

Charles Freeman Lee, *circa* 1947, at Wilberforce University where he played trumpet in Wilberforce Collegians. He was born in New York City on August 13, 1927 and died in Yellow Springs, Ohio, U.S.A., on June 15, 1997.

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.*

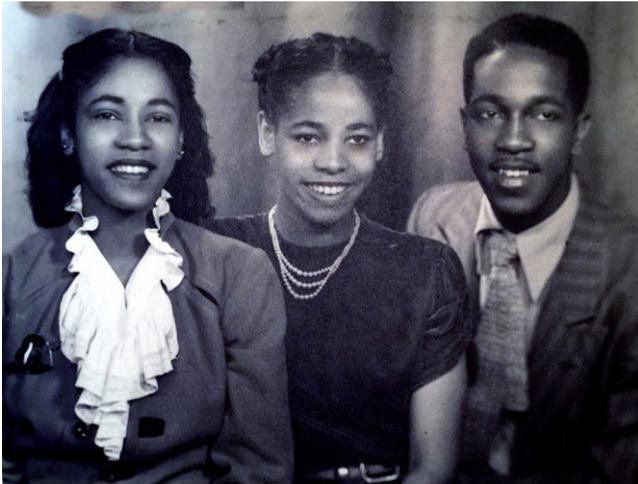
T. S. Elliot,

Four Quartets



Charles Freeman Lee, *circa* 1946, sitting atop his trumpet case as a member of Wilberforce Collegians. Wilberforce University was the home of Wilberforce Collegians, a university band, with famous alumni - Ben Webster, Benny Carter, Frank Foster and others. In 1949, Freeman graduated from Wilberforce with a degree in Biology and left Ohio for New York City to play trumpet. There, he joined Monk, Elmo Hope, and Bud Powell and others in the revolution called bebop at Minton's Playhouse and the Paradise Club.

FOREWORD



When bebop came on the music scene, some jazz musicians embraced it with fervor; others ignored it patronizingly. Its improvisational calisthenics were too challenging for many of the established artists. But Freeman Lee, my one and only brother, latched onto it when he first heard it. The swing music he'd learned to play on his trumpet was quickly abandoned for bebop. He listened to every bop record he could find. He loved bebop.

Right after college, he hurried to New York, determined to become a professional musician and play bebop. He played well enough to get recognized as a 'comer' and soon he was hobnobbing with the then-new, now immortalized, jazz musicians, some of whom, like Monk, Sonny, and Mo, (Elmo Hope) he could call friends.

But Freeman had a problem: he could not seem to make a living from music. He also could not seem to distinguish between what was helpful and what was harmful to his career and his life. He chose bad companions, bad habits, and bad relationships. Ultimately, his career never flourished as his talent predicted. His recordings are only a small percentage of the ones he could have made.

His life as a musician took him eventually to Europe, where he found kindred spirits and gigged with other American musicians as well as Europeans and South Africans. This was a period of his life he looked on with great fondness. But on his last visit home to Ohio, cancer began its devastation of his body and spirit. He died finally in 1997, almost to the day predicted by his doctor — mainly I believe, because he was sick of being sick in Ohio.

He might have been happier if he could have spent his last days in Paris or New York where, even though far from family, he would have felt that he was still hanging in there, being a bebop musician.

But those of us who loved him never calculated his failures. For Freeman had a sweet soul, a kind heart, a generous spirit. He would share whatever he had with whomever needed it. He was always there for me and always cared for me, his 'little sister'. He may not have been immortalized by the critics, but he is immortalized in the hearts of those who knew him well.

Professor Jane Lee Ball, 1998

The top photograph shows left to right: Mary Lee, Jane Lee and their brother, Freeman Lee, as students at Wilberforce University, circa 1946, while, at right is his sister, Jane Lee Ball, some 50 years later as Professor Jane Lee Ball, after her retirement from Wilberforce University, circa 2000.



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The photographs on the first and last two pages show the Wilberforce University Orchestra, *circa* 1890 on the front pages and *circa* 1900 on the back pages. All photographs in this book were provided under licence by the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Wilberforce, Ohio, United States of America. These photographs appear here on the printed page for the first time and are no longer available for licensing from the museum.

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“And most of the time, when you’re young and dumb – you know everything!”

Charles Freeman Lee, bebop trumpeter and pianist, 1993.

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

I offer my heartfelt thanks to Charles Freeman Lee, bebop trumpeter and pianist and for his generosity and trust in agreeing to an Interview in 1993, on a cold European fall evening, in a café full of chatter. His patience, humour, and his insights proved valuable, as, I too, improvised my way through life.

I also thank Freeman's sister, the late Professor Emerita of English of Wilberforce University, Professor Jane Lee Ball, for her love, kindness, interest, support, gentle critique and dedication to seeing the project to completion. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Freeman's extended family - Janet Ball, Cris and Elizabeth Ball and Carole Ball – who contributed photographs for this book and offered love and support, as silent partners.

I am also thankful for the help and support of Ajola Burton, Alrica Henlon, Paulette Cowan, Michael and Hilory Pollard, Nadine Taylor, Dan Wright and Jason Baugh, who all made their unique contribution to the final product.

The errors and omissions are mine and for these I take full responsibility.

Annette Johnson, November 2017.

Prologue

Charles Freeman Lee gave an interview about selected portions of his life as a jazzman, trumpeter and pianist in the USA and Europe. I got his story straight from him in 1993, in his own words, face to face, ear to voice, in a European café full of chatter, on a cold autumn evening. As a jazzman, improvisation was the main theme of his music. I discovered that improvisation was also the main theme of his life – not a bad idea, considering the mysteries, joys and heartbreaks that life often brings.

Freeman was a bopper, one of the beboppers, who took part in that revolution in jazz called bebop, that occurred in the years between 1945 and 1955. Freeman's interview was quite a ride and the verbatim excerpts in the screenplay show just how much fun he was, happy outlook, jazz lingo and all. The interview with his sister, Professor Jane Lee Ball, which follows the screenplay, was in a totally different key - he was talking to his little sister!

The screenplay is a story of love at first sight. It is funny in places and will make the most jaded laugh. At the same time, this screenplay is a love letter to jazz. I hope, you, the reader, will get that jazz feeling as you read. You may want to learn to improvise - get a *jazzitude*¹ to life – listen to your own drumbeat, solve your own issues, in your own way, by yourself and in your own time. Improvise, my friend - it's your life!

Let's make jazz fun again!TM

¹ A *jazzitude* is the wish to live one's own truth, improvising on one's formal learning from school, the media, pals and parents. It is a combination of jazz and attitude, a word coined by the writer to give a noun to jazz's relevance to life - when in doubt about the tune laid out before you, improvise!

INT. BAR, LE BAISER SALE, (THE SALTY KISS) RUE DES LOMBARDS, PARIS - NIGHT

Le Baiser Sale is a Paris jazz club, with a long wooden bar. A pewter bucket of Casablanca lilies stands on the corner of the bar. Black and white jazz performance photographs line the wall behind the bar.

The space is crowded, frenetic with pre-show orders. There is an anticipatory buzz from the crowd, below the LIVE HARMONICA.

A waiter, black vest and bowtie, weaves his way through standing room only, leans over, picks up a beer glass, adds it to the meter-high stack of glasses in the crook of his arm, which curves precariously to one side, but is expertly balanced.

He meanders through the crowd - *Excusez-moi!* - as people naturally shift to allow him to whizz through the swinging doors of the kitchen. The stack of glasses RATTLE, and the DIN OF THE KITCHEN SEEPS OUT as the doors open and close.

The ambiance is warm, earthy and Parisian – people of all ages, races and origins, from Africa to South America and islands in the Pacific and the tourists, Parisians for a day or two - gather to listen to live music.

WE HEAR APRIL IN PARIS

EXT. LE BAISER SALE, RUE DES LOMBARDS, PARIS - NIGHT

FREEMAN LEE, BILLY BROOKS and BENNY BAILEY are seated at a table outside the club. Wine, beer and cocktail glasses reflect the streetlights.

The trio look the quintessential jazzmen. Billy, however, is unusually diminutive and leans up into the table. They are in animated conversation, much laughter.

AS THE CAMERA APPROACHES, WE HEAR THE WHITE BLUES, SNIPPETS OF NEARBY FRENCH CONVERSATIONS, HEARTY LAUGHTER.

FREEMAN

Look up the definition of jazz in the dictionary. And look up the definition of music, and then improvisation, and see if it applies to it. They say jazz is something to do with rhythm of “negro” music! (laughs)

BILLY (laughing)

To do with the rhythm of Negro music? Must be. Maybe the rhythm was ours but the money they made certainly wasn't ours. I mean Louis Armstrong, man oh man, he should have been rich, but uh...

BENNY (nostalgic)

Yeah man, Freeman, I mean you remember them cats jamming with Big Nick at the Paradise? It seems pretty amazing now looking back. Those sessions were really swingin'! Idrees could cook, Stanley Turrentine was blowing everybody away, Art Farmer could cook...

FREEMAN

I mean, gentlemen, Dave Brubeck and Benny Goodman were supposed to have been king of something or the other! (laughs.) Yeah, Benny Goodman was an excellent clarinet player but, I mean, there were lot of black cats that could play better than Benny Goodman?!

REACTION Benny and Billy - rhetorical laughter.

And Miles was a black cat, right? And everybody says, "Wow, Miles!" But Miles, as a trumpet player, he wasn't nothing special to us.

Bird gave him a gig, but if Bird hadn't given him a gig, who was going to hire Miles Davis?

I mean you had Kenny Dorham, you got Fats Navarro. You had a bunch of trumpet players that could play better than Miles.

And the thing about Miles' playing is that the he's easily copied. Chet Baker came right along and wow! He had Miles down pat! But, I mean you couldn't copy Dizzy and them cats. You couldn't copy Bird!

BILLY (with bitterness)

And them cats never got where Miles was. Miles' sound appealed to the right people, so they promoted Miles and they got a lot of better cats... like, uh, present company not excluded! (laughs)

BENNY

I mean Miles could hold his own at the Paradise! When Big Nick call that tune. "The Song Is You - he separated the men from the boys! All those changes to the bridge B flat to E to A flat to G flat - the cats who couldn't cut it would just sit it out!

FREEMAN

Yeah right. Miles was creative. And he was a good trumpet player! But there were so many trumpet players that could blow Miles away.

In his autobiography, he says, “Me and Dizzy and Clifford Brown...” I can’t imagine him being with Dizzy and Clifford - not playing! I mean, yeah, hanging out maybe, but I mean - wow! (laughs heartily)

In 19 whenever it was that Miles started playing with Charley Parker, uh, there was so many players around that could... I don’t know, man.

BENNY

And now the situation is like all these guys coming up now, most of them seem to be influenced by Miles or so it seems...

FREEMAN

Man, Miles was never an influence on me! I never thought he could play that good, I mean he could play but not a virtuoso?? If you’re talking about creativity - he’s original! That is one thing. He come out with one thing that was easy to, very simple, very easy to copy too, because copying Dizzy is pretty heavy-duty work!

BILLY

Yeah, Chet was definitely influenced by Miles, matter of fact... (wistfully) Strange, isn’t. Then Chet went to Amsterdam and just passed away...

FREEMAN (incredulous)

I know Chet Baker had Miles down pat, but I didn’t realize he’s supposed to have jumped out of a hotel window in Amsterdam, man. You’ve got to be kidding!

BILLY

That’s right, man, he jumped, or he fell – nobody really knows. I just remember I was there, I had a gig at some place and I was hanging with Joe and next day someone called to say he died.

BENNY

As I recall it, Billy, I am the one that called you man – I was wanting to see him the next night.

BILLY

That's right – it was you that called. It's funny... yeah, I remember now. It was you that called to say Chet had passed away...

FREEMAN (interrupting)

But Chet checked out early, I guess. But, I was a late starter with everything! (laughs) I guess I'll be checking out late...

The others join in the laughter and Benny orders another round of drinks from the handsome French waiter now leaning over to clear their table.

BEGIN CREDITS

NO SOUND

EXT. PARIS, L'ARC DE TRIOMPHE, CHAMPS ELYSEES - DAY

A lone cyclist makes her way towards *l'Arc de Triomphe*, head lowered in a determined stance against the headwind, as the SWEET TONES OF A LONE STEEL DRUM ECHO, ever more clearly, bringing a gradual smile to her face.

She greets the STEEL DRUMMER at the entrance with a quick nod and rides under and out of the Arc to the *Place Charles de Gaule*, towards a wide avenue (*Champs Elysees*).

PAN slowly from cyclist to larger view of *Place Charles de Gaule* and avenues radiating out in all directions.

WE HEAR L'ASCENSEUR POUR L'ECHAFAUD

VOICE OVER

It may only be coincidence that after four or five visits to Riker's Island, in the tidal strait better known as the East River, Freeman found old friends forty years later, on the right bank of the Seine, on the streets of Paris...

WE HEAR L'ASCENSEUR POUR L'ECHAFAUD

EXT. PARIS, CENTRE POMPIDOU AND ENVIRONS – NIGHT

Mime artists - including a clown - perform outside the Pompidou Centre as tourists and passers-by watch the performance.

Crowds stream into jazz venues – Le Sunset/Sunside, Le Duc des Lombards, Jazz Club Etoile.

EXT. LE BAISER SALE - NIGHT

Freeman, Billy and Benny – now joined by many others at a table inside the club – are visible in outline through the condensation on the window.

Talk is animated and dominated by laughter of the table-banging, doubling-over variety. The background crowd is sparse.

WE HEAR L'ASCENSEUR POUR L'ECHAFAUD

VOICE OVER

He was in the company of fellow trumpeters, Billy Brooks and Benny Bailey, both of whom lived in Europe, in silent exile from America. Purely by chance, perhaps, all three of them were born as the Sun streamed through Leo, passing over land *en route* to the Pacific, for if east was via west, there just had to be Indians in America...

EXT. PARIS - NIGHT

VARIOUS ANGLES OF the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, the Montmartre district.

VOICE OVER

Less coincidental than this happy meeting of three friends, was the New Amsterdam Musical Association of New York, the forerunner of the Clef Club, formed by a cat called James Reece Europe at the turn of the century. For it bore a clear reference to the Treaty of Breda, signed over 300 years before, when the Dutch ceded New York to the British, more or less in exchange for Surinam...

EXT. PARIS, STREETS AND BOULEVARDS - NIGHT

INSERT series of road signs Versailles 20km Aeroport de Paris Orly 13 km .

Traffic, with beams on wet asphalt, moves slowly against the silhouette of the Paris skyline.

VOICE OVER

and bequeathing, among other things, the legacy of Harlem, or at least in name. This cat, Jim Europe, brought the Harlem Hellfighters, a pre-jazz ragtime band, to Paris during World War I. The Harlem Hellfighters toured 25 French towns and cities including Paris, France, and Paris, France loved them back!

EXT. PARIS, LATIN QUARTER - NIGHT

ANGLE ON a street-cleaning vehicle driving up a short narrow Paris street, the brushes on its underside rotate rapidly, leaving a trail free of rubbish behind.

WE HEAR L'ASCENSEUR POUR L'ECHAFAUD

EXT. PARIS, VICINITY PONT DES ARTS (LOVE PADLOCK BRIDGE) - NIGHT

The streets are a sea of young lovers kissing and embracing, giggling, laughing or looking into each other's eyes before locking their padlock in place on the bridge, which is plastered in padlocks.

Some lovers take pictures with cameras.

WE HEAR L'ASCENSEUR POUR L'ECHAFAUD

PAN to Pont des Arts completely covered in padlocks, symbols of young love fixed in place 'forever'.

VOICE OVER

In the New York of the bebop era, the deceitful ease of heroin was enjoyed by many. The tales told by musicians of brutal arrests and definite jail sentences for luckless users, should one fail to make a venal arrangement with the police...

EXT. PARIS, VICINITY GARE DU NORD - NIGHT

A gathering of heroin addicts, gaunt faced and hungry, focus on the fix, stooping, barely balancing on their heels, in their circle of desperation.

As they do their thing, four *gendarmes* come around the corner, and lighters, foil papers, spoons, straws and other paraphernalia fly into the air, as the junkies summon unseen strength and scatter in all directions.

WE HEAR L'ASCENSEUR POUR L'ECHAFAUD

VOICE OVER

might prove intimidating to the Parisian junkies of the moment, who so happily take refuge outside the Gare du Nord, huddled together, all the better to avoid the cops - *les flics* - the shivers and the man they owe.

EXT. LE BAISER SALE, PARIS - NIGHT

We see the silhouette of the trio - Freeman, Benny Bailey and Billy Brooks - joined by others, all of whom are laughing as Freeman holds court. Empty glasses of all shapes and sizes testify to an evening's hearty drinking.

WE HEAR STRAIGHT NO CHASER.

VOICE OVER

But then, all those bebop days were over sixty years ago.