*Gene Lees Ad Libitum*

# Jazzletter

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## Dumber and Dumber

It should be obvious to all but the most resolute optimists that jazz is in trouble. Never mind that the universities are turning out more young players than ever before. The best of them are capable, often flamboyant, technicians, and little more. Only a few young players have anything to say, and they are treasures. But the question facing all of them, good, bad, and so-so, is: Where are they going to make a living?

Forty years ago, Chicago, San Francisco, New York and the smaller cities in between had so many jazz clubs that you couldn't count them. Major names in jazz could count on regular bookings of a week or two in each city on the circuit. And that is not to mention all the "local" musicians across the continent who could find steady work. Now jazz musicians scrape to get one- or two-night bookings *anywhere.*

The culture of the United States has descended to a nadir I once would have thought impossible. Each time I thought popular music could not sink any lower, I turned out to be erring on the side of optimism. Rock removed harmony from popular music. And radio removed the popular music of the past from the consciousness of the public. Rap finally removed even melody from music.

Record producer Jimmy Jam said as much in an interview. He said, "Songs used to have something to do with chords and melodies and those things. Now it's beats."

In the *Wall Street Journal* on January 18, 2003, Daniel Henninger, deputy editor of the paper's editorial page, noted that Jean-Marie Messier built a former French water utility called Vivendi into a "media" conglomerate of awesome proportions, making films, records, and television shows, and operating theme parks. Henninger wrote:

"The 1% of the population that follows such things knows that Mr. Messier's career evaporated when the candle of Vivendi's share price burned down. But that doesn't mean anyone in the media business thinks he was wrong. All these guys think the entertainment potential of cellphones is vast. Just recently the Bertelsman/Arista hip-hop group TLC 'tied' its new album to an offer of screen savers and ringtones for T-mobile cellphones.

"Ringtones? TLC? Don't worry if you didn't follow that: the giant minds of media don't care about you anyway, assuming you fall outside the 18-to-35 age demographic that these companies believe to be the nirvana of American culture

. "This is the reason that so much of American culture seems so dumb, and getting dumber. Certainly in the old days movies or music were sold into the mass market, too. *Casablanca* was mass market, and so was Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. But those discreet markets aren't big or broad enough now to support the massive quarter-over-quarter revenue needs of a 'cross-market' media giant. So they've created a world of hypermass. It's a formula all right: Hypermass=dumber squared. By definition, you target the lowest common denominator — then think lower. Thus we get the 'reality' TV show *Joe Millionaire* now on Fox, which makes the original *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* on ABC look like *Masterpiece Theater*. The hit *Analyze This* degrades into the bomb *Analyze That.*"

With the death of Benny Carter, jazz has lost almost all its connections to the 1920s. Even the later generations are almost all gone, including Gerry Mulligan and Miles Davis and Art Farmer and Bill Evans. Writings about jazz in the future are going to be by younger writers who got what they know out of books and old magazine articles, which can be highly inaccurate, going back to the bogus John Hammond story in *Down Beat* that said Bessy Smith died because she couldn't get into a white hospital. She was dead on arrival at a black hospital. But the myth that Hammond set in motion is still part of the folklore of jazz.

Americans spend $13 billion a year on CDs, but only about 3 percent of that goes to jazz. And what the industry calls "jazz" includes the likes of Kenny G.

The late Stanley Turrentine told me of having a kid asking him to autograph "your new CD," which, when Stanley looked at it, turned out to be a reissue of an album he'd made more than twenty years earlier. Since the advent of stereo around 1959, recorded sound has not improved all that much, and most people don't have equipment (or ears) that will detect the difference anyway. And reissue albums are cheap

to produce: you just master a CD, use the same art work and liner notes, and put it out there. That costs about $3,000, which is about what an entire record date used to cost. A record date today for a small group can cost $20,000 to $30,000. The Miles Davis classic *Kind of Blue* still sells a few thousand copies a week. John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* has sold more than 500,000 copies on CD. But that's rare.

A new jazz CD by a well-known artist can sell about 3,000 copies, and 10,000 marks it as a big hit. Diana Krall has sold more than a million copies per album, but that is pop music.

Hep Records in Scotland (www.hepjazz.com.) turns out invaluable reissues. Alastair Robertson, the label's owner, told me in a recent email: "The business for jazz is really facing the end commercially. There are absolutely no replacements coming for the older players. And the great names are gradually receding in memory. Even the mini-flurry as a result of the Ken Burns extravaganzas has now subsided. There are limits to admiring Diana Krall's legs."

But it's not only jazz that's in trouble. The whole culture we built up over the last hundred years is in jeopardy. The movies that are made are mostly crap turned out for the 18-to-35 crowd. At first it looked as if the movies were becoming big-screen comic strips. And then they *became* comic strips, drawing for material not on novels and plays but on actual comic strips, including *Superman*, *Batman*, and more recently *Daredevil, X-Men, The Hulk,* and *Spiderman*.

The radio stations that play good music of any kind, not just jazz, are an endangered species, almost gone now, with conglomerate take-over of the independent stations approved by Colin Powell's son Michael Powell, who in one of the more flagrant recent manifestations of political nepotism was named head of the Federal Communications Commission.

Radio and television channels are theoretically the property of the American public, and the stations are charged with broadcasting "in the public interest, service, and convenience." How long has it been since they did that? In order to assure diversity in broadcasting, the FCC regulations once allowed any given company to own only ten AM and ten FM stations. The Republicans steadily dismantled that restriction, and finally, under Michael Powell, all restriction has been removed. Clear Channel now owns more than 1200 stations, which, according to Alan Schultz — co-owner of KRML, the all-jazz station in Carmel, California — amounts to about 10 percent of all the radio broadcasting in the U.S.

The FCC, then, was as effective in its work in broadcasting as the government was in regulating the power grid. The George W. Bush administration stalled reform of the electric industry to create a shortage that would force a deluded American people to permit drilling for oil in Alaska, to benefit his cronies and friends in the oil business. He thus contributed massively to the great blackout of 2003.

A partial examination of what has befallen us was described in a speech to the 2003 graduating class of the film school at the University of Southern California by Frank Pierson, president of the Motion Picture Academy. Pierson has directed many movies and written more, including *Cat Ballou* and *Cool Hand Luke*. After a summary of life in the "old days" and in that very creative period when the studio system was breaking down, Pierson said:

"Then, on Wall Street, it began to be noticed that a single blockbuster movie would make in a weekend what a substantial business made in a year. Warner Brothers was bought by Seven Arts, Seven Arts was bought by Kinney Services, which consisted of a chain of mortuaries and liveries, and the whole mess is owned by American Online/Time/Warner along with HBO, Warner Books, Turner networks and CNN. Viacom owns Paramount, CBS, Showtime Cable, and the Blockbuster chain of video stores. Of the prime time shows that will premiere on the four networks this fall and winter, more than 30 — including CBS news magazines — will be made by one or another company owned by Viacom. Another 25 or so will be made by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, which owns Fox network. That is almost fifty percent of the new shows controlled by two companies, one owned by a man notorious for his micro-management, narrow right-wing political philosophy, and his willingness to use his ideological power. We had been having too much fun to notice — the barbarians were inside the gates . . . .

"As the huge debt created by mergers was added to the rising costs of making little but blockbusters, the risk of making a film forced the businessmen to be risk averse, to play to the least critical audience:

"Teen-age boys with disposable incomes.

"The problem is how to keep this 'average' moviegoer, male, 16 to 25, high-school education at best, doesn't read books, gets his news from the 11 o'clock news if he bothers at all, never heard of Mussolini . . . this couch potato, this pimply undereducated slob with the attention span of a chicken — how do we keep him awake and interested, while staying awake and interested ourselves . . . ?

"What has happened in Hollywood has happened to us all, because the focus of international business has shifted from production to distribution. And further — whoever controls

distributions shapes what is produced — to what will fit under the seat or in the overhead compartment.

"Agribusiness has kamikaze researchers trying to produce cube-shaped tomatoes easier to pack in boxes — and that will taste like boxes, if past experience teaches us anything. And of course we already have milk that all goes sour on the same day. Watch the odd, the old, the personal, the traditional, the idiosyncratic disappear from supermarket shelves that are rented by the foot to international companies that then stock them with their own water and sugar products.

"Our defense is the farmers market, the yard sale, the auctions. We had hopes for the Internet, but that's being turned into a marketing tool . . . .

"Liberal critics have raised the alarm over corporate censorship, the exclusion from theaters and TV of anything except what seems marketable of anything that might offend somebody somewhere. But the danger of censorship in America is less from business or the religious right or the self-righteous left than to self-censorship by the artists themselves. If we can't see a way to get our story told, what is the point of trying? I wonder how many fine, inspiring ideas in every walk of life are strangled in the womb of the imagination because there's no way past the gates of commerce?"

Ah. There we have it. Mr. Pierson has just explained why I no longer write songs. There are few singers I really like. The great ones are almost all gone, and we are left with the boobs-bums-and-bellybutton girls. Those few "jazz singers" we do have don't sell enough records to make it worth my time. When I was first writing songs professionally we had countless singers of the highest quality. As for the new "jazz singers," as someone commented about a particular performance, "anyone who changes the words and the music of *Lush Life* at the same time should be forced to turn in her hip card." Dave Frishberg is still writing, but as pianist and singer, he is a free-standing agent. And as he was wont to say in nightclubs of a new CD, "Just released in France and soon to be unavailable world wide." Alan and Marilyn Bergman are still writing lyrics, but they do so mostly for movie assignments — and in a time when movie songs have sunk to an appalling level, when you compare them to the great age of Rogers and Hart, Harry Warren, et al. The biggest songwriter in films is Diane Warren, whose meandering melodies and soap-opera lyrics are so bad as to be unbelievable. If you watch the Academy Awards broadcasts (which I usually don't), you will (if you have any musicality at all in you) be horrified by the nominated songs. And one of the ways of scoring films is to use existing pop, rock, and rap records.

The great film composers of our time — and there are a few — must submit to studio executives, producers, and directors too young to know anything about the music of the past. Johnny Mandel was called in on doing the score of a picture. He had a meeting with a young executive, who flattered him unctuously: "You're my grandfather's favorite composer" and the like. Mandel had behind him the scores to *I Want to Live, The Americanization of Emily, The Sandpiper, Harper, The Russians Are Coming, Agatha*, and more, not to mention the title theme of *M.A.S.H.* At the end of the rubdown, the executive said, "Do you mind giving me a list of your credits, Mr. Mandel?"

Johnny said, "Not at all. But *you first*, Sonny." And he got up and left.

In his 1991 memoir *No Minor Chords*, André Previn recounts an incident with the Disney studios. André had long since left the Hollywood film studios to pursue a career — and very successfully — as a symphony conductor. There had been murmurings about doing a new *Fantasia* for the fiftieth anniversary of the original, done with Leopold Stokowski. He had prepared a list of major classical pieces he thought would be appropriate. He was asked to have a meeting with Jeff Katzenberg, the young second in command at Walt Disney. Katzenberg said he had seen the list "but we got us a problem.

"Yeah, a problem, but I think I've got it solved. See, frankly, I gotta tell you, there's not a single solitary piece of classical music that knocks my socks off. At first the realization stopped me. But then I thought, well, what does the word 'classic' mean? Doesn't it mean anything that will never die?

"Okay, well, then there's only one kind of music written in the twentieth century that definition can be applied to, the only music since 1900 that will live forever, and do you know what that is?

"The Beatles! What we want you to do is to make two hours' worth of symphonic arrangements of the Beatles' songs. No one can do it better than you, and it'll be a fabulous success, there'll be the movie itself and then all those spin-offs — records, videos, T-shirts, games, cereals . . . ."

André said no, not at any price, and left.

The generation of executives in charge, then, has grown up a-historical and, in many cases, awesomely ignorant. And it is not only in the entertainment industry that these figures have flourished.

One of the rock-and-roll babies is William J. Bennett. He has confessed his passion for rock. Subsidized as a Distinguished Fellow by the right-wing Heritage Foundation, Bennett is a rich man. He has been described as the intellec-

tual of the Republican Party, which should tell you something. This deeply ignorant man became Secretary of Education under Ronald Reagan. But then Reagan was the dumbest man I ever interviewed, vapid and self-admiring. Bennett was then made "drug czar," charged with "solving" America's drug problem, a job he botched while listening in his office to his beloved rock music, the very reason for the problem in the first place. It is estimated that one American in 37 has done time in federal or state prisons, many of them only for smoking pot. Bennett wrote some pietistic books decrying the decay of the American culture, never seeing that he is himself a factor in its decay. And now he has been exposed as an addict of the worst sort — to gambling. He is reported to have lost $8,000,000 gambling.

And then there was the late Lee Atwater, Reagan's 1980 campaign manager. He was a South Carolinian who had gone to college in the 1960s, smoking pot and listening to rock and roll, and he became a rock guitarist. Atwater is credited, if that's the word, for the race-baiting of Reagan's campaign and administration. He invented the term "welfare queen" to denounce black women shopping at supermarkets. He coined the term "evil empire" for the Soviet Union. He created Reagan's "unspoken campaign promise" to roll back the civil rights movement. He was the author of the infamous Willie Horton advertising campaign that helped George H.W. Bush destroy Michael Dukakis in the 1988 political campaign. There is a black web site that ran an interesting article rather persuasively arguing that in his drive, with Reagan, to reverse the civil rights movement, Atwater effectively ended the desegregation of American music. The article is titled *Lee Atwater and the Destruction of Black Music*. You might want to look it up at http://www.soul-patrol.com/funk/lee.at.htm.

It is still embarrassing to remember Lee Atwater on television, the Republican National Chairman whacking at his guitar and gyrating like the Neanderthals of rock. Well, not everyone is embarrassed. The Republican Party of Orange County, California, each year presents the Lee Atwater Award to outstanding right-wingers.

Rock-and-rollers. William Bennett and Lee Atwater.

Wendy Oxenhorn is executive director of the Jazz Foundation of America in New York, founded in 1989 by Herbert Storfer, Billy Taylor, Anne Ruckert, and Phoebe Jacobs. Its purpose is to help jazz musicians who have fallen on hard times. It is now helping about 300 musicians a year, and, as a non-profit organization, it is dependent on donations. Originally, it was meant to help musicians over 50, but, Wendy says, the applicants are getting younger. She points out that while some of the big jazz clubs, like the Blue Note and Birdland, survive, a lot of smaller clubs, such as Chicago Blues, Manny's Carwash, and Small's, have closed. There were places in the Village where a musician could play three hours for $75, but after the World Trade Center attack, attendance fell so badly that the owners couldn't afford music. So musicians agreed to play for $25 and a meal. The patronage has gone back up, but the money to musicians has not. Wendy says:

"I think 9/11 did more damage than anyone realizes. It affected everything from money to music to mood. It seems that every third person I know is two weeks away from no money in the bank." (If you wish to reach Wendy, you can write to her care of the Foundation at 322 W. 48th Street, New York NY 10036.)

The World Trade Center's destruction resulted in a ruinous decline of air travel, hotel bookings, and attendance at those places that presented good music. And it has affected attendance not only on this side of the Atlantic. A number of musicians found their tours of Europe canceled this past summer, to the considerable detriment to their incomes.

Classical music too is endangered. Classical radio stations are becoming rare. The symphony orchestras are in trouble, with some, such as the one in San Jose, California, having gone under. Part of the reasons for their difficulties is the decline in contributions from the rich, particularly the rich who inherited their money. Only a few decades ago, direct contributions or those made through bequests offered substantial support. But the baby-boom generation is now in its fifties and sixties and since they grew up on rock-and-roll and in deep ignorance of our collective cultural heritage, they do not give or leave their money to symphony orchestras.

As for popular music of high quality, that great body of song built up by Kern, Gershwin, Carmichael, Ellington, et al, you can drive across the country and never hear one of their works on your car radio.

If the stuff is to be preserved for future generations, it is going to take the academic world to do it. There are some good university jazz libraries at Rutgers, Tulane, the Smithsonian Institution, and elsewhere, and they do a good job of preserving oral histories, manuscripts, books, and records.

But that is as nothing compared to what is being done for rock music. There are two *major* museums devoted to it. One is the Experience Music Project in Seattle. The building, designed by architect Frank Gehry, cost $240,000,000, which came out of the pocket of Paul Allen, Bill Gates' founding partner in Microsoft. Allen's net worth is estimated at $21

*billion*. Just think of what that money could have done for medical research or other great causes, not to mention classical music. In his late forties, Allen has probably never been exposed to real music, only to rock-and-roll and its decadent permutations. The combined net worth of Allen and Gates is proof that they have been overcharging for their software products from the beginning. Allen, incidentally, developed Microsoft Word, a system so bad that I won't use it.

Then in Cleveland we have the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, an extravaganza designed by another famous architect, I.M. Pei. It stages rock concerts and parties, and displays the artifacts of famous rock musicians.

Even sports have nothing to compare to these two museums. The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, is quite a nice exhibit, but nothing like the rock museums of Cleveland and Seattle.

After French scientists and inventors — Chrétien in 1786, Niepce in 1817, Lemaître in 1826, and above all Louis Daguerre in 1829 — developed photography, our perceptions of the past were irrevocably altered. One of the great leaps came with the marvelous and grim Civil War photography of Matthew Brady. This altered everything. No longer were we seeing drawings or paintings of soldiers, such as the magnificent Civil War art of Winslow Homer, which left him a changed man, but seeing the actual men, painted by light on photosensitive media, at one time on glass plates, later on flexible film. When Sergio Leone began to make his strange and haunting "spaghetti westerns," he turned for visual design not to the standard costuming of Hollywood westerns but to the Brady photographs. This is an element in the rumpled, gritty look of his pictures, and it has been imitated in many Hollywood westerns since then.

The development of the motion picture and the phonograph record later in the nineteenth century spectacularly advanced our ability to record reality, the sound and sight of it. In old movies we are able to see what the world actually looked like, the very streets and houses and dirt roads of our own past. It's like looking down a time tunnel.

We can read about the great tenors of the nineteenth century, but we can hear Enrico Caruso. We can *read about* how Chopin played his music, but we can *hear* Rachmaninoff playing his, because he made so many records. Thus too George Gershwin. We can read about the great dancers of the past, but we can *see* Gene Kelly and Baryshnikov and the Nicholas Brothers. I once said that to Gene: "They'll be watching you a hundred years from now." Now I'm not so sure. The art will still be there. But will an audience for it be there?

In the age before recorded preservation, we tended to leave our artistic garbage behind, let it fade beyond memory. But the record industry discovered how crap can be endlessly repackaged and, given a push of reverential publicity (the neatest trick the industry pulled off), sold again and again. And this is altering our very culture, degrading it beyond imagination, with the two great rock museums in Seattle and Cleveland institutionalizing the worship of unutterable trash.

There is nothing remotely resembling either place for what many people, myself among them, consider the greatest American contribution to the arts: jazz.

Don't mention Jazz at Lincoln Center. That program exists for the aggrandizement of one man, Wynton Marsalis. And when we finally got a television series on jazz, it was called *Ken Burns Jazz*, as if he had invented or owned it. Ignoring all sorts of major jazz musicians (Nat Cole for one) in its 19 or so hours, it dwelt on Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, though its ultimate purpose, as you could see if you studied its structure, was the canonization of, again, Wynton Marsalis.

The decay of our popular music has reached yet another low, one that would be ludicrous were it not taken seriously by some people, leaving me to plagiarize myself from many years ago: "There is nothing so trivial that someone, somewhere, won't take it seriously."

I refer to the "air guitar" competitions. Can you believe this phenomenon? Recently at the Pussycat Lounge in New York City, the aspirants assembled to take part in the northeast regional semifinals of the U.S. Air Guitar Championships. If you've been away, let me hasten to inform you that this bizarre "art" consists not in making music but in pretending you're making music. You play a favorite rock record and stand writhing there with your left arm about shoulder height as your fingers wiggle as on the neck of a guitar and your right hand at crotch height frantically strokes back and forth in the watch-me-wonk-my-wang action favored by rock musicians. In other words, they play "air guitar." The final U.S. winners go on to an international competition.

Now the book-publishing industry is facing a dilemma. In an article posted August 8, 2003, in *Slate*, Joy Press wrote, "In an age when manuscripts circulate in digital form and scanners can swiftly convert hard copy into e-mail-able material, books are clearly vulnerable to piracy. Right now, devastated by file-sharing and bootlegging, the record

industry is desperately trying to shut the barn door long after the horse has bolted. Hollywood, too, has been spooked by hackers uploading movies to the Internet. Can the publishing business afford to make the same mistakes?"

There's a guy in Holland who specializes in stealing the writing of others and passing it off as his own. He took my entire *Jazzletter* piece on the death of Frank Rosolino and circulated it on the Internet without attribution. Should I sue? Where? In what jurisdiction? At what cost? How much would I get? And how much time would be devoted to getting that paltry sum? I just let it pass.

Joy Press continued: "Still, most publishers are skeptical that readers will trade paper for pixel, pointing to the relative failure of eBooks as proof that people don't enjoy viewing text on a screen . . . But if a book you were dying to read just popped up in your e-mail box, would you delete it? And if you already have it, or know you can get it for nothing, would you really trudge to Barnes & Noble and pay the full hardback price? Be honest: not always. That is what has left record stores like Tower looking like the Marie Celeste."

Again, let me confirm her. I found the transition from typewriter-to-computer strange at first, but got used to it so quickly that I wondered how any of us ever wrote on typewriters. But for years, when I wanted to edit my stuff, I *had* to print it out and do it on paper. Only because I had always done it that way. In recent times, I have noticed, a sea change has occurred. I now *prefer* to proof-read and edit on the screen.

Press recounts that the Harry Potter novel *The Order of the Phoenix* turned up on the Internet hours after the book went on sale. Its 870 pages had been scanned by somebody.

When the artist cannot make a living from his work, he cannot afford to keep on doing it. If songwriters of quality cannot earn from their efforts, and for that matter if the makers of trash find that their work is so effectively pirated that they are unable to retrieve money from it, they too will stop doing it. So too the novelists and other writers.

This being so, one can see that our culture is deeply endangered.

I used to go on the jazz cruises of the S.S. Norway every autumn. They were thoroughly enjoyable, something like annual reunions of old friends with a lot of good music to go with them, although over a period of ten years or so the quality of the food and other amenities gradually declined.

I used those cruises to advantage. It is very hard to get extended interviews with major jazz musicians because they are always traveling. But on the Norway, I was able to see my subjects day after day. The interview I did with Milton Hinton came to seven hours of tape. Thus too interviews with Clark Terry, Stanley Turrentine, and others.

But, I noticed, there was more and more white hair on the passengers, then more and more canes, then more and more powered wheelchairs maneuvering around the lounges. And very few younger listeners to replace them as, one by one, they stopped coming.

One night I sat up late on deck with two friends, both deep lovers of jazz. One was Claude Neuman, a brilliant Belgian businessman who now lives in Avignon. The other was Jose "Pepe" Hosiasson, born in Poland but resident of Santiago, Chile, all his adult life. Both are *Jazzletter* subscribers.

I said, "Five years after I'm dead, my work will be forgotten."

They both got angry at me. One of them (I can't remember which) said, "Fifty years from now, when they want to know about popular music and jazz in the Twentieth Century, they're going to have to look to you."

Maybe. I'm not sure anybody is going to *want* to know. But just in case:

## The Claremont Collection

The Claremont Colleges comprise a group of five colleges, Claremont McKenna, Pitzer College, Harvey Mudd, Pomona, and Scripps. They are small colleges, about a thousand students at each, with an average class size of sixteen. "And," said Mark Masters, who heads the jazz program, "the professor actually teaches a class, unlike a lot of universities and colleges where a grad assistant does it." The alumni list is quite impressive.

Claremont is a lovely little city not too far east of Pasadena, California, and Mark Masters is a tall, quite handsome musician in his mid-forties. He is highly articulate and quietly funny, and he is married to an attorney who specializes in corporate law. He called me some weeks ago and explained that he and students in his jazz courses at Claremont were doing oral histories of people who had participated in quite a bit of jazz history. To date they had taken oral histories from Ray Drummond, Tim Hagans, Lee Konitz, John LaPorta, Jack Montrose, Sam Rivers, Gary Smulyan, Joe LaBarbera, Billy Harper, Bobby Bradford, Steve Kuhn, Mark Turner, Milcho Leviev, Don Shelton, and Scott Ellsworth. Many of these musicians had also played concerts while at Claremont.

Mark said, "Mort Sahl did a great oral history. He has a

long history with the music and an interesting perspective. When he was opening at Gene Norman's Crescendo in Los Angeles for everyone, he knew them all. Mort talked about the humor of the jazz musicians. Most of the time it's very inside, and it's very dark. That's one of the things he loves about the whole scene. It's an underground culture, really."

All the jazz projects at Claremont are under the auspices of the American Jazz Institute.

Mark said, "In governmental terms that's a 501 C-3. That means you can make charitable deductions. It was formed in early 1997 to promote jazz events with archive music, memorabilia, photos, the thought being that this is a music where there is not a lot of money. Our slice of the pie, the jazz world, is minuscule when you look at record sales, concert attendance, and all that. So the thinking was that if we had something that people could make donations to, in terms of physical items, and then also people could buy memberships and give money, that would be a tax incentive for them.

"There are three other members on the board of directors, Richard Brew, a lawyer who specializes in non-profit organizations, Audree Kenton, Stan's last wife, and Ron Teeples, a PhD in the economics department at Claremont. Ron is one of those people who is not a musician but has a love and a passion for the music and the musicians. He is one of those guys who makes things happen.

"I was involved in a mini-festival at Redondo Beach in 1997. I met Ron there in a restaurant. He said, 'Would you be interested in doing any jazz concerts at Claremont College?' And I said, 'Sure.' Everything that's going on grew out of that conversation. A month or so after that, we got together for lunch, and he laid out his plan as to what he'd like to do at the college. As it unfolded — and we've finished our fifth season — the plan was that it would have three components. One would be jazz performances throughout the school year, and that would mean in many cases bringing in a guest artist. Two, we'd offer a jazz history class for non-music majors."

"Sure," I said, "the American schools and universities have done a remarkable job of training the musicians and no job at all of training the audience."

"Right. And the third part of the plan was an oral history project, whereby everyone who comes in as a guest would do an oral history, whether musicians or others."

Mark asked if I would do one of their oral histories. Certainly. So I went to Claremont, was treated like royalty, and interviewed by a student who obviously had done a lot of homework about me.

Mark said:

"You couldn't get further apart in terms of music than John LaPorta and Bobby Bradford.

"You find that all these people are extremely engaging. They all have interesting stories to tell, and usually are interesting story-tellers.

"It's been a great group of people for the kids. The students are 19, 20 years old, generally. When John LaPorta did his oral history two years ago, he was, I think 81. The person who interviewed him was probably 19 years old. Obviously some of the things John referred to, they were not aware of and didn't know where it fit into American history. But he's a very bright guy, and very funny, and there was a quick rapport.

"The first year we had it, the jazz history class was small. But the word has spread and we have averaged about 38 kids for the last three years. The primary teacher is Reed Gratz. You have to have a PhD to teach at Claremont, which I don't have. I think one of the things that makes the class successful is that he's a musician. We both know people who can relate stories first hand. I think the kids enjoy that. The last time Claremont offered a jazz history class, somebody who was not a jazz musician tied the class to poetry. I can't even fathom that. The class works because there are a number of different components. The performers who come in to perform usually appear to the class. They talk about their careers and do questions and answers. It's fun for the kids to see these people perform after they've talked to the class.

"We are trying to get the college to understand the importance of what we're doing. Our goal here is for the institute to be a legal affiliate of the college, and that will open up all kinds of things to us. Right now the program is supported for the most part by a small handful of alums, who give money to make this happen.

"If we can reach the alumni group from the fifties, they'd be very interested in what we're doing. There used to be a big jazz scene at Claremont in the 1950s. Shorty Rogers, Bud Shank, all those people played at the college during the heyday of jazz here on the west coast. We're trying to get them to see that they could have something like Rutgers, like Lincoln Center, on the West Coast.

"The thing that will appeal to them is the archiving and the oral histories.

"Improvising music, creating music on the spot, is one of the most scholarly disciplines there can be.

"So many times this type of program is strictly repertory. I believe there is great importance in that part of the music. Just last year we had Steve Kuhn out, and we did Gary

McFarland's *October Suite*, which is forty years old. That's an instance of repertory with a purpose. And Gary's music sounded so contemporary. If he had lived, he could have written that this year. And a couple of years ago, we had Tim Hagans out and we did Gil Evans' *Sketches of Spain*. And somebody said, 'Why do it? After the record?' Well, the fact is that there are things in the orchestration that you didn't hear on the record. When I was conducting it and Tim was playing, I thought, 'My God, this is a masterpiece.' To be surrounded by this sound that he created is remarkable.

"That's the repertory end of it, that's what we're doing.

"The other thing, probably the most important, is that we have current jazz artists, musicians of this generation, Mark Turner, Tim Hagans, Gary Smulyan. You've got to be current, but current with good taste and a purpose.

"I wrote a project last year on Jelly Roll Morton's music, but in a current fashion. And we recorded a Clifford Brown project with Tim Hagans."

What about Mark himself?

He was born in Gary, Indiana, on November 13, 1957. His family settled in Redlands, California, in 1964.

He started as a trumpet player in sixth grade and continued that through high school, went to Riverside Community College as a music major, then went on to Cal State Los Angeles. He said: "I was there with Bob Curnow, who played trombone in the '60s with Stan Kenton. In the early 1970s he wrote a lot of music for Kenton's band and he was A&R man at Kenton's Creative World. I was there two years to finish my degree and get my teaching credentials, and I worked in the business office of Kenton's Creative World.

"Berry Gordy, who founded Motown, told Audree Kenton, Stan's widow, that Creative World was the most successful independent record label that he had ever seen. It was a good place to work and learn some of the other aspects of the music business.

"When I got out of Cal State in L.A. in 1982, I started a big rehearsal band. I had a couple of records on the Seabreeze label, mainly devoted to music written for Kenton's band. People I had met like Bill Russo and Ken Hanna were very generous in sharing music. I did a lot of score study. I did the rehearsal band on and off for several years.

"At one point I thought I wanted to teach music. After I got my credentials, I wasn't sure I was the right person to teach. I didn't have the right temperament. I decided to concentrate on writing, arranging, orchestrating. Jimmy Knepper said to me once, 'The whole key to making a sextet sound big is to try to figure out how to make three horns play four-part voicings.

"A lot of people were very receptive. I was in Chicago about 22 years ago, and I called Bill Russo, one of my heroes. I asked him if we could sit down and let me ask him some questions, which we did. Shorty Rogers, Pete Rugolo, Ken Hanna."

"Then in an informal sense," I said, "you studied with all these people."

"Yes. I had a couple of quarters at Cal State with Bob Curnow, but it's hard to learn in a class like that. Both Curnow and Roger Rickson were more teachers in a private setting, where you could ask questions.

"Someone once said that visualizing music was very helpful in learning all aspects of it — when you hear something and try to figure out what it would look like on a score. I think that as an arranger or a writer, you're basically self-taught."

During my two days at Claremont, I was increasingly impressed by what they're doing. Obviously it is a far cry from those rock museums in Seattle and Cleveland. But they're doing something, not just archiving material.

Over the years, needless to say, I have acquired a tremendous quantity of artifacts, magazine articles I wrote long ago, books, interviews I've done — and all the cassette tapes of 22 years of interviews for the *Jazzletter*. One day I called Mark. I asked if he would like to have this material for Claremont, including all the taped interviews. The silence at the other end of the line was thunderous. And then we resumed talking. Within a few days he came to see me. I have turned over what are I guess hundreds of taped interviews. They are being transferred to CDs, because nobody knows how long tapes will last.

If young people and others are doing research on the master musicians of jazz, they can with this material go beyond secondary sources. They will not be reading what I said these people said (although I always clear quotes by the person before printing them) but they will be able to hear Milt Hinton or Clark Terry talking. They'll hear the actual conversation, not with the digressions edited out, but with all the hesitations and meanders of the real thing.

And we'll see (well, I won't, but somebody will) whether fifty years from now anybody will really care. Or whether the major conglomerates with the help of people like Paul Allen and Jeff Katzenberg will have succeeded in obliterating all that was great and good in the American culture.