Jazz Backstory Podcast
Episode #28 — Scrolling Down the Leader Board

[audio introduction]
Welcome to Jazz Backstory, Episode 28. We have been discussing our big band leaders and our interviewees have shared fascinating stories about Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Benny Goodman. This will be our final episode on the topic and I am calling it, "Scrolling Down the Leader Board" a sampling of anecdotes from sidemen and from the leaders themselves:

[[audio interlude] "The Buddy System]
My parents' record collection included a few choice big band LPs, including the aforementioned Ellington, Basie and Goodman as well as Glenn Miller. As a beginning fifth grade saxophonist, the classic Glenn Miller tune, "In the Mood," caught my ear and I spent considerable practice time learning that distinctive saxophone melody. The Miller band's recordings out sold even the King of Swing and were a staple on juke boxes across America. In a four-year span, starting in 1939, the Glenn Miller band scored 69 top ten hits, more than Elvis or the Beatles ever achieved. But in 1938, Glenn was searching for that magic sound. Saxophonist Jerry Jerome had a steady gig with Harry Reiser and the Cliqout Club Eskimos (that's right folks, rock & roll never had a monopoly on odd band names). Glenn made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Here is from Jerry's interview in1996:

JJ: So Glenn came over and said he liked my playing and would I like to join the band, he'd like to have me. I said, "Glenn, what does it pay?" Because I was still interested in going back to medical school. He says, "$45 a week." I said, "That's that I'm getting with Harry Reiser." And I couldn't see any advancement that way. He says, "Yeah, we're going to grow. We're going to be great, we're going to be great, and I'm recording next week." I says, "Really?" "Yeah," he says "recording at Decca." "Oh, that sounds pretty good to me." Decca. Recording. So I made my decision, I left Harry and went with Glenn. And then we went to work. And it was work.

MR: He was a task master?

JJ: Oh, unbelievable. I didn't mind, you know it was all new for me you know. He was a task master but he wanted perfection. And he was also struggling for an identity. You know in those days, band leaders had identity, a hook.

MR: A sound.

JJ: A sound, something. You know even a guy like Kay Kyser would — his sound was his personality. Just introducing the band, "Here comes sassy Sully Mason to sing a tune." But that was how you could identify him. Or Shep Fields blowing water through a straw, you know a bubbling rhythm. Whatever pleases you you know. But Glenn was a great experience, a great learning experience. I learned what playing notes properly is right and

how to really play by the marks. Glenn would say, “Crescendo — diminuendo” and he says, “keep it under — keep it, go above.” But one thing that comes to my mind that’s so cute, when I played my solo of “I Got Rhythm” with Glenn, I listened to it and it’s a chorus and you know you can do a thousand of those on a recording, you never do the same thing, you’re improvising, you know. So we went out on our first one-nighter after we did our recording somewhere along the line, and I got out and played, and played a totally different chorus as I heard it, which is a soloist’s preference I would think. Glenn came over to me and he said, “Jerry, when you stand up and play your solo, I wish you’d play the one that’s on the record.” I says, “Why?” He says, “Well” he says, “I consider that part of the arrangement. People expect it. They buy the record and they expect to hear that.” Oh, wow. The stock went down.

MR: I sometimes wonder, some of those classic trumpet solos in some of the Miller arrangements, were they improvised first and then someone actually wrote them out. You know like in “String of Pearls?” And it’s almost like what you’re saying, that solo, even though it might have been improvised first, became a part of the arrangement.

JJ: Without question. You know and now like there have been a lot of Miller bands that have come along the line and I notice that most of them that stand up, play the solos that are on the record. And I think that’s again for identity. To makes it sound more like the Miller band. So he had a point. But the Part B of that statement is that when I joined Benny Goodman, and I got up and stood up and played “Undecided” on a one-nighter, and I played what I’d played on the record, and Benny came over to me and he said, “Did you like what you played on the record?” “Oh,” I said, “thank you, Benny.” Yeah. See that’s the difference. Benny didn’t — you know.

MR: Glenn Miller was not jazz band per se, it was more of a dance —

JJ: Yeah. And the best. Really he was great. His tempos were great, and he strove for an audience reaction too. What do you like? What can I play for you?

Jerry points out a couple of considerations that musicians weighed when joining a big band, first the bread, 45 bucks a week? And this business of having to learn the improvised solo you played on a recording so you could reproduce it every night. Glenn Miller wanted that, the King of Swing didn’t buy it.

I suppose we could create leader categories: the nicest, the meanest, the cheapest, the best (fill in the blank with an instrument) etcetera. Stan Kenton would hands down win the most controversial category. You would assume that a swing band leader, playing swing music for swing dancers, during the swing era would strive to swing. Not so with Stan. He had an experimental and progressive sound in mind, and hired arrangers who brought elements of classical, Latin and programmatic music to the mix. Trombonist Eddie Bert described this seeming contradiction.

MR: What did you think of his music?

EB: Well he featured trombones. That's why I wanted to go with that band. And he was very popular. I mean guys were poll winners in the band, like Shelly Manne and Art Pepper and all them. So I figured well let me go. Because Kai had done great on the band and Kai and I were friends. So I went with the band. And it was like a family that band. It was great. He was a great guy to work for. Great.

MR: Some people didn't think he swung very good.

EB: No. That he didn't.

MR: Okay.

EB: One night we played in Mankato, Minnesota. Mankato Ballroom. And generally Stan would like spread out. But this night the bandstand was small. So we were like this. And the band started swinging. And of course we all wanted to swing. So the band was swinging and he stopped it. He said, "This is not Basie. This is Stan Kenton." So we were looking at each other like damn.

MR: At that point how would you stop swinging?

EB: I know. We all looked at each other like what is he talking about. I mean Shelly is a swinger. You know, Shelly Manne.

MR: Yeah. Don't swing.

EB: Well we always used to go out after the gig and go blow somewhere, wherever we were. But when you get on the bandstand it was Stan Kenton.

MR: But people who came to Kenton expecting to dance, was that a problem?

EB: We used to play the "Concerto to End All Concertos" and that was like all different tempos. And I swear I'd see people dancing. I don't know what they were doing but they were dancing. You know you'd have the crowd in the front they were all standing there, and then in the back would be people dancing. Well maybe they caught the changes, I don't know.

"Maybe the dancers caught the changes." We'll revisit that phrase shortly. Stan Kenton confounded audiences and critics alike but his fan base was fanatic and loyal. Stan was one of the first jazz educators, booking the band for concerts and clinics at high schools and colleges across the country and frequently finding future sidemen in the process. In 1972, the Kenton band came to my alma mater, SUNY Fredonia. One of the tenor players said he would recommend me to fill his chair in the near future. I'm still waiting for that phone call.

[audio interlude]

Drummer Buddy Rich would place first or close to it in more than one of our fictitious band leader categories. He is arguably the greatest of all time on his instrument and he could be off the charts with angry rants. Some Jazz Backstory listeners may have heard the infamous " bus

tapes", a surreptitious recording of Mr. Rich vigorously berating his band. I have chosen not to seek it out. Similar to Benny Goodman, the Buddy Rich anecdotes depend on which musician is telling the tale. Saxophonist Don Menza, perhaps the most notable of Rich sidemen and famous for his incredible a capella sax solo on Channel One Suite, offers his opinion.

DM: Buddy Rich was the only real band leader I ever worked for. He told you truths, mediocrity did not exist in his vocabulary. He was very hard on people and he expected them to give as much as he did in the band. But if something went wrong with the band, I mean if something happened, if there was any kind of scene, he pushed everybody out of the way and he'd say, "You deal with me, this is my band." And some of the leaders, and they were all very good, they'd back up and, "It's your problem, you deal with it, you got it." Buddy was incredible. He knew exactly what he wanted out of a piece of music, and he'd sit out front, he didn't read — he had a lot of insecurities and he never gave you that impression by how he played. He had a lot of insecurities. He didn't read any music. He didn't know a lot about music, except he knew what was good and he knew what he liked. Nothing more, nothing less. And if you stood up to play and you stepped on it, you can be sure you'd never stand up and play again. The people that put him down are the people that were mediocre and that couldn't play. And they hated him. I think it's very simple. I mean you talk to Sweets Edison about Buddy and he says, "Oh man," he gets like rekindled. You'd get ready to play, and Buddy'd be there and he'd be propelling you along, making it easier for you to play.

MR: Well you know I have to ask you about the recording you made of course. Even in the *Grove Dictionary of Jazz* it mentions the "Channel One Suite." My roommate and I just used to sit and listen to that piece over and over and over. And I was one of the unfortunate people that, of course our college band got the arrangement, and I had the part. So no matter what you did, you could play really well, but everybody's, "Well it sure wasn't much like what Don played."

DM: You know I played it every night and I had a bag of tricks, and the bag kept getting bigger and bigger, and I had all the space in the world. He never told me, hey cut it short. Never once said that, no matter how long or how absurd or bizarre I got with what I played, he said, "You got it, that's you." And people said you have to see him on the drums in back of you — he's got his foot up on the bass drum and he's listening and looking at me, laughing you know, and like sometimes he'd egg me on — "Yeah, that's it, play, yeah," he'd be screaming at me you know. Okay one night Joe Romano and I partied all day in New York. My daughter had just been born, this was October of '68. And we were working at The Riverboat. And Joe Romano and I walked in and I had a box of Havana cigars and we had been drinking all day. And we walked in and we did look a bit disheveled, you know, and I'm trying not to look at him. And at The Riverboat they had buttons on the floor right where I sat, and I had to press the button to turn the lights on and there was another button to step on to open the curtains. Well I could see

him looking at Joe and Joe has this classic look about when he's been partying too much, his hair down in front of his face. I didn't have that luxury you know. And Joe is sitting there and he's like warming up, and Buddy goes over and pulls his locks from his eyes and he says, "Uh huh," and then he looks down at me and I'm fooling with my reed and I'm trying not to look at him, and of course with me my eyes are bright red and I'm trying not to look at him and he says, "Uh huh," and he says, "okay," he says, "Willowcrest," which is a tenor-alto feature. And he used to play it fast [humms] in three [humms]. And he'd start playing and he'd scream, "Willowcrest" he says "Menza, get the lights, get the curtains." Well I reach over and press this thing and all the lights go out, I pressed the wrong button. And then he says, "The lights, the lights!" And the lights are blinking on and off and I can't get the curtain thing to work, and finally I stand up and I'm trying to find the button, and I'm looking at him and I'm like this, and I press the button, the lights go on, the curtains open, and I'm out in front of the band looking like this, and he cut the band off and he says, "This isn't your band." He comes out, closes the curtain, and he got on my case and Joe's case. He says, "If you guys ever come on my bandstand like this again—" and then he started laughing. He says, "What have you been doing all day?" And the people are waiting for the concert. I said, "My daughter was born last night." He says, "Oh, congratulations," he says, "you didn't bring me anything?" I says, "Yeah, I got you a cigar, I got a bottle of wine, I got a bottle of Cognac." He says, "Give me these things." He took the cigar and the bottle of Cognac and the curtain opens and he starts talking to the people about my daughter.

SN: He was nuts, man.

It's possible that Buddy Rich never once had a music stand in front of him during his whole career. Schooled musicians were astounded how he could hear a chart once and then play it perfectly, catching all the changes. Pat LaBarbera replaced Don Menza in Buddy's band and shed some light on Buddy's learning curve:

MR: I just watched a video with you and Buddy, and the set-up was very interesting because he looked like he would always look to his left when he played, for the most part.

PL: He always looked to his left, you know why that was, right?

MR: I do not.

PL: Oh okay, I asked him one time, I said — because I saw him one night and we were playing and he sat in with Basie's band and he knew all the charts — "Whirly Bird" he knew everything. And he came out, I said, "Buddy, how did you do that without" — because he doesn't read music. He said, "Well I know all the charts of every book," he said, "Tommy Dorsey," he said, "I have them all in my head." I said, "What happens if somebody throws you a chart you don't know?" He said, "You see why I'm always looking to the left?" He goes, "I'm always looking, I'm watching the lead trumpet player and the lead trombone player breathe. I don't care about the saxophone players, but I'm

watching how they breathe. If I know they're going to go [takes a deep breath] I know there's something coming up and I can usually psych out the fill." That's what he told me. He said, "I learned that from working with Dorsey" he said, "I watched him breathe and I watched the lead guys breathe if there was something I didn't know." But he was fast. He picked up stuff so fast you know. I was always amazed how he did it. "Channel One Suite" when we did that we brought it into Las Vegas. We were playing there right after that Japanese tour. And my brother Joe was playing Buddy's drums because he was backing the singer who we were backing, Frankie Randall. So he had Joe come by in the daytime to rehearse "Channel One Suite." Joe was the first one to do it. And "Channel One Suite" goes [counts quickly], so it had that kind of, you know that take three and five, which is really eight. But you know that's the way it was broken up. So Joe played it. He listened to it for just a little bit and then he went, "Get off the drums" and he went up and played the part.

Stanley Kay, a drummer himself, was a right hand man to Buddy and dealt with his mercurial temperament.

SK: He always felt the guys were putting him down because he couldn't read music. I mean he didn't know a note. He was like Erroll Garner. Wherever the hands went was the key. So they wrote a book for him, *The Drum Book*, Henry Aller. And it sold like a hundred thousand copies, but everybody wanted the dexterity that Buddy had. So he decides to want to read. And he gets the drum pad. And his band boy was a drummer. You know, an amateur but he could read some. So Buddy opens the book and it's page one, and he's got to play four quarter notes and — two bars of four quarter and two bars of eighth notes. He could play the four quarter notes, he's going right, left, right, left, right. But he can't play one and two and, see he doesn't understand that. And he was impatient. So after four or five minutes he took the book and threw it up against the wall, he said the book is wrong. That was him.

MR: He was quite a practical joker.

SK: Oh yeah, oh forget it. He threw a pie in Mel Torme's face while he was singing.

MR: Really?

SK: Oh yeah. We were playing at our club, Buddy's club that I ran, and it was Mel's birthday. And he said, "I'm getting a pie and I'm going to throw it in Mel's face while he's singing "Blue Moon." And I said, "Buddy, it's a new club, you know, people are going to get whip cream on their suits, they're going to sue us." So I said, "Don't do it, Buddy, please don't, just don't do it." So I didn't trust him that he wasn't going to do it. So I told the band boy later, I said, "If you see a cake coming out, if I'm over on the telephone, get me right away." But the phone rang and I was there. But Buddy said, "I'm doing it." And Mel was singing "Blue Moon/I saw you standing—" And the whole pie went right in his face, got on all the customers, Mel is screaming and the customers want their money back

because he didn't finish the act, he had four songs to go. And Mel is crying because he idolized Buddy. And, "what are you doing." So I go to Buddy, I said, "Buddy, listen, I asked you not to do that with the suing – the cleaning bills." I said, "why did you do that?" He said, "Oh yeah, from now on no more fun." That was his answer. So what are you going to say after, no more fun. But he liked to do that stuff.

He liked to do that stuff. And Mel and Buddy were buddies. With friends like that — OK, time to move on from Mr. Rich before we get into overtime wages. I can't afford to pay myself time and a half. We could create a leader category just for Sun Ra, the founder of The Arkestra, the most adventurous, creative and outrageous ensemble ever. In addition to composing distinctive music, Sun Ra was a supreme reader of the potential of his band members. Saxophonist Marshall Allen encountered Sun Ra in the mid 50s and spent his entire career with the Arkestra. He spoke about Sun Ra's uncanny ability to inspire:

MR: I mean I've been in my share of bands and eventually there's always personality conflicts, people grate on each other's nerves and so forth. Did he try to fix those things or did he just let them play out?

MA: He was what they call a natural, a natural. He was the kind of person that he could look at you and look at your potentials and your faults and everything. He could read you like a book. And you couldn't get away with anything, with the slick stuff. He would expose you, you know? So he's saying that's what you know and you're going in that direction and I'm not going in that direction, I'm going in the direction of what you feel and the spirit of things, which is real. So if you — most people come in with "I know this, I know that." I knew how to play but I didn't know how to take that playing I'm doing and make it real, the spirit you know? So when he said I don't want to hear what you know, I want to hear what you don't know. Or I want you to do what you're not doing.

MR: And did that result in some of the techniques that you now use on the alto?

MA: Yeah, because I had to try everything I could think of, good, bad or what I think is good, what I think — you know, but until I could get the spirit, the soul of playing something,

Mr. Allen, now 99 years of age has lead the Arkestra since 1995, when Sun Ra returned to the planet Jupiter. Just Google it if you're curious. Trombonist Dick Griffin performed with Roland Kirk and Sun Ra's Arkestra. And during a 2024 interview he described a gig when Sun Ra set up what might be described as a "do or die" situation.

DG: So I'll tell you what, there was two things that Sun Ra said to me and he would always make sure that he challenged me. But one night we were playing at Slug's and he knew that I could play changes because I was playing the whole week with Rahsaan at the Vanguard playing tunes fast and with changes and everything. So I'm saying that to say Sun Ra said to me one night at Slug's, he said, "Griffin, I know that you've been playing

> your licks and everything," he said, "but once you play it one time I don't want to hear you play the same lick twice tonight." And that was really opening up me. I had to really think of everything I played, the way I played it, and to make sure that I didn't play it the same way. And ever since then I used to challenge myself to do it that way. Then the other thing that Sun Ra said to me, we were in Milan, Italy in a theater for two weeks. And each night he would send one person out on the stand and they would play and then the band would come out and join them. That was the way he was doing it, the opening. So he said, "Griffin, I want you to go out tonight and the band won't come out until you get a standing ovation." I was out there, I don't know how long I played, but I was playing, playing, playing, playing, just me on the bandstand. Then I said, "Oh Lord what can I do" and I went into the multiphonics. And I held on to multiphonics and played them I don't know, magically or whatever came in, until that band, 'til the audience stood up and gave me a standing ovation. And then the band came out. Now I was expecting Sun Ra to say — you know smile — he just looked at me as if hmpf, okay, so what? You know. And sit down at the piano. And he was saying, "I knew you could do it but you didn't know you could do it." That was the lesson.

Speaking of lessons, it's jazz vocabulary time. Multiphonics, as mentioned by Mr. Griffin, is the art of playing two or more notes at the same time on a wind instrument, employing both your voice and the phenomenon of harmonics. I have played multiphonics a few times in my life, but not on purpose. Both Dick Griiffin and Eddie Bert mentioned "changes". Dick was referring to rapidly shifting chord changes in jazz tunes while Eddie cited the multiple changes of tempo and feel in Stan Kenton's "Concerto to End All Concertos." To his amazement, the dancers "caught" these changes. I think there's two likely explanations. Either they were members of a modern dance ensemble or more likely, they simply ignored the music and kept dancing. Lastly, we heard the term "band boy." The large big bands often had a guy (not a boy, but usually young) who set up the band, kept the music organized, carried the suitcases etcetera. A band boy might be an aspiring musician, a nephew of the leader, an avid fan, or all of the above. And those, faithful podcast listeners, are the jazz terms for today.

[audio interlude]

We have been focusing on leaders of large ensembles, "the big bands". For a number of reasons, most big band leaders called it quits after World War II, effectively bringing the Swing Era to a close. A few stuck it out, taking advantage of the burgeoning field of jazz education and assembling the band for more prestigious concert hall gigs. A number of iconic ensembles continued to tour after the leader had passed, thus the term "ghost band." Notably, in the last few decades women band leaders, including Sherrie Maricle, Toshiko Akiyoshi and Maria Schneider have come to prominence.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Maria Schneider personifies the quality and musical excellence on a level equaling that of Duke Ellington. A constant DownBeat poll winner, her innovative composing and leadership qualities set the standard for big bands in the modern era.

MS: I'm lucky in that respect. I am really lucky that — because people always ask that question about is it hard to keep it together. I'm lucky that it's not because they're there for me, and they are in such a big way, they're so nice. We're kind of the mutual — it would make people nauseous if they heard — it's like a mutual admiration. "Oh you played so beautifully last night." "Oh, Maria, you know that you're this." You know? That's so nice. It's like a family. And I guess that's the way it has to be. If it wasn't that, if I ever got the feeling I was doing my music and people were there doing it because they kind of felt like they had to, didn't know how to say no or whatever. At that point, and it has come to that with a couple of people, that I could feel that they were dissatisfied, and then you just kind of gently say you know what? Move on. Do your thing. Everybody should do what they want to do, and I certainly don't want anybody ever sitting there playing my music because they feel like they have to or they need the money. If they don't love doing it, I'll search for somebody hopefully that will.

Small jazz groups, sometimes referred to as "combos" have leaders as well. Weather Report, arguably the best of the jazz fusion ensembles, had two leaders, keyboardist Joe Zawinul and saxophonist Wayne Shorter. The '80s version of Weather Report only had four members and one of them, bass phenom Jaco Pastorius, had the personality and drive to be a third leader. Peter Erskine was the drummer in this potentially volatile mix and described the experience during our 2020 interview.

MR: When you got into Weather Report, where did your ego fit in between Joe and Jaco?

PE: Wow. There wasn't a whole lot of air for it. I instinctively just kind of stood back a little and observed. Playing-wise I was pretty fearless, and Joe liked that. Now Joe and Wayne were intrigued by the idea that I had played with Kenton. Now they had both played with Maynard's band way back in the start of both of their careers. And you know they both had good things to say, or good feelings about Maynard. But it was the Kenton band that had intrigued them. Now had they heard me with the Kenton band I think they never would have even let me in the front door. But they were thinking of like the Kenton band in the '50s and how experimental it was. So a jazz writer in Japan had either the insight or the temerity to ask, my first question at the press conference, I hadn't played a note in concert yet with the band, we had just rehearsed briefly. You know, I'm just sitting there and they're talking. So the journalist says, "I have a question for Peter Erskine. You've played in the big bands of Stan Kenton and Maynard Ferguson, how does this qualify you to play for Weather Report?" And I was a bit taken aback. And I start to give this sort of, "Well good music is good music and —." At that point Zawinul interrupts me and he

goes, he just kind of motions for me to shut up, and he speaks into his microphone, he goes, “Weather Report is a small group and we’re a big band too. Next question.” But otherwise to try to compete with Joe or Jaco was tough. I mean I have a microphone on my chest so I dare not thump it but they were real chest thumpers and literally they would, hey man, thump their chest. I’m sure anthropologists or somebody with that kind of understanding would have a field day with these guys.

MR: I’m surprised then that it held together as long as it did, with that four —

PE: Well Wayne was always kind of the yin to Joe’s yang I think. Adam Nussbaum said something yesterday, he said, “You know you can’t have the fire without the air.” But yeah, it’s all about balance. And Wayne provided that balance and even when people were beginning to complain that Wayne wasn’t being heard enough I think that was his instinctive or conscious attempt at balance somehow. We are touring, I talk about this in my book. After “Birdland” there would be two or three more tunes — you know there were built-in encores and stuff. And we get to the last tune. It was a medley of two compositions of Joe’s, “Badia” and “Boogie Woogie Waltz.” And it goes into this very fast double time [scats]. But on this one tour of Europe, the lighting rig was designed, it was just lower than it had been. And when they would turn on all these lights it got really hot on stage, and we were playing outdoors and it was hot and these lights, and I’m running out of steam. And so I asked Joe or suggested to Joe, “Hey, as we’re playing this, can I kind of give you the look, or the high sign so we can play the last cycle, I can go on afterburners, and end it at maximum strength, you know, for the sake of the tune as well as my own —

MR: Survival.

PE: Survival. And Joe just looks at me like, “Oh yeah?” So I should have been prepared. That night we play it, and I give him the look and he just looks at me and he turns and digs in and all of a sudden his keyboards get substantially louder, and he keeps playing. So now we have to do another whole long cycle. So I’m betrayed and I’m really annoyed. And so now I’m cursing — son of a — I just can’t believe it. I’m like flipped. And so he’s had his fun. He looks around rather triumphantly. Okay. Now we finish. I’m the band leader. And you know, you can’t try to lead the band if you’ve got a band leader. And I should have remembered that because Maynard had taught me that. There can only be one band leader. Anyway, we end the tune, the lights go black, we’re supposed to clear the stage. It was just the way the show went. And I was so angry I just started pounding the snare drum, at first kind of incoherently. And I’m just like, “You son of a” —And so I’m banging away playing this thing. And I sense a presence from, and I have no idea how I’m going to end this thing. There I am on stage by myself. And I look up and open my eyes and somehow Joe has climbed up and he’s balanced somewhat precariously on the edge of this drum riser, and he’s right in front of me. And my first thought is he’s going to punch me in the nose. But instead he has this look of ecstasy. And he goes, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.” And he jumps off and pumps his fist up in the air, he

> jumps off the riser. So I finish it. And he comes up and thanks me. He just said, “Thank you, man.” And I’m like for what (to myself). I didn’t understand. So the next day the manager comes up to me, I was kind of half expecting this. He says, “Joe would like to speak with you.” Uh oh, here we go. I have to admit I get a little emotional when I tell this. But the manager said, “Joe wants to see you.” So I go to the dressing room and there’s the whole crew and band, and I’m handed a plastic cup, you know, for the dressing room drinks. And I’m handed a cup of cognac. And everyone is there and Joe just announces, he says, “Everyone, last night Peter graduated.”

And that ladies and gentlemen is a Jazz Backstory.

[audio interlude, “The Buddy System”]

The celebrated arranger Bill Holman once complained to Woody Herman about the tempo the band was playing one of Bill’s charts. Mr. Herman replied, “the arrangers that are unhappy — we tell them to start their own bands.” So Mr. Holman proceeded to do so, as did all of the leaders in our first four episodes of Season 4. Tune in next week, our theme is a variation on “What did you do in the war daddy” — jazz musicians in the military. You can check out our full video interviews and subscribe to the Fillius Jazz YouTube channel, that’s F-I-L-L-I-U-S jazz on YouTube.

See you on the flip side.