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A Farewell to Ray

The Sportsman's Lodge at Ventura Boulevard and Coldwater Canyon in North Hollywood has for years been a favorite location for celebrations and tributes for or by jazz musicians, It has a large auditorium that serves quite good food.

On October 15, 2001, some four or five hundred people gathered there in tribute to the monumental bassist Ray Brown; it was two days after his seventy-fifth birthday. And Ray was there to hear the tributes and teasing of his friends. Eight months later, four or five hundred people gathered in that same room in tribute to Ray, but Ray was not there. The event was a reception following Ray's funeral.

Back in the 1959, '60 and '61, whenever the Oscar Peterson Trio, the edition with Ray Brown on bass and Edmund Thigpen on drums, would play the London House in Chicago, I would be with them almost every night. I remember Ray saying: "I'm getting too old to play the bass and almost too old to carry it." He was thirty-five.

I told him that he would probably die on the road. That's exactly what happened. He was playing the Jazz Kitchen in Indianapolis. On July 2, 2002, he spent the morning playing golf. He had lunch and lay down to take a nap before the gig that evening. He never woke up. Way to go!

The funeral service was at Forest Lawn cemetery in Los Angeles in a lovely white chapel on a hillside. People were standing on either side of the chapel, because there was no more seating. The service was distinguished not by solemnity but irreverent humor, as such of Ray's friends as Frank Capp and John Clayton told stories about him.

People had come from all over the country to attend the service and participate in what amounted to an evening-long jam session after the dinner at the Sportsman's. Jay Leonhart, who had studied bass with Ray, came from New York, along with Kenny Burrell and Jon Faddis. Roger Kellaway, Jay Leonhart, and John Guerin comprised one of the groups that played, and Kenny Burrell, joined them. John Clayton, also a protégé of Ray's, performed. So did Jon Faddis, Monty Alexander and Benny Green. The bass players all played Ray's bass.

When he left Oscar Peterson in 1966 to work in the studios of Los Angeles, Ray said he was tired of the road. But in time he grew tired of the studios, and formed trios that included pianists Monty Alexander, Gene Harris, Geoff Keezer, and Benny Green, and went back out on the road, traveling seven months a year.

He is survived by his beloved wife Cecilia; his son by first wife Ella Fitzgerald, Raymond Brown Jr.; three grandchildren; three nephews and a niece; and friends beyond count.

At the time of the tribute I wrote last fall, Chuck Domanico said, "For the whole world, we've never needed Ray Brown more than we do now. For he is joy."

He was. He is. And as long as his 2,000 or so recordings endure and we have ears to listen, he always will be.

Ralph Burns

Almost eighteen years ago, the December 1984 Jazzletter published an essay by Grover Sales asking the question: Why Is Jazz Not Gay Music?

He wrote:

> The chasm that separates the gay world from the jazz world is fascinating, yet little explored. Singer Betty Bennett, who worked with the bands of Claude Thornhill, Woody Herman, Benny Goodman, and Charlie Barnet, wrote in her memoirs, "The percentage of jazz musicians who are gay must be near zero. When I asked Shelly Manne if he was aware of this phenomenon, he thought for a couple of minutes, shuddered and said, 'What would the cats in the band say?'"
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> I first became aware of this split thirty years ago [and you can now make that forty-eight years ago — ed.] when I began a twelve-year career as theatrical publicist for everyone in show business from Moms Mabley to the Bolshoi Ballet. One of my obvious functions was to case audiences to advise clients where to spend their advertising money: you didn't buy ads in the underground or black press for the Kingston Trio, Stan Kenton or the Tijuana Brass, or radio spots on an easy-listening station for Miles Davis or Lenny Bruce.

Years of intensive audience-watching made it clear to me that certain stars and attractions such as Judy Garland, Carol Channing, Ethel Merman, opera, ballet, and later, Bette Midler, drew vast audiences of homosexual men. I also learned that authentic jazz, particularly of the non-vocal variety, did not. Increasingly curious about this little-discussed phenomenon, I started to ask jazz musicians — those I knew well enough to expect candid answers — if they knew any homosexual jazzmen. Whether they had come of age in the 1920s or the 1950s, their answers were much the same: "No, not a one. Well, maybe so-and-so was, but he's an arranger. I heard Tony Jackson was (died 1921), and that piano player with Erskine Hawkins, but that's about all. Plenty of chick singers are bi, but gay men usually go for Broadway show tunes, not jazz. In this business I'd say they're about as rare as one-armed ball players."

It became evident to me that the incidence of homosexuality in jazz was not only below that in other kinds of music and all the other arts, it was far below population norms cited in studies such as the Kinsey Report. While firm recent figures are lacking, the Gay and Lesbian Archives in Los Angles says the best estimate of the national average of male homosexuality is ten percent.

Dizzy Gillespie once said, "I don't even know a jazz musician who's a homosexual — not a real jazz musician."

But that is an overstatement. Surely he knew about Billy Strayhorn, Duke Ellington's brilliant arranger and co-composer. Everyone in the jazz world did. But nobody ever talked about it. David Hajdu's biography of Strayhorn deals extensively with this aspect of Strayhorn's life.

There have been rumors about Lester Young, but they seem unsubstantial. The drummer Vic Berton was widely said to be homosexual, and there were rumors about Bix Beiderbecke. When I put the question to Richard Sudhalter, one of the authors of the major biography on Bix, he said, "If you put that key into the lock and turn it, you can hear all the tumblers go click." Meaning of course that this would explain about his tortured bachelor life, including his rejection by his family, his expulsion from private school, and perhaps even his suicidal drinking.

When Grover was writing that piece, we consulted with the Gay and Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles, and were told that their people were well aware of the rarity of homosexuality in jazz. And when I consulted a few jazz musicians recently, they said it still is rare, with Fred Hersh and Gary Burton being the overt exceptions.

There is one more name you can add to the list. So long as he was alive, I along with others of his friends never mentioned it. But now he's gone, it doesn't matter.

Ralph Burns was born in Newton, Massachusetts, on June 29, 1922. The family name was originally Byrnes, but such was the prejudice against the Irish in America that his grandfather changed it to the Scottish spelling. The family was in real estate.

"I was the black sheep," he said. He began playing club dates with older musicians, at which time he discovered marijuana. "That was the time when only musicians smoked grass," Ralph said. "But nobody else in the high school did. The high schools were clean." Ralph attended Newton High School, another of whose students was Serge Chaloff. "I was about a year ahead of him." Ralph was a year older than Chaloff. "I knew him, but I never used to pay any attention to him then, because he was kind of like a nutty kid."

"And he stayed that way," I said. Excepting Stan Getz, Serge Chaloff was the most notorious bad boy in the history of the Woody Herman band.

Ralph attended the New England Conservatory for the year 1938-39 but, perhaps more significantly, he studied piano with Margaret Chaloff, Serge's mother. One of those "classical" musicians who have had a significant but unsung influence on jazz, she trained a lot of excellent pianists, including — after Ralph's time — Michael Renzi, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Steve Kuhn, Richard Twardzik, and Dave Mackay. A characteristic of her former students tends to be a warm, golden tone. Kuhn says that a lot of established major jazz pianists would consult her when they passed through Boston.

Mike Renzi once showed me one of the secrets of what I think of as the Chaloff tone: a way of drawing the finger toward you as you touch the key. "That's one of her things," Dave Mackay said. "And if you use a very light arm, you can execute with very clean articulation and rapidity."

"She was wonderful," Ralph said. "I loved her. She was a great teacher and a wonderful woman, a lot of fun."

Dave lost his eyesight to retinitis pigmentoso when he was in his early twenties.

"I remember that one summer I had a little apartment on the river," he said. "I had just begun to use a white cane. And every morning, four or five days I week, I would walk a few blocks to her apartment. I stopped at a little grocery store and

picked up a few things, and she would cook my breakfast while I practiced. She would pop in and out of the kitchen and say, 'No, no!' or 'Yes.' And after my breakfast she would give me a lesson. And she never charged me a penny."

This was one of the formative influences on Ralph: Madame Chaloff, as if have often heard her called .

Ralph left the New England Conservatory to play in a band led by a young man named Nick Jerret, whose real name was Bertocci. He had a sister, Chiarina Francesca Bertocci, who had changed it to Frances Wayne.

In April, 1993, Ralph — by now a handsome man with a full head of white hair, a white mustache, and dark-rimmed glasses — recalled those early days, saying: "We had a job in the Mayfair in Boston, which was the big nightclub then. We had six pieces, and Frances was the singer. I moved in with her family. They lived in Somerville. I loved that family. They were like my own family. I was very close to all the brothers, Vinnie and Cosmo and little Louis and the mother and father. I had a wonderful time living there. Vinnie used to manage us.

"We went down to New York and auditioned at Kelly's Stables one weekend, and got the job. I was eighteen, I believe. A week or so later we all took the bus down and started work. We were there off and on at least a year. We were the relief band, a little jazz band patterned after a John Kirby style, a bit more modern, I think. I started writing for that band. What a thing to be thrown in with! It was great. Art Tatum and his trio and Coleman Hawkins and his group and Thelma Carpenter. Wow! I just used to wait to get through work so I could sit and listen.

"They flew Nat Cole and his trio in from California, the King Cole Trio. Their first record had come out, *Straighten Up and Fly Right*. I'll never forget. Nat never *let* me forget. He was a wonderful guy. There were two separate unions in New York. They made thirty-two dollars a week, the black union scale. We were white, so we made thirty-five dollars a week. After he was a big star, Nat would see me and yell across the street, 'Hey, Ralph, I remember when!'"

When Ralph wasn't working at Kelly's stables, he'd pick up jobs along Fifty-second Street. One was with Red Norvo.

Ralph said, "Frances Wayne went with Charlie Barnet. Charlie needed a piano player and she got me the job. That's when I started writing for big bands. After that I went with Red Norvo. This was World War II. Red got together a group. We were going to go overseas and play for the troops. We never went.

"Frances then went with Woody. In those days the big bands used to trade off musicians. Chubby Jackson was with Charlie Barnet. Woody offered Chubby a job. Dave Matthews, who wrote Duke Ellington style arrangements for Charlie Barnet, wrote some for Woody. Woody wanted to change the sound of his band. So Frances and Chubby said, 'Why don't you get Ralph? He writes and he plays piano.' On their recommendation, Woody called me up, and I was hired."

Ralph, a slim and sensitive-looking young man when he first wrote for Woody, became an essential element in the evolution of what came to be known, accurately or not, as the First Herd, for a series of brilliant arrangements of popular songs and original compositions, most of which were to remain in the band's book permanently.

Woody said, "I was constantly seeking other colors, you know, as to what it could be and still be able to get a good swinging thing going. And that's why in those years I guess we were starting to use the sound of vibes, clarinet, guitar and piano. And Ralph had the great ability of writing for these odd instrumentations — odd at the time — and making it happen . . . . Ralph was heavily influenced by Sweetpea" — the nickname for Billy Strayhorn — "and Duke, so we were all shooting for the same thing. We didn't want to be like Duke, but we sure wanted to be good like him. Charlie Barnet did an actual copy of Duke's music, and that to me would have been very distasteful and dishonoring a great man and a great group of musicians. But what we did was try to capture the feeling, warmth, and enthusiasm, and if we could outswing Duke, then we'd figure we'd won the game."

Woody was fond of saying "I'm just an editor," as if this were not an excellent ability in itself. "I concern myself with being a fair editor. I may take letter B and put it where letter A is and put letter C somewhere else. And I may change solos, because it will suit that particular chart better.

"The reason I got that, in the early days, was Ralph, who I thought was one of the greatest talents of all, ever. And the first chart he brought in to me, in 1944, was *I've Got the World on a String*. Ralph said, 'Here's this thing I made for you to sing.' It was a tune that I liked and used to sing anyway. Ralph said, 'If there's anything you don't like or anything you feel could be changed, go right ahead' He said, 'I've done the best I can, but if you can make it better, great.' I didn't even touch that one, nor did I very often with Ralph, but it gave me the courage so that if I could make something better — mostly by pacing — I would do it. Ralph had given me this freedom to do that, and if *he* did that, then I believed I could do it as well as anyone else. It was Ralph who encouraged me, and he was much younger than I."

Ralph had never heard that comment of Woody's when I quoted it to him. He laughed and said: "Because I didn't complain." Then he added, "Woody's big thing was simplicity. As a writer, you'd get carried away. I used to make things complicated and Woody would say, 'Let's simplify it.' And it came out better. I didn't get peeved."

The so-called First Herd — the band of Dave Tough, Flip Phillips, Chubby Jackson, Sonny Berman, Pete Candoli et al — had two other outstanding arrangers in Neal Hefti and Shorty Rogers. But to a large extent the color and character of that band was determined by Ralph, who turned in an outstanding string of compositions and arrangements. He was the arranger on *Laura*, *Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe*, *A Kiss Goodnight*, *Welcome to My Dream*, *I've Got the World on a String*, *Put that Ring on My Finger*, *Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams*, *I Told Ya I Love Ya Now Get Out*, *Lazy Lullaby*, and *P.S. I Love You*, with vocals by Frances Wayne, Mary Ann McCall, or Woody. He is the arranger in *Apple Honey* and *Goosey Gander*, whose authorship is attributed to Woody, although it is likely that Ralph was co-composer. The writing on *Northwest Passage* is attributed to Ralph, Woody, and Chubby Jackson.

The whole band was enamored of the music of Igor Stravinsky, Neal Hefti and Ralph citing him as one of their important influences. Pete Candoli would play bits of Stravinsky in his solos. Ralph told Doug Ramsey: "Those were the days when we listened to Stravinsky and Ravel. We used to get high in the hotel room and listen to those symphony records. It was bound to have an effect." And then *Down Beat* announced that Stravinsky was writing a piece for the band, a piece that ultimately became known as the *Ebony Concerto*.

Woody told the late British writer and broadcaster Peter Clayton: "A mutual friend introduced our band via records to Igor Stravinsky in California. The man said he was going to get Stravinsky intrigued enough to do something for our band. I, of course, pooh-poohed it and thought it was ridiculous. I didn't believe Stravinsky would get involved with our kind of thing. Fortunately for me and the band, I got a wire from Stravinsky saying that he was writing a piece for us and it would be his Christmas gift to us."

Woody said that reading the telegram caused him "one of the wildest psychological moments I ever had." He said, "Having one of the world's great composers write for me was beyond imagination." He told Peter Clayton that it was "the greatest thing in this man's musical life."

Ralph Burns was told that his composition *Bijou* was the piece that intrigued Stravinsky. Ralph said, "It sounded like Stravinsky. It was like his sound. Not a copy of any notes, or anything. It was what Stravinsky did that nobody else did. All the grunts and cheeps and everything. *Rites of Spring, Petrouchka*." It does indeed sound like Stravinsky, once your attention is drawn to its genesis. It is jagged, angular, with notes flicked into it in unexpected and asymmetrical ways.

The premier performance of the *Ebony Concerto* was given March 25, 1946, in Carnegie Hall. Personnel for the concert comprised, besides Woody, Conrad Gozzo, Pete Candoli, Marky Markowitz, Shorty Rogers, and Sonny Berman, trumpets; Bill Harris, Ralph Pfeffner, and Ed Kiefer, trombones; Sam Marowitz and John LaPorta, alto saxophones and clarinets; Flip Phillips and Mickey Folus, tenor saxophones; Sam Rubinowitch, baritone saxophone; Tony Aless, piano; Billy Bauer, guitar; Chubby Jackson, bass; Red Norvo, vibraharp; John Barrows, French horn, and Abe Rosen, harp.

Stravinsky could not be there to conduct: he had been booked for a tour in Europe, and as he told Woody, he had to eat. The work was conducted by Walter Hendl, then assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic.

Also on the program was a three-movement work by Ralph, who recalled: "Woody said, 'We're going to give this concert. Why don't you write a serious piece?' I stayed out at Chubby Jackson's place on Long Island and wrote *Summer Sequence* in three movements. I called it that because it was summertime when I wrote it. It was written for me on piano, Billy Bauer on guitar, Chubby on bass, and the other members of the band. It was a big hit at the Carnegie Hall concert."

The concert was a sellout, a great success, though *Ebony Concerto* undoubtedly nonplused many members of the audience. The reviews in the New York newspapers were cautious. Barry Ulanov's in *Metronome* was not. He wrote that the piece was "more like a French imitation of Igor than the great man himself. . . . Rhythmically, tonally and melodically it is as dry as dehydrated eggs and far less palatable."

Neal Hefti said, "I loved it. Not all the guys in the band did. Their take was that it didn't swing."

Ralph said, "The concert was wonderful. Then we went on the road with it, and Alexei Haieff conducted it. He was a protégé of Stravinsky, and I took orchestration lessons from him."

The band attracted vast flocks of girls. Woody would take them aside and talk to them, telling them to go home, occasionally appalled at their candor in confessing that they

simply wanted to be band girls. One girl, in love with Ralph, followed the band from the east all the way to California. Another, according to Terry Gibbs, was an habitué of the Paramount Theater in New York, who would make out with all the members of whatever band played there. The musicians called her Mattress Annie. "She was very pretty," Terry said, "and the funny part of it was that she was a very nice girl. She was just a straight-out nympho."

"The way it was in those days," Chubby Jackson said, "is that when a band was leaving town, they'd tell a girl, 'Benny Goodman's band is coming in next week. Look up so-and-so.' The guys would pass them along that way."

There were legends about how Ralph came to write *Lady McGowan's Dream.* According to one, Lady McGowan turned up with several trunks apparently filled with belongings at the Ambassador West Hotel in Chicago. She was enraptured by the band, constantly entertaining it in her suite, buying it all the liquor it could drink and putting the expenses on her tab. Then she disappeared, and the management found that her trunks were empty.

According to Chubby Jackson, however, this is how it happened: The band was playing the Panther Room of the Sherman Hotel, but Chubby was staying at the Ambassador West, sharing a room with the comedian Buddy Lester. One night Chubby ran out of cigarettes. He tried to call the desk to see if any were available and somehow got connected to a wrong number. A woman with an educated English accent answered, and after a short exchange, said to him, "I am intrigued by the texture of your voice. Please come over?" Chubby and Buddy Lester went to her suite.

"The door opened," Chubby said, "and here was this very attractive fortyish woman with a turban on, tight-fitting pants, and a huge white shawl that covered her breasts. We walked in, and this woman, Lady McGowan, was looking to have the two of us get into bed with her. She looked like she was out of history. Picture going back into the Roman era. She went to the telephone and started talking to some guy. She came back and said, 'He's coming over.' And now we thought she wanted to have a foursome."

The third man, when he arrived, shocked Chubby and Buddy. It was the comedian Professor Irwin Corey. "It got 'way beyond anything sexual," Chubby said. "We were throwing one-liners at each other and laughing hysterically.

"We went home. The next evening I told the guys at the Sherman what had happened. And I invited them over. There was Billy Bauer, Steve Condos, the dancer, there was Mickey Folus, there was Lord Buckley, the comedian, Flip, Bill Harris. We had Mickey Folus enter nude. Within minutes, Lady McGowan was leveling one-liners at everyone. She told Lord Buckley he was full of shit, which I thought he was. Finally she took off her robe, and she was totally bare.

"Now it's getting wilder. She gets into the bathtub. She had a lot of sour cream there. We were taking cupped handfuls of it and throwing it on her, splat! Finally we all went home. The next day we found out that the hotel management had ordered her out. She was taken away to some kind of place.

"A week goes by, and she's out on the dance floor with a guy and waving hello to all of us. We went over to the table and talked to her, and she introduced this doctor. She said, 'I've talked him into coming to live with me. He's left the hospital.'

"None of us little squirts had ever seen anything like this in our lives. Ralph Burns had written one of his gorgeous things for the band. It needed a title. He said, 'Why don't we call it *Lady McGowan's Dream*?'"

This is the way Ralph remembered the encounter:

"We were playing the Panther Room at the Sherman Hotel. She was a jazz fan, she was a nut, she was a psycho, she was a very wealthy English lady. At least I thought so. At that age, if somebody tells you she's an English lady, you believe it. She used to give parties for the band. After we'd finish at the Sherman Hotel, we'd all go over to the Ambassador West. Chubby, myself, all of us. It was like a big sex orgy. She loved to have sour cream spread over her whole body and then we'd eat it off. We were a little stoned. It was a marijuana and brandy trip.

"It may have been hearsay, but I understood that Lady McGowan was in and out of a mental institution. Her family would put her there. Then they'd let her out to stay at the hotel. As far as I can remember, that was her real name. We'd play all night, and then go out and ball all night over at the Ambassador West. Lady McGowan balled practically the whole Woody Herman band."

More than four decades later, composer and conductor Gunther Schuller, in his book *The Swing Era*, would come to this evaluation:

> (The band's) extensive repertory, primarily the creation of Burns and Hefti . . . , has hardly dated in retrospect. It is as fresh and exciting now — even when played today by younger orchestras as "older repertory" — as it was then . . . . The reasons are obvious: the

> Burns/Hefti pieces were *really* new and original at the time, a striking amalgam of first-rate jazz solos (by the likes of Bill Harris, Flip Phillips, Sonny Berman, and Red Norvo, supported by a dynamic and indefatigable rhythm section), and orchestral writing derived from these very same fresh improvisatory styles. Secondly, the musicians played this material, night after night, with an infectious exuberance, an almost physically palpable excitement and a never-say-die energy. As I say, this partially represented the sheer pleasure of frolicking in such high-level instrumental virtuosity. But the band also played with a sense of pride in its individual and collective accomplishments. And it appreciated, indeed relished the newness of their style's harmonic and melodic language, the rich advanced harmonies, the lean, sleek bop lines. The musicians also knew they were playing for a leader who deeply appreciated their talents and their contribution to the cooperative whole.
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> Some four decades later we tend to forget *how* new this all was. As a result of the constant recycling since the late 1940s of that genre of big-band style by dozens of orchestras, we tend to take much of it for granted today. We should not forget, however, that there has been very little substantively new in big-band styling since Woody's First Herd . . . .

Woody broke up the First Herd at the end of 1946, but he soon grew restless and within a year formed the "Second Herd" — frequently called the Four Brothers band because of its use of three tenors and a baritone in its sax section, instead of the usual two altos, two tenors, and baritone. And what a sax section it was, with Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Herbie Steward (later Al Cohn) and Serge Chaloff. Ralph wrote for this band too.

It was widely said that when Stan Getz joined Woody in September, 1947, he played the book flawlessly at sight and never looked at the book again. I asked Woody if it were true. Woody said, "If he ever did, I never saw it." Chubby Jackson said that while the story might be exaggerated, Stan memorized the book in at most two or three readings.

"I don't know about it," Ralph commented. "But I could believe it of Stan if nobody else. He was a fantastic reader. At that time the musicianship was not the greatest in bands. When Stan came in, it was unbelievable for me that anything I could write, Stan could play immediately. The rest of them would have to woodshed it."

On December 27, the band recorded a piece by Jimmy Giuffre designed to exploit the sound of three tenors and baritone: *Four Brothers*. The piece would be as strongly associated with the band as *Blue Flame, Woodchopper's Ball*, and *Caldonia*.

That same day the band recorded a piece Ralph had written as a sort of fourth movement to his *Summer Sequence* suite. The first three movements had been recorded more than a year earlier, on September 9, 1946. At three movements, the piece ran 8:36. Each movement had featured the band's principal players in solos.

Ralph recalled: "Woody said, 'Will you write a fourth part?' because it wasn't long enough to put on one side of one of the new ten-inch LPs. Stan had just joined the band, so I wrote this tenor thing because Stan didn't have anything in *Summer Sequence*. I wrote it in early autumn, so we called it *Early Autumn*. I think Woody thought of the name."

Comparatively little known in the United States, *Early Autumn* is one of the most famous American compositions abroad, for this reason:

Willis Conover used *Early Autumn* as the theme of his *House of Sounds* Voice of America radio show seven days a week for more than ten years. Thus listeners in other countries have been exposed to the piece more than three thousand times.

The fourth movement, *Early Autumn*, recorded December 27, 1947, added 3:02 to the suite. The record of it, issued in 1948, instantly established Stan Getz as a major voice in jazz, and he would hold his pre-eminence until his death. And Johnny Mercer added one of his most exquisite lyrics to a slightly simplified version of Ralph's tune, adding it to the American song repertoire. You don't hear it often, however: it's too hard to sing.

Guitarist Jimmy Raney, born in Louisville, Kentucky, on August 27, 1927, was twenty when he joined the band, a few months younger than Getz. He had gone up to Chicago from his home town to establish himself; Chicago was the hub that drew jazz musicians from all over the midwest.

"I had been playing in Chicago," Jimmy said in May, 1993. "Georgie Auld had passed through with Tiny Kahn, Serge Chaloff, and Red Rodney in the group, and they heard me. And I had met Stan Getz somehow at a jam session around that time. So when the guitar player left Woody, they called Tiny Kahn in New York and said, 'Who can we get who plays in this style?' And he said, 'There's only one guy, and that's Jimmy Raney in Chicago.' And then, I guess, Woody said, 'Anybody know who he is?' And Stan and Serge

said, 'Oh yeah, get him.' They seconded the motion. That's how I got hired. I was totally unknown.

"Ralph Burns did a very nice thing for me. In those days, I wasn't such a hot sight reader. As a guitar player, I did as well as most. You never get to read notes. I was trained when I was young, but you get out of practice. There were some parts Ralph wrote for guitar that weren't too easy, things he had written, I suppose, for Billy Bauer. I was struggling with them a little. This was very early, maybe my third day. We were in Salt Lake City, I think. Ralph said, 'Jim, I love the way you play. Would you like me to run over the things I wrote that may cause you a little problem?' He put it so nicely. I said, 'Oh, gee, I'd really appreciate it.' So we went into the ballroom. He got out the charts he'd written that had electric guitar parts. He played piano for me and helped me. And who was I? Some kid they'd picked up in Chicago. Nobody knew who I was, except the ones who'd recommended me.

"It was a wonderful band. Bebop was then new, relatively, and hadn't been translated into the big bands. That tenor lead on that Four Brothers sound was usually Stan. He could play the high register and make it sound like something, which is not an easy thing on tenor."

But Jimmy never really felt he belonged in the band. He carried two guitars, an amplified Gibson for solos and an unamplified instrument for rhythm playing. He said, "There really isn't much for a guitar player to do. Al Cohn took pity on me, and also Ralph and Shorty Rogers. They wrote me a few solos. Al Cohn replaced Herbie Steward the night after I joined the band. I played one night with Herbie Steward, and he left, somewhere in Nevada. Al and Ralph and Shorty made it a little easier for me.

"It was such a wonderful band, but the rhythm section wasn't up to the rest of it, since Walt Yoder, who was the Isham Jones bass player, was playing. He was probably not originally very good, and he was getting old. Don Lamond was wonderful, but I wasn't any big help in the rhythm section.

"Guitar became unnecessary, a fifth wheel, with bebop. I didn't like guitar rhythm behind me myself. But I had to play it because it was traditional. It was out of character with the bebop stuff. Rhythm sections had changed. They became a counterpoint of things. Guitar by then was in a class with rhythm piano."

In the fall, Jimmy gave his notice. "I joined Woody in January of 1948 and left in October of '48."

And the "Second Herd" would not last much longer. Woody estimated that he lost $180,000 on it. He assembled a septet comprising Milt Jackson, vibes; Conte Candoli, trumpet; Dave Barbour, guitar; Red Mitchell, bass; Bill Harris, trombone; Ralph Burns, piano, and Shelly Manne, drums. It occurs to me that they are all gone now. The first booking was a four-week engagement starting in early December, 1949, at an outdoor Havana nightclub called the Tropicana.

The engagement was to prove nothing short of weird. The floor shows in Havana were famous for being gaudy, loud, and fast, with elaborately costumed chorus girls and Cuban bands heavily populated by conga and timbale players shouting "Arriba, arriba!"

"The Tropicana was unbelievable," Ralph said. "It was the first time we were ever part of any show like that. All of a sudden a cannon would go off and a hundred doves would float up into the air. It was pretty wild."

Audiences were baffled by the septet. Milt Jackson said, "Woody had hits on *Don't Cry, Joe* and *Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe*. Well down there, the Cuban people didn't know anything about an American hit. So when he would sing *Don't Cry, Joe* and got no hand, he got rather frustrated. One night I just took him aside and said, 'These people down here don't *know* those songs.' "

So Woody drew on Milt's phenomenal memory for tunes, having him play anything that sounded remotely Hispanic or that the audience just might know. For the most part, however, the group's offerings inspired silences and baffled stares. They got rained out on Christmas Eve. The club owner was taken to a hospital after a heart attack. Rain came again on New Year's Eve, normally the biggest night of the year. The job continued to be an unqualified disaster.

Red Mitchell recalled, "Milt Jackson and I were rooming together. We had cockroaches and Milt used his entire Spanish vocabulary telling the owner about the *cucarachas*. The owner just laughed. One day we got all the poison we could buy, sprays and all, and did up the apartment. When we came back, the place was crawling with dying cockroaches. I put as many as possible out of their misery."

Then Ralph got into trouble. He said, "One night after the gig, we were in the bar at the hotel. There were a lot of girls around, hookers, especially late at night. Woody and I were pretty loaded. I know I was, and I think everybody else was. This girl was trying to make a deal with me. I didn't want to go upstairs with her. I said, 'No.' She called in the cops. And naturally they all spoke Spanish. None of us spoke Spanish. She told them something like, 'This man stole my fur coat.' It

was some cheap old fur wrap." (Woody said it looked like an old inner tube.) Ralph said, "She was Cuban, the police were Cuban, so they believed her and they threw me in jail overnight until Woody could get me out the next morning."

The professional association with Woody came gradually to an end, but not the close personal friendship, and indeed, from time to time, whenever Woody needed him, Ralph would write for the band. But for the most part he worked as a freelance, writing a good deal of orchestration for Broadway shows, to which he brought a jazz sensibility that has not, shall we say, been common in American musical theater. Ralph orchestrated the musical version of *Golden Boy*, starring Sammy Davis Jr., and *Pippin*, directed by Bob Fosse. He arranged music for many films, including Woody Allen's *Bananas* in 1971, Bob Fosse's *Sweet Charity* in 1969, *Cabaret* in 1972, and *Lenny* in 1974 (Ralph worked a lot for Fosse and thought the world of him) and Martin Scorsese's *New York, New York*, for which Ralph wrote an original score. In 1973, Ralph won a Tony for *Pippin*, an Emmy for the TV special *Liza with a Z*, and an Academy Award for *Cabaret*, the only person ever to get all three in one year.

If you ever worked for Woody Herman, you were part of a circle, a sort of family. Woody was one of the most-loved men in the business. I worked for him for about a year in 1959-60, handling his publicity. You soon found out why he was called the Road Father. He was so good to everybody. But the other side of that coin is that from then on, he sort of owned you, and in later years I would do anything he ever asked me to do. At some point in the mid-70s, I got a call from him from somewhere on the road. He said that PBS was going to do a television show about him and the band, taping it at Concerts by the Sea. He said, "I want everybody there," meaning all the alumni in Southern California. He said, "So call Ralph and round up the guys." So I called Ralph and we rounded up the guys. That was quite a gathering of musicians. At another point, Woody did a reunion concert at Carnegie Hall. Ralph was in the band.

I had known Ralph slightly for years when I started work on my biography of Woody, but he became my invaluable support and source in my research. He and Johnny Mandel read manuscript for me. He was a man of exceptionally sweet nature, and we developed a lovely friendship. I still have tapes of our many telephone conversations.

In the days of the big bands, it was not unusual for bandleaders to add their names as co-writers and compositions by their arrangers, and some of the material that also bears Woody's name is fully Ralph's. I once asked Ralph if he resented that. He said, "No, never. Because Woody kept me on full salary when most of the time I was lying around drunk with Billy Strayhorn in New York."

I asked him another question. Why were he and Strayhorn both secretive about their homosexuality? Ralph said, "In those years, if Billy or I had ever admitted it, our careers would been over immediately."

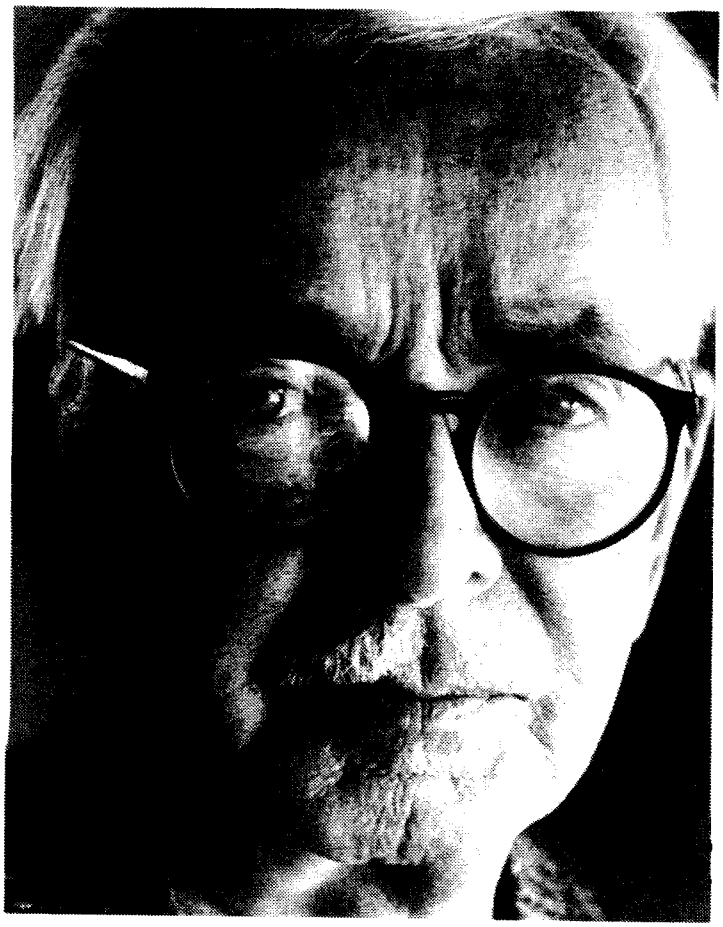
"What?" I said, in amazement. "I thought jazz musicians were a lot more tolerant in such matters than the general public."

"No they're not," he said. "They're far *less* tolerant. Billy and I would have been ruined if it had been known."

Peter Levinson once asked Woody who was the most talented musician who ever passed through that band.

"That's easy," Woody replied. "Ralph Burns."

Ralph lived his last years with his two dogs in a house in the hills above Los Angeles, on Woodrow Wilson Drive. He died in November, 2001. He was seventy-nine.



1991 Photo by John Reeves