

ONE NIGHT NOT long ago, a group of friends met at the home of Jean Gleason in Berkeley, California. They came from different parts of the Bay Area and different walks of life. Over the dinner table, with the lights of San Francisco and the Bay Bridge as a backdrop through the western windows, the conversation was light and literate, touching on the arts and issues that crop up in gatherings like this throughout the country.

But after a while the mood turned mellow. Slowly the guests filed into Jean's living room, arranged themselves on couches and cushions, and waited as the lights dimmed to darkness and a motion picture projector came to life. The film was *Anatomy Of A Hit*, produced by Jean's late husband, the noted jazz critic Ralph Gleason, for public television in 1963. For the next few hours, everyone watched silently as images of a short stocky man with thick-rimmed glasses and an improbable mustache flickered across the screen. He joked with acquaintances in the shadows of the past, hustled into late-night bistros long since forgotten by today's young San Franciscans, scribbled messages to himself on a basement pipe, clambered playfully onto an empty storage shelf in the warehouse at Fantasy records, and above all, he played the piano.

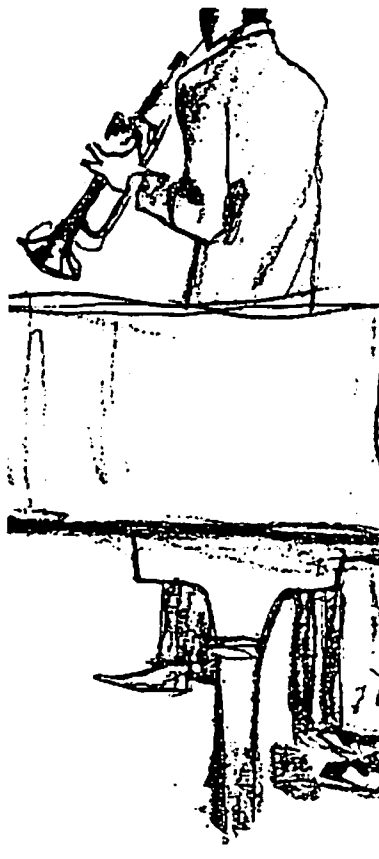
In recording studios, in North Beach nightclubs, in his own house, where he kept a battered spinet and a baby grand only a few yards from one another in case inspiration hit too suddenly to move, Vince Guaraldi was filmed behind the keys. Away from the instrument he seemed restless, a cigarette burning the minutes away until he could sit down and explore some new ideas. Throughout his career, Vince was an explorer, peering down unfamiliar musical paths in search of new changes, new rhythms, yet never forgetting his own voice, which spoke best in the language of melodic simplicity.

All around the room Jean Gleason's friends looked into the distant years. Most of them had known Vince back in the halcyon days of San Francisco jazz, the late '50s and early '60s. Some had first met him in the '70s, after he had attained fame as the soundtrack pianist and composer for the *Peanuts* television specials, or as the Grammy Award-winning creator of "Cast Your Fate To The Wind," one of the first records by a jazz musician to break into the national Top 40 listings. The rest had never met him, but because of his music and the legacy he left among his many colleagues still playing jazz in his old home town, they smiled at his picture as if they had known him too.

Perhaps an empty chair should have been left at the table that night for Vince. He would have fit right in, maybe dominated the conversation with his energetic banter, even as his image, frozen from nearly twenty years before, drew the room's attention now. Like the Blackhawk, the Trident, the Matador, and the world that he and the people at Jean Gleason's had shared, Vince Guaraldi is gone, the victim of a heart attack between sets at Butterfield's in Menlo Park on February 6, 1976. He was 47 years old.

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Vince Guaraldi



Remembering the Man Behind "Cast Your Fate To The Wind"

"Music was a part of his heritage. There were two other musicians in the family, my two brothers," recalls Carmella Guaraldi, Vince's mother. "Muzzy Marcellino was with Art Linkletter's *House Party* show — he's my youngest brother — and Joe Marcellino was a very popular local violinist. So music was in the family, and Vince showed signs of his talent when he was about five years old, keeping beats when Muzzy played. He was very interested in the piano, so when he was about seven I started giving him lessons."

Vincent Anthony Guaraldi, born in San Francisco in 1928, had already begun building the foundations of his style on the rolling rhythms of Meade Lux Lewis and Albert Ammons by the time he got to Lincoln High School. "Vince was very popular because he was playing boogie woogie," his mother remembers. "He had a very strong ear, and he played by ear for the longest time, up until when he graduated and went into the service."

After returning from his stint in Korea, Vince went to work as an apprentice at the *San Francisco Daily News*. There, in 1949, he

suffered an accident that almost severed a finger. It was this incident, along with his family's encouragement and his own desire to develop his talent, that committed him to the music world full-time. He played his first professional gig that year, with Kermit Scott, former saxophonist with Thelonious Monk, and began attending classes at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and frequenting local clubs. In 1950, he went to work with vibraphonist Cal Tjader.

"I was playing with Dave Brubeck in the Octet when I met Vince," Tjader says. "He was a young kid who used to come sit in on our Sunday sessions, but we didn't actually start working together until after I left Brubeck. He was very much influenced by Bud Powell in that early period, and he had tremendous drive. He comped with his left hand like Powell, and played a lot of single-note melodies with speed and agility in his right hand. We used to have very friendly but argumentative discussions on the philosophy of music. Sometimes we'd end up screaming at each other, but it was always resolved. I used to say, 'Vince, voice it like this,' and he'd

By Bob Dwyer and



SELF-PORTRAIT AND TYPE DESIGN BY VINCE GUARALDI. COURTESY CARMELA GUARALDI

Fate To The Wind"

say, 'No, this is the way I'm gonna play,' and then it would be boom and bang, but we'd always end up together having a belt at the bar."

Guaraldi was with Tjader's group until 1953, when he left to play with trombonist Bill Harris and bassist Chubby Jackson, but in 1957 he rejoined Cal for a two-year stint. "Vince and I roomed together on the road during that time," Tjader says, "and we had a lot of laughs, especially at Lake Tahoe, when we had a great group with [percussionists] Willie Bobo, Mongo Santamaria, and [bassist] Al McKibbin. We got into a lot of trouble at the blackjack table, which means that we got half whacked and proceeded to win a whole lot of dough. I remember him falling off the barstool because he hit blackjack with about two or three hundred bucks down, and he couldn't believe it."

Most of Vince's friends from the old days remember both his personality and keyboard style as energetic and extroverted. Musically, bebop and Bud Powell had replaced his earlier, boogie woogie approach, a progression many young pianists of the day

were following. Dean Reilly, Guaraldi's bassist during the mid-'50s, remembers that "his left hand wasn't very strong, but his right hand was really powerful. He could really bring out a melody, and he also did those double-time things very well, especially in the key of F — boy, look out!"

"He loved to play the blues," muses Larry Yukovich, another close friend of Guaraldi's and his only piano student. "Bill Evans opened up certain harmonic ideas in him, but Vince never got really far out harmonically. He always played with strong feeling, and he could play very simply. Also it was very personal. I'm sure he liked a lot of different styles, but you could always hear his personality."

In his notes for a 1964 show at the San Francisco Museum of Art, Ralph Gleason wrote, "Mr. Guaraldi's approach to the piano is essentially lyrical. He finds his satisfaction in melody; his songs have clear, 'singing' themes, but always with a strong jazz pulse to give them the hard edge of the jazz feeling that is known as 'swinging.' He is a Schubert rather than a Mozart, and always with a sense of humor."

From the performer's angle, Seward McCain, Guaraldi's last bassist during the '70s, assesses his style as "very spontaneous. He was like a tiger at the piano. He would pounce on the keyboard and rock back and forth on the piano bench to get the song going. His music was very much 'right now'; you never quite knew what was going to happen next."

Tjader agrees. "In the beginning, he was so excited in his playing, it was like trying to hold back a colt or a stallion," he insists. "He had a tendency to play too much behind me sometimes, but after months of hassling and screaming and all that, eventually he became aware of the fact that you don't play every tune like a bebop express running 120 miles an hour. I think his interest in bossa nova mellowed him out a little, and allied itself to his single-line right-hand approach, because you don't hear a lot of block chord playing in that soft Brazilian style."

It was during a trip to New York with Tjader that Vince had his first exposure to Latin American music, a style that was to have a profound effect on his own playing. Years before most American musicians were even aware of bossa nova, Guaraldi was looking for ways to blend the piano into the hypnotic rhythms and soft textures that music required. But before delving into its subtleties, Vince put his effort into winning a gig with one of the most prestigious big bands in the country. From 1956 to '57, and again on an international tour in '59, he was on the road with Woody Herman and his Thundering Herd.

George diQuattro, a San Francisco jazz pianist who knew Vince from the early '50s, remembers Guaraldi's encounter with Herman. "Vince went and auditioned, but he couldn't cut it; his reading wasn't good enough," he says. "So he went and locked himself in his room for almost a year. He didn't come out and play gigs until he had learned to read. The next year, when Woody came back to San Francisco, Vince did another audition, and this time he got the gig. He had been woodshedding for almost a

year because he was so bugged about not cutting it the first time. That's the kind of guy he was."

"I believe I met Vince through Ralph Gleason and a lot of his friends in the Bay Area," Woody Herman adds. "Most of all I was impressed at how inventive and natural a player he was. His reading wasn't that fabulous, but I don't think that was important to him, and it certainly wasn't to us. The only album he recorded with our band was *Blues Groove* on Capitol [now out of print], which shows something of what he was required to do, and he was very capable of doing it."

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"I can remember following Woody Herman in '46, from San Jose to Oakland to San Francisco," Vince Guaraldi said. He was speaking with Ralph Gleason, sitting in the Gleason living room, being filmed for the movie that his friends would watch there nearly 20 years later. "I always saw pictures of Woody Herman smiling — you know that smile — and I saw this salty cat on the stage like that, and it was beautiful, because the band was something. It scared me to death; it was like a three-ring circus."

Vince was crewcut then — it was still the beatnik, pre-hippie era in the North Beach — but he was already twirling the points of his mustache, soon to blossom into a spectacular handlebar and, eventually, muttonchops. The cigarette smoke hung between him and the camera as he paused between thoughts. "See, before I was a performing musician, I was a fan, you know, and I know what it is to stand out there by the stage and watch them cats, to really see them. I know what it is to look at musicians and think they're glamorous. At one time in my life I felt that deeply, you know, but one trip on the road and I knew that what you think is glamor is really beat. They're not cool, man; they just can't move. All they're thinking about is: 'It's a hundred more miles before we hit the bed.'"

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Vince did his share of travelling with Herman, fulfilling an ambition to play in Carnegie Hall, and even going as far as Great Britain, Holland, and Saudi Arabia. In later years he would do more touring on his own, and for a while he settled in Los Angeles, but in the end he was a Bay Area homebody. He lived in Daly City, then Mill Valley, and played jazz steadily from Monterey to Concord.

Vince's longtime guitarist, Eddie Duran, recalls that "he seemed to be pretty content. He did talk at times of moving to LA, but I think he really dug staying in the area, because he was sure of himself. When you're sure of where you are as an artist, you don't seek to go other places to prove it. You don't have to prove it to anyone but yourself, so he felt he could do anything anywhere."

With the '60s, Guaraldi began to establish himself both locally and nationally. Well-known musicians began listening to his early work with Bola Sete and following his lead into playing jazz with a soft Brazilian tinge. Sergio Mendes expressed his respect for



Guaraldi with John Scott Trotter, arranger for Peanuts soundtracks.

PHOTO COURTESY TEE MENDRISON

ONE OF VINCE Guaraldi's most popular works is "Linus And Lucy," which he wrote and recorded for the *Peanuts* television specials. His performance can be heard on three albums: *Vince Guaraldi's Greatest Hits* [Fantasy, 4505], *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* [Fantasy, 8430], and *Oh, Good Grief* [Warner Bros., 1747]. Several elements of his later piano style are evident in this transcription, especially his fondness for open voicings, which is most apparent in the right hand during the main theme and through much of the first 16-bar solo passage; fourths, fifths, and major thirds abound, lending to the childlike flavor of the piece. But Guaraldi also had a gift for straight-ahead jazz improvisation. When the rhythm switches from straight eighths to swing in the second solo break, he creates a highly melodic single-line variation on the theme from his previous solo, using perhaps his most recognizable lick, which also kicked off the solo in "Cast Your Fate To The Wind," in bars 8 and 9. One aspect of his style that could not be easily notated here was his knack for gently pushing the rhythm with slight pauses between notes to complement melodic leaps; a momentary breath should be dropped between the C₄ and the higher B₄ in bar 6, for instance. When playing a solo, Guaraldi used his left hand sparsely, without complex harmonies, so to save space, only the right-hand solo lines are given here.

—BD

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Vince's talent, and reports circulated that Miles Davis had asked him to join his band. As far as the public was concerned, though, Guaraldi got his big break in 1962, with the recording of "Cast Your Fate To The Wind."

"I can remember when that tune was being born," says Dean Reilly. "Vince wasn't alone in writing it; he had some help from [bassist] John Mosher, who was working with Vince in those days. I remember hearing it when they were just putting it together, and I said, 'Oh, boy, that's nice.'"

Ironically, "Cast Your Fate" was included on Vince's album *Black Orpheus* purely as an afterthought. Strongly moved by the soundtrack to the film *Black Orpheus*, Guaraldi had put together an LP featuring his interpretations of the movie's bossa nova-like material. When Fantasy records informed him that there wasn't enough of it to fill both sides of the album, he laid down a few extra tunes, including "Cast Your Fate," as filler material. The opening cut, "Samba De Orpheus," was selected for release as a single; "Cast Your Fate" was put on the flip side only because it was the one other track that would fit a 45 rpm record. But a Sacramento, California, disc jockey fell in love with the B-side and began playing it once every hour on his show. Soon it was catching on throughout the country.

With its unpretentious, almost stark

framework, catchy theme, and tastefully restrained performance, the disc established Guaraldi's sound in the ears of many young record buyers who had only been exposed to rock. Some jazz lovers, predictably, were quick to accuse Vince of "selling out" in order to win commercial success, but those who knew his style could hear that, as ever, he was playing from the heart. "When he started doing 'Cast Your Fate,' Vince was definitely developing his own style," explains Eddie Duran. "He started getting more contemporary, listening to a lot more of the sounds that were going on at that time, but he never went too far from his jazz-oriented approach. And he always swung."

"I worked with Vince just before he did 'Cast Your Fate,'" says drummer Benny Barth. "We'd been playing it a lot, although we were mainly a jazz group. He hadn't really gotten into the pop thing yet. But throughout his life he remained a great improviser, no matter what kind of music he was playing, and he didn't change his scene just to make money. He had a purpose in mind, and I'm sure he was looking to reach a wider range of younger people at that time."

"Vince, did you sell out with 'Cast Your Fate'?"

Guaraldi leaned back in the comfortably worn black chair that still sits in the Gleason

living room, then smiled at the camera. "No, I bought in."

"I'll tell you when I wrote it," he continued. "I think it was in '58, just about when I left Cal. In fact I brought it to Cal, but I never played it until after I left Woody, when I was at the Outside At The Inside in Palo Alto."

"When you first started to play it, were there reactions from the audience right away?" Ralph Gleason asked.

Guaraldi thought for a moment. "It was unconscious at first," he began, "but I started realizing that it was an identification with me. People used to ask me about this song. Every time I play this tune I really get a reaction. Most of the time, it's one group digging what you're doing, and one is not. But this tune kind of encompassed the whole thing. You could fill up the room with this tune."

The film had opened with Vince and his trio restaging the recording of the "Cast Your Fate." He played it in A₄, his stubby hands coaxing the theme out over the open fifth in the lower register. From somewhere beneath the opened lid of the grand piano, cigarette smoke floated with the melody toward the ceiling.

With "Cast Your Fate" in the charts for 22 weeks, Guaraldi's sound offers and audiences still find him. The changed climate en... in his

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investigation of new settings and sounds, but he had no clue that it would lead to the most ambitious project of his career, the composition and performance of the first jazz mass ever staged in America.

The Reverend Charles Gompertz was then 25 years old, on the staff of St. John's Church in Ross, California. "I read in the paper one morning that Jim Pike, who was then bishop of the diocese of California, wanted to do something special to commemorate the completion of Grace Cathedral," Gompertz explains. "One of the things he was talking about was something called a 'Holy Hootenanny,' and I just went through the overhead on that. I was involved with the youth division of the diocese at that time; we were supposed to put that on. So I called him and said, 'Hey, Bishop, what is this stuff? That's ridiculous!' He said, 'Okay. You've got the cathedral in May. You do it, and call me back.'"

The assignment caught Gompertz by surprise. He spent the day wondering desperately what he could do to draw enough people to fill the 2,000-seat cathedral. The answer came, one is tempted to say, providentially on the radio. "Cast Your Fate To The Wind" wafted through the Reverend's speakers, and inspired by the feeling of the piece, Gompertz was able to quickly track Guaraldi down and arrange a luncheon appointment, appropriately at the Trident, where Vince often performed.

"We started talking, and I don't know where the idea came from, but it just built and built," Gompertz relates. "By then I'd formulated the idea that doing a mass was in keeping with the completion of a great cathedral. I kept telling him over and over again, 'I don't want a gimmick. I don't know anything about music, Vince. Music is your department. But I do know about capturing people's spirits, and I do know that church music has to be a vehicle of the time of the people for whom it's played.' Well, he got excited about this, because throughout his whole life, everything Vince did was driven by a desire to communicate."

In order to anticipate criticism from less

At the piano with Woody Herman's Thundering Herd, 1957.

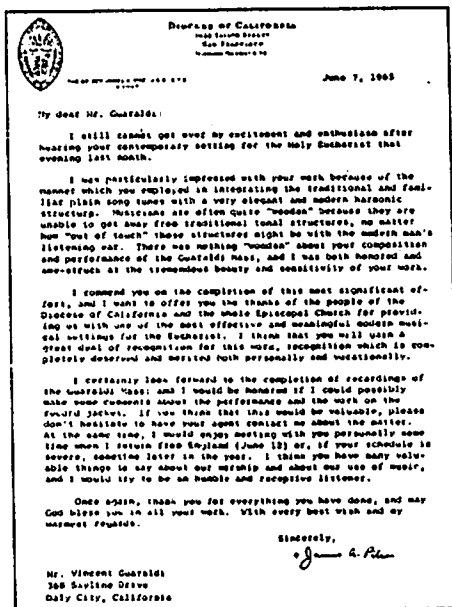


COURTESY CARMELA GUARALDI



COURTESY THE REV. CHARLES GOMPERTZ

The Rev. Charles Gompertz at the Jazz Mass, 1965; Guaraldi in background at right.



jazz-oriented parishioners, Guaraldi, Gompertz, and Barry Mineah, then choirmaster at St. Paul's Church in San Rafael, agreed that the mass should be grounded in the Anglican tradition, so that any Episcopalian could recognize the parts of it. For that reason they chose as the basic springboard the missal *mirialis*, the plainchant setting to the holy communion, with roots all the way back to the tenth century. Further, they carefully probed the Episcopalian hymnbook for the most singable hymns, to encourage a spirit of free participation. And finally, some traditional elements, like organ introductions, were preserved. "We were trying to bring the two traditions together," Gompertz explains, "so that the jazz people could say 'Golly gee whiz, there's jazz in church, and isn't it wonderful?', while the church people could say, 'Gee, I recognize this music! This isn't so bad!' We wanted that 'gee whiz' quality on both sides, and I think we succeeded."

Gompertz looks back warmly on his planning sessions with Vince. "He taught me a lot about music, and I taught him as much theology as I could," he says with a smile. "He was a very bright individual, and we would spend hours discussing the theological points behind the mass. I tried to tell him that he was falling into the same line as Verdi, Mozart, and lots of people who had written masses and faced the same problems of understanding how the liturgy moves and builds toward communion. Through those discussions a mutual respect grew, and we became close friends."

The mass was held at Grace Cathedral on May 21, 1965, with Guaraldi and his trio providing a subdued jazz background to the Gregorian melodies as sung by a 68-member chorus. Perhaps on a personal level, this was the most satisfying achievement of his career. His mother still keeps Bishop Pike's subsequent letter to him framed in her home: "I still cannot get over my excitement and enthusiasm after hearing your contemporary

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setting for the Holy Eucharist. . . . Musicians are often quite 'wooden' because they are unable to get away from traditional tonal structures, no matter how 'out of touch' those structures might be with the modern man's listening ear. There was nothing 'wooden' about your composition and performance of the Guaraldi Mass, and I was both honored and awe-struck at the tremendous beauty and sensitivity of your work."

Most people know Vince's work through the soundtracks to the *Peanuts* television specials and films, however. Lee Mendelson, who has produced them since their inception around 1963, knew exactly what kind of music he wanted from the start: "I somehow thought that a jazz piano track would make us different from all the cartoons that had been done prior to that time, so I called Ralph Gleason and, half kidding, I asked him, 'Do you know a jazz pianist who has a family and kids and who might read *Peanuts*?' And he suggested Vince."

The two men made contact, discussed the project, and went their separate ways, until Guaraldi called Mendelson a few weeks later. "He wanted to play something for me over the phone," Mendelson laughs. "I said, 'It never sounds good on the phone, Vince, so come on over and let's talk,' and he said, 'No, I gotta play this for you.' It was 'Linus And Lucy,' and as soon as I heard that over the phone I just knew this was gonna be it for the next many years."

Guaraldi did 16 half-hour shows and one movie with Mendelson over the next 12 years, working off the story boards and writing to fit the characters and the plots of each episode. They consulted constantly about the tunes, the moods Schulz and Mendelson wanted, the instrumentation: Once they decided to use trombones to capture the sound of Snoopy howling. Toward the end of their association Vince began singing and playing synthesizers and guitars. Usually they used small ensembles, from three to six instruments, with Bing Crosby's arranger, John Scott Trotter, often writing the charts on Guaraldi's tunes.

Since Vince's death, the music to the *Peanuts* programs has been composed by Ed Bogas and Judy Munson. Mendelson is pleased with their work, though he still looks back warmly on his long collaboration with Guaraldi. "I think Vince's music was one of the main contributions that made the Charlie Brown shows successful," he states. "Vince gave it a sound, an individuality, that no other cartoon had ever had. I'd say that over the past 15 years we've received as much mail asking about the music as we have about anything else in the shows. He was a true genius, and we had a marvelous relationship. I still haven't gotten over the shock of his passing away."

Ralph Gleason had raised the question of Guaraldi's new-found public recognition. Vince had an explanation: "See, every morn-



PHOTOS COURTESY IAN GLEASON

ing I go out in front of the house and I write in chalk, *Vince Guaraldi Lives Here.*"

"What is it like to be well-known? Does it change your relationship with people that you know?"

"Well," Vince answered, "the man in the laundromat called me Mr. Guaraldi."

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Despite the *Peanuts* series, Guaraldi made no more hit singles. His follow-up to "Cast Your Fate," "Treat Street," sank quickly into obscurity, and throughout the '70s he found himself playing the local circuits in the Bay Area. Apparently this didn't bother him, or impede his creative instincts. He began incorporating rock elements into his playing,

listening to Chick Corea and early fusion experiments. For a while he worked in a duo-keyboard group, alternating on acoustic piano and Rhodes with his former student Larry Yukovich. He even shifted his focus from the keyboard for a while in order to teach himself guitar.

"He was very moving in the fusion jazz-rock direction. In fact, when I joined him, he was so heavily into fusion things that I almost didn't take the gig," Seward McCain affirms. "He had two 300-watt amps laying on their sides, with a Rhodes straddling them, and he would sit in the middle of it all. It was taking him away from the bebop style. He was also very interested in Chick Corea, and was making a lot of efforts in the last couple of years to evolve his melodic improvising style closer to McCoy Tynerish voicings and suspended chords."

McCain had played with Vince for about two years at a club in Menlo Park called Butterfield's when they began their last gig there on February 6, 1976. "It was a Friday night, I think. We had just played to a pretty full house the first set, and it was quite good. The last song we played was 'Eleanor Rigby' — he had a nice, exciting version of that. Then he went back to his room with our drummer, Jim Zimmerman.

"When Vince fell and hit the floor, Jim got me. We went back and tried to revive him, but it didn't work. He passed away."

Few of Vince's associates suspected that he suffered any health problems. Only a few weeks before his death, he had had a physical check-up, including an EKG, and the results showed him to be in pretty good condition. "I saw him about a week before he passed away," George diQuattro says. "Vince seemed really fine. The only thing I'd heard was that he had seen a doctor because he had stomach problems and was feeling ill and tired. The doctor told him it might just be ulcers, and prescribed him some dumb medicine and told him to forget about it. But it wasn't that. That's really a shame, man. That

With bassist Gene Wright, saxophonist Jerry Dodgion, and unidentified drummer, late '50s.

