

The Great Herb Geller

From time to time, one hears some talking head on television decrying the effects of the Internet. One of the laments is that it isolates people and makes them lonely. This is, to use a term from the 1930s (or earlier), pure hooley. On the contrary, it lets people, especially older people, establish and maintain contact, and it has a peculiar ability to create and sustain friendships. This happened to me most recently with the great alto saxophonist Herb Geller, whom I had admired for years yet never met. That is because he has lived for more than forty years in Germany, and he is not as well known in America as he deserves to be. He comes back from time to time but never long enough to consolidate a beachhead before he returns to Hamburg, where he has had a long career playing with and arranging and composing for the Norddeutscher Rundfunk, that is to say the North German radio and television networks. The German networks don't just play records, they put musicians on staff in both symphony orchestras and jazz bands, both big and small, doing far more for this music than American broadcasting has ever dreamed of doing. He also has had a busy career teaching and, in the months of his vacation time, playing gigs all over Europe.

"Herb Geller is a monster," composer Johnny Mandel said recently.

Herb was born in Los Angeles on November 2, 1928, and was playing with Joe Venuti by the same he was eighteen.

Herb said, "In 1946, I was going to L.A. City College. I was taking a course for musicians on how to play in the studios, play all sorts of different styles. There was a guy named Dick Pierce who started a band, using a lot of these musicians. He had some arrangements made. Copies of Lunceford style things. He wanted me to play tenor. He had a friend who wanted to play lead alto. I was not fond of his concept, although he was a competent player.

"Stan Getz came to town. He had just left Benny Goodman. He wanted to put in his Los Angeles union card. At that time, you had to live there six months without doing certain kinds of studio or recording work. You could do occasional

things. Club dates. But you couldn't work in a steady job. This leader said he wanted to put Stan Getz on the solo tenor and me on the second tenor. I said, 'Yeah, that's cool. I'm not much of a tenor player anyway.' So Stan came in and we become good friends. I said, 'I'd really like to take some lessons from you.' He had an apartment, he and Beverly, his first wife, near Western and Santa Monica. I went to the place and Stan asked me who I liked on tenor. And I said I'd been listening to Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins and Chu Berry. He said, 'Uh-uhn. Listen to Lester Young.' I spent three or four hours there. We drank some wine. He'd show me things. 'Here's a lick that I practice.' He showed me some minor chromatic thing." Herb sang it. "Stan said, 'Learn that.'

"Okay, great.' At that time he was holding his tenor like Lester Young, out to the side. He showed me all these things, and then he said, 'No, you need another mouthpiece. Here, take this one.' He gave me a mouthpiece and said, 'Here, that will get you that Lester Young sound.'

"He and Beverly had a child, no money. I was living at home with my parents. I said, 'How much money for the lesson?' He said, 'Nothing.' He spent all that time with me and even gave me a mouthpiece. And I think it was the best lesson I ever had in my life about how to play jazz.

"Another time, I was visiting London. I had just finished a little tour, and Tubby Hayes was on it. We were good friends. I wasn't working, I was just there for a few days and I wanted to see some show. Tubby said, 'Where are you staying?' I told him the name of the hotel, somewhere around Piccadilly. He said, 'Come and stay at my house. My girlfriend just left me, and I've got a whole big house.' I moved into his house.

"That night he was going to play at Ronnie Scott's club. I went to the club. And Stan Getz was there. He was playing somewhere else. And he immediately came up to Tubby and said, 'Hey, let's hang out tonight. Let's go to the Playboy Club.' I was on a limited budget, and Tubby didn't have any money. I said, 'I don't think that's such a good idea.' Stan said, 'Come on, I'll pay your way.' So we went. He paid the admission. He said, 'You guys want to gamble?' He gave us

each ten pounds. I went to the roulette table and bet on black. It came up red about four times, and I was out. And Tubby lost his at the craps table. We stayed out till late, just talking. To me, Stan was one of the most generous, nicest people, plus an idol. To me he was the epitome of a *great* jazz musician.”

“Yes,” I said, “and he left Beverly, strung out, in Los Angeles in a motel room with no food for herself or the baby. A friend called Stan in New York and told him the condition she was in and said he should do something about it, and Stan said he would and he had her declared an unfit mother and took the child from her.

“She was Buddy Stewart’s sister. Dave Lambert was like their older brother. Stan strung her out on heroin and then abandoned her. In 1962 in New York, Bill Rubinstein, whom I met when he was Carmen McRae’s pianist, took me to some bar in the Village. You could hear someone singing in a back room, and I said, ‘Who the hell is *that*?’ Bill said, ‘Come on back and I’ll introduce you.’ It was Beverly. She was about thirty-six as I recall, but her teeth were gone and she looked sixty. God! Could she sing. But Dave never forgave Stan for what he did to her. *Nobody* ever hated Stan Getz the way Dave Lambert did.”

Herb said, “I saw her once in New York. She had no teeth.”

I have known only three musicians who actually liked Stan Getz: Johnny Mandel, Lou Levy, and Herb Geller. When I made the mistake of saying to drummer Kenny Washington, whose mind is a well-stocked encyclopedia of jazz history, that I’d only met a handful of jazz musicians I disliked, he said gleefully, “Who are they?”

“Well,” I began, “Stan Getz . . .”

“Yeah, but he’s on everybody’s list,” Kenny said.

So what Herb told me about Stan is about the best I ever heard of him, although there is one thing about Stan I admired: he was the only man I ever knew who managed to cheat Norman Schwartz, rather than the reverse.

Herb moved to New York in 1949, and performed and recorded with the glorious Claude Thornhill band.

In New York he met pianist Lorraine Walsh, who had been playing with the Sweethearts of Rhythm. Herb took her away from all that in 1951 by marrying her and whisking her off to Los Angeles, where she performed with Shorty Rogers, Red Mitchell, Stan Getz, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker. Herb worked with Maynard Ferguson (1954-56), Shorty Rogers, Bill Holman (in 1954, then 1957-59), and his own quartet. In 1952, Herb played with Billy May’s big band. In 1955, Lorraine and Herb made an album called *The Gellers* with Red Mitchell and Mel Lewis.

Herb said, “Nesuhi Ertegun wanted to record me in New York. He said, ‘Think of a project.’ And I said that whatever it was, I wanted Scott LaFaro on it. My favorite pianist was Hank Jones. At that time a lot of people were doing show albums. I had seen *Gypsy*. It had a great score. Jule Styne did the music, Stephen Sondheim did the lyrics. I said, ‘How about doing the music from *Gypsy*? And Nesuhi said, ‘Okay.’ I started writing and I told Hank Jones that I needed a trumpet player and a drummer, and he said, ‘Get my two brothers.’ So Scotty was thrilled about that.

“I’m walking down the street, down Broadway, and I ran into this girl, black girl. She said, ‘Herb, don’t you remember me? I sat in with Shelly’s band when you were in Milwaukee. And I sang.’ I said, ‘Oh yeah!’ She was a fantastic singer. I told her I was doing a show album and she should sing a couple of the tunes. I called Nesuhi and told him and he said, ‘Okay, I’ll take a chance.’

“I rehearsed with her. I showed her the four tunes and she learned them immediately. We were recording the whole thing in two days. I got there the first day and Elvin Jones was not there.”

“Oh oh,” I said. Elvin had that reputation.

“I called up and he was still sleeping. I said we could rehearse the girl until Elvin got there. And she spoke in a whisper. She said, ‘I lost my voice.’ Her husband, who was a trumpet player, said, ‘Every time she gets into the studio, she loses her voice. But don’t worry about it. I know how to fix it.’ He disappeared for about ten minutes and came back with a small bottle of vodka. And she took it right down, the whole bottle. And her voice was back. But she couldn’t sing!

“The second day, I was really under the gun. I had to catch a flight at 7 o’clock that evening, pick up my car, and drive to Las Vegas, because I was opening that night at the Flamingo Hotel with Louis Bellson’s band. I’d never played with the band before. The band was playing in the lounge, and Louis said, ‘I’ve got five or six arrangements featuring you.’ He’d had them written for me.

“So I was under a lot of pressure that day. And Elvin Jones didn’t show up again. He came about an hour late. There was one song called *Some People*. I love it but it’s the hardest tune I ever played. The harmony moves very fast at that tempo. At the end of about an hour and a half, Hank said, ‘I have to leave. You told me the date was only three hours long.’ I had promised Nesuhi we wouldn’t go overtime. So Hank split. So we did one song without piano. There was one song, the *Cow Song*. I asked Scotty if he could do it solo. It was a little high, but he did it beautifully. Billy Taylor came in for the last tune, and we finished the date.

"I get to the airplane and make the flight to L.A. I get in my car to go to Las Vegas. At that time there was no freeway. It was July. I get out on the desert and I get a blowout. It seemed like it was 150 degrees. I change the tire and go a few more miles and another tire blew out. The heat had just exploded the tires. And I'm stuck in the middle of the desert. I hadn't slept, and I kept thinking about the record date.

"I hitch-hiked. I got a ride to a gas station. The guy said he could get the tire in about two days. I called Louis Bellson. We were supposed to start at eight. It was now about six in the evening. He says, 'Don't worry. Pearl is going to pick you up. Tell me where you are exactly.'

"There was no air conditioning in this place, just a fan. I got a bottle of wine. Then this big Cadillac pulls up. *Hey, honey chile*. Pearl drove me to the motel, I took a shower and shaved and hit the stage. The first number was *Just One of Those Things* at a tempo like this." He tapped out a very fast tempo. "I soloed all the way through on an arrangement I had never played before.

"They were two of the most hectic days of my life. And that's the story of the *Gypsy* album."

Lorraine Geller died of pulmonary edema, the consequence of a severe asthma, at the age of thirty on October 13, 1958.

"After she died," Herb said. "I went through a very bad time. Depression and drugs and whatever. I just didn't have a great desire to live. I was always working. I never was out of a job. But I didn't want to play any more. I put our house up for sale.

"I was working at a strip tease club. When I didn't have a good gig, I could always work there. And one night a lady I knew called me and asked, 'Are you playing somewhere tonight?' I said, 'I'm playing at a club.' It was at a place called The Pink Pussycat on Santa Monica Boulevard. She said, 'A good friend of yours wants to drop by, and he wants to surprise you.' I said, 'Okay.' I was in the middle of *Night Train* and in walked Stan Getz.

"All kind of jazz musicians played there. The people there liked me. I knew all the tunes. Lorraine had worked with Stan. Stan and I were talking, and he said, 'Herb, you should go to Europe.'

"I said, 'I might do that.'

"He said, 'I'll tell you what I'll do. Go to Copenhagen. I know some people there.' He lived there for a while. He played at a club called the Montmartre. That was *the* jazz club. He said, 'I'll write the people and tell them that you're coming.' He wrote the letter, which was very nice. We were very good friends.

"The house finally was sold, and I sold my car. I bought a

one-way ticket to Copenhagen. And two days before I was to leave, I got a call from Benny Goodman to go to South America. I cashed my ticket in. I flew to New York and we rehearsed and we went on tour in South America. We ended up in Sao Paulo, Brazil. And every night I was going to a club and jamming. It was a dance place, but they were playing bossa nova and light jazz. The owner was a piano player. He said, 'If you were staying here, you could play here all the time.' I said, 'Well I've got no reason to go back. I can stay. Will you pay me so much money per week?' He said, 'Yes.' The rest of the Goodman orchestra left. Mousey Alexander was the drummer. Buck Clayton, Arvell Shaw and Bob Wilber were on that band. I said good-bye and they went back to New York.

"I stayed in Sao Paulo for close to two months. And I got tired of it. It was New Year's Eve and I got very depressed. They were playing bad music that night, and I didn't even play. I just sat there. I said, 'I'm leaving.' I cashed my couple of Benny Goodman checks and I booked a boat on the Italian line, the Julio Cesar. I had to go to Rio for a couple of days. The boat was sailing from there to Naples. Just before I was to leave, this guy who was the manager of a Brazilian comic approached me. They were going to do a show in Portugal. He said, 'Get off the boat in Lisbon, and work with us for two weeks, and you can make a little money.'

"I got off at Lisbon, and the people arrived to do the show a couple of days later. We started to play. It was January, and it was ice cold. We played in the pit with gloves on. I was supposed to go on the stage and play a rock-and-roll number with this comic. I refused to do it. The worst thing was that the band was so out of tune. We couldn't get in tune because it was so cold. I got back to the hotel, and I said to the night manager, 'Is there a plane leaving for Paris?' He said, 'Yes, there's one leaving at eight o'clock.' I said, 'Book me a ticket.'

"In the morning, just as I was leaving, I ran into the manager who booked me. He said, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'Sorry, man, I just can't do it.' He was very nice and even suggested a nice hotel I could stay at in Paris.

"I got to Paris. And I looked at the newspaper and Kenny Clarke and Kenny Drew were playing at the Blue Note. I went to the club that night, and Kenny Drew said, 'Hey, we've got some gigs coming up. Do you want to do them, in a quartet?' So I started working immediately. Then I was doing a radio show for a while, and I was in Paris four or five months."

They played a concert in West Berlin.

Herb said, "The Wall had gone up about a year before. In the band were some very good musicians, and there was a

great band at Sender Freie Berlin, which translates Radio Free Berlin. Nat Peck was in the band, and Benny Bailey. And Joe Harris, who had been the drummer with Dizzy Gillespie, and Ake Persson, marvelous trombone player from Sweden, and Ack Van Rooyen and his brother Gerry Van Royen. Ack plays trumpet and fluegelhorn, and Jerry was the arranger and composer for the band. Ack is still very active but Jerry is retired with Parkinson's. They said, 'Why don't you join the band here?' They said it's great here, spies and intrigue, and all kinds of things going on.

"There were two radio stations sending propaganda into the east, that one and RIAS in the American sector. That stands for Radio in the American Sector. Francy Boland and Ake Persson were in the RIAS band. Francy was mostly writing. I gave up my apartment in Paris and moved to Berlin, which is where I met my wife. Her maiden name is Christine Rabsch. Her father was a music professor and a close friend of Paul Hindemith. We met in September, 1962, got married in December, and the baby was born in July. Figure it out. We've been married for forty-three years.

"I was in Berlin for three years, and then I had a falling out with the contractor, who was being paid by the radio. He wasn't a hundred percent honest. He owed me some money for some things he had promised. I quit, and we were getting ready to move back to Los Angeles with our baby girl. Then I got a telephone call from a dear friend of mine, Rolf Kuhn, the clarinet player. I knew him from New York. He was sort of a protégé of Benny Goodman's. He said, 'I'm leaving the Hamburg radio orchestra and I've recommended you to take my place.'

"I said, 'We're leaving for Los Angeles, but we haven't got our tickets yet.' He said, 'Well come to Hamburg.' So I went there for five days and did an audition, and they hired me. That was in 1965.

"Leo Wright replaced me in the SFB band, and later Carmel Jones and Al Porcino came into that band. Sad to say that both stations no longer have big bands.

"So instead of going to Los Angeles, we moved our furniture and everything to Hamburg. It was more money than I was making in Berlin. We worked for nine months a year but we were paid for thirteen. All medical bills for the whole family, including dental, were covered. Glasses! Hearing aid!" He laughed. "It was a good gig! And every year we got a raise to compensate for inflation."

Soon he was also teaching. He became a professor at the Hamburg and Bremen conservatories, teaching composition and arranging, among other things.

"I had started playing the flute. There was a drunken American soldier in a club, and he needed some money, and

he sold me his flute. I started practicing three or four hours every day. I thought, If I go back to L.A., it gives me a good double. I played clarinet, but I had never played flute. And then they told me I could arrange for the orchestra in Hamburg and make extra money. I'd written only a few arrangements in my life. And here was a chance to develop my arranging skills. And composing also. So I figured I'd stay a couple of years and get my flute chops and learn the oboe and the English horn. And get a bass clarinet, everything to compete in L.A.

"So I got very busy. And every year, during our summer vacation, we'd visit L.A. All the studio guys said things were bad and nobody was working. I'd always made several recordings *a week* while I was in L.A., film backgrounds and whatever. They said, 'What kind of job do you have?' and I told them, and they said, 'Stay there! Can you get us on the gig?'

"The Viet Nam war was on. I said, 'I'm not going to stay here and pay taxes for that.'

"So I went back to Hamburg. After five years, they said, 'You can't have this contract any more.' I had a contract with extras, the same as Rolf Kuhn. I conducted the orchestra eleven times a year. I had four combo productions and fifteen solo titles. I'd write an arrangement, get paid for it, play the solo, get paid for it, conduct the band, get paid for it. Above and beyond the salary. Then they said, 'You can't have the contract any more. You either join the band as a regular member, but you're on the highest pay scale, or you have to leave.' And the Viet Nam war was getting worse, so I said, 'I have to make a choice. Either Richard Nixon or Willie Brandt.' I chose Mr. Brandt, because I really liked him. So we stayed, and our second son was born, and we bought a house."

As Herb and I talked, I kept noticing that he spoke like someone else I knew. It was really disconcerting me and then I got it. He talks quite a bit like my almost-lifelong friend the bassist Hal Gaylor. I told Herb that. Herb said:

"This is a coincidence. I was doing a tour of Ireland. There's a legendary Irish guitar player."

"Louis Stewart?" I asked.

"You got it," Herb said. "Did I tell you this story?"

"Nope. I just know who he is."

"Well the agent said, 'I've got three days for you in Ireland. I've got all the musicians for you everywhere except Ireland, and the promoters are going to get you those.' I said, 'Is there any chance I can play with Louis Stewart?' Because I'd heard so much about him. And there was a pause and the woman said, 'I never want to hear that name again.'

"The first gig was okay. For the next two gigs, Louis

Stewart was to join us. The second night, the promoter, an amateur tenor player, wanted to jam with us, so we had to play the tunes he knew. It was rather depressing.

"Meanwhile, I heard the story of what had happened. The agent had booked Louis Stewart on a tour and he was the leader and he didn't like the rhythm section and after about the third gig, he disappeared. Nobody knew where he was; he was hidden somewhere. And that's why she didn't want to hear the name again.

"Well on my third gig with him, we were playing at the Bank of Ireland at the Fine Arts Center in Dublin. Beautiful hall. This time we were going to play some real tunes. I pulled out some things I thought didn't require any rehearsal. We were in a small wardrobe. There was a piano there. And there was a big sign saying, 'Smoking not allowed. We have smoke detectors.' And Louis Stewart was sitting underneath the sign, smoking a cigarette. I said, 'Louis, we go on in a few minutes. And the sign says No Smoking.' He said, 'Oh don't worry about it, man.'

"Now he lived in Dublin and had played here before. We go on the stage and the first tune we play is *The Red Door*, Zoot Sims' tune. I played the melody and did some choruses. No piano. He starts playing a solo. I look over at him. And smoke is coming out of him. And all of a sudden it started smelling bad. I tried to be real cool. I said, 'Louis, you're on fire, man.' He said, 'Don't worry about it, man, don't worry about it.' And he finishes his choruses. He had a lit cigarette in his pocket, and it burned a big hole in his jacket. He was very calm about it. We played the rest of the gig, and everything was cool.

"We were going from the second gig to the third. We were driving. I'm telling a story about a little band I had together in Cincinnati, Ohio. He said, 'Who was in that band?' I said, 'I had a guitar player named Billy Bean.' And all of a sudden he gets hysterical. He says, 'Billy Bean! That's my favorite guitar player.'"

"That's the connection," Herb said. "I really liked Billy Bean, but I had never thought of him with such lofty . . ."

I said, "Yeah, Hal Gaylor loved him."

"Louis said, 'What happened to him?' And I said, 'I have no idea.' Well, I get back to Hamburg. About a week later, I get a letter from a man named Seth Greenberg. He said, 'I'm writing a biography on Billy Bean, and I'm sending you some pictures to download.' One of them was with Hal Gaylor. I recognized Don Payne in one of them. I told the guy, 'I really can't tell you much. I worked with him one summer for about six weeks in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1960. He was a great player. And this guy said, 'Billy gave up on life about thirty years ago and just stays home.' I said, 'Can you give me his telephone

number?' He gave me a number. I tried it about twenty times. There was never any answer. Once I got a busy signal. That was encouraging. Scotty worked with him too. Billy had worked with Tony Bennett."

"So had Hal. And Hal and Billy Bean had a trio with Walter Norris on piano. I believe Walter is living in Berlin."

"He is," Herb said. "I saw Walter two months ago. I played a gig there. My daughter was with me and we went to his house for dinner. He doesn't play much any more."

Herb said, "I compose a lot. I sit there and I'll get an idea. I'll write it out and edit it and edit it. Then I'll say, 'Okay, let's see what it sounds like on the saxophone.' Transpose up quick.

"Even if a tune is not finished, you should try to finish it somehow. And then I can always go back and correct it. I can write a tune in ten minutes and then edit for a month. I'll transpose it for alto, and think, 'Oh my gosh, this is much better.' I'll immediately find things to do that improve it, although on the piano I thought it was perfect." He laughed. "But somehow, you put the horn in your mouth, and the way I breathe and the way I live changes it. I make a quick note of it on the computer."

I said, "I have a theory that anyone who plays more than one instrument plays the second one with the influence of the first. And since Scott LaFaro played saxophone before he took up bass, that may to some extent explain his melodicism. Oscar Peterson played trumpet, and I think you can hear it in the playing, that bright projection. Bill Evans played flute. Bob Magnusson played French horn before he played bass. Jack DeJohnette played piano before he played drums. John Guerin played tenor before he played drums. I think what you hear is the *conception* of the other instrument."

Herb said, "I heard a solo album by Hank Jones, playing like Tatum. He was doing his own thing, but it was like a tribute to Tatum. I didn't know he could play like that."

"I heard Jimmy Smith do the same thing at a party at Sarah Vaughan's house. He was playing piano, and he sounded so much like Tatum."

"Jimmy Smith, the organ player?"

"Yep. Piano was his original instrument. He said, 'Well, that's my Art Tatum imitation for the evening,' and walked away from the piano."

Herb said, "I'm not a fan of organ. Two years ago I played an event for Ken Poston. And I was very good friends with Benny Carter."

"Oh. Dear dear Benny," I said.

"I finished my set. It was like a jam session. And I walked

out, and a car pulled up, and it was Benny Carter and his biographer, Ed Berger. And Benny said, 'I came here especially to hear you.' And I said, 'Well, you missed it.' We sat together for the next set and there was an organ and it was very, very *loud*. And it was hurting *me*, and I was concerned for Benny's health. Benny said, 'Herb, did you ever make any records with organ?' I said, 'I think I made one. I sat in once with Wild Bill Davis in Atlantic City.' He said, 'I did two records — the first and last. I never did it again.'"

I said, "It's an instrument that can overpower anything with its loud pedal."

"Yeah," Herb said, "You can't compete with it."

I said, "I'll tell you a story about that. Joe Mooney was a good friend of mine. He was playing a gig and singing, and you know how softly he sang. Remember his *Nina Never Knew* with Sauter-Finegan? Well that night, it was a rich, loud crowd and the gig was in a very noisy club somewhere on Central Park South. And Joe gave up singing that night, since nobody was listening, and just played organ, and he kept raising the level with that pedal in order just to be heard. And at the end of the set, he sat down with me, and said, 'Well, I didn't shut them up, but I sure had them crescendo-ing like hell.'"

"He played accordion too," Herb said.

"And piano. A lovely, sweet, gentle man. I never knew anyone who bore misfortune with so little lament. He had been crippled by polio and he was blind, and yet he remained a really funny cat. I remember when he moved back to Florida from New York, he said, 'If this is the Apple, there's a worm in it.' And when I asked him if he had a swimming pool in Florida, he said, 'No, I'll just go out and dive in the dew on the grass.'"

I came to know Herb Geller when Alastair Robertson, the proprietor of the small British Hep label, told me that he was producing an album by Herb Geller of some of the songs of Arthur Schwartz. I suppose somebody else may have done that before, but I don't know about it. And I have always admired Schwartz, ranking him close to Jerome Kern as one of our greatest melodists. The recording was to include *Dancing in the Dark*, *I'll Be Tired of You*, *Alone Together*, *I See Your Face Before Me*, *Come A-Wandering with Me*, *By Myself*, *Haunted Heart*, *A Gal in Calico*, *I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plan*, *You and the Night and the Music*, *They're Either Too Young or Too Old*, *Oh But I Do*, *Something You Never Had Before*, *Something to Remember You By*, and *That's Entertainment*.

Listening to it, I realized I hadn't heard Herb Geller in years. Whitney Balliett once aptly defined jazz as the "sound

of surprise." But listening to this CD, one might add that it is also the sound of discovery, which of course can be the cause of the surprise. Herb Geller gets into phrases and whole tunes in unexpected ways. Herb is absolutely individual. He sounds like no else, and no one sounds like Herb. He has a unique approach to inflection, a full tone, and a slow romantic vibrato, whether he is playing alto or soprano saxophone, which he does on *I'll Be Tired of You*, *By Myself* and *I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plan*. And of course he's inexhaustibly inventive.

He is abetted in the enterprise by a lovely British rhythm section that includes John Pearce, piano, who has worked with Jack Parnell, Robert Farnon, Conte Candoli, Art Farmer, Eddie Daniels and Peggy Lee. The bassist is Len Skeat who had worked with Ruby Braff, Scott Hamilton, Joe Newman, and Bob Wilbur. The drummer is Bobby Worth. It's a lovely, sensitive rhythm section.

When I played the CD for Roger Kellaway, he looked shocked at the opening phrase of *Dancing in the Dark*, and said after barely a moment's pause: "It's joyous! It's such joyous music!" And after a minute more, "And such romantic music. It's so inventive, and so effortless. There's no sense of trying. He has complete command and doesn't even have to think about it.

"That's what we all strive to achieve."

At the end of November, 1993, Herb was automatically pensioned from the NDR on 60 percent of salary. "December 1 was my first day of *freedom!*" he said.

"I've done a few things there since then. I subbed for a week for the second altoist, and I was honored with a concert for my seventieth birthday, and a few years ago I did a concert for them with Charlie Mariano.

"In October I'll be doing a concert for them, playing the solos on the Marty Paich arrangements for the *Art Pepper Plus Eleven* album."

One can only hope that it is recorded and, eventually, released. We have heard far too little of Herb Geller in recent years on this side of the Atlantic.

If you want to catch up with the current Herb Geller, you can get the Arthur Schwartz album by writing to Alastair Robertson at alarob@hepjazz.co.uk.

The Jazzletter is published 12 times a year at PO Box 240, Ojai, California, 93024-0240. \$70 U.S. per year U.S. and Canada, \$80 for other countries. Subscribers may buy introductory gift subscriptions for friends for \$35. Copyright © 2005 by Gene Lees.