

## FROM THE CHAIR

### Negatives and Positives

Historically, a New Year is viewed as a time to be positive about the future. But not for 2022. I hope you will be able to *remain negative* as we move into the third year of the Pandemic.

So many things have been impacted by COVID-19. All kinds of retail stores have closed. The joy of eating in a restaurant has been made more difficult due to the fear of being exposed to one of the variants. The same has been the case for concerts, live theater or film productions being cancelled or postponed. Despite all, PAJA members have been able to enjoy jazz experiences via the streaming offerings listed by Harvey Mittler and communicated to your email addresses by Leslie Marks. It isn't the same as hearing jazz live, but we are learning about a lot of new players. So it is a bit of positiveness, as PAJA continues on.

All the negativism has been magnified by the loss of many significant creators in the music world. I single out two that may have escaped your notice, the juxtaposition of which seems worthy of note.

Consider **Sandra Jaffe**, the co-founder with Allan Jaffe of the Preservation Hall in New Orleans. Sandra passed on December 27 at age 83 (see NYT obit 1/2/22). The Jaffes' effort at providing an inexpensive site for the old-time Dixieland musicians to be seen and heard live has been an important effort for keeping the public in touch with that historic style of jazz.

Then there is **Barry Harris**, a pianist and devoted scholar and practitioner of Bebop, one of the last original ambassadors, who moved on at age 91. According to the NYT obituary (12/10/21), he was totally committed to this jazz genre, both as performer and teacher. Like so many jazz greats, Harris came of out Detroit. In the 1940s he moved on to the Manhattan scene where he taught and played, with a last appearance in November. His love of jazz was different in many ways from the traditional New Orleans style, and is one that especially connects to my generation and that of other PAJA members.

Perhaps it is being negative to mention such losses but let's remember them positively and how fortunate for jazz lovers that such individuals came along and made

their wonderful contributions. Just as with the various new artists we are getting to know via the streaming platform. We can be positive on both counts.

Combine all this with confidence that the day for live indoor concerts will return. Let's hope it will positively happen in the near future.

Thank you for your continued support,

C. Stuart Brewster  
Chair, Palo Alto Jazz Alliance

## FUNDRAISING FOR BACH'S, SJW, ETC.

The end of the year always sparks fundraising efforts by jazz groups: San Francisco Jazz, KCSM, San Jose Jazz, Stanford Jazz Workshop, the Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society



among them. And of course the Palo Alto Jazz Alliance recently emailed fundraising notes to members. All of these worthy causes deserve your support, of course.

Bach's has a goal of \$50,000 by February 9th (Pete Douglas's birthday); Stanford is soliciting donors on a monthly recurring basis and is promising a full 2022 Festival season, along with the usual Workshop activities in jazz education. It is SJW's golden anniversary—the 50th year of this wonderful gift to the jazz community.

Of course all of this is *omicron/delta willing*. Here is the Bach D&D Society winter schedule:

- 1/23 The Baylor Project
- 1/30 Ray Obiedo Group
- 2/20 Immanuel Wilkins Quartet
- 2/27 Lorca Hart Trio, featuring Ralph Moore on sax
- 3/13 Roger Glenn—Vibes of March. Terry Gibbs tribute
- 3/20 Anat Cohen & Marcello Goncalves

All shows start at 4:30pm and tickets are available for the live shows or streaming.

## SUPERFAN KENNETH COBB STILL MAKING NEWS

*The Jazz Buff carried a small piece in September 2011 about Jazz Superfan Kenneth Cobb, who at the time was a technical manager at NASA. We reported on his making 24 trips to New York City in 2020 to “indulge his jazz habit—220 gigs in all”. Ken has since relocated to the east coast, with a more reasonable commute to the Big Apple, and he hasn’t slowed down very much. He is such a familiar face at jazz clubs that musicians and club owners know him by name and are happy to reserve prime seats for him upon request. Recently Ken was the subject of a long interview on the All About Jazz online magazine site. He subsequently posted a number of jazz reminiscences, and we’d like to share this one with Buff readers.*

“In July 2002, just less than a year after I’d changed employment from being an FAA contractor in Washington, D.C., to becoming a NASA contractor in Silicon Valley in support of a joint FAA/NASA aeronautics (the first “A” in NASA) R&D program that I’d supported since 1996, I had the opportunity of attending a three-day off-site meeting in Vancouver, B.C., located just north of Washington state. Having done my jazz research in advance (of course!), I was keenly aware of a famous jazz club in Seattle called Jazz Alley. I hadn’t visited there before, but I discovered that the driving distance from Vancouver was only 143 miles. No problem!

“So, once the Day 1 meeting adjourned, I was out of there! I had my own rental car, and while my oo-workers were hitting the local gyms, bars and restaurants, I was cruising southward on Interstate 5. Catching a glimpse of a distance sign which said 209 to Seattle, my heart sank! But then I realized that was kilometers and that translates to less than 130 miles. ‘Okay, that’s more like it,’ I thought.

“Anyway, I arrived safely in Seattle, found Jazz Alley without getting lost, parked the car, and saw a wonderful, swinging set by the Dr. Lonnie Smith Trio, featuring Peter Bernstein on guitar and special guest alto saxophonist Arthur Blythe. Afterward, being in a college town, I stopped by two different Tower Records stores. I then checked into the Bellevue Hilton Hotel ten miles outside Seattle, got a short night’s sleep, then hit the road northbound nonstop back to Vancouver in time for Day 2’s 9:00 AM meeting. For me, the detour to Jazz Alley no doubt was the highlight of this business trip!”

*Kenneth Cobb*



If you’re interested in the full interview with Kenneth: [www.allaboutjazz.com/meet-kenneth-cobb?width=375](http://www.allaboutjazz.com/meet-kenneth-cobb?width=375).

### WORLD’S GREATEST DRUMMER

In May of 2012, PAJA presented Richie Cole’s Alto Madness Plus, at the Oshman auditorium. Those who attended may remember this joke, one of our favorites, told by one of the band members, the great trumpeter Carl Saunders.

Gene Krupa gets a letter in the mail, addressed “To the World’s Greatest Drummer.” “Well, Gene says, I’m pretty darned good, but I don’t know about ‘world’s greatest.’” So he sends the letter on to Louie Bellson. Louie thinks the same thing: “I’m really good but I’m not sure about ‘world’s greatest.’” So he forwards the letter to Buddy Rich.

Buddy looks at the envelope and says, “Yep, that’s me—world’s greatest drummer.” So, he opens the envelope and starts reading—“Dear Ringo”.



Buddy Rich

## PAJA DONORS—2021

Once again, we want to thank those members and others who generously made contributions to the Palo Alto Jazz Alliance in 2021. Given our pandemic-caused relative inactivity this year, it was heartening to know so many of you were still willing to provide extra support to PAJA to keep us functioning and hopeful for great jazz offerings in 2022 and beyond.

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Annual dues, \$35 for individuals \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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## TADD



I'm not a betting man, but I would wager that you've never heard of Tadley Ewing Peake. And I'd also wager that you *have* heard of Tadd Dameron. In what follows, the former becomes the latter, who then becomes one of those figures in modern jazz more admired by their contemporaries than by today's average jazz fan.

Tadley Ewing Peake was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1917 to Ruth (née Harris) and Isaiah Peake. The latter soon exits the story, to be replaced by Adolphus Dameron, a chef and restaurateur. Whether or not their adoption was legally recognized, young Tad and his three-years-older brother, Caesar, adopted the new surname.

When Tad's mother had encouraged him to play piano, albeit by ear, it was Caesar who introduced him to jazz via recordings by the big bands of the 1930s. Tad said, "I was listening to Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington and the Casa Loma band that was playing unique arrangements at the time." Alto saxophonist Caesar took young Tad to local clubs, where he was allowed to sit in. Cleveland jazz musician Andy Anderson is quoted as saying of Tad's playing with the Snake White band, "He's got ten fingers and all of them went down just like this (on the piano keys) and all of them were on different notes. . . He had been studying all the time, and I said to myself, 'Gee Whiz:

with kids like that who stay in and study—you don't expect to hear anything that good!" Given that endorsement and what was to come, it's ironic that Tad failed his music exams at Central High School.

This point in Tad's story is as good as any to mention his changing the spelling of his first name, adding that second "d" simply because, apparently, numerology suggested that a Tadd would be a more successful musician. (Compare Pierre in *War and Peace*.)

Following high school, Tadd played briefly with Blanche Calloway, and then was persuaded by his high school comrade, trumpeter Freddie Webster, to join his band. At age 22 Tadd formed his own 14-piece band which toured Northern Ohio in the very late 1930s. It was around that time (1938) that Tadd did his first big-band arrangement, for the Jeter-Pillars territory band, originally from Cleveland. Of that "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart," he said, "Everything was wrong with it, but there were some good ideas."

As it seems all jazz musicians do, Tadd then moved to New York City, in his case in 1940 to join Vido Musso, although this wasn't a success. Tadd said "Musso fired me, because my voicings weren't good enough." (At the end of this article we'll learn of Benny Golson's exactly opposite assessment.) Thereafter he toured for a couple of years with Harlan Leonard's Rockets, out of Kansas City, composing and arranging over half a dozen pieces, among them "Rock and Ride", "400 Swing", and "Dameron Special", all three of which were recorded. (And in each case, co-composer credit went to the leader, Harlan Leonard. This was the custom of the time: ASCAP co-credits Tadd's "Good Bait" to Count Basie, for whom Tadd had arranged it, even though Tadd had written it in the '30s.) I have heard the three titles named, and concur with the perceived wisdom that they are "pure swing", without any trace of what later would be known as "the Dameron Touch".

Charlie Parker, three years younger than Tadd, had left Leonard (presumably to join Jay McShann) just before Tadd joined the Rockets. Nonetheless, the two knew each other in the nexus that was Kansas City (Tadd sold arrangements to McShann, too), and this acquaintance might well have been the very impetus Tadd needed to change direction. The 1940s were to be the best decade of the few he had.

In 1941 Tadd sent, unbidden, a number of arrange-

ments to Jimmie Lunceford. (Lunceford's band had been hugely popular in the 1930s, respected by musicians and adored by its fans. Its arrangements—largely by Sy Oliver—were tight, its musicianship impeccable, and its humor irresistible.) Lunceford liked what he heard, and soon Tadd was a full-time arranger for the band. One of the tunes Tadd arranged was "Yard Dog Mazurka," written by trumpeter Gerald Wilson, who said that Tadd "was a wonderful arranger. He was a romantic who liked to write about people, places and things." ("Romantic" is a word that often appears in comments about Tadd; another is "beauty", as in the following quotation.) Lunceford trombonist Trummy Young introduced Tadd to Dizzy Gillespie, saying, "There's a guy here who writes some beautiful things." Tadd was soon playing piano with Dizzy at New York clubs, and jamming with Dizzy and Bird at Minton's.

By 1944 Tadd was writing for the first bebop big band, Billy Eckstine's, of which Dizzy and occasionally Bird were members. Tadd's arrangements of his own "Lady Bird" and "Cool Breeze" were featured. With that band, Tadd got to know Dexter Gordon, Sarah Vaughan, and (via a brief substitution) Miles Davis, all of whose orbits were to intersect with Tadd later. (It's salutary, I think, to be reminded that these names whom we recognize to be giants of our music were at the time youngsters: Tadd was the old man at 27; Dexter and Sarah were aged barely 20; and Miles was only 16 or just 17.)

By the end of that year, the "old men"—Tadd, Dizzy and Bird—had left Eckstine, but kept in touch. In 1945 Dizzy recorded Tadd's "Hot House" with Bird, and Tadd's "Our Delight" with Dizzy's big band, which soon recorded arrangements of new and older pieces such as "Cool Breeze", "Good Bait", and "Stay on It." The following year, Tadd took the cadenza from Diz's "Groovin' High" and wrote "If You Could See Me Now" for Sarah Vaughan, which was to become Tadd's most famous composition. (Unlike the usual situation for an independent tunesmith, Carl Sigman's lyrics were written contemporaneously.)

In 1947, Tadd began to perform and record regularly with the star-crossed trumpeter Fats Navarro (like Tadd, an Eckstine alum, although I don't believe they overlapped). Sometimes one was the leader (e.g., Fats Navarro and His Thin Men), sometimes the other (e.g., The Tadd Dameron Sextet), and sometimes they were jointly sidemen with someone else (e.g., Dexter Gordon and His Boys). Every track from every session is

worthwhile. Of the Dexter sessions, Kenny Mathieson writes in "Cookin'", "The cut on which Fats does not feature, 'Dexter's Mood' (co-credited to Dexter and Tadd; there are two takes), is an exquisitely unfolded ballad, in which the saxophonist glides beguilingly over Dameron's teasing interpretation of the harmonic sequence." And of a Fats Navarro collection including these recordings, Whitney Ballet wrote "the best are those with the pianist Tadd Dameron, a gifted and largely unsung bebop arranger and composer who brought order and inspiration to the recording sessions he participated in."

Of bebop itself, Tadd said he felt that "the old jazz is limited by the way it sticks to standard chord structures. . . We're trying for a different kind of phrasing and harmonics, a more intricate voicing of chords, using different and more finely shaded chord progressions." That said, he feared that the movement was too exclusive, its acolytes wearing dark glasses and goatees and giving the sign of the flatted fifth. In an attempt to make the music more accessible, he joined the *sui generis* Babs Gonzales in Three Bips and a Bop.

Tadd was among those befriended by Mary Lou Williams, who said he "had ideas even then that were way ahead of his time." His musical interests extended beyond jazz. In a 1948 blindfold test for *Metronome* magazine, he said, "When I'm at home just listening to music, you know what I play? Ravel, Delius, Stravinsky, Villa-Lobos, just to mention a few". And in a later interview he mentioned the French impressionist composers Debussy and Ravel. In this regard, he was



In Mary Lou Williams's NYC apartment (1947): Diz, Mary Lou, Tadd, Hank Jones, Milt Orent, Dixie Bailey, Jack Teagarden.

akin to Benny Golson, a decade younger, who became a student of composition and arrangement with Tadd. In 1947 readers of *Esquire* magazine voted Tadd “Best New Arranger.”

In the early 1950s, Tadd’s musical activities varied between the ridiculous (e.g., his time with Bull Moose Jackson in a band which included, equally bizarrely, Benny Golson) and the sublime (e.g., his own big band which included, on and off, the likes of Blue Mitchell, Stanley Turrentine, and Tadd’s fellow Clevelander Tony Lovano—the father of Joe Lovano). Certainly sublime was the short-lived nine-piece group Tadd formed in 1953 which included Philadelphia natives Percy Heath, Philly Joe Jones, and Clifford Brown, as well as trumpeter Idrees Sulieman and alto saxophonist Gigi Grace (surely a musical soul-mate for Tadd).

Throughout the 1950s, Tadd battled his addiction to heroin, a habit he’d developed in the 1940s. He disbanded the nonet and returned home to Cleveland for an attempt—not his first—to kick the habit, but again without success, despite spending two years there this time. Once back on the scene, he resumed excellent contributions to what was a series of essentially piecemeal projects. The following were in 1956 alone: arranging Richie Powell’s “Time” and his own “Flossie Lou” for Clifford Brown and Max Roach; playing and arranging five of his own compositions for an octet including Kenny Dorham, Sahib Shihab and Cecil Payne for his recording, “Fontainebleau”; arranging and conducting three songs for Gillespie’s Orchestra; and playing piano and arranging half a dozen of his own compositions for his quartet recording “Mating Call” with John Coltrane, John Simmons, and Philly Joe Jones. But you can’t beat the odds forever: Tadd was arrested on narcotics charges in both 1957 and 1958, and spent the rest of the ‘50s incarcerated, even if only in a prison hospital.

For Tadd Dameron the 1960s were to be short, albeit sweet. In late 1960 and early 1961 he arranged and conducted five tracks for Blue Mitchell, including two of his own compositions, one of which became the title of the album “Smooth as the Wind”; in 1962 he arranged two tracks including his own “If You Could See Me Now” for Milt Jackson’s “Big Bags”, and four tracks, including two of his own compositions, for “Sonny Stitt and Top Brass”. Perhaps Tadd’s *pièce de résistance* was what was to become his swan song, “The Magic Touch”, a big band recording containing a baker’s dozen performances of his arrangements of ten of his own tunes recorded over three dates in 1962 by the likes of Clark Terry, Johnny Griffin, Bill Evans,

and Philly Joe Jones; Barbara Winfield sings effectively on two tunes. Two-and-a-half years later, Tadd was dead at age 45, a victim of an old enemy, heroin, and a new one, cancer.

Tadd’s not-so-immediate legacy was the nonet Dameronia assembled 15 years later by Philly Joe Jones to play Tadd’s arrangements and compositions. They made two excellent albums for the Uptown label, “To Tadd with Love” (1982) and “Look, Stop, and Listen” (1983). Apart from Jones, none of the regular artists had played with Tadd, although Johnny Griffin, who guested on some tracks on the former album, had done so (on “The Magic Touch”, as just mentioned). After Jones’s death in 1985, Dameronia continued intermittently, making one final recording, “Live at the Theatre Théâtre Boulogne-Billancourt” with Kenny Washington on drums: in no way does it disappoint.

That legacy continues: contemporary recordings of Tadd’s compositions and arrangements continue to appear. Among them are two of my own favorites, “Barry Harris Plays Tadd Dameron” (1975) and Tardo Hammer’s “Look, Stop, and Listen: Music of Tadd Dameron” (2007), both by piano trios. Vanessa Rubin recently (2019) issued the only vocal recording known to me of Tadd’s compositions. Perhaps the most significant recent release is that of Paul Combs, “Unknown Dameron: Rare and Never-Recorded Works of Tadd Dameron” (2019).

At the very beginning of this article, I opined that Tadd Dameron was more admired by his contemporaries than by today’s average jazz fan. Let’s leave the final words to two of those contemporaries.

In the excellent biography of Dizzy Gillespie, “Groovin’ High”, by the English jazz all-rounder Alyn Shipton, Benny Golson, referring to their Bull Moose Jackson days, comments as follows: “Tadd was my first influence as an arranger. . . his voicing could make just a trumpet, saxophone, and trombone sound full.” Later he expanded, “It’s much more difficult to write for a small group than for a big band. . . You have to learn a lot about the instruments themselves, their technical limitations and how to exploit their strengths. Tadd showed me how to exploit the piano—where to pitch certain figures at the top, middle or bottom of the range, and even which cymbals to specify—they all mean something. He knew how to use these things strategically.”

The very last word goes to Dexter Gordon, quoted in Eric Nisenson’s “Round Midnight: A Portrait of Miles Davis”: “I think Tadd Dameron is the romanticist of the whole period: he’s a poet.”

*Michael Burman hosts “Weekend Jazz Oasis” Saturday evenings on KCSM, Jazz 91.1*