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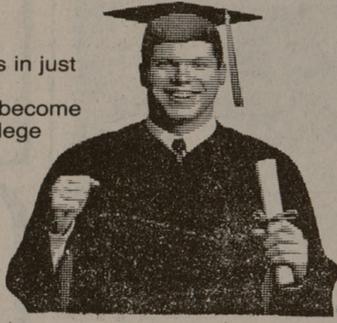
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\$400 \$400 \$400 \$400 \$400

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NEW YORK (AP) — Louis Bellson, drummer extraordinaire, is not one to beat his own drum.

When he turned 65 in July, his offstage modesty matched his flamboyance on stage.

He chooses to praise other musicians.

But the most sincere form of flattery in the music business is when musicians ask you to sit in with them. And Bellson is much in demand.

When trumpeter Clark Terry put together "Clark Terry and Friends" for this year's JVC Jazz Festival here, Bellson and pianist Oscar Peterson were the friends he chose for his final set. Bellson's wife since 1952, Pearl Bailey, was in the audience.

In 1946, Bellson got the idea of using twin bass drums. His simultaneous manipulation of two bass drums at incredible speed is one of the most exciting and popular features of his drumming — used both for spectacular effect and musical validity.

But, characteristically, he'd rather talk about other drummers.

"It's an honor to be put in a class with Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich," he said. "But I'm not the only one left. My teachers are living today. I learned to play listening to Max Roach and Art Blakey."

"I listen to Max today. I smile. I'll pick out something I never heard before. He's the first drummer to teach all of us to play melodically. Before him, drummers played rhythmically."

"How can you not talk about Chick Webb, Big Sid Catlett, Jimmie Crawford with the Lunceford Band. People said, 'You finally swung the Ellington Band.' I'd say, 'Listen to those records Sonny Greer did. There was so much magic there.'"

Louis Bellson, (pronounced Louie), was born in Rock Falls, Ill., one of four boys and four girls whose Italian father had a music store. Frank played clarinet, Tony and Henry still play drums. Ede teaches music in Las Vegas.

Ted Fio Rito hired Bellson when he graduated from high school and asked if he knew a jazz singer. Bellson recommended a fellow cheerleader, June Haver.

"I stayed with him three months, at the Florentine Gardens in Los Angeles. The Mills Brothers were the main attraction. I learned so much from that great quartet. One night Freddy Goodman came in. He was managing his brother. He sent me a note to come to his table and said, 'How would you like to audition for Benny Goodman?'"

"Benny was doing a picture at

Paramount Studios. I went down the next day. I heard Benny say 'Where's the kid?' I started to sweat. Benny said, 'Put makeup and a jacket on him.' My audition was in the movie. Benny said, 'You got the job. We leave Thursday.'"

After Goodman, and Army service, Bellson was with Tommy Dorsey from 1947 to '49, had a sextet, he played with Harry James and spending 1951 to '53 with Duke Ellington.

"With Ellington," Bellson says, "you never knew exactly what you were in for."

"When you joined Ellington there was no drum book," Bellson says. "He wanted to get the ultimate from you."

Bellson's latest album is "East Side Suite," a 53-minute piece composed with Tommy Newsom, plus six other tracks. Earlier this year, Mustang Records also released "Hot." "I've got a big band in Los Angeles and in New York," Bellson says. "Both are superb. Pearl requires a quartet when she performs. I'm part of that, and I still work as a quintet and do clinics at high schools and colleges."

Miss Bailey and Bellson haven't their traveling, her Broadway star in "Hello, Dolly!" or her Georgetown University attendance — graduated in 1985 — keep them apart for months at a time.

Most musicians say Bellson never shows anger, but he once got fuming with Benny Goodman.

Goodman had asked if Bellson's band would play the first half of programs in San Francisco and Phoenix. "I was delighted."

But gradually during rehearsal Goodman started to stare down some of Bellson's musicians and tell them what to do.

During a break, Bellson found Goodman sunning himself on the hood of Bellson's brand new car. Heels scratching the paint.

"We went back and he started picking on me and the rhythm section. I put the sticks down and said, 'I don't know what you want. Get yourself another drummer.' I was mad at Benny I wanted to kill him."

Goodman apologized later by phone.

Bellson tried movie music in the 1960s for the likes of Henry Mancini, but found it unfulfilling. "I had to go out on the road and play."

"If it were all to end tomorrow I still smile — Ellington, Basie, Goodman, Dorsey, James — what more can you ask for?"

Adventures of Mack continue in new novel

(AP) — How sweet it is to read a novel without getting mired down in the gratuitous sex and violence that mars so much fiction these days.

Such a book is Jim Lehrer's "Crown Oklahoma," a very funny telling of the further adventures of the One-Eyed Mack, an exuberant character who first burst onto the fiction scene in "Kick the Can."

The earlier novel detailed the adventures of Mack and his best friend, Pepper, during the 1950s. After Pepper was killed fighting in the Korean War, Mack married his widow, Jackie, and took her two children into the fold. The new couple went on to have two of their own.

In "Crown Oklahoma," Mack has become "the first one-eyed lieutenant governor in Oklahoma history." (He lost the eye in a childhood accident.) Mack, whose "all-time favorite meal (is) a tuna-fish-salad sandwich and a Grapette," has been assigned by Gov. Buffalo Joe Hayman, a zany character among many such, to "watch the news on national television for the good of the state."

Since the time is the 1970s, much of the news deals with Watergate.

But one thing on TV news, Mack hears correspondent Archibald Tyler say:

"They call themselves the Okies. All of them either are from the State of Oklahoma or have strong Okie-homa connections. Their leader goes by the name Boomer. Thus the first sketchy profile begins to emerge of the new organized crime group that is causing violence and havoc for the old-line Mafia and law enforcement agencies from one end of the country to the other."

Mack reports the startling news to Buffalo Joe, who in turn orders Mack to find the "Okies" and drive them out of the state, preferably Texas.

Mack does as he's told, even though none of the police agencies have heard of or know of the gang. He enlists a group of very funny friends to help him in the search and the result is a sweetheart of a story.

For Mack, it would be a tuna sandwich.

By Phil Thomas, AP Books Editor

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