

# The New York Times

ON THE WEB

June 22, 2005

## Networking: A Love Story

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON

Networking: A Love Story

After the litany of dirty jokes that LES PAUL told at the Songwriters Hall of Fame ceremony, we were determined to make it to his 90th birthday celebration on Sunday night, if only to hear him tell them again so we could not print them again and thus save paper.

The celebration concert, though 10 days late, was part of the JVC Jazz Festival, and one of the few times at Carnegie Hall that you could hear the crowd angrily roar "Turn it up! Turn it up!" at the sound technicians.

But the culturati are everywhere in this fine city, and A BEARDED MAN up front had the presence of mind to turn around and yell back: "It's Carnegie Hall! Listen hard!"

The performances ran the gamut from hard rock to jazz riffs on MOZART, and the performers included TOMMY EMMANUEL, JOSÉ FELICIANO, STANLEY JORDAN, JOE SATRIANI, STEVE MILLER, MADELEINE PEYROUX, BUCKY PIZZARELLI and EDGAR WINTER.

Mr. Paul, inventor of the guitar that many were playing, came out for the second act, and was no slouch either; not only did he play a few songs, but he also told the dirty jokes we had come to hear and gave the audience the finger.

After the concert, the performers moved over to the Gibson guitar showroom in the former Hit Factory. The party was on two floors: downstairs was a crowded room with a stage where the striptease dancers of the Va Va Voom Room performed.

The crowd seemed to consist of short, balding record executives, round as whole notes, accompanied by much younger, taller women, curvy in certain places, like treble clefs.

The ambitious younger men were left with little to do, though we noticed one surreptitiously slipping his business card to a woman when her record exec wasn't looking.

We were also told that CHRISTIAN SLATER was somewhere at the party, but we must have had our back to him.

Upstairs, we approached PETER FRAMPTON, who doesn't have the huge head of hair he used to have, doesn't have much hair at all, really, though he appears to be in good shape. We asked him when he had met Mr. Paul, but as we pulled out the recorder he suddenly paused.

"Is this an interview?" he asked. "Have you talked to my publicist?"

(Note to people walking by Greenwood Memorial Park in Renton, Wash., about 9 o'clock Sunday night: that whirring sound? JIMI HENDRIX.)

Downstairs, as MISS SATURN was doing hula hoop tricks on stage, we swam through a sea of cameras and microphones to get to Mr. Paul, a tiny man who would have been overlooked if he weren't the center of attention. He has difficulty hearing but just about everything he says is entertaining, if a little blue, so it really doesn't matter what the question is.

We asked him about some of the old tunes he played that night, particularly Ms. Peyroux's version of "It's Been a Long, Long Time," which was a No. 1 song for Mr. Paul and BING CROSBY in 1945.

"Sometimes I have to go in the other room," he said. "I kind of get pretty sentimental about it."

Mr. Paul began talking about how difficult it was to achieve the right balance between fame and a personal life, though not mentioning his former wife and music partner, MARY FORD.

"Bing would call me and ask for my advice," he said. "I would say, 'You know, you are god and when you get this big you have to sacrifice a lot of things.' "

"And that applied with JUDY GARLAND, that applied with almost everyone that became so famous that they can't do what they'd like to."

He said he tried to find that balance himself, with mixed success.

"It's like my 90th birthday," he said. "If somebody wants to be nice to me, what am I going to tell them to do? I have to say thank you and be a nice guy and go with it. Sometimes you'd just like to crawl in a hole somewhere and go with your cellmate - soul mate, sorry - and kind of get away from it all. But it doesn't work that way."

You still seem to take to the ladies, though.

"It's true!" he said. "You're not a young kid, but you love to look at a very lovely lady."

He smiled.

"And you kid about it, O.K.?"