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RE: All About Jazz

Q. You are without a doubt one of the most important.....

A. Preceding me, even though some of them were not jazz players, were Eddie Lang, Dick McDonough, Carl Kress, George Van Eps, Tony Mottola and George Barnes. Charlie Christian and Bus Etri, who both died very young, were significant for me as a young man. (C. Christian, 1916-1942; Bus Etri, 1917-1941).

As for those that have chronologically come after me, I never comment on my contemporaries nor those in the generation after that.

Q. Tell me about what band leader you had the most respect for.....

A. Artie Shaw. He had really good bands, he treated me well, paid me well and the music we played was good.

There were several other bands that were very good that I played with. Benny Goodman always had a very good band at the time I was with him. He was forgetful and hired and fired and rehired me more than once apparently forgetting what had come before.

Q. The PollWinners with Ray Brown and Shelly Manne.....

A. There were 5 Poll Winners albums. The Poll Winners, 1957; Poll Winners Ride Again, 1958; Poll Winners Three, 1959; Poll Winners Exploring the Scene, 1960. Then after 15 years, Straight Ahead in 1975.

It was musical empathy not personality. Shelly and Ray are and were wonderful musicians who were able to carry out my ideas and come up with many of their own.

The Poll Winners from the beginning did start the idea of a jazz trio with the guitar as the primary instrument. They set the standard for guitar jazz trios that continues to this day.

Q. What musician do you find that you keep in touch with.....

A. Oscar Peterson has been wonderful at keeping in touch with me. I talked to him just a couple of weeks ago. I admire him and his playing.

Many of my close friends that I stayed in touch with have passed on recently like guitar players Tal Farlow, Charlie Byrd, Remo Palmier, bassist Red Mitchell and band leader Frank Duval.

Besides my jazz career, I played in the studios almost 40 years and I talk with many of the musicians, contractors and arrangers I played with in Hollywood.

Q. Who are you most proud of having influenced.....

A. I certainly admire Howard's playing. I've been told by innumerable excellent guitar players of my influence on them. Many in the United States but also all around the world. This includes many rock musicians as well. I'm sure I don't even know all the players I've influenced.

Q. You've made mention that Lady Day.....

A. It is fair to say I was the ideal guitarist to accompany those vocalists. I knew what to do. It's about ideas and taste as well as musical ability. By the way Dean Martin should be on that list too and Claire Austin, and of course lots of other singers.

Q. You still listen to a lot of music.....

A. I do listen to a lot of music but I don't listen as a non-musician. When I listen to my recordings or other jazz recordings I listen with a critical ear. My standards for jazz have not changed since I stopped playing. If anything, they're more critical. I only listen to what I admire. I do not listen with less technical ears. I only enjoy listening to what for me is the very best.

I listen to classical music starting at 6 AM every morning before breakfast. My favorite composers are Debussy and Ravel (always have been) but I also am very fond of among others, Brahms and Chopin, Mozart and Bach and listen to many other classical works. As a musician not a non-musician.

Q. At 16 years of age.....

A. The experience of meeting Charlie Christian when I was sixteen and playing with him for three days made me realize that I didn't want to emulate him. I needed to find my own voice. That was the turning point to establishing a true Barney Kessel identity. Christian certainly had an influence on me but Lester Young, my favorite all time jazz musician had the most influence on my playing.

Q. You participated in the timeless Jammin' the Blues.....

A. Yes, I still enjoy listening to Lester's recordings. Friends have just finished reading me a biography of him called *You Just have to Fight for Your Life* by Frank Buchmann-Moller which I really liked. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie introduced me to bebop which I initially didn't care for until I studied it more carefully and played it.

As I said before, Charlie Christian and Bus Etri. It is my policy never to comment on my contemporaries or the younger guitarists.

Q. You were an original member.....

A. Yes, Norman brought us together. I met Norman around 1943 when he asked me to play in Sunday afternoon jam sessions which were on Jefferson Boulevard I believe. Norman brought me together with Oscar (Peterson) in 1952 for Jazz at the Philharmonic. I had to leave the trio after 10 months to go home and care for my baby boys. I played with Oscar later for two weeks in London.

I agree-Norman Granz did the most for jazz in the history of music. No contest. In my own career, he recognized my talent early on and hired me for recordings with people like Billie Holiday and Fred Astaire and others.

Norman was like an older brother to me, sharing his sophistication for food and clothes and culture, putting some polish on me, the country boy from Oklahoma. I was very fond of him.