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# Jazzletter

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## More Jim and Andy's

Since the Jim and Andy's article appeared, I keep recalling other stories.

Bassist Buddy Clark remembers a trombone player, a man of dapper manner and attire, who used to come in after gigs, take off his coat and hang it up, take off his hat and hang it up, then take off his toupee and hang it up.

One of my funniest memories of the place involves singer, pianist, songwriter and vocal arranger Morgan Ames. One night she and I began talking about old flames and liaisons. Morgan mentioned a former boy friend who had been involved with another lady who in turn had had an affair with a musician who had gone with a lady who before that had done me the kindness of, as they used to say, bestowing her favors. Morgan and I laughed, and then, in a fit of amused curiosity, began to draw up a diagram on the back of a place mat, a chart of amorous connections leading out from that original short chain.

Morgan, who was born and raised in Los Angeles and had gone to high school with at least two now-famous actresses, was able to provide an enormous amount of information about west coast activities, prompting me to comment that it was a wonder that California didn't have even more earthquakes than it did. I was able to report on New York which, in the age of air travel, connected with L.A. with great frequency. And since I had spent much of the previous year in Europe, I was pretty much *au courrant* about who was doing what and with which and to whom over there as well. The link to Europe was easily established through an American actress already on the diagram who had had an affair with a certain noted trumpet player who had had a fling with a certain Parisian *chanteuse* who to my firm knowledge had been the mistress of both a famous Hollywood producer and a prominent French politician.

The chart kept growing. I got more sheets of paper and scotch-taped them to the original. The late John F. Kennedy clicked into place. (Although the public didn't know yet about the Marilyn Monroe affair, people in show business did.) And since I knew at least about two other ladies who had had the pleasure of his company, we were able to loop the White House into our schematic both in series and parallel.

As I kept adding sheets of paper to the expanding tableau, Morgan and I developed almost terminal giggles. The thing looked like a diagram on how to build a Heathkit. It ran through the hills of Hollywood, to say nothing of those of Beverly, famous name after famous name, bedroom after bedroom. It included congressmen and secretaries and movie composers and at least one professional hooker of the expensive sort and saxophone players (*particularly* saxophone players, for some reason). It ran up hill and down dale and across the Las Vegas desert. Faster than a speeding rumor, able to leap entire continents in a single bound, it just kept growing, there in that booth in Jim and Andy's, while **Morgan and I melted into helpless puddles of laughter. There was** a certain Danish *vedette* whom I had known only for a weekend, but she was a bonanza, since she was plugged into half the show business of Europe and vice versa.

I hoped to connect Charles DeGaulle into this cosmic venereal guide-map, but only faintly, since DeGaulle was so formal that he addressed his wife as *vous*. However, due to the activities of the aforementioned *chanteuse* and her circle it was quite easy to fit Georges Pompidou into the diagram, and the Danish girl led us albeit circuitously, to Roger Vadim, who gave us both Brigitte Bardot and Jane Fonda, which was like Advance to Go.

There was no end to the story. There *is* no end to it. Somewhere out there, the chart is still growing, although Morgan and I destroyed our actual diagram that very evening: it was much too dangerous a thing to keep around.

Another night I was in there with Morgan, Gerry Mulligan Ruby Braff, and Robert Offergeld, the distinguished classical music critic and historian, who was at that time music editor of *Stereo Review*. With that group, as you can well imagine, there was more talking than listening going on, and Ruby was giving the record industry an appropriate excoriation. Finally, around 3 a.m., Jimmy Koulouvaris started clapping his hands and calling out, as he did every night, "All right, you guys, everybody out!"

And, thus ejected, the five of us stood on the street, still laughing about something or other and, like children, not wanting to break up. And to extend the laughter, Ruby, who at that time lived in Riverdale and had a big Cadillac, offered to drive us all home.

First we dropped Bob Offergeld off at his apartment on East 81st Street (where he still lives, working now under a Guggenheim Fellowship on a biography of Louis Moreau Gottschalk) and then we headed across Central Park. I came next in the map sequence and I got out of the car on West 86th. The events that followed were described to me the next morning, in a phone call from a very rattled Gerry Mulligan.

Ruby and Gerry dropped Morgan off at her place in the West 70s, and then headed further west, on a cross-town street toward Gerry's place on West End Avenue.

Suddenly they heard BANG! Bang bang bang BANG! And they realized they were caught in the cross-fire of a gunfight. On one side of the street, several cops, hunkered down by their cruisers, were shooting it out with a gang on the other side of the street. And the bullets were ricocheting off buildings, *zing!* and passing *zowie* right over the hood of Ruby's car.

With the agility of Spiderman, Mulligan dived over the back of the front seat and hit the floor in the back. Ruby sat there in astounded paralysis, and after an interminable second or two Mulligan cried out, "What are you waiting for???"

And Ruby replied in a mesmerized voice, "There's a red light."

"Go, man, go!" Gerry yelled. And Ruby took off through the stoplight.

## Reflections on Duke

On April 19, 1982, on the stage of the New York theater where *Sophisticated Ladies* was playing, a party was held to observe Duke Ellington's eighty-third birthday. Its purpose of course was publicity for the show, and the television coverage was extensive.

There were ironies in the situation which eluded the notice of the TV commentators. One was that the honors devolved on Duke's son, Mercer Ellington, who had been at times estranged from his father. It is not easy to be the scion of a famous parent and Mercer no doubt had a worse time of it than, say, Bach's sons

who at least were able to persuade themselves that their old man was a square, or Johann Strauss Jr., who became a far better composer than his father. Mercer Ellington has lived his life in the sound of his father's acclaim. And so there was a second irony, I mused as I watched the television images of Mercer smiling and accepting congratulations on the show. When Duke finally got something he had wanted, a hit Broadway musical, he was not there and Mercer was.

Duke Ellington died May 24, 1974, at seventy-five, of the pneumonia that is usually the final insult of lung cancer.

I did not know him well. The omission was intentional. Even had I wished to know him better, I doubt that it would have been possible. In any case I could not be comfortable with someone about whose work I had reservations, being incapable of standing there at one of those after-the-show events, participating in the chorus of predictable sycophancy or, on the other hand, maintaining the polite silence that would have been only too eloquent to anyone as shrewdly observant as Duke Ellington was. He was, I think, a far more interesting man, with complex dimensions, than the hagiography of jazz has made him out to be. I think Duke knew I had reservations about the band, reservations in which I was by no means alone, but he never said so. It was all in that Buddha smile of his and the penetrating amused light in his eye.

A substantial amount of nonsense was written about him at the time of his death. One disc jockey said, "He was the most important composer of the Twentieth Century — more important than Shostakovitch or Stravinsky." So much for you, Igor, and you too, Bela, Maurice, Alban, Claude, and the rest of you cats, including Sibelius and Charles Ives. As for Shostakovitch, he is hardly considered the summit of Twentieth Century composition. In any event, such comparisons are ridiculous, generated by the assumption that art is some sort of contest.

In the obituaries, it was stated that Duke had written nine hundred or a thousand songs. That is not a lot, considering the length of his life and the intensity of his activity. And a lot of his tunes began as head arrangements, composed in effect by the band — and source of the complaint that Duke developed bits of material improvised by others and put his imprimatur on them as composer. If quantity is a criterion, which it is not (Paul Dukas left only twelve works), Duke's output did not begin to compare with the seven hundred-odd opuses of Bach, or the works of Schubert which, in reduced-score book-form, fill several feet of shelf space — including among other things fourteen operas, eight symphonies, fifteen string quartets, and six hundred songs. And Schubert died at thirty-one.

When Duke died, the commentators, not knowing what to say, then, compared him improbably to Shostakovitch or counted the number of his songs. And this phenomenon haunted his life: to be extolled for the wrong reasons. The praise of Duke Ellington had the odor of an attempted expiation of American guilt over the treatment of blacks. As if to hide this great national shame, sweep it under the carpet, deny its existence, everyone from presidents to television commentators seemed to be saying, "No, no, it's not true. Look how we honor Duke Ellington." I think Duke knew how jive the praise was. I cannot imagine that he did not. When Count Basie urged Artie Shaw to come back to the business because it needed him, Artie said, "I hated it, and so do you. Why don't *you* quit?" Basie said, "What could I be? A janitor?"

Having attained an exalted position in American society, Duke, I think, perceived that it was the better part of valor not to question it, even though it had been bestowed for dubious cause. Whether or not he had genius — I think he did; and more to the point, I think he thought he did — he was for those people at the Kennedy Center and in the State Department and the White House and all the other branches of the Establishment the right black man in the right place at the right time, one who spoke we and had manners and posed no apparent threat, and so they hel him up for all to see not as the artist he was but as evidence th America is really not what those marchers and malcontents say is. I don't think they had the slightest idea who or what Duk Ellington was. In any event, the way a society treats its celebriti has nothing to do with how it treats its common people, and tl honoring of Duke Ellington in no way compensates for the abu of a black farm boy. Duke knew all that. And maybe that was tl cause of the sadness that slept in his Buddha smile and tl wellspring of his mocking "We love you madly."

Duke's father was a sometime butler at the White House. An since the mighty are inclined to look on servants as self-propelle furniture, they converse indiscreetly in their presence. So we ca only guess what table talk Duke heard at second hand in his hom And we can assume that his father was a master of the niceties an taught the son fine points of social behavior that were tl foundation of Duke's unshakable poise and impeccable manner

Late one night, watching on television with a kind of morbi fascination one of those 1930s Three Mesquiteers westerns th starred John Wayne, I was boggled by the racial stereotype of black bellman, bowing and scraping and terrified of big o broad-shouldered Duke (Wayne, that is; and in view of Wayne Neanderthal political thinking, the man may well have ha reason) and rolling his eyes and saying, "Yazzuh, yazzuh." Was really like that? And so recently? Yes it was. Let us not forget th Duke Ellington emerged into fame in the time of Manta Moreland and Steppin Fetchit. It is doubtful that many of u including younger black musicians who have tended to think Louis Armstrong as an Uncle Tom, can grasp, except as an act the imagination, what it was like to be a black man in that tim And a gifted one. You did what you had to do, and you smile with big white teeth if you were in show business, and entertaine the idiots and took the money home. Some, like Fats Waller, let certain sly contempt creep into their work, which accounts f those hilarious performances of the utter crap he was ofte required to record. Even Fats Waller's lousy records are wei masterpieces.

Duke handled things in a different way. Having grown up in sophisticated ambience, he used his learning well. Duke built distance around himself. He spoke to the white world in its ow

**Hoagy Carmichael, on being told that Bix wa dead: "No he's not. I can hear him from here."**

language, with his perfect diction and elegant enunciation. B Duke never let any white man think that he necessarily wanted live in the same neighborhood. The question with Duke w always: did he want you to live in *his* neighborhood? I proclaimed not his equality but, in subtle and silent ways, h superiority.

In the news reports of Duke's death, I did not encounter o mention of Billy Strayhorn, the gentle and gifted arranger a composer who died seven years before Duke, also in New Yor also of cancer. Theirs was an unusual arrangement. Strayho was more than Duke's arranger and amanuensis, and their wo was as close, probably, as we'll ever get to joint composition. N one will ever know how much of the Ellington music Strayho was responsible for, and indeed many compositions common supposed to be Duke's, such as *Take the A Train* and *John Come Lately,* were, as one finds on reading the record labe Strayhorn's.

The Ellington band was often sloppy to the point of soundi seedy. I once made the mistake of saying that sometimes it w

mediocre. "Wrong," Johnny Mandel said. "That band was wonderful, or it was *awful.* But it was never mediocre." Another time, I said to my photographer friend Ted Williams that the band sometimes sounded as if a couple of the saxophone players had got drunk and not shown up. "No," Ted said. "It sounds as if they got drunk and *did* show up." Once in Chicago, Ted was shooting some pictures of Duke during a recording session. The band tried several takes on a tune. Paul Gonsalves kept botching it. Duke, in the control booth, said, "Oh shit." And he pushed the talk-back switch on the console and said, "Paul Gonsalves. You're wanted on the telephone in the hall." Gonsalves left the studio and Duke called to the other musicians, *"Lock that door!"* And then he kicked off a tempo and the band got its take. He did not of course fire Gonsalves. Did Duke ever fire anybody?

Sometimes he would begin a performance with only six or seven men on the bandstand. The others would come drifting in as they felt like it until a full complement, more or less, was reached. It is notorious that there were a lot of sons of bitches in that band. One of the musicians — trombonist Quentin Jackson, if memory serves me — told me once that he was in the band eight months before anybody spoke to him.

They were a strange sort of travelling circus that Duke somehow knew how to handle, men who in some cases couldn't fit anywhere else in musical society but whose idiosyncrasies of sound Duke could use as colors in his own highly personal tapestries. He said he stayed on the road because it gave him the privilege of hearing his own music every night, but it is reasonable to suspect he also did it to provide employment for his orphans. His ASCAP earnings from his songs must have been enormous and he didn't have to do it for the money.

His band was a sort of secret society whose members did as they pleased, and Duke let them get away with it. "But when it really matters," he once told Freddie Williamson, his agent with Joe Glaser's Associated Booking office, "they come through for me." Indeed they did. "If you caught that band on a hot night," Johnny Mandel said, "there was nothing like it. It was history, coming right out of the Cotton Club and Harlem in the 1920s, and it was *alive.*"

No doubt everyone who listened attentively to that band would mention those nights that were forgettable and are forgotten. But its high nights stay bright in the memory. For me, the two occasions that flicker in that darkened movie theater of the mind are the first time I saw the band and the last.

The first was in Niagara Falls, Ontario. I must have been ten or eleven. I was visiting my grandmother and on a weekend summer evening, I was out tooling around on my grandfather's bicycle (he never did learn to drive). I was returning from the Falls, at whose foot I was wont to play among the rocks in the flying spray and awesome roar of the waters, when I saw a crowd gathering in front of the arena on Lundy's Lane. I paused to consider this and heard music. So I took my bike around to the back of this vast barn, put a padlock on the back wheel, and managed, by that sneaky skill with which small boys are endowed, to slip into the building through a rear exit. And there were these men, black, brown, and beige (as Duke put it in a suite), with their shining brass instruments, and a drummer with a great Oriental gong behind him (which immediately identifies him as Sonny Greer) and this suave man with a pencil mustache at the piano, collectively emitting a roar of music that put Niagara Falls to shame. I had never heard anything so exciting in my life. I worked my way through the crowd near the bandstand until I stood at the very feet of a black man with a trumpet in his hand who moved with a piquant cocky bantam-rooster strut, his shoulders back and his back arched, and sang laughingly into a microphone with such fervor that he was spraying spit on the crowd with every P and B of the song. No one seemed to mind. In memory, one recognizes Ray Nance. And vapor was coming from the bells of the trumpets and trombones. And I was so close that I could smell the slide and valve oil. I must have stayed there all evening. No doubt my grandmother was frantic with worry. No doubt she raised hell when I got home. But I don't remember that. I remember only the music. I soon learned there was a band at the arena every Saturday night, and so I went back the next week, found the same door ajar, and saw Jimmie Lunceford. My Uncle Harry, who was a trombone player and arranger, told me that this music was called jazz.

The last time I saw the band was as memorable as the first. It was at the Newport Jazz Festival eight or ten years before Duke died. Ellington and his weird ragtag go-to-hell we-couldn't-care-less crew went on stage and started to play. Their power grew and they became the meaning and embodiment of swing, of sheer surging musical strength. The crowd was going crazy. I heard a voice cheering and screaming and realized it was my own.

And so those two concerts are book-ends, as it were, on my memory of the Duke Ellington band. Between them, I heard many performances that were, well, awful. And one wonders about serendipity, and the antique claim that necessity is the mother of invention, and whether Duke's way of orchestrating was not in part an evolution from happenstance, a style of writing that evolved because some of his guys got drunk and didn't show up and he made the best of those who did.

One might speak of Basie and Ellington as the two main streams of big jazz-orchestra style. A lot of men contributed to the development of what we think of as the Basie way of orchestrating and playing, particularly Don Redman and Fletcher Henderson. Woody Herman, in his characteristically self-abnegating fashion, has often said that Basie took care of one thing and Duke took

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**Perhaps computer-written music and poetry have been unimpressive because the computer itself was neither pleased nor displeased by its own product, as every creative artist is. Without that test, it wasn't able to tell whether it had created a work of genius or a piece of trash and it didn't care.**

**—Morton Hunt in *The Universe Within* (Simon & Schuster)**

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care of another, "and we went for what was left over." That seriously understates Woody's own contribution to jazz, and particularly big-band jazz, but there is a point to the remark. Redman and Henderson organized the sections in the way that is common to big bands — rhythm section, trumpets-trombones and saxophones, voiced by and large to work antiphonally as separate choirs. The sections led independent lives, except insofar as they would accompany each other or sometimes come together *tutti.*

Duke didn't work that way. He put his colors together up through the sections, as it were, mixing and matching them in all sorts of odd ways. He was the first man in jazz (Debussy had already done it in the *Sirenes* section of *La mer*) to use the wordless female voice as an instrumental color. *Mood Indigo* uses a trumpet on top, a muted trombone as the middle voice, and a clarinet in the chalumeau register (later bass clarinet) below them. That gave it its haunted sound. Whether Duke did it because on night he had only this possibility available to him or whether he planned it, I cannot say. Chances are that Duke found some of his combinations because of the vagaries of the band's behavior and then saw possibilities, as Dizzy Gillespie did the night somebody sat on his trumpet and he picked it up in fury and tried playing with its uptilted bell and said to himself, "*Damn!* I think I like that!" Many a great discovery is tripped over.

To be sure, classical music used mixed colors and the information about these techniques was available in orchestration books. In view of the scope of Duke's mind, it is unlikely that he had not looked into them. Still, it seems probable that some of his colors were the consequence of the vagabond behavior of his band.

Gil Evans, Charles Mingus, Gerry Mulligan, Bob Brookmeyer, Oliver Nelson, Clare Fischer, Eddie Sauter, Rob McConnell, and many superb writers learned in Duke's school. Robert Farnon admires Duke, and other arrangers and composers admire Farnon. And the influence of these men has permeated American — and world — music, including film scoring. Thus through his disciples Duke has infused the world with his way of writing.

Thad Jones was trying recently to describe the character of the Basie band, trying to describe what it was like to play in that band, with its great fraternal sense of shared identity. Words were failing him, as they would anyone, and he was using his hands. He held them in front of him, waving them back and forth in parallel, describing a sort of walled highway in the air. "It's focussed," he said. "The sound comes straight out at you." And you know what h[illegible]eans. The Basie band has force, even when it is loping lazily over Freddie Green's guitar, which is the nexus of it all, and then, casually, it goes *wham!*, blowing you out of your socks.

The Ellington band was totally different. It had a *wide* sound, a sort of Cinerama effect in color. When it came off, as Johnny Mandel says, there was nothing like it. To be both diffuse and intense at the same time was the thing that the Ellington band could on occasion accomplish. That is what they were doing that night at Newport. And it was no doubt what they did that night I first heard them. When it was all working, the band was exotic.

Duke did all sorts of things before anybody else did, including use of the brass section as a sort of rhythm instrument. He was incorporating Latin American touches into his music long ago. When he would discover something strange, like the sound of the Cuban valve trombonist Juan Tizol, he would use it — as in the recording with Tizol of *Caravan*. Instead of saying to a musician, "Do it this way because that's how I want it," he would say to himself, in effect, "That's how this man plays, and I'm going to use it just the way it is."

His band was like a brilliantly strange assemblage of *objets trouves*. Juan Tizol and Lawrence Brown in the same trombone s[illegible]on? in Ellington's world of color, the answer was "Why not?" And these distinctive musicians, interestingly, almost always sounded better in the Ellington band than out of it. Some really couldn't work anywhere else. Where else could you fit the odd, slushy drumming of Sonny Greer? "We used to say," said Johnny Mandel, "that nobody but Sonny Greer, who had strange time, could play with that band. We did not foresee how good it would sound when Sam Woodyard or Louis Bellson was with it."

Only a few men — Clark Terry and the late Ben Webster in particular — were as effective out of the Ellington band as they had been in it. Some of his musicians left for a while and then, like lost sheep, came back.

For all these things and more, Duke Ellington is a major figure in American musical history, if a creature quite different from the paper hero described by the wire services when he died.

Among the other inaccuracies expressed at that time was a remark by John Chancellor, the NBC newscaster and jazz fan. He said Duke didn't look a day over forty. It was a gracious thing to say but it wasn't true. In the latter years, the suave handsomeness had given way to a lined and weary puffiness. There were great sacs under the eyes. Duke didn't like growing old. Who does? But I think he hated it more than most men. He dyed his hair and it had a henna tint that people pretended, sometimes even to themselves, not to notice.

For, as everyone in the music business knew, Duke dug chicks. Married and divorced in his young years, he later travelled on th more elevated planes of society, that world of lofty hedonisn inhabited by the likes of Tallulah Bankhead, Noel Coward, an Cole Porter. He was not, shall we say, averse to the pleasures o the boudoir.

Because of his position and perhaps too because of what he ha learned from his father, Duke knew plenty. Dizzy Gillespie' comment, "I know more than they think I know," would hav been a perfect motto for an Ellington escutcheon.

Duke once told someone, during a discussion of politics, "Trus nobody. *Nobody.*" On another occasion, someone wa speculating about possible Communist involvement in the dru traffic for the calculated purpose of undermining America. Duk said, "The Communists were always in it, even back in the '30s." But for the most part, Duke kept his cool and his own counsel an seemed content, if sad, to know more than anybody knew h knew.

He took the world as he found it, both in life and in music tolerating discrepancies and contradictions in men an circumstance. That is how he was able to make a functioning uni of men with such disparate sounds and personalities. Therein lie one difference between classical and jazz composition. Classica

Photo by Ted Williams

music assumes, within a certain narrow variability, a "correct" trumpet sound or a "correct" trombone sound. Jazz tolerates all sorts of peculiarity, and Duke went beyond toleration: he celebrated difference. He turned idiosyncrasies to advantage and accomodated Ray Nance's violin; Cat Anderson's paper-thin high-note trumpet; the swooping golden-sad alto saxophone of Johnny Hodges, who was a sort of concertmaster of the band and often used his authority over the other musicians with imperious disdain; the big throaty baritone saxophone of Harry Carney.

ver since the 1920s the solid cement foundation of that band, a ind and good man who himself lay in a hospital with terminal ouble pneumonia even as Duke's cancer was producing its neumonia; and the smoky autumnal trombone of Lawrence rown.

Duke knew how to handle them, producing order out of their haos. He knew how to handle *the world.* And he could do it all at he same time and find a distant laughter in the very act of it. He was putting us all on, and that very put-on was perhaps his most rilliant performance.

This is an instance:

One of his saxophonists, known for heroin addiction, died a few weeks ahead of Duke, which was a mercy — it is doubtful that he could have functioned in a world without Duke. A few years earlier, the man had been picked up by two federal narcs in Las Vegas. They booked him and then spoke to Duke. How, Mr. Ellington, they asked, can someone of your international repute, who has received every honor, keep a man like that in your band?

"Gentlemen," Duke said in a way that anyone who knew him can hear in the mind's ear, "he has two of the most beautiful little girls."

The two narcs went to court and testified in the saxophonist's behalf. *And got him off!*

When Duke died, I told that story, which was widely known within the profession, in a magazine essay, as an example of Duke's kindness and the deft assurance with which he could handle difficult situations. Stanley Dance, one of the most dedicated chroniclers of Duke's life and work, read it and wrote an attack on me in an English publication for repeating this tasteless tale — and revealed that the saxophonist in question was Paul Gonsalves, something I had sedulously avoided doing! I suppose it was a point on which he was able to focus his anger at my daring to say what every musician knew: that that band was sometimes something less than perfect. Stanley Dance apparently saw Duke as a god and himself as a guardian of the icon. I saw Duke as a man. He was indeed a man — often praised, as I've said, for the wrong reasons.

And insufficiently praised for other things. I always thought he was a far better pianist then he was usually given credit for. *The Single Petal of a Rose* is enthrallingly lovely. There is an album on Atlantic called *Duke Ellington's Jazz Violin Session.* It contains a tra[illegible]n which Stephane Grappelli plays Duke's *In a Sentimental Mood,* accompanied by Duke on piano, Ernie Shepard on bass, and Sam Woodyard, drums. It is one of the most gorgeous tracks in jazz. Grappelli will make you cry, and not with sadness but with an exaltation that fills his startling solo. Duke plays no solo on the track but his accompaniment for Grappelli is so constantly surprising that one wonders, as one does with Mozart, how he ever thought of certain things. And he subtly prods Grappelli. If Duke could command and direct other musicians from and through the piano — and he could — this track perfectly reveals him in the process of doing it.

Duke functioned in an insane world. He made his music and managed not to let the madness drive him mad and still got wry amusement and some life out of life. And the girls. Always the girls. Maybe Stanley didn't like me mentioning the girls, but everybody knew that about Duke too. A taste for women is not after all an uncommon affliction in men.

Duke was a complex, highly intelligent, articulate, cunning, restless, ironic, worldly, superior, tolerant, amused, hurt, and, in the last analysis, intensely private man. I know a lot of people who saw him frequently and a few who thought they knew him well. But I doubt that anyone really did. Duke and Benny Carter were acquaintances over a period of many years. Benny travelled with him with *Jazz at the Philharmonic* and says he knew him "hardly at all." Gene Norman too travelled with him at one time and hung out with him extensively, and says he too knew him hardly at all.

The final irony is that Duke probably would have hated *Sophisticated Ladies,* made up of various of his tunes but not composed as a unit intended for the stage. Indeed, Mercer Ellington has said in an interview that he feels that had his father been alive, he would not have allowed it to be produced.

No one who knew Duke's music well seems to have liked the show. "It was like visiting the Hollywood wax museum," Johnny Mandel said. "I don't think anybody connected with that show understood Duke's music."

The tunes, at least, are wonderful, though the lyrics — this was true of many of his songs — are well below the standard of his music. I admired Duke more than he knew. I simply felt squirmy amid the abject acclamation, that kind of supine worship, that surrounded him. But perhaps he knew that. He was that perceptive.

Duke Ellington had his secrets, and he took them with him.

## ...and Guy Lombardo

For everyone there is a last battle, the one you don't win, and at the time Duke Ellington was fighting his I went to hear the band of another leader, a band I had never seen, one I had never wanted to see, one whose passing has altered our New Year's Eves forever. I refer of course to Guy Lombardo. When I saw his band in person, I found, to my own incredulity, that I liked it. And about thirty years of jazz theology got blown to hell.

In the late 1930s and during about the first eight years of the '40s, there were hundreds of big bands travelling America, including those with a strong regional popularity, known as territory bands, which never broke through to the national and international status of "name bands". This term was a sort of generic catch-all that did not imply judgment of whether these orchestras were good or bad, whether they were jazz bands (the pinnacle) or sweet bands (the pits). It was useful in that it avoided the terminological confusion that has plagued discussions of music probably since pithecanthropus erectus started stomping around a stew-pot.

All the bands, including the jazz orchestras such as those of Fletcher Henderson, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Chick Webb, Count Basie, Billy Eckstine, Woody Herman, Charlie Barnet, Artie Shaw, and Jimmie Lunceford, played for dancing and had for the most part begun as dance bands. And others that were basically dance bands were capable of playing jazz—Benny Goodman, Glenn Gray, Les Brown, Harry James, Tommy Dorsey. Indeed when the Tommy Dorsey band chewed into a chart by Sy Oliver, as in *Well Git It* or *Deep River,* roaring ahead on a rhythm section fuelled by Buddy Rich, it was transformed suddenly into a soaring jazz band, and few could swing as hard.

For the sake of clarity, then, let's say that there were a lot of dance bands—thousands of them, if you included those whose activities were confined largely to the dance pavillions of the local amusement parks that dotted the continent. Some of them were infused with a jazz spirit and staffed with jazz players and they played as much jazz as they could get away with.

There was another kind of band that had no apparent interest in jazz. These were the so-called "sweet" bands, detested by the jazz fans on a sliding scale according to the corn content of the music Hal Kemp, whose band even a lot of musicians liked; Kay Kyser Freddie Martin; Tommy Tucker; Shep Fields and His Rippling Rhythm; Richard Himber; Wayne King, even then an anachronism because his thing was waltzes in an age of unrelenting four; and Sammy Kaye. A few jazz fans secretly liked Kay Kyser, although they would not dare mention it to their hipper-than-thou young friends. It was a good commercial band

despite its Ish Kabibble comedy and Kyser's mortarboard hat, which fact I mentioned to Johnny Mandel. "Of course," Johnny said and, being one of those walking encyclopediae of arcane information, promptly ran off some of the personnel roll of the band. "Some pretty good players," he said. Then he added drily, "The Sammy Kaye band, however, had no redeeming features."

The jazz fans considered these bands a threat to the true faith, and they were perhaps right. Mass public taste does not naturally tend toward altitude, and the businessmen who then as now dominated entertainment displayed their usual unswerving fidelity to whatever made the most money. And the sweet bands made a lot of money, none more that Guy Lombardo, who was probably the most successful bandleader since Strauss the Younger and quite possibly the richest in the history of the world.

Consequently he was at the head of the hate list. His was the name that most immediately inspired the ire of true believers, the young finger-poppers who dug the jazz bands. And with ritual regularity we elected him King of Corn in the *Down Beat* poll, although Alvino Rey told me recently with a sort of shy and perverse pride, "We won that title once."

But rumor had it that Louis Armstrong liked the Lombardo band. And since he occupied in the pantheon of jazz approximately the position of Zeus, this presented a problem like the Manichean heresy. Nobody has ever determined, as far as I know, whether Charlie Parker was putting us on when he said he liked Rudy Vallee's saxophone playing. But in the case of Louis Armstrong, rumor was in accord with fact: he did indeed like the Guy Lombardo band, whereby hangs a tale to which we shall come in due course. Louis's opinion was so disturbing that we all chose to ignore it, hoping it would just go away. Almost as unsettling was the rumor that Guy Lombardo in turn was a jazz buff.

Early in 1974, Lombardo was booked to play an engagement in Toronto. Don Hartford, the president of radio station CFRB and a big-band fan, asked me to interview him for the station. I threw that journalistic switch that requires you to suspend prejudice and be fair, no matter the subject, and met Guy in the studio at the station. Like Duke, he was then in his seventies—71, to be precise. Unlike Duke, he really did not look his age. He looked about 55. And he turned out to be a warm and altogether lovely man, innocent of pretense.

He invited me to hear the band and I went to do so, already beginning to catch glimpses of history.

Of the few bands that survived into the 1970s, all were born in the 1930s or '40s. But those of Duke Ellington and Guy Lombardo were born in the '20s. They had moved on an unaltered course from the time of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the hip flask and Shipwreck Kelly, through the eras of bread lines and shot-down workers, World War II, the bomb, the home-coming, the burgeoning of suburbs, Korea, ducktail hair, Bill Haley and the Comets, Elvis Presley, Timothy Leary, Viet Nam, the Rolling Stones, Dealey Plaza, Bangla Desh, and Alice Cooper and his snake. They had led their bands from the time of Mary Pickford and Pola Negri into that of Linda Lovelace and Georgina Spelvin.

I settled down at a table to await the band. This was in the main dining room of the Royal York, one of the many hotels Guy still played regularly. It was a candlelight-and-wine setting, with white- and blue-haired ladies comprising much of the audience. That women generally outlive their husbands was attested to by the fact that there were tables without men where elderly ladies sat together. (Later on I watched two of them get up, at first timidly and then with growing amusement, to dance together, like schoolgirls.) There were also many white-mustached men in the audience and, surprisingly, a few thirty-year-olds.

The band came out and sat down and Guy followed and took his bows to great applause and raised his long baton, and they began playing. And I went into mild shock, as he swooped an danced about the stage, smiling: it was a *damned* good band, clea and smooth. To be sure, its music was simple, none of those richc harmonies that came into use through the '30s and '40s and '50 But if I could like triadic French popular music, for exactly what was, why couldn't I like this? And very quickly, I began to do s

The band was a museum piece. It had preserved a style from time before people in middle age were even born. And it wasn't a imitation, a reconstruction. It was alive, as Duke's band was alivc and these men knew how to play that music. Its instrumentatio was what it had always been: two trumpets and one trombon three saxophones doubling clarinets (no baritone), two piano drums. Tuba carried the bass line. I had never seen a tuba-ba dance band. There were only two concessions to changing time the band included guitar and it was amplified, and one of the "twi pianos" was a Fender-Rhodes. Otherwise it was a kind c monument to and evocation of an era that had faded long ag

Guy joined me at the table after the first set. I told him ho much I liked the band, hoping my surprise was not obvious, an asked him how he accounted for his almost solitary profession survival.

He sighed. "Well," he said, "we lost a lot of very talented peop to untimely deaths, for one thing. If Tommy and Jimmy Dorse and Glenn Miller were still alive, they would still be in the musi business, and it would be a better business because of it.

"And then there are no places today to develop new bands. Th ballrooms are gone. In the old days, every hotel had a band, an some of them were very good bands.

"And we were lucky. We were very lucky."

"In what way?" I asked.

Guy was born in London, Ontario. He and his brothers, Lebe (trumpet) and Carmen (flute), played for garden parties an weddings with four- or five-piece groups. "Sometimes," Guy saic "we even got paid." The success of the Paul Whiteman band ha great impact on him and his brothers. The saxophone becam popular. Carmen planned to be a symphony flutist and wa working toward that goal but, for the sake of the jobs they wer playing, he took up the saxophone.

"He wanted to avoid that reedy sound," Guy said. "He wante to get a flute sound."

"Then that explains his vibrato," I said. "It's a flute vibrato.

"Exactly," said Guy. "And it gave him a unique soun Carmen's saxophone was one of the things we had in our favor. (And it was one of the things, I learned some years after this, tha Louis Armstrong liked about the band.)

The band had grown somewhat in size. All the musicians in wanted to improvise. "I told them, 'Play the notes as they' bloody well written.' That almost caused a mutiny. We had a bi confrontation in a poolroom. But I told them, 'Play the notes o you don't work,' and they gave up."

London, Ontario, lies halfway between Toronto and Detroit a 43 degrees north latitude on a peninsula formed by Lake Huror the St. Clair River, and Lake Erie. Almost due south of it, acros Lake Erie, is Cleveland, Ohio. In November, 1923, the sam month Sousa worked that gig in Sioux City, Guy and his brothe took a chance on a trip across that invisible border in the lake t Cleveland. They were never to go home again, except on tou (But Guy played his home town once a year all his life.)

"In Cleveland, we had another piece of luck. The owner of th Claremont was a man named Louis Bleetz, who knew the ban business from A to Z. We had just enough brains to listen to hin He taught us to play softer and play slower. He schooled us for year. So when the real break came, we were ready for it."

The break came in 1927, when they were booked into th Granada Cafe in Chicago. The owner of the Granada didn't thin Guy Lombardo and Company was a very classy name. And s

they became Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians, probably for a subliminal association with the good booze that was following Guy across the border.

The mob was running loose in Chicago, busy with its internecine warfare. One night two hoods came in with machine guns. The band hit the deck when the shooting started. Several people were killed. Guy didn't say whether he considered packing up and going home but the thought surely crossed his mind. For whatever reason, he stayed on, and it was in Chicago that success came, not even overnight but in four hours.

The band had picked up a few fans, including some musicians.

"It is true that you and Louis Armstrong were friendly?"

"Yes," Guy said. "He was playing in Chicago, and I just loved him, and he loved our band. He and his whole band used to come to hear us." Guy's voice dropped then, sad with a memory. "But in those days, you see," he said, "they couldn't get in. So they used to stand on the roof of their car and look in the window." (Duke was at the Cotton Club in Harlem. Bix was with Whiteman.)

Louis Armstrong may have liked the band but few laymen knew it existed. After a time Guy did indeed begin to feel discouraged and did think about going home. A new radio station wanted to try out its equipment and its manager elected to do a remote of the band. At 8 p.m., the club was almost empty. But all over Chicago, people were listening to the radio, still fascinated by the new phenomenon. College kids, hearing the broadcast and finding something totally fresh in the band, began getting into cars and driving downtown, and by midnight the club had wall-to-wall customers.

Broadcasts on subsequent nights made the band into a Chicago smash. They were offered a record contract. The label, however, had little faith in them. Thus, even in that time, one sees the phenomenon of a record company signing an act and then doing nothing to sell it. You could get the records in Chicago but they were hard to find elsewhere. And soon kids at the eastern colleges, Yale and Harvard and Princeton, were having their friends in Chicago send them to them, and the band became a hit on records too, in spite of the company. Its first hit was a song Carmen had written, *Little Coquette.*

Guy went back to the bandstand to play another set. By now I was fascinated by the band and the man. I stayed to the end of the evening. Next day Guy and I had lunch.

By the 1940s Guy had become wealthy enough to indulge in one of the most expensive of rich men's hobbies: speedboat racing. It is not forgotten in sports circles that he was one of the great racers.

"Do you ever miss it?" I said.

"I'll tell you," Guy said, "I once asked that question of my friend Wilbur Shaw, the great race driver. He said, 'Sometimes. But I just go lie down in a quiet room and turn out the lights and the feeling goes away.' I feel the same way."

Nonetheless we lapsed immediately into talking about those wonderful Harry Miller engines, and the three Allison engines—built for the Bell Aerocobra, a hot but dangerously unstable fighter of World War II—that he had mounted in a boat in the late 1940s to blister his way across the water with a vast white rooster-tail behind him and set records which, he admitted, he would now and then sentimentally look up in the books.

"I gather from what you've told me," I said, "that you're a jazz lover."

"Oh yes," Guy said. "Particularly Dixieland jazz. I think good Dixieland jazz is the most creative, the most soulful music in the world. That's what I listen to a lot.

**"Twice I tried to change my band into a jazz band, but the** public hated it. So I went back to what we've always done. Although obviously I like what we do, or I wouldn't be doing it."

"It's funny," I said, "how the public is about keeping its heroes in pigeon-holes. They wouldn't let Edith Piaf sing comic songs."

After lunch we shook hands on the street and parted. He had invited me to come and visit him. I always intended to do it, wanting to ask him more about Chicago, about the early days, about how it all came about. But I never got the chance. He died.

Recently Gerry Mulligan played Los Angeles with his new big band, born in the 1980s and proof that the big bands will not go away, no matter what the conglomerates do. It had on lead trumpet a girl—that's one of the ways times have changed—named Laurie Frink, and on tenor, young Ted Nash. Ted was 14 when Duke died. His father, the superb trombonist Dick Nash, was born while Guy was playing the Granada and Louis had to stand on the roof of a car.

I told Gerry about my experience with Guy Lombardo and how much I had liked the band the one time I heard it in person.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Gerry said with a certain fervor. "Everybody was always so busy putting that band down that they never bothered to listen to it. It was *not* a corny band. It was a hip 1920s dance band."

## ...and Gary LeFebvre

Such is America's preoccupation with youth and money, and so strongly is manhood measured in terms of success and success in turn defined in terms of money, that anyone who hasn't "made it" by forty, if not thirty, becomes the object of a vague and demeaning pity. This is compounded in jazz by the curse of hippitude and the attendant belief that if anybody of that age really "had it", we'd all have heard of him by now. Wrong.

As Oscar Treadwell of WGUC in Cincinnati (well-known to musicians from his days at WDAS in Philadelphia, from which he was fired for playing Monk's *Misterioso* five times in a row), put it: "I audition about ten new albums each week, and I am constantly shocked by the high level of musicianship and jazz sense exhibited by relatively unknown players. That is one of the reasons I become almost messianic about getting the music to my listeners." That impassioned outburst was occasioned by his first encounter with a new album by saxophonist Gary LeFebvre. And I agree with Oscar Treadwell. The album is titled simply *Gary LeFebvre Quartet* and it is on Discovery (DS-849). It is excellent.

Gary LeFebvre, 43, is one of the finest saxophonists around, and Frank Butler is correct in saying that he belongs in the list of great tenor players. He has so much: chops, time, imagination, depth, sensitivity, and the kind of melodic sense that produces lines, not notes. His fan club at present is largely limited to musicians, but if the album gets the kind of exposure it deserves, it should expand rapidly.

The rhythm section comprises Frank Butler, drums, Leroy Vinnegar, bass, and a Japanese-born pianist named Kei Akagi who lives in Santa Barbara. He too is to be taken seriously—very "modern" but disciplined and coherent.

Gary LeFebvre has a big strong tone on tenor. On soprano, he eschews that oboish sound, filling the horn to produce almost an alto tone. He is one of those muscular players, but the strength is mixed with a lyrical quality. As for whom he resembles, forget it. Aside from the fact that comparisons of that kind, so often made, serve little purpose, he seems to have listened to everything, but sounds like Gary LeFebvre.

The album consists of six tracks, two of which are composition by Gary: *Autumn Shades,* a nice, up-tempo tune based on the changes of *Autumn Leaves,* and *Walkin' the Sunrise,* at a medium loping tempo. By overdubbing, he plays two tenors on these, reminding you (but only because that's what two tenors sound like) of Zoot Sims and Al Cohn.

The other tunes are Wayne Shorter's *Footprints,* Miles Davis' *Milestones,* Chic Corea's *Windows,* and Leonard Bernstein's *Some Other Time,* which Bill Evans brought into the jazz repertoire. This track is dedicated to Bill. Over a pattern by Akagi

resembling Bill's *Peace Piece* (which in fact began its life as an intro for this tune), Gary plays a melody chorus almost devoid of embellishment and stripped for the most part of vibrato. When vibrato does come, it's slow and inflectional. Such is his phrasing and such is the way he breathes the horn that it's beautiful. In his blowing chorus, he's all over the tune, but always lyrically. What a sound he gets on that instrument. Akagi's Fender-Rhodes solo indicates that he too has listened to Bill Evans, of which the only thing that need be said is that he'd be a fool if he hadn't. Incidentally, this is the only track in the album that was not done in a single take (except for the overdubs). On *Footprints*, Gary plays two sopranos with Echoplex to produce an ethereal and lovely effect.

Further detailed discussion is a waste of time. The album doesn't have a weak track. Butler and Vinnegar are, which should be to no one's surprise, beautifully supportive. What more is there to say? Gary LeFebvre can really play.

What's the mystery then? Why the obscurity? Anyone who's been around jazz for very long could guess: when someone of this stature remains unknown, the cause may well be dope or booze. Gary is remarkably open in stating that in his case it was both. And since no one is as skeptical of dopers as ex-dopers, let it be known in the ranks of the reformed that Gary's been off for five years. In fact he even quit smoking a few months ago. He lives now in Ventura County, California, near the sea.

# Six Fingers

When Walter Wohlkarpitz read Pandit Mersey-Leslie's review of Fingers Wombat at the Semihemidemiquaver, he decided to record the pianist as soon as possible. In view of the sudden acclaim he had received, however, Fingers determined to take a hard line on his recording contract. He sent his attorneys to renegotiate it. Schmartz and Scheisster announced that they had successfully done so: Honest Records agreed to pay for the paper sleeves in his albums.

(Fingers paid Schmartz and Scheisster five thousand dollars for their work. Honest Records paid them ten.)

In view of the publicity, and the growing crowds resulting from it, Wohlkarpitz decided that Fingers should be recorded live at the Semihemidemiquaver. The Duchess of Bedworthy and Park Benchley planned a gala social affair, and while recording engineer Tom Mix was setting up his Wohlensack in the men's room, Bella de Ball, society editor of the New York Daily *Nu*, was busily making note of the famous names in attendance.

These included acting mayor Ward Hieler, the noted Reichian psychotherapist Hammond Orgone, Grover and Dover Andover of Horace Heights, Medusa van Bicycle of Westchester, Chester and Esther Lester of Leicester, Aretha Holly of Port Chester, Richard Chichester of Rochester, Lancaster Ancaster of Doncaster, and Field Marshall Helmut von Spike, West Germany's dashing ambassador to the United Nations, who escorted Cecille, the ravishing wife of the distinguished French diplomat, sportsman, and novelist Ilya Cocu. Cocu arrived later, accompanied by the Hungarian beauty Iona Ferrari, and exchanged friendly waves with his wife and von Spike.

A hush fell as Rushmore and Lowe came on to the small bandstand, followed by a burst of applause as Fingers stepped into the spotlight and sat down at the piano. As opener, he played a medley of *Red Wing, Indian Love Call, Cherokee, Along the Navajo Trail, Pale Moon, By the Waters of the Minnetonka*, and *Sweet Sioux*.

During the subsequent applause, the Duchess smiled so broadly that her face modulated for a moment into C. Park Benchley, in authoritative and vibrant tones that could be heard several tables away, proclaimed Fingers "the greatest pianist of the last thirty years...No, forty," effectively dismissing everyone since James P. Johnson. Piggy Friggentime found Fingers "divine".

Modestly acknowledging this acclaim with a slight nod, Fingers then launched into one of his originals, *Wombat Ramble*, followed by another of his compositions, based on the chord changes of Charlie Parker's *Donna Lee*, which he had entitled *Indiana*.

"Refreshingly new," Benchley said.

Now, with a blue gel on the spotlight, Fingers, head down close to the keyboard and eyes closed, went into two rhapsodic ballads, Alec Wilder's famous *If You See Kay*, followed by the Zoot Sims classic *How Many Times Do I Have to Tell You I Love You?*

"Sensitive, " Benchley announced.

Fingers then featured his bassist in a pyrotechnic display entitled *Lowe Blow*. It was during this number that the only misadventure of the set occurred. During a stream of sixty-fourth notes, Lowe got his fingers so entangled in the strings that Mix had to stop the tape while Wombat and Rushmore extricated their colleague from his instrument. "Unprecedented!" Benchley intoned. "Brilliant! I've never heard anything like it before!" Regaining his composure, Lowe picked up his bow and concluded his solo with a ferocious arco passage played on the steel peg of his bass — a technique perfected by the late Freddie Schreiber. Fingers took over from there and played an out-chorus of burning intensity, filling the room with what *Jive* magazine has called his "table-napkins of sound".

The acclaim at the end of the set was deafening. Everyone in the room applauded wildly, excepting Ilya Cocu, whose Saint Cyr class ring was caught in Ferrari's garter belt. Never having mastered the sound of one hand clapping, Cocu dinged enthusiastically on a highball glass with a swizzle stick. Wohlkarpitz rushed out to be assured by Mix that he had everything on tape, excepting the three minutes when Wombat and Rushmore were freeing their friend. Mix said that, because the equipment had been set up in the men's room, there was a problem of leakage on the tape. "But we can fix it in the mix," he said. "Wonnnnnnderful," Wohlkarpitz said.

The second set was even more of a success than the first. By now Benchley was calling Fingers "the greatest pianist of the last hundred years". But the high point of the evening came about midnight when Fingers saw in the crowd his old friend Zip Cody, a trumpet player so original that he had spent most of his professional life working in the post office. (Because of his musical knowledge, he had been assigned to the record warping room.)

Fingers had in fact wanted Cody for his first octet but an unfortunate accident had prevented his joining the group. Cody, who played a Dizzy Gillespie model trumpet, had been caught in a downpour during a solo at the Baffin Island Jazz Festival and had almost drowned. The resultant pneumonia had precluded his joining the octet. He and Fingers had not seen each other in years. They had met again by chance while cashing checks in the drug store across from the Brill Building.

Fingers insisted that Cody sit in for the last set. Cody unpacked his new horn, which had a Dizzy Gillespie bell and a Don Ellis fourth valve that permitted him to play on purpose the quarter tones he had been achieving throughout most of his career strictly by accident.

During the set, Cody played notes so high that they were inaudible in the Semihemidemiquaver, although they set off performances by every poodle between Fifth Avenue and the East River.

"We've got an album, we've got an album!" Wohlkarpitz cried amid the stormy and prolonged applause. At this point, Cocu managed to free his class ring with a loud *Snap!* which prompted Ferrari to comment demurely, "Ouch."

The evening had been for Fingers a triumph that would erase forever the humiliation of his long-ago *Jazz at the Waterworks* concert. He had been justified at last.

(To be continued)