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The Worlds of Paul Desmond

In the first paragraph of a Foreword to *Take Five*, Doug Ramsey's superbly researched biography of Paul Desmond, Dave Brubeck asserts:

"Paul Desmond was an enigma. I considered him my best friend. Yet, for a couple of years in my life I vowed I would never speak to him again. The rift eventually healed and for three decades we were as close as brothers."

Darius Brubeck, one of Dave's sons, for many years a jazz teacher in South Africa and England, told me he was about twelve before he realized that Paul wasn't actually his uncle.

"From the very first," Dave says in that introduction, "we seemed to possess an uncanny ability to anticipate and read each other's musical thoughts. Paul called it ESP. Desmond became a part of my musical life for the next thirty years, from 1947 until his death in 1977. Seventeen of those years, from 1951 to 1968, he was a member of the Dave Brubeck Quartet. Rhythm sections changed, but he and I remained constant. In 1958, with the rhythm section of Joe Morello and Eugene Wright in place, we became the group jazz historians now refer to as the 'classic' Brubeck Quartet."

And one of the most successful in jazz history. It was rivaled in popularity and longevity only by the Modern Jazz Quartet, which underwent only two changes in personnel, and those in its early years: Percy Heath replaced Ray Brown on bass in 1952 and Connie Kaye — one of Desmond's two or three favorite drummers — replaced Kenny Clarke on drums in 1954. With John Lewis as its pianist and music director and Milt Jackson on vibes, it remained that way through the rest of its days. Other jazz groups, including those of Gerry Mulligan and Miles Davis, had many incarnations with different personnel.

That it took so many years for a publisher to commission a book on Desmond, one of the most popular and pre-eminent of all jazz players, may be shocking but it shouldn't be surprising. Paul was the wrong color, and it is a common dictum in jazz, a viewpoint firmly held by the late Ralph J. Gleason, that no white man ever contributed anything to the development of jazz. That is nonsense, of course, and if you must look to black authority figures to validate the life and work of a jazz musician, it is notable that Charlie Parker, one of the supreme icons of this music, was several times on record that Paul was his favorite alto player. That they were also friends is something I did not know. That is documented in this book.

I once did a radio interview with Paul in which he said he went far out of his way not to sound like Charlie Parker, in a time when seemingly every young player was trying to do so. He said there was enormous pressure on young players, during his formative years, to emulate Parker. He called it "a kind of musical McCarthyism." Much of what Paul said was funny not only for its content but his manner of speech, his idiosyncratic inflections, which of course cannot be captured on paper. But I still can hear the way he said it: "If you think you can play as well as Charlie Parker — lotsa luck!"

The general theory is that Desmond was influenced by Lester Young, and there is some truth to that. Indeed, a great many saxophone players were. Lester Young in turn was, by his own statements, influenced by Frank Trumbauer, Bix Beiderbecke, and Jimmy Dorsey. Dorsey is a surprising inclusion in any list of jazz influences, but he is cited by quite a few players, including Gerry Mulligan.

I thought I had found the key to Desmond one day a few years ago when I was listening to some tracks of Lester Young on clarinet. Aha! I thought. That's where Paul comes from. Paul too played clarinet; most saxophone players do, if only because in those years there were no college courses on saxophone, only on clarinet. But I have only recently come to a conclusion about the major influence on Paul: Artie Shaw. They played the same kind of long, fluent lines, with inexhaustible inventions spilling well over the conventional four and eight-bar phrase lines. Ever since writing that piece on Artie a few months ago, I have continued to listen to him. I mentioned this influence to U.S. Air Force Brigadier General (Ret.) Harold A. Strack.

Hal Strack had been a tenor player in San Francisco when he and Paul were young. He went into the Army Air Corps in World War II, and stayed on as a career officer, eventually becoming heavily involved in designing our nuclear defenses, a subject in which Paul had an extraordinarily well-informed interest. Hal kept up his tenor playing all during

those years, and also his friendship with Desmond. General Strack, now living in Arizona, told me:

"Shaw's influence on Paul was very substantial. Paul borrowed the easy way of blowing from Lester, but the pattern of development in his playing comes from Artie. The same was true of Gerry Mulligan, who always played Shaw's chorus on *Stardust* on Paul's clarinet whenever he visited Paul's apartment. Gerry was the only one who played Paul's clarinet in those days, and according to Paul his performance was unfailing.

"Sam Donahue, who started out playing like a swinging Lester and later played with a much bigger sound, nonetheless had a very lyrical quality that he developed further from playing in Artie's Navy band. His choruses on *How Long Has This Been Going On?* and *It Might as Well Be Spring* with the Kenton mellophonium band are as lyrical and patterned as anything that can be found outside the Shaw-Desmond-Mulligan realm."

Anthony Braxton in turn said his important early influence was Desmond. And Cannonball Adderley, with whom Desmond had a sort of mutual admiration society, told Leonard Feather during a *Down Beat* Blindfold Test that Paul was "a profoundly beautiful player."

Desmond was charming, drily funny, and good company. He was affable, approachable, and personable, and women were always drawn to him. But he was also, and none of us really knew this until he was gone, extremely secretive, keeping his friendships in separate compartments. I didn't know there was a Hal Strack until he wrote me a fascinating and highly articulate letter about Paul, and when Doug began work on the book I told him about Hal.

I also told him about Duane.

Excepting the Brubecks and me, hardly anyone knew she even existed. Most of Paul's long-term friends and acquaintances thought of him as the permanent bachelor, not knowing that he had ever been married. I did. And for this reason.

When I was a reporter at the now-vanished *Montreal Star* in the 1950s, my sister Pat worked in the record library of one of the city's radio stations, CKVL. I would drop by occasionally to go to lunch with her. She was friendly with somebody named Duane Desmond, a San Franciscan who was in fact the person who turned me onto the Dave Brubeck Octet and the first of the quartet records and, in the process, to Paul Desmond's playing. Duane worked as a disc jockey at the station, with her own program called "Miss Music" and she did a nice show, as I recall. Somehow or other it came about that at one time she had been married to this Paul Desmond. Beyond that I knew nothing, but the name stayed with me, probably because it's so pretty (as was she).

Flash forward to 1959. Mulligan, Desmond, and I were frequent companions, sometimes two of us, sometimes all three. And the main hobby was drinking. I had met a lady named Janet Westcott, whom I would eventually marry. She lived in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. Sometimes I'd fly out there to see her, sometimes she came into New York to see me. Mulligan and I did most of our juicing at Jim and Andy's but Paul had a preference for Elaine's on the Upper East Side, probably because it was a den of writers, some of them quite famous, and Paul cherished ambitions to be a writer.

One night Desmond, Mulligan, and I took my new friend Janet along on one of our pub crawls, and she said later it was a dark evening for her — with three drunks who were afflicted by Celtic melancholia even at the best of times and who, that evening, were quite convinced that the world could only get worse, which (as you may have noticed) it did. As the time wore on, Desmond got even more loaded than Mulligan and I. It came time to call it quits. Desmond, still seated, was bowed over the table. Gerry and I kept saying, "Come on, Paul, let's go home," and words to that effect. He didn't move. He bordered on the comatose, and finally put his head down on his forearms. Janet, the sober one, insisted that we could not leave him here to find his way home, but despite Gerry's pleas and mine he remained immobile. How could we get through the fog to reach him? And then, by whatever instinct, standing behind his chair, I put my arm around his shoulder, leaned close, and said, almost in a whisper, "Paul, I knew Duane."

He burst into tears. He sat up a little. Gerry and I took him under the arms, stood him up, got him out into the street, grabbed a cab, and dropped him off at his apartment building on 57th Street at Sixth Avenue.

Next morning Mulligan called me in panic. "Where did we leave Janet last night?"

I said, "She's right here."

"Thank God!" Gerry said.

But that's how I knew about Duane, and when Doug started research on his book, I told him about Hal Strack and Duane. The question was: Where was she? Finally, Doug's publisher, Malcolm Harris, hired a private detective, who found her. She had long ago left Montreal and moved back to the Bay Area. Doug found her enormously gracious and helpful. She and Paul had remained warm friends and stayed in touch until a few years before his death, and Iola Brubeck told me at some point that she and Dave had long held a hope that they would get back together. But they didn't and he never told anybody about her.

She now lives in Western Canada and wishes to preserve

her anonymity.

The phone would ring, and you'd say, "Hello," and the voice at the other end would say one of two things. It was either, "Hi, it's me, Desmond." Or: "It's your friend Paul Breitenfeld."

Breitenfeld was of course his real name. His father, Emil Breitenfeld, was a composer and arranger highly respected in San Francisco. He trained his only child from the earliest age, and Paul was capable of writing arrangements, which he never did. I always said that Paul had the perfect set-up: he had Dave to take care of business, run the group, handle the payroll, and all Paul had to do was to turn up, play his breath-taking solos, and at the end of the gig, leave with some chick.

Ramsey, one of Paul's best friends — they first met in 1955 — gives variants on the story of how he came to change his name to Desmond. Hal Strack told Doug that in 1942, Gene Krupa hired a new singer "with some convoluted Italian name." It was in fact Giovanni Alfredo de Simone. He changed it to Johnny Desmond. Hal said they were listening to the band and Paul said, "Jeesh, you know that's such a great name. It's so smooth and yet it's uncommon. If I decide I need another name, it's going to be Desmond."

But over the years, Doug says, "he gave a variety of answers, often delivered with his enigmatic grin: from the telephone book, from the union directory, from a newspaper, from a girl friend. He delivered these harmless put-ons with charm, conviction and the ring of sincerity. The telephone-book answer took on a life of its own and is endlessly repeated in stories about Desmond."

On some occasions, he would say that he chose "Desmond" because Breitenfeld sounded too Irish. His mother, Shirley, was Irish Catholic, and Dave Brubeck once told me, "If you'd known Paul's mother, you could forgive him anything." His father was Moravian by descent, and Paul for years thought that the family line was Jewish, but since the family had a long history of secularism, nobody knew for sure.

I confess I thought that, given Paul's secretive ways, Doug was up against the impossible in researching Desmond's life. But then came Duane and Hal Strack. And then came Rick Breitenfeld, Paul's cousin.

Paul's mother, it turns it, was unstable. I daresay she would today be diagnosed as bipolar. She wasn't much of a mother, and in 1933, when Paul was nine, his father sent him to live with his brother's family in New Rochelle, New York, twenty miles north of Manhattan. Paul's cousin, Rick, was two years old. In his adult years, he had a Ph.D. in communications and a distinguished career in public broadcasting.

Of Paul's mother, Rick Breitenfeld told Doug:

"She got into a cleanliness fetish, by which, 'If I touch this, you can't touch it, and the minute you touch it, it's spoiled.' She would have her whole side of the house that nobody could enter, and she washed her hands constantly. The theory was that she felt guilty about marrying outside the church. But that's only a family guess."

With Rick Breitenfeld, Doug hit the Comstock lode. Rick said, "I was the baby and he was the big boy, so I would ride on his shoulders. Paul was the older brother that I didn't have biologically in my family, and since there was seven years between us, there was a lot of hero worship, and there was a lot of trying to tag along when he was less interested than I. But there was also that protective feeling that when he was around I was okay, and he played with me the way an older person plays with a younger person. But there was a mysterious quality about him. That is due to one of two things; either every four- or five-year-old thinks that every nine-, ten- or eleven-year-old is mysterious, or there was, indeed, part of Paul that was removed. As I think of Paul in later years, I think it's more the second . . . ."

I was fascinated by the statement that Paul was "removed." He played that way. That assertion will probably raise some eyebrows, since Paul was the most lyrical and romantic of players. I see no contradiction. The quality is almost Mozartean. Mozart never thunders and screams, like Beethoven. If Mozart walks the great cloudy corridors of the gods, it is with an unasserted air of belonging there. I once heard Eugene Istomin play a Mozart concerto with the Louisville Orchestra. Instead of forcing emotion into the performance, he just let the music happen, and in his very restraint I found such poignancy that he made me cry.

And Paul was mysterious. I didn't even know he had a cousin or any other relatives until after he was gone, and if memory serves it was Dave or Iola Brubeck who told me about Rick Brietenfeld who, now retired, lives in Pennsylvania.

Paul adored his father, and they exchanged long and literate letters until Emil Breitenfeld's last days. And, it turned out, Rick Brietenfeld had in his basement cartons of Paul's private papers, including much (and maybe all) of the exchanges with his father. These are rendered only the more valuable in that Paul was writing to a fellow musician, and he often gets into technical matters that would have gone unrecorded had his father been a layman.

In addition to these letters to his father, Paul wrote innumerable memos to himself, criticizing his own playing, and projecting plans to improve himself. Nowhere in all the

literature of jazz is there anything remotely like this consciously conscious self-examination and record of growth. He examines his development of his tone, he examines questions of intonation. Large sections of his letters and memos, in some cases complete documents, are in the book.

Because Doug is not only a fine writer and journalist, but also a musician, he gives us some detail another biographer might not. He quotes Paul's friend Herb Geller, who played tenor in the band of pianist Jack Fina while Paul played alto:

"I think he really wanted to be a writer. Writing was frustrating him. I think that's what he really felt he should have done instead of playing the saxophone. Later, he thought he was successful and didn't deserve it. He felt like he had undeserved riches, which isn't true at all. The most important thing about Paul, you turn on a record and you know immediately it's him. Nobody sounds like that.

"One thing I have to claim a little bit of credit for. [He] was playing with a Gregory mouthpiece with a number 16 chamber. I used to play that mouthpiece, but it just didn't have enough volume. I changed to one with a bigger chamber, which was an 18 chamber. And I told Paul, because his sound didn't project enough . It was beautiful for that time, but it really didn't have enough power to be heard if a drummer was playing with any kind of intensity. I told him he should play with the same mouthpiece but to get an 18 chamber. He did that, and years later he always thanked me for my little contribution. His tone became stronger. Every time I'd see him, he'd say, 'That 18 chamber, that's what did it.'"

Paul's published output comprises only a few liner notes and an amusing article about a gig played by the Brubeck group. He had a contract to write a book, but never did it.

Paul, I realized later, had read quite a bit of my writing by the time I met him in Chicago, probably in late 1959. We had lunch. Thinking of the Thorne Smith novel *Turnabout*, and also that I would give anything to play *any* instrument as well as Paul did, I said, "Wouldn't it be marvelous if we could exchange abilities for a month"

And Paul said, ever so softly, "Even for an hour."

Because Paul did write so well, some of the passages Doug quotes about life on the road are particularly vivid. I can't imagine that any jazz musician would find this stuff anything but fascinating, although some of it might be a little dense for the layman. For music students, particularly reed players, this book should be compulsory reading.

In the early years, Dave and bassist Norman Bates worked for Paul at a place called The Band Box with singer Frances Lynne. If you can imagine Paul functioning as a leader, or Dave and Paul singing, you're a better man than I am. But sing they did, a theme song Desmond wrote for the gig:

It's The Band Box, the joint for you.
Get high when you're happy,
and blind when you're blue.
The whisky is old but the music is new
at The Band Box.

If the state you arrive in encourages jivin',
relax on the sofa with a chick you can go for.
That's why the proletariat
make merry at The Band Box.

Paul did the driving on their way to The Band Box, thirty miles south of San Francisco. "Paul considered himself a terrific driver," Dave told Doug Ramsey. "He had calculated that the traffic lights on a stretch of road down the peninsula to Palo Alto were timed for 45 miles an hour. Using perfect logic, he figured out that if you could make all the lights at 45, you should be able to make them at 90 and leave later for the gig. Every time we drove down there, I thought there was a good chance I was going to die."

And, while tearing along at 90, Paul would read the road and street signs aloud — backwards.

The Band Box idyll ended in the summer of 1949. Paul was offered a chair with a band playing at the Feather River Inn in the California Sierra Nevadas. He accepted, and when Dave told him he could get clarinetist Bill Smith as his replacement for the summer, Paul was furious, arguing that he'd found the gig, and it was his when he returned. Dave ended up having to take a band job at Silver Lake for very little money. He and Iola and their boys Darius and Michael lived in a quonset hut so hot in the daytime that to protect the children, they rigged a fan to blow through soaked flour sacks. Dave told Iola, "I never want to see Paul Desmond again."

Dave continued working in a trio format with Ron Crotty on bass and Cal Tjader on drums, and they recorded for the newly-formed Fantasy label. Desmond finally tired of the Jack Fina band and returned to San Francisco. The Dave Brubeck Trio was doing well, with NBC broadcaster Jimmy Lyons, later founder of the Monterey Jazz Festival, doing live broadcasts of the group. These were heard far out to sea by sailors, both military and civilian, and when their ships came into San Francisco they crowded the Burma Lounge, where the group was now working. Aware that Brubeck was becoming a jazz phenomenon, and aware too that he had treated Dave very badly, Paul, twenty-five now, set out to get

back into the group, and finally turned up on the Brubecks' doorstep, "his wide grin and dimples rampant," as Ramsey puts it.

The Brubecks jointly recounted what happened next.

"I was amazed to see him," Iola told Doug, "because he was so completely out of our lives, and he was his cheery, blithe self. You know, 'I've just come back from New York . . . .' I just wanted to see Dave,' and he really just talked his way in by being charming and so confident that we would be delighted to see him."

"No," Dave said, "he got by you because you always liked Paul."

"Well, yeah, I wasn't just going to block the door. He assumed that he was going to be welcomed. I went to the back door and told Dave, 'You just have to see him.' Dave was on the back stoop hanging out diapers on the clothes line. Paul came out to talk to him and it was a little touchy there for a few minutes. Paul managed to talk about where he'd been and how he'd really missed playing with Dave."

Dave said, "I was mad as hell at Iola for letting him in, because he had left us where we could hardly exist. But seeing he was there . . . ."

Iola said, "I remember seeing a startled look on your face, and that's all I remember. But we both remember how he was making all these wild promises. He wanted to play with Dave. He would do anything to play with Dave. He would babysit, he would do dishes, he'd wash our car."

Doug asked, "Did he do all that?"

In unison: "No!"

"Did you ask him to?"

"No!" With more laughter.

An observation is in order here. Paul always carried on what I think of as fantasy romances with the wives of his best friends, including Doug's, mine, and Iola Brubeck. While always observing what Johnny Mercer called in a lyric "a gentleman's code" of silence about his sexual relationships with usually (perhaps always) glamorous women, he somehow used his friends' wives as a safe outlet for his more romantic impulses, knowing he could confide in them because they would never pressure him toward marriage. It is another example of his compartmentalization of his life, something he developed almost into an art form.

"So he broke down my resistance," Dave said, "and of course it was a good thing."

Indeed. The remarkable rapport between Desmond and Brubeck, together with a contrast in their styles, gradually caught on with audiences through public appearances in clubs and recordings for the Fantasy label. The Brubeck group pioneered college concerts by jazz groups, back in a forgotten age when the taste of college students had not yet fallen to the level of the Grateful Dead and the Rolling Stones. Their album *Jazz at Oberlin* proved to be a breakthrough for the quartet, and for Fantasy, followed by the *Jazz at the College of the Pacific* LP. Columbia records, one of the biggest and most powerful of labels, at that time had a substantial jazz line under the supervision of producer George Avakian. Dave made the move to Columbia, was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine's November 8, 1954, edition, and made an album called *Jazz: Red Hot & Cool*, which was tied to a Revlon ad campaign. They were the hottest group in jazz. Paul made a number of recordings as leader, but his public image grew mostly from his position as the featured soloist with the Brubeck group.

And the group's power went on growing, although we were now in the age of Elvis, and not far from the age of the Beatles. In 1959, they began working on an album for Columbia that would be titled, which consisted of Brubeck compositions except for one by Desmond, *Take Five*. Columbia was lukewarm about the album, since most of its pieces were in "odd" time figures rather than the four-four of almost all jazz up to that time, an exception being Fats Waller's *Jitterbug Waltz*, which was looked on as a pure novelty. Lennie Tristano had recorded pieces in "unusual" time signatures, and a lot of jazz musicians were becoming restive in the strictures of four. There are versions of the story of how Paul came to write *Take Five*, but the best explanation is that the 5/4 time figure came from Joe Morello, who was now the group's virtuoso drummer. During his drum breaks, he would pass into other time figures, including 5/4. He urged Dave to write something in five, and when he didn't, Desmond said he'd write something. And that rhythm section, which by now included Eugene Wright on bass, had no trouble with the album's "odd" time figures — already used in classical music and that of other cultures. Indeed, Paul Motian in the Bill Evans Trio had no trouble with them: his family background is Armenian, and "odd" time figures were as natural to him as breathing.

Columbia did almost nothing to promote the album. I remember a particularly nasty review in *Down Beat* saying the whole thing was a phony attention-seeking gimmick. *Time Out* proved to be a revolutionary album whose influence continues to this day. It became one of the best-selling albums in jazz, and Take Five was the first million-selling jazz single. As for whether the music was "natural," in 1962 in a restaurant in Georgetown, British Guiana, I saw local couples dancing to *Take Five* as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Prior to *Time Out*, jazz musicians usually sounded stiff and uncomfortable even in three, but after that

album they became comfortable in all sorts of "other" meters.

Paul was growing increasingly prosperous, and at the end of 1963 he sent his parents a check for $3,000 as a Christmas present. By now, Dave and Iola had moved to Connecticut, and Paul was living in New York. Desmond made a number of independent records for other producers, including *Take Ten* for George Avakian and RCA Records, and one of my favorites of all his records, *Summertime*, for Creed Taylor at Verve, with a stunning album cover photograph of sunlight blazing through hanging icicles. The pianist was Herbie Hancock. (I have three copies of that album, including one still in shrink wrap that I refuse to open.)

The Brubeck group with Desmond came to its end in late 1967. Paul had no reason to work, and he did pretty much nothing for a while. He got a request to play a club called Bourbon Street in Toronto, where I was now living, mostly writing and performing in television and radio, and he called me about it. I urged him to do it. But what about a rhythm section? he asked. I suggested that he get Don Thompson on bass, Ed Bickert on guitar (Jim Hall had already told him about Ed Bickert), and either Terry Clarke or Jerry Fuller on drums. He said he hadn't played in a long time. I said, "Practice." He did too. This may be the origin of his quip to Ramsey that he'd tried practicing once "and played too fast." He also defined himself as "the John P. Marquand of the alto." He played Bourbon Street more than once, and Don Thompson, who in addition to playing just about any instrument you can name is also a recording engineer, recorded all of those nights, and the resultant albums are gems.

One of my memories of those Toronto sojourns is a day when Paul came to have lunch with my wife and me. The woman in the apartment above was a religious nut, and since this was a Sunday, she and her vocal group, if you want to call it that, were singing those hideous four-square Protestant hymns. Paul listened for a while. At last he said, "Does this group take requests?" With Paul, part of the humor was not just in what he said but the dry way he said it, with that sly ironic pixie smile of his.

Later, he took the guys, "my Canadian group," as he called it with some pride, to the Edmonton and Monterey jazz festivals. Don has tapes of a lot of material that has never been released, which he played for me a few years ago.

In 1974, my wife and I moved to Los Angeles. Some time in 1975 or 1976, Paul called us. He was in L.A. to contribute to the sound track Bill Conti was writing for a Paul Mazursky film called *Next Stop: Greenwich Village*, released in 1976. He wanted us to have dinner with him, and the matter seemed somewhat urgent to him. We went to a place called The Cock and Bull, which was right on the border of West Los Angeles and Beverly Hills. It was a remarkable replica of a British pub, with superb food. I thought Paul would like it, and he did.

He told me all sorts of secrets about his life. I had never seen him this open and unguarded, and after one particularly piece of narrative, he said, "Don't you think it'd make a good book?"

I said, "Yes. Why don't you write it?"

"No," he said softly, "you write it."

He knew something I didn't. He was dying. And strangely, he seemed rather happy that night. Paul was not really a happy man by nature, which may have been the legacy of his mother. Perpetually (if secretly) self-critical, he had in his youth seriously considered suicide, and I once wrote (and it has been quoted) that I thought he was the loneliest man I have ever met, there in his penthouse apartment in New York amid his clutter of books and papers and magazines and recording equipment, smoking his three packs a day of Pall Malls and downing great quantities of Scotch. He kept a syringe in that apartment, not to inject dope but vitamin B-12 on those days of especially horrendous hangovers.

He went to his doctor, who ordered some tests. Paul thought he might have liver trouble from his lifetime of drinking. But he had no such problem. Instead, the x-ray exams revealed a spot on his lung.

With his usual sense of irony, he told Doug Ramsey on the telephone, "Pristine. One of the great livers of our time. Awash in Dewars and full of health."

He tried to make his friends comfortable about his condition (as, later, did Henry Mancini and Gerry Mulligan about theirs.) Mort Sahl told me about it. I ran into him at some social event, and he took me aside and said, "Do you know that Paul has cancer?"

After that, Gerry Mulligan, who visited him frequently, kept me posted on his condition. If you've lived in New York City, or visited it often, you know that most of its highways to the airports, out through Queens, pass by cemeteries. Paul told friends that he wanted to be cremated: "I don't want to be a monument on the way to the airport."

Another story has assumed the proportions of legend in the Desmond Saga. Doug Ramsey clarifies it:

"Because he was too weak to get up easily and answer it, Paul left his apartment door unlocked and spent most of his time in bed or in his Eames chair, alternating between dozing and wakefulness. Visitors came and went. Charles Mingus, whom Paul had first known . . . in San Francisco in 1942,

sometimes came for chess and conversation. One morning Desmond opened his eyes to see an apparition. Mingus, in a black cape and what Desmond described as 'his Orson Welles hat', was keeping watch over him from the corner. Swimming up out of his drowsiness, Paul searched his memory and fixed on the figure of death from Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. 'I thought The Man had come,' he [said] later."

On Memorial Day, May 30, 1973, Paul slipped away. Some of his friends think he did it himself, with pills.

Dave told me that Mingus said to him, after Paul was gone, "Dave, when I'm dying, will you come to my bedside?" Dave gave his word, but he was unable to keep the promise: Mingus died in Cuernavaca, Mexico, on January 4, 1979.

The disposition of Paul's ashes is also part of the Desmond legend. Jimmy Lyons, who'd had so much to do with the establishment of the Brubeck group through his broadcasts, took care of them. Jimmy told all Paul's friends about the incident, and Doug writes:

"Paul stipulated that there be no funeral and that his ashes be distributed over the craggy Big Sur territory that he loved, the canyon that ran toward the Pacific below Jimmy Lyons' cabin. With the urn containing Paul's ashes and a shaker of martinis, Lyons went aloft in a small airplane. As the pilot took them low through the canyon, Jimmy opened the window, let the ashes flow into the slipstream and toasted his friend. He took a sip of the martini and tossed the rest to join the ashes. The wind blew it back in his face. "Thanks a lot, Paul," Lyons said, and laughed as the plane turned and climbed."

A friend asked Paul in his last days if he wanted a memorial service. Paul said: "I don't care. I'll be dead."

There were impromptu gatherings anyway, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. The one in New York was held in a Columbia Records studio that had once been a church. All sorts of people "materialized out of the compartments of Paul's life," as Doug put it, people who knew each other in many cases but were surprised to learn that each of them knew Paul. The Brubecks, of course, and Joe Morello and Eugene Wright, Jim and Jane Hall, Gerry Mulligan, Rick Breitenfeld, Hal Strack and his wife Margaret, the actor Kevin McCarthy, the cartoonist Arnold Roth and his wife, Jimmy Rowles, Nat Hentoff, and, as Doug puts it, "a cross-section of Paul's girl friends, and many others."

There were cartons of liquor too, and then some of Paul's solos were heard softly on the sound system, and people began to say, "I'm going to have a drink."

When it became known that Paul was terminally ill, he had a conversation with his lawyer about his will. The attorney asked to whom he wished to leave his royalties. Paul said something to the effect of, Oh, make it the Red Cross. It was to be temporary, until a time when Paul could express a more specific disposition. He died without having done so, and the Red Cross got it all. For a long time it simply accepted the money without ever so much as a thank you or a recognition. This went on for years, with his royalties from *Take Five* and his share of the royalties on the Brubeck recordings, amounting to millions. His lawyer, Noel Silverman, wrote to the Red Cross.

Silverman said, "For twenty-five years, they just collected money and collected money and once in a while I got an acknowledgment that obviously bore no relation to the size of the gift or any awareness of who Paul Desmond was."

After a drum-beat of complaints from Silverman, the Red Cross told him it would name a facility in its new national headquarters the Desmond Training Room, with a plaque in his memory at the side of the door.

Small thanks, it seems to me, for what they got.

Paul's Baldwin grand piano was left to Bradley's, where Paul and I used to go, it seems, whenever Jimmy Rowles was performing there. After Paul's piano was installed there, Nat Hentoff wrote in his *Village Voice* column:

"The piano had been tuned, but nobody had played. Then, from the back of the room, a graying man, wearing a golf hat and a quizzical look not unlike Paul's, moved almost at a run to the piano and said, 'This is a song Paul always asked for.'

"Jimmy Rowles played *Darn That Dream*, fitting it to Paul's tone and floating beat. He got up, did a small jig, and uttered a cry. Not in mourning. What Thomas Wolfe called a goat cry — to life. To Paul's music.

"So much for no immediate survivors."

Take Five: The Public and Private Lives of Paul Desmond, *published by Parkside Publications, Suite 3210, 999 Third Avenue, Seattle WA 98104, www.parksidepublications.com, telephone 206 839-1191. Malcolm Harris, the attorney who founded the company, has done previous books on automobiles, one on Buddy DeFranco, and two by clarinetist Bill Smith. Like the DeFranco biography, the Desmond study is a coffee-table book, printed in Singapore on gloss paper to accommodate photos not in separate sections in the middle of the book but on almost all the pages throughout it. The book includes a lengthy discography, as well as transcriptions and analyses of a number of Desmond solos by Bill Mays, Bud Shank, Paul Cohen and John Handy, and Gary Foster.*

Changes

As the *Jazzletter* approaches its twenty-fifth year, I find myself occasionally remembering how it started. In 1981 I queried some of my friends about whether they would be interested in a projected publication, and a lot of them were. Among the very earliest subscribers were Jerome Richardson and Phil Woods. I said from the outset that this was *not* a publication about jazz musicians but *for* jazz musicians. In other words, about what *they* were interested in and if lay listeners wanted to take part in the dialogue, fine. And it always has been a dialogue: that's why I love to print letters.

I have a pretty extensive technical knowledge of music, though I wish it were even more. I shudder sometimes at writings that indicate that an author doesn't. I was interviewed a few months ago by a French writer who asked me some questions about Bill Evans. I told him that Bill once took a year off to work on his tone. When the Parisian magazine came out, quoting me in translation, it had me saying that Bill took a year off to work on his *intonation*. I cringed.

And that's why I'm baffled by writers who have no technical knowledge of harmony and composition. Why don't they spend a year on the Berklee correspondence course that Bob Share designed and wrote? I did. And Bob — dear kind, generous, gracious Bob, rest him — coached me on the telephone. Years later, a French Canadian composer showed me a book he'd written on theory and har - mony. I said, "This reminds me of the course Bob Share designed."

He smiled broadly and said proudly, "I *studied* with Bob."

Thus does an influence spread, and I think Bob's is very great. There is no mention of him in the Leonard Feather-Ira Gitler *Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*. He is one of the heroes of this music, and he's almost forgotten.

Yet, whatever I know, I never put out a *Jazzletter* that has not been critically examined by someone whose knowledge and judgment I respect. Very often that is the aforementioned Phil Woods, my secret weapon. Advancing technology made the *Jazzletter* possible. In the old days of the linotype, with its hot-lead slugs, putting out such a publication would have been prohibitively expensive. But a new process had been developed. I checked with a printer and found that due to the development of "cold type", a photo process on which the type was presented in long strips of glossy photo paper, the cost had come down drastically. A single operator, working at a computer keyboard machine, could give you any type face you wanted, and in quantity. But that machine cost, in 1981 dollars, $65,000. And I had to correct the operator's errors.

But I started, writing the first issues on a typewriter and sending them in for typesetting, then pasting up each issue on a light table. Tedious, but practical. Then I saw a television news story about a man in the San Fernando Valley who could set type from your home computer over the telephone. I called him in 1984. He guided me through the purchase of my first computer, a Kaypro, which cost about $1,000 in 1984 currency. As long as I live, I will be grateful to Ira Gerber, from Brooklyn, for what he taught me in my first days with a computer. But, he said, his typesetting business was already obsolete. Why? "Because you're going to be able to do it yourself, at home." He was telling me, I realized later, about the steady improvements and falling costs of the laser printer.

And in due course I came to set my own type, using a laser printer. But there was one more phase to the job: getting it printed. And that is a process that I have often found frustrating. Printers are funny people. Like dry-wallers in the construction business, they are frequently unreliable. I'll have, say, four or even five issues of the *Jazzletter* at the printer and a month or more will pass until I get them back.

And then, recently, I found out something I wish I'd known a couple of years ago. I have a laser printer guru named Terry Meyers, a wonderful man, expert in the field, who lectures all over North America. He also has a supply business. He supplied me with a Hewlett Packard LaserJet 4000 N, which is *not* the newest model but is built like a Mack truck. When Terry told me he could set it up to print on both sides of the paper, I asked him whether, if I ran an entire issue of the *Jazzletter* on it, it would burn out the machine. "Absolutely not," he said.

So that's what I'm going to be doing. There's one drawback: I can't print eight pages on two folded sheets. I can only print on single sheets. On the other hand, this process producers crisper, cleaner type. As always, I have consulted a number of readers, and they say it would make no difference to them. So this is the first issue in that format.

But oh, what a break-through! To think of those early days of doing it on a typewriter, I feel like heaving a heavy sigh.

So. Here's to technology. And to Bob Share, and Ira Gerber, and Terry Meyers.

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