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Jazzletter

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Letters

People kept calling me last weekend about your latest *Jazzletter*, some of them quite outraged by the piece on Duke Ellington. Now that I have finally seen it, I am glad to say that I am not. It is basically sound and far better than the one you wrote in *High Fidelity* in 1974, although you repeat the errors about Juan Tizol being Cuban and Duke being divorced in his "young years".

What I most objected to in your *High Fidelity* essay was the reference to Duke as "very vain". He really wasn't, although he went to great pains to maintain an urbane public "image". That was surely justifiable from a business viewpoint, and keeping the band together through thick and thin, as Mercer explained in his book, dictated a number of strategems he might not have otherwise have employed, to survive.

I did not, as you suggest, see Duke as a god, nor myself as "a guardian of the icon". I happen to be a practicing Catholic and I know about false gods. Duke was, however, the most brilliant man I ever met, certainly the most fun to be around, and essentially a very good man. Much more remains to be written about how he supported relatives, dependants, and sick musicians. After his death, I was much concerned with the preservation of his music and unreleased tapes, so I tried to help Mercer to this end as much as I could. As I'm sure you know, there was no will, and Mercer was faced with enormous problems, including taxes. I felt I owed him a debt of loyalty, and I continue to think that he has not generally had the support he deserves.

Duke's escapades with the ladies were just as well-known as Paul Gonsalve's part in the Vegas drug bust, especially in England, where Paul died and where my one-paragraph "attack" you appeared in a *jazz* magazine. I questioned the necessity for you to dwell on those subjects so soon after the deaths of both men.

You intimate that I may have resented your mentioning the "girls". So far as I was concerned, and particularly when we were working on *Music Is My Mistress*, they often proved a nuisance. Nearly all felt they had the inside track and were indispensable. To a considerable extent, too, Duke was womanized, because he could not keep women away even when he wanted to. They amused him, of course, and he dealt with them with charm and gallantry whatever the nature of the relationship. The main liaisons were sketched by Mercer in his book in the hope of spiking the guns of gossips and keyhole voyeurs. The Jewell and George books offer examples of what he anticipated.

One further point: the occasional sloppiness of the band on one-nighters was also well known, but on such occasions Duke was often surprisingly happy and relaxed. Sometimes he contributed to it by dealing another hand of cards when the band was supposed to be on the stand. Musical departures from the ordinary then resulted in creativity as the guys came up with original ideas in unexpected solo roles. But when they closed ranks, or when they were hot, as Johnny Mandel said, they could outplay anyone, except perhaps Fletcher Henderson's band in its Coleman Hawkins heyday.

I believe much of what you say about Guy Lombardo could apply to Lawrence Welk. When Johnny Hodges came out to make the album for Welk, I was asked to accompany him. I found the often-ridiculed bandleader considerate, intelligent, and knowledgeable. The album was scorned by nearly all the jazz people, most of whom never heard it, but there was much good music in it.

Stanley Dance, Vista, California

Juan Tizol was born in Puerto Rico.

While we're on the subject of first-year errors, here are some more:

Phil Woods turns out to be not Anglo-Saxon after all. He is Irish and French. Which only goes to prove that Anglo-Saxons in jazz in America are even scarcer than I thought.

Herbie Haymer, not Herbie Steward, played tenor on Kay Kyser's Pushin' Sand, *which I heard recently. It isn't as good as I remember from childhood. I guess I was just mind-blown that that band could play anything beyond* Popacatepetl (Sleeping Flame of Love).

Sirenes *is not a part of Debussy's* La mer *but one of the* Nocturnes.

Fingers lives.

Robert Frank, Marina del Rey, California

He certainly does.

I note that in your June issue you are truly even-handed, having used "right-wing" pejoratively once and "left-wing" a single time.

I believe your $30 subscription rate is absurd. The level of your June effort surely qualifies as graduate-level college material, and $300 would be more appropriate (diploma included, of course). But then, at $300, only we right-wing tycoons could afford it. I am enclosing gift subscriptions for two friends.

A humble suggestion. The Jazzletter, excellent as it is, cannot survive on subscription income. If I'm a typical non-musician subscriber, many of us are passionate about jazz and would gladly make an annual donation to support the publication. You might study the tactics of William J. Buckley Jr. who annually gets his handy little band of true believers to contribute $200 or more to keep his little *National Review* afloat. I'm sure the folks over on the *New Republic* side do the same.

Hank Maller, MD, Sherman Oaks, California

You may regret saying that, Hank. If it comes down to that, you'll be the first guy I hit on.

The Reluctant Romantic Part I

On one of those folding chairs designed no doubt by the same misanthrope who invented the wire coat-hanger and those modern medicine bottles that only a child can open, I was enduring a chamber-music concert with a friend who, at that time, had a full beard. This occasion, which would have slipped swiftly from memory but for a small event that came at the end of it and more important events flowing out of it, occurred in the ornate white marble rotunda of the city hall of Ventura, California. Perhaps a thousand yards away lies a strip of sand beyond which

the Pacific Ocean begins its long march to China, Japan, Polynesia, and India. My friend and I, both of us far from the crimson autumns and white winters of our respective childhoods, were listening to European music on the final frontier of Western civilization — which is probably where we both always wanted to be.

The orchestra comprised eleven musicians. The audience, despite casual California attire, had the air of earnest interest (concealing many a wandering thought on other subjects) common to chamber-music recitals, and I tried to keep a certain amusement from showing in my face. Then the orchestra turned to a piece by Gounod. The respect of Twentieth Century audiences for Nineteenth Century composers has anesthetized us to Gounod's mediocrity. The piece opened with a long major chord that for some reason I recognized to be E-flat, which is the opening chord of P.D.Q. Bach's *Schleptet in E-flat Major*. That's the piece where the orchestra plays an interminable tonic triad followed by an even longer dominant chord during which the musicians begin to faint and crash to the floor. My friend chose that moment to whisper in my ear, "You have to admit, this is pretty dull music," and in my effort to maintain the proprieties I nearly choked.

The Gounod, fortunately, was followed by a nice Dvorak piece and then some Stravinsky. During the course of both works, my friend drew my attention to the two young clarinetists in the orchestra. After the performance he made it a point to speak to one of them. I paused for a moment to talk to someone else, then joined him. He told the young man, who must have been about twenty-two, "Anyway, I just wanted you to know how much I liked your playing." And he walked away. The young man went on disassembling his clarinet and putting it into its velvet-lined case. His equanimity piqued my curiosity and I went back and said to him, "Did the man with the beard tell you his name?"

"No," he said. "Who is he?"

"Artie Shaw," I said.

He looked as if he had been hit with a brick. He abandoned his clarinet and hurried to find other woodwind players and soon they and some of the string players had Artie surrounded and were begging him, as musicians always do, to start playing again.

Artie chatted with them for a while. Then we left with one of the flute players, a very pretty girl of twenty-six named Jennifer Carey. We went with her parents to a nearby restaurant for coffee, and she asked Artie, "How did they know who you were?"

"This idiot," Artie said, jerking his thumb toward me, "told them."

"Arthur," I said, "there was no way that I was going to let that young man go through life never knowing that once, when he was very young, he received a compliment on his playing from Artie Shaw."

Arthur Arshawsky, writer, of New York City, via New Haven, Connecticut, and a long detour through a music he loves and a fame he detested, is now seventy-two years old. He is bald on top. The beard has disappeared since that evening but he still has a full mustache. He quit smoking when he reached five packs a day and is in such good form and health that when I introduced him to a thirty-two-year-old neighbor of mine, she took him to be about fifty-five.

He can now visit restaurants without causing a stir or tool around Newbury Park (a suburb of Thousand Oaks which is in turn a suburb of Los Angeles) on his bicycle, wearing his jogging clothes and, usually, a cap resembling those you see in Holland, without drawing attention. He has the anonymity he once craved. But it is a conditional anonymity at best. You need only mention his name to anyone over forty-five in America and eyebrows rise. And he is so well-known in France that there is even a joke on his name: "Why do Americans name their bandleaders after vegetables?" (They pronounce his name *artichaut*, which means artichoke.) And clarinet players everywhere know his work. The principal clarinetist of the Cleveland Symphony, who was about to perform his *Concerto for Clarinet* after diligently studying the record, recently phoned him for suggestions. Jerome Richardson, himself a fine saxophonist, clarinetist, and flutist, said "I was a Benny Goodman fan until I heard Artie Shaw, and that was *it*. He went to places on the clarinet that no one had ever been before. He would get up to B's and C's and make not notes but music, melodies. He must have worked out his own fingerings for the high notes, because they weren't in the books. To draw a rough analogy, Artie Shaw was at that time to clarinetists what Art Tatum was to pianists. It was another view of clarinet playing. A lot of people loved Benny Goodman because it was within the scope of what most clarinet players could play and therefore could copy. But Artie Shaw took the instrument further."

Barney Bigard said that, to him, Artie was the greatest clarinet player who ever lived. Superlatives are of course questionable, if only because none of us has heard every clarinet player who ever lived, or for that matter who is living now. But it is safe to use these:

He was the most celebrated and the most glamorous of the big-band leaders and he made the most headlines, in part because of marriages to famous beauties such as Ava Gardner, Lana Turner, and Evelyn Keyes, and in part because he did what in America is unthinkable: he walked out on success. The headlines have yellowed by now, but what he left behind, in a business that still regrets his leaving it, is a legend that will not die, four hundred recordings many of which are still selling forty years after they were made, and a reputation for peerless musicianship.

The trouble with Artie Shaw, to paraphrase the title of his first book — he has his own theories on the subject; I have mine — is that his glamorous image (he was in movies; and he and Charlie Barnet were probably the handsomest of the bandleaders) obscured the fact that he led one of the most beautifully polished and swinging of all the big bands and one that played some of the most intelligent charts of the era. And his image as a bandleader in turn has overclouded the fact that the man up there in that spotlight was one of the finest jazz *players* America has produced. He was also, back when classical music and jazz were considered mutually exclusive and inimical tastes, a superb classical clarinetist. Book of the Month Club Records is about to bring out a five-album package of his last performances. Three of them are jazz, two are classical, and on one of the two latter discs is his performance of the extremely difficult and seldom-played Berezowsky clarinet concerto.

> ...there has been considerably more injudicious praise of mediocre composers than injudicious disparagement of first-rate composers.
>
> — Ernest Newman (1868—1959)

The further trouble with Artie Shaw was that we all knew his music only too well. In common with any number of musicians, I can whistle *Stardust* (including his solo, except where it goes above my whistle register and also the legitimate register at that time of the clarinet) from beginning to end. A fish, it has been said, is unaware of water, and Shaw's music so permeated the very air that I never really noticed just how good a player and how inventive and significant an improviser he was. Only now, listening to tapes that have never been issued — such as a performance in which he and Lionel Hampton and Tommy Dorsey and Ziggy Elman jammed with the Count Basie band — have I begun to evaluate the man as a jazz musician.

Artie had no idea where or when that improbable performance occurred — the cassette had been sent without explanation by an admirer — but since an announcer referred to Ziggy Elman as a

sergeant, we deduced that it must have been toward the end of World War II, probably on a military base. Part way through this tossed salad, Artie said, "What tune are we playing?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," I said, "and neither does anybody in that band." We laughed at the scrambling (during which, by the way, Tommy Dorsey played some surprisingly hot hard-toned trombone) and I said, "This may be a historic recording but it's terrible."

However, there is on that tape a blues in which Artie solos at length while Basie weaves fluent lines around him and Freddie Green paves the highway smooth and straight. It is so good that, were the quality of sound not so poor, I would hope to see it released publicly.

It is in such moments of hearing Artie Shaw playing unfamiliar things that I perceive him not as a bandleader or one of the idols of my childhood but as a player.

The continuing reissue of his records by RCA is also helping to put him into historical perspective. *The Complete Artie Shaw* is now up to seven volumes, each containing two LPs with as many as eight tunes to a side. Some of these tracks were previously unissued — Shaw has been fighting RCA for years to get all his masters released — and they are valuable precisely because they are unfamiliar. One of these is a tune Shaw wrote and Ray Coniff arranged, *Who's Excited?*, a riffy thing with strings playing the harmonic pads that previously would have been assigned to saxophones. Shaw plays a radiant solo, filled with those fluid glissandos, smooth rapid runs, and the rich lyrical tone that was one of the several glories of his playing.

Another value of these recordings is that some of them contain two takes of the same tune. These alternates — a blues called *Mysterioso* by the Gramercy Five, for example — put to rest a rumor you occasionally hear that Shaw wrote his solos in advance, a denigration that pays an inadvertent compliment to their compositional perfection. His solos in *Mysterioso*, recorded probably minutes apart, are distinctly different. The rumor may have its source in the fact that on his major hits, Shaw would play in personal appearances the solos he had recorded. So did the side men.

What Shaw did do was to write out saxophone choruses, even marking the breathing places, and turn them over to his arranger, who in the early years was usually Jerry Gray. "Jerry came very close to being to me what Billy Strayhorn was to Duke," Artie said. "He was a pupil and he was a friend. I taught him how to arrange. Remember, I was an arranger before I was a bandleader. Jerry started with my string band in 1936. He was my first violinist. And he played some jazz accordion. Later, in 1939, when I broke up *that* band, I called Glenn Miller and told him I had a few people he ought to listen to. He hired Johnny Best on trumpet, and he hired Jerry. Jerry did Glenn a lot of good. Jerry wrote *A String of Pearls* for him."

Because, then, of the close relationship between Shaw and Jerry Gray and because of his habit of writing out the sax choruses (and Artie was a sought-after lead alto player before he was an arranger or a clarinetist), there is a stylistic continuity in what he plays and what the band plays. The sax-section choruses, in effect, are orchestrated Shaw solos.

Even Artie can't remember whether he or Jerry Gray wrote certain things during the 1938-'39 period. "I didn't write too much for that band," he said with that touch of sarcasm that sometimes comes into his voice when he is talking about his former self. "I was too busy being a celebrity."

In addition to the RCA reissues, there are five albums on the Hindsight label (address: PO Box 7114-A, Burbank, California, 91510) containing as many as nineteen tracks each, drawn from radio broadcasts. These are casual performances and some of the tracks stretch out to nearly six minutes.

"When you went into the recording studio in those days," Artie said when we were listening to some of the Hindsight test pressings, "there was no tape and you knew it was going to have to be perfect. The tension got terribly high. And often you wouldn't take chances doing things that might go wrong. But on radio broadcasts, you could do anything. It didn't matter. You never thought of anybody recording it and forty years later releasing it! The recordings were done under better conditions. You had better balance. But you didn't get anything like the spontaneity you have here."

The Hindsight records reveal what the band played like in the late 1930s but cannot reveal what the band actually sounded like. Recording technique was too primitive. The bass lines are unclear and the guitar chords all but inaudible. What you get, really, is the upper part of the harmony, and you cannot follow the separate lines in the voicings.

For a sense of the band's true sound you have to hear a Capitol stereo LP (unfortunately out of print) for which Shaw put together a band containing a number of his former side men. As we listened to it, I caught a glimpse of the inner Artie Shaw and something I don't think even he knows about himself.

Shaw had quit playing by then and his solos were recreated by Walt Levinsky, a fine player. But Levinsky's attack lacks the chilly bite that Shaw's had. There is a sound that many superb pianists have in common, a click that occurs on the leading edge of the tone, as the hammer connects with the strings. Nat Cole's playing had it. It is a particular kind of clarity, a coldness that expands immediately into a round warmth. A similar quality inhered in Shaw's playing.

Listening to Levinsky, I said, "Well, he's not you."

And Artie immediately said, not so much defensively as with a hint of hurt, "He's an excellent clarinetist, don't you think?"

"Absolutely. But he was asked to do an all but impossible thing. He's not being allowed to play in his own style and he can't quite get into yours."

"Well, that's true enough," Artie said. "But he's a very fine clarinet player."

On another occasion, he named the people serving with him on a certain musical advisory committee. "There sure are a couple of prize lemons in that group," I said.

Immediately Artie said, "You don't mean John S. Wilson, do you?"

"I assuredly do not."

And Artie seemed relieved, probably at not having to do battle. "I think John's a first-rate man," he said, "and he definitely knows what he's talking about."

"I agree," I said. "I learned an awful lot from reading him. John was an influence on me."

His respect for the dedicated musician is enormous. He thinks Phil Woods is one of the finest saxophonists jazz has ever known, adding, "and I've heard them all, including Charlie." Artie may have quit playing in 1954, but he didn't quit listening. He had great admiration for Art Pepper, and someone told Art about it. Art was flabbergasted. He immediately contacted Artie and told him he was going to send him *all* his albums. A few days later Art died.

In the first flush of success, Artie made about $55,000 in one week, equivalent to $550,000 today. The superlatives were flying, including the statement that he was the best clarinetist in the world. As he was leaving a theater in Chicago, aware that he was becoming rich at an early age, a thought crossed his mind. So what if I am the best clarinetist in the world. Even if that's true, who's the second best? Some guy in some symphony orchestra? And is there all that much difference between us? And how much did he earn this week? A hundred and fifty bucks? There's something cockeyed here, something unfair.

It is at such moments in conversations that one sees, behind all that rationalism and adamant logic, a hidden gentleness in Artie and a sense of brotherhood with all the world's musicians.

It is occasionally said that some musicians who worked for him hated him. It may be true. He was a strict disciplinarian and would

not, and still won't, tolerate the lazy, the careless, the second-rate. But I have never been able to find one of these detractors. "Great dude," said Johnny Mandel, once one of his arrangers. "I love him." Neeley Plumb, who played saxophone in one of the Shaw bands, said, "He always knew exactly what he wanted, and you cannot imagine what a joy it was to work for a man who'd rehearse four new charts in three hours, get them straight, and never bother you about them again."

The Book of the Month Club albums bear the collective title *A Legacy*. The jazz performances are by Shaw and the Gramercy Five, which at that time included Tal Farlow on guitar, Hank Jones on piano, Irv Kluger on drums, Tommy Potter on bass, and Joe Roland on vibes. "We had been working together and the group sounded so good," Artie said, "that I thought it should be recorded. So I just took them into the studio and recorded them myself." After that he stopped playing. That was in 1954.

One of these LPs contains a *Stardust* that is startling. For one thing, recording technique had advanced to the point that you can hear all the parts, and the true nature of Shaw's own tone is evident. He had at that time taken a year off to play "classical" music — or "long-form music," as he prefers to call it — and this had altered his approach to the instrument. Indeed, he had even begun playing a different clarinet. On the old records, you rarely hear Shaw play more than eight or sixteen bars, due to the necessity of limiting performances to about three minutes. But on this final and farewell version of *Stardust,* he is able to lay back and develop his material. The solo is absolutely gorgeous, one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard. It had me on the edge of the chair at his house, mouth agape. "Play it again," I said.

"There are some other things I want to play for you."

"Please. I really want to hear that again." And he played it three or four times. Its beauties only grew with familiarity.

The further trouble with Artie Shaw is that he never did suffer fools gladly. In her autobiography, Helen Forrest said that Shaw was the most intelligent man she ever met. He not only has read seemingly everything but he has known many of the major intellectual figures of the mid-Twentieth Century. Even when he was very young, he was an omnivorous reader, hungry for knowledge. One musician recalls that when he joined Artie in a New York sax section in the early 1930s, he was reading Thorstein Veblen during the breaks.

Such a man was ill-suited for congress with the primitives who dominated the business end of dear old show biz and who differed from their successors only in that many of the latter have law degrees or M.B.A.'s to mask their essential venality, not to mention musical ignorance. Shaw did not set out to be a public figure, did not even want to form a band. He wanted to become a writer. But nature, in its careless apportionment of abilities, had given him an x-ray ear, infallible taste, and a steely will about developing musical technique. In 1936, when he was a studio musician, a booking agency approached him about forming a band. He said he was interested only in finishing his education at Columbia University. He was asked how much money that would take. He took a deep breath and blurted the largest figure he could think of — $25,000. He was told he could earn that in a few months if he organized his own band. And so he formed a band, but hardly the one the agency had in mind. It contained a small jazz front line, a rhythm section, and a string quartet. It bombed. So he broke it up and organized a big band with conventional saxes-and-brass instrumentation. "If the public wanted loud bands," as he put it, "I was going to give them the loudest goddamn band they'd ever heard."

But as Buddy Rich says, there is a way to play musically loud and a way to be unmusically loud, and the Shaw band was from the start very musical.

A confrontation with "the business" was inevitable. Artie had a prickly and at times tactless kind of screw-you integrity ill-designed to earn him friends. Richard Schickel once wrote, "Any unique artist must have, to survive, utter confidence in the correctness of his own judgment." Artie had it. "I never really considered myself part of the entertainment business," Artie said. "I recognized that people had put me in that business. That's where I worked. That is, the ambience I played in had to do with entertainment. So I had to make the concession of having a singer. But that's the only concession I ever made — aside from occasionally playing so-called popular tunes. Mostly I was doing this to meet some inner standard of what I thought a band or I should sound like."

Shaw's certainty about his own judgment was at least part of the cause of his reputation for arrogance. Arrogance is requisite to the creation of any kind of art. The fact of assuming that what you have to say will be of interest to so many people that you will be able to make a living from it is implicitly arrogant. "As a matter of fact," Artie said, "the arrogance goes so far that you don't care whether it's of interest."

"The only thing," I said, "that humbles the real artist is the art itself."

"That," Artie said, "and his own fallibility."

Shaw's problem is clearer in retrospect than it must have seemed at the time. While most people — including many musicians — were still thinking of jazz as entertainment or simply dance music, Shaw was already seeing it as an art, something that should be regarded as a concert music. As soon as he could, he added a good-sized string section — sixteen men; the band travelled in two buses — and further enhanced his reputation for pretension. Now, of course, string sections are common in jazz recordings, but Shaw used one first, not out of aspiration to status but because, as every musician knows, there is no more gloriously transluscent harmonic texture against which to play than fine-tuned and well-voiced strings. (Tommy Dorsey picked up Shaw's entire string section when Artie joined the Navy.)

There was something new in the air when Shaw formed his first band. There had always been more influence of classical music on jazz than the narrower breed of jazz fan realized — Sidney Bechet, for example, liked to listen to Beethoven. The bebop era was seen as having its harbingers in Charlie Christian and Lester Young. But there were earlier signs of the music that was to come. If Bix Beiderbecke was interested in the French Impressionist composers and in Stravinsky, so was Artie, who roomed for a while with Bix when he first arrived back in the city of his birth, New York. And Artie says he was deeply influenced by Bix, trying to play like him, but on saxophone.

> ...the rigor mortis always associated with overtheorized music.
>
> — Constant Lambert (1905—1951)

Once your attention is drawn to it, you can hear the influence of Bix in Shaw's early recorded solos, which go far beyond the diatonic simplicity of the average non-blues jazz solo of that time. Artie says, "I was listening to the same things that Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were listening to a little later on — the dissonances, as we thought of them then, of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Bartok. Another factor was that I was not thinking in two-bar and four-bar units. The lines would flow over bar lines. That's simply being musical, of course. In the Mozart A-major quintet, I can show you a phrase that's eleven bars long followed by one that's nine, and they're completely organic. We have been so trained to think of music in even numbers. Have you ever noticed that the things of nature — the number of kernels in a corn row, the number of peas in a pod — occur in odd numbers?

"Incidentally, while we're on the subject of Dizzy and Charlie, can you answer a question for me? Why hasn't Dizzy, one of the

greatest trumpet players we've ever had, been given the recognition Charlie has?"

"Because," I answered, "he isn't a junkie who died young and tragically. Haven't you ever noticed that America immortalizes those who live screwed-up lives and die young? America makes legends of such people. Lenny Bruce, Hank Williams, Bix..."

"Billie Holiday, Bunny Berrigan, Lester Young," Artie added.

"It's a particular American pattern of neurosis, a sort of corollary of puritanism. Dizzy has been successful, and he likes laughter, and for that reason full approval is withheld. If Bill Evans hadn't lived a tortured life, he might never have been given the recognition he's received. There is a kind of condescension in the phenomenon. So long as you can look down on someone with pity, it's okay to praise him."

"I think you're right," Artie said.

Those who thought they were going to get a conventional smiley bandleader in Artie Shaw should have paid more attention to his theme, *Nightmare,* which he composed. It was no promise of romance, no *Moonlight Serenade* or *Getting Sentimental Over You.* "And no *Let's Dance,*" Artie added pointedly. *Nightmare* was a stark piece, consisting of a four-note chromatic ostinato over a pedal point and gloomy tom-tom figure, joined by a falling major third in which the clarinet plays lead to trumpets in straight mutes. It screams a kind of shrill terror, a dark Dostoyevskyan vision of the world, a clairvoyant look into the horrors to come. "Guernica," Artie says, and it does indeed have something of the Picasso mural about it.

Artie was to encounter some of the horrors personally. He joined the Navy early in 1942 and formed a band. He was offered the rank of lieutenant commander but turned it down. "As soon as you took a commission," Artie said, "you got into another world." And he wanted to play for the enlisted men. Eventually he was given the rank of chief petty officer. At first he was stationed at Newport, Rhode Island. He soon chafed under the easy assignment. He knew Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, and he pulled wires. An admiral said to him, "Son, you're the first man I've met who didn't want to stay here and hang onto the grass roots. Where do you want to go?" "Where's the Navy?" Artie said. "In the South Pacific," the admiral said. "And that's where I want to go," Artie said.

Glenn Miller joined the Army Air Corps and became a major and went to England, to broadcast to the troops on the BBC from somewhere outside London. Artie took his men — designated Band 501 by the Navy — to the Pacific. There are a few mementoes of those days in his house, including a bullet-torn Japanese battle flag inscribed to him by Admiral Halsey; a model of a P-38 fighter made from brass shell casings by Seabees, who gave it to him; and, on the wall of the landing of the stairs, a painting done by a wartime artist for *Life* magazine that shows Artie playing his clarinet in front of the band for troops on Guadalcanal. The background is a wall of jungle. In the picture Artie is wearing a black Navy tie tucked into the front of his khaki shirt. This detail bugs him. "Halsey had banned ties," he said. "No tie. That was the uniform of the day." But there is something else that is somehow off. Artists rarely portray musicians accurately, and the stance of the figure in the painting isn't quite right.

The band was in the South Pacific from mid-1942 until late 1943. It played in forward areas, some still harboring snipers, and at times being bombed almost nightly. Once, with all its members under ponchos, it played for thousands of young paratroopers, themselves under ponchos and stretched up the slope of a hill in a pounding tropical rain. When the band finally came home, the men were exhausted, depleted by what they had seen and by disease. Several of its members were immediately given medical discharges. "Davey Tough was just a ghost," Artie says. And Artie had been having crippling migraine headaches. When the Navy learned of this, he too was discharged. Several months later he formed a new and superb civilian band. (In England, Captain Robert Farnon was being mustered out of the Canadian army band. He, like Artie, was badly shaken by the horrors of the war and to heal himself he went away and wrote his gentle and now-famous orchestration of *A la claire fontaine.*)

Artie's new band recorded *Lady Day, Jumpin' on the Merry-Go-Round,* and *'S Wonderful,* all of which are in Volume VI of the RCA reissues. But Artie still was not comfortable with fame, and that band, for which Ray Coniff did some fine writing, lasted only a year. Artie says he wasn't simply indifferent to fame: he actively loathed it.

"It is a very strange thing to realize you are no longer a person," he said. "You have become a thing, an object, and the public thinks you belong to them.

"A guy yelled at me, 'We made you!' I said, 'Well, break me, man. If you're powerful enough to make me, break me. I'm waiting. Do it.' They look at you, baffled. Another line is, 'Who do you think you are?' And I'd say, 'I *know* who I am. Who are you?'

"You can't believe the things that happen. A guy once came up to me and said, 'Remember me?' I said, 'No.' At first I used to say, 'Yeah,' but that can get you into trouble. The guy said, 'Remember the Cornell prom?' I said, 'I don't remember. It was just one more one-nighter.' For me at that time, one out of maybe two hundred a year. The guy said, 'I was there.' I said, 'No kiddin'. But even so, why should I remember you?' He said, 'I asked for *Begin the Beguine.*' 'Oh, well *sure.* You're *that* one. *Now* I know who you are.' So help me Jesus. I make that up not."

Artie chuckled. "Another guy — oh, God! — said, 'Remember me?' And I said, 'Nope.' And he said, 'I used to sit behind you at Dwight Street School.' I left Dwight Street School when I was nine. At the time he did this, I must have been fifty. Which makes it forty-one years. He told me he sat behind me in English or something. I said, 'Do you expect me to remember that?' He said, "Well I remember you.' I said, 'Would you have remembered me if I'd become an insurance man?'

"It's crazy," he said. "I guess lots of people are conditioned to be stupid."

"Do you think it's as bad in Europe?"

"It's just as bad, but there *is* one good thing about it: they have respect. They have a certain respect for people who are no longer big stars. They seem to recognize that in order to have become a big star, you had to have had something going for you.

"I used to get a lot of criticism for being 'nasty' to fans. But I don't think I was being nasty. I remember walking out of the Stanley Theater in Pittsburgh one time, and this kid came up to me and was very aggressive about getting my autograph. I finally said, 'Wait a minute, what do you *want* this for?' And he said, 'Well, I admire the way you play.' So I said, 'Well get a clarinet and learn to play,' and walked away. That's what I think you should do if you really admire something.

"I just remembered something. When I was about ten years old in New Haven, some kid came up to me and said, 'Hey, come on,' and I said, 'Where we goin'?' and he said, 'The Rialto Theater,' or whatever the hell the name of the place was. They were playing *Son of the Sheik,* or one of the old Valentino movies. He said, 'Valentino, Rudolph Valentino, he's gonna *be* there. Let's go and watch him come out of the theater.' And so we went. We stood in the alley leading to the stage entrance and, by God, here came Rudolph Valentino. Surrounded by people. And I looked, and there he was — the Sheik. Well, the kid grabbed me and said, 'Come on,' and I said, 'Whatya doin'?' 'I'm gonna get his autograph.' And I said, 'Well jeez, I don't wanna talk to him.' I pulled back. So you see, even then, I felt that way. If there's someone you look up to, well, leave him alone, man. Don't invade his privacy.

"The point is that I learned that I had lost *my* privacy. And you know, it's taken me forty years to get it back."

"Some people like fame," I said.

"I wonder if they'd like it if they had it long enough. Johnny Carson hates it. Johnny told me he hardly ever goes anywhere because someone is always trying to pick a fight. I'll tell you another guy. Mohammed Ali. People are always taking a poke at him. What can they lose? He *can't* hit them back."

"My buddy Julius LaRosa," I said, "played a gig in Dallas last year. A couple of ladies came up to him and one of them pulled his cheek and said to her girlfriend, 'You see? I told you it isn't a face lift.'"

"I *believe* it," Artie said. "You're public property. People are always asking me, 'Don't you miss playing?' Well of course I miss playing. But not enough to give up what I've got now. It's like having a gangrenous arm. The only thing you can do is amputate it. Obviously you're gonna miss the arm, but if you *don't* cut it off, you'll die."

"I guess if you decided to do it," I said, "you could get your chops up in six months."

"No way," Artie said. "Closer to a year."

(To be continued.)

Fingers Eight

Fingers used his time at the Hotel Leonard well. Indeed the four months were among the more productive periods of his life, and he turned out a considerable body of classical composition.

During his Paris years, he had become convinced that composers were wasting their time in experiments with quarter tones. Fingers had written a few works in eighth tones, and at least one work — now, alas, lost — in sixteenth tones, and then had begun reducing the size of his intervals even further, dividing the octave into 77½ parts, finally producing his famous Fifth Quintet, Opus 80, No. 174, known as the *Glissando*, scored for four violins and a slide whistle. The work had been widely acclaimed — "astonishing," one of the French critics called it — but seldom performed, due largely to the scarcity of accomplished slide whistlists.

Fingers revised it during his stay in St. Catharines, rescoring it for four violas and trombone, which gave it a darker tone. At the same time, he decided to tighten the work somewhat, eliminating the fourth, seventh, and eighth movements, thereby reducing its playing time to two hours.

The next week he began work on his Woodwind Quartet, Opus 812, scored for ocarina, bagpipe, bass saxophone, and eunuch flute. This lovely work, which shows the composer's mastery of unusual instrumental colors, has unfortunately been overshadowed by the celebrated *Aleatory Rhapsody*, composed immediately after it.

Fingers was of course familiar with the work of the Flemish composer Pierre Mouche, which offered, he felt, some improvement on the usual chance mechanisms. Mouche's technique of hanging sticky score-paper outdoors at his farm and then having orchestras of indeterminate size, chosen by firing buckshot through a union book, play the notes indicated by flies attached to the staves, was interesting, but only as far as it went. Since the flies usually died, this tended to give the music a static quality. Fingers wanted something that would be more alive.

In St. Catharines he got the idea of spraying honey with an atomizer (experiment established that it was best to dilute it) onto score paper and then releasing ants of different sizes and colors to walk across the field of random tackiness. The ants would get stuck on the honey spots. Large black ants could signify whole notes, red ants quarter notes, the small kitchen ants eighth notes, and so forth. Since the ants in their struggles would tend to wriggle, this would produce interesting tremolo effects. And since the ants would eat their way free of the honey spots and move on, only to become stuck again, the resultant music could not be predicted even by the composer, for it would constantly change even as it was being performed.

Like all great artists, Fingers did not at first grasp the significance of his own innovation. As usual, the work was not fully understood until Pandit Mersey-Leslie clarified the issue. "The advantages of the system," Mersey-Leslie was to write some time later, "are enormous. It frees the composer from the tedium of dealing with harmony, counterpoint, rhythmic notation, and all that other boring stuff. But most important of all, it frees music itself from the intercession of fallible human judgment and the subjective selection process of composers."

At the moment, however, Fingers was merely fascinated with the technique in and of itself. He learned that there were 4,712 known kinds of ant. This made the number of possible combinations virtually indeterminable. Given a large enough orchestra, the range of colors became infinite. Yet chamber groups could also perform the *Aleatory Rhapsody*, which is why the work has been subtitled *Any Number Can Play.*

Fingers was tired when he finished work on this composition, but his creative juices were still flowing. He thought he might try his hand at a song, and although he had never written a lyric before, he was confident he could handle it. After all, he had once read a book entitled *How to Get Rich in the Music Business*, which contained a paragraph on writing lyrics. He decided he would like to write a California song, one that incorporated some of the more romantic names of places in that state. Several such songs had already been written, of course: *I Left My Heart in San Clemente, Do You Know the Way to Sam O'Fay, It Happened in Morro Bay.* During the job at Neptune's Net in Malibu, Fingers had become entranced by the name of the naval base, Port Hueneme, pronounced Why Knee Me, and he decided to immortalize it in song. And that is how he came to write:

The moon was new over Point Mugu
the night I came from Simi
to share with you a rendezvous
on the beach at Port Hueneme.

We strolled the sand, you held my hand,
my glasses grew all steamy.
The waves did crash and splish and splash
on the beach at Port Hueneme.

It was rather strange on the rifle range,
my darling little Mimi,
but we had no-where else to go
but the beach at Port Hueneme.

The M.P.'s came, we had to leave
as dawn came up like thunder.
I still hold dear the memory
of romance torn asunder.

I see again the Oxnard plain
in dreams that will not free me.
But that was Oh so long ago
on the beach at Port Hueneme...
oh yeah,
the beach at Port Hueneme.

Fingers was pleased with the song. He liked its imagery and symbolism and felt that it had a certain French realism about it. He sent a lead sheet to his friend Sonya Papermoon, who recorded it on Obscure Records.

The job at the Persian Room ran its course pleasantly. Fingers received a rave review from Victoria Lawn, jazz critic of the St. Catharines *Substandard*, who described his playing as "unexpected." He returned to New York in the fall of 1966 or '67 — he could never remember which, creating a problem that still has his biographers baffled.