

Jack Maher: 1923-2003

Jack Maher liked working behind the scenes. For more than 30 years as DownBeat's owner—and at various times publisher, editor and/or chairman—Jack championed the perpetuation of jazz, music education and the music business. He did so by deflecting attention away from himself to what he felt was most important—DownBeat, music and musicians.

When he died Feb. 14 in suburban Chicago at the age of 79, the jazz world lost a dedicated cheerleader, friend and legend.

"DownBeat won't be the same," said producer/musician Teo Macero, who had a long relationship with Jack. "He lived through it all. He saw the music change. I liked him so much. We did argue about some points in regard to the music and the magazine, but that's to be expected from two opinionated people."

"He was not only a lovely friend, he was my chauffeur," trumpeter Maynard Ferguson laughs, telling a story that conveys Jack's humor and penchant for practical jokes. "It was at the NAMM convention. I was anxious to get to the gig and warm up. There was a limo for me waiting. The guy opens the door, and I tell him to hurry up because I wanted to get to the gig. I looked at his face, and it was Jack. He had borrowed the chauffeur's hat, doing the whole act. It was quite a laugh. I have great memories of him, and he was so devoted to jazz education."

Jack became a stalwart in the music industry almost by chance. A 1942 graduate of Fenwick High School in Oak Park, Ill., Jack briefly attended Notre Dame University and the University of Illinois before joining the U.S. Marines, where he served as a First Lieutenant on the U.S.S. Wichita during World War II.

He loved animals (shown by his lifelong love of riding horses) and wanted to become a veterinarian. But upon returning from the war, Jack started his career as a salesman in the printing business. He went to work for the John Maher Printing Co., a sheet-fed operation owned by his father. After successfully learning the business and building a client roster, Maher saw more opportunity in the emerging offset web printing business.

With two partners, Jack split off from his father's business to open Cardinal Printing in the late 1950s. Over the course of the next decade, Cardinal became successful in its own right, and Jack's career path was set—or

so he thought.

Jack may have had a passion for ink on paper, but he didn't realize that magazine publishing would be in his future. In 1950, Jack's father took over DownBeat when the magazine's publishers could not pay their printing bill with him. John Maher Sr. owned and operated the magazine until his death at the end of 1968. As John McDonough wrote in the book *DownBeat: 60 Years Of Jazz*:

"There was considerable concern for the future of DownBeat. Maher's will left everything to his wife. The magazine went into the hands of American National Bank as trustee, with instructions to sell it after 12 months. Neither Maher's widow, who served as titular president during the trust period, nor his two daughters had any interest in buying it themselves."

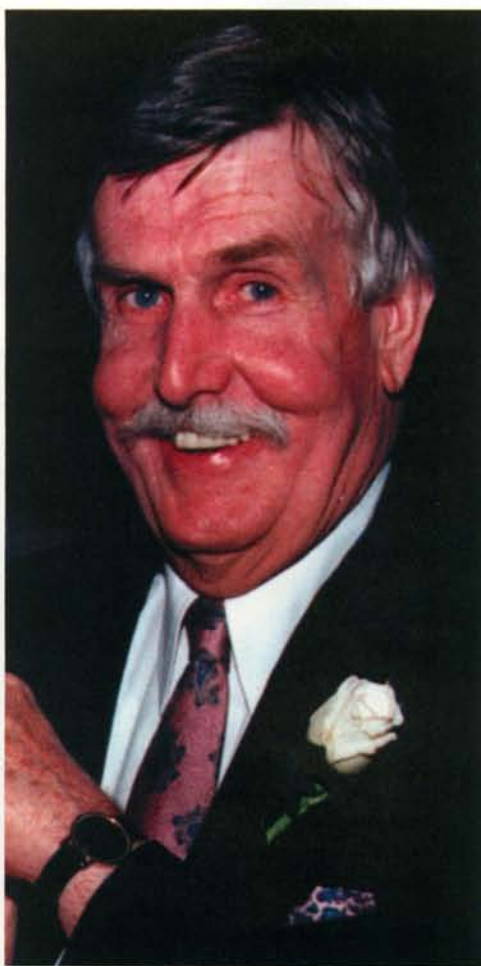
During the course of the year, Jack began to spend time at the magazine. He saw that the publication had potential to become profitable, and that it looked like it could be fun. Jack successfully outbid a number of suitors, including Hugh Hefner at Playboy magazine, and took over ownership in 1970.

Jack went into owning DownBeat with a very clear and oft-repeated philosophy, "The responsibility of a magazine is to stay in business."

"He had a great love for the music industry," said Chuck Suber, who knew Jack from 1952 (when he started to work at DownBeat) and served as DownBeat's publisher under Jack until 1982. "That was essentially why he bought the magazine from his relatives. We had a conversation in which he said, 'Look, let's work it out. You run the magazine and I'll do the business side.' We went from there. He was very good at that. He became very good friends with the people in the business."

"In the 34-plus years that Jack Maher headed the most prestigious jazz magazine in the world he never sought the spotlight. As a non-player, he was actually shy around musicians, somewhat in awe of their abilities and their passion for the music."

Dan Morgenstern was editor of DownBeat when Jack took ownership of the magazine, and remembered his early attitude with DownBeat. "He was completely focused on his new role and as determined to succeed as a coach in playoff contention," Morgenstern said. "There may have been some early fumbles, but he made a perennial winner of DownBeat, keeping it in the



Maher family and perpetuating his father's legacy. We had our disagreements, as would any publisher and editor, but I always respected his dedication to the magazine."

Suber recalled Jack's unbending dedication to jazz education. "One of the questions he always used to ask, even at the last lunch we had together, was, 'Where are the new jazz musicians?'" Suber said. "That's why we put a lot of education back in the magazine. He trusted the talent and judgment of such jazz players—educators as Dr. David Baker who were, and still are, responsible for keeping jazz alive and well."

Baker, who chairs the jazz department at the University of Indiana in Bloomington and is president of IAJE, first and foremost recalls Jack as a friend, someone with whom he could talk basketball and music for hours, and who selflessly helped him publish his jazz education books. Their friendship translated into a long relationship with the magazine, including Baker being a judge in the DownBeat Student Music Awards since their start in 1978.

"Jack didn't draw artificial lines between performance and education," Baker said. "Even before it was fashionable to be inclusive in terms of what this jazz thing is, he was already thinking in these terms. He put

DownBeat on the vanguard of jazz education, featuring young musicians in the magazine, naming the DB Student Music Awards and education columnists, and publishing transcribed solos.

"He made sure that across the years the people working for him would produce a great magazine. He made sure that the movers and shakers in the magazine were the best people out there doing it. He would always say, 'How are we doing?' He was really a good friend. We take good friends for granted sometimes. We think they will be around forever. I really loved him for what he did for the music, for the students, for education and for me. This cat was all the best things that this music represents."

When Morgenstern left the magazine in 1972 as its editor, Jack took a strong editorial role as well as the title of editor for most of the next 11 years. Still, he put his faith in the ability of his editors to make DownBeat the standard bearer in jazz publishing.

"I consider my association with DownBeat in the mid '70s to be a cornerstone of my career in music and media, and Jack made it possible," said Chuck Mitchell, an editor at the magazine in the '70s. "I always enjoyed our periodic catch-up phone calls over the years. Contentious and irascible as he could be, Jack loved the music (especially Maynard Ferguson) and, I think, loved DownBeat even more. I'll always have fond memories of 222 W. Adams and hard-charging to get the magazine out every two weeks."

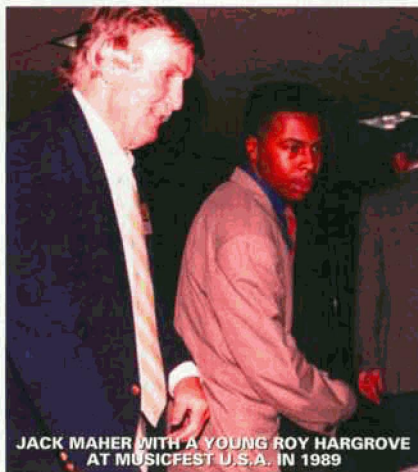
"Jack was devoted to maintaining the magazine," said DownBeat senior contributor Howard Mandel, who started writing for the magazine in 1974 and served as an editor from 1978-'81. "He made some good choices about editors who served the magazine well over the years. It's to Jack's credit that, except for a brief period, DownBeat never went over the top to become a pop magazine. It had some breadth of vision and reality of perspective. In working with him, it was a question of selling him on the ideas before we made the assignments. He did not stand over your shoulder reading copy. He gave his editorial staff the trust to bring the stories that suited the magazine."

"I enjoyed his stories about the early days of his work at DownBeat, going to New York, selling ads, running into musicians," said John Ephland, an editor at DownBeat from 1987-'98. "I also enjoyed his perspective. He was opinionated, and that was refreshing. We had never-ending talks about Miles Davis. Miles was his ace in the hole. If there was a way to work him into the maga-

zine, he would do it."

"Jack always showed great respect for the practicing musician," said Ed Enright, who started working at Maher Publications in 1990, became DownBeat's associate editor in '92 and served as editor from '96-'99. "He loved the fact that editorial guys like John Janowiak, Dave Zaworski and I played out all the time, and he always encouraged us to share stories about recent gigs. 'Did you play it dirty?' he'd ask with a devilish grin. Jack liked grit.

"Whenever a new batch of CDs made its way into our offices, you could always count on Jack for honest criticism," Enright continues. "He knew what he liked when he heard



JACK MAHER WITH A YOUNG ROY HARGROVE AT MUSICFEST U.S.A. IN 1989

it. He never nitpicked over a musician's performance; he waited for the music to hit him in the soul. And Jack always expressed concern about the future of the music. As a businessman, he was determined to help grow the market for jazz. He invested a lot of time and money in music education, and he was always looking for ways to raise jazz's profile in the public eye. He wanted to nurture the art form more than anything else, to ensure its well-being so future generations could enjoy it."

Future generations benefited from such events that Jack spearheaded such as MusicFest U.S.A. and JazzFest U.S.A.; and the DownBeat Student Music Awards, which he started with Suber in 1978, have become the preeminent junior high, high school and college jazz achievement awards in the nation, giving the likes of current jazz stars Wallace Roney, Maria Schneider, Brad Mehldau, Norah Jones and Roy Hargrove their first national attention. They are also responsible for millions of dollars in college music scholarships that have been awarded to the winners.

Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas has

received more than 100 Student Music Awards, and the impact this has had on the school and its students has proven invaluable.

"I remember his quote when he bought the magazine," said Bart Marantz, who heads the jazz program at BTWHSPVA. "He said that the force behind him buying and producing the magazine was to further jazz education, to create the next generation of jazz artists. And Jack did that in a big way. He put his time and money behind our leaders of today, who were heard first through DownBeat. He opened up doors for all students. The DownBeat Student Music Awards have proven to be a focal point for the next generation of jazz artists. You can name so many who have come through the awards. Two of our past students who won the awards—Roy Hargrove and Norah Jones—are up for Grammys. This proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jack's foresight more than 30 years ago to support jazz education has come to full fruition."

His love for music also came through his devotion to the music products industry, for which he published Music Inc.—a leading trade magazine for the industry—and the UpBeat Daily magazines for the NAMM shows.

"I have lost the best friend a person could ask for," said Larry Linkin, past NAMM CEO, and, along with the recently passed Armand Zildjian and Jack, was part of a three-way friendship that's legendary in the music industry. "More importantly, our industry has lost a giant in the music and music education community. Jack was always on the leading edge of music education, helping to develop the best programs, methodologies and attitudes that would inspire young people to learn and appreciate music throughout their lives."

"Jack, with his great and happy smile, truly loved the music industry," said Leblanc Chairman Vito Pascucci. "His many important contributions—from him personally and from the publications he did so much to build—were often behind the scenes, but they will live on."

"Jack Maher was a true legend in the jazz world," said Blue Note President Bruce Lundvall. "DownBeat magazine has long been the standard for jazz journalism—a standard that prevails today. Jack's vision and dedication to the art form was a support system for countless jazz musicians and for the music itself. He will be missed."

But not forgotten, as the high standard he set for us at DownBeat is something that we will forever strive to meet.

—Jason Koransky and Frank Alkyer