

AL COHN MEMORIAL JAZZ COLLECTION at EAST STROUDSBURG UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

# The NOTE

WINTER/  
SPRING  
2021

MAYNARD  
FERGUSON  
PLAYS AL COHN

AL COHN AND  
THAD JONES

MILES DAVIS  
& POP MUSIC



EAST  
STROUDSBURG  
UNIVERSITY

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 **A NOTE FROM THE COLLECTION COORDINATOR: STAYING HONEST**  
By Dr. Matt Vashlishan
- 4 **WHY HARDLY ANYONE PLAYS JAZZ CLARINET**  
By Su Terry
- 5 **REFLECTIONS OF THE PIANO BY ERIC DONEY**  
By Phil Mosley
- 7 **MILES DAVIS AND POP MUSIC**  
By Rob Scheps
- 10 **WILLIE DENNIS**  
By Gordon Jack
- 13 **WILLIAM PATERSON'S LIVING JAZZ ARCHIVES**  
By David Demsey
- 18 **MAYNARD FERGUSON "PLAYS" AC IN THE MUSICAL SHORT SWINGIN' AND SINGIN' (1957): TWO TITANS CONVERGE ON FILM**  
By Patrick Dorian
- 31 **CONTRIBUTORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

## FROM THE COLLECTION



Cover: Miles Davis at Newport in 1990.

*Photo by Herb Snitzer*



Centerfold: "Thad and Al" circa 1975 Left to Right: Skip Crumby-Bey (bass), Thad Jones (trumpet), Al Cohn (saxophone)  
*Photo by Art Markey, courtesy David Demsey*



Back Cover: Maynard Ferguson (age 62) performs at ESU, April 11, 1991. Dr. Larry Fisher and Patrick Dorian interviewed him separately later that evening.  
*Photo by Walter Bredel*

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

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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The Note contains some content that may be considered offensive. Authors' past recollections reflect attitudes of the times and remain uncensored.



# A NOTE FROM THE COLLECTION COORDINATOR

Dr. Matt Vashlishan

## STAYING HONEST

I have known about the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection and The Note for many years, long before my time as Coordinator. I think my very first introduction to the Collection was during my involvement with the COTA Cats youth big band when I was in junior high school. I definitely remember seeing the ACMJC exhibit yearly at the COTA Festival. I also remember seeing all the copies of The Note on display and remember its positive reputation even from that young age. Add twenty years and a total of 75 issues and here we are, still serving the jazz community and ESU by communicating to you all through this publication.

I humbly strive to continue to serve the legacy of this Collection and publication as best as I can, and although we have come a long way in many positive respects there are always things that can be improved upon. I have received some correspondence from loyal readers regarding name misspellings and some other mistakes regarding dates, events etc. and I want you to know that I take these comments very seriously and will do my best to ensure The Note remains the quality publication you have all been accustomed to. For the record, no, I do not think it's spelled "Jerry Mulligan!"

Someone who has probably never spelled any name incorrectly deserves special thanks in this issue, and that is Pat Dorian. As you will read, Pat has been incredibly busy working on his Maynard Ferguson opus for this issue and I am incredibly thankful for everything Pat has contributed to the ACMJC, including his time spent with me in my office when we go digging to get to the bottom of any number of historical



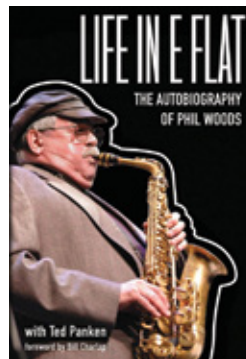
issues or projects. You will hear more from him in the upcoming issues as well, so stay tuned! He is indeed an invaluable resource to what I do here at the ACMJC. In my rearranging of the last issue, I managed to leave out his name for authoring: "The Charles Christopher Parker Centennial Year Continues: Bird with the Herd, Kenton, & the Orchestra."

Among my other corrections is the date for a photograph used in the Bill Holman interview of the last issue #74 of Zoot Sims, Bill Holman and Stu Williamson. This photo was taken by William Claxton and was taken in 1954, not 1964. The complete caption for this photo is below:



Left to Right: Zoot Sims (tenor sax), Bill Holman (arranger), and Stu Williamson (valve trombone) at the recording session for the LP Zoot Sims Quintet (AKA Zoot Sims in Hollywood), June 16, 1954, Hollywood, CA. Bill Holman said about Stu Williamson (age 21 in photo) that "he was an emerging jazz star... a good and intelligent performer on both valve trombone and trumpet who led a heartbreaking life right up until his tragic end in 1991."

The jazz community is fortunate to have two new books that give incredible insight into the life of two very important musicians: Phil Woods and Dottie Dodgion. *Life in Eb* is Phil's autobiography and *Memoirs of a Jazz Drummer* describes Dottie's life in music, including details of her years at the Deer Head Inn.



Both are available at numerous places such as Amazon.

Thankfully I don't only receive criticism, but also letters of appreciation from loyal readers. Here are two of the most recent:

*"I adore The Note. And like the late, great Johnny Mandel, I also read it cover to cover, often twice. One of the hippest periodicals, period. The interview you and Pat did with Bill Holman was terrific. And I love all the records you cited, which I now have to go look up!"*

– Rick Hirsch Composer/Arranger, Saxophonist, Educator

*"You're producing a great magazine! If I look through Down Beat these days, I can expect to see 'coverage' of virtually one or two persons at most that are important and/or familiar. In your September issue I counted 32 familiar names/friends!"*

– Jerry Coker Jazz Educator

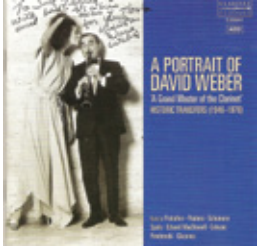
If you have any comments or information pertaining to the subject matter of the Collection, please send it along. If you have a short story or any additional information about Al, Zoot or any of the Pocono musicians please let me know and I can spread the word to our readers. I look forward to hearing from you and as always, enjoy! ■



FROM THE BRIDGE | By Su Terry

# WHY HARDLY ANYONE PLAYS JAZZ CLARINET

Years ago in New York I studied with clarinetist David Weber, then in his nineties. He had played under Toscanini (who hired him personally) in the NBC Orchestra, among many other high profile positions. He was world renowned in the arena of classical clarinet, so jazz clarinetists also studied with him. David told me a story about Benny Goodman; the “King of Swing” had come to Weber’s house for a lesson. “He took all my good reeds and left without paying,” said Weber.



When you studied with Maestro Weber, he figured you came to him because you wanted to play like him, so his teaching was very rigid. He would tell you what mouthpiece to use, which kind of reeds, and so forth. When I studied with him he actually gave me a mouthpiece and told me: “Please, don’t ever use that other mouthpiece again.”

Once, after a lesson, we got to talking about jazz clarinet. Artie Shaw had been a student back in the day, as well as a teenaged Kenny Davern. I had never met Kenny, so David said, “Let’s call him up!” At a certain point the telephone was passed to me and I had a most enjoyable conversation with Maestro Davern, which included a reed story. At the time Weber had advised that he switch to a Selmer mouthpiece and Vandoren reeds, however, neither brand was favored by his saxophone teacher Joe Napoleon. While in the foyer outside Napoleon’s studio, Kenny was practicing his clarinet at pianissimo volume using the newly acquired setup. A few minutes later Napoleon burst through the door, interrupting the current student’s lesson, shouting, “What are you doing! You think I can’t hear you’re playing one of those Selmer mouthpieces, and those Vandoren reeds?”

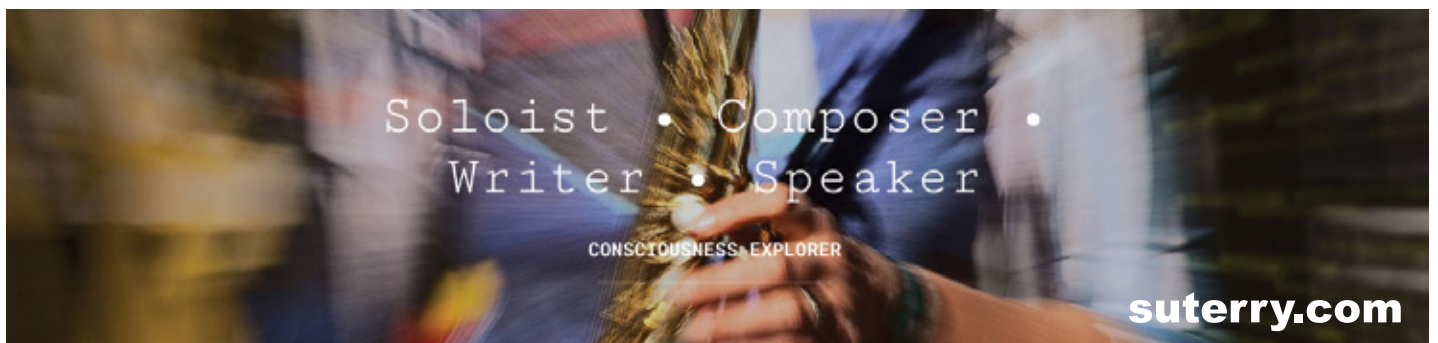
There are reasons why clarinet is not as popular an instrument as saxophone. Firstly, clarinet is harder to play. Sorry, sax players, but it is. The clarinet has a range of more than 3 1/2 octaves, and the notes have a different fingering in each octave. This is unlike other wind instruments where the fingerings repeat in subsequent octaves. To further complicate things, there are three different pinky keys on the right hand that are duplicates of three pinky keys on the left hand, because it’s considered bad form (if not actually impossible)

to play two pinky keys of the same hand in a row, if you can avoid it. Lastly, the clarinet is a bit of a Frankenstein’s monster, ultimately assembled from elements of prior instruments. In fact, the middle of its range where the throat B flat ascends to B natural is affectionately dubbed “The Break” and is feared by beginner clarinet doublers throughout the known Universe. Hence the witticism, “the clarinet was invented by three guys who didn’t know each other.” (The clarinet’s final form is credited to J.C. Denner, a.k.a. the third guy.)

Standard practice back in the day was to start on clarinet before taking up the saxophone. There was only one reason for this: it was thought a student should start on the more difficult instrument. It was a common practice, and still is to a degree, for a saxophonist to double not just on clarinet but also on flute, especially in the jazz and commercial music fields. But doubling came about not because those instruments were similar to each other (which they’re really not), but because of economic reasons. Music promoters thought one player could easily take care of any sax/flute/clarinet parts that came down the pike, rather than hiring three different players. The drum set came about in the same way: why should A play bass drum, B snare, C cymbal, when a single player has two feet and two hands—more than enough to cover all the parts!

Today woodwind doubling is not considered as necessary as it was in the old days. As a Broadway pit player remarked on the first day of rehearsal for a new show, “Hey, this orchestra is putting one synthesizer player out of work!” I remember the late great

NEW WEBSITE FOR THE AGE OF AQUARIUS! MUSIC, VIDEO, PHOTOS, CURIOSITIES



# REFLECTIONS ON *THE PIANO* BY ERIC DONEY



By Phil Mosley

Emeritus Distinguished Professor of English and  
Comparative Literature at Penn State University

Howard Johnson telling me about a broadcast from Carnegie Hall he'd seen, featuring Barbara Streisand performing with a string orchestra and one woodwind player. The camera stayed on Streisand for several numbers while Howard listened to the woodwind player perform equally well on all the saxophones, flute, piccolo, clarinet, bass clarinet, oboe, english horn, and bassoon. "Wait a minute," he thought. "There's no guy in New York that plays all those instruments that well!" Sure enough, when the camera finally lingered on the woodwind player, Howard saw he was playing an EWI ("Electric Wind Instrument.")

As far as occupational hazards, playing clarinet can be hard on the right wrist which supports the instrument's weight. I recall a visit to Phil Woods' house where we talked clarinet shop, among other arcane subjects. Phil picked up his clarinet and started playing with the bell propped up on an open desk drawer. Sheer brilliance! Except I wasn't willing to shlep a desk around as part of my equipment. (If I were, I'd be playing a Hammond B3.) I bought a clarinet neck strap soon after.

Despite the trials of playing the Black Stick of Death—an undeserved nickname likely bestowed by those who'd been bested by it, not to mention the fact that this is also the name of a model of Olt duck call popular with hunters—it is immensely rewarding. The woody timbre of the chalumeau register of the south, the brilliance of the north, the clarity of the middle clarion register are to a clarinetist what the classic P.S. OLT duck call is to the waterfowl chaser.

Even though my beginner clarinet book is out of print, the clarinet is apparently not going away anytime soon. The Clarinetists Facebook group has almost 10,000 members! It especially warms my heart to see youngsters playing the instrument, because it takes a lot longer to get good on clarinet than it does to get good at Fall Guys Ultimate Knockout. Perhaps there is hope after all. ■

From the first bars of "Lauren," the lead-off track on Eric Doney's album *The Piano* (Pacific St. Records, 1991), the listener senses a fresh approach to the art of solo jazz piano. The song's flowing melody, limpid lines, cascading notes, bluesy and churchy chords also suggest



Eric Doney, Mark Williams and Fred Domulot  
at COTA 2006 Photo courtesy Fred Domulot

an approach open to different musical forms, a hallmark of Doney, who died in April 2015 at the age of 62 one month after fellow Pocono, PA area resident, trombonist Rick Chamberlain and less than three months before another friend and local stalwart, alto sax great Phil Woods.

Doney's career as a pianist, composer, conductor, and arranger saw his extensive work in jazz with luminaries like Jon Hendricks and Les Brown stretch to pop (with Engelbert Humperdinck, Connie Stevens, Bob Hope's television show) and rock (David Johansen Band). Comfortable in any situation from solo to large ensemble and ever alert to the adventurous possibilities of new projects, Doney's outstanding reputation was also as an inspiring teacher of younger musicians.

Florida-based drummer and music teacher Fred Domulot met Doney at the beginning of the 1990s through guitarist Scott Jarrett (brother of Keith), who later came up with a vocalese take on "Lauren" entitled "Without You." "Nobody played like Eric," says Domulot, who joined bassist Will Lee (The Late Show with David Letterman band) in Doney's trio that recorded the album *And Why Not?* (1997). Besides, adds Domulot, "he had great, impeccable time," while his highly individual "twist" on various influences gave him a "whole other side" including at times "almost a backbeat, funky jazz element."





Eric Doney, Will Lee and Fred Domulot at Red Rock Recording Studio, November 1998  
Photo courtesy Fred Domulot

Having taken up playing jazz in junior high school, Doney spent many teenage hours at the jazz mecca of the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap, PA, listening to and taping the lyrical, idiosyncratic, and often daring piano performances of one of his idols, the late John Coates, Jr. Unsurprisingly then, five of Coates' compositions featured on *The Piano*. There's the bluesy "Prolog No. 39," a tune showcasing Doney's masterful control of dynamics; the impressionistic "Trilogy," another classically inclined piece again bringing Debussy or Satie to mind; two kinetic flurries: "Motion" and "Prance"; and the wittily named "Utilitarian Samba," in which Latin meets the blues and swings like crazy.

"Eric had every Bill Evans recording," notes Domulot. Unsurprisingly, Doney's interpretation of Evans's "My Bells" is a lyrical exploration of the tune in the characteristic manner of another of his idols. His quirkiest version of others' material on the album is perhaps that of Jimi Hendrix's "Little Wing," which is given a countrified reading with a wistful edge often heard in Doney's work. On this selection, the melancholic feeling is reminiscent of the "lonesome cowboy" sound perfected by Floyd Cramer through his celebrated "slip note" style, one derived from guitarists and that Cramer understood, as I feel sure Doney would also have done, as going back deeply to such pioneers as Maybelle Carter, to steel players, and to the rural blues.

In these trying pandemic days, when we are largely denied the precious experience of live music, we may still turn to the pleasures of recorded music as a comfort, a blessing, and an inspiration. Beautifully played, imaginatively arranged, and given a pristine sound typical of Pacific St. (his own label) releases, the carefully interwoven textures of *The Piano* remind us that so much simple beauty and genuine emotion remain to be experienced in this world. On this record, says Fred Domulot, "Eric's essence came through." ■

Another admirer of *The Piano* is The Note editor and saxophonist Matt Vashlishan for whom the album is one of the first recordings he can remember genuinely enjoying by discovering it on his own. "Lauren" quickly got inside of Vashlishan's head too; Doney's music, he says, "was universal—it had something for everyone while staying true to himself as well as showing a depth of musicality and theoretical knowledge that passed the test with the most seasoned musicians, not just casual listeners."

Named for his niece, "Lauren" is one of six Doney compositions on this thirteen-track album. With its repeated figures, "And Why Not" bears traces of boogie-woogie piano, while "As If By Magic" has the same gently mesmerizing quality as does the opening track. Another composition named for a family member, his younger sister, "Kristin" reveals Doney's classical training in its ethereal tone and delicate progressions. "Martins Day," clocking in at a mere 1:24, has a folksy, country flavor; a mood that "Minsi Ridge" develops more fully into a staccato piece as strong and uncompromising as the rocky Pocono landscape for which it is named.

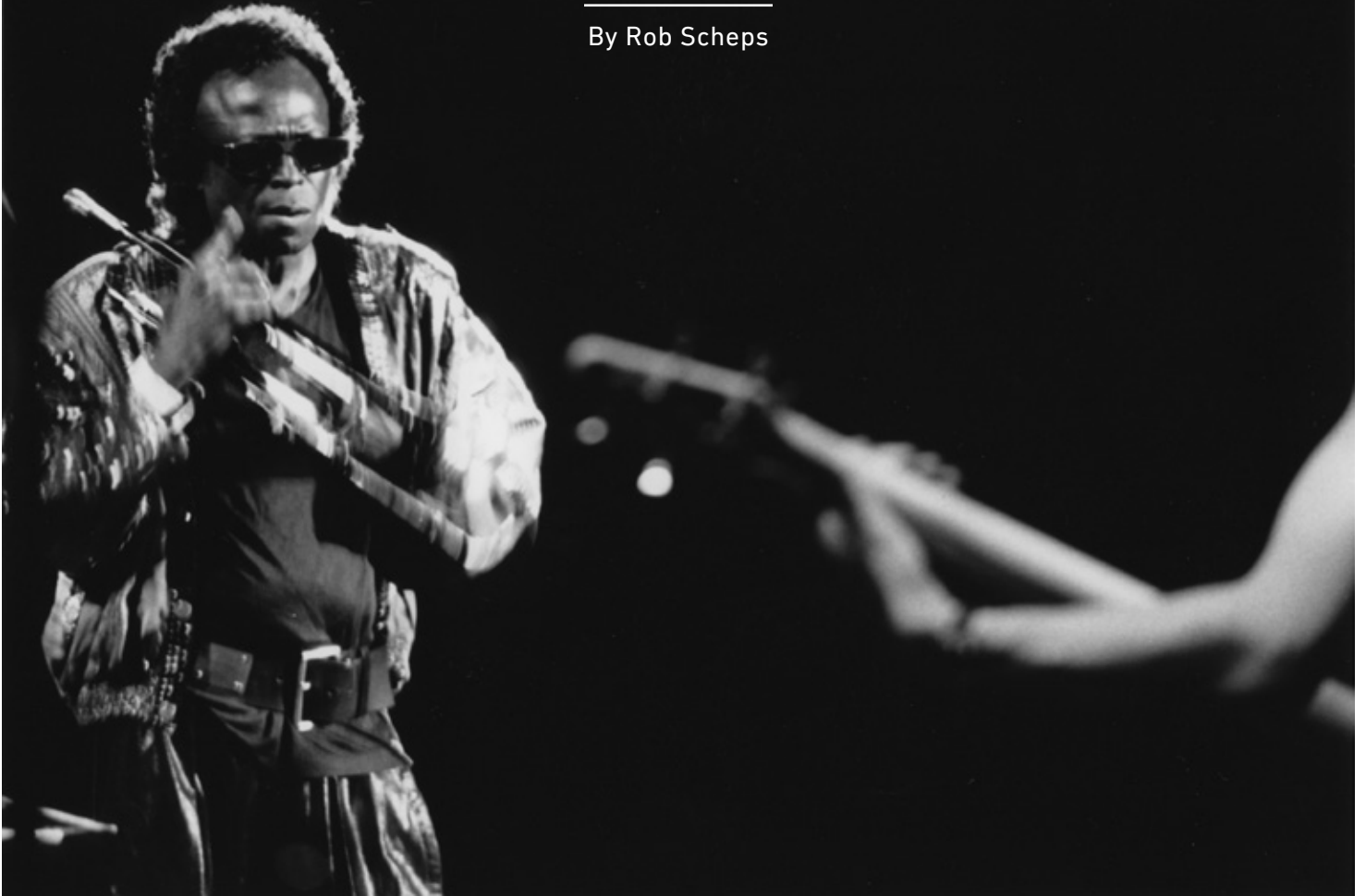


Fred Domulot, Eric Doney and Scott Jarrett in August 2005.  
Photo courtesy Fred Domulot

# MILES DAVIS

## AND POP MUSIC

By Rob Scheps



Miles at the Boston Opera House in 1989. Photo by Herb Snitzer

Miles Davis is a hallowed name in jazz. His name conjures visions of sea changes in music, a vast expanse of styles, periods and colors. However, aspects of Miles' canon are overlooked, such as his influences from American popular music of various stripes and eras. In fact, Miles borrowed popular tunes for his bands as early as the 1950s.

Miles seems to have been a musical omnivore who eschewed snobbery for a more inclusive approach to listening and staying aware of many types of music. Popular songs are no exception.

## INFLUENCE

Miles was married three times. His second marriage was to Betty Mabry who supposedly introduced him to the music of Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone (in addition to expanding his clothing and fashion sense). It seems plausible that Miles' forays into rock and funk from 1968-1975 were in large part a result of exposure to this music. In fact, Miles, Gil Evans and Jimi Hendrix purportedly had a record date on the calendar but Hendrix died the week before. What a collaboration that would have been!



## MUSICAL THEATER

Miles reportedly saw *Guys and Dolls* on Broadway starring Marlon Brando. He culled the Frank Loesser song, “If I Were a Bell,” from the show, changed the key from E flat to F, and it became a jazz standard. He did the same thing with “Surrey with the Fringe on Top” from *Oklahoma*, another Broadway musical written by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Gershwin’s magnum opus *Porgy and Bess* straddled the divides between classical, opera, pop and jazz. It contains a rich vein of popular classics that can be mined. This is what Gil Evans and Miles did with panache on tunes like “Summertime,” “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” and “There’s a Boat Dat’s Leavin’ Soon for New York.” Miles was using pop songs of various types to create straight ahead, swinging jazz renditions.

## PRINCE

Miles was a great admirer of Prince. They performed together on Prince’s concerts. They also reportedly recorded at Prince’s studio near Minneapolis. The mutual respect between these two diminutive giants was palpable.

## TINA TURNER

In the same period, Miles did a rarely heard cover of Tina Turner’s “What’s Love Got to Do with It.” The tune shows up on bootlegs and live shows but not on any studio recordings. Miles’ version is interesting and worth searching for.

## DAVID CROSBY

Miles recorded the Crosby, Stills and Nash song “Guinnevere” in 1968. It lends itself to a “jazz” treatment with its modal structure and employment of the Dorian scale. As legend has it, Miles met Crosby in NY’s West Village, drove David to his home, and played the version for him. Crosby disappointed Miles by saying he hated the treatment. Regardless, it remains a hidden gem in the Davis oeuvre, a sneaky twenty-minute soundscape including periodic returns to Crosby’s melody, voiced for soprano saxophone (Steve Grossman), muted trumpet (Miles) and bass clarinet (Bennie Maupin). It is sometimes classified as an unreleased track for the extended *Bitches Brew* sessions.

## YOU’RE UNDER ARREST

BY MILES DAVIS (Columbia Records, 1985)



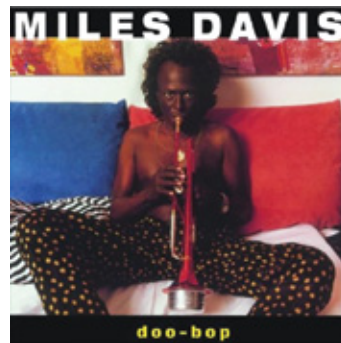
This album by Miles is the most well-known introduction to his use of pop tunes in his music. Many of these tunes became staples in his live performances years later, but this recording represents his documentation and interest quite well.

Sting (Track 1) – Sting appears as a guest playing the part of a French-speaking policeman on the first track: “One Phone Call / Street Scenes,” and is credited as Gordon Sumner. Miles was supposedly Sting’s idol, and Miles’ bass player Darryl Jones introduced them to each other.

Michael Jackson (Track 2) – “Human Nature” is the Michael Jackson hit that also became a staple of Miles’s late career live shows. The melody suits the sensitive, plaintive sound of Miles’s harmon muted trumpet perfectly. The use of synthesizers and flute casts it firmly into the mode of pop music of the time.

Cyndi Lauper (Track 7) – “Time After Time” was a wistful staple of this recording and used in later concerts around 1989-1991. Once again, Miles heard an unlikely pop tune of the day that spoke to him, and in performance it became beautifully his own.

## DOO BOP (Warner Bros., 1992)



Received unfavorably by most critics, this was Miles’ last studio recording and was released posthumously in 1992. It features Miles interacting with rappers, following his lifetime M.O. of curiosity about, and interaction with cutting edge artists of the day.

Despite its initial reception, it went on to win a Grammy Award for Best R&B Performance in 1993.



# THE INSTRUMENTAL CHANGEOVER

## KEYBOARDS

Miles gradually shifted from using acoustic piano in his bands to a litany of keyboards: Fender Rhodes, B3 organ, and beyond. The finest pianists of the day were the purveyors of these transitional sounds in Miles' bands: Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Joe Zawinul, Keith Jarrett and organist Larry Young. This timbre shift became permanent. Miles did not revert to acoustic piano in his groups again until just before his death in 1991. In later years, Miles would hire musicians who were primarily keyboard players, such as Bobby Irving, Adam Holzman, Kei Akagi, and even a 17-year-old Joey DeFrancesco, best known later as a B3 organist.

## BASS

After hiring the finest acoustic bassists in jazz such as Paul Chambers, Ron Carter, cameos by Gary Peacock and Buster Williams, and even obscure (but world class) bassist Albert Stinson, Miles initiated the switch to electric bass using Dave Holland. Holland was versatile and great at holding down repetitive ostinato grooves such as "Duran." Initially playing acoustic bass, he weathered the change by playing electric bass on "Directions" and "In a Silent Way," among others.

Using Dave Holland on electric bass paved the way for Michael Henderson, a young phenom culled from the Motown herd by Miles to update the music with a more soul/blues-based approach. Henderson stayed with Miles for about four years and was the bedrock of the grooves on classics like "Get Up with It," "Jack Johnson," "Pangea" and more. Electric bass became de rigueur in Davis' bands as the switch to rock and funk became permanent. Darryl "The Munch" Jones, Marcus Miller, Tom Barney, Felton Crewes, Benny Reitveld, Richard Patterson and Angus Young were some of the proponents.

Marcus Miller was the first bassist in Miles' comeback band on *The Man with the Horn*, and *We Want Miles*. He later became even more important and intimately associated with Miles in an expanded role, serving as a trusted producer, composer and conceptualist for the music on *Tutu* and for the film score for *Dingo*. Marcus shaped much of Miles' later output.

## GUITAR

Miles rarely, if ever, used guitar in the 1950s and 60s. His bands were traditional jazz quintets and sextets and were piano based. The first well known interpolation of guitar on a Davis record was George Benson's guest appearance on *Miles in the Sky*. Playing in a distinctively clean jazz style, this gateway guitar appearance by Benson paved the way for the inevitable use of more funky, dirty, blues-based guitarists like John McLaughlin, Dominique Gaumont, Blackbyrd MacKnight, Pete Cosey and Reggie Lucas.

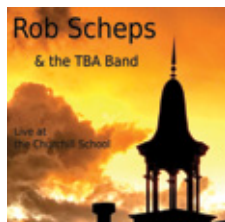
John McLaughlin's epic contributions to *In A Silent Way*, *Jack Johnson* and *Bitches Brew* are well known. A singularly chameleonic guitarist, John starkly contrasted his acoustic playing in other arenas with a searing, nasty, wailing, "in the pocket" approach to Miles's increasingly rockier and funkier creations. This gave Miles the shredding, bluesy guitar voice that he wanted so much.

Rarely discussed is "Fun," the calypso track where unlikely candidate Bucky Pizzarelli (a guitarist usually found in very mainstream acoustic jazz groups) guests with Miles' working band of Wayne Shorter, Tony Williams, Herbie Hancock and Ron Carter. This track is often mistakenly credited to Joe Beck, who made a limited number of sides with Miles too, including "Water on the Pond."

Guitarist Reggie Lucas was a long-time member of Miles' live band and played on *Get Up with It* and *Agartha*. He seems to have played mostly or all rhythm guitar with Miles, laying the foundation for other guitarist Pete Cosey's blues drenched psychedelic solos, or the eerie musings of the now obscure French Gypsy guitarist Dominique Gaumont. Lucas later became the producer for Madonna, creating yet another pop connection to Miles.

In later years, guitar became more of a focal point in Davis' ensembles. Miles featured guitarists Mike Stern, John Scofield, Barry Finnerty, Bobby Broom and Robben Ford, all musicians who hybridized jazz and rock in pleasing new ways. Miles also included his nephew Foley McCreary, who sounded like a rock guitarist but played an instrument he called "lead bass."

In summation, the oeuvre of Miles' ever-changing music spanning decades and a multitude of styles had a barely disguised but rarely discussed secret weapon - Pop music. With this in mind, it behooves all Miles fans to take a second listen. ■



For more information about Rob Scheps, visit his website at [robschepsmusic.com](http://robschepsmusic.com)

Comencio is available on Amazon and iTunes

Churchill School is on Bandcamp, Amazon, and [Robscheps.bandcamp.com](http://Robscheps.bandcamp.com)

# WILLIE DENNIS



| By Gordon Jack

This article originally appeared in Jazz Journal on January 13, 2021 and is used with permission. Willie Dennis was a beloved colleague of Al Cohn and Phil Woods. Phil composed “Sweet Willie” for his 1978 LP *I Remember*.

It’s a long time ago but I still remember buying Gerry Mulligan’s 1961 Concert Jazz Band recording – *A Concert In Jazz* - and playing it almost ceaselessly over the next few weeks. Gary McFarland’s “Chuggin’” was one of many gems and it featured trombonist Willie Dennis who was a new name to me at the time. Unlike his contemporaries who had mostly fallen under the spell of the great J.J. Johnson, his roots were clearly in the more expressive Bill Harris School. Almost free of articulation and barely seeming to tongue at all, his use of slurs and glissandos created overtones as he moved between slide positions – often alternate slide positions. Many years later I asked Eddie Bert who knew him well to explain how he did this: “Willie had a unique style and sound playing some notes out of the usual positions and doing something we call ‘Crossing the Grain’. The trombone has seven positions and each one has a series of overtones starting with an octave, then a fifth, then a fourth and a third and as you get higher the intervals are smaller. If you move quickly from the first position to the fourth for example you can play these overtones up high and ‘Cross the Grain’ which Willie did a lot.”

Willie Dennis (William DeBerardinis) was born on the 10th of January 1926 in Philadelphia and was mostly self-taught on the trombone. He began working with the popular Philadelphia-based big band led by Elliot Lawrence on the local WCAU radio station. He made his recording debut with Lawrence in 1946 on a 78 rpm single featuring vocalists Jack Hunter and Rosalind Patton. An interesting but short-lived addition to the band at that time was Mitch Miller on oboe. Dennis was on two broadcasts with Elliot later that year which have subsequently been released commercially – the Meadowbrook Ballroom in New Jersey and the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City. In the late 1940s he also worked with Claude Thornhill and Sam Donahue but did not record with them.

Around 1951 he began studying with Lennie Tristano at his studio on 317 East 32nd Street in NYC joining a group of students that included Lee Konitz, Warne Marsh, Don Ferrara, Ted Brown, Billy Bauer, Peter Ind, Sal Mosca and Ronnie Ball. In his book *Jazz Visions* Peter Ind says, “Some of the most exciting musical times I remember were with Lee, Warne, Don and Willie playing some of those incredible lines composed by Lennie, Lee and Warne. Lennie recorded some of this music but I have no idea whether the tapes still exist.” Willie along with Marsh, Ferrara, Mosca and Ind would occasionally travel to Konitz’s house in Elmhurst, Long Island to rehearse. Lee once told me that he considered Willie to be a, “Wonderful trombonist and a lovely guy but I didn’t know him that well because he used to drink and hang out at places like Jim & Andy’s. Being a family man I didn’t hang out there.”

Regular work was scarce though and sometimes the musicians had to take day jobs. Ind and Konitz both worked occasionally in the mailroom at the British Information Office and Dennis took temporary employment as an attendant at the Museum of Modern Art. Coming from a relatively affluent background Marsh probably did not have quite the same financial pressures as the others but he did give occasional saxophone lessons. His father was the celebrated cinematographer Oliver T. Marsh whose credits included “David Copperfield,” “A Tale Of Two Cities” and “The Great Ziegfeld.” Sal Mosca, Peter Ind and Don Ferrara taught throughout their careers and around 1955 Mosca gave piano lessons to a very young Bob Gaudio who wrote numerous hits for The Four Seasons.

We have Bob Sunenblick to thank for a fascinating insight into the trombonists' work with Tristano. In 2014 Uptown Records released a previously unissued double CD of Tristano's sextet performing at the Blue Note in Lennie's hometown of Chicago in 1951. The other members of the group on this historically important release were Lee Konitz, Warne Marsh, Buddy Jones and Mickey Simonetta. The billing on the illuminated marquee was, "Lennie Tristano With His Great Band and Slim Gaillard's Trio." An intriguing if somewhat incongruous combination which might explain the bizarre request for "Tennessee Waltz" which was a big hit at the time from a member of the audience. Presumably Peter Ind, Arnold Fishkin, Al Levitt or Jeff Morton who regularly accompanied Tristano were unavailable which explains the presence of Jones and Mickey Simonetta. Jones was playing bass with Buddy DeFranco at the time and went on to perform with Elliot Lawrence, Al Cohn, Joe Newman and Manny Albam among many others. The obscure Simonetta was a local drummer and his only other recordings were with Danny Bloc in 1953 and 1954.

Standards were always a rich vein of inspiration for the Tristano school and the 14 Uptown titles are either well known tunes or songbook contrafacts: "Sound Lee (Too Marvellous For Words)," "Two Not One (I Can't Believe You're In Love With Me)," "Sax Of A Kind (Fine And Dandy)," "Background Music (All Of Me)," "No Figs (Indiana)," "Palo Alto (Strike Up The Band)," "Judy (Don't Blame Me)" and "Tautology (Idaho)." Just as an aside when Tristano announces Judy, "Written for a very nice lady," he does not inform the audience that he wrote it for his wife Judy Moore Tristano. There are two versions of "All the Things You Are" and it is worth pointing out what Jerome Kern's sophisticated harmonies continue to mean to Lee Konitz. In a *Down Beat* interview he once said, "I could just spend the rest of my time playing 'All the Things You Are'" and as if to stress that point again he told writer Andy Hamilton,

"I mean that." Willie's powerful, choppy phrasing combines well with the more cerebral, vibrato-free work of Konitz and Marsh and he has his own ballad feature on "These Foolish Things" where he is centre stage. Reviewing the engagement in *Down Beat*, Jack Tracy called Dennis, "A fabulously facile musician who comes close to Warne's and Lee's standards."

In September 1953 he made his first album with Charles Mingus on a live date with three other trombones in the line-up – J.J. Johnson, Kai Winding and Benny Green. It was essentially a jam session recorded on Mingus' own Debut label at the Puttnam Central Club in Brooklyn. All four trombones stretch out at length and Willie certainly holds his own in this heavy company on numbers like "Move," "Wee Dot," "Ow!" and "Now's The Time." When the album was reissued in 1964 Ira Gitler gave it three-and-a-half stars in *Down Beat*. A month later Dennis performed with Mingus' octet and is heard briefly on "Miss Bliss."

In March 1956 he performed on Englishman Ronnie Ball's first and only date as a leader in the USA. The pianist had arrived in New York in 1952 and immediately began studying with Tristano and for this recording he added fellow student Ted Brown to the front line on tenor. Wendell Marshall and Kenny Clarke who had worked with Tristano the year before were recruited to add their subtle uplift to the rhythm section. The leader included two of his originals "Pennie Packer" (a minor variant of "Pennies From Heaven") and "Citrus Season" (based on "Limehouse Blues"). This was Ted Brown's first recording date and he contributed "Feather Bed" ("You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To") and "Little Quail" ("I'll Remember April") to the repertoire. He also transcribed Lester Young's famous 1940 "Tickle Toe" solo calling it "Prez Says." Learning classic jazz solos was a regular Tristano teaching device and another good example of this practice is a 1957 Lee Konitz date with Don Ferrara. On "Billie's Bounce" they play Charlie Parker's four choruses from the 1945 date with Miles Davis. The unison is so perfect that one could be forgiven for thinking they must be reading it, however Ferrara confirmed to me they were actually playing from memory.

Later that year he did a tour with Charles Mingus in a group that included Bunky Green, Wynton Kelly and Dannie Richmond. They travelled across country playing Washington D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco and Vancouver before returning to New York for a booking at Birdland. Willie then decided to leave Mingus to concentrate on studio work and recommended Jimmy Knepper as his replacement. 1957 was the year he proved to be an elegant spokesman for his instrument when *Metronome* published his essay – "The History of the Trombone" – in their March issue. For most of that year he was a member of Woody Herman's Fourth Herd sitting next to his original inspiration Bill Harris in the section. "The first time I heard Bill Harris," Willie once said, "I knew that he was the one who was doing anything new on the trombone. I went to hear that Herman band as many times as I could and bought all their records just to listen to that Harris sound. I knew it was the sound I wanted for my own blowing." He joined in January when the band appeared on the Jerry Lewis TV Show and stayed with Herman for most of 1957. Harris along with Jack Jenny was Herman's favourite trombonist so Bill obviously took care of the trombone solos himself.

He joined Benny Goodman for a short European tour in May 1958 that included a week performing at the Brussels World Fair. Zoot Sims was in the band and after the tour he and Willie were invited by Joachim-Ernst Berendt to join Kenny Clarke for a concert in Baden-Baden, Germany with some local musicians.



The trombonist is heard on “Blue Night,” “These Foolish Things,” “I’ll Remember April” and “Trottin’.” Back in the USA he rejoined Woody Herman for a hugely successful three-month tour of South America and the Caribbean under the auspices of the State Department. Early in 1959 he performed on Mingus’s *Blues And Roots* album and is heard on an infectious “Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting.” For the next year or so he was usually found working with Buddy Rich’s small group at Birdland with either Phil Woods or Seldon Powell as the other horn. He visited Brazil with Rich in 1960 which was the year he recorded a particularly fine album with the drummer titled *The Driver* along with Seldon Powell, Marky Markowitz, Mike Mainieri and Earl May. He is particularly impressive on “Big Leg Mary,” “Straight No Chaser,” “Bloody Mary,” “Night In Tunisia” and “Miss Bessie’s Cookin’.” For all his brilliance in powering a big band it is sometimes forgotten what a sympathetic and very subtle drummer Buddy Rich could be in a small group situation.

Don Ferrara, who was a charter member of Gerry Mulligan’s Concert Jazz Band (CJB), told me how Willie came to join the band, “Gerry already had Bob Brookmeyer but he wanted another strong soloist in the trombone section so a couple of months before we left for Europe, Willie Dennis joined us and he was perfect. I had first met him when he was with Elliot Lawrence in 1948 and he was a very good friend of mine. He started studying with Lennie and his playing was just beautiful. He had very good chops and great time with a soft texture to his sound...he was very spontaneous immediately reacting to what was happening. He was also a very good cook and if you ate at his house you ate well.” Brookmeyer too was very happy to have him in the band, “Willie and I loved to work together. We tried to give him all the solo room we could on pieces that suited him, bearing in mind that I was the second banana and featured soloist. He was a very unusual player because he didn’t seem to tongue

at all and I don’t know how he did that but he was wonderful to work with. Later on when Clark Terry and I had our little band (at the Half-Note) he would be quite happy if I sent Willie in when I had to have a night off. Of course Willie Dennis and Don Ferrara came from the Lennie Tristano school and all his students had a very individual voice.”

His first recording with the CJB was at a 1960 concert in Santa Monica. The band then travelled to Europe for performances in Gothenburg, Milan, Basel and Paris. His solo opportunities sitting next to Brookmeyer were just as limited as they had been with Woody Herman when Bill Harris was his section-mate. On their return to New York things changed a little. One of Brookmeyer’s regular solos was on “Blueport” but during a residency at the Village Vanguard he let Willie take the solo, “He played so individually and well...we had to give him something to play. He deserved it.” He stretches out inventively for eight choruses, perfectly at home despite the blistering tempo of some seventy bars to the minute. The following year the CJB recorded probably its most ambitious album (*A Concert in Jazz*) which included George Russell’s magnum opus – “All About Rosie.” Mulligan described Gary McFarland as “a godsend” and he contributed not only “Weep” but “Chuggin’” to the date which was a notable feature for Dennis’ utterly relaxed, laid back sense of swing.

In 1961 he married singer Morgana King who had previously been married to Tony Fruscella. Willie had performed on her 1959 album (*The Greatest Songs Ever Swung*) and she had visited Brazil with him when he was there with Buddy Rich. The CJB’s last studio recording in 1962 featured Willie on “Bridgehampton Strut.” He carried on working with the band but it was becoming increasingly difficult for Mulligan to keep it on the road. Their last engagement was at Birdland in December 1964 not long before ‘The Jazz Corner of The World’ finally closed down for business. By then Thad Jones had been added to the trumpets, Phil Woods had taken Gene Quill’s place on alto and clarinet and the tenor solos were in the very capable hands of Richie Kamuca who was replaced by Al Cohn for part of the booking. Ira Gitler had this to say in a Down Beat review of an earlier CJB performance that year at Birdland, “If this band cannot work when it wants to, there is something very wrong with the state of music in the United States.”

Willie Dennis died when he was involved in a car accident in New York City on the 8th of July 1965. Eddie Bert gave me the details, “I saw him the night he was killed because we were both in Joe Harbor’s bar across the street from Birdland. There was a sailor there who was pretty juiced and kept asking if he could take Willie home. Eventually they left and the sailor was driving so fast in Central Park that he lost control and hit a tree sending Willie through the windscreen. He was killed instantly.” At the funeral there was a closed casket. Phil Woods, Gary McFarland and other friends of Willie’s established an annual scholarship in his name to the Ramblerny Music Centre near New Hope, Pennsylvania (where Phil Woods directed the jazz department). Contributions were sent to the Willie Dennis Memorial Scholarship Fund c/o Jim & Andy’s Tavern.

Seven months after Willie Dennis was killed Gary McFarland presented a program of new music at Lincoln Centre’s Philharmonic Hall in New York. It was performed by a nineteen-piece band that had enjoyed the luxury of four days of rehearsals prior to the concert. The repertoire included “Willie” which was Gary’s tribute to his good friend and there is a hint of “Chuggin’” in the coda. In Willie’s memory there was an empty chair in the trombone section. ■

# THE LIVING JAZZ ARCHIVES

## AT WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY



By David Demsey

Professor of Music,  
Coordinator of Jazz Studies  
Living Jazz Archives Curator  
William Paterson University

There is a wonderful, growing connection between the Al Cohn / Zoot Sims Archive at East Stroudsburg University and the Living Jazz Archives at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey, now just ten years old. We are proud that ESU Archive Director Matt Vashlishan is a masters alumnus of William Paterson. I'm equally proud to be in the saxophone section of the Water Gap Jazz Orchestra under Matt's leadership. As Matt and I have spent more time together over the past three years, we are both realizing that the two campuses' jazz archives have many similarities, strengths and challenges.

At WPU, the jazz archives began with a donation of Thad Jones' pencil scores and original parts from the leadership of the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. Thad was the Founding Director of the WP Jazz Program, and the co-leader of the groundbreaking big band, the Thad Jones – Mel Lewis Orchestra. When Thad took the William Paterson teaching position, he brought some of his bandmembers to the campus as adjunct faculty. With the passing of Thad in 1986, and later, the passing of his co-leader Mel Lewis in 1990, that ensemble evolved to be the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, now beginning its 56th year playing every Monday night at New York's historic Village Vanguard jazz club. The band still has some members hired by Thad; similarly, the WP Jazz Program still to this day maintains an unbroken connection of current faculty members who are members of that legendary Monday night band. That connection between this historic ensemble and William Paterson's jazz program is further deepened by our continued work together on the Thad Jones Archive.

Along with Thad's collection, it was Clark Terry's donation of his own personal collection that truly established this as The Living Jazz Archives – in fact, that title comes from Clark himself. We all feel so fortunate to have worked with Clark on his collection for over eight years. Clark told me about his deep desire to not only store his materials at the highest archival level, but also to have copies of his music on the music stands, in rehearsals and classes as part of our ongoing curriculum at William Paterson University. At the opening ceremony, Clark said, "If I donate my music to more of a museum-style place, that's for dead people!

I'm known as an educator as much as I am from my performing career. I want my legacy to live on, through the talented students that come to William Paterson every year." With that statement, Clark's stroke of genius virtually re-defined the word "archive," and ours is one of the few jazz collections directly associated and intertwined with the day-to-day curriculum of a major, internationally known jazz program.



It was at the point of Clark's donation that we realized the need to dedicate an on-campus space to this. Thanks to the efforts of then President Arnold Speert, and to the continuing support of his presidential successors Kathleen Waldron and the newly arrived Pres. Richard Helldobler this past fall, we have a 1000-square-foot space in College Hall on the main William Paterson campus. That space contains a large outer room with a conference table, two glass display cases, two audio-video workstations, a large video screen and plenty of workspace; also two smaller inner rooms where the collections are actually shelved and stored.

Since that donation of Thad's and Clark's music nearly a decade ago, it is amazing to realize the growth and expansion of the Living Jazz Archives. Today, the Living Jazz Archives are made up of a number of collections, detailed here:

**THE CLARK TERRY ARCHIVE** contains original sheet music, 100 of Clark's Big Bad Band arrangements, awards, two of his horns, 300 LPs and CDs, tour posters and vintage photographs. Clark was one of the few musicians who was a member the orchestras of *both* Duke Ellington and Count Basie, as well as making cultural history as really the first African American on nightly network TV as a member of the NBC Tonight Show Orchestra from 1960-1972. His virtuoso career as a soloist spanned eight decades, and his sound and amazing time is as instantly recognizable as any soloist in jazz history. It is equally important that his founding role in establishing worldwide jazz education is documented here with school recordings and memorabilia.

Thad Jones performing at his  
Ph.D. ceremony, 1977



**THE THAD JONES ARCHIVE** holds original pencil scores and parts and 250 LPs of the trumpeter, cornetist, bandleader, influential arranger, and Founding Director of the William Paterson Jazz Studies Program. This collection includes all of the original parts that were on the stand at their debut performance at the famed Village Vanguard jazz club in February 1966, as well as dozens of scores from the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra, and with Joe Williams, Rhoda Scott, Ruth Brown, Jimmy Smith and others. We are also collaborating with the Count Basie Orchestra to house scores from Thad's nearly ten years with that band, and thanks to several donors we have scores Thad wrote for Harry James.

**THE JAMES WILLIAMS ARCHIVE** contains the manuscripts, 1500 LPs, 800 cassettes, photographs and teaching materials of the pianist, composer, educator, and WP Director of Jazz Studies from 1999-2004. There are numerous released and unreleased recordings of James' 10-album association with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, as well as his many tours and recordings as a member of bands led by Elvin Jones, Tony Williams and others. James' solo career was equally significant, including his own trios, quartets, quintets,

his jazz gospel group Intensive Care Unit and his Finas Sound production company. In addition to his incredible strengths as a pianist and composer, James had the amazing ability to connect with a wide swath of the jazz world, including many of the great "elders" as well as some of the great modernist players; so many of these collaborations are contained in his archive.



LJA Listening Center



**THE MICHAEL BRECKER ARCHIVE** is now nearly three years old, thanks to the generosity of Mike's wife Susan Brecker, and the leadership of his brother, the great trumpeter Randy Brecker. There are 26 boxes of original pencil sheet music, nine practice journals, date books, nearly 1000 hours of unreleased audio, awards, posters, photos and memorabilia spanning the career of this influential saxophonist, and one of the most recorded studio session players in history. The collection includes original sheet music and audio from Brecker's solo career, his time with Steps Ahead, the Brecker Brothers, and his tours with Horace Silver, Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, Elvin Jones, Pat Metheny, Joni Mitchell, and Paul Simon. We have just added the exciting element of several mouthpieces, ligatures, reed equipment, and three Electronic Wind Instruments (EWIs) to the collection.

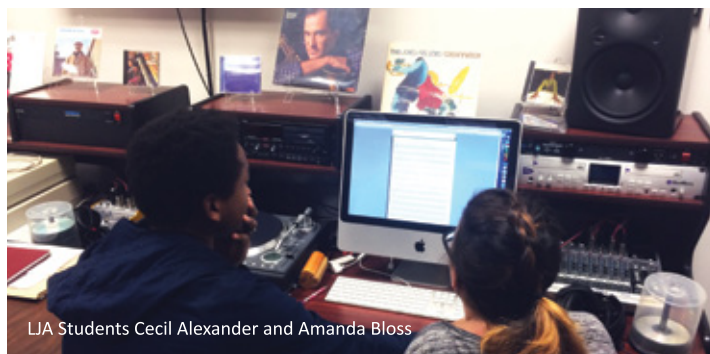
**THE DON SEBESKY COLLECTION** was donated by Don a year and a half ago, including over 300 scores, over 1000 albums, cassettes, tape reels and other memorabilia spanning particularly the later career of this landmark arranger and longtime central New Jersey resident. The collection includes Sebesky's virtuoso orchestral writing for Wes Montgomery, Maynard Ferguson, Chet Baker, Hubert Laws, Paul Desmond, Freddie Hubbard, and more, including dozens of projects for the CTI record label. There is also material that transcends the world of jazz, from several of Sebesky's Broadway and theatrical projects, and original scores for such singers as Barbra Streisand, Nancy Wilson, John Pizzarelli, and others.

**THE JIM MCNEELY COLLECTION** was just donated by Jim this past summer. McNeely has been a member of our faculty for a number of years, first for a period in the 1980s as a pianist, then returning ten years ago to teach in the graduate arranging program. His huge collection of scores, parts and recordings spans all of his work with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, small-group arrangements for the Phil Woods Quintet, as well as his many European collaborations with the Danish Radio Orchestra, Stockholm Jazz Orchestra, the Metropole Orchestra, and the WDR Orchestra in Germany. This collection is still being fully cataloged and stored, just recently "tamed" from the original 38 giant plastic tubs that took over the archive space this past summer!

We have also just added a huge amount of saxophone and woodwind music from saxophonist **ALBERT REGNI**, and from the late **RAY BECKENSTEIN**. Ray was the founder and leader of the New York Saxophone Quartet, one of the original "crossover" groups that collaborated with historic classical chamber music composers as well as major jazz writers like Eddie Sauter, Phil Woods, George Handy, and others. Al Regni was a member of the New York Quartet, then founded and led the American Saxophone Quartet in the 1980s and 90s. I'm fortunate that Al was one of my teachers at Eastman,

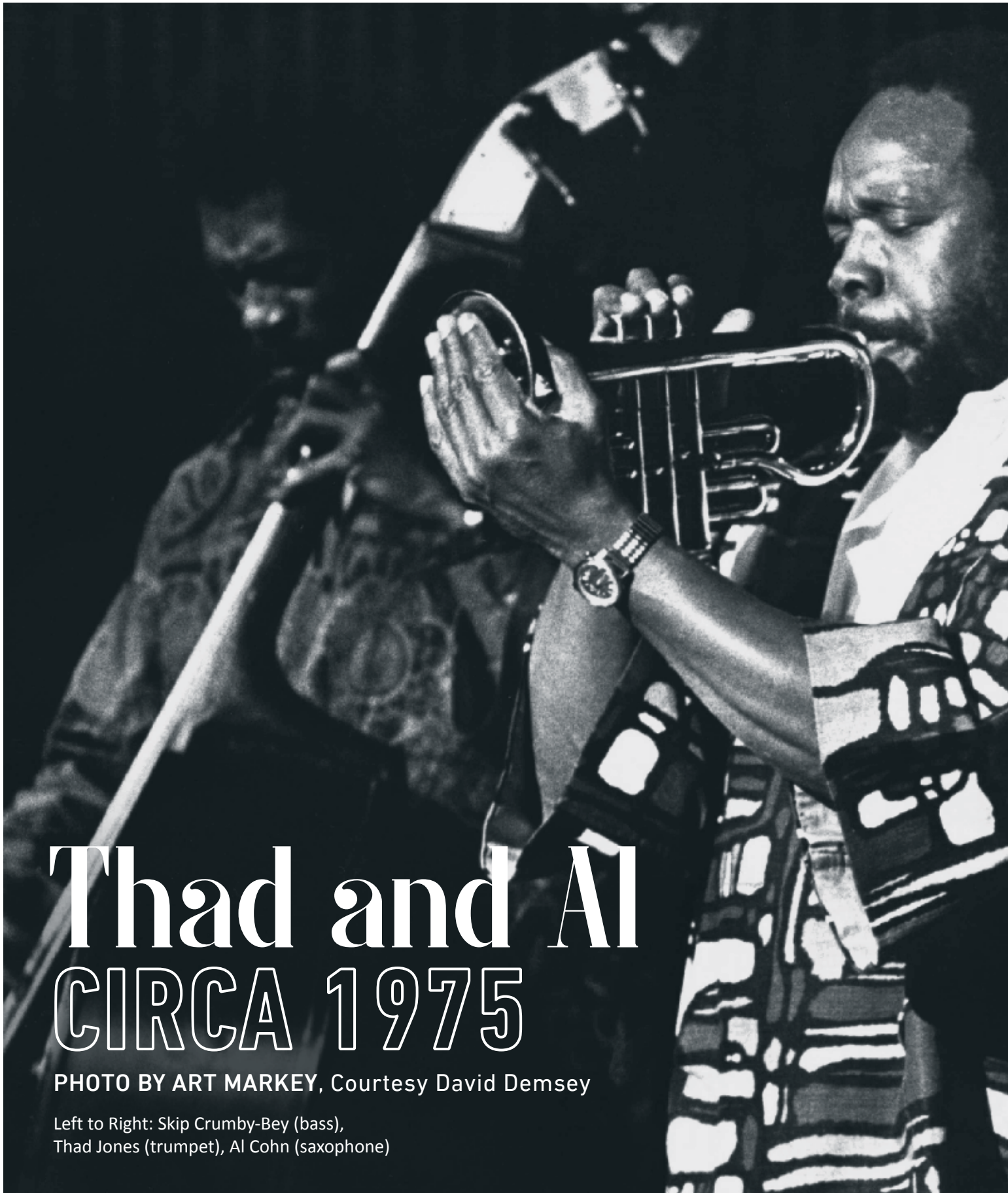
and I was a member of the American Quartet for ten years. During that time, we collaborated with Bob Mintzer, David Matthews and many other major writers. These two collections contain the entire recorded output and most of the musical repertoire of these two historic sax quartets, plus an enormous amount of quartet and solo music from Al Regni, to the point that it now forms the basis of our entire William Paterson sax curriculum.

And, at the writing of this article, we are thrilled to be about to accept the collection of the late **MULGREW MILLER**, the virtuoso pianist and our director of jazz studies from 2004-2012, from his wife Tanya and his family. Mulgrew had a huge solo career as the leader of his own trio and of the larger Wingspan group, and was also a member of bands led by Woody Shaw, Tony Williams, and more recently Ron Carter. He made over 50 Japanese tours as a leader and as a sideman. We are looking forward to having sheet music and recordings of all types from these hugely important associations, and from his landmark career.



One of the highlights of my membership in the Water Gap Jazz Orchestra – and, in fact, my first introduction to the band when it was still the Phil Woods Big Band – was their request that I bring a set of Thad Jones' high-energy classic arrangements to the Deer Head, something we've done several times since then. Similarly, the students of our William Paterson Jazz Orchestra always have in their books arrangements from the library of Clark Terry, Thad and now Don Sebesky, and our 24 small groups often study and feature compositions by Clark, Thad, Mike Brecker, James Williams and Mulgrew Miller. The same is also true when I travel to other high schools or colleges for clinics and workshops, or when I am invited to conduct all-region or all-state high school bands – always featuring music by these artists, carefully chosen to be the right level for the students' ages.

True to Clark Terry's vision, our mission continues to work to bring the music of these world renowned artists to our students, to students in other colleges and high schools, and to jazz club bandstands at places like the Deer Head Inn and Dizzy's Club Coca Cola at Jazz at Lincoln Center. ■



# Thad and Al

## CIRCA 1975

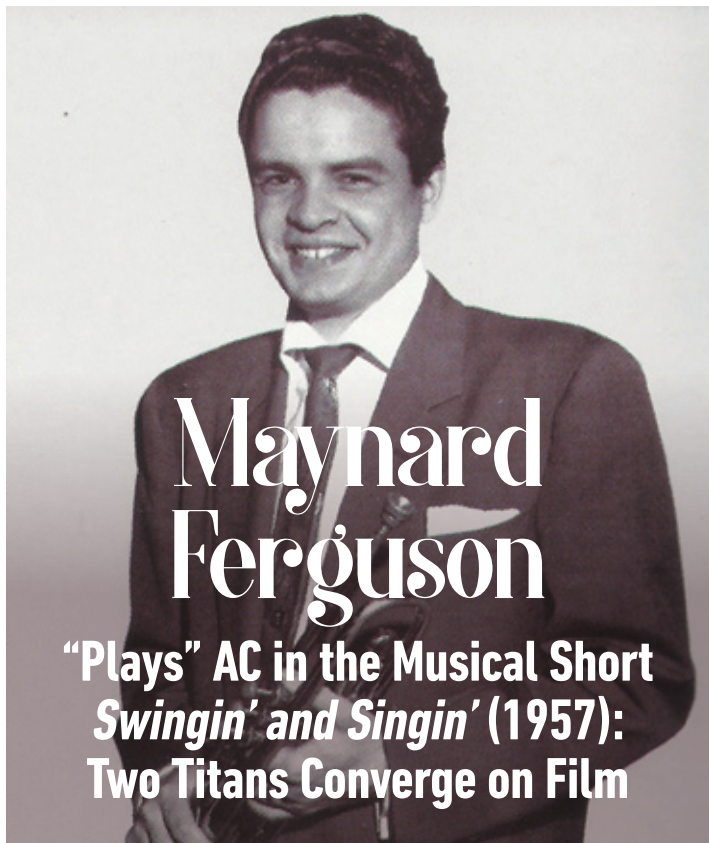
PHOTO BY ART MARKEY, Courtesy David Demsey

Left to Right: Skip Crumby-Bey (bass),  
Thad Jones (trumpet), Al Cohn (saxophone)









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By Patrick Dorian

Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Music  
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

While performing and recording many live tracks at Peacock Lane jazz room in Hollywood in December 1956 and January 1957, Maynard Ferguson (MF) and his orchestra (his West Coast Dream Band) were contracted by Universal International to record music and film a short subject *Swingin' and Singin'* (Universal Musical Short Film 3655 produced by Universal-International Pictures Inc./Universal Studios, December 18 & 21, 1956, © March 1, 1957). MF's band accompanied several entertainment acts, but the only piece that would feature MF (age 28) and his musicians was as the beginning credits were shown. Universal International needed a fiery, up-tempo "curtain raiser." The piece was Al Cohn's (AC) composition "The Wailing Boat," which was one of five pieces AC had composed four months earlier for MF's Birdland Dream Band's (his East Coast Dream Band) appearances at the NY jazz club Birdland in September 1956. Those same weeks, the Birdland Dream Band recording sessions were held after hours (4:00 a.m. and later!) in Webster Hall in the East Village section of Manhattan. This preservation of MF's superno brass and AC's compositional sass piqued my interest as I suspect it will for many readers on the mailing list of the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection (ACMJC). I have often thought that it would be poetic justice if a photo existed of AC holding his tenor saxophone AND a pencil, displaying his equally prolific artistry performing AND composing/arranging.

I first found out about the film several years ago while researching the many works by AC for MF from the 1950s and 1960s, which brought me to the Library of Congress's "Guide to Jazz in Film Bibliography" web page. Some basic information/credits were there, such as it being a 35-millimeter black-and-white film, directed and produced by Will Cowan, also featuring a dancing duo and singing ensembles. Even though the only musicians in MF's 13-piece band (MF+12) listed on the web page were MF, Herb Geller, and Mel Lewis, this remarkable trio whets the appetite, along with the indication that AC's "The Wailing Boat" was performed! The film seems to be obscure and has been so under the radar that it is not even mentioned in *MF Horn – Maynard Ferguson's Life in Music*, the 1997 authorized biography by Dr. William F. Lee III. (Dr. Lee was the father of prominent electric bassist Will Lee.) Even though AC is not in the film, having one of his masterworks performed doubles its artistic clout.

I viewed a mediocre iteration of the film online in October 2019. My research intensified when I had the honor of interviewing saxophonist Nino Tempo in April 2020. He is the only surviving member of MF's Peacock Lane Dream Band (PLDB) and this extensive interview will be published in the next issue of *The NOTE*, available late summer/early autumn 2021. Other researchers followed online, such as on June 15, 2020, when Marc Myers posted a short entry with a link to the film on his JazzWax.com web site under the title "Video: Maynard Ferguson -1957." Myers appropriately called it "the faux show" and questioned the purpose: "It's hard to know what this was for." A few months later, the web site *Current Research in Jazz* dedicated its volume 12 to Dr. Thomas Herb's remarkably detailed *Maynard Ferguson's Birdland Dream Band: A Performance Chronology of the Years 1956-1959* ([crj-online.org/v12/CRJ-FergusonChronology.php](http://crj-online.org/v12/CRJ-FergusonChronology.php)), from which I was able to confirm and clarify many topics and details in my article. In researching this musical short, I commiserated with jazz historian Noal Cohen because of his expertise about Herb Geller, the lead alto saxophonist in both MF's Dream Bands who appeared in the film. Noal has compiled exhaustive discographies of several important jazz musicians ([atticoys.com](http://atticoys.com)). He was not aware of the film and dug right in, making significant contributions, including bringing Mark Cantor ([jazz-on-film.com](http://jazz-on-film.com)), renowned authority on jazz in film, into the discussion. I am indebted to them for their input, and I admire their intellectual and artistic passion.

In the 1930s and 1940s, many big bands appeared as a part of the plot and/or diversion from the plot in full-length movies along with the star actors of the day. In addition, these big bands were filmed for musical short subjects to be shown in movie theaters throughout the U.S. as supplements to highlighted movies. The early years of television may have presented some of these featurettes to fill out an hour of programming, but as the popularity of television rose in the 1950s, movie theaters no longer showed them and television completed the hour with advertisements.

*Swingin' and Singin'* with MF and his orchestra might be one of the last musical short subjects to be released. It was produced and directed by Will Cowan (1911-1994), who was involved in about 200 short films featuring iconic swing-era performers from 1940 through 1958. Mark Cantor supplied documentation about the demise of these films by contributing information that Cowan's final directing year of 1958 included *The Wildest*, which was filmed in Lake Tahoe and featured swing era bandleader Louis Prima.

### **1925-1931 - Birth of Band Members and Subsequent Development**

MF's native province of Quebec enacted Prohibition in 1919 but repealed it months later. About the same time, America enacted the National Prohibition Act (Volstead Act). What was in the water of Prohibition America that would lead to the birth in 1925-1931 of most of the future performers and/or composers/arrangers for MF's Peacock Lane Dream Band? They were living in the Great Depression followed by the Second World War. In their early teen years, these future music pros were imprinted by the swing/big band era as it morphed into the early stages of bebop. By the mid-1940s, they were severely hooked, and many of them started making significant contributions to jazz during the 1950s. I will attempt to include their age in parentheses to give perspective. I find it fascinating to observe the accomplishments of these mostly twenty-somethings! The exceptions born outside of these birthdates are the "old guys" in MF's West Coast PLDB: piano performer Paul (Moerschbacher) Moer (b. 1916) and trombonist (Francis) Bob Fitzpatrick (b. 1921), along with the young'un Nino Tempo (b. 1935), who is still on this astral plane!

### **1928-1949 - MF's Evolution**

Walter Maynard Ferguson was born May 4, 1928 in the Verdun section of Montreal. MF started playing the trumpet in 1937, eventually attending the High School of Montreal with African-Canadian piano performer Oscar Peterson. They would become lifelong mutual admirers and a basis for MF's future championing of inclusion. While in his early teens, MF's astonishing ability on trumpet led to him performing seven nights a week. By age 16, he had his first experience of leading his own jazz and dance band. In late January 1948 in Montreal (age 19), his band performed in a ballroom adjacent to where Stan Kenton's band was performing. Kenton offered MF a spot in his band, but MF had to delay accepting the offer. He immigrated to the U.S. later that year and soon was touring famous American theaters with Boyd Raeburn's orchestra along with the Ink Spots. He then joined Jimmy Dorsey's big band for six months, with recordings from March through May 1949 (turning age 21). That same year, MF was a member of Charlie Barnet's big band along with future PLDB trombonist Bob Burgess (age 19), with recordings from March through December.

MF and Burgess would be reunited on Stan Kenton's band in 1952, and MF would choose Burgess to be in his big bands from late 1955 to 1957. On October 28, 1949, he recorded a radio broadcast with Barnet at the Apollo Theater with the bassist and future PLDB member Tom "Red" Kelly (age 22). For several months MF and Doc Severinsen were in Barnet's trumpet section. Severinsen was 10 months MF's senior. In Lee's MF biography, Severinsen speaks of the thrill he felt when MF would warm up before a concert, then bring that stratospheric excitement onto the bandstand.

### **January 1, 1950 - Featured with an Iconic Orchestra and First Major Recording As a Leader**

MF joined the Stan Kenton Innovations in Modern Music Orchestra (age 21) for three years. His electrifying performances set the musical universe afire. Trombonist Bob Fitzpatrick joined Kenton at the same time (age 28) and would be on the Kenton band throughout MF's time there, then joining MF's PLDB in 1956. MF (age 22) recorded four tracks as a big band leader on September 13 with Kenton-affiliated musicians.

### **1951 - Young Love at MGM**

MF (age 22) established a close relationship with actress and vocalist Kay Brown (born Mary Catherine Dagley; age 18 or 25, depending on the source) while both were recording music for the MGM movie *The Strip*, featuring Andy Rooney.

### **1952 - Becoming a Frequent Leader in California**

On February 25, while still touring with Kenton, MF (age 23) made the first recordings under his own name, fronting a 14-member big band of experienced L.A. musicians. Three of the four tracks feature vocalist Brown and are released as *Maynard Ferguson & His Orchestra* on two 78 RPM discs [Mercury 5819 & 5863 and released decades later on Fresh Sound FSR2204 as *Maynard Ferguson: Band Ain't Draggin'-1950-1954*, consisting of 18 tracks featuring MF]. In April, MF met future PLDB saxophonist and composer/arranger Willie Maiden (age 24) while Maiden was parking cars at the El Capitan Theater in Hollywood and they discussed Maiden arranging for MF. A few days later, MF played through one of Maiden's arrangements and said that his entire band felt that "the chart was really good." This was the start of their 14-year professional relationship.

On June 7, MF would front his own U.S. big band for the first time in public at the Trianon Ballroom in San Diego, featuring Brown's vocals and garnering a decent review on page 46 of the June 18 issue of *Variety*. He must have enjoyed the "good ink," as his upper register AND musicianship was lauded. It was prescient that the 13-member ensemble had an average age of 21, including teenage drummer Joey Preston (Prestianni, b. 1933?), as this youth-centric approach would pertain to most of his future groups. MF played arrangements from his Canadian days in addition to new works by Willie Maiden. The review ended by stating that the "Ferguson-Brown

package is a promising bet for ballrooms and looks ripe for TV." Maiden would continue supplying arrangements to MF and then become a saxophonist/arranger in MF's PLDB in 1956 at age 28, staying with MF's big band and sextet for the better part of 10 years.

By July, Willis "Bill" Holman (age 25) joined the Kenton Band as tenor saxophonist and composer/arranger, making major contributions to Kenton's big band "book" (of arrangements) while becoming MF's longtime colleague. Willis would also provide seminal works for MF's future PLDB, plus play a part in the musical short. Also in July, Brown joined Kenton's band as the singer while MF was still with the group. She became MF's first wife on December 2 at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas, with MGM bankrolling the event. In late August, future PLDB member Richie Kamuca (age 22) would meet MF when joining Kenton on tenor saxophone, staying six months.

### **1953 - Subliminally Forming a Great Band of His Own**

In early January, Brown left the Kenton band after six months. Interestingly, MF gave his notice the next month but would continue to record with Kenton until early 1956. He soon started a three-year contract as a first-call studio trumpeter for Paramount Pictures in Hollywood. On July 11, MF first recorded with alto saxophonist Herb Geller (age 24) and his spouse, pianist Lorraine Geller (age 24), on a Shorty Rogers big band recording (*Live "Rendezvous Ballroom" Balboa Beach*). Herb and MF would record regularly with Shorty Rogers and with MF's first groups, then he would be the only performer common to both of MF's Birdland Dream Bands: Birdland and the PLDB. Herb and Lorraine became important components of the PLDB, although Lorraine's contributions would be somewhat unorthodox, as will be documented later.

### **1954 - Recorded As the Leader of the Band**

MF started to come into his own as a bandleader and recorded with seven other musicians in Los Angeles during sessions on February 19 and 22 (age 25). The February 19 sessions were produced by Bobby Shad and contained eight arrangements by Willie Maiden, including three original compositions, released as *Dimensions*. All eight tracks were included on the previously mentioned Fresh Sound FSR2204 CD release. Shad would become the grandfather of director-writer Judd Apatow.

### **1955 - MF Plus an Octet, Plus More Big Band**

On January 25, MF recorded with future PLDB drummer Mel Lewis (age 25) on a Stan Kenton session, with four additional sessions a little over a year later. Lewis was Kenton's drummer for the better part of three years.

MF started leading his own Los Angeles-based smaller band (himself with an octet) in studio sessions in Los Angeles (age 26) on April 25 and 27 and August 26. These sessions included future PLDB members Tempo (age 20) and both Gellers, with all 13 arrangements by Bill Holman released as

*Maynard Ferguson Octet*. Three big band sessions followed on November 7 and 10 and May 7 (possibly May 12), 1956, with the Gellers and Holman on tenor saxophone. All 12 works by Holman were released as *Around the Horn with Maynard Ferguson*. These octet and big band recordings were released decades later on a two-CD set as *Maynard Ferguson Plays Bill Holman's Arrangements - I Have But Two Horns* [Fresh Sound FSRCD 2209]. The title refers to Maynard's virtuosic abilities on both trumpet **and** valve trombone, as is demonstrated in the musical short.

MF's marriage to Kay Brown ended in divorce in autumn 1955. Brown would go on to marry and divorce several trumpet players throughout her life. This same year, MF met his soul mate, Flora Lu "Flo" Farmer (age 25).

### **1956 - Leaving Paramount Studios and Locking in Great Performers for His Bands**

For the first eight months of 1956, MF maintained a busy schedule of 28 recording dates, including several sessions with Ella Fitzgerald and multiple sessions with Bing Crosby, Pete Rugolo, Patti Page, June Christy, Johnny Richards, and Georgie Auld. MF (age 27) made his final recordings with Kenton on February 11 and 12. These *Kenton in HiFi* sessions included future PLDB lead trumpeter Ed Leddy (age 28). In the Kenton trumpet section with Leddy in November 1956 was future PLDB member J. "Tom" Slaney (age 25).

MF married Flo Farmer on April 21, with her daughter Kim (age 6) as part of the package, and they remained together until Flo's death in 2005. Kim would become integral to MF's business dealings for decades, starting in the early 1970s.

MF finished his contract with Paramount Pictures. His movie soundtrack legacy is demonstrated in his final year at Paramount during *Anything Goes* when Bing Crosby sings "Blow, Gabriel, Blow." The Les Brown Band was brought in for this selection and MF soared throughout. It can be seen on YouTube by entering "Blow Gabriel Blow (from 'Anything Goes' Soundtrack / Remastered 2004)."

MF's experiences up to this point would serve him beautifully for his next project, arguably the most important of his 60-year career...

### **Late Summer - Leading Bicoastal Dream Bands - Temporary Travels**

The relationship between MF and Willie Maiden grew into an unofficial partnership, with them gradually building a big band book (library) to feature MF, who was making a very good living at Paramount Studios and would hire accomplished composers as an investment. MF asked composers to write pieces that could be used with a full big band but adapted for a slightly smaller group. For several years, Maiden and MF remained optimistic, and the accumulation of charts gained momentum in 1955 (both age 26).



This period of the journey is covered extensively in *The Complete Roulette Recordings of the Maynard Ferguson Orchestra*, a remarkable out-of-print 1994 10-CD (141 tracks) box set with a 28-page booklet by Bret Primack. Used copies are extremely expensive, but some libraries/archives might have the set in their holdings. Maiden and MF's hopeful investment paid off in 1956 when MF's colleague, drummer Sid Bulkin, met with Artists & Repertoire visionary Jack Lewis, longtime friend and professional colleague of AC. Lewis was with Vik Records (founded in 1953 as a subsidiary of RCA Victor Records) and was a fine friend of the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection (ACMJC) until his death in 2011. Bulkin had performed with Billy Eckstine, Benny Goodman, Terry Gibbs, and others. Also at the meeting was Morris Levy, the owner of Birdland, one of NYC's legendary jazz nightclubs on Broadway since December 15, 1949. Birdland was named for jazz great Charlie "Bird" Parker. They had a "Birdland Dream Band" concept in mind and wanted someone with the "it factor" to front it. Bulkin spoke on behalf of Maynard's electrifying marketability. Later in 1956, MF traveled to NY and met Levy and Lewis, and would soon be able to boast about an original repertoire to record in NY with renown composers from both coasts. Their enviable task was to provide orchestrations of their own compositions. Some of the composers were added as the Birdland Dream Band was being formed these months, especially AC (age 30), who contributed five seminal works to the mix ("Rosebud," "Maynard the Fox," "Button Nose," "Lady Bug," and of extreme importance to this article, "The Wailing Boat").

Born Alvin Gilbert Cohn in Brooklyn on November 24, 1925, he needs no introduction other than the fact that this periodical and the ACMJC exist because of his saxophone and composing/arranging brilliance. He cut his musical teeth in several of the famous big bands of the 1940s and 1950s, observing carefully when they performed six to eight sets per day from noontime into the evening in between showings of movies. AC composed several "curtain raisers" (the auditory trigger when the curtain was raised), all the while cleverly sneaking in advanced bebop phrases to make the drudgery enjoyable for his colleagues.

AC originally registered all five of the Birdland Dream Band compositions for publishing and licensing, each with its own "sketch sheet" outlining the basic melody pitches and form. "The Wailing Boat" sketch is in the key of C, but AC arranged it for MF's band in the key of Bb. It is dated August 13, 1956 for Planetary Music Publishing Corporation, a few weeks before the MF Birdland Dream Band recordings at Webster Hall. Six months later, AC would diversify the effectiveness of his composition when he and Zoot Sims recorded "The Wailing Boat" with the Al Cohn Quintet on March 27, 1957 in New York, a six-minute version done in a different key (Eb).



"The Wailing Boat" Lead/Sketch Sheet

AC's five orchestrations of his compositions for MF might have remarkably been done in just a few days in August, as his future wife Flo would attest years later that he would go upstairs after dinner to start an arrangement and come back down in time to watch the 11:00 p.m. news with a complete score in hand. This ability to work swiftly and accurately kept him busy for over three decades as the first-call composer/arranger of exhilarating pieces for television programs (including the Tony Awards and the Miss America Pageant), Broadway shows, popular performers, and jazz groups of many sizes.

The final list of composers for the Birdland engagement and sessions is one for the ages: The West Coast writers were Johnny Mandel (who was East Coast until a year or two before this), Marty Paich, Bill Holman, Willie Maiden, Jimmy Giuffre, and even one contribution by Herb Geller. Among Giuffre's three contributions was a medium-slow 12-bar blues titled "Blue Birdland," which MF would adapt as his theme song to start every performance for the next 49 years and 10 months! The East Coast composers were AC, Manny Albam, Bob Brookmeyer, and Ernie Wilkins. Wilkins' involvement was special, since he was an African American alto and tenor saxophonist with Count Basie starting in 1951, eventually becoming one of Basie's most iconic writers. He demonstrated his versatility by holding down the baritone saxophone chair for the entire Birdland run, including the recording sessions. The instrumentation that MF had thought about for a few years and that became his preference was now galvanized as a semi-big band (for both sonic and economic reasons). Think of it as an "MF + 12" formula (4+3+2+3):

- 4 saxophones, instead of the usual 5; 3 trumpets besides himself, instead of the usual 4;
- two trombones, instead of the usual 3 or 4; piano, bass, and drums

On April 11, 1991, MF performed a concert on the campus of East Stroudsburg University during which he graciously presented one of his albums to ESU Professor and Music Department Chairperson Dr. Larry Fisher. Dr. Fisher had organized the free event and interviewed MF after the concert. The interview was published in the *IAJE Research Papers 1994* book and *The NOTE*. This excerpt concentrates on MF's extraordinary list of arrangers for his bands.

**LF:** I understand Al Cohn played in your band and did some arrangements for you.

**MF:** He was part of the Birdland Dream Band. That was when Birdland was in its heyday and they decided they wanted to form a dream band. They were looking for an extrovert to be the leader, so naturally they chose me. I was the only one who knew how to tap dance.

**LF:** Which arrangements did Al do for you?

**MF:** "A Foggy Day" (in London Town) [rec. July 1957] was a great arrangement and so was an original of his called "Maynard the Fox" [rec. September 1956], which was a little play on words on the classic "Renard the Fox." To this day if "Cannonball" [Adderley] was still alive he would say "Yeah Fox, how are you?" Slide Hampton still calls me "Fox."

**LF:** ...There is a Maynard Ferguson band ensemble sound.

**MF:** Yeah.

**LF:** What makes that sound? Was this anybody's particular idea?

**MF:** Well, I will tell you what. I might be borrowing from Ellington just a little bit, but every big band will eventually emanate the characteristics and personality of its leader. . . . The real truth is that it comes out in personality and writers like Denis DiBlasio and people like that, who know me so well. They know what seems to work with my bands and yet I'm constantly saying to them, especially when I have a new writer, "OK, you're aware of a lot of our things and you know what we do and now with that knowledge go for yourself so that we don't create too much of a pattern."

**LF:** When I refer to your sound, I'm thinking back to some of those albums from the [late '50s and] early '60s: *A Message From Newport*, *Newport Suite*, *Maynard '61*, *Maynard '62*, and *Maynard '63*. There seems to be a specific ensemble sound in these albums. Were these the ideas of arrangers or was it you who was responsible for the concept?

**MF:** I would say very much that it is a combination of all of us. But certainly I always had great arrangers so we must give a lot of credit to all those guys . . . when Don Sebesky, Willie Maiden, Slide Hampton, and Mike Abene were all on the band at the same time. I had four great writers at once within the 12-piece band.

The interview continues with MF discussing the origins of two of his most beloved arrangements, Mike Abene's arrangement of "Danny Boy" [recorded March 26, 1963] and Slide Hampton's electrifying composition/orchestration "A Frame for the Blues" [recorded May 1958], which is considered the epitome of a slow 12-bar blues in big band jazz.

For a short diversion at this point, it would be healthy to inject a bit of humor now that we see the involvement of AC, Jack Lewis, and Johnny Mandel. This story allows us to include AC's career-long partner in legendary music and humor, saxophonist Zoot Sims, who has always been so important to the ACMJC. The following story was told to me by Johnny Mandel in his kitchen in Malibu, CA, on February 17, 2020. It appears in other forms, but since Johnny was *there*, it is best told by him:

"Due to an eye infection, AC had lost an eye. Jack Lewis grew up in a Jewish orphanage and had also lost an eye early in life. Zoot, AC, Jack, and I were in the car one night. Al was driving and the weather was just awful. Jack was in the front seat with Al, and Zoot and I were in the back. Zoot was sleeping. He suddenly woke up, noticed the horrendous driving conditions, leaned forward, and said, "I hope you guys are keeping both eyes on the road!"

Anyway... AC was so connected within the NY jazz and studio scene that he was asked to recommend NY's best big band studio musicians. During the summer, MF called each musician to invite them into the fold. The only exception MF insisted on was LA-based Herb Geller, his colleague on many Hollywood recording sessions. Geller traveled to NY to be a member of the Birdland Dream Band. MF was in LA through August 29, having spent the month recording with Johnny Richards and Ella Fitzgerald (her iconic *The Rodgers and Hart Songbook* LP), and flew to NY in time to start the Birdland engagement. His Birdland Dream Band opened on Thursday, August 30, at Birdland's original location below street level at 1678 Broadway, near 52nd Street. It was originally for a two-week engagement, but popular demand and word of mouth led it to be expanded to four weeks, through Thursday, September 25. There were two other groups on the bill, thus allowing breaks for MF's ensemble: Al Hibbler and the Phineas Newborn Quartet. The four recording sessions were at Webster Hall on September 7, 11, 24, and 25. On at least one occasion the band performed several sets at Birdland until 4:00 a.m., then went into the recording hall at 4:45 a.m.!

The sessions involved recording 24 pieces, which filled up two LPs: *Birdland Dream Band Volumes 1 & 2*. These two albums were released in 2007 as *Maynard Ferguson and His Birdland Dream Band* [Fresh Sound Records FSR-CD 470]. On this CD, AC's name is omitted from the list of arrangers on the cover,

although he is listed as a featured performer. The personnel for the Birdland run and recordings include formidable musicians. Extra musicians were platooned to spell others from the rigorous schedule; however, composers Al Cohn, Ernie Wilkins, and Herb Geller also performed on all four sessions. The studio recording of Al Cohn's "The Wailing Boat" was done on September 11, 1956. Its sparkle led to it being chosen as the opening track on the LP, plus it was the only jazz piece on the film three months later.

Jumping ahead for a moment, AC stayed in NY, continuing his incredible composing/recording output. He would no doubt go to Birdland when MF returned in 1957 and perhaps sit in/sub. While talking on a break at the bar, MF might have asked AC to arrange a few standards for his upcoming record date. It was MF's final LP for the EmArcy label (a subsidiary of **MeRC**ury Records). AC delivered three typically top shelf works recorded July 29 and August 2, 1957. His final arrangement for MF was for a September 4, 1963 recording session in Queens, NY, near the future site of the World's Fair. Eric Nemeyer interviewed producer Dave Edelman, who said they must have needed another arrangement for the recording session to fill up the LP. Ever up to a challenge, AC arranged "Come Blow Your Horn" either the day before or overnight and into the day of the recording. The copyist was apparently copying the parts as quickly as Al Cohn was handing off each page of the score. This arrangement became the title cut of the LP on the Cameo-Parkway label [C/SC 1066].

### **Autumn Not in New York**

The day after the Birdland engagement ended, the *Miami Herald* published that MF would be televised on the *Steve Allen Show*. On October 2, 1956, he performed at a Musical Salute to Ike (wow!) at Rockland Palace in Harlem, where Charlie Parker was recorded with strings on September 26, 1952. By October 6, MF and Geller were back in LA, where for the next six weeks MF recorded with Jerry Lewis, Pete Rugolo, Russ Garcia, and Charlie Barnet. MF had signed a contract with Joe Glaser and his famed Associated Booking Corporation (founded by Glaser and Louis Armstrong in 1940) to perform at Pete Vescio's Peacock Lane jazz room on the corner of Hollywood Blvd. and Western Avenue. Sources indicate that the Peacock Lane engagement went for two weeks in mid-October. (This performance space should not be confused with the small jazz club Peacock Alley on 8th Street in Los Angeles.) Vescio and his wife LaVerna were from the Niagara Falls, NY area, where he had owned a ballroom until moving to the San Fernando Valley and opening Peacock Lane in 1954. Vescio was close to saxophonist Georgie Auld. Bill Holman told me on March 24, 2020 that he (Holman) frequently sat in on tenor sax with Chet Baker's Quintet at Peacock Lane.

MF was now experienced in assembling a band and he chose eager colleagues, almost all of whom he had performed/

recorded with over the years in LA. Los Angeles-based piano performer Paul Moer was chosen for the PLDB engagement (age 40 – so old!). He was on many fine jazz recordings in the four years before PLDB, yet this would be his only recordings with MF. In addition, Dallas-born trumpeter Joe Burnett (age 29) had not recorded with MF until the Peacock Lane dates. As previously stated, Herb Geller was the only musician who was involved in the NY Birdland run. MF's new band:

Alto Sax – Herb Geller; Tenor Sax – Richie Kamuca, Nino Tempo; Baritone Sax – Willie Maiden; Trombones – Bob Fitzpatrick and Bob Burgess; Trumpets – Tom Slaney (lead), Ed Leddy, and Joe Burnett; Piano – Paul Moer; Bass – Tom "Red" Kelly; Drums – Mel Lewis

### **November and December 1956 – Hollywood: Peacock Lane Live**

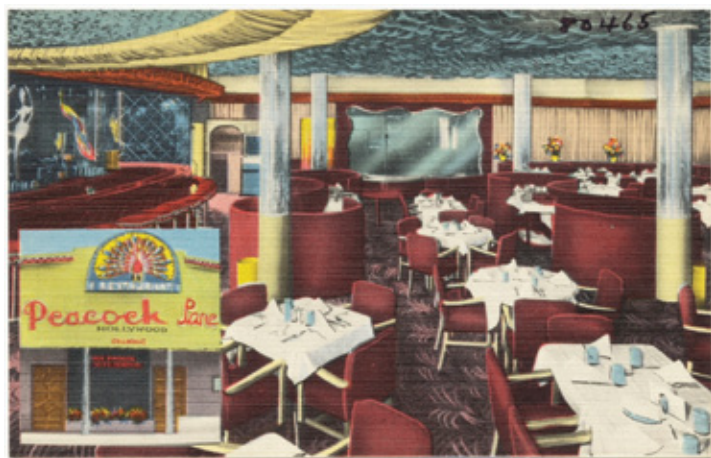
These new MFers then returned to Peacock Lane for a period in November, possibly staying all the way through a Gala Holiday Show with Carmen McRea (age 36) in December through January 6, 1957. The legendary recording engineer Wally Heider (age 33) came to the club and recorded at least one night in December and also January 6, 1957 (some sources indicate that January 4 and additional nights might have been recorded). Twelve tracks were released 27 years later in 1984 on the LP Maynard Ferguson and His Original Dream Band on Artistry Records [Artistry 104], a small (and somewhat mysterious) label that released about a dozen LPs/CDs of famous big bands performing live mostly in the late 1940s through the late 1950s. These were released between approximately 1982 and 1989. The title of this LP and subsequent releases is misleading, since the "Original Dream Band" was actually the ensemble that MF and Al Cohn assembled four months previous (August/September 1956) for the Birdland engagement in NY with after-hours recordings at Webster Hall. These 12 tracks along with another 13 tracks were eventually released together 46 years later in 2003 on a two-CD set, *Maynard Ferguson and His Swingin' Dream Band Orchestra: Live at Peacock Lane, Hollywood – 1956-1957*, on Fresh Sound Records [FSR-CD 346]. The 1956-1957 time frame is misleading in that all of the tracks were recorded within a few weeks of each other. This set includes re-records of several compositions from the NY Webster Hall recordings while adding nine pieces not recorded in NY, all of which were contributions by West Coast writers. In between selections on the recording, Ferguson refers to the band as "movie stars," in a clever reference to the two days of movie production.





There are two pieces that are not arranged by the composer: Willie Maiden’s arrangement of Rodgers & Hart’s “My Funny Valentine,” which MF would record in the studio with his new band in the summer of 1957 (on the *Boy with Lots of Brass* LP); and “Christmas for Moderns,” a medley of six holiday tunes, also arranged by Maiden. For many decades, MF would program this arrangement each December as a certain crowd pleaser. Sources verify that this holiday medley was a favorite of Miles Davis. Even though this Fresh Sound CD set is a valuable contribution to MF’s output with a fine insert book by Jordi Pujol, it incorrectly credits Neal Hefti as the composer of AC’s *Rosebud*; however, Hefti composed *Rose Bud*, which was most notably recorded by Count Basie in November 1962. Bill Holman also composed his own *Rose Bud*, recorded by Stu Williamson in January 1956. Any or all of these composers might have been referencing an object in the iconic film *Citizen Kane*, produced and directed by Orson Welles. They were in their teenage years when the movie was released in 1941 and it is quite possible that this movie scenario stuck with them. Bill Holman told me that his composition might have been referencing the movie.

Other important recordings at Peacock Lane include segments of LPs by Woody Herman’s big band, Erroll Garner’s trio, and famed comedian Lenny Bruce (*Thank You Masked Man*). These recordings were done in 1957-1958, several months after MF’s stint there, and a Peacock Lane record label existed from the recordings.



A mid-late 1950s vintage postcard of the Peacock Lane jazz room in Hollywood

### They Oughta Be in Pictures – MF and His Band Truly “Go Hollywood”

While performing in Hollywood at Peacock Lane in December, MF and his orchestra had been contracted to be featured in a musical short at Universal Studios in Universal City, four miles northwest of the Peacock Lane jazz club. This might have been through Joe Glaser’s Associated Booking Corporation.

Via email on August 3, 2020, Mark Cantor informed Noal Cohen and me that the performers recorded the music in this featurette on December 18, 1956 and returned to Universal on December 21, where they were “filmed-to-playback.” This world-renowned authority even has copies of the contracts, which he shared with the ACMJC and may be viewed at [mattvashlishan.com/maynard](http://mattvashlishan.com/maynard). Mark explained that “filmed-to-playback” refers to the fact that on December 21 the recording was played back with the musicians miming to the music as they were being filmed. The technical term is “sidelining.” MF’s miming to his stratospheric acrobatics recorded a few days before lend a whole new meaning to the term “lip synching”! The motions of the musicians viewed on screen when performing a featured improvisation requires that they “go through the motions” on their instruments while replicating the technical actions. It is entertaining to watch closely how well they replicated their pre-recorded solo as we watch for accuracy in terms of fingerings, slide positions, and drum stickings of the pre-recorded solo (or maybe our evaluation doesn’t matter!).

The contracts affirm that there were a couple of substitutions in MF’s band for the recording and the filming. Even though Nino Tempo was performing on tenor saxophone for the Peacock Lane engagement, our man Bill Holman recorded Tempos’ tenor saxophone parts; however, when the sideline (filming) session was completed a few days later, Tempo was positioned in the band, where he “mimed” Bill’s recorded part. Even though Paul Moer was performing on piano for the Peacock Lane engagement, Herb Geller’s wife Lorraine recorded the piano parts and appeared in the film. One of the recording contracts indicates that 36 string players recorded accompaniment music for the acts along with Mike Pacheco (percussion), guitarists Al(ton) Hendrickson and H.J. “Tiny” Timbrell, and Herbert Dell (piano).

Talk about being busy, MF and Herb Geller would fit in a recording session on December 20 of nine tracks with Buddy Bregman and his orchestra.

This 15-minute film short is viewable on several sources on YouTube and partially on MF’s web site, yet it is often misnamed and misdated. (Is this to camouflage the source for legal reasons? We may never know!) Many sources, including IMDB.com, incorrectly state that the short film is from 1950. I have been in contact with IMDB to adjust this, but to no avail; however, I was successful at getting them to add that AC composed the opening musical piece.

Visit [mattvashlishan.com/maynard](http://mattvashlishan.com/maynard) where Mark Cantor’s generosity allows readers to view a decent iteration of *Swingin’ and Singin’* and the film’s three Hollywood studio contracts.

Also, view analytical charts by Noal Cohen and Patrick Dorian (Made available for educational purposes only).

Upon my informing Noal Cohen about this film, he thoughtfully constructed a basic table (see *Performance Segments* box) to guide us through its segments, from the use of AC's theatrical opening "curtain raiser," "The Wailing Boat," with MF capping off AC's work with a *sustained* double-high C (concert pitch Bb), through each act where MF gets occasional featured phrases, and the "big ending," where MF blows the DeCastro Sisters off the screen with a *sustained* high G (concert pitch F). As seen in the film, when approaching an upper register passage, MF's physical posturing throughout his career added visual "show biz" appeal for large segments of his audience.

Performance Segments in *Swingin' and Singin'* (Universal International, 1957)  
Table Constructed by Noal Cohen (attictoy.com)

Segment	Title & Composer with Description	Length in min:sec	Performers
1 of 9	<i>The Wailing Boat</i> (Al Cohn)	2:25	Maynard Ferguson
2 of 9	<i>Pity Me</i> (Diane Johnston, Don Johnstone)	2:00	The Sabres
3 of 9	Peggy Ryan: Tap Dancing Sequence	0:48	Maynard Ferguson and Peggy Ryan
4 of 9	Peggy Ryan & Ray McDonald: Slow Dance Sequence	0:58	Maynard Ferguson, Peggy Ryan & Ray McDonald
5 of 9	Peggy Ryan & Ray McDonald: Fast Dance Sequence	0:41	Maynard Ferguson, Peggy Ryan & Ray McDonald
6 of 9	Peggy Ryan & Ray McDonald: Slow Dance Sequence	0:34	Maynard Ferguson, Peggy Ryan & Ray McDonald
7 of 9	<i>Ev'ry Day of My Life</i> (Jimmie Crane, Al Jacobs)	1:37	Maynard Ferguson and Russ Arno
8 of 9	<i>With My Eyes Wide Open</i> (Mack Gordon, Harry Revel)	2:51	Maynard Ferguson and The DeCastro Sisters
9 of 9	<i>The Birth of the Blues</i> (Ray Henderson, Buddy DeSylva, Lew Brown)	2:39	Maynard Ferguson and The DeCastro Sisters

Al Cohn's "The Wailing Boat" is the first 2 minutes and 25 seconds of the 15-minute film. The two recordings of it that appear on albums come in at a little over 3 minutes, so the version for the film contains some of the sections being shortened/cut. AC decided to arrange it in the often-used key of Bb. Before writing any pitches, he decided on at least two things: (1) He would use harmonies (chords) very similar to those used by George Gershwin in his 1930 Broadway song "I've Got Rhythm." Jazz musicians refer to this progression of chords as "rhythm changes." AC had the sound of this chord progression in his "mind piano," as it cycled repeatedly. He could take this template and add clever variants when the muse inspired him. (2) He chose to structure his composition with a very common song form for the melody: 32-bar AABA. This eight-bar per four-segment structure involves composing a melody by:

- A: 8 bars/measures - stating original musical information in a phrase(s) of musical information, similar to literary phrase/sentence structure
- A: 8 bars - repeat of the first phrase, usually with a slight change near the phrase ending
- B: 8 bars – fresh contrasting melodic material, usually coincidentally referred to as the "Bridge"
- A: 8 bars - melody concludes with a repeat of the material from the opening 8 bars.

Think of each of the four segments of the form as the phrase/sentence parts that add up to a paragraph in an essay. AC used notes from the blues scale to give the piece a dissonant, spicy flavor.

After the melody is presented, the rhythm section of piano, bass, and drums repeats this 32-bar AABA segment over and over in cycle with new material written for sections of the band or improvised solos. Improvisation could be thought of as featured soloists presenting their own "spontaneous composition" that fits over the song form and chord changes. Each time this 32-bar segment cycles, it is called a "chorus." MF was asked to keep his feature opening to 2 minutes and 30 seconds, so he had to "cut" (edit) out several of AC's brilliant segments to make it fit the demanded time frame.

Allow me academic "paralysis by analysis" as the reader looks at "The Wailing Boat" scorecard chart, which may be used when following along with the opening performance. Repeated experiences clarify important details.

"The Wailing Boat" Detailed Musical Analysis

Segment Start Time - min:sec (approximate)	Length: min:sec (approx.)	Part of AABA song form	Description
00:00 - 00:03	00:03		Blank screen and no sound.
00:04 - 00:09	00:05	Introduction	Entire screen consists of credits using graphics. <i>The Wailing Boat</i> starts with a short, exuberant introduction by the full band with swinging accented impacts by the great drummer Mel Lewis.
00:10 - 00:15	00:05	First "chorus"- The MELODY! A	The first "chorus" (start of the melody) starts with fast melodic phrases in the sax section, led by lead alto saxophonist Herb Geller's splendid fluid phrasing. The brass enter with loud punches that end the segment.
00:16 - 00:22	00:06	A	Immediate repeat of the previous 8 bars with a slight variation at the end that leads directly to . . .
00:23 - 00:29	00:06	B ("bridge")	The brass section taking over with sets of three high, loud "dahs" as the drums add "kicks" and "bombs" for maximum excitement.
00:30 - 00:35	00:05	A (final A segment completes the 32-bar melody – first chorus)	The recap of the first phrase that started at 00:10, ending with a slightly different brass figure: this time it ascends to a high point that is a "send-off," which introduces the first improvising soloist.
00:36 - 00:46	00:10	Second "chorus"- Improvisations A A (starts at 00:42)	Trombonist Bob Burgess starts miming his prerecorded improvisation on the 32-bar form, while the sax section plays smooth, connected phrases beneath him. The band finally appears onscreen at 00:41. Burgess finishes . . . for now.
00:47 - 00:58	00:11	B ("bridge") A (starts at 00:53 - final segment of second "chorus")	The brass stand up for the first 4 bars of the B "bridge" and loudly herald that something new is coming, with a double-tongued descending send-off that introduces MF as he joyfully mimes his prerecorded improvisation, not on trumpet but on valve trombone. His first 4 bars complete the B section followed by 8 bars of the final A section, completing this second "chorus."
00:59 - 01:10	00:11	Third "chorus" A A (at 01:05)	Burgess comes back in for 4 bars as he and MF will continue to "trade fours," a musical conversation where 4 bars are improvised by one player followed by the other player improvising for 4 bars, over and over, while continuing to follow the AABA form.
01:11 - 01:21	00:10	B ("bridge") A (starts at 01:16 - final segment of third "chorus")	Burgess and MF continue "trading fours." As the bridge starts, there is a lack of harmonic definition in the rhythm section and/or the phrase that Burgess plays, which may not reflect the actual chords at that point.
01:22 - 01:28	00:06	Interlude	Full band: AC wrote an exciting, syncopated 8-bar interlude full of surprises that involves a gradual and thrilling ascent, which suddenly drops off, serving its purpose as it sends off to . . .
01:29 - 01:39	00:10	Fourth "chorus"- Improvisations A A (starts at 01:34)	Joe Burnett's trumpet improvisation. He plays technical phrases, then on the second A (01:34) he uses blues scale phrases. MF puts down the valve trombone and picks up his trumpet . . . watch out, folks!

01:40 – 01:45	00:05	B (“bridge”)	Full band: AC composed a send-off that is repetitive and rhythmically displaced, which is very typical of technically demanding bebop melodies/phrases since the mid-1940s. At 01:43, MF starts a trumpet improvisation.
01:46 – 01:51	00:05	A (final segment of fourth “chorus”)	MF continues improvising.
01:52 – 02:03	00:11	Fifth “chorus”- Improvisations A A (starts at 01:58)	Joe Burnett postures himself closer to MF and starts the music dialogue of “trading fours” with him. At 02:01, MF executes one of his signature high-register flourishes.
02:04 – 02:16	00:12	B “bridge” A (starts at 02:10 - final segment of fifth “chorus”) 02:16 - a cut, with a preplanned 2-bar extension that Mel Lewis “drums through” (4 bars)	Burnett and MF continue “trading fours,” eventually working their way into yet another high point, where at 02:10 (final A of fourth “chorus”), they “trade twos” (one set, with MF up an octave from Burnett). Finally together (02:13), they play a technical display previously worked out to the pitch of the dominant (MF’s high G), giving an effect of frenzy but not completion. At 02:14, segments of music are cut from the original arrangement when the great Mel Lewis is heard, then seen (02:15) playing a swinging lead-in drum fill in bars 7 and 8. This completes the 8 bars of the A (2 bars), then continues 2 extra bars in an edit of the original arrangement. This preplanned extension of the A gives Lewis a little more time (4 bars total) to build the excitement as the band cuts to ...
02:17 – 02:29	00:12	A (variation: The Coda)	The tag or coda, where AC composed a final rollicking full-band variation of previous material. The band is “shouting” (a short “shout chorus”), yet Maynard’s power allows him to “scream” over the band on his high G, then playing a very technical phrase along with the band, BUT up an octave. The high G and this phrase set our ears up for one more tasteful drum fill, which has Mel Lewis “applying the brakes,” followed by a split-second pause, leading into MF ending on his sustained double high C (concert Bb, arriving home to the starting key of the piece, giving satisfying closure).
02:34			After MF and band have totally exhausted the viewer with excitement, lukewarm applause segues to a SHOCKING contrast: Ladies and gentlemen, the Sabres.

Chart constructed by Patrick Dorian

As the film opens, even though we hear MF and band performing “The Wailing Boat” at a ferocious pace typical of bebop (upwards of 350 beats per minute!), only the opening credits are shown for the first 37 seconds (including “Maynard Ferguson and His Orchestra” and the names of the other performers, along with the director and crew). At 00:38, the camera shot changes to MF and band on stage, where trombonist Bob Burgess is improvising a solo. On the PLDB CD set, Bob Burgess performs the trombone improvisation and Joe Burnett has the trumpet improvisation on “The Wailing Boat.” They maintained these roles in the film. When the entire band is finally seen, instead of having the bass and drums next to each other near the piano, some Hollywood genius positioned bass player “Red” Kelly on the opposite side of the bandstand from drummer Mel Lewis, which would never happen in an in-the-moment performance. It did not matter sonically, since they were miming their parts, but might this have been an obsession with some kind of symmetry? Maynard reminds us that he was a virtuoso on many brass instruments by taking his first improvised solo on valve trombone before switching over to trumpet.

The rest of the film has Maynard and his band accompanying several “Eisenhower-esque” commercial entertainers. Keeping the mainstream cultural “tightness” of the Eisenhower era in mind, these acts were “perfect”! Apparently, the only people of color in the film were the DeCastro Sisters. No doubt Canadian MF kept track of these demographics and looked ahead to a time when HE could do something about it.

After MF and crew finish, the real entertainment starts with the Sabres, a vocal and instrumental trio consisting of Dick Henson (top tenor, bass), Jerry Wright (lead tenor, piano), and Fritz Weybright (low baritone, drummer). They met in 1948 as students at Chaffey College, Ontario, California, and performed together in the U.S. Air Force in the early 1950s. They were discharged (musically?) in 1955, and in 1956 and 1957 they released a couple of 45-RPM EPs and a 12-track LP on RCA Victor. They are seen here appropriately performing “Pity Me,” which was on the B-side of a 45-RPM EP that featured... wait for it... Eddie Fisher! Even better, they were accompanied by Henri René’s Orchestra. Of overwhelming importance, René had something to do with popularizing “Beer Barrel Polka.” See that? Bebop and brews self-contained in one article!

Next is the dancing dexterity of Peggy Ryan, with Maynard positioned in a risqué location that would have social media blowing up in 2021. Herb Geller makes the most of his featured melodic turn off camera. This is followed by Ryan’s husband and dance partner Ray McDonald. They had appeared together in at least three movies, were married in 1953, and would divorce in 1957, shortly after the making of this film. Ray McDonald died in 1959 at age 38 in New York City after choking on food and/or a barbiturate overdose in his hotel room.

The ecstasy continues when singer Russ Arno performs his recent Liberty Records 45-RPM release “Every Day of My Life” (even though the actual title is “Ev’ry Day of My Life”). He recorded from 1956 into the 1960s for the Liberty, Tabbs, and Reprise labels, the latter founded by Frank Sinatra in 1960. Arno’s 1962 release of “You’re Nobody ‘Til Somebody Loves You” was arranged by Bill Holman and conducted by Frank Sinatra Jr. Bill searched his remarkable memory and told me that he does not remember it. Enough said.

Singing group the DeCastro Sisters from Cuba take it out with two selections, the second of which is a Cha-Cha-Cha version of “The Birth of the Blues.” They also appeared in several musical shorts in the late 1940s into the 1950s. One year later, they would perform “The Birth of the Blues” on the Ed Sullivan Show (December 29, 1957). When Pocono bassist Paul Rostock and Chicago-based woodwind ace Mike Smith would finish an extended run with Frank Sinatra Jr. in Las Vegas in the 1980s and 1990s, Mr. Sinatra would throw an elegant wrap party and invite the local cognoscenti. Invariably, the DeCastro Sisters would attend with bells on. Everyone would partake in the ample food, adult beverages, and even an ice cream cart at the end.

Hindsight allows us to view this film as a visual and auditory snapshot in time. While it was being prepared, Elvis Presley (age 21) had already been seen by millions of young people on the powerful medium of television several times and had at least five top-selling 45-RPM singles. A vast majority of young people just waking up to the media had no interest in works



that explored rich harmonic structures and tone qualities or interesting melodies or polyrhythms. America's white youth had no idea that Elvis et al. were simply channeling rural and urban African American rhythm 'n' blues. The end result was questionable on many levels, leading to massive victories by the biz and a sad harbinger for future waves of youth "needs." Later on, I'll mention how Elvis and MF's worlds would gently collide a few months later.

### **Fun with Song Titles!**

Jazz composers either take their song titles seriously or derive great humor from them. This is especially the case when our legendary friends of the ACMJC were commissioned to compose for MF's Dream Bands:

- "The Wailing Boat" is a typical Al Cohn tongue-in-cheek reference. When a jazz musician's performance is "on fire" in terms of mournful expression, range, and volume, listeners might say, "Wow, they're really 'wailing' tonight!" Al chose to reference the homonym of the oceangoing hunting vessel unless there is a boatful of folks somewhere out there mourning.
- "Groover Wailin'" (PLDB CD set only) – I played the PLDB recording for Johnny Mandel in his Malibu kitchen on February 17, 2021 (age 94). He said, "I wrote that chart and I knew enough to stay out of the way! Grover Whalen (1886-1962) was a big man in New York at that time in the financial world. He wasn't hip, I know that." Johnny's play-on-words also uses that "wailing" reference after alluding to the "in-the-groove" feel of the piece, as in "that chart's a real groover."
- "Little Girl Kimbi" is Johnny Mandel's medium-tempo work with lots of nods to his former employer Count Basie. Upon hearing it, Johnny said, "That's my chart, all right!" and the title references Flo Ferguson's daughter Kim, about five years old at that time.
- "Goodbye Mr. Chips" – (PLDB CD set only) was previously recorded by MF on November 10, 1955 on the *Around the Horn with Maynard Ferguson* LP. I spoke to Bill Holman on March 31, 2020 about his compositions for MF, and he said producer Bob Shad probably named this one as a clever reference to the 1939 film *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, while calling attention to MF's extraordinary lips. This time around, the title was prescient, as MF was about to leave LA until the early 1970s.
- "Dancing Nitely" (PLDB CD set only) by Bill Holman had been previously recorded by MF on November 10, 1955 for the *Around the Horn with Maynard Ferguson* LP. Bill informed me that it was a pipe-dream fantasy about driving all night through a secluded area like Wyoming and suddenly coming upon a roadhouse that had a "Dancing Nitely" sign.
- "Ain't Life Grand" (PLDB CD set only) by Bill Holman was also initially recorded on the November 10, 1955 session for the *Around the Horn* LP and would be reused and

renamed for a December 1961 MF session as *Zip 'n Zap* for the *Maynard '62* LP. Al Cohn also composed a work titled "Ain't Life Grand" for a December 1957 session for the Art Blakey Big Band, featuring a recently clean John Coltrane on first tenor saxophone with AC on second tenor sax. On August 6, 2012, I exchanged emails with Bill, attempting to clarify how he and Al came up with the same title (great minds think alike). He responded, "The only explanation I can think of is that Al and I were both pretty young in 1957 and bought the story that life was, indeed, going to be grand. As it turned out, there were (are) some very good moments." On March 24, 2020, Bill told me that this title "reflects the feeling of the piece." Amen! Two additional Holman compositions for MF's Birdland Dream Band with "interesting" titles that were not of his doing (producer Jack Lewis, perhaps?) are "Mogo" and "Somebody Wants Me Down There." The latter is an inverted reference to the movie that starred Paul Newman and came out two months prior to the Birdland recordings with a film score by "Bronisław" Kaper. Many of you know Kaper's famous 1947 movie theme song *On Green Dolphin's Feet!* Finally, the May 7 (possibly May 12), 1956 session that also contributed to the *Around the Horn* LP contains "Mrs. Pitlack Regrets," which Bill said (April 9, 2021) was one of his all-time favorite titles. It was a cartoonish play-on-words of "Miss Otis Regrets," a Broadway song composed in 1934 by Cole Porter.

- "Rosebud" by Al Cohn (as previously mentioned) might reference an object in the iconic 1941 film *Citizen Kane*, produced and directed by Orson Welles.
- Finally, as MF discussed in the interview earlier in this article, "Maynard the Fox" was AC's play on words of "Reynard the Fox," the medieval literary cycle of European fables involving "Renard," the main character whose name is the French word for "fox"--appropriate since MF grew up in heavily French-influenced Montreal and the word structure of Renard very much aligns with the word structure of the name Maynard. "The Fox" became one of MF's main nicknames for the rest of his career.

### **Archival Preservation of the Music**

Some of the sheet music for MF's Dream Bands is archived at the University of North Texas (UNT) Library in Denton, home of the longest running degree-granting jazz education program in the U.S. and the alma mater of hundreds of alumni of MF's bands. The Maynard Ferguson Collection can be explored at [library.unt.edu/music/collections/maynard-ferguson/](http://library.unt.edu/music/collections/maynard-ferguson/) by clicking on the "Maynard Ferguson Collection Finding Aid" link. Of the 24 works recorded in Webster Hall in NY plus eight works getting their first recording at the Peacock Lane engagement in Hollywood, 13 are archived at UNT.

Unfortunately, all five of AC's works are not there. It is theorized that they burned in a fire around 1960 after MF had moved his family to NY. This might have happened at either MF's home on West End Avenue on Manhattan's Upper West Side or the next home, a 34-room house in the bluffs overlooking the Hudson River in the Riverdale section of the Bronx. Fortunately, Philadelphia-area saxophonist/arranger and good friend of the ACMJC, Ed Etkins, has passionately taken on the task of reconstructing AC's Birdland Dream Band works and other composers/arrangers for MF by painstakingly and lovingly listening to recordings and transcribing ("lifting") AC's works onto manuscript paper. He has done remarkable work for years. The scores and reconstructed lost parts serve UNT students and researchers in the study of MF's incredible arrangers. Ed has visited the ACMJC and for years has traveled to MF's archive at UNT and then an hour northwest to the Sherman Jazz Museum in TX, where much of MF's paraphernalia is preserved.

### **Early 1957 - Peacock Lane Concludes and the Band Waits**

MF and band completed the Peacock Lane engagement on January 6, 1957, and Wally Heider finalized his efforts of recording several nights. In January and February, MF was on several recording sessions for Elmer Bernstein, the Axidentals, Shorty Rogers, Francis Faye with Russ Garcia, and the DeCastro Sisters. He also took his band to Salt Lake City for a prom and a nightclub performance in mid-February. The next week it was confirmed that MF would be appearing in Birdland for 12 weeks a year. Joe Glaser fronted the money so that MF could purchase two nine-passenger station wagons and a one-ton panel truck to travel to NY. MF told band members of the modest pay opportunity with additional travel, and many agreed to go east.

Some of the PLDB members, such as Herb and Lorraine Geller, decided to stay in LA. Tragedy struck less than two years after the PLDB sessions when Lorraine died (age 30). Herb became deeply depressed and traveled to South America and then Europe. In 1962, he was offered a job with the big band of the Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) station in Berlin. Geller stayed there for three years and then for 28 years became a permanent member of the NDR big band in Hamburg, where he was lead alto saxophonist and also did some arranging. The NDR ensemble became one of the best in Europe and beyond. In July 1994, his admiration for Al Cohn's compositions led him to record 14 tracks for his *Plays the Al Cohn Songbook* CD for the Hep label.

Mel Lewis stayed on the West Coast, finishing up some Kenton recording dates over the next three months, which would become the *Stan Kenton with Voices* LP, and staying with Kenton through late spring of 1958. Mel Lewis would have a profound impact on jazz drumming.

Starting in February 1959, he would perform dozens of AC works with the Terry Gibbs Dream Band, the Gerry Mulligan Concert Jazz Band, Bob Brookmeyer, and his own Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, right up through April 1986 when Al Porcino recorded 13 AC works originally done for the Jerry Wald Orchestra in 1950 on *In Oblivion* (Jazz Mark 106).

Richie Kamuca would also stay in LA, where he, too, would make significant contributions to the jazz pantheon.

### **Late March 1957 - The Beginning of the Beginning**

The PLDB trumpet and trombone sections stayed intact. Only Willie Maiden stayed on in the sax section, along with bassist Red Kelly. New saxophonists were Joe Maini (see photo in the previous issue of *The Note*), Jimmy Ford, and Pepper Adams. Bobby Timmons, who would record his seminal composition "Moanin'" with Art Blakey 17 months later, took the piano chair. Drummer/vibraphonist Larry Bunker had been sitting in at Peacock Lane and he became the drummer. The band left California about March 21 and they might have sung "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66" in retrograde, performing in Tucson, AZ, and then pushing a mere 1,300 miles to Omaha. Future road stories would abound where members would get a penny or two a mile to drive the band vehicles. The next "hit" was in St. Louis, where they were to perform at the Kiel Opera House on a bill with Chico Hamilton and vocalist Lurlean Hunter, for whom AC had done an entire LP's worth of arrangements WHILE he was composing pieces for MF's Dream Band! The bill was completed with the Don Shirley Trio. Sixty-one years later, Shirley would be portrayed in the 2018 Oscar-winning movie *Green Book*. The Opera House was the front portion of a building that had the massive Kiel Auditorium in the back. Four days earlier, Elvis Presley had decided to perform the same night as MF, but in the attached Kiel Auditorium. He sold the room to more than 10,000 screaming teens while MF and company watched the proceedings before performing for a few hundred people. (Hey Maynard! You sure you want to make this career change? It's not too late to turn back!) There was one more gig in Minneapolis before driving east in time to open at Birdland on April 4 through 17.

From late April through July, the band traveled extensively, including two weeks at the Blue Note in Chicago, where Joe Burnett's future wife, vocalist Irene Kral (age 25), would audition for MF and be hired starting in Cleveland the next week. Burnett eventually joined Stan Kenton in early 1959 and stayed for two years, where he even switched over to the awkward and experimental mellophone section that Kenton added for about a year. Burnett was there when trumpeter Marvin Stamm (age 22) started his career with Kenton, fresh out of North Texas State University (now UNT) in spring 1961.

An interesting note is that Tom Slaney would stay on in the trumpet section for a year and a half before leaving to become a commercial jet pilot. Willie Maiden would

stay with MF for nine more years, before leaving the road for three years and then joining Stan Kenton as one of two baritone saxophonists for four years.

### **A Half Century on the Road**

Other than his time in India and the UK in the 1960s, March 1957 was the beginning of MF's almost continuous touring for the next 49 years. His was the last big-name big band behind its original leader. Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Woody Herman also stayed "out there" for the better part of 50 years. It might have been Duke, who upon being asked if he would ever retire, asked, "Retire to what?" MF's last performance was at the Blue Note in New York in July 2006. After recording sessions the next week at (Tony) Bennett Studios in Englewood, NJ, he went home to Ojai, CA, dying three weeks later. He played and lived the road life right up to the end, as he continued to find ways to front and pay his band and daunting overhead. MF + 12 was his standard instrumentation other than his mid-1980s High Voltage groups for two CDs, which was MF + 6 (close to his octet recordings in the mid-1950s).

### **Steady Infusion and Inclusion**

Within three months of arriving in NY in April 1957 and five months after hiring Ernie Wilkins, MF continued integrating his band with remarkable African American musicians such as bassist Richard Evans (age 24) in July and left-handed trombonist Slide Hampton (age 25) in October. In early spring 1959, Austrian-born Joe Zawinul (age 26) won the piano chair in MF's Birdland Dream Band and became friends with saxophonist Wayne Shorter (age 25). According to Michelle Mercer's fine biography *Footprints: The Life and Work of Wayne Shorter* (2004), they would visit many of the midtown Manhattan jazz spaces. Carmen Leggio, one of MF's saxophonists, was leaving the band, so Slide Hampton set up an audition in early summer 1959. Zawinul strongly encouraged Shorter to audition and other future well-knowns such as George Coleman and Eddie Harris also auditioned. Shorter won the opening and became one of five African Americans amongst MF's 12 musicians that month. Shorter was only with MF for a month, yet MF performed a couple of Shorter's compositions and there were performances at the Toronto Jazz Festival, several nights at Birdland, and the Newport Jazz Festival on July 3, 1959 (which was noted as Shorter's earliest recording with a major band and is available as a download from Wolfgang's Vault [www.wolfgang.com], #224). On July 24, 1959, while performing at the Toronto festival at a racetrack, drummer Art Blakey and his Jazz Messengers were also performing. Blakey gave trumpeter Lee Morgan (just turned 21 that month) approval to run across a field to ask Shorter to join Blakey's iconic ensemble. MF reluctantly gave his blessing. After stints with Blakey and Miles Davis, Shorter and Zawinul

formed the mega-jazz fusion ensemble Weather Report, which lasted from early 1970 through December 1985. Shorter has won the world's highest cultural honors. MF added drummers Rufus "Speedy" Jones and Frankie Dunlop, bassist Jimmy Rowser, pianist Jaki Byard, trombonist Charles Greenlee, and several other African Americans.

### **MF's Local Globals**

Shorter's engagement with MF was one example of hundreds where young aspiring musicians could hone their skills in public and go on to a major career in music. MF's extraordinary radar for gauging talent made his band a conduit for hundreds of future accomplished musicians. Here in the Poconos, six resumes include touring and recording with MF.

Baritone saxophonist Jay Cameron (September 14, 1928 – March 20, 2001) was well traveled and recorded for seven years before he "signed on" in spring 1958 (age 29), in time for MF's *A Message from Newport* LP. He stayed only six months but forged a solid camaraderie with Slide Hampton, then toured and recorded extensively with him for three years before joining Paul Winter in 1963 for a year of international travel and three LPs. Toward the mid-1960s, he moved to the Poconos and opened a music store on Main Street in Stroudsburg. He called it Mainline Music to reference a previous heroin addiction. Cameron hosted jam sessions at the store from around midnight to 4:00 a.m. The store closed in the early to mid-1970s. In 1972, Jay opened the Back Door tavern on the north side of Main Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets, with the entrance in the back of a building off the alley. Bob Dorough (age 49) auditioned and was asked if he could play "the old songs." Subsequent occasional performances there were the beginning of the resurgence of Dorough's singing/piano-playing career. The Back Door closed in 1973. A couple by the names of Barry and Patty, with assistance from Steve and Anita Davis, opened the Lone Pine Inn in a large house on Route 447 in spring 1972 to present jazz. Jay worked alongside all of them to showcase world-class jazz performers such as George Coleman, Zoot Sims with Bill Goodwin, Steve Gilmore, Mike Melillo, and Dave Liebman with drummer Les Perlman (brother of actor Ron Perlman). Denny Carrig, present co-owner of the Deer Head Inn, witnessed multi-instrumentalist/composer/music experimenter David Amram swirling a tube tied to a string above his head, in Amram's continued search for interesting musical sounds. By the early 1980s, Cameron and his wife Kita had moved to Las Vegas to run a music publishing business, where they would interact with bassist Paul Rostock. They then moved to San Diego, where Jay died from prostate cancer on March 20, 2001.

Stroudsburg native trumpet performer Danny Cahn joined MF on June 29, 1973 (age 23) as co-lead trumpet with Lin Biviano at Jimmy's jazz club in Manhattan through July 10.



MF had wisdom tooth surgery, so Biviano played MF's parts and Danny played lead trumpet while MF healed. Their one day off was Monday July 9 which was filled in with a run-out to Boston. They finished the Boston performance, got on the bus, and rode back to Manhattan in the early hours of the morning, where they then slept on the floor of Jimmy's for a few hours. That same morning, they set up, sound checked, and around noon recorded the double LP *M.F. Horn 4 + 5: Live at Jimmy's*. That afternoon they rode the bus to a performance in Sommerville, NJ. This was Danny's first of many recordings with major jazz artists. He's also proud of being a part of the lengthy audio that is available online at "YouTube Maynard Ferguson At The National Trumpet Symposium 1973 Audio." This was recorded in Denver on August 13 and 14 and includes over four hours of performances, an open rehearsal, and a trumpet clinic. He left the band a few days later on August 19 in California and went on to a remarkable career in New York recording studios, theatres, and concert halls. Coincidentally, five months after Danny's recording with MF at Jimmy's, the stalled career of Phil Woods would be reignited in remarkable fashion on the LP *Michel Legrand Recorded Live at Jimmy's* (recorded December 8, 1973), featuring Phil's astoundingly virtuosic version of Legrand's "You Must Believe in Spring."

Saxophonist Mark Kirk became a fixture in Delaware Water Gap in the 1970s when he settled here to study with Phil Woods. His brother Jeff was with MF in 1980-1981. When Jeff was getting married, Mark (age 30) took his place from May 22 through June 11, 1981, for a tour of Japan. Thirteen performances took place all over the country including two days in Tokyo's Olympic Stadium for World Soccer.

Fifteen days after Mark Kirk left, saxophonist Nelson Hill joined MF. Nelson was raised 10 miles south of the Deer Head Inn and studied with Phil Woods while in high school before attending the Eastman School of Music. Upon graduation, he joined MF on June 26, 1981 (age 20). A year later, on June 19-20, 1982, they filmed three songs at the Hollywood Bowl for the Pony Laserdisk *Playboy Jazz Festival '82, Vol. 1 & 2* [Pony Video G88-M0014 and Pony Video G88-M0015]. This features Nelson at length and can be seen at "YouTube Maynard Ferguson at the 1982 Playboy Jazz Festival." Three days later, they recorded MF's LP *Storm*, also in *Hollywood*. In addition, Nelson recorded tracks for MF's *Hollywood* LP and did some recording in Venice, Italy. He stayed with the band for 17 months, leaving after a November 27, 1982 performance to return to the Poconos, where he became a member of the orchestra at Tamiment Resort. He went on to record with several Phil Woods ensembles and presently tours and records with piano performer Eric Mintel.

Pittston, PA-native bassist Paul Rostock has been in the Poconos since the late 1970s. In late summer 1981, then MF saxophonist Nelson Hill recommended Paul for the bass chair. Paul joined MF on September 16, 1981 (age 24)

in Wisconsin for the fall tour and stayed through a performance at the Comedy Store in LA on December 10, 1981, around which time he recorded a bit for MF's *Hollywood* LP. Paul performed with Frank Sinatra Jr. for 38 years, from March 1978 to March 2016 and has taught at Moravian College/University for quite a few years.

Archbald/Scranton native Marko Marcinko joined MF as drummer on October 21, 1994 in Fort Wayne, IN, and stayed until July 1997, then returned for three nights in August 1997. From June 3 to 7, 1997, he recorded the *One More Trip to Birdland: Maynard Ferguson & Big Bop Nouveau* CD, which features Marko's arrangement of "Manteca" and also his arrangement of a medley of holiday songs that came out on the *A Concord Jazz Christmas, Volume 2* CD. Of MF's 49 years of fronting a band, Marko is probably one of the three longest touring drummers MF ever had, along with Randy Jones and Rufus "Speedy" Jones. Marko has played with Dave Liebman's quartet (2000-2015) and Lieb's Big Band (2000-present) and has been Director of Jazz Studies at Penn State University for several years.

### **Autumn 1971 - Younger Than Springtime Was Me**

I first heard of Maynard during my sophomore year of high school in autumn 1971 (my age 15) when a student brought in MF's newly released *Alive and Well in London* LP. I immediately became one of thousands of proud "May-nerds." This was just a few weeks after being astounded by Bill Chase's double high Q's on his AM-radio hit "Get It On" by his four-trumpet group CHASE and seeing them on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*. When I delved into Chase's career, I was duly impressed that he got his first major break performing for a year with MF's band starting in spring 1958 (Chase age 22). All of this was a few months after the death of Louis Armstrong on July 6, 1971. I had cut out a short reminiscence of Satchmo in the *New York Times* by John "Birks" Dizzy Gillespie and pinned it on my bedroom door. My history teacher was an MF fan and knew that I studied trumpet. He loaned me MF's LP *Boy with Lots of Brass* with AC's three arrangements and vocals by Irene Kral. I made a cassette that I have kept for 50 years. My music director then brought in a copy of the two-LP set *North Texas State University Lab '72* featuring Marvin Stamm and two compositions by Lou Marini Jr., plus a photo of Clark Terry. I was hooked.

I would attend dozens of MF performances over the next three decades and interview him at ESU in April 1991 about Bill Chase. On Valentine's Day evening 1996, the MF band with Marko Marcinko on drums performed at Stroudsburg High School. SHS director Bill Austell invited ESU's University Jazz Ensemble under my leadership to open the concert. Before we started, I went to Maynard's dressing room, and he was warm, welcoming, and humble. He has been quoted as saying, "My conception of an ensemble is that everybody must really be enjoying what they are doing and be happy on the band." Thanks always, MF!

After Mary and I arrived in the Poconos in autumn 1980, I started to get called to perform in resort bands when they needed a last trumpet player. I would often see that AC had done an arrangement or two, if not the entire set. As the 1980s went on, Pocono resident AC would often be in the sax section of the resort bands. His occasional 8-measure improvisations would be to die for! I worked with him on several projects involving students at East Stroudsburg High School and the summer student jazz ensemble that Phil Woods and I directed (the COTA Cats). In September 1986, the student first tenor saxophonist was very ill and could not play the COTA (Celebration of the Arts) festival set with us. Who stepped in to play his parts? AC . . . good sub! This was also the set where regular COTA attendee Bill Potts had graciously donated to the student band sheet music copies of his entire January 1959 big band masterpiece produced by Jack Lewis, *The Jazz Soul of Porgy & Bess*. This was years before he allowed it to be published. AC graced us by revisiting his extraordinary feature on “It Ain’t Necessarily So.” AC might have known then that he would be performing the entire suite again three months later, this time directed by Johnny Mandel, and yet one more project produced by Jack Lewis on December 12, 1986 in Los Angeles at the Wiltern Theatre. An exceptional group of musicians was assembled for this live performance and a CD was released on the NEC Avenue label [NACJ-3511], but alas, only available in Japan. I asked Johnny about this release and he said, “Really? They snuck that by me and released it?”

When AC and Phil sightread a newly commissioned work by Manny Albam for the students (“Honk If You Love Jazzers” – summer 1987), I was astounded by their instant execution, but not surprised. I would talk to AC often at the Deer Head Inn. In the mid-1980s, I asked if he would be willing to compose a piece for the COTA Cats. He got a distant look in his one eye and said, “Pat, writing is hard work.” He was not composing much if anything for large ensemble at that point. He was having a great time playing big and little gigs on tenor saxophone, especially if he could get bassist Steve Gilmore, living a few burgs over from AC’s Canadensis home, to pick him up. How convenient to have one of the best bassists anywhere nearby, doubling as your chauffeur! AC continued to be in demand yet stayed quite active in our area right up through the end of 1987. We lost him in February 1988 in Pocono Hospital in East Stroudsburg, PA, less than 3,000 feet from where his archive would be founded at ESU.

Was MF the GOAT (young-people speak for Greatest of All Time)? We must factor in his ability to embrace and incorporate contemporary and diverse styles, including the Ragas of India and fusion jazz, into his ever-evolving repertoire, stamping all of them with his virtuosity for the duration of his entire 60-year career. Johnny Mandel might have had the best last words on MF, as he said when describing any of his iconic close colleagues, ... “none better!” ■

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Visit [esu.edu/jazzatesu](http://esu.edu/jazzatesu) to stay up to date on everything happening at the Collection. From jazz concerts on campus to annual concerts such as the Duke Ellington Nutcracker Suite to the Jazz Lounge Listening Series, any information will be available on this website.

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