

JAZZ, from page 10

interest outside of getting my academic credit for the music class to heading up this jazz monster.

B.R.P.: Was he part of the jazz scene or more of a photographer?

J.F.: He was kind of both. I think he had a very approachable calm demeanor. So he hung out in the clubs before he rigorously started taking pictures. So he would be in Birdland (the famous New York City jazz club), and between sets he would play the bass, and he knew everyone personally. So he was more of a *hobbyist* photographer and *jazz lover* who happened to get into the field.

B.R.P.: How did you start learning about him as a person?

J.F.: I had photos of him from throughout his life, childhood to adolescence to death. I realized that he had an extensive family. So I got a copy of his death certificate, and I knew I could get his Social Security number from that. This was before Google, really, before the internet was full of information; and I was calling people.

B.R.P.: The photos are from the early years.

J.F.: Bob moved to New York City on his 25th birthday. He started photography in the late '50s, early '60s. Before he moved to the city, he was spending a lot of time taking trips to Manhattan to clubs. I actually found a guy named Peter who went to high school and college with Bob. He said Bob was always trying to get him to go on the New York City adventures. The bulk of his photos are from the late 1950s to mid-1960s, jazz and then it turned into more folk (music).

B.R.P.: What happened to him before New York City?

J.F.: What I do know is that he had a very tumultuous upbringing. His mother was not emotionally fit to be a caregiver. She actually sent him away to her sister, Elizabeth, and his uncle, and they raised him. His mom would come in and out of his life, and there were times when the three of them would be raising Bob. I think Bob always had a sense of abandonment. He struggled with that his entire life. He was never really settled into a place. On the back cover of the book is a quotation (from his journal): "I would stay in my place, but I don't think I've found it yet."

He left New York City and went to L.A., and he was with (singer-songwriter) Tim Buckley and the Underwoods (guitarist and writer Lee Underwood). Those were his buddies. He was a kind of a groupie and started taking work on movie sets.

I don't know what happened between working in L. A. and moving back to New England. His mother died. His entire family died off. He moved into his mother's house in Portsmouth (N.H.), lost the house, lost everything. And then he had a stroke when he was in his mid-50s. That left him hearing impaired. It changed him. People who knew him at this time said he was always very willing to work. He was always up for getting a job. A guy from those years says Bob was very talented and handy. He would



PHOTO BY ROBERT JAMES CAMPBELL, CITY OF BURLINGTON, VT.

cement a curb at a gas station, and with the money he made, he would buy movies and films. I don't think he ever had the mind set to plan for the future. He lived for the moment, always, and then just ran out of money and time.

B.R.P.: Is this ultimately a tragic tale? Bob's magnificent work is saved and shared with the world, but he didn't live to see it and likely had no expectation that his work would survive.

J.F.: The way I have come to learn of Bob and his character – I actually asked someone that question, what he would think right now. He

wasn't self-assured enough to do this for himself. He wanted it. Lee Underwood said that Bob would have gotten a kick out of it, that it was really funny that someone would take all this material and spend all their time. Rather than a debt of gratitude, it's more of: "Well, damn! I can't believe this crazy girl did this!" I think it's tragic that his life wound up in someone's file, and that's an example of thousands of

people that happens to. He let life pass him by, but everything he did was really valuable. He made the conscious choice to pursue a career that wouldn't necessarily provide him with a kind of stability.

B.R.P.: Does it give you pause that there must be many Robert James Campbells out there?

J.F.: I've met people who call me and say, "My name is whatever and I've photographed these people at Woodstock and would you be interested in helping me get my photos out?" I do think there are countless Bobs out there, but in Bob Campbell's case, the footage that he has is

very rare – the fact that he was in New York City at a time where the transitioning of jazz and all the politics and the volatile times. I don't think that too many people captured what he did.

B.R.P.: He was incredibly fortunate to have you. I can't imagine that too many people, even lovers of jazz or lovers of photography, would have seen this project through.

J.F.: I worked on this for 13 years. But it was actually a lot of rejection. I'm really grateful that powerHouse Books saw something in it.

So as far as Bob being fortunate to have found me, I feel that this project was a huge learning experience for me, but I never would have gotten to know what I now know about jazz and about the legal issues in trying to get it published, about design, about publishing, about what New York was like at a time of which I wasn't even aware. I think it's been mutually beneficial.

B.R.P.: How big is the collection? Obviously the book is just a tiny portion.

J.F.: The book is just the tip of the iceberg. The collection is incredibly disorganized. I think I'd need to call upon some historians and experts who know the West Village (in that period).

The collection itself is probably 5,000 or 6,000 images, but every sheet is 24 or 36 frames because that's how many frames are on a roll (of film). So that's how many there would be if some of the negatives weren't missing. He would number things like C1, C2, C3, C4 and go into the hundreds, but maybe 60 of those are gone. So what I have is not in the five or six thousand. I have maybe half that.

B.R.P.: There must be some photos that you

hated to cut from the book?

J.F.: When the book was supposed to be just a jazz book, that was really hard. There were a lot of other beautiful images. He took a lot of fashion photographs. ... And I thought I'd have only one chance to get his work in a book. If I make it just a jazz book, I'm going to have to eliminate all that. So in the end, when powerHouse decided to make this more of an expansive broader scope of his work, I was then able to include a lot. At the last minute, I talked to the designer and noted that it's too masculine; everyone in here is a man, and everything is dark and heavy. So I wound up getting 35 additional images. So literally a week before the book was going to press, 35 images were added. These are more portraits in the park and comedian Flip Wilson.

B.R.P.: I'm thinking now of that heart-rending photograph of Myrlie Evers, widow of Medgar Evers, the civil rights activist who was murdered in Mississippi in 1963.

J.F.: That photo was taken right after the murder. I didn't see a lot of civil rights activists, but I did see a lot of protests, a lot of picketing.

That is one image I loved so much. It's one of my favorite pictures in the book. I had to find a way to get it in there.

B.R.P.: One fascinating part of your text is about that personality test that he took in 1976. What did that tell you?

J.F.: It was a watershed moment. It was so weird. It's a Scientology Scantron test, and at first I didn't know what it was. I had no idea. Then a friend pointed out that it was a Scientology test and that I could probably find the questions online. So I downloaded all the questions and matched up Bob's answers. Even though it's kind of superficial, the questions really placed him in a way that I didn't really think that they would. For example there was this one question that said, "I wouldn't hunt ..." with choices, "A.) I don't eat meat; B.) I wouldn't inflict harm on another living being; and C.) I don't like guns." And he picked, "I wouldn't inflict harm on another living being." I could see that he was a really gentle person. Other people have told me what he was like, but on the test, that's his pure answer.

B.R.P.: It must have been a struggle for you to start from zero information. Now that the book is out, is it leading to more new information?

J.F.: Yes! There have been a few people. One of the most valuable connections that I've made was Peter B., who went to high school with Bob and a year of college. He painted Bob the way I always thought he was. With this kind of situation, you just want to know. You have someone's personal belongings, and you don't know who they are. I could make him anyone that I wanted him to be. ... "Oh, he's a homeless man" or "Oh, he's a drug user" or "He's done a lot of horrible things" – any way that I wanted to. But I judged him in a very positive light. And then when I found out from people who have read the book that, yeah, he was exactly the way I thought he was, it was so satisfying, a validation.



FROM REBIRTH OF COOL BY JESSICA FERBER, PUBLISHED BY POWERHOUSE BOOKS

"Rebirth of the Cool" by Jessica Ferber.
Top: The Dave Brubeck Quartet.