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Jazzletter

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Of Typos and Ojai

The struggle to eliminate typographical and spelling errors from copy is without end. It has been eased by the computer, which will catch major spelling mistakes, but the computer thus far cannot detect whether you wrote two when you meant too or to, or there when you meant their, or here for hear.

Sometimes the errors are small — and not always, one suspects, accidental. In my newspaper days, we were reasonably certain that typographers made certain slips on purpose, because some of them occurred time after time, and on newspaper after newspaper. Little things like leaving the o out of count. In the old days, the people on the sports pages were diligent indeed in the proof-reading hockey stories because of what the linotype boys could do with the word puck. Some papers banned the word, which must have made it awkward for anyone covering hockey.

Curiously enough, some of the errors happen in large type faces, and still slip past proof-readers. When I was music critic of the Louisville *Times*, my opposite number at the *Courier-Journal* — the papers had the same owner — wrote a review on a performance by some singer whose name I've forgotten, to which a copy editor attached the two-column headline Madame So-and-So Gives Charming Recital. The problem was that, by accident or otherwise, the i got left out of recital. It turned up in the paper.

Sometimes errors are small, almost invisible, yet of considerable consequence. *Singers and the Song* is now out, and all those who ordered copies should have received them by now. If you haven't or received an incorrect numbers of copies, please let me know. The book was proof-read about fifteen times. I still found two typos in it. A more significant error is that I said Hugo Freidhofer's scores were now at the University of Utah. They're not. They're at Brigham Young University. I suppose I could drop a note to the University of Utah, telling them, "If you get any calls about... " No, that wouldn't be too cool.

Forgive me, please, those typos that creep into the *Jazzletter*.

Which brings us to a goof that occurred last month. A number of people have asked where Ojai is, and whether we had moved away to someplace else called Oak View.

Ventura, California, is about seventy miles up the coast from (which, if you look at the map, means west of) Los Angeles. The Ojai Valley is about eleven miles inland, due north from Ventura. The town of Ojai, which has about six thousand residents, is at the center of it, surrounded by a great rim of mountains which, during the winter rains, sometimes get snow on them. It lasts a few days at most, but it's gorgeous while it does. The valley is pretty, and peaceful, and the err — pardon me, air — is clean.

I said in an early *Jazzletter* that it was a dull town, and boy did I hear about it locally. It is if anything even duller now than it was then, despite an influx of movie people who keep quietly to themselves, as I do. It's a nice place to live, but who'd want to visit there? There is a festival of avant-garde classical music in May, which attracts the likes of Pierre Boulez. It's cultural glory is Bart's Bookstore, an outdoor used-book emporium that is one of the best anywhere. Browsing there is the best game in town.

Oak View is a smaller town on the road between Ventura and Ojai. We live closer to Oak View than to Ojai, and it occurred to me that it would be more convenient to operate out of there than the Ojai post office. And the Oak View staff and the postmaster, whose name by the way is Burt Reynolds, were wonderfully helpful, so I moved the mailing to Oak View. But *we* didn't move.

When last month I made up the renewal form, I told my typesetter to just pick up the logo. He did, all right: the old one, with the Ojai address. Which, fortunately, is still valid. But I didn't notice this massively obvious error until the entire issue had been mailed.

The fact is that both addresses are operative. I prefer the Oak View CA 93022 address. But if some of the mail goes to Ojai, well, after all, to heir is human.

Letter of the Month

To the Editor
Dartmouth Alumni Society Magazine

Your recent cover story on Jon Appleton would seem to contain some jarring elements, particularly at a time when Dartmouth's new president is emphasizing the importance of a liberal arts education.

Never have I read such a gleeful account of people losing employment, pianos disappearing from the American scene, orchestras and bands disintegrating, and virtuosity rendered "meaningless"! And one of Appleton's students writes, "You come out of his course wondering how *Your Cheatin' Heart* sounds on bagpipes." What a wonderful culmination for a musical education at Dartmouth College.

Appleton concluded his article by saying that "educators must realize that the major difference between music today and that of the last three centuries is that amateur composers have unprecedented opportunities" and "musical technology has made the search for virtuosity meaningless (who cares how fast and flawlessly you can play a keyboard instrument when a computer can do it better?)." Putting aside the unforgiveable arrogance of these silly statements, one must recognize the attitude of the amateur (and that of the punk and hard-rock genre) — *fast* and *loud* make music better.

Are we about to stop going to concerts to hear people like Heifetz or Perlman give their interpretation of a musical work because a computer can play it *faster*? Three hundred years of the development of the art of music is dismissed with the statement that "virtuosity is meaningless."

And Appleton laments that our colleges do not provide "electric" guitar lessons, on what he calls one of the "instruments of our time". It should be pointed out that the "electric" guitar is played the same as the acoustic guitar and if one aspires to play like Segovia, electrification can't take the place of years of instruction and practice.

One personal aside into musical mathematics. It seems only

yesterday (actually it was 1938) that Glenn Miller tried to talk me into studying arranging and composition with Joseph Schillinger, who had arrived in New York announcing that he could use numbers to write better fugues than Bach. (The world has yet to hear one.) Tommy Dorsey, who was not careless with a buck, offered to pay for our lessons if Axel Stordahl and I would augment our arranging ability by studying with the man. Ax and I said no thanks, Tommy's band didn't seem to suffer, and Glenn Miller's biggest instrumentals were written by musicians to whom a square root was something corny.

Appleton completely ignores the element known as talent. Buy a synthesizer and you're a success. Unfortunately it doesn't work that way. Machines will never replace dedication, practice, and knowledge diligently acquired. Let's not let Dartmouth College be put in the embarrassing position of endorsing the view that virtuosity is dead, talent is unimportant, and a machine can make an amateur into Rachmaninoff or Jerome Kern.

Paul Weston, class of '33, Los Angeles

The Insomniac's Companion

Musicians, by the nature of the work, keep night hours. In the early days of television, at least in major cities, you could usually stumble on something to watch when you got back home or to the hotel. Old movies were the main fare, and if you couldn't chance on a piece of good trash such as *Casablanca* to watch for the umpteenth time, you could find a piece of bad trash to amaze you, maybe even an old Jane Withers picture to remind you of lost youth, or one with Donald O'Connor and Peggy Ryan.

As television has grown, with UHF and VHF stations and cable networks and satellites in the sky making Chicago's WGN and Atlanta's WTBS available in Los Angeles and New York, the quality of programming hasn't gone up. Indeed, as with expansion teams in sports, the proliferation has actually diluted the content. Since Newton Minnow called it a "vast wasteland" in the time of Jack Kennedy, television has improved greatly at the technical level but in little else. You can't even find that many late-night movies. *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *Kronos* have gone off to the video store, and those who work late — musicians and writers and journalists, nurses, policemen, airline pilots, and disc jockeys — find little to stare at in the process of unwinding.

But all is not lost. The best show on television runs from two in the morning until six. More exactly, it runs from two until four and then is repeated. The name of this oasis in the wasteland is *Nightwatch*, and what makes it so excellent is the brilliance of its two hosts. Most of the time that's Charlie Rose. Sometimes his substitute is Lem Tucker, who is so good in a somewhat different style that it is hard to say one or the other is the better.

Nightwatch, which originates in Washington and runs on CBS, is a talk show. There is no music, except the theme music used in the breaks, there's no bandleader to throw straight lines to the host, no announcer to laugh reflexively at pallid jokes, and no audience giggling on cue. Rose simply sits there at a coffee table and interviews people in the deep of the night. And he does it superbly. He apparently is in his late thirties or early forties — with television makeup, it's hard to judge age. His accent, with its dropped r's and his habit of turning unvoiced consonants into voiced (impordant for important), identifies him as southern, and by the evidence in his remarks he has a background in law. He has suburban good looks that might lead you to underestimate him. More important, he has a rich and eager mind and a range of command of subject matter that borders on the miraculous.

Granted there is a staff in the background, providing him with notes on the people he is to interview and the subjects to be discussed. But even so his comprehension of the material, his ability to dig into the subject at hand — whether with an actor or an athlete, a novelist, the secretary of state or the chairman of a senate committee — and his ability to follow it when the conversation takes unexpected swerves, are amazing. He seems to know sports and literature as thoroughly as he does politics and theater and science. He'll discuss a Supreme Court ruling with the understanding in detail that he brings to a conversation about, say, the politics of oil. And he must spend all his waking hours boning up for the interviews he is about to do, four or five of them in a row, on all manner of subjects, and with the same astonishing command.

Recently he interviewed William Styron. As he got into elements of style in Styron's novels, it was obvious that he knew Styron's work. Assuredly Rose was not working from cue cards prepared just before air time by a research assistant. And when they both got into the letters of Flaubert, one had the impression that Rose had read them too. The same sort of understanding was evident in an interview with Saul Bellow; and another with Raymond Burr. When Burr, who raises them, got onto the subject of orchids, Rose went right with him. A discussion with John Kenneth Galbraith revealed not only the depths of Galbraith's perceptions but of Rose's as well. When they talked of Keynes and then of developments and tendencies in the Soviet economy, it was obvious that Galbraith was not the only one who knew what he was talking about. And Rose, you could tell, had read Galbraith.

When you realize that Rose, who is on the air five nights a week, in any one week does maybe twenty or thirty of these serious interviews with serious people — as opposed to someone like Elizabeth Ashley, dingalinging off the walls — the sheer quantity of his work begins to boggle the mind.

Occasionally — perhaps as the result of press agentry or because CBS is pushing one of the acts on its record label, and Rose is after all on the CBS network — he will interview a rock star. TV journalists are under constant pressure to interview these numbskulls, and some of them resent it. Rose did one with Adam Ant, which was so awful that it sounded like the satiric interview Peter Sellers, as a scholarly questioner, did with a fictional Cockney rock star. The Sellers interview, which is in an old album, is hilariously embarrassing. The Charlie Rose interview with Adam Ant was merely embarrassing, although it had the discomfitting virtue of reminding one how profoundly trivial most of these people are. Nonetheless, I get the feeling that Rose likes rock music, and he treats the subject and its practitioners with a solemnity that demeans him. When Rose interviews a New York *Times* "rock critic" about Bruce Springsteen (who, be it noted, is on the CBS label) as if the subject were Tolstoy or Brahms, Matisse or Sibelius, you're liable to find yourself squirming a little.

The substantiality of the other interviews render the occasional segments on rock singers only the more incongruous. The night after Clare Boothe Luce died, Rose interviewed two or three people who had known her. One of them was General Vernon Walters, Reagan's ambassador to the United Nations. He's an unlikeable man, but he is one of indisputable intelligence who, among his other accomplishments, speaks seven (I think it is)

languages, including Russian. I don't know how good his Russian is, but his French has no accent. Walters and the others traced Luce's life, which threads through modern history like that of Upton Sinclair's fictional Lanny Budd. She knew everybody, did everything, a woman of dazzling brilliance. On the same show, Rose interviewed Daniel Ellsberg on the new information that has just come to light about the Cuban missile crisis. What the Kennedy advisers did not know was that Kruschev did not control the Cubans. There was a fire fight between Russian and Cuban troops near one of the SAM installations in which three Russians were killed. Kennedy was negotiating, then, with the wrong adversary, and in consequence of this fact life on this planet was very nearly erased.

On the same show, Rose ran a segment from another CBS show, *West 54th Street*, in which some pretty English thing interviewed the lead singer of a hugely successful (they said) Irish rock group called U-2, the very name of which was ironic in the context of the Ellsberg discussion: Castro's gunners shot down a U-2, killing an American officer. What was amazing was the reverence with which the girl addressed this rocker, a neanderthal with your basic greasy hair and earring. You'd have thought she was supplicating the Buddha or Bertrand Russell. The rocker in question, sitting there modestly enraptured with his own importance, defined himself as a "militant pacifist", a phrase he obviously thought was fraught with profundity. The cameras cut away to him in concert somewhere, shaking his fist and screaming in your basic rock-and-roll sandpaper scream about Beiruth and Belfast and peace and things like that. It seems that he and his group are all for peace, just like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and all those other original thinkers of our time who are against war and croolty and in favor of justice and brotherhood and things like that. Deep. I recalled that sad aphorism of Sir Richard Burton: "Peace is the dream of the wise. War is the history of man." With the man from U-2 on the same show with Vernon Walters discussing Clare Boothe Luce, the political right seemed to be winning hands down for intelligence. It was fortunate that Daniel Ellsberg was also on the show to make a showing for real brains.

These rock segments on *Nightwatch* are rendered still more egregious by the the paucity of interviews with jazz people. The only one I have seen — an interview Rose did with Dizzy Gillespie — wasn't good. He didn't know how to get into Dizzy's depths, he just dog-paddled in Dizzy's charming shallows, and I had the feeling John Birks was not comfortable.

Rose's rock interviews send me to the kitchen to make tea. But everything else he does is outstanding. And one of the marks of the man is his detachment. Whether he is questioning a political conservative or a liberal on some issue of national moment, such as the attempt to put Bork on the Supreme Court or policy in Nicaragua, he prods, he pushes, he elicits information and attitudes that let you judge the material for yourself rather than imposing his views upon it. He plays devil's advocate, and that's what good journalism is all about.

When Rose is off the air — I suppose even TV people catch the 'flu — Lem Tucker is usually the sub. Rose has intense energy and laughs a lot; Tucker is quieter and not so jolly, but he seems to be fully as informed and in command of a broad range of subjects, and he has his own kind of soft human warmth. Occasionally the sub is someone else, always somebody good, although not so virtuosic at interviewing as Rose and Tucker. Indeed, you realize the depth of talent in the newsrooms of network television that doesn't get put to full use. In any event, *Nightwatch* is rarely less than informative and much of the time it is compellingly interesting, a show wherein you learn things that just do not come up in the run of the news, either print or broadcast journalism.

Often Rose's guests, including Raymond Burr and Marty Engel, go out of the way to tell him how much they love the show, and they obviously mean it. Who knows, then, how many people are awake in the night and watching *Nightwatch*? If you join them, you'll find yourself with two fascinating companions in Charlie Rose and Lem Tucker, and you won't miss *Kronos* in the least.

There is one bright spot for jazz on television, however. As it happens, it is also on CBS:

Talking to Billy Taylor

Billy Taylor walked across the lobby of the Westwood Marquee in Los Angeles with his friend actor William Marshall. The Westwood Marquee is a luxury hotel catering to those who need tax write-offs and those on expense accounts. Billy was there on a tab from CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System. The Westwood Marquee is one of those modern glass towers, which in the interior affects an older and reassuring decor, and it wasn't there back when Gerry Mulligan wrote *Westwood Walk*, nor were any of the tall apartment and office buildings that have made a traffic impasse of a once quiet corner of Los Angeles near the campus of UCLA.

A man stopped them, shook Billy's hand, and told him how much he appreciated his segments on jazz, seen monthly or so, on the excellent CBS *Sunday Morning* show with Charles Kuralt. The man apparently did not recognize Bill Marshall, whose list of television and movie credits is long.

Billy smiled as he recalled the incident a day or two later, this evidence of the power of television to make one's face famous. Would that its power were used to the full enhancement of the culture it so inexorably affects, rather than irresponsibly debasing it. But that's, as Walter Cronkite used to remind us, the way it is. Mr. Marshall's feelings at the incident have not been recorded, and in any event he passes immediately out of our tale, having appeared like Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern just long enough to deliver a message, in this case to point up what recurrent appearances on TV can do for a jazz musician, one of a breed who live lives of total obscurity to that larger public that likes the likes of Madonna. CBS has changed that for Billy, and Billy is using the power the network has given him sensibly and well for the cause of jazz.

Billy Taylor was born July 24, 1921, in Greenville, North Carolina, his father a dentist and his mother a schoolteacher. Except on television, whereon one has the advantages of makeup and skilled lighting, I had not seen him much in recent years, since he remains a denizen of New York City, though of that leafy part of it, somewhat above the crush of Manhattan, known as Riverdale. I had every reason to expect that by now, when he was sixty-six years old, time had wrought its relentless handiwork on his hairline and the composure of his features, as it has on the serenity of Westwood Village, which is no longer referred to as a village. Just Westwood now. But Billy shares with bassist Bob Cranshaw (who was once a third of his trio) and singer Ruth Price some peculiar genetic good fortune that makes them seem to inhabit a Shangri-la of their own. They don't age, or at least not much and not fast, and Billy looked all of forty-five. His hair remains thick, well forward on his forehead, and black. His skin is a medium orange-brown, remarkably unlined, and clear. He is

tall, erect, and if not quite slim at least not thick-waisted. There is a slightly oriental cast to his features, as if he too partakes of that Cherokee lineage that so many black Americans can claim as part of their heritage. He is habitually dapper, and this day he was wearing a khaki safari jacket. He always did have a teacherly mien, and, looking at you through his dark-rimmed glasses, he still did. And teaching is one of the things Dr. Taylor. who attained a combined master's and doctoral degree in education from the University of Massachusetts in 1975, does best. It was for his prodigious energies as a teacher that Stan Kenton, shortly before his death in 1980, commented that Billy was the most important figure in jazz today.

Billy's playing has the crystalline tone of a perfectly aimed touch that marks the work of jazz pianists with extensive "legit" training. And like Bill Evans, who studied flute and violin in his youth, and Oscar Peterson, who played trumpet, Billy first played a linear instrument, saxophone, before settling into piano. This experience probably contributes in all three men to the quality of their legato playing. From the age of thirteen, when Billy undertook further and more dedicated "classical" studies, the piano was his instrument. Yet it was as a sociology major that he enrolled at Virginia State College. It is less likely that this is the reason for the breadth of his viewpoint than that these tendencies of character caused him to take the subject in the first place. In any event a teacher convinced him music was his true calling, and after graduating with a bachelor of science degree, he undertook — on the recommendation of Teddy Wilson — piano studies in New York City with Richard McClanahan.

Billy's credentials since that time have accumulated like peanut hulls on the flattened grass of a county fair. He has honorary degrees from six universities, including humanities degrees from Fairfield University and Clark College, and honorary doctorates from Berklee College of Music and Virginia State. Virginia State is his father's alma mater. (His father took his pre-med degree there, his dentistry degree at Howard.) Billy is a Duke Ellington Fellow at Yale. He still plays nightclubs, but more and more he is doing seminars and clinics at universities. The number of universities at which he has lectured is enormous. He founded and still runs the Jazzmobile in New York City.

"The Jazzmobile is a very important part of what I do," he said. "Education and media are two areas that we need to do something special about. So in the Jazzmobile, which is now twenty-five years old, we give free concerts on the streets of New York. All the jazz players have played on the Jazzmobile. But we also have a workshop, which is run by Jimmy Owens, and has twenty-six instructors, who share their on-the-bandstand experience with people who aspire to do what they do. People like Jimmy Heath are on the staff. We try to engage people in the active participation in performing jazz, understanding it, relating to it, and using it for whatever purpose they think is suitable."

What is all this educational activity doing to his own playing —a style he himself sees as rooted in Art Tatum, Fats Waller, Debussy, Ravel, Bach, Ben Webster, and Eddie South? How much time does he have left to perform?

"I'm playing more than I ever played. I do four or five school concerts a month. For example, this coming week I'm going to Savannah State College. We'll spend a full day doing workshops and clinics. Normally I'll do a clinic, and workshop, culminated by a concert. We do four or five of these a month. I do sixteen or seventeen appearances with symphony orchestras a season, and that's plenty of playing. I've got one of the best trios I've had in years. I've got Victor Gaskin who's worked with me for many years, and I've got Bobby Thomas, who used to be my drummer on the Frost show."

Before Charles Kuralt and *Sunday Morning*, Billy was musical director of the David Frost talk show. There was much chat in the trade at the time about his being the first black musical director of a major TV series, which says something about the state of America then. It says something about the state of America now that he is still the only one ever to have held such a post.

"That," Billy said, "was the most visibility that I have ever had on a regular basis. It was a daily show, and David started every show with, 'O.K., Billy,' the camera would cut to me, and the show began."

A maid was making up Billy's room at the time, so we sat in the bar just off the lobby.

Billy achieved his present eminence slowly and quietly but clearly as the consequence of a passionate drive. He has all the credentials to be so visible a spokesman for jazz. He is richly articulate in a sort of halting manner, hesitating in a way that is at odds with the way he plays. There is usually a relation between the way jazz musicians speak and play — Jack Teagarden in a lazy laconic drawl, Bill Evans with low-level but definite dynamics, Miles Davis in raspy short bits paced by articulate spaces, Bob Brookmeyer in an eloquent ironic mumble, Ben Webster in a great low boom, Gerry Mulligan with a kind of cheery chuckling sadness. Billy is one of the exceptions, and there are uhs and ahs in his speech that are quite absent from his fluid playing.

What makes him effective is a kind of psychological sure-footedness, possibly the consequence of his training in sociology, although as I suggest, it may be the bent in his temperament that led him to the study in the first place. The processes of intimidation are widespread in our society, in all societies, and the Irish who were abused in New York when they arrived later abused the Italians, leading to a kind of self-effacing quality common in people of that city and that heritage. I once heard Tony Bennett talking intelligently about Picasso, and suddenly a veil seemed to cross his face, and he said, "But who am I to be talking about Picasso?" and he ended the dissertation, cheating me of keen insights. Julius LaRosa, another New York Italian — he was born not far from Tony — for a long time had a similar quality, which we have as a private joke come to call the Picasso syndrome.

But no group of Americans has been as viciously intimidated as blacks, and the evidence of this is everywhere to be seen in jazz. I remember vividly the occasion when a nightclub publicist brought Blue Mitchell, whom I admired and was anxious to meet, to my office at *Down Beat* in Chicago. To my keen distress, not to say horror, he seemed uncomfortable in this atmosphere, and I moved quickly to put him at his ease, after which Blue and I became rather good friends. Only a few months ago, I was talking to Curtis Fuller about an insight he gave me during that period — the perception that in music you sacrifice tone for speed. I've since come to see this as axiomatic, but Curtis was the first to make me aware of it. When I reminded Curtis of this, he reminded me in turn that I took him to lunch that day. It is significant. I remembered the insight; Curtis remembered the lunch. That tells you something about being black in America, the more revealing for being a tiny detail of daily living, rather than some great matter of criminal injustice. Or again: in New York in the early 1960s, I wrote some songs with Floyd Williams, a gifted composer who had been Lionel Hampton's drummer. I

managed to get us a publishing contract. As we rose in the elevator to the publisher's office, Floyd did a mock Mantan Moreland number, something he could do to hilarious effect. He said, "We're on our way up to see the white man boss! Am I gonna got screwed by the white man boss?"

I laughed and said, "Listen, baby, the white man boss will screw me as fast as he will screw you." But I sensed that Floyd was kidding on the square, that there was real apprehension there. (Floyd later took his doctorate in black cultural studies and now teaches music at Alleghenny College in Pennsylvania.)

The black experience in America seems to produce in men two extremes of conditioned personality, with broad variants within them. One seethes with hatred, open and flagrant hostility and contempt toward whites, as manifest in Wynton Marsalis, who during his interview with Billy on *Sunday Morning* talked of the way "we" play jazz and the way "they" play jazz, citing as his example of the white jazz player Herb Alpert, of all people! Who has never claimed to be a jazz musician, has never made a jazz album in his life. The other extreme manifestation of the experience is the kind of pre-defeated personality I think I saw in Blue Mitchell, who was a man of great inherent sweetness. Wilhelm Reich spoke of the shrinking biopathy. If it exists, Blue would seem to have been the classic example of it, and he died of cancer. To someone shy, as I think Blue was, the pain of being black in a white world must be incommunicable.

Contrary to legend, the black American population was not universally docile and intimidated during its earlier history. There were other uprisings besides that of Nat Turner, although the brutal suppression of that one — horrifyingly described in the William Styron novel — makes it perhaps the most dramatic. Nonetheless, the numbers of these rebels were insufficient against the vast controlling force, the people who had the education, who could read and write, who owned the guns and controlled the armies. It is all too easy to sit back now and call Louis Armstrong an Uncle Tom. But the black man of anger, and Armstrong evidently concealed an enormous anger, often had no choice but to grit his teeth in what looked like a smile, and ingratiate himself against his own wishes with white people some of whose money it was his intention to get.

Billy Taylor is one of a generation of black men who had begun to reject this solution to the problem, to stand up — as Dizzy Gillespie did — with a man's pride and make his way in the world and make his music along that way. A revolution was dawning in the 1940s, and Billy came in on it. What is exceptional about him is his equanimity. As far as I can see, he has always had it. He does not of course come from poverty but from the educated middle class. Whatever the reason, a stable home led by an educated father, a temperament that led him to sociology and an awareness of the world beyond music, the solid "classical" training (although that was more common among black pianists than myth now has it), the awareness of European and other cultures as well as American culture, or just something in the congenital temperament, Billy has always walked securely in both worlds, black and white, with an awareness of injustice probably deeper than that of most blacks because of the sociologist's knowledge of history, yet without a self-corroding rage. It is a remarkable achievement, and Billy Taylor is a remarkable man. He has the sunny disposition of the fulfilled teacher.

Billy and I share some serious reservations about the historical image of the emergence of jazz. Those happy singin' an' dancin' folk who ignorantly invented this music out of thin air and inspiration. The inventors of jazz were often extremely well-trained musicians who may, of course, have found it politic to conceal this fact from the white customers for it. "The noble savage," Billy said sardonically.

"I think the housekeeper must be finished by now," he said, and we took the elevator up to his room.

She had finished. The room was fresh and clean and modern. A pale yellow bedspread was pulled as tight as the blanket on an army cot. Billy took a soft chair by a round table near the window, whose gauzy curtains filtered the relentless California sunlight. Occasional toots of carhorns from the streets below penetrated his comments. Two packed soft-leather black travel bags, evidence of a quick hit-and-run trip, lay in a corner, poised for departure. It was just after noon. Billy had been in California to shoot a feature on Horace Silver for *Sunday Morning.*

The portrait of Horace would become, after editing, something like the hundredth such study Billy has done on the show since he became its correspondent in jazz, and in turn the jazz community's delegate to television, a medium that has not been hospitable to it. On camera, curiously, the uhs and ahs drop out of Billy's speech, and he is a clear and articulate interviewer, at ease with the medium and the subject matter.

His portraits have not been universally flattering: the camera is a dispassionate machine, and sometimes it has captured the darker elements in the personalities Billy has examined. In the editing these have been allowed to show through. On the whole, though, his portraits have been affectionate and admiring, reflecting his love of the subjects and their music.

"I was particularly pleased with the one I did recently on Dave Brubeck," he said. "Dave isn't always comfortable in interviews, and he doesn't always come across. But it was just two piano players, old friends, talking, and he was at ease.

"You know," he said, and the racism in jazz lay at the heart of his remark, "you'll hear guys say, 'Dave Brubeck doesn't swing.' He swings, believe me. On my radio show, I'd play Dave Brubeck tracks and not identify him and guys would say to me later, 'Who was that?' and I'd say, 'Dave Brubeck?' and they'd say, 'That was Dave Brubeck?'"

I told Billy the story Cannonball Adderley told me: that he had played some records for his group by a pianist he said he was thinking of hiring, and, after his colleagues had committed theselves to enthusiastic approval, sprang it on them that the pianist was white. And English. And incidentally Jewish. Victor Feldman.

Billy chuckled.

Billy has done *Sunday Morning* portraits of Peggy Lee, Ella Fitzgerald, Joe Williams, Carmen McRae, Sarah Vaughan, Benny Carter, Gerry Mulligan, Maynard Ferguson, and many more. These studies have not been limited to performers. A particularly interesting piece portrayed Max Gordon, the

Notice

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founder and still owner of the apparently indestructible Village Vanguard, the Greenwich Village cellar nightclub that has been providing a bandstand for jazzmen since the 1930s. He has done pieces on disc jockey Jonathan Schwartz and pioneer jazz record producer John Hammond.

How did Billy's association with the show come about? "They did a profile of me. The person who wanted it done was Robert Northshield, the show's producer. Shad Northshield is in my opinion a genius. He created *Sunday Morning*. He thought of those nature segments at the end of the show. He is just a marvelously creative producer. It was his view, and Kuralt concurred, that this should be a magazine show that gave equal emphasis in whatever it did. If you're doing something on jazz, you don't give that any less time and production values than you would an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When Valdimir Horowitz went to Russia, we took our heavyweight people and did a major study of this world-class artist who was returning to his native country. So that's the kind of thing Northshield did. He did this piece on me. Peter Levinson — " Peter Levinson is a publicist, probably the best known in the jazz field. "Peter told him, 'You really should use Billy on some of these things. You don't have anybody doing jazz at the moment.' He knew Shad is a jazz fan. Shad asked me and I of course said yes, and I've been doing it ever since."

Kuralt too, Billy said, is a jazz fan, and in the folksy manner in which he conceals a superb journalistic mind, he will play the uninformed straight man in his questions, allowing Billy to give him the inside on a story. Kuralt takes the role of the lay listener. He casts himself as the audience.

Billy spoke with warmth about his associates in the show, including Bob Shattuck who got an Emmy for editing the piece they did on Quincy Jones. "Brett Alexander, who produces the segments, is a knowledgeable writer, who knows a lot about sports, a lot about jazz, a lot about popular music. He used to write for the New York *Post* and a lot of magazines. As a non-musician, he'd keep me from being too technical or too inside. He'd say, 'Well, hey, they won't know what you're talking about if you say Bird, why don't you just say Charlie Parker?' Things like that."

"Alas, they still won't know what you're talking about," I said.

Billy laughed. "A classic example of the kind of overall production values Shad Northshield would give me is the piece I did on Count Basie. When we finished the piece, Shad looked at it and said, 'Well all the information is here, but when Basie played the piano, there was a lot of space in it. We don't have enough space in this piece.' So he made it longer, spread it out a little, made it flow, changed the whole pacing.' You don't get that from producers! That's hard to come by, man!"

A significant thing about the Taylor portraits on *Sunday Morning* is that he is not preaching to the converted. One of the undiscussed tragedies of the contemporary American culture is its ghettoization — jazz radio for the jazz fans, rock radio for the rock fans, and even subdivisions of it for the fans of those subdivisions, country radio for the country fans, and classical music for the classical fans. But Billy's work at CBS goes to millions of people who are not necessarily even music lovers, much less jazz fans, and, yes, he confirmed, "It's very satisfying to me when somebody comes up and shakes my hand and says they enjoyed a piece on So-and-So, and they'd never thought about it before, but now they were interested and they were going to listen."

Billy is optimistic — it is hard to imagine him ever being pessimistic — about a resurgence of jazz that he sees happening. One of his recent *Sunday Morning* pieces had been on exactly that.

"Do you really think there's a resurgence? Or are we just succumbing to a fit of wishful thinking?"

"Oh yes," he said. "There are a lot of things which have come into being in the twenty or twenty-five years of jazz instruction, when you have all the mistakes that have been made by all of us trying to teach jazz — whether you're talking Berklee, North Texas State, Jamie Abersol, me, Jazzmobile. We've learned from the experience. In the process of doing it, we have created a large body of people who are knowledgeable about the music. There are holes in their knowledge. But they know what the music sounds like, they know what's good about it. Many of the people have gone to jazz camps, have studied privately, and they have added to this ever increasing group who understand what the music is about. This, compared to rock groups and rock fans, is a small group. But compared to the former jazz audience, it's a growing group. You've got this, and the availability of jazz — or whatever passes for jazz — on radio, with two hundred and some National Public Radio stations playing whatever they call jazz all over the country. You've got the jazz festivals presenting whatever they call jazz all over the world. You've got the books, such as the fake books, that have been put together. All these things have contributed to a large body of players and listeners who are not satisfied with New Age music, or whatever is being given to them. They want something more. They don't necessarily know what it is, but they are a part of the people who look at the *Sunday Morning* show, who listen to NPR, who are buying up the reissues of the cutouts of the things they've heard about either in a jazz class or wherever else they heard it. Or they read a news piece and say, 'Oh, Billy Taylor said he was in Russia and found out about this guy who plays tenor. Let me check him out.' So it's not only in this country, where things are slower to be changed, it's going on in Russia, in South America, in Singapore. This year I've been to Hawaii, South America, Russia, Australia, and Hong Kong. That's just this year. Prior to that, the jazz festival in Singapore..."

"There's a jazz festival in Singapore?"

"Absolutely. There's more and more of them everywhere. The Moderrn Jazz Quartet, Betty Carter, Jimmy Owens, Jimmy Heath, Roland Hanna and myself were part of a newly established festival in South America. There's a lot of growth, and it's healthy."

"Do you see jazz becoming then a world language? It started as a New Orleans language but now seems to be becoming — with the Japanese players and the European players — an international language."

"Yes, although it seems to be necessary for them to make some sort of contact with America to develop fully. In Russia, I met Igor Butman, who is a tenor player about nineteen now studying at Berklee. Paquito de Rivera is from Cuba, and Adam Makowicz from Poland. Each one of them said essentially the same thing. I want to come to America because I've done about as much as I can here. Paquito was with one of the world's greatest fusion bands, Irakere. One of the damnedest bands I ever heard in my life. They were playing really good music, any way you want to cut it. But he said, 'Hey, I want to get here and play with these great American players, so I can grow as a musician.' And he has. This guy is a totally different musician now than when I first heard him in Irakere. Adam Makowicz had all the facility in the world, he could get over that piano. But now that he's been

here and played with Marc Johnson and other good players, he's really swinging. He's speaking the jazz language without accent. The emotion in his playing has expanded, you can hear the depth. And the same thing is going to happen to this young Igor Butman, because he has the basic talent.

"So the music is an international music. It comes from the black experience, but one of the strengths of that experience is that it can be appropriated by people who don't belong to that ethnic group. All of my career, because I am black, it has been assumed that I think only blacks can play jazz. And I don't think that. When I had the band on the David Frost show, it was a mixed band not because I had any axe to grind but because I just picked the guys who could best do that job for my needs in that show. Yet, as a black man, I resent the fact that a lot of guys who are not black don't have the same view. I see a lot of white bands that would be better served if they were racially mixed, because it would be a better blend for what they are doing.

"That's not an axe I want to grind. My whole thing is that the music itself has grown. Whether you're talking about Phil Woods or Zoot Sims or Bill Evans or any number of people who come immediately to mind, they epitomize the best in jazz creativity and playing. That takes nothing away from other guys I admire, Art Tatum or Charlie Parker, you're talking apples and oranges. Each one brings to the music his own experience and ability. One guy does it one way, another guy does it his way."

"How do you explain a couple of little kids growing up in Canada, like Kenny Wheeler and me, or Rob McConnell, listening to the radio, and getting turned on by people like Basie? What does the black experience mean to a white kid in Canada, or another kid in England like Victor Feldman, and why?"

"It means that the music Basie was playing and Ellington was playing and many other black musicians were playing had such truth and spoke with such clarity that the message came through to people who were not of that ethnic group. That's the strength of the music. The Mississippi blues can do that if you listen to it properly. Any kind of truthful experience in esthetics can reach you if you're open to be reached. Some people close themselves off and won't for a variety of reasons allow specific kinds of things to touch them — gospel music, for example. And yet what we used to think of as purely of the black church, gospel music, as done now by Andre Crouch and James Cleveland and Shirley Caesar and many others, you look out there now in the audience and many of the people who are responding are not black. They're getting the message. I did a piece on gospel music on the *Sunday Morning* show, we ended in a Catholic Church, St. Augustine church in Washington, D.C., with as mixed an audience as you are ever going to find — white, young, old, black, middle-aged, fat, skinny. They were responding in a Catholic church, they were responding to the strength and truth of the music."

"That leads to the thought," I said, "that if this were not so, Leontyne Price and Martina Arroya would not be able to sing opera."

"Absolutely," Billy said. "Absolutely."

"I've heard people put down the *Porgy and Bess* score," I said. "Then I saw Todd Duncan, who originated the role of Porgy on Broadway, in an interview. I guess there weren't many black opera singers in those days. Todd Duncan said that it is nonsense, putting that score down, this is opera, it's a broad emotional dramatic experience. He really defended that score. We can say, I guess, that if George Gershwin as a white composer cannot use the black experience as a subject for an opera, then you had better cross the grave and tell Verdi he can't write an opera set in Egypt, and Puccini that he can't compose music about a Japanese girl in love with an American. *Madama Butterfly* is Puccini's perception and emotional projection of an American and Japanese experience based on an American play, and it even has meaning to Americans, who go to see it at the Met in Italian. And it has meaning to Martina Arroya and Leontyne price, or they couldn't sing Italian music. And apparently *Madama Butterfly* is meaningful even to many Japanese."

"*Summertime*," Billy said, "is not only a lovely aria, it's a blues. Gershwin was a very perceptive and astute student of the things he was writing about. You don't have to be black to like soul food."

"Yeah," I said, "it seems to me that if we are all restricted to the artistic materials of our ethnic origins, our art becomes very narrow indeed."

"Absolutely," Billy said.

"Now," I said, "we still have the question of what we mean by jazz. If memory serves, you were the first one to call it, at least as part of the definition, America's classical music."

"Yes I was. There are different kinds of classical music. There's a Chinese classical music, there's an Indian classical music. These are different from European classical music. In Indian classical music, which is based on an oral tradition, there is improvisation.

"Just to rule jazz out as a classical music, because it is a tradition transmitted orally from one person to another, is not good enough. I defined the music simply because the Louis Armstrong and/or Fats Waller definition, 'If you have to ask, you'll never know,' was never very satisfactory to me. There are people who are honestly asking, who want to know. I could appreciate that those two musicians and others don't suffer fools gladly. But there is an answer.

"To me, jazz is a way of playing which is defined by a repertory. And that repertory codifies the vocabulary that has been developed over the years. The simple way of defining it is to say that jazz is a way of playing and it's a repertory. But when you define the way of playing, it has something which has developed from master to pupil — certain kinesthetic principles and certain aesthetic principles that have by trial and error been accepted. And so there is a definite language which starts with early ragtime and has been expanded right up until today, inclusive of ethnic input, musical input, inclusive of many other things. And all of these things have validity and they are found to whatever degree the individual wants to use them in his work. In my book *Jazz Piano* I took styles and examined them. I didn't take artists, to say that Louis Armstrong did this and then he handed the baton to Roy Eldridge who handed the baton to Dizzy, who did this . . . That's too easy. That leaves out all the other great people, Buck Clayton, Bunny Berigan, Red Allen, Bix Beiderbecke, so many musicians who in their own way added to the vocabulary and added to the repertory.

"When you think of it from that point of view, it's impossible for me to say — as much as I loved him — that in his most productive and influential period Art Tatum was the only guy. How could I leave out Teddy Wilson? How could I leave out Hank Jones? How could I leave out Milt Buckner? How could I leave out a whole bunch of other people who were operating on a different wave length at the time Art Tatum was doing his most creative work in putting together his version of what the jazz vocabulary was about? One can take Bill Evans and say, He took this aspect of jazz and did this with it. It's possible to take one guy and say, he did so much! And there's all these guys who imitate

him. But that leaves out a whole bunch of other guys who were doing things that are ultimately going to be as important to the overall vocabulary as whatever this great giant did.

"So. It's a way of playing and it's a repertory of pieces which defines that way of playing. And I really am delighted that that simple definition is one that can be used by people. I'm not talking about raised ninths and contrapuntal playing and this scale or that scale and all that. If you want to study music, fine. But to me, some things can be defined in such a way that it's useful in moving from this plane of knowledge to a higher level of knowledge. And that's all a definition is — a tool. And we have needed one that's helpful to the layman."

"You haven't used the word 'improvisation' once in the definition."

"No, and that's deliberate. I think too much emphasis is placed on the spontaneous creativity that we call improvisation. Louis Armstrong played things which were set solos. Art Tatum too did things which were set solos. I've heard him do it. You can't say that it wasn't jazz and that it wasn't swinging. And I heard Louis Armstrong play . . . " He sang a Louis Armstrong lick. "I've heard him do that a million times, and those quarter notes swung every time.

"If the New York Philharmonic plays *Sophisticated Lady*, they're playing jazz. They may be playing it badly, but they're playing jazz."

"Now," I said, "there's an opposite side of the coin. Bill Evans made a recording of *Danny Boy*, which is an Irish tune. He plays two choruses of melody, he doesn't play a thing that isn't the original theme. He plays it his way, of course, with his chord voicings. Do you call that jazz?"

"Absolutely."

"You know, Bill strongly emphasized the element of improvisation in his definition of jazz, as does Dave Brubeck."

"I'm not de-emphasizing the improvisational aspects of it in my overall definition. The reason I stay away from it in my limited version of the definition is that it is too easy for either a died-in-the-wool jazz fan or a non-jazz fan to get confused and say, 'O.K., if what this guy is playing is not new, absolutely different, it is not jazz.' That's the reason with students, I stay away from it. Whenever I make a statement like this, I don't talk about improvisation.

"For instance, the way that Dizzy Gillespie created some of his songs, like *Groovin' High*, where he took the basic harmony of *Whispering*, changed the harmony, changed the rhythm, and added another melody. That's a tradition, and it didn't start with bebop. Guys were doing that back in the '20s, ragtime players were doing that. But that was one device that led to one kind of improvisation, regardless of style. There are a lot of devices that have to do with improvisation that are looked on as *defining* what the music is, and that's wrong. The device of reharmonizing. The device of rhythmatizing something. Or making something a Latin rhythm. They may enhance somebody's idea of the way to present a given type of material. But the devices are just devices, they are not the essence of the music."

"What about ballads? You love ballads."

"Bill Evans and I used to laugh about this thing. He was my neighbor in Riverdale for some time, you know. When I was house pianist in Birdland, Bird would play *Koko* or something like that, and then when Bird gave me a piano solo, I'd play *Laura*. I'd play ballads every chance I got, because that was the way I really expressed myself. And guys put me down for it, they said, 'Man, that's cocktail music, that's not jazz.' And I used to tell Bill, 'You come along a few years later and play the same gorgeous things I enjoyed playing, and people said, 'That's great art!' I said, 'You're standing on my shoulders,' and he'd laugh and say, 'Well you have to stand on somebody's.' Bill's creativity in that context was undeniable. He was one of my favorite artists.

"You know, I gave Bill his first major television show. In 1958, I was musical director of a show called *The Subject Is Jazz* on National Educational Television, which was the predecessor to PBS. We were working out of studio 8-H in New York, and I was told by the producers at the end of the thirteen weeks that we needed to make a prediction: where is jazz going? I said, 'There's a young man who's just recorded a piece written by a friend of mine. I'm not good at predicting, but I really believe that this is one of the directions that jazz is going. George Russell has just written this piece called *Billy the Kid* and the soloist is Bill Evans.' And they said, 'Who?' I brought the record in and played it, and I said, 'We don't have sufficient time to rehearse a work of this difficulty so why don't we bring in the guys who did the record?' We'll keep our band on, and bring them, and blow the whole budget. It's the last show anyway.' They went for it. So we brought the band in and for some reason the drummer on the record date couldn't make the TV date. So Ed Thigpen, who was my drummer, read the son of a bitch at sight. I mean, *sight read* that son of a bitch. And he played the hell out of it. He's one of the damnedest musicians on earth."

We looked at our watches. It was almost one o'clock, time for Billy to leave for the airport and New York. We descended to the street, gave two attendants the tickets for our cars. They disappeared into the maw of the hotel garage.

"Tell me about your kids," I said. "How old are they? What are they doing?"

"Casey is thirty-five now. He lives here in California. He works with the Herman Miller furniture company, which makes what they call office environments. He's in charge of their west-coast installations. My daughter Kim's a lawyer in Washington D.C. She is thirty. She graduated top of her class at Yale. She's kind of the family brain. She went to Washington and had everything going for her: she's a black *woman*, so she was immediately snapped up."

"A few years ago she'd have been dead on both counts."

"Right! But that's changed. They got two for one. She was hired immediately by a very prestigious firm in D.C. at a salary that just blew my mind. So she worked long enough to get a house and a car, quit, and now she's working for the public defender. Teddi, my wife, was a model when I married her, but she decided she wanted to be a mother, and she gave up all of that and she's been as good a mother as you could possibly ask for."

"Is that why you look so young?"

"In the last few years I've been able to concentrate on things which are very exciting to me. Everything that I do — radio, television, playing the piano, writing music — those are things that I enjoy doing. The combination of that and being married to the same lady for forty-six years. She's to be congratulated on that, it's her doing."

Billy's car came up first, a rented Cadillac the shiny blue-gray shade of a dolphin. He grinned. "One of the perks of the job." We shook hands, and he got in and drove off on his way to Los Angeles Airport. I got into my car and followed him through the carbon monoxide of Westwood. *Westwood Walk* indeed.

Stan Kenton was right about Billy.