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Jazzletter

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December 1987 Vol. 6 No. 12

Letters

Norman Granz has been such a large influence on the jazz world. It's good of you to remind us in such a thoughtful way. I was critical of his *Jazz at the Philharmonic* format when I was young, feeling the music was being bent out of shape to appeal to a mass audience that didn't understand or appreciate the real thing. But I later came to realize how much employment Norman created for musicians he genuinely admired. He found a way to the mass audience that made him and his musicians a lot of money, and the popularity of the format led to opportunities for other musicians when the concert jam session became a standard type of gig.

I ran across Norman only a few times, but I got a strong sense of his style. Jimmy Raney had brought me into Stan Getz's quintet in 1952, just after Stan left Royal Roost records, and we did a few dates under Granz's supervision. On the first ones Norman only concerned himself with the balance and accepted Stan's choice of tunes and takes. Later, with the new group built around Bob Brookmeyer, Norman got a little more involved in the material itself.

Brookmeyer had written three originals and a treatment of *Have You Met Miss Jones*. (I'm pleased with the role I had in helping that tune become a jazz standard. Brookmeyer was looking for a fourth tune for that date, and I just happened to have a copy of the sheet music that a songwriter friend had given me, so I handed it to Bob, and he and Stan played it so well that it began turning up at jam sessions — with their phrasing included.)

After a take of a Brookmeyer original, Norman asked from the booth, "Has this tune got a name?"

"I call it *A Rustic Dance*," said Bob.

"Great," said Norman. "We'll call it *Rustic Hop*." Bob shrugged, and we went on to the next tune.

"What's this one called?" Norman asked.

"*Trolley Car*," said Bob.

"I really liked the mix we got on this one," Norman said. "Let's call it *Cool Mix*.

Brookmeyer shook his head and laughed. "Whatever you say, Norman." I forget Bob's title for the third one, but Norman came up with *Erudition*, and that's how the tunes were listed on the album.

Those records were released on 78s on the Mercury label and as 33s and 45s on the Clef label, so you can see it was a time when the record industry and Norman's record business were both undergoing changes.

My second trip to Europe with Gerry Mulligan was under Norman's auspices. I really dug the way he handled it. We went first class, the money was right, and we were presented well. Jimmy Giuffre's trio and Gene Krupa's quartet were also on the tour. As soon as we arrived, Norman met us and made a little speech.

"I want you to know that you're here as artists, and that's the way you're going to be treated. You're also adults, and I'm not going to take you by the hand. I'll tell you when the buses and the planes leave, where the concerts are, and what time you hit. If you miss the transportation I'm providing, get there on your own. You're responsible for yourself. And I'm paying everybody a good taste, so don't be staying in any fleabag hotels. I've built a reputation for American musicians over here, and I want you to live up to it. Don't screw it up for the next group that comes over."

Having said that, he relaxed and had a ball with us.

We flew into Berlin from Frankfurt during one of those times the Russians were harassing the air corridor with MIGs, and our plane was delayed so long that we missed the concert. But Norman was cool. After doing everything he could and still not getting the plane off the ground until too late, he accepted the situation without a word. We flew into Berlin, spent the night, and flew out again the next day.

Norman had to be in New York for an opening of Ella Fitzgerald, and planned to meet us in Italy in a day or two, but he needed someone to drive his Mercedes 300SL from Frankfurt, where he'd parked it, to Milan. Pete, his road manager, and I volunteered. Norman gave us the route through Switzerland and told us it should take a certain number of hours. We realized later that he was talking about the way *he* drove. It took us so long we arrived in Milan after the band had left by train for Bologna for the concert that night. We headed directly there and made the gig.

When we got back to Milan, where we stayed for run-outs to other cities in Northern Italy, we called Norman to find out where he wanted the car delivered. "Oh, there's no hurry," he said. "I got back a day early and needed a car, so I bought a new Maserati."

On the second tour we did for him, opposite Horace Silver's quintet, I was able to bring Aileen. After doing a tour of one-nighters through France, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany, and Holland, we wanted to go back to Paris for a week before we went home. I discovered we were on a special-rate airline ticket that expired on the last day of the tour, and extending the return flight a week would result in our having to pay several hundred dollars in extra fare. Norman heard us talking about it, called someone he knew at the airline, and arranged things so we were able to visit Paris and fly home a week later at no additional cost. We really appreciated his thoughtfulness.

Your codetta on Max Jones's interesting piece on Billie contains a small error. I was a member of Gerry Mulligan's quartet when that *Seven Lively Arts* program was shot, but I wasn't on the program. Gerry was booked by himself. I watched the show on Dave Lambert's TV set (he lived in the next building on Cornelia Street) with a group of musicians and friends. The story we heard from someone who made the rehearsal the day before (maybe someone in Giuffre's group) was that Pres was feeling bad, juicing and having trouble getting his playing together at the rehearsal, where he was originally supposed to play with a group of Basie alumni. Press still had trouble playing a coherent solo, but whoever told me the story said you could hear him putting little phrases together, which came together beautifully during the shooting session. It was Billie's expression on camera while listening to him that was so touching.

I saw that piece of film in one of Chertok's collections on Channel 13 last month.

It's still touching.

Bill Crow, New York City

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A few years ago an auction gallery here in New York was selling some of Count Basie's jewelry. Norman Granz purchased either a watch or an I.D. bracelet he had given Basie years earlier. I could only speculate that his relationship with Basie was too special and private to allow the item to be owned by anyone other than Basie or himself.

The recorded legacy of Clef, Norgran, Verve, and Pablo is amazing and can stand independently as his contribution to the vitality of jazz through over forty years. He created a repertory company that recorded prolifically and toured the world; he broke all the rules and invented new ones as a record producer (e.g. two limited-edition sets *The Jazz Scene* and *The Fred Astaire Story* as well as two major collections of Art Tatum material); he stylized his companies so that they became instantly recognizable from the jackets alone (e.g. David Stone Martin drawings on Clef/Norgran/Verve and black-and-white photo covers on Pablo).

I was pleased to see your *A Farewell to Granz* which praise a man in his lifetime -- a man to whom jazz owes a great debt.

Frederick Cohen, New York City

The intent was not to praise Norman Granaz, only to tell the story fairly and as accuratley as possible.

I have known Norman for 35 years. Never has he been less than generous and courteous to me, a small wheel in the large scheme of his operations. I've heard what a tightwad, how cold, how uncooperative he is, how everything negative he is. In all my years of trafficking with record-company owners and executives, and I think I know them all, no one has ever been more fair with me than Norman -- and most of them far less.

About ten years ago, I was working on a small AM station in West Hartford, Connecticut, doing an afternoon drive-time program, jazz and jazz-inflected popular music. Invariably on such stations, billing is the denominator to longevity. So I put out several sounds to record companies requesting that they contribute to my job security by participating in the program --buying air time to advertise their product. Granz, in response to my request, wrote back immediately to say that he'd do whatever he could to help sustain me, and enclosed a check for a formidable amount made out to me, not the station, and telling me to use the money as judiciously as possible for our mutual benefit. How about that for putting the lie to his "cheapskate" label?

I should add that my association with Norman has always been through the mail or the telephone. We've never even met.

Mort Fega, Delray Beach, Florida

The reference to *Rock Around the Clock* leads me to suggest that you place on the record a strong recollection I have about the song, which I heard years before it became popular.

The year would be 1938 or '39. A trumpet-playing friend of mine, Niles Lishness (whose name I would use in a million comedy sketches on TV), took me to some "roadhouse" outside our home town of Chicago, to hear several black entertainers playing jazz. One of them was a heavyish woman, probably in her forties, whose name I never did learn that night and consequently cannot recall.

But I could swear that among the unusual songs she sang were *If I Can't Sell It, I'm Gonna Sit Right Down on It, But I Ain't Gonna Give It Away* and *Rock Around the Clock. If I Can't Sell It* was of course overtly sexual, and quite funny. *Rock Around the Clock* too was treated -- at least by that performer -- with naughty-naughty overtones as if the verb *to rock*, which the singer boasted should be done repeatedly at one, two, three a.m., etc. -- really referred to sexual intercourse.

It seems to me that *Rock Around the Clock* became a pop-rock hit in the early 1950s. Is there anyone among the readers who might recall hearing the song so many years before it supposedly was introduced?

Steve Allen, Los Angeles

Steve seems to have discovered yet another case of material by black originators being copped by white performers -- some of the "appropriators", as Ayn Rand called such people. Does anybody know anything more about the source of that song?

My whole-hearted support for a suggested boycott of radio stations that refuse to identify labels and sidemen. Since my last communique on the subject, KKGO-FM in Los Angeles has not changed its policy of withholding information from its listeners. Most often, only the name of the leader is announced, regardless of the number of musicians who solo. The name of the label is never disclosed.

Only Chuck Niles -- late at night, well out of the precious commodity known as drive time -- seems to break the embargo on sidemen's names. Of course Niles is an exception in almost every regard. He has a sense of history and the relative importance of the artists, for example. But even Niles does not break the rule against telling the listener the names of labels so that he or she might actually be able to act on that knowleddge and buy the record.

If the record companies don't cut off the free DJ copies to such stations, they are not acting in their rational self-interests, the first rule of market economics.

What can the listener do to protect this greedy little exclusionary practice? Vote with his fingers. Now that KLON-FM in Long Beach has boosted its power (or else aimed its transmitter signal to reach my house!) I listen to KKGO only until the information drought infuriates me. Then I twist the dial rapidly to the left. It's not the fact that KLON is non-commercial; I understand the need for, tolerate, and sometimes even enjoy commercials. It's that the DJs at KLON tell me what I want to know. They also play little ersatz or near jazz. But that's a matter of taste, said the old lady as she kissed Spiro Gyra.

What can you do if the only jazz radio in your area is commercial and irresponsible? I don't know. Write a letter to the manager, maybe.

Or move to Long Beach.

Doug Ramsey, Los Angeles

I am at work on a biography of Thelonious Monk. I would love to hear from anyone who knew or worked with Monk, and who has stories, memorabilia, photographs or observations they would be willing to share with me.

Peter Keepnews
77 West 85th Street
New York NY 10024

Journalist Peter Keepnews, formerly of the New York Post *and now a contributor to the New York* Times *is the son of Orrin Keepnews, who produced many of the most important Monk albums at Riverside.*

The question of jazz radio runs deep into the way the government licenses radio stations. It used to be that the airwaves were owned by the people of this country, held in trust by our government and licensed to the stations, who were responsible ultimately to the people they were supposed to serve: the public. Now the stations are responsible to the shareholders that own them. Only to the extent that it serves the owners' interests is the public interest a consideration.

Douglas M. Wilber, Seattle, Washington

And a Happy New Year, Mike

by Red Mitchell

From an American jazz musician living in Sweden, an open letter to the general secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. And, of course, to all my friends.

STOCKHOLM

Dear Mike:

You may not yet be aware of it, but in the jazz world there is a lot of understanding, empathy, and support for what you are doing. I believe I can speak for the majority of us when I say we wish you all the luck in the world.

For one thing, we really identify with your efforts to reduce the drinking habit in your country. We understand the meaning of the phrase "force of habit". Of course, we need some habits — for instance the muscle memories necessary to play a musical instrument. Some other habits are not only unnecessary but counterproductive. Many who failed to make this distinction are no longer with us to discuss the subject.

As always, we need music to help us remember meaningful survival-associated experiences, since our tonal memory is longer, older, and more deeply seated than any other sense memory excepting that of taste-smell. We can taste before we can hear and we can hear before we can touch, see, or speak. That's why taste rules music and music rules language.

And that's why I have put new words and harmony to an old melody that I wish I had written, but which, in fact, has partly written me — *The Song of the Volga Boatmen.*

Force of habit
force of habit
force of habit
Gorbachev's up against
force of habit.
Strong as Volga boatmen at the oar,
strong as any bolted bankvault door.
Bound by a tether,
tougher than leather,
what rules most of us fools?
Force of habit

(Etc. Long board fade.)

We also understand that bureaucracy is sometimes bound by force of habit, and we admire you for challenging that enormous and sometimes reactionary force on an international level. As an American jazz musician living in Sweden who once fought the American immigration people for three months just to get a work permit for a great Sweden tenor saxophonist, Nisse Sandstrom, I've had a microscopic taste of what you're dealing with.

Many people ask me why I moved to Sweden, which I did in 1968. My answers are consistent, but vary with the available time. If I have only seconds, I might say, "To compose myself." As playing composers, we must first compose ourselves. Or, "To get my act (which is my life) together."

Physician, heal thyself, and so forth...

In the 1960s in America I had begun to disintegrate. My first love, jazz, had taken something like fourth place after family, studio work, and small political activities — not to mention escaping without actually leaving.

The studio work paid well and some of it was beautiful. But most of it involved playing background music behind violent films and TV series. I was a free-lance musician and also the first bass player at MGM. I got to accompany an astounding list of singers and players, from Dizzy Gillespie, Frank Sinatra, and Billie Holiday on down the line. I also played in clubs and at concerts the entire sixteen years that I lived in Hollywood. But it was that "also" that finally got to me, plus the institutionalization of racism and violence. It wasn't just on the screen. It was established all the way from the White House on down to the subways of New York, and it included Vietnam and other countries. We were a contributing part of that establishment. It was a two-way street with reality influencing us and vice versa, and our taxes were financing this reality.

It's been really rough, making a living playing only jazz since my move here. But it's been worth it. I've been able to stick to my no guns and only do what I love doing, which has included more and more song writing, piano playing, and singing. My last solo record won the Swedish Grammy — and I didn't even know they had a Grammy over here. Not only that, but we have an alternative employer here called "Normal Grants". (One of the czars of the jazz world is Norman Granz.)

I was strongly attracted to Sweden, having toured here and around Europe in 1954, playing with the Red Norvo Trio and Billie Holiday, still the deepest jazz singer of them all, in my opinion. We were all impressed by the fairness and honesty here. I remember Lady (Billie) saying one day as we were being driven around Stockholm, "Where are the slums? Show us the slums."

Someone answered, "There are no slums. And there's no Beverly Hills, either."

She said, "What?" And to this day I believe she might have lived longer if she had moved here.

The quality of musicianship here is another reason for my move. And it's not only the jazz musicians. I think it has something to do with the big, open, clear sound of the Swedish language and the tradition of singing and playing in tune: a combination of soul and technique with somewhat less of the isms — racism, nationalism, sexism, and age-ism, just to start. A couple of years ago I was talking with Thad Jones, a genius who has since departed, about all of that, and our reasons for moving. Thad was living in Copenhagen. He shook his head and said, "Yeah. Ism ain't 'em." Sorry, I guess that only sounds good in American, but everyone needs to understand it. That'll be a song someday. It might start off, "Every ism makes a schism. I'm for anti-ismism, sometimes."

I define a serious ism as a belief system from which a signicant number of people think they're going to get all the right answers. In my opinion there never has been and never will be any one system that has all the right answers. So of course I'm in agreement with your statement that no political party has all the right answers. Right on! But am I right about how rare it is for a professional policy-maker to make a statement like that?

Maybe it's just my selective memory, but whenever this subject comes up, I always ask whether anyone present has ever heard any other politician say that. A Swedish student added the name of Ingvar Carlsson, the new Swedish prime minister. And my old buddy, one of the world champions of what I call Tell It Like It Is Music, Barbara Dane, added Fidel Castro to the small list. Any other comments or additions will be welcome. I'm even prepared for a little knee-jerk anti-communism.

Which brings us to the two former Big C's, capitalism and communism. From the world citizen's point of view — please forgive me, from my viewpoint here in Stockholm — both are developing into caricatures, each of only half a human being. Some capitalists are trying to tell us that we are basically selfists; me first and devil take the hindmost. Some communists are trying to tell us that we are basically groupists: the group first and the individual never. But to play jazz, you've got to be both at the same time. Any player or singer who was only a selfist or only a groupist could only be half a jazz musician at best. In fact the two functioning together in an integrated person or group is far more powerful than the sum of the two parts.

We must be able at all times to subordinate our egos to the benefit of the group (which includes our audience, by the way). At the same time we must express with total honesty and openness (glasnost?) exactly what's on our minds and souls through a sound so individual that we are recognized by jazz lovers around the world after two or three phrases. Wouldn't it be nice to have a world system that was balanced like that some day? But wait. Let's not make an ism out of it.

When we play we try to strike a balance within this balance in a kind of never-ending cycle which goes something like this:

Knowing (in one's heart and soul); planning (putting form to our knowledge); improvising (allowing the imagination to respond to our perceptions and structuring [perestroika?] the original song); total integration (of the self, the group, and the universe); realization (that our unconconscious, subconscious, conscious, and superconscious states are all in tune and functioning simultaneously), which leads back to knowing and a glorious feeling.

When — and I don't mean if — this cycle gets too far out of balance one way or the other (for example, too much or too little planning or form, or too little or too much freedom or improvisation) the musicians themselves will probably start saying, "This isn't really jazz."

Again, without making an ism out of it, how about a world political system some day where we give proportional amounts of time and space to knowing, planning, improvising, integration, realizing, and knowing again? Or, perhaps to oversimplify a little, one might say that the essential problem most governments face today is their inability to find that ever-shifting balance between form and freedom, which we jazz musicians depend on for our living.

Balance is what I hope my songs reflect — a balanced life. When I moved to Sweden I made myself several promises, one being to learn to improvise words and music at the same time, another being to live a balanced life, not necessarily in that order. On the way to improvising words and music simultaneously, I've written ninety-some songs with titles like *A Declaration of Interdependence* (about a year or two ago; thank you and Mario Cuomo for recently requesting that one), *Tell it Like It Is* (music by Wayne Shorter, words by me), *Poles Apart* (about the counter-productive polarization of so many people, not only the Poles), *Corruptus Interruptus* (about all the corruption of the world, starting with cleaning up my own) and *Looking for a Friend* (dedicated against the common-enemy principle which I call the "scapegoat race trick"). Also, *The Sun and the Water* and *Sorry Son*, both written to my son and both about energy and survival. There are some in the jazz world who don't believe jazz and politics should be mixed. Perhaps they've missed the meaning in some of Duke Ellington's music, for example. Anyway, when someone says that to me, I usually say, "Oh, is that your policy?"

Mike, it looks to me as though the joke of the century is writing itself right now. I hope I'm around for the punch line. It looks to me as though the groupists, of all people, have produced the individual, you, who before the end of the century could really turn things around and head our species in a healthier direction. Wouldn't that shoot down everybody's theories? I love it, and I can almost hear the melody.

If *The Joke of the Century* does become a song, I suppose I'll have to include the other side of the coin too: that the selfists have produced an actor — a puppet — whose strings are being pulled by a group, a very powerful group of groups indeed, which I euphemistically call "organized business".

I believe you are voicing our deepest instinct — I call it Instinct No. 1 when you say that the avoidance of nuclear war, the survival of the species, is priority number one.

I define instincts as a priority list built into the combined reflexes of a species with survival of the species at the top of the list. Of course the individual is a member of the species and therefore also has the urge to survive himself (Instinct No. 2). But when we think about the lengths to which any parent will to go save a child (and how about to make one?) — the suicidal lengths some of us will go to in order to save or entertain the species or one's own tribe — I don't think there's any doubt.

I understand that your wife is a sociologist. So's mine, by the way. Some sociologists believe that human beings are different from other animals in that we have minds instead of instincts. Well, I think we have both. My wife and I have some very lively discussions on the subject.

I believe the basic cause of all wars is a misunderstanding of Instinct No. 1. Nature gave us this primal urge to save our group at all costs. But she had no way of informing us of the size of the group. When one tribe, nation, or religious group confuses itself with the whole species and depersonalizes the others, and then another does the same thing, all you need is some kind of basic economic clash and you've got a war just waiting to happen. At this point the priority lists are thrown out of order, our highly touted reason fails, and violence, which I call the last and most easily identifiable stage of insanity, takes over.

I believe, as I think you do, that we're in a brand new and unique era, in which we no longer have the cosmic economy to be able to afford these old misunderstandings.

Notice

The *Jazzletter* is published 12 times a year at Oak View, California, 93022, and distributed by first class mail to the United States and Canada and by air mail to other countries. Subscriptions are on a year-to-year basis, January through December issues. Subscriptions are $40 a year in U.S. currency for the United States and Canada, $45 to other countries. Subscribers can purchase gift subscriptions for other persons at $30 U.S for the U.S. and Canada, $40 to other countries. Past issues can be purchased for $30 U.S per year, or $2.50 per issue.

I suppose the rules of cosmic economy existed long before money was invented. I've written a poem using that as a title. It's about Star Wars, the so-called Strategic Defense Initiative. I think it's easy to visualize an ever-expanding spherical race for the "high ground" — as if there were any ground at all out there within our reach. It goes like this:

Cosmic Economy

This means permanent expansion
at a geometric rate,
but the whole world's wealth will never,
altogether, be that great.

As professional communicators ourselves, we have become very aware of your ability — I might even say envious. Not only have you out-communicated our "great communicator" who, by the way, has given both communication and nice guys a bad name. But we believe the content of your stuff is what the world needs now.

I suppose communication is my main interest, and jazz a very special case. I've had a jazz group both here and in America since 1973 and given a course since 1970, both of them called Communication. There's an old standard song that says it ain't what 'cha do, it's the way how 'cha do it. But I think it's both what 'cha and how 'cha, and even more important, why 'cha do it.

One of my first experiences with direct international communication came in Germany in 1946-47. I was fortunate enough to be a member of the United States Army's best big jazz band in Europe. In '46 we represented America at a Four Power Ball in Berlin, before the Cold War. It was a beautiful feeling. We believed we were winning the peace.

Just one more poem and I'll let you go.

Music

O.K., every nation has its own
traditions and its language,
and to take good care of them is really laudable;
and the language and traditions
find their way into the music
with results that now and then are really audible.
But the function of the music
is to get beneath our differences —
communicate directly, soul to soul.
It's the nearest thing to
universal language we've developed
and its purpose is to make the whole world whole.

With that we'd like once more to wish you all the luck in the world in the coming year, partly because to say that and thank you is all we can do at the moment, and partly because it looks as though you're going to need it.

With utmost respect,

— Red Mitchell

A Little Song of Christmas

A young Jewish friend and I were talking about Christmas. I asked him how it affected him as a chld in school when all the kids around him were excitedly preparing for it. "Like I was on the outside looking in," he said, "with my nose against the glass."

This led me to ask another Jewish friend, a woman in her early eighties, what the holiday had done to her as a child. She said, warming to the subject immediately, "We were very poor. There was a non-Jewish family who lived next door to us. They were even poorer than we were. And yet every Christmas I envied those kids."

I am amused whenever someone starts complaining about gift-giving as a modern evil and demanding that we "put the Christ back in Christmas". I realize how little the holiday — which is actually an eclectic accretion of rituals from many cultures —is understood either by those who deplore it or those who love it. It might help us all to know more about it.

No man kept Christmas with more enthusiasm than my Cockney grandfather Frederick Flatman, who was an undeviating atheist and probably — by family evidence — a Sephardic Jew whose ancestors came to England from Holland with the court of William and Mary.

Part of the ritual each year was that we sit by the radio and listen to Lionel Barrymore's performance of *A Christmas Carrol*, although I didn't realize for years that that was its name. I thought it was named what my grandfather called it, *Scrooge's Christmas*. I had only the faintest notion of the religious element of the holiday, although my grandmother, a simple trusting Anglican, saw to it that I knew all the carols, and sang them, those haunting melodies in modes from other times. And every year I would help decorate the tree with electric lights in the shape of fantastic figures. One was a green frog with a little brass extension on his nose that screwed into the socket. Another was a Santa Claus that always went high on the tree.

Many of the Christmas traditions and symbols predate Christianity, though no one bothered to explain this to me, because, no doubt, they didn't know their origins: the holly, the mistletoe, the lights on the tree, the Yule log burning slowly in the fireplace, the turkey, the mincemeat pie. The manger scene that the French call a creche. The twelve days. The Christmas cards. The gifts and the revelry, and even the spontaneous irresponsibility, the temporary lapse of disciplines. Where did the man in the white beard and red suit come from? How did he get four names — Saint Nicholas, Santa Claus, Kris Kringle and Father Christmas?

And why is the birth of Jesus Christ celebrated on December 25 when there is no mention in the gospels of Luke or Matthew of a date for the event? Luke says only, "And she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn." Matthew says, "Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Judah, in the days of King Herod."

That is all the evidence there is, and for several centuries debate raged among Christians over that elusive date. Indeed, the early church discouraged the celebration of birthdates, including that of Jesus. But the people wanted to celebrate it, and the Coptic Christians of Egypt were probably the first to do so. The Christians of western Europe settled on December 25 during the Fourth Century, but the Eastern Church celebrated January 6, finally agreeing on December 25 in the Fifth Century.

How was that date arrived at? The festival of spring had been celebrated since pre-Christian times on what we now call March 25. It was a fertility celebration. And by the logic of adding nine months to the date of the spring festival, the December 25 date was arrived at.

It was a propitious one. The season had been a holiday for unnumbered centuries. Sacred to many religions, it was a time for celebrating new life, for one strong reason: the winter solstice comes then. *Solstice* comes from the Latin *sol*, sun, and *sistere*, to stand still. It is the time when the days begin to grow longer again and the hope of spring arises. The Romans celebrated their Saturnalia at this time of year. It is from this event that a good

many of the seasonal traditions derive, including the unrestrained revelry and the giving of gifts.

Saturn was the Roman god of sowing or seed. The celebration in his honor, the Saturnalia, originally held December 17, was extended at first to three days and later seven, which brings us to Christmas Eve. Business and work of any kind were suspended — which, more or less, they still are, leading to the common complaint that it is impossible to get anything done at this time of year. Slaves were given the freedom, during these few days, to say and do what they pleased. Certain moral restrictions were relaxed. It is easy to see where the modern office party came from, with half-loaded celebrants playing slap-and-tickle by the water cooler. The streets became crowded and loud with a kind of celebrant madness. Gifts, particularly wax candles and small clay dolls, were exchanged. The influence of Saturn obviously is still with us — even in the word Saturday, from Latin *Saturni dies*, the day of Saturn.

When Constantine the Great became the first Christian emperor of Rome, he made Sunday, a day of rest observed by the Christians, an official holiday, and he fixed December 25 for the celebration of the Nativity.

January 1 was observed by the Romans as *Kalendae Januarii*, the feast of the New Year. They decorated their houses with lights and greenery and gave gifts to children and the poor. The French to this day exchange gifts on New Year's Day. The Jewish Feast of Lights, Hanukkah, was celebrated for eight days in late December by the lighting of candles, one on the first night, two on the second, three on the third, up to eight candles. It is from Hannukah with its candles that the idea of Christ as the Light of the World is derived.

This period of the year was sacred too to the Germanic pagans of Europe's northern forests. Even as they were absorbing Christianity, Christianity was absorbing many of their ceremonial winter customs. The Norsemen celebrated the winter solstice and the returning of the sun with a festival called Yule.

At one time, the most important event of Christmas Eve in England was dragging in the great Yule log, rolling it into the fireplace, and lighting it. The log was expected to burn through the Nativity vigil and all Christmas day and evening — and in homes with fireplaces capacious enough for really huge logs, right through Twelfth Night. It embodied, therefore, the old Celtic belief in perpetual fire, in turn a symbol of eternal life. Thus it too represented the undying sun.

The Church was always uneasy about the association of pagan customs with Christmas but on the whole found it judicious to accomodate them. Its authorities decided that the burning of the Yule log was acceptable so long as the log was of ash, which gave it a symbolic Christian meaning, since the baby Jesus had been washed and dressed in the warmth of an ash fire made by the shepherds. Ash had been used because the fire had had to be built quickly and ash is one of the few woods that will burn when still green. And it does so without sputtering, as conifer woods do. Thus ash became the traditional Yule log of England.

The association of evergreen plants with the season of the winter solstice also precedes Christianity. The conifer trees were sacred to the Germanic peoples as a symbol of undying life, mistletoe to the Celtic peoples who inhabited France and what is now called England, for the same reason. But the Romans too revered evergreens and brought them home or gave branches as gifts in the late days of December. Holly was easily accepted as a symbol of Christmas by the Church, which viewed the sharp leaves and red berries as representing the crown of thorns and the blood of Jesus. It was seriously perturbed, however, by the use of ivy as a Christmas symbol because of its deep association with Bacchus, the Greek god of wine. And it never could or did accept mistletoe because mistletoe was held sacred by the druids.

Mistletoe is an extremely interesting plant. Not only is it evergreen and thus yet another symbol of eternal life, it seems to survive without food, hanging high in the branches of trees. But it obviously does not live without food. It is a parasite whose roots penetrate the host plants off which it feeds.

The Roman historian Pliny the Elder, who died in 79 A.D., tells us that it was held in reverence by the druids. Made into a drink, it was believed to be a cure for sterility and an antidote to poisons. The chief among the druids would cut it with a golden sickle in late autumn. It would fall from the tree to be caught in a white cloth stretched out by virgins. Then the people would hang it over their doors, to protect them from witchcraft, ill health and ill fortune.

No one knows when the British custom of kissing under the mistletoe arose. According to the old form of the custom, a young man picked a berry from the plant for each kiss he collected. When the berries were gone, so were the kisses. One superstition is that kissing under the mistletoe leads inevitably to marriage.

According to one of the Norse myths, the evil spirit Loki tipped an arrow with the magic mistletoe and used it to kill the otherwise invulnerable Balder, god of poetry. Somebody's always trying to kill poetry. And music. And all art. Balder's mother Friga wept so grievously that Balder was restored to life. Thus mistletoe became a symbol of love; the little white berries are the tears of Friga.

The custom of decorating homes with pine and fir originated in Germany, far back in antiquity. Northern Europe was covered in forests and the peoples who inhabited them feared the bitter winters with their long bleak nights. They believed that evil spirits traveled the darkness, killing living things, evidence for which was the seeming death of deciduous trees. Only the conifers seemed to defy the spirits, suggesting that they had special powers. And so these Germanic peoples took to hanging branches of evergreen over the doorways or from the rafters of their homes to ward off death in their families. Sometimes they would decorate these branches with fruit and nuts, and later they took to bringing in entire trees. They also brought indoors branches of fruit trees and set them in water, causing them to bloom around Christmas time. It is not known when they began to put lighted candles on their Christmas trees. One legend attributes the practice to Martin Luther, who was said to have been so moved by the sight of the stars on a clear Christmas night that he decorated a fir tree with tiny candles to remind children that Christ had come down from heaven to save our wayward species. It is not clear why candles on trees should have this

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New Frontiers in Musical Analysis

Chuck (Berry) played in a lot of strange keys, like B-flat and E-flat.

— Bruce Springsteen

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peculiar mnemonic effect, but however and wherever the practice began, Germans adhering strictly to the old tradition still put real candles, rather than strings of electric lights, on their trees, and watch them *very* carefully.

The Christmas tree did not arrive in England until the time of Queen Victoria, who was of German ancestry, had been raised by a German governess, and married a German cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. It is not certain that Victoria and Albert actually introduced the custom to England; there is evidence that a few people had adopted it before that. But they assuredly made it popular. In 1841, Victoria wrote in the diary she kept all her life that the sight of the lighted tree "quite affected dear Albert who turned pale, and had tears in his eyes, and pressed my hand very warmly." From England the custom of the Christmas tree spread quickly to America. But it has never caught on in France.

All of the evergreen symbols associated with Christmas come, then, from Europe, and from long ago. But there is one that does not. The glorious poinsettia plant is native to Mexico and Central America. Its Latin name is *Euphorbia pulcherima*, euphorbia most beautiful. The name it bears in English derives from that of Joel R. Poinsett, of Charleston, South Carolina, who introduced it to the United States in 1828 while he was minister to Mexico. Its brilliant red, white, or pink top leaves are at their best around Christmas, and it has become an enormously popular seasonal decoration.

Turkey was a prime Christmas dish in England as far back as the reign of Henry VIII, but it is not an English bird. There is perhaps no more American food, the turkey having been a staple of the Indian diet long before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. It had been brought to England, according to one theory, by one of Sebastian Cabot's officers. The bird acquired its name because merchants from Turkey imported it.

Before the turkey's ascendancy in England, goose was the more common Christmas delicacy, except among the rich, who ate pheasant and swan, as they had on the continent for centuries. If you have never had goose slowly and carefully cooked, you haven't lived.

Mince meat pies were originally made of exactly that, minced meat — a blend of pheasant, rabbit, pigeon, sheep kidneys, pickled mushrooms, capon, and various spices and flavorings, baked in a crust. Originally the pie was rectangular, to represent the *creche*, or cradle, and sometimes there was the figure of a little child, made of pastry, atop the pie. Oliver Cromwell forbade the celebration of Christmas, and the mince pie along with it. When Christmas came back with the Restoration, the pie had become round and the child's figure was gone.

The *creche* itself was introduced to the Christmas celebration by St. Francis of Assisi, who died in 1226. Within a century most of Europe included some sort of representation of the manager scene in Christmas observances. The figures were carved out of wood and, in accord with the custom in religious art, were dressed in contemporary styles rather than the manner of the time of the nativity.

The first Christmas card is generally considered to be a design by John Horsley made in 1843 and sold in a thousand lithographed copies in 1846 by Henry Cole, later Sir Henry. Cole referred to it in his diary as a "Christmas card," thereby coining the term. The design showed a happy family seated at a holiday table, wine glasses in hand, looking out at the viewer through a trellis beneath which was the message "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You." The custom of sending such cards did not at first catch on but the invention of chromolithography brought the price of color reproduction down to the point where many people were able to afford to send at least a few cards. By 1880, the Postmaster General of England was urging people to "Post early for Christmas," and as far back as 1877, a letter to the editor of the London *Times* complained that the flood of "children's cards" at Christmas had become a social evil. And so the complaint against the commercialization of Christmas — which reached a funny peak in Stan Freeburg's *Green Christmas* record — goes back a long way.

But how did Santa Claus get into the act?

He finds his origin in St. Nicholas, the patron saint of pawnbrokers, pilgrims, brewers and fishermen — and of boys and girls. In the middle ages, many legends grew up around his name, though comparatively little is known about the man beyond that he was born in a province of Asia Minor and became archbishop of Myra. He died early in the Fourth Century. One legend has him raising from the dead three boys murdered at an inn, which is perhaps the reason he became the saint of small children. He was an enormously popular saint and on the night of his feast day, December 6, children would leave food for his horse. During his unseen visit he would in turn leave them small presents. In Germany and Holland, his name gradually evolved into Santa Claus.

We have already noted that the Romans exchanged presents during their Saturnalia. But the giving of gifts was widespread at that time of year well before the coming of Christianity. Odin, the chief god of the Vikings, rode through the night leaving gifts. And the Church, rather than deprive the northern peoples of the popular custom of exchanging gifts, accomodated the practice by the deft replacement of Odin with St. Nicholas as the philanthropist who traveled the wind. In England, parents traditionally told their children to write their notes to the patron saint of children on December 6 — the feast day of St. Nicholas, whose name had evolved into Santa Claus, a curious name in that "Santa" is the feminine, not masculine, form of the word "saint" in Spanish and Italian. The old form of the name still persists and in Clement Clarke Moore's poem *The Night before Christmas*, when the family settles down to sleep, it is "in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there." He was also known in England as Father Christmas, a name derived from that of a pagan figure who was a stock character in medieval Mummers' plays. Thus he had three names in England. And in the United States, he acquired a fourth, Kris Kringle.

In Bavaria, tradition held that St. Nicholas was the messenger to the Christ child, who brought the gifts to the children. In German, Christ child is "Christkind." There has always been an enormous German influence in the United States: at the time of the Continental Congress, German lost out to English as the official language of the new nation by only one vote. And so the term "Liebes Christkind," beloved Christ child, to whom St. Nicholas carried the messages, became widespread here. And gradually it was corrupted into Kris (with German spelling) Kringle, and attached itself to the Santa Claus figure.

Call him as you will, the modern image of Santa Claus — the jolly old gentleman with the white beard and black boots and red suit — was perfected in the United States. For *Harper's Weekly*, during the last part of the Nineteenth Century, the caricaturist and political cartoonist Thomas Nast made a series of drawings illustrating the Clement Clarke Moore poem.

Moore was a classical scholar, a professor of Greek at the New York Theological Seminary, who wrote the poem for his children. Nast was born in Germany, although he had grown up in the United States, and so some of the German image of St. Nicholas may have crept into his conception. The poem and Nast's drawings replaced the horse of St. Nicholas with the "miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer". If you accept that Santa Claus lives at the North Pole rather than in the small province of Asia Minor that was the true home of St. Nicholas, the reindeer are logical. Among the people of Lappland and other far northern reaches, the domesticated reindeer is the common form of animal transport and the sleigh the only vehicle you can pull over snow. In taking to the air, of course, Santa and his reindeer anticipated Superman by a century.

Aside from the oddities of his mode of travel and his phenomenal generosity, Santa Claus has a peculiar way of entering homes: by the chimney. He may have learned the trick from a Norse goddess named Hertha who appeared in fireplaces in mid-winter to bring toys to children. One can only presume that in modern apartment buildings devoid of fireplaces, Santa — and Hertha, too, if she's still around — have to settle for more conventional entry through windows or, in absolute desperation, doors.

The origin of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* is unknown, but the song is common to France, Britain, and America. The twelve days refer to the time between the birth of Jesus and the arrival in Bethlehem of the Magi, the three wise men, or kings, or astrologers, from the "Orient", probably Persia. This day is observed as Twelfth Night, Epiphany, from Greek roots meaning the showing of a god or other supernatural being. In Christianity, it means the revealing of Jesus as the Christ to the gentiles, represented by the Magi. Epiphany falls on January 6.

Christmas, then, is an accretion of holidays, drawn from many cultures, going back to time beyond human memory or history. It is the high spot of the whole calendar year, actually a series of celebrations commencing with Hallowe'en, culminating in the day chosen — no matter how inaccurately — to observe the Nativity, and gradually subsiding through New Year's and Twelfth Night, by which time most people are more than ready to go back to their daily rounds, as they begin another year.

Jewish composers have written works in celebration of Christianity. Leonard Bernstein and Lalo Schifrin, for example, have both composed Masses. And many of our best Christmas songs were written by Jews, among them *White Christmas* by Irving Berlin and one of the loveliest of them all, *The Christmas Song*, by Mel Torme.

Some years ago, I wrote and performed in a Christmas television special for the CBC in Toronto, with the great contralto Maureen Forrester as co-star. I had to write several new Christmas songs for the event. It was to be taped in May. I couldn't get into the mood at a time of the year when the trees were budding. I hated the very idea of writing Christmas songs at such a time, so in a fit of disgust I wrote an anti-Christmas song, a country-and-western waltz with this lyric:

I'm glad we broke up before Christmas.
Now I won't have to buy you a gift.
I'd hate to of spent all my hard-earned cash
on a girl that jes' treats me like trash.
I'm glad we broke up before Christmas,
'cause you're jes' not a very nice dame.
Now I won't have to waste Christmas day on you,
ah c'n watch mah football game.
Ah should have knowed it last Noo Years
that one day we'd have to part.
Now ah'm not gonna sit here and let you
break my holiday heart.
I'm glad we broke up before Christmas.
Now ah won't have to put up a tree.
There ought to be peace on earth this year,
and ah c'n sing Merry Christmas to me.

My wife contributed the line about the football game. And Alec Wilder, who happened to phone when I was in the middle of writing this travesty, contributed "break my holiday heart".

Having got the pique out of my system, I sat down that same day and wrote two Christmas lyrics. This is one of them:

Snow drifts down
on this tiny town.
I'm home at last —
it's Christmas.
Old friends meet
in a quiet street
and recall the past
— it's Christmas.
The Santa Claus
on the Christmas tree
still smiles as he looks down at me.
Kids grown tall
I remember small
come by to call —
it's Christmas.
This is what I've been dreaming of —
the faces that I love
and Christmas eve.

Maureen Forrester later recorded that.
This is the other song I wrote that day:

When I see the yellow leaves
go streaming down the wind,
and scarecrows with their arms up to the sky,
and tiny birds, like notes of music gathered on the wires,
I hear of a song of autumn and I sigh.
Then one day the leaves are gone
and all the trees are bare,
and spears of ice appear along a stream.
I watch the kids go by to school and build a quiet fire.
I hear a song of autumn and I dream.
I hear a lazy class-room clock
and smell the dust of chalk.
I see a girl with golden hair,
and me too shy to talk.
Then one December afternoon
the snow begins to fall
and cutout Christmas images
are hung along the wall.
And every year it seems that I
become a child once more,
impatient for the holidays to start.
I see all the laughing girls
and the bright-eyed boys,
having a snowball fight,
making a joyful noise,
and I sing a little song of Christmas in my heart.

Have a great 1988, everybody.