

## Cecil Taylor – Letters to Bob Ceely, 1951-54, Part 2

Two more letters transcribed by Allan Chase [[allanchase.com](http://allanchase.com)], selected from seven handwritten letters held in the New England Conservatory Archives. The first four letters were posted in my blog at <https://allan-chase.com> with links to the PDF transcriptions in my post, “Cecil Taylor’s Education & Student Writings” (October 13, 2019).

The remaining letter was typed out, probably by or for Ceely, and submitted in both handwritten and typed form to the archives.

*Courtesy of the New England Conservatory Archives*, with thanks to Maryalice Perrin-Mohr, librarian and archivist.

[?] = uncertain words or parts of words, either the preceding word or one or more missing words.

The spelling, punctuation, and indentation are all preserved from the handwriting. In two cases when a correction is added, [sic; correct name] is used.

About Robert Ceely: <http://www.ceelymusic.com/Biography.htm>

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July 1952 [date from file name, not visible on scanned letter]

Just heard a panel of famous people appraising records [?] the Birdland show They included L. Feather as moderator, C. Jackson his bassist Herman one writer on the downbeat staff Geo. Shearing and Duke Ellington. Herman was the most outspoken with Geo. saying complimentary things in his most wonderful british way. Jackson was so hip! The drag was Duke – he had nothing to say and what was worse they made him seem foolish, God was it awful!

Shearing is at Birdland for 2 more weeks; Duke finishes at the Apollo this Thursday; Lee Konitz is working at a club on 45th St called Snookie’s with Kenny D, Oscar Pett; K. Winding etc.; Heard Shearing last week from Birdland – he played the exact same solo on April as record, I turned the dial to Toscanini. – Some of the Swedes are really swinging, but I must admit I’m angered at the great generosity of the supposed great “jazz” critics like Leo. Feather who go searching all over the globe for jazz talent instead of attempting to develop what is under their noses.

My quintette met with an a-[?] end I can’t begin to describe all the currents of emotional differences that wrecked the c[?]. I learned certain things from them though...

Sure great play a guitar but do you realize all the cats working on that crawling box? – which is not what I meant to say at all (If I’m cynical slightly [?] there’s a couple of reasons) play it by all means but you’ve got to submerge yourself in it. As for playing with me – I never knew you had the desire as I never knew what you thought of my playing – well it’s not important I would like to think of you in terms as a guitarist and as a part of our group 1950 – or say 1952 — —

Earle the most intelligent, stable, and nice guy from the quintette loves Miles and I must admit I see your's and his point.

My address is 315 W. 113 ST, Apt. 46, N.Y.C. and telephone number is MO-3 2618.

We have two rooms – no piano and no records it's ghastly. I'm slowly going mad. and becoming human – well that's something else again. Do come to N.Y should imagine you would have been down before this – Why have you not said what went on in Brandies [sic], Lenny has shown interest in a friend of mine – but I don't go near 'im for reasons that will be explained later. So when are you floating to N.Y. (ghastly huh?) Let me know. What has happened to D. B. Carr is he still with Prince? Ensermet's Rite of Spring is Terrible.

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[Note: The handwriting in this letter is quite different, generally more legible, and changes fairly drastically several times within the letter, none resembling the earlier letters very closely. But it's signed "Cecil" and the language seems consistent with the others.]

Feb 5th 1953

Up among the stars:

As you can see I answer letters quickly; therefore I won't apologize but will say I have thought of you and if it wasn't for a most enervating habit of procrastination, would have written you eons ago; and as fortune would design it there is no writing paper in apt. 22 – but I will not be stopped, hence this scribble.

Am busy analyzing Beethoven sonatas. How does one get to "fail" form? What do you make out of the Largo e Mesto Op. 10 No 3 – and why? Am doing a little writing but that is secondary as one must know the literature of zee masters Tao, I lost my most interesting scores; 2 things I had worked on for 9 months, not a trace of them can be found as the sketch book was either misplaced, stolen, lost. This was quite a blow – I thought I would give it all up but what else would I be content doing?

I do practice piano these days – but I couldn't tell you how much progress has been made since the Boston days, all I know is I'm not even close to Powell, Tristano or Peterson – so where am I? Powell opens tomorrow nite at Birdland – and we have seen + heard the "man" twice since his return. He was so very great once. but now it is his shadow which on occasion becomes the raging angry genius of a few years ago. His harmonic concept has changed, or rather seems to be in a state of change, although his single finger bit is still basically the same, naturally less brilliant technically.

Bishop seems to be his leading emulator in N.Y. and was playing very well when last heard working opposite Silver. The latter is in great demand but is still as corny as ever although his point of [venture?] is his wonderful swinging chords.

Saw Miles a few weeks ago – and wish I hadn't; he looked bad and sounded worse, high etc. Met D. G. recently and must admit I seriously doubt his ability to build –

Was in the 125th st scene this weekend participated in 2 jam sessions – not much happening.

Imagine have heard Petroppla [^re] (spelling is lowest), Fire Bird [?], that terrible Capriccio for Piano (I give up!) a h[?] Norwegeigan [sic] Memoirs (Why even try?) and am now listening to Sacre – all these sounds of [from?] N.Y. radio stations (impossible!) with in one day!!

Saw the great man at Town Hall in Dec. when he conducted his Concertante (a swinging little thing of about 4 min. duration with a funny little coda tacked on.) It would have been a gas if he had kept building for a few more but as it was it was a good little piece. The main work was the Cantata for chorus (about 8 chicks) and the Philharmonic Chamber Ensemble. On the whole I didn't feel that this was an impressive work; the choral pts seemed to be the [?]ing link and possessed the type of feeling found in most of Orpheus. – nostalgia? – The most exciting thing was pt. 2 a little bit called Western Wind. – a duet for male + female soloists + chorus + canon + all crazy type things going on. the group really shook.

After the the master conducting L'Histoire du Soldat in a most splendid fashion – and everyone went home swingin'.

3 wks later saw + heard Krenck [sic; Ernst Krenek] play (accompany) Heatha [sic; Herta] Glaz in a performance of Ernst's 2 Sacred songs. I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about them; simply cause I couldn't make head or tail of them.

Saw H. Duckham briefly Saturday – was leaving for Boston when I arrived on Flo's scene [?].

When are you coming to N.Y. Have 3 rooms in N.Y.'s lower East side away up on floor six – but this is the most – will put you up – so come down. I'm told your friend Cage lives a few – away from here. Did you see Duke when he was in Boston? How was Lennie + Warn Marsh when they were there? Brubeck has a very noisy following in N.Y. When are you leaving that terrible school and place — ?

S[am?] almost blew the walls down but I'm conditioning not only the walls but the people behind them. Have a fabulous view – N.Y.'s mid Manhattan from my front windows. And Brooklyn from my rear — .

Am I ridiculous – how is Morris?

I hope you can understand some of this. Ellington's '42 records I will always dig. God what a band. I loved Diz's 2 bass hit, O[?] etc. too.

Tell Daniel I said hello – write when you can — I hope soon.

Cecil.

Feb. 13. the Rake's Progress at the Met my seat is A.19 —