

## FROM THE CHAIR

HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN, happy days are here... well, not quite. I mentioned this old song in a column last year and now have been rethinking its relevance to all of us who are dealing with what future historians will call "the lost year." The song was traditionally played in upbeat tempo and used as campaign background by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during his four campaigns as a stimulus for raising the morale of Americans during the dark years of the depression and WWII.

And there is the slow-tempo blues version of the tune, as so brilliantly created by Barbra Streisand. Up/down, such duality makes it a nice metaphor for our current situation. Happily the Covid-19 limitations are starting to be removed. Let's hope this continues and that we'll be able to present the long delayed concert featuring Greg Abate and Friends in mid-October. That will truly be a Happy Day, if it happens.

As I cogitate over something to share, I think about the good old days and all the wonderful LIVE concerts that PAJA has been able to generate, thanks to the efforts, first of Dr. Herb Wong, and in recent years, of our Events Chair Harvey Mittler. Nostalgia is fun but also depressing since the old never quite fully comes back. Have no fear, PAJA is committed to its mission of keeping jazz alive and providing support for jazz education and the growth of the jazz audience. That will not change. However, the players will be different, the styles will change. We are especially lovers of bebop and so-called straight-ahead jazz, but there are other varieties of the music we need to welcome. For example, the New York Times recently had an article about Jazz Innovation and Tradition that presents the views of NYT pop music critic Jon Caramanica, Giovanni Russonello who covers jazz for the Times, and Marcus J. Moore who writes about music in general for the Times. Recommend that you check it out via [nytimes.com/popcast](http://nytimes.com/popcast). I know nothing about any of them and suspect they would be a challenge to my traditional ears. But if we don't listen to what is happening in the real world, then PAJA will have a narrow future as beboppers and more traditional players will be gone. Also, we need workers to keep the ship afloat; too narrow a focus will not attract volunteers.

One such helper in the past who has now moved on to the Great Jazz Show in the Sky was Ronald J. Sax, who left us in February. He served as Board member and secretary from early on until the limitations of health required his retirement. Ron was one of the PAJA members who traveled to Cuba in 2000. His home was a frequent site for Board meetings. Many thanks to Ron for his contributions to the business operation of the Board—preparing meeting minutes, keeping records, etc. Our deepest sympathy to Ron's extended family over their and our loss.

Congratulations to the Palo Alto Adult School on the celebration of their 100th year of operation. PAJA came into existence due to a blending of efforts in 1992 between Adult School Director Henry Page and Herb Wong, a collaboration which led to Herb offering courses in jazz under the Adult School banner. PAAS has continued to sponsor our efforts and we wish them continued success in all their efforts which have provided a significant value-added benefit to the community as they move into their second century .

In continued appreciation of your support,  
*C. Stuart Brewster*  
Chair, Palo Alto Jazz Alliance

## NEW JAZZ VENUE IN SAN JOSE

The SJZ Break Room at South First and San Carlos will be opened soon within the downtown office of San Jose Jazz. It will be the venue for the SJZ New Works Festival, April 29-May 8. Performances during San Jose Jazz's summer and winter festivals will also be housed at the Break Room. Some of the performers at the New Works Festival are Tammy Hall, Chris Cain, Claudia Vilella, and Howard Wiley. All performances will be streamed, and tickets cost between \$10 and \$20, available from [www.sanjosejazz.org](http://www.sanjosejazz.org). Small indoor live shows at the Break Room will be held in the near future, once pandemic protocols allow for small indoor concerts.

# NOODLING *Thoughts on jazz* By Michael Burman

## DRUMMER ALAN DAWSON

The first drummer I ever noticed on record was Joe Morello; this was shortly after Dave Brubeck's recording of "Take Five" had been released as a single, becoming a surprise hit. Joe had joined the quartet, replacing another Joe (Dodge), four years earlier in 1957, and was to stay for a decade, until Dave broke up the quartet in order to concentrate on his composing. I saw that "classic quartet" live two or three times during that period, and loved everything about them: Gene Wright's imperturbable rhythm, Paul Desmond's insouciance and ethereal tone, Joe's snare drum work (described by Whitney Balliett, in what I hope was intended as a compliment, as being "as furious as an electric typewriter"), and Dave's obvious delight at everything that was going on. So, at the time, I was most disappointed at Dave's decision to disband; then, a year or two later I was both surprised and delighted to learn that Dave had reformed a quartet. Not "the quartet", but simply "a quartet". The horn player was another of my favorites, Gerry Mulligan (who, like Dave, had tired of bandleading and touring, but, unlike Dave, also of leading); but on bass and drums there were two who were unknown to me, Jack Six and Alan Dawson, respectively. In the words which the screenplaywright, the great William Goldman, put in the mouths of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, who are those guys?

I've griped in the past in these pages about the difficulty in former days of finding out any information whatever, and the ridiculous ease in finding it these days. (Where's the intellectual rigor in a Google search?) But both Six and Dawson defy the stereotype: there's little about Six; and while there's a lot, at least comparatively, written about Dawson, most of it seems to be at best recycling and at worst simple repetition.

George Alan Dawson was born in 1929 in Pennsylvania into a musical family: his father played guitar, his mother sang in the church choir, and both played piano. It was on piano that Alan himself began picking out tunes, although by age five he'd already shown an interest in drums. Jazz writer Dan Morgenstern quoted him as saying, "I played on chairs and cardboard boxes. Knives had a good feeling: they'd bounce. I had very little doubt about what I wanted to do, but I couldn't get myself to go to a teacher." (The irony in that last statement should soon become clear.)

At some time, the family moved to Roxbury, the heart of Black culture in today's Boston, and it is with that city that Alan is always associated. By age 14, he was playing with bassist Tasker Crosson, who led society bands in the Boston area. Fellow band-member and jazz tenor great Sam Rivers remembered those days: "We were kind of amused with Tasker Crosson, old-school, you know, being young kids, and Tasker was old-school, so we played with him sometimes and always made fun, we kind of ridiculed him. He had society jobs so he paid good money." Alan himself was more measured, telling Morgenstern simply, "Tasker



Crosson was the man who gave me my start."

It was around that time that Alan's father offered to pay for lessons, but Alan declined. Until, that is, Alan's friend Marquis Foster, something of a leader in his own right and an obsessional practitioner of rudiments,

inadvertently embarrassed Alan into a realization of how little he really knew and of how much of that was wrong. Alan immediately signed up at Charles Alden's studio, where he learned to read music and also play vibes and marimba.

Notwithstanding Sam Rivers's recollection of a forward-looking sextet ("We had a group, myself, Gigi Gryce, Joe Gordon, Jaki Byard [and] Alan Dawson on drums"), much of Alan's early experience came with pianist Sabby Lewis. Sabby was one of those local heroes, known and worshipped by so many nearby, but whose fame scarcely reaches beyond the town or city or county limits. Neal Cohen and Michael Fitzgerald wrote of Sabby as follows. "[His band] was one of the finest in the area. It was a musical incubator for many fine players including Paul Gonsalves, Big Nick Nicholas, Ray Perry, Roy Haynes and Jaki Byard. Alan Dawson was first with the band in 1950-51, and remembered 'Working for Sabby was really a big deal. So many people started their careers with him.'" (As an aside, this is the only reference I know of for those two great drummers, Roy Haynes and Alan Dawson, who were contemporaries—Haynes being four years older—and both from Roxbury.)

Alan was drafted into the army in late 1951. But like so many in our music from that generation, he didn't see service in Korea, but, rather, spent his time in the band, in his case at Fort Dix. Two years later, on 12th August 1953, he was discharged, and joined Lionel Hampton's band the very next day; among its members were his contemporaries Art Farmer, Quincy Jones, Jimmy Cleveland, and Monk Montgomery. Morgenstern quoted Alan as saying it was "an unnerving experience, though it was a great environment." Apparently it was Montgomery who persuaded Alan not to quit Hampton following the successful, if "unnerving", stint at the Band Box in New York City, but instead to stay with the band for its forthcoming tour of Europe. Before that trip, the band was joined by, first, Gigi Gryce and Clifford Brown, and later Benny Golson, all from the Tadd Dameron band.

That overseas tour, which gave 24-year-old Alan his first experience of Europe, was a great commercial success, and its term was doubled in both scope and duration, to more countries and perhaps from six weeks to three months. Commercially successful for the Hamptons, that is, but not

so much for the band: Golson reported having negotiated a \$25 weekly salary, but that Lionel's wife Gladys, who held the band's purse strings, made him take the same \$19 that everyone else got.

Accounts differ as to whether the moonlighting on that tour (notably in Paris and, later, Stockholm) by some of the younger members (Brown, Gryce, Farmer, Jones, Cleveland, and Tony Ortega) was a consequence of youthful high spirits, or of frustration with Hampton's relatively old-fashioned music and arrangements. Either way, they did give Alan the opportunity to make his first recordings. His contributions to Brown's performances of Gryce's "Brown Skins" are notable, especially when compared with some of the work on other sessions from the same period by French drummer Jean-Louis Viale. As Louis-Victor Mialy (then writer for "Le Jazz Hot", and later road manager for Nat Cole) noted at the time, in comparison with Hampton's other drummer, Curly Hamner, "Alan Dawson was a much greater drummer."

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After the Hampton band returned to the USA, Alan went back to Boston, rejoining Sabby Lewis's band. And there he stayed.

He didn't lack for work. Not long afterwards, Alan got a call from a bass player about a gig at Wally's Paradise in Boston: he took the job and somehow became the group's leader. Roland Alexander was on tenor saxophone; Alexander was a multi-instrumentalist, and might have played piano, too, had there been one at Wally's but there wasn't, so Alan occasionally doubled on vibes.

It was at this period that Alan, who you will recall had been reluctant actually to study drumming, became a teacher himself. Via a process of accretion, he acquired a student here and another there, and one thing led to another. Several of those students were enrolled full-time at Berklee School (now College) of Music. Word spread at Berklee, and in 1957 it was the school itself that came metaphorically knocking at Alan's door in Lexington, and he became supervisor of drum instruction. At the time, his private students included Clifford Jarvis, aged c. 16, and Tony Williams, even younger at only 11, who was to go on to join Miles Davis in 1964 at the age of only 17.

In 1963, Alan became the house drummer at Lennie's on the Turnpike in Peabody, some 15 miles north-east of Boston; the pianist was Ray Santisi. For Alan, it was a marriage made in Heaven, because the relatively relaxed jazz schedule at Lennie's (some 20 weeks a year) meshed nicely with his schedule at Berklee. Lennie's was the sort of club where such as Roy Eldridge, J.J. Johnson, and that archetypal lone wolf Sonny Stitt would come into town and play with a local rhythm section. Among those out-of-towners was Booker Ervin, who was so impressed that he invited

Alan to appear on his then imminent recording "The Freedom Book". That was the first of what became four "Book" sessions for Prestige recorded by Rudy Van Gelder in Englewood Cliffs over the space of a year: "The Freedom Book" in December 1963, followed in 1964 by "The Song Book", "The Blues Book" and "The Space Book" in February, June and October respectively; the earlier two had Jaki Byard on piano, and all four had Richard Davis on bass.

In 1965, Alan made his second European tour, this time in trio with Byard; the bassist was Reggie Workman, who was approaching the end of his stint with The Jazz Messengers. Perhaps the most significant aspects of this tour were his appearances with Lee Konitz, Bill Evans and Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen in Berlin and Copenhagen.

From those days and throughout the Brubeck era, Alan continued to divide his time between teaching, both at Berklee and privately, and playing at Lennie's. He also recorded with many others, including Jaki Byard (live at Lennie's), Charles McPherson, Frank Foster, Junior Mance, Sonny Criss, Houston Person, Illinois Jacquet, Roland Kirk, and James Moody.

Just as with the schedule at Lennie's, Dave Brubeck's schedule meshed with Alan's. As mentioned above, the reason Brubeck had disbanded in 1967 was in order to concentrate on his compositions (indeed, I saw an oratorio, probably "The Light in the Wilderness", at the Royal Albert Hall in the very late 1960s), so his touring schedule was relatively light, certainly when compared with that of Dave's classic quartet. In a way, the fact that the Boston gig came to an unplanned end in 1972 after Lennie's had burned (its Phoenix-like reopening was to be only brief) was something of a blessing since it allowed Alan to work with Dave and his sons Darius, Chris and Dan, in Two Generations of Brubeck.

But all this was to change in 1975, when Alan suffered a ruptured disc, which dictated surgery. A consequence was his abandoning all touring and ending his teaching at Berklee. He did, however, continue to play locally (notably with Billy Pierce and James Williams), and continue to teach privately at home in Lexington until his death two decades later at the age of 66.

What is Alan Dawson's legacy? Notwithstanding the long list of jazz celebrities with whom he played and recorded, it is as a teacher that he is best remembered. His students must number in the hundreds: among those not mentioned already are Steve Smith, Vinnie Colaiuta, Billy Kilson, and Terri Lyne Carrington. Kilson studied with Alan for over seven years, probably longer than anyone. He said in a 2007 interview, "It could have been 17, 27, 37 years...if I am a great drummer, all kudos go to [Alan]. . . he's like my musical dad; he's very, very special."

Let's leave the last word to Tony Williams. "Alan Dawson was one of the best drummers in the world. That's a fact, not just my opinion. I met Mr Dawson when I was nine years old. He went out of his way to encourage me, help me and to see that I had opportunities to develop my meager skills. . . Mr Dawson didn't only teach me to play the drums, he taught me how to conduct myself as a musician and as a man. Thank you, Alan Dawson."

*Michael Burman hosts "Weekend Jazz Oasis" Saturday nights on KCSM Jazz 91.1.*

## MORE INTERNET GEMS

Our friend and PAJA loyalist **Karl Robinson** has unearthed a few more jewels on the Internet for your listening/watching pleasure.

**TEA FOR TWO (1957) by Nat King Cole—two different versions.** From his TV show. These demonstrate why so many fans consider him one of the best-ever jazz pianists.

**CECILE MCLORIN SALVANT—“WIVES AND LOVERS” (Official Video).** Her original group, with Aaron Diehl on piano, Lawrence Leathers drums, and Paul Sikivie bass. Much of the video is silhouetted dance with Storyboard P. A very nice version of the Bachrach/David song.

**AHMAD JAMAL—POINCIANA—OLYMPIA PARIS—LIVE.** The master in Paris in 2014, with great backups including the great Herlin Riley on drums and James Cammack, bass. Karl says, “I used to think the original Poinciana from the Pershing was impossible to improve on, but this version from 2014 is as good or better. I especially love the joy and interaction between the musicians.”

**JOE LOCKE—“AIN’T NO SUNSHINE”—You Tube.** A dynamite group with Kenny Washington on vocals, Joe Locke on vibes, Ernesto Simpson on drums, Daryl Hall on bass, and Danny Grisset on piano. Pure joy for 23 minutes from a jazz festival in Bratislava (Slovakia) in 2014.

**CHRISTIAN SANDS, THOMAS FONNESBAEK & ALEX RIEL.** Live at Jazzhus Montmartre. Jazzhus Montmartre is Copen-



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CECILE MCLORIN SALVANT



THOMAS FONNESBAEK

hagen’s premier jazz club. This is a version of *Moanin’* recorded in 2015. Fonnesebaek’s bass solo is outstanding.

OK, and here are a couple more I’ve run across recently:

**SMILE (a Capella).** This is a version of the Charlie Chaplin song (from “Limelight”) by a vocal quartet led by Ben Bran, later I.D.ed as The Quad. Lovely.

**THOSE 7 TIMES OSCAR PETERSON WENT NEXT LEVEL GENIUS/bernie’s bootlegs.** The amazing Oscar Peterson—this is a 20-minute compilation of seven remarkable clips. Oh, the arpeggios./Ed Fox

## SIXTH CD FOR DUMAINE, MILLER

For the past ten years the stalwart local group of Rebecca DuMaine and the Dave Miller trio has turned out one pleasing album after another. Their latest (their



sixth album since 2010) is “Someday, Someday,” and it’s another showcase for Rebecca’s elegant, intelligent interpretations of familiar tunes—and some not-so-familiar. There are fourteen selections

on the new album, and they include such tasty standards as *Cry Me A River*, *On a Clear Day*, *Alone Again*, *Sunny*, and *Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams*, plus Joni Mitchell’s *Both Sides Now* and two originals from DuMaine, *Time To Get Unstuck* and the title track *Someday, Someday*. Considering all the beautiful numbers on this recording, my favorite is the brilliant uptempo *La Vie En Rose*, sung against Dave’s swinging background of the jazz standard,

*Au Privave*. Yowza! Just Friends is also an uptempo highlight, with some serious piano licks by Mr. Miller. Dave on piano is ably backed by Bill Belasco on drums and Chuck Bennett on bass.

Of course, we all know this is a father-daughter team which has been featured in PAJA concerts a few times. And—full disclosure—Dave Miller is a member of PAJA’s Board of Directors. But we can’t let such nitpicks interfere with serious jazz criticism, can we?

Like a lot of groups (musical and otherwise), 2020 started out encouragingly for DuMaine and the trio, with a successful album (*Chez Nous*) getting good airplay and gigs at several local venues and with invitations to local and East Coast festivals. With the pandemic, it pretty much shut things down, but it did give them time to plan *Someday, Someday*, with its themes of love, loss, longing and hope. Rebecca and the trio can be heard live Saturday evenings at Restaurant Vida on Santa Cruz Ave. in Menlo Park./Ed Fox

The *Someday, Someday* CD is available from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) for \$15.95.



## FROM MED FLORY, ORIGINATOR OF SUPER SAX

“I never thought about living in New York. I always wanted to move to L.A. . . . Hollywood! You know I figured if Alfalfa could make it, how hard could it be?”

“They [my students] play for me and I tell them what they’re doing right and what they’re doing wrong, and how to just play swing time. Divide the beat into three instead of two and don’t even mention the word ‘rock’ when I’m around! I don’t allow anybody to say that even in my own house. Even if he’s a geologist!” From “Interview With Med Flory, Part 2” in *The Note*, Fall/Winter 2015.

## THE ARTISTRY OF JIM HALL

“Known as much for the notes he left out of his creative comping and unique phrasing as the ones he left in, [Jim] Hall changed the course of jazz guitar with his minimal, less-is-more aesthetic. His playing was subtle yet sophisticated, lyrical and always in the moment, with an indelible connection to the jazz guitar traditions of swing and the blues. . . Hall may have come out of the Charlie Christian school, but it was his innovative ideas and constant search for fresh modes of expression that caused Pat Metheny to describe him as “the father of modern jazz guitar.” Bill Milkowski, from “Bill Frisell & Friends Pay Tribute to Jim Hall at Blue Note,” *DownBeat*, July 2014.



