

Phil Schaap...at the epicenter of jazz

Phil Schaap is unique. In my forty-plus years of interaction with jazz musicians, historians, impresarios and aficionados, I have encountered many people who are extremely, indeed impressively knowledgeable about jazz and the history of jazz. They exist on one level. Phil Schaap exists on an entirely different and higher level. Perhaps the reason for this is that he has an astonishing memory. Perhaps it is because he has exercised that memory continuously throughout his life, stocking it with information provided to him by legions of jazz musicians, written on thousands of jazz LP dust jackets, CD liner notes, books and articles. Perhaps it is because he has taught various aspects of jazz over the years at Princeton, Juilliard, and Columbia. Perhaps it is because he has been on radio in New York City almost daily for several decades presenting not only the music of jazz, but its history as well. (His radio show, called "Bird Flight," airs daily on WKCR, Columbia University's radio station, at 8:20 running until 9:40. He also hosts another show on WKCR on Saturday evening called "Traditions in Swing." Both can be accessed online at wkcr.org. He also has a marvelously resonant voice that is perfect for radio.) Whatever the reason or reasons, he is a singular phenomenon.

On the day I met him, a Friday afternoon in May of 2013, he asked me to come to the fifth floor of the building at 60th and Broadway in Manhattan, the Time Warner Center, overlooking Columbus Circle that houses, among many other enterprises, Jazz at Lincoln Center. I appeared somewhat early, and began to explore, when a rather substantial tall man with a boyish face and a shock of tousled reddish hair approached me and extended his hand. "Are you Mike Zirpolo?" he asked. I said that I was, and he said, "Phil Schaap, glad to meet you" as he pumped my hand. "Would you like to look around?"

Phil Schaap's relationship with Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) is not easily summarized. Although he teaches there in what is called "Swing University," and bears the title "curator," it would be more accurate to describe him as JALC's jazz guru in residence. In the couple of hours I was with him there, several of his colleagues stopped him to ask questions about the music and history of jazz.

Jazz at Lincoln Center has been, since 1991, affiliated with the numerous cultural institutions which collectively comprise Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. It became a full member of Lincoln Center in 1996. It was readily apparent to me as Phil Schaap showed me around the facility that JALC occupies, that it is an extremely well-funded operation. That facility consists of 100,000 square feet of space in a prime Manhattan location, and cost 131 million dollars to build. There are several performance spaces there. The largest of them, the Frederick P. Rose Theater (1,233 seats), is a magnificent concert hall that has orchestra level seating, three balconies, and superlative acoustics. Every seat has a clear view of the stage. The Allen Room, also sonically perfect, is an amphitheater with 483 seats, and a stage that is placed in front of a fifty by ninety foot window overlooking Columbus Circle and the southwest corner of Central Park. The nightclub performance venue at JALC is called Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, after a certain famous jazz trumpeter, and a certain soft drink. Phil did not explain the Coca-Cola connection and I did not ask. It too has a spectacular view of Columbus Circle and Central Park. Phil did mention that when one

is in this venue listening to jazz in the summer months, when the sun is setting after 8:30 p.m., the experience as night time Manhattan comes alive, is unforgettable.

There is also a large open space adjacent to a bank of windows with the same spectacular view called "the Atrium," where social events are held, with music of course. The interior of the JALC facility is comprised of "classrooms" of various sizes. These are spaces where the educational part of JALC, "Swing University," is accomplished. There are also offices on the interior of the JALC space.

In all, it is a most impressive place. As a result of the jazz performances that keep this facility humming with audiences, the educational component, which services hundreds of people at any given time with a varied curriculum, the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, an aggregation of jazz virtuosi under the direction of Wynton Marsalis, and abundant outreach to people of all ages and at all levels of familiarity with the music and history of jazz, JALC can rightly be termed the epicenter of jazz today.

When we finished walking through the JALC facility, Phil and I headed for a quiet place where we could talk without bothering anyone, or being bothered. He guided me into the Rose Theater, which was empty, except for a few people passing through from time to time, and quiet.

Among jazz cognoscenti and New York based jazz musicians, Phil Schaap has been well known for decades. He was born in 1951, and grew up in New York, the son of Walter Schaap, a New Yorker who went to Columbia University, then went to Paris to study at the Sorbonne and work on an encyclopedia of the French Revolution. He also was deeply interested in jazz. In Paris, he worked with Hugues Panassie' and Charles Delauney on their pioneering jazz magazine called *Jazz Hot*. Upon his return to New York, the elder Schaap worked with jazz photographer William P. Gottlieb making educational filmstrips. Phil's mother, Marjorie, was a librarian, a classically trained pianist, and a Radcliffe graduate. She too was a jazz fan, and a bohemian. The soil from which Phil would spring was from the standpoint of jazz, very fertile and nurturing. "When I was a child, jazz was constantly playing in our house."

In addition to having complete access to his parents' sizeable collection of jazz recordings, Phil began acquiring his own records at the age of six. "The first records I bought were Ruth Brown's "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean," and Ray Charles's "(Night Time Is) the Right Time." Since then, tens of thousands of recordings have come under Schaap's scrutiny.

"The first jazz performance I went to was in August of 1956, with my mother. It was the Randall's Island Jazz Festival. We saw Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, the Count Basie band, and a number of others. She took me backstage. A number of musicians were being rather forward with her, but she simply brushed them off. I didn't understand what went on that night until many years later, of course. She was a liberated woman long before womens' liberation. While this was happening, someone asked her how she liked Basie's vocalist at the time, Joe Williams. She said he was OK, but that she preferred Basie's previous vocalist, Jimmy Rushing. A man standing near her turned and said, 'Madame, I heard that, and it was lovely.' That man was Jo Jones, Papa Jo, Basie's great drummer from the 1930s and 1940s. As the conversation progressed, Jo asked me if I knew who Prince Robinson was. I said he was a tenor player for McKinney's Cotton Pickers. He was on

a Bluebird 78 that my father owned. Jo Jones was flabbergasted. When he regained his composure, he said to my mother, ‘Madame, you’ve got yourself a new babysitter.’”

“This was the beginning of a series of jazz ‘grandfathers’ coming into my life. Where we lived, in Hollis in Queens, was near to where many musicians like Milt Hinton and Buck Clayton lived. Many others came into my world through Jo Jones. Jo did babysit me. But the way he handled that was unlike how most babysitters would have. He would play records for me from my parents’ collection, and we would discuss them. He once played me a Basie record featuring the great tenor saxophonist Herschel Evans, ‘Blue and Sentimental.’ Jo called me ‘Mister.’ ‘Mister, what does that sound like to you?’ It sounds friendly, I said, I was about seven at the time. He then said, ‘That’s right. The first thing to know is that Herschel Evans is your friend.’”

“So that was the beginning of my own personal music training. The quality of a music teacher is really important. I was incredibly lucky in this regard. Over the years, I had many jazz masters as my informal music teachers. In addition to Jo Jones, they included Eddie Durham, Lawrence Lucie, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, a group of bop musicians from Brooklyn including Randy Weston, and many, many more. Among the many things they taught me was how to really *listen* to the music, and hear what is going on. This is a big part of what I teach at Juilliard.”

Sitting in the Rose Theater with Phil Schaap, a native New Yorker, inspired me to ask him about historically significant recording spaces and performance venues in Manhattan. Among the recording spaces we discussed: Victor’s fabled studio A on East 24th, between Madison and Third, where the majority of Victor and Bluebird recordings were made in the years 1930-1950; Liederkrantz Hall, which was on East 58th, between Park and Lexington, was used by Columbia; Webster Hall, on East 11th, between Third and Fourth Avenues; the old NBC studios at 711 Fifth Avenue (near 55th), called World Broadcasting in the later 1930s through the 40s, then Fine Sound Studios; the ARC studio at 1776 Broadway, at 57th; Columbia’s 799 Seventh Avenue studio (at 52nd), later used by the legendary sound engineer/producer Phil Ramone; Columbia’s Thirtieth Street Studio (207 East 30th), where Miles Davis’s “Kind of Blue” album was recorded. Among the performance venues: the original Birdland at 1678 Broadway (east side), just north of 52nd; Eddie Condon’s original club at 47 West 3rd, in Greenwich Village; the Village Gate; the Village Vanguard, still very much in business, at 178 Seventh Avenue; the uptown Cotton Club (142nd and Lenox), and the later downtown version at 48th and Broadway (later the Latin Quarter, which I well remember from my early visits to NYC in the 1970s); the Savoy Ballroom, the Apollo Theater, the Paramount and Loew’s-State Theaters, the Pennsylvania Hotel, Manhattan Center, the Lincoln Hotel. A vast amount of the history of jazz has been played out in these places.

The discussion then turned to the ineffable Duke Ellington, who recorded and performed in many of these venues. I mentioned the unorthodox instrumental blends Ellington often used, and how many people cannot identify what instruments they are hearing in various Ellington recordings. This prompted Phil to begin an analysis of how to listen to jazz most profitably.

(At this point, I sensed that Phil was getting on a roll. It is amazing how inspired he is about listening to jazz, hearing what is going on, and then explaining it. Here is the balance of our colloquy.)

MZ—But when you are teaching the virtuosi at Juilliard, and you're hearing things that they don't hear, why?

Because the whole concept of scrutinizing music as an event of listening is underutilized in contemporary jazz quarters. And that would be comprehensive; it would be the buffs, meaning the fan base, and many of the musicians. And the reason why I know that is because I'm old enough to remember how we used to listen to the records. My primary training came from Jo Jones. He'd take the time to listen to the same record with me, over and over again. Very often, we would listen to 78s together, so we would spend time listening to the same tune over and over.

MZ---He would do that with you?

Oh sure.

MZ---What would be the objective?

To understand.

MZ---But what would he say to you to get your antennae so that you would be receiving things?

The younger you are, the more one-dimensional or rudimentary it is. Like, do you notice the tenor solo? Is it Prez? Or the trumpet, is it Sweets?

MZ---And he took you through all of that?

Yes. Then he had me do it on my own to see how far I could go, and then he would jump in. Sometimes you would run into dilemmas, as for example is that Sweets or Buck Clayton? The eight-bar trumpet solo on "Jive at Five," is by Sweets Edison. To me now, that's really easy to discern. But there were still some cross-talk issues between Sweets Edison and Buck Clayton the longer they sat next to each other, so that they began to borrow knick-knacks of each other's playing.

On the other hand, when I asked Buck Clayton who is it, and he said "I don't know," I'm sure he was kidding. There was a playfulness involved in this which I think is fun because it keeps you on your toes.

Then, when I started hanging out with the Brooklyn beboppers, I ran into a completely different animal, yet still similar in certain ways. This is going to be a recurrent theme: things are exactly the same, only different. The way that they listened to music was based on the widespread existence of LPs then. (This would have been in the 1960s.) In that was the first wave of reissues, like Victor's "Vintage" series, and occasionally the Decca "Jazz Heritage" series. The Columbia device was to create an anthology that always introduced something that you couldn't get anywhere else, and then you'd have to go searching for the 78. It was very hard. But they knew what they were doing. It was run by collectors who were getting stuff out. With Decca, I think it was totally accidental. If you have the Andy Kirk album "Instrumentally Speaking" it was called, it had a red, pinkish cover, the "Wednesday Night Hop" on that was an unlisted alternate. (Phil was absolutely correct: "Wednesday Night Hop" is on, Decca/MCA 1308—1980-MZ).

MZ---Really! I'll have to go home and listen to that.

It's great.

MZ---How did you know that that was an unlisted alternate take, going backwards?

In 1978, I listened to the 78 for the first time, and they were *different!*

The way the Brooklyn beboppers used alternate takes was completely different. They would say, OK Phil, bring all the alternate takes. And then we would have a party. This started with Randy Weston. I'm old enough to have been at his father's restaurant once, at the beginning of my experiences with that group of musicians. Then others carried on with it for a time, including Ed Lewis, the tiger they called him, and then Harold Cumberbatch, the baritone player, Willie Jones, the drummer. The way they did it was to get all the takes and then listen to them while you are having some food and beverage.

MZ---This is how many people Phil?

Eight, seven, whoever showed up. We would listen to this series of alternate takes. Eventually, we would get down to deciding which of the alternate takes was the best. Sometimes, it would get quite argumentative. But they would work towards a decision. Their follow-up was what was so different. After they decided which take was best, that is all they wanted to hear. They'd say, "that's OK Phil, don't play take A of 'Quasimodo,' play take B twice."

At some point during my teen years, the Dizzy Gillespie Victor "Vintage" came out. On it was an alternate take of "52nd Street Theme." (Right again, Phil: "52nd Street Theme" is on Victor Vintage LPV-530---1966-MZ). When the Brooklyn cats heard that, they went crazy! They would hit me in the side with their elbows and say, "dig that, 'Rain on the Roof!'" It is an obscure song, but Dizzy started his solo by quoting "Rain on the Roof."

MZ---Buddy Rich recorded that in the late 1940s with his band.

Yes. So after they heard this alternate take, they never wanted to hear the issued take ever again. So I wondered what that was all about. It took me years to unravel that. Unfortunately, most of them are no longer alive, though Randy Weston still is, so I had to figure this out myself. When Dizzy first started playing "52nd Street Theme" as a set closing device, which is still how it is used to this day, he always quoted "Rain on the Roof." But when the record came out, it wasn't there. (For what it is worth, the probable reason for this is that the Victor producer/A&R man likely told Dizzy NOT to quote "Rain on the Roof," because that might have created a copyright infringement problem for Victor. MZ) So 1946 passes, and 1956 and into the 1960s, and there is no "Rain on the Roof," and then a high school student from Queens plays them a version of "52nd Street Theme" with "Rain on the Roof" in it, and they went out of their gourds. Although I had many audiences with Dizzy, I never did ask him about that.

But I have asked many people things like that. I asked Roy Eldridge about the two takes on "Wabash Stomp." I got him to pick which was the better of those two takes on the air. He did that and picked the alternate, and then he wanted to talk about why he thought that was the better take.

He chose it because in the key moment of the solo, he sounds more like Roy Eldridge and less like the trumpet concepts of jazz that he was then building upon.

MZ---What year was that recorded?

That was his first record date as a leader, January 23, 1937. They rejected the alternate take because of one fluffed note in the melody chorus. So at the climax of his second solo appearance on the issued take of "Wabash Stomp," he does a Louis Armstrong gliss. On the alternate take, he does a Roy Eldridge zestiness into the stratosphere, which of course is more Roy Eldridge. Nevertheless, some of Roy's licks are really Louis's licks, and that is overlooked.

This kind of fascination is at the core of *really listening* to jazz.

MZ---Are you doing this with your students at Juilliard?

Yes, but you and I are doing it on a high level right now.

MZ---But are you doing essentially the same thing in terms of them *really listening*, and then you asking them what they are getting out of it?

I'm not trying to get them to emulate the Jo Jones or Brooklyn beboppers' approach, I'm getting them to *listen to the music, and hear it*.

MZ---Most people, even some very good musicians, don't do that. Why don't they do it? Are they more focused on mastering a certain instrument from a technical standpoint?

Well actually, what they do in terms of their own music-making is their own business. But why people don't listen to music as they once did is the bigger issue for me because I'm about audience development. If we don't replenish the audience, it really doesn't matter what they think they're doing, because there will be nobody to hear it. On the other hand, I don't think the music is going to improve until the audience improves because they won't demand it.

MZ---I agree with you, and not only from a jazz standpoint. Near where I live in Ohio is a tremendous orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, and their audience is shrinking. Where are the people going to come from who are going to sit in the concert hall and listen to and enjoy and understand the music?

If we don't start creating them, they are not going to come from anywhere because they won't exist.

MZ---We now have people on school boards who are cutting all of the music out because they say it is unnecessary. Really, where are we going musically, especially with regard to the music you and I want to talk about?

How much do you want to talk in one afternoon? If cultural exposure and continuum is what our chat is about, we simply can't touch all the bases because this is as vast as any educational question that can be raised or discussed. But it needs to be discussed. In the microcosm of a jazz entity, I am discussing it here, and also everywhere I go.

MZ---Is that your mission?

Well, it's my skill-set. My real mission would be just to sit back and enjoy it the way I did when I was growing up.

MZ---But you and I are now in the fourth quarter. I know that you are aware of that.

Yes, I am. Whatever is going to happen, you can't affect it after you are not around, so this is crunch time. But it's also crunch time in terms of continuum. If you have something that you think is of quality, you have an advantage as long as you are within two generations of whom you are trying to reach. It's like someone taking certain information and impressions from his or her father, and then investigating all of that and falling in love with it, and then they teach it, and then you have continuum. Most culture is passed on by a generational passing of the torch, and it's a perfectly good model. This isn't about just education or jazz; it is about continuing the human cultural existence.

So what happens if you let it elapse? It will then become invisible to a new generation. Access to it will be unlikely, maybe even prevented. Then you have the makings of what was once called the Dark Ages. Getting out of that is a) hard; and b) takes too long. So it's much simpler for continuity to use the generational process of passing the torch while it is still operational. In the case of this cultural phenomenon called jazz, we are now at the point where the original generations of creators are gone. There is a wall now separating us from the originators. So we've got to set up a system by which it can be passed on. (MZ note: That is what the various educational programs at Jazz at Lincoln Center are about.)

This is not about marshaling esoteric historical information. Even though I bring the goods historically, as you know, I stress more musical applications in what I teach. But the esoteric information has a use. It is a part of the historical continuum, which is very important so that one can present the clearest picture possible. In other words, I probably could name most of the great rhythm guitarists in the history of jazz, in sequence. But that is really meaningless in itself. What is important though, is the lesson I learned from Lawrence Lucie about how the four-piece rhythm section worked. He didn't teach me that because I played or wanted to play rhythm guitar. He taught me that because it explains a certain very important function in jazz performance. That, I think, is valuable to pass on to anyone interested in jazz performance.

This leads to another subject that has two levels. The quality of music, really a number of musical skills, are not clearly in evidence in many jazz training programs. By saying this, I know am causing trouble for people I truly love. I understand the heartfelt sincerity in their approach. But they are training performers to replenish a bandstand that is already overstocked, in the absence of any audience development. My students at Juilliard hear this from me. They are astonished when I tell them that as a kid playing B-flat trumpet during the holiday season playing parties, I once had five gigs in one day. They say to me, "I had six gigs *all of last year!*" Not only that, I was probably paid more in that one day in 1964-65-66 money than they were paid for the gigs they played last year. And I teach in the graduate school, so they all already have degrees, and they are all great musicians. So there is something wrong. That is the first level.

The second level is that there is not really a true understanding of the many aspects of music that are deployable in jazz, but are real regardless of whether jazz exists or not. You mentioned earlier

about Duke Ellington's placement of instruments in the musical stack, well, there are very few arranging classes. I teach from a non-performance perspective. I haven't made a gig since March 11, 1974. I need a pitch-pipe and a prayer to tune a record so it's in the correct key it was played at, and I'm talking to people who have all of this at hand immediately. So when I ask them, "what's the difference between a good lead alto player and a great one," I don't get an answer because the concept is so foreign to them.

MZ---These are graduate students at Juilliard?

Anybody at Juilliard. This concept is foreign to them.

MZ---Where are you going with this? Don't give away the answer yet. I'm trying to think of what differentiates a good from a *great* lead alto player. To me, when I think of a great first alto player, I think of Willie Smith, or Marshal Royal, or Toots Mondello, or Les Robinson, who was Artie Shaw's first alto for years, or even Skeets Herfurt, who played first alto on hundreds of recording sessions and even played with Lawrence Welk's band on TV. Each of these guys had a great singing sound, and they could *command* a saxophone section. They didn't dominate, though Willie Smith and Marshal Royal came close. But they utterly shaped the sound, phrasing and dynamics of any saxophone section in which they played.

PS---The leader of the saxophone section has to make the disparate timbres and dynamic approaches to playing of five or four saxophonists each having their own individual approach to playing the instrument blend so they sound as one. The volume disparities have to be trimmed by direction so that they could all hear each other, and hear the lines at their appropriate importance to the harmonic stack. The leader has to understand this, work towards it with the other saxophonists, and then do it with them in performance. That is good. *Great* is that you also know who is playing lead alto when you hear the music, that that person has imposed his own individuality on the entire saxophone section.

MZ---But you and I have invested decades of listening and studying to get to the point where we can identify certain lead alto players. How realistic is it to expect someone to arrive at that point in less time and with less work?

PS---I don't think it necessarily has to take decades. There is no harm-no foul if someone *never* gains these skill sets. Lennie Tristano used to yell at me, and I used to either be fearful or dislike him for doing that. He had been dead for a good twenty years when finally Sal Mosca explained to me, "Sure Lennie yelled at you—he was just trying to save you some time." But it could take time. Some people listen to the music and say it's so blue, it's so green, I'm in heaven... That's good enough, man. If you are having fun listening to music, don't let me mess up your fun. But what I'm asserting is that if you can tell Hymie Shertzer's playing lead alto, you are now upon a new vista of joy.

MZ---Or first trumpet players.

PS---The job of a lead trumpet player is very different. Paquito D'Rivera (a frequent guest with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, and producer of other concerts at JALC), Sherman Irby, our lead

alto most of the time, and Marcus Printup, to a lesser extent (in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra), they want me to reenact the rehearsals I attended.

MZ---How do you do that?

PS---Well, I have a good memory. I went to many rehearsals conducted by Eddie Durham, and I tell them what Eddie Durham did. And then they think, why would he do that? I then tell them why Eddie Durham did this or that. I don't do this with lay listeners. I don't tell musicians how to play; I'm telling them how certain people who played went about it. What about the people who notice that Dave Tough is very different from Gene Krupa?

MZ---Is day different from night?

PS---Let's take it from jazz 101 to jazz 201. Hearing individuality and style is probably the most important and joyful of the listener's skill sets. Most people come to the table with something they like, for example Coltrane. I will play something by a tenor saxophone player and ask, is that Coltrane? Most of them say no or yes, and are right, for their particular guy.

Then I move on to something else. For most people who listen to jazz at a fundamental level, the rhythm is the main attraction. Obviously, it is a prerequisite and a necessity. The rhythm section is a creation of jazz. Why is the music constructed the way it is? Do you perceive the drummer? Yes, I love the drums. The drummer is doing something...who is the drummer? They invariably can't identify the drummer because that's the hardest skill for the most likable basic component. People are attracted to the rhythm, the drummer is typically most responsible for the driving force that is the attraction, yet their identity is the least perceivable. That really is a paradox.

Listening training should not be a chore. Of course most people never think of listening to music on an analytical level. For most people, listening to music is fun, and that is as it should be. I don't want to spoil that. This is not rudimentary education. It is cultural training for something that is enjoyable. And that is the only way it's going to survive. If it's something you think you have to do with a checklist...

MZ---Some people do approach it that way.

PS---Well, God love them, because we do need people who are dutiful. There's a student at Swing University, Melissa Jones, who doesn't like abstract improvisation. But she understood from the courses she did like that understanding is important. So she took Ben Young's free jazz course, and she still doesn't like abstract jazz improvisation. But now, she has respect for Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor, and even for contemporary performers like William Parker, people who are really genuine, they just feel differently... Different strokes...

Back to listening training. Here is a short-cut: listen to something that is already preidentified. Listen to it a lot. It's like handing an orange to a baby. You say, "this is an orange." There is universal agreement on that. The baby holds it and looks at it and feels it. The message is then transmitted: this is an orange. When he is later handed an apple, he knows that it is not an orange. He can then learn what an apple is in the same way that he learned what an orange is.

So if we apply this to drummers, I suggest that you listen to Art Blakey because he is, in my view, the most insistent of anyone I've heard upon saying with his drumming: "I am Art Blakey." I'm not saying that Art Blakey is better than Chick Webb or Billy Higgins, I'm saying that he says "I'm Art Blakey" very clearly in his playing. If you listen to Art's playing for a time, and then hear a record somewhere where you have no information, and it's a recording with Art Blakey on it, you are going to say, hey, that's Art Blakey.

MZ---That will be when a door opens.

PS---Then you get into the thing, well Davey Tough can't really play, but he's great.

MZ---Another paradox.

PS---That's the arts. Just dig it!

MZ---Apropos of this, I have over time become much more aware of how brilliant Count Basie was as a pianist. He was like a nuclear reaction in any band he played in. This is the analog of the Dave Tough thing. He played so little and you are wondering: why is this happening the way it's happening?

PS---That reminds me of the wonderful classical musicians I teach. They are all much better musicians than I am. But I'm interested in something that is foreign to them, something that they don't understand, and they want me to tell them about things like that. For instance, Bud Powell. Typically, classical music students do not understand his greatness. They actually point out things in his playing that they see as huge flaws. For example, they say, "he keeps both hands at the center of the keyboard. That is so foolish. He should use the entire keyboard. He doesn't have much dynamic range. The instrument can be played loud and soft." So obviously, they don't hear what he *does* do. I debate with them because Bud Powell, more than any pianist I've heard in my life, when he started to play a solo, no one ever had to elevate the mike to bring up his dynamic level. And this on recordings with fixed mike positions, and maybe three mikes, if that.

But from their point of view, they have all kinds of insights about music that give me listening lessons. I'm a Charlie Parker freak. (An understatement.-MZ) I offer you the sign of the flatted fifth. And they say to me after hearing Charlie Parker, "I don't dig Bird."

MZ---What are they bringing to that? Is it usually something relating to instrumental technique?

PS---It is because one day I played a Bud Powell recording of "Cherokee," to illustrate something about Bud Powell. But on that recording, Sonny Stitt played alto, and they said, "Who is that?" And I said, "It's Sonny Stitt." And I'll never forget this, they asked, "Why didn't you play us *that instead of Charlie Parker?* That's great! *Can't you tell?*"

MZ---Why? Why did they think that was great? What was their insight into that?

PS---I may not be able to answer that question with the profound understanding they have from their perspective. I just said to them, "He's playing Bird cleaner than Bird." I also pointed out that the quality of performance of the mimic may have been clouding their understanding of the

innovator. Sonny Stitt played the saxophone in a way that a classical musician would revere. Johnny Griffin was one of the few jazz musicians who would rather listen to Stitt than Bird.

MZ---Interesting.

PS---There is a lot to be learned from musicians having a different perspective, or even from one's self after the passage of time. Recently on "Bird Flight," I played a recording by Bird of when he was on the predecessor to the "Tonight Show," which was called "Broadway Open House." Milton De Lugg was the conductor of the studio band. He's still alive, by the way, and still working. He's the consultant for the music on the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

MZ---Milton De Lugg has got to be 95 years old.

PS---I think he's 93.

MZ---Didn't he write "Bebop Spoken Here?"

PS---Yes.

MZ---Speaking of elders, Van Alexander is still alive.

PS---And he is 98, and doing great. Here's one of his jokes. When people ask him what the secret to a long life has been, he will look at them seriously and then say: "I never touched cigars, alcohol, or women...until I was eleven." (Note: Van Alexander recently assisted the producers at Mosaic Records with the new Chick Webb/Ella Fitzgerald CD box set. The producers said this about him: "We were fortunate to enlist his spectacular memory in cleaning up the discography from these sessions by correcting many past mistakes and discrepancies."—MZ)

PS---Speaking of Van Alexander, I'm sure you are familiar with the Chick Webb recording of "Liza." Well, I think the arrangement on that was written by Van Alexander.

MZ---The conventional wisdom is that Benny Carter wrote that arrangement. What makes you say that Van Alexander wrote that Phil? Did you ask Van that question?

PS---Well, Benny Carter and Ed Berger (a co-author of the Benny Carter biography--MZ), couldn't answer my questions about that. My father knew Benny Carter. They came back to the United States from Europe on a ship that docked at a pier on the west side of Manhattan on the morning of May 2, 1938. Chick Webb's recording of "Liza" was made on May 2, 1938. I asked Benny if he had been in contact with Chick Webb before that recording date, if he had written it on the ship and brought it to the record date and conducted it. He said, "No, no, I wrote that years before." But the instrumentation of the Webb band in 1938 was different from years earlier, certainly different from when Carter had had a brief association with the Webb band (in early 1931—MZ), and the band and jazz had evolved so much between then and when "Liza" was recorded.

MZ---Did Benny Carter write an arrangement on "Liza" that Chick Webb ever used?

PS---I think he may have, and that Chick used it at one point in time, perhaps. But I am quite confident that the arrangement recorded on May 2, 1938 was not written by Benny Carter. At that time, Van Alexander was writing many arrangements for Chick Webb.

MZ---But did you ask Van Alexander?

PS---Yes.

MZ---And did he say he did?

PS---Yes.

MZ---Well then that's it.

PS---It would be nice to have them both saying it. But the music always tells the truth.

PS---Speaking of Benny Carter, I'm more than in awe of him. He had incredible ability in many things. Anyone who knows anything about jazz history knows about his great musical versatility. But if he chose to, he could do what you do or I do, and do it better. He could have been a great lawyer, anything. I wanted him to appear with me on my radio show, and he didn't want to do it. Finally, he made a commitment to show up on a given Wednesday. He did, and at first, he really messed it up. He looked at me and saw that I was uneasy about how he was performing. And then, suddenly, he became the best radio show host imaginable.

One more thing about Benny Carter: the Chocolate Dandies record from October 10, 1933, called "Krazy Kapers," Sid Catlett is not the drummer on that, and there are definitely drums on it.

MZ---How do you know this Phil?

PS---Because the music tells the truth. 1) There are drums on the recording—you can hear them. 2) It's not Sid Catlett's playing. This comes with an acquired ability. If you listen to the drums on the first three recordings from that date, this being the fourth one recorded at that session, Sid was the drummer on those. This comes from the discography, which tells you the order of the recordings. It also sounds like Sid's playing. On "Krazy Kapers," the fourth tune made that day, the sound of the drums is entirely different. Mezz Mezzrow, who was a family friend, told me he was at that recording date, just to watch and listen, and that he played the drums on that because Sid had to leave. Even though he said that to me, there are books written that in retrospect tend to dislike Mezz. But that doesn't mean that he was incapable of telling the truth occasionally. He was there. To me that is superior evidence of what happened. As a lawyer, you work with evidence... (Note: Phil is emphatic in his opinion that Mezzrow was in fact the drummer on "Krazy Kapers." MZ)

MZ---I love when we talk about evidence. I go through that process all the time, not only as a lawyer, but as somebody trying to figure out things about music. I have read or heard many assertions over the years saying this or that was true, and then I begin to gather evidence, facts related to the assertion, to test the truth of the assertion. Very often, conventional wisdom is not the truth.

(To further clarify—or confuse---this issue, when I was writing this article, I consulted “Benny Carter...a Life in American Music” by Morroe Berger, Edward Berger and James Patrick, (1982), Scarecrow Press, at page 51, to see what information was contained there about this recording date. Here is what is on page 51: “On ‘Krazy Kapers,’ the supposed replacement of Sid Catlett, who probably had another engagement, by the ubiquitous Mezz Mezzrow is disputed by John Hammond who states, ‘Mezzrow tried to play the drums, but I asked him to leave the studio.’” The Hammond quote is taken from page 36 of the Time-Life “Giants of Jazz” volume of recordings and notes on Benny Carter. That booklet explained that Hammond was the producer of that date, so he was also there. Consequently, we must decide if Mezz Mezzrow or John Hammond remembered this incident correctly many decades after it actually occurred. MZ)

PS---Here is another example. Today I discussed on the air that Bird took a lot of heat for not showing up at this concert in Paris. Bird said that he got sick and went home. He said that in the early days of December of 1950 he was in the hospital for treatment of his ulcer. Now this evidence is coming from Bird, and he is known to lie. And he is also known for not showing up for reasons that are not related to his health. So what is on the other side? Why would he blow a big pay day? Bird is in France. He just turned thirty years old. He got there on Tuesday and the pay day is on Friday. And he gets really sick. I can't call him a liar because he is the only source of information about this, at least the only source I know of. No one has said he didn't have an ulcer attack. He is in France alone, and does not speak French. So does it make sense that he would conclude that he should go home to see his own doctor? This is certainly plausible. But the conventional wisdom on this is that he blew off this big concert because he was a flake and a junkie. It might be true, but on the other hand Bird did have an ulcer problem then and for the rest of his life.

MZ---The conventional wisdom on that provides a convenient explanation. A lot of jazz scholarship is convenient but not necessarily accurate.

PS—In your book, you did not offer convenient explanations. You challenged them, and if you couldn't arrive at a conclusion supported by solid evidence, you left the explanation open. Very often, we simply cannot know after the passage of a lot of time, exactly what happened. The honest thing to do is to say, after you have looked at the evidence, this is inconclusive.

MZ—But people seem impelled to provide some explanation, I've never understood that.

PS---It has something to do with the amateur status of many who have written or commented about jazz and its history. The first wave of jazz scholarship came from enthusiasts, and thank heavens they existed or we would have a lot less than we have.

MZ---Their enthusiasm was wonderful. But as scholars and historians, they often left something to be desired.

At this point, I asked Phil if there was some place where we could play a CD. We then walked from the Rose Theater toward the JALC offices. On the way, we encountered trumpeter Wallace Roney in the corridor. He and Phil exchanged greetings, and Phil introduced me and very graciously mentioned my book about Bunny Berigan. Roney asked me several questions about the book and how he could buy it.

We moved on to an office that was small and cramped, and occupied by a gentleman who was working. Phil asked him if we could borrow his computer for a minute, and soon the music of Bunny Berigan was pouring out of the computer's speakers. I wanted to play a previously unissued track of Berigan's music for Phil, and watch him listen and then react to the music. The track was "Royal Garden Blues," which has now been issued on Hep CD-95, "Bunny Berigan---Swingin' and Jumpin'." As the music played, a smile came across his face. At the conclusion of the track he said: "Bunny was wonderful. Was the tenor Georgie Auld? He was still learning how to really swing. Who was the trombone soloist?" When I told him Sonny Lee, he said, "he played an excellent jazz solo. Was the drummer Johnny Blowers?" (It was.) "He also played very well."

We then discussed how that recording came to be made, the excellent fidelity of its sound, and talked a bit about Johnny Blowers, whom Phil had known.

At this point, I had to leave. So Phil ushered me through a maze of corridors and elevators to a fire exit door which opened at street level onto west Sixtieth, just west of Broadway. He walked out into the balmy spring day with me. The sidewalk was crowded with people hurrying home at the end of the work week. "I really enjoyed our conversation Mike," Phil said. "Not half as much as I did, I'm sure." I said. "This has been a unique experience for me." We shook hands again, and Phil disappeared into the exit door. It had been a most enjoyable and informative afternoon for me at the epicenter of jazz.