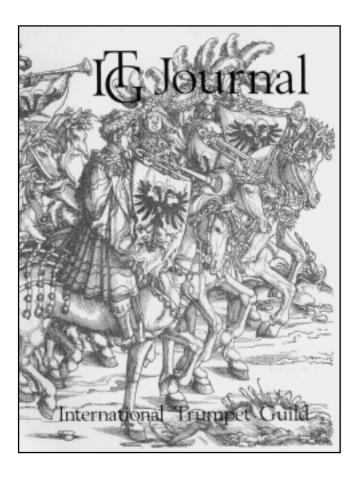
Reprints from the

International Trumpet Guild Journal

John La Barbera - Bill Chase: A Reminiscence (Sep97)



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Photo courtesy of Tommy Martin

ack in the old days, before all economic hell broke loose with the oil crisis, a road musician could get a real breakfast (that's one without a 'Mc-' prefix) for a buck and a room for five. I'm talking about the late 60s when they did not homogenize hotels and motels into one large patent system of "your rooms will be ready at 2:00 p.m." The day sheet (check-in time for that day) usually started at 5:00 a.m. So, coming off an all-nighter on the bus, one prayed the driver would get there as close to it as possible. If you got in early, you could pay one day's rent for the one or two hours of extra sleep or hang out for a few hours to save money. Even if you were ghosting with a couple of other guys (one checks in and the others sleep on the floor and split the rent), rationalizing the additional bread for the extra snooze was hard.

I have fond memories of our band (the Glenn Miller Orchestra) and Woody's band hanging out at the Eastgate Hotel in Chicago waiting for the "magic hour." It wasn't unusual for two bands to cross paths like that and many sidemen used it as an opportunity to jump ship. That's when I first got to know Bill

Chase. We trumpeters would hang together and exchange stories about the road, gripe about the one-nighters, catch up on who's with whose band, and talk trumpet. Bill was our idol and generous with his advice and tips on trumpet playing. Our paths crossed often and I was always in awe of his technique and energy.

For this article, I interviewed three people – Bill Byrne, Jay Sollenberger, and Jim Oatts – whose lives were touched by Chase during different stages of his career. They worked with Bill as trumpet players and experienced day to day interaction within a trumpet section. I am sorry that time and space did not permit interviewing many others who worked with him.

Byrne was road manager for the Woody Herman Band for more than 25 years. Byrne's reminiscences give us a rare look at Chase's lead playing days with Woody and some insight into his trumpet playing. Sollenberger and Oatts were a part of Chase's last ensemble and offer rare insights into the last hurrah of the band "Chase."

William Chase

William Chase was born to John & Emily Chiaiese in Squantum, Massachusetts on October 20, 1934. I don't know when his family changed their name to Chase but like many immigrants of that era, an Americanized surname eased one into the mainstream of society and lessened the opportunity for discrimination. He studied with Armando Ghitalla, Al Tobias, and John Coffey. His early days are well-chronicled by others, and sources for further reading about Bill's career are listed at the end of this article.

His college years were spent at Berklee School of Music in the late 1950s. After graduating from Berklee he went directly to Maynard Ferguson's band where he played lead. The recordings from this period are true classics. They capture a fire and the beginnings of a lead playing style that would become universal among lead trumpet players around the world.

From there it was on to the Stan Kenton band for a short stint. After Kenton, Chase joined Woody Herman's band where he would find a home, on and off, for about 10 years. I believe it was during this time that he moved to Las Vegas. Unlike the corporate atmosphere of today, Vegas was a city that was pure entertainment, and there was an abundance of work for musicians. Bill's most steady gig was with the "Viva Les Girls" show where his high-note playing and endurance were a necessity. I can imagine him sitting around between shows thinking that there has got to be another avenue for his talent. Chase, the band, was formulated during this time with rehearsals and demos ready to break new ground. The result was a hit record with all the trimmings to go with it. Keep in mind that Chicago; Blood, Sweat & Tears; Lighthouse; and similar groups had paved the way. Chase was at the right place at the right time. The listening public could accept a group of four trumpeters screaming away with vocals, imaginative arrangements, and improvisation. Success associated with this first album allowed the group to tour the world and enjoy all the fruits of success in the music business. However, the glamour was short-lived as the next two albums failed to sustain mass audience attention. Bill was forced to regroup and try to regain the early success with a new ensemble and a fourth album.

Bill Byrne

Bill Byrne heard his first Woody Herman record in 1948 while studying with Bob Scriver in Browning, Montana. He studied at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music for five years where his teachers were Frank Simon, Henry Wolgemuth, and Eugene Blee. From there he went to the U.S. Naval Academy Band where he played cornet in the concert band and lead trum-

"On August 9, 1974 a two-engine Piper Comanche crashed during a heavy rainstorm outside of Jackson, Minnesota, proving fatal to four musicians on their way to a performance at the Jackson County Fair, close to the Iowa/Minnesota border. The casualties were Bill Chase 39, trumpeter; Wally Yohn, organist, 27; Walter Clark, bassist, 25; John Emma, 22; plus an unnamed pilot of the craft. They were within 75 yards of their destination.

Chase achieved the height of his fame a few years back when Chase, a nine-piece jazz-rock group, was organized. It consisted of four trumpets, organ, guitar, bass, drums, and vocalist. Prior to that he worked in Las Vegas, with Woody Herman's Herd as brass leader for a period of years. In 1971, Chase recorded his first album and won popular acclaim for its live performances in the Downbeat Polls. Readers voted Chase the No. 1 Pop Album of the Year, the band No. 2 among rock/pop/blues groups, No. 5 on trumpet himself, and No. 2 Pop Musician of the Year.

His album sold in excess of 3,000,000 copies. *Ennea*, his album to follow, was a great disappointment. He composed a neo-symphonic suite which did not grasp the attention of the public. The new Pure *Music* climbed steadily with unspeculated sales...'

pet in one of the big bands. While there, he completed his masters degree in performance at Catholic University. After his stint in the service he moved to New York City where he played with Larry Elgart's band and pursued the life of a freelance musician. Bill plays a Benge 2x medium-large plus with a Bach 3C mouthpiece.

Eventually, Byrne joined Woody Herman's band where he played trumpet and managed the band for more than 25 years. Band members had affectionately dubbed Woody "Road Father." To my mind and countless other sidemen, Byrne was "Son of Road Father." I personally remember Bill cashing in some of his personal investments in order to bail out the band during lean times and working miracles to get the band from one gig to the next. He deserves his own article some day. Bill's reminiscences give us a rare look at Chase's lead playing days with Woody and some insight as to his trumpet playing.

JLB: When did you first meet Bill Chase?

BB: I met him at Jake Koven's practice studios in New York City. Five dollars got you 12 hours of practice in those days. Sometimes I would watch the studio for Jake and he'd let me practice for nothing. Bill used to practice there when he was in the city.

JLB: Is that how you got the job with Woody?

BB: Well, kind of. I was in Jim 'n Andy's (a favorite watering hole and ersatz office among musicians) with Bill Berry when Berry got a call from Chase looking for three trumpet players. One thing led to



The Chase band at Club La Bastille in Houston, Texas (1973).
Russ Freeland, Jerry Van Blair, Carl Hafeli, Jay Sollenberger, & Bill Chase. (Photo by Nelson Hatt, courtesy of Jay Sollenberger)

another and I got a call from Chase to go with the band. I told him I was basically a section player and didn't play any lead or jazz but my range was about an E-flat above high C. He said "that's OK man, we can't all be stars." This was in 1965.

JLB: He was managing the band at the time?

BB: Well, Bill did all the hiring for the brass and Nat Pierce did the rest. I started out on third and eventually ended up playing the fifth book. After the first two weeks Woody asked Bill why I was still in the band. Bill told him I was playing the parts as good as anyone. He knew I was practicing them every day.

JLB: What horn was Bill playing at that time?

BB: I think he was playing his Martin, but I also think he was starting to get into Schilke around then.

JLB: Did Bill play all the lead?

BB: At that time they tried to have three lead players and two jazzers. One reason Bill sounded so strong on lead is because of Jerry Lamy. Jerry was indestructible and he was always there for him. He would cover what lead Bill didn't play and support him all the way. They were great buddies.

JLB: Was Bill writing for the band at that time?

BB: Yes he was. As a matter of fact, he was working on charts for the band when I met him at Koven's studio. I'd hear him pounding away at the piano.

JLB: You were great friends I take it.

BB: Oh yeah, we were pals. I guess it's because I like to eat and drink wine, and that's what he loved to do. We'd eat tons of food before a job, especially if it was an Italian restaurant. Teo Macero's (legendary producer for Miles Davis at Columbia records) mother had a restaurant in Glens Falls, New York. Whenever the band played there they'd have supper for us. They were feasts. I recall when we were in Milan in 1969, he asked the concierge for a good restaurant. He directed us to a tiny joint in an alley where we had our first taste of Mediterranean scampi. We ended up eating four servings each. Bill was also a terrific cook. He could make all kinds of Italian dishes.

JLB: Did Bill have a regular warm up?

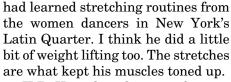
BB: He would do long tones and intervals if he had time before a gig. He also liked to use a warm down. It was basically starting at the top and coming down. That was a ritual when time permitted. He also had a set of physical exercises that he did all his life. He

"Leading a trumpet section is Chase's natural habitat, and the one he has gathered here is first-rate. In full cry, it rivals the best ever assembled, in or out of studios. The trumpets give the band its own special character and color, and their energy output, range, bite, and precision are something else."

- Dan Morgenstern. downbeat, June 24, 1971.

The 1971 album Chase on Epic Records sold over 3-million copies and included Open Up Wide, Livin' in Heat, Hello Groceries, Handbags and Gladrags, Get It On, Boys and Girls Together, and the suite Invitation to a River. (See the lead part to Get It On on the next page.) The trumpet section consisted of Bill Chase, Alan Ware, Ted Piercefield, and Jerry Van Blair.

The album *Chase* has been reissued as a CD (Sony A26660) by One-Way Records and may be ordered from your local record store or the Bill Chase website at www.great-music/bill-chase. The band's other albums include *Ennea* and *Pure Music*.



JLB: How about his range?

BB: He told me the way he got his range was long tones. When he was a kid he'd work his long tones and intervals a half step at a time. He would expand the exercise a half step at a time and wouldn't move to the next half step until he really had it locked in. So his range wasn't some natural or freak thing, he worked his ass off on it! Another thing about Bill was that he could analyze chop problems and figure out solutions. If someone got a cut or something, he would figure out what the guy was doing wrong.

JLB: Did he mention any specific teachers?

BB: John Coffey and Al Tobias were two I remember.

JLB: How did he lead the section? **BB:** He was a stickler for accuracy. He would call sectional rehearsals just to work on tone quality and cut-offs. We'd run some things as many as 20 times until it was really solid.

And when we got to the gig, we played it that way too. One thing I noticed is that the band played with a big open sound. It was the loudest I ever played but it was solid and mu-



Photo courtesy of Tommy Martin



First trumpet part, used by Bill Chase, to *Get It On.* (From the band's orginal chart. Courtesy of Cha-Bil Music, Linda Chase, and Tommy Martin.)



sical. The section really blended well even on the soft passages.

JLB: Was he a screamer if he thought someone wasn't up to par?

BB: No. He would give you the "ray," look out the side of his eye at you, or have a talk with the player. If the guy wouldn't cooperate, he'd get somebody who would. Another thing is that Bill would listen to the balance of the whole band. He was very aware of what the band was doing. He would talk it over with Nat and the guys to make it better all the time.

JLB: Any other stories?

BB: Well, here's something we used to get a kick out of. He'd ask Nat Pierce if it was a sit-down gig or a stand-up gig. He had sit-down pants and stand-up pants.

JLB: Tight pants for the stand-up gigs, \grave{a} la Tom Jones?

BB: That's right. You know Bill was also an excellent photographer. He took his 16 mm movie camera to Africa when we were on tour there in 1966. He shot a tremendous amount of footage and made a great movie about the band being there. Unfortunately the film got stolen when Bill's apartment was looted after the plane crash. We never found out who took it. Woody was thinking of having Bill write music for the film and have the band record it.

JLB: How long was he in the band with you?

BB: Let's see. From August '65 to August '66. He left after a gig at the Tropicana Hotel in Vegas. He left to play the "Viva Les Girls" show, taking over for Charlie Turner. It was kind of a shock for Bill because it was a different kind of playing. Three shows a night took a lot of endurance. When they redesigned that show, they had Bill out front playing trumpet with beads hanging all over him. When the other players in Vegas would put him on about this he'd say, "Man I get a hundred bucks a week extra." He came back to Woody's band in either February or March 1969 and played until September.

JLB: Was it in Vegas that he got the idea to start his own band?

BB: I think so because he went out to Los Angeles to visit Woody and talk it over. Woody told him to definitely do it.

JLB: I know Woody loved Bill like a son.

BB: Oh yeah. They drove around together all the time. They both loved sport cars. Sometimes they'd take off in Woody's Corvette before the gig was over. We'd end up finishing some dance gigs with four trumpets and no leader.

JLB: When did you first hear Bill's band?

BB: It was at the Pussycat á Go Go when we were playing at Caesar's Palace. That was around 1970. They would play five sets from 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. Bill lived in some little apartments behind the

Tropicana Hotel, and that's where we would go to eat. Bill was a very good chef, and he'd really put on a feast after the gigs.

JLB: Did Bill do a lot of experimenting with equipment?

BB: No, not too much. He pretty much played the same horn all the time as far as I can remember. I'm pretty sure it was a Martin.

JLB: Thanks Bill. By the way I like your idea about having a convention of fourth and fifth trumpet players. I definitely fit into that category. Maybe we can get out a newsletter for a National Association of Fourth and Fifth Trumpeters of America (NAFFTA) that doesn't go above the letter Q in the alphabet. All those interested write or e-mail me and I'll get it organized.

BB: Glad to pitch in. It was fun!

Jay Sollenberger

Jay Sollenberger began his musical training in McPherson, Kansas. He attended Wichita State University and the University of North Texas. He was a member of the One O'Clock Lab Band. In 1973 he joined Chase and played with his group until Bill's untimely death. He started touring with Stan Kenton in 1974 and after three years he went on to join the Woody Herman Orchestra. He also did stints with Buddy Rich. Jay is currently a clinician for United Musical Instruments and plays Benge trumpets.

JLB: What are your earliest remembrances of Bill Chase the trumpet player?

JS: I remember listening to recordings of Woody's band back when I was in college. Up until this time I was more into Stan Kenton and hadn't heard much of



Jay Sollenberger in concert at Hutchinson Kansas Community College (1977).



Opening bars and coda to the trumpet part of *Open Up Wide* in Bill Chase's handwriting. (Courtesy of Cha-Bil Music, Linda Chase, and Tommy Martin.)

Woody's band. When I heard those recordings I was knocked out with the band and especially Bill Chase.

JLB: What was your first experience with Bill?

JS: I remember that pretty well. I got the job through recommendations and flew to Chicago to hook-up with the band. We rehearsed at Universal Studios for about a week and a half and then went on the road. I remember one rehearsal that started at midnight, and we were still going when another band came in to use the studio at 8:00 a.m. Most of the rehearsals were four or five hours. I remember our first gig was in Houston at the La Bastile Club and we were using wire music stands. Later that summer we played at the Trumpet Symposium in Denver. That was the year before ITG was formed.

JLB: If I remember correctly, it was at this time Bill was still experimenting and trying to get a new direction. Is that right?

JS: That's correct.

JLB: Was the record company still involved or was Bill saying, "This is what we're gonna' do"?

JS: A little bit of both. Bill would say this is what we want to do and the company would say well, we don't think so. As a result, we ended up getting rid of the trombone and percussion, and we made several attempts at creating another hit like *Get It On*. Remember, at one time the band owned its own plane with Chase written on the tail. By the time I joined, we were all traveling by rent-a-car.

JLB: Are there any trumpet tips you picked up from him you'd like to pass along?

JS: Well, he always warmed up. Sometimes not for very long but he'd always play one high note to make sure he had it before he went on stage. That's because he started each concert with a cadenza solo. He'd start improvising and playing a little bit higher, and when he was ready we'd kick off a tune.

JLB: Fill us in a little more on the show.

JS: We'd start every show in the dark. We had to find our way to the stage in the dark. There would be a spot light on Bill as he started on a double high c''. He'd do the cadenza for awhile, using electronics, playing high notes, blusey licks – the works. When he was ready, he'd play a certain lick four times, and we knew it was our cue to start the tune *Open Up Wide*.

JLB: Did you pick up a lot of tips on trumpet playing from him?

JS: This was my first professional road band experience and I never thought to talk shop. I guess I could have learned from him if I had only asked. One thing I did learn was style. I picked up on his way of falling off a note using all three valves and continuing down a long way. Also, he'd play a high a'' with all three valves down. I don't know anybody else who does that. It wasn't from Maynard, because Maynard would use a different valve combination every time

he played up there. He taught me how to back off and shape phrases so you don't have to play loud all the time and how to really play short notes short. I was always impressed with his concept of time. Sometimes he'd be so on top of the beat he'd be almost pushing us. He was definitely unique. Nobody played like him. He was an original.

One thing I do remember is that he'd insist we play with our feet apart. I was the biggest offender. He'd stick his foot in and pull my feet apart. He believed you could afford the air better with the proper posture. He probably learned that from Maynard. He also had this yoga thing where he could release air just when it was about to give out. He'd contract the stomach muscles to force the air from the diaphragm. It would look like he was breathing but he wasn't. I used that quite a bit when I was with Stan Kenton. I'm not sure if I learned correctly but it seemed to help.

JLB: How about his writing?

JS: He developed skills in that area very well. He knew how to write for the entire band. The horns and rhythm sections were very similar to that of Woody Herman. Very much like the exciting chart he wrote for Woody called 23 Red. He had a way of writing for the trumpet section that was unusual. He'd write the first eight bar phrase for the first player playing lead, then the second player would pick it up for eight and so on down the line. It kept the music interesting for the section.

JLB: What equipment do you remember Bill using? **JS:** I believe his horn was a Schilke B3 with a tunable beryllium bell, and the mouthpiece was a 6A4A. We all used Yamaha flugelhorns at that time.

Jim Oatts

Jim Oatts received his BME at Metropolitan State College in Denver, Colorado and did his graduate work at VanderCook College of Music in Chicago. Jim is currently a music educator in Rippey, Iowa. His professional credits include touring with Chase, Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, Wilson Pickett, Thad Jones-Mel Lewis, and others. He can be heard on dozens of recordings and TV shows. He has worked in jazz education with the Clark Terry Jazz Camp and the S.W. Community Jazz Camp. He has been the director of the Des Moines Big Band since 1987.

JLB: How did you first meet Bill?

JO: I introduced myself to him when I was a kid. I don't want to say he was arrogant, but he was very sure of himself and at the top of the ladder. When I finally got to know him on the road, he was a puppy dog. A genuine human being.

JLB: How did you get the gig?

JO: Well, two of the band members were from Iowa and recommended me. I took Jerry Van Blair's place.

JLB: Do you remember any specific trumpet techniques you might have picked up from Bill? I remember him showing me the left-hand grip I use to take pressure off my chops.

JO: I moved my grip down at that time too. I always played with my ring finger in the valve slide. Pulling back seemed to center it more on the top lip rather than the bottom. By moving it down it seemed like I had a better control over the horn. Bill showed me that.

I remember asking him how he got such iron chops and was able to do so much work all night. He kind of laughed and said, "long tones." Sometimes we'd be off for a week, and he wouldn't touch his horn. He'd have some rough moments, but he was strong, and he'd pull it together. I believe he did work out. I used to see ankle weights and stuff like that around his room. I don't know for sure that he did a regular workout, but I suspect he did.

JLB: I remember a gig the band played and I happened to be off stage. I just couldn't believe the energy level. Was it always like that?

JO: Every night was that way. When we got there to play it was like, "go for it." Everybody was good friends. There was no bickering that I've seen on so many other road bands. Bill treated you with respect,



Jim Oatts



Bill Chase. (Photo courtesy of Jim Oatts)

so you really wanted to play and make it happen. He was the kind of guy that, if you asked him for \$500, he'd give it to you if he had it - no hassles. I'd never experienced that kind of respect before on a band.

JLB: How about rehearsals?

JO: I remember my first rehearsal very well. He said here are the parts, memorize them in a week. He was a great believer in letting things happen naturally. The band was his idea, and we worked on locking in with him.

JLB: How about preparation for the gig?

JO: I'd hear him warm up before a gig, and he'd really warm the horn up. You know, he'd take it up to the top. Basically his warm up was short and sweet to get it working, not burn it all up before the gig. For two hours that was a demanding book, we'd play an awful lot, especially him. He not only played with the section but did the majority of the solo work as well. Sometimes I thought the band got way, way too loud, but that was the whole rock and roll syndrome. Actually, I suffered a little hearing loss because of it. When Bill hit double high c""s through those giant monitors, you thought your fillings would come out.

JLB: What about your final days with the band?

JO: Well, we played in Texas and then had five days off. At the time we were all living in Chicago and I hadn't been home to see my family in maybe six or seven months. The next gig was above the Iowa



Jim Oatts, Bryron Lingenfelter, Jay Sollenberger, Bill Chase, & Dart Brown at the band's last job in Houston, Texas. (Photo courtesy of Jim Oatts)

line in Jackson, Minnesota. So all us from this area went home and got together to drive up to Jackson. Well, the band was always late and we thought Bill and the rest were driving and didn't give it too much thought. We kind of soothed the promoter and all that. But when it got to a certain point, we called Beacon Artists in Chicago and found out that they flew. It got to the point where it was obvious the gig had to be canceled. It turned out they were in a severe storm, and it was probably a wind shear that took the plane down. There probably hasn't been a day that's gone by when I don't think about that guy. He'll always be with me. They weren't found until the next morning. The authorities called and told us there were no survivors. My father is a musician and they asked him to identify everybody, but he just couldn't do it. It was a very sad time for all of us.

JLB: And for us too. Jim, thanks for taking the time to talk with us.

JO: You're very welcome.

More On Bill Chase

Pat Dorian has made a valuable contribution to the documentation of Bill Chase's career in the form of three research papers available from: International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE), PO Box 724, Manhattan, KS 66505-0724 USA; 913-776-8744; fax 913-776-6190; IAJE@ksu.edu.

Pat Dorian. "Interviews of Maynard Ferguson and Roger Middelton." *IAJE*, Vol. XII, 1992.

Pat Dorian. "Bill Chase, The Early Years in Boston: An Interview with Herb Pomerov." *IAJE*, Vol. XIV, 1994.

Pat Dorian. "Woody Herman's Fourth Herd With Bill Chase: An interview with Paul Fontaine." *IAJE*, Vol. XV, 1995. Dorian is an assistant professor of music at the University of Pennsylvania at East Stroudsburg and national chair of the IAJE Jazz Festivals and Summer Jazz Studies. He recently played on the new Phil Woods Big Band album *Celebration* on Concord Jazz and wrote the liner notes for Urbie Green's new album *Sea Jam Blues*. Pat plays a Bach Strad 37 and is "in between mouthpieces."

For those of you interested in hearing Bill Chase's work with Maynard Ferguson, I highly recommend *The Complete Roulette Recordings of Maynard Ferguson and his Orchestra* on Mosaic MD10-156 (10-CD boxed set, with 141 tracks from 1958-1962). However, some of the personal remembrances in the enclosed booklet are, to me, somewhat suspect.

Tommy Martin

Trumpet player and promoter Tommy Martin was a close personal friend of Woody Herman's. Tommy knew of Chase's talent so when Woody suggested including Bill in their dinner plans one night, Tommy agreed. Over this monumental meal at Mike Fish's Restaurant in Chicago, Bill described his new project and Tommy wanted to hear it. They went to Bill's hotel room and listened to the instrumental demo tape of Get It On. Martin was so excited about the project that he later flew to Vegas to hear the band live. Bill picked Tommy up at the airport in his Corvette and immediately ran out of gas. They pushed it to a gas station where Bill guipped, "Great way to impress my future manager." After hearing the band Tommy told Bill, "I love it and want to run with it." He and Bill sealed their long-term business relationship on the spot. Martin became Bill's agent/manager and the rest, as they say, is history. What evolved was a lasting bond between them that transcended tremendous success, acclaim, hardship, and tragedy.

Tommy still has Bill's Yamaha flugelhorn and Schilke B-3 trumpet (serial #3917 with a tunable beryllium bell) that were in a leather gig bag at the time of the crash. They are reminders of how quickly a career can come to an end and how quickly a talent can be gone ... but not forgotten.

