A TROMBONE FORCE 11

During its long history Stan Kenton's band aroused strong passions both from those who loved and those who hated the band. Many felt that the band never really swung, despite such early hits as "Eager Beaver," "Artistry in Rhythm," "Intermission Riff" and "The Peanut Vendor." It is true that much of Kenton's music was produced expressly for dancers, amounting at times to merely sophisticated mood music. And Kenton's forays into "concert" music with the various Innovations orchestras, as well as his interpretations of the music of the romantic master Richard Wagner, not to mention the futuristic sounds concocted for the band by the singular Bob Graettinger, were far removed from the mainstream of jazz. Whatever one may think of the controversial Kenton himself and the music he championed, and where their place in the canon of jazz may ultimately be settled, one cannot deny the outstanding soloists that he employed at one time or another. From Stan Getz, Art Pepper and Shelly Manne in the '40s to Lee Konitz and Maynard Ferguson in the '50s and Marvin Stamm in the '60s, and even teen-aged drummer Peter Erskine in the early '70s, there were always some excellent sidemen in the band. The Kenton band was a great popular success in the 1940s, and it remained at least solvent (in part due to the leader's periodic concessions to popular taste) through the '50s, '60s and '70s, when the band experienced a resurgence through Kenton's far-sighted early entry into the new jazz education scene.

Three acknowledged trombone masters put in important apprenticeships in the band at various times: Kai Winding, Frank Rosolino and Carl Fontana. Eddie Bert, another historically significant trombonist, was also an important, if short-term, Kentonite. There were other admirable trombone soloists who will be discussed below, but the trombones in Kenton's bands were much more than just a few fine soloists. The trombone section in the Kenton band was a force. One simply cannot think about the Kenton band without thinking about the big lush sound that emanated from the trombone section. It was one of the first bands to use a five-person section, with the bass trombone (and sometimes tuba, or two bass trombones) an essential part of that section. The fact that some of the Kenton trombone sections' finest moments were in some of the least musically substantial music of the band does not faze the lovers of trombones. And almost independently of the contributions of the trombonists mentioned above, a certain style of Kenton trombone playing developed and was carried on until the end of the band's history.

The solo style so often identified with the Kenton band usually was technically rather simple, in part because the soloist was usually playing quite loud. This was in keeping with the general tenor of the band, known throughout its history as one of the loudest big bands around. Not only was the trombone solo playing loud, but it was also forceful (which is not necessarily the same thing), with considerable rhythmic drive, even if the rhythmic figures were not complex. Often the statements would be expositions of themes, or paraphrases of themes. In a recent release of early Kenton recordings (from 1943–47), annotator and Kenton discographer Michael Sparke sug-

gests that this solo style can be traced back as far as **Freddie Zito**'s brash statement on the May 1945 recording of Kenton's composition "Southern Scandal." The extroverted style was continued through 1945 by the unheralded **Jimmy Simms,** who soloed on a variety of arrangements, both fast and slow, and was the only soloist on an arrangement of Ellington's "Solitude." While one could put Simms' playing into the developing Kenton trombone model, it is also remarkably close (as Sparke suggests) to the style that the great Bill Harris was expounding with Woody Herman's First Herd at the very same time.

Simms might be viewed as merely a warm-up act, however, for the next trombone soloist in the Kenton band, **Kai Winding.** Winding, discussed at length in Chapter 9, is best known in jazz circles for his work in the great trombone duo that he and J. J. Johnson co-led in the 1950s. But his time with the Kenton band was important in his career, and it was also important in the development of the trombone in the Kenton bands. Milt Bernhart, who was to follow Winding in the Kenton tradition, recently talked about the importance of Winding in the section and band. "Kai Winding was the lead trombone in 1946–47, and possibly the most important player in the band at that time. His style was unique, and Stan [Kenton] wisely allowed him much freedom." Bernhart went on to describe how Winding used this freedom to affect what went on in the music. "Even when playing lead over the section, Kai would change figures and inflections as his feelings dictated, and we all got pretty good at anticipating this and following him. It was kind of a game, like a steeplechase, and sometimes Kai would even become nettled because we had second-guessed an especially intricate variation of the original part." Kenton and the band's arrangers at that time, primarily Pete Rugolo and Gene Roland, gave Winding solo space on a large number of the tunes recorded during his stay with the band. He was heard on slow and fast tempos, in a variety of styles – straight-ahead swingers, ballads and Latin tunes (Roland's "Ecuador" resembled Ralph Burns' famous "Bijou," written for Woody Herman's band, with Winding playing the "Bill Harris" part as Jimmy Simms had earlier). Winding's style with Kenton was no longer the prototype of the Kenton solo trombone style, it was the style, full-blown and fully formed. Either Winding had yet to develop the much more bop-oriented style that he later displayed with J. J. or he just did not find it appropriate for the Kenton milieu. Fine examples of his solo work abound in the recordings of '46–47, but his most impressive exhibition is probably on the great ballad "Lover Man." It is a feature for Kai from beginning to end and shows his convincing exposition of melody and a relatively simple, but decidedly effective improvisation as well. Sparke concludes his discussion with the following: "Under Winding's leadership, the trombones attained a vibratoless purity of sound, and perfected the unique tonal blend and unity of phrasing that became a Kenton trademark." While the section did not constantly maintain the vibratoless aspect of the sound over the years, it is true that the section sound, as well as the solo sound, can be in large part attributed to Kai Winding. Bill Russo, later a trombonist and composer-arranger with Kenton, put Winding's contribution in a different way. "Winding somehow got this section of unwieldy instruments to play with speed and lightness and flexibility and with very subtle inflections."[1]

Another important development in Kenton's trombone section in the early part of the band's history was the addition of bass trombone. **Bart Varsalona** had joined the

1 *All quotes from Michael Sparke's liner essay for* The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. *13, 15, 18.*

band on tenor trombone in 1942, and probably in 1943 made the switch to bass. As he explained it, "Stan Kenton had a great passion for bottom register (also high trumpets) sounds in his charts, so I decided to try a bass trombone on one of our dates. He liked it and I stayed with it right through. He offered to help me pay for it. I thanked him, but I was single and had it all to spare. The money was there every week."[2] Varsalona established and maintained the bass trombone role that was to be carried on by some of the most outstanding bass trombonists in big band history. The sound of the bass 'bone on the bottom of the band was, indeed, a defining aspect of the Kenton sound. Trombone sections in big bands were never to be the same again. Later Kenton would even go to two bass trombonists, often with one of them doubling on tuba.

Sometime in 1946, **Gene Roland,** who had played trumpet earlier in the band and who also did a significant amount of composing and arranging for the band from the '40s into the '60s, rejoined the band on valve trombone.[3] Apparently Roland just made up parts to fit in with the existing charts, but wrote them out, creating a fifth book. After Roland left the band again, Kenton decided that he wanted a fifth part in the section permanently.[4]

Skip Layton, who replaced Roland, was with the Kenton organization for a short period of time in 1946 and 1947. He is one of those intriguing figures in jazz that flashes across the sky, seemingly appearing from nowhere, making a stunning impression, and then disappears, not to be heard from again. Layton had played with Johnny Richards and Bobby Sherwood, but was hardly well known in the jazz community. The special skill that Layton possessed was the ability to play extremely high, but not just squeaking, as some trombonists do in the extreme upper register; Layton could play very high at a very loud volume. Kenton, and his chief arranger during this period, Pete Rugolo, discovered Layton's ability and didn't hesitate to add it to the other exciting musical ingredients that the band already employed. Layton's first recording session with the band was 2 January 1947. By the session of 13 February, Layton had been "discovered," and Rugolo wrote a thrilling "screech" section for the chart "Machito" with Layton and lead trumpeter Buddy Childers squealing away together in the high range. A similar effect was used at the 27 February session on part 2 of "Rhythm Incorporated." Layton is on his own with high note work on "The Spider and the Fly" (31 March).[5] Trumpeter Ken Hanna wrote a chart to feature Layton, in a more normal register, on a standard tune, "How Am I To Know?" Layton acquits himself quite nicely, with two solo sections that stand up well next to Winding's work from the same period. But by September, Layton was no longer with the band. Michael Sparke suggests that this "underrated trombonist, with outstanding tone and technique and improvisational skills … never quite made it in the competitive world of jazz."[6]

The next trombone soloist to come to the fore in the Kenton band was **Eddie Bert.** Bert, previously discussed in Chapter 7, was only twenty-five years old at the time, but he was already a veteran of the bands of Sam Donahue, Red Norvo, Woody Herman and Herbie Fields. He caught the Kenton trombone fever, and a number of his solos

2 *Lee, 52–53.*

3 *In addition to his writing, Roland was for a time a regular on mellophonium in the early '60s, and also soloed on soprano saxophone. An album for which he wrote all the charts,* Adventures in Blues, *features him as a soloist on both instruments.*

4 *Bauer, July 1983, p. 25.*

5 *Several times Layton is in the vicinity of what is referred to as the trumpet's high C (or double high B♭ for trombone). At one point, it sounds as if he hits a high D (concert pitch, D6).*

6 *Sparke, notes to* The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings, *17.*

grace the recorded sides of late 1947. Somewhat unlike much of his later work, they are very loud and brash – in the already established Kenton tradition. Bert also returned briefly to Kenton in the mid-1950s.

While Bert took over most of the improvised trombone work, **Milt Bernhart** took over the lead chair, and the written trombone melodies.[7] Had he played nothing else, Bernhart would have gone down (in infamy?) as the definitive interpreter of "The Peanut Vendor," one of Kenton's biggest all-time hits, and coincidentally, one of the few head arrangements that the band ever recorded.[8] But Bernhart was to be an important member of the section on and off for a number of years. Some of his finest work can be heard with the "Innovations in Modern Music" Orchestra, the forty-piece orchestra – the regular big band augmented by a substantial string section, French horns and tuba – with which Kenton toured for a couple of years starting in 1950. The "Innovations Orchestra" was yet another manifestation of Kenton's constant searching and striving for new sounds and ways of expressing his music. On the set of complete recordings of this group, re-released in 1997, Bernhart is heard playing melodic lines on several tunes, most notably Bill Russo's "Solitaire," on which he also improvises with great style. More solo statements from Bernhart can be heard with the "dance" orchestra of the period, on Gene Roland's "Riff Rhapsody" and Pete Rugolo's "Francesca." He is featured improvising on most of a thirty-two bar chorus on Kenton's "Something New." This track, not released until 2001, perhaps because of a little bit of stumbling by Bernhart at the end of the chorus, nonetheless has a very solid sixteen bars of him playing with a nice relaxed swing.[9] Bernhart went on to establish a reputation as a solid jazzman on the West Coast scene, recording prominently with such smaller groups as the Lighthouse All Stars.[10] However, his most famous recorded solo ("Peanut Vendor" notwithstanding) is undoubtedly the spot he contributed to Frank Sinatra's hit 1956 recording of "I've Got You Under My Skin."[11]

Harry Betts, who had taken Skip Layton's place in the section in 1947, was a sometime soloist. Two cuts that first appeared on the pot-pourri, limited edition, four-LP boxed set in the 1950s, *The Kenton Era,* featured Betts soloing with the Innovations Orchestra. On one of Bill Russo's first arrangements for the Kenton band, "Ennui," Betts does little more than play the theme, although in the accomplished style that was already expected of Kenton trombonists.[12] One might have expected this to have been played by the lead player, Bob Fitzpatrick. On the Latin "In Veradero," Betts gets a chance to stretch out and blow over the top of a surging Latin rhythm that had already become one of the several trademarks of the Kenton band. In 1950 with the regular band, Betts could be heard playing the melody at the top of the dramatic Rugolo arrangement of Cole Porter's "Love for Sale," in typical Kenton style, and in '52 he added the fire to the Kenton arrangement of the enigmatic "Soliloquy" of Rube Bloom.

7 *There are fascinating recollections from Bernhart's career with Kenton, other bands, in the Los Angeles studios and after his music career ended in Gene Lees's* Friends Along the Way. *See bibliography.*

8 *Eddie Bert related a story of Bart Varsalona dropping his slide once in performance, during "Peanut Vendor." Kenton managed to make a joke of the incident with the audience, but Varsalona said that he lost his slide because the seemingly endless repetition of his part in the tune was "so boring." Lee, 114.*

9 *This tune reappeared in 1955 as "Sunset Tower," featuring Eddie Bert. Sparke, notes to* Easy Go *(see discography).*

10 *A compact disc that has Bernhart on some cuts and Frank Rosolino on others is listed in the discography.*

11 *See discography for a CD that has this track.*

12 *This recording, done live in 1951, is included on the* Innovations Orchestra *CD set.*

Even many of the jazz fans who do not much care for most of Stan Kenton's music have some appreciation for his band of the mid-1950s, the so-called New Concepts in Artistry in Rhythm, or more simply, the Concepts, band. There was much to admire in this band – the straight ahead swinging of trumpeter Conte Candoli and tenor saxophonist Richie Kamuca, the sublime creations of alto saxophonist Lee Konitz, the driving rhythm of drummer Stan Levey (succeeded by Mel Lewis) and bassist Don Bagley. A young Maynard Ferguson could not fail to excite live crowds and record buyers with his phenomenal high-note trumpet playing. The band featured outstanding swinging charts by Bill Holman (who at the time was playing tenor in the band) and specially commissioned charts by Gerry Mulligan. The fans of the more experimental side of the band could still be challenged by superb new music by Johnny Richards and band trombonist Bill Russo. (Some of these charts were, of course, "turn-offs" for more traditional fans.) The trombone section was "loaded." **Bob Burgess** (known later in his career as Bobby) played beautiful lead, while **George Roberts,** who was to become a legend on his instrument, held down the bass trombone chair. One of the outstanding soloists in the band was one of the most happily swinging trombonists in the history of jazz, **Frank Rosolino,** whose story is told in Chapter 10. **Bill Russo** had gone to high school in Chicago with alto star Lee Konitz and like Konitz, studied with iconoclast Lennie Tristano. He was not to become a star trombonist, but his charts, a number of which still sound "modern" today, bore a crucial part in defining the Kenton sound for some years to follow.[13] One of the few chances to hear Russo play with Kenton is on his own chart, "Bill's Blues." He contributes a solid blues solo.

In September of 1952 this new edition of the band laid down some tracks with which it would ever after be identified. Russo wrote features for three of the great soloists: "Portrait of a Count" for Candoli, "My Lady" for Konitz, and "Frank Speaking" for Rosolino. Russo also contributed to the sessions the exciting Latin number "23 Degrees North – 82 Degrees West" (the geographical coordinates of Havana) and the experimental group piece "Improvisation." Several Gerry Mulligan charts were recorded, with "Young Blood" ending up on the eventual album configuration. Holman created the beautifully crafted "Invention for Guitar and Trumpet" for Sal Salvador and Maynard Ferguson. The most notorious recording was "Prologue (This is an Orchestra)", a sonic spectacular in which Kenton talked about the band and introduced each member of the orchestra individually in a musical setting. Burgess's lovely ballad segment, Roberts' "show-off" of his outstanding high range and his fantastic low range, and Rosolino's infectiously swinging style were three of the highlights. For anyone who was not already familiar with his style, Rosolino's performance of "Frank Speaking" showed a brilliant young trombonist already at the top of his game. Certainly these recordings made a considerable splash when they were first released in the '50s, but that wasn't the end of their influence. When I was in high school in the 1960s, they were still around, and still amazing to the ears of young players. We devoured them before I went to my first "stage band" festival in 1967, at which Frank Rosolino was the guest artist. When I was in college in the early 1970s the album had been re-released on Kenton's new Creative World record label, and we "jazz freaks" still marveled at the writing and the playing.

13 *Russo led his own bands, continued to write jazz and "concert" music, wrote texts and until shortly before his death in 2003 led an outstanding jazz repertory orchestra in Chicago.*

Rosolino was to continue as one of the jazz stars of this group, and among the other recordings that featured his solo talents in the next few years were Gerry Mulligan's "Swing House," recorded later in 1952, and "Shadow Waltz" and "Fascinating Rhythm" from January of 1953. On the same session, Bob Burgess was able to display his considerable interpretive abilities on a feature written for him by Russo on the standard "Over the Rainbow." While Burgess sticks close to the melody through most of the arrangement, he gets off a few "hot licks" toward the end that suggest that he was listening to his section mate Rosolino. Also in January of '53, Bill Holman wrote an arrangement of Jack Teagarden's theme, "I Gotta Right To Sing The Blues," that featured Rosolino's considerable vocal talents as well as his ebullient trombone. On the sessions that became *Kenton Showcase,* the eight scores by Bill Russo featured Rosolino only once, on the Latin-flavored "Bacante;" the more swinging Bill Holman charts "The Opener" and "Fearless Finlay" were more suited for Rosolino's style. A rare ballad feature for Rosolino was his distinctive July 1953 interpretation of the Ellington classic "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)." While maintaining relative control throughout, Rosolino managed to inject his unique musical enthusiasm (as well as a couple of his favorite licks). In January of 1955 Rosolino was called upon to play (in two different octaves) the theme in Kenton's arrangement of "Malaguena." (Holman's quite different arrangement of this piece a few years later was to become one of the band's most requested pieces for a long time.)

Like many other players who went through the Kenton band, George Roberts established his reputation through his Kenton tenure. Although there were a couple of short-term replacements in between, Roberts essentially replaced the band's very first bass trombonist, Bart Varsalona. Roberts was more than up to the task. Coming to the band in 1951, he actually replaced John Halliburton, who chose not to go on the road. Halliburton recalls what happened. "My replacement was selected, and it was obvious that he had a new approach to the bass trombone – a really polished approach. His name was George Roberts."[14] Roberts approach may have been polished, but what stands out on the recordings made while he was in the band was his beautiful big fat bass trombone sound. Any of the recordings of this trombone section bears this out. And when the bass trombone sets ostinato (repeated) figures, such as on Manny Albam's "Samana" or Bill Russo's "23 Degrees North – 82 Degrees West," the bass trombone just jumps out at the listener. Two of the concert-like charts that Russo wrote for the *Showcase* album, "Thisbe" and especially "A Study for Bass," feature tremendous playing by Roberts. Johnny Richards wrote an arrangement on "Stella By Starlight" to feature Roberts that showed off this tremendous sound and a nice interpretive sense.[15] After leaving the band for the last time in 1955, Roberts went on to become the most in demand bass trombonist on the West Coast for decades.

The great **Carl Fontana** was only in the Kenton band for a little more than a year, but he left a permanent record of his presence. On his first recording session with the band, he made an indelible impression. *Contemporary Concepts* is one of the most treasured of all Kenton albums by those who are fans of swing. The album contained six splendid swinging charts by Bill Holman that featured an excellent roster of jazz soloists.

14 *Lee, 160.*

15 *In the notes to the re-release of* Sketches on Standards, *Kenton scholar Michael Sparke relates that originally Roberts came in with his own chart on "Stella." Although it was not successful, Richards took the same idea and retooled it to feature Roberts.*

Featured were Charlie Mariano and Lennie Niehaus, alto; Bill Perkins and Dave van Kreidt, tenor; Don Davidson, baritone; trumpeters Sam Noto and Stu Williamson; and the superb drummer, Mel Lewis. **Kent Larsen,** who played both valve and slide trombone in the band for about four years, takes a nice spot in the standard "What's New?" Fontana was featured in the one non-Holman chart, a swinging Gerry Mulligan composition, "Limelight." Fontana has all the solo spots in the chart, and he exposes the style that continued to serve him so well for the next almost half-century: Speed, taste, high range; it's all there. On the compact disc release of this album, a reworked Kenton original and a set of three Gene Roland "color charts" were added. Fontana makes another good accounting of himself, in a style that sounds more traditionally "Kenton" on "Sunset Tower." Larsen adds his solo voice to "Opus in Turquoise" and "Opus in Beige." As was the case at times in subsequent recordings, it is not completely clear from listening whether Larsen was playing slide or valve trombone on these solos.[16]

In a rare concession to the past, the usually forward-looking Kenton agreed to an album of remakes of some of his early hits, which was recorded in February of 1956. Obviously the public was ready for such a project, as the resulting album, *Kenton in Hi-Fi,* was a very popular release. One of the stalwarts of the '40s bands, Milt Bernhart, joined the band briefly (or possibly just for this album) and recreated Kai Winding's solos on "Collaboration," "Lover," and "Artistry in Boogie," as well as those of Jimmy Simms on "Painted Rhythm" and Eddie Bert on "Unison Riff." In a turnabout, Kent Larsen took the solo spot on "The Peanut Vendor" that Bernhart had created in 1947. Fontana was chosen to redo Freddie Zito's solo on "Southern Scandal." More significantly, Fontana was given a long spot on "Intermission Riff." Unlike the other trombone solos done on this session, this one was a substitute for what originally had been a solo for another instrument – in this case, Ray Wetzel's trumpet. Fontana also appeared on another 1956 recording, Johnny Richards's suite *Cuban Fire!* While not quite as big a commercial success as *Kenton in Hi-Fi,* this album was another of the long string of relative "hits" for the Kenton band of serious "concert-type" big band music, as opposed to swing music for dancing. (This album was quite popular with young jazz musicians looking for different sounds.) There are trombone solos scattered throughout the suite.[17] Clearly Fontana is the soloist on "Recuerdos" ("Reminiscences") and "Quien Sabe" ("Who Knows"). If not quite as impressive as "Limelight," all of Fontana's solo work on this album is very good – with touches of the already-established Kenton style, but indisputably his own style. From these groups of sessions, he is at his best on the uncomplicated changes of "Intermission Riff."

Kenton (and/or his handlers at Capitol) was astute about mixing up his albums. An experimental album like *Cuban Fire!* would be followed by a remake of old hits. And Kenton could introduce new charts, and spotlight soloists in the context of "swinging dance music," as *Rendezvous with Kenton* was described in the liner notes. In October of 1957 the band recorded a set of charts, arranged by Joe Coccia, in the Rendezvous Ballroom in Balboa, California, where Kenton had had his first great suc-

16 *I would guess that he plays valves on "Turquoise" and slide on "Beige."*

17 *Of the other trombone solos on the album, my best guess would be that Bob Fitzpatrick plays the melody statements on "Fuego Cubano" ("Cuban Fire") and "La Quera Baili" ("The Fair One Dances"), although I believe it must be Kent Larsen on a second statement in "Cuban Fire," as well as on "El Congo Valiente" ("Valiant Conga"), where the solo instrument sounds like valve trombone.*

cess in the early '40s. Three trombonists were featured: Kent Larsen, newcomer **Archie LeCoque** and bass trombonist **Kenny Shroyer.** Larsen's feature on this album was the old Eubie Blake standard, "Memories of You." Le Coque, soon to be proven as an excellent ballad player, carried "High on a Windy Hill." Kenny Shroyer was only on the Kenton band for brief periods of 1956–58, but was one of the few bass trombonists on the band who got to really improvise on record. He has the Coccia original "Desiderata" practically from beginning to end. He improvises mostly in the middle register, only showing his true bass trombone colors at the end of the arrangement.[18] The "sequel" to this album, *Back To Balboa,* also recorded at the Rendezvous some months later, was another good album for trombonists. Le Coque has solos on three tunes, both fast and slow. Larsen has spots on two standards, "Out Of This World" and "I Concentrate On You." It is not noted on the album jacket, but it certainly sounds as if he plays valve trombone on the former (and possibly on the latter as well).[19] Shroyer, who like George Roberts before him would soon leave Kenton for steady studio work in southern California, gets another feature, "Get Out Of Town."[20]

Another rebuttal to the charge that the Kenton band didn't (or couldn't) swing was the set recorded in February of 1959, *Kenton Live from the Las Vegas Tropicana.* This performance (like many of the CD releases, considerably expanded from the original album) features, in particular, the excellent soloing of trumpeter Jack Sheldon and alto player Lennie Niehaus – two more sidemen who were to become stalwarts in the southern California scene. But it also affords yet another look at trombonists – especially Kent Larsen, heard on several tunes, most notably on "Intermission Riff," and some tantalizing bits by Archie LeCoque on "Street Scene."

Larsen, incidentally, was an important member of the organization. According to the drummer in the band for much of this era, Jerry McKenzie, "Kent was a superman! He was road manager, band boy, singer, trombone soloist, and sometimes bus driver, and he did an exemplary job on them all." When Larsen left the band in 1960, he joined Capitol Records as a producer. Among other things, he rescued the rejected tapes from the band's 1959 performance at the Las Vegas Tropicana and whipped them into "release condition."[21]

When novice Bill Mathieu did only a limited amount of arranging for Kenton, but he was evidently allowed a free hand to arrange the tunes that appeared on the album *Standards in Silhouette,* recorded in September of 1959. Some might consider this, like some other Kenton albums, a sophisticated "mood" album, and surely the executives at Capitol Records hoped that it would have an appeal of this sort. The tempos are all quite slow, and though there are moments of the patented screaming Kenton trumpet section (led by Bud Brisbois), most of the album banks on the rich sounds of the trombone section and the lower saxophones. Trumpeter Rolf Ericson, superb alto saxophonist Charlie Mariano and tenor man Bill Trujillo have many of the solo duties, but there is considerable room for the two trombone soloists, Archie Le Coque and **Don Sebesky.** Sebesky's feature is the lush ballad "When Sunny Gets Blue," and despite his rich, dark sound, one

18 *"Desiderata" appears on the compact disc release of* Back to Balboa.

19 *Larsen is pictured in Lee,* Artistry in Rhythm, *playing valves (photos after p. 176).*

20 *Two good albums to hear Shroyer on are the "trombone albums"* 10 Trombones Like 2 Pianos *and* Tutti's Trombones. *On the former, he and George Roberts do some trading back and forth of lines. See discography.*

21 *Quote and information from notes to re-release of* Kenton Live from the Las Vegas Tropicana.

might hear the influence of his study as a youth with Warren Covington, one of the smoothest of lead trombonists in the late '40s and early '50s. Sebesky never had the opportunity to be featured on a chart like this during his earlier stay with Maynard Ferguson's band. (Some Sebesky "fast playing" can be heard on *Viva Kenton!*)

LeCoque has several beautiful solos, including on "I Get Along Without You Very Well" and "Ill Wind," on which he is featured throughout. This album, and especially LeCoque's playing, served as a primer in ballad interpretation for quite a few trombonists. Unfortunately for trombonists, after this beautiful display of trombone artistry, Le Coque soon disappeared into the relative obscurity of Las Vegas show bands for most of the rest of his career.

After this run of albums, however, for a while one just doesn't find as many trombone solos on Kenton records as had been the case through the Winding, Bert, Rosolino and Fontana eras. To cite just one example, on 1961's *Kenton's West Side Story,* one of the band's most popular albums, trombone solos were limited to a couple of brief thematic statements by lead trombonist Bob Fitzpatrick and a short improvised solo by **Jack Spurlock.**

A brief look back is in order, however. Given the importance of the trombone section (as opposed to trombone soloists), probably the most important trombonist in the band from the early '50s through the mid-'60s was **Bob Fitzpatrick.** Although he had played with other bands – Woody Herman, Harry James, Gene Krupa, even Paul Whiteman – he will always be associated with the Kenton organization. He started playing lead in the Kenton section in 1950, left in '52, was back for most of '54–57, then after another hiatus returned to lead the section for most of the time between early 1960 and late 1966. As was usually the case for the lead players, Fitzpatrick was most often heard in a solo role when exposing a theme. These themes could be in many styles, however, and Fitz, as he was known, could handle them all. Yet when he first joined the band, Fitzpatrick was heard as a relaxedly swinging soloist in short spots on "Easy Go" (12 August 1950) and "Night Watch" (28 June 1951). By early 1952 he was in the lead chair and stating melodies such as "Star Dust." In "Bill's Blues," Fitzpatrick blows a blues chorus, but now in the louder, more blustery style for which the trombonists in the band were so widely known. Two particularly fascinating melody statements were recorded on the same day, 3 March 1954. Bill Russo was writing the most experimental music of his time as arranger with Kenton, and Fitzpatrick has the lead on the Russo originals "Edgon Heath" and "Thisbe." Fitzpatrick is in total command on music that was beyond what any other jazz-oriented big band was being required to play – in the 1950s, or for a long time after that. At least on record he was rarely heard improvising during this period, particularly at any length. However, on another forward-looking Russo chart that was recorded the day before, "A Theme of Four Values," Fitzpatrick not only states the theme, but clearly seems to be improvising over the dense modal harmonies established by Russo.[22] This is serious modern music, if, arguably, not jazz. Fitzpatrick and the trombone section and the rest of the band handle these extremely challenging scores with dazzling precision. After several more years of playing "written"-type solos, long-time Kenton associate Gene Roland gave Fitzpatrick his due on a lighter note, a tribute called "Fitz," recorded in December

22 *These three compositions can be found on* Kenton Showcase *as well as the Mosaic Russo-Holman collection in the discography.*

1961. Appropriately, a good bit of the chart features the section, with the ever-reliable Fitz in the lead, with the section sounding as powerful as ever. The album notes suggest that Fitzpatrick was "Conceded to be the strongest sounding trombonist in music …" [23] This is the kind of statement that can be argued endlessly and never proven, but given the volume levels that the Kenton band put out every night, it was probably not far from the truth. Fitzpatrick, however, also acquits himself on several very respectable blues choruses on this performance.

A trombonist who made a short appearance but a lasting impression in the Kenton section was **Dee Barton.** He joined the band in 1961, fresh out of North Texas State University, at that time probably the most notable hotbed of young big band players on the college and university scene. Recorded in December 1961, nine months after the popular *West Side Story* album, *Adventures in Jazz* became another favorite of fans of the Kenton band's jazzier side. The album featured charts by Bill Holman, Gene Roland and Sam Donahue with plenty of blowing room for such outstanding soloists as alto saxophonist Gabe Baltazar, great tenor veteran Donahue and another recent North Texas product, trumpeter Marvin Stamm. Two of the works on the album, though, served to introduce the fresh new writing talent of Barton. "Waltz of the Prophets" and "Turtle Talk" brought fresh variations to the Kenton sound. They also served to display the considerable solo talent of their composer. Barton's style, as exposed on these two cuts, was decidedly modern. He made extensive use of "against the grain" playing, which was still rare in jazz in the way in which Barton employed it. He also made startling rips into the upper register, squeaking out indeterminate pitches for dramatic effect. When playing in a more conventional manner, he used a more modern language than was usually found in Kenton's band, with whole tone and quartal passages prominent. At these same sessions the band also recorded the Gene Roland charts that would become the album *Adventures in Blues.* Barton has one solo, on "The Blues Story." His blues playing, if this is a representative example, was edgy and exciting, with a good touch of "dirt." Would that Barton had chosen to continue his career as an active trombonist! He seemed to have a lot to offer.

After switching for a time from the trombone section to the drum chair (!), Barton left the band and settled in Hollywood, writing big band charts for a band that he fronted for a time, as well as writing some commercial jingles, presumably to keep food on the table. His association with Kenton culminated in December of 1967, when the band recorded *Stan Kenton Conducts the Jazz Compositions of Dee Barton.* This was probably the most forward-looking album that Kenton had recorded since the futuristic compositions of Bob Graettinger in the 1950s (which were direct descendants of the experimentation of some fantastic scores by Pete Rugolo in the '40s). Besides writing all of the material for the album, Barton convincingly drives the band from the drum chair. Barton's compositions were not so far removed from the mainstream of jazz as Graettinger's had been, but they were certainly a stretch from what Kenton had been doing. The fascinating compositions on this album made quite a stir in the big band world, at least in college programs that were looking for new and different sounds. Except for some more traditional arrangements (Barton's arrangement of the Burke-Van Heusen ballad "Here's That Rainy Day became a Kenton classic), however, the book was then shut on Barton's experimental writing for the Kenton band.

23 *Wedder, notes to* Adventures in Blues.

A Kenton sidelight in the 1960s was the Los Angeles Neophonic Orchestra. The concept of this orchestra was not new for Kenton. The "Innovations in Modern Music Orchestra," introduced in 1950, has already been discussed. The Neophonic Orchestra was formed in 1965 and staffed by many players who had previously worked in the Kenton big band. With trumpets, trombones, horns, woowinds of a wide variety and an expanded rhythm section, this band resembled a slightly larger version of the mellophonium band (with French horns substituting for the mellophoniums). The repertory of this non-traveling group consisted of a variety of works commissioned by the orchestra from such composers as Clare Fischer, Russ Garcia and soon to be well-known film and televsion composers Hugo Montenegro, Allyn Ferguson and John Williams. The works, while featuring improvised solos, were a continuation of Kenton's ideas about "serious" concert music that owed something to jazz. The one recording in circulation by the Orchestra contains only one trombone solo, a striking technical display on Russ Garcia's "Adventure in Emotion, part II: Anger" by **Gil Falco,** who was to become one of the respected trombonists on the West Coast scene. An excellent showcase for Falco's talents was the trombonists' dream album of 1966, *Tutti's Trombones,* where he had an extended spot on the New Orleans standard "Just a Closer Walk With Thee," as well as short solos on a couple of the other arrangements. He also was heard with Clare Fisher's band in 1969.

As was the case for other big bands, the 1960s were not a great time for the Kenton band. However, the seed for Kenton's last great run of success was planted then. Kenton was the first big band leader to get in on the budding jazz education scene. He and his band took part in the very first National Stage Band Camp, held at Indiana University in 1959, staying on the camp's staff until 1963. The school stage band movement was not brand new, but it was still not ready to blossom. When it did, Kenton had already gotten in on the ground level. Starting in the late 1960s, the Kenton band was to "make its living" touring around the country giving concerts and clinics at schools. The touring was not exclusively school gigs, but the backbone of it was. Because of the success of the involvement with schools, Kenton was not only able to determine that there was a demand for his music, old and new, but he was also actually able to do something about it. He formed his own company, Creative World, which published music that the band played, making it available for school groups. He also was able to buy the rights from Capitol Records to distribute his old albums. Creative World sent out newsletters to thousands of people around the country and sold both by mail and at performances thousands of recordings – both the old Capitols and new records that the current band recorded at a very healthy clip.

While the only real jazz stars to come out of the later editions of Kenton's band were drummer Peter Erskine and trumpeter Tim Hagans, the band, and the trombone section, continued to be manned by very capable players. The most famous trombonist in the band from the late '60s through the final tour of the late '70s was unquestionably lead trombonist **Dick Shearer.**

Shearer was, in effect, the new Bob Fitzpatrick. Mostly heard as a lead player or as a soloist playing themes or melody lines, he was well prepared to do this in the style expected of a Kenton lead trombonist. When he was young, he heard the famous "This is an Orchestra" declaration of Kenton and was completely taken with the lead playing

of Bob Burgess. By the time he was called to join the band in 1966, Shearer had not only absorbed Burgess's playing, but also that of Fitzpatrick, Winding, Bernhart and Kent Larsen.[24] Like Fitzpatrick, one of Shearer's attributes during his long tenure as lead trombonist was his great strength. The Kenton band was still the loudest big band around (perhaps louder than it had ever been), and the amount of strength and endurance needed to put out the tremendous amount of sound that Kenton asked for at least a couple of hours a night, day after day, required a certain kind of player. Shearer definitely fit the bill. And while he continued the tradition that had been established years earlier, especially the famous section non-vibrato sound, he added his own personality to the Kenton trombone sound. One device that was sometimes used to excellent effect was the section glissando. Most often used on ballads, it could create a stunning effect in the right circumstances. Although the perfectly straight sound was still prevalent, Shearer also used vibrato in a very idiosyncratic way. When soloing, on melodic statements Shearer often affected an extremely wide vibrato at the ends of certain phrases. While some people considered this a somewhat grotesque exaggeration that was unmusical, the outcome it produced was certainly memorable. And it was personal – unquestionably Dick Shearer. Like Fitzpatrick, Shearer also occasionally got to play jazz solos. But he will best be remembered for his lead playing on the many new Ken Hanna originals and arrangements that the band played during this era, as well as his melodic statements on the new swingers that Bill Holman was still contributing to the band and the numerous odd-metered contributions of Hank Levy. The *Live at Redlands* album, recorded in August of 1970, shows a good cross-section of Shearer in these roles. He is the featured "player of the theme" on the two cinematic Hanna ballads, "Bon Homme Richard" and "Tiare."[25] He also exposes the first theme on the old Latin standbys "Tico Tico" (arranged by Holman) and "More Peanut Vendor," where he reprises Milt Bernhart's original statement. He also has "the tune" on a Latin-tinged Levy original "Chiapas." On the band's arrangement of the Beatles' "Hey Jude," (an arrangement that has not worn too well over time) Shearer not only plays part of the tune, but solos over the long repeated four-bar passagethat marks the second section of the piece. Here one can hear both his power and his ability to move around on the horn. Perhaps his most satisfying role is as the muscular leader of a most powerful trombone section, as on Willie Maiden's swinging "A Little Minor Booze." He can be heard playing similar roles on subsequent albums.

Shearer did not, however, do all of the trombone soloing during these latter years. New trombone soloists would appear for a short time on the band and contribute a memorable statement or two, then move on. These included **Lloyd Spoon** and **Brett Stamps** and most impressively, on record at least, **Harvey Coonin** and **Jeff Uusitalo.**[26] Important bass trombonists were not a thing of the past either, as **Joe Randazzo,** who later played with Ray Charles, Bill Watrous and other big bands, and **Douglas Purviance,** still at this writing after many years one of the most in demand bass trombonists in New York, put in time with Kenton.

24 *Lee, 337–338.*

25 *This evidently was a favorite Kenton role for Shearer. Shearer similarly handled two more Hanna tunes, "Fragment of a Portrait" and "Beeline East," on the* Live at Butler University *album.*

26 *Hear Coonin's work on "Happy Birthday to You" and "No Harmful Slide Effects," on the* Birthday in Britain *album, and Uusitalo's fluent soloing on "Granada Smoothie" on* Journey Into Capricorn *and on "Turtle Talk" and "Tattooed Lady" on the* Stan Kenton Live in Europe *album.*

The band carried on when Kenton had an accident and was forced to recuperate at home in the late 1970s. He eventually was able to rejoin the band briefly. But he had decreed long before he died in 1979 that there was to be no Kenton "ghost band." A magnificent chapter in trombone history was closed with his passing.

DISCOGRAPHY

All listed recordings are under the name of Stan Kenton unless noted. Most of the following are compact discs. Other Kenton albums mentioned in the text are not currently on compact disc, but may still be found on LP in collections or second-hand stores in either their Capitol or Creative World releases.

Dee Barton

Adventures in Blues. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 20089 6.
Adventures in Jazz. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 21222 2 6.

Milt Bernhart

The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.
The Innovations Orchestra. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 59965 2 8.
Easy Go. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 24553 2 4.
Portraits on Standards. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 31571 2 8.
Kenton in Hi-Fi. Capitol Jazz CDP-59841.
Howard Rumsey's Lighthouse All Stars, Volume Three. Original Jazz Classics OJCCD-266-2 (Contemporary C-3508).
Frank Sinatra. Classic Sinatra: His Great Performances 1953–1960. Capitol CDP 7243 5 23502 2 3.

Eddie Bert

The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.

Harry Betts

The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.
The Innovations Orchestra. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 59965 2 8.
Easy Go. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 24553 2 4.

Bob Burgess

The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts. Mosaic MD4-136.
Sketches on Standards. Capitol Jazz 7234 5 34070 2 5.
The Best of Stan Kenton. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 31504 2 7.
New Concepts of Artistry in Rhythm. Capitol Jazz CDP 7 92865 2. (Bob Fitzpatrick is incorrectly listed in the personnel on this album. The lead trombonist on all of the included selections was Bob Burgess.)

Harvey Coonin

Birthday in Britain. GNP/Crescendo STCD1065.

Gil Falco

Stan Kenton Conducts the Los Angeles Neophonic Orchestra. Capitol Jazz 7243 4 94502 2 6.
Tutti Camarata. Tutti's Trumpets and Trombones. Avid Entertainment AMSC 739.

Clare Fischer. 'Twas Only Yesterday. Discovery DS-798 (originally Thesaurus, Atlantic SD-1520). LP.

Bob Fitzpatrick

The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts. Mosaic MD4-136.
Easy Go. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 24553 2 4.
Kenton Showcase. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 25244 2 6
Cuban Fire! Capitol Jazz CDP 7 96260 2.
Adventures in Blues. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 20089 6.
Adventures in Jazz. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 21222 2 6.

Carl Fontana

Kenton in Hi-Fi. Capitol Jazz CDP-59841.
Contemporary Concepts. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 42310 2 5.
Cuban Fire! Capitol Jazz CDP 7 96260 2.

Kent Larsen

Kenton in Hi-Fi. Capitol Jazz CDP-59841.
Contemporary Concepts. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 42310 2 5.
Cuban Fire! Capitol Jazz CDP 7 96260 2.
Rendezvous With Kenton. Capitol ST 932. LP.
Back to Balboa. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 93094 2 2.
Kenton Live from the Las Vegas Tropicana. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 35245 2 5.

Skip Layton

The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.

Archie LeCoque

Rendezvous With Kenton. Capitol ST 932. LP.
Back to Balboa. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 93094 2 2.
Kenton Live from the Las Vegas Tropicana. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 35245 2 5.
Standards in Silhouette. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 4 94503 2 5.

George Roberts

Sketches on Standards. Capitol Jazz 7234 5 34070 2 5.
The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts. Mosaic MD4-136.
The Best of Stan Kenton. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 31504 2 7.
New Concepts of Artistry in Rhythm. Capitol Jazz CDP 7 92865 2.
Kenton Showcase. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 25244 2 6.

Frank Rosolino

Sketches on Standards. Capitol Jazz 7234 5 34070 2 5.
The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts. Mosaic MD4-136.
Portraits on Standards. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 31571 2 8.
The Best of Stan Kenton. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 31504 2 7.
New Concepts of Artistry in Rhythm. Capitol Jazz CDP 7 92865 2.

Kenton Showcase. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 25244 2 6.

Bill Russo
The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts. Mosaic MD4-136.

Don Sebesky
Standards in Silhouette. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 4 94503 2 5.
Viva Kenton! Capitol Jazz 7243 5 60444 2 5.

Dick Shearer
Live at Redlands University. Creative World Records (GNP/Crescendo) STD 1015.
Live at Butler University. Creative World Records (GNP/Crescendo) STD 1058.

Kenny Shroyer
Rendezvous With Kenton. Capitol ST 932. LP.
Back to Balboa. Capitol Jazz 7243 5 93094 2 2.
Pete Rugolo. 10 Trombones Like 2 Pianos. Mercury PPS 6001. LP.
Tutti Camarata. Tutti's Trumpets and Trombones. Avid Entertainment AMSC 739.

Jimmy Simms
The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.

Jack Spurlock
Kenton's West Side Story. Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 29914 2 7.

Jeff Uusitalo
Journey Into Capricorn. GNP/Crescendo STCD 1077.
Stan Kenton Live in Europe. London SP 44276. LP.

Bart Varsalona
The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.

Kai Winding
The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.

Freddie Zito
The Complete Capitol Studio Recordings of Stan Kenton 1943–47. Mosaic MD7-163.

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_____. Notes to Stan Kenton. Easy Go. *Capitol Jazz 7243 5 24553 2 4, 2000.*

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_____. Notes to Stan Kenton. Sketches on Standards. *Capitol Jazz 7234 5 34070 2 5, 2002.*

Wedder, Noel. Notes to Stan Kenton. Adventures in Blues. *Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 5 20089 6, 1999 (original notes and release, 1962).*