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Lead Voice

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Curtis Calderon
2nd Voice



Vince Johnson
Baritone Voice



Bob Ferreira
Bass Voice

JOHN KENNETH ALBERS IN MEMORIAM

by Bill Comstock (FF Hall of Fame)

He was born JOHN KENNETH ALBERS, but to me he was always Kenny or “Old Jawn.” We were close friends and associates for the better part of sixty years. I believe the story should begin with the way in which we met.

I had come down to Philadelphia with a group fronted by a fellow who had been playing trumpet with the Gene Krupa band. After several weeks of working in Philly, he decided to go back with Krupa, which left us looking for a trumpet player. One of the group remembered “this guy, who looks like Van Johnson, from some little town over in Jersey.” How does he play? was the next question. “I only heard him once but, as I remember, he sounded real good.”

So we called a rehearsal and into our lives ambled this big blond fellow who did, indeed, somewhat resemble Van Johnson. And could he ever play! Improvisationally, much better than the person he replaced. And could he ever sing! And he had the ability to “hear” harmonically, which is the rarest gift of all. He fit in perfectly. He attracted attention and accolades everywhere that we appeared. And he could write (arrangements) very well. At this point I asked him if he would like to go on the “road” for about four weeks. His reply was “Man! four years!” And so began a long personal and professional association which was to have a profound impact on my life.

If I were to take a word association test for which the trigger words were “Kenny Albers” and “music,” my automatic response would be “Taste.” Now “Taste” is most difficult to discuss because in my view it is one of the most misunderstood and misused words in the language. It is so often confused with, or used as a substitute for the word “preference.” The difference: There are NO standards for preference! I define “taste” as the innate ability to perceive the essence (or what is implicit to) the nature of something and to display it with dignity, integrity, and restraint. In the case of music, Bill Evans did that. Kenny Albers did also. It takes a lot of courage to play (or sing) without “spilling your guts” or “grandstanding.” Ben Webster did that. Kenny Albers did also. Restraint is a very rare quality which is often unappreciated. Kenny Albers had it “in spades.” It was inherent to his nature.

The sounds that Kenny could make with his horns were truly something to behold. I’ve never heard anyone with quite the warmth and depth that he displayed. His solos were imbued with the kind of “quiet fire” which burns with great intensity but without much noise. They were always beautifully melodic while embracing every appropriate chord progression. But there was still another side to the Kenny Albers coin.

His mastery of the mellophone (which very few people were able to play “in tune”) provided the kind of raucous excitement which was so very important to Ross Barbour’s show-stopping pieces like “It’s Only a Paper Moon” and “Them There Eyes.” And when he and

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