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Well Thanks, John

The following item is reprinted in its entirety, including the headline, from the front page of the Sioux City Tribune *final edition of November 23, 1923.*

Sousa, in S.C., Asserts World Is Better than Ever; Even Has a Good Word for Jazz

A large majority of the people in the present day insist on believing and not thinking, in the opinion of John Philip Sousa, world famous musician and band conductor, who makes his appearance in Sioux City tonight at the auditorium. His band gave a matinee performance Friday afternoon.

"What success I have attained in my profession is due to the fact that I have made that observation and have fitted my concert numbers to such a condition," said Sousa. "Most of the men who sit through my concerts are tired business men, and tired men are those who have been bested in the day's work. Can you imagine me making my escape from an audience of tired men to whom I had presented a program of dirges? Music from the masters of the past is like castor oil, both being smooth but hard to take."

Sousa is a dedicated optimist in his attitude toward present world conditions. The world is better now than ever before, he believes. Even jazz music that has been ostracized by nearly every instructor of music and decried by purists as one of the most pronounced vandalisms of the present trend in culture, gives the famous band conductor a cheerful viewpoint as to the permanent effect it will produce.

"Jazz music is often based on some of the most melodic masterpieces of the past," he said, mentioning *Song of India* as an example. "Let the jazz composers have free rein and they will hang themselves when they start incorporating parts of *Nearer My God to Thee* and other religious songs in their music, bringing an avalanche of sectarian disciples down on them. But I know what the people want and I give a good deal of attention to the lovers of jazz who attend my concerts. I always give three jazz numbers to those hearts that sorrow for it, with the result that they leave after the performance with the impression that I am a great musician."

Modern music, a great share of which he has fitted for concert work, makes up the entire program, for the reason that Sousa believes more coloring can be produced than in ancient melodies. One number, *On With the Dance,* is based on six or seven fascinating themes of ancient melodies taken from music of all nations and written in a modern manner.

Sousa's first appearance in Sioux City was 32 years ago. Since that time he met with an accident while riding a horse, practically making his left arm immovable, but he declares that although 62 years old he feels better now than ever before and declares he will not leave the concert platform until he reaches the age of 106 years.

"When I first conducted an orchestra at the age of 16, I was possessed with wild ideas of educating the public in music but I have kept pace with the times and have had to change my conceptions of what musical education implies," he explained.

Sousa believes he has come as close to leading a "fairy life" as anyone in the world. "God only knows what my lot would be now had I taken the position of instructor in violin offered me on that first concert tour at the University of Nebraska," he said.

Sousa is a hiking enthusiast and a devotee of horse back riding. In his stables in North Carolina he keeps a riding horse, Alladin, which he secured from the Sultan of Turkey's stables a few months ago. He gives athletics, generally, credit for saving his life after he met with the accident in which he lost the use of his arm. Physicians told him he would never recover.

Sousa died nine years later at the age of 78. (He had apparently been clipping seven years off his age.)

Bix Beiderbecke had died a few months before him, on August 6, 1931.

Bix

"Bix" was not his nickname, as one would assume from its frequent enclosure in parentheses or quotation marks in various writings about jazz. It was his real name. There it is on his birth certificate: Leon Bix Beiderbecke, born in Davenport, Iowa, in March of 1903. His birth certificate is one of the documents examined by the camera in a remarkable film called *Bix.*

When I said to music publisher Michael Gould after a screening of this picture, "It's one of the best films ever made about jazz, certainly the best I've ever seen," he replied, "It's one of the best films ever made about anything." Mike knew Bix in Chicago.

A similar opinion is held by Artie Shaw, who used to jam with Bix and who is one of his many friends interviewed in the film. Indeed I chanced on the picture only because Artie called one afternoon and urged me to see it at a showing that evening in Los Angeles, since the film does not yet have distribution and there was a possibility that I might not soon get another opportunity. I would like to add my opinion to that of Artie Shaw and Mike Gould and beg you, if you ever get the chance to see this picture, to do so. I think you'll want to see it more than once.

(Those of you in England, by the way, may get to view it before we do over here: it has already been bought for British television.)

It was partly out of a sense of duty that I went to see the movie, expecting to get a closer look at a legend who had always been seen dimly in a mist, as it were. I came away with an understanding of a genius.

In fact I had never really been "into" Bix, partly because the sensualism of sound means too much to me and therefore I dislike listening, as if through a tin wall, to those old records, and partly because I never liked that overblown Paul Whiteman band, in which much of Bix's music alas was made. Unlike Artie Shaw, I have never heard Bix play a full chorus and of course never will—only eight bars here, four somewhere else, amid music that was beneath him. I almost came to grasp his importance years ago in Chicago, when a friend played me a tape of only his solos, with the rest of each record omitted. After seeing this film, I am immovably convinced that Bix had one of the most original minds in the history of jazz.

There is perhaps a way to get an impression of what a full chorus by Bix must have sounded like: listen to *Stardust.* Hoagy Carmichael is composer of record of the song. But Bud Freeman told me that that melody is a Bix Beiderbecke solo. If you run the

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tune in your mind at a quick tempo—which is the way it was originally recorded—the similarity to a solo by Bix is conspicuous. (Hoagy Carmichael was a sort of groupie to Bix who carried Bix's mouthpiece around until the time of his own death.)

Stardust breaks the commercial rules of songwriting then or now. It contains not one single full eight-bar repeat. From the start of the magnificent verse to the end of the chorus, it is through-composed, evolving constantly. (Mitchell Parrish's striking lyric, seldom mentioned in discussions of the song, is fully as good as the tune.) It has been determined from internal evidence that certain of Bach's concerti were based on works written for other instruments. The evidence within *Stardust,* I suggest, is that it is a trumpet—or cornet—solo, and not a solo by just anybody but by Bix. It lays naturally on the horn and it certainly is not an inherently vocal melody.

A second Carmichael tune, *Skylark,* is in the same style and has similar characteristics. Note at the end of the first eight bars how the melody does not come to rest on a long note, a standard procedure in songwriting, but goes soaring over the bar line, through the changes into the next eight. Again, the tune has the characteristics of a trumpet solo, complete with fills. If these tunes are not actually by Bix Beiderbecke, they are faithfully in his manner, and they are unique and brilliant melodies. *Riverboat Shuffle* also sounds like Bix.

"Many people mentioned *Stardust* to me while I was working on the picture," Brigitte Berman, its producer, director, editor, and co-writer (with Val Ross), said after the screening. Miss Berman, 33, who was born in Germany and lives in Toronto, produces documentaries for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, although the corporation had nothing to do with this project. A friend told her she should familiarize herself with jazz and mentioned Bix Beiderbecke as one of the musicians she should listen to. She became mesmerized with his music and obsessive about doing a movie on his life. She got a grant, borrowed money, ran herself into debt, and spent four-and-a-half years making the film. We all owe her deep gratitude because she has, metaphorically speaking, done the impossible: she has brought Bix back to life, if only for two hours.

She uses black-and-white still photos of the bands with which Bix played—the Wolverines, Jean Goldkette, Whiteman—and Edward Hopper paintings to evoke the era. She zooms slowly in on the face of one young musician or another, then cuts to a sequence in color of the man as he is today, talking about Bix. One after another of these men told her he cannot get Bix out of his mind, all these years after his death. She interviewed Doc Cheatham, who is alive and well and playing beautifully. He says that everybody in those early days was trying to play like Bix. She interviewed Jess Stacy, Al Rinker, and many more, including Paul Mertz, who played piano with the Goldkette band and with Bix and his Rhythm Jugglers, and Jack Fulton, who played trombone and sang with Whiteman. The effect of these cuts was all the more startling to me, since afterwards I attended a small party at Paul Mertz's house, and there a number of those musicians were, getting on in years now but in handsome good health, really quite a distinguished-looking crowd, and I tried to fade into the woodwork to listen to them talk, somewhat overawed, like a schoolboy.

Miss Berman's camera traces the locales of Bix's life, the recording studios and summer resorts and his high school and the places he lived, including the lovely frame house, now painted yellow and white, on a leafy street in Davenport. And she uses many still photos of his youth (he was being written up in the local paper as a boy wonder of the piano when he was only seven). There he is, a little boy with a bright smile and bright clear eyes and you know how he's going to end up, an enfeebled tortured alcoholic who'll be dead at twenty-eight. He had such a nice face, such a dear good face, looking out of those photos at you with an incredible trusting honesty. That was his first mistake.

His second mistake was that he never learned to read well. When his mother sent him to a piano teacher at the age of seven, the teacher listened and said she couldn't teach him anything. When, years later, he went to a symphony trumpeter for lessons, the man listened to him and then said emotionally that compared with Bix, he was a creature in a cage. And so he never learned to read. Bill Challis, who was Goldkette's arranger, transcribed the only Beiderbecke piano compositions we have, a mere five—and Bix nearly drove him to distraction because he never played one of them the same way twice. Two of those compositions are heard in the picture and they hit you like a sea-wave with awareness of his startling harmonic originality.

What Benny Carter told me—that he thought Bix was influenced by Debussy—is confirmed in the film by Matty Malneck, who says Bix used to take musician friends up to his hotel room, put a blue or red light-bulb in a lamp "for atmosphere", and play them records by Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky. We hear *Afternoon of a Faun* on the soundtrack, then a solo by Bix, and suddenly one is aware of how much he was influenced by Debussy. I wonder if Ravel ever heard Bix. Debussy was dead by then; Ravel outlived Bix by six years.

Louis Armstrong is not seen in the picture, except in stills, but an old interview with him is heard. Louis's public *persona* was always the smiling entertainer, but in this interview we hear him in real and passionate anger over Bix's death, indicting the "friends" who kept proferring him liquor when he was trying to quit drinking. One of the musicians recalls seeing Bix walk in one night to hear Louis, and Louis removing his mouthpiece and handing his horn to Bix, who inserted his own mouthpiece, played three choruses, and then gave the horn back to Louis. He says he never saw Louis do that for another musician. Louis says of Bix, "Ain't none of them play like him yet." That is the subtitle of the picture.

Jules Chaikin may well be right in speculating that the anti-jazz conspiracy may have invaded the post office. Their latest gambit was to tear the labels off three envelopes and return them marked "insufficient address." Who didn't get the March issue?

Everybody may have tried to imitate him, but for one thing, as one of the musicians observes, none of them could capture his tone, which is oddly bell-like. Someone says that every note he played seemed thought-out, and that after a solo, he would sit down and seem to be analyzing what he had just done. Bill Evans told me once that you should be able to think of a single tone for five seconds without another thought intruding. Actually, my memory is that he said five *minutes,* but I find the very idea of such concentration so impossible to grasp that I tell myself he must have said five seconds. In any event, Bix plays as if he could think that way. There is a sense of absolute concentration in his solos and in every carefully-selected note. The solos seem sculpted, carved. They are compositionally so exquisite that it is almost umimaginable that they were improvised. The man was a Chopin.

The tone of Miss Berman's film is cool, a little detached. She doesn't push the tragedy of Bix's life at you. The result is that the realities of his life and death affect you only the more powerfully.

At one point, the Whiteman band travelled twelve thousand miles by slow train in eight weeks. That life was very hard on Bix, and for that matter on all the musicians. One musician says there was nothing much to do but play poker, at which Bix was a shark, and drink. Another recalls seeing him in a hotel room during the late phase, making swipes at a wall, on which he could see snakes.

Finally his friends sent him home to Davenport to dry out—the wrongest possible place. His German Presbyterian family, sunk in their Iowa respectability, had always been appalled by his career, his life in dance halls and speakeasies, and his black friends. He had never been able to get their approval, although he had reached out for it pathetically from the road, sending them every record he made. When he got home he found all the records still in their mailing wrappers. Miss Berman and narrator Richard Basehart don't tell us what effect this had on this sensitive young man. They don't have to.

Bix was institutionalized for five weeks, then released with a warning that he must never drink again, and he returned to New York.

Network radio had arrived. The Whiteman band was travelling less, being heard primarily through the new medium. Nobody ever said that Whiteman was much of a musician himself, but for all his pomposity, all the ludicrous self-importance of the man, people such as the late Joe Venuti, who was in the band with Bix, have told me that he treated his musicians well, and they have a respect for his memory. And Bix said that Whiteman was almost a father to him. At least Whiteman admired his music, which his own father didn't. But Whiteman was running with the wind, and the jazz quotient in his band was being steadily reduced, which left Bix with less and less to do. Radio was in fact putting bands out of work. And Bix was becoming unreliable. During ensemble passages, he would sit there, nodded out, until one of his fellows would nudge him awake for a solo. The camera goes in close on somebody's orchestral part, on which there is a pencilled scrawl, "Wake up Bix." And in fact the solos themselves were deteriorating. At last Whiteman let Bix go.

Many musicians were climbing off the bus or the train to take up studio work in New York. But Bix couldn't work those gigs. He couldn't read.

Matty Malneck, who roomed with Bix at one time (as did Artie Shaw, seven years his junior), recalls him waking up at five a.m. and reaching for the gin bottle he had left by the bed. Finally, in order to escape the crowds of musicians and others who were always around him, Bix moved to a quiet apartment house in Queens.

We are allowed to examine two of the letters he wrote there to his parents. Narrator Basehart's reading of them is beautiful. Bix is reaching out for their approval. In the second letter he says he is enclosing a photo of his future wife. Bix was shy with women. My secretary at *Down Beat,* Mary DeMet, dated him a few times, and Mary told me that. He was almost courtly in his manners in their presence. And in his letter he talks so proudly of Alice, the New York girl with a New York accent whom he is going to marry. The letter was never finished and never sent. It stops at the end of a paragraph. He was sick.

The death certificate says that he died of lobar pneumonia. Joe Venuti used to make an issue of that. Joe told me that Bix died not of alcoholism but pneumonia. Joe was fudging to protect the memory. The fact is that Bix was in such weakened condition that the pneumonia took him out very easily. As Basehart and Miss Berman say in the narrative, Bix died "of everything." Nobody knows who Alice was.

Somewhere early in *Swann's Way,* Proust says (and I have no intention of plowing through all that prose to find the passage) approximately this: fiction has its effect on us because of its transparency. We are able to enter into the characters we read about, share their experiences, and thus have an emotional response we rarely know with the people of our daily existence. The people of real life are always to an extent opaque. "Which of us has known his brother?" Thomas Wolfe asks.

Joseph Conrad wrote that his job was to make you understand, but above all, "to make you see." The classic literary medium for this has long been fiction, including drama and especially the novel. Along about the 1950s, as Tom (not Thomas) Wolfe points out in an essay on the New Journalism, a lot of people sitting around on newspapers, bored by repetitive format reporting, began to experiment with the application of fictional techniques to fact. Some of the most interesting achievements in this genre have been made by Wolfe himself who, in a series of brilliant and often very funny books, has transmuted journalism into art. The approach is almost the diametrical opposite of the historical novel, in which the outline of someone's life is used quite freely for the construction of fiction. In the New Journalism, fact is used with strict fidelity, but structured and detailed to achieve the narrative momentum and emotional grip of fiction. One of the best of the books of this kind is Joseph Wambaugh's *The Onion Field.*

The movies have long dealt with fictionalized biography, sometimes with real distinction, as in John Huston's portrait of Toulouse-Lautrec in *Moulin Rouge.* Too often, however, the results have been meretricious, as in that ridiculous film "based on" the life of Chopin, *A Song to Remember*—not to mention *Young Man with a Horn,* based on the Dorothy Baker novel which in turn was "inspired by" Bix. That's the picture in which Kirk Douglas got to snarl in anguish and bash a trumpet out of shape to symbolize the frustration of a jazz musician. A terrible piece of romanticized nonsense.

Miss Berman's film is an application of the methods of the New Journalism to cinema. Though completely factual, it permits you—indeed compels you—to enter into the life of its subject. This is the key to its power.

The film would appeal to any sensitive layman, I should think, though it will have particular force to anyone who loves jazz and above all to the professional. Many of us in the music world have had the experience of family disapproval of one's profession. But at least my father eventually said to me, "If I'd had my way, I'd have ruined your life." Bix's father never had that much grace, or understanding.

There is a known ethnic pattern in American history. Whichever group is at a given time the most downtrodden tends to send many of its sons into four sleazy professions: police work, crime, boxing, and show business. They offer a way out, a way up. When there were lots of Irish cops, there were lots of Irish gangsters and comics and fighters and singers and songwriters.

Louis Armstrong was an outcast by birth, and playing trumpet in a joint was better than life in that boys' home; and Louis was king of the hill in an ethnic group that respected what he did—if only because that group was allowed to aspire to little more. Bix's case was different.

Nobody creates art because it is an easy way to make a living. For whatever reason he enters into the career, the true artist continues to create it because he can't stop, cannot *not* do it. He has become a compulsive about it, as Bix did. Jazz today commands the respect and even deepest admiration of doctors, scholars of all kinds, teachers, engineers, industrialists, artists in other fields, even priests and jurists, and it is taught for credit in esteemed academies. Not so in those days. It was just speakeasy music, just trash. For Louis, jazz meant status. For Bix, whose family had been successfully settled in Davenport, pillars of the community, since the 1850s, it meant exile.

His friends describe him as quiet. They say he had a dry sense of humor. They say he was always reading. At that party after the screening, I watched them and could not help but think that he could still be alive, still be playing. Look at Doc Cheatham, Stephane Grappelli, Vic Dickenson. Bix would be 78.

Two days after I saw the picture, Artie Shaw called and said, "I thought you were going to call me back and tell me what you thought about the picture?"

The fact is that I was almost unable to talk about it. "Artie," I said, "it is one of the most affecting movies I've ever seen, and it left me with a terrible melancholy. I feel as if I had known him, almost as a close friend, and I am overwhelmed by a sense of loss."

"Melancholy," Artie said. "That's a good word for it. I saw the picture again yesterday, and it left me in a peculiar state of mind. Full of rue."

Hoover, Coolidge, and Radio

Bix was twenty when Sousa was delivering himself of those roseate sentiments in Sioux City. Events were unfolding in Washington, D.C., whose import to the American culture and to music in particular neither of them could have perceived had they been aware of them.

Herbert Hoover was Secretary of Commerce. The president was Calvin Coolidge, who in a speech delivered fourteen months later managed to delineate the cultural problem of a nation in six dead words: "The business of America is business."

That Republican sentiment, so hostile to the highest values of humankind (and so curiously close to Marxist materialism in the assumption that man's only imperative is the acquisition of objects), would shape the legislation that was to govern the evolution in the United States of the most powerful means of communication ever discovered by our species: radio, and later television, broadcasting.

Broadcasting developed in different ways in different countries. It was only in the United States that the government handed over this inestimable natural resource entirely to private interests, even while maintaining as a public palliative a legal position that the "airwaves" are the property of the people. Stations are supposed to broadcast "in the public interest, service, and convenience." Otherwise — in theory — they can lose their licenses. Few in fact do broadcast in anything but the interest, service, and convenience of their owners and advertisers. Licenses are almost never revoked.

Hoover's legacy is evident in the fact that the finest television programs presented in America are produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation — and in the greater appreciation of jazz in countries other than that of its birth. This appreciation is due in part to the system of public broadcasting adopted by most of the civilized nations. Some of these state-owned foreign television and radio networks even have standing jazz bands, in which many expatriate Americans perform. No American network maintains a house jazz orchestra, or any kind of orchestra for that matter. The excellent band led by Doc Severinsen on the *Tonight* show does not prove the exception. It is almost never featured and it is used primarily to accompany guest singers and entertain the studio audience during commercials; its status is manifest in the way, after a commercial break, it is cut off, sometimes on a dominant chord, by a perfunctory wave of Johnny Carson's pencil.

Most histories of the subject hold that American broadcasting was born November 2, 1920, at KDKA in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with announcement of the results of the presidential election that day, the one that put Warren Harding in the White House. Since the term "American" embraces all of North (and for that matter South) America, and since radio signals go sailing right across national boundaries, this is not so. American broadcasting was born nearly two years earlier than that — in late 1919, when the station today known as CFCF went on the air in Montreal. Radio broadcasting, which was largely developed in Canada, due to the more sympathetic atmosphere discovered there by the Italian physicist Guglielmo Marconi, was at first much more advanced north of the border than in the United States. On May 20, 1920, CFCF originated a program by a full orchestra. But Canada, which has a kind of national genius for missing opportunities, soon lost its lead to American broadcasters, whose programs became more popular with its people than its own. This is still substantially true.

In both countries, reaction to the new medium was immediate. The public rushed to buy radio receivers, even while the Marconi company was beginning experiments in Montreal with television. (The principles on which television is based were understood as far back as 1897.)

Not that everyone was enthusiastically in favor of radio. Stations in both countries were often blamed for such things as hailstones and excessive rain or the lack thereof. Radio broadcasts were blamed for aggravating arthritis. A few ladies in the Canadian prairies protested that announcers were watching them "down the airwaves" in their bathtubs. Some men claimed that radio made them sterile. And some ladies said it made them pregnant — one of history's more imaginative explanations.

All the objections were not so frivolous. In a book called *Straight Up,* a history of commercial broadcasting in Canada, the late James Allard wrote, "Even amongst the saner elements there were widespread fears that radio broadcasting would destroy the record industry; cause unemployment amongst musicians and printers; cripple the motion picture industry, the libraries, the book business, magazines, and above all newspapers.

"Some whispered that radio broadcasting would convert the young to heretical ideas, both religious and political; that it would debase the language. There was a horror of a strange new musical idiom called 'jazz'."

From the beginning, the problem of radio was how to finance it. Although private investors had done all the development work, the Canadian government soon got into the act and laid the foundation for what became the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a Crown corporation owned by the government. At the same time private broadcasting was permitted to continue, although it was often and shamelessly hampered by the CBC and government bureaucrafts. England elected in the early years to have a single non-commercial government-owned system. In the United States, all the licenses were assigned to private holders, ranging from business interests to universities, labor unions, and religious groups. That is one mistake Canada did not make: it did not (after one brief and unhappy experience) allow religious groups to have broadcasting licenses. There is no pray TV in Canada.

Curiously enough, the idea of using radio as an advertising medium was not at first enthusiastically embraced even in the United States. Hoover himself disliked the idea of broadcast advertising, and David Sarnoff of RCA was vociferously opposed to it. But the first commercial was broadcast on New York's WEAF (cost: $100) on August 28, 1922, and by 1925, Sarnoff had become a convert to this way of financing broadcasting and was organizing NBC.

The medium grew with incredible rapidity. The record industry, however, remained frightened of it and for a decade declined to let recorded music be played on radio. Anyone who owns old 78 records can read the inscription "Not licensed for radio broadcast", which continued to appear on labels long after the manufacturers had started slipping the old payola to disc jockeys to get them on the air. This caused the newly emergent radio networks, and even local stations, to hire their own orchestras, including, at NBC, a full symphony orchestra directed by Arturo Toscanini, whose broadcasts made his a household name.

Every comedy show had its own orchestra, including Skinnay Ennis and later Les Brown on the Bob Hope program, Phil Harris on Jack Benny's show, and, on *Fibber McGee and Molly*, the Billy Mills orchestra. (I just liked it. I was too young to make the judgment that it was an excellent band. The rhythm section — I did not even know the term "rhythm section" — contained a guitarist who caught my ear. Small wonder. Years later I found out that it was George Van Eps.) Fred Allen's *Town Hall Tonight* featured the hippest vocal group of the time, the five DeMarco Sisters. Bing Crosby was the star of *Kraft Music Hall;* his music director was John Scott Trotter. Dinah Shore was heard with Paul Lavalle and the Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street, whose very name made mock of the pretensions of the classical establishment and a sly claim for the legitimacy of jazz. Raymond Scott performed regularly on radio. For those listeners whose taste ran to classical or "light classical" music (meaning Strauss and the *Poet and Peasant Overture),* there were such programs as the Cities Service, Bell Telephone, Firestone, and Carnation Contented hours. The Carnation hour, in fact, brought Percy Faith to the U.S. from Canada where he had been, as he [illegible]e tartly put it, "the token Jew of the CBC." The radio networks, although they were aimed at the common man, whoever he might be, seemed bent on raising the listener's taste, not debasing it.

Johnny Mercer, Jo Stafford, Paul Weston, Woody Herman, Glenn Miller, and Harry James were heard on regular broadcasts. So were John Kirby and Maxine Sullivan, whose show had a long run. Mildred Bailey had a show. Both shows regularly presented black artists such as Coleman Hawkins and Teddy Wilson. "Remote" broadcasts from such dance pavilions as Frank Daley's Meadowbrook in New Jersey, augmented this flood of free, live, non-recorded music. And those local shows that did play records might follow Woody Herman's *Wildroot* or Ellington's *A Train* with Freddy Martin or Henry Busse.

It was a glorious and indiscriminate melange in which jazz and classical and country music were mixed on the same station or network, so that it was impossible not to know what the full range of America's music was, no matter what one's personal and primary preference might be. A Basie freak was also aware of Spade Cooley and his Western Swing. (A good band, by the way.) Those who have grown up on format radio — all rock, all jazz, all [illegible]utiful Music (which it rarely is) — cannot imagine what network radio was like. In the compartmentilization of broadcasting that has since occurred, it is difficult for a rock fan to discover Mahler or Monk. In those days one's awareness was expanded without one's knowing it. Expansion of one's cultural knowledge and taste today takes determination and effort.

Historical speculations over the rise of the big bands tend to slight the influence of radio broadcasting — and the fact that this was also a golden age in popular music, theater, and movies. Although broadcasting's purpose was to make money for its proprietors, the unprincipled avarice that became the industry's distinguishing characteristic after the 1940s was not yet obvious. Radio *created* the public taste that embraced Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, and Harold Arlen, instead of the musical slobs who came to dominate American popular music from the 1950s onward. The broadcasting industry — led largely by those who had pioneered its techology — did an absolutely astounding job of educating the public; since the 1950s, that industry, including television, has done largely the opposite, being the chief inspiration and disseminator of bad music as well as bad grammar. But for about two decades, between 1925 and 1945, radio championed and brought into being a popular music that was probably the most intelligent and artistic the world had ever known, and at the same time fostered a Lone Ranger kind of decency that made it safe to leave the milkman's money in a bottle on the doorstep or hitch-hike across the country or to sleep, as Fred Hall did, on a park bench in Washington, D.C., without fear that one's bicycle would be stolen.

Fred Hall is a slim, silver-haired man of 58 who represents what was and occasionally still is good in American broadcasting. The radio station he founded in Ojai, KOVA, is musically one of the best in the United States. Hall's own radio show, *Swing Thing,* is heard on 47 stations throughout the U.S. and may soon be heard in Canada and England. A pirated edition of the show, taped off the air, is heard on two different stations in Manila, and Hall is a celebrity in the Phillipines.

Ojai, if you want to look it up on the map, is a dinky and dull but very pretty little town of 6,000 about seventy miles northwest of Los Angeles in Ventura County. Hall has been called Mr. Ventura County, and not long ago rejected a Democratic party request that he run for the United States Congress. He said he was too busy with and too interested in music.

Swing Thing, heard in Ventura County five nights a week and for five hours on Saturdays, is one of the best jazz broadcasts in America. Hall's knowledge of the history of jazz and popular music, with particular reference to the big band period, is encyclopedic. When I need information about some detail of that era's history, I either look it up in Leonard Feather's *Encyclopedia of Jazz* or phone Fred Hall. *Swing Thing* is a delight to listen to, and I leave it on all Saturday morning, getting an education in the process, as in the old days of radio.

Sometimes Fred will take a single subject and explore it thoroughly. He incorporates interviews with various players and composers, such as Benny Carter and Matt Dennis, into the shows. He has more than 800 hours of these programs on tape, and ultimately they belong in university archives. He is a skilled interviewer, although more than one person has been slightly disconcerted by his detailed knowledge of their lives and careers. Jo Stafford and Paul Weston both say his interview with them was the best ever done by anyone. "He knew things about the period when we were with Tommy Dorsey that *we'd* forgotten," Jo said. His style is easy and even a little folksy. He knows his audience as well as he knows his subject.

(Jazz and high-quality popular music labels and artists should all have Hall on their mailing lists. His address is: P.O. Box 711, Ojai, California, 93023. And this applies to those of you in Europe, too.)

Hall's record collection, which he has been assembling since the 1930's, is phenomenal — and irreplaceable — and his knowledge of broadcasting has deep roots. "Basically, I consider myself an engineer," he says. He began his professional career at WWDC in Washington, D.C. in 1941. He built the station from the ground up to the transmitter, then went into the navy after Pearl Harbor and was assigned to the Armed Forces Radio service. Sent to the South Pacific, he did a show on the so-called Mosquito Network — Australia to the New Hebrides by radio relay. He came to be known as Dr. Jazz to servicemen throughout the war zone, competing for their attention with Tokyo Rose.

"We thought she was hilarious," he says. "The Japanese simply didn't understand the mentality of our people. It was a very entertaining show, because she had all the latest records from the States. She had records I didn't have."

"How did she get them?" I asked.

"I have no idea."

After the war, Fred became a freelance newsman for Mutual Broadcasting. Specializing in politics and science, he covered political conventions and was at various times assigned to Ronald Reagan, Nelson Rockefeller, Barry Goldwater, Eugene McCarthy, and John F. Kennedy. Among other things, he is an astute observer of politics.

Hall became a sort of Johnny Appleseed of broadcasting: he

founded and built radio stations in eight cities and rebuilt stations in two more. He invented a booster system to fill the holes some FM stations have in their coverage, and obtained the earliest FCC licenses for their use. In 1971, having sold his interest in KVEN, Ventura, he founded what he intends to be the last of his radio stations, KOVA in Ojai. He was its general manager, chief engineer, program director, and news director. Finally he sold that station too in 1979, to concentrate on his own show. The station continues to follow the format he established for it, playing good popular music during the day, his jazz show in the early evening, and classical music from then until sign-off. Hall knows as much about classical music as he does about jazz, and indeed has for the past several years been president of the Ojai Festival. Last August, along with his friend Lynford Stewart and with me, Fred co-produced the first Ojai jazz festival. To our amazement, it actually earned a few hundred dollars, and thus encouraged, we will produce a second edition next August 14 and 15.

Hall has recently embarked on a new business, working out of the small but well-equipped studio he built at his home: a syndicated music service called *Great Times* to be heard on automated radio stations. The service differs markedly from such programs as *Music of Your Life* and *Unforgettable*. "I've avoided all that is corny, trite, mediocre and forgettable," Fred says. "While I don't neglect such mass-audience favorites as Tony Bennett, Benny Goodman, Peggy Lee, and Perry Como, the show is salted with easy jazz by such as Oscar Peterson, Dave Brubeck, the Hi-Lo's, the Singers Unlimited, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington." Four stations have already subscribed to the service; it goes on the air on KPRO in Riverside, California, on June 1. "I hope it will prove," Fred says, "that good taste and commercial success can still go together."

Hall is an outspoken critic of American broadcasting — and, at the same time, a persuasive defender of it. He is well aware of its numbing banality, the endless outpouring of blather and blah that one hears driving across the country with the radio playing. Hall says that the invasion of the advertisers began before television, when the ad agencies and then the sponsors themselves began dictating the content of broadcasts. "They took it away from the creative people, the programmers," he said.

"I can say,'Screw you,' to the corporate structure, because I'm able to do it all myself. And I *know* corporate structure. I've never allowed myself to be a full-time employee of a radio network. Money is essential to broadcasting, as it is to any business, but that doesn't mean that quality has to be submerged for the making of a buck. They can be coincident. There are lots of idiots around, but in general the people are not idiots. People who are not terribly well educated formally — me, for example — are not necessarily idiots. You don't have to be educated to have good taste. There's so much in music, classical music and jazz and pop music, that's good and so much that's bad, and it ain't so hard to figure out which is which.

"I used to work with Bob Wills and the Country Playboys on a show out of Sacramento. That was a *very* musical band. There's nothing wrong with country, a lot of it, or with a lot of pop. It's only when it gets to be *nothing* — when no-talent people get to make it — that we have the problem."

For all the faults of American broadcasting, Hall defends it on these grounds: "I don't think there's another country in the world where you can get the diversity of radio programming that you do here. The BBC is a form of autocracy. They dictate what's on the BBC. There's a lot of great stuff, but they dictate." So, of course, does NBC.

Fred pays close attention to his audience and the flow of his mail is enormous. "Part of it comes from people who want to hear more Russ Morgan and Jan Garber," he said. "They have sentimental attachments to time and memories. A lot of them are very touching letters, telling how they met the wife thirty or forty years ago. Then there are the others who are very hip, who have collectors' items by Jimmie Lunceford or Paul Whiteman. They often send me tapes. Then there are the people who are really aware. They have entire collections of Coleman Hawkins or Bix Beiderbecke." (Fred himself has every record Bix ever made.)

"These people are something else," he said. "If I make a little tiny mistake in chronology —wow! They'll write and tell me about it. These are *passionate* lovers of the music. The letters I get are not casual — they're love letters.

"And I hear a lot from musicians who used to play with big bands and are now in some other business.

"And finally I get letters from people saying, 'I am seventeen years old and I dig this music more than anything else.' And they have been reading about it! They've done the research. And this is a whole new crew, a whole new audience."

Fred has a piece of advice for musicians planning albums: whenever possible, include a standard song, preferably in a take under four minutes. When an album is made up entirely of originals, he — and other broadcasters — are able to play them to some extent in all-jazz shows, but he has trouble fitting them into other contexts, where the music can be exposed to a broader audience. He cited Gerry Mulligan's recent big-band album, *Walk on the Water*, as an example. It is made up mostly of originals, but it contains a track of *Getting Sentimental Over You*. "I'm able to play that constantly," Fred said.

Fred thinks radio in the United States is improving. He believes the various technical developments — satellite relays, for example — are going to bring about a growing diversity in broadcasting. "And they're going to have to return control of it to the creative people, the programmers. If they don't, then there isn't going to *be* a radio industry."

He points to the number of big band shows now heard around the country, including Chuck Cecil's syndicated program. WJJD in Chicago just switched to a big bands and Sinatra-style programming after 17 years as a country-and-western station. There are other indications of change, including the growing number of stations taking on his own *Swing Thing*. One of the stations considering it is CKFM in Toronto, one of the best stations in Canada.

Bill Ballentine, its vice president and general manager, reports a growing interest in big-band style programming. And CKFM is doing something old: live jazz broadcasts. Every Saturday afternoon it carries a "remote" of jazz performances from the Sheraton Center, using local rhythm sections and such guest artists as Dizzy Gillespie. The show is getting excellent response.

Ballentine believes that the sheer necessity of making a living keeps a radio station efficient. He is well aware of procedures and practices in the CBC: he was trained there. The CBC some years ago was accused of spending ninety percent of its substantial funding on administration and only ten per cent on programming. Too much of its programming has been precious; and in recent years too much of it has been pop trash. Nonetheless, at its best it does superb work, and along with the arty types and phonies, it has some very talented people within its structure. No musician who ever did a television show with producer-director John Coulson — and Bill Evans, Marian McPartland, Oscar Peterson, and many more have done so — will ever forget the pleasure of working with so gifted and sensitive a man.

And the CBC has been good to jazz. For example, Bob Smith has been doing a jazz show for CBC Vancouver continuously since 1938.

Because Ballentine has worked both in the CBC and private broadcasting, I asked him what, in an ideal world, he would wish to establish as the "right" system. "Oh boy," he said, "that's a

tough one. I think I would have to say a mixed system, with both public and commercial broadcasting."

Hall agrees with him.

The United States does have a government-owned radio network, the Voice of America. The irony is that it can be heard only in other countries. The VOA is to an extent comparable to the CBC's and the BBC's international service. What it lacks is a domestic arm. If jazz is more appreciated abroad than in the United States, another and perhaps significant factor is Willis Conover's excellent *Music USA* program, which has been heard by scores of millions of people around the world for more than twenty years. It is a further irony that taxpayers' money has been spent to raise the taste and educate the peoples of other lands but not Americans. A domestic arm of the VOA, comparable to the BBC, could provide the country with substantial cultural enrichment, but such an evolution is unlikely to come about, at least until the United States outgrows Coolidge. In any case, a system would have to be established that would keep the hands of the politicians off such an organization, and American politicians have generally shown themselves to be far less disciplined than the B[illegible]sh in such matters.

Fred Hall is probably right in thinking that radio in the United States will change for the better. Aside from the diversification made possible by advancing technology, demographic factors will force change: the population is aging.

Aging Babies

When the record industry began to go "soft" in 1979, there was panic in many an executive who, blase about mere gold records by now and anxious for the platinum, had been riding high by catering almost exclusively to an adolescent market. They should have started worrying in 1975. For by that year, it was becoming obvious to those whose understanding of society is based on something more substantial than yesterday's *Billboard* that the domination of entertainment by the very young was about to come to an end.

Gerber's baby food company was diversifying its investments. Television ads for Johnson's baby oil and baby shampoo encouraged adults to use these products. *Time* reported that between 1975 and 1985, 20,000 primary schools would be closed in the United States. In the San Fernando Valley, several hospitals shut down their maternity wards. The Los Angeles *Times* carried a story saying that the country was approaching Zero Population Growth and this was hurting the peanut industry. "After all," the story said, "kids meant peanut butter and jelly sandwiches."

In a paper delivered in Milwaukee in May, 1974, to the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association, a sociologist named Jon H. Rieger said, "The number of young people in the U.S. during the next decade or two will decline, not only relative to the total population but absolutely. The most recent projections indicate, in fact, that the age group 10-24 will shrink by as many as six and one half million by 1990. Only by the year 2000 are the young people likely to equal or exceed their number in the population during 1975, the peak year. This cannot but have devastating implications for the popular music industry, for it is the young who buy the most records."

In March, 1975, Stan Cornyn, vice president and director of creative services for Warner Bros.-Elektra-Atlantic (WEA), made a speech to the National Association of Record Merchandisers, excoriating the industry for catering to a "drastically narrow market of young radio listeners." Cornyn said:

"Why is it adults are no longer record buyers...?"

"Broadway musicals are as popular as ever. Their audiences are still the same age audiences. That audience used to buy original cast albums. Now they don't. Why? Other than in the country music area, adults have stopped buying records...

"Anybody over 30 going into a record store doesn't know what's in there. It's like he went into a book store and all the books were Chinese novels. As a record industry, we're selling Chinese novels to Chinese novel buyers. We're lucky there's a lot of them."

Soon there would not be a lot of them. In Milwaukee Rieger had said, "As they drift out of the educational system, they have considerably less contact with each other and cease to participate in the peer culture of which the music has been such a part. Moreover, their work schedules tend to remove them from frequent exposure to music, and family formulation encumbers them with other financial obligations, limiting the resources available for the purchase of records." (This was, by the way, the kind of social science language about which I used to kid Don DeMicheal. Rieger means family *formation.*)

Another man who had some idea what was happening was Bruce Lundval, then vice president and general manager of CBS Records and now president of Warner-Elektra-Atlantic. "The industry today is very segmented," Lundval told me at that time. "All kinds of music are making it.

"Whereas in the early and mid-1960s the industry could be characterized by a few artists like the Beatles selling millions, now there are many more artists selling 250,000 to 700,000 albums than ever before.

"I think there is tremendous public sophistication, and it will continue. You see it in the jazz groups, like Herbie Hancock, Freddie Hubbard, Chick Corea, and Weather Report, who are all selling. You see it in the new black popular music by groups such as Earth Wind and Fire.

"About two years ago we made a survey of record-buying trends in colleges and high schools. It showed a sharp increase in jazz and classical listening. I would think that's continuing."

Continuing and growing. Seven years after Lundval made that analysis, there were more than a hundred jazz festivals in the United States. About fifteen of them were in California. In the late 1950s, California had only one — that at Monterey, and its chances of survival were doubtful. Last fall it was sold out weeks in advance.

At the peak of the "youth music" period of the 1960s, record executives used to repeat like a mystic incantation that half the population of the United States was under 25. This was never true. The median age of an American in 1965 was 26.1. But even if it had been true, it never seemed to occur to them that this meant the other half of the population, the half they were ignoring, was over 25 — and a substantial part of the under-25 group was under ten. The grasp of statistics was like that of Dwight D. Eisenhower, who said he was disturbed to learn that half the students in America were getting under-average marks.

But statistics are for most of us a vague and cloudy abstraction. And so I drew up, for an article I was writing for the *Saturday Review,* a table, drawn from Bureau of Statistics figures, of all the 12-year-olds and 30-year-olds in the population across a 25-year span.

	12-year-olds	30-year-olds
1960	3,942,000	2,311,000
1965	3,800,000	2,260,000
1970	4,172,000	2,486,000
1975	4,062,000	2,951,000
1980	3,442,000	3,682,000
1985	3,164,000	4,189,000

I chose the figures 12 and 30 to make the picture clear, not to make it complete. The size of the balloon of young people in the population, those between 10 and 24, was enormous, for frantic reproduction went on from 1946 until 1956, after which it began to taper off. The birthrate in Depression year 1930 was low; the babies born then turned 30 in 1960. The birthrate was high in 1948. Those born that year turned 12 in 1960.

These young people were a totally gullible audience, cut off from any broad culture by the extinction of network radio in the late 1940s and 1950s, exposed constantly to what Willis Conover calls disc jockery, and urged by the rock stars to despise their parents and elders. And they were abject conformists (even in protesting their individualism), terrified of not doing and liking exactly the same things as their "peer group" members.

The radio and record industries discovered their presence in the population and launched a campaign to exploit them that remains remarkable for its viciousness and its effectiveness. By 1965, some disc jockeys and progam directors were complaining about records celebrating the use of drugs. Within a year or two this criticism fell silent as the record industry bribed them off with cocaine, heroin, acid, grass, you-name-it, and they too became creatures of the Stoned Age. Even many jazz musicians, hardly naive about psychotropic chemicals, were disturbed by the spreading drug culture among the very young — although a few were annoyed mostly by the decline in the quality of pot.

And soon the kids were stumbling around Haight-Ashbury, brains burned out, dying in doorways, and declaring themselves — because their rock heroes, the record company press agents, *Rolling Stone,* and all the other seekers after their money had told them they were — a special, wondrous, talented, original, unprecedented generation. All of this was a cultural phenomenon created by the record industry, which finally proved the validity of O'Connell's famous maxim, "Let me write a nation's songs and I care not who writes her laws."

To fit that generation into historical perspective, we should note that Ella Fitzgerald first recorded with Chick Webb when she was 17. Gerry Mulligan composed *Disc Jockey Jump* for Gene Krupa at 19. Woody Herman formed his band when he was 22. Charlie Christian was *dead* by 24. So was Scott LaFaro, and the French novelist Raymond Radiguet (*Devil in the Flesh*) was dead at 19. George Gershwin wrote his first Broadway score at 24. Carbaggio painted his *Bacchus* when he was 17, and Michelangelo carved the *Pieta* at 21. Einstein published his Special Theory of Relativity at 26. Talent almost always reveals itself at very early ages, although the most spectacular example is Mozart, who was composing symphonies at nine. It is in fact far more unusual for talent to become evident in middle age, as in the cases of Roussel, Shaw, and Conrad.

Brendan Behan, after an afternoon of watching bull-fighting, and bad bull-fighting at that, in Mexico: "It could have been worse. It could have been folk-singing."

And so what seems singular about the Woodstock generation is that, slowed in their growth by the self-anesthesis of dope and rock and self-congratulation, they have been late to blossom. But they are blossoming now. Some, of course, seem hopelessly drug-damaged and will probably never recover, and they have gone off to live gentle lives in communes or forests, seeking a pastoral self-sufficiency and doing no one any harm, perhaps even doing some good. Others, trying to function in a "modern" age that none of us likes very much, seem oddly inept, groping, still turning to parents for help even in their late twenties or early thirties. But substantial numbers of them have an impressive competence. Some superb jazz (and classical) musicians are among them, including some women, such as the striking pianist Jo Anne Brackeen and the superb guitarist Emily Remler who, at 24, is almost too young to be considered part of that generation. In any case, generalizations about a generation, like those about a nation or a profession or an ethnic group, are doomed to failure. After all, the Woodstock generation also includes David Stockman. What can be said is that their years of adolescent conformity are ended; their years of individuality have arrived.

And joining them as a force in the entertainment marketplace is a group whose influence no one foresaw: their parents. Freed, for the most part, of the responsibilities of child-rearing, this most affluent group in the population, these one-time jitterbugs, is back, looking for the music they love.

Fred Hall's analysis of his audience is a good picture of what is going on.

Meanwhile, record executives themselves in their thirties, raised on rock and incapable of merchandising anything else, are the new reactionaries, trying to blame kids with cassette recorders for the current poor fortunes of the industry. The industry estimates that it loses up to three billion dollars a year to home tapings. How anybody can project a figure of what has *not* sold is unclear. To some extent this may be a smoke screen to conceal the fact that these executives do not know what to do about the variegated tastes of the new audience.

Last August, after that first Ojai jazz festival, when all the musicians had gone home, I wondered if all the work that had gone into it had been worth it. The answer came in a letter from a stranger.

Dear Mr. Lees:

Thank you and Mr. Hall and Mr. Stewart for bringing such wonderful musicians to us all last weekend. My boyfriend and I had tickets to all four shows, which we thoroughly enjoyed. We really had to push and shove the responsibilities and obligations of our ho-hum lives around to clear space for two days of enchantment in the Ojai Valley, but oh boy! are we glad we did. The weekend was magical to us.

Joe and I, aged 22 and 27, respectively, were raised on a steady musical diet of acid rock. The Doors and Led Zeppelin were our favorites at junior-high dances. Rod Stewart faded in and out of our stereos and our favors in high school. And Pink Floyd, along with punk rock, we now indulge only at stop signs on hot days with the car windows down, or as we turn the knobs of the radio in search of something prettier than adolescent rebelliousness.

The names and faces of most jazz musicians are foreign to us. We don't instantly recognize the old tunes. But at Ojai last weekend, we fell, once and for all, in love with jazz. And it wasn't just the music we fell in love with. It was the respect the musicians had for the music, the way they seemed to think the music was more important than their acts, their egos. It was the admiration the saxophone players had for the piano players and the piano players for the bass players and the bass players for the drummers. It was the shyness, the unassuming attitudes of the performers. It was even the audience there in Ojai. We were all friends. We shared our wine, our food, our conversation.

I think you are right in suspecting that there are more jazz fans than anyone knows. Lots of high-schoolers are probably sneaking away from their friends even now to listen privately to music that is music — not electronic warfare.

Thank you for your part in bringing us the festival last weekend. I hope it has been considered a success and that there will be more such shindigs.

Sincerely,
Kathie Waggener

Let's hear it for Kathie Waggener, gang. She is what is happening. Brigitte Berman, who was 13 when the Beatles hit, is what's happening. At the festival this August, we plan to show her movie about Bix on the Sunday morning. I particularly want Kathie Waggener to see it.

Maybe old Sousa, in his funny optimism about the future, wasn't so wrong after all.