Gene Lees
Jazzletter

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Following our conversation at dinner about KKGO, I also listened to the station more often and agree with many of your conclusions. Having made my living in commercial broadcasting for twenty-three years, I cannot deny a station's need to make money. However, I am still irritated by two elements of KKGO's policy and one of its practice.

I have learned that it is against station policy to name soloists or sidemen. Example: just now, KKGO aired *Tangerine* from Chet Baker's album *She Was Too Good to Me*. Paul Desmond played a solo the equal of Baker's but was unmentioned by the DJ either preceding or following the music. This happens all the time. If KKGO plays, say, *Bijou*, the jock will tell you it was by Woody Herman, ignoring the fact that the Bill Harris solo is what makes the record important. The policy represents a major failure to serve the most elementary educational or informational function. Listeners to serious music want to know the identities of sidemen and soloists.

The second policy failure is a rule against label information. When I hear a piece of music I like that is new to me, I want to know what label released the record. Doesn't everyone? If I buy the album, that's good for the economics of the entertainment business and thus good for KKGO.

The bum practice is that old radio bugaboo, talking over the music. It is done, I presume, either out of insensitivity or a desire to save time. Is it possible there are people who actually want to hear a disc jockey talk over a Nat Cole piano intro? This isn't rock and roll. Yet.

I must add that Chuck Niles, bless his heart, gives information, and often insights. I've never heard him talk over a record.

In haste and low dudgeon,

Doug Ramsey
Northridge, California

I have to take issue with your defense of the indefensible, the ostensible jazz programming of KKGO.

Let's start with an unarguable given. Chuck Niles, at night, is the most literate and tasteful music host/dj local radio has ever seen; heard, to be more accurate. From Chuck, however, it's all downhill.

KKGO's other jocks may have some taste; it's rarely reflected by their music selection. Most of KKGO's general music programming is an unlistenable mishmash of fusion, crossover, electronic funk and what has become the morning travesty, supposedly humorous Gary Owens as the morning music host.

KKGO has its audience, no argument. The junk that masquerades as music on the station sees to that. As you know better than most, popularity has rarely been equated with quality in any field of art.

There is an alternative for the local radio listener, and my interest in it is not related to the fact that I've done a show Saturday evenings on the station for more than three years now.

The alternative, of course, is KLON, the broadcast station at California State University Long Beach. Mainstream is the main musical message, along with swing, bebop, and the kind of jazz that bears more than a passing relationship to genuine music.

The fact that KLON is non-commercial is the least of it. Any station, thanks to the flood of reissue music on the market and new material from such labels as Concord Jazz and Pablo, can program with the same integrity. It's a matter of taste emanating from the program director and KLON's, Ken Borgers, is committed to that direction.

KLON's signal is only 1200 watts strong; you probably can't hear the station in Ojai. But, its choice of artists in a range from Bird to Basie, Goodman to Gil Evans, Akiyoshi to Zoot, transmits it all.

Jazz lives on L.A. area radio — in the hearts, minds and tastes of those who really understand what it means.

Alan Harvey
Arleta, California

No, I don't know that "popularity has rarely been equated with quality in any field of art." Mozart, Wagner, Liszt, Paganini, Chopin, Verdi, Puccini, and many more of that stature were hugely popular, and Sibelius was a national hero. Mozart died poor only because composers were not yet protected by copyright laws. When Jacques Offenbach, the brilliant satiric composer, visited Boston, mobs of women unhitched his carriage and pulled it through the streets by hand. Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, and Somerset Maugham were international celebrities. Picasso and Dali, two of the greatest painters of the Twentieth Century, became millionaires comparatively early in life. Henry Moore's work is world-renowned. The gorgeous home of Ansell Adams is hardly a symbol of failure. Oscar Wilde was lionized, not to mention Charles Dickens. Ernest Hemingway was hugely popular, as was John Steinbeck. Laurence Olivier and Marlon Brando are not only among the greatest actors of our time, they are among the most popular. Jean Anouilh has consistently written hit plays, such as Beckett, *a masterpiece. Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller have all been highly successful and popular playwrights. Miles Davis has done very well. Dizzy Gillespie is a world celebrity. You forget what Woody Herman said of the big band era: "It was the popular music of the land." When Leonard Feather polled jazz musicians some years ago, a substantial majority voted Frank Sinatra their favorite singer. Sinatra was, even by 1944, the greatest singer of our popular music — and the very best of our popular music — America had ever known. One can hardly argue that he was unpopular. He's still popular. Tony Bennett, Peggy Lee, and Nat Cole, three truly great singers, had hit after hit. Cole was so popular that Capitol Records was largely built on his sales. Woody, Duke Ellington, Artie Shaw, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman, and Count Basie were immensely popular, and Louis Armstrong was the most famous American of his time, perhaps in all the country's history. Irving Berlin, Johnny Mercer, Harry Warren, George Gershwin, Harold Arlen, and Jerome Kern wrote hit songs.*

The triumph of trash in our time is a result of the unflagging greed of large corporations, which have abandoned all but the barest pretense of ethics or morality. What troubles me is precisely the decline in the last few decades of the popularity of the excellent.

Doug Ramsey's points are well taken. Since writing that commentary, I have encountered on the station three tracks played back to back, leaving me with a desperate desire to know what the first one was. It was never announced. But having driven from Boston to Los Angeles, listening to radio all along the way, I remember the pleasure of at last picking up KKGO's signal. While it has its flaws, those I mentioned as well those

Doug just named, I hold that it is a superior commercial radio station. Come to that, I find some of the new electronic things interesting rather than unlistenable.

Your point about the excellence of KLON is quite correct. I only wish we could get it in Ojai.

And now for some voices from eleswhere:

I am glad you supported KKGO and especially that marvelous guy Charlie Niles. I know him only by writing and also through my friend Buddy Childers, who is a good friend of Chuck's.

I might add that there is a very nice gentleman here in town, Joseph Lucchesi, who owns the cable system and has been pulling in KKGO for the past two or three years. This type of public-spirited service is something that deserves a medal and has done a great deal to increase the awareness of the jazz idiom.

James L. Harrison MD
Williamsport, Pennsylvania

Having recently been in Los Angeles, I agree with your contentions regarding KKGO. I had an opportunity to listen to the station during different portions of their programming day and I must say I found them to be a refreshing oasis in an otherwise arid radio desert. Granted, there was a certain amount of fringe jazz. However, this too was programmed with admirable taste and decorum. Los Angeles jazz folk should sample radio around the rest of the country, particularly what passes for jazz radio in some areas. Were they to do so I am certain they're return to L.A. thankful that they have KKGO.

Regarding subsidies for jazz, I must object, albeit mildly, to one contention you made. While it may not always have been true, the people sitting on National Endowment of the Arts grant panel who deal directly with the jazz community are a highly qualified lot. I have observed such panels and, indeed, have sat on some myself, and I have been mightily impressed with the extremely high caliber of the people, particularly on the purely jazz panels.

In two cases I found myself one of two, or the only, representative of the jazz community on an NEA panel, and I must admit I was somewhat dismayed at the lack of knowledge and in some cases the lack of interest in the jazz applications that came up for review. This was the case when the jazz discipline was intermingled with other disciplines in various multiple categories. I would suggest that the NEA do all it can to see to it that *all* jazz proposals be reviewed by jazz panels. Should this become the case, the NEA would have an airtight argument against some of your contentions.

I would, however, admit that as regards the state arts agencies' funding of jazz projects, fellowships, etc., you have a stronger argument regarding the people who sit on panels and their lack of jazz acumen. I would suggest that there is where we need to make an impact. There are fifty state arts agencies, but one NEA.

I think the readers would find it stimulating if you were to open up a dialogue on the subsidy issue where it regards jazz. It is my feeling that this is an area that is just now becoming known to the jazz idiom, and it's about time.

Willard Jenkins
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Willard Jenkins is the jazz co-ordinator of Arts Midwest, which covers Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. He broadcasts regularly on jazz in Minneapolis, edits the jazz newsletter of Arts Midwest, and contributes to Jazz Times.

Collier's Controversy

Part II

My knowledge of Jim Collier was limited to the information one gleans from the dust jackets of books and impressions gathered from a modest exchange of letters and two or three fairly brief telephone conversations. I had no clear idea how old he was, although the number of his books precluded his being a callow youth. So I checked him out in *Contemporary Authors* at the public library.

James Lincoln Collier was born June 27, 1928, in New York City, the son of Edmund Collier, writer and editor. He took a bachelor's degree in English literature at Hamilton College in upstate New York, married, had two sons, then was divorced and married a second time. He has written approximately thirty-five books, fiction and non-fiction, of which twenty-five are for children and young adults, and more than six hundred magazine articles for publications as diverse as *Penthouse* and *Boys' Life*, *Esquire* and the *Wall Street Journal*. He has received a number of literary awards, including the Newbery Honors Medal. Besides *The Making of Jazz*, his books include *Inside Jazz* and *The Great Jazz Artists*. *My Brother Sam Is Dead* is a young adult's novel about the Revolutionary War. A number of his books are general history, including the latest, *Decision at Philadelphia*, a study of the Constitutional Convention, co-written with his brother Christopher, historian of the state of Connecticut. One of his books, *Practical Music Theory*, is a text at the high school level. A lot of his work is in the social sciences, including *The Hypocritical American*, a study of American sexual attitudes. And he seemed to have his own "leftist" leanings, whatever that means in a time when the lines have become faint and only the demented, like the erstwhile Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, remain unswervingly doctrinaire.

I was also aware that Jim Collier is a trombone player.

Among the purposes of his trip to Los Angeles was a meeting with Stanley Dance.

Jim turned out, when I picked him up at his hotel in downtown Los Angeles, to be a man of a little above middle height with a full head of white hair, youthful skin, and a flat belly that is the result of jogging five miles a day for the last twenty-five or so years. I liked him at once and the conversation began in mid-sentence, as if I had known him for years. He is a warm man with a quick chuckle. We had lunch in a Japanese restaurant in downtown Los Angeles, then headed back to his hotel.

"Sweets Edison," I said, "made the comment to me recently, 'Jazz is no folk music, it's too hard to play.' If it's in decline, as a lot of people think, including some of the musicians, it could be just because of the preoccupation with it as an art form. First it was called a folk music, then an art music. You can't have it both ways. And it seems to me it was healthier when it was an art form unaware of being an art form. As soon as you have an art form, you have a self-consciousness about it instead of simply the search for excellence. It starts to be about impressing people rather than moving them."

"I have a little trouble with that word 'art'," Jim said. "We have what I call the yarts. I am apprehensive when I meet someone who announces, 'I have an interest in thee yarts.'"

We arrived back at the Holiday Inn and I parked the car. We deposited ourselves in the hotel restaurant, and Jim ordered a beer.

"Tell me more about that *New Republic* piece," I said.

"Well the crucial point," Jim said, "is that so much of what has been written as jazz history has just been regurgitation of

previous writings. Very few people have bothered to go back and really look at the information, read the old newspapers, the *Amsterdam News* and whatever you have to read in order to find out what really was going on there. We're now beginning to see a new approach to jazz scholarship, where people are starting to think that we have to apply scholarly standards. I think that Gunther Schuller deserves a lot of credit, because Gunther brought a real academic attitude toward it. Of course he's a trained musicologist, and he produced what I consider to be the first important really scholarly book on jazz, Gunther's *Early Jazz*. It remains kind of a cornerstone in jazz writing. Prior to that there had been musicologists who'd done this kind of thing — Winthrop Sergeant's book in 1939, *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*; and also André Hodeir, also a musicologist, was doing this kind of thing. But nobody had done the kind of serious work that needs to be done. Now I have a problem with this, because I'm the kind of guy who believes that jazz does not belong on a stage, it belongs in a club where there's smoke and people drinking beer and nobody is hushed and reverent about it. I see jazz in a kind of experiential way. It's supposed to be, well, fun isn't the term, because jazz should be a rather deep experience. A lot of the involvement to me is the whole sense of being with a group of people who are actively engaged in the music. I love it, when I'm playing, when people dance. I would much rather play in a club, even though I don't smoke, sit there and deal with all that — play, and have the people very involved with what I'm doing, rather than the concert situation. So I have this, in a strange sense, anti-academic bias. But nonetheless, if we're going to write about it, that means people should be going back and doing the appropriate kind of research, rather than simply putting their opinions down on paper."

"What you had," I said, "at least in the early days, was enthusiasts writing about the music, but not scholars. And sometimes I think the musicians were putting them on."

"Undoubtedly. I got a lot of flak about my Louis Armstrong book. The view of Armstrong that the jazz writers have is almost diametrically opposed to the view of the black people who knew him well. When you talk to guys who were on the band, like Pops Foster, people like Zutty Singleton, who was his boyhood friend, and knew him very very well, you get a very different picture. I've been listening to Louis Armstrong's music since I was twelve years old. I love it probably more deeply than any music that I know. I continue to get chills up my spine when I put the needle on those first few notes of *West End Blues*. It still carries me away. The fact of the matter is, despite my love for the music, Louis Armstrong was not in all respects a wonderful human being."

"Neither was Beethoven."

"Neither was Wagner, God knows, if you get into that. But the point is this: Louis was a kid who'd come out of a very tough background. He was street smart. He knew perfectly well, when he talked with a white jazz writer, how to present himself. But when he was with black people, he let his hair down. Lucille Armstrong told me in so many words that he was never comfortable with uppity folks — all the heads of state, he was never comfortable with them. Where Louis was comfortable was with working class black people. That's where he really was happiest. Then you saw that other side of him, that bristly side of him. There were a lot of stories I never used in the book because I couldn't verify them — people were always telling me about how he attacked Joe Glaser with a knife. I didn't use that story and I don't know whether it's true."

"And you can't ask Joe Glaser now."

"And you can't ask Joe Glaser. There was a story about the girlfriend he was involved with the 1950s. Lucille knew all about it, I've seen the documentation on it. I've seen the telegram Lucille wrote to Louis, congratulating him sardonically on the birth of what Louis thought was his child but obviously wasn't. I left all that out, because it was irrelevant.

"You know, one of the things that I do in the course of my life that is extremely important to me is to go out and play jazz. And I generally get out a couple of times a week. To me it is a great experience, a key experience in my life, it matters to me a great deal, and I love doing it very deeply. When you're playing jazz, you're trying to tell the truth. Many jazz players have said this. And the truth in playing jazz is what you feel. But when you're writing history, the truth is *not* what you feel. What you feel is irrelevant to what you're doing. The truth is what you can document, what you've got some evidence for. A lot of the — I can't say older writers, since I'm fifty-seven — but a lot of the earlier writers frequently went on gut feeling of what they liked and what they didn't like. And that was correct, the right thing to do at that time. Jazz needed people who felt strongly about it and were able to write with the kind of passion that they did. But I think at this point, when we're writing about things that happened twenty and thirty and forty and fifty years ago, we need to approach information with some objectivity."

"And," I said, "when it is part of college and university curricula throughout the United States, jazz no longer needs people simply beating the drum."

"That's right. We need the scholarship. And there are people out there doing it — Larry Gushee, Lewis Porter, Mark Gridley. John Chilton, of course, and there are many other other Europeans who are doing good solid research in jazz. What I am saying in answer to the critics of that piece is, 'Okay, fine, maybe I'm wrong. Go do the research and show me where I'm wrong and maybe this way we'll be led to the truth.' But you have to do the research, you can't just say, 'I don't like what you said,' you can't just say, 'I was there and that's not the way I remember it.'"

"Memory is too fallible."

"Yes, and if I'm wrong, they've got to show where they're right. Here's why, here are the facts and figures. They've got to spend those hours in front of the damn microfilm machines getting seasick reading copies of the *New York Age* and the *Amsterdam News* from 1923 and the *Melody Maker* from 1928. That is the work you have to do in order to find these things out. It's dull, dull work. Worse than that," he said, laughing slightly, "it's bad enough when the microfilm machine runs vertically, from top to bottom, but when it runs sideways, I can take about an hour of that and then I'm so nauseous I have to quit! There's a wonderful very important, very early jazz study that appeared in the New York *Sun* in 1917. It was written by a professor of English at Columbia University, who did a small study of jazz rhythms, the best thing on jazz rhythm that was printed probably until the 1960s. This is how far back scholarly research goes in the United States.

Notice

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"I'm the kind of guy who likes to boogie. I'm very concerned, on the other hand, for jazz becoming too academitized. The kids today are studying jazz in colleges and getting this method or that method, and that's great. But that is not how jazz players learn how to play. Jazz players learn how to play by figuring out what it is they want to play, whether something in their own minds or something from another player they're emulating."

"Where did you study music?"

"I didn't. I was like everybody else. I was a twelve-year-old kid who fell in love with Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey and just started picking it up."

"Yeah, there's that great trombone counterline in *A String of Pearls*.

"That's a great line! I was living in London and I was in a little swing band out in Essex, in Chigwell. Ain't much of a town, I'll tell you that. And they were playing Glenn Miller charts, and that kind of thing. This was about twenty years ago. And they threw this *String of Pearls* thing up. And here I am playing that trombone figure, all these years later. Of course the Bobby Hackett thing on that piece made it memorable. It's a great solo. Anyway, I just came by it. My family was not musical at all. My mother played a little piano. But she never did it, we never had a piano, because we came from a left-wing family. We never had a radio, because that was too bourgeois."

"So when it comes to the left wing, you know whereof you speak — as I do too, because my grandfather was a communist."

"I grew up with it. My aunt was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, and was before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee in 1938. I was part of all that, I was what they called a red diaper baby. All my credentials were in order. I did a piece for *The Village Voice* in the late '60s on the color line in symphony orchestras in the United States. There were five hundred men more or less in the big five orchestras; two were black. I was working with Arthur Davis, the bassist. I ended up doing two pieces — one on the club date scene. We did a survey, and we found of course that there was a color line. Nonetheless, the truth about the music's history is the truth, and let's try to find out what it is."

"On the opposite side from academic standards are journalistic standards," I said. "When I was coming up in journalism — and I think the standards were stricter then — the goal was absolute unshakable fact. That's the only thing your city editor was interested in. You were in trouble if you got a fact wrong. Not only was much of jazz history written by people who were not academically trained, they weren't journalistically trained either, except on music journals. Few if any had any daily newspaper training whatever."

"That's true. You still get a lot of bad journalism. There still seems to be kind of a notion in jazz writing that it's what you feel that counts. In writing anything that relates to fact, to history, its not what you feel, it's what you can demonstrate, what you can prove, what you have sources for. As I wrote in that piece for the journal of Black Music Research, you can get documentation, like say, from the *New York Age*. Now a lot of it's reliable, and a lot of it isn't. You know that the jazz stuff is not reliable because these guys were being given free tickets to write it, they weren't being paid by the papers, the newspapers had no money. I really want to see some young black guys come along and take a crack at this."

"Sure. They'll get material we could never get."

"On the other side of it, one of the things I object to is the black assumption that only a black can understand the black culture."

"Gary Giddins came up with the best answer I've heard to that one. When he was on a panel discussion, a guy got up and objected to the fact that there was no one black on the panel and questioning what right these white people had to be discussing *his* culture. Gary said that although he was Jewish, he was not a scholar of the Talmud, and if this man was, he would be inclined to listen to him. I think it's a strange presumption that the mere fact of being black makes you an expert on jazz. I worked for a while in 1961 as a desk man at the Chicago *Defender*. I don't know whether I was the only white who'd ever worked there, but I certainly was the only one at that time. I don't recall one of them who had any particular knowledge of jazz, in fact they used to ask *me* about it. But then, they were journalists, and weren't making assumptions like the guy who lit into Gary Giddins. I imagine Leonard Feather and Stanley Dance, both of whom are English, know rather more about jazz than Leontyne Price. On the other hand, I'll bet she knows more about opera."

"The black," Jim said, "can't make the assumption that he understands (a) all aspects of the black culture, any more than I understand all aspects of white culture, and (b) he can't take it for granted that he understands the white culture either. You have to do the work, you have to use the proper discipline."

"Sure. Look at that study Gunnar Myrdal did in 1938 on the Negro in America and the gap between the country's ideals and its practices. At that time, you had a Swede who knew a hell of a lot more about the dilemma of American blacks than probably any American, black or white. In consequence of the application of research and academic discipline."

"Of course. There are people like Sam Floyd, who is black, at Columbia College in Chicago. He's run seminars and journals on black music. He understands what needs to be done. We need guys like Sam doing this kind of work."

"The guy who questioned Gary Giddins disqualified by himself the very question he asked. It's the use of jazz as a political and polemical vehicle."

"I hope it'll all come out in the wash," Jim said.

"But is it possible to get error out totally?"

"No. You're always going to make mistakes. People say, 'Ah ha! Caught you there, Collier!' I say, 'Listen, baby, I'll give you a list of the real errors I made in that book.' Anything I've written has got mistakes in it, but you work very hard not to make them. In *The Making of Jazz*, I had every chapter read by somebody who was an authority on that area. The one chapter I didn't get read because I did not have time was the chapter on jazz in Europe. I made a couple of very bad mistakes in that chapter. Stanley Dance has graciously consented to read my manuscript on Ellington, which is terrific. In view of the fact that he's in a sense a competitor, and has books out on Ellington himself, that's wonderful. With each edition of *The Making of Jazz*, I was able to correct certain things."

"I am interested in the multiple-discipline people. There's another of the myths — the inarticulate jazz musician. They can be laconic, but that's not inarticulate."

"There *are* inarticulate jazz musicians."

"There are inarticulate engineers, and I know writers who are inarticulate away from the typewriter."

"I'll tell you who's inarticulate," Jim said, and laughed. "Editors!"

"I've known a few like that. Tell me some more about how you grew up."

"Some of my background is actually interesting. I had a whole literary background. My uncle, William Slater Brown, who wrote under the name Slater Brown, was in the first World War with e.e. cummings. They were in the ambulance corps together, and cummings wrote a book about it called *The Enormous Room*."

"It's a fascinating book."

"Well his buddy in jail in that story is my uncle. My uncle came from this very fancy New England family. By the time his generation came along, it was beginning to go downhill, but hadn't gone far. So I grew up spending my summers in this great house on the hill with many people in service and all that kind of thing. But my own family had no money, I was a working-class kid — with calf-bound copies of *Das Kapital*. After the ambulance corps, my uncle came down to New York and was going to Columbia. He got mixed up with the Greenwich Village people. One of the people he met and subsequently married, who became my aunt, had gone to high school with Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley. I've known Malcolm Cowley all my life. There was an attitude in the house toward letters. I knew a lot of those people. Eventually I bought a house which had belonged to my uncle and still have. Hart Crane wrote part of *The Bridge* up there, Paul Robeson used to play croquet on the lawn. My father ran away from home and that old, old New England family and joined the army at sixteen, trying to be a hero. Only he spent the first war in Hawaii. He never finished high school. He got into pulp writing. He had tried to kill his top sergeant in Hawaii and got thrown into Leavenworth. But the family was well-connected, and they got to Senator Cabot, and Cabot got to the president, and got him out. Then he became a cowboy, and he was actually on the Chisholm Trail, pushing cows up north. And because of that he got onto those western pulp paper magazines, and eventually was editor of *West*. For a period during the Depression, he was editing *West* out of the sunroom of our house."

"I loved all those wonderful trashy magazines with the garish covers. *Amazing, Astounding, Weird Tales*. There was some good writing in the science fiction magazines."

"Well, in the early 1950s, when I started as a writer, I worked for a company called Magazine Management, which was in terms of volume the third largest publisher in the United States. With a staff of about thirty people we were turning out an issue of a magazine a day, and putting twelve paperbacks out. The whole Marvel comics thing came out of there. At one point, when I was writing for *Stag* magazine, I think it was . . ."

"Oh yeah, I remember *Stag*," I said.

"Well, at the time I was writing for the damn thing, Bruce Jay Friedman was the editor and Mario Puzo was the assistant editor. I don't know whether Joe Heller ever actually wrote for any of those magazines, but he was around at that time."

"We all got into writing any way we could."

"Sure. And we were all going home at night and writing our famous novels. I'm sure it's being done right today. But as far as music is concerned, however, my family simply was not musical. My father couldn't carry a tune, and I didn't go to church."

"Music is too frivolous for the earnest left. Everything you do has to have a social purpose. That's one of the roots of the theory of jazz as social protest. It's linked very closely to puritanism. My communist grandfather was a total puritan, and completely indifferent to music. If you come from that background, you have to find yourself a non-frivolous excuse for your enjoyment of music, such as improving society. I was steeped in that as a kid, my grandfather's view that all art is propaganda — or that's what it should be. I broke with that in Paris. I remember the moment. I was walking through the Tuilleries, and looking at the statues left out under the rain and the sun, and wondered why they were there and what they were for, and the answer hit me like a brick: because they look nice. They're not *for* anything. And beauty has needed no further excuse for me from that day to this. But there is the source of the praise of angry tone on tenor. Unfortunately for my grandfather, he didn't produce one communist even in his own progeny, and his son, my uncle, became a trombone player and dance-band arranger who turned me onto Basie. It sounds like in your case too you were a departure in your family. How'd you start playing?"

"Some kid came up to me and said, 'We need a trombone player in the junior high school band.' This was in Fairfield County, a little town called Wilton, Connecticut."

"I know Wilton. Dave Brubeck lives there," I said.

"Dave lives about half a mail from where I lived. I played in the little band, and played my first jam session, and listened to Glenn Miller. I listened to Martin Block on the radio from New York. Occasionally he'd play something of Eddie Condon's. And I thought, 'Oh man, there's something about *this* stuff, something here that's different from Glenn Miller.' And I did the thing that everyone else did, I got the subscription to *Down Beat*, and I started reading George Hoefer, and realizing there was all this other great stuff, and George Hoefer was carrying on about the music, and I began reading the books and getting the records. By this time all the reissues were coming out — Bix and the other things. My family was ne'er do well, broke broke broke all the time, we kept pigs, we kept chickens. It's not fun being raised poor, particularly in a wealthy town. The problem of dating a girl. I was mowing their lawn, and I couldn't go in the front door. They'd say, 'We've left a coke for you in the refrigerator — back door.' And I'd be dating the girl on Saturday night. They put her in a convent as a consequence. Then I bought a trombone and I just struggled and sweat."

"What kind of horn do you use?"

"A Conn. I've played Conn right along."

"I remember my uncle had two horns. He gave me one of them. He played an Olds with a small bell."

"The peashooter. Those little ones where you get all the high notes. The horn is a little smaller, not in length of course. It's good for the top but it's not so good for the bottom. The symphony players use a very big bell because they don't have to go high."

"Guys like Bill Watrous use a big bell and still go up."

"That's because they're monsters," he said.

"Watrous once showed me the kind embouchure that gets that kind of smoky sound of Lawrence Brown."

"Well, how anybody gets a given tone is far too complicated to explain simply. When it came to embouchure, eventually I went and studied under Sy Karasick, a Mannes guy who had played first under Toscanini in the NBC Symphony. The trumpet player Arthur Briggs, who went to Paris in 1919 with Will Marion Cook and the Southern Syncopators and stayed there, I interviewed him about five years ago and he said that Louis, who had so much trouble with his chops, had about three different embouchures. When he'd get in trouble on one part of his lip he would move around to another part of his mouth. I don't know how guys do that. Do you play trombone?"

"No, I studied it, and I was smart enough to quit early. I've had a nightmare for years of being in a section and being unable to cut the part. But I sure love the horn and the guys who play it well."

"Trombone is a very easy instrument to pick up and get around a a little on, but it's a bitch to master."

"Guitar's that way too. Where did you study harmony?"

"I just bought the books and studied on my own."

"Gil Evans was self-trained. So's Gene Puerling."

"Well, the basics of harmony are really not difficult. But getting from there to *there* is another matter. Look at Duke Ellington. He never studied it formally. But he knew more about harmony than anybody who ever lived. The internal voicings that he would do. Writing this book, I sit down with

the records and try to figure out what the hell he was doing. Nobody realizes on the first cut of *Creole Love Call* there's a flat fifth. Joe Nanton's got a big flat five. Duke invented his whole musical thing. He'd sit at the piano hour after hour and fool around. He had this idea, which he articulated in so many words, whatever the rule is, do the opposite. Amazing stuff. Listen to the chord changes on *Black Beauty*. They're *like* a lot of things but they're not the *same* as a lot of things."

"I noticed the other day that *Hot and Bothered* sounds like the changes of *Bill Bailey*."

"He used the *Tiger Rag* changes again and again. He would do things with all of these things. *Take the A Train* has the same basic structure as *Dark Town Strutter's Ball*. Of course it wasn't his tune, it's Billy Strayhorn's tune. But there's so much happening in there. It's a whole lot of stuff going on. Duke's harmonic sense was instinctive, he never learned it, he just knew so much about harmony. The inversions he'd use. Those internal voicings. The stuff he'd have Carney playing down at the bottom. It's incredible. He was an extraordinary guy. He had his compositional weaknesses, there's no doubt about that, but he was an extraordinary composer."

"Most people who came up through jazz are so locked into theme and variations that they really don't handle big structures very well. They tend to think in chorus structures."

"Well, the term 'classical music' is a total misnomer. When I was doing the entry on jazz for the American *Grove's*, I used the term European concert music. But Wiley Hitchcock shot that down."

"I end up using the term 'classical music' but I don't like it."

"I use it too and I don't like it," he said.

"Did you play full-time professionally? Or as a writer who plays?"

"Well, I played professionally, and I continue to play professionally. In other words, I frequently get paid to play. Let me put it that way. But I've never done it full time. My God, it's hard enough to make a living if you're really good. And I'm not really good. I can play but Jack Teagarden I'm not. I work at Ryan's occasionally. I'll go in and sub with Max Kaminsky. There's a lot of work around New York if you're playing in that swing or Dixieland groove. I go out and get the occasional gig. And then I have a couple of regular things that I do. I've played over the past twenty years, I'd say, a couple of times a week. I'm better than I used to be. That's all I can say."

"Well, we have this tendency in America, created, I think, by Henry Ford, to make everyone a specialist."

"There was a study done some years ago on Jack Kennedy's class at Harvard, which suggested that the guy who does one thing well does all things well — the heart surgeon who plays the flute really well."

"There's a hell of a lot of *Jazzletter* subscribers who are doctors and also capable musicians."

"I tell you, one of the best gigs I ever had was a very bad bar in New York called Broadway Charlie's on 11th Street. It was my gig. It was a fantastic place because nobody ever came into it, it was always empty. You couldn't believe the guys we had down there. We had Eddie Gomez, we had Al Haig. I had no business playing with Al Haig, but there he was. He was a sardonic guy. Al was a very educated, conservatory-trained guy. He went to Oberlin College. One of the guys went over to Bradley's to hear him play, and after a set said, 'Do you know where we can get a piano player to fill in on this little gig we got for a few weeks?' And he said, 'What about me?' And the guy said, 'It's twenty-five bucks, Al. One night a week.' Al said, 'So?' So he took it, and he came over and played. We had a bass player who was a child psychologist who was a friend of somebody — we had to get rid of him. He didn't know note one. He just knew to pull the string on the bass. And Al Haig was playing with this cat. And what must have been going through his head! To think that these strange notes were coming from nowhere. I must write the story of that gig for the *Jazzletter*."

"Please do! Do you know Ron Goodwin, the British composer?"

"No."

"Ron told me a story. Shirley Bassey went out to do some concerts in Australia. When they got in she was tired out and went to the hotel to rest while her conductor rehearsed the orchestra, large orchestra. The first thing he hears is this horrible sound from the lead alto player. He called the contractor over and asked him about this cat playing terrible saxophone. And the contractor says, 'He's one of Australia's leading heart surgeons.' And the conductor said, 'Well tell him to bring his tools tonight, because when Shirley hears him, she's going to have a heart attack.'"

Collier's controversy, if you want to call it that, occurs against a background of Roger Riggins in *Coda* bashing away at Gary Giddins' admirable book *Riding on a Blue Note*, Stanley Dance bashing away at Max Harrison, Max Harrison bashing away at Stanley Dance, Gary Giddins and Nat Hentoff bashing away at each other, Mark Miller in *The Globe and Mail* bashing away at Grover Sales, and Bill Smith of *Coda* bashing Giddins' head against mine by dismissing us in the same sentence as "amateurs". It brings to mind Grover Sales' great crack that "most jazz critics would rather catch another jazz critic in a minor mistake than raise Bix from the dead."

However:

Twenty-five years ago — on January 30, 1961, to be precise — Severn Darden, then a member of the original Second City company in Chicago, made a comedy album for Mercury called *The Sound of My Own Voice and Other Noises*, which I still treasure. Darden's success as a character actor has obscured the fact that he is, or was, one of the funniest and most brilliant of American monologists.

In one track of the album he portrays a nutty German philosophy professor giving *A Short Talk on the Universe*. It is a wonderful satire on the whole field of philosophy. "Now why, you will ask me," the professor begins, "have I chosen to speak on the universe, rather than some other topic. Well it's very simple. There isn't anything else. Now, the universe we examine through what Spinoza has called the lens of philosophy. He called it this because he was a lens grinder. Heaven knows what he would have called it had he been, for example, a pudding manufacturer."

It's a funny line, and a pointed one. Objectivity is an elusive goal. "The human mind," as Artie Shaw puts it, "is a rationalizing machine."

Farther along in that short talk on the universe, Darden says:

"Take Heraclitus. Dr. Jose Benedetti, by the way, in his book *Coming and Becoming*, has quoted Heraclitus incorrectly as saying that time was a river which flowed endlessly through the universe. He didn't say this at all! He said that time was *like* a river which flowed endlessly through the universe. Ha ha, there you *are*, Benedetti!"

So it isn't confined to jazz.

Jim Collier has raised some interesting points, has exhumed some interesting information in his researches, and is accumulating more as he sits giddily in front of those microfilm screens.

Before he left Los Angeles, he had a cordial conversation with Leonard Feather, which pleased me. As I said, Leonard's been a friend of mine for a long time. And Jim Collier just became one.