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Jazzletter

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Letters

I was taken with your recognition of Beiderbecke's enormously underrated influence. Shortly before my retirement from the faculty at Carleton College, I taught a course entitled *Lord and Duke* and another entitled *Bix and Bird.* Together the two were designed to examine the contributions to jazz history made respectively by New Orleans, New York, Chicago, and Kansas City. In both cases I emphasized comparison as well as contrast. Ellington might dismiss Morton, but Duke had more in common with Jelly than with anyone else — including stature. And when I projected my sequel, composer John Eaton immediately responded by citing several basic ways in which Parker provided a parallel to Beiderbecke.

John S. Lucas, Winona, Minnesota

Don't give me any great credit for insight. One of the people who missed the boat on Bix was me. John S. Lucas is a poet and a retired English professor. Under the byline Jax, he was, during his graduate student days, a reviewer for Down Beat.

Roses in the Morning moved me to tears. Mercer's lyrics have always been great favorites of mine, and I loved his vocal way with a song, especially in the early Capitol days. Even as a kid I sensed his artistry in the bird songs like *Skylark.*

Recently I heard an Ellington version of, of all things, *Margie,* from 1934. It was Rex Stewart's first appearance with the band and I was struck by the obvious influence of Bix, bearing out your conviction of his being such an important factor in the development of the art.

Janet Kelsey, Honolulu

Janet Kelsey is a retired English teacher.

I enjoyed the piece on Johnny Mercer. I met him only once, but when I did, he did me a favor I didn't deserve. I was a kid reporter, very green, and I had buggered up an assignment and Mercer bailed me out by giving me an excuse.

Why is it that so many lyricists, often better musicians and tunesmiths than the guys they write lyrics for, are so timid about letting their own tune-writing get heard? Mercer was one such. So is Sheldon Harnick, who will *only* write lyrics for the Broadway stage (*Fiddler,* etc.) but who is a superbly trained musician. My friend Frank Roberts staged a comic opera of Harnick's in D.C. some years ago, a one-act spoof of French Impressionist operatic style with the lyrics coming out of a Berlitz manual and the music a flawless send-up of the Debussy of *Pelleas et Melisande.*

George Warren, Monterey, California

Former guitarist George Warren, who used to have a studio in Los Angeles with Laurindo Almeida, is now a novelist. And this brings us to a most interesting subject...

...the pimps, procurers, and purveyors of popular culture who own stage, screen, and radio...

—Nicholas von Hoffman

The Musician as Writer

When Roberta Mandel, the singer and pianist, subscribed to the *Jazzletter,* she said she thought I deserved a medal for optimism. "I didn't know musicians read anything but notes," she said, thereby — in spite of the fact that she is witty and articulate herself — indicating her submission to the image of the jazz musician as inarticulate boob (not that we haven't all known a few who filled the bill). So many writers have written that "jazz musicians are not normally an articulate group," or some variation thereon, that, I think, the musicians themselves came to believe it. No one who ever hung around Jim and Andy's could accept that image of the jazz musician. My God, the talk there was incessant. You could drown in exchanges that went on from eleven a.m. until closing.

But I had no idea just how articulate jazz musicians really are. Until now, that is. I have been inundated, to my great pleasure, not only with long and highly literate letters but even with entire books, some of which, including one by Ernie Furtado, I still have not had time to read. Bobby Scott has just written six pieces for harp, a quintet for flute and harp — and a novel, whose first chapters are excellent. And I have become aware that some of our people have pushed this duality to the point of pursuing parallel careers as writers and musicians. Owen Cordle, for example, is a saxophonist and writer, music critic of the Raleigh, N.C., *News and Observer,* and a contributor to *Down Beat* and *Jazz Times.* Ben Sidran is a pianist, songwriter, singer, and journalist. Like Artie Shaw, Paul Desmond originally intended to write. He used to hang out not so much at J. & A.'s as Elaine's, a habitat of writers. Paul said a lot of them were very capable musicians.

Hugo Friedhofer almost became an artist and he certainly could have been a writer. When I was a student at the Ontario College of Art, preparing to be a painter, I was interested in how many of my fellows wrote poetry or played piano. There was a piano in one of the school's hallways, and it was always being played, and well. Larry Rivers is an ex-musician. Actor Michael Moriarity is a fine jazz pianist. Novelist Anthony Burgess is a substantial composer. Dudley Moore's degree is in music. Pianist Chuck Folds used to be an editor at American Heritage.

The fact is that an interest in one only of the arts is exceptional, not the rule. "Don't let anybody put you in a box!" Bobby Scott said, with passion. To love one of the arts usually is to love them all. And since a substantial part of what we call talent is an insatiable compulsion about finding out how things are done, anybody with enough smarts to find out how music is made is usually able to figure out how a painting or a book is put together. Marion Evans even figured out the stock market. Barry Little, the Toronto neurologist, pianist, and composer, is a good painter as well.

Which brings us to the subject of doctors as musicians. Terry Rogers, the Seattle pulmonary specialist, plays saxophone in a group made up entirely of doctors. Doctors tell me that doctors tend to be shallow people of narrow focus, but not the ones I know, because they are all musicians, or at least music freaks.

Oh! I just remembered. Shirley Bassey had to play a gig in Australia — Sidney, I think. Her conductor was rehearsing the

orchestra during the afternoon. The lead alto player was *terrible.* The conductor, disturbed, called the contractor aside to find out where this guy had come from. The contractor said, "He is one of the top cardiologists in Australia." "Well tell him to bring his tools tonight," the conductor said, "because when Shirley hears him she's going to have a heart attack."

Doug Hamilton, the Toronto composer and trombonist, and an excellent one, is a physician. Doug, incidentally, became one of the newest subscribers on the same day as Dizzy Gillespie, our hero. He has a superb album, called *The Brass Connection,* on the Dark Orchid label. It includes, aptly enough, Dizzy's *Tanga.* Incidentally, the Toronto musicians sometimes kid Doug about his speciality. He's a proctologist. And of course we all know about Denny Zeitlin, the composer and pianist who treats your other end. He's a psychiatrist.

I have been discussing with some of the subscribers the possibility of closing the *Jazzletter* down at the end of its second year, in July. If it does in fact cease to exist it will be due not to any lack of literacy among musicians but to the Xerox machine. It is read by a large number of people who are not subscribers. Without advertising to sustain it, it can only die as a result. It is costing more than it takes in, and indeed it has just been bailed out by a couple of our sawbones friends, Drs. Hank Maller of Los Angeles and Terry Rogers of Seattle, who have made donations.

It will sadden me more than a little if it has to be folded up. We indeed need an adult musical forum, and we are just reaching the point where the *Jazzletter* can be opened to other writers, particularly those who are also musicians.

The first of these is Dick Sudhalter, the fine cornettist of the Beiderbecke-Hackett school whose joyous album *Friends with Pleasure* can be obtained from Audiophile Records, George Buck's label, at 3008 Wadsworth Mill Place, Decatur, Ga. 30030. That album's a gas. Dick was for twelve years a UPI correspondent in Europe, covering, among other things, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Having your nose rubbed in that much dark reality is enough to send anyone fleeing into the sweet illusions of music, as I did some years ahead of Dick when I got out of newspaper reporting. Johnny Mandel recently drew my attention to the fact that quite a number of music people have been ex-journalists, including Ned Washington. Dick is also the co-author of *Bix: Man and Legend,* considered by many the definitive biography. I thought you would find Dick's reflection on Bix and traditional jazz as fascinating as I did, and I am herewith gonna lay it on ya.

And next month I'll present you with a wonderful piece by trombonist Michael Zwerin, who now writes for the *International Herald-Tribune* and many other European publications. It is a memoir on the last sad days of the Claude Thornhill band by a man who was in it and remembers it wistfully but with wild humor and a kind of searing candor.

Indiana Twilights

By Richard M. Sudhalter

NEW YORK

I suppose it was inevitable that I would want to discuss Bix with you. A crucial point is sometimes missed — that Bix never stopped being his parents' son, a product of that upper-middle class environment and ethic so clearly expressed through the Beiderbecke family and their life in Davenport. Yes, he coveted parental approval and never got it. But at root he didn't want that approval for being a jazz cornet player.

Far from it. He was awed and intimidated, impressed to tears, with what he found in Whiteman's orchestra — with virtuosity and theoretical excellence and compositional skills. For him, on the testimony of friends and acquaintances, most of them long gone now, Bix had kind of grown outside his infatuation with hot jazz by 1925. He came more and more to consider it a manifestation of adolescence. In his view, the people who clung to it were either musically stunted or, as in the case of Louis Armstrong, native geniuses.

Bix saw himself — *wanted* to see himself — as a "legitimate" or "respectable" musician, a composer, someone who could create something musically enduring and, in his view, worthwhile. His solos on the records? He liked some of them, didn't like others. Some — particularly the early Wolverines efforts — embarrassed him. It was a very revealing moment, that meeting with Sylvester Ahola which we describe in the book. Hooley remembered with lasting astonishment Bix's demeanor: looking at the floor and mumbling, "Hell, I'm just a musical degenerate..." He meant it. To him, the writing of Ferde Grofe and Gershwin and Bargy and the rest was class. It was accomplishment, Kultur, if you will. Not for nothing did he all but forsake the cornet in the last year of his life. He just didn't give a damn about it anymore. He wanted to compose, to excel as a "real" — his quotation marks more than mine — musician.

But that was half a century ago. No dropping out to take a few courses at Berklee or Juilliard or Manhattan. No chance to get his primal scream out of his system with some Park Avenue shrink. No "support system" of friends to whom he could talk. Just Hoagy and Challis, both of them wrapped up in their careers, plus a bunch of jazz guys whose adolescent mentality would remain rooted in their systems far into old age. Imagine discussing inner aesthetic and socio-musical conflicts with Wild Bill Davison, Eddie Condon, or George Wettling. Dave Tough, maybe — but then he was off in Europe somewhere playing Bohemian.

"Hell, there are only two musicians I'd go across the street to hear now," Bix said to Richardson Turner. "That's Louis and LaRocca." LaRocca for auld lang syne and Armstrong because Bix recognized him for the apocalyptic figure he was. By then jazz seemed almost irrelevant to him. Yet he was caught very securely in a classic trap. If he dropped out, went home, took any kind of left turn, he'd lose the prominence, the adulation of the musicians and the kids who formed the core jazz audience of the time. It would have constituted a loss of face and of what small self-esteem his quick rise to prominence had granted him. He had to hang on, to keep proving and proving and proving — to himself as well as to the rest. "I'm not worthless," he might have said, had he had to express it verbally.

Eddie Miller tells of a date he worked at Yale with Bix, Bunny and Bill "Jazz" Moore — a light-skinned black working in white bands — as the brass team. Eddie was just a kid then. He said he had looked forward with anticipation and wild surmise to working with his idol. Yet Bix not only didn't play all that well; he seemed alternately indifferent to the music and sullen. It was Eddie's impression that he regarded Berigan as a threat (and in one sense, if you subscribe to the jazz adversary system, the polls and tallies and other gladiatorial paraphernalia, he was) and resented his energy and dash and sheer strength. It is one of the more piquant ironies of that phase of the jazz story.

Bix was not a revolutionary, a jazz rebel. He was a nice, middle-class boy who never succeeded in bringing his prodigious musical gifts and aspirations into line with the realities of his life. Had he lived — ah, the eternal teaser! — had he lived, I am convinced he'd have ended up either writing for the movies, if the commercial lures had snared him; a significant American composer, following through what Gershwin wanted to do but couldn't because of his imperfect grasp of the native American jazz idiom; or out of music entirely.

By the way, I have always doubted the authenticity of the story wherein Louis takes out the mouthpiece and hands his horn to Bix. By then Louis was playing trumpet. Cornet — and Bix never played anything else — takes a different-sized mouthpiece. His wouldn't have fit Louis's horn. It makes good legendry, but sober considerations of fact suggest that it never happened.

Your discussion of French Autumn Syndrome prompts thought. And that's all to the good. No matter how heated the disagreements that such writing arouses, it has performed an invaluable service by stimulating thought and feeling. How much writing within what we rather foolishly called "jazz criticism" even approaches doing that? Strip away the opinion-mongering and what generally is left? Onanism, elevated through sheer energy to the level of art.

Life and love, taste and emotion and style, seem to be matters of infinite gradation — the crowd as usual made up of individuals. Language is at best an approximation, an arbitrary method for identifying things, concepts, feelings to be communicated and shared. The danger is built in. Who's to say that our own understandings of the things we try to express will correspond to the understandings of others? They seldom do, especially in those areas of experience which rely heavily on subjective response and emotional involvement. Music especially sets up all sorts of snares. Why do we enjoy what we enjoy? What penetrates the walls, scales the battlements of daily defenses and how?

Each response is custom built, formed out of a lifetime of experiences. Consensus helps a little — but its aid is deeply suspect. In the end, music is one of the eternal mysteries, reliant on personal chemistry, perception, need, and all the other variables that make us a planet of quirks and accidents.

With that in mind, can you defend your case for the nature and/or politics of the traditional jazz audience? Would you want to have to furnish corroborative proof that the "admirer of 'modern' jazz is inclined to respect the earlier styles of the music," while the lover of the earlier styles displays only contempt for latter-day developments?

Not that all those attitudes don't exist. Of course they do. But to draw such general inferences from your experience with them puts you on rather shaky turf.

Consider this. Consider one man's view. It's that of a man who doesn't belong to the Flat Earth Society, doesn't know any cops or rednecks, doesn't vote Republican (as a matter of fact usually doesn't vote, but that's another story), and loves to be challenged by life. He argues:

It is possible to perceive the jazz which emerged from this culture during the '20s and '30s as a final expression of late Nineteenth Century Romanticism. Its aesthetic foundation, manner of harmonic and melodic organization, sound, and sonorities, all seem less a part of what we've come to identify as Twentieth Century motivation than echoes of an earlier time. Indeed, the very yearning quality which finds its most explicit form in Bix, but is by no means confined to him, bespeaks lavender, lilacs, and *fin-du-siecle* twilight.

What about Bix, with his layering of jubilation and melancholy, the bittersweet afterechoes and *temps-perdu* atmosphere of his work both on cornet and at the piano? Its sound and emotional atmosphere are redolent immediately of the French Impressionists — and more directly of the salon piano idiom of this century's first two decades, themselves warmed-over Romanticism, Nineteenth Century thoughts and feelings viewed through a soft-focus lens.

Listen, with these thoughts in mind, to the large body of popular and light-classical piano music written in the 1920s, including Eastwood Lane's *Adirondack Sketches,* Willard Robison's *Rural Revelations,* and such Rube Bloom confections as *Soliloquy* and *Suite of Moods.* They provide a context within which Beiderbecke's ruminations at the piano seem very much the expression of a *Zeitgeist.* What is most remarkable about *In a Mist* and the rest, I think, is not what they are — viewed objectively, they are charming but in some respects unremarkable — but who wrote them and how. The notion that a self-taught hot cornet player brought these pieces into being says much about him, even more about American music in the early Twentieth Century.

Armstrong. What did Louis really do? What made him so extraordinary? At least one man's answer comes readily: he created a distinctive, individual model for a solo style, both on his instrument and all others, a style with its own integrity and logic, aesthetic coherence and emotional arc. Yes, but listen to *bel canto* singing, especially in the tenor repertoire, throughout French and Italian opera of the late Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth. Play a record of Pavarotti singing *Gelida Manina* from *Boheme* back to back with Armstrong's final chorus on the Okeh *When You're Smiling.* Compare the gathering intensity and the inner cry of *Willie the Weeper* or the bravura stop-time chorus on *Potato Head Blues* with climactic moments in *Turandot, Tosca, Norma, Lucia,* and the rest. The language, the frame of reference, is the same.

At one minute after midnight on January 1, 1900, nobody closed a door, lowered a trunk lid, or erased a blackboard. Things went on as usual, with all sorts of expressions of hope that the new century would improve on the old and usher in some kind of golden age which would wed the accumulated wisdom of ages and the wonders of technological progress. No one knew what to expect, and it took, I would submit, a couple of decades or more for the character of the new century, in particular the effect of burgeoning technology, to assert itself. In the meantime, music of all sorts simply continued to do what it had always done: to express aspirations, strive for excellence and beauty.

Why should jazz have been any different? If anything, it was slower than many other forms to explore the implications of a technologically-dominated world. Jazz musicians during the 1920s were still fooling with whole-tone scales and parallel ninth chords fifteen years or more after Stravinsky unveiled *Le sacre* and *The Firebird.*

In sum, I believe that the Nineteenth Century and its aesthetic priorities saturate early jazz. And I would submit that there are many, many people who listen to that music, love it, lobby for it, and for just that reason. Whatever their individual reasons, many of them (or us, since I would include myself) respond more vigorously to the stimuli and aspirations of that age — identify with, as they say nowadays, values and ideas rooted in those times. We still perceive a coherent and enduring set of aesthetic standards in the music of those years, a set of standards which seem to look better and better as the Twentieth Century grinds its angry, violent way along.

We are discussing an age which had not yet shifted from idealizing life to reflecting it, an age which asked art to stimulate imagination, to reach out and up. In the context of those values, that age, it is possible to ask, "Why *should* art simply reflect life? Isn't life (reality, if you like) prosaic and demoralizing enough, frustrating and downright ugly enough, without being reflected and projected again through music, painting and literature?"

It is a basic philosophic difference that pervades every level of this culture. It's Webster's International (prescriptive) vs. Webster's Third International (descriptive); Fred and Ginger (idealized) vs. *Taxi Driver* (descriptive).

I believe it took jazz close to forty years to catch up to the heartbeat of the Twentieth Century. I believe that bebop was the

result. It said, in essence, "Why waste your time mooring and dreaming? That's not life, *this* is life. Life is full of tension and nervousness and *angst*. Life shatters dreams into fragments, then reassembles them according to the moment and the mood." For a long time, romanticism all but disappeared from modern jazz (or whatever else one feels like calling the jazz which grew out of the war years). Without reaching too far for a point, it is possible to conclude that World War II really dragged popular art kicking and screaming at last into the Twentieth Century. The first war, the Great War, the "war to end war" — had been endured; the nation heaved a vast sigh of relief on Armistice Day and vowed that now we knew better and it would never happen again, not like that.

Let us not forget the ability of music to move us. For many years, jazz — and I think part of the grievance of many traditional jazz lovers can be traced to this — seemed to have collectively forgotten this. Or rejected it. The music impressed its listeners: no dearth of complexity, technical mastery, harmonic and melodic inventiveness, sheer ingenuity. But there is something quite else in the ability to play a note, a phrase, and bring a tear to the eye of the guy sitting at the corner table. Remember that feeling, when you ache and exult and tremble and suffer, all at once, because of something somebody played or sang?

A lot of us live for those moments, the moments that allow us to leave the scene of the experience just a bit different from what we were when we arrived. Far from wanting not to be challenged, this in a sense is the ultimate challenge — not to the head but to the heart, not to knowledge and skill, which we acquire at no cost to ourselves, but to our innermost reservoirs of feeling; the things we guard and keep secret and defend. Bix Beiderbecke reached me on that level the first time I ever heard him on a record. For all my years of hearing and growing and broadening and understanding my world, he still does. And I'm very very glad of it.

Eddie Condon and his close associates suffered now and then from a kind of selective musical myopia. And their pronouncements — especially Eddie's, in that he was among the most vocal and compulsively articulate of them — occasionally did harm.

Red Nichols is a case in point. Few — least of all Red, were he still living — would make a case for him as a jazz soloist of towering resourcefulness and originality. What he was, however, deserves recognition. He was a superb, well-disciplined trumpet player, an organizer of excellent bands, and an energetic promulgator of good jazz. He managed to get work, good record opportunities, and exposure for good musicians. He was responsible for a large and still impressive body of fine recorded music, in a sense the modern jazz of its day — musically literate, harmonically and melodically varied, and sometimes fascinating in its ingenuity. It didn't swing much. But, as has been proven again and again, it *do* mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. It had its own integrity, and established a standard. The efforts of Mole, the Dorseys, Livingstone, Schutt, Rollini, McDonough, Vic Berton, and the rest — and of Red himself — were a model to an entire generation, black and white.

It was not, as many have claimed with the luxury of hindsight, merely wrong-headedness. Nichols and the musicians with whom he surrounded himself were far and away the most accomplished jazz musicians of their time. Some day, when racial parochialism from both camps has spent itself and the guilt paroxysms of the 1960s and '70s have subsided, perhaps we'll be able to enjoy a balanced, comfortable, and fair appraisal of the roles of white and black musicians in the formative jazz years.

Artie Shaw, for example, is quite right: the Casa Loma Orchestra was indeed the pioneer force among white swing bands. More than that, it is interesting to listen to records by the Mills Blue Rhythm Band and others of that period, to hear how very influential the Casa Loma band was.

Two decades after the war to end war, it not only happened again but it happened worse. No more time for dreams and backward looks. Too much grubby reality staring us all in the face. No wonder the jazz of those days said "Screw you, Jack," in almost its every note and phrase.

There are no absolute realities, no truths save perceived ones. If our century has adopted, at last, an aesthetic quite different from that of the century that preceded it, let us remember it is only that: different. Not better or worse, only different.

It's only too comprehensible. Not the full story, of course. Nothing's ever that simple. But as you fill in the details, they all seem to fall in place.

Yet humanity always confounds the experts. Despite the times, despite the realities and the atmosphere and the prevailing attitudes, people insist on growing up listening to the voices within their heads. How else to explain a middle-class boy from Newton, Mass., who spends his teen years full of dreams of Hoagy and Willard Robison, Bix, Tram, Red, and Miff, Indiana twilights and country lanes and the scent of lilacs in summer dusk.

I apologize for running on so long. But that, my friend, is the effect the *Jazzletter* has. And you want to hang it up?

—RMS

One Pianist...

For reasons that are really not all that obvious, tragic art has always held a higher status than comic art. This is as true in music as it is in literature. Music that is cheerful and charming and tends to shed sunlight is never taken as seriously as that which reminds us of the darkness around us. We see this is Beethoven's work. His "cheerful" symphonies, for some reason those bearing even numbers, particularly the fourth, sixth, and eighth, do not have the weight in collective esteem as the third, fifth, seventh and ninth. Or consider Mendelssohn. His music has an airiness about it and often is shot through with a warm light. And it is not given the credit that is probably its due. The brightness and popularity of Paul Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* blinds us to what an extraordinarily good piece of music it actually is. The same can be said of the music of Johann Strauss the younger. We have lost sight of what a beautifully made (and orchestrated) piece of music is *The Blue Danube*.

Why is this? Why do we value melancholy more than joy in our art? Do we crave it more than we do happiness? If so, is it because of guilt feelings? Is it because, in our puritanism, we are more easily able to accept pleasure in the guise of sorrow? Is this a manifestation of self-destructiveness? We have the well-documented case of Norman Cousins who, stricken with a grave degenerative disease, exposed himself hour after hour and day after day to movie comedies, and proved in spite of the poorest possible prognosis that laughter is indeed healing. After his recovery, he wrote a book on the subject.

Why then do we honor our tragedians more than our comedians? I don't know. It is as hard to write comedy as it is to write tragedy, and it takes as much skill or more.

These thoughts kept recurring as I was listening to a new album by Lincoln Mayorga. Lincoln, if you are not familiar with his work, is a superb California pianist, primarily in a "classical" style, constantly on call in the recording studios. He was also the co-founder and co-owner (with Doug Sax) of Sheffield Records, which made the first direct-to-disc LPs and to a large extent inspired the next great leap forward in recording technology. Lincoln has recorded twelve pieces in the genre of novelty compositions for the piano that became popular more than sixty years ago, that body of music to which Dick Sudhalter refers.

Their popularity continued into the 1930s and some of these works have had a residual influence that still is with us.

In general these pieces have an antic quality. They lean toward a dry syncopation reminiscent of ragtime. Often they utilize an wide-jumping left hand characteristic of stride piano. And they are mostly happy pieces, which no doubt is why they have not been taken seriously, despite the efforts of pianists from time to time — Dick Hyman, for one, — to remind us of their worth.

Light-spirited they may be, but easy to play they are not. They take practice. This tells us something about the America of the period. "It was an era of many pianists of high literacy," Lincoln said when I was listening to a tape of the album just prior to its release. "You had to play reasonably well or you could never tackle these things. You certainly couldn't sell many copies of them in sheet music today. But in those days, they sold in the millions."

Some of the pieces, such as Zez Confrey's *Kitten on the Keys* and *Dizzy Fingers,* will be familiar to people over forty-five or so. Others, like *The Moth,* by Lee Sims, probably will not.

How Lincoln became acquainted with this repertoire is a story in itself. He used to work in a piano duo with Lou Busch under the group name of The Brinkerhoff Piano Company. Busch was an a&r man at Capitol Records in Hollywood, a fine pianist and by all accounts a fine man who invented the fictional honky-tonk pianist Joe Fingers Carr, played the role, recorded "him" on Capitol, and made him famous. Busch was friends with Ray Turner, a legendary studio pianist in Hollywood. I never heard Turner during his life, but I've heard tapes, and he was a good as Lincoln says he was. Turner was fascinated by this piano music of the 1920s and '30s and acquired an invaluable collection of the sheet music. One night The Brinkerhoff Piano Company played a concert somewhere in Los Angeles and Turner turned up. Lincoln and Lou Busch insisted that he sit in. He did. "And he played brilliantly," Lincoln said. The next day he died.

Much of his sheet music collection passed to Lou Busch. Then Busch drove his car off an embankment and was killed. And a good deal of that Ray Turner sheet music collection came to Lincoln. A lot of this album is drawn from it. "It was Lou who really turned me onto this stuff," Lincoln said. Indeed, the only piece of comparatively recent vintage in the album, *Waltz in time,* was written by Busch in 1950.

The point to be emphasized about this music is that these pieces are for the most part not songs arranged for the piano. On the contrary, they are mostly full-composed piano pieces of which one, *Manhattan Serenade,* was later turned into a song, in the sense of a line with changes and lyrics. "If you get sheet music published after the 1940s," Lincoln said, "it is so simplified that you can't get the true flavor of the piece."

Two of the pieces, *Nola* and *Flapperette,* are by Felix Arndt. *Nola,* published in 1915, is the oldest piece in the collection. "Lou Busch told me," said Lincoln, who is forty-six, "that on a warm summer day when the windows were all open, you could walk down any street in America and hear people practicing this or pieces like it."

Canadian Capers, also published in 1915, is by Gus Chandler, Bert White, and Henry Cohen. *Slipova,* whose title embodies a New England accent, is by Roy Bargy, Paul Whiteman's pianist, who, according to Dick Sudhalter, so impressed Bix. "He was a very fine pianist," Lincoln said. "I have a 1928 recording he made of Gershwin's *Concerto in F.* Later he came out to California and became a musical director in television. His pieces are fun. They're kind of funky. They hark back to an earlier era of vaudeville playing. This piece reminds me a little of Clarence Williams, who used to play for Bessie Smith."

One of the most interesting pieces in the album is Rube Bloom's *Saphire,* because of its touches of Chopin and Debussy

And then there is *The Moth* by Lee Sims, a composer and pianist who had a Chicago-based radio show with his wife. Oscar Peterson has repeatedly said that he has never heard a pianist with a more advanced harmonic sense than Art Tatum. Every major jazz pianist I know idolizes Tatum. But Tatum said that Lee Sims was one of this most serious influences, and unless he was lying for unfathomable reasons, and in view of Tatum's enormous influence on others, Lee Sims appears to be one of those seminal figures whose influence on jazz has been quietly ignored.

In one sense, of course, we should not be surprised by *The Moth.* This kind of so-called Impressionist harmony had been in the air since not long after Debussy's graduation from the Paris Conservatory. Indeed, classical music had become far more radical than this. The jazz myth clings to images of musicians in the 1920s and '30s creating their music out of intuition and in spite of deep technical ignorance. It simply isn't so, and Sally Plackin in her valuable book *American Women in Jazz* (Seaview, New York), recounts the careers of well-schooled women pianists, particularly black women, in the 1920s, who were more than casually familiar with the classical repertoire. And so it is not surprising that Lee Sims should have incorporated into *The Moth* harmonic usages that had been in the air for more than twenty-five years. What is surprising is that the accepted history takes such slight note of their lineage in jazz, leaving the unalerted student with the impression that they were invented in the 1940s and came from nowhere. Nonetheless those hearing *The Moth* for the first time will be surprised to learn it was published in 1932.

Impressionist practice turns up in the famous *In a Mist,* one of the pathetically few surviving piano pieces by Beiderbecke. In addition to Ravel, Debussy, and Stravinsky, Beiderbecke had listened — as Dick Sudhalter points out — to the piano compositions of Eastwood Lane.

When he wrote *In a Mist,* he was unable to put it on paper. He and Bill Challis, Paul Whiteman's arranger, sequestered themselves in the apartment of Challis's sister. "She didn't approve of all the booze," Dick says, "so she left." There Challis transcribed the piece as Bix played, driven nearly to distraction by Beiderbecke's incapacity or disinclination to play it the same way twice. A curious echo of this incident is to be found in some of the working encounters between Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Bird would go to Dizzy's apartment, and although he could of course read, Dizzy was the disciplined one about getting the job done , and Parker would play lines and concepts on his horn and Dizzy would write them down.

Above and beyond the African, even the Spanish influence on jazz has been noted. More recently there has been an enormous Brazilian influence. *In a Mist, Saphire,* and *The Moth* remind us that there is a substantial French presence as well, particularly in harmonic practice.

There is enormous diversity within the unity of that piano music. The pieces are of a style, yet highly individual within that style. And one is struck by the utter freshness of it, a body of music that has been slighted and trivialized. What I like most about Lincoln's performance of these pieces — aside from the technique and lovely tone; he was trained by a student of Schnabel's — is precisely that he does not slight these pieces. He lavishes as much care on the lighter works as he does on the darker *In a Mist.* Sudhalter thinks more highly of Bix's *Candlelight* than *In a Mist.* "*In a Mist* is episodic," Dick said in a phone conversation, "and *Candlelight* is through-composed." But *In a Mist* is a lovely piece and it is good to have a new recording of it.

You may of course have trouble finding this album in stores. If so, you can purchase it for $9.98 directly from TownHall Records, P.O. Box 5332, Santa Barbara, California 93108.

...and Two Singers

"Somebody put her in that corny bag," Julius LaRosa said on the telephone the other day, "and they forgot that she got to the top in the first place because that chick can really sing." He was talking of Teresa Brewer. And he should know: LaRosa is himself a superb singer at the peak of mature power.

He'd called in elation from New York to read to me Sudhalter's New York *Post* review of his opening at Michael's Pub, a similar rave from Jerry Parker of *Newsday*, and an interview with John S. Wilson in the New York *Times*. I didn't have to be there to know the reviews were justified. I've known for years how well he sings.

His program at Michael's Pub was built around the lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein. LaRosa is one of the most thoughtful and intelligent people in the business, which is why he gets so far into lyrics. And the Michael's Pub gig is likely to destroy his image as the kid who got fired from the Arthur Godfrey show (for what Godfrey weirdly claimed was an insufficient humility) and sang Italian songs. LaRosa is, and always was, a very American singer.

He and Brewer have a number of things in common. They are the same age, fifty-two. Time has taken no toll of their voices; on the contrary, both sing better than they ever did in their lives. And both have been coming out from under corny images as singers of corny songs. Brewer first spun me around with a recording with Duke Ellington of *It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing*. If others have not grasped how good LaRosa is, I had not until then realized how good she is.

The case for Teresa Brewer is amply documented in two new albums on the Doctor Jazz label, Bob Thiele's new company. Thiele produced the albums. He has been married to her since 1972, which is why he was able to dig her long before the rest of us were aware. The first of these albums, called *On the Road Again*, is with the Stephane Grappelli quartet. It is, very simply, wonderful, fresh and charming and humorous. And musical.

Those who remember Brewer only for her little-girl sound are likely to be surprised. The years and the experience tell in her style and inflections and attack. The voice has, in the most complimentary sense, toughened. When Brewer wants to growl or rasp, she can do it. Yet the voice retains a youthful quality, and the effect is surprising, precisely opposite to that of Blossom Dearie. Blossom sings sophisticated lyrics in a "teacup voice," as Whitney Balliett vividly described it, as if she is too naive to understand them. Brewer reads salacious subtleties into the most innocent lines. She can make even *Chattanooga Choo-Choo* sound like a dirty song. And one song in the Grappelli set, *Come on and Drive Me Crazy*, which she wrote, would have been barred from radio in an earlier time. The effect of these contrasting qualities, intense sexuality expressed in that curiously childlike voice, is that of a little girl, all right — a very bad little girl, the kind your mother didn't want you to know but you *did*.

The second album is overtly commercial, a tribute collection called *I Dig Big Band Singers*. If follows the medley pattern established on RCA by Larry Elgart, but utilizing the vocal hits of the band era. The songs flow without pause into each other, one chorus to each. How long since you've heard *And the Angels Sing* and *Elmer's Tune*? Brewer is backed by a hot New York band driven by Grady Tate on drums. The charts are by Glenn Osser. The album bounces and swings and it's enormous fun. Wait'll you hear what Brewer does to *Ragtime Cowboy Joe*, a hit for the Dick Jurgens band, and to *Daddy* — whose author it Bobby Troup, which I never knew till now because when I was a kid I wouldn't have been found dead with a Sammy Kaye record. *Tain't What You Do* is there, and should be, because the album has an exuberance and lift and drive reminiscent of Jimmie Lunceford. Incidentally, Sy Oliver, who wrote it for Lunceford, joins her to sing *Yes Indeed*, which he arranged and sang for Tommy Dorsey.

If the distribution system of this business weren't a disaster, this album would be a big hit. It may even make it at that. But then, if the business weren't completely irrational, Julius LaRosa would have a recording contract.

Fingers Eleven

Despite initial indifference to it, the *Canadian Caper* album gradually grew into a *success d'estime*, if not a commercial one. The Duchess of Bedworthy added to Fingers' scrapbook rave reviews from the Medicine Hat *Band*, the Minneapolis *Bore*, the Burbank *Bang*, the Tombstone *Engraver*, the Orange County *Heil*, the Schroon Lake *Nooner*, and the Yukon *Yellow Icicle*. The *Icicle* found the album "mystifying, intimidating, incomprehensible, and therefore probably profound."

Fingers appreciated that, and several photos of him taken at the time — a dashing figure — would seem to indicate that he was happy. But his emotional state was not that simple. He was suffering from an acute attack of the divine discontent that is never far below the surface in the true artist. It was at this time that he decided to organize the Fingers Wombat Ghost Band.

The band's first (and last) album for Honest Records, *Ghost of a Chance*, a collectors' item within a week of its release, contained, in addition to the title tune, *Ghost Writers in Disguise, Haunted Heart, Danse Macabre, I See Your Face Before Me*, Fingers' haunting arrangement of *A Night on Bald Mountain, Spirit Feel*, and *I've Got My Mojo Working*.

The band, which was highly experimental, contained Pearce Eardrum on lead trumpet, Slide Rule on first trombone, Slip Horner on jazz trombone, and on lead alto, Pearl Keyes, of whom many enthusiastic critics had said, "She plays good for a chick."

Why Fingers elected to organize a ghost band before he was even dead remained a mystery until recently, when Pat Bottoms, jazz columnist for *Modern Tobogganist*, caught up with him while he was gskiing at Gstaad and did an in-depth interview about the state of the art at that time.

"It's hard to say," Fingers said. "All I can do is give some input to your overview. Like, I was having trouble interfacing with my record label, communication-wise. The company was kind of profit oriented, money-wise. And I don't have to tell you, that can be a drag. But I was younger then, like, you can dig it, and naïve, business-wise. At that point in time, I wanted to give it my best shot and build a viable band, if you know where I'm coming from. The bottom line is that I was into the public. I had been suffering from terminal boredom, and I decided to really go for it, organize a world-class band that people could arguably identify with and relate to. That was the main thrust, momentarily, of what I was doing, if you know, hopefully, what I'm saying. That's where my head was at, head-wise."

Fingers, in a laid-back mood, laid back, sipping a Pernod. "In some ways, like," he said, "I guess it was a happy period. I wasn't feeling up-tight or anything, because I was having a meaningful relationship. It ended sadly, though." He declined to elaborate, but he was probably referring to the French *danseuse* Tutu Divine, for whom he was composing a ballet at the time. That she was the partner in this meaningful relationship cannot be confirmed because Mlle Divine, while posing for some publicity stills, did a *jete* off the observation platform of the Empire State Building.

She never reached the ground, thereby arousing the interest of the Fortean Society. Erik von Daaniken says she has been seen dancing on the waves in the Bermuda Triangle, usually in *Les Sylphides*.

"Yeah," Fingers said pensively, "it really impacted on me. It was a real bummer."