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ON THE COVER: Greg Herbold felt the need for speed and captured the year's first big downhill event at the Big Bear National. Photo by Guy-B.

Windham Hill Jazz recording artist

Denny Zeitlin views mountain biking as a catharsis

for his life's callings

in psychiatry and music.

But can one person be

successful in

integrating all these seemingly

disparate activities?

Story and photos by Mark Langton



"I grew up with music and art;" says Denny. His mother, who was his first piano teacher, has been involved in the arts for sculpting. One of her works is proudly displayed casting a baby grand.





Dr. Denny Zeitlin, successfully practicing psychiatrist, accomplished jazz pianist — and mountain biking enthusiast! Here Denny rides up Shaver Grade near his home in Marin County, and gives an impromptu jam session prior to a quick ride.

o there I am, driving into the beautifully green hills of Marin County, on my way to interview accomplished jazz musician and practicing psychiatrist Denny Zeitlin. What would I ask him? How should I act? Would I wind up divulging some innermost secret that I hadn't even realized I was holding back? And what kind of doctor is he, anyway? Does he somehow use music to sooth his patients into a state of relaxation? There was only one way to find out. Heck, I like music, and I'm a little daft. We'll probably get along fine.

As I pull up the driveway to Dr. Zeitlin's rustic home, tucked away in the hills of Kentfield north of San Francisco. I see a semi-mud-caked Cunningham Racer leaning up against the garage door. So much for the "gotta have a mountain bike to put on the roof rack of the Beemer" theory. This guy rides! As I walk up to the front door. I no sooner raise my hand to knock when the door swings open and I'm greeted enthusiastically by a tall, slender man with graying hair and beard, kind eyes, and wearing a full length riding outfit. (His anticipation reminds me of when I'm chomping at the bit to go riding. This was going to be fun!)

As he leads me upstairs, I'm greeted by at least three exotic felines, their inquisitive eyes following me into the living room. Denny says, "What would you like to do first?' I tell him I'd like to take some pictures of him playing, so he promptly sits down at his grand piano and begins improvising on some of the best free form jazz piano I've ever heard. After a few bars he looks up and asks, "Is something wrong?", and I realize I'm

just standing there mesmerized by his playing. "Oh, sorry, I'm just, uh, checking out the angles of the lighting," I deadpan. After about twenty mintes and three or four rolls of film later, it's time to go for a ride in Denny's back yard — that is, Mt. Tamalpais.

Once out on the trail I feel a little more at ease. I guess in a way mountain biking is my therapy. Denny and I chat amicably. He is a rather striking figure in his all red outfit, complete with wrist braces and knee pads. "Hey, if I go down and break my wrist. I'm out of commission musically for at least four to six months." He leads me up Shaver Grade, winding through the robustly green surroundings. It's sunny, warm, and I'm working. Ha!

Spending a day with Denny Zeitlin is like stepping into a different dimension for awhile. Here is a man whose destiny was surely predetermined. If there is any truth to the saying, "If you want to do well in life, you have to pick the right parents," Denny did a great job. With the guidance of a medical father and musical mother, he had the choice of two desirable careers. Fortunately, no one told him he couldn't do both.

A refreshingly candid man, he has been married for 20 years to Josephine, a landscape designer and photographer, has no children ("With our career involvements and wanting to spend quality time together, unless there's 40 hours in the day, there's no way we could adequately be the kind of parents we would insist on being if we were to take that on. I mean, if you're not going to really do it, don't do it! I see an awful lot of people

who didn't have a chance to be with parents who did it."), and has been a resident of the Bay Area since 1965. Born in 1938, he grew up in the Chicago area, where the basis of his jazz background would come. As a teenager he played in the hot spots of the era, jamming with jazz heavyweights Ira Sullivan, Johnny Griffin, Wilber Ware, and Bobby Cranshaw. Later, while attending med school, he would hook up with jazz legends Joe Farrell, Wes Montgomery, and Gary Bartz.

He is a highly regarded practicing psychiatrist, and has integrated his psychiatric and musical background into

workshops and lectures, presenting his "Unlocking the Creative Impulse" seminars at jazz festivals, music schools, colleges, and museums. He has been a recording artist since 1963, and since then has created albums whose contents span from modern jazz trio to a blending of jazz/electronics/classical/rock to major motion picture scoring to acoustic piano free improvisation. Twice he has topped the Downbeat International Jazz Critics Poll, has had numerous appearances on The Tonight Show, has created original music for "Sesame Street," has performed at both the Newport and Monterey Jazz

Festivals, and has toured Europe, Canada, and Japan. He was Keyboard Magazine's first "Sound Page Artist," and of his playing, this is what the critics have to say: . a stunning display of instrumental virtuosity, emotional depth, and musicality . . . "-Downbeat. " . . . among the few contemporary jazz pianists who have the imagination, discipline, and technique to rise above the competent but routine level that most of them appear willing to settle for."-John S. Wilson, New York Times. he can rip the keyboard apart or coax the most delicate nuances from it with a virtuoso's assurance".-High Fidelity, and on and on. I'm not one to comply easily with critics' opinions, but I have to say that I agree completely with their comments. Would that we could have included a sample of his work here in these pages. I guess you'll just have to settle for

MCB: What came first for you, music or psychiatry?

the interview.

D.Z.: I was exposed from day one to both because my parents were both involved in music and medicine. My father was a radiologist - still practicing radiology at age 91 - and my mother was a speech pathologist. She doesn't practice now, but she's still very involved in the arts. Up until just last year she was a sculptor (all of the pieces in the house are by Denny's mother). She's very gifted. She was my first piano teacher, so I really formally began music a long time before I did medicine.

MCB: At what age did you begin playing piano?

D.Z.: I started playing when I was two or three. I have dim memories of climbing up on the lap of whichever parent was playing - they both played. My mother was a classical pianist, and my father played by ear. I could put my little hands on their hands as they were playing, and I would go along for the ride and get at least the kinesthetic experience of playing.

As far as when my psychiatric activities started, it was several years later. I do think along about second or third grade, I started practicing psychotherapy without a license in the playground during recess! For some reason, kids would like to come up to me and talk with me about things, and I was interested and wanted to hear. I guess I had kind of a predilection for that kind of experience. I had an uncle who was a psychoanalyst, and I began hearing directly from him what that work was about. So I had an idea pretty early that that's what I wanted to do someday. And I knew I wanted to be involved in music - I never had a clear picture as a kid what the nature of that involvement would be -

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DOCTOR JAZZ

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I knew I would always be playing and composing, but had no idea how public it

might or might not become.

When I got into high school, I stopped studying classical music formally. That's when I heard jazz really seriously for the first time, and it just knocked me into orbit. I was just made for that idiom somehow, because I had always been much more interested in composing and improvising than interpreting the written page. The rhythmic and emotional quality of jazz just called out to me.



Denny has as his neighbor mountain bike masterpiece maker Charlie Cunningham of Wilderness Trail Bikes. It seemed only natural that he should ride a Cunningham!

MCB: What style of music was happening when you first became interested in playing contemporary jazz?

D.Z.: We're talking about 1951 and '52, so there was big band stuff that was still happening — Kenton's band was still playing, you could still go hear Count Basie, and that was wonderful. You could still hear Duke Ellington. And be-bop was happening in small groups. I was always much more interested in composing 20th century music rather than simply playing Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. So I gravitated very quickly toward the modern jazz. I played Dixieland briefly in my freshman year, but it didn't really captivate me.

MCB: And this was all self taught?
D.Z.: All of the jazz was completely by osmosis, the informal apprenticeship that comes from hanging out with musicians who know the language. I was fortunately tall, and I could pass for 21, so from age 15 on I was going down to the south side of Chicago, hanging out in these (Continued on page 94)

DOCTOR JAZZ

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clubs all night, just soaking it all in. At that time it was a tremendously fertile period in Chicago's jazz history. Lots of major players were there, and I did get a chance gradually to sit in more and more and have people give me pointers, so it was an invaluable informal education.

MCB: Was all this for free, or did you get paid?

D.Z.: Well, I got paid for some of it. I was still certainly being supported by my folks, but I did start gigging professionally from age 15 on. Then I went on to University of Illinois undergrad from 1956-60 in Champaign, which was close enough to come back into Chicago on weekends to play certain gigs, so I kept my associations with people there. And also on the campus it turned out there were lots of major players. I was very lucky that I always had people to play with. Then I finished my B.A. degree and went to med school at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. I'd never seen the east coast - I wanted to get some taste of what that was like - so I went out there and got lucky again, because there were a couple of jazz clubs where there was lots of music happening. So I started sitting in there, as well. I was happy playing, I was immersed in medicine. Although it was demanding doing both, I loved it. I would sort of sneak away at the end of the evening and go play for an hour, just grab it when I could.

But all this time I didn't have any formal aspirations to start recording and touring. Then it was through a quirk of fate

"I really began to get involved in exercise. It's important to my whole psychological attitude."

(that I got my first recording contract). I had a fellowship at Columbia University in New York City in 1963, so I had a chance to be in New York for ten weeks. A friend of mine, Paul Winter, who had been recording for Columbia Records for several years, insisted I come and meet his producer. And I really complained! I thought it would be a drag, that record companies subvert your music, they change it, they don't treat artists well—

I was very puristic in those days — so, kicking and screaming he dragged me to meet John Hammond, who was actually a legendary producer in the jazz world. He "discovered" Billy Holliday, Count Basie, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen. Sadly, he's recently passed away. I met him, and played for him, and it just happened he loved my playing. He offered me carte blanche at Columbia, which in today's terms is totally absurd, but back then in 1963, when the world was young, he said, "Record whatever you want, use whomever you want, I'm delighted to have you on the label."

So then it became an association with him and Columbia that lasted about five-six years. I did about a half dozen albums for them, which really did open a lot of doors for me to playing some of the major festivals and being on *The Tonight Show* a handful of times. There was a lot of exposure from that which was really very nice.

So, I started recording for Columbia in '63, I finished medical school in '64, came out to San Francisco for an internship in '65, fell in love with this city and decided I wanted to spend the rest of my life here, took my psychiatric residency at UC San Francisco at Langley Porter Institute, the medical school of the Univer-

sity of California, and have been on the teaching faculty there ever since. I'm an associate clinical professor of psychiatry there, and have had a private practice for the last 20 or so years in San Francisco, and when we moved out here to Marin, I established an office here in the home. There's always been a compromise in trying to maintain the two careers, in that I've never been able to spend as much time touring and actively promoting the musical side of my life to get the kind of visibility some people get who are doing it full time, and I understood that as being part of the trade-off. And similarly in psychiatry, I don't have the time to do the kind of writing that people have that are doing it full time, or research activities. Fortunately, what I really love most about psychiatry is teaching and treating patients, and I do have adequate time to do that, so that's worked out well. And musically, I'm grateful to have been able to continue to record and tour; to share the music and keep growing.

MCB: Do you have a recording studio in your house?

D.Z.: Yes. I've recorded three or four albums here in my own studio, which is wonderfully convenient and low pressure.

MCB: So your credits can include producer, then?

D.Z.: Yes, but not on a large scale. I guess the biggest production I ever did was writing, composing, and producing the score for the remake of the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which was in 1978.

MCB: Well, here comes another cat. How is it that you have so many?

D.Z.: My wife Josephine has a great eye for strange, wonderful breeds. And I just love cats. We usually have at least two or three in the bed at night, on top of us, under the covers, they're all around us!

Mt. Tam bicyclists will like that our Sable Burmese is named Hoo-Koo-E-Koo after the famous trail and fire road. We have a Red Burmese, a Singapura, formerly the street cat of Singapore, and we have a Siamese — she's the *grande dame*, she's 20 years old — and the semilonghaired cat is Ninfa, who is a Javanese.

MCB: How much of your time is spent teaching and seeing patients?

D.Z.: The bulk of my psychiatric time is spent in private practice, working with patients. I see individuals, couples, and groups.

MCB: Would you say that your musical career is more demanding than your private practice or are they fairly equal?

D.Z.: There's a certain ebb and flow of activity depending on certain things that are going on, but I've been able to main-

tain the kind of balance I want for a number of years now. Most of my concertizing and touring is on extended weekends, so it doesn't disrupt the flow of my private practice much at all. And every now and then I'll go play for a week or two, or, rarely, three weeks. But I have plenty of advanced notice, and always have a colleague cover for me. It's never really turned into any kind of problem.

MCB: Do you get a lot of musicians seeking your psychiatric expertise?

D.Z.: Not specifically musicians. I have maybe a somewhat higher percentage of people in the performing arts in general than other therapists, just because they might have heard of my interests and involvement and so they think I'll be able to tune into those issues.

MCB: Do you ever envision having to make a choice between the two professions?

D.Z.: I really couldn't make a choice. I love doing them both so much, I honestly can't imagine what it would be like doing one of them totally full time, and not having the other as an activity I was deeply involved in. I just wouldn't be happy. It's the cross pollination back and forth that's always kept me energized. I would hate to have to give either of them up.

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DOCTOR JAZZ

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MCB: How did you first become interested in mountain biking?

D.Z.: For some years I was a hiker and a runner up on Mt. Tamalpais. I used to run up the Shaver Grade, and gradually I started noticing these strange creatures on wheeled vehicles going up and down, and I think initially I had some of the same hostile take that die-hard hikers and runners had, like "who are these people and what are they doing to our environment?" and I didn't give them much thought beyond that, until I had some friends that started taking up the sport and telling me how wonderful it was. And then I began asking questions of people on the mountain. People would stop and be friendly, and show me a little bit about what the bikes were about.

I think I had even more reticence in taking up bicycling again than maybe the average adult in that I do have a memory from 8th grade of riding to school, and my saddle bags somehow got caught in my rear wheel, and I did an endo and got a brain concussion. I didn't have to go to the hospital, but I was in bed for a couple of days and it was scary. So it's made me even a little more cautious about bicycling and getting back into it. Josephine was very eager for us to get into the sport, so we eventually did go to a local bike shop (Point Reyes Cyclery). She's real tiny and I'm six foot three inches, so it was hard to find bicycles that looked like they would be really made for us. But we lucked out, as this shop happened to have two bikes they hadn't been able to move for a couple of years. One was this Fisher Mt. Tam with 24 inch wheels which was perfect for her, and they had a 24 inch Ritchey Anapurna that had been made special for a six foot four inch guy who had reneged on the deal. So we ended up with those two bikes, and they were really great for

I had a fair bit of cycling experience as a kid. I'm old enough so that I do remember what it was like to ride those old Schwinn balloon tire bikes, and the J.C. Higgins bikes. I still can remember the little horn button on the side. And then, the big thing was these racing bikes came into being. There was the Schwinn three-speed racer that had hand brakes all of a sudden and this gear shift thing, man, that was the rage for awhile! And there was an English bike competing with the Schwinn back then, I think it was called the Hercules, which was a real super-light bike that some of the kids had. But I had a Schwinn. It's interesting, as I've taken up mountain biking now in adulthood, and (Continued on page 100)

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some of my adult friends of the same vintage have taken it up, some of them have old memories and experiences to build on that I never had. Some of them used to ride their bikes through the woods and do all this stuff, so they immediately felt at home on very rough terrain, where it took me a bit to feel even that a bicycle ought to be able to do that!

Eventually I got a little concerned about the stability of Josephine's 24 inch wheels on rough terrain. I read about the "Little People's Bike" that Charlie Cunningham made in Eugene Sloan's The Complete Book of All Terrain Bicycles, which was the first book I read on the sport. Charlie had somehow solved the problems of geometry and engineering to come up with an exquisite, tiny bike with 26 inch wheels. We began noticing a few Cunninghams on the mountain, and talked with the owners who were ecstatic about their bikes, despite the big bucks and long wait for one of the 10-15 custom made bicycles Charlie turns out each year. Jacquie Phelan, who he recently married, pioneered and dominated the women's racing division for many years on a Cunningham. We got to know Charlie and Jacquie, and pretty soon Josephine had her "Little People's Bike." It was just magical, and eventually I began to feel the limitations for trail riding of my Ritchey, which has a 67-1/2 degree head angle. It's a wonderful touring bike, but I really wanted to have the experience of a bike that was more agile and maneuverable, so I got Charlie to measure me for a Cunningham Racer. This guy loves challenges; I was the tallest person he had built this model for. The bike is just perfect. I still enjoy the Ritchie for certain situations, but the Cunningham is something else. Its bothered me for years that I've never seen a major feature on Charlie in any of the magazines. True, his production is too small for lots of folks to end up with his bikes, but he has been a major innovator in so many aspects of bicycle technology. Among many innovative designs Charlie has come up over the years, including the Rollercam brake and Grease Guard system, he desighed the "Fitfinder" adjustable stem that allows the rider to custom fit a stem to his body and riding posture. This device was absolutely invaluable to me when I was setting up my bike, particularly since I have a history of occasional lower back strain. I think every bike shop in the country should have this device and offer it as an option to buyers who may want to "tweak" a new bike into a perfect fit.

MCB: Do you ever integrate mountain biking into either of your professions?

D.Z.: I haven't really made it into a prescription like an edict for anybody. As part of just my getting to know a new patient I find out if they're involved in physical exercise, because I think, if a person can tolerate it, it's such a wonderful thing for the psyche and the soul and the body. And if they don't have any source of activity, I have recommended to a half dozen or so of my patients that they give mountain biking a try, for all of the obvious reasons. They have really become converts. Several of them read your magazine as well as other magazines, and have gotten into mountain biking vacations and the whole works.

I know that it's meant a tremendous deal to Josephine and myself taking up this sport. I mean, we've been involved in other outdoor activities before, I still love going running on the mountain — there's something about that experience that's very special — but there is something so wonderful about being on a bicycle out in the wilderness. At times it's exhilerating, riveting, scary. At other times it does get you, I think, into a kind of meditative state where all kinds of wonderful experiences, internally, can happen. I've had a lot of music occur to me on a bicycle. On my previous Windham Hill jazz album, called Trio, there's a tune called Shaver Grade that literally wrote itself while I was riding on that fire road.

MCB: Have you ridden any place else besides Mt. Tam?

D.Z.: We've been to Moab, Utah a couple of times. I think that is just a wonderland. When people think of Moab, they almost always think of the Slickrock Trail, which is certainly an amazing kind of sandstone trail with tremendous gymnastic challenges, but I think much of Moab is not the Slickrock Trail, but all of these other wonderful rides that take vou through incredible canyons and terrain that you would never see anywhere else. There are rides that challenge even world class cyclists, and there are other rides that mortals can do! It's an experience that anybody who likes the sport could have and be very well taken care of out there.

We've also been to Vermont at foliage time. That was a wonderful trip. We went with another couple, and spent the first seven or eight days with Vermont Country Cyclers Touring doing a northern Vermont mountain bike loop from inn to inn. That was fun, although I must say, the "groupness" of it was kind of a drag. The tour leaders seemed to feel it was their responsibility to make us all one happy family. And we had our own sub-group that

we wanted to focus on, and I had to make them understand that they were doing their job if they let us alone! We weren't being hostile, we just wanted to do our own thing! So gradually it worked out. But the real fun was going down to Pittsfield, Vermont and the Pittsfield Inn, where they had a regular thing going for mountain bikes. The proprietor took the four of us out himself each day for rides, and it was all single track stuff, which was just wonderful. In the woods, man, it was so different from alpine situatiuons. I'd never been in this lush, verdant world, where you're just swooping down, easing yourself over these logs and stuff, and everything seemed possible and safe because the ground was so soft. You could risk things you wouldn't want to risk on the Slickrock Trail! We hope to do more of that, and this summer we plan to go to Colorado. Some friends of ours have a condominium in a little town in Colorado that's got great access to some good alpine riding. I would eventually like to go to Crested Butte to see what that's like after all I've heard

MCB: Do you do anything to stay fit when you tour musically?

D.Z.: Unfortunately I don't get to ride. I just either find a way to go to the gym or go running. But I do *something*. It's so important, because you can get into a different sort of rhythm on the road where you end up not getting any exercise at all. You have to be very disciplined about it or it doesn't happen. I find I get very uncomfortable if I don't have some access to exercise.

MCB: How important do you feel exercise is to overall well being?

D.Z.: I think it's *really* important. I remember the quality of my life changed back in 1973 when we moved out to Marin. That's when I really began to get involved in exercise. It's important to my whole psychological attitude.

MCB: Where do you see the world of mental health heading?

D.Z.: Oh, boy, that's a huge question, and I don't think I could do justice to it quickly, but I'll just mention some types of work going on in different sectors. In the area of verbal psychotherapy there's much more important controlled research going on that is getting us down into the nitty-gritty of what really works. There have been great advancements in the area of pharmacology. Understanding the biochemistry of the mind and how drugs can be designed and worked with that can help certain kinds of mental disorder. New, precise and specific surgical techniques are developing that are a far cry from the old "lobotomy" days. As an example, just recently there was an article on how some kinds of epilepsy may be surgically approached by actual removal of a part of the temporal lobe. In the area of genetics and inborn errors of metabolism, that whole area, there's been breakthroughs in terms of where the gene is for certain diseases. I think we're getting much closer to a "map" of certain mental health problems genetically. All these things are very positive. What I feel is negative is how the national government and society continues to treat mental patients as second class citizens. In terms of insurance plans, national health plans, the mental patient gets the short end of the stick. It's a kind of stigma that I hope will fade soon.

MCB: Do you have any political aspirations to that end?

D.Z.: No, I really feel that my place is with treatment of patients and teaching, and that's how I see myself spending my time.

MCB: Have you ever done any musical benefits for mental health causes?

D.Z.: Yes, I have over the years. Actually, that goes back all the way to when I was in high school. I used to take a band and go to the state mental hospital and just play for the people on the ward in hopes of just activating them and brightening up their day.

MCB: How do you feel about the title 'renaissance man''?

D.Z.: (laughter) Media hype! That's overblown. I guess I have a number of interests, so they hooked onto that.

MCB: At first glance your two careers seem very different. But are there similarities as well?

D.Z.: I think that each field has in common as its central core communication and the need for empathy. There's just no way any music is going to happen with another musician up on the stage without those things, and there's no way to positively interact with a patient unless there's understanding and cooperation. The task is somehow to enter into a merger, to lose a little of yourself in order to be as deeply involved in that process as you can, and yet keep a little of yourself outside to be able to notice, and comment on what is happening, whether that be putting your personal style on the music or recognizing a patient's problems and helping them with it. I see that as a fundamental commonality with both fields. I feel that each activity refuels me for the other. I try to organize my days so that I am involved in both activities every day. And I try to ride at least three times a week. It's real important to me, and I love doing it with Josephine. I'm so happy we've finally found a sport together that we both really like. I really have to thank her for urging us to get involved with it.