

DECENT

DESCANT #15 (Part 2)

by Norm Clarke

Premailed for FAPA 116



-LORE CLARK

OUT of my LIFE and MIND

- Norm Clarke

What Have I Been Doing Lately? Dept. (or, Outside Peck&Poll)

First of all, I'll have you know you're talking to a Teevy Star. Yaas. One day last summer, I and my B-flat tenor saxophone -- along with the Glenlea Boys and Girl Singer Mary Lou Downes -- brightened the TV screens and lives of countless viewers in the Ottawa area; and as the weeks passed, the tape we made circulated all over the country (Boyd missed it when it appeared in Toronto) and I became famous, and the fabulous offers started coming in. For example, the husband of a second cousin of mine asked my mother to ask me if I and "my band" would play for his office party. I was tempted to say yes, and then quote a price of \$1500.

The show wasn't too bad, really, if you like R&R and Beatles songs and Gogo girls and all that; and it received Critical Acclaim, too. Ahem. I quote from the Ottawa Journal:

"...Sunday's show featured a group from Ottawa, the Playdates, introduced by Lloyd McGuigan. The program presented 30 minutes of song and dance in a teen-age fashion that was capably presented.

The group was strong instrumentally but rather weak vocally. Norm Clarke, undoubtedly Ottawa's top saxophonist, augmented the sound of the quartet which made the difference between day and night."

Ahahaha! And that printing one's own egoboo for this issue. In all fairness and modesty and humility, though, I have to admit to you that the Critic who wrote that review is the one about whom I have been saying for years, "That num-skull! That moron! He hasn't a trace of wit, intelligence, or taste!"

I humbly admit I was wrong about him.

Then, a few weeks (or months, perhaps: we creative artists have no conception of the passing of time) later, I was invited to play on a series of radio Jazz Shows. The series was called "Jazz from A to Z," except that it was on the French local station, and was really called, "Jazz de A a Z." There was a theme to the program, see: each week's show would be devoted to an "Homage a ..." some famous Big Name Jazzman, or something ("This week: a tribute to Jazz At The Philharmonic"). Willy-nilly, I found myself the Musical Director. That meant that I was the guy who stayed up all night, a few hours before the weekly taping session was to take place, hunting through my jazz records and trying to figure out What The Hell Will We Play Tomorrow. ("First we'll do a B-flat blues, and call it 'Dizzy's Blues!'") Well, that program, originally scheduled for 13 weeks, went on for 39 weeks. As a matter of fact, it's still on the air, even though we stopped taping weeks ago: we got cocky and decided to tape two half-hour shows at each session, so that some of us could have a summer holiday. Anyway, it was a good program, however hectic some of the sessions may have been: it was great to get paid a lot of money for just having fun playing jazz.

Good things happen all at once (as do lousy things): just after the radio show

had begun, I got a call to play in a Big Band on a regular weekly TV show: an amateur show, it was. That is: the acts were amateur (boy, were they amateur), but the band sure wasn't. It was full of competent musicians, with whom it was a pleasure and a privilege for me to work. A wonderful experience (I have done very little playing in sections, in which one is required to Read and Blend and Phrase as part of a unit, rather than just honk and skree along according to one's individual whim). That was another experience where I got paid too much for just having fun (mainly, having fun laughing at the amateur "acts"). Oh, there were some funny things happening on that show (not the least remarkable of which is that now when I walk down Aylmer's main street, people stop me and say "Aren't you a Teevy Star?" Gee, recognition at last.): one night, for example, as I was sitting there in the TV studio, as a member of the Band accompanying the Amateur Acts, there came on a German Folk-Dancing Group. What their act was, was: they clomped around and kicked each other in the butt, and spanked each other, and picked each other up by the seat of the pants (really; do you think I'm making this up?), and all the while they emitted chilling Aryan screams. We guys in the band didn't have to play for that act (they had an accordion player as their accompanist), so we just sat there and croggled. "Jeez," said the alto player who sat beside me, "why do they scream like that?" "It wouldn't be Ethnic if they didn't," I ventured. "Gee yeah," he nodded pensively, "I guess it'd be unethical."

However, both the radio and the TV show have gone off the air for the summer, and I find myself working regularly in the big band (7 men) at the Standishall Hotel, where things are always happening. For example, just the other night three girls almost demolished the place. Just after Our Band had finished playing the last sucky tune of the evening, and I was putting my horn away, I heard a hell of a commotion that sounded very much like a lot of bottles and tables crashing. I dashed upstairs from the band room, to dig the action, and beheld three broads rassing their way towards the front lobby, amid cries (from one, or maybe two, of them) of, "If I wanna peddle my fuggin ass, it's not your fuggin business, you fuggin fugg, you!" I was fascinated by this scene, commonplace though it is at the Standishall Hotel; so I stood around and watched until the police arrived and hauled the broads away (along with one inexplicable guy who had blood all over the back of his shirt, and who was unconscious, as well). So as I was standing there, not having a lift home, up to me came one of my fellow ~~colleagues~~ musicians, a guy named Enzo, who is an Italian immigrant about 20 years of age. He had two ladies with him, one of whom was tremendously drunk.

"Hey Norm," Enzo said, "this girl wants a boy friend for tonight."

"Well, Enzo," I replied, tired old man that I am, "I just want a lift home ... to Aylmer, you know."

"Aw right," said Enzo, "You go with her." He pointed at the drunkie. I looked at her; she looked at me; I looked at Enzo again. "I gotta get home to Aylmer," I repeated. "Yeah, yeah," he said, "You go with her." By this time, my brain was working furiously. Aha, I figured out, with my brain, here is Enzo stuck with two chicks, one of who he wants to ~~be~~ be alone with, and the other of whom is in the way.

"Well ... okay, Enzo," I said dubiously, "as long as it is understood that I must get home to Aylmer East, Province of Quebec, eventually. You know my wife doesn't like my staying out late." "Si, signora, ahahaha." So there I was, all of a sudden, sitting in a car with a strange woman. A strange drunk woman! A strange drunk woman who immediately said to me, "Well there, Fred, or whatever yer fuggin name is, I'll have ya know I am a married woman, so ya don't hafta worry I might rape ya or somethin." "Oh ... well ..." I said, waving my arms nonchalantly.

So the drunk lady (whose name, so she said, was Carol) drove very cautiously in a direction exactly opposite from that of Aylmer. She was hanging on to an open bottle of beer as she drove (cautiously). At one point she pulled over to the curb of a fairly well-travelled residential street, and trustingly handed me her bottle. "Hold onna my beer," she said, "I hafta make pee-pee." She got out of the car, went around to the curb side, stood beside my open window and leaned in, saying, "Don't look, now." She made pee-pee. Of course I didn't look, even though she was squatting almost right under my nose. Maybe I'm just blasé, but ladies who pee under my nose are nothing to me.

Anyway, we eventually arrived at our destination. I didn't know what our destination was; as I said to Drunkie Carol, "Uh, what will your husband think when you arrive home with a strange man -- me -- in your car?" "Fool," she answered, "We are not going to my place. We're goin to her place," waving vaguely in some direction where she thought Enzo and the other broad might, perhaps, be. And sure enough, just as Carol stopped her car, there were Enzo and his chick, pulling in (or out, I dunno) behind us; and we all went into this apartment.

Now, understand this: all I wanted was a lift home. So when we entered that apartment, right away I sat down in a chair in a corner opposite from the one in which Carol had set herself with her bottle of beer. Resignedly, I opened my saxophone case and took out my bottle of gin. Enzo and his broad sat on a sofa between me and Drunkie Carol. It was all very cozy, until suddenly Carol spotted my jug. "What have you got there?" she whooped. "It is merely a bottle of gin," I replied in an aloof, dignified manner. Carol scrambled across the room, bounded onto my lap, and grabbed my ... bottle of gin. "I wanna drink," she suggested, grabbing my "drink."

Well, that settled it: I certainly wanted to get home to Aylmer without another moment's delay, as you can well imagine. This drunken creature seemed as though she was about to drink all of my booze, which lord knows I needed all for myself. But meanwhile, Enzo was not remaining idle: "Hey, why you don't put on a record?" he asked his girl, in his broken, sober English. So the girl he was with ("Dorothy") hauled out a \$19.95 hi-fi set and a Lovin' Spoonful LP. "Norm," said Enzo, "Why you don't dance?" "Well, Enzo, I'm afraid that I don't mess around with stuff like that, with strange ladies," I said, winking, "How about let's get going now, hey, Enzo? I just want a lift to Aylmer."

In a moment or two we were all dancing. I say "dancing": I mean that some of us were stumbling and lurching. Suddenly my partner, good ol' Carol, tore herself from my fevered grasp and yelled intimately, "I go now to take a bath!" I put that in quasi-quotes because that isn't exactly what she said. I couldn't understand most of what she said, matter of fact, except that she had a Husband and Three Children and Wasn't Like That. So I sat down on the sofa while Carol, who isn't Like That, went into the bathroom, singing loudly, and Enzo and his girl disappeared into another room. For a few minutes, I sat there, mindlessly listening to the Spoonful LP and the splashings and singings from the bathroom; and then another sound impinged upon my sensitive ears. "Oooof, cw, no. NO. NONONONONO," I heard. "Get off me, ya bastard. NONONONO. Help!" "Humm," I wondered, "I wonder how Enzo is makin out?"

In about ten minutes, Enzo's broad stumbled back into the room where I was sitting contentedly with my gin; Enzo trudged after her. "Well, is it time to go, Enzo?" I asked, "Let's not forget that I have to be getting to Aylmer East." At this point, the bathroom door opened, and a drunk, wet, female figure emerged, bearing a glass of (my) gin. "Whee," said this figure, who then tottered over and sat on the floor at my feet and proceeded to spill an entire glass of gin all over my pants. There was a moment's silence (I considered the spilt gin). Then Carol seemed to realize that Something Had Happened between Enzo and his chick. The two

ladies began to converse in French, obviously assuming that neither Enzo nor I could understand this secret language. In essence, what they said was: "That wop bastard tried to sleep with me!" "Well, you stupid broad, what else?" "I will not sleep with a strange man the first night!" "Aw, yer a freak." "I thought he was a gentleman." "He's normal. You ain't normal. Yer a freak. Yer frigid." "All right, so I'm frigid. I'm glad I'm frigid."

While this exchange was going on, Enzo and I sat there, glancing at each other and winking slyly -- Enzo perhaps a bit embarrassed, though, for they were talking about him; and maybe he thought he was a failure, in my eyes, because he hadn't managed to tumble the chick into bed right away. At any rate, he stood up and said, "Let's go"; and I said okay.

"Waitaminnit, waitaminnit!" yelled Drunkie Carol (who had just taken a bath -- not for nothing, she obviously hoped), and then she dropped back into French to say to her pal, "Now see? They're leavin. Look, what the hell do you think the guy came over for? To listen to a record and have a glass of milk?"

"Yeah," said Enzo, "I'm-a no come here for no record an a glassa milk," he said scornfully, astounding both ladies, who had thought they were not understood by us wop and anglais types. "Hey," Enzo continued, "I'm-a no waste my time on girls like you."

"Well!" said Enzo's girl (actually, so Carol had told me, a 30-year-old widow of three years' standing), "If that's what you want, go back to the Standish-all. There's lots of girks like that there." ("That's true, Enzo," I reminded him, though he doubtless hadn't forgotten, anyway.)

"Aw fugg," Enzo said, "I'm-a got no time a fugg around. I gotta go school in a morning."

"You WEAT?" both broads gasped.

"Gotta go school," Enzo repeated obligingly. Suddenly the truth banged both chicks between the eyeballs: here they are, those 30-year-old (not to be trusted) broads, picked up by a Schoolboy. Neither of them seemed to know what to do or think next: to be embarrassed by the realization that they had messed with a Young Boy, or to be fascinated by it. As a sort of nervous reaction, Carol took off her pants and danced around violently for a few moments; but by that time the whole scene was so grotesque that it didn't matter. "Well, I have to get home to Aylmer East," I said once again to Enzo. "Yes, and I hafta go school inna morning," he reminded himself. So we left, the sound of Carol's curses loud in the early morning stillness. On the way to Aylmer, "That was kind of a drag," I said to Enzo. "Yes," he nodded, "atsa ... drag. Atsa drag. Yes," he said, "Muhfugga. I hafta be inna school inna three hours."

"That's show biz, Enzo," I said.

"Sumbidge," he said.

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So that's what I've been doing lately. Life in the Aylmer East area goes on in its placid way, its ordinary routine broken occasionally by fans dropping in from Seattle (hi there, my fellow SHFU Officers!) and the occasional visit by the police searching for stolen goods (let me give you a hint: never buy a tape recorder from a waiter at the Glenlea Club). I had hoped to have something more in the mailing than just this (Mailing Comments, even, maybe), but ... well

-- Norm

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