

We have consciously used an inclusive multi-cultural philosophy in most of these pieces. I have always been aware of my multi-ethnic ancestry. It includes German, Polish, Russian, English and, according to my Father, (possibly) Native American (Modoc Tribe) roots.

CAD: You have made Rhythmic, Melodic and Harmonic contributions to the language of the Jazz traditions and have had a large influence on improvised music. What players are you aware that you have influenced?

D.B.: Players as diverse as Bill Evans, Cecil Taylor, Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea, Keith Emerson, Denny Zeitlin, Jessica Williams, and even Billy Joel, have been quoted as saying they were influenced by my playing and/or musical concepts.

CAD: It is my understanding that you are a rather unique, mostly "home-grown" player?

D.B.: Yes. I'm not really a formally trained pianist. I am also primarily an "ear" player. Because of early problems with my eyesight, I am not a good sight-reader. I learn many things by ear.

CAD: You have huge hands. How far can you reach?

D.B.: In the 1950s, Frank Metis pointed out that I could reach perfect 12ths. However, my reach has shrunk slightly in recent years. I can't reach all the 12ths any more, but I can still manage 11ths.

CAD: In the early 1950s you suffered a serious spinal injury that cost you some of your piano technique; as well as years of severe pain and muscle spasms. Have you recovered from that?

D.B.: I still experience some pain from that swimming accident, but I have mostly recovered.

CAD: I understand that you have always been more interested in the potential of spontaneity in performing?

D.B.: I will accept a few missed notes on my part or my group's, if the feeling is there. I have never been overly concerned with "backlog repertoire" ("pattern") playing. How the group plays as a whole is more important than mechanical perfection.

CAD: Tell me about the times you spent with Art Tatum.

D.B.: The first time I saw him I think I was 19 or 20 years old. I had a note (introducing me) from (pianist) Cleo Brown, who I was working with, to Art Tatum. I went down to Hollywood, where he was playing, to a place called the "Streets of Paris". I think it was on Sunset (Boulevard). I went in and there was not a soul in the Club, except the bartender and Art Tatum. Before I went in there was not one customer. This was so hard for me to accept, that this was maybe the greatest genius that America has ever produced, (who) was playing there and there was no one listening. Years later in his life, I would go to bars that were like strip joints, because Tatum would be playing piano there. They weren't really like strip joints, they were like "risque" kind of entertainment. A strip joint would have been high-class by comparison. I couldn't believe that either.

I got to play after him in a real Jazz club, he was really the main act as far as I was concerned, with my quartet following his performance. That was at George Wein's "Storyville" in Boston, the first "Storyville" in Kenmore Square. That's the first time I saw him given the respect that he deserved, but in these other places where I first heard him, he was not given respect and was not treated as the genius he was. I'd heard that Tatum didn't trust (booking) agents and I think he sure could have used someone dependable to book him. Later on he had Norman Granz, but in those (early) days he really needed someone to book him in decent places. These places he ended up working weren't where he belonged at all!

I remember at Storyville I got to hear him play every night for ten days and would talk with him in between sets. I also talked with him when he would come into Clubs to hear me play. I would sometimes sit in a booth and talk with him, rather than play (Brubeck laughs).

CAD: How much would you say you learned from hearing and seeing him play, when you first met him in your young days?

D.B.: Well, he had such a tremendous

piano technique, that if I could have imitated him, maybe I would have. I didn't have that kind of technical command at the piano. I don't think anybody before or since did. I hear conceptual influences from Tatum in my playing. He was probably one of my greatest conceptual influences, but I don't sound like somebody who is trying to copy his style. It is not in that way (style) that he influenced me.

He inspired great awe in me. I remember hearing him on the radio one time and thinking "This is impossible!". It was some of the greatest playing I ever heard. I didn't think I could keep driving the car, but I had to because I was in traffic on the San Francisco Bay Bridge. If I'd had been any place else, I would have had to pull off and stop. I got in the slow lane and drove along. It was just so overwhelming! I think he was playing "Aunt Hagar's Blues". That must have been in 1947 or '48, because when I was living in Oakland I was playing in San Francisco. Then when I moved to San Francisco, I ended up playing in Oakland (Brubeck laughs). I was always on the Bay Bridge going one way or the other.

Tatum was so sharp! Little things even. I remember one night when I had just gotten done playing a set, and went and sat next to him at the bar. He drank so heavily, like big water glasses of whiskey. I don't know how much he had drank before I sat down, but he said he wanted another drink, before he would go up and play his set. The bartender gave him this huge water glass full of whiskey, which he drank straight down. I've seen some heavy drinkers, but it sure didn't seem to affect his playing. I have no idea why he should drink like that. I have the feeling that if I was purple and could play the piano like he could, nothing would bother me! You know what I mean. But I don't know how he felt. He must have known that he was just (musically) beyond anything or anyone who had come before him. And I feel that he is still beyond anyone today.

CAD: I remember reading somewhere that you had been quoted as saying that you felt that there was as much chance as another Art Tatum occurring as there was of a Bach or a Mozart.

D.B.: That's how I feel! He was just a total genius! But back to what I was telling you about, after he drank this whiskey straight down, he didn't feel like going up and playing immediately. You never could rush him up there, he would always take his time. He pulled out all the change in his pocket and slammed it on the bar. I thought that he was maybe angry at something. There was a lot of money in change there. And he said to me, "I can tell you everything that's on that bar". I said, "How do you know what's there?". He said, "I can hear it. I can hear what went down". He told me how many pennies, how many nickels, how many dimes, how many quarters, how many fifty-cent pieces, were on that bar!

CAD: His eyesight was almost non-existent, wasn't it?

D.B.: Yes!

CAD: That's an incredible pair of ears.

D.B.: Yeah! Maybe he was putting me on, but I don't think so. He was so sharp! So aware!

There was one night I heard him, and during the gig he played everything almost note for note from his recordings. This is the opposite of what I believe that you should do if you're a Jazz musician. Yet he was my favorite Jazz musician! (Brubeck laughs). But this night, after the gig, there was hardly anyone around and he went back up and played things that I had never heard before. He was playing things in different concepts and different key centers than usual, I think almost to frighten you. Like there was nothing he couldn't do. I know that he was playing and improvising very differently than he usually played in public. It was a different realm! I got to hear the private world of Tatum that night. I knew a young woman, a pianist who used to hang out with Tatum. Tatum trusted her to drive him wherever he wanted to go. She had told me that Art frequently would play the same solos every night, and often the same solos at a "jam session". She said that *he didn't have to*, but for some reason he did. It was amazing to her that often at a session after-hours, where there wasn't a paying public, he would often play "Tiger Rag" for example,