

# Thank You,

# Dave

*By John Salmon*

**John Salmon,** pianist, is on the faculty of University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has recorded his own jazz compositions (*Albany*), as well as the piano works of Dave Brubeck (*Phoenix*, *Naxos*) and Nikolai Kapustin (*Naxos*).



# O

n Sunday, December 2, 2012, I called Dave Brubeck at his home in Connecticut, as I had every few weeks for the past few years, to catch up, talk about my latest projects involving his music, and ask how he was doing. "Hanging in there," was his response to my query about his recent medical issues. He seemed more interested in hearing about me than talking about himself.

I told him about a recording I made last summer of his ballad *Dziękuję*, in

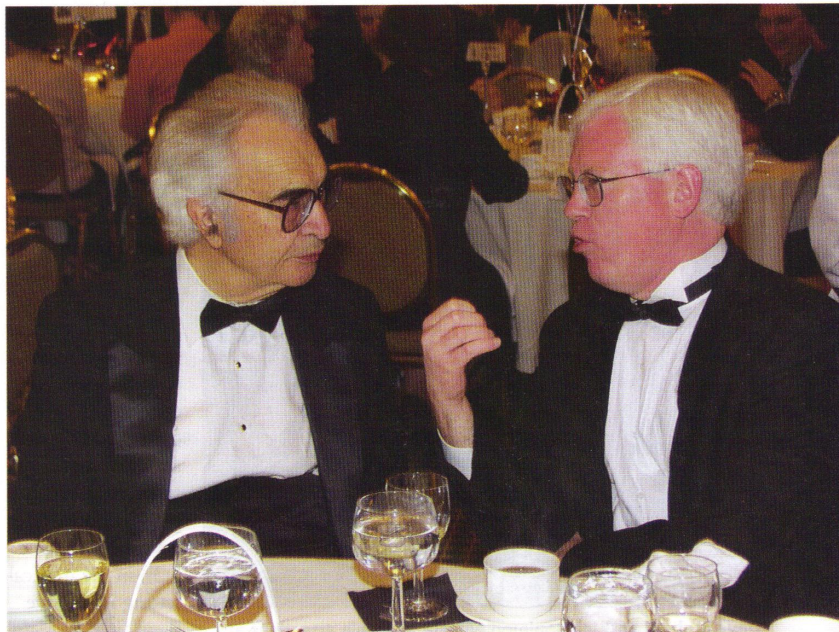
which I quoted Chopin's *Mazurka in B-flat Minor, Op.24, No. 4*. "I think you must have heard your mother play that piece when you were a boy, because your theme mirrors the first bars of Chopin's *Mazurka*," I told him. Brubeck's mother, Elizabeth Ivey "Bessie" Brubeck, was a classically trained pianist who had studied with Tobias Matthay and Dame Myra Hess in England. Brubeck actually composed and premiered *Dziękuję* in Poland in 1958, during a tour sponsored by the

U.S. State Department. The first three notes, an F followed by two Fs an octave higher, could be sung to the three-syllable word *dziękuję*—Polish for “thank you.”

Brubeck was well aware of the Chopin-esque style, if not the precise mazurka upon which it seems to have been based, as revealed in his liner notes to the 1958 LP *Jazz Impressions of Eurasia* (Columbia Records, CS 8058): “After our first performance of ‘*Dziękuję*’ there was a complete silence. I thought I had insulted the audience by linking the memory of Chopin to jazz. Then came the applause and I realized with relief that the Polish audience had understood that this was meant as a tribute to their great musical tradition, and as an expression of gratitude.”

Gratitude was at the center of that LP, which included musical incipits inspired by “thank you” in other languages, including the Turkish phrase *choc teshejjur edem* in “The Golden Horn” and the German *danke schoen* in “Brandenburg Gate.” Gratitude also seems to have been at the core of Dave’s life. He ended our conversation that Sunday afternoon in a manner similar to many of our other conversations: “Thank you, John, for all you do for me and my music.” I responded, “No, thank YOU, Dave, for all the beautiful music you have given us.”

Of course, I did not know those would be our last words to each other. Dave Brubeck died December 5, 2012, one day shy of his 92nd birthday. Almost providentially, we concluded our relationship in the best possible way. As sad as his passing was to me, my final goodbye to this important musical mentor and friend could not have been more meaningful and comforting.



John Salmon and Dave Brubeck talk during the Gala at the 2001 MTNA National Conference.

#### Dave’s Music

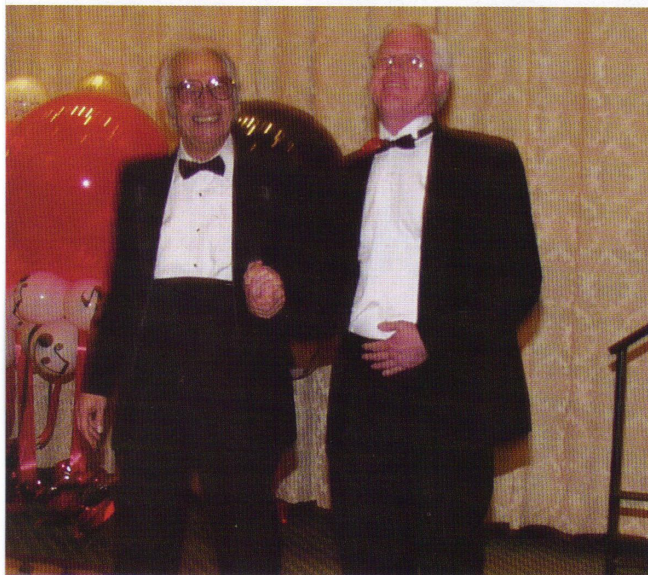
Dave’s music always struck something deep inside me. As a precocious 5-year-old, I used to put the Dave Brubeck Quartet’s classic *Time Out* album on our family’s 1960 stereo and internalize the mesmerizing 5/4 rhythm of “Take Five” and the infectious 9/8 pulse of “Blue Rondo a la Turk.” Later on, I absorbed his sacred choral works, such as the oratorio *The Light in the Wilderness* and the cantata *Truth Is Fallen*. His melding of classical and jazz idioms always seemed particularly fresh, incorporating tone rows reminiscent of Schoenberg, bitonality à la Stravinsky/Milhaud, Bachian chorales and counterpoint, and stride straight out of Fats Waller.

It has been my honor over the past two decades to record Brubeck’s “classical” piano pieces. This includes large-scale works such as *Points on Jazz*, *Glances* and *They All Sang Yankee Doodle*, in addition to smaller pieces such as *Reminiscences of the Cattle*

*Country*, excerpts from *Dave’s Diary* and several *Two-Part Adventures*. Most of this music has been published and, for some volumes, I have contributed as editor. The general public and, I suspect, many professional musicians think of Dave Brubeck strictly as a jazz musician and leader of one of the most successful jazz combos in history. However, Dave’s role as composer of works in the classical tradition is an equally significant, if relatively unknown, aspect of his musical biography.

As with any prolific composer, it will take some time to catalogue Brubeck’s complete oeuvre. He wrote works for a wide variety of mediums, including *Elementals* for orchestra and jazz combo (1963), *Chromatic Fantasy* for string quartet (1997), and *Tritonis* for flute and guitar (1979). Perhaps the most prominent genre of his entire classical output is the large-scale, often sacred-themed choral work.

Dave composed more than a dozen such pieces, exemplified by the cantata



Dave Brubeck and John Salmon entertained Gala attendees at the 2001 MTNA National Conference with an improvisation on Duke Ellington's *Things Ain't What They Used to Be*.

*Gates of Justice* (1969), the oratorio *Beloved Son* (1978) and the mass *To Hope! A Celebration* (1980).

### Dave's Humanity

As important as Dave's music has been to me, when I think about his influence on my life, more than anything else it is his humanity that stays with me. He was always an advocate for the oppressed and the disadvantaged. His stance on civil rights, epitomized by his 1960 cancellation of a tour of Southern universities and colleges over their refusal to accept an integrated music group (Brubeck's bassist was black), was particularly significant to me growing up in segregated Fort Worth, Texas. Dave's strong feeling for equality among the races can be traced back to an experience he had as a boy when his rancher father asked a black friend who had been a slave to show him the "brand" on his chest. Decades later, the memory of

this sight caused Dave to tear up as he recounted the story in Ken Burns's *Jazz* documentary.

I will always hear certain Bible verses, such as "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3), in the musical setting Dave gave them (in *The Light in the Wilderness*).

In life, as in music, Dave stood for tolerance and forgiveness. "You have to be taught to hate," he told Andrew Zuckerman in the 2008 book *Wisdom*. No doubt, he was also deeply influenced by his experience as a soldier stationed in Germany during World War II. In an interview for the Milken Archive in 2007, he recalled witnessing death and mass destruction during the Battle of the Bulge, an event that propelled him to produce *The Commandments* some 60 years later. "Thou shalt not kill" became an internal mantra he finally set movingly to music.

### My Musical Father

It is hard for me not to view Dave as my musical father. He was a part of my musical life since I became conscious. When I realized my own father was born in Dave's birth year of 1920 and grew up less than 10 miles apart from him in California (my father in Walnut Creek, Dave in Concord), my relationship to Dave became more per-

sonal. Had they played together in basketball games? Taken apples from the same orchard? They definitely had breathed the same air and participated in the same zeitgeist.

I must have mentioned that in the first letter I wrote Dave in early 1971 when I was 16 years old. It was definitely a "fan" letter and I never expected a reply. After all, Dave Brubeck was a public figure in the same celebrity stratosphere as Elvis Presley and John Lennon. Imagine my surprise when I actually heard back from him (see page 23.) His mention of my father and his own sons' musical activities strengthened a connection that had been born when I first heard "Take Five" at age 5.

My relationship with him started to transcend "fan-star" status around 1992, after my article "What Brubeck Got from Milhaud" appeared in the February/March 1992 issue of *American Music Teacher*. For that article, I interviewed Dave, his brother Howard Brubeck, and clarinetist Bill Smith, who performed in the Brubeck Octet during 1946, when Dave was studying composition with Darius Milhaud at Mills College. Howard Brubeck (1916–1993) was actually Milhaud's assistant in those days and thus a valuable source of information about Milhaud's role in Dave's development. He also transcribed and edited much of Dave's music, and composed *Dialogues for Jazz Combo and Orchestra*, recorded by the Dave Brubeck Quartet and the New York Philharmonic with Leonard Bernstein conducting.

After Howard's death in 1993, my participation in Brubeck's professional activities deepened. I certainly cannot say I took over Howard's role—the close relationship between Dave and

# Dave Brubeck

## THE DAVE BRUBECK QUARTET

October 26, 1971

Mr. John Salmon,

Dear John:

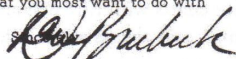
My reply to your letter is very late, I know, but with so many letters to answer between concerts and other musical activities, I simply have to operate under the assumption "better late than never" and hope that you will accept my apologies.

It is especially pleasing to me to know that "The Light In The Wilderness" and "The Gates of Justice" have reached you, as well as the straight jazz work I have done, because although a great deal of myself is involved in both, my philosophy can be more clearly stated with words than in the abstractions of music. My newest piece, a cantata, was written for chorus, orchestra, soprano soloist, and rock group and deals with the problems of violence and destruction in our contemporary society. The rock group is my son's band, New Heavenly Blue. They are University of Michigan students at Ann Arbor and have an RCA album out. We are completing the recording of the cantata, called "Truth is Fallen" (based on Isaiah 59, "Truth is fallen in the street and equity cannot enter.") and hope for a release within the next 6 months on Atlantic Records.

Your intense interest in music of all kinds reminds me of my own sons. My oldest boy, Darius, has an avant garde jazz group, The Darius Brubeck Quartet, which has just begun to receive some critical notice--boos from Leonard Feather, hurrahs from John S. Wilson, and a very enthusiastic reception in Denver, where they played recently for two weeks. My third son, Chris, has the rock group and is an accomplished trombonist in the university symphony orchestra and stage band. Another son, Daniel (16) is a drummer and has a group at North Carolina School of the Arts in Winson-Salem.

Your father and I must have grown up in the Concord area at about the same time if he is my age. Paul, Gerry and I played at the Concord Jazz Festival this summer. In attendance was estimated six to eight thousand people--more than the total population of the area when your father and I were boys there.

Thank you for writing and I wish you every success. If you decide to become a professional musician, the road is rough and the rewards are slim, financially, as my boys are soon learning, but to be doing for a livelihood, what you most want to do with your time, means more than anything else.



his older brother was irreplaceable—but I did begin a solid trajectory of recording, editing and writing about Dave's music, one that continued for the next two decades. It was also my privilege to participate in three ceremonies that celebrated Dave's achievements: an honorary doctorate degree from Gerhard Mercator University in Duisburg, Germany (1994); the Achievement in the Arts award, given to Dave and Iola Brubeck, from Northwood University (1996); and the

Achievement Award from Music Teachers National Association (2001). In addition, my work achieved its own recognition: in 2006, I received the Distinguished Achievement Award from the Brubeck Institute at the University of the Pacific. But perhaps most meaningful are the two pieces he dedicated to me, "The Salmon Strikes" and "Bach Again," both of which I have recorded.

From 1993 until the summer of 2012, Dave sent me photocopies of multiple scores, most in his own handwriting, some with self-effacing annotations such as "John, is this any good?" or "John, can you use this?" Several large storage bins sit underneath my pianos at school, each filled with scores, letters and other Brubeck-related items including many years of Christmas cards. In 2003, I was granted a research leave that I used to organize these letters and scores and to record my second CD of his piano music. In the intervening 10 years, I've accumulated enough additional material to justify another research leave. With his long and productive life—more than 60 years of nearly nonstop recording, composing and touring—archivists, biographers and musicologists interested in assessing Brubeck's creative legacy have a lot of work ahead of them.

My own father died on December 6, 2005, Dave's 85th birthday. That moment, even in loss, confirmed the extrasensory connection I have felt with Dave for nearly my entire life. His music will always be a core part of my own music making. But I am also the beneficiary of a greater gift: Dave Brubeck's humanity, humility, warmth and encouragement—the qualities of the man that helped me create and affirm my own values. I have tried to emulate him as much in these ways as in any purely musical ones. I'm so grateful for Dave Brubeck's music, grateful for the role I played in propagating that music and grateful our last words were mutual expressions of gratitude. There is nothing that could give me more solace.

AMT