

Dan recalls Dizzy Gillespie

Producer: Hank Hehmsoth

[music - "Shaw 'Nuff" - Dizzie Gillespie]

[Dan Morgenstern] Dizzy was so outgoing! He was a wonderful personality, and in his own way he was like a bebop edition of Louis [Armstrong], you know. [laughter] First time I saw him was due to a girl that I had met. She was pretty hip, and this is again early in my New York days, and she was the first one to take me to Harlem. She took me to the Apollo to see Dizzy's big band, and I will forever be grateful to her for that, because this was the stage where Dizzy had Chano Pozo. So I fortunately got to see that, and I'll never forget it! The band was great but Pozo was something else. They had this number written by George Russell that featured Chano called "Cubano Be Cubano Bop". It was a whole show that involved Chano Pozo, who, as you know, did not live too much longer after that because he was killed in some stupid encounter that had to do with drugs and some guy just pulled out a thing and shot him. So I was lucky that I got to see him.

But it was a real show, because what they did was, they put the house lights down for that. And Pozo had been playing with the band, but then he came out, stripped to the waist with some kind of interesting pair of pants, and how they got by with that on stage I don't know. A lamp, one of those things with a flame on it... He heated up the skins of his big drum that he carried there, and he had a whole array of stuff. And then he'd sit down and he started to chant.... as he does. It was recorded, and there's even a.. there's a live recording of it, too. He would start chanting, Cuban style... I mean, it was a tremendous performance and I'm just delighted that I got to witness that! So that was my first encounter with Diz. Dizzy was so easy to get to know. We became friendly ... and I saw him in the many different circumstances and I must say that he was the most consistent, I mean, he never seemed to have an off day, off night. And the way he played, you know, the way he mastered that instrument. He, you know, he had his own approach. He had the puffed cheeks, which you were not supposed to have. That's where he stored all that air because he could play those tremendous runs. Nobody else has been able to do that, at that speed, and in such a long flow. Well, I saw Dizzy at recording sessions and one was with Benny Carter... was the musical director. It was for that film, was it "A Man Called Adam?" And he was always in the studio, very relaxed, and he could come up with some funny stuff. He was an easy person to work with for producers and for band mates. And of course, musically, there were moments of where you could really get an insight into how brilliant he was harmonically and rhythmically, and he did one session. He would go over to the piano and demonstrate something. aHe was a good piano player. But he was fun! I mean there was a Carnegie Hall thing. I wanted to see him. I went backstage. At that time I had press passes and all that stuff. I went backstage and I was in Dizzy's dressing room... [laughter] And... They were smoking a joint! [more laughter] At Carnegie Hall backstage!! I can talk about that now because it's legal now, for Christ's sakes! [laughter] But anyway, I had Dizzy here when I was with DownBeat, yeah it was doing a preface for my first book, for "Jazz People". So, I interviewed him. Among other things, he mentioned Miles there. He said about [Miles Davis] "a lot of people don't understand Miles, because basically," he said, "Miles is a shy person". I remember

one night I was late, .. early in the morning, you know, "jazz hours". I was walking with some musician friends. There was a trumpet player, he was carrying his trumpet under his arm. And all of a sudden, this was on Columbus Circle, you know where you walk around. A car came around, and somebody yelled "Musicians!!" and it was Dizzy! He was in the car, he wasn't driving, and so he waved. [laughter] you know.. musicians... But I did a thing about his Zen quintet. A very young Kenny Barron. Dizzy put Kenny on the map. I think he wasn't 20 yet, but terrific. Chris White was the bass player. and Moody! [James Moody] Moody is somebody. yea, we got to talk about Moody, too. What a beautiful man! Anyway, this was a really good band It was always nice to see Diz. I was at a recording session and he recorded with Benny Carter. So that was interesting. Dizzy was... obviously, he had been a sideman with Benny and a small band that Benny had in New York. And when Dizzy left Cab Calloway. So, I mean, they were hardly strangers, but Dizzy, really, you know, you could tell how much he respected Benny. But it was great too, what he played. You know, he was such a brilliant musician. And his relationship with Louis... You know, you had all this bullshit, stupid, stuff going on in the jazz press with "Moldy Figs" and Be-Boppers and all this stuff. Musicians were above that really, unless they were prodded by some press agents. So, Dizzy and Louie were really friendly. When they had the tribute to Louis, at Newport, and they had all the trumpet players. And Dizzy was the one who said, "Without him, No Me!" [long pause] That was a great way to put it! That meant more than some long cascade of words. That was perfect! He was..... He was a very brilliant guy.....