

"Each of us bears the imprint of a friend met along the way; In each the trace of each."
- Primo Levi

It's impossible to describe the feeling I had playing next to Larry McKenna. At the recording session for **Along The Way**, I was filled with the same amazement and wonder I had as a kid. That sound! He filled the room with a tenor tone both beautiful and singing, strong and powerful. With an authentic, natural beat, he always swings and makes the music dance. There is his deep melodic awareness and his mastery of The American Songbook. Everything is in place, unhurried and natural. At age eighty, he's playing better than ever.

Along with Charlie Parker and Sonny Rollins, Larry was the first saxophonist I remember hearing – really *hearing*. I wanted to play music their way, not knowing that it meant such hard work and dedication. I just knew I loved it and couldn't find that feeling anywhere else.

Those outside of the East Coast may not be familiar with Larry McKenna's name. Born July 1937, McKenna is a legendary saxophonist from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mostly self-taught, Larry was deeply inspired by his older brother's LP collection. Completing high school, McKenna worked around Philadelphia and along the East Coast until the age of 21, when his first big break came with Woody Herman's Big Band. McKenna has played and recorded with Clark Terry, Frank Sinatra, Rosemary Clooney, Tony Bennett, Warren Vache and countless others. He has four recordings under his own name, with extensive credits as a sideman. McKenna can be heard almost any night of the week in and around the Philadelphia area.

Larry is also a wonderful storyteller, with and without the tenor in his hands. I love this one in particular, where Larry describes meeting his own hero:

The famous clubs in Philadelphia – Peps, Showboat, Blue Note – hired the stars of the time. Every night of the week, one could go out and hear artists like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Stan Getz, Oscar Peterson and more.

These traveling bands would play week long runs, with time off during the day and little to do. A radio host for WKDN in Camden, New Jersey named Tommy Roberts decided to take advantage of the opportunity. He would hire these famous musicians to play at a place called Heritage House for a program he called: Jazz Workshop. Roberts designed the program especially for underage children who couldn't get into the clubs, but desperately wanted to see and hear the famous musicians.

One weekend the bands of Chet Baker and Charlie Parker were in town. Roberts went to great lengths to book them for Jazz Workshop, packing the room with excited young jazz fans. To their great disappointment, Parker was a no show, so Baker played the

concert with his quartet. At the end of the program, Larry and a few others were tasked with cleaning up. As he put chairs away, in walked the great Charlie Parker. Much to his own surprise, the young McKenna found himself calling out, "Hey Bird!" Parker looked up, smiled, and just like that Larry was talking with Charlie Parker. Parker had a friend with him, who was visibly tired and annoyed about the way his day was going, and he pleaded to leave. "I don't want to leave, I'm talking with my friends", McKenna remembers Bird saying. Looking back at Larry, he put out his hand and said, "Oh by the way, my name is Charlie Parker and this is my horn." After talking for a while, Bird wanted to know where the concert he missed was held. Larry took him to the small performance space. Bird walked in, looked around and said, "Now you can tell the guy I was here."

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This recording is thanks to my first teacher in Philadelphia, Len Murphy, who introduced me to Larry McKenna's music. An expert saxophonist, composer and arranger, Mr. Murphy is one of those truly masterful educators. Our lessons were always filled with joy and his trademark wit. At his baby grand piano, he taught me: *I Cover The Waterfront, But Not For Me* and other standards from The American Songbook. Most importantly was the cassette tape he made for me to absorb and study. On Side A, Charlie Parker; side B, Larry McKenna.

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We all bear the imprint of a friend, a teacher, a hero we've met along the way. Len Murphy and Larry McKenna inspired me to take up a life of music, but their lessons extend beyond this. Listen first and help those around you. We're all in this together. Don't force your point of view, stay engaged, be open hearted. Add beauty to the world, no matter how challenging the day may seem.

I am incredibly grateful to have made this recording with Larry McKenna and to share it with you. As always, I hope our music makes you smile, dance and take a breath.

Sam Taylor
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