

## **Marty Grosz recalls Frank Chace**

We met by chance at a record store in Evanston in 1948. I was eighteen and had hitchhiked to Chicago with a school pal. I wanted to be the next Eddie Condon and pal Hugh was going to be the next Berigan or Armstrong.

We both worked at a drugstore lunch counter. Frank was a few years older and was taking care of his senile father (his mother was dead) in the family's "railroad apartment." "Be Bop" was the newest jazz fad, but we couldn't care less. Frank was crazy about Pee Wee Russell, loved Frank Teschemacher, Jess Stacy, Joe Sullivan, and Fats Waller, also Rollini, and Bix.

I would hang out with Frank, and we spent many nights listening to all sorts of clarinetists, and Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, Lee Wiley, until we reached the "stupor" stage. Sometimes we would hop the EL to the Victory Club, a deadfall on the near North side where trumpeter Lee Collins held forth, and anyone could sit in and did.

In 1954, after my discharge from the Army, I returned to Chicago . . . . Frank got me into "The Gaslight Club" on Rush St. where I replaced the banjo-player in a trio: clarinet, banjo, piano. After about two years Frank left because of the piano player, and the patrons banging on tables with little mallets, the no-talent waitresses who were obligated to sing and dance, and the free booze (for musicians) were getting to him. I had to persevere because I was a new father. The pay wasn't bad and the tips were good. The pianist used to play the melody under the clarinet: insane!

After the Gaslight Club I go some road jobs, as a sideman. I got Frank on my gigs whenever possible. Frank finally got sick of it all, tried to curb his drinking, and got a day job. When I was between gigs (too often). My Wife and I would have Frank over for dinner and then play records and drink till dawn.

I got back to New York in '75. Many more opportunities came my way than had in Chicago. Frank and I did not communicate much. To get him on the phone you had to ask his landlady to knock him up (pardon the expression). The last time we saw one another was in the late seventies (not sure of the year).

He came to NYC with a Chicago contingent to represent the Windy City at a Carnegie Hall appearance. I believe I joined him for a tune or two. The event was over before it got going. We met for a meal. After that he withdrew more and more, becoming more and more "disengage" (accent over the final e") a position he had espoused in a conversation we'd had twenty years earlier. Eventually he sold his instruments and withdrew more and more from the world.

I believe his rebarbative manner and reclusive life style have inclined some to regard him as a sort of undiscovered master, a rare talent, unique voice, unheard by a world of tone-deaf philistines, a Joseph Cornell of jazz. Frank was not one to accept praise unless he felt he had merited it, and even then he suspected it, all in all a sound policy.