

## A Moody Afternoon

### *Reflections on Dizzy*

Of all the musicians in Dizzy Gillespie's life – and the list of those he discovered and nurtured and mentored is interminable – the longest association was that with saxophonist James Moody. Probably the second longest was that with pianist Mike Longo. The three of them were devoted friends.

Moody first worked for Dizzy in 1946, and their association continued until Dizzy's death on January 6, 1993. He was in the hospital room when Dizzy drew his last painful breath.

Moody is too often taken for granted. He has been such a presence for so long, so reliable a performer, that it is too easily overlooked that his best work is brilliant. Mike Longo says he is "a stone genius of the blues, and my dearest friend in life. In fact he's my brother. I learned so much just from playing with him and hanging out with him. He's been a big influence on me musically. Just comping behind him I learned so much."

Moody was born in Savannah, Georgia, on March 26, 1925, but he grew up in Reading, Pennsylvania, and Newark, N.J. An uncle gave him his first saxophone, an alto, when he was sixteen, but he soon took up the tenor. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps from 1943 to 1946, playing in a military band.

His first influence on saxophone was Jimmy Dorsey, then Charlie Barnett or, as he put it, "anybody that had a horn, because, you know, I just wanted to play saxophone. I just liked the way it looked. And around the corner from where we lived, in Newark, there was a music store called Dorn and Kirchner, where I saw all the saxophones in the window when I was little, and also, on First Street, there were two theaters across the street from each other, the Savoy and the Essex.

"In the Savoy Theater, we couldn't sit on the first floor. We had to sit in the balcony because of racism. Nine miles from New York!" He laughed.

"I would always go to the Adams Theater in Newark. Count Basie's band came and I went to that, hoping to see

Lester Young. But when I got there, it was Don Byas, instead of Lester. And Buddy Tate was there. As I learned more, I grew to understand that Don Byas was playing his butt off."

One of his close friends in the Newark years was the trumpeter, and later composer and educator, David Burns.

"Then I was drafted into the air force," Moody said. "I didn't know I was going to be playing music. I went to Greensboro, North Carolina, and it was segregated. Three quarters of the base was Caucasian and one quarter was Negro. They said they wanted to have a Negro band. They said, 'Has anybody got a horn? I said I had one. They said, 'Send for it.' They didn't ask if I could play it. So I sent for the horn and that's how I really started playing.

"Dave Burns was in the band.

"I was eighteen years old and a so-called American, an American Air Force serviceman. The German prisoners of war would come in with the military police on the truck. They would have P.O.W. printed on their backs. And they would go into the restaurants to eat. I couldn't go in and eat.

"So when I stop and think how great this country is supposed to be, and things that they've done, it makes you say, 'Well?'

"There was a place on the base called 'The Big Top.' It was a big tent, and Dizzy came to play with his big band. That's when I met him. We had maybe three more months, and then we were going to be discharged. So Diz said that he was going to disband when he got back to New York and get another band. He said, 'If you want, come try out for the band.' And so that's what we did, Dave Burns and myself." Both of them passed muster.

"I joined Dizzy at the Spotlight on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. Thelonious Monk was the piano player, Kenny Clarke was the drummer, Ray Brown, bass, and Milt Jackson, vibes. We had a seventeen-piece band. We had Cecil Payne, baritone, Ernie Henry, reeds, John Brown, alto sax, Howard Johnson, alto. Miles was even in the band for a hot minute. It was really interesting.

"I didn't go to school for music. So consequently, I wouldn't be looking for the same things as a person who knew music. I think I was just on the move, and knowing



that I didn't know musically what I thought I ought to know. But I was just trying to get better. You know, when you don't know something, you don't know what it is you don't know. You can't very well explain that to anyone.

"That was the first time I went anywhere in the country. We went on a tour with Ella Fitzgerald. We went down south. There's where I got my thing, again, about the signs. Colored — White. It's funny, how we went from Colored to Black. What color is this watchband?"

It was black.

"What color am I?"

The answer of course was brown.

Moody said, "I really object to it. People that say, 'Oh well, he's a black guy.' My uncle over there, he's black?" His uncle Louis, who had given him his first saxophone, was sitting at the far side of Moody's family room, lighter than a lot of white people. It was a subject Moody would return to.

The band toured all over the south. "You know," he said, "the Chitlin' circuit. The Apollo Theater, the Howard Theater in Washington D.C., the Royal Theater in Baltimore. If you could make it in those places, you could make it anywhere in the world."

More formally, the Chitlin' Circuit was the T.O.B.A. It stood for Theater Owners Bookers Association. The owners were white, but they booked only Negro acts to Negro theaters, from the vaudeville days into the big-band era. The money was inferior to that paid on the white circuits, and the conditions were sometimes appalling, so much so that its performers said T.O.B.A. stood for Tough On Black Asses.

Moody, who has always been disarmingly frank about it, said, "I had an alcohol problem. I went to Europe. I went to visit my uncle in Paris, to stay for two weeks. I stayed three years.

"When I went over there I had a complex. I thought something was wrong with *me*, you know? Because that's the way things were and the vibes that I got. When I got to France, to Paris, after about two or three weeks, something happened. And I said, 'Wait a minute! It's not me. It's *them* — speaking of this government, here.

"And so right away I got another feeling. My wife will tell you, I always say this: 'Nobody in the world's better than I. I don't give a darn who they are.' And by the same token, I'm not better than anyone else. But I really felt bad. It's because of the way people here are taught. Babies aren't born to hate. They are taught.

"I was playing in Club St. Germain in Paris. We were jamming down there, and this young man, Anders Berman, who was a drummer, came up to me. I didn't know who he was. He said, 'Would you like to come to Sweden and make

twelve sides?' I said, 'Yeah.' So he said, 'I'll send you a plane ticket.' 'I don't want to fly,' I said. 'I want to go on a boat — a train and a boat to Sweden.' And that's what I did.

"The funny thing is that *Moody's Mood for Love* was the twelfth song on the date." Needing another song for the session, the producer asked Moody for a suggestion, and he proffered *I'm in the Mood for Love*.

"But they didn't have an arrangement for it. So Gusta Theselius, who was the arranger, stepped out and went to the john, and sketched out the notes. I borrowed Per-Arne Croona's alto saxophone and we did it in one take. You wouldn't play someone else's horn nowadays. You just don't do it. But in those days it was cool. There wasn't any AIDS. Man hadn't made that disease yet.

"I can't think of the piano player's name now. It may have been Thor Swanerud. [It was.] And Yngve Akerberg was on the bass. Anders Burman was on drums. Arne Domnerus was on alto. It was on Metronome Records. When it came over here, it made Prestige Records." It certainly did: it was a huge hit for the company. Singer Eddie Jefferson put words to Moody's solo, and the solo took on a new life as vocal material.

The session took place on October 12, 1949. Moody confined his European work from that point on to Paris, where he was part of an illustrious expatriate group. "I played with Kenny Clarke, Miles Davis, and Nat Peck the trombonist. Annie Ross was there. Then Coleman Hawkins came over to live for a while. Don Byas was there. Roy Eldridge came and lived for a while. Bill Coleman was there too. Soon after I left, Dexter Gordon came."

For a time, Moody — like many another jazz musician, such as the late Carl Fontana — worked in Las Vegas in orchestras backing Liberace, Elvis Presley, Ann Margret, and other favorites of the tourist and gambling crowd. Most of them didn't and don't like these jobs, but they pay well and one can live in one place.

Mike Longo said, "From Vegas, he'd call me every day, and I said, 'Moody, you remind of Picasso painting houses.'

"In fact, I got him out of Vegas. I got him booked at Sweet Basil in New York. A lady was doing some booking at Sweet Basil. She hired me and she said, 'If only I could get a headliner.' I said, 'I know a headliner.' I called him. I said, 'Moody, are you ready to get out of Vegas?' He said, 'I don't have a group.' I said, 'You can use my trio.'

"So Moody played Sweet Basil, and there were lines around the block for all three shows, all week. That got him out of Vegas, and he kept going with a jazz career."

Though he hasn't had a drink for years, Moody keeps a



well-stocked bar for his friends. Unlike so many “recovering alcoholics,” as they tend to call themselves, he makes no issue of his non-drinking. That’s one of the things you learn about him — and the fact that he likes to be called “Moody,” nothing else. Even his wife calls him Moody.

Our conversation occurred during an extraordinarily pleasant afternoon of mixed sun and rain at Moody’s home in San Diego, California. You had to be conscious of the changing weather, since his big family room has a wall of uninterrupted glass that looks out past his swimming pool and garden into a deep valley in which nestles a golf course, and a steep mountain beyond. The occasion was the videotaping of Moody’s reflections for an oral history project at Claremont McKenna College. I have taken part in several of these occasions, and I find them rewarding and stimulating, especially this one with Moody, partly because of our shared love for Dizzy Gillespie. Moody’s wife had asked me when he and I first met, and I could only venture that it was in 1959 or ’60, when Moody did some recording in Chicago for the Chess brothers and their independent label Argo, later renamed Cadet Records. I suppose Dizzy introduced us.

Another thing you learn is that Moody doesn’t like to be called black. “I say Negro, even though that means black in Spanish,” he said. “I prefer that to being called black, because I am not black.

“You know what, Gene? I don’t know any black people. I don’t know any white people either — unless they’re dead.” He laughed: “And the blood has run out of them.”

I said, “I remember the Reverend Elijah Mohammed talking about ‘the so-called Negro’ and insisting that the term ‘black’ be used, and the newspapers immediately surrendered to it. I said to myself at the time, ‘It’s just Spanish for black. So what’s the difference?’”

Moody said, “I prefer to be called colored, because that really gets it.”

“Well, that’s the term Dizzy used.”

Moody said to his wife, Linda, “Honey, come here and explain this. That book you read.”

Linda Moody — his third wife, a successful San Diego real estate agent — said, “Well, actually it was a PBS show on DNA. Most of the people on the show were celebrities. The narrator, Louis (Skip) Gates, was a professor and writer, from Harvard University. Anyway, the main genetic results upset many so-called black people when they discovered they did not descend from Africa, or Africans. They didn’t come from African royalty, I guess that’s what it was. Oprah Winfrey found out that she had a lot of native American Indian ancestors.”

I mentioned a number of jazz musicians who’ve told me

they had Indian ancestry, among them Art and Addison Farmer and Dave Brubeck. Miles Davis was another. I said, “I was fascinated in reading the Miles Davis autobiography by how much Paris changed him.” I mentioned that, like Moody, he had experienced an epiphany in Paris, and Kenny Clarke wanted him to stay there. Kenny did stay. But Miles returned to the United States.

Moody said, “After a couple of weeks in Paris, I said, ‘Oh oh. I see what it is. It’s not me. It’s them.’ My wife is white, blond hair with green eyes. We have the same blood. They talk about, ‘If you’ve got just one drop of Negro blood, you are this.’ And if you just look at blood, you couldn’t tell the difference between a Negro and a Caucasian.”

I mentioned that even the term African-American bothers me. I said, “I’ll tell you why. I know a white woman from South Africa who is a racist. She is an American citizen. She is an African-American. And what do you call Oscar Peterson? An African-Canadian? What about Monty Alexander Alexander? He’s from Jamaica.”

Moody said, “Look at my Uncle Louis here. His grandmother was an Irish woman. She had a farm, and her husband died. A Negro helped her. And what happened was, they had intimate relations and my grandfather came. She said, ‘I’m not going to let my child go to school with those black kids.’ And his father said, ‘Well I’m not going to let my son go to school with those white kids.’ So my grandfather never got an education. But he still learned how to read blueprints and build houses, and he knew how to cook. He was my Uncle Louis’s father.”

I said, “You must know that Milton Hinton’s father was from Africa. He came over here and married Milt’s mother, then went back to Africa. Tiger Woods refuses to let anyone classify him as black or white. He says because of the mixture in his parents that he’s a Cablanasian.”

“Remember Chano Pozo?” Moody said. “His passport said ‘White’. Maybe it was because he didn’t speak much English.”

“You know,” I said, “I’ve talked to any number of guys, including Ray Brown and Junior Mance, about what they learned from Dizzy. Ray told me that he was with Dizzy three or four months and Dizzy didn’t say anything to him. He started to get nervous, and finally said to Dizzy, ‘How’m I doing?’ Dizzy said, ‘Fine. Except you’re playing a lot of wrong notes.’ And he sat down with him at the piano and told him what he wanted in the base line. And Junior Mance told me that he would be playing a rhythmic figure he thought was right, then Dizzy would tell him it wasn’t quite right, and he would go to the piano and show him. Everybody I ever talked to who worked with him learned some-



thing. Miles said, 'If you ever worked for Dizzy, and did not learn, you didn't have it in the first place.'

"He's right about that."

"Guys said that working for Dizzy was like going to school."

"It's like a broken record. I hear this over and over again. Every time I do an interview, people ask what did I learn from Dizzy? And I'll tell them, 'I'm *still* learning.' I'll go on playing and later on I'll say, 'Ah, that's what he meant.' This has been going on for years. Because you see, the effect that everyone has on you, it doesn't all come at once. When you start to think about it, like when you think of your uncle or aunt or wife, you think of something over a span of a week or a day, a month or a year, or five years. You know what I'm saying?"

"Yeah, I do. Bill Evans taught me some things in harmony and the meaning of it kept going off in my head for a long time. When I asked him why a flat ninth always seemed to work on a dominant chord, so long as it wasn't in conflict with the melody note, he said it had more to do with the principles of counterpoint than harmony. Eventually I got it."

Moody said, "Same way with me — with the minor seventh flat-five chord. Dizzy said that he got that from Monk." Moody hummed an example.

I said, "Monk called it half diminished. These things go on working themselves out in your head for years."

"When you say for years, it's as long as you live. Nicholas Slonimsky, have you read his book of scales?"

"You mean his *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*? I've looked at it, but I can hardly say that I've read it. Coltrane studied it."

Moody said "He wrote his book for composition on the chromatic scale. And that's just twelve notes. The more you learn, the more you find out what you don't. With just four notes, what is it, 24 or 16 ways to play them? It would take 25 or 30 thousand years to get that down. Then you say, 'Damn — boy! But you try. That's why jazz is so hip.'"

"Having grown up on both classical music and jazz, I began saying when I was very young that jazz is the greatest musical art form of the twentieth century."

Moody said, "I say that too. A woman looked at me and she said, 'Mr. Moody, are you a musician?' And I said, 'Yeah, I'm a jazz musician.' Then she said, 'Oh, that's nice, but I like classical music.' I said, 'Well that's okay. A whole note still gets four beats.'" We both laughed. "But, check this out, in jazz, if you play a composition, you play it in all keys. Suppose we were to take all the classical sonatas and things and put them through all the keys. Imagine what that would be."

I said, "Bill Evans used to play a new tune through all the keys to decide which one he liked."

"Yeah. Just because a song is in a certain key, that doesn't mean that's the way you want to play it. Some things sound better in certain keys."

The subject turned back to Dizzy. Moody said, "Dizzy was, like . . . he was hardheaded. I would tell him not to eat certain things because he was diabetic. Then again, when you look back, all diabetics are hard-headed, you know? But Diz was like . . . a very tender man. Nice. He looked at me one time and said, 'Moody, you're a real nice person.' He said, 'I've got a little larceny in my heart, but you are too kind.' And now I'm saying to myself, 'Damn. Why would he say that to me?' And then as the years went by, I'm thinking, 'I see what he means. He means 'Don't trust everybody.' But I got that from my mother. You trust everybody until they show you wrong. You have to watch it."

"It took me a long time to learn that," I said. "But I still don't want to go around distrusting everybody."

"I know. It can make you sick. And then, Dizzy was very funny too. Like the funny things that he did, but I can't say here. He was funny, and like a father, like a brother. He was a wonderful guy and a good man. The first time I went anywhere in Europe, I went with Dizzy. After he passed, when I would go to these same places and festivals, it would be kind of depressing for me — because he wasn't there. I had been to Sweden and places like that with my quartet. I would get a phone call, and he'd get on and say in a feminine voice, 'Hello? Is this Moody? I love you so much.' I would say, 'Oh Diz!' and he would say, 'How did you know it was me?'"

I said, "You know, when Sahib Shihab was dying, I was there at the hospital a lot of afternoons. And I called Dizzy and asked if he knew that Sahib was in the hospital, and told him it wasn't looking good. And, Sahib told me on one of my visits, Dizzy called him every day from then on. That continued until Sahib died. Dizzy was like that."

I mentioned to Moody an occasion when I was driving in South Carolina and saw a road sign pointing to Cheraw.

"Cheraw," Moody said. "That's where he was born."

"And where his father beat him up pretty good."

"I didn't know about that."

"Yeah, his father was very rough on him. It's in a couple of biographies, and anyway he told me about it himself, a long time ago. There is a book of my essays in which I wrote about musicians who had every right to hate white people and didn't — Clark Terry, Milt Hinton, Nat Cole, Dizzy."

"That situation is similar to mine. My wife, she tells me,



'Honey, I don't see why you don't have a chip on your shoulder.' I would be walking to school and they'd yell, 'Hey, snowball.' A kid. It shows how stupid people can be. They think that they can be of one color and say that one color is better than another color. Have you ever been to Japan?"

"Never."

"The cities in Japan make the cities in America look like slums, and it makes you say, 'I wonder who won the war.' They have beautiful buildings, you can leave things wherever, your wife could walk anywhere downtown at whatever hour at night, by herself, and nobody will bother her. I mean, America is . . . ." He raised his arms, at a loss for words. "People say to look at the Constitution. Well when it was written, Negroes were slaves. So it wasn't written for them, *All men are created equal*."

"All white men are created equal," I said. "Even that's not true. If you were born with a lot of money, you could go to any school you wanted, and it's still true."

"I never heard my mother say anything derogatory about the so-called white race. I say 'so-called' because there is no such thing as a white race in the first place. But she never said that. And for me, I would never say, 'Oh that guy is a so-and-so.' I'd just say that guy's a jive-ass cat. Because all people are basically the same. You know, if you cry tears, if you have saliva in your mouth, and if you do doo-doo and pee-pee, you're the same. And you know something else? Like they say, 'Mate unto your own kind.' It's written in the Bible. And some people think that means to go with this color or that color. But what it means is to leave the dogs and cows alone."

"My father said they wouldn't have written these prohibitions unless *somebody* was doing these things." And we laughed. Moody continued:

"Our own daughter-in-law is Japanese. I'll have to show you a picture of our new grandson. That's why Linda was in Japan three weeks ago." He got out of his chair and retrieved a photo of his grandson, and then several other family photos.

"My father was a trumpet player. The reason I was born in Savannah, Georgia, is because he was playing in a circus band. And he didn't come home. My mother went down to Savannah looking for him. While she was there I was born. After she recuperated, we went back to Reading, Pennsylvania, where we were living.

"My wife fell in love with Savannah. Did you know I was in that movie *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*? Did you see the guy walking the dog? That's me. I was about forty pounds heavier there.

"We met a gentleman by the name of W.W. Law. He was a historian, Negro gentleman. Linda made some inquiries as to who could show us Savannah. A woman told us to get

W.W. Law. So we got Mr. Law and he took us on all of these different walking tours. But I want Linda to tell you the one about the sidewalk."

Linda said, "Mr. Law became very close to Moody and me. He was a wonderful friend. And every time we went to Savannah we would spend as much time with him as we possibly could. We would invite him to all our meals because we loved to listen to him talk, tell stories. He was the one who orchestrated the first lunch-counter sit-in in Savannah. They practiced for two years to be nonviolent. They would have people spit in their faces, hit them, and club them, do all these things. They practiced not hitting back or retaliating. It all had to be done in secret. For two years.

"One of the times we were walking with him after lunch, it was really hot, and I was dying. I said, 'Mr. Law, would you mind if we walked on the other side of the street — in the shade?'"

"And he said, 'Mrs. Moody, I will only do it for you. Because we were required to walk on this certain side of the street all our lives, until not too long ago. When that stopped, I said I was never going to walk on that side of the street again. But for you, I will do it.' And he was wonderful.

"He took us to a home where a white woman for twenty years taught little black children in a secret room in the attic of her home. When people got wind of it, they would check on her. She had a special place for these children, through a secret door. They were totally quiet, and never said a thing. That went on for twenty years, and nobody ever found out."

I said, "Did you ever read William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*?"

Linda said, "A long time ago."

"The effect is harrowing, the thoughts of a self-educated slave interspersed with the shuffling way of speech to whites he doesn't dare let know he can read. I used the technique in my Oscar Peterson biography, contrasting the dialogue that was written for him in radio, such as, 'Say, boy, how many hands you got?' contrasted with the way he actually thought and spoke."

Oscar's father and his sister, I pointed out, exposed him to music and taught him. Did Moody's father teach him?

"No, I didn't meet my father until I was twenty-one years old. I met him in Indianapolis. He came up to me and said, 'Is your father James Moody?'"

"'Yeah.'"

"'Is your mother Ruby Hann?'"

"'Yeah.'"

"'Well, I'm your father.'"

"And I said, 'What know, Pops?'"

"Actually, I had no relationship with him. I didn't have



any feelings for him at all. My mother played piano in church in Reading, Pennsylvania. When I was a kid she would take me to church with her. And I would be sitting in the front row when she would play. And then she would look at me and do this . . .” He made a gesture of dismissal. “That meant I could go outside. Because the damned minister would talk.” Moody demonstrated the screams of an impassioned preacher. “It would frighten me.”

“Hellfire preaching.”

“Yeah, it’s stupid, man.”

“How did you come to live in Newark?”

“Well, they wanted to put me in a school for retarded children, because I was partially deaf. I was born that way. They didn’t know it. So my mother moved to Newark and told the teacher in my Newark school that I couldn’t hear. And the teacher just put me up front. I skipped a couple of grades, and then I was doing okay. The doctor came by and looked at my eyes, ears, and throat and he told me, ‘You are going to go deaf.’ So they sent me to Bruce Street School for the Deaf in Newark. I graduated from there and I wanted to learn music. So I went to Art High School. They put me in a solfege class.”

“Moveable doh?”

“No, fixed doh.” He turned to his wife: “What he means is that a tenor clef or an alto clef, that is doh, and can move to a different range. But a regular treble doh, that’s fixed.” He resumed: “I would be called on to find notes with my voice and I would be cut off. ‘Sit down!’ That is the only F grade that I got in school. And it was a big red one too. Then I went to East Side High School in New York. After that I was drafted into the Air Force. That’s when they asked ‘Does anybody have a horn?’ I had one, but I couldn’t play it, I mean for real. That’s how I started playing.”

“Which air base was that?”

“BTC Number 10 — Basic Training Center Number 10, Greensboro, North Carolina. I did overseas placement.”

“Because so many guys studied music in the service,” I said, “they called it the Khaki Conservatory. Al Grey was at that Great Lakes Naval Air Training Station.”

“Was it segregated when he went in?”

“You bet.”

“So Frank Foster and Clark Terry and Ernie Wilkins — all those guys. You know, I don’t understand it. But then again, I guess it has to do with the slavery thing. All I know is that it’s stupid. When it comes to the arts, America is the land of mediocrity.”

“Dizzy said to me once, ‘Jazz is too good for America.’”

“That’s right. He said that. I’ve got a book called *People’s History of America*. [By Howard Zinn.] You take people like Columbus and Cortez. They think these people were wonder-

ful.”

“Well, they slaughtered the Indians, and destroyed the Aztec culture.”

“Oh yeah. When you look at it, you say to yourself, ‘When is it going to get better?’ Never! And you know why? Because of the Illuminati, the New World Order. All those things. Just wait. All hell is going to break loose.

“We have twins who travel all over the world. When we get the news from them, it’s the opposite of what it is here, because here they lie. The people here in power, they own the newspapers and everything and write crap. But over there, the Americans are getting their butts kicked. Well, then they wonder. No country, none, likes America.”

“They did once. It was the most admired nation on earth.”

“Once. And they were being fooled then, because this country has never helped anybody.”

I said, “When I was much younger, in the 1950s, and living in France, this country was held in the most immense respect. In 1984, I was in Italy, writing the lyrics for an album by Sarah Vaughan based on poems by the Pope. My wife came over to join me. She went to get her hair done. Some wealthy woman sent out for a bunch of exquisite pastries for her, and said in her hesitant English, ‘Thank you for saving us.’ That was the attitude and sentiment in Europe for a long time. But it’s gone now. And it’s tragic. When I was covering the French negotiations to get out of Viet Nam, I studied a lot of Vietnamese history. And Ho Chi Minh, who began as very pro-American, turned. And he said, ‘Democracy is something that no nation exports.’”

“I know that,” Moody said. “Saddam Hussein and Ossama Bin Laden, the Americans made them. And it’s the same thing with Noriega in Panama that they put in jail, because they said he was making drug money. But you know who the biggest drug runners are? The CIA. The worst. And the people don’t want to believe that.

“If they would only apologize for slavery. But the people are saying, ‘Oh, but I wasn’t here when it happened.’ I say, ‘Yeah, but you got the advantage of everything.’ The slaves would work but it was the slave owner who got the money. And the slaves always owed him, because you went to the grocery store and you never could pay anything off.”

I said, “They are trying to reduce America back to that condition now. If they can reduce the income level of the American working class far enough, they have got something like a form of slavery again. When you see people working two or three jobs to survive, we are getting close to it.”

“But you know what? They can do that, but they can’t make the music a drag.”

“America’s greatest presentation to the world.” I said.



"The American Century to me was music. Not just jazz, the American popular song, Cole Porter, Arthur Schwartz, all the others. John Lewis always said that jazz grew up in tandem with great popular music."

"Yeah, it did. Look at George Shearing's *Lullaby of Birdland* and *Love Me or Leave Me*." Moody sang lines from both songs; the latter of course is based on the former. "Just like Dizzy did." He sang some of *Whispering*, then eight bars of *Groovin' High*. Many of the great bebop tunes were based on standards."

"Was Gil Fuller writing for the band when you joined it?"

"Yeah. He was the one, when I tried out for the band, who told me I didn't play loud enough. And about a month later I got a telegram from Dave Burns saying, 'You start with us tonight at the Spotlight.' Later I said, 'Am I playing loud enough?' And he said, 'Oh I was just trying to pull your coat and stuff.' I made a couple of albums for him."

"Was Tadd Dameron writing?"

"Yeah. I remember Gerald Wilson was writing for the band. He and Erroll Garner's older brother, Linton Garner. He was in the service with Dave Burns and me. A piano player. He could read and everything. The opposite of his brother."

(Other writers for the band during the late 1950s included Ernie Wilkins, Pete Anson, Gigi Gryce, and Benny Golson.)

"I worked with Dizzy for about 43 years."

"Did you do any of those 1992 concerts, *To Dizzy with Love*? at the Blue Note in New York? When he had guests coming in from his old groups?"

"Oh yeah!" He showed me a photo from that engagement. The walls of his family room, as well as the foyer, are covered with posters and photos and memorabilia of Dizzy, one of them from the *To Dizzy with Love* concerts. On successive nights, various musicians who had been close to Dizzy came in to play with him.

Moody said, "I'm going to play my next gig in Philadelphia at the Kimmel Center with the Dizzy Gillespie big band."

"Who's conducting? Jon Faddis?"

"No. He's conducting in Chicago. Slide Hampton is conducting. Roy Hargrove is in the trumpet section."

Jon Faddis, I learned later, is artistic director of the big band the late Bill Russo established in Chicago.

We took a break, and when we resumed I said, "Comparatively late in life, Dizzy changed his embouchure."

"The reason he did was because he had a hole in his lip as big as a lollipop. I don't know where that thing came from. But you could see it. It was a round hole."

"A lot of guys get scarred lips playing trumpet."

"Yeah, but this was different."

"It seemed to change his tone, made it fatter."

"Well, any time you change embouchure it does something. It either makes it better or . . . But Diz always had a unique sound. Like, nobody sounded like that."

"Yeah. Two notes and you knew who it was. What do you think the scope of his influence is?"

Moody said, "Not as much as it should be. And I don't mean to take anything away from Miles, because it was two different things. Miles couldn't do what Diz did, and I could say that Diz couldn't do some of the things that Miles did. But Miles was learning from Diz."

"Miles told me that himself."

"Yeah, and Miles deserves all the recognition that he gets. But they don't give Diz enough recognition. I think they short-change him."

"Miles told me, 'I got it all from Dizzy.' That's not quite true, because he got some of it, he told me, from Bobby Hackett and some it from Freddy Webster. But most of it, he said, came from Dizzy. He didn't sound like Dizzy because he didn't have Dizzy's chops."

"You know, some of the stuff you cannot finger. Dizzy had some unorthodox fingering. The only person that can do it is Jon Faddis."

"He is the one guy who can come close, close, close to Dizzy. Mind you, Miles had more chops than he got credit for. You know, when I was working with Charles Aznavour, translating some of his songs into English, he told me something I never forgot. He said, 'We don't build our style on our abilities. We build it on our limitations.'"

"Mmmmm, that's good. You hear that, honey?" He repeated it to Linda.

I said, "I've heard certain singers, as they grow older and can't breathe and can't do what they once did, start spacing the phrasing. And it works."

Moody said, "Oh yeah. I have done that a few times when, like, my chops weren't right up there. You know, you play, and stop and smile for a minute. Not because you want to do it, but because you *have* to do it." He laughed.

"Clark Terry told me that a lot of the old trumpet players sang to rest their chops. Let the blood flow back into your lips. I noticed that Dizzy sang more and more as he grew older. He'd sing two or three tunes in a row, then plant his feet and take up the horn and scare you to death. He'd save it."

"You know, the more you play the stronger your lip gets. And the less you play . . . Like, if you don't practice — I have to practice — your lip gets weak. When you're young, it doesn't go away that fast. When you're older, it goes faster."



"Like I said before, man, Dizzy does not get the recognition that he should get. Dizzy felt like Bird was the man. He said when he heard Charlie Parker, he said, 'Now that's the way the music is supposed to go.'"

I said, "He was a very modest man. I said to him once that everybody talked about what a generous teacher he was."

"Oh yeah. If he was doing something, he would show you. 'Look at that, look . . .' And if you were trying something, he would say, 'Why don't you try it this way?'"

"He said to me once, 'I don't know that I know very much, but whatever I know, I am willing to share.' And of course he knew plenty."

"Do you know Jon Faddis?"

"Sure. It went around that Dizzy died peacefully with Jon Faddis in the room and that CD *Dizzy's Diamonds* playing."

"There was no music there that night," Moody said. "The night before, Mike Longo and I went to see Dizzy. He was in bed. They had just given him a bath. And Dizzy looked at us. I said, 'Hey Diz.' He said . . ." Moody imitated Dizzy putting one finger to his lips and puffing his cheeks slightly. "You know, he tried to make like his jaws would go. We said, 'Oo-bop-a-dah' and he just went . . ." He imitated Dizzy trying to blow. "You know, he tried to do his boppin'. So we said, 'We better go.' I said, 'I'm coming back tomorrow and stay with him as long as I can.'"

"So that ends that legend about him listening to *Dizzy's Diamonds*." That is the name of a Verve album in which a lot of Dizzy's finest tracks are collected. Thinking back on it now, I realize that that story always made me uneasy. I have never known a jazz musician who listened much to his own records, and I had trouble imagining Dizzy doing it.

Moody said, "Jon Faddis and I and Jacques Muyal, a record producer from Switzerland and his son, and John Motley, a choral director and an old friend of Dizzy's, were with him when he passed. And I told Jon, 'Mark my words, in ten years, or five, from now, there are going to be thirty-five or forty people in the room with Dizzy when he passed.' And it will be like Dizzy's dying . . ." And Moody mimed Dizzy playing trumpet. "It wasn't like that. Diz was sitting in a chair trying to breathe." Moody demonstrated the slumped posture. "He never opened his eyes. He went like this." And Moody demonstrated a last breath with eyes closed and a slight smile, letting his chin slump to his chest. "I said, 'Diz, Diz, Diz.'" Moody reached out as if to touch someone. "And then I said, 'Donna, Donna!' She was his nurse, Donna Pace. She listened. Then she went and got the doctor. He came and he listened. He said, 'That's it.'" Moody made a baseball umpire's *safe* gesture.

"He was gone, and he didn't weigh a hundred pounds.

Donna took him and wrapped him up like a mummy."

I daresay I believed the *Dizzy's Diamonds* story because I wanted to.

Within months, Dizzy's beloved Lorraine, the great stabilizer of his life, too was gone.

We had talked well into the afternoon. Moody wanted us to stay for chile dogs. He claimed to make the world's best chile dogs. So we sat on stools at the bar that separates the family room from the open kitchen, and Moody went about his magic. He had not exaggerated the quality of his chile dogs. He served them with salads, and when we were done — stuffed is a better word — it came time to us to leave. We went out through the garage. And there, with another car of Moody's, was Benny Carter's Rolls Royce.

When Benny was in his final days in Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, Linda Moody called him almost every day. He told her, "I'll never leave this hospital. I'm checking out." He said, "Do you still want that car?" She said they did. Benny said, "Call Hilma, and tell her what you want to pay for it and write her a check."

Linda said, "I drove to Los Angeles right after he died and wrote Hilma a check immediately." Benny died July 12, 2003. Linda requested and got the California license plate *Bennys*. Linda said, "It will always be his car as far as we're concerned."

Doug Ramsey, another of Moody's friends — and their number is inestimable — tells a story about Moody and cars:

"One night my wife and I met him at his house in New Jersey for a drink before his gig at — I think — the Half Note. We had another couple with us. It may have been Al Belletto and his girl when Al was visiting from New Orleans. Moody and his wife, Margena, got in his Cadillac. The four of us piled into our ancient Volvo and followed. At the turnpike toll both, I pulled up after Moody went through. He had paid for our car as well as his.

"That's how he lives his life."

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