

the BEAT GENERATION

hb mus mag st 17

JAZZ. ANTOLOGIER
The beat generation
Rhino R2 70281
3 compact discs, 1 hæfte
6172
930907 3758595136

Tilhører Helsingør Kommunes Biblioteker

©1992 Rhino Records Inc.
R2/R4 70281

the word
the BEAT

Helsingør Kommunes
Biblioteker



“A swinging group of new American men intent on joy”—that’s how Jack Kerouac defined the Beat Generation in 1959. And since he had invented the term “Beat” some 10 years earlier, his comments ought to stand as the last word on the subject. But they don’t.

Kerouac named the Beat Generation, but the moguls of the media did their best to take it away from him. Maybe the likes of *Time* and *Life* magazines just couldn’t accept his belief in “joy” at face value. Certainly there wasn’t much officially sanctioned joy available in the U.S.A. circa ’59. After a decade’s worth of the Cold War and McCarthyism, joy was a controlled substance to be parceled out very sparingly.

So when Kerouac and his cohort Allen Ginsberg came along shouting about visions and cross-country driving and supernatural ecstasy in works like *On the Road* and “Howl,” commentators in the press and on the airwaves *knew* it all meant something else. In short order, the Beat Generation became a media symbol for a litany of sins: laziness, obscenity, drug abuse, perversion, smelly feet. Even when Kerouac insisted that Beat stood for “beatific” and offered kind words for President Eisenhower, it was somehow made to sound subversive. *Partisan Review*’s Norman Podhoretz delivered the verdict of many when he denounced the Beats as “young men who can’t think straight and so hate anyone who can.” Others depicted the Beat Generation as merely overgrown children in need of discipline, hard work, and a bath. Soon the “Beat” was transformed into the “beatnik” (a label dreamed up by San Francisco columnist Herb Caen in 1958), a goatee-sporting, bongo-playing human cartoon unworthy of serious discussion.

Thirty years later, fact and fiction about the Beat Generation have been jumbled together in the same fossilized strata, mixing treasure and trivia together indiscriminately. Sorting through it all takes a clear eye, a sharp ear, and a freewheeling sense of humor—qualities the original Beats had in abundance. Dean Moriarty (hero of *On the Road*) and Maynard G. Krebs (the beatnik goofball on TV’s *Dobie Gillis*) may not have been equally significant as cultural icons, yet both testify to the impact that the Beat mystique had on the American psyche.

The truth is, the Beat Generation could only have been born in America. Its heritage was disreputable, however—jazz musicians, junkies, sexual outlaws, hobos, and other marginal types contributed much of their attitude and vocabulary. In this the Beat was almost (but not quite) synonymous with the jive-talking, flashily dressed hipster of the World War II era. Hipsters came in two varieties: “hot” (enthusiastic, fun-loving) and “cool” (withdrawn, nihilistic). Kerouac, Ginsberg, and company were definitely in the hot category.

There was an undeniable racial factor in all this. Disaffected whites viewed the black community as embodying the honest vitality missing from their own culture. It might’ve been news to many of the “happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America” (Kerouac’s description) that their lives were so untroubled. Accurately or not, white would-be hipsters picked up on black music, slang, and style as a way out of stultifying Caucasian conformity.

The development of bebop jazz in the ’40s was a key influence on the Beat sensibility. Kerouac in particular was a devoted fan of Charlie “Bird” Parker, Dizzy

Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and other bop innovators. Making leaps of association between musical and literary ideas, he used the improvisational techniques of Bird and Diz in his writing. The result was "spontaneous bop prosody" (a Ginsberg phrase), the "undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words" that became Kerouac's trademark.

The Beats wrote for the ear, not just the printed page. Ginsberg arranged the words of his epochal "Howl" according to patterns of breath and speech, a method that gave his work incendiary force when read aloud. William Burroughs (the third principal figure among the Beat founding fathers) based much of his writings on the spoken routines he amused friends and strangers with. When Burroughs gave public readings of *Naked Lunch* and his other scabrous opuses, he performed them in character to hilarious effect.

The next step was reading to jazz accompaniment—Kerouac first tried live performance in 1957, then recorded three LPs during the next two years. [All are included in Rhino's *Jack Kerouac Collection*, R2/R4 70939.] Other literary figures with and without Beat associations were reciting with combos around this time as well. Chicago versifier Ken Nordine coined the term "Word Jazz" for his own version of these dabbings. In any case, nearly all poetry/music experiments in the late '50s/early '60s were labeled "beatnik" by the non-hip.

Whatever Mr. and Mrs. Mainstream thought the Beat Generation was, they found it a source of fascination, amusement, and repulsion for as long as the fad lasted. Weekend pseudo-Beats began turning up at coffeehouses across the country, sipping strong java and listening to bad free verse. One enterprising New Yorker even started a rent-a-beatnik service for those desperate for vicarious hipness. The Beat way of life—frequently confused with *Blackboard Jungle*-style juvenile delinquency—became grist for the mills of exploitation films and television exposés. Previously obscure or taboo topics (drugs, homosexuality, Zen) were thrust under Middle America's nose because of the Beats.

Even in adulterated and distorted form, the Beat Generation had an unmistakable effect. It was the beginning of a

nonconformist uprising that would mutate into the psychedelic and New Left movements of the '60s and the punk rock subculture of the '70s and '80s. The Beats themselves have gone on to become objects of fascination for later would-be rebels. The coffeehouse and poetry-reading revival of the early '90s is evidence of continued beatnik appeal.

Beyond the faddism, the contributions of the Beat writers endure. The works of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Gregory Corso, and their allies have lost none of their power or relevance with time. As the American century closes on a note of anxiety and conservatism, we could use the Beat Generation's ecstatic madness more than ever.

So consider this Beat Generation anthology an audio travelogue, an excursion into the poetic, the puerile, the inspired, and the absurd. Prepare to become immersed in the muck and mire of U.S. pop culture—this is not a journey for purists afraid to get their aesthetics soiled. Our itinerary defies the laws of time and space, giving glimpses of the Beat Generation's forefathers (Lord Buckley) and inheritors (Tom Waits) alike. The sublime sounds of Parker, Gillespie, and Mingus are interspersed with jazz-slanted TV jingles. Perry Como and Rod McKuen offer sidelights from Squaresville. News commentators flit in and out to deliver the Official Line. Here's the raw data—as they used to say, dig it!

VOLUME ONE

Jack Kerouac's "**San Francisco Scene (The Beat Generation)**" opens these proceedings on an authentic note. Recorded in 1959, this prose sketch was later included in his novel *Desolation Angels*. He finds the Beat essence in the frantic excitement of a jazz jam session, then slides into a quick portrait of seminal hipster Herbert Huncke, "martyred, tortured by sidewalks...ready to introduce a new world with a shrug." (In fact, Kerouac claimed that he first learned the expression "I'm beat" from him in the mid-'40s. A notorious New York hustler, Huncke survived to publish his autobiography, the aptly titled *Guilty of Everything*, in 1991.)

The mysterious Bob McFadden fol-



Jack Kerouac and Joyce Johnson Outside the Kettle of Fish Bar, Greenwich Village, NYC.

Photo: Jerome Yulsman



lows with the title song from *The Beat Generation*, a 1959 exploitation flick starring the voluptuous Mamie Van Doren and lesser luminaries. McFadden was none other than Rod McKuen, future poet laureate of the Silent Majority, spouting forth here like a true espresso addict. McKuen's activities in the '50s included a stint as a "psychological warfare scriptwriter" during the Korean War, which may have helped prepare him for his infiltration of the beatnik underground. With a sly sense of pop revisionism, punk rocker Richard Hell updated "The Beat Generation" into "The Blank Generation" in the late '70s.

The Beat Generation was just one more bohemian wave to roll through Greenwich Village—tormented artistes, political malcontents, and misfits of all stripes had found asylum there since the pre-World War I era. An interviewer from WNYC FM set out in 1960 to comb the place for Beats, though he found almost nobody who would admit to being one. What he did manage to capture in the radio documentary excerpted here were the ramblings of various residents and several anguished poetry recitations monitored at the Gaslight coffeehouse. As café owner Romany Marie put it decades earlier: "Greenwich Village ain't what it used to be—and it never was!"

Tales of Manhattan

the cool philosophy of
Babs Gonzales

Such media profiles helped to arouse interest in releasing poetry/music LPs by a variety of American writers. One of the best to enter the studio was Langston Hughes (1902-1967), who recorded his *Weary Blues* album in 1958. Legendary for his contributions to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, Hughes had written extensively about jazz and chose a blues lyric format for much of his poetry. In recording *Weary Blues*, he recited his slice-of-life verse over tracks arranged by Leonard Feather and Charles Mingus. "Blues Montage," taken from the Feather sessions, finds Hughes in a wistfully ironic mood, invoking the ghosts of Lennox Avenue with understated backup.

Babs Gonzales (Lee Brown) was another individual who knew the streets of New York well. A sometime jazz singer, road manager, and concert promoter, Gonzales made the '40s scene with Bird and generally kept himself useful until his death in 1980. His "Manhattan Fable" (1954) owes something to the black street poetry/jailhouse toast tradition, carried on by such later practitioners as Lightnin' Rod, Iceberg Slim, and Rudy Ray Moore.

Ken Nordine's distinctive brand of "Word Jazz" mixed a bemused, friendly sort of humor with a hint of the jitters

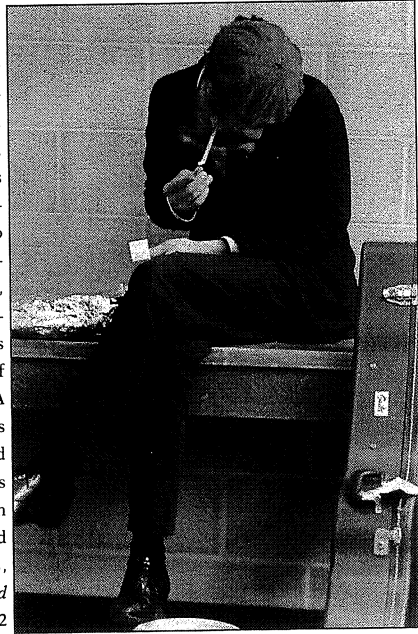
just under the surface. His purring, velvet-textured voice made even his weirdest flights of fancy go down smoothly. "Reaching Into In" (taken from his 1960 Dot LP *Word Jazz Vol. II*) displays Nordine at his most gently unsettling. During the '60s, he applied his intimate murmur to radio and TV commercial work, becoming familiar to millions as the Voice of Levi's Jeans. [A collection of his classic Word Jazz recordings is available on Rhino/Word Beat Records, *Best Of Word Jazz, Vol. 1* (R2 70773).]

Yet another approach to making language jump in rhythm was popularized by King Pleasure (Clarence Meeks). He became renowned for writing original lyrics to jazz solos by Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Stan Getz, and others. "Parker's Mood" (recorded for Prestige in 1953) celebrates Bird's Kansas City beginnings while deftly negotiating the melody's dips and curves. The King, who died in 1981, helped innovate a style later adapted by Al Jarreau, The Manhattan Transfer, and other vocally ambidextrous artists.

On the Road never made it to the big screen, but a well-scrubbed variation on the novel's premise was served up by CBS-TV as *Route 66*. The series, which ran from 1960-64, followed the vagabond adventures of pals Martin Milner and George Maharis (with Glenn Corbett replacing Maharis from '62 onward). The roadside America these guys encountered in their Corvette was considerably tamer than the one Kerouac and buddy Neal Cassady had experienced. Still, *Route 66* did boast a lively theme song composed by Nelson Riddle, the man who arranged everyone from Sinatra to Ronstadt during his long career. "Route 66 Theme"

(not to be confused with Bobby Troup's "Route 66" from the '40s) reached #30 on the pop singles charts in 1962. The fabled highway had its 66th birthday in 1992, having lured Steinbeck, Guthrie, and a host of other vagabonds to its roadside diners, motels, and souvenir stands.

The Beat Generation's shoes (sandals?) would go largely unfilled for a decade, until Tom Waits made his debut in the early '70s. His barfly/hep cat persona (complete with goatee!) made him an oddity in the post-Woodstock years, and some



Tom Waits

found it tempting to dismiss him as a novelty artist. From the start, though, his gifts as a songwriter were clearly evident. "Diamonds On My Windshield" (from the LP *The Heart Of Saturday Night*, 1974) was his initial foray into beat-style word-sliding, a nocturnal narrative harkening back to Dean Moriarty's manic automotive odysseys. Further releases would confirm Waits' mastery of the jazz/poet idiom.

In his introduction to *Naked Lunch* (1959), William Burroughs offered "a word to the wise guy" about the true nature of addiction and control. After emerging from 15 years of junkie dissipation, he was an expert witness on the subject, and he brought a remarkable erudition and scathing wit to his testimony. But there was more to the man than his drug experience. For all his credentials as the Beat Generation's Dean of Decadence, Burroughs was also an old-fashioned Missouri storyteller at heart, a cracker-barrel philosopher who could have swapped yarns with Mark Twain (between nips of codeine cough syrup). After *Naked Lunch* brought him notoriety, Burroughs became adept at reading his works before audiences, drawing



Gerry Mulligan

with the laconic air of a surrealist W. C. Fields.

Call Me Burroughs, recorded for ESP Records in 1966, was the first of his spoken-word albums and remains perhaps his best recording. Delivering his

"Naked Lunch (Excerpt)" with sardonic insinuation, he leads the listener through a nightmarish (and extremely funny) panorama of addicts, agents, media manipulators, and predatory psychiatrists. During the past three decades, Burroughs has risen in stature to become the reigning Dark Genius of American Letters. *Dead City Radio*, his 1990 Island

album, found Uncle Bill as delightfully disturbing as ever. Burroughs penetrated yet another medium in late '91 with the release of director David Cronenberg's film version of *Naked Lunch*.

California served as "yin" to New York's "yang" in the '50s hip upheaval. During those heady days, baritone saxman Gerry Mulligan became a prime exponent of the West Coast school of jazz. Easy-flowing and keen on melody, the West Coast style seemed to match the

mood of the Golden State, much as early bebop was embraced as gospel by the New York Beats. After stints with Gene Krupa, Miles Davis, and others back East, Mulligan relocated to L.A. and soon organized a series of his own groups.



Dizzy Gillespie

"Bernie's Tune" comes from a 1953 live club date during which alto player Lee Konitz (then a member of The Stan Kenton Orchestra) sat in with The Gerry Mulligan Quartet. Trumpeter Chet Baker adds his trademark bittersweet sound as well.

Even as the bona fide Beats were being picked apart by the Guardians of Culture, the fad-chasers continued to appropriate hipster argot for fun and profit. A sample of such efforts is "Like Rumpelstiltskin," taken from the *Grimm's Hip Fairy Tales* LP (1961). Narrator Don Morrow (in real life a "top-flight TV-radio announcer") recites this beatified bedtime story to the genial accompaniment of The Cool Personnel. Coffeehouse kiddie kitsch at its finest.

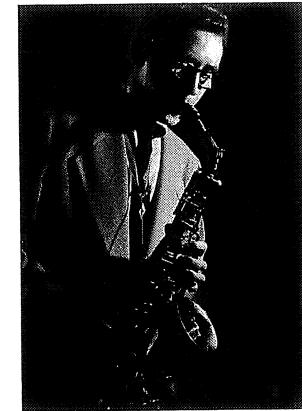
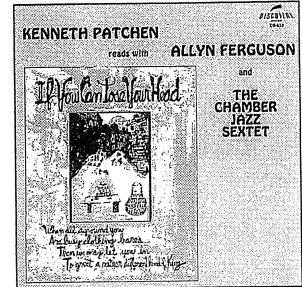
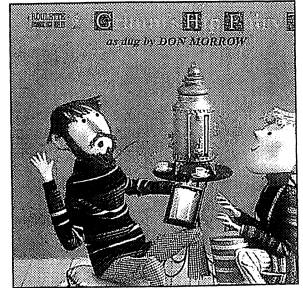
As noted earlier, bop mastermind Dizzy Gillespie (John Birks) was one of

the unknowing inspirations for the Beat Generation. The seeds were planted when Kerouac encountered Diz, Bird, and their colleagues wailing away in Manhattan clubs in the early '40s. Gillespie's unpredictable, technically astounding feats on the trumpet hit Kerouac with an impact from which he never recovered; he would rhapsodize about those early bop days in fervent prose years later. And while Dizzy may never have realized that he'd helped to launch Jack's spontaneous bop prosody, he *did* name one of his arrangements "Kerouac" at the suggestion of a mutual friend. Diz would continue to rewrite jazz history while enjoying such hits as the scat-happy "Oop-Pop-A-Da" (1947), a number written by Babs Gonzales.

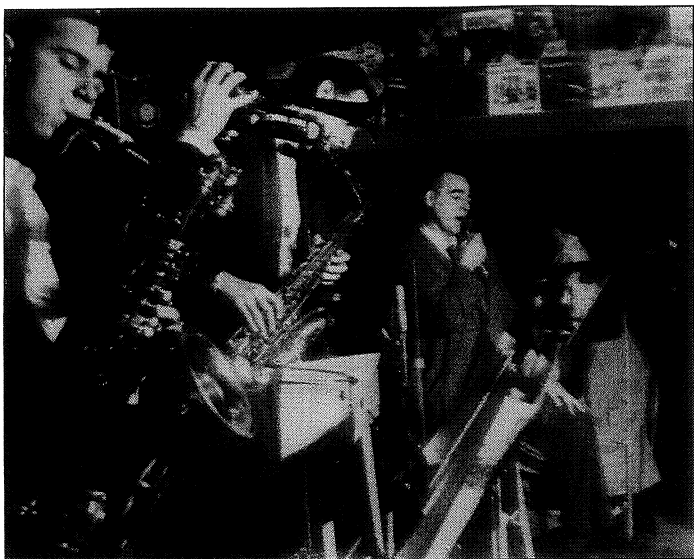
Among the funniest attempts to cash in on the Beat brouhaha was the LP *How To Speak Hip*, a mock documentary/language instruction disc released by Mercury in 1961 and rereleased in 1969. The album's dialogues paired a starchy "Instructor" (played by Del Close, a stage actor who had appeared in the beatnik-slanted Broadway musical *The Nervous Set*) with hipster "Geets Romo" (John Brent, a comedian with Chicago's Second City company and a sometime Village performing poet). While making the scene strictly for laughs, the cult classic *How To Speak Hip* was more on the money than many similar satires. "Basic Hip" riffs on the ambiguities of Coolsville terminology and reefer-adjusted perception. (*How To Speak Hip* was reputedly one of John Belushi's favorite albums, by the way.)

High School Confidential arrived a bit early (summer 1958) to be a full-fledged Beat exploitation film, though it did contain many of the right ingredients. Russ Tamblyn starred as a narc, while Mamie Van Doren displayed her usual vixenly virtues and Jackie (Uncle Fester) Coogan peddled dope. The supporting cast included Jerry Lee Lewis, Michael Landon, and Charlie Chaplin Jr. John Drew Barrymore (of the Barrymore acting aristocracy) also distinguished himself as J.I. Coleridge. His hip history lesson, "Christopher Columbus Digs The Jive," was released as a 45 by MGM Records.

A different sort of lesson is laid down by Charles Mingus and Jean Shepherd in "The Clown" (1957). This unsettling show-biz fable began with a tune by bassist/composer Mingus, who then sketched out an accompanying story idea to Shepherd. Known at the time for his unfettered improvisational performances on New York's WOR Radio, Shepherd took the tormented clown concept and ran with it in the studio. The result was a Kafkaesque narrative perfectly suited to Mingus' dark carnival instru-



Lee Konitz



Kenneth Patchen Reading With The Chamber Jazz Sextet



Slim Gaillard

mental setting. (It should be noted that Mingus' 1971 autobiography *Beneath the Underdog* contains compelling accounts of early L.A. jazzdom.)

One of 20th-century literature's outstanding eccentrics, Kenneth Patchen (1911-1972) was well-established as a cult figure by the time he recorded an LP with the Chamber Jazz Sextet in 1958. Anyone who's delved into *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* or *The Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer* knows that Patchen's skewed, dreamlike writing defies easy analysis. Not only did his writing shine in a jazz setting—the author himself had a natural acting flair that added resonance to his words. **"The Murder Of Two Men By A Young Kid Wearing Lemon Colored Gloves"** is an inexplicable piece even by Patchen's own idiosyncratic standards.

VOLUME TWO

Before there were Beats, before there was bop, before almost anyone had spread the gospel of hip on stage, there was Richard M. "Lord" Buckley (1907-1960). This brilliantly unhinged personage was more than a great nightclub comic—he was the original hipster comedian and directly influenced everyone from Lenny Bruce to Bob Dylan. Lord Buckley first adopted his aristocratic persona in the 1930s, graciously referring to his audiences as his "royal court." With an air of woozy dignity, His Double Hipness would launch into a jivetalk retelling of Shakespeare or the New Testament, sometimes breaking into song with a Louis Armstrong-like growl. Offstage,



Lord Buckley

Buckley's king-sized appetite for women, alcohol, and drugs became the stuff of legend. Yet what remains most vivid about him is his loving, benign nature as a performer. No matter the level of lunacy he reached, his routines were never mean in spirit. **"The Hip Gahn"** (that's Mahatma Gandhi, dig?) reveals His Lordship in all his flipped-out, warm-hearted glory. (The best of his Vaya recordings are available on *His Royal Hipness*, Discovery Records #7100, and *A Most Immaculately Hip Aristocrat* is available from Rhino, R2/R4 70363.)

Jazz-jive vocalizing reached new heights of refinement in the hands of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, represented here by their famed 1959 recording of **"Twisted."** Each of them was an established solo artist before they joined forces in 1958. Dave Lambert had led his own group of singers and appeared on recordings with Charlie Parker and others. Jon (John Carl) Hendricks had credits as a drummer and songwriter as well as a vocalist. Annie Ross (Annabelle Short) had been a child actress before singing with various jazz bands and recording as a solo artist. It was Ross who set the "Twisted" lyrics to an instrumental by tenor man Wardell Gray. This

swinging salute to schizophrenia was later covered by Joni Mitchell and Bette Midler. Jon Hendricks sings his solo rendition as the theme for HBO's *Sessions*.

Readers of *On the Road* may recall the name Slim Gaillard—he's the gibberish jockey Sal (Kerouac's character) and Dean (Neal Cassady's) commune with in one of the novel's nightclub scenes. In real life, singer/composer Gaillard was on a planet all his own, a place with a special language called "Vout." The lexicon of Vout may never be fully compiled, but one of its key elements was the phrase "oroonie," which Gaillard attached to the end of words whenever possible. He began his career in the mid-1930s as a solo act, then teamed up with singer/bassist Slam Stewart for a few years before striking off on his own again. **"Yip Roc Heresy"** (1951) swings the body and baffles the mind, displaying both Slim's vocal acrobatics and his snazzy guitar touch. In his later years, he performed in Europe (especially Britain) and appeared on the TV series *Roots—The Next Generation*. Sadly, Vout lost its sole exponent when Gaillard died in early 1991.

Tenor sax man/bandleader Charlie Ventura called his particular jazz blend



Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross

"Bop for the People." During the '40s he arranged bebop themes in a big band context, an intriguing idea that would prove only partially successful. "Ha" gives a taste of what Ventura and his Orchestra were trying for—this punchy number jumps scat-ologically, arriving at the frantic intersection of bop and swing. The '50s would find Ventura moving on to join combos with Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa; he led his own small groups until his death in early 1992.

"Pull My Daisy" is a pop ditty with erotic implications that became the title tune of Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's 1959 Beat cult film. The lyrics (taken from a Kerouac/Ginsberg collaborative poem) were set to music by David Amram, a composer/French horn player and former sideman with Lionel Hampton and Charles Mingus. In 1971,

Amram and his group rerecorded "Pull My Daisy" in a playful spirit, weaving diaphanous jazz strands around Lynn Sheffield's breezy vocals. The song, like the movie, was appreciated by only a select few. Amram went on to score other films, record further compositions, and conduct music workshops around the New York area.

Jazz with a bluesy tinge permeates Jack Kerouac's reading of "October In The Railroad Earth," taken from his 1959 Hanover LP *Poetry For The Beat Generation*. The music doesn't come only from Steve Allen's cocktail piano backdrop—the piece itself is filled with its own keen rhythmic sense. Easing into his recitation, Jack becomes half-bard, half-saloon singer; Walt Whitman with the swing of Sinatra. He infuses his portrait of San Francisco's shabby backstreets



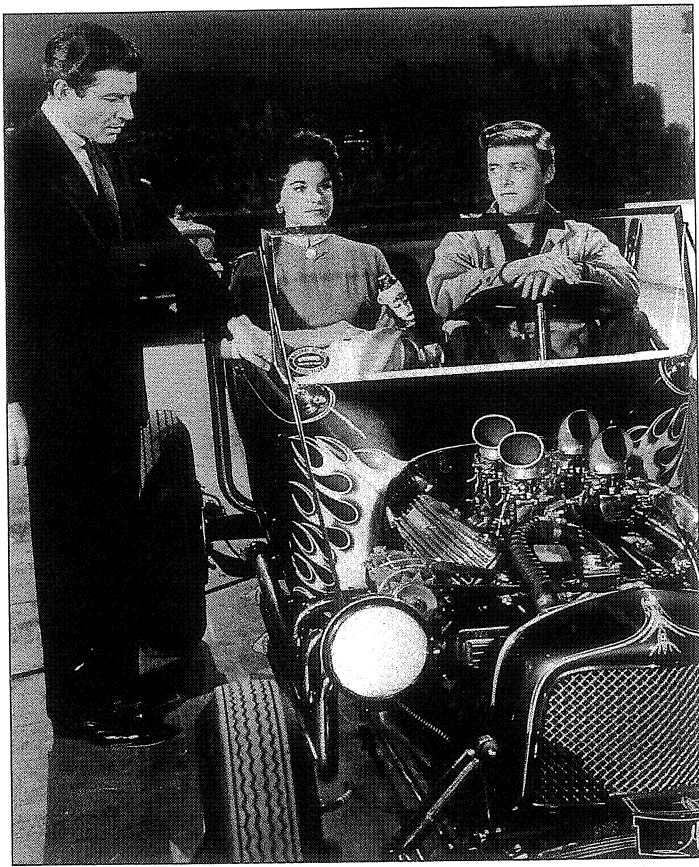
Charlie Ventura

with a tenderness for the bums and forgotten old men he finds there. It's ironic that Kerouac was often accused of escaping from reality (the officially sanctioned kind)—"October In The Railroad Earth" is the work of a man immersed in the everyday world, finding beauty in the most unlikely of landscapes.

The Beat Generation's two West Coast meccas were San Francisco's North Beach district and the Los Angeles-area community of Venice. These were the locales visited during the making of "The Cool Rebellion," a segment from the 1960 CBS News presentation *The Hidden Revolution*. Host Howard K. Smith tries to dig the Beats on their own terms, though he seems to believe they all belong to a secret society with membership cards and passwords. Denunciations of consumer culture and the work ethic are interspersed with sober comments by responsible spokesmen, including a "with-it" priest. One highlight is a coffeehouse conversation

between a hipster and a cube-shaped tourist on the subject of God and immaturity. Smith ends up speaking out in favor of individualism in modern America, a nicely innocuous way of coming to terms with the prickly beatnik question.

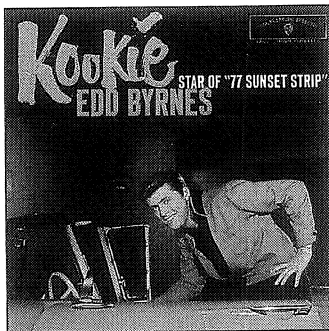
Squeezing the story of Charlie Parker into a paragraph is an impossible task, but what *can* be cited here is his central place in the Beat Generation's pantheon of heroes. Kerouac called him "the kindest jazz musician there could be while being and therefore naturally the greatest"—strangely, Bird died on Jack's 33rd birthday (March 12, 1955). The links between bebop's greatest figure and the King of the Beats are evident on many levels. More than anything, they shared an obsessive approach to their work that drew upon virtuosity and then transcended it. In his sax solos, Parker chased after the indescribable "it" of pure feeling that Kerouac tried to articulate in *On the Road* and elsewhere. Both risked incoher-



From 77 Sunset Strip: Ephraim Zimbalist, Sue Randall, and Edd "Kookie" Byrnes

ence, chaos, and madness in their art and found their own sense of form and order before their inner demons finally overtook them. Bird is represented here by "Cosmic Rays," recorded with his Quartet in 1952.

On a less exalted plane, let us consider the fleetingly famous Edd "Kookie" Byrnes of ABC-TV's *77 Sunset Strip* (1958-1964). When the detective series began, Kookie was only a supporting character, a hip-talking parking lot attendant who hung out with stars Ephraim



Zimbalist Jr. and Roger Smith. But this lovable jivester soon became a teen heartthrob and overnight sensation, leading Byrnes to record his hit "Kookie, Kookie, Lend Me Your Comb." He cut an LP for Warner Bros. as well, from which comes "Kookie's Mad Pad." Herein we find an

inventory of his far-out furnishings, including blue suede drapes and plaid lightbulbs. Crrrrazy!

"He's got his beret on, his glasses are trimmed in gold"—at first glance, the subject of "Bebopper" seems to know the Rules of Cool. Yet there's a touch of awkwardness in this picture, as if this scene-maker's groovy threads can't cover up his square edges. "Bebopper" was recorded in 1953 by The Gordons, a family vocal group featuring George Sr. and his teenage children Honey, Richard, and George Jr. Their polished harmonies are supported by the redoubtable trio of Hank Jones (piano), Charles Mingus (bass), and Max Roach (drums).

We return now to Ken Nordine, raiding the refrigerator while a jazz



Photo: Jerry Stoll

Kenneth Rexroth and George Hitchcock, Poets

combo slinks in the pantry. During "Hunger Is From," he manages to maintain his usual cool even while chomping on a celery stalk. This ode to guilty gastronomic pleasures comes from Nordine's first Dot LP, *Word Jazz* (1957).

"I catch cold in sandals," admits Rod McKuen in "No Pictures, Please," taken from his *Beatsville* LP (HiFi Records, 1959). Toughing it out in silence was never McKuen's style. He made an incredibly successful career out of confessing his loneliness and longing on record and in print. *Beatsville* (later rereleased by Everest Records as *Life Is*) finds him checking out "the beard and leotard set" from a half-satiric, half-sincere perspective. It's easy to dismiss a piece like "No Pictures, Please" as just another outsider's attempt to exploit the beatnik fad. But no matter what topic he chooses, McKuen's patented combination of achingly personal sentiment and numbingly commonplace language

remains constant. He would go on to sell millions of books and recordings around the world in the late '60 and early '70s. As the Beats evolved into hippies and times grew increasingly weird, McKuen kept poetry comprehensible to the mainstream consumer.

Mild-mannered, ultra-straight singer Perry Como also had a brush with hipness in the late '50s, when he recorded the slightly jivey "Like Young." It's hard to imagine Como making it with the poetry-digging Beat chick in the song, though. He had firmly established himself as America's most relaxed hitmaker, scoring more than 40 Top 10 records without working up a sweat. His weekly TV variety show (1955-1963) brought his acutely casual charms to still more households. "Like Young" is probably as close to going bohemian as Como ever got.

Curmudgeonly Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982) had been reciting verse to



Lenny Bruce

jazz accompaniment as far back as the 1920s, before those upstart Beats were born or at least out of their diapers. Active in West Coast literary circles, Rexroth had an ambivalent relationship with the younger writers who sought his approval and sponsorship. In his own cranky, Dutch uncle fashion, his efforts helped Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and other emerging poets gain recognition in the late '50s. In his reading of "**Married Blues**" (found on his 1960 *Poetry And Jazz/At The Blackhawk LP*), Rexroth carries himself with a wry, "I've-been-there-pal" air. He's especially fond of the pregnant pause, e.g., "hot...stenographers...on the subway." Not bad for a pedantic old fart.

Dirty Lenny...crazy Lenny...prophet Lenny. All of the above have been applied to Lenny Bruce, surely one of the great hipster icons of modern times. Even today, the late Leonard Schneider casts a

long shadow across comedians and performance artists who take their rights of self-expression for granted. Lenny was no saint, but his death in 1966 after years of legal harassment for "obscenity" served to canonize him as a martyr for the cause of free speech. Artistically, he was a true mutant, the missing link between conventional borscht belt Yiddish comedy and drug-fueled freakout humor. His work was comparable to Parker's or Kerouac's in its impact on American culture. His irreverence and honesty aimed for the jugular and drew blood with laughter. Anything was fair game to be spritzed when his stream-of-consciousness was gushing, including the beatnik portion of Lenny's audience. "**Psychopathia Sexualis**" (from *The Sick Humor Of Lenny Bruce*, 1959) is a pseudo-Beat elegy that careens from hippophilia to the Ku Klux Klan with perverse verve. (*The Lenny Bruce*

Performance Film collector's set video/CD is available from Rhino Home Video, RNVD 2949, and Lenny Bruce's *The Berkeley Concert* is available from Bizzare/Straight Records, R2/R4 70355.)

VOLUME THREE

Tom Waits copped the Beat attitude with a sure grasp of his subject. "**Jack & Neal/California, Here I Come**" (from his 1977 *Foreign Affairs* album) is an explicit tribute to Waits' role models, an imaginary page from the Kerouac Chronicles. And if the rather bawdy nurse in the song is only a dreamed-up detail, Tom definitely got the essence right.

Kerouac's appearances on television were rarely to his advantage. But despite his nervousness, he gave a memorable performance on *The Steve Allen Plymouth Show* in November 1959, with "**Readings From 'On The Road' and 'Visions Of Cody.'**" Viewers looking for an Angry Young Man saw instead a well-mannered individual invoking God in the form of Pooh Bear. The reverence and humanity expressed in his reading certainly didn't jibe with the beatnik menace of popular mythology.

Interviewers usually didn't have a clue about where Jack was coming from. A funny and fascinating example of this was Kerouac's October 1958 encounter with Ben Hecht on the latter's short-lived TV talk show. Hecht had been something of a bohemian during his younger days as a newspaperman in the 'teens and '20s. By the time he became a television personality, though, he had spent years as a highly paid Hollywood script doctor, an experience that would dissolve anyone's idealism. Kerouac's seemingly naive attitudes about world affairs elicit a condescending sort of sympathy from Hecht. Jack handles Ben's generally smart-assed questions with restraint and good humor. The two of them debate everything from the history of Christianity to the proper number of sleeping pills for committing suicide. Ultimately, in the immortal words of Strother Martin in *Cool Hand Luke*, "What we have here is a failure to communicate."

Kerouac became public property during this era—even his name turned

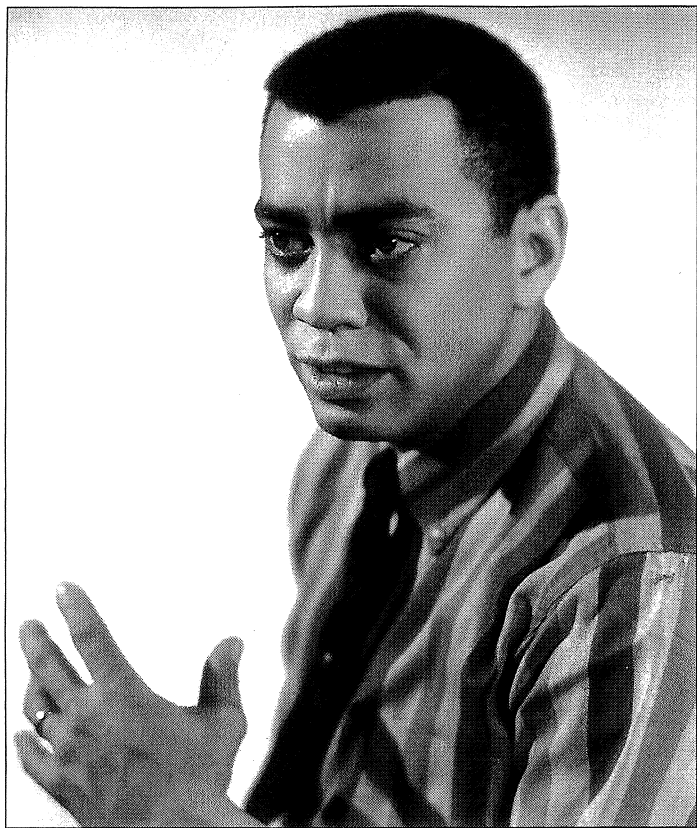
into a catchphrase. "**Kerouazy**" by Don Morrow and The Cool Personnel (remember them from Volume One?) was yet another tip of the beret to the Beat King. Among the players on this perky number (found on the aforementioned *Grimm's Hip Fairy Tales* album) was *Tonight Show* trumpeter Doc Severinson. In the past decades, Doc traded his cool for a more flashy persona.

Speaking of "cool," exactly what does this much-used and abused phrase mean? Del Close and John Brent attempt a definition in the *How To Speak Hip* segments "**Cool**" and "**Uncool**." In the course of these colloquys, Brent ("Geets Romo") dissects the fine points of coolness with all the thoroughness of a teahed looking for seeds and stems in his shag carpet. Major revelation: "Paranoia is the hipster's disease."

"**But I Was Cool**" by Oscar Brown Jr. is strategically sandwiched between the two Close/Brent bits. This comedy-skittish piece comes from Brown's 1960 Columbia LP *Sin & Soul*. Hailed in the album's liner notes as "a whole man in a compartmentalized age," Brown gained renown as a poet, actor, and playwright as well as a recording artist. He went on to release further albums and perform into recent times. Steve Allen, Max Roach, and Dorothy Kilgallen all thought he was very talented (according to *Sin & Soul's* jacket), so he *must've* been cool.

Phillipa Fallon's one shot at screen immortality came when she portrayed the "poetess" in *High School Confidential*. And if she subsequently sank from sight, at least she leaves behind the wiggled-out recitation "**High School Drag**" (released as a 45 by MGM Records). Playing the sullen hipsterette to the hilt, Fallon dishes out choice non sequiturs to a yowling crowd. "Turn your eyes inside and dig the vacuum," she sneers imperiously. More than two decades later, the surly likes of Lydia Lunch and Sandra Bernhard would (unknowingly?) tread the same path as the forgotten Miss Fallon.

For some fast-acting relief from the preceding poetic angst we turn to Kenny Clarke, who recorded his version of "**Oop-Bop Sh-Bam**" six months after Dizzy Gillespie's ode to bop nonsense. Clarke was the premier bebop drummer (the drum equivalent of Parker and



Oscar Brown Jr.

Gillespie), having played with The Modern Jazz Quartet, Diz, and various other groups. An expatriate living in Paris, Kenny became known in the states for his fine work with the Clarke-Boland big band.

Babs Gonzales returns with "Professor Bop," a 1949 piece that pays homage to Diz and other Doctors of Jive Jurisprudence. As the bass steps lively behind him, Gonzales quotes "Oop-Bop Sh-Bam" and invites everyone within earshot to become swingin' scholars themselves.

"Beatnik's Wish" (1959) affords us a closer look at that maligned and misunderstood creature, the Beat chick. In November 1959, *Life* magazine described such females as follows: "Scraggly hair, long black stockings, heavy eye makeup and an expression that could suggest either hauteur or uneasy digestion." But Patsy Raye, the cool kitten featured in "Beatnik's Wish," sounds insatiable rather than dyspeptic. Coming on with breathless abandon, she confesses her Christmas cravings over throbbing

drums and leering brass. Raye and her brazen band of boppers have apparently vanished—let's hope that her "long black stocking" was filled with something satisfying on Christmas morn.

A private eye who moonlights as a jazz pianist? What a concept!—especially in 1959, when anything jazzy or beatnikesque or otherwise hip was hot stuff. That's the year NBC-TV premiered *Staccato*, a half-hour crime series starring John Cassavetes. As jazz piano-playing P.I. Johnny Staccato, Cassavetes jammed at Waldo's nightclub in Greenwich Village when he wasn't tracking down thugs and dames. The show's "dynamic modern jazz background themes" were handled by Elmer Bernstein, whose previous credits included the edgy score to 1955's *The Man With the Golden Arm*. A more happy-go-lucky mood pervades "Like Having Fun," taken from the *Staccato* soundtrack album. The series itself was dropped mid-season by NBC, picked up by ABC, and then canceled in 1960. Cassavetes graduated to more worthwhile projects

as an actor and filmmaker.

Not all distinguished Americans disapproved of the Beats. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and author Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) endorsed them in the 1959 CBS TV interview "On Beatniks." The venerable folklorist and Lincoln biographer evidently felt a kinship with the younger generation of bohemians. Sandburg spent some time on the road himself, scuffling about Chicago and elsewhere in his youth before winning fame and respectability. Perhaps he wished he could still hop a freight for parts unknown.

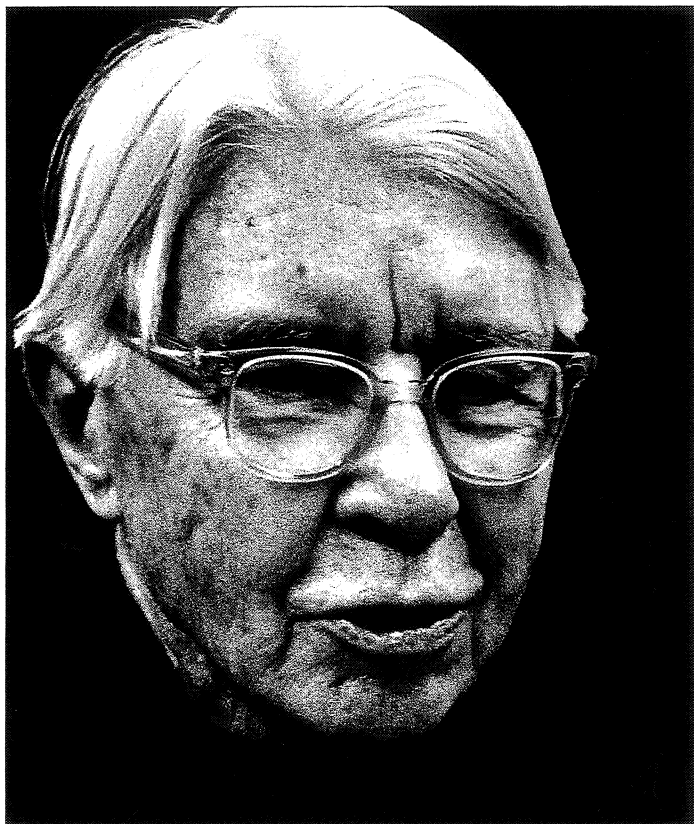
No one came to exemplify the tragic jazz artist more than Chet Baker, especially after his death in 1988. His early promise and slow decline were poignantly documented in the 1989 film *Let's Get Lost*. Baker's trumpet work seemed to convey coolness itself (as did his limited but evocative singing voice). During his brief (1952-53) stint with the Gerry Mulligan Quartet, he helped to define what the West Coast jazz school was all about. "Swinghouse," recorded in '53 for

the Pacific Jazz label, boasts a distinctive Mulligan arrangement that allows Baker room to take a mellifluous solo.

For the last stretch of our cultural meander, we head back to the Village and link up with Charles Kuralt, known for his own sort of *On the Road* TV journalism. He was sent by CBS News in June '59 to investigate the New York 'Niks and came away with the wry report found here. "The poets and the Greenwich Village coffeehouses have won their battle against the law-givers, the cops, and the squares," he announced, a judgment that was a bit premature. Thanks to Kuralt and CBS, television viewers received yet another earful of irritating-if-earnest beat poetry, for better or verse.

As hipsters blend in with Washington Square folksingers (isn't that Robert Zimmerman shaking spittle out of his harp over there?) and Camelot appears on the horizon, we bid the Beat Generation goodbye, following a final benediction....

In his poem "America" (recorded in



Carl Sandburg

© 1992 Ray Flerlage

1959), Allen Ginsberg spoke for more than himself and his circle of friends. This brooding, mocking, beseeching, hostile, and curiously hopeful poem gave voice to those uncounted souls who were excluded from orthodox 1950s society. Ginsberg was the Beat writer most comfortable in the spokesman's role, the ambassador and the alliance-builder. He was also the most overtly political (he came from a fervently Leftist family) and the most steeped in Biblical literary traditions ("Howl" and "Kaddish" had definite Old Testament overtones). He knew how to don the robes of the poet-as-prophet and make himself heard, but what tempered any messianic pretensions on his part was the nakedly confessional nature of his message. It just so happened that the Molochs and mind police that pursued him were after a lot of other people as well.

Ginsberg's career from the late '50s onward illustrates the profound influence that the Beats had on the artistic and social movements that followed. His involvement in the psychedelic rebellion and the anti-war uprisings of the 1960s found him living out the apocalyptic predictions of his own poems. His explorations into Western mysticism and Eastern disciplines anticipated the widespread American interest in these subjects that eventually coalesced into the New Age movement. In popular music, echoes of his work were heard in the songs of artists like Bob Dylan—compare the ideas and imagery in "Howl" with those found in "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," "Mr. Tambourine Man," and any number of other Dylan standards. Ginsberg went on to periodically record with rock musicians, most recently for his 1989 album *The Lion For Real*.

From McKuen to Burroughs, from "Kookie's Mad Pad" to "October In The Railroad Earth," we are left with the flotsam and jetsam of the postwar hip legacy. If you take the Beat Generation and what it represented seriously, the way it all went down can't help but make you feel a twinge of regret. Mass Culture America swallowed the Beats whole and digested them with only a belch or two. With a little monetary incentive and

some mental antacids, Mass Culture America can consume *anything*.

But that's not quite the whole story. The Beat Generation was a flowering of something genuine and necessary, and its significance stands apart from the attempts to trivialize it. Perhaps it's best not to recall it with too much reverence—that would demean it in a different way. Jack Kerouac had it right. More than anything, it's about joy.

—Barry Alfonso
Los Angeles, June 1992



Photo: Jerry Stoll

Pony Poindexter



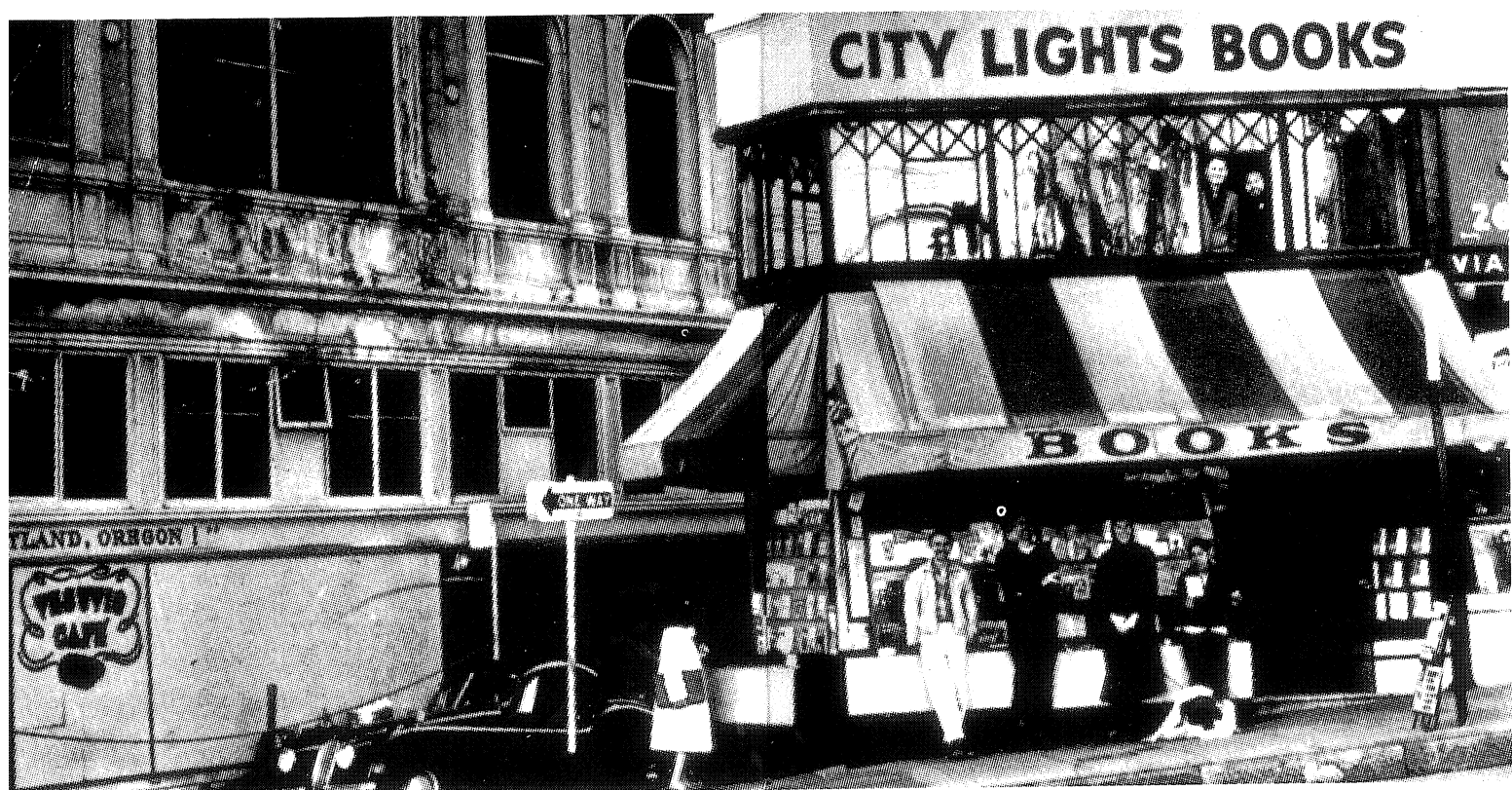
Michael McClure, Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg.

“**M**inneapolis was the first big city I lived in if you want to call it that,” remembered Dylan. “I came out of the wilderness and just naturally fell in with the Beat scene, the bohemian, bebop crowd, it was all pretty much connected...St. Louis, Kansas City, you usually went from town to town and found the same setup in all these places, people comin’ and goin’, nobody with any place special to live. You always ran into people you knew from the last place. I had already decided that society, as it was, was pretty phony, and I didn’t want to be part of that...also, there was a lot of unrest in the country. You could feel it, a lot of frustration, sort of like a calm before a hurricane, things were shaking up. Where I was at, people just passed through, really, carrying horns, guitars, suitcases, whatever, just like the stories you hear, free love, wine, poetry, nobody had any money anyway. There were a lot of poets and painters, drifters, scholarly types, experts at one thing or another who had dropped out of the regular nine-to-five life. There were a lot of house parties most of the time. They were usually in lofts or warehouses or something or sometimes in the park, in the alley wherever there was space. It was always crowded, no place to stand or breathe. There were always a lot of poems recited—‘Into the room people come and go talking of Michaelangelo, measuring their lives in coffee spoons’... ‘What I’d like to know is what do you think of your blue-eyed boy now, Mr. Death.’ T.S. Eliot, e.e. cummings. It was sort of like that, and it kind of woke me up...Suzie Rotolo, a girlfriend of mine in New York, later turned me on to all the French poets but for then it was Jack Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso, and Ferlinghetti—Gasoline,

Coney Island of the Mind...oh man, it was wild—I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness— that said more to me than any of the stuff I’d been raised on. On the Road, Dean Moriarty, this made perfect sense to me...anyway, the whole scene was an unforgettable one, guys and girls, some of whom reminded me of saints, some people had odd jobs—busboy, bartender, exterminator, stuff like that, but I don’t think working was on most people’s minds—just to make enough to eat, you know. Most of everybody, anyway, you had the feeling that they’d just been kicked out of something. It was outside, there was no formula, never was ‘mainstream’ or ‘the thing to do’ in any sense. America was still very ‘straight,’ ‘postwar,’ and sort of into a gray-flannel suit thing, McCarthy, commies, puritanical, very claustrophobic and whatever was happening of any real value was happening away from that and sort of hidden from view, and it would be years before the media would be able to recognize it and choke-hold it and reduce it to silliness. Anyway, I got in at the tail end of that and it was magic...everyday was like Sunday, it’s like it was waiting for me, it had just as big an impact on me as Elvis Presley. Pound, Canus, T.S. Eliot, e.e. cummings, mostly expatriate Americans who were off in Paris and Tangiers. Burroughs, Nova Express, John Rechy, Gary Snyder, Ferlinghetti, Pictures From the Gone World, the newer poets and folk music, jazz, Monk, Coltrane, Sonny and Brownie, Big Bill Broonzy, Charlie Christian...it all left the rest of everything in the dust.”

—Bob Dylan

© 1985 Special Rider Music. Used By Permission. All Rights Reserved.
Photo: Larry Keenan



CITY LIGHTS BOOKSTORE A LITERARY MEETING PLACE SINCE 1953

If the Beats had a central message, it was "Widen the area of consciousness." Their generation sought a new awareness derived from urgent experience and found their identity in the aftermath of the Second World War. The war was very influential: Besides the generalized anxiety created by its atomic climax, it greatly increased travel and contact among the races, and the GI Bill put college within everyone's reach.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who as a naval officer had seen the devastation in Nagasaki, used the GI Bill to study at the Sorbonne in Paris. He returned to America with a doctorate and a decided taste for the poetry, painting, wine, and existentialist cafés of "The City of Light." To his satisfaction, he discovered North Beach, an Italian neighborhood in San Francisco, America's most "European" city. It had a creative and eccentric population with their own bars and cafés, and it was right alongside Chinatown, with its Buddhist churches and exotic but inexpensive restaurants.

What it did not have was a literary bookshop, so Ferlinghetti formed a partnership with Peter Martin to open the first-ever all-paperback bookstore. Martin had been editing a pop culture magazine named after Chaplin's silent film *City Lights*, and they kept that name for the new shop. Stocking books on film, mysticism, radical politics, and culture, it occupied the wedge-shaped space beneath the magazine's office and a basement that had been a holy-roller church. The church's cryptic religious slogans painted on the walls are still visible to this day.

In 1955, after Martin sold his share and left for New York, Ferlinghetti published his own wry, lyrical poems in *City Lights'* first book, *Pictures of the Gone World*. It was labeled "Pocket Poet Number One" and issued in the now familiar small format Ferlinghetti styled after books he had seen in France. Books by "the Kenneths," Rexroth and Patchen, followed in the series, tying it into an earlier generation of literary mavericks.

North Beach continued to attract artists and would-be artists from all parts, the same way Greenwich Village did in New York. Eager to show their work, they

crammed pictures onto the walls of Vesuvio, across the alley from City Lights. It was the best known of several bohemian bars started by the great self-invented convener of scenes, Henry Lenoir. "Don't Envy Beatniks...Be One," read a sign in Vesuvio's window advertising Beatnik kits to the weekend crowd. In addition to shades, beret and turtleneck, the kits included the official signature of Eric "Big Daddy" Nord, a posturing scene fixture. By this time tour buses were pulling up in front of City Lights. North Beach had become the world capital of the Beat Generation, and the bookstore was its headquarters.

What had done the most to transform North Beach from an underground enclave into an international tourist mecca was another volume in the Pocket Poets Series, *Howl and Other Poems*. First read publicly by the then-obscure poet Allen Ginsberg at a legendary event at San Francisco's Six Gallery in 1955, "Howl" was a work of holy madness. This prophetic poem dragged more skeletons out of conformist America's closets than any literary work before or since. But what made the poem go from a Beat literature's inside tip to a cause célèbre was the obscenity trial that followed its publication. Busted by U.S. Customs and then by the S.F. police, Ferlinghetti and his new partner Shig Muroa prevailed in the highly publicized case when professors and poets rushed to the poem's defense.

With its new high profile, City Lights Publishing thrived, producing books by most of the important emerging Beat writers, including Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, Bob Kaufman, and Diane DiPrima. A lot of other Beat-associated businesses were not as lucky; places like The Co-Existence Bagel Shop and The Cellar jazz club folded under tourist stampedes, police heat, and, eventually, shifting styles.

As the '60s took shape, City Lights managed to retain its aura. Bob Dylan put in an appearance there in 1965 with Ginsberg and Michael McClure. Dylan had tried unsuccessfully to get Ferlinghetti to publish his early poetry and now returned triumphant. He had taken the Beat quest one step further, moving poetry beyond the coffeehouse and putting it on the jukebox at the local diner.

When the center of the hip world moved across town to Haight-Ashbury, Beat poets were invited along to the be-ins. City Lights continued to participate by issuing

hippie books, selling tickets to all the psychedelic dances, and getting busted again, this time for selling Lenore Kandel's Tantric sex poetry in *The Love Look*. Lenny Bruce, who was working the clubs on Broadway in North Beach, put a little book of his own on sale at the store, *Stamp Help Out the Potsmokers*. He later had Ferlinghetti stash remaining copies when he decided he could not juggle another bust.

In 1988 City Lights succeeded in having Adler Alley renamed Jack Kerouac Street; other streets in North Beach were also renamed for Beat figures. After nearly 40 years the bookshop's still there—it's not "solidified nostalgia" or a time warp, but an ongoing scene. You can still find underground literature, an espresso, and many of the same ideals of personal freedom, nonconformity, and the search for enlightenment and kicks. And people still arrive every day looking for those elusive Beatnik kits.

—Stephen Ronan

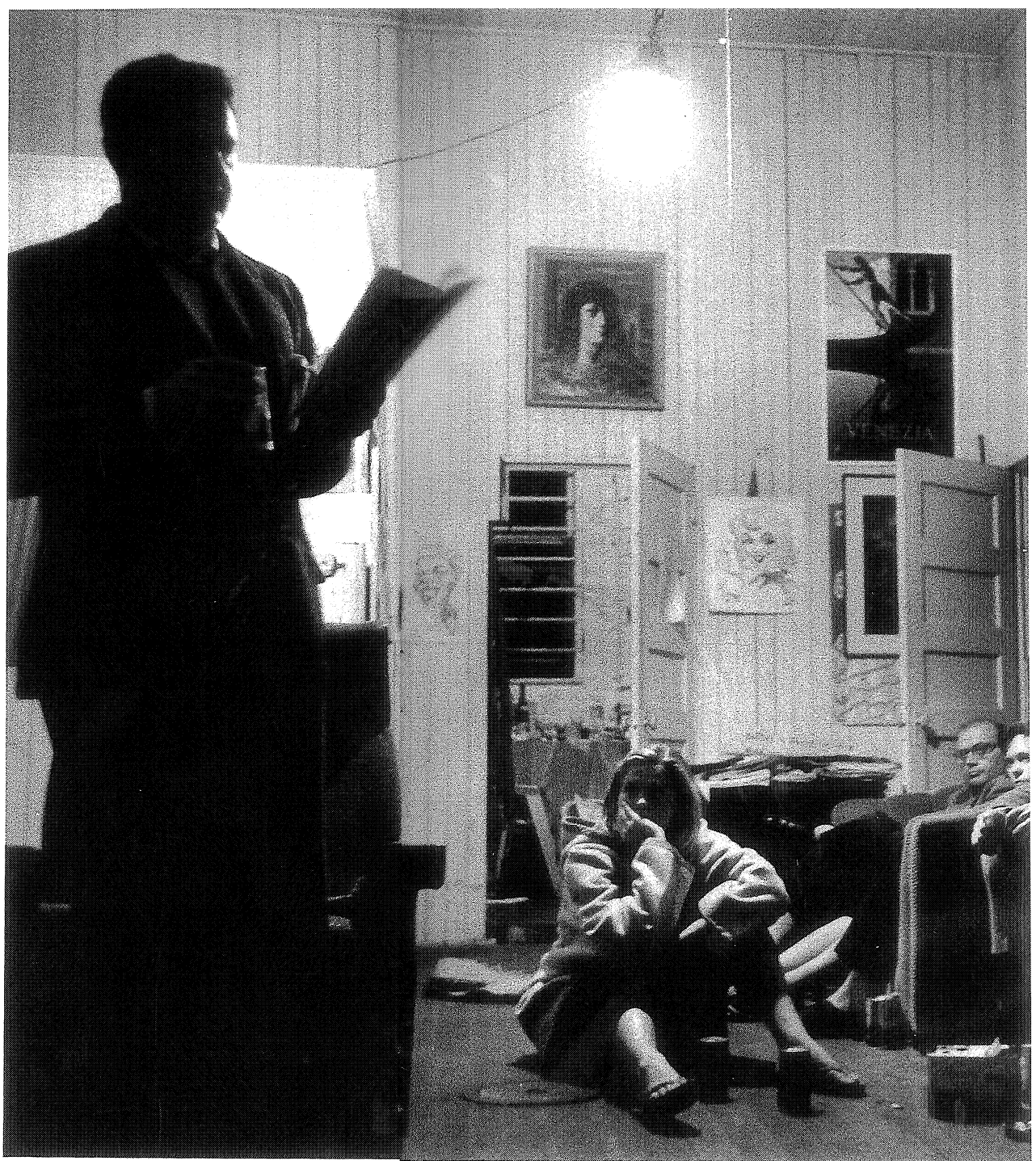


Photo: Jerry Stoll

Poetry Reading at Eric's Pad in North Beach
Michael Grieg, Poet