johann Strausses, the Bach family (whose tradition may still be going on), Leopold and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the Casadesus family, the Brubecks, and many more. Then there are those in whom the imperative for an art seems to emerge from a genetic umbra, an atavism, boon perhaps of an unknown ancestor. Debussy, for example.

I'd known about the garden hose for years.

"I must have been ten, eleven years old," Clark said. "Twelve, maybe. My older sister's husband, Cy McField, played tuba in the Dewey Jackson band — Dewey Jackson's Musical Ambassadors — at a place called Sauter's Park in Carondolet in South St. Louis. That's where I was born.

"The park was all Caucasian. We were not allowed to go in there. Us kids, we'd walk down there, about three miles. Walk down to the end of Broadway, the county line. We'd stand up on something behind the bandstand and we'd listen to the band that way.

"I remember one cat who played in Dewey Jackson's band, Mr. Latimore. He was a big, huge guy, played lead trumpet. He used to like me and my brother-in-law used to take me to all the rehearsals. He'd say, 'Son, you can watch my horn.' And I'd say, 'Oh thank you,' and I'd literally sit there and watch his horn. After so many rehearsals, I became very very close to him. He owned a candy store, and he always kept a pocket full of caramels and mary janes, and he'd give me a couple of caramels and a couple of mary janes and sometimes a couple of pennies. He was the greatest cat in the world, so I wanted to play the horn he played. I'm glad he wasn't a banjo player!

"So one time they went on a break. He said, 'You watch my horn.' I said, 'Okay, Mr. Latimore,' and by the time they came back, I had been magnetically drawn to this horn, huffin' and puffin' away, trying to make a sound. And he walked in. He said, 'Ah, son, you're gonna be a trumpet player.' And I've always said, 'And I was stupid enough to believe him.'

"That, plus the fact that on the corner called iron Street and Broadway, near where I lived, there was a Sanctified church. We used to sit on the curb and let those rhythms be instilled in us." Banging a beat with his hands, he sang against it a strong churchy passage. "You know, with the tambourines, and the people dancin' and jiggin' and all that. That was as much as you needed to be instilled with the whole thing.

"We had this little band. We used to play on the corner. My first thing was a comb and tissue paper. The paper vibrates. Then I came across a kazoo, which is the same principle. Later on in my life, we had to have kazoos as standard equipment in the studio. Sometimes we would have do little things when you were recording for different commercial products.

"We had a guy named Charlie Jones — we called him Bones — who used to play an old discarded vacuum hose, wound around his neck like a tuba, into a beer mug." Clark sang a buzzy bass line in imitation, mostly roots and fifths. "It was a better sound than the jug." The jug of course was the old earthenware jug used in country music and jazz.

"We had a cat who played the jug, too. With the two of them, we had a good solid foundation. My brother Ed played — we called him Shorts, he was a little short cat — played the drums. He took the rungs out of some old chairs for sticks. In those days we didn't have refrigeration, we had ice boxes, and when the pan wore out, started leaking and got rusty, it would sound just like a snare. They had those tall bushel baskets in those days, I haven't seen one in a long time. He'd turn one of those upside down and hang the old discarded ice pan on the side and take the chair rungs and keep a rhythm like that. He got an old washtub and put a brick and fixed it so he could beat it." Clark laughed that delicious and slightly conspiratorial laugh of his as he pounded a beat.

I said, "He sounds like some kind of a genius."

"Yeah!" Clark said. "He was. Well, I got an old piece of a hose one day and coiled it up and got some wire and tied it so that it stuck up in three places so it would look like valves. I took a discarded kerosene funnel and that was my bell. I got a little piece of lead pipe — we didn't realize in those days that there was lead poisoning — and that was my mouthpiece."

It struck me that Clark had invented a primitive bugle, on which he could presumably play the overtones.

"Yeah!" he said. "By the time I got into the drum and bugle corps, I had already figured out the system like the Mexican mariachi players use. They were taught back in those days to play the mouthpiece first."

He did a rhythmic tonguing like a mariachi player, then pressed his lips together and buzzed. "After a while I figured out how to change the pitch." Pursing his lips, he did a glissando, up one octave and down, flawlessly. "And then they could do that with the mouthpiece. After you got the mouthpiece under control, and you got a bugle, you could play notes. You could make all the notes that went from one harmonic to the other."

Never having seen Clark teach, I realized what makes him such an incredible — and so he is reputed — pedagogue, and why young people who study with him worship him. And all of it is communicated with laughter and a sense of adventure.

I told Clark of a conversation I had in the early 1960s with Jack Teagarden. Teagarden's group was playing the London House in Chicago. Jack and I were sitting in one of the booths, with conversations going on all around us. It was legend that Jack could play all sorts of notes in "false" positions on the trombone because, as a child with short arms, he could make them no other way. As we discussed this, Jack, very softly, played a major scale with the slide in closed position.

Jack said, "You should be able to play any note in any position. All the slide does is make it easier."

"Yeah, I agree," Clark said, laughing. "I'll never forget when I met Sweets Edison in the Basie band. Well, I knew him before that around St. Louis. That was before he really got known. He had an old Reynolds trumpet. It was an old, old, old brand. I don't think there's even one on the scene today. It was jammed, and you couldn't tune it. But Sweets could play the damn thing in tune! It was just his chops.

"This proves the important thing is the mastery of the embouchure. Like Jack proved to you."

I said, "You've never gone in front of the audience with a stern look and challenged the audience to like your music. Neither did Dizzy. About his clowning onstage, Dizzy said to me once, 'If I can make people laugh, and if that makes them receptive to my music, I'm gonna do it.' That doesn't mean one isn't serious about the music itself."

"Not at all!" Clark said. "Who was more serious about playing than Dizzy was? Nobody!"

"When did you begin to think of jazz as art, rather than merely entertainment?"

"Well," Clark said, "I think from the very beginning. I wasn't aware of how much it was attuned to art until later years. But from the very beginning I knew that it was an entertaining thing, and you had to get involved if you were going to have a certain amount of success. My older sister's husband, Cy McField, played tuba in that Dewey Jackson band, as I mentioned. He used to do a little bit about a preacher. I was just a kid, and used to enjoy the music, and I found it very entertaining. Made you want to move, you know, and it made you laugh. People like to hear things that make them forget about their worries. People had a lot of worries in those days. It was the Depression. So jazz was in a sense born out of that, too. People wanted to forget about their inhibitions, and their problems, and where the next meal was coming from. They wanted to sing and dance and play instruments. In New Orleans, the pawn shops were loaded with ostracized instruments. These cats got hold of them, and played them by hook or crook. We always show this in clinics. How they played here, or over there or over there."

With a mouthpiece he demonstrated aberrant and off-center embouchures, something one saw not infrequently in the old days among older players. "They were never taught properly. They just grabbed the instrument and played it however they thought they should. Maybe they saw somebody else do that. Most of them had very bad tone. But a lot of things came out of that. They had bad habits. But somebody had the ingenuity to figure out how to make

his sound more acceptable to those who were considered legitimate players. This cat figured out how to hum and play at the same time."

Clark demonstrated the burry sound that this produces. "All those cats, all the way up to Vic Dickenson, knew how to play and hum. It was known as a buzz. It made the sound seem bigger. This was, in a sense, a by-product of ignorance. And people would say, 'You don't want to listen to this cat. He sounds puny. He sounds like a monkey pissing on a shovel.'

"Things in the Italian vocabulary for music, we can't use a lot of them. You wouldn't get on the bandstand and say, 'Let's play some largo blues.' You'd sound like an educated fool. You want to say funky, greazy, slimey, ass-kicking, or whatever. The jazz cats figured out ways to communicate without knowing all that vocabulary. There was no way for them to get to that. There were no schools they could go to."

He imitated the kind of big, pushed sound that Ben Webster, among others, obtained. "There was no vocabulary for it," Clark said. "It's from the abdomen. We called it 'body huffs.' *Hoo! Hoo! Hah! Hoo, hah, ho!* The reason Duke Ellington's band sounded so different was because the guys would use things like body huffs." He sang, remarkably reproducing the feeling of the Ellington sax section, an eighth-note pickup, the quarter notes anticipated by an eighth: *Huh-hoo, hoh, hoh!* "Any section," he said, "that tries to phrase like that, if they don't know how to do the body huffs, it ain't comin' through." He sang it again, without that pushed body sound, reproducing an effect in which the time was academically the same, but the feeling wasn't there.

"It's from the abdomen," Clark repeated. "Like, for instance, when Prez played . . . " He sang in a completely different manner, the phrases light and airy. "We called it the *lull* sound, *lu, lu lu-lah.*" Then he made another sound, *Thuh, thuh, thuh.* "You produced the sound from between the teeth. You stop it with the tongue and the air continues around it." He sang some more, beginning the notes with the unvoiced *th* sound and ending it with the longer, voiced, buzzy *th.* "This is the kind of thing you ain't gonna find in no Italian dictionary. Ain't gonna find it in no classical players, and if they know, they're not gonna condone it because *they* didn't figure it out.

"We had an occasion with Duke to play with the Buffalo Philharmonic. At the end of the piece, I'll never forget the phrasing." He sang it. "That was the figure he wrote. They passed it out to the strings." And he sang the fixed classical phrasing of the same passage. "So Duke said, 'Let's take a break.' And he rewrote it in triplets. They came back and they played it. It came off. Tom Whaley, who did the copy work — he was with the band for years and years and years, and he died in complete obscurity two or three years ago — and Strays were there, and they got it. It took about an hour. But Duke made it swing."

"Now, getting back to your garden hose and your bugle . . . .

"I heard other notes," Clark said. "I was able to get those open tones on the bugle." He sang the race track bugle call.

"Were you able to get those in-between tones on that garden hose?"

"Not really. But it was a device that satisfied my yen for a trumpet, which I couldn't afford. I didn't have to use it too long because luckily the neighbors got tired of hearing me make sounds on that hose and — you won't believe this, Gene — they chipped in and bought me an old C.G. Conn trumpet from the pawnshop for twelve dollars and fifty cents."

"That's a sweet, dear thing, to give such encouragement and an instrument to a kid."

"Yeah it is," Clark said, "and I don't forget it. I've bought tons of instruments and given them to kids. I got a lot of kids started. The head of Boys' High in Brooklyn, I gave him his first saxophone, bought it from a pawnshop, old raggedy baritone. That was his instrument, and he learned how to manipulate it. And he's head of the jazz department. That's where Aaron Copland, Max Roach, Randy Weston, all these cats went to school. Yeah."

"How old were when you got that real trumpet?"

"I'd say roughly fifteen years old. I was at Vashon High School in St. Louis. Our director was Mr. Clarence Haydn Wilson. He was head of the music department. He issued the instruments for band. I wanted a trumpet, but there were no trumpets available. There was a valve trombone. He said, 'Take this, it's the same fingering. You can make more noise with it than you can with a trumpet."

"Was it in concert?" I said.

"I don't know. Wait, come to think of it, I think it was in B-flat. Same as trumpet. So, when I finally got hold of a trumpet the next semester, Mr. Wilson assigned me to a guy name Leonard Smalls to teach me the scales. Up till then I was just making noise on it. Old timey stuff." He sang a couple of riffs of the period. "We'd sometimes play on the streetcar, on our way to or from school. When the people from the neighborhood bought me this Conn, I didn't know from nothing, and Mr. Smalls taught me the fingering. I think by then I had lucked up on the right embouchure. From watching people, and asking questions."

"Did you also start boxing during that period?"

"Yeah. I learned it in St. Louis," Clark said. "Archie Moore and I were friends. Archie used to go with my sister, and we were pretty good buddies. He said in his book that I could have become a champion boxer if I'd wanted to. I was pretty good. I learned it in Carondolet ??? There was a guy named Kid Carter, he used to teach all us kids. He'd walk up and hit you in the belly, and say, 'You gotta learn how to take it, boy.' He gathered us up and taught us the art of self-defense. He taught us how to punch and how to shift and recoil and all that. We got some pretty good little boxers out of there."

"Miles boxed too," I said.

"Yeah, but Miles learned to box after he got to New York. He was a fan. I started early."

"Miles talked in his book about coming to hear you and play for you."

Specifically, Miles describes his studies with Elwood Buchanan, who taught at Lincoln High School, where Miles played in the school band. In *Miles: The Autobiography*, he avers that Buchanan was the greatest influence in his life other than his father.

He writes: "One of the most important things that happened for me in high school — besides studying under Mr. Buchanan — was when I met Clark Terry . . . . He became my idol on the instrument . . . . He was older than me." Miles was born May 25, 1926, and thus Clark was just under six years his senior. He continued: "Anyway, we went down there to Carbondale to play and I saw this dude and walked right up to him and asked him if he was a trumpet player. He turned and asked me how I knew he was a trumpet player. I told him I could tell by his embouchure. I had on my school band uniform and Clark had on this hip coat and this bad, beautiful scarf around his neck. He was wearing hip butcher boy shoes and a bad hat cocked ace-deuce. I told him I could also tell he was a trumpet player by the hip shit he was wearing.

"He kind of smiled at me and said something that I have forgotten. Then, when I asked him some things about playing trumpet, he sort of shined me on by telling me that he didn't want to 'talk about no trumpet with all them pretty girls bouncing around out there.' Clark was really into the girls at that time, and I wasn't. So what he said to me really hurt me . . . . But I never forgot that first time me and Clark met, how he was. I decided then I was going to be that hip, even hipper, when I got my shit together."

Clark's memory of their first encounter is at variance with that, although it's conceivable that both stories are true. Clark said:

"His teacher, Elwood Buchanan, was a good buddy of mine. We used to hang out in the beer joints and drink beer together. He said," and Clark went into almost a Louis Armstrong growl, "'Man, you gotta come over to school and hear this Miles Dewey Davis, this little Miles Dewey Davis is *bad*.' Miles was from East St. Louis. So I went over one day to hear this little cat. He was very, very thin, a timid little cat, man. He couldn't look you in the eye. He'd hold his head down. He was so skinny that if he'd turned sideways, they'd have marked his ass 'absent'. And he played. And he played his ass off even then. Just a little kid.

"Buch — " his friend, Buchanan; Clark pronounced it Buke, as in the second syllable of *rebuke* — "had a long ruler with some tape on one end of it. He said, 'He's got only one problem. Every time he shakes them notes, I have to hit him with the ruler.' Miles liked to play like Harry James. He loved Harry James. Buch said to Miles, 'Stop shaking those damn notes. You'll shake enough when you get old. Play it straight.'

"Buchanan's old teacher was Joe Gustaff, who was head of the trumpet section in the St. Louis Symphony and a very domineering type. He insisted on all his students using Heim mouthpieces. They were wafer thin with deep cups. Miles got hold of one of them. He loved it. I could never play it, because I think my chops are too thick. Miles had thinner chops. He had a knack for making that thing sound. Even in later years, he'd say to me, 'Hey, man, can you find me a Heim mouthpiece?' I found four or five Heims for him.

"Now I always figured that the fact that Buch made him play without vibrato, plus the use of Heim mouthpieces, helped him develop that pure sound. Nobody sounds like Miles. This kid Wallace Roney does about as good as you can hope for. And Miles liked Harry James' sound.

"I loved Harry James too. Harry was a *bitch*. And Harry was so real. I had a picture of him and me and and his wife Betty Grable and Duke sitting in a club. Somebody copped that picture. When he won the *Down Beat* poll, Harry said, 'No, this should be for Louis Armstrong,' and he gave it to Louis."

"I'm sure you know that line of Dizzy's about Louis Armstrong: no him, no me."

"That's right. No him, no us. Harry came out of Louis Armstrong too. Roy, Dizzy, all of us. Harry was a phenomenal cat, man. In his latter years, when the band was just playing weekends, he'd put the horn up and come back the next week and pick it up and . . . . " Clark sang the opening phrase of *Ciribiribin*. He had some chops. He was from that carnival scene. You'd have to blow from sunup to sundown, and take a break, come back and bally four or five times, then do a show, and bally some more and do a show . . . "

"Bally?"

"Yeah. That's what the barker did. *Step right up, ladies and gentleman, there's a show going on* . . . . Lure the people in."

"Does it come from 'ballyhoo?'"

"I guess so."

"You came from that carnival scene too."

"Yeah," Clark said. "I was with the Reubin and Cherry carnival."

"And you got into the Duval Building in Jacksonville."

"I had gone to a small carnival, called a gilly show. I don't know where the word comes from. It was a truck show. They carried everything they owned on trucks, whereas Reubin and Cherry was a railroad show. They carried everything by train. We had berths on the train. But we were on this little gilly show, and we went to winter quarters, which was the end of the season. We were in Jacksonville, Florida. We'd just come from Pennsylvania.

"We went to a five and ten cent store to buy some tee-shirts, which were five and ten cents a piece in those days. I was hanging with a bass player named William Oval Austin, we called him Fats Austin. We'd come from cold weather right into Florida, and we had nothing to put on. We had no money anyhow. So we went to the five and ten cent store. It was a Saturday, and it was crowded. Now Fats was a big, fat cat, man. Naturally, going through a crowd, he gotta touch people. He slightly brushed against an old woman with a cane, and she screamed, 'Aaaaaah, git that nigger, he tried to knock me down! Catch that nigger!' I looked around and said, 'Hey, Fats, there ain't nobody in the store but us. Let's get the hell out of here.' You could hear, 'Nigger, nigger,' all through the store.

"We ran. Now I was just out of high school, and I had the record for the low hurdles and the 220 and 100 yard, and I looked around, and Fats was right on my ass." He laughed. "Behind, a mob was gathering as we ran, and they were throwing bricks and rocks and things.

"We managed to run up into this area where they were putting up a round building. And it was Saturday and they weren't working. So we were running around." He drummed his fingers on

a coffee table, like running feet. "And they were after us." More running feet. "We got almost back around and we jumped into an area of excavation. I pulled Fats down and we hid, and we heard them." More drumming. "Luckily, they had no dogs.

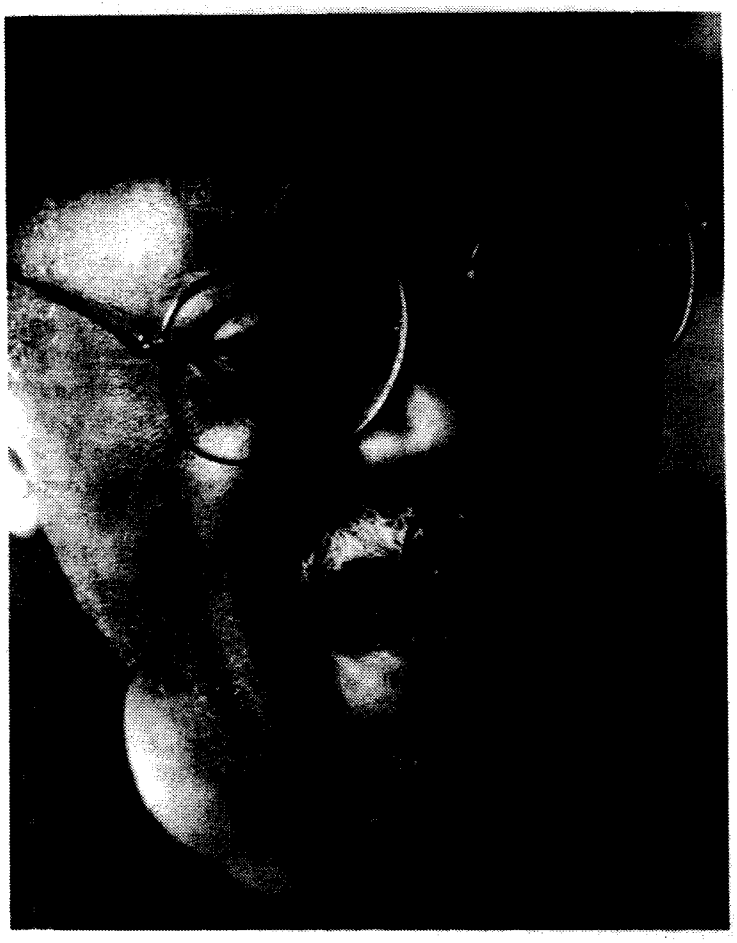
"We stayed there until dark, and we sneaked out, and got back to safety."

"And then there was the incident in Mississippi you told me about."

"The carnival stopped in Meridian, Mississippi," Clark said. "It was the end of the tour. Marvin Wright was the drummer. He ended up being a high school principal in East St. Louis. He was a good drummer. On Saturday, you had to pack up your drums, because Sunday you travelled.

"Marvin was packing up his drums and I was waiting for him on the midway, right outside the tent, and I was with his girlfriend. Now she was a very fair lady. A child of miscegenation. The Mills Blue Rhythm Band was playing a dance that night. Lucky Millinder. We were going over to this dance. All of a sudden here comes a little . . . a little . . . a little *motherfucker*. 'Whatchyall doin' hangin' around thish heah midway, boy?'" Clark mimicked the man with chilling verisimilitude.

"'I'm waiting for my buddy to pack his drums, and we'll be off.'



Clark Terry Photo by John Reeves

"'You with thish heah show?'

"'Yeah.'

"He said, 'What? Do you realize you just said 'Yes' to a white man?'

"I said, 'What am I supposed to say, No? I *am* with the show.'

"He pulled out a blackjack, one of those leather things loaded with lead, and started beating me about the head."

If you have never seen a spring-loaded sap used by someone skilled with it — and I saw a police detective use one on a man in a Louisville restaurant — you have no idea how brutally efficient this implement is.

"It had been raining," Clark said, "and he left me face down in the water, to drown. And he went away. And the train crew, which was all Caucasian, came out and picked me up and took me back to the show train. They put some towels on me. By this time he'd come back, with fifteen or twenty more guys with axes and hammers and chains, and he said, 'Where's that nigger I left here?'

"And the train crew which, I repeat, was all Caucasian, said to him, "Ah, he was a smart ass. We kicked the shit out of him and sent him out that way.' Whereas in reality they'd taken me back to the train and were taking care of me.

"And from that time, I never generalize about race, creed, color, nationality, or anything else. Never."

"You see, Clark, that's a point I've been making for years. Nobody white can *ever* know what it is to be in that kind of danger for no reason, and to be insulted constantly throughout your life — again, for no reason."

"Absolutely," Clark said. "And then there was that cat who wrote something about, I Was a Negro in the South for Thirty Days. *Sheeeit*!"

"You know, Clark, over the years of knowing you and Dizzy, you seem like miracles to me. I don't know how anyone who comes up through that experience can even *speak* to white people."

"Yeah, but that incident affected me. When I think of that Caucasian crew that saved my ass, I'd be stupid to generalize. I've never forgotten that."

"I don't know how *anybody* deals with it, day after day."

"It's a very difficult thing to do," Clark said. "Except you reach a point where you have a choice. You can lower yourself to that standard or you can elevate yourself in the hope that you can put an end to all that shit. You know, my first wife could not look a Caucasian in the face. She couldn't talk to one. Because when she was a little girl, they took this kid, a little boy, her cousin, out from her bedroom, he was staying over. They took him out on the porch and hanged him."

(To be continued)

The Jazzletter is published 12 times a year at PO Box 240, Ojai, California 93024-0240. Subscriptions are on a year to year, January to December, basis, $70 a year U.S. for the United States and Canada, $80 for other countries.