

## INTERVIEW WITH ART KIDD - NOVEMBER, 1994

*Arthur Kidd was born in March, 1946 in Houston, Texas. His first percussion instructor, his father, taught him drumbeats on the steering wheel of the family car. Art later had his "real jazz-in-the-trenches learning experience" playing in a working quartet with Arnett Cobb and Jimmy Ford. Art's close kinship with Dave began when they met and worked together as fellow musicians on a Royal Viking Cruise Line world cruise in the mid 1980's.*

I had been part of the Houston music scene from '69 to '77, when I got a call from Barry Dean to go out on the cruise ship for the first time. I was out with Barry on the ships a lot before Dave appeared on the scene. These were mostly Mediterranean cruises, and I got to know Wayne Holt and Barry really well on those. Wayne is a very spiritually-oriented guy--he was president of the Theosophical Society in Houston--so we went through all of these metaphysical trips together. I had my Ram Dass books and my vegetarian books. It was a really tight group we had then.

Then there was sort of a break until 1981 when I went out again, and that was the beginning of the Royal Viking period. Barry was booking the entertainment again, and I'd known Barry really closely all those years. We were out on a Royal Viking cruise, and he got a call for another band to do the around the world cruise. That's when he started auditioning people, and Dave was one of those people. I remember Barry calling me and telling me what an incredible pianist and person he was. Even before I met him, Barry was raving about him.

That's when I first met Dave, during that period, though I really didn't see him all that much. When I really got to know Dave well was when we were out on the cruise ship together. I was the musical director and led the sextet. There was also a quartet, and then Dave led the trio. This was a three month cruise I believe, from December of '84 to February or March of '85. Dave and I had a great rapport right away but we really got close on that cruise. We spent a lot of time together in those days.

Dave had his first solo piano job on that cruise and he was scared to death because he'd never played a solo piano job before. It was a little cocktail party down in the club where he usually played with the trio. He had a lot of fear and worry--we talked about that--because he really didn't have the left hand at that point and had literally never played a solo job before. Dave was such a perfectionist and cared so much about the quality of his playing that he had some anxiety about it. I actually went down to the job with him and of course he did a great job, and there were a lot of people talking so it wasn't like he was in the spotlight. But after that he really started focusing on developing those skills and even later on in those cruises began to relish it. It was just getting over that first time.

It was interesting that his last album was solo and he got to be so good at solo. In fact we used to laugh that he ended up playing years of solo piano jobs at the Four Seasons and other places in Houston six nights a week, where he'd go in and play four hours by himself. It always was educational, and he was always working on new things and always keeping it fresh.

Another thing about those cruises when we were together, he started singing for the first time really and started focusing on that. I think it dawned on him that singing was another avenue that he could take and he really got into it, singing standards mainly; *My Romance* and things like that. Dave wasn't a great singer in those days but he was really, really open to getting into it, and was really expressive. I think he really liked the rapport with the audience. He really got to be a host type personality on the ship and did really great with the audience.

Another interesting thing from those cruises was the fact that that little trio room where he played, technically, could be open as long as anybody stayed there. And you'd get these travel agents coming in who were on the ship for free and they'd party until four or five in the morning--a few of them--and Dave and the trio would have to stay there just incredibly long hours. But they started having these jam sessions up there.

Another nice thing that happened during those cruises was that there were big bands on the ship. The Harry James Big Band and the Dorsey Band, under the direction of Warren Covington, were on the ship, so the James Band had all these great jazz players from LA, and the Covington Band had a bunch of New York jazz players. So Dave and the trio became the hosts for these late-night, fantastic jam sessions that happened every night after most of the passengers had gone to bed. Dave would be holding forth with these great horn players from the big bands. Those were some really good nights. I'd go sit in, and some of the higher times on the ship were those jam sessions.

Dave was such a community-people kind of person. He was also very ambitious in making things happen. A lot of people have ideas, but Dave was the sort who made things manifest and actually brought them into being. He was so persistent and spent so much time on the phone and was such an organizer, not only for himself, but for the whole musical community, which really happened in Houston. He was like a one-man incredible force in Houston in terms of making gigs happen and bringing musicians together, almost single-handedly maintaining the jazz scene or at least creating and taking it to another level. I think he got to be more and more that way as he went along. He used to spend a lot of time on the phone with his own career, but as time went on it seemed like he focused more on helping other people and making things happen; bringing people in from out of town and really going for quality sorts of shows. Unfortunately during a lot of this later period I was in Austin and wasn't down there to witness all of it, but he told me about a lot of things and who he was bringing in and so on. So a lot of it was second-hand to me. I didn't actually get to experience it.

I'll never forget one time I went down to Houston. He said, "I've got a surprise for you." I went to his apartment one night about 9:00, having just driven in from Austin. He took me out the door and into the Blue Moon, and there was Ray Brown with Herb Ellis and Monty Alexander. So he treated me to that. I'd never seen Ray Brown before, much less the other two.

Dave was such a generous person. He was always making me tapes and always spreading music around to people, as much as anybody I've ever known. I'd show up, and he'd have put together a tape of his favorite jazz tunes for me. He had one tape he did up called Mellow Sampler, that had John Abercrombie and Miles Davis; just a whole compilation of favorite tunes he'd made just particularly for me. No occasion, no Christmas or birthday or whatever. He was always doing that for me.

Dave had really diverse musical tastes and loved all kinds of music without being a jazz snob or that critical. He would play Broadway show tunes with Barry and really embraced Barry's musical theater domain, unlike some jazzers who might be less open to things like that. Dave had incredible ears, and of course pianos that were out of tune drove him nuts. On the cruise ships the pianos seldom get tuned, and just with all the movement and the changing climatic conditions the pianos would easily go out of tune. So Dave would really go nuts with ears like his on the ship. He got hammers and actually learned how to tune pianos, because they were so bad that he was forced to on the cruise ships. We'd have these piano tuners come on in like Columbia or somewhere and then sometimes the pianos would sound worse than before they'd started! So that was a little painful for Dave. He was always trying to fix his pianos and he was always on the cruise directors to get the pianos tuned. He was quite upset about it obviously because it was just painful for him. I played a couple of trio gigs with him in Austin around '89 or '90, and the pianos were so out of tune that he hated to play ballads on them. It was hard for him to play anything slow so he ended up playing mainly fast tunes because things going by slowly were too painful harmonically for him.

Another interesting thing he did on the cruise ship was he put incredible energy into his band show. We had band shows for all the bands. I think Barry was probably an influence like that because Barry has such an incredible producer/director talent with shows. A lot of entertainers on the ship were blown away by the fact that a band put on such a good show. Dave was so inspired by meeting Page Cavanaugh that he wrote this incredibly tight arrangement of *My One and Only Love* for four male voices, and I was one of those. It was a really hard, tight thing to sing. I had one of the inner voices; it would go up a minor 6th and then be a half step from the guy next to me. It was like this incredible part to learn, but he made individual cassette tapes for all of us. I believe one side was the whole piece and the other side was just our part. He put all this time into it so we could each have our tape to practice with. That whole band show of Dave's is on videotape.

Dave always had intensity and high energy. He was very friendly too. We became instant friends and the rapport was always so verbal and so high energy and so friendly. And so much intelligence; Dave was such an intelligent person. I think his mental intensity was almost too much for some people because he seldom downgraded it in terms of intensity. His mind was fast and always so thought-ful, that to match his energy was not always easy. If you got tired, Dave would be *zoom--still going!*

When I was in Austin and he was in Houston we'd have two or three hour phone calls. I knew if I called Dave it was going to be an expensive call! In fact sometimes I didn't call him. "I don't know if I can afford this this week ... Because he loved to talk, and we talked about so many things, from music to relationships to the meaning of life. He was very interested in the spiritual side of life and was always open to receive books. I gave him a lot of metaphysical books which I'm into. He was always reading the books and we were always talking about them. We had a great long distance telephone relationship. In the last few years I hadn't seen him that much so a lot of our friendship was carried on over the phone.

Dave's intensity and intelligence made for a great sense of humor as well, which is something we really enjoyed together. The other thing that really jumps out about him is that he really was a typical Capricorn in terms of being grounded,

organized, focused, persistent, never giving up. He would spend hours on the phone getting things done, really focused on making things happen musically.

Dave used to say that his trips to Austin were like spiritual retreats for him because he would get so wrapped up in the music world and his business world and on the phone and agents and gigs and the urban kind of energy. He'd get a little stressed out and burned out so he would come to Austin, and we'd always go eat at his favorite restaurants. I'd give him massages because I'm a massage therapist, and I used to work on Dave and Barry when I'd go down to their place in years past.

Barton Springs is really the spiritual center of Austin. It's cold, natural water and it's actually the center of the whole development vs. ecology struggle that's going on here. But we'd always go to Barton, and it was just a real renewal-vacation kind of trip for Dave whenever he came up. Sometimes he and Barry would come up together and stay with me.

The last time I saw him, he and Scott and Barry came up together. We went out and ate and then we went to this place called Mount Benel, which is really where everyone goes in Austin to see this breathtaking view of Lake Austin and the hills and the city. It's out of the city a ways. Really my last meaningful image of Dave was standing silently looking out at the stars and the sky and the hills and the lake, and Barry telling me that Dave was just really into relishing every moment of experience at that point. And that's the sense I had with him here too. We went to his favorite restaurant and he was just really into enjoying everything he could on every level. That was the last time I saw him--that trip--which was about three or four months before he died. After that there were phone calls.

Dave had an interesting experience with rebirthing, or transformational breath-work, with me. It's basically just opening up to your breathing in a very relaxed way and sort of just letting go. It's interesting how people will get into a space where their breath is almost breathing them, surrendering to this spontaneous energy which flows through your body through the agency of the breath. It's amazingly cleansing. Some people call it "God's vacuum cleaner." Everything you're holding onto on emotional levels and physical levels and mental levels will sort of be cleansed out. Often times people's fears come up. It can be pretty intense. Breathing doesn't sound like that much, but when you really open up to it and let go to the energy of the breathing rhythm, things come up and you can have a lot of catharsis. And when you're really complete you get to a real clean, peaceful, joyful sort of state.

Dave and Barry lived over in Montrose in an apartment in the Gardens and they had a hot tub. Dave and I went out there one night. I was doing some massage on his shoulders and stuff, and when I go into a hot tub I always go into into an open, relaxing kind of breathing rhythm; the water is an impetus to get that going for me. And I was either a catalyst or the massage was or whatever, but Dave really got into it. He started hyperventilating and was in some fear. You can get some tetany or tension in your fingers if you're kind of holding on; it's an indication of your body holding on. But I guided him through it, and he got to this incredibly joyful, freed up, energized state. It was pretty much a complete, spontaneous rebirthing experience. He really got to a stage of completion. He said he'd never been that high or clear or relaxed before in his life.

That was a really major sort of event. Anybody's first rebirthing experience--as I can testify--is like that, when you really get to a point of that clarity. And he had some of the same experiences in Barton Springs. We would go out and lie on our backs in the cold spring water and just breathe, floating on our backs. It was not necessarily as intense, but was the same sort of cleansing and energizing experience. One reason that I bring this up is because the last time I talked to him on the phone he told me that the night before he'd had the same kind of experience where--all of his fear of death and just an incredible amount of tension and energy--he'd breathed it right out and gotten to this high spiritual state of peace. He called it a "palpable feeling of love." And not just talking about it, but feeling it in an amazingly palpable way. That's the last conversation I had with him. He really conveyed a sense of peace, and three or four days after that he died. He'd called me the night before he died, and I called back and couldn't talk to him anymore; it was too late at night. The nurse told me he'd improved a little bit, and I got up the next morning and loaded my car and called him to tell him I was coming to see him, and the nurse told me he had died that morning. So I missed seeing him by a day or so which was hard for me to take, that I hadn't gotten down there before he passed. That was frustrating, but the conversation was really wonderful that I had with him that night when he told me about his experience.

When Dave and I were out on the cruise ship it was the first time the Polish band had not been on the ship. There were three American bands for the first time when I went out on this cruise with Dave. The Norwegians have this folk dance show which is a big deal to them, and we didn't know the show, and they were scared to death that we couldn't pull off the show. So our one day in Costa Rica when everyone else was riding the train through the rainforest, Dave and I were listening to tapes of Norwegian dance music and he was picking it out on the accordion. I think maybe he played accordion when he was young, but we took metronome markings on every dance tune so we had the precise tempo, and I sat back there with the metronome and we played the show. It was great. David stood up there playing accordion with one hand; he didn't play the buttons but he played the other part and he was fantastic. I had to give him massages the next two or three days because his back hurt him so much from holding the accordion. But he did a great job and sounded like a Norwegian folk accordionist. The Norwegians loved us. They were completely on our side after that night, but I remember sitting up worrying and working on the show for hours while everybody was in the Costa Rican rain forest. Basically Dave was winging it and did an amazing job.

Everybody in the bands knew that Dave was gay--he was open about it--and there was like total acceptance with the musicians on the ship. I think it was really good for Dave that it was open. There weren't any bigoted people among them and they just accepted his gayness. I think he really appreciated that. I don't know if he'd had difficulty with it before.

I knew about it from the beginning, and of course I'd known Barry forever. When Barry first called me he was totally attracted to David, really in love with him at that point. It's interesting that Barry and Dave and I spent a whole lot of time. I'm straight myself and have never had any same-sex sexual relationships but I've always been totally comfortable with gay people, and they were two of my closest friends. I used to go down to Houston and hang out. It's interesting that I became almost closer to Dave in a way, probably because of our shared philosophical-spiritual bent, which Barry was sort of into, but not quite as fully. I love Barry and he's one of my favorite people on the Earth, but Dave and I had sort of a special spiritual relationship. He was always eager to read and learn about that aspect of things. There was always a drive in him to understand life beyond the superficial level.

He loved his family very much. I was over there right before Christmas, and he'd made this incredible calendar for his family where he had pictures of his family-- every month--from their childhood, and all the family birthdays. He marked family events on the calendar. .. I didn't see the finished product or all that much of it. I just happened to be over there, and he was really intent on it; in fact he was running in and out to the copy store all night that night. Like his other projects, he was totally into manifesting it. It was a very creative thing. He obviously really cared for his family.

I remember one Christmas--I think it was Christmas night--he had Barry and Barry's niece and nephew over to the house. He was so excited. He'd cooked and decorated. The house looked great and he did all the cooking himself and was so excited to host a sort of Christmas event. I went over after they'd already eaten that night and had some dessert.

Dave kept the fact that he was HIV+ a secret for years. I think I was one of the first people he told, not too long after he found out. He didn't want it public. I talked to him a lot during those first months. He put all the energy and perseverance and discipline into beating it that he did with everything else. He was amazingly disciplined. There was this whole dietary plan he was into. It was a book he had and he was doing wheat grass juice and carrot juice and eating a very strict diet He was really dedicated and into it, just attacking the problem at every level at that point. And it seemed like almost all the way to the end he didn't give up; he still had hopes that he could beat the thing. He really got into meditation and positive thinking. There's this book called *Why I Survive AIDS* that he was into. In fact I bought the book thinking I was going to give it to Dave and he'd already read it. He was really on a program with it.

I'm not sure of all that was going on in the later years, but being the practical kind of person that he was he decided he would attack it on every level which meant getting the current drugs and the latest things they had and working with the diet and with his thoughts and clearing his emotions and doing meditation. He worked it on every level possible and it seemed he had hope. Every time I talked to him--and I'm sure he had his down moments--his will and positive attitude were strong. Barry told me at one point he even said that he was ready to go, and it was like he was sticking around for his friends, but he was ready to go.

Even now I still can't believe that he's gone. I didn't see him that much in the last couple of months when he was so bad, so the reality of that, that other people saw in person, I didn't see in person that much. After he died it seemed like I thought about him even more. It's just hard to believe when such a strong friendly presence like that is gone. It just makes you appreciate more the quality of the friendship and the communication and his energy. It seemed like I appreciated it even more after he was gone. The loss of it makes you appreciate it.

When Dave called me and told me about being HIV+ I think he valued my sort of spiritual perspective on the whole thing as well as my emotional support. I don't know if he had that many friends that he could talk metaphysics with although he and Linda became very close. He went through an Ann Rand period where he was reading Ann Rand and gathering something from her work.

We got stoned a lot together and had a lot of wonderful times enjoying the beauty of the Caribbean together, just really enjoying the physical universe a lot. Of course Dave just loved life in general, so many aspects of it. He really loved to eat. He loved all the variety of foods there were to eat. I remember getting off the plane from London--I'd been over there visiting my brother--and Dave and I went to eat at a place where Scott was actually a waiter. I remember Dave looked pretty bad. His color had gotten a lot darker with one of the drugs that he was taking and he was very thin but he was really into sampling all kinds of food, and Scott was bringing us all these little things that maybe weren't on the menu to try. It was obvious that Dave was really into experiencing life to the full and that included sampling all the tastes of life. We had a wonderful meal that night. It was one of those potpourri-sampler type meals. We stayed there for a couple of hours and had a wonderful time. This was during the summer of '93.

He loved to have jam sessions on the ship so much that even after hours we'd just go in the clubs and play at three or four in the morning, with no audience. He would organize these sessions with various musicians on the ship in the middle of the night in the big ballroom. We had several of those that were really great. Dave just loved to play so much.

He was really good with the audience, always personable and great onstage in terms of talking and humor and personality. I don't know if he'd done it that much before the cruise ship. Dave always had such a natural feel for the music. It just always swung. As a drummer, whenever I played with him the time was always just right there, and that was the way I liked to play too. It was always that crispy, driving feel that I like to play, very high energy and aggressive. Playing with him was so effortless because his time was just perfect. I loved his joy in playing and in putting together creative lines.

That was the other thing about his playing. He didn't repeat himself as much as a lot of people do. He was always going for something new, and those swinging angular lines that he'd create--just kind of digging in to the beat--were just fantastic. So playing swing stuff with him was great. And then he turns around and plays a ballad with these amazing colors. It seemed that as he went on he just got more and more into interesting little colors. Dave had rather large hands and he really got around on the keyboard.

Another interesting thing I remember was I went to see him one day, and he'd been up all night with a synthesizer doing a piece that was like this amazing classical piece with orchestral sounds. I don't know how many hours he'd spent on doing this thing; it was just like a little exercise that he'd done playing around. But for me that was one moment of recognition of the genius of his talent because it was incredible compositionally and with the instrumentation he'd come up with. It sounded like a symphony orchestra he'd done on his synthesizer overnight. It was not a jazz piece. It was more like an orchestral classical piece. I was just completely blown away. I never heard it after that, this remarkable composition of Dave's.

Scott's a remarkable person. Quiet and unassuming but really solid, and he was so strong and centered and steadfast there in the end with Dave. I'm very impressed with his character. He's amazing. Another thing that comes to mind with Dave which is probably true of a lot of people dealing with AIDS is that they really cut through the meaningless sort of extraneous BS part of their personality and life. This really seemed to happen with Dave, his really realizing what's

important. By the end there was no jive there. Being a serious jazz-er there was the jive that was playful, and as time went on the jive went away, and it was more pure, straight ahead Dave. That struck me, particularly the last time I saw him. There wasn't artifice there. All that extraneous jive was gone. It was such an inspiring example to me to see how he was transformed and grew as a person. It seems like he got more and more into his heart and more and more into his feelings and less and less into going for meaningless things and being superficial. AIDS is a hell of a thing to go through obviously, but it was like this spiritual transformation, and it was obvious and it inspired countless people. I wasn't present in Houston for it, but it's obvious that what he was going through, and what he managed to accomplish in spite of it, inspired countless people there.

During that last conversation I had with him he read to me the statement the reporter had read at the Houston Music Awards. Dave wanted to read it to me over the phone and obviously he was choking up a little bit when he read it. It's really remarkable that his transition and growth was such a public thing in a way, a witness that inspired so many people. I think a lot of people are a lot more private with all of their changes, but he kept out there in the public and kept playing. With all the articles that were written about him in the paper, it was almost like he was a living example to a lot of people of an incredibly courageous way of dealing with things. I know near the end *everybody* was wanting to see him in the hospital, and they had to monitor who was coming. Apparently some people were trying to come all the time. There are a couple of negative stories in there, but he really needed some peace and just couldn't see everybody.

In the early '90's Dave came up here and played three jobs in Austin. I played two of them with him and the last one I couldn't play. He used some other players without drums. So it was great that the last time I got to hear him play I was actually playing with him with a bass player from New York. We had two straight ahead jazz jobs, particularly the second one. There's a jazz club called the Elephant Room in Austin where you just play exactly what you want to play, and we just stretched out. Dave was so generous, he'd give me whole choruses on drums. Seldom do I play jazz gigs where so much freedom is given to me to play. Dave would give everybody whole choruses; play songs as long as you want to and just stretch out and dig into the tune and explore it fully. That's the last time I actually heard him play live, on those gigs.

There's a great trumpet player here named Bob Myers who's an older guy who used to be the jazz director at UT, and now he's the music liason for the city of Austin. I was playing with him the other day, and he was talking about some gigs he did with Dave and how magical they were. He said the musical rapport was amazing. Bob is such a great musician. He can play anything he thinks, and his harmonic and musical knowledge is just vast, and he and Dave were just having this conversation of the monsters!

One time Dizzy Gillespie played in Houston at this club, and they'd hired Dave's trio to back him up. There was some singer with him too I guess. They charged a whole lot of money to see the show, and apparently Dizzy didn't really pay any attention to the band. They charged people all this money, and I think one set Dizzy got up and played one tune. Then he said, "I'm hungry", and he sat down and ate the rest of the set! Dave was definitely unimpressed with Dizzy. Dizzy was pretty irresponsible and didn't really connect with him or anybody else particularly that much. He didn't seem to particularly want to play, and I think they were charging some outrageous amount of money. So that was not a high point for Dave,

playing with Dizzy Gillespie. Everyone who came to see him I guess watched him polish off a steak or something. I remember Dave telling me that story.

Dave loved the piano so much. He gave me a book on the piano, just a little book on the nature of the piano and how it's put together, a little history. And he wrote that wonderful poem, which is like a love poem to the piano. Dave's love for music was sort of a case in point for his love of life really.