

the rescue would not do the job. Rather the deck would need to be drilled, as no burning was safe. The forward area of the ship was still covered with a thin film of oil from the bombing - fire danger too great. The ship construction and repair force insisted that the rescue be through a manhole drilled out of the armored steel. That meant that a hole would be manhole size. The ship really didn't have but one power drill which could only work with a drill bit of about a half inch diameter. The prospect was daunting as about 200 to 300 holes must be drilled, one right next to the other so the armored steel could be knocked out. This meant that with continuous drilling if we could keep the drill from overheating at least 2 days of drilling. Could the 4 trapped men stand the noise? Actually, they had no choice other than to stand the drill for an hour and rest for an hour or two to adjust to the noise. This plan did work, but it took three days to do the job. When the manhole was completed, the 4 men crawled out with much assistance from the drilling detail who really had to pull them out. Despite their ordeal every one was quite well, no longer scared, and most happy.

The taskforce commander was so pleased that all came out in good shape that he prepared a letter of commendation for each of the 4 men. This was sent to the Washington Bureau of Personnel and resulted in a shipside assembly of the entire crew months later as a new Captain awarded each of the 4 a medal. The Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic fleet had authorized a Navy and Marine Corps medal for each; that is rarely awarded.

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THE WHITE CAT

February 14, 2000

Joseph P. Tomain

It's good to get the clutter out of your life every now and then. I usually start in my study

rearranging books and music. Somehow I never quite make it to the clutter of the garage, but maybe someday. It's funny what you find, like the map of center city Dublin that I used as a bookmark in a Joyce biography or the postcard of Fra Angelico's The Annunciation in Florence sent by Paddy O'Mara and Sarah Heaney whom I believe I introduced to you some time ago. I also found a swizzle stick from Benny's Place.

Benny's was a small club in New York City down on Lower Broadway next to the Village Vanguard. Benny was the owner/bartender of the place which was no bigger than the pit in front of me. There was a red lit exit sign, two dim lights somewhere in the room, and since it was a three step walkdown, the small windows over the bar looked out onto the pavement. The lack of light made the place look bigger, cleaner, and comfortable.

I found Benny's Place, and Benny of course, when I was living in the Village playing drums off and on. Benny was my jazz rabbi and I remember our afternoon conversations at his bar as crisply as a new CD. It was there that I asked him to teach me about jazz history. He said jazz was a big topic and that I needed to accept his personal definition of jazz. I can hear him even today:

"Listen, as far as I'm concerned, jazz, as we best know it," he had that superior way about him, "started in 1942 with Dizzy Gillespie's song, 'Salt Peanuts' and lasted until the mid-1960's. Jazz ended with either the release of Miles' Live at the Plugged Nickel or Coltrane's A Love Supreme. Dizzy, Train, Miles, Bird, Bud, and Lester Young - the Pres - created Real Jazz. Everything before this period was a flouncy prelude, 'flouncy' what a great Benny word, "was a flouncy prelude to what was to come. And everything after has been a disappointing postscript."

"Benny," I said, "I don't suppose everyone accepts your definition."

"Of course not. And, my young friend, I have two disclaimers. First, Duke Ellington doesn't count in the equation. Ellington is in no class of musicians

that the world has ever known. Second, even the most technically gifted, virtuosic musicians since then play their best when they play in the traditional style or play the jazz standards. Again jazz is a big topic. Care to narrow it?"

"I'm most interested in jazz piano."

"Oh, young blood, now you're entering dangerous waters. There are a lot of contenders to be next in line."

"'Next in line.' What does that mean?"

"Well," Benny intoned, "in the Book of Jazz, it is written that Scott Joplin played Ragtime, and begat Earl Fatha Hines who played Early Jazz, and begat James P. Johnson who played Stride, and begat Art Tatum who played Everything and begat Bud Powell who played Bebop, and begat Oscar Peterson who plays my definition of Real Jazz and begat. . .And there the begats end. . .maybe." He smiled again.

"Do you have a candidate for next in line?"

"Look, you have to understand we jazz guys take this stuff very seriously. These arguments can start fights and end friendships, but," he paused for effect, "I would definitely put Bill Evans on the list."

I knew the name, but asked anyway, "Why Bill Evans?"

Here Benny's voice got quiet. "It's simple, Evans was a poet, genius."

I had seen pictures of Evans, "Wasn't he kind of frail?"

"Don't let pictures fool you," Benny straightened, "Bill wasn't a small guy, but I know what you mean. His physical talents were hidden in his photographs. He played football at college, was also the best pool player I ever lost to, and, he mastered golf. When he was with Miles for Kind of Blue, his pictures come across like the college kid he was playing against some

seriously seasoned veterans. In those pictures, he is wide-eyed, slack-jawed, and pasty. Later, when Bill let his hair grow and grew a beard, even that could not hide his underlying fragility.

"You know," he continued, "there's an interesting thing about his size, he developed a special technique on the piano where he would let the weight of his arms fall on the keys rather than pump at the wrists. I remember him sitting virtually over the piano with his fingers straight out, falling on the keys, and creating his sound."

"Did you know him?"

"I knew all those guys. I came to the Village after the War - World War II to you - and was part of the house band at the Village Vanguard."

"I didn't know that the Vanguard had a house band then."

"They didn't. I hung out there a lot, bounced a little, bartended a little - great training for my true and future vocation - and sat in on bass when they would let me. I met Bill that way."

I asked Benny about Evans' background.

"Bill was born over the river in Jersey and went to school outside of New Orleans. He studied classical piano there and became quite good at it. After hearing him play Beethoven, one of his teachers told him to become a concert pianist. Can you imagine that? That training caused no small amount of confusion for Bill, particularly since he was close to New Orleans.

"Bill and the boys would hit the Quarter all the time, they'd listen, sit in, and play on their own. When he left college, Bill had a tough decision to make."

I told Benny that I knew where Evans ended up, but wondered how he got there. At this point, I could tell that Benny was focusing on the story because he began

polishing glasses with that limp, damp bar rag - part of the bartender uniform.

"After college, the choice between the jazz club and the concert hall was postponed by Korea. Bill was in Special Services and played a lot of popular music and jazz. After he was discharged, he withdrew completely from performing for over a year to work out his own conception of music. He turned his apartment on West 83<sup>rd</sup> Street into a studio. The apartment was just large enough for a Knabe grand piano and a music stand. I remember the first time I saw that apartment; the piano was covered with pieces of Chopin, Ravel, Scriabin, and Rachmaninoff. And the bookshelves were loaded with books on literature and philosophy. Bill was a smart guy, a huge reader, and - you'll never guess this - a Thomas Hardy expert. Where does that come from? He loved touring England just for that reason.

"This apartment was the last time for Bill's classical studies. After that he drifted from his 'studio' to joints like the Roseland Ballroom, and the Friendship Club in Brooklyn, and to tuxedo gigs and over-forty dances for about a year. Fortunately for Bill, and for the rest of us I suppose, Bill's days as a journeyman were fairly short-lived. Eventually, and prophetically as it turned out, he landed at the Village Vanguard opposite the Modern Jazz Quartet where he was first heard by the heavy jazz guys. But a big break came from Miles Davis."

"Did you know Miles too?" my eyes widening.

"No." And a small smile showed at the corner of Benny's mouth. "Nobody knew Miles except maybe for Gil Evans - now that was one sweet collaboration."

"Well, how did Bill and Miles get together?"

Benny told me that they met through George Russell who was this crazy cat from Cincinnati who started out singing in the AME Church choir and moved on to become something of an avant-garde jazz performer, composer, and arranger. "Russell," Benny said, "was multi-talented but his biggest contribution was a book he

wrote during an illness he had in the late '40's with this impossible title called The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization for Improvisation (for all instruments)."

"That's a mouthful. What does it mean?"

Benny told me that the Lydian Concept formed the basis of "modal jazz" which was a style in which a set scale dictates melody and harmony. Despite the title, it was an attempt to simplify jazz. Miles and Evans were both experimenting with the modal form and the result was Kind of Blue. Now here, I must confess that having listened to Kind of Blue as many times as any other recording I've always felt that modal jazz was like William Carlos Williams' "variable foot." Both were searches for a form that doesn't exist - but the search turned out to be productive.

I remember asking Benny about how Bill got to play on Kind of Blue.

"Bill loved that story," Benny said, "told it all the time. I can just imagine Bill crossing his apartment to answer the phone. On the other side, was The Voice. You only need to hear The Voice once and it was imprinted on your mind. It was more growl than voice and sounded as if it had just swallowed a magnum of shattered glass. The Voice also brought to mind a face like no other's. The face was dark and shined with eyes embedded and piercing. No words describe those eyes that don't sound cliché - laser-like, penetrating, etc., etc. They can only belong to one man.

"As Bill tells it, he picked up the phone and heard: 'Hello, Bill, this is Miles - Miles Davis. You wanna make a studio gig? Meet me at Columbia.' Nothing more.

"Well, Bill showed up at Columbia 30<sup>th</sup> Street Studio that March in 1959 to play with Miles, Jimmy Cobb, Cannonball Adderley, Paul Chambers, and John Coltrane. When the very young and still collegiate looking Bill sat down at the piano, someone blurted out: 'Who's that?'

"Who do you mean" responded Miles 'that white cat'? That's what Miles called Bill, 'that white cat.' Miles had a mouth on him, and told the assembled that Bill could play like a . . . (Club decorum requires that I delete Miles' less than flattering maternal expletive.)

"Hell, that's all Miles had to say and Bill was the piano player for Kind of Blue."

I've heard jazzmen, bluesmen, and rockers all say that Kind of Blue influenced them, but asked Benny about its significance.

"Miles loved to experiment. For Kind of Blue, the players had no charts before the session. Miles wanted to force the spontaneity into a pre-set mode." As Benny tells it:

"One day at Miles' apartment, Evans told me, Miles wrote. . . the symbols for G minor and A augmented and said 'What would you do with that?' Bill said he really didn't know; but he went home and wrote "Blue in Green" which became a standard. Bill always said he wrote it; but it appears with Miles' name. Bill played down the issue, but I think it bugged him that he didn't get formal credit.

"Bill described "Blue in Green" as 'a 10-measure circular form following a 4-measure introduction, and played by soloists in various augmentation and diminution of time values.' These guys played at too many levels above me, that's why I sat in with Bill rarely."

It isn't obvious to me that Miles and Bill would work well together so I asked Benny about the collaboration.

"Aside from the fact that both were into the modal thing, Miles admired Bill, said that he played with a 'quiet fire' and that he played underneath a rhythm. On both counts, Miles was right as he invariably was on things musical. You don't have to listen to much Bill Evans to hear the 'quiet fire.' Bill's music drives, but drives with a special softness and there's always

more there than meets the ear. I've seen drunks walk into the Vanguard thinking that Bill was playing cocktail music. Bill's playing is lush, but it's also intellectually lyrical.

"As for 'underneath the rhythm,' Bill never stepped on the soloist's lines. Even knowing Evans' was playing, you have to listen closely for him on Kind of Blue. His playing is distinctive, clear, and yet it's as if the stretches of piano and bass are waiting for the horn players - Miles, Cannonball, and Coltrane. Bill rarely played the right hand horn lines on the piano like almost everyone else. He had bigger things in mind. When Bill played 'underneath,' he was like the great arrangers who worked with Sinatra, such as Billy May and Nelson Riddle whose sometimes fiery, sometimes explosive, and always swinging arrangements let Sinatra do what he did best - sing the story. In Kind of Blue and in an album he did with Tony Bennett, Bill accomplished the same thing. He was a piano player who let the soloists soar when he had to and who soared himself when he led his groups."

Kind of Blue is the largest selling jazz recording ever, but what did Evans do after that? Benny gave me some history.

"Kind of Blue wasn't Bill's first album, but it did bring him certain stature. The best things from Bill were just around the corner. Three years earlier he had recorded New Jazz Conceptions, his debut album. Then his second album, Everybody Digs Bill Evans, had this great jacket adorned by blurbs from Miles, Cannonball, George Shearing, and Ahmad Jamal testifying to Bill's extraordinary talent. The jacket was a surprise to Bill. When he looked at what was said about him and by whom, he only asked his publicist whether or not he had found a quote from his mother."

Benny had definite recommendations about Bill's discography.

"If you want to get to know Evans, start with Everybody Digs, but the two indispensable albums are Waltz for Debby and Sunday at the Village Vanguard.

"Waltz and Sunday were recorded live one day in June, 1961 at the Village Vanguard and I was there. Bill was with drummer Paul Motian and bassist Scott LaFaro. That trio created a sound yet to be duplicated and a type of jazz trio called conversational. Up to that time, jazz trios had two standard formats. One was piano intro, solo, solo, solo, and out. The other was a mini-piano concert supported by drums and either bass or guitar. In Bill's trios, the piano was not the only lead, the bass did not merely keep time through walking notes, and the drums were not limited to rhythm. In an Evans trio, LaFaro's bass was really a second lead and fully melodic. Motian's drums carried the melody as well as the rhythm. The Evans Trio sound was unique, but didn't last long. Ten days after the Vanguard date, Scotty was killed in a car accident sending Bill into a deep depression and it was nearly twenty years before that trio magic was recaptured."

I asked Benny if Bill was technically proficient.

Benny said that Bill could do it all and do it without being flashy, in Benny's words, "Tatum and Oscar could furiously lay down cascades of notes. Bill could too and does at times but you have to listen through the softness."

I understand what Benny meant about Bill. Listening to him is like letting a warm wave wash over you with layers of harmony. Before you realize it, you are magnetized by his playing and are catching your breath. Sometimes the waves come in soft blocked chords; sometimes the chords come through locked hands an octave apart and sometimes both hands move in different directions.

Benny described Bill's ability to display the melody; and play against the time. At other times, he told me, Bill would simply "indicate" the melody (Bill's word) or "indicate" the tempo as he works out a pre-planned harmonic architecture setting up his improvisation and he always unerringly returned to the tune, as his improvisation came to its logical conclusion.

Bill's most famous tune is Waltz for Debby and I asked about how it came to be.

"Bill had an older brother," said Benny, "Harry, who he greatly admired. Harry wasn't half the musician that Bill was and became a music teacher which Bill very much respected. Bill spent a lot of time with Harry and his wife and wrote Waltz for Debby for his then three year-old niece who, other than Helen Keane, was probably the most important woman in his life."

Waltz for Debby starts in waltz time. ONE, two, THREE; four; FIVE, pause, SEVEN, then two shimmying descending chords followed by two measures of soft, ascending eighth note chords. The first time you listen to Waltz for Debby, you will swear that it opens with a piano solo of single notes for the first measure and a half. A closer listening reveals very quiet lefthand chords in counterpoint to Bill's right hand and to LaFaro's bass. The four measure sequence is then repeated before the chord and tempo changes and opens into a marvelous jazz exploration.

I didn't know whether Bill ever married. Again Benny provided the details:

"Bill married a woman named Nenette Zazzara for a short time, but everybody thought that he and Ellaine were married. Ellaine shared his music, his bed, and his bad habits. They were together for over 10 years. She was cool, funky. A beatnik really but had serious mental problems. When they were together, she was able to take care of Bill's daily needs. But Bill was on the road a lot and one thing leads to another and Bill met Nenette and felt that he could have the child with her that he could not have with Ellaine for whatever reason. The sad part of the story is that when Bill returned to New York to tell Ellaine about his pending marriage, her mental equilibrium went off and she threw herself under a subway. Helen Keane had to identify the body. Nenette didn't share Bill's music, but they did have a son Evan. Letter to Evan is dedicated to him. Bill loved to put his friends in his songs. He wrote "Peri's Scope" for Peri Cousins and "Laurie" for his last girlfriend. He also wrote "There Came You" for Ellaine."

I had never heard about Peri Cousins and asked about her.

"Peri," as Benny described, "was this gorgeous black chick who Bill was as wild about as she was about him. I ran into Peri a few years ago" he said "and she told me how much Bill loved playing classical music and said 'Of course, you know, he was a romantic. He played Rachmaninoff, but he also played Beethoven and Bach. He would play that and then just drift into jazz in a very fluid kind of way. It was wonderful to hear this - that was my privilege.'" Benny said that he always thought that Peri and Bill were soulmates, she so understood Bill and his music.

"Why did they split?" I asked.

And then Benny told me the inevitable.

"Peri split when Bill met the White Lady. I don't mean Ellaine, I mean heroin."

"I was afraid of that," I said. "How did Bill get into drugs?"

The story was that Bill picked up the habit from Philly Joe Jones who was asked to leave Miles' group just before the Kind of Blue gig. Philly and Bill were junkie buddies.

As Benny tells it: "Some junkies get wrapped up in the ritual of it all - the bending of the spoon; the few drops of water mixed with white powder boiled to a lethal solution; the placement of a needle in a ball of cotton - no need for impurities in one's smack; the pulling up of the plunger to fill the syringe; the tying off with whatever rope or belt available; the slapping of the vein; the insertion of the spike into that vein as the plunger pushes the junk into the body." Benny paused, "That story is just too close to home. I'm sweating just remembering. But Bill could care less about the ritual. He wanted out of the ordinary world, he wanted to get from one performance to another, from one life to another. Bill once said:

'You don't understand. It's like death and transfiguration. Every day you wake with pain like death and then you go out and score, and that is transformation.'

"I really hated Bill for that then. Now I think that if only that were some junkie rationalization, then there was hope. I finally realized, but still don't understand, that the pain he spoke of wasn't life without drugs; it was life - life when not playing."

I think Benny was right. Tony Bennett was recently interviewed on NPR and was asked if Bill's addiction ever affected his performance. "No," was his unhesitating answer. Still, I asked Benny one afternoon, "Why the drugs?"

Benny wondered, "Aren't the fates unusual things? Maybe Bill should not have answered Miles' phone call; maybe he should not have gone to the session, maybe he should not have gone out with the boys who introduced the white cat to the white lady because Bill's already black lifeview turned down a darker road. My guess is he would have picked up the habit some time - it was in his nature. The real tragedy for Bill was that there was no room for love between his muse and his demon."

I asked Benny if Bill always used heroin.

"No," he told me, "he got off it for a while with Ellaine's help, but went back, stopped heroin, and did coke up to the end. His drug habit was more lifelong than less. He'd cadge money from his friends and badger his producers for advances. The constant handouts annoyed and depressed Bill's closest friends and they eventually conspired to stop lending him money. That strategy backfired as Bill moved from friends to loan sharks who threatened to break his hands unless he repaid with vigorish which, of course, moved Bill back to the annoyance but continued loyalty of his friends especially Helen."

Benny had mentioned Helen Keane before and I was curious to know more about the woman whose name is on most of Bill's albums.

"Helen was romantically involved with Gene Lees, a sometimes lyricist and long-time friend of Bill's. In fact, Gene wrote the lyrics for Waltz for Debby. Keane was a remarkably successful professional who worked her way up from secretary at the MCA booking agency to become the first woman agent/manager/producer. As Gene tells the story, he told Helen that there was a piano player he wanted her to hear and brought her down to hear Bill at the Vanguard. It didn't take much. After sixteen bars, Helen turned to Gene and said, 'Oh no, not this one. This is the one who could break my heart.' Inevitably and repeatedly he did, of course, yet Helen stayed Bill's manager and producer."

I also wanted to know what it was like to listen to Bill live.

"Bill had a large repertoire, but there is definitely an Evans songbook. Bill played like a summer rain; sun shower perhaps. His notes were crystalline, they glistened, he played steadily, he sparkled, and filled the space. The more I think about it, his playing was more like an evening shower as dusk turns to dark. It was always there, the dark, I never understood it, it is in every song he plays."

"Jazz and improvisation go hand and hand, but it sounds as if Bill was pretty structured."

Benny clarified that impression. "Thought out - yes. Structured - no. I think Bill's statement about his improvisation was best explained in the liner notes he wrote for Kind of Blue, where he compares the fluidity and creativity of jazz to the fluidity and creativity of Japanese line painting - one mistake in either and the composition is ruined."

Benny continued, "On first listening to Bill, there's that lovely, lush, full sound. On repeated listenings, the rich complexities of his harmonies, rhythms, tones, and timbres flow through. Bill had a certain tone or feeling that he wanted to evoke, he had signposts along the way, and in between those signposts, creation would emerge through improvisation. For Bill, piano playing wasn't limited to a melody and a rhythm. Instead, for him piano playing was harmony

upon harmony, upon tones and moods - jazz with Bill has a symphonic dimension."

"What was Bill like as a soloist?"

"Bill loved to solo but in an odd way he never really left the trio. A soloist must command the stage not only with a fully conceived, but with a fully executed composition. Bill found that a big challenge.

"As a soloist he experimented with triple overdubbing in his great album Conversations with Myself. Bill recorded that album on Glenn Gould's Steinway and won his first Grammy. Overdubbing had been done before with the intent of adding more notes to the music. With Bill, each of the three tracks expanded the mood he tried to evoke. As Gene Lees once explained, there were three Bills - Bill Left, Bill Right, and Bill Center. See, the triple overdubbing was Bill being the trio."

I appreciated Benny's respect for Bill's music, but wanted to know about the person.

"I loved Bill - you couldn't not. Just hearing his voice revealed this gentle, modest, smart, nice guy. Bill had an uncanny sense of integrity in his work and in his personal life. Once after getting a big advance from a producer, Bill grabbed a taxi and we drove around New York all day repaying drug loans - he was an odd junkie. Modesty was one of the funny things about Bill. Here he is, one of the great jazz pianists of all time, working on his art until his death. When he did his radio interview with Marion McPartland near the end of his life, he told her that he was still working, still developing, and said that he most liked to solo but did not have that dimension. The Glenn Gould of jazz didn't have 'that dimension'?!"

"Bill's music is art; it's truth and beauty. Yeah those words are overused, but listen to him. Listen and tell me if Bill doesn't move you at a solitary, personal level -that's what I mean by art, truth, beauty. For me and for countless millions, Sinatra did that. You listen to Sinatra and he is telling you his story of love lost, of swagger, of innocence past. In

that way, Sinatra is a secret delight, he is your buddy, your bartender, your priest, your shrink. Bill Evans does the same thing. His music speaks directly to you. He is your private insight into music and touches points of you that you may not have known you had, and you might rather not have touched.

"Bill has been described as a lyricist, but it's his complex, layered harmonies that grab you. Just listen to one of the last times he recorded "Bill's Hit Tune," there are a few driving bars in the middle of the song and, before you realize it, your breath is caught somewhere between the very top of your chest and the depth of your heart and you can feel the tears begin to fill your eyes. Regardless of how fast or exciting Bill's piano playing, there is that wellspring of melancholy that infuses his music. I often think that the Surgeon General should issue a warning for all of Bill's records saying: "Warning: This music should not be listened to while drinking alone. Side effects include: shortness of breath, heaving of the chest, dripping nose, and the threat of uncontrollable sobbing."

New York was a heady place artistically during that period and I asked if Bill was into that scene.

"I don't know how much Bill knew the painters personally, but he knew their work," Benny continued, "He loved Jackson Pollack and Mark Rothko especially. I can see why. They visually represent Evans' music. Pollack, like Bill, was classically trained, technically impeccable, and was pulled to create a new form of art. Like Bill's playing, Pollack's drip paintings are many-layered, architecturally constructed, harmonic, lyrical, and delicately balanced.

"Rothko typifies Evans' interior, darker side. Rothko's squares are simple, almost primitive at first glance, but they are hauntingly compelling like Bill's music. The edges of Rothko's squares merge into each other, merge into the field, and then into the edges of the canvas. Rothko's paintings are evocative of emotions most of us would care not to admit that we have - shades of sadness that only artists can

describe. In a word their art was nothing but emotionality."

Thinking about Benny and his Bill Evans' story reminded me of the end of Warren Leight's play Side Man. Leight's talking about trumpet players but the same applies to Bill: "No one will even understand what they were doing. A fifty-year blip on the screen. Men who mastered their obsession, who ignored, or didn't even notice anything else. They played not for fame, and certainly not for money. They played for each other. To swing. To blow. Night after night, they were just burning brass. Oblivious." I suspect that's why Bill played; why he lived; and, why he died.

I left New York shortly after those afternoon bar conversations; never saw Benny again, but continued to think of him and what he taught me; and continued to follow Bill's career. I continued to wonder about the drugs. Bill was fearful of life but fearless and passionate about his music. Even still, he needed drugs to get the clutter out of his life - maybe as we all need to do every now and then, in different ways, for different reasons.

Benny was a good jazz musician but was afraid to tempt the demon and he chose to become a tavern owner, staying close to but not in the life. I hated driving a cab, and enrolled in NYU law school. I still play, but keep my day job. I was afraid of discovering insufficient passion, an insufficient gift, or more likely a good bit of both.

After the '61 Vanguard dates, Bill had his ups and downs, but was a jazz success story, winning his share of awards and earning the deep respect of all musicians. He played with the greats, and was seen as someone to play with.

In 1978, Bill connected up with another young bass player, Marc Johnson who rounded out the last great trio with Joe LaBarbera on drums. Johnson knew the Evans book. He also knew the curse of Scotty LaFaro. The trio went to the Village Vanguard for four sessions in June, 1980 to record two albums which were never produced as planned. Those sessions were finally

released in 1996 as a 6 CD set with the title, Turn Out the Stars, named after an Evans/Lees tune. As a jazzman, Bill only needed a good tune and his artistry took over. One of the more complex and up tempo tunes on Turn Out the Stars was the Theme from M\*A\*S\*H subtitled Suicide is Painless.

After Turn Out the Stars, the summer of 1980 was not a good one for Bill. It was a series of gigs, junkie stories, and goodbyes. Everyone who saw Bill that summer knew that he was dying; knew they'd never see him again; and wanted to hear him play one more time. After the Village Vanguard he did concerts in Europe and on both coasts.

Bill's final date was Fat Tuesday's in New York City. He started the gig on Tuesday, September 9, but by Thursday he could not go on. Refusing medical help, he refused to eat anything but the candy an addict craves. He stayed in his apartment until September 14 when he finally got to a hospital where he began coughing up blood and lost consciousness. The official cause of death was a hemorrhaging ulcer and bronchial pneumonia. Contributing factors were liver damage caused by hepatitis when he was young, and malnutrition. I can just imagine what Benny would say, "Well, yeah, the docs have to say something fancy. The truth is that Bill's death was a suicide - a 20 year suicide." I can also imagine Benny's memorial: "On Monday morning, September 15, the quiet fire was extinguished and, the name Bill Evans was inscribed in the Book of Jazz."

Thanks Benny; thanks Bill.

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THE SUBLIME OLD CHILD

February 21, 2000

Thomas S. Gephardt

The only thing most Americans know about Horace Greeley is related to going West. And that's a pity. Greeley, to be sure, was a lifelong advocate of westward migration and the extension of the United States to the West Coast. But he was far more - a man of immense complexity, a truly multifaceted man.

One facet reflects his career as the most creative and influential editor of his time - the father, some would say, of modern journalism.

Another reflects his career as an unfulfilled politician - always dabbling in the affairs of his community, his state and his nation but never quite summoning the public confidence he thought he deserved.

Another facet reflects his zeal as the advocate of forlorn causes. Were he alive today many would dismiss him as a psycho-ceramic, which is the genteel term for crackpot.