

STAN MCDONALD, PLAYING IT WITH PASSION

By George A. Borgman

I first heard reedman Stan McDonald in person when he appeared with the New Black Eagle Jazz Band in March 1980 at The Boston Globe Jazz Festival at the Berklee Performance Center in Boston. The fire alarm sounded just before the performance began, and the building was evacuated. My son, Eric, age nine, and I exited through a rear door into an alley where several Black Eagles were beginning to jam. One of them was Stan McDonald, playing clarinet, and tenor saxophonist Scott Hamilton, also on the festival's program, soon joined the session. Twenty minutes later everyone returned inside, for the firemen had extinguished a small fire in a floor ashtray in the lobby.

Impressed with the jam session, I wrote a letter to the Globe, saying that the best part of the concert was the music in the alley, and the letter was published. In 1981, I received correspondence from McDonald, inviting me to come to the Sticky Wicket Pub in Hopkinton, Mass., to hear his new Blue Horizon Jazz Band. In a postscript he wrote, "Remember the Alleymo!" When I arrived at the Sticky Wicket, the band was about to begin a tune, and as I walked by the bandstand, I commented, "Remember the Alleymo!" I heard a woman laugh and later discovered she was McDonald's wife, Ellen, the band's diligent manager. - G. Borgman

Stan McDonald, whose musicianship and playing style have been acclaimed by fellow musicians and critics for more than 30 years, has accumulated a wide and loyal following among traditional jazz fans, as he has worked with various groups, including the New Black Eagle Jazz Band, and he has led his own bands, the Blue Horizon Jazz Band among them.

Whether playing his soprano saxophone or clarinet or during his occasional vocals, McDonald always performs with a depth of feeling and emotion. He tends to favor the compositions of reedman Sidney Bechet, his idol, but draws equally upon those of Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Clarence Williams, and Bessie Smith, for his band material, which ranges from rags to Duke Ellington, with a liberal mix of pop and show tunes in which Cole Porter and Irving Berlin are among his favorites. As with Bechet, anything goes for McDonald's solo features, but they are typically lyrical and emotional vehicles.

Robert F. Bliss, in the *Worcester Gazette*, Worcester, Mass., identified McDonald as a pure musician who plays his horns with tender precision, a big, warm tone, excellent harmonic sense and faultless intonation. According to Bliss, McDonald knows just when to lean into a long note and when to begin coloring it with a wider vibrato or an embouchure change and the proper time to throw in a fill, when to turn on the soprano's brassy sensuality, and when to play at little

more than a hush. Bliss admired the sense of balance of McDonald's performance, his ability to husband notes and to express in his solos a clean, pure, simple music.

Many consider McDonald one of the better Sidney Bechet stylists today, and in *Jazzfax*, the newsletter of the Jazz Appreciation Society of Syracuse, N.Y., Pat Carroll wrote that although McDonald plays with the same spirit as Bechet, he is a creator in his own right, his playing is honest, he puts forth his utmost effort every time he appears in public, he never compromises, he appears very discontented when he feels his performance is not up to the standard or goal he has set, and he plays the music the way he feels it.

McDonald and his wife, Ellen, reside in semi-rural Sherborn, southwest of Boston, in a house built in 1836 by Reverend Dowse, pastor of the village church, chaplain of the Massachusetts State Senate, and close friend of Vice President Henry Wilson, who served under President Ulysses S. Grant. The house, which McDonald bought in 1964, is included in the National Register of Historic Places. His music studio has a large collection of recordings of classic and contemporary traditional jazz bands, including the complete output of his favorites: Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Johnny Dodds, Albert Nicholas, and others, whose photographs and signed posters (e.g., Ralph Sutton and Marty Grosz) cover the walls. A large oil painting of Bechet, given him by Dick Freniere, an early mentor and painter of jazz artists, hangs over the family piano.

McDonald has amassed hundreds of live recordings, going back to the 1950s, of his own bands and others at clubs, concerts, radio and television performances, etc. Shelves and cabinets are filled with bound and sheet music, volumes of jazz history and biography, and memorabilia, plus three clarinets and three soprano saxophones.

A retired college library director, McDonald maintained his library profession to enable him to support his family, thus allowing him the freedom to play the music of his choice.

McDonald provided much of the following information to the *Rag* during interviews at his home.

Early years

Stanley (Stan) Montrose McDonald, Jr., born on August 28, 1935, in Boston, Mass., an only child, grew up in Needham, then a small town of about 4,000 population southwest of Boston. With cows and a stream behind the family home, McDonald developed a life-long love of nature, equal, he says, to his later passion for jazz.

Of Scottish descent, McDonald's father, a retired manufacturer's representative, died in 1993 at age 94. His mother, Ruth Gertrude McDonald, nee Kaiser, of Swiss-German heritage, was born on July 21, 1903. A 1925 graduate of Framingham State College, Framingham, Mass., where she studied home economics and taught until 1933, she was a teacher in the Needham school system in the 1950s and '60s.

McDonald's maternal grandfather was a member, possibly a cornetist, in Tambours de Bale, a military-style band in Basel, Switzerland. In Boston, he was the foreman of the wood and finishing department at the McPhail Piano Company factory and supervised the on-line production of a piano for his wife. The piano, on which McDonald first had lessons, is in his home.

Ruth Kaiser and her eight siblings, who grew up in the Roxbury area of Boston, had a close relationship to music: brother Fred, a violinist, led an orchestra which rehearsed at home and possibly played ragtime; sister Carrie gave piano lessons to Ruth and sister Rosa; Carrie and Ruth brought home sheet music of the latest popular songs when they went shopping in Boston; and Fred Hinkley, a railroad engineer and ragtime pianist, courted Margaretha, the eldest sister.

McDonald's father, a member of the choir at Trinity Church in Boston, had a sister, a pianist, who, in her late 80s, wrote Tin Pan Alley songs, both music and lyrics. Her daughter was an actress and member of the Rockettes in New York City.

At age seven, McDonald began seven years of piano lessons from two warm and dedicated women. Around age 12, he tired of classical music, and his teacher gave him a book entitled *Sammy Price's Blues and Boogie Woogie*. McDonald, who treasures Price's recordings with Sidney Bechet, still has his original copy of the book, but, he said, "with something added." In 1984, Sammy played his formidable piano with my Blue Horizon Jazz Band at Ephraim's in Sudbury, Mass., and he was amazed and delighted when I handed him the book on the spot and had him autograph it, some 37 years later!

"I might be playing jazz piano today, but no one thought then to introduce me to harmony. I could read music like a hawk, but I had no conception that I needed to understand harmony in order to improvise, which was what I wanted and was trying to do, but could not explain. I guess that's why no one thought to teach me harmony, until years after I mistakenly figured it would be easier if you were playing one note at a time. So I took up the saxophone!"

The alto saxophone lessons began when McDonald was about 14. His teacher was John Swagher, a general business musician. McDonald played alto in the junior high school band, and at home he improvised to music on records and radio, where he heard mostly swing. His musical interests, though, gravitated to boogie-woogie, blues and traditional jazz, and he listened to *Le Jazz Hot*, a radio program from New York. Ted Felton, Aunt Carrie's son, had a collection of 78 rpm. jazz records, including those of Eddie Condon. On his way home from school, McDonald often stopped by the Felton house in order to absorb the recorded music.

McDonald, who played in marching, concert and dance bands in high school, and trumpeter Dick Sudhalter, then a high school student in Newton, Mass., and later a biographer of Bix Beiderbecke, occasionally got together and jammed with reedman Frank Nizzari and other budding jazzmen.

First Years in Jazz

McDonald first earned money as a musician performing at his high school's dances, and he was first exposed to live jazz in 1952 at the Log Cabin in Dedham, a town bordering Needham. Since he wasn't of drinking age, he told his parents that he was going to the movies with friends, and he tied his saxophone case to a rope and lowered it out his bedroom window. At the Log Cabin, he sat in with the house band, whose members were cornetist Art Manthorne, trombonist Dick Roche, reedman Bruce Burrell, pianist Sam Waldron, and drummer Tommy Benford. McDonald believed that Manthorne led the band, which played in a dixieland-like style.

McDonald formed lasting friendships there with sit-in trumpeter Walter (Walt) Miller, sometimes a band regular, and Benford, who had played and recorded with Jelly Roll Morton in the late 1920s. Miller played with Lil Hardin Armstrong and Lee Collins in Chicago, Buck Clayton in Paris, J.C. Higginbotham on the college circuit, and at Mahogany Hall, Storyville and the Savoy in Boston.

Another sit-in musician at the Log Cabin was clarinetist Jim Moynahan, who in the early 1920s played Original Dixieland Jazz Band tunes and in the late 1920s worked and recorded with Brad Gowans. Moynahan taught McDonald harmony and the concept of improvisation on chord progressions. McDonald also learned on his own, and from then on he played on all the chords he could.

McDonald began exploring the history of jazz, including Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers and Sidney Bechet's New Orleans Footwarmers, his favorite groups. As a teenager he was going against the stream of things when jazz music was bop and cool, which, he said, "was insipid, mannered, artificial and cut off from feelings. So I sailed through the 1950s blissfully unaffected by pop jazz currents of the day and immersed myself in the traditional jazz revival that began in the 1940s."

McDonald was graduated from Needham High School in 1953, and that summer he went to hear the trio at Lee's Four Aces in Brewster on Cape Cod. Jim Moynahan played tenor sax, an elderly woman played piano from sheet music, and a man, with a sea captain's hat, was the drummer. They played such pop tunes as "A Slow Boat to China."

That fall, McDonald entered the University of Massachusetts (UMass), at Amherst. At first he majored in wildlife management, but later switched to English studies.

Shortly before his freshman year at UMass, McDonald began playing the soprano sax which his father had purchased for him. As a freshman, McDonald put together a band, the New

Orleans Six, which played at fraternity parties and for a while weekly at the Sportsman's Club in Hadley, Mass.

At a local bar, McDonald put a couple of 78 rpm records, featuring Eddie Condon's band, in a jukebox, and he put on the label, "Courtesy of Stan McDonald and His River-boat Ramblers," a name he made up. A customer asked the bar-tender where McDonald could be found, and he was sent to McDonald's dormitory to meet him. The man was trumpeter Tony Pappas, a UMass alumnus who aspired to play traditional jazz. He and McDonald soon became fast friends.

Pappas had found Gil Roberts, a black maintenance man at a frat house at Amherst College, who had been playing mostly solo banjo at frat parties. Roberts had worked and recorded with the Blue Ribbon Syncopators of Buffalo in 1925 and '27, occasionally performing for gangsters at gunpoint, and in the late 1920s he toured Europe and North Africa, visiting 23 countries. In Egypt, he played for King Farouk and his harem. On April 25, 2002, Roberts was 106 years old.

Tony Pappas and Roberts joined McDonald's band in 1955 or '56, and its name was changed to Stan McDonald's New Orleans Jazz Band. In the band were Pappas, trombonist Cliff Carr (Carriere), Roberts, pianist Paul Waldron (Sam's cousin), and drummer Harry Gittes.

The New Orleans Jazz Band played at fraternities at UMass and Amherst College, and at various East Coast colleges, from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Penn., to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., where some parties began at 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. and lasted until 6:00 a.m. The band then traveled, sleepless, from RPI to Middlebury College in Vermont, where it played for noontime milk punch (bourbon with milk) parties, with such guest musicians as trombonist Stan Vincent and pianists Robin Verdier or Bob Pilsbury.

McDonald said, "Those were great days, and we were indefatigable. We'd stay up all night and not think a thing of it."

Gil Poyton, from Providence, R.I., was the band's most regular trombonist after Cliff Carr, and, McDonald said, "He could listen to a De Paris brothers record and come back the next night and play Wilbur De Paris' solos, note for note, every inflection. The guy was a genius. He'd drive to Amherst in his big, old Packard, hardly able to see over the dashboard because he was little more than five feet tall. Gil was the most urbane cat, and he played that way."

Another member of the band was drummer Jimmy Parker, who later played with Charlie Ventura's band. Parker was one of the best drummers McDonald ever heard, for, he said, "He'd begin with a solo sort of mezzo forte, and then he'd bring it up to forte. Then he'd go down to pianissimo with a press roll that would diminish until it sounded like steam coming out of a radiator; then silence and the place would explode with applause."

In 1955, McDonald went to hear George Lewis' band at the Savoy in Boston, but Lewis was ill, and substitute clarinetist Tony Parenti emulated him perfectly. Jim Robinson was on trombone, and bassist Alcide (Slow Drag) Pavageau advised McDonald, "If you're going to make a 'humbug' [mistake], make a good one. You'll learn to get it." Pavageau spoke about his acquaintance with Manuel Perez, Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, and Bunk Johnson. Pavageau told McDonald that Perez was a fine musician who didn't drink or smoke, and Bolden did the blues right. Drummer Joe Watkins missed the old days, but said that if men really tried, they could play New Orleans jazz.

In about 1956, the New Orleans Jazz Band, with Tony Pap-pas, Dick Libertini or Henry Francis on cornet or trumpet, and Robin Verdier or Sam Waldron, played during the summer at Taber's on Revere Beach in Revere, Mass. At the Southward Inn in Orleans on Cape Cod, McDonald sat in with the Excalibur Jazz Band, led by Leroy Parkins from New York. It played seven nights weekly and on Sunday afternoons. In the band were Dick Wetmore, violin, cornet, baritone horn; Cas Brosky, trombone; Parkins, clarinet, tenor and bass saxes and flute; Bob Pilsbury; Frank Gallagher, bass; and Tommy Ben-ford.

McDonald said, "The Excalibur Jazz Band was a great band. They'd play sort of polite stuff during dinner, and then they'd gradually crank it up over the course of the evening until the place would be rocking."

In November 1956, McDonald's New Orleans Jazz Band, with Gil Poyton and Gil Roberts, was at the Quonset Club in Hadley. Admission was 50 cents.

During his college years, McDonald frequently visited jazz clubs in New York City and Boston. In New York, at the Metropole, he sat in with trumpeter Red Allen, Tony Parenti, Parisian pianist André Persiany, and drummer Zutty Singleton; at Jimmy Ryan's he heard pianist Don Frye with Wilbur De Paris; he marveled at pianist Hank Duncan, of Sidney Bechet fame, at Nick's; and at Eddie Condon's he met clarinetist Edmond Hall and pianist Ralph Sutton.

McDonald, with one course in music harmony at UMass, took a few clarinet lessons from Dick Hurlburt, and he began to play clarinet with the New Orleans Jazz Band in 1956 or '57. The band played live on public TV in Springfield, Mass., in 1957. The other players were Tony Pappas, Cliff Carr, Paul Waldron, Gil Roberts, and Harry Gittes.

A Summer in Paris

McDonald spent the summer of 1958 in Paris, France, where he had a squalid room on the beautiful Ile de la Cité, an island in the Seine River, when not staying with his girl friend, Françoise du Parquet, and her family. She had been a teaching fellow in the French Department at UMass. Between his studies at the Sorbonne at the University of Paris and his close association with the du Parquet family, McDonald spoke hardly a word of English the whole summer in Paris, where he visited numerous churches, museums and historic shrines, tracking down places where Vincent Van Gogh and other famous artists had lived.

In Paris, McDonald hoped to meet Sidney Bechet. In early 1958, at the Log Cabin, Tommy Benford told McDonald that his playing reminded him of Bechet's, his old friend, and he gave McDonald a note of introduction, which read: "Hi, Sidney. Why in the hell don't you write a guy sometime? Stan is a very dear friend of mine. Treat him right. Also, regards to your son, wife and all my friends. Your pal, Tommy Benford." Unfortunately, Bechet was either ill or on tour, and McDonald never did meet him. Bechet was to pass away in Paris on May 14, 1959, his 62nd birthday.

McDonald sat in at some of the jazz clubs, playing with clarinetist Mezz Mezzrow at the Caveau de l'Huchette, where clarinetist Maxim Saury had a band. One night, at another club, McDonald heard a recording of Albert Nicholas, one of his favorite clarinetists. McDonald identified it to the bartender, who pointed out Nicholas sitting in a corner of the barroom, and McDonald went over and introduced himself.

McDonald said, "Nicholas was thrilled to have somebody appreciate his playing as much as I did. He took me to his apartment, where we drank cognac a good part of the night and listened to all the records he'd made in France that I had never heard and couldn't get over here."

McDonald bought a new Boehm-system Buffet clarinet in Paris, and he later used it on the first six recordings he did with the New Black Eagle Jazz Band. He later switched to a Selmer clarinet and has recently returned to his original, but reconditioned, Buffet.

McDonald studied 19th-century French poetry at the So-bonne and received a French-language proficiency certificate, and, he said, "That's how I finished my credits later at UMass. I was lacking three or four credits for graduation, because I was spending too much time with the girls and the music. "That was a great summer in Paris."

After Paris

In Fall 1958, at UMass, McDonald received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature, with a minor in philosophy, and he joined the Historic Jazz Band, led by trombonist Ken Reed of the Harvard University Business School in Cambridge, Mass.

In September, the New Orleans Jazz Band became the New Orleans Jazz Doctors, and Tony Pappas became the leader due to McDonald's imminent departure in December for duty with the U.S. Army. Dick Hurlburt replaced McDonald on clarinet, but McDonald subbed for him on a few jobs and also played with the Historic Jazz Band before he left for the Army.

McDonald took basic training at Fort Dix, N.J., and from early 1959 to July that year, he was at the Navy School of Music in Washington, D.C., where he received his only formal training on the clarinet.

In Washington, McDonald met drummer Beale Riddle, who had known Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong. Riddle introduced him to many musicians, including trumpeter Thornton (Tony) Hagert and trombonist Slide Harris, and they worked together at parties and functions. Also, at such jazz venues as the Charles Hotel, Blues Alley and the Mayfair, McDonald heard pianist Willie (The Lion) Smith, cornetist Wild Bill Whalen, violinist Stuff Smith, guitarist Danny Barker, and pianists Johnny Eaton and Booker Coleman, and he sat in with some of them. Riddle also introduced McDonald to Bob Wilber, tenor saxist with The Six.

McDonald was in Hawaii by July 1959 and playing solo clarinet in the 25th Infantry Division Band at Schofield Barracks. He sat in with several pianists at hotels and bars in Waikiki and met the legendary, but reclusive, pianist Paul Lingle.

In November 1960, McDonald was discharged from active duty in San Francisco, where he heard cornetist Muggsy Spanier, clarinetist Darnell Howard, trombonist Jimmy Archey and pianist Joe Sullivan in a band at the Hangover Club, with Earl Hines playing intermission piano.

Immediately on his return to Boston, McDonald linked with Tony Pappas and the New Orleans Jazz Doctors and also resumed playing with the Historic Jazz Band, led by trombonist Fred Walsh.

McDonald soon began working at the Free Public Library in Concord, Mass. A friend and co-worker there was William F. Buckley, who left to go on duty with the Army, and McDonald replaced him as reference librarian. He never saw Buckley again, for, according to press reports, in March 1984, Buckley, the Central Intelligence Agency's station chief in Beirut, Lebanon, was taken hostage by a militant Islamic organization, and he died after 15 months in captivity from illness and torture.

McDonald quit the job at the library in October 1961 when the director refused to allow him to adjust his schedule to play band jobs, and, from November until July '62, he taught English to foreigners at the Boston School of Modern Languages.

McDonald was married to Maxine Keller in 1962, and they were to be divorced in 1975. Their daughter, Alison, and son, Andrew, were reared in the house in Sherborn. Alison plays piano, and Andy took piano lessons for a while, and even though mildly handicapped, he got into it and enjoyed it, for, McDonald said, "Andy loves music." Alison has three children.

In August 1962, McDonald, who had been writing poetry, got an assistantship at the Breadloaf Writers Conference in Vermont at Middlebury College, where he knew poet Robert Frost. In October, McDonald was hired as reference librarian and later became assistant director at the Wellesley Free Library.

From about 1963 to '68, the New Orleans Jazz Doctors did gigs regularly at parties given by millionaire Bill Ellison at his shorefront estate in Duxbury, Mass., and at his duck blind, a low, frame building on a small island, about a half mile offshore. It was equipped with swing-

open gun ports for shooting season, and at parties, the guests enjoyed Oriental rugs, ship-to-shore radio, and endless supplies of filet mignon, lobsters and Tanqueray gin. Stan Vincent negotiated these events with Ellison, who always requested the inclusion of Gil Roberts in the band.

At Connolly's Stardust Room in Roxbury in September 1963, McDonald heard Edmond Hall with his all-star quartet. Mc-Donald also caught Hall's performance at Lennie's-on-the-Turnpike in Peabody, Mass., and sat in there with singer/pianist Jimmy Rushing.

In 1965 and '66, McDonald earned a Master's degree in library science at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Library and Information Science in Providence. He was to receive the school's Distinguished Alumnus Award in 1996.

By the mid-1960s, even though work for traditional jazz musicians was hard to find, McDonald continued working in the Historic Jazz Band, playing the soprano sax increasingly in the style of Sidney Bechet, but by 1965, the band was no longer really an organized ensemble.

In 1966, McDonald led the Exit Jazz Band, which played for about six months at the Lord Fox in Foxborough, Mass. The sidemen were Tony Pappas, Stan Vincent, Robin Verdier, ban-joist Steve Hamilton, tubaist Bill Batten, and drummer Art Burns. McDonald carried on with the Exit Jazz Band and other combinations in 1967, playing at yacht and country clubs, college gigs, and private parties. The Historic Jazz Band's Walt Miller retired from music in 1966. McDonald and other New Orleans Jazz Doctors, including Vincent, occasionally Gil Roberts and the Historic Jazz Band's Verdier, worked with various other trumpet or cornet players in ad hoc bands until around 1970.

In 1968, word reached McDonald of Tony Pringle, reputedly a good cornet player, who had recently arrived from Liver-pool, England. McDonald invited Pringle to visit him at his home for a get-acquainted session, and Pringle was engaged for various jobs. From February through December, McDonald worked in bands that sometimes included Pringle, Stan Vincent, clarinetist Bob Porter, Robin Verdier, Bob Pilsbury, and Art Burns.

The New Orleans Jazz Doctors, with McDonald and Gil Roberts, played as a unit until Fall 1968. Its final performance was at the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

In December, reedman Franz Jackson's band was featured at a Massachusetts Jazz Club concert in Auburn, Mass. McDonald was there, and he got autographs from pianist Lil Hardin Armstrong, trombonist Preston Jackson, and Ikey (Banjo) Robinson. The drummer was Tommy Benford, whom McDonald hadn't seen since 1958.

New Black Eagle Jazz Band Years

By Fall 1970, Tony Pringle and clarinetist Tommy Sancton, a student at Harvard University, formed a group they called the Black Eagle Jazz Band, which included trombonist Jim Klippert, pianist Eli Newberger, and Ray Smith or C.H. (Pam) Pameijer on drums. McDonald played a few times with them at Passim's, a coffeehouse in Cambridge. Klippert eventually

moved away, and Sancton, the leader, after graduation from Harvard, left to go to work for *Time* magazine.

McDonald left the library job in Wellesley in January 1971 to become Director of Library Services at Framingham State College, from which position he retired in 1996.

At a gig for the Massachusetts Jazz Club in Worcester in April 1971, McDonald led a group he called the Boston Bayou Jazz Band. He has a poster that lists the bandsmen as McDonald, Tony Pringle, Stan Vincent, Eli Newberger, banjoist Peter Bullis, bassist Joe Sah, and Pam Pameijer.

After McDonald introduced Vincent and Pilsbury to the Black Eagle Jazz Band, and Pringle took over its leadership, with Bullis as manager, the word "New" was added to the Black Eagle Jazz Band's name.

According to McDonald, the New Black Eagle Jazz Band took its final form for the next 10 years when Bob Pilsbury came into the band on piano, and Newberger moved to tuba. This occurred in mid-September 1971 at a job aboard the *Peter Stuyvesant*, a ship permanently moored at the Long Wharf in Boston.

By 1971, interest in traditional jazz had increased to the point where jazz clubs were beginning to open all over the United States. Around Halloween, the New Black Eagle Jazz Band, with McDonald as its reedman, began a once-weekly gig at the Sticky Wicket Pub in Hopkinton, Mass.

In September 1972, the band made its first long-play record album, and, at the forefront of the resurgence of traditional jazz, it gained an international reputation as it appeared throughout the United States and in Europe at innumerable clubs and concerts, including six years on the *Jazz-boat* in Boston, on radio and TV programs, and at festivals, to include the St. Louis Ragtime Festival (1973, '75 and '80), *The Boston Globe* Jazz Festival (1980), and those in Breda, Holland (1976, '78 and '80) and Edinburgh, Scotland (August '80), as well as tours in Germany and Norway. McDonald also played with the band in performances with the Bangor Symphony in Maine and the Boston Pops Orchestra.

When Tony Pringle made trips to England, McDonald fronted the band at the Sticky Wicket and on the *Jazzboat*, on several occasions with Doc Cheatham on trumpet and other times with Benny Waters on alto sax.

McDonald picked up many of his current followers while he was with the New Black Eagles, his solo abilities were acclaimed, and his work on the soprano sax was compared with the very best players of that instrument. In *The New York Times*, John S. Wilson described McDonald as "a jewel on either clarinet or the soprano saxophone."

Through the years, though, relations between McDonald and some of the New Black Eagles deteriorated. McDonald was forced to feel that his energies were best spent elsewhere, when, between sets during the evening of November 13, 1980, at the Sticky Wicket, there were

furtive, intimidating confrontations with another band member. McDonald told Tony Pringle that he was quitting the band after the final set. As McDonald began to leave, Pringle challenged him in front of the entire group, but McDonald refused to alter his decision.

Subsequently, after three meetings with Pringle, Peter Bullis and Bob Pilsbury, McDonald was assured that all of the band members wanted him back, and he rejoined the group at the Sticky Wicket on November 28.

In January 1981, McDonald was with the New Black Eagles when they performed on *Morning Pro Musica*, broadcast on WGBH, the public radio station in Boston, and at concerts with the symphony in Baltimore and the philharmonic orchestra in Plymouth, Mass.

McDonald, though, disillusioned with his situation in the band, became embittered by what he considered to be evidence that efforts by Pringle to support the alleged unanimity were being undermined. McDonald reluctantly told Pringle that he was not going to travel in May to the Breda festival because of personal commitments, but, McDonald said, "I just didn't feel like going. The end was in sight. Brian Ogilvie went to Holland with the band," as McDonald's substitute.

On May 3, 1981, McDonald married Ellen Horn, nee Miller, at the Unitarian Church in Sherborn. They had met during a New Black Eagle concert at Mt. Gretna, Penn., in 1979.

In June, McDonald played with the New Black Eagles at their weekly gig at the Sticky Wicket and at a couple of concerts. On July 1, McDonald sat in with cornetist Wild Bill Davison at Sandy's Jazz Revival in Beverly, Mass. Two days later, he was with the New Black Eagles in an outdoor concert in Wellesley. At the end of the gig, at which only three of the regular members were present, Tony Pringle said to him, "Thanks for 10 years of good music," and handed him a note, signed by all of the members.

McDonald said, "Of course, I could hardly have failed to see this coming. They had simply waited until they could re-place me. (The note) said they no longer felt I was an asset to the band, or something. It was like getting divorced from six people at once. Literally, that's what it felt like.

"I think that band was at its best from 1971 to '81, and that's where the reputation came from. The name was made in that decade."

As part of an ultimate cash settlement with the New Black Eagles, McDonald gave up all rights to the 12 or more recordings he made with them, with the exception of a small number of tracks on which he was the sole, featured player with the rhythm section. Six of the tracks are included on *A Real Love Strong*, a compact disc released later on the Blue Horizon label.

Blue Horizon Jazz Band Years

In April 1981, McDonald, with cornetist Paul Monat, began putting together the Blue Horizon Jazz Band, named after Sidney Bechet's "Blue Horizon," a clarinet blues. (When performing Bechet's "Blues in the Air," McDonald often interpolates a low register clarinet solo from "Blue Horizon.") The band began playing Sunday night gigs in April at Duca's in Framingham.

The Blue Horizon Jazz Band's formal founding was in July. McDonald dedicated the band to re-creating the spirit of the pioneer jazzmen, and, he said, "with an eclectic repertoire from rags to early swing, which featured organized ensemble and solo improvisation - 'head arrangements' - but no writ-ten music.

"I faced difficulty from the outset in finding musicians who were both interested and experienced in the tradition and repertoire and who were within eastern Massachusetts, and who, if they were full-time musicians and/or partly committed to other bands, as several were, had to be willing to prioritize the Blue Horizon Jazz Band. This included rehearsals required for mastery of the broad repertoire on which I insisted, as opposed to the 'jam session' school. Each of these factors ruled out many potential players and eliminated others along the way.

"The lack of good musicians was not the most limiting factor, however. It was the dearth of regular gigs to attract and hold them. Over the previous 10 years, I had been instrumental in the rise of regular jazz concert performances throughout New England. These were now largely preempted de-spite demand for me personally. Also, serious competition for the aerie of the New Black Eagles had developed earlier in the formation of the Heritage Jazz Band, the Yankee Rhythm Kings, and the Paramount Jazz Band, each of which stabled outstanding players."

McDonald and his wife, the band's manager, set about seeking gigs for the Blue Horizon at established area jazz venues and opening up other restaurants and bars for the first time to any kind of live jazz. They also found concert and festival jobs and a diversity of other public and private engagements. Most of the band's six recordings, on the band's label, have been made live at public venues.

Early on, the Blue Horizon performed at the two main trad jazz venues in greater Boston: the Sticky Wicket sporadically from July 1981 until it closed seven years later and at Sandy's Jazz Revival, encouraged by jazz impresario Sandy Berman, about once monthly between 1981 and '83. The band also appeared weekly at Jessica's in Framingham from October 1981 to the following February.

McDonald induced Walt Miller, after 17 years of musical retirement, to join the Blue Horizon in 1982. In April, the band played for the Connecticut Traditional Jazz Society in Hartford; in September, it was featured at an Arts Council concert at the University of Connecticut and on the *Jazz-boat*; and the band also played at Storyville, during its brief reincarnation in 1982, with trumpeter Stu Baird, pianist Henry Francis, guitarist Bob Leary, and, on different nights, drummers Buzzy Drootin and Ernie Wight.

In about April 1983, the band released *The Dawn of the Blue Horizon*, a long-play album of music recorded live in July and October 1982 at Sandy's, and in the liner notes, Allan C. Webber wrote about McDonald, "The consensus is that no living reedman plays so effectively in the Bechet manner - full, rich tone, pronounced vibrato and long, lyrical melodic lines." On "Wolverine Blues," Tommy Benford, using his brushes on his drum case, took a solo that McDonald called a knockout.

Soprano saxist Bob Wilber and his Bechet Legacy and the Blue Horizon were featured together at Sandy's on a Saturday night in July 1983. In August, the Blue Horizon performed for the Arts Foundation in Sharon, Conn., where McDonald re-corded what he considers a compelling "Love for Sale" with Robin Verdier and Benford. In October, McDonald was interviewed by Ron Della Chiesa on *Music America* on WGBH; and in November, the Blue Horizon was at the Longwood Inn in Marlboro, Vt., where, in April 1986, McDonald organized a jazz workshop for aspiring traditionalists.

Pianist Phil Hower joined the band in 1983. Beginning in December and continuing for four years, the Blue Horizon appeared on Sundays at Ephraim's in Sudbury, from where, in 1987, it broadcast live on radio station WTTP. Tommy Benford and his wife came there to hear the band, and reacting to McDonald's low register clarinet on "Atlanta Blues," Benford, seated at the front table, was heard to say, "Just like one of my own." McDonald considers that the most touching compliment of his lifetime.

In May 1984, the Blue Horizon was featured at the Manassas Jazz Festival in Virginia; in Spring 1985, the band issued *Banned in Boston*, a cassette recording; and between March and August, it played on six occasions at the Regattabar in the Charles Hotel in Cambridge. The sidemen on these gigs included Walt Miller, Cas Brosky or Fred Walsh, Hower or Robin Verdier, bassists Hans Brack or Steve Pratt, and drum-mers Alan Dawson, Jimmy Kay, or Charles Mazza.

Other 1985 gigs included appearances at the summer concert at the Hatch Memorial Shell on Boston's Esplanade (also annually until 1989 and in 1992 and '93); at the Nile Lounge at the El Morocco in Worcester in October (and May '86); and the "Summer Breeze" concert series at Framingham State College (annually until 1993).

The Blue Horizon played for Fourth of July jazz picnics annually at a private home in Framingham, from 1985 to '94. Host Dave Murphy opened these to the public and sometimes capped off the evenings with spectacular, though erratic fireworks, which occasionally captured the attention of the police.

In March 1986 (also in March '89 and July '90), McDonald was interviewed by Eric Jackson on *Eric in the Evening* on WGBH.

The Blue Horizon was busy with gigs in 1986 at the Star-light Roof, Howard Johnson's Motel, Boston; the Matrix Jazz Club, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Natick, Mass. (also in '87); the Jazz

Appreciation Society of Syracuse, N.Y., in May (also in May '87); and at the Arts Jubilee, Conway, N.H., in August.

The band released its *Classic Jazz Variations* on LP and cassette in December. Most of the tunes were recorded live at Ephraim's between 1983 and '85. McDonald's performance on the soprano sax on "Dardanella" was called stunning by W. Royal Stokes in *Jazz Times*.

Jim Enright, a long-time fan of McDonald and the New Black Eagles, died in November 1987. At his widow's request, McDonald played at the funeral with the New Black Eagles.

In 1988, Stu Grover became the Blue Horizon's drummer, and the addition of Jon Rayworth, a banjo player, increased the number of members to seven. The band appeared weekly on Sunday afternoons at Bogart's, Milford, Mass., from March to September, and it was featured in Maine in August (and June '97) at the Down East Jazz Society's Jazz Festival in Camden and other towns. Butch Thompson, on piano and clarinet, was a guest with the Blue Horizon in a concert at Framingham State College in March 1989, and in 1990, Thompson's trio and the Blue Horizon performed at a private home in Sherborn.

The Blue Horizon began a weekly Monday evening gig at the Tavern Room of the Sherborn Inn in April 1989, continuing there through February '91. John Kafalas played trombone and euphonium, but Ken Parsons replaced him around October 1989.

Blues vocalist Natalie Lamb worked with the Blue Horizon in May 1990 at the Sticky Wicket, and in June at Jack O'Connor's Steak House in Bridgewater, N.J., and at a concert celebrating the so-called 100th anniversary of jazz, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Jazz Society in Stockertown, Penn. Also, in 1990, cornetist Dave Pinardi's Paradise City Jazz Band was the guest band at the Blue Horizon gig at the Tavern Room.

The Blue Horizon was at Boston's Harborfest in 1990 (and '91). In early Fall 1990, guitarist Royce Anderson replaced Jon Rayworth, who moved to Germany, and the weekly gig at the Tavern Room ended in October. The band was featured live on Ron Della Chiesa's *Music America* on WGBH in November. Natalie Lamb was with the Blue Horizon in December at Chan's in Woonsocket, R.I.

In April 1991, Don Russell replaced Stu Grover, who re-tired from drumming, and the Blue Horizon began a weekly Friday night gig at the Foundry in Walpole, Mass., in October, continuing there, with summer breaks, until December 1994.

Banjoist Cal Owen joined the band in Spring 1992. Lamb hosted the Blue Horizon in July 1992 at her annual Columbia County Jazz Festival in West Ghent, N.Y.

In August 1993, jazz supporter John Quincy Adams, Jr., 64, a member of the famous Adams lineage and resident of Rowley, Mass., passed away. At Adams' wake in Boxford, Mass., McDonald and pianist Bill Whitcraft played several songs, including "Stars Fell on Alabama," written in 1934 by Frank Perkins, who was at the wake.

From October to December 1993, Walt Miller was absent from the Blue Horizon, due to illness, and trumpeters Chuck Stevenson and Jeff Hughes subbed for him. In August, Hans Brack left the band to move to Switzerland.

On the Blue Horizon's *Innside Track*, a CD and cassette tape released around Christmas of 1993, most of the tunes were recorded live in 1990 at the Tavern Room. McDonald considers his performance of Django Reinhardt's "*Nuages*" to be a standout, and, he said, "It is one of the songs I get asked to play most often. I've recorded two earlier versions, but the best may be on *Inside Track*."

In 1993, McDonald's son, Andy (b. 1967), was placed in a group home, "which structure he needs due to his developmental disability," McDonald said. "For years Andy went everywhere with the band." Subsequently, "Andy has been allowed to go out to hear us at public performances only occasionally, but this can't make up for the lost years. He loves to help us with band mailings, and when he knows I'm playing somewhere he asks, 'Will you play some notes in my direction?' I always answer, 'All of them.' Andy knows and loves the music, and he said to me recently, 'I've got that old-fashioned jazz in my heart, his play on the lyrics of 'Old Fashioned Love,' which he's heard me sing many times."

In 1994, around January, drummer Harvey Simons joined the band. Tommy Benford passed away on March 24, and McDonald described him as "the most profoundly beautiful person I've ever known, and Tommy used to say to me, 'When the Man calls, I'm ready.'"

Also in 1994, McDonald was the featured guest in May (and also in May '99) with reedman Bob Thulman's Last Chance Jazz Band in Columbia, Md.; the Blue Horizon performed at the Hot Steamed Jazz Festival in Essex, Conn., in June (also in '95 and '98), with guest Natalie Lamb during its first two appearances.

Also in June, pianist Terry Waldo was at the Foundry with McDonald, bassist Ken Steiner and Harvey Simons, and three tracks recorded there were used on McDonald's later solo CD, *A Real Love Strong*.

McDonald said, "Terry has been a good friend since we re-corded with the New Black Eagles at the 1973 St. Louis Rag-time Festival. While Terry was staying with me and Ellen in Sherborn, a neighbor unintentionally contaminated our well water, which we first discovered when Terry's white pants were put in the wash and came out pink!"

The Blue Horizon made an appearance in February 1995 at the 1280 Restaurant, Brookline, Mass., and in May and June, the band played a weekly gig there, with Gerry Gagnon on tuba.

In July, Ralph Sutton was featured guest with the Blue Horizon at a sold-out special concert in the Sherborn Inn's dining-room, and his appearance was such a success that the Inn's manager agreed to a weekly Tuesday night traditional jazz series, with Ellen McDonald as the

series' coordinator. The Blue Horizon, initiating the series on September 19, has played at the Inn on the third Tuesday monthly since then, and McDonald, by invitation, has frequently sat in with other bands at the Inn.

Other Sherborn Inn special concerts throughout the years featured various guests, with McDonald acting as host and/or providing accompaniment with various musicians: Terry Waldo (January 1996 and October '98), clarinetist Kenny Davern (February '96), Natalie Lamb (May '96), Sutton with Ken Steiner and Buzzy Drootin (July '96) and with bassist Jack Lesberg and Drootin (July '97 and '98), the Paradise City Jazz Band (March '97), tenor saxist Scott Hamilton (June '99), guitarist/vocalist Marty Grosz (November '99), the New Wolverine Jazz Orchestra from Australia (August 2000 and July '02), Carol Leigh (October '00), Paris Washboard (July '01), English stride pianist Neville Dickie (July '01) and his Rhythmmakers (McDonald, cornetist Scott Black and drummer Dave Bragdon, May '02), and vocalist Terry Blaine and pianist Mark Shane (February '02).

Beginning in October 1995 and annually through '99, the Blue Horizon played for the Vintage Sports Car Club of America show at Castle Hill, Ipswich, Mass.

In January 1996, the Blue Horizon released *A Real Love Strong* on CD and cassette, a retrospective collection of Mc-Donald's featured solos, and, he said, "On 'Just One of Those Things,' Tony Hannan on drums sets up a huge relent-less drive that I'm just able to stay on top of. That was in 1984 at Ephraim's, and in 1985 there we did 'Dear Old South-land,' with drummer Jimmy Kay, Hans Brack on bass and Phil Hower on piano. Phil was, and is, one of the most diligent and supportive ensemble players I know. On that he played Joe Sullivan's double octave breaks for our emulation of Bechet's 1947 recording on the *This Is Jazz* series. Bob Osgood, reviewing this CD in the *Rag*, called 'Black and Blue' one of the definitive versions."

Dave Didriksen became the Blue Horizon's drummer in May 1996. Walt Miller temporarily left the band in August, and Paul Monat replaced him. In September, the Blue Horizon played for the Pennsylvania Jazz Society in Hellertown, Penn., and at the Museum of Our National Heritage, Lexington, Mass., in a concert featuring various entertainers, with proceeds donated to save the *Music America* program on WGBH. Outside the building before the concert, McDonald, playing the soprano, and guest violinist Valentin Gregor improvised on "*Nuages*."

Ross Petot became the Blue Horizon's regular pianist in May 1997. For two years Petot had either sat in with the band, subbed for Phil Hower, or played intermission piano at several special concerts at the Sherborn Inn. The band had monthly gigs at the Acton Jazz Café, Acton, Mass., in the spring, and appeared weekly on Thursday evenings at John Stone's Inn, Ashland, Mass., in May and June. The sidemen were Paul Monat, trombonist Dan Walker, Petot, Cal Owen, Gerry Gagnon, and drummer Phil Monat.

Richard (Dickie) J. Darling, 80, died in July 1997 in Natick. According to McDonald, Darling was an avid and very astute trad jazz fan and critic. At the family's request, McDonald

played several numbers with the New Black Eagles' Tony Pringle, Bob Pilsbury and Peter Bullis at Darling's memorial service.

In April 1998, after an appearance of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band at Mechanics Hall in Worcester, reviewer Peter Landsdowne in Worcester's *Telegram & Gazette*, wrote, "The Preservation Hall Jazz Band's erratic performance Saturday night underscored a sad fact: The group has become a Crescent City tourist attraction, while other bands -- try Massachusetts' own New Black Eagle Jazz Band or Stan McDonald's Blue Horizon Jazz Band for starters - are more responsible for preserving the New Orleans jazz tradition."

Also in April, the Blue Horizon recorded *I Remember When*, a CD, and McDonald's favorite tracks on it are of Sidney Bechet's "I Remember When (*Si tu vois ma mère*)" and "Blues in the Air." In January 1999, Walt Miller returned to the band, which was featured in early June at a concert, *A Night in New Orleans*, at Worcester's Foothills Theater's 25th anniversary celebration.

On Monday evenings from March to July 2000, McDonald had gigs with pianist Henry (Thins) Francis at Ken's Steakhouse in Framingham, and, McDonald said, "After we began filling the joint, we were fired because the regulars at the bar complained they couldn't hear the TV."

One of the Blue Horizon's June gigs, with Hank Wiktorowicz added on banjo and guitar, was at the Cactus Grille, Hopkinton, a short-lived transformation of the former Sticky Wicket. The band, with guest guitarist Jon Wheatley, in July was at the Razz-Ma-Jazz 2000, sponsored by the Springfield Library and Museum Association in Springfield, Mass. The Blue Horizon performed live on *Eric in the Evening* on WGBH in November.

In May and September 2001, McDonald presented a special group, Sweet Thunder, at the Sherborn Inn. With McDonald were Bob Roskopf on trumpet, Ross Petot, Wheatley, bassist Barry Bockus, and Dave Bragdon. That July, the Blue Horizon Jazz Band, with substitute Bockus, appeared in Maine at the Bar Harbor Music Festival, and during the band's regular gig at the Sherborn Inn in September, Jeff Stout, a 30-year faculty member at the Berklee College of Music, Boston, substituted on trumpet.

In April 2002, Carol Leigh was featured with the Blue Horizon Five in a fundraiser concert at the First Congregational Church, Westfield, Mass. McDonald's sidemen were Scott Black, Petot, Bockus, and Bragdon, who became the band's regular drummer in May. In June, McDonald took the Blue Horizon Five, with sub drummer Joe Mocerri, to the Hot Steamed Jazz Festival, and on July 21, 2002, with guest John Russell on drums, the quintet was at the Bar Harbor Music Festival.

McDonald's Views

McDonald somewhat reluctantly calls traditional jazz his favorite style of music, and he says, "I use the word 'jazz' in an historical sense, what it's been to me. This whole business of

putting a label on things is semantics. If you take the example of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the term 'dixieland' came into being because it was identified with that band. To me that word has superficial and commercial connotations.

"Any band that's good enough makes important stylistic and artistic distinctions of its own. I'm not equipped to make an historical analysis, but you can hear this as surely in Armstrong's Hot Five in 1925 – its spontaneity – as you can in Wilbur De Paris' New New Orleans Jazz Band of the 1950s. Both bands were as far from dixieland as you can get. Armstrong was sheer individual genius. De Paris exploited every device in the tradition, and invented new ones, to distance himself from imitations, and he had the best of the survivors of the ensemble tradition.

"Let's say that jazz began around 1900. When I started playing, like in 1950, I only had 50 years of history to deal with. A lot less in fact, because I was completely deaf to rhythm and blues, rock, cool and fads like that. Anybody starting now has 100 years to deal with, and in the process, the word 'jazz' has gotten so loose, like 'blues,' that it's practically meaningless. So when I say traditional jazz, basically what I mean is a band that has roots in about the first 30 years, but also including the ones inspired by veterans like Armstrong, Bechet, George Lewis, Kid Ory, and others which spanned the generations and played just as authentically in the 1940s and '50s and beyond; also, those 'revival' or 'contemporary trad' groups which emerged later with similar values and aspirations. As for the Blue Horizon Jazz Band, we are in there chronologically. Spiritually, though, on good nights I feel it's the 1950s when Walt Miller, our trumpet player, now 82 years old, was raising the hackles on the back of my neck. I was learning where it all came from and discovering what I loved best. I'm still doing that. And on good nights, I can raise my own hackles.

"Of course, people want some general idea of what you're doing, so I use the word 'traditional,' whether or not that encompasses 'dixieland' or tunes associated with it. Some of the Bechet stuff we play, like 'Blackstick' or 'Viper Mad' from the 1930s is swing, when it still had jazz and blues substance and hadn't been orchestrated to death.

"I appreciate a lot that has happened since 1930, but for me the golden era was, roughly, between 1923 and 1933 with Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, Clarence Williams' Blue Five, Armstrong's Hot Five, the Creole Jazz Band of King Oliver, Johnny Dodds' New Orleans Wanderers, and the hottest of them all, Sidney Bechet's New Orleans Feetwarmers of 1932. That period covers the bases for me in terms of the greatest invention and spontaneity. It's remarkable that that concentration of creation only lasted for 10 years."

Bechet, of course, is McDonald's favorite musician. In 1983, critic John S. Wilson, in *High Fidelity*, described McDonald as "a gloriously full-bodied Bechet stylist."

McDonald said, "I'm not ashamed to copy note for note certain things that Sidney played, but that's because I feel them, and I wouldn't want to play them any other way. Then again,

there are things that I just don't pay any attention to the way he might have done it. But to play in a style and then not to feel it is not right."

Other McDonald jazz favorites are Louis Armstrong, Red Allen, and Sidney De Paris. Among the classic clarinetists, McDonald has always especially admired Johnny Dodds, Omer Simeon, Edmond Hall, and Buster Bailey, but ranks Albert Nicholas next to Bechet, whom he considers the top. "If I had to pick three masters among living reed players, I'd say Bob Wilber, soprano sax; Kenny Davern, clarinet; and Scott Hamilton, tenor sax. Their great loves and influences are historical, like mine, and they show through. But they have become originals. Wilber had the unique advantage of being Sidney's personal protégé, but whenever a new guy comes into my band I play the 1947 recordings of Wilber's Wildcats. They are still a life-long inspiration to me."

When queried as to who influenced his playing style, besides Sidney Bechet, McDonald replied, "Many people, but not all are reed players. I play two or three phrases now and then that I picked off of trumpeter Buck Clayton. I just like them. A lot of the great trombonists, too - J.C. Higgenbotham, Jack Teagarden, Sandy Williams, and Vic Dickenson are among my favorites. I could include dozens on every instrument, past and present, all special.

"Pianists?" asks McDonald. "Among those I've played with are Claude Hopkins, Ralph Sutton, Art Hodes, and Sammy Price, and among the living are Butch Thompson and our own Ross Petot, who has added tremendously to the Blue Horizon. I'd also include James P. Johnson, Joe Sullivan, Willie the Lion, Hank Duncan, Earl Hines, Dick Wellstood, and Don Ewell. Except for James P. and Ewell, I heard them all in person. And Cliff Jackson, too. I used to hear him at Condon's. He was wonderful. I think he was underrated. At least you don't hear much about him, in contrast to James P. or Fats Waller. Paul Lingle was a great exponent of Jelly Roll. I met him in Hawaii. He made just two long-play recordings, and I have them. He was fabulous, man."

McDonald's favorites among drummers are Baby Dodds, Zutty Singleton, Freddie Moore, Sid Catlett, and Tommy Benford.

McDonald feels that he is a better player on the soprano sax than the clarinet, and, he said, "I have to put a lot of emphasis on soprano, even beyond my preference, in order to sort of shape the band. You can't lead the band as well on clarinet if you want things to go in a certain direction." He considers it difficult for a lot of people to play a soprano sax in tune, and said, "One of the nicest compliments I ever got was from Butch Thompson. He said I was 'one of the few people in history to ever play that instrument in tune.'"

McDonald disdains a lot of modern jazz as lacking truly personal expression, but he is up front with his personal feelings, for he asks, "Why am I playing the horn? Why am I in front of this audience? What do they expect of me? The reason I play is that I don't know any better way to say what I want to say, and most of what is worth saying is too personal for words. What satisfies me is reaching people and being close to people."

And for the people, he always plays it with passion.