



# The NOTE



Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania • Fall 2009



JAZZ MASTERS SEMINAR: JOHN COATES, JR. • DANCING WITH DIZZY • PHIL IN THE GAP 50

# In this issue...

- 3 Phil In The Gap  
by Phil Woods
- 4 A Note from the Collection Coordinator  
by Bob Bush
- 5 From the Academy  
by Patrick Dorian
- 6 From an ESU Jazz Masters Seminar: John Coates, Jr.
- 16 Dancing with Dizzy in the Summer of '65  
by Donna Wilcox and John Wilcox
- 20 Al Cohn: The 1986 *Cadence* Interview – Part Two  
by Bob Rusch
- 24 On Education and the Improvising Musician  
– Part Three  
by David Liebman
- 28 Jazz at ESU: Bridging Generations
- 31 Sideman Asides  
compiled by Patrick Dorian
- 32 Readers, please take NOTE
- 33 Mailbag
- 34 Contributors & Acknowledgments
- 35 About the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection

## From the Collection . . .



Cover Photo (front): Pocono jazz icon John Coates, Jr., performing at the Deer Head Inn, Delaware Water Gap, PA, May 16, 2009, by Jeff Phillips.



Centerfold Photo: Dizzy Gillespie, surrounded by young admirers after a concert at the Bundy School, Washington, D.C., August 1965, by Donna Wilcox, donated by Ms. Wilcox.



Cover Photo (back): Al Cohn, performing a solo with the Count Basie Orchestra, Randall's Island, New York City, 1956, by Chuck Lilly, donated by Mr. Lilly.



## The NOTE

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The mission of the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection is to stimulate, enrich, and support research, teaching, learning, and appreciation of all forms of jazz.

The ACMJC is a distinctive archive built upon a unique and symbiotic relationship between the Pocono Mountains jazz community and East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania.

With the support of a world-wide network of jazz advocates, the ACMJC seeks to promote the local and global history of jazz by making its resources available and useful to students, researchers, educators, musicians, historians, journalists and jazz enthusiasts of all kinds, and to preserve its holdings for future generations.

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David Coulter

## Auld Lang Sine and Al Haig

by Phil Woods

Play long enough and you will have do some strange gigs. Here is one of my favorites that happened back in the day.

I met Al Haig when he worked Birdland with Dizzy's big band in '57. He played on *Young Bloods* with Donald Byrd and me on the Prestige label during this same period. The band was supposed to be on the road for the Newport Jazz Festival but Al was jammed up with a union problem. We were all waiting in the bus for him to get his act together when Diz spotted Wynton Kelly walking by and he shanghaied him right onto the bus. We split to Rhode Island and left Al to sort out his own mess.

Later on, Al called me about a New Year's Eve gig. I wasn't working that night and assumed that if the great Al Haig had a gig it was going to be a hip jazz gig, because it sure didn't pay any money. Thirty-five dollars on New Year's Eve was not raising any sand at all. I showed up for the date – it was at a longshoreman's club in Brooklyn, with pitchers of beer on the table with paper cups. Classy! It looked like a scene from *On the Waterfront*.

I met the band – a dwarf with a snare drum and a half a hi-hat. No bass! It was going to be a three-piece quartet. There was no bandstand and

the three-octave Acme piano was in the middle of the dance floor and was terribly out of tune. And if any one of these longshoremen got too drunk and fell on the little guy, he was a dead man! Starting time came

and went and no sign of Al. The crowd was getting rowdy so I offered to play the piano until Al got there. Better than getting beat up! The piano was a quarter-tone flat and the vertically-challenged drummer was a little short of time. Perfect! But my Greek training paid off, rhythmically and harmonically. I had just recorded my bête noir album, *Greek Cooking*, which had recently knocked them dead in Athens. Finally, Al showed up and I jumped on him.

"What is it with this gig, Al? That little mother can't play, I can't tune to the piano, and we might end the year in the river with cement overshoes! The bread sucks, the piano sucks and you're late!"

Al's retort was the first indication I had that this man was stone nuts!

"Oh! All of you artist-types exhibit tension and bring a preponderance of emotional problems to the marketplace of life! Don't you know any polkas? Are you a musical illiterate, or just a commie?"

What the hell did that mean?

We played a set to overwhelming indifference on the part of these behemoths and their muscular, leather-clad lady friends. We tried to win them over with an oceanic medley – "Slow Boat To China," "My Ship," "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," and "How Deep Is the Ocean" – all to little effect.

I could not take any more and right after the set ended I excused myself and went to the toilet with my horn and case (another first), packed it up, and slipped out the window into the alley. I ran like hell to the IRT subway, hoping I wouldn't be missed until I was safely aboard the first train out of this gig from hell.

I went to one of my favorite haunts, the Hickory House, and sat in with my good buddy, Joe Morello, who was working with the Marian McPartland Trio, with Bill Crow on bass. I had a ball jamming with this great trio, and even made fifty bucks thanks to Marian's class act! Next time I saw Al, he never mentioned the gig and I never found out where the drummer came from. Maybe Günter Grass recommended him.

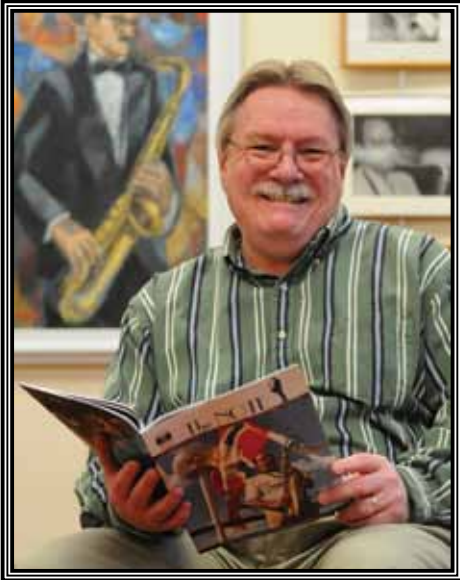
Al and I had a couple of weekends together in Jackson Heights. The bandstand was extremely small and I was wedged in right next to Al at the upright piano. During our opening night first set, Al turned to me as I was playing and said: "Will you please point that goddamned thing somewhere else!"

Somehow he talked me into bringing him home to New Hope one night. The next morning, I overheard him talking to my stepson, Baird Parker.

"Yes, my son. Your father, Charlie Parker, and I were extremely close. He treated me like a brother, like peas in a pod. We were a regular Frick and Frack. By the way, you look just like him, and you're a fine fellow just like your dear old dad. By the by, my good lad, would you know where your lovely mom keeps the cooking sherry? I find that

Continued on Page 27





Charles Perry Hebard

## When Saying 'Thank You' Just Isn't Quite Enough

by Bob Bush

After 50 columns spanning 20 years, Phil Woods has decided to retire *Phil in the Gap* (see page 27). I can already hear the sighs of disappointment from readers around the globe at this news (the Mailbag is ready to receive your letters!).

Personally, I feel the same way. We will miss that unique style of word-smithery that has kept us riveted to his column over these many years. All of us owe Phil our heartfelt thanks for informing us, riling us up, rallying us to assist others, but most often keeping us in stitches.

I don't believe anybody has done more for the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection since its inception than Phil Woods. In fact, I doubt there would be a jazz collection at ESU today if not for Phil's leadership and unflinching support. He's only retiring now as a columnist, thankfully. But it presents the perfect time to review just a few of his many important contributions to the ACMJC:

- ❖ Phil was instrumental in 1988, along with Ralph Hughes and Flo Cohn, in successfully convincing

the University to establish a jazz collection in memory of his friend, Al Cohn;

- ❖ Phil's writings have appeared in each of the 50 issues since *The NOTE* was launched in September 1989. His column, *Phil In The Gap*, is enjoyed by readers world-wide for its humor, personal opinions and dedication to musicians and jazz history;

- ❖ In addition to his monetary gifts, hundreds of materials in the ACMJC inventory bear the "Donated by Phil Woods" label, including recordings, photographs, music manuscripts, videos, posters and more. His generosity to the Collection has benefited many, many students and researchers for more than two decades;

- ❖ Phil is also very generous with his time, which is always in scarce supply and in high demand. He has served on the University's jazz advisory board, the ESU Regional Jazz Coalition, since it was created in 1999. He has given many clinics and performances at ESU.

(Remember the special Al & Zoot salute at ESU in 2005 when Phil flew all night after his gig in Frankfurt, Germany to perform here to honor his old pals?).

Phil leads the COTA Festival Orchestra at the twice-yearly Library Alive concerts, and attends ESU arts events regularly with his equally-supportive wife, Jill.

And, in the past five years, Phil has created more than 100 sets of

digital engravings of classic (and precious) music manuscripts in the ACMJC inventory. It has required a time commitment and work effort of monumental proportions that Phil has done voluntarily. The ESU Jazz Ensemble and the COTA Orchestra, and others, have already benefited from these digitized charts, and Phil's work helps to preserve this outstanding music for future generations;

- ❖ As an NEA Jazz Master and global saxophone icon who travels extensively to perform for audiences everywhere, Phil has been an outstanding ambassador for Pocono jazz and the ACMJC. His Al Cohn stories have been documented on several CDs and DVDs, and his endorsements have resulted in many new additions to the mailing list for *The NOTE*.

I know this is a woefully incomplete list of the contributions that Phil has made in support of the ACMJC. But, I trust you get the picture: Phil Woods has walked the walk.

Now, knowing Phil, I believe that he will continue to feel the need to express his opinions about jazz, politics, and the everyday absurdities of life. I hope he knows that he will always have a place in *The NOTE* to grace us with a future column whenever he feels the need to temporarily suspend the retirement.

And I hope that will be soon, and often. Thanks, Phil, on behalf of a legion of faithful readers, not just for *Phil in the Gap*, but for everything! ☺



Charles Perry Hebard

## The Coordinator

retired), and spouse, Narda. The NOTE is sent to more than 1,700 jazz aficionados in 24 foreign countries and 45 states (plus D.C.). In addition to redesigning and editing The NOTE, Narda was absolutely essential to the success of the *Salute to Al & Zoot* event held at ESU in November 2005.

I make very few demands as the music department liaison to the ACMJC, yet I'm vehemently standing by my demand to have Bob include a photo of his receiving this most-deserved prize in this issue. Go ahead, Bob, fight the Irishman! But don't think of it as a loss.

Bob first became involved with the ACMJC in 1998, volunteering at that time to assist in the editing of The NOTE. As the Collection's permanent location and University status then floated for a few years, Bob became a part-time contracted consultant, organizing and managing the Collection from January 2003 through August 2007, when he became full-time, interim coordinator.

Well, Bob will probably remember August 2009 as a pretty good month too, as he completed the two years as interim coordinator and signed his letter of appointment to the position of continuing coordinator. That's right, 21 years after Al's passing, ESU now has a permanent, full-time overseer of the ACMJC. There was an advertised search in the spring of this year and a committee from three areas of the campus community screened and interviewed several candidates over the summer. In addition, the position of Director of Kemp Library has been elevated to Dean of the Library and University Collections, and was filled this year by Dr. Edward Owusu-Ansah (Bob's new boss), who was integral to the search and screening process. These gradual yet significant changes signal a commitment from ESU to concretely recognize and support the legacy and future of Pocono jazz.

Continued on Page 27

by Patrick Dorian

"... and the 2009 Fred Waring Award goes to ... Bob Bush," exclaimed Delaware Water Gap Celebration of the Arts (COTA) executive board member and co-founder Rick Chamberlain on September 12, 2009. This provincially prestigious honor has been awarded for decades at the annual COTA jazz and arts festival. It's named for the blender mogul and popular music leader who once owned the property on the corner of Delaware and Waring drives in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania, where the annual event has been held for 32 years.

Congratulations to Bob for his deep passion and involvement in artistic community outreach, not only at this event for several years, but also at the Sherman Theater in Stroudsburg via the Library Alive concerts; on campus with the ESU Jazz Synergy Series; his weekly jazz radio programs on ESU's WESS-FM; his visitor presentations and tours of the ACMJC in Kemp Library; and his absolutely remarkable overseeing of the comeback and metamorphosis of The NOTE, a winning collaboration with his indispensable volunteer editor (now



Garth Woods

Bob Bush receives the Fred Waring Award from Rick Chamberlain, COTA Festival, Delaware Water Gap, PA, Sept. 12, 2009.

# From an ESU Jazz Masters Seminar: John Coates, Jr.



John Coates, Jr., ESU, Nov. 5, 2005.

Charles Perry Hebard

For more than 50 years, pianist John Coates, Jr. has been performing regularly at the historic Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania, which certainly ranks as one of the longest-running steady gigs in jazz history. Although still deserving wider recognition for his amazing skills, he is an icon to jazz lovers in the Pocono Mountains region and respected by his professional peers for his unique piano stylings, innovations and artistry.

John shared his experiences in a deeply personal and informative presentation to ESU students and community members on October 15, 2003 at ESU's Cohen Recital Hall as part of the ESU Jazz Masters Seminar, a series developed by ESU Music Professor Patrick Dorian. More than 110 seminar lectures have been presented at ESU since 2000 providing audiences with rich, rare glimpses into the lives and careers of many internationally-known, regionally-based jazz performers.

This transcript of John's [JC] presentation includes comments from Patrick Dorian [PD] and various members of the audience [AM].

JC: Thank you so very much. This is the first time I've ever attempted to tell my life story in any manner and, well, so here goes.

I was born February 17th, 1938 in Trenton, New Jersey. For those who are calculating, that's 65-and-a-half years ago. I was born into a very musical family. My father was a

full-time performing musician and a band leader. He later also got into private lessons. My mother was an entertainer, also. She was a dancer and an actress and she had a strong liking for music. There was a lot of music around the house. My father was working six-seven nights a week at the time around when I was born, and during the day he was practicing the piano at home a lot. When he wasn't doing that, a lot of the time he was playing records of music that he liked, which included some classical but a lot of jazz of that time.

This was during the early '40s and some of the records that he would play a lot were by piano players like Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson, and a couple of the newer piano players at that time who were somewhat influenced by Nat King Cole, like George Shearing and Billy Taylor. Some of my earliest memories are just waiting for the piano not to be occupied, and for the record player to be turned off, so I could try to climb up on the piano bench and see if I could pick out some of those same things I heard my father doing, or some of the things from the records that I heard being played. It was really fun to be able to do that. I was mainly trying to copy him, and the records I heard, and I got pretty good at it pretty quickly.

By the time I was four years old, it was determined by my father and mother and a couple of other people that I had "perfect pitch," and that's what made this fun. *[laughs]*

The perfect pitch probably got a little bit less perfect over the years. But in the early days, I remember my parents maybe exploiting me a little bit. When they would have friends over, they would have me go away from the piano, and my father would play notes, and I would call out the notes he was playing. Sometimes they would have me go in another room and he'd play four or five notes, sometimes at the same time and in different registers of the piano. But I was pretty good at being able to identify the pitches I heard.

So, with that gift of perfect pitch, I really wanted to play the piano as much as I could whenever it wasn't occupied and when the record player was not going. I played a lot by the time I was five years old. I actually did quite a few little songs by then. They were standard tunes that he played often. I even tried to make up songs of my own, to try to compose a little bit. I wrote some songs and that went on for quite a while.

Then, I guess by the time I was more like six or seven, I got pretty interested in sports. That came in conflict a little bit and took me more away from the piano than I had been. My parents didn't try to discourage it at all. They actually did things to encourage it, like putting a basketball backboard up in the backyard. However, I think that my father and



mother were both a little bothered by the fact that sports might be winning out over the music.

One of my first big memories along those lines is of my father, when I was about seven years old, offering me a small challenge with a nice little reward (probably a dollar at that time, which would have been about four weeks allowance or something like that). The challenge was for me to copy a George Shearing song from a 45-rpm record. He had a few George Shearing records and he gave me the choice of which one of three or four that I would like to try to copy. And the reward, in addition to the dollar, was also that he would take me to a Boston Red Sox baseball game. That was my team at that time. I started to like them when I was about five or six, largely I think because of Ted Williams more than anybody else. He played for the Red Sox, and he and Joe DiMaggio and Stan Musial were the big guys at that time. For some reason, I liked Ted Williams more than the others.

I was able to copy the song, which was "Roses of Picardy." My father just wanted me to copy the beginning chorus and then try to do my own improvisation on it. I was successful in copying the beginning and last choruses pretty much note-for-note, and I was able to improvise on it somewhat. It was kind of fun. That challenge that my father gave me really opened my eyes quite a bit as to what theme and variations based on chord changes of the songs was all about. It did a lot for me, and, in reward, I got to see the Boston Red Sox.

My father took me to Philadelphia which had an American League team at that time, the Philadelphia A's, who nowadays are the Oakland A's. We went when the Boston Red Sox came into Philadelphia to play the A's. As it turned out, we entered through an entrance in right field and warming up a pitcher down the right field line was Ted Williams. My father wasn't really all that forward of a person but he beckoned to him and Ted Williams came over and gave me an autograph and talked to me a little bit about baseball. So, I was a strong Boston Red Sox fan from that day on.

That would take me up to about the time when I was seven or maybe closer to eight. My parents sort of deemed that it would be a good time for me to study formally. My father wanted me to learn the music of some of the classical composers, and that sounded good to me, too. I was really hopeful, though, that he would be my teacher. I remember that he expressed some reservation about that, citing the fact that a parent-sibling relationship in the teaching circumstance very often wasn't the best and oftentimes didn't work. But I was sure that it would. Anyway, he reluctantly, *[laughs]* somewhat reluctantly, I guess, got together with me. We had two, maybe three lessons and he was right. It didn't work. But then he took it upon himself to find a teacher for me.

The daughter of the owner of the hotel that he worked at in Trenton, New Jersey, was studying at the Mannes Music School in New York City. She knew of a woman that she thought we should contact to see if she would be interested in having me as a student. So, my father took me in and I played for her. One of the things I played for her was this "Roses of Picardy" that I copied off the George Shearing record. It went very well and she wanted to take me as a



John Coates, Jr., life-long Bosox fan, c. 1980s.

student on a full scholarship basis, which she did. I studied with her from the time I was seven until I graduated from high school, which was essentially 12 years.

It was kind of a great deal because the public schools where I went really looked very favorably on such a circumstance. They granted me a day off a week from public school so I could go into New York City to study with her at the Mannes Music School. I remember I never went to public school on Thursdays; I went into New York City to study with her. Her name was Urana Clarke.

After studying with her for a few years, I also took other courses at the Mannes Music School, pretty much for the entire time I was with her. For a couple years, she switched to the Diller-Quaile School of Music but then she returned to Mannes. I also took other courses there. We'd go in for a good part of the day on Thursdays. In the beginning, my father accompanied me on this trip because I was only seven when I started, although by the time I was 10, I did the trip on my own. From Trenton to New York in those days was not that hard even for a 10-year-old to do. I remember in the early years, and some of the other later years too, when my father accompanied me into New York City, we would often go to a jazz club that night, such as Nick's in the Village, or Birdland, which was the jazz mecca at that time. I remember that one of the first times I went to Birdland, probably when I was about 13 or 14, I saw Bird and Diz – Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie – playing together. That was really, really fun.

So, those were the early study years [late '40s, early '50s]. Around that same time, a pretty vivid memory of mine is getting my own radio. Jazz then was played on AM radio, especially late at night. There was a deejay by the name of Symphony Sid who was on from midnight to 6:00 in the morning, and he played the most interesting stuff to me. I remember finally getting my own radio and hiding it under my pillow at night in my bed. When I thought my parents were asleep, I'd turn it on and listen to Symphony Sid as long as I could, thinking my mother never knew the radio was there. But, of course, she knew. *[audience laughs]* Those were fun times.

After I had been studying piano for about three years, I began studying clarinet, thinking that it would be good to

have some knowledge of another type of instrument. There were some pretty well-known jazz clarinet players at that time: Benny Goodman, of course; and Buddy DeFranco was one of the newer players. One of the players that really appealed to me was Jimmy Giuffre, who played the instrument very, very differently, mostly in the lower register with a very breathy sound. I was impressed with the profound simplicity in the way he played. So, he was more my idol than even the others on that instrument. The clarinet for me was actually an easier instrument to play along with records than the piano. On the piano, you always had the feeling that because you could play more than one note at the same time that you should. Doing that with a record was a little awkward for me at that time. The clarinet, being just one note at a time, was easier to play along with a record and have it sound okay.

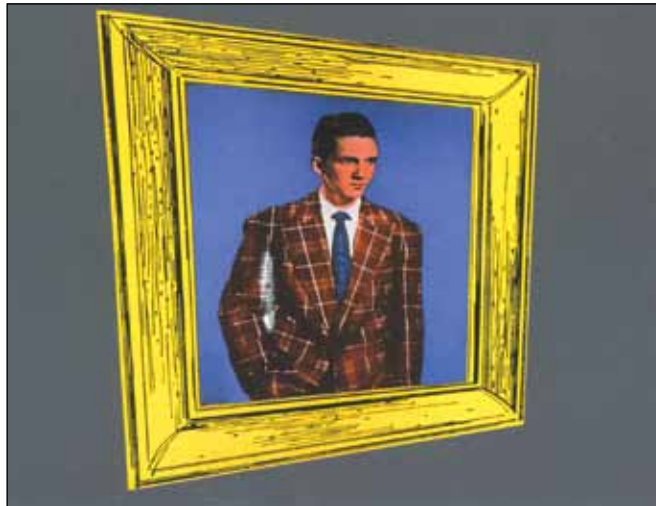
So, I had two instruments going, and I remember that every Wednesday night, from the time I was about 11 until 13 or 14, I would go with my father to a job that he played at the YMCA in Trenton. It was a Wednesday night dance thing and I would go and sit in with my father and four other guys who were really good musicians. It was really fun, I really enjoyed it. And I felt that I got better at improvising on the clarinet than on the piano, mainly because I was getting a chance to do it with good players. That was a fun memory.

Then, about the time I was 12, my father began teaching piano to both beginning students and to some more advanced students. He also taught to students who wanted to play music other than classical music. My father had fun trying to teach that kind of thing. I should say, at this point, that back in those days – this is still the '40s and early '50s – jazz was not really taught in music schools or colleges. There were really very few people who even attempted to teach it privately. One of my father's first adult students was probably the best bass player in the city of Trenton at that time. His name was Jack Weigand, who later became a really good piano player and jazz organ player.

Jack was a guy that I really liked a lot. He was into new voicings, new chords and all that. After his lesson with my father, we would often talk about new guys from the bebop era that he had recently heard and he liked, and we would exchange ideas. It got to be a big part of the week for me when Jack would come to study with my father. We would sometimes play together – a "four hands, one piano" kind of thing. When he would come to study with my father, he eventually brought his bass over, too, and we played a little

bit, just the two of us.

Jack tried to talk me into joining the musicians union, which he successfully did after not too much talking, I guess. It was a little strange then because that particular musician's union (I guess most unions) had never had anybody quite as young as me. I was still just 12 years old. The musician's union didn't have any tests or anything like that; it was sort of an informal examination I had. I played some things – I probably played the Shearing thing. *[laughs]* Anyway, I was granted admission into the Trenton musician's union. And



Donated by John Coates, Jr.

"Johnny" Coates, at 17, from the cover of *Portrait*, his first LP in 1955 for Savoy Records.

just about a month or less after getting into the musician's union, I worked my first professional job with Jack, who played bass. He got me the job; I remember it paid \$10. I also remember playing the job and having so much fun and how it really felt funny taking money for something that I enjoyed so much.

That first job at the American Legion in Trenton was just playing for listening. A couple weeks later, I had my first job on clarinet, also with Jack. That was an interesting memory. It was a Jewish wedding and there is a part of the ceremony where the groom breaks a glass and "Mazel

Tov" is played. My friend Jack, the bass player, was playing piano on this job, and he didn't really want to play that tune. *[laughs]* So, I had to play it solo on the clarinet. Strange memory *[laughs]* but a memory.

Because of my gift of perfect pitch, and really good absolute pitch, I didn't need to read music as much. It was a drawback in my learning to read because it was easy for me to play something without having to read. I'm just telling you this prior to mentioning my memory of the first New Year's Eve job that I played.

I guess I would have been 13 at the time. It was a New Year's Eve job at the Polish Falcons in Trenton. There was a floor show for which charts had to be read and I didn't read that well. But because of my ear, I could jive my way through. There was the floor show: a singer, a comedian, probably a dancer, and a stripper! And all of that had music. I had heard about strippers but I had never seen one before! *[audience laughs]* I remember, she had these charts and I was trying to read as well as I could in those days. I remember soon into her act, looking over and seeing a stripper for the first time and losing my place *[audience laughs]* and never finding it! But, thanks to my good ear, I was able to recover.

By the time I was 14, I was probably playing two nights a week, and more on the weekends. Also, by that time, I think I had given up the clarinet. I went to vibes instead of clarinet for my second instrument because vibes seemed like more of a "happening" instrument at that time. In addition to Lionel Hampton and Red Norvo, new players like Milt Jackson were



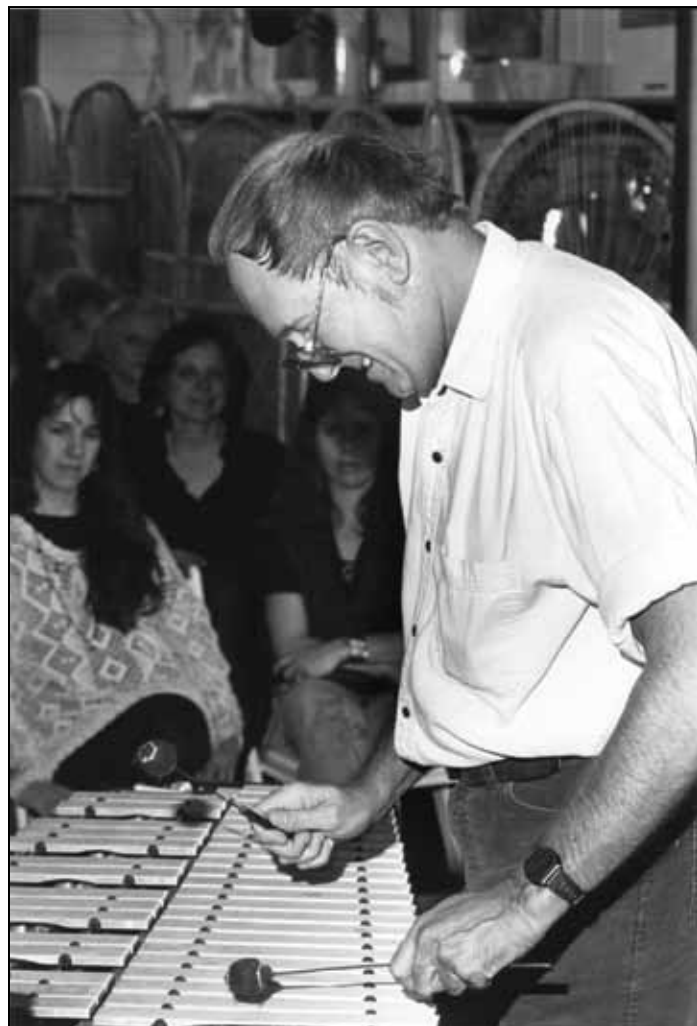
on the scene. They really appealed to me, plus the fact that vibes were really pretty easy for a keyboard player to learn because the keyboard, so to speak, is the same. You just had to learn a different technique. I played some union jobs on vibes, so by the time I was 15, I guess, I was probably up to playing three sometimes four nights a week at this time, and sometimes with jazz names that would come into Trenton. I had become sort of Trenton's "modern jazz" piano player; it was a real kick.

Then, I think in the next year, when I was about 16, a trombone player who had played a fair amount with my dad, Bob Jenney, became intrigued with my playing. [Bob's brother, Jack Jenney, played trombone in the bands of Bunny Berigan and Artie Shaw] My playing was a little bit more modern, so to speak, than my father's. Bob was playing at a place that featured Dixieland jazz in Trenton. He had just recently encountered a student at Rider College, a man by the name of Bob Lehr, who had just gotten an old hotel from his father in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania called the Deer Head Inn. Bob Lehr really loved jazz, and he also liked some of the newer jazz.

Bob Jenney asked me if I would be interested in playing at the Deer Head in the summer because Bob Lehr had invited him to do that. It would be the whole summer, six nights a week. Bob Lehr wanted to try jazz at the Deer Head. I would have been a junior in high school, I guess; I still was not old enough to drive in the state of New Jersey. That would have been about 1955. So, anyway, it sounded like fun and, even though I didn't drive, it was set up that I could live there. Bob Jenney would be able to get me around to places I needed to get to. I could live at the Deer Head. I could eat with Bob Lehr and his wife, Fay, which I did, and it was wonderful. That was my first year at the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap. I just realized the other day that, in two years [2005], it will be 50 years that I've played there at least some part of all of those years. That was a wonderful summer.

During the second summer at the Deer Head, an important thing happened to me. A man and his wife were staying at a resort hotel down the hill from the Deer Head called The Glenwood. He was an A & R man for Savoy Records and he inquired at The Glenwood whether there were any places to hear jazz in the Poconos. They told him there was a place just up the hill in Delaware Water Gap. He came to the Deer Head and he liked the way I played and we talked about me maybe recording for Savoy. I didn't know whether it was really on the level or not. But, after that summer, when I was back in Trenton, I guess in my junior year in high school, I got a call from him inviting me to come into Newark, New Jersey to audition for the owner of Savoy Records, which I did.

They wanted me to do a trio album with the house rhythm section players that Savoy had at the time: Wendell Marshall, the bass player, and Kenny Clarke, a really well-known drummer. They were both great players. So, I consented to do it and I did the Savoy record date. It was scary because I was not as grown up emotionally or socially as I was musically. I have a little humorous, now, sidelight of that session. But I should first say that, in those days, record dates all involved short tunes, even in jazz. They wanted you



David W. Coulter, donated by Bette Bowman

John plays the vibes at The Studio, Delaware Water Gap, PA, 1994.

to do three- to four-minute tunes. They would set up a record date for an album to be, like, three sessions of four tunes each. You would try to get four tunes and then come back in and get another four tunes and then another four tunes, and there would be 12 tunes on an album.

So, on that first date, I remember talking over what we would do with Wendell Marshall and Kenny Clarke, and then doing the first tune. We did a couple of takes and got one that seemed okay. Then Wendell Marshall and I talked about how we were going to do the second tune, and I looked over at Kenny Clarke and he was asleep on the drums! *[audience laughs]* I remember taking it pretty personally. *[audience laughs]*

The same thing happened between the second and third tunes. He napped on the snare drum. *[audience laughs]* I'm thinking, what is it? I must be boring the hell out of him, you know? So, after the first session, in addition to it being a scary thing for a 16-year-old kid to do, I was *[laughs]* somewhat bothered about that. So, when I went back to do the second session, one of the first things I did was talk to Wendell Marshall about Kenny Clarke. I asked him whether he thought I was really boring and was putting Kenny to sleep. Wendell explained to me that Kenny sometimes

played five or six nights a week, and sometimes recorded five or six times a week, and he needed sleep. He said napping was how he got his sleep. So that eased it a little bit for me knowing that I wasn't the only person with whom he took these little naps in between tunes.

Soon after the record came out, something else happened that made me realize that Wendell was probably telling the truth. In a promotion for that LP [*Johnny Coates, Jr. At The Piano – Portrait*, Savoy Records, 1956], we did the Steve Allen Show. It was a live television program and, as we were waiting to go on, we had to wake up Kenny Clarke who was asleep on the couch. [audience laughs] He was a pretty relaxed guy. [audience laughs]

So, that takes me up to about when I was 18 years old. Right around that time, in what would have been my senior year at Ewing High School in Trenton, they had what they called a "post prom." It provided entertainment for the students, the "prom-sters," to keep them from driving into New York or something like that which was kind of a tricky thing. From Trenton, they could go into New York City after the prom where the drinking age was 18. In the past, this had led to some bad situations with people after the prom going into New York and drinking and trying to get home, sometimes not making it very well. So, my mother was involved in this concept of the post prom.

A year earlier, the first year they had it, she had succeeded in getting Bill Haley and the Comets to perform at the post prom. They were really big back in 1955, as big as Elvis Presley was, actually. She got Dick Clark's help with that post prom thing. Then, the second year, which was my senior year, again with Dick Clark's help, rather than getting a rock-oriented act for the post prom, she got a jazz performer. Charlie Ventura, who was one of the biggest jazz

saxophone players of that time, agreed to come do the post prom if I would play it with him. Apparently, his sideman couldn't make the date but he'd heard some about me. He hadn't heard me play but he was adventurous, I guess. He came and did the post prom and I got the bass player and drummer, and it went really well.

Later that year, he called and wanted to know whether we would go on the road with him, and we did. It was really wonderful. I was with Charlie Ventura for close to three years and played the clubs of my dreams, like Birdland and Small's Paradise in New York, and the Blue Note and the Brass Rail in Chicago, and The Flame in Detroit, and other places like that. I met some really great musicians, like James Moody and Ray Charles and Cannonball Adderley and Bill Evans and Dave McKenna and Art Blakey. George Shearing even came to hear us [laughs] and that was kind of a kick considering the story I told before about his "Roses of Picardy."

But, after about three years with Charlie Ventura, it started to get a little bit old for me, doing pretty much the same stuff every night. Plus, I became aware of so many other gaps in my personal development. So, at that time, I elected to go to college. My mother had always wanted me to go to college but she understood my desire to go on the road rather than attend college right after high school. So, anyway, I chose to go to college and elected to go to Rutgers in 1959. I really wanted to study things other than music, which I did. My first major was meteorology, but then, after two years of that, I switched to romance languages and Italian. I liked Italian, but also the romance languages major allowed the most electives, and that's what I wanted the most out of college at that particular time. I was able to pay for college because I had been working quite a bit up to that time. I even had a Jaguar! [laughs] I realized I could play weekends and summers while doing college.

I think in the back of my mind I really hoped that someday I'd play at a place like the Deer Head again because I had more freedom there than even at the places that I played with Charlie Ventura, when I hit the "big time," so to speak. I mean, it was playing the same things every night because that's what the people who came wanted to hear. So, I hoped I would play some place like the Deer Head again. Plus the fact that some of those places I played with Charlie Ventura – the "big time" places – weren't as wonderful as I thought they might be in some sense. For example, at Birdland, back at that time, you had to play the piano a certain way or it would fall on you. [audience laughs] There were a lot of things like that. The maître d' at Birdland was Pee Wee Marquette, and if you didn't tip him enough, he'd screw up your name on purpose when he introduced you. [laughs] It didn't matter to me but it did bother some people.

So, I went to college but, in a musical sense, I still hadn't found any real voice of my own. While I was in college, I got involved in studying contemporary classical music, largely on my own. I also explored some other types of music to hopefully broaden my personal improvisational approach. Also, while in college, for two summers I traveled to Europe with students from Rutgers and Princeton. I was the musical director of the group. That's kind of a long story, I'll save it for



David W. Coulter, donated by Bette Bowman

John with Eric Doney at The Studio, DWG, PA, 1994.



Jeff Phillips

Johnny and Eric in a two-piano concert, Deer Head Inn, DWG, PA, May 2009.

some other time, but we did student sailings on the Holland America line. We sailed in the beginning of the summer and came back at the end of the summer and we were able to get jobs at jazz clubs in Europe, which were a lot of fun.

Also about that time, when I was in college, I did a lot of dates with a really good drummer by the name of Barry Miles. Some of the players that he had with him about that time ... I remember that the bass players were either Eddie Gomez, Ron Carter or Richard Davis. All three were and still are really wonderful bass players. Woody Shaw, the trumpet player, was one of them, and Harry Leahey, a wonderful guitar player. At about that same time, I was part of a house rhythm section at a club in Elizabeth, New Jersey. There I got to play with Al Cohn and Zoot Sims, and Kai Winding and Urbie Green, and Pepper Adams. Those were good years.

But when I graduated from college in 1962, I returned to the Deer Head *[laughs]* and it's kind of what I think I wanted to do more than anything else. I returned to the Deer Head as a leader. I played there six nights a week; four of the nights I played alone. Any solo playing I had ever done prior to that was just for people dining or just background music. At the Deer Head, I never thought solo playing could be like that, where so many people wanted to hear that kind of freedom. It really became apparent right away to me how interesting solo playing could be.

I did the Deer Head in the summer and then for awhile I took other jobs in the area because the Deer Head was still only a summer job. I took a couple of resort jobs, at Pocono Manor and Shawnee Country Club, in order to be able to stay in the Poconos, because I had really gotten to like the Poconos a lot. So then, to be able to stay in the Poconos longer than just the summer, in the spring and fall I played resorts.

At about that same time, Marjorie and Ernie Farmer from Shawnee Press, which was a music publishing company in Delaware Water Gap located across the road from the Deer Head, asked me if I would be interested in trying to

write choral music for them. At first, I was reluctant because I didn't think it was for me. But after awhile I submitted something and they liked it. I had fun doing it, and soon there was a second thing, and a third thing, and then it got to be something that I got very heavily involved in. These were really wonderful years after graduating from Rutgers.

In the winters, I would go back to Trenton. I would work a club there six nights a week which was really a fun place – noisy, but fun. It was called Henderson's Club 50. Two or three of the nights I played solo; two nights were with a trio. Then, there was one night a week when guest players came in from New York; really big, big players like Coleman Hawkins, Clark Terry, Doc Severinsen, Phil Woods, Urbie Green, Al Cohn, Marvin Stamm, Bill Watrous. I have some of the names written down here *[laughs]* but, anyway, a lot of great players. So, doing Henderson's Club 50 in the winter and the Deer Head in the summer and being able to stay up in the Poconos in the spring and fall really made for a nice, nice situation. At times, I wondered if I was having too much fun! But it was good.

Then, in 1966, when I was about 28, I married. Shawnee Press, at that time, offered me a full-time, 9-to-5 job as a keyboard and choral music editor. I took it because it gave me more security, which seemed appropriate for married life. That meant moving up to this area but I chose to live in New Jersey rather than Delaware Water Gap because Delaware Water Gap just seemed a little too "small town-ish." I was aware of the fact that an awful lot of people liked to know other people's business there. *[audience laughs]* A bass player that I knew, Dave Lantz, lived in northwestern New Jersey, near Belvidere, in a little community called Mountain Lake. He interested me in trying to find a place to live in Mountain Lake, which I did. I lived there for close to 20 years. It was a good situation; it was only about 20 minutes from Delaware Water Gap. So, I did my day gig editing, and I continued to write for Shawnee Press because that was on a royalty basis and on my own time, and then I played the



Deer Head. But because of the fact that I now lived up there, the Deer Head gig became year-round, and that was all the better.

I also had gotten back into playing vibes, pretty much because I had gotten a better set of vibes, and I got playing with a really good French piano player, Bernard Peiffer. I did some touring with him because it didn't conflict with the other things that I did. That went on for about seven years until I was about in my mid-30s. Then, in about 1974, Shawnee Press made some demonstration recordings of a choir they had. I think what precipitated all this was that they had acquired more sophisticated recording equipment and, upon getting it, were interested in trying it out before it was time to record the choir.

They asked me if they could record a concert that I was doing at Northampton Community College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to which I said yes. They came and recorded it and they were pleased with the way it went. I heard the playback and it was a good day. They asked me if I would consent to their releasing it, and maybe starting a record label. Mainly, I think their original intent was to do it for their choral music customers – maybe some people who knew me in that sense would be interested in the record. So, that happened and that was the beginning of a label I was with for quite some years called Omnisound. Ernie Farmer, the president of Shawnee Press, was mainly responsible for that, and a gentleman by the name of Yoshio Inomata became kind of a one-man record company. He really knew all aspects of the record business in no time. He was such a quick learner.

That first recording led to a recording which was done live at the Deer Head, and then several more live recordings at the Deer Head with some of the really wonderful players who either lived in the Poconos or often came to the Poconos to play. I did a couple of other recordings which were called Pocono Friends.

Phil Woods, George Young, Urbie Green, Harry Leahey, and Steve Gillmore would have been the other players on those recordings I did for Omnisound. Some tours were even set up by Omnisound for me to do, one of which was in Japan, a solo tour. Then another Omnisound recording was made in Japan.

After that, Omnisound started getting inquiries from other places interested in having me come to play. I felt about that time, however, that maybe I had been trying to do a little bit too much, which I think I really had. Working the 9-to-5 day job and working weekends at night, or more a lot of the time, and trying to write was like holding down three jobs. I was just spreading myself thin at times. With touring possibilities on the horizon, I decided at that time to leave my editing day job with Shawnee Press. For the next eight years, I continued to do the Deer Head. I toured some, mostly solo, but also with a really wonderful bass player by the name of Paul Langosch. I continued the choral writing for Shawnee Press, although that was a little bit less now that I was somewhat away from Shawnee Press. Those years

were really enjoyable too but a little less secure.

So, I think that takes me up to about when I was 48 or so. Anyway, right around that time, in my late 40s and early 50s, things got to be quite a lot less good. I lived in Charlottesville, Virginia from about 1986 to 1990. I had divorced in the mid-'80s and remarried in Charlottesville and the marriage didn't work at all. There was not a whole lot of music of my type happening in Charlottesville. Actually, the best parts were probably the periodic trips back up this way to play the Deer Head, but they were only a few a year. So, that was certainly not as good a period, especially musically, as the times before it.

From Virginia, I returned to Trenton and lived with my parents for a while. And soon after returning to Trenton, I began a really difficult and pretty long, probably more than five-year struggle with depression. Anti-depressants and therapy and even shock treatments didn't help the depression. It was pretty awful. I wasn't playing much at all. I wasn't even doing the Deer Head at that time. Then, in about 1990 or '91, my mother suffered a serious stroke. I became somewhat involved with trying to help her recover from that as much as was possible. That endeavor, of trying to help her, also helped me some with the depression I'd been experiencing. At the same time, I was finally beginning to somewhat understand my type of depression and was making some inroads regarding recovery. So, things were improving some.

Then in, I think, 1993, a friend by the name of Eric Doney, who is himself a really wonderful piano player, decided to form a record company. I've known Eric's father, Bob Doney, ever since I began at the Deer Head. He's a wonderful painter/sketcher who came to the Deer Head from the very first year that I played there and started bringing Eric when, I guess, Eric was 12 years old or something like that. Anyway, Eric formed Pacific Street Records in about '93 and I recorded a solo CD at Red Rock Recording Studio for him which was called *Piano ... Forte!* I was really happy with the way that went, probably happier with that recording than any recording I had ever done.

So, things were getting a lot better. I was back doing dates at the Deer Head and other places, and the following year I recorded another CD [*The Trio Session*, Pacific St. Records, 1996] for Eric in Washington, D.C. with Paul Langosch, the bass player that I had been on the road with, and a wonderful drummer by the name of Mike Smith. Soon after that recording, the three of us played the Blue Note in New York, and Blues Alley in D.C., some good places. Things were a lot better again and I thought I had a pretty good handle on the depression.

However, in another year or something [1996], I guess I was about 58 at that time, some differences with my father led me to move out of Trenton and eventually into New York City where I pretty soon ran out of money and was without a place to live. That led to a suicide attempt in March of 1997 in New York City at the Chelsea Hotel. I came close but I'm happy now that I failed in the attempt. I was in Saint Vincent's Hospital in New York City for the next several months.

When it became time to leave the hospital, the big question then was, where would I live? I was told about what are



Charles Perry Hebard

John accompanies 2007 NEA Jazz Masters Frank Wess and Phil Woods, ESU, February 2007.

called “adult homes,” which I had never heard of before. They’re for people with emotional disorders and limited financial resources. I was told about some of them in the five boroughs and I was interviewed at a couple. One of the first homes I visited was in Coney Island, where I now live. I loved the fact that it was on the ocean and on the beach. So, I elected to try living there. That first month or so, I thought I had made a mistake. But, in no time, it seemed not to be all that difficult to find ways to make it work. Plus, the fact that it has the best backyard I’ve ever had, you know? *[laughs]* It’s a super backyard.

So, since I’ve been at this adult home in Coney Island, which is called Oceanview Manor, I’ve worked further on recovering from the depression and all that to which I was alluding. I feel that in most ways my life is in better shape than it’s really ever been. I’m back to playing a pretty fair amount in the city, and in New Jersey, in Pennsylvania, and, of course, at the Deer Head. I’ve even gone to places like North Carolina to play some. I’m back to recording for Pacific Street and I very much enjoy living where I do in Brooklyn. So, I think my move to Coney Island has definitely been a very good one.

Finally, I’d just like to say, without question, the highlight for me since I’ve lived in Coney Island, and maybe the highlight of my entire life, occurred two years ago [September 2001] at the Celebration of the Arts festival, which is held in

Delaware Water Gap. They decided to dedicate the festival to me and hold it in my honor. That really blew me away and it still does. And I’d especially like to thank Bob and Fay Lehr for making that possible for me, and Phil Woods for making that happen for me. *[pauses]* Thanks a lot. *[audience applauds]*

*PD: John, you’re being sketched, by the way. Bob Doney is up here sketching.*

*JC: I saw that. [laughs, then waves to Bob Doney] I know you!*

*PD: John, would you take a few questions, please?*

*JC: Sure*

*AM: Is there a copy of the Savoy record, the first record you cut?*

*JC: Yes. It was reissued on CD on the Denon label. I don’t have a copy myself but I know it exists.*

*AM: You mentioned hearing Art Tatum’s records when you were a child. How much of an influence has he had on your playing style?*

*JC: Quite a lot because he was the first to really make me aware of how much could be done by one person on the piano. In my early days, I tried a lot to simulate and copy players on my father’s records, as I was talking about before. But he was too much; he was too much to copy. *[laughs]**

*AM: Thank you for sharing such personal stories. It certainly has been very moving. Thank you.*

JC: Oh, thank you. Thank you so much.

AM: I have something else to add. About a year and a half ago, I was interviewing here at ESU to teach theater, and now I'm a professor of theater. I happened to go to the Deer Head and you played "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." I was so moved by that performance that I thought, if I get this job, I'm coming to this mecca again.

JC: [laughs] Oh, well, thanks for relating that.

AM: How did you make it through college as a language major and still perform music actively?

JC: Well, you know, I really got into the language. I didn't mention it before but that was one time that I felt I got a little bit competitive in my life. My mother was really happy and relieved that I was finally in college. I wanted to pay her back some, so most of my time I really spent with the language. It's due to the fact that I had played so much music – I had been performing professionally since I was 12 years old – that I could do my gigs on the weekend. But the language thing in college really went pretty well. I actually ended up graduating magna cum laude and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. It made me feel really good to somehow repay my mom for being patient with me while I went on the road first before going to college.

AM: Did you have any artists that you worked with that have really, really inspired you? You mentioned tons of artists before – are there any of them in particular that you were just blown away or inspired by?

JC: Oh yeah. Do you mean with whom I worked?

AM: Yes.

JC: In trying to put this all together, the hardest thing for me was not so much remembering some of these things but remembering when they happened, you know? [laughs] It's a lot of years to get chronologically straight. That's why I have all these papers. [audience laughs] On the last paper, I made a list of some of the players in my record listening days who often gave me a lot of thrills. A lot of them I never worked with. But I'll just read off the list and maybe cite the ones that I did work with.

The piano players, well, you might guess: Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, and Art Tatum. But the other piano players that thrilled me a lot included a piano player by the name of Carl Perkins, who I really liked a lot; Wynton Kelly; and Dave McKenna, who I really like a lot. Jazz players who play other instruments who often gave me thrills are Sonny Rollins; Ben Webster (I did work with Ben Webster once); Al Cohn, whom I worked with; John Coltrane, with whom I never have; they're all tenor players. Other saxophone players: Ornette Coleman; Charlie Mariano; Phil Woods, with whom I've worked on several occasions. Trumpet players: Red Rodney; Jack Sheldon; Miles Davis; and Clark Terry, whom I've worked with. I worked with trombone players Carl Fontana and Urbie Green. The bass players that in my early listening days I really liked the most were

Continued on Page 31

Following are excerpts of tributes to John Coates, Jr. that were compiled and printed in the 2001 Celebration of the Arts (COTA) program, as part of COTA's dedication of that year's festival to John:

**Phil Woods:** "I remember so many jam sessions at our illustrious watering hole [the Deer Head Inn]. I used to jam with John on many a New Year's Eve (safer to walk there from my house, all downhill, but a little more difficult to crawl home from the next morning!). John epitomizes jazz in our area. Like many great musicians who humbly ply their craft without any notoriety, John is not famous in America, at least not as famous as he should be. He is, however, very well known in Japan, and Europe is aware of him as well. ... Only an experienced player with total emotional and technical control can realize the maturity, depth and total focus that [John] demonstrates."

**Dave Brubeck:** "I first heard of Johnny Coates through my association with Shawnee Press in Delaware Water Gap. He was, perhaps, still in his teens when [Shawnee Press executives] Ernie and Marjorie Farmer took me across the street to the Deer Head Inn and said, 'You've got to hear this young man!' I have been an admirer of John Coates ever since."

**Eric Doney:** "I first heard John Coates when I was 13 years old. My father took me to the Deer Head Inn almost every Saturday night while he sketched John. I must admit his music was a bit over my head back then, for John employed rich harmonies, used advanced rhythms, and spun wild contrapuntal lines seemingly at will. He strummed inside the piano, muted the strings with music paper to get a percussive effect, and played large clusters of notes with his whole arm ... and all of that just in the intro!"

**Manny Albam:** "For all the years that John has been one of music's best-kept secrets, most of us who listened to his piano and read his lead sheets have known that he is a giant."

**Ben Sidran:** "While it's been said that he came out of Tatum and that Jarrett got it from him, Johnny Coates is an original who proves his hometown motto: Trenton Makes and the World Takes!"

**Kim Parker:** "John Coates has reached and touched so many people over the years. His individual voice has influenced more than one pianist; his sound is unmistakable. He is pure Coates."

**Phil Markowitz:** "John Coates – sensibility, lyricism, passion, swing and touch; all things that make great music and a great musician."

**Dan Morgenstern:** Hearing John Coates is a special treat – nobody plays solo piano (his thing) like he does. He's a musical explorer, and it's a great treat to join him on his adventures."

**Steve Gilmore:** "John Coates was the earliest inspiration in my musical life, and continues even now to inspire. Besides his masterful presence at the piano, I also remember his performances on vibes at the Deer Head with Bernard Peiffer on piano and Gus Nemeth on bass."

**George Young:** "If anyone makes the music happy, it's Johnny Coates. ... He has a special feeling for music along with a wonderful harmonic sense, and when you have the pleasure of playing with him, John really listens to you, for you, and with you. It's like magic!"

**Bill Charlapp:** "John Coates is a true American original. His ability to fuse the roots of American folk music with the blues and jazz has been influential on modern jazz piano."



# An Update from John Coates, Jr.

Editor's Note: We asked John to fill us in on the many things he's been doing since he presented his seminar in October of 2003. Following is a letter he wrote to us in September to update his more recent activities and life events.

I've never been anywhere near comfortable with public speaking, and I was pretty anxious about trying to tell my story in front of an audience back then. But after doing it, I was happy that I'd given it a go and grateful that there were people there who were interested in hearing it. I'd certainly like to thank Pat Dorian for having asked me to do this Jazz Masters Seminar.

There have been some real good things in my life since my talk back then, and I'm happy that Bob Bush asked if I might give a bit of an update. I'll try to mention these things in chronological order, so, as a result, they won't necessarily be in order of importance to me personally.

First (and pretty big on my list!) ... in 2004, "my" Boston Red Sox miraculously beat the New York Yankees in the playoffs and won the World Series vs. the St. Louis Cardinals. As a rather big fan of the Red Sox since 1945 when I was seven years old, this was the first time in my lifetime that they were the champs, and it had become something I thought I'd probably never live to see. (And in 2007, they won the World Series again!)

In June of 2005, my 50th anniversary as a performer at the Deer Head Inn was celebrated there, and I'm very indebted to Chris and Doña Solliday for having so nicely put that together. Although I've appeared there many more times in some years than in others, this is one of the longer "steady gigs" that I know about.

The Deer Head has continued to be my favorite place to play, and, in addition to having continued to perform there several times a year, in recent years I've also done some concerts elsewhere in Pennsylvania, and in

New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Vermont. Most of these concerts have been solo, but some have been in a duo context with Phil Woods, Joe Cohn, or Nancy Reed. Some of my more recent Deer Head appearances have also been with these people, as well as with Gene Bertocini and Eric Doney. In 2006, Phil Woods and I recorded together again for Pacific St. Records, this time live at the Deer Head, showing that "giants" sometimes work! (*Giants at Play* was our first CD, and the title of this one is *Giants at Work*.) The next year (2007), Nancy Reed and I recorded a CD at the Deer Head.

That same year, I was informed by Mark Cabaniss, the current president of the music publishing company Shawnee Press, that my published (in 1971) choral adaptation/arrangement of "Amazing Grace" had surpassed one million copies sold, being, I think, only the second choral music publication to ever hit that mark. (I did know that it was closing in on a million, and I was pretty happy to have been informed that it had gotten there!)

I continued to live at Oceanview Manor, the "adult home" in Brooklyn until January of 2008, and I very much enjoyed and valued my 10-and-a-half years there. As I said in the seminar, this facility is in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, and Coney Island got to be quite a kick for me. I think I may also have mentioned in my talk at ESU back in 2003 that the first half year or so of my stay there was pretty challenging, but it did get good. On January 19, 2008, I moved to the southern California city of Mission Viejo, a move that was set about by a pretty wonderful happening in my life.

In early 2006, my first wife and I began communicating again for the first time in over 40 years. We had married in New Jersey when we were both in our early 20's and "gave up" when things got less easy. (Fortunately, there weren't children in this marriage.) Since she, Lisa, soon moved to California and I pretty much stayed back east, there

was virtually no communication between us until March of 2006 when she emailed the Deer Head (where we lived together in 1962) and asked the new owners, the Carrigs and Mancusos, to say "Hi" to me the next time I performed there. That they did, and I was very touched.

Soon there were letters and phone calls between us and visits by me here, at which times we both found ourselves expressing the hope and desire of getting a second chance to be together. Our second chance is now almost two years old, and I feel we're getting it right this time. We live with two wonderful dogs in a very pleasant "gated community" here in Mission Viejo, a city often listed as one of the safest cities in this country.

I did my first California solo concert a little over a year ago at Cuyamaca College in El Cajon (near San Diego), and, somewhat ironically, this was set up and produced by the head of the music department there, Pat Setzer, who performed as a guitarist at the Deer Head for a couple of winters 30 years or so ago when I couldn't be there. As regards my recent playing style, etc. – for some time now, I've been working on trying to make my playing a bit more simple or "economical" without being uninteresting (but I don't think I'm there yet).

California living has taken very little adjusting for me. I've had no more trouble with depression for a quite a lot of years now, having discovered sometime back that, in my case, the sun can often be a mood elevator. The beautiful weather here, coupled with the opportunity to be back with my wife, makes me think I'm definitely in "the right place."

And even though it's much more of a distance away now, the "right place" for me in a performing sense is still the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania. I'd like to think that I could appear there from time to time for another 50 years (but anyway, I'll be back).



# Dancing with Dizzy in the Summer of '65

Editor's Note: Donna and John Wilcox recently donated a set of photographs to the ACMJC capturing an appearance by the Dizzy Gillespie Quintet for some very appreciative school children in the mid-'60s. We are pleased to be able to share their fond remembrances and to display some of these vintage images of that magical summer day in D.C.

by Donna Wilcox

In the summer of 1965, I volunteered at Bundy School in Washington, D.C., which was the location of a summer school program for sixth graders to try to raise their reading levels before going into the seventh grade. I took photographs to illustrate a paper the principal was putting together to try to get funding for the program the next summer.

At a meeting of the school's staff toward the end of the

session, the discussion centered on having a closing activity, or treat, to reward the students who had stayed with the program and been successful.

My husband, John Wilcox, (a radio personality at WMAL who had interviewed Dizzy Gillespie) and I had been at the Showboat nightclub the night before to hear Dizzy and his group. It occurred to me that it might be possible to get him to do a short morning concert for the students while he was in town doing the performances at the Showboat. The staff liked the idea, so I said I would pursue the possibility.

When John and I went to hear Dizzy again that night, I sent a note telling him about the summer school at Bundy and asking him about a morning concert. There was no response that night, a Wednesday, or for several more days.

I began to assume it was not going to be possible, but Sunday night the telephone woke me at 4:00 a.m. A gravelly, breathy voice said, "I hope you are still awake." (*Oh yeah, Dizzy*) "Where is the school?"

I told him the address for Bundy. "Ah, chocolate town," he remarked, and then said that the group would indeed perform. He gave me the address where band members Chris White and Rudy Collins would be staying, so I could pick them up and their instruments, and the date and time were set. Dizzy, Kenny Barron, and James Moody would find their own way to the school by 10:00 a.m.

The next morning I scrambled to find a van I could borrow that would accommodate a bass and drums. Done. Then, I wanted to get the school piano tuned. It was a bit sad, as most school pianos are, but I wanted it to be the



Donna Wilcox



Donna Wilcox

Above, from left: Pianist Kenny Barron, bassist Chris White, Dizzy, drummer Rudy Collins.

Left: Dizzy Gillespie with saxophonist James Moody.

best we could manage. I contacted the Jordan Kitts piano store and arranged for a tuner to come to the school in mid-afternoon. After he tuned the piano, I needed to give the piano technician a ride home. He was blind, and he had to direct me with landmarks that he knew, in a neighborhood that was totally unknown to me. It was probably funny if one was on the outside looking in, but it was certainly more nerve-wracking to the participants.

I had never driven the van before, and was unfamiliar with some of the streets, but I picked up Chris and Rudy and got them to the school without killing us all, although there were some close calls. Let's face it: there is a reason why insurance is so expensive for working musicians.

The other fellows got there in fine shape and the concert, which was a generous hour, was a smash hit. The kids got on stage with Diz and danced; they presented him with a letter of thanks; and he gathered them around to look at the famous tilted horn up close.

Dizzy was a most generous, talented, funny man. I will certainly never forget him, his kindness, or his music. ☺



Donna Wilcox

Dizzy demonstrates his signature horn for the kids.

*The following article by John Wilcox appeared in the October 7, 1965 issue of Down Beat magazine:*

During a recent two-week stay at the Showboat Lounge in Washington, D.C., the Dizzy Gillespie Quintet passed up an afternoon off and played a special, free concert for some 150 enthusiastic 12-year-olds. The concert was held on a typically steamy Washington August day at Bundy Elementary School.

Most of the youngsters, voluntary participants in a special reading improvement program, were not familiar with the Gillespie wit and music before the concert, but by the last number, when the trumpeter issued an invitation to one and all "to come up on the stage and dance for us," he had won a number of new fans. At the conclusion of the dancing, Gillespie and his group spent a half-hour signing autographs and talking to the youngsters about music. Gillespie later disclosed that he had been investigating the possibility of a nationwide tour of various cities to play for high school students and to encourage them to remain in school and graduate.



Donna Wilcox

Donna Wilcox

"... come up on the stage and dance for us."



A student gives Dizzy's horn a try while his classmates dig the sound.







*Dizzy Gillespie with sixth-grade students  
at Bundy School, Washington, D.C., 1965.*

**Photo by Donna Wilcox, donated by Ms. Wilcox**

# Al Cohn 1986 *Cadence* Interview - Part Two

BR: You worked with practically a dozen big bands.

AC: Yeah, maybe not that much, but –

BR: Woody Herman, Alvino Rey, Buddy Rich, Artie Shaw, Stan Kenton, Benny Goodman, Joe Marsala, Elliot Lawrence –

AC: I never played for Benny. I wrote for him a couple of times, but never played in his band.

BR: But, of the bands that you have worked for, which was the most contented unit that just seemed to ride smoothly?

AC: That's hard to say. Probably the best band, with the highest level of musicianship, was Woody's band. However, contented wouldn't be the word I would use for that band. Everybody was cooperating, but everybody had their little grievances. Guys felt that they didn't have enough to play or they weren't making enough money or the schedule was too hard. ... It was a real road band. We did I don't know how many couple of months of one-nighters once. Usually when those kinds of things happen, it's cliques in the band ganging up – they don't like this guy, they don't like that guy – but I never really encountered that.

BR: Does that usually mean that the person ends up leaving?

AC: Well, sure. I really never encountered that.

BR: How brotherly were "The Brothers" when you were there?

AC: It fluctuated. Sometimes road conditions made people irritable and those things did happen. It would erupt, but not in a really serious way; little altercations or disagreements about one thing or another, but nothing of a lasting nature.

BR: It's been somewhat suggested that Stan Getz did not fit well with the other sax players.

AC: Stan's a special case. Like Zoot said about him one time, "He was a nice bunch of guys." Stan said to me, comparatively recently – this year – he brought that up, and he said, "You know, it was true." So, time has a way of mellowing things out. As I said, it wasn't anything lasting and it wasn't anything serious.

BR: Do you consider yourself somewhat of a "step-Brother"?

AC: Because I didn't make the record ["Four Brothers"]? No, I got a lot of glory out of it. I always say Herbie Steward did

Editor's Note: On Sept. 15, 1985, Al Cohn sat down in Minneapolis, Minnesota with Bob Rusch of *Cadence* magazine and talked about his playing, his recordings, his influences and many other fascinating aspects of his life in jazz. This valuable historical transcript appeared in the November 1986 issue of *Cadence*, and we are extremely grateful to Bob Rusch and the folks at *Cadence* for their permission to reprint it for our readers. Following is the second part of the interview; due to its length, the interview will be continued in future issues of *The NOTE*.

the record and I got the glory. Just being associated with that band – and I was on the band 15 months and we played that every night – it did a lot of good. People still remember that, still come up to me and talk about it.

BR: There have been reunion dates and stuff where you have usually been there instead of Stan Getz, at least on the RCA Four Brothers Reunion recording. Do you know why he wasn't on that?

AC: Well, I really don't know, but he was very hot then. He was probably demanding a lot more money than they cared to pay for that type of record.

BR: I'd like to discuss Serge Chaloff. I know it's been said that he played the same solos with the Herman band for a while.

AC: He used to do that, play the same solos and everybody knew what he was going to play and some of the guys would play along with him sometimes. But, you have to remember, in those bands on a lot of the tunes you'd just get to play eight bars or 16 bars. And sometimes, especially if you made a record or something, the people would expect you to play the solos that were on the record. A lot of musicians, great players, used to do that. The Ellington band used to do that a lot; the Basie band, too, some things, some players.

BR: You've worked a lot with Basie band members. Is it a band you would have liked to have worked with?

AC: Oh yeah, I would have.

BR: Did you ever try to make that known or try to be in a position where you might get the call?

AC: Oh, I wouldn't know how to do that. When the band came back, after Basie had the small band for a while, when they had Frank Wess and Frank Foster, if I had ever had the opportunity to go with that band, it would've been then. But I was very busy as an arranger around New York in those days, and even if I had done it, you know, it was a road band and I had a family. I don't know if I would've done it.

BR: In the late '40s you retired.

AC: Yeah, 1950. I had sort of family pressure. My father had a business that he wanted me to learn about and he sort of asked me.

BR: What kind of business?

AC: It was related to woolens. They had a business where they shrunk cloth before it was cut to make garments, they shrunk it. But, as things turned out, synthetics came in and



that sort of knocked them right out of the box anyway. I stayed in it for a few months, not in his business, but something related to that, to learn about fabrics. But I wasn't very good at it and as soon as something presented itself I grabbed at it. That's when I met Elliot Lawrence.

*BR: Was that a rewarding band to be in?*

*AC: Elliot? Yeah, I'll say it was. We had some great musicians in that band: Tiny Kahn on drums, Johnny Mandel was playing and writing in that band, Nick Travis, and Earl Swope. We had a real good band.*

*BR: Was the band recorded fairly accurately or was it different when it was playing nights?*

*AC: One of the things was *Live at the Steel Pier*. That was a very good album and that was very, very true.*

*BR: Did you arrange in that band?*

*AC: I did.*

*BR: How did your debut under your own name come about? It came out on Triumph and was later reissued on Progressive.*

*AC: Gus Statiras liked me and we met somehow and he asked me if I'd like to do a record, or 78s. And, sure, I was very happy to do it. That was the first thing I did as a leader.*

*BR: In the '50s, you went pretty much to work exclusively for RCA, I guess.*

*AC: I did a lot of work for them. Not exclusively, but I did do a lot for them.*

*BR: Was that because you wanted to be with your family or was it because the economics were just –*

*AC: No, I always followed the path of least resistance. That's how I could make money, so I did that.*

*BR: I want to talk about your relationship with Zoot Sims. Was that very formalized in any kind of contractual way?*

*AC: No, it wasn't necessary. We didn't just work together. He did his things and I did my things and then sometimes we did it together, had our own job together.*

*BR: A cooperative group?*

*AC: No, what happened was, we'd have a fee and we'd pay the piano, bass and drums and split the rest.*

*BR: Was there never a time where that would have been economically feasible to become more permanent on a regular basis? I lived in New York City so my idea was that it seemed to be pretty permanent. But I guess that's a New York perspective.*

*AC: Well, Zoot and I were a lot alike in that we didn't plan things; things just happened. We didn't have a sense of ongoing project and career basis. A job would come, I'd get a call, and I'd do it. It's not as if we had an act. We didn't think of it like that.*

*BR: You said that you and Zoot Sims were very similar in some ways. Both Zoot's and your playing is*



Chuck Lilly, donated by Mr. Lilly

**Count Basie and Al Cohn, Randall's Island, New York City, 1956.**

*excellent. But he seems to have developed more as the darling of the jazz press or –*

*AC: Well, Zoot – that's comparatively recent. That was in the last 10, maybe 12 years of his life. Before that, he really scuffled.*

*BR: What accounts for that? Ira Gitler has said that Al Cohn is never going to be a jazz superstar. What do you think of the elements that make popularity in jazz? Do you think they're musical or –*

*AC: You'd have to ask Ira. [AC laughs] I really don't know. It's a hard thing to think of. There've been some guys that play great and can't even make a living, much less be a star.*

*BR: How much do you think it has to do with just out-living everybody?*

*AC: That's a factor. Dizzy said one time to me, he said, "You know, longevity's a factor. You stick around long enough for them to remember your name."*

*BR: Is that frustrating as an artist?*

*AC: Well, I don't know. I have no complaints. I've always supported my family and never had to really starve. So, I really haven't been faced with having to think in those terms. I've been very content to go on as I am.*

*BR: In the mid-'50s, you were part of the Birdland tours. Were you the leader of that or the organizer?*

*AC: No, I was not. We were all contracted separately by some people that worked for Morris Levey, who was the owner of Birdland, and they put this group together. Now, I know a record came out which sort of made me the leader on it.*

*BR: It was issued under your name on French RCA.*

*AC: But I wasn't the leader. It was all equal. As a matter of fact, I didn't even do any arrangements for that. It was all by Manny Albam and Ernie Wilkins.*

*BR: How long did that group work together?*

AC: We did the tour, which was about a couple of weeks, maybe two-and-a-half weeks tops. And we did an album in a studio, and that was it. We never worked together after that. I did team up with Conte Candoli for a few engagements after that, but that didn't last very long either, maybe a month.

BR: *And you had nothing to do with the record coming out under your name?*

AC: No. As a matter of fact, I haven't even heard from French RCA.

BR: *You didn't contract it at all or anything, right?*

AC: That's right.

BR: *You were no more or less than anybody else on that.*

AC: That's right.

BR: *It was reported that you broke your jaw in a car accident in 1955.*

AC: Yes, but that's not totally true. I had a car accident and I have a scar on my chin, but I didn't break my jaw.

BR: *In the early '70s, there was a group led by you called the New York-D.C. Band. What were the circumstances of getting that together?*

AC: I was contacted by Willis Conover and he wanted to get something going because he had been involved with that D.C. band: Joe Timer, Earl Swope, and a bunch of D.C. musicians. Well, Joe Timer died and Willis wanted to get something going. So, he contacted me and I agreed. I lived 90 miles from New York City and I couldn't really handle going into New York for rehearsal and calling up different guys, and that kind of band, with no work you can't depend on guys, they have their own commitments. So, it was just too much hassle and I really didn't feel comfortable as a leader of a big band.

BR: *What was Willis Conover's role in the band besides suggesting it? Was he financially backing it?*

AC: No, we didn't have any jobs, we just had rehearsals. We played one job, I think.

BR: *He just put the bug in your ear and you –*

AC: Yeah.

BR: *Was he a persuasive fellow?*

AC: Well, he didn't have to persuade me very hard, but as it turned out, it really meant very little to me.

BR: *You've worked mainly for RCA, Xanadu and Concord. Is it different producing your own dates for those three companies? Is there a different approach?*

AC: Well, I was not a producer.

BR: *No, but how you were produced, say, between Carl Jefferson [Concord] and Don Schlitten [Xanadu].*

AC: Don always suggested musicians that I use and he always had good musicians. Carl Jefferson didn't have very much to say about choice of materials or which musicians I should use. He sort of let that up to me.

I get along great with both of them. RCA was different, because I was handed projects by Jack Lewis, who was the A & R man. He would hand me projects. He had these ideas, and sometimes I would have my doubts, but they generally worked out pretty good. Stuff like four trumpets; I did four trumpets and myself on saxophone.

There were some sort of weird ideas that I don't know how they worked out: a whole album of different versions of "Lullaby of Birdland." He had these sort of nutty ideas. Some of them worked. I don't think there were any real disasters. Some of them worked better than others.

BR: *What was the intent of that Birdland thing? Was it just sort of a commercial hook?*

AC: I don't know. Jack Lewis might have had some kind of behind-the-scenes deal with Morris Levey. Morris Levey, I think, published the tune. Of course, it had the name Birdland and it made a little tie in there.

BR: *Are there any of your records that you particularly feel stand up well, that you're satisfied with more than others?*

AC: ... I like the ones I did for Concord and Xanadu, and I like the one especially, *Motoring Along*, on Sonet.

BR: *Do you find that the most satisfying of the collaborations?*

AC: Well, I don't listen to my own records a whole lot. But I like those albums. I like the *Heavy Love* thing I did with Jimmy Rowles for Xanadu. Basically, I'm not unhappy with any of the records I did. There were times, in the days when I was doing a lot of writing, I used to come in the studio to make a record just having finished the last arrangement and being really too tired to play what I thought I could've played. But that's just the way it worked out.

BR: *Was there any particular recording that you just wish people would cast out?*

AC: Yes, but I'll keep that to myself.

BR: *An earlier one?*

AC: [AC laughs] I'll keep that to myself. It's bad for business.

BR: *You mean, it's still currently on sale?*

AC: Well, they're all on sale somewhere, aren't they?

BR: *Not really. All right, be that way. You've made dozens of commercial dates. Would you consider any of them artistic standouts?*

AC: I did that one I thought was really good, that one with Tony Bennett that Don Costa arranged. It had "Fly Me To The Moon" on it and I had something to play on that.

BR: *Is this for Columbia?*

AC: Yeah.

*BR: What is it that you felt made that a little better than the average?*

AC: Well, Don Costa's a wonderful arranger, and it was a really fine orchestra, and I had obligatos to play behind Tony. I thought it came off very nice.

*BR: Did you ever record under a pseudonym?*

AC: Yes. I did an album for Victor, for Jack Lewis. This was one of his more crazy ideas: six different versions of "Waltzing Matilda." This was when that movie came out; it was Fred Astaire, an atomic war, *On The Beach*.

We did an album of six different versions of "Waltzing Matilda," which is kind of lean material to begin with. It was a pretty hard job. They put it out – it had strings and a fairly large orchestra – they put it out with some made up name, "So-and-So and His Orchestra," some kind of real high-tone kind of name on RCA.

*BR: You don't remember the name?*

AC: No.

*BR: But that was you?*

AC: Yeah.

*BR: Was that just an arranger role or were you featured as a sax player?*

AC: No, no. I didn't play on it. I arranged it and conducted it.

*BR: Why didn't they put it under your name? Or didn't you want it under your name?*

AC: No, it wasn't that I didn't want it. They just thought that it was not jazz. Maybe they thought that I'd be identified with jazz and if they put it out under one of these kind of fancy names, it would have a better chance.

*BR: Than Al Cohn.*

AC: Yeah.

*BR: It was a name that hadn't been used before.*

AC: Right.

*BR: There's a tenor player named Al Epstein –*

AC: Yes, he's a real person. He's a friend of mine, long-time good friend of mine.

*BR: In January 1959, you arranged a Benny Goodman session. It included Zoot Sims, Russ Freeman, Turk Van Lake, Chuck Wayne and Donna Musgrove, who was the featured singer, I guess. It was never issued. Do you know why?*

AC: I don't remember it. ... You know, I was doing an awful lot of arranging and generally in a very hectic way, and I wasn't very disciplined in those days. The pages would be flying and I couldn't even remember from one day to the next what I had just written.

*BR: Do you consider it a job, or do you consider it art, or do you consider it work?*

AC: Well, it didn't start off that way, but it got that way. It became work and a job. That's why I don't do it anymore.

*BR: Do you think you were hurt in some ways by moving into that?*

AC: Well, I spread myself a little thin and I suppose, in a way, it hurt in the sense that I didn't keep up with playing as much as I should and suffered for that later, I think. I never really completely got away from it, because all through the '60s I was working with Zoot at the Half Note for as much as 25, 26 weeks a year for a couple of years, down to maybe 15 weeks a year at two or three weeks at a time.

I never completely got away, but I didn't get out. You have to get out in this business; you have to travel, you have to have exposure, and I wasn't doing that.

*BR: Do you feel you're getting more exposure now?*

AC: Oh, definitely.

*BR: Does Concord give you exposure?*

AC: I'm not with Concord anymore. I just did an album for Uptown Records, Carl Fontana and I did, just last week. I had nothing to do with record companies. I've been getting out playing at festivals, traveling, going to Europe quite a bit and Japan, traveling the States and Canada, that's what I meant – exposure.

*BR: How did you find working for Uptown relative to some of the other companies you've worked with?*

AC: Well, I've only done two albums with them. I'm not under contract with them. Bob Sunenblick, he's a very nice man and he loves jazz, and he's a doctor. I did another album for him a little over a year ago with Red Mitchell and a trumpet player named Don Joseph, who used to be around New York.

*BR: He still is.*

AC: Yeah, but he sort of disappeared off of the scene. He lives in Staten Island and he hasn't been playing outside of Staten Island for maybe 30 years. He played beautiful – really good.

*BR: Why did you leave Concord?*

AC: He says he didn't make any money on me.

*BR: Do you think any of the Al Cohn records really are making anybody a lot of money? Al Cohn or anybody else?*

AC: I'm not making any money, so I couldn't say. But I think jazz records, by and large, don't make money. But over the years, they will make some.

*BR: You did the Lennie soundtrack. Who was on that?*

AC: I don't remember. I just know that Ralph Burns wrote it. ...

*BR: What are your memories of Al Killian? What kind of a person was he?*

AC: Al Killian played with Georgie Auld's band for a little while, for just a very short time. I didn't know Al Killian that well.

To be continued . . . next issue.



# On Education for the Improvising Musician



Marek Lazarski

## Part Three – Walking the Woods to Freedom

Editor's Note: Dave Liebman [DL] participated in an interview with musician Marco Cattani [MC] in Barga, Italy, in August 2008 on the broad subject of jazz education. Following is the conclusion of a three-part edited transcription of that interview.

by David Liebman

*MC: What is the creative contribution, quantitatively and qualitatively, of European improvisers to free jazz?*

*DL: Well, the European tradition has classical music as its home base. Europe is absolute ground zero for classical music. This is not like America looking east to appreciate Mozart. This is Europe where Bach, Beethoven and Brahms did their work – right on that very ground.*

America has the blues, of which jazz is an extension, as well of course black culture. For us to experience and be part of the African-American culture as white people was like being a visitor to another planet.

European culture also has world music as a result of colonization and imperialism; basically, England had India and Africa; France in the Caribbean, Asia and Africa; the Dutch everywhere, etc.

So even now, there is the world culture aspect of living in Paris or London or Berlin and so on. There's something to be said about where people do something – how the geography affects them; how the weather is; what the buildings are like; what they eat.

I mean, there's a reason for classical music happening in Europe and not, say, in Laos, which, for example, has

its own "classical" music; it's a different state of being. So, the European music is intrinsically tied to the world music and classical aspects which are at home there.

*MC: In your personal evolution, musically, what is the meeting point between composition and improvisation?*

*DL: In a certain way, the ultimate goal as an improviser is to create the perfect composition. A composer is somebody who spends time picking and choosing the perfect solution to a musical "problem." They have all the choices in front of them depending on their milieu and environment, context and so forth.*

But, basically, there's no rush. They're not being asked to improvise on the spot. They're being asked to embody some musical thought on a piece of paper or on the computer or whatever format. So, the composer has all the days, all the time in the world, to choose between a C and a C sharp.

The improviser, because of what we were talking about earlier concerning the whole "being there," present-time aspect of jazz, will choose that C or C sharp based on a variety of things: guessing, good luck and timing, knowledge and experience, who they're playing with, etc. Some of it is voodoo; some of it is real.

It's a whole bunch of things that makes me choose a C or C sharp in the moment of playing whereas a composer has a chance to really pick and choose; what I refer to as compositional review. That is a process of looking over what's been done and editing it, refining it, getting it to be more like what it really sounds like in one's inner ear and mind.

Do I really want the C sharp? Maybe it should be a D? Let me go back and look at it. A new composition stays on my piano for a couple of weeks. I go over and look at it constantly. It's never done. The only way it's "done" is if I record it. And even after that I might change it over the years.

So, in the final result, if I could play like that, with that kind of introspection, review process, etc. – well, who knows how perfect the music could be ... at least from a technical standpoint.

*MC: Twenty-twenty vision.*

*DL: Yes, to refine it because I have time. So far, no one has come up with the perfect improvisation. Perfect means that under compositional review you would have the five elements of music that we spoke about (melody, harmony, rhythm, color and form), all equally balanced and so on. You would have perfect reasoning, and perfect intellect – right choices. And, of course, it would be meaningful in the expressive way. We have enough well-conceived pieces*

in the classical literature to serve as a standard.

If I could improvise like that, it would be the end game. Now, that is not going to happen – theoretically, never; and realistically, I would be way dead before I ever got that good.

Of course, every generation is more musically equipped than previous ones. But if I could have it the way I wanted to, if I looked on paper at what I played last night, at any one of those solos, and had the time to analyze it, I could've said, "I made the right decision right there to use the F instead of the F sharp," or "I could've played an E," or whatever. I made the right decision to put that over there in that place or the right decision in the expressive way I played that F and F sharp on the soprano sax, etc.

I did the right thing based on experience and knowledge, aspects that I have built up in abundance over the years. But once again, in real time I don't have the chance to do that. In "past" time, with retrospective evaluation and conditional tense stuff – like, could've, should've – I would have the chance to do that.

So, can an improvisation be perfect? Theoretically, yes, but never in reality. But what a great thing to have in front of you! [DL laughs] That means that the sun is always there staring you in the face.

*MC: How would an orchestra improvise? What would be an alternative to Butch Morris' methods of group improvisation?*

DL: Well, I don't know Butch Morris' methods but I've seen Cecil Taylor and Karl Berger work. I have a big band at home and we do aspects of improvisation. I'll say, "Everybody please play with an atmosphere/feeling of waterfalls;" something like that. In this sense, there's nothing different for a big band than for small groups. It just requires having enough cooperation and a common desire to want to do it.

The beauty of a large group is that there are so many textural possibilities. In a small group, you have four guys improvising in a free manner. But in a big band, for example, there are 18 musicians. It also could get out of control very easily because the line between chaos and order is very thin and there is a critical point where numbers sometimes

make chaos more apparent and harder to control.

I usually say, for example, five people on stage are about the ideal number before the sheer mass of six-plus musicians becomes inhibiting for freedom of expression in the moment.

I mean, we can have 20 people playing anything they want at any moment and that could be wonderful. Will that be musically satisfying, meaning will I listen to it again? Will it really qualify as great music with all that that means: tension and release, high and low, soft to loud, all the contrasting elements that we talk about in music?

I think with 20 musicians it could easily get chaotic. In fact, I think with six it can become that way. I'm exaggerating, but there's a point where bigness becomes much more susceptible to the possibility of loss of focus, actually raising loss of focus exponentially: 6 is 10, 10 is 90, and 90 is 500.

Five hundred people playing wonderfully together? I don't think so, outside of the beautiful energy it might create and all that. But musically, I don't think so. I'm satisfied if three to four to five people get it. I think that's a great accomplishment. [DL laughs]

*MC: Sometimes there's the case of people who know what they're doing and do it, and others who are trying or mimicking. Guesswork is what we're talking about. Do you think that's a valid distinction within the confines of a musical project?*

DL: Well, I try to get the most competent people. I don't want anybody bluffing. If that's all they're doing, you've got to watch it. The truth is, depending on who is listening and what the situation is, you can get away with murder. Obviously, this is not life or death, so it's no big deal in real world terms, but more in terms of aesthetics. I can tell if somebody doesn't know what they're doing pretty quickly.

And, by the way, it doesn't have to do with the context. It could be a blues player who's absolutely happening. I mean, he may play only three notes – no problem. But I can tell that he knows what he's doing compared to somebody who's just like kind of "playing," you know

Hopefully this kind of "playing" guy is a young person who's going to learn

and improve. Cool. But if it's somebody who says, "I've got this together," and they don't, that's when we have a problem.

Check this out: you need a license to drive a bus, to drive a taxi, to open a restaurant. But there is no test to be a musician. There's no test to be a painter. There's the test of public approval, but the public doesn't necessarily know what's good either.

So what happens? Is it only the "experts" who can judge? Mmmm ... maybe, maybe not, I don't know. This is a whole other discussion about aesthetics, but the point is, do we really know what quality is? Do I know what quality is? Do we have some reference point?

That's why the past is important; it's not that I love Coltrane and therefore I have a great story to tell everybody. That's wonderful, that's fine, and that's good for discussing over a beer and so on.

But the truth is that past great music, like Trane's, sets a standard. That's what it means. Picasso is a standard; Mozart is a standard; different languages and styles, but they each set a standard. And when you have a standard and you've learned about it, that's the whole deal.

You don't just say, "Mozart's great because everybody says he's great." Excuse me; do you know why Mozart's music is great? The melodies are amazing! The harmonies are amazing! The music is perfect! And I know that because I've studied music and I've been taught that by people who studied music, so I have a high standard. That separates my judgment about what is real and what isn't from somebody who doesn't know.

So, yes, it's wonderful to just improvise and feel free and be in the moment. But it's got to be based on knowledge and based on true work with discipline that you've put into it. You can't be free until you know what you are talking about and have done it.

I had this discussion with my first mentor. Few people know who he is, but his name is Pete La Roca, a drummer. He played with Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, etc. Anyway, in the late '60s, he was my first heavy experience with a real jazz guy. You know, not playing with my friends, but playing with a real

accomplished, recognized artist. I was 23 years old and it was a very heavy experience. I talked to Pete last weekend. We had a band for a minute with [pianist] Chick Corea and [bassist] Dave Holland.

MC: *Wow!*

DL: We were standing outside on 69th Street and Broadway in midtown Manhattan in 1969 playing for five dollars a night. [MC laughs] Everybody wanted to play with Pete, obviously. Of course for me, it was a life experience.

At that time, free jazz was ascendant. It was, like, "You gotta play free, you gotta play free." And I remember Chick and Dave were talking to Pete, who is one of the greatest drummers of all time – a real time player, four-four, no nine-eight and all that stuff. Chick and Dave were reciting the current mantra, "We should play free. How come you don't play like that?" Pete said, "I am free. I don't know what you're talking about. I'm free in four-four. You got a problem?"

And the truth is, the way this guy played four beats and put it together, he was free. I now see that 40 years later.

It's one thing to recite a cliché; it's another thing to understand its implications and what is true or not about a statement. Freedom is knowledge. You can't be free until you have acquired knowledge. You shouldn't avoid the forest by going around it. You need to walk through the jungle with the lions and the tigers and the dark and all the crazy stuff; walk through and then come out into the sunshine. If you do that, you can look back and say, "I know what's in there (up to a degree). I know what's in the woods. I now can afford to talk about that, I'm experienced."

If I don't do that and I just walk around the woods, that's not freedom. In fact, you're more locked in than anybody. You think you're cool until you see somebody who's actually walked through the woods who says, "You don't know what I know, do you?" "Well, I'm trying," you say. But the experienced one says, "Wait a minute, you didn't go into the woods. You thought you could get away by walking around it." You can't do

that. It will show and I can hear it, and I'm not the only one.

So, what are your choices? To walk through the woods and to get it right and have the knowledge, putting the necessary time in to master something because, in the final result, it's time and discipline, or should you walk around the woods and say, "I knew it but I don't really know it." Well, that's a personal decision, but I think you understand where I'm coming from.

MC: *Sure, sure. Okay, a final question. Would you feel up to improvising with an orchestra of 12-year-olds that have only just started to play? ...*

DL: Sure.

MC: *[continues] ... And how would you elaborate a project based on this type of musical performance, with or without a director?*

DL: Every way; all ways. "Play the highest note you can, and you other guys play the lowest note you can." "Play and move your fingers as fast as you can," and so on. You know what I'm talking about? "Play only one note until your breath runs out."

This is just coming off the top of my head. You could list 50 things to do that have nothing to do with the C 7th chord; no technical challenges in that respect, only expressive improvisatory "games" with the instrument in their hands. "I'm going to play, and by the way, when I look at you, you do that. And when I look at you, you do that, or just do whatever you feel like." We'd have so much fun, it would be great.

I mean, I don't know if we could do that for 10 years. But we'd have a good time because kids, their enthusiasm, their freedom – this is worth everything. Now, hopefully if that ever happens, if we did that today, then tomorrow, meaning the future, they'd say, "Man, that was some great stuff that we did there. But what is it that I really played? And what was it that that guy was playing? I need to go back and listen to that and check that out." And then, they would find out about John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Amadeus, etc.

That inquisitiveness comes from a moving experience; a student having "learned" something who wants more. That's the thing you want a student to see. You want a student to realize that there's freedom, and expression, all possible in the moment; but then, there's the knowledge that makes you able to do it at a high level. If you accomplish that for a young man or woman, they will have something to strive for. You'll bring a lot of joy to the world, that's for sure.

Making a living and doing what you love – this is another discussion – but as far as feeling good about yourself, what's better than doing that? I mean, let's face it. If a person has an instrument in their hands, or paints, or clay, or something like that and they create something, they always feel better. Look at what sick people and those who are so-called "disabled" are capable of. If you give them some kind of a creative thing, it puts a smile on their face. Why is that? It's because they have done something on their own.

And that's very liberating and really what this is about; trying to instill freedom of expression in young people (before it's too late). I don't care if they're classical musicians, or Aboriginal musicians, or Indian musicians who only know ragas. They should understand what "Giant Steps" is, too, and I should understand ragas.

We could really have a nice thing going here. I'll never understand it the way they do because they come from that culture, but I certainly can visit. I can eat your food for a minute so therefore I can try to play your music. We can have a meeting of sorts. And when I see someone who plays like that, I have the highest respect for it and the greatest desire to know more about it.

But I can be only who I am. I bring myself to the plate, my experiences. We can have a good exchange as long as we understand that about each other, respect the tradition, and go as far as we can in the moment.

Let's put it this way: if art and what it engenders ruled the world, I don't think we'd be having the problems we have.

MC: *Grazie, Dave.*

DL: My pleasure, Marco. ☺



Continued from 3

a bit of sherry before breakfast sets the tone for the day and mellows my ruffled edges."

Baird was a nice guy and off they went, mom's cooking sherry in hand. Al wanted to go for a swim, so Baird took him to the state park just down the road. Al waded into the shallow facility and was thrashing and splashing and tasting. The park ranger told him there was no drinking allowed. Al was floating on his back when he got this distressing news and chug-a-lugged the bottle. As the liquid level dropped, so did Al, slowly sinking from sight until all you could see was the empty bottle, looking like a periscope, sticking out of the water, and still clenched tightly in Al's mouth. He was ejected from the pool forthwith.

That afternoon, we took Al to town where he met the owner of Odette's and fell in love with her instantly. He told us that she was crazy about him and that he was moving to New Hope to help his new-found and very wealthy fiancée manage her considerable portfolio. Property values plummeted when news of this reached the local real estate offices.

The next day, as I got ready to drive Al back to the city, he said he thought he would just stick around here until our next weekend in Jackson Heights. That way, he said, he could sort out his complex business empire and get some needed R & R. A look of terror came over Chan's face and she waved at me frantically, signaling clearly that I should get this drunken a--hole out of here pronto, like - now! The previous night, he had picked up our frail, old terrier, Tuki, by the hind legs and shook him violently. He said this was a sure cure for the little beggar's arthritis. Chan snapped! I finally got Al in the car and we were ready to start the two-hour return run to New York.

"Well, Phil, you certainly have a lovely family and are to be commended for your generous spirit in seeing that they are all spared the rigors of urban existence. The children seem

to be thriving and Chan is obviously as happy as a clam. Mightn't we perchance stop and perhaps purchase a little toddy for the long journey back to the asphalt jungle of the Apple?"

He bought a gallon of some noxious smelling sherry spody-ody that he got for a dollar-and-a-half and proceeded to chug-a-lug the whole damn thing in about 10 minutes. When I finally dropped him at 52nd and 7th in front of Local #802 and physically ejected him from my one-door Ford Falcon, the last words I heard were: "Yeah, f--- you. You're a self-centered bastard and your wife's a shrew, your kids are a drag, and your goddamned arthritic dog is a homosexual!"

Ah! What a poet! What a piano player! What a piece of work!

**I have been watching** the wonderful Ken Burns PBS series, *National Parks: America's Best Idea*, all week and this morning park ranger Todd Bolton called us. He is coming to the Deer Head Inn Saturday night to listen to John Coates and I. Mr. Bolton is based at the park ranger training school in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, and was the man who presented me and Charli Persip with the Don Redman Award last summer. Don Redman was a great sax man, band leader, arranger and songwriter ("Gee, Baby, Ain't I Good To You" is his most famous song) and was Dewey Redman's uncle.

This annual event is held on the lawn of Storer College, America's first black college, where Mr. Redman went to school; all park rangers are trained at the former school. It gave me a great feeling that a man who takes care of our natural wonders loves jazz and helped to begin the Redman award many years ago.

**After 50 PITG's**, I think it is time to put the cap on the Quill – come to think of it, he didn't wear a cap. I do. Where was I? Oh yeah! I just got my third rejection slip in regards to my autobiography, *Life In E Flat*, and it's the second time an editor has said I should punch it up. I have shared a cherry pie with Bird, studied with Tristano, worked with Dizzy, Monk and Quincy, and made Billy Joel a star, and they want me to

punch it up.

After 40 years, *The Children's Suite* is out on the Jazzed Media label and is selling like hotcake. My Italian record label, Philology, went belly up – my last outing went lead in Bosnia. I recently finished a double CD of my songs sung by the fantastic singer Michela Lombardi, and it has been received with underwhelming indifference. So, I think I will now concentrate on finishing that pesky rondo of mine. I think I have a real A&P finish for it – a perpetual ad nauseum da capo should do the trick. There is no Coda! Arividerci! Punch this!

Oh! Some good news! My new sax quartet, "Requiem for Vincent J. Abato," commissioned by the New Jersey Sax Quartet, will be premiered on January 7 at Town Hall. Watch philwoods.com for details. Live long and prosper.

Now, where did I put that rondo? ☺

## From the Academy

Continued from 5

After Al Cohn left us in February 1988, several people were seminally involved in establishing and perpetuating the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection: Flo Cohn (deceased), Ralph Hughes (deceased), Phil Woods, now Professor of Music Emeritus Dr. Larry Fisher, Vice President for Advancement Dr. Larry Naftulin (deceased), and now President Emeritus Dr. James Gilbert. I was peripherally involved, deviously plotting how I might eventually take credit for everyone's efforts. And now, 21 years later, I'm damned pleased with myself as I'm able to write about and celebrate these key individuals in one of the classiest jazz periodicals on the planet.

Who could have foreseen it? – A "living" jazz archive within the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education on the campus of East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, celebrating the world-class jazz heritage of this region of the state – and it has truly arrived in 2009! Readers in 24 countries and 45 states owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who stepped up over the past 21 years.

All things Al! ☺

# Jazz at ESU: Bridging Generations



East Stroudsburg University once again welcomed jazz students and their mentors to campus during the summer session for workshops and presentations aimed at continuing the oral tradition of jazz education.

The photos on these pages are clear evidence that learning can also be fun!

Left:

Students from COTA CampJazz visit Kemp Library's Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection to interact with its many jazz education resources, such as oral history interviews and vintage sound recordings.



Garth Woods



Below: Spencer Reed's bi-weekly blues jam at the Deer Head Inn, a Thursday night favorite among local musicians, provides the perfect performance setting (and a great hang!) for a mix of professionals, COTA Campers, and students from the David Liebman Saxophone Master Class.



Mark Ginsburg





Left: David Liebman ❶ rehearses three of his master class students prior to their traditional Friday night gig at the Deer Head Inn. Providing the accompaniment are acclaimed jazz professionals Phil Markowitz (piano), Tony Marino (bass) and Michael Stephens (drums).

Middle: Bob Lieve demonstrates some of his trademark stage flair for the COTA Campers, as well as his musicianship on all sorts of brass instruments. Joining Bob and the students in the fun are faculty members Jim Daniels and Jay Rattman ❷ and camp director Rick Chamberlain. ❸

Bottom: “ESU Welcomes COTA ‘09” was the theme of the first concert of the 2009-10 ESU Jazz Synergy Series on Sept. 10. Bob Keller ❹ and Friends, including Bill Crow ❺ and Danny Cahn ❻ performed Al Cohn tunes from his classic 1955 recording *The Natural Seven*, plus more, to an enthusiastic audience of returning ESU students and Pocono jazz fans.

Mark Ginsburg

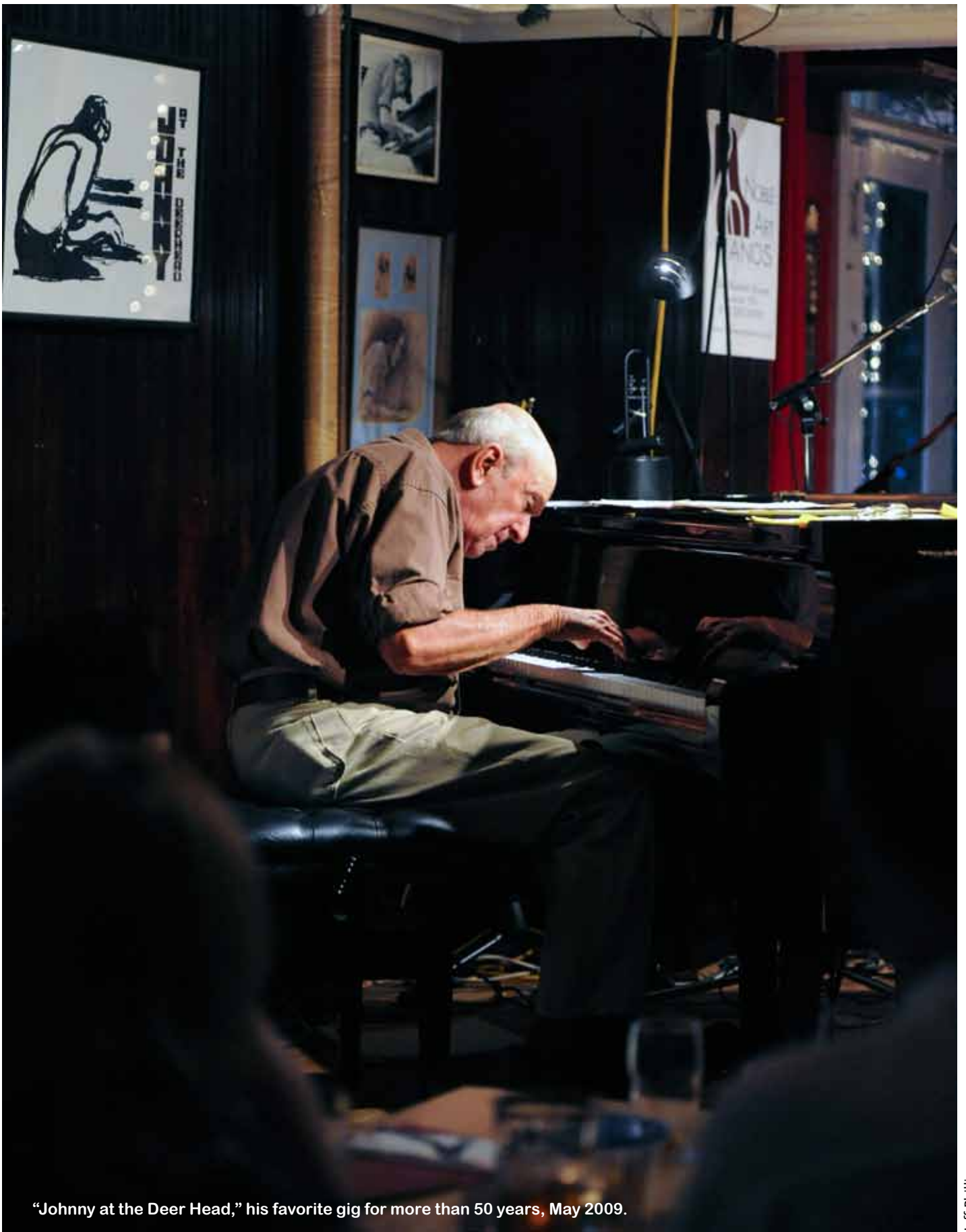


Garth Woods



Jeff Phillips





“Johnny at the Deer Head,” his favorite gig for more than 50 years, May 2009.

Jeff Phillips

Continued from 14

Ray Brown and Red Mitchell. Guitar players I wrote down here are Jim Hall and Harry Leahey. I worked a lot with Harry. I mentioned Jimmy Giuffre before. As an arranger, I was always intrigued with Bill Holman. And I also have Ray Charles down here because there's a lot that I think I got from him.

*PD: Can you tell us, pretty briefly, the John Coates - Keith Jarrett story?*

JC: Soon after I began working at Shawnee Press, Keith used to come into the Deer Head, when he was, I guess, 11 or 12 years old, initially just to listen. His mother worked right across the hall from me at Shawnee Press. She was Fred Waring's secretary.

He never played piano, but when he got a little bit older, he brought a soprano saxophone, which he was playing very well, to sit in sometimes. He also very much liked the chance to play drums with us, when the drummer we had at that time was not able to make it or on a night when we didn't have a drummer. After a while, he became the drummer there with me and a bass player by the name of DeWitt Kay. He played at the Deer Head for two summers; it was at the time when he was with Charles Lloyd. But Charles Lloyd took some sort of a sabbatical. I don't know whether he had the guys on a retainer or not but it was that kind of a thing. They were waiting around for Charles Lloyd to go back to work and it was during those two years that Keith played at the Deer Head with me.

The other thing with Keith Jarrett was that when I moved to Mountain Lake in New Jersey, less than a year later, probably about six months after I moved there, Keith by chance moved to Mountain Lake too. Dave Lantz, I guess, was also instrumental in getting Keith to live in Mountain Lake. He lived right across the road from me; it was a stone's throw away. We saw each other every day for quite some time. I would take care of his car when he was away, he would take care of my car when I was away, you know. That's pretty much it.

*PD: When did you begin reaching into the piano and pulling the strings?*

JC: Oh, that's was quite some time ago, I think. *[laughs]* Actually, I think what started that was really this business about perfect pitch and the ear. It used to be a hassle for me if the piano wasn't in perfect tune, you know? It was bothersome and it really affected the way I played. At one time in my life I had two pianos at home. One I de-tuned; it was out of tune to begin with. I mean, it was in tune with itself but it was almost a perfect half-step out. But I de-tuned it further than that and would play it before going out on a job so that whatever piano I would play on the job would sound relatively okay. *[audience laughs]*

And the thing about plucking the strings ... I think that started when I used to try to put mutes in the piano to block out the strings that would go out of tune when I was playing. I got fairly quick at touching up a piano. At one time, I used to be able to tune it in between numbers; you know, play a tune and be very aware of which notes had gone out during that tune and before the next number get them back in tune. When it would happen during a tune, I would put this wedge or mute on the string so as to make it more tolerable for me. I think in doing that I sometimes hit on some interesting sounds. *[laughs]* I think that's how that started. *[audience laughs]*

*PD: Johnny, thank you for 48 years of music at the Deer Head. We're very fortunate to be here today to hear your story because it's truly inspiring. You told us everything. [To the audience] Originally, Johnny said, "I don't know if I can do something for an hour and 15 minutes."*

JC: Live and learn.

*PD: Well, we have been the beneficiaries of that and I have to ask the class – and all of you students of life – what have we learned today? Always repay your mom. [audience laughs] She let you go out on the road, so you went and got your degree, and that's a show of respect from the old school. So, Johnny, thanks for your gift to us and for giving us a lot to think about.*

JC: Thank you, Pat. *[audience applauds]*

Thank you all. ☺

## Sideman Asides

Compiled by Patrick Dorian

Perhaps you needed to be there, but no matter how you process these anecdotes, we include them as documentation of another form of auditory joy from the jazz spirit.

**Steve Gilmore** is one of the world's great bassists and has been a member of the Phil Woods Quartet/Quintet/Little Big Band/Big Band for over 35 years. His reflections about the symbiosis (or lack thereof) between the performers and the audience spawned thoughts of the following:

Why have there been evenings when the performers thought they weren't sounding good, yet the audience responded wildly? Whereas, on other evenings, each performer thought that they were "in the zone" functioning at their creative peak yet the audience response was tepid.

Steve, one of the ultimate "levelers" of the ego, mentioned to me years ago that one never sounds as bad as one might have thought, *and on the other hand*, one never sounds as great as one might have thought. The proof is in the ears of other performers and, of course, recordings.

A final Gilmore-ism: Upon stepping off the stage, a performer lamented to colleagues, "I was terrible," wherein one of the colleagues replied, "No, that's not true. I've heard you sound much worse than tonight."

**Relayed from trumpeter Pete Hyde:** Dave Brubeck was friendly with Marj and Ernie Farmer at Shawnee Press in Delaware Water Gap in the 1960s, and they negotiated a contract to publish his "oratorio," I guess you'd call it, "La Fiesta de la Posada." It included a few instrumental parts, with a bit of two-trumpet feature (sort of Mariachi style), so they asked me to be the editor.

I had a number of questions to clear up regarding the manuscript, and Marj suggested we get together with Dave. He was scheduled to be in New York soon, and she asked if I knew of a place where we could meet.

Yes, I had spent many an hour

Continued on Page 34

# Readers, Please Take NOTE

## 2009-10 ESU Jazz Synergy Series

If this issue reaches you in time, please plan to join Phil Woods and the COTA Festival Orchestra for Library Alive IV at the Sherman Theater, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, on Thursday Nov. 12 at 7:30 p.m.

Three concerts in 2010 will round out the remaining schedule for this year's ESU Jazz Synergy Series:

- JARO on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, at 3 p.m. at ESU;
- The David Liebman Big Band on March 25, at 7:30 p.m. at the Sherman Theater.
- Library Alive V on April 15, at 7:30 p.m. at the Sherman Theater.

For more information, call (570) 422-3828.

## France Honors David Liebman

Congratulations to David Liebman, who has received the prestigious Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Order of Arts and Letters) from the French government in recognition of his "significant contribution to the enrichment of the French cultural inheritance" through the Arts.

Previous honorees in the jazz field have included Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Max Roach, Hank Jones, Keith Jarrett and only a few others. Dave will receive his award, symbolized by a medallion with ribbon, at a ceremony in France in December.

## Phil Woods Receives Redman Award

Congratulations are also in order for Phil Woods, who along with drummer Charli Persip, received the Don Redman Award on June 27 at the eighth-annual Don Redman Heritage Awards and Concert in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.

The event was held on the grounds of the National Park Services' Stephen T. Mather Training Center on the former campus of Storer College, one of the first institutions of higher learning in the United States to offer enrollment to freed African-Americans following the Civil War. Redman, who studied at Storer College and the Boston Conservatory, was an acclaimed composer and arranger ("Gee Baby, Ain't I Good to You").

## Jazz Programs on WESS 90.3 FM

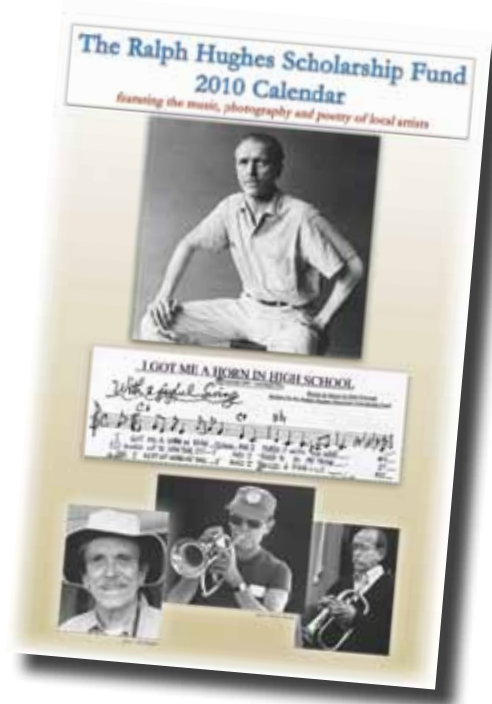
If you live in the Pocono region, don't forget to tune in on Wednesdays for *Jazz from A to Z* (10 a.m. to noon) and the *Pocono Jazz Hour* (noon to 1 p.m.). Both programs are hosted by Bob Bush and feature music from the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection. On Saturdays, listen to Steve Krawitz and his long-running jazz programs, *Alternating Currents* (8 to 9 a.m.) and *Jazz for the Common Man* (9 a.m. to noon). All programming on WESS may be accessed via the internet at [www.esu.edu/wess](http://www.esu.edu/wess).

## 2009-10 ACMJC Fundraising Appeal

The second annual fundraising campaign for the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection at ESU will commence in November. Letters will be mailed to all recipients of *The NOTE* asking readers to make a tax-deductible donation to help keep the Collection and *The NOTE* "afloat."

To those who have given generously to the ACMJC in the past, we send along our heartfelt thanks.

If you've enjoyed this magazine but haven't contributed lately to help us keep it going, please take the opportunity when called upon to lend your much-needed financial support.



## Great Gift Idea: 2010 Jazz Calendar

Need a great gift idea for the holidays? Why not order the Ralph Hughes Scholarship Fund 2010 Calendar!

This visually impressive and informative calendar features artistic images of Pocono jazz musicians including Bob Dorough, David Liebman, Phil Woods, John Coates, Jr., Paul Rostock, Michael Stephans, Mark Hamza, with several photos of Ralph Hughes on the cover.

To order, visit <http://ralphhughes.org> or send a check for \$24.95 made payable to "The Ralph Hughes Scholarship" to: Elvi DeLotto, P.O. Box 702, Delaware Water Gap, PA, 18327.



Just a note to tell you how much I enjoyed the Johnny Mandel interview [Winter/Spring 2009]. When I was with Tony Bennett, I never got tired of hearing the orchestra play Johnny's chart on "Emily" (with that beautiful flute solo on the intro), as well as on "The Shadow Of Your Smile" and "A Time For Love." And Tony never got tired of singing them. Many thanks for a great story.

**John Bunch**  
New York, NY

I got the latest issue of *The NOTE* the other day; always an enjoyable read. *The NOTE* is by far the best-produced jazz publication I receive. The only other ones I get are for record collectors and discographers and are printed in black and white. The quality paper stock yields nicely reproduced color and black-and-white photos, and the type is a nice, readable size.

**Geoffrey Wheeler**  
Ft. Wayne, IN

As the daughter of Ray Beckenstein, Danny Bank's colleague in the original New York Saxophone Quartet (NYSQ), I grew up with Danny, in a manner of speaking, and remember him well.

In his tribute to Danny [Summer 2009], Kenny Berger writes: "Danny was also the founder of the New York Saxophone Quartet" and he credits Danny with commissioning works for the NYSQ by jazz composers such as George Handy, Phil Woods and John Carisi. However, this is not the whole story.

The Spring 1987 issue of *Saxophone Journal* [Vol. 12, No. 1] contains a detailed article by David J. Gibson which chronicles my dad's long career in music. In it, Ray revealed that there was a precursor to the NYSQ, conceived by A & R man Jack Lewis of Vic Records, for whom many of New York City's jazz and studio musicians worked in the 1950's.

After hearing the Marcel Mule

Saxophone Quartet, Lewis suggested that an American quartet be formed. The personnel on that first quartet was Hal McKusick on soprano, Ed Caine on alto, Al Cohn on tenor and Sol Schlinger on baritone. Said Ray: "It didn't last a minute! They tried playing one of the traditional French compositions and decided it didn't move them."

Around this time, Danny Bank and Ray were getting together regularly to practice between gigs. After the first quartet dissolved, and inspired by the idea of a truly American saxophone quartet, Danny and Ray formed the NYSQ in 1959 with Ed Caine and Al Epstein.

"We immediately began collecting music from our friends. We didn't want to play [French] music because we weren't playing their sound. ... We made more individually American sounds and felt that we had to have American music to play. ... We had friends ... who were very interested in writing for the quartet." In other words, the NYSQ's original repertoire arose because all of its members were working in the New York studio scene and had personal relationships with Handy, Woods, Carisi, et al.

The NYSQ was an idea whose time had come. It was a pioneering joint effort, the first group of its kind to bring an American sound and sensibility, along with a jazz-based body of repertoire, to the now-ubiquitous, worldwide phenomenon of the saxophone quartet. This is something of which Danny, Ray, Ed and Al can all be rightfully proud.

**Cara Beckenstein**  
Sunnyside, NY

Editor's Note: After a long illness, Ray Beckenstein died on August 24, 2009 at the age of 86. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Ruth, his daughters Cara and Marion, and two sisters. We thank Cara for adding this additional context and important historical information to the story of the formation of this amazing musical group.

Eddie Locke, the great drummer, musician, and educator, passed away on September 7, 2009 at the age of 79. He was one of my dearest friends, one of my "musical fathers," a term he used to describe his own relationships with Papa Jo Jones, Roy Eldridge and Coleman Hawkins, three of the most important musicians in the history of jazz.

Eddie did more for me than I could ever put into words, but here's a sample: he got me my first apartment in New York City by cat-sitting for a neighbor in exchange for two years of free rent! He told me to learn "TUNES!," hired me for gigs; played records for me that I needed to hear; and took me to play with him on a gig with Roy Eldridge when I was 20, an honor and a thrill I'll never forget!

He loved kids so much, and was so loved by them. He had a way of playing that was like no one else; no one has that feel like he had. He was a "Fearless Truth Teller!"

There are a few Eddie stories that I think say a lot about who he was. One day, I asked him how he was. He said, "Man, I got tore up last night. I went to play a tribute for Zoot Sims and listened to all these people get up and talk about how much they loved Zoot. Some musicians, but a lot of music industry people – you know the type. I couldn't take it any more, and got up on the microphone and said, 'You all get up here and talk about how you loved Zoot, but most of you didn't hire him for a gig or a record date when he was alive, when you had a chance to actually help him! You're full of sh-- and I'm not going to listen to it anymore,' and I walked out."

That was Eddie; no tolerance for that kind of b-s!

Another time, Barry Harris called him and said "Locke, I've known you since we were kids and you never come to my yearly concert at Symphony Space, and it's right down the block from you!" Eddie said, "Barry, I'm so sorry, I always mean to go but just

haven't made it, but I promise I'll go this year." What Eddie didn't know was that at the end of every year's concert, Barry gives a lifetime achievement in jazz award to someone. At the very end of the concert, Barry got up and announced, "This year, to close our annual concert, I'd like to give the lifetime achievement in jazz award to one of my oldest and dearest friends, Eddie Locke."

Eddie was shocked! He told me he just burst into tears. He loved and respected Barry so much; he didn't know an award was given out, much less that he would receive it. He went on stage, hugged and thanked Barry, wiped the tears from his eyes, and started to politely thank everyone there.

And then he said, "Hey, how come Barry ain't runnin' one of these 'jazz programs' at Lincoln Center and these schools that charge so much damn money! Most of the people doin' that don't know nothin' about no jazz! But Barry could teach 'em, and he should be teachin' 'em!"

That was Eddie; as flustered as he was, his stubborn love and determination about jazz was always there, just beneath the surface. He was all heart!

He loved all kinds of music. He would listen to Rubinstein, his favorite pianist, for hours. He loved the videos of Horowitz, particularly in his later years.

His friend, Mr. Sullivan, would play

Irish songs on the violin for him and bring him to tears; and he'd say "Jon, he don't know nothing about readin' no notes or nothing like that, you know what I mean? But he just plays so soulful!"

For those of us who knew him, we loved him – you couldn't help but love Eddie Locke if you knew him. Eddie had something to offer that won't be seen again in the same way, and we need to learn from it and remember it! I know that those of us who knew and loved him will never forget him and the things he taught us.

Thanks, Eddie.

Jon Gordon  
New York, NY

Editor's Note: Phil Woods recommended this excellent remembrance by saxophonist Jon Gordon for this issue, and added that Eddie was considered "a mentor to many, many, many young players and never got his due. This [article] would help fill that mistake."

Readers, we love hearing from you! Just mark somewhere on your correspondence that it is intended as a "Mailbag" letter, and include your name, city and state/country. Send it to: Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection – Kemp Library, 200 Prospect St., East Stroudsburg, PA 18301. If you send it via email, put "Mailbag" in the subject line. Our email address is: [alcohncollection@esu.edu](mailto:alcohncollection@esu.edu). Please note that due to space limitations, letters selected for publication may be edited.

Continued from 31

practicing at Charlie Colin's studio when I lived in New York, and the price was reasonable. I called up the studio, and as luck would have it, Charlie himself picked up the phone. I figured Charlie would be oh, so delighted to have such a celebrity on his premises. I told him I'd like to use his best room with his best piano for a meeting with Dave Brubeck.

"Oh, yes," he said, "you can have the room for thirty dollars an hour."

I went to Marj Farmer and, fuming, told her, "This guy is trying to take us for a ride! I used to pay four dollars an hour to practice there. I should never have told him it's for Dave Brubeck." Marj told me to calm down, that the company could afford it, and if it's a convenient place to meet, we'll do it. So, we did it.

The day we met, Charlie must have barged in at least four or five times, to proudly introduce his friends and employees to Dave Brubeck (I remember trumpet icon Jimmy Maxwell was one of them – he practiced there, too).

With all of the interruptions, we spent about three hours in there. By the time we were done Charlie had gone home. I went up to the clerk at the front as we were leaving, to see if he would lop off a few bucks for the many interruptions. Before I could say a word, he said, "You were here three hours? That'll be twelve dollars, please."

Charlie had forgotten to tell him. I felt vindicated as hell!

## Contributors & Acknowledgements

For additional information about contributors to this issue of *The NOTE*, you can visit their websites:

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# About the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection

Long-time readers of *The NOTE* are no doubt very familiar with the history and makeup of the ACMJC. However, we're delighted to be adding new recipients to our mailing list on a regular basis. So, for those of you who may be just getting acquainted with us, here's a bit of general background information to let you know about this valuable ESU educational resource.

The **Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection** was established in 1988 to honor the life and legacy of "Mr. Music," Al Cohn – saxophonist, arranger, composer and Pocono neighbor. The collection is located on the ground level of ESU's Kemp Library and consists of donated jazz recordings, books, periodicals, oral histories, sheet music, art, photographs, memorabilia and ephemera. All styles and eras of jazz are represented in the Collection, with a special emphasis on the preservation and documentation of Al Cohn's music, his long-time association with Zoot Sims, and the contributions of the many jazz musicians considered to be influences, colleagues, disciples, admirers and friends of Al.

There are also several special collections within the ACMJC. The *Pocono Jazz Heritage Collection* maintains the history of the fertile jazz community here in the Pocono Mountains, through recordings, documents, photographs and a complete set of videos from the ESU Jazz Masters Seminar and Mentor Concert Series. The thousands of exceptional recordings in the *Coover Gazdar Collection* reflect the life-long love of jazz of this avid record collector and dis-

cographer. The *Eddie Safranski Collection* contains personal materials from the acclaimed bassist who played with the Charlie Barnet and Stan Kenton orchestras in the 1940s and worked as a music director for NBC in the 1950s and 1960s.

Materials in the collections are available year-round to students, researchers, musicians, journalists, educators and jazz enthusiasts, and are used as part of the ACMJC's outreach activities, such as the publication and world-wide distribution of *The NOTE* three times per year.

### The ACMJC Needs Your Support!

Donations to the ACMJC are gratefully accepted and help to sustain the Collection and *The NOTE*. Corporate matching gifts are very welcome too! Please make all checks payable to "ESU Foundation – ACMJC" and mail them to:

ACMJC – Kemp Library  
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania  
200 Prospect St.  
East Stroudsburg, PA 18301-2999

To donate materials, please call the Collection Coordinator at 570-422-3828 or send email to [alcohncollection@esu.edu](mailto:alcohncollection@esu.edu). And to all those who have so generously contributed to the ACMJC in the past, please accept our heartfelt thanks!

For more information, visit the ACMJC website at [www.esu.edu/alcohncollection](http://www.esu.edu/alcohncollection)



The ACMJC area in ESU's Kemp Library.

Charles Perry Hebard



Al Cohn with the Count Basie Orchestra,  
Randall's Island, New York City, 1956

Photo by Chuck Lilly, donated by Mr. Lilly

