Gene Lees Ad Libitum

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A Walking Sound

On the evening of Monday, October 15, 2001, more than four hundred persons, mostly musicians and their wives, gathered in the banquet room of the Sportsman's Lodge in North Hollywood, California, in a tribute to one man. It was two days after the seventy-fifth birthday of Raymond Matthews Brown, born in Pittsburgh October 13, 1926, one of the major figures in jazz history, in particular the evolution of the bass. The event had been organized by John Clayton, one of Ray's protégées, Uan Racey, David Abell, and drummer Frank Capp. When Frank, acting as master of ceremonies, asked the bassists in the room to stand, at least forty men rose.

The warmth toward, the admiration for, this magnificent and pioneering musician were almost palpable. It amounted to reverence. And it was not just for his abilities as a musician, but for his character as a human being as well.

And for me, it was one of those where-do-the-years-go? moments. I realized that I met Ray in the first week of May, 1951, when he and Oscar Peterson were working as a duo, playing a club in Hamilton, Ontario, when I was a neophyte newspaper reporter at the *Hamilton Spectator*. I thought, My God, I've known Ray fifty years. That first meeting, however, was a brief encounter, and I did not get to know Ray well until 1959, when I was the editor of *Down Beat* and the Oscar Peterson Trio with Ed Thigpen on drums played extended engagements at the London House, a great restaurant and club at the corner of Wacker Drive and Michigan Avenue in Chicago. I would spend almost every evening with the three of them. One bitter-cold winter night we left the place and Ray said of his bass, "I'm getting too old to play it and almost too old to carry it." He was thirty-five. Recently I reminded him of this and he chuckled and said, "Yeah, well now I really am too old to carry it."

But not to play it, which he continues to do magnificently and constantly. It is almost impossible to find him at home in Los Angeles.

It is interesting to note how many bassists began music on other instruments, for as Chuck Domanico put it, "When you're eleven years old, the bass looks like a tree." And John Clayton is one of those who thinks, "You don't find your instrument, the instrument finds you." Bill Crow, who began on trombone, compiled a list of bassists and the instruments on which they began:

Harvie Swartz, Jamil Nasser, Niels Henning Orsted-Pedersen, Cameron Brown, Beverly Peer, Walter Yoder; Dean Johnson, Cameron Brown, piano; Gary Peacock, Bob Cranshaw, piano and drums; Ron McClure, piano and accordion; George Duvivier, piano and violin; Andy Simpkins, piano and clarinet; Art Davis, piano and tuba; Reggie Workman, piano and euphonium; Buddy Clark, piano and trombone; Ralph Pena, baritone horn and tuba; Willie Ruff, French horn; Arvell Shaw, trombone and tuba; Jack Six, Artie Shapiro, John Simmons, Frank Tate, Rufus Reid, trumpet; Gene Taylor, sousaphone; Gene Wright, cornet; Michael Moore, accordion and tuba; Ron Carter, Buell Neidlinger, and Pops Foster, cello; George Mraz, violin and saxophone; Percy Heath, Jack Lesberg, Eddie Jones, Eddie Safranski, Joe Benjamin, and Chubby Jackson, clarinet; Vinnie Burke, violin and guitar; Stanley Clarke, accordion, violin and cello; Dennis Irwin, clarinet; Scott LaFaro, clarinet and saxophone; Milt Hinton, violin; Henry Grimes, violin and tuba; Howard Rumsey and Keter Betts, drums; Walter Booker, saxophone and clarinet; Wellman Braud, guitar and drums; Gene Ramey, trumpet and sousaphone; Major Holley, violin and tuba.

Ray is yet another bassist who began on piano. His father wanted Ray to play like Fats Waller, and, later, like Art Tatum. "That was asking a little too much," Ray said. "But that's not the reason I gave up piano. I just couldn't find my way on it. It just didn't give me what I wanted.

"Besides, I was in a high school orchestra and there must have been fourteen piano players in it. And twelve of them were chicks who could read anything in sight."

Ray tried trombone, but that didn't take either. There was a bass available at school. He remembered: "I played that school bass for two years. I used to take it home weekends. The teacher used to think, 'That Ray Brown, he's really serious, the way he practices.' He didn't know I was making gigs on the school's bass. But then they ran my picture in the

paper, in connection with some job I had, and the teacher saw it. They stopped me taking it home, right there. My dad gave in and bought me a bass."

In time Ray went with the Luis Russell band. It was playing Miami. Ray recalled. "Three other guys and I began plotting to get to New York and try our luck. But the night before we were to go, everybody chickened out, leaving me with my bags packed. So I said, 'The hell with it,' and went.

"I got to New York, took my bags to my aunt's place, and the very same night had my nephew take me down to show me where 52nd Street was. That night, I saw Erroll Garner, Art Tatum, Billie Holiday, Billy Daniels, Coleman Hawkins, and Hank Jones. I'd known Hank before. While we were talking, he said, 'Dizzy Gillespie just came in.' I said, 'Where? Introduce me! I want to meet him!'

"So Hank introduced us. Hank said to Dizzy, 'This is Ray Brown, a friend of mine, and a very good bass player.'

"Dizzy said, 'You want a gig?' I almost had a heart attack! Dizzy said, 'Be at my house for rehearsal at seven o'clock tomorrow.'

"I went up there next night, and got the fright of my life. The band consisted of Dizzy, Bud Powell, Max Roach, Charlie Parker — and *me*! Two weeks later, we picked up Milt Jackson, who was my roommate for two years. We were inseparable. They called us the twins. Milt and I did some *starving* to death together at times. Milt introduced me to my wife, Cecille. They'd been kids together.

"After I'd been with Dizzy about a month and figured I had everything down, I cornered him after the gig and said, 'Diz, how'm I doin'?' He said, 'Oh — fine. Except you're playing the wrong notes.'

"That did it. I started delving into everything we did, the notes, the chords, everything. And I'd sing the lines as I was playing them."

Dizzy told me: "Ray Brown's always been that type of guy, very, very inquisitive. On *I'm through with Love*, we get to one place where the words go, *for I mean to care* . . . Right there, that word *care*.

"The melody went up to an E-flat, B-natural, and G-flat, and that sounds like an A-flat minor seventh chord. *Sounds* like it. So I told Ray, 'Now, Ray, you're making A-flat there. Your ears are good. Make a D there.' He say, 'But you're making A-flat minor seventh.' I say, 'No, I'm not.' He say, 'Show me.' So I take him to the piano and play D and there's the same note up there in the D. And he say, 'Ah-*hah*! But I had to show him. He'd have done it anyway, because I'm the one playing the solo. But Ray wanted to know why."

Bill Crow said: "Ray started right out with good pitch, a big sound, and the technique we call the 'long sound,' that is, making each note ring into the next one, giving the bass line continuity and a singing quality. His early work with Dizzy, both in small groups and big bands, served as a model for me when I was learning the instrument. I didn't know how to finger a bass, but I knew, from listening to Ray and Oscar Pettiford and the records of Jimmy Blanton and Israel Crosby, what I wanted my bass to sound like.

"When Ray hooked up with Oscar Peterson, he really went after the technical difficulties of the bass, refusing to allow for the possibility that some things couldn't be played. He constantly challenged Ray, and Ray ate up that sort of thing.

"He developed a lot of the skills that became the standards of the next generation of virtuoso bassists. Like Blanton, Mingus, and Pettiford, Ray developed his technique before the invention of amplifiers and metal strings which made it easier for bass players to make themselves heard. He knows how to project his tone, and he pulls the strings percussively, making the bass line powerfully propel the rhythm section and the band.

"He credits Dizzy with starting him in the right direction harmonically, and has developed a sure ear for a telling bass line, selecting sequences that perfectly support the music.

"I wish he didn't live so far away, so I could hear him more often in person."

Ray's partnership with Oscar Peterson went through two famous trios, the first with Herb Ellis on guitar, the second Ed Thigpen on drums. Herb, bassist John Frigo, and pianist Lou Carter were three-fourths of the rhythm section of the Jimmy Dorsey band when they left to form a group called the Soft Winds, so hip and ahead of its time that it failed. They never found an audience, and when the group was on the verge of disbanding, Ray took Oscar to hear them, and Herb joined the Oscar Peterson Trio, the three of them constituting one of the most brilliant trios in jazz history. When Herb left, Ray recommended Ed Thigpen.

Hal Gaylor knew Oscar Peterson early — in Montreal. Hal said: "Oscar went to Montreal High School about four years ahead of me. I got to know him better when he had a trio in the Alberta Lounge. He would have my sister sing with the group. We'd talk a lot about music. This was about 1948 or '49. I'd say, 'How come you don't go and play with the big boys in the big cities?' He said, 'Well, there'll be time for that, but right now I'm comfortable here, I feel I belong here.'

"And he told me about this bass player. He said when he

got farther along, he was going to have this guy Ray Brown. He lent me a 78 record with Hank Jones and Buddy Rich. It was Ray's record date. It had *The Volga Boatmen* on one side and *Blue Lou* on the other. On *Blue Lou* he played the melody with the bow, and then went into this stride of his. Man, I must have worn that record out. That was my first real introduction, my concept of how the bass should be. Before that, even Blanton, the bass was kind of thumpy. Ray Brown twisted that string into such sound, and such power, that it was overwhelming.

"I was playing clarinet and saxophone and a little bass, because my dad had a bass at home. Everything he had at home I played on. Trombone, trumpet, a little piano, and I'd thump on the bass.

"I was playing up in the Laurentians with a trio. I had memorized Ray's solos on *The Volga Boatmen* and *Blue Lou*, and I decided to record them to see what they sounded like. They sure didn't sound like Ray Brown. It was a great reminder of how much you don't know. I'd only been playing bass about six months at that time.

"In the mid- '60s, when I was with Chico Hamilton, we did a Jazz for Moderns tour. It was a six weeks tour, most of the major cities, the Miles Davis Group, the Australian Jazz Quintet, Helen Merrill, the Gerry Mulligan Quartet with Lee Konitz, and George Shearing. George Shearing got sick and for about two weeks, he was replaced by Oscar, Ray, and Ed Thigpen. So I really got to talk to Ray for the first time. I looked at his bass, and said, 'Would you mind if I tried it?' He said, 'No, go ahead, play it.' So I started playing it. I noticed it was so *thick*. It had this woody sound. Even bumping it, you'd hear this sound. It played really nice, real slick, and I was surprised that his strings were so low, because he had this big, big sound. Later, I heard him play different basses, and he made them *all* sound like him!

"He had this clarity of sound, and his intonation! At that time most bass players were playing kind of thumpy. You didn't have to recognize all the notes so long as you felt the pulse. There was a rash of playing real fast, because of Bud and Bird and Dizzy and Max Roach. They'd play at break-neck tempos. And there was Ray's choice of notes. No other bass player I've ever heard played quite the lines Ray played, particularly with Oscar, because he is very meticulous about harmonic movement and sound. That power he puts into his playing! There's a lot that's the same musically about Oscar and Ray. They basically lay it out in their heads and they execute it flawlessly.

"Ray plays fantastic lines and phrases, and he plays every note. He doesn't slide around. And he doesn't play for a lot of notes. The arpeggios are real arpeggios. When he walks, he walks in between the notes. The chordal construction. Nobody walks the way he does. Maybe Oscar Pettiford. And Red Mitchell had that same sense of melodic-harmonic choice of notes. And he always listened to who he's playing with and gave him exactly the notes he needed.

"His solo concept was kind of like Oscar. Oscar just thinks and his hands do it. Ray plays the same way. There are a lot of bass players now who play more fluently, but I think they've forgotten the role of the bass. And Ray never did. Ray set the pace and style of trio jazz accompaniment. His time and power are unmistakable. And there's the accuracy of his melodic lines. No shucking.

"I think one of the finest examples of him and Oscar and the trio was the *West Side Story* album. Some of the musicians talk about how Oscar is not progressive, he doesn't stretch out. And you could say the same about Ray. Oscar created his own clichés, and he's still playing them. Ray is pretty much the same way. When you play that often, and every night, you have to stick pretty close to the same arrangements, if you're going to hold it together. I hear young bass players saying, 'He plays great time, but that's it.' They don't know what it means to play at that level every night. Oscar can tear you apart.

"Those of us — those who came along on his coat tails — who emulated Ray were fortunate to have helped perpetuate a style and a power that has held the soul of jazz music together. He influenced young musicians all over the world."

At one point, Hal played in a New York trio with Roger Kellaway. Because of his preeminence as a pianist, it is usually forgotten that Roger began his professional career — with Ralph Marterie and then Jimmy McPartland — as a bassist. Roger said:

"I took up the bass because there were eight pianists trying out for the orchestra in junior high school. The band director pointed to a guy standing next to a bass and said, 'How'd you like to play one of those?' And I said, 'Sure.' I stood next to a bass player and watched the notes and watched where he put his hands. I had been playing the piano for a few years, so I knew the bass clef.

"When I'm playing with a trio or a duo, I have an affinity with the bass, which causes me to accompany the bass in a different way and integrate the bass in a different way. I don't know that I can explain that, other than to say that I've watched Monty Alexander, and how he relates to the bass because he also plays the bass. So does Kenny Barron. Kenny

plays pretty well.

"The first attraction to Ray for me was the Oscar Peterson trio. My favorite trios are the ones with Barney Kessel and then particularly the trio with Herb Ellis. I must have heard that trio when I was about seventeen, at Storyville in Boston.

"The thing about Ray is the strength, such physicality. That's the way to play the bass. When I was playing bass with Jimmy McPartland, I'd get a little drunk, and he'd turn around and say, 'Play the fuckin' bass.' I was just barely experimenting with the thumb position. That was my first lesson in playing the function of the bass. He didn't *want* the high notes. The way I play the bass is more like Ray. Or early Red Mitchell. In terms of the circular motion of the index finger, picking the notes, as opposed to the hand horizontally addressing the strings and using at least the first three fingers, which Scotty LaFaro probably started."

"Red told me he taught Scotty LaFaro that technique."

"Maybe he did."

"Red told me that you will find yourself using the index finger of the one hand with, maybe, the middle finger of the other, and it can be like rubbing your head and patting your belly, and it has to be mastered."

"Yeah, I understand that," Roger said. "You have to disassociate the fingerings of both hands."

"Oscar said that Ray can be very bad for some pianists, because he so easily overpowers them."

Roger laughed. "He sure is powerful! He bends the changes his way. He kind of leans over towards you, and the sound's really pretty big, and he says, 'We're gonna go *here*,' and he says, 'How about this one?' I cannot remember what year it was that I first played with Ray, but it was at Royce Hall at UCLA. Cab Calloway and Benny Carter were there. I was supposed to do this quartet thing with Herb Ellis and Ray and Shelly Manne. And I actually asked Shelly if he would not play on the first tune, so that I could have the experience of playing with Ray and Herb, which I dearly enjoyed.

"In 1985, I went to Israel with Dizzy Gillespie, Mel Lewis, Frank Foster, and Ray. It was wonderful.

"To evaluate Ray's influence, I have to go to your title of your biography of Oscar, *The Will to Swing*. Ray is as much a part of that equation as Oscar and Herb. The whole thing is there. When they'd start to dig in, there was nothing like it.

"Ray called me for a date with himself and Louis Bellson. I said, 'Who are the horns on it?' He said, 'Nobody. You. It's a trio.' It was a Japanese album.

"Ray is not a side man! Ray is a member of the band. Unless you sit back too much, in which case he becomes the *leader* of the band. He's been so kind to me, and he's always such fun to be with."

"Ray," Oscar once told me, "has an insatiable desire — insatiable, absolutely insatiable — to find the right note at the right time. I know a lot of players, they'll say, 'Hey, wait a minute. There's a better change we can use there.' Then they'll say, 'Hey, there it is, that's a better change.' For Ray, that's okay for this playing. The next time around, you'll see the eyes going, and he'll approach that same spot, then all of a sudden he hears a better placement of that particular harmonic sequence."

Oscar called him "the epitome of forethought. Sympathetic forethought."

In 1986, after a thirty-seven year friendship and professional association, Oscar said, "A very difficult talent to describe. Because his talent has the kind of depth — it's not just intuitive. His talent is almost ethereal. The thing that he has you can't describe. I believe that Itzhak Perlman could pick up any violin, and it's a $19.95 job, and I don't thing many of us would be aware of it. Buddy Rich [had] that thing too. I've seen Buddy sit down at a set of what I call soggy drums and make them sound like his. Ray has that kind of talent. He is a walking sound. Ray has a sound that he walks around with that he can't even describe, within himself. I don't care what *he* says. The fact of having the instrument under his hands makes him approach it that way. There are very few people like that. I think Dizzy's like that with a horn. Ray has that."

Ray attributed the "sound" for which he is famous in part to the bass he owned, one he acquired in 1947, two years before he began working with Oscar. "I've had it legitimately appraised three times," he said. "I mean I paid money to have it appraised. Two experts said it was an Italian bass, and one said it was English. It's also been called Scotch. It doesn't matter, really. I'm not one of those pedigree followers. If it gets the sound I want, that's it.

"Actually, it's not the best bass for solos, but it's such a gas for other things. I could get a lot more speed on a smaller instrument. But my heart lies in that sound."

Ray made that comment sometime around 1960, when he and Oscar and Ed Thigpen and several colleagues were teaching at what they named the Advanced School of Contemporary Music in Toronto. And that attribution of his "sound" to the instrument must be treated with skepticism. Ray let me monitor one of his sessions with a student. Ray picked up the

student's Kay student-model bass, worth about $125 at that time, and got *his own huge sound* out of it.

Ray said,"I used to think that if you studied you'd naturally stay in tune. But it's . . . it's something besides knowing where the notes fall that makes some bass players play more in tune than others. It's some little inner thing. One of the most in-tune bass players I've ever heard is George.Duvivier.

"Frankly, I credit Oscar with a lot of my development. He always gives you a little more than you think you can do. He'll say, 'Is this possible on the instrument?' It's been a spur and a challenge to me.

"Most people who think about bass think about solos. They tend to measure the greatness of a bass player according to the way he solos. But to me, the major, the primary function of bass violin is time.

"There have been a lot of different concepts and a lot of experiments made and in conjunction with other instruments. And there has been a tendency to get away from basic time. But I don't think bass can ever get away from time.

"And I'll say this too: bass is a two-handed operation. And a lot of people think it's a matter of pulling the string. But you have to match the pressure of the left hand to the pull of the right. A lot of guys will pull hard with the right, but the left will be weak in comparison. Matching the hands — that's one of the secrets of a good sound."

Oscar Peterson said, "The other thing that Ray has is an innate mechanism, something within himself, that will adjust to any situation; and consequently he will adjust that situation to what he thinks it should be. Ray has that mechanism within him, like a tuning fork, that keeps him straight. It's so well built into him that he can infiltrate another situation — ask any players who've played with him — and put it on the same venture that he's on. This is unknowing on his part. Totally unconscious. The times when it doesn't work is when he forces it. If he comes in and just plays the way Ray plays, everything sort of adjusts to it."

Jay Leonhart said: "I played piano and drums and guitar. And then at fourteen, I found the bass.

"In 1960, when Oscar and Ray and Ed Thipgen had the Advanced School for Contemporary Music in Toronto, I went up to study. I turned twenty-one while I was there. I had a little apartment across from the school. I got a quart of beer and drank it and sang 'Happy Birthday to me.'

"Ray was a very, sort of, formal teacher. He was very serious about your becoming technically a very legitimately good player. Only a couple of times did we actually play any jazz together. He wanted everybody to play exactly like he played, to dig in deep and push that time along. He was never critical. I just had that feeling of how Ed Thigpen must have felt. We'd be playing together, bam bam!, and Ray would look at you with this fire in his eyes. To keep this thing poppin' and snappin', he just didn't want anybody letting the time down, or the interest.

"Wherever I put the beat, he was ahead of that. I realized later that that was how he made his living. He was not going to be behind *anybody*. He was later quoted as saying, 'I made a living rushing the beat.'"

I told Jay a story. Ed Thigpen was, and is, one of my closest friends. When the trio would play Chicago, Ed often would stay at my house. One night Oscar was bitching to me about Ray Brown. (Despite their deep friendship, they often clashed.) Oscar said, "Ray Brown rushes." A couple of nights later, Ray said, "Oscar Peterson rushes." I quoted these remarks to Ed Thigpen, a gentle and lyrical man and a powerful drummer. With a dour expression, Ed said, "They both rush."

"He's right," Jay Leonhart said. "I agree. I think Ray and Oscar together were a machine that couldn't be stopped. They were both so *intense*. Both of them had so much to say, and so much technique and drive in them. One thing the beat never did was slow down! The one time I heard them play in a duo, it seemed solid. It was different when they had Herbie or Ed anchoring them down. They were both so up on the beat. That sounds like a strange thing, I know.

"Along came Miles Davis with Paul Chambers, who played so laconically. And yet he played so beautifully, wonderful things. His concept of time was never what Ray's was. Ray's spoke of joy and extravertism, the thrill to be alive. That's what I got from Ray's playing. Paul Chambers would just lay back. He was a junky. His life was not easy. Nowadays I'm doing a one-man show called *The Bass Lesson*. In it I like to play like Ray sometimes, do a little Paul Chambers some times, my feeling of what guys play like. With Paul I just kind of lay there, put myself in a trance when I play. Whereas Ray was always a statement, never a wasted note, he wanted everything to count. He was a serious career-builder, the builder of his own fortune. He took every situation in hand and made the best of it."

"He was never in pursuit of failure," I said.

"No! Anything he ever did, his golf, his cooking. Everything was very strong. When I first heard him he thrilled me to death. I just couldn't believe it. That anybody could get such a huge sound and get such *accuracy*. And frankly nobody's ever played like that since. And many of us have

tried. I've damn well *tried*. I don't think I have ever been as strong as he was. In my own way I've tried to play good strong time and get a big sound out of the instrument. I can get a sound that's similar, it's a bass sound, not a plucky guitar-y sound, that high-edged plinky thing. But Ray is the best. Boy. He got the biggest sound.

"There are some brilliant bass players today who get big sound out of the instrument. But somehow they don't have Ray's time, his sense of notes.

"Have you ever heard him sing? Ray is a beautiful singer. As good as anybody. He's got a beautiful voice, he's got pitch, a great bluesy sound. He could have made it as a singer in no time. Why wouldn't you play like Ray Brown, why wouldn't you try to get the same sound, the same feel? There's a lot of his influence in my playing, but I figured out I was not going to be the next Ray Brown."

Another bassist who studied formally with Ray is John Clayton. John too began on piano, and took up bass at the age of thirteen. John said:

"When I was sixteen years old and getting serious about the bass, I started classical lessons. I heard that record called *The Trio*, recorded live at the London House. And there was a song in it called *Billy Boy*. I thought, I have *never* heard the bass played like that. So at my next classical lesson, I asked my teacher, Ray Siegal, if he had heard of this guy named Ray Brown. He said, 'Sure, he's a friend of mine.' And he took out a letter that said, 'Dear Mr. Siegal, Would you please tell your students that I'll be giving a course at UCLA called *Workshop in Jazz Bass?*' That was my last classical lesson. I saved sixty-five dollars and enrolled in this extension course, and *then* began to discover what a god Ray was. I'd heard only a record, but I had no idea.

"Discovering a Ray Brown song is only discovering the tip of that Ray Brown mountain. I can't think of any other bass player that every bass player feels is an icon. We all have our icons, but *every* bass player, no matter what style — avant-garde, bebop, Dixieland, straight-ahead, fusion — bows down to this man. I am blessed to have been able to stand as close to him as I do. Whether it's an orchestra classical player, or a classical soloist like Gary Karr, all of these people know him. He's done too many far-reaching things to be ignored.

"To show you the love and concern that Ray Brown had for this hungry young buck who wanted to make playing the bass his life, I got star eyes. I would follow Ray around to recording sessions, and I saw these big-name stars he was playing for, and I'd sit in a corner with my mouth open. And I'd see a big case for the bass that had stenciled on it *Ray Brown*. And I'd see an amplifier that said *Ray Brown Amplifier Two*, which implies that there's an amplifier one, and maybe even an amplifier three. I was so smitten by this world. And I said to Ray Brown — we laugh about it now — 'When I'm done with college, do you think you could help me get into the studio world?' And Ray Brown went ballistic on me. He proceeded to spew a stream of obscenities like you have never heard: 'Are you out of your mind? You don't even know how to play this mother —' He said, 'Studio work is ninety-five percent bullshit and five percent pure fright. And you want to do this? You don't even know how to play the bass, you haven't made any music, you haven't seen the world. The first thing you have to do is learn how to play the bass from here to here.' And he held his hand at the top of the bass and the bottom of the bass. 'Go out and make some music, and if you want to come back here and do this bullshit, *it will still be here*.'

"I was shaking in my boots when he got through. And it was the absolutely best advice anyone ever gave me. I did exactly that. I went out on the road. I played, I did all that stuff, and I came back to Los Angeles fifteen or so years later, and the studio work *was* still there. And I did become a part of it. And, like he, I have since gotten out of it.

"He was absolutely right. And he *did* support my getting into the studio world. When Henry Mancini needed a bass player for his then-new television series, *The Mancini Generation*, he called Ray Brown. I was nineteen years old at the time. And I got a call from the contractor who said, 'Mr. Mancini is interested in having you do the television show,' and she gave me the dates. And I said, 'Oh no, I'm going away to college, and I wouldn't be able to do the last weeks.' She said, 'I'm sure he'd want you to do the whole thing.' I hung up the phone, and my heart sank. I called Ray. It happened that he was recording with Mancini the following week. He said, 'Meet me at the RCA Studio.' On a break, Ray said, "Come 'ere. I'll introduce you to Hank.' Hank was walking by, and Ray said, 'Hank, I want you to say Hi to John Clayton.' And Hank said, 'Oh, you're the young bass player I've been hearing about.' And I said, 'It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Mancini.'

"Ray said, 'John has to go to Indiana University.'

"Hank said, 'Great school.'

"And Ray said, 'The problem is that he can only do the first part of the TV show. Would that be okay?'

"And Mancini, never having heard a note that I played, said, 'Oh sure. See ya.'

"After I did the first couple of tapings of the show, Hank

and I were sitting around, and he said, 'So you're going to Indiana. When you get there, call my contractor, Al Cobine. He puts together my orchestras, and when we go on the road, I want you playing bass.' Thanks to that I was able to work my way through school playing with the Mancini orchestra.

"I can hear three notes on a record, and know it's Ray Brown. If I'm in an elevator, and there are five hundred strings, and Ray Brown plays three notes, I know."

One of the young musicians who would turn up at the London House to hear the Peterson group was Chuck Domanico, born in Chicago in 1944. "I started studying trumpet in 1955 when I was eleven," Chuck said. "My teacher was Frank Lisanti. His wife Nicoletta was a piano teacher. She had studied with Horowitz. They were musicians of the highest order. He took me in like a son. We talked about music for hours every day. I was so fortunate. They understood the scope of music from Stravinsky to rhythm-and-blues.

"I was playing trumpet in a little quartet. And one day we went to rehearsal and there was the bass. We had a bass that we borrowed from the high school. The drummer said, 'Chuck, you keep looking at that bass. What is it?' I said, 'I don't know. There's something.' He said, 'Pick it up and play.' We played some time. He said, 'Don't tell the bass player, but you're better than he is.' Of course I put about nine blood blisters on me.

"But pretty soon I was getting phone calls for jobs. They liked the way I played. Next thing I knew I was eighteen years old. I didn't even know what tuned in fourths meant, but for some reason I could play the bottom of the chord. A friend of mine let me borrow a bass and practice it. I found a teacher named Rudolph Fassbender, who had been the co-principle bassist with the Chicago Symphony for about forty years. I studied with him for nine months, and from there on I studied with everybody else.

"And I heard Ray Brown on records. Now, when you heard Ray Brown on a record, that was one thing. His joy and his vibrance were remarkable, the most exciting thing. He would get right to your heart, it seemed. He was making so much music, all the time. He just made music naturally, as Milt Hinton or Blanton did.

"Then, when I was about eighteen, I went to hear him with the Oscar Peterson Trio at the London House. When I *saw* him, *and* heard him, he took the mystery out of the bass for me. There was something so incredibly simple about how he appeared to play the instrument. It just came from a very, very easy place to understand. He had the perfect body to play the string bass. His hands were so perfect. They looked so natural on the instrument. His sound was unbelievably beautiful. He would do one of his things, tuckata-bong, people would stand up and applaud. And with the smile on Oscar's face, everybody could feel the joy that came out of them.

"I was with a piano player who wanted to study with Oscar. We wanted to talk to them. We introduced ourselves. There was never a bass player that didn't want to hang out with Ray. You couldn't study with him because he was just so busy. We had a beautiful night with them. That was 1962.

"It was about six months later that the trio came back to Chicago. And the most mind-boggling thing happened. We were sitting in the club. Ray and Oscar came over and said, 'Hey, Chuck, how you been?' And I thought, 'Oh my God, they remember our names!' And that put me into another place in my life. I realized what an elegant trio I was really listening to, what real gentlemen they were, and what bright, brilliant men these three guys were. And Ray Brown ever since that moment when I met him has done nothing but make the world a better place for all of us.

"I've heard a lot of great bass players. By 1962, I was getting involved with Paul Chambers, Scott LaFaro, Sam Jones, and Blanton — and Milt Hinton, of course! These great, great musicians who were just taking my breath away. But there was something incredibly dominating about Ray's presence in any musical situation. It was something that nobody else had. There was a strength. There's almost no way to speak about it.

"Bob Ciccorelli was a symphony bassist who played jazz. He had tremendous chops. He could fly around the bass. He certainly was no Ray Brown. Bob and I became friends and we went to hear Ray Brown together. Bob said to Ray, 'I want to study with you!' Ray said, 'Come over to the hotel tomorrow and we'll hang out.'

"We got to the hotel about two in the afternoon. We had a cup of coffee and Ray grabbed his bass and started to play a little. Then he told Bob to play. Bob took the bow and started to play. Ray sat down and took a lesson from Bob Ciccorelli. Literally. Ray was watching this guy and taking a lesson from him. That's what Ray is all about. Ray always wanted to learn, always wanted to get better, loved the instrument, and respected the instrument on a level that was so high. He was the most perfect student. He would listen, he would check it out. It was just incredible, a phenomenal thing to watch, the great Ray Brown, sitting there being a student.

"When Ray moved out to L.A., everybody panicked. I got so many phone calls, guys saying, 'Oh Chuck, what are we

going to do? Ray Brown's moving to Los Angeles.' I said, 'It's gonna be the greatest thing in the world.' They said, 'What do you mean? He's gonna get all the work.' I said, 'Don't you understand? This is *Ray Brown*. But you idiots don't know from Ray Brown. He's not gonna hurt your work, he's gonna help it. Besides, he can only do one job at a time.'"

"Yes," I interjected, "and he recommended people and *got* them work."

Chuck said, "Ray helped me out so much! He helped so many people. Oliver Nelson was here, and J.J. Johnson, and there were musical supervisors around this town who were really excellent musicians. Of which we don't have one left in L.A. And they were hiring the likes of Johnny Mandel and Roger Kellaway and Dave Grusin. The list goes on and on of these wonderful composers, who did all this work for the film industry and television. Ray just came right in and did the same thing that he'd done to the jazz world. He brought a strength and energy and *honesty*. Ray is one of the most honest people I ever talked to in my life. He never edited what he said. He just spoke from his heart. He says what he means and he means what he says. And I think that's why he's the great bassist he is. He did the same thing. He just played from his heart. He went right for what he heard. There are very few people who can say that about themselves in this world, especially in this business, where honesty comes as a shock.

"He is one of the most unusual people anyone will ever meet. He told me Oscar Pettiford taught me this, Israel Crosby taught me that. He would sound like a kid when he'd talk about it. Music was always foremost.

"The bass has gone through tremendous changes over the years. Now it's a shame, the kids are playing with amps and they're not getting the sound. They're just getting the sound of the amp. We started out getting a sound with *our hands*. There are great young players all over the world. But none of them would have been able to play anything if it wasn't for Ray, Milt Hinton, Jimmy Blanton, Oscar Pettiford, Israel Crosby; none of us would be able to play.

"Without Ray, we wouldn't be here."

Bob Magnusson, who studied French horn for twelve years before he turned to bass, said: "He's an amazing guy. He totally changed the direction of the bass. He carried on the tradition of Oscar Pettiford and Jimmy Blanton and took it to the next step. After that you have to go on to Red Mitchell and Scott LaFaro. He was the link. He took it to the place where the bass is now. And the bass has evolved more than any of the jazz instruments. It became more and more sophisticated over the last thirty or forty years.

"Some of it had to do with technical things, such as the steel strings and amplifiers and pickups. These things made it possible to bring the strings down closer to the fingerboard and this added to facility on the instrument. The steel strings began to come into use in the 1960s, following on the nylon and gut strings. And the manufacturers began to make all kinds of hybrids. Sound and intonation became really crucial. All of a sudden you were hearing the bass players. Ray was really one of the guys that carried that on into the next generation of players."

John Heard said, "Ray Brown and I are from the same town, Pittsburgh. Ray went chasing after Blanton. And if he pauses to look over his shoulder, he'll find a whole mob of guys chasing after *him*. But nobody comes close to Ray Brown."

Don Thompson, who began on piano so early in life that he can't remember it and became notorious in his adult life for his work on just about any instrument you can name, including bass, said:

"Ray is just the best cat we've got on the bass. Beyond being the best player — there are guys who've got more chops — what he does is to make the band sound better than it would if he wasn't there. Every time, he makes everyone sound better than they've ever sounded before. In fact, he makes everyone better by just showing up. You know from the first couple of notes that it's him. He plays the most perfect notes. It's as if he'd sat up all night figuring out the best possible line to play. There's his choice of notes, never mind anything else. He's the Bach of bass players."

That night at the Sportsman's Lodge, Frank Capp presented a film he had assembled that showed some of the high points of Ray's career. John Clayton played a duet with his drummer partner Jeff Hamilton. John presented a composition in tribute to Ray, played by his own class of bass students at the University of Southern California. Ray's old and dear friend and golf partner Herb Ellis, white haired, his step slowed by time, was one of those who paid tribute.

Ray said that never had he been so deeply moved. When the tributes ended, Ray stood at the foot of the stage. I wanted to say hello, but there wasn't a hope of getting near him.

He was surrounded by bass players.

Chuck Domanico said it best: "He didn't make himself into a god. *We* made him into a god.

"For the whole world, we've never needed Ray Brown more than we do now. For he is joy."