

Jazz In The Bittersweet Blues Of Life

Wynton Marsalis & Carl Vigeland

CHAPTER ONE

Picnics and Parades

It's a hot, early-summer afternoon, and we're traveling west across Iowa on Interstate 80, crossing the Plains in the thirty-five-long Winnebago that Wynton rides in when the alternative is flying. With two drivers—a professional from Washington named Keith Anderson, who is on his first gig with Wynton, and veteran photographer Frank Stewart, who often does double duty on assignments like this—and me, we make a quartet. Today is Friday, June 9, 200. Late tomorrow we will rendezvous with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra at Snowmass, Colorado, for several days of rehearsals and the start of a western tour. We've been driving for nearly twenty-four hours without a break except to refuel since leaving New York late yesterday afternoon. In the rear bedroom he uses as a study, Wynton has been correcting the transcribed parts of several Louis Armstrong tunes for his musicians. Earlier he had been entertaining us with recitations from a well-thumbed paperback edition of Yeats, concluding each poem's reading with an animated analysis of its imagery. Last evening, as we made the long climb up into the Alleghenies, Wynton sat down next to Keith, put his feet up on the dashboard, and practiced scales on his horn before playing some blues as a yellow sun set into the dark mountains. Then, before commencing for Keith's benefit a rumination about the presumed romantic entanglements and imagined sexual accomplishments of his passengers, Wynton asked Keith if he played basketball.

"I could teach you to shoot and dribble, little man," Keith answered.

"Damn, Newman," replied Wynton, enormously pleased at this early evidence of Keith's temperament and spirit. "What are you saying to me?"

"Wynton has been calling Keith "the new man" since we stopped yesterday at a sushi restaurant less than a mile from Lincoln Center in New York. Wynton developed a taste for sushi and a love for Japanese culture during many tours in Japan. *I must have been Japanese in another life.* The restaurant was closed but Wynton talked his way in while the rest of us waited skeptically in the Winnebago. "You know, five o'clock means five o'clock." A few minutes later he emerged, smiling, with the restaurant's Japanese waitress at his side. "Her name is Tomiko," Wynton said. Leaning toward us, he added, "Let's hurry up before they change their minds."

Keith had never eaten sushi, but was willing to try.

Wynton ordered seven or eight different selections, as well as a glass of sake for himself. Keith did okay until he tried some uncooked fluke. "Don't kill yourself trying to eat that, man" Wynton told him, suppressing a smile. He was trying to make Keith feel comfortable, while Keith struggled with the raw fish. He finally spit the fish into his napkin and shook his head. "Whoo-hooee! That's something you have to get used to," he admitted.

So is the challenge of driving cross-country the world's most well known jazzman, who just now in the Winnebago is asking Keith about his family. The questions are as much a part of Wynton's

persona as his trumpet playing. Wherever he goes, whomever he's with, he asks questions. And he listens to the answers.

I've been on the road more than twenty years. Every day I have the opportunity to meet lots of different people. Try to make connections between them. I try to understand what they tell me. The hardest part about hearing jazz is understanding what the musician is saying to you. On the bandstand, when you play something someone can relate to, they break out with "uh-huh," or "yes!" or "Preach. Speak to me, tell it." Or they just laugh in recognition.

Keith says he has a son he rarely sees. His own father, he says, disappeared from his life when he was very young. Wynton responds with immediate empathy.

"That's hard," he said, "That's truly hard. Not seeing your son a whole year at a time. How did it happen?"

Slow to speak, Keith considers not only what is being said to him but the effect his own words may have on Wynton. A friend has gotten him this job, and he is clearly trying to square what he's been told about Wynton with the constantly surprising, energizing experience of actually being with him. Keeping his eye on the road and both hands on the wheel, Keith nods and says he hopes to see his son when we reach California, where the boy lives with his mother. Then he changes the subject as he continues to size up his new employer.

"So," he says, "do you ever, you know, play anything contemporary?"

The question throws Wynton off balance momentarily.

"Keith," he implores. "We play real jazz, man." Wynton emphasized the word real; this is a subject we will come back to, he is indicating. Later, when Wynton returns to his bedroom for a nap, Keith asks me and Frank questions about the band's recordings. He's interested in a long lyrical piece Wynton wrote for his septet, *in This House, On This Morning*. "In its overall form," I could say, "The piece incorporates the order and parts of a church service, but with its rhythmic energy and sonic variation it is certainly not a 'sacred' work. Borrowing from a wide range of jazz tradition, it celebrates the equally wide spectrum of human emotion and national landscape that nourished its fevered creation on the road." But I settle for, "It's a very beautiful piece. It's long, but if you have the time to really listen you'll want it to last even longer. You can hear different parts of the country in it. The mountains outside of Santa Fe, for example, where Wynton wrote a section in 7/4, seven beats to a measure."

We cross the Missouri River from Iowa into Nebraska with a recording of Wynton's lyric *Marcillac Suite* playing on the Winnebago's sound system. Composed as a thank you to the people of Marcillac, a small town in France's southwest corner where the band has been performing every August for nearly a decade, the music bursts with the joyous spirit of those people and that town. But the band's sound on the recording strikes Wynton as a little diffuse. "You like that?" he asks with feigned shock. When he travels, Wynton is always listening to a wide variety of music. He also takes with him a compact digital tape player on which he listens to takes of recordings that have not yet been released and marks for his producer, either Steve Epstein at Sony or his brother Delfeayo in New Orleans, measure-by-measure commentaries on corrections that have to be made. But not today, not on a recording already released.

By this time late in the afternoon, we're all getting a little restless. Much bragging about respective basketball games has ended in, "Let's stop at the next court and see." Just in time, Keith spots an empty basketball court from the interstate.

“Newman, let’s get off this highway and see what’s happening. We’ll see if you can back up all that shit you talked,” Wynton says. “Ou-eee, I’m going to tear your big ass like the bottom of a check,” he exclaims. His own self-congratulatory laughter follows this threat.

“You call this little hop a jump? I thought you had game.” Keith taunts. “You just a little man in a little man’s body. I hope this doesn’t hurt your flute playing.”

Keith is in his early thirties. He has a thin black mustache the length of his mouth. At several inches more than six feet and about two hundred pounds, Keith towers over Wynton; with his broad shoulders, thick neck, and large thighs he has a fullback’s build. From outside he is no match for the trumpet player’s one handed jump shot, but inside, under the basket, he easily pushes Wynton out of the way for rebounds.

“Is that what you call defense? You better call Red Cross!” Wynton hollers jubilantly as he scores repeatedly from the perimeter of the poorly paved court. Instead of nets there are chains dangling from the hoops, and sometimes there’s a noise like a swing when one of us drains a shot. Games are eleven points, and we play one-on-one. These pickup contests are a farce compared to the level of good college basketball, even decent high school ball, but they are taken seriously. Wynton hates to lose, and the results of a game are analyzed in detail afterwards, especially by the victor.

When I first came out on the road with Wynton I used to play regularly, until one day, after butchering several band members, they asked me to think about doing something else for exercise. “You might kill somebody, man,” they said. Today with less competition, he has relented and invited me to play. But after scoring triumphantly three times in my only game against Wynton, I leave the court and walk by myself to the other end of the park from where we’ve stopped. I’m not a basketball player, as he knows. Nor a trumpet player, for that matter, though I had played seriously from the age of nine until I was in college. We were in North Carolina, on a tour where I’d brought my old Selmer Bundy; Wynton’s horn was broken and at a sound check in Charlotte, in an old downtown church that had been converted into a theater, he borrowed mine, sounding notes on it that had never been attempted, let alone made. I tried to play something when he gave it back, and he couldn’t contain his affectionate scorn. On another occasion, before a gig at Kimberly’s East in California, I sat in for Wynton during a rehearsal. The velocity of the music was too great for me to keep my place. Wes, sitting next to me, nearly fell of his chair laughing. Later, at dinner, he told Wynton, “Watch out for your gig, Skain. Someone might be taking your place on the bandstand.”

Now, over the incessant roar of the trucks barreling along the highway, I can still hear Wynton’s voice. High-pitched, animated, it sounds a little plaintive, like a child’s on a school playground on a rainy afternoon when his ride home is late. “Damn, High Point,” I hear him say. High point is Frank’s nickname. Mine is Swig, given me when we were in Washington for a week one December. Wynton’s copyist at the time, the diminutive, profane Ronnie Carbo, had counseled me at length in the art of greeting someone (a light touch at the knuckles) and the minimum standards of good dress (get rid of the button-down shirts). Then he began good-naturedly taunting me about the number of women I must have slept with. Wynton had picked up the inquisition and gleefully announced his answer: Three. Ronnie agreed. “One in high school, one in college, and your wife!” To the number three was added the word piece. Three piece, as in a suit. Wynton introduced me that night at Blues Alley as Three Piece, invited me to stand up and take a bow. Riding back to the hotel in a cab, three became tre, and piece

became swig, because it sounded a little like the beginning of my last name. Over time tre was dropped. That left Swig.

Up close to the concrete abutment bordering the side of the road, I can only see the tops of the trucks, whizzing past. I move back from the road into the field of weeds above the basketball court and up the small hill that parallels the road, and more of the trucks' bodies become visible, and cars, too, of course, until at the crest of the hill, fifty or so yards away from the small section of I-80, there are so many vehicles moving east and west I couldn't count them if I wanted to. And the sound is overwhelming. Wynton's trash talking is completely inaudible now.

A series of houses rims the sloping field at the top of the hill. The dirty tan house nearest the highway needs paint. The owner has spent his money on a satellite dish, which is mounted on the roof. At the far side of the fence, where a street ends, a middle-aged man in jeans and white T-shirt enters the field. He is walking two Scotch terriers. Near where we left the Winnebago by the basketball court, an older woman in a red top and a tan skirt walks her black miniature Schnauzer. Neither person pays attention to me or the basketball players, though I can easily imagine Wynton striking up a conversation with them.

I feel a little cut off in this plains meadow, looking out at the sea of cars, remembering how I felt when I left my wife and my children, whom I kissed goodbye first in their sleep and then in my memory when I boarded a plane. My farewells to my family were not followed by an amnesia caused by the road. Rather, I learned, my feelings went into a kind of hibernation to emerge stronger and sharper upon my return.

At the start of another tour many years ago, in winter, before a gig at a new auditorium attended mostly by rich retired folks from up north, I ran into Frank Stewart in the lobby of our glitzy hotel near the beach in Naples, Florida. After checking in, he and I followed a boardwalk through the wind-swept dunes to the beach. Along the shore, a few couples were strolling. I took my shoes off and tested the Gulf water, which was warm. We talked about our kids. Frank, a photographer whose career had been nurtured during a long period when he worked for the painter Romare Bearden, understood the twin virtues of observation and circumspection. He had left his two daughters to go on this tour. He seemed protective of his feelings for them, as if it were a sign of weakness for him to be admitting how much he missed those girls. We didn't talk then about circumstances that could precipitate such an emotion. We were on the road.

Frank and I had been introduced backstage at Carnegie Hall, in the small dressing room Wynton was sharing with several other musicians at a benefit he'd agreed to play in. The closely trimmed line of beard above his upper lip that formed the hint of a mustache was, I would learn, a part of Frank's style that went with the Stetson he often wore and the vests and jackets, their pockets filled with film. Frank's dark hair was neatly trimmed, too, and perfectly combed. He was a handsome motherfucker, but I didn't know to say that to him yet, nor did Frank know to call me, as Wynton later would, tongue in cheek, "Massah Veeglan."

Holding a camera around his neck, Frank extended a hand in a friendly but quizzical greeting: We each wondered why the other was there. Over the next few months, as we found ourselves regularly on the road together, I feared Frank might be usurping territory that was mine. Because we were the only non-performing members of the entourage, other than the regular driver for Wynton's septet, Harold Russell, and the usual compliment of road manager and technician, both of whom also

had specific duties at each gig—setting up the drums, checking the lights, and so on—Frank and I hung out. Many of the people we met on the road assumed we were working together, and I suppose today, you could say we were. But I used to feel threatened by such assumptions. The robbed me, I thought, of my individuality. The propriety feeling about myself and my work I brought with me when I went out on the road took me a foolishly long time to lose, culminating in the only time I ever yelled at Wynton.

“What’s Frank *doing*?” I hollered.

“Taking photographs,” Wynton replied. “What are *you* doing? Besides bullshitting, that is.”

Direct, honest, open to what was around him, Frank showed me mostly by example how to get along on the road. He taught me how to watch without speaking, a skill I thought I already possessed. Wynton reinforced the lessons. Once, coming back from a gig outside New York, Wynton pointed out to me the ease with which Frank interacted with the other musicians of the band.

“The cats love Frank,” Wynton said to me. “I want them to feel that way about you being on the road with us.”

It seemed a perhaps unattainable ambition. But Wynton meant it not only as a reflection on me but as an indication of his sense of the way things should go when we were traveling. Uppermost in his considerations, though he never stated it this way, was the absence of animosity. More subtle than that was the ease of interaction necessary for a group of men to live comfortably on the road and perform music before live audiences.

I remember a cold, cloudy morning after a gig in Wilmington, Delaware, early in my travels with the band. The Radisson Inn, where we had stayed overnight, was pretty much all there was in a downtown of deserted stores with boarded up windows and doors. Coming into the dining room I found Wynton by himself, reading the paper at a table, his food before him. I slipped into the seat across from his and opened my own paper and ordered breakfast. We didn’t speak until after the waitress had left. Wynton’s alto saxophonist Wess Anderson, whom everyone calls Warm Daddy because of his beautiful, sweet tone and gentle personality, was just wandering into the lobby as Wynton looked up at me, raised his eyebrows over his glasses, smiled sort of, shook his head, took another bite of his eggs, and then sighed before we returned to silence.

This feeling wasn’t here when we came on the road. It’s something we created and had to keep feeding, keep believing in. Us.

Or the ride from Wilmington to Washington, D.C., a quiet ride until Wess put on some blues and the inimitable Harold Russell at the wheel of the bus started cursing and laughing at something. There was a recording session in New York coming up after our week in Washington, and then a benefit concert, all before the holidays. Washington looked stark as we arrived, its tree-lined streets swept clean and all the stone monuments hard and imposing. But the feeling of arriving in the capital with Wynton and his band on Harold Russell’s bus was warm and inclusive, like the sense in someone’s home that you are welcome whoever you are.

“We’re not out here to be bullshitting,” Wynton often said. He was referring not only to the music but to the life. The worst thing a new member of the band—and that is how Frank and I were treated, from the very first day, as members of the band—the worst thing you could do was impose tension from your own life onto the life of the group. I had to learn this, but eventually, in the same way I joined him for breakfast in Wilmington, I could enter a room where Wynton was changing his clothes

before a gig and say nothing, not even hello, if my mood or an intuition about Wynton's indicated there was no reason to speak. And it was cool.

Cool. How many times did someone use that shopworn word? And yet, especially coming from Wynton, its very sound took on new meaning. It could be a compliment, a putdown, a noun, a verb, an adjective, an adverb. He could make it come out as an insult, an epithet. But usually, when he was talking with me on the road, it came out like a mantra.

"I want you to be cool about," or "I wish you could be cool about," or, simply, in response to some concern or worry I had just expressed, "Be cool." Nor did Wynton leave it at that; he *was* cool, unflappable really. I never saw him completely lose his composure, no matter what the provocation. Not that he couldn't get angry. But those moments were rare, fleeting, and invariably humorous. Even when someone had crossed him, Wynton could usually box his feeling, square it, let it go—only to find it later, when he was performing or composing, to be transmuted into an emotion that would move an audience to its own laughter or tears.

The first time I saw him with an audience his group had just become a septet. The new man, trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, was still learning the tunes and spent much of the night simply standing to the side of the stage, holding his horn. The septet had played two sets on a June night at the Iron Horse, a nightclub in Northampton, Massachusetts. I'd gone to both, taking my eleven-year-old son to the first and my wife to the second. Wynton had gone out of his way to speak with both of them after the sets, beginning an extended relationship with my family, especially my children, all of whom he treated as tenderly as he treated his own sons. At the end of the show, I patiently posed for a snapshot with three young women and then walked upstairs, where a man was waiting to speak with him. We had a mutual friend, David Monette, who made Wynton's trumpets, but we didn't talk about trumpets or trumpet players during the first conversation; we almost never spoke about such subjects.

The second time I heard the band, in November of 1990, again at the Iron Horse, Wynton told me that they were going the next day to Boston and then on to Maine. That was as much of the itinerary as he knew. He invited me to join them in Boston and I drove myself there. The band was waiting for Wynton at the Berklee College of Music, where it was performing at a benefit that evening. Wynton had been honored in nearby Cambridge, across the Charles River; there had been a program with kids, and the mayor had presented Wynton with the keys to the city. Then he'd returned to his hotel, the Park Plaza, before taking a limousine to Berklee for a soundcheck that was well under way by the time of his arrival. The men played on for just a few minutes and then Wynton sat down at Herlin Riley's drums and Wycliffe took Eric Reed's place at the piano while Wess Anderson continued playing his alto sax during a long chorus of blues.

"The blues are a form, just like the sonata is a form," Wynton said to me on the ride back to the Park Plaza. This was my first music lesson with him, as well as my first ride in a limo. The conversation did not stay focused for long on the blues. Matt Dillon, a childhood friend of Wynton's from New Orleans and now, for a time, the band's road manager, was riding with us, too. A short, fast-talking man with a quick smile, Matt began rhapsodizing about women he remembered from home, and this set Wynton's memory rapidly and colorfully in motion.

"Man," Wynton said to Matt, "you remember how they used to go out of their way to fix me up with black women when there weren't even any black women in the town?"

“You know we don’t discriminate, bruh,” Dillon contributed. “Creole. Caucasian. We love them all.”

Wynton said, “Brothers get all kinds of women, just not in the movies.”

Matt laughed, and the driver cocked an ear, but before the talk had a chance to go further we were at the hotel.

In his room upstairs, Wynton ignored the fruit basket and bottle of wine left on the table by the hotel’s manager and looked for the phone. It was dark outside the window, but the Boston Common below was lit so brightly and festively it might already have been Christmas.

“Got to call my kids,” Wynton mumbled, in what I later recognized was a rare instance of explaining his behavior to someone else.

While Wynton talked on the phone with his two young sons, who were with their mother in New York, I sat down at the piano that had been placed in the room for Wynton’s visit. A notebook of music paper was filled with tiny, precise pencil notations. I looked in Wynton’s direction and then held the music, as a way of asking if it was ok for me to peek. He nodded assent. Lush chords evoked a romantic but somber mood. It was hard to hear them in my head over Wynton’s voice across the room.

The call ended and Wynton surprised me by joining me at the piano. This man I hardly knew, I was just beginning to discover, could make a few chords or the simple playing of a scale an invitation to reflect on the passing of a friend or the possibilities of a romance. And even though he was supposed to be on stage in less than half an hour, he was completely focused on our conversation as he explained that this piece was about someone in a ship. I was sure, several years later, that he had been describing the beginning of his Pulitzer Prize—winning *Blood on the Fields*, when the two slaves sing to each other together in the slave ship’s hold, but he sharply contradicted me when I said so.

In Boston at the piano as he played a little of the piece, the music took me to a place I could not name but was certain I knew. I felt a shiver, then a pang: I was in the mountains, a quiet, windswept vista of green foliage and golden sky, holding my father’s ashes.

Now, several years later, standing on a Nebraska hilltop watching Wynton and Keith shoot baskets, I recall the first time I went on the road with the band—starting in the city where Wynton had grown up, the city where jazz was born, New Orleans. The band was rehearsing King Oliver before leaving by tour bus for Texas. I took a cab from the airport and from my downtown hotel room I called Wynton, who was also staying in the hotel, even though his mother and father still lived in the city.

“I’m here,” I announced, sitting on my bed, looking out the window as a streetcar passed below.

“When do you want to get started?” Wynton asked me. “My daddy and I are playing a gig tonight.”

“I’m ready to go,” I answered.

“Well,” Wynton said. “Let’s go then.”

I went. Into the city at dusk, with the clouds coming up from the southeast and the sound of thunder, the streets lightening as the street lights came on, then a brief, hard rain with a brighter sky in the distance and then the sunset and orange ball falling in an overcast sky. To the nightclub where Wynton’s father, Ellis, and he performed; to an endless rehearsal the next day, a long rainy afternoon in a classroom at Xavier University. A then a few days later across the verdant Texas plains to San Antonio, before backstepping to Houston where oil rigs sprouted from the grounds like trees, and downtown, at

night, the wind whipped scraps of paper along empty streets by tall, deserted glass building, and where returning to our hotel late at night I yearned to hear within those manmade crayons the echo of a horn.

By now I have heard the horn all across the United States, watched its finger buttons pushed down, felt the release of air in its valves as if they were pumping chambers of a human heart and the sound emanating from the trumpet's bell the breeze blown to every corner of the country. Connecting an airline employee on a tarmac in Oakland with a native American chieftain at a Gathering of Nations in Santa Fe, a waitress in Wilmington, Delaware, with a man walking his dog in Omaha, Nebraska, that sound—that music—unites race, sex, and class, bridging past and present, allaying the anxiety of living without narcotic and affirming the glory of great cities and small towns, the smell of perfume in an elevator, the rustle of a skirt, the siren-like call of someone's footsteps, the rhythmic beauty of a baby's breathing heard in the morning as the door opens and the shade rises.

One night the tour bus started out in Boulder, Colorado, where it was spring, then drove through Vail Pass, where it was still winter, and when we spoke in the early morning in the Utah desert it was early summer. Whenever I traveled with the band and heard its music, I underwent an emotional metamorphosis as dramatic as that changing landscape and changing weather. I did not believe I had lost anything, but instead, had found—what? Hard, then, to say. Easier to feel: in the happy exhaustion checking into a hotel at dawn after fitful sleep in my bunk on the bus, in the enclosing familiarity of road routines (hotel, soundcheck, gig, meal, bus), in the rhapsodic sensation of sight and sound as we moved along the highway at night to the accompaniment of some Coltrane or Mingus or, as often, someone in the band practicing or just playing for the pleasure of it.

“Can I call you Skain?” I asked Wynton in California a few weeks after that first trip to Texas, on a tour that had started in Oregon and Washington state.

“Only if you speak Skainish,” he replied.

A few days before we'd been to a winery outside Seattle, with a view of Mt. Rainier in the distance. There were so many people gathered on the lawn that the ushers had to form a kind of phalanx for the band to get through, like one of them was running for office. It was a sight, the men single file behind the semi-official guards, walking past couples on their blankets and old folks eating their picnics and kids running and yelling everywhere, until they reached an area backstage, a tent really, where one of the band began playing a tune with a Latin beat, and another clapped its rhythm, and whoever else was there joined in a kind of dance. The crowd was in a happy frenzy by the time the band came out onto the small stage. And just as they started to play an old friend of Wynton's named Leebo, who used to play funk gigs in high school with him in New Orleans and now worked in a hotel in Seattle, ran onto the stage and embraced him. It was late in the afternoon, fragrant in the field, the sun just beginning to set, and everywhere you looked in the crowd there was another beautiful woman.

And I'd be lying if I told you that beautiful women don't make you play better. Or try to play better. But no just the women. The presenter, who has worried for weeks about today's weather. The sweet grandmother who fixed you some cookies and asked if you could play some Harry James. That's your woman, your presentation, your grandmamma. The whole place was colorful and happy. We paraded out onto the bandstand. Parades and picnics, a stage, a summer's day, the cats. I loved them. I just loved them. You could take away all the glitter and just let us play. Hell, we're from New Orleans.

We understand picnics and parades. And sweet things. And the blues. And making love and the wangdang doodle dandy.

The world is a hard place. It, was, and will always be. But armed with that knowledge, you can still find a million ways to make people feel good about what we're all out here doing together. Could just be saying good morning or thank you, or looking somebody in the eyes. I don't need what you hate. Give me what you love. And if that costs you too much, at least give me what you like.

I like the late-night sound of the train, clunking down the tracks, through the distant air the scream of its whistle changing pitches as it passes from one somewhere to another who knows-where. It makes me feel like a boy again. I like the tenderness of an uncertain kiss which innocently begins with a question mark but crescendos to an exclamation point. It reminds me of adolescence. I like the way warm milk and honey rolls down my tongue sweetly, heating everything from my throat to my knees like a well-intentioned blanket in the dead of winter. I could return to babyhood once again in my mother's arms. I like the romance of moonlit figures, flickering on the ceilings and walls of rooms in places as diverse as San Antonio, Seattle, and Boston—dancing shadows in syncopated rhythm which know the unending story of each room. Then. I am a man.

I love the road. It's not an effort to play for people. I don't feel like I have to go out there. I want to go, every night, want to swing—hard—with the men in the band, with people. Willful participation with style and in the groove—that's swing. And once you feel it, you've got to get you some more.

When you are on the road, playing in cities around the world, each performance reminds you of all the other times you have swung on bandstands or in audiences. It's just like when you move out of one house into another, you remember how the old house looked in the neighborhood, how it smelled, how your bed was next to Branford's for what seemed forever—seventeen years—and how a particular song you played or heard with regularity bounced through the rooms.

On the road, this kind of thing happens every day.

On the road, something incredible can take place at any moment, something that can reaffirm or realign your conception of who you are and want to be in the world.

Not that it's not a thorough and total pain in the ass sometimes, with the routine of every day—the plane, the bus, hotel check-ins, telephone calls, interviews, arguments. You get tired and say to yourself, "Ooouweeee, Lord have mercy."

But as you step out of the shower and attempt on yet another night to avoid burning your suit with yet another defective hotel iron, you feel the beginning of a change, a little like a change of weather or season, except this change is internal. It is the feeling of something impending, like your first spanking, or first day of school. Or kiss.

Then as you don your almost well-pressed suit you realize tonight is the only night you will play in front of this particular group of people. So, in a way, each concert is also like an initiation or some other one-time ceremony. That is why the intensity of this feeling is the same in Lewisburg, west Virginia's Carnegie Hall and New York City's Carnegie Hall.

You drive past the hall, see people coming in, see hip and unhip, and the wannabe-made hipsters. See the couples in elegant dress, the old people and the young, the fine, the refined, and the granulated. Band directors with their students. People named Gene, or Mary. Alphonse. Ralph. Even

*Nathan. And you realize that you've been given the opportunity to bring happiness to people, provoke thought, evoke sorrow, or convey something beautiful that adds to someone's life.
This is what I love.*