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## Playback

The Jim & Andy's article left me parched. That's one of the troubles with today's world. There aren't too many holes left. People drink Perrier in places with plastic-injected walnut molding and ersatz stained glass. We need a revival of the basic joint.

For instance, there's this place on Cicero just south of Belmont that's named, so help me, Joe's. Even better, the sign is broken and so is the floor linoleum. But against the wall are maybe 500 bottles of liquor and Joe's home-made cordials. The last time I was there I had some bourbon circa 1907, \$3.50 a shot. A cellist from the Chicago Symphony was belly up next to me in his tux. The juke box was playing Avery Parrish's *After Hours* and that was one of the newer selections. Now that is what I deem a noble establishment. It's so well protected against the vicissitudes and travails of the modern era that when you ask for a tab, you get credit instead of a diet drink.

You really take chances (as every artist must). Reading the October issue, even I wondered for a moment, "Who the hell is Albert Copland?"

Albert Copland, Chicago

*For those of you similarly puzzled, Albert Copland is a writer and public relations specialist, who is at present researching and writing for us an article on the state of music in general and jazz in particular in Chicago. We should all be grateful for this, particularly in view of the fact that he isn't going to get paid.*

Thank you for bringing back so many fine memories of Jim and Andy's and of the wonderful friends my husband Jim had. Good old days. Most of these fine gentlemen gave me and my family great backing and encouragement after Jim's passing. They will always remain in our hearts. Many of them still keep in touch with us, some from California, some from South Africa, and most from New York City and vicinity, and they still continue to shower us with their love and sincerity.

Your article was sent to me by so many of these wonderful fellows. They knew how much I would enjoy it, and I did. But though Jim's place on 55th St. was close to Eighth Avenue, hard-line hookers were not encouraged to come in. Jim was like a mother-hen over his "guys" and watched out for them and did not allow hookers to bother them or hang out in Jim and Andy's. I followed the same policy.

The new place on 55th was safer than 48th St. because it closed its doors to transit customers and opened only for regulars. Jim was more concerned for their safety than his register.

And, in the case of that great talent and good friend of ours, Gary McFarland, his passing away grieved Jim because the store was closed for a holiday.

Again, Gene, a great big Thank You for putting a smile on my face and in my head. God love you. I wish you the best of luck and success on your *Jazzletter*.

Mrs. Catherine Koulouvaris, Brooklyn, N.Y.

*Catherine: You have a subscription for life.*

History is a distillation of rumor.

—Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

Thanks for the October issue and your note regarding the post office's disinclination to deliver it to me. Can the forces of anti-jazz have infiltrated the postal service?

Your article, *And One to Pay the Rent*, should be required reading for every person who takes it into his head that he would like to be a part of the music business, whether he be performer, composer, arranger, producer, disc jockey, or what-have-you. The brilliant treatise you have produced should not be exposed to your readership alone. They are only too aware of the frustrations (like icebergs with only 10 percent showing) that lurk around every corner waiting for the wary and unwary alike.

Jules Chaikin, Los Angeles

The *Jazzletter* is dynamite!

Larry Bunker, Los Angeles

*Maybe we can use it to blow up the post office. The October issue was sent as an experiment by bulk mail. Julius La Rosa got his copy six weeks later. The Pony Express did better than that. Did anyone fail to get that issue?*

No, I am not the Marilyn Dunlap you knew in Toronto. The only other Marilyn Dunlap I ever knew was a hot check artist. That was an interesting experience.

Marilyn Dunlap, Denver

## Dear Everybody

First of all, thank you—all of you. This past few months have been one of the remarkable experiences of my life. One morning last April I woke up with the thought, *We really must have a new music publication. We need it. I wonder if the newsletter format would work?* For, in the past, whenever someone has asked me why I didn't start a music magazine, the reply has been: "I'll give you about five million reasons."

The response to the idea was immediate, and it continues to be phenomenal. And the letters I've received, from professionals and laymen alike, are more than encouraging: they are warming. It is interesting to see how many individuals felt alone in being fed up with the crap and the greed of contemporary society. And we are all losing that feeling, suddenly. I truly believe we can change the conditions of our professional existence.

Incidentally, the man most responsible for my taking the mad jump into starting this thing is Phil Woods. The *Jazzletter* grew out of a conversation I had with Phil and Clark Terry seven years ago in Denver at Dick Gibson's jazz party. It was given its name by Fred Hall of radio station KOVA, whose *Swing Thing* program is heard on forty stations across the country. He is a fascinating man about whom I want to tell you a lot more in the February issue. Fred has a clearer understanding of what went wrong with radio and therefore with music than any man I've met.

The article I had planned for this issue is being delayed until January, because I couldn't find copies of three books from which I want to quote: *The Agony of Modern Music* and *Serious Music and All That Jazz* by Henry Pleasants, and *Music Ho!* by Constant Lambert. I found a copy of *Serious Music*. Does anyone have copies of the others that I might borrow?

Anyway, that's the reason the piece I had planned for this issue will be in the January issue. That's close enough for jazz.

## Shorty Pederstein Revisited

Every jazz musician over forty, and the serious listener as well, remembers the Shorty Pederstein interview. For you younger folk, it should be explained that this was a comedy record on the Fantasy label in which a pedantic interviewer tries to get a mumbling, inarticulate, out-of-it jazz musician to say anything whatever about his music that makes sense. There is between the two men what nowadays would be called a communication gap—to say the least. The interviewer is bemusedly earnest; Shorty Pederstein's reluctant replies are an opaque wall of bebop slang and attitude. Musicians loved the record. Some still have copies of it.

Shorty Pederstein immediately became the mythological jazz musician.

Steve Allen made a contribution to the myth with a record called *Bop Fables*, in which a musician of the bebop persuasion tells in his own style and vocabulary such fairy tales as *Little Red Riding Hood*. It was very funny.

The musicians themselves gleefully abetted this image with a whole series of what were called bop jokes. Sample:

Road musician comes back to his hotel room after a matinee movie. Room reeks of grass. His room-mate is kneeling, ear to the floor. "What're you doin', man?" the first says. "C'mere an' listen to this," the second says in a stoned voice. First musician also kneels, listens, and says, "I don't hear a thing." "I know, man," says the second, "it's been like that *all day*."

Another: Bebop musician is leaning against a building on 72nd Street in New York. Little old lady approaches him and says, "Crosstown buses run all night?" "Doo-dah," the musician answers.

A third: Little old lady approaches musician in New York and asks, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" "Practice," the cat replies. This was probably the most widely circulated of all the bop jokes. There's a footnote to it. Bobby Hackett and Dizzy Gillespie were walking down Seventh Avenue. A woman said to

Music above all, and for this  
Choose the irregular.

—Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)

them, "Pardon me, gentlemen, can you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?" Anyone who knows Dizzy can imagine the impish look on his face, the glance from side to side, the timing, the pause. "Practice," he said at last. And Bobby Hackett had to hold himself up with the aid of a nearby pole.

I received one year a Christmas card on the front of which was a cartoon, a beautiful little line drawing of two musicians standing under a Dickensian lamp-post in the falling snow. One has a trumpet in a soft leather case under this arm, the other carries a saxophone case. And in the caption, one says to the other, "Like, have a Merry." Whoever did that cartoon really knew musicians. Everything about it was perfect, including the slouched posture. It was not only a funny cartoon, it was curiously touching. In a moment of emotion, the musician is able to say no more than that.

How true to life were these jokes and fables? How accurate a characterization was Shorty Pederstein?

The fact is that, far from being inarticulate, the average jazz musician will, given half a chance, talk your ear off—and often brilliantly. Next to music, what musicians seem to like most is conversation.

The only musician I ever knew who seemed to live up to the bebop image was Frank Rosolino—funny, tragic Frank—and Frank did it as a joke, a perpetual parody of himself and his friends. Once I was in a coffee shop with Frank. The place was a-swarm with flies. When the waitress at last approached us, Frank

said, "I'd like a bowl of those flies, please." The waitress, who was as quick as he was, said, "We only serve them on Thursdays." "I'll come back Thursday," Frank said.

After Frank's suicide, Roger Kellaway said, "When somebody cracks three jokes a minute, we all should have known something was wrong." Frank wore the Shorty Pederstein mask right down to the end. He was apparently incapable of expressing his true inner feelings, his anxiety and pain and fear. Frank seemed to have stepped out of that Christmas card I received. He did the bebop joke only too well.

I have circulated in all walks of life—among statesmen and ward politicians, lawyers, doctors, military men, labor leaders, corporate executives, actors, construction workers. There is no one from whom you can't learn something if you can get him talking in his own area of specialty. But on the whole, in my experience, the most intelligent two groups of people are journalists and jazz musicians.

Bill Evans was extremely well-read and, when he was able to break out of his almost pathological shyness, highly articulate. He was a virtual authority on the fiction and poetry of Thomas Hardy, among others. The range of Paul Desmond's reading is phenomenal. Indeed, his first ambition was to be a writer. Eddie (Lockjaw) Davis, Phil Woods, Horace Silver are all extremely interesting men to talk to. Jake Hanna, who on first meeting seems to fit the Shorty Pederstein mold, is liable to quote anything from W.C. Fields to Confucius. Herbie Mann, Allyn Ferguson and Bud Freeman are all very well-read. Oscar Peterson is powerfully articulate. So, in a shrewd and cautious way, was the late Duke Ellington.

Clare Fischer's knowledge of seemingly everything, including romance languages (he also speaks German), is amazing. Arranger and composer Paul Weston is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth, not in music but in economics. Patrick Williams has a degree in history. Jack Teagarden was a self-trained engineer who held several patents. Johnny Smith has a second career as a pilot. Bill Perkins is respected as much for his knowledge of electronics as for his musicianship. Med Flory is an actor and writer as well as a musician.

One could cite such examples endlessly.

Alan Helfman is a psychologist specializing in the behavioral and emotional problems that attend various physical illnesses. He is also a music lover with many friends among jazz musicians. "You can find them the same way you do," he said. "Very broad, well-read, intelligent and articulate. I think the reason is not hard to find. When they are on the road, all they do is read.

"Another thing. I am often fascinated by the way they play chess and do things like building paper airplanes. When they get involved in that, you'll find they've read just about everything on the aerodynamics of the subject. They have used their road time well, the dead time spent on airplanes and buses and in hotel rooms. After they've drunk and smoked everything, they say, 'Now what can I do that's interesting and creative?'"

Many of them are serious sports fans. Bill Evans, who had played football in college, was a crack golfer and also a demon pool shark. Golf is a passion with many musicians, the classic example being Ray Brown. When he and Herb Ellis were with the Oscar Peterson Trio, they would sleep for a few hours after the gig and be off to the golf course by dawn.

And yet we have all met what seems to be, if not Shorty Pederstein's brother, at least his cousin. At one time or another, we have seen most of these people take on a little touch of Shorty in the night. Why?

"I think they were slightly embarrassed by the conditions under which they had to live and work," Mundell Lowe said. "That was one of the things that killed Davey Tough, a brilliant and very literate guy. I remember doing that number myself on occasion, when I'd be working at Birdland with Mingus or some other

group. You didn't want anyone to realize that you knew anything more than the job seemed to require."

That remark illuminates another remark, made to me once by Dizzy Gillespie: "I know more that they *think* I know."

Mundell has defined the cause of the behavior. The style of it still requires consideration.

Since black musicians invented jazz and were its first heroes, they set the style and even social behavior of the young white musicians who idolized them.

Out of the black experience in the United States (blacks born in Canada or in the West Indies have on the whole quite different attitudes; the historical experiences were different) grew a calculated dissembling whose purpose was defense. Blacks *deliberately* created an impression that they were dull-witted, slow, so brainless that they could not do anything that required precision. The white slave-owner or, later, boss, would be more forgiving of someone he considered merely stupid. When I suggested this recently to the gifted black (he's also half Mexican) photographer Ted Williams, he said, "You're right. And appearing stupid had the additional advantage of letting the boss know you were no threat to him."

The air of vagueness and the slang developed by blacks—actually a clever code—all worked to their advantage. In essence, they were following military strategy: try to make the enemy underestimate you. The very word *ofay* (which seems to have dropped out of use: younger blacks often don't know the term) was pig Latin for *foe*.

In the 1920s, no one of the Establishment took jazz seriously as music. They took it seriously only as a possible corrupting influence on their children. The young white musicians who played jazz were immediately outcast, not only for having taken

Drum on your drums, batter on your banjos,  
sob in the long cool winding saxophones.  
Got to it, O jazzmen.

—Carl Sandberg (1878-1967)

up the music of blacks but for associating with and even hero-worshipping them. They must have been strange times, and it is difficult for most of us alive today to reconstruct them, even in imagination. And of course all these musicians, black and white alike, had to make their music in shoddy dumps run by men who were often scum and sometimes very dangerous scum.

Exiled from their own world, fiercely defensive of the music they loved (and everyone who loved jazz became fierce about it, due to the hostility toward it of the surrounding society), these young white musicians fled into a black world. And the older black musicians they admired taught them not only how to play the music; they taught them how to get away with it—how to duck, how to hide your intelligence, how to make yourself seem a harmless, eccentric clown. They had devices of behavior and even a private language developed during generations of experience at handling a dangerous world, which they taught along with the music. It wasn't only that the young white musicians began using the slang because it was the speech of their heroes, although that was undoubtedly a factor: they had themselves become part of an outlaw culture, and the coded speech, the vagueness, the out-to-lunch attitude, were all *useful*.

The image of jazz musicians as a subculture was most vivid in the early bebop days, the years right after World War II. By then the musicians were going out of their way to seem alienated, separate. They were of course; but they were also working at it. The beboppers had a double problem. Not only were they a suspect group to the general culture around them. They faced

hostility from within jazz itself, from the admirers of more traditional jazz and from some of its players, although the latter schism was probably exaggerated by journalists. I read a disparaging remark Dizzy Gillespie was purported to have made about Louis Armstrong. Later, when I knew Dizzy and became

Musick is the thing of the world that I love most.

—Samuel Pepys (1633-1703)

aware of his respect for the traditions of jazz, a reverence for its history, I asked him about it. "Oh no," Dizzy said with soft passion, "I'd never say anything like that about Pops." And Dizzy of course has always had friendships with musicians of the "older" school such as Hackett and Roy Eldridge.

The boppers behaved according to a classical psychological pattern: before you have the chance to reject me, I will reject you. They rejected the social conventions, cultivating eccentricity of speech and manner for their own sake. *Life* magazine ran an article about bop and Dizzy Gillespie, paying more attention to his beret and thick-rimmed glasses than to the important musical advances that were being made. Dizzy, who has an extraordinary gift for comedy and has developed the put-on almost into an art form, undoubtedly enjoyed the situation thoroughly. And he set the style for a lot of musicians. Bop glasses and berets became for a while almost a uniform. That was the period when everybody was supposedly going around making the sign of the flatted fifth, a gesture I for one never saw in real life. But the slang was real.

Nobody drove a car, he drove a short. One did not have an apartment, one had a pad. The term *short* has vanished, but *pad* has been absorbed into the general American speech, as has *dig*. One hears people who have never heard jazz in their lives using argot that was once the exclusive vocabulary of the jazz musician. *Latch onto* seemed fresh, funny, descriptive; years later I saw it in a *New York Times* editorial. *Too much* has similarly become commonplace, along with a grammatical aberration I came to think of as the dangling adjective: the adjective used without the logically following noun, as in *the lowest, the greatest, the worst*. *Like* was dropped into the bopper's conversation about every third word, as if he were reluctant to commit himself about anything. It became a sort of audible comma, one that one still encounters now and then, although it has been more or less replaced by the ubiquitous *y'know*. Used in combination, they achieve some sort of ultimate of the unexpressive: *Well, it's, like, y'know, man...* And of course everybody was referred to as *man*. This was a considerable aid to indefiniteness, since you never had to learn anyone's name, being able to slip on by with "Hey, man, how've you been?"

What pleased you *knocked you out*. If it amused you, you *fell out*. What was good was at first *groovy* and, later, *gone* or *crazy*. Some of the members of the Les Brown band were in a restaurant sometime around 1948. One of them asked the waitress for some cherry pie. She said, "I'm sorry, it's gone." "Crazy," one of the musicians said, "bring me two pieces." And needless to say, the others fell out.

It was all very sophomoric, but we were young, and it was fun. Beneath the fun, however, was a functional purpose: the slang, the manners, the self-indulgent eccentricities created unity in a group that felt itself—and not without reason—to be misunderstood; and it kept the bebop subculture a secret from the outside world. The idea was to keep anyone from the "square" world from knowing what you really thought or felt.

That is in part what makes Shorty Pederstein so funny even now: we're never quite sure whether Shorty is as dumb as he seems or he is merely putting this guy on. There is a flash of self-recognition in Shorty's low-keyed "Go, man."

We begin to see who Shorty is. He may be white. But he is the cultural heritor of slaves.

There is, I think, another reason why jazz musicians created a barrier of behavior and colorful slang.

Jazz musicians, in my experience, are extremely sensitive people. All art of course is created out of sensitivity, out of the ability to make the calculating and the imaginative sides of the brain work in balance. The balance is usually uneasy and often short-lived, which is why you have days when you have it and days when you don't. Aldous Huxley said, "Art is created in a state of relaxed tension." You must be relaxed enough to let the dreams flow, alert enough to know what to do with them, to grab them out of the incorporeal air as they rush by, and turn them into something that others can perceive and be moved by.

Being then usually very sensitive—romantic, imaginative, and desperately in love with music, so much so that they want to create it spontaneously, instantaneously, and go on to the next thing, always relishing the flashing joy of creation—jazz musicians are guarded among those they have not learned to trust. Making jazz is a very naked thing to do.

That anyone can do anything at all but stand there in paralyzed puzzlement when the chord changes are going by, that musicians can function without premeditation with great creativity within the materials of a song's structure, is more remarkable than even the most expert practitioners of the art themselves seem to realize. It requires not only tremendous knowledge (whether intuitive or acquired) but also a highly sensitive nervous system, quick intelligence, and the physical reflexes of an athlete. Jazz is not only one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of music, it is one of the striking achievements in the history of human thought.

In recent years, jazz musicians seem to have become more thoughtful, more articulate. Not so. With maturity, with the growing acceptance of the music and their growing acceptance of themselves, they have simply begun to take off the mask.

I rather liked old Shorty Pederstein. I'm afraid, however, that we're leaving him behind, with our youth.

But in the meantime, like, have a Merry.

## Dizzy Fingers (cont'd)

Bitterly disappointed by the reception he had received at the first *Jazz at the Waterworks* concert, and unaware that Pandit Mersey-Leslie, in a Baltimore *Aureole* review, had called his music "absolutely inexplicable", Fingers Wombat sailed for France. There, following in the well-worn path of Aaron de Djeestryng, Leonard Beerstein, Igor Bivorvitch, and Quincy Mass, he studied composition with the great Nadia Boucher de Cheval, as well as organ under the tutelage of the Alsatian physician, medical missionary, and mystic Jacques Strahp.

"Boucher de Cheval was a great teacher," Wombat says. "From her I learned discipline." She sometimes forced him to stand in a corner for days, which inspired one of his earliest works of this period, his *Perpetuum Immobile*, widely admired for its utter lack of harmonic motion. From Jacques Strahp, he learned how to handicap horses through prayer, and this enabled him to eke out a living at Longchamps.

His efforts were not to go unrewarded. After twelve years of study, he was given the prestigious Prix de Rome, not, as some of his detractors have claimed, to get him out of Paris but because there were no other contestants that year.

Fingers had been happy in Paris, where he had acquired a taste for fine wines, and in memory of his years there he wrote his haunting *Sous les tables de Paris*.

He arrived in Rome in August of that year, and, overwhelmed by the beauty of the history-soaked Eternal City, wrote one of his most joyous works, *Catacomb Capers*. In Rome he studied with

twelve-tone composer Largo Factotum and the Polish avant-gardist Jerzy Bountz.

Applying the discipline acquired from Boucher de Cheval, Fingers would arise each morning at six, play an hour of the six-finger exercises he had invented for himself, and then settle down to his heaviest philosophical reading of the day, the fine print on breakfast-food boxes. He was completing his repast about eight

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I believe that you become what you do.

—Jane Fonda

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o'clock one morning, he recalls, when he noted that thirteen corn flakes were still floating, somewhat limply, in the milk at the bottom of his mendicant's bowl. He immediately grasped the significance of this.

"You see," he explained, "because of my twelve fingers, dodecaphonic composition has always been a snap for me." Fingers tried to emphasize his point with a gesture, but due to his lack of a thumb was unable to do so. The resultant silence, which produced a typically Wombatian syncopation, was, however, more eloquent than any mere finger-popping could ever be. "I just knew there had to be something beyond the twelve-tone row," he said.

The sodden corn flakes inspired him to the development of his thirteen-tone concept of music which, strictly applied, requires that each tone be played thirteen times before the next is heard. The system is known as triskaidekaphonic composition or, more commonly, cereal music. "It is definitely not for the superstitious," Fingers explains.

That very morning, he wrote his first piece in the new manner, a ballad entitled *Now and Zen*, which has become a standard with the harp bands of Paraguay. And in another week of feverish activity, he produced his "Roman Sketches," including *Vespa Not*, *Ciao Ciao Boogie*, *Tiber Rag*, and *She's Too Fiat for Me*.

It is in this suite that we first encounter what would become a benchmark of Fingers Wombat's harmonic system, the flatted octave.

Unknown to Fingers, a recording of his *Jazz at the Waterworks* concert had been released in the United States, and the number of his fans in America had grown to dozens. He first became aware of the recording, in fact, when he received a royalty check for cents. More important, the release of the album had given Wombat's champion, Mersey-Leslie, the opportunity to take up his cause again. He called the album "bewildering" and speculated about what had become of Fingers.

Fingers was, in fact, preparing to give his first, and as matters turned out, his last, recital in Rome. In that performance, he introduced his *Music for Prepared Piano and Unprepared Audience* and five sacred works, *Vatican Vagaries*, *Cardinals Sin*, *Up Your Chimney*, *Sacred Cows and Papal Bulls*, and *Tertium Orgasm*. The music critic of *L'Osservatorio Romano* immediately nominated Fingers for excommunication, but on being informed that Wombat was not a Catholic, said he would settle for deportation.

*Pravda* said that the music was sacreligious even by Soviet standards, and the Italian Red Guard said that if the authorities did not take care of Fingers, they would. Fingers went into hiding in the tomb of Victor Emmanuel, professing amazement at the response to his music, as mobs surged through the street calling for his head.

Deciding at last that discretion was the better part of valor, Fingers surrendered to the Carabinieri and was taken to the airport under protective military guard. Thus he was returned to America in July of 1965, to be given a hero's welcome by six admirers at Kennedy Airport.

(to be continued)