Gene Lees
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Letters

The current issue is, as usual, right on the mark. A leaner rather than a ringer, however, is your ascribing Pete Seeger's truly great song to Bob Dylan — hard as it is for one of the latter's fellow Minnesota lyricists to join the host of protesters gathering in the wake of your frothy attribution. The mistake in no way undermines the cogency of your basic argument, but you know better than anyone that, good as it may be, *Blowin' in the Wind* is not in the same class as *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?*

John S. Lucas
Winona, Minnesota

Oops. Sorry, Jack.

I have done a lot of meditating about the songs that came out during World War II and wondered if anyone ever set up a chart to match them, by type, against what was happening in the war itself. Those awful, cornball, racist things (did you ever hear *When the Ryans and the Kellys Catch the Little Yellow Bellies?*) seemed to predominate early in the war. The ones about gee-I-miss-you became more popular as it wore on — a lot of people saw that *Life* photo that you and I remember of the dead GI on the beach (it was New Guinea) with the sand starting to cover up his legs as the water did its work.

I can remember all those movies too. Early in the war, people in the theaters would — literally — stand up and cheer, not only at those John Wayne concoctions but at those Republic Pictures travesties in which balsawood Japanese armadas were set on fire. By 1945, when a lot of real war had been shoved in our faces, I think we all realized what we might have known only intuitively. Some time in 1945 I saw for the first time a couple of dozen Bill Mauldin cartoons. The only way I can explain my reaction is to say that it was about the same as the first time I heard the Norvo-Wilson-Gillespie-Parker *Congo Blues*, also in 1945. In both cases, it was a revelation of something I had known was there, just hadn't seen/heard.

Of all the treacle that songwriters tried out on the U.S. public in World War II, two items stand out. The first is a slice from something I don't even know the name of: "I want to take the Axis down a peg./ Do not judge me by my twisted leg." If the crippled boy trying to enlist doesn't get you, how about: "I want to give my dog to Uncle Sam/though I'm a blind boy, yes I am."

But stuff that bad was never very successful. Maybe radio jocks in those days still had a sense of taste.

Bill Fogarty
Leawood, Kansas

A quick thought while it's on my mind.

When we were taping one of my KKGO radio shows the other day, I asked Lou Levy, who had brought in one of his recent albums, about a certain track. He pointed out that it had quite a long bass solo. So I said, "My bass-playing friends probably will hate me for this but I think we'll listen to one of the other tracks. When I'm in a club, I don't mind bass solos. If a guy want to play a five-minute solo and I'm sitting there where I can see him, watch his fingers, catch the whole flavor of the performance, that's okay. But, for some reason, when I'm listening to records or the radio. I don't really enjoy long bass solos. More importantly, I don't think Just Plain Folks like them either."

I feel the same about drum solos. In person, it's okay. But when I'm listening — not seeing — I tend to get restless after about sixteen bars.

Anybody else feel that way?

Steve Allen
Los Angeles, California

Shelly Manne says that he too dislikes drum solos "unless the guy really has something to say..."

One of the most conspicuous changes in jazz in the last thirty years has been the expansion of bass playing, both in technique and function. The proficiency that was considered extraordinary in Scott LaFaro has become a norm. One can understand the desire of the bassists we have today to have their solo say. But I too have reservations about long bass solos on records.

And they present a practical problem to people in radio. Fred Hall avoids tracks with long bass solos, which means they are automatically scratched from the fifty-odd stations that subscribe to his Swing Thing *show. The reason is that they are almost inaudible on the small speakers found in portable and car radios. The listener may think the station has gone silent.*

Does anyone else have thoughts on the subject?

Several years ago I became a BMI-affiliated composer. (I have no way of knowing if my experience would have been any different in ASCAP.) After a certain video program for which I had composed the score had played repeated schedulings on PBS and the English cable channel, and indeed had reached millions of homes in the United States, I wrote to BMI regarding royalties. I was told there were none and that no monies were paid for PBS programming. After some investigation, the hiring of an attorney, and the assurance of other composers that royalties were paid for PBS programming, BMI notified me that I was indeed owed the grand total of $1.17. However, they have a policy of making no adjustments under $10, but generously offered to take me to lunch the next time I happened to travel to Los Angeles. This is the industry committed to protecting my rights as a composer!

Lynette W. Hart
Hailey, Idaho

I don't know whether all the words on how and why we all get screwed will amount to anything but a release of emotional steam. It's a Catch 22 situation. If we take the time to understand how we are robbed, we will not have the same time to write. Ergo one becomes a businessman or an artist. You and I have opted for our muse. So be it.

I once spent $75,000 in legal fees to get back $150,000. Still, I wouldn't want to be anybody but me. Considering how hard it must be, physically and morally, to steal, I almost wish well the people who steal some of my royalties. No doubt it is their symphony, sad as that may be.

Alienation is in order for the likes of me and you. Not that I want to reflect upon it, but what does that RIAA woman do when she goes home at night? Turn on the TV? Which gives her her own world stumbling along so that she can laugh at it? Or does she let the bird in her breast out of its cage? No. She has no bird in her breast. She sleeps, and recharges for the morning battle with inanities. Perhaps she has more money in the bank than you or I. I want her to have it. I really don't have time to think about it. I'm too busy opening and closing the cage for my bird.

Keep punching, but don't get upset if the opponent doesn't go down. Love,

Bobby Scott
Forest Hills, New York

Thank you for the hard work you've been doing on this stupid attempt to levy a penalty on buyers of blank tapes. I have spoken to my congressman, Bob Kestenmeier, about this and to just about anybody who will listen to the voice of experience. I am still trying to collect legitimate royalties from every record company I ever signed a contract with. Getting an honest accounting is virtually unheard of. The idea that these gentlemen — these moguls who are milking one of the greatest cash cows to amble through the media farm — will, out of the goodness of their hearts, look after the best interests of the artist (particularly the jazz artist!) is outrageous. And I think it's significant that all the unions and trade groups are lining up behind the manufacturers. From the artist's point of view, it's the same old story: who will protect us from our protectors?

It's a tremendous rip-off. But you know this, and you've expressed it most thoroughly and eloquently in the *Jazzletter*. And for this I thank you.

Ben Sidran
Washington, D.C.

I have just finished reading the *Jazzletter* regarding the state of the record industry, and I couldn't agree with you more. It's shocking that such an exciting productive business could get into such a sorry state: too many amateurs running the business and too many others out for their own profit.

I'm lucky. I've worked with several men who are not only creative record and A&R men but have given and contributed to the entire business.

Margaret Whiting
New York, N.Y.

Pavilion in the Rain

On warm summer nights, in that epoch before air conditioning, the doors and wide wooden shutters would be open and the music would drift out of the pavilion over the converging crowds of excited young people, through the parking lot glistening with cars, through the trees, and out over the lake — or the river, or the sea. Sometimes Japanese lanterns were strung in the trees, like moons caught in the branches, and sometimes little boys too hung there, observing the general excitement and sharing the sense of an event. And the visit of one of the big bands was indeed an event.

The sound of the saxophones, a sweet and often insipid yellow when only four of them were used, turned to a woody umber when, later, the baritone was added. The sound of three trombones in harmony had a regal grandeur. Four trumpets could sound like flame, yet in ballads could be damped by harmon mutes to a citric distant loneliness. Collectively, these elements made up the sound of a Big Band.

It is one that will not go away. The recordings made then are constantly reissued and purchased in great qualities. *Time* magazine recreates in stereo the arrangements of that vanished era, while the *Readers Digest* continues to issue many of the originals. Throughout the United States and Canada, college and high school students gather themselves into that basic formation — now expanded to five trumpets, four trombones, five saxes, piano, bass, drums, and maybe guitar and French horns too, the saxes doubling woodwinds — to make their own music in that style. By some estimates there are as many as thirty thousand of these bands. North Texas State University in Denton has fourteen of them. The sound has gone around the world, and you will hear it on variety shows of Moscow television — a little clumsy, to be sure, but informed with earnest intention.

Why? Why does that sound haunt our culture?

For one thing, it was deeply romantic. In 1983, the Bureau of the Census reported that people over sixty-five for the first time in American history outnumbered adolescents (a piece of information apparently ignored by a record industry still trying to blame home taping for its problems). These people remember that era. They courted to it. Furthermore, since the mean age of Americans is now thirty, it is safe to say about half the population of the country was sired out of the moods and marriages and affairs inspired by that music.

It was also a dramatic sound, which is why it has remained in uninterrupted use in film underscoring since Henry Mancini, Johnny Mandel, and a few others managed to sell it to producers toward the end of the 1950s.

The era that gave birth to that sound, and which that sound dramatized, defies — like all historical periods — tidy definition. It begins more or less in the early 1930s but its elements were in place by the 1920s. It ends in the late 1940s, just about the time that Dizzy Gillespie got his shot at having his own big band. Yet four of its principle leaders, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, and Stan Kenton, were out there travelling, leading their bands, in the mid-1970s. Basie and Herman still are. When I asked why and how these four bands had survived, Herman and Kenton, who agreed on very little, both said that it was because they were all jazz bands, listening bands, and the audience for that music was loyal.

But in broad essentials, it was an era of about fifteen years duration. (The rock era has persisted now for thirty.) It was an era when a lot of popular music was good and a lot of good music was popular. This fact has led many of those who grew up in that time to sentimentalize it, which entails forgetting that the music was not all unalloyed gold. If it was the age of Ellington, Basie, Herman, Kenton, the Dorseys, Chick Webb, Glen Gray, Jimmie Lunceford, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Les Brown, Harry James, Earl Hines, Erskine Hawkins, Lucky Millinder, Will Bradley, Freddie Slack, Bobby Sherwood, Boyd Raeburn, Charlie Barnet, Claude Thornhill, Elliot Lawrence, Glenn Miller, Alvino Ray, Artie Shaw, Teddy Powell, Sonny Dunham, it was also the era of Kay Kyser, Shep Fields, Sammy Kaye, Blue Barron, Art Kassel, Tommy Tucker (for whom Gerry Mulligan briefly wrote), Orrin Tucker, Wayne King, Freddy Martin, Clyde McCoy, Richard Himber, and others in that vastly successful group known to the fans of more fastidious preferences as the Mickey Mouse or ricky-tick bands.

There are those who think Glenn Miller belonged in this class, thanks in part to the band's use of clarinet lead on the saxophone section, a much-vaunted sound that in fact was cloying in persistent use. Jo Stafford, who in the early 1940s sang with the Tommy Dorsey band, a collection of rugged individualists with a fierce collective pride, said years later, a little hesitantly, as if confessing to an American heresy, "You know, in the Tommy Dorsey band, we thought the Glenn Miller band was...kind of corny." It was. But Glenn Miller, like John Lennon, has been canonized, and one does not question the significance of ikons.

The Miller band could play ensemble jazz of a kind, recorded

some good instrumentals, and claimed Bobby Hackett, who played guitar and soloed on cornet, in its personnel. Hackett lent a certain Bixian beauty to the interlude of *A String of Pearls.* But one measure of the band is that no other outstanding jazz soloist ever went into or came out of it.

The classification of these bands was neither easy nor clear, since some of the dance bands, such as that of Charlie Spivak, embodied a decent level of taste. All the jazz bands played for dancers; and some of the most commercial dance bands occasionally put out something that resembled jazz. Kay Kyser, whose arrangements were a cut above those of most Mickey bands (no doubt because George Duning wrote some of them), now and then startled audiences with some ensemble swing. It was even rumored that the Sammy Kaye band, in many ways the corniest of them all ("And now this lovely refrain sung by..."), could do it.

The best of the bands, however, the elite of them, leaned strongly into jazz. Their captious members wanted to lean even farther into it, and played dance music only as a concession to the exigencies of continued employment. The best of these best, a group that included Basie, Ellington, Shaw, Herman, the comparatively short-lived and wonderful Lunceford band, and Tommy Dorsey, played brilliant jazz, framing the work of some highly individual soloists in ensemble structures of remarkable discipline and power. To hear one of these bands straining the walls of some arena or theater or pavilion, without all the paraphernalia of modern amplification, was and remains one of the great thrills in music.

If the Les Brown band was essentially a dance band, it played with a strong jazz feeling and a bouncing two-beat. It had some good jazz soloists, such as the late Don Fagerquist, and excellent arrangements by Frank Comstock, among others. It was one of the most polished of all the bands, and it takes on only the more significance if one accepts the judgment of many critics in excluding it from the jazz band category. If it was not a jazz band, then it showed just how good commercial popular music could be. *Sentimental Journey,* on which the young Doris Day sang, is no doubt the best-remembered of its hits, but it had hits as well on jazzish instrumentals such as the beautifully crafted arrangement of *I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm* and Ben Homer's witty *Bizet Has His Day.* No adolescent dancers ran horrified from the rooms to seek out a simpler music from some folk singer. "It was the popular music of the land," as Woody Herman has pointed out, and it was sophisticated and intelligent music indeed. Popular music then encompassed *Take the A Train* and *Sophisticated Lady* and *Mood Indigo* by Ellington, *Begin the Beguine* by Shaw, *Eager Beaver* by Kenton, Basie's *One O'Clock Jump* and Herman's *Northwest Passage.* This was music you heard on the radio.

The tributaries of this vast river of superior popular music arose in the 1920s, although its instrumentation grew out of the marching bands of New Orleans. The instruments were those that could be played while walking and were loud enough to be heard in the open air.

By the 1920s, of course, bands were sitting down, playing for dancers. Benny Carter recalls that when he was in the Charlie Johnson band in that period, its instrumentation was three trumpets, two trombones, three saxophones — two altos and a tenor — and four rhythm, including tuba bass. Not until the bands forgot their ambulatory origins did string bass, a more flexible instrument than tuba and certainly a more pulsating one, become the rhythmic and harmonic footing on which all bands to this day have built their walls of sound.

The leading figures in this evolution were Duke Ellington and the arranger and saxophonist Don Redman. Redman's influence in its way has been wider than Ellington's. Redman is generally credited by musicians who remember the period with organizing the trumpets, trombones, and saxophones into choirs working over the rhythm section. Ellington, who even then was using baritone saxophone to add color and fortify the bottom of the orchestra, was moving in a somewhat different direction. Whereas Redman, whose thinking soon affected Fletcher Henderson and, through Henderson, other writers, maintained the identity of the sections, using them antiphonally, Ellington was using his instruments in unusual combinations, mixing them up through the sections, as it were. Ellington was becoming more and more adventurous in explorations of harmony, influenced in part by the French impressionists. Eventually he voiced the band to produce strange, almost disembodied and highly idiosyncratic sounds.

The practices of these two men, modified and transmuted, to be sure, have dominated serious non-classical orchestral writing in America and much of the world to this day. The problem with embracing the Ellington approach is that the writing sounds so Ellingtonesque, although such writers as Thad Jones, Gerry Mulligan, Clare Fischer, and Rob McConnell have been able to use it without seeming too obviously derivative. But it was on Redman's practices, passed on through Fletcher Henderson, that the Swing Era was built. It is startling to consider that Don Redman may have been the most influential composer of the Twentieth Century. And most people have never heard of him, including more than a few of the arrangers and composers around the world using the orchestral tools he bequeathed to them.

Benny Carter, who joined the band of Henderson's brother Horce in 1926, says that Fletcher Henderson's arrangements, written for his own band but copied and given to his brother's band, were his first real encounter with the Redman-Henderson mode of writing.

When Fletcher Henderson's band folded, Benny Goodman too acquired some of its arrangements, and hired Henderson to write more. When Goodman became a success — one of the most remarkable successes of the period — other musicians formed bands on his model, or took existing bands in the direction pointed by Henderson. A few looked to Ellington for inspiration, particularly Charlie Barnet and, less obviously, Claude Thornhill, who altered the color of big-band sound — partly by adding French horn, partly by hiring Gil Evans, whom he had known in the Skinnay Ennis band.

The repertoire of the bands was hybrid, drawn from the movies, the blues, Broadway, and even grand opera. The instrumentals were usually original compositions by members of the band or staff arrangers, such as Goodman's *Six Flags Unfurnished,* a piece by Richard Maltby.

All the bands carried singers, the "boy singer" and "girl singer" as they were coyly called, and many had vocal groups, such as the Modernaires with Glenn Miller and the Pied Pipers with Tommy Dorsey. Thus the repertoire comprised fast or medium-fast instrumentals and slow vocal performances of songs written mostly by Jewish composers and lyricists. In the big band era, the two most important streams of American non-classical music fused — the black and the Jewish.

It should be remembered that the Big Band Era was also the Age of the Movies. Movies came into their own with the addition of sound in 1929. The bands were already taking the form they would have through the '30s and '40s. The band era and the movies era coincided, and they died together in the late 1940s, for more or less the same reasons. But while they remained predominant, they profoundly affected America's way of thinking and living.

Because of what were deemed sexual excesses in the movies of the 1920s and then scandals in the film industry, the motion picture studios had set up a system of self-censorship. The movies made under that restraint presented a false picture of life.

You might never have known from the American movies of the

1930s that there was anyone but Anglo-Saxons in the United States. The late Lenny Bruce, in his routine *How the Negro and the Jew Got into Show Business,* said that since the Jews controlled the business, including the movies, the bad guys in pictures were never Jewish. But the good guys never were either. There were no Jews at all — or Italians or Poles or Lithuanians — in most movies, although during World War II, some of the minor characters in assaults on Iwo Jima or other far-off places might be named Kowalsky, Shapiro, or Corelli. However, the nice boy who showed his buddies the photo of his young wife and whom you knew was going to get nailed by a sniper, was named Walker or Bridges or something like that, and he was probably blond. The principles in pictures were always Caucasians, and usually Anglo-Saxons, although John Ford and Leo McCarey got away with reminding us that there were a few Irish in America too. What we got was a Jewish vision of what WASP life must or should be like, and it had the curious effect of influencing to the point of distortion the mores of the very WASP culture it so inaccurately portrayed. The average WASP adolescent was baffled by that unperturbed world so insouciantly inhabited by Donald O'Connor, Peggy Ryan, Gloria Jean, and Jane Withers, and felt only the more an outsider for his or her incapacity to emulate their paradigm of youthful happiness.

Only rarely was the hero of a movie (and *never* the heroine) romantically involved with someone of another race, and if he was, the affair ended unhappily. If the girl was Oriental, she died at the end.

No marriage ended in divorce. The couple always resolved their problems in the last reel. No man ever slept with his wife. They occupied twin beds, even though twin beds were rare and every child in America knew his mother and father reposed together in the night.

There were two kinds of girl in movies, nice girls and bad girls. Nice girls always won in the end, bad girls always lost out, although life itself offered evidence to the contrary. A girl from the home town was always more deserving than the girl from New York.

Bad girls were played by Lynn Barrie. Nice girls were played by Joan Leslie. Also by Joan Caulfield and Bonita Granville. Bonita Granville was nice to the point of nauseating. Very, very rarely a more realistic film came to grips with moral subleties. In *King's Row*, Ann Sheridan had the sympathy of the audience, although it became clear that the girl of the working class she played, Randy Monahan (Irish, right?) was not really bad, just sort of...well, y'know, defiant.

All nice girls were chaste. In the end, when the problems of the plot had been resolved, the boy saw the light and married the nice girl. Marriage solved everything: that was the goal of life and all striving, true love the sustenance of a fulfilled destiny. Shortly after the final fadeout, the girl lost her virginity, but only, one presumed, after due process of law and ceremony.

The songs of the period reinforced the view of life presented by the movies. Jo Stafford with Dorsey sang, "A heart that's true, there are such things..." Helen Forrest with the Harry James band sang, "I never thought it could be, but there you were, in love with me..." Love was a fragile thing attainable, if at all, only by the pure of heart, yet without which life wasn't worth living, and the loss of which was the ultimate personal disaster. "I'll never smile again..." Only occasionally, as in Bob Russell's lyric *Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me,* which expressed anguish at the pain caused by gossip, did popular music deal with something like reality.

The big band leaders were big stars, and the movies were quick to conscript them into service — white ones, anyway. Artie Shaw appeared with his band in *Second Chorus.* Tommy Dorsey's band was in *Ship Ahoy,* the Glenn Miller band performed in *Orchestra Wives* and *Sun Valley Serenade,* while Harry James turned up in *Swingtime in the Rockies.* In such films, the band would break out its instruments and start performing at little or no provocation, even on trains and buses. In real life, the musicians on band buses were more likely to be found sleeping, drinking, smoking joints or groping the girl singer as meager consolations for the monotony of the road.

In *Sun Valley Serenade,* such was the supposed *joie de vivre* of the Miller band that they played in open sleighs passing through the snowy countryside. How the brass and saxes could hear the rhythm section, how the musicians kept their hands warm enough to play, and how the instruments remained in tune in the cold were questions left to the nigglers in the audience.

Growing up in this false picture of life and love generated by popular music and the movies, the young people of the era were naively unprepared for life. It was accepted that only virgins were nice girls, even by the boys striving to reduce their numbers. When the libido did its programmed thing, girls (and some boys) persuaded themselves the feeling had to be love, and not infrequently rushed into inappropriate marriages that ended in divorce. Even then they rarely awoke to the possibility that their ideal of life might not be in harmony with reality. Instead they concluded that *this* marriage wasn't "it", the great love that solves everything, as in the songs and movies. So many second and third marriages ended in divorce that at last a sociologist would coin the term "sequential polygamy" for what had become the American practice.

> There is nothing remarkable about it. All one has to do it hit the right notes as the right time, and the instrument plays itself.
>
> —J.S. Bach

It is not that realistic songs were not written. They simply were not widely heard. For radio, which was exercising an increasing hegemony over music, was deeply if unofficially censored.

The era of the big bands and grand movies was also the era of the Broadway musical, and since its audience was limitted to a well-to-do stratum of society, freed by its money from such inconveniences as inadvertent pregnancy, stage composers and lyricists had considerably more latitude than those working on movies or Tin Pan Alley.

The musical was passing through its own golden age. Evolving from the plotless merinque of the 1920s into integrated and well-structured near-operas, musicals were often urbane and wry and occasionally realistic (*Pal Joey, Carousel,* later *The Most Happy Fella*) works of art.

But that was a special and better brand of popular music, and for the most part the songs heard on the radio were in keeping with the everything's-lovely-and-Andy-Hardy-Goes-to-College image of life presented by the movies. There were no whores in western movies, only dance-hall girls. The lyric to Cole Porter's *Love for Sale,* a compassionate consideration of a prostitute's lot in life, was barred from radio. In *By the Mississinewa*, Porter managed to cover miscegenation, lesbianism, fellatio, cunilingus, and troilism. That one, needless to say, was never heard at all outside the show for which it was written. Lorenz Hart wrote *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered* for *Pal Joey*, but the line "until I could sleep where I shouldn't sleep" was altered in the out-of-show version to "till love came and told me I shouldn't sleep," which doesn't even make sense.

Occasionally somebody wrote a "naughty" song such as the sophomorically sniggering *She Had to Go and Lose It at the Astor*, but in the end it turned out that all she'd lost was her sable cape. But then, for a movie called *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, the late Ira Gershwin put lyrics to one of his late brother George's

unpublished melodies and called the song *Aren't You Kind of Glad We Did.* Gene Krupa recorded it with a vocal by Buddy Strewart, whose gifted life ended soon after that in an automobile crash. The record was, in its time, amazing: it really was discussing sex, albeit with charm and a little humor. It was a departure.

A few years later, in 1950, Hugo Friedhofer scored *Broken Arrow*, in which James Stewart marries an Indian girl. To be sure, the girl is killed in the end, but the viewpoint of the film is firmly on the side of the Indians and the marriage. Then Aldo Ray married a Japanese girl in *Three Stripes in the Sun*, which wasn't a tragedy but a comedy of manners, and Otto Preminger released *The Moon Is Blue*, a film so ordinary that the public might not have noticed it had the Motion Picture Code seal of approval not been denied to it because it contained the word "virgin".

Songwriters pressed against the censorship of the radio stations and networks and occasionally slipped something suggestive past the watchdogs, such as *(I'd Like to Get You on) A Slow Boat to China*. One of the most fondly-remembered (at least within the profession) acts of rebellion was by the late Alec Wilder, who wrote a sweet little song fully in accord with the puritanical restrictions of the time. There was nothing wrong with the words. The problem was in the title. It was called *If You See Kay*. It was broadcast a number of times until some network executive finally got the point and bounced it off the air.

It is difficult to remember, in this era of crumbling language and casual coupling, how restricted the moral tone of the time was, and how much pain people suffered because of their hormones. Certainly it was not the big band era of the present false memory. The serious musical experiments of the bands usually turned up in instrumentals on the B sides of more commercial and saccharine songs. If it was the era of Herman's *Your Father's Mustache*, it was also that of Helen O'Connell's cutie-poo wrinkle-nosed *Green Eyes*, of the Andrews Sisters, and for that matter of *Cruising Down the River* and *Chaballa-Chaballa*. If it was — and it was — the golden age of American song, awash in the superb melodies of Kern, Gershwin, Porter, Arlen, and the rest, it was at the same time an era of trivial, preposterous, and even idiotic songs, many of which have been elegantly vivisected by Jo Stafford in the series of albums she made with her husband Paul Weston, under the *nes de blague* Jonathan and Darlene Edwards.

And in the end, the adventurous and exuberant experimentalism of the big bands would lose its constituency.

Seeking a wider palette of colors, at least five of the bands — those of Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, Harry James, and Stan Kenton — tried using string sections. The effect left much to be desired. A full symphony orchestra requires up to sixty string players to balance its comparatively sedate brass and woodwind sections. Jazz brass is much louder. Yet for reasons of economics, the bands could not carry large string sections. Dorsey carried thirteen string players. At its worse, the effect was ludicrous — watching Gene Krupa's fiddles sawing inaudibly, for example.

The main direction of musical evolution was harmonic. For years the thinking of the arrangers had been well in advance of that of the players, and still farther ahead of the public's. Don Redman, born in 1900 and graduated from the Boston Conservatory, was by the 1920s well aware of developments in contemporary classical music. (William Grant Still was by then studying with Varese.) Big band harmony had, by the 1940s, become much more complex and "dissonant". Experiments with polytonality were under way. Stan Kenton pushed his band toward the symphonic, sometimes to laudable effect, sometimes not. Other bands, including those of Krupa and Herman, to some extent partook of the bebop "revolution". The famous soaring trumpet passage of *Caldonia* that flabbergasted audiences in 1945 (and which younger Herman bandsmen would play twice as fast and an octave higher twenty years later) was in fact a Dizzy Gillespie solo transcribed for four horns.

Die-hards to this day argue that bebop killed the big bands. It is a thesis that requires a careful ignoring of a complex of social changes that we will examine in the next issue.

Like so many epochs in art, the big band period attained its finest moments just before it ended. Its finest moment of all may well have been the Dizzy Gillespie band. Whereas many of the pre-war big band records today seem thin and archaic, partly of course because of primitive recording, the best of the records made after 1945 retain their freshness and vitality. They do not sound callow; the music has found its maturity. The rhythm sections have lost their awkwardness and the forward motion is strong, fluid, and natural.

Why has it remained with us?

Because it has enormous musical validity. It is a wonderfully rich and flexible tool of musical expression. The arrangers of the time, from Redman through Henderson, Sy Oliver, Paul Weston, Alex Stordahl, Pete Rugolo, Ralph Burns, Ben Homer, Ernie Wilkins, Eddie Sauter, Bill Finegan and many more — with Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and the unique Gil Evans off in a slightly different direction — explored the first important new orchestral formation since the symphony orchestra took its basic shape in the time of C.P.E. Bach.

For all the bands in the school system, for all the rehearsal bands the musicians themselves organize for the pure pleasure of playing in them, for all that the big-band sound is used in film scoring, the era itself — when hundreds of bands criss-crossed America and hundreds more played in their home areas — is indeed gone, gone beyond recall.

The late Johnny Mercer loved the big-band sound and was wont to set words to instrumental compositions such as Lionel Hampton's *Midnight Sun.* Another was Ralph Burns' *Early Autumn.* Mercer could not have dreamed, when he was writing words for it, that one line of his lyric would some day seem a suitable epitaph for the entire era:

There's a dance pavilion in the rain,
all shuttered down...

Dizzy's Big Band

I never saw Dizzy Gillespie's big band, and what could be heard of it on records left me frustrated. Many musicians contend that it was one of the greatest of all the bands, and some say *the* greatest. Most recordings of it, however, seem like faded photographs of a dream. Tape was only coming into general use and stereo was ten years in the future.

One recent evening I had dinner with Gene Norman. Afterwards we repaired to the house high above the Sunset Strip (and a few blocks from Woody Herman's house) where he has lived for more than thirty years. Below us Los Angeles stretched far in the dark, a carpet of lights much more striking than it seemed in those movies of my high school days wherein the hero took the girl to one of the roads above the city to neck in a convertible and tell her Something Important. It was in fact during those days that so many of us were first listening to Dizzy.

We settled in the studio office Gene has at one end of his house. There was only one low lamp in the room; the city was a picture in a wide window. Gene played test pressings of some albums he was about to release on his Crescendo label, including one by the Phillipine pianist Bobby Enriquez, who had just finished touring for six months with Dizzy. Gene asked if I'd heard the LP derived from the 1949 concert by Dizzy's big band that he had produced at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium. Not that I know of, I said. Gene got a copy of the album from a shelf and cracked the shrink wrap. He said it was one of the records listed in Len Lyons' book, *The*

101 Greatest Jazz Albums. In an interview published in the May, 1983, issue of *Keyboard*, Joe Zawinul too called it one of the greatest of all jazz albums.

And it is. It belongs in the library of everyone who loves jazz and assuredly in every school where jazz is taught. Despite a hissy surface from the acetate discs on which it was originally recorded, despite some wayward balances and other shortcomings in sound, it is a vital representation of the Dizzy Gillespie big band. It brings the legend to life.

The band had everything, laughter and swing and invention and vitality, an incredible fire and an exquisite balance of abandon and control. It is almost beyond belief that traditionalists could have found this music nihilistic or anti-social or sullen or nervous; it is filled with youth and joy and exuberance. The boppers were accused of indifference to the audience; yet Dizzy was (and still is) accused of catering to it. "If making people laugh makes them more receptive to my music," he said to me more than twenty years ago, "then I'm going to do it." Had he not been so brilliant a musician, and of course had all other factors been equal, he could have been one of the great clowns, in a class with Buster Keaton and Laurel and Hardy. Not unlike Jack Benny, he can walk on-stage, look around with a mock gravity and an apprehension that expresses all our suspicions of strangers and the unknown, and reduce an audience almost immediately to laughter — and submission.

The antics in the album indicate that the whole band had taken the cue from its leader. There are sudden unison vocal outbursts, even in a ballad such as *Round About Midnight*. They're funny — and rehearsed. So far as the theory that bop killed the big bands is concerned, the Pasadena Civic concert was a sell-out, partly due to the promotion done by Gene Norman, then a young disc jockey. (He had offered free admission to those who turned up looking like Dizzy, in horn-rimmed glasses, goatee, and beret. A hundred young men had done so.)

Dizzy Gillespie in Concert *is available from GNP Crescendo Records, 8400 Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles, California 90069, for $8.98.*

In point of fact, only a few of the bands really embraced bop. Woody Herman's was one. Bop became largely a music of quintets. Dizzy's was, really, the only flat-out all-bop big band. It featured no singers of current ballads, it played for listeners instead of dancers. Every man in the band was a disciple, including James Moody on tenor, Ernie Henry on alto, and Cecil Payne on baritone. If, as Artie Shaw insists, it is almost impossible for anyone who was not young in the 1920s to conceive of Louis Armstrong's originality and his impact on musicians, it may be impossible for anyone not young in the 1940s to perceive the impact of Gillespie and Parker. The surprising thing is how many musicians had by 1949 assimilated their conception and approach, enough that Dizzy was able to put together this band — and there were of course many more like them out there somewhere. All the men in the band are echoes of Dizzy, but by no means pale echoes, as Cecil Payne proves in bopping away with prodigious facility on *Stay On It*, a tune by Count Basie and Tadd Dameron. Dameron and Gil Fuller are credited as the arrangers of this band. But Dizzy's thinking infuses the writing.

Also in the band was Chano Pozo, the Cuban percussionist who was murdered not long after this concert. (Gene Norman believes this was his last recorded performance.) Here again we see the breadth of Dizzy's vision, his role in the Afro-Cuban infusion into jazz and later, his part in importing Brazilian samba, all of it a reaching back to an African past to shape the music's future. Just as elements of Elizabethan balladry were preserved in comparative purity in the Appalachian hills until the highways came punching through, patterns of pure African percussion survived in Cuban backwaters, at least until Castro's drive for universal literacy. Dizzy perceived the importance of this and, among other things, hired Chano Pozo at a time when few could see what that music had to do with jazz. Pozo is heard to powerful effect on *Manteca*, which is Spanish for lard or butter and slang in Cuba for pot.

Because of what Dizzy became, it is too easy to forget what he was when this band, with a trumpet section playing bravura unison passages perfectly in his style, came into being. Dizzy was thirty-two when he led it, and he already had a substantial body of achievement behind him. Let's not get too excited about his youth. Mozart was dead at thirty-six, Charlie Christian and Scott LaFaro in their early twenties. Nonetheless, Dizzy was a young man at the time. And the most remarkable musician in the band was its leader.

The Gillespie-Parker revolution has been assimilated into American music. As Dizzy has pointed out, you hear its traces in television commercials. Dizzy himself is one of those who assimilated the innovations, thereby conforming to a common life pattern: major scientists, such as Einstein and Heisenberg, spend the rest of their lives working out implications of discoveries made in their twenties. This is not to suggest that he has been static. Far from it. A couple of years ago, he changed his embouchure and talked to friends with a neophyte's enthusiasm about its effects on his playing. One effect is a great expansion of his tone. This from a man of sixty-five. Clark Terry and Plas Johnson and I sat listening to him at Monterey a year ago, in a state of awe. "He's still the master," Clark said. He plays now with a great secure wisdom, one of the giants of Twentieth Century music, an Olympian figure, really. A way to catch a sideways glance at his brilliance is found in this album in the scat-vocal track *Ool-Ya-Koo*. Yes it's funny, yes it's clownish. But just as his musical invention is luxuriant, so is his abstraction of language. In a perfect onomatopaeic evocation of his own playing, he flings out sounds and syllables unknown to English and probably every other language, entirely free of inhibition or any trace of desire to have them "make sense". You find yourself wondering how that mind works, how the man's neuro-muscular system has been put into such responsive touch with the incorporeal inner self. There is something of Zen archery in Dizzy's perfect communion with his own body.

His playing and singing are *ecstatic*, the root of which, as Rollo Mays points out in *The Courage to Create*, is "ex-stasis" — to stand out from: to be, as Mays puts it, "freed from the usual split between subject and object which is a perpetual dichotomy in most human activity."

He says, "*Ecstasy* is the accurate term for the intensity of conscious that occurs in the creative act. But it is not to be thought of merely as a Bacchic 'letting go'; it involves the total person, with the subconscious and unconscious acting in unity with the conscious. It is not, thus, *irrational*; it is, rather, suprarational. It brings intellectual, volitional, and emotional functions into play all together."

And there you have Dizzy's playing on that stage in Pasadena. In his journey from thirty-two to sixty-five, something has been gained and something lost. This is not an evasive way of saying that his playing is not as good as it was. On the contrary, it is far better now. But something is gone, something that is of the intemperate time of youth. His playing had a madcap abandon, a total lack of caution. He had energy to burn and he burned it, squandered it, a magnificent wastrel. The band was the brilliant final flower of the era, and it is fortunate that recording equipment was running on that evening in Pasadena nearly thirty-five years ago.

As *Manteca*, the last track of the album, ended, the twenty-seven-year-old disc jockey who produced that concert, now sixty-one and white haired, sighed. "Those were great days," Gene Norman said.