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Mail Bag

The take on Chet Baker prompts me to recount an encounter with the Bad Boy of Jazz whose "ears could hear paint dry."

In the mid-1960s, I handled publicity for The Trident, a euphoric Sausalito waterfront jazz club owned by Frank Werber, a French Jewish escapee from a Nazi death camp who got rich as discoverer of the Kingston Trio. The Trident's affable manager, Lou Ganapoler, formerly of the Village Vanguard, booked Chet into a seemingly strange duet with bossa nova pianist João Donato. Chet's plane was late. About four hours before the opening night show, he checked into a Sausalito hotel where he told an edgy Ganapoler and me that he was currently afloat with the strongest marijuana he had ever found, "absolutely dynamite shit." He had no rehearsal with Donato, whose English was marginal at best. They had not in fact ever met.

For the opening set, Chet sat on a high stool in the bend of the grand piano when Donato kicked off the first in a series of bossa nova tunes at tempos that were up — *way* up. Some of these tunes were obscure compared to then-current hits like *Desafinado* and *The Girl from Ipanema*, and they were new. Like coupled stops on a baroque organ, Chet and Donato flawlessly played the heads in unison before Chet was turned loose to improvise. Things went this way without a hitch for the entire two-week engagement.

— Grover Sales, Belvedere, California

Grover Sales, author of Jazz: America's Classical Music, *(Coda, New York) has taught jazz history at Stanford and San Francisco State Universities. The best comment on Baker's almost supernatural hearing came from Gerry Mulligan, who surely knew his playing better than anyone. Gerry thought that Chet could in fact read music, despite legend to the contrary. It wasn't so much that he couldn't, Gerry said. "He didn't have to."*

The farewell to Chet Baker, ten years ago, was a small gathering, as celebrity funerals go. Even on that quiet Saturday, there were several other funerals in the Inglewood Cemetery that attracted more people. This one, though, was very different. A wonderful young trumpeter, Chris Tedesco, played *My Funny Valentine* as a most respectful last salute. The speakers — Chet's friends and co-workers — spoke about music, specifically jazz music, more specifically bebop jazz music, albeit a different kind of bebop than that which came out of New York's 52nd Street. A guy who went to Glendale and Redondo High, El Camino College, and drove a chopped and channeled primer-gray '36 Ford with a full-race '46 Merc engine would naturally approach bebop from a slightly different direction.

This was a memorial for a Californian, a symbol of an exciting, wonderful era, and one of the most gifted musicians who ever lived. As Charles Champlin said of Chet in the *Los Angeles Times*, "He and his contemporaries played the score for the Los Angeles I knew. In its go-ahead optimism, its mobility and its congeniality, it reflected for me the excitement and sense of promise of Southern California itself."

I spoke of my first encounter with Chet Baker, then a slight blond kid with riveting good looks, one front tooth missing, wearing Levis, white tee-shirt, and an expensive garbardine sport coat which I later learned had been bought in Paris. That first meeting was in the band room at Redondo High School. The concert band was rehearsing and the band leader introduced him to us as a new student. We figured that he must have done pretty well at the audition when he was seated second chair first trumpet. We were playing *Russlan and Ludmilla*, a difficult overture.

The first trumpet player later said, "The first time through he hardly played a note, but the second time down, he carved my butt. The worst thing about it, though, was that he hardly ever pushed the right valves down."

The next years of my life got interesting, though not without some frightening moments. As fascinated as I was with Chet's talent and musicianship, the dangerous aspects of his life style kept me from getting as close as I really wanted to. Besides, even at that age, it was obvious that his gifts and even his presence belonged to the world.

For the next few years — in high school and then at El Camino College — I had the good fortune to be the saxophone player in Chetty's quintet. Even then he liked my baritone sax. I wanted to play my alto sax on the gigs but he would say, "Play the bari. It sounds better with the trumpet." A fact he proved later with Gerry Mulligan.

One night we were walking down the Strand in Hermosa Beach, after a gig at the Lighthouse. Chet spotted a catamaran pulled up on the beach and said, "Let's go to Catalina." I protested. "I'll put it back," he said, and began lugging it across the sand to the water. I grudgingly lent a hand. He was gone for the next four or five days. He sailed the thing to Catalina and back wearing his gig suit.

Once, Redondo High exchanged its Varsity Show with Beverly Hills High. A couple of us from the band were walking on Beverly's Campus with Chet. He was wearing one of his Paris suits, cut pretty much like a zoot suit. A cluster of football players, wearing letterman's sweaters, made a few pithy comments about Chet's suit. Before we could stop him, he charged the biggest one. By the time we pulled the behemoths off him, they had ripped the

suit completely off and bloodied him badly. He seemed to have no fear at all, and he was still taunting them when we dragged him away. All this from a guy capable of playing and singing in the most gentle, lyrical, and poignant way.

At the farewell service, Russ Freeman, who wrote and performed with Chet on so many marvelous records, told about their long association and friendship. This collaboration produced some of the best music of that era.

Hirsch Hamel, also a close friend, and the bass player on some of the gigs I worked with Chet, spoke eloquently. Frank Strazzeri told about Chet's unswerving dedication to artistic ideals and his refusal to compromise with the latest fad or fancy. This dedication took Chet to stardom and to the depths, but he stayed true to the music he heard.

The funeral ended, and I was left with my last memories of Chetty. I was in New York in 1987 for a union negotiation meeting. Chet was playing at a club in the Village. I was delighted to get a chance to hear him.

After the first few tunes it was obvious to the packed house that he was too frail to play up to his former greatness. He didn't have the physical stamina to say what he wanted to say on the trumpet. Lukewarm applause masked the embarrassment we all felt. Then Chet took the mike and sang *Just Friends*. He sang the lyrics the first chorus and then scatted three choruses of some of the most beautiful, inventive jazz lines I've ever heard.

Something I'd never seen before happened. The entire audience stood, as if by reflex action, not at the end of the song but after Chet's choruses. All the brilliance, beauty and inventiveness that he didn't have the strength to produce on the trumpet poured out in his singing. The audience was transported.

I spoke to him. We hugged each other. Chet promised to come over on his break, and I told my companions that I probably wouldn't see him for another twenty years.

He never did come over, but I didn't care. I knew Chet Baker, got to play with him, and I got to hear him play. That's enough reward for a lifetime.

If genius can be defined as knowing more than one could possibly learn, Chet Baker was a true genius.

— Bernie Fleischer, Glendale, California

Bernie was president of Los Angeles Local 47 of the American Federation of Musicians from 1986 to 1991.

The Triumph: Clark Terry
Part 2

For a time Clark worked in Illinois in a Danville group led by a man named Toby Dyer. Another local band was led by Jimmy Raschel. Its personnel included Booty Wood and Milt Buckner.

"Lionel Hampton wanted Milt to join his band," Clark said. "Milt was afraid to go, so we got him drunk and made him get on the train for Chicago to join Hamp. Hamp right away took him off vibes and put him on piano. He was a *marvelous* vibes player. So Hamp stymied his career on vibes, although Milt was a great rhythmic player on piano."

Clark hung out in a club in Peoria called the Grenada, owned by Sweets Edison's uncle, Bruce Collins. "They used to gamble in the back and there was a bar in the front. I'll never forget that Seagram's Five Crown whiskey was in those days five dollars a fifth. I was in Peoria on Pearl Harbor day in 1941. I went into the Navy in 1942."

After boot camp, Clark went on leave, visiting a cousin named William Scott who lived on Morningside Avenue in Harlem. Like so many other servicemen later known as major jazz musicians, Clark, on hitting town, headed for 52nd Street and its many jazz clubs. He encountered Stuff Smith and Jimmy Jones at one club, Ben Webster and Tony Scott at another. Clark stood at the bar in sailor's uniform, holding his trumpet case. Tony Scott said on the microphone, "Hey, there's a sailor over there with a trumpet. Come on up here, sailor. You want to play something?" Terrified, as he recounted later, Clark mounted the bandstand and played. Scott got him a job at the 845 Club in the Bronx. Then Clark went back to the navy and a position in one of the bands in training at Great Lakes Naval Station, a cradle of great jazz musicians. Clark and Tony Scott would remain friends.

"At Great Lakes," Clark said, "there was a whole bunch of people like Willie Smith, guys from the Jeter-Pillars Band in St. Louis, like Charles Pillars. Al Grey was there. And Lou Donaldson."

The bands were kept strictly segregated at Great Lakes.

"Our camp was called Camp Robert Smalls," Clark said. "It was in barracks 1812. They really had two branches of the navy in a sense, as far as we were concerned. All the black people were relegated to being over there. They wanted Willie Smith to come over on the main side, because he could pass. They even offered him a commission. He turned it down, said, 'I'm going to stay over here with my gang.' He was a beautiful cat."

"When I was growing up," I said, "he was *my* alto player."

"Oh, mine too, baby. He came into Duke's band when Johnny Hodges was out sick or something. Man, nobody remembered Hodges was in the band while Willie was there.

"So that was a great band we had at Great Lakes. We had a concert band, a marching, and three jazz bands, the A band, the B band, and the C band. We played engagements in Chicago for special affairs.

"When a new guy would come into the band, most of us were old guys — maybe twenty-three years old! There were some eighteen, nineteen, even seventeen-year-olds coming in, and they wanted to play in the band. And we'd play a joke on them. We slept in hammocks in those days, and you had to lash the hammock a certain way. If you didn't do it right, there was no way in hell you could make that last hitch. We'd teach these kids the secret. We'd tell them, 'What you have to do is go over and get the rope stretcher. Go over to Camp Moffat and get it, room 305.' And the cat over there would tell them, 'Oh shoot, you just missed it,' and send them somewhere else. The kid would be looking for it all day, and he'd come back, and we'd say, 'Did you get the rope stretcher?' 'No, I couldn't catch up with it.' It took him a long

time to figure out he'd been had.

"When the war ended, I went back to St. Louis. I started working with George Hudson's band. We became popular through the acts we played for at the Club Plantation. We'd take the music home and rehearse the parts. The acts would go back and say, 'Man, you've got to play St. Louis and get that George Hudson band to play your *music*! You've never heard it *played* like that before!' As I'm sure many of them hadn't. We rehearsed it like we were going to be playing it forever.

"We went to New York and played the Apollo Theater on a bill with Illinois Jacquet. He had a marvelous band with Shadow Wilson and Sir Charles Thompson and his brother, Russell Jacquet, and Joe Newman and himself. They were real big. He hired our band as an opening act. We had a bad tenor player with us named Willie Parker. We called him Weasel, because he was a little cat. One of the top writers in St. Louis, Bugs Roberts, wrote a bad chart on *Body and Soul*.

"It went into double time on the end. We went on first, since Jacquet was the star. We opened, and we ended with that number. Weasel was featured on this one. Opening show in the Apollo, he had people standing up on the chairs after that thing. Jacquet came running back and said, 'Take that number out, get that goddamn thing out!' It was out for the rest of those shows."

"Sounds like Benny Goodman," I said. "Benny didn't dig it when other people got the applause."

"He sure didn't," Clark said, laughing.

"Duke and Woody Herman *built* their bands on their soloists."

"They sure did, and gave them beautiful arrangements."

I told Clark the story of the time when Stan Getz said to Woody Herman. "You can't play." And Woody said, "That's right, that's why I hired you."

"Sounds like Stan," Clark said. "I don't know anybody else who'd have the balls to say something like that to Woody. He was a sweetheart of a guy. I loved him."

"What came after the Apollo?"

"We did the T.O.B.A circuit," he said, and laughed. The letters stood for Theater Owners Booking Association, but the musicians who played it universally said it stood for Tough On Black Asses.

"It was a rough circuit," Clark said. "But it kept you employed. You knew you were good for four weeks. The Apollo, the Royal in Baltimore, the Earle in Philadelphia, the Howard in Washington. If you could squeeze in a few more weeks, you had six months.

"Then you'd go down south on a tour. The white audience would sit in one place while the blacks danced. Another night the black audience sat in one place while the whites danced. All the money they spent to segregate!

"After we got home, I played a couple of little stints with Ellington. I subbed for Francis Williams for one night in St. Louis. Duke put me in his phone book, saying, 'We'll have to have you come with us some time.' After that, I subbed again, this time for Al Killian. I stayed with the band maybe four, five days.

"Then I got a call from Charlie Barnet. I'd met Gerald Wilson. Gerald lived in Los Angeles. He said, 'If you ever come out here, stay at my house.' So Charlie made me an offer, and he asked me how I wanted to come out. I'd never gone cross country, so I said, 'I'd like to take a train ride.' Charlie sent me a train ticket, and I took the train and enjoyed the scenery. Gerald met me at Los Angeles Union Station and took me to his house, 5612 Ascot, on the west side.

"That night Gerald took me out to Hermosa Beach, where the Barnet band was playing. The band was on a coast to coast broadcast. We walked through the crowd. Charlie spotted Gerald. Gerald told him, 'Here's your new trumpet player.' Charlie announced, 'Our new trumpet player has just arrived. You'll be hearing from him in a very short time. Maybe the next tune.' He said, 'Get your horn out.' So he kicked off the tune. In the middle of a broadcast, coast to coast, I joined the band! Luckily, it was a tune I knew the changes to.

"He was crazy. I loved him. Charlie was always good to musicians. He took a special liking to me, for some reason. I was very close to him.

"Doc Severinsen was in the band. Doc is a *marvelous* trumpet player. He's always been. I became close to his mom and his dad. His father was a dentist in Portland, Oregon. Whenever we'd come to town, Doc's mother would make cookies for me. And his father would do our teeth, me and Doc. He'd say, 'You've got the hardest damn teeth!'

"Doc's mother still calls me her son. Every time I go out there, I call her up and say, 'Mom, are you going to come to the concert?' She said, 'Yes, I'd love to.' I said, 'I'll send a car for you.'

"She said, 'Well, no, I've got my own car.'

"I said, 'Mom, you can't drive.'

"She said, 'No, but Carl provides me with a chauffeur.'

"Carl?"

"Yeah. That's Doc's real name. He's a great musician, and a beautiful cat too."

Clark stayed with Barnet about a year. That edition of the Barnet band went east to play the Apollo Theater and Town Hall. In addition to Doc Severinsen and Clark, the trumpet section also contained Jimmy Nottingham. Bud Shank was playing tenor. When the lead alto player was unable to make one of the engagements, according to Clark, Bud asked Barnet if he could play that chair, and did. "That was Bud's turning point on alto," Clark said.

Clark's next plateau would be the Basie band. "They were holding auditions at the old Nola studio at 1619 Broadway, near the Paramount," Clark said. Musicians often make that distinction. Later, Tommy Nola, the owner, moved it to its present location at the top of the Steinway Building on 57th Street, near Carnegie Hall; it is one of the prominent recording studios.

"They were rehearsing," Clark said. "Sweets Edison, Dicky Wells, Earle Warren, Ted Donnelly, Jack Washington, Buddy Tate, and all that bunch. They had a knack for making it difficult for a new cat. Put the new boy through the steamer. Now when I came in they said, 'We'll fix his ass.' So they called *South*. Snooky had recorded it with the band a few years before that. We got to the out chorus, and I made that high A natural. I'd never made one before and I haven't made one since. But I got the gig.

"At that time, Emmett Berry, Sweets, and Ed Lewis were the trumpet section. Shortly after that, Jimmy Nottingham got out of the Navy. We got Jim in the band.

"There was another trick they used to put on everybody when you first joined the band. My seat on the bus was with Jimmy Rushing. And he took up *all* the seat. And they would laugh their asses off. I'd have to sit there riding with Rush. We got to be real buddies."

He joined Basie in 1948, when the big-band era was waning, and constricting financial pressures made it increasingly difficult for anyone to keep a large group on the road. And Basie had debts. "He sure loved the ponies," as Clark put it.

"After he broke up the band because of financial difficulties, he started a small group. He called me in St. Louis and told me to pick up somebody down there who'd work out in the small group. I told him there were two, the older, established cat named Jimmy Forrest, and a young Caucasian kid named Bob Graf. Right away he said, 'Get the kid.' He'd be cheaper. So I brought Bob to Chicago, downtown in the Loop, the Brass Rail. Jimmy Lewis on bass, Gus Johnson on drums, Freddy Green, Basie of course, and Buddy DeFranco, me, and Bob Graf. Carlos Gastel came in every night to hear us. He was scouting Bob Graf for Woody. After that we got Wardell Gray.

"Freddy Green was the foundation. He was the greatest rhythm guitarist that ever lived. Freddy used to say, 'You have to turn the amp down so you can feel it more than you can hear it.' We used to call him Ching Chang. The second note was always a little more dominant. Just a little. That was the secret.

"Basie, as a leader, was one of the most beautiful people in the whole world. He was very candid and very down to earth. He'd tell you in a minute, 'Kiss my ass,' anything he felt like saying. But he was loving. We used to call him Holy. Some called him Bill, some called him Count, some called him Basie, but some of us called him Holy. In the Basie band, we had some weird names. Prez started all that. 'Holy' had a connotation of something that was special to you. Your wife was holy, your horn was holy. And Basie was the head man, so he was Holy. I can't think of anyone who could ever leave that band and say anything against Basie. He would listen to the band, he would hang out with the band. We'd be somewhere shooting dice or drinking booze, and he'd be right there with us.

"The small group was going to Boston. When I got to the airport, I got scared again. I've always been afraid of flying. I do it all the time and I'm still afraid of it. I got to the airport, and I said, 'I'm not getting on this plane.' Basie said, 'You've got to get on the plane. We've got to be in Boston. Come on with me.' We went over to the liquor store in the airport. He got a half a pint of gin. He said, 'Come on, drink some of this.' We started taking slugs. He started talking about other things completely. Ham and cabbage was his favorite dish. He'd kill for ham and cabbage. I was telling him how my wife could cook ham and cabbage. And we passed the bottle back and forth, and he said, 'Come on, let's get on this plane before we miss it.' And I got on the plane!"

Clark was with Basie from 1948 until 1951. Then began one of the most important associations of his life: that with Duke Ellington.

"How did that come about?" I asked. "Leaving Basie, a much-loved man, must have been a wrenching experience."

"We were working at the Capitol Lounge in Chicago," Clark said. "Duke called me on the phone and said, 'I'd like to talk to you. We'd like to have you come aboard.'

"So I said, 'Yeah, I'd like to talk to you too.'

"Duke said, 'I'll come by your hotel.'

"I said, 'Fine. I'll meet you at the elevator.' I was at the Southway Hotel, at 60th and South Parkway.

"Duke called from the lobby. Just as the elevator comes up and he gets off and I'm meeting him, the door across from the elevator opens and Freddy Green comes out. Freddy looks and says, 'Ooooh, shit,' and goes back and slams the door.

"Duke and I talked and got our business straight. That night on the gig, I walked in, and Freddy Green was tuning up. Instead of saying, 'Hello,' he turned his eyes up and said, 'You're a fool if you *don't*.'

"And they were friends, Ellington and Basie," I said.

"Sure," Clark said.

"That seems to have been the accepted thing. Apparently they all did it. Woody was always raiding the Charlie Barnet band, and yet they remained close. And Willie Smith went back and forth between Ellington and Harry James for years."

"Sure," Clark said. "Duke told me to tell Basie I was sick and go home to St. Louis. He said, 'I'll put you on salary, and when you've gotten well, you might like to come out and get your chops together again.'

"Toward the end of my stay with Basie, I was making $125 a week. He gave me a $15 raise. When I told him I was leaving, he took the raise back.

"Years later, I was at Carnegie Hall. They had a little side elevator. It came up, and Basie got out, and I said, 'Hey, Holy. I've got to talk to you about something that's been bugging me for years. Remember when I left you, I told you I was sick?'

"He said, 'Yeah.'

"I said, 'I wasn't sick, Holy. Duke had made me an offer. I lied to you.'

"He said, 'You think I didn't *know* that? Why the fuck do you think I took the raise back?'

"I felt like an idiot."

I said, "Have you ever heard the story of how Don Byas resigned from the Basie band?"

"Sam? We called him Sam. I don't think I have," Clark said.

"The story goes that he said to him, 'Basie, in one month I will have been gone two weeks."

Clark laughed and said, "*If you don't believe I'm leavin', you can count the days I'm gone!* It's an old blues. Anyway, that's the story of how I left Basie and went with Duke."

The great jazz arrangers and composers have built their music around the individual sounds of specific players — but no one more than Ellington, whose genius in part lay in knowing exactly how to use the idiosyncratic sounds of his men, as different from

one another as musicians could possibly be: men such as Juan Tizol, Tricky Sam Nanton, and Lawrence Brown; Ben Webster and Paul Gonsalves; Ray Nance and Bubber Miley. Clark's inflection, articulation, phrasing, and infectious buoyancy make his one of the most identifiable sounds in all jazz, and Ellington used it to potent effect — and made Clark a major star. This affiliation with Ellington was to last from 1951 to 1959.

"Duke was unique," Clark said, "in that just being around him, you could garner more by osmosis than you ever realized until it was time for you to use it, when you needed it. I've been in many situations where I thought, 'What do I do here now?' and then, 'What would the maestro do?' and I'd push the button once and the answer would come. I learned an awful lot about establishing rapport between the bandstand and the audience. How to handle men psychologically, how to read audiences, how to program music. It's very important to someone in front of a band. You've got to *know* your audience, you've got to know what kind of music to choose. Just from being around Duke, these things would rub off on you.

"One of my favorite sayings, one I just love, came from Ellington. He said, 'I'm very easy to please. Just give me the best.'"

"Clark, did you ever read Mingus's book *Beneath the Underdog*?"

"I read most of it, but it was *so* ridiculous."

"Yeah," I said, "but it's kind of marvelous in its way, regardless of whether it's accurate." In one passage of the book Mingus attacks Leonard Feather, Whitney Balliett, Barry Ulanov, John S. Wilson, Marshall Stearns, Bill Coss, and me, placing us at a party together. As Whitney has written, that group was never in the same room at the same time in our lives. But the passage is rather funny. And the opening paragraph of the book is a sharp definition of Mingus's own troubled personality. "In other words, I am three," he says. "One man stands forever in the middle, unconcerned, unmoved, watching, waiting to be allowed to express what he sees to the other two. The second man is like a frightened animal that attacks for fear of being attacked. Then there's the ever-loving gentle person who lets people into the uttermost sacred temple of his being and he'll take insults and be trusting and signing contracts without reading them and get talked down to working cheap or for nothing and when he realizes what's been done to him he feels like killing and destroying everything around him including himself for being so stupid. But he can't — he goes back inside himself."

Mingus's contradictions were complex. His book is an impressionistic diatribe, poetic in its way, in which he denounces whites and ruminates on his sexual past. Yet he didn't hesitate to hire white musicians; and one of his best friends was Paul Desmond, whom he visited when Paul was dying. Most musicians who knew him, in my experience, thought Mingus was crazy as hell, and a lot of them were afraid of him. Mingus verified what he said about himself in the book in a conversation we had. He told me he attacked "because I'm a coward and I'm afraid," and I not only liked him for that, I admired him for the candor. But that didn't help his victims. I told Clark that I knew one musician (I can't name him for obvious reasons) who told me that when he worked for Mingus, he carried a .32 automatic behind him in his belt, under his jacket. He was that afraid of the towering rages he might encounter.

"I don't blame him," Clark said.

And Mingus hurt some people. There is nothing as frightening to a brass or reed player as the possibility of injury to his teeth. And, Clark pointed out, "He knocked Jimmy Knepper down and broke his teeth. He knocked out Jackie Maclean's teeth."

I said, "And Oscar Peterson came close to laying Mingus out. But he gave Mingus a message. He said if he so much as raised his hand to him, 'Death! Nothing less, death!'"

"I came close to decking him," Clark said. "When he first came to New York, he passed out this music, *Mingus Fingers* and those things."

Mingus Fingers was a piece Mingus originally wrote for the Lionel Hampton band. They recorded it on Decca; it was Mingus's first recorded composition.

"The parts were all water-spattered and tattered," Clark said. "You couldn't tell whether a note was a G or an A. I'm sitting there trying to play it, me and Britt Woodman and lot of people Britt got for him. We're sitting there rehearsing. It reached the point where I just couldn't make it any longer. I was very busy anyway. I put my horn up and I said, 'Mingus, I am not able to determine what some of these notes are, and I don't have much time. I'm going to have to cut out instead of wasting your time.'

"He stands there, breathing heavily, his nose expanding. Like I said, I used to box. And if you've boxed, you can see somebody telegraph what they're going to do. I laid my horn down. I was ready. And he stands there, breathing. Finally, his nose went down and he said, 'Okay, okay.'

"One time Mingus was on the bus with Duke. Tony Scott was in the band. Tony had always wanted to play Ben Webster's book. He was sitting in the bus, I'm behind him, and Mingus was back there. Mingus was talking to somebody sitting next to him. Tony, in front of me, was talking about sex. He said, 'My cock was so hard,' and so and so and so.

"And Mingus said, 'It ain't a cock, it's a dick, a prick! You motherfuckin' ofays always want to change that shit around.' And he jumped up and he grabbed Tony and he was choking him. I thought he was playing! And then I said, 'Wait a minute, this cat is *serious*!' And I had to take them apart."

In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus says that he left the Ellington band as the result of an altercation at the Apollo Theater with Juan Tizol, who, he says, attacked him with a bolo knife. Whether the passage is factually accurate or not — and Clark says it isn't — Mingus deftly captured the lofty, imperial, and wryly florid way in which Ellington could speak when he was of a mind to do so. The passage led me to believe that Mingus had the ear and basic abilities of a great writer, had he chosen to develop them; and if he actually invented this passage, it establishes his gift as even the greater. The passage reads as follows:

"'Now Charles,' (Duke) says, looking amused, putting Cartier

links into the cuffs of his beautiful hand-made shirt, 'you could have forewarned me — you left me out of the act entirely! At least you could have let me cue in a few chords as you ran through that Nijinsky routine. I congratulate you on your performance, but why didn't you and Juan inform me about the adagio you planned so that we could score it? I must say I never saw a large man so agile — I never saw *anybody* make such tremendous leaps! The gambado over the piano carrying your bass was colossal. When you exited after that I thought, "That man's really afraid of Juan's knife and at the speed he's going he's probably home in bed by now." But no, back you came through the same door with your bass still intact. For a moment I was hopeful you'd decided to sit down and play but instead you slashed Juan's chair in two with a fire axe! Really, Charles, that's destructive. Everybody knows Juan has a knife but nobody ever took it seriously — he likes to pull it out and show it to people, you understand. So I'm afraid, Charles — I've never fired anybody — you'll have to quit my band. I don't need any new problems. Juan's an old problem, I can cope with that, but you seem to have a whole bag of new tricks. I must ask you to be kind enough to give your notice, Mingus.'

"The charming way he says it, it's like paying you a compliment. Feeling honored, you shake hands and resign."

"But it wasn't like that," Clark said. "I was there. Juan Tizol had written some music. There was no one in the dressing room but me, Mingus, and Juanito — Juan. Mingus had his bass. Juanito said," and Clark imitated his Puerto Rican accent, "'Play this for me. I want to show it to Duke and I want to be sure the notes are right.' Mingus played an A flat at one point, and Juanito says,'That's an A natural.' So he played it again and he played the A-flat, and Juanito says, 'I wrote it!' and Mingus said, 'I don't give a shit what you did, I'm playing what's down here!'

"One thing led to another. In those days the walls in theaters had fire axes. Mingus grabbed the fire axe. And Juanito came Bing! with his switch-blade. And it came out this long! Now I'm right between a fire axe and a switch-blade, and I took them apart.

"When Duke found out about Tizol and Mingus, he yelled to Al Sully, the manager, 'Hey, Sully, pay him off. Call Oscar.' Oscar Pettiford. Oscar got there in record time. He came in laughing. And of course walked in and played his ass off."

"I was told Pettiford knocked Mingus down once."

"Yeah, sure! He cold-cocked him in Birdland one night."

Clark left the Ellington band in 1959. He quickly became a major jazz star on his own, and one of the regulars of the New York studio scene.

It is hard for younger musicians, not to mention listeners, to realize what the music world of New York was like in those days just before the the culturally destructive storm of British rock-and-roll hit American shores. The big-band era was ended, but any number of jazz musicians whose reputations had been established by the bands were able to work in the countless jazz clubs of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto, Montreal, and to a large but lesser extent other cities. There was a circuit to which such musicians as Clark Terry, Miles Davis, Zoot Sims, John Coltrane, Horace Silver, Art Blakey, and others were able to travel for work. And in New York and Los Angeles — and, again to a lesser extent, Chicago — they were able as well to work in the thriving recording industry. Singers of high quality, such as Ethel Ennis, Tommy Leonetti, and Marilyn Maye, not to mention highly successful major stars such as Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Peggy Lee, Nat Cole, Vic Damone, Matt Monroe, and more, were recording with large orchestras, frequently including substantial string sections. You would walk into one of their record sessions and find all sorts of major jazz musicians doing section or solo work, such as Phil Woods, Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Frank Rosolino, Cappy Lewis, Bud Shank, Herb Ellis and, since the racial barriers were breaking down, Sweets Edison, Joe Wilder, Paul Quinichette, Snooky Young, Ray Brown — and Clark Terry.

Snooky and Clark were among the first to break through the network-television racial barrier, joining the Johnny Carson *Tonight Show* band under the leadership of Clark's old friend from the Barnet days, Doc Severinsen. All this was in addition to Clark's own recording as a leader.

But the daily grind of racial abrasion did not cease. He was looking for a house, and found one in Bayside, Long Island.

"It was listed, I went by to see it," Clark said. "I wanted to be as close to NBC as I could. And the cat said, 'You just missed it. We just got a binder on it.'"

A section mate of Clark's in the *Tonight Show* band was Jimmy Maxwell, a veteran of the Jimmy Dorsey and Benny Goodman bands and one of the great lead trumpet players. Big, strong, bearded, Maxwell — a native of Stockton, California, and a friend since adolescence of Gil Evans — casts a large shadow. He is an imposing man; if I were seeking someone to play him in a movie, it would be James Robertson Justice.

"Maxwell and I are real tight friends," Clark said. "I told Maxwell about the house, and he said, 'Let's just check it out.' Maxwell called up and said, 'I'd like to come by and see this house.' So we went by. I sat in the car down the street. Maxwell said, 'When I give you the signal, you come on in.' He asked the cat if the house was for sale, and he said, 'Oh yes.' Maxwell said, 'Is there any tie-up, are there any binders in or anything?'

"'Oh no.'

"Maxwell said, 'If I put some money down, I can have it?'

"'If you want it, you got it.'

"Maxwell whistled, and I came in, and Maxwell said, 'You son of a bitch, you'll sell this house to this man or you're in trouble.'

"And that's how I got the house."

Clark laughed. That anyone can laugh at so painful a memory is part of the mystery of this man. But then all comedy has roots in pain, and the old expression "laughing to keep from crying" is one of the most valid truisms of human experience. We need only reflect on the involuntary expulsion of air from the lungs involved in laughter and sobbing, and think how easily one turns into the other, as at funerals, to realize this. It is this alchemical conversion of pain into joy, I think, that lies at the heart of Clark's great art.

(To be continued)