

Born into a musical family in 1960, Jeremy Monteiro launched his international career playing on the Main Stage of the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1988 with his group, Monteiro, Young & Holt. The band received a 3-minute standing ovation, and *Swing Magazine* called Jeremy “one of the best exponents of jazz piano”.

In 2007 he was elected to the prestigious Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures & Commerce in the UK, putting him in the illustrious company of past Fellows such as Charles Dickens, Yehudi Menuhin and Stephen Hawking.

Jeremy is one of the founders of the Composers & Authors Society of Singapore Limited, and Managing Director of his music management and production company, Showtime Productions Pte Ltd. He has been an International Arts Ambassador for EFG Bank, headquartered in Zurich, since 2012.

In 2016, together with some fellow jazz lovers and supporters, Jeremy founded the arts charity, the Jazz Association (Singapore), to promote excellence and participation in jazz locally, and to bring Singapore jazz to the world.

**J**azz pianist, composer, producer, vocalist and educator – Jeremy Monteiro *FRSA* has been a professional musician since 1976, with more than 40 solo albums to his name. He has performed with music icons such as James Moody, Ernie Watts and Simon & Garfunkel in great venues all over the world, in the process earning the accolade “King of Swing”. In 2002 he received Singapore’s highest honour in the arts, the Cultural Medallion.

Jeremy is also a keen observer and deep thinker. The stories he tells on stage at his many packed concerts and jazz club shows never fail to keep his audiences in rapt attention. Here, for the first time, he has put many of his “late-night thoughts” to paper, offering us a wealth of hard-won wisdom about life, love, music and human nature.

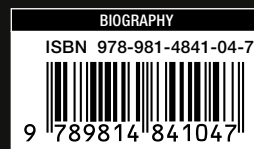
From fond reminiscences that tug at the heartstrings, to funny anecdotes that will evoke a huge guffaw, the essays in this volume take us on an intimate journey into the mind of one of Singapore’s most talented, most respected and most loved musicians.

Immerse yourself in Jeremy’s soundworld with a playlist of jazz tracks specially chosen for listening to as you read the essays in this book. Visit [www.jeremymonteiro.com/LateNightThoughtsMusic](http://www.jeremymonteiro.com/LateNightThoughtsMusic) or scan the QR code.



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Jeremy Monteiro Late-Night Thoughts of a Jazz Musician

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# Jeremy Monteiro

Late-Night Thoughts of a Jazz Musician



With a Foreword by Professor Tommy Koh

“Jeremy Monteiro is a musical icon of Singapore. He is loved at home and admired abroad. If Jazz were an Olympic sport, Jeremy would have won a gold medal for Singapore. He has certainly put Singapore on the world map of jazz.”

— Professor Tommy Koh,  
Founding Chairman (1991–96),  
National Arts Council



For Review only

# *Jeremy Monteiro*

Late-Night Thoughts of a Jazz Musician

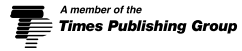
With a Foreword by  
Professor Tommy Koh

Edited by  
Kannan Chandran

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*I dedicate this book*

*To  
Mum and Dad  
I miss you both so much*

*and*

*To  
Josephine, my rock and my love  
and Varian, our pride and our joy*

~

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## Foreword

I thank my good friend, Maestro Jeremy Monteiro, for giving me the privilege of writing the foreword for his book.

Jeremy Monteiro is a musical icon of Singapore. He is loved at home and admired abroad. If Jazz were an Olympic sport, Jeremy would have won a gold medal for Singapore. He has certainly put Singapore on the world map of jazz.

I have enjoyed reading his “Late-Night Thoughts”. Let me refer to some of my favourite stories and essays.

First, I like his essay, “The Line Dividing Good and Evil”. He quotes the great Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who, in his book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, wrote that, “the line separating good and evil passes... through every human heart”. Monteiro, in turn, writes: “It would be easy if we could draw a line and say that the evil people are on one side and the good people are on the other. However, as Solzhenitsyn says, the line exists within the human heart of each and every one of us.”

This is a profound observation about the human condition. We are all capable of good and evil, altruism and selfishness, heroism and treachery, kindness and cruelty, humility and arrogance. The same man can be a hero in one stage of his life and a traitor in another stage of his life. Marshall Petain of France was such a man. He was a hero in World War I and a traitor in World War II. I have been urging the Singapore authorities to erase his name

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from Petain Road in the Jalan Besar area. It is morally wrong for Singapore to honour such a man.

Second, I like very much the essay, “Four Stages in a Jazz Musician’s Growth”. What are the four stages? They are: (1) learn your instrument well; (2) build a large repertoire; (3) develop beautiful phrasing and an astute sense of dynamics; and (4) develop your own sound or identity. It sounds simple but it is not. It takes talent and a lifetime of practice to reach stage four.

Third, I like his essay, “High Points in Life”. It contains the musical milestones of Jeremy’s life, beginning with his first gig, in 1976, when he was only 16 years old. It has been a busy, eventful and successful career. What the milestones do not tell us is the years of hard work and sacrifice, the failure of several business ventures and the loneliness of the nomadic life of a musician.

In “The Difficult Jazz Scene” and “There Should Be More Jazz Venues in Singapore”, Jeremy warns young jazz musicians of the difficulties of making a living in Singapore as a jazz musician and the limited opportunities for performing in Singapore. Few of our hotels have a jazz band. There are hardly any jazz clubs in Singapore. The current situation is truly disappointing. I hope the Singapore Tourism Board looks into this. STB should encourage our hotels to have more live bands. Our hotels should promote Singapore’s music and musicians.

Fourth, I want to close on a humorous note. I refer to the essay, “Either He Goes, or I Go”. In this story, Jeremy recalls the New Year’s Eve of 1983. Jeremy was the leader of a band playing at a jazz club founded by our first-generation Renaissance man, Dr Goh Poh Seng. The band accompanied the American singer,

Jean Bonard, who went on to play the part of the famous Paris-based American singer Josephine Baker at a long-running revue on her life and times in Paris. The guitarist of the band, tactfully unnamed, was drunk and was disrupting the music. Things became so bad that Jean issued Jeremy an ultimatum: get rid of the guitarist or I leave.

Jeremy had to think fast. During the break, he removed the fuse from the guitar amplifier, put it in his pocket and walked away. When the band resumed playing, the guitarist found that his amplifier was dead. Jeremy consoled him, paid him and urged him to go home and spend the rest of New Year’s Eve with his family. Jeremy’s quick thinking saved a tricky situation.

The book is full of gems like this story. I am sure it will be a success when published. I hope Jeremy will be encouraged to write a sequel to this book.

**Professor Tommy Koh**  
Founding Chairman (1991–96)  
National Arts Council

26 July 2018

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## Editor's Note

Just listening to Jeremy Monteiro talk about his schedule can leave you feeling inadequate about your time management.

Rehearsing, teaching, creating albums for others, recording his own albums, performing at large events, curating intimate concerts, developing his own watch brand.... He's a perpetual motion machine.

Although we were in the same secondary school (I am a year older than Jeremy), I have little to no recollection of Jeremy from that time. We moved in different circles, and though we both liked music, I enjoyed listening to it, while Jeremy was busy creating it.

But we connected during my time at *The Straits Times*, where I covered the music and media beats. Jeremy was already well established by then, performing in a 1980s Singapore entertainment scene that was still young and finding its way.

Even then, I marvelled at his ability to bring music and business together. Not an easy feat, judging by the number of talented musicians who have fallen by the wayside attempting to do so. It was not without its challenges, but the failures proved to be invaluable lessons and Jeremy persevered.

Watching Jeremy on stage at the 1988 Montreux Jazz Festival allowed me to be part of a significant moment. Here was a young Singaporean musician who was sharing the global stage with internationally renowned musicians.



Kannan Chandran  
and Jeremy Monteiro,  
Switzerland 1988 /  
Photo by Stephen Boy  
Francis

And it was all accomplished by Jeremy's sheer determination and desire to make it.

It put Singapore talent on the map. It certainly reinforced Jeremy's place on the jazz map.

Not one to sit back and reminisce, Jeremy sat up nights to put his thoughts on paper.

The resulting collection of views and opinions in *Late-Night Thoughts of a Jazz Musician* affords us insight into the musician and the man.

I am fortunate to have known Jeremy for quite a few decades, enjoying the occasional *teh tarik* and *makan* sessions, and sharing WhatsApp conversations on a variety of topics.

Those who have only seen the gifted performer on stage will get to realise from reading this book what a multi-faceted, determined and dedicated individual Jeremy is.

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**Kannan Chandran** spent the 1980s covering media, music and features at Singapore's national daily, *The Straits Times*. In the 1990s, he was the Managing Editor at Magazines Incorporated, responsible for the regional content for titles like *The Peak* and *Expression* (for American Express). In 2001 he started E-Quill Media, which publishes magazines and books, including the award-winning commentary magazine and site, STORM.SG. He has known Jeremy Monteiro for more than four decades.

For Review only

*Late-Night Thoughts  
of a Jazz Musician*



## 1

*Creativity and the Birds*

I am a night owl.

I find it hard to sleep before 2 a.m., often hitting the sack around four in the morning.

A second wave of energy washes over me at the witching hour, and I'm energised to work – developing show concepts, composing a tune or writing an essay. This was scratched together in the peace and quiet of the early morning in Bishan.

The usual work day is filled with constant communication – though it's not the sort of chats or face-to-face meetings I grew up with. It's all faceless tapping on a screen, be it emails, WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook Messenger or Facebook itself.

Despite all that chatting, people seldom talk any more. Except my old friends who still like to meet for a meal or coffee or chit chat on the phone.

My world gets quieter at around 11 p.m. when people stop messaging me – though there are a few old friends who are also night-birds and like to tweet and chirp virtually.

My battle with the bed is a long affair. I usually start to feel drowsy and sleepy at around 11 p.m. and if I do manage to get to bed at that time, my head hits the feathered pillow and I can sleep through the night.

But if I fight my sleepiness like a naughty child and am still awake 'round midnight... then my lids snap open and suddenly I'm wide awake again for a few hours.

I wrote many of the essays in this book in the late – or early – hours between 12 a.m. and 4 a.m. The clarity that comes from silence and the lack of distractions seem to work well for my prose.

But I have a cut-off time to fall asleep, even if I'm not sleepy. The magic hour is 4.30 a.m., because at precisely 5.30 a.m. one of my neighbour's pet birds will start singing its lungs out. I'm sure its singing can be heard in the neighbouring towns of Ang Mo Kio and Toa Payoh!

When I say loud, I mean LOUD. It's like turning on a National Geographic programme on deranged schizophrenic birds at full blast inside the bedroom.

Somehow, if I am already asleep, I am oblivious to it and can sleep right through its loud aria.

I usually wake up to my phone alarm, set at 9.50 a.m., so I can snooze until 10 a.m. Sometimes the snooze lasts until 10.30 a.m. if I don't have an appointment or if I slept extra late the night before. Or failed to fall asleep before the *pontianak* (lady vampire in Malay) bird started shrieking.

But if I happen to oversleep until 11 a.m., guess what? There is a cockerel that lives in a neighbouring block (Who keeps chickens in government flats, you ask?), which has made a total cock-up of its clock and thinks sunrise is at 11 a.m.

I guess this essay is for the birds, but I hope you enjoy the rest of the book.

2

## *A Love Letter*

In love, in love, I grow more in love with you all the time.

Although you've been in my life for more than half a century, my love for you grows stronger all the time, with each passing year. I always learn something new about you, which makes you unceasingly refreshing and interesting to me.

My love for you grows with each passing year.

Even though you sometimes frustrate me and although I often don't understand you, after I take a walk and come back, I am ready to try and make it work again. In all honesty, there were times I did doubt if we could go on together. How silly of me.

You are often with me as I fall asleep, when I travel around the world, when I am happy and when I am sad. When I am well and when I'm not. When my pocket is empty and when my pocket is full. When I am playing with you alone or when I am listening to you. When I have you to myself or when I am sharing you with my close friends....

Through it all, and even when you are in the hands of another, you never cease to amaze me and bring me joy.

Some five decades on and I am even more convinced that this is going to be a lifelong relationship. Thank you for all the joy and fulfilment you bring me.

Music, I love you now, and I always will.

3

## *Roles People Play in My Life*

Very often, as artists or musicians, we mistakenly think that our friends and relatives must also be our fans and work collaborators.

For example, when I had my two jazz clubs, which have since closed down, I always expected my friends and relatives to come and support me. I was disappointed that they seldom or never came. Same with my shows, I was disappointed that some of my friends and relatives didn't come to support me, whether they are musicians or not.

Then I realised that my friends are not in this world to necessarily be my fans. It could be that they hate jazz or hate bars even as they love me. Or they might love me as a friend or relative but don't really like what I do musically or share my musical tastes or resonate with my aspirations.

The same is true for collaborators. Some collaborators are not people I would consider friends. I collaborate well with them and make music that people consider special. But these people may not care deeply about my personal issues and I may not really care deeply about their private matters.

But these people are not in my life to be my movie buddies or to play pool with me or take me to the hospital. These people are there because, on a musical level, our work together helps me to fill concert halls and jazz clubs, and to make music that, to us, feels like a window to Heaven has opened.

Conversely, there are people I genuinely love. I would care for them when they are sick, drive all over town looking for something they need, but I don't necessarily want to buy their paintings or be in a jam session with them.

I believe people are in our lives, or come into our lives, be they relatives or friends, to play specific roles. Whether to have fun with, to work with, to have as a listening ear, to commiserate with, to come and buy tickets to watch our shows, or to be best friends or lovers.

It is when I expect all my friends and loved ones to come to any or all of my shows, to buy my records, to play chess with, to take me to the doctor, to remember my birthday, to hire me to perform with and also to listen to all my jokes, well, then I am setting myself up for heartbreak and broken relationships. I think that if we expect this of people, we may push them away.

I am lucky that some friends are also fans who fill up 30 to 40 seats in a 2,000-seat concert hall. And when they come, I am happy and grateful to see them.

Some fans have also gone on to become really close friends who would go to the ends of the Earth for me, who help me out of difficult situations, and who love me unconditionally.

On the other hand, I have also experienced situations where a fan, after becoming a friend, starts to become a critic, bent on telling me what music I should play and how and with whom I should play it. Or they tell me that I should wear funky glasses or colour and gel my hair, sing more, tell more jokes, or even suggest that I hire them as my manager.

Nowadays, I am also happy to go for drinks after a concert with friends who didn't want to come to my concert but who love and enjoy my company socially, so they come and hang out with me post-concert.

The key thing is to accept whatever role people wish to play in your life. And for me to know what role I wish to play in other people's lives. And not to force my idea of what role they should play in my life upon them.

This way, I can enjoy my friends and relatives as friends and relatives, and I can enjoy my fans and followers as fans and followers... or any combination thereof.

4

## *But He Still Can't Really Play the Blues*

When I was 23, and already a professional musician for seven years, my uncles – Greg and Casey – told my Dad how much they admired my career and work as a pianist.

My Dad nonchalantly and quite dismissively replied, “Yeah, he can play all those Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock fancy licks and harmonies, but he still can't really play the Blues.”

Uncle Greg relayed my Dad's opinions to me later on. I realised later what my Dad was doing. At 23, I acted like I wasn't really listening to him and pretended that what he said didn't really matter. In reality, the converse was true and everything my Dad said to me, whether good or bad, whether I agreed or not – everything he said – mattered a great deal to me.

After I stopped being upset with him for saying that I couldn't play the Blues properly and being upset with myself because he was absolutely right, I proceeded to work at it; to really learn how to play the Blues well and authentically.

It would be three years before I got to meet two of the swingiest and blues-iest jazz musicians on the planet, Grammy Award-winning bassist Eldee Young and drummer Redd Holt, and began an amazing 20 years of heavily blues-infused jazz from 1986. If not for my Dad's critical words, relayed, unwittingly or otherwise, to me via his brothers, I would not be half the musician I am today.

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8



With my Dad, Abner, in 1975

I have enjoyed a lifelong love affair with the Blues and if nothing else, no one can say that I can't play the Blues.

Thanks Dad!

---

9

5

### *From Mr No Problem to Mr No Way*

It's amazing how some people start out in music or show business with open hearts and open minds, ready to try anything, and then as they go along in their career they change from Mr No Problem to Mr No Way!

And then they wonder why audiences and hirers lose interest in them.

I think that the worst thing that any creative person – artiste, producer, venue programmer, etc – can do, is to grow up.

Sure, we can become smarter, avoid pitfalls, toxic situations and be responsible to people we support. But when we do the actual creation, whether a song or a show, if we tell the kid inside us to shut up and let the grown-up within take over, it's going to be blah!

Remember to carefully switch hats.

Don't leave your businessman hat on when you should have your artist hat on, and remember to put on your business game-face when you have to interface with the illusory world of business and finance.

But make sure that in your heart, the kid inside you is imagining that the business guy you are talking to has a clown's suit on, a big red nose and orange Bozo-the-clown hair.

6

### *No Miles, No Go*

I have a musician friend in Chicago who is a great drummer. We'll call him Steve to protect his identity, and so as not to embarrass him.

Steve told me the story of how when he was younger, if he was dating a lady and was starting to get interested in seeing her again, he would wait for an invitation to go to her apartment.

Once inside, he would wait for her to go to the kitchen to fix something to drink, or to change into something more comfortable, and then he would casually browse through her record collection (yes, it was still records back then in the '70s and '80s).

He would rummage through her jazz collection, and in particular, he would look for any Miles Davis records.

If he didn't find any Miles Davis, that would be the last date.

I asked him why he did that. He said, "Simple. No Miles, no Steve."

7

### *If You Don't Ask...*

I was sad to learn of the passing of Mr Charles Berthoud, the famous F&B Director formerly of the Shangri-La Group and Westin Asia-Pacific, on 14 March 2014.

I first worked for him in 1981 at the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore, then the Westin Singapore in the 1990s, and finally at Shangri-La Hong Kong in 2000.

Once, after a ballroom performance at the Westin Singapore with famed Asian singing star Frances Yip, I went up to him and asked, "Mr Berthoud, how come the Filipino dance band got a free buffet lunch and my backing band for Frances Yip didn't get the free lunch?"

He looked at me incredulously and growled, "You don't ask, you don't get!"

Then he added, more gently, "If you want something, ask. The most I can say is no. But if it's a reasonable request and I can give it to you, I will." He winked and walked off.

He left me standing there stunned after delivering one of the most life-changing lessons I ever learnt, at age 27.

I can't begin to thank him for that lesson, for all the things I have received in my life because I became unafraid to ask for what I needed. As long as it was a reasonable request, people seldom said no.

This was such an important lesson that I have to repeat it.

You don't ask, you don't get.

8

### *What Do You Mean "It's Not Personal"?*

I do not believe in having different values in my business life and in my personal life. If one has congruency in the way one practises one's values, there should be no difference in the way one behaves at work and in one's personal life.

I think that fairness, fair play, a forgiving nature, understanding, strength, flexibility, strictness and loyalty are some attributes that help define a person. I believe these and other positive attributes and virtues are applicable to any situation in life.

For example, I feel that a person who teaches Sunday school in church could not, in good conscience, also work the rest of the week at a chemical weapons factory.

For me, one clue that I will probably get screwed by someone is when they say to me, "Business is business, personal is personal." Or if they say, "It's not personal, it's just business."

To me, it's the same person; and one person should have one set of values that they apply holistically in all aspects of their lives.

9

## Monteiro, Young & Holt: *Friends and Players*

Between 1987 and 2007, I had the chance to play with two very well-known American musicians, bassist Eldee Young and drummer Redd Holt. The pair of them formed the rhythm section of the seminal Ramsey Lewis Trio with pianist Ramsey Lewis.

They were famous for recording the instrumental funky jazz-blues version of the tune *The In Crowd*, composed by Billy Page and originally performed by Dobie Gray on his album *Dobie Gray Sings For "In" Crowders That Go "Go Go"*, a 1964 Motown hit record.

Ramsey, Eldee and Redd recorded it as an instrumental in the famed Bohemian Caverns in Washington, D.C., the following year, with only one microphone, and won a Grammy for it.

Dizzy Gillespie was said to have cited Ramsey, Eldee and Redd along with Cannonball Adderley and Herbie Hancock and a few others as "the inventors of fusion jazz".

Eldee and Redd first came to play in Singapore at Somerset's Bar at the former Westin Plaza Hotel, now the Fairmont, as part of the Eldee Young Trio. They changed the face of jazz in Singapore in many ways.

Firstly, thousands of Singaporeans flocked to Somerset's for great cocktails and emerged as jazz fans. Eldee and company played a swinging, sometimes funky, sometimes Latin form of



With Redd Holt and Eldee Young at the Pori Jazz Festival in Finland 1988

jazz, and we were exposed to a brand of jazz they had invented with Ramsey Lewis and on their own as Young-Holt Unlimited.

This was known as "Happy Jazz". They were described as doing this in some 1960s US newspapers and magazines, but the term did not stick as a genre name.

Eldee used to say, "All that cerebral jazz is fine and some people enjoy that, but jazz doesn't have to always be as serious as a heart attack."

Many people told me that one reason they used to catch Eldee, Redd and whoever their pianist was that season, was that the music always made them feel better after a hard week.

I was 26 when I first heard Eldee and Redd. And they taught me a few things.

1. It's OK to be happy, to smile at the audience and infuse humour in my playing. It's OK to have fun. Although one has to be serious about working on a craft like music, it is important to realise that one can choose to be a musician that helps to make people happy with one's music.
2. They taught me that the operative word in playing music is PLAY. Although I still spend many hours practising, especially before an important concert, music is no longer work to me but play. This was an important gift because as much as I can sometimes get bogged down with the business side of things or the travelling hassles, when I sit at the piano, it's playtime, whether I'm practising or playing to a concert hall full of people.
3. They taught me how to really play the Blues. In my earlier essay I talked about how my Dad agreed with his brothers about my talent at the piano in my early 20s but said, "But he still doesn't know how to play the Blues". Well, Eldee showed me and pointed me in the direction of great bluesy pianists I should listen to, like Gene Harris and Monty Alexander. I had a huge dose of Vitamin B-lues under Eldee's guidance.
4. They taught me what real Swing is and how to swing. The father of Modern Jazz, Louis Armstrong, said

(I paraphrase him from something I read): "Swing is the ability to sound a note the very instant it's meant to be sounded. Not a moment before and not a moment after." This is a skill that requires a lot of practice, but I think it is also something that one has to have a propensity for. There are many musicians who can play great jazz but lack the ability to swing. I didn't have it when I first met Eldee and Redd, but I learned how to swing from them.

Eldee once said to me, "One clue that you are swinging is when you look out into the audience when you are playing a swinging Blues and you see people not only tapping their feet or clapping along but also swaying from side to side. Then you know you got them. Then you know that the rhythm you are feeling in your soul is the same rhythm they are feeling in theirs."

This "Pied Piper" effect is something amazing to see from the stage when I am playing. To me, this is the thing that makes me feel one with the audience. That makes them part of the music being played and is one of the most electrifying things to feel as a performing musician.

I remember a few years ago when I was invited to play in the resident band at a jam session at the oldest jazz club in Germany, the Jazzkeller in Frankfurt, a couple of German musicians came up to me and asked, "How is it that you are able to really swing like an American jazz musician?"

I blurted out, "Because I had a chance to play with Eldee Young and Redd Holt for 20 years."





With Claude Nobs, founder of the Montreux Festival

What is amazing to me is that Eldee and Redd agreed to form a band with me. They allowed me, the baby in the band, to lead the band Monteiro, Young & Holt, as it was called.

That is the extent of Eldee's humility. Together with guitarist, the late O'Donel Levy, and saxophonist, the late John Stubblefield, we went on to play the main stage of the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1988 in a concert that was telecast "live" in Europe and later broadcast all over the world.

Montreux Festival's founder, the late Claude Nobs, called this concert "an unforgettable classic concert of the first 22 years of Montreux".

This concert helped greatly to launch my international career as it was broadcast on TV all over the world, including on the PBS channel in the US in the late 1980s.

If not for Eldee and Redd, I would not have the career I now enjoy.

Eldee passed away in 2007 in Bangkok while on a performing engagement at the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit where I often played with him and my other bands. Redd, at 86, still plays regularly in Chicago, where he lives, but doesn't travel out of the US these days, so I don't get a chance to play with him.

I cannot overstate how valuable and enjoyable the time I spent with Eldee and Redd was. I think of them all the time, especially when I am on stage and often imagine that "Swing" they taught me, especially if I see my audience swaying from side to side, feeling my rhythm in their souls.