

## INTERVIEW WITH ART LANDE --- JANUARY, 1995

*Born in New York in February, 1947, Art Lande grew up on Long Island. Heavily influenced by his jazz pianist father--Teddy Wilson was a family friend--Art absorbed much good music and gravitated naturally to the piano and to composition. He has played in the states and abroad with many jazz greats and has recorded extensively for ECM, Windham Hill, Elektra, and Atlantic Records. Since 1989 Art has played drums and piano with the Colorado-based Russian Dragon Band, and on April 21-23, 1994 the band, in various configurations--one of those nights with Dave--played to great effect at Cezanne.*

I've had several different bands over the years which have been real communal, with everybody in the band contributing to the concept of the music. I moved eventually to Boulder and started this band that I'm with now called the Russian Dragon Band, in which I play drums. It's guitar, bass, drums and sometimes saxophone. It's another wonderful band that's been going now seven, eight years; gigantic, crazy repertoire, great, fine players, and theater and openness and friendship and all that sort of stuff.

It was necessary for me to really take on drums seriously. Piano is rewarding for me but I needed refreshment; I needed the challenge of being fresh with an instrument. I play more melody a lot of times than I do rhythm, so it just gives the whole color of the band a real different sound. I've enjoyed that.

I'd heard of Dave Catney through Doug Young, the guitarist in my group. And Fred (Hersch) had mentioned him over the last three or four years also, but I didn't really know his music. And then just out of the blue one day Dave phoned me early in '94 and said that he had always liked my music and that he and Fred had talked about me a lot and that he knew Doug Young. He just wondered if I wanted to come and spend a week in Houston and play at Cezanne. I was really open to it, and since Doug was planning to come to Houston and see his folks anyway, I thought, "Couldn't we make it an interesting week where I play solo piano one night and then with my band a few nights, and then you joined us one night, so that each night was something different." Then Dave helped line up that we played at this jazz festival as well, so we had a bunch of fun conversations just kind of planning this. He helped get sponsors for it so that our plane fare was handled by sponsorship. It was great .

I'm no businessman, and he was no businessman. It was just like, "I want to hear you. I want to meet you. I think the people of Houston would enjoy your music." I thought, "Wow!" I was in a real reclusive time actually. I wasn't playing very much. I was going through a lot of personal things and I kind of needed a real invitation in order to feel interested in something. I wasn't really willing to put myself out there very much, but there was nothing wrong with this. It was like, "I want you. I want you to do what you love to do." It just felt real welcoming.

Dave had a lot of enthusiasm. He had a tremendous amount of vitality and naturalness and honesty. These things struck me. Even though we didn't know each other, it was just forthright and to the point. When I contact somebody like that who

doesn't have an angle... He wasn't trying to get anything. It was no "deal." It was just a real simple offering something. Dave was a giving person and a sharing. person. Not on the take at all.

He sent me some of his tapes, which I enjoyed. There was an instant kind of rapport; kindred spirits in a way about music and about "human being-ness." Dave handled the details of the week really well, and I mean he didn't need to do any of this stuff. He would call real regularly, and if I ever called he was always receptive. It was never like he'd put you aside and he never skimmed on anything. He was scrupulous somehow and just handled all these little details about it, and was really helpful.

I was aware of the AIDS and his health situation through Fred, and there was not any difficult transition of us being able to talk about that. He knew that I was aware of it. He would be able to tell me whether he was doing OK or not OK, but he just didn't dwell on it. His spirit was so alive and healthy that even when his body wasn't OK, he was OK, by his standards. It was just "My body's going through a hard time, but I'm fine," because I never saw it once deter his spirit. That was really inspiring, to see that consistency in the face of really radical, difficult, physical things throwing him in the hospital and a lot of pain and spending hours and hours a day medicating himself. Yet you never felt that he was depleted. It never showed up in any exchange, musical or otherwise. He was also very totally non-self centered and really interested in asking new things and not drawing a lot of attention to his own situation at all. Dave was a pretty selfless human being. Even right up to the day when he was scheduled to play with the Dragon Band he was saying, "Well, you know, you don't need to do this..." .He was a little shy about it.

We had a really great rehearsal. We had a very busy schedule that week, but I told Dave, "There's no jam session. I really want to do a full-fledged gig with you and want to do your music and some of our music and some standards that we choose and open pieces and whatever, and really do it serious, and let us feel each other's music and not just throw this night away." And he really liked that. That really appealed to him, and the rehearsal was wonderful. He brought a bunch of his charts, and the guys I play with are really great. They just can learn music real quick, and he was really excited how well we played his pieces. He was very willing to communicate, to say, "Let's try it this way," and "That didn't seem to work. Let's do it this way...." " So he really was able to assert leadership in the sense that once we got him into that realm he really was able to hold forth and communicate his music, which was great because then we could really honor it and play it well. And at the same time too, other things that we picked he was real into, so it was a real band.

Our band does a lot more open playing than I think Dave was used to, and yet there was such a good feeling and there was so much trust that I think the first set was really like a mind-blowing experience for him, just because things went all kinds of unexpected ways--very different than rehearsal--which is normal for our band, but not so normal for Dave. He was real excited and also just was kind of in new territory. And then the second set was almost like, that was already old territory. He became even more of an initiator and he was more at home with it.

There were just some poignant incredible pieces in the second set, some ballads that were just glorious. He played great, and the integration of him in the band after just one rehearsal and one set... By the end of the evening it was like a real

band, which is pretty amazing. I mean, there aren't many people who could really play with our band just because all kinds of stuff happens; people are playing at different speeds and changes are dissolving and songs are moving one into the other without warning and... He just saw that it was fine, because there was a lot of support and he was such a good musician and he listened well and didn't force; just really knew how to share the music. So it was really exciting for all of us and the listeners too. I think everybody really appreciated that night. It was the highlight of the week for me.

The evening inspired him to say, "Wow, it's great to have a real band!" Because in contrast to what what Fred or I have lived, which is having groups over long periods, Dave hadn't done that. He'd been in a lot of situations that had kind of just occurred for one recording or one little tour, and it was pretty exciting for him to realize what is possible from a band. He talked a lot about it. If he had been able to live longer, that was going to be what he was going to do. He said, "It's not even really about the music, but just the safety of the human part, of everybody kind of knowing and understanding each other." It's kind of hard when you're more of a freelance jazz player and you don't know the people, and they don't know you, and by the time you get to know each other, the gig's over. It just doesn't produce really great music. So I think it gave him kind of a hands-on sense of what that is, just by being included and being in a band that was long established and had a real language. And Dave understood the language and he contributed to it.

Like most of the people who I really like to play with, the music was there but it was no different than anything else you did together. So when we went out for bar-b-que and went shopping in the Texas store and all that.... His music was not separated from his being at all. He was just the same person whatever he was doing, with that same enthusiasm and kindness and simplicity, so he could have all the fun things like sharing a meal or whatever we did. He was pretty open to that even though he wasn't really doing that well that week. Actually after the night when we all went out to eat together and then came to the gig, after the first set he was gone. I said, "What happened to Dave?", and they said he just felt really not well at all and he had to go home. It was kind of strange, because his energy was always so high that you didn't know that he wasn't well until he really just had to surrender, because it didn't show up in his demeanor. We had no clue that he was sick that night, or maybe it just came on suddenly. But it wasn't like he had a coating of illness around him at all, so you just would tend to forget in a way. Then he'd have to kind of drop out for a while. When we called the next day, he said it had been a really hard night and that he was going to try to make it to the gig the next set which he did. He was really brave.

Dave just went straight forward from what I saw. And the way he did that whole thing with Cezanne ... He was real honest with me and said, "I just want to get the people around here who really should be heard." He didn't care that we weren't real well known or that the music might be real adventuresome for the audience. He just said, "I'm going to bring the things to Houston that I think Houston should hear and that I want to hear; musicians who I think are saying something."

So he was a real patron of the music in that sense. And he could have been playing there all the time himself or could have gotten himself on the gigs and used it for his own advancement but he never did that. He just would have come and listened every night and spread the word and done everything and wouldn't have even asked to play a note himself. I thought that was really great that he was really trying to do something for the town and for other musicians. He was putting himself in the position of supporting other people and he was barely alive! He had to use most of his energy to just live

through another day. Dave was a very inspiring human being, and if his example doesn't teach you how to conduct your life, I don't think anything can. Just take a look at how you live it, and whether you're skimping or not or selfish or not or whether you're really putting out good energy or not. He was a real good role model for people--in terms of whether you're honoring this life that you've been given--because he sure was doing it. And there was no song and dance with it. Nothing. Just any old guy, in a way, which was great. No trappings.. No proselytizing. And no judgment.

I thought him a really expressive musician, a wonderful pianist. His sense of harmony and texture and mood; I really liked that. I think his playing was kind of traditional in style and yet totally open, like his being. He wasn't an avant-garde or odd person and so his music was also not odd at all. And yet he wasn't closed. He didn't have a narrow view about music at all. Even though his style suited him, he didn't think, "Well, that's the way people should play. So especially in the situation of working with him, and his being open to having our band, it wasn't Like, "Oh, this is different than the music I like ..... " It wasn't. He wasn't narrow.

All the parts of him that were essential, they were there for you and that's who you got to experience. There was no show. He was a blessing. He was a blessing to this place that he visited us here and had his life. And I think he would find it odd that there was any attention being drawn to it, because he didn't need that.

Dave was so loved by the whole music community in Houston, really openly, obviously cherished. Without being championed. He was no kind of guru or leader or high-profile. He was just one of the people.

The week in Houston was helpful to me. As I said, I hadn't been playing very much and hadn't been traveling at all. I hadn't been touring, hadn't gone to Europe in a while. I hadn't gone with my band anywhere and didn't really have the energy. I didn't feel too accepted by the world at large in terms of my music. So it was really Dave's invitation, and the experience of that week was just really positive, and people hearing this music, and us playing the way we play. It helped my spirit a lot, just keeping things in perspective that "Oh yes, it's possible to share your music, and there are people who will listen." It helped remind me that you have to be patient for the right situations. I don't do well with the big world at large, but these kinds of situations like the one with Dave and various things that have happened ..... Usually the important things come about through personal contacts and people just believing in you and wanting to share your energy, and it's not related to the big commercial "system." I think Dave was a little like that too. I'm not part of that. I'm just living my little life, so we hooked up real good because we're just not prominent people, but we have something to share that can be valued, and he recognized that and encouraged me. "C'mon, this'll be good." I felt really happy.