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Jazzletter

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Letters

Your loving remembrance of Hugo touched me deeply. Those of us who were privileged to spend some time with him have an appreciation of his value, both as artist and human being, which has not as yet been generally shared. Indeed, his contribution may never be properly assessed. Nevertheless, you have reminded us, with love and care, that Hugo Friedhofer left us a richer world than the one he entered.

By the way, I plead guilty to the charge Hugo made about the tempo being a little too fast that night. That minor criticism, coming from an unmitigated perfectionist, amounted to a rave. I escaped with my life!

Thank you for caring.

Allyn Ferguson, Studio City, California

Too fast compared to what? The original tempo and the click track of the movie? (Which of course Hugo probably remembered.) A concert performance is not a studio session, and the tempo has to lie where it feels right. If the tempo was too fast, the only people there who knew it were you and Hugo.

I thought you conducted The Best Years of Our Lives *beautifully, and that performance was one of the memorable concert experiences of my life. And of his too, I venture to guess.*

Paul Glass thinks it is very important that we try to assemble as many as possible of his final, finished, fully-orchestrated scores. I would like to propose to you and all the other interested composers that we form a committee to find and at least photocopy those scores before they are lost. It will take money, but I'm sure contributions would be forthcoming.

Thank you for your thoughtful and loving tribute to Hugo, and also for your very kind references to me. Himself would approve, except for one thing — his middle name was William (not Wilhelm). The piece is wonderful. You really captured him.

Jeri Southern, Hollywood, California

There's another error in that piece. His late daughter's name was spelled Erica, not Ericka. And unaccountably I omitted mention of his two grandsons, Erica's boys, Eric and Daniel Essman, both writers, of whom Hugo was quietly proud.

Thank you for insights into the lives of some remarkable people, accomplished with erudition, humor, and grace. The Hugo Friedhofer essay was a masterpiece of what the marvellous English writer V.F. Pritchett has described as "the exquisite pain of remembrance when the air suddenly grows cold in the cracks".

Peter Shaw, Ottawa, Ontario

I am working on a long piece on guitarist Arv Garrison. Last March I spent two weeks in Arv's home town, Toledo, Ohio, talking to anyone I could find who had had some association with him before he drowned in 1960. Does anyone have records, tapes, remembrances, articles, or knowledge of what musicians might know something about Arv?

Bob Dietsche,
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There is no question that the "next-quarter avarice", as I believe you phrase it, of those in control of music — and all the arts — is homogenizing artistic expression in this country, and suppressing much of it. It's the same across the board in the arts: if they could work it, businessmen would like to make one movie a year, one record a year, one book a year, that *everyone* would buy (over and over again, preferably.) In a subtler way, of course, this is as totalitarian as the Chinese or Cuban or Soviet or Iranian governments actively suppressing artistic expression.

It's refreshing not to be talked-down-to as subliterates.

Terry Borst, San Francisco, California

The Reluctant Romantic Part II

Artie Shaw's book *The Trouble with Cinderella* was published in 1952. It was not so much an autobiography as an unsparing and self-searching essay on the life of one troubled man living in a fame-crazed America. Probably no country on earth has ever placed as high a premium on conspicuous public success as the United States. This preoccupation amounted, and to a large extent still amounts, to a national disease, embodied in the cruelly misleading myth that anyone can grow up to be president, anyone can be discovered sipping a milkshake in a drugstore and become a movie star overnight. The movie industry nurtured and magnified the myth but did not invent it: it was embodied in the Nineteenth Century Horatio Alger novels. In the 1940s or '50s, Glenn Ford appeared in a movie in which he played a bus driver. You knew as the film unfolded that there was something amiss. Hollywood didn't make movies about bus drivers, bus drivers were not people with stories worth telling. Movies were made only about the rich and famous, or the likes of test pilots and soldiers of fortune and outlaws. And sure enough, toward the end of this picture, Glenn announces that he is really a writer, and that his first novel has just been accepted; he has made the great leap into doing the only thing considered worth doing in America, namely being rich and famous.

This is not to suggest that the aspiration to upward mobility did not exist in Europe: it is inherent in fairy tales such as *Snow White* and most notably *Cinderella,* which is of course the reason for the title of Artie's book. But Europe's was largely a stratified and inflexible society in which these sudden elevations into power and fortune were accomplished only by the intercession of improbable accident if not the supernatural. Europeans were sensible enough to let the dream repose in wistful stories for children. The trouble with the Cinderella myth in America was that, in a flexible and open culture, one that is alas now becoming stratified along economic lines, as in Europe, the dream came true just often enough to encourage the dreamers and lead them to numberless heartaches and suicides.

It would be inconceivable that Artie, in his youth, did not aspire to making a lot of money. His childhood in New Haven was too impoverished for him to have been devoid of that ambition. Artie is not notably "Jewish". Each of us is a creature of his culture and of ethnic and religious and regional substrata of that culture. A Jewish atheist, a Catholic atheist, and a Protestant atheist are three different breeds of cat, if only because they disbelieve

different things. More importantly, one usually carries the behavioral conditioning of a particular ethnic upbringing long after its superstitions and mores have been intellectually rejected. And Artie isn't particularly Jewish. I doubt that he understands Yiddish, beyond the show business pidgin Yiddish we all know. (He does, however, speak Spanish well and some French.) He is a man of deep cultivation who collects and knows a great deal about art, is endlessly and penetratingly observant of politics and history, and who is in sum, and in the largest sense, a citizen of the world. There are, however, two things about him that I find to be quite Jewish, and particularly Russian Jewish. One is his passion for education. The other has to do with music, and requires a little explanation.

Under the czars there was a law that a Jew could not live in Moscow unless he or she was an artist, a ballerina or a fine musician — a wind-up toy to entertain the rich. And so in Jewish families in such cities as Odessa (the breeding ground of an astonishing number of great violinists and, coincidentally or not, the birthplace of Artie's father), there was emphasis on becoming a musician in order to live in the great city of the czars. It was a way up and a way out. In America, among Russian Jewish families, the tradition lingered. And so in Arthur Arshawsky, a Lower East Side Jewish boy transplanted to WASPy New Haven and later abandoned by his father and always teased about his "peculiar" name, there must have been a tremendous drive to get out of that poverty whether through literature or music or whatever variant of the Cinderella-Alger myth. Sometimes, when I am talking to Artie, sometimes when I hear him laugh or see some trace of an old sadness, I think I catch a glimpse of that boy, the boy standing in the alley watching Rudolph Valentino.

And I think his permanent aversion to signing autographs may have a cause quite different from what he considers it to be.

When *The Trouble with Cinderella* was published, it caused a stir but sometimes for the wrong reasons. It is an extremely well-written and literate book on an interesting subject, which should have been enough to commend it, but the attitude toward it was often one of surprise, as if one had come across a bear riding a bicycle. The reaction in these instances was not one of pleasure

One may derive art from life, but not from art.
— Jean Cocteau (1889—1963)

that Artie Shaw had written a good book but of amazement that he had written one at all. This bespoke underlying assumptions that jazz musicians are stupid illiterates and bandleaders only baton-waving clowns. More than that, it implicitly expressed another American neurosis, the belief that no one can do more than one thing well — an article of faith whose father was probably Henry Ford. It is contradicted by a University of Michigan study establishing that children with talent for one thing usually have it for many things, to say nothing of the life testimony of Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Cocteau, James Thurber, Albert Einstein (who was a creditable violinist) and countless others. George Wettling became a well-regarded artist. The vivid pencil portraits of his fellow jazz musicians by bassist John Heard are a joy to behold. John Rubenstein is a working film composer and a working actor. And Charles Mingus's portrait of himself in *Beneath the Underdog* reveals a precise ear for language.

If anybody thought Shaw's first book was a fluke, his second, *I Love You, I Hate You, Drop Dead* — three novellas dealing with American marriage — proved him to be a skilled writer of fiction. He has not published another book since then, but he works steadily every day on a vast novel about the evolution of a musician. The character's name is Albie Snow. If it bears a certain resemblance to Artie Shaw, that is not by coincidence. "It's fiction, though," Artie says. "I'm having fun making this guy a genius." And fiction of course allows a writer to take liberties with time and sequence, to elide several characters into one for the sake of story organization — and, not incidentally, to avoid libel suits. Artie writes carefully and slowly, constantly revising, always seeking what Flaubert called *le mot juste*, that perfect word..With a touch of self-mockery he says, "I've got twelve hundred pages of manuscript and I've just got the guy up to the age of twenty-three." Twelve hundred pages amount to three hundred thousand words, which means that the book well may turn out to be the longest novel since *Remembrance of Things Past*. "It'll probably become a trilogy," Artie said a few months ago. Now it's up to tetralogy. "I started a band to get an education so I could become a writer," he said, "and here I am, more than forty years later, still plugging away."

Artie's late-model IBM typewriter is in a small office in one corner of the second story of his house. This large room is so full of books and records — on the walls and in partitioning bookshelves — that it looks like a branch of some well-endowed public library. It has two broad windows, set in alcoves projecting out from the slope of the roof. These windows face north over a swimming pool, other homes, clouds of foliage, the inevitable upthrusting cypruses, and, in the distance, brown California hills that turn luxuriantly green in the January and February downpours, or to slip back into dessicated slumber in the long rainless summer.

I called Artie from Los Angeles one afternoon and told him I would shortly be heading home to Ojai and would stop by en route to see him if it were convenient. The freeway passes within a half mile of his house. He said he'd be about ready to knock off writing by then. It had been hot and smoggy in Los Angeles and I was looking forward to the respite. Artie has an unexpected flair for the mimicry of other people's voices and occasionally tells music business stories that will put you on the floor. He is a most enjoyable companion. I did not always find him so.

His 1944-'45 band was followed by a 1949 band, one that contained Al Cohn, Zoot Sims, Herbie Steward, Dodo Marmarosa, Don Fagerquist, and Jimmy Raney. Its writers included Johnny Mandel, Tadd Dameron, Gene Roland, George Russell, Eddie Sauter. It was, by all accounts, an advanced and adventurous band. Its only recordings were transcriptions, and it never found a large audience. The big-band era was ending. Speculations on why that era ended rarely take note of the fact that during that period movie attendance was also falling off disastrously. So was baseball attendance. Televison was having effect, as well as "high fidelity" and the long-playing record. The trend toward home entertainment was well on its way.

After that Artie put together — almost contemptuously, it would seem — a band that played the hits of the day. To his dismay, it was a success. He folded that band in 1950. Senator Joseph McCarthy was running around like a rabid dog, causing heartache and heart attacks and leaving a trail of blighted lives. McCarthy told at least one journalist I know that he was going to be the first Catholic president of the United States. And he obviously didn't care whom he killed in pursuit of this ambition. This vicious political performance contributed to Artie's disgust with the public and its manipulators. After playing some Gramercy Five gigs with Tal Farlow and Hank Jones, he quit playing completely. He moved to Spain, there to finish *I Love You, I Hate You, Drop Dead,* whose acerbic content to some extent reflects his state of mind at the time.

After he returned to the United States in 1960, he tried his hand at several things. He started, of all things, a rifle-range and gun-manufacturing business. At one point he set out to become a marksman and got so good that he placed fourth in national competition. He established, and did well at, a film-distribution company. It was while he had this company that I first met him. That would have been about 1966. He had read a novel of mine which dealt with the music business and talked to me about filming it. We had several meetings during which we discussed a possible restructuring of the story in script form.

I did not see him again — except once, at a distance during a party; and I did not speak to him, thinking he would not remember me — for fifteen years. And when I did he said, "Hey, man, you disappeared on me back in New York. What happened?"

"I don't know," I said.

But I did know. I couldn't handle him at all in those days. I found him too intense, too serious, and too angry, all of which could be said of me as well at the time. Viet Nam was in full flaming flower, and I hardly needed Artie's outrage and pessimism over man's rush toward destruction to reinforce my own. So I split. Fast.

When I encountered him again in California, I found him changed — still a dominating talker, to be sure, but somehow more accessible. And witty. And funny. And his anger had softened into a kind of resignation. He was living alone in the house at Newbury Park with his books and his typewriter and a

Hindemith is as little suited to lulling the senses of the stupid as he is to arousing the interest of the intelligent.
— Constant Lambert (1905—1951)

big friendly English sheepdog named Chester Chaucer and a Hindsberg grand piano at which he would occasionally sit in solitary musing — "I've done some stupid things in my life," he said recently — playing Debussy or Scriabin. Now and then he would have friends in for dinner and, to judge by his protestations, he finally had his life in the rational control he had so assiduously sought to impose on it. But a certain loneliness, like a fine gray rain, seemed to have come over him. He never said so, and I never asked, but I could sense it.

There were traces of the old Artie Shaw, to be sure. He was teaching a course at Oxnard College not so much about music as esthetics in general. At the end of it, he asked the class if they had any questions. A young man stood up and said, "I play three instruments, piano, tenor, and bass."

"You've got a problem right there," Artie said. "What do you consider your primary instrument?"

"Bass, I guess."

"Because you can get away with more on bass, right? People can't hear pitch that well down in those registers. But what's your question?"

"I hate to practice," the young man said.

"Is that a question?"

"Well, yeah."

"Practicing goes with the territory, man. But I still don't know what the question is."

"What do I do about it?"

"Quit playing," Artie said.

He asked the class if they'd got anything out of the course. One elderly man said, "You seem to be saying: We pass this way but once, so pay attention."

And one girl asked such penetrating musical questions that Artie asked what she did for a living and she said she was a flute player. He asked her if she was any good. She hesitated. He told her a story: when Helen Forrest applied for a job with his band, he asked her too if she was any good. And she too hesitated — conditioned by society, like so many of us, to affect a modesty one does not really feel. He told her that if she wasn't sure whether she was good, why should he audition her? And she said she was indeed good, and he auditioned her, and she became one of his two favorites of the singers who worked with his bands. (The other was Billie Holiday.) And so Artie asked the flute player again if she was any good, and she said, "Yeah, I'm pretty good." And Artie said that in that case he'd like to hear her. And later he called me and I went with him to that concert in Ventura, and that's how I met Jennifer Carey. A week or two later he brought her over to my house and he and Jennifer and my wife and I went to dinner. I found that Jennifer had a wonderful rich sense of humor and a maturity beyond her years.

Soon after that I attended a rehearsal in Ventura by a band directed by Bruce Allen Hardy and assembled to present a concert of classic Shaw arrangements, with Abe Most playing the clarinet parts. Artie turned up with Jennifer. At one point he got onto the podium to rehearse the band himself. Leonard Feather, who was there, said, "I never thought I'd live to see Artie Shaw in front of a band again." "I never thought I'd see him in front of a band at all," I said, "because I never saw his band." I sat with Jennifer while Artie worked with the musicians. I was surprised at the ease with which he could shape phrases, work out dynamic problems. During a moment's confusion, he told the brass players their notes and sang the lines, although he had not seen these arrangements in thirty years and was not looking at them now. (There they were, those old road charts, gray and soiled, a saxophone part on *Begin the Beguine* marked up with pencil and stained by some long-ago coffee cup.)

"Have you heard these before?" I asked Jennifer.

"Some of them."

"What do they do for you?"

"I find them fascinating. But what do they do for you?" And I knew exactly what she meant.

"Well, it's not nostalgia," I said. "Chiefly, I feel as if I'm hearing some of them for the first time, because I could never hear the bass lines before."

Artie felt frustrated by the rehearsal. "How can you rehearse twenty charts in four hours?" he said. "The material should have at least two or three weeks of rehearsal and then be played in on the road for a while." He left the rehearsal early and he did not attend the concert.

In the weeks after that, Artie saw Jennifer with increasing frequency. Finally he called me to say that he was deeply troubled by the situation. If he expected to hear a discouraging word, he came to the wrong man. A cellist friend of mine married one of his students, a girl years younger than himself. But they had everything in common, and although she outlived him, her life is the richer for the years they had together, and she has no regrets. Artie likes solitude. So do I. It has its advantages, particularly to a writer. But they wear a little thin in the evening. We are all walking on a fragile bridge over eternity, and happiness is not in such copious supply that any of us can afford to turn it down. Artie said something that struck me as terribly funny: "Goddamn it, don't encourage me at what I want to do!"

I swung off Highway 101 and wove through the winding streets to Artie's house, which, at the end of a short lane lined by oleanders, is hidden from the street. I was thinking about a book I'd been reading, Margaret Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, whose central thesis is that a new kind of thinking is emerging as we bring about a better balance between the left lobe of the brain — the rational, calculating, logical side of the brain (at least it is in right-handed people) — and the right, which is the dreaming, image-holding, pattern-perceiving but wordless lobe. Ferguson says that Teilhard de Chardin's noosphere is in fact coming to pass. She says that this new thought has come about through various means, experiments with psychedelics, Zen, yoga, Alcoholics Anonymous, meditation. She says that people who think this new way — beyond governments, beyond the old patterns of social organization — have begun to coalesce into informal networks which in turn are linking up with other networks, and that in time we will make a massive leap into the future. I found the book fascinating, though excessively optimistic. But I think it is sound in its main argument, although one cannot help hoping we reach this New Jerusalem before one of the nitwits pushes the button.

As I got out of the car, I was intending to tell Artie about the

book. He opened the door and the conversation began, in the middle as usual. He said, "Hey, man, I got a book you should read."

"What's it called?"

"*The Aquarian Conspiracy*."

"I'm reading it."

"Well, that takes care of that. It's a little too much on the bright side, but she has some things to say."

"What else have you been reading?" I said as we settled on the sofas of the living room.

"It's kind of interesting. I've been re-reading Hemingway. I was astonished to see what had shaped me in many respects. Hemingway shaped our whole generation, of course. He stood there like a block in the road. You couldn't ignore him. It interested me to find that the kinds of values he espouses in certain stories — *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber, The Snows of Kilimanjaro* — are essentially the stiff-upper-lip we-don't-speak-about-that upper-class British thing: like looking down on some poor bastard who runs from a charging lion. Not done, dear boy. Right? Man, if a charging lion comes at me, you're gonna see me under the nearest couch, and I don't care about anybody saying, 'That's just not done.'

"Which takes me right back to old Socrates, where he says in *The Apologia*, 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' When you go back to re-reading something that helped shape you, you can examine *why* you feel a certain way, why you think certain things that aren't logically sound. *Why* do we feel in our bones that to be afraid is a very bad thing? You're not necesarily a coward to bow to superior force, and a wounded charging lion is something I would definitely call superior force.

"And you're not necessarily foolish to examine what music is — *music*, not popular entertainment. There's a big difference between the artist and the entertainer. When we talk about Elvis Presley or John Denver or Fleetwood Mac, we're talking about entertainment. Now there's nothing wrong with entertainment. But we ought to make a distinction between that and art.

"Take Phil Woods — or anybody who's an artist. The man has a serious purpose, which is basically to do what he does to his utmost limits. If the audience doesn't like it, that's too bad. He naturally wishes they did. But he can't stop himself. Where the entertainer says, 'Give the people what they want,' the artist says, 'No, I'm gonna give the people what *I* want. And if they don't like it, *tant pis*, that's tough, but I gotta do it.' Isn't that the basic distinction? And don't we overlook it?

"I keep telling people, 'If you want to play your own kind of music, get yourself a livelihood. If you want to write your own kind of music, do something like what Charles Ives did — run an insurance company, or take up carpentry, whatever.' I read something somewhere recently. If you cheat on your own ability, for instance by writing less than your best, in order to make money, you're doing something that'll vitiate your abilities forever.

"It's too bad most people can't seem to see these distinctions. When you're a young man just getting out in the world, one or your biggest problems is, 'How am I going to make a living?' In order to do it, you must please a certain number of people so they'll pay you the money you need. When you get past that — that is, if you grow — you can then ask yourself, 'Now. What do I want to *do*? Rather than, 'How do I make more money?' And the more they make, the more some like it, and they laugh, as they say, 'all the way to the bank.' Man, what a phrase. But they've stopped growing. I prefer to invert the old phrase, 'If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?' and make it, 'If you're so wise, why ain't you poor?'

"A few weeks ago I was at a writers' conference in Santa Barbara. Joey Bushkin was playing piano, and he talked about Bing Crosby. When he was working with Bing, he played something and Bing liked it and the audience liked it. The next time Joey played it differently. Bing said to him — and Joey quoted this with some admiration — 'If you do it right and the audience likes it, why change it?' Joey looked at me and said, 'Don't you agree?' And I said, 'No. If you're an artist, you have to change it. How can you keep doing the same thing over and over without being bored to death? And the boredom, if you're someone who's capable of growth, eventually communicates itself to an audience.' Point is, the reason Lawrence Welk has been so successful is that he does what would bore me to tears and does it with great enthusiasm. You were right about Guy Lombardo — he did what he did very well. But it was Model T music, of course. He was a sweet guy, and the band played Model T music. We used to laugh at them when I was a kid. When I was seventeen, I worked right across the street from him in Cleveland. I was listening to Bix and Tram at the time, and the Goldkette band and, occasionally, even the Dixieland Five. Guy's was a perfectly okay sweet band, like Jan Garber, Paul Specht. Paul Whiteman, mostly, was a sweet band.

"But it's a strange thing to look at the business forty years later and realize, 'It's going *backwards*.' That bothers me. It seems to be a mirror of what's happening to the entire world.

"Morally and ethically, we seem to be going backwards. We've now got a thing called the corporation, which is of course simply a device for the abrogation of individual responsibility. You say, 'What time is it? and the waiter says, 'This ain't my table.' People in corporations say, 'I don't make policy.' Fine. But then why are you there? They can steal from you, but the bottom line is, 'How much money have we made this year?'

"The robber baron was a respected man. Today, if Robert Vesco came back and paid his dues — served a short sentence, got a parole, all that — he would probably be respected. Bernard Cornfeld lives in a mansion in Beverly Hills. Look at the David Biegelman case. The elimination of moral responsibility seems to be where we are. As they say, Nixon would have been fine if only he'd erased the tapes."

"By the way," I said, "I never did understand that. All you have to do to ruin a tape is set it on a TV set."

"He handled it very clumsily," Artie said. "Like most everything else. Maybe he was nervous. Would you like some wine?"

"I would indeed."

I followed Artie into the kitchen. He took a chilled caraffe from the refrigerator and poured two glasses of white wine. When we returned to the living room, I said, "Listen. You come on as a man attempting, at least, to solve his problems through rationality. Always you try to be so rational. But then I listen to your playing, and I happen to think it is virtually impossible to lie on a horn..."

"I agree with you about that. I listen to people play or sing and I know whether they're decent people or not."

I mentioned a player whose reputation as a human being is not an enviable one. "I think you can hear it in his tone," I said. "There's a meanness there."

"It's true," Artie said. "If it's not meanness, it's pettiness. And it's preoccupation with technique as opposed to content. Technique is valuable only insofar as it enables you to do what you want to do. Beyond that, it's like a Japanese acrobat doing four somesaults into a chair. Why not just walk in and sit down? That's what chairs are for. If you're going to demonstrate your dexterity, find a way to do it that's useful. It's not useful to do four somersaults into a chair. It might be *spectacular*, and there are always lots of people who'll fall for it, but it's got nothing to do with how to sit down."

"To get back to my question. You come on as the ultimate rationalist, you..."

"I try."

"Yes, you try. But when I hear you play..."

"That's not always rational," he said, and laughed.

"You're ducking. I say that beneath the rational facade is a hopeless romantic."

"Well, what I'm going to say could not have been said up until about ten years ago. Until then, brain studies had not evolved to the point where we could talk about the two hemispheres of the brain the way we do now. I'm largely a left-brain person, or fight hard to be. But a lot of me *is* right-brain. The difference between the artist and other people is that you try to take the right brain's findings and put it together in the left brain to make it rational. But that doesn't mean that you eliminate dreams, eliminate the instinctive or perceptual or intuitive approach to things. When I play — when I used to play — I never quite planned out where I was going. I'd get into something that felt good, and then go along with it."

"I'm reminded," I said, "of something a friend of mine, a symphony conductor, said about Mozart. He said Mozart would be developing his material logically and then suddenly he'd come up with something so unexpected and off the wall and yet so right that you wonder how he thought of it."

"The point is that he didn't *think* of it."

"Which clarifies something Bill Evans argued. He said that any kind of music that was not somehow in touch with the process of improvisation was likely to be sterile."

"Of course. If music is all left-brain, it comes out cold. If it's all right-brain, it comes out chaos. When I was playing, if I got into a good solo, my right brain was doing it. My left brain was translating it into fingers."

"There's a remark attributed to Charlie Parker: first you learn the instrument, then you learn the music, then you forget all that shit and just play."

"Right. Learn enough technique, develop enough ability that you can then ignore it. Use a boat to get to the other side of the river. Then you don't need the boat any more. You turn the switch that says, 'Improvise'. Technique is something you learn so you can throw it out. Charlie was dead right.

"It's funny, the idea of being an artist. In *The Aquarian Conspiracy* she talks about... Well, it's an old story and I've been saying it for years, but I'm always pleased to see someone else come to the same conclusion. She says in essence, 'Do what you enjoy doing and then it will no longer be work and you'll have a good life.' And live on what you can earn doing that.

"I keep telling people: all of us can be better than we are. The only way we can do it, though, is to make up our minds what we want and go for it. Everything else is secondary. How many human beings grow up and get on a treadmill that was devised by their society, their friends, their relatives? The treadmill is: this is the kind of house you should live in, this is the kind of wife and kids you should have, this is the Mercedes you should drive. And they *do* it. And then they say, 'How do I pay this rent?' And they go scrambling around on the treadmill, paying the rent. Rather than growing up in a sane society that says, 'What do you love the most?' 'Well, I love to draw — draw and paint.' All right, make whatever money you can at it. If you need to supplement it, do something else. Live that way and you'll find you go to work *enjoying* it. How many people do you know who do that? We live with so many false assumptions. Someone once said to me, 'An assumption is the mother of a fuck-up.' And we sure are fucking up. Look at this world."

Wagner has good moments but bad quarter hours.

—Gioacchino Rossini (1792—1868)

"You live a very privileged life," I said. "So do I, for that matter. A lot of people do things they hate."

"A lot of luck was involved, in my case. I could have become hooked on that narcotic of success. I came very close. At a certain point I found myself doing things I loathed, to pay an overhead I didn't need, to acquire things I didn't want."

"You deftly ducked my earlier question. I said I think you're a hopeless romantic."

"Well, I don't think 'hopeless' is the right word."

"Let's not talk about the adjective, let's stick to the noun."

"All right. Let's ask ourselves a question about 'romantic'. If 'romantic' is to believe, in spite of all the horseshit and in spite of the fact that we die at the end of it all, there is some good to be got out of this experience called living, then yes, I am a romantic. I believe living is the only crap game in town. And I want to live my life to its fullest. Do you know the Zen koan, 'I draw the wood and I haul the water. How extraordinary.'? If you translate that into terms of modern science, you suddenly see that it has a marvellous logic to it.

"We have learned that there are electrons, protons, neutrons, nuclei. We have been told that a table which appears solid is actually composed of tiny electrical charges spaced as far apart as the stars in space, and that, in fact, matter is merely a vast amount of space held together by what scientists call 'the strong force'.

"Now go back to 'I draw the wood.' The wood is billions of atoms. 'I haul the water.' The water is also atoms. And I, who do the hauling, am also atoms. So we have this curious conglomeration of atoms hauling other atoms. That's a pretty extaordinary idea, right?

"That's what the *Tao of Physics* is about. And if you read Alan Watts or any of the modern mystics who are looking into what reality is about, as opposed to what we always thought it was about, we're not so far apart."

"We are seeing at last," I said, "the fusion of Western and Eastern thought."

"You must read *The Morning of the Magicians*," Artie said. "Its thesis is simple. Simple, not easy. The thesis more or less is this:

"If you look back at Egypt — a civilization that lasted five thousand years — ours has lasted only two thousand — you realize that they did some remarkable things. Look at the colossal statues of their gods. Look at the pyramids. Look at geometry, at algebra, at their astronomy, look at their great dynasties. They knew that *pi* was the way you measured a circle. They knew you *couldn't* measure it, yet they made fountains that were circular. Everything worked — and all of it based on the premise that *the earth was flat and it was the center of the universe.* Their geometry was flat, yet they accomplished all these practical things.

"*The Morning of the Magicians* deals with the fact that we are now at a point where rationality alone can no longer account for what we see. What we now believe and take for granted, just as the Egyptians took for granted that you could fall off the edge of a flat earth, will, in several thousand years, when people look back at us, seem so absurd that they'll say, 'My God, those people actually operated on the assumption that if they touched each other, no magnetic things happened, no magic flowed.' In short, we have come to the limit of Western rationalism.

"Look at the glory, look at the marvel, look at the wonder of life. It's satori, man. I look at those clouds every night. The oleanders are going crazy now. The simple miracle of existence is the one I just can't get past."

He got up from the sofa. "How about another glass of wine?"

"Yes," I said, "and then I have to split."

"First I've got something to show you," he said.

We poured the wine and then he led me through a door into the garage. He opened the big lift door to let in the sunlight. And there was an eye-popping new burnt-orange Datsun sports car with an open roof.

"Outasight," I said.

"It handles like a Porsche," Artie said. And then he read my mind. I was considering the car's color and finding it significant. And as if to refute what I was thinking, he said, "It was one they happened to have in stock."

"Really?" I said. And what I was thinking was this:

Up until then, Artie had been driving a Volkswagen Rabbit which gets, he boasted, "about a thousand miles to a gallon" of Diesel fuel. It was a left-lobe car, a "sensible" car bought for good and defensible reasons of linear logic. But this Datsun was not a sensible car. It was a car to appeal to the right lobe of the brain, a car designed for fools and dreamers, and I knew it, and — more to the point — Artie knew I knew it.

"Well well well," I said with a smile.

"I'm going to take a trip," he said, and sank his wheels deeper into the sand. "Jennifer and I are going to drive east and see the autumn foliage."

"I see."

About that time Jennifer arrived. I greeted her and said, "I gotta go." I got into my car, and Artie called, "Wait a minute. Tell her the Zoot Sims story."

"Oh," I said. "I should check with Zoot to see if it's true, but it sounds like him. Zoot was doing a clinic. A young musician got up and said, 'On a D-seventh chord, I play a D melody note. Is D a good note?' And Zoot said, 'D is a very good note. I love D.'"

I left Jennifer and Artie in the driveway, laughing.

Buddy Rich has said that it was a tragedy that Artie Shaw gave up music. Artie's answer to that is, "It wasn't a tragedy for me." Maybe. Maybe not. But a young man with an outstanding gift for what we now see as a right-lobe function — the making of significant improvised music — was so tortured by the fame it brought him that he literally turned his life inside out. He turned to the act of writing, which is logical and linear and of the left lobe, despite all the splattered images in the disjunct prose broken into short lines that we have come to call poetry in our time. And he has lived to see our Western system of logic called into question by those working on the outer fringes of physics and astronomy. That may in fact be a tragedy, even for him. But it's his life.

There is a further puzzle about Artie Shaw that should be, and I think can be, cleared up.

There would seem to be a contradiction between his "elitism" and his refusal to accept a commission in the Navy because he wanted to play for the enlisted men. But that contradiction is not real.

The words "elitist" and "elitism" require examination. They are being used in our time as a subtle derogation of those who believe that work should be done to its highest possible level. There was a time when that belief was a vital component of the American ethic. But "elitist" is used today by such people as record company press agents (and all the other apologists for bad art) for the purpose of discrediting excellence. It is essential that they do this if they are to fulfill their assigned task of selling crap. By substituting "elitism" for "the-search-for-excellence", they achieve a brain graft on the unthinking, implanting the idea that the excellent is bad because not everyone can attain it. What Artie Shaw was telling the young man at that Pittsburgh theater was: "Don't fawn over excellence: *achieve* it. If I can do it, you can do it. So *do* it." In a few more months, we will be in 1984, and it is fascinating to see how Orwell's prediction of a thought-form called doublethink has come true. Applied to esthetics, particularly those of music, the commerical panders are now able to suggest, by a linguistic distortion, that excellent is bad and mediocre is best on the grounds that excellence is somehow undemocratic. One wonders if they would want these standards applied to doctors or aircraft mechanics.

The fact of the matter is that Artie Shaw is an intensely egalitarian man. His attitude is manifest in the statement, "All of us can be better than we are." His objection to the invasion of the artist's privacy is of course quite justified. Every artist resents it, although many handle it with greater patience than Artie did. But I suspect his distaste for autograph-seekers has a deeper cause than even he suspects. I think it is rooted in his egalitarianism. I think he feels in some as-yet unformulated way that no man should grovel to another for any reason whatsoever, least of all the tenuous condition called fame. I think he stopped giving autographs for precisely that reason that I at an early age stopped seeking them: I could not accept the implied inequality of the action, could not accept that any man was my superior, except in his specialized area of work — and in that I *expected* excellence. Asking for an autograph was an obeisance I was not willing to give. And it was an obeisance Artie Shaw was not willing to accept.

A final question remains, one that everyone asks: Will Artie Shaw ever play again?

He insists that he will not. I am not so sure he won't. I confess that I have been quietly needling him on the subject for about a year, dropping little hints here and there about why he should pick up his axe again. And sometimes I think I hear him hesitate before saying, "No, never." But perhaps that is just wishful thinking on my part. He did say something that I thought was significant — as if the glacier just might be shifting. He attended a James Galloway concert with Jennifer. Afterwards he said, "That audience knew what it was listening to. If we'd had audiences like that when I was in the business, I just might still be playing."

This much I do know: he is thinking seriously about forming a new band. He says that, if he does, he will limit himself to hiring and rehearsing it. Then he will send it on its way with someone else as its leader. That strikes me as being like deciding to get a little bit pregnant. But he is a very disciplined and a very stubborn man.

At least he has admitted to a romanticism that anyone with ears could always hear in his playing. At least he has come, along with growing numbers of informed and thoughtful people, to accept that there are limitations to Western linear logic.

And who can tell what a man in a burnt-orange sports car will do?

A Memory

Some years ago I wrote a sonnet that has been printed in several different places, the first time as a liner note for Herbie Mann. I was thinking of all music and all musicians when I wrote it, and of one in particular. A number of them have asked for copies of it.

The morning after the Newport Jazz Festival riot of 1960, I went for a walk through the town.

As I walked along Cliff Walk, I heard a faint sound like that of Greek pan pipes, eerie and beautiful. I searched for the source and realized it was somewhere down the cliff. I climbed down and came upon Eric Dolphy, sitting alone, lost in thought, and playing his flute to the breaking sea. Eric saw me then and waved, and I joined him. We talked, sitting there on the rocks, for perhaps half an hour. Finally, I said, "Don't stop playing, man." And Eric resumed, his music gentle and soft and lyrical, like the morning itself. I left him there. I never saw him again.

Long after Eric had died in Paris, I wrote this for him:

Music is a strange and useless thing.
It doesn't offer cover from the storm.
It doesn't, really, ease the sting
of living, or nourish us, or keep us warm.

And men expend their lives in search of sound,
in learning how to juggle bits of noise,
and by their swift illusions to confound
the heart with fleeting and evasive joys.

Yet I am full of quaking gratitude
that this exalted folly still exists,
that in an age of cold computer mood,
a piper still can whistle in the mists.
His notes are pebbles falling into time.
How sweetly mad it is, and how sublime.