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Torture

Kenny Drew's angst over the state of popular music put me in a mind of a news story that came out about a year ago.

The Associated Press carried a report on a U.S. military prison near Kabul in Afghanistan that specialized in torturing prisoners. The Human Rights Watch group, based in New York City, after interviews with so-called "detainees" (if you don't call them "prisoners" you can do anything you want to them), describes how prisoners were chained to walls or hung upside down or kept in total darkness for days and subjected interminably to loud music. And what kind of music was it? "Loud rap, heavy metal music, or other sounds blared for weeks at a time."

A prisoner born in Ethiopia and raised in England said that he was exposed to Eminem and Dr. Dre for seeming endless hours.

What? No Mozart? No Bach? No Debussy or Duke Ellington or Charlie Parker or Bill Evans or Miles Davis or Frank Sinatra?

The prisoner said he could hear people knocking their heads on walls and screaming.

No kidding.

Legend

In his book *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight*, the awesomely confident Canadian writer Mark Steyn tells a tale that Andrew Lloyd Weber asked Alan Jay Lerner, "Why do people take an instant dislike to me?" to which Lerner replied, "It saves time."

I encountered that story seventeen years ago when I was researching my biography of Lerner and Loewe. I asked Bud Widney, Lerner's right-hand man, if the story were true. He said that he thought it was. I doubt it.

As I heard it, Weber was looking for a new lyricist, and Lerner, who hadn't had a successful show in many years,

wanted to "get with" what was happening now. So they decided to try writing a few songs together. After a time, Weber said, "Alan, you're an older man. Can you tell me why people seem so quickly to take a dislike to me?"

And Alan said, "Well maybe it's to save time."

Weber is widely disliked. A bad composer who took the measure of his era and by feeding it the banality it craved, became immeasurably successful, so much so that the Queen and the British Parliament made him Lord Andrew Lloyd-Webber, which I recounted some years ago in an examination of the knighthood awarded Paul McCartney and the Pulitzer Prize given to Wynton Marsalis. The piece was called *Dishonored Honors*. There was, and may still be, a web site devoted to tracing the sources of Weber's deeply derivative music. (He has used both spellings of the name.)

The British drama critic Max Beerbohm wrote in the September 1908 *Saturday Review*:

"What can be hoped of an art which must necessarily depend on the favor of the public — such a public, at least, as ours? Good work may, does sometimes, succeed. But never with the degree of success that befalls twaddle and vulgarity. Twaddle and vulgarity have the upper hand."

Weber's ego is so notorious that I asked Robert Farnon about it. Were the stories true? "Yes," Bob said in his gentle and deferential way. "He's said that he is the twentieth century Mozart."

I still didn't use the story, which had only two possible sources: Weber or Lerner.

Weber was unlikely to tell such a story on himself, since it hardly reflected well on him. And Lerner, as I discovered, was not averse to embellishing tales of his life and appropriating the witticisms of others and passing them off as his own.

If I didn't print the story, I did recount it in private conversations. And one evening, over dinner, I told it to Larry Gelbart. He replied, "If Lerner actually said that, it's a line he stole from me. I wrote it in an early episode of *M.A.S.H.*"

So if you hear that story, which is still in the air, don't pass it along.

Young Mr. LaFaro

Scott LaFaro was something of a mystery to me. I never knew him well, and not for long. There was too little time. He played the bass for only seven years, from the summer of his eighteenth year until just after his twenty-fifth birthday, when he was killed in an automobile accident, but in that short period he became the most influential bassist of the last half of the twentieth century, and his echo continues in the work of Dave Holland, Neal Swainson, Eddie Gomez, Christian MacBride, and many more. In this he was like Jimmy Blanton, who influenced the bass in terms of its harmonic role and fleet lyrical solos and was dead at twenty-four, in his case of tuberculosis. One thinks too of Charlie Christian, who died at twenty-six but influenced probably every guitarist who came after him. He too succumbed to tuberculosis.

It was not only LaFaro's extraordinary technique that set him apart. He had a lyrical sensibility which reached its pinnacle in his work in the Bill Evans Trio of the early 1960s, a distinguished melodic gift that made his solos and contrapuntal conversations with Evans unique.

Bill's drummer during that period was Paul Motian. Later, Jack DeJohnette played drums with Bill. Jack told me:

"I guess the concept of the bass the way Scott played it was not so much unusual — people like Mingus were playing with the fingers before Scotty. You had Blanton. I think had Danny Richmond been a different kind of drummer, he might have had the kind of interplay with Mingus that you got with Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian. That combination of Bill, Paul, and Scotty shifted the emphasis of time from two and four. The way Paul played sort of colored time rather than stated time. As opposed to what Miles would do. So that they made it in such a way that when they did go into four-four, it was kind of a welcome change. Then they'd go back into broken time.

"I remember the effect it had on rhythm sections in Chicago, because I was at the time a pianist, playing with a bassist who also played cello. We would sit up nights late, listening to the trio records. I noticed the rhythm sections in Chicago started playing that way.

"I had a drummer with me named Art McKinney, who was doing things like Paul Motian and Tony Williams were doing. This whole concept of broken time freed up the rhythm sections. It created a dialogue in rhythm sections as opposed to just the solid rhythm section like Wynton Kelly and Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb.

"After that everybody followed that concept."

Bill Crow, himself one of the finest bassists, said:

"The big influences were Blanton, Oscar Pettiford, Ray Brown, Red Mitchell, and LaFaro, for my money. Charles Mingus was impressive, but I don't think too many bassists tried to emulate his playing. Israel Crosby knocked me out when I heard his first records, and later with Ahmad Jamal he was impressive. But the five I listed probably changed the way people played more than any others.

"I was at the Village Vanguard when the Bill Evans trio with Scotty first played there, and I remember how delighted Ray Brown was, sitting at the table next to mine. He kept saying, 'This kid has his own thing! Man, he really has his own thing!'"

Ray's widow, Cecilia, told pianist Mike Wofford that when Ray was teaching clinics, he put Scott LaFaro in his list of the top five bassists and innovators on the instrument, with Jimmy Blanton, Oscar Pettiford, Milt Hinton, and Paul Chambers.

Bill Crow continued: "The Bill Evans Trio found a new game to play: all three musicians agreed on the time center so completely that no one of them felt the need to be explicit about it. They could all dance around it, play with it, decorate it, ignore it, and the time was still solid among them. Scott opened up a whole new way of thinking about the role of the bass in the rhythm section."

A magnificent illustration of Bill's — and Jack DeJohnette's — point is found in the trio's recording of Johnny Carisi's *Israel*, in the 1961 Riverside album *Explorations*. After a chorus of the melody, they play a chorus of collective improvisation. No one is playing the time, not Motian (who plays brushes), not LaFaro, and not Bill. Yet you can feel the pulse at all times, so perfectly are they agreed on where it is. In the third chorus, Paul starts playing with sticks, and LaFaro goes into straight four. It is more than relief. Such is the swing that it will lift you off your chair. It is one of the most thrilling recordings in all of jazz. A footnote to this thought: after you have listened to this track, start it again immediately. You will find that the tempo has not changed by even a micro-beat. That was characteristic of Bill's playing, but obviously of Scott's and Paul's as well. A friend from Scott's high-school band days in Geneva, New York, said, "Scotty was a stickler with perfect pitch. He was also a stickler on rhythm — I accused him of having a metronome in his head. Whenever I listen to Scott's recordings, I'm certain of it."

LaFaro's use of a two-fingered right-hand technique to pluck the strings came not from Charles Mingus but from Red Mitchell. Earlier bass players plucked the strings with just the forefinger or, sometimes, the forefinger and middle

finger held together for strength, and often just a four-fingered grip in the left hand. Modern jazz bassists all use the classical left-hand configuration, with the index and pinky fingers outstretched and the middle fingers close together, but Red Mitchell was the primary influence in establishing the use of two fingers in the right hand, which tremendously increases facility.

Scott, according to his sister, always gave Red Mitchell credit for this development in his playing. Red told me a few years ago:

“It is the left brain that controls articulation. The right hand. That’s what the right hand does — articulate. The right brain controls spacial visualization, fantasy, forms, abstraction. That’s what the left hand has to do.

“Gary Peacock and Scott LaFaro were both protégés of mine. I remember one session in east L.A. when I showed them both this two-finger technique, which I had worked out in 1948 in Milwaukee, on a job there with Jackie Paris

“It’s a little harder than patting your head and rubbing your stomach. But it’s the same kind of problem. You have a tendency, if you go one-two one-two one-two with your fingers, and you want to go two-one two-one on the other hand, to hang up. You have to develop the independence. So that you can go one-two one-two one-two, or, even better rhythmically sometimes, two-one two-one two-one with the right hand and then random — you have to practice — fingering with your left hand so you can keep the right hand consistent and the left hand can go anywhere and not be hung up. When you get it down, the one hand doesn’t know what the other hand is doing.

“And then you use your weaknesses. As Miles and Dizzy both used their pauses between phrases. You use the unevenness of it later so that the accents are where you want them. The loud notes are where you want the accents.”

Bill Crow told me: “The funny thing is, Red developed that two-fingered system of plucking the bass before there was good amplification for the instrument. As a result, in the early years of his using it, you often couldn’t hear him very well in night clubs. On records and in concert halls you could hear the wonderful music he was playing. But he played very softly. You can’t pull the string as hard when you’re just plucking with the fingers. Most players up until then got strength from pressing the right thumb against the side of the fingerboard and pulling against that leverage with the forefinger. The two-finger system raises the hand above the fingerboard where, even with the thumb as a fulcrum, the pull isn’t as strong. But as soon as good amplification systems were invented for the bass, it became possible to change the setup putting the strings closer to the fingerboard,

and to pluck without pulling the strings so hard. That opened up a new technique that now has bass players playing with a velocity that was impossible in Blanton’s day. You win some and you lose some. Not pulling the string hard changes the tone of the instrument, and amplification won’t completely replace the tone quality of a richly vibrating instrument. I think George Mraz strikes the best balance I’ve heard: rich tone, wonderful technique.”

Charlie Haden, another brilliant bassist who was one of Scott’s friends, said: “Scotty never liked pickups — he wanted a real wood sound. Sometimes he would use a microphone wrapped in a towel wedged between the tailpiece and belly of the instrument, not in the bridge.”

Don Thompson, who is not only a fine pianist and vibes player but a superb bassist, said:

“Because they’ve got the amplifier, guys lower the strings, lower the action, and then they can play real fast. And they get all that stuff going for them. But, unfortunately, what you lose in a lot of cases is that actual sound. Because when you hear guys play live now, you’re not hearing the bass, you’re hearing the amplifier. A bass doesn’t sound like a bass any more. You’re hearing pre-amps and speakers and effects and every other darn thing.

“Scott LaFaro had a beautiful sound. It was a real bass sound. Charlie Haden’s sound on those old Ornette Coleman records, that’s a real bass sound. Ray Brown on the Oscar Peterson records, you were hearing the bass. Now you hardly ever do. It’s turned into something different. I don’t like it as much.

“A lot of bass players are missing the message of Scott LaFaro. Scotty had some chops. He figured out the top end of the bass. He could play fast arpeggios. He could play amazingly fast. Too many bass players, I think, just play fast. But they don’t hear the beauty of his melodies. They also don’t hear how supportive he was when he played behind Bill Evans. He played pretty busy sometimes, but I don’t think he ever seemed to get in the way or take the music away from Bill. Some other people, when you listen, you wonder: Who’s playing here, is it bass or piano or what? With some guys the bass is actually distracting from the music. You can’t really tell what’s going on in the music because the bass is either too loud or too busy or playing too hard. The guy’s not playing what the music needs, he’s just playing what he wants to play. The music needs something from the bass, and if you don’t play that, it doesn’t matter what else you play, you’ve screwed it all up.

“Scotty managed to play the foundation and play a bunch of other stuff too and he never got in Bill Evans’ way at all.”

Chuck Israels, who replaced LaFaro with Bill Evans and

was yet another friend of Scotty's, is in complete accord: "People have misused Scotty by saying 'Oh my God, it's possible to play fast.' And then they play fast but the content is missing."

One magazine writer called Scott the most influential bassist of the last fifty years, and I think that's true. Incredibly, his reputation rests almost completely on only four albums. Although he recorded with other groups, his importance emanates from the three sessions with Bill for Riverside Records and the four albums that came out of them, all produced by the company's president, Orrin Keepnews.

Bill recalled the beginning of that trio:

"When I left Miles Davis to form a trio in the fall of '58, Miles tried to help me get off the ground. He called some agents, and I asked (bassist) Jimmy Garrison and (drummer) Kenny Dennis. They said they'd like to try, so we had a few rehearsals and I got a booking at Basin Street East, which was a pretty heavy club.

"We were opposite Benny Goodman, who was returning to the scene after a long absence. It was a triumphant return — the place was jammed the whole time and they were paying him a tremendous price, chauffeured limousine, the whole thing. But they treated us as the intermission group, really rotten — a big dressing room and steak dinners for Benny's band, but we couldn't even get a Coke without paying a buck and a quarter.

"Kenny and Jimmy couldn't put up with this scene. It really got bad. In a two-week engagement, I think I went through six bass players and four drummers. Philly Joe Jones was on the job a few nights and began to get pretty heavy applause. So the boss said, 'Don't let your drummer take solos any more' and turned the mikes off on us."

Goodman was notorious for this. Whereas Woody Herman reveled in the applause his sidemen got, Goodman would not tolerate it, and would remove those solos by others that generated excitement. This is recounted in the extended article about the Goodman band's Russian tour, written by Bill Crow, who was on that tour, and published in the *Jazzletter* in 1985.

Bill Evans continued: "Well, I was quite friendly with Paul Motian. We had been making sessions together. And Scott LaFaro was working around the corner with a singer — I forget who — and dropped into Basin Street a couple of times. Anyway, it ended up where Scott and Paul were the final guys.

"All I had to offer was some kind of reputation and prestige that enabled me to have a record contract, which didn't pay much, but we could make records — not enough to live on, but enough to get a trio experienced and moving. I

found these two musicians were not only compatible, but would be willing to dedicate themselves to a musical goal, a trio goal. To make an agreement to put down other work for anything that might come up for the trio."

The first engagement he obtained for this trio was at the Village Vanguard, owned by Max Gordon who, I always sensed, adored Bill. The club itself, on lower Seventh Avenue, was in a basement reached by a steep flight of stairs. It was shaped like a slice of pie, with the bandstand by the south wall. My memory is that it was mostly in red. It had very good acoustics, and I can think of no club in jazz history that, over the years, presented so distinguished a roster of great musicians. It was Bill's New York home, and I spent numberless evenings there with him, sitting back at the bar when I was alone, or at a front table when I was with his manager (and later, record producer) Helen Keane, to whom I introduced him. Soon after that Orrin Keepnews produced the first of the albums with that group, *Portrait In Jazz*, which reached the market in March 1960.

Orrin told me, "There were two studio sessions that produced *Portrait in Jazz* and *Explorations*, and an all-day session at the Village Vanguard that produced two albums, *Waltz for Debby* and *Sunday at the Village Vanguard*."

I asked Orrin, "During the sessions, did you have any feeling of their historical importance?"

"Of course not," he answered. "I do remember what went on during the *Explorations* session. Bill and Scott were fighting constantly. Scott was asking for more money, because he didn't want to run the risk of going on the road with a junky and getting stranded somewhere." Orrin laughed. "So you could say there was a lot of creative tension on that session. Years later, Bill surprised me by telling me how happy he was with that album."

Scott was always angry with Bill over his heroin addiction. So was I.

Explorations was released in March, 1961. Four months later Scott LaFaro was dead. Bill refused to play in public for nearly a year. He was shattered by the death, and guilty over the thought of all they might have accomplished during their brief time together had he not been strung out. He told me so. He worked with some superb bassists in the ensuing years, among them Eddie Gomez and Marc Johnson, but there was something he had with Scott LaFaro for which he yearned ever after.

Though he is known primarily through the albums with Evans, LaFaro played with a great range of jazz musicians during his short career, including Chet Baker, Paul Bley, Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Stan Getz, Hampton Hawes, Freddie Hubbard, Cal Tjader, Booker Little, Bobby

Timmons, Victor Feldman, and Herb Geller. Feldman and Geller loomed large in his life.

Scott LaFaro was born on April 3, 1936, the eldest of five children. Next in line was his sister Helene, who later married a Cuban-born engineer and artist (and a very good one) named Manny Fernandez. Helene was followed by Linda, Lisa, and Leslie. She and Scott were particularly close.

A few months ago, she and Manny paid me a visit, bringing along Herb Geller, with whom I had struck up a friendship within the previous few months. Herb has lived since 1962 in Hamburg, Germany. He has had a highly successful European career, but his absence has left American jazz fans largely unaware of what a magnificent alto saxophonist he is.

Manny has a vivid memory of the kind of ear Scott had. He said, "I had an old 1955 Jaguar. I was in the garage trying to tune the car. I was messing around with a timing light to get the spark right. And Scotty had his hand on the fender. He said, 'It's tuned now.' I looked at him. He said, 'There's no vibration now. You've got it right on.' I was shocked. Just by touching the car he could tell."

Helene says: "Scotty and I were born in Irvington, New Jersey, which is a suburb of Newark, but my mother and father were born in Geneva." Geneva is in a verdant agricultural area of Upstate New York, in the Finger Lakes region.

Scott was named Rocco Scott LaFaro, Scott from his mother's maiden name. Helen Lucille Scott was twelve years Joe LaFaro's junior. They married, with the approval of both families, eleven days after she turned eighteen.

Helene continued: "My dad went to the Ithaca Conservatory of Music when he was twelve. He studied under Fritz Kreisler's professor. It later became a credentialed college. It's still one of the major schools in the east to study music, like Eastman in Rochester."

It was founded in 1892, added a drama course within five years, and continued expanding.

"My dad," Helene said, "was eighteen when he had finished six years of the Ithaca Conservatory.

"It was the middle of the roaring twenties. My dad played with Paul Whiteman, Rudy Vallee, and both the Dorsey Brothers. He was pals with George Van Eps. He was with CBS studio orchestras in New York. In World War II, work was just non-existent. My dad was too old for military service, and he had flat feet. It would have been better for his career if he had gone into one of the service bands, like many of the guys he worked with. They kept their networks of connections, and all ended up better than my dad did, but finally he went back to his home town. He had a society band there at a private club all the rest of his life."

His father in turn was an immigrant: the family's origins

lay in Calabria, which is in the toe of the Italian boot. Calabrese have a reputation among Italians for being stubborn, and Scott LaFaro was all of that.

"My dad told us we had to appreciate everybody's music. He wouldn't allow us to make fun of hillbilly music or anything like that. He said it has a value, because it's an expression of the people. He also had this other side. He said, 'If you can't do something really well, do the world a favor and don't do it.' Both of those things came through to Scotty and myself. I think that some of that intolerance that Scott had came out from my dad. My sons have the same thing, so maybe it's a familial thing: an impatience with people who don't see things immediately. Just aren't as sharp as they should be.

"Geneva High School was a really terrific school. It still has a pretty good music program. In junior high you had to take music. You had a choice. You could take general music or you could take an instrument to prepare for the high school orchestra. I took general music. That was real basic theory, sitting there and singing to show you could read the notes. But Scotty thought, I'll take an instrument.

"There wasn't really any choice. It was whatever the band director was going to be needing. He would tell the kids, 'Once you get into high school, you can switch over to what you want.' Scott ended up playing bass clarinet. He was very very good at that too right away, and by the time he was in eighth grade he was invited to be in the high school band. They had theory and advanced theory. Scott was in, I think, three different choruses as a tenor. He was in Varsity Chorus, Boys' Chorus. We both had to join the Presbyterian church because the organist was so fantastic. My father said, 'You have to go there, you have to sing.' When it came to religion, our family always went wherever the music was best. Sometimes we'd be at the cantor's Friday night for the Shabbat dinner because he would sing the service. At the Presbyterian church, there was this fabulous organist that my father just couldn't stop talking about. Scotty sang tenor and I was a second soprano.

"At the high school, they had a concert band, and marching band, and orchestra and jazz orchestra. Godfrey Brown was Scotty's mentor. He kind of gave Scotty the discipline that my father was loath to do. He was never going to force music on him, but Godfrey was very exacting and stern and he and Scotty had a great relationship and admiration. He really made Scotty get concentrated on things.

"Scott had four serious girlfriends, and I've got the things he wrote to them. He told each of them, 'You're very important but you're not music.' That kind of ended some relationships." Helene laughed. She continued:

"In the early years, he really was only interested in being a sax player. He wanted to be the next Zoot Sims and Parker and everybody rolled into one. And he was going to be better than them all. And that's how he left high school, thinking that that's what he was going to do. He started on bass clarinet in junior high and then went to tenor saxophone and the only reason he took clarinet was that when he was going to go to Ithaca College, you couldn't major in sax.

"Because he was a music major, Scott had to take a string instrument and percussion and piano. The girl who was a bass player in the orchestra showed him a few things, and when he talked to my dad about string instruments, he told Scott, 'Well with the bass, when you're at home, you can gig with me at the club.' That's how he decided that for strings, it would be the bass.

"He used to play basketball at the Y, and he cut his lip. He had a few stitches, and his lip hung. He thought it was going to affect his embouchure for saxophone. He was going to overcome all that. But the minute he touched the bass, that was it. My dad had him take a few lessons with a bass player named Nick D'Angelo. He was from Pennsylvania, but when he was in the Air Force up there, he liked the town, and after he went to Eastman, he got a job teaching music, and he's still doing it today. When Scotty was just a month or so into the bass, it was, 'My God! What have I been doing all this other time?' I was talking to his teacher only a few weeks ago, and he said, 'Teaching Scotty was like a Hollywood script because it was from A to Z in only three months.'

"Scotty was there all that year, and he went back for the beginning of the sophomore year. And Nick D'Angelo had a buddy who was playing with Buddy Morrow. His buddy called and said he was leaving the job, and asked Nick if he wanted it. He said, 'No, I enjoy teaching. But I'm giving lessons to a kid who's really pretty good.' Nick told me he covered the phone and said to Scotty, 'Hey, do you want a job?' And Scotty said, 'Well, do you think I can do it?' Nick said, 'It's a dance band. It's not going to be very hard for you.'

"And so he set it up for Scotty to have an audition with Buddy Morrow. It was only about three weeks into the fall term of the sophomore year.'

"How old was he then?" Herb asked.

"He was nineteen. So he auditioned for Buddy Morrow and he called home and said, 'I got the job.' And he was off. He'd been playing bass for about a year and three months. That's the first time he traveled across to California, the first time he saw the West Coast."

In New York City, in the fall of 1956, LaFaro auditioned for Chet Baker, and joined Baker's group.

Early in 1957, Scott met Victor Feldman, who would become one of his closest friends. In May of that year, the Chet Baker group went to Los Angeles, and played a gig there. The pianist on that job was Don Friedman, the drummer Larance Marable, and Richie Kamuca the saxophonist. Friedman said:

"Scotty and I worked [that] gig at Peacock Alley . . . [It] was for a week. As I recall, Chet didn't finish the week. The cops were looking for him and he literally escaped from the club and never came back. I don't remember whether we finished the week without him."

Scott was stranded, which experience may have contributed to his wariness about heroin addicts. And Baker was one of the worst. His habit destroyed his career and eventually his life. He was found in May 1988 close to a hotel in Amsterdam. Whether he fell or was pushed or thrown no one knows, but the underworld of Holland is notoriously among the most vicious in the world, and it is widely believed that he was murdered over a narcotics debt.

During the Chet Baker engagement in Philadelphia, Scotty expressed his dismay at Baker's heroin use. He told Helene that of all the musicians he had met thus far, the one who puzzled him the most was Gerry Mulligan. He couldn't understand how anyone of Gerry's intellect could get caught up in heroin addiction. But intellect has nothing to do with it. As it happens, Gerry was a very close friend of mine and his drug habit, which he successfully broke, is something I discussed with him. Indeed, I discussed it with a lot of addicts and former addicts, including Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Arnold Ross, Bill Evans (on *many* occasions), Howard McGhee, and J.J. Johnson, who told me he found it easier to give up heroin than cigarettes, a not uncommon experience. I became interested in the question of heroin use, because it had been epidemic in the jazz world, when I became editor of *Down Beat* in 1959. The magazine's owner, John Maher, wouldn't admit there even was such a problem, but there was. And then Art Pepper got a third-time conviction in California and was sent to prison for life; and Bill Rubinstein and J.J. Johnson were denied "cabaret cards" permitting them to play in places in New York City where liquor was sold. I raised so much editorial hell about this that, I have been told, I was partially responsible for the abolition of the cabaret cards. But it was the Art Pepper case that really bothered me, and I read every possible book on heroin use, including DeRopp's *Drugs and the Mind*, which I can no longer find. And I devoted an entire issue of the magazine to the drug problem.

I came to a conclusion. All men (and women) who are operating at the highest levels of their own intelligence crave

to expand beyond its limitations, and some take to psychotropic substances to help them achieve this. All such persons sense that there is *more* out there. Within a few years, I am certain, we will have means to lift the level of human intelligence to new and very high levels. But we are not there yet, and the substances we use in our aspirations to it are not efficient, and some of them, such as crystal meth, are devastating in their physical ravages.

I have never known a jazz musician who had quit drugs who didn't assert that they don't help your playing. I am not sure they are right. Alcohol is one of the finest intellectual lubricants known to our species, which is why so many of our greatest writers have been very heavy drinkers, from Shakespeare (by all the evidence) on through to Faulkner, Steinbeck, Dorothy Parker, and many more. And since improvising music is an extraordinarily dangerous thing to do, I'm not surprised that some musicians have resorted to drugs to lower the inhibitions, get the self out of the way, and let the conceptions flow from somewhere within.

And Scott worked for three heroin users: Stan Getz, Chet Baker, and Bill Evans. No wonder he was leery of them.

In the summer of 1957, Scott worked at Howard Rumsey's Lighthouse, and recorded for the first time with Stan Getz. Whether Stan was using or not using at the time, I can't guess. The album was *Stan Getz with Cal Tjader* on Fantasy. In January of the next year, Scott played on *The Arrival of Victor Feldman*. He returned to New York early in 1959, received the *Down Beat* Critics Poll New Star Award, and then in May recorded an album of songs from the musical *Gypsy* with Herb Geller. Helene recalled:

"When he was with Chet Baker, we were going back to the hotel in Philadelphia, and he said, 'I'm so mad at dad. Why didn't he make me play strings? Think how much farther ahead I could have been.' But the moment Scotty got really interested in music when he was playing the horn, my dad did a lot of training with him. He would sit at the piano with him and play chords. He worked with Scotty a lot when he asked. But it was always when Scotty wanted it. He never forced it on his kids.

"It was the same with Victor Feldman and his three boys. If they wanted to take lessons, if they showed the interest, fine. Because Victor was touring the continent when he was seven years old. And like my dad, he wanted to have a normal family life, because they didn't have a childhood themselves. And that's when Victor stopped traveling and started doing all the studio stuff. He was playing golf with music contractors in order to be able to stay in town with his family.

"It became apparent when he was very young that Scotty

had absolute pitch. We started playing piano. It's the reasons that I don't play any instrument. He knew even at a very early age that I wasn't doing something right. There were only three times in my whole life that Scott was less than kind to me, and two of them had to do with the piano. As soon as we started having the initial piano lessons, he just started being sensitive to that. He said, 'Stop that noise!' and closed the keyboard cover on my hands.

"Scotty wasn't particularly crazy about the idea of going to college to start with. He wanted to go out and start playing.

"My dad told him he'd better get an education because he might not be able to make a living as a musician. I went to the college when I was back east recently and got Scotty's records. I found out that as soon as he took up the bass, he started not attending the clarinet classes. Almost anything besides the ear training. And I know from the girlfriend he had there and from the girl who was the bass player that that was all he did. He wouldn't even go swimming because he was cultivating the callus on his fingers. He would play until his hands were bloody.

"He was really very driven, and he had a real anxiety."

One day in 1957, Helene's father came into their doctor's office, where she worked, complaining of chest pains. The doctor did an EKG and told Helene to take her father directly to the hospital. The hospital was only about a mile away, but it seemed an infinity of distance to her. Her father took some deep breaths in the car, then slumped. When she reached the emergency entrance and summoned doctors, they told her he had died in the car.

Helene said: "When my dad died was the first time he expressed his anxiety to me. Scotty said, 'That does it. I know I'll be dead at twenty-five.' He said that, standing in our driveway. He said it just that casually, kicking stones in the driveway. It was kind of a weird thing. On the wall of the house that we had there was my father's violin bridge and Scotty's bridge."

"How old was your father?" I asked.

"Fifty-one. Scotty was twenty-one."

"He *predicted* that, that he'd be dead at twenty-five?" Herb Geller said. He and I were equally shocked.

"Yes. He was going with a girl named Maggie Ryan, but she married Bob Denver, who played Dobie Gillis in television in the early sixties. I'm still in touch with her. She was working in the production office of that show, which is where she met Bob Denver. She asked Scotty if there was ever going to be anything more than being the girlfriend of a jazz musician, and he expressed to her that he wasn't going

to be around that long. He expressed it to me more than once. I've always had a thing that people know things about themselves.

"It really bothered him. He had so much that he wanted to get out, and he felt really compressed by time."

After their father's death, Scott and Helene decided that the family should be moved to Los Angeles. Scott had met Herb Geller's wife Lorraine, the house pianist at the Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach. They had a house in the Hollywood Hills and invited Scott to use their spare bedroom until his family arrived. Herb said Scott practiced constantly, always facing into a corner of the room (for acoustic reasons, I surmise).

Helene arrived in early October and she and her brother moved into the upper floor apartment of a hillside house on High Tower Drive, not far from the Hollywood Bowl. Their balcony gave them a sweeping view of the city, but the smog bothered her.

"I think the thing with Scotty, which started in high school," Helene said, "was that people thought he was aloof because he became so focused on music. People who got to know him found him really humorous. He loved Victor Feldman's sense of humor, which was very dry. By then I was living in Los Angeles with Scotty, and after a lot of gigs, Victor would come over, and we would sit on the floor, just rolling with laughter. Scotty would be always pulling jokes on Victor.

"I think the aloofness was only because he was concentrating on other things. In high school, people used to say, 'He only talks to Ann and you.' His high school girlfriend was a girl named Anna Marie Paculli, and I'm still friends with her. He felt just so overtaken by music and what was in his head. He felt compulsive about getting things out."

I told her, "Bill had that kind of concentration. I remember once he and I were at Warren Bernhardt's apartment. We were listening to the Alban Berg violin concerto, and carrying on a three-way conversation, and Bill was writing out the trio's bass book. Somebody was always stealing the bass book, and we didn't have the photocopying we do today. And Bill would laboriously write it out again. And with all that going on, he was still able to concentrate on the bass book. I think that putting his head down almost into the piano had to do with contact and concentration. Glenn Gould did it too."

Helene said, "I would think, 'Don't they get backache?'"

Herb said, "I got a phone call from Scott, that he had just returned to Los Angeles. He'd been touring with Stan Kenton's band. They were playing a one-nighter somewhere, and a young man came up to Stan and said he was a drummer, and his lifetime ambition was to play with Stan Kenton's band. And Stan said, 'Okay, you start in two weeks.'

"After about the third night, Scott told Stan Kenton, 'Either he goes or I go.' Stan said, 'Well I'm going to keep the drummer.' The last engagement before Scott was to leave, they were in the middle of the country somewhere, like Omaha, Nebraska, where it was the same distance to either coast. And Stan said to him, 'I'll pay your way home. Where do you want to go, New York or Los Angeles?' Scott said, 'I'll go back to Los Angeles.' And then he told me, 'As soon as I was approaching the plane, I said, 'I made the wrong decision; I should have gone to New York.'

"So he arrived in Los Angeles, telephoned me, and said he was back and available for work. I said, 'I'm leaving tomorrow morning for New York. I'm joining Benny Goodman's band for a tour.' He said, 'Do you think he might need a bass player?' I said, 'I'll check it out.' He said, 'I'm willing to go there on a minute's notice.'

"It was my second tour with Benny. I said to Benny, 'Are you set on a bass player?'

"He said, 'I've been auditioning bass players. Tommy Potter is the last one.'

"I said, 'If you're not happy, I know this very wonderful bass player in Los Angeles.' He said, 'I'll keep that in mind.'

"After the rehearsal, Benny said, 'Can you get in touch with your friend and have him here tomorrow?' Benny was very critical. He didn't like Tommy's intonation, and his reading wasn't very good. So I called Scotty, and he said, 'Yeah, I'll be there tomorrow,' and he was. I told him, 'Benny is very conservative, don't do any of those fast things you can do. Play what's written there.' We rehearsed. Benny always did some quartet numbers. It was really great. Scott was being a bit on the conservative side. I watched Benny listening to Scotty, and he gave me a thumbs up. He really liked Scotty's playing, so we were happy.

"The end of the rehearsal, it was Scotty's first night in New York and my second. And I said, 'Scotty, did you ever hear Bill Evans in person?' He said, 'No.' Bill was playing in some club with a trio. Before they started, I said hello to Bill and I introduced him to Scotty and I said, 'He's bass player from Los Angeles and a very very fine player.' And Bill said, 'Do you want to sit in on the second set?'

"So he played with him.

"The next day we went on tour with Benny. It was Benny Goodman's band, the Ahmad Jamal Trio with Israel Crosby on bass and Vernel Fournier on drums, and Dakota Staton.

"We did our six weeks tour of one-nighters and we came back to New York. There was a telegram waiting for Scott: Bill wanted him to join his group.

"My big contribution to jazz."

Herb asked Helene, "Who were his influences on bass?"

Who did he used to listen to?"

She replied, "The very first bassist that he heard live was Leroy Vinnegar, in our home town. He played a club there with Dizzy Gillespie. Leroy used to hum when he played, and Scotty acquired that habit. The first record that he bought in Geneva was Oscar Pettiford. And he liked Mingus and Paul Chambers and Percy Heath. That's who he was listening to in high school. But he always remarked about the record collection *you* had. He said he learned so much by listening to the records Herb had."

"Well," Herb said, "I had all the records I liked. I guess our tastes were similar."

Helene said, "Around the house, he listened to the records my dad had. He listened to Tatum and George Shearing. My dad was just nuts about them. Tatum we listened to a lot."

I said, Scott kept his strings quite low, right?"

"Yeah," Helene said. "Herb knows about that."

Herb said, "He was the first one who really did that. But he still got a hell of a sound. The conventional wisdom is that the higher the bridge, the bigger the sound."

"He lowered it because that increased his speed. Everybody does it now. All the good young jazz players play with lower strings. Scotty — as far as *I* know — was the first one to really do that."

Helene said, "Today, so many of them do."

Herb said, "He had to compromise in one sense. You aren't going to get as loud a sound, but you're getting something else."

Helene said, "Even when he was with Buddy Morrow he used to get in trouble. Eventually his girlfriend, Suzanne Stewart, came on the band as the vocalist. They were in a hotel room in Chicago, and he was practicing. And there was a knock on the door and it was Percy Heath, and he said, 'So why aren't you playing the guitar? What is it you're doing here?'"

Much has been made of the supposed good looks of Chet Baker, including assertions that he could have been a movie star. His flat face put me in mind of the kind you would see at the bar in a Kentucky road house; but to each his own. Scott LaFaro, on the other hand, really was strikingly handsome. I used to wonder about the origin of the name: grammatically, it fit none of the Latin languages. But it turns out that it is one of those names distorted by some forgotten immigration officer. The name is Italian, and since the article must agree with the noun in all languages that I know of (except English), it really should be LoFaro, according to Helene. It means "lighthouse", and in French it's *le phare*. But only his father was Italian; his mother was of Scottish, Irish and English

descent; to me Scott looked pretty WASPY, with short-cut slightly curly hair. He was six feet tall, thus the same height more or less as Bill. Bill said:

"Scott was quite a good looking guy — young, vital. His hair was slightly curly, blondish-Italian but blond. Fair skin. He was intense in experiencing anything but bullshit, not wanting to waste time. And yet selecting values that others might not think worth their attention. He was discriminating about where quality might be. He didn't overlook traditional playing, realizing it could contribute a great deal to his ultimate product."

"Scott was in life right up to the hilt, but wasn't going to mess with indulging in experiments with drugs. Once in a while he might smoke a little pot or something but it didn't mean anything. He was physically a clean and pure kind of cat"

"I was very happy when after the Vanguard date we were listening through stereo headphones, and he said, 'You know, we didn't think too much of it while we were doing it, but these two weeks were exceptional.' He said something to the effect that 'I've finally made a record that I'm happy with.'

"Scott's playing had evolved tremendously. My first impression of him . . . was that he was bubbling out almost like a gusher. Ideas were rolling on top of each other; he could barely handle it. It was like a bucking horse."

"I think what happened during our time together was that the format, the very pure, strict, logical kind of discipline that the trio worked with — though there was all the freedom within that structure to do whatever he wanted — it gave him firmer control over that creative gusher."

"The most marvelous thing is that he and Paul and I somehow agreed without speaking about the type of freedom and responsibility we wanted to bring to bear upon the music, to get the development we wanted without putting repressive restriction upon ourselves."

"I don't know — Scott was just an incredible guy about knowing where your next thought was going to be. I wondered, 'How did he know I was going there?' And he was probably feeling the same way."

"But the mechanical problems are something else — the physical, theoretical, and analytical problems involved in playing together intuitively within a set structure. We understood music on pretty much the same basis. But at that time nobody else was opening trio music in quite that way, letting the music move from an internalized beat, instead of laying it down all the time explicitly."

Paul Motian said: "Bill and I had worked together, for Tony Scott and for Don Elliott. But with Scotty we became

a three-person voice — one voice, and that was the ground-breaking point. I loved Scotty, man. One thing that knocked me out was that his rate of improvement was so fast. He was practicing and playing all the time. Also, Bill and I were both sort of inward types, and Scotty just clonked you over the head.

“I remember the last time we played the Vanguard. I was packing up the drums and as we were leaving, we all said, ‘Let’s really try to work more often.’ Because we were really enthusiastic about the music. It seemed we had hit a really good peak and we wanted to continue on from there.”

That final recording is available on a three-CD boxed set from Riverside, distributed through Fantasy. Orrin Keepnews wrote in his notes to the 2003 reissue that when he learned that the trio was booked to play the Village Vanguard for two weeks beginning June 1, 1961, he made immediate plans to record them. He wrote:

“Somewhat unexpectedly, I had no problem getting Evans to agree — he was entirely aware of what this trio was creating, and undoubtedly even more worried than I about how fragile their unity might be. It was realistic to plan to work on Sunday; the Vanguard routinely scheduled two matinee sets that day in addition to a standard evening program

“Almost from the very first moments of recording, it was impossible to ignore the importance of these performances. And that, in itself, was rather unexpected. Bill Evans, as a human being, was always just about as introverted as he sounded. He was not yet sufficiently widely popular to provide substantial audiences at the two Sunday matinee sets or the last one that night, and was not yet likely to interact dramatically with an audience. There are times during these recorded sets when you hear glasses clinking and almost feel you are overhearing conversations at the tables I intend to continue to think back on this day as anticipating its own eventual immortality.”

Paul Motian told an interviewer for the PBS radio show *Fresh Air*:

“Bill was really particular. If the result wasn’t top-notch, really great and satisfying for him, he wouldn’t want it released. I’m sure he would be against a lot of the stuff that is being released now, second takes, out takes, and that stuff. He did really think of himself sometimes as not really playing great. I remember one time at the Vanguard, we were playing something and it was really good and it was moving along, and all of a sudden it seemed like it took a nose dive. He just didn’t feel like playing any more or something. After the set I asked him what happened. It just seemed like you weren’t into it any more. He said, ‘I heard some people laughing at the

bar. I thought they were laughing at me.’

“And another time he said to me, ‘Gee, I don’t know if what I’m doing is real. Sometimes I think I’m a phony.’ He did say things like that that made you think he was low in self-esteem.”

I can support Paul’s observations. Bill once said to me, “I had to work harder at music than most cats, because you see, man, I don’t have very much talent.”

Bill recalled the bass that Scotty owned, an exceptional instrument, three-quarter size, which Scott bought on the recommendation of Red Mitchell. Made by Abraham Prescott in Concord, New Hampshire, around 1801, it became part of the LaFaro legend. Bill said: “It had a marvelous sustaining and resonating quality. He’d be playing in the hotel room and hit a quadruple stop that was a harmonious sound, and then set that bass down on its side and it seemed the sound just rang and rang for so long.”

Bill marveled at Scott’s ability to play in the upper register, saying, “Other guys would hit a couple of high notes, and then come down. But Scott made it part of the total plan. As young as he was, and only having played for [a few] years, he brought a great, mature organization to what he was doing.”

All of that is evident in those Village Vanguard recordings of June 25, 1961. He had only ten more days to live. Stan Getz had booked him to play the Newport Jazz Festival on the upcoming Fourth of July weekend. The rest of the rhythm section included Steve Kuhn on piano and Roy Haynes on drums.

Scott’s mother and sisters were living in Los Angeles. Helene recalled, “Scotty and I had relocated the family out here. And the guy who had had a lease option to buy our house in Geneva was vacillating. My mom really needed the money, so Scotty said, ‘Well, I’ll swing by and see him, and see if I can get him to make a decision.’ We talked to him on the third, but he said he was going to hang around for another day. So that’s why he went back to Geneva. The holiday, the Fourth of July, was Tuesday. The irony is that on the Monday, a letter arrived from these people that settled the affair. I tried to reach Scotty, but that was in the day before cel phones. I wanted to tell him, ‘Don’t bother, go back down to the city to see Gloria.’

“He went out with a buddy to hear some music in a small town close to there, where a friend of theirs was house sitting. They had a really good stereo and a good record collection.” The house was in Warsaw, ninety miles west of Geneva. Pianist Gap Mangione, brother of trumpeter Chuck Mangione, was there. He knew Scott only slightly.

Mangione later recalled: "They were pretty blasted, so I said, 'Stay a while.' But Frank (Scott's friend) and the lady went off, and Scott and I stayed in the living room and drank coffee, listened to records, and talked. We played an album by Chet Baker, and I remember one ironic thing Scott said: 'There's one of America's greatest tragedies. Chet could have been as successful as Miles Davis. But instead he gets himself into drugs and into jail and there goes that.'"

It occurs to me that Scott was probably thinking about Bill and wondering about their future together.

"After two or three hours," Mangione continued, "Scott was a lot straighter, but he was very tired. But when the others returned, he insisted on driving back, despite our efforts to have them stay and rest. So Scott and Frank got into the car — it was a huge Chrysler, Scott's bass was in the trunk — and they drove out, taking a side road, Route 20. Later on I heard they hit a tree. They both died."

Helene said, "Scott had driven nine hours from Newport and swam all afternoon at my aunt's house, which was on Seneca Lake. He really hadn't been to bed for a day and a half. And he fell asleep at the wheel."

The car went 188 feet on the shoulder of the eastbound lane of Route 5-20 before hitting a tree and bursting into flames.

In a 1996 article for the journal of the International Society of Bassists, Scott's friend from their high school days, Robert Wooley, wrote:

"The tree that he hit was in the front yard of Joan Martin, who was the pianist with our dance band. She still lives there, and, speaking with her recently, she said she thinks of Scott every time she looks at that tree."

Helene said: "We got a phone call about two o'clock in the morning. It was from Gloria Gabriel, the girl he was going with. Her dad was Filipino and her mother Italian. She was a Broadway dancer. She was one of the original children in *The King and I*. He met her in New York. I answered the telephone, and I really didn't understand what she was saying. It took me a while, because she was hysterical. She kept saying, 'He's dead, he's dead.' Ever since then, I don't like getting calls in the middle of the night. That did it for me."

Paul Motian got a call from Bill in the middle of that night. Bill told him Scott was dead. He thought he was dreaming and went back to sleep.

When the word spread of Scott's death, it was said that his Prescott bass had been destroyed in the fire. This is not correct; but it was badly damaged.

George Duvivier met Scott in April, 1960, and recognized the incredible scope of the younger man's talent. He took

Scott to meet Samuel Kolstein, who repaired basses. Kolstein's son Barrie wrote a memoir of that meeting published in the Spring 2004 issue of *Bass Line*, the magazine of the International Society of Bassists. He wrote:

"I was nine years of age when the wonderful George Duvivier brought Scotty to my father's house and shop in Merrick, New York Scott had recently acquired his small Prescott bass through the efforts of his close friend Red Mitchell. Red had found both his Lowendahl bass with the famous cut-away in the shoulder, and the three-quarter-sized Prescott while in California. Red felt the Lowendahl was perfect for his own needs and the Prescott was ideal for what Scotty was looking for. He immediately contacted Scotty about the smaller Prescott. Scotty made the purchase and brought it back to New York.

"Scott soon realized that while the Prescott was dimensionally ideal, tonally it was not. While in collaboration with George Duvivier, this problem surfaced. George was a lifelong client and a virtual member of my family. He suggested to Scotty that they make a trip to see Sam Kolstein, and ask him to evaluate the bass and see what could be done to improve its tonal and playing qualities.

"George arrived with Scotty, and in his deep robust voice said, 'Sam, I have a young man I want you to meet.' Even before Sam could walk out to greet Scott for the first time, he heard the kind of playing coming from the showroom that he had never heard before. Sam looked at George and simply said, 'Who is that and what is that?' You have to understand, this was in the late fifties, and even by today's standards, Scotty's playing would turn heads. But back in those years, this style of playing was unheard of and unique in every aspect. George look at my father and said, 'Let's go meet this young man.'

"As Sam told me many times, Scott was . . . a kid in a candy store, playing on every bass he could lay his hands upon. It was an immediate mutual admiration between Dad and Scott.

"Dad . . . told Scotty that he would take care of anything it would take to make his Prescott bass right, and that Scott should not even worry about the costs.

"The work went on for several months and the bass was fully restored. When Scott got his Prescott bass back, it was what he hoped for and the bass became an extension of this brilliant young bassist."

On another occasion, Barrie Kolstein wrote, "The success of the restoration can be attested to by the quality of sound produced on Scott's last and perhaps most acclaimed recording, *Live at the Village Vanguard*. . . ."

Kolstein said that for all practical purposes, the bass was

destroyed in the crash. He wrote:

“Scotty’s mother offered [it] to Sam. My father wanted [it] and did purchase the bass in total disarray, promising Mrs. LaFaro that [it] would be resurrected. But Sam never had the heart to restore the bass. I think this was due to his emotional connection with Scotty and the sense of a deep, profound loss that stayed with him after Scotty’s passing.

“In 1986, the ISB [International Society of Bassists] announced its next convention would be held at UCLA in California and dedicated to the memory of Scotty. I went to my father and asked his permission to do the restoration on the LaFaro Prescott that we had stored for twenty-five years. Sam was very pleased at the prospect of seeing the bass returned to playing condition in time for the convention in the summer of 1988.

“The restoration was quite arduous, but over a year and a half, I accomplished the work. I know that it pleased my father, and I can only assume that the work would have pleased Scotty as well.”

For the past thirty-one years, Scott’s — and Helene’s — alma mater, Geneva High School, has given the Scott LaFaro Memorial Award to a graduating student with a serious dedication to the school and its music program. It is a stipend to help with college costs.

When, early last year, the school contacted Helene to ask permission to dedicate a spring concert to Scotty, she learned that the school did not currently own an acoustic bass.

“My three sisters and I,” she said, “just found it appalling and decided to right the situation.

“Working with Barrie Kolstein, we arranged to have a new acoustic bass presented to the music department as a surprise at the end of the concert. It is a DiVacenza with Busseto corners, similar to the design of Scotty’s Prescott . . .

“Since I could not be there to make the presentation, I had my friend, and Scotty’s mentor’s daughter, Gail Brown Kirk, present the gift with another of Scotty’s old band mates, Al Davids, who still lives in Geneva.

“Needless to say, they were all pretty surprised and delighted and the music department director has a couple of students working on the instrument now.”

I once told Gerry Mulligan that he and I must be just about the only WASPs in the music business. He laughed and said, “Speak for yourself. I’m an Irish Catholic.” Since he didn’t practice religion, I asked him on another occasion if he *felt* Catholic. He said, “No, but I do feel Irish.” And I laughed in turn and told him that all his solos sounded like *I Met Her in the Garden Where the Praties Grow*. He told me in turn that

Judy Holiday, listening to Zoot Sims, would say, “There he goes, playing that Barry Fitzgerald tenor.” And she laughed like Barry Fitzgerald. Zoot was of course Irish. (And Gerry was part German.)

I began keeping mental note of national origins in white jazz musicians. There are remarkably few of actual English ancestry. And those of other origins all tend to play in styles influenced by their family origins. No one ever played in a more Jewish style than, at times, Artie Shaw, and you can hear such influence in Al Cohn and Stan Getz. The Italians in America tend to play in a lyrical melodic manner, as witness Mike Renzi, Guido Basso, and Frank Rosolino, and the composers of Italian background write that way, as witness Henry Mancini and Harry Warren.

And Scott LaFaro’s magnificently melodic and lyrical playing strikes me as redolent of Italy. I hadn’t even thought of him as Italian until I met his sister.

I am endlessly aware of the roots and origins of events. Had I not done this, that wouldn’t have happened. Or: if only I had done this, *this* might have happened. And so on.

If the dilatory purchaser of the LaFaro house in Geneva hadn’t delayed his decision, Scott might be alive today. He would be seventy.

One of the best tributes to Scott LaFaro is this: bassists all over the world, classical and jazz alike, still call him Scotty.

As Gary Peacock put it to Helene, “Scotty kicked everybody in the ass.”

A footnote. I have admired great bassists since I was in high school. The problem I had with old recordings is that if I couldn’t hear the bass line, I couldn’t feel all of what the music was about. Miraculously, modern electronic techniques have made it possible to bring up those seemingly inaudible parts, as in the Robert Parker restorations of records from the 1920s.

In must have been Walter Page I admired in my high school years. Then came Blanton and Mingus, whom I saw with the Red Norvo Trio when I was about twenty-one, and then of course Ray Brown. I have written extensively about bass players, including Ray Brown, Milt Hinton, Red Mitchell, Don Thompson, and John Heard.

I have received quite a few awards in my life, including the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Association of Jazz Journalists. But the one that gives me a true secret pleasure is a modest brown shield-shaped plaque from the ISB. It is engraved simply: Friend of the Bass.

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