

My Great Friend Bill Comstock

Eulogy given November 29, 2016 by Dave Bentley in San Antonio

Bill Comstock was a father, a husband, an intellectual of significant accomplishment, a member of the Four Freshmen during the years 1960 to 1973, and above all, Bill was what I call a gentlemen. He was a quiet man, reserved by nature and careful with words. He believed, as George Shearing did, that speaking softly garnered attention. He, and George were right. I once asked George why his audiences were so rapt when he played – was it his enormous talent and keyboard chops? – “No,” he said, “I always played softly – that gets the audience to listen.” So too with speaking.

Bill Comstock and I met in 1969 in our home for a dinner my wife and I had given to honor the Freshmen. It was the wonderful group #4 – Bob Flanigan, Bill, Ross Barbour and Ken Albers. The cocktails and dinner went fine, and just before we were to leave for the gig they had that evening, Bill and I found ourselves alone in my library. We just seemed to have gravitated there, and our bond began. We enjoyed many of the same things, though I was a far cry from Bill’s musical abilities. I suppose I could be called a groupie, because I followed the Freshmen all over the country and listened to that captivating sound. But always WCC as I called him – he called me DOD (I’ll let you ponder what that meant) would meet for a private dinner or lunch or breakfast and talk about things that meant something to each of us. I was frankly captivated by Bill’s intelligence and his constant seeking of answers to difficult questions. Most of all – since I am far from being an intellectual, I was captivated by Bill’s playing – his comping for the Freshmen. I had listened carefully to the guitar sounds that Don Barbour made, but his unique tuning of the guitar produced a somewhat muddy sound to my ears. The chords were correct, but the time and tuning did not reach me. Enter Bill Comstock in 1960. It was a jolt, and a happy one, because instead of just laying back and comping in time as Don had done, Bill energetically attacked. He provided a clean, harmonically interesting and percussive approach to comping for the group, and to my ears the sound improved dramatically. Flanigan, as only Bob could do, at first called Bill’s playing “bleep bleep mystery chords”. But Bill persevered and the group persevered. Any of you who care can listen to the first four tunes on the album *Four Freshmen In Person Volume Two*, and you’ll understand what I mean. And all this guitar sound from a man who had never taken a lesson. Just great ears and a curiosity about harmonics. And he was so right.

In 1973 Bill left the group, starting a series of businesses, first in Selinsgrove, PA, then San Angelo, TX where he started what was to become a competitor to McDonald’s. It was called Hogans

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Heroes. Past tense says it all, but he had fun doing it, and I spent some time there with Bill and Sue. Then on to San Antonio and many good years there working on various financial projects.

We talked twice a week, sharing stories of our respective neighborhoods, and of course talked of the Freshmen. This group, that group, did he like what was going on, etc.

It was during one of these conversations that I got the idea of asking him to put to paper some standards. I played guitar, and I wanted to see in his hand how he handled various tunes. 50 tunes later I am playing them all, including many of Bill and Gene DiNovi’s songs. What a treat, and what an honor. Gene and Bill were best of friends, and they collaborated for years writing great songs – *Summer Has Gone*, *Act III*, *Seasons of the Heart*, *Susan*, *You Kicked Me Out*, *Give Me Time*.

Bill Comstock was a unique individual, as we all are. He was special, as we all are, and he was a gentle, wonderful friend whom I shall miss for the rest of my life. I leave you with words written by Bill:

***“Seagulls cry on rain swept beaches
Tear washed eyes and pain love teaches,
reminds me Summer has gone.”***

So have you my dear friend.