Gene Lees .
Jazzletter

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Look to the Children

I feel that your statement that "music is the only art that works directly on the nervous system and requires no degree whatsoever of intellectual comprehension to induce its emotional results" has been amply demonstrated as true.

Although mental illness does not necessarily correlate with I.Q., I have read very moving prose and poetry by seriously disturbed children and adults who had been systematically exposed to various musics.

An example more pertinent to your comment would be the teaching of opera to seventh-grade students as we did at our school one time. We were warned not to try it—that that age group does not relate well to certain styles and adult voices, etc. But with an excellent staff available, we decided to try a unit on opera. *La Boheme* was one which was most successful, as was *Carmen.* Parts of the story line were revealed as the recording was played. By the point at which the long-separated lovers were reunited only to find that one was dying, most of the youngsters were in tears. There are several points to keep in mind here: (a) the opera was sung by superb performers; (b) the seventh-grade class was rather large and untracked according to intelligence or any other ability-grouping methods; there was a wide range of reading ability within the class and the fact that the opera was not sung in English made it necessary for us to read the plot aloud. The bare bones of the plot plus the fine performance—in a foreign language with no visual stimulation—moved most of these young students to tears.

As a final note to this, I once played some old recordings of Art Tatum with his trio of Grimes and Stewart, and the genius of the man transmitted itself from my old, scratchy, low-fi 78s to the youngsters (who knew nothing about jazz) and left them in complete silence, stunned by what they had heard but could not believe.

Blair Deiermann, St. Louis, Missouri

Pianist Blair Deiermann has been active in the St. Louis jazz world since World War II. He was for some time staff pianist at the CBS outlet in that city. He taught music for eighteen years. Currently writing a series of jazz arrangements for voices, he has just made the melancholy discovery, on top of the other thousand natural shocks a musician is heir to, that most music publishers can't read music.

I believe you short-changed your readers on the Shaughnessy *Ode:*

"We are the music makers,
"We are the dreamers of dreams."

Skipping the next four lines of that stanza, we come to what I think is the most important statement that Shaughnessy wanted to make:

"Yet we are the movers and shakers
"Of the world forever, it seems."

For me, this is the definitive *raison d'etre* for poets and composers. And dancers, a little bit, too.

Congratulations on the *Jazzletter.* It is absolutely first-rate.

[redacted] Beverly Hills, California

Re-reading the *Meet Me at Jim and Andy's* piece reminded me of something I saw once at Charlie's, the other musician's bar.

I had just arrived in New York, early in 1951, and was walking with a young woman when, seeing the name Charlie's on a window, I said, "Hey, this is the musician's hang-out I've heard about. Let's go in and have a drink."

My companion and I were seated at the bar, which was otherwise deserted except for one lone drunk down at the far end. The guy was so out of it that it didn't seem to occur to him that he could be clearly heard as he mumbled through just about every four-letter word in the book. Today, even a good many women talk like this, but back in '51 they didn't.

I frowned at the guy a few times. The bartender, who may have been Charlie for all I know, dug the situation very quickly, walked down to the drunk and, in a quiet voice, said, "Hey, man. Modulate."

Steve Allen, Van Nuys, California

The absolutely worst bop joke I ever heard was about two musicians who meet in a delicatessen. One says to the other, "Man, get the liver, it's the wurst."

There's a joke going around up here in the Great White North based on our Canadian penchant for attaching "eh?" to the ends of sentences. This very commercial musician forms this very, very commercial dance band. On the first gig, he announces, "We will now play Duke Ellington's immortal, *Take the Train, Eh?*"

Rodney North, St. Catharines, Ont., Canada

Rod North is a drummer. He and Kenny Wheeler and I have been friends since our high school years.

Rod told me a story that anyone who knows Kenny will appreciate. Kenny's emergence as a major jazz trumpeter has always amazed me, since in our early days he was too shy to ask anyone if he could sit in. And he hasn't changed much.

A few years ago, Kenny came home from England to St. Catharines to visit family. He and his nephew visited a club where some local young musicians were playing. The leader did a build-up about the great jazz celebrity in their midst as Kenny shrank deeper into his chair. Finally the leader said, "And here he is, ladies and gentlemen—Kenny Wheeler!" Applause, applause. Kenny gave his nephew a sharp elbow and said, "Stand up!"

Continuing from November...

Serious discussion of music tends to founder on the difficulty of proving anything. And those who grew up in a scientific age have a conditioned yearning for "objective" evidence in support of any argument.

A remark attributed variously to Duke Ellington, Claude Debussy, and Richard Strauss holds that "there are only two kinds of music, good and bad." But try to "prove" that a certain piece is good or, which is harder, that another is bad. Good or bad intonation, good or bad harmonic motion and voice-leading, economy of means and its opposite, all the things by which refined judgment of music is made, mean nothing to someone whose experience has not prepared him or her to notice them. Lalo

Schifrin has referred to most contempory pop composers as "diatonic cripples" and Clare Fischer, on the same subject, describes ours as an age of "harmonic regression". They are both right. They are also both irrelevant to someone jiving down the street with a Walkman mainlining moronic music into his brain.

The problem proves no less thorny at the other end of the spectrum, the upper levels of trained musical intelligence, since musicians cannot even agree among themselves, and skilled and highly articulate reasoning is applied to the defence of what are often only passionately-held opinions.

About the only thing that is generally believed by schooled musicians is that the musical system we use is not inherently meaningful, that it is only a symbology to which we have attached meanings according to a complex of conventions. A certain chord is not inherently "beautiful" or "poignant" or "bright", certain intervals, such as the sixth and the ninth, are not really "warm".

Oddly enough, this is one subject about which they could be wrong.

All trained musicians are familiar with the harmonic series. When you strike a tone, others occur in a known sequence due to subdivisions in the vibration of whatever is making the sound. The "note" one hears most conspicuously is the fundamental. The first overtone is its octave, the next its fifth. Then occurs a second octave and on it a dominant seventh chord in root position, the seventh somewhat out of tune according to our tempered scale. This is the so-called "chord of nature" and entire theories of harmony have been erected on it. Above that chord the overtones occur closer and closer together. "The development of harmonic resources," Leon Dallin says in his book *Twentieth Century Composition,* "has followed a consistent course of exploiting higher and higher elements of the overtone series. In this respect contemporary composers are merely continuing a process that started with organum and magadizing and led successively to triads and chords of the seventh, ninth, eleventh, thirteenth, and beyond."

In a James Lecture at New York University, Virgil Thomson said, "These (overtone) intervals are fixed by nature, and our awareness of them is very ancient.

"Actually, the Greeks knew much of what we know regarding the first dozen or more of these, the Hindus and the ancient Chinese more than the Greeks. Their number, though theoretically infinite, is for practical performance limited to about half a hundred, or fewer. Mixing them gives great variety to sound color. Transposing them into a single octave for use as modes or scales is a convenience. Falsifying them to facilitate pattern-making has long been common practice, the European 'tempered scale' of twelve equidistant semitones being already more than two centuries old. A somewhat less acceptable tuning practice is to mix the overtones of slightly different fundamentals. This produces an acoustical interference known as vibrato. Mixing these from distant fundamentals is likely to cause more complex interference and to erase clear pitch. We call these mixtures noise.

"Sound patterns made from scale tones, commonly called 'music', have long been thought to be good for the spirits and to give pleasure. Noise has no such reputation; indeed it is known to produce exasperation and bad temper. And though it is easy to compose noises into patterns, it has been a fancy of only recent times to call such arrangements music."

During the Nineteenth Century music became increasingly chromatic, culminating in the music of Wagner and then Debussy. The system of harmonic "laws" had become sufficiently complex that, early in this century, Arnold Schoenberg went beyond it and argued that all twelve tones of the chromatic scale have equal weight. The dodecaphonic, serial, or twelve-tone (he himself rejected the term *atonal,* although it is widely used) system of composition essentially requires that the twelve tones be sounded in a chosen sequence without repeating any of them, since a repetition would add emphasis to one of them and thus disrupt the equilibrium that one is working to establish. The tone row thus constructed is the basic material of the composition. One may use the row in mirror inversion, in retrograde motion, with the tones outside the octave, and so forth. But the tones must be used in order.

Other composers have used, modified or, through rhythmic and dynamic devices, extended the system. But Schoenberg's influence has been enormous. "We cannot escape the consequences of his method and attitude," Norman Kay wrote in the February, 1969, issue of the British publication *Music and Musicians.*

But there is a problem, one that has been under discussion for at least half a century: only a comparatively small audience of devotees likes this music. To the rest, even to the most intelligent and musically receptive of laymen, it communicates little but tension and agitation, and it does not give pleasure.

More than twenty years ago, the Chicago *Sun-Times* ran an editorial posing an interesting question. Why was it, the writer asked, that works of art produced forty or fifty years before were still considered "modern" and "radical" and had attracted a very limited audience? And he cited examples from all the arts.

It's my music, and I wouldn't give up jazz for a world revolution.

—Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

James Joyce's two major novels, *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake,* would be cases in point. At one time many people read the last fifty pages or so of *Ulysses* because they contained the "dirty" parts that had kept the book for so long on the banned lists of the United States and Ireland. With *Finnegan's Wake* a more or less opposite phenomenon occurs. Quite a number of people, impelled by a dutiful feeling that to be cultured they must be familiar with so eminent a work, have read the first three pages, only to lay the book aside in bewildered boredom. With its portmanteau words and elaborate puns, sometimes in several languages, it is for most people incomprehensible. It must be the most widely purchased but unread book in history.

Size of audience and breadth of appeal are of course no criteria of worth. If they were, we would have to account Floyd Cramer a better pianist that Art Tatum or Vladimir Ashkanazy, Dolly Parton a better singer than Sarah Vaughan or Roberta Peters, Johnny Cash better than Joe Williams, Tony Bennett, or Luciano Pavarotti. But neither is smallness of audience proof of merit, as people in the classical establishment seem to assume in rationalizing the public's resolute indifference to various arcane modern *oeuvres.* The defence of the uninteresting on grounds of public ignorance is hardly persuasive in a time when we have revolutionary electronic means to disseminate our art to the largest well-educated audience in the history of the world. Any reasonably bright high school senior is better educated than Louis XIV.

Nor is it true that the public has always been slow to appreciate great art. Though there are instances of long nights preceeding the sunrise of appreciation, most of the major Nineteenth Century composers were successful and made a good deal of money from public performances and publishing. For that matter, Machaut did well, and while it may have been two hundred years before his work was appreciated by musicians, he certainly was admired in his own time *by his audience,* which consisted of the court heads of Europe. Nor does Bach provide an example of the unappreciated genius, as musicians often insist. His audience—

including the Duke of Brandenburg and Frederick the Great—certainly appreciated his music, and he was able to make a living. (He *had* to, to feed and clothe twenty kids.) He was ignored for a hundred years not because the public considered him new-fangled but because many musicians considered him old-hat.

As for Mozart, he revelled in his popularity and had he lived the few more years until the first reasonable copyright laws were passed, might have died a well-to-do man. Some of his successors did. Some composers, such as Spohr, were lionized internationally, and both Liszt and Paganini bed-hopped across Europe. (Liszt in his later years became a monk, and I think it is reasonable to speculate that this was due as much to exhaustion as piety.) When Offenbach visited Boston, the women of that city unhitched his horses and drew his carriage through the streets by hand. In Beethoven's case, he took some of his worst knocks from musicians. The public liked him. The fact is that "the public" has often been *ahead of* the critics and the artists in appreciating genius, no doubt because artists and critics are committed to their own particular philosophies and to the defence thereof. As for the fire art of jazz, it survived not because the professors of music in the conservatories and the critics on the great newspapers and the symphony conductors and the rich and famous families of America espoused its cause, but because intelligent plebians liked it, including a lot of young people.

And so the myth of public stupidity does not hold up to examination. The time lag in the arts is to a large extent a modern phenomenon. Music written more than seventy years ago, such as Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire,* is still considered "weird" by most people.

Common-practice harmony, essentially that codified from Nineteenth Century usages, holds that there is a powerful relationship between the fifth note of the scale and the chord built on it (the dominant) and the first note of the scale and its chord (the tonic). The fourth of the scale and its chord (the subdominant) have a somewhat less powerful influence than the dominant. There are all sorts of ways to manipulate the system and enrich it -- through shifting temporarily into other keys or "areas of tonality", through chromatic alteration of chords, through suspensions and substitutions and secondary dominants and so on. The chords can be extended by the use of tones equivalent to the overtones to produce ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords. (Indeed the beboppers did all these things, infuriating the adherents to traditional and largely triadic jazz.) But essentially that's the system, one that presupposes the power of the dominant, subdominant, and tonic chords. Most music in our culture is made in accordance with it.

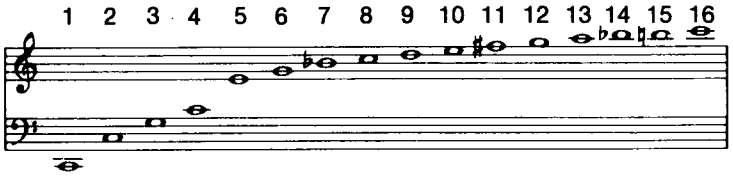
The use of the tones that lie outside the diatonic scale (in major, that's the do-re-mi scale almost every child learns in school, or at least used to) is called chromaticism. The term applies to both melody notes and chords. In good popular music, chromaticism is now so common as to pass unnoticed.

Jazz and popular music of all kinds, including country-and-western, work off the European harmonic system. Indeed the only contribution of jazz to that system (the rhythmic factor and the custom of collective improvisation are separate subjects) was the development of the blues scale. That, of course, was an outstanding innovation.

Despite the myth of the uneducated black musician inventing the whole system for himself, the fact is that Don Redman was a conservatory-trained musician who must have been aware in the 1920s of Debussy and perhaps also Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Jazz musicians were studying the Cecil Forsyth orchestration treatise by the 1920s, according to Artie Shaw and Bennie Carter. "Certainly Forsyth was one of the first books I got," Benny said. "It was the Bible to a lot of us. I may have had the Lang book before that. I always thought Bix Biederbecke was influenced by Debussy. And believe, no matter what you've heard, Louis Armstrong could read." Artie Shaw and others were listening to Bartok by the 1920s. Twenty years ago, John Coltrane and I spent a summer afternoon listening to Bartok. I've heard Hank Jones warming up for a record date playing Chopin. Come to that, there was in New Orleans in the last century a sizeable body of black classical musicians. The influence of classical music on jazz is, then, by no means a recent phenomenon. What is odd is that classical music has been so little influenced by jazz, a fact that puzzled Ravel, who was very interested in jazz.

It is sometimes said that jazz retraced the history of European classical music in about seventy years. This is not precisely so, since jazz was triadic at the time of its emergence and the blues used the IV, V and I chords. And jazz did not so much retrace harmonic history as assimilate it approximately as fast as the musicians felt the public could accept advances in what had been born as a folk music. The harmonic system in modern jazz, particularly big-band writing, owes much to Debussy, although Stravinsky and Bartok, among others, have had their innings. Some jazz musicians studied the European system so assiduously that they became "classical" musicians. Jazz lost one of its freshest and most inventive pianists—and incidentally one of the most seriously under-rated in its history—when Mel Powell went off to study with Hindemith.

In passing, it should be noted that a number of musicians from jazz and for that matter popular music as well have successfully entered the world of "classical" music, while the efforts of "classical" composers to write jazz have been, to put it as gently as possible, embarrassing. I once asked Johnny Mandel if he had any idea why this was so. "I think," Johnny said, "it is possible to go from intuitive music to formal music, but I am not sure the reverse is possible."



The Overtone Series

The low C (1) is the fundamental. Overtones 7, 11, 13 and 14 are somewhat out of tune in terms of the Western tempered scale.

With Charlie Parker, jazz had pretty well caught up with chromaticism. John Coltrane and others pushed it about as far as it could go, and a certain amount of bitonality came into jazz. Now what was it to do? Should it follow classical music into the abandonment of tonality? Lennie Tristano had already pointed in this direction. Soon there was music by Ornette Coleman and Carla Bley and others in the loosely-named "free jazz" movement. And something similar to what happened in classical music came about in jazz. Over twenty years have passed since the first impassioned debate about this music, and most jazz lovers still consider it aberrant and unattractive music. The same arguments that had been used in classical music came into play. Look how long it took the public to dig Bird, etc. etc. But as a matter of fact, the recognition of Charlie Parker came with remarkable rapidity. The first time I, to cite a personal example, heard him (at Massey Hall in Toronto), I thought his music was totally incoherent. Six months later I had every one of his records that I could get my hands on.

And Charlie Parker was a special case, a man beset by personal problems. It is conceivable that without them, he would have

become the celebrity that Dizzy Gillespie became and to a large extent still remains.

If the principle argument of Twentieth Century music is to be resolved—essentially over whether musical intervals have a natural or only conditioned affect on the nervous system—we would be well-advised to look to physiology and medicine for guidance.

A doctor named Patrick L'Echevain has written a book called *Musique et Medicine,* recounting his experiences with music as therapy. Last month in France, L'Echevain told trombonist and journalist Michael Zwerin some interesting things. He described the case of a Swiss pop musician who, after a brain hemmorhage, could not write, repeat verbal phrases, or understand simple orders. His musical functions, however, were unimpaired. He continued to play piano, take musical dictation, read music, and learn new tunes. L'Echevain concludes that there must be "a separate musical language center in the brain."

That would seem to be testimony against the theory that music is symbolic speech.

An experiment in a Japanese factory with 120 nursing mothers produced interesting results. One group was exposed to Western classical music, the other to jazz and pop music. Some heard the music on speakers, some through headphones. Those who listened to classical music on speakers had a twenty percent increase in lactation. In those who heard it through headphones, lactation jumped one hundred percent. Those who listened to jazz and pop music experienced a twenty percent *drop* in lactation and a fifty percent drop occurred in those who heard it on headphones.

This is fascinating at several levels. For one thing, it suggests that music can produce effects below even the subconscious: it can work directly on the autonomic nervous system. For another, it tends to undercut the centuries-of-conditioning theory of musical responses, since these women were listening to *western* music, which is essentially new to their culture. At a working-class level, it seems likely that in the years of childhood these women were more exposed to traditional Japanese music.

"The ear is more intense than the eye," L'Echevain told Mike Zwerin. "Sound is the first thing to touch the individual. Babies already hear inside the womb, but they wait a month after birth to see light."

L'Echevain also said this: "With recordings and radios we hear much more music now than, say, in Bach's time. We need more music now. It is possible that music replaces the religious faith we have lost. If we seem to have need for more and more music, that is because it fills a hole in our spiritual life. Music is becoming a religion in itself."

One conclusion suggests itself: with music so pervasive in our society, and with increasing evidence of its effects on the body and mind (and even on plant growth), the image of the music-maker as an irresponsible Romantic doing just as he pleases, the public's participation in the musical process being restricted to a supine acquiescence, is more than obsolete. It is dangerous. There is not room at this juncture to discuss and document the devastating social effects of rock music in the past quarter century, but we must note them in passing.

Now, the whole trend of classical music in the years after World War I was subjected to scrutiny by the British composer and conductor Constant Lambert in the 1934 book *Music Ho!* Lambert concluded that the most vital and valid music of our time, and the music with the most promising future, was jazz.

Henry Pleasants, a classical-music critic trained at the Curtis Institute, excoriated the classical establishment in his 1955 book *The Agony of Modern Music,* and concluded again that the most vital music of our time was jazz. He expanded on this thesis six years later in *Serious Music and All That Jazz.*

In that 1969 article for *Music and Musicians,* Norman Kay wrote, "Serialism, viewed as a psychological and material product of the traditional European attitude—indeed as its final flowering—can also be seen as an extreme expression of the division between composer and audience. If we think of this basic series as the composer's fiat—his to create, his to abandon for the next composition, or retain if it suits him—we see why this is so. For, if the sequence is imposed by the composer, we (the audience) are less imaginatively involved than ever. We mean this when we say that the totally serial composer is the most arrogant in music's history. He has taken upon himself the arch-Romantic style of priest, magician, monarch, and yes, even God, all in one stroke. We are the grateful recipients. Small wonder that the normally balanced listener still rejects his method. He may say that he finds it 'difficult' or 'prickly', but he could also add that it is unscientific, and artistically erroneous. It was the isolated composer's final fling. And, incidentally, the shortest-lived major innovation in the history of music."

It is interesting to consider the history of serialism's growth, and for this, I think, we can turn to Henry Pleasants who, aside from his profound historical scholarship, particularly in German music, spent the twenty post-war years in Germany.

"Serial music had made little headway between the wars," Henry wrote in a letter to *Music and Musicians.* "But Hitler's proscription of it as 'degenerate' made it immediately fashionable the instant World War II was over, especially in Germany and Austria. Everyone—composers, critics, publishers, editors and the directors of opera houses and broadcasting institutions—was eager to demonstrate that his heart was, and always had been, in the right place. Suddenly serialism and the serialists were *in.* We had Darmstadt and Donaueschingen, sponsored by the broadcasters and publishers, the obligatory annual new productions in the opera houses and so on. The response of *the general concert-going public* was nil. Festival programmes were subsequently broadcast in Germany late at night, while those who footed the bill were sound asleep. But to the outside world all this seemed liberal and enlightened, and the German example was followed, encouraged of course by those serialist composers who had emigrated to academic safe havens or had returned to their homes abroad.

"Schoenberg, of course, sounds innocent enough today alongside, say, Stockhausen or Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy,* but the important fact is that one thing led to another: Schoenberg to Webern (fragmentation and dislocation) to Boulez to Cage and Stockhausen and to 'Three? Avantgarde? Operas?' Hence the priority for a reassessment of Schoenberg. Indeed, it can no longer be evaded, for if the current and fashionable assessment is erroneous, then all that has happened in his wake has compounded the error."

Henry Pleasants and Constant Lambert have not been the only apostates in the classical world. The conductor Ernst Ansermet, in his praise of Sidney Bechet, was one of the first. Vladimir Horowitz was and is an Art Tatum admirer. Walter Damrosch saw the possibilities of jazz. Sixten Ehrling, when he was conductor of the Detroit Symphony, was often seen at Baker's Keyboard Lounge, listening to jazz. The Austrian pianist Friedrich Gulda has been an adamant champion of jazz.

And now, one of the strongest voices in American classical music, and one of its most honored composers, has recapitulated Lambert and Pleasants and added some thoughts of his own to the support of jazz—Virgil Thomson.

In that aforementioned lecture, adapted as an article in the Dec. 17, 1981, issue of the New York *Review of Books,* Thomson said:

"The practical methods of Baroque and Romantic music, their exploitation, expansion, and codification, as well as their embodiment in a repertory of concert and theater pieces that both professionals and straight music lovers can accept, all that seems

to have come to term about 1914. The constants of music have not altered, but their utilization within the assumptions of our recent centuries would seem to have reached some kind of terminus. Their high point of interior organization and of expressive intensity had already come with the work of the Viennese symphonic masters roughly between 1775 and 1825. Some amplification of volume, extension of length, and intensification of senuous appeal have taken place since, but these achievements too had all been pretty well finished off, I think, by World War I.

"One may point out also that the United States came to participate in this European history at only about that time, too late to have taken a major part in music's major branchings out or in any decline of its flowering. Our musical needs therefore and our contributions, if any, are likely to lie outside of Europe's narrative. Our folklore and our jazz, now studied in many European academies, are phenomenal creations. Indeed, they may lead us elsewhere than toward joining Europe. If jazz could replace classical counterpoint, it might justify our abandoning the classical line. I find such an eventuality quite improbable. But I have observed that the commercial establishment, by fighting jazz relentlessly, has strengthened it. Also that, in its fight for life, black music, jazz, has developed a remarkable ability to reject impurities. Actually, it is a persecuted chamber music with nearly three-fourths of a century's history of survival."

I have a minor cavil with that analysis. Jazz is not a pure art. From its beginning, it has been a vigorous hybrid. Jelly Roll Morton spoke of a "Spanish tinge" in early jazz, and it has always manifested a casual attitude about absorbing whatever musical influences it finds around it, from Broadway show tunes in the 1930s to Impressionist harmonic practices to the samba of Brazil to, in more recent years, a few of the more useable elements of rock. It is like Kronos, the energy monster in that silly science-fiction movie: attack it with flame, electricity, atomic bombs, and it merely eats the energy and grows larger and stronger. It is now casting envious eyes at the symphony orchestra, whose personnel is rapidly being infiltrated by young players at home in both idioms.

The sense in which jazz is pure (and this is perhaps what Virgil Thomson meant) is that it has a fierce esthetic morality. Its pride of craft is magnificent.

It is an art come into its maturity. But if it is to attain its promise, it is going to have to resolve the question that has bedevilled the classical music world for more than sixty years and jazz itself for more than twenty: is the tonal system valid? If jazz were to preserve the system not out of conviction but out of the naked need to earn a living, a moral decay would set in and it would become nothing more than another commercial music. Yet if the jazz players become convinced that the tonal system is invalid, the sincere among them will have no choice but to follow classical music into atonalism. Predictably, it will lose its audience and, since jazz is not on the heart-lung machine of public and foundation funding, the art will die. The question, then, is not a minor academic quibble.

It may have an answer.

The late Ernst Ansermet wrote a book called *Les fondements de la musique dans la conscience humaine,* or *The Basis of Music in Human Consciousness.* In that book, which Virgil Thomson cites, Ansermet presents a case for the human ear's affinity with the overtone series—and perhaps even the ear's evolution from that series. Ansermet says that the semicircular canals of the middle ear have a shape that can be defined by natural logarithms and which make the air within them vibrate in response to the overtone series, also governed by natural logarithms.

The implications of this are obviously far-reaching, and yet not so surprising in view of geometric structuring in plants, crystals, snowflakes. It suggests that we are attached to the system of tonality not simply because we have been exposed and conditioned to it (although that in itself, let's not forget, would be a not inconsiderable argument in its favor) and not because we in our brutish perversity selfishly decline to let the composer do as he will to our hearing, but simply because *we are made that way.* Putting it another way, we didn't make the system. The system to an extent made us. Tonality is apparently part of the mechanism by which we perceive the universe.

Jazz for the most part has resisted following European music down the road into atonalism and its offshoots, approaches to music that make it meaningless to all but those who take an intellectual pleasure in deciphering patterns, a pleasure akin to solving acrostics. In the right frame of mind, I take pleasure in a lot of that music myself, but it is more a matter of respect for someone's ingenuity and technical resources than emotional response. Most people look to music for an emotional rather than an intellectual experience. And jazz, for a large and steadily growing number of people, has prodigious abilities to communicate emotion and impart pleasure. Classical music has largely lost those abilities.

There is another and extremely important way in which jazz differs from classical music. It is the first art music in history created by and for the proletariat, which needless to say makes mockery of Soviet hostility to it.

European art music was financed by and largely created to please the aristocracy. Jazz was not.

It is almost impossible to resist, when discussing American society, quoting from de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America,* published in 1840, because it was so eerily accurate in its anticipations.

"In an aristocracy," he wrote, "the artisian would seek to sell his workmanship to the few; he now conceives that the more expeditious way of getting rich is to sell them at a low price to all. But there are only two ways of lowering the price of commodities. The first is to discover some better, shorter, and more ingenious method of producing them; the second is to manufacture a larger quantity of goods, nearly similar, but of less value. Among a democratic population all the intellectual faculties of the workman are directed to these two objects; he strives to invent methods that may enable him not only to work better, but more quickly and more cheaply; or if he cannot succeed in that, to diminish the intrinsic quality of the thing he makes, without rendering it wholly unfit for the use for which it is intended . . .

"To satisfy these new cravings of human vanity the arts have recourse to every species of imposture . . . "

And that's how rock was born.

But a remarkable thing has happened, something that—for once—de Tocqueville did not foresee.

In America, the people—and at the time, the lowest people on the social totem pole—created an art music of extraordinary ingenuity and intelligence by themselves and for themselves. This is unprecedented.

As jazz has grown, it has reached out to that large and highly educated body of "common" people that has come into being in our western nations and the orient. It is not music that they like because they have been told they should admire it by a dominating aristocracy. They like it because it is at once emotional and intelligent, it is exciting, and—they merely sense this—it is *theirs.* It is, even in the way it is organized, a truly democratic music, which is perhaps why so many rulers and would-be rulers are hostile to it. It can be said to its eternal credit that it has been denounced by reactionaries of the right and the left and by every individual and organization that any decent and self-respecting art could possibly aspire to be hated by. It thrives in Poland and Hungary and Czechoslovakia, in Denmark and Sweden and

Sweden and France, in Japan and Australia and England and Canada and Italy.

The Hon. Gerard des Iles is a justice of the Supreme Court of Trinidad and Tobago, a polished, handsome man of middle age and middle height with brown skin and grey hair and with that modified-British accent of the Islands. He is a dyed-in-the-wool jazz fan.

"Jazz," he said to me last fall, in his elegant voice, "is God's gift to America and America's gift to the world."

Further Fingers

Back in New York, out of money, friendless but for a fan club of 288 members, most of whom lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Fingers Wombat began looking for a gig. Because he had always played his own music, Fingers knew only three standards, but he had forgotten what they were.

Deciding that this must be the next phase of his musical growth, he sequestered himself for six months in Brooklyn with a rented Solovox and a fake book, and quickly mastered *Lavender Blue (Dilly Dilly), Sincerely, Cherry (I'll Get You Yet), Papa Loves Mambo, Darling je vous aime beaucoup, Hot Diggety Dog Diggety,* and other songs of that stature. Having exhausted the fake book, he began assembling a collection of sheet music. The reharmonization of these tunes, he said later, was one of the most enjoyable exercises of his life. He would learn the guitar chords and then look for simpler changes.

It was at this point that fortune smiled on Fingers. On the recommendation of a Sheepshead Bay auto mechanic named Carl Start, he was hired by Sonya Papermoon, the singer, who was not then as obscure as she later became. Fingers headed up a trio that accompanied her at the chic Semihemidemiquaver. The bassist was Simi Lowe, who years later would make headlines by killing an A&R man with a sharp contract, for which he received a Victoria Cross, a Hero of the Soviet Union medal, the Legion of Honor, and a *Down Beat* New Star award. The drummer in the trio was Willie Rushmore, with whom Fingers formed a close and lasting friendship. Rushmore, Fingers said, "is the only drummer I ever met who understands my concept of creative acceleration."

Fingers and his group were kept on at the Semihemidemiquaver to accompany such singers as Amanda Reckonwith and Isabel Ringin. (It was in fact for Ringin that Fingers wrote his great standard *Shostakovitch Small by a Waterfall.*)

The job with Ringin was a turning point in the Wombat career. Impressed by his playing, which she described as "weird", she introduced Fingers to Walter Wohlkarpitz, president of Honest Records. Wohlkarpitz, after hearing one set by Ringin and the trio, left—but not before telling Fingers, "We must have lunch some time."

Nothing loth, Fingers telephoned Honest Records the following afternoon and, on asking for Wohlkarpitz, was in turn asked by a sequence of secretaries, "Does he know you?" and "What is this in reference to?" and "May I ask what it's concerning?" Thrilled by this evidence of the company's deep interest in him, Fingers told the secretary of Wohlkarpitz' gracious invitation, after which he was left on hold for twenty minutes. The girl returned to say that Mr. Wohlkarpitz was "in conference" and would return the call. Since Fingers' only number was a telephone booth just south of the elevators in the Brill Building and twenty-three degrees south-southeast of Irving Mills, Minnesota, he said he would call back. He did so the next day and the next but was advised that Mr. Wohlkarpitz was out of town, a condition in which he remained for six weeks.

Indeed he might have remained so indefinitely had Fingers not read in the "Executive Runaround" column of *Trash Box,* the Bible of the record industry, that Wohlkarpitz was preparing to leave for the MIDEM conference. Deducing that the executive must be in town, if only for a moment, Fingers took the bull by the horns and went directly to the offices of Honest Records.

He had chosen an unfortunate time to arrive—Thursday morning. Wohlkarpitz was in the habit of spending every Thursday morning at the company's warehouse in Queens, stamping "Quality Reject" on boxes of records. (Wohlkarpitz denied, during a grand jury investigation of the record industry, that these cartons were shipped to a distributor in Los Angeles who happened to be his cousin. He maintained he was merely maintaining the quality of pressings for which his company is known. Wohlkarpitz was completely cleared of corruption charges by the office of the Manhattan District Attorney after what was described as a "complete, thorough, and objective investigation". Wohlkarpitz is now chairman of the board of the international communications conglomerate known as International Communications Conglomerate at a salary of four million dollars a year, plus stock options.)

When Wohlkarpitz returned from the warehouse, he found Fingers ensconced in an armchair in his waiting room. Beaming with that warm affability for which he is famous and saying, with that warm resonance of voice for which he is also famous, "*Wonnnn*derful," to Fingers' every utterance, he invited the pianist into his palatial office. Fingers took a chair facing the quarter-acre desk behind which Wohlkarpitz seated himself. On the wall behind the great executive was emblazoned the company's logo and its famous motto, *We'll give you an honest count.*

"What can I do for you?" Wohlkarpitz said pointedly.

"I want a record contract," Fingers replied softly.

"Wonnnnderful," Wohlkarpitz commented trenchantly.

"And I think I'm ready for one," Fingers replied modestly.

"Wonnnnderful," Wohlkarpitz asserted cogently.

"I've paid my dues," Fingers said proudly.

"Wonnnnderful," Wohlkarpitz observed keenly.

"And I can play the blues," Fingers said confidently.

"Wonnnnderful," Wohlkarpitz averred thoughtfully. "What kind of terms are you looking for?"

"Anything fair," Fingers said graciously.

"Wonnnnderful," Wohlkarpitz responded quickly. "Do you have a lawyer?"

"No," Fingers said shyly.

"*Wonnnnnnnnnnnn*derful," Wohlkarpitz asseverated enthusiastically.

After six minutes of negotiation, Fingers signed his milestone record contract with Honest Records, becoming the first artist in history with a 20 percent royalty—20 percent to be paid by Fingers to the company for every album sold, the figure rising to 25 percent after 20,000 albums, and 40 percent to be paid for all remainders, with a 75 percent breakage clause. Further, Fingers was charged only for production expenses, studio and mixing time, tape, mastering, limousine service, advertising and publicity, album cover design and production, paper sleeves, coffee breaks for secretaries, and an annual vacation for Wohlkarpitz at La Costa.

When Fingers left Honest Records that afternoon, he was elated. He was in debt to the company for two million dollars. He had feared the figure would be much higher. He realized however that he would now need a patron. It was out of this need that he became acquainted with the Duchess of Bedworthy, famous in jazz circles for her unstinting kindnesses to the Count Basie band, the Duke Ellington band, the Boyd Raeburn band, the Stan Kenton band, the Tommy Dorsey band, the Sonny Dunham band, the Guy Lombardo band, and the Fordham football team.

It was to be a fruitful relationship.

(to be continued)