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The Big Myth

In a 1983 liner note, Nat Hentoff writes that "Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young were never admitted to 'official' American culture. No Pulitzers, no invitations to join National Academies of Arts and Letters, no artist-in-residence appointments at any universities (white or Black)." The capitalization is Hentoff's, not mine.

Hentoff has been sawing out the same tune on the same violin ever since I can remember. It is the sorriest of all the many sociological myths about jazz, and he has contributed massively to its making: These poor uneducated black folks invented this music out of inspiration and thin air, thereby creating America's Only Original Art Form, which a malign WASP establishment has ever since kept on the outside looking in, as the classical music world frowns down on it with disdain.

That image of jazz is nonsense.

It is mystifying that Hentoff keeps it up when there are an estimated 30,000 jazz bands of one sort or another in the high schools, colleges and universities of the United States. And if Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young were never appointed to university staffs, Hentoff must have heard about the distinguished career of Dave Baker, head of the department of jazz studies at Indiana University, who has been on the faculty there since 1966. And Hentoff surely must have known, even as he wrote it, that if Lester Young was not artist-in-residence at a university, Mary Lou Williams *was*. She held that position at Duke University, where she taught full time in the last years of her life. If anyone is looking for Floyd (Floogie) Williams, the composer, once Lionel Hampton's drummer, he has his doctorate in black studies and is head of a department of jazz studies at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania.

When jazz has penetrated the academic world to the level of regional colleges, it can hardly be considered to be on the outside looking in. Clark Terry is one of the most respected clinicians in America, and Dizzy Gillespie turns up in Denton, Texas, to play with the North Texas State University Lab Band. Indeed, if jazz today faces a danger, it lies in this comfortable acclimation in the academic world. The easy way to teach anything is to standardize it — to say that this and this only is the correct way to learn the trumpet, not blowing into a garden hose, the way Clark Terry did as a boy. It will leach the individuality out of the art and you will get players as precise, mechanical, and cold as Wynton Marsalis. It faces another danger, too, over which Clark Terry has expressed concern: Ghetto children aren't learning jazz, they're learning whatever will make them the most money quickly, and that is rock and roll, not jazz. I know an extraordinarily gifted young black trumpeter who gave up playing under pressure from his prosperous middle-class family who thought that jazz was not a sensible or secure profession — a point of view with something to be said for it. If present trends continue, jazz is in danger of being largely abandoned by the ethnic group that invented it. Johnny Griffin has said, "The American jazz audience today is predominantly white. Let's hope that those faithful white connoisseurs of jazz will hang in there long enough for the people back in the hood to get the message."

The idea that the men who developed jazz were uneducated and merely manifesting — this is always implied, if seldom stated — some remarkable inherited attribute is as racist as any other social image of those happy singin' an' dancin' folks with their natural rhythm. And it demeans many seminal figures in the music's history, men who achieved what they did not because they were black and had natchal rhythm but because they were superior musicians who mastered their craft the only way it can be done, by education and hard work.

Benny Carter mentions studying the Forsythe orchestration treatise probably toward the end of the 1920s. Claude Hopkins studied at the Washington Conservatory and had a bachelor's degree from Harvard. The Canadian-born pianist Lou Hooper, one of Oscar Peterson's teachers, who was a figure in Harlem jazz of the 1920s, graduated from the Detroit Conservatory in 1916, and ended his career on the faculty of the University of Prince Edward Island. (Oscar studied also with the Hungarian pianist Paul de Marky, who had studied in Budapest with Istvan Thoma n, a pupil of Liszt; which should offer an insight into Oscar's playing in lieu of the derived-from-Art Tatum idea of his work.) Paul Whiteman's father, a noted Denver music educator, numbered among his students Jimmie Lunceford, who went on to get a bachelor's degree from Fisk. Lil Hardin Armstrong was an alumna of Fisk. Don Redman was the son of a prominent music teacher. By the age of 12, Redman played all the reeds, including double reeds. He studied at both the Chicago and Boston conservatories.

In music, private teaching has always meant more than class instruction, and a great many of the early black musicians had solid training behind them, whether they had degrees or not. To insist on the intuitive and anonymous invention of jazz when so many disciplined and sophisticated minds were involved, and to describe it as a folk music, is to demean both the music and the men who developed it. "Folk" can't play jazz. It takes musicians. And very good ones. It always did.

Given the background of men like Carter, Redman, Hooper, Hopkins, and Lunceford, it is inconceivable that they were unaware of the revolutionary turn-of-the century developments in European music. By 1927, William Grant Still — who had a degree in music — was studying with Varese, the farthest-out of all far-outs. To insist on some sort of intuitive invention of jazz by an uneducated "folk" is to overlook the amazing personal achievement of black musicians who were able, more than half a century ago, to get into and graduate from universities, Harvard among them.

There is no single element in jazz that was or is original, not the harmonic-melodic system, which is European, not the rhythmic character, which is African, not even the idea of improvisation, since improvisation has always been a part of the European tradition. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, were all master improvisers. Church organists have always been trained in keyboard improvisation, with the best of

them able to create spontaneously large and complicated structures that go beyond anything yet attempted by jazz musicians.

The originality arises in the combination of elements. Art Blakey insists that "this is American music. There's nothing like it anywhere on the planet. People are always trying to connect it to something else, to African music, to Latin music. It's not. It's American music. And no one else can play it. Now they say, 'Art Blakey, he's black. That makes him an African.' I'm not. I'm an American and this is American music." He narrows the case a little — there are now innumerable excellent jazz musicians of nationalities other than American. But he could rightly say that they succeed in this music only insofar as they Americanize themselves. And certainly he is quite correct in asserting that it is American music in that the particular cultural collision that produced it occurred in America. But to suggest that the early jazz musicians did not look to "educated" music to pick up a few tricks is to imply that they were stupid.

Nor is it true that the classical establishment universally has disdained jazz. Virgil Thomson long ago affirmed, "Jazz is the most astounding spontaneous musical event to take place anywhere since the Reformation." In 1947, Leonard Bernstein said, "Serious music in America would today have a different complexion and direction were it not for the profound influence of jazz." In 1944, the Chevron School Broadcast published an appreciation of authentic jazz for use in public schools. The extensive notes in praise of the music were by the noted classical music critic Alfred Frankenstein. In 1941, Louis Harap wrote in *The Musical Quarterly*, "The most valid and vital music created in America in this century has been hot jazz, while classical composition here during the same period has been something less than vital." In the early 1930s, the British composer and essayist Constant Lambert deplored the sterility of contemporary classical music in comparison with the vitality of jazz, particularly the work of Duke Ellington, which he enormously admired. And continuing in his path, the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin's* former classical music critic (he wrote for the paper from 1930 to 1942), Henry Pleasants, an authority on opera, published not one but a series of books excoriating contemporary classical music and praising jazz as the most important music of our time, starting with *The Agony of Modern Music* in 1955, a work that rattled the cages. In August 1924, *The Etude*, the most pervasive journal for music teachers, published an issue devoted to what it called *The Jazz Problem*. It surveyed a number of then-famous people (some of them now largely forgotten) on the subject. It got a result it apparently did not anticipate: extensive praise of the music, along with a few derogations. These statements are a little startling to read today.

The magazine's own editorial on the subject seems confused, as if approval of the music by men such as Leopold Stokowski left it uneasy about its bias. That editorial is worth quoting in full.

The Etude *has no illusions on Jazz. We hold a very definite and distinct opinion of the origin, the position, and the future of jazz.*

The Etude *reflects action in the music world. It is a mirror of contemporary musical educational effort. We, therefore, do most emphatically not endorse Jazz, merely by discussing it.*

Jazz, like much of the thematic material glorified by the great masters of the past, has come largely from the humblest origin.

In its original form it has no place in musical education and deserves none. It will have to be transmogrified many times before it can present its credentials for the Walhalla of music.

In musical education Jazz has been an accursed annoyance to teachers for years. Possibly the teachers are, themselves, somewhat to blame for this. Young people demand interesting, inspiriting music. Many of the Jazz pieces they have played are infinitely more difficult to execute than the sober music their teachers have given them. If the teacher had recognized the wholesome appetite of youth for fun and had given interesting, sprightly music instead of preaching the evils of Jazz, the nuisance might have been averted.

As it is, the young pupil who attempts to play much of the "raw" Jazz of the day wastes time with common, cheap, trite tunes badly arranged. The pupil plays carelessly and "sloppily." These traits, once rooted, are very difficult to pull out. This is the chief evil of Jazz in musical education.

On the other hand, the melodic and rhythmic inventive skill of many of the composers of Jazz, such men as Berlin, Confrey, Gershwin, and Cohan, is extraordinary. Passing through the skilled hands of such orchestral leaders of high-class Jazz orchestras conducted by Paul Whiteman, Isham Jones, Waring and others, the effects have been such that serious musicians such as John Alden Carpenter, Percy Grainger and Leopold Stokowski, have predicted that Jazz will have an immense influence upon musical composition, not only of America, but also of the world.

Because The Etude *knows that its very large audience of wideawake readers desires to keep informed upon all sides of the leading musical questions, it presents in this midsummer issue the most important opinions upon the subject yet published. We have thus taken up the "Jazzmania" and dismiss it with this issue. But who knows, the weeds of Jazz may be Burbanked into orchestral symphonies by leading American composers in another decade?*

We do desire, however, to call our readers' attention to the remarkable improvement that has come in the manufacture of wind instruments of all kinds and to the opportunities which are presented for teaching these instruments. Jazz called the attention of the public to many of these instruments, but their higher possibilities are unlimited, and thousands of students are now studying wind instruments who only a few years ago would never have thought of them.

There is much to smile at in there, including the publication's idea of what jazz actually was. It is amusing to see George M. Cohan defined as a jazz composer — or Fred Waring's as a jazz orchestra. Not one black musician is even mentioned. But the editorial does indicate, particularly in its last paragraph, how much impact on music education jazz had already had. And I remind you of the date: 1924.

Now let us look at comments of the people the magazine questioned. The composer and educator Felix Borowski said, "I do not see anything particularly pernicious in 'Jazz.' It would seem that the disapproval which has been bestowed upon it has been the result of the dancing which has accompanied jazz rather than the music itself... and in its own special department jazz is often as 'good' as a waltz by Strauss .... I find in this form of music something peculiarly American, our restlessness, for instance. Whether jazz could or should be used in what are generally considered serious compositions depends largely upon the composition and upon the person who writes it. Tchaikowsky, Borodin, Glazounow and others used Russian dances in their symphonies and chamber music; there is no

Notice

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reason why an American composer should not employ his own dances — if only he does it well."

Composer John Alden Carpenter wrote, "All music that has significance must necessarily be the product of its time .... I am convinced that our contemporary popular music (please note that I avoid labeling it 'jazz') is by far the most spontaneous, the most personal, the most characteristic, and, by virtue of these qualities, the most important musical expression that America has achieved."

The Czech violinist and composer Franz Drdla, an associate of Brahms who had just finished touring in America, wrote, "Every time and every age has its characteristic music precisely as it has its characteristic dress. In the days of the madrigal, the very character of the words and the text reflect the architecture and the dress of the times. Jazz is the characteristic folk music of modernity because America is the most modern country of the world. It is ... an expression of the times and it is not surprising that jazz should rapidly circulate around the globe like the American dollar."

John Luther Long, described as "Eminent Author Dramatist", said, "One thing is certain: The world loves and will practice joy. And in jazz there is joy!"

John Philip Sousa wrote:

"My Standard Dictionary gives forth, 'Jazz: — Ragtime music in discordant tones or the notes for it.'

"This is a most misleading meaning and far from the truth and is as much out of place as defining a symphony when murdered by an inadequate and poor orchestra as 'a combination of sounds largely abhorrent to the ear.'

"Jazz can be as simple in construction and as innocent of discord as a happy child's musings, or can be of a tonal quality as complex as the most futuristic composition. Many jazz pieces suffer through ridiculous performances, owing to the desire of a performer ... to create a laugh by any means possible .... (That) simply makes it vulgar through no fault of its own ....

"There is is no reason, with its exhilarating rhythm, its melodic ingenuities, why it should not become one of the accepted forms of composition."

A few of the people consulted denigrated jazz, but even they seemed a little uncertain in doing so, as if they suspected there was more to the music than they were perceiving.

There is an invaluable new book of record reviews by the three British critics Max Harrison, Charles Fox, and Eric Thacker. Its full title is *The Essential Jazz Records, Volume 1, Ragtime to Swing*. It is available for $39.95 from Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, PO Box 5007, Westport, Connecticut 06881. Its appeal is obviously specialized, which doubtless makes necessary the rather steep price, further justified by the research that went into determining where these records can be found. The book contains some thoughtful and illuminating writing by all three men, and a surprising section by Harrison on *The Influence of Jazz on European Composers*. He says, "The musical richness of the best jazz was bound to interest younger composers in the 1920s and beyond. Although the works they wrote in response to it are not in themselves jazz, knowledge of some of the relevant pieces is essential to an understanding of the impact jazz has had on Twentieth Century Music."

Among the pieces he cites are Satie's *Jack in the Box* (1899), Debussy's *Golliwogg's Cakewalk* (1906), Auric's *Adieu, New York!* (1920), Hindemith's *Suite 1922* (1922), Schulhoff's *Ragmusic* (1922) and *Esquisses de jazz* (1927), Burian's *American Suite* (1926), Copland's *4 Piano Blues* (1926-48), Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat* (1918), *Ragtime for 11 Instruments* (1918), Martinu's *Preludes* (1929), *Shimmy Foxtrot* (1922), *Three Sketches in Modern Dance Rhythms (1927), The Kitchen Revue* (1927), a ballet, *Le jazz* 1928), *Jazz Suite* (1928), and *Sextet* (1929), Milhaud's *La Creation du monde* (1923), *Caramel mou* (1920), and *Trois rag caprices* (1922), Weill's *Kleine Dreigroschemusik fur Blasorchester* (1928), Constant Lambert's *Concerto for Piano and Nine Instruments* (1930-31), *Elegaic Blues* (1927) and *Elegy* (1927), Bliss's *The Rout Trot* (1927), and Walton's *Old Sir Faulk*.

In 1919, five years before *The Etude* addressed itself to *The Jazz Problem*, the notedly intellectual Swiss symphony conductor Ernest Ansermet — he was founder of *L'orchestre de la Suisse Romande* and a mathematician — wrote an essay called *Sur un orchestre negre*, which the magazine didn't mention. Possibly it had not been translated yet. I had never read it in full until the Belgian composer and arranger Francy Boland, joint leader with Kenny Clarke of the late and lamented Clarke-Boland Big Band — who lives and works now in Switzerland — took me book-browsing in Geneva and we picked up a copy of Ansermet's fascinating *Ecrits sur la musique*.

"Today ragtime has conquered Europe," Ansermet tells us across the years. "It is ragtime that one dances in all our cities under the name of jazz and hundreds of our musicians apply themselves at this moment to accomodating this new art to a taste that is insipid and sentimental, to the coarse and mediocre sensuality of their clientele. Ragtime is even in the process of passing into what I will call, for lack of another word, *la musique savante*; Stravinsky has used the material in several works; Debussy has already written a cakewalk and I certainly believe Ravel will not be long in giving us a fox-trot." (Ravel "gave us" a foxtrot in *L'enfant et les Sortileges* [1920-25], and the jazz influence is evident in his *Violin Sonata No 2* [1923-27]. It is powerfully evident in the glorious *Concerto in G* for piano, which is drenched in its colorations.)

"But there is, under the name of Southern Syncopated Orchestra, an ensemble of authentic musicians of the Negro race who have been heard in London. Instrumentalists and singers, they present pellmell all sorts of manifestations of their art, old and new, the best and the worst ....

"The first thing that strikes us about the Southern Syncopated Orchestra is the astonishing perfection, the highest taste, the fervor of their playing. I cannot say if these artists make it their duty to be 'sincere', if they are penetrated by the idea that they have a 'mission' to fulfill, if they are convinced of the 'nobility' of their task, if they have that holy 'audacity' and sacred 'valor' that our police of musical morals exact of our European musicians, or even if they are animated by any 'idea' whatever. But I can see that they have a precise feeling for the music they love, and a pleasure in making it that communicates to the listener with an irresistible force, a pleasure that pushes them ceaselessly to outdo themselves, constantly to enrich and refine their medium. They play generally without notes, and even when they have them, they are used only to indicate a general line, for few of their pieces that I heard twice were executed with exactly the same effects. I imagine that, knowing which voice is assigned to them in the harmonic structure, and aware of the role of each instrument, they can, in a certain way and within certain limits, let themselves go, according to the heart. They are so entirely possessed by the music they play that they cannot help dancing it within themselves, in such a way that their playing is a true spectacle, and when they surrender to one of their favorite effects, to return to a refrain at half speed with a redoubled intensity and figuration, a startling thing happens: it seems as if a great wind passes in a forest, or that doors are thrown brusquely open on an immense orgy.

"Moreover, the musician who directs and to whom the

Most unprophetic song title of 1959: *The Night that Rock and Roll Died*, **by Jimmy Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn, written for the film** *Say One for Me.*

constitution of this ensemble is due, Monsieur Will Marion Cook, is a master in every respect, and there is no orchestra leader I take so much pleasure in watching conduct. As for the music that comprises their repertoire, it is purely vocal, for one voice, a vocal quartet, or a choir accompanied by instruments, or again purely instrumental; it bears the names of composers unknown in our world or is marked: traditional. The music called traditional is of religious inspiration. It is the index of a whole religious way and a true religious art that merit a full study of their own. The entire Old Testament is recounted with touching realism and familiarity. There is much about Moses, Gideon, the Jordan, and Pharaoh. In an immense unison, the voices intone, 'Go down, Moses, and tell old Pharoah to let my people go.' And suddenly they clap their hands and stamp their feet with a joy like that of schoolchildren told that the teacher is out sick: 'Good news, good news! heaven's chariot is descending to the earth. I don't want it to forget me!' Or else a singer gets up: 'I got shoes. . .' pronouncing the s to make it pretty '. . . you got shoes, all God's children got shoes. When I get to heaven, gonna put on my shoes, gonna walk all over God's heaven . . .'

"(Some of the songs) are about the sweetness of Georgia peaches, or the scent of flowers, the land, the mammy, or the sweetheart; the instrumental works are rags, or even European dances. Among the authors, some are Negro, but they are the exceptions. The others are of European origin, and even when this is not so of the author, it is of the music; most of the ragtimes are based on well-known works, or particular formulae particular to our art. There is one based on the *Wedding March* from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another on the celebrated *Prelude* of Rachmaninoff, another on typical Debussy chords, another quite simply on the major scale."

Let me intrude on the flow of Ansermet's eloquence, not to say perception — did he have some ears! — to point out that it seems Will Marion Cook and his people were familiar with Debussy, who had died about a year before Ansermet wrote the essay.

"The above-mentioned traditional music," Ansermet says, "itself has its source, as could no doubt be easily rediscovered, in the hymns the Negroes learned from English missionaries. Thus all, or almost all, the music of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra is of origin foreign to the Negroes. How is this possible? Because this music is not a matter of thematic material, but of spirit.

"The Negro populations of North America are of African origin. I do not know the music of the Negroes of Africa. It is said that it consists of work songs and ritual dances, that it is based on melodic modes different from ours, that it is particularly rich in rhythm, which already practices the syncope. In losing their land, did the Negroes who were brought to America lose their songs? (One shudders to call up such images.) At least they didn't lose the taste for them. In their new villages, near the fields of cotton, the first music they encounter is that of the canticles the missionaries teach them. And very quickly, they reshape them in their own manner . . . .

"The desire to give to certain syllables a certain bounce, or to draw out a resonance, for the sake of expression, seems to have determined in the vocal music of the Negroes their anticipation or retard of a fraction of the rhythmic unit. This is the birth of the syncope. All of the 'traditional' Negro songs are strewn with syncopes realized in the voice, while the movement of the body marks the regular rhythm. When secular music, the Anglo-Saxon ballad, the commonplace dance forms reached 'Dixieland', the land of the plantations, the Negroes appropriated it in the same way, and that's the birth of the rag. But it isn't enough to say that this Negro music consists of the habit of syncopating whatever musical material. We have seen that the syncope is itself only the effect of an expressive need, the manifestation in the field of rhythm of a specific taste. In a word, it is the genius of a race. That genius is marked in every element of the music, transfiguring all that it appropriates. On a trombone, the musician has a way of shaking each note by a continual vibration of the slide, and a sense of glissando, and a taste for muted notes that make of it a new instrument. He takes a clarinet or a saxophone and he has a manner of playing notes with a light *inferior appoggiatura*, he finds a whole series of effects produced by the lips alone, which make it a new instrument. There is a Negro way of playing the violin, a Negro way of singing. As for our orchestral percussion, it is needless to say how eagerly he has taken them up, he seizes at once all the apparatus, with his own great refinements, making of them the object of an inexhaustible jugglery.

"The banjo (a stringed instrument played with a plectrum) is perhaps not the invention of the Negro, but a modification to his use of a type of instrument of the family of the bandura and the mandolin.

"By bringing together, in the most diverse combinations, these chosen instruments, a more or less definitive type of Negro orchestra is constituted, of which the Southern Syncopated Orchestra is the first result — the attempt at a synthesis of great style.

"Composed of two violins, a cello and a saxophone, two contrabasses, two clarinets, a horn, three trumpets, three trombones, timbales and drums, two pianos and a group of banjos, it creates, by the manner in which these instruments are treated, a very special and strangely molten overall sonority in which the neutral timbres, such as that of the piano, disappear completely, and which the banjos halo with a constant vibration. So much so that in this fusion (all brasses muted) it is difficult to recognize individual timbres. Then a clarinet shrills out of it like a bird taking flight, a trombone bursts forth suddenly. And the ensemble displays a formidable dynamic range, which goes from a subtle sonority that makes one think of the orchestra of Ravel to a terrifying roar in which are mixed shouts and the clapping of hands.

"In the field of melody, although his habituation to our scales has effaced the memory of the African modes, on old instinct pushes the Negro to seek his pleasure outside the orthodox intervals: he plays thirds that are neither major nor minor and false seconds and falls often by instinct on the natural harmonic sounds of a given note; no written music can give the idea of his playing. I have often remarked, for example, that (in their music) the A-sharp and B-flat, the E and E-flat, are not the sounds of our scale. It is only in the field of harmony that the Negro has not realized his own expression. Still he uses series of chords of the seventh, and ambiguous major-minors, with a sure hand that many European musicians should envy. But harmony is perhaps, in general, an element that appears in musical evolution at a point that Negro art has not yet reached.

"Perhaps we are going to see, one of these days, a Glinka of Negro music. But I am inclined to think that it is in the *Blues* that the genius of the race manifests itself most forcefully.

"The Blues, that is what happens when the Negro is in pain, when he is far from 'home' . . ." Ansermet uses English words here, putting them in quotation marks; the effect is charming ". . . far from his 'Mammy' or from his 'Sweet heart'. He thinks

then of a motif or a favorite rhythm, and he takes his trombone or his violin or his banjo or his clarinet or his drum, or else he sings or, simply, dances. And on the motif he chooses, he exhausts his fantasy. That makes the pain pass. It is the Blues...

"There is in the Southern Syncopated Orchestra an extraordinary clarinet virtuoso who is, it appears, the first of his race to have composed on the clarinet blues of consummate form. I heard two on which he elaborated at length, then played to his companions who responded with accompaniment. Though they were extremely different, one was as admirable as the other for the wealth of the invention, the strength of the accent, for their audacity of novelty and the unforeseen. They gave already the idea of a style, and the form of it was gripping, sudden, harsh, with an ending abrupt and pitiless like that of the *Second Brandenburg Concerto* of Bach. I wish to declaim the name of this artist of genius, because for my part, I will never forget it: it is Sidney Bechet. When one has sought so often to rediscover in the past one of the figures to whom we owe the advent of our art — those men of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, for example, who from dance tunes created expressive works that thus opened the road on which Haydn and Mozart mark not the point of departure but the first milestones — it is such a moving thing to meet this large black boy, with white teeth and narrow brow, who is so happy that you like what he does, but does not know how to speak of his art, save to say that he is following his 'own way'. His 'own way' is perhaps the great road that the world will be swept along tomorrow."

That, slightly condensed, is the famous Ansermet essay, which is more read about than read. I have not rendered it fully into idiomatic English in order to avoid doing violence to its meaning and flavor. It is a remarkable document, unbelievably prescient. And in a particular way, it is quite moving. It is not, however, helpful to a person trying to make a case for jazz as a music persecuted by a conspiratorial establishment. Bechet spent much of the rest of his life in Europe, where he was lionized, and even presented at court to King George V. (The event prompted his wonderful wisecrack that it was the first time he had ever met anyone whose picture was on money.)

For society to assign to the artist an exalted position is a comparatively recent thing. In Haydn's time, even the most celebrated artists were not served at the same table or even in the same room as the aristocratic patrons for whom they performed. Bach is referred to in a church document of the period as "our worthy Kappelmeister". For a long time there was a law in England that an actor or actress could not live within a mile of Buckingham Palace. Artists have always been held a little suspect in Western society — and not just in Western society. In some African tribes, musicians are looked on as lazy and useless because all they want to do is practice their craft.

Pulitzers and Tonies and Nobels and foundation support and all the rest are phenomena of recent times. True appreciation of artistic creation has always been limited to a minority of people, for, as Ray Brown says, "The better it gets, the fewer of us know it." Not everybody likes jazz. Not everybody likes opera. But a large and perceptive body of jazz appreciators demonstrably has come into existence.

Years ago, when I was classical music critic of the Louisville *Times*, I circulated professionally mostly in a "classical" music world, meeting many of the major "serious" composers of our time, pianists, conductors, and opera singers. I simply never encountered the condescension to jazz that is supposed to exist in that world, except now and then from one of the bluehaired ladies, as Alec Wilder used to call them, on the committees of symphony orchestras and chamber music societies. Among symphony players there was a widespread admiration for jazz. Furthermore, a number of brass players I met had backgrounds in jazz or dance bands. Miles Anderson, the principal trombonist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, is a great jazz fan. So was the late cellist Edgar Lustgarten, who loved to play it if you'd write it out for him. In Oscar Peterson's basement is a photo of himself taken with Art Tatum and Vladimir Horowitz. "Is it true," I asked, "that Horowitz has always been a Tatum fan?" "Absolutely," Oscar said. So too was Horowitz's friend Rachmaninoff. When Sixten Ehrling was conductor of the Detroit Symphony, he could often be found after concerts and other evenings in Baker's Keyboard Lounge, listening to jazz. And let us not forget who is the new conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic — Andre Previn, than whom jazz has never had a more articulate champion. Indeed, Previn is himself an accomplished jazz player, for all the condescension that used to be heaped on him by some jazz critics. And another symphony conductor, now coming into prominence, has a, shall we say, not-bad background in jazz: Lalo Schifrin.

Nor have things apparently been much different in Britain. Max Harrison told me, "As a person who's spent most of his life in classical music publishing and then as a — mainly — classical music critic, I can wholly endorse your Louisville experience. Apart, inevitably, from an occasional individual, I simply haven't encountered the anti-jazz prejudice which jazz people almost universally imagine to exist in that world. This is a prime example of jazz people convincing themselves, by repeating, a la Hentoff, over and over, something which is untrue."

A look through the subscription list of the *Jazzletter* is revealing. It is full of college professors, doctors, attorneys, psychiatrists, editors, a microbiologist, an anthropologist, and others of presumptively high intellectual and social standing. Jazz has its admirers in the highest and lowest places. A friend of mine saw Richard Nixon sit down at the piano and play several Duke Ellington tunes. With the right changes.

Any number of jazz musicians have honorary doctorates from various universities. Oscar Peterson has at least six, including three LLDs. And in 1973, he was made an officer in the Order of Canada, the Canadian equivalent of a British OBE. And if Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins did not have Pulitzers, as noted by Hentoff, jazz works *have* been nominated for it. Ornette Coleman has been awarded a Guggenheim. Teddy Wilson was teaching at Juilliard more than thirty years ago.

Dianegra

(7 April 1985)
Holiday goes double:
this very Easter
the real Billie
no stand-in
would have beat off
three score and ten
had she not risen
a quarter century since
from her cross
of self-torture
wherein we all
drove the nails:
God bless this child
who never was.

— John S. Lucas

Dr. Billy Taylor is artist-in-residence at Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, and has taught at the Manhattan School of Music, Columbia University, and Howard. He has a combined masters degree and doctorate from the University of Massachusetts. He has been a Yale Fellow at Calhoun College for some years and has been appointed a Duke Ellington Fellow by Yale. And he broadcasts regularly about jazz for CBS-TV's *Sunday Morning* program. Willie Ruff, educated at Philadelphia Musical Academy, is on the faculty at Yale.

This is not for a moment to suggest that jazz has encountered no resistance. Obviously it has.

But then that has been true of new music throughout history. Beethoven was fiercely attacked by critics, and one fellow composer said that the *Fifth Symphony* gave proof that he was mad. The Berlin critic Richard Wurst said Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* was "a musical monster . . . an ear-flaying horror." The Boston *Evening Transcript* said his *Fifth Symphony* in turn was "pandemonium, delirium tremens, raving, and above all, noise worse confounded" — the same sort of thing detractors said of jazz. Debussy's *Pelle as et Me lisande* was booed cruelly and the French took to calling it *Pè de raste et Me disante.* The London *Times* in April, 1924, four months before *The Etude* took up the jazz "problem", said, "To hear a whole program of Ravel's work is like watching some midget or pygmy doing clever, but very small, things within a limited scope. Moreover, the almost reptilian cold-bloodedness, which one suspects of having been consciously cultivated, of most of M. Ravel's music is almost repulsive when heard in bulk; even its beauties are like the markings on snakes and lizards." This of one of the warmest and most elegant composers of our century.

The blue-stockings of the 1920s hated jazz, and feared it. "The church also hated it," the classical music scholar and historian Robert Offergeld observes. "But they were more or less irrelevant. Jazz was deeply unnerving to the pedagogic community, and the music teachers associations set up what amounted to a national campaign against 'playing by ear,' a coded phrase that meant jazz. No respectable piano teacher had the faintest idea what jazz was, much less how to play it. Old maid piano teachers went out of business by the thousands."

Henry Pleasants adds, "A great many professional and accomplished classical musicians have been familiar with the work of jazz musicians, both black and white, and respected it — but at a distance. And the establishment was instinctively hostile because it was, understandably, I think, fearful. In following the relationship between the establishment and our indigenous American music, I am constantly reminded of Robert Ardrey's book *The Territorial Imperative.* An alien (African) element had entered the mainstream of western (European) music. The tribe (establishment) closed forces to protect and perpetuate its territorial (ethnic?) integrity and keep the intruder out, or at least at a distance. One could respect him, but one didn't invite him to dinner. And not because he was black! Indeed, a black jazz musician had a better chance of being invited to dinner than a white!"

It is not surprising, then, that jazz encountered hostility. What is far more interesting is that a music so new should have encountered as much understanding and admiration as it did among people who really mattered in musical circles. On this point that edition of *The Etude* is illuminating. And jazz still encounters a certain amount of resistance. People involved in the jazz education movement in the universities will, sometimes, tell you of a certain cool toleration they encounter from the "classical" department. But this is well within the frame of what we might call a normal human conservatism, an uneasiness with departures and the unfamiliar. By their very nature, universities are conservative organizations, for it is in them that we *conserve* our culture, to pass it along. Yet that kind of self-protective academic toleration of jazz is no longer general in the universities. You won't encounter it at the University of Indiana, certainly, not with Harvey Phillips, whose official title is Distinguished Professor of Music, so influential in its proceedings and policies. In his vacation time, he is off touring with the Tuba Jazz Consort. And Harvey says that there isn't a college of consequence in the country that doesn't have a jazz course.

We are not talking here of the racial discrimination experienced by black jazz musicians. That is a separate discussion. The discrimination they have encountered is based on color rather than music and would be the same no matter what the individual's profession. If you are, say, a black investment banker in Los Angeles, your chances of being shot by a cop are notably higher than they would be if you were white. The issue is a discrimination supposedly visited on the music from its origins into the present by a contemptuous classical establishment. And there *has* been some of it. My own father, a "legit" musician (although he had also played in dance bands and in music hall in England), used to call to my room, "Turn that down!" when I was listening to *Harlem Air Shaft* or *White Heat* or *Apple Honey*. Yet even he, toward the end of his life, became a collector of big-band jazz records. "Boy," he would say, "can those fellows play!" (I took him once to the Copacabana in New York to hear Tony Bennett, and found him enthralled by one of the soloists. "Who's that lad playing the B-flat tenor?" he said in wondering admiration. It was Al Cohn, and I knew I had won a lifelong argument with my father.)

Finally, the subject has to be viewed against a background of condescension toward *all* American music that was the long lingering consequence of an immoral American copyright law that permitted the use without payment of music by foreign composers, which caused publishers throughout the Nineteenth Century to steal it and exploit it as superior to American composition. This held back the entire American musical culture to a degree we can only imagine. Even without the law as it was, such was European prestige in America that this condescension would no doubt have existed to an extent anyway. It was only in the 1950s that the United States began to escape the utter domination of the French in fashions. Even now, the great majority of American symphony orchestras are led by foreign conductors. Only a few American conductors have been allowed to rise in this field, Michael Tillson-Thomas, Leonard Bernstein, and Andre Previn among them. And if you want to split a hair, Andre was born in Berlin.

That an iconoclastic art should have received a good deal of acceptance in serious artistic circles, which turns out to be the case, is rather surprising. That it has not had a vast general popularity is *not* surprising. The highest art rarely does, although one suspects that jazz — and other art worthy of the designation — could, in this age of widespread public education, be much more popular than it is if the corporations on whom the artist must depend for the distribution of his wares were not so brutally indifferent to all but the most profitable "art", and committed to an untested belief that it is only the trash that sells. The public cannot acquire a taste for what it must struggle to hear.

Nonetheless, the notion that jazz has experienced the scorn of the cultured world throughout its existence turns out on examination to be something less than the truth. But it is a myth that dies hard, particularly with Nat Hentoff, one of the most widely-published writers on the subject in the music's history, working so diligently, for whatever reasons, at its perpetuation.