Gene Lees
Jazzletter

P.O. Box 240
Ojai, Calif.
93023

Oct. 15, 1981

Vol. 1, No. 3.

Yellow Days

What a pleasure to read your loving portrait of that great saloon, Jim and Andy's.

It's heartening to realize that by being part of Jim's permanent clientele, I was contributing to the legends, the lore, the mystique of the New York jazz scene, because all those years I assumed I was just in there getting drunk.

Gordon Mitchell, Los Angeles

The article on Jim and Andy's was very touching and humorous. I was able to recall my years of hanging out there and the safe, good times.

Bobby Shew, Los Angeles

The article on Jim and Andy's was beautiful. You know, I remember meeting you there once or twice. I never really hung out there, but still felt that it was an important part of my New York experience. The article gave that experience an added dimension. I missed knowing this good human being, Jim Koulouvaris. Thank you for the insight.

Edmund Thigpen, Copenhagen

Drummer Edmund Thigpen now lives in Denmark. He plays and teaches throughout Europe and at the conservatories in Malmo and Copenhagen. He is the author of a new book, which contains an instruction cassette, titled The Sound of Brushes.

The premier issue of *Jazzletter* was a bracing tonic. The Jim and Andy's piece was wonderful. Aren't you ever going to collect all your things? It would be truly some book.

Ken Glancy, New York

Needless to say, I *love* it! The article on Jim and Andy's had me laughing and crying.

Ann Johns Ruckert, New York

Ann Johns Ruckert is a studio singer, vocal arranger, contractor, and organizer of the New York Women's Jazz Festival.

And One to Pay the Rent

A story went around the old Jim and Andy's on 48th Street. Jim Hall, the story had it, was sitting at the bar, having a drink in his characteristically private and unprepossessing fashion. This was after he had worked for Sonny Rollins, whose approval had ended a certain condescension toward him as a mere west coast musician. Jim was by now someone to be taken seriously.

Two younger musicians were sitting nearby, discussing some of the "older" players. They dismissed first this one, then that one, with, "He sold out...He sold out too." After this had gone on for a time, according to this minor legend, Jim leaned over and said, "Pardon me, where do you go to sell out? I've been trying for years."

Whether the story is true or apocryphal, it illustrates the dilemma of the jazz musician: while trying to function to his own best level as an artist, he has to make a living, which means that he must achieve some degree of popularity—fame, if you will. Unlike academic music, jazz receives few subsidies. This keeps jazz in an uneasy relationship with popular music.

That relationship has always been there, as much as some musicians regret or resent it, as hard as some of them have tried to escape it. In its early days, indeed, jazz aspired to nothing more exalted than a profitable popularity. In later years, when Bob Brookmeyer was asked the question that became irritating because it was unanswerable, "What is jazz?" he echoed the undoubted sentiment of early jazzmen in his reply: "It's a living."

"There's a problem with that word *jazz*," Artie Shaw said recently. "Being a word freak, I get nervous with words like *jazz* for which there is no acceptable definition."

Twenty-odd years ago, when Gil Evans wrote *Sketches of Spain* for Miles Davis, he was told that some people were puzzled by the album, not only because of its strong Spanish flavor but because he had scored for Miles and jazz orchestra one movement of Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, a modern "classical" piece. (The Spanish tinge needn't have troubled anyone. Gil, who was born in Toronto and grew up in the Canadian west and then Stockton, California, has a fascination with Spanish musical colorations. They are in much of his music, along with a spaciousness, a sense of the distances and great horizons of the west. I find Gil's music very western.) The main problem reviewers and others were having, I told him at the time, was indecision over whether to call the album classical music or jazz. "That is a merchandiser's problem, not mine," Gil said. "I write popular music."

Since Gil's music, which is held almost in reverence by many musicians, has had only intermittent and insufficient public recognition, this is an odd and interesting reply. I took these meanings out of it:

Gil had never intended his music to be exclusive, accessible only to an audience with special tastes and training. And he has never cared for the arid elitism of the "art" music world. Nor was he—like Artie Shaw—enamored of the term *jazz*, the more so at a time when jazz was being suffocated under the unleavened pedantries of such publications as *Jazz Review*. To cut through all that nonsense, declining to submit his music to autopsy, he simply called it "popular music" which, by any definition I can contrive, it most assuredly is not.

And yet jazz has a need for popularity, which makes the serious practitioner of the craft uneasy. He fears making compromises in order to achieve the conditions that permit his own—and his music's—survival. The public cannot know what the musician knows about his art and should not be expected to. When a musician has to undergo an operation, he doesn't care whether the physician knows chord scales, only whether he knows surgery. Ray Brown, who is not only a great bassist but has had first-hand and sometimes painful experience of the market place as the producer of commercial records, offered a simple and sobering insight into the dilemma of jazz and for that matter all serious art: "The better it gets, the fewer of us know it."

Once, when I was working on a song with Antonio Carlos Jobim, he looked up from his guitar with a sly grin and said, "We're fooling them. They think this is popular music." Maybe. But it isn't popular enough. I need only look at my royalty statements to reach that conclusion. But then, royalty statements are hardly a gauge of popularity, since none of us knows how much of our money has been stolen. When Herbie Mann did an audit of one record company, it cost him $3,000 *just to find his account in the computer.* Few musicians have the wherewithal to explore the labyrinthine accounting procedures of music publishers and record companies in search of missing moneys. As Johnny Mercer said to me one evening, "Whatever we come up with, the publishers will be a jump ahead of us." Tony Bennett

claims that some record companies have not two but three sets of books—one with which to hype the press and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences that a given album was a hit, a second with which to prove to the artist and the Internal Revenue Service that the album lost money, and a third for the company itself.

I have never known a musician, singer, composer, or lyricist, whether in country music, jazz, rock, or whatever field of non-classical music, who trusts the books. Never. Not one. Herbie has established his own record label, as have Blossom Dearie, Pete Christlieb and many others including, in Europe, Sahib Shihab and Kenny Drew. Plugging his new album from the stage of a jazz festival recently, Herbie said, "I know I can trust *me*." The American Guild of Authors and Composers came into being on the premise that most publishers are crooked. In its literature it boasts of moneys recovered for composers and lyricists. The industry has never challenged these charges.

And if you think it's bad here, count your fingers after shaking hands with a British publisher. If he's Australian, don't shake hands. And if he's Italian, don't even enter his office.

Given that a jazz musician has to make a living in the midst of what amounts to a larceny festival, his problem of selling what he knows to be good music to what he suspects may be a large and interested public, if only he could get to it, is as exquisitely painful as a case of shingles. It has enraged some musicians, driven others to drink or worse, and put a few in the nut house. And there is always some critic, at *Down Beat* or elsewhere, who, safe in an ivory tower and usually young and ignorant not only of music itself but of the business, accuses the musician of "going commercial" for making a certain album, when his choice was that or a job in the post office. Allyn Ferguson, a gifted and disciplined composer and a thoughtful one, said to me, "Look, the public doesn't understand art and the corporations aren't interested in it. These are the conditions of the time we happen to be living in. *This is not my fault.* I repeat, *This is not my fault.* I am not going to let myself go down the tube over this fact. I have become very clear in my mind about this."

Ferg, who once taught composition at Stanford, talks a better game of realism than he plays: he has become deeply involved in an audio-visual project for music education. Like almost everyone in jazz (or for that matter any of the serious arts), he has a recurring suspicion that, if only the public is given an honest choice between the good and the bad, it will with significant frequency choose the former. This is the exact antithesis of the philosophy of the accountants and lawyers who control the means by which music is distributed. Of the mass record industry, which is now awash in a sea of troubles, as it deserves to be, Herbie Mann said, "I wish it nothing but ill."

It is not, then, that the jazz musician necessarily wants to be "famous". It is that he must be. "No, I wasn't indifferent to fame," Artie Shaw said. "I *hated* it. It nearly drove me insane. I had to get away and ask the old question, Who am I? And what am I doing?"

Bill Evans told me more than once that had he not been faced with the need to make a living, he would have been happy to play for himself at home. And, he said, that was where he had done the very best of his playing. Oscar Peterson said the same. Dizzy Gillespie, of all people, told me public performing made him tense. So did, if you can believe this, Miles Davis. And in another field of music, Glenn Gould so disliked it that he simply quit, like Artie Shaw. He hasn't performed in public in years. He will only record.

Unless he is born wealthy—and it is an interesting fact of musical history that the wealthy class has never produced great composers, only an occasional good one of the second rank, such as Mendelssohn—the musician is forced to become professional. Only if he makes a living out of it can he spend enough time on his music to reach the highest potential and work with other musicians of excellence. And to make a living, as we know, he must achieve a measure of popularity. This puts him in a trick bag.

Recently Freddie Hubbard and Allyn Ferguson made an album together—tunes by Freddie and Ferg, a few from the current "pop" repertoire, charts by Ferg and some soaring solos by Freddie. They both seemed troubled by the inclusion of this "pop" material, and later, over a beer in a Chinese restaurant in North Hollywood, Freddie summarized the problem:

"I used to put down Louis Armstrong for playing things like *Hello Dolly*. But then, after I listened to it, it seemed as though he made that song a part of him." Producer Jeffrey Weber had proposed the inclusion of the pop material in order to get Freddie broader exposure than that offered by the all-too-few jazz radio stations. Freddie said, "At first I thought, 'Oh oh, here we go again—taking some of that pop shit and trying to turn it over.' Yet the same thing was very successful for me with a Paul McCartney song, *Uncle Albert and Admiral Halsey*. I had to think that one over, saying, 'Can I play this and go home and go to bed?' Because I've done some shit that I haven't been able to *sleep* over, knowing I'm going to get some flak from someone I really respect. But you have to go out here and make a living."

Get money—honestly if you can, but at any r[ate] get money! This is the lesson that society is daily and hourly dinning into the ears of its members.
—Henry George (1839-1897)

Artie Shaw again: "As far as singers were concerned, it was a great concession for me to have a singer at all. I wasn't in the entertainment business. I recognized that people put me in that business. That's where I played. The ambience in which I played had to do with entertainment. So I had to make that concession. But that's the only concession I made—that and occasionally playing so-called popular tunes. Mostly I was doing this to meet some inner standard of what I thought a band or I should sound like. The rest were concessions to pay the rent. Three chords for beauty and one to pay the rent.

"Interestingly enough, the records that have been making me a livelihood over all these years, the royalties, have been instrumentals—twelve gold records, none of which has a vocal."

The difference between the period Shaw is talking about, the late 1930s, and the present is that there was better "popu[lar] material to choose from then. Although song-pluggers and others kept him under perpetual pressure to record cheap Tin Pan Alley songs, and in the early stages of his band's career, he did, that repertoire occasionally offered a *Stardust*, a Hoagy Carmichael tune that sounds strikingly like a trumpet solo by Bix Beiderbecke, whom Carmichael idolized. (Listen to it; it's a trumpet solo.) And Shaw was interested in the songs produced by the theater composers, such as Kern and Cole Porter, "because that's where the best composers gravitated." Harold Arlen once read me a list of great classic American songs: it was the Hit Parade of one week in 1932.

Jazz musicians could play the material from Broadway shows by Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Arthur Schwartz, Vincent Youmanns and others with clear conscience. They offered superb melodies whose harmonic structures provided sound foundations for improvisation. To this day, jazz pianists will sit home playing over such songs for pure pleasure, sometimes playing straight melody and not even embellishing them very much. And, at that time, jazz musicians (with some exceptions, like Shaw) were not yet convinced that what they were doing was a separate thing from popular music.

In those days, Duke Ellington played for dancers. The fact that the jazz musicians were seeking, growing, trying to raise the level of their music, should not be divorced from the fact that Kern, Gershwin, and others in theater were striving to do the same. "The

best Gershwin songs," Artie Shaw said, "are as good as anything ever written by Hugo Wolf." In answer to a direct question, Harold Arlen told me that he and the others were quite aware that what they were creating was art music. Like Jobim and Gil Evans later on, they were slipping it to the public in the guise of "popular" music.

Thus the problem of the jazz musician, in using popular songs, was not as painful then as it is now. Some of the songs after all were by Duke Ellington and Fats Waller. And the jazz musicians were having an effect on popular music itself. As more and more of them took jobs in commercial dance orchestras, they imposed their style on it. By a process not unlike the infiltration of silicates into organic matter which eventually produces the beauty of petrified wood, they were changing its character. Eventually, as Woody Herman points out, big-band jazz *was* the popular music of America. Much popular music was good and much good music was popular.

The process was probably not accomplished without a certain amount of pain to some of the bandleaders involved. Gordon (Whitey) Mitchell, the fine bassist, who left music to become a comedy writer and television producer, tells of a job (this was in somewhat later years) he did for a certain famous New York society bandleader. The bandleader was hired for a veddy snooty Beverly Hills party. He flew out from New York, bringing a few key players, including Whitey—jazz musicians liked working for him; the music was rotten but the money was good. The contractor put together a band of west coast bebop musicians of the hey-man-wha's-happ'nin' breed, who came to rehearsal in their sloppy California clothes and shades and lounged in their chairs and, to the bandleader's consternation, made the music *swing*.

Later the band's manager entered the leader's hotel room to find him lying on his back on the bed, eyes shut, hands folded on his bosom, muttering incoherently.

"What's wrong, what's wrong?" the manager demanded.

"I am praying to almighty God," the bandleader said, "to save me from these *bastards*!"

Some very fine jazz musicians passed through some very dreary bands. Bill Evans had a knowledge of the Latin repertoire that amazed me; I think Bill knew every corny Latin tune ever written. Once asked him how come. "I used to work in a Latin society band," he said. "As a matter of fact, I got a lot out of it. I used to sit there and try to see if I could come up with something interesting, just to keep from going to sleep.

The Kay Kyser band could swing, when it was allowed to. Remember its recording of an instrumental called *Pushin' Sand*? The composer was the band's arranger, George Duning. And the excellent tenor solo was by Herbie Steward. And does anyone but me remember Ozzie Nelson's *Swingin' on the Golden Gate*? Aside from hiring people of Steward's musicianship, some of the commercial bandleaders themselves yearned for something better. Boyd Raeburn had been a society bandleader before forming his radical jazz band. Guy Lombardo loved jazz—at least Dixieland jazz—and tried to convert his orchestra. The public would not accept him in this other role. Shep Fields encountered the same resistance. And although some people date the swing era from the rise of Benny Goodman, there are others, including Artie Shaw, who think the credit for launching it belongs to Glenn Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra. "Hal Kemp, Al Katz and his Kittens, Ben Pollack, Austin Wiley," Artie said, "played the melody and the people danced to that. Then along came the bands like the Casa Loma. That was really the first so-called swing band, I don't care what Benny says about it."

True, the musicians in the dance-cum-swing bands lived for the instrumental numbers, when they could cut loose and blow. But they weren't all that unhappy playing the ballads behind the girl or boy singer. After all, it was during the ballads that you could reach under your chair for your drink. Or try to pick up some chick with her chin and fingers on the edge of the bandstand, like Kilroy. (Only God know how many Americans were sired in the back seats of cars during intermissions by musicians who promptly left town. This could explain why this country has such a talent for music.)

If any one man can be given credit for killing the big bands, it was James Caesar Petrillo, head of the American Federation of Musicians. The recording ban he called in 1944—the cause was just but the tactic disastrous—left only singers (not required to be members of the AFM) in the recording studios, backed by syrupy loo-loo-looing choruses. When the strike was over, Frank Sinatra, Dick Haymes and others were replacing the bandleaders as reigning musical stars. And Nat Cole's career as an important jazz pianist was obliterated by his success as a singer. The same thing happened to Billy Eckstine. His bandleading days were done; his singing career was just beginning.

The bands went on for a while. Indeed, the post-World War II bands were the best yet. Some expansion of their size, to include baritone saxophone and often bass trombone, and advances in the writing by arrangers interested in the "new" dissonance and chromaticism, produced the best music of that era. Like flowers, the big bands were most beautiful just before they died.

Network radio, which had given such strong support to the bands and to the excellent songs coming out of Broadway musicals, vanished when the companies that controlled it saw television as a faster way of slaking their corporate avarice. Radio was abandoned to local stations using only records for their broadcast material. An insidious symbiosis of radio and the record industry was thus established, one that is still with us and has done damage to American music beyond calculation. Carmen

---

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus.
Let no such man be trusted.

—Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

McRae thinks Europeans have better taste than Americans. I don't; Carmen apparently isn't familiar with the taste of the ordinary Frenchman, which is pretty bad. But Europeans are given a wider choice of art, and those among them with the capacity to appreciate the excellent have a better chance of encountering it. Billy Taylor has expressed an opinion that the reason Americans appreciate jazz less than people in other countries is racism. Billy is wrong. After all, racism isn't America's only sin.

The true cause of the problem is the structure of American broadcasting, the study of which I commend to anyone wanting to understand why good art has such a tough time of it in the United States. This is the only country in the world, to the best of my knowledge, that totally handed over broadcasting—a public resource; the Supreme Court has held that the "airwaves", meaning essentially the broadcasting frequencies, are public property—to *business interests*, interests concerned not in the least with the culture but with profits alone. America has no Radiffusion-Television Francaise, no BBC, no Australian Broadcasting Corporation. I suppose I must in duty mention the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, but the quality of its programming is uneven, due largely to the political maneuvering of some people with dreadful taste inside its staff structure. Nonetheless, the CBC has producers such as David Bird in Winnipeg and Peter Shaw in Ottawa turning out some very good jazz shows, both live and recorded. The CBC, like the BBC, ABC, RTF, and similar organizations in Sweden, Denmark, and other

countries, provides an alternative to raw commercial programming. Indeed, the United States no longer *has* a true radio network, commercial or non-commercial, although the underfunded PBS makes a pretty good try.

The men who founded American network broadcasting were to a large extent the engineers and scientists who had developed some of its technology. They were men of education and a measure of culture who were happy to broadcast Toscanini, the Metropolitan Opera, Grand Ol' Opry, and big-band remotes. Jazz, of a sort, high quality popular music, and classical music formed a not inconsiderable portion of their programming.

But when control of radio passed from the hands of these men into those of such corporations as Storer Broadcasting—Todd Storer invented Top 40 programming—good music, all kinds of good music, was in trouble.

Beginning about 1950, we entered an era of greed which, still rampant, is manifest in the conglomerates and what Dwight Eisenhower, in one of his few intelligent public statements, called the military-industrial complex. That greed has now come to threaten more than music. It threatens the existence of mankind itself. A liberal Catholic cleric said once that the Church could not afford more than one Galileo in its history. America cannot afford too many Three Mile Island incidents, no matter how eager the stockholders to escape work and play golf. The earth, water, and air are being poisoned. American goods are so notoriously shoddy that some Americans will not drive American cars. The telephone service may soon be about as good as that of Brazil. A few years ago, part of the West Side Highway in New York simply collapsed. Los Angeles artist Terry Kelley said recently, "Japanese pressings make American recordings sound like cow pies revolving under rose thorns." As a matter of fact, I have heard Mexican pressings that are better than American. The United States lost what Adlai Stevenson called its "regard for excellence". With the decline of standards for almost everything (including the quality of presidents), is it surprising that American popular music became such utter, unqualified, unmitigated, unspeakable, irredeemable, illiterate and unforgiveable crap?

The lawyers, accountants, Harvard MBAs and other narrowly myoepic men had taken over and were building their amoral

Music, the greatest good that mortals know,
And all of heaven we have below.
—Joseph Addison (1672-1719)

conglomerates. But such is the yearning for excellence in a few hearts that jazz went on developing, growing, now in small-group context. Gerry Mulligan—who is in the depths of his soul an unreconstructed big-bandsman—toured with a quartet. Dizzy Gillespie, the big-band leader *par excellence*, scaled down to a quintet. Buddy Rich led a sextet; for a time Woody Herman had a septet. (It is a sign of the times that Mulligan has a big band again, and a good one.)

As we slid downhill through Patti Page's *How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?* and Johnny Ray's *Cry* (garbage music was not born full-grown from the forehead of Elvis Presley in 1955), it became apparent—whether or not anyone ever articulated the observation—that small-group jazz had no hope of the kind of popularity the bands had once enjoyed. So the jazz musicians stopped reaching for it, and jazz made enormous strides in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s in terms of both intellectual and emotional subtlety. Their escape from "popular" music was rendered the easier by the quality of the current hits, which managed the odd trick of combining vapidity with high-decibel hysteria—nothing, said in a loud voice. (Despite the hoopla about the "genius" of the Beatles, when one of Count Basie's producers thought he should do a pop album and Chico O'Farrill was assigned to write the charts, Chico plowed through something like 150 Beatles tunes in the search to find a final ten of sufficient melodic and harmonic interest to be useful to the Basie band.)

On the theory that an infinite number of monkeys sitting at an infinite number of typewriters for an infinite time will eventually produce the Encyclopedia Brittanica and the plays of Shakespeare, the rock era should have produced more good music than it did by sheer brainless accident.

When the jazz groups now played "popular" tunes, they were old ones and they were no longer popular. When they played something new, it was likely to be an "original"—a tune written

Architecture in general is frozen music.
—Friedrich von Schelling (1775-1854)

specifically for jazz, such as Dizzy's gorgeous *Con Alma* or Brookmeyer's charming *Open Country* or Benny Golson's gentle *I Remember Clifford.* A synergistic effect set in: the groups played little that was currently popular; and they lost popularity *with the mass audience* because they offered nothing familiar to which new audience could cling in following the improvisations. Jazz became a music for a small audience that was self-defined as hip.

There was a brief deviation from the developing pattern: the *bossa nova* invasion in 1962. Suddenly there were hit records by instrumentalists on some truly excellent melodies. It lasted a short time. The post-war babies, by then in puberty, the age at which people are easily-manipulated conformists, became the most lucrative market for the record industry. For a time the good music coexisted uneasily with the garbage—the noise of the Rolling Stones, the whinings of Bob Dylan, the shrill maunderings of the Jefferson Airplane. But after a while, the executives of the record industry, interested only in the balance sheet, simply shoved the good music out the door. Suddenly the good singers, like Tony Bennett, Julius La Rosa, and Steve Lawrence, were without record contracts. A few, such as Jack Jones, survived on records for a while by doing the current pops, but succeeded only in alienating their existing audience while failing to attract the young. The classical music people, who had maintained a lofty *hauteur* towards jazz, found that their budgets, too, were being cut. Had it not been for the small and idealistic labels, the jazz people would have been in more trouble than they were. As the big labels abrogated responsibility for classical music, some of the best American orchestras found, in a curious cultural reversal, that they were under contract to European labels. And the Japanese and Germans were flying in to record American jazz players!

But the Japanese and German rescue and the operations of labels like Gerry MacDonald's brave little Choice Records were not enough. None of the companies involved, domestic or foreign, was able to get adequate American distribution, and the American jazz musician was hard-pressed to make a living in his own country. Some went into studio work, to play jingles or prop up the latest pop genius with their playing or arranging and, often, to fix up some really moronic chord changes. Claus Ogerman, the brilliant German arranger who was then living in New York, said of the era, "I wrote about 225 albums. And about 210 of them, I wish I hadn't." "I wrote a few of those albums myself," says Mickey Leonard tartly. The record companies may have tried to pass off this debris as art, but the men who saved the rockers from fully revealing their musical stupidity knew better. A few musicians and singers of talent committed suicide. And some, like Kenny Drew, Arthur Taylor, Red Mitchell, Sahib Shihab, Edmund Thigpen, Ernie Wilkins, and Al Porcino, packed it in and moved to Europe where jazz got, if not the popularity, at least the respect it deserved. And Claus went home to Germany. America, which had once been a net importer of talent, was now exporting it—including opera singers.

The musicians who remained here went on with their struggle to

make music and a living in the face of America's dedication to mediocrity and money, a dedication forecast by de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* in 1840. For all its problems, that struggle was not without value. It has undoubtedly caused jazz to hold back from the more ludicrous excesses of contemporary "classical" music. Lacking grants and the adulation of the academic establishment, jazz has had to remain real music, communicative music, exciting music, vital music, living music. It has no friends who secretly hate it and come to hear it only because their wives think that this attendance gives them the appearance of Culture. People who come to hear jazz do so because they love it. Some of them even understand it.

The struggle to survive, paradoxically, has helped keep jazz what it is: the best music of our time, the true classical music of America and, with its gradual spread and the development of first-rate jazz musicians of other nationalities, of the modern world. The constant confrontation with reality has kept it sane, when the "classical" music of our time is in a state bordering on schizophrenic catatonia.

But that is a subject that will have to wait for the next issue.

The Truth Comes Out in the Trash

by Steve Allen

This critic has the distinction of having been the first to detect the garbage rock movement. It is easy enough to assert, after the fact, that anyone might have realized the inevitability of the trend, given the success of punk rock. The fact remains that others did not. The shifting of the ground under all our feet was, in any event, over very quickly. Within less than a month the entire field of serious rock criticism had come to take garbage rock seriously, in large part because of my discovery that there are important clues to garbage rock music in the actual garbage produced by its more creative practitioners.

The historic breakthrough came when this writer, upon leaving the Bel-Air pad of Stanley Sickening, happened to casually glance at the contents of four garbage cans (not to be confused with the group of the same name) that stood in the driveway awaiting pickup. A broken pair of Stanley's "sunglasses" (the quotation marks because he steadfastly refuses to wear them except at night or while performing), lying atop (athwart?) the rind of half a grapefruit first caught my eye.

It was only the certainty, having just left the premises, that Stanley himself was passed out cold, along with his business manager and tax attorney, on the kitchen floor, that gave me the courage to lift one of the cans into the back of my underslung '74 Chevy pickup. One could hardly, after all, pore through the gold mine of decaying artifacts in broad daylight.

Once home, I lugged the container, somewhat weightier than I had first thought, into my kitchen, got out a yellow legal-lined notepad and Gucci writing instrument, and set about the task of classification and analysis. One of the first clues fell easily enough from the tree, perhaps because I had been the first to note the superiority of Sickening's *Stab Me With Your Love* to the tiresome MOR harmonies of Jerome Kern's *All the Things You Are.*

Can it really surprise the reader that I next noted a toy rubber dagger, encrusted with—gravy? chopped liver? Not the sort of thing, certainly, one ordinarily sees in a garbage can, and yet, very reasonably discarded. It was, after all, broken. Perhaps Stanley, tired of terrorizing stagehands and groupies with real knives (never mind the Cleveland incident and the three deaths), had resorted to the blatantly show biz fakery of a rubber approximation of the sadistic hardware which, even more than his inventive three-chord harmonies, initially brought him to public attention.

And what were the assorted broken eggshells? Clear but excruciatingly obvious representations of Sickening's own psychosexual emphasis on germination, birth, rebirth—the salacious appeal of apocalyptic destruction.

The three Campbell's tomato soup cans seemed almost to cry out loud, "Andy Warhol, Andy Warhol!" as I set them to one side of the kitchen table. The connection between Sickening and Warhol was evident enough. They both wore size ten-and-a-half shoes, were totally unknown in that insignificant area of the country between Pennsylvania and Wyoming, and—the clincher—had, during their teenage years, never learned the bridge to *Heart and Soul*, but merely the first sixteen bars.

Perhaps only William Blake could have known the spiritual ecstasy with which, fingers trembling, I lifted three compartmentalized aluminum frozen TV dinner containers from the odoriferous melange. Here it was again, the constant, even dominant, Stanley Sickening motif—the emphasis on the quick, the least troublesome, the slick, the prepackaged. And leave it to Sickening, with his incredible cat's sixth sense of where it's at, not to have scraped the last of the now-dried dollops of gelatinous pink gravy from the tins, as if to say, "Up yours, world! I'll take some of what you're dishing out, but I won't take all of it!"

Is it any wonder that many groupie Lolitas have publicly pleaded with Sickening and the other garbage rockers *not* to have sex with them—not even to do what he gloriously celebrated in his early classic, *I'm Gonna Cop a Feel*—but rather to punch them repeatedly about the abdomen?

Roach Motel—obviously named after the famous Culver City motel opposite the old Hal Roach Studios—deserves more credit than it has been given for its sensitive use of insect spray cans attached to the necks of its members' guitars. Their fans are still laughing over the new record of broken windows, flying beer bottles, bloodshed, hostage taking, and general mayhem at Polish Hall last summer. Undoubtedly the last memories that fade will be of lung cancer occasioned by the insecticides, but you can't make an omelete without breaking eggs, as we say.

Here's to all the musicians who died coming out of the bridge of *Sophisticated Lady.*
—Lou Levy (1928—)

Speaking personally, and as much as I like garbage rock, I prefer the ideas of its leading representative even more. I asked Sickening, at our last meeting, where he thought he would go when he died. "To Pacoima," he said. In an instant I knew that his interest in Zen was utterly sincere.

Consider, too, the following exchange between Sickening and Flasher Gordon, his drummer.

"How's it goin', man?"

"Oh, you know . . ."

That, of course, was just it; Sickening did know. He knew, alas, far more than he had ever told us. But that the knowledge is there (lurking like a demon in the incessant G7 chords of his four-bar introductions, in the sweat-stained Levis that he reportedly has not changed in the last two years) is radically evident.

Is it any wonder that a semireligious cult has grown up around the group, consisting, in large part, of people who profess little or no interest in its music? This will not come as a surprise to critics perceptive enough to realize the significance of the group's interest in Blake. It is true that Sickening revealed, in an early *Rolling Stone* interview, that it was not William but Robert (Baretta) Blake from whom he had drawn inspiration, but let him who is without sin and all that jazz...

Two Records

It has been the intention from the beginning of the *Jazzletter* to set up an alternative system of record distribution, one that circumvents the assembly-line and supermarket approach of the major labels and stores, which makes it difficult to locate important music.

There are on the market two albums that you may or may not find in stores, albums from which I have derived an enormous amount of pleasure and inspiration. If you cannot find them, we've arranged for their purchase through the *Jazzletter* for $9 each in the United States, $10.80 in Canadian funds, postage included. For Europe, including air mail postage (and anything less seems futile), it comes to $12.50 in American funds.

The first of these is the only recording ever made by Paul Desmond with the Modern Jazz Quartet. The album is on Ken Glancy's new Finesse label, one of its first issues. You may find it in stores in the United States, since Glancy is distributing through CBS, but the company as yet has no distribution in Canada, Europe, or elsewhere.

Paul Desmond died of lung cancer in 1977. Gerry Mulligan told me that Paul had said not long before that he wanted to be cremated—he said he didn't want to be a monument on the way to the airport. He left his Steinway to Bradley's bar in New York, a droll charity toward musicians who normally encounter dreadful pianos in nightclubs. And as Paul had requested, another of his friends, Jimmy Lyons, director of the Monterey Jazz Festival, went up in an airplane with a pitcher of martinis with which to drink a last toast and scattered Paul's ashes over the Pacific off Big Sur. The wind blew some of the martini and ashes back on him, which Jimmy took to be Paul's last joke. Paul was very much loved by those who penetrated his reticence, carefully camouflaged by mordant wit, well enough to know him. I for one shall always miss him.

Paul loved the Modern Jazz Quartet. The MJQ and the Dave Brubeck Quartet were the longest-lived small groups in jazz history. And unlike the Brubeck group, which had changes of personnel with the exception of Brubeck and Desmond, the MJQ was totally stable. For all Paul talked of the MJQ, I did not see their affinity with his playing until I heard this album (which strangely has no title). But it is one of those things that, once discovered, seems obvious. They are perfection together. Such is the compatibility that I was prompted to tell John Lewis, whose piano on the album elegantly complements Paul's delicate, lyrical, and sometimes sardonic inventions, "It looks like Paul spent twenty years with the wrong group."

That's an overstatement in that Paul did some beautiful playing with Brubeck. Nonetheless the compatibility of Desmond and the MJQ produces outstanding music; it is quite striking.

For one thing, Connie Kay's self-effacing drumming doesn't interrupt Paul's musical meditations. His playing, combined with Percy Heath's perfect bass work, sets up a sort of smooth mosaic pathway that allows Paul to stroll at ease, pausing to look at the flowers.

The album is derived from a two-track tape recorded during a Town Hall concert on Christmas Day, 1971. The quality of sound was so poor that John Lewis thought it could never be issued. But after Paul's death, he decided that it should be released, since there would never be another such collaboration, and went into the studio with engineer Don Puluse to remix it. The result is a triumph of the engineer's art. The sound is very good.

The material consists of standards *(You Go to My Head, Here's that Rainy Day, East of the Sun)*, a blues *(Bags' New Groove* by the MJQ's incomparable vigraphonist Milt Jackson), and traditional songs including *Greensleeves* and *La Paloma Azul.* There is love in this album, and I strongly recommend it to anyone who ever enjoyed Desmond or the MJQ.

The experiments with fusing jazz and classical music have been going on for years now. Depending on your viewpoint, you can date them from the 1920s, or the late 1930s (when Alec Wilder was writing his octets), or the early 1960s, when John Lewis made his courageous effort to establish Orchestra USA in New York. The progress has been uneasy and uneven, but it has been made. Not only have we developed players comfortable both in jazz and "classical" music. We have—to a large measure because of the movie industry, which offered a good deal of freedom for the experiments of writers trained in both idioms—developed a group of gifted and skilled composers capable in both areas. One of the best is Patrick Williams.

In 1976, when he was composer in residence at the University of Colorado at Denver, Pat wrote *An American Concerto,* which received a Pulitzer Prize nomination. Such was the reception from musicians that Pat decided to record it at his own expense with the London Symphony Orchestra and a jazz quartet comprising Phil Woods, alto saxophone; Dave Grusin, piano; Chuck Domanico, bass; and Grady Tate, drums. This formidable quartet and the LSO sight-read and recorded this complex piece brilliantly in just six hours. (Compare this with the months spent on some rock albums.)

CBS stepped in at the last minute and bought the album, but then did virtually nothing to promote it. It is not of course the first album ever issued in secret. The mystery is that record companies will spend large sums making albums which they then do not even try to expose to the public, thereby making their oft-reiterated comment that "this kind of music doesn't sell" a self-fulfilling prophesy. Albert Copland searched Chicago to find a copy of this album and couldn't. Although it was issued only a year ago, Herb Wong found three copies in a remainder bin in the San Francisco area—and bought all three.

An American Concerto is, in many opinions, including mine, the most successful large work to date utilizing jazz group and symphony orchestra. Pat has developed writing techniques (evident in his earlier *Threshold* album, which Capitol similarly did nothing to promote and which you can't get now) that give the illusion that the string section is swinging. The piece is beginning

Distortion is ugliness.
—Thomas Eakins (1844-1916)

to be performed by orchestras and jazz musicians around the country. For example, Don Menza recently played it in Buffalo.

The piece opens with references not only to Pat's musical roots but indeed the roots of most modern jazzmen—a fragment of *One O'Clock Jump,* another of *Take the A Train,* a bit of *Beale Street Blues,* some ragtime, and allusions to Stravinsky, heard in polytonal relationships with each other.

If you took a poll of the best jazz musicians to determine their favorite living players, Phil Woods would run a good chance of winning it. If Grady Tate accompanies with the sensitivity of a singer and the grace of a dancer, it is no doubt because he's both. If Dave Grusin plays with the structural intelligence of a fine composer, it's because he is one. If Chuck Domanico seems like one of the great bass players in jazz, he is. And the LSO is one of the world's finest orchestras.

Phil Woods is magnificent in the album, a remarkable balance of prodigious technique and selection, of flat-out intensity and dynamic shading, of anger and laughter, ferocity and unconcealable lyricism; and of course Phil's time is always a joy.

There is much more to be said about *An American Concerto,* some of which will turn up a couple of issues from now and some of which is in the liner notes, which I wrote. In the meantime, I consider it a milestone work and I am constantly playing it for anyone I can sandbag into sitting still for thirty-seven minutes. I have never encountered anyone who didn't immediately want a copy of it.