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Clayton-Hamilton
Together with an all-star lineup of Los Angeles-based musicians, the big band received an enthusiastic response from reviewers and fans.

Charles McPherson
He remains a strong, viable force on the jazz scene today. He is at the height of his powers. His playing combines passionate feeling with intricate patterns of improvisation.

Terell Stafford
Stafford’s exceptionally expressive and well defined musical talent allows him to dance in and around the rich trumpet tradition of his predecessors while making his own inroads.

Joshua Breakstone
His flowing lines on up-tempo cookers are impeccably clean and fiery, bearing the mark of a first-rate improviser, while his chordal work on heartbreaker ballads is the final word in finesse. — Guitar Player magazine.

Ken Peplowski
Ken Peplowski is reunited with his NYC working group that includes Ted Rosenthal on piano, Martin Wind on bass and Matt Wilson on drums.

Stranahan / Zaleski / Rosato
Limitless shows that the partnership is working quite well and in all likelihood hadn’t even hit its ceiling yet.
— S. Victor Aaron, Something Else Reviews
By Eric Nemeyer

**JL:** Let’s start from square one. I was on the road...my brothers Pat and Joe, we were all at Berklee at the same time. Pat had one more semester to go before graduating. To give you an idea about Pat, Pat played in a rehearsal band every Saturday morning. Jimmy Mosher, the alto sax player who was on Buddy’s band, couldn’t take the road anymore so he came back to Boston and started a Saturday morning rehearsal big band. There would be paying gigs. And the regular tenor player in the band would always send Pat in as a sub on Saturday morning rehearsals and then Pat would never get the paying gig. Everyone told him, “well, you’re a sucker, you shouldn’t be doing that” but Pat was playing and when Buddy Rich called Jimmy asking if he knew any good tenor players, he didn’t recommend the regular guy, he recommend—ed Pat. Pat, one semester shy of graduating, just went out on the road with Buddy. I was on the road with a society, a show band, a Vegas review band, and he said, “Buddy’s looking for a trumpet player.” I gave notice and I showed up. The thing about Buddy was there was no audition. You gave your notice on the other gig, you showed up on the bandstand, and if you didn’t play the book that night, you were fired. So, I flew into Last Vegas. We were at the Sands, first of January, 1968. We played a month at the Sands.

**JI:** The whole big band?

**JL:** The whole big band. Frankie Randall was our opening act and my brother, Joe, was Frankie Randall’s drummer. He was a good singer and Joe was his drummer. Sinatra even gave Frankie a bunch of charts. They really liked him a lot. Because Joe was there, he’d hangout with us at Buddy’s rehearsals, and Joe was the first one to play “Channel One Suite.” Buddy had him rehearse the band while he listened to it when Bill Reddie brought it in. It was pretty well documented. Joe was the first one to play it. Then, Buddy went up to the bandstand, sat there, and just played it down.

**JI:** After one shot through, right?

**JL:** Pretty much one shot. There were some time change things, but pretty much Buddy had it. Joe played it all the way through as written but Buddy put his own stamp on it because certain tempos and certain things, he had an instinct for what to change and what not to change.

**JI:** When you joined the band, you were just sight—

(Continued on page 6)
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Buddy Rich

(Continued from page 6)

**JL:** Yup, and Buddy Rich, he just wanted new stuff all the time and, consequently, for a writer, that was great! I don’t think everyone really realizes this, but he never really had a style. When I wrote for Basie, I had to write in Basie style. When I wrote for Woody, I had to compliment Woody’s style. Buddy didn’t really have a style, per se, except it had to be high quality and energetic. So, I could write any kind of music I wanted. I tried some rock stuff, I tried all kinds of things, and he would play it. He may not keep it every night, but he would try new things all the time. I started supplying the few odds and ends to him. Then, he had an open call. He got an RCA Victor deal. There was an open call in Philadelphia for new material, and all the guys from New York went down. I took a bus to Philly from Rochester. The band had a week at Brandi’s Wharf. Since he had a week, and there I was in Studio C of RCA/Victor. I just stayed in town, went to New York the next week, and there I was in Studio C of RCA/Victor.

**JL:** Their stuff was there. I think Bob was there. I know all the guys in New York were there because it was a real short train ride. After he said that, we ran down “Straight, No Chaser,” the ballad part with Jimmy Mosher. Basically, Buddy let me take the rest of the afternoon to rehearse all of the stuff. I just stayed in town, went to New York the next week, and there I was in Studio C of RCA/Victor.

**JL:** Was he playing the stuff at the gig at Brandi’s that week?

**JL:** Towards the end of the week, he started putting the stuff in there and he was just tearing the club up. Every night of the week, I was in heaven. I’m hearing all of my stuff played back by all of the best players in the business...

**JL:** In anticipation of the recording!

**JL:** Yeah. So, with Buddy, you know, anything could change. He could change his mind the day of the session... I was pretty confident he was going to record them ... But it all worked out, *Different Drummer* came out ... and that one shipped over 50,000 in the first pressing.”

**JL:** How did your career begin to evolve after the recording of *Different Drummer*?

“**JL:** I had been off the Glenn Miller Band and writing, and this literally put me on the map. It connected me in New York very well. I was doing jingles in commercials like everyone else was. That’s how you made your living as a writer and you didn’t have to put your name on them. Really, it opened up a lot of doors. I was writing for Woody, and Basie, and bands like that occasionally, too. When the word gets out, band leaders are like anyone else—they all talk amongst each other like club owners. It helped immensely. Willard Alexander, who was Buddy’s booking agent, befriended me. He’s the one who put me in touch with a lot of very important people in the business to help me get work and things like that. He kind of took me under his wing and that really helped a lot.

**JL:** That was a really fortuitous connection.

**JL:** Oh, without question.

**JL:** Buddy didn’t have a style, as you mentioned, but when you wrote for Basie, what were some of the formulas that you had to follow?

**JL:** I’ll give you a good example. Willard Alexander introduced me to him at the St. Regis Hotel. Buddy had a dance gig. Willard convinced Buddy to play dance music, which Buddy hated, but he’d be able to stay in New York. His apartment was much stuff, that after awhile, it blurs.

**JL:** I remember years ago when I was first studying arranging with Manny, and he told me a story that he was at Johnny Mandel’s house and he said to Johnny Mandel, “did you write that or did I?”

**JL:** You know why? They both studied with the same teacher when they were kids (Van Alexander). They were very close friends. After awhile, you start to say, “who did write that?” I miss Manny. I studied with him as well and he was just a great teacher and a great guy.

**JL:** What were you doing after you left Buddy’s band as a player and ultimately in ’72 when *Different Drummer* came out?

**JL:** I was playing on the Glenn Miller Band with Buddy DeFranco, writing charts and doing transcription for the Miller band. They paid me like an extra 50 bucks to transcribe stuff off of the 78s that either kind of walked away or got thrown away. I was making good bread, I was learning my craft, I was really learning how to write on that band because it becomes a very practical day to day, this is how that works. You have to be able to turn out material very quickly, no mistakes, hand-copied, copy the things yourself. It was a great training ground. I think if I had gone right in without that road training of having the pressure of deadlines, I probably would have not succeeded as much as I did. That experience really puts you into the thinking that you can never miss the deadline. You’ll always get it done but there’s no time to waste. So, you learn the most economical way of doing things.

**JL:** What did you do after you left Buddy’s band?

**JL:** Well, for today, that’s unheard of. But for then… well, Buddy had a huge name so that was a pretty much guaranteed run. From then on, of course, I became his arranger. That was it. I tell people who want to listen that you haven’t got it any better than to have someone call you on the phone and say, “I’ve got a month in London or two weeks in London. Fly to London and bring me new material.”

**JL:** That’s a dream.

**JL:** It is a dream and, of course, I wasn’t dumb. I would pick the times when I knew he had a location in London, or Los Angeles, or Disney World, and I’d call him and tell him I’ve got some new stuff. He’d say, “Get a plane ticket and come out!” He knew what I was doing but why not? I wrote so

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— Eric Hoffer, American Philosopher
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Eric Nemeyer Corporation
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right up the street in Lincoln Plaza. I wrote a dance
book for Buddy, a complete dance book. Straight
ahead stuff but, you know, kind of hip and Buddy.
During that engagement, Basie came by to check it
out and Benny Goodman and John Hammond and
all those guys were there, they all came to check
out the band, and I got introduced to Basie. He said
to me, “I want you to write something for my
band.” I was totally knocked out just to meet him,
but then here’s the punch. He says, “I want you to
write this thing that Freddie Martin had a hit on,
you know, “Melody in F.”’ Rubinstein’s “Melody in
F.” I say, “Holy Christ, the first thing I get to do
for Basie is this dumb old tune!” So, I go home,
write the chart, call and tell them I have the chart
ready. I go into the rehearsal and Basie says to me,
“what key did you write it in?” ‘Melody in F, I
wrote it in F.’ Basie says to me, “oh, no, I don’t
play in F.” So, I had to write a modulation. There
were certain stylistic things… the bucket-mutef
trumpets, saxophones or trombones concerted ex-
actly the same note, things like that. He didn’t play
in F normally. I had to make a modulation down to
Eb or maybe I went up to G. He liked G. Things
like that, those stylized kinds of things. He was
really a smart man when it came to programming
and the audiences. He just had years of experience
dealing with people. So, that’s what I meant about
styles. Woody had a style, you know, mainly blues-
oriented and with Bill Chase, he had a lot of good,
strong high parts.

**JL:** Why don’t you talk about some more experi-
ences you had with Buddy, writing for his band,
the recordings and so forth?

**JL:** Definitely. The one that was the most fun for
RCA Victor was the *Rich in London* album that we
did. Marie and I had gone over to London just on
vacation, and I knew that the band was going over
to record but it wasn’t definite. So, after a week we
flew back home because it really wasn’t definite
and then I got a telegram saying “come on back,
we’re going to record the band.” I wasn’t totally
prepared with all the charts. I had “Dancing Men”
and I forget what other ones are on that album. I
flew back to London, started cranking stuff out,
and then Buddy Rich’s daughter along with John
Hendricks’ and Stan Getz’s daughter had this vocal
group so buddy said, “I want a chart on this tomor-
row night.” It was one of those things where I had
to write a chart, copy the parts in one night, and
have it ready for recording in the morning.

**JL:** I’m looking at the lineup for that album…there
was “Dancing Men,” “St. Mark’s Square”…

**JL:** That’s right. I wrote that there because Pat got
married at St. Mark’s Square.

**JL:** “That’s Enough” for Cathy and her group?

**JL:** They didn’t have any lead sheets so I had to
make a sketch. I went back to the Whitehouse Ho-
tel, sat in the tub, and started sketching. The owner
of the hotel, who was an ex-RAF pilot, he loved the
guys in the band, he let me go down to his apart-
ment. He and his wife had a piano. He let me check
some things out on it. I always score it first, then
check it. I found lots of mistakes but I got it done,
copied the parts. The guys in the band were all
friends of mine, so they’d fix a lot of the mistakes.
They’d find wrong notes and they wouldn’t bring it
up in front of Buddy, which, today, is unusual.

**JL:** “Two Bass Hit,” was that yours’ too?

**JL:** “Two Bass Hit”… I think that was Don’s
(Piestrup). Great chart. Now, you’ve got the single
album—*Rich In London*. The album was actually
released as a double disc set in England. On that
was “Watson’s Walk,” a great shuffle that I
wrote…

**JL:** Actually, you know what? I was such a big
Buddy Rich fan back then, I bought the American
album and somehow or another found the English
release and bought it too.

**JL:** You’re probably one of the few because that’s
hard to find! We recorded a lot that week. What we
did was take over Ronnie Scott’s office. We put the
sixteen-track board in there to get the sixteen
tracks. The waiter was just bringing pint after pint
after pint of beer to the backroom for us as we were
trying to record this stuff. So, we did a week of
recording and there’s tons of tape in the vault from
that week and there are some great moments. When
Buddy Rich was in London or New York or any
city, we had Emerson, Lake and Palmer and other
rock groups coming in like crazy. Any drummer
was a great drummer in the world would come and see Buddy. I mean,
that’s it. He was just this magnet and they would
just shake their heads and walk away. They just
couldn’t believe it. There are certain legends about
him. He was perfectly tuned, had a great backbeat feel. Tony got him into it. Then of course
Buddy broke up the band for a couple of years to
do the small group thing at Buddy’s Place. I didn’t
do any writing for him at all. I started doing com-
mercials and after he reformed the band with Mar-
cus and all the guys, if I had something, I’d come
in and he’d play it. Up until the day he died, I was
still bringing him stuff.

(Continued on page 12)
JAZZ STANDARD

March

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Buddy Rich

(Continued from page 10)

JI: Talk about your experiences after he reformed the band.

JL: You know, I’m going to have to stop and go through my library to see what we did. When he was recording, he’d always play “Best Coast” every night of the week. A lot of the older stuff he would include in the live recordings and so probably those would be the most prominent of what was represented in the later CDs or albums. I’d have to go look but I know “The Walk on the Wild Side” that I did on my CD, I wrote for him. He asked me to write it for him for that Rich in London album. He always wanted that score. I did a pretty half-assed job on in London. He knew it, he knew it, and we never really addressed it over the years. He kept asking me, “When are you going to get me “Walk on the Wild Side”? I put it off. Finally, I found the original recording of the movie soundtrack at a yard sale that had all of the other songs except the main theme, which I heard before. After he got out of the hospital for that quadruple bypass, I brought it to New York and he had a ball. He loved that. It’s on video at certain festivals but he never had a chance to record it. Of course, since then I recorded it but that was something that he always wanted, that and “Mission Impossible.” Luckily, I got him “Walk on the Wild Side.”

JI: Could you talk about some of the observations you might have made or discussions with Buddy that you might have had that made an impact on your artistic development or understanding of human nature?

JL: When I played trumpet on the band, we went to London with Tony Bennett for a month. We played out of town first, before we landed in London. We were in Birmingham I think or Manchester, I can’t remember…you know that drum break on “Love for Sale”?!

JI: That incredible single stroke roll?

JL: That one night in Birmingham or Manchester, he totally blew it. We were totally shocked because he never blew anything. He yelled to Pat, “pick it up before the break.” We picked it up again and this time he nailed it and the crowd went wild. Years, years later, maybe four or five years before he died, we were hanging out at his apartment waiting for takeout and I said, “you know, Buddy, I always wanted to ask you, that night in Manchester, did you blow that lick on purpose so you could get the show business aspect of doing it again and pulling it off, like falling from the trap-pee once?” He went ballistic. He said, “You never do tricks like that on purpose. You’ve got to give it 100%. Don’t lay back.” He went on and on and on and that told me a lot. You may have the option to shortchange, but you better not do it because that’s going to track you the rest of your life. With Buddy, half the time, we’d talk about anything but music unless I’d bring it up. Every now and then I’d ask him about a certain band leaders or some-

thing like that, but mostly he wanted to know how the kids were doing. We’d talk about life in general, moving around, having a house here, a house there. He’d run things by me every now and then. I’m sure Steve Marcus had the same kind of relationship with him. He’d talk about cars. He couldn’t even set up his own drum set. He was a klutz, but he loved racing and he loved fine automobiles, all that stuff. Mechanical things didn’t like him.

JL: No, but he would make cuts here and there. Buddy, too. I learned from Mancini that you don’t want to fall in love with everything you’ve written because that could be the first thing to go. Like on “Walk on the Wild Side.” I’ll give you a for instance. There’s a Dixieland thing from the movie as well. He cut the whole section out, much to my dismay, Instead, he went right to the shout on the way out. I listened to it, I watched the video of him playing it, and when I went to record it for my CD, I realized that he was right. I didn’t put it in. So, he had an instinct and so did Woody. He knew that you knew how to write for him and if you didn’t, well, you probably wouldn’t get a call anymore.

JI: Are there things that you wanted to talk about that we haven’t covered?

JL: Well, sure. If you want to lose a lot of money, start a big band. [For me] Buddy’s there all the time. He’s sitting in the back row somewhere. I use a lot of his jokes with the band, how to rehearse a band, all these things. I am a direct result of all the things that I’ve watched him do over the years. Also, the reason those CDs are so good is because I hired the best players that there are. Period. That’s what Buddy did.

JI: How do you use encouragement or otherwise motivate players?

JL: I try to be as hands-off as possible. Like with Buddy, if you treat me like an adult, I’ll treat you like an adult if you perform. I try to not dictate because you have to let them try and find their own stride but I learned from Buddy when to bring the hammer down. You have to know when to nail them and when to encourage them. I learned that from Buddy. Buddy did a lot of things people don’t know about. Art Pepper was having problems—and Buddy was paying hospital bills, and a lot of stuff. Buddy knew when they were having problems and messing up. He knew when to be encouraging and when to be a bad guy.

JL: When you observe Buddy, you might get the surface impression that he had a huge ego. Behind the scenes, he was very generous, concerned, private, and quiet.

JL: Buddy was very kind and he did a lot of things that Frank Sinatra did. I think they picked it up together, helping people out, encouraging musicians, and they knew when they were getting taken for a ride and wouldn’t put up with it.

JI: It can be tempting for fans or aspiring musi-

cians to observe someone like Buddy Rich and pick up surface elements of the image he projected on stage, the wise-guy image, and so on—and to emulate that on the premise that one has to be like that to perform like he did.

JL: Now, when you look at Buddy play too, you see this astonishing technique and, as you mentioned, he’d sit in front of the band, listen to it once, and be able to play it. He would listen to classical music and be able to hum back or sing back the entire part. That speaks more to his musical ability, as opposed to his being merely a phenomenal drummer.

JL: Oh, he had an ear! He was unique. Talking about extraterrestrial beings, I think he was planted here by a flying saucer or something. I think I sound like I’m just spewing. But to have an association with someone that great, that doesn’t happen very often in life and this guy was just unique. He really is the complete package. He really is the real thing. People forget that he wanted to be a jazz player first and then a drummer. The times when he was forced to go commercial here and commercial there—he was making money, but he realized it was dumb. Same with the clubs. That technique was a direct result of wanting to play jazz so badly. You know, he would support the family when he was growing up—he was the star. They were dying because he would take a jazz gig and not remain the breadwinner for them [their Vaudeville act]—although he was the breadwinner until the day he died.

JI: What is on the short list of the most important things you learned from Buddy Rich?

JL: As I get older, I start to see that I could shortchange things. I try not short-change the music or go for a cheap shot, I try to be honest with the music, and I think it comes through with the CDs. That’s what Buddy would expect.
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- Elane Elias, Birdland
- City Stomp, Shapeshifter
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Sunday April 2
- Peter Bernstein, Village Vanguard
- Chano Dominguez Flamenco Quintet, Sonia Fernandez, Ismael Fernandez, Alex Zumbado, Jose Moreno, Jazz Standard
- DIVA jazz orchestra, Dizzy's Club Coca Cola
- Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Birdland
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- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Al Mekkani Trio feat. Sacha Perry; Microscopic Septet; Alex Norris Quintet; Hitlil Salem - After-hours Jam Session, Small's

Monday April 3
- Vanguard Orchestra, Village Vanguard
- Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Joe Jones, Berklee College of Music Sextet
- Danilo Brito Quartet; Choro Meets Jazz, Dizzy's Club Coca Cola
- Sam Dillon Quartet; ELEW and Nature of Next, Small's

Tuesday April 4
- Eric Reed Quartet, Tim Green (saxophone) Michael Gurrola (bass) McClerty Hunter (drums), Village Vanguard
- Mobetta Tuesdays, Pass the Peal, Maurice Brown, Lakecia Benjamin, Chris Rob, Marcus Machado, Doug Wimbish, Louis Cato, Jazz Standard
- Stanley Clarke Band, Blue Note
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- Frank Lacy Group; Abraham Burton Quartet, Small's

Wednesday April 5
- Eric Reed Quartet, Tim Green (saxophone) Michael Gurrola (bass) McClerty Hunter (drums), Village Vanguard
- Chris Bergson Band, Craig Dreyer, Matt Clohesy, Tony Mason, Ellis Hooks, Reggie Pittman, David Luther, Jazz Standard
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- Christian McBride Big Band, Dizzy's Club Coca Cola
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Thursday April 6
- Eric Reed Quartet, Tim Green (saxophone) Michael Gurrola (bass) McClerty Hunter (drums), Village Vanguard
- Randy Weston's African Rhythms Quintet, 91st Birthday Celebration, TK Blue, Alex Blake, Lewis Nash, Neil Clarke, Jazz Standard
- Stanley Clarke Band, Blue Note
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- Pierre Christopher/Joel Frahm/Joey Martin Trio; Roxy Coss Quintet; Sarah Slonim Project - After-hours Jam Session, Small's

Friday April 7
- Eric Reed Quartet, Tim Green (saxophone) Michael Gurrola (bass) McClerty Hunter (drums), Village Vanguard
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- Buddy Rich Centennial: Celebrating The Jazz Drum, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis and music director Ali Jackson presents new arrangements of hits made famous by Buddy Rich and premiere Jackson's Living Grooves: A World of Jazz Rhythm, Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center.
- Yellowjackets, Birdland
- Human Element, Shapeshifter
- Tom Dempsey/Tim Ferguson Quartet; Noah Preminger Quartet; After-hours Jam Session with Corey Wallace, Small's

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- Robert Edwards - Afternoon Jam Session; Fujikis Taikina Quintet; Noah Preminger Quartet; Phillip Harper Quintet, Small's

Sunday April 9
- Eric Reed Quartet, Tim Green (saxophone) Michael Gurrola (bass) McClerty Hunter (drums), Village Vanguard
- Randy Weston's African Rhythms Quintet, 91st Birthday Celebration, TK Blue, Alex Blake, Lewis Nash, Neil Clarke, Jazz Standard
- Stanley Clarke Band, Blue Note
- Christian McBride Big Band, Dizzy's Club Coca Cola
- Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Birdland
- Yellowjackets, Birdland
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Al Mekkani Trio feat. Sacha Perry; Johnny O'Neal Trio; Ian Hendrickson-Smith Quartet; Jon Beshay - After-hours Jam Session, Small's

Monday April 10
- Vanguard Orchestra, Village Vanguard
- Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Deborah Davis - 19th Annual Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Benefit Concert, Blue Note
- Manhattan School of Music Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy's Club Coca Cola
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**Wednesday April 12**
- Tom Harrell (trumpet) Ralph Moore (saxophone) David Virelles (piano)
- Ugomna Okegwo (bass) Adam Cruz (drums), *Village Vanguard*
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- Kevin Eubanks Quartet with Dave Holland, Nicholas Payton, and Jeff Tain Watts, *Birdland*
- Tyler Blanton Quartet; Dave Baron Quartet; Aaron Seeber - After-hours Jam Session, *Small’s*

**Thursday April 13**
- Tom Harrell (trumpet) Ralph Moore (saxophone) David Virelles (piano)
- Mingus Big Band, *Vanguard*
- Vanguard Orchestra, *Village Vanguard*
- Mingus Big Band, *Jazz Standard*
- McCoy Tyner, Gary Bartz, *Blue Note*
- Monday Nights with WBGO, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
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- Vinnie Sperrazza trio and Moppa Elliott’s Advancing on a Wild Pitch: Double bill, *Shapeshifter*
- Mark Sherman Quintet; Ari Hoenig Group; Jonathan Barber - After-hours Jam Session, *Small’s*

**Friday April 14**
- Tom Harrell (trumpet) Ralph Moore (saxophone) David Virelles (piano)
- Ugomna Okegwo (bass) Adam Cruz (drums), *Village Vanguard*
- Billy Childs Quartet, Donny McCasin [4/13], Steve Wilson [4/14-4/16], *Jazz Standard*
- Kenny Garrett Quintet, *Blue Note*
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn with Josh Evans, Marcus Strickland, Nasheet Waits, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Kevin Eubanks Quartet with Dave Holland, Nicholas Payton, and Jeff Tain Watts, *Birdland*
- On Ka’ Davis, *Shapeshifter*
- Tal Cohen - Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings, *Small’s*

**Saturday April 15**
- Tom Harrell (trumpet) Ralph Moore (saxophone) David Virelles (piano)
- Ugomna Okegwo (bass) Adam Cruz (drums), *Village Vanguard*
- Billy Childs Quartet, Donny McCasin [4/13], Steve Wilson [4/14-4/16], *Jazz Standard*
- Kenny Garrett Quintet, *Blue Note*
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn with Josh Evans, Marcus Strickland, Nasheet Waits, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Kevin Eubanks Quartet with Dave Holland, Nicholas Payton, and Jeff Tain Watts, *Birdland*
- Michael Bond - Afternoon Jam Session; Chris Byars Group; Philip Harper Quintet; Brooklyn Circle, *Small’s*

**Sunday April 16**
- Tom Harrell (trumpet) Ralph Moore (saxophone) David Virelles (piano)
- Ugomna Okegwo (bass) Adam Cruz (drums), *Village Vanguard*
- Billy Childs Quartet, Donny McCasin [4/13], Steve Wilson [4/14-4/16], *Jazz Standard*
- Kenny Garrett Quintet, *Blue Note*
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn with Josh Evans, Marcus Strickland, Nasheet Waits, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, *Birdland*
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Michael Pedicin Quintet; Johnny O’Neal Trio; Grant Stewart Quartet, *Brooklyn Circle, Small’s*

**Monday April 17**
- Vanguard Orchestra, *Village Vanguard*
- Mingus Big Band, *Jazz Standard*
- McCoy Tyner, Gary Bartz, *Blue Note*
- Monday Nights with WBGO, *Shapeshifter*
- Rags to Ragas*, Blaise Siwula clarinet/sax, Luciano Trojan piano, Vinny Sperazza trio and Moppa Elliott’s Advancing on a Wild Pitch: Double bill, *Shapeshifter*
- Mark Sherman Quintet; Ari Hoenig Group; Jonathan Barber - After-hours Jam Session, *Small’s*

**Tuesday April 18**
- Scott Colley Quartet, Jonathan Finlayson (trumpet, Tue-Fri) Ralph Alessi (trumpet, Sat-Sun) Jon Cowherd (piano) Scott Colley (bass) Nate Smith (drums), *Village Vanguard*
- James Carter, *Blue Note*
- Jaleel Shaw Quartet, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Ann Hampton Callaway, *Birdland*
- Vinny Sperazza trio; Jacob Sacks - piano Chet Doxas - tenor Vinny Sperazza 

(Continued on page 16)
CHano Domínguez flamenco quintet
Sonia Fernandez - Ismael Fernandez
Alexis Cuadrado - Jose Moreno

THU-SUN APR 1-2

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Troy Roberts - Dan Wilson - Michael Ofe

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Howard Johnson (4 - 7) - Kwaku Alston (4 - 7) - Hassan Ghassem (4 - 8)
Salah Soussou (4 - 9) - Ayoldele Maakarou (4 - 9) - Tampani (4 - 9)

WED APR 5

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Jay Collins - Reggie Pittman - David Luther

THU-SUN APR 6-9

Jimmy Greene Quartet
Aaron Goldberg - Doug Weiss - Otis Brown III
SAT-SUN APR 29-30

Jimmy Greene & Love in Action
Mike Moreno - Renee Rosnes - Reuben Rogers
Jeff "Tain" Watts - Roberto Bocatto

THU-FRI APR 27-28

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THU-SUN APR 13-16

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- Linda May Han Oh, Jazz Standard
- James Carter, Blue Note
- Robert Rodriguez’s Noche de Boleros featuring Claudia Acuña and Melissa Aldana, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Ann Hampton Callaway, Birdland
- Night of Illusions IV Oddfellows: The Summer Ludow quintet featuring Luca Chesney & Joao Martins Quartet Double Bill, Shapeshifter
- HaleyNxwanger Quartet; Harold Mabern Trio; Jovan Alexander - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Thursday April 20

- Scott Colley Quartet, Jonathan Finlayson (trumpet, Tue-Fri) Ralph Alessi (trumpet, Sat-Sun) Jon Cowherd (piano) Scott Colley (bass) Nate Smith (drums), Village Vanguard
- Joey DeFrancesco (Troy Roberts, Dan Wilson, Michael Ode), Jazz Standard
- Arturo Sandoval, Blue Note
- Robert Rodriguez’s Noche de Boleros featuring Claudia Acuña and Melissa Aldana, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Ann Hampton Callaway, Birdland
- Thomas Marriott Quartet; Nick Hampton Band; Sarah Slonim Project - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Friday April 21

- Scott Colley Quartet, Jonathan Finlayson (trumpet, Tue-Fri) Ralph Alessi (trumpet, Sat-Sun) Jon Cowherd (piano) Scott Colley (bass) Nate Smith (drums), Village Vanguard
- Joey DeFrancesco (Troy Roberts, Dan Wilson, Michael Ode), Jazz Standard
- Arturo Sandoval, Blue Note
- Celebrating Slide Hampton’s 85th birthday, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Ann Hampton Callaway, Birdland
- “Spin Cycle”; Rob Scheps Core-tet; After-hours Jam Session with Corey Wallace, Small’s

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- Scott Colley Quartet, Jonathan Finlayson (trumpet, Tue-Fri) Ralph Alessi (trumpet, Sat-Sun) Jon Cowherd (piano) Scott Colley (bass) Nate Smith (drums), Village Vanguard
- Joey DeFrancesco (Troy Roberts, Dan Wilson, Michael Ode), Jazz Standard
- Arturo Sandoval, Blue Note
- Celebrating Slide Hampton’s 85th birthday, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Ann Hampton Callaway, Birdland
- Andrew Forman - Afternoon Jam Session; Bhn Gillece Quartet; Rob Scheps Core-tet; Philip Harper Quintet, Small’s

Sunday April 23

- Scott Colley Quartet, Jonathan Finlayson (trumpet, Tue-Fri) Ralph Alessi (trumpet, Sat-Sun) Jon Cowherd (piano) Scott Colley (bass) Nate Smith (drums), Village Vanguard
- Joey DeFrancesco (Troy Roberts, Dan Wilson), Jazz Standard
- Arturo Sandoval, Blue Note
- Celebrating Slide Hampton’s 85th birthday, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Birdland
- Annie Chen Octet, Shapeshifter
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Ai Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Perry; Johnny O’Neal Trio; Mary Quintet; Jon Beashay - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Monday April 24

- Vanguard Orchestra, Village Vanguard
- Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Purchase Jazz Orchestra, Blue Note
- Alan Broadbent, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Craig Brann Quintet; Ari Hoenig Group; Jam Session, Small’s
Tuesday April 25

- Bill Stewart Trio, Walter Smith III (tenor sax) Larry Grenadier (bass), Bill Stewart (drums), Village Vanguard
- Soul’d Out (the finale), Maurice Brown, Chelsea Baratz, Chad Selph, Marcus Machado, Antoine Katz, Joe Blaxx, Saunders Sermons, Jazz Standard
- Duke Ellington Orchestra Celebrating Duke & Ella’s 100th Birthdays, Blue Note
- Lauren Sevian, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Jane Monheit, Birdland
- Steve Nelson Group; Abraham Burton Quartet, Small’s

Wednesday April 26

- Bill Stewart Trio, Walter Smith III (tenor sax) Larry Grenadier (bass), Bill Stewart (drums), Village Vanguard
- Pedro Giraudo Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Duke Ellington Orchestra Celebrating Duke & Ella’s 100th Birthdays, Blue Note
- Jane Monheit, Birdland
- Tim Armacost Quartet; Sam Raderman Quintet; Aaron Seeber - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Thursday April 27

- Bill Stewart Trio, Walter Smith III (tenor sax) Larry Grenadier (bass), Bill Stewart (drums), Village Vanguard
- Jimmy Greene with Aaron Goldberg, Doug Weiss, Otis Brown iii, Jazz Standard
- Duke Ellington Orchestra Celebrating Duke & Ella’s 100th Birthdays, Blue Note
- Christian Sands Quartet, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Celebrating Ella: The First Lady Of Jazz, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis and vocalists Kenny Washington and Roberta Gambini, Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Jane Monheit, Birdland
- Sanah Kadoura Group; Carlos Abadie Quintet; Jonathan Thomas - “After-hours” Jam Session, Small’s

Friday April 28

- Bill Stewart Trio, Walter Smith III (tenor sax) Larry Grenadier (bass), Bill Stewart (drums), Village Vanguard
- Jimmy Greene, Aaron Goldberg, Doug Weiss, Jazz Standard
- Duke Ellington Orchestra Celebrating Duke & Ella’s 100th Birthdays, Blue Note
- Jane Monheit, Birdland
- David Bixler Quartet; Anthony Wonsey Quartet; After-hours Jam Session with Joe Farnsworth, Small’s

Saturday April 29

- Bill Stewart Trio, Walter Smith III (tenor sax) Larry Grenadier (bass), Bill Stewart (drums), Village Vanguard
- Jimmy Greene & Lovett Action, Mike Moreno, Renee Rosnes, Reuben Rogers, Jeff “Tain” Watts, Rogerio Bocatto, Jazz Standard
- Duke Ellington Orchestra Celebrating Duke & Ella’s 100th Birthdays, Blue Note
- Jane Monheit, Birdland
- Afternoon Jam Session; Andy Farber Septet; Anthony Wonsey Quartet, Brooklyn Circle, Small’s

Sunday April 30

- Bill Stewart Trio, Walter Smith III (tenor sax) Larry Grenadier (bass), Bill Stewart (drums), Village Vanguard
- Jimmy Greene & Lovett Action, Mike Moreno, Renee Rosnes, Reuben Rogers, Jeff “Tain” Watts, Rogerio Bocatto, Jazz Standard
- Duke Ellington Orch, Duke & Ella’s 100th Birthdays, Blue Note
- All Sides of Ella with Ulysses Owens, Jr. & Friends, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Birdland
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Ai Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Perry, Leslie Harrison Quartet, Joe Magnarelli Quartet, Hilte Salem - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

“Some people’s idea of free speech is that they are free to say what they like, but if anyone says anything back that is an outrage.”

- Winston Churchill

“...among human beings jealousy ranks distinctly as a weakness; a trademark of small minds; a property of all small minds, yet a property which even the smallest is ashamed of; and when accused of its possession will lyingly deny it and resent the accusation as an insult.”

- Mark Twain

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“A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true.” — Socrates
Steve Peck
Road Manager, Buddy Rich Big Band

By Eric Nemeyer

Jazz Inside: As Buddy Rich’s manager, you became an expert at handling highly emotional, sensitive and creative people—would that be accurate?

Steve Peck: That’s not far off. When dealing with the level that Buddy was at—you’d have to put him in the genius category someplace—there’s always some deficit that comes with genius. Entertainers especially have deficits when it comes to social behavior. Buddy was probably at the top of that list in most cases. He was really a very, very shy guy. He was like a Boy Scout and sometimes a Cub Scout leader for the band. He was like a travel agent. Sometimes it was really very good and at times—which were in the minority—it was very, very bad, as far as social engagement on the bus… it would depend on the band and where we were going. A smaller size town or city compared to New York or Chicago or LA or San Francisco… key places on our itineraries had to be right. And if they weren’t, there was a degree of animosity that came off the drums toward the band… back to the genius category. There’s an ego involved with genius, in the celebrity world, that I was exposed to. I don’t know about all of these guys, but if it’s not number one, it’s tough. I remember Buddy, on a number of occasions, went head-to-head with some pretty big talent over who got billing… Mel Tormé comes to mind. He wanted to be number one and Buddy wanted to be number one, so they wound up putting them side by side. On certain occasions it became problematic and quite interesting. It led to some head-butting and some name-calling. It was eye opening and psychologically bigger than his bite, during the time that I knew him. There were some stories that floated around that he became physical and he was punished for it. Over the course of his career, he came across as a real tough guy, and hard to handle talent. He hurt himself. My personal input to this is that he was as big a talent as you can get. It wasn’t just playing drums, as far as a show, it was electrifying. Most of the audience waited for that last ten minute drum solo, really the band was supporting Buddy that whole time, till they got what they wanted.

JI: Did he ever tap dance when you were with him?

SP: As a matter of fact, he did a little jig every night. If you want to say on the stage, no. But he got himself up by loosening up… it was like a thing for him. There was one show where we were doing a tour of Europe with Sammy Davis, and we were in England. Buddy was the honored guest and Sammy came on unexpectedly and they did a tap-dance number… or a sand dance number—they spread some sand on the stage and they were doing a shuffle kind of thing and then they got into a tap dance and Sammy decided he was going to upstage Buddy, as far as cameras were concerned, and got in front of him. Buddy never wanted to be upstaged by anybody so he kind of really took it up a notch and put Sammy away. Sammy realized what was going professional level—which is a history story of where he began. From a very young age, from what I understand from pictures I’ve seen and people I’ve spoken to, he was like a learning machine. He soaked up everything that he saw. Till the last day, he had this genius memory. He could remember everything that he had ever played and remember the lyrics to every song that he had ever heard and he knew how it was supposed to be. He had a tremendous repertoire. Enormous. As far as musical ability, he could play just about every instrument and he knew what was supposed to come out of it; aside from the fact the he couldn’t read music, he had the musical genius of not perfect pitch but perfect memory and he knew what was supposed to be. He couldn’t tell a player if he was sharp or flat, he just knew that it wasn’t right. And when it was wrong, he went after him, the same way anybody at that moment he’s coming after. To get it right and to get your students, apprentices up to that night’s level. Do it the way it’s supposed to be done, which was what was drilled into him through his whole career. Every time he played, like with Tommy Dorsey or with Artie Shaw, all of these guys had that same “had to have it right” kind of thing. Otherwise you’re out of here.

JI: Why don’t you talk about how you came to be Buddy’s right hand man. How did that association develop?

SP: Well, it was an accident…and it’s been an accident for many, many years. I say that with joy, because it started out as just a fluke. I was sitting on the beach in a bathing suit in Fort Lauderdale…and a guy that worked for Buddy at that time came down the street with Buddy’s car that had to be very challenging to be able to read him without getting canned or yelled at. A lot of my tolerance to being yelled at, was that I had a built in self-defense mechanism, to know that he wasn’t yelling at me personally… he just had to yell. So, if it was a band or some poor guy that was trying to make a hamburger for him or the person behind him on the plane that was juggling his seat, he would yell… otherwise, he was a very pussy cat kind of guy. There’s no getting around that his bark was much on—that he had turned Buddy into a monster, so he backed off. The emcee of the show, whoever it might have been, kind of realized that it was starting to get a little hot, so he busted it up. He learned from all of the greats in the tap dance business. He saw, every night at Vaudeville all the wonderful dancing that was going on. Because you didn’t push a button and turn on the TV in those days. Live entertainment was all that existed. So, his first nineteen years, before he started playing drums at a Sand Dance number… or a sand dance number—there were some instances it became problematic and quite interesting. Most of the audience waited for that last ten minute drum solo, really the band was supporting Buddy that whole time, till they got what they wanted.

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SP: …of 1975. Well, I was living on the beach in a house with a couple of guys and a couple of girls were downstairs and I was upstairs. It was a different time for me because I had just wound up with a separation and a divorce from a marriage and I decided—I was in my mid-thirties, and I had never done anything like this and it was like a good time to see what the lifestyle would be. I had grown up in a pretty disciplined shall we say Brooklyn, Jewish kind of thing?

JI: Buddy Rich grew up in a Brooklyn, Jewish.

SP: Exactly. A whole bunch of good people came out of Brooklyn, don’t get me wrong. It was a different lifestyle for me. I had a business, a corporate life, of designing factories and that kind of went by having some super human thing built into him that doesn’t exist in most people. You can work as long as you want and you’ll never get to that level.

JI: You were telling me about that particular one where you had just left New York City a couple of days before to go on that tour. Maybe you want to get into that a little?

SP: Well, the Second Avenue Deli was one of the stops on the way out of New York. It was like, you’re going to pack up your stash. You’ve got a stash going out of New York of chopped liver and whatever other delicacies you can’t get on the road.

JI: And you were on the beach at Fort Lauderdale…probably sometime in the winter?

SP: Well, or others,’ but I was the first guy in the line to get it. It’s kick the dog or kick Steve. So, he would kick Steve or he would kick the lead trumpet player or whoever happened to be closest at the time. It would be, “I’m not taking this kind of stuff. I’ll see you later,” or it would be, “Get off the bus!” And he’d leave you someplace in the middle of nowhere. I’d have to find my way back to New York and go and get my back pay. Then after two weeks the phone would ring and it would be, “Hey man, what are you doing? Do you think you might be able to come out?” And I would say, “You’ve got to be kidding me…after that?” And he’d say, “Well, we’ll double your salary” or something like and I would say, “Well, I’m not doing anything right now,” and I’d get on a plane or whatever and meet them wherever they were having trouble and pick up the pieces. This was the way the first three or four years went. I started in 1975.

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JI: Was apple pie one of those?

SP: No, we bought apple pie on the road. That was one thing that didn’t stay in the cooler well. I’m sorry you asked me that because that opens up a whole other area of diet on the road. It’s not the greatest place to be. There’s only one stop you can make with fifteen guys on the bus and get out of there in ten minutes. It wasn’t like we were living the life of celebrity dining. It’s hard to eat on the road. Buddy had a preference for a particular brand and that’s the only place we went. It was like Howard Johnson’s; you knew what the room was. I’m not saying it was Howard Johnson’s, but the room was standard issue, and you’d find the toothbrush holder in the same place everywhere you woke up.

JI: Coming out of New York, he’d get a couple pounds of that chopped liver he liked.

SP: ...and in about three days most of it was gone, because that’s all he ate. There were New York City hot dogs, too. You had to stop on Broadway and 72nd street, otherwise it wasn’t New York. So, he lived in New York and he lived on the bus...and loved Chicago. London was a great place because he could eat all the Italian food that he wanted. There were some favorite eating establishments. Most of them were steak...and more steak, because he needed it in order to be able to get along. He also consumed chocolate milkshakes a lot, which were made when we were in the hotel. He took along Fox’s U-Bet by the case. Hershey’s didn’t make it, but Fox’s U-Bet was a winner, because that’s what he grew up with. Buddy’s habits—culinary, dining—he knew how to eat well, but it was like a very limited diet. That’s like, unfortunately, some of the health problems in America. He consumed stuff that he shouldn’t have, but he refused, even after the heart attack, to give it up. He was like, smoke a few cigarettes...but man, you’re not supposed to be smoking. He said, “I want to smoke. Don’t tell me what not to do. Go buy me a pack of cigarettes.” And I said, “You’re going to have to buy your own cigarettes, man.” Because I had recently quit and I just couldn’t enable him any more. And he knew it, so he had other people run for cigarettes. There were some things that I wouldn’t do, mostly regarding his health, after almost losing him. It’s not a pretty sight to see a man in the hospital with all kinds of tubes sticking out of him. He wasn’t just my employer, we were really good friends. To see him in that condition was not pleasant. After he came back from the heart attack, he was changed. He was stopping to smell the flowers. You could actually talk him into going to the Grand Canyon and looking at something rather than just going ninety miles an hour across the country. We’d get to Chicago and there are some really good steak joints. The place for ribs was Miller’s in Chicago. I was hanging up there about a year ago. I went back to Miller’s and found that same table with the same picture, along with all the other celebrities that go to Miller’s. So there were places that he really enjoyed; were home to him.

JI: What were some of the places that you and he enjoyed going cross country?

SP: There are a lot of miles between Chicago and LA. He didn’t particularly like Las Vegas or Denver. The mid-west was good for him. He had great respect. When we got into the south...we didn’t do too much in the South. Florida, yes, because that was fairly transplanted Brooklyn-ites. Texas, we did a few going across, but Texas is a very long state. It takes you a thousand miles to get across it. After that is New Mexico, Nevada...and 72 pounds of that chopped liver he liked.

JI: Of course, New Mexico has Roswell, where the famous UFO sightings occurred in 1947. Wasn’t Buddy interested in Ufos?

SP: Yes, he was very knowledgeable and he was associated with a whole bunch of people...Dr. Allen Hynek...

JI: Who ran the Blue Book Project, which was a government cover-up project, then turned around when he realized that this stuff was actually legit. Buddy knew him?

SP: Yes he did. He visited him in Chicago, when he had his thing there. Roswell was not a place to play. We played Los Alamos, which was a strange place to get to, because its really out in the middle of the desert and I don’t even know why they did it, because nobody would know that it was there. It was built in amongst the canyons, but we played there. Favorite places? LA, San Francisco was very good to him. But then it was also the hotels that he stayed at. When we got to San Francisco, it was the Paramount. In LA, it was Home. We would use major cities as a jumping off place. Rather than stay in smaller towns, we would drive two or three hundred miles just to get back to a major city. There aren’t too many places in Montana...east to west the whole state you’d never see anything—like eight hundred miles and it takes you two days, at ninety to drive across the state of Montana.

JI: Back to the recovery from the bypass...

SP: Well, there was no real recovery. We were supposed to play Ann Arbor. Of course, that was cancelled and Ed Shaughnessy came out with the band and played a couple of things. I guess it was maybe four or five weeks till Buddy got back to actually sitting behind a set of drums. I think he did that with Freddie Gruber. He was going to play. He had this unbelievable drive.

JI: When was this?

SP: 1983. Buddy said this to his doctor—it’s a quote. The doctor said, “it’s too soon. You can’t go back. You can’t do what you did for awhile.” He convinced him enough to say, “Okay I’ll take another two weeks.” So the band flew over after eight weeks, on a regular plane. Buddy flew on the Concord. I met him at the airport. That night, he dressed the band in tuxedos. Normally, we played Ronnie Scott’s in T-shirts, it was really casual. He said, “Tonight I’m putting on a tux and we’re going to see if it works.” He was like stitched together with wires and suture on his chest. After the show he had his wrists in ice-water because he had swollen up. He was taking all kinds of suppressor drugs to keep his heart rate from bursting loose. He played in spite of that, but he paid a price. Because after that, he did thirty days touring Great Britain. We almost lost him because he just didn’t have the juice in him. We had to cancel one night. Then he was right back on his regular schedule. The only exercise that he ever got was playing, so for eight hours during the day we sat on the bus. We had an exer-cycle, we had a bicycle. We had all kinds of stuff, but he didn’t want to know about it. Buddy was his own man, to get back to that part again. He knew his own body and wanted to do his own thing and continue on.

JI: Tell me about Buddy and Frank Sinatra...

SP: A booking agent got word from Mr. Sinatra that he would like to have Buddy’s band on a tour with him. Which was, unfortunately, probably the worst thing that could ever happen to Buddy, because Buddy as an opening act in the middle of a twenty thousand seat arena had to look like...ego, right out of the box, you know. Thirty minutes of high-powered, arm waving exaggerated playing—showmanship—in order to get that audience up for Frank. He hurt himself because it wasn’t happening every day. He didn’t have the hour and a half warm-up.

JI: His thing was to do an hour and a half warm up with the band and the finish with the finale...

SP: With Frank, he had to be “on” all the time. That whole thirty minutes was like...drum solo. He wasn’t doing it every night. Like, we would on the road and Frank would be on one night and be off four or five days, or the next weekend have another show. It wasn’t like Buddy’s usual thing. With his heart situation, and still recovering and not being as young as he was, it was a hardship, and it showed. The continuing diet...

JI: He didn’t change his diet after the...

SP: No. Like I said, he was his guy. He wanted what he wanted. When I got into trouble with him was when I would say, “no.” If anybody would say, “no, you can’t have that and you shouldn’t,” he would go out of his way to prove that he was going to have it. And twice as much! So, he put on a gut, he put on much too much weight, and the wrong kind of weight for a recovering cardiac patient. This is like a word to the wise: you just don’t do this kind of stuff and get away with it. Unfortunately, he didn’t. If you do the best you can and you’re going to go, you’re going to go, but he wanted to go the way he wanted to. He could have changed his career. He could have played in a small band, but he wanted that power, he wanted that control. He wanted to put it out there. That was his thing, the big band. He could play amazing stuff—small group, he was just superb and if he played brushes, nobody could take him. But he didn’t.

JI: What happened after the heart attack?

SP: At that age and at that stage, with the damage that he incurred, he wasn’t as good internally. I don’t know how many calories a jazz drummer burns, but the sweat didn’t come from being nervous. It came from work. He sweat, that was part of his thing. If he didn’t work out a sweat, he knew
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that he didn’t put out as much as he could have. He really worked hard. At that level of his game, to be able to do it for as long as he did and he didn’t want to lose it. He knew that if he lost it, he was hanging up his sticks, so he played it right out to the end. Through all the adversity, this was the show must go on Buddy. This was what he learned growing up and this is what he had and that’s what he tried to project to the world, that the show will go on. And he did. Johnny Carson knew when the show was over. He knew when to hang up his sticks, literally, because they played together. Buddy gave Johnny a drum set that Johnny played on. Johnny was playing with pencils on the stage ever since then. So it was like, for Buddy not to play at the level that he played…he went out playing. He died with his boots on, as they say. He did what he had to do and nobody was going to deter him. He didn’t give up. He gave Johnny a drum set that Johnny played on. Johnny was playing with pencils on the stage ever since then. So it was like, for Buddy not to play at the level that he played…he went out playing. He died with his boots on, as they say. He did what he wanted to do and nobody was going to deter him from that band. We have to give him a lot of credit; at the same time we have to understand that he was driven. He was coming from a place that most of us can’t understand. Just to be able to perform at that level, in front of ten million people in his lifetime—not counting TV, live performances—I might be exaggerating here, but how many people saw Buddy play? …And walked out of there with their jaws slack and going, “Oh my God! Look at what he just did! “And that’s how he ended, just about every night. People were stunned at his performances. That’s a level that is very hard to keep on a consistent basis. So, perhaps, all those stories about the rage… the rage was part of his ability to be able to keep that level going. It was an adrenaline rush. Whether he manufactured it from getting angry over the smallest thing, it just got him up there. And it allowed him to play at the level that he expected people to have.

JI: I think one of the first recordings you may have been around for was Buddy Rich Plays and Plays and Plays. Barry Keiner was on that. They did one on a specialty label, you know an audio file kind of a thing, where they did “Bouncin’ With Bud” and maybe “Birdland”…

SP: We did some on, I recall, not a major label…I think in a studio in Tennessee somewhere. It wasn’t a major event. Most of Buddy’s recordings, unfortunately, because of Buddy’s demands in the studio, never really came off as well as a live performance. If he had take two or take three, it just didn’t have it. It wasn’t at a level with the first take, because he was putting it all out there…hardly any rehearsals. It was like, “Let’s not wear ourselves out folks. Let’s just give everything we’ve got… roll the tape…full speed ahead.” Not to be clichéish about it, but the engineers would put baffling around the drums because the drums got into all the other mics on stage. Because he didn’t want to be in an isolation booth, which is the way most recordings are made these days, also with a metronome someplace—he wanted to have a live band playing all together, the way they played on stage…and it would drive engineers crazy because they couldn’t isolate the sound. “Hold it…we just ran out of tape” or “the cable broke,” or…all of these things impeded him. So, by the time he got to take three or four, it wasn’t like there where he was at. So, all the recording dates that I had been on, whether it was for RCA in a big fancy studio, or in a little place in Tennessee somewhere, he wasn’t at his best recorded. I had made some tapes and there were tapes being made of live concerts which were much better than the entire studio operation came out. The sound quality wasn’t there, but the feel was there. The band was together. There was no pressure. The microphones were one thing, but the guy sitting behind the big console, the A and R guy, most of the time was looking for a particular sound, not what Buddy was playing. The end result never really came out well. I made a bunch of good tapes. I recorded the band every night for years and years with the first line tape recorder. This was not for anybody else. In the early days we would lay out a tour two, possibly three months at a time. Willard son’s band…

SP: So, when we did sit-down gigs for like a week, we would do them with somebody like Tony Bennett…Frank—excuse me, Mr. Sinatra, or Mr. S, as everyone called him, including Buddy, in occasional sarcastic moments, because he was on a first name basis. The two of them had quite a history going on, which was in some other book that you can read, but to hear Buddy’s side of it was quite something. To hear what the publishers thought about Mr. Sinatra is something else. Not to belabor the point…that was one of the things that was enjoyable about the front of the bus. Buddy had this amazing sense of humor and was very fast-witted. He’d turn things upside down and inside out, like faster than you could blink. I’m not blowing my own horn, but I understood what he was doing and I could answer him in some strange way…I was the straight man for Buddy Rich.

JI: You were Bud Abbott and he was Lou Costello.

SP: Okay, it wasn’t that good, but it kept them entertained. He played from the front of the bus with words a lot…I want to get back to the recording of the band. It wasn’t for production, it wasn’t for outside, it was for the next day, riding down the road, so Buddy could hear what the band was doing. He would critique himself and the band on that and it was without yelling and screaming. He would pass it around in the front of the bus which was mostly me and Steve Marcus. Marcus also had the sense of humor to be able to communicate with Buddy and keep him entertained and entertaining us. That was an amazing source of the adventure. To me, this whole thing was an adventure. I did something, like I said, that not too many people have an opportunity to do. It was a magic carpet… and at the same time, it was like, maybe I better join the Marines because boot camp in the Marines has got to be easier than what I’m doing today. The conditions, in some cases, were really horrendous. We had to do stuff that most other people don’t do, like ride eight hundred miles on a bus, play two hours, get back on the bus and then keep on going. Our destinations were obscure. The hardest part of this gig was getting between gigs. That drone of the diesel engine…endless. Most of the traveling we

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did was at night. It was easier to drive because you could go faster, without traffic. You’re driving with professionals and you’ve got to get there, to the next town. So, after we’d play someplace, we’d get on the bus and drive—as an average—three or four hundred miles. These are the distances once you’re out past Chicago that you have to drive between towns. So, we’d drive, get to a place at six o’clock or seven o’clock in the morning, go to sleep, get up, play the gig and then travel the next day again. Buddy didn’t want to stay where he was—the Howard Johnson’s wouldn’t exist…the steak place wouldn’t exist…the road, for him, when he first started out, was really tougher than what we were doing. You didn’t go five hundred miles a night in those days. There weren’t interstates, there weren’t the roads…Two lane highways that were poorly marked…

JI: Earlier on, I guess, was when the firing and hiring happened, after he realized how valuable you were?

SP: I got more valuable as I went along. I started increasing my worth by doing more and more. It became, to me, a real challenge. Not to be funny about it, but it was a twenty-four-seven kind of thing. It was. I was the road manager, the tour manager, the roadie that schlepped the stuff, set up the drums, set up the sound, did the stage managing and the calling of all the lighting cues and whatever and enjoyed the heck out of every night. I was being treated to one of the great beautiful events of our time, because there weren’t too many people doing it. There were a few big bands left and I’ve got to give them an awful lot of credit because they don’t make the millions of dollars on tour that the rock and rollers make, or the pop musicians, or the classical musicians can make. There were a few—during a solo, If he missed getting around like three drums—three drums is more than anybody needs—this is an aside by the way. Buddy didn’t, shall we say, appreciate some of the rock guys who had fourteen drums or more and surrounded themselves and could do triplets all around the world. His thing was like if you can’t do it on one snare drum then you’re not a drummer. The rest of that stuff was all show and flash, you know and it sold drums to kids. If you want to be a drummer, do it on one drum. So, it got pretty deep. Of course there are all kinds of stories about his temper. But, he came up playing with the very best players. On his way up, he was screamed at. He learned this routine from up…and he would get mad at himself. If he dropped a stick, it was like the worst offense a drummer could make…you just blew the whole scene, now, by dropping a stick or getting it caught on the side of a drum and not being able to hang on to it. It didn’t happen often, but when it did, he was his own worst enemy. He would come back ferociously. If he missed something that he tried to do, he would go after it onstage. I’m talking about during a solo. If he missed getting around like three drums—three drums is more than anybody needs—this is an aside by the way. Buddy didn’t, shall we say, appreciate some of the rock guys who had fourteen drums or more and surrounded themselves and could do triplets all around the world. His thing was like if you can’t do it on one snare drum then you’re not a drummer. The rest of that stuff was all show and flash, you know and it sold drums to kids. If you want to be a drummer, do it on one drum. So, it got pretty deep. Of course there are all kinds of stories about his temper. But, he came up playing with the very best players. On his way up, he was screamed at. He learned this routine from other great bandleaders who were esteemed in the industry…nobody ever heard about this stuff until after they’d passed away. But basically, Buddy grew up in that environment and that’s the only way he knew.

JI: You want to share some of the funny stories?

SP: Well, the funny stories, as relating to me…what’s funny? Buddy had a tremendous sense of humor and he’d have an entire audience in stitches. He would sit down at the end of the stage—which he did—and I don’t think there are that many tapes of that kind of stuff going around. He would be sitting at the end of the first set and rather than go on an intermission, he would sit down and talk to the audience. He would just joke around a bit and nobody would leave…the band would leave…but I was there and I was witness to some amazing stand-up comedy—even though he was sitting on the stage. He picked and chose his places and depending on his mood, he could keep you in stitches. It was a level that was equal to the comic genius resided in him along with the musical genius. Not to make light of that, he was a very funny guy, where he was not in a “well-known” situation…like when he was on the Carson show, Johnny would call him something evil. He would joke with Johnny at a level that was beyond most of the audience’s comprehension. A lot of really hip stuff was going on backstage with the writers and Johnny and Buddy and I was privy to that. Johnny was extremely spontaneous…he had to be at that level. When Buddy was on a one-on-one onstage and the cameras were on, it was like the Buddy that Johnny presented to the world. That helped Buddy’s career a great deal; international exposure. His booking agents used to take us into the back country—these people saw him, knew who he was. The guy that was on the Carson show three or four times a year, which was unheard of. He was on probably more frequently than any other guest. He played the drums on every show.

JI: Do you remember if there were events where other celebrity jazz musicians or guest artists sat in with the band?

SP: That’s kind of a discography question, but I would say Dizzy, on a number of occasions did that. Not too many guests. He would announce them in the audience. There’s a famous story about Buddy and Mel Tormé, which has been written about any number of times. It’s that Buddy was playing this club in New York and he knew Mel was going to be there. So he told the audience when he introduced Mel, to be silent…not to applaud, not to give Mel any kind of recognition. Buddy introduced Mel. Mel stood up and that was it. [laughter] With the practical jokes of Buddy and Mel going at each other, it seems Buddy was always the giver and Mel the taker of jokes. I never heard of Mel coming back at Buddy. In all of the years Mel and Buddy were friends. But at one point—I’m not really sure what the disagreement was—but they would up, even though they were playing together, not speaking. I was kind of like the intermediary. “He said that” and “No, he said this.” I was not the interpreter but I was speaking for each voice because they wouldn’t listen to each other. This went on even though they were sitting on the same plane—they wouldn’t talk to each other. It was really strange. They were carrying on some kind of thing that was beyond me. There was a lot of that. But at the same time, they’d be doing a week at a theatre in Stanford and there were ten people in the audience. It was like, what are we doing here? Well, we have to finish the gig because we won’t get paid. How can they pay us if they’re losing money every night? We’re getting paid but only after we fulfill our contract. How do you play to ten people? Then one night, Mel came in and asked how many people were in the audience and I said, “Three.” He just did not believe there were only three people that came out to see Buddy Rich and Mel Tormé in Stanford, Connecticut. I don’t know what the reason was—if nobody knew we were there or they just didn’t care, but Stanford’s not too far from New York and we did really good business in that neighborhood. So, I can’t answer that, but there are a number of times
Buddy Rich / Steve Peck

that we bombed. And it’s not a good feeling—especially for a marque name—to bomb. I think back on some of the Sinatra concerts where he would be looking out for people backstage before he went on to make sure the audience was a full house.

JII: What were some of the highlights of the Sinatra/Rich bookings that you observed?

SP: They were dynamite, you know. You play Royal Albert Hall for one week in London and sell the place out. People standing and cheering and throwing flowers on the stage. No matter where we went, Frank had that ability. Even when he couldn’t sing anymore, people would come out and they just adored the man. It was magic at a level most people wouldn’t understand. Even past his prime, so to speak, because Frank was starting to lose it, even though he was continuing to perform. Everybody knew that he wasn’t happening at a hundred percent. It wasn’t the same guy that was out there ten or five or two years before. He had teleporters to keep him aware of what was going on with the lyrics. When we first started, over like two or three years of doing Frank’s stuff—it wasn’t a continuous kind of thing. —there were moments that were just absolutely stunning…playing at some great locations. He was just an amazing performer. He didn’t even have to sing. He could come out onstage and just stand there and people were just slack-jawed, just to be in his presence. One of the problems of touring with Mr. Sinatra was that he entertained after the show as well as during the show. If you went to a city somewhere, after the show, most of the time, there was a dinner for the higher-ups in the band. The attorney generals, the judges…maybe fifteen, twenty people. There were receiving lines; it was almost like a royalty situation. Part of Buddy’s obligation with the show was to be at those receptions after the show. Mr. Sinatra never sweat a drop, he’d walk out in a tux and he’d finish in that suit and he’d go right to the event. On the other hand, Buddy would be drenched, would have to change his clothes and by the time he was done playing, to go to one of these events—and Buddy was not what you would call a high social animal—as a matter of fact he kind of abhorred going to these events, but because it required him, he went and stood in the receiving line. All of that stuff, so it was very politicized, but that was part of Frank’s thing. After a while, Buddy started going like, “I really don’t want to do this.” Eventually he didn’t do it, he didn’t show up. And it caused great anxiety and angst and ire on the Sinatra side, because they expected Buddy to be there. After the second failed attempt, I got some pretty heavy phone calls from the hierarchy…we had a call from New York in Atlanta—we were supposed to do a show in Atlanta—we got the call that said, “You don’t have to do the show”…“What do you mean, we don’t have to do the show?” “Mr. Sinatra requests the lack of your company”…[mutual laughter]…and he flew in a New York studio guy to replace Buddy at great cost. The message was, “sorry but you let me down.” And that was, according to Buddy, one of the few times in his entire life that he was ever fired. That ended the Frank Sinatra/Buddy Rich association for probably the last time, because there was some animosity throughout their careers as to who had top billing. At one point Buddy wanted equal billing to Frank at a show in New York and Mr. Sinatra’s people said, “I don’t think so,” and Buddy said, “Well, I ain’t gonna do the gig”. So, to answer that, the story went, Mr. Sinatra took second billing to Count Basie. The billing came out Count Basie and his band…featuring Frank Sinatra, which was the total reverse of the way show biz was, because the band, at that point, was backing Mr. Sinatra. So, the attorneys had a field day with Buddy on some things. I was in between that, along with the Alexander Agency, that got squashed…or became embarrassing. Unfortunately, it became embarrassing enough that Buddy was still doing the one-nighters in the mid-west instead of the well-paid, easy gigs.

JII: So, there definitely was a dichotomy between these one-nighters, specifically, and this gig where you might not have played as much, but when the gig did happen it was dollar signs; all the right locations, all the right everything, and things went smoothly. I guess its hard for a lot of people to imagine giving that up—many people work decades to get to that point—to just throw it away…

SP: Like I said, Buddy wanted to be his own guy there too. Another instance that comes to mind—this one kind of shows a sadness on Buddy’s part. We were doing Carnegie Hall and after the first night or the second night that Buddy played, an elderly gentleman came back into the dressing room and thanked Buddy for his performance and welcomed him to the hall. He turned around and left and Buddy said, “Who was that?” I said, “That was Isaac Stern,” and Buddy broke down, started to tear up and was speechless. Aside from being embarrassed about not knowing Mr. Stern; it was like being welcomed to our home. For a jazz musician to be playing Carnegie Hall was like the Benny Goodman concerts back in the late thirties, when they first brought jazz around to Carnegie Hall. So he felt very much honored, but at the same time extremely humbled by the reception that he got there. So, that was a highlight for me as well. That was a very, very touching moment, describing two very high level gentlemen one on one. And Buddy going, “Oh, I didn’t know.” But after the fact, he got his thing together and he was cool, but it was like one of the vulnerabilities that didn’t show often with Mr. Rich. He was a very, very sensitive guy—he didn’t want that to be seen. That was not his image to the world. He was the tough guy; he came out of the gangster era.

JII: Who were some of the musicians that came through the band that you developed relationships with?

SP: Sadly enough, there was a dividing curtain on the band. There was the front of the bus and there were the rest of us. It was a strange hierarchy. Steve Marcus, Barry Keiner—who were roommates of mine, over the years—we were like the four musketeers. I say this out of sadness and out of respect for both Marcus and Keiner, who are no longer with us. Barry passed away many years ago and Steve not too long ago. It came as a total shock and surprise. I’m the only guy left out of that musketeer group so that gives me a real empty feeling that they’re gone, but at the same time, I associated with some genius at that part of my life, which I’m very grateful for. Barry Keiner was the only piano player that sat down and played one chord and I lost it. I’m going, like, how can someone play just one chord and have such a sound to it that affected me so emotionally—and I am emotionally impact-ed by music—from the Star Spangled Banner to whatever. My wife can attest to that—I’ll mute too much, sometimes. I don’t find that objectionable, for myself, I don’t understand the motivation for why I do that but its something that’s part of me. Not to get funny about it, but I’m not the only one; otherwise music wouldn’t be listened to, along with some of the other finer things in life that you appreciate. And I appreciate that at that time I was exposed to the music world. I haven’t been, for quite a while. After Buddy passed away, I kind of got out of the music world. All of those folk that I had associated with…its kind of like, they were then and this is now and as long as I’m not on that bus it’s a whole other world. When that door closed on the bus, it was another place. So, in retrospect, I really was close to everything that was going on because of my job—that I had to do—but at the same time, I really enjoyed what I was doing. I had a challenge. It was like I said before, I would have been better off in boot camp, because of the hardships. I wasn’t slogging it in mud, but I was doing a hard job and so was everybody else. This is not an easy thing to do. The pleasure of the two hours a night was what you were working for—to put that show on as good as you can. That was the reward to be able to be in a big town, a big arena, or a small one…and know that, like Buddy said, “You’ve exposed these people to a whole other level. And maybe they’ll be better because of it and appreciate what we do here.” Those were some of the things that were highlights for me, throughout all the years. Aside from listening to some really good players, every night in the jazz world and not having it sound like a recording or a lip-synched show that’s run by a computer somewhere. This was like live music—spontaneous jazz was what it was about. That was the key thing for Buddy, to present that kind of a show…to be able to say, “This is what we do and take it for what its worth. If you don’t like me, tough.” We would play shows sometimes where we would get no response back from an audience and he’d say, “What am I doing wrong?” I’d say, “It’s not what you’re doing wrong, its what are they doing wrong? Because they don’t know, really, what you do here, so you’re teaching them at a very high level, and you’re way over their heads.” In a more sophisticated setting, no problem. To go into the deep south, you’re doomed. They don’t know what you’re doing. They’ve never heard of this kind of stuff, so it was very geographical. We took our music—Buddy’s music—all over the world. It was amazing the response that you got back:people applauding for ten, fifteen minutes at the end of a show. How many encores can we play? You’d run out of stuff to do…you can’t top what you just did, besides your physically not being able to. There’s blood on the stage…there are trumpet players that are bleeding because their lips are split, because they’re blowing their hearts out…and that’s what he was looking for.
“when music takes on a spiritual dimension”

By Gary Heimbauer

JI: Over the years, you have continued to keep up quite a prolific pace as a composer and arranger. How does this process work for you? What inspires you?

BC: The compositional process that I use depends on the composition, or rather, the intent of the composition. Sometimes I find it necessary to look inward, in order to express some sort of inner darkness or deeply buried emotion. Sometimes it’s the external world that inspires me - things in nature. Trying to recreate a beautiful natural scenario in music, just as French impressionism does. The main goal for me is always to make a dramatic statement with my music, one that will make the listener feel the drama and have it relate to his/her own experience. When it comes to melody - a component of the music that I feel is of the utmost importance - I wait for it to come to me. A beautiful melody, like a beautifully constructed sentence, is something that I cannot manufacture or rush. It has to come from the soul and, I believe, it makes itself evident. To me, it is a skill that cannot be taught in a classroom; it’s definitely the most difficult aspect of composing. I guess I would say that the older I get, the more I’m willing to revise my music several times before finishing.

JI: You grew up on the West Coast. What are some notable differences you find in the life and activities of a musician there versus the East?

BC: Well, the differences have more to do with the basic lifestyle differences between the two coasts. One specific thing I can say is that I find it easier to rehearse musicians in Los Angeles, simply because there is more space. Everyone has a car and can easily drive over to my house where I’ve converted my garage into a rehearsal space. In New York, I have to rent the rehearsal space, and the musicians have to worry about parking. On another note, there is a tendency to think of Los Angeles as a place where music is a trade, mainly because of the studio scene, whereas New York is a place where you go to develop your playing and concept. While there is truth to that presumption, it’s a bit of a generalization and not always true - there are a lot of really individual, innovative, and original musicians living in Los Angeles. On the other hand, there are a lot of New York musicians that punch in and out of a clock doing Broadway shows. But generally speaking, I find that more often than not, it is true.

JI: Could you talk about working with Chris Botti? I saw your band at Newport and I loved the interaction with the audience.

BC: It has been really great. I guess I have a history of working with trumpet players: Freddie Hubbard, Nat Adderley, and now Chris Botti. You mention interaction with the audience. Chris is one of the most adept speakers I’ve ever encountered. He really knows how to communicate verbally with an audience. The band is phenomenal with Billy Kilson on drums, Robert Hurst or Tim LeFebvre on bass, Mark Whitfield on guitar, me and Chris. He works non-stop - somewhere in the range of 250+ days out of the year.

JI: You’ve worked with Freddie Hubbard, Grover Washington, J.J. Johnson, Nat Adderley, Allan Holdsworth, Bobby Watson, Tony Williams etc. What were some notable aspects of those experiences? What wisdom have you gathered through these experiences affected your musicianship?

BC: My main teacher, without question, would be Freddie Hubbard. Also, J.J. Johnson figures very importantly in my development as a jazz musician. I love Freddie and I miss him terribly. Sometimes when I hear old recordings of me playing with him, I understand the incredible patience he must’ve exercised by simply withholding the “youthful” comping decisions I made while he was trying to solo. He taught me how to comp on a very high level because his soloing was so melodically rich. I remember he once told me to start my solos in the middle of the range of a particular melodic phrase, rather than from the top to the bottom, as though I were playing a pianistic scale exercise. Alan Holdsworth is another icon who has had a profound influence on me. I was intrigued by his harmonic sense, which is one of the most sophisticated systems I’ve ever checked out. He has this one tune, “Looking Glass,” where it is essentially four-part chorale-type harmony. It’s very simple in its construction, but absolutely brilliant in its economy of voicing. He’ll have one note move in the middle of the chord and it will change the entire sound and direct the progression in an entirely surprising yet logical place.

JI: Who would be your ultimate dream band (musicians could be dead or alive) and why?

BC: I already have my dream band: Bob Sheppard, Carol Robbins, Larry Koonse, Scott Colley, Brian Blade - or Jimmy Johnson, Antonio Sanchez. I’ve been really fortunate in that musicians I really respect find my music interesting enough to want to be involved in it.

JI: What kinds of challenges do you face as an independent artist, and what advice can you share about overcoming one or more obstacles?

BC: Today’s music business paradigm is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, gone are the days when a record company would sign an artist to a “record deal”, pay for everything including advertising, tour-support, radio promotion, etc. Of course, they would own the masters. Also, the days are gone where people had only one way to hear music (the radio) and, more importantly, only one way to buy it. So sales could be really tightly controlled and monitored (and manipulated). There was more centralized control over the business aspect. On the other hand, the internet is becoming (if not already arrived) the main way that music is consumed, be it iTunes, Amazon, CD baby, etc. Since technology has made it easier to produce high quality CDs from your home, everybody and their mother has a CD out. So it’s easier to put out a CD, but harder to distinguish yourself with your music. I would suggest to an independent artist to have a plan. Know why you’re putting out this music. I would suggest to an independent artist to have a plan. Know why you’re putting out this music. Why would anyone want to buy it? What do you have to offer? Once you figure that out, then I think that you need to have five basic things to shoot for. First, the CD that you make has to be the best that it can possibly be in all regards – the music, the packaging, the production, etc. Secondly, once having done the CD, distribution and fulfillment need to be worked out, whether it’s with an online label, a licensing thing with a traditional label, or you do the whole thing yourself. Thirdly, a publicist is essential - one who focuses on print, interviews, ads and reviews. Fourth, you need a radio promoter, someone whose job it is to make sure your stuff gets played on the radio. Finally, and by far the most difficult, you need a booking agent. The previous four are things that are taken care of by paying money, but the agent has to believe in your work, because it’s gonna be an investment of his/her time. But live bookings are essen-

“...”

(Continued on page 27)
tial for spreading the word about your music.

JI: What were some of the inspiring sounds and sights and experiences that moved you to pursue this creative path? What kinds of studies or practice did you undertake to develop your skills?

BC: I came to the realization at age 14 that I wanted to be a musician. I was basically in a situation where music was the only creative outlet that I had for a couple of years; I was in a boarding school for boys called Midland, in a rather rural part of California. So I’d be at the piano for about eight hours a day, trying to learn Emerson, Lake, and Palmer tunes. Later, at age 16, when I returned to Los Angeles, I took every music lesson my parents would pay for: theory, harmony, classical piano, jazz piano, etc. I eventually went to University of Southern California (USC) as a composition major.

JI: Who are some of your main influences and why?

BC: Six influences in chronological order: (1) Herbie Hancock - (age 13) Mwandishi/The Prisoner (first music that “spoke” to me); (2) Laura Nyro - (age 13) first four albums (use of piano with harp, dramatic and theatrical music - a world unto Laura Nyro); (3) Emerson, Lake, and Palmer - (age 14) first four albums (catalyst that got me into piano playing, classical with rock and jazz, first concept of composition); (4) D. Paul Hindemith - (age 17) Mathis Der Maler (intro to classical music, quartal harmony, counterpoint, formal structure); (5) Chick Corea - (age 18) The Leprechaun (first idea of a concept album, unique instrumentation, i.e. drums with string quartet and synthesizers and vocals, balance of virtuosic composition and soloing); (6) Pat Metheny/Lyle Mays - (age 32) The First Circle, Wiltern Concert (innovative structure of composition - one long crescendo, solo sections functioning as part of composition, solidified concept of jazz as chamber music)

JI: What kinds of activities are you doing, or planning to do to expand your talents, abilities and perspectives as an artist?

BC: Work out - generally take better care of my health. I think that the more physically in-shape you are, the more clarity of mind you have. I try to keep myself busy with interesting projects. Fortunately, I’ve been pretty lucky with that. I like reading. Lately, I’ve been into science-fiction and graphic literature.

JI: What have you discovered about human nature, from your observations on or off the stage?

BC: I’ve found that music can be a powerful influence for good and that people have a real desire to connect with the music.

JI: What do you do to recharge your batteries in our stress-filled contemporary world?

BC: Compose music

JI: If there is one for you, what is the connection between music and spirituality?

BC: The connection between music and spirituality for me is this: Music has provided me with the only tangible evidence of what I think of as “God”. When things hook up without having to think about them, when you can second-guess what everyone else in the group is doing and is going to do, when the entire ensemble seems to be of one mind, when the music makes you experience an inexplicable state of consciousness - that’s when music takes on a spiritual dimension.

Visit Billy on the internet at www.BillyChilds.com

“when the entire ensemble seems to be of one mind, when the music makes you experience an inexplicable state of consciousness - that’s when music takes on a spiritual dimension.”
Sheila Jordan

“The Cunning, Baffling, Powerful Jazz Child”

By Ken Weiss

Sheila Jordan (born November 18, 1928, Detroit, Michigan) left behind her impoverished beginnings, she was raised by her grandparents in the coal-mining area of Pennsylvania, to “chase” Charlie Parker to New York City, eventually forming a close relationship with him. A student of Lennie Tristano, Jordan was forced to maintain her secretarial job throughout her early to mid-adult life in order to raise her daughter as a single mom. Her first major success came with her striking version of “You Are My Sunshine” on the 1962 George Russell album The Outer View. Concentrating on performing during the second half of her life, Jordan been able to reach listeners like few other vocalists have ever done with her engaging personality and expressive and emotional singing style. Jordan pioneered a bebop and scat singing form, started the first vocal workshop in 1978, and initiated the vocalist-double bass duet. She was crowned a 2012 NEA Jazz Master and at age 87, maintains a busy touring schedule. Jordan is extremely down-to-earth and approachable. This interview took place on June 7, 2016 at her New York apartment in Chelsea, where she’s lived for over 50 years,

“The only reason I started doing more music at the age of 58 was because I lost my job. The advertising agency that I was working for decided to merge with another agency and I could have stayed on or taken a year’s severance pay and that little voice said, ‘Why don’t you go out and sing more? You’re always complaining about it.’ So I went and sang. Singing is part of me, it’s an extension of my body, my heart. The music is that close to me and my feeling. That’s what it’s all about to me, not a career.

JI: With all the major acclaim and love that’s been showered on you lately, has it become harder to sing the blues?

SJ: No, I always sing the blues, they don’t have to be unhappy blues. My blues are not unhappy blues, they weren’t written to be unhappy blues. It’s my way of letting people know where I come from and how I grew up because that saves people from asking me a lot of questions after the concert about where I come from and when did I start singing, who influenced me, and so forth. I put it in my blues so that when the concert is over, I can hear about them instead of questions about me.

JI: Where do you see yourself fitting into the pantheon of jazz singers?

SJ: I don’t think about it. I don’t have the voice, I was so hung up on Charlie Parker, I didn’t have time or money to buy singer’s records, although I did listen to them on the radio. If I got any money together, it would always be for Charlie Parker bebop record. In what terms do you mean fitting in?

JI: You’re an NEA Jazz Master so it’s fair to place you high up on the list of jazz vocalists.

SJ: I don’t think of it. I just do what I do and I’m just grateful that at this late age I can still do it. I never gave up because what was I gonna give up? Singing? No, I won’t give up singing. I know that I can always find a place to sing and that’s what I always tell young singers coming up when I do my workshops and when I used to teach regularly. I’m not gonna give up something that I love so much, it would be like cutting off my arm.

JI: Your performance schedule is packed with European tours. Why travel and perform so much at age 87?

SJ: Because I love it, and it’s not because of the money, because jazz musicians don’t get paid that much. It’s what keeps me alive. I really do believe that if it wasn’t for this music, if I couldn’t keep doing this music, I don’t think I would live very long.

JI: What adjustments have you had to make to maintain your voice in your later years?

SJ: I haven’t done any, it’s what it is. [Laughs] I don’t drink and I don’t smoke anymore. I knew that drinking and drugs and smoking were detrimental to my music. It was hard because I was addicted. You know, I’ve been in AA for over 30 years. Addiction is a cunning, baffling, powerful disease. I have it and most of my family had it. My mother died from the disease. I had a spiritual awakening onetime. I was coming out of a cocaine stupor and a voice said, “I gave you a gift and if you don’t take care of it, I’m gonna take it away and give it to somebody else.” And, whoosh! Talk about a spiritual awakening, man, I jumped up and that was the last time I ever…I had been on a dry drunk for 8 years before I got into AA and NA. I haven’t had alcohol in my system for over 38 years but the cocaine is what threw me into the programs. I wasn’t an everyday user of cocaine but that didn’t mean I didn’t have a habit. I was very fortunate, I never took heroin, but a drug is a drug is a drug. They all mess you up, cunning, baffling, powerful.

JI: You have the rare ability to communicate in the moment with your audience but you have a relatively small voice. Would you talk about your voice and what, if any, approach you took to maximize it?

SJ: No, I don’t think about it. My music comes from within, it’s beyond my voice.

JI: One of your extraordinary skills is in being able to improvise logical lyrics in the moment. Is that something that you actively developed or a natural talent?

(Continued on page 30)

Jazz Inside Magazine: You’ve garnered many top awards and honors over the past 10 years, including a 2012 NEA Jazz Master Award. That’s an astounding feat for someone who basically concentrated on their career at age 58. Putting your humbleness aside, how do you explain your later career success?

Sheila Jordan: I never thought about it as starting my career at 58-years-old, my career started when I was born, if you want to call it that. It wasn’t a talent, it was just a need to do music. It never entered my mind as a career, it was just an outlet for me. Music was an outlet to keep me alive spiritually as a little kid. I was very unhappy as a kid, I had a very unhappy childhood, so I sang. I was constantly singing because it made me feel better. The only reason I started doing more music at the age of 58 was because I lost my job. The advertising agency that I was working for decided to merge with another agency and I could have stayed on or taken a year’s severance pay and that little voice said, ‘Why don’t you go out and sing more? You’re always complaining about it.’ So I went and sang. Singing is part of me, it’s an extension of my body, my heart. The music is that close to me and my feeling. That’s what it’s all about to me, not a career.

Where do you see yourself fitting into the pantheon of jazz vocalists?

SJ: I don’t think about it. I don’t know. I guess because I never really tried to imitate any of the wonderful singers that were popular when I was growing up. I didn’t have the voice, I was so hung
Sheila Jordan

Photo by Ken Weiss
Sheila Jordan

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SJ: It just came naturally. One thing is, I learn the tune, exactly the way it’s written, note for note, then I listen for the chord changes, and then, I don’t know, it just happens. It’s part of my improvisation. I don’t think about it, I don’t plan it, it just happens. It’s born right in me as that old saying happens.

“I have the only score of George Russell’s. He did not give out any of his scores. He did not leave any of his scores to the New England Conservatory. He does not want his arrangements given out ... and the only person who got an arrangement is me. His wife gave it to me because she thought I should have it, after all, it was about me.”

JI: Is that something you address with your students?

SJ: No, I don’t tell them how to do anything. The only thing I tell them is not to try to copy other singers on records. They should listen to other singers to be inspired but not to copy the tune. If you’re gonna learn the tune, learn it from the original music because if you learn it the way another famous singer has recorded it, you’re only gonna sing what they sang and you won’t ever sing it the right way because, usually, if it’s a jazz singer, that’s not the way the tune’s gonna go completely. It’s changed and it’s their way, and why would you want to do their way when you should do your way?

JI: We see you on stage as so relaxed and comfortable. When was the last time you were really nervous to perform?

SJ: I can’t remember. I just love doing the music so much, I just don’t think about it. We always hope that it will be accepted, hope that you won’t lose your voice. I remember one time I lost my voice in California. I was singing and I lost it, and instead of freaking out, I just started improvising until it came back. I sang, ‘Oh, you went away? Did you have a good time? I’ve been waiting for you.’ Something like that, within the chord changes, within the melody. I didn’t plan that, it just happened. The audience was upright when that happened. I could see they were upright, they got scared for me, and when I did that, they laughed, they were relieved. My voice came back and I told it to give me a 24-hour warning, or something, if it was going to do that again.

JI: Your business cards include your name and underneath that it just says jazz, not vocalist.

SJ: I don’t know why I did that, I guess I just didn’t want to be categorized in a sense. I just do jazz, whether I sing it or talk it or teach it. I didn’t want to be categorized as just a vocalist. I don’t know. Well, I guess that’s kind of unique, no? [Laughs] I guess I’m unique and I don’t know it.

JI: Hasn’t anyone else ever asked you about that before?

SJ: No, only you!

JI: You talk of keeping “the message of bebop alive.” What is the message of bebop?

SJ: Charlie Parker, Charlie Parker’s music. I don’t want jazz to die because I believe that jazz music is the only true music that Americans can call their own. It started with the Afro American slaves in the cotton fields. It started with the blues. I feel it’s never gotten a fair shake as being recognized for the beautiful music it is with all the great, great musicians who have played it and died for it. They were willing to struggle with it, not give up, and keep it alive, and that’s what I want to do. I just want to keep the music alive because I feel it’s a stepchild of American music. It’s never been totally accepted in this country. I’m often approached by people who say, “Well, I don’t really know jazz. You really have to be an intellect to be able to hear it.” I’m always really nice when I reply, ‘Do you know where jazz came from? It came from the blues so do you think those slaves, out there being beaten to death picking cotton for hours, with very little sleep and food, do you think they were educated? They were singing this music. All I’m trying to tell you is that it’s a feeling. Once you feel it, you’ll know what it is and you won’t have to ask that question.’ I tell them that nicely and I leave it at that.

JI: You’re able to sing songs from deep inside the Great American Songbook. Would you venture a guess on the number of songs you know?

SJ: No, I wouldn’t know but I’ve been listening to this music ever since I was a little kid. When I grew up, we had the Hit Parade, and if our bill was paid, and my grandfather didn’t use it for booze, then we had a radio which somebody gave us. Those were the songs of the day. The Cole Porter’s, Rodgers and Hart, those were the songs I heard. They used to sell songbooks with all the current songs and their lyrics.

JI: At this point, are you still uncovering gems out of the Great American Songbook?

SJ: That’s why I have this book right here [a Rodgers and Hart compilation] because there’s some tunes in there that I sorta know but I’m not sure. I’m always looking for new tunes.

JI: What’s the most contemporary song you perform or would perform?

SJ: No, I don’t do that. When I hear a song, the first thing I listen for is the melody. If it’s a great melody, even if the lyrics are not so good, I’ll get...
the tune because I can always change the lyrics around. Whereas, if it’s a dull melody, and it goes nowhere, I don’t want to sing it. I don’t want to sing a song just because it’s popular and I’ll be accepted more. I’m not out here for that, I’m just out here to do what I do and keep the music alive.

JI: Your start in life was harsh to say the least. Your mother was too young to raise you so you lived with your grandparents in the Pennsylvania coal mines with little to eat or wear and no heat in the house. What effect does that experience still have on you on a day-to-day basis?

SJ: No, the only thing I feel today is gratitude that I don’t have to live like that anymore. That, thanks to my higher power, I’m able to go on and live a pretty cool life. I don’t have chauffeurs or a mansion but I own a little house upstate. It’s too far away to live there all year round, and in the winter time the roads get crazy because it’s almost on top of a mountain, but I’m grateful. I feel like I was taken care of, that somebody was really looking out for me, and I don’t want to go on carrying that burden of what it was like. The only time I talk about what it used to be like is when I celebrate my anniversary in my program. I’m sure whatever I lived in my past comes out in my music, it’s part of it, but I don’t think about it. Oh, poor me! I’m not into that.

SJ: Yeah, mascara, and women used to wear a black liner underneath their eyes. I remember my uncles, who were more like my brothers, worked in the mines and that coal dust would be embedded in them. I mean you had to be out of the mines for years to get all that out of there. I wear mascara but only when I’m working.

JI: Growing up in the coal mines you had to eat whatever your grandfather caught including porcupine. Sorry to ask but what does porcupine taste like?

SJ: I don’t remember, they just used it for soup. It was squirrel, groundhog, or anything they could catch. That was quite common back in the coalmining area. Anything they could put in a big pot with water. We never had milk as kids, only evaporated milk from a can. I drank coffee at a very early age because that’s what we got in the morning to put our dry bread in.

JI: Many singers draw from their upbringing in the black church but you had a very different experience. You came up through the Catholic Church at a time when only boys were allowed to sing in the choir. Did the church have much of an influence on your singing?

SJ: No, not at all. My grandfather was very anti-organized religion. My grandmother would make us sneak out to go to church. And when we did our Confirmation and our First Communion, he let it go but he wasn’t happy. I liked to go to the church because it was warm, so I’d go there and everybody thought I was so religious but in actuality, I was just trying to stay warm. I used to take the priest’s mail to him and he’d sometimes give me candy and little treats. There was a time when I was a little kid that I thought I might want to be a nun. Why? I don’t know, I feel a real contact. I believe in God. I guess I wanted something to believe in and, of course, Charlie Parker or bebop music wasn’t around at that time. I think a lot of it was wanting to have a place to call home that was warm and had food and I got taken care of, and in return I could give my services.

JI: In 1952, at age 24, you moved to New York City to be closer to Charlie Parker but you had no interest in becoming a jazz vocalist even though you had been singing in Detroit’s jazz clubs. Why didn’t you set out to pursue singing?

SJ: I wasn’t singing in Detroit jazz clubs, I was only sitting in. I wasn’t getting paid to sing. It wasn’t that I didn’t have any interest in becoming a jazz singer, I didn’t have any interest in becoming a

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famous jazz vocalist. Of course I had all the interest in the world of being a jazz vocalist but I didn’t care if I became famous or not. Actually, I was quite stunned when my first recording came out and it got the reaction it got. I didn’t think it was so hot. I don’t even listen to myself, even to this day. Sometimes I don’t even listen to the final product. I’ll listen to what I think is the best take. Singing was part of me and I would find a place to do it. I loved to go to sessions, I loved to sit in. After my record came out, I got a few good gigs. I originally worked in a club in the Village called the Page Three for two or three nights a week for many years. I made four dollars a night and by time I paid the babysitter three dollars and took a dollar to take a taxi home, there was nothing left, but I wasn’t doing it to pay my rent or keep my daughter alive, I was doing it to keep my soul alive because I needed to sing.

**JI:** You dealt with a lot of racism in Detroit due to interracial socializing and shortly after moving to New York City, you married Duke Jordan [Charlie Parker’s pianist]. Did you underestimate the repercussions of an interracial marriage in 1953 America?

**SJ:** I wasn’t thinking along those terms. When I walked down the street today and see all the interracial couples and biracial children, I say, ‘I knew this was gonna happen.’ And I feel very, very strong as one of the pioneers of it. I didn’t do it to be different. To be around the music and the need to have this music in my life outweighed the consequences of the hatred of racial prejudice. When I was growing up in Detroit, I was put down. I was part of me and I would find a place to do it. I was growing up in Detroit, I was put down. I was left my body, I was floating over it. I remember what was going on [Laughs] or understood, it but it was fantastic and he knew it. That’s why he said what he said to me. Unfortunately, we never did record. I’m not one for recording. I don’t go around and try to find recordings. I don’t like to record.

**JI:** As a single mom, you took a full-time job as a typist and legal secretary but still found time to sing at the Page Three where your first accompanist was Herbie Nichols. What are your memories of him?

**SJ:** Very quiet, very laid back. I remember one thing he said to me. He said, “You’ll never become a star until you make a recording with me.” [Laughs] I’ll never forget that and I said, ‘Well, that’s the most sentences I’ve ever heard you say!” He was fun. I communicated with Herbie through music more than conversations because he wasn’t a big conversationalist, not with me anyway. I know that when we played music together, there was a certain out of body experience I got singing with him that I’ve not experienced since. I have out of body experiences every once in a while, not many, you’re not supposed to have too many, but I remember the first one I ever had was while singing with Herbie Nichols and I actually left my body. I was floating over it. I remember singing with him, he would play something and I would hear it and just take off, and I would be with him. It was amazing. I don’t know if the audience knew what was going on [Laughs] or understood, it but it was fantastic and he knew it. That’s why he said what he said to me. Unfortunately, we never did record. I’m not one for recording. I don’t go around and try to find recordings. I don’t like to record.

**JI:** Why don’t you like to record?

**SJ:** I don’t like being in a place and all closed in and hearing every single breath you take. I think I’m better at live recordings. If I don’t know I’m being recorded, I’m okay. I keep putting it off, I should make another record before I leave the planet. I’m working on songs, I mean I’m not working too hard on them, but I’m working on songs that I want to learn that I’d like to record but I don’t have that [drive] to make a record that a lot of people have. I’ve never been into that.

**JI:** What was it about Herbie Nichols that had such a great effect on you?

**SJ:** I have no idea. If I knew that, I would know the answer to a lot of things. All I know is it was a spiritual communication that I had with Herbie, like I had with Bird. There was a spiritual communication, it was almost like I had known him in another life. There was just something there. Like I said, we never had long conversations, and I don’t even know if he knew that much about me. At that time, I think I had already made my first recording with Blue Note.

**JI:** George Russell famously got you to sing an a cappella version of “You Are My Sunshine” on his Outer View album. That song served as the unofficial anthem of hope for the coal miners you grew up with and it was also the song you sang to yourself to escape your childhood worries. How fitting was it that it turned out to be the song that launched your career?

**SJ:** I never thought about it that way. The thing that happened was, I was so used to singing unaccompanied that it was no big shock to me to sing it like that. It was a song that the miners always sang so George originally wanted to call it “A Drinking Song” and dedicate it to the out of work coalminers. We had gone to visit my grandmother so he could see where I came from and this whole idea of “Sunshine” came up. George called me and had me come to his home on Jane Street at the time in 1961. He played this incredible piano thing and then he stopped and said, “Sing,” I said, “Sing what?” He said, “Sing “You Are My Sunshine.”” I said, “What? Why?” He said, “Sing it. You used to sing it alone when you were a kid.” I said, “Oh no, I can’t do that.” And he said, “Just sing it.” That’s how it started. It really raised eyebrows in the jazz community but good. They didn’t put it down, they thought it was a pretty incredible recording.

**JI:** Your version of “You Are My Sunshine” is absolutely arresting. It’s wistful and wins, yet very soulful. Was the recorded version similar to the way you sang it for George Russell that first time?

**SJ:** Yes, that’s how I was singing it, it was painful. I was in pain as a kid, anything I sang was in pain. I sang on the radio as a kid, they had these amateur hours. Actually, one time I did “I’ll Never Smile Again” [sings I’ll never smile again until I smile at you] on a radio show amateur hour and this guy sent a letter of proposal. He found out where I lived and he sent it. Man, I was like 8-9-10-years-old, and my grandmother wrote him back, “I don’t think so, she’s only 10!” Anyway, “Sunshine” is very deep within me and that’s how it all started. And then George paid for a demo for me to do and he took it around and the first two places he took it to, they accepted it. Quincy Jones was the A&R man at Mercury, he accepted it, but I’d already signed with Blue Note but only for one recording. Quincy said, “Well, maybe in the future.” I should call him now. [Laughs]

**JI:** How did other singers react to your rendition of that song? Who reached out to you?

**SJ:** I don’t know how many singers heard it because you’d have to be in almost the avant-garde [scene] to have heard it. I don’t know that many singers, even to this day, have heard it. They have no clue that it even exists. I’d like to do it again one day. I have the score. I have the only score of George Russell’s. He did not give out any of his scores. He did not leave any of his scores to the New England Conservatory. He does not want his arrangements given out. I don’t know why but that was his decision, and the only person who got an arrangement is me. His wife gave it to me because she thought I should have it, after all, it was about me.

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Sheila Jordan

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JI: After you recorded with George Russell, Blue Note soon released your first solo recording – Portrait of Sheila [1962] – which is widely considered to be one of the most promising debut recordings by a jazz singer yet you wouldn’t record under your own name again for 12 years. It’s understandable that you had to raise your child by yourself but at the time you put out “Portrait” you had so much momentum going it seems odd that things had to come to a stop.

SJ: Nobody ever got in touch with me to record and unless they get in touch with me, I’m not a pusher. I don’t go out there and say, ‘Hey, are you gonna record me?’ I didn’t call Blue Note. That’s not my style, unless they get in touch with me, and even sometimes when they do that, I don’t do it. So they give up on me. [Laughs]

JI: You need a manager.

SJ: Yeah, I don’t have a manager.

JI: Early in your career, you worked the same club with comedian Lenny Bruce in Long Island. What can you say about him—what was your interaction with him?

SJ: I didn’t really talk to him very much. He was very, very funny. He used my name in his book as Governor Faubus’ daughter getting married to Harry Belafonte. Lenny died a horrible death, from a heroin overdose, and was found on a bathroom floor with a needle in his arm.

JI: I believe you saw him get arrested for using the F word?

SJ: Yes, can you imagine he was the first comedian that ever used that word in his act? Now they use it all the time, it’s like nothing. Yes, I saw it, they came in and arrested him for indecent language. I was shocked. At that time I wasn’t a user of the word, and I didn’t like the word so much, but I knew that it was used widely among the jazz musicians so I didn’t know what the big deal was.

They were just after him because he was brilliant. He was amazing, the greatest comedian I ever heard, still to this day. Nobody can touch him. All of these comedians coming up took so much from Lenny Bruce but not many of them mention his name.

JI: It’s ironic that only a few years later, in 1968, you had to sing the word “fuck” on Carla Bley’s epic opera – Escalator Over the Hill. Did you have flashbacks to Lenny Bruce getting arrested?

SJ: No, I didn’t because my music is always separate. I was more into hearing the music and concentrating on the story of what the lyrics were about as opposed to thinking of Lenny saying it. Actually, until now that you brought it up, I guess I was the first one that ever sang it on record. Yeah. [Laughs]

JI: You had a very close relationship with Charlie Parker.

SJ: He liked to talk about everything – life. He was incredible, he was brilliant, genius. Ugh, what always get me up to sing. Where ever he was playing, he’d usually have me come up and sing a tune. He believed in me. Bird, even though he wasn’t that much older than me, he was like the father I never had. I know he had the cunning, baffling, powerful disease of heroin addiction, but he never encouraged me or anyone else to use dope, and those who say he did are lying. My loft was like his second home before he met the Baroness. Thank God he didn’t die in my loft. I even had a little couch that I called “Bird’s Bed.” One time he came up to check on me and Duke was there, and Duke was nodding out. Bird looked at him and said, “Man, didn’t you learn anything from me?” Bird didn’t turn people on to heroin. He might have shot up with them because they were giving him some free dope, but as far as telling people to try it? First of all, he wouldn’t give up his dope [Laughs], I’m sure. I just wish that I had known more about [drug] programs when Bird was alive. At my house upstate I have pictures all over of Bird because Bird bought my house. I bought it through music, not my office job. I know that I wouldn’t be alive today if it weren’t for Bird.

JI: Why did Parker crash at your loft? Didn’t he have a place of his own?

SJ: Yeah, but Chan would get upset with him and throw him out or they would get in a fight. They had their problems and I can understand where she was coming from, being there and having kids. I remember he came by my house when Bree died, his daughter. I put my arms around him. Yeah, he was very special to me. He came by to check up on me and he also knew he had a place with me if he needed one. That’s why he started going to the Baroness’ later, I mean that was a fancy hotel. Come on, she was a millionaire, [Laughs] but he still came to see me.

“[Bird] always thought of me like a little sister. He told me I had ‘million dollar ears.’ I remember one time he came up to my loft and played a sax solo for about an hour. He didn’t stop, it was amazing. Why didn’t I have a tape recorder? Bird taught me so much, he’s the reason I sing. He showed me a way out of my pain and how to express myself through the music of bebop jazz.”
was a Sunday and you couldn’t get any alcohol yet?’ He wanted the alcohol content but I don’t think it was that dangerous, but I was scared. I didn’t want Bird dying in my loft, I would never be able to live that down. That he would die in my place, on my floor? My idol, I killed with rubbing alcohol? No, but he was okay. I don’t remember it that well, I just remember having beautiful conversations about what you believe in. He was very strong on me taking care of myself. “Don’t mess yourself up like me,” he’d say. He was like a little kid sometimes. He used to like to play those arcade machines on Broadway.

**JI:** You’ve said that one of the highlights of your life was singing at Monk’s memorial service in 1982. Would you share a memory of Monk?

**SJ:** He didn’t talk much. He was a very quiet man, he could say in three words what it takes somebody a whole paragraph. He was very brilliant. The thing that I found out after he passed away was how many songs that he wrote were based on really modern tunes like “Well, You Needn’t.” I was teaching that song to my class at City College one day and all of a sudden [it hit me that] he wrote that tune on the chord changes of “Temptation.” He did a lot of songs like that which means he listened to a lot of straight ahead pop tunes of the day like “Temptation.” That was pretty wild.

**JI:** Nica [jazz baroness Pannonica de Koenigswater] was inhabiting the same scene as you. Did you have a relationship with her?

**SJ:** No, she wasn’t very open to other women. I remember Duke did a concert at Town Hall and after it was over, I went backstage to meet Duke and she came up and said to Duke in front of me, “After you take your old lady home, why don’t you come by? I’m having a party.” After you take your old lady home, that pissed me off.

**JI:** You were a threat to her?

**SJ:** I don’t know. Why? She wanted to be queen of the “cats” and she was queen of the “cats” because she had a lot of money. She was there at Monk’s funeral when I sang. Barry Harris asked me to sing. I said, ‘Are you sure?’ He said, “Absolutely.”

**JI:** I’d like to ask you about a few of the musicians you had relationships with. What about Bill Evans?

**SJ:** I loved him. He was a quiet man. I met Bill through George Russell because Bill was on his *New York, N. Y.* recording. After that album was released, George Russell asked me one day if I wanted to go hear Bill Evans play on Broadway. During intermission, Bill came over, and I was in the middle of preparing to do “If You Could See Me Now,” [for Portrait of Sheila] and I had heard Bill play it and I just loved his chord changes, so I told George, and since George got me the record-

**JI:** How about a memory of Jeanne Lee?

**SJ:** I loved Jeanne Lee. We worked together a few times. We recorded with this Italian composer Marcello Melis and also with Jane Bunnett on *The Water is Wide*. Jeanne was beautiful, oh, my God, I loved her. What a voice! Talk about being underrated! I never felt unrated when I go back and think about Jeanne Lee because if anybody was ever underrated, it was Jeanne Lee. Now that’s a singer that I really feel had everything going, man. Great soul, great feeling, incredible voice, incredible sound. Not forced, just a beautiful, natural sound. A very sweet person, a lovely lady.

**JI:** Sonny Rollins

**SJ:** Aah, my buddy! I still see him. He calls me and sometimes says, “Miss Jordan, this is Mr. Rollins calling.” [Laughs] Sonny and I go back to when I first came here up in Harlem. It was Jackie McLean, Sonny Rollins, Arthur Taylor, they were all hanging out together. Of course, we were all Bud Powell freaks. Oh, it was great! I became closer with Sonny recently, especially since Lucille died. I try to go see Sonny, he’s so sweet. I love Sonny Rollins. Talk about being humble, oh my God. He’s like family to me.

**JI:** Ornette Coleman

**SJ:** I loved Ornette. Ornette came by to visit me one time and I wasn’t there and he left a Polaroid picture of himself in the door. I said, “Oh, I know who this was.” [Laughs] Ornette, George Russell, and myself went to Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln’s wedding in George’s little green Volkswagen. One year I made a huge Thanksgiving dinner when Ornette still had his loft on Prince Street. I made two turkeys and I took everything over to Ornette’s house for Thanksgiving. He loved it. He came to the NEA event the year I got the award and of course, he had on this incredible suit. He always wore something incredible.

**JI:** Elvin Jones

**SJ:** He would always brag that he was my daugh-

ter Tracey’s babysitter. He used to hold her and he’s so big. When he first came to New York, he wanted to see if he liked it, years ago, in the early ’50s, and he stayed at my loft. I said, “Yeah, you can stay here but you have to take care of my daughter in the morning because I have to go to work for four hours.” He said, “Yeah, I can do that.” He was a sweet man, I loved Elvin.

**JI:** Max Roach

**SJ:** The last time I saw Max was at Elvin Jones’ funeral. He was in a wheelchair. I remember one time, years ago in Detroit, he came through with Bird and one of the guys went up to Max and said, “Max, who’s the greatest drummer?” We were all standing around Max because we loved Max, and you know what Max replied?” “I am!” [Laughs] And we laughed. Actually, Max got me my job teaching at UMass at Jazz in July, which I still do in the summer, because Max was teaching there. Max and Billy Taylor were the two but it was Max who recommended me because he remembered me from teaching at City College, starting the program there through John Lewis.

**JI:** Jackie McLean

**SJ:** Oh, there’s so many memories of Jackie McLean, we were like family. Jackie was very funny. He would come to the loft all the time and he always wanted to know when Bird was coming by. My best friend from Detroit started going out with Jackie when we first moved to New York from Detroit. We were going up to Harlem to see all the “cats” up there, and the sessions, and Minton’s after hours, and, oh, my God, it was incredible. She went with Jackie until he met Dolly and then she was history. I remember he said to me, “Are you going to be mad at me?” I said, ‘Why would I be mad at you? That has nothing to do with me, you’re my buddy.’ I loved him. He was so funny, always telling jokes, always being some kind of a character. Toothpick Harry, he called himself. Once in my loft he asked if I had any toothpicks. I said, ‘Yeah.’ He said, “Can I have em?” I said, ‘How many do you want,’ and he said, “As many as you can spare.” So he sat on the couch and he started chewing them and throwing them on the floor and he said, “Do you know who I am?” I said, ‘No, who are you,’ and he said, “Toothpick Harry.” I said, ‘What is that supposed to mean?’ He said, ‘Whatever you want it to.’ [Laughs] Crazy man.

**JI:** Jazz education has played a strong role in your life. You taught at City College from 1978 to 2005 and introduced the first solo jazz vocal program in America. You took the job admittedly not knowing how to teach. What were your thoughts at the start of that role and how did your teaching expertise evolve?

**SJ:** It scared the hell out of me is what it did and I said that to John Lewis when he asked me to teach there. He said, “We need you here.” I had done a little concert for them and when they asked me I told them, ‘I don’t know how to teach.’ That’s when John told me something that stayed with me the rest of my life. John Lewis looked me in my eyes and said, “Sheila, teach what you know. That’s it, nothing else.” So I carried that with me and that’s what I do. I only teach what I know. If a student asks me a question that I don’t know I tell them I’m sorry and I refer them to someone else. I learned to teach through teaching and every time I teach, I learn something new. I’m still learning. I love teaching, I know that I’m getting across what my message is to these young singers coming up when I get the same feeling I get when I’m con-
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necting with instrumentalists on a concert. There’s a feeling that you get when you all become one sound almost. When you’re connecting, you can become one sound when this music is really happening on stage, and when I get that feeling when I’m teaching, I know that I’m doing okay. And I’ve had wonderful responses from my kids and a lot of them are doing so well. I’m very proud of them, they’re like my kids.

JI: It’s very sweet that you list photos of your students on your website.

SJ: Yeah, it’s important.

JI: In a 2011 Jazz Inside Magazine interview [by Nora McCarthy] you said, “One of the things I found out very early is that you do not break people’s spirits.” That being the case, what do you do with the student who doesn’t really possess much talent?

SJ: I try to seek out something in that person. There’s got to be something there, otherwise they wouldn’t sign up to take the course. They’re not gonna pay money to do something that they don’t think they can do, so there’s got to be something there. What it is? I don’t know, but that’s what I’m there for. It’s for me to find out what it is? What’s within this person that gives them the desire to want to do this music, and I usually find it. Sometimes the reason that they’re not, or we think they’re not as talented as they should be, is because they’re scared or they don’t know. So what do you do in a case like that? Listen to the music. I want you to learn this bebop head of Charlie Parker’s, I want you to learn all of these bebop heads by Bird, Diz, and Miles. I want you to try to sing the solo. It’s gonna be hard but learn the line first. That gets them into the phrasing, that’s how I learned. I teach them how I learned it. ‘Hey, you can’t sing, don’t waste my time.’ I would never do that because obviously they have a desire within them that wants them to at least try. The point is, most of them do try and then find that they want to do something else, but you know what? I always get thank you letters from them. The only thing I have a hard time with, and I say this in all my classes, is that there’s three ingredients for this music – it’s what’s attached to your head, your ears, listening; what beats in your chest, your heart, emotion; what happens with your foot, timing, rhythm. You got bad time? That’s the worst thing that can happen, then you better go and take some lessons with a good drummer. Timing will bug me more than singing out of tune.

JI: You were born into hardship and when you sing, it’s all real. Do you feel anyone can be trained to sing the blues?

SJ: In everybody’s life they’ve had times were things haven’t been wonderful. We’re only human so we’re all gonna have to suffer at some point. I don’t believe that we’re born with a silver spoon in our mouths. I don’t think anybody would really get into this music, which started with the blues, if they didn’t feel they had something to say because it’s not gonna pay you anything. The only reward from it is the feeling you get from doing it, which is an incredible feeling when it’s happening. As far as singing the blues, the blues can be in any form. What I do with my kids, my warmup is singing the blues, and don’t scat. I don’t want you scatting on the blues as an exercise, I want you singing about who you are, how you feel today, and why do you want to sing jazz. That’s how I open up my workshops – have them sing 12-bars straight ahead blues. If they want to take the time and energy to learn and feel this music, then they can sing the blues, of course.

JI: What is Sheila Jordan like off stage?

SJ: The same as I am on stage, [Laughs] there’s no difference. My guilty pleasures? Chocolate, milk chocolate, but I’ll take dark if milk isn’t available. The things I like on TV are the CSI’s and 48 Hours, and I like all the mysteries. I think somewhere in another life I was a detective because I usually know who did it. [Laughs] As far as listening to music, every time someone sends me their recording, I always listen to it, all the way through, and then I send them a little thank you, a little encouragement. All these young people are sending me their CDs and I don’t want to not listen to them and just say I did because that would be lying. And I love classical music, especially if I’m up on a mountain. Sonny and I talk a lot about not listening to our own music. I don’t listen back either. I don’t necessarily want to hear it because I’ll be too critical.

JI: There’s a photo from the ‘80s in your biography Jazz Child of you sleeping under a barbed wire fence with your head on one of your cows at your home in Middleburgh, New York. Do those sort of things go on a lot up there?

SJ: The bebop cows I call them and they’re all over the world I find. I was in Brazil and found some cows and I had them stop the car. I started singing a bebop line and they came running. Then I said, ‘Now watch this,’ and I sang a ballad and they split. You sing a ballad, they leave, you sing a bebop tune, they wag their tails. I used to walk a mile down from my house and this guy had all these cows and I remember the first time I found out about this. I was improvising on chord changes and all of a sudden these cows came stampeding up to the barbed wire fence. I said, ‘Oh, you guys like bebop, you want to hear a ballad?’ And they left. That picture in the book was actually taken in the Azores because that’s a brown cow. I had a concert there and stayed a couple extra days to see the country and I found these cows and sang to them.

“[jazz baroness Pannonica de Koenigswater]... wasn’t very open to other women. I remember Duke [Jordan] did a concert at Town Hall and after it was over, I went backstage to meet Duke and she came up and said to Duke in front of me, ‘After you take your old lady home, why don’t you come by? I’m having a party.’ ‘After you take your old lady home,’ that pissed me off.”

This cow was the only one that stayed after I sang. She laid down and I said, ‘Oh, my God, I’m exhausted. I’m gonna lay down with her,’ and I believe that’s when that picture was taken.

JI: What are you memories of living through 9/11?

SJ: I saw it. I saw Sonny on TV leaving his residence there. I was at my daughter’s because she had been ill and I went down to take care of her the night before. When I would stay there, I’d stay near the window and you could see the World Trade Center and I used to say, ‘Good morning twins,’ as I called them. I went down to get some food that morning and this woman came in screaming, ‘Hurry up, hurry up, buy all the food you can! They’re bombing the World Trade Center, they’re bombing the city!’ And I thought, ‘Oh, some nut.’ Just as I got upstairs, the second tower went down. I pinched myself, I thought I was dreaming. I could not believe it. I saw the second one go down. I saw low flying planes which were the Airforce planes. It was awful, and that smoke? I had two friends who lived there that stayed with me here for a few months afterwards. They couldn’t go back there, all that dust was coming in their windows. I’ll never forget that, to see a building actually crumble, disappear like that, and all the smoke. There was smoke in the area for days and you also had to prove that you lived beyond 41st Street or they would not let you down. The two things I’ll never forget is that and when Kennedy was assassinated. What is wrong with this world I kept thinking!

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Sheila Jordan

(Continued from page 35)

JI: The final questions have been given to me to ask you from other musicians:

Bob Dorough (vocals, piano) asked – “I heard Duke Jordan play with Bird a time or two. As he was a real bebopper and instrumentalist, what was Duke’s attitude to your desire to sing?”

SJ: He wasn’t pro or con but if I wanted to sing something, he played for me. He never put me down. He thought I could sing but he didn’t encourage me to the point, like Bird. Bird encouraged me – “Come on up here and sing.” Duke wasn’t like that but I knew when I sang with Bird, I’d always have the right key because Duke would be playing, so he’d know what key to transpose in. I think that in the end, he was very proud of the fact that I became as popular in jazz as I did. I think he was surprised that I kept the Jordan name alive.

Steve Swallow (bass) asked – “Sheila, you were so very kind to me when I was a rookie and new to the big, bad city. Would you talk about your experience at the old Page Three?”

SJ: That’s where I met Steve Swallow, he was the bass player on Monday night, which was jam session night. They had three or four singers nightly and every other set you would sing, so everybody got to sing two sets. Monday nights were my nights to take off, man, I didn’t care. They used to call me “a new note in jazz,” that’s how they announced to take off, man, I didn’t care. They used to call me, ‘Who the fuck is this guy?’ I always stuck up for people like that. I told the people complaining that he was expressing himself and that they didn’t understand the music. When they said it sounded like ‘static,’ I said, ‘It just depends on what kind of static you like.’

Harvie S (bass) would like to share a memory in place of a question – “We were in San Francisco on a tour and this young girl came up to us and congratulated us. We looked at her and said, ‘Thank you so much.’ Then we went a step further and asked what she was congratulating us for. She said, ‘I heard you two are getting married.’ Sheila answered in an unexpected way. I of course expected her to explain that we were not romantically involved but we were just musically a team and good friends. Instead she turned, pointed to me and said in a question like manner, ‘To him?’ I looked over and said jokingly, ‘Am I really that bad?’ She said, ‘To him right before he passed. He couldn’t move at all! Annie Ross told him no because there was no guitar or piano to accompany a young Cecil Taylor?’

SJ: She heard about that from Mark Murphy. Mark would come to my house every Thanksgiving because he thought I made the greatest turkeys in the world. I was very close with Mark, he was like my younger brother and we spent a lot of time together because we did a couple of jazz operas for George Gruntz. We had so much fun together. I’ve known him since he first came into the Page Three and sang “Willow Weep for Me.” I said, ‘Who is this handsome guy?’ He was so good-looking and, man, could he sing. It always surprised me that he didn’t get the NEA Jazz Masters award but Tony Bennett would. But then I was surprised that I got it, so who knows? Any young male singer out there should always be inspired by the late, great Mark Murphy. He was wonderful and so funny. One time I sent him on a gig that I couldn’t do, a teaching gig in Greece. He went a week early and wore bedroom slippers and he was walking around, didn’t know where to go because he was a week too early! There he was, walking around Greece in bedroom slippers! He was ‘out’ but in a funny way.

JI: I asked earlier about Herbie Nichols at Page Three but you also played with a young Cecil Taylor as an accompanist there. What was it like to accompany a young Cecil Taylor?

SJ: Oh, brother. I was the only one that could sing with him, okay? He was sent in as a substitute by Dave Frishberg. I don’t know why Frishberg did that, I think he had to be kidding. He knew that Cecil was ‘out,’ which was great, I’m not putting Cecil down, but the point is, we’re talking about strippers and joke tellers and a guy who had his face all made up with huge makeup and singing Broadway. Cecil was only there one time, I think. I enjoyed it but, boy, the other people, they were freakin’ out! ‘Who the fuck is this guy?’ I always stuck up for people like that. I told the people complaining that he was expressing himself and that they didn’t understand the music. When they said it sounded like ‘static,’ I said, ‘It just depends on what kind of static you like.’

Harvie S (bass) also wanted to share an anecdote rather than a question – “I really admire her, her voice and stringed instrument ever since I did it. I love the sound of the instrument. It’s so much easier to work out ideas.

Annie Ross (vocalist) asked – “I’ve heard rave reviews of your turkey. How do you do it?”

SJ: She heard about that from Mark Murphy. Mark would come to my house every Thanksgiving because he thought I made the greatest turkeys in the world. I was very close with Mark, he was like my younger brother and we spent a lot of time together because we did a couple of jazz operas for George Gruntz. We had so much fun together. I’ve known him since he first came into the Page Three and sang “Willow Weep for Me.” I said, ‘Who is this handsome guy?’ He was so good-looking and, man, could he sing. It always surprised me that he didn’t get the NEA Jazz Masters award but Tony Bennett would. But then I was surprised that I got it, so who knows? Any young male singer out there should always be inspired by the late, great Mark Murphy. He was wonderful and so funny. One time I sent him on a gig that I couldn’t do, a teaching gig in Greece. He went a week early and wore bedroom slippers and he was walking around, didn’t know where to go because he was a week too early! There he was, walking around Greece in bedroom slippers! He was ‘out’ but in a funny way. I went to visit him often when he got sick and I saw him right before he passed. He couldn’t move at all and usually had on a hospital gown, but on this day, he was all dressed up with a hat. I said, ‘What are you doing up?’ I should have known. He was getting ready to leave but it didn’t hit me until I was in Europe and I heard he had passed.

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