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MARTY GROSZ ~ interviewed

STEVE KUHN ~ the jazz pianist returns

LEE MORGAN ~ career appraisal

45th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

Marty Grosz

interviewed by Martin Richards

His unshakeable belief in the supremacy of the classic jazz performers from the twenties and thirties, together with an ardently maintained support for the virtues and values of ensemble playing might encourage some people to label Marty Grosz a jazz dinosaur or, at least, a 'Mouldie Fygge'. They would be wrong, for Marty is, above all, an experimenter, as his work with the early Soprano Summit or the more recent Orphan Newsboys so clearly shows.

Marty explores the mixtures of sound created by differing instrumental permutations. He pursues the rare popular song or the obscure lyric as relentlessly and doggedly as a musical Columbo. He magnetically attracts likeminded musical accomplices.

Seldom other than jacketed and bow-tied, the six foot plus Mr Grosz looks more like a successful Madison Avenue PR executive than a jazz musician. If he hadn't become a jazz player, he could have earned a good living as a comedian, singer, writer or a cartoonist and illustrator. He is a humorist, a wordsmith and something of an expert on the early English novel. He thrives on his use of vocabulary and synonyms.

This interview, conducted at the 1991 Brecon Jazz Festival, provided for the writer six or seven entertaining hours of splendid company, interlaced with jazz information, social commentary, literary gems and above all laughter, but all constantly underpinned by Marty's colossal commitment to the music he adores and the tradition which he worships.

Add to all of this dexterous rhythm guitar chording, agile solo work and the manically funny vocals and you complete the picture of Marty Grosz . . . jazzman extraordinaire!

'I grew up with all these very interesting people. Professors from the University of Berlin, publishers, writers and stuff who were in our house all during the thirties.'

'I was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1930. My father had come over to America; he was an artist, a cartoonist, and a caricaturist, and he had come over to teach at the Art Students' League in New York in 1932.

'From 1933 on we lived first in New York City then finally in Huntingdon, Long Island, a suburb of New York. We grew up in a household that was full of refugees. Throughout the thirties I can't think of a time when there weren't people who, either for religious or political reasons (maybe they had the wrong hair colour) were staying with us. My father had a job. Selling art in the depression was slow, but he had a steady teaching job and he also had a job illustrating for Esquire magazine, which was big in those days. So he was doing pretty good, in spite of all the misery that was going on around. He was doing well enough so that he could vouch for these people, sign affidavits for them and bring them over. So of course, I grew up with all these very interesting people. Professors from the University of Berlin, publishers, writers and stuff who were in our house all during the thirties and would be with us for three meals a day.

'Anyway, we grew up, my brother and I, as sort of normal American kids, but not really, because it was a household that wasn't organised like our neighbours' households were. It was a household where a foreign language was spoken. A household where these characters wore long leather coats and berets and nodded their heads when they walked, and clasped their hands behind their backs. Middle Europa intellectuals congregated. My father loved to sing and would frequently perform unaccompanied at dinner parties. Old vaudeville songs and stuff. Of course, the impact of American music wasn't lost on him even though he was born in 1893. He knew *Georgia Cake Walk* and *Whitewash Man Rag* and many of those songs. We grew up basically with the swing era.

'The first thing I can remember is a ukelele in the attic, taking it to school. They said if anybody wants to study and take a musical instrument, bring 25 cents to school and bring an instrument and during your lunch hour we'll teach you. So, of course, there was a classroom and there was drums and a piano. Someone was banging the piano and someone was playing paradiddles on the drums. Somebody was trying to play a trombone. We were all eight or nine years old. Somebody was playing a clarinet and here I am with this silly little uke. You couldn't even hear the damn thing. That lasted about three or four lunch hours and I gave up, it just wasn't any fun. A teacher would come round and

say "Put your fingers here", indicating some basic chord form and I'd strum that for half an hour and say "Now what do I do?". But it must have lingered with me because when I got to be about 12, I started paying attention to jazz.

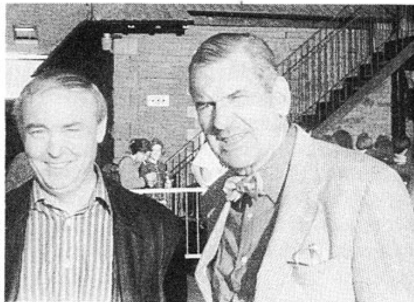
'Jazz was not very popular, contrary to what you believe now. Swing music and pop big band music was popular. Vocalists, Ziggy Elman's *And The Angels Sing,* that kind of thing; Johnny Long and *It's Only A Shanty In Old Shanty Town,* with the whole band singing. Of course, there was some Count Basie, they knew who Harry James was, *One O'Clock Jump,* Benny Goodman and Dorsey, but hard core people who knew who Joe Sullivan was or Bessie Smith, that I would say was about five per cent of the adolescent population.

'It wasn't until I was sent to boarding school—which was a mistake—when I was 13 that I ran into a couple of kids who really had a bit of experience and actually knew people. "You gotta listen to Bix Beiderbecke or Bessie Smith; that's Coleman Hawkins!" Most of them went along with the Glenn Miller thing and it was what I would call glossy commercial stuff.

'There was a Petrillo record ban about '42 and then reissues began appearing in the record shops. They couldn't record anything for about a year and a half. And here I was, I'd had inklings of jazz; I'd heard a Bob Crosby record. I said "What is that, that's interesting!". It somehow caught my ear. I still think ensemble playing should be cultivated. It doesn't have to be like King Oliver, but people can't forever be playing unison riffs and things like that, or harmonised riffs. There really should be more ensemble. In fact, I have to have a band where we play a couple of tunes all ensemble. I've tried to do it at jazz parties. Give the guys a chance to breath in the middle; we give them a piano solo. Anyway, I heard this and I said "Hey, that's wild, that's different" and I started investigating.

'About that time I got interested in the guitar and I still don't know why; I had just heard some guitar players. In 1939 there was a World's Fair exhibition, and there was a British exhibit and they had a film, an animated cartoon. There were no characters in it, it was like abstractions. And there was like a swing combo, I remember now. It was one of the little groups with maybe a fiddle and a clarinet, guitar, vibraphone, bass, drums and as they played images would flash on the screen. The vibraphone player would play and you'd see these little ping-pong balls. I was knocked out by that, so maybe that's where it all started, but somewhere along the way I decided I wanted to play the guitar.

'At that time Charlie Christian had just made his mark; then he died. Oscar Moore was the big hot attraction. Somehow I never wanted to play electric guitar, it didn't interest me. That sound didn't grab me. It sounded like Hawaiian guitars.


Derek Coller

Martin Richards and Marty Grosz at Brecon.

'I did not learn by listening to Buddy Bolden playing across the lake, or to some neighbour, it's true; I actually went to the library when I was about 12 or 13 and I got some books. I said "Do you have any books about jazz?". And they gave me, I think, Robert Goffin's Jazz, The Congo To The Metropolitan, or something. I must have read The Real Jazz and Rhythm On Record. And I got pictures! That was good. I liked that. And I got Louis Armstrong's book, Swing That Music. I still have it. In the back of Swing That Music were solos written out. Red Norvo, Ray Bauduc, Bud Freeman and Eddie Miller. There was half a guitar chorus by Carl Kress, so I copied that out, note by note. I couldn't read music. And later on when I could read music, I dug it out and it's not bad.

'Then I found out about the Commodore Music Shop and records. I remember the first jazz record I ever bought was Paging The Devil. I didn't know who the Kansas City Six were. I didn't know who Buck Clayton was or anybody was. The reason I bought the record was because of the title. For a 12-year-old kid, that sounded pretty evil and funky. Then later on I found it was Walter Page and the Blue Devils. I think *Way Down Yonder In New Orleans* was on the other side; Lester Young and Buck Clayton. Wonderful!

'Then I just started listening. I went and bought a Django Reinhardt album that Victor reissued about 1943. There are guys imitating it today, but Django, of course, was marvellous. Flying away like a bird over everything. Then I bought Jelly Roll Morton's Victor album and Louis Armstrong's Hot Five. It wasn't a bad education actually. And along with that, Duke Ellington and stuff. At that time a couple of radio shows in New York had disc jockeys, and they were marvellous. One was Alan Courtney and the other Fred Robbins and it was all just a kaleidoscope.

'It wasn't until later that I got an idea that there were factions and isms. It was just all jazz and I sort of liked them all. I thought some of the stuff was a little bit on the commercial side but what the hell, it was a hotchpotch, an olio, and I liked that. I still think it's a good way to learn, just throw it out there and let them figure it out.

'Then I started playing. I saved up my money and bought a cheesy guitar for 30 bucks—it may have even been 15. I don't know what it was but it was terrible. I couldn't get a sound out of it. It was awful. But you persist when you're a kid. It went from there and pretty soon my parents sent me to a boarding school, which was a mistake. They didn't know anything. They were from Europe and, naturally, they took the advice of American friends who said "Georgie, Eva, send that boy to one of them New England boarding schools. It's the best kind of thing to do". They had sent my older brother and he got drafted into the navy. He'd gone and I went and it was the wrong place for me. I was not going to be a captain of industry, obviously. My father wasn't a captain of industry. My father didn't belong to a golf club or the New York Athletic Club and do all those things. Why the hell should I? I had no inclination that way.

'So then I started teaching myself, painfully, the guitar. It's a painful thing to do, to teach yourself anything! I wish now I'd had a teacher, although I always keep running into guys who say "I had a teacher and all he wanted me to do was play *Comin' Round The Mountain* or *Red River Valley.* I wanted to play jazz! How do you do what you do?". Teachers can't teach you everything, but I would have saved a lot of time and making a lot of mistakes. You start finding people you're interested in that are interested in jazz. I found a friend at the boarding school. He had a notebook. He would sit in the library studying and his notebook says "Bunny Berigan and His Blue Boys". I said "Do you like that?" and he said "Yes, I do" and we started talking and pretty soon we got a bunch of people. Then I got kicked out of the school for going to Boston to listen to a band, Charlie Spivak's band. I listened to any band I could. I was crazy about music and I didn't care if it was Phil Spitalny and his all-girl orchestra or Count Basie.

'It made no difference to me, I went. They had a band, they had a guitar player. 'Cos you never could hear the guy, but he was there. His hands were going up and down. Bobby Sherwood had a band and you could hear him. He was a wonderful guitar person, little appreciated. Studio guitar player, played all the other instruments too!

'I'd go and hear any band I could, it didn't matter. I was on probation, which meant you couldn't leave the campus and I snuck out. Just had to go. In those days every big city had two or three movie houses that always had bands, as well as clubs and everything. But in the afternoon you'd go and hear the bands in movie houses. I was 16 and couldn't get into saloons. Somebody found me out and the next thing you know I was on the train back to New York, which was okay too.

'Then I got a job as a kitchen boy on Cape Cod. My mother was a disciplinarian. I took all my salary and she said, "Now, you save this money up, and you can have anything you want.". You know the ideas mothers have, I don't know what she wanted me to do. My father didn't give much of a damn. But I took it all and went

Marty Grosz

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out to the Commodore Music Store and bought records. Jimmy Noone And His Apex Club, you know the 78 album on Brunswick. I went out and bought that. I didn't know anything about it. I went to the Commodore Music Shop and said "I want something new. What about this *Carnegie Drag*?". And the guy turned to me and he said "New? That's the first record we ever recorded!". I didn't know. So, from then on I was hooked.

'I had the good fortune at that time, 1945 and 1946, to see a lot of guys and the misfortune to miss a lot of people. But I saw Louis Armstrong with his first All-stars. I saw Duke Ellington's Orchestra when he still had Tricky Sam and Hodges and Freddy Guy on guitar, at the Roxy. That was a marvellous experience. He got three hands before he even played a note. They had a pit band as well. They'd start off playing something like Duke's theme, *A-Train* at that time, then the announcement "Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra.". Wonderful looking orchestra too, in tan suits with powder blue neckties.

'Then I had the pleasure of seeing James P Johnson with Wellman Braud and Bechet and Bunk. I had the pleasure of going and listening to Joe Sullivan and Condon at Nick's. All those guys, you know. Caceres, Red McKenzie, with Brad Gowans and Brunies playing, and Hackett playing behind him. Willie The Lion, I can't think of all the guys. I thought James P. was ancient. He was probably only about 50 years old. Bunk was really old! I thought they'd opened up a mummy's tomb. Sixty-four years old! Unbelievable! And he could touch his foot to his ear, and he did!

'Then you start to meet guys. There used to be a place in New York called NoLa Studios, where you could rent a studio with a piano for about five bucks an hour, and we'd all chip in. Everybody chipped in a dollar or 50 cents. We'd meet Dick Wellstood there. He'd come down, and once or twice Bob Wilber. A bunch of us. There was no other place to play so we'd go play for an hour or two at NoLa Studios. Then you start playing little jobs around. I played a job in Southampton, Long Island. A friend of mine got that job and we went down there and we played for no salary. We played only for room and board and figured we'd get our salary during the daytime by mowing lawns and doing things like that.

'I finally made a little pin money, working for a sign painter. He couldn't draw very well so when he had to do something like cocktail hour, I would draw the Martini glass, with the olive in it, and when he had to do like a turkey raffle, I would draw the turkey! Tal Farlow, whom I'd met at that time, was also working in Southampton with a society trio and Tal was a sign painter. Tal didn't like the sign this guy painted so he brought his own poster paints and his own thing, his own brushes and stuff and he made the sign. The sign painter came and said "Who made that sign?" and Tal said "I did.". The guy said, "Terrific! You wanna work for me in your spare time?". So both Tal and I, though we didn't know it then, were working for the same guy, Tal the lettering and me doing cartoons for him, and artwork.

'After that, I got itchy feet and a friend named Hugh McKay and I decided that we would go to California. We were young and foolish. I remember going to Eddie Condon's, this was 1948. Condon said "When you leave, you'd better have lots of money.". He said "I tried that." and he told us about their trip. Everybody wants to go to California. But we said, why not, we're young, we're gay blades, we're merry Andrews. Somebody will just surely see us walking down the street and say "You guys are young and it's obvious from the way you carry yourselves and comport yourselves, that you have piles of talent and that you'll do well. I will take you under my wing and give you food and drink, you can desport yourselves with my daughters and I'll give you some pocket money as well while you find yourselves in Hollywood.". You know how you are when you're young! Silly things.

'So we got as far as Chicago! Hitch-hiked! I spent a year in Chicago, doing all kinds of odd jobs. Serving food and the kind of jobs one does. Working in a music store and having the pleasure of meeting some wonderful musicians. The last of those Chicago guys who were left like Bud Jacobson, Floyd O'Brien and Dave North, and although he didn't play much, Lee Collins. He was playing there working in a place called The Victory Club on North Clark Street. His hours were something like seven to three in the morning. Long, long hours. He had a trio, with a guy who had his hand shot and he was wearing a plastic thing. He could only play octaves with the left hand. And he had a drummer who rolled cigarettes full of pot and smoked them on the stand. He was a real deadfall and he would let anybody sit in, just to relieve himself of the duty. We often hied ourselves down there and sat in.

'I met a clarinet player named Frank Chace in Evanstown and we got together and started playing. He took me to his house and gave me an education in jazz. Up until that time I'd had certain likes, but he really gave me an education. He played Pee Wee Russell and Frank Teschemacher for me, which stayed with me for the rest of my life because they are probably my two favourite clarinet players, and some of my favourite jazz. We would sit for hours and hours in his apartment and then afterwards we'd sometimes go down and play with Lee Collins. We'd sit in and dream and he played me the Pee Wee Russell solo on *One Hour*. He was crazy about it. Over and over. I mean, 20 times in a row! And then we'd go out and clear our heads and take a walk and come back and he'd play it some more. He'd discovered that quirky, sawtooth kind of thing and I was under the spell. I'd seen Eddie Condon and was under *his* spell and tried to play like him, but I realised that you couldn't be anybody else! I realised that early, especially if you were the absolutely opposite type. So I spent a year in Chicago playing with guys like Danny Alvin and we used to go to rent parties at Jimmy Yancey's house. Jimmy Yancey had a wonderful, indescribable, laid-back way of sparse playing, which had a wonderful mood to it. It had a wonderful feeling. Sometimes, Albert Ammons would come by and he was about 180 degrees the other way from Jimmy. Jimmy almost looked comatose when he played and would be very slowly choosing these notes. Jimmy made Count Basie sound like he was playing *Nola*. Albert would come there and he was a heavy-set guy. He would sit at the piano and he had hands that were like machine guns. The whole place would shake.

'It was in Chicago that I ran into Don Ewell, whom I admire and always admired. Don had a room at the Fifty Third Street Y, on the South Side. He used to take Wingy Manone's record of *Stop That War, Them Cats Are Killing Themselves,* and sometimes when he was feeling particularly foxy, he would play that out the window, loud, early in the morning as people were going to work. And they would hear these machine guns and bomb noises and look around and wonder what was happening.

'The Chicago that I had in my head was the Chicago of the Sunset Café, the Apex Club, The Three Deuces, Bix, Tesch, Bud, The Dodds brothers, you know, that whole thing. It was a far cry from that. Funny, how in 20 years from 1928, a place can become a ghost town from what it was. I don't know how that happens, but it happens.

'I came back to New York and took odd jobs and played as much as I could until, I think, it was in 1950 I made my first record. We had a job a couple of nights a week at a place called The Rats Keller, up

in the Bronx. So I called the band after Tesch and Bud, I called the band The Cellar Boys. Marty Grosz and the Cellar Boys. We recorded four tunes and we used Dick Wellstood, Tommy Benford, Pops Foster, Johnny Dengler and Ephy Resnik. Hugh McKay on trumpet, Frank Chace on clarinet and myself. That was our debut into the 78rpm record. I was thrilled. Playing with Pops Foster, and some of the others were pretty good too. But Pops Foster! I'd heard him on records like *Give Me Your Telephone Number* and *Higginbotham Blues,* with Luis Russell, and *Mahogany Hall Stomp*. The records were later reissued under the name of Pops Foster and his Big Eight, because he had the bigger name. My name was nothing!

'After that we'd go sit in and play. Go here, go there. I played the summer in the Pocano Mountains (Pennsylvania) with Johnny Dengler's quartet. It was a resort community. And then Uncle Sam beckoned me and I was drafted. I went for two years over to Germany, which was better than Korea. I did not play in a band. Wilber was at Governor's Island at the time playing in a band. Carl Halen, a cornet player and a friend of mine, was playing at Fort Dix but he couldn't help. It depended upon openings existing. There were no openings and if you played guitar, they would give you something else to play in the marching band. You held the bass drum or you played the cymbal. So I went over to Germany and I had like a nine to five job which gave me time to practise, drink and carry on. And when I came back, a friend of mine said "What are you doing?". I said, "Nothing, I'm at a loose end.". I'd been back about a week, I was staying at home and I was trying to find what was going on. Anybody around? No, they've moved, he's left. So and so's playing. You can try to sit in! My friend was going to the University of Chicago and he said "Why don't you come out here and visit me? I'm newly married, we've got an apartment, we got room and everything.". So I said "Okay.".

'So I went (back) to Chicago and stayed for 20 years. I got married, started a family, the whole thing. Through my friend Frank Chace, I got a job at The Gaslight Club and this was a key club in those days. You couldn't buy liquor on credit so you called it a private club and charged two bucks or five bucks for a key. And that made you a member. They had a trio there. Banjo, piano and clarinet—I was the banjoist. I bought a banjo, learned to play it and did that for five years. The tips were very good and it was good for the chops because we had to play long hours and there were only the three of us. We had to play all the Dixieland tunes. All the strains and everything! I used to have to do the drum tags at the end on the banjo. After five years, I'd had it with that. It was a manic atmosphere and I was drinking heavily every night. What we'd do was we'd take a benny, you know, Benzedrine, so that we'd stay peppy and then you could drink. You were wired and you could throw down the booze.

'After five years of that, Frank Chace left. The piano player we had used to play the melody along with Frank and it drove Frank bats. He stood it as long as he could and finally gave up, so then we worked with a succession of clarinettists and trumpet players, especially my dear friend who's dead now. A guy named Norm Murphy, who had once played with Krupa and The Saints And Sinners and Jimmy Dorsey. He was a bosom buddy of Roy Eldridge, and a friend of Dizzy. He was a wonderful player who taught me a lot. All the things you need to know about music and performing. You know, take your time, don't rush it, less is more, basically. Most guys when they're young they don't ever want to get off the stand. They wanna keep going. "I've almost got 'em, I've almost got 'em. Give me another chorus!". And then they realise they're just thrashing about like drowning men. But he knew how to run a band and get things going. A wonderful player, but alcoholic, alas.

'I was looking at the ads for the Civil Service, government jobs and stuff, when Bob Wilber called me up and said "Would you like to join Soprano Summit?".'

'After that I joined The Village Stompers, a tawdry, meritorious ensemble that would play folk songs, or pseudo folk songs like *Walk Right In,* or *If I Had A Hammer* and, of course, their big hit, *Washington Square*. They would play them first in a so-called folk style in the sharp key. I played banjo, mostly. Then after a couple of choruses there'd be a key change and a trombone gliss and we'd go up half a step, and the Dixieland ensemble would ensue. This was their formula and it was really a cheesy thing. That's why their song was a hit. It was so cheesy and crumby. I did that for a while and we were scheduled to go to Japan when I got an offer to go into a place called The Velvet Swing in Chicago. Another tawdry dump where they had a girl on a swing in the front, and in the back they had a band. It was my first experience playing entr'acte. I had to play the banjo. They didn't wanna hear about the guitar, so I played the banjo. The standard, visiting firemen for the corn chandlers and the pig floggers of Iowa and Omaha. The usual stuff like *Alabama Jubilee, Waiting For The Robert E Lee,* that kind of stuff.

'From there I went up to Canada to do the same thing and went down and worked with Henry Questa and I switched back to guitar. The banjo, per se, is not a bad instrument but you're instantly type-cast. People hear a banjo and they think *Carolina In The Morning* or they think *Twelfth Street Rag,* especially when they've had a couple of drinks, so I said "I've gotta get out of this.".

'So then, borrowing an idea from Carl Kress, which I knew was admired, I modified the guitar tuning on a six string guitar. I added two bass strings lower than the standard Spanish guitar tuning. The banjo only has four strings and I was getting so tired of never having two lower strings to play, so I did it with a vengeance and still do. This makes you a good partner in a duet, because you can play lower than the usual tuning, and I've stuck with that ever since.

'I was still in Chicago, doing every kind of job you could think of. Balloon occasions. Openings of Wisconsin cheese stores. I even found myself playing conventions. These people would sell to the conventions because Chicago was a convention town. There was a lot of work. People would say "Oh, we need a little band for the convention, something that's exciting and peppy.". The agent would say "How about a banjo and a tuba?". "No, no, this is a big convention. How about three banjos?". And I found myself playing for dances with three banjos, a tuba and drums! You can imagine what *Stardust* sounded like with three banjos. So all of the time, I was in Chicago and wanting to play jazz. Being in Chicago at that time was like being a ballet dancer in Tucson, Arizona. It just wasn't the place to be.

'I tried everything. I did national television. Dan Morgenstern was editor of Downbeat for a while and, through his kind offices, I got onto a thing called Just Jazz, or something. It was a series on TV. I had an eight piece band called The Sounds of Swing. Ugh! What a terrible name, but that's what it was called. I apologise now. I played guitar duets with a friend of mine and I tried everthing. Records. Everything, and nothing seemed to work. I was just desperate. I said, "That's it.". I finally wound up playing at a place called The Riverside Savings And Loan Bank and they wanted us to play in short pants with big bow ties, like Humpty Dumpty. Big bow ties and with little beanies on. I talked 'em out of the short pants. I said "For Christ's sake, we got hairy legs here. It's gonna look terrible.". Talked 'em out of that but we had to play *Down By The Riverside* over and over again!

'Right at that moment, I was looking at the ads for the Civil Service, government jobs and stuff, when Bob Wilber called me up and said, "Would you like to join Soprano Summit?". We'd encountered each other a few times through jazz sessions at a place called The Bighorn, north of Chicago. I said, "I'll tell you what, Bob. Look over your shoulder. See that dot that's growing bigger all the time? That's me.". It was 1975. I said, "I'm gone, I'm on my way.". Two weeks later I was in Carnegie Hall with my foot on a stool and I was singing the words to *Milenberg Joys,* would you believe? I remember Carmen Mastren was on the programme as well. I'd met him. Nice man. I always admired Carmen. My knees were knocking together. I said, "Jesus! Here I am, 45-years-old and I'm in Carnegie Hall. I don't think I'm going to last the evening out!".'

To be continued next month

Marty Grosz

The all-acoustic guitarist concludes his conversation with Martin Richards

Marty continues with his account of his debut at Carnegie Hall, begun last month:

'Well, we lasted it out and got an ovation, the whole thing, and that was a wonderful way, when I think of it now, to come back to New York. Not to come back saying "Hi fellows, remember me?" or "You don't know me but I used to live here. I've been outa town. Can I sit in?". This way, boom! I was launched.

'We worked at The Downbeat Room and that year I also went to Nice with them (Soprano Summit), and South Africa. Later on, Carmen was doing this Louis Armstrong tribute thing with Dick Hyman and he was in a car accident. He broke about three ribs, so they called me to do that. For me, it was mind boggling, because I was coming from playing these crummy jobs in Chicago and dreaming. I wonder how many others are out there carrying around these dreams in their heads, someplace? All the small towns, all the cities are full of them saying "I know I got the stuff." and wondering if you can ever get there. I was just fortunate that I got a good entrée onto the scene.

'I did six or eight albums with Soprano Summit on Concord and that was a good experience. In New York the competition was tough and you had to get on your mettle. It was the big time. I started working with those guys and then Soprano Summit sort of faded into oblivion. They'd made their first record with George Duvivier (b), Bobby Rosengarden (d), Dick Hyman (p) and Bucky Pizzarelli on guitar. I joined them because they wanted to go on the road. For economy, they decided to forget the piano so we just did it with five guys. I sat in the middle of the front line with bass and the drums in the back. So that was the second Soprano Summit. The original one was the studio thing.

'Beyond that, it was countless jobs with countless people. I started getting into the jazz party circuit, which is very big in the States. Steady bands and steady jobs are getting scarcer than hen's teeth. I'm trying to take myself now from 1978, 1979 up until now (August 1991). There were several recording groups. That's always a great source of pleasure, to put records together. I like to write charts and to plan things. I like to organise things and I like to go into the studio. The best is when they just record you live.

'I find an interesting thing is happening. The younger guys aren't interested in new things. For the last 50 or 60 years, the hi-hat has been played relentlessly on two and four by every drummer from here to Peking. People have been walking on the bass until, if you put it all together, they would walk to the moon 10 times and back. The standard for rhythm guitar is a relentless four-four of even value, even measure. I think it's time for some changes and I notice the younger guys I play with are not interested in the fifties stuff that a lot of these people are playing. Even the Dixieland bands and the fifties rhythm sections. They go back to Wellman Braud and Chink Martin for the bass players and Pops Foster and Steve Brown. They find that more creative. You see, even the best things get to be clichés after a time, no matter how good they are. You have to try to work your way out of them and still keep things swinging.

'My own hobby-horse is to get more ensemble things going. I'd like to have a band that plays ensemble, but this doesn't mean that it has to be a Turk Murphy band or a King Oliver imitation. Far from it. There are all kinds of ensembles. There's the ensemble that Chicagoans played. The ensemble of the Summa Cum Laude band. There are the ensembles that were played on the Billie Holiday records for example, or when guys like Chu Berry and Lips Page would just jam. Sometimes quite interesting, sort of strange things happen. I like that New Orleans idea of the ensemble going on for 14 or 15 choruses. One thing getting softer and softer and another coming more to the fore. One instrument to the fore and then receding again. I like to hear drummers play press rolls on calf skin heads, because it's a big, fat, lovely sound and there's no need to discard it. The notion of progress is all right for machinery but in art it's a spurious one. By 1940, press rolls were de trop. That's unfortunate. Everybody's always afraid of being considered old-fashioned, but I'm not. I don't give a damn. I like that fat sound of the rhythm section and I used to put down a feeling of cooking. Early on, some of my favourite records were the Chicago guys, Tesch and Bud, Muggsy and Joe Sullivan and Condon, Tough and Wettling and everything. I still love it. But that doesn't exclude Eddie Lang and Miff Mole or Fud Livingston. It's not as swingy but so what!

'I hate electric guitars. These guys sit there with these boxes and the first thing they have to do is plug in. It's like a life-support system.'

It's another dimension. You can listen to Bartok string quartets and take inspiration from them and you can listen to Bach. They're not mutually exclusive.

'I think I first started to sing in Chicago about 30 years ago. It goes with the instrument, the guitar. In the old days, if you were a banjo player you had to sing. I used to sing backstage, just for my own amusement. One day the leader came to me and said "Listen, why don't you do that on stage? We need all the help we can get". I was absolutely tongue-tied. I didn't know how to present myself. I wouldn't look at the audience. I didn't know how to address them. I was a total wreck. Oh, I was smart and a wise guy off stage, but when I got out there and had to look at those people looking up at me, that sea of faces with mouths agape, I didn't know how to do it. It took me a long time to learn, but it's like public speaking. If you do it long enough, you learn a few of the tricks. And then I always thought it was fun.

'I don't understand why jazz should be treated as concert music. It didn't start out that way. It started out as dance music, as bordello music, as parade music. I'd like the audience to get more involved in jazz. I'd like them to dance, I'd like them to laugh. I don't mind if they talk back to me. I see it a little bit as theatre of the absurd. When I was growing up, the first jazz bands that I saw were, of course, big bands and they were never presented as solely art attractions. Duke Ellington had three girl vocalists. He had Ray Nance tap-dancing. He had the horns waving in the air, Sonny Greer throwing his sticks around. Duke himself got up and did a monologue accompanied by Stravinsky-like reed figures. I don't see any reason why you can't combine that sort of thing. I know there is a purist side. I know that in the old days they didn't like Louis Armstrong's mugging around. They didn't like Fats Waller's asides. That doesn't bother me. Guys talk on the stand. I'd much rather they'd talk to the audience. Pure music, just playing, can bore an audience.

'When I'm recording I try to find unknown or lesser known tunes. No more *A Trains*. No more *Indianas*, please. As good as they are, even the most wonderful tune palls after a while. So, of course, one looks for something different. *Sweet Georgia Brown* has been done to death. Instead, I like to play *Rose Of The Rio Grande* which has a lot of the same chords in it.

'I also think people should try to write original material as much as possible. In the old days, jazz musicians used to come into the studio and have originals. Some of them weren't great, some of them were made great by great players, but it seems to me that that would vitalise the art.

Also, certain producers are tune-oriented. Like Stomp Off Records. He likes you to do different tunes. There's a tune network, so it's getting easier. There are guys who are putting out huge books of old, obscure tunes. I was surprised how many people collect old sheet music. I told a guy in Ohio that we were supposed to do a Walter Donaldson album, Keith Ingham and I. He sent me a sheaf of xeroxes of Walter Donaldson stuff, two of which we used. I'd never heard some of the songs. I would have loved to have been recording in the thirties, and have an A & R man throw four or five tunes at me. That's a wonderful challenge, even some of the crumby tunes like *The Miller's Daughter, Marianne* or *Roll Along Prairie Moon.* Another way is that you call up the publisher. They'll send you a big, fat folio of tunes. They figure that if you record it, they'll get a royalty.

'From here, I'm hoping to do more touring with a little combo of guys. I've whittled it down as far as I can. Now the Orphan Newsboys is just four guys. I figure that's a pretty good size. We've been able to sustain an evening's entertainment, do three shows a night, or three sets and do concerts. I'm also working on a guitar duo album with Frank Vignola. I love arranging for two guitars, but two instruments of the same kind can become monotonous. You have to be very careful it doesn't all sound the same, and doesn't repeat itself.

'The notion of progress is all right for machinery but in art it's a spurious one.'

'I'd like to do an album live, where several nights are recorded live. All the asides and the goofy things. I could ham it up and clown around. I have a conception for a band called The Pearl Casters. I have band names ready, in case one band folds. I have The Obsequious Toadies waiting in the wings. My first name for The Classic Jazz Quartet was the best name I ever thought of. I called them The Bourgeois Scum. Wellstood liked that. But a disc jockey in New York said "I am not going to use that name on the air". So we had a contest between the four of us and came up with this rather bland, dumb name, The Classic Jazz Quartet. The Orphan Newsboys was just a total stream of consciousness.

'I love to read old record labels where they have those names, like The Peacock Serenaders or the Sunburned Seven. The Ham And Egg Orchestra! It's all communication. Duke Ellington knew this. The great band leaders of the old days knew this. It makes me unhappy when guys get up in T-shirts. People pay money to go and see a band. Give 'em something for it. Or do like Sun Ra. Give 'em a show. If we like this music we should do everything we can to make it attractive, so that people will listen to it.

'I think there's a healthy trend developing away from amplification. Calf-skin drum heads with a lower, more warm sound. There's even a few guys who play acoustic guitar like me, and a few who play acoustic bass. I hate electric guitars. These guys sit there with these boxes and the first thing they have to do is plug in. It's like a life-support system.

'I'd like it if they could learn to play with good time and if the horn players could learn to support the rhythm section instead of thinking that the rhythm section is just gonna go on for ever and ever while they float above it. The earlier musicians played figures what would support the rhythm section. If you are a rhythm player nowadays, you spend an awful lot of time slogging away, marking the miles off, whilst these guys are on their ego trips. There are certain horn players who make your fingers just fly. With others, you're just working and working.

'I feel pessimistic about the showbiz grandstanding, cheap trick concert part of jazz, but optimistic about the acoustic instrument part of jazz. If a band plays a little softer it doesn't mean they're less masculine. Take the amp away. Raise the action on the guitar and bass. Get heavy duty strings. Clarinet and trumpet, get away from the mike. It's hard to wean the old-timers, but the young guys still strive, and they still have some agility in their brains. I think they're the hope.'