

INTERVIEW WITH CARL LOTT - OCTOBER, 1994

Carl Lott was born in Houston, Texas in February, 1942. His father was a well-known bassist/writer/arranger. Carl began playing the drums at age nine, and has recorded with Della Reese, Joe Wilson, Arnett Cobb and trumpeter Diamond Brown. In 1993 he received his doctorate in higher education administration, and today works in music, construction and management. Along with bassist David Craig, Carl became a regular third of the Dave Catney Trio at Cezanne throughout much of the early 1990's.

I met Dave while he was in high school in the late '70's. I played a set with him at some club. That first time I think he just came up and sat in with the group that I was playing with. That's how I was really introduced to him. It may have been at a club called St. Michelle's. He was an aggressive type player in that he seemed to know where he was going or what he was trying to say. He was searching at the same time but he kind of had an idea as to what he wanted to do, probably from people that he had been listening to; trying some of those things out, in the experimental stage, from what I can remember of the way he sounded at that time.

In the early '80's I had a jazz club myself called Lott's Emporium, and Dave played on a couple of occasions there. He came in and played a few times, and we got to know each other a little better.

After that I played with him under his leadership that time at a restaurant called Landry's. We were playing a brunch set which would start about 11:00 a.m. on Sundays. Warren Sneed was in the band, and we had several different bass players. Dave and I also played parties and wedding receptions, in terms of just gigging around.

After Cezanne opened up, we started playing a lot more jazz gigs, where we were just playing straight-ahead. That was on a pretty regular basis--almost weekly--for several years, mainly a trio with David Craig and Dave and myself most of the time. And then on a number of occasions we would back those gigs when they had featured guests come in. We also played jazz concerts together. I played a lot of those with him, festivals that would be held downtown in the summer. We'd do the jazz festival at the Miller Outdoor Theater and other concerts at different universities here.

Our best times together were probably at Cezanne. It was a regular jazz gig, and we'd get a chance to just play, just straight-ahead playing. We didn't rehearse too much. We did have a few rehearsals, but the majority of the trine it was "on cue"; call the tune, and we'd just go for it at that point.

We read each other quite well and we were always able to lock in and be on the same plane. That's what was most enjoyable to the both of us, because we could always feel where the other one was going, which really made things click very well, and the energy was there where the audience could pick up what was happening very well. It just made the whole event rewarding for everybody the majority of the time. Every time we played it was electrifying. I always felt rewarded at the end of the night. It was very rewarding musically.

I didn't really learn anything about Dave's personal life until toward the end. He kept that pretty personal. Even in his earlier times I never had any idea. That's why I didn't detect it until he told me. One night after the gig we just started talking. We were philosophizing about religion and so on and so forth, and I was getting a feel as to how he felt about that, and we were just talking and talking and talking in general about life itself. Of course he had his opinion about things, and I had mine, but actually I was really getting to understand him more as to how he thought about life itself and how he fit in. It was a bit of an eye-opener to me. And I think toward the end of that he told me that he was sick. He was going through those changes and he was fighting it and doing everything he could do to get over it. He was very positive, all the way to the end. He was very energetic all the time. Even when he was hospitalized he would come out and would still be positive about what he was about and what he was trying to do. I think that's what helped him hang in there as long as he did, because he was full of energy all the time. He had planned out what he wanted to do and be about and he worked towards that every day. He put all his energy towards that, so I think that's what helped him to hang in like he did.

Dave was an excellent musician. He was on his way up to being one of the highlights in the music. I think he had the potential to be a great piano player, because he played with that kind of enthusiasm. He was on his way to getting his own identity established, where when you'd hear a pianist you would know that that was Catney playing. Like Red Garland or Bill Evans; he was on his way to that. He was working towards that. When he played he played with aggressiveness and excitement and he was growing and improving all the time. He was listening to everybody--like we all do--and you pick up whatever you can from whoever you like and at the same time you try to do it the way that you like to do it, to establish your own identity mainly. He was growing in that respect and mellowing out and being more selective in the things that he was trying to say: not trying to say too much, but saying enough to get the message across. He was getting a lot better at that. Dave was growing all the time, and I think he was that kind of guy; he was looking to improve continuously .

Dave was a very friendly person, very outgoing. I liked his spirit. He seemed to be happy a majority of the time. He could be opinionated sometimes but he would "give" too when another point of view would seem to make more sense. He might have a definite opinion about a certain thing, but if someone could add to

that or show another side to the same thing, he was flexible enough to lean toward that. He was open, so I thought he was pretty hip in that respect. Very easy to get along with. Always loose, not too uptight. He'd get uptight at times when he'd be under a lot of pressure but even then he was flexible. He knew how to chill out.

He was active, very active. I mean from the time he woke up he was into it until he went to bed. That's the way he seemed to be to me, and I wasn't around him every day. Most of our encounters were either over the phone or the bandstand. And he was always up. He seemed to be very hyper to me because he was just full of energy all the time. Steady into something, and that's what kept him going. Maybe if the AIDS didn't take him out he'd have had a nervous breakdown because of how active he was. He was just full of energy and he kept everybody up.

When he was sick I'd call him and talk to him and see how he was doing and send him a card or something. I'd talk to his manager and touch bases and keep up with it because we were kind of close. We worked a lot with each other and we talked a lot, so I got to know him fairly well. The majority of the time, even if he just called me about a gig, we'd end up talking a few minutes. Not just about the gig that was coming up; we'd talk about different things. I thought we had a pretty good rapport with each other.

I kept up with things right up to the end, and at the very end his manager Linda called me and told me. I played drums at the memorial session for him. Myself and Joe LoCascio and Warren Sneed and Erin Wright--we were the main group--and then everybody else played the rest of the evening.

Dave's death was a great loss. I was also losing a friend, and it's always a sad situation when somebody goes out as young as him. It has an effect on you.

He was always very energetic and always ready to play. And he tried things. That was one thing I really liked about his playing too; he'd try new things--even if he didn't quite do it--to see if it would come out right. He was always stretching out, taking chances, and I would think that 99% of the time he'd make it. It would work. And then if it didn't, he would know how to clean it up where you would think it worked.

He'd made you listen to him. In concert or on a gig we'd always leave the set hot. The people would be waiting for us to come back every time. They would be there until the last tune was played. That's the kind of energy that would be generated in the room. We had a lot of fun.

Being that we were locked into each other so well we fed off of each other. We did that very well, and I think that's probably one of the reasons why I played with him quite a bit, especially on a lot of his

important gigs and concerts and in backing certain artists he would have featured at the club. We would be able to create that kind of energy between us. With David Craig on bass too, everything would click. It just seemed to work all the time .

Toward the end he was really getting more spiritual. He was just getting more deeply into himself, and I think he was leaning more toward belief in God and the hereafter and so forth. You never know; when you start getting toward that point in time you start communicating on another plane. It seemed like when I would talk to him or see him he would just be in a euphoric type state of mind, like he'd be here, but somewhere else at the same time.