

'Scuse Me While I Disappear

David Raksin, whose song with Johnny Mercer's lyrics, *Laura*, is one of the great classics, said, "I write all kinds of music, including concert music. I think that our country's greatest musical gift to the world is not concert music, and not jazz — and I love jazz. Our greatest contribution is the American popular song." David was talking about what is now seen as a golden era, roughly from 1920 to the end of the 1950s. He said, "It is the most incredible flowering ever of that kind of music."

One of the greatest practitioners of the songwriter's art in that time was Matt Dennis, whom we had the misfortune to lose recently. The body of his work was not large, compared with that of, say, Cole Porter or Jerome Kern, in part because he was not a creature of the Broadway musical theater or part of that group, like Harry Warren and Johnny Mercer, who wrote mostly for films. But what he did write is unfailingly exquisite: *Let's Get Away from It All*, *Will You Still Be Mine*, *Everything Happens to Me*, *Violets for Your Furs*, *The Night We Called It a Day*, *Junior and Julie*, *We Belong Together*, all written with lyricist Tom Adair, and *Angel Eyes*, with lyrics by Earl K. Brent. It was written for the movie *Jennifer*, with Ida Lupino and Howard Duff. Some of Matt's songs have lyrics by his wife, singer Ginny Maxey.

One of my close friends, and one of the best singers to emerge in the generation influenced by Frank Sinatra, is Julius La Rosa. He said, "Matt Dennis had an ability to write the most beautiful and sophisticated melodies, and yet they were never hard to sing. He was also a gentle, lovely man." Sometimes when La Rosa and I are talking on the phone, he (or I) will sing an opening phrase of a Matt Dennis song, and continue through the whole thing, in unison, laughing. So steeped were we in Matt Dennis songs in our high-school years.

Back around 1960, when I was editor of *Down Beat*, Mel Tormé was playing Chicago, where the magazine's head office was located. Mel asked me to go along with him on a disc jockey interview. The disc jockey said, "Don't you think the singing of Matt Dennis was influenced by yours?"

Mel flared slightly. He said, "I've heard that before, and it's not true. If anything, I was influenced by Matt Dennis."

In fact, it is difficult to estimate the reach of the influence of a career in the arts. Obviously I was influenced by all the great songwriters, but certainly Matt Dennis and Tom Adair together were a powerful force in my becoming a songwriter. One of the factors in great songwriting is an appropriate match of a melodic interval with what would be the natural inflection if you were speaking the lyric. La Rosa points out that *The Night We Called It a Day* is a superb example of the matching up of intervals. And the octave leap on the opening phrase, "There was a moon (out in space)" sort of makes you look up, lending a visual dimension to the song. In fact, that is a very visual song. It is also a very literate one. It was in that song that I first encountered the phrase "the song of the spheres." I first heard the song among the four "sides" Frank Sinatra recorded for RCA Victor's Bluebird subsidiary with arrangements by Axel Stordahl: *The Night We Called It a Day*, *The Lamplighter's Serenade*, *The Song Is You*, and *Night and Day*. I became an instant fan of Frank Sinatra, Matt Dennis, and Tom Adair. That has never changed.

Matt recalled to Ed Shanaphy, the editor of *Sheet Music Magazine* (goodmusicgroup.com), "I will never forget when I first played and sang *The Night We Called It a Day* for Tommy Dorsey, backstage at the old Paramount in NYC. Tommy was seated next to Harry James and Ziggy Elman. As I ran the song over, I noticed Tommy looking at Harry and Ziggy and nodding their heads in approval.

"When Tommy decided he really did like my tune, I rearranged my own chart for Frank and the Pied Pipers. What was not expected, however, was Frank and Tommy were not getting along too well. Frank was reaching a popular level and wanted to leave the band and go on his own."

Sinatra's departure from Dorsey, who had a firm contract with him, is by now one of the legends of show business.

Matt said, "So I decided to re-arrange it again to fit Jo Stafford as the soloist. As fate turned out, later in 1944 TD's recording came out of *The Night* with Jo Stafford and a good cut, too. Frank did record the song on his own and fortunately it became a collector's item. F.S. recorded and certainly

performed it over and over during all the ensuing years, keeping the tune very much alive."

Matt had an impact on Jo Stafford's career as well. Jo's entire interest was group singing, and she became a star half by accident because of Matt's song *Little Man with a Candy Cigar*, with lyrics by Frank Kilduff. She heard it, went to Dorsey and said, "Tommy, this is the first time I've ever done this, and it'll probably be the last, but I want a favor of you. I want to do the record of *Little Man with a Candy Cigar* solo." He said, "You've got it." From then on he assigned her to solos, and of course she became a major artist, all of it starting with Matt's song.

A few years ago, Jo told me she had been driving and heard one of those Sinatra Bluebird tracks on the car radio, and impulsively said to herself, "My God, could he sing." Indeed. And so could she.

Knowing how much I admired Tom Adair, Matt at one point offered to introduce us, but I moved too slowly, and Tom Adair died. I hope he knew how much I loved his work. Maybe Matt told him; I would like to think so.

Tom Adair was born in Newton, Kansas, on June 15, 1913, and went to Los Angeles Junior College in 1932 and '33. He wrote scripts for television and movies, as well as night-club material. He was a sitcom writer on *My Three Sons*, *The Munsters*, *My Favorite Martian*, and other shows. For Matt's tunes, he wrote lyrics for *Let's Get Away from It All*, *Everything Happens to Me*, *Violets for Your Furs*, *The Night We Called It a Day*, and *Will You Still Be Mine*, as well as *There's No You* (with Harold S. Hopper) and *In the Blue of Evening* (with Alfred D'Artega).

Matt was born into a vaudeville family in Seattle, Washington, on February 11, 1914, and went to San Rafael High School in California. His father was a singer and his mother a violinist. Matt made his professional debut in the family act, called the Five Musical Lovelands. In 1933, in San Francisco, Matt joined the Horace Heidt band on piano. Later he and Dick Haymes had a band, with Haymes in front and Matt as its organizer. Then he became known as an arranger and accompanist for singers, and sometimes as a vocal coach. He held all three roles with Martha Tilton.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, there were a number of sister vocal groups, including the Boswell, Andrews, DeMarco, Clark, Dinning, and King Sisters. Jo Stafford and her older sisters, Pauline and Christine, became active as the Stafford Sisters. They had their own radio show on Los Angeles radio station KHJ. They replaced Jo with another girl when Jo joined an eight-voice group called The Pied Pipers.

Matt's association with Jo went back to the days with her sisters. Matt told Ed Shanaphy in a letter: "I used to accompany (the Staffords) — fine singers of the blues, and good pop songs. Then Jo organized the group of singers that Tommy Dorsey hired for his summer radio series in the East, naming them the Pied Pipers.

"Prior to that I continued playing piano for the group in appearances in and around L.A. during which I seriously started writing songs. Jo heard my songs and set up an audition for me with Tommy Dorsey at the Palladium Ballroom, which led me to a contract with Dorsey, writing songs which he wanted to publish, and did most successfully — glad to say. Jo, the Pied Pipers, and Sinatra all started singing and recording my current songs, *Let's Get Away from It All*, *Everything Happens to Me*, *Will You Still Be Mine*, *The Night We Called It a Day*, and others."

Everything Happens to Me and *Let's Get Away from It All* were recorded February 7, 1941. In fact Dorsey recorded 14 of Matt's works in that one year, including a little-remembered patriotic song called *Free For All*, recorded on June 27, and *Violets for Your Furs*, recorded on September 26. Sinatra would retain a taste for and powerful loyalty to the Matt Dennis tunes throughout his career. He would re-record *Violets for Your Furs*, *Angel Eyes*, and *Let's Get Away from It All*, for example, during his period with Capitol Records, when he had become the biggest superstar in the history of American show business.

With the U.S. entry into World War II, Matt served in the U.S. Army Air Force, with the Radio Production Unit and the Glenn Miller USAAF orchestra. He spent three and a half years in the Air Force. When the war ended, he settled in New York City and became an arranger and sometime performer on a number of network radio shows. And when his friend Dick Haymes got his own radio show, Matt became its music director.

In 1955, Matt starred in his own NBC-TV series, doing some of the very first coast-to-coast color shows. "I replaced Eddie Fisher that year. I had Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Vaughn Monroe had Tuesday and Thursday," Matt said. "Then in December I joined the new Ernie Kovacs five-mornings-a-week show with Ernie, Edie Adams, and myself."

Matt was a very fine pianist, and a sympathetic teacher who wrote a piano method, available from Mel Bay.

I was always enthralled by Matt's singing. He had a light and airy voice, which indeed was not unlike that of Mel Tormé, for reasons already noted in the disc jockey interview I mentioned. He made an estimated six albums, far too few.

*: best story for parents (in 55 as E. Stanley: first story for children)
55 (1) freedom (feel) -> allow respect for children indep, rebellion
1st generation with \$ enough for kids -> ok to buy, rebellion
3rd -> market and kids not on next to make product: 60s, 70s, 80s

One of them I treasured for years was on Trend Records. It contained all of Matt's well-known tunes and a few that were not so known. Alas, I no longer have it. And my local "record" store, which is always very accommodating, finds nothing by Matt in American CD reissues. But you can get four of them online from songsearch.com. *Dennis Anyone?*, *Play Melancholy Baby*, *Matt Dennis Plays and Sings*, and *She Dances Overhead* are on German or Japanese imports.

Matt told Ed Shanaphy: "Looking back, I'm very proud to have had the success I've had . . . and pleased that most of my tunes are still around the world after all these years, and also that I'm still around today, able to enjoy the pleasure of hearing some of my songs at this late date. Hallelujah."

Matt died June 21 in a hospital in Riverside, California, of natural causes. He was 89. He's gone. But the music isn't.

The Journey: Milt Bernhart

Part One

The role of coincidence in our lives always fascinates me. To call something a coincidence is no more to explain it than the term Carl Jung made widespread, synchronicity. To name something is not to explain it. Call it simultaneity. Who cares? It's comparable to saying that the reason something falls to earth is "gravity". Good. Now explain gravity. I have seen so much "coincidence" that at times it has become eerie.

The town in Canada where I spent most of my public and high school years, St. Catharines, Ontario, is about ten miles from the Niagara River and the U.S.-Canadian border. The famous big bands did not come to St. Catharines. They usually came to Niagara Falls, Ontario, where they could draw audiences from Niagara Falls, New York, and Buffalo, and even St. Catharines.

But one night when I was fifteen, the excellent but now-forgotten Teddy Powell band played at the St. Catharines Armory at Welland Avenue and Lake Street, and of course I went to hear it. And I did what kids were wont to do: got the autographs of everyone in the band. They were written on two sides of a sheet of my father's business stationery.

I mentioned all this recently to Milt Bernhart, of whom I first became aware when he was playing trombone with the Stan Kenton band, thinking that he would, like most Americans, have no idea what or where St. Catharines was. Milt said with about as much excitement as his low-key and unhurried voice can convey, "Then you've got my autograph."

"What?" said I.

"I not only played that job in St. Catharines, it was my first professional job. I joined the Teddy Powell band that night."

"I found that sheet of paper not too long ago," I told Milt. "But I don't recall seeing your name on it."

"That's because Teddy gave me another name," Milt said. "Teddy Powell was a semi-name band. It was well known at the time. I was seventeen. Teddy decided to Anglicize my name to Barnes. I was singing scat vocals, and one of them was a pop tune of the times called *Deacon Jones*, a hand-clapping carry-over from maybe Andy Kirk's band, and there were some semi-hip lyrics about Deacon Jones. I volunteered to sing it. I wanted to be seen. I was playing third trombone. So they gave me the name Deacon Barnes. My name was not on the list as Milt.

"Interestingly, Boots Mussulli was on that band. Later we were on Kenton's band. Boots always called me Deacon.

"Teddy approached me after about six months on the band when I was getting ready to register for the draft. He said to me quietly, 'You know, you don't have to go into the service.' I said, 'I don't?' He said, 'I can fix it. I've done it for a couple of guys who've been on the band.' One of them was a very good trumpet player named Dick Mains, who was featured on the band's theme, a kind of Randy Brooks type of thing. Many people imagined, listening to a broadcast, that Teddy Powell was the soloist. It was Dick Mains. Dick Mains got drafted anyway. Apparently he had signed to stay a year or two with the band, and Teddy could pull strings on Park Avenue at the draft board to keep you out of the service. He offered that to me. It whetted my interest. I didn't want to go in. Who did? So I gave it a little thought. I said, 'Let me think about it.' Meanwhile I talked to a couple of the guys in the band and everybody said, 'Steer clear, don't touch it.' So I told Teddy that I really couldn't do that. He said, 'Do you know what you're doing? You're going to be sorry if you go in.'

"I said, 'It's illegal, Teddy.'

"What did Teddy Powell play?" I asked.

"He had played banjo with Abe Lyman's band. How's that? But sitting in the front row with Abe Lyman, he became kind of popular. He wrote a couple of songs. The only one I remember is still round, *Take Me Back to My Boots and Saddle*, Gene Autry's thing. Teddy was the co-writer."

Teddy Powell, according to the ASCAP biographical dictionary, was born in Oakland, California, on March 1, 1906. The book says he was educated at the San Francisco Conservatory, but I can't imagine a course in banjo at a

conservatory. He recorded for RCA Victor and Decca. The only record I remember is a slapstick satirical song called *If I Were as High as the Moon in the Sky*. But I remember from that one night in St. Catharines that Teddy Powell's was an excellent and swinging band, and Milt confirms this.

"Well," he said, "a couple of months elapsed before my draft notice arrived. And on my last day on the band, I was walking down Jefferson Street in Detroit, and a headline on a newspaper jumped out at me. It said, 'Band leader arrested.' Teddy had been arrested in his hotel room in Detroit. They had been following him for maybe months, tapped his phone, and moved in and arrested him that day. We played that night without him. He did about two years in, I believe, Danbury, Connecticut, a white-collar federal prison. And after he got out, it was not the same. Things had changed enough that there was no place for him in the music business. As I understand it he ended up in Florida, semi-retired, and occasionally doing a gig with a very Mickey Mouse band, not the swing band he'd had."

Milt Bernhart is one of the most fascinating men I know. He no longer is an active trombone player. He owns a travel agency that handles the nomad necessities of jazz musicians, some of whom — Bud Shank, for one — are still among his clients. Milt is president of the Big Band Academy of America, which is a repository of some of the lore of one of the most important musical movements in history.

And Milt is history. Living history. He has a phenomenally retentive memory and powers of analytic observation that I have rarely seen equaled. He has been through just about every phase of the music business, including the Hollywood studios. I find conversation with Milt invariably fascinating, and what follows is a distillation of talks I had with him over a period of about two weeks. It is more than an interview. It is a journey. The subject matter ranges from his youth in Chicago through the recording sessions of Frank Sinatra — the fierce trombone solo on *I've Got You Under My Skin* is Milt's — to Marlon Brando's role in bringing jazz into film scoring and how Milt came to be the owner of Kelly Travel Service. Milt talks in a low unhurried manner filled with a quiet irony that, alas, cannot be retained in print. But I hope at times you'll be able to catch a hint of the tone.

This is his story:

"My father was trained in Russia, family style, to be a tailor. He came to the U.S. with a wife and one child already. He went to Chicago where there were relatives, a Jewish family, but he didn't like it and heard that there was a small

town that sort of resembled the town he had lived in, the *Fiddler on the Roof* type thing, in northern Indiana. That's where they moved. The town was Valparaiso."

Milt was born there on May 25, 1926.

"The population was about 12,000, a farm town, My father was the town tailor, and a very good one. He died when I was about seven. So I hardly knew him. He and my mother had six children, and I was the last. All of the other five were gone, married and moved. My mother was ill, and then she passed away too when I was about ten and a half. I had brothers and a sister to live with. The eldest took me. They lived in Chicago, he and a wife and a son. My nephew, Arnold Bernhart, was a year older than I. He was studying violin at Lane Tech and had an accident and hurt a finger, and he switched to string bass. We gave up trying to explain that I was his uncle, and we called ourselves brothers. To this day, a lot of Chicago musicians think we're brothers.

"I was very lucky to go to Lane Tech. It was the best. It was open to every kid in Chicago. Originally it had been intended to be a junior college, about ten times the size of any high school, to be a vocational school in the '20s, for the children of immigrants coming over in large numbers to learn a trade. Eventually it was called a high school. It continues to this day. They had a music department. I was a four years music major.

"I got lucky with a teacher, a good one, named Forrest Nicola. Amongst his students were players who went in every direction. He was certainly a long hair and played most of his life in pit orchestras, but he appreciated jazz and insisted that I listen carefully to the jazz musicians. He made mouthpieces that were well known in the business. Harry James came by when he was in town, and the side men in most of the name bands. His walls were plastered with the likes of Tommy Dorsey. Some of his students were Ray Linn and Graham Young, and a lot of Chicago players who never left town but stayed and played in the studios. There were staff orchestras at local stations all over the country, very good ones in some cases. WMAQ, the NBC station, had a full-sized symphony orchestra conducted by Dr. Roy Shields, who had a country-wide reputation. That's where David Rose got started. They hired him when he was still a teen-ager."

David Rose was born in London, England, but educated at Chicago Musical College, as were a number of musicians who later became prominent.

Milt said, "I learned from day one harmony, theory, counterpoint. I was excused from gym, so I had two hours of practice a day. The band and orchestra were national champi-

ons. I can look back now, sixty some years later. The orchestra was good enough to compete with smaller city symphony orchestras. A lot of people in the Chicago Symphony came out of Lane. A fiddle player called me last year and said it was a reunion. And a lot of the musicians I went to school with are still in the Chicago Symphony.

“Cass Tech in Detroit was our big competitor. And also Cleveland Heights. The concert band at the high school in Joliet, Illinois, was so good that they were eliminated from competition. The competition at these high schools turned music into something important. I got a start in composition, but I was too interested in playing. Jazz was not a word you could use.”

I said, “Dusable was the other great music high school in Chicago. Milt Hinton said they didn’t play any jazz there. It was strictly classical.”

“That’s true. That was the policy in every school everywhere. Nobody could bring up jazz because it was nasty. That meant that a certain group of us did our experimenting off the school grounds, and I got into a few kid bands. I made fifty cents a night at dances. It was a thrilling four years of high school, just great. The object for me in those days was to try to get into a symphony. I was taught the repertoire. I was getting that I could read anything. My teacher was purely legitimate. But he respected jazz. He got out his horn and played ragtime the way he had played it in ’20s. I didn’t care for it, but I didn’t say so.

“But I learned a lot. Chicago was a great place.

“I met a kid in another high school, when we were rehearsing with a concert band one Sunday. He was the only kid there besides me. The rest were ex-Sousa players. It was a very good concert band. We were recommended by our teachers. His name is Lee Konitz. I saw him across the room, sitting in the clarinet section. We found each other. He went to Senn, where Bill Russo was going. Lee in those days was going the same direction I was, being trained to be a clarinetist, to be in a symphony. We got to be pals. He was hoping to make a living playing in clubs. He was in a vocal group for a while that did Louis Jordan stuff in a bar down on the South Side. He played Louis’s solos and they sang. It’s hard to believe.

“I had heard since I was a kid, working non-union jobs for fifty cents a night, that someone would show up from the union and throw your horns against the wall. It never happened, but when we finally joined the union, we met Petrillo.”

Milt got into the union by chance. The Lane Tech band won a national competition, and one of the prizes was

membership in the Chicago musicians union. Milt said:

“The first thing Petrillo did when you were ushered into his office was to get his Luger out of a drawer and onto the desk, and he’d say, ‘This is the way it is.’ He could hardly speak the King’s English. He had been picked by Al Capone and company. All unions in Chicago operated with the good wishes of Capone. There couldn’t be a union that didn’t pay obeisance to Al Capone. None. It became the most active union town in America, the stockyards and everything else. It was all unionized and the unions belonged to Capone. I could write a book about Petrillo.

“Mitchell Ayers, who I worked for years later on a television series, *The Hollywood Palace*, came out from New York to Chicago and he got me aside and said, ‘You guys are getting ready to have a revolution against the A.F. of M.’ And we were. He said, ‘I’m for it. Put me down for anything you need.’ I said, ‘Well I’m grateful. We’re not getting that kind of response from bandleaders or anyone in management.’

“He said, ‘I’ll explain. In 1934, the Chicago World’s Fair took place. And there was a lot of music.’

“All the hotels were going to have bands. So among the bands they imported was a band Mitch was on, Little Jack Little, to play at the Stevens Hotel. A danceable band of the period. Mitch was a violinist. Mitch said, ‘We were excited. It was our first job out of New York. We arrived and settled down at a hotel. We were called and told we were to be at Mr. Petrillo’s office the next day. We thought he was going to throw his arms around us.’” He was then president only of the Chicago local, not the Federation — he took that over later. Mitch said, ‘We all got into his office, and he said, ‘Which one of you guys is Jack Little?’ ‘I am, sir.’” Mitch began to turn as red as a beet when he told me this story. He had been a football player and bouncer. Big build. “Petrillo slammed his gun down on the desk and said, ‘Tell me, Mr. Little, who booked your band into Chicago?’ Jack Little, a very well brought up, literate, nice guy, said, ‘A little outfit in New York called Columbia Artists.’ They had just gotten started. Petrillo said, ‘Sorry, they didn’t book you here. The only outfit that books anyone into Chicago is MCA.’ Little said, ‘But Mr. Petrillo, we signed a contract, and they’ve seen us through hard times. They gave us a little money to get by on. They gave us transportation to get here, and they booked the job.’

“Petrillo said, ‘I don’t care,’ and then he picked up the gun. He said, ‘If you want to work that job, tomorrow morning you’re with MCA.’ Little coughed and said, ‘But sir, even if I could break the contract, it isn’t in me to do that.’

Petrillo said, "Then you're not working the job. Time's up." Outside, Mitch told me, they discussed it. As he talked about it, he got so animated that I thought he might wring *my* neck. He wanted to kill on the spot, he was that angry in thinking about that event.

"I said, 'What did you do?'"

"Mitch said, 'We asked around the union office if he was joking. They turned white and said, 'He never jokes.' To a man, we decided to give up the job. We got the next train back to New York.'" It would have been a three-months job, with a nightly broadcast. And Mitch never, never got over it.

"Nobody made a decision but Jimmy Petrillo. And how did he do it? He hardly could play cornet. He'd been a street fighter.

"It was well-known in Chicago that Jules Stein, who was an eye doctor of sorts, was put in charge of MCA by Big Al. Later, when he was about a trillionaire, the word was spread that he was one of the great eye doctors of all times."

"And don't forget," I said, "that Joe Glaser, who was Louis Armstrong's manager, came out of Chicago, and he was also connected."

"Joe Glaser was also Teddy Powell's manager. Joe Glaser was a hard-nosed crook. Somehow Jules Stein got to be liked by Al Capone. And from that came Petrillo, the idea being that we'll organize the musicians and you'll book the bands, Music Corporation of America. And that's exactly what they did. And it worked so well that it was useless for any other big city to try to get anything else going, including New York. And MCA branched out. Lew Wasserman came in very early on, and was Dr. Stein's number one guy. He had been working in a department store. He became known as the man who put the bands on the road. They had most of the name bands. And then came the move to the West Coast, and they became personal agents, and from that they decided to be producers, and glommed onto television before anyone realized it was going anywhere, and became so large they couldn't be told not to do anything.

"And now MCA is out of the picture, since Vivendi bought it for untold sums."

Anyone who wants to know more about these sinister connections is advised to read *Dark Victory: Ronald Reagan, MCA, and the Mob* (Viking 1986) by Dan E. Moldea, a noted investigative reporter, who scrupulously chronicles Reagan's ties to Wasserman and other figures connected to organized crime, including the late mob attorney and fixer Sidney Korshak and Jackie Presser of the Teamsters. Reagan even appointed a union attorney, William French Smith, attorney

general.

The late Spike Jones told George Maury, a special attorney for the Justice Department, "Stein's a member of the union, its Chicago local, and he's present at nearly every AFM meeting."

The fix was in early, and big.

His work with Teddy Powell may have been Milt's first full-time professional job, but it was not his first employment by a band of some reputation. He had previously played as a sub with the band of Boyd Raeburn, for whom he retains a great respect and affection. Milt said:

"I had played with Boyd Raeburn before I left high school. Boyd for years was someone that I looked down on, and my gang in Chicago, jazz kids, did too, because he had the house band at the businessman's nightclub in Chicago, the Chez Paree. It was a tenor band, like Freddy Martin's, three tenors, three brass, saxes, fiddles. And he played that kind of tenor sax, lead tenor. Then the word got around that he had left the Chez Paree and he was forming a swing band. It played at a place downtown, where you could actually stand outside and hear the music inside. It was the only way I ever heard these people. And he played at the Blue Note. I got the idea that Boyd Raeburn had gone hot. And there were a lot of good players around. I got a call from his manager, saying, 'We need a sub on Thursday. You've been recommended.' My trombone teacher had recommended me, thinking that I could do it.

"I was just in the middle of fifteen. Too young, and still learning. But I said, 'Okay.' What did I know? I showed up with dark pants, first time I'd ever gone into a nightclub. I'll never forget the smell of booze as I went down the stairs. It hit me like a ton of bricks. That odor. Beer and booze. Cigarette smoke. I was wondering even then, 'Am I over my head?' I looked around, and there was nobody there. Then the band started to arrive, and I recognized the players. The lead alto man was Ray Degaer. You'll see the name on a number of Charlie Barnet records. Good lead alto man. Hodges was his idol. He was on Teddy Powell's band later, a very good player but a hopeless drunk. He was a good example for me in a negative way. But I admired him as a player.

"The drummer was Claude Humphreys, nicknamed Hey Hey because he had a nervous tick of saying 'Hey hey' every couple of seconds. And the best drummer in Chicago. My tryout night, he walked in when they all started to arrive. He caught my attention immediately. He was indescribable. His face, from his habits, whatever they were, was everything. It

was kind of a beet red, with a lot of lines in it. And he was young, but he'd seen a lot of time on the river boats. He played with Fate Marable on a river boat as a kid. Somebody killed somebody in a stateroom he was sleeping in. After that, the nervousness set in, and he had this speech problem. They couldn't put a microphone near him. They went on the air that night. And it wasn't just 'Hey hey,' which was harmless. He did *that* in tempo. But he also said four-letter words, so they couldn't mike him. I noted immediately that he was a very good drummer, except that he said 'Hey hey,' and all night long I thought he was calling *me*. I kept turning around.

"The trumpet players, right behind me, were enjoying it immensely. They were Chicago-brand swing trumpet players, awfully good. Most of them ended up on other bands. Ray Linn, for instance. Graham Young also.

"Boyd arrived, hardly noticed me. I had to wear a uniform, a tuxedo jacket. Whoever I was sitting in for must have weighed three hundred pounds. I looked ridiculous. The lead trombone player was on staff at NBC. There were a lot of local non-sponsored radio programs with house bands, so I could hear him every night. There was a guy named Bob Strong who had the house band at NBC. Good writers, and a very good band, playing Benny Goodman style swing. And they did sustaining programs. So I knew who this guy was. And right away, it began. Nervousness set in. Boyd looked around, and there wasn't much of a crowd, maybe two people. He called a number. Most of the book was stock arrangements. A lot of them I had played with a kid band I was in. So I should have been at ease about reading the book. Boyd called the first number, a Basie number, probably *Down for Double*. And I knew it. But instantly I was petrified. I went into a state of total, complete fear, the likes of which I never experienced again. He said, "Two bars." And the band started to play, and I couldn't lift my horn. It weighed a thousand pounds, and I realized at that I shouldn't be there, and it was mostly fear. Boyd noticed, and he came over, and I figured this was the end of it. He leaned over and he said, "What's the matter?" I croaked out, 'I don't know.' He looked at me. He had a smile on his face. I never forgot it. He said, 'You're gonna be all right. Give it a chance.'

"To this day I thank Boyd Raeburn for giving me a chance. If he had tossed me out, if he had rejected me, I probably would have given it up. How many band leaders would have done that?"

I said, "Woody."

Milt said, "Yes, Woody might have done that. Certainly not Buddy Rich. And with Benny Goodman, it would have

been, 'Get out of here.'

"I got through. Within a minute or two the blood returned to my head and I started to play. And faster than I would have imagined, I got into the spirit of it. Before the evening was up, I was getting some valuable advice from the first trombone player about phrasing. When the evening was through, Boyd came over and said, 'Can you work next week?' So in my last year of high school, I was subbing with Boyd Raeburn in Chicago, and learning faster than anyone in my gang.

"Boyd started to build his library. The saxophone player with him was Johnny Bothwell. But Ray Degaer was better. Only Charlie Barnet would put up with him. For, as Billy May has said, in Charlie's band, there was no drinking off the stand.

"Which brings up a Lawrence Welk story, and I won't try to do Welk's accent. There was a cornet player named Rocky Rockwell on his band, who sang vocals kind of like Butch Stone and had a following. He played traditional kind of cornet, not bad. But he drank like crazy. After he'd been on the band about five years, Welk fired him. A few years went by and Welk asked somebody, 'What happened to Rocky?' The guy said, 'Some friends have been working casuals with him. And he's doing fine.' 'He's not drinking?' 'No.' So Welk called him and said, 'Rocky, I hear you're not drinking.'

"Rocky said, 'It's true. It's been two or three years.'

"So Lawrence said, 'Would you like to come back with the band?'

"And Rocky said, 'Lawrence, that's the reason I was drinking.'"

Milt went from the Teddy Powell band into the Army. He was in the service for two years: "I got drafted in late '44, and by the time they sent us over, it was '45.

"One year a rifleman. I got to Okinawa just as the horrible campaign ended. I got in a band and the war ended, and we were set down in San Francisco at the Praesidio. In the band were two ex-Kenton men, Red Dorris and a trombone player named Harry Forbes. They had been with Stan's first band. Stan was sending Harry rejected charts that he wasn't using. It was a pretty good swing band at the Praesidio. Eventually Jo Jones got in it. He and Prez went into the Army together, and Prez got thrown out. Jo was on his way overseas. He was a he-man figure, who was going to show them all. There wasn't integration, but we made such a fuss to keep him there that they put him in the drum and bugle corps.

"It was a revelation to play with him, and get to know him. Of course he had all kinds of Basie stories. We got to be good

friends. Later, I would run into him at Charlie's tavern in New York. By then he was yesterday's news in New York.

"The first day we rehearsed with the Army jazz band, we thought we knew a lot. We had all the Basie stocks. Wes Hensel, the trumpet player who ended up with Woody Herman and Les Brown, was the head man. With Jo Jones, he just went out of his mind. The warrant officer was the leader, kind of square. We were going to play a Basie thing Jo had recorded. I couldn't believe it.

"The warrant officer said, 'Are you ready, Mr. Jones?' The man said, 'On two, one two three four.' And about four bars into it, Jo wasn't playing. The warrant officer said, 'I beat off the band. Didn't you hear me?' 'Yes, I heard you.' So he did it again, Jo's not playing. We all looked back. Jo was grinning ear to ear. The leader said, 'Aren't you going to play with us?' And Jo said, 'Let's hear how you do without me.' How's that? Up until that day, I never dared dream that any dance band could play without drums, although I guess I knew about Benny Goodman and *The Earl*. Benny fired Sid Catlett and went on and did one more tune on that record date."

I said, "I know that Tommy Dorsey would run a tune down and Buddy Rich would just sit and listen, and memorize everything. His memory was legendary. Buddy told me he thought the reason his memory was so good was that he couldn't read, and had to memorize."

"Bill Harris too," Milt said. "It wasn't that he didn't know music. He was born to play music. He didn't start playing trombone until he was in his twenties. He never seriously went to a teacher. He was driving a truck for a living. He stayed away from local bands, like Elliott Lawrence. He went to jam sessions where they didn't bother with music. His name got to be known because he was so good. From what I was told, it came out of the horn the first time anyone heard him. He played like himself. So he got his first job with a big-time band, Gene Krupa. He was on the band maybe about a week. A big yelling fight, and he was gone. Then Benny Goodman. Benny liked the way he played and gave him a chance. Bill would look at the general contour of the notes, and not play the first time through. The only person on earth who could handle this was Woody. The fact that they found each other, you have to wonder. Nobody could say, listening to the records, that Bill didn't play those things immaculately. The second time through he knew what to do. He and Buddy Rich were of a kind. Jazz at the Phil was Bill's last good job, and when he started to look around, he couldn't be hired because he couldn't read fast enough. Wes Hensel once proudly

introduced us. I'd never met Bill.

"Wes had settled in Vegas. He talked them into hiring Bill for one of the pit jobs, but it was just impossible. The acts changed every week. I think Bill was the one who said, 'Forget it. This is painful for all of us.' And Bill went into business in Vegas. He opened or bought a swimming-pool supply firm. He could handle business. He had quite a mind. He did that, made some money, sold the store, and went to Florida, and he was around in the last years of his life."

I said, "He and Flip Phillips had a group there. Flip told me that he couldn't read very well either, and Benny was very patient with him. But getting back to your post-war experience . . ."

"When we were discharged, the war had been over almost a year," Milt said. "I went back to Chicago, thinking maybe I could find my way into something.

"Lee Konitz and I were still very much in touch. He had found Lennie Tristano. Lennie was a blind Chicago accordionist. I had heard of him, but never took it seriously. The word was that he had started out like Charlie Magnante, a virtuoso, and gradually he decided to play jazz, and switched to piano. When I got out of service, I called Lee and said, 'Are you still in that Louis Jordan type band?' Lee said, 'No, I've found somebody that I'm studying with him, and you've got to meet him.'

"I met Lennie at his apartment. A very quiet man. Under-spoken but very opinionated. They set up for me to take a lesson. And I was never going to be a jazz player. I started out to be a symphony player. I was pretty square for a long time. I could fake, and that's the way it was. Reading chords and playing jazz never happened. I couldn't do anything but follow the chord changes and play one, three, and five — maybe seven — in a chord. But up and down. And I always thought that Bobby Hackett, because he had been a guitar player, played that way. His cornet playing was vertical. He played up and down chords.

"Lee was thinking nothing else but Lennie Tristano. His personality even started to change, because Lennie took one over. He had ideas about what you eat, and even though he couldn't see, what you wear. He was running the show, and he loved it."

To be continued

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