



# A Curious Relationship

*Dave Brubeck and DownBeat have not always gotten along. But through numerous features, reviews and news stories, the magazine has told the sometimes controversial story about how a musically rebellious cowboy became a jazz legend.*

By Jason Koransky

It was interesting to watch Dave get mad all over again," Iola Brubeck said, referring to her husband's rereading of the batch of DownBeat stories that had been sent to him.

Dave Brubeck expressed a similar sentiment when told that some of his DownBeat archives would be reprinted in this feature. He winced, then offered a contained laugh, which conveyed less a sense of humor and more a feeling of, "here we go again."

"Early on, I had great reviews," the pianist said while sitting in the music room of his Connecticut home, reminiscing about his DownBeat stories. "Then, the typical thing is the more known you get, the bigger target you become. The more polls you win, the more people come after you."

Over the past 40-plus years, Brubeck has been more or less heralded as a jazz pioneer in these pages. For example, Michael Bourne's September 2003 cover story, "Classic Time," deemed him "one of the most popular and honored jazz musicians" of all time, and called his visage more akin to an emperor than a jazz artist. Today, he's unquestionably considered a master of the music. Time has the ability to change perceptions.

Not long after Brubeck first appeared in DownBeat in 1947, he started his meteoric rise to fame. The magazine covered him extensively—and he wrote two features for the magazine—yet this coverage reflected the polarizing effect that Brubeck had on the jazz world. Some people loved him, while others called him an

overhyped artist who did not play "real" jazz.

Take the magazine's infamous review of *Time Out*, written by Ira Gitler. One of the most popular and influential jazz albums of all time could only muster 2 stars in the magazine.

"In classical music, there is a kind of pretentious pap, sometimes called 'semi-classical,' which serves as the real thing for some people," reads the April 28, 1960, review. "As a parallel, Brubeck is a 'semi-jazz' player. There is 'pop jazz' with no pretensions like that purveyed by George Shearing—and everyone accepts it for what it is. Brubeck, on the other hand, has been palmed off as a serious jazzman for too long. ... If Brubeck wants to experiment with time, let him not insult his audience with such crashing-bore devices."

"The review wasn't all negative," Gitler recently said.

Brubeck can laugh off Gitler's review today. "Ira eventually came around," Brubeck said. "The critics who put me down the most came and asked me to forgive them."

Perhaps Gitler didn't ask Brubeck for forgiveness. But a peace has been made. And most have come to respect Brubeck and his music. At 88 years old, Brubeck is a proud man, someone who believes strongly in his music. He still has a confidence that encroaches on but does not become cockiness. And he deserves it. After all, reading through these DownBeat archives shows just a glimpse of the battles he fought in order to make the music in which he so strongly believes.

## Jazz's Evolvement as an Art Form

By Dave Brubeck

Feb. 10, 1950

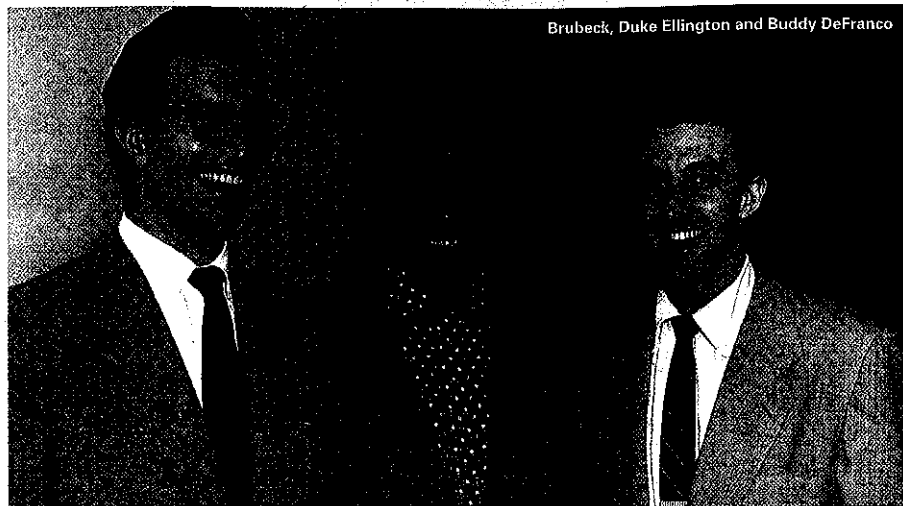
(This story was part two of a lengthy feature the pianist penned for DownBeat.)

No matter what the future of music has in store for us in the way of harmonic surprises, the jazzman's criterion of adoption will always be tempered by what he can hear. I know from experience that the jazz creator while improvising is somewhat like a mountain climber walking on the brink of a precipice. He is protected on one side by the mountain of tradition and exposed on the other to the abyss of the unknown. ...

Jazz (for various social and cultural reasons) has primarily emulated its European harmonic heritage, and in so doing has unfortunately lost a great deal of the rhythmic drive which African music offers. The tendency, until recently, has been toward a more subtle, Europeanized syncopation, as typified in the change from two to four beats in the measure. ...

New and complex rhythm patterns, more akin to the African parents, is the natural direction for jazz to develop when the jazz musician has progressed to the point where he can no longer "hear" what his logical mind tells him he must play. ...

This new interest in the African heritage of jazz is but one of many awakening forces. ... Because the jazz musician creates music, interprets music as he hears it, it is natural that his improvised compositions should reflect every kind of music to which he has been exposed. Jazz has taken into itself characteristics of almost every type of folk music which can be heard in America. It absorbs national and artistic



Brubeck, Duke Ellington and Buddy DeFranco

ROBERT PARENT

influences, synthesizes them so that they come out in the jazz idiom and no longer typify just New Orleans, the South, the Negro or the Italian street song which may have inspired it—but American music.

I would not be surprised to hear a jazz musician who had been exposed to Chinese music use devices from the Oriental system while improvising a chorus. It is fitting that the country which has been called "the melting pot of the world" should have as its most characteristic art form a music with as mixed a parentage as jazz.

### *Brubeck's Take Today*

"I predicted so much that people didn't know what I was talking about. World music, without specifically saying world music. I said that all of the different cultures that we play in would come back into jazz.

"Darius Milhaud told me to travel the world and keep my ears open. We talked about the different influences that come into music. He

talked about Bartók knowing more about Hungarian music than anyone else, and documenting it and writing it down. So much of what is written so-called classical comes from folk music. Jazz is America's great folk music. You listen to everything, and anything you've listened to is part of you. If you don't like it, it's part of you. You just don't play it. If you love it, it's part of you.

"*Jazz Impressions Of Eurasia* is a good example of our touring at that time. Things like 'Blue Rondo À La Turk,' the rhythm of that. A lot of the people who weren't following the direction I wanted to go didn't understand the direction jazz had already gone. I was convinced that New Orleans was the place where so many cultures met. When I talked that way, people did not think I was honoring the African. I'm honoring the African as being the strongest. But it was ridiculous for writers and critics to think there was a pure African beginning to the music."

## Dave Brubeck Answers His Critics

By Don Freeman

Aug. 10, 1955

Dave Brubeck is sick and tired of the bulk of the written criticism which he considers manifestly unfair, often misinformed, at times irrelevant and frequently, he says, based on a woeful lack of understanding and background.

"I don't expect critics to be great musicians. But I do think they should have put in a number of years studying music, and they should know what they're trying to evaluate. ...

"Since we're constantly improvising, a critic should spend, say, 30 nights in a row seeing us in a club. I know that's impossible. But fans do it, night after night. And that's the only way the critics could get a thorough idea of what we're doing. ...

"The critics deny it, of course, but it's too obvious not to be true. They don't like success.

They're restless, these jazz critics today. They want to discover an unknown talent, build him up but make sure he doesn't get too popular because that's when they start getting picayune in their criticisms. When an artist gets popular, the critics hunt for flyspecks."

### *Brubeck's Take Today*

"John Hammond gave me my first East Coast review. He basically said to listen to what this guy in San Francisco is doing. Duke [Ellington] came in, told me I had to go to New York and arranged for me to play at the Hickory House. At the same time, Joe Glaser arranged for me to go to Birdland. There I played with [Charlie] Parker, who was there, and Bud Powell. Bud listened to me the rest of his life. A French writer, who lived with Bud, wrote in a story, 'I'm so tired of hearing Brubeck.' Bud was playing my music all the time.

"Most of the jazz musicians who I thought were interesting; creative and doing it right,

they all liked me. I could never put together how some critic thought he knew more than Duke Ellington, Mercer Ellington or Charles Mingus. Miles [Davis] took back the bad remark he had made about me. If the criticism got too bad, I just remembered Chet Baker, [Gerry] Mulligan, Paul [Desmond], all of these genius players thinking I was OK.

"Dr. Willis James, the African-American musicologist, when I was being put down, went to a meeting in Lenox, Mass., at the Music Inn. He went up to the lectern and started singing. He asked, 'Can anyone tell me what time signature this is in?' I didn't know. I knew it wasn't 4/4 or 3/4. Gunther Schuller, John Lewis, so many guys were there. When he finished singing that, nobody raised their hand. He said, 'That's 5/4 time. It's an African work song and the Brubeck Quartet is on the right path.' I couldn't believe that someone with his authority was defending me."

## Jazz Pianists: 2

By John Mehegan  
June 27, 1957

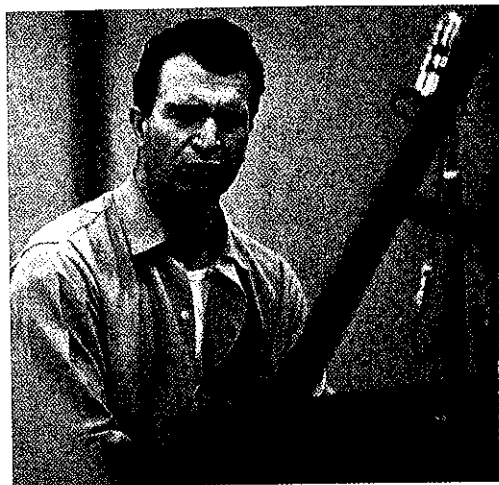
For someone extremely sensitive to criticism, it has been a painful experience for a man as sincere and serious as Dave "to laugh all the way to the bank."

Critics have been mixed in their reactions to the Brubeck quartet; musicians have been fairly unanimous in putting down the quartet as a dull, unswinging group. Just as some of the problems of the Modern Jazz Quartet evolve from the instrumentation of the group, so the Brubeck quartet, although probably less so, suffers from a lack of timbre. ... A second apparent weakness in the quartet is that Dave is not by jazz standards a good pianist, although he somewhat makes up for this by his excellent musicianship, which no one questions.

However, even good musicianship without an adequate array of technical tools begins to pall after a while. ...

What Dave lacks as a performer he makes up for as an entertainer. There is no doubt but that an aura of total conviction dominates all his playing; this quality more than any other has brought him the rampant success he enjoys with fringe jazz audiences. ...

Like any messiah, Dave would like more



than anything else to possess devoted apostles who would go out into the world and preach his gospel.

### *Brubeck's Take Today*

"That was the critic who hurt me the most, because he was my friend. Two of my kids had studied with him. He had come here, and his wife loved my playing. After he wrote that article, he came to the club where I was working and told Joe Morello to get me to come over and talk to him. He wanted to tell me how sorry he was that he wrote those things. I said to Joe, 'Don't let me near him. I don't know what I might do to him.'

"His wife and daughter told me that he had been drinking for three days, and had got so many phone calls saying he shouldn't have written that, that they didn't know what was going to happen. They said, 'He's come into the club where you're working so you can tell him it's OK.' I said, 'No.' But I finally said OK. His wife and daughter were so desperate to have him forgiven.

"[As far as being called an entertainer], when I started I couldn't even introduce the guys in the band, I was so bashful. I didn't want to go near the microphone. One of Joe Glaser's guys said he would not represent me unless I learned how to introduce my men and talk about what I am doing. 'What do you want me to talk about? All I am here to do is play.' This was at Birdland. He said, 'I'll be here for the next set. Try to be the leader we want you to be.' I was panicked. So, I started saying, 'We came in from Philadelphia, and our bass player got sick. Philadelphia is a bad place to get sick. The whole front table broke up laughing. What's so funny? So I kept on talking about being sick, troubles on the road. These guys would break up. Anything I said was funny. Desmond was looking at me cross-eyed, wondering what was going on. At that table were *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial* actors. Henry Fonda was sitting there. That was my beginning of being able to speak on the microphone."

## Brubeck: For the first time, read how Dave thinks, works, believes and how he reacts to critics

By Ralph Gleason

July 25, 1957

(This excerpt comes from a three-part feature that ran in the magazine.)

In 1942, Brubeck enlisted in the army. ... "I was 21 then, and I was amazed. All the guys in these bands were wonderful musicians and very competent, but I was shocking everyone. I don't know of a pianist who's ever come along that has shocked the accepted guys like that. They just completely wiggled over me; there were so many new ideas.

"And, of course, they all thought I was too radical. The first time I wrote an arrangement for the band nobody would play it. So I took it to Kenton in L.A. Stan said, 'Bring it back in 10 years!' It was my first big-band arrangement, and I wouldn't be ashamed for Stan to play it today.

"I would say it predated a lot of things. It didn't have a tremendous jazz, swinging feeling, but it was very polytonal and harmonically it was tremendously advanced, and it had a message you don't usually find in jazz." ...

While at Camp Haan, Brubeck got a weekend pass and went into Los Angeles to try to arrange to study with Arnold Schoenberg.

"We didn't get along at all," Dave says. ... "I had written something, and he wanted a reason

for every note. I said, 'Because it sounds good,' and he said that is not an adequate reason, and we got into a huge argument in which he was screaming at me. And I asked him why did he think he was the man who should determine the new music, and he screamed, 'Because I know more than any man alive about music.'"

### *Brubeck's Take Today*

"Ralph came around to like my music after 'The Real Ambassadors,' with Louis Armstrong, live at the Monterey Jazz Festival. That night converted a lot of guys.

"Considering that arrangement [I took to Kenton], I was further out than I could get on paper. Arrangers, when I first started playing in Hollywood, movie arrangers, NBC guys, told me that if I could only write this down, I'd have something. I couldn't. I struggled so much to learn how to finally write things down. It wasn't easy. That first arrangement I wrote for Kenton isn't as good as I sound like I'm talking about. But I was playing way more into improvisation than I wrote into that arrangement. This would knock Kenton out. He'd say,



'Where did you hear voices like that?' Coming from him was amazing. He was a giant.

"[In regard to Schoenberg], oh boy, he got angry. He told me to go into the next room. I went into the next room. He told me, 'See all of these scores? I know every note in every one of these scores. That's why I can tell you what notes you should write next.' I wasn't going to play to those conventions. I can't believe that I would argue with him, but it's true."

**Mrs. Dave Brubeck  
Discusses Jazz Abroad**  
By Ralph Gleason  
July 19, 1958

We should send more jazz groups to Poland," said Iola Brubeck, wife of jazz pianist Dave Brubeck. "The Poles consider jazz an art; it means the free expression of the individual to them."

Mrs. Brubeck had returned to her Oakland, Calif., home from Europe, where she had accompanied her husband and his quartet on an extended tour.

The highlight of the tour was a two-week series of concerts in Poland, sponsored by the American National Theater association. The Brubeck quartet was the first small jazz group ever to visit Poland (Ray McKinley's large orchestra went there two years ago) and the first racially mixed jazz group ever to appear in that country.

During the two weeks from March 6-19 that the Brubeck group was in Poland, the quartet played concerts in small auditoriums on all but two nights, were feted by Polish jazz fans, acquired a small entourage of young jazz buffs



who followed them from city to city, and met many citizens of Poland who were avid jazz fans. . . .

Although the Brubeck quartet received enthusiastic response throughout Poland, perhaps the warmest reaction came in Stettin on the night of March 7. As an encore, the jazz critic [Roman] Washco introduced the two Brubeck sons, Darius, 11, and Michael, 10, who then played a piano-and-drums version of Duke Ellington's "Take The 'A' Train."

"It was my first public appearance," said Darius, who is named after his father's classical mentor, Darius Milhaud. "I was real nervous. I started to fumble around, and my father yelled, 'Play the melody!' So I played the melody. It

didn't sound too bad, really, but when it came to the breaks, Michael just looked at me. I wouldn't want to do it in this country, though. It would be kinda comy."

Some idea of the attraction jazz has for the Poles may be gained from the fact that Brubeck accepted a request to play a concert in Warsaw at the Palace of Culture on only 24 hours' notice, yet filled the hall. With no publicity except a few announcements on the radio, 3,000 Poles jammed the hall to hear the Brubeck group.

**Brubeck's Take Today**

"We went back to Poland for the 50th anniversary of this. A lot of the same musicians who followed us town to town for 12 concerts were 50 years older, and still wanted to remember those wonderful days. There were underground organizations that followed jazz. On the last day of the 1958 tour, they gave us a party because we were leaving Poland. One man stood up to give a toast, and he said, 'When you leave here, remember that us Poles love freedom as much as you in the United States.' It was so touching, as jazz was the symbol of freedom behind the Iron Curtain. You can't realize how important jazz is to people in a dictatorship."

**An Appeal From  
Dave Brubeck**  
By Ralph Gleason  
Feb. 18, 1960

An appeal to Southern jazz fans "to cooperate in helping us demonstrate that jazz music is one of the best aspects of American democracy" was issued by Dave Brubeck on the heels of the cancellation of his 25-day tour of Southern colleges and universities because his quartet is racially integrated.

"We know the problem is not with the Southern jazz fans," Brubeck told DownBeat. "They know us and they know who we are. And they want us. And we want to play the Southern colleges and universities. All we want is that the authorities accept us as we are, and allow us—and all other integrated jazz groups—to play our music without intimidation or pressure."

Brubeck's 25-date tour was originally scheduled for February. As it became evident that he would not accept a lily-white clause in contracts, the tour dropped from 25 to 15 to 12 to 10 colleges. When the final 10 were notified by telegram that the Brubeck quartet was integrated, only three would accept the group.

"Let me reiterate," Brubeck told DownBeat, "we want to play in the South. The jazz fans want us to go there. They bought our group. They must want us—they voted for us in the DownBeat poll." . . .

Brubeck, of course, has toured in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East and Poland for the U.S. Cultural Exchange program.



Eugene Wright, Brubeck's bassist, said, "I think it's a shame we can go and travel all over the world and have no problems and come home and have such a silly problem. But it doesn't bother me. It's a shame they can't get themselves together. If they ever do get themselves together, they're in for a treat."

**Brubeck's Take Today**

"Eugene Wright was so great about accepting the bad conditions that were going down. He contributed so much to making things better, by not being angry. He used to say, 'I'll handle this my own way. Don't worry. I understand the situations we'll get into. I'll protest in my own way.'

"My band right now, two guys in it have been in it 30 years. This group has been

together longer than the old group. People don't realize that. I put a high value on a working group. The old group, we were together more than with our families. You have to respect each other, and it becomes a situation like you're all brothers. Paul Desmond—my kids thought he was my brother. Even when they grew up, they called him Uncle Paul. I learned how to be a mediator and moderator. With Gene, I never had to say anything. But with Joe and Paul, I'd have to sidestep, keep them from being angry with each other. Paul had such a sharp wit. If I did something he didn't like, the next phrase he'd play would be 'Don't Fence Me In' or 'You're Driving Me Crazy.' Nobody would know except me. Sometimes I'd let it happen, other times I'd give him something a lot worse."

**Two Generations of Brubecks: A Talk With Dave, Darius and Chris**  
By Dan Morgenstern  
May 25, 1972

**Dave:** When we moved into the house before this one, there was a newspaper article saying to expect all-night jam sessions and a different quality in the neighborhood.

**Darius:** Poppy fields.

**Dave:** The kids have had a really tough time living down that they're mine.

**Darius:** Nothing caused me to snap out of my revolt against jazz because no decision was made. By the time I was old enough to revolt, I played three instruments—maybe not well, but it was still my favorite thing to do. I never thought of music vocationally, and that's what Dad considers my great revolt. I went through a period I'm just coming out of, of being very bored with AABA-type choruses. ...

**Chris:** I'm the white sheep of the family. I've yet to have my big revolt. Maybe one will come up. The thing in school is that the kids who mature the fastest, who are basically brightest, want to become hoods more than anything else, and I was kind of into that.



Brubeck with Mike, Darius and Chris in the late '50s

**Brubeck's Take Today**

(An amazing part of Brubeck's story is how it has involved his family. This has been an angle covered in DownBeat, from interviews with Iola to this interview with his children.)

"Right now, I'm preparing a new piece with Chris based on Ansel Adams," Brubeck said. "There will be a screen over the orchestra with his photos. Then it'll be done with seven different symphonies. I wrote the piano part. Chris has put together the Ansel Adams photographs and orchestration. I just did a thing with Yo-Yo Ma and my son Matthew. My son Darius has done such great work in South Africa, and he'll be out at the University of the Pacific [in April] for the premier of the Ansel Adams piece. It's so gratifying. That's going to be a big day in my life." (Unfortunately, Brubeck got ill before the event and could not fly from Connecticut to California for the premier.)

"[My sons] naturally fell into careers in music. I didn't want them to be jazz musicians, or musicians.

Right in this room it all happened. There was a bass under the piano, a drum set right here. And the kids would see Paul Desmond, Joe Morello, Eugene Wright and Gerry Mulligan. One day, Gerry and I were playing in this room. The kids came home from school. Gerry said, 'Do they play? Well, why don't we have them sit in.' He said, 'You're lucky. You have a rhythm section. You can rehearse right in your own house, with your own kids.'

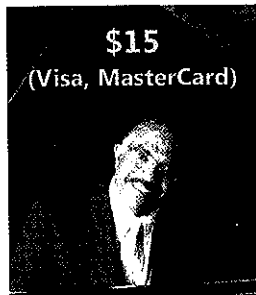
"My wife is writing all of my sacred texts, some of my art songs and some songs like 'In Your Own Sweet Way.' We work as a family. It's great."

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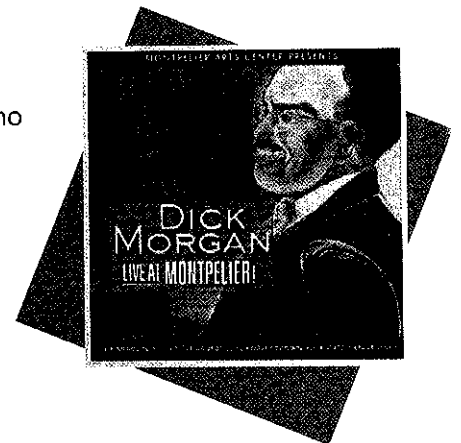
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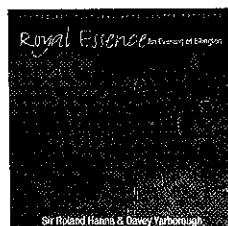
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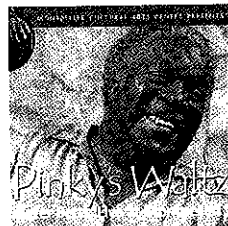
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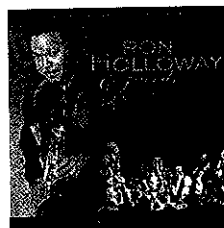
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## About This Man Brubeck ... Part 2

By Gene Lees

July 20, 1961

Brubeck impresses this writer as being one of those rare truly happy human beings.

Maybe this is because he has a wife who evidently understands him. The remarkable Iola Brubeck is an intelligent and articulate woman with a keen sympathy for her husband's problems. Perhaps this is because she is creative herself. She has written the words to many of Brubeck's tunes, and is, if the music business ever discovers it, one of the best lyricists in America today.

But probably the basis of Brubeck's contentment is a deep faith in himself.

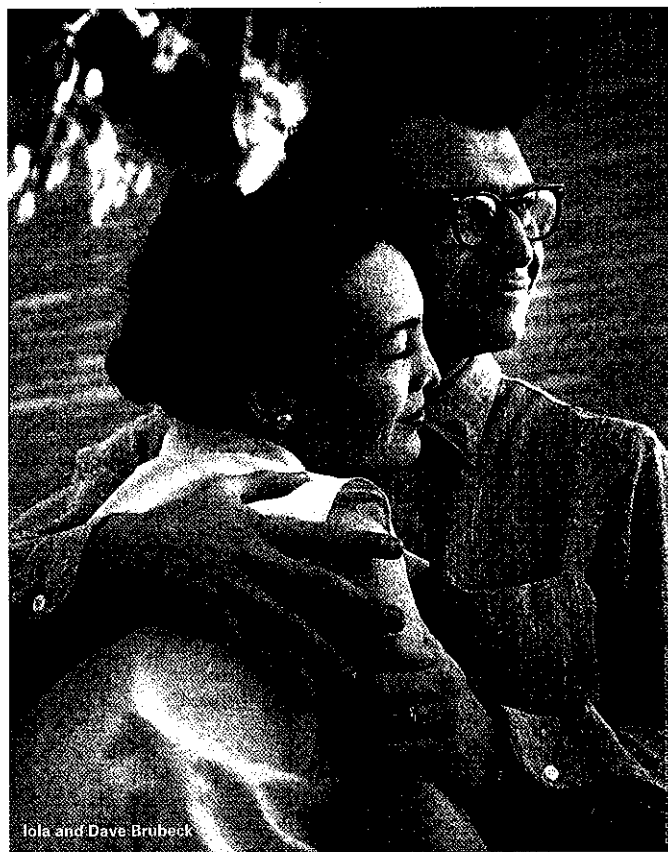
His wife recalls an incident that indicates that this faith has always been with him.

When Brubeck, unknown and with no money, began talking of marriage to her, he told her of his many aspirations, and warned her how hard his struggle would be. "It's funny," she said, "I can still remember the exact spot crossing the Oakland bridge where he talked about it."

"It may take me a long time, and it may be very hard," he told her, "but I know I can do it."

### Brubeck's Take Today

"We've been married now 67 years. And we decided to get married the first night we went out. All of the dreams we had, a lot of them have materialized. Things like 'The Real Ambassadors' and the sacred services. This year we'll again be doing the piece that Iola and I wrote using Chief Seattle's speech. Boy, that's a dynamite speech. It's the first great lecture on ecology. It's been quite the ride." **DB**

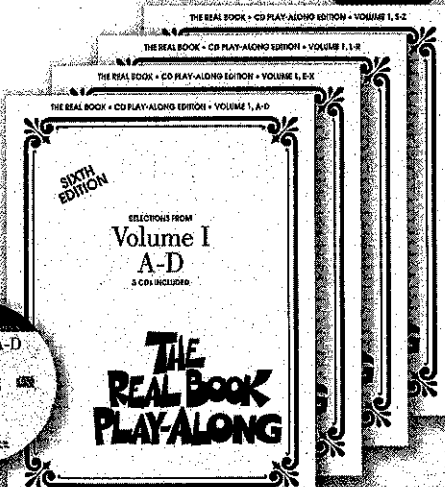


Iola and Dave Brubeck

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