

EXCERPT OF ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BURN THE ROAD

1952 Period piece - a scene in which Jack Kerouac flashes back to a lecture he received from Neal Cassady on the meaning of Bop jazz while travelling the USA by boxcar.

Written by BENNETT STEIN - COPYRIGHT 2004

INT./EXT. CHECKER TAXI CAB - VILLAGE STREETS - CONTINUOUS

KEROUAC slams the door, looks back to see the COP on their tail. The swank SAX stylings of LESTER YOUNG on the CAB RADIO. The CABBIE, 50s, a big hearted loud mouth from Staten Island.

CAB DRIVER

Whoa, where's the fire at,
lovebirds--

KEROUAC

East village! Step on it, if you
would!

The CABBIE throws the meter and just makes it through the Sixth Avenue yellow. DOMINO pulls KEROUAC close for a love bite.

CAB DRIVER

Any particular address you's like
me to shoot for?

KEROUAC

Sixth Street, and ah... Avenue A.

SYMPHONY SID

(from the cab FM RADIO)

That was the well swung 'She's
Funny That Way' by the Lester Young
Octet. I'm your host, Symphony Sid,
and we are live with fifty-thousand
watts of killer jive from Birdland!
And now a word from our sponsor.

CAB DRIVER

Puts you in spittin' distance of a
hot happening I hear.

KEROUAC

What hot happening, pray tell?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAB DRIVER

Not so fast. Gotta know who I'm dealing with here. Lest you forget, you're under oath. Young sir, are you now or has you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?

The CABBIE chuckles and relights a spit-soaked stogie.

KEROUAC

Any club that votes Joe Stalin its chief muk-muk do not swing in my book, Mac.

CAB DRIVER

I'm with ya but I gotta say, much as I think Commies stink that 'Tail Gunner' Joe McCarthy stinks worse. And after last week's World Series you can add my 'Bums of Brooklyn' to the stink column.

KEROUAC

Your Dodgers took three games, almost showed them damn Yanks. Oh well--so what's this hot happening?

CAB DRIVER

Huh? Oh, was just--Symphony Sid...
(indicates the radio)
...said before Charlie Parker's playin' some last minute clambake--

KEROUAC

Bird?! Where? Cafe Society? Five Spot?

CAB DRIVER

Yeah, one of them--what, you like that guy? Yardbird?! I don't know, it ain't swing. It's too fast, you can't even dance to it.

KEROUAC

That's the point. He wants you to listen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CAB DRIVER

And he plays too loud. I dunno, my wife can't stand him, I picked up his record, "Donna Lee"--that's my wife's name-- so, for her birthday. Damn thing, sounds like all mistakes--

KEROUAC

Mistakes?! Come on, don't be a--

CAB DRIVER

Drum beat, horn parts--goddamn mistakes!

KEROUAC leans forward to hash this one out.

KEROUAC

Hold up, you should know good stuff, the quality goods, always rolls out like mistakes at first, it's an acquired taste thing--

CAB DRIVER

Bird's record, 'Red Cross,' the musicians play in all different tempos, gives me heartburn. And don't get me started on 'Marmaduke.' Trust me, Bird is disturbed--

KEROUAC

No, I'm hearin' admiration, you're coming around. Don't let the swing-loving moldy figs tell you Bird don't cut it. Bop's the livin' end, well ahead of its time--

CAB DRIVER

Think so? I dunno, sounds like a whole lotta mistakes.

KEROUAC slouches, riled by BIRD talk. CLOSE ON HIS EYES.

FLASHBACK - INT. FREIGHT TRAIN BOX CAR/GREAT PLAINS - PREDAWN

HAY BAILS stacked, MOONLIT PRAIRIES roll by outside the big open box car door that NEAL CASSADY leans against. KEROUAC does push-ups.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CASSADY

Told ya, man, to play Bop you gotta
have evil chops and one large nut
sack.

KEROUAC

How the hell did Bop get so wild
west?

CASSADY

Down in Kay Cee the badest cats
would duke it out in these battle
of the horn shootouts. To win you
had to be one fast mother, a cut
throat improviser, steal other
cats' riffs, fuck with time, octave
leaps, eat fire, anything--just
make it work, never lose your place--
and rule number one: Never repeat
yourself.

KEROUAC

Whoa! What's the dope on Bop
stealing a Swing tune's chord
progression? Is that--

CASSADY

Yeah, but the secret is don't play
the original Swing melody--just the
notes around it, blowing a new line
that hints at the original, like
the chalk outline of a dead guy
kinda--which creates a sonic
hallucination! Dig? And Bird's term
'blow?' Means compose on the fly.
It's what makes Bop so treacherous
and hip.

KEROUAC

Damn, I wanna try that. That's
killer...

5 snaggle-toothed HOBOS lounge to the side. Amused by Neal's
Bop sermon, they swig a gallon jug of 'Sweet Lucy' Muscatel.

KEROUAC (CONT'D)

How the hell you pick up on this
stuff?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CASSADY

All night bender with trumpet man
Johnny Carisi, only white boy ever
allowed up to them Harlem woodshed
jams in the Apple.

The sky purples above dreamy meadows rolling by the big door.
CLICKITY CLAK goes the train wheels' rhythm on the tracks.

KEROUAC

Okay, Mister Know's-Where-It's-At,
hip me one more time to that Kenny
Clarke shit.

CASSADY

Kenny 'Klook' Clarke, house drummer
at Minton's, starts fuckin' around
switchin' up kick accents, jumpin'
in on open beats with stomp beats.
Monk says Kenny's 'dropping bombs'
and 'Klook mops,' which are down
beats hit on ride or high hat
instead-a the usual snare.

HEAD HOBO

Klook mops!

The other HOBOS LAUGH, revealing a few semi-toothless
wonders.

CASSADY

You hillbillies can laugh but Klook
mops are what makes Bop sizzle and
give it that lopsided about to tip
over--room's spinin' feeling.

KEROUAC

Where the hell Kenny Clarke get the
idea--

CASSADY

He's a drummer what thinks like a
horn player.

KEROUAC

Oh, right, yeah--and I read how Bud
Powell attacks piano like it's a
set of drums.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CASSADY

And Diz plays horn like a drummer,
and Bird plays sax like it's a
piano, and the saints come
markchin'--so Monk digs on Kenny
Clarke's Klook mops, see--

HEAD HOBO

Klook mops!

CASSADY

There an echo in here?

KEROUAC nods at the mischievous HEAD HOBO, who offers the
'Sweet Lucy' muscatel jug. KEROUAC takes a pull on it.

CASSADY (CONT'D)

Monk lays his jagged edge piano
comps over Clark's trumpet freaky
drum grid, and--are you ready for
this?

(off KEROUAC'S wide eyes)

In walks Yardbird--Ka-fuckin'-Boom,
dad! Sound the alarm, it's a full
scale prison break. These cats have
split the atom, sonically speaking.

Inspired to his core, KEROUAC jumps up by the door, and
dances a glee-mad greeting to the dawn's first early light.

CASSADY (CONT'D)

That Dago Carisi told me this hip
shit how the Bop cats say, Swing
hesitates--we blow fours and eights--
-which is two cats blowin' a four
or eight bar chorus--it's called a
chase. Man, that hits the spot--

KEROUAC

Good God! So harmonically Yardbird
and--

CASSADY

Think of it as a bank job, your
honors.

Shoots the line to the grinning HOBOS, who preen like pillars
of society.

KEROUAC

How come the Dorsey Brothers hate
Bop?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

CASSADY

One word: fear. They know it's hip
but ain't got no clue how to play
it. Even some sissy ass cube critic
said Bop's like a hardware store in
an earthquake. It's just fear.

SECOND HOBO

Klook mops!

The box car erupts in LAUGHTER, HOBOS slappin' thighs,
KEROUAC is in total awe of CASSADY and his command of Bop-
ology.

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. CHECKER CAB/VILLAGE - NIGHT

DOMINO and KEROUAC slide out of the CHECKER, hike a
brownstone stoop and press a buzzer marked "GINSBERG."

KEROUAC

Behold the pale criminal, how she
craves the bliss-mad fix of the
heist, the night jazz of criminal
mischief--

DOMINO

You making love to me?

KEROUAC

Just riffin'.

DOMINO

Oh, yeah? Riff this...

She reels him in by his tie and soul kisses him. GINSBERG
bursts out the front door nearly toppling them.

END OF EXCERPT

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY entitled BURN THE ROAD

WRITTEN BY BENNETT STEIN