Gene Lees Ad Libitum

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The Journey: Milt Bernhart

Part Three

"Stan organized the Progressive Jazz band," Milt said, "and we did concerts. The guys liked that, because it was shorter hours. A couple of hours. That was nice. And the idea of being on stage, and being pressed to play better, was better for everybody. The band was playing the music well. Not everybody in the band was crazy about it. There were those who were outspoken. Stan heard some of it, but he never said anything to anybody. Shelly was outspoken."

"Yeah, he said playing in that band was like chopping wood, and it made a headline in *Down Beat*."

"The moment Stan was off the stand for a while, we usually said to Shelly, 'What do you want to play?' We had some things by Neal Hefti, and they were immediately trotted out. Stan would usually return, but he didn't say, 'Who pulled that up?' But he wasn't happy. Sorry to say, it didn't move him. And here was a guy not brought up in long-hair traditional concert orchestra music, but a little Dixieland and black bands. Not too many white commercial bands. So where did he get this need to stay away from swing? He didn't want to sound like anybody else. I'm sure that was part of it.

"I got married at the end of '48. We were still touring. I began to think I can't do this traveling forever. Stan was very understanding. I tried Chicago. I couldn't get arrested. After about three months, I got a phone call from Lee Konitz. He had just started rehearsing with Benny Goodman, and he said, 'Do you want to be on the band?' Did I *want* to? He said it was a bebop band. Fats Navarro was in the band. Benny had heard Gerry Mulligan's Tentet on a record and went down to Birdland to hear the band. He hired everybody he could get, including the writers, and was having a new book written. It was hard to believe.

"I walked into the rehearsal on Seventh Avenue in New York. I looked around for Lee. No Lee. After less than a week's rehearsal, he had had enough of Benny. I looked around some more. No Fats Navarro. Gerry Mulligan was still there. He wasn't playing, he was writing. The band had about a dozen of his arrangements. After about an hour of rehearsal, I realized I was auditioning. Nobody told me that. I thought I had been hired. Eddie Bert was on the band. Doug Mettome had come in in place of Fats. I had met Wardell Gray with a small Basie Band. The arrangements were new, mostly Mulligan's. They played nicely and I took to them. They were easy reading. He had ideas about interpretation — always, and rightfully. Benny never said anything. After the run-through the manager came over and said, 'Okay, you're on the band.' I feigned gratitude.

"Turned out that Lee had said something to Benny about an advance. 'Get away.' So Lee didn't come back. Fats Navarro was deep into drugs. The next day Benny fired Mulligan, in the middle of rehearsal. It was memorable. We had been rehearsing Mulligan, Chico O'Farrill, and a little Tadd Dameron, and a couple by Johnny Carisi. We were taking a break, and it looked okay. Suddenly Benny let out a terrible shout. He didn't have a good one. It sounded like Death Incorporated. And he followed that with, 'Get him out of here!' He shouted to the manager. We turned around, frozen. 'Get him out of here!' He was pointing to Mulligan. All I can figure is Gerry asked for an advance, or payment of any kind. Nobody did anything. Benny took handfuls of music and threw them on the floor. 'Get these things out of here. I don't want to see him any more!'

"Gerry was still new to the world. He had been writing for Krupa and Thornhill and Elliott Lawrence. It turned out Gerry had written most of the arrangements for those other bands. I was dumfounded and stunned. I didn't like Benny Goodman on the spot. But I needed the work. I did a week of rehearsing without pay. We did a week at the Paramount and then headed west.

"We got to Las Vegas. Benny had junked everything new in the book. A bunch of young kids were playing *Don't Be that Way* seven times a night. *King Porter Stomp*. Nothing wrong with that but that wasn't what we wanted to do. By the time we got to the Flamingo, which Bugsy Siegal had built, we were terribly demoralized. There were no hotels in those days. The band had one black musician. I liked Benny for having Wardell Gray. Wardell was heavily featured. Loveable guy, as sweet as could be. I roomed with him. We talked race.

And it was very grown up. I felt like a man for once. But the city fathers in Las Vegas kept a very strict Jim Crow law. Did you know that?"

"Yeah. And I heard that Wardell was taken out into the desert and murdered."

"That was a couple of years later. Wardell was not allowed in the front door. He and his wife had to stay in a hotel on the other side of the tracks, and on the breaks he was not allowed to come out into the casino. And so we took turns in the band, sitting with him in the dressing room. We kept giving Wardell a pep talk. He said, 'I thought this band was going to make me something. At least I thought I'd be treated like the rest of you.' And we had to try to explain, but there was no way to explain.

"And it was Benny Goodman. I grew to hate him. The last night, Benny showed up for the last show looking mad as hell. I could pick this up. Nobody else ever looked at him. He was beyond-belief angry. The way his eyes were darting around, I figured the first person that does something wrong, there's going to be hell to pay. It turned out later that they'd given him his bill for roulette, and it was a big one, and it turned him into a monster. He wasn't crazy about the band, that's for sure. He was barking out the numbers. Wardell hadn't come out of the band room. He was drunk. Eventually he got out there and I whispered, 'Be careful. Benny is loaded for bear.' We played the theme song. But the first number, the bridge was Wardell, one of the old Fletcher Henderson charts. Wardell couldn't stand up too fast. So he didn't start playing for about a bar and a half. Benny stopped the band. A full house, on Saturday night, and screamed, 'Get off the stand, Pops!' And now everybody in the band realized that we've got troubles. It could have been anybody. Wardell was stunned. It took a minute for him to realize he was the one. Now Benny was screaming, 'Did you hear me?' The audience didn't know what to do. Gradually Wardell put himself together, managed to pick up his clarinet and sax, and wasn't able to walk too well.

"Before he fired him, Benny had personally given him a clarinet. He walked over and took the clarinet from him. Now he had a band that was completely torn to shreds. I should have said, and I think about it a lot, 'Then I'm gone too, Pops.' I couldn't get myself together to do it. Nobody had the guts. We played the show, God knows how. We went back to the band room, and Wardell was there, out of it beyond belief. I said to him, 'What are you going to do?' But it turned out that Benny had a contract with him, and it had about six months left. So Benny wasn't going to let him go. He put him on fourth tenor, no solos, and we played the Palladium in Los Angeles.

"I figured when I heard about Wardell's death that Benny had something to do with it. He was found 'way out of town in the desert about a year after he left Benny. Why Vegas? What Benny did to him was insufferable. I gave my notice as soon as we got to Los Angeles. I had to work out two weeks. He demoted me to third trombone right away. Why should I mind? But Benny thought he had done something to me. His mind was the smallest. His ability to make music only God could explain. You cannot deny that he could play. He didn't know much about anything else. He didn't have to. Why music? Why did it come so naturally?

"Anyway, I quit, and I was in Hollywood. There was about a year when I was around town, playing casuals. Jerry Gray's band. Once in a while a record date. I wasn't too welcome in the studios, because I was classified as a jazz player. I knew I could read and play a cue. But Alfred Newman at Fox didn't think so. Morris Stoloff at Columbia didn't think so. I was taking anything I could get and I had a day job for a while. I had a family and thinking of music as maybe a sideline. Stan had been on the road with the Progressive Jazz band. He came back and decided to form a big orchestra with strings. I went on that, and it was a challenge. Maynard Ferguson was with the band.

"We had heard him in Toronto in maybe 1948 with his own band. The union in Canada required a standby orchestra. Stan didn't mind. Some of the American bands wouldn't let them play. They just stood by and got paid. Stan wasn't like that. Some of those bands, like the Niosi brothers in Toronto, were very good bands. Maynard had a kid band. We almost walked out in the first intermission. I was in the doorway. We didn't know who he was. He started to unload everything he could think of. Everybody in the doorway stopped cold. When we came back from the break, and I said to Stan, 'Did you hear that kid?' Stan said, 'What kid?' He was upstairs in the dressing room. Maynard was the youngest bandleader in Canada. The number he played, knowing we were all still in the room — Buddy Childers was there, Shelly Manne was there — featured the high notes. We stopped cold. Then he played baritone sax. He played alto too."

"I knew he played trombone," I said, "but I didn't know he also played saxophones."

"Learned from his brother," Milt said. "His brother Percy played good saxophone. Maynard sat at the drums. He was going to show us. It was intense. Next set Stan heard him, and he took him aside and said, 'Can you come on the band?' But

Maynard was under age. He made Stan a promise that he would call him. The first American band he played with was Boyd Raeburn. He played first with Jimmy Dorsey and Boyd Raeburn. When Stan organized the Neophonic Orchestra, Maynard joined the band and was featured. Then we both left Kenton after a few months, about 1952. Shelly left, Buddy Childers left, Bud Shank left. Suddenly Stan was without anybody to speak of. That's when he reorganized a smaller, modern band, the one with Frank Rosolino, Lee Konitz, and good trumpet players galore. Conte Candoli. I believe Stan Levey was the drummer.

"I was on the West Coast, and I was nobody. Then Howard Rumsey called and said he had this jam session going at the Lighthouse on Sundays. So I went down and it was a ball, a lot of fun. Shorty Rogers, Jimmy Giuffre, Howard Rumsey, and a little later Bud Shank. We were all out of work. It was a big hit from the beginning and expanded to five or six nights a week, and we were getting twenty-five dollars a night. We weren't rich, but we were making a living. It went on for about a year.

"I had been out here two years before I saw the inside of a studio or sound stage, and I had almost given up.

"Some people from the studios came to the Lighthouse to listen, unbeknownst to us. About five of them from the music department at Columbia Pictures showed up on Sunday at the Lighthouse. They were not going to believe that we could read, and that we weren't dopies. They were dressed like the crowd. They watched us very carefully, took notes. Can these musicians read? Can we trust them to show up on time for the calls? After two or three weeks of showing up incognito, they made themselves known to Shorty

"Marlon Brando had heard an album of Shorty's small group on Capitol. He wanted it as source music from a juke box in a picture that was coming up, *The Wild One*.

"Leith Stevens, a very nice man, music director at Columbia, gave Shorty a break. In the 1930s, he had been the house band on *Saturday Night Swing Session* with Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, and others. He was proud of that. Leith Stevens wrote cues for music in *The Wild One*, but for any source music that was supposed to be jazz, Shorty was there. He didn't get credit but he got paid well.

"Shorty's writing fit a lot of films like a glove, especially films about boys in the big cities who were in trouble, druggies. It just seemed to work. It became modern west coast jazz. It became standard for pictures that Marlon Brando made that were modern. John Cassavetes, Paul Newman pictures. The young people who came out of the Actor's Studio in New York went for that kind of music. They loved Shorty. Then Rugolo.

"Because of that, Shelly, me, Bud, Pete Candoli, Conrad Gozzo, and anybody who could play bebop and read music started to get calls on motion pictures, because we could play that other music. And the door opened very quickly, and just like overnight I was very busy through the 1950s. *The Wild One* really broke the ice.

"One of the music directors was George Duning, who was really the chief writer at Columbia."

I said, "He shouldn't have been prejudiced, because he came out of the Kay Kyser band."

"He did. But was also completely trained to write for the concert orchestra. He had studied at the Cincinnati Conservatory. He had a doctorate. Mostly with Kyser, he wrote cues. He didn't write the dance-band music. I didn't listen to that band much."

"That band could swing a little," I said. "They did an instrumental called *It's Sand, Man*, which was quite nice."

Milt said, "I can't remember who wrote that chart. Good arranger who was playing in the band.

"One of the writers on staff with Kyer was Jerry Fielding. And Jerry Fielding was an original, if ever I knew one. It took him a while, too, to get into movies, and I worked for him quite a lot. He was called in by the House Unamerican Activities Committee. He had been doing the Groucho Marx show, *You Bet Your Life*. And he was very thick with Groucho. It was Jerry's first big job. He was a left-wing liberal. Outspoken. Quite bright. They were after Groucho, and they called Jerry in to ask about Groucho's activities. He wouldn't talk. He was run out of L.A. and didn't work for about five years. Then he worked his way back in, and I worked for him."

I said, "Hank Mancini knew him when they were both students in Pittsburgh. They were friends."

"Very much," Milt said, "and Hank might have had something to do with getting him back in."

"They studied with the same teacher," I said. "Max Adkins. He was leader of the pit band at the Stanley Theater in Pittsburgh. While Hank was studying with him, Adkins was also teaching Billy Strayhorn and Jerry Fielding."

"And Jerry used to speak of him in hushed tones."

"So did Hank. Some teacher."

"Anyway, in *The Wild One*, everything that came from the juke box was by Shorty. Shorty wrote two thirds of the music in that picture. Leith Stevens said he couldn't possibly write that style of music, all the source cues."

A source cue, for those not familiar with movie music terminology, is music that comes from any source that is actually in the movie: a radio, a dance band, a juke box. Underscore is music that the characters in the story do not hear; source music is music they supposedly can hear.

"Jimmy Giuffre and Bob Cooper, also working at the Lighthouse, also got that call," Milt said. "I believe it was also the first studio call that Joe Mondragon got. Shorty really loved Joe. So did I. A great time bass player. The best in town. So we did that movie, and played the cues.

"The guys in the orchestra were coming up and introducing themselves. Manny Klein was their lead trumpet player at Columbia. They all had it proven to them that bebop musicians — and I was on the fringe; that really wasn't what I could do — could read music, which I had been doing all my career, including the Kenton band. A lot of its music was semi-legit. Pete's stuff certainly fell into that category — modern American music.

"So with that, the phone started to ring and I started to work. Shortly after that a big picture came up, *The Man with the Golden Arm*. And that really got the word around. The composer was Elmer Bernstein, who to this day speaks lovingly of the guys who were in that band, whom he never met until that picture. On the call were a lot of the guys who had done *The Wild One*. The likes of Bob Cooper in the sax section. And he was playing some oboe. And Bud Shank started to get work. He played the flute beautifully. He was getting calls mainly for flute.

"I was, just like that, very busy. And because eventually I proved I could play in the symphony orchestra, I got calls from Miklos Rosza, for instance. I did work with the crowned heads. I got to know Hugo Friedhofer pretty darned well. Hugo loved the group, and Shorty."

I said, "Hugo once told me that he was so fed up with the movie industry, he wanted to go on the road with a jazz group, but unfortunately cello wasn't considered a jazz instrument. You know that line of his, when somebody called him the real giant of film composers? He said, 'No, I'm a false giant among real pygmies.' And instead of hating him for it, every composer in town quoted it."

"He came to Hollywood in the early '30s," Milt said.

"Even earlier," I said. "He did the charts on *Sunny Side Up*, one of the first film musicals, in 1929. He loved jazz players. You do know, I presume, that the trumpet solos on his score for *One-Eyed Jacks* are . . . ."

"Pete Candoli," Milt said. "I may have worked on that picture. Hugo was one of the older composers who took to the young jazz players. Another one was Dave Raksin. For him I had to play a ballad. Real hard, really tough. A lot of jumps of elevenths, big jumps. One of those. Slow, and a very tender ballad that was going to run throughout the picture. I was still working on chops that I had developed from the road. That went, after about seven or eight years. But the first five years in town, I had strong chops. Eventually I was no longer the guy who had played with Kenton. I was practicing every day, but I didn't have a four-hour-a-night lip. Everybody who had played with any kind of swing band had endurance. A two-hour concert was like a stroll in the park. But doing it every night, four hours of hammering, I could play eight hours. Boyd Raeburn's book was demanding. So everybody who was with Stan had what they called road chops.

"But studio work was going to be a trap for the likes of me. As the years passed, that kind of studio call that called for those chops came up about three times a year. I was now getting calls for pictures where I was playing Wagnerian, or quasi-French horn.

"Good reading was very much a necessity in the studios. You walk in, and you look at the cues for the day, and there would be a big stack. Manny Klein used to say, 'Don't look at the music. If there's something hard to play, you'll be thinking about it, and you'll be nervous.' So most everybody talked. And we began when the stick was tapped on the stand. And after one reading, the red light was on. One reading! In most studios. Eight o'clock in the morning we are recording it for posterity. Either you could do that or you were not going to be there. And these people wrought miracles on the stages with the expectation of that. The fiddle players! A bar of three, a bar of four, a bar of seven, a bar of four, going like wildfire. And playing it from the first run-through. You had better be that good or you were not going to make it. You won't get calls, that's all.

"I was practicing. I never got the time to practice with Stan. We traveled. What I had with Stan was endurance. And the music was tricky and it needed to be read. It hardly fit the bill on the West Coast. Previn wrote some pretty complicated things. He studied with Castelnuovo-Tedesco. A bunch of them did. Everybody who came here eventually went to him. The likes of Raksin and Previn and Hugo Friedhofer.

"I did a couple of pictures with Franz Waxman, who was a martinet. He could have been a U-boat commander. But he wrote scores that were great. Academy Awards. And I did finally do a serious score with him, a picture with Anthony Quinn. By the time I got there in the '50s, those great ones had seen their best days. New people were coming in, and jazz

was edging them out. They were plenty angry.

"One of the new guys was Jerry Fielding. Fielding I really respected. It took me a while to get to know Mancini. I did Hank's first picture at Universal, the one he did with Orson Welles, *Touch of Evil*, which came out in 1958.

"It was early in my time in Hollywood. Mancini had been at Universal, learning the ropes, and finally came this Welles picture. Pete Candoli, me, Bud Shank, Shelly. We were hired to play with the Universal staff orchestra. All the studios in town had staff orchestras, paid weekly and handsomely. Big orchestras. The small studios had smaller orchestras. Columbia was always considered second run. But Columbia movies got to be cult pictures, like. It was that staff orchestra, playing *Picnic* and Leonard Bernstein's score for On *the Waterfront* and playing it damn well. Bernstein said to Morris Stoloff, the head of the music department, 'Never mind me conducting this. I can't do it. That's for you to do.' Morris Stoloff never got over that. He conducted it beautifully.

"*Touch of Evil* came and went. I really didn't know Henry Mancini. About six months later, the phone rang at home. And he said, 'This is Hank Mancini.' He said, 'I'm starting a television series.' And he mentioned *Peter Gunn*. He said, 'I'm not going to call you on it,' and he was apologizing. He didn't have to call me at all. I said, 'I'm pretty busy anyway.' And he said, 'I'm glad to hear that. But I wanted you to know why I'm not calling you, when I'm using most of the people who were on my big break at Universal. Ted Nash told me that his brother, Dick, needs some work. He just got into town. And I'm going to use him.'

"I said, 'That's great.' I was thrilled not to show any signs of regret. I was busy. So it didn't matter. And he hired Dick Nash. I had met Dick. He's, you know, a scarey trombone player.

"But then Hank called me again, and I'm on the *Peter Gunn* album. Dick and I trade some eights. I worked for Hank, and I worked a lot with Dick."

"How did you come to do all that work for Sinatra and Nelson Riddle?" I asked.

"When they started recording Sinatra at Capitol, I still was Mr. Nobody. They were looking for a new package. They went to Billy May, and the result wasn't bad. The trouble with Billy was that he had his own band and was committed to go on the road when Frank was set to record *I've Got the World on a String*, the record that began the new Frank Sinatra. And I got the call. Nelson Riddle led the band, but I didn't know him at all. I'd heard of him. So his first major-league job was standing in for Billy May. Billy's name was on the label when the record came out. A couple of other tunes we did on that date were by Billy, including *It Happened in Monterey*, conducted by Nelson."

"But," I said, "Nelson wrote for Nat Cole before he did for Sinatra."

"Yes, but he wrote as a ghost at first."

"For Les Baxter," I said.

"It was a well-known story. I asked Nelson. His story was that Nat did several dates with Les, who was on the Capitol label. He had those exotic things, *Tambu* and other things. Very nice to listen to. Turned out later to have been written by a man named . . . ."

"Albert Harris," I said. "Wonderful arranger. He did all those Les Baxter albums, because Les couldn't write. The stuff he supposedly wrote for Yma Sumac was actually by Pete Rugolo. Les Baxter was one of the great four-flushers in the history of the business, but by no means the only one."

"I worked for Les Baxter a few times," Milt said, "and I soon picked it up that he couldn't read the scores. He had a Roger Corman movie to do, a cheap picture, and he didn't get to see the film before doing the music. In class A movies, they ran the film. It was at Capitol. We had a stack of cues. He called the first cue. We played it. He couldn't wave his arms in time to the music. But everybody that knew whispered, 'Don't look at him, just play it.'

"It was crap. Somebody else had written it. Then we come to cue two or three. Now he's in a hurry and he doesn't want to pay overtime. He said, 'We don't need to rehearse this, do we?' And so the red light goes on, and it's standard stuff. Except that I'm sitting in front of the piano player, who's playing another cue. Entirely different music. We get to the end. I look to the piano player, and he shrugs. I said, 'This is cue M-6. Did you play that?' He said, 'No, I played M-8.' I said, 'Well we'd better tell Les.' So I ended up telling him, for which Les wasn't happy. Les said, 'It sounded great, forget it, next cue.' So that was the end of that.

"I was not on his call list after that. We knew then that embarrassing him was a mistake. Now the way Nelson told me is that he had written the arrangement for *Mona Lisa*. It was very simple, but it had good voicings for the strings, and nice little backgrounds. Les was conducting. Somewhere in the middle, Nat says to Les, 'Sounds like the chords on bar 38 just don't go with the melody sheet I have.' Now Les was in trouble. Nat didn't make a fuss, but he knew instantly that Les couldn't read the score. So when the date was over, Les said it had been copied wrong. But Nat knew and a couple of days later, he said to Lee Gillette that it was wrong and it

would have to be done again. And Lee said, 'Well then I have to get in touch with Nelson Riddle.'

"And Nat used Nelson from then on. And he used him far more adventurously. Nelson wrote Nat's big hits in about an hour.

"When Nelson did the Nat Cole dates, he used largely a string orchestra, so I didn't see much of him. Then he got assigned to Sinatra, and he did the albums that made Frank a ringa-dinger. I got called, and I couldn't believe when I got there that every arrangement had my name on it as first trombone. And I didn't know Nelson from the man in the moon. The reason for me was Stan Kenton. Lee Gillette had been Kenton's a&r man. They wanted to do something with Sinatra that would have the Kenton push. Lee dug out some of the Kenton records. One of the tunes was a thing Pete wrote called *Salute*. We did it on tour with the Innovations in Modern Music orchestra. And I was solo from beginning to end. It was melody, but it was declamatory. That was my style with Stan. It enhanced the melody. It was perfect for me, because I was not really a jazz player."

"Now," I asked, "what about your solo on Sinatra's *I've Got You Under My Skin*? Was it written, or were you just blowing?"

"I was playing from the chords. A while ago somebody in the Sinatra group on the internet implied that Nelson Riddle had written out that solo. We did seventeen takes. Before we were through, I was playing the same solo. But the earlier takes, I was looking for something to play, and I thought my solos were much better. I was playing jazz. I was answering the trumpet section. I was doing that on the Kenton band with Kai Winding. It was the only solo I played, but I played lead on that whole album.

"Nelson eventually became a client in my travel office. He was long gone from Sinatra. He was still certainly Nelson Riddle. He looked out my window overlooking Hollywood and Vine. He said something to the effect, 'It's really been a screwed-up life for me.' I said, 'Well, Nelson, you couldn't convince any of us. You're a huge name. You're big. You've made plenty of money. You're a star.'

"And he said, 'Yeah, but I only wrote arrangements for other people. I'd trade the whole barrel of them for one song that Hank Mancini wrote.' And then he looked out the window with this vacant, longing look. And he meant it. I said, 'Maybe Hank would like to have written some of your arrangements.' He began to realize that maybe I wasn't just a trombone player. He started calling me to come over for dinner. His wife, Naomi, was a Kenton fan anyway. In latter years, I saw a lot of Nelson. But by that time, I'm afraid he'd been drinking more. Then he got the call that restored his career, from a pop singer. Linda Ronstadt. He went on the road. If I'd still been playing, I probably would have done that, and the album. She wasn't bad. A little mechanical. She sang in tune, she sang the words. She was beside herself with thrills. Nelson became somebody that I think she fell in love with."

It was inevitable that I ask Milt about Frank Rosolino, as painful as the memory would be to both of us.

"Frank Rosolino, Milt said, "didn't play the trombone. He was playing Frank Rosolino. He rarely put the slide where the note was being played. All ear and instinct. I know the way he learned. His sister got a violin when he was about ten. And he wanted to play the violin. So he started sneaking it when she wasn't looking and teaching himself. She began to cry, there was a family scene. His father got a trombone cheap at some junk shop. There was no teacher, they couldn't afford one. It didn't matter. The fiddle was the instrument he was going to try to play like. In six months he was doing *Perpetual Motion* and Fritz Kreisler. And he could do it — without knowing where to put the slide.

"For that reason, he was not much good in a big orchestra call. That was one of the reasons for his depression. If they wanted Frank on a sound track, they'd call him, use him on those numbers, and not expect much on the cues. His sound wasn't like any other trombone player. He blew hard, but everything that he did came out of the mouth."

Frank Rosolino was one of the funniest men I ever knew, and everybody who knew him loved him. But as Roger Kellaway put it, "When somebody cracks four jokes a minute, we all should have known something was wrong."

In 1978, I attended the Dick Gibson jazz party in Boulder, Colorado. On the bus back to Denver, my wife and I were sitting in front of Frank, who was telling his live-in girlfriend he was going to commit suicide and take his two boys with him. I thought I was hearing wrong. And Frank was so funny on our night flight back to Los Angeles — Sarah Vaughan got up and moved to the back of the plane, saying she couldn't sleep for laughing — that I thought that surely we had misunderstood that chilling conversation on the bus. We hadn't.

To be continued