Gene Lees
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The Boy in the P-38

As the major bandleaders of the swing era have stepped off into what someone called the Great Perhaps, efforts have been made to keep their music alive. Commerce, of course, enters into it. Somebody stands to make money on these "ghost bands", as Woody Herman was apparently the first to call them. He avowed that after his death, there would be no Woody Herman ghost band, but his resolve weakened at the end and there is a Woody Herman band.

As with all the ghost bands, the flesh may be willing but the spirit is weak. Whatever animated those bands died with their leaders. How the presence of a man in front of it could inspire a perceptible and specific personality in a band no matter who wrote its charts and who might be in its personnel is one of the imponderables.

Of all these bands, the most disappointing (to me) has been Basie. It seemed that there could be no Count Basie band without two critical elements: Freddy Green and Basie. Without Freddy Green to pave that smooth highway-to-the-horizon with his almost inaudible guitar chords and Basie to smile his genial and slightly stoned smile and go plink-plink on the piano and somehow, awesomely, supercharge the whole band, it wasn't the same.

Of late that has changed. This is evident from two CDs released by the MAMA Foundation, an alas obscure label founded and funded by Gene Czerwinski, who made his money manufacturing studio-quality loudspeakers, and set up the foundation in memory of his wife. The first of these albums, *Count Plays Duke*, won a Grammy Award in 1999. The album is quite marvelous, and so is the second, called *Swing Shift*, nominated for a Grammy in 2000.

A number of factors contribute to the quality of the new Basie band. One of them is its current leader, trombonist Grover Mitchell, veteran of the band in Basie's own time and of the Los Angeles recording studios. Mitchell is a lovely lead trombonist. And he is obviously a superb organizer (lead players by the nature of the responsibility tend to be that way), who has assembled an exceptional body of musicians.

Another major factor is the principal arranger on these albums, Allyn Ferguson. He wrote the charts in the Ellington album, and for *Swing Shift*, contributed seven original compositions and arranged three standards. (Bob Ojeda, who plays in the band's trumpet section, wrote the rest of the album, and he's no slouch either.)

A few jazz lovers know Allyn Ferguson for his writing for the Stan Kenton and Buddy Rich bands, others for his long-ago Chamber Jazz Sextet, and some for his association with writer and poet Kenneth Patchen in the poetry-and-jazz movement that never found enough audience to sustain it. Still others will recognize at least the Ferguson part of his name from television scores, as a participant in the Elliott-Ferguson organization, for such shows as *Charlie's Angels, Barney Miller,* and *Starsky and Hutch.* And still others will know him for scores to a long series of high-quality films produced by Norman Rosemont, including *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *All Quiet on the Western Front.*

Allyn Ferguson's is not a high-profile name. You rarely see it in print. He is unmentioned in the 1988 *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, although the late Leonard Feather and I quit counting when we reached 110 major omissions, from Guido Basso to Peggy Lee. But Ferguson is unmentioned as well in the new Leonard Feather-Ira Gitler *Biographical Dictionary of Jazz* (Oxford University Press).

He seems not so much indifferent to publicity as unaware of it. He has been a friend of mine for twenty-five years, and I have never written a word about him. His abilities creep up on you, and only recently did I pause to realize: This is one of the most interesting persons and musicians in my experience, disciplined and learned, a heavy reader and a close observer of the society around us.

He is a man of sturdy trim build, a full head of gray hair and a gray beard, and, at seventy-five, of remarkable vigor and intellectual energy. He lives at Malibu, California, where I spent several recent afternoons with him, on a patio overlooking the Pacific.

He was born October 18, 1924, in San Jose, and has spent his entire professional life, excepting a period during World War II and another when he was a student in France, in California. Thus, if anyone can accurately be called a west-coast jazz musician, he's it.

"My father owned music stores," Ferg said. "He was a self-taught bass player, trombone player, piano player, and he loved music. He worked at the old Orpheum Theater in San Francisco with Phil Harris and Morey Amsterdam and all those people. Then he got out of the music business and into the retail business. My mother was a pianist and elementary school teacher. One of my father's best friends was Red Nichols, and we were close to the Nichols family. Red's father was an old Mormon bandmaster, from Ogden, Utah. Red had a sister, Dorothy Nichols, who was a *fine* cellist and was on staff at the radio station in San Jose.

"I started studying trumpet when I was four with Red's father, Loring Nichols. He took an old wooden coat-hanger, which he used as a prop for my knee and put a ruler on it with a slot in it so that the trumpet would stay up. I couldn't hold the weight.

"I played trumpet until I was about six. Then I started piano lessons. I had a fine piano teacher. My mother would sit with me an hour a day on the piano bench and make me practice, because I would rather play baseball. Had it not been for my mother, I'm not sure I'd have been a musician. She saw to it that I spent the time at that piano whether I liked it or not. I don't know why she did it. Probably it was her own ego. The fact is that she did do it.

"By ten or eleven, I was giving concerts, playing pretty good

piano literature, Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccio and things like that. Showy pieces that I could do. There was no depth in it; I had it all in my fingers. But for a kid that age, I had astonishing technique. Yet I never liked to play for people very much. I didn't like the fact that I could play perfectly at home and go in front of people and make mistakes. I could never have been a concert pianist.

"When I was about twelve I started writing charts for a little band that I had. It was almost Lombardo but not quite. Hal Kemp, that kind of thing. I didn't want to study piano any more. I got into popular music, which led almost directly into jazz. By the time I was fourteen, my favorite bands were Lunceford and Erskine Hawkins.

"When I was about fifteen, I worked for eight weeks in the summer with Sonny Dunham. I did that with Charlie Barnet too. And a lot of territory bands. To be in California in those days, in San Jose or Palo Alto, was tough, because that was not where anything happened. I never had any eyes to go to New York. I was a Californian, and I was going to stay.

"I played in a band with a clarinet player who thought he was Artie Shaw. He couldn't play a note of jazz, but he could play anything Artie ever played if you wrote it down for him. I took almost every contemporary Artie Shaw record off the 78s. I didn't even know what a score was. I'd put the needle down and get the first five notes of the lead alto, for example. Then I'd go back and get the second alto part. And the tenor and the next tenor."

"Could you slow the turntable up?" I asked. "Some guys used to do that to do take-downs."

"No, I couldn't. I just did it. I didn't study writing in those days. Years later, when I had a record contract with Archie Bleyer, Benny Carter told me, 'I learned to write for three or four saxophones from Archie Bleyer stocks.'

"I said, 'What do you mean?'

"Benny said, 'I used to put them on the living room floor and study them, how he wrote for three saxophones.' This would be the 1920s. So Benny Carter learned the same way I did."

I said, "Bob Farnon told me he did that too, until Don Redman showed him how to lay it out in a score."

"We all did. Benny Carter was very good to me, by the way."

(For those unfamiliar with the term, "stocks" were arrangements of their songs commissioned by publishers. These stocks were sold in music stores all over America. They were so structured that they could be played by large bands or, with the selective elimination of parts, by small groups. Every arranger I ever met who grew up in that period mentioned studying stocks. But what is amazing, in retrospect, is that there were so many regional bands in the cities and towns of the U.S. and Canada that the extensive publication of these stocks was profitable. Archie Bleyer was an important writer of stocks, as was Spud Murphy.)

"Anyway," Ferg continued, "I took down *Concerto for Clarinet* and *What Is This Thing Called Love?* for this clarinet player. And years later, when I went over to study with Nadia Boulanger in France — there was no solfeggio study as such in America in those days; we just didn't understand that, and we didn't do it — we were taking four-voice dictation and so forth, and finally she said, 'How are you good at this? I don't understand.' I said, 'I don't know.' And she said, 'And you never studied solfeggio?' And I said, 'No. Not at all.' Taking those things off records was just ear training. I can remember when I was probably five, walking to school, singing a tune and in my pocket fingering the trumpet. And that's a form of solfeggio — associating the fingering with the notes. But Boulanger was amazed that I could do that."

I told Ferg a story. Around 1962, when I first lived in New York, riding one afternoon on the subway, I noticed that the guy sitting next to me was moving his fingers in patterns. I said, "Are you a trumpet player?"

He said, surprised, "Yes. How did you know?"

"Watching your hands," I said. And he introduced himself. That's how I met Johnny Carisi.

"Yes. And that's why I tell you that. When I got to France, that training — I didn't know I was doing anything, except writing for a guy that didn't pay me — made me a star in four-voice dictation. None of the American kids could do it.

"After I wrote for that guy, I had my own band in San Jose. Big band. I was sixteen. We played all the old Basie stocks, *Sent for You Yesterday, One O'Clock Jump*. We played dances and so forth. Then when I was seventeen, Pearl Harbor.

"The next morning I went out and enlisted in the air force. Some people said, 'What do you want to do that for? You're a musician, why don't you get in an army band?' I said, 'I don't think that's the way to win a war.' So I became a fighter pilot."

"Percy Heath was a fighter pilot."

"I didn't know that. So was Skitch Henderson. He was at the same base I was, a class ahead of me.

"I should say that from the time I was twelve, when I stopped taking piano lessons, I was really a teen-age rebel. I raced cars. I almost cut my foot off with a motorcycle. I did crazy shit. By the time I enlisted in the air force, I figured I could win the war all by myself. And those were the kind of guys they wanted flying fighter planes.

"I was court-martialed three times for buzzing. I really was crazy. I didn't think anything could happen to me. The first time, I was still a cadet.

"I learned to fly in a Stearman biplane. The old Stearman PT 13. Still a great airplane. On TV just this morning, I saw four of them in the Ohio air show. All fixed up. They're still *wonderful* acrobatic airplanes. I had about forty hours in a Stearman, and I had just learned basic aerobatics. I had a girlfriend at Scripps College. I was at Ontario, California. It was a primary base. I knew she was playing ground hockey and I was getting some solo time in the airplane. I went and buzzed the field. The whole field flattened, I was that low. I pulled the airplane up, and I did a snap roll. I wouldn't even *think* about doing that today. But I was going pretty fast and I got away with it. They never caught me. One of my instructors thought it was me, but nobody ever copped.

"I graduated and went to Marana Air Force Base in Arizona, between Tucson and Phoenix. You went to basic training in the BT-13, which we called the Vibrator. It had fixed gear."

"I was in an experimental class where we were to move directly from Stearmans into AT-6's, which were advanced trainers. They wanted to cut out the Vibrator. That meant you went immediately into variable props, retractable landing gear, and flaps. But they

tended to ground-loop. When you come down and you're drifting to the right, when your right wheel hits, it spins the whole plane around. That class I was in, about half of them washed out right away. I didn't. I was getting in some time before going to advanced. I buzzed again. I don't remember where. One of the instructors saw me do it and reported it. And here I was, I had just finished basic training, and I was one of maybe twenty guys out of a class of a hundred who had made it. That's the only reason, I think, that I wasn't washed out. I was court-martialed and sent to advanced with diminished salary. They sent me to Williams Air Force, where Skitch Henderson had been."

I said, "In the RAF, they looked for the crazy kids. The sober, adult, steady ones they wanted for bomber pilots."

"I know it! So did the Americans! I went through with a friend. I had enlisted with him. We'd look around and say, 'That guy's not going to make it, he's gonna kill himself.' We could point to the people who weren't going to make it. They were afraid to fly, they had no guts, they got airsick, whatever the reason. In those days, fighter pilots were the cream. You wore the crushed hat. You were *the* pick of the military."

"Don't you think it was the old knighthood image? The two men with lances?"

"Yeah. Exactly. We were the knights. That's why I wasn't washed out. When I got to advanced, I went to P-38 training. That was a stepped-up program. And I did the same stupid thing. But this time I buzzed a bus.

"I was buzzing a long dirt road in Arizona. A huge cloud of dust rose up behind me. I was down on the deck. I must have been fifty feet off the ground at the most. There were power lines on either side of the road. And a bus came toward me. I saw it, and I wasn't going to hit him. But by the time I got to the bus, he had gone off the road, and he was out and shook his fist at me as I went by. I kinda got a laugh out of that, and rolled it into a chandelle, which is a climbing turn. I caught the wing on a power line, and lost about two feet of my right wing."

"Scared you to death?"

"Oh! Oh! I climbed to about ten thousand feet,
aid, 'I've got to find out what this thing's gonna do when it lands.' I dropped the gear and pulled it back, and simulated the stall as you land. A P-38 landed at about 120 miles an hour. I got down to about 130. Of course the air was rarefied at 10,000 feet. It did a violent snap roll to the right. I said, 'Holy mackerel, I've got to land this thing a lot faster than 120 miles an hour, or it'll snap roll right on the ground.'

"If you test the control surfaces, if you are too rough on them, they just stall out. The airplane is no longer flying. It's just a missile. You've got to get your surfaces back into a flying condition. The way you recover is to give it opposite control. Anyway, I cleared Williams Field. I said, 'I'm coming in. I've got a problem, and you'd better clear the field.' I almost was going to bail out. I thought, 'Well, they're going to hear about the incident with the bus, they're going to find the airplane, they're going to see what happened. I'd better at least bring the airplane back.'

"So I came in about 130 miles an hour, which was really hot. I hit the deck and blew out a tire. But I saved the airplane. As I taxied up to the line, people were running out. I'll never forget my court martial. The judge said, 'Lieutenant Ferguson, why do you do these things?' And I said, 'Because it's fun.'

"He said, 'Don't you realize you could kill yourself?'

"I said, 'That never occurs to me at all.'

"I was in Section 8 — mental — for a long time. They had me in a hospital. Interestingly enough, one of the doctors on the ward was from San Jose. He knew me and my father. He came in one day and said, 'Allyn, I'm going to intercede, if I can, but they really think there's something wrong with you.' I said, 'What's wrong with a guy who wants to have fun?' It was all I could think of.

"He interceded, and they sent me down to Ajo, on the Mexican border in southern Arizona, a big gunnery school. I taught gunnery for about nine months. With P-38s. There was one with twenty-millimeter cannon and four machine guns. Later, there were other variations."

"They had contra-rotating props, right? And that obviated torque."

"Yeah. How do you know those things?"

"Because," I said, "you guys were flying them, and I was a kid in school *devouring* aviation magazines and *Metronome* and building models. And I thought the P-38 was the prettiest of all the fighters. I've read that they were marvelous to fly."

Ferg said, "What a feeling. You sat at the end of the runway with your feet on the brakes. They had turbos on the top of the engine. They kicked in, as I recall, about 3,800 rpm. So you sat with the airplane braked, just raring to go, until you saw both turbos kick in, because if you went on a take-off run and one of the turbo wasn't kicked in, it flipped you right over. The worst thing about a P-38 is if you ever lost an engine on takeoff, it was really tough.

"Another pilot and I just about caused an international incident. We went out one day just to shoot up the landscape. It was such wild country down there. He's still a good friend of mine. The two of us went out, just looking for trouble. He spotted a shack in the mountains. Just a little shack. I followed him down, and we buzzed the place, and there was no action of any kind. So we thought, Oh, it's an abandoned shack, let's shoot it up. We climbed back. He made a pass, and I was right behind him, and he gave it a burst, and people came out of this shack like . . . kids and dogs and . . . oh, they came running out. And I'm right behind him and I had my hand on the trigger, and I thought, 'I can't get my hand off this thing!' It seemed so long for the nerves to transmit. And I didn't give it a burst, but I nearly did.

"We got the hell out of there.

"We didn't know it, but we were no longer over Arizona. We were over Mexico. Nobody knew that it was us. There was so much traffic in the air that day that they couldn't figure it out. They thought it must be somebody from Ajo. But there was another base at Gila Bend, north of Ajo. We never got caught, and thank God nobody got killed.

"I guess what I'm trying to say to you is that I was really a little nuts. I was gonna go and win the war by myself."

I said, "I remember reading that somewhere over the Pacific, in a descent, somebody got a P-38 up to something like 460 miles an hour."

"Oh more than that. I did that myself," Ferg said. "You could get it up close to the speed of sound. There were several ways you could do it. But the airplane would shake so hard. We thought it would explode."

"Well," I said, "there was a theory at one time that they would never be able to exceed the speed of sound. that the plane would come apart."

"That's exactly right," Ferg said. "Absolutely. We were very careful about approaching the speed of sound. But the P-38 could have done it. We thought it would be like hitting a brick wall. I was flying a P-38F or G."

"So. Did you go overseas?"

"No. By then the war was nearly over. And because we were good at gunnery, we were put into jets — the first American combat jets, the P-80s, which are now used as trainers

"In those days, there were no dual controls in jets. You got into it for the first time and flew it, alone. And I firewalled the thing and nothing happened. It started out really slow, and I wasn't used to that." He laughed. "I got about halfway down the runway, and thought, This damn thing isn't going to take off. I looked down in the cockpit to pull up the landing gear, and by the time I had my head up, I was 'way out, two or three miles from the runway, going like hell, about fifty feet off the ground. It scared me to death.

"I was assigned to teach gunnery in the jets. We had a group of Chinese cadets. About thirty-five percent of them would kill themselves in gunnery. They brought them over here, and they really didn't know how to fly yet. God, I watched a lot of them get killed. I tried to pull one of them out of a burning aircraft. His arm came off in my hand. Weird things used to happen in the war that nobody talks about.

"We had orders to go four days later to the South Pacific, but the war ended, and I was out of the army in two weeks.

"I was not yet twenty-one, and I'd been flying for three-and-a-half years. I decided I was going to go back to school. I went to Stanford, and fooled around, took pre-law, took music courses, and all of a sudden I was really interested in being a composer. I studied privately in San Francisco with a teacher who used the Ziehn method — I never learned much at Stanford — but that guy really turned me on.

"I went up from San Jose to San Francisco once a week to study with him. I got absolutely fascinated with music and the seriousness of it. It was the first time I was ever serious about anything.

"I really wanted to go to France to study with Nadia Boulanger. I got married when I was twenty-six, and Joline and I went on our honeymoon to France on the Queen Mary. I was there about a year and a half.

"Boulanger was interesting to me because, for one thing, her abilities were astonishing at the piano. She could read the Beethoven quartets at sight on the piano in four clefs."

"Did you ever know Jeff Davis?"

"No."

"Jeff studied with her, but it was probably before you did, it was right after the war. Jeff was from Brooklyn. He'd been in the air force as a radio operator. He stayed on, never came back at all, and studied with her on the GI Bill. Later he was Jean Marais's accompanist, he was Eddie Constantine's accompanist, he collaborated on songs with Charles Aznavour. When I was in Paris in the early 1960s, working with Aznavour on English adaptations of his songs for Broadway, Charles introduced me to Jeff, and we became very good friends and wrote some songs together. By then he was very established as a songwriter, and people by then thought of him as French. He was a big, overweight blond guy with a round face. Nice guy, a sweet man.

"Jeff told me that Boulanger would put full symphony scores in front of students and expect them to read them on the piano, making all the transpositions to concert. Then, when you could do that, she would expect you to do the whole thing in transposition. In other words, in a lot of instruments, a kind of double transposition."

"She did that," Ferg said. "She was really intimidating."

"I've been told that if you had a strong sense of your own identity, she was a truly great teacher. But if you didn't, she would destroy you."

"That's exactly correct," Ferg said. "I saw her bury some people, intimidate them so horribly that they never got into music at all. And I can understand that. But in those days I was too cocky to be bothered with that. I took what I wanted from her."

The scope of Nadia Boulanger's influence on American music can hardly be estimated, much less over-estimated. A partial list of the composers she trained includes Leonard Bernstein, Easley Blackwood, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, David Diamond, Roy Harris, Walter Piston, Laurence Rosenthal, Harold Shapero, and Virgil Thompson. And that's only the Americans; in view of the European composers (and in some cases conductors) she also trained, she has to be considered the pre-eminent music teacher of the twentieth century, and her influence in the United States is further extended by the work of Piston and Copland and others of her students as teachers. I met her in 1958; she was seventy-two at the time, a slim, handsome, cordial woman whose graciousness belied the formidable qualities as a disciplinarian I have heard described by everyone who ever studied with her. Her gray hair was pulled back in a bun. I told Ferg about that one meeting with her.

"I studied with her in 1950," Ferg said. "The reason we all went over there was Aaron. He was one of the first American expatriates to study with her. It was the thing to do, in those days.

"When I was in Paris, I grew my first beard. Nadia said to me one day, 'Why do you American people come over here and lose all sense of propriety? What's the beard all about?' I said, 'I don't know, I've always hated to shave.' She took me aback. She really was incensed that I would come over there and grow a beard and act bohemian. She didn't like it at all. And I said, 'It's an opportunity I've never had before.'

"When I got home, by the way, my mother cried. So I shaved it off, and never grew it again until I was doing the Andy Williams show in '63, and I've had it ever since show in '63, and I've had it ever since.

During this sojourn, Ferg was moonlighting in the jazz joints of Paris. "I was playing piano a lot in a place called Honey Johnson's in Montmartre. She was an American black lady who was a blues singer, and it was the only place in Paris where you could get a good American hot dog. We used to play all night. All kinds of us. Kenny

Clarke, Marcel Mule. We used to go to work at twelve and play to six in the morning. I had a good time. I had a little Renault Quatre Chevaux, which I drove all through Spain and North Africa. Franco had closed Spain down, and September of 1950 was the first time they opened Spain to tourists, and we were among the first to go there. Every little town we went into we would attract *crowds* of people! It was wild.

"We came home and I drove the Quatre Chevaux from New York to California."

"In that little thing? It must have been kind of crowded for the two of you."

"Oh! And we had a steamer trunk on the top of it. It was unbelievable.

"I had done one quarter at San Jose State when I was seventeen, just before I went into the air force. I went back there. They'd done a personality profile on me at seventeen. I took another one. I wanted to get my degrees. I'd screwed around enough at San Jose and Stanford. There was a dean at San Jose who was a friend of my father's. He showed me both profiles. He said, 'If I didn't know, I would say that this couldn't be the same person. You are totally, a hundred and eighty degrees from what you were. You were extremely aggressive and outgoing and spirited. Now you are introspective. You are a totally different kind of personality. You were extremely social before. You're not any more.' And so forth.

"The war let me get all of that spirit out, which a lot of people don't get to until they're forty. Then they divorce their wives and all kinds of crazy things happen.

"I went to San Jose State for two and a half years. I finished my AB and master's with honors. I wrote a piano concerto for my master's thesis. I sent it to Copland and he gave me a scholarship to Tanglewood. My life totally changed, and I have no idea what did it, unless it was that teacher in San Francisco who opened a world for me. Let's face it, composers had better be introspective. They better enjoy solitude. They better be comfortable with an asocial existence. That's what I became. I never was interested in business. It broke my father's heart, that I wouldn't take over the business. He got over it when he saw that I had a measure of success. Fortunately, my wife, Joline, was very supportive.

"I got my degrees and went immediately that summer to Tanglewood. Had a lot of opportunities to join the world of so-called serious composers . . . . "

"If you'd gone gay."

"Essentially, yes. But I had two children and a pregnant wife in California, and it was not a choice I could make, or would have made in any case. Music is not the only area. Ballet. Musical theater today. I think exclusion on any basis, whether it's racial or religious or sexual, is very debilitating. It's overlooking some of the great talents that we've produced in this country. And so I resent it from that standpoint."

"But if you'd gone that route, the way would have been open to you."

"Oh yeah. I won't even tell you the story, but yes, it's true. Aaron Copland in those days was the lion. Lenny Bernstein and Gian Carlo Menotti and Samuel Barber, David Diamond, Virgil Thompson, John Cage. That's okay, and that voice should be heard. But I don't think it should be heard to the exclusion of other voices and philosophies, it shouldn't be that American voice exclusively.

"When I left Tanglewood, Aaron said, 'What are you going to do now?'

"I said, 'I'm going back to Stanford and get my PhD.'

"And he said, 'Why?'

"I said, 'Because I figure it's a good place to write music.'

"He said, 'Have you ever heard of a good composer coming out of the academic world?'

"I had to say, 'No, I guess not.'

"He said, 'It's the other way around. You're already a fine composer. You don't need to go to Stanford. You should be writing.' I didn't listen to him.

"I liked Aaron. A lot. In those days I had done a lot of stuff with percussion, and he was enamored of different kinds of percussion. And half the time in a lesson we would talk about percussion that was available that he wasn't sure about and I knew about. He was very interested in a lot of stuff that I brought to him, including my jazz background. Aaron loved jazz but didn't understand it very much. He was such a contrast to Nadia Boulanger.

"Anyway, after studying with Aaron at Tanglewood, I went to Stanford and started on my doctorate. They made me an assistant teacher."

"Tell me again why you gave up teaching at Stanford."

"I was watching my three children starve. I was breaking my head making a living and I was not writing.

"Two things set off the decision. One day I was in school teaching, a master's class in composition. I was angry at this kid who had done no work, and he was wasting our time. He had a brand new Ford convertible out in the parking lot, and a cashmere sport coat on, and I was threadbare. I held him back after class and said, 'Why don't you ever listen to me?'

"And he said, 'Why should I listen to you? My father can buy and sell you fifty times.

"I said to myself, '*Now* I understand. I *see*.'

"And then two days later I was having a drink with an old high school buddy who was carrying hod five days a week on a construction company. And he said, 'What's the matter with you? You're at Stanford, and you're gonna be a big man.' I said, 'How much money are you making?' He told me. And I figured that if I stayed at Stanford for nine years, I would finally make what he was making carrying hod. That was the second thing that said, 'Okay, that's it. I've gotta get out of here.'

"While I was at Stanford, I had started the Chamber Jazz Sextet. I was just so hungry to write. I met Kenneth Patchen who was living in Palo Alto. We decided we wanted to do a jazz album together. I by then had a record contract with Archie Bleyer. I had done one album. We made a deal with him to do a poetry-and-jazz album. We had started this whole thing on the west coast. Later on Ferlinghetti and a lot of others jumped on that bandwagon. But Kenneth was a real poet. I mean, he was an astonishing human being. We did a whole album of poetry and jazz.

"It is the only one, apart from one that was done in Canada and not very well, where Kenneth's voice is extant. That album is still far out of print. I want to get it out on CD.

"I left Stanford. We were doing serious concerts with the Chamber Jazz Sextet. Some of the things are still far out, such as a *Baroque Suite in the Jazz Manner*. And a bunch of stuff that was trying to combine caccia, an old Italian from the fourteenth century. We did this thing with a *cantus firmus*, and that *cantus firmus* was *What Is This Thing Called Love?*

"Then we went on the road, the sextet and Kenneth Patchen. We were at the Black Hawk in San Francisco, and then we were in Los Angeles, in a club on Hollywood Boulevard. Interestingly enough, every night when we played I'd see Stan Getz in the back of the audience. Stan was mystified with what we were doing.

"We had Modesto Briseno in the group, a little kid from San Jose. He was one of the great saxophone players of all time. He played baritone, tenor, and clarinet. He was eighteen years old. Unbelievable. He went with Benny Goodman. Benny used to stand with his mouth open when Modesto played. He missed an off-ramp one night, hit a pole, and killed himself. He was twenty-two.

"The trumpet player with the sextet was Bob Wilson, a nuclear physicist at Stanford and a great jazz trumpet player. The bass player was Freddy Dutton, who played bassoon and contra-bassoon. The drummer was Tom Reynolds, who played a lot around San Francisco, and still does. He plays a lot with the bass player Vernon Alley. I played piano, Wurlitzer electric piano, and French horn.

"We starved in Los Angeles. We were in Gene Norman's club, the Interlude. That's where I met Benny Carter, Paul Horn, Chico Hamilton, all those people. Paul and I did a lot of things together.

"Benny Carter had the Los Angeles Jazz Concert Hall. Benny said, `What you guys are doing is important. We can't pay you, but we'll put you in there as long as you want and we'll share the gate.

"We'd play sometimes to six people. We'd have hamburgers for lunch and dinner. We were staying in an apartment house in Hollywood. We were being touted by a lot of people, but I think we were over everybody's head. When we were at the Interlude, downstairs at the Crescendo was Chico Hamilton, and he and the guys were always up listening to us.

"The group didn't make it, but I stayed in Los Angeles. I did a review called *Vintage '60* at the Ivar Theater in Hollywood. We had an eight-piece jazz band, Paul Horn, Stu Williamson, Bob Enevoldsen, Frankie Capp. David Merrick took the show to New York. Johnny Mandel and I did a lot of charts for New York. But I didn't go with the show. Instead I went with Johnny Mathis as his music director and pianist.

"That was in 1960. I stayed with Johnny for three and a half years. Johnny was the first black sex symbol of America. We'd get to a city and we'd be attacked, getting out of the limousine. They'd tear his clothes off. And yet we'd get to Baltimore, the finest hotel in Baltimore, and he was in the presidential suite, and we would have to take steak sandwiches up to him, because nobody would serve him. I love Johnny. He's a lovely man, and believe it or not, I think he's singing better now than he's ever sung.

"His first managers were Helen and John Noga, who owned the Black Hawk in San Francisco. They owned fifty percent of Johnny Mathis for years, and the fifty percent came off the top, and he paid the expenses out of his fifty percent. He finally came to me and said, 'I've got to get rid of them. Do you know anybody?' I knew a lawyer named Ed Blau. Ed said, 'I'd like to take you on.' Johnny has been with Ed ever since, and Ed has been wonderful for him."

Pictures at an Exhibition has fascinated a lot of composers. Ravel made the best-known orchestration of it, and Ralph Burns did an interesting adaptation. While he was on the road with Mathis, Ferg began writing his own orchestration of it. It was recorded in 1961. "Paul Horn is the promenader on the album," Ferg said. "He played alto, clarinet, flute, and piccolo. The saxophones were Paul, Bud Shank, Bill Perkins, Jack Nimitz, and Bill Hood. Great band."

The album was issued once on CD, but is currently out of print.

"After that I went with the Andy Williams television show. Dave Grusin was the music director. He wanted a staff of arrangers that turned out to be the best, I think, of any show *ever*. Dave Grusin, Billy May, myself, Johnny Mandel, Skip Martin, Jack Elliott, Marty Paich, Dick Hazard. It was incredible. When Dave left, Jack Elliott conducted for a year, and when Jack left, I conducted for the rest of the show. I was on the road with Andy and Hank Mancini. I finally got tired of doing that, and in 1968, I did the show with Buddy Rich and Buddy Greco, called *Away We Go*, which was a summer replacement for the Jackie Gleason show.

"I had written for Buddy Greco a lot. I met Buddy Rich on that show. When Buddy came in, I had augmented his band. We couldn't afford strings, but I had added a French horn and three woodwinds. We were recording the main title, called *Away We Go*. The booth said, 'Allyn, come on up and listen.' And Buddy got furious. He said, 'Who's band is this?'

"I finally took him aside. I said, 'Look, Buddy, I don't want your band, I don't want to get in your way, all I can do is help you. You've got to have a musical director.'

From that day until he died, we were friends. I did a lot of writing for Buddy. I did a long suite called *Diabolus*, a very complicated piece built on a tritone. They've re-released it.

"The first time we played it, I hired Norm Jeffries to run down the drum part, because Buddy of course couldn't read music. We read it through once. Buddy was sitting in the back. Buddy came up, and said, 'Great, Allyn, I'll take it from here.' He'd heard it *one time*, fourteen minutes, and he played it as if he'd been playing it all his life. Unbelievable. Buddy was an astonishing guy. He became a very, very close friend, and I still miss him.

"Jack Elliott and I had met at Tanglewood. He was studying with Lukas Foss when I was studying with Copland. I was studying also with Ernst Toch. Jack and I were very good friends through the days of the Andy Williams show. In 1968, right after the summer show with Buddy Greco, we got together and decided to work as a team. Andy Williams couldn't understand it. He said to Jack, 'I thought you guys were competitors.' In a way, nobody could understand it. It worked out very well for a long time. We did movies, we did every show in town. We did *Charlie's Angels* for five years. We did *Barney Miller*, *The Phyllis Diller Show*, *Tim Conway*. I can't even remember them all. We worked our heads off. We wrote tons of music, had fun, and we made a lot of money.

"We were called in by Spelling-Goldberg, and we went in and did *Mod Squad* for two or three years. We did *SWAT* for a long time, we did *Starsky and Hutch*, all those Spelling-Goldberg shows. In the meantime we were both doing motion pictures. We started

with Norman Rosemont in 1965 with *Carousel* with Bob Goulet for Hallmark. We did *Kismet* and a couple more. In 1974 Jack was busy with *Where's Papa?*. Norman was going to England to do *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Norman said, 'How can I get you guys to do this picture?' And Jack said, 'Just take Allyn.'

"After that I did *The Man in the Iron Mask, Les Miserables, Little Lord Fauntleroy, All Quiet on the Western Front, Four Feathers*. Every year there was another one for Norman. Most of them were released in theaters in Europe and on television here. In this country, most of them were done for CBS or Hallmark. They're still playing all over the place. I still get royalties from all of them. And very good ones.

"In those days I really was for hire. I wasn't writing for myself. Sad to say, a lot of us were composers for hire. In some ways we were really just tailors.

Ferg and Jack Elliott founded an orchestra made up of the best musicians in Hollywood, one designed to be able to play in everything from the jazz to the classical traditions. In 1979, they parted. Jack still directs the orchestra that evolved from their project, now called the Henry Mancini Institute Orchestra . "Ferg is a first-class musician," Jack Elliott said recently. "A wonderful musician. Also, by the way, a first-class guy." Ferg went on writing for film and an occasional jazz project, such as an album he wrote for Freddie Hubbard. The Basie association, then, is a return to his origins.

"During all of it, all my life, jazz has been my first love," he said. "My roots. I was always enamored of what I think of as our true American folk music.

"Hungarian folk music is the basis of everything Bartok did, but it is so codified that a lot of people can't relate to it at all. And that is what happened to jazz starting around the late '50s and early '60s, with Miles Davis and *Sketches of Spain* and other things. A lot of things started to stretch out. Jazz musicians were not content to play thirty-two-bar choruses any more. Gil Evans was responsible a lot. I was doing things. Even though we were not national figures, we were very influential to certain people. Chico Hamilton. There were a lot of people trying to break the bonds.

"The process is inevitable with all music. With Wagner, Richard Strauss, Brahms. They stretched beyond the bounds. Berlioz. Beethoven. Bach wrote the French suites, the English suites, patterned on dances that were already two, three hundred years old. Bach represented the transition from modal music to tonal music as we know it. *The Well Tempered Klavier* is a demonstration for the first-time of what could happen with the tempered scale. Some of the chorales were two and three hundred years old then. He reharmonized them sometimes three or four times.

"The cerebral content of music gradually emerges to change its whole function. The minuet was the movement of symphonies; it was taken right out of dance music. And as soon as the composers did that, it lost its appeal to the guy on the street. And that's exactly what happened to jazz. Plus, Elvis Presley. When we were recording the Chamber Jazz Sextet in the late 1950s, Elvis was in the studio sometimes for days at a time. We thought those people were crazy. We used to go and do whole albums in three hours. But that was the beginning of the change.

"Jazz, as we call it — and I think that means something different to everyone — our American folk music, started to be codified. And the musicians started to be more erudite. They started listening to Ravel. All artists are reaching ahead, sometimes fifty years. As Nadia Boulanger said, artists are often fifty to a hundred years ahead of their contemporaries in the way they are thinking. That's true of all civilizations.

"In the nineteenth century and before, all of our folk music in America really had British roots. It all came from Scotland, Ireland, England, including our national anthem, *To Anacreon in Heaven*. What some people call our folk music is not American at all, it was imported. There are still people in the Appalachians who sound like they're from the English east coast. They talk like them, they sing the same songs.

"What is *real* American folk music is truly jazz, because it sprang up in this country, nowhere else. It was never understood by anyone else until recently. When I was working with Ted Heath, with Johnny Mathis, I used to have to tell the band how to phrase things. They didn't grow up with that tradition. And that was in the 1960s. The jazz tradition sprang up in New Orleans with the funeral bands and the rest.

"At the same time, I don't think it's black music either, because it has roots in European harmony. Rhythmically, maybe. But the bottom line is that people like Scott Joplin were using a European system. Scott Joplin was a genius. When you listen to some of the things he did, you can hardly believe it, harmonically, rhythmically, and everything else.

"This all started right here. We called it jazz for a long time, and still do. But I think that's a misnomer. It misleads everybody. Is the music of the 1920s jazz, as well as Stan Kenton? I don't know. I think Stan Kenton is an outgrowth of Jimmie Lunceford.

"All of these influences came to pass and become codified — I don't know what other word to use. So-called jazz became no longer music of the people. It became music of the musicians. And the minute an art becomes for artists, you lose your audience. That's exactly what happened in the '60s."

I said, "I remember when you conducted in Japan for Julie Andrews, you wore a kilt, the Ferguson tartan. And another time, I remember, you said you were watching the rodeo on television, and one of the bronco riders was named Ferguson, and you said, 'If that silly bastard were back in Scotland, he'd be tossing the caber.'"

"That's right," Ferg said, laughing. "Actually, I'm a pretty good mixture. My grandfather came from the north of Ireland. His family very early was part of the plantation moves. When Queen Anne was trying to control the north of Ireland she gave free land to the western Scots, who had nothing. They moved to Ireland, and they of course were Presbyterians. That started what's still going on today.

"My grandfather came over here from a place near Belfast when he was about eighteen. I still consider I have Scottish roots. Maybe that's a fantasy. But I've been back to the Ferguson manor house in Ayre. That strong filial thing happens whether you like it or not.

"That has to do, strangely enough, with your last name. I know people with Italian last names who are maybe an eighth or sixteenth Italian, but they consider themselves Italian because of the name. I

think that kind of prevails throughout America.

"I was very happy to be Scottish, because the Scots are incredible. Most of the major inventions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were Scottish. It's astonishing what the Scottish have done. They were always ferocious fighters, and they still are. That quirky mind, if you point it to science, still works the same way."

I asked, "How did this close association with Grover Mitchell and the Basie band begin?"

"The first time I wrote for Basie was an album he did with Sarah Vaughan in 1981. I've known Grover Mitchell a long time. When he lived in Los Angeles, we used to use him on all our record dates. We worked a lot together, that goes back to the '70s. Grover went back with Basie. After Basie died, they went through a couple of guys who led the band. I think Grover was the third one. Grover put the band where it belongs.

"The band itself is in the tradition. When you talk about early Basie bands, you cannot ignore what Sweets brought, Freddie Green, Bill himself. The guys in the band now, even the young guys, have roots. The band is *wonderful*. It also works maybe 230 nights a year. It's truly a band on the road in the old conception. No band that you get together for a few rehearsals is ever going to sound like a band on the road like that. It's the only one left like that, as far as I know. They are astonishing. In terms of ensemble, I think they play better than the old Basie band. And they have great solo players. Every one of the four trumpet players is a great jazz player, not just good but great, and the three trombone players, and the saxophone section too. And they have a wonderful feeling for ensemble. I give Grover all the credit for this. Grover molded that band in the tradition of the Basie band. And yet the band is playing very modern. It's not stopped at blues or anything else. It's a joy to work for them. I'm having the time of my life.

"And we've been doing some great concerts with symphony orchestras. It's one of the most exciting things you ever heard."

The *Dallas Morning News* agreed with that evaluation after a performance last month with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra at the Morton H. Myerson Symphony Center. The paper's critic, Marc Lee, speculated on the reason for this effect. "Most likely, though," he wrote "the credit goes to conductor Allyn Ferguson. (His) arrangements gave the DSO silky, swirling introductions and brought the Basie band in with a bang. Or maybe a BOOM. To say it was loud would be an understatement. Who knew 17 mostly unamplified instruments could make so much noise? But after it caroused through the opening number, *Basie*, the audience erupted in shouts and hoots that seemed unlikely in such a stately hall."

This went on for three concerts to capacity audiences.

Ferg said, "Next year we're doing a three-week tour of Japan. They'll go absolutely crazy. It's an extension of the Basie band into a lot of areas Bill would never have gotten into. Bill did some symphony concerts, but he was kind of afraid of that.

"And I think this is the kind of thing that needs to be done. We need to pay more attention to our folk music, that's all there is to it — as every great composer in the history of western civilization has done. Every great composer has used his folk music, and used it in extremely interesting ways. And we have yet to do that.

"With this swing dancing, which is jitterbugging, and kids wearing zoot suits, I think now, interestingly enough, there is some kind of awareness of the importance of what went on back there. And the kids are starting to get into that."

He was referring of course to such groups as Big Voodoo Daddy, Royal Crown Revue, Squirrel Nut Zippers, and Cherry Poppin' Daddies. Jazz purists, at least some of them, remain unimpressed by the success of these groups, but at least (or so it seems to me) the young people are dancing to something that swings, even if it is a resurrected kind of swing. Somebody should name a band Lazarus Leaps. And of course there are those who say that some of these groups are just doing Louis Jordan. But it's time somebody did Louis Jordan again, and maybe these groups will lead young people back to the original. And to the Basie band. That in fact seems to be happening.

Grover Mitchell described how the association of Allyn Ferguson with the Basie band began.

"When I became the leader of the band," Grover said, "I talked to Bill Hughes, the bass trombone player, about the future. He's the oldest member of the band still with it. We wanted something fresh. We decided to get Allyn Ferguson. I knew his work from working so much with him in the recording studios. He's so well-trained. He's just so *good*!

"I can't say too much about him. He's one of those talents who was too much for the scene he was working in. He wasn't being noticed, not the way he should have been, when he was working in Hollywood.

"The band has had so many great writers, like Neal Hefti, Thad Jones, Ernie Wilkins. Allyn should have come out with us long ago. He'd have been poor, but he'd have been famous!"

And where is the boy who flew P-38s and buzzed schoolyards and dusty roads and a desert shack?

"It's hard for me to remember those days," Ferg said. "Sometimes I think back about it, and I can't believe I was ever that kid. It's like it happened to somebody else. I read letters that I'd written to friends in those days, and I don't recognize myself. They're full of foul language, just ready to kill the world. But that's what they wanted, that's what they needed. Kids like that."

The boy is gone.

Completely? I'm not so sure.

For one thing, Ferg still holds a pilot's license and sometimes still flies. And he said, "Do you know there are only six P-38s still flying? Unbelievable. And they built something like 17,000 of them.

"Oh I loved that airplane!"

Not long ago I heard there was one for sale in Santa Monica, California. I said, "Why don't you buy it, Ferg?"

"For a million bucks? You've gotta be kidding."

But then this came up: "Flying," he said softly, "is as close to music as anything I know. It's the same kind of high.

"It's the same kind of exhilarating freedom."