

"Otherwise you carry around a little library and you have a rehearsal and it never gets off the ground. That would be such a bringdown after having my own rhythm section. I don't think I could stand it. I played *Stella By Starlight* enough to last me a lifetime."

Woods lit up what has become almost as much of a trademark for him as his small flat cap, a long thin dark brown cigarette, and leaned back in the chair to reflect on the growing number of jazzmen who have abandoned traveling as a single to tour with a regular group. He mentioned Clark Terry, Woody Shaw, Dexter Gordon, Johnny Griffin and the tenor sax-trombone duo of Jimmy Forrest and Al Grey.

"More and more musicians have their own groups as it becomes economically feasible," he said. "But some musicians don't want to bother with that, and it doesn't hurt Zoot Sims. A great player will always be a great player. I don't care how lame the rhythm section is."

Still, for Philip Wells Woods, having your own group means being able to create something a little extra.

"I think it's better artistically if you have your own group and if it's better artistically it's got to be better commercially because the music will be better," he began spinning out his reasoning without pause. "And if the music is better you should make more money at it. Plus you can get a real identity with your own group."

Having one's own group also puts some stability, some ease, into the otherwise completely strange setting of a new club, Woods noted. For, as he admitted with some intensity, "It's hard to get comfortable when you're on a bandstand for the first time at a place where you've never played before. You need either a night or a set to get involved."

"You have to get used to the ambience and the sound . . . who you're dealing with. But once you get used to that, you can settle in and really play music. So when we go back to a club, the band always feels better. You know who you're dealing with."

"It's great to get to know a place. It does affect your playing. When you feel comfortable and feel better you play better. But sometimes we give our best performances when we're totally exhausted. You get on the bandstand and it sounds great. You overcome your fatigue. Maybe the audience turns you on. The fact you got a good night's rest doesn't necessarily mean you're going to have a great performance because it's always different. But if you're dealing with a place where you've had a good experience, when you return you're going to play better, everybody is going to play better."

But as anyone who has heard Woods can testify, he almost always sounds damn good, even on that first set of the night, even opening night. The quartet gets up on the stand and with only a few words between them they start to play, usually an old standard that Woods tears into, burning a new trail through familiar territory.

"We try to get hot right in front," Woods responded with a confidence that contained a hint of doubt as to whether he really was as successful at "getting hot" as he tried to be. "But I still feel our second sets are better than our first sets. But I think our first sets are above average. Sometimes we get to work and it's magic all the way through. It depends on the room. Sometimes it's hard to get going. It's like . . ." He paused to get his analogy correct,

then smiled and waved his arms in a breast stroke as he continued ". . . plowing through a sea of Mars bars. But if people are responsive, the band responds to that."

The five years Woods spent living in Europe and leading what was to be his first truly full-time band, the European Rhythm Machine which is represented on six albums, obviously had a maturing influence on the man, helping him develop as a musician, as a leader and as a businessman as well as an individual.

"I've always had a band of some sort," he reflected, casual softness in his voice, "but never on a regular basis. I never could learn about the business because Gene Quill and I didn't work that much. Or I had local quartets that were a local, easy type thing to manage—work a week and then have three months off."

He wasn't laughing, or even smiling, when he added that last comment.

Woods, after studying with the late Lennie Tristano and at the Manhattan School of Music and then for a full four years at Juilliard, began his professional career in 1954. Before the '50s came to an end, he had served with, among others, Richard Hayman, Charlie Barnett, Jimmy Raney, George Wallington, Friedrich Gulda, Dizzy Gillespie, Gene Quill, Buddy Rich and Quincy Jones, with whom he remained for two years, besides his musical ally of long standing, Oliver Nelson. Then came a tour with Benny Goodman and a return to Gillespie, followed by much studio work until his departure for Europe in 1968 and residency in France.

He still has a farm outside Paris, and he and covivant and business manager Jill Goodwin, sister of his drummer, Bill, get there at least for part of every summer. He also keeps the place as a "touchstone for the kids."

"I want that to stay in the family," he explained. His son, Garth, now 19 and a professional photographer, spends much time there. Last fall he used it as a base while working on a photo essay on the wheat harvest.

"Garth is more French than American, a true Francophile," Woods related. "He thinks in French. I have a love affair with France myself, but you can't just sustain yourself on what I do in France."

Phil Woods is, at last, sustaining himself in jazz now. Not only has he said goodbye to studio work but he and the quartet are able to turn down job offers, including some they would have accepted only two or three years ago when they still were not working regularly. Now they will refuse an engagement if they don't like the room or if it's too far from their last or next gig. They even try to avoid traveling on a working day.

"We all make the decision whether to take a job," Woods explained the quartet's working relationship. The four function as a cooperative, whether they are deciding to accept a job (Woods as leader gets two votes) or dividing up earnings.

"I'm the leader and I should get a little more money, but not that much more money," he interjected with a touch of self-deprecation. "It should be as equitable as possible. That way you get the best performance."

For traveling, the four musicians generally rent a van and try to keep dates within easy driving distance.

"Airlines can kill you," Woods said, touches of anger and frustration in his voice, "and they're a pain in the ass. They don't like the acoustic bass. They don't know what to do with it."

"We give the airlines a lot of money but when it comes to 20% of what you're making, that's too much. It's much more reasonable to rent a van. We try to keep travel down to 300 miles at top; 100 or 200 is nice between jobs. Then we do it on what we call a traveling day. We're not out to outdo Kenton or Basie. We've all done that when we were younger."

"I'm turning jobs down when they're impossible. I don't even take a vote on those. I'm the leader," he smiled, "and so I take the prerogative of saying 'no' to those."

"We're trying to space it out so we're not out on the road quite so long. We're trying to get more money in a shorter period of time."

"We can be choosier today," he added. "But we'll take a chance just because we feel it's important to open up new territory and out of the last two tours we've only had one bummer where we said, 'Oh God, I'm not going back to that one again.'"

Woods stresses the importance of opening up "new territory" for the quartet, and for jazz in general.

"We've gotten to the Northwest—Bellingham, Seattle—where we'd never performed before," he commented. "Most of the places we play are new rooms and some are not just jazz rooms. They're all kinds of things. There's a lot of new places for music now—places in Amarillo, Austin, Buffalo."

"The best way to build an audience is to play for one; record companies can't do that for you," he explained, drawing on a recording experience of more than two decades that has involved more than two dozen different labels. "If you play to 100 people a night and play 40 weeks a year that insures the existence of the group."

Although Woods and the other three members of the group have been busy recording in recent years—and Woods has those Grammys to his credit—the saxophonist apologetically admits, "We don't have one quartet record out."

The Grammy winning two-record set on RCA, *Live From The Showboat*, and the direct-to-disc *Song Of Sisyphus* feature the group in its year-and-a-half long incarnation as a quintet with guitarist Harry Leahey. (For *Showboat*, percussionist Alyrio Lima was added, making it the Phil Woods Six.) The quartet also was augmented for a still unreleased album cut in London which consists of a series of portraits of deceased jazzmen including Gary McFarland and Julian "Cannonball" Adderley. And Woods appears as soloist on an album RCA will soon release, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, for which he did some of the writing. ("Different composers each took a sin.")

Woods is presently involved in a contractual dispute which further delays any chance of a recording by the quartet alone. Although obviously annoyed by this situation, he is resigned to the fact.

"The records out do show where we're at," he felt. "They give a pretty fair indication, although not instrumentation-wise. Musically they're not at variance with what the quartet is doing. And there is some quartet on *The New Phil Woods Album* (RCA)."

"Harry joined the group in August 1976 but he just doesn't want to travel any more. He didn't realize we'd be so busy . . . and we weren't when he joined us. Harry was so unique. When he left, we decided not to replace him."

"Without him, I think the group's sound is clearer. It's more of a meshing. The interplay, the dialogue is more important."