Gene Lees
Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

May 1999 *Vol. 18 No. 5*

Mail Bag

Re your October, November, and December Jazzletters, and specifically *To the Ladies* and Jeri Southern.

I first performed in New York (as Eve La Mont) playing piano and singing. You could say I was one of those "ladies". Jeri, Peggy, Carmen, Mabel Mercer were subliminal influences. After many stints as a single, I decided to head my own trio. I was trained, both in piano and voice, and sought proper recognition. Boy, did I starve in the beginning.

No one wanted to book a trio, especially a relatively unknown one. Never mind, Eve! I hired the best sidemen available (Ronnie Bedford comes to mind) and, of course, the other fact was that I wouldn't play by the agents' rules. I finally made it to Danny Segal's Living Room, famous in the '50s and '60s. I was performing opposite Bobby Short (my sidemen doubled with Bobby). While there I married Michael Short, manager of the Living Room, and changed my name, becoming Eve Short. I have kept that name professionally since. (On a gig recently I overheard a lady saying, "Oh, you know, Eve Short, she's Bobby Short's sister.")

I perform in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, still with a trio and still with the best musicians around. I have a following, and when new people discover us, they are fond of saying, "You remind me of Peggy . . . Jeri . . . Carmen . . . etc. Why aren't you in New York?"

Right!!!

I don't sound like any of them, but I perform their songs along with a Shearing lick or a Bud run. I especially endure because even though I have my own interpretation of the music, the "ladies" certainly must have rubbed off. Who knows? Maybe I'll have rubbed off on a few myself.

The Jazzletters are a treasure.

— Eve Short Braytenbah, Doylestown, Pennsylvania

I'm sending your *Slaughterhouse '99* piece to the people on my mailing list, and a good many others as well. The nation is currently, if belatedly, absorbed with the vulgarity-and-violence problem as it affects popular media and therefore the public consciousness. Everyone concerned about that issue should give careful study to your piece.

On another note, how lucky you are to have had such long-lasting and intimate friendships with so many musical greats. Your piece on Dizzy is perfect.

I have one modest Gillespie story to contribute.

I was in Jacksonville, Florida, having been invited to serve as emcee for a jazz festival there. I spent most of my time just happily sitting around and listening.

At one point, during what I recall as a sort of dress rehearsal, Dizzy was playing with a six- or seven-piece group that included Art Blakey as the drummer. Dizzy called out to me, "Steve, why don't you sit in?"

"If I knew the tune you're playing . . . " I said.

"How about *Birks' Blues*?"

"I'm sorry," I said, "I don't know it."

So far a pretty dull story, right? But within the next few minutes, Dizzy grabbed a piece of paper and, knowing that I don't read music, just sketched out one chorus with the bars and chord symbols.

Not many people I know would have gone to that trouble.

I thought you might be interested in a letter I wrote recently to Paul Zollo at *Performing Songwriter*.

— Steve Allen, Burbank, California

I am indeed interested. What is being taught in colleges (including Berklee) about the craft of lyric writing these days is appalling. Steve (who seems to read absolutely everything) gives in this letter some idea of what is going on.

I happened to see the feature on page 79 of the May '99 issue concerning the subject of rhyme, but I'm puzzled by something in the text.

In the first two lines of the sample lyric, *frayed* and *cafe* are given as rhymes. Naturally, having been conditioned in the true rhymes of Lorenz Hart, Alan J. Lerner, Johnny Mercer, Ira Gershwin, and other master craftsmen of the lyric-writing art I do not understand how words that have nothing in common except the same basic vowel sound can be referred to as rhymes.

The next couplet presents the same problem. The two words *spoke* and *petticoats* are represented as rhymes when in fact they are not.

There was a time, and not terribly many years ago, when "rhyming" of this sort was considered a mark of amateurishness or carelessness. But perhaps when all my attention was diverted to a thousand-and-one elsewheres, the rules of the lyric-writing game have been changed. I note that at one place in the explanatory text the writer refers to "imperfect rhymes".

There is a great deal more to the craft of lyric-writing, needless to say, than rhyming. But for centuries both poets and song lyricists have at least agreed on the definition of the word *rhyme*.

As regards today's rules, I would appreciate it if you would explain them to me.

— S.A.

I have just purchased your book *The Modern Rhyming Dictionary* on the advice of Jimmy Webb. I would like to shake your hand across the miles and say thanks. I have waited years to read an explanation of songwriting as concise as the one in your introduction — and I haven't even used the dictionary yet. It should be on every songwriter's shelf. Well, no! It should be on his desk or knee or wherever he works.

— Andrew J. Titcombe, England

Composer and lyricist Jimmy Webb's first songs appeared in what one might call the post-classic period. When songwriting was sinking rapidly in quality and content, Webb gave us Up Up and Away, MacArthur Park, Didn't We, *and others of stature. Johnny Mercer admired his work. I consider* By the Time I Get to Phoenix *a jewel of a song.*

When I Look in Your Eyes
by Alyn Shipton

The following piece appeared in the January issue of the British publication Jazzwise. *It is reprinted by permission.*

You get the impression after talking to her for a while that it's a relief for Diana Krall to focus on her musical career From what she says, plenty of interviews here and in the U.S. have concentrated on her appearance, and in particular her clothes — the diaphanous off-the-shoulder dresses from her last *Love Scenes* album — in other words, on her image as a blonde bimbo who can sing and play piano.

Her "take me seriously as a musician" attitude fits with the fact that in jazz company, she has always seemed able to slough off her cleverly contrived image and communicate directly to knowledgeable and enthusiastic audiences with all the immediacy, swing, and instrumental talent that marked her out as exceptional for her mentors Ray Brown and Jimmy Rowles. I've heard her in a club setting, like Ronnie Scott's or the Iridium, and she inhabits this milieu naturally and without affectation, something she does even more effectively in front of a festival crowd, like the broadcast sets from Wigan I introduced recently on Radio 3's *Jazz Notes*, which drew some of the most plentiful and appreciative listeners' letters of the last twelve months.

And yet, the packaging of Diana Krall moves on inexorably, and in company with some new and dramatic pictures that have her in formal black against French windows, a grand piano and tasteful oil paintings, or coyly informal in a casual dress and open-toed sandals, her new album *When I Look in Your Eyes* makes a firm bid for what they call M.O.R. — the "middle of the road" audience. As well as more cuts by her trio (occasionally augmented to a quartet with either Jeff Hamilton or Lewis Nash on drums), roughly half the disc backs her vocals and small group with a studio orchestra arranged and directed by Johnny Mandel.

Johnny Mandel's no slouch when it comes to providing an orchestral platform for a singer, and his work for Frank Sinatra (such as *Ring a Ding Ding*!) put him in the very highest echelon of arrangers. However, the Johnny Mandel of today is not so much the man who played brass in the Boyd Raeburn and Jimmy Dorsey bands, or arranged for Basie and Artie Shaw. Rather, he's the Grammy-winning composer of *The Shadow of Your Smile* from *The Sandpiper*, and a man who's respected the world over for giving the full orchestral treatment to a ballad. Even so, "while jazz fans abhor the string section," wrote Gene Lees recently, "musicians know there is no more subtle and transparent texture against which to set a solo, whether vocal or instrumental." And what Mandel has done is to give Diana Krall an orchestral palette as subtle and transparent in texture as the garments she wears in her soft-focus fashion photos. But is this the right direction for her? And is the pursuit of the crossover hit marginalizing a genuinely attractive jazz talent to its long-term detriment?

You can tell a little of how a musician's career is going from the kind of guest appearances they choose to make, and while the jazz community will have warmed to her recent duo with Fred Hirsch on his latest album to raise money for AIDS charities, her appearance as the singer of *Why Should I Care* over the closing credits of the Clint Eastwood film *True Crime* is a more significant clue, and her walk-on parts on albums by the Chieftains and Rosemary Clooney are others. This is not just a jazz singer and pianist, but someone who appears to want to be thought of as a star.

Perhaps the most intriguing thing about this stage in Diana Krall's career — now the focus is shifting to her as a singer with an orchestra, rather than as a small-group pianist who sings — is that when she first decided to be a musician she had no thoughts about being a vocalist, and concentrated on piano. This goes back to schooldays when she failed to pass the audition for her local youth choir: "I auditioned for a soprano," she says, "and the choir director, who was a very good and well-meaning man, was trying to push my range. I was straining to make these high notes, and getting so stressed that it was really quite an achievement even to audition for the youth choir.

"I didn't pass, and it just devastated me. Nowadays I wish I'd had the confidence to ask to be put in the back with the boys, where I could flirt to my heart's desire and sing tenor. I also think now that it's important not to stereotype yourself as a soprano because you're a woman, but back then I really did develop a complex because I thought I couldn't sing high enough. As time's gone on, my voice is getting lower, but to be honest I didn't really feel comfortable singing until I did the album *All for You*, which was only three years ago."

Pushed further, she says that developing her voice is a constant process, that she wasn't finally happy until *Love Scenes* was in the can, but that now "I know what I can do, and I know what I'm

shooting for artistically."

Her confidence as a singer began to gain ground for the first time when she left the Vancouver Island area of her native Canada, and became a student at Boston's Berklee College of Music. "My teacher there, Ray Santisi, encouraged me to sing. At first, I'd been the pianist in a vocal jazz ensemble, getting quite frustrated because several of the singers didn't play piano, or didn't know the keys, so I ended up singing in the group as well, but never really in public."

Everything changed when she moved to Los Angeles to study with Jimmy Rowles. There, she says, "it was sinking in that it's not your voice, not whether you have an operatic voice or not but what you do with it that counts. If you want to sing, you should sing. I was still pretty much a kid when I went to study with him, and I'd spend every day at his house and I'm still coming to grips with things he taught me. The beauty of the music for a start. Jimmy Rowles was not flashy, but he was incredibly complex harmonically in his knowledge, which extended from music in general to Debussy and Ravel in particular. The way he played and sang was very, very subtle, and the beauty of the music came through in the way he played and sang songs like *Poor Butterfly*, *Nature Boy*, or *How Deep Is the Ocean*. Those things sunk in while I was there, but I'm still processing that, and coming to terms with his whole artistry. But the other thing he taught me was not to take myself too seriously, even though I took the music itself very seriously."

Perhaps it's the very power and depth of Jimmy Rowles as an influence that's made Diana Krall look over her shoulder into the musical past for inspiration, rather than the present. She's a dramatic contrast, for instance, to her one-time school classmate, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, who's followed a very similar route from the same high school band to today's New York scene. But whereas Ingrid works on her own compositions, and plays with cutting-edge colleagues like Dwayne Burno and Bill Stewart, as well as having a musical agenda that's to do with advancing the cause of female instrumentalists in jazz, Diana still plays standards, and mimics the instrumentation and genre of Nat King Cole's trio.

She goes quickly on to the defensive when I challenge her on this: "I am a storyteller, and I play the piano, which is the most challenging thing for me at the moment, and always has been. Singing's a challenge too. But as far as compositions go, I feel like I'm studying my Shakespeare, and I'm not ready to write and direct my own play yet. I'm studying songs from Jerome Kern to Joni Mitchell, and there's a lot of music there — it's not an excuse, but I'm not ready to write. And I'm fulfilled by performing standards — I don't see too many people singing songs any more."

So, when the call came from Johnny Mandel, he caught her at something of an artistic crossroads. "I wanted to do more with my trio, and I hadn't really thought about making an album with strings. I wasn't really comfortable with a complete switchover. So, to me, this is the best of both worlds: the Diana Krall Trio with Johnny Mandel orchestrating some of the tunes."

Mandel has brought his usual artistry and subtlety to the charts, and his ravishing scoring complete with bass clarinet and flute at the start of *When I Look in Your Eyes* is both a perfect starting point for Diana's regular guitarist Russell Malone, and for her own narrative skill with the lyrics: "The story's all right, you just have to sing it. But like reading a poem to someone you have to get inside it so that people believe you."

For me, the problem with this is that the songs Diana gets inside best are the quirky, funny, occasionally double-entendre pieces she does as light and frothy parts of her trio sets. Dave Frishberg's *Peel Me a Grape*, from the *Love Scenes* album, is typical, or *Popsicle Toes* from the new album with its risqué story line: "You load your Pentax when I'm in the nude . . . I'd like to feel your warm Brazil and touch your Panama." On these, she sings and plays her best, hemmed in neither by the arrangement or any instrumental constraints. On the uptempo jazz numbers with the trio it's the same story, her artful rephrasing of the vocal on *Devil May Care* is mirrored by the off-center accents of her piano solo, as well as by the intuitively placed stabbing guitar chords from Malone.

But just because these are the songs that Diana makes uniquely her own doesn't mean that they're automatically the most popular. Her straightahead ballads were the favorites of those who wrote in after her recent *Jazz Notes* broadcasts, and she's put in a perfect trio miniature of *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* on the new album. Surrounding it, though, are the Mandel pieces. I find it hard to get worked up about them, in the same way I find the *Mona Lisa* end of Nat Cole's repertoire less compelling than his quicksilver jam-session piano or his jaunty jazz vocals with the trio. There's one moment on her new album when Diana's quartet is sailing happily along during *Let's Fall in Love* when they unexpectedly get snagged on the underwater trawl nets of the string section. What's more, the sultry rendition of *I've Got You Under My Skin* sounds more like a parody of a torch singer than the real thing. So there's an unexpected touch of irony in her comment that "there's no question that the strings shine a new light on some of these tunes. I usually have a clear idea of what I want to do, but collaborating with other artists is always a great learning experience. We worked really hard on making sure all the parts fit together correctly. Really, it's a jazz group improvising as usual — the strings are just another instrument."

Maybe, but to me they don't really seem to have made a genuine connection. There's Diana's group improvising as usual, and then there's the orchestra.

In terms of popular success, I'm sure I'm barking up the wrong tree. *When I Look in Your Eyes* has all the hallmarks of an immensely popular album that will be gracing elevators and restaurant sound systems for years to come. I just think it's a shame that the edge and originality of Diana Krall's talent for singing and playing frothy songs in a swinging small group is being pushed aside by a piece of image-making far more threatening than the clothes she wears or the way she's photographed.

— Alyn Shipton

The Price of Making It

Few things illustrate the tensions in the career of Diana Krall as clearly as the letter from Eve Short and Alyn Shipton's article. Their polarity expresses the conditions of our time.

Alyn Shipton is a musician by training — a bassist — and the jazz critic of *The Times* of London as well as a broadcaster on jazz for the BBC. He is the author of *Groovin' High*, the biography of Dizzy Gillespie to which I made reference in the previous three issues. He is also a project editor for the British publisher Cassell, and he is my editor on the newest collection of Jazzletter essays, devoted to composers and arrangers, among them Gil Evans, Robert Farnon, Marion Evans, Mel Powell, Roger Kellaway, Gerry Mulligan, and Kenny Wheeler, due out in November.

Diana Krall's biggest problem in the jazz world is success. The first press run on her new album with charts by Johnny Mandel was, reportedly, a million copies. She can fill concert halls around the world, and no one in jazz or even quality popular music, to coin an awkward term, has had anything like the promotional and publicity buildup that she has. It is usually reserved for rock stars.

Her blonde image has been on the cover of seemingly every publication except *The Watchtower*. Her career has been advanced by such mentors as Ray Brown and John Clayton, and she has studied with outstanding teachers, including Mike Renzi, Alan Broadbent, and, most extensively, the late Jimmy Rowles.

You'd think most jazz fans and critics would be delighted. But she has been the subject of a fair amount of attack. That was to be expected, since many admirers of jazz really do not *want* it to be popular. It would deny them their claim to special taste. Someone fresh comes along, is acclaimed by press and the fan corps, becomes immensely popular, then suddenly is on the anathema list as having "sold out". It happened to Dave Brubeck, Cannonball Adderley (accused or producing "homogenized funk"), George Shearing. It happened, to a degree, to Dizzy Gillespie. To some extent it even happened to Miles Davis.

It's happening now to Diana Krall. And this raises certain significant issues.

Mel Tormé said once that "the trouble with this business is that it's all bottom and top. There's no middle." And whatever middle there ever was has been eroding, along with the middle class of America, as showbiz looks for the blockbuster movie hit, the overnight payoff, leventy-million-dollars the opening weekend.

I once said to Gerry Mulligan, "The trouble with people like you and me, Mulligan, is that we want world fame and total anonymity at the same time."

The truth behind that quip is that without a Name, the corporations are not interested in your work, no matter how meritorious. You are not "bankable," as they say in Hollywood. And nowadays, few are the executives who will invest the time and effort and grooming in a talent that new careers really require. RCA producer Joe Rene told me at least thirty years ago that whereas he had once been allowed five years to build the career of a new singer, now the accountants and lawyers invading and controlling the record industry wanted to see the payoff in one year. Singers like Terri Thornton and Ethel Ennis and Marge Dodson and Marilyn Maye, magnificent talents, got dropped. The business was no longer about music, it was about selling pieces of plastic.

The point of my comment to Mulligan is that you accept the necessity of publicity and the building of a Name, but the very process makes you want to run and hide from it.

Until a few months ago, I had never heard Diana Krall. Terry Teachout had been importuning me about her for two years, and friends among the musicians of Toronto had talked about her.

Then one day Johnny Mandel and I went to pay a visit to Red Norvo in a small hospital in Santa Monica. We both sensed, as we left his room after about an hour, that we would never see him again, and we never did.

When we reached the street, Johnny told me he intended to do an album with Diana Krall. He was astounded that I'd never heard her, and had me drive from one Santa Monica record shop to another until he found the album he wanted to be my introduction to her, *All for You*, subtitled "a dedication to the Nat King Cole Trio." I was charmed by it. I liked her piano work, and I liked her singing. We listened to it all the way back to his home in Malibu.

By coincidence, *JazzTimes* magazine asked me to write a profile on her. I was about to spend some time in New York, and thought I might interview her there. But she was doing a gig in Philadelphia at that time. I agreed to see her there.

Before I went, however, I read the thick sheaf of articles about her supplied to me by Rogers and Cowan, the public relations agency that is handling Krall. The redundancy of questions in the interviews was notable. Everyone subject to the pressures of a publicity campaign has been through it. Eventually the process becomes numbing. You begin to recite your answers to the predictable questions.

Mandel said that part of his enthusiasm lay in his delight in encountering a singer under fifty who knew the classic song repertoire. But realistically, she's not all that young. She's thirty-three. Ella Fitzgerald first recorded at seventeen, Frank Sinatra recorded *All or Nothing at All* with Harry James when he was twenty-four and by twenty-seven was the biggest singer the business had ever seen, Nat Cole was twenty-six when he recorded *Straighten up and Fly Right*, Gerry Mulligan wrote *Disc Jockey Jump* for Gene Krupa when he was twenty, Victor Feldman was an established professional at twelve, Woody Herman was twenty-two when he became leader of the Band that Plays the Blues, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker revolutionized jazz before they were thirty, Mendelssohn was seventeen when he launched the Bach revival and died at thirty-eight, while Bizet and Mozart died when they were only a couple of years older than Krall is now. Krall is, in fact, something of a late bloomer, and her work is still evolving.

The question frequently thrown at her — why isn't she writing songs? — is odd. Our best writers have not been singers, Johnny Mercer being the spectacular exception. Al Jolson would seem to be another exception, but in fact his name is on all sorts of songs to which contributed nothing whatsoever: it got there by coercion

exerted on the songwriters in a process known in those days as the cut-in. Ella Fitzgerald never wrote a song in her life. Nor did Tony Bennett, Sarah Vaughan, Carmen McRae, Julius LaRosa, or Matt Monro. Frank Sinatra contributed a line or so to a couple of songs, but built his career on the classic repertoire. Frankie Laine wrote the superb lyric to Carl Fischer's *We'll Be Together Again*. Peggy Lee wrote a few quite excellent songs but nonetheless built her career on the work of others. A few of the good songwriters sing or sang well though not for a living, Alan Bergman, Alan J. Lerner, and Harold Arlen among them, but most sang badly if at all, and to hear some of them demonstrate their wares could be excruciating. Verdi, Puccini, Leoncavallo, Rossini, and Bizet didn't sing; or if they did, they didn't do it publicly. Years ago the two professions were considered mutually exclusive. Rock-and-roll changed that perception, and we have now had forty years of double-threat people who can't sing and can't write.

As for Krall's comment about operatic voice, it misses the point. Back when I was singing a lot in Canada, particularly on television, I did a CBC special that starred myself and the great contralto Maureen Forrester. I was reluctant to do it at all, figuring that with her pipes she'd blow me away. In fact she was enormously supportive, because she understood blending. I learned a lot of tricks from her in the downtime between camera shots, and she made a remark I do not forget: "I can sing opera and bounce a note off the back of a concert hall without a microphone, but I cannot sing Cole Porter without one." Maureen began as a band singer, and knew as few opera singers do the difference between the two kinds of voice production.

The late Jeri Southern once told me that each of us has two voices. I disputed this. Then she pointed out to me that Sarah Vaughan had a high, thin, intimidated speaking voice, almost that of a little girl, but a singing instrument of incredible power, darkness, and range. As for herself, Jeri said, she had been classically trained and she belted out a few phrases in an operatic voice sufficient to shatter goblets. She had become a success, she said, when she abandoned that voice and began singing in her speaking voice. It was a revelation to me, and I remembered that my early vocal influences had been Kenny Baker, Nelson Eddy, and John Charles Thomas; then I heard Sinatra. I once could produce a powerful operatic baritone; now I am not in touch with those muscles, and in any event, I don't like the sound. *It is not appropriate to songs.*

The most important thing operatic singing *does* have in common with "pop" singing is the breathing, the *support.*

It's unfortunate that Diana didn't, during her Los Angeles years, take some lessons from Jeri Southern, who taught a lot of people, including some established professionals.

Having read all the material, I went to Philadelphia. Beth Katz, the cordial and effective agent from Rogers and Cowan, had made a dinner reservation for Diana and me. I was there a little early. Diana came in, said hello, a little out of breath from hurrying, sat down, and began the conversation as if we knew each other, which in a sense, through mutual friends, we did. I took an immediate liking to her.

She was born in Nanaimo, British Columbia. Vancouver Island lies off the coast of British Columbia. Nanaimo (it's a Coast Indian name, pronounced Na-NY-mo) is a small city on the east coast of the island, facing toward the mainland. I went to high school for a year in Victoria, the capital of the province, a few miles south of it; Paul Horn lives in Victoria now. The island is one of the world's great beauty spots, mountainous and covered with Douglas firs, though how long they will last in the face of clear-cutting, the land's ongoing rape by the lumber companies, in both Canada and the United States, is questionable.

She mentioned Wigan, in Lancashire, England. I said immediately, "George Formby."

"How did you know?" she said.

"I not only grew up loving his movies and his records," I said, "but when I was a young reporter, I actually interviewed him." Formby was a Lancashire music-hall man and movie star, who played what he called a banjolele and sang comic songs. Peter Sellers was the ultimate Formby freak. But how did *she*, at her age, know Formby? Through her father, she said. Her father and mother loved that era of show business, and had recordings of the great radio shows, such as those of Jack Benny. It is not the influence of Jimmy Rowles that made her "look over her shoulder" at the older material. It was her family.

Her father is a chartered public accountant, her mother a teacher with a master's degree in educational administration. Her sister is bylaws officer of Nanaimo. When the two girls were young, they loved swimming and skiing. Diana had a dream of being an astronaut.

"I couldn't have had more supportive parents," Diana said. "The most important thing for me is my family. I'm close to my family. The hardest thing is living far away. I go home once a month."

"That often?" It's a few thousand miles from New York City, where she now lives, to Nanaimo.

"Yeah. I try to."

"And the singing?"

"I sang with my grandmother. I sound like her, a lot like her. My father's mother. She was a real character. She was the last person to go to bed Christmas Eve. She'd still be up singing *Hard-Hearted Hannah*. Knew every tune. I went over to her house every day after school. We'd play the piano and sing. I just sang there, never at home. I didn't think I had a good enough voice. Then I started getting piano-bar gigs. I sang as little as I possibly could. Typical story. You get more gigs if you sing."

A considerable number of women singers began as pianists: Sarah Vaughan, Carmen McRae, Meredith d'Ambrosio, Audrey Morris, Jeri Southern, Shirley Horn among them.

She said, "I met Jeff Hamilton when I was nineteen, at the Bud Shank Port Townsend Music Camp. I listened to Rosemary Clooney when I was a kid, and he was on most of her records. And John Clayton, and Monty Alexander. Jeff encouraged me to come to Los Angeles and study, and said they'd make sure I was okay and got a good teacher.

"The next month, I think it was, the L.A. Four came up to Nanaimo. It was Jeff, and Ron Este, and Bud, and John. My mom

and dad had them over for dinner. There was a jazz club in Nanaimo called Tio's. I heard Dave McKenna there, and Monty Alexander. I met Ray Brown in Nanaimo, and since then they've all been very important to me.

"I got a Canada Arts Council grant and went to L.A. to study. I stayed four years. I studied with Alan Broadbent first. I'd like to study with him some more. And then I studied with Jimmy Rowles. Ray said, 'I don't think he teaches.' I talked to John Clayton, who said, 'Here's his phone number.' I called him up and went over to his house and I ended up spending most of my time at his house.'

"What were the lessons like?" I asked. "I can't imagine Jimmy giving formal lessons, saying 'Do this, do that.'"

"I wish he were still here. I'd like to go over and ask more questions. He'd say, 'Sit down on the couch and talk and ask questions.' We'd talk. He'd tell stories about Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan. I just did a tour with Ray. I'd sing about three tunes a night and play piano. It was just as important to me to hang out and listen to stories as it was to practice and play. With Jimmy *and* with Ray Brown. And still is. A lot of the time with Jimmy was spent just talking. Jimmy wrote out *Poor Butterfly* for me. It's one of my favorite recordings he's done. I'd come over and we'd talk and there was a piece of music there on the piano, and I knew it was waiting. And he'd say, 'Go take a look at that.' And it always had my name in the corner, Diana. And he'd have things written out for me."

"What was it like? Voicings and such?"

"Yeah. He'd play for me, and then I'd play for him. But most of the time was spent with me listening to him play. And we'd listen to records. We'd listen to Ben Webster, to Duke Ellington. He'd say, 'This was recorded 19-whatever.' I admire those guys who know the history. Kenny Washington. The jazzmaniac! He is amazing. We're going to do some dates with him. One thing I couldn't do was play or record Jimmy's tunes. Two weeks before he died, I called him and told him, 'I can't play your tunes. They're so personal to your style that I would have to imitate you to play them.' I thought that way at the time. I don't feel that way now. I'd like to do a lot of his music. I thought, 'Why bother?' He recorded *The Peacocks*, Bill Evans recorded *The Peacocks* beautifully. I thought, 'What am I gonna do with that?' He'd swear and growl and say, 'Forget that! Play them!'

"There's a time to emulate, and then you have to do your own thing. There's so much to Jimmy Rowles. It's about attitude. I think the most important thing he ever taught me was about beauty. And I think I was too young even to grasp that. You want to play *fast*. That's all I wanted to do. He put on *Daphnis and Chloe* and we'd sit and listen to that. Ansermet's version. That was the recording I had to listen to. And he'd give me the scores. I learned a lot of stuff."

"I hear Rowles in your playing," I said. "But without the quirkiness. Jimmy would do eccentric things just for the fun of it."

"Oh, I do that too, sometimes," she said.

"What else did you listen to?"

"Art Tatum, which I found overwhelming at that age." She gasped aloud.

"I started singing in L.A. I did a lot of piano bar stuff, 'cause that's how I could survive. I moved back to Toronto after L.A. That was '87 to '90."

I said, "I noticed how many Canadians hit the Grammies this year."

"Canadian *women*," she said. "Celine Dion, Alanis Morissette, Shania Twain, Sarah McLachlan."

"I'm sorry Shirley Eikhard's album got so little attention. It's a hell of an album. Blue Note just seemed to toss it out the window and did nothing with it."

"Well I'm really lucky," she said, "to have a record company that's been supportive. A record company that has not tossed me aside, but has allowed me to grow and change as an artist publicly, and given me support. I've had tremendous support from Tommy LiPuma and Al Schmidt." They are her producer and recording engineer respectively. "I've worked so hard to be a musician and play what I really want to play."

"Let's get back to this criticism that you don't write your own stuff. When I was growing up and listening to Frank Sinatra, he was doing stuff that was already old, like *Night and Day*."

"Oh *yeah*?" she said, with real surprise.

"Sure! *Night and Day* is from 1934. So was *Try a Little Tenderness*. A lot of it came out originally before I was born. All that stuff Sinatra did in the 1940s was at least ten years old and a lot of it twenty years old. Sinatra's whole career was largely built on older tunes. So is Tony Bennett's. Peggy Lee and Nat Cole too. All built on classic repertoire."

She said, "I've been misquoted on this point, including this criticism that I don't write my own material. There's this pressure in interviews: 'Do you consider yourself a jazz musician? Are you a jazz singer?' Because I'm not improvising and scat singing, does that make me a pop singer? But I play piano and I improvise in my trio and quartet. So it confuses people. I don't think about whether Shirley Horn is a jazz singer or not."

"No. And Sarah, with whom I worked, and who was my friend, *hated* the term 'jazz singer' and didn't want to be called one."

"Well, I don't want to be labelled. 'You don't fit, you're not a jazz singer like such and such.' Or 'You don't write your own tunes.' There's a lot to do. I'm writing my own arrangements, I'm playing piano, I'm leading my own band. I'm inspired by Ahmad Jamal and the way he took standards and did them his own way. I find that creatively fulfilling. Songwriters are songwriters. I think of Ahmad Jamal as a great jazz pianist, not as a songwriter."

I pointed out to her that most accomplished songwriters, and many jazz musicians, do not like scooby-dooing "jazz singers." No one was ever as well equipped to do it as Nat Cole, and he didn't do it. On the contrary, in his singing, he was scrupulously faithful to the melody. The best scat singers have been instrumentalists — Clark Terry, Richard Boone, Dizzy Gillespie, Frank Rosolino — and they would always do it in the abstract, not destroy songs by tortured melismatic meanderings.

Diana said, "Can you imagine someone saying to Nat Cole, 'Why don't you write your own songs?'"

"Well," I said, "he wrote a couple of light novelty songs, such as *Straighten Up and Fly Right*. No ballads that I know of. Donald Byrd once told me he'd concluded that the hardest thing to do was play straight melody and get some feeling into it. I've seen Nat Cole referred to as a cocktail pianist. Bill Evans too."

"There's that fine line. People will say, 'All you're doing is cocktail piano.' I don't listen to that. I don't obsess about it. Things that sound simple . . . it's not the easiest thing. Charlie Parker, Miles, Ahmad Jamal, they were playing standards."

"Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, all the great ones. And John Lewis argues that jazz was built in a kind of symbiotic relationship with popular music during its classic period."

"It's not something I feel I have to defend," she said. "I get that question, like, almost every interview. It's always, 'Why don't you write your own material?'"

Bill Evans once told me that his very unfavorite question in interviews was, "How did you start playing the piano?" Some years later, I was interviewing him for a radio program. I reminded him of what he'd said. "It *is* my unfavorite question," he affirmed.

"All right," I said. "Then how *did* you start playing the piano?"

He chuckled and did about twenty illuminating minutes on musical pedagogy.

I had learned from the interviews that Diana was tired of questions about the onset of fame. A boy in a master class asked her what it was like to be famous. She said she hated the question.

I told her I thought the question was legitimate. I have long been fascinated by the phenomenon of power. Why didn't somebody just knock Hitler off? What keeps a killer in power, a Stalin or Pol Pot or Milosevich? Intimidation? What allowed John Foster Dulles to send thousands of Guatemalans to their deaths just to protect his family's interests in the United Fruit Company?

And fame is power. How can one expect a Frank Sinatra to be "normal"? Once at a recording session I heard him make a mild joke and all the executives and minions of Reprise records in the control booth fell about in roaring laughter as if it were a brilliant witticism. And in that I glimpsed his dilemma and the nature of power. Did anyone ever say to him, "Frank, you're full of crap"? I doubt it. Someone who knew him well said to me recently, "Frank was an asshole." But how could he be anything else? Sir Robert Walpole said, "Gratitude, in my experience, is usually the lively expectation of future favors." And those who sucked up to Frank expected future favors.

Lord Acton wrote, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." And fame is, usually, money, and money is power, and all the sycophancy that accompany it. The endless, servile flattery distorts reality. And beyond that, there is the erosion of privacy that fame brings, which can be frightening. Or merely annoying. Once, at a crowded but supposedly private party at Woody Herman's house, I watched Rosemary Clooney having a pleasant chat with friends. And then someone asked for her autograph. She left.

I told Diana "I've seen fame destroy people. Some survive it."

"Is it worse for men or for women?" she asked.

I thought for a long moment, particularly of a singer I have known for many years, a wonderfully funny and down-to-earth person when she was little known and an affectedly phony diva after fame hit her. "Women," I said. "For one thing it puts them in the position of commanding men, and men resent it. You've got to be feeling it. What's it doing to you?"

"Well, I'm embarrassed. I feel like that when I walk out on stage and everybody claps. When we finish a show, as we did night before last in Pittsburgh, and people give me a standing ovation, I feel like saying, 'No, it's okay, sit down, don't bother.' I'm not comfortable with it. I love to make people happy but I'm not comfortable with that. Sometimes because of that embarrassment, it comes out in, I've been told, people saying that I'm aloof."

"Do you think it's a Canadian characteristic?" I said. "Kenny Wheeler's that way. Kenny and I went to high school together."

"Maybe," she said. "I think I put a lot of pressure on myself where it isn't necessary. I'm trying to handle it. I'm happy for my success, and I'm trying to enjoy it. Not to be so *worried* about things. The pressure is learning, learning how to answer questions that may not be directly pertinent. I've got to get used to it."

We got into Canadian stories. I told her a joke: Why did the Canadian cross the road? To get to the middle.

There is so much about her that is Canadian. The main element of any singer's style is enunciation, particularly the shape of the vowels. I had a bilingual French Canadian journalist friend who used to say that the Canadian accent, in both French and English, with the tight, closed vowels, develops "because our jaws are frozen half the year." One of the elements of Frank Sinatra's "style" is his New York-area Italian dentalized t's and d's and half-swallowed r's, coupled with almost Oxonian vowels. Krall's "style" is a Canadian accent with excellent time and a voice that is inherently lovely. It has a slight croak in it. So did Sinatra's, though his probably came from smoking.

In several of the interviews I'd read, she'd made the comment that she was shy, which I believe is true. But many performers and public figures are shy, no one more so than the late Woody Herman. "Even me," Steve Allen said, when we were discussing this phenomenon one day.

Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie both told me they were nervous before going onstage. "And it gets worse as I get older," Miles added. Peggy Lee, in her performing days, used to get sick before going on. One of the shyest persons I ever knew was Ella Fitzgerald, and believe it or not, off-stage Sarah Vaughan was quite shy. And Jeri Southern was so shy that she quit singing entirely, devoting her later years to teaching. She refused offers of big money to do just one performance in Las Vegas. I suspect that people become performers not in spite of but because of shyness: it is better to embrace the problem, rather than sitting frightened in a corner, and do something that will garner by indirection the attention one is too timid to seek directly. But it crippled Jeri.

Looking at it another way: an ability to perform is not necessarily accompanied by a taste for it.

The next evening I went to Diana's concert in the Zellerbach

Theater at the University of Pennsylvania. She is particularly impressive in person.

I am underwhelmed by the coy salacity of *Popsicle Toes*. It recalls those yuck-yuck — get it? — elbow-in-the-ribs songs of Belle Barth, and of such 1940s sniggering sophomoric silliness as *She Had to Go and Lose It at the Astor* and Gertrude Niesen singing *I Wanna Get Married* ("I wanna sleep in pajama tops," oh wow!). Actually, *Popsicle Toes* would work better if Diana sang it naively, as if she didn't get it; or better yet, dead-pan, as Virginia O'Brien used to sing in movies.

As for *When I Look in Your Eyes*, the title song of her album with Mandel, I am not enchanted by it. To begin with, the title is grammatically wrong. It should be "when I look *into* your eyes." But directionality in pronouns is fading fast, as in "I'm really into that." A yearning for structural niceties is a lost cause in the age of lyric-writing theories such as those that disturb Steve Allen (and, I might add, Alan Bergman) and the ubiquity of *hopefully, thankfully, upscale, bottom line,* the loss of the distinction between *fewer* and *less*, and the spread, like the 'flu, of that hideously misused *venue*. The English language itself is under assault.

Andrew Fletcher wrote in the seventeenth century that he knew "a very wise man" who "believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation."

Or who should make its grammar.

Her concert impressed me considerably, even more so than the records. Afterwards we went back to the same restaurant and talked until late. Now it was conversation, not interview.

"After we had dinner last night, I was thinking about it," I said. "It's your legacy now. I knew Arthur Schwartz, I knew Harry Warren, I met Yip Harburg and Harold Arlen, and Johnny Mercer was my friend. Just as you sought out your heroes, so did I. Mercer and I would talk about songwriting by the hour."

She said, "I guess I'm very focussed on what I want to hear, what I want to do, and what I like. I made some mistakes along the way. Still makin' 'em. I would have chosen something different now.

"Original music is obviously important. It's like," she said, laughing, "I'm neither for nor against apathy. I'm not against writing my own tunes — if I felt I had something to say. When I do, I will. Now what I'm focussing on is the art of interpretation. It's funny how a lyric can be changed by a tempo, the meaning of the song. I'm studying this art. *I've Got You Under My Skin* at this tempo — " she snapped her fingers at a Basie-like medium tempo — "tells one story, and if you slow it up to a ballad tempo, it becomes bittersweet. The same words. Tempo is my biggest thing right now. It's splitting hairs, it's lint-picking. I'm learning how to count off the right tempo, knowing where it is in my head. Benny Goodman used to snap his fingers for no matter how long until he got the right tempo. Ray Brown and I talked about Basie, how they would play it until it settled in, and they got it where they wanted it. Tempo changes everything."

"Sure," I said. "It changes your phrasing, for one thing. At a fast tempo, you can breath more words in a phrase. If you do it very slowly, it breaks the line at completely different points, and that changes the meaning."

She said, "Yes! I'm still trying to get the tempo right on *Under My Skin*. If you get nerves on stage, you'll sing it faster. And things will sound a little nervous. I try to relax so that I'm not rushing, rushing, rushing."

"I'm sure you've noticed that when musicians do a song over the years, the tempo will creep up. I suppose as they get a tune more under control. I don't know whether it's done consciously or not."

"Sure. We do it too."

"I imagine you're careful about keys. Singers have to be."

"Sure. Although sometimes I'll get lazy and instead of doing something in A I'll do it in B-flat or A-flat. Instead of doing *Over the Rainbow* in B, I'll do it in B-flat. Jimmy Rowles told me that Ben Webster used to do *Over the Rainbow* in E. It changes the feel of a tune."

"And Fletcher Henderson," I said, "wrote a lot of charts for his band in sharp keys and drove the saxophone players crazy."

"Guitar players and bass players love sharp keys. "There's nothing like a blues in G. That's my favorite key to put a blues in."

"Bill Evans used to run through a new tune in all the keys until he found the one he liked."

"The master. I'm embarrassed to say that I should do that. Geoff Keezer does that. His mind!"

"Warren Bernhardt practiced *My Bells* through every key, as an exercise in voicings. Don Thompson claims that because of the character of the sonorities, that tune works only in Bill's original key."

Singing is closer to the actor's art than the musician's. The real trick of the ballad is not to make the song happen but to let it happen — to get out of its way. Someone once wrote in the *New Yorker* that when Mel Tormé sang *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square*, you heard the singer. When Frank Sinatra sang it you heard the song. When Nat Cole sang it, you heard the nightingale.

The packaging of Diana Krall doesn't bother me. Without it, she wouldn't get all this chance to grow. She would be sentenced to a life in piano bars, perhaps in Nanaimo.

Fancy gowns didn't hurt Peggy Lee. As for publicity, I'd far rather see the money spent on Diana than some junked-out rock-and-roller. Indeed, among the encouraging signs in music in recent years are the successes of Shirley Horn, Natalie Cole, and Diana Krall.

To tell Diana Krall that she should be writing songs is a legacy of rock-and-roll. It's a little like telling the late Glenn Gould that he should be composing rather than bringing us brilliant interpretations of Bach and Scriabin. We need excellent interpreters of classic song, and Diana is evolving into exactly that.

I wrote my piece about her for *JazzTimes*. They put her picture on the cover.

She still hasn't made *The Watchtower*.